

Discourses on European Integration in the UK press: an assessment of the New Labour era.

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The influence of the media on attitudes towards European integration is much debated. In the UK, the print media - newspapers in particular - have been characterised as being dominated by Eurosceptic attitudes (Daddow 2012). Some have gone so far as to describe the nature of press reporting of the European Union as 'insulting the public' (Anderson and Weymouth 1999). In the period in which New Labour formed the UK Government, between 1997 and 2010, this Euroscepticism was faced by a project in government that sought to change the dynamics of the relationship between the UK and EU - breaking out of the pattern of 'awkwardness' set in the past, and adopting a more constructive tone (George 1998; Daddow 2011). This change has been characterised by Oliver Daddow (2011) as a programme to redefine the core components of British national identity: encouraging Britain to appreciate its role and place in European history, and encouraging the British people to embrace a European future. Tony Blair declared this as a key objective of his first government in 1997, pledging to give the UK 'strength and confidence in leadership... particularly in respect of Europe' (Blair 1999). Even in 2009, Gordon Brown echoed Blair's message, pledging to put Britain 'at the heart of Europe'.

However, Labour's project to redefine the way the British see themselves in relation to Europe failed. This can in part be attributed to the fact that neither Blair nor Brown were willing to challenge the narratives on Europe found in the popular press (Price 2005; Daddow 2011). The way in which citizens understand their national identities can act as an important determinant of their attitude to European integration. Citizens who hold an exclusive conception of their national identity are more likely to oppose European integration, and are liable to have those views politicised by the cueing, priming, and framing of political actors (Hooghe and Marks 2009). The New Labour period also saw the emergence of the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) as an electorally-successful Eurosceptic challenger to the main UK-wide parties. UKIP won its first seats in the 1999 European Parliament elections, and during the course of

Tony Blair and Gordon Brown's premierships, built support to be the second-placed party at the 2009 European Parliament elections with 16.5% of the vote. During the same period, support for membership of the EU remained largely static (Usherwood and Startin 2013).

This paper explores the ways in which the UK press reported on Europe during the New Labour period. It reports on the preliminary research findings of a larger project examining the relationship between discourses of national identity and constraints on policy making towards the EU in the UK. The paper proceeds in three parts. First, the relationship between the press and European integration in the UK is examined, and the context of the New Labour period is outlined in more detail. Secondly, the press landscape towards the EU is examined - the positions of newspapers and their readers towards European integration are discussed. Finally, the key themes of the ways in which the press framed Europe during the period as discussed, with examples drawn principally from the 2001 UK general election. While the empirical examples of press discourses related in this paper refer largely to the 2001 general election, the general conclusions of this paper reflect the preliminary conclusions of the whole project.

Press discourses and debates on Europe in the UK

A number of recent studies have examined the representation of European integration and the EU in the media of European countries: many of these have been quantitative in nature (Peter and De Vresse 2004; De Vreese et al 2006; Kandyla and De Vreese 2011). These studies offer comparative data on the relative visibility of, and support for, the EU across European media, but tell us very little about the content of these discourses. A smaller number of studies have examined the content of media reports and the discourses and themes that emerge from these (Anderson and Weymouth 1999; Hawkins 2010; 2012). For instance, Anderson and Weymouth (1999) examine nine national newspapers during the very start of the New Labour period – the 1997 general election and the UK Presidency of the EU in 1998, arguing that the press discourse in this period was significantly negative towards Europe, and that the coverage often misrepresented the EU. Other, more specialised studies have examined smaller numbers of titles to examine particular cases. Firmstone and Statham (2007), for instance, examine claims made by actors in *The Times* and *The Guardian* from 1990 to 2006, with a focus on the development of the EU Constitutional Treaty. Diez-Medrano (2003) examines both media rhetoric and public opinion, arguing that the media, along with school textbooks and history teaching help to frame much of the debate on the EU in the UK. However, his study is limited by the examination of only two specialist magazines: *The Economist* and the *New Statesman*.

Hawkins (2012) examines five major national newspaper's reporting of the negotiation of the Lisbon Treaty. The findings of that study are, in some respects similar to those of the present paper – Hawkins finds that the EU is portrayed alternatively as a 'foreign power', and also as a 'forum for inter-state bargaining' as part of a 'nationalist meta-narrative'.

The significance of the media coverage of the EU is demonstrated by the link between media framing of Europe and levels of support for European integration. Framing the EU in a positive manner – highlighting potential benefits of membership over potential disadvantages – is correlated with higher levels of support for European integration (Vliegenthardt et al 2008). Conversely, negative framing of the EU results in greater opposition to European integration, while frames which present new European policy initiatives in terms of risk are likely to cue lower levels of support for those policies (De Vreese 2007; De Vreese and Kandyla 2009). In the UK, Carey and Burton (2004) have argued that where newspaper coverage frames the EU negatively, readers are likely to feel more hostile to the EU if the political party that they support mirrors that negativity.

This expanding literature does little to analyse the structure of press discourses, nor does it present a comprehensive analytical picture of the nature and content of discourses in the press in the UK. Comprehensive qualitative analysis of these discourses will allow us to more fully understand the ways in which the UK media represents Europe, and will aid in the capturing of the underlying logics of these discourses. The research of the wider project, summarised in this paper, aims largely at the latter. The issue of structure is partially addressed first, with a discussion of the relative positions of readers of the main UK daily newspapers on European integration.

