

BBC “Europe and Us” week

Survey: February 18 – 23, 2001

Conducted by Minotaur Media Tracking for Global Britain

Part 1 - summary

The BBC trailed heavily across television, radio and the internet its strand “Europe and Us”, claiming that it would give important insights into the relationships and issues involved. While the programmes involved were in many elements wide-ranging, the strand appeared to lack any real cohesion. As such this appeared to be a “spinning” exercise, a shiny package designed to show that the corporation was covering Europe adequately.

The important programmes during the week were:

Referendum Street (BBC1 Sunday 18th February): This was a “reality” genre programme that attempted to show how a referendum on the single currency might work, what the arguments would be and how they would be deployed. In the event, it fell into several traps that left the viewer not properly equipped to judge the import or veracity of the outcome. The key weakness, at the very beginning – which would have been relatively easy to address through a psephologist - was that it did not tell the audience what the sample size was, how the initial survey of their views had been conducted and even what was the question they had been asked to answer. Further and equally serious, it did not say how the pro- and anti-teams had been chosen, how representative they had been of the real forces that would be deployed and how they arrived at their tactics or approach. As such, it was impossible to gauge whether, within the time available, each team of canvassers had been as effective as they could be in deploying their arguments – or whether the result had been the consequence of superior tactics rather than the arguments themselves. There was - for example - a suspicion, not at all provable, but nonetheless there, that the “anti” team (led by David Mellor) was less voter-friendly than the “pros”, led by the young and untainted Lembit Opik. Even if this was an illusion, the problem was that it was not possible to know. The presenter, Nicky Campbell, did say the whole exercise was a “bit of fun”, presumably warning in one catch-all phrase of these shortcomings. But this was not enough to remedy the shortcomings. Viewers were not told in clear enough terms that the original sample size was (probably) 50 and that as few as 8 had switched from the pro-Pound to the pro-Euro group. Instead, the impression given was a big switch to the Euro. And the reality was that the programme’s result was already being used the following day by Europhiles to argue that people’s minds could definitely be swayed “once the real arguments” about the Euro were put (for example, on the Nicky Campbell Radio 5 Live show included in this survey and by Will Hutton in the Observer, Appendix 2). Of course that may eventually be the case. But viewers of BBC1 should have been far better informed about the realities of this exercise than they actually were.

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A memo supplied by Theresa Villiers (Appendix 1), one of the pro-Pound team, underlines the conclusions above. It seems that the producers did not make clear the sample size, even among those taking part. She raised further doubts about the way the poll was conducted, suggesting that the pro-Pound team may not have visited as many as the Pro-Euro canvassers. If this was the case, then the programme was even more deeply flawed than it was possible to glean from what was broadcast.

A further level of questions about the programme is raised by the role of the associated website (analysis contained in the section reviewing the content of the segment as a whole). This had much more material within it than the programme itself, particularly about the detailed arguments for and against joining the Euro. By comparison, those chosen for inclusion in the BBC1 programme were lightweight. It seems that, by confining this material to the website, a decision was made that this argument was too “in-depth” for the overall audience - raising the issue of why this should be the case. The programme itself could have been allowed to run for longer, or be split into two parts. The role of the BBC is to illuminate political issues for its entire audience, not just a section of it.

Will Hutton’s article in the Observer about his taking part in the programme also underlined the problems with Referendum Street. Despite the dubious and opaque methodology, he used it as clear evidence that pro-Euro arguments were more appealing to voters. Other commentators – for example Paul Hoggart writing in *The Times* on February 19 – failed to pick up on the fundamental weaknesses of the exercise and actually argued that “the whole exercise was revealing because so many people changed their minds”.

Newsround (BBC1 Monday 19th – Thursday 22nd February): This was a series of four special reports designed to bring the programme’s young audience a deeper understanding of the EU. They were prime examples of skewed treatment of European affairs, all the more alarming because they were aimed at children. The final item sought, for example, to bring a taster of children’s views for and against joining the Euro and greater involvement in Europe. Rudimentary analysis showed that there were more views included that were pro Europe. The opening sequence contained deeper flaws: it was supposed to be an objective report on the importance of the Referendum Street programme. In fact, it was reverse – a round-up which showed the winning side in a far more favourable light than the anti-Europe camp. These were basic mistakes in the best traditions of propaganda films – showing the pro-Euro arguments being put by smiling young people and the pro-Euro result being greeted with cheering and adulation; by contrast, the anti-Euro argument was put by Simon Heffer, who with the best will in the world – wearing a hacking jacket and looking rather glum – was not the sort of figure who would appeal to a young audience. Yet he was chosen above both Theresa Villiers and Karishma Gillani, both of whom had been on the anti-team and would have been much more in keeping with the images chosen to represent the other side. Going further, the arguments put forward during the item for and against the Euro suggested that greater involvement in Europe would bring more pizza, more football and better weather...while those against it could only muster keeping the pound for tradition’s sake.

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The second item in the series was based on a light-hearted search for the geographical heart of the EU and concluded with the question from the presenter: “In Britain, one of the things that has most angered opponents of European Union is the fact that if we do join up fully, we’ll also have to stop using pounds and pence... Are you bothered? Well maybe not, but I wondered what your parents and grandparents think?” This was an ambiguous remark that could be interpreted as suggesting that this was an issue unimportant to children. The third part of the series – a top ten of EU issues – contained several factual errors. Most significantly, it repeated, in its summation of the Euro-sceptic case, a number of factual inaccuracies about the EU, saying for example, that it wanted to ban toy advertising, when this is currently only the hope of Sweden and that the sales of second-hand computer games had been banned in charity shops when the actual regulation only related to selling faulty goods. These inaccuracies – apart from being journalistically indefensible - suggested that the programme’s research into the Euro-sceptic case was not as thorough as it should have been. The danger is that in spreading such false information, the real Euro-sceptic case was both undermined and ignored. Of equal interest to children, for example, could have been a point about the ecological problems posed by over-fishing, which some argue is the result of the Common Fisheries policy.

Churchill the European (BBC Radio 4, Monday 19/2)

This seemed to be part of the growing efforts to ensure that Churchill is cast in the mould of a visionary who wanted a united Europe on the lines now evolving. What he actually meant and wanted are murky, complex waters on which historians, neither Euro-sceptic nor Europhile, cannot agree. What is *certain* is that this is an area which needs treating with great care – because Churchill saw Britain outside and above any United Europe that might evolve and his reasons for advocating unity in the rest of continent are far from clear. This was absolutely central to his beliefs. Notwithstanding, David Sells pulled out and pushed to great prominence lines from speeches he had delivered, during the war itself, but most in the period 1946-51, calling for a united or federated Europe that lead to a lasting peace. Churchill did call for an alliance between Germany and France, he did want a United States of Europe and he was even keen to contemplate the possibility of a joint European army. The danger of isolating these parts of his political advocacy is that they appear to be supporting something he was not. Everything he argued needs to be put in context. David Sells instead brought to the party Europeans who believed that Churchill had played a crucial part in laying the foundation stones of a united Europe. He went to people such as Sir John Coalville, his former private secretary who put into context Churchill’s remarks. But the overriding impression was that here was a man in favour of the Europe that we now have – which he wasn’t. A better title of this programme would have been “Churchill *and* Europe”; and the programme as a whole should have paid more attention to putting into context the pro- Europe remarks.

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Nicky Campbell phone-in (Radio 5 Live, 9am Monday 19/2):

Any suspicions among Euro-sceptics that the dice are loaded against them in trying to build programmes that fairly put their case may well have been reinforced by this programme, both in its set-up and what was actually said during its three-hour duration. The first fault in this programme, which sought to focus the issues raised by Ireland's experience of the EU and its relationship to the UK, was that the panellists were overwhelmingly Europhile in their opinions and responses. The most prominent, William Maher, of the European Movement and Jane Davies, a journalist working in Brussels, were brought in on 14 separate occasions, whereas Norah Bennett, an Irish Christian Democrat, the only prominent Euro-sceptic, was given the space for only three contributions. The initial Europhile panellist content was strongly buttressed by Peter Hain –in the core part of the programme - who, in expressing his pro-Europe and pro-government views went virtually unchallenged. David Byrne, Ireland's European Commissioner, the second main guest, was also given substantial space to put forward his adulation of the EU and all its works. But, unlike Peter Hain, he was challenged in his views to some extent, first by Nicky Campbell himself and then by two callers and Norah Bennett. There were further Europhile contributions from four members of the invited audience, against none from Euro-sceptics.

The main Euro-sceptic content, by far the minority part of the programme, came from piecemeal questions from listeners – there were 11, against five from people making points that were Europhile in tone. The Euro-sceptic points raised were wide-ranging: from the perceived incompetence of Brussels, to loss of sovereignty and individuality. In addition, there were sequences where Nicky Campbell, as presenter, played devil's advocate in putting Euro-sceptic points to guests. This was most prominent during the sequence with David Byrne. The approach of the producers appeared to be to use these contributions to balance the clearly Europhile impetus created by panellists and guest contributors. In reality this did not happen – the majority of the programme was Europhile in tone.

Furthermore, the programme did not get to grips with some key topical issues of Irish membership and its relevance to the UK – for example, the whole area of loss of sovereignty and control evidenced by the overheating of the Irish economy, perhaps the most important issue to the UK at the time, was scarcely raised. And Nicky Campbell, as programme host, though putting some firm questions from the Euro-sceptic perspective, also strayed at times into questionable territory. He put it to David Byrne for example that Euro-scepticism might be the result of “xenophobia” or the “Little Englander” mentality, when it might have been better to leave such phraseology to his guests rather than creating the impression that this was his own opinion. And on one issue – that the British press was “mainly Euro-sceptic” – he got his facts wrong, or did not clarify them sufficiently to avoid the impression he was wrong.

Food Wars (BBC1, Wednesday 22/2): This was a programme which sought to bring into focus, warts and all, the impact of the EU on a number of issues relating to food. In some respects, it pulled no punches, spelling out the absurdity of the 27-year battle over whether chocolate produced in the UK, because it usually contained non-milk fat, was, in

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fact “chocolate”. It illustrated that there was a strong anti-European feeling in the battle over Steve Thoburn, the so-called “metric martyr”, a UK trader who was being prosecuted because he wanted to sell his produce in imperial measures. There was clear criticism, too, of the Common Agricultural Policy – most strongly that its production policies were leading to corruption - and claims that the BSE crisis could on the one hand break the EU budget and, on the other, was leading to forces in individual countries that were pulling the community apart. In these points, a variety of opinions, including those of Euro-sceptics such as Lord Powell, were brought into play. But this was not the entire picture. At the heart of the programme were contributions from two European Commissioners, Neil Kinnock and David Byrne, whose main arguments were that, although the EU had got things wrong in the past, they were now being remedied. The presenter, Adrian Chiles, excluded some important areas of concern, for example the fisheries policy, while focusing on relatively easy ones, such as chocolate or cucumbers. On the CAP, his treatment was limited and did not get to grips with, or even flag, some of the key concerns of farmers or consumers – such as the damage being inflicted on the environment and waste. On metrication and food uniformity – though highlighting the absurdity of the rules relating to straight cucumbers and bananas - he edged towards the conclusion that the problems lay with individual member governments, even though this is hotly contested, leaving the last word to Commissioners Kinnock and Byrne. Overall, he did not include as wide a variety of Euro-sceptic opinion as the time given to Commissioners Kinnock and Byrne, with the result that there was a degree of imbalance. And some of his own comments – for example about membership of the EU being responsible directly for the choice now available to UK consumers – appeared to be pushing one particular point of view.

Question Time (BBC1, Thursday 22/2): By contrast, a special European edition of Question Time during this week was a model of fairness and balance. It brought into play everything it should – a wide range of questions, both set-piece and spontaneous, probing but fair chairmanship from David Dimbleby and a wide range of opinions from panellists who had been chosen to give the main strands of opinion on the UK’s relationship with the EU. It is a shame that other programmes in the sequence could not meet the same high standards.

Overall, the key programmes in the “Europe and Us” week showed that the BBC’s treatment of questions related to the European Union remains deeply suspect. The BBC claimed that the purpose of the programme strand was to give deeper insight into the current state of Britain’s relationship with the EU. An integral part of that is that the Conservatives, the main opposition party, is sceptical of the Euro currency. Yet in most of these programmes, the Euro-sceptic perspective was relegated to second place or not fully brought into focus. In some cases, such as in the Nicky Campbell phone-in, government spokesmen or EU Commissioners seemed to be offered centre stage, with no direct counter-views from senior Euro-sceptics. And on none of these programmes was there a front-bench Conservative spokesman, or even a Commissioner who was from a Conservative background.

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Website:

The material available on the BBC website was focused mainly on Referendum Street. Some of this was a valuable adjunct to the main programme, but it did raise the question of why this was not deemed important enough to be offered to the audience as whole, particularly as it contained the more substantive arguments about Euro membership. Otherwise, the web material seemed to fall into the same trap as the strand as a whole – there was little evidence of overall cohesion, some programmes and topics did not have a web presence at all and it was therefore hard to discern the central focus.

Cultural issues:

The treatment of Europe as a cultural as opposed to a political entity, was interesting in that in several programmes – notably Referendum Street and Food Wars – presenters put across the unambiguous notion that joining “Europe” the political identity had delivered more cultural choice through the wider availability of foodstuffs. This, of course, is a matter of complex debate. The danger was that the presentation made it seem that being in Europe was the delivery of more (pleasing) choice. It would have been interesting to see the reaction of residents of Referendum Street if the food offered to them at the “Euro fair” – in which they could exchange chocolate Euros for delicacies such as filo, pastry and pizza – had instead been the Belgian speciality of horsemeat or the Spanish live baby elvers.

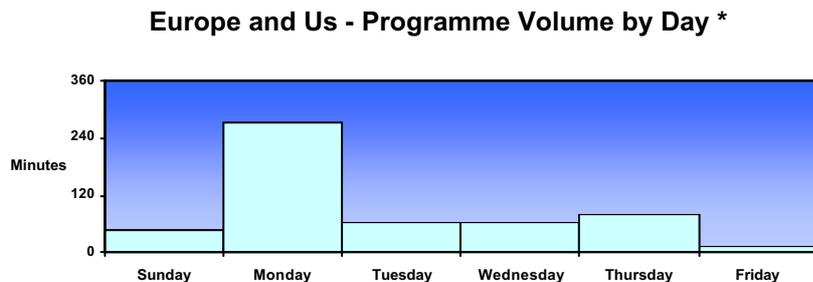
Part 2 – the programmes and the strand

1. “Europe and Us” - overview

The “Europe and Us” package delivered programmes across a range of BBC channels and services, including terrestrial television, radio and the Internet. The strand also included a certain amount of region-specific output, although for the purposes of the monitoring project only nationally available material was assessed and analysed.

Some programmes were stand-alone features (Referendum Street, Food Wars, Churchill the European) while others introduced debates surrounding Europe into established programme formats (The Nicky Campbell Phone-in, Newsround, The Citizens, Question Time). This cross-media approach was perhaps intended to raise the strand’s profile and ensure awareness of “Europe and Us” across an array of core-audiences. However, the tactic was not without its shortcomings. Primarily, of course, it meant that those wishing to follow the strand for its entirety were faced with something of a challenge. A number of programmes were broadcast during the daytime (and therefore traditional ‘work hours’) others were placed towards the latter end of evening schedules. This raises concerns as to how far audiences were able to engage with the package as a whole and whether the disparate elements that comprised “Europe and Us” ever actually gelled successfully.

It became clear, as the week progressed, that little attempt was being made to draw the strand together in anything more than a superficial way. Each programme began with a “Europe and Us” ‘ident’ – a bulldog surrounded by the European Union flag or, in the case of radio programmes, a verbal introduction. Aside from this one common factor, programmes for the most part made little reference to others in the package and, for the most part, appeared to exist in isolation from each other. As the week progressed the “Europe and Us” strand itself appeared to lose momentum - by Friday the only programme available to national audiences was Radio 4’s The Citizens.



* National programmes only, includes repeated material

The responsibility of rounding off the package fell to the regular Thursday edition of Question Time, which, by default, was the last substantive nationally available programme in the “Europe and Us” week. Although the programme produced a lively and well-organised debate concentrating solely on European matters, it remained fixed to its traditional format and as such did not deal specifically with the programmes of the previous week, nor with the particular issues they raised. Cohesion could have been provided through daily commentaries or perhaps a closing summation at the end of the week – some sort of final debate was certainly necessary in order to pull together the variety of issues the package raised and to offer both public and politicians a ‘right to reply’.

The only other avenue providing an overview of the “Europe and Us” week came by way of a set of dedicated web pages, although as shall be demonstrated this too raised a number of issues and problems.

