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BLAIR'S EU-TURN

A CASE STUDY IN BBC PARTIALITY

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© Centre for Policy Studies, June 2004

ISBN No: 1 903219 72 8

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Printed by The Centre for Policy Studies, 57 Tufon Street, London SW1

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The research on which this paper is based has been funded by Global Britain, a cross-party think tank whose principals are Lord Pearson of Rannoch, Lord Stoddart of Swindon and Lord Harris of High Cross. The authors have worked on an entirely independent basis throughout. Global Britain has not had any influence in the content of the research work, other than in matters of fact.

The authors are also extremely grateful to Andrew Jubb who has been responsible for the detailed monitoring of the BBC's output in this and other papers.

SUMMARY

- On Tuesday 20 April 2004, Tony Blair formally announced his decision to hold a referendum on whether to accept the proposed EU Constitution. This announcement had been expected since Thursday 15 April. It was a major change of direction of Government policy.
- In the light of well-publicised concerns over its coverage of the EU, the BBC now had an opportunity, and the obligation, to achieve coverage that was balanced, fair and authoritative.
- On the day of the announcement the BBC's coverage was carefully monitored to see whether this was achieved.

Airtime Imbalance

- Of all the flagship news and current affairs programmes surveyed on Radio 4, BBC1 and BBC2, 38.4% of airtime was devoted to the referendum story.
- There were 62 contributions by outside speakers, totalling 88 minutes. Of this total, Europhile contributions took 61%. Eurosceptic contributions, which included the Conservative response, accounted for only 30% of the total airtime. This imbalance is hard to understand.
- From the three main parties, 65% of the spokesmen came from the Government; (31 minutes); 27% from the Conservatives (12 minutes 42 seconds); and 8% from the Liberal Democrats (4 minutes).
- 6 minutes 48 seconds were given to the Prime Minister's House of Commons soundbites while only 1 minute 47 seconds were allocated to Michael Howard's refutation.

- Of the eight guest speakers on the Today programme of 20 April, only one was a recognised Eurosceptic (Sir Malcolm Rifkind). He was allotted only 37 seconds. Three were strongly Europhile (Donald Anderson MP; Simon Buckby and Jack Cunningham MP); two were from broadly Europhile publications (*The Independent* and *The New Statesman*); and two were mildly Eurosceptic.

Presentational bias

- The Government's presentational strategy at the time of the announcement was to try to depict those arguing against the Constitution as advocates of withdrawal from the EU. As the Prime Minister declared to the House of Commons: "It is time to resolve once and for all whether this country, Britain, wants to be at the centre and heart of European decision-making or not; time to decide whether our destiny lies as a leading partner and ally of Europe or on its margins. Let the Eurosceptics whose true agenda we will expose, make their case."
- This line was, whether intentionally or not, consistently reflected in the BBC's coverage. For example, Michael Ancram was questioned aggressively on the World at One on this subject "Are you happy to fight this battle on the terms Tony Blair has dictated, exposing your wider anti-European agenda, as he puts it?"; whereas Baroness Williams' statement that "there are a lot of people who are going to support the 'no' side, who really do want to get out of the European Union altogether" was allowed to pass unchallenged.
- The Conservative arguments for a referendum were barely covered. Today and The World at One paid little attention to the Eurosceptic arguments, while PM demoted its sole Eurosceptic contribution to the last minutes of the programme. In the 10 o'clock News, there was no reporting of the Eurosceptic dimension at all nor was there any report of the Conservative response.

Poor journalistic standards

- The Constitution was presented solely and uncritically as a requirement for enlargement. Many Eurosceptics would argue that, while administrative reforms may be necessary for the EU, enlargement does not depend on the adoption of the Constitution as presently drafted.
- There was misleading and inadequate reporting of developments relating to the Government's 'red lines' between December 2003 and April 2004. For example, the BBC accepted without analysis the Government's claim that it had secured its red lines in the Brussels summit in December 2003.
- In the consideration of Mr Blair's U-turn, the BBC did not challenge the one-sided Europhile interpretation of the lessons to be learned from the Irish referenda on the Treaty of Nice.
- Conservative policy was mis-represented and identified too closely with the UKIP policy of withdrawal.

FOREWORD

Since 1999, Minotaur has monitored in detail more than 2,000 hours of BBC output, made more than 2,000 programme transcripts and written 15 separate reports. The reports have found consistent areas of bias which chime closely with what was found during the period surveyed in this paper.¹ This reinforces the claim that the findings of these two days are not a one-off aberration.

Minotaur's reports were all sent to the Chairman of the BBC, since the Chairman and Governors are ultimately responsible for the BBC's discharge of its public service remit. A serious problem has been that the Chairman passed them to the BBC's management for adjudication, which dismissed them as unfounded (see correspondence between Lords Harris of High Cross, Pearson of Rannoch and Stoddart of Swindon with the BBC Chairman 1999-2004 at www.globalbritain.org).

It is encouraging to learn that in future the Governors may be advised in this vital area not by the managers themselves but by people who are independent of management.

It is most encouraging to learn that in future the Governors may be advised in this vital area not by the managers themselves but by people who are independent of management. It will be seen, however, that much still needs to be done if the BBC is to achieve balance in its coverage of the EU.

¹ The key findings of earlier reports can be found in Appendix 2.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

We broadcasters are stranded in a European no man's land – certain to come under fire from both sides. The pros declare our job is to counter the myths of the antis. That of course is not what we are in the business for. Yet if we don't we will be accused of following the agenda of the Eurosceptic press... What is the answer then? To admit that there is no single truth: ...in other words to shun the current allergy to debate and disagreement.

Nick Robinson, political editor of ITV News, *The Times*, 23 April 2004

It appears that the BBC has taken on board some of the criticisms made of its low level of coverage of the European Union.² It has acknowledged that the EU-related output needs monitoring and has commissioned a six-month independent review,³ ahead of an expected referendum on the proposed EU Constitution. And it would also appear that awareness is permeating down through the editorial hierarchy: discussing the recent Centre for Policy Studies paper, *An Outbreak of Narcolepsy*, BBC Radio 4's 'The Message',⁴ deputy director of News and Current Affairs, Mark Damazer acknowledged that the BBC's coverage of the EU needed to be improved:

² For details of the low level of coverage, and the lack of attention to detail to EU-related issues, see *An Outbreak of Narcolepsy: why the BBC must improve its coverage of the EU*, Centre for Policy Studies, 2004.

³ *Daily Telegraph*, 5 May 2004.

⁴ 30 April 2004.

I think one of the problems is precisely in this area where legislation is initiated by the European Union and where the European Union has a lot of power... I don't think that we are on top of our game there... I think in terms of the BBC's role in informing the public, we have a huge responsibility and I don't think that we always live up to it and I do think that we need to raise our game.

The most recent tracking of BBC EU-related output since the end of March also suggests some changes may have been introduced. An over-reliance on live "two-ways" with Europe correspondents has been replaced with better constructed pre-edited reports. A series of dedicated reports by Tim Franks on *Today* during the third week in May, a special report on *The Westminster Hour*⁵ and a report by Martha Kearney for *Newsnight* on 21 May on the relationship with the EU all raised levels of information and background understanding.

"I think one of the problems is precisely in this area where legislation is initiated by the European Union and where the European Union has a lot of power... I don't think that we are on top of our game there" – Mark Damazer, BBC Director of News and Current Affairs, Analysis, 30 April 2004.

In this new climate of attention, it would be expected that the coverage of Mr Blair's U-turn on a British referendum on the EU Constitution, arguably, the most dramatic day of EU-related coverage since Black Wednesday in 1992, would be fair and fearless. The announcement of the U-turn had been well flagged. *The Times* on 15 April seemed to have an exclusive leak, and in his interview on 'Today' on 17 April, the Prime Minister proffered a classic 'non-denial denial' in repeating three times that if the Government's policy did change, "we would let you know".

The U-turn was so well trailed that there was ample opportunity for the BBC's forward planning department to take all the necessary steps to achieve coverage that was balanced, fair and authoritative. But analysis of the main BBC news and current affairs coverage in the hours up to and immediately after 20 April – the day on which the U-turn was officially announced – demonstrates that it failed to meet obligations.⁶

⁵ The edition on 9 May 2004 carried two EU items: a report on the EU Elections; and an analysis of the inadequacy of the scrutiny process for EU directives.

⁶ The BBC states on its website that it "exists to enrich people's lives with great programmes and services that inform, educate and entertain. Its vision is to be the most creative, trusted organisation in the world. It provides a wide range of distinctive programmes and services for everyone, free of commercial interests and political bias."

This paper scrutinises the BBC's coverage of the 27-hour period surrounding the U-turn.⁷ It shows that the imbalances identified are deep-rooted, echoing some recurrent themes since systematic monitoring by Minotaur began in 1999. These include:

- **Consistent airtime imbalance** between advocacy and presentation of the Europhile perspective and the Eurosceptic case in an overall ratio of 2:1.
- **Consistent presentational bias** (in the limited time allocated) through treating Eurosceptic opinion as 'extreme' rather than as an alternative policy approach – reflecting and supported by public opinion – to membership of the EU.
- **Poor journalistic standards**, including inaccurate reporting of statistics and sources. For example, the BBC Programme Complaints Unit has acknowledged that figures on Irish inward investment were used 'misleadingly'.⁸ The wrong use of these figures influenced the coverage of the second Irish referendum on the Treaty of Nice in October 2002.