Positioning the press and its readers: how Eurosceptic are newspaper readers

Drawing a link between the attitudes of readers and the messages of the newspapers they read first requires an examination of the British press landscape in regards to European integration. In order to understand the structure of the press and what positions the readers of each newspaper take on European integration, data was drawn from British Social Attitudes Survey (BSA), which asked questions covering the newspapers read by respondents, and their attitudes towards Europe, in almost every year of the Blair-Brown administrations (the exceptions being 2007, 2009, and 2010). A dataset was assembled from the 1997-2006, and the 2008 BSA datasets. A combined dataset of all the responses from these years allows for a large total

sample size (N= 16726). Of these respondents, 53.1% were regular readers of *any* kind of newspaper (N=8888), and 45.8% (N=7658) were regular readers of one of the national daily newspapers included in this study, having reported that they read one of these newspapers at least 3 times each week. The BSA also provides data on the general attitudes of citizens towards British policy on the EU. Respondents were asked to choose from a series of responses to the question ‘Do you think Britain’s long-term policy should be...’ comprising the following items: (1) ‘to leave the European Union’, (2) ‘to stay in the EU and try to reduce the EU’s powers’, (3) ‘to leave things as they are’, (4) to stay in the EU and try to increase the EU’s powers, or (5) ‘to work for the formation of a single European government’. The mean response to this question from the readers of each newspaper is used to represent the position of the readers of that newspaper on the ‘euroscepticism scale’. Thus a 5-point scale of positions on European integration is created from the responses to this question. While it is possible to draw some inferences from the responses of the readers of each newspaper to this question, explored below, the relative positions of the mean response of the readers of each paper is more instructive of the overall structure of the press.

Positions the readers of newspapers on the Euroscepticism scale

When we consider the data, it is clear that there are marked differences in the distribution of readers’ positions on the Euroscepticism scale for each newspaper. Table 2 shows a cross tabulation of the responses for the readers of each newspaper, while Chart 1 shows the relative positions of the mean position of each newspaper on the resultant Euroscepticism scale. We see strong evidence, when considering the mean positions of readers, that the readership of newspapers in UK is largely Eurosceptic. Only two newspapers have mean reader scores on the European integration policy scale that are greater than 3, these are the *Independent* and the *Guardian*. At 3.10 and 3.28 respectively, their position could be described only as moderately pro-European integration; even the readers of the most pro-EU newspapers are only marginally more favourable to European integration than simply supporting the current level of EU powers.

The most important conclusion that can be drawn from the mean positions of newspaper readers calculated here is that the results appear to suggest that the positions of readers largely chime with the findings of the qualitative analysis, already undertaken, of the nature of the discourses in those newspapers. That is, the attitudes of newspaper readers seem to largely

reflect (and vice versa) the general stance of the newspaper that they read towards European integration. The positions of readers of the most pro-European newspapers here, *The Guardian*, *Independent*, and *Financial Times* are the furthest to the euro-positive end of the axis, while the relative positions of the readers of the most Eurosceptic newspapers, the *Daily Mail*, *Express*, *Sun*, and *Telegraph* are towards the lower (Eurosceptic) end of the scale.

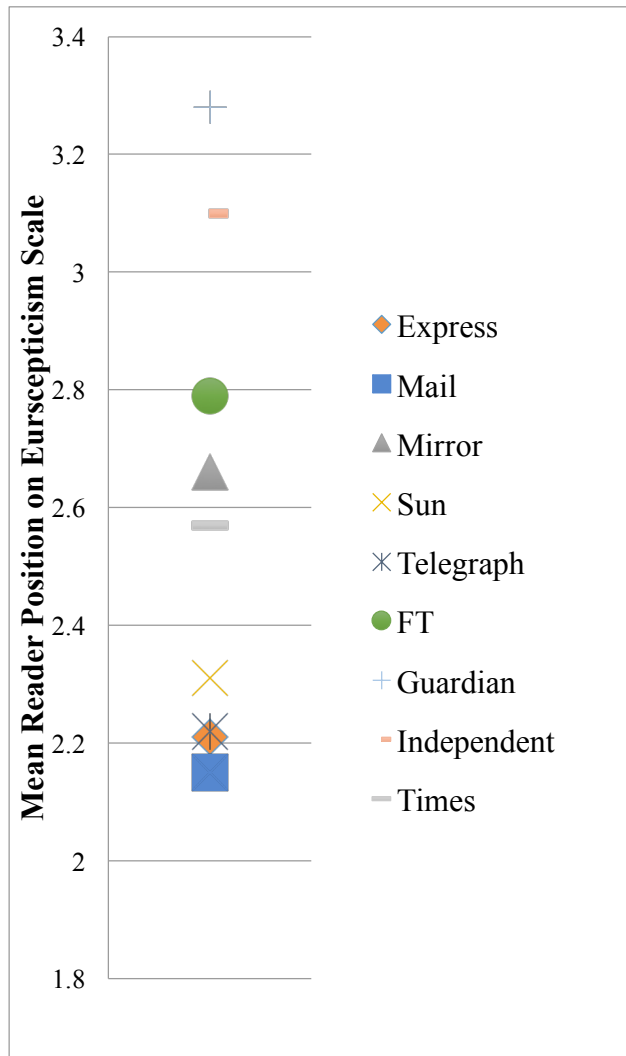


Chart 1: Mean reader positions on the Euroscepticism scale.

The two most consistently pro-European newspapers, *The Guardian*, and *The Independent* have mean reader positions that are the most positive towards European integration, with means of 3.28 and 3.1 respectively. The relative positions of the readers of these newspapers are significantly more positive towards Europe than the readers of the other publications. *The Guardian* has a readership that is the most supportive of European integration, and this reflects the positive constructions of the European Union found in the discourses on Europe in *The Guardian*. Similarly, the position of readers of the *Independent* appears to suggest that the positive discourses around European integration found in that newspaper were reflected in the views of its readers. Both newspapers, as shown in Chapter 6, presented positive constructions of Europe, and were consistent in their support for further integration throughout the 1997-2008 period

covered by the data. Both were also supportive of British entry to the Euro, and endorsed Labour at the 2001 general election, when Europe was a key issue.

