REPORTING OF THE ELECTIONS TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ON UK TERRESTRIAL TELEVISION SERVICES AND BBC RADIO 4

A survey by Minotaur Media Tracking for Global Britain

Background

People rely increasingly on broadcast services as one of their main sources of news. For many they are the primary, or even their only, source. The reporting of elections by the broadcast media is therefore vitally important to ensure that voters have an overview of the key issues involved.

The national agenda in news coverage is set by the terrestrial television channels - the BBC services on BBC 1 and BBC2, and the ITN-provided programmes on ITV, Channel 4 and Channel 5. GMTV, the ITV breakfast channel, has its news provided by Reuters Television, and also produces its own news features.

Radio also plays a very significant role in defining the agenda, principally through BBC Radio 4 and its main news programmes - Today, with an estimated audience of 9.6m a week, the World at One, PM, the Six O'Clock News and the World Tonight.

Both the BBC and the commercial terrestrial television broadcasters, as public service providers, have clear statutory obligations to provide news. The 1990 Broadcasting Act stipulates that the news must be of a high quality, of accuracy and due impartiality, and cover national and international news. The BBC Charter is not prescriptive, leaving the exact nature of broadcast services to the governors and the director general. But it is generally accepted that the Corporation's news output must be impartial, wide-ranging, authoritative and cover the full spectrum of domestic and world affairs. The annual report just published emphasises this obligation.

In addition, the Representation of the People Act provides that in General Elections, broadcasters must give equal time and consideration to the candidates' standing. While the European Elections are not specifically included in these provisions, most broadcasters would accept that they also apply.

Purpose:

The purpose of the survey was to examine the precise content and range of the information presented to prospective voters in the European Elections by the main news bulletins and programmes on terrestrial television and on BBC Radio 4 in the five weeks up to the poll results on June 13. It investigated whether the broadcasters met their public service remit - that is, to provide news relating to the event that was wide-ranging, impartial and of high quality.

Methodology: The survey monitored and recorded the main news output of UK terrestrial television: BBC 1 and 2, ITV, Channel 4 and Channel 5, as well as the main news bulletins and news programmes of BBC Radio 4. It covered the period leading up to and immediately after the European Parliamentary Elections on June 10, from May 9 (Europe Day) to June 13.

All the items relating to the Election or issues directly related to it - for example the performance of the Euro - were transcribed, and a record kept of the context in which they were broadcast.

The survey was different from most others that have explored balance because it was based, not on individual items (or incidents), but on an assessment over the five weeks leading up to a major election of the entire terrestrial television news coverage, as well as that on Radio 4. Judgements have been applied not just item by item, and programme by programme, but across the coverage as a whole on each channel.

The remit of the assessors was completely open-minded. Each item and each bulletin in more than 600 hours of programming was carefully listened to, watched and evaluated. The main question asked was whether the different manifestos and viewpoints, the different politicians and commentators, were given fair and balanced treatment, both within individual items and across the entire coverage.

Findings

1. The volume and nature of the coverage

- **Just 2% of TV and 6% of radio news programmes were devoted to European Elections**
- **Much of the coverage - eg on BBC TV Breakfast programmes - was carried outside peak hours**
- **There was no systematic coverage of key issues in television bulletins - and many reports only emphasised voter apathy**
- **Channel 5 and GMTV virtually ignored the Election**
- **Newsnight on BBC2 and Channel 4 News covered very little, with 10 main items between them in 25 days of transmission**
- **Channel 4 appeared to show distinct bias against the Conservatives**
- **Coverage on Radio 4 was narrow and unstructured, with some key issues almost completely ignored**
- **Specific instances of bias were found on all outlets - except Channel 5, which had virtually no coverage**
- **On BBC Radio 4, bias appeared at times to be systematic and engrained**
- **BBC On the Record and ITV's The Dimbleby Programme had a major imbalance in the political views included in the Election period**
- **The UK Independence Party, though polling 7.7% of the total vote, was virtually ignored, while the Pro-Euro Conservatives, polling just 1.2%, was treated as a major Party**.
- **Those in the Labour party opposed to the Euro - prominent figures such as Frank Field or Austin Mitchell - were not featured at all in coverage on television and scarcely warranted a mention on radio.**

The monitoring exercise analysed more than 600 hours of television and radio in 610 individual news programmes (435 on television, 175 on radio) spread over the five terrestrial television channels and BBC Radio 4. The purpose of the survey was to establish the nature of this news coverage and ask rigorous questions about its political balance and range in relation to the broadcasters' obligations under their public service remit (usually defined as "to carry news which is wide-ranging, impartial and authoritative").

The central question asked was: "Would people watching the main television and radio programmes in the UK be given information that was wide-ranging, impartial and authoritative about the campaign and its key issues?"

PART 1 - THE RANGE OF COVERAGE

1. Coverage on television was surprisingly limited.

Over the period as a whole, there were no more than 90 items on all of terrestrial television. In crude numerical terms, that adds up to a maximum of five hours in a total of more than 375 hours of programming monitored - less than 2%. Much of this total was in interviews contained in the Sunday news programmes, which totalled almost two of the five hours.

By contrast, Kosovo and its issues probably took up half the total time. Most of the Europe-related items were short packages, and only one or two looked at issues in any real depth - the way Kosovo or GM foods were being tackled.

The exceptions to this were in the long-form Sunday programmes - **On the Record, GMTV, Breakfast with Frost** and **Dimbleby** - which carried longer interviews of the main politicians involved in the campaign and two 10 minute packages on Euro issues, defence and the minority Parties' standing.

Coverage in **bulletins** looked extremely narrow. It was confined largely to short summaries of the party positions pegged on the manifesto launches (with short soundbites of the key points), a few campaign progress reports, short items explaining the ballot paper, just two constituency reports and, in the final run-up, daily campaign reports - mainly mentioning voter apathy. There was one phone-in with a news context, on BBC Breakfast Time

Most of the coverage focused on the Tories being against the Euro, perhaps reflecting their PR success in making this a key Election issue. Reports featured attacks by both Labour and the Lib Dems against their position - saying that their position was more "pro-European" - but took hardly any steps to explore what this meant.

The longer treatment of European topics, when it did happen, stuck out clearly, precisely because these items were extremely rare. They were confined to a three-part examination of the performance of the Euro on BBC Business Breakfast, the items on Sundays previously mentioned, and one survey on the BBC 6pm news about the impact of the EU on prices.

Those pictured and spoken to in reports for the main bulletins were drawn from a relatively narrow range. Very few came from outside the ranks of senior politicians, the exceptions being in BBC Breakfast's surveys of the Euro, the constituency reports on BBC Breakfast, a survey of the ballot paper, and a studio discussion on Channel 4. Only a handful of senior figures from the EC were interviewed - Romano Prodi and Leon Brittan being the most prominent. The treatment of the Election elsewhere in Europe was limited to short packages on Finland, Holland, Germany (from Frankfurt) and Ireland by the BBC, and on Ireland by Channel 4. Several mentioned the rally of Euro socialists in Paris.

Vox pops, when they took place - for example of the BBC Nine O'Clock News, Channel 4 News or Newsnight - were invariably used to ask why people were apathetic to the Election, rather than asking what the important issues were.

There was little attempt to explain the key "live" issues of the Election - the withholding tax, the performance and the implications of the Euro and EMU, the moves towards greater integration (for example through a European foreign policy) and federalism. Virtually nothing was done to demonstrate the impact on people's lives of European issues at stake in the election.

This was in sharp contrast to the treatment, for example, of GM foods, where science correspondents were regularly called in to give detailed explanations, and the BBC spent a whole day covering the destruction of a genetic crop in Wiltshire with live broadcasts from a

correspondent at the scene, interviews with the entire family of the farmer involved and in-depth explanation of the issues raised.

2. Coverage on individual channels

BBC1.

BBC Business Breakfast (6-7am) carried one item on the withholding tax, a sequence on the Euro, a package on the attitude of Chambers of Commerce to the Euro, and news of a conference about the Euro. It mentioned a Dun and Bradstreet survey saying that more businesses were now against the Euro, a Business for Sterling survey among trade unions saying the same thing, and a Guardian opinion poll ditto.

BBC Breakfast News (7am-9am) itself was much narrower in its coverage. One element of the sequence on the euro was repeated in the 7.40 business news, as was part of a package on the withholding tax. There were mentions in bulletins of the launch of individual Party manifestos, and that voting was underway. Apart from that, there were seven separate packages:

- Chris Patten's (possible) appointment to the EC
- The launch of the campaign, described by Michael White
- Voting in Kidderminster
- Voter apathy in Merseyside
- The vote in Northern Ireland
- Voting in Finland
- The voting paper explained (again)

There was also a phone-in, lasting approximately 17 minutes, which took half a dozen phone calls, with guests from the LSE, the EU Parliament, and a group called Operation Black Vote. Its main theme was how to combat voter apathy.

This survey covered 80 hours of breakfast broadcasting. The BBC claims an "all news agenda" for the programme. Yet, the European Election was scarcely mentioned. There was no attempt to explain any European issues, save the Euro. Most coverage was concentrated either between 6 or 7pm, or after the 7.00am bulletin, with the exception of two to three items and the phone-in.

BBC Bulletins: In total, BBC bulletins carried around 25 items in 42.5 hours of transmission. It was clear from the very beginning of the Election campaign that coverage would have to fight for space, not just against Kosovo, but also against a raft of "initiative" stories on topics such as teenage pregnancy and personal health. BBC bulletins on May 9 did not even mention the story that they themselves had thrown up the fact that Romano Prodi was calling for a European superstate. Mostly through the campaign, a European story, started at breakfast time, was picked up by the main bulletins, and was run throughout the day - sometimes unchanged, and sometimes updated as the story unfolded. The bulletins covered the launch of the manifestos, mainly through individual packages, a survey of the campaign progress pegged on the Euro socialist rally, a clash between Blair and Hague in the House of Commons over the Euro, the call by Mr Hague to scrap the Euro change-over plan, voting prospects in two individual constituencies (repeated from breakfast time), and one package each on voting in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. In the immediate build up to the Election, there were daily campaign packages, updated regularly - though mainly pegged on the line that voter apathy was dominating the progress. Two items about voting in Europe were tacked on to the end of these packages, and both Emma Udwin and Joshua Rozenburg were also called in to explain the ballot paper.

There was also that rarest of items, an item on prices in Europe, saved to the final day before voting.

This survey covered 42.5 hours of BBC television news bulletins, roughly half of which was devoted to Kosovo. The European Elections warranted no more than an hour in total. Viewers tuning in to BBC bulletins would have known that the Elections were happening, and were given an inkling - mainly through soundbites of the main politicians, of the fact that the Tories were opposed to joining the Euro, that Labour was on the fence on the issue, but wanted greater integration with Europe, and that Paddy Ashdown was unhappy with both. They were also given brief explanations of how to vote, and some pointers that this had a dimension outside the UK.