There is a consistent imbalance of 2:1 in favour of the Europhile perspective.

Such charges are not made lightly. The analysis here is based on thorough examination of all the relevant programme transcripts. It demonstrates that the BBC fails to consider Britain's relationship with the EU from a sufficiently broad range of perspectives; and that it fails to subject the Government's approach to the EU to critical scrutiny.

⁷ The programmes monitored were, on 20 April,: Today, The World at One, PM, The Ten O'clock News, The World Tonight, Newsnight.; and on 21 April: Today.

⁸ See the Global Britain website for details (www.globalbritain.org).

CHAPTER TWO

THE U-TURN

What and who had led to the Prime Minister's decision and what were the implications for Tony Blair's political future? Did this change of mind mark a tectonic shift in the Government's EU policies? If so, what were the implications for the Government's negotiating stance on the Constitution? Or did the Prime Minister's decision boil down to a Machiavellian attempt to wrong-foot the Conservatives on their most powerful political weapon before the European Elections?

On this day of high political drama, these were some of the questions for the BBC to report on and explore. On an issue of this magnitude, the corporation would be expected to achieve balance, and to explore as wide a range of opinion as possible across the day's news output.

Of the contributions by outside speakers, 61% of the airtime was allocated to Europhiles, 30% to Eurosceptics and 9% to neutral speakers.

Of all the flagship news and current affairs programmes surveyed on Radio 4, BBC1 and BBC2,⁹ 38.4% of the feature airtime was devoted to the referendum story. There were 62 contributions by outside speakers,

⁹ See 27-Hour Monitoring Statistics in the Appendix. All newspaper commentators have been treated as neutral (not categorised as either Europhile or Eurosceptic).

totalling 88 minutes. Of this total, Europhile contributions took 61%, divided between those supporting the U-turn (70% of the 61%) and those against (22%). Eurosceptic contributions, which included the Conservative response, accounted for only 30% of the total airtime.¹⁰ This imbalance is hard to understand.

Labour spokesmen dominated the airtime with Mr Blair, Mr Straw, Mr Cunningham and Ms Hewitt taking 31 minutes of the 88 minutes given to outside speakers. In contrast, Conservative spokesman received just 12½ minutes of airtime.

Labour spokesmen dominated the airtime, with Mr Blair, Mr Straw, Mr Cunningham and Ms Hewitt alone taking up 31 minutes of the 88. Obviously, Government reaction and reasoning was important. In contrast, Conservative spokesmen received only 12½ minutes of airtime. In this time they not only had to refute the Government's rationale for the U-turn, but also had to confront the Government's allegation that the Eurosceptics had run "a successful campaign to persuade Britain that Europe is a conspiracy aimed at us rather than a partnership designed for us".¹¹

The spokesmen approached or selected by the BBC to make the Eurosceptic case were also unusual. Jens Peter Bonde, a Danish MEP, was the first Eurosceptic contributor on air. Andrew Rosindell MP, a Conservative vice-chairman with little previous experience of speaking on EU-related issues on the media, was the last. Between them they gave, unknowingly, the main interviews of the day. Neither contributor was a known spokesman and neither had notable presentational skills in comparison with the chosen Europhiles.

With so little to pick up on, the programme presenters were reliant on the BBC political correspondents to fill the gap. In the event, although their contributions were largely fair, they were also cumbersome in making the Eurosceptic case. For example Andrew Marr identified the terms of the coming political debate as likely to be – "is it Europe in or out, is it this particular Constitution, which can be torn up and another one substituted, what really this is about".¹²

¹⁰ Europhile Pro-Referendum 38'14"; Europhile Anti-Referendum 16'10"; Eurosceptic 24'13".

¹¹ Of ten soundbites broadcast from the Tony Blair statement to the House of Commons, this extract was repeated four times over the day.

¹² World at One.

The clear imbalance of the coverage in favour of Europhile opinion put a huge question mark over the Eurosceptic perspective on the debate – ‘whether this particular constitutional draft can be torn up’ – either getting a fair hearing on that day or in the future.

TODAY: 20 APRIL

The BBC’s feature coverage of the U-turn opened just after 6.30am on Today with a ‘two-way’ between John Humphrys and political editor Norman Smith.

There were three further items at 7.09, 8.10 and at 8.55am, adding up to a combined 24% of Today’s feature airtime.¹³ Those invited to react to or be interviewed about the referendum were:

7.09: Jens Peter Bonde a Eurosceptic Danish MEP, and Dr Tim Evans, President of the Centre for New Europe, a think tank based in Brussels;

8.10: Sir Malcolm Rifkind, the Conservative Eurosceptic MP; Donald Anderson, Labour Europhile MP and Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Select Committee; Simon Buckby, the former Campaign Director for Britain in Europe; and Dr Jack Cunningham, Labour Europhile MP;

8.55: Andy McSmith, Political Editor of the *Independent on Sunday*; and John Kampfner, Political Editor of the *New Statesman*.¹⁴

Of the eight contributions to this edition, only one was from a Eurosceptic perspective. It totalled just 37 seconds.

Of the eight contributions in this edition, only one was from a Eurosceptic perspective, that of Sir Malcolm Rifkind. It totalled just 37 seconds. The contributions of Danish MEP, Jens Peter Bonde and Dr Tim Evans, were both mildly Eurosceptic, but neither man was from the forefront of Eurosceptic opinion, or directly linked with the Eurosceptic campaigns in Britain. Their analyses – of Mr Blair putting himself into a political win-win position in terms of out-manoeuvring Eurosceptic opposition and with strengthening his hand in renegotiating the Constitution – were not taken up in this or subsequent items.

Of the five remaining contributors, three – Donald Anderson, Simon Buckby and Jack Cunningham – were strongly Europhile and in favour of the new Constitution. All three were allocated considerably more airtime than the 37 seconds allocated to Malcolm Rifkind. While they were challenged in their views, this was not to the extent that it cancelled out the imbalance.

¹³ Outside the prescribed news bulletin, sport and weather spots.

¹⁴ See Appendix 1.

The two other contributions, from political editors Andy McSmith and John Kampfner are more difficult to classify. Though both could be regarded as “neutral”, it was striking, that on a morning when the balance of opinion was important, both were from publications that would not be classified as Eurosceptic. Notably, there was no commentator from the Eurosceptic press, such as *The Daily Mail*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Sun* or *The Times* – which had all been campaigning vociferously for a referendum. In addition, the content of their interviews was not angled at exploring Eurosceptic opinion. Their inclusion as main interviewees further skewed the overall drift of the morning’s coverage.

It was notable that, while there were contributions from the political editors of The Independent and The New Statesman, there was no commentator from the Eurosceptic press.

The one point of difference between the main contributors from the Europhile perspective was over the desirability of a referendum. Here there was a ratio of 4:1 against. The only defence of Tony Blair’s decision was made by Jack Cunningham MP.

It was of course important for the programme to explore the opinions of the ‘disappointed Europhiles’. But the absence of adequate counterweight¹⁵ to their combined anti-referendum perspective – other than from Mr Cunningham in the main shop window item – made the primary message to emerge from the programme’s coverage as one of muted dismay, disbelief and later, some sympathy. The tone of this was foreshadowed by John Humphrys’ opening question in his 6.32am exchange with Norman Smith, when he asked simply “what made him do it?”, and it was echoed later and his introduction to the 8.10am item:

You can see why politicians tend to be a bit cagey now and then, you know, not always answering every question as directly as they might. Tony Blair must be kicking himself that he was quite so adamant about ruling out a referendum on the new European Constitution.

This approach – which could be interpreted as supportive of Mr Blair – prefaced an interview with Mr Cunningham which was not, by Mr Humphreys’ own stated standards, one of those in which he showed ‘bias in favour of challenging those in power.’¹⁶ Adopting a discursive rather than

¹⁵ Labour Party Eurosceptics who had been actively campaigning for a referendum, like Ian Davidson, of Labour against a Super State, or Pro-Referendum Labour party Europhiles like Gisela Stuart MP, or the Pro-Referendum Liberal Democrats would all have added interesting perspectives and broadened the range of reaction.

¹⁶ *The Times*, ‘Thunderer’, 20 April 2004, .headlined “Yes, guilty as charged. I’m biased like the rest of the BBC”.

interrogative mode, he did not pin Mr Cunningham down, he did not pursue his one tricky question,¹⁷ letting Mr Cunningham off the hook, and generally let him run with the ball. He said for example:

Now where Michel Howard is wrong is to suggest to people or imply that we could have this referendum next month , or in the summer, or in the autumn. Everyone knows it would be a farce to go to the country...In any event, the ratification process has to take place...we then have to legislate to have a referendum...