Four newspapers occupy positions in a cluster towards the Eurosceptic end of the scale. Readers of the *Daily Mail* are the most Eurosceptic of the newspapers included, with a mean of 2.15. In close proximity to the *Mail* are two other high-circulation tabloid newspapers, *The*

Express and *The Sun*, with scores of 2.21 and 2.31 respectively. The *Daily Mail* and *The Sun* were consistently the two highest circulation newspapers in the UK from 2000 onwards: *The Daily Mail* overtaking the *Daily Mirror*, which was the third-largest circulation newspaper from 2000 onwards.

Between these two groups lie the readers of a further three publications: *The Times*, the *Daily Mirror*, and the *Financial Times*. Of these, the relative position of readers of the *FT* lies furthest towards the pro-European end of the axis, with a mean of 2.79. The *FT*, as discussed in Chapter, adopts an outlook that is positive towards European integration, with particular regard to its business focus and concern for the fundamental freedoms (of labour, capital, people, and later, services) of the EU. Taken alone, the position of readers of the *Daily Mirror* is perhaps more surprising, given its generally pro-European editorial stance. However, when compared to the other mass-market tabloid newspapers here (the *Mail*, *Express*, and *Sun*), the readership *Mirror* is clearly more pro-European. This suggests that, again, one can reasonably argue that the attitudes of the readership of the *Mirror* ‘fit’ with the editorial line taken by the newspaper. Finally, *The Times* is located centrally within the distribution of mean reader positions along the scale, with a mean of 2.57. *The Times* has taken what might be termed a ‘soft-eurosceptic’ editorial stance, opposing membership of the Euro and advocating the reduction of certain EU powers, while being supportive of UK membership (Taggart 1998; Szczerbiak and Taggart 2008). *The Times* is notable for having switched from a position of endorsing a number of Eurosceptic candidates at the 1997 general election, to supporting Labour in the 2001 and 2005 general elections, with the proviso that it was opposed to Euro membership and Labour’s support for it.

Paper Read	1 - Leave European Union	2- Stay in EU and reduce EU Powers	3- Leave things as they are	4- Stay in EU and increase EU powers	5- Single European Government	Total
Scot/Daily Express	131 22.0%	300 50.4%	96 16.1%	41 6.9%	27 4.5%	595 100.0%
Scot/Daily Mail	457 25.2%	916 50.6%	253 14.0%	115 6.4%	69 3.8%	1810 100.0%
Daily Mirror/Record	209 15.6%	455 34.0%	402 30.0%	162 12.1%	111 8.3%	1339 100.0%

The Sun	515 26.4%	665 34.1%	545 27.9%	133 6.8%	94 4.8%	1952 100.0%
Daily Telegraph	138 18.4%	450 59.9%	69 9.2%	53 7.1%	41 5.5%	751 100.0%
Financial Times	4 7.0%	28 49.1%	8 14.0%	11 19.3%	6 10.5%	57 100.0%
The Guardian	7 1.7%	110 27.3%	98 24.3%	127 31.5%	61 15.1%	403 100.0%
The Independent	9 5.4%	53 31.5%	41 24.4%	45 26.8%	20 11.9%	168 100.0%
The Times	52 8.9%	311 53.3%	93 16.0%	86 14.8%	41 7.0%	583 100.0%
Total	1522 19.9%	3288 42.9%	1605 21.0%	773 10.1%	470 6.1%	7658 100.0%

When considering the breakdown of responses to the BSA question on European integration preferences used to calculate the Euroscepticism scale, a number of observations can be made. Particularly striking is the difference in the levels of support between the readers of different newspapers for the two ‘extreme’ options, ‘leave the European Union’ at one end, and ‘work for the formation of a single European government’ at the other. At two newspapers, more than a quarter of readers advocated leaving the European Union; 25.2% of *Daily Mail* readers, and 26.4% of *Sun* readers. Indeed, among the readers of the four mass-market tabloid newspapers, support for leaving the EU was generally higher than among the readers of quality broadsheet newspapers. The average support for leaving the EU among all tabloid readers was 23.0%, with readers of the *Mirror* being less favourable towards leaving, with 15.6% support.

Staying in the EU while reducing its powers was option that attracted the greatest number of responses. 42.9% of newspaper readers chose this response. In the case of only two newspapers did the option to reduce the powers of the EU whilst retaining UK membership fail to attract a plurality of support among readers: *The Independent* and *The Guardian*, the two most editorially and discursively pro-European newspapers in the sample. Readers of these two newspapers were, overall, more supportive of European integration than those of any other newspaper. 15.1% of *Guardian* readers and 11.9% of *Independent* readers were in favour a single European government, and 31.5% and 26.8% respectively in favour of staying the in the

EU and increasing its powers. Notably, a significant proportion of readers of both the *Guardian* and *Independent* were in favour of reducing the powers of the EU: 27.3% and 31.5% respectively. However, very few readers of these newspapers advocated complete withdrawal – only 1.7% of *Guardian* readers and 5.4% of *Independent* readers chose this option.

Thus, the positions of newspaper readers on European integration seem to, in general terms, reflect the editorial preferences of the newspapers that they read. As the next section will show, the newspapers that are most closely identified as engaging in the most strongly Eurosceptic discourses, the *Telegraph*, *Mail*, *Sun* and *Express*, had the most Eurosceptic readership. Conversely, the newspapers with the most pro-European outlook had a readership that was relatively more in favour of European integration: the *Guardian*, *Independent*, and *Financial Times*.

