

# **THE BBC AND “EUROPE”**

## **Analysis of the output of BBC Radio 4’s Today programme**

**February – June, 2006**

**Minotaur Media Tracking**

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## INTRODUCTION

The Wilson report recommended in January 2005 that the BBC's EU-related output must improve, and the BBC news management duly promised to make significant changes.

But 18 months on, the evidence of this new survey is that EU-related coverage is less substantive and more biased than before. There was marginal improvement in some aspects of reporting during 2005 (post-Wilson), but this has since evaporated.

In a recent letter to Lord Pearson of Rannoch, the BBC director general Mark Thompson has suggested that if all the corporation's output is considered, there is balance and range in EU coverage. But his support for this was a series of generalisations rather than measurable research evidence.

The Minotaur approach is to put a spotlight and a microscope on selected areas of programming, using a wide range of quantifiable research criteria. There is a clear requirement that individual programmes, especially flagship ones such as Today, must – over time – be balanced and wide-ranging.

In this case, 96 editions of the BBC Radio 4 Today programme over 16 weeks leading up to the heads of government summit in June 2006, adding up to 272 programme hours, were analysed. The findings include:

- Although the EU was mentioned or was a theme in 212 programme items, the percentage of content devoted to EU matters was 4.1% (437 minutes), the lowest in seven years of tracking by Minotaur, and down by a half since the last survey. EU material in the peak half hour from 8am-8.30am was only 0.81%. EU coverage surrounding the June heads of government summit was the lowest of ten summits tracked by Minotaur since 2000. And EU news items led the bulletins only twice.
- Of the 166 speakers on EU-related issues, the ratio of pro-EU to eurosceptic or anti-EU speakers was 2:1. Among political interviewees, the ratio was 3:1. Representatives of eurosceptic opinion outside the UK scarcely figured at all. This imbalance translates into bias. For example, interviews featuring eurosceptics ran for less time, and the interruption rate by interviewers of eurosceptic speakers was consistently higher than that of pro-EU interviewees. Some eurosceptics were interrupted in a way that prevented them making basic points; the corresponding tendency among pro-EU interviewees was to allow them to speak longer. Textual analysis in part 2 reveals examples where eurosceptics received much tougher treatment than their pro-EU counterparts.
- Of the EU-related material in the most recent period, less than half (200 minutes) was devoted to structural EU issues. In consequence, major topics such as expansion, with only five substantive reports in the sixteen weeks, and the Constitution (11 substantive reports and 22 mentions in total) received narrow, often biased (in the sense that the full range of opinions on the topic was not properly explored) and inadequate coverage. "Lesser" themes on the news agenda, such as the EU role in the World Trade talks, the ending of the ban on British beef exports to the EU, the EU budget and corruption, or the performance of the eurozone, were considered only superficially. And the CAP and EU fisheries policy were mentioned only in relation to the mishandling of payments to British farmers by Defra.

## Key points

### a) Volume of coverage

Coverage of EU-related issues during the 16-week survey period covering 96 editions of Today was the lowest recorded by Minotaur at 4.1% of programme output. This comprised 51 separate bulletin items, 17 mentions in newspaper reviews and 144 programme features, adding up to 437 minutes (7 hours and 17 minutes) out of 177 hours of feature reports. Of this total, less than a half (200 minutes or 1.9% of programme time) was focused on EU structural issues (such as the Constitution and expansion), as opposed to EU 'actions' such as moves towards capping carbon emissions, footballers' wages or telephone roaming costs.

In addition, EU material tended to be placed outside peak listening hours. Less than one per cent of items in the 'front page' 8-8.30am related to the EU; in the 6-6.30am period the total was almost seven per cent. EU news was lead item in the bulletins on only two occasions.

Minotaur has tracked Today's EU coverage during equivalent periods surrounding the heads of government "summit" meetings on ten occasions since Feira in July 2000. EU coverage in the period of the June 2006 meeting was the lowest recorded, with only 98 minutes compared with 586 minutes in June 2005 (the highest), 110 minutes (the previous lowest in Copenhagen, 2002) and 252 minutes (the average of the previous nine summits). Analysis of other stories carried demonstrates that there was no obvious alternative news pressures to account for the sharp decline in 2006

The Wilson independent report into BBC EU-related output recommended that the BBC should mount more EU-related coverage with the aim of 'making the important interesting'. There was a rise of coverage during 2005, immediately after the report's publication, but since then, the volume has halved, and is now 25% less than the previous lowest levels tracked by Minotaur during autumn 2004.

This change is significant because it means that, again contrary to Wilson report recommendations, many programme items did not explore sufficiently key topics and include in them a broad enough spectrum of opinion. The fate of the Constitution, for example, was the subject of only 16 reports in total, and only one of them was an in-depth interview of a government minister. There were only two interviews about issues connected with the eurozone, and no substantive discussion of the CAP (or fisheries).

Other problems in the volume of coverage highlighted by the report include:

- Only two items brief about the lifting of the export on British beef, and little effort to probe the background or impact
- Poor exploration of the EU's role in the Doha talks, and especially of allegations that the EU was the main obstacle to progress
- Only one report about EU spending and continuing allegations of fraud and mismanagement
- No exploration – apart from through a newspaper review – of persistent claims that EU budget contribution would be significantly higher than that stated in December
- No inclusion in reports of Eurosceptic opinion outside the UK
- The Chirac walk-out in the March mini-summit was elevated to the most important event at the summit; coverage of other parts of the summit agenda, such as EU energy policy and of moves towards 'economic patriotism' were reduced accordingly.
- Consideration of expansion was limited to less than half a dozen feature items.
- Steps towards more spending on a common European defence strategy were discussed only twice (on March 3).

The fall in volume of coverage cannot be accounted for by the EU agenda being less important. During 2005, the Constitution referenda and budget battles did provide added focus, but in the 16 weeks of the survey, there was still a wealth of live EU issues including the fate of the Constitution, continuing debates about expansion, pressure to introduce more cross-border security initiatives (and the possible ending of the British veto), the rise of 'economic protectionism' and much more.

#### **b) Speaker imbalance and programme bias**

The Wilson report stressed the need for a range of voices to be heard on European issues in order to reflect the diversity and complexity of the debates involved.

During this survey period, 80 (48%) of the speakers in interviews were in favour of the EU or its legislation, 46 (28%) were against the EU and 40 speakers (24%) were neutral or made a factual contribution. Thus the ratio of pro-EU speakers to eurosceptics was approximately 2:1.

This imbalance is broadly in line with other Minotaur surveys, though in the survey immediately after the Wilson report, the proportions reached almost parity.

The BBC have consistently argued that such imbalance does not constitute bias. Minotaur believes strongly that it does.

In April 2006, an Independent Panel chaired by Sir Quentin Thomas published a report on the BBC's coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Research undertaken by Loughborough University to support the inquiry assessed the numbers of outside participants ('actors') in the Corporation's news reporting, and recorded the 'talk time' awarded to each. The researchers noted:

The number of appearances of actors can be seen as a measure of *news presence* while the amount of quotation or talk time is linked with issues of *news access*. Whose voices do we hear? Who is allowed to speak and for how long? The granting of access to the news is widely recognised in the secondary literature as an indicator of both the perceived news value and credibility of sources.<sup>1</sup>

The Loughborough research underlined the importance of guest contributors and interviewees to the framework of broadcast news, an issue which was largely avoided in the Wilson Report into the BBC's EU coverage. The BBC's counter-argument - that balance does not depend upon speaker numbers and airtime being equal, and that equality can be achieved through tough interviewing and devil's advocate questions - is brought into question by Loughborough's research, where inequalities in the number of 'actors' provided one of the main strands of inquiry.

In several areas, the latest Minotaur report also found problems:

There was a continuing over-representation of views from Westminster politicians and those in the EU, amounting to 50% of speakers on EU matters. Wilson stated: *'the dominance of Westminster politics, both in the structure of BBC News and in the allocation of air-time, leads to distorted reporting of the EU'*.

Of the directly political speakers, 57 were pro-EU and only 20 negative to the Union, a ratio of 3:1.

The contributions of the 'non-political' speakers were mainly (60%) on issues to do with the economy, business, or the environment. Eleven per cent were linked to the programme's EU-related April Fool's joke.

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<sup>1</sup> The BBC's Reporting of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, Loughborough University Communications Research Centre, April 2006

Only 11 interviews were with figures who were critical of the EU from a political or ideological standpoint. Their contributions added up to just 6% of the total airtime afforded to EU coverage, a figure which is reduced further if input from the programme's presenters during interview sequences (often in the form of devil's advocate questioning, putting forward the opposite perspective) is subtracted.

Only two of the interviews, amounting to six minutes and eighteen seconds, were broadcast during the peak listening hour of 7.30 and 8.30am.

The Wilson Report found that that BBC news had 'failed to reflect a significant minority opinion that the UK should withdraw from the EU because this does not figure in the policies of the Westminster parties'. Of the 166 speakers on Today, only six (3.69%) were in favour of withdrawal, five of whom were from UKIP. Minotaur has also found that the number of withdrawal supporters to appear on the programme has declined since the Wilson report.

There were occasions when eurosceptic speakers were demonstrably given a tougher time than Europhile ones, undermining the BBC's claim that the Europhile imbalance was cancelled out by their tough treatment.

One example was the disparity in approach by James Naughtie to William Hague on June 7 and Geoff Hoon on June 14. Mr Hague was speaking about the Conservative party's links with EPP, Mr Hoon about the forthcoming summit. These were regarded as useful examples to analyse because both were rare appearances of senior party figures, they were fairly close together and both were interrogated by the same presenter, about perceived lack of progress towards stated EU-related goals. Mr Hague was interrupted 20 times, (a rate of 3.8 per minute), and could manage an average answer of only nine seconds; in comparison, Mr Hoon was interrupted only , four times (0.7 per minute) and had an average answer length of 15 seconds.

## **Part 1 – Project Overview**

On Monday 27 February 2006, Minotaur Media Tracking began a sixteen-week investigation into the Today programme's coverage of European Union news and current affairs. During the survey, each edition of the Today programme was recorded, logged and archived in its entirety, and every item of relevance to the European Union and its relationship to the UK was transcribed in full.

Using a number of analytical techniques and statistical measures, Minotaur sought to establish whether the BBC's charter obligations of impartiality and fairness were met by the Today programme in its coverage of European Union affairs, and to examine whether the recommendations of the 2005 Wilson Report on the corporation's EU coverage have been implemented by editors, presenters, and journalists.

The monitoring period culminated with the EU's biannual heads of government summit, held in Brussels on the 15 and 16 June, 2006. At the summit, EU leaders resolved to extend the 'period of reflection' on the proposed Constitution, which French and Dutch voters had rejected a year previously.

In addition to the Constitution, a number of other EU matters were on the Today programme's agenda. These included: the EU's environmental policy and emissions trading scheme; the proposed enlargement of the Union to include Bulgaria and Romania, the EU's decision to withdraw funding from the Hamas-led Palestinian Authority; and David Cameron's pledge to remove Conservative MEPs from the EPP grouping in the European Parliament.

## The Today Programme

Today is BBC Radio 4's flagship news and current affairs programme, broadcast for three hours each weekday morning, and for two hours each Saturday. The programme comprises of 'features' and 'fixed items'. In a typical weekday edition, there are approximately two hours of 'features': including reports by journalists, two-way discussions between presenters and correspondents, and interviews with invited guests. The remaining hour comprises 'fixed items': news bulletins, newspaper reviews, and 'non-news' items such as sports reports, weather forecasts, trailers for other BBC programmes, and the religious affairs slot, 'Thought for the Day'.

Each edition is also made available 'on demand' for those visiting the programme's dedicated website, and selections from Today are included in the BBC's podcast service, which enables listeners to download programme content directly to their personal music player.

### 2.1 Airtime

Since 1999, Minotaur has monitored, tracked and analysed the Today programme for exactly 150 weeks, equating to 900 separate editions with a combined airtime of over 2500 hours. This long-term monitoring has established that the programme, on average, devotes approximately 7% of its airtime to EU-related features.

In the most recent monitoring period, EU coverage accounted for just 4.1% of the available airtime – less than during any previous survey.

Survey Date	Monitored Weeks	Proportion of EU coverage
September 2002 – July 2003	47	5.6%
September – December 2003	12	5.7%
March – June 2004	12	9.5%
October – December 2004	10	5.5%
March – June 2005	15	10.8%
October – December 2005	9	8.2%
February – June 2006	16	4.1%

The Wilson Report, published at the beginning of 2005, expressed concerns about low levels of coverage given by the BBC to European Union news and current affairs. This included 'a failure to report issues which ought to be reported, perhaps out of a belief that they are not sufficiently entertaining'. The report also noted:

As the public service broadcaster, the BBC bears a heavy responsibility for raising the level of public awareness and understanding of EU matters without itself taking sides in



the debate. We think it needs a conscious strategy to achieve this...The thrust of our recommendations is that there needs to be better and more impartial coverage of the EU to explain major issues to a wider audience.

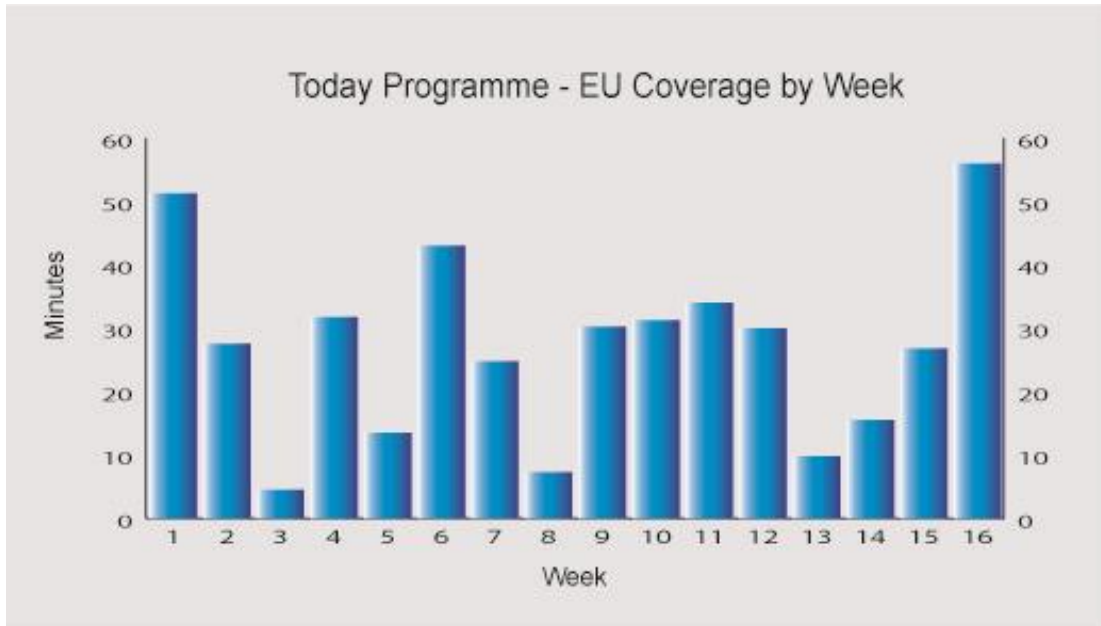
The first two Minotaur surveys post-Wilson appeared to indicate an upward trend in the amount of EU coverage broadcast by the Today programme. However, the most recent survey has discovered historically low levels of coverage.

