

EUROPE

In London, Some Residents Fight To Remain In The European Union

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Heard on All Things Considered



ROBERT SIEGEL

On Thursday, the United Kingdom will vote on whether to continue its membership in the European Union. People in London explain why they support remaining part of the EU.

KELLY MCEVERS, HOST:

And our colleague Robert Siegel is in London today. Hello, Robert.

ROBERT SIEGEL, BYLINE: Hi, Kelly. How are you?

MCEVERS: So you are there covering what will be a big vote tomorrow on whether the U.K. leaves the EU. What is the outlook for the vote?

SIEGEL: Well, the polls show it's close. Typically they show the remain vote slightly in the lead but still within the margin of error. So nobody would say for sure who's going to win this one.

MCEVERS: And yesterday you told us a lot about people who want to leave the EU, and now today you're going to tell us about the people who want to remain. Tell us about that.

SIEGEL: Yeah. I heard a good code to who votes which way in this referendum from Ed Balls, the Labour politician we hear elsewhere in the program. He said there were four indications that somebody's going to vote to leave the EU - someone over 60,

someone lives outside a city, votes for the conservatives and doesn't have higher education. You get 3 out of 4, you're likely to vote to leave.

On the reverse side, if you are young, if you have a university education, if you don't vote for the conservative party, and if you live in a big city, you are likely to vote for staying in the EU.

So I went to a small rally last night where the couple of hundred people who showed up fit the remain bill perfectly.

(CHEERING, APPLAUSE)

SIEGEL: They were young people. They were in London's Trafalgar Square. It doesn't get much more urban than that. They skew politically left. There were lots of Green Party signs around. And they are mostly university students. Kate Stevenson just graduated from University College London.

KATE STEVENSON: So yeah, perfect, (inaudible).

UNIDENTIFIED MAN #1: Cool. So which side (unintelligible).

SIEGEL: Kate was carrying a small white board and markers. She'd written on the white board the words, I'm voting remain because - and then she would ask others at the rally to complete that sentence, take a picture of the white board and post each message on Facebook.

STEVENSON: It's just quite a good way of getting the message around.

SIEGEL: So this last gentleman wrote, because of benefits and workers' rights.

STEVENSON: Yes.

SIEGEL: And if you were to sign it yourself, what would you say?

STEVENSON: I think I'd need a bigger white board. I've got so many reasons.

SIEGEL: Among them the educational benefits that she's taken advantage of.

STEVENSON: I studied Italian, so I studied in Bologna, and I got funded from the European Union. And I've - that year really enriched my life to be honest. And I think

it would be such a shame if other people younger than me weren't to get the same opportunity that I had.

SIEGEL: But Kate Stevenson speaks equally of political and social values that EU membership implies and what kind of a country Britain should be. So does Sophie Nazemi, a student at King's College London who organized the rally.

SOPHIE NAZEMI: I think it's the kind of country that's outward-looking, that promotes unity and cooperation and is also welcoming to, say, refugees and cares about the environment. And I think the best way to promote those values is to show that we want to work with other countries, and we want to cooperate.

SIEGEL: The point of the rally that Sophie Nazemi organized was to get young people to vote given their worldwide reputation for slacking on Election Day.

(CROSSTALK)

SIEGEL: Here another glimpse of remain campaigning which shows that all politics, even about continental super-national organizations, is local. It is the remaining campaign table at a summer festival in East Finchley - that's in the north of London - wall to wall young couples with small children in a park called Cherry Tree Wood. Local councillors were handing out stickers that just say, I'm in.

MICHAEL INGRAM: Yeah, do you want - how many do you want?

UNIDENTIFIED MAN #2: Four or five - I'm not greedy.

SIEGEL: Michael Ingram is a general practitioner and a passionate remain supporter. He says the EU is like Britain's National Health Service, the NHS.

INGRAM: We like to moan about the NHS, and yet we realize that the NHS intrinsically is an absolutely magnificent system which if we didn't have, we'd be in the powerless state of many of your compatriots who don't have health insurance. Europe's the same. We can whinge, and we can criticize Europe, but if we actually throw out Europe, we could be in a really difficult situation.

SIEGEL: Whingeing is Brit speak for whining. That difficult situation, Ingram told me, would be Britain standing alone at risk of being marginalized in world affairs. And

Michael Ingram pointed to another dimension of this debate. The EU without Britain, he argues, would be a less united, less stable place.

