The BBC and European integration, c. 1945-1975

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Author's declaration

I declare that all the material contained in this thesis is my own work.

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ABSTRACT

The BBC was the most prominent media organisation in Britain between 1945 and 1975. Listened to and watched by huge audiences, the facts and opinions broadcast in its programmes defined national debates. In the formative years for European integration, an issue that would prove divisive between and within the major political parties, the BBC shaped a public discussion that was wide-ranging, thoughtful, and creative. Internal papers show that its deep internationalist instincts, based on an institutional involvement with, and knowledge of, the Continent enabled it to lead an imaginative interrogation of what EEC membership would mean for Britain's national identity and the future of the country.

Over later years, however, the increasing politicisation of European integration posed challenges for the BBC, who had to manage inter-party and intra-party divisions, and give fair hearings to the well-resourced and well-connected pro-Marketers as well as the poorly-resourced and poorly-connected anti-Marketers. Under these pressures, the BBC moved from a proactive to a defensive stance, seeking to pre-empt criticism and imposing rigid 'balance' instead of a broader conception of impartiality. It led to a debate that was defined more narrowly, and a BBC that was following a national discussion rather than leading it.

In its External Services, the BBC continued to set the European debate within broader topics of freedom, democracy and trade. Often subsumed into the Cold War effort, the BBC was itself a diplomatic actor, seeking to explain and – through its role as an interlocutor – support the British government's European policy.

The BBC, in its role as a national broadcaster, enthusiastically sought to bring together the people of Western Europe and support Britain's place within that community. The Corporation's sustained engagement with the European integration project indicates that being an 'awkward partner' was never inevitable within Britain's national institutions.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACML: Anti-Common Market League
BBC: British Broadcasting Corporation
BIE: Britain in Europe
CAP: Common Agricultural Policy
CNR: National Council of Resistance (France)
COI: Central Office of Information
DP: Director of Programmes
EBU: European Broadcasting Union
EC: European Communities
ECIU: European Communities Information Unit
ECSC: European Coal and Steel Community
EEC: European Economic Community
EMU: European Monetary Union
ENCA: Editor, News and Current Affairs
EU: European Union
FCO: Foreign and Commonwealth Office
FO: Foreign Office
HMRP: Head of Midland Regional Programmes
IRD: Information Research Department
ITA: Independent Television Authority
NACA: News and Current Affairs
NRC: National Referendum Campaign
OAS: Algerian Secret Army
OIR: International Broadcasting Organisation
OIRT: International Radio and Television Network
PPB: Party Political Broadcast
UIR: International Broadcasting Union
VAT: Value Added Tax

INTRODUCTION

On 21 June 1961, the British Cabinet decided to begin negotiations for terms of entry into the European Economic Community (EEC).[1] This followed a four-year period in which Britain had obstinately refused to even consider the possibility of membership, and preceded fourteen years in which the nation, with increasing desperation, continued to try and secure membership – finally gaining entry to the club in 1973 and confirming its newfound membership via a national referendum in 1975. During this period, the Labour party became riddled with division over whether it should support or oppose membership, and the Conservative party moved from the latter stance (pre-1961) to the former (post-1961). What could have been a deathly dull dispute about trade relations became a hotly contested issue within the political arena. It divided the nation, and divided the major political parties as it became one of the most important issues facing the country. This thesis will examine the national debate through the institution that was most important in setting its terms: the BBC.

OBJECTIVES

This thesis aims to analyse the BBC as a way towards improving our understanding of British perspectives on European integration, and of the BBC itself. The BBC broadcast a wide-ranging array of views on European integration, and was the single most important media outlet engaged in organising and presenting the national debate and discussion throughout the years studied here. It referred upwards to elite politicians and political institutions, and translated and interpreted their views as a broadcaster that sought to inform the public. This makes a study of the BBC particularly well-suited to understanding how the people of Britain came to understand European integration. By using it as a lens through which to view the domestic debate over European integration in its formative period from 1945 until 1975, we can see

[1] S. Wall, *Reluctant Europeans: Britain and the European Union from 1945 to Brexit* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), p. 56.

what the dominant themes of that debate were, and better understand the dynamics that propelled public opinion.

This thesis also uses the BBC's handling of Britain's relationship to European integration as a case study for improving our understanding of the Corporation itself. Given the BBC's place at the heart of public debate in the UK, it is crucial that we understand how it functions as a publicly-funded institution that has been central to Britain's political culture since its foundation in 1922. We cannot understand political debate in the United Kingdom without understanding the BBC's contribution. Given the dynamic nature of European integration in Britain, with constantly fluctuating inter- and intra-party views, it provides an exemplary case study for exploring how the BBC dealt with the challenge of broadcasting impartially. Nobody has previously examined the BBC's long-term coverage of European integration as an issue.

Maintaining impartiality on European integration posed particular issues for the BBC. Both major parties, Labour and the Conservatives, were internally divided on the issue, with their MPs falling over the entire spectrum of views ranging from the most hostile of anti-Marketers to the most Europhile of pro-Marketers. Often, it was difficult to know where some MPs fell on this spectrum, or indeed to tell whether their views were unchanged since they had last spoken on the issue. At times, neither main party officially supported British involvement in the integration project. At other times, neither party did. And at still other times, one party did and the other did not. The only constant was the lack of consensus.[2] This thesis will analyse the BBC's relationships with government, political parties, and extra-parliamentary pressure groups.

[2] N. Crowson and J. McKay, 'Britain in Europe? Conservative and Labour Attitudes to European Integration since the Second World War' in W. Mulligan and B. Simms (eds.), *The Primacy of Foreign Policy in British History, 1660-2000* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 305-318, p. 306.

The BBC had to remain impartial within this whirlwind of changing opinions and policies. Examining the BBC's coverage of this topic will improve our understanding of how its internal functioning affected its political coverage over an extended period, thus improving our understanding of the BBC's role in political debates in mid-to-late twentieth-century Britain. Throughout the thesis, the overarching question is – what was the BBC's role in reflecting, interrogating and shaping Britain's relationship with, and perceptions of, European integration?

METHODOLOGY AND SOURCES

In practising broadcasting history, there is an inherent desire to concentrate on programmes; the perfect scenario has been summarised by Richard Toye: 'In the case of every programme examined, one would like to know (1) the intentions of the programmers, (2) what the programme actually contained, and (3) the reactions of critics and ordinary viewers'.[3] Limitations in the archives make this an impossible dream, yet programmes must remain the focus, as it is the programmes that mould public opinion – the 1962 Pilkington Report's 'identification of programmes as the central focus for any assessment of broadcasting' will be reflected in this thesis.[4] Programmes, however, are made by individuals working within an institution, so this thesis also concerns itself with the institutional workings of the BBC and its relationship to outside bodies.

One difficulty with studying the BBC is that it is not a 'homogenous body' but 'a site of considerable political contestation', with different power centres and departments with very different interests and perspectives – because it is a complex institution, it is harder to form judgments about the Corporation as a whole.[5] We must, therefore, understand *how* to study the BBC, and where power lay within it.

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[3] R. Toye, 'Review of History on British Television: Constructing Nation, Nationality and Collective Memory by Robert Dillon', *History* 96:322 (2011), pp. 226-227.
[4] J. Seaton, 'Class, taste and profit', in J. Curran and J. Seaton, *Power Without Responsibility: The press and broadcasting in Britain* (London: Routledge, 1997, 5th edn.), 173-180, p. 179.
[5] T. Mills, *The BBC: Myth of a Public Service* (London: Verso, 2020 edn.), p. 27.

In Jean Seaton's view, the Board of Governors had very little real power, except for the Chair, and even his power only came through his relationship with the Director-General.[6] Tom Mills, in his left-wing critique of the BBC, writes that 'the editorial policy is defined at the top of the BBC – which is the most politicised section of the Corporation, given that senior executives have to periodically negotiate with governments over its funding, its Charter and so on, and senior editorial figures have to respond to constant complaints over its reporting – and that policy then cascades down the hierarchy'.[7] This thesis will consider whether Mills' view is correct, or whether he underestimates the influence accorded to producers and other staff further down the hierarchy.

Methodological questions are also raised around the BBC's place within the nation. Peter Hennessy has described Britain's constitution as being made up of 'custom and precedent, rigidity and malleability, concealed beneath layers of opacity and mystery'.[8] As Seaton has noted, 'according to this insight the constitution is constructed by a kind of historical practice' and the BBC is part of this constitutional settlement: 'Thus, although much was written down about the Corporation's duties and much specified about any government's relationship to the BBC, the devil was in the detail of the day-to-day conventions. A great deal depended on the shape of power and responsibility in Whitehall'.[9] Seaton's position accentuated the importance of the BBC's relationship with government, as it operated in practice rather than in theory – a recurring theme throughout this thesis.

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[6] J. Seaton, 'Broadcasting and the theory of public service', in J. Curran and J. Seaton, *Power Without Responsibility: The press and broadcasting in Britain* (London: Routledge, 1997, 5th edn.), 302-316.

[7] Quoted in P. Barwise and P. York, *The War Against the BBC: How an unprecedented combination of hostile forces is destroying Britain's greatest cultural institution … And why you should care* (London: Penguin, 2020), p. 133.

[8] Quoted in J. Seaton, 'The BBC and the "hidden wiring" of the British constitution: the imposition of the broadcasting ban in 1988', *Twentieth Century British History* 24:3 (2013), 448-471, p. 449.

[9] Seaton, 'The BBC and the "hidden wiring" of the British constitution', p. 449.

The years chosen for study are 1945 to 1975, covering the entire period of Britain's post-war relationship with European integration, up to the referendum in 1975 that seemed to settle the debate. The time frame allows long-term trends and patterns to be identified, and we can analyse how the BBC's coverage changed or stayed the same over three decades that saw never-ending fluctuations in the party-political context of the European debate.

The research for this thesis is primarily based on archival sources, supplemented by contemporary publications and a smattering of interviews conducted by the author. A wide variety of archives have been used, the most important being the BBC Written Archives Centre (WAC). Where other histories of the BBC have focused on either policy or programmes, this project set itself a wider remit encompassing both policy *and* programmes and that is reflected in the source base. Files at the WAC pertaining to policy, programmes and audience research for both the domestic and overseas services have been invaluable, and form the backbone of my research across the entire period studied.

Files from the National Archives have been used to illuminate the relationship between the BBC and government, and have provided a particular insight into the government's pro-Market publicity campaign of the early 1970s and into the overseas services across the entire period studied.

Of the other archives explored, those containing papers from the pro-Market Britain in Europe (BIE) campaign have been especially useful. They record the day-to-day views within the organisation about the BBC's handling of European integration, and the relationship between BIE and the BBC. Papers from the anti-Market National Referendum Campaign (NRC) were less useful, with their limited resources contributing to a lack of sustained engagement with the BBC and other media organisations. Likewise, the archives of the Conservative party contained little material directly pertaining to the BBC's coverage of European integration.

The Covid-19 pandemic meant that archives were closed for a significant period of time during the writing of this thesis. Consequently, a planned analysis of the BBC's cultural offering – ranging across the full breadth of programming from sitcoms to postmodern plays – had to be cut, meaning this thesis can only ever be a partial look at the BBC's handling of European integration. It focuses on the news and current affairs departments, but does not interrogate other strands of the BBC. The pandemic also meant there was less room for serendipitous discoveries in the archives, but more time for ideas to form and gestate from the sources already viewed. During the closures, a series of interviews were conducted with people who had worked for the BBC during the period studied, helping to inform the conclusions drawn from the archival evidence.

Additionally, periodicals from the time have been used to form a broader picture of the types of programme that were broadcast, and the judgments formed of those programmes at the time they were heard or watched. The BBC's own magazine, *The Listener*, published weekly during the period studied, has been particularly helpful through its transcriptions and reviews of programmes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This book sits at the intersection of several different historiographical fields. It contributes to the history of the BBC and broadcasting in Britain; to the history of Britain's relationship with European integration; to the history of British foreign policy; and to the history of political culture in twentieth century Britain, especially the links between popular opinion and the opinions of political elites. No study of the BBC and European integration over an extended period of time currently exists, and only two historians have published any work focused on it, namely Paul Gliddon and Martin Herzer.

Gliddon has published two articles exploring the BBC's links to the government's pro-Market publicity campaign in the early 1970s.[10] They provide a detailed snapshot of one element of the BBC's programming, and act as an excellent starting point for assessing the BBC's relationship with government and with external organisations such as political parties and EEC campaigning groups. He considers what we can learn about the government and civil service from its relationship with the BBC; this thesis will consider what we can learn about the BBC from its relationship with government. Herzer, meanwhile, has written a monograph on what he describes as 'Euro-journalism', studying journalists across Western Europe from the 1950s to the late 1970s.[11] The BBC feature in this book, but only in any detail for the sections covering the 1970s – however, it is still worth examining his work in some depth as it provides a starting point for questions this thesis seeks to investigate.

It is worth bearing in mind a couple of weaknesses of his work, namely that he at times misunderstands the BBC's constitutional position – seeing it as a state broadcaster, not a public broadcaster – and he sometimes fails to grasp the strict and complex impartiality requirements incumbent upon the BBC, leading him to suggest that it takes an official editorial line on issues. He claims that the BBC was categorically pro-Market, and that EEC membership 'had the unanimous support of public broadcasting'.[12] He therefore argues that his book contributes 'to the revision of the view that the British media has always had a special "Eurosceptic" bias'.[13] But the BBC was not systematically pro-Market, as this thesis will show, and the press largely supported British membership of the EEC throughout the 1960s and the first half of the 1970s.

[10] P. Gliddon, 'Programmes Subjected to Interference: The Heath Government, Broadcasting and the European Community, 1970-1971', *History* 91:3 (2006), 401-424; P. Gliddon, 'The British Foreign Office and Domestic Propaganda on the European Community, 1960-72', *Contemporary British History* 23:2 (2009), 155-180.
[11] M. Herzer, *The Media, European Integration and the Rise of Euro-journalism, 1950s-1970s* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).
[12] *Ibid*, p. 307.
[13] *Ibid.*

Herzer also attaches a mistaken importance to individuals at the BBC, rather than to the overall institution. He correctly recognises that some senior BBC journalists were personally pro-Market, but wrongly infers that this means the BBC as an entity was systematically pro-Market. He fails to understand that BBC reporters were working within the structure imposed by the Corporation they worked for. [14] This thesis aims to take a more sophisticated approach to the role of individuals within the BBC, examining their roles within the wider institution. In any organisation the size of their BBC there will always be people who are avidly pro-Market or anti-Market; the key is for the institution to ensure its output remains impartial despite that fact.

With these caveats in mind, let us now turn to Herzer's arguments. He argues that there was a distinct caste of journalists, termed 'Euro-journalists', who worked as economic and foreign affairs journalists in the editorial departments of major Western European media outlets and wholeheartedly embraced European integration, which they believed was a prerequisite for peace, prosperity and power. They portrayed the European Communities (EC) as the only legitimate incarnation of both European integration and Europe, and believed that European integration as a process must always move forward.[15]

These views formed part of the 'Euro-narrative' that they sought to propagate. It is implied that Euro-journalists gave the EEC a more prominent place in the news agenda than was deserved by news values alone, pushed their own beliefs, and brought about 'the central position that European integration and the EU today occupy in European public discourse'. This thesis will consider whether that happened at the BBC and, if it did, whether it happened consciously or unconsciously.

[14] *Ibid*, p. 230.
[15] *Ibid.*

According to Herzer, Euro-journalists were campaigners who 'helped to create and to shape the European Union', transforming it into the central institution of European integration.[16] They were able to do this because they were 'integrated into and cooperat[ing] closely with pro-European circles in politics, business and academia' – an embeddedness with senior pro-Market politicians that will be a recurring theme in this thesis.[17]

With Gliddon and Herzer focusing only on specific periods, there is a lack of historical studies exploring the BCB and European integration in the long-term. Other scholarship on the BBC and European integration between 1945 and 1975 comes from contemporaneous sources, usually in the social sciences.[18] Prominent among these are the Nuffield election studies for each national election and referendum in this period, which all devote a chapter to broadcasting.[19]

It is not only the BBC and European integration that has been comparatively neglected by historians, but also the wider story of Britain's relationship with European integration as it related to popular politics. Most studies of Britain's relationship with Europe in the latter half of the twentieth century have restricted their research to the domain of *haute politique,* with domestic politics 'sidelined' according to Jon Parry.[20] There is a need to look beyond the state in writing the history of Britain and European integration, and consider its connection to domestic politics and political culture.

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[16] *Ibid.*
[17] *Ibid.*
[18] For further examples, see e.g. U. Kitzinger, *Diplomacy and Persuasion: How Britain Joined the Common Market* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973).
[19] R. B. McCallum and A. Readman, *The British General Election of 1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1947); H. Nicholas, *The British General Election of 1950* (London: Macmillan, 1951); D. E. Butler, *The British General Election of 1951* (London: Macmillan, 1952); D. E. Butler, *The British General Election of 1955* (London: Macmillan, 1955); D. E. Butler and R. Rose, *The British General Election of 1959* (London: Macmillan, 1960); D. E. Butler and A. King, *The British General Election of 1964* (London: Macmillan, 1965); D. E. Butler and A. King, *The British General Election of 1966* (London: Macmillan, 1966); D. Butler and M. Pinto-Duschinsky, *The British General Election of 1970* (London: Macmillan, 1971); D. Butler and D. Kavanagh, *The British General Election of February 1974* (London: Macmillan, 1974); D. Butler and D. Kavanagh, *The British General Election of October 1974* (London: Macmillan, 1975); D. Butler and U. W. Kitzinger, *The 1975 Referendum* (London: Macmillan, 1976).
[20] J. Parry, 'Review of The End is Nigh: British Politics, Power and the Road to the Second World War by Robert Crowcroft, *London Review of Books* 41:22 (2019), p. 3.

Crowson has recognised that this is a problem with the broader historiography of British foreign policy.[21] However, it is a particular weakness of the historiography on Britain and European integration because it comes despite Britain having faced two referenda on its membership of the EEC/EU (the only issue on which there have been multiple nationwide referenda) and the ensuing importance of public opinion – Britain could not have joined the EEC if public opinion had been strongly and passionately opposed to it, and its membership was unable to last beyond 2016, when a majority of voters supported leaving the EU, an event which itself resulted from the growing electoral success of UKIP. It is impossible to understand Britain's relationship with Europe and European integration if we do not understand public opinion on the issue.[22]

The importance of public opinion on European integration has often been ignored or downplayed in the historiography, though the situation has begun to change in recent years, with books such as Lindsay Aqui's *The First Referendum* and Robert Saunders' *Yes to Europe!*.[23] Saunders' book, for example, situated the 1975 referendum within its broader historical context and made extensive use of national and local press archives.[24] He declared that his book 'seeks to break down the divide between "British history" and "the history of Britain in Europe", two fields that have rarely embraced free movement', an objective shared by this thesis.[25] In doing so, his book proves the value of using the media to examine Britain's relationship with Europe, especially in the context of the 1950s through to the 1970s, where media consumption was more concentrated than in the twenty-first century. People read the same newspapers, listened to the same radio stations, and watched the same television channels, with the internet and social media non-existent.

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[21] N. J. Crowson, *Britain and Europe: A political history since 1918* (London: Routledge, 2011), p. 12; see e.g. R. Crowcroft, *The End is Nigh: British Politics, Power, and the Road to the Second World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).
[22] L. Aqui, *The First Referendum: Reassessing Britain's Entry to Europe, 1973-75* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), p. 15.
[23] *Ibid*, pp. 5-6.
[24] R. Saunders, *Yes to Europe! The 1975 Referendum and Seventies Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).
[25] *Ibid*, p. 22.

Both Aqui and Saunders' studies go some way to correcting the previous dearth of historical studies of Britain's relationship with European integration in the first half of the 1970s, and to meshing high and popular politics in innovative ways. However, like many other studies of Britain's relationship with Europe, they are based on the key moments – the referendum, and the negotiations for terms of entry. Key events also underpin other major studies of Britain and European integration through the 1950s and 1960s.[26] This thesis takes a different approach, exploring the BBC's coverage of European integration over a longer period, allowing it to recognise long-term trends in the ways European integration was discussed. It also provides an opportunity to consider how European integration permeated everyday British political discourse, rather than short-term eruptions around key events. It is in the mundanity of everyday discussion of the issue that we can most clearly expose the BBC's long-term perception of the issue.

This long-term approach allows the thesis to take a more nuanced approach to British attitudes towards European integration, joining the growing resistance to the simplistic 'awkward partner' and 'missed opportunity' narratives that have dominated the field and suggest that Britain was destined to remain on the edge of European integration rather than an enthusiastic partaker within it.[27]

As Aqui and Wolfram Kaiser have noted, these narratives risk encouraging an ahistorical understanding of contemporary events, based on looking backwards from future events, rather than understanding Britain's relationship with European integration on its own terms.[28] Brexit has disrupted a peculiarly Whiggish and teleological view of this history, in which relations between Britain

[26] See e.g. J. Ellison, *Threatening Europe: Britain and the Creation of the European Community, 1955-58* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000) and G. Wilkes (ed.), *Britain's Failure to Enter the European Community 1961-63: The Enlargement Negotiations and Crises in European, Atlantic and Commonwealth Relations* (London: Routledge, 1997).
[27] For more on the awkward partner narrative, see N. P. Ludlow, 'The Historical Roots of the "Awkward Partner" Narrative', *Contemporary European History* 28:1 (2019), 35-38. For more on the missed opportunity narrative, see C. A. Wurm, 'Britain and European Integration, 1945-63', *Contemporary European History* 7:2 (1998), 249-261.
[28] Aqui, *The First Referendum*, pp. 5-6; W. Kaiser, *Using Europe, Abusing the Europeans: Britain and European Integration, 1945-63* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1996), p. xv.

and Europe were seen to be moving ever-closer despite disruption, and membership of the EU was seen as an irreversible historical inevitability.[29] Political events in Britain over the last decade have demonstrated the fallacy and folly of these views. This thesis seeks to avoid falling into the trap of imagining that anything was inevitable in Britain's relationship with European integration by asking: how did the BBC perceive the potential future relationship between the UK and EC? Was it optimistic that it would be a fruitful relationship? Did it present it in ways that risked undermining it, or that could have improved it?

It also seeks to avoid a simplistic 'missed opportunities' perspective by recognising that the EEC was not the sole mechanism through which European integration operated.[30] The 'missed opportunities' thesis often ignores other possible routes to European integration, working with the benefit of hindsight, and ignores developments in British policy such as Plan G, which Aqui argues was 'a genuine advance in Britain's policy towards a closer relationship with European integration'.[31] This is especially important for the years before 1961, when Britain launched its first negotiations for a possible application to join the EEC. That application, and the two subsequent applications, are dissected in detail in this thesis.

Throughout, we will consider what Britain's reasons for entry were, assessing them against the historiographical consensus that senior politicians focused on political reasons, while voters weighed up a mix of economic and political arguments.[32] Using the BBC's unique window onto the nation's public discourse, this thesis will ask what the key reasons advanced for and against EEC membership were.

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[29] See, for example, N. J. Crowson arguing that the referendum result in 1975 was 'closure' on the membership issue. Crowson, *Britain and Europe*, p. 103; A similar phenomenon has taken place in the history of education in Britain, see P. Mandler, *The Crisis of the Meritocracy: Britain's transition to mass education since the Second World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), p. 16.

[30] K. K. Patel, *Project Europe: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

[31] Aqui, *The First Referendum*, p. 27.

[32] As recognised by Aqui in *The First Referendum*, p. 262.

While the BBC's coverage of European integration has not been subject to in-depth analysis, press coverage from the 1960s has been, with several studies specifically related to press coverage of Britain and European integration. These include Robert F. Dewey Jr's exploration of the *Daily Express*'s anti-Market perspective in the early 1960s, and Mathias Haeussler's comparison of the *Express* and the *Daily Mirror* in the same period.[33]

The press are intrinsically linked to the BBC – not only as media outlets, but because of the longstanding belief among some that the BBC allows itself to become a follower of the papers, with Robert Peston, for example, believing that the BBC was 'completely obsessed' with the agenda set by the papers.[34] However, this could also work the other way – Denis Healey, for example, commented that 'a modern election is fought essentially on television', and the press often relied for stories on politician's appearances on television.[35]

The BBC was the dominant British media institution throughout the entire period covered by this thesis, with the broadest reach and widest output. For Healey, broadcasting was where the public got most of their information, and where he was most able to influence opinion.[36]

While this thesis concludes with the 1975 referendum, it is also worthwhile drawing attention to the literature on the BBC's coverage of European integration *since* that referendum. European integration has remained a prominent issue for most governments in the period, from those led by Margaret Thatcher and John Major to, more recently, those of Tony Blair, David Cameron, Theresa May and Boris Johnson.

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[33] R. F. Dewey Jr., *British national identity and opposition to membership of Europe, 1961-63: The anti-Marketeers* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009); M. Haeussler, 'The Popular Press and Ideas of Europe: The Daily Mirror; the Daily Express, and Britain's First Application to Join the EEC, 1961-63', *Twentieth Century British History* 25:1 (2014), 108-131.
[34] Mills, *The BBC: Myth of a Public Service,* p. 106.
[35] D. Healey, *The Time of My Life* (London: Michael Joseph, 1989), p. 503.
[36] *Ibid*, p. 442.

Major noted the potency of divisions over European integration in his memoirs, and they tore open afresh in the 2010s.[37] The 2016 referendum showed how salient European integration was as an issue – and how much people cared about BBC coverage of it. The newspapers, and social media, were rife with criticism of the BBC, recognition of the key role it continues to play in national life and the impact in can have on how the public view a given issue. Cameron himself, in his memoir, complained about the BBC's alleged failure to understand the distinction between 'balance' and impartiality', while Jonathan Coe's state-of-the-nation novel *Middle England* made the BBC's neutrality (or otherwise) a recurring theme.[38] James Harding, the Director of BBC News in 2016, had to defend his organisation from charges that they had implemented 'false balance', rather than impartiality, thus obscuring the real balance of opinions among various groups.[39]

One of the BBC's more strident critics, Paul Dacre – formerly editor of the *Daily Mail* – thought that the Corporation had maintained a pro-EU stance throughout the 21st century, except when prioritising 'balance' around the 2016 referendum.[40] It is telling that he focused on the BBC, not any other channel, and that he set the referendum in its long-term context. Other anti-EU critics of the BBC include Rod Liddle and Robin Aitken, the latter of whom has devoted significant space in his books to the idea that the BBC has consistently failed to be impartial on European integration.[41] For him, senior BBC officials including the Director-General and governors have been 'easily subverted by the lefties at the coal face'. We will see later how that contrasts with the view of the BBC held by left-wing critics such as Tom Mills.

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[37] J. Major, *The Autobiography* (London: HarperCollins, 2000), p. 363.
[38] D. Cameron, *For the Record* (London: William Collins, 2019), p. 667, 676; J. Coe, *Middle England* (London: Viking, 2018).
[39] J. Harding, 'A truly balanced view from the BBC: don't blame us for Brexit', *The Guardian*, 25 September 2016. Accessed online at https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/sep/24/dont-blame-bbc-for-brexit-false-balance on 25 November 2023.
[40] P. Dacre, 'The BBC's Brexit coverage is a disgrace', *The Spectator*, 5 October 2019, p. 19.
[41] R. Liddle, 'How the BBC can achieve real diversity', *The Spectator*, October 2019. Accessed online at https://www.spectator.co.uk/2019/10/how-the-bbc-can-achieve-real-diversity/ on 19 November 2019; R. Aitken, *The Noble Liar: How and why the BBC distorts the news to promote a liberal agenda* (London: Biteback, 2018), pp. 61, 65-67; See Mills, *The BBC: Myth of a Public Service,* p. 128; and quoted in Barwise and York, *The War Against the BBC*, p. 131.

The above sources – and others from a position that is friendlier to the BBC, including Patrick Barwise and Peter York – show that the issue that stands above all others in the BBC's broadcasting of European integration is impartiality.[42] Aside from the never-ending problem of party-political impartiality, no single issue has caused more debate about whether the BBC is getting it right on impartiality than European integration. Understanding the history of this decades-long debate will tell us more about the BBC and its approach to impartiality, and more about the nation too. The answer to the question of how the BBC should cover European integration was never static, and this thesis will consider how the answer changed over a period of several decades.

There have been a variety of 21st century studies of whether the BBC is biased in a pro- or anti-integration direction. The IEA argued that the BBC was systematically biased against Leave supporters in 2016 and 2017, while 'News-watch' purports to monitor bias among public service broadcaster, but in fact focuses almost exclusively on BBC coverage of European integration, and accuses the BBC of being anti-Leave.[43] Meanwhile, a study in Zurich concluded that the BBC presented too few positive stories about the EU, and one at Cardiff University judged that the EU was framed in largely negative terms by the BBC.[44] In fact, the BBC itself commissioned the 2004 Wilson Review of its EU coverage, responding to claims that their coverage was 'systematically pro-EU … and too Westminster-centric'.[45]

Given the comprehensiveness of this Review, it is worth dealing with in more detail. It found 'no evidence of deliberate bias' towards pro-EU perspectives, but *did* find some bias, occurring for five reasons: the BBC's 'institutional mindset'; 'over-simplified polarization of the issues and stereotyping'; the 'Westminster prism', whereby too much emphasis was placed on the views only

[42] Barwise and York, *The War Against the BBC*, p. 314.
[43] M. Grant, 'BBC bias is still skewing the Brexit debate', *Daily Telegraph*, 1 February 2019. Accessed online at https://web.archive.org/web/20200104024859/https://www.telegraph.co.uk/opinion/2019/02/01/bbc-bias-still-skewing-brexit-debate/ on 21 December 2021; Barwise and York, *The War Against the BBC,* p. 114.
[44] Barwise and York, *The War Against the* BBC, p. 151, 314.
[45] *Ibid*, p. 149.

of the major parties; 'ignorance' with journalists themselves not grasping the complexities of the EU and Britain's membership of it; and 'omission', with simply not enough coverage of the EU given its 'importance and relevance … in the political and daily life of the UK'.[46]

These factors are all criteria that will be assessed in this thesis, looking at the BBC several decades before the Wilson Review. Did the BBC adequately reflect the wide variety of opinion? Did it place too much emphasis on Westminster opinions? Did it recognise the importance of the impact of EEC membership on British political culture? These questions are all fundamental to this thesis.

It is particularly worth considering the way in which the BBC perceives the world, and whether it places too much emphasis on Westminster opinion. The BBC has a worldview, and it is within this worldview that it continually seeks to achieve impartiality. One of Tom Mills' criticisms of the BBC is that it aims to reflect the opinions of elites, and that BBC journalists 'orientate themselves' towards senior politicians.[47] Jean Seaton and James Curran, who often disagree with Mills, agree on this, writing that 'broadcasting operates in the context of an elite political culture and a highly centralized system of government. There are strong pressures on broadcast journalists to internalize uncritically the Westminster-Whitehall consensus, take their bearings from the leaderships of the parliamentary parties, and to rely on the "authoritative" and "accredited" as their sources of information'.[48] Seaton and Curran argue that political parties 'monopolize avenues of access to radio and television, and in the process crowd out other collective organizations'.[49] Roger Mosey, formerly an executive at the BBC, 'argued that, while the BBC is scrupulously non-partisan in its political coverage, it nevertheless exhibits a "groupthink" on certain issues, meaning that

[46] Mills, *The BBC: Myth of a Public Service*, p. 124; Barwise and York, *The War Against the BBC,* pp. 149, 314-315.
[47] Quoted in Barwise and York, *The War Against the BBC*, p. 133; Mills, *The BBC: Myth of a Public Service*, pp. 211-212.
[48] J. Curran, 'Media reform', in J. Curran and J. Seaton, *Power Without Responsibility: The press and broadcasting in Britain* (London: Routledge, 1997, 5th edn.), 358-371, p. 361; J. Seaton, 'The fall of the BBC', in J. Curran and J. Seaton, *Power Without Responsibility: The press and broadcasting in Britain* (London: Routledge, 1997, 5th edn.), 161-172, p. 170.
[49] Curran, 'Media reform', p. 361

although its journalists and editors are not consciously biased, they accept certain taken-for-granted assumptions'.[50]

This thesis will ask whether the BBC exhibited this 'groupthink' on European integration, whether it fell under the power of the Westminster-Whitehall consensus, and whether the Corporation was a leader or a follower of popular and elite opinions, in response to Mills' view that 'the traditional BBC approach has not been to hold to account … but rather to report largely from the perspective of, and within the terms set by, the British state'.[51] Seaton takes a divergent view, noting that during the Troubles in Northern Ireland the political parties 'bitterly resented the independent capacity of broadcasters, and especially the BBC to define who were political players on the ground … simply by putting them on air … politicians … felt that the broadcasters were diminishing their power to control legitimacy, and consequently their power'.[52] This thesis asks who the BBC gave legitimacy to in the debate around European integration.

Mills and sociologist Philip Schlesinger both take the view that BBC journalists tend to follow an editorial line from their seniors.[53] David Hendy, more sympathetic to the BBC, has also argued that there was a 'programme ethos' to which everyone subscribed – producers 'learned to adjust their ideas to what they knew to be unacceptable', with anything that could potentially be deemed unacceptable being religiously referred upwards.[54]

Mills argues that this has led the BBC into a position where it is an 'integral part' of the Establishment and, as a result, has 'marginalised alternative and oppositional perspectives' and been 'much more amenable to elites than democratic and egalitarian movements'.[55] This argument will be explored throughout this thesis, considering its relevance to the BBC's coverage of European integration. There is widespread recognition that the BBC is part of

[50] Mills, *The BBC: Myth of a Public Service*, p. 127.
[51] *Ibid*, p. 96.
[52] Seaton, 'The BBC and the "hidden wiring" of the British constitution', p. 450.
[53] Mills, *The BBC: Myth of a Public Service*, p. 31.
[54] Quoted in Mills, *The BBC: Myth of a Public Service*, pp. 31-32.
[55] *Ibid,* p. 2, 35.

the Establishment – from Barwise and York, for example – but some do not believe that this causes any problems in maintaining its independence and impartiality.[56] Barwise and York also provide a useful list of ways we can judge impartiality: choice of topics; framing of issues; the selection of commentators; how they are questioned.[57] They also draw a crucial distinction between impartiality and balance, noting that they are not synonymous. The tension between these two terms will be a recurring theme of this thesis – though the BBC is only committed to ensuring impartiality, many critics prefer to focus on balance.[58]

It is also important to note the BBC has never been, or intended to be, impartial on every issue – and nor should it be. This was especially pertinent in the late 1960s, when immigration became a salient political issue and Enoch Powell had inflamed the national debate with his 'rivers of blood' speech in 1968. He felt that the BBC did not treat his views on this issue impartially; the BBC's response was that it could not be impartial on issues such as racism, or crime – which frustrated Powell, who viewed the former as subjective and only the latter as objective.[59] The BBC, therefore, openly restrict the airing of some views that are perceived to be on the extremes of what is acceptable; they preserve a 'consensus band' of opinion as do quality newspapers, and 'maintain and repair consensus as the nature of the status quo changes'.[60] While the issue of European integration never inflamed tensions to the extent of debates around race and immigration, this thesis will consider the 'consensus band' it maintained on the issues, asking which opinions were admissible at various points in the post-war era.

[56] Barwise and York, *The War Against the BBC*, p. 240.
[57] Barwise and York, *The War Against the BBC*, p. 125.
[58] *Ibid*, pp. 231-232.
[59] C. Schofield, *Enoch Powell and the Making of Postcolonial Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 257.
[60] J. Seaton, 'The sociology of the mass media', in J. Curran and J. Seaton, *Power Without Responsibility: The press and broadcasting in Britain* (London: Routledge, 1997, 5th edn.), 264-286, p. 280, 284.

One key question that needs answering in explaining why this thesis is worthwhile and that is: why the BBC? The short answer is that it is subject to greater scrutiny than any other British media institution. It is a symbol of the nation in a way that other broadcasters are not. As Barwise and York put it, 'the BBC is the whole British nation in all its untidy variety and, at the same time, one of its glories' and 'broadcasting like the BBC's is central to the country's understanding of itself and the rest of the world – and a big part of the world's understanding of Britain'; the role of the BBC is to 'discuss and mould national issues'.[61] Moreover, the BBC has a 'huge, central role in British culture, society, democracy and international standing'.[62] For Seaton, the BBC is 'not merely embedded in British identity but institutionally woven into the fabric of politics and the operation of the state – part of what Peter Hennessy called the 'hidden wiring' of Britain's unwritten constitution'.[63] It had power and authority – Seaton adds that 'to appear on the BBC is seen as being endorsed by the British authorities. It carries a different weight'.[64]

She and Curran argue that 'the media are political actors in their own right', rather than simple reflections of contemporary political culture – to an extent, this is a similar view to Aitken, who says that the BBC is a 'hidden persuader'.[65] They choose the voices and the topics that the public come to know and think are important.[66] And, as Seaton and Curran point out, broadcasters – and the BBC in particular – are often seen as authoritative, trusted sources, increasing their potential impact on public opinion.[67] Both determinists and pluralists in media theory agree 'that the media have a key political role, stressing the way in which press and broadcasting shape public understanding'.[68]

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[61] Barwise and York, *The War Against the BBC*, pp. vii-ix, 29; Seaton, 'Broadcasting and the theory of public service', p. 302.
[62] Barwise and York, *The War Against the BBC*, p. 7.
[63] Seaton, 'The BBC and the "hidden wiring" of the British constitution', p. 449.
[64] *Ibid*, p. 456.
[65] J. Seaton, 'Introduction', in J. Curran and J. Seaton, Power Without Responsibility: The press and broadcasting in Britain (London: Routledge, 1997, 5th edn.), 1-4, p. 1; Aitken, *The Noble Liar*, p. 307.
[66] Seaton, 'The sociology of the mass media', p. 276.
[67] *Ibid*, pp. 272-273.
[68] *Ibid*, p. 285.

The Annan Report, published in 1977, described the BBC as 'arguably the most important single cultural institution in the nation', and even critics such as Mills and Aitken have agreed with this view.[69] It was the most comprehensive news and current affairs organisation in the UK, more comprehensive than any newspaper or broadcaster with its mix of global, national, and regional news. The BBC had a monopoly on television immediately after the Second World, and a monopoly on radio (though there were pirate stations too) until near the end of the period studied in this thesis. It was a trusted news source that made visible – and audible – Britain's place in the world, but it was far broader than that too, with its mix of musical, educational, dramatic, literary, entertainment and cultural programmes.