Press discourses: analysis of the key themes

Having considered the relative positions of newspaper readers on European integration, the content of newspaper reports on Europe will now be discussed. The larger study, of which this paper reports the preliminary key findings, studies the news reporting of the nine major national daily newspapers listed above. Examples for the discussion of the key themes here are drawn from a sub-analysis of the 2001 UK general election. This election was particularly notable as an example of the issue European integration being contested in an electoral setting. During the election, William Hague, leader of the Conservative Party, declared that he wanted the election to be ‘a referendum on the Euro’, and built much of the Conservative campaign around a position of ‘saving the pound’. This position was juxtaposed with that of the Labour Party, which supported British entry into the Euro in principle, and under certain conditions in practice. The 2001 general election can be seen as forming part of a trend of increased visibility of European integration in UK elections.

While Europe and the European Union were much more visible in the news during the 1997 general election campaign than in 1992 (Norris et al 1999), the 2001 general election featured an intensification of this coverage focussed around the political contestation of Euro membership between the Conservatives and Labour (De Vreese 2001, 286). As an example of an occasion during which ‘Europe’ was an issue that was particularly strongly contested between the two largest political parties, and was highly-visible in the press, the 2001 general

election provides an opportunity to study a period of intense political competition over European integration, played out in both discourses engaged in by both elite and media actors.

For the purposes of the examples cited here, articles were sampled from a period of 10 days before the 2001 general election, which took place on 7 June 2001. Articles were downloaded from the Nexis UK database with the search term ‘Europe OR Euro*’. The results were then read quickly in order to discard articles that were false results (i.e. they did not contain the search terms in the text, but rather in metadata), and articles that did not fall into the desired categories. Articles from all sections of newspapers were sampled, with the exceptions of sport and letters published. The article totals from each newspaper are contained in the table below. A total of 6 such samples comprise the evidence for the larger study.

Newspaper	Articles
The Guardian	67
Independent	42
Times / Sunday Times	35
Mail	26
Express	10
The Sun	30
Daily Star	3
Total	213

Results

A number of frames are visible in the discourse on Europe across the sampled newspapers. Overall, there is evidence that the Eurosceptic press seeks to engage Europe as an identity issue. Also clear from the results of the discourse analysis is that the Eurosceptic press reproduce and, in many cases, strengthen the Eurosceptic elite political rhetoric engaged in by the Conservative Party in particular. The high readership of these newspapers, and their considerable agenda setting power, contributes to a discursive environment in which Eurosceptic ideas are strongly embedded. This has implications for the way that policy is

formed in such an environment, and for the interaction between the discourses constructed by political actors and the policy-making elite. Developing a deeper understanding of this interaction ought to be a central aim of the wider study of press discourses on European integration.

The Eurosceptic press discourse is constructed around three key principles, or 'logics'. In common with Hawkins (2010; 2012), this study finds that 'Europe' and the European Union are constructed as separate from Britain, an out-group to the British in-group. This is particularly visible at the basic linguistic level. British national identity is constructed as part of this logic as exclusive of Europe or 'European-ness'. In some cases this is articulated through the notion that it is somehow 'un-British' to support European integration and that Britishness, and the distinctiveness of the British national community is threatened by Europe. The second is the logic that the European Union is damaging British sovereignty, and British prestige and influence in the world. This arises from the construction of a logic of incompatibility between British independence and membership of the European Union. Britain can, according to this logic, only fulfil its potential without 'interference' from the EU. Finally, the idea that the British state has become subordinate to a growing European bureaucratic 'superstate' is an important part of the discourse of Eurosceptic newspapers. The superstate discourse plays on fears of British powerlessness to influence its own destiny in the face of a European Union which does not take British national interests to heart, and which is determined to stamp a 'European' policy agenda on the British state. Invariably referred to as 'Brussels', the European Union is portrayed as undemocratic, bureaucratic and inefficient; a force holding back Britain.

However this discourse is not uniform, or unchallenged. The two pro-European leaning newspapers included in the sample present a rather different discourse on Europe, one which is closer to that engaged in by the Labour Party. European integration is constructed in these newspapers, *The Guardian* and *The Independent*, as a 'positive means to an end'; they emphasise the functional purpose of integration alongside the practical benefits. They also challenge the Eurosceptic discourse found elsewhere in the press.

Europe as the 'Other'

As Hawkins (2012, 565-7) finds, the EU is framed as separate from the United Kingdom, or a

‘foreign power’ in Hawkins’ analysis. Hawkins sees the EU framed as ‘a hostile, quasi-imperial power’, and dismisses the differences between this depiction of the EU and constructions which emphasise the deliberative aspects of the EU, describing what he calls a ‘nationalist meta-narrative’ (Hawkins 2012, 566). However, focussing solely on the ‘nationalist meta-narrative’ of these constructions dismisses the key difference between them; where the deliberative nature of the EU is emphasised, press discourses often focus on the need to achieve the best ‘deal’ for Britain, whereas constructions of Europe solely as a ‘foreign power’ tend to emphasise the threat of EU institutions to British cultural distinctiveness and political independence.

