

THE BBC AND EUROPE

TODAY survey: May 22 – July 21, 2000
Conducted by Minotaur Media Tracking for Global Britain

Preliminary findings

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Introduction

The BBC aims to achieve impartiality in its editorial coverage of national and international events, as it is required to do by its Royal Charter. One of its flagships of journalism and editorial quality is **Today** on BBC Radio 4 – arguably the nation’s most important and influential news and current affairs programme. This survey examined whether that programme’s coverage of developments relating to Britain’s relationship with the European Union reflected and balanced the full range of economic and political opinions currently being expressed in this important area of national debate.

Achieving such balance is particularly important at the present time because within the next two years Britons may be asked to decide through a single question in a referendum whether they wish to join the European Economic and Monetary Union (EMU – “the Single Currency”), or, alternatively, to keep the Pound.

Today is obviously part of a wider news coverage throughout the day by the BBC, both on Radio 4 and elsewhere, and the Corporation interprets its balance and impartiality requirements across the output as a whole. But **Today** is an unusually influential programme, often said to be the main source of news and information at the start of the day among a very important section of the population – and in some cases, all they hear of BBC Radio News. It is therefore reasonable for listeners to expect that this individual programme should achieve balance and impartiality in its key areas of coverage. This particularly applies to an issue where there are strong divisions of opinion, such as entry to EMU.

Obviously in a programme often dealing with breaking news, and also needing to offer a variety of topics to the audience to make it palatable, that balance is not simply a matter of arithmetic (i.e. offering exactly equal airtime to opposite political views, or matching guests by topic). But the Charter requirement does mean that over reasonable time, balance should be maintained, and that different views are fairly and equally represented.

It is also important that, with programmes such as **Today**, the BBC fulfils its public service remit, delivering to listeners not just coverage of fixed events (such as the Portugal EU summit) and breaking news items, but also the enterprising reporting of topics that – on “Europe”, for example - illuminate on a proactive basis the developing relationship with our European partners.

Methodology

Minotaur Media Tracking sought to establish whether the BBC’s requirements of broad impartiality and fairness were met on the **Today** programme between May 22-July 21. The period of the survey was chosen at random. Nine weeks was felt to be sufficient time to observe trends and patterns. In arriving at its judgements, the principals’ wide experience of broadcast news, combined with a rigorous analytical approach, were deployed to ensure that every single relevant programme item was scrutinised and taken into account.

Minotaur Media Tracking recorded and logged the entire contents of the **Today** programme over the nine weeks from May 22 to July 21, a total of 54 editions, adding up to 153 hours of output (45 x3hrs Monday to Friday, plus 9x2hrs on Saturdays). All the programme segments that had significant mentions of European Union-related topics were transcribed, amounting to more than 250 items, running to a total of a little over nine hours. A daily written commentary was also kept, analysing the transcripts on a minute-by-minute basis as soon as they were available. These important, but bulky, components of the evidence used in this paper are available in CD format.

After the survey period, these logs – amounting to more than 200 pages - were used as the basis of this overview analysis.

Minotaur understands that defining fairness and impartiality within a specific area of journalistic output is in itself an inexact form of inquiry. Opinions vary enormously on even the simplest of political points, and on a debate as complex as that about Europe, it is not easy to define where the centre of “balance” should be, let alone whether the BBC is adhering to it. For example within the Euro-sceptic camp, there are those who wish to withdraw from Europe altogether and join NAFTA. But the official Conservative party line remains firmly “In Europe, but not run/ruled by Europe”. Within the Pro-Euro camp, there are those who want urgent entry of the Euro, such as the Liberal Democrats and trade unionists, such as Sir Ken Jackson, while the official Labour party line – as was tested and re-affirmed

vigorously during the period of the survey - is in favour of joining a “successful” Single Currency in principle, but not until the economic conditions are right.

To add further complexity, Pro-Euro advocates often accuse the Conservatives of being anti-European, while Euro-sceptics draw an additional battle line – that Pro-Euro equals pro-federalist and, with it, support for a superstate. Neither do divisions confine themselves neatly to party lines. The dissent of Kenneth Clarke and others to the official Conservative party line has been well publicised, and there are a growing number of Labour Euro-sceptics, such as Lord Shore and Austin Mitchell MP.

Seldom in British history has an issue caused such fundamental discord. Against this complex background, the aim of this survey was to apply common sense journalistic judgements to the coverage. The approach was to ask, topic by topic, and across coverage as a whole, whether:

- principal elements of the Pro-Euro and Euro-sceptic arguments were taken into account
- the programme explored all it could, with fairness, firmness and clarity .
- items were set up and conducted in such a way that differing points of view could be put across

A weakness of an external survey such as this is that the authors have no knowledge of the internal decision-making that went on in arriving at individual programme items and lines of inquiry. These are often taken under severe time constraints. Some of this can be assessed from the outside by deduction. It is for this reason that the aim of this report is to point out apparent problems with the output and open a dialogue over it, not to claim definitively that **Today** was biased or imbalanced.

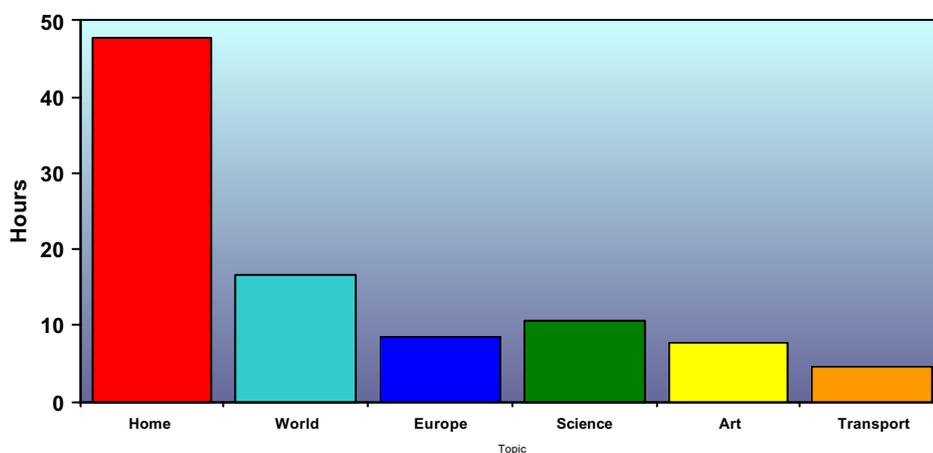
Part 1 - Content

A running daily list of the topics covered is attached at appendix 1. A fuller minute-by minute breakdown is also available.

On content, Minotaur Media Tracking felt it was important that the **Today** programme gave sufficient time to the coverage of European affairs, not just with diary items such as the Portuguese summit and breaking news stories, such as the series of leaks about inward investment, but also of developments that it identified and investigated itself. In other words, it needed to be proactive, not just reactive, in setting the news agenda.

Analysis of the total volume of items on the programme (appendix 2) outside the bulletins and programme fixed-items, indicated that rather less than 9%, amounting to 8 hours and 32 minutes, was devoted to coverage of EU-related matters. This was considerably less than the total devoted to foreign affairs, and less than that given to scientific and environmental matters.

Total - Subject Distribution



Whether this was sufficient coverage, given all the circumstances, is a complex judgement. The average of nine minutes per day of feature items and the total of 4.7 items per day, including bulletin reports and newspaper reviews, adds up to the fact that European Unions affairs were a significant part of the **Today** agenda.

A range of difficult topics was brought into sharp focus (Appendix 1). This happened, for example, on June 2, with a number of items on the developing arguments over the Charter of Fundamental Rights. There was one problem with this coverage, in that an important piece of research relevant to almost everything being discussed was not introduced until the end of the programme, but on balance, it cut to the heart of the debate, and gave viewers an overview of both the Euro-sceptic and Pro-Euro views on this topic.