No PhD thesis can cover all the ground it may want to, and in this case it was not possible to cover these broader aspects of the BBC. But it must always be borne in mind that the BBC's attitudes towards European integration were visible not only through its news and current affairs output, but also through its cultural offerings – through its selection of music, its broadcasting of characters such as Basil Fawlty, and its choice of cuisines for cookery shows. The sheer breadth of the BBC's output means that it would naturally lend itself to a cultural history of Britain and European integration – part of a much-needed expansion of the source base used to analyse Britain's relationship with Europe, as pointed out by Aqui.[70]

But even while limiting itself to news and current affairs, this thesis is necessarily both a cultural and a political history. Political culture was revolutionised by television – for Geraint Thomas, a televised political culture meant one that marked a point of no return in the move away from localist politics.[71] The BBC was at the heart of that, with no official competition in radio broadcasting until 1973, and only ITV for competition on television; there was no plethora of digital radio stations or pay-TV channels. By 1960, half of the United Kingdom's

[69] Mills, *The BBC: Myth of a Public Service*, p. 223; Aitken, *The Noble Liar*, p. 10.
[70] Aqui, *The First Referendum*, p. 14, v.
[71] G. Thomas, *Popular Conservatism and the Culture of National Government in Inter-War Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), pp. 20-21.

population was watching television at peak time.[72] MI5 described the BBC as 'the most powerful instrument for propaganda in this country', and Michael Cockerell describes television as 'the most powerful form of political communication ever invented'.[73]

This did not necessarily mean that the public always agreed with those they heard over the airwaves. On European integration, for example, Herzer has argued that the rise of 'Euro-journalism' exacerbated an existing 'divide between elite discourse and the views of the broader public' – a topic which will be explored in more detail later in this thesis.[74]

This cultural and political centrality leads itself to an obvious historiographical question: to what extent was the BBC part of elite political culture? While this is a question also posed by contemporary students of the media, the distance in time provided by historical study can help formulate answers. Given the case study of European integration, where pro-Market supporters dominated the circles of senior politicians from the early 1960s onwards, and where anti-Market supporters were portrayed as outsiders (indeed, Aqui uses the theoretical framework of insider and outsider groups to analyse them), this thesis is an excellent place in which to attempt to answer that question of to what extent the BBC is part of the 'insider' networks.[75] Did the BBC have a similar role in determining who the insider and outsider groups on European integration were? And how did the BBC's view of which were the insider and outsider groups influence its coverage of European integration?

In assessing the BBC, this thesis attempts to limit the encroachment of analysis of the BBC's internal structure into its remit. There is already a surfeit of studies considering the BBC's internal governance and structure, most obviously Asa Briggs' monumental five-volume official history of the BBC and the sixth

[72] P. Hennessy, *Winds of Change: Britain in the Early Sixties* (London: Allen Lane, 2019), p. 503.
[73] Mills, *The BBC: Myth of a Public Service*, p. 40; M. Cockerell, *Live from Number 10: The Inside Story of Prime Ministers and Television* (London: Faber and Faber, 1988), p. 2.
[74] Herzer, *The Media, European Integration and the Rise of Euro-Journalism, 1950s-1970s*, p. 308.
[75] Aqui, *The First Referendum*, p. 9.

volume of the same series, authored by Jean Seaton.[76] This thesis will lean heavily on their work when providing necessary detail of the BBC's internal workings, but their excellence on those workings enables this thesis to look outwards: at the BBC's programmes and audience reactions to their programmes, and at the BBC's relationship with outside organisations including the government, political parties and other political campaigns. The longer history of the BBC is always present; Aitken has noted that the BBC has an 'instinctive internationalism', going 'back right to [its] foundation'.[77] Though he uses this to explain what he perceives to be the BBC's 'deep, sincere and abiding love affair with the EU', it is worth noting here given the historical consensus is that the BBC has indeed always been outward-looking and internationalist, and that this will have impacted on its attitude towards European integration in the later twentieth century.

Utilising the BBC as a case study also links this thesis to broader themes in modern British history, an approach shared by other histories of European integration. We will consider how the BBC's coverage showed the links between views on European integration and broader political issues, which arguments the pro- and anti-Market campaigners tried to focus on, and how they related to the wider political context. More broadly, we will consider the influence of the media at a time when the importance of class and social networks in determining voting patterns was declining, and voters were instead picking up a greater percentage of their information through the mass media.[78]

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[76] A. Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom Volume I: The Birth of Broadcasting* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961); A. Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom Volume II: The Golden Age of Wireless* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965); *A. Briggs, The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom Volume III: The War of Words* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970); *A. Briggs, The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom Volume IV: Sound and Vision* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979); *A. Briggs, The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom Volume V: Competition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); J. Seaton, *Pinkoes and Traitors: The BBC and the nation 1974-1987* (London: Profile, 2015).

[77] Aitken, *The Noble Liar*, p. 50.

[78] Seaton, 'The sociology of the mass media', p. 274; Seaton, 'Broadcasting and the theory of public service', p. 312.

Another key theme of contemporary political debate was declinism. Aqui, for example, argues that the rampant declinism of mid-1970s Britain had a major impact on the domestic debate about EC membership – indeed, that declinism was *the* key argument for joining.[79] Aitken, in his vehement denunciation of the Corporation's attitude towards European integration, has written that it was in the 'atmosphere of despair' surrounding declinism 'that the BBC's attitude to the European project was fashioned'.[80] The thesis will analyse the truth of that claim.

External Services

It is worth dwelling explicitly on the role of the BBC's External Services. They are crucial to this thesis, and the BBC as an institution cannot be understood without recognising that its reach is far broader than the British public alone. It was through the External Services that the BBC maintained its international knowledge, reputation and role, and became 'not merely an observer of foreign affairs but … an actor in the nation's relationship with the world'.[81] It represented and served the national interest. The broadcasts of the External Services affected how other countries viewed Britain's attitudes towards European integration, and often reflected British foreign policy. The approach of the External Services to European integration can also tell us about both the BBC's approach to European integration and about the BBC's relationship with the government and civil service, given that the External Services engage in closer cooperation with the institutions of state than do the domestic services. A crucial question asked by many academics, and asked again here, is: to what extent were the External Services independent from government? The External Services are throughout recognised as an integral component of the wider Corporation, giving it its distinctive internationalism and wide outlook on the world.

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[79] Aqui, *The First Referendum*, p. 11, 239.
[80] Aitken, *The Noble Liar*, p. 54.
[81] J. Seaton, 'Asa and the Epochs: The BBC, the Historian, the Institution and the Archive', in M. Taylor (ed.), *The Age of Asa: Lord Briggs, Public Life and History in Britain since 1945* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 184-209, p. 198.

It is also crucial that the External Services are themselves an actor in foreign policy, as services that enable the rest of the world to understand Britain. An important question for this thesis, therefore, is: how does the BBC itself relate to the 'awkward partner' narrative? Did the External Services present Britain as an 'awkward partner' in the European integration project, or as an 'active' participant with a 'constructive pattern of engagement'?[82] Piers Ludlow, in his excellent analysis of the 'awkward partner' narrative, notes that one reason for its embeddedness in the historiography is that UK-EU relations have often been viewed from a top-down level with leaders and their interactions prominent; whereas a more positive and constructive relationship can be found behind-the-scenes and away from the rows that are a feature of leadership summits.[83] The External Services broadcast about those summits and rows, but as an actor was not in the frontline of political events – it acted behind-the-scenes, yet had a position that meant its broadcasts could influence public opinion and outcomes. How does it fit into Ludlow's hypothesis?

The historical context of the External Services will be utilised to tell a story of wider British foreign policy – Benjamin Grob-Fitzgibbon, in his book *Continental Drift*, correctly notes a surprising separation of the twin narratives about Britain's imperialism and Britain's relationship to European integration.[84] The External Services began as the Empire Service and, to some extent, the story of the BBC's overseas services from that point on is the story of British foreign policy and its changing priorities and foci. Aitken has argued that in the inter-war years the BBC operated in the 'context of an agreed national understanding that certain things were taken for granted and not be questioned', such as Britain's imperial role and League of Nations membership.[85] Reflecting British foreign policy was often simple: it meant helping bind the Empire together, then supporting the war effort between 1939 and 1945. Both major parties took broadly similar positions on key issues and events, and the BBC could represent the national

[82] Ludlow, 'The Historical Roots of the "Awkward Partner" Narrative'.
[83] *Ibid.*
[84] B. Grob-Fitzgibbon, *Continental Drift: Britain and Europe from the End of Empire to the Rise of Euroscepticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), p. 3.
[85] Aitken, *The Noble Liar*, p. 129.

consensus. The same was true for the Korean War and the Cold War.[86] However, issues came when the parties were divided on foreign policy – as evidenced by the Suez debacle in 1956, a major crisis for the BBC.[87] The issues that made Suez a major problem for the BBC were also present on the issue of European integration (though there were differences, most obviously the lack of such a prominent 'flashpoint' and the potential to lead to sudden and great loss of life) – crucially, there were divisions between and within the two major parties on how to deal with the issue.

This thesis therefore considers how the BBC dealt with a world in which there was no such widespread agreement on the foundations of Britain's foreign policy. An attempt will be made to connect the turn away from Empire with the turn towards Europe. The Second World War and the Cold War were also crucial influences on the development of the BBC's External Services as they related to European integration, as will be explored in detail.

Historical work on the BBC External Services pertaining to these other key areas of foreign policy provided a useful guide for this thesis in how to conduct research on the external services, and the key debates in the historiography. Simon Potter's *Broadcasting Empire* (which also considers the domestic services) examines the belief in the BBC that their programming should encourage a particular attitude towards foreign policy – and a particular view of the world – among listeners, and notes that programme planners would often discuss the methods through which they could do this.[88] Potter's work along with that of Alban Webb on the Cold War means that two of Churchill's 'three circles' of British foreign policy (the Empire, the USA and Europe) have been analysed by historians of the External Services, with only Europe left relatively under-

[86] See A. Webb, *London Calling: Britain, the BBC World Service and the Cold War* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).
[87] For more on the BBC in the Suez crisis, see T. Shaw, 'Eden and the BBC during the 1956 Suez Crisis: A Myth Re-examined', *Twentieth Century British History* 6:3 (1995), 320-343.
[88] S. J. Potter, *Broadcasting Empire: The BBC and the British World, 1922-1970* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 15-16.

analysed – though Webb does spend much time on Eastern Europe.[89] The absence of Western Europe from the historiography is despite Potter admitting that 'Europe generally loomed much larger on the BBC's world map' than the Empire.[90] Webb has noted 'the relative paucity of subsequent studies [following Briggs'] that have attempted to engage in a debate about overseas broadcasting from Britain'.[91] This thesis seeks to engage in that debate.

CHAPTER SYNOPSES

This thesis is divided into an introduction, conclusion and six substantive chapters. These chapters are ordered chronologically, covering the years 1945-63, 1963-67, 1968-72, 1973-74, 1974-75 and 1975 respectively. The dating is based on major events in the history of Britain and European integration – the vetoes of Britain's first and second applications to join the EEC; the domestic debate and negotiations that led to the signing of the Treaty of Accession and joining the EEC; the first year of membership; the renegotiation of the terms of entry in 1974; and the referendum in 1975.

Finally, a note on terminology. This thesis does not use the terms 'pro-Market' and 'pro-European' interchangeably. The former will be used to refer to views that were specifically in favour of the EEC and/or British membership of it, while the latter denotes a broader cultural view of Europe. For example, someone who felt themselves to be culturally aligned with the Continent but was against British membership of the EEC would be pro-European but anti-Market. It also occasionally uses the terms 'Eurosceptic' and 'Europhile'. The former of these was not in common usage during the time studied, but has entered the public's lexicon in the debate around European integration since the 1980s. While its contemporary use does have its definitional difficulties, it remains a useful term in denoting views that were hostile to aspects of European

[89] For more on the 'three circles' idea, see A. Gamble, 'The European Issue in British Politics' in D. Baker and D. Seawright (eds.), *Britain For and Against Europe: British Politics and the Question of European Integration* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 12-30, p. 14; Webb, *London Calling*.
[90] Potter, *Broadcasting Empire*, p. 239.
[91] Webb, *London Calling*, p. 5.

integration, without being fully anti-Market, and so is sometimes applied retrospectively in this thesis.[92]

Chapter One, on the years 1945 to 1963, examines the BBC in the years when British involvement in the European integration project became a realistic possibility and television ownership spread across Britain. These were the years in which the BBC became modern, at the same time as membership of the EEC came to be seen as something that could take Britain full thrust into the modern ea. The idea of European integration was already being presented in myriad ways, rooted not just in geopolitics and economic arguments but in shared cultural values too. There was an idealistic undertone, partly as a consequence of experts and 'true believers' often being given broadcasting time to express their views rather than pragmatic pro-Market politicians predominating. The BBC was bringing its institutional knowledge and expertise to bear in providing audiences with an array of creative, free-thinking perspectives on the EEC, and was not yet limited by significant party-political constraints. Impartiality was defined broadly rather than narrowly, and freedom from top-down policies was granted to producers who foresaw the potential historical importance of the EEC. The BBC was on the front-foot, leading a national debate on where Britain fit into the geopolitical future.

The External Services, meanwhile, were dominated in these years by their Cold War role. This role affected how they broadcast about the Common Market to their sizeable audiences in Europe, both East and West, which retained great trust in the Corporation. As with the domestic services, the BBC recognised the importance of having an open debate on the EEC and Britain's relationship to it, and European integration was discussed optimistically, as a project with positive potential. In another nod to the domestic services, a wide range of arguments were propounded to foreign audiences for British involvement in

[92] For a discussion of these definitional difficulties, see O. J. Daddow, 'Euroscepticism and History Education in Britain', *Government and Opposition* 41:1 (2006), 64-85 and D. Pasquinucci, 'Beyond Euroscepticism: Italian Criticism of European Integration', in M. Gilbert and D. Pasquinucci (eds.), *Euroscepticisms: The Historical Roots of a Political Challenge* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 57-74.

European integration but there was a distinct priority given to those that were idealistic not pragmatic. The key aims remained those for the External Services as a whole – to project Britain and to help in the Cold War effort. These were reflected in the portrayal of Britain as a very close friend of Western Europe, as a nation that supported the process of European integration and that had a national 'democratic debate' on the issue.

Chapter Two looks at 1963 to 1967, stretching from the veto of Britain's first application to the veto of the second application. It was in these years that Labour and the Conservatives both supported British membership of the EEC on realistic terms for the first time. The BBC began to adapt to this changing party-political context, in which the leadership of both parties supported membership but substantial numbers of other MPs did not. It continued to lead the national debate, ensuring the issue remained prominent, with independent producers who were fearless in exposing divisions within the major parties.

Increasingly, debate came to be broadcast through politicians rather than non-party experts, with the arguments propounded accordingly shifting from the idealistic to the pragmatic. The BBC's conception of political neutrality began to be challenged, with opponents of membership having to be found from outside the leaderships of the major parties. Its Westminster focus meant these groups had to fight for coverage, with an instinctive pro-Europeanism present among BBC staff.

Pro-Europeanism was common in the External Services (XS) too, with senior staff hoping to present the Continent with a perception of a Britain united in support for membership – even after de Gaulle's veto had curtailed that idea in the medium-term. There was a belief in European integration as a way out of Britain's 'decline' and economic ills; and as a tool with which to fight the Cold War, in which the BBC was a key player.

Chapter Three covers the period of the revived second application for membership of the EEC and its success. This chapter deals more than others with the relationship between the BBC and the government, and between the BBC and outside organisations that were not political parties. Between 1970 and 1972, the government launched a concerted pro-European publicity campaign, in which they tried to involve the BBC. There was, throughout, far closer liaison between the BBC and pro-Market campaigns than between the BBC and anti-Market campaigns, and government and civil service officials had an indirect influence on programme-making despite the BBC retaining their editorial independence. This was a period of adaptation for the BBC on the issue of the EEC. They had a clearer policy for allocating time to politicians, and a new, narrower conception of impartiality which was adapted to the fluctuating party-political context – though this did not stop complaints from both sides of the debate about their coverage. 'Balance' began to come to the fore.

The EEC began to emerge from the shadow of the Cold War as the dominant theme of the External Services in Europe, with integration becoming an issue that was used to 'project Britain' rather than to support the Western cause in the Cold War. Attempts by the government to reduce services to Western Europe were successfully fought off by the BBC, working as a diplomatic actor which valued its links to the Continent and recognised their importance to Britain.

Chapter Four looks at the first year of British membership, up to Labour's promised renegotiation with the EEC after their election win 1974. Entry brought changes to the BBC's coverage – with a newly-created role of Common Market correspondent, an office in Brussels, cooperation with ORTF, and much coverage of the Fanfare for Europe celebrating entry. Coverage was broad, and showed an understanding of how membership would affect the British polity.

There was also a sense that entry had been a decision made by a united country, rather than by a single government – a picture of consensus was painted where none existed. This was most evident in the European Services, with the mooted launch of a new EEC radio service, which was developed enough for the BBC

to take the idea to the Foreign Office (FO), who were supportive. It would broadcast in multiple languages including English, and would seek to inculcate a 'European consciousness' among the peoples of the EEC countries. While the idea did not come to fruition – stymied by Labour's coming to power in 1974 on a Eurosceptic manifesto – it provides a relevant insight into the BBC's culture and thinking on the issue of European integration, their keenness to be part of British pro-European foreign policy. It shows the BBC as an actor in foreign policy, disrupting the 'awkward partner' narrative. The External Services had already proved their use during the negotiations for entry, when their continued large audiences in Western Europe made them useful for showing the British government's commitment to being part of the European integration project. There was a growing recognition of how the External Services could be actively used in this way, to persuade other nations of British thinking on European integration.

Chapter Five looks at the period of the renegotiation, and the BBC's preparations ahead of the in-or-out referendum to be held in 1975. It shows that the BBC's instincts were to seek examples of how referenda had been treated elsewhere, and to lead a refreshed national debate. Instead, however, plans quickly came down to working out what the most easily-defensible strategy was and sticking to it. The party-political context was given an important role, with the BBC fearful of criticism from both major parties. Simplistic 'balance' was to be the order of the day, and became a focal point of internal discussions, while politicians were given a more prominent role than before and experts were relegated to the background.

Chapter Six, the final chapter, looks at how these plans were put into practice. It shows that they were successful on their own terms, negating criticism from those outside the BBC, and there was a widespread view that the BBC had handled the debate competently. Yet the coverage was defensive, and did not encompass as broad a discussion as in earlier years. It lacked an understanding of the fundamental constitutional innovation that was presented by the referendum, and failed to try to separate the referendum from party-politics.

Fear of criticism became a primary motivation in scrupulously enforcing a narrow 'balance', that seemed to become the goal in itself rather than a mechanism for achieving impartiality. The BBC was in a difficult position, with a complex issue reduced to a simple Yes or No Vote, and everybody trying to influence their coverage. Ultimately, it remained an opportunity missed, with the chance to lead a national debate about British national identity and the country's future being spurned. It showed the BBC's inherent conservatism as it seemed to reach a period where the European issue was settled for the first time.

CHAPTER 1: 1945-1963
LEADING

The BBC emerged from the Second World War as a radically different entity to that which had existed in 1939. It had rapidly expanded and proved itself vital to the war effort both at home and abroad, while developing its independence from government and establishing a formidable reputation for its objective news reporting. Its programmes had boosted morale, informed the world of the latest developments in the war, and negated the impact of Axis propaganda. Yet even two years before the conclusion of the War, thoughts inside the BBC had turned to its post-war role.[1] Questions were raised about when the television service should be resumed, and to what extent resources should be poured into developing it. The future of the External Services was also unclear, after the War had left the BBC looking outwards and broadcasting in nearly fifty foreign languages.[2] What should be done about those foreign services now?

The XS were always working alongside British foreign policy – and the period from the end of the war until 1963 was a crucial one for this policy, with government having to lay the groundwork for a new relationship with Western Europe amid the rapid development of several multinational and supranational organisations. Britain initially opted not to join the supranational European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) when it was created in 1951, preferring instead to cooperate through intergovernmental structures. But, in 1961, Harold Macmillan's Conservative government overturned the existing policy of remaining outside the EEC by beginning negotiations for possible entry. The application was vetoed by French President Charles de Gaulle in 1963, leaving Macmillan to write in his diary that 'all our policies at home and abroad are in ruins', and setting the tone for future relations between Britain and the EEC.[3]

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[1] A. Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom Volume IV: Sound and Vision* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995 edn.), pp. 27-28.
[2] A. Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom Volume III: The War of Words* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995 edn.), p. 18.
[3] H. Macmillan, *At the End of the Day* (London: Macmillan, 1973), p. 367.

By 1963, European integration had grown to occupy a significant place within British politics, and the BBC had had to adapt accordingly. The questions faced at the end of the War had all been answered, one way or another, and Britain's relationship with European integration had become a regular topic in broadcasts both at home and abroad. At home, the BBC led and created the public debate, considering Britain's future in new and innovative ways rather than being excessively constrained by existing ways of thinking. Abroad, meanwhile, Britain's involvement – or otherwise – in the processes of European integration was weaponised to serve the wider purposes of the External Services in the Cold War.

This chapter will explore how the BBC began to conceptualise the issue of European integration, both in its domestic services and in its External Services. During these formative years for the issue of European integration in Britain, the chapter will look at what kind of debate the BBC created, the programmes it broadcast, how those programmes were made, and the impact of government policy on its broadcasting.

DOMESTIC SERVICES

We will start in the most outward-facing place: the programmes. As Jean Seaton has written, broadcasting history is 'the programmes, stupid … it is about how broadcasters have a discussion with audiences'.[4] Here we will delve into the programmes broadcast on the domestic services, told largely through the records held in the BBC's Written Archives.

Radio

Radio was the dominant medium for broadcasts about European integration in these years. Most programmes about Britain and the Common Market were broadcast on the Third Programme, which broadcast high-brow music and

[4] J. Seaton, 'Writing the History of Broadcasting' in D. Cannadine (ed.), *History and the Media* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 141-159, p. 155.

speech programmes and had a far smaller audience than the Light Programme or the Home Service.[5] Between 1950 and 1963, the programme descriptions in *Radio Times* mentioned the phrase 'Common Market' only twice for the Light Programme, 18 times for the Home Service, and 53 times for the Third Programme. This was to be expected to a certain extent because the Third Programme broadcast more talks than either the Home Service or Light Programme – but the extent of the difference suggests that interest in the Common Market among the British public was believed to be relatively narrow.[6]

From the earliest years of European integration coverage, the Third Programme – itself in some ways European, run by people who knew and loved Europe and promoting European music, drama and other arts – broadcast complex talks that dealt with different elements of the Common Market and the idea of European integration. It ranged across topics that dealt directly with the Common Market to those that were far broader in scope. For example, the six-part series *Background to the Common Market* and a programme on *The Common Market and the Common Law* were both broadcast on the Third Programme in 1962.[7] Meanwhile, the Home Service featured the Common Market across its regular programmes, such as *The World Today, At Home and Abroad, The Way We Live Now*, and agricultural programmes including *On Your Farm* and *Farm Forum*.[8] The broader topic of Britain's place in Europe was explored in these programmes too, with *The Way of Life*, for example, featuring on discussion on 'Britain's place in Christian Europe' in 1962.[9] The Light Programme gave little coverage to the EEC, but it did carry a debate on whether Britain could stay out of the Common Market, and occasional discussions on European integration within *Listeners Answer Back*.[10] We can see that the BBC's radio services were already a key provider of regular information and views about the Common Market from the earliest years of Britain's potential involvement in it. There was a clear distinction

[5] It attracted around four listeners out of every hundred. Briggs, *Sound and Vision*, pp. 60-61.
[6] Briggs, *Sound and Vision*, p. 513.
[7] BBC Genome, 3 October 1962, 10 March 1962. BBC Genome is a digitised archive of the *Radio Times* magazine and listings.
[8] BBC Genome, 10 February 1953, 31 May 1961, 22 September 1961, 23 November 1962.
[9] BBC Genome, 28 October 1962.
[10] BBC Genome, 19 July 1962, 6 July 1961, 13 July 1961.

between the stations on the handling of the Common Market and potential British involvement in it – the Third Programme broadcast special talks, the Home Service featured it within its existing programmes, and the Light Programme did little of anything.

Television

Meanwhile, these were the years in which television became the dominant broadcasting medium over a remarkably short time span – though European integration remained more often talked about on radio. Television was the preserve of a tiny minority when it restarted following the War, but by 1963 it had acquired huge audiences. By the late 1950s, the number of combined television and radio licences exceeded the number of radio-only licenses, and Radio Times was putting the television schedules first within its pages.[11] The distribution of BBC resources was also radically altered: in 1945, the BBC had spent £6.5 million on radio and £0.7 million on television; by 1963, the relevant figures were £14.5 million and £22.8 million.[12] And, unlike in radio, the BBC no longer had a monopoly on television broadcasting, with ITV broadcasting from 1955.

This growth in television's significance was felt especially in the conduct of political campaigning. For Jon Lawrence, the development of radio during the inter-war years had failed to alter British political culture to any great extent, but television had a huge impact and dramatically altered the relationship between the people and the parties.[13] Campaigns were increasingly conducted via television rather than in-person, and the parties devoted more time than ever before to their party political broadcasts – Macmillan and Gaitskell would use

[11] A. Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom Volume V: Competition* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 30, 1005; D. Hendy, *Life on Air: A History of Radio Four* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 14.
[12] Briggs, *Sound and Vision*, p. 7; Briggs, *Competition*, Appendix C.
[13] J. Lawrence, *Electing Our Masters: The Hustings in British Politics from Hogarth to Blair* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 10.

these to talk to the public about the Common Market in 1962.[14] Television was a modernising influence on the conduct of politics in Britain, running alongside the never-ending battle between the parties to be perceived as the 'modernising' party.[15] There was an increasing recognition in the parties that what the BBC did mattered for the nation's political culture. We will consider below how the BBC's nascent service spoke about European integration.

Programme content and reception

In the 1950s, the BBC was leading the domestic discussion surrounding European integration. At a time when other media outlets had limited coverage of the different organisations, including the EEC, the BBC was informing British audiences about the subject and exposing them to a cacophony of varied viewpoints. In contrast, the newspapers continued to provide only limited coverage of European integration at this time – Martin Herzer has argued that it was only in 1961 that the EEC first became 'an object of interest for a wider range of senior journalists'.[16] Robert Lieber, too, believed it was only with the beginnings of a pro-Market press in 1961 that the European issue was launched 'into the forefront of public attention'.[17] This is perhaps unsurprising, given the 'rather desultory consideration' the British government gave to the issue of integration for most of the 1950s.[18] Yet, by 1961, it had already been a topic of interest in BBC programming for years, presented as a serious historical movement.

That the BBC was different is evident from the records of programmes, available via the *Radio Times*, *The Listener* magazine, and other contemporaneous sources.

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[14] *Hansard*, 6 June 1961, Vol 661, European Economic Community; *Hansard*, 11 February 1963, Vol 671, European Economic Community.
[15] A. Ridge-Newman, *The Tories and Television, 1951-1964: Broadcasting an Elite* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2017), p. 20; E. Robinson, *The Language of Progressive Politics in Modern Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p. 204.
[16] M. Herzer, *The Media, European Integration and the Rise of Euro-journalism, 1950s-1970s* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), p. 171.
[17] R. Lieber, *British Politics and European Unity: Parties, Elites, and Pressure* Groups (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), p. 220.
[18] M. Camps, *Britain and the European Community 1955-1963* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 53.

The Listener, in particular, is of considerable value. Maintaining an average circulation of more than 100,000 per week and published by the BBC, it printed scripts of recent programmes, allowing them to reach a wider audience than would have otherwise been possible.[19] A significant proportion of programmes on the Common Market – which generally consisted of radio talks at this time – were included in the *Listener*.

The sheer volume of articles in *The Listener* about European integration prior to 1961 is striking. The issue was not sidelined, but instead foregrounded a number of times per year – with even more at times of special interest. This was at a time when neither the Conservatives nor Labour were interested in joining the ECSC or EEC (the Messina conference of 1955 that led to the creation of the EEC was never even discussed in Cabinet, and the Common Market was not mentioned in Parliament until 1956), and so the BBC, and especially its radio services, played a vital role in ensuring the issue was brought into the public consciousness.[20] The Corporation was an outlier in a media landscape that barely covered the issue – they did not simply report on a pre-existing debate, but helped forge an all-new public discussion.[21]

From 1953 onwards, the *Listener* regularly reported on programmes covering the formative mechanisms of European integration, typically broadcast on either the Home Service or the Third Programme. Programmes by Kenneth Matthews and Charles Janson, among others, portrayed Britain as an interested observer – 'a kind of non-resident member of the club'.[22] The Reith Lectures of 1954, given by Sir Oliver Franks on the topic of 'Britain and the Tide of World Affairs', portrayed the government and public as being in agreement that 'Britain must not be absorbed into Europe', but argued nonetheless that Britain should lead

[19] British Broadcasting Corporation, *BBC Handbook 1963* (London: BBC, 1963), p. 177.
[20] Lieber, *British Politics and European Unity*, p. 138.
[21] W. Kaiser, *Using Europe, Abusing the Europeans: Britain and European Integration, 1945-63* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1996), p. 58.
[22] *The Listener*, 19 February 1953, p. 3.

in Europe and that it could do this by joining the ECSC, an organisation he believed would become hugely important.[23]

As the decade progressed, the volume of programmes on European integration only increased. From the beginning, it focused on the new EC institutions – the ECSC and the EEC – rather than alternative modes of integration and cooperation, such as the WEU and Council of Europe. In contrast, when the British press reported on European integration, the Communities were not treated more prominently than these alternative forms of cooperation.[24] For Herzer, the 1950s saw the emergence of the first 'Euro-journalists', shaping a narrative that saw the EC as embodying Europe and European integration.[25] The BBC were part of this process, recognising early on the importance of the EEC as the vital conduit of integration.

The coverage remained impartial, but the programmes mentioned in the *Listener* skewed positive – Kenneth Matthews, for example, said 'nothing quite like [the ECSC] has been in the world before', and described it as a 'revolutionary' organisation that would have a significant impact on trade conditions in Europe.[26]

And, by the mid-1950s, the impact on Britain of developments in European integration was beginning to be openly discussed on the BBC. Andrew Shonfield, for example, an economist who would give the 1972 Reith Lectures on European integration, acclaimed the proposed EEC while recognising that for 'many Englishmen, Europe is another name for abroad', and Bickham Sweet-Escott argued on the Home Service that if Britain 'stay out of the Common Market plan altogether, our trade will be shut out of western Europe, which is something we cannot afford'.[27] Paul Bareau, meanwhile, told *At Home and Abroad*

[23] *The Listener*, 2 December 1954, p. 13; O. Franks, 'The End of the Old World', 1954 Reith Lectures. Accessed online at http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/rmhttp/radio4/transcripts/1954_reith4.pdf on 13 October 2022.
[24] Herzer, *The Media, European Integration and the Rise of Euro-journalism, 1950s-1970s*, pp. 62-63.
[25] *Ibid*, p. 65.
[26] *The Listener*, 5 February 1953, p. 5.
[27] *The Listener*, 11 October 1953, p. 538; *The Listener*, 25 October 1953, p. 3.

on the Home Service in 1956 that the Common Market 'may hold the key to a revolution in our foreign trade policy'. He strongly supported British entry to the EEC's free trade area, if not the customs union.[28]

Marghanita Laski, reviewing *Commonwealth and Common Market*, broadcast on the Home Service in October 1956, concluded that the programme 'did fairly argue the pros and cons', but 'seemed to conclude that, even on the most selfish level, we would be foolish to stand out'.[29] She came away with the impression that the reasons for joining were mainly 'stark unmitigated selfishness', rather than to do with 'doing our duty to other people'.[30] Later, in May 1958, A. C. L. Day gave a Third Programme talk on 'Salvaging the Free Trade Area': 'If we are committed [to Europe] so deeply, would it not be better to accept the facts of the situation by entering the Common Market now and using our influence to help direct its development?'[31]

It is striking how many pro-Market programmes were broadcast by the BBC in this period, though it must be pointed out that the lack of significant support for joining among senior politicians meant there was little in the way of organised opposition. This was a noticeable break from the press, who Herzer suggests were generally suspicious of European integration due to their focus on the Empire and Commonwealth, and from the public and political response in later years once membership became a serious possibility.[32] The BBC was leading the debate on European integration, and doing so in a way that suggested Britain's involvement would be beneficial for the country.

It was not until 1958 that the *Listener* first covered a programme that was openly critical of European integration. Even then, it was a single talk, taken from the Third Service and entitled *Socialism in One Country*, which suggested that

[28] *The Listener*, 4 October 1956, p. 493.
[29] *The Listener*, 18 October 1956, p. 631.
[30] *The Listener*, 18 October 1956, p. 631.
[31] *The Listener*, 1 May 1958, p. 725.
[32] Herzer, *The Media, European Integration and the Rise of Euro-journalism*, p. 42.

'problems created by the migration of capital and labour would come up in an acute form if we entered the European Common Market'.[33]

This minor lapse did not stop the broader trend, with most published programmes remaining broadly positive. Sir Arnold Plant, for example, gave a talk about the economic outlook for 1957 on the Home Service, and suggested trade would greatly increase if Britain joined the Common Market. He added: 'How serious the damage to our economy will surely be if, when this new community is established, we elect to remain, alone in western Europe, shut out by the tariff wall'.[34]

While programmes on a new proposed free trade area – known as Plan G and part of British government policy at this time – were rarely made, BBC programmes openly talked about the possibility of Britain joining the EEC and the consequences of remaining out. This put the BBC at the forefront of a national debate – opening up a national possibility that, especially in the 1950s, was hitherto largely undiscussed in public discourse, and which was not being actively considered by either major political party.

Even when the possibility of Britain joining the EEC was not explicitly mentioned, the institution was taken seriously in a way that was not always mirrored by other media outlets. A television film on the new Market visited companies in every member country, asking what impact the organisation would have on trade, employment and political culture. The presenter, Aidan Crawley, described the Market as 'one of the biggest problems with which we [Britain] have ever been faced in peacetime', and endeavoured to find out what impact it would have on the country.[35] *Panorama* – still in its early days as a current affairs show – also featured sections on the Common Market in February 1957 and in April 1960, before the idea of joining was taken seriously by the political parties. The BBC was taking serious notice of the EEC, and bringing it to the attention

[33] *The Listener*, 6 March 1958, p. 411.
[34] *The Listener*, 3 January 1957, p.3.
[35] *Radio Times* 1765, September 1957; 'The European Common Market', 3 July 1957, WAC T32/637/1.

of the British public. That said, we must be clear that European integration was still a foreign policy issue of secondary importance on the BBC – their coverage of foreign affairs continued to be dominated by the Cold War and the Empire, with the Corporation's presence in Western Europe 'limited' in comparison to its 'large network' of imperial correspondents.[36]

The BBC's innovative discussions of Britain and European integration continued from 1961, when the EEC became a live political issue in the country after the Conservative government announced its bid for membership. It began to take its place among regular news bulletins and current affairs programmes.[37] Still, the Corporation did not simply fall in behind a pre-existing national debate but opened it up in fresh and exciting ways. For example, it broadcast a talk by H. C. Allen proposing the new idea that British entry into the EEC could be decided by a referendum; when reported in *The Listener* this became the focus of several letters from the public, suggesting that by leading the debate on European integration the BBC also helped foster public debate about wider issues surrounding the British constitution.[38] One viewer wrote to *The Listener* in October 1962 to echo the views of a review that had stated: '*Spotlight* (of September 20) … contained the only lucid, immediately comprehensible account of the Common Market problem, pro and con, that I have found anywhere'.[39] It became a topic of broader importance too – a discussion programme in July 1962 on 'sluggishness in British industry' was seen to show that the Common Market 'argument is really an argument about Britain's role in the world'.[40] The BBC were leading a wide-ranging, intelligent debate rather than one that was narrowly-focused on the EEC itself.

However, the BBC did come in for criticism suggesting that it was too pro-Market. By 1962, Malcolm Macmillan MP was saying to the Commons that there was 'a great deal more time devoted and opportunity given to the arguments for

[36] Herzer, *The Media, European Integration and the Rise of Euro-journalism*, p. 31.
[37] *The Listener*, 1961-1963, *passim*.
[38] *The Listener*, 12 July 1962, p. 45; *The Listener*, 19 July 1962, p. 103.
[39] *The Listener*, 4 October 1962, p. 535.
[40] *The Listener*, 19 July 1962, p. 3.

rather than to the arguments against' and that there was a 'danger … of a subject of that kind being treated by the BBC, once the Government have announced their policy, as if that were the only possible policy that could be adopted. The BBC at times tends to favour the Establishment and its case, and, indeed, the Government's case'.[41] This shows the growing salience of the BBC's coverage, and recognises the BBC's internationalist instincts to generally portray the EEC in a positive light, but ignores the BBC's long-standing platforming of pro-Market views.[42]

Without the BBC, it is unlikely that the public debate on European integration would have been so far advanced by the time negotiations for entry began in 1961. By then, the BBC had helped acclimatise the public to the *idea* of British entry, and given them at least some grasp of the issues involved, through its programmes featuring pro-Market views. It was delivering on its role of informing and educating – and doing so in a way that set it aside from its commercial competitors, especially the press.

Ironically, one of the few complaints regarding BBC coverage of European integration prior to the opening of negotiations for joining the EEC came from pro-Marketers. Max Beloff, Vice-Chairman of the Oxford Liberal Group, wrote to *The Listener* in May 1961 to complain that the pro-Market Liberal policy on European integration was never discussed or viewed as distinctive.[43] Jo Grimond had in fact explained the Liberals view 'at some length' on a programme the previous week, but given the large quantity of pro-integration material that had been broadcast on the BBC in the preceding months and years, it is unsurprising that some Liberals felt aggrieved that their policy was not receiving regular recognition.[44] The EEC before the negotiations opened was spoken about as a topic outside the realm of party politics.

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[41] *Hansard*, 30 January 1962, Vol 652, Broadcasting (BBC Licence and Agreement).
[42] The reasons behind the BBC's internationalist instincts are explored in greater detail elsewhere in this chapter.
[43] *The Listener*, 4 May 1961, p. 788.
[44] *The Listener*, 11 May 1961, p. 833.

The position of the Liberals as the only major party arguing for entry into the Common Market was not long-lasting. The Conservative government began negotiations for possible entry in summer 1961, and one year later the BBC could rely on a Labour party that opposed this move towards accession. Labour leader Hugh Gaitskell gave a speech to their party conference in October 1962 that was hostile to the idea of British EEC entry, suggesting that it would mean 'the end of a thousand years of history'.[45] This altered the BBC's task, as European integration began to be a debate that was conducted on inter-party, rather than intra-party, lines. *The Listener* shows that this change to the party-political context and the greater prominence of the issue led to more 'pairing' of talks on Europe, where two talks would be broadcast in quick succession, with one supporting and one opposing entry. For example, in September 1961 E. J. Mishan wrote a talk for the Third Programme that was avowedly anti-EEC.[46] It was followed a month later by a response from Alan Day, who spoke on 'The Economic Case for Britain Joining the Common Market', and explicitly opposed Mishan's arguments.[47] This was the first time Mishan had broadcast about the Common Market, whereas Day had already spoken about it several times on the air – showing the pro-integration tendency prevalent in the BBC until this time.