2. Referendum Street

BBC1, Sunday 18th February

Nicky Campbell (programme host): *“This is just a bit of fun. This whole exercise. There is absolutely nothing scientific in it”.*

Commentary

This was the opening salvo in the heavily-trailed “Europe and Us” week. It was the only programme in the series specifically about membership of the Euro. .

The programme opened saying that it contained a “unique contest” – but without explaining what, precisely, the basis of the “unique contest” was, other than that it was 48-hours long and there were 50 residents of the street who would be lobbied about what they thought about the Euro. Nicky Campbell said that 35% supported the Euro at the outset and 65% were against it. That immediately raised important questions:

- **The arithmetic did not add up – how in a sample of 50 people, could there be support from 35%?**
- **The reference to the 50 was passing and crucially, did not elaborate how they had been chosen. Were they, for example, a representative sample in terms of age and occupation and the sort of families they were in? No clue was offered.**
- **It was also not made clear what question they were asked. Was it simply “do you want the UK to join the Euro?”, or something more complex?**

The danger of vagueness in dealing with a serious political issue such as attitudes to the referendum was that – while it might make an amusing television format – it did not treat the issue seriously enough. People’s views are swayed by such programmes and viewers deserve to be given the full framework with care. It would have been relatively easy to introduce a psephologist or other commentator to explain the set-up.

Nicky Campbell vested the sample with some basis as being representative by claiming that the breakdown was “like the country as a whole” and then adding: “remember fairly soon it could be happening for real”. Further authority for the exercise was conferred by the phrase “so what happens when the road is blitzed and bombarded with the arguments?”.

The choice of pro- and anti-campaigners for the Euro assumed crucial importance in the context of the methodology of the programme. But in the presentation, Nicky Campbell gave no clues about how they were chosen. Was the production view that the campaigners on both sides representative of those who were advancing the arguments on a national level? If so, viewers should have been told the basis on which they were selected and why they were typical.

Nicky Campbell also gave no clue about how much time was allowed by each side to develop and prosecute their arguments, though it was implied, that each voter was visited at least once. On the surface, the choice of young Lembit Opik, Marcelle d’Argy Smith and Will Hutton provides a stronger team than the discredited government minister David Mellor, Simon Heffer and Austin Mitchell. Of course, this is arguable – but that is the problem. How exactly were these people chosen, how good were they individually at presenting this particular debate in this particular devised-for-television format? Obviously, all were seasoned campaigners in one form or another, but in a limited exercise of this nature the qualifications and idiosyncrasies of the individuals are inevitably magnified and it becomes impossible to judge whether what went on – and particularly off-camera – was properly regulated in relation to the overall objectives of the exercise.

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In the light of his recent track record, it would be certainly be legitimate to question, for example, the voter-friendliness of David Mellor – and Simon Heffer, was not, on the face of it, the most likely populist campaigner. Of course, that cannot be objectively proven either way – but thereby hangs one of the legion of problems with this type of format.

The approach adopted by the programme was first to show each side pitched against those who disagreed with them. The opening substantive argument, deployed by Lembit Opik, was that 3m jobs in the UK depended on joining the Euro.

Rosalind Wheeler said in response that she was “pro-British”, to which Mr Opik replied, he was too.

David Mellor was then seen attempting to convert Perry and Sherry Barrow, respectively anti and pro the Euro if the currency was a success. The latter said she did not want to change the currency. Mr Mellor’s on-camera response was that people should “trust their instincts”.

The scene moved back to Rosalind Wheeler, who argued to Mr Opik and Ms D’Argy Smith that her grandfather and father had fought to keep the country as it was. Mr Opik responded, “it may be within our best interests to be within the European currency, but still maintain our identity”.

Back with Perry Barrow, David Mellor then advanced that if the UK joined the Euro, it was for keeps, despite what Romano Prodi and others said.

After Lembit Opik left, Nicky Campbell asked Ms Wheeler if they had found a chink in her armour. She responded that she had not heard anything new.

The next scene was a European food fair, which Nicky Campbell said “to find out what it’s like to swap Euros”.

But there was an inherent problem in this scene-staging. In fact, the whole tone and colour of the fair suggested that Europe was given something positive – ie a variety of food. Was this something likely to sway residents? Of course, it’s not possible to know definitively, but there must have been a risk that this could be the case.

Either way, the fair underlined the difficulty in running an event like this, because it is hard to define what the impact of creating such an event about Europe was likely to be on the minds of the prospective voters. Although the intention was to focus more interest on the voting event, it made Europe seem about additional choice.

This is what Nicky Campbell said: “We are at our special Euro fair and people are spending their Euros which they go from a very nice chap at the gate. Six Euros each, albeit chocolate Euros and they are buying lots of lovely European food with their Euros”.

Thus this specially-created “jolly event with a nice chap at the gate giving out Euros for lovely European food” was deliberately engineered to create an atmosphere. Would that sway the result? Of course, people are not that gullible, but why could the event not been at least partly a festival of “lovely British food” paid for in pounds?

In the soap box sequence that followed, Lembit Opik argued that “Britishness does not depend on how you pay for your living and what you buy”, that it would allow “the celebration of my Britishness right across the continent and share my currency too”, concluding “say yes to the Euro and yes to a better future in the United Kingdom”

Theresa Villiers said, by contrast, that joining the Euro would “transfer the power over the economy to unaccountable bankers in Frankfurt”...and “if you want to preserve democracy in Europe you should vote to keep the UK out of the Euro... it means a single, centrally set interest rate that would be wrong for our

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economy nine times out of ten” She added: “Ask the Irish what happens if you go into the Eurozone when your economy is out of step with it”.

Nicky Campbell said the next stage was to “sniff out the waverers”. One of the anti-Euro campaigners was heard saying: “the best bit was to have interest rates under control, making them suit (our) economic conditions, rather than those elsewhere.

Will Hutton and Julia Gash were then seen speaking to Rebecca Wood. She said she was not traditionally British – but not European either. Ms Gash asked if she was happy being both a Yorkshire woman and British, to which she replied she was...that her main problem was that she did not think of herself as particularly European and having a currency called a Euro “ was a bit alien to me”. Ms Gash responded that she had an “overnight pack” that had been drawn up “to tip the balance in favour of the Euro”.

It was not stated whether both sides had such packs and on what basis they had been drawn up. This was crucial information for viewers in deciding whether or not campaigning was equally balanced on both sides.

There was a brief clip with Tony Banks declaring the importance of closing garden gates after canvassing voters.

Nicky Campbell then moved on to David Mellor and Simon Heffer with the McClymont family. David Mellor argued that you did not have to be rampantly anti- Europe to be against the Euro...rather they are “biting off more than they can chew”, they are “inefficient” – “I know from personal experience” – and there was no rush to move into the Single Currency. Simon Heffer introduced the danger of losing economic freedom in the context of being with either “well-off” or “better-off”. Mrs McClymont countered that there is a need to work together and that there was “no big bad baddie out there”.

David Mellor responded, “If it’s not necessary to change, it’s not necessary to change”. After they have gone, Mrs McClymont said she was swayed to some extent by David Mellor’s arguments.

The next segment featured another staged event, a special quiz night in the local social club. This seemed mainly to be fun and froth, by the nature of the questions being asked, which focused on flags on the EU, the European leader who vetoed UK membership and which EU country’s citizens were most overweight.

David Mellor, was then seen campaigning at the start of Day Two with the message “if it ain’t broke don’t fix it”and said in response to a question from Nicky Campbell that he has found that most people don’t know enough about the issue and that the danger was that they would shift towards the latest argument they hear.

The next shot was a resident saying that the slogan “Save the Pound” was too emotive, “it’s not an intellectual approach. It’s almost as if the voters are being treated as mugs”...immediately followed by a clip of David Mellor announcing “Save the Pound” from his campaign car and receiving the thumbs down signal from two residents.

This looked and felt like an example of a fundamental danger of television editing – of creating a sequence that makes a participant look absurd or even stupid. It is most unlikely that these two events were immediately juxtaposed in the way presented; and it is equally hard to perceive that Mr Mellor or anyone else would have pressed these sentiments on a voter who had just expressed such a view.

Whatever the derivation of the event, it should not have been included in this fashion – it cast David Mellor in a totally unfavourable light. There was no similar juxtaposition of a pro-Euro campaigner and for the sake of balance, even if the events *had* happened in the sequence constructed, it should have been excluded from the final edit.

The next scene featured Lesley McClymont, by now clearly identified as being a key waverer, being canvassed by Marcel D’Argy Smith and Lembit Opik. He sidestepped the issue of whether the Euro was

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for keeps and said that joining the Euro was better for jobs and “also better for shaping the type of Europe that we want”. Marcel D'Argy Smith then deployed the argument that decisions were being made in Europe made without the UK and the UK was losing influence because it was not in the Euro....”we should change because it's the 21st century”.

There followed a brief sequence of extracts from the campaign trail, with one resident questioning whether Will Hutton could claim that the value of houses would rise if the UK entered the Euro.

The next point of call was Anne Golding, who told Austin Mitchell that the pack of leaflets (presumably presented by Julia Gash) contained some very good arguments Austin Mitchell responded that it was not a European dream pack, but a European nightmare pack.

Karishma Gillani (with Austin Mitchell and introduced glancingly as a “youth campaigner”) said the danger was that “you can't kick them out if you get it wrong, democracy goes, really...”

Anne Golding (who they were seeking to persuade) said that as a campaigning slogan against Euro “democracy goes” was better than saying simply “no to the Euro”.

The next segment featured a debate conducted in a local pub, chaired by Nicky Campbell. Three campaigners from each side of the argument were seated at tables, surrounded by supporters and residents of Referendum Street. Mr Campbell first asked Lembit Opik why it would be better if the UK was part of the single currency and then said - in response to Opik's answer that jobs were flowing away because of the strength of the pound - that inward investment had been going up steadily. Mr Opik countered that 5,000 jobs had gone from Corus.

The focus then moved to Theresa Villiers who said that not one job had been lost as a result of keeping the pound...and others would be at risk if we went for boom and bust.

David Mellor argued against Lembit Opik, that unemployment was double in the Eurozone than in the UK. Opik countered: “ancient stuff”. Will Hutton argued that 6m jobs had been generated in Europe over the past three year “more actually than in America”. David Mellor took issue, asking whether he wanted the UK to be like France.

Tony Banks interjected that despite the weakness of the Euro, the economies of Germany and Italy and France “had enormously benefited from it”, while we had lost 300,000 jobs. David Mellor asked where that idea had come from, before asserting that the German economy wasn't a success; the French economy was strike ridden; and the UK, now the fourth largest economy, had overtaken France, which remained locked in outmoded working practices.

Tony Banks rejoindered that the EU could only work with a single economy. A resident, wrongly identifying Mr Banks as Mr Benn (who replied: “well at least he didn't think I was Tony Blair”) asked how much the Euro would cost. Tony Banks said he doesn't know. Nicky Campbell chipped in with “they say £36bn”. Tony Banks asked angrily where the figure had come from, but Nicky Campbell then rhetorically asked what the Euro would mean for the price of beer, the price of cigarettes, the cost of mortgages and in the High Street – would it be “the end of rip-off Britain” (implying, perhaps, that it would).

Austin Mitchell said it would be the end of our independent economic policy, a leap in the dark towards a superstate which would yield no benefits.

Mr Campbell asked Tony Banks to answer and he claimed: “We are ripped off more in this country. I mean you get this ludicrous situation at the moment where people are taking white vans over to Dover, going over to Calais and loading them with cigarettes and drinks made in this country...“What kind of arrant nonsense is that”

Resident: *You say white van goes and gets drinks, but it's your stupid lot that puts too much tax on them.*

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Tony Banks: *Now we know exactly what your politics are, you are a nasty right-wing little shit-bag.*

Nicky Campbell said it had to be left there.

In the next scene, back in the street, Nicky Campbell said there were a few hours to go “and opinions are hardening”. There followed several different shots, with one resident saying she would vote for Julia Gash.

Then to Rebecca Wood, who said she believed that the antis had a better case...and to another resident who said she would vote for the Euro.

It went through sundry opinions of the campaigners before focusing again on Lesley McLymont, who was seen being canvassed by Tony Banks. When pressed she said she was voting for the Euro because she found it impossible to decide on the financial arguments but believed “in general we would be better to be part of Europe ...I prefer to be part of it, I feel more part of it than America”.

Nicky Campbell asked Theresa Villiers to try and persuade her back to the antis and she pointed out that if Mrs McLymont voted for the Euro “it’s an irreversible constitutional decision”

Nicky Campbell interjected: “but which has the greatest risk”

Lesley McLymont finally argued “that things are changing all the time”people are moving on”.

She added that the arguments for conservatism are “out of the sphere in the basis I am making my decision on. They are not even touching”.

The final scenes moved to Nicky Campbell, who said that time had almost run out. He concluded first by giving a recap of the original voting and then with the verdict, saying that it had switched from 65% no to the Euro and 35% in favour, with a swing of 23% to No 42%, yes 58%. He prefaced this with the words “this is just a bit of fun. This whole exercise. There is absolutely nothing scientific in it”.

He added: “A quick reminder that of course, that if that happened in a national referendum that would mean there was everything to play for and it would be extremely close”. Presumably he meant that the sample composition was slightly more in favour of the Euro than national opinion polls suggested, though this was not clear at all.

Then there were three clips:

Julia Gash said that the pro-campaigners “had climbed a mountain this weekend and I think it’s the people of Referendum Street that have done themselves credit – they’ve thought about the issues, considered the arguments and I am really very pleased. They have embraced the future.”

Will Hutton said that “it was a great result”. Nicky Campbell said: “Lembit Opik, don’t get too excited – this means that 13 people changed their minds”.

Mr Opik asserted that if this was repeated across the country “that’s millions”.

Nicky Campbell asked David Mellor if this was a “warning shot across the bows”. Mr Mellor said he believed it was: “it suggests that if we get a real referendum, there’s going to be all to play for”.

Nicky Campbell asked if this showed that “if there was a real referendum, it’s going to be a lot closer than people think?”

Austin Mitchell responded that “it was easier to argue the case that they have been arguing, which is really that the Euro is good for jobs, that it will bring lower interest rates...because you know it’s simplistic stuff and it’s easier to put over”.

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Mr Campbell signed off with an aside – unclear in terms of what he was referring to – that “ there was a split in the camp already”. It sounded like he was drawing attention to an argument between Mr Mitchell and Mr Mellor. His final words were: “And congratulations once more on this very small scale on Referendum Street to the “yes” camp, who have won”.

Conclusions

The fundamental weakness was that it was not clear to viewers what weight this exercise had as a pointer of how voters’ opinions might be changed – and the programme did not give sufficient clues to form a reliable judgement.

Evidence for this contention is that the following day, on Nicky Campbell’s Radio 5 programme in the “Europe and Us” series, pro-Euro figures were already citing the exercise as evidence that voters’ minds might be changed once they had all the facts at their disposal.

On the programme itself Nicky Campbell sought to claim that it this was only a “bit of fun” with “absolutely nothing scientific about it”. But the point was that this programme was staged during “Europe and Us” week, with considerable attention drawn to it. In the absence of anything else of a similar nature, this was the example that viewers were left with...and the unavoidable and uncountered conclusion was that if the points about the Euro were put to group voters over a sustained period, it would result in a change of mind in favour of the Euro.

In terms of a programme exercise, the weaknesses were:

1. There was no clear indication for viewers as to how Referendum Street was chosen, what the sample size was and what the question was they had been initially asked.

It would have been relatively easy to address these issues with information at the beginning and during the programme. The inclusion early in the programme of the views of a psephologist would have given viewers vital information – such as how a sample size of 50 could have 35% in favour of the Euro, what import could be attached to the behaviour of a sample of voters this size and what the residents had actually been asked. In the event, no such pointers were given – if anything the 35% - one of the few bits of data actually given - was likely to confuse rather than clarify for those who stopped to ponder for a moment.

2. No clue was given as to how the “for” and “anti” campaigners had been chosen. This absence leads to a whole raft of questions about of how representative the respective camps were, how they had chosen their arguments and how much time they had been allowed to decide upon and refine their arguments and how cohesive they actually were as teams. In the absence of any clues, it was left to the viewers to assume that they were in some way representative – but nothing of their backgrounds was given, how they linked to established political parties and whether the views and opinions they deployed were what would be used in an actual referendum.

As such, this was another fundamental weakness.