The main European-related story during the period of the survey was the growing evidence – denied repeatedly by the government – that there were splits in the cabinet over the approach to joining the EMU. **Today** reported this speculation, mainly through its political correspondents, and put the allegations to a string of cabinet ministers, including Tony Blair himself, Robin Cook, Gordon Brown, Margaret Becket. It also sought the opinion of, and reported the reaction of Euro-sceptics to, the apparent differences in approach.

Coverage was also mounted of important topics relevant to the UK, such as the Danish referendum on Euro entry (reports on 20/6 and 14/7), the Austrian battle against EU sanctions (30/6, 11/7 and 12/7), the efforts in Ireland to control inflation against the alleged constraints of being in the Eurozone (7/7),

the debate over attempts by the UK weights and measures authorities to enforce the use of metric, and the difficulties in the enforcement of border controls.

But on other occasions, for example the Portuguese summit on June 19-20, coverage did not seem extensive, or to convey as much of what had gone on as might have been expected. The summit was obviously a very important focus for defining policies and for the programme editors, an important peg for bringing out the key issues. Overall, there was coverage in the weeks building up to the two days in Feira, of several important topics on the agenda, including the Charter of Human Rights, fishing policies, the withholding tax directives the moves that were likely under France's presidency towards a two-speed Europe, enlargement and the continuing debate over the Euro's performance. Within the two days, **Today** had one special package devoted to the summit, several bulletin items outlining the developing agenda issues and decisions, interviews with Tony Blair and Robin Cook, and two business news items looking at the impact of decisions over tax harmonisation. In addition, John Kampfner, as the main BBC correspondent, was interviewed five times to give his assessment of developments. In these he first established the context of the conference, then gradually outlined some of the main decisions, and finally weighed up what had been achieved.

On one level, this seems a significant number of items. Closer inspection reveals, however, that the amount devoted to the conference was overshadowed to a great extent by football hooliganism at Euro 2000. The main parts of the interviews with Tony Blair (June 19) and Robin Cook (June 20), for example, focused on the football issues. Of course, this was an important news story, had a bearing on how Britain was being received at the summit, and could not therefore be ignored. But the impact was to push the treatment of the summit itself to a secondary level, and it is hard to see that the actual volume of coverage on conference issues per se was sufficient. The third John Kampfner piece on June 19, for example, ran to less than a minute and mentioned only that Tony Blair was attempting to ensure unity over the Euro. His closing assessment of the conference on June 20, which incorporated the interview with Robin Cook, included questions covering, first, football hooliganism then the withholding tax concession, and finally whether there was unity over the Euro. The only other assessment was this:

“Absolutely – they’re looking towards this treaty in Nice in December with no little trepidation, the Charter of Rights about which we’ve been hearing over the past couple of days, that’s certainly going to be given impetus by the French. The big dispute is whether this is going to be enshrined in law, or be purely declaratory, and whether there’s going to be new rights enshrined, or whether it’s just existing ones. And then we’ve got the question of new institutional changes that allow for the accession of new countries from Central and Eastern Europe and more Majority Voting. Now Britain is holding out against any form of tax issues being subject to Majority Voting – it wants to retain the veto, so a lot of problems ahead.”

While this clearly flagged the importance of Nice, it was scarcely exhaustive coverage. The newspapers over the two days mentioned far more: for example, agreements over BSE controls, small business regulation, a common European police force, additional debate on the Charter of Fundamental Rights, new cross-border rules on takeovers, and the further development of policies aimed at creating a two-speed Europe (flagged by BBC correspondent, Patrick Bartlett, on June 9 as likely to be one of the most important issues of the summit, see below). It was noticeable also, that nowhere over the two days (or on immediately subsequent days) was a voice heard on the programme that put the Euro-sceptic perspective on events.

Further, John Kampfner's interviewing of Robin Cook seemed less tough than is often the case on **Today**, for example when William Hague or Gordon Brown were interviewed. Mr Cook made, without challenge, the surprising assertion – at total variance with what was being said elsewhere in the media – that other countries at the summit did not think that the way the UK had tackled the football hooliganism was a matter for concern. Mr Kampfner's question about the withholding tax was not really a question but rather a statement that “it had been a personal triumph for the Chancellor”. Not surprisingly, Mr Cook agreed. On the topic of Cabinet splits, Mr Kampfner asked whether he and the Chancellor were singing from the same hymn sheets “and whether it had all been media invention”. Without hesitation, and unsurprisingly Mr Cook responded to the effect that it was from exactly the same sheet, and yes.

Overall, this interchange was more reminiscent of the tone of interviews in the days before Sir Robin Day first began asking senior politicians direct questions than of the modern-day BBC.

Equally surprising was Mr Kampfner's conclusion to his reports from the summit. Against a background of huge international concern about British hooliganism and a week of conjecture of cabinet splits over the Euro - he seemed content to allow Robin Cook to paint a rosy picture of success at the summit, letting him say without challenge that there was no problem over the hooliganism issue, and that he and the Chancellor were singing from exactly the same hymn sheet on the Euro. He chose in the interview not to explore possible problems over Austria, or about the possible difficulties ahead with the Charter of Fundamental Rights, and the enlargement of the community. It seems hard, given all the circumstances, to accept that this was as robust an interview as it could have been, or totally realistic - as a wrap-up piece - about the British position at the Portuguese summit. This might have been justified had there been counter views expressed by other politicians (or even correspondents) in other parts of the programme. But there were not.

Another example of the approach to European coverage was on June 9-10, of the Franco-German summit, extensively covered in the national press as the basis for the development of a "two-speed Europe" **Today** covered it on June 9 with a brief bulletin mention and through a preview correspondent interview with Patrick Bartlett at 6.10am. This flagged that important issues were on the agenda:

"So they're trying to agree a common position on issues such as paring back the National Veto, which was imposed by Britain; also allowing groups of countries to press ahead with deeper integration, without other members being able to stop them; and also this fundamental question of how to reform the European Commission, reduce the number of members, and overhaul the number of votes that Member States have. And this is probably going to be the most controversial issue of this summit, because the Germans are pressing their case to have more votes at ministerial meetings than any other country, which is resisted by the French."

But one two-minute item after the 6am news, outside peaktime, was hardly in-depth coverage.

The day after the Franco-German summit, when the newspapers contained extensive analysis of the implications - including the very important possibility of the emergence of a two-speed Europe - the one mention on **Today** was in an interview with the German ambassador to the UK Herr Hans Frederick Von Plotz. Clearly by this time, other BBC news programmes had considered the outcome, and the need on the day after was to find something that would not be a re-hash and which would introduce new information. The choice of Herr Von Plotz, with his diplomatic constraints and his specific national perspective, was arguably always unlikely to achieve this objective. In the event, Edward Stourton questioned him in three areas - whether the alliance with France was as strong as was being claimed, to which he replied that it was, though there were some differences of opinion; whether he thought that William Hague's stance on the Pound was right, to which he replied the Euro was a difficult issue for all parties; and finally, whether the UK was playing politics in its relationship with Europe, a point with which he agreed. It was left to Herr Von Plotz himself to bring up at the end that the summit had agreed important co-operative measures on the development of a new military airbus and a satellite communications system.

This, therefore seemed a small amount of coverage for **Today** listeners of such a significant event. There was another European item on the agenda that morning - an OECD report suggesting that convergence between the Euro and the Pound was happening - but this was not covered to an extent that it could have introduced the EU "boredom factor", and in any case was very different. Nothing on the main news agenda was so important that programme space was at a tight premium. In this context, it seems hard to explain why so little was done, and why what was done seemed to be from such a one-dimensional perspective. A golden opportunity for illuminating the issues of European Union development seemed not to be utilised.