However, many broadcasts that supported European integration remained unaccompanied by a contrasting opinion. For example, in 1961 Kenneth Younger delivered a broadcast to sixth forms on Britain and European unity, which noted that the reasons for the Conservatives opening negotiations on EC entry were 'fairly straightforward' because 'the contrast between the dynamism of the European Economic Community and the stagnation of the British economy has not diminished'.[48] No anti-EC talk stood alongside this; a sixth former who had heard only this talk may have found it hard to understand why anyone would oppose entry, and indeed why it had taken the government so long to begin its membership negotiations.

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[45] R. Broad, *Labour's European Dilemmas: From Bevin to Blair* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), p. 52.
[46] *The Listener*, 14 September 1961, p. 373.
[47] *The Listener*, 19 October 1961, p. 3.
[48] *The Listener*, 6 July 1961, p. 3.

Talks such as this encouraged Anthony Fell MP (a member of the right-wing Conservative Monday Club) to ask the Postmaster-General to require the BBC 'to stop all broadcasts to schools on the subject of the Common Market'.[49] Unsurprisingly, the response was that the government would not be intervening in BBC editorial decisions. But the raising of this question demonstrates the importance that some MPs attached to the broadcasting of this national debate, and shows that some were already accusing the BBC of bias on it. It went both ways too – Lord Grenfell argued that schools broadcasting should devote more time to the Common Market and other 'topics of international and national interest'.[50]

Talks from a single speaker could prove controversial, and perhaps for this reason there was an increased use of discussion programmes during the negotiation period to broadcast about the Common Market. *The Listener* reported in February 1962, for the first time, on a discussion programme that had taken place on the BBC and featured speakers for both sides of the debate.[51] Even these programmes, however, did not meet with the approval of all viewers; Peter Green wrote in *The Listener* that 'arguments pro and con are no earthly use to the viewer unless he has a clear working knowledge of the facts on which they are based'.[52] There was clearly a use, then, for programmes such as *Background to the Common Market*, which sought to explain the Common Market even if this meant using many speakers who had 'an unconcealed connection with the "European" movement'. This was not seen as an issue because they 'express[ed] their view moderately', but it is notable that the task of explaining the EEC was often left to people who were pro-Market.[53] They may well have been the best people for the job, but it shows the beginnings of a problem that would raise its head repeatedly – how to explain the EEC without viewers inferring a preference for EC membership?

[49] *Hansard*, 19 December 1961, Vol 651, House of Commons Written Answers.
[50] *Hansard*, 18 July 1962, Vol 242, The Pilkington Report on Broadcasting.
[51] *The Listener*, 8 February 1962, p. 3.
[52] *The Listener*, 9 August 1962, p. 29.
[53] *The Listener*, 11 October 1962, p. 582.

The arguments put forward in favour of EEC entry via the BBC were many and varied, showing the value of a public broadcaster able to explore an issue in depth and with freedom, and undermining the contention of many historians that the debate in Britain was focused solely on pragmatism. This may have seemed true among senior politicians and diplomats, but was not true of the wider public debate – the Third Programme even hosted a discussion on whether the arguments proposed for entry were positive or negative, based on optimism or pessimism about the future.[54] The debate was never exclusively about pragmatic arguments; even some of these senior politicians, including Macmillan, had long held idealistic pro-European views, but were reluctant to air them in public.[55] Similarly, Edward Heath, leading the government's negotiations in Brussels and 'scarcely off the screen' in these years, portrayed his deeply-held commitment to European integration as a pragmatic view.[56] The lack of a leader willing to stand up for an enthusiastic, positive argument for EEC entry was noted by viewers of *Panorama* in 1962, one of whom suggested that 'what seems to me lacking is a British statesman with the vision and eloquence needed to formulate this concept in a way which can be at once inspiring and non-committal'.[57]

The BBC did not let the lack of a high-profile, enthusiastic and positive pro-European personality dissuade them from broadcasting idealistic arguments in favour of entry, those that were based on a shared, hopeful vision rather than selfish pragmatism. Cultural elements of the pro-European cause were utilised. In a country where 'discursive Christianity' remained powerful and the Second World War had occurred only recently, for example, one programme explicitly tied the idea of a shared European Christian heritage to the Common Market application, stating 'there was no doubt then [in the Early Church] that this country should draw deeply from, and contribute massively to, a Common Market of Christian ideas and practices that are still the basis of our European

[54] *The Listener*, 8 February 1962, p. 3.
[55] Kaiser, *Using Europe, Abusing the Europeans*, p. 53.
[56] M. Cockerell, *Live from Number 10: The Inside Story of Prime Ministers and Television* (London: Faber and Faber, 1989), p. 119.
[57] *The Listener*, 14 June 1962, p. 1044.

civilization'.[58] Another, also broadcast in 1962, gave listeners a radio talk on 'Britain's Place in Christian Europe'. Christianity was bound up with people's definition of Europe, and increasingly came to be used to juxtapose the religious West with the atheist and communistic East in the Cold War context. Reporting on the 1962 Conservative party conference, which was broadcast on BBC TV and 'voted for entry … by a majority which astonished even the most optimistic of the pro-Europeans', it was noted that there was 'evident enthusiasm for Europe, the feeling that it offered an exciting new vision, an ideal to replace the old imperial mission'.[59] From the BBC's reporting, you got the sense that this was a project not aimed only at pragmatic benefits, but at modernising Britain and giving the country a new sense of national purpose.

Yet cultural and idealistic arguments, as other historians have recognised, were also put forward by anti-Marketers.[60] Norman S. Marsh, for example, told Third Programme listeners that Britain would require significant adjustments to its legal system due to the Common Law tradition, which sat in opposition to the legal systems in place among the Six.[61] Other programmes discussed how the memory of war, and a common culture of 'religion, law and art' related to the current debate surrounding political integration.[62] They were a distinctive feature of this period, with the BBC leading an all-encompassing debate that did not seek to limit the integration discussion only to the political realm.

While the presence of optimistic and idealistic arguments for EC entry are a distinctive feature of this period at the BBC, they continued to broadcast programmes focused on the material consequences of the EEC for Britain. The agriculture department, for example, argued that joining the EEC would 'be a revolutionary change in our economy' and so decided that interest in the EEC needed 'to be stimulated'. In 1961, then, they broadcast a radio series on the

[58] C. G. Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation 1800-2000* (London: Routledge, 2009, 2nd edn.), p. 12; *The Listener*, 8 March 1962, p. 443.
[59] *The Listener*, 1 November 1962, p. 705.
[60] See e.g. R. F. Dewey Jr., *British national identity and opposition to membership of Europe, 1961-63: The anti-Marketeers* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009).
[61] *The Listener*, 15 March 1962, p. 3.
[62] *The Listener*, 11 October 1962, p. 582.

Common Market as part of their farming output, with filming taking place in Germany, Italy and the Netherlands.[63] *Gallery* had several episodes in 1962 alone on the positive and negative impacts for the UK of joining the EEC, while the informative *Background to the Common Market* series has already been mentioned. The BBC were leading a wide-ranging debate, looking at both the tangible and intangible consequences of Common Market membership.

The making of programmes

How were those programmes made, and what influence did that have on the kinds of programmes that were broadcast? Using evidence from the WAC, we can see that in this early period for BBC coverage of European integration, producers were the staff members taking the lead, with senior officials creating an environment that fostered their creativity rather than seeking to control the types of programmes they made.

One important memorandum was sent by John Grist – a protégé of Grace Wyndham Goldie, at the time producer of *Gallery* and working in the Television Talks Department, he would go on to be Head of Current Affairs – to Leonard Miall, Assistant Controller of Current Affairs and Talks in TV. In December 1961, summarising their recent conversation, Grist wrote that:

> There obviously has been in our output a lack of a sustained programme about the Common Market. It, and its ramifications, will be the main domestic political issue in 1962. It is not a subject which particularly interests producers, although I have been surprised by the interest outside, especially amongst politicians and those with political interests. There is no doubt that the main anti Common Market lobby in the Conservative Party is going to increase its efforts towards the end of January. Also it is probable that by the early Spring the Labour Party will have come out officially against going into the Common Market.[64]

[63] Ronald Webster to HMRP, 4 October 1961, WAC R19/2097/1; George Sigsworth to The Rev. J. Van Nieuwenhuijzen, 25 July 1961, WAC R19/2097/1.
[64] John Grist to Leonard Miall, 19 December 1961, WAC T32/838/1.

This memo suggests that the initiatives for TV programmes on the Common Market came late, and initially came from programme-makers themselves rather than senior officials, many of whom still saw television as less 'serious' than radio. Programmes such as *Gallery* and *Panorama* were innovative, helping to dissipate the notion that pure entertainment had to dominate on TV. We've seen in the first section of this chapter that the Common Market was covered more extensively by radio than by TV, and that programmes were often special talks or documentaries rather than planned series. The situation continued after this memo – Miall heard two days later from S. C. Hood, Controller of Programmes for Television, that while he 'likes the idea of a programme about the Common Market in principle', he needed 'further details about the programme shape' before he allocated funding for it.[65] These memoranda illuminate how crucial individuals were in determining the programming on European integration. There was no coherent policy imposed from above – instead, a culture was fostered that created an ad hoc system in which producers and more senior officials discussed the merits and practicalities of individual programmes.

We can also see the importance of individuals when we look at how *Foreign Correspondent* was produced in 1949 – one of the first BBC TV programmes to deal with European integration. The first series visited six capitals of Europe to explore life there, while the second series was more overtly political, looking 'at the prospects of Western Union and the possibilities of European integration'.[66] It was produced by Grace Wyndham Goldie, a pioneering politics producer in the Television Talks Department, who used Charles de Jaeger, a cameraman who 'knew the European ropes' and spoke a number of continental languages.[67] Norman Collins, who had worked in the External Services and would go on to campaign for the creation of ITV but was then the BBC's Controller of Television, suggested they should send him abroad for a programme that suited his talents – and thus *Foreign Correspondent* was born.[68] Given the number of BBC

[65] Leonard Miall to John Grist, 21 December 1961, WAC T32/838/1.
[66] G. W. Goldie, *Facing the Nation: Television & Politics 1936-76* (London: The Bodley Head, 1977), pp. 54-56. The six capitals were Paris, Rome, Copenhagen, Athens, Vienna and Helsinki.
[67] *Ibid.*
[68] *Ibid.*

staff who had experience of working in or with Western Europe, this likely illustrates a broader trend, and explains why the BBC was at the forefront of bringing European integration to the public's attention.[69] For Goldie, *Foreign Correspondent* was the 'direct precursor' to long-lasting current affairs programmes including *Panorama, Tonight* and *Gallery* – and this was a programme based initially on looking at Europe and European integration.[70]

By 1962, there was a clear impetus for extensive programming on the negotiations between Britain and the EEC, with the increasing politicisation of the issue causing a switch from programmes happening when a producer suggested it, to a concerted effort being made to increase coverage. In August, less than a year after the memoranda between Grist and Miall, Grist sent a further memorandum to B. S. G. Bumpus (of the BBC's Secretariat) for the Commonwealth Broadcasting Conference, which stated that the BBC had now broadcast 'numerous long programmes about the Common Market'.[71] A further memorandum from Grist in the same month, this time entitled 'Gallery Central Planning and Staffing for the Future' and sent to the Head of Current Affairs (Television), suggested he had now been persuaded of the merits of broadcasting on European integration by audience figures. Gallery's average audience was now 'over 2 million' people, a figure Grist thought was 'all the more remarkable because we have never reduced the intellectual level of the programme'.[72] He thought that their efforts to bolster audience figures had 'been helped by … the Common Market'.[73] And that meant he now wanted to run more programmes on the topic, writing 'we would continue our work in relation to the Common Market, and I hope to do some coverage of European politics, particularly as they affect the Common Market. It may be in time that we should do an extra monthly programme specifically on Common Market/European affairs'[74].

[69] More details on the extent of BBC experience in Western Europe will be provided in the next section.
[70] Goldie, *Facing the Nation*, pp. 54-56.
[71] John Grist to B. Bumpus, 17 August 1962, WAC T32/838/1.
[72] John Grist to HCAT.Tel, 1 August 1962, WAC T32/838/1.
[73] *Ibid.*
[74] *Ibid.*

A year previously, the BBC was relying on the efforts and persuasion of individual producers to get programmes on the EEC made. Now, the long-term Europeanisation of a prominent current affairs programme was being seriously proposed. The BBC had taken its time to push European integration to the forefront of its programming, but it was now happening as it looked to continue leading the national debate.

EXTERNAL SERVICES

For the External Services, broadcasting across the world, the end of the Second World War marked the beginning of a new era and a new way of operating. Gerard Mansell, the culturally European future head of External Broadcasting who had been born in France and educated in Paris, saw this as a 'period of decline and lost opportunities' for the XS before a reversal of that trend in the 1960s.[75]

This is unsurprising – after the necessity of broadcasting during a moment of global crisis, the post-war years seemed rather unimportant in comparison. But the External Services remained an integral part of the BBC, and retained a loyal listenership. Audiences may have been down on the 20m adults who regularly listened to the various European-language services during the War, but they still wanted to hear from the BBC on both sides of the iron curtain. In Czechoslovakia in 1948, for example, around three quarters of all radio owners listened to the BBC, while the French Service had an estimated total audience of more than 3m listeners in 1955.[76] But where did Western Europe and European integration fit into the External Service's plans, and what can the Service tell us about the BBC's handling of European integration?

[75] G. Mansell, *Let Truth Be Told: 50 Years of BBC External Broadcasting* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1982), p. 241.
[76] Briggs, *Sound and Vision*, p. 466; French Service Annual Report 1955, WAC E3/145/1.

The aftermath of the Second World War

The External Services were editorially independent, but relied on a grant-in-aid from the government for their funding. They were a tool of foreign policy, but also an actor in their own right – and sometimes an active actor. For Alban Webb, their government funding came because they were a tool of public diplomacy, but the BBC had their own aims which were 'often competing' with the government's aims.[77] Martin Moore describes the BBC as sitting 'in an uncomfortable middle ground, ostensibly free to determine their own programming, but always in close consultation with the Foreign Office and always in pursuit of the national interest'.[78] After the War, the BBC had to revert to a peacetime operation and consider anew where their services fit into the government's broader foreign policy.

Key to foreign policy at this time was the 'three circles' approach: Europe, the Commonwealth, and the Anglo-American alliance.[79] The BBC was quick to recognise that its European Services would need to be differentiated, with differing strategies required in the capitalist West and the Soviet East. And, while Briggs argues that the War demonstrated the BBC's 'strategic significance in the conduct of British military and foreign policy', they had to do this on a reduced budget. Ministers subjected the European Services to the swingeing cuts that were affecting the broader External Services in the late 1940s, and threatened them with further cuts.[80]

By 1947, the European Services had already lost a number of wavelengths, causing 'a deterioration in [staff] morale', and further cuts were made to the services for Western Europe; the number of hours broadcast on the French, German, Dutch, Austrian, Swedish and Belgian Services were significantly cut, for example, as Eastern Europe became the priority, with the BBC aiding

[77] A. Webb, *London Calling: Britain, the BBC World Service and the Cold War* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), p. 13, 5.
[78] M. Moore, *The Origins of Modern Spin: Democratic Government and the Media in Britain, 1945-51* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 179.
[79] *The Times*, 11 October 1948, pp. 4-6.
[80] Webb, *London Calling*, p. 13, 16.

Britain's Cold War efforts.[81] Resources were poured into broadcasting to Eastern Europe at the expense of Western Europe. At the end of the War, the BBC had been broadcasting in 20 European languages, but it did not take long for its output in the West to be steadily chipped away.

This all happened despite key ministers and the BBC having a strong internationalist strain – Clement Attlee had wished for a League of Nations radio service in the inter-war years, and John Reith himself had written in the 1920s of broadcasting's role in promoting 'a spirit of world citizenship' and helped found the International Broadcasting Union.[82]

Despite a few dissenters – such as William Haley, who as Director-General expressed the view that the European Service should be cut to only four languages following the War – the BBC was inherently internationalist, and many senior officials had worked in the External Services themselves and were inclined to support them.[83] The Services were a real breeding ground for talent. For example, Ian Jacob (who also helped found the EBU) was Director of the Overseas Service from 1947 until 1951, before serving as Director-General from 1952 until 1959. His successor as Director-General, Hugh Carleton Greene, had also worked for the External Services in Germany and across Eastern Europe, from which he gained a sense that public broadcasting should be a weapon of democracy.[84] In their previous work too – Jacob as a wartime official close to Churchill, Greene as a journalist in Germany – they had gained a sense of foreign policymaking and its impact, and they saw the BBC as connected to that realm – they wanted it to work in the national interest. The External Services were therefore well-represented at the highest levels of the BBC, giving them a strong influence within the Corporation. Not only that, but they tended to see Britain

[81] Briggs, *Sound and Vision*, p. 441, 476; Mansell, *Let Truth Be Told*, p. 212; G. Johnston and E. Robertson, *BBC World Service: Overseas Broadcasting, 1932-2018* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), p. 190; see also Webb, *London Calling*.
[82] John Reith, Memorandum of Information 6, WAC R4/27/1. Quoted in S. Potter, *Broadcasting Empire: The BBC and the British World, 1922-1970* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 35; European Broadcasting Union, 'Our History'. Accessed online at www.ebu.ch/about/history on 15 January 2021.
[83] Mansell, *Let Truth Be Told*, p. 211.
[84] Briggs, *Competition*, p. 324.

as being just as European as those countries in continental Europe. Noel Newsome, for example, wrote that the BBC had always 'spoken to Europe with one voice' and that they had tried to make the European Service 'the voice of one European nation – Britain, speaking to the other nations of Europe from a European point of view'.[85]

The Drogheda Report

The trend towards reducing the European Services was confirmed by the 1954 Drogheda Report, which recommended ending all BBC services to Western Europe.[86] This was a government inquiry, initiated in October 1952 to examine 'the broad span of Information Services'.[87] Thankfully for the BBC, not all of its recommendations were acted upon, in part due to the hostile response to these recommendations from the BBC, from the press and in Parliament.

Even the BBC's defence of services to Western Europe was affected by the prevailing foreign policy winds, which made the Cold War the key issue – they argued that the services were important in avoiding the spread of Communism to France and Italy.[88] A paper on broadcasts to Western Europe provided by the BBC to the Drogheda Committee stated:

> Britain's relationship – at once very close and yet slightly aloof – with the Continent is at any time liable to misunderstanding; at a time like the present when the nations of Western Europe are required to make a great common political and economic effort, such misunderstandings may be more than usually acute, wasteful and dangerous. Britain has, for instance, been continuously attacked in Western Europe for her attitude to European Union, the European Defence Community and the Iron and Steel Community. On such matters the British point of view must be clearly and repeatedly stated.[89]

[85] Quoted in Johnston and Robertson, *BBC World Service*, pp. 131-132.
[86] Briggs, *Sound and Vision*, p. 494.
[87] *Ibid*, p. 484.
[88] Johnston and Robertson, *BBC World Service*, p. 177.
[89] Briggs, *Sound and Vision*, p. 492.

This demonstrates a strong belief in the importance of broadcasting to Western Europe – in relation to both European integration and the Cold War – and a recognition of the importance of maintaining strong connections with the region, but no mention of the possibility that Britain may herself one day join the EEC and ECSC. The BBC's defence of its Western European services relied on it being a mouthpiece for the British view on this, rather than an active agent in determining *de facto* foreign policy – and it believed this was done through being pro-European, though not pro-Market.

Outside the BBC, both Labour and Conservative MPs spoke out against the Drogheda Report's recommendations, as did the *News Chronicle*, *Manchester Guardian*, and *The Economist*, among others, and a number of prominent people in public life.[90] Labour MP Ernest Davies argued that implementing the Committee's recommendations would cause 'irreparable harm' to 'British prestige, leadership and influence in Europe', while an editorial in the *Manchester Guardian* reckoned that they would 'be read as another sign that we are not greatly interested in our neighbours'.[91] Lord Birdwood, too, felt that European listeners 'would feel that a friend had wilfully cut off his friendship'.[92]

The concerns were valid, with newspapers across Western Europe criticising the proposals. In France, for example, *Le Monde* saw it as evidence that the government saw it as 'superfluous' to give European countries a 'clearer idea' of their attitude.[93] In Denmark, meanwhile, the *Harlems Dagblad* said it was a 'mistake for Britain to fail in her task of keeping Western Europe informed of her point of view at the very moment when one would like to see the ties between the continent and the British Isles become closer'.[94]

[90] *Ibid*, p. 494.
[91] *Ibid*, p. 495.
[92] *The Times*, 9 December 1954.
[93] *Hansard*, 31 July 1957, Vol 574, Overseas Information Services.
[94] *Ibid.*

In the end, despite the European Services being cut by three hours per week, they were given a stay of execution, though initially only for a single year – the *Spectator* noted that 'the threat of extinction still hangs over these services' and it remained clear that the government wanted the BBC to prioritise the Cold War and the Commonwealth.[95] For Simon Potter, there was a slight time lag before 'the fact of imperial decline belatedly began to register in British popular and elite culture', and we can see that this manifested itself in the prioritisation of the Commonwealth over Western Europe in the BBC's role.[96]

The issue reared its head again when Charles Hill, newly installed as Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (and later Chairman of the BBC), was tasked with reviewing the UK's overseas information services. Unlike many people who would hold senior roles in the BBC, he had no direct experience of the External Services. His resulting White Paper made significant cuts to the European Services – the Swedish, Norwegian, Danish, Dutch and Austrian services would be culled, and hours on the French and Italian services were slashed in half.[97] The government's logic was that listeners in Western Europe had a wealth of media sources available to them, whereas those in Eastern Europe and other parts of the world did not.

Unsurprisingly, the BBC responded negatively, showing their deep belief in the importance of these services – Jacob thought the changes 'would have a disastrous effect' and 'destroy' staff confidence.[98] As a leading founder of the EBU, he cared deeply about European cooperation. Concerns were raised in the Commons, with John Harvey asking Ian Harvey, the Joint Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, why these cuts were being made when 'Britain's future relationships with the Common Market may … well call for our point of view to be clearly put to our friends'.[99] The minister responded that the services to Western Europe 'did not play such an important part' in foreign policy that they

[95] Extract from Official Report, 2 March 1955, TNA CO1027/70; *Daily Telegraph*, 9 December 1954; Briggs, *Sound and Vision*, p. 496.
[96] Potter, *Broadcasting Empire*, p. 201.
[97] Mansell, *Let Truth Be Told*, p. 237.
[98] *Ibid*, p. 234.
[99] *Hansard*, 31 July 1957, Vol 574, Overseas Information Services.

could not be reduced.[100] As with the Drogheda Report, the decision was met with criticism in the domestic and foreign press – summed up in a *News Chronicle* editorial: 'Who else but this government would argue that your friends are the one group you snub?'[101] Criticism continued over many years, with Lord Ritchie-Calder arguing in 1971 that Britain had 'missed a great opportunity' by not using 'her unquestionable moral authority to convert the resistance and resurgent movements into constructive forces for consolidating a European system … instead of [the BBC] being the mentor of the new Europe, we dismantled the European Services, we dimmed the light and left our friends to flounder'.[102]

While European integration clearly overlapped with the Cold War and the Commonwealth – as will be discussed later in this thesis – it was evidently not the government's priority for the BBC in the 1950s. This conflicted with the BBC's own views, where belief in the importance of the services to Western Europe continued. But they had to work within the brief given to them by government, and this meant that European integration could only be a matter of secondary importance.

The Cold War in the early 1960s

The Cold War was at its heart an information war. East and West fought over the airwaves, trying to control the narrative and win over the hearts and minds of listeners across the world. While this broadcasting battle has been explored in detail by Alban Webb in *London Calling*, he restricted his analysis to the 1950s.[103] But, as will be seen, the dominance of the Cold War as a theme in foreign broadcasting extended well beyond that decade.

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[100] *Ibid.*
[101] *News Chronicle*, 19 July 1957.
[102] *Hansard*, 28 July 1971, Vol 323, United Kingdom and the European Communities.
[103] Webb, *London Calling*.

In 1961, a Working Party on External Broadcasting was set up by the government to conduct a review of the External Services in consultation with the BBC.[104] It was led by J. A. Bergin, who was part of the office of the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, working under Dr Hill.

Their draft report said that broadcasting was 'an information medium of the highest potential value', and that it could be 'the most important of all Cold War weapons'.[105] The priority for the BBC was clear. Reams of paper were devoted to examining services in the Iron Curtain countries, while other European services – such as those serving Spain, Finland, Greece and Turkey – were described as 'peripheral'.[106]

There was a renewed perception that the intended audiences in Eastern and Western Europe were different; in Eastern Europe, the BBC was aiming to reach the entire population, whereas in Western Europe the objective was to speak to political and social elites. The draft report, for example, noted that 'behind the Iron Curtain, direct broadcasting is our only means of reaching a mass audience', whereas in Western Europe 'direct broadcasting must have a lower priority' due to the wealth of services available to people in those countries.[107] The government saw broadcasting as having 'unique value' behind the iron curtain, but potentially 'ineffective and therefore wasteful' in Western Europe.[108]

There were dissenting voices – Robert Mathew MP, for example, asked Dr Hill whether 'in view of the increasing interest in and importance of the United Kingdom's relationship with the EEC, he will ensure that Great Britain's case is fully understood in Western Germany by now restoring the number of broadcast hours from the British Broadcasting Corporation overseas service to the Federal Republic of Germany to their former level'.[109] Clearly, some pro-Market

[104] Draft Arranged Oral Question and Answer, December 1961, TNA DO191/71.
[105] Review of BBC External Services 1961-62, TNA FO953/2058; The Working Party on External Broadcasting, August 1961, TNA FO953/2058.
[106] Review of BBC External Services 1961-62, TNA FO953/2058.
[107] *Ibid.*
[108] Notes for supplementaries, December 1961, TNA DO191/71.
[109] *Hansard*, 3 July 1961, Vol 643, Germany.

supporters believed that the BBC could play a role in bringing about British membership of the EEC.

The BBC also argued strongly against proposed reductions to services in Western Europe. For example, when cuts were suggested to the Italian Service, Sir Arthur fforde (Chairman of the BBC) and Sir Beresford Clark (Director of External Broadcasting) wrote to senior civil servants that the Service remained 'very productive' in a country where radio remained the dominant broadcasting medium, and that it would be a 'pity to stop service at start of our Common Market negotiations' in a country where the Communist Party remained strong.[110] There was a real fear that Italy could become Communist, leading to a 'domino effect' where other Western European countries also turned. That two such senior BBC officials were making the case for the Italian Service shows the important that the BBC attached to it; but, as in the 1950s, their argument relied upon a Cold War reasoning for continuing the service.

BBC policy on broadcasting about the Common Market

While the BBC's output to Western Europe continued to be squeezed by the government, the question of how best to use that output re-emerged dramatically when negotiations for possible EEC membership began in 1961 and it became a live issue in British politics. Until now, we have discussed the government's policy on broadcasting to Western Europe, and the BBC's responses to that. In this section, we will look at the BBC's own policies and programming.

The first dedicated BBC XS report on the EEC debate came in May 1962, when the European Services produced a report on 'how best to treat the EEC theme in our output during the coming months', as well as a supplementary paper detailing 'practical measures and programme plans for the implementation of

[110] BBC External Services: Conclusions of Review by Officials, 1961, TNA DO191/70.

the general paper'.[111] The authors show that the matter was deemed to be significant across Europe, rather than only in broadcasting to existing EC members: E. Ashcroft (Head of South European Service) took the lead, helped by G. H. Gretton (Head of European Talks and English Service), M. B. Latey (Head of East European Service) and K. Syrop (Head of European Productions).[112] Until now, there had been no overarching policy paper for BBC staff to refer to – initiatives for programmes on the EEC had come from below, rather than above. But from here on in, they would be working to this top-down policy from senior figures in the XS.

The report itself was split in two, half dealing with broadcasts to Western Europe and half pertaining to countries behind the iron curtain, and it was clear that 'two quite different kinds of treatment' were required for the two regions.[113] It considered coverage both during negotiations, and how it would change upon Britain's entry.[114]

Problems with the BBC's treatment of the Common Market to date were identified: that too little information on developments had been given 'to people behind the iron curtain … whose knowledge of the subject is either rudimentary or distorted by community misrepresentation; most of their broadcasts on the Common Market were 'of a topical and even ephemeral nature'; and, too often, they had 'tended to tip the balance too heavily in favour of British participation', with 'too little coverage' for 'responsible opposition'.[115] They had not immediately caught up with the shift to a politicised debate.

These failings, spotted at a time when programme policy was being led by bottom-up initiatives, are revealing. The lack of a top-down policy and the freedom given to individual producers – characteristic of the BBC under Director-General Greene – led to programmes being caught up in the day-to-

[111] The Common Market, May 1962, WAC E39/22/1; Treatment of Common Market II, May 1962, WAC E39/22/1.
[112] The Common Market, May 1962, WAC E39/22/1.
[113] *Ibid*, p. 1.
[114] *Ibid*, p. 2.
[115] *Ibid*, p. 1.

day, rather than the big picture, and to a position that was almost directly supportive of the government's ambition to join the Market.[116] There was a clear pro-European instinct within the European Services, and this had manifested itself in output that was seen as being too close to the government's view. We can see similarities here with the domestic services, telling us something of the BBC's institutional mind. There was a recognition that these instincts needed to be reined in – the report stated that while 'it is reasonable for us to work on the assumption that Britain will in fact … negotiate acceptable terms for joining … if we do not reflect all responsible opposition, we are neglecting our duty under the Charter'.[117]

The Services were working in a difficult position, however. The Conservatives supported negotiations for entry, the Liberals supported membership, and Labour did not yet have a clear position, meaning that there was little organised opposition to the principle of entry, despite some of the public remaining sceptical of its purported benefits.[118] That the BBC were working on the assumption of British entry shows how unexpected de Gaulle's veto was, and ties into the common historiographical trend in the late twentieth century of seeing British entry as inevitable.[119] But it also says something about the BBC – this assumption affected how they broadcast about the EEC prior to entry. It perhaps contributed to their tendency to prioritise pro-Market over anti-Market voices.

At this stage, the European Services had to toe a careful line between supporting the government's stance and making clear that there remained a debate to be had on the issue. This mean that, for example, they would 'recognise that in Britain public opinion has not a decided view for or against', while the 'general lines' of government policy would be 'clearly expounded'.[120] But more

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116 A. Crisell, *An Introductory History of British Broadcasting* (London: Routledge, 2002, 2nd edn.), p. 112.
117 The Common Market, May 1962, WAC E39/22/1, p. 2.
118 Gallup polling during the negotiations found around 30 per cent of people disapproved of membership. Gallup, *British attitudes towards the Common Market, 1957-1971* (London, 1971).
119 See, for example, N. J. Crowson, *Britain and Europe: A political history since 1918* (London: Routledge, 2011), p. 103.
120 The Common Market, May 1962, WAC E39/22/1, p. 4.

controversial topics – such as questions on sovereignty and federalism – would only be discussed by the European Services *after* Britain had joined.[121] Coverage was to be pro-integration: 'Whilst we should reflect any public anxiety about the form of political unity, the general balance of our output should convey the impression that Britain is working out a political conception of Europe with our European partners and as an integral part of Western Europe'.[122] The European Services were to actively encourage this view; and this was not imposed on them by the government, but determined by the Services themselves. We can see that the BBC was interpreting foreign policy as a foreign policy actor and decisionmaker in its own right. Listeners in Western Europe would get the sense that Britain was more pro-Market than, in fact, it was.

Away from broadcasts to Western Europe, the optimism about the possibilities of European integration and Britain's place in it was even greater. When broadcasting to the Communist countries of Europe, the report stated:

> We can present this as a decisive step in one of the great revolutions of our time – a revolution brought about by peaceful means and by consent. European Union can be presented as a great force for peace, finally liquidating rivalries which have in the past led to war, and harnessing national energies – in particular those of Germany – to a constructive, co-operative enterprise. The Common Market can be presented as a great new economic development which is bound to have an influence far beyond its borders. Britain can be presented as playing a special role in giving the Common Market an outward-looking character by her relationship with the Commonwealth and her interest in expanding world-wide trade.[123]

The BBC played up the importance of the Common Market; they believed that in countries that traded with the UK, such as Poland, Yugoslavia, and Czechoslovakia, 'the attitude of the man in the street is perhaps a mixture of envy of the great possibility of the Common Market and a desire to participate in them', and they believed that there was 'even in the less interested countries

[121] *Ibid*, p. 5.
[122] *Ibid.*
[123] *Ibid*, p. 13.

such as the Soviet Union, Bulgaria and Rumania, a general desire to know what it is all about'.[124]

In broadcasts to these countries, the BBC was to describe 'the movement towards a United Europe' as 'one of the two great revolutions of our time', one that could be presented as 'an example of the creative power of self-renewal of Europe from which only Communist domination and dogmatism exclude the Iron Curtain countries'.[125] Broadcasts during the negotiations would focus on providing information, avoiding contentious topics, and showing, for example, 'that in the Common Market countries the position of the working class has improved', in contrast to countries in Eastern Europe.[126] Room would be left, however, for broadcasts to note that there was an ongoing debate in Britain about the merits of membership, 'illustrating how great decisions are taken in a free society' – a recurring theme in BBC external broadcasts up to 1975.[127] Programme-makers too would make it clear 'that the Communist leaders have voluntarily excluded their peoples from this great new progressive venture' – showing that the BBC saw European integration as part of the drive for modernisation in British politics at this time.[128] Seemingly, any point that could be made on Britain's application to join the EEC could be made to work for the purposes of Cold War propaganda, strengthening the Western European cause. There was a spirit of positivity towards the EEC, subsumed into the BBC's Cold War effort which was deemed to be the priority. Sir John Tusa, who was working for the XS in Bush House at the time and would become Managing Director of the World Service, remembers that 'the most important thing' for staff in canteen discussions would be 'keeping democracy alive in Eastern Europe … European integration was not an overriding issue'.[129]

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[124] *Ibid*, p. 10.
[125] *Ibid*, p. 8.
[126] *Ibid*, pp. 11-12.
[127] *Ibid*, p. 12.
[128] E. Robinson, *The Language of Progressive Politics in Modern Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p. 204.
[129] J. Tusa, personal interview with the author, 1 July 2020.

The drive for European integration was seen as a great revolution, as a modernising movement, and as something that would bring 'growing economic, political and cultural unity'.[130] While the BBC's main goal remained to be the purveyor of reliable news, it concluded that its broadcasts should put across a view of the Common Market that was broadly supportive. This was shaped by the government's policy, but it was also the result of the internationalist inclinations of BBC staff – and it demonstrated the BBC's flexibility and independence as a foreign policy actor, acting as an interlocutor between British foreign policy and the audiences it reached across the world.[131]

The European Broadcasting Union

The BBC's ties with Western Europe were deliberately strengthened further through its initiative in creating the European Broadcasting Union (EBU), which replaced the UIR and OIR, two inter-war organisations which the BBC had left. Instead, it focused on creating the EBU which formally came into existence in Torquay in 1950.[132] This was the BBC's baby; Haley stated that the Corporation was 'as anxious as everyone else is to see established the unity of broadcasting bodies in the European area', and it demonstrated the BBC's convening capacity in diplomatic and politics-adjacent spaces.[133] Closer cooperation with Western Europe was an instinct of the BBC from the top-down. A deep analysis of the EBU is beyond the scope of this thesis, but it is worth briefly outlining its presence and functions.

The EBU was made up of nations from Western Europe, with countries behind the iron curtain creating their own organisation, OIRT; it acted as a Cold War bulwark through its design of bringing Western European broadcasters together. The EBU helped create the 'Eurovision' system of programme exchange in 1954, at a time when no such system yet existed with either the Commonwealth

[130] The Common Market, May 1962, WAC E39/22/1, p. 13.
[131] For more on the idea of the BBC as interlocutor, see A. Webb, 'The Sound of Revolution: BBC Monitoring and the Hungarian uprising, 1956', *Media History* 25:4 (2019), 446-461.
[132] Briggs, *Sound and Vision*, p. 443.
[133] *Ibid*, p. 442.

or the USA. It was met with excitement from the press and the public, with audience research showing that viewers enjoyed taking in World Cup football matches from Switzerland, and the *Picture Post* arguing that Eurovision could 'forge the first genuine link between the *peoples* of Europe'.[134] The EBU also worked on technical issues such as wavelengths and television standards – with pressure from some in Britain's Parliament for Britain to bring its technical standards for television sets in line with those used in Common Market countries.[135]

The BBC's leading role in founding and organising the EBU shows its internationalist instincts, and its desire to work closely with broadcasters in other European nations. An outline of the BBC's connection to it illustrates the Corporation's broader tendencies and helps explain why it acted as it did on matters relating to European integration.

The programmes

This chapter began with an assessment of programming about the Common Market on the BBC's domestic services. Having now outlined the BBC's general policy towards broadcasting about the Common Market in the External Services, we will return to the programmes themselves.

Unfortunately, sources here are scarce, often leaving little other than the titles of programmes. From what does remain, we know that one of the most prominent programmes broadcast overseas by the BBC in the early 1950s was a series entitled *The Unity of European Culture*.[136] In this series, Britain was seen as part of Europe, rather than as an 'Other' – the definition used by the BBC of 'European' in this instance was inclusive, demonstrating that they believed Britain to be culturally European.[137] The programme reflected the wide range of XS

[134] *Ibid*, p. 460.
[135] *Hansard*, 19 July 1962, Vol 242, Pilkington Report on Broadcasting.
[136] Briggs, *Sound and Vision*, p. 491.
[137] For more on the idea of Britain seeing Europe as an 'Other', see L. Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

programming on European integration in the 1950s, covering both broader British European policy and the circumstances of individual European countries. For example in 1957, Andrew Shonfield spoke to General Overseas Service listeners on 'A New British Approach to Europe?', Nicholas Carroll broadcast on the same service about 'General de Gaulle's Drastic Programme' in 1959, and Stanley Mayes spoke to European Service listeners about 'Italy's Industrial Revolution' in the same year.[138] The BBC helped educate its audiences on the affairs of Common Market nations – without it, these audiences would have known less about these countries.

Some unexpected programmes were seen to relate to European integration too, with the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in 1953 successfully relayed abroad by the BBC. In France alone, more than one million people watched and it was suggested in Francophone papers that programmes like it could 'strengthen the ties that unite us'.[139] For Briggs, the British were also 'encouraged to think of Europe' by a *Coronation Day Across the World Programme* including speakers from continental capitals such as Paris and Copenhagen.[140] Britain and Europe were seen as inextricably intertwined – though Europe was still an 'Other' rather than necessarily something which included Britain.