The lack of clarity here was of significance, because it emerged during the programme, that one side had used literature to reinforce their arguments, but it was not made clear whether both sides had done this. Nicky Campbell also referred at the end to a “split” in the “anti” camp, implying that they had previously not been split and therefore cohesive – but he gave no clues about what, precisely, they were split over. Whether it had any significance in relation to the approach or to the team as a whole was not at all clear. At the end, Austin Mitchell, also said that there had been real difficulty in getting over the anti arguments. This assumed importance in the context of the exercise as whole. Was the weakness a lack of tactical forethought, or inherent in the anti-Euro arguments themselves, or because the team had been in some way deficient in putting them across? Again, no clue was given and it was therefore left to viewers to form their own conclusions.

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3. It was not clear what the editorial process was and how representative the sequences chosen were. Viewers were not given indications of what all of the 50 residents actually thought because there was not enough time. In the event, only about 15 residents were included. It appears that the sequences included were, on the one hand those of residents who were prepared to, or actually did change their minds and on the other (in order to establish the pro and anti arguments), residents firmly resolved either way. In fact, viewers were given no insight into the methodology and whether, therefore, what was in the programme was representative of what had actually gone on.

Close analysis of the content suggests that the arguments actually chosen to go into the programme, though covering the main framework of some of the pro and anti territory were highly selective. The main points in the pro argument, for example, were that joining the Euro would create jobs, that the tax system which led to higher costs for cigarettes and drink in the UK could be reformed and that the prospects for manufacturing industries would be improved. In the anti camp, among the main points isolated were that this was an irreversible move, that democracy would be damaged and that it would be the end of independence in terms of economic policy.

Yet other substantial arguments deployed by both sides which could have swayed voter opinion – for example David Mellor giving the figures on the sources of inward investment into the UK and the proportion of GDP exported to the EU, were included on the related website debate, but not in the programme itself.

Of course, it is the job of the programme editors to give a balanced version of what actually went on and it is certainly the case that in this example, a form of balance was achieved between the pro- and anti arguments. The very important question in relation to this exercise was whether all the key deciding arguments – those that actually swayed people's thinking – were actually included. The answer is that for the viewer, there was absolutely no way of knowing. As such, the methodology and approach was flawed on this count, too.

4. The impact of the Euro fair, the pub quiz and the pub debate on proceedings is difficult to gauge. They were designed to be fun elements, which added to the viewer appeal and, presumably, as a focus to also fire the street's residents. The danger was that the food fair, in particular, gave the impression that being in Europe did deliver extra choice – and the converse, that not joining the Euro would lead to withdrawal of variety. Of course, precise quantification of this is impossible – but this was the same dilemma with much of the rest of the programme; it was impossible to know what the impact of the various components was, whether positive or negative.

5. There was one clear example of doubtful editing which put one of the sides in a negative light. This was the juxtaposition of sequences showing a resident arguing that Save the Pound “is not an intellectual approach. It's almost as if the voters are being treated as mugs”...immediately followed by a clip of David Mellor saying “Save the Pound” and receiving the thumbs down signal from two residents. And the sequence at the end of the programme, in which Nicky Campbell suggested that the anti camp might be split – without giving clear reasons why – was also ambiguous and potentially unfair.

3. Newsround – series of four reports

Newsround trailed heavily both on air and on the BBC's website that it was carrying a special series of reports in the "Europe and Us" sequence. This was clearly a measured attempt to stir children's interests in European issues. In the event, the programme carried four special items, each of around one minute thirty seconds to two minutes in length.

The first tackled the issues raised by the special BBC programme Referendum Street, though it was designed to be comprehensible for those who had not seen it; the second examined opinions of children at the geographical heart of Europe in France; the third was a semi-humorous attempt to list a top ten of issues for and against Europe; and the final one was a brief compendium of children's views ostensibly for and against the Euro.

The opening report on February 19 dealt with children's views on the Euro in Referendum Street – the street where the previous night's programme had been based.

The piece opened with the reporter saying that the street had been inundated by camera crews, before moving to a shot of a young boy resident saying that the "fuss" was all about the Euro.

Reporter Lizo Mzimba explained briefly the programme was a "documentary" about whether the country should join the Euro. He said that in two year's time the government "*wants to give very vote in the country the chance to decide on the issue. It's called a referendum. The real referendum could happen in to years time, but for the time being Ayrshire Street is holding its own*".

There was no mention here that there are other views on this, on whether there should be a referendum at all. Clearly this is a children's programme and there was limited space. But one sentence explaining that "some thought the issue should not be subject to a vote at all" could have been made.

A child from the street showed a Euro coin, before Lizo picked up again saying first that it could become the money of the future "*but only if we decide that's what we want. And whatever happens here, the Euro will eventually become the currency that most European countries use, instead of the currency they are currently using...that means no more Spanish pesetas, no more German Deutsche marks and no more French francs*".



The opening to these remarks showed a shot of the specially developed Euro symbol, which was surrounded by 12 flags, including that of the UK. On its own, this was not important; in the context of the drift of the piece as a whole, it was.

The implication of this analysis and the choice of background was that "whatever happened here" the Euro was the currency of the future. It expressly pointed out that it might not happen here. But in the context of the piece as a whole, the impression was that the drift towards the currency was very strong. To countermand this, there

could have been a shot of the pound, with someone saying we have had this for many years and there were arguments for keeping it. But this option was not chosen.

Instead, the piece then focused on something completely different – what children felt Europe meant. One boy said he thought it meant football. It may not be possible to stop children having thought associations, but it is possible to edit so that it does not seem that in some way football is dependent on being in Europe and the move to the Euro. This was an insidious association that was seemingly completely outside the stated remit of the piece and illustrates exactly why presenting an item on "Europe and Us" can drift into murky waters.

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Next came a boy saying, “When I think of the pound I think of Europe”, which was almost meaningless.

The third piece chosen again presented association with Europe in a wholesome, warm light. “Even though I’m not from Italy I still think of it as a really good European country, because it’s really hot there, lovely pizza.”

This was extraordinary editing. This was a piece ostensibly about whether or not we should join the Euro – but it instead presented association with Europe in a wholly glowing light – warm weather, lovely pizza. What was the direct connection between that and the Euro? And it seemed to want to create the impression in the audience that closer co-operation with Europe would lead to a better life – more football and more pizza.



The piece then moved to Simon Heffer – who had taken part in Referendum Street, but was perhaps not the most user-friendly face or appearance (his clothes were hardly fashion items) or voice for young people – explaining why the Euro should be kept:

“If we have the Euro then today’s children, when they become voters, won’t have any ability to influence how the people in government can run the economy, because the people who are governing won’t be running the economy, it’ll be run by people in Europe”.

This was a complex argument, perhaps the most complex deployed in the piece. Obviously children would understand its main drift – that joining the Euro would lead to loss of influence – but it was a relatively remote implication compared to the promises of warm pizza and more football presented immediately before as being a consequence of the ties with Europe.

By contrast, the pro-Euro voices – young people with smiley faces wearing baseball caps – made a more simple case:

In ten years’ time when a ten year old now will be entering the jobs market, if we are part of the Euro, there could be much more jobs in Britain for those people to get when they come out of school, because if we have the Euro it make it cheaper for people to employ people in Britain.



Irrespective of whether or not this is true, this was a crystal clear argument put in a very straightforward way with the unambiguous message – join the Euro and there will be jobs for you when you leave school. The contrast between the “for” and “against” pieces in terms of the strength and impact of the messages contained could not have been greater. On the one side an “oldish” person with a tough manner saying that Britain’s economy would be run by people in Europe; on the other, a much younger type saying “join the Euro and you’ll have a job”.

An editor can’t alter what is said in soundbites. But selective editing of soundbites can give a wholly misleading and false representation of the strength of arguments. In this case, the editing gave this young audience the clear view that joining the Euro was a better option.

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This was reinforced by the next carefully chosen sequence. Lizo Mzimbi asked what the referendum decided and then showed a cheering audience saying it was 42% no and 58% yes. This created the impression that there was huge enthusiasm for the yes vote. His out line was to balance this to some extent by saying that the latest opinion polls said that six out of ten people wanted to keep the pound. But this was delivered as a voiceover, (over a shot of the anti-Euro campaigners cutting into a cake in the shape of the pound) and had less impact than the cheering actuality.

She also said that six out of ten people in the UK wanted to keep the "traditional pound". Quite apart from the fact that "traditional" pound is tautology, Today's recent opinion poll showed 70% against scrapping the Pound and Referendum Street (according to Nicky Campbell) 65%. Fractions can be rounded up or down with 5% in the median area. Would it not have been more accurate to say "up to seven in ten", or 65%?

Overall, this was a flawed piece of television journalism. It claimed to balance the arguments for and against joining the Euro, but the imagery used and the drift of the editing gave the impression that joining the Euro was a better option that would lead to more jobs, more football, never ending pizza and cheering among the populace. By contrast, not joining Euro was linked to arguments by fuddy-duddies that Britain would lose control of its economy.

This was bias and appeared to show a subliminal approach wholly in favour of the Euro.

February 20

The second report, on February 20, focused on reporter Matthew Price finding the geographical heart of the European Union. He showed the process of ringing up to find out where it was located, with the tone slightly jokey. This was presumably aimed at making the quest sound interesting.

The next shot was of him approaching the sculpture in a forest near the Belgian village of Oignies-en-Thierache village. His analysis of the EU was basic:

The European Union as we know it today started when six countries in Europe decided it would be a good idea to get together to try and make it easier to buy and sell goods to each other. It quickly grew and now there are fifteen members of the EU and many governments across Europe seem to think it's a really good idea because they are applying to join.

He moved to ask what children living in the village thought of it.

The vox pop that followed among local children included opinions that the EU was good and it allowed a Belgian girl's parents to come over from France to visit.

Matthew Price then explained that the Euro was on its way and that it would mean that currencies such as the Belgian Franc would no longer be accepted in shops.

A second girl's reaction was that if everything was changed, it wouldn't be pleasant – "It's better if everyone has their own country". A boy then added: "We can exchange different types of fruit, so we can get to eat better".

Mr Price concluded: "In Britain, one of the things that has most angered opponents of European union is the fact that if we do join up fully, we'll also have to stop using pounds and pence... Are you bothered? Well maybe not, but I wondered what your parents and grandparents think?"

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This seemed to be aimed at stimulating children to ask questions and to accept that there are many who are opposed to the Euro. But the framing could be interpreted as Mr Price opining that for children, the Euro was relatively unimportant – and something that they were more likely to accept. It came very close to comment, as if to say, “do you really care about the Euro, it’s an old person’s issue”.

The purpose of the rest of the piece was difficult to interpret. Newsround seemed to be suggesting that at the heart of Europe, children had a variety of views about Europe and that being part of Europe brought with it benefits – more fruit, better diet, easier visits between cross-border families. It framed the opinions in the context that the EU had grown from small beginnings and was thought to be so advantageous to trade that many more countries want to join. In the mix was injected that the introduction of the Euro was imminent but that some in Britain were opposed to it.

This was important information – but did not really indicate the depth of the feeling in the UK about the Euro or that there may be doubt in the UK about the overall direction of the European project.

February 21

The third item on February 19 was a semi-humorous attempt to bring into focus some of the issues through a top ten of facts about the EU. What followed was a strangely-focused catalogue of information about the EU, some of it wrong.

Kate Sanderson opened by saying that at number ten was the European Parliament, with the explanation that the European Commission comes up with ideas; the council and the parliament turn them into laws.

At number 9, Ms Sanderson put forward the idea that English oaks were forbidden in Europe. Kate Sanderson said: “...*they can control what we plant and where. So German oaks are in, English ones are out – they’re not proper oak you see, so you can’t plant them anywhere*”.

This is what the community itself says about that regulation:

The directive in question goes back to 1966 and was revised in 1971. Covering the marketing of certain seeds, including oak and their external characteristics, the former sets up certain quality conditions but is not discriminatory against the UK or any other Member State (Directive 66/404/EEC, OJ L125 of 11/7/66). The latter (Directive 71/161/EEC, Official Journal L87 of 17/4/71). In this vein it also identifies forests from which seeds may be taken within a trading year.

The Directive was made to be very flexible; its purpose being to enable someone who wants to grow straight trees for harvesting know that they are getting the product they want. However neither the EU nor the relevant UK legislation obliges anyone to get their acorns from a registered source. Nobody is stopping them from buying and planting bendy ones from non-registered sources if they so want.

The European Commission is aware that as there is a demand for straight trees for felling, there is sometimes a shortage of suitable acorns in the UK. Consequently there is a derogation allowing the UK to import acorns from third countries, usually countries in central and eastern Europe .

Whatever the precise situation, the reality is more complex than was presented by Newsround. This underlines the danger of attempting in this or any other context to “simplify” matters. In this case, it appears that there are at least two sides to the story – whatever the source of the allegation about straight oaks – and viewers should have been made aware of it rather than presented with a generalisation which, at best, was not completely accurate and, at worst, plain wrong.

Ms Sanderson said at number 8 was that the EU “talks more than hot air about pollution. They’ve got strict rules to keep beaches clean and stop factories puffing out smoke”.

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The aim was presumably to underline that the EU was attempting to tackle pollution. But in the context, an inference that could be drawn is that the EU is solely responsible for regulations about smoke pollution. This is another over-generalisation that becomes too simplistic. John Prescott, for example, was in the vanguard in Kyoto in demanding tougher fossil-fuel regulations and the UK remains a leader in emissions control.

At number seven, she said: “the days of school caning are over. All because the European Court of Human Rights made it illegal for your school to punish you physically”.

It was finally a ruling of the court that outlawed caning. But long before that, the UK was developing measures that were severely limiting in schools the amount of corporal punishment and the conditions under which it could be administered. This made it sound as though it was the EU which had been solely responsible for ending caning in schools.

Ms Sanderson continued: “A stunning number six – if you wanted a Playstation on the cheap and you thought a charity shop could help out, think again. The EU says no to shops like these selling second hand toys.

This is what the EU itself says:

All toys placed on the Community market for the first time must bear the CE mark. This also applies to new toys sold for charitable reasons. Second hand toys sold for charitable reasons are beyond the scope of the Directive. The responsibility for deciding whether unmarked second-hand toys may be sold in a particular national market is left to the national authorities concerned. In the UK the Sale of Goods Act 1979 requires goods sold by traders to be of satisfactory quality. Traders selling new or second hand goods must also comply with general consumer protection legislation, such as the Trade Descriptions Act 1968.

The claims made by Newsround were therefore inaccurate – there is apparently no bar on charity shops, or anyone else selling second-hand toys, though such as sale is subject to the UK’s own consumer protection laws. This was journalism that appears on the face of it to be wrong – and a check with the EU press office would have presumably avoided the error.

At five, Miss Sanderson said accurately that the European Parliament wanted to make it easier for sports stars to move from team to team.

She added: “At number 4 – toy story. The EU wants to stop this, advertising toys. They say it make you want things that you can’t always afford and the answer is to stop all ads for toys on television”.

This is what the EU itself says about this matter:

There are no EU plans whatsoever to ban television advertising for sweets and toys. The national policy of a single Member State (in this case Sweden) can in no way be assumed to lead inexorably to EU action. Were the Swedes to make a proposal concerning advertising during their presidency, the proposal would have to gain the support of the other Member State governments. As advertisements for under-12s are not banned in the UK, France, Germany, Italy etc. such a proposal would seem unlikely to succeed.

The actual truth, therefore, is that the Swedes, as current chair of the EC, want to use their current influence to limit toy advertising and maybe move to similar European-wide restrictions similar to their own. But Newsround’s reporting in no way reflected this reality. It could have said that there are moves within the Union to try and limit the advertising of toys, originating mainly from Sweden, but even that should have been qualified by the point made about the need for wider support.

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Ms Sanderson said, “holding its own at number three was the Eurovision song contest. They can put on a show”. In fact, the song competition is not directly organised by the EU, but by the European Broadcasting Union, a separate agency. The links with the EU are tenuous.

She added: “Nearly into the top slot – the straight banana. It became a symbol of the EU when they said they wanted all banana to be straighter”.

This is what the Commission says on this matter:

Bananas are qualified according to quality and size for international trade. Individual governments and the industry have in the past had their own standards and the latter, in particular, have been very stringent. The European Commission was asked by national agricultural ministers and the industry to draft legislation for the ministers to agree.

There is therefore an element of truth in that the EU does want straighter bananas, but as the Food Wars programme pointed out, the issue has been on the agenda of governments, including that of the UK, for some time.

Ms Sanderson concluded that the final point was the question “everyone wants answered” – “are we going for the Euro?” She said: “It’s going to be the big issue at the next election. But I guess we will just have to wait and see”.

This was a flawed piece of reporting that made fundamental errors and in so doing misrepresented the points involved. Most of the items it chose to draw attention to as weaknesses of the EU were wrong, or capable of different interpretations, suggesting both incompetence in the search to find facts against the EU and that efforts to really track down issues from the Euro-sceptic perspective had not been seriously pursued.