The overall programme log, which also contains a tracking of the main European stories being covered by the national broadsheets, reveals a number of other areas where **Today's** coverage seemed limited. On June 5-6, for example, there was very little coverage of the Ecofin meeting at which France was reportedly pushing for more powers for the Eurozone. This was covered only in an item in the business news. Further, in that interview, with Dr Jurgen Fischer, head of research in the Commerce Bank (and therefore pro-Euro) Nigel Cassidy did not push hard on one of the key issues. - whether, as the

newspapers that morning were speculating, there were attempts to marginalise the UK. This is the commentary in the daily log:

“This was an interview with a pro-Euro banker seeking to establish whether the Ecofin group was trying to increase its power and perhaps move towards increasing its power in a fashion that would ultimately further isolate the UK in its position outside the Euro-zone. Nigel Cassidy’s intro was structured to make that point. In the event, Dr Fister said – point blank - that there was no chance of this happening.

“This was a view at odds with what others were thinking, as evidenced in the Times that morning (p26 5/6), where David Lister, filing from Brussels, said that Laurent Fabius, France’s finance minister “had proposed measures to give the Euro-11 more political clout”, backed by other Eurozone nations (including Germany, Austria, Spain, Belgium and Finland). Additionally, he said, Spain had called for a special monetary committee responsible for preparing for Euro-11 meetings.

“Lister went further, saying that although the proposals were unlikely to need institutional changes to bring them in to effect, they were likely to antagonise the ECB – and also risk raising suspicions of the Euro-sceptic nations such as the UK, which “had already given warning that the Euro could become a political tool”. He added that the proposals could come into effect from next month, with measures to increase co-ordination between the Euro-11 group and to rise the profile of its monthly meeting.

“Whether or not Lister’s report was inaccurate, or went too far, Mr Cassidy’s interview did not take this issue head on at all. He accepted the words of Dr Fister without putting to him that there were Euro-sceptic fears being reported that not only did France want “to drive a wedge” to push Britain aside, but also that there were specific reports that special motions were being prepared to give the Euro-11 more influence – without need of further discussion.

“For the sake of balance (not simply because it was in the Times), that’s a specific point that arguably should have been put to Doctor Fister, rather than him being allowed to dismiss any chance of change point blank.

“The issue of how fast, and to what extent, European institutions are changing – with or without the consent of the UK – is absolutely central to the European debate currently underway. This interview did not adequately deal with that”.

On the following day, June 7, the broadsheets were teeming with stories about Europe, as outlined in the daily log:

“Another rich variety of EU-related stories in the national press: the head of the Post Office regulators arguing that he favoured a more open EU market in postal services (FT p8 7/6); Chris Patten acting to refocus EU foreign policy and to “assert Brussels’ authority over the EU’s foreign policy”(FT p12 7/6); an editorial calling for the ECB to be “unfashionably bold” in raising Euro-zone interest rates (FT p24 7/6); Euro-sceptic MPs in the Tory party planning to rebel against the official party line to fight the next general election of a “never” join the Euro platform (Independent p1 7/6); proposals to give MEPs a salary of £63,000 in return for a tighter expenses regime (Independent p18 7/6, Guardian p15 7/6, editorial Daily Express 7/6); the government accepting a new European race directive that reversed the burden of proof in discrimination cases (Daily Telegraph p2 7/6); a poll commissioned by the Tories showing that voters in Labour ministers’ seats were strongly opposed to the Euro (Times p14 7/6); John Major attacking “seditious” calls by some Tories to quit the EU (Guardian p11 7/6): the new Lord Chief Justice predicting that European Convention on Human Rights “will probably strip the Home Secretary of his powers to rule that the very worst of murderers should never be freed” (Daily Mail p12 7/6); profile of Tony Blair caught in the middle of the Euro debate being conducted by “dinosaurs” (FT p10 7/6)”.

Although **Today** did cover some of these items briefly - for example the debate about MEPs allowances, in a brief bulletin item, John Major’s speech in a news paper review, and the poll about ministers’ constituents being anti-Euro – there was no substantive coverage on **Today** of any of these topics. Editorial judgements are made on complex grounds, and there is no obligation for **Today** to follow the agenda of newspapers. But it was noticeable over these few days that there was no attempt

to tease out issues with pegs that were important to Euro-sceptics, for example the allowances row, or Chris Patten's call for the EU to assert its foreign policy.

Over the period, the programme interviewed or included soundbites from a wide range of proponents in the European debate, a total of some 130 speakers on matters directly involving the UK's unfolding relationship with the Union. Most of the major figures from the political parties were included, along with a sprinkling of back-bench MPs. There were also a wide range of trade unionists, economists, employers and employers' organisations.

From Europe, there were a number of senior EU and EC officials and politicians from France, Germany Portugal and Denmark - though noticeably not from other EU countries such as Greece, Italy and Spain.

Almost completely absent from the master list of speakers were MEPs, the exceptions being Daniel Hannan (Conservative) and Geoffrey Titford (UKIP).

Overall, it seems that **Today**, during the period of this survey, though covering some items well, did not come to grips adequately with others, and seemed to miss out important opinions in some areas.

Part 2 - Speaker breakdown

The full list of speakers is at Appendix 1. This table is ordered by date of their appearance. Appendix 3 is a breakdown, in date order, of the Pro-Euro, Euro-sceptic and neutral speakers.

Pro-Euro (not to be confused with Pro-European, as it sometimes is) is here defined as those in favour of the Euro, of the UK joining it, and also those in favour of greater integration with the EU – the broad aims of the Britain in Europe group. In the survey, it is assumed that employees of the EU are Pro-Euro, and also in favour of greater integration..

Euro-sceptic covers those who are against joining the Euro now or in the foreseeable future, and those who are wary about increased integration with the EU. It also incorporates those, like UKIP, who want complete withdrawal from the Treaty of Rome.

The classification is complicated by those, like Lord Haskins, who argue that to want to re-negotiate treaties is anti-Europe. The Tory party maintains strongly that they are not anti-Europe – but rather against the extension of treaties into new areas.

Included in the list of Pro-Euro and Euro-sceptic speakers are those who appeared on the programme to talk about issues relating to the UK's unfolding relationship with Europe (for example covering Euro entry, the Charter of Fundamental Rights, border controls, withholding tax and so on. Not included are a small number of those who spoke on EU affairs – for example in a report about Crete being fined for allowing pollution.

During the period of the survey, on issues related to Britain's role in the EU, **Today** featured 87 Pro-Euro speakers and 34 Euro-sceptics. Overall, the Euro-sceptics provided 34 interview and 21 soundbite contributions, while those from the Pro-Euro camp gave 72 interviews and provided 40 soundbites. If the list is confined to UK mainstream politicians – talking about matters relating to the Euro and the UK's relationship with Europe - there were 27 Pro-Euro (who gave 23 interviews and 17 soundbites), buttressed by three trade unionists (four interviews and one soundbite), against 16 Euro-sceptics (15 interviews and 12 soundbites). There were no Euro-sceptic trade unionists.

Broadly therefore, there were twice as many Pro-Euro speakers than Euro-sceptics. If the list is confined to UK politicians, the ratio is also near 2:1. Euro-sceptics gave slightly more interviews than the Pro-Euro ones, but only marginally.

Obviously, political balance in coverage does not equate only to numbers. Other factors such as the length of time given to individual speakers and the overall contextual importance of the topic being discussed come into play. One telling contribution from the right source, or one devil's advocate question skilfully put can help to create overall balance – and it is the job of programme editors to measure this on a day-by-day basis, tailoring their output accordingly.

Yet on the face of it, at least the sheer numbers of Pro-Euro figures, combined with the overall 2:1 ratio would suggest that the BBC needs to explain how their assessment of achieving “balance” in this area is reached. Minotaur Media Tracking could think of no simple reason, other than that in the House of Commons (most) Labour MPs and the Liberal Democrats are Pro-Euro, leaving the Tories as a minority.