But the overriding message of the coverage of the campaign was that people were apathetic, and unlikely to turn out. Apathy was mentioned as early as May 28 by Robin Oakley and the theme continued. There was virtually no generation of issue coverage, and no effort to go off the main and easily-covered offerings from the daily Party press conferences. The bulletins did not mirror the wider agendas offered in the daily newspapers, and pointedly did not pick up on stories generated by OTR and Frost - which ITN did (on one occasion), as well as the newspapers.

Notably, the new Six O'Clock News, launched at the start of the campaign, with the aim of covering the United Kingdom as a whole, did nothing special at all to cover the Election in Europe.

BBC2 Newsnight: Newsnight is described in the BBC's annual report summary - just published - as recently "adopting a more inclusive tone and substantially increasing its audience". It is widely regarded as the flagship of the BBC's news analysis programmes, explaining and exploring the key issues affecting national and international affairs.

It saw fit during the Election period to mount packages on topics as wide ranging as the aids epidemic in Malawi, the drying up of a Russian sea, body piercing, the eclipse at Land's End, a major investigation of the allocation of lottery money, and a look at the latest issues on cloning. In addition, there was very substantial coverage of Kosovo - perhaps taking up half the programme time. Yet the European Elections hardly figured at all.

Bulletins during the programme mentioned the launch of the individual manifestos, and progress in Election week towards voting. Some of these had longer commentary from the presenter. There was also frequent tracking of the performance of the Euro, but no analysis.

In addition, in longer form:

- A seven-minute package by Mark Mardell, pegged on the Euro socialist rally (May 27), giving a profile of the stance of the main parties
- An investigation by Gordon Brewer (June 4) of the workings of a common European defence policy
- An investigation of the EU mammi fruit scandal (June 8), demonstrating how EC money was still going astray - and not really pegged on the Elections
- A package after the polls closed on June 10 in which the Election was described as an "outbreak of narcolepsy"

It seems scarcely credible that the BBC's main news analysis programme should tackle the Elections (apart from its bulletins) for the first time only on May 27, and then mount just two dedicated Election items until polling was over. Of the 20 (27x45) hours analysed for this exercise, coverage of Europe amounted to little more than half an hour - 3-4% of the total.

BBC Frost on Sunday (Sunday 8.30-9.30am): This programme is - and has been since its TV-am days - a cornerstone of Election coverage, with David Frost traditionally interviewing the Party leaders in the run-up to polling day. But even here, coverage of the Election was severely limited. It was confined to roughly three questions each put to William Hague, Tony Blair and Paddy

Ashdown in the context of wider questioning about other current issues. This was coverage by the book - ensuring that items were included and balanced. But there was no effort to explain the wider context of the Election, or to talk to analysts (for example in the newspaper review) who could have shed further light on the issues involved.

BBC On The Record (Sunday mainly 12-1pm): This carried interviews specifically on Europe and the Election with Jack Cunningham, Sir Leon Brittan, William Hague, Margaret Beckett and Paddy Ashdown, each running to around 15 minutes. In addition, there was a 12-minute interview with Romano Prodi - his only appearance on television during the Election - and packages dealing with moves towards a common EU defence policy and the prospects for the minority parties in the election. Both of these were the most detailed treatment of the issues involved

This was the most extensive coverage anywhere on BBC television, and it is interesting editorially that the BBC could consider the issues important in this context, but not so much in others. Having said that, even in this context, there was one programme during the Election period, on May 16, that did not touch on any Election issues. But it raises the prospect that the Election coverage on BBC television was in part, deliberately shunted into this one programme. It should also be noted that OTR's balance was extremely suspect (see below under bias).

GMTV: The Sunday programme (7-8am) with Alastair Stewart covered the Election extensively in the four weeks it was broadcast during the survey (taking a break for the bank holiday on May 30), with most of its programme time devoted to interviews with the key figures. There were nine interviews in total, and they covered many of the main issues. This was perhaps a model of what studio-based Election coverage could have looked like elsewhere, and illustrated the range of controversy and views involved. It was in marked contrast to the approach adopted by both the BBC and Channel 4. It has to be said, however, that this went out at 7am on Sunday mornings when viewing figures scarcely rise above half a million.

The GMTV programme on weekdays was a completely different story. Bulletins scarcely mentioned the Elections at all, being confined to very brief pieces about the Election manifestos being launched, that voting was underway, and about the results. Studio based discussion before the Election was limited to three pieces - all at 6.17. These were supposed to give viewers an "overview" of the key issues involved in the Election. After voting, various politicians were brought in to give their reaction and analysis.

GMTV's contract is for a news and current affairs programme. It does not say that news and current affairs should only be carried on Sundays, nor only before 7am on weekdays. Quite simply, three short items hidden outside the peak viewing times, with reaction after the event, did not seem to constitute proper coverage of the European Elections.

ITV: ITN's coverage of the Elections in its main bulletins was less than the BBC's. Like the BBC's, it was limited to the manifesto launches - usually as read items only - a brief package on the voting paper and, in the days building up to the launch, almost daily campaign reports. In addition, on May 9, Jo Andrew put together a package on Romano Prodi's interview on the OTR programme, linking it with William Hague's remarks on Euro-scepticism. But that was it.

There no attempt to mount coverage of any of the issues involved in the Election, and from the beginning this was characterised as a poll dominated by voter apathy.

In total, this survey chronicled around 40 hours of ITN's news programmes for ITV. The complete list of European coverage was as follows

May 9 - Package about Prodi's remarks on OTR
May 16 - Speculation about Heseltine Euro views - following interview on GMTV
May 19 - Launch of the three manifestos - Michael Brunson
June 2 - Jo Andrew says that apathy is the hallmark of the Election
June 7 - Norman Smith says battle bus used to counter voter apathy
June 9 - Michael Brunson gives eve of poll round-up
June 10 - Mentions of polling underway
June 11 - Lowest poll on record
June 14 - Results

That's a total of nine packages in the five weeks. Some or part of the packages were sometimes repeated or updated between the first news at 12.30 and the Nightly News at 11pm. There were also mentions of the launches of individual Parties, such as the SNP and Plaid Cymru on the relevant days. Out of the total, that adds up to a maximum of 25 minutes, less than 1%.

Channel 4: Channel 4 News - also produced by ITN - was slightly more extensive in its coverage of the Elections than Newsnight. There were read items in news headlines on the manifesto launches and the progress of the campaign.

Packages were:

- The projected appointment of Chris Patten to the EC
- The launch of the Tory manifesto, followed by an interview with Michael Heseltine
- The launch of the Labour manifesto (much shorter)
- The impact of the fall of the Euro on Dublin
- The reasons for voter apathy, followed by studio discussion with Tory, Labour and Lib Dem MEPs
- A political survey of the Election by Eleanor Goodman
- Voter apathy after the Election

As with Newsnight, it seems hard to understand why the flagship news programme of Channel 4 (and of ITN) covered so little. What there was added up to around 40 minutes out of the total output of 21 hours - around 3-4%

Channel 5. The channel's news output is made up of programmes at 12noon and 6pm, totalling around 40 minutes a day. Of the 25 hours total during the monitoring exercise, scarcely fifteen minutes (1%) was devoted to the European Election. There were three packages, one mentioning the launch of the manifestos, and two in Election week describing the key points being made by each Party, the ballot paper and voter apathy.

2. The election on radio

Coverage on BBC Radio 4 was also limited.

BBC Radio 4 plays a unique role in national life. Its news coverage unquestionably plays a vital part in setting the overall news agenda, and often breaks stories which others follow. This news programming is at the heart of the BBC's public service remit, and is often held up as a bastion of quality - an exemplar of all that the Corporation stands for.

In this framework, the European Elections figured considerably less than might have been imagined.

The main news programmes analysed amounted to five and three quarter hours per day. (Today 6-9am, World at One 1-1.30pm, PM 5-6pm, Six O'Clock News 6-6.30pm and the World Tonight 10-10.45pm). Overall, there were more items in the monitoring period than on television - around 130 in total, averaging around four minutes each - adding up to approximately eight hours out of 170 hours.

That equates, however, to just over 6% of the total output - and less in the period, for example, than the amount devoted to sport.

A significant proportion of the total was made up of packages and discussions chronicling the fall of the Euro.

Like television, radio covered the manifesto launches, gave progress reports on the campaigns and, close to June 10, carried interviews with the party leaders, as well as last minute campaign details. The emphasis, particularly in the week immediately before the Election was on voter apathy.

However, it is hard to see that this treatment of European Election items was systematic. The reports in these categories were dispersed widely through the agenda, and were often either in the first hour of Today or on the World Tonight.

Questioning about European issues was sometimes also tacked on to other topics such as the resignation of Sir Norman Fowler.

Overall, the extra amount of coverage over television (approx. 130 reports, as compared to around 90 on television) was largely down to the closer tracking of the performance of the Euro, plus no more than 25 reports on the Election in Europe itself and broad topics of membership - the withholding tax and operation of grants. Apart from that, only about half a dozen stories - the de-selection of Christine Oddy as a Labour MP or an analysis of the non-Kosovo decisions of the Bonn summit - were carried exclusively on radio. Much of the "extra" coverage of radio was on the World Tonight, at the time of the lowest audience for radio services.

Radio 4 news did not go out into the constituencies, made little effort to talk to ordinary voters about what Europe meant to them, and scarcely came to grips with major issues such as the possible emergence of a European superstate or a common tax policy. It made virtually no effort to talk to anyone in the UK Independence Party, which won 7.7% of the popular vote.

It hardly spoke, either, to the main Euro-sceptic groups Business for Sterling and newEurope.

Today

As would be expected of the BBC's flagship news programme, it carried a significant number of stories about the Election, totalling more than 50, an average of more than 1.5 per day, over the five-week period - though 15 were in the final three days before the Election. At the peak of the coverage, during the Election week, there were seven or eight items a day, with updates of running stories throughout the bulletins.

The range of stories included: regular tracking of the slide of the Euro, the de-selection of Christine Oddy as an MEP candidate, the manifesto launches, a follow up to Romano Prodi's call for a European superstate, the launch of a Business for Sterling survey saying that support for the Euro was less than had been thought, the man who blew the whistle on the EC being on hard times, the call for a common European defence policy, the new ballot paper explained, doubts on the withholding tax, voting intentions in Scotland Wales and Northern Ireland, a look at the non-Kosovo issues raised by the Bonn summit, voting issues in Strasbourg, Julian Critchley and Nicholas Scott writing to the Times saying they were unhappy with the Tory stance on Europe,

with reaction from Lord Tebbit and James Spicer.

In addition, there were three separate interviews of the main Party leaders, along with those of SNP and Plaid Cymru.