The questioning of the Europhile contributors was notable for its omissions. Was this a hiccup, or something more serious for the Europhile movement? Had the Government's EU policies been abandoned to save the Labour Party? Had the change of strategy paved the way for a change of heart – reflecting a 'closet' acceptance of many Eurosceptic concerns? Would it free the Government's negotiating position on the Constitution after becoming trapped in a battle over the red lines which they were seemingly losing?

None of these important points were asked; instead, the presenters seemed as surprised as their guests. Eurosceptic reaction was marginalised and was not made up for by the contributions from the political editors in the final item of the programme.

THE WORLD AT ONE

The World at One came on air just after Tony Blair had spoken to Parliament about his decision:

It has been an unrelenting but, I have to accept, partially at least, successful campaign to persuade Britain that Europe is a conspiracy aimed at us rather than a partnership designed for us...

It is time to resolve once and for all whether this country, Britain, wants to be at the centre and heart of European decision-making or not; time to decide whether our destiny lies as a leading partner and ally of Europe or on its margins. Let the Eurosceptics whose true agenda we will expose, make their case. Let those of us who believe in Britain in Europe not because of Europe alone but because, we believe in Britain and our national interests lying in Europe, let us make our case too, let the issue be put and let the battle be joined.

¹⁷ His one sceptical question was: [Tony Blair has] "finally realised, given the strength of the Opposition, given the fact that you've got a tough leader of the opposition now in Michael Howard, given the damage it would do to him domestically, that he had, in the end, he had no choice, he'd made a rotten call in the first place and now he being smoked out?"

Both of these extracts from the Prime Minister's statement were repeated in full across the flagship news programmes over the rest of the day and in part the next morning.¹⁸ The statement was a clear political ploy to manoeuvre the debate about the EU Constitution in the Government's favour, to present it as a choice between deliberately cast extremes with no options in between.

The statement was a clear political ploy to manoeuvre debate about the EU Constitution in the Government's favour.

This is not, however, an analysis that Eurosceptics accept. Depending on their affiliations, they see a number of options, ranging from partial re-negotiation of the Constitution to withdrawal from the EU altogether.

Despite this, the main thrust of the BBC's past questioning of the Conservatives about the Constitution had been to echo the Europhile and Government claim that their main policy, though cast as re-negotiation, is really to withdraw.¹⁹ Thus in the first interview of the day with a Conservative shadow cabinet member, Guto Harri confronted Michael Ancram:

Are you happy to fight this battle on the terms Tony Blair has dictated, exposing your wider anti-European agenda, as he puts it?

The editorial decision to push Mr Ancram so aggressively²⁰ was questionable, especially in view of the fact that the Prime Minister's U-turn ('spectacular acrobatics' as Mr Harri had just described it) had been confirmed only minutes before the programme went on air. The interview with Mr Ancram lasted only around 1 minute 30 seconds (23rd in the length of contributions across the 27 hours, and compared with almost 6 minutes for Jack Cunningham) and gave him only a limited opportunity to defend and explain his party's stance.

Michael Ancram was followed by a pre-recorded interview from Neil Kinnock (who expressed opposition to the referendum only on the grounds that it was not necessary); then a brief soundbite from Tony Benn (who

¹⁸ Yesterday in Parliament, 22 April 2004.

¹⁹ Minotaur surveys: Today and the Convention on the Future of Europe (covering September 2002-July 2003) and Europe and the European Constitution (September-December 2003).

²⁰ Mr Harri's second question was: "What has changed, of course, from your point of view is that something that Tony Blair had been denying the British people, the chance to have a say on this, is something that he's now granting them, and that deprives you of this weapon that you've been using against him for many, many months now, do you feel a slight sense of loss and regret now as you go in to the European Elections and next year's general election?"

spoke in support of the referendum, but who had no time to explain why). The next item was another pre-recorded interview, this time with Baroness Williams. She claimed that Mr Blair had allowed the stage to be:

...dominated by some of the most extreme and the most biased voices you could possibly hope to find in the media and elsewhere, with a result that the British public has, I think, an extremely distorted view of Europe... there are a lot of people who are going to support the 'no' side, who really do want to get out of the European Union altogether, and I think that there's some evidence that Mr Howard is playing this group as well as those who simply object to the Constitution.

Shirley Williams' views – in line with the Government's strategy of depicting those against the Constitution as extremists – were aired without comment.

These views – exactly in line with the Government's strategy of depicting those against the Constitution as extremists – were aired without comment from Mr Harri. Their inclusion without debate from one of the most fervent supporters of the European Union had the effect of endorsing the Prime Minister's rationale for his U-turn, on which, at this stage, neither he, nor his spokesmen had been questioned on the main claim.

Mr Harri did not follow up Michael Howard's primary charge, that Mr Blair was guilty of political opportunism. Nor did he refer at all to Mr Howard's vision of a flexible Europe. In the context of the structure of the piece, these omissions were striking.

Next in the World at One sequence came clips from 1975 of Tony Benn and Margaret Thatcher. The purpose was to underline Baroness Thatcher's shift from being an enthusiastic supporter of the then Common Market to her later Euroscepticism. The effect was to cast further negative light on the current Conservative position over Europe.²¹ Although the final interview sequence gave Dominic Cummings a limited chance to put across anti-Constitution arguments, the overall anti-Eurosceptic tone was reinforced by Mr Harri's emotive use of language²². He asked whether:

...Tony Blair has allowed you to help fester Euroscepticism?

The overall structure of the programme, the terms of the questioning, the higher prominence given to Europhile opinion, combined to create the impact that the Government wanted: a debate which cast the opponents of the Government and the Constitution as 'extreme'.

²¹ Especially since Mr Kinnock's defence of his change of heart was included in his interview, an opportunity not accorded to Mrs Thatcher.

²² Appearing live with the Europhile George Foulkes MP.

PM

By 5pm, the start of PM, programme editors had had time to digest the story, to review its coverage so far, and to decide which questions and responses needed further exploration.

Caroline Quinn's guests were Dick Roche, Ireland's Foreign Minister with special responsibility for Europe who had steered the 'yes' campaign for his country's second referendum on the Nice Treaty; Foreign Secretary Jack Straw; European Commissioner, Neil Kinnock; UKIP leader Roger Knapman; Trevor Kavanagh, Political Editor of *The Sun* and Andrew Grice, Political Editor of *The Independent*.

In view of the higher number of Europhile interviewees on the World at One and now on PM, it might have been expected that the programme would adopt a robust approach so that Eurosceptic and anti-Constitution points would be made and pursued. Yet Caroline Quinn failed to scrutinise adequately either Mr Roche or Mr Straw or to advocate in her interviews with them the Eurosceptic case. She observed to Mr Roche, for example, about the first referendum on the Treaty of Nice:

...and that no vote, when the question of EU integration was put to the popular test, it was a bit of a scaring experience for the Irish.

This generalised statement was partisan towards the Irish Government's position, implying that the 'no' vote was unwelcome. Mr Roche then claimed:

..the first Nice referendum was lost in Ireland largely because there wasn't a particularly spectacular campaign. What happened then was that the people who were opposed came out to vote, and the people who were in favour just didn't. In the second referendum, that position was reversed.

Ms Quinn allowed this one-sided view to pass without comment. This suggested that she either ignored or was unaware of the very different Eurosceptic interpretation of events that had been aired at the time and the disquiet surrounding the management of this referendum.²³ She also let a further two equally partisan comments pass without any Eurosceptic points being made or offered.

Ms Quinn's nine-minute interview with Mr Straw was neither robust nor tough, as is underlined by one of the key questions in the sequence. She put to him the apparent lack of logic in the Government's case because it was using the same argument for having and not having a referendum to defend its position that 'a Constitution would not change the relationship with UK'. But after his lengthy justification, her sole response was:

Alright.

²³ Including disquiet about the level of government and EU funding for the 'yes' campaign.

Crucially, in terms of the Eurosceptic case, she also let pass without challenge Mr Straw's allegation that Mr Howard "...had no words" to explain how the Constitution would change the relationship with Britain. Nor in the eight questions during this lengthy interview did she confront Mr Straw directly with Mr Howard's main accusation of the political opportunism of the Government.²⁴ Her interviewing was not adversarial and no elements of the Eurosceptic case emerged from her approach. Mr Straw had almost free rein to repeat the terms of the debate on the referendum as he saw them.

Neil Kinnock, the third Europhile to be interviewed, in his second interview of the day, repeated the terms of the debate that he wished to see the battle lines drawn on.²⁵ After Neil Kinnock, Caroline Quinn then stated:

In advance of the referendum, ministers will of course have to frame a question about the Constitution, but the debate looks likely to range far wider, and on to the broader question of Britain's place in Europe. I touched on that when I was talking to Jack Straw...and certainly in his statement today, the Prime Minister did little to correct that impression.

She then linked into Mr Blair's statement itself:

As this debate continues, it will become very clear what the choice is. The choice is either that we have Britain at the heart of Europe, able to play its full part in the EU, or we end up opting to go down the road set out by the Eurosceptics that now dominate the Conservative party, and that is to change fundamentally the relationship that Britain has with the EU. That is what is at issue – whether Britain continues at the centre of European decision-making, as we passionately believe it should, or we retreat to the margins.