Closer analysis of related topics of coverage, for example over June 30 – July 6 when the Nissan warning of job cuts because of the “high value of the Pound” story was followed by two leaks warning of the collapse of inward investment and then the release of inward investment trade figures – reveals similar apparent imbalance.

This was the breakdown of opinions sought in the handling of arguably the most important EU-related story of the survey:

June 30 – four views (two interviews and two soundbites), all in peak programme time, warning that the “high value of the Pound” was a problem, and that it could be solved by joining the Euro. One neutral commentator, early in the programme, saying that a number of factors, including the “high Pound” could be involved.

July 1 – Another trade unionist re-asserting that 3m jobs were at stake if the UK did not join the Euro, one Euro-sceptic soundbite saying that the fears over the Pound were overdone and a Euro-sceptic arguing that intervention to force up the Euro would be dangerous (but not tackling the issue of whether jobs were at stake because of the “high value of the Pound”, as had been strongly alleged by the four Pro-Euro speakers up to this point)

July 3 - One industrialist, one senior MP and one manufacturer agreeing in peak time interviews that there was potential meltdown in inward investment because the UK wasn't in the Euro. One interview – very early in the programme - with a Japanese analyst saying that Japanese fears about investment were based on a number of factors, not just the “high value of the Pound”. One question put at the end of this to a Euro-sceptic, who said the “high value Pound” couldn't alone be blamed for Japanese investment decisions.

July 4 – Euro-sceptic industrialist disagrees strongly with a leak suggesting that Japanese investment would dry up if the UK did not join the Euro. North West employer says that inward investment and jobs were at risk. Labour (Pro-Euro) MP condemns industrialist's remarks about the Japanese ambassador, and then Chris Patten says that the warnings of the ambassador were spot on.

July 5 - US industrialist says inward investment figures show that the US doesn't care whether the UK joins Euro. US ambassador says US likes investing here, but won't be drawn on the Euro. Senior Tory MP says trade figures prove the UK doesn't need to join the Euro. Senior Euro-sceptic figure returns to defend his attack on the Japanese ambassador and say he got it wrong. Senior civil servant says Lord Hanson is wrong to attack an ambassador. A Euro-sceptic and a Pro-Euro investment expert take questions on whether the UK is at risk. The director of a major Pro-Euro group argues that the investment is at risk, preceded by soundbites from a Euro-sceptic MP and a Pro-Euro one.

July 6 – Former Japanese ambassador gives soundbite saying that the current ambassador was right to warn that the Japanese would stop investing in the UK. The European Commissioner for Trade says that the UK relies heavily on Europe for trade.

The total for the period were as follows:

Pro- Euro interviews 11

Sir Ken Jackson, head of AEEU, John Cushnar, head of Nissan in the UK, John Monks, TUC, Hugh Morgan-Williams, North-east Chamber of Commerce. Martin O'Neill Labour chairman of the Trade and Industry Select Committee, Alan Woods UK head of Siemens, Vernon Holt, North-West region of Engineering Employers Federation; Donald Anderson, chairman of Foreign Affairs Select Committee, Chris Patten EU Commissioner for External Affairs; Graham Bishop, former investment banker, Simon Buckley, director, Britain in Europe Campaign; Pascal Lamy, EU Trade Commissioner.

Pro-Euro soundbites 4

Chris Richeter, HSBC securities; Bill Midgley, North-East Chamber of Commerce, Giles Radice, chairman of European Movement, Sir Hugh Cortaze, former ambassador to Japan.

Neutral interviews 4

Carl Ludvigson, motor industry analyst; Philip Leider, US ambassador; Norika Harma, Japanese analyst with Matsushita; Jonathan Baume, First Division of Civil Servants.

Euro-sceptic interviews 5

Ruth Lea, Institute of Directors, Lord Hanson (2); Michael Portillo; Phillip Carrol, chief executive Flaw Corporation; Roger Bootle, Capital Economics.

Euro-sceptic soundbites 2

Stephen Alambritis, UK Federation of Small Businesses, Austin Mitchell MP.

This was a particularly important sequence of stories in the Euro debate. It was unusual in that the issue of whether or not foreign investment was being damaged by being outside, created clear divisions on Pro-Euro and Euro-sceptic lines. Essentially the Pro-Euro camp believed that the Nissan warning indicated that all their fears about the UK being outside the Eurozone were being realised through the

suspension of investment programmes because of exchange rate instability. Foremost among those warning that millions of jobs could therefore be at risk, and at the main axis of coverage, were Sir Ken Jackson, John Monks, and Martin O'Neill MP. Ranged against them in this argument – contending that inward investment was not under threat at all and that the high Pound per se was not an issue, but rather (if anything) the low Euro –were Lord Hanson and Michael Portillo. In this context, it seems hard to explain how the sequence of interviews constituted balance. All of those classified as “pro-Euro” were arguing in one way or another that the Euro was a solution to the problems being faced by the manufacturing industry.

By contrast, early in the survey period, there were isolated days in which the Euro-sceptic perspective on topics was put without a corresponding pro-Euro argument. This happened for example, on June 8, when Francis Maude was interviewed about his party's plans to call for a referendum on early Euro entry. However, this was the exception rather than the rule.

On most days, the expression of a Euro-sceptic perspective was usually accompanied by the close proximity of a Pro-Euro view. And often, an interview with a pro-Euro figure was prefaced only by a soundbite from a Euro-sceptic, as happened on July 8, when Kenneth Clarke was welcoming the initiation of proper debate in moves towards joining the Euro, and was prefaced only by a brief word from Bill Cash saying that the series of leaks over the past week had been suspiciously orchestrated.

Part 3 - Corus/Nissan “high value of the Pound”

An important thread in the European debate which **Today** considered extensively during the period of the survey was the damage being caused to UK manufacturing by the relatively high costs of our exports as a result of currency fluctuation. This was generally characterised on the programme as the problems of the “high value of the Pound” (usually, but not always, “against the Euro”), although some figures Euro-sceptics (for example Michael Portillo on July 6) argued that the real problem was the “weak Euro”. In wider terms, the reality during this period was that the Pound reached its lowest - and therefore arguably “weakest” – position against the dollar in almost four years. The position of the Euro against the Pound was also “weak”, its value reaching some of the lowest points since the launch.

It is recognised that the phrase “the high value of the Pound” was probably adopted by **Today** to assist in the clarification of the reporting of a complex issue. Clearly, Nissan, was complaining about the “strong” Pound and some economic commentators were themselves using it as the way of explaining that in some markets, British exports were expensive. But with such shorthand came attendant dangers of imbalance – there was a special duty to explain the differences of interpretation and the strands of argument which led Euro-sceptics to their position of disliking the phrase. In the event, the analysis below indicates that this special duty was perhaps not clearly met.

As a topic of concern, the “high value of the Pound” was first brought up during the survey period on May 25, when the business news included an interview with the leader of a lobby from the West Midlands going to London to ask the government for measures to reduce the value of the Pound against other currencies. It was noticeable here that in the first mention of the topic, no qualification of “against the Euro” was included. This is what Mary Garn said:

“More than a hundred business people from the West Midlands are travelling to London this morning to tell senior figures the strong Pound’s having a damaging effect on their business.”

A week later, there was a package containing opinion from three economists, one of whom said that the “high value of the Pound” was pushing manufacturers away from the UK and towards the Eurozone. On June 6, Kenneth Clarke, responding to Lord Lawson’s claims that the purpose of the EMU was to move Europe towards a superstate, said that the “high value of the Pound” was damaging the British economy and its industrial base.

