



*Dear Simon, how do think the referendum campaign will unfold now?*

The structure of the campaign is well understood, since in typical British style, despite not holding very many referendums, we have a set of rules about how to run them.

Now that David Cameron has announced 23 June as the date for the vote, he has to get this approved by Parliament, which will then authorise the Electoral Commission to oversee the campaign and the vote itself. That means that the Electoral Commission has about six weeks in which to choose the groups that will officially represent the two sides in the debate: These groups will have access to public funding and can make TV spots.

The formal campaign will last a minimum of ten weeks, during which time the government is supposed to maintain a neutral position, something that is easier since Cameron decided not to force his party to support the Remain position: The Tories, like most other parties, contain strong advocates on both sides of the argument, and a cross-party debate means that the vote will be less about Cameron's popularity. Instead, there will be broad coalitions of politicians, business people and others on each side, trying to convince the public of their case. TV debates are being discussed, but plans have still be finalised, although it's hard to see anyone becoming the 'face' of the two campaigns – the range of issues and positions is too wide for that.

The big question will be whether the public really cares very much about this referendum. To date, the EU has not been a very important issue in the UK since the days of the Constitutional Treaty (which French voters will recall they voted against in 2005), and so far it would be fair to say that there has not been a burning passion for debate.

However, people are concerned about issues such as immigration, welfare and employment: we can certainly expect that campaigners will do their best to connect these concerns to the vote. Perhaps these will push turnout closer towards the 65% who voted in the 1975 referendum, although that is very much at the top end of what we might expect.

*Best wishes,*

*Simon.*