INGRAM: Whenever Europe is disunited, you have you massive world problems. The history of the last hundred years has shown the problems of European disunity. And I feel that Europe's on a knife's edge.

And if Britain leaves Europe, a very big amount of ballast that Britain brings to Europe would be lost, and Europe would become unstable, which I think would be detrimental not for Europe but for the whole world. And I think particularly that's something the Americans have to take into account.

SIEGEL: I lived in this city over 30 years ago, and of all the ways in which London has changed over that time, this next place I visited and the man who founded it are among the biggest changes I can think of. And it all has to do with the EU.

UNIDENTIFIED WOMAN: (Singing in French).

UNIDENTIFIED CHILDREN: (Singing in French).

SIEGEL: It's a bilingual nursery school called Les Petites Etoiles - The Little Stars. The kids are taught one day in English and the next day in French. For each of the 60 toddlers here, someone is paying the equivalent of over \$2000 a month.

The big change is the size of migrant communities from other European Union countries. Everyone here talks about the hundreds of thousands of Poles and Romanians who've come for low-wage jobs, but all kinds of jobs, including very high-paying jobs in London's financial district, are also a draw, and the French have come in droves. The man who founded the nursery school is named Olivier Bertin.

OLIVIER BERTIN: We estimate that there is a bit more than 300,000 French people in U.K. and around 250 in London.

SIEGEL: Two-hundred-fifty-thousand...

BERTIN: Yes.

SIEGEL: ...French in London.

BERTIN: Yes.

SIEGEL: Olivier Bertin also owns an art gallery. Unlike leave supporters I've heard from, Bertin says he appreciates the EU regulations that apply to his nursery.

BERTIN: One of the rules is anti-discrimination rules from EU. It's quite important in the management to check that there is absolutely zero discrimination from the employer but as well between the staff.

SIEGEL: Oliver Bertin is 48. He moved to London 20 years ago, and he is no longer an expat. He is a British citizen.

BERTIN: I asked for British citizenship just after the act for the referendum.

SIEGEL: You mean Prime Minister David Cameron announced a referendum on the EU, and you applied for British citizenship.

BERTIN: That's it.

SIEGEL: At that time, he says he didn't think there was going to be a Brexit, but he did want the chance to vote against one. Now he's worried, and he says so is the French community in London.

BERTIN: It's the only conversation we have for the few last week (laughter). We can hear a lot of different things. Some are afraid to lose their job. Some are afraid to lose 30 percent of the value of their house.

SIEGEL: Oliver Bertin himself is hopeful that Britain will stay in Europe and that Europeans will stay in Britain. In the event of a Brexit, he says he might retire not to France and not in Britain but to Portugal where he has a vacation home. Welcome to today's Europe. This is Robert Siegel reporting this week from London.