The next part of the sequence was a link to a soundbite to Roger Knapman of UKIP. He said:

He (Tony Blair) said that it was about our place in Europe, and if it's about our place in Europe, it's about 'in or out', the vast majority does want to get out of the European Union, have Britain governed by the British and British taxpayers money sent to our own schools, our own hospitals and our own pensioners. That's what the vast majority want, as a result of today's announcement it's only the UK Independence Party that's saying what the majority want to hear.

²⁴ Her nearest question was: "Isn't it the case really, honestly, that Tony Blair just didn't fancy going into the European Election with the Tories calling for a referendum? That's why he's decided, it's not a matter of principle or trying to make things clearer for people, it's a purely political decision?" to which Mr Straw replied; "No it's not the case, honestly, truthfully".

²⁵ "... the way in which the European issues, Britain's engagement in the EU, the nature and potential of the EU are completely shrouded in all kinds of manufactured fog, mainly coming from sections of the press, but some political opinion as well, and that fog, he feels, must be cleared away."

The combined impact of the Blair and Knapman contributions was to reinforce Tony Blair's claims about the choice facing voters. The UKIP extract was a Eurosceptic contribution. But it was the only direct input in PM from any Eurosceptic politician. Its uncompromising tone – and the absence in the programme of a political perspective on re-negotiation – could be seen as helping the Government's goal of portraying the only alternative to its stance on the EU as withdrawal. It seems from the construction of the sequence that this was intended.

Of the final two contributors on the programme, Trevor Kavanagh's was the lone Eurosceptic voice during the hour who was actually interviewed. He revealed that Mr Blair had been:

..warned by his own European advisor in the foreign office Sir Stephen Wall, that his position, in terms of saying this did not alter our relationship with Europe at all and the way we are governed, was unsustainable.

It was a shame that this important allegation in terms of the Eurosceptic case came too late in the programme to be put to either Mr Straw or Mr Kinnock. Andrew Grice, (the second journalist from the Independent Group on that day), added his sympathy for the necessity of the U-turn, though arguing that the result of the referendum would be a tough call.

THE WORLD TONIGHT

Presenter Clare Bolderson's interview with David Cowling, the BBC's head of political research, was the first during the day's coverage to explore the substance of the Constitution. She asked him what he saw as the most contentious areas of the draft document. His reply was detailed and informative.²⁶ It was followed by live interviews with Simon Buckby, his second of the day, and Andrew Rosindell, only the second interview of the day with a Conservative party spokesman.

Ms Bolderson asked Mr Buckby why he would vote yes in a future referendum. His reply included the two key arguments of the need for a

²⁶ “The possibility of greater defence co-operation, the idea of majority voting, the fact that with 25 members, in June, as opposed to the present 15, it becomes a very cumbersome organisation, therefore majority voting should actually be extended. So areas which previously were open to the veto of individual countries, one country saying ‘no’, and that stops it, now the suggestion is that a greater area, a greater territory of policy dealt with by the European Parliament, by the European Commission should be subject to majority voting, which means of course that potentially, if Britain takes one view, we may lose the vote and therefore the matter is resolved outside, to an extent, our control. Majority voting on asylum and visas and immigration, majority voting on criminal and judicial cooperation, so there are issues there that are fairly important issues, and that, I suspect, is the battle ground for the months and the years ahead.”

Constitution to cope with enlargement and to unify and rationalise existing treaties.²⁷

Mr Rosindell who is a Conservative vice-chairman, but not part of the foreign affairs team, was invited more than once to comment on the specifics of the Constitution. His responses focused on generalities of the protection of British interests and fears of loss of sovereignty, but he did not put across a detailed case against it. Neither he or Ms Bolderson queried the enlargement rationale.

There was only one direct opportunity on that day for a Eurosceptic or Conservative spokesman to present their detailed arguments against the Constutiton... It is striking that it came from a relatively junior and unknown spokesman.

This was the only direct opportunity in 24 hours of coverage given to either a Eurosceptic or a Conservative spokesman to present their detailed arguments against a Constitution. It was the last main radio news programme of the day and the one with the lowest audience. It was not clear why Mr Rosindell was invited to put the Conservative case. During the course of the day, the Labour party had fielded some of its leading spokespeople on Europe. It is striking that the one contribution from the Conservative Party was by a relatively junior and unknown spokesman.

BBC1 TEN O'CLOCK NEWS

The bulletin opened with:

The prime minister has been explaining why he's changed sides on the question of a referendum on the new European Constitution. Tony Blair told MPs that a referendum would be necessary to counter what he called the 'myths' being spread by Eurosceptics. The announcement ended weeks of speculation and confirmed the fundamental shift in government policy. In a taste of the campaign to come, the prime minister said it was time to decide whether Britain's destiny lay as a leading partner in Europe or on the margins.

Huw Edwards' introduction was entirely on the terms presented by Mr Blair. The only reference in the flagship BBC1 news programme to the Opposition response was:

²⁷ "First the European Union started off forty years ago with six members, then it enlarged to fifteen, and now it's up to twenty-five,..... therefore to make the decision-making procedures effective. Second, it's important that we unify the existing arrangements. to delineate very clearly that this isn't – as was suggested just a moment ago, an ongoing march of chopping away our sovereignty, but actually it's a negotiation which comes to an end."

The prime minister is accused by Conservatives of a humiliating U-turn, but he promises a tough contest.

In its own words, the programme then set out to assess:

...what the decision means for politics here and across the European Union.

The first report from Mark Mardell referred again to the soundbite in which the Prime Minister had blamed the need for the referendum on ‘myths peddled by Eurosceptics’, before playing Mr Blair’s Commons statement once again. It was followed by Michael Howard mocking the Prime Minister’s U-turn and asking who could trust him again. The sequence did not, however, include any of the ripostes from Mr Howard which took head-on Mr Blair’s key claims about ‘myths being peddled by Eurosceptics’. In the overall pattern of omission of the Eurosceptic case, this was an important absence.

The next report came from diplomatic correspondent Bridget Kendall. It focused on the likely impact of the referendum decision within the EU. After referring to “the likely arguments as the EU prepared to welcome ten new members”, she made the claim that “in ten days, they really will have something to celebrate”. Ms Kendall then made what anti-Constitution figures argue is a typically Europhile case for the need for the new Constitution: “because of the logistical nightmare of enlargement to 25 countries”.²⁸ Her final point about the Constitution was that the Government had laid down red lines which it claimed it would not cross in terms of new powers for the EU.

Her report was followed by a live three-way exchange between Huw Edwards, Mark Mardell and Stephen Sackur, who was reporting from Poland. He was asked by Huw Edwards what kind of impact Mr Blair’s decision would have on the rest of the European Union.

Mr Sackur presented only one perspective in his answer. It represented official EU and Europhile opinion, namely, that the decision by Mr Blair had caused consternation and concern elsewhere in Europe, along with worries about the risks now posed to the Constitutional process.²⁹ Mr

²⁸ “Tonight, these young Poles in Warsaw are still on Europe’s doorstep, but from the first of May, they and millions like them will be new European citizens, a powerful economic bloc, but potentially a logistical nightmare – (*shots of EU Summit photo* call) already the line up of 25 leaders at EU summits seems to go on forever. Day to day bureaucracy could descend into gridlock, unless – say its supporters – it’s streamlined by the new Constitution. Already, thousands of old rules have been revamped, a new full-time president and foreign minister have been agreed, and voting rights adjusted to make it harder for countries to block policy. But Britain has red lines it says it won’t cross, over taxation, where it wants a veto; foreign and defence policy; social security, and some law and order issues.”

²⁹ “I think there’s some consternation in many quarters in Europe about Mr Blair’s decision, because what it emphasises again is that the road to this Constitution is

Sackur's approach mirrored the words of EU president Pat Cox³⁰ in Bridget Kendall's report. It culminated in three rhetorical questions:

What would they do with Britain if it voted no? Would they give it a chance to vote again, or would some people in Europe talk about booting Britain out of the European Union?

The programme made three prominent references to Mr Blair's allegation about Eurosceptic myths and conspiracy. It did not include any Conservative or Eurosceptic refutation of this allegation.

The programme had led on the intention to see what the decision meant for politics in the UK and in the European Union but proceeded to give in detail only the latter side of the picture. None of the items included a domestic Eurosceptic perspective on Mr Blair's statement, either in the UK or abroad. In addition, the programme made three prominent references to Mr Blair's allegation about Eurosceptic myths and conspiracy. It did not include any Conservative or other Eurosceptic refutation of this allegation, either in the introduction and headlines, or in the reporter package or in the live three way interchange.

No one was invited to dispute Ms Kendall's presentation of the argument that a Constitution is necessary to cope with enlargement,³¹ nor Mr Sackur's account of what might happen if Britain voted no, (such as the possibility of a renegotiation or a new different treaty). No alternatives were put forward.