On June 12, the debate moved up a gear when **Today** led its bulletins with a warning from Sir Ken Jackson that the government needed to take stronger action over joining the Euro because the “high value of the Pound” was putting 3m jobs and manufacturing industry at risk. This was buttressed by an interview with Martin O’Neill, chairman of the Commons Trade and Industry Select committee, who agreed broadly with Sir Ken Jackson’s analysis. An important rebuttal of this came from Michael Portillo on June 15. The following day, reacting to the news that steelmaker Corus was to make 2,000 redundancies, both a BBC correspondent and a trade union leader at the affected plants said that the “high value of the Pound” was the reason, though other possibilities were also mentioned. The same programme also contained an interview with Liberal Democrat treasury spokesman Matthew Taylor, who also advanced the argument that the Chancellor’s slow progress towards joining the Euro was putting jobs at risk.

On June 17, following up on the Corus jobs losses and arguments about whether there should be early entry of the Euro, Bill Morris of the Transport Union, said he disagreed that 3m jobs were at risk in the short term, although he agreed that the UK needed to join the Single Currency as soon as the government’s tests were met. Ken Livingstone concurred completely that 3m jobs were at risk, and raised the additional claim that unless the Pound came down and stability was achieved by joining the Euro, many London firms would start relocating.

On June 26, David Yelland, the editor of the Sun argued that the government was taking the UK into the Euro by stealth and called for an early referendum on the matter.

The next major treatment of the “high value of the Pound” putting jobs at risk came on June 30th. Here the peg was that the chairman of Nissan had given a warning, in an interview with the Financial Times, that his company would not manufacture the new Micra model in Sunderland unless it joined the Euro, thereby bringing down the value of the Pound and creating exchange rate stability. The view was

amplified in the programme through an interview with John Cushnar, the head of Nissan in the UK, who confirmed broadly the story, and as a result of strong pushing from Sue MacGregor, that Nissan did want the UK to join the Euro. Bill Midgley, of the North-East Chamber of Commerce also said that jobs were at risk, and Sir Ken Jackson, interviewed as head of the main union at Nissan (his strongly pro-Euro stance was not spelled out to listeners) repeated that he now believed that millions of UK jobs were at risk because of the “high value of the Pound”.

The following day, coverage included a soundbite from Stephen Alambritis, of the UK federation of Small Businesses, who argued that it should be left to the British people in a referendum to decide Euro entry. Ruth Lea, a leading Euro-sceptic, and Roger Monks of the TUC (strongly pro-Euro), were invited to discuss the Nissan warning that large numbers of jobs were at risk. It became more of an exploration of whether the TUC’s call for intervention by the government to boost the value of the Pound was feasible, and the Euro-sceptic perspective on the issue as a whole was not fully explored.

On Monday morning, July 3, the emphasis shifted to a leaked memo, said to have been written by a senior civil servant (from the DTI’s Invest in Britain Bureau) warning of a possible meltdown in the British manufacturing industry, unless the Government changed its ‘wait and see’ policy on the European EMU. This item – followed up from the morning’s papers – was second story in the bulletins. It was followed up in the programme through an interview with Hugh Morgan Williams, of the NE Chamber of Commerce, who agreed that jobs were at risk; Martin O’Neill MP, who warned that the government had only until October to decide finally on how soon it wanted to join the Euro; and with Alan Woods, the head of Siemens in the UK, who had to deny a set-up that his company had shed UK jobs because of the “high value of the Pound”, before moving on to warn that the only solution to current problems was to join the Euro. There was also in business news at 6.15, an interview with the head of investment at Matsushita, saying that although the confidence of Japanese investors in the UK was shaken, other factors than the “high value of the Pound” were involved. At 6.50, in business news update, the views of an HSBC spokesman were used to suggest that the warning in the memo supported the view that millions of jobs were at risk.

The next day, July 4, the second lead in the bulletins was another leaked memo, this time from the British ambassador in Japan, who was warning that inward investment from Japan would dry up unless the UK joined the Euro. The Euro-sceptic industrialist, Lord Hanson, rebutted the claims in a programme interview which also included Vernon Holt, the vice-chairman of the NW region of the Engineering Employers Federation. The latter disagreed with Lord Hanson, and claimed that many of his members were at risk. Donald Anderson, chair of the Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, interviewed mainly about the hunt for the killer of the UK ambassador to Greece, was invited to comment on Lord Hanson’s views that the Japanese memo had been deliberately leaked. He said such a suggestion was an impossibility, as ambassadors did not do that. Chris Patten, being interviewed about the Zimbabwe elections, was also asked about Lord Hanson’s views. He, too, said it was impossible that the memo would have been leaked by the ambassador, and also contended that Lord Hanson’s claims that Britain would be better off if it joined NAFTA and reduced its role in Europe, were wrong-headed as most of the UK’s trade was with Europe.

At the end of this piece, John Kampfner, the BBC’s political correspondent, was invited to give an assessment of the leaks. He said it indicated that this was the start of “a projected propaganda campaign by both sides”, particularly those wanting to join the Euro early.

On July 5, the bulletins had -as fourth or fifth in the running order, lower down than the leak stories – that inward investment figures showed record levels. At 8am, this was revised to include the lead that Lord Hanson, interviewed on the programme, had declined to apologise for suggestions that the British ambassador to Japan had leaked his concerns about inward investment (in the interview mentioned below). In the business news, a US investor in the UK said that Euro entry was irrelevant to his decisions. The US ambassador, though refusing to be drawn on the Euro said that the UK was a good investment prospect. Michael Portillo said that manufacturing industry was not suffering from “the strong Pound”, but from the weak Euro and argued that the UK could prosper outside the Euro. Lord Hanson, asked if he would apologise for his remarks about the UK Japanese ambassador, said he would not, and claimed that he had got his analysis on inward investment prospects completely wrong. A leading civil servants’ union spokesman attacked Lord Hanson for his remarks. Two bankers were brought in to respond to pre-selected listeners’ questions about the Euro, with one advancing Euro-sceptic and the other Pro-Euro arguments. An item on whether the memos had been leaked included

soundbites from Labour Euro-sceptic Austin Mitchell MP, and Giles Radice, chairman of the European Movement. These were followed by a substantive interview with Simon Buckby, the director of the Britain in Europe campaign, who argued that more important than the leaking issue was that jobs were definitely at risk.

On July 6, coverage of the issue abated. The only item was that Pascal Lamy, Europe's Trade Commissioner, was addressing a meeting of the CBI on how important the UK's links with Europe were. John Humphrys pushed that the UK's links with the US were just as important. The Lamy sequence was prefaced by a soundbite from the a former UK ambassador to Japan who agreed with the contents of the leaked memo that jobs were at risk.

Peter Shore, the Labour Euro-sceptic, was asked on July 7, what he thought about Wim Duisenberg's remarks, reported in the bulletins, that the UK economy was converging with the Euro. He said that the UK Chancellor had many tools at his disposal for dealing with the economy, only one of which was the value of the Pound. Simon Buckby was also part of the interview.

The following day, July 8, the programme again looked at the leaked memo issue. It included a soundbite from Euro-sceptic MP Bill Cash that they looked "orchestrated", before moving to an interview with Kenneth Clarke. He welcomed the beginning of real debate on Euro entry, claimed that the government was definitely behind the leaks, and repeated that jobs were seriously at risk. John Prescott, argued that the government's policies on Euro-entry were exactly right – he was not asked questions on the issue of jobs being at risk.

On July 10, the programme newspaper review mentioned that the Daily Mirror was carrying a story saying that Nestle was warning that jobs were at risk at the York KitKat factory because of the "high value of the Pound". Nigel Cassidy also reported the item in business news. Mr Cassidy mentioned the following day that the Sun had brought out a special York edition claiming that the factory head was the most dangerous man in Europe.

On July 12, on business news, there was a brief mention that engineering employers were calling on the government to take action to alleviate the damage being done on the economy by the "strong Pound" and the weak Euro.