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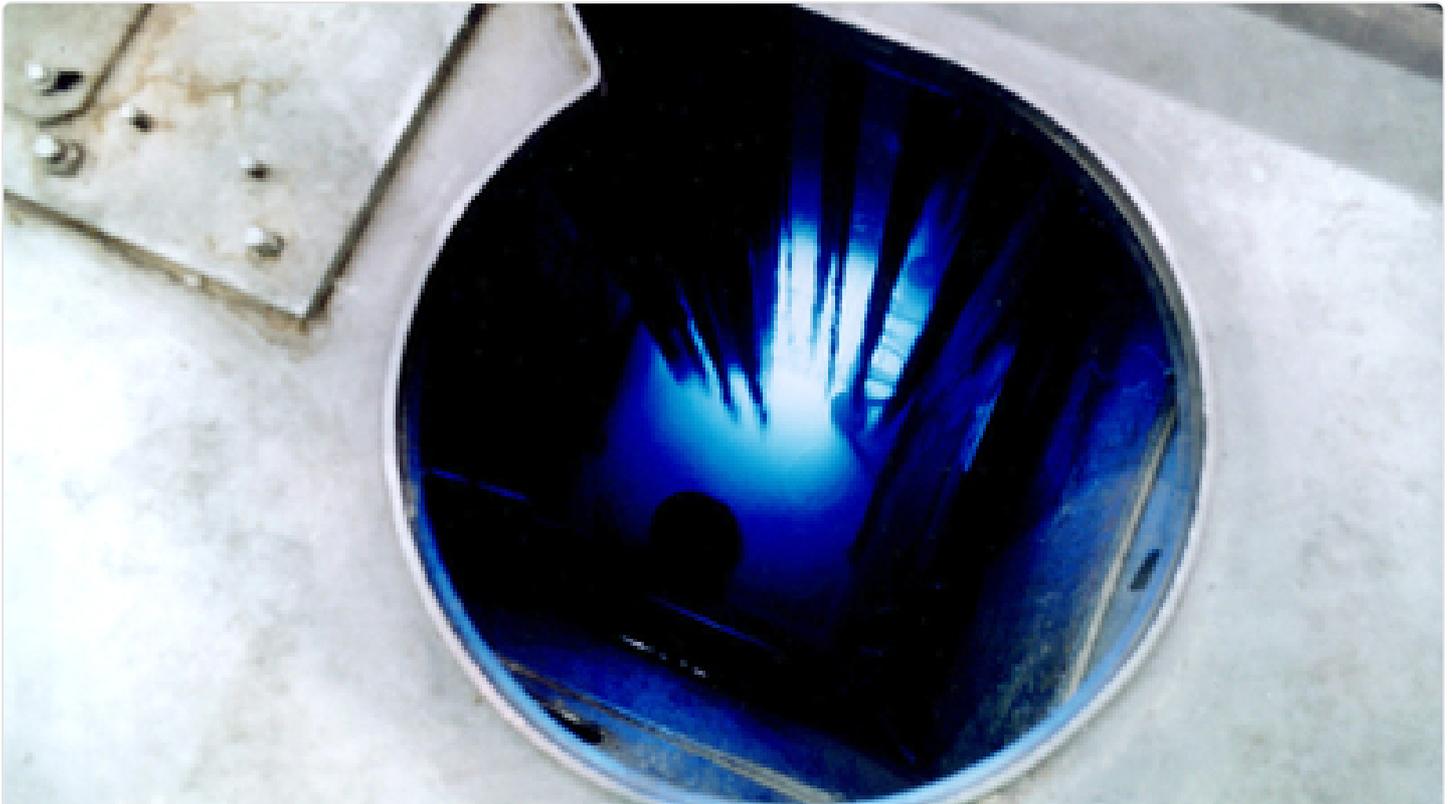
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