NEWSNIGHT

The presenter, Gavin Esler, said the programme's focus was the on the kind of campaign it was going to be. The sequence began with a package from political editor Martha Kearney followed by interviews by presenter Gavin Esler of Jack Straw, Michael Heseltine and David Owen.

going to be long and rocky, and who knows, it may even prove to be a dead end. What we're looking at now is political argument over the Constitution, not just in Britain, but as Bridget Kendall just outlined, in many other countries from Ireland to Denmark and here in Poland as well, arguments that will rage through this year and through next year to the end of 2005 as well, and at the end of it all, if even one country says 'no' to the Constitution, then the treaty cannot come into effect."

³⁰ President of the European Parliament.

³¹ Kendall offered no alternative view to her statement "Day to day bureaucracy could descend into gridlock, unless – say its supporters – it's streamlined by the new Constitution."

The balance of Martha Kearney's report – which included Tony Blair's claim that a 'no' vote would ruin Britain's relationship with the EU and Michael Howard's counter-claim that Britain could vote no and remain in – was upset by its concluding interview with Kirsty Hughes of the Centre for European Policy Studies,³² a Europhile group. This gave a negative analysis of the repercussions of a 'no' vote, claiming that Britain's role in Europe would be severely diminished. There was no alternate analysis from a similarly-positioned Eurosceptic or anti-Constitution commentator.

It was Jack Straw's second lengthy opportunity that day to present and defend the Government's case. The Conservatives, who had succeeded in their aim of securing a referendum, did not appear on the programme.

Gavin Esler's pre-recorded interview with Jack Straw focused on the background to the Prime Minister's change of mind and the apparent lack of consultation in Cabinet. It was a more adversarial interview than that by Caroline Quinn on PM, in that it pushed Mr Straw over the inconsistencies in his case. But he nevertheless did not challenge the Foreign Secretary on his argument that a no vote from Britain would leave the UK in a minority of one against 24 who were going to sign up to the Constitution, something that is by no means certain, and has in the past been questioned by those of Eurosceptic perspective.

It was Jack Straw's second lengthy opportunity to present and defend the Government's case. The Conservatives, who had succeeded in their aim of securing a referendum, were not invited to share the platform or to take part in the ensuing debate.

Mr Esler then introduced, live in the studio, what he called the 'big beasts' of the debate: Lord Heseltine – a strong Europhile; and Lord Owen, who has expressed concerns about the Constitution, but is only mildly Eurosceptic.

³² “Are the Conservatives going to be prepared to say we'll leave the Union, join the European Economic Area along with Norway, and let you lot go ahead with the Constitution, or are they, one country going to block all the rest of Europe, 400 million people? And for the Government, they'll be in a very big problem, because they will have lost the vote, they'll have been arguing for a 'yes', they'll have lost, they may have lost Blair as prime minister, but they're still going to have to look for a way through. Are they going to be able to find specific changes to the Constitution that will be enough to go back to the British public for a second time? I don't think the British public are going to react very kindly to being asked to vote twice on this”.

Michael Heseltine made two central claims: the first, that Tony Blair, in calling the referendum, had capitulated to pressure from the Eurosceptic press, notably titles owned by Rupert Murdoch; and second, that the debate would not really be about the Constitution but on the wider issue of withdrawal from the EU,³³ exactly as Mr Blair had claimed.

David Owen, speaking with less emotion, argued that the debate would focus on the Prime Minister winning a better deal for the UK. He claimed that, despite the Europhile arguments, it would not be turned into an ‘in out’ debate. He argued that the Constitution was necessary, but there were many substantive issues still to consider.

Mr Heseltine refused to be drawn on the debate over the Constitution and instead repeated his allegation that this would be:

...a campaign dominated by people who are on the verge of actually wanting Britain out of Europe, certainly a minimalist Europe as far as they’re concerned... There’s no other country that I’m aware of that has actually allowed its national press in such large measure to be owned by foreigners who have a north American agenda.

This was, from any standpoint, an extreme claim – that Eurosceptic opinion in the UK had been fashioned by “foreigners with a North American agenda”. It was also – Eurosceptics could argue – an insult to the intelligence of voters to suggest their views were fashioned purely by figures such as Rupert Murdoch. Yet Mr Esler made no challenge to his assertions.

This was the second occasion during the day’s coverage that a Europhile peer had been allowed by a presenter to give free rein (the first being Baroness Williams on World at One).

It was left to Lord Owen to give a measured response: “I think the issue before the people is ‘do you want this Constitution, or do you want to carry on as you are?’” He welcomed the referendum on the Constitution in terms of drawing attention to some serious problems. His objection to the Constitution appeared to be based on whether Mr Blair managed to negotiate acceptable terms.

Lord Owen did not make a substantive case against the Constitution; nor did he express the Eurosceptic case against the principle of a Constitution. The audience was therefore left uninformed – apart from brief mentions in the Martha Kearney package – of the reasons for the Opposition’s position on the referendum in the context of Mr Blair’s change of mind. And there was no detailed advocacy of the full anti-Constitution case.

³³ “Goodness knows what the Eurosceptic press are going to do about this, but I can tell you without any imagination that we will have the most appalling scare stories, gross exaggerations, Mr Murdoch will dictate, basically, what Britain should think and what Britain should be told, and it’s quite appalling and irresponsible decision that the prime minister’s taken.”

TODAY: 21 APRIL

Coverage of the Government's U-turn on the referendum continued on Today the next morning. To discuss it, were Lucy Powell from Britain in Europe, Stuart Wheeler, a Conservative party donor, Roger Knapman of the UKIP and trade secretary Patricia Hewitt.

The first discussion came shortly after the 6am news between John Humphrys and BBC correspondent, Christopher Morris.

John Humphrys:

Big question, simple question, very difficult question: can the new European Union of 25 members carry on without a new Constitution?

Christopher Morris:

Very difficult to do so, I think, because it will just become increasingly messy – too big, too unwieldy, perhaps too fractious, and I think that's what makes this such a critical period; it's just coming up to the biggest enlargement in the EU's history, the re-unification of Europe, all that great big historical resonance, and yet it's possible, not likely, but possible I think that historians could look back on the last few years and the next couple of years as the time when the EU as we know it began to fall apart. It doesn't have to happen, but I think that's how high the stakes will be in this Constitutional debate, and it may be that Mr Blair and his fellow leaders across the continent will fight and win their arguments, but whichever way it goes, the EU I don't think is going to be quite the same again.

This response included three main strands of Europhile argument: that the Constitution is necessary to deal with enlargement; that the Constitution was integral to the 're-unification' of Europe; and that, should the Constitution not go ahead, the consequences would be dire.

Mr Morris also claimed that those countries that were holding referendums were doing so:

...(not because) its politically expedient. or they think it's a good thing to do, they have to, it's the way they, the only way, they can ratify the Treaty.

He thereby downplayed and marginalised both the case for, and the demand for, referenda in the various countries of Europe. He also appeared to venture the rather suspect case for *not* holding referenda – that the countries which registered 'no votes' would have to repeat the process until they got it 'right' (i.e. a 'yes' vote) – as though that were a necessary consequence of the model set by Ireland.³⁴

³⁴ "Any country that does will be put under pressure by the Euro-enthusiasts to vote again and again – look at Ireland it said no . . . to the Nice Treaty, and everyone else said 'wrong answer, vote again', and they voted 'yes' the second time."

Norman Smith also painted a one-sided view of events in his report after the 6.30am bulletin. His pivotal assumption was that if the referendum debate was framed in terms of “in or out of Europe” (as Tony Blair had clearly done in his Commons statement), it strengthened the Government’s hand. The structure of his remarks during his exchange with John Humphrys seemed to support the view that Mr Blair’s approach was correct. Mr Smith also assumed that people were not likely to become exercised about the Constitution itself (despite the fact that polls have showed that 90% are opposed it) because it was a “rather complex” legal document.

Mr Smith added that the Conservative position of having to renegotiate with 24 other members would jeopardise Britain’s place at the heart of Europe, casting further doubt on his neutrality. The Conservatives had argued consistently that renegotiation would be possible in the context of a Europe with several “speeds” and degrees of integration, according to national preference.

After the 7am news, John Humphrys interviewed Lucy Powell from Britain in Europe, a strongly Europhile pressure group; and Stuart Wheeler, described as both Chairman of the IG group and as the Conservative Party’s biggest donor. These interviews were effective, exposing the illogicalities and inconsistencies in their respective arguments. The interviews with Roger Knapman of the UKIP and Patricia Hewitt at 8.10am were preceded by a report from Tim Franks. Mr Humphrys, in his introduction asked:

What about our position at the heart of Europe? Do they think we’re still at the heart of it now that decision has been taken?

There was distinct bias in the framing of this question because it was Tony Blair and the Government who claimed that Britain’s position in Europe would be threatened by a rejection of the Constitution, a claim strongly contested by Eurosceptics. The substance of Mr Franks’ report was to underline that the calling of the referendum – in the view of senior EU figures – had caused a headache within the EU.