Two days later, July 14, a bulletin story said that Corus were planning to make more job losses and were blaming the "high value of the Pound". A union leader, interviewed about the latest losses, put the blame on the company and did not bring into the equation the "high value of the Pound". A week later, on July 21, with Corus confirming further redundancies, a union leader and the BBC correspondent commenting on the story, both mentioned "the high Pound", but not as a major factor.

Thus over the course of the survey, the "high value of the Pound" was repeatedly said to be putting jobs at risk. It was the fulcrum of very extensive coverage of the Euro debate, with John Prescott remarking in his interview on July 8 that he hadn't listened to **Today** in weeks "without hearing mention of the Euro". The overall drift of this coverage appeared to be to report that trade unionists and others were warning of two points

- The "high value of the Pound" was damaging manufacturing by pricing exports out of the market, thereby putting jobs at risk
- The solution being argued in some quarters was joining the Euro, as this would lead to stability in exchange rates.

Stories on this theme were elevated high in the bulletins on five separate occasions during the survey period. This was particularly striking in the case of the warning by Sir Ken Jackson on June 12, as it was not pegged on anything other than a speech that he was due to make, and on June 30, when the programme chose to amplify the interview in the Financial Times. Clearly job losses are important news items, and the **Today** programme had a duty to follow them up. The issues they raised relating to the Euro were also of the utmost importance in the EMU debate.

A major question here, though, is whether the subsequent interviews gave a balanced perspective of the different arguments being deployed by Euro-sceptics and the Pro-Euro camp. The analysis above (Part 2) in relation to the intensive coverage days June 30 – July 8 would suggest an imbalance in

favour of the Pro-Euro side. Further, devil's advocate interviewing did not appear to make up for the shortage of Euro-sceptic views.

In the period as a whole, there were also considerably more Pro-Euro voices heard deploying arguments that joining the Euro would create economic stability and save jobs, led by Sir Ken Jackson on June 12, and Ken Livingstone on June 17. The programme did interview important figures from the Euro-sceptic side, including Michael Portillo and Lord Hanson. They were able to deploy rigorous arguments rebutting the claims of Pro-Euro side, but they were in a noticeable minority. **On key days such as June 30 and June 12, not a single Euro-sceptic voice was heard, a factor important in attempting to assess whether overall, there was balance.**

The transcripts of the interviews and bulletin items also reveal that the programme mentioned specifically on many occasions that "millions of jobs" could be at risk through the problems of the "high value of the Pound". Yet when it came to the handling of the record level of inward investment, there was no exploration or mention of specifically how many jobs might have been created. The bulletin report said only :

"Figures released Today are expected to show that Britain attracted a record amount of investments from foreign companies last year. Campaigners against joining the Single European Currency are likely to claim that the figures prove Britain is prospering outside the Eurozone. But the Pro-Euro camp will argue that the high level of inward investments will not be maintained, unless the Government shows more enthusiasm for British membership of the currency."

Those interviewed on the programme pointed out that the UK was an attractive place to invest, and made the important Euro-sceptic point that, to them, the Euro was an irrelevancy in this equation. But the programme scripts or questioning did not seek to establish how many jobs had been created by the investment flow. This was in contrast to newspaper coverage that morning, which mentioned the figure of up to 50,000 jobs (Daily Mail 6/7). It would seem a significant omission that, if Corus making 2,500 redundant made a headline, and Sir Ken Jackson warning that 3m jobs were at risk through the UK not being in the Euro was elevated to programme lead, the creation of up to 50,000 jobs by record levels of inward investment – even if the precise figure was contested - was not mentioned.

With the Nissan story on June 30-July1, there was another area of limited relevant information being made available to listeners. The emphasis in the main treatments was that jobs were at risk because Nissan wanted the UK to join the Euro. But most did not mention an important ownership link between Nissan and Renault which meant that – irrespective of the value of the Pound – there may have been a company reason for moving Micra production to France. Motor analyst Charles Ludvigson did point this out this briefly in the 6.15 business news, as did BBC correspondent Jonty Bloom at 6.35. But the important point was not pursued by the **Today** scripts or presentation in later scripts or questioning , with the result that it was almost totally lost under Sir Ken Jackson's dramatic claims that up to 3m jobs were at risk.

Given that spin and counter-spin were going on in the presentation of facts from both sides of the debate, this seems on the face of it a significant omission. It also seems from inspection of the transcripts that **Today** was slow to consider – given that there were two leaks in two days from highly unusual sources warning that the economy faced meltdown unless the EMU was joined – whether the leaks had been orchestrated in some way. John Pienaar, the highly experienced BBC political correspondent, was interviewed on July 4, for example, without reference at all to the point that there had been two in two days. The bulletins that day mentioned that the second such leak in two days was "suspicious", but did not say why, observing instead that:

"The pressure on the Government, which is being increased by a series of suspiciously regular leaks, is being added to by the now-regular chorus of big-business leaders calling for Britain to join the Euro".

Later in the programme, John Kampfner, commenting on the leaks, claimed that they were the start of the general election campaign. But neither he nor the presenter explored the important point of whether they may have been timed ahead of the inward investment figures, due the following day.

On the business news the following morning, when it would perhaps have been possible to explore whether the two leaks in two days could have been orchestrated in an attempt to limit the “good news” element of the inward investment figures, Nigel Cassidy introduced his item as follows:

“The row over whether the UK economy is suffering from indecision over joining the Euro will take a new turn Today, as we’ve been hearing. Yearly figures from the Invest in Britain Bureau, the part of the Department of Trade and Industry which encourages overseas firms to set up shop in the UK will show record levels of foreign investment here, in spite of the relative weakness of the Euro. What the Government hopes is that these figures will help calm the stormy Euro debate, whipped up this week by fresh job warnings from high-profile inward investors such as Nissan and Toyota, and two separate leaks by senior Government officials, warning about the impact of the official line”.

This clearly suggested that the government was under pressure over its Euro policy, but not that the impetus might be coming from those who wanted early Euro entry.

Lord Hanson, in the programme, was able to point out that the timing of the Japanese memo, and its content, was suspicious. Similarly, Michael Portillo was able to argue that the weak Euro was to blame for the economic woes faced by some manufacturers. But he was not asked by the presenter what he thought about the timing of the leaks.

The overall issue of whether the memos had been leaked by senior government officials was, by contrast, the subject of intensive scrutiny by the national press, for example by the Times on July 4 and the Financial Times on July 5. In the **Today** programme, this was treated as a minor issue, with the focus firmly on the danger of job losses, and then the propriety of Lord Hanson’s remarks about the UK Japanese ambassador.

Part 4 - The Today Format

Today is a fast-paced magazine programme; the average duration of a feature is between three and five minutes, and a bulletin correspondent report just over a minute. For most of the programme's daily output this tight format is unproblematic. The majority of stories covered each morning are homogenous – self-contained reports fitting neatly into their allotted time-slots. But for those issues requiring more consideration than can be fitted into a single package or interview, coverage is divided into separate sections and dispersed over the course of the programme. This fragmentary structure can present difficulties, especially when the story being covered is as multifaceted or complex as many issues in the European debate, as happened several times during the period of this survey. Often, two or more perspectives on an argument are broadcast up to the full three hours apart – meaning that individual listeners hear only one viewpoint, as very few tune in for the entire duration.

This occurred, for example, on June 3, during the coverage of the memo warning of a meltdown in UK investment from Japan unless we joined the Euro. Three interviews agreeing with the viewpoint were broadcast during peak time (defined as between 7am-9am), while an important “balancing” perspective, from a Japanese analyst who contended that many more factors other than the Euro were in play, went out only during the business news at 6.17am.

