The Conservative Party

- Descending from the "Tories", a political faction strongly supporting the monarchy, the Conservative Party traces its roots to the 17th century and is thus one of the oldest parties in the UK.
- When coming to power in 1951, the Conservatives at first accepted the welfare state as established by the preceding Labour Government including the nationalisation of certain industries and the National Health Service.
- But under Margaret Thatcher (prime minister from 1979 to 1990) the Conservatives then became a party of uncompromising reform. Radically committed to free enterprise Margaret Thatcher's policy was marked by
  - rigorously cutting government expenditure with all its implications for welfare, education and the National Health Service,
  - the privatisation of formerly nationalised industries,
  - restraining the power of the trade unions.

The Conservatives have always been sceptical about a closer European Union. In the fear of being governed by Brussels, they generally prefer relying on Britain's own political and economic strength.

The "Brexit" Referendum

- In February 2016, Conservative Prime Minister David Cameron announced a referendum on the British membership in the EU. His aim was to get better conditions from his European partners once they see the British Euro-scepticism. Cameron himself campaigned for remaining in the EU.
- However, for the British public the main issue in the referendum was the fear of uncontrolled immigration into the country. About 50 % of British immigration at that time was from within the EU (mainly Eastern Europe).
- In a very close decision (51.9 % to 48.1 %) the British people opted for leaving the European Union in the referendum on 26 June 2016.
- David Cameron immediately stepped down as PM.

Problems in the negotiations with the EU

On the basis of Art. 50 of the EU-Treaty the British exit was terminated for 29 March 2019. In the negation process two issues caused the greatest difficulties:

- The Europeans perceived the British strategy as cherry-picking. In the European view the free movement of capital, goods and people is indivisible. The British, however, wanted to be part of the customs union, but tried to get rid of unrestricted immigration.
- "**Backstop**": With the Republic of Ireland remaining in the EU, there will be a land border between Britain and the EU in Northern Ireland. Both parties agreed on a guarantee to avoid strict border controls as these might inflame the troubles in Northern Ireland again. The British government, however, does not accept any customs control between Northern Ireland and England. The problem is still unsolved.

Nevertheless, in November 2018 Prime Minister Theresa May and the European leaders signed a treaty, paving the way for "Brexit".

Theresa May's defeat in the House of Commons

Proponents of a different "Brexit" course within the Conservative Party caused a historic defeat of a prime minister in parliament. With an overwhelming majority the House of Commons rejected May's deal with the EU three times in a row. Most MPs feared an endless bond to the EU without any seat in the European Parliament or other international committees. After her desparate struggle for the people's will failed, she finally resigned.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson

Johnson had always campaigned for a hard Brexit since 2016. In order to secure a majority within his own party he called for a snap election in December 2019, the third general elections in five years. Opponents in the Conservative Party were expelled. With his uncompromising manner and the slogan "Get Brexit done" he triumphed in a resounding victory. After Brexit had been postponed twice, Britain formally left the EU on 31 January 2020.

For a transition period until the end of 2020 all European laws are applied. If not all legal problems are solved until then, a hard "No-Deal-Brexit" is still possible.