The final part of the series on February 22 was not a report at all, but a series of opinions of viewers about whether or not they were in favour of the Euro. Matthew Price said that Jamie, from Hove thought we should use the Euro “because we are all in the same continent and it would make more sense”, while Katie from South Wales felt the pound “gives us our identity”.

Of the six voices that followed, four were presumably included because they were deemed in favour of the Euro:

I think it’s good that we have closer ties with Europe because that way we can visit more countries and discover more cultures.

It’s like a whole load of countries and they will all help you if you get into a fight or something

It means personally other countries coming together and communicating and working together as well.

If you have the Euro then you won’t have to go o the bother of getting travellers’ cheques and everything like that.

The ones against, were:

I prefer not to be part because sometimes they make things that don’t suit us.

I would like there to be more kind of money, because it would just be the same, like you’d have pound notes which are all the same and you wouldn’t have different ones, like the Queen’s head.

This was presumably meant to be a balanced presentation of the arguments received for and against the Euro. It was not. They were split four to two of those favouring aspects of relationships with Europe, with two having no connection with the Euro at all. Basically, there was a four sentence construction saying that

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the children chosen believed that Europe “meant that we can visit more countries”; it helped if you “fight or something”, it was about “coming together and communicating”; and it meant that you no longer had to bother with travellers’ cheques.

These were clearly-articulated points. But they were nothing to do with the Euro – even though the item’s construction suggested that they were. In effect, it gave the impression, therefore that membership of the Euro would bring very tangible benefits of more country visits, closer co-operation and help in the event of adversity.

By complete contrast, the voices which were chosen to illustrate opposition to the Euro said quite negative things that were insubstantial “it doesn’t suit us” and “more kinds of money, some with the Queen’s head”. Additionally, from the introduction – but not amplified - was “it gives us our identity”.

Clearly, it’s impossible to manufacture voices and opinions completely artificially. The editorial process has to go with what is available. But it seems very odd that the arguments chosen that were supposedly for the Euro were, in fact, arguments about the benefits of European Union membership, while those against the Euro had no equivalent depth or substance.

4. Churchill the European

BBC Radio 4, Monday February 20

This programme was broadcast on Monday February 20 and was clearly billed as part of the "Europe and Us" series.

The aim was to establish that Churchill had advocated, both during the Second World War and in the period up to the 1951 general election, surprising ideas about the future direction of Europe. The presenter, David Sells, sought to prove that Churchill had made speeches that laid the bedrock of thought which led inexorably to the European Union and that, by implication, he was a visionary who had wanted moves towards federation – and even a European army.

The title itself could be interpreted as to some extent loaded: why not, for example Churchill and Europe? This would have avoided any possible interpretation or implication that he was "European" in the modern sense of being unambiguously in favour of wider integration and greater involvement in the EU. The obvious danger of using such terminology in a trans-temporal context is that the phrase can mislead. Or was it intended to do so?

Churchill's attitude towards Europe has been the subject of vigorous debate, with historians clearly divided over the extent to which his ideas foreshadowed – and may even have supported – the development of the European Union which is now evolving. No one will ever know what Churchill really wanted – but it is certain that there is no single interpretation. This, for example, is from the Historical Journal, (28(4), 1985: 923-937) by David Young:

One of the points at which Britain lost an opportunity to enter the European community followed Winston Churchill's return to Downing Street in October 1951.

'Pro-Europeans' like Harold Macmillan had high expectations from the new Prime Minister. They remembered that Churchill had not only supported proposals for a Franco-British political union in 1940, but he had also talked about a "Council of Europe" to help govern the continent in the future. At Fulton, Missouri, in March 1946, he called for "a new unity in Europe" to meet the threat of the "Iron Curtain" that divided Europe. Shortly after, he argued that Europe must create "a regional structure called, it may be, the United States of Europe." In 1950 he condemned Labour's refusal to enter talks on the Schuman Plan and even proposed the creation of a European army.

But Churchill's commitment to European unity was limited. His 1940 Franco-British union proposal was at a desperate moment. He often spoke of Britain as one of the "friends and sponsors of the new Europe." During 1946-1951 his pro-European stance served to win publicity and to embarrass Labour, but it remained vague. His vision was of a more united continent, but with Britain preserving her world role via the Empire and Commonwealth and tied to Europe rather loosely.

In response to the activities of pro-Europeans like Macmillan and Robert Boothby, Churchill circulated a paper in November, 1951 which declared that Britain had three areas of interest: foremost, the Commonwealth; next the "English-Speaking World" (presumably Churchillesse for America); and only then, a "United Europe" (with not much detail of what this precisely meant).

Anthony Eden actively opposed the actions of the "pro-Europeans." When Macmillan sought a cabinet confrontation with Eden in 1952, he discovered that Churchill no longer seemed concerned with European unity. Even Churchill's son-in-law, Duncan Sandys, had little hope of influencing the Prime Minister.

Discouraged by his defeat in cabinet, Macmillan withheld his resignation only out of affection for and loyalty to Churchill. While Anthony Eden and the Foreign Office had been the main obstacles to

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pro-European schemes, the proponents of those plans had certainly misjudged the meaning of Winston Churchill's statements calling for closer contacts with the nations on the European continent.

This, though clearly not the only interpretation of Churchill's views and conduct on a united Europe, is a clear warning that his statements about European union were open to a variety of interpretations.

David Sells' opening statements that "Churchill the godfather of a united Europe" is "a little-known figure" and "the prophet of European Union" were in this context, therefore, questionable. His next point was even more so:

"But prophet he was and visionary. After the war...he was even promoting the idea – an idea that is with us again today, alive, kicking and controversial – of a European army".

He used, to support his contention, an extract from the speech in 1950 to the Council of Europe in which Churchill declared himself in favour of the immediate creation of European army under a unified command "and in which all should bear a worthy and honourable part".

Mr Sells claimed – and this was his second major point in his central thesis – that "this was one of several apocalyptic speeches he made urging European integration in the immediate post war years when he was out of power".

Mr Sells immediately qualified this, to some extent, by adding that there was a strand of opinion that held that Churchill remained ambiguous about his country's precise role – Britain should belong but somehow not belong, a "big three" worldpower that should "not be subsumed into the Europe of which he dreamed" – "more an helpmeet, an overseer, a guardian" – but, crucial to the impression left by the programme, he explored little about the implications of this.

He concentrated on comments that Churchill had made that Mr Sells believed demonstrated that Churchill favoured a united Europe.

The context and construction was thus misleading. At the top of the programme, as one of his main points, Mr Sells implied that Churchill was a "visionary" who saw a vision of an integrated Europe with an army. The implication was clear – that Churchill wanted what was happening now.

There was nothing at this key juncture to dilute this – nothing of the alternative argument that his views were ambiguous, that his advocacy of greater union within Europe did not include Great Britain and was, perhaps, a device to both goad the Labour opposition and to create a bulwark against Soviet aggression in a very different world order.

Mr Sells instead moved to highlight Churchill's support of the "United Europe Movement" in the immediate aftermath of the war. He enlisted Paul Lavy, a Belgian, who had witnessed the speech and believed that it had made (Sells' words) "a vivid impact on the European scene".

Mr Lavy, a former senior official "with Churchill's brainchild, the Council of Europe" could not be seen as an impartial observer. He alleged straightforwardly that Mr Churchill had played a "major role in the assembly" and had enthused the Strasbourg population with a speech in French.

Mr Sells used this "evidence" to reinforce his theory further, contending that Churchill's vision of a united Europe was not a passing whim and that he wanted a Council of Europe to help diffuse the ancient enmity between France and Germany, claiming that "burdened as he was with the day to day progress of the war...he should have thought so consistently about a new shape for Europe."

At this stage, he also commented that Churchill "continued to nurse illusions about Britain as a great power". This was a loaded judgement in the 1945 context. Britain *was* – arguably – still a world power in terms of the possessions it held and in its role as broker of the peace after the war. It was not, therefore, to

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Churchill an “illusion”. Yet this point is at the heart of Mr Sells’ argument “...the illusions...the reality still was imperial Britain – the notion that shaped his understanding of the British relationship to a united Europe”

Mr Sells at this point introduced actuality from John Colville, Churchill’s private secretary. What he said qualified the picture of what Churchill wanted in relation to Europe, in that he explained that Churchill was “European as far as Europe was concerned, but not necessarily as far as the United Kingdom was concerned” and wanted a united Europe to avert war, but said that “We are of Europe but not of it, we are linked but not compromised”. He further explained that Churchill’s reasoning behind the need for a United States of Europe was that “every step taken to that end, which appeases obsolete hatred and banished oppressions, which makes easier the traffic and reciprocal services of Europe, which encourages nations to lay down their precautionary panoply, is good in itself”.

These points were absolutely crucial. They undermined very considerably Mr Sells’ central theory of “Churchill the European” and should therefore have been introduced at an earlier point. But that, perhaps, would have destroyed the main drift of what was being argued.

Mr Sells, despite Sir John’s clear qualifications of Churchill’s advocacy, built his theory further through again bringing in Paul Lavy. Mr Sells said that that even if there was “ambivalence” about British involvement (was this only ambivalence? – it sounded more like opposition to), the continentals “saw Churchill as a prophet of a new Europe”.

Mr Sells then mentioned Churchill’s Iron Curtain speech, claiming that it totally overshadowed another speech at Zurich, which “showed Churchill at his most farseeing” – “Europe must unite, he said”.

He quoted him further: “If we are to form the United States of Europe, or whatever name it may take, we must begin now.”

Mr Sells pointed out that this was made during the Nuremberg trials and said he had quoted Gladstone that after the retribution there must be a “blessed act of oblivion” before painting a “breathtaking vision of a possible future” - his vision of a partnership between France and Germany leading to a USE with “small nations counting as much as larger ones”.

Mr Sells then used a further extract from the speech to claim that Churchill had painted a “breathtaking view of a possible future”

WC: I’m now going to say something that will astonish you. The first step in the recreation of the European family must be a partnership between France and Germany. In this way only can France recover the moral and cultural leadership in Europe: there can be no revival of Europe without a spiritually great France and a spiritually great Germany. The structure of the United States of Europe if well and truly built, will be such as to make the material strength of a single state less important. Small nations will count as much as large ones...”

Mr Sells, arriving at his main proposition, argued that “here was Churchill foreseeing precisely the partnership which was to become the driving force of the European Union”.

This was an argument that was true only insofar as Churchill was advocating a link between Germany and France. His inference that “it was precisely the partnership that became the driving force of the European union” is completely out of context and, therefore, wrong in its implications. Churchill did not know on what lines his partnership would develop and still less did he know that it would lead to the community and then the union that did evolve. The logic of the partnership was perhaps astonishing in the context of what had just happened, in that Churchill was advocating the very rapid settling of differences. But it is impossible to infer unambiguously from it that he was visualising the Europe or the relationship that actually evolved and still less that he was a visionary of the community and the union that wanted it to happen.

Mr Sells sought nevertheless to reinforce the importance of Churchill's words by saying that it was turning point for politicians such as Helmut Kohl, who had witnessed the speech and "had never forgotten it". Again, the implication – through selecting the most passionate advocate of European unity – is that somehow what Churchill said actually was a bedrock of the union. There was, of course, no doubting the impact of the speech or that Herr Kohl remembered it; the danger was the marshalling of the argument and the juxtaposition of alleged facts to inflate the impact to the point where Churchill's himself was actually advocating events which were unknowable to him, still less supported.

Mr Sells added that two years later, Churchill had gone out of his way to welcome the post-Nazi German delegation to a Congress of Europe meeting, before delivering an "Olympian speech" which advocated political unity through economic and military collaboration.

The task before us at this conference is not only to raise the voice of Europe as a united whole...we must resolve that in one form or another, a European assembly should be constituted, which should enable that voice to be continually heard ..."

The extract he quoted from Churchill could be interpreted differently – that the words chosen referred only to a common *voice*, not concretely to any proposals.

He further built his argument by claiming that back home the Foreign Office and the Labour government, were "more and more embarrassed by Churchill's European efforts" Mr Sells said that these were believed by Christopher Mayhew, then a Foreign Office Minister, to be a headache. The actuality included from Mr Mayhew suggested that Bevin had yielded to pressure from Churchill and the soft centre of the Labour Party into giving them "a talking shop in Strasbourg, this Council of Europe".

Mr Sells then constructed his next point, that Churchill had been seen as a "federalist". He used as evidence comments from Evelyn Shuckber, a Foreign Office official who had witnessed a conversation involving R.A. Butler, in which he had expressed fears that the Council of Europe would be ruined "by Churchill's over espousal of federation".

Mr Sells pointed out, for effect: "Now there's a thought to give us pause – Churchill the Euro-federalist".

He qualified it immediately – though the impact and implication is nonetheless clear – by adding "actually Churchill never got that far". But he went on to reinforce, rather than weaken the implication, by adding that he had also tackled the "equally delicate" issue of sovereignty in his Hague speech by saying there needed to be "some sacrifice or merger of national sovereignty", juxtaposing it with Churchill's belief that as far as the UK was concerned "where the United Nations or NATO were an issue, some pooling of sovereignty was inevitable".

Mr Sells thus sought to imply that Churchill was not only federalist, but also accepted the concept of diluted sovereignty in his European thinking.

He moved on, using a quote from Peter Thorneycroft – who he identifies as a "backer of European integration" – to argue that when Churchill returned to power in 1951 "his views were an anathema to the mandarins of the FO".

Mr Thorneycroft was quoted that "all the top brass felt the same. "They had been brought up on a tradition of balance of power, on the division of Europe, not the unity... what you (Churchill?) were asking to do was to play an entirely new game".

Mr Sells' next statement was that: "Churchill was back in Downing Street in 1951, but when it came to uniting Europe, it was FO scepticism that triumphed. For all his passionate advocacy of the USE whilst in opposition, once back in power, Churchill in effect turned his back on Europe...and there were other priorities, the Anglo-American relationship was paramount". Sells argued that reasons included that the fact that Eden, his chosen successor, was a Euro-doubter and "Churchill didn't want to tangle with him".

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Mr Sells argued that Mr Churchill had also moved against “his baby”, the European army – not because he had moved ideologically against it – but because “he didn’t believe in a mixed army that would become a “sluggish amalgam”, adding, “what soldiers want is their own marching songs”.

Mr Sells then went on to state that the FO believed Churchill to be a romantic in his view of Europe, before contending: “Churchill himself was clearly torn two ways. His vision of Europe clashed with his view of Britain as an abiding world power. But that belief (according to the view of US diplomat Luke Battle) now made him “yesterday’s man”.

Hugh Colville summed up Churchill’s views on a united Europe as that Britain should no doubt take part, “but not at the expense of sinking everything...into the European system. But he wouldn’t have objected to a European federation, in which we would have had some kind of association”.

Mr Sells included further actuality of Paul Lavy saying that while Mr Churchill was one of the genuine founders of the European institutions “I’m not sure that he would have been in favour of the economic union we have now”, adding that many were disappointed that he did not take a lead in bringing the UK into the EEC. He added from Mr Lavy that he was disappointed that Mr Churchill had not acted as expected.

The conclusion was:

DS: A true prophet of European unity – for all the demurs where Britain’s role was concerned. It is, of course, impossible to know what Churchill would have made of today’s European Union in this vastly changed world. And it’s unsurprising that both sides in the current British conflict over Europe claim his inheritance. He spawned both acceptance and rejection. What remains is the power of his vision all those years ago, of a Europe functioning on a Franco-German axis of reconciliation; a vision that a lady called Thatcher later found worthy of praise. She was the new Conservative leader, standing beneath the grand old man’s Westminster statue, campaigning for a ‘Yes’ vote in Britain’s 1975 referendum on European Community membership.

MARGARET THATCHER: It’s very fitting that you should keep an all night vigil under the statue of Sir Winston Churchill, the first person to have the great vision of working together for peace in Europe.

DS: Lady Thatcher, one suspects, would these days prefer to praise the bulldog not the prophet. As for the ageing Churchill, he did fail to practise what earlier he had preached. The statesman who had spoken with such resonance of a new Europe became once again the politician imbued with a yearning for an imperial grandeur, which had gone. This dichotomy within the great man mirrored the uncertainties that still bedevil Britain today.