During 2005, the French and Netherlands referenda in the summer, and the budget battles leading to the December summit meant there were obvious foci of EU-related programme efforts. However, the fall of more than 60% in the volume of EU coverage cannot be accounted for by a lack of EU activity or issues; there remained on the agenda numerous pressing topics, including the fate of the Constitution, continued expansion and its associated problems, the rise of so-called 'economic patriotism' at odds with the single market and a constant stream of EU initiatives.

Every report with an EU dimension was counted towards the airtime total, even if the European Union only played a constituent part in a particular item. For example, a feature on carbon emissions trading would be counted solely as an EU story, rather than a story about the environment, or a combination of the two. The only exception occurred when there was a clear delineation within a particular package between two or more different news categories. For example, a minister being asked a series of questions on the EU, followed by questions on a home affairs issue. Here, the discrete sections of a particular report were individually timed and added to the appropriate category. This methodology ensures that the totals for European Union coverage are not influenced by the judgement of the monitoring team. In considering these totals, it therefore important to appreciate that the EU airtime figures represent an absolute maximum. The actual amount focused centrally on EU affairs was significantly less.

## **2.2 Today's EU Coverage**

Between 27 February and 17 June 2006, Today broadcast 212 European Union-based news items. There were 51 separate bulletins items, 17 mentions in the programme's newspaper review sections, and 144 more substantial 'feature' reports, with a combined duration of 437 minutes. In addition, there were nine marginal or passing mentions of the EU. The amount of EU coverage varied week by week, as the graph shows:



The highest levels of coverage occurred in the approach to the heads of government summit in the final week of the survey, with 56 minutes of feature reports (8.4% of the available airtime) being devoted to EU stories. The lowest level was recorded in the third week of monitoring, with only 4.5 minutes of EU-related feature reports (0.7%).

The amount of airtime afforded to EU issues has been an ongoing area of investigation for Minotaur, and on numerous occasions the lack of space allocated to significant EU events has been a major cause for concern. It must be appreciated that airtime figures are a blunt statistical instrument: they provide only details of volume rather than an insight into the depth or quality of the reporting itself. However, it follows that the less space afforded to a particular EU theme, the less opportunity there is for a full and balanced discussion, taking in a full range of opinion.

### 2.3 Structural Reports

The data was assessed to determine how many of the programme’s feature reports dealt with the day to day business and actions of the EU – its proposals, legislation, rulings – and how many dealt with the EU as an institution, and its structural plans. There were some areas in which an overlap occurred, or which could be considered open to question, but broadly speaking the 437 minutes of EU related feature reports were divided into 237 minutes of reports looking at the EU’s actions, compared with 200 minutes looking at European Union structural issues. With the total EU coverage standing at 4.1% of the programme’s available airtime, this means that only 1.9% of

features dealt with a discussion of the EU's institutions and its political projects – including enlargement, the European Security and Defence Policy, the euro, and the Constitution.

## 2.4 The Position of EU News

Assessing how EU news was positioned within Today is a complex calculation, given that each half hour segment does not contain the same amount of space for feature reports. For example, the first half hour of the programme generally has room for 17 minutes of feature coverage, whereas the last half hour has between 26 and 29 minutes. In addition, the Saturday morning programme begins at 7am, and has a slightly different running order to the weekday editions.

With all these variables taken into account, the table lists the six half hour segments of the Today programme, and gives a weighted figure for EU news reporting as a percentage of the total feature output available in each segment.

Time Slot	6am–6.30am	6.30am–7am	7am–7.30am	7.30am–8am	8am–8.30am	8.30am-9am
EU Airtime	6.97%	5.4%	3.66%	5.21%	0.81%	3.59%

The programme's peak listening hour (between 7.30am and 8.30am on weekday mornings) generally receives an audience in excess of two million, whereas first hour of the programme generally receives less than half this amount.<sup>2</sup> But the statistics show that while 6.2% of feature reports between 6am and 7am were EU-related, this slipped to 4.4% between 7am and 8am, and then to 2.2% between 8am and 9am. As such, EU-related reporting was unevenly distributed towards the beginning of the programme – the segment with fewest listeners –and almost completely excluded from the crucial 8am-8.30am slot.

## 2.5 Bulletins

During the sixteen week survey, Today aired 51 individual bulletin items relating to EU Politics. The table categorises these bulletin reports according to their highest position each story achieved during the programme's six morning bulletins. The total number of stories broadcast during Today's bulletins varies from morning to morning, but generally between ten and thirteen items are transmitted in the programme's hourly bulletins, with fewer the half-hourly slots.

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<sup>2</sup> Tim Luckhurst, *This is Today*, 2001.

<b>Bulletin Position</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>Total</b>
Number of Reports	2	3	7	13	8	5	3	4	3	2	1	51
Correspondent Reports	2	3	7	9	5	5	2	2	1	1	1	38
Additional Speakers	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	4

As the table shows, EU-related news provided the morning's main headline on only two occasions during the sixteen week survey – and on both occasions these reports were concerned with the EU tangentially, focusing on the Union's joint decision, with the UN and US, to suspend aid to the Hamas-led Palestinian Authority.

EU bulletins were fairly well supported by additional material from journalists and correspondents – of the 51 items, 38 had additional commentary, and four contained brief sound clips from other speakers.

There is a strong correlation between the items high on the news agenda and the space given to a particular story in the programme's 'feature' sequences. Generally, the further down the bulletin running order a story appears, the less likely it is to be covered elsewhere in the programme. Of course, both features and bulletins are arranged according to the relative 'news value' of a particular story and the relationship is therefore one of symbiosis rather than dependence. As such, the bulletin data presented here is entirely consistent with the low levels of EU coverage delivered elsewhere in the programme.

## **2.6 Guest Speakers**

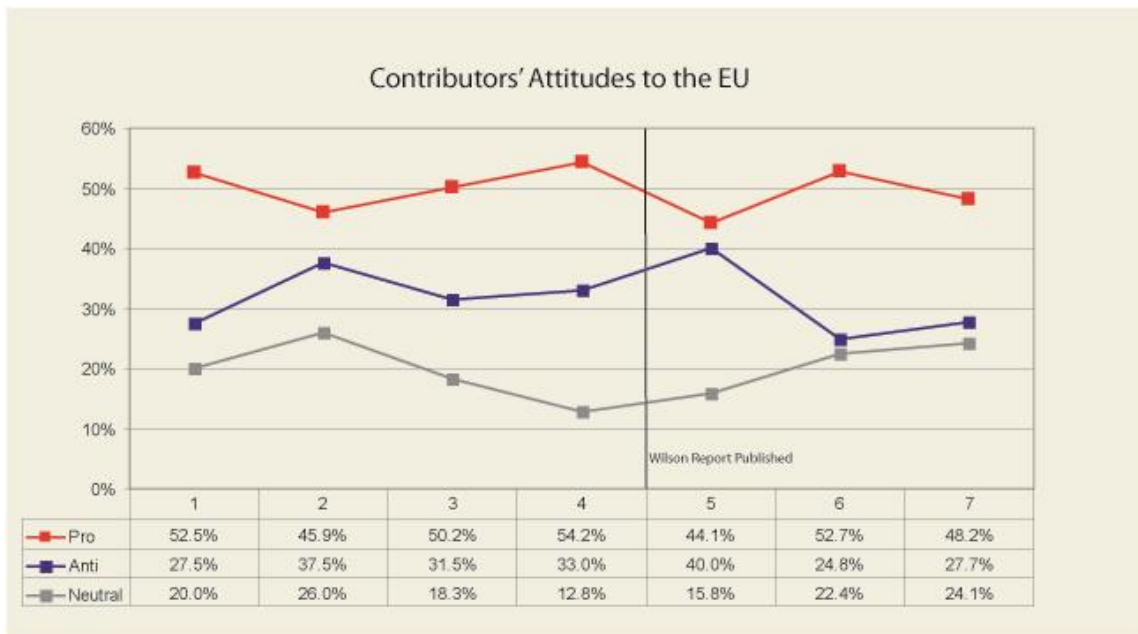
167 guests contributed to Today's EU coverage during the sixteen weeks of monitored output. There were 103 interviews, 58 soundbites, and six pieces of correspondence from member of the audience.

The table below provides details of all contributions. It lists speakers according to whether they expressed Europhile or Eurosceptic views (including comments on specific pieces of EU legislation). Each interview, soundbite and vox pop was assessed and categorised according to the contents of the contribution, rather than the established views of the person concerned, or their party affiliation.

Contributions by Party	Labour	Conservative	Liberal	UKIP	EU	Other		Total
Pro-EU	26	2	2	0	25	8		63
In favour of specific EU legislation/action	0	2	0	0	0	15		17
Anti-EU or Eurosceptic	1	7	0	5	1	7		21
Against specific EU legislation/action	1	0	2	0	3	19		25
Neutral/Factual viewpoint	4	1	1	0	1	34		41
<b>Total Speakers</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>83</b>		<b>167</b>

In broad terms, 80 speakers (48%) were in favour of the EU or its legislation; 46 speakers (28%) were against the EU or its legislation, and 40 speakers (24%) provided a neutral or factual contribution.

These figures are in keeping with previous surveys undertaken by Minotaur, where the number of broadly Europhile speakers has continually outweighed those speaking more critically of the EU or its legislation. The chart shows the proportions of Pro, Anti and Neutral speakers over the course of the seven Minotaur surveys since September 2002, and represents the viewpoints of 2136 guest speakers. (Details of these seven previous surveys are provided in section 2.1)



The numbers of Europhile and Eurosceptic speakers reached closest parity during Survey Five (March-June 2005), which assessed the Corporation's coverage of the general election, although there was still a 4% differential in favour of Europhile speakers. (This was also the first Minotaur

survey to be undertaken following the publication of the Wilson Report's recommendations in January 2005). The widest divergence occurred in the first survey (September 2002-July 2003), although the most recent two investigations have seen a return to proportionally low numbers of sceptical speakers.

It is acknowledged that EU is a complex area of debate, and that at any given time a wide variety of opinion is competing for airtime. As such, creating balance requires more than simply setting pro-EU guests against their sceptical counterparts at every opportunity. There are occasions where it is entirely appropriate to consider the views, for example, of two broadly pro-EU speakers who might have different perspectives on an EU matter, just as at other times it would be appropriate to challenge two eurosceptics in order to explore the similarities and differences within their positions. But it is equally vital that these various shades of opinion, over time, achieve a broad parity. Minotaur's research indicates a constant and long-term trend weighted in favour of Europhile opinion, with sceptical contributors being outnumbered by Europhile guests – often heavily – in every survey undertaken to date.

In April 2006, an Independent Panel chaired by Sir Quentin Thomas published a report on the BBC's coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Research undertaken by Loughborough University to support the inquiry assessed the numbers of outside participants ('actors') in the Corporation's news reporting, and recorded the 'talk time' awarded to each. The researchers noted:

The number of appearances of actors can be seen as a measure of *news presence* while the amount of quotation or talk time is linked with issues of *news access*. Whose voices do we hear? Who is allowed to speak and for how long? The granting of access to the news is widely recognised in the secondary literature as an indicator of both the perceived news value and credibility of sources.<sup>3</sup>

The Loughborough research underlines the importance of guest contributors and interviewees to the framework of broadcast news, an issue which was largely avoided in the Wilson Report into the BBC's EU coverage. The BBC's counterargument - that balance does not depend upon speaker numbers and airtime being equal, and that equality can be achieved through tough interviewing and devil's advocate questions - is brought into question by Loughborough's research, where inequalities in the number of 'actors' provided one of the main strands of inquiry.

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<sup>3</sup> The BBC's Reporting of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, Loughborough University Communications Research Centre, April 2006

## 2.7 The Westminster Prism

The Wilson Report found that *'the dominance of Westminster politics, both in the structure of BBC News and in the allocation of air-time, leads to distorted reporting of the EU'*.

Data from the most recent survey indicates that exactly half the contributors were politicians (domestic MPs, EU representatives, MEPs, politicians from other member states), and half came from outside mainstream politics (economists, business leaders, print journalists, representatives of think tanks, programme listeners, vox pop interviewees).

The table provides data collected during the last seven Minotaur surveys, and gives details of speaker proportions, separated into three categories.<sup>4</sup>

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Westminster Politicians and British MEPs	38%	44%	46%	34%	29%	37%	32%
EU Representatives and EU Politicians	16%	19%	11%	23%	27%	22%	18%
Other Speakers	46%	38%	41%	41%	43%	41%	50%

The increase in the proportion of non-political participants during the most recent survey demonstrates the inclusion of a more diverse range of opinion, and in terms of the Wilson recommendations is to be welcomed. However, for balance to be achieved, the numbers of contributors speaking for and against the European Union must be broadly similar in both the political and non-political categories. The table below lists political and non-political speakers according to their broad attitude towards the EU and its legislation. (Those speakers who delivered a neutral or factual contribution have been excluded)

	Political Speakers	Non-Political Speakers
<b>Pro EU</b>	57	23
<b>Eurosceptic/Anti EU</b>	20	26

When these two categories are considered in isolation, it becomes clear that there was an over-reliance on non-political speakers when putting forward a sceptical perspective on the EU or its legislation. (57 political speakers offered a broadly positive opinion of the EU, compared to only 20 politicians who took a negative stance – a ratio of almost 3:1.) If the inequalities between the

<sup>4</sup> In previous surveys, British MEPs have been categorised according to their domestic political parties, and to adjust this system would make comparisons with earlier work difficult, and lead to anomalies in the way information regarding speakers is recorded and presented (for example, many UKIP speakers – who are elected MEPs – would be categorised as 'EU' in the main statistics compiled for each report). As such, the figures presented here do not equate exactly to the definition of 'Westminster' provided in the Wilson Report.

numbers of Europhile and Eurosceptic speakers are put aside, the data shows that 71% of those who spoke in favour of the EU or its legislation were politicians, compared to only 43% of the sceptical contributors.