They say he’s chasing short-term tactical gains, but in the long term they argue he’s damaged himself and possibly the whole European project. It’s not just that there could be a ‘no’ vote in Britain, it’s that a British vote could well tip other countries such as France into holding a referendum.

There was no attempt to analyse the decision in the context of Eurosceptic opinion, only to underline that Britain’s EU partners were unhappy. Given that Eurosceptics believe that the referendum could improve the European project, this was again one-sided reporting. Another issue was raised by Mr Franks’ report. He claimed that, “adding to Mr Blair’s problems”, was that acceptance of Britain’s ‘red lines’ might not be as secure as the Prime Minister had claimed:

Back in December, Mr Blair announced that despite the rancorous failure to agree a new Constitution, he’d banked commitments from everyone else to Britain’s much painted red lines – the refusal

to give up the national veto on tax, social security, foreign policy and defence. The prime minister may be convinced that he's won the case, but many of his European counterparts aren't so sure.

This drew attention to weaknesses of Today's coverage of the Brussels summit in December. It failed to pursue adequately the fate of Government's red lines, focusing instead mainly on the rejection of the voting changes. Mr Franks' own rather brief reporting of the topic at the conclusion of the summit – a matter of a couple of phrases – suggested that, despite all the problems over the Constitution's proposals on voting, the UK's position on the need for the red lines had been accepted.³⁵

After Mr Frank's contribution, the most logical place to go for a response and follow-up – given the absence of official party input since the Mr Blair announcement – would have been to the Conservative party. Instead an interview with the UKIP followed. This was a doubly strange choice in that it was the first time that UKIP had appeared in the prime slot in the hundreds of hours of output in the tracking periods monitored by Minotaur.³⁶ The programme thereby appeared to endorse the Government's attempt to frame discussion on the Constitution in terms of being 'in or out' of Europe. The choice of the UKIP leader appeared to support the desire to explore this approach, rather than trying to reveal more of the pressing need, in terms of balance, of the Conservative Party stance. This was a point seized on eagerly by Patricia Hewitt:

Patricia Hewitt:

Well I think what we've just heard absolutely gives the Tory game away. Because...

John Humphrys:

Well hang on, he's not a Tory! He's from a different party!

Patricia Hewitt:

They you have... I know, but there you have the UK Independence Party whose views are quite openly shared by many on the right of the Conservative Party, saying 'let's get a 'no' vote on the referendum and then we can take Britain out of Europe or at best associate membership'. Now that's exactly the argument that David Heathcoat – a leading Conservative MP – was putting in a pamphlet a year ago, and that is the consequence, whether they realise it or not, of the Conservative position which is saying that they want a 'no' vote in the referendum.

³⁵ See Coverage of the EU Constitution Brussels Summit, Today, at www.globalbritain.org.

³⁶ For details of Minotaur Tracking periods, see *An Outbreak of narcolepsy?*

John Humphrys:

There is a certain amount of chutzpah, I have to say, in taking one party's position and then applying it to another party, and saying 'it proves our point'.

Patricia Hewitt:

But John, this is going to be the real argument in the referendum, and that's why I believe we are so right to have made this decision and to say 'we're going to have a referendum so we can talk about the merits of the case, the merits of what Europe does for Britain, rather than the myths that are peddled so much of the time.

Mr Humphrys was clearly tough in his handling of Ms Hewitt, but this approach did not completely mitigate the impact of choosing the UKIP spokesman for this crucial slot. Had the Conservative's case been made elsewhere, in the programme, this would not have mattered so much. But in the absence of proper exploration of the Opposition's stance, it did matter.

CHAPTER THREE

A BULWARK AGAINST A EUROSCEPTIC PRESS?

Making the Government's peace with the BBC recently, the Culture Secretary Tessa Jowell, praised the BBC's role as a 'bulwark' against the opinionated press.³⁷ Whether or not this should be an appropriate role for the BBC is open to question: yet the evidence suggests that the BBC is failing to operate from an impartial agenda in its reporting of the EU.

Redressing the balance is overdue. Since Minotaur began tracking, and probably from before,³⁸ the BBC has appeared to have been over-sympathetic towards Europhile opinion. This is evident from successive surveys of BBC output on the EU since 1999.³⁹

The BBC has consistently given expression in its news output to the views:

- that Eurosceptic opinion is extreme. It has equally consistently failed to show interest in or examine radical options on topics such as re-negotiation of the Constitution, the CAP, the Fisheries policy, suggesting that such options are difficult or impossible;

³⁷ Radio 5 Live 10 May 2004.

³⁸ The list of complaints about BBC's coverage of the EU goes back to 1971 – see C. Booker and R North, *The Great Deception*, Continuum, 2003.

³⁹ See Global Britain website www.globalbritain.org

- that for the Conservatives, the EU remains a bigger ‘party unity/policy’ problem than for Labour, when the evidence of the past few years is that the Conservatives have become more unified, while Eurosceptic opinion within Labour is growing;⁴⁰
- that, in turn, Eurosceptic opinion and the case made for withdrawal are only of interest through the prism of the Conservative party and its (perceived) problems, even though as an issue, they transcend party lines and represent broad swathes of public opinion;
- that EU affairs are boring – leading to a lack of analysis and scrutiny of EU operations, particularly the non accountable EU Commission and its ambitions.

In addition, the case study demonstrates how the BBC’s failure to maintain impartiality, in terms of accuracy and expected standards of journalism, leads to the latter reinforcing the existing agenda. As David Dimbleby has observed:⁴¹

If the BBC is to retain public confidence it has to put its house in order. It has to convince the licence-paying public that it will use its privileged position to the benefit of the broadcasting industry as a whole... not perhaps the "voice of Britain" any longer but the invaluable purveyor of its many voices.

Coverage of the EU should be guided by the knowledge that there is no consensus view – in fact public opinion is deeply and sometimes bitterly divided. It must perhaps also be guided by the knowledge it is not ‘the voice of Britain’ but must represent fairly the several voices of Britain.

The resolute public trust in the BBC⁴² shows that the public still values the principles on which it was set up and the standard tests of what this involves, described by Tim Gardam, a former senior BBC News editor, as: “a commitment to accuracy, a balance of views, the right to reply and the separation of news from comment”.⁴³ Another former BBC executive, Patricia Hodgson has argued that impartiality needs to be combined with pluralism.

So due impartiality allows us to have my impartiality, your impartiality and a sensible debate about the boundaries beyond which you are actually straying into – prejudice, misinformation and propaganda.⁴⁴

It is clear that the exercise of impartiality today carries a heavier burden of proof. The test is whether it stands up to the type of examination conducted in

⁴⁰ 40 Labour MPs support an alternative view on the Constitution. By contrast, all but approximately 15 Conservative MPs are categorised as Eurosceptic.

⁴¹ *Sunday Times*, 23 May 2004.

⁴² See the opinion polls published in Lord Hutton’s report.

⁴³ BBC Radio 4 Analysis 25 March 2004.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

this paper. This is something that Richard Sambrook, the BBC's Director of News, appears already to acknowledge:

In the end I suspect where we are is that we're going to have to redefine impartiality and we're going to have to start measuring it and defining it and coming up with ... matrices in some way that actually really define this debate to a greater extent than we've ever had to before".⁴⁵

This degree of recognition of the problem should lead to:

- independent scrutiny on matters of impartiality which were not included in the remit of the external enquiry set up after the Hutton Inquiry and conducted by Ron Neill;
- more rigorous continuous internal monitoring and scrutiny of output.

The BBC needs to protect its legacy of public trust, its independence from the Government and its independence from News International and the Scott Trust equally. All this depends on an updated observance of its core Charter obligations on impartiality.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

APPENDIX ONE

MONITORING STATISTICS

1. AIRTIME ALLOTTED TO THE CONSTITUTION REFERENDUM STORY

The total available airtime for ‘feature’ style reports was calculated for each of the BBC programmes included in the 27-hour monitoring exercise. Each report concerning the Constitution Referendum was individually timed. From this it was possible to determine the proportion of airtime which each programme allotted to the story. The results are listed in the table below.

Programme	Total Available Airtime	Airtime for Referendum story	Percentage of Programme
Today	117 minutes	27.5 minutes	24%
World at One	25 minutes	20 minutes	80%
PM	50 minutes	39 minutes	78%
The World Tonight	38 minutes	12 minutes	32%
BBC 10pm News	23 minutes	9 minutes	39%
Newsnight	44 minutes	22 minutes	50%
Today	118 minutes	30 minutes	25%

The programmes broadcast 28 separate reports on the Constitution referendum story. These comprised: five news bulletins, four newspaper reviews and 19 ‘feature style’ reports, (including stand-alone correspondent reports, two-way discussions between presenters and correspondents, and interviews with political figures and other commentators).

Overall, the programmes surveyed broadcast 6 hours and 55 minutes of feature reports, of which 159.5 minutes dealt with the Government’s referendum announcement or issues arising from it. In total, 38.4% of feature airtime in the BBC’s flagship programmes was devoted to the issue.