Conclusion

Mr Sells did, to some extent, qualify his arguments about Churchill’s support for European unity by the inclusion of the views of his private secretary. The problem, nonetheless, was that he sought to elevate, to a greater level of importance than warranted, what Churchill did say about possible changes in Europe – and sought to link his views, both directly and by implication, to the moves towards European unity which have subsequently happened. Clearly, some people (such as Hugo Young and in this programme, Paul Lavy) are now advocating that Mr Churchill did want European unity on the current model. But this is a view strongly contested by other authorities and Mr Sells did not include early enough, or prominently enough, those counter views, if what he was aiming to create was a balanced view. This was a programme in a series about “Europe and Us” and was promoted as such. On that basis, it was presumably intended to give a rounded and balanced view of one aspect of our relationship with Europe. The views it put forward were a skewed analysis that sought to leave the impression, above all – in listeners’ minds, that Churchill, to many the ultimate embodiment of “Britishness”, was a “visionary” who wanted a united Europe on the lines now being engineered. Those ideas could and should have been subjected to greater challenge.

5. Nicky Campbell Phone-in Radio 5 Live Monday February 19

Commentary

This was designed and billed as a follow-up the Referendum Street programme. It came from Limerick in the Irish republic. Its format was an outside broadcast phone-in from the City Hall in Limerick before an invited panel and guests.

The basic substance was that there was a scene-setting in which the invited panellists each made a contribution. The panel were:

Jackie Davies, European affairs journalist working in Brussels
Gundi Garisman (phonetic), DeutschePresse
Herman Meltzer, European correspondent for Swedish radio
Norma Bennett from the Christian Democrats
William Maher, European Movement.

The framing of the programme was very specific – Nicky Campbell said in the intro that Ireland’s relationship with Europe “has absolutely reinvigorated the country” and was now welcoming back those who had left because of previous economic hardships. He contrasted that with the UK, where he said that Europe was “set to be one of the most divisive” issues at the general election, before asking:

But what have we gained so far from our membership of the EU? Has it been for better or for worse? What are Britain’s prospects if there is ever more close European integration? What has Europe ever done for us? Call us now for free.

As such, listeners could have reasonably expected a balance of views both in favour and against the issues raised by Ireland’s experience of the EU. These would reasonably have included whether Ireland had benefited from EU membership; what its experience of the Euro was and whether it was creating problems because of the current reported “overheating” of the economy.

Part 1- The Euro-sceptic content

One of the basic aims of the programme was, in Nicky Campbell’s words, to establish:

what have we gained so far from our membership of the EU? Has it been for better or for worse? What are Britain’s prospects if there is ever more close European integration? What has Europe ever done for us?

There were three main rafts of Eurosceptic content -

- **Callers** – a total of 12 callers were invited to put points which could be categorised as Euro-sceptic
- **Contributors** – Of the invited panel, one – Norah Bennett – was clearly Euro-sceptic and she made three short contributions. Also mildly Euro-sceptic was a Swedish radio journalist, Herman Meltzer. .
- **Questions** – Nicky Campbell played Euro-sceptic devil’s advocate, particularly in the later part of the programme with David Byrne.

It was left mainly to **callers** to put the Euro-sceptic arguments:

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James – who argued that Pro-European ideas were being steamrolled into young people by those who claimed to be objective on Europe, but who were actually propagandists

Derek – who thought that joining the Euro was like “boarding a rudderless leaky ship and that the true economic alignment of the UK was with the US, not Europe. His points were countered, at the invitation of Nicky Campbell, by Jane Davies.

Janet – who said she couldn’t see any point in joining the Euro, as the UK already contributed £11bn to the EU and only got half of that back.

Mary – who argued that fear of Europe was not xenophobic, especially when the French role in BSE was considered. Nicky Campbell put it to her that her views “were little Englander” and gave her space to respond that this was not the case. Mary was brought back into the discussion at a later point, when she expanded her point that the UK bought far more goods from Europe than it bought from us.

Anna, a student from Sweden – who said it was difficult for young people to understand what Europe was about and people therefore didn’t feel very close to it.

Derek – who described himself as a Euro-sceptic who had been a Europhile. His mind had been changed by the damage that the EU had done to UK interests, for example in the steel industry and farming.

David – the managing director of a small company, who argued that the EU should be about economic free trade, not political union and that people were investing in the UK because it had more flexible employment laws.

Rachel – who argued that everything in Europe was fudged and muddled and that the only possible outcome of joining the Euro was a political federation of Europe. There followed a discussion between Rachel and Niamh, the latter repeating her argument that we got nothing out of Europe because “we were too agitated about the next step”.

Phil – who claimed that it “beggared belief” that it could be possible to create a harmonious superstate.

Derek – who put it to Peter Hain that if we did away with our currency, we would become only one of fifteen voices, with one fifteenth of the influence. He reinforced the point several times against Mr Hain’s counter-arguments, with additional claims that there were no attempts to have a single currency covering America, or in the Japanese sphere of influence.

Graham – who argued that Europe was overwhelming the individual, that small people had to be part of Europe whether they liked it or not.

Elizabeth, - claimed that the EU had caused BSE by giving subsidies, thereby paving the way for irresponsible farming methods.

Some of the questions were raised in the earlier parts of the programme with the panellists Jane Davies and William Maher.

Typical was:

Nicky Campbell: What has the European Union done for us?

Caller: Very little, it’s doling out a bit of money sometimes, we’ve put a lot of money in and it’s doled out a certain amount of money back to us in various areas.

NC: Jackie Davies, speak to Derek, that’s a perception that many people have.

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JD: No, absolutely, as I was saying earlier, he said you know, ‘they’ve doled out some money in certain areas’, that’s true, through regional funding and so on. But as I say the argument is we’ve got here the biggest single market in the world, 370 million consumers, so a company in the UK can sell its goods anywhere in Europe, *anywhere*, without all sorts of restrictions, without having to pay duties on those goods and so on. And if you took that away, if Britain was to withdraw, which increasingly seems to me people *are* talking in those terms, then that would go, that huge market of potential consumers. And that would have a profound impact on jobs. So, as I say, I really don’t think it’s a question of looking a balance sheet of ‘when did they give us money?’, it’s the money generated through economic growth and increased trade.

Another sequence which illustrated the way the programme dealt with the Euro-sceptic points was:

Caller: But it seems to me that the Government at the moment are trying to sneak this issue through the back door somewhat. I mean, programmes like the one we saw on television last night, now call me a cynic, but are they perhaps using the state broadcasting corporation, the BBC, to try and get this pro-European agenda across?

NC: A Euro-cynic. Neil, what’s your point?

NEIL: Well I thought the programme was most interesting, it seems to me that when you boil it all down, the ‘antis’ were really playing on emotion and fear of the unknown. David Mellor kept saying ‘Well, aren’t you worried about this?’ – and they really didn’t define what the issues of fear and unknownness were. And on the other side, the ‘pros’ were talking about things that people really understand they were talking about jobs, they were talking about prosperity, they were talking about fifty years of peace and co-operation between countries. And really, when you think about it, sovereignty is a very vague issue and sovereignty does not pay the mortgage.

Slightly earlier, the same caller had argued:

...in fact, delegates there were faced with a barrage of pro-European speeches and it seemed to me that the whole thing seemed to be nothing more than a propaganda coup for the Government. Now I’m concerned that the pro-European argument will just be perhaps steamrollered onto the impressionable youth by the Government, leaving people of my age with an imbalanced and ill-informed view of the issue.

NC: There are those of course who would argue that the imbalance is the other way, given the state of the press opinion within the United Kingdom, which is by the large majority Euro-sceptic.

The Euro-sceptic callers were also invited to engage briefly in the arguments advanced by Peter Hain – challenging his view that joining the Euro would be good for Britain - and more strongly with David Byrne, countering his view that European regulations had help ameliorate the spread of BSE and that democracy within the EU was improving. These were important debates and in general, there appeared to be a policy of allowing more calls from Euro-sceptics, to deliberately counter the imbalance of the panel and the location.

Also arguing from the Euro-sceptic perspective was the panellist Norah Bennett, who was present at the recording in Ireland and who was asked to contribute on three occasions and herself chipped in on one. Three of the points she made were central to the European debate both in the UK and in Ireland:

NB: I’m one of the few Irish sceptics and, you know, listening to your speakers there, those on the lines, it’s great to hear that there are people out there who are questioning. You know, you say, what has Europe done for Ireland well Europe has in a way benefited Ireland in many ways, but Ireland has also contributed much to the European Union, both at the economic level and the technological level. And I think it’s very important for the people who are not yet tied fully in – and I think we are irrevocably tied in, we did that when we voted for the Amsterdam – those who are not irrevocably tied in should continue to question it. I think it would be absolutely daft for any

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individual or any young people across the whole Eurozone to actually sign away their independence and they're right to be able to decide their own destiny – just ask the questions and keep asking.

Then:

NB: Well, one size doesn't fit all – oil and water doesn't mix, we know that. What is important for us to realise is that the Irish Government brought in a budget and then they got rapped on the knuckles and the EU told them you must obey the EU, you must obey orders. And the Irish people, Charles McReevy ...

NC: The Irish Finance Minister.

NB: Dug in his heels and he said, 'we will and we must be in control of our own budget'. And there are signs now that the EU are going to strike in harder at us in that. And you know, again, the last gentleman that spoke, he said that it wasn't only Europe that created the economy – there are people out there who would suggest that the Celtic Tiger is a yank in fact and that it's the American multinationals and the money coming into Ireland to Europe that has actually created our economy. So, we've got to look at all of that, it is a multinational, it is a global economy.

And finally:

NB: I mean David has actually put his finger on the whole nub of the problem. The point is that the decision-making power-base, if you like, is moving further and further away from the people. He said, you know, that decisions are taken there in Europe and then they come back on the Member States, or the politicians make the decisions. But those decisions are not coming to the people first, as I said, the central core of the decision-making process is being moved away, further and further from the people in every nation. And that's a big danger and it's a huge danger. He speaks about the democratic deficit, we're leading into a greater and greater and greater democratic deficit, I'm sure David you'll have to agree with that. And I support what you're saying, with regard to the lack of information and the lack of communication between those MEPs in Europe and the people on the ground, the ordinary voters who voted for them and we see it here in Ireland all the time and I stood myself in the European Elections in 1994 . . .

These were important contributions which cogently underlined that there were doubts within Ireland about the direction of Europe.

There was one other vaguely Euro-sceptic contributor, Herman Meltzer, a Swedish radio journalist. He made three short comments pointing out that Swedes remained doubtful about joining the Euro, but was not invited to expand beyond basic facts.

Overall, the comments of Norah Bennett, combined with the questions from Euro-sceptic callers, added up to a significant contribution to the programme, creating the clear impression that there were alternative views to those of the panellists and the Europhile politicians who were invited to take part.

But it was noticeable that some of the key topics of particular interest to Euro-sceptics at the moment – and of relevance to the whole perspective of Irish membership - were dealt with in only a very limited fashion:

Overheating – in the event, this topic was scarcely tackled. Only David Byrne was asked a direct question about it and he brushed aside the importance.

Reduction of sovereignty – this was mentioned glancingly by several speakers, most of whom dismissed it. Only callers raised this topic and their points were not agreed by those called on by Nicky Campbell to react.

On balance, the Euro-sceptic content part of the programme, though prominent, was totally overshadowed by contributors who were Europhile.

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Part 2 – The Europhile content.

This could be divided into five main components:

- Peter Hain – who was the special guest in a sequence taking up most of the central part of the programme
- Questions from callers
- Contributions from Europhile panellists, notably Jane Davies and William Maher, who between them had 14 separate sequences, compared to Norah Bennett’s three.
- Contributions from the floor – from Shannon Development, local politicians and a university lecturer, all of whom were Europhile
- David Byrne, the European Commissioner – who took up most of the final hour.

1. Peter Hain (Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office) The central contribution came from Peter Hain, who, with very little challenge or intervention, was allowed to put forward the Labour Party pro-Europe and pro-Euro line.

In a sequence covering around 2,500 words, a very substantial chunk of the programme, the only direct challenge to his views came from the caller Derek, who argued cogently that joining the Euro would weaken the UK’s role in the world (by a fifteenth) and that our trade links were more naturally with the US. In addition, Nicky Campbell put to Mr Hain, a series of mildly challenging questions, about whether conditions had been right when Ireland had joined the Euro (referring to the recent debate over measures to tackle inflation) and what UK farmers and fishermen would think that the EU had improved prosperity. But it was hardly in the Jeremy Paxman league:

NC: What about our fishermen, what about our farmers? They’re not going to be agreeing with too much of what you are saying, are they?

One question actually seemed to endorse Peter Hain’s views:

NC: Those people who are against it, Peter Hain, would you ascribe an element of the anti feeling, as a kind of ‘Little-Englander’ mentality, people living in the past?

This was not quite putting words in to Mr Hain’s mouth, but it was not adversarial or challenging questioning. Mr Hain himself had not raised the point about Little Englanders.

Equally “soft” a question was:

NC: A huge amount of Euro-scepticism at the moment, looking at any poll, but do you think the ‘No’ vote is pretty soft?

Unsurprisingly, Mr Hain thought it was.

In addition, during the Peter Hain sequence, Nicky Campbell brought in two additional speakers, both of whom were wholly Europhile – economist Jim Deagan, who argued that most economists wanted the UK in the Euro and that Britain’s economic malaise could be traced to the need for restructuring rather than the EU; and Frank Prendergast, a former mayor of Limerick, who argued that Britain had no real future outside the EU.

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Peter Hain came on the programme to advocate and elucidate government opinion on the Euro and Europe and that is largely what he was allowed to do.

These are examples of some of the bolder claims he made:

(In response to Nicky Campbell's Little Englander question) There may be that, but I think it's largely a fear of the unknown and I think the more people are confronted with the arguments . . . Britain is stronger in the world it's stronger in our relations with the US and other countries such as Japan, key countries, because we're seen as one of the top countries in Europe. We can be a bridge – a unique bridge – for example, between the European Union to the USA, the biggest country in the world in terms of its influence.

The second issue is regulations and Britain has actually led the way in Europe, because we're now very influential – with our Government being seen as being at the heart of Europe, rather than shouting on the sidelines – to reduce over-regulation, which is far too burdensome in Europe.

We take forward an agenda to make Europe the most competitive knowledge-based economy in the world. That means introducing extra competitiveness, it means liberalising a whole number of areas including energy and electricity and gas especially and making sure that Europe drives forward an idea of an e-commerce Europe and e-Europe in which Europe in IT and in very many other areas is actually the leading player challenging the US for world dominance. And through that process create 20 million new jobs across Europe by the year 2010.

In summary, Peter Hain was given a lot of space and was not subjected to questioning that significantly scrutinised some of his more controversial claims.

2. Questions from callers. These included:

Neil – who believed that those who were against the EU were actually xenophobes and that sovereignty was a thing of the past because the economy was global

Ian – who argued at length that the EU had prevented war and had a vital part in future economic developments. Nicky Campbell chipped into his contribution by asking him to comment on Will Hutton's observation that those on the "pro side" of the Euro arguments had a "sunnier disposition, they're more optimistic...and naturally more inclusive". William Maher responded that it was certainly the case.

Margaret – of Bridgewater, - who argued that the UK had much more economic clout because it was a member of the EU, that there were million and millions of jobs dependent on trade with the EU and that not being a member of the Euro would penalise the UK heavily.

Two emails – one saying that "Little Englanders would still like us to be part of the Empire", the second that Little Englanders were selfish, narrow minded and xenophobic, while Europeans were forward thinking."

Niamh – who claimed that the English were very ill-informed about Europe and did not really know what the UK could get out of it because too little was reported in the English press.

Euan – who said that there wasn't enough knowledge about the Euro to make a decision.

This amounted to fewer than those from Euro- sceptics - but this was more than offset by the studio and guest contributions from Europhiles.

3. Contributions from panellists: The main contributions from panellists introduced at the beginning of the programme came for example, from Jackie Davies, a Europhile journalist working in Brussels and William Maher, of DeutschePresse, also a Europhile. Though they were presumably brought on as

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“impartial” or at least objective observers, the points they made were largely not so, as the following examples underline:

Jackie Davies: But as I say the argument is we’ve got here the biggest single market in the world, 370 million consumers, so a company in the UK can sell its goods anywhere in Europe, *anywhere*, without all sorts of restrictions, without having to pay duties on those goods and so on. And if you took that away, if Britain was to withdraw, which increasingly seems to me people *are* talking in those terms, then that would go, that huge market of potential consumers. And that would have a profound impact on jobs. So, as I say, I really don’t think it’s a question of looking a balance sheet of ‘when did they give us money?’, it’s the money generated through economic growth and increased trade.

NC: People like Janet and Mary are living in the past?

JD: Well, I think what they’re not seeing is that there is this thing called the EU now, as somebody was saying earlier, the world moves on, things change, size *does* matter now, companies are all multinational, they’re all huge, if countries don’t club together, if they’re on their own, if there was no EU, the UK would do reasonably well, but the club exists now and you’ve got to join.