When it came to discussion of the EEC itself on the External Services, it was talked about in generally positive terms as a transformative organisation. A talk given by Aidan Crawley – who served as both a Labour and Conservative MP at different times, and served in Europe during the Second World War – on the General Overseas Service in October 1957, for example, was entitled 'Problems of a European Common Market' but happily stated that 'within the next three months, I believe that a Free Trade Area will be negotiated and that a process will have been begun that within ten years may transform Europe and perhaps

[138] *The Listener*, 29 August 1957, p. 3; *The Listener*, 1 January 1959, p. 6; *The Listener*, 17 December 1959, p. 6.
[139] Briggs, *Sound and Vision*, p. 431.
[140] *Ibid*, pp. 431-432.

open the greatest period of its history'.[141] There was a sense of unbridled optimism surrounding many talks about European integration in this period.

There was also a sense already that Britain may end up having to join the EEC for pragmatic reasons – many historians have supported the view that the British application for entry was proposed on these grounds, with Britain facing no alternative in light of relative economic decline and the failure of the Commonwealth as a coherent political project.[142] As early as July 1958, Alan Day was commenting: 'The danger I see from Britain is that we may be tempted to try to turn our backs on Europe, in a chase after what seems to me to be the chimera of tight Commonwealth economic integration'.[143] Pre-dating this argument being made by either major political party, the BBC was again leading the debate on European integration by allowing opinionated and knowledgeable commentators to express their views on the airwaves.

Politicians, too, were given their chance to discuss Britain and European integration. In 1957, for example, the Italian Service ran a 'well received' series on the Common Market where listeners heard from 'important speakers' such as Harold Macmillan and Harold Wilson (then Shadow Chancellor) who 'helped to clarify Britain's position in relation to the Common Market'.[144] A similar talk on the French Service in 1962 was also received well by listeners, who found it 'very interesting'.[145] As politicisation of the issue developed, the debate – and broadcasting time – began to move away from experts and towards party politicians.

The wide scope of XS programming about European integration changed after negotiations for British membership of the EEC opened in 1961, with programmes increasingly prioritising practical issues directly related to the EEC – for example: a series called *Common Market Issues*; *Background Notes* on subjects

[141] *The Listener*, 3 October 1957, p. 3.
[142] See e.g. R. Denman, *Missed Chances: Britain and Europe in the Twentieth Century* (London: Cassell, 1996).
[143] *The Listener*, 31 July 1958, p. 151.
[144] Audience Research Summary for 1957: South European Services, WAC E3/139/1, p. 2.
[145] Audience Research Report for French Service, Survey for 1962, WAC E3/145/1, p. 10.

related to the EEC; *The Debate in Britain*; *Facts of Commonwealth Trade with Britain*; and *Report from Britain: Common Market Attitudes*. For the first time, European integration also began to be pushed to the forefront of coverage – for example, with regular Thursday broadcasts of *The World and Communism* were replaced by a new programme on *Common Market Issues*.[146] There was a gradual move away from the free-wheeling coverage of earlier years – his was a topic that could now have serious practical consequences for the nation, and it would not be long before more stringent policies were imposed by senior officials.

THE VETO

For the BBC, which had been working on the assumption that Britain would enter the EEC, de Gaulle's veto on 14 January 1963 meant a disruption to their plans. In the immediate aftermath, Macmillan broadcast a response to the veto, which was decreed by the BBC to have been spoken as prime minister rather than party leader – meaning there was no right of reply for Labour, despite their *de facto* opposition to membership.[147] George Brown, who became acting party leader after Gaitskell's death on 18 January, was furious.[148] It followed an earlier incident, in September 1962, when Macmillan had come to the BBC looking to broadcast to the nation, and Greene had suggested the BBC could 'from time to time' invite the PM to address the nation without an automatic right of reply from the Opposition.[149] Initially, the BBC said that Macmillan's broadcast – which portrayed the EEC as a modern and forward-thinking institution and was positively received by commentators – would meet this criteria, but caved in the face of pressure from Gaitskell.[150] This incident, and its follow-up after the veto, showed the BBC's instinct towards siding with the government on foreign policy issue, of downplaying debate within Britain and exaggerating the level of

[146] Treatment of Common Market II, May 1962, WAC E39/22/1.
[147] M. Cockerell, *Live from Number 10: The Inside Story of Prime Ministers and Television* (London: Faber and Faber, 1989), p. 87.
[148] *Ibid.*
[149] *Ibid*, p. 83.
[150] *Ibid*, pp. 83-84.

consensus that existed. They failed to quickly understand the extent to which this foreign policy issue had become partisan.

Even *That Was The Week That Was*, the satirical show that ordinarily had no problem with lambasting Macmillan, went easy on him. In their broadcast on 18 January, it was de Gaulle who they made to look silly for rejecting the idea of British membership, rather than the prime minister whose bid to join had failed.[151] They recalled Winston Churchill's speech in 1940, with France occupied by the Nazis, in which he stated: 'We do not forget the ties and links that unite us to France … Vive la France!'.[152] The presenters imagined the alternative speech that Churchill would have given if he had used de Gaulle's logic, ending in 'let them stew in their own juice'.[153] There was only one target for their satire – and it was de Gaulle. The BBC appeared to be going easy on criticism of Macmillan after the veto as they dealt with the consequences to the disruption of their own assumptions.

CONCLUSION

As the BBC emerged from the War and began to develop a new perception of and relationship with Western Europe, its programming and policies on European integration began to take shape. These early years, before the national parties had proactively involved themselves in the debate, are the best opportunity to see the institutional thinking of the BBC on this issue.

Domestically, freedom was granted to individuals to deliver talks that provided listeners (and, increasingly, viewers) with a wide range of innovative perspectives on the EEC, not limited by party-political constraints and open to unusual opinions away from the pragmatic arguments. There was an almost immediate understanding of the importance of European integration to the continent, and a recognition that Britain could be part of the process and change its political future. With the press lacking in coverage – and often sceptical where they did

[151] Television Talks Scripts, 'That Was The Week That Was', 18 January 1963, WAC.
[152] *Ibid.*
[153] *Ibid.*

write about it – the BBC stimulated and led the national debate. The Conservative and Labour parties were not discussing the possibility of EC entry in the late 1950s, but the BBC were, and began to expose the public to the arguments for and against joining. Programmes were made by interested producers, with no clear top-down policy on broadcasting about the subject, allowing a greater freedom in the material broadcast.

The Corporation's internationalist and pro-European inclinations were visible through the lack of negativity about the EEC and the platforming of speakers who were pro-Market for ideological and cultural reasons. From 1961, senior officials began to take note and ensure that programming on the Common Market was ramped up, with comprehensive and factual coverage. Criticism of its coverage began to be expressed by interested pro- and anti-market parties, but the BBC continued to prioritise its mission of delivering key information about European integration without worrying unduly about criticism that may come its way.

In the XS, many of the same trends were visible. The Common Market was portrayed in optimistic terms, and there was early recognition of its potentially huge political and cultural impact. This portrayal reflected the continued presence in the BBC during these years of those who had worked in the European Services during the War, bringing with them pro-European views and a striking internationalism, and it reflected too the lack of a clear party-political divide on European integration before 1962. Throughout this period, the BBC leaned towards a pro-integration stance while simultaneously recognising the importance of having an open debate. It also showed that despite the constraints imposed by government cuts to the European Services, the BBC retained a great deal of flexibility in how it carried out its broadcasting – it remained a diplomatic actor in its own right.

The European Services retained sizable audiences and used the possibility of British involvement in European integration to effect in improving relations and aiding the Cold War effort. Rarely was European integration allowed to stand

on its own as a key issue – it was constantly subsumed into the Cold War, in broadcasts to the West and East of the continent. Taking a broadly pro-integration stance and playing up the 'democratic debate' angle allowed the BBC to portray Britain in a positive light to listeners in Eastern Europe, and to portray Britain as close friends of Western Europe to listeners in those nations.

The XS had made plans for Britain's entry to the BBC, but these were disrupted by de Gaulle's veto. However, the issue had been firmly thrust to the forefront of public attention by Macmillan, and it would remain there for more than a decade. Never again would the BBC be able to broadcast on European integration with so little scrutiny, and so much freedom.

CHAPTER 2: 1963-1967
ADAPTING

When President Charles de Gaulle curtailed negotiations between Britain and the EEC in January 1963, it left both the country's relationship with European integration and the BBC's plans in disarray. The prospect of imminent British accession to the Common Market came to an end. It seemed likely that the issue of European integration would therefore recede into the background of British politics – and yet this did not happen. Instead, with 'declinism' on the rise and a solution to Britain's economic ills being sought, Harold Wilson, Labour prime minister after the 1964 general election, began to consider a fresh application for EC entry and submitted it in May 1967.[1] For the first time, there was bipartisan support for British entry to the EEC – continuing after the veto, with Wilson declaring the application would remain on the table – presenting a new challenge for the BBC in their handling of the issue.[2] They had to manoeuvre around an issue where the party leaderships were united in support, but where a number of backbenchers and a significant portion of the public were opposed. The Corporation continued to lead the national conversation – increasingly now through TV rather than radio – and platform speakers with wide-ranging and idealistic arguments for and against entry, but the seeds were being sown for a later move towards a more defensive, pragmatic stance in their coverage.

European integration had become a party-political affair in 1962, when Hugh Gaitskell, who was unconvinced by the economic benefits of entry and saw cultural and political reasons for remaining outside, opposed Harold Macmillan's application to join the EEC on the terms that would likely be required to enter.[3] This status quo remained in place at the 1964 general election, with Alec Douglas-Home's Conservatives remaining pro-integration and Labour, now led

[1] U. Kitzinger, *The Second Try: Labour and the EEC* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1968), p. 177.
[2] B. Pimlott, *Harold Wilson* (London: HarperCollins, 1992), p. 441.
[3] B. Brivati, *Hugh Gaitskell* (London: Richard Cohen, 1996), p. 414; R. Broad, *Labour's European Dilemmas: From Bevin to Blair* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), p. 44, 52; P. Williams, *Hugh Gaitskell* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 391, 397.

by Harold Wilson after Gaitskell's untimely death, remaining anti-integration.[4] The Conservatives – from 1965 led by Edward Heath, a passionate European – continued down this path, while Labour – now in government after their victory in 1964 – began to steadily change their mind even if they formally maintained their sceptical stance at the 1966 general election.[5] The issue was prominent during TV coverage of the 1966 general election, where Labour maintained their opposition to integration on the terms that were expected to be available.

Just a few months after that election, however, Wilson, continuing as prime minister, opted to launch a 'probe' of the Six with a view to a future membership application. For Ziegler, by this point Wilson had become 'a decided, if sometimes covert, supporter of British entry'.[6] The covertness disappeared in May 1967, when Wilson announced that a fresh application for membership was to be made.[7] In the ensuing Commons debate, Heath noted that this momentous occasion was 'historic' for its cross-party agreement, with Labour, the Conservatives and Liberals all lining up in support of EC membership.[8] 488 MPs voted for the application, and just 62 against – there was a 'growing gap', as Lindsay Aqui has described, between the pro-Market 'political class' and an 'uncertain' public.[9]

Why had Wilson's stance developed? At the start of this period, British foreign policy was still influenced by Churchill's 'three circles' approach, but by 1964 it was coming under increasing pressure. Britain was dependent on American military support, and the USA was consistently supportive of British entry to the EEC.[10] And, although Wilson described himself as a Commonwealth enthusiast,

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[4] F. W. S. Craig, *British General Election Manifestos 1900-1974* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1975), p. 241, 267-268.
[5] D. Butler and A. King, *The British General Election of 1966* (London: Macmillan, 1966), p. 131.
[6] P. Ziegler, *Wilson: The Authorised Life* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1993), p. 332.
[7] H. Wilson, *The Labour Government 1964-1970: A Personal Record* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1971), pp. 389-390.
[8] *Hansard*, 9 May 1967, Vol 746, European Communities (Membership).
[9] H. Wilson, *The Labour Government 1964-1970*, p. 390; L. Aqui, *The First Referendum: Reassessing Britain's entry to Europe, 1973-75* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), pp. 31-32.
[10] R. Vickers, 'Foreign and Defence Policy', in A. S. Crines and K. Hickson (eds.), *Harold Wilson: The Unprincipled Prime Minister? Reappraising Harold Wilson* (London: Biteback, 2016), 261-278, pp. 265-266.

he was unable to halt the Commonwealth's declining share of trade with Britain, leaving him with 'no choice but to turn to the EEC' in the view of Helen Parr, the most prominent historian of Britain's European policy in this period.[11] For her, and others including David Reynolds, it was essentially a 'negative' choice that Wilson was forced into.[12] While in Opposition, Labour could oppose EC entry without consequences, but in power it had to deal with Britain's economic reality and sense of decline.[13] It was, ultimately, a pragmatic decision made as part of the 'declinism' that was becoming rampant in Britain at this time – perhaps also influenced by Wilson's need to keep a divided party together.[14] Alternative pragmatic reasons have been suggested too. Roger Broad and Ben Pimlott, for example, see him taking the choice as he believed it would unite his party on an issue that threatened to divide it.[15]

Yet there is also a hint that idealism was more important to Wilson's change of heart than has generally been acknowledged. Pimlott, for example, thought that the probe may have begun with Wilson 'still lukewarm' on European integration, but that it ended with him becoming 'tolerably hot'.[16] The Prime Minister himself spoke to Cabinet in June 1967 about 'our profound desire to become more European in our outlook and policies' – hardly the statement of someone keen to tread a middle ground between the pro- and anti-Marketeers in his party – and Melissa Pine saw it as a 'positive commitment'.[17]

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[11] P. Ziegler, *Wilson*, p. 9; D. Gowland, A. Turner and A. Wright, *Britain and European Integration Since 1945: On the sidelines* (London: Routledge, 2010), p. 66; H. Parr, 'A Question of Leadership: July 1966 and Harold Wilson's European Decision', *Contemporary British History* 19:4 (2005), pp. 437-458.

[12] H. Parr, *Britain's Policy Towards the European Community: Harold Wilson and Britain's world role, 1964-1967* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 137; *D. Reynolds, Britannia Overruled: British Policy and World Power in the 20th Century* (Harlow: Pearson, 2000 edn.), p. 213, 218.

[13] P. Hennessy, *Winds of Change: Britain in the Early Sixties* (London: Allen Lane, 2019), p. 426.

[14] J. Tomlinson, 'Thrice Denied: Declinism as a Recurrent Theme in British History in the Long Twentieth Century', *Twentieth Century British History* 20:2 (2009), 227-251, p. 235; Broad, *Labour's European Dilemmas*, p. 67; Pimlott, *Harold Wilson*, p. 435.

[15] Broad, *Labour's European Dilemmas*, p. 67; Pimlott, *Harold Wilson*, p. 435

[16] Pimlott, *Harold Wilson*, p. 439.

[17] Cabinet meeting minutes, 6 June 1967, TNA CAB128/42; M. Pine, *Harold Wilson and Europe: Pursuing Britain's membership of the European Community* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2007), p. 1.

However it came about, Wilson's commitment to British involvement in European integration continued after de Gaulle's second veto, in November 1967, as he made clear that the application remained on the table. Historians including John W. Young, Piers Ludlow, Helen Parr and Clive Ponting see this as evidence that the second application was a success (despite contemporary appearances) because it demonstrated a bipartisan consensus and strength of commitment to joining the EEC that was recognised by other member nations and many in France.[18] For them, Wilson's application here paved the way for entry in 1973, making this an important step that has often been surprisingly overlooked by historians.

For the BBC, this period was a formative yet transitory one. In retrospect, it was an interlude between the initial application, where success had been assumed, and the application that eventually proved successful in the 1970s. Few seriously expected the 1967 application to get a different response from de Gaulle – the issue remained prominent, but success seemed unrealistic. The growing party-political focus on European integration meant the BBC needed to change its unformulaic way of doing things in the earlier period, and move towards the more defensive, less open stance it would amp up in later periods. We see in these years the roots of the BBC's move towards a wary, defensive pragmatism and away from an innovative approach to the issue.

[18] J. W. Young, *The Labour governments 1964-1970: International policy* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p. 160; N. P. Ludlow, 'A Short-Term Defeat: The Community Institutions and the Second British Application to Join the EEC' in O. J. Daddow (ed.), *Harold Wilson and European Integration: Britain's Second Application to Join the EEC* (London: Frank Cass, 2003), 135-150; H. Parr, 'Harold Wilson, Whitehall and British policy towards the European Community, 1964-1967', unpublished PhD thesis (Queen Mary University of London, 2002), p. 265; C. Ponting, *Breach of Promise: Labour in Power 1964-1970* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1989), p. 214.

DOMESTIC SERVICES

After the veto

Little changed in the BBC's programming in the aftermath of the veto, with discussions and talks continuing to be in-depth and knowledgeable, featuring an expansive range of speakers based on the value of their contributions and not becoming defensive or worrying unduly about potential criticism. In January 1963, for example, Peter Kirk, a Conservative MP who was a member of the Council of Europe and WEU Assemblies, spoke on the Third Programme about 'Parliamentary Democracy and the EEC' – he analysed the relative power of each institution in the EEC, and suggested reforms for the Assembly, which he deemed to be insufficiently democratic.[19] In the same month, *From Our Own Correspondent* on the Home Service struck a markedly anti-French tone, saying they had 'destroyed' a plan to develop Western European unity 'through the fusion of national sovereignty'.[20] And, in February and March, S. C. Leslie gave a series of three talks on the Third Programme about the fallout from de Gaulle's veto, considering the potential impact of membership on Britain politically and economically, and Britain's place in the world now it was excluded from the group.[21]

These talks were explicitly critical of elements of European integration, showing the freedom programme-makers had to allow the free expression of views on the issue without imposing a 'balance' from a different speaker.[22] The BBC was still exploring and innovating. Coverage of the EEC continued unchanged throughout the year, to such an extent that Anthony Burgess, commenting on *Panorama* in December 1963, said it included 'one of those now mandatory symposia on the Common Market'.[23]

[19] *The Listener*, 31 January 1963, p. 3.
[20] *The Listener*, 24 January 1963, p. 5.
[21] *The Listener*, 7 March 1963, pp. 407-409.
[22] *The Listener*, 18 April 1963, p. 24.
[23] *The Listener*, 26 December 1963.

The Bidault affair

However, one incident after the veto saw the BBC suffer one of its most serious crises related to European integration. It would have long-reaching consequences for the BBC's relationship with government and how it handled programmes tangentially related to European integration, and would reveal the BBC's role as a diplomatic actor in its own right.

Panorama broadcast a programme on 4 March featuring an interview with Georges Bidault, who was famed for his presidency of France's CNR during the Second World War but had since become an extremely controversial figure.[24] In 1959, he had supported de Gaulle as the best hope of ending the Algerian War of Independence, but had turned on him by 1962 after de Gaulle began to favour Algerian independence. With riots spreading and a febrile atmosphere in France, Bidault founded a new anti-de Gaulle CNR and was believed to be liaising with the OAS, who approved of violent resistance to plans for independence and attempted to assassinate de Gaulle. As a result, Bidault was accused of conspiring against the state, and went into exile.[25]

The BBC's decision to secure an interview with him was therefore one of great controversy, and had been recognised as such internally, with the BBC 'informally' telling Home Secretary Henry Brooke that they had recorded an interview with him in an undisclosed location.[26] The interview was kept under wraps until 4 March, on the morning of which there was a Board of Management meeting. At this meeting, Director-General Hugh Greene said that he had previously 'withheld' the programme but that he thought the moment was now right to release it, with an OAS leader recently captured.[27] Greene's personal involvement in this programme, about Bidault's movement and its plans to overthrow de Gaulle's government, shows some recognition of its potential for

[24] J. Jackson, *A Certain Idea of France: The Life of Charles de Gaulle* (London: Allen Lane, 2018), p. 326.
[25] *Ibid*, p. 792.
[26] *Hansard*, 12 March 1963, Vol 673, M. Georges Bidault.
[27] *The Times*, 6 March 1963.

controversy.[28] It also shows a Director-General keen on freedom of speech, and with a strong understanding of what made material newsworthy.

The interview did not discuss the Common Market directly, but nevertheless the link was drawn by the press and Parliament. The Paris correspondent of *The Times* on the morning after the broadcast wrote that 'French official sources, which are usually reluctant to comment on the affairs of other countries, expressed sharp surprise' at the BBC's decision to broadcast the interview.[29] On the same day, Parliament discussed the broadcast after the revelation that in September 1962 the French government had sent a note to the British government with a list of alleged anti-state activists, including Bidault, who they thought should not be allowed into the UK.[30] Brooke faced questions because permission had not been sought for Bidault to enter the country, with the suggestion that he had arrived illegally.[31]

French officials were strongly critical of the decision to broadcast the interview, and *The Times* reported that 'French commentators … cannot imagine that M. Bidault would have appeared on British television … had General de Gaulle not wrecked the Brussels negotiations between Britain and the Common Market'.[32] For the first time – but not the last – the broadcasting of the interview was explicitly linked to the British application for EC membership. Some in France saw the BBC as seeking British revenge for de Gaulle's veto.

On the same day as the *Times* article, Lord Merrivale described the BBC's decision as a 'remarkable blunder', and said it was 'exceedingly regrettable and reprehensible … that they should not have appreciated or cared for the political or diplomatic repercussions' of broadcasting the interview.[33] The Board of Governors were later told that Heath himself, prior to de Gaulle's veto, had

[28] Board of Management meeting minutes, 4 March 1963, WAC R2/16/1; *The Times*, 5 March 1963.
[29] *The Times*, 5 March 1963.
[30] *The Times*, 7 March 1963.
[31] *Hansard*, 5 March 1963, Vol 673, M. Georges Bidault.
[32] *The Times*, 6 March 1963.
[33] *Hansard*, 6 March 1963, Vol 247, Consequences of Breakdown of Brussels Negotiations.

asked the editor of *Panorama* not to broadcast the interview while negotiations were ongoing – and indeed the BBC had waited.[34] Heath told the Commons that the FO had 'pointed out the international implications' of airing the interview when they had first been told about it.[35]

A tussle over government-BBC relations ensued. Sir Harold Caccia, a senior civil servant in the FO, proposed to Gerald Coke (a BBC governor), that the government 'hoped for some form of prior consultation in future'.[36] Greene promised to 'bear … in mind' a suggestion from Ashley Clarke (a BBC governor and former diplomat) that the BBC could provide a 'tip off' to the FO, but refused to go along with Sir Harold's suggestion because he 'did not think this would have been right' because 'prior consultation with the Government would have implied a possible readiness to cancel'.[37] The BBC's independence was thus maintained, though it was a chastening incident that made senior officials think twice about how their programmes may be received both by the British government and by governments abroad. Throughout this saga, there had been an implicit understanding that the BBC would not broadcast the interview if it may disrupt government policy on European integration – but the BBC had failed to realise that the disruption would be possible even after the veto. As we will see, this had an impact on the BBC's future decision-making.

Greene's decision to broadcast the interview received 'unanimous agreement' from the Board of Governors and the Board of Management in the aftermath of the incident.[38] Though the BBC's independence was never seriously threatened in this episode, it did show its role as a diplomatic actor that thought for itself and made decisions for itself, but was seen as official enough to cause problems in Anglo-French relations and in Britain's relationship to European integration. Many on the Continent saw the BBC as closely connected to the British government, and considered its actions in that light. *The Times* reported

[34] Board of Governors meeting minutes, 21 March 1963, WAC R1/31/1.
[35] *Hansard*, 13 March 1963, Vol 673, M. Georges Bidault.
[36] Board of Governors meeting minutes, 4 April 1963, WAC R1/31/1.
[37] *Ibid.*
[38] Board of Management meeting minutes, 11 March 1963, WAC R2/16/1.

that 'French commentators … clearly do not believe that the British authorities could not have suppressed the broadcast had they wished'.[39] The BBC was caught in the middle, refusing to bow down in the face of a French misconception about its role. It was, inadvertently, a foreign policy actor through its provision of independent news that was not beholden to the government.

This sense of the BBC as a foreign policy actor in its own right was cemented in 1967, when there were further issues after de Gaulle's second veto. In the first instance, the French government suspected that a BBC news report about de Gaulle's health was 'grist to the high-powered offensive which the British Government … have launched to force their country's way into the Common Market'.[40] Then, in December 1967, the French Ambassador launched a 'formal protest' at 'the kind of criticism and satire about General de Gaulle which the BBC allowed itself to broadcast in recent months'.[41] The BBC continued to be perceived as an official organisation, and even its domestic services were of consequence for Britain's foreign policy – though, thankfully for the, this time no major diplomatic incident ensued.

The general elections

There were general elections in 1964 and 1966, with European integration a particularly prominent issue in the latter one – only two issues received more coverage on BBC1.[42] During both elections, Labour formally maintained their stance of being opposed to integration on the likely terms of entry, but it was an issue that Harold Wilson did not want to focus on, given the risk of it exposing internal party divides.[43] It led to complaints from Labour about the focus on the Common Market, and to Wilson declining invitations to appear.[44] But it does show that the BBC continued to lead the national debate, pushing the issue to

[39] *The Times*, 6 March 1963.
[40] *The Times*, 19 October 1967.
[41] *The Times*, 29 January 1967.
[42] Butler and King, *The British General Election of 1966*, p. 131.
[43] Craig, *British General Election Manifestos*, pp. 267-268, 310.
[44] P. A. G. Waymark, 'Television and the Cultural Revolution: The BBC under Hugh Carleton Greene', unpublished PhD thesis, Open University (2006), p. 232.

the foreground when it may otherwise have been brushed aside – for Jon Lawrence, the 'strong public service ethos' of the BBC's producers meant they wanted to assert their independence, and a play a 'more active, agenda-setting role' in elections, as they were in their broader European integration coverage.[45] Wyndham Goldie saw the exposing of intraparty divisions as part of the BBC's role – their job was about 'reflecting situations which exist', even if it would 'inevitably infuriate' party leaders.[46] Unsurprisingly, election coverage of European integration often focused on politicians to the exclusion of other voices. *Election Forum* in September 1964, for example, had Douglas-Home on to provide some 'useful revelations' on Conservative Common Market possibility, and a promise to 'consult with the Commonwealth' if membership became a possibility.[47]

THE BBC IN THE 1960s

Television

Television had swiftly become a powerful political actor. That the prime minister wanted to use the medium to explain his policy on a topic of crucial national importance to the public was a mark of its growing power. Resources were poured into television in these years, with operating expenditure rapidly increasing from £27.6m in 1963-64 to £47.5m in 1967-68 – more than double the cost of the BBC's radio services.[48] TV also became an ever more ubiquitous presence in British homes, with 14.3 million combined TV and radio licenses by 1967 – it now enabled politicians to speak to 'almost the entire population'.[49] Political leaders, such as Douglas-Home, recognised this an began to use it more regularly to explain their policies on European integration. In February 1965, leaders of all three major parties featured on BBC One's *Gallery* 'to define more

[45] J. Lawrence, *Electing Our Masters: The Hustings in British Politics from Hogarth to Blair* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 206 and p. 213.
[46] G. W. Goldie, *Facing the Nation: Television & Politics 1936-76* (London: The Bodley Head, 1977), p. 299.
[47] *The Times*, 25 September 1964.
[48] A. Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom Volume V: Competition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), Appendix C.
[49] *Ibid*, Appendix A; Lawrence, *Electing Our Masters*, p. 205.

clearly their parties' attitudes to Britain joining the Common Market'.[50] And when Wilson announced his decision to apply for membership in 1967, Heath stated in the House of Commons that 'those who watched "Panorama" must have thought that the Prime Minister has moved fast'.[51] Wilson's use of *Panorama* to effectively announce the government's new policy to the nation, Heath's mention of it in Parliament, and the other incidents outlined above demonstrate the deep penetration of television and its programmes into British society and politics. Increasingly, television became the favoured platform for political leaders looking to bring new policies into the open, replacing the Commons speech or press article. It marks a transitional moment for the BBC's coverage of European integration – until 1963, politicians had been one group among many to comment on the issue. During this period, they increasingly drowned out more unusual voices, including academics, and this trend would only develop further in future periods as politicians increasingly came to rely on television's power to connect them with the electorate.

The trend meant there was a noticeable shift in the balance between programmes that sought to explain the EEC and the idea behind it and programmes that gave well-known politicians a platform to express their views directly. Increasingly, the latter became predominant, a sign that the BBC's keenness to continue regular coverage despite the apparent impossibility of entry in the near future had led to the topic becoming routine, and one of day-to-day politics. In February 1964, for example, we see Douglas-Home, Wilson and Grimond all subjected to questioning on the Common Market during interrogations from Robin Day on *Panorama*.[52]

Politicians were trying to find the space to express their views in their own terms, rather than speaking to a producer who would then edit their remarks for use in a programme – something that was common during the first application for membership. On 17 April 1967, for example, *Panorama* had four Labour MPs on (Christopher Mayhew, Jack Ashley, Manny Shinwell and Edward Fletcher) to

[50] *The Times*, 19 February 1965.
[51] *Hansard*, 9 May 1967, Vol 746, European Communities (Membership).
[52] *The Times*, 18 February 1964; *The Listener*, March 1964 edns., *passim.*

debate the Common Market issue, with two of them being pro- and two being anti-. For the *Listener*'s reviewer, this showed 'the extent to which TV is taking over from the House of Commons as the forum for discussing the great issues of the day'.[53] A month later, Wilson himself appeared on a live edition of *Panorama* to answer questions on the EEC application for 50 minutes, describing it as 'a great historical turning point'.[54] It wasn't just in debates either – in December 1966, BBC1 broadcast *The Hard Sell*, about 'the diminishing sales of British cars in Europe', presented by Labour MP Roy Hattersley.[55] With the issue increasingly politicised, the BBC was under implicit pressure to give broadcasting time to politicians rather than non-party experts.

There was less room for programmes designed to explore wider views of the issue, such as *Europa* on 18 April 1967 – this was a Danish film examining Britain's chances of entry, which was judged by the *Listener*'s reviewer to 'not dig very deeply'. They saw its main worth as being to raise 'awkward questions about whether the British people really want to go into Europe'.[56] There was, occasionally, a sign that the BBC recognised that support for entry was stronger in Parliament than in the country – but they did little to act on this or let it affect their broadcasting policy, as we will see later in this chapter.

There was also a tilt away from the bottom-up programming policy of the period until 1963, with senior officials – including the Director-General himself – requesting regular updates on planned coverage at meetings.[57] Greene was an advocate for leading the debate, not following it – he thought broadcasting had a duty 'to be ahead of public opinion, rather than always to wait upon it' – and he wanted the BBC to do this with the national conversation about the Common Market.[58]

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[53] *The Listener*, 27 April 1967, p. 567.
[54] U. Kitzinger, 'New Situations, New Policies', in A. Moncrieff (ed.), *Britain & The Common Market 1967* (London: BBC, 1967), 8-34, p. 34; *The Times*, 5 May 1967.
[55] *The Times*, 3 December 1966.
[56] *The Listener*, 27 April 1967, p. 567.
[57] Extract from NACA meeting minutes, 12 May 1967, WAC T58/226/1.
[58] M. Tracey, *A Variety of Lives: A Biography of Sir Hugh Greene* (London: The Bodley Head, 1983), p. 241.

Radio

While television had become the domain of set-piece events, radio remained popular and widely listened to, and had more latitude to explore. When it came to the EEC, radio was a platform for in-depth, informative and exploratory discussions of the topic, in contrast to TV's increasing role as a platform for politicians to air their views directly to voters – a consequence of the lesser political scrutiny and pressure on radio services.

We have seen how radio programming in the immediate aftermath of the veto was explorative and knowledgeable, and this continued in 1964 too, when there were a range of programmes, which treated Britain's entry as a real possibility and continued to take an expansive view of the issue – these included a series of talks for schools and sixth forms on the workings and purpose of the EEC, and a Home Service examination of the impact of membership on British industry.[59] It was the BBC making the running at this time, maintaining the position of the EEC in public debate, and keeping alive the hope (for the pro-Marketers) of one day joining the club.

One of the more prominent series – even having its own book produced – was called *Britain and the Common Market*, and produced by Anthony Moncrieff. He proposed the eight-part series in a letter to Lord Archie Gordon in March 1966, at a time when Moncrieff believed a second application was an increasing possibility.[60] He was keen for it to be edited by an academic – partly to 'absolve [the] BBC from accusations of editorial opinion' – but plumped for keen pro-Marketer Uwe Kitzinger as editor with the 'enthusiasm' he would bring.[61] J. A. Camacho, Head of Talks and Current Affairs (Sound), was supportive and work began in earnest in December 1966 before broadcasting in February and March 1967, around the time when Wilson's 'probe' was ending.[62] The aim of the series

[59] BBC Genome, 'Talks for Sixth Forms', April-May 1964; BBC Genome, 'Britain at Work', July 1964; *The Listener*, 1964, *passim*, especially 22 April 1964, 13 May 1964, 30 September 1964, 3 December 1964.
[60] Memorandum from A. Moncrieff to Lord Gordon, undated, WAC R51/1081/1.
[61] Memorandum from A. Moncrieff to Lord Gordon, undated, WAC R51/1081/1.
[62] Memorandum from J. Camacho to Lord Gordon, 29 March 1966, WAC R51/1081/1; A. Moncrieff (ed.), *Britain & The Common Market 1967* (London: BBC, 1967), p. vii.

was 'less to air the pros and cons of British entry than to elucidate the current issues'.[63]

It was an attempt by the BBC to do what they did best during the first application – consider the debate on its own terms rather than fit their coverage around the party-political context. While aired on the Third Programme, it excited much interest among senior politicians and officials – with an 'unusual number of requests for scripts … from MPs, Embassies, the Labour Party, etc'.[64] Politicians were heard on the programme, but there was no imposition of balance at the expense of impartiality and depth – for example, George Brown's speech on it as Foreign Secretary was included despite Edward Heath declining an invite to appear.[65] The programme-makers hoped, with some success, to be given prominent coverage in the *Listener*, based on the Board of Governors wishing 'that the BBC should reflect the issues about the new British approach to Europe' – the European issue was now taken seriously at senior levels.[66] Listeners enjoyed the series too, according to the book produced of the talks, with 'audience appreciation for the series … well above the average for comparable output on other subjects'.[67]

The programme itself was 'designed to be an objective examination of the problem of Britain's entry into the Common Market, within the terms of the current debate' and recognising the newfound party-political context.[68] It aimed to move away from the short-termist view of the EEC prevalent in day-to-day broadcasting and towards a focus on bigger issues – the European geopolitical situation, the working of the EEC in practice, the impact of joining on the pound, agricultural impact, and 'the realities of sovereignty'.[69] Kitzinger noted 'an enormous amount of rhetoric' had already been expended on sovereignty.[70]

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[63] Memorandum from J. Camacho to D. Maitland, 19 December 1966, WAC R51/1081/1.
[64] Memorandum from J. Camacho to Books Editor, 16 January 1967, WAC R51/1081/1.
[65] Letter from A. Moncrieff to H.T.C.A.(S), 19 January 1967, WAC R51/1081/1.
[66] *Ibid*; *The Listener*, 16 February 1967.
[67] A. Moncrieff (ed.), *Britain & The Common Market 1967* (London: BBC, 1967), p. viii.
[68] *Ibid*, p. vii.
[69] BBC Genome, February to May 1967.
[70] U. Kitzinger, 'The Realities of Sovereignty', in A. Moncrieff (ed.), *Britain & The Common Market 1967* (London: BBC, 1967), 67-75, p. 67.

A key focus of this series was about the changes from 1963; this programme was almost a legacy of the BBC's broad aims at that time to familiarise the public with the issue and furnish them with a broader understanding set aside from the political party context. The parties were evidently not ignored in this new series; but they were an addition rather than fundamental to the programme; they were not the main focus.[71] Listeners heard from presenters such as the strongly anti-Market William Pickles, who were able to openly air their views, with Kitzinger openly agreeing or disagreeing – there was no fear that the BBC would be criticised for not maintaining an impeccable balance of pro- and anti-Market speakers.[72] There was no talking down to listeners either, with the final episode three hours long.[73]

This explorative and in-depth coverage of the issue was seen in other series too, including *Partners in Europe* which was broadcast on the Home Service in December 1966.[74] As with *Britain and the Common Market*, this nine-part series came from below – it was proposed by Thena Heshel – with radio programme-making on the Common Market more reliant on individual producers for inspiration than TV.[75] The series visited every Common Market country, with residents speaking about the EEC, and featured prominently in the *Listener*, which said it presented 'a more emotional, subjective' side to the debate on the Common Market, bringing in elements such as language, travel, and cuisine.[76] The expansive view of what European integration was about recurred in April 1967, with a three-part series of talks on the Third Programme by R. W. Southern titled 'England and the Continent', tailored to appeal to people interested in the EEC – *Radio Times* described the Norman invasion as 'Britain's first entry into Europe', and the *Listener* described the twelfth century

[71] Moncrieff (ed.), *Britain & The Common Market 1967*, p. viii.
[72] W. Pickles, 'The EEC System', in A. Moncrieff (ed.), *Britain & The Common Market 1967* (London: BBC, 1967), 35-42.
[73] Various, 'Open-ended discussion', in A. Moncrieff (ed.), *Britain & The Common Market 1967* (London: BBC, 1967), 76-139.
[74] BBC Genome, 27 December 1966.
[75] Memorandum from C. Clarke to Ch.H.S. and M.P., 14 November 1966, WAC R51/1081/1; Letter from C. Clarke to Ch.H.S. and MP, 28 November 1966, WAC R51/1081/1.
[76] *The Listener*, 19 January 1967, p. 84.

component as being about 'the first European Union'.[77] At a similar time, in January 1967, Third Programme listeners heard from 31 'prominent members of the intelligentsia' who gave their views on the EEC; they were reaching beyond explicitly political figures for informed comment.[78] There was a clear difference between TV and radio in this era – TV programming policy was similar to future periods, with politicians heard from directly, and an increasingly pragmatic approach to the EEC, in contrast to radio where politicians were heard through more heavily edited programmes that took the EEC partially out of its party-political context and discussed broader issues around it.

But even in radio, the BBC was increasingly anxious that programmes on European integration could cause trouble for them, and sought to avoid this – pushing it into a defensive rather than an innovative stance. In November 1967, for example, Stanley Henig, a Labour MP, wrote to Stephen Bonarjee to suggest a programme that would consider whether Britain could associate with the EEC, rather than become a full member – this followed de Gaulle's veto.[79] But for Camacho, this was a no go – there was a 'tendency abroad to regard us as quasi official', and 'it was 'conceivable that if the impression were given that Britain would be happy with associate membership, this might, however slightly, weaken the position of those negotiating for full membership'.[80] In addition to supporting Herzer's argument that journalists at institutions such as the BBC saw the EEC as central and other mechanisms of European integration as peripheral, this incident shows that there was a heightened awareness that the BBC's domestic services were themselves foreign policy actors, with the ability to cause diplomatic rows – as in the Bidault affair – and this led to programming policy prioritising the avoidance of possible trouble with the government, over delivering the most informative and thought-provoking programmes.[81] This was a sign of a trend that will become more prominent in future chapters.