The fact that it is not only possible, but common, in the British context to refer to Europe as the ‘Other’; a group or idea from which the British are excluded, gives an indication of the landscape of the discursive environment in which Eurosceptic press discourses seek to appeal to those citizens who hold a strong or exclusive form of British national identity. Through the repeated and sustained construction of Europe as something separate from the UK, the Eurosceptic press is able to perpetuate the notion that Britishness and Europe are somehow incompatible. Examples of the rhetorical strategy for achieving this separation can be observed in the linguistic construction of Europe as apart from the United Kingdom. In particular, references to ‘the EU’ tend to refer to not the European Union as an international organisation of which the UK is a part, but rather as a separate entity with which the UK engages in a bilateral relationship, akin to another state (see also Hawkins 2010). Similarly, references to ‘our relations with Europe’ (*The Times*, 5 June 2001), and ‘giving the EU greater powers over us’ (*The Sun*, 6 June 2001) perpetuate this ‘us’ and ‘them’ discourse.

Another common strategy for constructing Europe as the ‘other’ is the use of metonyms to homogenise European institutions or states. The word ‘Europe’ is frequently used as shorthand for the European Union, and thus references to, for instance, ‘withdrawal from Europe’ (*The Times*, 7 June 2001) are therefore not uncommon - conflating Europe as a geographical location and Europe as a political entity. This contributes to the idea that Britain is not European, and is separate in a physical as well as political sense. This can also be observed in articles not reporting on politics. For instance references to ‘holidaymakers *to* Europe’ [emphasis added], and references to how banking arrangements differ to those in Britain ‘in most European countries’ (*The Express*, 6 June 2001). The metonym of ‘Brussels’ is also frequently employed to refer to either the European Commission in particular, or the European Union in general. In

the sample, all the newspapers studied used 'Brussels' as a metonym, with the exception of *The Express*. This indicates the prevalence of this term as a shorthand for the European Union, which is frequently used to refer to burdensome regulation or bureaucracy. Similarly, the use of terminology such as 'euroland' has an equivalent effect, separating the UK from states within the euro by suggesting their homogeneity; this particular word being used by *The Daily Mail*, *The Times*, *Sunday Times*, and *The Sun*.

However, it is not the case that this discourse is necessarily hegemonic over all others. The more Eurosceptic newspapers frequently conceptualised Britain as a part of Europe when it suited their desired message to do so. This often occurred when making comparisons to other European countries, and particularly when these comparisons were flattering to Britain. For instance, *The Sun*, while often referring to Britain as separated from Europe in a political context, referred to the City of London as 'financial capital of Europe' (*The Sun*, 5 June 2001). Similarly, *The Times* referred to Britain as part of 'Europe's anger' at the rejection by the United States of the Kyoto climate change agreement (*The Times*, 5 June 2001).

The discourse of otherness is not the only way in which Britain is referred to in relation to Europe, however. This discourse of 'us' and 'them' is also directly challenged in the more pro-European newspapers, and occasionally in the Eurosceptic-leaning press too. These challenges are discussed below. First, the discourse of 'otherness' is linked to the idea of national self-determination to discuss the second key theme, that of sovereignty.

Sovereignty and the Discourse of 'Threat'

Closely related to the construction of the EU as the 'other' to Britain is the common construction of the EU as a threat to British sovereignty in the Eurosceptic press. The European Union, as an out-group, is argued to be interfering in British democracy, and imposing unwanted laws, rules, and decisions on the British polity. Britain is portrayed as being compromised by external decision-making, decisions in which Britain is frequently portrayed as having negligible influence.

British sovereignty and national independence is a theme that is frequently invoked in the Eurosceptic press. In particular, Britishness, and British sovereignty is regularly constructed as

being threatened by the EU. This is aided by the creation of a dichotomy between the national and supranational levels of governance. Whilst the EU is constructed as being able to influence the national level, the opposite is rarely expressed. For instance, concerns over the ‘surrender’ of national vetoes were often expressed (*Daily Mail*, 2 June 2001; *The Sun*, 1 June 2001). *The Daily Mail*, for instance, was able to talk about Labour’s pro-European stance in these terms:

it could finally seal this country's absorption into the EU as we join the single currency and spell the end of our national independence (The Daily Mail, 2 June 2001)

Europe is often described in terms of being an emergent ‘superstate’, into which Britain might be absorbed. *The Sun*, for instance, described the policy of the Liberal Democrats to ‘dissolve what is left of Britain into the socialist superstate of Europe’ (4 June 2001), and the French Prime Minister Lionel Jospin as ‘calling for a European superstate’ (1 June 2001). *The Daily Mail* uses similar terminology, describing ‘the European Republic’ (3 June 2001). Common to both *The Sun* and *The Mail* is the notion that the UK is involved in ‘the headlong rush into a federal Europe’ (*The Sun*, 7 June 2001)

Frequently, this discourse is framed in terms of analogies involving conflict or warfare. Britain is conceptualised as being involved in a ‘battle’ over various issues, particularly membership of the Euro (*The Sun*, 7 June 2001), and over the potential referendum (*The Daily Mail*, 7 June 2001). This was one of the most common frames employed in the Eurosceptic discourse, featuring in 34 articles in total. *The Sunday Times*, for instance, employed an extensive metaphor of ‘the business battle over the euro’, including the idea of the “phoney war” of the last parliament’ (*Sunday Times*, 3 June 2001). Similarly, the efforts of British politicians to ‘resist’ this encroachment upon British sovereignty is often presented in terms which invoke the language of conflict or violence:

IRON Chancellor Gordon Brown yesterday smashed an EU bid to seize control of Britain's economy. (*The Sun*, 6 June 2001)

The editorial opposition of some newspapers, particularly *The Sun* and *The Daily Mail*, was frequently expressed in violent or war-like language. *The Sun*, for instance, discussed the Euro as ‘a matter *The Sun* will return to with massive and unmitigated aggression after the election’ (5 June 2001). The use of this conflict imagery is reflective of the use of similar metaphors by

William Hague in his promise for a 'crusade for genuine reform' and other Conservative politicians. The language of conflict can also be seen, as discussed above, in the promise of Tony Blair to 'fight' for British interests. Similarly, the idea of war was to be found in representations of disagreements between Tony Blair and Gordon Brown; such was the divisiveness of the Euro that *The Independent* concluded that 'we will all have to hide in old war-time shelters to protect us from the explosions within Downing Street' (3 June 2001). This suggests the use of metaphors of conflict, which are inherently divisive, is common to newspaper reporting on issues beyond European integration, and on both sides of that debate (see Bishop and Jaworski 2003).