The table lists the contribution of the non-aligned speakers according to the subject area upon which they were asked to comment.

Subject Area	Speakers
European Union trade, business or economics	33
Carbon Trading Scheme, Climate Change and the Environment	16
Today Programme's April Fool's Joke	9
EU Enlargement	8
EU and Palestine	6
EU Defence	2
David Cameron and the EU	2
EU and bureaucracy	2
Italian Elections	1
Travel Ban on Belarusian government	1
Angela Merkel	1
Guantanamo Bay	1
European Constitution	1

Roughly forty per cent of the non-politically aligned speakers commented on EU trade, business or economic issues, the majority appearing in the Business News or Business Update slots. Environmental matters also featured a high number of guest speakers from outside mainstream politics, with approximately twenty per cent being invited to comment on these matters. Almost eleven per cent of the non-political contributors were linked to the programme's April Fool's joke and its aftermath – which suggested that the Radio 4 UK theme would be 'rearranged with music reflecting Britain's place in Europe' – and thus the opinions on the EU expressed here (mainly sceptical) were arguably negated by the speakers' gullibility, in having fallen for the hoax.

Political and non-political speakers were categorised according to their broad attitudes towards the EU and its legislation, and whether they contributed to the programme through interviews, shorter pre-recorded 'soundbites' or letters/emails. The results are shown in the table below:

	Interview	Soundbite	Letter/Email	Total
Political Pro	38	19	0	57
Non-Political Pro	17	4	2	23
Political Anti	12	8	0	20
Non-Political Anti	9	13	4	26
Political Neutral	2	5	0	7
Non-Political Neutral	25	9	0	34

The chief inequality here is in the programme's interview sequences: there were three times more political contributors speaking in favour of the EU than there were political contributors speaking against it. This raises a number of implications: are non-political speakers able to offer the same



level of insight and understanding as politicians when speaking about the EU? Do politicians receive more airtime than non-political speakers, or appear in more prominent parts of the programme? Are speakers from outside mainstream politics more likely to offer criticism of a single piece of EU legislation as opposed to speaking for or against the EU in broader, or more firmly ideological terms? Are listeners more likely or less likely to trust the views of a politician than the views of someone from outside mainstream politics?

These are all important considerations, and some are impossible to quantify or address using statistics alone. However, if the EU debate is to be opened up beyond the ‘Westminster Prism’, it seems clear that this must be done even-handedly, with both sides of the argument being represented by equivalent numbers of political and non-political contributors, otherwise it may become the source of further inequality between the presentation of Europhile and Eurosceptic viewpoints.

## 2.8 Sceptical opinion

The range of sceptical opinion expressed during the survey period ranged from those who were completely opposed to continued British membership of the European Union, to those who simply objected to a specific piece of its legislation.

There were 21 interviews with guests who spoke critically of the EU, but ten were guests who spoke only in opposition to a particular EU measure. These included Phil Kirby from Vodaphone, who spoke against EU legislation on roaming charges, Liberal Democrat MP Chris Davies, who criticised the European Union’s decision to remove aid from the Palestinian Authority, and Vittorio Prodi, Italian MEP, who opposed an EU funding decision on stem cell research.

Eleven other interviewees were directly critical of the EU from a political or ideological standpoint, and these guests are listed in the table below.

Speaker	Party or Occupation	Duration	Programme Slot
Michael Gove	Conservative Party	2 min 20 sec	6.52am
Philip Davies	Conservative Party	2 min 28 sec	6.55am
Nigel Farage	UK Independence Party	2 min 16 sec	7.14am
Roger Knapman	UK Independence Party	2 min 54 sec	7.20am
Hans Peter Martin	Austrian MEP	2 min 41sec	7.23am
Nigel Farage	UK Independence Party	2 min 05 sec	7.25am
William Hague	Conservative Party	5 min 15 sec	7.33am
Tony Benn	Labour Party	1 min 03 sec	7.35am
David Heathcoat Amory	Conservative Party	2 min 20 sec	8.33am
Jacques Myard	French MP	0 min 28 sec	8.36am
Professor John Gillingham	Author	3 min 44 sec	8.52am

These interviews amounted to just 6% of the total airtime afforded to EU coverage. As these timings also include input from the programme's presenters during interview sequences (often in the form of devil's advocate questioning, putting forward the opposite perspective) the actual airtime given over to directly critical opinions on the EU, was actually significantly less.

Only two of the interviews - with a combined duration of 6 minutes and 18 seconds – were broadcast within the programme's peak listening hour of 7.30am to 8.30am, although three more were aired between 7am and 7.30am, a segment which also receives a significant number of listeners.<sup>5</sup> Two interviews took place before the 7am bulletin, and three after 8.30am.

## 2.9 The Withdrawal Perspective

*We strive to reflect a wide range of opinion and explore a range and conflict of views so that no significant strand of thought is knowingly unreflected or under represented.*<sup>6</sup>

The Wilson Report found that that BBC news had 'failed to reflect a significant minority opinion that the UK should withdraw from the EU because this does not figure in the policies of the Westminster parties'. The report expressed confidence, however, that the situation had been addressed since the success of The UK Independence Party in the European Elections of May 2004.

The following analysis will examine to what extent advocates of withdrawal were allowed access to the various EU debates conducted on the Today programme. A caveat is required: approximately 15% of those who spoke critically of the EU during this survey were not identified editorially as belonging to a particular party or political group. This made it impossible to ascertain whether certain contributors were criticising the EU from a pro-withdrawal position, or simply opposed to the EU's direction in a particular policy area. Thus, for the purpose of this analysis, speakers supporting withdrawal could be identified as such only if they met at least one of the following criteria:

1. They explicitly expressed, as part of their contribution, a support British withdrawal, their own country's withdrawal, or the dissolution of the European Union.
2. They were said to hold these views in introductory sequences, or in additional journalistic commentary.
3. They belonged to a party which explicitly advocates withdrawal or holds comparable views.

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<sup>5</sup> Tim Luckhurst, *This is Today*, 2001, p75

<sup>6</sup> BBC Editorial Guidelines, 2005, p.27

Of the 166 speakers who contributed to the Today programme's EU coverage during the sixteen week survey, only six were identifiably of the belief that Britain should withdraw from the European Union.<sup>7</sup> There were four contributions from Nigel Farage of the UK Independence Party, one interview with UKIP leader Roger Knapman as part of the programme's coverage of the June summit, and an interview with the Conservative MP for Shipley, Philip Davies on the launch of the campaign group 'Better Off Out'.

The table provides details of contributions from pro-withdrawal speakers during the five previous Minotaur surveys periods. In the first and third surveys, Today was monitored in conjunction with other BBC news programmes, and speakers from other programmes are included in this data.

Start Date	End Date	Programmes	Weeks	Speakers	Withdrawal Supporters	Percentage
29 Mar 2004	22 Jun 2004	Today, PM, 10pm News, Newsnight	12	279	16	5.7%
14 Oct 2004	18 Dec 2004	Today	10	94	7	7.4%
7 Mar 2005	2 Jun 2005	Today, PM, 10pm News, Newsnight	12	657	24	3.7%
24 Oct 2005	24 Dec 2005	Today	9	165	3	1.8%
27 Feb 2006	17 Jun 2006	Today	16	166	6	3.6%

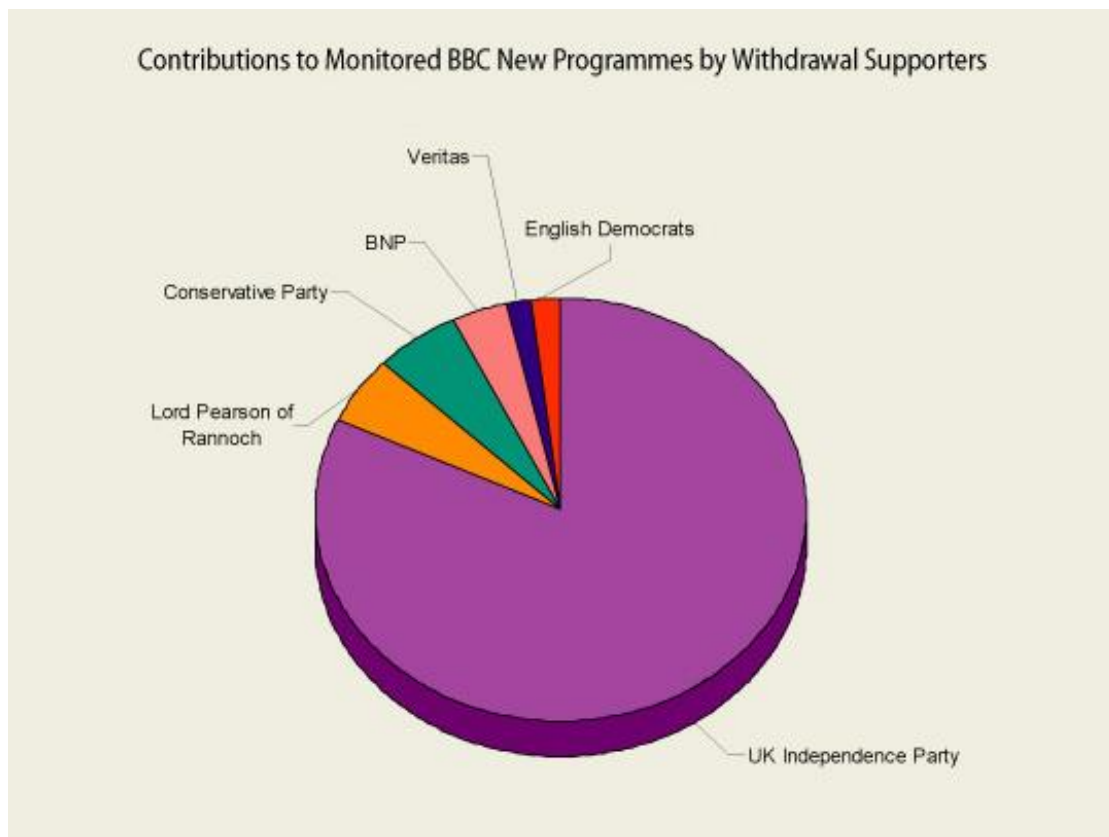
The figures demonstrate there has been a decline in the proportions of pro-withdrawal speakers since the publication of the Wilson Report in January 2005 (the lower three rows on the table). When assessing these totals, it must be noted that these proportions do not reflect the actual airtime given to pro-withdrawal speakers: in straightforward headcounts such as this, a brief soundbite counts for as much as a full length interview.

But Minotaur has conducted detailed timing and word-count analyses on a number of occasions, and concluded that withdrawal supporters are generally awarded far less airtime than comparable interviews with government speakers, or EU politicians and commissioners.

The chart below shows the withdrawal supporters who have contributed to the BBC news output in the five Minotaur surveys undertaken since March 2004, and categorises them according to the political party they represent. The vast majority of pro-withdrawal contributions speakers were representatives of The UK Independence Party, with UKIP speakers accounting for 46 of the 56 withdrawal contributions. Three contributors were Conservative Party members, (two unnamed party activists and one MP), and the Independent Conservative peer Lord Pearson of Rannoch

<sup>7</sup> In addition, there was an interview on 5 April with David Campbell Bannerman, UKIP's chairman, concerning the Conservative leader David Cameron's accusation that UKIP were 'fruitcakes and loonies and closet racists'. However, because Mr Campbell Bannerman spoke on UKIP's immigration policy and made no mention of the EU in his interview, his appearance is not included here.

has been counted separately. The speakers from the English Democrats, the British National Party and Veritas all appeared in election coverage.



As the chart indicates, UKIP is virtually the sole voice of the withdrawal argument in BBC coverage. This has a number of serious implications. Foremost, the party and the argument itself are fast becoming inexorably linked. In these circumstances, any news item which calls into question the reputation of UKIP may also serve to discredit the withdrawal perspective itself in the minds of news audiences. There are numerous examples. In the most recent survey the most widely reported UKIP story did not deal with policy of EU withdrawal, but with a claim by the recently elected Conservative leader, David Cameron, that UKIP were 'a bunch of fruitcakes, loonies, and closet racists'. There were also reports that Roger Knapman - despite opposing EU enlargement - had employed a team of Polish builders to renovate his mansion. Previous surveys witnessed a BBC journalist suggesting it would be interesting to see, 'how far they actually bother to turn up in the European Parliament', a psychologist drawing parallels between UKIP and 'the hooligans who besmirch Britain's reputation abroad', and a church leader labelling the party 'selfish'. There have also been recurrent claims of links between UKIP and the BNP.

Of course, it is entirely proper that political parties are subject to scrutiny. But the exclusion of alternative withdrawal viewpoints (there were no contributions from the political left, from journalists, economists or academics, or any commentators from other EU member states) means that audiences might easily perceive the withdrawal argument as solely the preserve of the political right, or as a policy with implicit links to racism or xenophobia. UKIP are an important voice in the EU debate, but it is vital that their perspective is augmented by a range of other contributors in the BBC's news and current affairs programming. Only then will the corporation begin to accurately reflect the views of the significant proportion of its audience who support British withdrawal from the European Union.

## **2.10 Case Study: Interviews with William Hague and Geoff Hoon**

The BBC has previously attempted to justify the consistent disparities in the numbers of pro-EU and eurosceptic speakers by suggesting that straightforward headcounts of guest speakers disguise the nuances involved in particular interviews. The former Today editor, Rod Liddle, criticised directly Minotaur's methodology following the publication of the Wilson Report in January 2005.