2. CONTRIBUTIONS

There were 62 contributions by outside speakers to reports on the Constitution Referendum. 39 of the contributions were edited, pre-recorded ‘soundbites’ and 23 were interviews (both live and pre-recorded) of varying durations. Of these 62 contributions:

- 32 were Europhile contributions (21 soundbites and 11 interviews);
- 20 were Eurosceptic contributions (12 soundbites and 8 interviews);
- 9 were neutral contributions (5 soundbites and 4 interviews).

All eurosceptic, anti-Constitution, and anti-EU speakers supported a referendum on the Constitution. However, the Europhile speakers were divided between those who supported the Government’s policy change, and those who felt that the decision to hold a referendum was ill-advised. Of the 34 Europhile contributions:

- 20 were supportive of the Government’s policy U-turn (15 soundbites and 5 interviews);
- 9 were critical of the Government’s change of policy (4 soundbites and 5 interviews);
- 4 were neutral, or expressed no opinion on the policy shift (2 soundbites and 2 interviews).

The following tables provide a more detailed breakdown of contributions to the coverage of the Constitution Referendum announcement. The pro-EU speakers are divided according to whether they were supportive, unsupportive or neutral with regards to the Government U-turn.

EUROPHILE CONTRIBUTIONS: PRO-REFERENDUM

Speaker	Soundbites	Interviews
Tony Blair	8	0
Jack Cunningham	0	1
Charles Kennedy	5	0
Shirley Williams	1	0
Dick Roche	0	1
Jack Straw	0	2
Marek Belka	1	0
Patricia Hewitt	0	1

EUROPHILE CONTRIBUTIONS: ANTI-REFERENDUM

Speaker	Soundbites	Interviews
Donald Anderson	1	0
Simon Buckby	0	2
Neil Kinnock	1	1
Kirsty Hughes	1	0
Michael Heseltine	0	1
David Curry	1	0

EUROPHILE CONTRIBUTIONS: NO OPINION EXPRESSED REGARDING THE DECISION

Speaker	Soundbites	Interviews
Margaret Thatcher*	1	0
George Foulkes	0	1
Pat Cox	1	0
Lucy Powell	0	1

* archive recording from 1975 referendum

EUROSCPTIC CONTRIBUTIONS

Speaker	Soundbites	Interviews
Michael Howard	7	0
Jens Peter Bonde	0	1
Dr Tim Evans	0	1
Malcolm Rifkind	1	0
Michael Ancram	0	1
Tony Benn	1	0
Dominic Cummings	0	1
Roger Knapman	1	1
David Owen	0	1
Andrew Rosindell	0	1
David Heathcoat-Amory	1	0
Frank Field	1	0
Stuart Wheeler	0	1

NEUTRAL OR FACTUAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Speaker	Soundbites	Interviews
Dr Richard Wyn Jones	1	0
Ray Barrett	2	0
Justin Cernis	1	0
Professor David Butler	1	0
Andrew Grice	0	1
Andy McSmith	0	1
John Kampfner	0	1
Trevor Kavanagh	0	1

3. TIME GIVEN TO SPEAKERS

Every soundbite and interview was individually timed. Of the 159 minutes and 30 seconds of coverage across the six monitored news programmes, 88 minutes and 1 second of airtime featured the contributions of guest speakers. The remainder featured the commentary of BBC journalists, correspondents and presenters. The chart below lists each outside speaker who contributed during the 27 hour period, and the airtime allotted to each. The final column categorises the speaker as either Europhile, Eurosceptic or Neutral.

Speaker	Soundbites	Interviews	Total Airtime	Category
Jack Straw	1	2	13 minutes 18 seconds	Europhile
Tony Blair	8	0	6 minutes 48 seconds	Europhile
Jack Cunningham	0	1	5 minutes 40 seconds	Europhile
Michael Howard	7	0	5 minutes 16 seconds	Eurosceptic
Patricia Hewitt	0	1	4 minutes 49 seconds	Europhile
Simon Buckby	0	2	4 minutes 20 seconds	Europhile
David Owen	0	1	3 minutes 45 seconds	Eurosceptic
Neil Kinnock	1	1	3 minutes	Europhile
Andrew Rosindell	0	1	2 minutes 50 seconds	Eurosceptic
Michael Heseltine	0	1	2 minutes 49 seconds	Europhile
Dr Tim Evans	0	1	2 minutes 43 seconds	Eurosceptic
Roger Knapman	1	1	2 minutes 42 seconds	Eurosceptic
Stuart Wheeler	0	1	2 minutes 6 seconds	Eurosceptic
Trevor Kavanagh	0	1	2 minutes 1 second	Neutral
Charles Kennedy	5	0	2 minutes	Europhile
John Kampfner	0	1	1 minute 58 seconds	Neutral
Shirley Williams	1	0	1 minute 54 seconds	Europhile
George Foulkes	0	1	1 minute 54 seconds	Europhile
Jens Peter Bonde	0	1	1 minute 53 seconds	Eurosceptic
Dick Roche	0	1	1 minute 45 seconds	Europhile
Lucy Powell	0	1	1 minute 40 seconds	Europhile
Michael Ancram	0	1	1 minute 27 seconds	Eurosceptic
Andy McSmith	0	1	1 minute 20 seconds	Neutral
Dominic Cummings	0	1	1 minute 15 seconds	Eurosceptic
Andrew Grice	0	1	1 minute 14 seconds	Neutral
Ray Barrett	2	0	1 minute 9 seconds	Neutral
Tony Benn	1	0	57 seconds	Eurosceptic
Dr Richard Wyn Jones	1	0	51 seconds	Europhile
Malcolm Rifkind	1	0	37 seconds	Eurosceptic
Professor David Butler	1	0	32 seconds	Neutral
Donald Anderson	1	0	28 seconds	Europhile
Kirsty Hughes	1	0	28 seconds	Europhile
Pat Cox	1	0	27 seconds	Europhile
David Heathcoat-Amory	1	0	26 seconds	Eurosceptic
David Curry	1	0	24 seconds	Europhile
Margaret Thatcher (archive)	1	0	23 seconds	Europhile
Frank Field	1	0	20 seconds	Eurosceptic
Justin Cernis	1	0	17 seconds	Neutral
Marek Belka	1	0	15 seconds	Europhile

The airtime allotted to guest speakers over the 27 hour monitoring period fell into the following proportions:

- Europhile contributions accounted for 52 minutes and 22 seconds (61%);
- Eurosceptic contributions accounted for 26 minutes and 17 seconds (30%);
- Neutral speakers accounted for 9 minutes and 22 seconds (9%).

EUROPHILE PRO AND ANTI-REFERENDUM SPEAKERS

Of the 52 minutes and 22 seconds of airtime allotted to Europhile speakers:

- 36 minutes and 29 seconds were given to those who were pro-referendum, and in support of the Government's U-turn (70%);
- 11 minutes and 29 seconds were given to those who remained anti-referendum and were speaking against the U-turn (22%);
- and 4 minutes 24 seconds were given to those expressing no direct opinion on the policy change (8%).

PRO-REFERENDUM AND ANTI-REFERENDUM SPEAKERS

From the total 88 minutes and 1 second of airtime given to guest speakers:

- 62 minutes and 46 seconds (71%) of airtime was given to those in favour of a referendum (pro-referendum europhile and eurosceptics combined);
- Europhile contributions accounted for 36 minutes and 29 seconds (41%), and eurosceptic contributions for 26 minutes and 17 seconds (30%);
- 11 minutes and 29 seconds were allotted to anti-referendum speakers (europhile speakers who did not support the policy change) (13%);
- 4 minutes and 24 seconds from Europhile speakers who gave no direct opinion on the referendum or Government U-turn (5%);
- 9 minutes and 22 seconds from neutral speakers (11%).

THE EUROSCEPTIC RESPONSE

Of the 88 minutes and 1 second of airtime allotted to guest speakers, Eurosceptic contributions accounted for 26 minutes and 17 seconds (30%).

Six Eurosceptic Conservatives – Michael Howard, Andrew Rosindell, Michael Ancram, Malcolm Rifkind, David Heathcoat-Amory and Stuart Wheeler – contributed to the referendum debate. These guests provided programmes with nine soundbites and three interviews. In total, their contributions lasted for 12 minutes and 42 seconds, (14.4% of the total airtime given to guest contributors, and 8% of the overall airtime given to the referendum U-turn story).

The eurosceptic case was also put by seven contributors from outside the Conservative party. These were: Dominic Cummings, Lord Owen, Dr Tim Evans, Jens Peter Bonde, Tony Benn, Frank Field, and Roger Knapman. These guests provided programmes with three soundbites and five interviews. In total, their input amounted to 13 minutes and 35 seconds (15.4% of the total airtime given to guest contributors and 8.5% of the total airtime given to the referendum U-turn story).