Listeners to the programme would have clearly known that the Election was taking place, and would have been aware of the arguments about key issues such as the Euro. Yet this is the flagship programme. Total coverage of the Elections was approximately only 4 (50 x 5 minutes average) hours out of the 85 hours of transmission during this survey - only around 5%. Sports coverage (9 minutes a day) totalled more. The reporting framework did go wider than that on television, and more closely mirrored the coverage of national newspapers during the Election.

But the range did not expand on many of the topics which the political Parties thought were central to the campaign. It did not tackle - except in one brief piece from John Sargeant - the moves towards greater powers for the European Parliament outlined at the Bonn summit. It did not really examine the efforts by economic leaders to try and impose a unitary tax structure. And it did not look at the impact of the EU on voters: there were no constituency reports, no examinations of the working of the CAP and CFP, and the role of the MEP, and much more.

It is hard to see how editors of the programme felt the range of coverage, given the number of slots available and the great flexibility of radio, brought the Election alive or brought the fundamental issues into focus.

WORLD AT ONE/WEEKEND WORLD

The programme carried 18 items (some of them in bulletins) during their 30 days of transmission during the Election period monitored. The European Election therefore figured in roughly 10% of the available slots - the highest rate of any analysed. Yet against that, there was virtually no coverage in Election week, apart from in the bulletins.

Issues that were covered included the launch of the manifestos, William Hague's warning on tax hamonisation, efforts to shore up the Euro, William Hague calling for the scrapping of the change-over plan on the Euro, a wrap on the Bonn Euro summit by John Sargeant, possible links between the Italian neo-fascist Party and the Tory Party, together with doubts about Tory Party finances.

PM

This carried approximately 20 items on the Election in 27.5 hours of transmission. A small proportion was exclusive to the programme - a look at proportional representation and its workings, David Shukman saying that Europe had new teeth following the Bonn summit, an Election scandal in France and Frederick Forsythe giving his views on why he felt that the EU was swamping national cultures.

But the main coverage was amplification of the running agenda as broadly established by **Today**, with, for example, latest campaign reports and follow-up items on the withholding tax. PM broke one significant story - purely because of the timing - that of Eddie George and Mervyn King's evidence to the Treasury Select Committee.

SIX O'CLOCK NEWS

During the course of the campaign there were 22 reports on Election issues, ranging from the Election manifestos, meetings on the withhholding tax, to last minute efforts to enthuse voters.

This was straightforward coverage, with no movement away from the agenda set by other programmes, and nothing carried out of the ordinary.

WORLD TONIGHT/ WESTMINSTER HOUR

World Tonight is Radio 4's equivalent of **Newsnight**, often going off the main diary to investigate and analyse issues at greater length. During the course of the campaign, it focused on 13 Election-related stories, and provided - at a time when audiences are at almost their lowest - the only look at a number of important matters relating to the EU and its operation

The topics covered included:

Analysis of Romano Prodi's OTR interview about the European superstate
Christine Oddy steps down as a Labour MEP candidate
Voter apathy - a discussion
Francis Maude and others on the withholding tax
The row over Eddie George's claims about the Euro
European defence policy examined from the perspective of Greece and Germany
Operation of EU grants - Newcastle
Hill farmers and EU funding
A discussion with French/UK journalists about the Election
Ditto in Spain.

This almost looked like the list of topics that could be expected to be covered. But there were just 13 main stories in 35 days analysed, an average of just over one in three days. This vehicle could have been used for examining so much more.

PART 2 - issues of balance

The survey looked exhaustively at the output to establish whether the broadcasters were rigorous and fair in their treatment of the issues relating to the European Election. Of course, bias is a heated topic of debate, and it is easier to perceive than it is to prove, as the impression left by a broadcast is often different from what was actually said. For that reason, all the items concerning the elections have been transcribed, and the analysis that follows is based on careful analysis of those transcripts.

"Balance" also depends to some extent on the perspective of the observer. The arguments here start from the point that, as this was an Election period, it was a fundamental job of the broadcasters to facilitate the clear articulation of the key policy issues, as put by the parties standing, with close probing of the viability of those issues and their implications.

Critically, for the sake of equity, no problems in any Party could be assumed unless there were very strong reasons and evidence to the contrary.

1. Bias by default?

Perhaps the most important information revealed by this survey was that broadcasters devoted less than 4% of the total airtime to the European Elections. And perhaps not surprisingly, with a total of just 215 reports in 600 hours of broadcasting the focus of the coverage, despite this being a national Election, was narrow: at core, little more than the reporting of Election manifestos, campaign progress reports and, on Radio 4, the tracking of the ups and downs of the Euro.

The narrowness of coverage in itself raises several important questions. The most important is whether the broadcasters met their public service obligations.

But it is also legitimate to ask whether the low level of coverage was the result of an acceptance that Europe was not that important - and perhaps a reflection by the broadcasters of Jo Andrew's alarming assertion on ITN on June 2, "a tribute to Labour's defusing the issue of Europe"?

Why, exactly, did the broadcasters think that the European Elections, held only every five years, and dominated by not only the Euro, but also important points of principal relating to national sovereignty, the conduct of defence policy and the nature of EU taxation, were of so little importance? Why was there very little effort to investigate any of these matters?

Most broadcasters acknowledged that the Euro was a central issue of the campaign. Its ups and downs were closely tracked, as were the attitudes of

bankers to its performance. But there was very limited investigation of what joining the currency would actually mean - the implications for sovereignty, for overall taxation policies and the long-term performance of UK business.

Why was there no effort to investigate in Europe the growing pressures and moves towards federalism, and the creation of a superstate? The strength and prominence of these issues in relation to the current agenda were clearly outlined at the very beginning of the campaign by Romano Prodi, speaking on the BBC's On The Record programme. The BBC itself scarcely followed them up - and certainly did not carry any investigation of the implications for the people of Britain. The Labour Party was not asked about its attitude to federalism - even though Tony Blair was one of the strongest supporters of the appointment of Mr Prodi, and the Labour Party was fighting on a manifesto penned in association with the Euro socialists. In addition, Mr Blair spelled out his vision for a much more integrated Europe in a major speech at Aachen during the campaign - an event scarcely reported.

Why also was there apparently little attempt to go off-diary - outside the confines of the Party press conferences - to look at the issues that actually mattered to voters? There was some acknowledgement that these issues existed, in brief packages for the BBC TV in constituencies outside London, and in a survey of prices in Europe, but these were very rare.

It is true that Kosovo dominated the Election period, from the bombing of the Chinese embassy in Serbia, to the signing of the peace deal to the start of the pull-out of Serb troops. These were momentous events, and this survey does not suggest otherwise.

But it is the clear duty of public service broadcasters to strike a balance between national and international news. Was a ratio of around 20 times more coverage of Kosovo really the right balance against such an important Election?

Another suspicion is that keeping the Election off the agenda as much as possible was what the Labour Party wanted. Though Labour disputed this, several presenters noted that the normal Millbank machine was not greatly in evidence during this campaign, with the emphasis firmly turned on Tony Blair's performance in Kosovo.

An important question is whether a relative absence of activity by Labour led to the broadcasters downgrading the Election in terms of the coverage it received. The survey itself cannot conclusively prove this one way or the other. But it can point to the circumstantial evidence of so little coverage fitting in with what some observers claimed that Labour wanted.

Other issues:

The UK Independence Party, which gained three seats with 7.7% of the vote, and just 5.3% less than the Lib Dems, warranted just one interview - on Today - and was bracketed with the British National Party. The Party was included in an OTR package on the minority parties as a whole, and its launch was mentioned on the same day, and in the same breath, as that of the BNP.

By contrast, the Pro-Euro Conservatives, which won 1.4% of the vote, were often treated at a similar level to the Tories themselves. Remarks from John Stevens, the Party leader - for example - prefaced the interview on **Today** of William Hague on the penultimate day before polling. This was despite categorical assurances from Michael Heseltine and others that they would support the official Party line, and a complete absence of evidence of any widespread support.

It was striking that, although within Labour there is a sizeable number of Euro-sceptic MPs who are publicly opposed to the Euro - some of them senior figures such as Frank Field and Austin Mitchell - this was not tackled as a topic at all. The election was not about the Euro, but it was about attitudes and approaches to membership of the EU, and it might have been thought pertinent to question the dissenters about their views on the way forward, especially when the Pro-Euro Conservatives figured so frequently and so prominently.

The Election was characterised by apathy almost from the start. True, turnout had been traditionally low. But apathy as an accepted and unavoidable feature of the elections began to feature very early in the campaign. Vox pops asked voters why they would not vote, rather than what they thought was important about Europe. And there was a note of weary triumphalism in Jeremy Paxman's voice when minutes after the polls closed, he described the Election as an "outbreak of narcolepsy". Channel 4 appeared to enjoy covering the same theme the following day. All good fun - but it is legitimate to ask in retrospect just how much the broadcasters had contributed - through lack of coverage - to creating a new national record low in Election turnouts.

This was also a "faceless" Election. Interviews with candidates on any channel were a rarity.

2. OTR fails to strike impartiality balance.

The political balance of the BBC's **On the Record** over the period of the Election was wrong. The normal practice in Election periods on such programmes "of record" is to achieve balance over the period of the campaign, ie by giving equal time and prominence to the main parties' views. OTR did not do this. The Election period opened with a long interview with Romano Prodi, who argued the

case for federalism. No-one subsequently was allowed to put the counter-case directly. In subsequent weeks, William Hague, Margaret Beckett and Paddy Ashdown were interviewed. But then in the final week came another Labour interview - with Jack Cunningham - followed on June 13 by one with Sir Leon Brittan. There were, therefore, before the Election, 5 interviews with figures favouring greater integration with Europe, as against just William Hague from a more Euro-sceptic perspective. Even if Leon Brittan was counted as "Conservative" - which he has not been since his appointment to Brussels, there would have been imbalance.

By contrast, Alastair Stewart's GMTV programme, had a carefully constructed range of views including John Stevens, Michael Heseltine, Michael Portillo, John Redwood, Menzies Campbell, Robin Cook and John Edmunds of the GMB. It brought in Ruth Lea of the IoD to discuss business attitudes towards the Euro. The only question marks related to the weight given to the Pro-Euro Conservatives - did they really warrant a full interview? - and the characterisation of the Tories as being split.

The strange case of Romano Prodi

John Humphrys' interview of Romano Prodi (9/5) was the longest given during the Election period to a figure from the EC (the only other one to be interviewed being Leon Brittan immediately after the Election), and the longest given to the expansion of the federalist case. John Humphrys was not strongly adversarial in his approach, largely allowing Mr Prodi to put his views with little challenge.

That would have been fine - in the overall Election coverage - if room had been given to a counter view about the way forward for the Commission. This didn't happen on BBC television, either on OTR or anywhere else. Humphrys' interviews with party political leaders concentrated on other areas, such as what the exact time frame for joining the EMU would be. There was, additionally, a package on the moves towards a common European defence policy, but this was only one of the areas covered by Mr Prodi.