Democracy and Trust

Another aspect of the discourse of the 'threat' posed by the EU to Britain is the portrayal of the European Union as an anti-democratic body; one which ignores the views of the British government and people in making decisions. Two clear components of this discourse can be distinguished. The first constructs the European Union as undemocratic - often ignoring the will of member states and citizens. The second is the view that the Labour Party was contemptuous of democracy and consequently keen on European integration as a manifestation of this. A discourse of mistrust and a sense that Labour may try to 'trick' the British people into joining the Euro is clearly evident. This reflects William Hague's argument that Tony Blair would 'force' Britain into the Euro against the wishes of the British people.

The discourse on democracy, which seeks to construct the EU as un-democratic, contains a number of features. The first is the idea that powers pooled or 'transferred' to the European Union were irrevocably lost, much is made of the loss of national vetoes, as mentioned above. Secondly, the EU is depicted as not accountable as part of a democratic process, this is shown to be damaging to the UK Parliament and British national independence. European integration is constructed as an inevitable process, one which is being undertaken by an elite without democratic consent:

'...too often Europeans seem to consider as inevitable projects which they do not really favour. And that is inimical to the spirit of representative government' (Sunday Times 3 June 2001)

This anti-democratic tendency is shown to extend to all areas of national life, including sport,

where *The Daily Star* ran the headline ‘EU Footy Meddlers’ and asked ‘hasn’t the EU got bigger issues to sort out?’ (1 June 2001). ‘Brussels’, or the European Commission, is frequently constructed as bureaucratic and anti-democratic, a key part of this discourse. When describing policy formation, the term ‘bureaucrats’ is frequently employed, often alongside ‘unelected’. Both *The Express* and *The Times* adopt the metonym ‘eurocrat’ as a shorthand for this. Emphasis is often placed on the allegedly interfering nature of this bureaucracy, with *The Sun* warning of the effect of ‘watchdogs... meddling’ on the position of London as a business centre, for instance (5 June 2001). Britain is thus constructed as the recipient of a ‘flow’ of regulatory interference and burdensome lawmaking from the European Union.

Related to this is the way that Britishness is constructed as diametrically opposed to any supranational authority, and thus any transfer of sovereignty from the UK to supranational institutions. An extract from an article by Peter Hitchens in *The Daily Mail* is worth quoting at length because it demonstrates these features, along with the discourse of threat:

FINALLY, it prepared to take the country into the euro, placing it irreversibly under the control of a supranational socialist system which will be able to impose on Britain all the taxes, regulations and restrictions that the Westminster Parliament might resist, delay or modify, and which will sweep away everything which makes Britain special and unique, and which has until now prevented Labour from exercising the almost limitless power that it has always longed to have. (*The Daily Mail*, 3 June 2001)

This view is closely associated in some Eurosceptic newspapers with the idea that the New Labour government itself was ‘anti-democracy’. As the above extract shows, *The Daily Mail* in particular expressed this view, representing Tony Blair in particular as evading discussing European policy: ‘Questions about the euro and spending were dismissed with a flick of his hand’ (*Daily Mail*, 7 June 2001). This was to be found elsewhere; for instance *The Sun* declared that ‘New Labour isn’t much interested in democracy, which is why it’s so keen on Europe’ (5 June 2001). The Eurosceptic press thus repeat the Conservative Party message that New Labour could not be trusted on European policy. This is particularly evident in discussion of the potential referendum on the Euro in the coverage of the 2001 general election, which will now be discussed.

The Euro and the Referendum

The discussion will now move to a matter specific to the reporting of the 2001 general election: the potential referendum on Euro membership. Two positions emerge from the coverage when the promised referendum on British membership of the Euro is discussed. Among Eurosceptic newspapers, all supported the idea of a referendum, however there was significant variation in how they constructed the referendum and its political and economic implications. In addition, not all newspapers which were sceptical about the Euro, and Europe more generally, endorsed the Conservative Party in the election. *The Times*, for instance, offered its endorsement to Tony Blair and the Labour Party, but reiterated its opposition to Britain joining the Euro; ‘we are confident that the euro can be defeated in any plebiscite... our voice against it will be vigorous and loud’. *The Express* argued that the issue of Euro membership must not ‘be skirted around any longer’ (7 June 2001), whilst endorsing the Labour Party. These newspapers expressed a position which was to trust the referendum, and to construct the Euro, and European integration more generally as an issue for another time:

Voters still don't want the euro -but this election has not been about the euro. (*The Sun*, 6 June 2001)

Labour cannot, despite the Tories' best efforts, renege on its promise to hold a referendum. (*Sunday Times*, 3 June 2001)

Indeed, *The Times*, explicitly rejected the idea that a referendum could be rigged, arguing that any referendum would be conducted ‘fairly’ (7 June 2001). However, we see a division in the Eurosceptic press between those newspapers which oppose the Euro and support a referendum, and those which construct a discourse of untrustworthiness and deception around the proposed referendum. This discourse closely reflects that of William Hague’s claim that Tony Blair would ‘force Britain into the euro’.