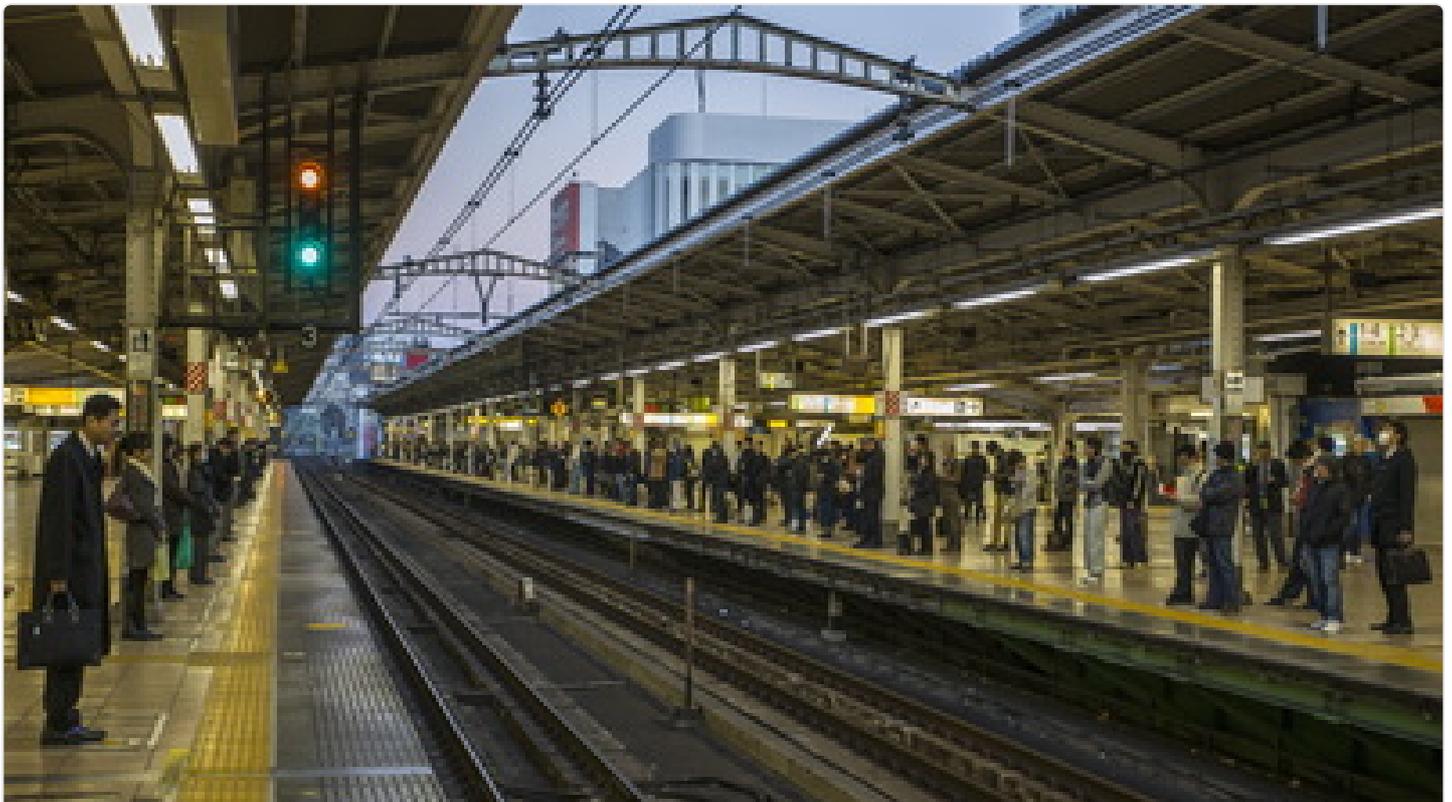
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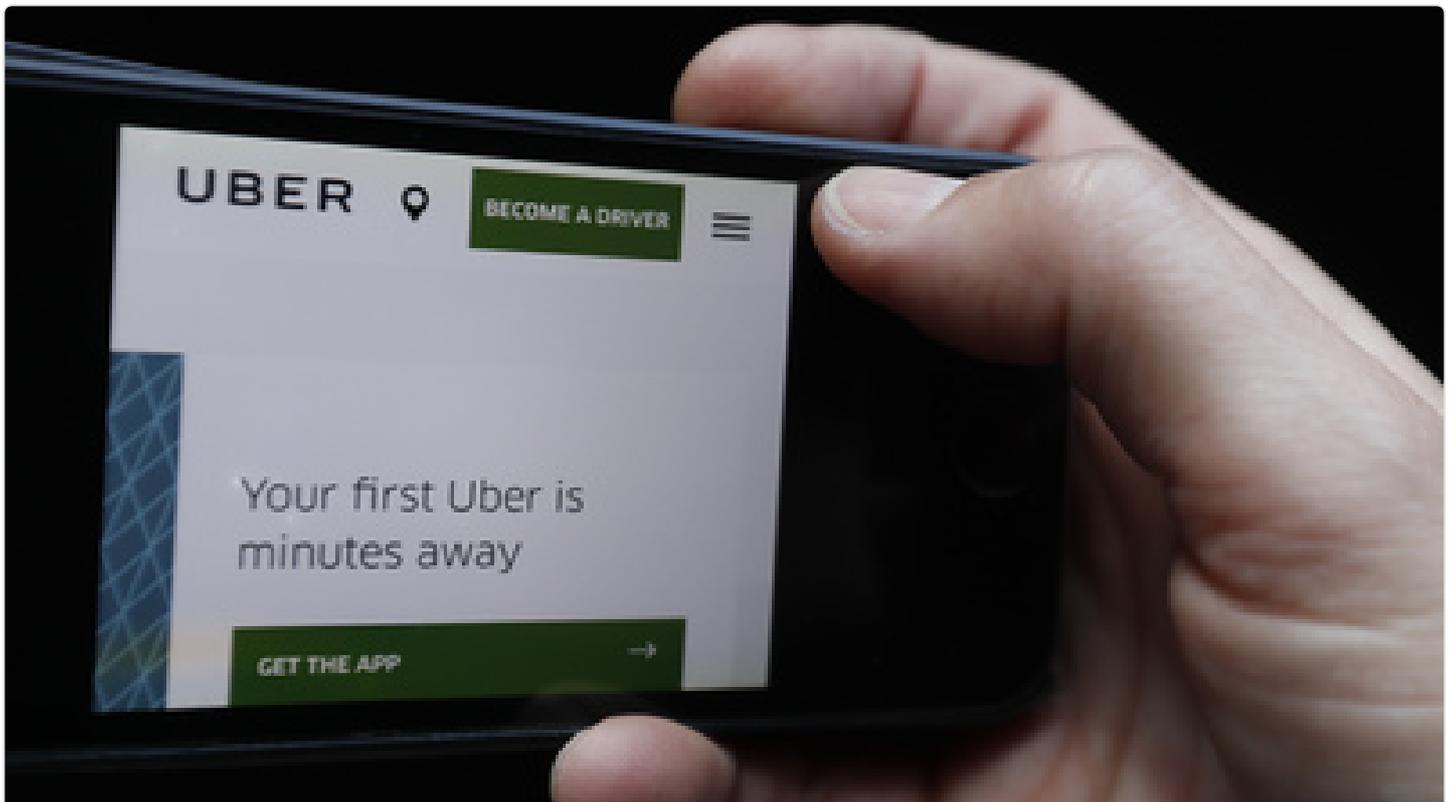