A 15-minute interview with a pro-EU politician is not evidence of BBC bias in favour of the union if the interview is sufficiently combative. In fact, bias is a far more subtle creature and, as Lord Wilson found out, difficult to put one's finger on. It is about tone, nuance, grammar and story selection.<sup>8</sup>

Of course, Minotaur's methodology has always included line-by-line analyses of every EU item, but Mr Liddle's central point – that devil's advocate questions and robust interviewing can compensate for inequalities in the airtime afforded to each side – is often difficult to contest through statistical analysis alone, as there are ordinarily too many variables in the presentation and delivery of news and current affairs reports to make such a comparison worthwhile.

But towards the end of the survey period, the Today programme aired two interviews, one with the newly-appointed Europe Minister, Geoff Hoon, and one with the Conservative shadow foreign secretary William Hague. Both interviews were conducted by James Naughtie, were of a similar structure and length, and appeared in the same 7.32am time slot, exactly one week apart. These two interviews were analysed and compared in close detail, and the findings are presented in the table below:

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<sup>8</sup> Rod Liddle, The Times, 30 January 2005.

	WILLIAM HAGUE, 7 June		GEOFF HOON, 14 June	
	Words	Duration	Words	Duration
Whole Package	1713	8 min 32 sec	1659	8 min 13 sec
Introduction by James Naughtie BBC Correspondent	63 496	18 sec 2 min 59 sec	68 508	16 sec 2 min 34 sec
Main Interview Total <sup>9</sup>	1154	5 min 15 sec	1083	5 min 39 sec
James Naughtie	361 (31%)	1 min 50 sec	467 (43%)	2 min 28 sec
Interviewee	793 (69%)	3 min 32 sec	616 (57%)	3 min 8 sec
Longest uninterrupted contribution	138	37 seconds	167	54 seconds
Average length of contribution	34	9 seconds	47	15 seconds
Interview rate of speech	220 Words per minute		192 Words per minute	
Number of Interruptions	20		4	
Interruptions per minute	3.8		0.7	

The most significant disparity was in the conduct of the main interview sequences. As a proportion of the total interview time, William Hague was interrupted more than five times more frequently than Geoff Hoon, (3.8 interruptions per minute compared to 0.7 per minute). Mr Hague's spoke on average for 9 seconds before being interrupted by the presenter compared to 15 seconds for Mr Hoon. The robust tone James Naughtie adopted in his questioning of the shadow foreign secretary also meant that this interview was also conducted 14.7% faster than that with the Minister for Europe.

## 2.11 Today and the 'Period of Reflection'

Following the rejection of the proposed Constitution by voters in France and the Netherlands in Spring 2005, the EU entered into a year long 'period of reflection', with the declared aims of 'reconnecting the citizens with the European project', and 'deciding the fate of the Constitution'.<sup>10</sup> In effect, the EU entered into a period of strategic paralysis, with different groups of member states favouring different courses of action, ranging from 'allowing the dust to settle', to cutting the Constitution 'piece by piece' into less controversial provisions. During the survey period, 22 of the 211 European Union-related programme items contained discussion of the Constitution, amounting to 15% of the total EU coverage. The table provides details of all these reports.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Apparent discrepancies between this total and the sum of the interviews constituent parts are caused by both interviewer and interviewee speaking at once.

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.euractiv.com/en/constitution/constitutional-treaty-reflection-period/article-155739>

<sup>11</sup> On occasions where discussion of the Constitution was combined with other issues in one package, only the section dealing with the Constitution has been timed)

Date	Report Title	Duration	Correspondent	Speakers
1 March	Interview with Valery Giscard D'Estaing	7		Valery Giscard D'Estaing, former French president
21 March	Interview with Guy Verhofstadt,	6..5		Guy Verhofstadt, Belgian prime minister
25 March	Interview with Nigel Farage	2.5		Nigel Farage, UKIP
6 April	Correspondent package on Constitution	3	Tim Franks	
6 April	Interview with Peter Mandelson	5		Peter Mandelson, EU Commission
8 April	Interview with Nigel Farage	0.5		Nigel Farage, UKIP
10 May	The Future of Europe	3	Jonny Dymond	
10 May	EU Commission and the future of Europe	10	Mark Mardell	Hans-Gert Poettering, EU Commissioner
				Atzo Nicolai; Dutch Foreign minister
				Nigel Farage, UKIP
				David Heathcoat-Amory, Conservative Party
				Urma Spaet, Estonian Foreign Minister
13 May	Interview with Denis McShane	1		Denis McShane, Labour Party
23 May	United Nations	0.5		Craig Murray, Former Ambassador
27 May	Bulletin item on EU foreign ministers meeting	n/a	Jonny Dymond	
29 May	Bulletin item on 'period of reflection'	n/a	Jonny Dymond	
7 June	Interview with William Hague	0.5	Nick Robinson	William Hague, Conservative Party
14 June	Interview with Geoff Hoon	8	Mark Mardell	Geoff Hoon, Labour Party
15 June	EU Summit	4	Tim Franks	
15 June	Yesterday in Parliament	6	Robert Orchard	Chris Bryant, Labour Party
				William Hague, Conservative Party
				Margaret Beckett, Labour Party
				Gisela Stuart, Labour Party
				Geoff Hoon, Labour Party
15 June	Bulletin Item on Brussels Summit	n/a	Tim Franks	
15 June	Interview with Roger Knapman	3		Roger Knapman, UKIP
16 June	Bulletin Item on Brussels Summit	n/a	Tim Franks	
16 June	Brussels Summit	3	Alix Kroeger	
16 June	Newspaper Review	n/a		
16 June	Interview with Margaret Beckett	8		Margaret Beckett, Labour Party

The inequality reflected in the global speaker counts for this survey period was mirrored in those reports dealing specifically with the Constitution. In total, there were 12 Pro-EU speakers, 7 who were against the EU, and 2 who were neutral. A word count analysis was undertaken to measure the duration of each contribution. In total, 62% of the words spoken by guest contributors came from pro-European Union speakers, 36% came from anti-EU speakers and 2% from neutral commentators. A fairly sizeable proportion of words (13%) came from UKIP representatives – but it important to appreciate that four of the five UKIP appearances during the survey period were in these Constitution-based reports.

## 2.12 Political Interviews

The analysis so far has demonstrated a clear disparity in the numbers of contributors who spoke in favour of the EU or its legislation, and those who spoke against it. However, these broad headcounts do not provide information on the duration of each interview or give an indication of the way the discussion was conducted. The comparison of the William Hague and Geoff Hoon interviews raised a number of concerns, and, in order to see if this was simply an anomaly, or if the problem was more widespread, it was decided that all political interviews conducted during the survey period should be individually timed, and the number of interruptions tallied.

### Interruptions

In order to gain an understanding of how these individual speakers were treated in their interviews, an analysis was undertaken to explore the number of interruptions in each interview sequence. Of course, there are a host of variables at play in an exercise such as this: the programme employs a range of presenters each with a different style; a particular interviewee may persistently avoid answering a question or need to be reined in for speaking tangentially; interruptions may be more frequent if an interview is conducted over the telephone or from a radio car, as the visual and body language cues associated with typical conversation are obscured. But in spite of these contributory factors, some apparent trends emerged.

All interviews with politicians (domestic MPs, MEPs, representatives of the EU institutions, and politicians from member states) were timed and the number of interruptions counted, in order to determine the interruptions per minute (IPM) for every interview. Any occasion on which an interviewer began to speak before the guest had finished was recorded and entered into a table. Any interjection which did not break or attempt to break the flow of speech were discounted – for example, when a presenter began to speak, but did not form a whole word before allowing the guest to continue, or when presenters murmured their assent to a particular point. The methodology also ignored interruptions undertaken to bring an interview to a close, although this circumstance did not occur in any of the sampled interviews.

Interviews where no interruption was actually possible – generally when a guest was asked only a single question on the EU, or when mention of the EU was not followed up by the presenter – were excluded from the list. As such, the table below also serves as a record of all the *substantive* political interviews broadcast during the survey period.



Today Political Interviews - Interruption Analysis						
Date	Contributor	Party/Title	Duration	Interruptions	IPM	Interviewer
27-Feb	Benita Ferrero Waldner	External Affairs Commissioner	5 min 29 sec	4	0.72	Edward Stourton
01-Mar	Valery Giscard D'Estaing	Former French president	6 min 44 sec	2	0.30	Carolyn Quinn
03-Mar	Lord Drayson	Labour Party	4 min 27 sec	3	0.67	Sarah Montague
06-Mar	Lord Patten	Chancellor of Oxford University	2 min 23 sec	0	0	Greg Wood
06-Mar	Lord Heseltine	Conservative Party	2 min 37 sec	0	0	Edward Stourton
09-Mar	Charlie McCreevy	European Commission	1 min 49 sec	0	0	John Moylan
09-Mar	Andris Piebalgs	European Commission	3 min 20 sec	0	0	Sarah Montague
16-Mar	Hans Peter Martin	Austrian MEP	2 min 41sec	0	0	James Naughtie
21-Mar	Guy Verhofstadt	Belgian Prime Minister	5 min 57 sec	0	0	Carolyn Quinn
25-Mar	Nigel Farage	UK Independence Party	2 min 05 sec	4	1.92	John Humphrys
25-Mar	Wolfgang Schuessel	Austrian Chancellor	4 min 50 sec	1	0.20	Carolyn Quinn
04-Apr	Andris Piebalgs	European Commission	2 min 24 sec	0	0	Carolyn Quinn
06-Apr	Peter Mandelson	European Commission	4 min 26 sec	3	0.67	Sarah Montague
07-Apr	Jimmy Hood	Labour Party	2 min 24 sec	2	0.83	Sarah Montague
07-Apr	Michael Gove	Conservative Party	2 min 20 sec	0	0	Sarah Montague
08-Apr	Nigel Farage	UK Independence Party	2 min 16 sec	1	0.44	James Naughtie
10-Apr	Chris Davies	Liberal Democrat	2 min 43 sec	0	0	John Humphrys
13-Apr	Chris Davies	Liberal Democrat	2 min 33 sec	0	0	Sarah Montague
19-Apr	Jack Straw	Labour Party	3 min 19 sec	1	0.32	Edward Stourton
26-Apr	Philip Davies	Conservative Party	2 min 28 sec	0	0	Sarah Montague
28-Apr	Peter Mandelson	European Commission	5 min 01 sec	5	1	John Humphrys
10-May	Marc Otte	European Commission	3 min 45 sec	1	0.27	Sarah Montague
10-May	Douglas Alexander	Labour Party	1 min 04 sec	4	3.74	James Naughtie
10-May	Urma Spaet	Estonian Foreign Minister	2 min 41 sec	1	0.37	Sarah Montague
10-May	David Heathcoat Amory	Conservative Party	2 min 20sec	2	0.86	Sarah Montague
16-May	Geoffrey Van Orden	Conservative MEP	2 min 31sec	0	0	Edward Stourton
23-May	Baroness Nicholson	Liberal Democrat MEP	2 min 15 sec	1	0.44	Carolyn Quinn
30-May	Malcolm Harbour	Conservative MEP	2 min 58 sec	0	0	Greg Wood
05-Jun	Gordon Brown	Labour Party	2 min 42 sec	2	0.74	John Humphrys
07-Jun	William Hague	Conservative Party	5 min 15 sec	20	3.80	James Naughtie
12-Jun	Gisela Stuart	Labour Party	2 min 45 sec	0	0	Greg Wood
13-Jun	Eluned Morgan	Labour MEP	2 min 27sec	4	1.63	James Naughtie
13-Jun	Vittorio Prodi	Italian MEP	2 min 26 sec	1	0.41	James Naughtie
14-Jun	Geoff Hoon	Labour Party	5 min 39 sec	4	0.70	James Naughtie
15-Jun	Roger Knapman	UK Independence Party	2 min 54 sec	3	1.03	James Naughtie
16-Jun	Andrej Bajuk	Slovenian Finance Minister	3 min 31 sec	0	0	Rebecca Marston
16-Jun	Margaret Beckett	Labour Party	4 min 31 sec	1	0.22	John Humphrys
17-Jun	Simon Coveney	Irish MEP	2 min 16 sec	2	0.88	Edward Stourton

The next table shows the five most interrupted interviewees, each of whom received over one interruption per minute of interview time.

Date	Contributor	Party	Duration	Interruptions	IPM	Interviewer
07-Jun	William Hague	Conservative Party	5 min 15 sec	20	3.80	James Naughtie
10-May	Douglas Alexander	Labour Party	1 min 4 sec	4	3.74	James Naughtie
25-Mar	Nigel Farage	UK Independence Party	2 min 05 sec	4	1.92	John Humphrys
13-Jun	Eluned Morgan	Labour MEP	2 min 27sec	4	1.63	James Naughtie
15-Jun	Roger Knapman	UK Independence Party	2 min 54 sec	3	1.03	James Naughtie

William Hague's interview appeared to be the toughest, with a twenty interruptions taking place during of his five and a quarter minute discussion. Transport minister Douglas Alexander experienced a similar rate of interruption, but the section of his interview concentrating on the EU was the shortest of all interviews qualifying for inclusion in this table, and the rest of his interview – which concentrated on proposals for a new national system of road charging – showed that this segment was actually atypical. The appearance of two UKIP speakers in the top five (out of only three interviews during the survey period) suggests that representatives of the party were treated comparatively harshly.

The table below shows the five speakers who were interrupted the least. (As there were fifteen speakers who were not interrupted at all, this table represents those who spoke for longest without interruption).

Date	Contributor	Party	Duration	Interruptions	IPM	Interviewer
21-Mar	Guy Verhofstadt	Belgian Prime Minister	5 min 57 sec	0	0	Carolyn Quinn
16-Jun	Andrej Bajuk	Slovenian Finance Minister	3 min 31 sec	0	0	Rebecca Marston
09-Mar	Andris Piebalgs	European Commission	3 min 20 sec	0	0	Sarah Montague
30-May	Malcolm Harbour	Conservative MEP	2 min 58 sec	0	0	Greg Wood
12-Jun	Gisela Stuart	Labour Party	2 min 45 sec	0	0	Greg Wood

All the speakers in this table – including the Conservative MEP Malcolm Harbour, who discussed a compromise deal on cross border trade he had negotiated in the European Parliament – were speaking in favour of the EU or an element of its legislation.

To investigate how a particular presenting style might influence the number of interruptions occurring in a particular sequence, data relating to each presenter was isolated, and the results are presented in the table below.