In particular, *The Sun* and *The Daily Mail* constructed a discourse of untrustworthiness around Labour in regards to the referendum, expressing the notion that the result would somehow be manipulated. The *Mail* repeats this claim in multiple articles, for instance; ‘if Blair wins another big majority, the euro referendum will be rigged’ (The Daily Mail, 3 June 2001); ‘what is to stop Mr Blair from railroading the country into the euro[?]’ (Daily Mail 2 June 2001). Labour were also accused of conspiring with large corporations who were accused of ‘complicity’ in

‘making us accept’ the Euro (Daily Mail, 3 June 2001). These newspapers construct much of this opposition to the Euro on the negative connotations of ‘ditching the pound’ and the potential economic consequences of membership. *The Sun*, for example, invited its readers to imagine if their savings were in Euros;

You would have to watch helplessly as they fell in value thanks to bungling, unelected European officials like Dim Wim on fat salaries and huge expense accounts. (*The Sun*, 2 June 2001)

The discourse of Labour being unresponsive to voter concerns, and obfuscating its own position on the Euro was not confined to these two newspapers, however. Even moderate newspapers expressed reservations about the amount of information provided by the Government about their future plans. The implicit, or indeed explicit, suggestion in many of these reports is that Labour sought to ‘hide’ its true position from the public, or else stifle public debate:

When Brown and Tony Blair decided in October 1997 to rule out euro entry for this parliament, they also agreed to keep their views on the issue as opaque as possible. They have succeeded beyond their wildest expectations. (Sunday Times, 3 June 2001)

Even *The Guardian* published a leader article by its political commentator, Hugo Young, which constructs Blair and Brown as evasive about to Euro, and even arrogant towards journalists who asked about it, which is worth quoting at length:

...whenever the euro was mentioned, Tony Blair and Gordon Brown declined to talk about it. They shut every questioner up with the impatient assertion that it had nothing to do with the election. They began to recoil from the ignorant effrontery of interviewers who still dared to look forward a few months... (*The Guardian*, 6 June 2001)

Despite this, an important theme which runs throughout almost all the newspapers in the sample, with the noticeable exception of *The Daily Mail* is the idea that the Conservatives were ‘obsessed’ with Europe and that they had failed in their objective to turn the election into a ‘referendum’ on the Euro.

Pro-European counter-discourses

Some of the key features of the more pro-European newspapers will now be discussed. Much as in the Eurosceptic press, the pro-European press does not present any one single narrative about European issues, and varies greatly in its coverage of the EU across titles. Some common themes can be identified, however. In general terms, the depiction of the EU in *The Guardian* and *The Independent* builds an account of relations between the UK and EU which is more sophisticated in its understanding of the way in which the UK as a member-state interacts with EU institutions. In some cases, *The Guardian* and *The Independent* build a discourse that explicitly challenges Eurosceptic viewpoints and what it often refers to as the ‘right-wing press’. In this coverage, this is particularly evident in the challenge presented by both newspapers to the viewpoint articulated in the Eurosceptic press that the Labour government might, through deception or undemocratic means, ‘force’ the UK to join the Euro.

Two key areas are examined here. First, the construction of Europe as a social grouping is considered, and it is shown that the pro-European press are more likely to conceive of ‘Europe’ as an inclusive concept which incorporates the UK. Second, the coverage of the referendum and the Euro is discussed, and it is shown that the pro European newspapers explicitly challenges the discourse of ‘untrustworthiness’ engaged in by the Eurosceptic press in this area. These areas are examined specifically in this paper because they were the main focus of pro European newspapers in the coverage of the issue of Europe at the 2001 election.

Constructions of the EU and Europe

When examining the general construction of the EU or Europe as a political entity or idea in the pro-European press, a mixed picture emerges. The use of the ‘separation strategy’ of emphasising the British in-group as fundamentally separated and different from a European out-group is less evident in the pro-European press. However it is not entirely absent, and some cases of the rhetoric of ‘us and them’ can be observed. Nevertheless, this is a much smaller part of the discourse in these newspapers than in the Eurosceptic press.

The Guardian and *The Independent* were instead much more likely to construct Britain as being a part of Europe. For instance, comparisons were often made between ‘Britain and *other* prosperous *European* countries’ [emphasis added] (*The Independent*, 3 June 2001); or the British working ‘the longest hours *in Europe*’, and Britain having ‘the highest teen pregnancy rate *in Europe*’ [emphasis added] (*The Guardian*, 4 June 2001, 7 June 2001). In particular,

these newspapers often emphasised the similarity between Britain and other European countries. Reference is made to other European countries as ‘Britain’s European partners’ (*The Guardian*, 4 June 2001) or as ‘the rest of Europe’ (*The Guardian*, 6 June 2001; *The Express*, 1 June 2001). *The Independent* in particular held an editorial line which conceptualised Britain as an explicitly European country:

The Independent's vision is of Britain as a modern European country. This has to do with much more than engaging fully in the EU, vitally important though that is, or the narrower question of joining the single currency. (*The Independent*, 6 June 2001)

In many cases, this discourse formed part of an attempt to explicitly challenge the eurosceptic discourses found in other parts of the print media. This came in both articles which criticised what is often referred to as ‘the Tory press’ (*The Independent*, 2 June 2001), and in criticism of Hague and his campaign. However, perhaps the most striking examples of this discourse of rebuttal were not to be found in *The Guardian* or *The Independent*, but in articles published in *The Times* and *Daily Mail* respectively which were markedly different from the overall tone of those publications. *The Times* published an article by Lisa Verrico that argued that the British were little different from other Europeans:

If William Hague had kids, he wouldn't worry about Britain merging into Europe. At a party in Berlin headlined by Atlanta hip hop crew Outkast, there was no discernible difference between the trendy German crowd and their British counterparts. Not only did they dress and dance the same, they sang along to the lyrics without any trouble. (7 June 2001)

Stewart Steven, writing in the *Daily Mail*, exemplifies this kind of criticism of the discourse of euroscepticism and, as the headline describes, ‘silly lies that keep us at war with Europe’. Steven challenges the idea that Britain will be forced into the Euro or coerced into further integration against its will, writing that:

European leaders may have very different ideas from those of most people in this country about the future of European integration, but this does not make them part of a worldwide plot to destroy Britain. (*The Daily Mail*, 3 June 2001)

Similarly, Stevens is unequivocal about the Euro, arguing that William Hague was ‘playing with fire when claiming that the referendum could be ‘rigged’, and that ‘the charge is, of course, a falsehood. It can't be rigged’. Indeed, it is the Euro where the pro-European newspapers were most clearly engaged in a discourse on Europe that was markedly different in tone and structure from that in the Eurosceptic press. This will now be discussed in the next section.

The Referendum and the Euro

When reporting on the Euro and a potential referendum, a number of key differences emerge between the Eurosceptic and pro-European newspapers. Most importantly, both pro-European newspapers were in favour of British entry into the Euro. Their construction of the Euro is based on a largely pragmatic basis, and this contrasts with opposition to the Euro that relies largely on nationalist discourses that emphasise sovereignty and identity as the primary factors in ‘defending’ the Pound. They instead constructed a representation of the Euro as a means to improve trade, increase investment, and strengthen the economy. The advantages of the Euro and European integration in general were also stressed; this includes particularly the idea of European integration as a means by which Britain was able to exert more influence than she would otherwise have alone. This was presented in pragmatic terms - a means to create ‘stronger UK voice in Europe to help shape business policies there’, for example (*The Guardian*, 6 June 2001)

The Euro was largely constructed as positive for the British economy, with the language of ‘the national interest’ often adopted by the pro-European press. This echoed the rhetorical strategy adopted by Tony Blair (Daddow 2012). For instance, *The Independent* argued that joining the Euro would be ‘in Britain's economic and political interest, and that to rule it out "on principle" for the next five years is a populist dogma that is plain irresponsible’ (*Independent*, 6 June 2001). Similarly, *The Guardian* published an editorial written by Liberal Democrat Chris Huhne that frames the EU in a similar way to that of Blair - a functional means to an end which gives ‘the British’ the ‘ability to exercise choices over phenomena that they would not otherwise influence’ (5 June 2001). Membership of the Euro is presented in similar terms - the ability to take ‘control over events that individual nations the size of most European countries cannot hope to influence’ and as a means of lowering prices increasing trade and investment (*The Guardian*, 5 June 2001).

The pro-European press similarly challenged the discourses of untrustworthiness found in the Eurosceptic press, at least in regards to the referendum. For instance, *The Independent* criticised Hague over the Euro: 'He was wrong to say that this election provided the last opportunity to "save the pound" when this was clearly untrue' (*The Independent*, 3 June 2001). Claims that the referendum could be manipulated are dismissed, and the referendum itself is portrayed as both an opportunity for public debate and for a fair resolution of the euro issue. Again, this reflects the discourse of Tony Blair and the Labour Party. Indeed, the logic of the referendum as a political opportunity for the Conservatives, found in the Eurosceptic newspapers, is reversed by the logic in *The Guardian* that 'a euro-referendum is the one event that could give the modern Tory party a new future' - by losing (1 June 2001).

When dealing with the Eurozone institutions, however, the pro-European press have much in common with the Eurosceptic press. For instance, joining the Euro is described as potentially 'damaging' to Labour's economic credibility, while the ECB is described as incompetent in both *The Guardian* and *The Independent*. Similarly, entry into the Euro is depicted as being potentially difficult to achieve even if a referendum were to be won; 'managing the pound's entry rate to the single currency will prove a headache even if Labour manages to convince a sceptical public of the benefits of the euro' (*The Guardian*, 7 June 2001). In common with the Eurosceptic press, the pro-European newspapers represented the fall in the relative value of the Euro during the election period in similarly negative terms, frequently employing terminology such as 'beleaguered', or 'embattled'. For instance:

Europe's troubled single currency fell to within two cents of its all-time low yesterday as the markets dismissed the prospect of official intervention to rescue the euro. (*The Guardian*, 6 June 2001)

The coverage of the Euro and the referendum in the pro-European press thus presents something of a mixed picture. While both pro-European newspapers were in favour of the Euro, and of a successful referendum, they engaged in some residual Euroscepticism in regards to negative representations of the Eurozone institutions and the strength of the Euro itself. The referendum is treated as an opportunity for public debate, while claims of a 'rigged' vote are constructed as baseless.

Conclusion

This paper has explored some of the key discourses engaged in by the British press during the New Labour period, with particular examples drawn from the 2001 UK general election. Three key themes emerged from the Eurosceptic newspapers studied: that of Europe as the ‘other’, national sovereignty, and the claimed un-democratic nature of the EU. These discourses are challenged, and to some extent counter-balanced, by a more positive discourse on Europe in the more pro-European newspapers. However, the structure and readership of the press in the UK is predominantly oriented towards the Eurosceptic press. These titles dominate sales and readership, and this is an important factor in understanding how discourses on Europe in the UK are disseminated and reproduced – an overwhelming majority of readers read reports which frame Europe negatively, which may have significant consequences for the way that they perceive the European Union. This is particularly important when we recall that the media are the most important source of information on the EU for citizens (Gavin 2000).

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