In any event, Mr Prodi's remarks on the need for a European Government was a strong story, to the point where they were followed up widely in the next morning's press - and on ITN, where they made a package by Jo Andrew on both the early evening and late evening

BBC television, however, did not judge it worth even a mention - even though Radio 4 did at both 6pm (briefly), on Westminster Hour, and then again the following morning with an interview with John Maples about the common European defence policy.

This, arguably, is a case of direct imbalance and bias by default; of BBC Television deciding that moves towards a superstate, with the consequent

reduction of national sovereignty, were not important enough to bring to the attention of the peak time television audience. At the same time, the editors did not appear to think that Mr Prodi's views needed balancing.

3. Dimbleby also not balanced

Jonathan Dimbleby's programme on ITV should also have achieved political balance over the period of the campaign. It did not. The only unequivocally European item carried was an interview with John Redwood. The focus of the adversarial interview was Tory splits, though he was allowed to also put across some of the Conservative policies. Paddy Ashdown was also a main guest of the programme, but ***he actually had to ask*** to be asked about the European Election. The main focus was the Liberal succession battle - about which Mr Ashdown himself appeared not to have been told.

The overall tally for the programme over the Election therefore did not include Labour at all (apart from on Kosovo-related items), gave Paddy Ashdown a scant few minutes to present his Election views, and subjected John Redwood to an intense grilling on whether or not the Tories remained split on Europe, and whether Mr Redwood himself would eventually consider voting for the Euro if the Tory Party (ten years hence) decided to join.

4. Channel 4 - a case to answer

Channel 4 did not carry many items about the European Elections. The question has to be asked - why? - as with everywhere else, but perhaps more so in Channel 4's case. Their remit is clearly to provide an alternative, intelligent and in-depth analysis of the day's main news stories, and the programme has consistently won awards for its enterprising journalism on diverse topics.

Yet it judged the European Election so unimportant that it warranted just seven items (one after the Election, and one not directly about the Election itself) - and there was absolutely no attempt, apart from one brief foray into Dublin, to look at the Election in Europe.

Was Kosovo so important that it almost pushed the Elections off the agenda?
It is not valid simply to say that nothing much was happening in the Election, or that there was little that warranted exploring. The task of broadcasters is not merely to reflect the main agenda, but to go behind the scenes and look at the key issues, as Channel 4 often does.

Of the items that were covered, nearly all showed a degree of bias. Main points:

- Chris Patten's "appointment" treated so as to put William Hague in a bad light
- Sole party manifesto launch package highlights Tory splits and looks at no other issue of substance
- First question to the sole MEP guest about Tory splits
- After poll discussion that featured a Labour supporter as the sole political guest
- Only one Euro-sceptic featured in the entire coverage

a) Appointment of Chris Patten as an EC Commissioner (May 12), a story which the channel broke. In essence, the treatment appeared in parts to be determined to put the Conservatives in a bad light.

This was during an Election period, but no inkling was given that this might have been a deliberate Labour attempt to undermine the Tory Party over Europe. The viewers should surely have been alerted to the possibility.

The treatment was initially confusing as it did not establish whether the appointment was a rumour (as Jon Snow said) or a confirmed move (as Gary Gibbon implied). The information had all the hallmarks of a carefully timed Labour lobby leak, possibly to embarrass William Hague (his choice rejected, undermining his stature) on the day of the attacks on the Kosovo strategy and, as the EU Election campaigns, moved slowly into gear. Nothing was said about the provenance: important during an Election period.

The commentary also planted the clear line that the appointment was a "snub to William Hague" - even though, as it was not confirmed, that might not have been the case. The piece was constructed to further amplify the Tories implied weakness, by putting Mr Blair firmly in control of the appointment.

What was not mentioned was anything to do with the continuing turmoil over the Commission - even in passing - casting Mr Prodi in the light of someone "wanting an A team", while ignoring the fact that there was significant controversy over the exercising of his powers. That point was firmly on the Election agenda, as both the Telegraph that morning and the FT had carried stories about the launch of the Tory EU Election manifesto, a central point of which was to be a call to re-appoint the whole Commission.

It would have been easy to weave in some sense that Mr Patten's recommended appointment came amid continuing Tory unease - as an Election issue - about the Commission itself, and about the relationship between Mr Blair and Mr Prodi. Rather than that, the report was entirely uncontextualised in terms of the continuing (and central debate) over Europe.

b) Coverage of the Conservative Party Election manifesto launch. This was a full package by political editor, Eleanor Goodman, followed by an interview with

Michael Heseltine.

A very important question is why the Tories were elevated to this amount of coverage, when the Lib Dems manifesto launch was simply a short read, and Labour's was a read plus a short extract from Mr Blair. During an Election period, when the practice is to give parties equal amounts of time, this looks odd as an editorial balance.

It also emerged that the main purpose of the piece was to explore Tory splits. John Stevens, as leader of the Pro-Euro Conservatives was given more space than William Hague. And the purpose of bringing Michael Heseltine on seemed to be to explore to what extent a former deputy leader was possibly at odds with the main Party line on the Euro.

It is hard to justify on editorial grounds - in the context of completely different treatment of the Lib Dems and Labour - why so much emphasis was put on this issue. Basically, it looks as if the programme worked to explore Tory divisions - elevating that point above all others in what was actually covered by Channel 4.

Jon Snow elevated that point even further, by suggesting to Michael Heseltine that William Hague's position as leader might be compromised by a vote below 30%. He knew that Mr Heseltine was not likely to spring massively to Mr Hague's defence - and his question was therefore unlikely to be countered. In the event it was simply parried, creating a sense of further problems for Mr Hague: the parting shot.

The over-riding question here is why, during an Election period, in a piece deliberately structured to show the exact nature of Tory divisions, was there not an opportunity for a Party spokesman (Michael Ancram, Francis Maude, John Redwood?) to paint a view of the formal Party position? Following the Goodman package, the Heseltine interview further compounded the impression of division, while one with a Tory spokesman would at least have allowed some of the points raised to be answered, however adversarial the questions from Jon Snow.

Outside an Election period, the approach adopted might have been (just) acceptable. But this was an Election period, and Channel 4 was quite simply wrong in its treatment of this piece.

c) The package on the Euro was less problematical, though some elements in the choice of language, "William Hague gloating over the fall of the Euro", came across as unnecessarily snide during an Election period. Taken alone, the remark would not have stood out but, against the previous package (and the absence of other coverage on the topic), it looked as if there were further efforts to diminish the Tory position. The question at the opening - "Did the fall in the Euro matter?" might also be viewed in that light, given the central prominence the Tory campaign gave it.

It seems strange that of all the companies that Channel 4 *could* go to in Ireland, it chose an independent television production company - hardly typical of the economy as a whole and, hardly, for a television station, investigative journalism. That would seem to underline the lack of real commitment in covering the European Elections, given the overall scarcity of items.

d) By June 8, having hardly covered the Election at all, Channel 4 News was saying that the turnout was going to be very low. This was a dispiriting approach, given that it was only the third significant piece on an Election-related issue they had covered (and the first that actually tackled electioneering). A set-up piece by Gary Gibbon was designed to reinforce the point - it was a vox pop, and underlined just how much the Election was characterised in terms of apathy. Jon Snow then went into a discussion with three Euro candidates: Pauline Green, Edward Macmillan-Scott and Graham Watson - the first (and only) candidates to be interviewed directly by any of the main programmes.

The three candidates were eventually allowed to get to grips with some of the key issues, and even the Maastricht Treaty was mentioned. But not before Jon Snow had managed to both trivialise the Election, and again return to the theme of Tory splits. He opened by asking what in the past year any of them had done to make a difference to a single person in the UK…and followed that by saying they were overpaid, over there and didn't do very much. Both questions sounded almost facetious, particularly when taken with the previous paucity of coverage. Tory splits came next (how many Tory parties are there, three or five?). Taken alone and said not during an Election period as the opening question, this might have been understandable. But coming after the previous examples of emphasis of splits, it amounts to a consistent and questionable line, particularly as neither of the other two guests were asked about splits.

e) Finally, on June 9 - the only day with consecutive coverage - Eleanor Goodman did an excellent survey of the Election and the main issues. The only criticism was that it was too little, too late - where had other similar pieces been during the campaign?

f) Gary Gibbon's package after the Election on June 11 went to Toxteth - the area of lowest turnout - and examined some of the reasons for the poor voting level. Its tone was simply negative, and it did nothing to really explain why there had been so much apathy - a kind of final shrug of the shoulders which did little to enhance the feeling that the programme was really serious about its European coverage.

It was followed by another discussion (or perhaps double interview) with John

O'Farrell, who had worked with Tony Blair on campaigning and who had written a book about his experiences, and Simon Atkinson of MORI. This set-up continued the throw-away, pro-Labour tone of the channel's coverage. Jon Snow's first question to O'Farrell about apathy opened with the observation that maybe the answer to the low turnout was that people actually thought that things had got better. This was hardly adversarial to a Labour supporter. It was followed by an (unchallenged) answer that the reason why people didn't turn out was that the Tories were in disarray - and the Election was a bit like Manchester United playing Scarborough. Clearly a Labour view, and to be expected from a Labour man. One would have expected a degree of scepticism from Jon Snow, but there was none. He moved on to another question - thus allowing the response to go as a stated fact.

The final piece, sadly, typified Channel 4's approach to the Election. It started with bias against the Tories and ended with it; in between - though there was one sharp piece of political reporting from one of the best in the field (Eleanor Goodman) - the over-riding feeling was "couldn't care less".

5. BBC Radio 4

Tory splits?

A key defining issue of the Elections, distinguishing the parties clearly, was the Tory opposition to joining the Euro. It was their central line of attack and, by the end of the campaign, Robin Oakley was among those who concluded that the Party had fought a strong campaign, getting their message across.

One of the key issues of coverage overall is how radio treated this Tory position, and their campaign.

It became evident that the Conservative Parliamentary Party, no matter what the history on EMU and of past divisions on policy, was in this campaign, united in following the Party line of not joining the Euro during the course of the next Parliament - waiting to see how the currency performed "in good times and in bad".

Those defined as prominent pro-Europeans in the party, including Michael Heseltine, made it clear on broadcast outlets that they would not publicly challenge the central manifesto points. Michael Heseltine spelled that out on both GMTV and Channel 4 (though it is interesting that the BBC itself did not ask him about his position anywhere in its coverage until after the Election).

During the entire course of the campaign, the only nine Conservative politicians who did come on the record on the broadcast outlets surveyed, saying that they were against the main Tory line, were Sir Julian Critchley (a fomer MP perhaps

as important in the Tory Party as Joan Lestor now is in Labour) and eight other signatories of a letter to the Times on June 8. The Tory Party made it clear that those who openly advocated voting against the Party would be expelled from it, but stressed that the views of the letter signatories were not representative of the large majority of the party.