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[77] BBC Genome, January 1967; *The Listener*, 6 April 1967, p. 452.
[78] *The Listener*, 26 January 1967, p. 126.
[79] Memorandum from S. Henig to S. Bonarjee, 13 November 1967, WAC R51/1081/1.
[80] Memorandum from J. Camacho to S. Henig, 16 November 1967, WAC R51/1081/1.
[81] M. Herzer, *The Media, European Integration and the Rise of Euro-journalism, 1950s-1970s* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), p. 3.

Criticism of the BBC

Paradoxically, there were few complaints about the BBC's European integration coverage until the move towards bipartisan consensus emerged from late 1966. The BBC aired anti-Market views through coverage of the Labour Party and Labour politicians, and both the pro-Market and anti-Market supporters were reasonably happy with the coverage their sides received. This rough balance had created a sense that the BBC were succeeding in maintaining impartiality. But for some, the BBC did not adequately adapt to the emergence of bipartisanship. Anti-Market views became increasingly rare in Parliament, and the BBC could no longer rely on a split between coverage given to Conservative and Labour politicians also ensuring a split between coverage given to pro- and anti-Market views. Stuart Hood, Controller of BBC Television between 1961 and 1963, has said that the BBC 'interpreted impartiality as the acceptance of that segment of opinion which constitutes parliamentary consensus. Opinion that falls outside that consensus has difficulty in finding expression'.[82] It was the emergence of this pro-Market consensus in Parliament that posed a challenge for the BBC, disrupting its normal impartiality procedures and leading to a growing volume of criticism.

It arose because of the BBC's Westminster-centric perspective, with most critics overwhelmingly – and tellingly – anti-Market voices who suggested they were not being adequately heard. They believed that Wilson's probe into a possible EC membership application had rekindled the possibility of a bipartisan consensus, and that this in turn had led to their voices being ignored, with the BBC reflecting the division of Parliamentary opinion, rather than public opinion, which was much more sceptical – in April 1967, 30 per cent opposed EC membership while 43 per cent supported it.[83]

[82] Quoted in J. Seaton, 'Public service commerce: ITV, new audiences and new revenue', in J. Curran and J. Seaton (eds.), *Power Without Responsibility: Press, Broadcasting and the Internet in Britain* (London: Routledge, 2018, 8th edn.), 246-257, p. 256.
[83] Gallup, *British attitudes towards the Common Market, 1957-1971* (London, 1971).

The first sign of the anti-Marketers campaign for more coverage on the BBC reached them on 15 February 1967, when Christopher Frere-Smith, Chairman of the newly-formed Keep Britain Out campaign, wrote to Oliver Whitley.[84] He hoped that the BBC would 'see that in discussions and programmes on the Common Market, the case against going in is put', and offered assistance in providing anti-Market speakers.[85] Only the anti-Marketers at this stage felt the need to write letters like this – the pro-Market campaigns, full of 'insiders' and already part of informal networks with BBC staff, felt no similar need. Whitley replied that this had already 'been the subject of a good deal of discussion' at the BBC, and referred Frere-Smith to the Third Programme series on the Common Market – as if a programme tucked away in this service could allay Frere-Smith's worries.[86]

The trouble grew with a letter to the *Times* on 20 January 1967, signed by 21 prominent anti-Market personalities including a Labour MP named Alfred Morris.[87] They agreed that Wilson was correct to call for a 'Great Debate' across Britain about possible EC entry, but noted that 'unfortunately, the normal processes of the party system for ventilating controversial matters are denied us in this vital matter, as the official attitudes of all three parties are, at least superficially, so close together'.[88] They understood that the effect of bipartisanship could be to shut down effective debate. And, indeed, they argued that this had already happened:

> Important sections of the press *and broadcasting channels* seem to be already committed and tend to give the impression that membership of the European Economic Community would automatically bring substantial economic advantages at least in the long run, that it would be unreasonable to appear to quibble about the terms of the Treaty of Rome before acceding to it, and that the only real question is whether or not French objections to our entry can be overcome.[89]

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[84] Letter from C. Frere-Smith to O. J. Whitley, 15 February 1967, WAC R78/1813/1.
[85] *Ibid.*
[86] Letter from O. J. Whitley to C. Frere-Smith, 16 February 1967, WAC R78/1813/1.
[87] *The Times*, 20 January 1967.
[88] *The Times*, 20 January 1967.
[89] *Ibid.* Emphasis added.

To combat this, the authors of the letter appealed 'to all those who see objections to acceding to the Treaty of Rome in its present form … to make their views publicly known by every possible means', including 'on the radio'.[90] Morris and another Labour MP, Michael English, became figureheads for the campaign, with the *Guardian* reporting five days after their original letter that they would be approaching the BBC and the ITA asking them 'to widen the field of debate on the pros and cons of British entry'. They reported that this had happened after 'an informal meeting of Labour MPs … arranged because of alarm created by the success of the propaganda drive towards Europe'.[91]

From late January 1967 (at which point Wilson was visiting Rome, Strasbourg, and Paris in his probe and returning home 'determined to enter the Market'), Morris and English were strenuously arguing directly to the BBC that the anti-Market case was 'insufficiently reflected by the broadcasting authorities' and that therefore 'there was a danger that Britain's entry into the EEC might become a fait accompli before all the issues had been ventilated in public'.[92] One particular complaint was that the BBC often treated Britain's future membership as a given, saying 'when Britain joins', rather than 'if'. We can see an example of this in *The Listener* in July 1966, which reported on an architectural series from the Third Programme that talked about something happening 'once we have joined the Common Market'.[93] O. J. Whitley, Chief Assistant to the Director-General, 'warned those concerned' to avoid the future positive tense in future, with a directive issued at the next News and Current Affairs (NACA) meeting.[94] The BBC recognised the validity of part of English and Morris's complaint, that there was a tendency within NACA to assume that entry was now a given, and they were keen to rectify it.

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[90] *Ibid.*
[91] Extract from *The Guardian*, 25 January 1967, WAC R78/1813/1.
[92] Pimlott, *Harold Wilson*, pp. 439-440; Extract from NACA meeting minutes, 27 January 1967, WAC T58/226/1; Extract from NACA meeting minutes, 3 February 1967, WAC T58/226/1.
[93] *The Listener*, 14 July 1966, p. 751.
[94] Letter from O. J. Whitley to M. English, 1 February 1967, WAC R78/1813/1; Extract from NACA meeting minutes, 3 February 1967, WAC T58/226/1.

However, NACA officials unsurprisingly disagreed with the suggestion that BBC coverage did not give a fair hearing to the anti-Market case. At one of their weekly meetings, P. L. Fox (Head of Current Affairs Group (Television)), noted that 'those opposed to the Common Market broadcast frequently in *Twenty-Four Hours* [the BBC One current affairs show broadcast every weekday] and so long as there was continuing discussion he did not feel that more deliberate measures need be taken'.[95] He also referred to 'a recent survey [which] showed that 59% of the population now favoured Britain's entry into the EEC' and to the fact that 'in Parliament there was no longer any major division of opinion as between Government and Opposition' as reasons why there was no need to maintain complete balance between pro- and anti-Market views.[96] This proves that programming policy was being affected by the consensus between the major parties, with the BBC explicitly using it as a reason not to give more time to anti-Market views.

The BBC was pushed into finding reasons to defend their coverage, a slippery slope that would end up with them permanently on the back foot and no longer leading a national debate, but following an existing parliamentary debate – or non-debate. It is also striking that a slim majority of the electorate supporting entry was viewed as a legitimate reason to limit the airtime received by those who were on the side of the large minority, and that similar arguments were not put forward within NACA in support of more anti-Market coverage at the times when public opinion was on their side – by June 1967, a majority of the public were opposed to membership but the BBC did not change their policy.[97] The BBC were happy to follow the lead of the political parties, who were united, rather than follow the lead of the public, who remained divided. There was no attempt within the BBC to provide a 50-50 'balance' of pro- and anti-Market views; instead, the Corporation was content as long as some anti-Market views were aired.

[95] Extract from NACA meeting minutes, 27 January 1967, WAC T58/226/1.
[96] *Ibid.*
[97] Gallup, *British attitudes towards the Common Market*.

Yet some BBC staff sympathised with Morris and English. O. J. Whitley (Controller, Staff Training and Appointments) and D. I. Edwards (Editor, News and Current Affairs) initially responded to the argument from the MPs that the 'great debate' on membership should now begin by saying that it should only start after an application for entry had been announced, rather than during the ongoing 'probe'. But Whitley began to have doubts about its suitability as a policy, saying that his 'confidence' had been 'punctured … that some kind of recognisable moment would come for Press and Broadcasting to begin a crucial "yes or no" debate before an uncommitted audience', and, as a result of this, he wrote 'I guess that we have to make our own running?'[98] He wanted the BBC to be unapologetically creating a national debate, and was tacitly recognising that bipartisan consensus meant it was increasingly possible for entry to be pushed through Parliament without a widespread public debate, and that it may end up therefore being the media's job to initiate the debate. Until now, reporting on key events meant a predominance of pro-Market stories, given it was their side taking the actions that they hoped would prepare the way for entry. If the BBC were to start a 'great debate', however, they would be giving greater prominence to the views of anti-Market supporters.

J. A. Camacho (Head of Talks and Current Affairs (Sound)) agreed with the original line taken by Whitley and Edwards that 'the Great Debate does not begin until after the government' have begun it.[99] He suggested that Whitley could pass onto English and Morris 'that Bill Pickles – arch enemy of Britain's entry to the Common Market – not only himself delivered programme No. 2 [in the Third Programme Common Market series], but commented with presumably genuine astonishment and pleasure on the fairness and impartiality of programme No. 1'.[100] Lord Gladwyn – an avowed supporter of Common Market membership – also praised this programme at a NACA meeting, yet it is questionable how much impact a talks series aimed at a small minority audience

[98] Extract from NACA meeting minutes, 27 January 1967, WAC T58/226/1.
[99] Memorandum from Camacho to Whitley, 15 February 1967, WAC R28/509/1. Emphasis in original.
[100] Memorandum from Camacho to Whitley, 15 February 1967, WAC R28/509/1.

would have had in deflecting the criticisms made by English and Morris.[101] Indeed, they responded asking for details of Common Market 'programmes which attract larger audiences than the Third'.[102] An eventual response was suggested by E. R. Thompson in March 1967, who suggested pointing them to coverage of the issue on *The World At One* and TV current affairs programmes, and to note that the Third Programme series was to be repeated on the Home Service.[103] It did not stop their complaints – in late 1967, they asked David Attenborough (Controller, BBC2) whether 'BBC2 could offer some discussion of the importance of safeguarding essential Commonwealth interests in any negotiations for entry to the EEC'.[104] No such programme was made.

One particular suggestion by the anti-Marketers shines a light on the BBC's attitude at this time. Frere-Smith wrote to Whitley in February 1967, notifying him of their public meeting to be held at Caxton Hall. He hoped that, given the BBC had recently covered the British Council of the European Movement's rally at the Albert Hall, the anti-Market meeting could receive similar coverage.[105] The response was that the decision on whether to cover it would be based on news values alone, and internally they noted that no 'figures of first-rate national importance' were signed up to speak.[106] We can see that the BBC was not yet fully committed to 'balance' between the two sides, and that it continued to be Westminster-centric – news value was being judged based on the party-political importance of the speakers, rather than through a desire to reflect the significant percentage of the public who were anti-Market or sceptical. This was a continuing complaint of Morris and English – the former rang Whitley in February 1968 to object that a *Panorama* programme the previous night 'gave no indication of the large and increasing part of British public opinion which is anti-Common Market'.[107] Lieber's argument that the anti-Marketers at this time saw the BBC as part of a broader 'insider' network including the official party

[101] Extract from NACA meeting minutes, 31 March 1967, WAC T58/226/1.
[102] Letter from A. Morris to O. Whitley, 2 February 1967, WAC R78/1813/1.
[103] Letter from E. Thompson to CA to DG, 7 March 1967, WAC R78/1813/1.
[104] Letter from Morris to Attenborough, 17 October 1967, WAC T58/226/1.
[105] Letter from C. Frere-Smith to O. Whitley, 26 February 1967, WAC R78/1813/1.
[106] Extract from NACA meeting minutes, 3 March 1967, WAC R78/1813/1.
[107] Letter from O. Whitley to HCAG Tel, 13 February 1968, WAC R78/1813/1.

channels and the press as 'already committed in favour' of membership would seem to be correct.[108]

In contrast, complaints from pro-Marketers about the BBC's EC coverage were rare. One example came following an edition of *Focus* on 7 December 1965 – a lean period, if such exists, for programmes on the EEC – dedicated to the Common Market. With Britain's possible future membership in mind, it wanted to give listeners an understanding of the EEC itself, and so heard from many experts, including European journalists, European politicians, and representatives of various industries.[109] Jeremy Nicklin, a producer, thought it was part of a 'vigorous onslaught' of programmes that would help the Common Market 'actually mean something' to Britain, and it aimed to 'present a collage of opinions' that were 'balanced' in terms of time given to pro- and anti-Marketers.[110]

They were, however, unable to get enough material from Commission members themselves for them to be included, despite an interview with Sicco Mansholt, one of the European Commissioners. Partially in consequence of this, John Lambert from the Commission Press Office wrote to Nicklin to complain. He said that he had 'talked to several people who listened and have been surprised to discover that they all felt the program had left an almost unreasonably negative impression about the Common Market', with a particular focus on comments made by regular contributor Professor Pickles.[111] Nicklin held his ground, pointing out they had used Richard Mayne, an aide to Jean Monnet (and another regular contributor to programmes on the EEC).[112] The important takeaway from this is that the BBC were still taking an expansive view of the issue, including speakers from a range of backgrounds and with a range of views. It does hint, however, at the beginnings of 'balance'

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[108] R. Lieber, *British Politics and European Unity: Parties, Elites, and Pressure Groups* (Berkeley: University of California Pres, 1970), p. 255.
[109] Transcript: Focus: The Common Market, 7 December 1965, WAC R19/2096/1.
[110] Letter from J. Nicklin to J. Lambert, 7 January 1966, WAC R19/2096/1; Letter from J. Nicklin to W. Sanders, 30 November 1965, WAC R19/2096/1.
[111] Letter from J. Lambert to J. Nicklin, 15 December 1965, WAC R19/2096/1.
[112] Letter from J. Nicklin to J. Lambert, 7 January 1966, WAC R19/2096/1.

becoming used in place of a broader view of impartiality, a theme which will become more prominent in future chapters.

We have seen in this section some of the difficulties that the BBC faced in adapting to the party-political consensus that now existed on European integration. They took their steer from parliamentary politics, which meant that widespread opinions failed to attract coverage if they were not supported by the leadership of either the Conservative or Labour parties. This contributed to a growing perception among anti-Market campaigners that the BBC did not give them an adequate platform for the dissemination of their views. There was very little similar criticism from pro-Market politicians. Moreover, the BBC used the parliamentary consensus and growing (but inconsistent) public support for entry to explain why they did not give more airtime to anti-Market figures. While the Corporation had continued to lead the national debate for a time after the veto in 1963, it was increasingly on the back foot, following a national debate instead– it was up to lone figures, such as Whitley, to make the case that the BBC should initiate the 'Great Debate' that had been promised by Prime Minister Wilson. BBC viewers and listeners, then, could be forgiven for imagining that the country was far more united behind a policy of applying for EEC entry than it was in reality.

EXTERNAL SERVICES

De Gaulle's veto had left the External Services reeling. They had not expected it, and had been preparing for a future in which Britain was part of the Common Market.[113] It led to a scramble to re-think policy. A review was hurriedly put together by a group of senior officials within External Services. Those taking part included the Controller, European Services, the Head of European Talks & English Service (G.H. Gretton), the Heads of the German, French, Central European, East European, and South European Services, and the Head of European Productions. All were enlisted in the search for a new approach, one

[113] See chapter one.

which would see them through the ensuing years in which audience sizes would remain considerable, with 1.5m adult listeners, for example, to the Italian Service.[114]

The fruits of the group's labours were three separate memoranda: an initial draft; a minority paper; and a final majority paper. The first, authored by Gretton, was distributed on 7 February 1963, less than a month after de Gaulle's veto.[115] The minority paper, from 7 March, was submitted by Edward Ashcroft (Head of South European Service), 'in the hope that some of the ideas it contains may be worth further discussion'.[116] However, there is little evidence that it had an impact – a final majority paper, with Gretton again the lead author and dated 20 March, was largely unchanged from the original document of 7 February.[117] While this final paper had the widest possible agreement within the European Services, it was also the least radical of the three memoranda. The minority paper was the most outspoken and remained important given the authority that Ashcroft held within his own Service, which broadcast in Italian, Spanish, Greek, Turkish and Hebrew.

There was an explicitly pro-European – though not always pro-Market – thread running through all three memoranda. The majority paper declared that 'we [the British] see ourselves as Europeans', and argued that 'despite the French veto on our membership, we continue to believe that we are a part of Europe, and our policies will be based on this assumption'.[118] Ashcroft's minority paper took things further, stating that 'Britain seems to have little prospect except through partnership in the new Europe of gaining direct access to a large assured market for her industrial production and, by so doing, being able to maintain her

[114] Audience Research South European Summary for 1965, WAC E39/22/1.
[115] Memorandum from European Talks Organiser (D. Sington) to Various, 'Common Market Paper', 7 February 1963, WAC E39/22/1.
[116] Memorandum from Head of South European Service (E. Ashcroft) to Controller, European Services, 'Common Market', 7 March 1963, WAC E39/22/1.
[117] Memorandum, 'The Common Market', 20 March 1963, WAC E39/22/1.
[118] Memorandum from European Talks Organiser (D. Sington) to Various, 'Common Market Paper', 7 February 1963, WAC E39/22/1, p. 3; Memorandum, 'The Common Market', 20 March 1963, WAC E39/22/1, p. 4.

position as a major industrial country'.[119] For Ashcroft, membership of the Common Market would undoubtedly have a positive impact on the British economy, stemming the apparent decline of the nation. He was keen for the BBC to continue pushing this view in its output, stating that 'the prevalent view that negotiations are unlikely to be resumed for a period of two years may be right, but it would be a mistake to take this too much for granted and it would be wrong for the BBC to allow its listeners to believe that British interest in the EEC is now dormant'.[120] Gretton's majority paper agreed with this latter point, arguing that 'in our broadcasting to Europe we should try to show that we are sincere about this [Common Market membership]'.[121] This was despite only one of the two major parties supporting entry on terms that would be reasonably achievable.

Ashcroft and Gretton's papers also agreed that both Britain and the Six would be stronger and better off by joining forces – British entry into the EEC would be mutually beneficial. In Ashcroft's minority paper, for example, he argued that 'in propaganda, Britain's great strength is that the Common Market functions at a great disadvantage without Britain. We should emphasise all the points made in Mr. Gretton's report on this subject and our broadcasts … should develop this theme as strongly as possible'.[122] Gretton's final paper, meanwhile, suggested that de Gaulle was wrong to believe that the close Anglo-American relationship was incompatible with Common Market membership, and argued that 'it can be shown that on balance the EEC is losing at least as much as we are from our exclusion'.[123] For Ashcroft and Gretton, this was about the BBC performing a diplomatic role – presenting the issue in a light that would benefit the foreign policy of the present government. This commitment towards British involvement in European integration effectively supported Conservative policy over Labour policy – and there was no new policy paper after Labour came to

[119] Memorandum from Head of South European Service (E. Ashcroft) to Controller, European Services, 'Common Market', 7 March 1963, WAC E39/22/1, p. 1.
[120] *Ibid.*
[121] Memorandum, 'The Common Market', 20 March 1963, WAC E39/22/1, p. 9.
[122] Memorandum from Head of South European Service (E. Ashcroft) to Controller, European Services, 'Common Market', 7 March 1963, WAC E39/22/1, p. 4.
[123] Memorandum, 'The Common Market', 20 March 1963, WAC E39/22/1, p. 9.

power in 1964. There is perhaps a hint here, as seen in the previous chapter, of an instinctive pro-Europeanism among staff working in the XS, many of whom considered themselves to be European.

However, while there was an underlying current of pro-Europeanism, this did not mean anti-Market views were excluded. The majority paper noted that these views 'should be reflected (as they were in the past)' and highlighted that 'the attitude of the Labour Party is specially relevant'.[124] The language is striking when compared to that supporting the pro-Market view; anti-Market views were to be 'reflected', while pro-Market views were to be actively supported by showing that both Britain and the EEC would be best off with Britain inside the Market. Further evidence of this pro-Europeanism and pro-government view comes from Ashcroft's minority paper, in which he stated 'what we must do … if our intention is to join the EEC as soon as possible'.[125] This was a more pro-integration view than that espoused by the Conservative and Labour parties – both were only committed to entry if 'acceptable' terms could be negotiated, rather than to entry at any cost. Ashcroft wanted the BBC to lead the charge in favour of British entry into the Common Market, and use its status as a diplomatic actor to that end. He argued that 'we [the BBC] should convey the impression that Britain is at all times willing to renew negotiations'.[126] Yet Labour had no wish for Britain to renew negotiations, and the Conservative government was by this time (partly due to the collapse of EC negotiations) showing its weakness and struggling in the polls.[127] It was far from clear that the current government or a future government would support re-opening negotiations. Yet the BBC were keen to suggest Britain would want to do so 'at all times', again reflecting an inherent pro-Europeanism, and portraying entry as a British-wide ideal rather than a topic of party-political division.

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[124] *Ibid.*
[125] Memorandum from Head of South European Service (E. Ashcroft) to Controller, European Services, 'Common Market', 7 March 1963, WAC E39/22/1, p. 3.
[126] *Ibid.*
[127] A. King (ed.), *British Political Opinion 1937-2000: The Gallup Polls* (London: Politico, 2001), p. 7.

Ashcroft was also keen that the BBC 'should increase our news reporting of European meetings concerned with the EEC' and 'take much more care than we do to report back in news and programmes all pro-European statements which are really significant. We should play down deliberately all statements which militate against the aim of the British government to get into the Common Market'.[128] This did not make it into the final majority paper – and for good reason, as Ashcroft was advocating a major policy change. He was arguing that the news should be selected based not on news value, but on whether it would support government policy. And, while the BBC adapted its news broadcasts depending on the country being broadcast to, there was a commitment to not adapting the treatment of specific news items to specific countries. This would have been the implication of adjusting European Services policy to align it with government policy – it was a view that had hitherto been anathema in the External Services. William Haley, Director-General between 1944 and 1952 – who Gerard Mansell said 'played a key role in setting the External Services on the course they were to follow in the post-war era' – thought the priority of the BBC's overseas broadcasting efforts should be to provide 'an accurate, impartial and dispassionate flow of news' and that 'the treatment of an item in an overseas news bulletin must not differ in any material respect from its treatment in a current news bulletin for domestic listeners'.[129]

Ashcroft wanted to rip these principles up in pursuit of a pro-Market news policy, that would see stories selected because of their possible impact on the achievement of government policy and give a distinct advantage to pro-Market advocates. It would not have maintained impartiality. While Ashcroft's views in this area did not make it into the majority paper, his position of authority within the South European Service enabled aspects of his thinking to be influential within that Service, and he pushed colleagues towards a policy that was closer to his own than to what had been agreed in the majority paper.

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[128] Memorandum from Head of South European Service (E. Ashcroft) to Controller, European Services, 'Common Market', 7 March 1963, WAC E39/22/1, p. 4.
[129] G. Mansell, *Let Truth Be Told: 50 Years of BBC External Broadcasting* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1982), p. 216.

In December 1963, Ashcroft sent a disgruntled memorandum to B. Moore, Head of External Services News Department, criticising the lack of a story about EEC agricultural prices. This was not the first memorandum he had sent urging them to 'improve' their output of Common Market stories: he stated 'may I repeat again that there are many occasions when it seems to me and my Programme Organisers that the News Department misses or deals inadequately with stories concerning the EEC and related matters'.[130] One story that he picked out in particular was 'the opening of the WEU conference and the remarks of Carlo Smid and de Bloch about Britain', which was 'not reported in the Italian News bulletin (and Spanish) last night'.[131] He believed this to be an issue because 'here is Britain's membership of the EEC and participation in the planning of the political structure of Europe being advocated and we say not a word about it'.[132] Even after his views on selecting news stories had been ignored in the majority paper, Ashcroft was advocating at less senior levels for them to become common practice.

Ashcroft's views in other areas were much closer to the mainstream opinions in Gretton's majority paper. For example, their papers agreed that 'it is very important that we should try to reflect a positive and outward-looking mentality … we must be careful … not to sound anti-French', while Ashcroft added that 'we should avoid francophobia like the plague'.[133] In this, the BBC was aligning with government policy, which was also straining to avoid any perception that it was anti-French, given the potential ramifications for a future application.[134] The agreement here suggests a close affinity between their views, and their objectives when it came it European integration.

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[130] Memorandum from Head of South European Service (E. Ashcroft) to H.X.S.N.D., 'Common Market', 3 December 1963, WAC E39/22/1.
[131] *Ibid.*
[132] *Ibid.*
[133] Memorandum from European Talks Organiser (D. Sington) to Various, 'Common Market Paper', 7 February 1963, WAC E39/22/1, p. 1; Memorandum from Head of South European Service (E. Ashcroft) to Controller, European Services, 'Common Market', 7 March 1963, WAC E39/22/1, p. 5.
[134] S. Wall, *The Official History of Britain and the European Community Volume 2: From Rejection to Referendum, 1963-1975* (London: Routledge, 2013), p. 36.

One theme from the previous chapter recurs in Gretton's majority paper – the Cold War remained the BBC's priority, and the focus on the War continued to underpin policy on European integration. As such, it was stated that 'we should continually stress the vital importance of unity and co-operation in the defence of Western Europe and the dangers to all its members, including France, of go-it-alone policies'.[135] An earlier draft argued that 'a Europe excluding the Anglo-Saxons and relying on a "force de frappe" which for years will have neither warheads nor missiles, is a defenceless Europe'.[136] This line was explicitly pro-integration (though not necessarily pro-Market) and pro-British involvement. The BBC were determined that the French veto of Common Market membership should not threaten British involvement in other areas of European cooperation, especially where this could be useful in fighting the ongoing Cold War – NATO was a prominent theme.[137] However, any 'disputes in the Alliance' were to be presented behind the Iron Curtain 'as examples of how free and equal allies settle their differences'.[138] As in the period until 1963, everything could be turned to use in the Cold War – it was not a coincidence that a section headed 'the Communist bloc' was the most detailed within the final majority paper.

The final majority paper was agreed in March 1963, and it set the BBC's policy on the Common Market for its external services for a number of years – no further policy papers were produced in the period covered by this chapter. But how widespread were the views expressed within it?

One answer comes from a lecture given by James Monahan, Controller of the European Services, in October 1963. Speaking about the BBC's European role after the veto, he recognised the Second World War legacy, with an anecdote about a French farmer who had named his cow BBC after listening to the service during the war.[139] Monahan saw Britain as part of Europe, and recognised the continued importance of the 'Two Europes' that the BBC had to broadcast to.[140]

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[135] Memorandum, 'The Common Market', 20 March 1963, WAC E39/22/1, p. 5.
[136] Memorandum, 'The Common Market', undated, WAC E39/22/1, p. 2.
[137] *Ibid*, p. 7.
[138] Memorandum, 'The Common Market', 20 March 1963, WAC E39/22/1, p. 5.
[139] *The Listener*, 31 October 1963.
[140] *Ibid.*

He gave the usual arguments for the importance of the services behind the Iron Curtain, but stressed the importance of the Western European services too.[141] He saw it as a 'national failure to give us the resources which could have brought our influence fully to bear on the development of Western Europe since the war' – like many historians, he thought Britain had been left outside an opportunity to influence the continent's future.[142]

Referencing the 1957 cuts, Monahan said that the BBC had 'witnessed the slow abandonment of a European role', and believed that this had led to a perception in Europe that Britain was uninterested in it – a significant consequence for potential EC entry, especially given de Gaulle's avowed reason for his veto.[143] Two years later, Dr J. P. Stern of St John's College, Cambridge, also noted that reducing the XS seemed to be a 'strange contradiction' at a time when the government sought closer relations with the EEC.[144] We see here again the role of the BBC as a foreign policy actor in its own right – it had its own perception of which foreign policy issues were important, and how they should be treated. They disagreed with governmental cuts to the European Services partly because it is in the nature of any organisation to defend itself, but also because they genuinely believed in the importance of broadcasting to Western Europe. Listeners, too, saw the BBC as an important conveyer of British views and strength of feeling. One, in Lucca, wrote into the *Listener* to explain the importance of the European Services for Britain's EC application.[145] He agreed with Monahan on the value of broadcasting to Western European countries and said: 'The Italian view of international affairs is markedly closer to that of Britain than to that of any other major power; how tragic that Italians are given so little opportunity of realising this! At a time when the British are at last coming to realise that Britain is part of Europe, Europeans are in danger of forgetting that important fact'.[146] For this listener, the European Service was an important mechanism to show the Europeans that Britain was serious about entry.

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141 *Ibid.*
142 *Ibid.*
143 *Ibid.*
144 *The Times*, 20 January 1967.
145 *The Listener*, 21 November 1963.
146 *Ibid.*

Returning to Monahan's lecture, he spoke about his 'hope' for the future after the veto.[147] He saw Britain as having 'neglected the opportunity to be Europe's leader', and thought the BBC and EC entry together could play a part in rectifying that (as he saw it) mistake:

> The hope must be that with the new appreciation, now forced on the country, of the situation, there may come a new appreciation, too, that the treatment of those particular BBC Services has, indeed, been characteristic and significant and, by the same token, that if Britain is to make her presence fully felt, then the recrudescence of these Services will be a characteristic and significant part of that story.[148]

Adding that the BBC could play a role in 'the building of the new Europe', his words were more prophetic than he knew, as we shall see in the chapter dealing with the immediate aftermath of Britain's entry to the EEC in 1973.[149]

For those in charge of the European Services, then, the BBC was a foreign policy actor that could support government policy on European integration. Pro-European and pro-Market views predominated, and they actively affected policy, with Britain framed as part of Europe and membership of the Common Market seen to be in the best interests of both Britain and the existing member states. The BBC made clear the continued British interest in joining the EEC, even though only one of the two major parties was committed to negotiating terms of entry – the issue was portrayed as being settled, rather than one on which there was still widespread division. It did this while continuing to subordinate European integration programming to the Cold War, which remained the priority across the External Services. However, key members of staff were becoming increasingly outspoken in their commitment to a policy that was friendly towards pro-Market views, laying the groundwork for European integration coverage to become a greater priority as time went on.

147 *The Listener*, 31 October 1963.
148 *Ibid.*
149 *Ibid.*

CONCLUSION

The party-political context of British involvement in European integration changed dramatically between 1963 and 1967 – and the BBC began to adapt with it in a transitional period for its coverage. It continued to lead the national debate on potential EC membership, keeping the issue at the forefront of public attention even when political leaders preferred to put it away. Producers were unafraid of exposing intra-party divisions, and continued to give platforms to experts in a variety of fields, presenting the British public with a wide range of perspectives on European integration.

But there were signs that this was beginning to change. As party politics considered the issue in greater detail, the amount of time given to politicians to speak directly to viewers and listeners on the issue increased. Programmes where heavily edited interviews were used as part of an expanded piece became rarer, and the role of producers as intermediaries began to diminish. Inherently, these changes also meant the beginnings of a steady shift in the balance between pragmatic and idealistic arguments towards the former, with politicians largely focusing on the political and economic arguments for and against entry.

Potential flaws in the BBC's conception of political neutrality began to arise too. It usually accounted for balance between the parties and was not set up to handle an issue where divisions were intra-party, not inter-party. With the leadership of every party supporting membership, opponents had to be found elsewhere, among backbench MPs, campaign groups, and industry bodies. But the BBC's Westminster-centric view meant these groups had to battle for coverage, despite the significant public opposition to membership – the pro-Market majority in Parliament was used as a reason to give their side more coverage. The conception of 'balance' was still focused on traditional party politics rather than treating the EEC as an issue in its own right. The BBC was part of informal 'insider' networks with pro-Market supporters – they did not have to battle for coverage, unlike the anti-Market side – and filled with people who were instinctively pro-European, as demonstrated in their treatment of anti-Market criticism.

Nowhere was this instinctive pro-Europeanism more common than in the External Services, where senior staff held openly pro-European and pro-integration opinions. Even after de Gaulle's veto, and even with the Labour party initially remaining opposed to entry, they hoped to present Europe with the picture of a British consensus in support of Common Market membership. Key figures in the European Services, such as Edward Ashcroft, believed that membership could solve Britain's apparent economic ills and end the culture of 'declinism' that had taken root. But, while the view that EC membership would be beneficial to both Britain and the Six was widespread among European Services staff, it continued to be of only secondary importance; the Cold War was still the dominant force shaping the European Service. European integration as an issue continued to be related but subordinate.

The BBC learned, to its cost, that European integration was inseparable from broader foreign policy through incidents such as the Bidault Affair. To people in Europe, the BBC took on a semi-official role as a spokesperson for the government, and opinions on European integration were regularly read into its broadcasts. The BBC came to a greater understanding of this, with decisions about whether to produce programmes made with the possible reactions of European governments in mind. This shows two key trends that would be important going forward. Firstly, there was a recognition that the BBC was itself a foreign policy actor, with the ability to make its own choices about how it presented programmes on key issues of British policy. And secondly, it was beginning to make choices on European integration coverage based not on what it thought was best, but based on what it may be criticised for. Where the BBC had been on the front foot in its broadcasting of European integration until 1963, it was now sliding into a defensive posture where it would no longer be creating the national debate, but following it instead.

CHAPTER 3: 1968-1972
PREPARING FOR ENTRY

Despite Charles de Gaulle's second veto in 1967, the potential for British entry into the EEC was higher than it had been in previous years, with both major parties in the UK united in supporting entry on the right terms. De Gaulle's resignation in 1969 – and death a year later – opened up the path for entry. Appropriately, the prime minister who would oversee the successful application was Edward Heath – he led his party to victory in the 1970 general election. His maiden speech in the House of Commons had supported British membership of the ECSC, and as Lord Privy Seal he had headed the initial negotiations for entry between 1961 and 1963.[1] He was the most pro-European of all post-war prime ministers, and joining the EEC was 'the central plank' of his premiership.[2] It was something to be done 'not shyly or apologetically', but with an enthusiastic and positive spirit.[3] His party remained largely pro-European throughout this period but with some dissidents, while Labour were racked with division over the issue, regularly changing their official stance. The BBC therefore continued to face the challenge of adapting to a perpetually changing party-political context, to which a successful application now contributed. This application and the ensuing negotiations saw a concerted effort – for the first time – from government to persuade the public of the merits of Common Market membership through the mass media. Consequently, relations between the BBC and government took on new importance, and these relations will be the key subject of this chapter.

[1] E. Heath, *The Autobiography of Edward Heath: The Course of My Life* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1998), pp. 144-145; L. Aqui, *The First Referendum: Reassessing Britain's Entry to Europe, 1973-75* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), p. 1.
[2] J. Campbell, *Edward Heath: A Biography* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1993), p. 442.
[3] M. McManus, *Edward Heath: A Singular Life* (London: Elliott and Thompson, 2016), p. 87.

DOMESTIC SERVICES

These were relatively sedate years for the BBC's television services, with the established system of BBC1 and BBC2 remaining in place. The major development was the introduction of colour television to both channels in 1969 and 1967 respectively, though take-up was slow – in 1972 there were 1.6 million colour television licences compared to 15 million black and white licences.[4] Hugh Greene's period as Director-General came to an end in 1969, following an uncomfortable couple of years that had begun with Harold Wilson appointing Lord Hill as Chairman in an attempt to 'tame' Green.[5] Before he went, Greene had overseen a major reorganisation of the BBC's radio services. Gone was the tripartite system encompassing the Home Service, Light and Third Programmes. In were Radios One, Two, Three and Four, and a move towards specialist stations and away from mixed programming.[6] Radio One was introduced as a 'specialised' station devoted to providing a 'continuous popular music programme', hinting at an end to mixed programming.[7] These changes affected the BBC's radio coverage of European integration, which was increasingly limited to Radio Four; more intellectual programmes that had previously aired on the Third Programme either migrated to Radio Four or were canned altogether. There was an overall increase in the number of hours devoted to news and current affairs programming.[8] Alongside these relaunched national stations, local radio began with the opening of BBC Radio Leicester in November 1967.[9] This change would also influence the BBC's coverage of European integration, with increased coverage of the issue as it affected localities. There was expansion in spending too: operating expenditure on radio

[4] A. Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom Volume V: Competition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 1050, 1059, Appendix A.
[5] M. Rosenbaum, *From Soapbox to Soundbite: Party Political Campaigning in Britain since 1945* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997), p. 112.
[6] D. Hendy, *Life on Air: A History of Radio Four* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 14; C. Seymour-Ure, *The British Press and Broadcasting since 1945* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 1996 2nd edn., p. 78.
[7] Briggs, *Competition*, p. 768.
[8] Briggs, *Competition*, p. 768.
[9] Briggs, *Competition*, p. 1052.

grew from £19.4 million in 1967-8 to £30.8m in 1972-3, and on television from £47.5 million in 1967-8 to £81.9 million in 1972-3.[10]

Changes at the top of the BBC also affected the Corporation's relationship to European integration. In 1969, Charles Curran replaced Greene as Director-General and would remain in post until 1977, two years after the point at which this thesis ends. He worked, uneasily, with Lord Hill as Chairman until 1972, and then, more happily, with Michael Swann for the remainder of his time as Director-General As will be detailed during this chapter, European integration was a cause close to Curran's heart – he 'greatly treasured' the three terms he served as President of the EBU from 1973 to 1978 – and his leadership had a considerable impact on the BBC's coverage of European integration, and on its relationship with other European broadcasters.[11]

Political background

Before exploring the BBC's role during these years, it is important to lay out the political context in which they were operating, and the historiographical debates that have developed from this period. The question of British entry to the EEC became moot following de Gaulle's second veto – it was now clear that, for as long as he was in post, the application that the Labour government had decided to keep on the table could not be successful. But the situation suddenly changed in 1969 when de Gaulle resigned as President of France and was replaced by Georges Pompidou. Wilson's government immediately re-opened discussions about a potential application, as Pompidou appeared more amenable to British entry than de Gaulle had been, and at the Labour Party conference in September 1969 Wilson told his audience that 'if … the Six are ready for negotiations to

[10] Briggs, *Competition*, Appendix C.
[11] BBC, 'Charles Curran'. Accessed online at https://www.bbc.com/historyofthebbc/research/directors-general/charles-curran] on 23 April 2021; A. Briggs, 'Charles Curran', Oxford Dictionary of National Biography. Accessed online at https://www.oxforddnb.com/display/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-37333 on 23 April 2021.

begin, we are ready'.[12] With an application on the table, the Six discussed enlargement at the Hague summit of December 1969 and declared themselves open to beginning negotiations in 1970.[13] However, by the time of the general election in June 1970, negotiations had still not begun. Of the five general elections between 1964 and 1974, this was the one at which the two major parties' stances on the EEC had most in common. Labour's manifesto stated that 'we have applied for membership of the European Economic Community and negotiations are due to start in a few weeks' time. These will be pressed with determination with the purpose of joining an enlarged community provided that British and essential Commonwealth interests can be safeguarded'.[14] Meanwhile, the Conservative manifesto wrote that 'if we can negotiate the right terms, we believe that it would be in the long-term interest of the British people for Britain to join the European Economic Community'.[15] Even the wording was very similar: Labour had 'if satisfactory terms cannot be secured in the negotiations Britain will be able to stand on her own feet outside the Community', while the Conservatives had 'these policies will strengthen Britain so that we can negotiate with the European Community confident in the knowledge that we can stand on our own if the price is too high'.[16] It was expected that the election would bring a continuation of the Labour government; instead, the Conservatives under Heath achieved a shock victory.[17]

Unlike Labour, the new government was not wrestling with serious internal divisions on European integration and could proceed with negotiations enthusiastically and at once. But there remained a bipartisan approach to the negotiations; the new government only 'had to … pick up the briefs and files

[12] S. Wall, *Reluctant Europeans: Britain and the European Union from 1945 to Brexit* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), p. 83; S. Wall, *The Official History of Britain and the European Community: Volume II: From Rejection to Referendum, 1963-1975* (London: Routledge, 2013), p. 335, 339, 341.
[13] D. Gowland and A. Turner, *Reluctant Europeans: Britain and European Integration 1945-1998* (Harlow: Pearson, 2000), p. 175.
[14] F. W. S. Craig (ed.), *British General Election Manifestos 1900-1974* (London: Macmillan, 1975), pp. 365-366.
[15] Craig (ed.), *British General Election Manifestos*, p. 342.
[16] Craig (ed.), *British General Election Manifestos,* p. 342.; Craig (ed.), *British General Election Manifestos*, p. 329.
[17] M. Broad, *Harold Wilson, Denmark and the Making of Labour European Policy, 1958-72* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2017), p. 220.

that had been in the making for three years' under Labour and there was 'a depth of continuity that was greater than has often been understood'.[18] However, this mood was quickly destroyed by a renewed outspokenness among Labour anti-Marketeers, which left Wilson with the fiendishly difficult task of preventing divides in his party over Europe from breaking out into open conflict. To do this successfully, he manoeuvred himself into a position where he could oppose the terms that were being negotiated by Heath's government, but not the principle of the application itself.[19] The negotiations themselves proceeded smoothly enough, such that on 28 October 1971 a vote was taken in the House of Commons on the motion 'that this House approves Her Majesty's Government's decision to join the European Communities on the basis of the arrangements which have been negotiated'.[20] Wilson imposed a three-line whip on Labour MPs to vote against the motion, while Heath allowed a free vote among Conservative MPs.[21] The whip did not stop 69 Labour MPs from voting for the motion, which passed with a resounding majority of 112.[22] Rebellions – in both parties, but especially Labour – continued through the remainder of the divisions required to approve the legislation necessary to secure British entry, but did not prevent the bills from passing into law.[23] This successful passage through Parliament would result in the United Kingdom joining the EEC on 1 January 1973. The complexity of Labour's stance throughout these years – in contrast to the unequivocally pro-Market position of the Conservative party, albeit with some backbench dissenters – posed a significant problem for the BBC, which had to grapple with complex issues of balance, impartiality, cross-party support and intra-party dissent, as will be explored in this chapter.