William Maher: It’s caught on here because it has given Ireland an opportunity if you like, [*word unclear*] it’s given Ireland a link. We have an affinity with Europe, both in our geographical position and also by our by our historical connections with Europe. But come back to my point, my point being that the success of the EU is dependent on one point and that is peace. Over the past fifty-odd years, not one drop of blood has been shed over an EU related conflict, throughout the continent. And that I think alone makes the EU a tremendous success.

Another example of the essence of their contributions was when William Maher was brought in by Nicky Cambell to comment on a caller’s fears about a drift towards a superstate. This is what he answered:

I think first of all, people are aware that the EU is the sum of all the members. I think our identity, if you want to bring it into that, our identity really has flourished. If you look at a country with a population of 3.5 million people, so widely known and with such international clout, despite its extremely small size, I think that sort of means we’re comfortable with ourselves, we’re happy with where we’re at.

NC: It’s all about being comfortable in your own skin, in a sense, in a national way.

Between them, these two were invited to give no fewer than 14 separate contributions – among the most significant in the three hours. Not all of what they said was entirely Europhile in its perspective, but most of it was in its drift and tone. None of what they said in any sense attacked the EU or its works, nor did it tackle any of the substantive concerns raised, for example by Norah Bennett. Combined with the contribution of Peter Hain, they formed the core of the programme.

4. Contributions from the invited audience: On top of above, Nicky Campbell selected several audience contributions. Most made points which suggested that membership of the European Union had benefited Ireland enormously and in favour of the UK joining the Euro too. Some of the comment was on a slightly more cautionary note, for example arguing that Ireland’s renaissance had not been due entirely to EU funds, growth being far higher than the 3-4% contribution to GDP. But at their centre was sentiment that wholly favoured Ireland’s membership and further involvement. Typical was that from the former mayor of Limerick, Frank Prendergast (which came during the Peter Hain sequence):

He seems to forget that Britain is one of the great powers in world history and she has no place in the future outside the European Union. I really subscribe to the opinion that I’m appalled at some of the ignorance that comes, generated may I say by some of the tabloid-mentality press. I welcome this debate, I think it’s a fabulous contribution, English people need to hear more of this. And I would remind your listeners in Britain, that Britain is one of the great players in world history and Europe is going ahead, whether Britain realises it or not.

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Or this, from an Jim Deagan, an economist:

One is the last gentleman spoke about Ireland's position and the European Currency and so on, the reality is that virtually every economist in this country was in agreement that it would be much, much more favourable for Ireland if we entered the Single Currency with Britain, so I think there's little or no doubt that most economists are of the view that we'd much prefer Britain to be members as well.

5. David Byrne, the European Commissioner for consumer affairs: . Typical of his contributions was this:

No, it isn't, but I do see some issues, like for instance the chocolate debate last year, where I think people in the UK were wondering what on earth the people in France or Belgium were talking about in trying to disallow the UK to call the chocolate they understood to be chocolate, 'chocolate'. Equally if you look at the row in the UK at the moment about metric measures, measuring and so on. I would imagine that the people in France and Belgium are wondering what on earth the people in the UK are talking about, why are they so concerned about these issues? The point I'm trying to make is, when you weigh those smaller – what I describe as smaller issues, I hope I'm not offending anybody, I don't intend to offend anybody by saying that – but when you weigh these smaller niche issues in the balance against what it is that we're trying to achieve here, which is peace and prosperity for everybody, I fundamentally believe that we must realise that the balance is much in favour of the European Union. Look at the peace that we now have in Northern Ireland I'm convinced that the involvement of Ireland in the membership of the European Union had a significant influence in that. Look at the prosperity that you have right throughout the European Union, it has been greatly increased by membership of the European Union.

And this:

GRAHAM (caller): Well, yes, this gentleman's talking about law and making law and this law and that law. But they seem to be making laws for huger and huger entities and they seem to be totally forgetting the little people, the individuals whether they're English, Irish, French, German, whatever, the laws are being made for Europe and for the people who want to be part of Europe and not made for the people who live in Europe and are going to be part of Europe whether they want to or not.

DB: ...Well, I don't accept that. One of the jobs that I have is that of Commissioner for Consumer Protection and therefore the focus of my job and my interest is the protection of the rights of consumers. And we're identifying the necessary policies to ensure that this can be done within the context of the treaties of the European Union, which do put some constraints on what it is that I can do and we bring forward legislation to protect consumers in that way. So I don't accept that proposition and it seems to be mixed up to some extent with what Nora Bennett was saying earlier, about the democratic deficit issue. And whereas that is so, it is being addressed by the Commission and has to be addressed more and more by Member States themselves. And after all, it's much better that we have the development of the driving force of the founding fathers of the European Union, which is peace and prosperity, that's what this is about, peace and prosperity. And very often I see debates emerging in different Member States about what I would describe as smaller niche issues that irritate and aggravate some particular individuals and what might . . .

Nicky Campbell questioned him from a Euro-sceptic perspective on a number of issues: for example why there was such Euro-scepticism in Britain, that MEPs and Commissioners were seen as a "bunch of superannuated politicians" (such as Chris Patten), that Britons would "welcome the idea of getting rid of you", that sovereignty was bound to be an issue uppermost in some people's minds, that Europe "fell out badly" within itself over BSE in a saga which had been about dishonesty.

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Mr Campbell also brought in to the discussion – at her request – Norah Bennett, who argued that despite Mr Byrne’s claims, the decision making in the Union was “moving further and further away from people” and that it had dealt with BSE badly.

Following these points, Graham, the caller mentioned above, also challenged Mr Byrne, his central point being that Europe was “totally forgetting the little people”. He was followed by Elizabeth, who argued that BSE was the fault “of the EEC by giving subsidies to farmers”.

Thus David Byrne, unlike Peter Hain was subjected to some searching questions and made to respond to Euro-sceptic issues of concern.

There was one exception, a question from Nicky Campbell, who put to him that newspapers, in adopting a Euro-sceptic stance, were following xenophobia:

NC: Do you think that one of the reasons for the Euro-scepticism about which you speak -and you correctly identified as being something which exhibits itself day by day in many of the British newspapers, broadsheet and tabloid – do you think, I mean there is the accusation levelled at some Euro-Sceptics that it’s just residual kind of post-empire xenophobia, do you think there’s anything in that?

DB: I think there’s an element of that, I think you’ve put your finger on something there, I saw something very interesting over the past few days on the debate about whether the UK should join the Euro or not and the view’s now being advanced I think, in the UK that if it’s argued on the basis of the monetary aspects, the financial aspects of it, then the argument’s there to be won, rather than focusing on the sovereignty issues.

This did not conform to the general drift of questioning, which kept Mr Byrne firmly on the track of explaining, against questioning and points to the contrary, why he believed that the EU was doing such a tremendous job.

6. Food Wars

BBC1, Food Wars, February 22

This kaleidoscopic programme – the precise focus of which was hard to define – skated over the interaction between the UK and the European Union over a number of issues related to food.

The key areas were:

Apples – and how British manufacturers suddenly realised in the 1970s that their markets were being hit by French imports after the UK joined the EC – despite expectations that the only impact would be better marketing prospects in Europe.

Chocolate – how it had taken the European Union almost thirty years to settle the issue of whether British chocolate was really “chocolate” because of the inclusion of non-milk fats.

Bananas – whether it was the EU or the UK (and other member states) who had decided that bananas must be straighter, with the conclusion that it was member states.

Metric weights – looked at the battle in the UK, allegedly against EU regulations, to save the right to weigh out foods in pounds and ounces. The programme produced evidence, that it was Britain itself that had decided to go metric in 1966, thereby leading the moves towards the present controversy.

Olive oil – included claims that the EU had produced more choice for UK consumers than ever before through products like olive oil, but also noted that the EU policy towards olive oil (via the CAP) production had encouraged corruption

Common Agricultural Policy – it argued that this had produced absurd levels of production, but produced evidence that it had been ameliorated and would be reformed further in order to meet the pressures of expansion of the Union to the east.

BSE – said that despite British beef being given the all clear, the French had ignored the ruling and concluding that the continuing wrangles over the issue were both “directly challenging the authority of the Commission” and was “severely testing European unity”.

The programme was structured through a number of interviews with a variety of commentators who had differing knowledge and perspectives. The key political input came from Adrian Chiles own commentary and from two European Commissioners, Neil Kinnock and David Byrne. Their strongly pro-EU and pro-Commission statements – which included claims, for example, that the EU had been responsible for the development of choice and that the CAP was reformed – were buttressed by similar opinions from chef, Rose Gray.

Political counter-balancing, which was distinctively Euro-sceptic (as opposed to simply cynical) was provide from two brief quotes from Baroness Thatcher’s former adviser, Lord Powell and from a variety of quotes from those supporting the “metric martyr” Steve Thoburn.

In between were a variety of other comments from people who were not really making directly political comments about Europe – for example, Hugh Fearnley Whittingdale, who believed that the EU had acted to make everything the same, or Rick Stein, who wanted Britain to go metric because it would make things simpler.

Adrian Chiles opened the programme with a strong statement that “in the past thirty years, our food’s improved beyond measure. Jaded British palettes have been revived”.

The opening sequence included actuality from Rose Grey, the chef, claiming that being in Europe had widened variety and our tastes. There was an immediate counterinterview from Hugh Fearnley Whittingstall

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that Europe was trying to harmonise everything. It was followed by claims from Kent apple growers that the French had tried to swamp the apple market, leading to dire problems for UK growers. There was then a lengthy analysis of the 27-year battle to reach a compromise definition of British “chocolate”, as “family chocolate”. This both explained the complexity of decision-making process in Europe and included strong views about their perceived absurdity.

The first view of a politician on the matter was from Neil Kinnock who explained that the reason was that “democracies could not agree with each other on the design and application of the legislation. That wasn’t a problem produced by the Commission, it was the reality of getting 15 democracies to work together”.

Adrian Chiles then explained that in Brussels “they say they have learned their lesson...as long as ingredients are safe, you can make what you want where you want”, implying strongly that the chocolate – type issue was a thing of the past “which was the idea in the first place”.

He added: “The Common Market was supposed to mean the end of borders and red tape....The boast of the pro-Europeans is that food exports to Europe from the UK have increased 7-fold and that 60m customs forms have been removed. Across all business, they claim up to 900,000 jobs have been created in the EU”.

David Byrne, the Commissioner for Consumer Standards added: “The fact that you remove trade barriers means that you are in a position to enhance trade. Once you enhance trade you are then increasing the purchasing power...now that increases wealth, that increases jobs, that increases the well-being of the people right through the European Union”.

Adrian Chiles – who did not include anything to counter or put a different perspective on this view – then said that the Commission claimed that boosting trade by opening borders had helped change what we eat. He added: “Perhaps more than any other product, olive oil symbolises the changes in our tastes as we’ve embraced the flavours of our European neighbours”, pointing out that, in the past decade, sales had multiplied six times.

The next stage of the sequence was chef, Rose Gray, repeating that the change in our tastes were entirely due to our joining the EU, followed by David Byrne arguing that globalisation of trade – and better choice – had come about because the EU had been in existence since the 1950s.

After this sequence establishing the argument that the EU – and the EU alone – had created more choice, “the upside of the Common Market”, Adrian Chiles moved on to “the daft rules“ about bendy cucumbers and things”, which, he said, required bananas to be a minimum length of 14cms and strawberries to be uniform in size.

He then put Byrne on the spot over regulations to do with cucumbers. Mr Byrne denied that “there was anything to do with the bendiness of cucumbers”, but Adrian Chiles produced the regulation that did. Mr Byrne countered: “That’s not a food safety issue”.

Adrian Chiles commented “Rules, all in the name of harmonisation. The trouble for Brussels is that the accusing finger sometimes points in its direction when it’s sometimes not as straightforward as that.”

Mr Chiles then said: “Take the war over a pound of bananas. Under a European directive passed by our Parliament under a Tory government, traders had to stop selling goods in pounds and ounces by new year 1999. They were also obliged to replace their imperial scales”.

He then focused on the case of Steve Thoburn, the so-called metric martyr, being prosecuted by Sunderland Council for insisting that he continued to sell with his old scales in old measures. There followed actuality from Gordon Ramsay, arguing that it was hard thinking in metric; Rose Gray saying that it was hard to keep converting backwards and forwards; and Rick Stein concluding that it was absurd that we did not change straightaway.

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There were then opinions from supporters of Steve Thoburn blaming strongly directives from Brussels. The opinions expressed included: “We believe that it is directives that are coming over Brussels from the EU that are changing the British way of life” and: “we have 28,000 regulations and directives pouring forth from Brussels” and: “we want to stick with the pound; Europe is building a totalitarian superstate.”

Adrian Chiles asked “whether it is fair” to blame Europe for the drive towards metrification.

Neil Kinnock asserted that it was political consensus in 1965 that led to metrification “so the idea that this is being rammed down the throat of the British people is not true”

Chiles used footage of an ad from 1965 which was made in support of metrification and said it was made “with the aim of helping industry to compete in an increasingly global market”. He included an interview with the former head of board responsible for measures, before saying that by 1975, the process was supposed to be complete, but a date never set. He then pointed out that “far from harrying the UK”, that the EU had supported the procrastination “not once, but twice – a stay of execution for twenty years”, even though it had theoretically been a condition of joining. There were more quotes from James Humble, the former director of the metrification board, about “messing and muddling”...and “blunting our competitive edge”.

Mr Chiles concluded that metrification wasn't “straightforwardly Brussels's fault”, then added “and embarrassingly enough, it's the same story on cucumbers”. He referred to a 1967 directive – the same as the “much-mocked European rules”. David Byrne said that if the laws of any of the member states were examined “there's legislation on these kind of issues...so that people know exactly what's expected of them, so the law can be properly implemented”.

Adrian Chiles then moved on to what presumably was a central point of the programme: “The problem with this preoccupation with small print is that it diverts our attention away from the most serious problem that 's been dogging the European Union for at least the past two decades. It's the story of high ideals undermined by waste and fraud. The Common Agricultural Policy was created...” He added that the trouble was that by the 1980s “farmers were being paid to produce too much food”.

There was footage of Bob Geldof angrily attacking the EU for waste when people in Ethiopia were starving.

Mr Chiles, in his longest commentary, pointed out that Europe argued that it was cheaper to buy grain on the world market for Africa than send it from Europe; that grain mountains had been created. He said that “reforms had significantly reduced these”, but said subsidies were still being paid to produce more food, leading to a £1m olive oil scam. He claimed that up to £270m was paid out to people “who weren't entitled to it”, with evidence produced that the scam had been going on for years from Nicola Ruggero.

Mr Chiles then pointed out that with enlargement, countries such as Poland would be joining the Union, with the estimated costs of expanding subsidies of £7bn

The next comment was from Neil Kinnock, who said: “The system we have now...needs to be changed even further – it has been changed – that change has got to be rapid and it's got to be radical. Nobody pretends it's going to be easy, but that's got to be part of the overall further reform of the CAP over the next five to six years”.

The next actuality was from Lord Powell, who argued that “enlargement will finally explode the CAP and make it untenable” because of expense triggered by the new countries joining as “agriculture is a large part of their economies and fairly backward.”

Mr Chiles moved on to what he said was “a more pressing problem for the European Court; “...Beef sales in Europe, are now down by almost a quarter is a more pressing problem and the cost of buying unwanted mountains of beef back could break the EU budget.” He added that doubts whether the EU was capable of

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safeguarding consumers' interests "is now making sceptics of Europeans too", with Austria Spain and Italy all passing individual bans "directly challenging the authority of the Commission".

He added that there were further doubts about ability of the Commission to enforce rules because spinal cord material was still being found and that: "The French, architects of Europe, who live for food, have also had their trust in the EU shaken and despite their ban, they don't solely blame Britain for BSE".

Mr Chiles included a quote from Dominic Moise, spokesman from French institute for foreign relations: "They don't have confidence in their government and they probably have even less in European authority....so there is a feeling of collective , anonymous irresponsibility of Eurocrats in Brussels. So what is at stake is not Great Britain, but Europe itself".

David Byrne, said that that the initial response of member states had been to put forward individual national measures, but said that he thought the message was now getting across to all member states "that BSE knows no borders and there's no point in having individual responses in individual member states. You've got to have an overall community response".

Adrian Chiles added that a European food agency was being formed to prevent BSE ever happening again. Neil Kinnock said: "Previously when the states of Europe disagreed with each other fundamentally, they used to go to war and millions were slaughtered in the course of that. Now, there are quarrels, there are squabbles, but they are resolved round the negotiating table."

