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# Brexit news latest: Election watchdog allowed Vote Leave to break rules on spending

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A damning High Court ruling today said the watchdog in charge of the 2016 EU referendum mistakenly allowed unlawful donations by Vote Leave.

It found the Electoral Commission had misunderstood the laws that it was supposed to uphold forbidding campaign spending above legal limits.

The ruling is a major blow to the watchdog and will fuel claims that the narrow victory for Brexit was skewed by unfair spending and big donors.

The case was brought by the Good Law Project, led by barrister Jolyon Maugham QC, an anti-Brexit campaigner, who said "heads should roll" at the Commission.

Today's ruling found that hundreds of thousands of pounds funnelled by Vote Leave to another anti-EU campaign, BeLeave, should have been counted as Vote Leave's own campaign spending.

That would have taken Vote Leave's campaign spree over the £7 million limit set by law.

Some £600,000 was donated to BeLeave, a smaller group run by student Darren Grimes. In reality it was paid directly by Vote Leave to a Canadian data company.

Mr Grimes and Vote Leave deny wrongdoing, and say they were acting on advice from the Commission.

In his judgement, Lord Justice Leggatt said the Electoral Commission had "misinterpreted the definition of 'referendum expenses'" as defined by the Political Parties, Elections and Referendum Act. He said its interpretation of the law was "a recipe for abuse of the spending restrictions".



Vote Leave Brexit campaign fined £61k over breaking electoral law

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