The Speed of Delivery

Radio is an ephemeral medium: audiences cannot revisit a difficult passage as they can when reading a newspaper, nor do they have visual imagery to reinforce elements of a story, as with TV news. There are many factors affecting audience understanding, the most obvious and basic of these being the speed at which a report is delivered.

As the monitoring process progressed, it seemed to the monitors that reports on European politics were often being delivered more quickly than reports covering other subjects. In order to test this hypothesis, a sample of thirty reports were selected and analysed. To avoid problems caused by stylistic differences of delivery, the same presenter was chosen for a particular type of report.

The results (measured in words spoken per minute) were as follows:

	Home	World	Europe	Science	Arts	Transport
Bulletins	184	181	192	172	187	188
Presenter and BBC Correspondent	185	200	200	183	197	186
BBC Correspondent (Stand-alone report)	176	150	190	163	153	173
Interview with one person	199	173	187	172	164	190
Interview with two people	181	137	187	185	179	179
Overall Average:	185	169	191	175	176	182

(Notes on the methodology used in the compilation of this table are at Appendix 4)

Although the overall rates were often influenced by the speaking style of the person being interviewed – something outside the programme's control – it was observed that the rapidity of the introduction and questioning seemed to affect the way the interviewee responded. A slow introduction with measured questioning generally resulted in a moderate and unhurried conversation; when these elements were more rapid, interviewee speaking rates were usually faster.

Additional difficulties emerged with strong regional or foreign accents – the latter being a feature of some of **Today's** European coverage; or, most importantly, the complexity of the concepts being addressed.

This surprising finding raises important questions about the possible causes of the variation. This is a relatively small sample, but the findings confirmed the impressions of the researchers. It seems possible that with science stories, presenters deliberately slow down because they were aware that what they were dealing with was complex. In international affairs, there were often long or unfamiliar words to contend with. With Europe, the precise cause is a mystery, though the monitors formed the impression that the presenters actually seemed on occasions to want to rush through the delivery, as if Europe was a topic that was perhaps less interesting. Whatever the reasons, it warrants investigation.

Complexity of Material

Today's structure is such that information must be imparted quickly and succinctly. As a consequence, it was observed that the programme's European coverage often assumed a high level of background knowledge on the part of its audience. Certain issues and concepts – both historical and contemporary – were referred to regularly over the course of the monitoring period, often without explanation or context. Phrases such as 'The Maastricht Treaty', 'Tax Harmonisation', 'The Schengen Agreement' and 'EMU' are each loaded with their own meanings and histories; and each listener will have a different level of awareness of them when they arrive unannounced in parallel debates.

Clearly it would be impractical for the programme to explain these issues every time they are used – such an approach would bring a stagnancy to coverage and would risk patronising the audience. Similarly, the programme does not operate in isolation and it can be safely assumed that its listeners have access to other forms of news and current affairs media, along with some memory of past coverage, where listeners may have heard these auxiliary subjects covered in isolation. There is a fine balance, however, between clarity and over-exposition, and the use of such phrases without background information can present the listener with an additional challenge and sometimes produce coverage which is confusing or opaque.

Perhaps the most conspicuous example was on the May 29, when **Today** attempted to merge two separate stories together, in a number of features on the theme of immigration. The first story was a bilateral agreement between the UK and France to allow immigration officials to patrol three French Eurostar terminals. The second concerned Britain's signing up to the Schengen Information Exchange – which would give the British police access to files held on the continent. Problems arose when **Today** then brought the wider constitutional implications of the Schengen Agreement into the debate, namely the parts of the accord which have removed border controls amongst the signatory countries. Listeners were being told on the one hand about new, tougher measures to curb illegal immigration, on the other that there were possibilities that Britain's border controls could be removed completely. Here then, were *three* separate issues, each deserving of their own coverage, placed together in such a way as to make each of them virtually unintelligible.

Although it is unclear whether these issues were grouped due to time constraints or what seems from the outside to be doubtful editorial judgement, this condensing of issues also happened in a number of other areas. It would seem that the shorter an item's length, the more likely it is that the issues themselves will be reduced to a single phrase or concept:

NIGEL CASSIDY: I read that hundreds of British workers making Kit-Kats face the axe if Britain keeps the Pound, the chocolate giant Nestle warned last night. It says that foreign wholesalers are switching to Nestle's German plant because it uses the EMU, they have the headline 'Quit-Kat'."

This short item appeared in the Business News of July 10. The story itself has a somewhat questionable pedigree – having been part of an overt Daily Mirror campaign to join the Euro - and the danger is that the item merely consolidated the one-sided questionable ideas about the damaging effects of the 'high Pound' with warnings from unions and manufacturing industry. Although brief, stories such as these perhaps have the most impact because of their simplicity – and in this case more so because of the catchy tabloid headline tacked onto the end.

Sometimes, whole debates were explained in this journalistic shorthand – a practice with serious implications for balance and fairness. Examples during the survey included that it was 'the "high value of the Pound" against the Euro' rather than 'the weakness of the Euro against Sterling' that was putting jobs at risk (as repeatedly during June 30 – July 5 over the Nissan jobs warning and the subsequent memo leaks about a reduction of inward investment), Another was the 'Euro-bashing' Daily Telegraph

– a phrase with implicit overtones of intolerance and violence, as opposed to the frequently used opposites “Pro-Euro” or “Europhile”. France and Germany, in contrast, it was said, could form a ‘pioneer group’ wanting a two-speed Europe, a phrase with overtones of bravery in the face of the unknown. Meanwhile, the notion of Britain joining NAFTA was said in some quarters to be ‘barmy’ (June 30, interview with John Perle), Euro-sceptics were reported to be ‘fervent’ or extremist (June 12, interview with Julian Morris of Business for Sterling) and Britain had scored an important ‘victory’ over the Withholding Tax. It can be contested that language itself is rarely neutral, but on many occasions these terms are memorable, have emotive central concepts, and could clearly sway public perception of the Europe debate.

Over the course of the monitoring period, there was only one report that placed contemporary European politics into a wider historical framework. A piece broadcast on June 5 looked back at the 1975 Common Market Referendum, and interviewed two key figures in that debate, Barbara Castle and Roy Jenkins. Clearly, features such as this are invaluable to listener understanding – especially when one considers that even the youngest voters in that Referendum will now be over forty years of age, leaving a whole generation with little personal knowledge of this issue. But with a format as headline-based as the **Today** programme, opportunities for such discussions are relatively few and far between.

Problems of Engagement

There are clear indications that **Today**’s self-imposed time constraints seem to affect the way features and interviews are actually conducted. Foremost, there were many occasions over the course of the monitoring period where presenters seemed determined to ask a fixed number of questions during an interview. While this practice appeared to be born of necessity, it often led to the interviewer moving onto their (possibly predetermined) ‘next question’, rather than engaging fully with the responses being made by the interviewee. This was demonstrated during an interview with Kenneth Clarke on 8th July.

JAMES NAUGHTIE: Do you accept that if the pro-Euro side doesn’t get its act together, the vote may slip beyond recall?

KENNETH CLARKE: No, I think we will have a referendum in two years’ time, and I think the ‘yes’ side will win it.

This was seemingly clear indication that he was placing his own views on Europe over the political future of the Conservative Party he represents – he was effectively saying that he believed the Conservatives would lose the next General Election. Yet rather than asking Mr Clarke to elaborate on this comment, Mr Naughtie focused briefly on the time scale for joining the Euro proposed by Mr Clarke, before moving onto a question on Governmental infighting between Euro-enthusiast Robin Cook and a more reticent Gordon Brown, which was dominating the news at that time.

A lack of engagement could also lead to inaccuracies going unchallenged. In an interview with Sir Ken Jackson of the AEEU, on the 30th June the union Leader claimed, ‘three million jobs are at stake’, if Britain remained outside of the EMU. In fact, the figure he used was highly controversial, being based on *possible* job losses calculated by the Pro-Euro camp

JH: You see, the latest poll this morning shows we’re even less enthusiastic about the Euro now than we were before.