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[18] H. Young, *This Blessed Plot: Britain and Europe from Churchill to Blair* (London: Macmillan, 1998), pp. 223-224.
[19] B. Pimlott, *Harold Wilson* (London: HarperCollins, 1992), p. 583; R. Saunders, *Yes to Europe! The 1975 Referendum and Seventies Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), p. 61; U. Kitzinger, *Diplomacy and Persuasion: How Britain Joined the Common Market* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973), pp. 371-372.
[20] Kitzinger, *Diplomacy and Persuasion*, p. 329, 371.
[21] R. Broad, *Labour's European Dilemmas: From Bevin to Blair* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), p. 84.
[22] Broad, Labour's European Dilemmas, p. 85; Kitzinger, Diplomacy and Persuasion, p. 373.
[23] Kitzinger, *Diplomacy and Persuasion*, pp. 387-389.

Historiography

This period, especially the remainder of the 1960s, has been curiously under-researched by historians – a recent spate of publications on Britain's relationship with European integration in the 1970s tends to focus on the period after membership.

We are more reliant than usual, therefore, on contemporaneous studies. One, by Uwe Kitzinger, is of paramount important in providing a thorough and erudite account of 'how Britain joined the Common Market'.[24] His comprehensive research provided a basis for some of the material in this chapter, and his personal papers (on his research for that book) have been utilised to add detail on television coverage of the Common Market in the early 1970s. This is the one chapter of this thesis for which there are several existing publications on the broadcast media's coverage of European integration, because it is the first period in which the government ran a comprehensive publicity campaign on the issue. Paul Gliddon's two articles on the publicity campaign and on the involvement of the broadcasters also provided a starting point for the research on this chapter, although his focus is on the activities of the government rather than on the agency of the BBC.[25] He provides one angle; this chapter will provide an alternative lens through which to view the events that he analyses.

More broadly, this chapter works with the historiography surrounding declinism and the reasons for Britain's entry into the EEC. For David Edgerton, the 1970s was the decade during which 'declinism got such a grip on the elite imagination that grotesquely exaggerated accounts of relative economic failure proliferated'.[26] And in the introduction to their ambitious edited collection on *Reassessing 1970s Britain*, Lawrence Black and Hugh Pemberton argue that it was in this decade that 'to ordinary Britons, decline seemed now to be all too apparent and

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[24] *Ibid.*

[25] P. Gliddon, 'The British Foreign Office and Domestic Propaganda on the European Community, 1960-72', *Contemporary British History* 23:2 (2009), 155-180; P. Gliddon, 'Programmes Subjected to Interference: The Heath Government, Broadcasting and the European Community, 1970-1971', *History* 91:3 (2006), 401-424.

[26] D. Edgerton, *The Rise and Fall of the British Nation: A Twentieth-century History* (London: Penguin, 2019), p. 406.

experienced at home'.[27] Britain was widely perceived to be a nation that was suffering, and the debate over whether she should apply for membership of the Common Market was wrapped up in this perception. There was a sense that something needed to change, and the Common Market was seen by some as an answer to Britain's problems. The debate on this revolved around the combination of economic and political issues discussed in previous chapters: sovereignty, economic growth, geopolitics, trade. This chapter will detail how these issues were covered by the BBC, building on a limited historiography – unlike for the Macmillan and Wilson governments, there has been relatively little analysis of why Heath also decided to apply for membership, beyond his own pro-European inclinations. Had the key arguments changed between the earlier periods and these years, or had they remained broadly similar? How widespread was support for joining, and how may the BBC's activities have impacted on this? These are questions that have not been asked often enough by historians, and this chapter will attempt to answer them as it considers the period from 1968 until 1972.

1968-70
THE DEMISE OF CHARLES DE GAULLE'S PRESIDENCY AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF BIPARTISANSHIP

With Wilson's application remaining on the table, the ball was left in de Gaulle's court, and European integration campaigners continued to make their case. For anti-Market advocates in particular, stuck with the leadership of every major party supporting membership, having their views heard on the airwaves remained crucial.

Unfortunately for them, they were seen as 'outsiders' by the BBC, unable to exert much influence on its staff, while pro-Market supporters were 'insiders' who had a network of contacts within the Corporation and were able to use this to their advantage at times. Wyn Grant, in his theory of insider groups, argues that they

[27] L. Black and H. Pemberton, 'Introduction: The benighted decade? Reassessing the 1970s' in L. Black, H. Pemberton and P. Thane (eds.), *Reassessing 1970s Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 1-24, p. 5.

are defined by three key characteristics: they are 'recognised by government as legitimate spokespersons for particular interests or causes', are 'allowed to engage in a dialogue on issues of concern to them', and 'they implicitly agreed to abide by certain rules of the game'.[28] While he is talking in the context of groups classed as 'insiders' by government, his characteristics can be adapted to show that pro-Market groups, often closely connected to the major party leaderships, were recognised as 'insider' groups by the BBC, while anti-Market groups, generally involving MPs who were on the margins of their own parties, were not. The government and party leaderships were seen as 'legitimate spokespersons'; the Anti-Common Market League (ACML) was not. The BBC was willing to engage in dialogue with the government and Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) officials; it was not willing to engage in dialogue with anti-Market groups. Unlike pro-Market insiders, anti-Market outsiders could not hope to directly influence BBC policymaking.

We see these dynamics at play throughout this period. John Paul, the ACML's Chairman, argued 'that the BBC ignored its existence'.[29] BBC NACA staff griped that complaints from the ACML were 'an annual event', and a response was swiftly dictated, rebuffing any suggestion of imbalance, and adding: 'The BBC did not pay any attention to leagues or pressure groups in the discussion, and in any case, there was no pro-Common Market League to balance the one now complaining'.[30] Rarely is the BBC's policy on impartiality around the Common Market so clearly marked out – they would take their steer from elsewhere, not from pressure groups, who they saw as 'outsiders' and somehow illegitimate in their Westminster-centric worldview. The BBC had a habit of dismissing pressure groups, such as that led by Mary Whitehouse.[31] They failed to recognise that there was little need for a strong pro-Market pressure group at this point, given the views dominating within each party – and the falseness of their claim that they ignored pressure groups would be demonstrated shortly, when the

[28] W. Grant, 'Pressure Politics: The Changing World of Pressure Groups', *Parliamentary Affairs* 57:2 (2004), 408-419, p. 408.
[29] Extract from NACA meeting minutes, 23 February 1968, WAC T58/226/1.
[30] *Ibid.*
[31] D. Hendy, *The BBC: A People's History* (London: Profile, 2022), p. 428.

European Movement came onto the scene. There was a narrowness of vision, a failure to recognise that the pro-Market consensus among the leadership of the three major parties meant that alternative avenues needed to be explored if the anti-Market case – which polls suggested was supported by a plurality of the electorate at this time – was to be put across adequately.[32]

By 1970 – and in contrast – we can see the BBC's eagerness to appease pro-Marketer representatives, who were 'insiders' in this Westminster-focused view of events. Harold Wilson himself was the most prominent of these 'insiders', as the prime minister who was now reviving Britain's membership bid with a White Paper titled *Britain and the European Communities: An Economic Assessment*. Membership was a realistic prospect now, with Georges Pompidou installed as French President.[33] Sitting alongside it was the BBC's fractious relationship with Wilson, who had 'provocatively' installed Lord Hill as Chairman to bring about Greene's 'downfall', called for the BBC to cut its costs, and 'scrupulously recorded' his numerous complaints to the Corporation, feeling himself regularly 'misused' in their programmes.[34]

Wilson was keen to minimise media coverage of the issue, feeling that the more prominent it became the greater the risk of exposing Labour divisions and public opinion turning against him. He asked Cabinet ministers to avoid discussing the White Paper on TV or radio until Parliament had debated it, and he personally went to Curran and Sir Robert Fraser, Director-General of ITA (Independent Television Authority), with a similar request.[35]

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[32] Gallup, *British attitudes towards the Common Market, 1957-1971* (London: Gallup, 1971), p. 6.
[33] M. Pine, *Harold Wilson and Europe: Pursuing Britain's Membership of the European Community* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2007, 2012 edn.), p. 129.
[34] D. MacShane, 'Media Policy and the Left' in J. Seaton and B. Pimlott (eds.), *The Media in British Politics* (Aldershot: Avebury, 1987), 215-235, p. 220; C. Higgins, *This New Noise: The Extraordinary Birth and Troubled Life of the BBC* (London: Guardian Books, 2015), p. 117; S. Barnett and A. Curry, *The Battle for the BBC: A British Broadcasting Conspiracy?* (London: Aurum Press, 1994), p. 15; K. Morgan, *Britain since 1945: The people's peace* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001 edn.), p. 311; P. Ziegler, *Harold Wilson: The Authorised Life* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1993), pp. 269-70.
[35] Conclusions of a Meeting of the Cabinet, 3 February 1970, TNA CAB128/45/5.

Wilson's argument was that it would be 'inappropriate' for the issue to be 'the subject of a confrontation' on TV and explained that 'it would be difficult for Ministers to take part in any public debate on the White Paper in advance of the Parliamentary debate'.[36] This left Curran with a choice – should the BBC acquiesce to Wilson's request or not? Should it avoid discussing an important national issue to appease the PM, or should it ignore his request and provide the public with a range of views? Curran decided on the former, agreeing not to broadcast discussion on of the White Paper and promising to instead to explain the subject, 'on the ground that information should precede argument'. This would have effectively led to a pro-government and pro-Market stance by default, with broadcasting on the facts of the pro-Market White Paper not countered by dissenting, anti-Market views; but instead, despite an instruction being given to the ENCA, no factual, explanatory programme occurred, demonstrating the limits of Curran's authority in a way that 'appalled' the governors.[37] Eventually, a 'full and serious' programme on the Common Market was broadcast in primetime the following week.[38]

Wilson returned to Cabinet two days after his meeting with Curran, reporting that the Director-General 'had agreed that it should be factual and educational and aim to avoid political controversy'.[39] Curran helped the PM reduce the chances of an upsurge in anti-Market feeling derailing his plans. The DG thought that the BBC was meeting its obligation to remain impartial by presenting 'factual and educational' coverage. In his eagerness to avoid 'controversy', he showed a lack of bravery and instead avoided political discussion on one of the most important topics of the day – the BBC had now transitioned from a positive stance, looking to lead and create the national debate, to a defensive one, in which it sought to avoid any kind of controversy. It was a win for the government – Wilson hoped that if ITA took the same stance, it would be 'possible to avoid the need for Ministers to take part in the presentation of the

[36] Conclusions of a Meeting of the Cabinet, 5 February 1970, TNA CAB128/45/6.
[37] C. Hill, *Behind the screen: The broadcasting memoirs of Lord Hill* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1974), p. 154.
[38] *Ibid.*
[39] Conclusions of a Meeting of the Cabinet, 5 February 1970, TNA CAB/128/45/6.

White Paper'.[40] He was hoping that the broadcasters would make the government's arguments for them, thereby negating the need for Ministers to themselves explain the government's position on the airwaves. Curran was happy to oblige.

After the White Paper was presented to Parliament in February, the BBC's engagement with the government increased as negotiations drew closer. In May, Con O'Neill (then Deputy Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs (European Integration)) asked Robin Haydon (then Head of News Department at the FCO) whether it would be possible to arrange a TV appearance for Jacques Duhamel, the French Minister of Agriculture, so that he could show British viewers that France was now open to the idea of UK membership.[41]

Haydon acted promptly on O'Neill's suggestion. He had an 'informal word' with Paul Hodgson, a Panorama producer who was described by Haydon as 'a very constant and vigorous supporter of our policy towards the EEC and most willing to help'.[42] This was early evidence of a network of informal contacts between the BBC and FCO that would blossom during Edward Heath's premiership. The FCO felt they could rely on certain BBC staff members to support their agenda, and gently nudge them into presenting the issue of European integration in a way that was amenable to the pro-Market cause. Bluntly, there was an expectation at the FCO that they could rely on Hodgson – a relatively senior member of staff, who later moved to the BBC's new office in Brussels 'at the direct request' of Curran – to act in a manner that favoured their cause.[43] Sue Bonner, a long-serving BBC staff member who ran the Brussels office, recalled that it had been opened at the direct request of Curran so that the BBC could best cover the ongoing plans for entry.[44]

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[40] Conclusions of a Meeting of the Cabinet, 5 February 1970, TNA CAB/128/45/6.
[41] Wall, *Reluctant Europeans*, p. 89; FCO Historians, 'A Directory of British Diplomats', Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 2014, p. 376. Accessed online at https://issuu.com/fcohistorians/docs/bdd_part_1_with_covers on 8 April 2021.
[42] Memorandum from W. R. Haydon to Sir C. O'Neill, 7 May 1970, TNA FCO26/573.
[43] G. Mansell, 'Paul C. Hodgson 1923-2009'. Accessed online at http://www.aej-uk.org/Paul%20C%20Hodgson.docx on 8 April 2021.
[44] S. Bonner, personal interview with the author, 14 September 2020.

In the end, Hodgson decided that Duhamel's English was not fluent enough to allow for a live programme, but his suggestions of other ways for Duhamel to influence opinion in Britain demonstrated his proactive support for the pro-Market campaign.[45] When the FCO wanted help from BBC staff with their pro-Market publicity, they knew they would find some loyal allies. The BBC saw the government as insiders, and producers were willing to listen to the ideas and arguments proposed by them about how it should cover European integration. In contrast, outsider groups such as the ACML – with far less representation in Westminster – were dismissed as irrelevant and illegitimate.

This was another example, to add to those in the previous chapter, of the BBC failing to adapt to the changing circumstances of the debate about British involvement in European integration. Ignoring outside pressure groups may have made sense in 1963, when there was a clear divide between Conservative and Labour views on European integration, but by 1968, with a consensus between the parties, it no longer made sense. The BBC's conception of 'impartiality' was limited by its party-political and Westminster-centric viewpoint.

Things were changing fast too. By the time Duhamel arrived in London (without a BBC appearance), Britain had a new government. The Conservatives, led by Edward Heath – who demonstrated his skills as a television performer during the campaign – sprung a surprise victory.[46] It was therefore his government that oversaw the opening of negotiations with the Six, adopting the negotiating briefs drawn up for the Labour government. As these negotiations progressed, the relationship between government (and especially the FCO) and the BBC became increasingly intimate, building upon the foundations detailed above.

[45] Memorandum from W. R. Haydon to Sir C. O'Neill, 7 May 1970, TNA FCO26/573.
[46] P. Ziegler, *Edward Heath: The Authorised Biography* (London: HarperPress, 2010), p. 221.

1970-72
HEATH'S 'GREATEST SUCCESS' – BRITAIN AGREES TO JOIN THE EEC[47]

Britain now had as its leader a man for whom the 'central plank' of his political purpose was to achieve EC membership, a man who had made his maiden Commons speech in support of British membership of the ECSC, and who had led the initial negotiations under Harold Macmillan's government.[48] Heath was 'arguably Britain's most "European" prime minister since the Second World War'.[49] His personal allegiance to the cause was intimately tied up with his political career; Andrew Geddes writes that 'a commitment to European integration was a long-standing component of his political credo'.[50] He did not want to let this chance slip. It was a personal mission.

It was for this reason that he launched a campaign to persuade the British public to support the membership application, creating a climate of opinion conducive to the pro-Marketers and therefore encouraging MPs to vote for entry.[51] The FCO was enlisted in this endeavour, with the Information Research Department (IRD) moving away from its normal Cold War role to form the European Communities Information Unit (ECIU). These entities within the FCO conducted a broad campaign, with one objective being 'to achieve favourable TV and radio coverage of its policy'.[52] This was the most significant pro-European publicity campaign yet directed by the government.[53] Gliddon correctly argues that Heath's government 'practised an interventionist style of media relations', especially in comparison to his two immediate predecessors. There were formal, written complaints both retrospectively about programmes already broadcast, and prospectively about forthcoming programmes (including

[47] Heath, *Course of My Life*, p. 380.
[48] Campbell, *Edward Heath*, p. 442; Aqui, *The First Referendum*, p. 1.
[49] Aqui, *The First Referendum*, p. 1.
[50] A. Geddes, 'Europe', in K. Hickson (ed.), *The Political Thought of the Conservative Party since 1945* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 113-132, p. 121.
[51] Gliddon, 'Programmes Subjected to Interference', p. 405.
[52] *Ibid*, p. 406.
[53] Gliddon, 'The British Foreign Office', p. 156.

from Heath himself); and extensive use was also made of more informal relationships between FCO and BBC staff.[54]

BBC-government relations

These informal relationships between the FCO and the BBC underpinned the government's Common Market public relations strategy, and influenced the BBC's coverage. The campaign's priority was to secure favourable coverage in the broadcast media; influencing the press took on only secondary importance, given that the overwhelming majority of newspapers already supported entry.

Most of the BBC's contact was with the ECIU, which was established by Sir Anthony Royle, an FCO minister, in September 1970. He 'informed the secret government propaganda unit of its new duties in a five page memo after discussions with Geoffrey Rippon, the Europe Minister and Willie Whitelaw', then Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons.[55] This was to be a low profile unit; Royle stated that 'it is important that the Foreign Office is not known to be inspiring, encouraging and helping to educate public opinion'.[56] There was a tacit understanding that this was a task which the public would disapprove of government engaging in. Indeed, when Uwe Kitzinger wrote his contemporaneous work on the campaign for entry, senior FCO figures (Royle and Norman Reddaway) urged him to delete altogether the section 'on collaboration between the European Movement, the government, and the media,' and suggested that he would become a traitor to the cause he supported (Kitzinger was pro-Market) if he went ahead and published it.[57] When Royle and Reddaway met with Kitzinger and his publisher, John Goulding, they made suggestions for changes he may like to consider making to his manuscript,

[54] Gliddon, 'Programmes Subjected to Interference', p. 423.
[55] H. Thorpe, 'Former MP's role revealed', *Richmond & Twickenham Times*, 11 July 2003. Accessed online at https://www.richmondandtwickenhamtimes.co.uk/news/392168.former-mps-role-revealed/ on 13 December 2022.
[56] P. Day, 'Secret dirty tricks team spread pro-Europe propaganda for Heath', *Daily Telegraph*, 23 June 2003. Accessed online at https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1433795/Secret-dirty-tricks-team-spread-pro-Europe-propaganda-for-Heath.html on 12 December 2022.
[57] Letter from J. Goulding (Thames and Hudson) to U. Kitzinger, 13 July 1972, U. Kitzinger's private papers.

and 'most of their points seemed designed to avoid mention of the Civil Service as having had any but the most humdrum role in the affair'.[58] Specifically, they wanted 'to play down the idea of there having been a conspiracy'.[59] The implication was that if Labour anti-Marketers discovered the close involvement of the civil service in formulating a pro-Market publicity campaign, they would have a valid case that this was improper. The ECIU was the unit behind much of this pro-Market publicity emanating from the civil service, and it became part of an informal network that also encompassed the BBC.

The ECIU very quickly built up an informal network of contacts within the BBC, regularly lunching with BBC producers and other staff, allowing ECIU officials and other pro-Marketers to make speaker proposals.

In April 1971, for example, Stanley Budd from the ECIU raised concerns about an *Analysis* programme that was to be produced by Roland Challis, dealing with 'the possibility that the talks may break down'.[60] Budd thought the proposed speakers were 'a truly appalling selection', right down to the presenter, Leonard Beaton, 'a raving anti-Marketeer'.[61] His discontent clear, Budd invited Challis for a lunch at which he could propose alternative speakers.[62] The meeting was a success – for the ECIU. Budd reported back with 'slightly more cheerful news', namely that Challis is 'himself a convinced pro-Marketeer, and it is he, not Leonard Beaton, who will be responsible for the editing and assembly of the "Analysis" programme'.[63] Budd had also 'persuaded him to try for Lord Harlech instead of Lord Gladwyn, to introduce Harold Lever (or failing him Andrew Shonfield) as an antidote to Professor Kaldor, and to add Richard Mayne to his list'.[64]

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[58] Letter from J. Goulding (Thames and Hudson) to U. Kitzinger, 18 July 1972, U. Kitzinger's private papers.
[59] *Ibid.*
[60] Memorandum from S. A. Budd to Mr Adams, 20 April 1971, TNA FCO26/821.
[61] *Ibid.*
[62] *Ibid.*
[63] Memorandum from S. A. Budd to Mr Adams and Mr Ford, 'Roland Challis: BBC Analysis Programme on the Common Market', 22 April 1971, TNA FCO26/821.
[64] *Ibid.*

This was a deliberate attempt by government to influence the array of speakers present on a BBC programme. Was this proper? And did it lead to the BBC better fulfilling their obligation to seek impartiality, and to a better programme?

Gliddon argues that it was improper and unconstitutional for the government to seek to influence BBC coverage in this way.[65] Ministers still referred back to the government view of 1926, when the Postmaster-General had declared that 'while I am prepared to take responsibility for broad issues of policy, on … matters of day-to-day control I want to leave things to the free judgment of the Corporation'.[66] Clearly, that was ignored in this instance with a senior civil servant using his position as a government insider to exert pressure on the BBC. Gliddon is correct, therefore, to view the government's actions as improper.

But this does not mean that the BBC, in being influenced by a civil servant, was neglecting its obligation to seek impartiality. The final list of speakers for the *Analysis* programme was not overwhelmingly tilted towards one side of the debate – and stronger speakers were found as a result of Budd's advice, making for a better programme. Crucially, decision-making power rested with Challis. If there are grounds for complaint here, it would not be that he listened to the arguments and guidance of a pro-Market civil servant, but that he did not *also* listen to an anti-Market supporter. The outsider status of the anti-Marketers restricted them from taking advantage of close contacts with programme-makers, while civil servants and pro-Marketers used their insider status to their advantage.

Informal relationships also enabled the ECIU to influence panellists more indirectly – and in ways that raise more troubling questions about BBC propriety. It liaised closely with the European Movement, a pro-Market and cross-party pressure group that had itself been asked for speaker suggestions by the BBC. In April 1971, for example, Mrs de Courcy Murville from the European Movement was approached by the BBC to 'choose nine subjects and nine

[65] Gliddon, 'Programmes Subjected to Interference', p. 423.
[66] British Broadcasting Corporation, *BBC Handbook 1970* (London: BBC, 1970), p. 166.

speakers to speak on them' for a forthcoming television programme on Britain's relationship with the EEC that 'would take the form of a series of very short confrontations between pros and antis'.[67]

She in turn approached the ECIU for their suggestions, and they responded with a list of topics and names, urging her 'to make good use of the strong marketeers on the Labour Front Bench' and suggesting topics such as 'the consequences of staying outside the Common Market' that would never be proposed by the anti-Market side.[68]

Although the programme did not end up being broadcast, this interaction remains notable for three reasons. Firstly, the ECIU was making a conscious effort to have Opposition pro-Marketers involved in making the pro-Market case on television, enhancing the impression of a pro-Market consensus among politicians. Secondly, the BBC proactively encouraged the European Movement to propose topics and speakers for a supposedly 'balanced' programme. There is no evidence that equivalent encouragement was given to an anti-Market group – indeed, just a few years earlier the BBC had said it 'did not pay any attention' to pressure groups. That was evidently no longer true. And thirdly, the interaction with the European Movement underscores the value to the pro-Market side of having a coherent and competent umbrella organisation fighting their cause. As Jean Seaton has written, 'some groups – stronger, richer, and with better access – are always able to secure more attention than others'.[69] In this case, that benefited the pro-Market side, which was able to influence BBC coverage to their benefit. In contrast, the anti-Marketeers were 'outsiders', unable to liaise with the ECIU, missing out on these benefits and unable to try to tilt the debate in the same way.

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[67] Memorandum from W. J. Adams to Mr Ford, 29 March 1971, TNA FCO26/818.
[68] *Ibid.*
[69] J. Seaton, 'Introduction', in J. Curran and J. Seaton (eds.), *Power Without Responsibility: The Press and Broadcasting in Britain* (London: Routledge, 1997, 5th edn.), p. 1.

It was not only through the selection of speakers and panellists that the ECIU and European Movement exerted an influence on day-to-day BBC programme-making. They also actively oversaw and occasionally intervened in the production process itself.

One example of this came in February 1971, when James Kemp from the BBC's Scottish Service contacted Mr Pottinger, then Under Secretary in the Scottish Office. Kemp was hoping to produce a series of programmes on the Common Market, and thought it would be useful to visit Brussels.[70] He was put in contact with G. A. Ford of the ECIU, who told Kemp that the unit 'would certainly do what we could to help'.[71]

Plans progressed quickly after Kenneth Christofas of the UK delegation to the EC in Brussels became involved – he 'supposed that someone was coordinating what was being done by the BBC on the subject of our relations with the Common Market'. [72] In the end, Pottinger travelled to Brussels with Kemp and Hugh Cochrane, who was to present the programme.[73]

During the trip, Christofas raised concerns about potential impropriety; Pottinger desired to be present while Kemp and Cochrane spoke to EEC officials, and he wrote that 'this did not seem to me to be compatible with the independence of the BBC'.[74] His views underscore the improper behaviour of government representatives outlined earlier. Christofas – a senior diplomat whose goal was to obtain British EC membership – was concerned that Pottinger, a civil servant, was attempting to interfere in BBC programme-making to make it more favourable to the pro-Market side. Those inside the ECIU did not seem much perturbed; Budd only commented that he hoped the BBC in London might take the hint of producing a similar programme.

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[70] Memorandum from J. A. Ford to Miss Petrie, 9 February 1971, TNA FCO/26/818.
[71] *Ibid.*
[72] Memorandum from K. C. Christofas to Mr. Richards, 'Television', 9 February 1971, TNA FCO/26/818.
[73] Memorandum from P. E. Rosling to Mr Ford, 10 February 1971, TNA FCO/26/818.
[74] Memorandum from K. C. Christofas to Mr. Richards, 'Television', 16 February 1971, TNA FCO/26/818.

The programme on which Kemp was working on was to be an exploration of 'what Scotland would have to offer to an enlarged Community', an implicitly pro-Market framing, and Budd gradually became more closely involved with the series.[75]

In April 1971, he reported to W. J. Adams (also of the ECIU) on a recent visit he had made to Glasgow to liaise with BBC TV, which he found 'useful and productive'; he had been able to sit 'in on the entire plotting session for the third and most important of the programmes planned'.[76] Remarkably, he did not simply 'sit in' as a silent observer, but made comments that actively interfered in the programme-making process. He wrote:

> My journey was worth-while on one count alone. The programme is to begin with what TV people call "Vox Pop" where people are stopped in the streets and asked for their opinion. The original plan was merely to mount a mini-referendum: "Do you think Britain should join or not." I fear they may still do this, but I think I have persuaded them also to ask another question: "Can you name the present countries of the Common Market", which should at least put the answers in some sort of perspective.[77]

Of course, there was no obligation on the BBC producers to accede to his suggestions, and there is no suggestion that they made any decisions because they wanted to make the programme reflect a more pro-Market stance. Budd's suggestion may have improved the programme, and there is no suggestion that the programme breached impartiality requirements as a result. But it was nonetheless improper for a civil servant to be so closely involved in the minutiae of programme-making, and in this case the BBC may also have acted improperly by allowing Budd's presence in the session. When one recalls that Christofas raised concerns over a less blatant indiscretion, it is remarkable that Budd and Kemp were more than willing to commit a far more egregious breach of protocol, demonstrating the closeness of the BBC and the ECIU.

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[75] Memorandum from S. A. Budd to Miss Petrie, 'Scottish Television – Programmes on the EEC', 17 February 1971, TNA FCO/26/818.
[76] Memorandum from S. A. Budd to Mr Adams, 'Trips to Leeds and Glasgow', 13 April 1971, TNA FCO/26/818.
[77] *Ibid.*

This was not a one-off incident; cooperation continued as the making of the series progressed, with the BBC taking the lead. Kemp ran the suggestion by Budd that he [Budd] 'should be there [in Glasgow] as a sort of saver of time; that I might be able to give an indication of whether or not it was likely that certain politicians, journalists, etc., would be good visual material, to discuss ideas for the programme itself, and, if necessary, to get a quick opinion from London or Brussels on the prospects of getting Mme Lepere, Mr Buchanan-Smith, or whomever, to appear on the programme'.[78] Understandably, Budd thought this 'a splendid opportunity which should be grasped'.[79] The way in which the BBC were making programmes actively benefitted the pro-Marketers, who themselves recognised this. It demonstrates the ways in which the BBC interacted with 'insider' groups, in ways that they would never have considered interacting with 'outsiders', such as anti-Marketeers. There is also an implicit suggestion that the BBC, in conceiving the public debate on European integration, believed that because all party leaders supported the principle of EC entry, there was less need to avoid the perception that the Corporation was too close to government.

Budd himself thought that his privileged access to the BBC gained some results, which he described in a memorandum on the three programmes. The first programme was 'very well done and made a considerable impact', and the second was 'balanced and fair, if not particularly gripping'. However, the third programme was 'astonishingly pro-market in flavour, as well as being good television'.[80] For a pro-Marketeer to be saying this lends it greater credence, and brings into question the BBC's impartiality.

It is tempting to conclude that this incident should lead to an immediate denunciation of the BBC, but we must remain cautious for several reasons. Firstly, and critically, the BBC was required to remain impartial across its entire output, rather than within single programmes. This was the bedrock of its policy

[78] Memorandum from Mr Budd to James, April 1971, TNA FCO/26/818.
[79] *Ibid.*
[80] Memorandum from S. A. Budd to Mr Adams and Mr Ford, 'BBC Scottish TV Programmes on the Common Market', 3 May 1971, TNA FCO/26/819.

and ensured that a wide variety of voices could be heard and explored – it helped those with minority views to be heard yet also ensured that their huge audiences were not, on the whole, presented with a distorted view of events. The existence of a single pro-Market programme, therefore, does not necessarily mean that BBC programmes were, overall, breaching their requirement to seek impartiality. Secondly, the expression of surprise from Budd – 'astonishingly' – suggests that this programme was an isolated example of partiality, and was therefore the exception that proved the rule. Thirdly, Budd was unable to provide a view on how each programme might portray the pro-Market cause until he had viewed them himself, suggesting his involvement in making the programmes remained limited.

While it was improper for Kemp to work so closely with Budd, there is no evidence that a pro-Market bias was widespread in BBC programming. Consultation with ECIU officials – experts on European integration – had the potential to improve BBC coverage, and editorial control remained with the Corporation itself. However, it is important to note that this consultation was not available to the outsider anti-Marketers, who were rebuffed when they contacted the BBC, who made no attempts to proactively contact them. In this instance, the ECIU could look back on a job well done with Budd reiterating his hope that the BBC would make similar programmes in London too.[81]

Media breakfasts

The informal network and relationships between pro-Market groups and the BBC was even more prominent among more senior politicians and officials, who held weekly 'media breakfasts' at the Connaught Hotel in Mayfair. These were organised by Geoffrey Tucker, a Conservative public relations consultant who was involved in the European Movement, and brought together notable people from various backgrounds – politics, industry, business, the civil service, voluntary groups, journalism.[82] Kitzinger notes that they were part of 'the

[81] *Ibid.*
[82] Kitzinger, *Diplomacy and Persuasion*, p. 205.

response of the pro-Market forces to demands from some of the media (notably television) for easier access to the vast body of disparate data they required to do their job of information properly, and for better communication with those who could help them gain some overall sense of perspective of the complex issues and tortuous processes of the Brussels negotiations'.[83] Among BBC staff, Ian Trethowan (then head of radio) and Marshall Stewart (then editor of the *Today* programme) were among the attendees.[84] There were valid journalistic reasons for attending these events (those present were briefed on how negotiations with the EEC were progressing), although it seems unlikely that the BBC would have been represented by senior figures such as Trethowan and Stewart had this been the main reason for the presence of BBC representatives.[85]

The breakfasts enabled a two-way relationship between those in the media and those outside: those in the media received useful information about the Common Market, and in return those who were 'long-standing Marketeers [had the opportunity] to awaken both the government and the private pro-Market organizations to the importance of more skilful public relations'.[86] Anti-Market Labour MP Peter Shore saw these breakfasts as evidence that on the EEC, 'the role of the media was … unbalanced almost beyond anything in my political lifetime'.[87] He gave two reasons for this thinking. Firstly, that the press were overwhelmingly in favour of entry. And secondly, that 'the BBC involved itself with the "media breakfasts" … in order to stimulate and advise upon how the 'Yes' campaign would win'.[88] Whether this was the reason for the BBC's attendance or not, it is clear that this was indeed an objective of the breakfasts; Kitzinger writes that journalists present would give their 'frank' views on how the European Movement and Whitehall could improve their public relations campaigns.[89]

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[83] *Ibid*, p. 204.
[84] Gliddon, 'Programmes Subjected to Interference', p. 408.
[85] *Ibid.*
[86] Kitzinger, *Diplomacy and Persuasion*, p. 204.
[87] R. Broad and T. Geiger (eds.), 'Witness Seminar: The 1975 British Referendum on Europe', *Contemporary Record* 10:3 (1996), 82-105, pp. 91-92.
[88] *Ibid.*
[89] Kitzinger, *Diplomacy and Persuasion*, p. 205.

One notable incident occurred with the sacking of Jack de Manio, then host of the *Today* programme; a Radio Four documentary called *A Letter to the Times* in 2000 recorded that Geoffrey Tucker and other personalities present at these breakfasts had complained to Trethowan and Stewart about de Manio because they thought he was 'terribly anti-European'. Two weeks later, de Manio was removed from his post. He was replaced by Robert Robinson who, along with John Timpson reporting from Brussels, 'started the nation's day with a certain amount of interest in and even at times apparent enthusiasm for the cause', according to Kitzinger.[90] This observation of potential partiality in the *Today* programme is more striking given it was made by a professed federalist and pro-European. It is not known whether the decision to sack de Manio was based entirely or in part on his views on European integration – the BBC turned at this time to hiring *Today* presenters who were more willing to get involved in the preparation of the programme.[91] But it is notable that one pro-Market politician present when the complaints were made – Roy Hattersley – 'was so shocked he decided he couldn't go again'.[92] In analysing these breakfasts, Gliddon concluded that the government's involvement in them was 'constitutionally questionable'.[93]

For the BBC, it was clearly in their interests to attend. If their staff had not, they would have missed out on valuable information that was provided to members of other media organisations, including ITN. We should therefore judge the attendance of BBC staff not on the *possibility* that it enabled pressure to be exerted on the BBC to force out an anti-Market figure, but based on the *knowledge* that in enabled the BBC to gain access to information which enabled them to produce more informative programmes on the EEC and the ongoing negotiations. However, we should again note the benefit to the pro-Market side of being an insider group – they were well-organised, well-connected and could provide updates to the media on real news events. In contrast, the anti-Marketeers were poorly organised, poorly connected, and could not assist the

[90] *Ibid*, p. 206.
[91] D. Hendy, *Life on Air: A History of Radio Four* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 50-51.
[92] M. Vestey, 'Radio: The Nobbling Game', *The Spectator*, 12 February 2000, p. 51.
[93] Gliddon, 'Programmes Subjected to Interference', p. 408.

media by granting them access to privileged information – it was the pro-Market government, after all, who were conducting negotiations and creating news.