There was, of course, in addition, the Pro-Euro Conservative Party, formed by John Stevens and Brendan Donnelly. It made great play of the amount of support it would get (as it would) but there was no evidence at the beginning of the campaign, nor did any emerge during the course of it, that it had major (or any) supporters within the main wing of the Tory Party.

When asked by GMTV, Michael Heseltine specifically said that he wished the Party had not been formed.

The reality was that this breakaway faction - described by William Hague as "fanatics" - was at roughly the same level of significance as Arthur Scargill's Socialist Party was to the Labour Party - as the poll results confirmed.

Overall, the main Conservative Party was not evidently split and, indeed, for the first time in some while, could claim to be united - as spokesmen frequently did - on the major specifics of the Election campaign. If there were significant divisions - other than those outlined above - radio certainly did not produce evidence of them. Nor, substantively, did the press.

BBC Radio's 4 treatment of the Party and its position did not reflect this.

From the start of the Election period, there was an almost constant line of questioning that suggested that the Party was split, combined with a consistent tendency to elevate the importance of the Pro-Euro Conservative Party. The approach was perhaps best typified by a question by Sue MacGregor (Today 10/5) to John Maples who, up until that point, had been reacting to moves towards a common European defence policy.

Sue MacGregor: Won't you get more votes if you came out more strongly against Europe - what you are doing is now giving the impression of sitting on the fence and preventing a split which we know is there for the asking for the Tory Party?

Items which contained this treatment included:

- **Voice piece about William Hague and the Pro-Euro Conservatives, World This Weekend 9/5.**

The context of this voice piece by Nicholas Jones was the interviews that morning of John Stevens of the Pro-Euro Conservatives on GMTV, and of

William Hague on Breakfast with Frost.

This piece immediately elevated the Pro-Euro Conservatives to the point where they were reported as a direct threat which could help take the Tory vote below 25% and be the end of Mr Hague. And it said categorically that there was a continuing Tory feud over Europe which could cloud Tory recovery.

It clearly reported Mr Hague's dismissal of the claims by Mr Stevens and, in that sense, put the Tory view. But that is not the substantive point. BBC Radio 4 news, at the very start of the campaign, lifted the Pro-Europeans to the point where they were reported in a main bulletin as a clear threat, not only to Mr Hague himself but to the Tory Party as well. The only evidence for this assertion was that of the two disgruntled MEPs who had formed a breakaway faction and who, in the event, attracted just 1.4% of the vote. There was no reporting of any similar threats to Labour, or of the extent of support John Stevens actually had, either in the Parliamentary Party or elsewhere

This treatment contrasted markedly to that in the (Europhile) broadsheet press, where for example, Rosemary Bennett (FT 10/5) noted - as Nicholas Jones did not - that the Pro-Euro Conservative Party had little support on the back benches.

The Guardian (10/5) went one further for its angle, with Michael White saying that, in his remarks to Mr Frost, Mr Hague had moved to try take the middle ground on Europe. White pointed out - again something that Nicholas Jones chose not to mention - that Mr Hague's manifesto on Europe had been agreed by the right and the left of the Party, including Ted MacMillan-Scott on the left of the Party. He even went so far as noting that "unless Mr Stevens finds an effective formula, it will be hard to urge Clarkeite Conservatives to vote for him".

- **Sue MacGregor interviewing John Maples about Romano Prodi's call for a European army (Today 10/5). (Transcript 2)**

The background to this interview was Romano Prodi's call on OTR (9/5) for a common European defence policy and a European army.

Sue McGregor implied in the first question that the Tory position was not moderate - a legitimate adversarial point on its own. But she then went on to say the Party was sitting on the fence, and asserted that "we know" a "split is there for the taking in the Tory Party". Again, perhaps legitimate - on its own. Her final point was an assertion that the Party's position was on the line, and perhaps could be a threat to Mr Hague (implied).

Cumulatively this creates the strong impression that the Tory Party's position was under threat from a series of problems. Yet Miss MacGregor neither produced

nor cited any evidence for this**.**

- **Andrew Little interviewing John Stevens and Sion Simon (deputy editor of the Spectator) on the World Tonight (12/5) (Transcript 3)**

This interview followed speculation about the choice by Tony Blair of Chris Patten as the new UK EU Commissioner to replace Sir Leon Brittan.

The first difficulty with this item was that Chris Patten's appointment was NOT confirmed, and the sourcing of the story was not in any sense disclosed to the audience. Was it a Downing Street "leak"? If so, with an Election pending, it should have been flagged as such, treated with the greatest suspicion - and viewers told so that they could form their own opinions as to whether or not this was a deliberate effort to undermine Mr Hague.

As it was, the uncertainty was glossed over, and both guests were invited to give reactions on the basis that it was going ahead. These were tenuous and questionable grounds for commentary during an Election period - then compounded by the commentary being totally one-sided.

Patently, there was neither balance nor impartiality in the treatment of what followed - taking two people who attacked William Hague from different sides (even though one was editor of a right-wing journal) was not balance, especially during an Election period. John Stevens was given a credibility on a par with the Conservative Party itself, for which there was no evidential reason.

The air-time, legitimacy and prominence given to John Stevens in this and other items continued the suggestion that he was perceived as a serious and credible threat to William Hague. This turned out to be a totally unwarranted assessment**.** This practice, used for the first time here, featured many more times. To have properly balanced this possible development, it would have perhaps been better to use a Tory commentator such as Philip Oppenheim or Boris Johnson. As it was, it meant that only one view of the impact of the Chris Patten "appointment" was given. The alternative perspective - that Hague might not have been concerned - wasn't put. An official reaction from the Party does not even seem to have been sought - a strange decision with an Election looming**.** Sion Simon's theories were in no way borne out by subsequent events.

- **Nick Clark interviewing Sir Norman Fowler about his decision to stand down from the Tory front bench (BBC World at One 14/5). (Transcript 4)**

Nick Clark was obviously entitled to probe Norman Fowler about his reasons for leaving the shadow cabinet after so many years.

But the tone and the approach of the interview was negative from the start. Maybe on its own, this would not have been so noticeable. But coming after the previous examples - and in the context of others to come - it looked more doubtful as a balanced line of approach. Nick Clark began a series of interruptions from the second question. That compounded the immediately negative intro to the piece that on its own would have been less significant "*Yet* another Tory has left…." (three in total being cited).

Nick Clark was well aware that this was an Election period. This was an edited interview, and the main thrust of the questions that followed was that the Tory party was a sinking ship; that Mr Hague's ratings were almost invisible (in fact the latest Gallup poll puts them at 11.2%), and that Mr Hague was promoting the Elections to the point where he risked compromising his own position (presumably as Party leader).

Sir Norman Fowler was allowed to answer each of these points very briefly against questioning which was sharp in its tone and intent. But Nick Clarke appeared to be very strongly saying, yet again on Radio 4 news, that the Conservatives were in trouble over their stance on Europe. Sir Norman Fowler's answers were not of a length to completely or effectively rebut the points made.

This was particularly striking in the answer to the point about the sinking ship. Sir Norman's response was that the poll results in the local Elections suggested otherwise - but before his point was complete, Nick Clarke rebutted this by citing opinion polls, which broadcasters well know are often unreliable.

- **The manifesto launch of the Pro-Euro Conservative Party (15/5)**

This, the opening manifesto interview in a sequence, continued the now confirmed trend of treating the Pro-Euro Conservatives on a par with other major Parties.

There was no absolutely no challenge to Brendan Donnelly's view that the Conservatives had been hijacked - John Humphrys did not chose to adopt the equally feasible line (mentioned by Michael White in the Guardian 10/5) that on this occasion, the Tory Party was united, and that Mr Donnelly was therefore pursuing a lost cause. Nothing was asked, either, about the rather key point of whether Mr Donnelly could actually claim the support of either Mr Clarke or Mr Heseltine (as his party was implying in their election literature).

John Humphrys appeared to accept, without challenge, Mr Donnelly's totally far-fetched assertion (at any time in election history) that a breakaway party was in line to win a vote of up to 8 or 9%, and win at least one seat.

Not only that - he seemed to accept Mr Donnelly's claim that his party would

damage the Conservatives.

- **The launch of the Tory manifesto (18/5) (TRANSCRIPT 6)**

This was included in the Today programme, in an interview between James Naughtie and Michael Ancram.

John Kampfner set the framework for the interview of Mr Ancram, with a set-up package.

It suggested:

1. That the Pro-Euro Conservative Party - with its totally unsubstantiated claims that there was a "body of Conservatives" (implying from the main party) willing to fight its cause - was so important that it should lead this piece.

2. By implication, that Ken Clarke (and Michael Heseltine) might have had links with the Pro-Euro Conservatives.

3. "Mainstream Tories" - whoever they were - were relieved that the manifesto wasn't more "hardened", and they feared a shift in tone

4. There was a febrile mood in the party which might damage Mr Hague and lead to splintering of support for him

5. Some Tories were already playing the blame game and keeping their heads down (even though the supposed representative of this faction was prepared to talk on the record)

By any standards, these were strong claims about the situation facing the Tory party - especially during an election period, when there is supposed to be balanced treatment of parties.

Point number 1 was of highly questionable judgement but continued the treatment by Radio 4 of the Pro-Euro Conservative Party as being both electorally and politically as significant as the Tory party itself.

On point 2, Kenneth Clarke wrote to the Daily Telegraph during the campaign to say that he supported the official party line in this Election. Michael Heseltine made it clear that he had no links with the Pro-Euro Party (on GMTV and Channel 4). By stating that it was "awkward" for the likes of Mr Clarke (bracketing Mr Heseltine), it continued and compounded the insinuation of splits.

Point number 3 was pure speculation - it was not clear what Ian Taylor MP was reacting against in his edited answers, other than that he believed a typing error

in The Sun was responsible for a misconception about Mr Hague's position. The second part of his extract - that if the campaigning became more extreme, it would become difficult - would surely apply to almost any Party at any time, but it is here used by John Kampfner to imply much more.

Point 4 was subjective reporting, and was not borne out in the campaign

Point 5 suggested that the Tory Election campaign was not supported by the entire Party, that the real issues in Europe would be decided at another forum and that allegiances would really be put to the test at a later date.

All of this was subjective and might, or might not, happen. This, however, was an Election period when all such claims should be the subject of careful balance.

At this point, the interview with Mr Ancram began. He was given no opportunity to rebut the "split" claims, which by now totally dominated the agenda. Instead, James Naughtie asked about the position over the Single Currency, with a question which suggested that the manifesto had been changed (on the basis of an article in the Sun). Mr Ancram was allowed to respond to that.

James Naughtie went on to suggest that Mr Blair had the support of Mr Heseltine and Mr Clarke over the Euro. Whilst both men might be pro-Euro, the simple point was that, in this Election, they had said they supported the Tory Party official line. Mr Ancram was therefore made to rebut a point for which there was no real evidence. He was allowed to give his version of the á la carte view of Europe being advocated in the manifesto, but that was all.

