

newsfeature

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BRITAIN TO HOLD A REFERENDUM ON EC MEMBERSHIP

Washington, D.C. -- Britain will hold a referendum June 5 -- its first -- to determine whether or not it should stay in the nine-nation European Community.

The way was cleared for a referendum after Prime Minister Harold Wilson finished "renegotiating" Britain's terms of entry into the Community at a March 10-11 meeting of European Community heads of State or Government in Dublin. Britain's requests included a reduction in its contribution to the Community budget to bring it into line with the size of the British economy.

Votes will be counted on a national, as opposed to local, basis. In this way, negative votes in Scotland or Wales could not be used as fuel for their autonomistic movements.

The result of the vote will be determined by a simple -- and as yet unspecified -- majority.

Every household in Britain will get a copy of a simplified government White Paper, explaining how the referendum will be conducted, as well as summaries of the arguments for staying in the European Community and for getting out. The British Government has already presented its White Paper on staying in to the Parliament -- which voted to accept it by a 226 vote margin on April 9.

The wording of the ballot is intended not to influence voters one way or another. The question will probably be: "The Government has announced the results of renegotiation of the United Kingdom's terms of membership of the European Community. Do you think the United Kingdom should stay in the European Community (the Common Market)? Yes? No?"

A government information office will be opened to answer questions about Britain's new Common Market membership terms -- questions from individuals as well as from the press. The Government will provide financial assistance to both pro-and anti-Market sides to help them run effective campaigns.

In the referendum, the Labor Government will not require party members -- even cabinet ministers -- to vote the government line. The country is divided on the issue -- even at cabinet level. At the moment, opinion polls show a majority for Britain's staying in the Common Market. But many voters say they're still undecided.