However, while there is little hard evidence that these breakfasts impacted BBC programming, Tucker himself believed that they had 'softened up the communicators responsible for most of these programmes', including *24 Hours*, *Panorama*, *The World at One*, *The World this Weekend*, and *Today*.[94] He thought that 'coverage of the Common Market has improved greatly', but this does not necessarily mean that it became less impartial; Kitzinger has noted the phenomenon whereby simply providing information about the EEC could act as an aid to the pro-Market cause, because it would demystify the Common Market and delegitimise anti-Market arguments.[95] Tucker also reported that 'we have found … that it is no good talking to the controllers and overseers', suggesting instead that 'it is essential that people on our side mark specific communicators'.[96] This implies that Trethowan was not seen as a key ally, and Tucker later confirmed that 'the contact must be made with the specific producers and directors of programmes', which included Stewart.[97] He even described Stewart as part of 'our personnel', with 'our' referring to the European Movement.[98]

The precise nature of these breakfasts and the conversations that occurred at them will likely never be known. However, their existence and the presence at the breakfasts of BBC staff (including senior figures such as Trethowan) demonstrate that the BBC were part of a broad, 'insider' network composed of public figures from various domains who were overwhelmingly pro-Market. When informed in 1972 of these breakfasts, the Labour MP William Rodgers wrote to Kitzinger that in his book he may like to emphasise 'more clearly the naturalness of [MPs] getting together on the issue'.[99] These breakfasts were attended by a wider circle than MPs alone, but they were themselves a natural

[94] Memorandum by Geoffrey Tucker, 'European Campaign', 1971, TNA FCO26/811.
[95] *Ibid*; Kitzinger, *Diplomacy and Persuasion*, p. 333.
[96] Memorandum by Geoffrey Tucker, 'European Campaign', 1971, TNA FCO26/811.
[97] *Ibid.*
[98] *Ibid.*
[99] Letter from W. Rodgers to U. Kitzinger, 11 July 1972, U. Kitzinger's private papers.

event – precisely what would be expected of a well-organised campaign. The informal web of relationships cultivated within the meetings shows that senior BBC figures were part of pro-European circles and, though this does not mean they failed to be impartial, it does show that their 'insider' networks were laid out in a way that was amenable to the interests of the European Movement.

However, the BBC did not roll over and allow the ECIU to have it all their own way. They were open to being persuaded or influenced by ECIU and FCO proposals if they deemed them editorially prudent, but would not automatically take the advice proffered. For example, in March 1971 they allowed members of the ECIU and FCO, including Norman Reddaway, to initiate the creation of a co-production series with Bavarian TV (see below), but then resisted attempts by the ECIU and FCO to maintain their involvement into the production period.[100] This was a reassertion of their independence, but only to a limited extent – the idea behind the proposed series will be discussed below.

There is also a sense in this period that, even without the assistance and encouragement of the ECIU, the BBC were enthusiastic about producing programmes on Britain and Europe, saturated with a newfound fervour. In January 1971, for example, Stephen Bonarjee (Editor, General Current Affairs Programmes (Radio)) wrote to A. C. Whitby (Controller, Radio Four) on the subject of the 'Common Market Project', and noted that 'such is the enthusiasm for this project that notes are beginning to blossom forth'.[101] This project would become *The Road to Europe* – the title was opposed by Bonarjee because he believed it implied 'that entry is … desirable or certain', but chosen anyway. He pressed for the presenter to be someone who had not then taken up a clear position in public on the Common Market issue, and it went to Alan Watson.[102] Yet Watson's views on European integration were far from ambiguous – Martin Herzer describes him as a Euro-journalist who was 'convinced that television

[100] Memorandum from C. F. Hill to Mr Reddaway, 'Publicity for entry into the EEC', 16 March 1971, TNA FCO26/818.
[101] Memorandum from S. Bonarjee (Ed.Gen.C.A.(R) to C.R4, 'Common Market Project', 25 January 1971, WAC R51/1081/1.
[102] *Radio Times*, 15-21 May 1971, p. 35. The listing wrote that 1971 would be 'the most momentous summer in British history since the war' because of the EEC debate.

should be used to promote European unity throughout Western Europe'.[103] Other names considered for presenting included John Tusa and Andrew Shonfield, both later known for their pro-Europeanism.[104] These further reflect the inherent tendency among BBC staff – later recognised by BIE following discussions with senior officials – to be supportive of European integration, but it is worth reiterating that this does not mean they produced programmes which failed to be impartial.[105] They were people with an interest in the subject who wanted to inform the public about it, making them suitable candidates for presenting programmes on the Common Market.

Relations with European broadcasters

Further evidence of enthusiasm within the BBC for producing programmes on Britain and Europe emerged when they were engaged in discussions with the ECIU over possible cooperation with the COI and Bavarian television, as briefly mentioned above. In early March 1971, Wynn Hugh-Jones from the ECIU contacted E. R. Cawston and A. E. Singer at the BBC, who were then Head of Documentary Department and Head of Features Group respectively. Hugh Jones' objective was to persuade the BBC to become involved in 'a COI/Bavarian television co-production of a TV series on Britain in Europe', and their 'response was agreeably favourable', although this was simplifying matters somewhat.[106] The BBC were reluctant to become involved in the co-production series, because they would be required to 'contribute expertise and technical facilities' while 'not actually producing the programmes'.[107] The Corporation also stated that any programmes they assisted with must be suitable for broadcast on British domestic television, and as such suggested an alternative

[103] M. Herzer, *The Media, European Integration and the Rise of Euro-Journalism, 1950s-1970s* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), p. 226.
[104] Memorandum from S. Bonarjee (Ed.Gen.C.A.(R) to C.R4, 'Common Market Project', 25 January 1971, WAC R51/1081/1.
[105] Memorandum from Con O'Neill to Eric Robertson, 'Britain in Europe Broadcasting Department (Monitoring)', 10 June 1975, PA BIE/1/5, p. 2.
[106] Memorandum from W. N. Hugh-Jones to Mr Brinson, 'TV Series on Britain in Europe', 12 March 1971, TNA FCO 26/818.
[107] Memorandum from W. N. Hugh-Jones to Mr Brinson, 'TV Series on Britain in Europe', 12 March 1971, TNA FCO 26/818.

to becoming involved with the above pre-existing project. Instead, they 'thought … that a programme or series on Britain's contributions to Europe in the arts, science, technology, etc. could possibly be a good thing to do, for the British audience, at this time'.[108] This is further evidence of a fresh eagerness within the BBC to make programmes that related to Britain and Europe; according to a memorandum prepared by Hugh-Jones, 'Mr. Singer took up the idea with alacrity'.[109] Moreover, it demonstrates that the BBC instinctively made a link between programmes about Britain and European political integration, and programmes about Britain and Europe in ostensibly apolitical fields.

This was a top-down process, with Singer noting that 'the big problem … would be to find a producer interested in the programme or series'.[110] High-level BBC figures were pursuing their own enthusiasm for programmes on Britain and Europe, and looking for producers to meet that enthusiasm. Singer explicitly noted that it was more common for programmes to be commissioned after a producer had the initial idea when he expressed his concerns about finding a producer.[111]

There was an unusual closeness between the BBC and the government in creating this programme. The BBC representatives were, however, keen to make explicit that they would 'almost prefer that no Government money should be put into it [the programme or series], but rather that it should be a BBC/Bavarian co-production'.[112] This may have been an expression of concern at the potential improprieties of allowing government to have a say in their programme-making, but it also demonstrates their enthusiasm for working with west European television companies on their own initiative.

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[108] *Ibid.*
[109] *Ibid.*
[110] *Ibid.*
[111] *Ibid.*
[112] *Ibid.*

The mention of funding also suggests that government money was offered, and they would only have done so if they believed that such a programme would be beneficial to the pro-Market cause. If their offer of funding had been accepted there would have been a hint of propaganda about the process. As it was, government funding was rejected and Singer also 'made it clear that … he would want to have editorial control in his own hands', although Hugh-Jones 'hoped that we [the ECIU] could at least be consulted on the initial brief'.[113]

The key takeaway from this episode is that when it came to programmes on the Common Market, senior BBC staff were willing to move away from the traditional producer-led creation of programmes, towards finding producers for ideas that had already originated from either themselves or from external sources, including, in this case, the government through the ECIU.

The willingness to work with Bavarian TV on this series reflected a growing trend within the BBC towards liaising with other western European television organisations. At the same time as the proposal for cooperation with Bavarian TV was being promulgated by Hugh-Jones – March 1971 – he was also encouraging closer relations between the BBC and ORTF, the broadcasting organisation operated by the French government.

In an internal ECIU memorandum, Hugh-Jones expressed this opinion that there had 'recently been a marked change of ORTF policy towards the BBC, a newfound desire for co-operation'; the relationship had previously been marred by a reluctance on the part of ORTF to work with the BBC.[114] Hugh-Jones promoted the continued improvement of BBC-ORTF relations, and thought that 'we can rely on the BBC to do their best. The Director-General, Mr. Curran, and the Managing Director (Television), Mr. Wheldon, are well seized on the need; and lower down, there is, I think, a powerful intellectual desire to get on

[113] *Ibid.*
[114] Memorandum from W. N. Hugh-Jones to Mr Drinkall, 'Anglo-French Broadcasting Corporation', 23 March 1971, TNA FCO26/818.

with the French'.[115] The ECIU clearly thought this would be to the UK's benefit as it sought to join the EEC.

This endeavour may be viewed as part of a broader realignment of BBC overseas relations, influenced by Curran's instinctive pro-European tendencies. Steeped in the BBC's internationalism as Director of External Broadcasting prior to his appointment as Director-General, Curran found that his Catholicism worked as a 'common ground of interest' with broadcasters in some European countries, and was proud of the 'solidarity of action' that he was able to create between broadcasters across Western Europe.[116] Almost from its formation until well into the post-war period, the BBC had prioritised its relationships with public broadcasters in the Commonwealth, and especially the 'old' Commonwealth, who were often constituted upon similar lines to the BBC itself.[117] Examples of these included the ABC in Australia and the CBC in Canada. Now, however, with the British government beginning to prioritise relations with western European nations over relations with Commonwealth nations, the BBC also sought to realign its overseas relations, making a considered effort to liaise more regularly and more closely with European broadcasters. While the Cold War was also an impetus for this too, the timing shows the centrality of European integration to making this happen.

In the case of ORTF, this meant working with a broadcaster that was organised upon different lines to the BBC; whereas the BBC was a public broadcaster, ORTF was a state broadcaster, a mouthpiece of the French government. This may have contributed to the hitherto frosty relations between the two: under de Gaulle, Anglo-French relations were considerably strained. However, with negotiations for UK entry to the Common Market progressing well in this period, ORTF were able to take a more positive attitude towards working with the BBC. This would have come to nothing had those in the higher echelons of

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[115] *Ibid.*
[116] C. Curran, *A Seamless Robe: Broadcasting Philosophy and Practice* (London: Collins, 1979), pp. 349-350.
[117] For more on this, see S. J. Potter, *Broadcasting Empire: The BBC and the British World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

the BBC been unreceptive, but the ECIU recognised that they were also keen for increased cooperation. They noted that Curran, Wheldon, John Grist (Head of TV Current Affairs Group) and Ronnie Noble (Head of TV Current Affairs Special Projects) had all 'been trying for a long time … to induce the French Broadcasting Organisation, ORTF, to engage in co-productions with them'.[118] This was a reflection both of the personal pro-Europeanism among senior BBC personnel, and of the changing geopolitical context in which the BBC was operating.

These improved relations with ORTF came to fruition on April 2 1971, with what the *Times* described as 'a remarkable evening', involving 'a live debate on Franco-British relations'.[119] It was given a feature in *Radio Times*, where it was billed as the 'first ever simultaneous live transmission on British and French television', with Roy Jenkins and Couve de Murville debating 'the significance of the past and the prospects for the future between France and Britain'.[120] There would also be one short film 'made by the BBC, on the French as we see them' and one 'made by the ORTF, showing the French view of Britain'.[121] It is hard to believe that it had taken until 1971 for a joint transmission to occur between these two nations, given their proximity – the timing was not a coincidence, with Hugh-Jones in the ECIU suspecting that ORTF had received 'a political directive from the French Government to reverse their previous policy of keeping their distance from the BBC'.[122] The programme itself 'did considerable harm on French TV and Mr Jenkins left a bad impression' – apparently due to translation issues leading to Jenkins appearing to avoid answering questions directly – but Hugh-Jones was keen to view it 'primarily' in light of the improvement in relations it had brought between the BBC and ORTF.[123] These

[118] Memorandum from W. N. Hugh-Jones to Mr Drinkall, 'Anglo-French TV Co-Production', 12 March 1971, TNA FCO26/818.
[119] *The Times*, 12 March 1971.
[120] *Radio Times*, 27 March, p. 12, 53.
[121] *Radio Times*, 27 March, p. 12.
[122] Memorandum from W. N. Hugh-Jones to Mr Gayden, Mr Morland and Mr Barrington, 'The Jenkins/Couve Programme on TV', 14 May 1971, TNA FCO26/820.
[123] Memorandum from N. J. Barrington to EID, 'The Jenkins/Couve Programme on French TV', 13 May 1971, TNA FCO26/820; Memorandum from W. N. Hugh-Jones to Mr Gayden, Mr Morland and Mr Barrington, 'The Jenkins/Couve Programme on TV', 14 May 1971, TNA FCO26/820.

were seen as an asset to the ECIU in their pro-Market publicity campaign, and they would have been pleased to see a number of future BBC and ORTF co-productions being televised in the coming months and years. The incident makes clear the distinction between BBC policy – which sought to improve relations with western Europe in view of the British government's pro-Market foreign policy and the BBC's internationalist outlook – and the programmes that appeared on the BBC, with this programme in particular appearing detrimental to the pro-Market cause.

European politicians on British screens

The appearance of Couve on British television sets was part of a trend within the BBC towards increased coverage of European politicians. This again reflected the changing geopolitical circumstances of the period: no longer were the USA and the Commonwealth the most significant countries for followers of British politics; the Common Market countries now took on a newfound importance.

British viewers were to become increasingly familiar with European politicians and officials, reflecting the changing news agenda and increased salience of EEC affairs for the British public. For example, President Pompidou was interviewed on *Panorama* in May 1971, and another edition of the same programme featured an item with Jean-Francois Deniau from the European Commission – a transcript of this item held in ECIU files has a handwritten note on it stating that 'Mr [Michael] Pakenham [then serving as Assistant Private Secretary to the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, Geoffrey Rippon] may like to see the normal *Panorama* recipe of ignorance, aggressiveness and conceit'.[124] Regardless of the ECIU's views on the programmes in which these foreign politicians and officials made their appearances, it is notable that they were appearing at all. In earlier years, appearances by prominent Commission officials on flagship current affairs programmes were a rarity. But there was a recognition now, with the

[124] Kitzinger, *Diplomacy and Persuasion*, p. 119; FCO News Department, 'Verbatim Transcript of Item on BBC Television Panorama', 4 January 1971, TNA FCO26/818.

serious prospect of membership, that what politicians in western Europe and from the Commission said, did and thought were of relevance to British politics.

One series that made this link explicit was *Both Sides of Europe*, which ran five programmes over summer 1971 and was described in *Radio Times* as a series of 'discussions between leading Britons, Europeans and other international figures on the future of the European Community – and how it could affect Britain'.[125] Guests included 'three of Europe's youngest politicians from Germany, France and Italy', Jean Rey (formerly President of the European Commission) and Walter Hallstein (formerly German Foreign Minister and President of the European Commission).[126] There was still a place for Commonwealth and American figures, but they were now heavily outnumbered by the European politicians. This represented a significant change from the early-to-mid 1960s, when Commonwealth representatives and advocates of the 'special relationship' played a more prominent role in a foreign policy debate that was often framed as being a choice between Europe or the Commonwealth, or between Europe or the 'special relationship'. BBC programmes even put European officials directly in touch with British voters: Ralf Dahrendorf, an EEC Commissioner, appeared on *It's Your Line*, a pre-existing weekly series on Radio Four – and according to Kitzinger he 'answered with a much better feel for the British context than the Continental Europeans in *The Great Debate* on television'.[127] Geoffrey Rippon also appeared on the programme as part of his efforts to increase his exposure in the media (see below).[128]

The ECIU was heavily involved in this trend towards increased exposure of European officials and politicians on the BBC. In March 1971, W. J. Adams (of the ECIU) wrote to Hugh Carless, then Press and Information Counsellor in Bonn, with the suggestion that he could use his connections to press for an appearance by Chancellor Willy Brandt on the BBC when he visited London in May. Carless was happy to support this initiative, replying that he had 'spoken

[125] *Radio Times*, 26 June 1971, p. 22.
[126] *Radio Times*, 24 July 1971, p. 23.
[127] Kitzinger, *Diplomacy and Persuasion*, p. 337.
[128] *Ibid.*

to Ian MacDougall, the BBC correspondent here, and urged him to have the BBC make an approach … as soon as possible'.[129]

Previously, in October 1970, the ECIU had tried to find a spot on a television programme for some Dutch parliamentarians who were in the UK. J. C. Petrie, of the ECIU, was 'investigating possibilities with the television side of the BBC', and had contacted David Harrison (forward planning for *24 Hours*), who 'said he would put the suggestion to the programme producer'.[130] It appeared that both parties found this interaction beneficial, with Harrison 'grateful for the suggestion that I [Petrie] would tip him off when we had a promising visitor in mind'.[131] Petrie also suggested 'the possibility … that the BBC might do a programme at some stage with M. Monnet' to both David Webster ('who deals with current affairs programmes, with special responsibilities for Europe') and Norman Reddaway within the FCO.[132] This was a concerted campaign by the ECIU, with the BBC's support, to bolster the prominence of continental politicians.

A number of conclusions can be reached based on this increased coverage of European politicians and officials. Firstly, the BBC were adapting to the increasingly influential role of those politicians and officials in British politics – they could determine the success or otherwise of Britain's application to join the EEC, which would be a significant constitutional change and was one of the issues of the moment. And, if the application was successful, these public figures would have some direct power over the United Kingdom, and so it was in the public interest for the BBC to give them more coverage. It both reflected and encouraged the political changes that Britain was experiencing at the time, especially the reorientation from the USA and Commonwealth towards the Common Market: government policy meant it was wise to give European figures airtime, and doing so demonstrated to the public the increasing importance of

[129] Letter from Hugh Carless to W. J. Adams, 31 March 1971, TNA FCO26/818.
[130] Memorandum from J. C. Petrie to Mr Ford, 'Television coverage of European visitors', 19 October 1970, TNA FCO26/818.
[131] *Ibid.*
[132] *Ibid.*

Western Europe to the British polity. However, it is intriguing that the BBC still felt it necessary to lean on the ECIU, with its specific and strongly-held agenda, for European speaker suggestions. The Corporation was, to a certain extent, reliant on the ECIU's network of contacts, connecting it more closely to the government than it may have liked. However, editorial decisions over which speakers to have on remained with BBC producers, and their motivation continued to be to inform the public of affairs which were important to them and to the country.

The programmes and impartiality

This propensity to include western European politicians and officials was at its most obvious in one of the flagship series on European integration, *The State of Europe*, broadcast over five programmes on BBC2 in October and November 1970. A brief case study of this series reveals wider themes within the BBC in this period. The entry for the series in *Radio Times* said this: 'not another programme about the Common Market? Yes – but that is what is different about it. Most programmes ask the obvious question: should *we* join? *The State of Europe* is a series about the Market itself – the people who have been involved in building the Common Market talk about what it all means for *them*. And at the end you will probably find that you can answer the question *should we join* and really know what you are talking about'.[133] It was produced by Howard Smith, and was built around a series of interviews with EC figures who themselves explained the Community. This may have been expected to have the effect described by Kitzinger, whereby programmes that were crafted to 'dispel ignorance' about the Common Market were 'likely to help the Market cause' by rebutting some of 'the more naïve implications' of the anti-Market message.[134] However, in the case of this programme it seemed that the reverse was true. The *Daily Telegraph* – generally supportive of entry – reviewed the first programme.[135] Their review stated that:

[133] *Radio Times*, 10 October 1970, p. 29.
[134] Kitzinger, *Diplomacy and Persuasion*, p. 333.
[135] *Ibid*, p. 339.

> So much has been said, written and indeed televised on the pros and cons of joining the Common Market there seems little more to add. But the fact that few of us seem any the wiser probably tempts producers to keep returning to the subject [reflecting the increased amount of coverage it was receiving on the BBC at this time] … the first programme was on agriculture and will surely have done little to smooth away the misgivings of those who maintain we are better out of it. The programme presented such a confused, muddled picture of farming in the Market today that it is difficult to know what we would be getting into if we entered. No one seemed agreed on what the agricultural policy was or even if one existed. With agriculture one of the main stumbling blocks to Britain's entry, the programme emphasised the conflicting interests which exists in the Market itself. If ensuing episodes follow the same line the series promises to present a solid argument against entry.[136]

This was not an isolated view. ECIU staff shared similar concerns. Josephine O'Connor Howe wrote to Tucker and Budd about the programme. She noted that 'frank admissions were made by the various specialists and officials from EEC countries interviewed, that it [the CAP] was generally unsatisfactory but that agreement had not yet been reached on how to modify it'.[137] Petrie, also of the ECIU, mentioned in an internal memorandum that she thought 'the first programme … was rather superficial and counterproductive from our point of view'.[138] She expressed the hope that 'if we build up a good contact by offering something of our own [i.e. suggesting European politicians to them, see above], we may be able to get drawn into programme-planning in due course'.[139] This implied that she believed the BBC should be directed towards a more pro-European course, and that she thought there was a realistic possibility that the ECIU could become involved in the making of BBC programmes – as indeed it did, as noted above. It is a reminder that it was never inevitable that the Corporation would allow ECIU officials to influence their programmes. Instead, the BBC made an active choice in favour of closer cooperation with the ECIU.

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[136] *Daily Telegraph*, 13 October 1970.
[137] Memorandum from J. O'Connor Howe to Mr Tucker and Mr Budd, 13 October 1970, TNA FCO26/818.
[138] Memorandum from J. C. Petrie to Mr Ford, 'Television coverage of European visitors', 19 October 1970, TNA FCO26/818.
[139] *Ibid.*

For this specific programme, the ECIU's verdict was eerily similar to that expressed in the *Daily Telegraph*:

> Confined to 25 minutes, the programme was inevitably superficial given the size and importance of its subject. Whether or not it was intended to be weighted against the Common Market in the context of Britain's entry, it certainly succeeded in putting over the view that the CAP had failed, that no one could agree on how to improve it, that it benefited primarily large landowners at the expense of peasant farmers and that its main aim was to put 50% of the latter out of business.[140]

Indeed, this perception of the programme arose deliberately. *Radio Times*' description of the programme noted that 'Europeans from the Community will be given the opportunity to talk about their own problems and about those they see facing Great Britain in the immediate future'.[141] The views expressed within the ECIU and in the *Daily Telegraph* are understandable given the express intent of the programme was to consider 'problems' within the EEC. This series was a remnant of the BBC's earlier attitude towards impartiality, where it did not view it as necessary to impose strict quotas on pro- and anti-Market viewpoints, to assign all discussions to one side or the other, or to cram ambiguous viewpoints into either of those categories. The programme provided a valuable service in detailing the CAP for British viewers, from the mouths of those involved in it – that this seemed to make an anti-Market case does not mean that the BBC failed in their duty of impartiality.

But while glimpses of the BBC's earlier free-flowing treatment of the EEC, allowing programmes to range widely across topics and achieving impartiality overall rather than in individual programmes, remained, there was a notable change overall with the beginnings of a quota system on Common Market debates. The increased salience of the issue and the recognition that it had become a 'national debate' meant there was a desire for a system that would allow 'impartiality' to be kept more easily – in reality, this led to a focus on balance rather than impartiality. Kitzinger argued that television and radio

[140] Memorandum from J. O'Connor Howe to Mr Tucker and Mr Budd, 13 October 1970, TNA FCO26/818.
[141] Memorandum from J. O'Connor Howe to Mr Budd, 8 October 1970, TNA FCO26/818.

'adhered [to] elaborate parity systems', and noted that this set-up attracted opposition from some pro-Marketers, because, 'by continually putting on the screen a few individuals like Enoch Powell and Neil Marten, was television not imputing a totally inflated importance to two rather minor strains of the Conservative Party in Parliament?'.[142] Pro-Market politicians formed the centre-ground of British politics, including mainstream figures from all three major parties. There were significantly more pro-Market than anti-Market parliamentarians, with the latter often appearing on the fringes of the Conservative and Labour parties – Enoch Powell and Tony Benn, for example. The conflict between public and parliamentary views are evident here - if the BBC took parliamentary opinion as its steer, it would have given significantly more airtime to pro-Market figures, but the more easily defendable rule was one that maintained a 'balance' between pro- and anti-Market views.

Kitzinger believed there to be a system in place which gave a quarter of the time to Conservative pro-Marketeers, a quarter to Conservative anti-Marketeers (of whom there were very few), a quarter to Labour pro-Marketeers, and a quarter to Labour anti-Marketeers. This posed some issues, however, particularly when Denis Healey (then Shadow Foreign Secretary) seemed to move from a pro-Market to a more ambivalent position in July 1971 and this 'quadripartite formula in fact gave way to a quintupartite one, with the Labour "may-be's" also given a share of a two-and-a-half hour programme'.[143] This system perhaps seemed the easiest solution for the BBC in being seen to maintain their duty of impartiality, but in fact made it difficult to reflect the views of those politicians whose views were more ambiguous, like Healey's – when he changed his mind, it 'left the BBC somewhat disorganized' in trying to arrange the programme in which he eventually appeared, as they rushed to invite another pro-European onto the debate (Harold Lever, a Labour MP and member of the Shadow Cabinet, was added).[144] The system which, in practice, aimed at balance, seemed to undermine its attempt, in theory, to create impartiality. It forced politicians

[142] Kitzinger, *Diplomacy and Persuasion*, p. 334.
[143] E. Pearce, *Denis Healey: A Life in Our Times* (London: Little, Brown, 2002), pp. 394-396; Kitzinger, *Diplomacy and Persuasion*, p. 334.
[144] *Ibid*, p. 305.

into mutually exclusive camps that could not fully reflect their views. Kitzinger noted that 'the net result of this parity system was to present the Labour Party as far more split than the Conservatives and thereby if anything to make life less difficult for the government'.[145] It came just two months after the *Yesterday's Men* crisis, a 'furious row' brought on by a BBC programme looking, in part, at Labour's divisions.[146] The increased salience of the Common Market debate exposed the contradiction that sometimes appeared between 'balance' and 'impartiality', terms that were not interchangeable and only one of which (the latter), the BBC had a duty to uphold. Balance came to be seen as a simple method with which to achieve impartiality, but this was not always its effect, and it sometimes created a warped perception of the views of senior politicians. Impartiality was becoming narrowly numerical rather than resting on editorial judgment.

These debates about the meaning of impartiality in the context of covering Britain and European integration took on even greater importance given the role accorded to television by those involved in promoting pro- and anti-Market views. In January 1971, Petrie at the ECIU wrote to N. Statham (of the European Integration Department) that 'public opinion at the middle and lower levels is still abysmally ignorant of what is at stake, and the only way to get through to this audience is by means of television'.[147] While the ECIU devoted a great deal of time to newspapers – which still had very large circulations in this period and thus remained important – it was television that had become the method of choice for speaking to 'the masses'.[148] Newspapers were useful to campaigners because they were willing and able to take an editorial line; this was not possible with the broadcasters, but it made them, if anything, even more important given that viewers believed them to be generally impartial.

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[145] *Ibid*, p. 334.
[146] A. Briggs, *Governing the BBC* (London: BBC, 1979), pp. 221-222.
[147] Letter from J. C. Petrie to Mr Statham, 'Possible TV reports by the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster About the Negotiations', 5 January 1971, TNA FCO26/818.
[148] Seymour-Ure, *The British Press*, p. 17; J. Curran and J. Seaton, *Power Without Responsibility: The press and broadcasting in Britain* (London: Routledge, 1997, 5th edn.), p. 95.

As a result of this belief in the importance of television, it was suggested by Petrie that Rippon could 'submit to a panel of interviewers' in 'a BBC/ITN programme – in which we could co-operate to some extent with the producers'. Petrie thought that 'there would be every advantage in acquainting the television audience more closely both with Mr Rippon as our negotiator and with the problems of negotiation as they develop'.[149] In this way, it was hoped that the public could be won over to EEC membership through being made to feel part of the process and receiving information directly from Britain's chief negotiator. Statham believed that 'one of the reasons for hostility to membership is probably a feeling that HMG are seeking to get Britain into the Community without taking public opinion into their confidence … if the public could be made to feel, through the medium of official TV reports, that they were being kept more closely informed, some of this hostility might disappear'.[150] Those within the ECIU wanted to give these proposed broadcasts a veneer of impartiality because they were worried that a 'right of reply' would otherwise be granted to anti-Market figures. Michael Pakenham (then Private Secretary to Geoffrey Rippon) thought that if it was framed as a 'progress report', Harold Wilson would reject a right of reply (perhaps to avoid drawing further attention to a topic on which his party was greatly divided) and noted that Conservative anti-Market figures could not claim a right of reply, further demonstrating the potential issues for broadcasters in handling an issue where opinions did not split neatly along party lines.[151]

Statham liked the idea of a progress report, and added that while 'there might well be some reference to the reasons why membership is desirable … this would have to be carefully handled so as not to stimulate the BBC or the ITN into mounting a counter-broadcast by an anti-marketeer.'[152] They showed an understanding of the difficult position in which the BBC might find themselves,

[149] Letter from J. C. Petrie to Mr Statham, 'Possible TV reports by the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster About the Negotiations', 5 January 1971, TNA FCO26/818.
[150] Letter from N. Statham to Sir C O'Neill and Mr Tickell, 'Should the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster report on TV about the progress of the negotiations?', 4 January 1970, TNA FCO26/818.
[151] *Ibid.*
[152] *Ibid.*

and a recognition that this was uncharted territory. The broadcasters had experience in handling broadcasts by government ministers and deciding when a right of reply was appropriate; this would be a very different situation, because, while it was a controversial topic, it was not clear who may have a right of reply. The Labour Party were not obviously anti-Market, and as mentioned above the BBC would not give a right of reply to an anti-Market figure from within Rippon's own party. Instead of counter-broadcasts, Statham assumed that both the BBC and ITN 'would probably want to mount comment programmes afterwards', and thought that 'we would be able to persuade them' to include both pro- and anti-Market figures on these programmes.[153] The ECIU used the unique circumstances surrounding the debate on European integration as an opportunity to further their influence on broadcasting, given the lack of precedent and clear rules for this situation. Their views received support at the highest levels, including from Con O'Neill, a senior diplomat who would later head the BIE campaign in 1975.

O'Neill was influenced by a conversation with a friend during which they recalled the negotiations for entry under Macmillan's government. His friend's 'principal recollection was that every time he switched on his television set, there was Mr. Heath talking about the Common Market', and O'Neill thought this was 'probably a fair' opinion.[154] The contrast with the ongoing negotiations under the Heath government is striking: in the 1961-63 negotiations, the chief negotiator was regularly on television but there was little in the way of a wider publicity campaign on the Common Market; in 1970-72, the situation was reversed. The efforts of the ECIU and wider European Movement to establish a strong pro-Market publicity campaign used a wide variety of well-known politicians, negating the need to give a large quantity of broadcasting hours to a single minister or negotiator.

[153] *Ibid.*
[154] Internal memorandum, unknown date, f. 18, TNA FCO26/818.

Rippon's lack of public-facing time on-air is perhaps surprising given his personal role in initiating the ECIU; he and Wille Whitelaw were both present for discussions with Anthony Royle, before Royle penned the September 1970 memorandum which outlined the ECIU's role.[155] It shows the importance attached to the ECIU by the government.

Edward Heath and impartiality

Rippon was not the only senior minister to become involved in the pro-Market publicity campaign behind-the-scenes, however. Heath himself, as Prime Minister, became personally involved in a dispute between the government and the BBC regarding the latter's broadcasting on European integration. The importance of this should not be overstated – it was a very minor skirmish compared to Eden's attempts to interfere with the BBC during the Suez crisis, for example – but it does bear comparison to Harold Wilson's regular criticisms of the BBC. Wilson and his closest advisers kept an eye on alleged BBC bias against Labour, and Heath here became involved with alleged BBC bias against the pro-Marketeers. But whereas Wilson's attacks on the BBC were often broad brush, Heath's criticism here was over a regular, day-to-day programming issue.[156] It speaks to Heath's deeply felt commitment to the pro-Market cause, and to the importance he attached to the role of the BBC in the midst of a high-profile public debate on Britain's potential membership of the EEC.

This episode began when, in July 1971, the local press in New Zealand ran a story that Norman Kirk (then leader of the Opposition Labour Party in New Zealand) had 'declined an invitation from the BBC to fly to London to take part in a television debate on the political implications of Britain's entry into the EEC'.[157] The FCO learned of this, and then also learned from Sir Hamilton Mitchell (President of the New Zealand Returned Servicemen's Association) 'in

[155] P. Day, 'Secret dirty tricks team spread pro-Europe propaganda for Heath', *Daily Telegraph*, 23 June 2003. Accessed online at https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1433795/Secret-dirty-tricks-team-spread-pro-Europe-propaganda-for-Heath.html on 12 December 2022.
[156] For details of the BBC and Suez, see T. Shaw, *Eden, Suez and the Mass Media* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2009).
[157] Galsworthy, Telegram on 'New Zealand – EEC', 8 July 1971, TNA PREM15/241.

strict confidence, that he too was invited by the BBC to fly to London at their expense to take part in a television discussion'.[158] This raised eyebrows within government, with both figures known for being anti-EEC.[159] Understandably, this was viewed by the FCO as 'the BBC … touting in New Zealand for personalities disposed to express anti-Common Market sentiment to appear on a television programme in Britain', and thought it 'to the credit of both Mr Kirk and Sir Hamilton that they have declined to be involved in this exercise'.[160]

Heath himself became aware of the situation, and asked his staff to take it 'up with the BBC', which it duly was through the Lord President's Office.[161] The Prime Minister even pressed for updates on the matter.[162] When the Lord President raised the issue with Curran, the response was that the Director-General had 'investigated these reports and has been unable to prove that there was any substance in them on this occasion, but he has certainly taken the matter as far as he can and will be on the look-out for any further evidence of such activities'.[163] This is where the document trail ends – the Lord President's Office reported to Heath that they would not be 'pressing this matter any further, for fear of making a mountain out of a molehill' – but it is worth considering what this incident reveals about the relationship between the BBC and government, and about the individuals involved.[164]

Crucially, it demonstrates Heath's belief in the BBC's significance in setting the terms of the public debate. But it also shows the impact of Curran's pro-Europeanism. The BBC were attempting to find a representative for a mainstream view in New Zealand, one held by the Leader of the Opposition himself.[165] This was a reasonable step to take, with New Zealand prominent in

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158 *Ibid.*
159 *Ibid.*
160 *Ibid.*
161 Letter from P. Moon to J. Graham, 12 July 1971, TNA PREM15/241.
162 Letter from R. T. A. to P. Davies, 20 July 1971, TNA PREM15/241.
163 Letter from P. Davies to Robert Armstrong, 14 September 1971, TNA PREM15/241.
164 Note within Prime Minister's office to Robert Armstrong, 8 September 1971, TNA PREM15/241.
165 For more on the anti-Market views of senior politicians in New Zealand, see B. Grob-Fitzgibbon, *Continental Drift: Britain and Europe from the End of Empire to the Rise of Euroscepticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 353-4.

Britain's debate around European integration and the public caring about the potential impact on New Zealand of joining the EEC.[166] Gliddon, reviewing this episode, argues that 'it was extraordinary that a routine attempt to obtain an important strand of opinion on a topical and hotly disputed issue should be criticized as "touting" and considered as if this were disreputable behaviour'.[167] He is correct. The BBC had done nothing wrong, and was attempting to uphold its duty of impartiality. This makes Curran's response revealing. He seemed to think that, if the BBC had indeed conducted themselves in the manner suggested by the government, that this would be improper and something to crack down on. The real accusation levelled at the BBC was that they had tried to get an anti-Market voice on the television – even though the Corporation was obliged to present this view. Curran's instinctive pro-Europeanism ensured that he ignored this obligation and – in principle – agreed with Heath. His response was not to defend the BBC's attempts to give a voice to anti-Market New Zealanders; instead, he accepted the argument that this would indeed have been doing something wrong. Curran's own deeply-held pro-Europeanism lay under the surface of this response; there was an instinctive affinity with Heath's view of the event.

The BBC's coverage of European integration was more seriously impacted by relations with the government between 1970 and 1972 than in any other period studied by this thesis. Analysis of this relationship shows that the BBC was firmly embedded in the 'insider' network of pro-Marketeers that dominated the UK's political and media elite. The Corporation's producers and staff were part of these insider networks, cooperated with influential public figures, and were open to being influenced by them due to the prevalent spirit of pro-Europeanism and internationalism that pervaded the BBC. Relationships were built between the ECIU and the BBC, allowing civil servants and the European Movement a small say in programme-making, a privilege not extended to outsider, anti-Market

[166] H. McDougall, 'Staying Alive': New Zealand, Britain and European Integration, 1960-85, unpublished PhD thesis (London School of Economics, 2021), p. 61; see also H. McDougall, *New Zealand, Britain, and European integration since 1960: Staying Alive* (London: Palgrave, 2023).
[167] Gliddon, 'Programmes Subjected to Interference', p. 413.

figures – as we have seen previously, they were told that the BBC did not pay any attention to pressure groups.

However, despite this, programming remained impartial and became more informative as a result of cooperation with pro-Market groups. Complaints were still received from very senior pro-Market figures, including the Prime Minister himself, reflecting the increased political salience of European integration. While the BBC's close links to the government's pro-Market campaign *did* influence the making of some programmes, this actively aided the Corporation in fulfilling its obligations – connections always being helpful and necessary for journalists. The relationships formed enabled the BBC to devote more airtime to a national debate of critical importance; this may have inadvertently aided the pro-Market side, but did not detract from the BBC's attempts to remain impartial. European integration was itself integrated into the BBC's programming and policy, with more regular appearances from Western European officials and politicians, and closer cooperation with other broadcasting organisations. This was a period where the BBC began to get to grips with the issue of European integration, and its increasingly important place within British political culture.

EXTERNAL SERVICES

This period was one of slow evolution rather than rapid change in the External Services' handling of European integration. The most serious challenge came from outside, in the form of yet another government review.

Already the services to Western Europe had been subjected to post-war cuts, had fought through the 1954 Drogheda Report that recommended cutting them completely, and worked through the government's 1961 Working Party that saw these services as 'peripheral'. Now, along came the ominous government-commissioned Duncan Report in 1969, which looked at British overseas representation in the round.