Presenter	Interviews	Interruptions	IPM
James Naughtie	8	37	4.6
John Humphrys	5	12	2.4
Edward Stourton	4	5	1.3
Sarah Montague	10	12	1.2
Carolyn Quinn	5	4	0.8
Greg Wood	3	0	0
John Moylan	1	0	0

The data indicates that the three regular male presenters were most likely to interrupt a guest, the two regular female presenters interrupted less frequently, and the two business news presenters did not interrupt guests at all. While the overall sample size was relatively small – 36 interviews with a duration of just over 2 hours of airtime – this exercise perhaps give some indication of which presenters might be considered the ‘toughest’.

### Timings

All the substantive political interviews were timed. The totals include the time taken by the interviewers own questions, but exclude introductory sequences, soundbites from other speakers and reports from the programme’s correspondents. On occasions when two interviewees appeared in the same package, their contributions were calculated individually.

In total, these interview sequences accounted for 2 hours, 4 minutes and 16 seconds of programme airtime. Of this, those speakers who were broadly Europhile accounted for 1 hour 36 minutes and 58 seconds (78%) and those broadly sceptical or anti-EU accounted for 27 minutes and 18 seconds (22%). The average interview duration of an interview with a eurosceptic or anti-EU contributor was also significantly lower than interviews with Europhiles – 2 minutes and 41 seconds and 3 minutes 16 seconds respectively. Of the fourteen interviews which lasted over 3 minutes, only one of them was with a eurosceptic (William Hague, 7 June).

Coupled with the interruptions per minute data presented above, the evidence would suggest that the disparity in the airtime allotted to pro-EU speakers was not balanced by tough or confrontational interviewing: the most interrupted speaker was a eurosceptic, and two more of the top five were representatives of UKIP. All of the five speakers who spoke longest without being interrupted were Europhile.

There are a range of variables, and any conclusions drawn from this data is necessarily tentative. But the results presented here support the broad trends observed empirically by Minotaur during the monitoring process since 1999, and mirror the similar analyses of word counts, durations and interruptions undertaken in previous projects.

## The Brussels Heads of Government Summit, June 2006

Minotaur has investigated the Today programme's European coverage during nine previous heads of government meetings. The data collected during these earlier projects is presented in the table below, alongside figures from the most recent survey. In each instance, the programme was monitored for an equivalent twenty-one day period: for nineteen days leading up to and including the summits, and for two days subsequently.

	Total Items	Feature Reports	Airtime (features)	Speakers
Feira, July 2000	104	66	322 minutes	69
Seville, July 2002	69	43	137 minutes	51
Copenhagen, December 2002	54	34	110 minutes	50
Thessaloniki, June 2003	111	73	258 minutes	99
Brussels, December 2003	78	46	198 minutes	67
Brussels June 2004	110	61	303 minutes	90
Brussels, December 2004	48	33	122 minutes	40
Brussels June 2005	179	11	586 minutes	199
Brussels, December 2005	97	58	236 minutes	88
Brussels June 2006	41	29	98 minutes	28

The data shows that Today's EU coverage during the period of the June 2006 meeting was lower than during any previously monitored summit. While these figures are dependent on the amount of EU coverage in the wider news agenda, clearly issues surrounding the Constitution and the EU's 'period of reflection' were not a priority in the approach to the Brussels meeting. Even on the mornings of 15 and 16 June, where the programme might usually be expected to focus heavily on the matters being discussed in Brussels, the summit was far from being the most significant story, appearing fourth and seventh in the respective 8am bulletin running orders, and not appearing in either of the main 8.10am interview slots.

### 3.1 The Summit Week in Detail

To contextualise the programme's coverage of the Brussels Summit in relation to the wider news agenda, all news stories broadcast appearing on the Today programme during the summit week were individually logged and timed. The table lists those stories which formed the basis of three or more of feature reports.

Main Stories: Monday 12 June – Saturday 17 June			
Story	Total Airtime	Features	Average feature length
Sentencing Row	68 minutes	11	6 minutes 10 seconds
UK Anti-Terrorism Operations	51 minutes	9	5 minutes 40 seconds
Brussels Summit	32 minutes	6	5 minutes 20 seconds
Iraq	31 minutes	7	4 minutes 25 seconds
Guantanamo Bay	28 minutes	6	4 minutes 40 seconds
Immigration	23 minutes	6	3 minutes 49 seconds
UK and Afghanistan	20 minutes	4	5 minutes
NHS	20 minutes	4	5 minutes
World Cup	18 minutes	5	3 minutes
Government's Respect Agenda	15 minutes	4	3 minutes 45 seconds
Israel and Palestine	14 minutes	4	3 minutes 40 seconds
Whaling	12 minutes	3	4 minutes
Sexuality and the Church	11 minutes	3	3 minutes 40 seconds

During this six-day interval, the Brussels Summit achieved only third position in terms of total airtime duration, and received less than half the coverage apportioned to the week's main story: the row over lenient sentences being handed out to dangerous criminals. The main stories listed in the table above accounted for just over half of the total airtime available for feature reports; the remainder was occupied by stories which warranted only one or two separate items.<sup>12</sup> The sidelining of the summit was not, therefore, due to pressures on the agenda from other significant stories.

### 3.2 Contributions to the Brussels Summit Coverage

Eight speakers contributed to the Today programme's coverage of the Brussels summit, and information on their input is shown in the table below.

Date	Time	Speaker	Party	Interview	Soundbite	Words
14 June 2006	7.33am	Geoff Hoon	Labour	✓		616
15 June 2006	6.48am	Chris Bryant	Labour		✓	23
		William Hague	Conservative		✓	189
		Margaret Beckett	Labour		✓	59
		Gisela Stuart	Labour		✓	98
		Geoff Hoon	Labour		✓	26
15 June 2006	7.20am	Roger Knapman	UKIP	✓		330
16 June 2006	7.33am	Margaret Beckett	Labour	✓		615

Only two of the eight speakers offered a sceptical or anti-EU perspective: William Hague in the 'Yesterday in Parliament' slot on 15 June, and Roger Knapman from UKIP later in the same programme. Chris Bryant's contribution was coded as neutral, (he welcomed Margaret Beckett

<sup>12</sup> There were six additional 'stand-alone' EU reports broadcast during this interval which were not summit-related. These included a discussion in the European Parliament on stem-cell research, a call by an Irish MEP to close Guantanamo Bay, and Slovenia's adoption of the euro. These have been included in the main EU airtime totals for week 16 of the survey, but excluded here as they did not deal specifically with the heads of government meeting.

to the Commons debate, rather than giving a direct perspective on the EU), and the other five contributors all offered a pro-EU viewpoint. In terms of the number of words spoken during the summit coverage, 72% came from the pro-EU speakers and 27% came from those sceptical of the EU or opposed to it.

## **Part 2 – Feature analysis**

Calibration of what constitutes “adequate coverage” of EU affairs is difficult because the news agenda in a programme such as Today is flexible, and has to be shaped to respond to day-by-day priorities. There is no perfect news mix, and the adoption of targets for categories of coverage would be impractical.

However, the BBC appeared to accept, in response to direct criticism by the Wilson committee report, that it should generally make more efforts to boost both the quantity and the quality of the EU-related coverage across all of its news and current affairs output.

The latest survey by Minotaur shows that the coverage of EU affairs has fallen to its lowest level for no clear reason.

The fall was not warranted by the news agenda itself, because several EU-related issues, such as the fate of the Constitution, Britain’s vetoes in key areas, the possibility of cross border arrest warrants, and hot pursuit by security services, the development of a unified EU foreign policy, expansion, the operation of CAP, and the Commission budget, remained under consideration and debate.

The consequence of this reduced level of coverage was that several topics were not dealt with adequately, as the following analysis shows.

### **Where’s the beef?**

The programme was curiously un-inquisitive over the decision by EU vets to lift the ban on British beef exports and then, on May 3, the resumption of the export trade after more than a decade.

The news merited only a bulletin piece of a few seconds’ duration at 6am on March 8.

On May 3, with the resumption of beef exports, there was a bulletin item, accompanied by a voice report and an interview at 6.39am featuring correspondent Sarah Mukherjee.

The items noted that the ban had been in force for a decade: that fears about the human variant of CJD had been the main reason for its imposition: and that exports had once totalled almost

300,000 tons. Ms Mukherjee observed that beef farmers faced a tough fight to win back lost market share

The whole issue of CJD and beef has faded to an extent from news coverage, largely because the predicted number of deaths has not materialised. But this was nevertheless an opportunity to explore several important issues relating to the EU and beef farming that was not taken. The topic had relevance to a general audience because the beef ban had had a wide impact directly on the public as well as affecting many thousands of jobs. In what coverage there was, remarkably few facts were reported. There was no mention for example, that the number of CJD deaths was an estimated 155, compared to the tens of thousands predicted when the ban was imposed.

A possible line of inquiry by the programme, if it had been more interested in the EU agenda, could have been an exploration of whether the EU had therefore been right to impose such a stringent ban. This could have been the focus of interviews featuring a spokesperson from Defra, as well as with a wide number of groups who disagreed with the policy (and the British government's handling of it), including the Conservative EU spokesman, or representatives of bodies such as the NFU, or the Meat and Livestock Commission.

Overall, the whole episode of the ban was treated rather uncritically by Ms Mukherjee. She explained that the worldwide ban on British beef had been imposed by the EU, but did not attempt to discuss whether the decision had been controversial, or challenged. There was no mention of the difficulties it had caused farmers, or of any estimates of the number of jobs that had been hit.

### **The EU, Africa and the Doha round**

Throughout the period, trade talks as part of the Doha round, were on the news agenda. A central issue was whether the EU was blocking reform to the detriment of the developing world, but this was considered only to a very limited extent.

On March 10, there were two treatments of the latest talks that day of the Doha round. In business news, the guest was Michael Johnson, introduced as a former government negotiator at the talks. The EU's role was scarcely considered, the main issue being China's absence from the talks. In a correspondent question and answer session (at 6.07am) with David Loyn, his main emphasis was on the allegations that the US was to blame for the talks' impasse. He made no mention of the EU's position.



On March 11, there was a brief exchange in which Bob Geldof asserted that, a year on from the Commission for Africa report, the EU, in resisting trade reform, was the biggest barrier to helping the continent.

BOB GELDOF:           What the developing world is saying is, you must give way in your agricultural subsidies, etcetera, we need, supposedly, access for our services. I do think that someone's got to give way on this, it truly is the EU who is holding this up in my view. The Americans are playing a very clever game, and you know, there's more that the Brazilians can do. I think they've come to the table prepared to do that. But all that aside . . .

SARAH MONTAGUE:    (*interjects*) I don't want to push you, but it is of course . . . what Peter Mandelson, who is, of course, the EU trade commissioner says is that the onus lies on the big developing countries, like Brazil and India.

BG:           And they say the onus lies with us. And I think there is a general agreement, I'm not taking sides here, that the impediment is Europe. That's my personal view, I think that Europe is almost, you know, stuck in the glare of the globalised economy and doesn't know how to behave towards it. And I think we're stuck, we can't move forward on this, and I think again Britain really does lead on the whole issue of Africa.

This was a striking accusation, in effect, that Tony Blair was being thwarted in his much-publicised African ambitions by the EU, explicitly in its approach to trade barriers, and implicitly because of the CAP. It was not followed up.

On April 28, it was reported that the International Development Committee of the House of Commons had produced a report alleging that the EU was partly to blame for the Doha impasse. The introduction stated:

A committee of MPs has attacked the European Union for trying to force the poor countries into a deal which would damage their own interests. Malcolm Bruce, a Liberal Democrat chairs the International Development Select Committee, he says it's hypocritical for the United States and the European Union – the two most protectionist blocs in the world – to lecture the poorer countries about the merits of free trade while protecting their own interests.

There was a brief extract from Mr Bruce making the same point, followed by another soundbite from Helen Leadbitter, a spokesman for Oxfam. She stated:

Neither the European Union nor the US has offered anywhere near enough on cutting their damage on agricultural subsidies, or opening their markets to poor country farmers. And not only have they not delivered on these promises, but they're also making unreasonable demands on poor countries in other areas, for example, asking them to make massive cuts in the tariffs which protect their vulnerable industrial sectors, or rushing poor countries to liberalise their economies too quickly. Rich countries are acting against the letter and the spirit of these trade negotiations, which were meant to be about getting a fairer trade deal for poor countries.

Peter Mandelson, the European commissioner at the talks, was then interviewed and some of the allegations were put to him. He denied point blank that the EU was to blame and stated it was the US's fault for demanding "very radical access to markets round the world". John Humphrys, moving back to the House of Commons report, put it to him that other countries had "changed the rules at half time" and were trying to force developing markets to liberalise. He suggested that this was a new form of colonialism.

Peter Mandelson again denied point blank that this was the case, and the interview moved on to consideration of Tony Blair's future.

The next and only other (indirect mention) of the topic of the Doha talks was in an interview with Gordon Brown on June 5. It opened:

A cabinet minister is making a speech about globalisation today; now that, I grant you, is not a sentence that's guaranteed to make the pulse race faster. .

Mr Brown, touching indirectly on the CAP and problems with the Doha round, opined:

Now, the danger is that the world relaxes into another bout of protectionism, which could mean less trade, less growth, less exports, less jobs. And I think we've got to fight that, both in Europe and around the world. We need a trade deal for the world, and I'm pressing very hard that we make progress in the next few weeks on that, and we also need Europe to wake up to the costs of agricultural protectionism, and also what we've seen in the last few months, restrictive practices by some of the major economies in Europe, where they're blocking mergers, blocking takeovers, they're trying to operate what are called economic patriot policies, where in a sense they're restricting the growth of the single market and preventing us as British companies and us as British employees getting work from the rest of the single market in Europe

John Humphrys, in the remainder of the interview, did not ask him to elaborate on why he thought the EU was to blame in terms of agricultural protectionism, but focused entirely on the issue of mergers within the EU.

Overall therefore, in the sixteen weeks of coverage, there were four brief soundbite allegations that the EU was holding up agreement in the Doha round – one by the Chancellor of the Exchequer – accompanied by the grave accusation on two occasions (Geldof and Leadbitter) that this was seriously to the detriment of the developing world. The only detailed exploration of the topic was an interview with Mr Mandelson who flatly denied that there was such a problem, and placed the blame on the United States.

It is impossible to get blood out of a stone, and it is unlikely that Mr Mandelson would have budged from his well-guarded position by more aggressive questioning. But his hard-line stance underlined that the alternative viewpoint was not put at any length or explored properly. It would have been logical and more balanced if, in addition, someone holding eurosceptic views had been interviewed. More items on the topic were definitely warranted because the audience was only informed fleetingly of the outline issues involved.