4. PROGRAMME BY PROGRAMME BREAKDOWN

TODAY 20TH APRIL

YESTERDAY IN PARLIAMENT, 6.46AM

Speaker	Soundbite	Interview	Total Airtime
Michael Howard	✓		15 seconds
Tony Blair	✓		9 seconds

CONSTITUTION REFERENDUM IN EU STATES, 7.09AM

Speaker	Soundbite	Interview	Total Airtime
Jens Peter Bonde		✓	1 minute 53 seconds
Dr Tim Evans		✓	2 minutes 43 seconds

CONSTITUTION REFERENDUM, 8.10AM

Speaker	Soundbite	Interview	Total Airtime
Malcolm Rifkind	✓		37 seconds
Donald Anderson	✓		28 seconds
Simon Buckby		✓	1 minute 25 seconds
Jack Cunningham		✓	5 minutes 40 seconds

CONSTITUTION REFERENDUM, 8.55AM

Speaker	Soundbite	Interview	Total Airtime
John Kampfner		✓	1 minute 58 seconds
Andy McSmith		✓	1 minute 20 seconds

WORLD AT ONE

CONSTITUTION REFERENDUM 1.05PM

Speaker	Soundbite	Interview	Total Airtime
Tony Blair	✓		1 minute 24 seconds
Michael Howard	✓		1 minute 16 seconds
Charles Kennedy	✓		27 seconds
Michael Ancram		✓	1 minute 27 seconds
Neil Kinnock	✓		1 minute 5 seconds
Tony Benn	✓		57 seconds
Shirley Williams	✓		1 minute 54 seconds
Margaret Thatcher (archive)	✓		23 seconds
Dr Richard Wyn Jones	✓		51 seconds
George Foulkes		✓	1 minute 54 seconds
Dominic Cummings		✓	1 minute 15 seconds

PM

CONSTITUTION REFERENDUM, 5.05PM

Speaker	Soundbite	Interview	Total Airtime
Tony Blair	✓		1 minute 46 seconds
Michael Howard	✓		1 minute 15 seconds
Charles Kennedy	✓		25 seconds
Dick Roche		✓	1 minute 45 seconds

CONSTITUTION REFERENDUM, 5.20PM

Speaker	Soundbite	Interview	Total Airtime
Jack Straw		✓	6 minutes 39 seconds

ADVERTISING AND THE CONSTITUTION REFERENDUM, 5.28PM

Speaker	Soundbite	Interview	Total Airtime
Ray Barratt	✓		29 seconds
Justin Cernis	✓		17 seconds

NEWS BULLETIN, 5.34PM

Speaker	Soundbite	Interview	Total Airtime
Jack Straw	✓		30 seconds

CONSTITUTION REFERENDUM, 5.35PM

Speaker	Soundbite	Interview	Total Airtime
Neil Kinnock		✓	1 minute 55 seconds
Tony Blair	✓		40 seconds
Roger Knapman	✓		26 seconds
Trevor Kavanagh		✓	2 minutes 1 second

ADVERTISING AND THE CONSTITUTION REFERENDUM, 5.52PM

Speaker	Soundbite	Interview	Total Airtime
Ray Barratt	✓		40 seconds

THE WORLD TONIGHT**CONSTITUTION REFERENDUM, 10.07PM**

Speaker	Soundbite	Interview	Total Airtime
Tony Blair	✓		24 seconds
Michael Howard	✓		24 seconds
Simon Buckby		✓	2 minutes 55 seconds
Andrew Rosindell		✓	2 minutes 50 seconds

TEN O'CLOCK NEWS

Speaker	Soundbite	Interview	Total Airtime
Tony Blair	✓		43 seconds
Michael Howard	✓		38 seconds
Charles Kennedy	✓		19 seconds
Marek Belka	✓		15 seconds
Pat Cox	✓		27 seconds

NEWSNIGHT

Speaker	Soundbite	Interview	Total Airtime
Tony Blair	✓		1 minute 39 seconds
Michael Howard	✓		1 minute 3 seconds
Professor David Butler	✓		32 seconds
Charles Kennedy	✓		33 seconds
Kirsty Hughes	✓		28 seconds
Jack Straw		✓	6 minutes 9 seconds
Michael Heseltine		✓	2 minutes 49 seconds
David Owen		✓	3 minutes 45 seconds

TODAY 21ST APRIL

YESTERDAY IN PARLIAMENT, 6.46AM

Speaker	Soundbite	Interview	Total Airtime
Tony Blair	✓		23 seconds
Michael Howard	✓		25 seconds
Charles Kennedy	✓		16 seconds
David Heathcoat-Amory	✓		26 seconds
Frank Field	✓		20 seconds
David Curry	✓		24 seconds

CONSTITUTION REFERENDUM 7.09AM

Speaker	Soundbite	Interview	Total Airtime
Lucy Powell		✓	1 minute 40 seconds
Stuart Wheeler		✓	2 minutes 6 seconds

CONSTITUTION REFERENDUM 8.10AM

Speaker	Soundbite	Interview	Total Airtime
Roger Knapman		✓	2 minutes 16 seconds
Patricia Hewitt		✓	4 minutes 49 seconds

APPENDIX TWO

BACKGROUND TO THIS PAPER

Among the key findings from the earlier surveys are:⁴⁶

- There has been an overall bias towards Europhile speakers in the ratio of approximately 2:1.
- During the European elections of 1999, in more than 250 hours of main national news coverage by the BBC, not a single Labour Eurosceptic appeared on air.⁴⁷
- This broad picture has applied in almost every monitoring period, and points firmly to the conclusion that that the Eurosceptic case across dozens of issues has not been properly represented.
- Too much weight has been given to Conservative problems over the EU. During the elections of 1999, for example, undue prominence was given to the threat to the Conservative vote posed by the Pro-Euro Conservative Party. The supposed threat from that party (which eventually polled less than 1% of the vote) prefaced almost every main interview on Today with the Conservatives.⁴⁸ Likewise, in the 2001 General Election, consideration of EU-related issues was treated mainly through the prism of Conservative splits.⁴⁹ In the build-up to last December's summit on the Constitution, the focus was frequently on potential moves towards withdrawal by the Conservatives, rather than on exploration of deeper issues and what the Government was actually trying to achieve.⁵⁰
- Alternative visions for the way forward in relation to the EU, such as re-negotiation or withdrawal,⁵¹ have been heavily under-represented.. In a week on the Today programme supposedly dedicated to the case for withdrawal, for example, there was not one substantive interview with a figure actually in favour of withdrawal.⁵² Equally, during the steps to the EU Constitution, the case for re-negotiation was poorly explored.⁵³ And in coverage of the second Irish referendum on the Treaty of Nice, the case for 'no' was confined to one interview (with Gerry Adams).⁵⁴
- Poor journalistic standards in the coverage of many other matters relating to the EU. The detailed case for this accusation is presented in Minotaur's individual reports. One was in

⁴⁶ The conclusions relate mainly to analysis of the Today programme. The full list of reports was appended to the *Outbreak of Narcolepsy* paper. They can be viewed at www.globalbritain.org.

⁴⁷ Reporting of the Elections to the European Parliament p. 25. www.globalbritain.org.

⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 24.

⁴⁹ Ibid p. 2.

⁵⁰ Consideration by Today , for example, of Gisela Stewart's opposition to the Government stance on the new Constitution was relegated to one very brief interview.

⁵¹ UKIP, though having 3 MEPs, has only rarely been interviewed: in the monitoring by Minotaur until December 2003 (covering 2,000 transcripts), party spokesman were interviewed only 13 times.

⁵² The BBC and "Europe" Today survey, February 2001.

⁵³ See Minotaur's report Today and the Convention on the future of Europe, covering September 2002 to July 2003.

⁵⁴ Survey Irish Referendum on the Treaty of Nice, 2002.

October 2002, when an item which suggested that Ireland's attraction of inward investment being greater than the UK's was due to membership of the single currency. A complaint against the item by the 'No' campaign on the euro was upheld.⁵⁵

- During the coverage of the issue of Euro notes and coins in January 2002, the impression was given that the vast majority of EU citizens welcomed the end of their own currencies. The use of vox pops broke BBC guidelines which require it to consult a balanced variety of opinion.⁵⁶
- As discussed in the previous CPS paper on coverage of the EU,⁵⁷ there has been a persistently low level of coverage of EU affairs, amounting to 'bias by omission'. In monitoring periods when it would be expected that programme coverage would be high – in the build-up to key summits – programme time devoted to EU affairs has been as low as 4%.⁵⁸ At the same time, comparison with broadsheet newspaper output has shown that numerous issues relating to Britain's role in the EU have been poorly covered or ignored.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ The complaint, however, was not adequately dealt with by the BBC inquiry. It glossed over that there had been poor choice of interviewee (who was an enthusiastic Europhile who distorted the investment figures) and insufficiently robust questioning of the pro-EU case.

⁵⁶ Survey Launch of Euro Notes and Coins January 2002 at www.globalbritain.org

⁵⁷ *An Outbreak of Narcolepsy? Why the BBC must improve its coverage of the EU.*

⁵⁸ Survey Today and the Convention on the Future of Europe at www.globalbritain.org

⁵⁹ Survey Comparisons of European Coverage of Today with Reports in the British Press, 2003 (www.globalbritain.org).