

UK Elections: May 6, 2010 United Kingdom  
Eurovision's Plans Pay Off in UK Election Coverage

CASE STUDY: EUROVISION NEWS OPERATIONS

**CONTEXT**

On Thursday, May 6, 2010, a general election was held in the United Kingdom to elect members to the House of Commons. The election took place in 650 constituencies across the United Kingdom under a system known as first-past-the-post, where election results are determined by the highest polling candidate(s). Although David Cameron's Conservatives won the largest number of votes and seats, they fell just slightly short of the 326 seats needed to have an overall majority. This resulted in a "hung parliament", meaning that no political party held an outright majority. Britain's three major parties are Labour, Conservatives and Liberal Democrats.

Five days after the election, the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats, the smallest of the three parties, formed a coalition government – Britain's first since World War Two.

The strength of this new British government will be tested almost immediately by the financial situation facing Europe and by Britain's debt levels.

**EUROVISION**

When Gordon Brown announced that polling day would be May 6, the country had already been on general election alert since he became prime minister in June 2007. Throughout that time Eurovision's plans for a special operation in London were under constant review.

According to producer Jim Akhurst, once the date was announced plans went ahead for a large broadcast operation in the grounds of St Thomas' Hospital. This ancient site beside the Thames – named after the martyred Archbishop of Canterbury Thomas Becket – commands spectacular views of the Palace of Westminster. It was the third time the hospital had hosted Eurovision for a UK general election. A platform for six standup camera positions was built on the banks of the River Thames along with workspace for broadcasters in a marquee tent.



AFP Photos

"The 2010 general election was the most closely fought for decades. We needed a venue to accommodate the largest single broadcast services operation in London for this event. Once again we were able to call on our good relationship with St Thomas' Hospital and the fantastic views it offers.

"This view also caught the attention of the BBC's election programme editors, who were planning to project the election results onto the tower of Big Ben. The images were transmitted through election night via the Eurovision satellite network back to the BBC's election studio in west London. It was a first in British broadcasting and we were really pleased to be part of the BBC's election night coverage."

— Jim Akhurst, Producer

Three other operations were also set up, at each of the main political party headquarters. All three parties are based in Westminster, a short distance from Parliament. Eurovision was able to offer live standup positions at each of the three headquarter locations.

Eurovision also worked with the BBC election programme team to support a first in British television: the election results were to be projected live onto the clock tower of Big Ben. Eurovision transmitted these images for nine hours throughout election night.

#### RESULT

These four operations amounted to the most comprehensive broadcast facilities available to foreign correspondents covering the British election. In all, 10 satellite outputs were used on the Eurovision network operating 24 hours a day for three days.



AFP Photos