Adrian Chiles claimed in conclusion that the founding fathers of the European Community have achieved one of their aims, Europeans will never again go hungry. But in the continuing fight over enlargement, over the CAP, over BSE, the food wars rage on, severely testing European unity".

Conclusion

The key driver of the programme was to establish that battles over the issue of food have continued throughout the history of the European Union and appeared set to continue.

Some of the programme was directly critical of the European Union – the absurdity of the chocolate wars, for example, the frustration of Bob Geldof with the CAP during Live Aid and the centrifugal forces being created by the development of BSE. The conclusion suggested that European unity "was being severely tested". In addition, the programme contained views from a variety of Euro-sceptics such as Lord Powell, a number of supporters of Steve Thoburn and, at the end, the spokesman from the French Institute of International Affairs, who argued that his members were blaming Eurocrats for the continuing BSE problems.

In addition, Adrian Chiles did not pull his punches in some areas of analysis – for example, over the chocolate wars and in confronting David Byrne with the reality of the regulations on cucumbers. The main intention appeared to be to show that in its regulations and laws, the European Union could be an ass.

And yet, there were problems of balance in the overall structure and the analysis and in terms of where the central axis of this programme lay.

This was a programme about "food wars" and yet it did not really go the heart of, or even mention some of the key issues which are causing major concerns – chocolate was chosen as an easy example to discuss, but there was no mention of something more deeply complex and worrying, the direction of the common fisheries policy, arguably a much more awkward topic currently hitting the livelihoods of hundreds of British fishermen.

Nor was there meaningful elaboration of what Hugh Fearnley Whittingdale mentioned – his allegation that Europe had presided over a drive towards uniformity; instead, the emphasis was much more on Adrian Chiles' own opening remark – twice amplified by chef, Rose Gray, and then further elaborated by Commissioner Byrne, who argued that globalisation had happened because of Europe – that the EU had brought variety in food choice and had helped jaded British palettes.

Analysis of the very serious issue of the CAP, first showed powerfully through Bob Geldof that it had caused problems in the past, including food mountains and corruption in olive oil production. Adrian Chiles also pointed out that the CAP faced problems in the future because of enlargement, enlisting Lord Powell to drive home the point. But the last word on the topic was left to Neil Kinnock, who said that reform was happening and would continue to be a priority. There was no mention at all of the inefficiencies that Euro-sceptics argue are a structural problem of the CAP, nor – for example – that it was causing serious problems in environmental terms. The central message conveyed was that the areas of debate and contention were being resolved.

At the heart of the programme was a treatment of metrication, which though centred on the measurement of food, was not directly about food at all, but its measurement. It showed that there was a UK trader who was being prosecuted for selling in pounds and ounce sand that he had a number of determined supporters who believed that this was a core issue about UK identity in the face of the encroachment of the possibility of an EU superstate.

But the quotes chosen from Neil Kinnock and the former head of the metrication board, strongly conveyed that that this was not an EU-originated problem, but a UK one. This, of course, is an area being hotly contested at the moment in the court case and elsewhere – but the impression left by the programme was that almost certainly, it was the UK, not the EU, which was the cause of current controversy.

The treatment of BSE was much more challenging. It marshalled opinion and evidence that suggested that there was growing criticism of the Commission's handling of the spread, unleashing forces of disunity, combined with the fear that the cost of containing it could break the EU's budget. Yet in this analysis, too, the main political dimension was provided by the two European Commissioners. David Byrne said that after a period of individual action, member states had now realised that the way forward was "an overall community response". Neil Kinnock went much further, saying that previously such conflicts would have been settled by war involving the slaughter of millions, whereas now the matter was being "resolved round a negotiating table". Mr Kinnock clearly said this, but the editorial juxtaposition – creating the suggestion that BSE could have caused a world war had it not been for the European Union – was melodramatic.

In summary, Adrian Chiles concluded the programme saying that the EU still had problems and big challenges over the policy over food. But his methodology and approach – though bringing in to focus some of those problems, including especially BSE – was full of problems that led to an under-robust treatment of the issues. Specifically:

- He excluded some important areas of concern, for example the fisheries policy, while focusing on relatively easy ones, such as chocolate or cucumbers.
- On the CAP, his treatment was limited and did not get to grips with, or even flag, some of the key concerns of farmers or consumers
- On metrication and food uniformity, he edged towards the conclusion that the problems lay with individual member governments, even though this is hotly contested, leaving the last word to Commissioners Kinnock and Byrne
- Overall, he did not include as wide a variety of Euro-sceptic opinion as the amount of time given to Commissioners Kinnock and Byrne, with the result that there was a degree of imbalance.
- Some of his own comments – for example about membership of the EU being responsible directly for the choice now available to UK consumers – appeared to be pushing one particular point of view.

This was an interesting programme. It is a shame that it could not have probed deeper and been aware that opinions on the direction of the EU are more varied. This was yet another example of the increasingly limited scope of current affairs investigation.

7. The “Europe and Us” Website

The practise of using web-based content to augment more traditional methods of broadcasting has become commonplace. Many television and radio programmes have at least some sort of Internet presence and the “Europe and Us” week was no exception. In some respects, the package’s web pages acted as a unifying force for programmes scattered across both schedule and channel. However, it would have been preferable to have this cohesive force contained within the programmes themselves, rather than relying on another medium altogether. The foremost concern is that of accessibility. First, information on the web is necessarily limited to those with the prerequisite technology; second to those willing to invest the time, effort and – for those paying for their internet calls – money in acquiring information by these means.

Aside from a daily schedule and links to other BBC sites, The “Europe and Us” page acted chiefly as a gateway to content based specifically around the Referendum Street programme. These pages contained profiles and photographs of some Referendum Street residents and some general background information on the European debate. The site also contained an interactive element, featuring live web-casts with Austin Mitchell, Will Hutton, Simon Heffer and Lembit Opik, an online euro-poll and the opportunity for audiences to post their comments to a message board. A wide range of video content was also included on the site, including the entire Referendum Street programme and recordings of the aforementioned web-casts. Perhaps more surprisingly the site also contained a selection of video clips that appeared to be sections of Referendum Street that had been omitted from the final televised edit. The most sizeable of these was a thirty-minute, (although it seems not completely unabridged) version of the pub debate, which was edited to just over four minutes for inclusion in the programme. However, the website did not mark this explicitly as being anything other than the debate which had already been aired as part of Referendum Street and, as such, visitors may have been unaware that this was additional material, available exclusively to internet users.

The internet version included a host of additional topics completely excluded from the televised version and revealed that the debate had centred for the most part on questions of economics, with subjects including inward investment, Nissan, Corus, interest rates, exchange rates, the notion of a European Superstate and the ERM. Although the debate was often of a somewhat technical nature, inclusion of the footage in its entirety would certainly have benefited the televised programme. There were, however, problems surrounding Nicky Campbell’s chairmanship of the debate, which might have attracted criticism had the debate been included in its entirety.

The foremost cause for concern was that on twenty separate occasions during the half hour debate, the pro-European table were asked directly to speak, answer specific points, or encouraged by Campbell to continue speaking over Euro-sceptic attempts to interject. By contrast, Campbell specifically requested a Eurosceptic opinion on only six occasions and at no point were they encouraged to continue speaking over pro-Euro interruptions. Of course, there are a number of other elements to take into consideration when assessing how fairly a discussion is conducted: the line of questioning adopted by the chair, for example, or the dynamics at work within the debate itself. But ultimately Campbell’s stewardship did appear to make a difference to how the debate took shape. It was noticeable that Conservative MEP Theresa Villiers was only given one opportunity to speak during the thirty minute discussion, while all three pro-Euro panellists were given much more space to put across their views.

Inconsistencies were particularly clear during Campbell’s attempt to draw the debate to a close. He decided to go around the table, to ask each speaker their opinion on a pro-Euro claim, namely that joining the Single Currency would mean the end to ‘Rip-Off Britain’. He began with Tony Banks and Will Hutton, both of whom, fairly unsurprisingly, agreed with Campbell’s proposition. Next, the same question was put to Austin Mitchell, who countered that joining the Euro would mean an end to Britain’s independent economic policy. Campbell then moved on to Lembit Opik, who also agreed and appropriated the title of a positive-thinking self-help manual to implore the British public to ‘feel the fear and do it anyway’. Somewhat unfairly, Campbell then announced, ‘Okay, we have to leave it there, I’ve been told to wind it

up, but it was absolutely fascinating.’ Perhaps *most* fascinating in that all three pro-Euro panellists were given opportunity to sum up their argument on a ‘soft’ pro-Euro question, while neither David Mellor nor Theresa Villiers were given the chance to comment.

Elsewhere on the “Europe and Us” website were clips of comedians Paul Thorne and Simon Blyth performing at the social club quiz night. This raises more uncomfortable questions for Referendum Street: the principal concern being that their appearance was not mentioned in the context of the televised programme at all. While Paul Thorne, for most of his performance, aimed at well-established comic targets (Liverpudlians, television, sport, the Royal Family) he did also make some passing references to Europe. At one stage he remarked, ‘We did quite well in the Olympics didn’t we? Because as a nation we tend to celebrate failure really don’t we? Golds? We don’t like golds. Prefer bronze, much more like the pound. Gold, don’t trust it, it might be foreign.’ Another section of his act featured a comic look at the differences between French and English cheeses and jokes on French and German character based around BSE infected cows.

Simon Blyth, by contrast, made references to commonly-held ‘Little-Englander’ stereotypes throughout his act. He parodied such opinions through the use of an upper class, ‘stiff upper lip’ English accent: “You’ll be crying when Johnny foreigner is running our country. When you can’t get English sausages it’ll be your own fault.” His personal stance on the issue seemed clear, “I’m trying to run through my pro-English jokes (pretending to search through his pockets). I haven’t got any.” Of course it is impossible to say whether any of the residents might have been swayed either way by their views - but by omitting this completely, viewers of the television programme were presented with an incomplete picture of the influences acting on the street’s residents.

Four short films presented by Nicky Campbell also appeared to have been commissioned for the programme but left out of the final edit. They were available on the website under a section marked ‘Issues’ and like the pub debate, not particularly well signposted. Each short film featured the appearance of a female economist, but neither name nor title was given on screen during her appearances. The reports provided background information to the Euro debate, including ‘The Euro Story so Far’, ‘How the Euro is Run’ and ‘Mr Brown’s Five Tests’. While these were generally even-handed, the fourth film, entitled ‘Where the Parties Stand’ was perhaps less so. Its opening statement held some promise,

NICKY CAMPBELL: (*Walking down ‘Referendum Street’.*) There is no doubt that divisive feelings run deep on the Euro, but there’s more to this issue than simply left and right. So, where do the squabbling factions of Westminster stand?

The notion that there is ‘more to the issue than left and right’ is one that is often neglected – we tend to hear comparatively little, for example, of the ideology behind leftwing Euro-scepticism. What followed, however, simply reiterated ideas that are generally well-established in the public consciousness:

NICKY CAMPBELL: Well, the truth is, both sides are split. In the driving seat for the moment is Chancellor, Gordon Brown, who seems to prefer the slow lane. Cautiously in favour of membership of the Euro, but let’s not be too hasty. Mr Brown isn’t guaranteed an easy ride though. Alongside him in the car is Prime Minister, Tony Blair, who seems keener to get to the destination . . . Even though last month he lost his leading champion of the Euro, Peter Mandelson, Mr Blair has pledged to drive Britain all the way to the heart of Europe. Meanwhile, Mr Brown still seems to prefer the slow and scenic route.

There is a clear disparity between this and the report’s subsequent treatment of the Conservative Party position:

NC: While Labour crawl along, the Tories aren’t sure whether they want to get into the car at all. The official party line is dead against the Euro and although William Hague has not ruled out ever taking the trip, he has promised to say a loud ‘no’ to it for at least two parliaments – perhaps not until after 2007 . . . (*footage of Kenneth Clarke, Michael Heseltine*) Meanwhile, a vocal crowd of high-profile Tories, who were driving the Government before Hague had even passed his test, are all eager to leap into their Euro Limos.

Although Nicky Campbell refers to a split within the Labour Party, the example he gives concentrates solely on differences between Tony Blair and Gordon Brown. Both men are seen as being pro-European, but disagreeing over the speed at which they would wish to move into the Single Currency. His commentary on the Conservative Party, by contrast, focuses on differences between backbench MPs and the Party Leadership, with an inference that prominent Conservative pro-Europeans are somehow more experienced and better qualified than William Hague. The report therefore reiterated familiar perceptions about divisions within the Conservative Party, while studiously omitting mention of Labour backbench Euroscepticism.

Overall, despite the shortcomings inherent to some of this web-based content, such a range of additional material suggests that Referendum Street could have been extended beyond its forty-five-minute length, or perhaps spread across two nights, in order to present a more balanced view of the processes involved. In this instance, rather than using internet content to enrich the debate, it became an overflow system for material that the producers were unable to include in the programme itself. Even for those who could gain access to this material through the website, attempting to watch a half-hour film by way of a standard modem connection is something of a frustrating and uncomfortable experience. Both picture and sound quality suffer as a result of digital compression and the video stream can be frequently interrupted due to net congestion. Low quality was a particular problem for the full version of the Referendum Street pub debate – sections were rendered unintelligible whenever participants spoke at once. It would be fair to say that technology is not yet such that web-based video can be considered a viable alternative to traditional means of broadcasting, less so a replacement for it.

What is more puzzling is that this extraneous material was available over the internet while other programmes broadcast as part of the “Europe and Us” package were not. With items scattered across schedules, it would have been beneficial to use the strand’s web presence as an archival resource for programmes that audiences may have missed. There appeared to be no web-based multimedia material available for any of the other radio and television programmes transmitted during the “Europe and Us” week. Although there were links to other sites, only Question Time carried a video of its debate and this was replaced after a week by a more recent edition. Anyone searching for additional information, particularly on the stand-alone documentaries, would have been disappointed: Food Wars and Churchill the European, for example, had no detectable web-presence at all. Links to external, non-BBC sites showed a distinct pro-European bias. Three were for pro-Euro sites: Britain in Europe, the UK Government Euro Site and One Currency for Europe, while only one, Business for Sterling, put across the opposing case.

8. “Europe and Us” – the cultural issues

To begin with semantics, the very title “Europe and Us” offers a duality of meaning. First it denotes Europe the continent, a physical location with a rich diversity of language, nationality identity and cultural heritage. The second meaning emerged more recently but has quickly gained an equal foothold: this is Europe as a political and economic project, Europe as a collection of ‘Member States’, Europe as shorthand for ‘European Union’. The two concepts are distinct, but illustrate that “Europe and Us” is a homonymous phrase and thus open to interpretation. The press release heralding the series sought to offer clarity. Mark Damazer, Assistant Head of BBC news wrote:

The BBC’s “Europe and Us” week will invite our audiences to think about our relationship with the European Union. Few subjects arouse so much passion – both among those who feel that our membership of the EU has brought a host of problems and those who believe that the country’s future can only be served by a continued commitment to the EU. But many people feel they do not have enough information to make crucial decisions on the issue. We hope “Europe and Us” and the BBC’s ongoing commitment to coverage of the EU and European issues step into the breach and present both sides in a clear and thought-provoking way.

It appears clear from this statement that the essential purpose of “Europe and Us” was to investigate and explain the various political issues surrounding the European Union. For viewers and listeners, however, the driving force of the package might not have been so immediately obvious. Because the programmes themselves were so varied, the week’s central premise unravelled slightly and distinctions between Europe as geographical location and Europe as political project began to blur. Included in the strand, for example, was a programme on wildlife and a series of reports solely devoted to cultural aspects of Europe, namely Wild Europe and the Citizens, both transmitted by Radio 4. Perhaps more problematically, there were also occasions when shifts between the two disparate elements occurred within the context of a programme itself and cultural matters became subsumed into political ones. This analysis will explore and assess how the inclusion of European cultural matters might impact upon the wider questions surrounding the European Union, using a number of examples taken from the “Europe and Us” week.

Radio 4’s The Citizens offered five profiles of “extraordinary Europeans”, individuals, “whose actions or creativity have made a difference to people of their own country”. (*“Europe and Us” press release*). Included were an Italian photographer, a French literary critic, a Dutch architect, the Czech head of intelligence and a Danish ‘agony aunt’.