#### **Expenses and corruption – what corruption?**

During the period, the only primary mention of problems over EU accounting in dedicated interview was that Hans Peter Martin, an Austrian MEP, was continuing in his efforts to try and stop the practice of his colleagues claiming first class travel allowances even if they hadn't undertaken such journeys. The item was, by programme standards, a relatively brief exchange with Mr Martin, lasting only about two minutes, along with an estimate that the practice was costing up to £35m a year.

This sequence was enough to put some of the outline basic facts on the record, but not to explore the issues in any detail.

The brevity of this treatment also underlined how little the programme did both about this topic, and more generally about the continuing saga of discontent at the way the EU is managed in budgetary terms. If Today was genuinely enterprising in its EU coverage, this is the sort of topic that could be chosen for closer scrutiny, given the general concern about standards and propriety among politicians.

The only other brief mention of possible problems in the accounting of EU funds in business news on June 12 by Gisela Stewart, MP, who raised concerns that controls over the spending of the EU regional development funds might not be stringent enough.

## **Newspaper reviews...real coverage?**

On March 18, there was a brief mention in the newspaper review over problems with a new EU directive governing hazardous substances in electrical products, that, it was believed in some quarters, might mean that church organ pipes would have to be removed. This story was widely covered in the press, on the grounds that there were fears that it seemed to be an example of bureaucracy over-stepping the mark and making a law with unintended serious consequences. Some suggested that centuries-old organs in our main cathedrals could be at risk of being melted down. Yet, the Today programme itself did nothing on the topic apart from this mention.

On April 10, the newspaper review mentioned another EU directive which was causing consternation, this one among undertakers in that there were plans to ban some embalming fluids that had been in use for centuries. This was clearly not a front page story, but it had both a quirky and real human interest dimension. It was not explored elsewhere in the programme or followed up.

A week, later, on April 17, the newspaper review again mentioned a Daily Telegraph story:

The Daily Telegraph has been doing its sums, and it reckons the European Union's next budget is £20bn more than Tony Blair said it would be. The source of what the paper thinks is a severe embarrassment to the prime minister is the EU's budget commissioner, Dalia Grybauskaite. Mrs Grybauskaite, a Lithuanian who the paper rather pointedly reveals is also a black-belt in karate, says public statements issued so far about the size of the next spending package are not accurate, which leads the Telegraph to declare the country is being impoverished by the EU, the £20bn is a truly stupefying sum, it says, while claiming that for Mr Blair the figures are irrelevant – for him, it says, Europe has always been more about demonstrating his internationalist credentials, than about securing specific objectives for Britain. A billion here, a billion there, pretty soon it starts to add up to real money.

This, if true, was a major story, and sharply at odds with what Mr Blair had said was the case on the Today programme (and elsewhere) after the budget summit in December. Again, this was not followed up, despite there being the opportunity to speak to Dalia Grybauskite and possibly the Daily Telegraph journalist who broke the story.

The Today programme is not in business to slavishly mimic the agenda of newspapers. However, these three examples, in the context of the programme's generally very low level of EU-related

coverage, are an indicator of the kind of items that were on the political agenda and which posed interesting questions about Britain's relationship with the EU and the impact the EU was having on British life. Any of them could have made one or more programme items, and a platform to explore EU-related issues from a eurosceptic perspective, as well as through supporters of the EU.

The fact that they were not indicates a very low level of curiosity about EU affairs.

### **Come out, wherever you are - the missing European eurosceptics**

In an item on the proposed French employment law which had sparked widespread demonstrations (March 23), there was a brief exchange with the French eurosceptic MP Jacques Myard, who is a member of the ENC MEP grouping pressing for the Constitution to be dropped and for fundamental democratic reform of the EU . He stated:

So I think that this is very irrational but it shows something very deep in the French society, is that the French are fed up with such a high unemployment rate, which between 9 and 10, for the past fifteen years. And that shows that in fact we have to think over why is it so in the so-called Euroland. I would like to say that we have made the wrong choice at the level of Brussels.

This was an interesting analysis, essentially proposing that there was a strand in French society that blamed the EU for high unemployment rates that had been the norm in France for fifteen years. But there was no further elaboration of the point in the treatment of the topic.

Though Mr Myard's brief inclusion here was welcome, it underlined the fact that in the entire survey period, not one other non-UK Eurosceptic MEP or MP outside the UK was interviewed on direct EU procedural matters, despite there having been significant representation from several countries in the European parliament itself since the 2004 elections and the coverage of a number of issues where their views could have been relevant (for example in the treatment of whether the Tories should leave the EPP grouping, or the more general performance of the eurozone economy).

The perception generated by coverage of the EPP issue was, in fact, that those outside the mainstream groupings in the European parliament were "extreme" or "right-wing". James Naughtie observed on June 7, when talking with BBC correspondent Norman Smith about the EPP:

Because you can't go out of the EPP without allying yourself with someone, even if it's only by implication, and that would include sort of French fascists and all sorts of people that Mr Cameron wouldn't want to be seen dead with.

But there was no real exploration of eurosceptic opinion such as that of Mr Myard and whether it was indeed made up of such people. There was no mention either of the ENC group.

In reality, Today devoted just 50 seconds to direct engagement with European euroscepticism at a time when Eurobarometer surveys were showing that levels of disenchantment with the EU in several countries were at record levels. The only really mention of it was on June 7 when both James Naughtie and Norman Smith went out of their way to state that the alternative to the EPP was "extreme" or even "cranky".

### **Chirac walk-out – what's the big deal?**

Between March 23-25 a mini-summit of European leaders was held to discuss, in the words of BBC correspondent Tim Franks, "energy, competitiveness, enterprise, reducing regulation, employment in the context of moves to create more liberal markets and the gas price problems of earlier in the year".

Mr Franks filed a report package on March 23 about one aspect of this, France's growing so-called "economic patriotism". This was followed by reaction to their stance by Derek Scott, of eurosceptic think-tank Open Europe, who argued that the French approach was endangering the single market.

The following day, March 24, correspondent Jonny Dymond mentioned in a bulletin that the summit was thought likely to reach agreement on energy policy. But the coverage of the rest of the summit was dominated by a walk-out by president Chirac in protest about English being spoken during a conference session. The incident was mentioned by Mr Dymond in his bulletin piece, filled most of a discussion with Tim Franks, and was the subject on March 25, as the summit closed, of an interview with Rudi Thomas, the head of the Belgian equivalent of the CBI.

There were two other programme items about the summit, one a brief interview with UKIP MEP Nigel Farage, who warned that the Constitution remained on the agenda, and the second with Austrian Chancellor Wolfgang Schuessel, who spoke mainly about energy policy. He was asked about President Chirac, but pointedly declined to comment.

Although President Chirac's walk-out, together with the issue of whether English was now the main language of business communications could not be ignored, it became – in terms of volume - almost the main focus of the summit coverage. The topic warranted more consideration than the details of the energy policy and almost as much as France's "economic patriotism".

If the programme was truly serious about improving the coverage of EU affairs, this would not have happened. It betrayed a focus on human interest at the expense of the meaty issues that were at stake in the summit. These might not have been the sort that "set the pulse racing faster" but they were of significant importance to the business welfare of the UK, as Derek Scott had briefly been allowed to outline.

Correspondents covering the summit claimed that not a lot had happened. In reality there was enough to warrant significantly more coverage than was actually mounted. And, as the Wilson report pointed out, it is the job of public service journalists to work at developing features which bring complex topics alive – rather than plumping for easy human interest ones.

### **Economic protectionism**

Continuing on the theme of the previous section from a different angle, "economic patriotism" by France was centre stage throughout the survey period – that is, the alleged distortion of the single market by protecting its energy and other industries from foreign takeover, and at the same time boosting the chances of French companies to make acquisitions.

On February 28, business news first covered the topic, with a feature that dealt with the news that the French were planning to merge their main energy company with Suez in Belgium. Ten days later, on March 9, the Irish European internal markets commissioner Charlie McCreevy was interviewed in business news by Chris Moylan about his concerns that – in the context of the French opposition to a takeover bid from the Mittals for the steel maker Arcelor – there could be no place in the EU for economic protectionism.

The next mention of economic protectionism was on March 23 when Tim Franks, previewing in the bulletins the imminent two-day EU summit, said that "the drumbeat" of economic protectionism was on the agenda. Mr Franks also delivered a feature report from Paris at 7.33am on the same day in which he looked at allegations that economic protectionism was spreading to all areas of the French economy including the dairy industry.

It was followed by the interview mentioned in the previous section of Derek Scott, from the Open Europe group. He stated (in reaction to information in the Tim Franks piece):

Well I think it is another word for protectionism by and large, and the notion that somehow yoghurt is a strategic industry is just ridiculous, and I think for me it's summed up by what the French foreign ministry has said – that namely, what strengthens France strengthens Europe, which is a bit of a tautology. So I think it's a very worrying time, because many of the things that underline the founding of the European Union way back in 1957 are being challenged in important ways.

Mr Scott also alleged that the financial services directive had been undermined, and that the rhetoric of the single market was not being supported. He urged that the Commission should be more active in championing liberal market solutions and should not fear globalisation. He said:

The whole notion that somehow there's a threat from globalisation is misplaced, there's a huge opportunity there, and that requires being free to [unclear] takeovers within Europe and between Europe and the rest of the world.

Mr Scott added that claims from Italy, that the French decision to block the takeover of its energy company were the equivalent of 1914, were “over the top”, and added that talk of the break down of the whole EU were premature. He concluded:

...but I think there are worrying signs that we are going backwards, so if we look at the more recent services directive, it's been watered down, you're getting signs in Sweden and Ireland even that the opening up of labour markets is coming under some kind of challenge, the whole approach to the World Trade Organisation, free trade, and I think that's in a sense reflected . . . the damage it's doing is reflected in the fact that intra-European trade, that's trade within Europe, is growing less fast than it is for the rest of the world. And actually for the first time, at the end of last year, Britain had a greater trade in goods with the rest of the world than it did within the rest of Europe.

On March 24, Jonny Dymond, in a bulletin piece, said that an expected row at the summit over economic protectionism had “not materialised”.

The next mention of the topic was in Business News on March 28. Sir Martin Sorell, who was questioned about the launch that day Business for New Europe, a pro-EU business campaign aimed at removing unnecessary EU red tape and moves towards economic protectionism. He asserted:



Well, I think we're looking at, obviously, bureaucracy and red tape, the extent of the budget, areas: the Constitution, areas: the services directive, areas that we're concerned about, but I think the principle issue that we worry about, certainly in our case, the case of WPP and its clients is the increasing concern about the competitiveness of Western Europe in the context of the global economy. Obviously, we're seeing a major shift in wealth from the West to the East, the rise of Asia, Latin America, Africa, the Middle East and Eastern Europe are all areas of the world that are going to be highly competitive with Western Europe. Western Europe consists of big economies, but they are basically slow-growth economies, and our clients look for relative growth or like-for-like growth, and they are therefore very focused on the high growth parts of the world. And the critical issue is making sure that Europe remains highly competitive, and that's where protectionism or protectionist issues come into play.

Both Mr Scott and Mr Sorrell had the opportunity to express clear opinions that economic protectionism was a matter for concern. As far as the coverage of this issue went, they each had an important input, both in explaining the topic and registering concern that it was happening.

There was no equivalent interview of someone who supported France's approach.

This underlines a key matter of concern - whether the topic was considered sufficiently, given its importance in relation to the future direction of the EU. In absolute terms, the answer is no. The items that were carried, though welcome, were too brief. The three main interviews (of Messrs McCreevy, Scott and Sorrell), plus the package by Tim Franks were sufficient only to outline the very basic issues of concern. Most of the treatment of the subject was in business news, and substantive investigation of the issues involved amounted to just one package by Tim Franks. This did what it set out to do well, but it was striking that the themes involved were explored on only this occasion. The thwarted takeover of Arcelor by Italy was scarcely mentioned at all, and it was only in the questioning of Derek Scott that elements of Italian opinion had predicted the collapse of the EU in the wake of France's actions emerged. There was no examination of the topic from the French perspective.

This was the sort of subject that, had the post-Wilson commitment to greater coverage of EU affairs been valid, could have formed the platform for significant insight and analysis. As it was, the treatment was minimal.

Another issue is that these were the only occasions during the survey period when a platform was provided to both Open Europe and Business for New Europe.

## **The Constitution – “in an unhappy limbo”?**

During the survey period, the issue of whether the EU Constitution would be revived, buried, or cherry-picked, was of central importance. UKIP and David Heathcoat Amory, from the more eurosceptic wing of the Conservative party, for example, warned that it was being implemented anyway, while Peter Mandelson and Valery Giscard D’Estaing called for it to be re-visited.

Of all the EU topics covered by Today in the period of the survey, this figured the most. But, as the detailed analysis of the breakdown of speakers illustrates in part one of the report, the coverage had several shortcomings in terms of balance.

There was also a problem in the low volume of coverage. Only on one day – June 15, during the summit, when it decided to postpone consideration for a further year – was it deemed sufficiently important to warrant multi-part treatment. Other mentions tended to be short.

The coverage can be broken down into three main categories:

**Mark Mardell:** There were three assessments by Mark Mardell of what could happen next with the Constitution, one an interview pegged on a call by Peter Mandelson that it should be re-visited on April 6; the second, a package linked to the European Commission’s call on May 10 for the EU to be a body of results; and the third another interview, about the likely decision of the leaders’ summit on June 14, (that consideration would be postponed for another year).

In the April 6 report, Mr Mardell first summarised Peter Mandelson’s argument that the Constitution would need re-visiting to deal with expansion, as the Nice Treaty did not allow for an EU bigger than 27 states. He went on to claim that the British government’s main concern was not the idea of the old Constitution being brought back into play (because, he said, officials believed this version had no chance of being accepted), but rather of a modified version which could be pushed through without a referendum . He concluded that any proposal that reduced national sovereignty – which most versions of a Constitution would – worried people who were worried about the power of the EU.