In essence, this interview, on the launch of the Tory Party manifesto campaign, framed the Party in an extremely unfavourable light. It covered very little real ground in elucidating the Party's actual Election manifesto. It is hard to see which facts supported the approach, and how this can be squared with "balanced" reporting during a campaign period.

- **William Hague calls for national change-over plan to be scrapped (1/6) (Transcript 7).**

William Hague called at the morning press conference for the national change-over plan for the Euro to be scrapped.

The call for the change-over plan to be scrapped was adequately and properly reported in the earlier part of the item. But the issue here, again, is whether the Pro-Euro Conservative Party should have been given equal status and equal treatment to the official Conservative Party. Yet again, the Euro (and Europe as a whole) was presented as an issue for debate which was splitting the Conservative Party, rather than as a matter of debate between Labour and

Conservatives. (Robin Cook's Labour views were obviously presented, but not challenged or debated). That approach - a debate, though not necessarily with Robin Cook - would surely have been a more balanced and appropriate course in an Election period.

- **Tory finances, World at One (7/6) - The Independent newspaper's journalism explored on the eve of the Election, suggesting that the Tories are linked to neo-fascists (Transcript 8)**

The key issue here is why, three days before the Election, World at One chose to devote a significant part of its programme to alleged problems facing the Tory Party and, in its commentary, to firmly link the Tories with a Party which they said "was a direct successor of Mussolini". The report first taken up figured prominently only in the Independent, which had adopted a pro-Euro line during the Election, and could be regarded as having been designed to cause maximum embarrassment to the Tories in Election week**.**

There was a strong denial from the Tory Party about the neo-Fascist link. Although the Italian Party member interviewed in this piece claimed to have met Conservatives to discuss co-operation, it was to her advantage to claim that - and she was not challenged about who she had met, or exactly why.

It is hard to understand, on this flimsy basis, why the WATO editorial team thought the opening item stood up in Election week. The circulation of the Independent is less than 300,000 and, therefore, it would be hard to argue that WATO needed to cover it to put the record straight, as most listeners would have been unaware of the story.

Edward MacMillan-Scott's denial - which unlike Ms Muscadini's statement was challenged by Nick Clarke - was straight and to the point - but not before he mentioned the link with Mussolini, and Pauline Green and Nick Harvey were both allowed to add further credence to the Muscadini claims by saying that here was clear evidence that the Tories were moving further and further to the right. How could this be clear evidence when Edward Macmillan-Scott categorically denied the story? Both MEPs were making direct political capital. These comments were deliberately included in a tenuous story from a biased source.

It is equally hard to understand why WATO followed up, on the brink of voting, the second story casting doubt about Tory finances - especially as it created an additional picture of Tory problems. The story had its origins in Charter News, formed by one group within the Tory Party whose provenance or motives were not discussed or subjected to any examination.

- **John Humphrys interviewing William Hague (8/6) and Today's decision**

to lead with Julian Critchley, elevating the whole topic of Tory splits to one of the biggest stories of the Election campaign.

This is perhaps the most striking example of unequal treatment between the three main Parties.

During the final week of Election campaigning, Today carried interviews on successive days with the three Party leaders - Paddy Ashdown, followed by William Hague and then Tony Blair. Mr Blair's and Mr Ashdown's interviews were straightforwardly handled, with no hint of any dissidence mentioned in either Party. Mr Hague was treated differently. That day (June 8) The Times carried a letter from Sir Julian Critchley and eight other signatories (all former MPs and MEPs now mostly retired and therefore not active as political figures within the Conservative party) who were opposed to the Conservative policy on the Euro. Today followed the letter up, and carried an interview with Sir Julian Critchley at 6.55am, giving him free rein to attack the Tory policy.

Both Tony Blair's (he was asked whether he was losing the argument on the Euro) and Paddy Ashdown's introductions were straightforward. William Hague's was not. The bulletin before the interview at 8am mentioned Tory splits. Then the lead-in itself raised, first, the issue of Sir Julian - and then the Pro-Euro Conservative Party. The majority of the interview was about these issues. Later headlines picked up on William Hague's point that Party members who urged those who actually voted against the Party would be disciplined.

John Humphrys made a special point in pinning down Mr Hague on what would happen to Sir Julian, as if it was a central matter of concern in the Election, perhaps sensing, at last, a split in the Party. William Hague's response put the matter into a clear context.

Later in the programme, Today also spoke to Nicholas Scott - another signatory of the letter - further elevating the importance of the story. Shortly before sign-off, Sir James Spicer was asked to put the view of an elder member of the Party who did support the Party line (as was Lord Tebbit the following day), but this did not balance the coverage or completely alter the overall impression given by this treatment.

It is hard to escape the conclusion that the theme of the morning was that the Tories were split, and that the impression was dramatised by Today's decision to give such prominence to Sir Julian's views. No other European story during the Election period reached the headline lead - and yet this one, about Tory splits, did.

Editors cannot ignore real differences of opinions within Parties, but their task on live programmes is to weigh the real import of conflicting opinions, and ensure

that listeners are not mislead. On this occasion, it is hard to see that this happened.

- **Emma Trevelyan, discussing the Election results says the Tories are on the verge of falling apart (June 14) (Transcript 10))**

This contained apparently unsupported claims about alleged problems for Mr Hague and the Tory Party - which may, or may not, exist but are certainly not confirmed by the evidence produced by Miss Trevelyan.

It defined the Tory victory - a word used elsewhere on the BBC, for example by John Pienaar on the BBC TV news at 6pm - as a "trick". That's a good hand at cards, but also a slightly pejorative word ("a one-trick wonder") which starts the process of characterising the whole Tory performance as being "lucky" - the word used in the sign-off line.

Ian Taylor did not say anything which showed "entrenched positions" in the Tory Party. He merely said that the result "had some warning signals in it". And Damian Green, another convinced Europhile, said (World at One) quite clearly that he was quite happy working within the current policy, despite attempts by Nick Clark to get him to say that there was a problem.

There was no evidence at all within the voice piece itself about the "Euro-sceptic right's" steps to persuade William Hague to move further to the right. If it was in Ms Trevelyan's notebook, or on tape, such a sweeping statement should have been clearly labelled and attributed. As it was, it was at the level only of unsupported opinion.

(It may have been, although this was not clear, based on Michael Heseltine's claim, expressed in the World at One that there were those in the party "who saw the lurch to Euro-sceptism as a stepping stone to more extreme and anti-Europe measures". If this was the case, it would have been clearer - and more open - journalism to say so, rather than to have it as a reported but unattributed fact)

The issue of Tory finances was even more contentious. Wheeling out one disaffected former Party member did not add up to the conclusions in the opening statement about "widespread unease" about Tory finances, nor did it even begin to substantiate what problems, if any, Michael Ashcroft was causing. There may, or may not, be a problem over Mr Ashcroft's role. But it was simply not enough - on the basis of what Michael Strafford said - to make the clear assertion about "one man effectively bank-rolling the party". If that phrase was substantiated in Ms Trevelyan's notebook, she should have said. "There is unease in some quarters about what some perceive (allege) to be over-reliance on Michael Ashcroft's support of the Conservative Party".

However, this is a serious allegation, which has generated much comment in the national press, and is not accepted by the Conservative Party. In these circumstances (of an allegation that suggested some kind of malpractice) it is hard to see how the allegation could have been carried without the opportunity of a rebuttal or further explanation. As it was it, Ms Trevelyan added one controversial allegation to another - and then reinforced it with a quote from a plainly disaffected ex-member of the Tory Party.

The conclusion was the worst kind of reporting - the unattributed quote given credence because it is used. Who was this person? And why would he or she not go on record? Was he or she senior - or a clerk in the back office (which an "official" presumably could be). Was that person representative in any way, shape or form? And, if so, how did Ms Trevelyan judge the contribution to be so if they would not go on record?

Presumably, this person was less confident of his or her views than Michael Stafford or Ian Taylor - and yet the way the quote was used was to leave the listener with the clear impression that the whole Tory effort in this Election was "lucky".

In most of these examples, questioning was fixed firmly on the issue of splits within the Party, or moved on to the topic even if it was not directly related to the issue in hand (as with the John Maples/ Prodi interview). By contrast, coverage elsewhere of the Labour and Liberal Democrat campaign did not mention splits or divergence of opinion, for example, within Labour, there were prominent anti-Euro voices such as Frank Field or Ken Coates. Indeed, these figures were never mentioned.

At the launch of the Tory Party manifesto, it alone of the main Parties was treated as split, with the tone of James Naughtie both cynical and doubtful throughout. The interview with Michael Ancram was prefaced by a John Kampfner piece which indicated that the Tories faced multiple splits - just one of the many interview, outlined above which also explored the divisions.

These pieces selected for analysis are generally typical of the treatment on Radio 4 of the Conservative Party during the campaign, and the conclusion here is that they were therefore defined as being split. Of course, reporting must attempt to reflect reality and there is no suggestion that real differences over the approach to the Euro should not have been mentioned and analysed.

But the treatment analysed above indicates that radio felt that these "Tory splits" were the most important issue to explore about the Party. Apart from Sir Julian Critchley and Ian Taylor (marginally) it provided no direct evidence that supported the approach.

- **John Humphrys, interviewing Nigel Farage of the UK Independence**

Party, links it to the British National Party, and says leaving Europe would be impossible (Today, May 20) (Transcript 11)

One additional interview is worthy of close analysis - the sole example on radio of someone from the UKIP (the UKIP also featured briefly in a package about minority on OTR). John Humphrys' treatment - for a party which eventually polled 7.7% of the total vote and won three seats - seemed peremptory, to say the least. He begrudgingly allowed Mr Farage to explain why the party was contesting the election - but then chose a question (of the many that could have been asked) that clearly implied that it was linked to the British National Party. His next point was to suggest that - even if the party did win any seats (the implication being that it was extremely unlikely), the MEPs would jump on the gravy train. A similar question was not put to other parties, and it is hard to see why this was the main issue facing the UKIP. Finally, Humphrys contended strongly that it would be "literally unthinkable" to leave Europe - a strange point, to put it mildly, to put to a man whose whole party was based on that very proposition - and was therefore being very actively thought about.

This interview hardly tried to get to grips or illuminate for listeners the key points being advocated by the UKIP, or the philosophy or practical implications behind their stance. On its own, this would have been bad enough. The fact that it was the only interview anywhere on radio of a representative of a party which attracted 7.7% of the votes is seriously worrying.

6. ITV - too little coverage?

ITN's news coverage is less in volume than that of BBC television. The proportion of time given to the Elections was also marginally less. It was covered mainly through short correspondent reports interspersed with 15-second soundbites from the Party leaders.