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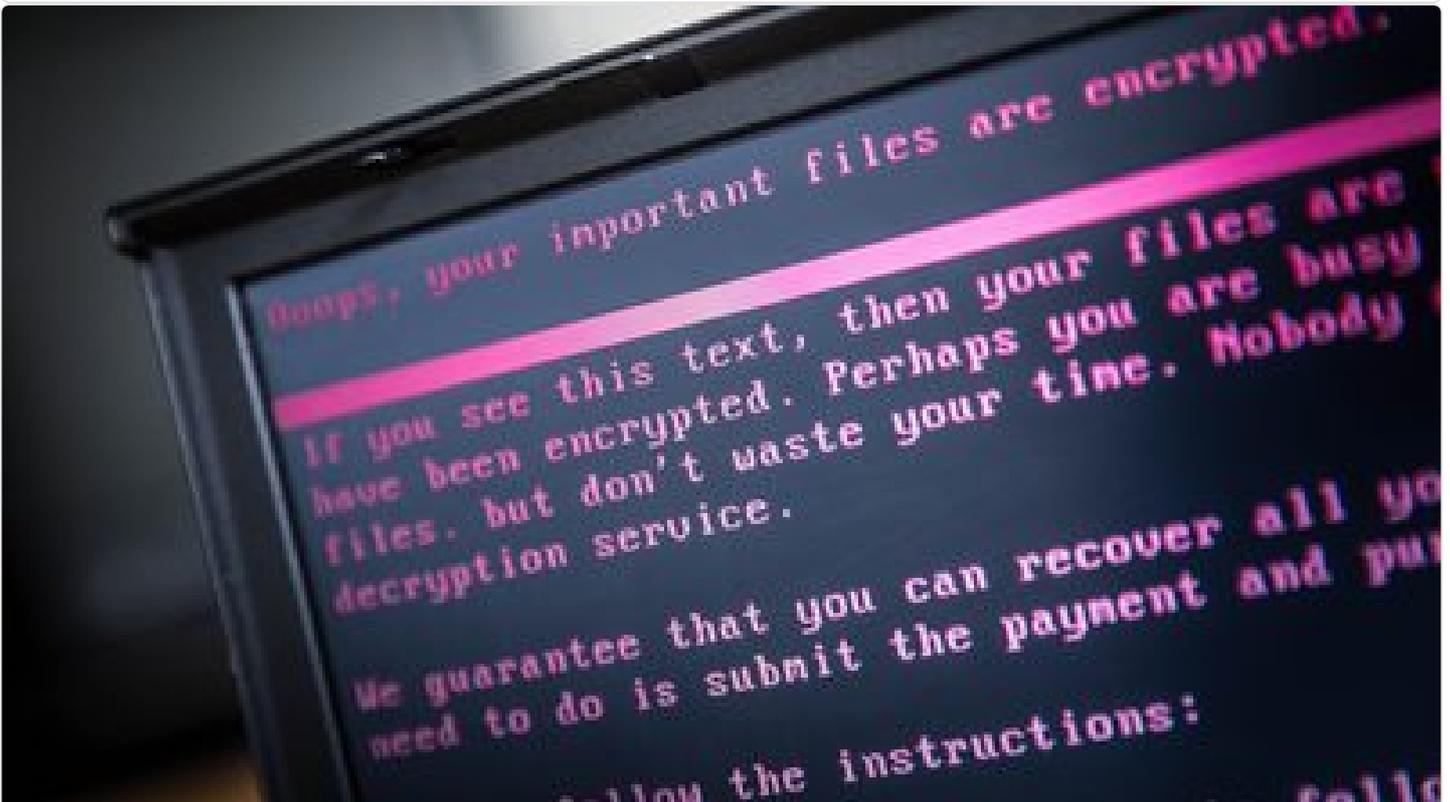
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