On May 10, in the package pegged on the Commission’s declared drive towards more efficient working practices, Mr Mardell first posed the question of whether the Constitution was actually dead. He included actuality from European parliament Christian Democrat leader Hans-Gert Poettering, who argued primarily that that the Constitution could be revived, then from the Dutch Europe minister Atzo Nicolai that it was dead, but he would consider an extension of powers for

the EU in areas such as common borders, and then a warning from Nigel Farage that the whole area needed a thorough review. This paved the way for an interview about what should happen next with Conservative MP David Heathcoat Amory and the Estonian foreign minister.

In his final report, Mr Mardell claimed that the Constitution was like something from a horror film in that it would not go away. He said that, though British ministers did not want it, they could not declare it dead and therefore would be focusing at the summit on pushing forward the idea of a 'Europe of results'. He added that as result of that there was pressure on Britain to drop its veto in areas like police and justice, where many countries wanted more EU measures and powers. He concluded:

Well, Britain's pretty open-minded, might even go down that route, but a Commission spokesman's been telling me, in private, 'well, we'd want to look at things like Belmarsh – can you hold foreign suspects indefinitely?' – The Commission don't like it, so Britain could get hammered if they dropped the veto over that. So it's a very delicate issue. The British government also knows that even if it sees merit in it, there will be lots of people in Britain who say, 'hang on, you're giving up yet another area of sovereignty to Europe'.

The three reports added up to the most detailed consideration during the period of what moves were being taken over the Constitution. They laid out in outline detail what might happen to the Constitution, and contained outside opinion from sources for, against and in between about the fate of the document.

**Correspondent reports:** This was the second main category of coverage. There were four dedicated reports in which the fate of the Constitution was centre stage.

On May 29, a bulletin report from Jonny Dymond marked the first anniversary of the French 'no' and noted that the fate of the document was still in limbo. He stated:

The political clocks stopped in Brussels when the French said no, and no one appears to have much of an idea as to how to start them again. Some would like to declare the treaty dead and give it a decent burial. But 15 countries have now ratified it, and many of them are unhappy at simply being ignored. So, a year long period of reflection that was due to end at a summit next month was this weekend extended for another year. There's much talk of the need for a new, slimmed down treaty aimed at simplifying the complex decision making machinery of the EU. But others, including British ministers, believe that the EU must reconnect with its citizens, before thinking about institutional change. The Constitution then remains, where the French people put it a year ago – in an unhappy limbo.

A correspondent interview with Alix Kroeger on June 16 (at 6.38am) gave consideration to the issues behind the decision by the summit to delay consideration of the Constitution by a year. She stated:

They can't really decide what to do about it. They've given themselves until the end of 2008 to come up with some kind of solution and the first real signs of what that solution will be won't appear until this time next year. They've got to wait for . . . nothing really can happen until the next elections in France and the Netherlands, those are the two countries where people voted to reject the draft EU Constitution. Until those governments, the shape of the next governments have been settled, they can't really move forward, and we won't know for some time...EU countries can't seem to agree whether the Constitution is dead or alive, and that makes it very difficult to decide even what to do. On the one hand you've got countries like Britain and also the Netherlands, and to a certain extent France who are increasingly sceptical about the Constitution. On the other hand there are some fifteen EU countries which have ratified it, and they say, 'why should our votes not count? We want to continue with this.' And as long as there's this . . . as long as they keep going in circles, they can't even agree on what's the way out of the current deadlock

Ms Kroeger added that she did not believe the issue would split the union, but said it affected the debate about enlargement because the Constitution had been 'supposed to' simplify working practices. She concluded by observing that new members joining made the existing structure increasingly unwieldy, but noted that critics of the Constitution did not want to reduce the voices of member states. She stated:

So, there are really fundamental divisions on this and it's something that the EU is going to take a long time to sort out, in the meantime they are trying to push ahead with other things to show that the EU is still working – issues like illegal immigration, liberalising energy markets, and creating jobs.

On June 16, the bulletins mentioned briefly that the Constitution had been put on hold, and Tim Franks prefaced an interview with Margaret Beckett with the longest individual consideration of the Constitution. He stated:

A large and splendid coffee table book is doing the rarefied rounds in Europe. The print run is small, and at the moment it's handed out only to VIPs and some retiring EU officials. It charts the attempts over the last seven centuries to draft the laws and the constitutions that might bring Europe's countries together. Guy Milton, the senior EU official who helped edit the book, says it's clear that today's questions have been exercising thinkers and diplomats from the middle ages onwards. One obvious unifying theme is the desire to avoid conflict – but it goes deeper. Dante, for example, didn't just write The Divine Comedy, he wrote about subsidiarity, about a political unity in Europe which respected the autonomy and diversity of its regions. The 15<sup>th</sup> Century king of

Bohemia, George of Podiebrad, tried to map where Europe ends, by advocating a continental confederation of independent states. Emil Ludwig, the German whose books were burnt by the Nazis proposed monetary union. And there are the long-forgotten British federalists of the 1930s and 40s. This was no esoteric sect – The Case for Federal Union, a book written in 1939 by a headmaster called William Curry sold more than 100,000 copies in six months. The British federalists championed the ideas of community law, of a directly elected European Parliament, with a Council of Ministers, of a supreme European Court. The federalists may be lost from British history, but we know their writings directly inspired some of the founders of the European Community. So what was the problem with the latest proposed Constitution? Well, there's a revealing argument made at the end of the book, in a postscript by the EU's foreign policy chief Javier Solana. He writes that the success of the Union over the last fifty years has been to avoid the grand gesture, and rather to concentrate on the incremental and the practical. In attempting to satisfy the very human desire for neatness and certainty, he writes, packaging Europe within a Constitution appeared as a rejection of the empirical and pragmatic method which had proved its worth over half a century. But there are plenty of others in the EU who still believe that the Constitution must survive in more or less its entirety. Some warn of an institutional train crash in three years' time. The last EU treaty says that when Europe becomes a club of twenty-seven, as it will be by 2009, there will have to be fewer than one commissioner per member state, but if you start hacking at the size of the Commission, then the dominoes fall, the institutional counterbalances in and between the Commission, the forum for member states and the European Parliament. A new, essentially constitutional setting must be reached, goes the argument. For that reason, Austria – the current chairman of the forum for member states – wants that new settlement arrived at by the end of 2008. But even among hearty supporters of the Constitution here in Brussels, there are some for whom that date would spell trouble. They warn that if a new treaty were to be concluded then, it could be speared on the horns of the subsequent British election campaign. Seven centuries after Dante first started musing about subsidiarity, we haven't nearly reached the end of the story.

Shorter correspondent mentions of the Constitution were:

May 10, Jonny Dymond, discussing new working arrangements was asked by Sarah Montague:

Just very briefly Jonny, what's going to happen on the Constitution, which you say they're getting away from, because the period of reflection or the time for reflection of whatever it's called is coming to an end, isn't it?

JD: It is. I think there is going to be an extension of that pause for reflection, it's turning into a couple of years' reflection, my own feeling is not a lot is going to happen until the French presidential elections are out of the way next April

On June 15, at the opening of the summit, Tim Franks filed a bulletin preview piece which suggested the main business was the Constitution. He covered the issue in two sentences, stating there was no 'settled view' of what should be done next, with Britain wanting the document 'buried deep at sea' but other countries such as Germany wanting 'something very like it' to survive.

Tim Franks was also interviewed about the summit at 6.38. He repeated that countries were divided over what to do next, whether to bury it, carry on with the existing document, or revive it in a slightly different format. He added that there was widespread agreement that the Constitution had been an 'unmitigated disaster':

it has helped put off an awful lot of people: the idea that this system will be imposed from on high, it's precisely the sort of thing that gets people's backs up, and indeed the sort of cliché now, around the corridors of Brussels is that the European Union has to be a Europe that delivers results that has real engagement with people, has real policy initiatives, and doesn't have these grand philosophical, political systems that it tries to impose on people. But you're absolutely right, the question is how much of the Constitution can you save and how can you package it?

He concluded that, although the EU could carry on working for some time under existing arrangements, a crunch would come in a few years' time over the number of commissioners, as the existing treaty promised one per country and that would not be possible because of expansion.

Overall, all the correspondent items consistently laid out briefly the basic fact that there was uncertainty about what to do next with regard to working arrangements. They stressed on occasions that the British government did not want the document revived, but that this was at odds with many countries in the EU, especially Germany. They also pointed out that something would have to be done in terms of the existing working arrangements in order to deal with expansion.

A feature of the reports was that while they incorporated integrally the Peter Mandelson view (expressed on April 6) that something must be done about working arrangements because of expansion, and the British government view that remained uneasy about the Constitution, none referred to eurosceptic opinion which maintained that radically new working arrangements were required, or that there was strong unease that despite what the politicians might be saying, the Commission was gradually adopting different elements of the Constitution. These ideas were expressed separately by the eurosceptic interviewees, but it is a striking omission that the

correspondents themselves did not mention such views, even in passing. To achieve balance and fairness, they should have been included.

Tim Franks was the only correspondent to venture outside this basic framework on June 15, in his long analysis of the history of the Constitution. His aim was apparently to put the Constitutional issues in historical context. But in order to do so, he chose a book which at worst was EU-propaganda and at best a one-dimensional and selective view of history written to support the idea that an EU Constitution had been in gestation for centuries. As a result, the impression given by the piece was that the Constitution was therefore a logical and even necessary conclusion. The sequence contained no views to the contrary, and the topic was not explored elsewhere, so this was misleading and imbalanced. Why was it that one of the correspondents did not also mention a book by Lindsay Jenkins or an article by Patrick Minford, both of whom put a very different perspective on the development of the EU?

A further question is whether there was sufficient analysis to arrive at the point where a balanced overview had been presented.

**Interviews with outside sources:** There were seven interviews in which the Constitution figured significantly: of Valery Giscard D'Estaing (March 1), Guy Verhofstadt, the Belgian Prime Minister (March 24), Peter Mandelson (April 6), Nigel Farage (March 25), David Heathcoat Amory and the Estonian Foreign Minister (May 10), Roger Knapman (June 15) and Margaret Beckett (June 15). In a sequence involving Geoff Hoon (June 14), the Constitution was mentioned, and was the backdrop, but was dealt with only in passing.

In the substantive interviews, David Heathcoat Amory, Nigel Farage and Roger Knapman each put across strongly that whatever others might say, the Constitution was both being implemented and firmly on the way for re-adoption as soon as the time was right. Margaret Beckett was questioned closely on this point and broadly denied that it was the case, although she also said that sensible working together approaches would be adopted in areas such as security. Peter Mandelson on April 10 was asked only three questions directly about the Constitution. All were simply designed to solicit his views about why and how he thought the Constitution should be resurrected, and he was given ample opportunity to respond.

A major issue relating to this coverage is whether, given the importance of the Constitution, it was considered sufficiently and on a balanced basis. In terms of the latter, a range of opinion was expressed, with three warnings against the Constitution being revived, two advocating that it

should be, the Belgian prime minister calling for a more federal EU, and Mrs Beckett sitting somewhere in the middle suggesting that sensible new working arrangements were required, but denying that the Constitution would be the way forward. The Estonian foreign secretary argued that the Constitution should be adopted, and Peter Mandelson that it was necessary to look at the Constitution again because something needed to be done about working arrangements in the face of continued expansion.

Although the seven interviews delivered a range of views for and against the Constitution, it was a relatively narrow assemblage, given the complexity and momentum of the debate. Omissions from the picture included (for example) a front bench Conservative (William Hague was interviewed during the period, but about the EPP, not the Constitution; Graham Brady, the shadow EU minister did not appear), any Liberal Democrats, any MEPs, or eurosceptic opinion from the wider EU (as opposed to Europhiles such as Valery Giscard D'Estaing and Peter Mandelson). As previously mentioned, eurosceptics from outside the UK were scarcely mentioned, let alone interviewed.

Looking at the way individual interviews were handled, there were also problems. These are quantified in the structural part of the survey. In addition:

Valery Giscard D'Estaing, for example, was given very ample space to advocate his views about the Constitution, which were broadly that the EU needed it to continue functioning properly and to effect necessary administrative reform. The questioning was only mildly adversarial, designed to allow Mr Giscard D'Estaing to expound his views at some length (by Today standards). There was no major effort to interrupt what he said or pick holes in his arguments. The same applied to the Belgian prime minister; although adversarial points were put to him, he had ample time to put his arguments without interruption.

Roger Knapman on June 15, by contrast, was given a much tougher time. James Naughtie interrupted frequently, and first picked him up strongly on the claim that (according to an opinion poll), 70% of the UK wanted to leave the EU, asserting (rather dubiously when eurosceptic positions were embraced both by the Conservatives and UKIP) that if that were the case, 70% of the population would vote for UKIP. Mr Naughtie also raised strong doubts about Mr Knapman's suggestion that Tony Blair would back down and would cede further judicial powers, on the ground that if he did, he would be "answerable to Parliament". Finally, Mr Naughtie, in the longest sequence in the entire interview, opined, in response to Mr Knapman's brief point that most laws affecting Britain were now made in the EU:



But the proportion of the law isn't really the point, is it? If you look, for example, at environmental questions, then of course a lot of law comes from Brussels, because these are things that affect all of us, but any British government will say there are things that should be determined and decided at home and of course, you can argue about where the line is drawn, but it's rather meaningless to talk about the percentage of laws that are, as you put it, made in Brussels, isn't it?

Mr Knapman was given a very brief opportunity to respond, and the interview terminated.

Margaret Beckett on June 16 was also given a relatively tougher time by John Humphrys than Valery Giscard D'Estaing. But on the Constitution itself, Mrs Beckett, unlike Mr Knapman, had ample opportunity to put her case and was not interrupted in her answers to the mildly adversarial questions of whether the Constitution might be adopted by the back door, the British veto in some areas dropped and EU-originating new laws accepted. She was certainly not challenged to the fundamental extent that Mr Knapman was. In the circumstances, there could have been much blunter questions, perhaps prefaced or inter-leaved with evidence of why people thought the Constitution, despite protestations to the contrary, was being adopted.

Instead, Tim Franks, as already noted chose to preface the item with the mention of a pro-EU book about the Constitution which gave the purported history of previous attempts to arrive at a unified Europe. His analysis, as well as being a one-dimensional view of history, did not contain anything which suggested that the government might be being (as some thought) disingenuous in terms of what it was prepared to allow in changes to working arrangements.