Short, sharp, and to the point - but was it substantive enough coverage in terms of the ITV licencees' Broadcasting Act requirements? And through not including any real treatment of the impact of the Election on voters, was this bias by default? It appears that a judgement was taken that the Election was not terribly important, despite the issues at stake, and despite the strong differences in the Labour and Conservative stance on the way forward.

ITN did acknowledge on one occasion that these differences existed, and that the European issues at stake were of some importance. On May 9, following the appearance of Romano Prodi on On the Record, it carried a package stating that Mr Prodi's views on the need for greater federalism had "sparked outrage". If so, it is hard to explain why they were not returned to or explored throughout the campaign.

A second package was more problematical, and needs considering in full. It showed that a week before voting, ITN was already writing the Election off in terms of voter interest.

ITN - euro apathy 2/6

6.45pm

Newsreader: The political parties have been stepping up their campaigning for the European Elections, which take place a week tomorrow. As ITN's Jo Andrews reports, one concern shared by all the Parties is the possibility of a very low turn out.

Jo Andrews: This is the Election campaign that has never quite got off the ground. In the past, Europe has raised strong feelings among voters, but not, it seems, this time. **A tribute, perhaps, to how well Labour has defused the issue since they were elected**. Labour's campaign has centred on the prime minister, out in South Wales today, and his record leading a Party which in his words, is at the heart of Europe...

Tony Blair: What's important to people is to vote for a Party that can deliver. Because none of these things, whether it's European funding, or it's influence in Europe, can come from any other Party but the one with influence in Europe.

Jo Andrew: For the Tories, this vote again is about not surrendering more power to Brussels, opposing the loss of Britain's veto, and above all fighting the Euro.

William Hague: There are huge political and constitutional risks involved in abolishing the pound and at stake could be the British people's democratic power to run the British economy in the interests of Britain.

(Pro-Euro Conservative Party broadcast, showing baseball-hatted drop-out: They say no man's an island...well they're wrong -)

Jo Andrew: But not all Conservatives agree

Pro- Europe broadcast continues: What's that...it's all foreign muck.

Jo Andrew: William Hague's views have been parodied by a splinter Party.

So, it's Paddy Ashdown, campaigning in the west country, who's presented his party as the most pro-European, with a strong accent on cleaning up corruption.

Paddy Ashdown; This time, every single vote will count. This time it's on proportional representation, something we have fought for for a very long time,

and that means it will not be wasted votes.

Jo Andrew: And a change to PR is crucial for other Parties too, such as the SNP and Plaid Cymru and the Greens. But in the end, the challenge for all is to persuade people to vote. Turnout is traditionally low and next week it could dip below 30% for the first time.

Far from being an objective piece of reporting, the contention that the Election campaign “has probably never got off the ground” was, arguably, probably at least partly because ITN had not mentioned it more than half a dozen times in total, with this only the third package in the three weeks of the campaign.

The piece opened with a questionable observation. Jo Andrews said that the reason why voters were not interested in the Election was (the qualifying “perhaps” doesn’t change the impression) a “tribute to the way the issue has been defused since Labour took office”. What issue? Europe as a whole, the Single Currency, or what? And what evidence was there that the issues, whatever they were, had been defused to the point that the electorate were content, let alone with Labour? This is highly questionable. Using the word ‘perhaps’ to qualify the assertion did not nullify its impact of telling potential voters that Labour were doing a good job over "defusing Europe" - whatever that meant.

The second flaw related to the use of the clips of the Pro-Euro Conservative Party immediately after the main footage of Hague, suggesting that that Party’s views ranked equally with those of Mr Hague. As a result, the clear implication was that the Tories - alone of the three major Parties discussed - was suffering from a major split in its ranks. The reality was that the Pro-Euro Conservative Party was supported by just two former MEPs, described by William Hague as fanatics. There was absolutely no evidence, and certainly none reported anywhere on ITN during the campaign, that the Tory Party was split, and that the Pro-Euro Conservative Party deserved to be ranked at the same level as the Conservative Party itself. If this was included, where was Arthur Scargill, and the UK Independence Party?

The imagery in the Party Political Broadcast (PPB) clip - showing a down-and-out in a baseball cap - juxtaposed to William Hague was also highly suspect, clearly creating the impression (as it meant to as a PPB) that there was something deeply seedy about the Tory stance and approach.

During Election week, there were two further packages, neither raising any balance issues.

Overall, an ITV viewer who was relying on the channel to inform him about the Election, would have had only the bare minimum to go on. The correspondent

packages made it clear that the Euro was an issue of contention, that no-one really cared about voting - and that, in any case, the ballot paper was quite complex.

The key question is why the Election was judged so unimportant.

7. BBC Breakfast

The coverage on BBC breakfast also contained several questionable points. The substantive coverage of European issues got off to an unbalanced start, and did not really recover, culminating in an eyebrow-raising incident on Election day itself. This repeated imbalance raises very serious questions about the editorial decision-making process within the programme, and suggests that there was a real unwillingness to treat properly the Euro-sceptic case. It also suggests that there was a lack of adequate planning.

Each of these problems was in one sense quite small - the omission of a balancing speaker, a short throw-away remark about Tory splits by a pro-European commentator, a reporter keen to puff a story by stating that something was “very embarrassing indeed” for Mr Hague. But that does not excuse items slipping through the net. This was an Election period, when all the most rigorous checks should have been in place to prevent imbalance, however small. And, at the same time, the very scarcity of coverage of the Election meant that every word in every report weighed that much more - what might have been almost lost if there had been extensive coverage was sharply exposed.

In the first days of the survey, there were a couple of items that suggested that this would not be the case. There was straight reporting of two surveys: one by Dun and Bradstreet, the other by Business for Sterling, both underlining that support for the Euro was waning. Each was balanced with counter-opinion. In the middle of the week, there was a short package on a forthcoming conference for the Americans in Europe about preparing them for dealing in Euros. Again, the pro-Euro line was balanced by a view from a Euro-sceptic, David Howell.

This promising start changed from the third day of the survey.

Patten appointment wrong-foots Hague

The first substantial item on a European-related issue was about the possible appointment of Chris Patten to the EC (May 12).

In this short piece, Carol Walker said unequivocally that it was “very embarrassing indeed” and “a real snub” to William Hague. One or two newspapers that morning had also said this - but, in the absence of real comment from Mr Hague, actual confirmation of the appointment and the fact

that this was during an Election period in a broadcasting environment, was this degree of emphasis really balanced reporting?

And was it really the Blair (master) stroke that she claimed? We now know that the appointment was still under discussion.

What was **not** pointed out (against the snub line and which a reporter of Carol Walker's experience would have known) was that there is nothing new in prime ministers appointing former political opponents to senior positions in Europe - John Major, for example, appointed Neil Kinnock, because, by convention, the UK's two Commissioners are drawn from each major Party.

The next twist in the report (and this took it deep into electioneering territory) was that, because Mr Patten "had very different views on Europe" to Mr Hague, this was bad news for Mr Hague. But, in relation to the Election campaign, was it? How Europhile is he? Was he for or against the current manifesto? Was he for or against the Single Currency? Walker did not say and, by omission, muddied the waters.

If she did know for certain that Mr Patten was certain to embarrass Mr Hague through comments in her notebook, in an Election period - in the absence of direct comment from Mr Patten - she should have qualified her reporting by saying "thought to be bad news". Against her claims of embarrassment, the Daily Telegraph that morning (13/5) pointed out that Mr Hague's own nominee, Sir Alastair Goodlad, was himself also pro-Europe (as indeed was Mr Hague himself - in Europe, but not run by it, as he pointed out to David Frost on Sunday the previous weekend).

Walker introduced a further unsubstantiated anti-Hague twist (raising the spectre of Tory splits) by saying that there was a wing of the Party that would be "very disappointed indeed" because it wanted Mr Patten to replace Mr Hague (by implication, after he lost the next Election).

The overall impression was to paint Hague as being seriously wrong-footed by a classic stroke by Mr Blair. During an Election campaign, the Tory position on Europe and the Euro was, yet again, called into question.

The ballot paper and Tory splits

Breakfast News opened their coverage of the Election proper by inviting Michael White of the Guardian to explain the ballot paper and the proportional representation. He explained both very well. Unfortunately, however, his views about the campaign were not balanced and they were not challenged.

Rob Bonnett: What are the likely issues in all this?

Michael White: Well one thing that neither Tony Blair nor William Hague is especially keen to talk about is the Euro. Why? Because there is a referendum coming up in a couple of years, probably after the General Election. Tony Blair wants to kick it into touch, and of course, it divides William Hague's Party. There's been a Pro-Euro break-away Party, their names are on that list, launched only yesterday, with rude horrid remarks about Mr Hague being a disaster.

Rob Bonnett: Um, And of course some of these MEPs appear to be rather remote from their constituency.

Michael White was totally wrong about William Hague - evidence elsewhere says he was very keen to talk about the Euro. This highlights the problem with the piece, and it raises the question as to why Michael White, as a known pro-Labour commentator, was chosen to launch the campaign coverage that was apparently meant to be straightforwardly informational. Instead, it gave (yet again) the clear impression of Tory splits on the Euro. And the remarks, which might have been balanced by a rejoinder from the presenter, went totally unchecked. The result was another small but significant example of imbalance.

Of course, he also said Tony Blair's desire was to kick the issue into touch. But making two negative points did not cancel out the impression given about the Tories.

The Euro Slide

The next questionable item - following a reasonably balanced item on the withholding tax (May 25) - was on May 28, after further falls in the Euro.

The package by Angela Garvey was pegged on Eddie George's evidence to the Treasury Select Committee the previous day. It contained commentary that expressed some doubts about the performance and prospects for the Euro, but the two speakers, including Otmar Issing, were firmly pro-euro, both giving the firm impression that the fall in value was nothing to be concerned about. Remarks from Mervyn King counter-balanced them to some extent, but came from a different perspective. On the first airing of the item, their opinions were properly balanced by the Euro-sceptic views of Stephen Barrow.

This was fine at 6.14 - but not so at 7.40 when the piece went out without the interview with Steve Barrow. This was the first (and virtually the only) piece on the Euro that the main (7-9am) Breakfast News audience had seen - and it did not include the Euro-sceptic perspective.

Euro sequence

On June 1, BBC Business Breakfast devoted four consecutive segments (running from 6.37, and totalling nearly 18 minutes) to the Euro, looking at its performance from the perspective of Frankfurt, Amsterdam and the UK, with reporter packages. These - the longest single sequence on the European Election anywhere on television, apart from the one-to-one interviews on OTR - were linked by a studio discussion looking at the recent falls and probing the reasons.

Part of the package - relating to Frankfurt - was repeated on BBC Breakfast News at 7.40

Each of the packages was reasonably constructed, and contained some Euro-sceptic content (for example from Sir Stanley Kalms). But it stood out that Holland, the country chosen to illustrate the reception of the Euro, was probably the most sure of it, and the one probably least affected by the value. Why, by contrast, was not Italy, Germany, Ireland or Spain chosen?

