

The Conservatives offer life in the European third leag...

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Danny Dorling and Mary O'Hara [offer a powerful analysis of the Tory's spending plans in the Guardian](#) this morning. As they note:

There is a lot at stake if the public spending cuts proposed by the coalition for the next parliament are introduced — and not just for poorer and marginalised groups. According to the latest [International Monetary Fund estimates](#), proposed UK cuts to public spending between 2015 and 2019 amount to 3% of GDP. If fully implemented, these would have profound repercussions. One of the less discussed of these is that the UK would join a tiny group of advanced economies — including Estonia, the Slovak Republic, and Ireland — that have shrunk the size of their states dramatically following the 2008 crash and which are all now seen as economic losers.

As they note:

European countries fall into one of four leagues when arranged by public spending. The first of these contains Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Italy and Sweden as well as France and Finland. These countries are spending at least half of their GDP on public services. The figures also include the servicing of government debts. There is of course no guarantee that publicly spent money will be spent well.

For instance, spending in Italy is high partly because it has to allocate so much in interest payments on its debts. However, in general these countries are doing well. In all of them [life expectancy is higher than in the UK](#) and in all but Italy, [levels of numeracy are higher than in the UK](#). And let's not forget that the median family in France and Germany has a [higher disposable income than the median in the UK, even before housing costs are taken into account](#).

But we're not in that league. In fact. We're about to fall out of league two and into league three if the Tories get their way. And as the Dorling and O'Hara note:

But, the government's plans to rapidly reduce the proportion of GDP spent on public services to 38% by 2019 mean that after 2015, the UK would leave the second division of European countries by public spending and enter the third division alongside Ireland,

[Estonia](#) and the Slovak Republic. A UK in this league would become more similar to these countries. It could become a place from which the young try to emigrate and in which the old are not well cared for, in which people on average live shorter, more brutal and less valued lives.

This is what is on offer at this election: brutal lives for most or something at least a bit better.

I campaign against poverty. That is my job at the end of the day. And short, brutal lives are characteristics of poverty. So I am not being party political by pointing this out. I am saying that we need not be offered this option. We can do better for people in this country. And we should. Which is why I do not think joining the third league of European nations should be on anyone's agenda for the UK. But as it is, I think I am right to point that out and make no apology for doing so.