As stand-alone features, these were illuminating and interesting profiles. But packaged as part of the week’s political programming, they acquired additional meaning. Here were five individuals, intelligent, creative, artistic, caring or visionary, each of whom had excelled in their chosen field. Of course, the calibre of those selected is not to be brought into question, but problems arise when they become somehow symbolic of Europe, in a week where the debate is raging hard on both sides. They and their characteristics became situated within a political debate and thus personified the positive social and cultural ingredients of the European Union itself. Including The Citizens within the wider package did the five profiles a disservice, politicising them when this ought not to have been so. On occasion, we caught a glimpse of some facet of European society that could be considered negative – the corruption of Italian political system by the Mafia, or traditionalist attitudes within Danish society – but the spotlight remained focused firmly on the protagonists and these issues were merely backdrops to their personal accomplishments. Indeed, aspects of European culture with negative connotations, when not hinged on any explicit political argument, were for the vast part omitted from the “Europe and Us” package.

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Referendum Street's Euro Fair was a principal example. Here residents traded chocolate Euro coins for, 'lots of lovely European food', to the strains of laid-back jazz music. We were shown close-up shots of paella, cheese and taramasalata, while also on the menu, according to the street's residents, were 'Italian pasta', 'Greek spinach and ricotta filo pastry' and 'French crêpes with mushroom'. Of course, the central concept of the piece was flawed from the outset; all of the aforementioned dishes are readily available from British supermarkets, where customers are able to purchase them using pound sterling. But if the exercise is considered closely, something more is noticeable, namely that all of the food on sale at the fair appeared to have been selected with the British palate firmly in mind. Had the fair offered European food from outside the residents' own cultural experience – horsemeat, octopus, snails, frog's legs, or skylark, for example – then a completely different reaction might have been garnered from those attending. It could be suggested that, for many, the chocolate Euros themselves may have become the main course.

Yet, as it transpired, the Fair was presented as an upbeat and optimistic example of cultural exchange. The insinuation here was the using the Euro would have a positive impact on food and culture and the spectacle of David Mellor munching on a sausage while announcing, 'Here's to Britain' could do little to lessen the implication that joining the Single Currency would enrich British cuisine.

This notion was echoed in the opening sequence of the Food Wars documentary. The presenter, Adrian Chiles, began with the statement,

"In the past thirty years, our food's improved beyond measure. Jaded British palettes have been revived."

This was bolstered by a comment from the chef, Rose Gray:

"I think now we've joined Europe and the European Union, it's made a fantastic difference to variety, availability, quality – everything you look for, you know, in food basically."

These claims were presented as a fundamental truth, a foundation upon which the rest of the programme was to be constructed. It is, of course, impossible to pinpoint one specific reason for changes in British eating habits. The British at present have greater exposure to food from other cultures, cheaper global travel, better access to nutritional and dietetic information and variety provided by the buying power of large supermarket chains. To put forward the European Union as the sole reason for changes in British cuisine is therefore somewhat misleading.

Aside from these opening comments, Food Wars applied cultural arguments in a very different way to others in the "Europe and Us" strand. Culture – in this case, food – was used in a proper manner and always linked explicitly to particular political questions, for example EU regulation, BSE, or the Common Agricultural Policy. This allowed for more balance than elsewhere in the package and both presenter and interviewees were able to offer cultural criticisms linked to explicit political points. This was in stark contrast to other programmes, where negative elements were played down and positive aspects used to evoke a somewhat nebulous sense of 'European-ness.'

In some instances, references to European culture were used to simplify debates, to present tangible symbols for abstract concepts, or avoid political issues altogether. This was most common in the four Newsround reports, but the practice was by no means confined to children's television. The first Newsround feature looked at the Referendum Street project, from the perspective of one of its younger residents. A vox pop with a group of young people, included the comments:

What does it mean to be European? I think of football a lot whenever I hear Europe, because you've got France winning the World Cup and the European Cup.

And:

Even though I'm not from Italy, I still think of it as a really good European country, because it's really hot there, lovely pizza.

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At first glance, this might be taken to show that children have problems differentiating between Europe as a continent and Europe as a political idea. However, a closer look reveals that the questions they were asked (illustrated by the first boy's repetition of the interviewer's question) were more concerned about European national identity than about the specifics of the EU debate. It may of course have been that questions on the European Union were asked and did not gain a useful enough response; but by the end of the week, emphasis had shifted more firmly. In Kate Sanderson's introduction to the final report, she explained that, "As part of the BBC's "Europe and Us" week, we've been reporting on what it means to be European". While this statement offered some justification for the change in emphasis, it did appear to move coverage away from the original premise detailed on the "Europe and Us" website as, "how children in the UK view our relationship with Europe". By sidestepping political issues in favour of issues surrounding identity - most notably in the sections featuring children themselves - Newsround ensured that distinction was blurred between the European Union as a political institution and Europe as a geographical and cultural location. Furthermore, most children viewed European culture in a positive light - certainly the majority of comments from children seemed favourable and at times, slightly idealistic.

As in previous examples, when positive European cultural concepts are expressed in isolation from any distinct political point, they tend strongly favour the pro-European case. Counter claims against cultural or social concepts are difficult to make, without the argument appearing xenophobic or intolerant. Clearly, this is a difficult area for programme makers and nowhere more so than in children's television, where ideas must necessarily be articulated as clearly and simply as possible. Yet it is essential to realise that each time cultural points are made in isolation, perceptions of audiences may be swayed or reinforced.

Over the course of its three-hour duration, The Nicky Campbell 5 Live phone-in moved back and forth between political debates and cultural questions. Certainly, in a programme of this length, there is a need to vary emphasis and tone in order to maintain audience interest. However, the political debate appeared to dissipate as the programme progressed, with the discussion moving onto areas including sport, television and music. Midway through the morning for example, the programme delivered a half-hour segment looking at linguistics. Various opinions were given, with the vast majority either being critical of the British public's perceived lack of foreign language skills, or describing the benefits being bi- or multilingual. While this was an interesting debate in itself, this was certainly a wider cultural question rather than anything relating specifically to the European Union. The avocation of cultural integration through language is fundamentally very different to the idea of cultural integration through politics and economics, but because the debate on linguistic was situated within the confines of a political debate, distinctions between the two concepts were to a great extent blurred.

The central difficulty, inherent to all these examples, is that when positive European social or cultural products are used as a backdrop to the political debate, an unspoken dichotomy is established. The Europhile argument becomes inclusive, attractive, bohemian and tolerant, while the Euro-sceptic viewpoint, often implicitly, takes on the inverse qualities and becomes exclusive, unattractive, philistine and intolerant. Debates about the European Union and Single Currency often being so abstract, complicated and technical, perceptions around culture may ultimately hold more sway with voters. As one of the residents commented in the final minutes of Referendum Street:

LESLEY McCLYMONT: I'm hopeless on the specifics because people use exactly the same pieces of information to argue different points. The conclusion I come to is that I'm just going to join with the rest and vote with my gut feeling ... it's now 'For' and it's actually done on the basis of not on the Euro - because I'm now clear that's a completely impossible decision to make, I can't do it on what's in the country's best interests financially. All I can do it on is the general, global, 'it would be better to be a part of Europe', we're more naturally a part of that and I prefer to be part of Europe, I feel more part of that than America.

This comment demonstrates how vitally important cultural matters may be within the debate over Europe. Whether positive or negative in tone, it is obvious that they may shape public perception on political or economic matters. The BBC's "Europe and Us" week highlighted how important it is that broadcasters

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appreciate the difference between Europe as a geographical location and Europe as a political and economic institution. In order to achieve balance and impartiality, differentiation needs to be made between these two distinct definitions and ultimately, when cultural issues are included in political questions, stringent guidelines must be adopted in order to avoid confusion.

Appendix 1

Memo on Referendum Street by Theresa Villiers

Pro pound team – “No team”

David Mellor
John Elliot – manufacturer
Simon Heffer
Theresa Villiers
Stuart Coster
Carishma Gillani

Anti-pound team – “Yes team”

Lembit Opik
Tony Banks
Marcel d’Argy Smith
Will Hutton
Plus various others

Comments from Theresa Villiers

“I’m not saying that the result was wholly due to unfairness on the part of the BBC. I did find it genuinely difficult to get my message across to people in a readily understandable way. In that sense, I found the programme a bit of a wake up call. Winning a referendum will not be plain sailing for those of us who want to keep the pound.”

“But I do have serious concerns about how the BBC put the film together. In a number of ways, it seemed to me that the BBC were not being even-handed.”

“This might be due to carelessness on the part of the BBC but it might also be due to deliberate manipulation. The BBC’s well-documented track record of bias against eurosceptics makes me suspicious. Either way, I don’t think that Referendum Street will reflect a completely accurate picture of opinion in Chelmsford Road, let alone the UK as a whole.”

“In editing the programme, I hope that the BBC will display greater fairness than they showed in putting it together”.

Concerns about the programme

Conflicting statements by the BBC regarding the opinion on the street

The BBC said they had selected a range of people reflecting a broad spread of society. They were fairly evasive about how they made the selection but repeated several times to me, that the main criteria had been that the people had not yet made up their minds on the issue.

In flat contradiction, at the end of the process, the BBC announced that there was a pre-campaign poll, suggesting that everyone had formed a view before the teams ever saw them.

Their statements on the pre and post campaign polls were also inconsistent. They announced at the count at the end of filming the following results:

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Pre-campaign poll

65% pro pound
35% anti pound

Post campaign poll

42% pro pound
58% anti pound

They later told Stuart Coster that the results had in fact been:

Pre-campaign poll

28 people - 56% pro pound
15 people - 30% anti pound
7 people - 14% don't know

Post campaign poll

20 people – 40% pro pound
28 people – 56% anti pound
2 people – 4% don't know

To their credit the BBC did point out on camera that only 17 people changed their minds.

Access to 50 residents

“Supposedly, 50 people took part in the poll. I do not believe that the No team was taken to see 50 people (or anything approaching this figure). I don't have all the lists in front of me but the one I have doesn't actually list 50 names - only 34. A number of those names were in neighbouring streets and I am almost certain that the No team was not taken to these streets. Certainly, I wasn't.”

“The Yes team seemed to be being taken to see people to which the No team were not. For example, I called on one household only after seeing the Yes team call there. Up to that point, the household had not been visited by the No team and no one had suggested that we go there. The No team was kept hanging around for protracted periods of time, while the Yes team appeared to be being rushed around to different streets.”

“Towards the very end of the weekend, I met at least 2 people who had been expecting the BBC but who hadn't been called upon. I would never have met them if they hadn't come out of their house to ask me what was happening.”

“I asked several times to see ‘key resident’, Perry Barrell, a second time, as he appeared to be wavering. I was unable to do this because Tony Banks took up all available time. For some reason (never explained by the BBC) Perry's wife, Cherry, was not included in the poll. (Cherry wanted to keep the pound).”

“I met others who lived on the street who had not been contacted at all about the programme. There were names that went on and off the various lists supplied by the BBC.”

Coaching residents

“A young child, from the Aziz family (residents of Chelmsford Road), was told by the BBC to recite the pro-euro statement:

“If we go into the euro, it will make my Pokomon cards cheaper”

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while waving a 50% off sign. When the No team expressed concern, the BBC's response was to ask him to recite "73% of people don't want the euro".

Pre-filming controversy

"A number of people apparently walked out of the programme in its preparation stage (including Zac Goldsmith) and Business for Sterling.

I was informed by a third party that they walked out because they felt that the BBC was not playing things straight. For example, they arrived at a meeting, supposedly designed to plan the programme, only to find cameras waiting to film the meeting.

Business for Sterling wrote to the BBC 10 days ago asking them not to do the programme and predicting the result which actually occurred."

Appendix 2

We can love the euro - I proved it

Will Hutton feared the worst when he was asked to campaign for a BBC mini-referendum in a London street. But after a weekend of knocking on doors...

Special report: economic and monetary union

Will Hutton

Observer

Sunday February 18, 2001

It was when Tracey Tait waved to me to say she had not changed her mind - and yes she would still be voting in favour of the euro - that I first dared to hope that we could do better than achieving a pro-euro swing. We might even win the mini referendum.

I had been asked in November by the BBC to be team leader for the pro-euro case in a mini referendum campaign to be undertaken over a week-end in a street whose opinions and socio-economic characteristics more or less matched those of the country where support is consistently two to one against the euro.

We would canvass and leaflet just as in a national referendum. I had insisted that we construct a team that was evenly composed of men and women and as young as possible; as the pro-euro side is funkier, younger and more open than the antis, I thought we should try to look that way - although with me in the team we already had a serious deficiency in the age and looks department.

People were listening. They were hungry for information, especially the young - and even more especially young women. What was more extraordinary they were coming over to us because they didn't like the xenophobic cloud of union jockery and reverence to the ageing gods of Britishness from the antis that just hours earlier had seemed like an insuperable block to our case. I had underestimated the British.

It was one of our earlier converts - Andrew Dewsall - who put it best. Going in to the euro made more economic sense than staying out. As for Britishness, he didn't want to be part of a culture that defined his identity as putting on Union Jack boxer trunks on the beach in Corfu, harping on about the war and regarding the European Union as a foreign plot.

Austin Mitchell had just canvassed him wearing his Union Jack tie; the antis can't see it, but it is precisely because people's patriotism runs deep that they recoil from tasteless stage props such as Union Jack ties. Their patriotism is much more quiet, discrete and anchored.

In the event it was a 23 per cent swing; 58 per cent of Referendum Street voting for the euro and only 42 per cent against. The opposition to the euro might be extensive, but it's shallow.

But it didn't feel that way when we started last Saturday morning. Lembit Opik, the LibDem MP, was paired with Marcelle D'Argy Smith, the former editor of *Cosmopolitan*. Tony Banks would join us on Sunday to canvass with Sara Priem of the Young European Movement. And I paired up with Julia Gash, a thirtysomething lingerie designer whose business has been decimated by the high pound.

We sallied forth down Referendum Street - a street off Southgate high street in North London - to meet our first voter. The six antis were led by David Mellor and included the Daily Mail's Simon Heffer and a self-consciously political Tory MEP, Teresa Villiers. With Labour's Mitchell they were cross-party and we thought (wrongly) that their Britain-should-not-give-up-what-works-for-an-eurofudge-and-lose-sovereignty line would play pretty well.

Julia and I found our first five or six encounters pretty depressing. Our argument was that the euro was good for manufacturing jobs, interest rates and investment; moreover it would strike a blow against rip-off Britain by promoting genuine price comparisons with mainland Europe.

Julia's own business experiences, increasingly having to invoice in euros, personally accepting an exchange rate risk even while her goods were being priced out of overseas markets, were pretty sobering. We said that although we could see it was a risk going in, staying out was also a risk. We accepted that sometimes one interest rate would not be suitable for every country, but that the gains for Britain and Europe as a whole would more than compensate for individual country's problems.

As for the sovereignty the sceptics said we were losing, it was illusory; Britain had no more control over the exchange rate in today's world of vast capital movements than Canute had over the tide. The choice was whether we wanted faceless foreign exchange speculators setting the value of the pound or the stability of the European Central Bank. Europe is no more than a club in which like-minded countries in a similar

position get together to achieve common ends that can't be achieved alone - like having a stable currency and consistently low interest rates.

Unsurprisingly, I think these arguments - on balance - make the case for entry pretty overwhelming. But try them on a working-class couple like Rosalind and John Wheeler and you quickly get disabused. He's a Tottenham supporter, a Daily Mail reader and a warehouseman. For all the complaint about lack of debate etc. the Wheelers were really clued up and they fired back replies for our every point.

I tried telling him that if Tottenham were successfully to compete in European football competitions it wouldn't make the club any less English and the FA didn't think it was losing sovereignty by being part of UEFA - and for the first time his sceptic flow was checked. Not for long though; like others we canvassed earlier he was engulfed in suspicion of all things foreign. 1945 lives on.

Then we hit gold; Tracey Tait and Victoria Knight, two highly intelligent young working-class women, were soft antis - but they carried none of the baggage about the Union Jack, the war and even Elgar. They wanted information. Like a lot of those we canvassed, they felt they had never heard the pro argument. Within 15 minutes they had come over to us. It was common sense, they said.

Seeing people respond to your argument is a great feeling - and I saw the buzz that politicians must get. But it was when someone in the lunchtime crowd shouted at a heckler that it was time to put the war behind us, that I first began to feel opinion really changing. The roots of too much euroscepticism is sheer nastiness - and British tolerance runs deeper still.

In the aftermath of the vote a lot of blame was heaped on the hapless Mellor and it is true that one of the reasons the sceptics lost is that they were not as personable as the pros. But this will reproduce itself in a real referendum; scepticism is a darker credo than the sunnier worldview of the pros - and this comes through in the style, culture and personality-type attracted to the twin camps.

Yes is more open than No. What was also impressive was the way young people would listen and the way they soaked up information. And while the British are profoundly patriotic, they are not nationalist in the simple fashion portrayed by the sceptics. An electorate this small is hardly representative, but the result is an important pointer. With leadership and conviction the pros could win a referendum. Tony Blair and Gordon Brown please note.