KJ: Yes, and the less enthusiastic we get, the more job threats we get. And you know, Nissan is only one; we’ve seen what’s happened at Rover, we’ve seen what’s happened at Ford, we’ve seen the announcements made by Corus over the last few days. This is just the tip of the iceberg, there are millions of jobs, three million jobs at stake out there.

JH: But you’ve got a heck of a job to try to persuade people to love the Euro.

Even though the figure used was hotly contested by Euro-sceptics and was based on the *possible* threat to jobs if Britain was to leave the EU, rather than not join the Euro, John Humphrys neglected to challenge Sir Ken on this important point, an issue at the heart of the debate about joining the EMU. He moved on instead with a question which, though superficially devil’s advocate in tone, in fact

invited him to put forward other arguments against the Euro-sceptics rather than probing him on the disputed figure.

On one noticeable occasion, a lack of engagement was demonstrated from an item's outset. On July 12 July, **Today** broadcast a piece based on a report by the fund management group, Phillips & Drew. The report warned that pension funds would be adversely effected if Britain were to join the Euro. John Humphrys remarked in his introduction that 'this is going to be horribly complicated and technical,' which appeared to set the item up as inaccessible to listeners from the outset. Despite a good attempt by business correspondent, Nigel Cassidy, to explain the intricacies of the report, Mr Humphrys' tone was arguably wearied, and he seemed to display a distinct indifference to the matters being discussed. It is interesting here to compare John Humphrys' comments to other features broadcast by the programme – for example those on scientific matters. Many would see these items as dealing with 'complicated and technical' subjects, but on almost all occasions the presenters showed signs of engagement with the topic and the reports were almost wholly lucid, linear and comprehensible to the layperson (and as the figures above reveal, delivered more slowly).

Restrictive Interviewing and Soundbite Journalism

Structural constraints created by pre-determined lines of questioning and inappropriate choice of guests could also serve to push interviewees down what seemed to be a restrictive path. In most instances, the purpose seemed to be to add weight to a central tenet of a main news story, to provide a real voice to the theoretical arguments discussed by the programme's own correspondents; but there are clear examples of this strategy producing superficial, one-dimensional coverage.

In the previously mentioned interview with the German Ambassador on June 10 about the Franco-German summit, Edward Stourton seemed intent only on drawing a comment from him on the British Euro debate. The second half of the piece saw Mr Stourton rephrasing the same question on this theme six times, but on each occasion Herr Von Plotz refused to be drawn on the issue. As the interview reached its conclusion, the Ambassador had to interrupt Mr Stourton to elaborate on the other matters that were decided at the summit. While Mr Stourton's interview style was hard-edged – similar to that employed against evasive politicians - on this occasion, it seemed only to highlight that Herr Von Plotz was an inappropriate choice of interviewee on this topic and for this type of treatment.

On the June 30, John Cushnar, director of the Nissan plant in Sunderland, was interviewed regarding his company's recent threats to expansion. Mr Cushnar himself initially appeared to be calling simply for exchange rate stability. The interview progressed to the issue of the Euro, with Sue MacGregor asking Mr Cushnar if "it would be helpful to Nissan if there was a more clear contention to join the Euro soon". Mr Cushnar answered in the affirmative the first time, but Sue MacGregor continued the interview by asking virtually the same question twice more. A possibility here seems that the end of the 'predetermined path' was reached rather too suddenly, the *raison d'être* of the interview had been achieved and Ms MacGregor was left with little else to say.

Other examples saw guests, particularly in the shorter time-slots, being guided towards producing 'soundbites' – neat encapsulations of viewpoint which can be used as a basis for later interviews, or recycled for inclusion in the hourly bulletins. When the original premise of an interview became derailed, however, distinct problems emerged.

For example, Sue MacGregor began an interview with Alan Wood of Siemens on July 3 with an introduction describing how the company had 'already pulled out of some of its investment in the UK'. This line of inquiry seemed to be aimed at adding substance to one of the morning's lead stories – a leaked DTI memo threatening industrial meltdown unless the Government made clear moves towards joining the Euro. But Mr Wood himself began by correcting Ms MacGregor's opening statement:

ALAN WOOD: If I could just correct the point you made about Siemens pulling back on investment, that's not currently true we . . .

SUE MACGREGOR: (*interrupting*): You have in the past.

AW: We cut our investment in our semiconductor factory two years ago, but that was not because of the exchange rate situation, it was because of the situation in the semiconductor industry.

SM: Yes, I hope I didn't imply that it was – but perhaps I did.

Despite Mr Wood's overall enthusiasm towards Britain and the Euro, Ms MacGregor continued to press the issue as the interview progressed, culminating with what appeared to be an ill-disguised attempt to place words into her guest's mouth:

SM: If though, there is a continuation of the 'wait and see' policy, will that affect your future operations in the UK?

AW: I think it's definitely a factor, whenever you're thinking about where you're going to locate any manufacturing, you have to consider all aspects. And the stability or instability of the exchange rate is one of those aspects.

SM: So you're saying that, yes, the answer to that is 'yes, we could.'

AW: It is yes.

SM: Would you be prepared to go as far as to say you might pull back further?

AW: I wouldn't be prepared to go that far, because we're heavily committed to this country, we're heavily committed to manufacturing here . . .

Conclusions

This survey found some important issues relating to balance and impartiality. Minotaur Media Tracking, who have analysed the output with no internal knowledge of the programme decision-making procedures, feel that issues of particular concern and in need of clarification from the BBC are:

- The overall 2:1 ratio on European –Union related topics of Pro-Euro speakers to Euro-sceptics was surprising and hard to explain. A broad division of 87 Pro-Euro speakers to 35 Euro-sceptics did not look like balance. Equally difficult to explain, on the specific issue of the Nissan jobs warning/inward investment leaks (June 30 – July 8), was the tally of 11 Pro-Euro interviews and 5 Euro-sceptic ones.
- The volume of coverage of European affairs, though amounting to 8.5 hours, and containing a superficially impressive range of speakers, topics and analysis, on occasions did not seem to explore fully some important issues and events. Here, the coverage of the EU Feira summit and its aftermath were particularly noticeable, as was the treatment of the Franco-German summit and its implications for the UK. And some important developments were ignored altogether. On many days, for example, developments that the broadsheet newspapers found to be important were not covered at all by **Today**.
- Some interviews, for example that by John Kampfner of Robin Cook after the Feira summit, and that by John Humphrys of Sir Ken Jackson warning that 3m jobs could be lost by not entering the Euro, seemed, by the normal standards of the programme, to be unchallenging.
- The treatment of the ““high value of the Pound”” throughout the survey period looked one-sided and potentially that it favoured those who believed that entry to the Euro would avoid further manufacturing problems. Further, **Today** elevated the claims about the danger of not entering the Euro to very high in the bulletins on several occasions. The only Euro-sceptic story afforded similar treatment was William Hague’s save the Pound campaign, mentioned once.
- There was notable prima facie evidence that European topics were delivered more quickly than those in other areas of output, apparently making them potentially less easy to understand. This needs urgent investigation.

Overall, there are clear grounds for concern, that at a crucial time in the Britain’s relationship with Europe, one of the BBC’s flagship news and current affairs programmes may not be meeting its remit. The consequence in shaping public opinion could be of great significance in the forthcoming debates over the EMU. From the outside, it looks as if the programme editors are devoting special energies and efforts to exploring the case for joining the Euro, and of explaining the issues involved in the developing relationship with European partners. While this in itself is an important aim, the problematical direct consequence is that not enough concomitant attention is being given to those with Euro-sceptic views, or to exploring their concerns on a wide range of issues.