But it was the choice of studio guests that was extraordinary. This was supposed to be an overview of the performance and the reception of the Euro to date. Yet both - one from the CBI, the other from TSB Lloyds - were enthusiastic about the Euro, and put forward no opinions that suggested otherwise. They were not challenged in their views, even when it was suggested that the real picture was that the dollar should actually be sliding against the Euro. An example underlines the degree of pro-Euro sentiment.

Kate Barker: I think it's important not to exaggerate the significance in the fall in the value of the Euro. As far as the Europeans are concerned, the value of the currency now has much the same significance as it has for the people of the US - external trade is not very, outside the Euro-zone, is not very big relevant to the GDP. A fall in the value of the Euro doesn't matter hugely, in that regard, it does matter of course helping the German exporters that had difficulty in exporting of course to some traditional markets in Eastern Europe. They need to find new markets, and the slide in the value of the Euro helps them to do that. And it should be good news for European growth longer term.

Michael White (reprise)

On Election day itself, Breakfast Time carried one of the most questionable items of all. Broadcasters are clearly obliged not to show bias as people go to the polls. This piece did. The fact that it was a newspaper review did not excuse it.

Michael White: But our own war by other means today, Europe's Elections. Go out and vote, pleads The Mirror, use your ballot paper to make a sun hat or line

the budgie cage says the Euro-sceptic Sun. Others put the boot in in their own way. The Euro-sceptic Times reminds Tory voters that Messrs Heseltine and Clarke are poised to back the Single Currency campaign soon. More subtly, the anti-Tory Independent highlights William Hague's financial problems. The Tories billionaire treasurer and tax exile, Michael Ashcroft, is not fit to get a peerage, it suggests. And oh yes, what's Ffion Hague wearing round her neck? Oh yes, it's a Save the Pound Campaign pound sign in diamonds, a £3,000 second anniversary gift from her husband Billie. Heaven help us.

The closing comment was a humorous and a (just) reasonable observation on Election day in the spirit of the newspaper review slot. The earlier references were not. Michael White chose two lines which were both anti-Tory, and they were shown prominently on screen. Saying one of them was in a Euro-sceptic publication did not balance it - if anything it strengthened the impact, as it implied that even in the pro-Tory press there was a split so serious that it warranted reporting. It was selected above everything else about Europe in the press that day - the Mail, for example, saying that Tony Blair had been forced to concede that he would lose seats - despite the fact that, as a story, it was little more than a flyer. Kenneth Clarke or Michael Heseltine had not, as the headline shown clearly suggested, personally come out as saying that they supported the new moves in support of the Euro. It might well be that they do so. But this, on Election day, planted a clear impression that might influence people's voting intentions.

The first mention was compounded by the second - another flyer of a story, calculated in an anti-Tory paper to cause maximum embarrassment to Mr Hague on voting day. Showing it might have been justified if it had been countered with a pro-Tory story, but it wasn't.

This was a clear breach of balance on Election day which cannot be excused by saying that the views expressed, or items chosen, were those of the contributor, or indeed, that events would subsequently bear out the Times story. At the time, it was a flyer. And the duty of broadcasters on Election day is very specific.

8. BBC TV news

The main problem of BBC TV news as a whole in relation to impartiality was the omission of coverage. There was virtually nothing about issues *behind* the news - as does happen frequently on BBC TV news programmes, for example, on (28/6) with a story in Northern Ireland on the background to the peace process, or during the Election campaign on GM foods. At the same time, the coverage of campaign stories scarcely ventured outside the narrow confines of the Party daily conferences, ensuring that viewers' only impressions of the Elections were soundbites about the Euro, Labour's attacks on Labour, and the Liberals belief that both Parties were at fault.

This was hardly likely to enthuse voters - or bring home to them that there were important issues at stake.

There were other problems. The 9pm bulletin on 27/5 had the first piece describing the UK view of the Elections, pegged on a visit by Tony Blair to Paris to take part in a European Socialist Parties' Election rally. It showed Blair as the statesman, and described him as a "passionate European".

Robin Oakley heavily featured UK voter apathy, saying that turnout here was around 30% compared with around 50% in France. He said that voters were not enthused - few turning out at a Euro Election rally in Stoke - and providing vox pops to support the contention. Anthony King argued that British voters felt they had been asked to vote too much recently and, in any case, perceived that the EU Parliament had no clout.

By contrast, Charles Miller, described as a European Parliament lobbyist, said that he and many like him were spending vastly increased time in Brussels because they realised that MEPs had more powers in the law making process than their counterparts at Westminster had. Oakley signed off on the line that Mr Blair's passionate Europeanism had not fired up UK electors - and he and other Party leaders would have to work hard if they wanted to do so.

It's hard to see quite what Oakley was trying to achieve with the piece. But it was one-sided in that it showed only Mr Blair in electioneering mode, and was not followed by any other similarly one-sided pieces focusing on Mr Hague or Mr Ashdown. As such, this was potentially a serious piece of bias: Tony Blair seen on the European stage, without any opportunity for the other parties.

Then there was the coverage of the Labour manifesto launch on May 18. BBC TV news covered those of the Lib Dems and the Conservative Party on the previous two days and both were short packages, broadly covering the same ground and with the same emphasis. Labour, however, merited three different treatments, and their three most senior political commentators, Robin Oakley, John Sargeant and Emma Udwin, handled them.

What was notable between the 1pm and 9pm news versions was that the whole tenor of the piece changed. Emma Udwin opened at 1pm by saying Labour was fighting not on a purely British manifesto, but "one agreed with the other Parties of the left". By 9pm this was changed by Oakley to "Labour's candidates are fighting too, on the European Socialist Party's manifesto" - a subtle but important difference.

Udwin mentioned that "the document, which also proposes closer economic co-operation, a European charter of rights, strengthened rights for workers and deeper co-operation on defence - and increased majority voting that means less

opportunity for British ministers to veto proposals. The Tories see Labour's platform as a recipe for a European superstate". These four points were picked out in a graphic.

Robin Oakley's emphasis, again, was different: "Campaigners are stressing domestic policies as much as Europe's future, and they insist that being pro-European doesn't involve backing for a federal European superstate". He chose four different points to emphasise from those chosen by Emma Udwin: "…It promises to boost British influence, and to modernise and open up European institutions. It says they'll bring decision-making closer to the people and it backs increased co-operation in defence".

These may be differences in style, but they look to be more than that because the emphasis *is* so different. Did the Labour Party object to the first piece, as the Lib Dems claimed (Daily Telegraph 20/5) and the BBC have denied, with the result the changes were made? And why were three separate correspondents used to handle the launch, a treatment different to that afforded to the other main Parties?

Transcript of Labour Manifesto Launch BBC 1pm 19/5

Anna Ford: Tony Blair has has launched the Labour Party's campaign for next month's Elections to the European Parliament. He contrasted what he called his Party's positive position over Europe with the divisions in the Conservative Party.

Emma Udwin: Canvassing in Britain, but not on a purely British manifesto, Labour is campaigning on proposals agreed with the other Parties of the left. Ministers don't think the conditions are right yet to join the new Single Currency, but the manifesto tells voters that the Euro will be good for business and consumers. Labour helped write the document, which also proposes closer economic co-operation, a European charter of rights, strengthened rights for workers and deeper co-operation on defence - and increased majority voting that means less opportunity for British ministers to veto proposals. The Tories see Labour's platform as a recipe for a European superstate. Tony Blair denies it.

Tony Blair: It's time to end, once and for all, our ambivalence towards Europe. I have confidence in our entry. We can state positively that we need not be fearful of Europe.

Emma Udwin: Labour is pressing Europe to integrate only where necessary, leaving nations to do the rest. Labour plans to fight these Elections as much on its record as on its manifesto, having won the lifting of the beef ban and protected the British rebate. The claim will be that its positive approach to Europe reaps results than the Tories' more sceptical tack.

6 O'Clock News - John Sargeant report

John Sargeant: Labour like to bring a sense of order to their Election campaigns and, this morning, the candidates were put on parade with their leader. The message was simple: we know what we are doing over Europe and the Tories are still in a mess. With plenty of women candidates, they want to portray themselves as the Party who can make a success of EU membership. If that involves stealing some of the Tories' own clothes so much the better...

Tony Blair: It is also a choice between Labour, the Party of enterprise and business, and the Conservatives, whose extreme European position makes them incapable of ever representing the interest of Britain in Europe.

John Sargeant: Labour promises to boost British influence in Europe, modernise European institutions, to bring decision-making closer to the people, and to increase co-operation on defence. In their campaign, which has already started, the Party want to encourage the idea that it should end its ambivalence on Europe, but Mr Blair is still not prepared to say when the uncertainty over the Single Currency will end.

Tony Blair: What I think is important is not actually to put on an arbitrary time limit, but to put ourselves into the position by making preparations so that we can join if we should wish to do so.

John Sargeant: Labour are still well ahead in the opinion polls but Party workers know that the real problem is making sure their supporters bother to vote.

Labour party manifesto BBC 9pm 19/5

9pm Peter Sissons: The Prime Minister has launched the Labour Party manifesto for the European Elections. Tony Blair insisted that only Labour could represent Britain's interests, and he contrasted what he described as Labour's positive approach to Europe with divisions over the issue in the Conservative Party. Here's Robin Oakley, our chief political correspondent.

Robin Oakley: Marshalled like film extras against the Prime Minister's backdrop, Labour's obedient Euro candidates displayed their manifestos to order. Mr Blair is using the warmest language any British leader has done about Europe, promising to make the British end their hang-ups about Europe. And to use it to boost employment. He spent much of today's launch attacking Tory attitudes. Now, he implied, it was new Labour which wore the pinstripes, so offering the people a choice...

Tony Blair: Between Labour, the Party of enterprise and business, and the Conservatives, whose extreme European position makes them incapable of

representing the true interest of British business in Europe.

Robin Oakley: Labour's manifesto claims success already in Europe in the budget rebate and relaxing the beef ban. It promises to boost British influence, and to modernise and open up European institutions. It says they'll bring decision-making closer to the people and it backs increased co-operation in defence. Labour's candidates are fighting too, on the European Socialist party's manifesto, which calls for less use of the national veto and warmly backs the Single Currency. Mr Blair's for the Euro on principle but, with voters still doubtful and the Tories promising to save the Pound, it won't be a highlight of the campaign

Tony Blair: We believe we should be part of a successful Single Currency, but the test must be on our own national economic interest, and we have set out the conditions to meet it.

Robin Oakley: Campaigners are stressing domestic policies as much as Europe's future, and they insist that being pro-European doesn't involve backing for a federal European superstate. After some shocks in the recent Scottish, Welsh and Local Government Elections, Labour is treating this contest with care. European Parliamentary Elections have in the past proved prime opportunities for the exercise of a protest vote.