The contrast between this set-up and that to the William Hague interview of June 7 by Nick Robinson – in which all the problems over the Conservative stance towards the EPP were clearly and rigorously set out – was considerable. The purpose of the set-up in the Hague interview was clearly to put the Conservatives and their policy on the spot; that did not seem to be the case with Margaret Beckett, where the introduction – in content and tone - was nearer to a colour piece.

This imbalance in approach (tough on Knapman, softer on Beckett and soft on D'Estaing) would not have mattered if there had been more interviews with contrasting hard cop/soft cop approaches. But there were not – Mandelson, Heathcoat Amory and Farage received pretty much the same treatment.

There was also not enough material to create true balance. The items carried gave the Today audience only a relatively fleeting glimpse of the issues involved and the shades of opinion. Mark Maddell's pieces shone a spotlight into the gloom, but three pieces over almost four months were not sufficient. Most of the other correspondent items dealt with the Constitution as part of the

wider EU agenda, and seemed therefore inadequate in terms of spreading detailed understanding, specially that by Tim Franks prefacing the Margaret Beckett interview.

### **Expansion – important or not?**

The expansion of the EU was a significant focus of EU activity during the period, with vigorous arguments continuing about whether and when Turkey should accede, when Bulgaria and Romania should be admitted, which other countries could be admitted and when, and the likely impact of continued expansion on existing working practices and structure of the EU. Those in favour of the Constitution, such as Peter Mandelson (April 6), pressed their argument on the basis that change was necessary to deal with expansion.

Detailed considerations of the topic on Today were limited to five feature items. Of these, four were special reports pegged on the expected decision on May 16 by the EU for the accession dates of Bulgaria and Romania. One was a correspondent interview with Jonny Dymond about the background to the decision, and three were special reports from Bulgaria – two about steps towards the reduction of organised crime in Bulgaria, and one about the possibility of a fresh influx of immigration to the UK following accession. The fifth item about expansion generally was carried on April 24; this was a discussion of the claims of American academic John Gillingham that in order to reflect its changing reality, the EU should move its centre of gravity towards Hungary, and also affect radical democratic reforms.

Each of the Bulgaria reports dealt intelligently with the issues involved and gave a useful, if brief, insight into the problems of organised crime and the likely impact on immigration to the UK. They stood out as examples of what could be done by the programme when it was decided to tackle an EU-related topic.

Similarly the discussion involving Professor Gillingham and Jacki Davies of the European Policy Centre, was a fascinating insight on the pressures developing within the EU for re-assessment of the focus and operational requirements in the face of expansion to the East. It again showed that, when the programme wanted, interesting EU-related territory could be covered without a particularly strong news peg.

However, there were problems with this feature, the limitations caused partly because it was a sole treatment on this topic during the survey period, and partly because of the narrow focus. It would have been refreshing and interesting to have included a eurosceptic perspective on this

topic, or that of someone from the Eastern countries. As it stood, it was a discussion between two people who apparently strongly supported the EU. Professor Gillingham himself, though critical of the way the EU was developing, was not advocating eurosceptic views, but rather that, as an institution, it needed fundamental geographical realignment to reflect changing realities. Jackie Davies made it clear immediately that she was speaking from a Europhile position. She stated:

But I think, if I may say so, Professor Gillingham exaggerates the EU's woes, to quote Mark Twain, reports of its death are greatly exaggerated. We are in a pause, I think that's more what it is. The debate now is about where does the EU go from here, but in the meantime it is working, it is carrying on business, it could do it better, but I don't think it's on the verge of collapse as he suggests.

There are many commentators who disagree with expansion and feel that the EU's operational momentum is wrong for host of reasons. Their input could have been both stimulating and have yielded more insights into the topic to the views of Jacki Davies. Ideally, they could have been heard in addition to those of Ms Davies.

Other mentions of expansion and its impact included an interview on May 1 in business news about a report from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation that expansion had benefited the UK building, farming and hospitality industries by allowing more EU labour to come to the country; a correspondent interview with Jonny Dymond, also on May 1, in which he said that the original 15 EU countries remained split on their policy towards migrant workers, with several deciding to keep restrictions in place; an interview about Montenegro's hopes for accession, pegged on a visit by the country's foreign secretary to Brussels (May 29); a correspondent interview with Jonny Dymond about a threat from Cyprus to scupper accession talks about Turkey over the latter's alleged failure to lift a range of restrictions governing Northern Cyprus (June 12); a bulletin report the following day that the talks had been successfully completed despite the Cypriot objections; and on June 16, an interview with Slovenia's finance minister, who explained why joining the eurozone would benefit his country's economy.

During the coverage of the June summit, there were brief mentions of expansion, made in connection with the future of the Constitution. Tim Franks said on June 15 that a crunch over working arrangements would come in 2009 because continued expansion would mean that each EU country would no longer be able to have a commissioner. He repeated the point in the report that prefaced the Margaret Beckett interview on June 16, as did Alix Kroeger in her interview that morning.

Overall, this adds up to a disappointingly low volume of coverage, given the prominence of expansion on the EU agenda and its potential impact both on the UK and the future character and structure of the EU. Outside the coverage of Bulgarian and Romanian accession, the only substantive reporting of the topic – featuring Professor Gillingham - was narrower in focus than it might have been. Other mentions of the mechanics of expansion were made mainly in passing, and were sufficient to give the listener only the briefest of information.

The items on the impact of expansion on the UK were also relatively brief and narrow. There were other problems in these treatments. The Joseph Rowntree report opened:

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation says that British employers are reaping huge benefits from European enlargement. It conducted a survey of the building, hospitality and farming industries to coincide with the second anniversary today of ten states gaining admission to the European Union. It found that highly qualified migrant workers from countries in Eastern Europe were filling many low skilled and low paid jobs which British workers were not willing to accept.

Interviewer Greg Wood also made the observation in one of his questions:

And they want the work, they're often earning more than they would do in their own countries, and there are vacancies to be filled, so from one point of view, it seems like a perfectly fair and natural arrangement.

The report's author, Dr Bridget Anderson, was asked whether she thought employment of such migrants was exploitation, and whether some employers were turning a blind eye to illegal immigrants. Dr Anderson acknowledged that these were issues of concern.

This amounted to a very one-sided perspective. The item pushed only the view that expansion was befitting the UK by making more labour available for the British economy. There was no effort, either in the writing or the questioning of the interviewee, to challenge this.

In his report on May 1, Jonny Dymond, talking about the same topic, stated:

...also it's difficult to say what the kind of impact on the British economy is. There have been numerous studies over the last few years that have suggested – and I think it's probably argued over – that the impact is generally beneficial on the United Kingdom, it helps the economy keep fizzing, and that's largely because the UK labour market is extremely flexible. It would be different somewhere like Austria, where they have a very inflexible system, with a lot of legal safeguards on the wages that can be paid, to suddenly have hundreds of thousands of people coming across. And of course geography plays another part, it is a lot easier to cross from Slovakia to Austria, than

it is to cross from Slovakia to Britain. And so it's difficult to say, but I don't think it really increases the pressure on the British job market.

He was more cautious in ascribing benefits to expansion, but nonetheless, the impression created pushed most that it kept the economy fizzing; he did not mention any details of counter-views other than that they 'probably' existed.

This was not heavy bias. But in both treatments of the impact of expansion, most stress was placed on that the free flow of labour was beneficial to the UK. This underlined the absence of alternative views – and that the topic could have been treated from different perspectives and in more depth.

### **Better Off Out – but why?**

The Wilson report specifically suggested that there should be more effort to cover the withdrawal perspective, even though it is not espoused formally by any of the main political parties.

The only advocate of a policy for the UK to leave the EU apart from UKIP spokesmen to appear on the Today programme during this period was the Conservative Philip Davies. He was interviewed on April 26 to mention the launch of his movement Better Off Out.

But in the relatively short exchange (less, for example than the interview of Valéry Giscard d'Estaing), Mr Davies was not asked a single question about why he actually supported withdrawal. Sarah Montague opened by asking what was different about the movement. Mr Davies responded that 40% of people in opinion polls supported such a move, but, before he could elaborate, the next question was how the Conservative party was likely to react to the withdrawal stance, "because it is absolutely not official policy". Ms Montague's next point was that David Cameron saw UKIP as fruitcakes, then she postulated that Mr Davies was "highlighting splits in the party" and finally asked if people were turning to BNP because they had nowhere else to go.

All these were legitimate questions, and Mr Davies was able to respond clearly. But the key arguments as to why Mr Davies and his movement wanted to leave the EU were just as relevant to the audience and they were not touched upon at all. It is hard to understand why Ms Montague did not feel the issue relevant or worthy of exploration.

By contrast, when Sir Martin Sorrell was asked on March 28 why he wanted the EU to be reformed and about the launch of his movement Business for New Europe, he was asked specifically to explain the reasoning behind the move and given the space to explain, as the extract illustrates:

Well, it wasn't just a question of the protectionism that you referred to, which is a sort of recent trend, and we've seen it in a number of countries in Europe and of course we've seen it in the United States as well, and it's worrying because one of the biggest stimuli to our business and our clients' business has been the development of free trade in the 90s and the early part of the new millennium, and I think we're very concerned about the continuation of that. But also its been in the context of reform in Europe, I think the group is basically pro-Europe but is looking for reforms in various areas that we think are important in order to improve the structure and the atmosphere.

The contrast in treatment is significant and suggests that the programme was simply not interested in exploring Mr Davies' views about the withdrawal.

### **Tough enough?**

James Naughtie, as previously noted, was tough in the tone and approach he adopted in his interview with Roger Knapman on June 15, to the point where Mr Knapman was unable to articulate some of his key arguments.

Mr Naughtie was also tough with Europe minister Geoff Hoon on June 14. He stated, in response to Mr Hoon's claim that a new debate about the future of the EU was required:

You've been in government for nine years, it sounds terribly odd to hear a Europe minister coming along in 2006, saying 'we really need to have a debate about the European Union'... Ministers have said this every six months for nine years, I mean, you know, it's what every single minister in your position and the prime minister says, every single time you talk about Europe 'we need to have a debate about what Europe can do in practical terms' – are you saying we haven't had it yet? Or have we had it and it just hasn't worked? Which is it.... So what you're saying is - all your colleagues have actually failed . . . you think the message has failed, and your colleagues, your government, the prime minister downwards have failed to get it across.

This was a strong riposte to what Mr Naughtie clearly regarded as an attempt at prevarication by Mr Hoon. It illustrated how tough questioning could be, though it was also striking that Mr Hoon had enjoyed considerably more space to put his case than Mr Knapman before Mr Naughtie cut in.

Detailed comparison between the approach to Mr Hoon and that towards Mr Hague on June 7, also underlines that Mr Naughtie seemed to be tougher on eurosceptics.

### **Conservatives – the eurosceptic Opposition?**

Press reports suggest that the Conservative front bench have not been easily available to comment on EU-related issues in recent months.

Whatever the reason, senior Conservative spokesmen appeared only twice to talk about EU affairs during the survey period.

Shadow foreign secretary William Hague was interviewed about Conservative policy towards the EPP, but only tangentially, when he raised them, about broader EU issues. Agriculture spokesman Jim Paice (May 5) was asked about the government's alleged slowness in paying out subsidies under CAP.

There was brief recorded clip from Dr Liam Fox (March 3) expressing reservations about the expanded role for the European Defence Agency.

Other Conservative MPs interviewed were David Heathcoat Amory, who spoke about the Constitution, Phillip Davies, who, as already explained was asked, about whether the formation of a withdrawalist group would split the party, and Michael Gove, who spoke about the inadequacy of Westminster scrutiny of EU legislation.

The contributions of both Mr Heathcoat Amory and Mr Gove were significant, and both men were given reasonable time to express their points (unlike Mr Davies).

The four interviews with Conservatives about EU affairs over 16 weeks do not amount to substantive coverage. Overall, there seemed to be very little structured effort to include the Opposition views on EU-related issues.

## **The Eurozone, CAP, and European defence policy – don't hold the front page!**

The performance of the eurozone and the impact of the CAP on UK farming and world trade continued to be of importance and relevance during the survey period.

On the Today agenda, there was no mention of the CAP either on its own or in connection with the Doha trade talks (where some held it was centrally important – the elephant in the room). The only farming issues that made the Today agenda were in connection with Defra's alleged slowness in handing out subsidy payments due under the new CAP arrangements (April 24). On May 5, after a bulletin item on the same topic Jim Paice, the Conservative spokesman was interviewed briefly about the delay in paying farming subsidies and suggested that Defra would incur costs of up to £20m a month. Today in Parliament on May 19 featured David Milliband explaining the reasons for the delays and defending the government's position. On May 20, bulletins said that farming minister Lord Rooker had apologised over the delays in payments.

The issue of agricultural payments was covered by the programme, but only in the barest minimum of terms. The fact that the topic was on the news agenda could have been a peg for wider discussion, including continuing worries in some quarters that the CAP was damaging British farmers. This, in the context of the very low level of EU-related coverage, was a missed opportunity.

With the eurozone, on March 2, business news interviewed an economist from the Bank of America, who argued that the ECB would need to adjust interest rates; on March 31, there was a fleeting mention that eurozone inflation was on the increase; on May 4, an economic commentator briefly predicted that interest rates would rise; and on June 16, also in business news, there was an interview with Andrej Bajuk about why Slovenia would join the euro from 2007. Mr Bajuk outlined in detail how he believed joining the euro would benefit the country's economy, including removing uncertainty about exchange rates. He dismissed suggestions that it would be a brake on growth or be a problem because of relatively high inflation in his country. .

In 16 weeks, therefore, there were only two relatively detailed treatments of the eurozone and its performance. Both were fine as far as they went; but they again indicated the programme's low level of interest in EU affairs. At the very least, Slovenia's eurozone talks could have been the peg for a slightly wider discussion about the performance of the EU economy. As it was, the Today audience received only a Europhile view.



The March 3 Today treatment of the plans to boost European defence spending, and strengthen the European Defence Agency, were the only mentions of the topic. They covered the basic ground involved, but analysis shows that the two features were heavily skewed towards those in favour of the changes. There were voice clips from three people in favour of the plan, and an interview with defence secretary Lord Drayson, who vigorously defended it, and had the time to do so. There was actuality from only one person (Dr Liam Fox the Conservative Defence spokesman) who was worried about the knock-on effect on the special military relationship with the US and NATO. Lord Drayson was pushed to justify the motives for the change in emphasis, but he was given a relatively easy time. Strikingly, no-one from the US was asked to comment.