The Report was a peculiar document. It was 'firmly anchored' in the recent 'major shift in British foreign policy', which recognised that the country was no longer a world power and included the turn towards Europe facilitated by both Conservative and Labour governments in the 1960s.[168] Yet the report also recommended that, while foreign language services to Eastern Europe should be retained, those to Western Europe should be ended.[169] This was a reminder that the Cold War remained crucial to what the External Services were setting out to do, and that western European audiences were perceived to be of relatively slight importance given their access to many other sources of trustworthy news. The Duncan Report also argued that 'there can be no hope of reaching mass audiences effectively from within the resources available' to the BBC, and that therefore 'efforts should be directed towards the influential few'.[170] This was a persistent theme in reviews of the External Services, but it did not appear to be acted upon – Mansell argues that the report 'left few traces', and its recommendations regarding the services to Western Europe were not implemented.[171] These services still retained large audiences. In 1970 it was estimated that 1.25 million people in France listened to the French Service each week, and three years later it was estimated that 600,000 people in Belgium also listened to the French Service each week.[172] In the same period, the German Service had 3.5 million listeners per week within Germany, and the Italian Service had 500,000 listeners per week within Italy.[173] These were huge audiences being exposed to British soft diplomacy; those who tuned in became acquainted with British culture, policy and views.

We can get a sense of what impact this may have had around European integration by turning to the audience research conducted for the French and German Services. In 1970 and 1971, with British membership a realistic

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168 G. Johnston and E. Robertson, *BBC World Service: Overseas Broadcasting, 1932-2018* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), p. 198.
169 G. Mansell, *Let Truth Be Told: 50 Years of BBC External Broadcasting* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1982), p. 255.
170 *Ibid.*
171 *Ibid*, p. 256.
172 Note on Audiences in EEC Countries for BBC Broadcasts carried on MF in English, French, German and Italian, 8 May 1974, TNA FCO26/1523.
173 *Ibid.*

prospect, these services were ramping up their coverage of that possibility becoming a reality, and their listener panels were quizzed on their responses to the programmes.

Listeners to both services regularly praised the objectivity and moderate tone of BBC reporting on the EEC, both in general news and in specific current affairs programmes.[174] The issues were presented from the British perspective with, for example, a German Service programme reporting on the problems potentially facing British fishermen if they joined. It proved a surprisingly popular programme, with panellists thanking the BBC for bringing the issue to their attention because they had 'seen nothing in our papers' about the issue – and a number wrote in to say that they supported the British fishermen.[175] It gave a distinctive British view while also innovating, offering a perspective on the debate that had been missing and offering an insight into new areas.

The same was true of another programme, broadcast in November 1970, about British agriculture and the possibility of EC membership. Most panellists reported that they now understood this issue, and a police official found that it was an example of the BBC opening up 'the possibility of more genuine and more important public discussion', instead of the one-sided view Germans could get from their newspapers.[176]

The programmes interested listeners in the long-term too, with German Service panellists mentioning its Common Market series more than any other when asked for the programmes that had pleased them the most or had the greatest impression on them.[177] A shop manager found it 'produced much new information which even opponents could not ignore', while it led a nurse to a greater understanding of why some Britons took an anti-Market view.[178] Again,

[174] French Service Annual Summary for 1971, WAC E3/145/1; German Service Listener Panel, November 1970, WAC E3/195/4.
[175] German Service panel report for June 1971, WAC E3/195/4.
[176] German Service Listener Panel November 1970, WAC E3/195/4.
[177] German Service Listener Panel review of 1970, WAC E3/195/4.
[178] *Ibid.*

it had evidently succeeded in the aim of presenting the British perspective on the issue.

All of these programmes stemmed from a change in the XS, who ramped up their coverage of the issue after potential British EC entry had become a live issue again. The Cold War receded in importance, while the importance of broadcasting about the Common Market increased. All of the programmes referred to above treated the EEC issue on its own terms, rather than linking it to broader geopolitical themes.

There was an increase in the 'projection of Britain' in these programmes too, with the BBC presenting a version of the world that was intrinsically linked with their perception of Britain's place within it, and the changing context of that perception. So the BBC's 1971 handbook, written to be the considered, official line from the Corporation, went on to state that 'in a year which introduced potentially decisive negotiations for the enlargement of the European Community, the services to Western Europe paid special attention to the problems to be faced in the negotiations, to the advantages which should come from their success; and they promoted discussion between Britons in various walks of life and their opposites in France, Germany and Italy'.[179] It implicitly looked to this cooperation as a positive vision for the future – as a project that was dynamic and had the ability to reinvigorate Britain. The BBC was again both reflecting the changing geopolitical currents that were bringing Britain closer to western Europe, and acting as an agent of that newfound closeness. It sought to present a British perspective on European issues, and took a wide-ranging approach to that – innovating, and leading the debate within the parameters of British foreign policy.

[179] British Broadcasting Corporation, *BBC Handbook 1971* (London: BBC, 1971), p. 90.

CONCLUSION

The period from 1968 until 1972 witnessed dramatic changes in Britain's relationship with European integration, and in the BBC's handling of the issue. An increasingly watchful eye rested over the number of Conservative, Labour, pro-Market and anti-Market figures who appeared on BBC programmes, with 'balance' deemed to be useful in helping the Corporation maintain impartiality. This new system left the BBC more flexible and fleet of foot in adjusting to changed circumstances when politicians and parties changed their views – for example, it was better able to include the more ambiguous stance on membership held by some prominent Labour politicians such as Denis Healey. Unlike in the previous period between 1963 and 1967, the Corporation found itself able to cope with fluctuating opinion on European integration. This 'balance' did not halt criticism of their coverage given, for example, that in reality the number of Conservative pro-Marketeers far exceeded the number of Conservative anti-Marketeers, but it did blunt the full force of attacks. It showed that the BBC had a clear policy in place, rather than the ad hoc situation that had previously existed, and that this had adapted to take account of the changed party-political context. Where criticism and pressure did arise, it now more often came from pro- and anti-Market pressure groups than from the parties themselves. This reflected the changing nature of the public debate on European integration; politicians had by now recognised that it was more appropriate to work in cross-party pressure groups than within their own parties that were divided on the issue. The move towards pressure groups would only speed up further as the 1975 referendum loomed into view.

The most significant change to the BBC's role with regards to European integration in these years was the Corporation's newfound closeness to government and senior pro-Market circles. This was initiated by government rather than by the BBC, Edward Heath launching a pro-Market publicity campaign with the objective of persuading public opinion to support the efforts of his government to enter the Common Market. He was assisted in this endeavour by those who organised and funded the 'media breakfasts', including senior media professionals and the CIA. When the government felt that the BBC

were hindering these efforts, pressure was imposed on them from the very top, including from the office of Heath himself. There was a deliberate effort within government to affect BBC programming in a way almost unheard of in peace-time – previous Prime Ministers, including Anthony Eden and Harold Wilson, had made criticisms of the BBC and attempted to influence it, but neither had tried to involve their governments in the minutiae of programme-making. The involvement of the ECIU in programme-making was new, not linked to broader criticisms of the Corporation (as Eden and Wilson's complaints had been) and instead pro-actively attempting to influence the making of individual programmes. This was the first governmental attempt at a widespread pro-Market publicity campaign, and the BBC cooperated with it in a way that they did not co-operate with any anti-Market campaigns. However, editorial control remained with the BBC and their relationships with the ECIU and European Movement did not lead to a general failure to maintain impartiality. Instead, their connections with these groups were used to provide more informative programmes, increasing the quality of the Corporation's output. If there is a valid criticism of the BBC here, it is in their failure to recognise that the access they were granting to senior 'insiders' enabled the pro-Market campaign to exert pressure that the 'outsider' anti-Market campaign found it impossible to match. Closer cooperation with government and civil servants on the making of individual programmes was the most significant change evident in the domestic services in this period.

Externally, the topic of European integration become of appreciably greater importance in broadcasts to other nations, with the Cold War becoming less prominent while always remaining a consideration behind-the-scenes. It was a transitional period, without any dramatic new policy papers but an organic adaptation to the revised circumstances. Europe was an issue through which to 'project Britain', rather than to project the Western cause in the Cold War. As the Common Market became a crucial political issue domestically, so it became one in British broadcasting to other nations. The BBC fought for the ability to do this, beating off another government attempt to cull the services to Western Europe – it valued these links, treasured them, and used them to provide a fresh,

invigorating British perspective on events that would affect all of Western Europe.

CHAPTER 4: 1973-1974
ENTRY AT LAST

On 1 January 1973, the United Kingdom joined the EEC, more than a decade after it had first applied for possible entry. It was a Conservative PM – Heath – who led the country into membership, celebrated with a grand 'Fanfare for Europe', much of which was broadcast on the BBC. For a short period, it seemed as if the divisiveness of the European integration question was a thing of the past, with the leadership of both major parties supporting membership.

This apparent consensus changed how the BBC saw the issue. The pro-integration shift saw the Corporation allowing freer rein to the pro-European views of their staff members and seeking to intervene more explicitly in pushing a pro-integration agenda. But this moment of national consensus was short-lived, derailed by domestic issues and Labour's internal divisions. As Heath's government struggled with the economy and a Labour victory in the next general election became increasingly likely, the prospect of a promised renegotiation of the terms of British EEC membership and a referendum became increasingly likely too. The fragility of Britain's long-term membership was clear, and the possibility of a first UK-wide plebiscite loomed.

This chapter will delve into the BBC's handling of this tumultuous period. How did it portray integration during the brief period of a perceived national consensus in favour of membership? What can we learn from its coverage and internal discussion? And how did it manage an issue where the long-term decision seemed to have been made, only to be faced with the prospect of a renegotiation, a referendum, and a potential change of course?

Political background

Britain joined the EEC on 1 January 1973, but the first year of membership showed that membership was not a panacea for all Britain's problems – the government remained under pressure, oil prices rose, strikes were increasingly common and harder to control, and the Troubles in Northern Ireland continued. Labour's policy evolved further as they committed to renegotiating the terms of EEC membership if they won the next general election, and, by February 1974 – when an election was held, marking the end point of this chapter – to a referendum on membership. This new commitment was further evidence of their internal difficulties in securing a clear stance on European integration, with Wilson facing a variety of warring tribes. In 1969, no NEC member had even been willing to act as seconder to Tony Benn's proposal for a referendum.[1] By 1973, it was party policy. This posed another challenge for the BBC to grapple with – the always flexible party-political context of debates on European integration.

DOMESTIC SERVICES

Heath described Britain's eventual accession to the EEC as 'one of the great moments of history'.[2] The United Kingdom became part of the supranational club; decisions taken by the EEC would now directly impact the UK. Sovereignty was being pooled and politicians from the Continent would have a say in how Britain was governed; in light of these changes, the BBC would have to reassess how it conducted its role as a broadcaster of current affairs.

The changes began on entry day itself, on 1 January 1973. A huge variety of cultural events were broadcast by the BBC – some as part of the government's 'Fanfare for Europe' series, others organised by the BBC itself. Utilising the BBC's ability and cultural immersion to pull together popular culture and the high-brow arts, viewers and listeners were treated to events such as a football

[1] Saunders, *Yes to Europe*, p. 76.
[2] E. Heath, 'Our role in the enlarged Community', *Financial Times*, 1 January 1973.

match between the Three (new EEC members – the UK, Republic of Ireland and Denmark) and the Six (original EEC members), and a series of concerts from Western European orchestras.[3] Instrumental was Sir William Glock, coming to the end of his time as director of the Proms, who had a 'European cultural outlook' that changed the nature of the BBC's classical programming.[4]

Political changes were sparser but began at the very start, at midnight on New Year's Eve, with a programme entitled 'Big Ben First Footing: Into 1973 – and into Europe' broadcast on Radio Four 'with the *Today* team in London, Brussels, Paris and Hamburg'.[5] On television, the only notable programme about the Common Market on entry day was *Talk-In Europe* on BBC One, where Robin Day and a studio audience asked questions of Sir Christopher Soames and George Thomson, Britain's first two EEC Commissioners.[6] The breakfast shows on radio were all broadcast from Europe, with the *Today* programme on Radio Four being especially dedicated – 'Robert Robinson and Douglas Cameron report on what Europe's getting up to this historic Monday morning'.[7] On 2 January, coverage continued with *Midweek* on BBC One carrying an outside broadcast from 'a special dinner at Hampton Court Palace … given by the European Movement to mark British entry into Europe', featuring speeches from Edward Heath and Sicco Mansholt ('retiring President of the EEC Commission'.[8] This did not turn out to be quite the celebration hoped for by the European Movement, as Mansholt dampened the atmosphere by noting 'what he saw as serious shortcomings in the Community's structure and policies'.[9] Other than these programmes, however, political coverage of entry was distinctly muted, contrasting with the breadth of the cultural programming that was broadcast to celebrate the occasion. In the end, the BBC did not need to

[3] BBC Genome, 3 January 1973, 4 January 1973.
[4] D. Wright, 'Reinventing the Proms: The Glock and Ponsonby Eras, 1959-85' in J. Doctor and D. Wright (eds.), *The Proms: A New History* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2007), 168-209, pp. 169-170; T. Stoller, *Classical Music Radio in the United Kingdom 1945-1995* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp. 101-102.
[5] *Radio Times*, 30 December 1972, p. 29.
[6] *Radio Times*, 30 December 1972, p. 32.
[7] *Radio Times*, 30 December 1972, p. 35.
[8] *Radio Times*, 30 December 1972, p. 39.
[9] D. Butler and U. Kitzinger, *The 1975 Referendum* (London: Macmillan, 1996, 2nd edn.), p. 21.

make drastic changes to make European integration part and parcel of their current affairs coverage – it had already become so over the past few years of national debate. Now, it was just about building upon the hard work that had come before – such as increasing the number of correspondents placed within Western Europe – without the need for a radical reshaping of coverage.

The BBC clearly recognised the importance of EEC entry to the British polity. While the volume of coverage was not overwhelming, entry was treated as a special occasion – the *Radio Times* even signified each programme on the 'EEC' with a specially made logo – and the Corporation understood that it would change Britain's governance, how it perceived Europe and the world, and how Europe and the world understood Britain. There is no evidence here to support the assertion often made since by historians and politicians that the debate around Britain's entry to the EEC ignored the consequences for British sovereignty.[10] While the 'Fanfare for Europe' was organised by the government, the BBC was not a passive broadcaster but acted enthusiastically in shaping the events and ensuring entry was marked in their own programming too, away from the 'Fanfare'.

Crucially, the focus on cultural programming to mark the occasion rather than explicitly political coverage framed the event as being one of national celebration, rather than party-political consensus. This was a further demonstration of the BBC's inherent pro-Europeanism – the BBC did not come out in support of Britain's joining the Common Market, but it saw it as an occasion that needed a celebration, in a similar vein to royal coronations and VE Day in the past.[11] In commemorating these occasions, the BBC was representing

[10] E.g. the Foreign Secretary introducing the Referendum Bill in 2015, *Hansard*, 9 June 2015, Vol 596, European Union Referendum Bill, and Mathias Haeussler arguing that national sovereignty was 'largely ignored' before the mid-1980s, M. Haeussler, 'British newspapers and the EU', *LSE Politics and Policy*. Accessed online at https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/the-british-press-and-europe/ on 22 April 2021.

[11] A. Briggs, The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom Volume II: The Golden Age of Wireless (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 611; A. Briggs, The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom Volume III: The War of Words, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 641; A. Briggs, The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom Volume IV: Sound and Vision (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 421.

a nation united in their wish to do so. But there was no such consensus in favour of celebrating entry to the EEC, given that polls in July 1971 (when the government's White Paper on EEC membership was being debated) showed 44 percent of the electorate opposed entry and given Wilson's deliberate decision to avoid involvement with the 'Fanfare for Europe'.[12] Yet the BBC still decided to broadcast a host of celebratory programmes, despite the lack of pro-Market consensus in the nation. This reflected the Corporation's inherent pro-Europeanism, and this theme will be developed further in the section below on the External Services.

Over the course of 1973, entry to the Common Market quietly but fundamentally altered the BBC's news and current affairs output. The *Today* programme now began 'with a litany of farm prices here and in the Common Market'.[13] The BBC's yearbook noted that the same programme 'also set out to fill in some of the gaps in people's knowledge about what Britain's membership of the Common Market would mean in practical terms', with listeners' questions answered by various figures including John Davies (Minister for Europe), George Thomson, and Peter Kirk (leader of the Conservative delegation to the European Parliament).[14] Radio Four renamed its *Into Europe* programme; it became *Inside Europe*.[15] Ian Mitchell became the first Common Market correspondent for the Corporation (after a Brussels office had been set up several years earlier).[16] This was part of a broader restructuring of staff to reflect Britain's changing foreign relationships; the BBC Yearbook for 1974 noted that Charles Wheeler, the BBC's chief correspondent in Washington DC, moved to Brussels at the end of 1973 'to strengthen coverage' of the EEC.[17] According to John Simpson, it was rumoured that Heath himself had suggested the BBC do this, symbolically moving one of their leading foreign reporters across the

[12] J. Spence, 'Movements in the Public Mood: 1961-75', in R. Jowell and G. Hoinville (eds.), *Britain into Europe: Public Opinion and the EEC 1961-75* (London: Croom Helm, 1976), 18-36, p. 29; Butler and Kitzinger, *The 1975 Referendum*, p. 21.
[13] F. Dillon, 'Radio: Encouraging the amateur', *The Listener*, 22 March 1973, p. 394.
[14] British Broadcasting Corporation, *BBC Handbook 1974* (London: BBC, 1973), p. 36.
[15] British Broadcasting Corporation, *BBC Handbook 1974* (London: BBC, 1973), p. 143.
[16] I. Mitchell, personal interview with the author, 29 July 2020.
[17] British Broadcasting Corporation, *BBC Handbook 1974* (London: BBC, 1973), p. 256.

Atlantic.[18] It was a notable move because jobs in Brussels were generally disliked by correspondents; Ian Richardson, who worked for the XS at the time, recalled one correspondent there telling him that he didn't imagine there would ever be a Common Market story 'that the public can understand' and, if there was, it would 'probably be wrong'.[19] But the BBC risked upsetting senior reporters to reflect the changes that had occurred in British foreign policy, acting as an agent in reinforcing and supporting this policy. British correspondents would now have a more prominent place within EEC circles in Brussels, with BBC reporters taking a full part in the life of the Common Market.

The BBC's public information role also came to the fore after entry, as the Corporation helped to inform the British public about the changes that would occur in their lives as a result of membership. BBC One broadcast *Looking to Europe* across the summer, 'a series of five programmes examining the education and training we need for life inside the EEC'.[20] *You and Yours*, on Radio Four, ran pieces on how car insurance and medical expenses for Britons on the Continent had changed after Common Market entry.[21]

This public information was regional and local as well as national. Regional programmes on the Common Market had been broadcast prior to membership, but took on a new level of importance now. With British EEC membership beginning to directly impact the regions in different ways, the local and regional stations started providing their listeners and viewers with more information about it. What had been a relatively abstract national debate now became an issue that was intertwined with important policies and political issues whose effects were different across the regions. The BBC's 1974 Yearbook detailed these regional initiatives. For the Northern Irish service, it noted that 'looking ahead to the Common Market six films were specially shot in Holland, Germany, France, Belgium and Italy, examining the opportunities for Ulster agriculture and

[18] J. Simpson, *Strange Places, Questionable People* (London: Pan Books, 1999), p. 138
[19] I. Richardson, personal interview with the author, 8 May 2020.
[20] *Radio Times*, 2 June 1973, p. 41.
[21] *Radio Times*, 23 June 1973, p. 35; *Radio Times*, 11 August 1973, p. 41.

industry'.[22] The Scottish service ran *The Europeans*, a programme that gave voice to 'personal views of the Common Market from Scots living in the Countries of the Six'.[23] And the radio service for Birmingham wrote that the 'Agricultural Unit met demands for information about the implication for British farmers of Britain's entry into the European Economic Community, a topic fully dealt with in, *Farming Week*, *Farming Today* and *On Your Farm*'.[24] There was a recognition at the BBC that the effects of EEC membership would vary widely by region, and this was reflected in their programming.

Entry into the EEC, therefore, marked a fundamental change in the BBC's broadcasting about European integration. There was a wide-ranging series of cultural programmes that celebrated Britain's membership of the Common Market, demonstrating the BBC's inherent pro-Europeanism and desire to mark national events – even where much of the nation were opposed to the cause being marked. As the nation adapted to the changes that came with Common Market membership, the BBC were there to assist, providing vast quantities of information to relevant audiences. These were adjusted for specific interest groups (for example, in agriculture) and for specific regions. The BBC's coverage portrayed an idealised and united nation that overwhelmingly supported EEC membership but also simultaneously reflected very real regional differences. It recognised the changes that EEC membership would bring and presented the UK as a nation that was now more European than it had previously been.

EXTERNAL SERVICES

In the previous chapter, we saw how the BBC became an agent seeking to work with the tide of Britain's newfound geopolitical closeness to the EEC – changes that were further embedded upon British accession to the Common Market. The 1973 BBC Handbook – published after Britain's application had been approved but prior to entry – observed that 'Britain's entry … presents an immediate

[22] British Broadcasting Corporation, *BBC Handbook 1974* (London: BBC, 1973), p. 54.
[23] British Broadcasting Corporation, *BBC Handbook 1974* (London: BBC, 1973), p. 152.
[24] British Broadcasting Corporation, *BBC Handbook 1974* (London: BBC, 1973), p. 55.

though continuing task, particularly to the French, German and Italian Services, of consolidating this new and close relationship'.[25] Consolidation – that was the BBC's allotted role in soft diplomacy. The External Services existed not to shape foreign policy, but to metabolise the government's policy into the ears of audiences across the world, adapting them to the needs and interests of different countries.

But the BBC, led by Curran, were not content to simply follow government policy. They were keen to undertake their own initiatives that would help Britain, now it had joined, become a key member of the EEC. We will see here events that disrupt the 'awkward partner' narrative that was popularised by Stephen George in his study of Britain and the EEC, and that Lindsay Aqui has recognised as often characterising these early years of British membership.[26] Piers Ludlow has rightly recognised that 'reality has been rather more complex' than this simple hypothesis would suggest – and the BBC was a key actor in showing that an alternative vision of Britain's EEC membership was possible.[27]

The BBC, as the national broadcaster and with its strong internationalist links, was keen to go further than maintaining the pre-existing BBC services in Western Europe. Within a year of Britain having joined the Common Market, the Corporation proposed the creation of an EEC radio service. It was discussed in a series of high-level meetings, initiated by the BBC, between senior politicians and officials at the FCO, and senior BBC staff. Those BBC staff crucial to the enterprise included Curran as Director-General, and Gerard Mansell as Managing Director (External Broadcasting), who produced a paper on the proposed service. In this June 1973 paper, titled 'Proposal for a Multilingual BBC Radio Service for Listeners in the European Community', Mansell discussed the idea of growing a 'European consciousness' among ordinary people, and thought the BBC could play an important role in 'advancing public opinion'

[25] British Broadcasting Corporation, *BBC Handbook 1973* (London: BBC, 1972), p. 103.
[26] Aqui, The First Referendum, pp. 4-5; S. George, An Awkward Partner: Britain in the European Community (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).
[27] N. P. Ludlow, 'The Historical Roots of the "Awkward Partner" Narrative, *Contemporary European History* 28:1 (2019), 35-38, p. 35.

which he believed was currently 'an ocean of indifference and ignorance' on matters of European integration.[28] He wanted the BBC to take the lead in creating this 'European consciousness'. This is notable as an example of a British institution – whose external services were funded by the government – looking to take the initiative in European integration, complicating the 'awkward partner' narrative. It suggests that in the early months of EC membership, there were signs that Britain was open to taking a more enthusiastic approach to European integration than has often been perceived. The BBC, a key national institution working with the FCO, sought to make Britain an eager partner, seen to be furthering the cause of European integration.

While the Labour party's promise of a renegotiation and a referendum swiftly curtailed the proposed re-shaping of the European services, the idea was very much alive throughout summer and autumn 1973, at a time when Heath's government was struggling with high unemployment, rising inflation, and the OPEC oil crisis.[29] The BBC were conscious of the role they wanted to play. Mansell wrote that 'it is proposed that the BBC, backed by HMG and with the encouragement of the Commission, should now take the initiative and seek to provide for Europe what Europe would undoubtedly take a long time to provide satisfactorily for itself'.[30] This was about British leadership on the Continent.

Mansell described the idea as 'radical', but one that had 'the full support of the Chairman and of the Director-General', and support also from those MPs he had discussed it with, including Christopher Soames and George Thomson (the UK's first EEC Commissioners).[31] The nuts and bolts of the service that Mansell was proposing are revealing. He wrote that – in addition to much coverage of

[28] G. Mansell, Proposal for a Multilingual BBC Radio Service for Listeners in the European Community: A paper by Managing Director, External Broadcasting, 18 June 1973, TNA FCO26/1302.
[29] D. Kavanagh, 'The Heath Government, 1970-1974' in P. Hennessy and A. Seldon (eds.), *Ruling Performance: British Governments from Attlee to Thatcher* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), 216-240, p. 227.
[30] G. Mansell, Proposal for a Multilingual BBC Radio Service for Listeners in the European Community: A paper by Managing Director, External Broadcasting, TNA FCO26/1302.
[31] Letter from Gerard Mansell to Norman Reddaway (FCO), 31 October 1973, TNA FCO26/1302.

EEC governmental affairs – the service would also broadcast 'programmes covering cultural, social, economic, scientific and agricultural subjects at the level of a common European interest'.[32] This was a vision of European integration that was all-encompassing, covering various spheres of life. It was more than a political project; it was about creating a state of mind. Indeed, he also wrote that 'it can be argued on a long view that the national interest may well now lie in Britain showing the way through radio towards a greater awareness of the oneness of Europe'.[33]

Mansell assumes and takes for granted Europe's 'oneness', even though elsewhere in the same paper he seems to recognise that this is not a concept the publics of Europe would recognise. He also offers us a glimpse of an alternative future for Britain in Europe, one without the 'awkward partner' narrative and with Britain becoming European in the 'national interest'. Mansell (and those who approved his paper, including Curran and Swann) wanted British involvement in European integration to be full-throated and enthusiastic. Mansell encouraged the government to take this stance too. Initiatives such as this one, had they been successful, could have transformed Britain's relationship with the Common Market in the early years of membership.

The initial FCO response was positive. Officials in London were the most eager. Michael Palliser (then the British ambassador to the EC), for example, described it as an 'imaginative and … very attractive scheme about which they [the BBC] are clearly enthusiastic' and that 'could be very worthwhile indeed'.[34] Norman Reddaway (from the ECIU) and Sir Thomas Brimelow (Permanent Under-Secretary in the FCO) also gave it their support in principle.[35] However, some in

[32] G. Mansell, Proposal for a Multilingual BBC Radio Service for Listeners in the European Community: A paper by Managing Director, External Broadcasting, 18 June 1973, TNA FCO26/1302.
[33] G. Mansell, Proposal for a Multilingual BBC Radio Service for Listeners in the European Community: A paper by Managing Director, External Broadcasting, 18 June 1973, TNA FCO26/1302.
[34] Letter from Michael Palliser to Sir Thomas Brimelow (FCO), The Possibility of a "Community Radio Service" Organised by the BBC, 18 October 1973, TNA FCO26/1302.
[35] Memorandum from G. F. N. Reddaway, Draft of letter that could be sent from Fowler to Palliser, 12 November 1973, TNA FCO26/1302; Letter from Sir T Brimelow to Sir M Palliser, 10 December 1973, TNA FCO26/1302.

the FCO wondered whether the BBC's motivation for proposing this new service was really as 'pure' as they made out, and thought that it may have been a ploy to simply cut BBC costs – but Mansell himself declared that 'the proposed service would cost more than our present French, German and English services to Europe', suggesting that this was instead an enthusiastic endeavour from the BBC.[36] The creation of the service would have therefore been an ideological choice, driven by a belief in the value of creating a European consciousness, not a pragmatic one, driven by financial concerns. Officials at the FCO decided to take soundings from their ambassadors in the EEC nations on the proposed service, and their responses were generally supportive. E. J. W. Barnes, in the Netherlands, agreed that 'we want to influence the way people in the Community think', while A. A. Stark in Copenhagen reported that 'there is a potential audience here for programmes on Europe at least amongst the professionals and near professionals'.[37] These responses encouraged the FCO to support the proposal, and reflected the fact that interest in the EEC was rooted in class distinctions across Europe, not just in Britain.

Discussions between the BBC and the FCO on the matter progressed to the point where they considered how the new service would be implemented. P. J. Fowler, in the Guidance and Information Policy Department, wrote to other FCO officials that 'knowledge of the proposal has been kept extremely tight … all strongly approved the idea of a low-profile start presented entirely as a revamping of the existing BBC European Service i.e. without any mention or suspicion of a possible future European role'.[38] The intention was to keep its real purpose hidden from the public. Curran agreed with this idea, noting that the project must not be 'launched in such a way' as 'to imply that we were engaged in some kind of cultural take-over'.[39] They were aware this was not what the

[36] Letter from Gerard Mansell to Norman Reddaway, 31 October 1973, TNA FCO26/1302.
[37] Letter from A. A. Stark (British Embassy Copenhagen) to Derek Brinson, BBC Radio Service for Listeners in the EEC, 13 December 1973, TNA FCO26/1302.
[38] Letter from P J Fowler (Guidance and Information Policy Dept.) to Mr Gaydon, Mr Brinson, Mr Reddaway, Proposal for a Multilingual BBC Radio Service for Listeners in the European Community, 6 November 1973, TNA FCO26/1302.
[39] Letter from Michael Palliser to Sir Thomas Brimelow, The Possibility of a "Community Radio Service" Organised by the BBC, 18 October 1973, TNA FCO26/1302.

public wanted, but hoped to make it happen anyway 'as a contribution to the development of a Community consciousness and informed public'.[40]

There was a paternalistic tinge to the efforts of the BBC and government here, harking back to the Corporation's earlier stance under Reith's Director-Generalship. They thought that their proposed service was in the national interest, and so wanted it to happen regardless of whether it had public approval. Curran explicitly stated that he thought the initiative could 'bring the people of the Community closer together and make them better informed of Community affairs and activities', and that doing so 'would be in the British national interest'.[41] He wanted to actively alter the cultural preferences of listeners across Europe for political ends. Informing people about Community affairs was a suitable goal for the BBC, but the proposal was wrapped up in an overarching political objective that the BBC claimed would aid in working towards the 'national interest', something that the Corporation was entitled (and obligated) to do.

However, in proposing this service, the BBC deliberately ignored the lack of a consensus in Britain over EC membership. Since 1972, the Parliamentary Labour Party and Shadow Cabinet had supported a referendum on continued membership, and Labour maintained a lead over the Conservative Party in the polls throughout 1973.[42] There was already an awareness that Britain's future membership of the EEC was not guaranteed, yet the BBC continued to push for a policy that was reliant upon continuing membership.

[40] TNA: FCO 26/1302, Letter from P J Fowler (Guidance and Information Policy Dept.) to Mr Gaydon, Mr Brinson, Mr Reddaway, Proposal for a Multilingual BBC Radio Service for Listeners in the European Community, 6 November 1973.
[41] Letter from Michael Palliser to Sir Thomas Brimelow (FCO), The Possibility of a "Community Radio Service" Organised by the BBC, 18 October 1973, TNA FCO26/1302.
[42] Saunders, *Yes to Europe*, p. 77; A. King (ed.), *British Political Opinion 1937-2000: The Gallup Polls* (London: Politico, 2001), p. 11.

Less surprisingly, the FCO also felt it would be in the national interest, with Fowler stating that the new service would be 'useful as a contribution to strengthening Britain's voice and Britain's presence in the Community'.[43] This was an important purpose of the External Services – to bolster British foreign policy and Britain's voice across the world. But the key difference between this goal and supporting British foreign policy on other issues and in other eras, was that there was not a general consensus in support of European integration in Britain (unlike, for example, for the Empire in the inter-war period). It was also hoped that, as a result of the new service, 'the development of European Community intelligence and expertise within the BBC would gradually have a pervasive influence on the whole of the BBC domestic services'.[44] The BBC recognised that joining the EEC was a radical change to the entire British polity, and that EC affairs could not be siloed off on their own, but would instead become deeply embedded in British politics and society.

Unfortunately for those involved, it soon became clear that an EEC radio service operated by the BBC would not be feasible, as a Labour government came to power in February 1974 on a manifesto opposing EC membership 'on the terms negotiated by the Conservative Government'.[45] They promised a renegotiation, followed by a referendum, which will be the subject of the following chapter. The BBC had been moving ahead of the nation, and the political world, in its desire for a Common Market radio service.

[43] Letter from P J Fowler (Guidance and Information Policy Dept.) to Mr Gaydon, Mr Brinson, Mr Reddaway, Proposal for a Multilingual BBC Radio Service for Listeners in the European Community, 6 November 1973, TNA FCO26/1302.
[44] Letter from P J Fowler (Guidance and Information Policy Dept.) to Mr Gaydon, Mr Brinson, Mr Reddaway, Proposal for a Multilingual BBC Radio Service for Listeners in the European Community, 6 November 1973, TNA FCO26/1302.
[45] Craig (ed.), *British General Election Manifestos*, p. 401. Emphasis in original.

CONCLUSION

After the initial fanfare, Britain's first year of EEC membership could be seen as a disappointment for the pro-integrationists. There was no outbreak of pro-European fervour in Britain, and the long-term prospects for membership were uncertain.

However, that was not initially apparent from BBC programming. For a number of years, they had been preparing for entry and their network of correspondents across Europe meant that no major changes needed to immediately be made to their current affairs coverage as a result of entry – they were already covering the EEC and its workings, even if details of the EEC were now more deeply embedded in BBC output. Their coverage was broad and showed an understanding of how membership would affect Britain's governance and perceptions. The BBC's inherent pro-Europeanism was allowed to come out in its handling of the 'Fanfare for Europe' – it treated entry as if it was a decision made by a united country, rather than by a single government. They painted a picture of consensus where none existed.

Yet it was away from the domestic services that this institutional attitude was demonstrated most clearly, in the European Services. This period saw the topic of European integration become of appreciably greater importance in broadcasts to other nations, with the Cold War receding somewhat (while remaining a more important issue). This was a demonstration of the External Services being used to project Britain – when the Common Market became a crucial political issue domestically, so it became one in British broadcasting to other nations. It also reflected the way in which the External Services both reflected and became an agent of geopolitical changes, in this case the government's efforts to bring about closer relations with the member nations of the Common Market. Broadcasts to Western Europe helped to consolidate the government's foreign policy.

Yet the BBC also undertook its own initiatives, most notably the attempt to launch an EEC radio service. This was about bringing together the people of Europe not just politically, but culturally, and reflected the pro-Europeanism of

senior BBC staff including Curran and Mansell. There was active enthusiasm within the Corporation about this project – rather than just following the government line, it was keen to play a more active role.

As an institution that aimed to reflect the British nation, the BBC's efforts could have undermined the 'awkward partner' narrative that has recurred in many histories of Britain's relationship with European integration. Instead, the possibility of this radio service being established was destroyed by the coming to power of a Labour government in 1974 that was committed to holding a referendum on EEC membership.

With the BBC focused on the 'national interest', it had attempted to uphold government policy and had ignored the lack of consensus in public and political opinion on EEC membership since entry had been achieved. The launch of an EEC radio service rested on an ideal of bipartisan support for European integration which was just that – an ideal. This reflected the Corporation's continued uncertainty about how to deal with a foreign policy issue on which the major parties disagreed, and where there could be no guarantees that policy would be unchanged in the medium and long-term. In aiding the British national interest, the BBC wanted to shape national policy in pursuit of a government objective that was supported by senior staff. These staff wanted the External Services to act as an agent of closer European integration, not just as a reflection of pre-existing political trends. Their plans demonstrated a recognition that joining the EEC represented a drastic change for the British polity; a change that required national institutions to innovate and adapt to. The BBC were willing to do this – but their plans were dashed by the lack of party-political consensus on European integration. It is the renewed national debate on whether Britain should have been a member of the EEC that is the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5: 1974-1975
PREPARING FOR THE REFERENDUM

1974 was a year of great upheaval in British politics. On the final day of 1973, Heath had announced the introduction of a three-day week in response to the OPEC oil crisis and a miners' strike.[1] It was this conflict with the miners that encouraged Heath to call a general election for February 1974 on the question of who governed Britain.[2] That question dominated the campaign, which resulted in Labour becoming the largest party.

Although it was relegated to a background topic, this was an important election for the continuing debate around European integration. The Conservatives, unsurprisingly given they had only just taken Britain into the Common Market, retained a positive view of the EEC while promising to continue to stick up for Britain's interests. The Labour Party, meanwhile, took a more negative stance – the implications of which are still reverberating through British politics nearly fifty years later. Their manifesto declared that while 'Britain is a European nation … a profound political mistake made by the Heath Government was to accept the terms of entry to the Common Market, and to take us in without the consent of the British people … this is why a Labour Government will immediately seek a fundamental renegotiation of the terms of entry'.[3] They spelled out the areas which they would seek to renegotiate, and stated that 'if renegotiations are successful … in view of the unique importance of the decision, the people should have the right to decide the issue through a General Election or a Consultative Referendum'.[4] This raised the prospect of a first nationwide referendum, following the 1973 referendum in Northern Ireland.

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[1] L. Black and H. Pemberton, 'Introduction: The benighted decade? Reassessing the 1970s', in L. Black, H. Pemberton and P. Thane (eds.), *Reassessing 1970s Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 1-24, p. 4.
[2] W. Weeks, 'Edward Heath', in I. Dale (ed.), *The Prime Ministers: 55 Leaders, 55 Authors, 300 Years of History* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2020), 416-424, p. 422.
[3] F. W. S. Craig (ed.), *British General Election Manifestos 1900-1974* (London: Macmillan, 1975), p. 400.
[4] *Ibid.*

The minority Labour government in place following the February election became a majority government after another election in October 1974, run on much the same platforms. Europe was again only a background issue in the campaign, with polling suggesting that only around one in ten voters saw it as the most important issue of the election (compared to over six in ten who thought that rising prices/the cost of living was the most important issue).[5] The key difference this time was that the renegotiation had already begun; but, crucially, the commitment to giving the public a say – likely through a referendum – remained.[6] For the BBC, this would mean grappling with the intricacies of maintaining impartiality while covering an entirely new electoral process. This chapter explores 1974, its general elections and the renegotiation process, and the BBC's preparation for the coming referendum in 1975.

DOMESTIC SERVICES

The general elections

1974's two general elections were called for very different reasons, with the first a 'who governs Britain?' election called by Heath in response to strikes and increasingly acerbic relations with the trades unions, and the second called by returning prime minister Harold Wilson in search of a parliamentary majority.

The Common Market featured in all three major party manifestoes for these elections, with a fundamental difference between the two biggest parties now. Yet despite this, European integration was not a primary consideration for most voters, with fewer than ten percent of voters at each election believing it was the most urgent problem facing the country.[7]

[5] D. Butler and D. Kavanagh, *The British General Election of October 1974* (London: Macmillan, 1975), pp. 273-274.
[6] Craig (ed.), *British General Election Manifestos*, p. 465.
[7] D. Butler and D. Kavanagh, *The British General Election of February 1974* (London: Macmillan, 1974), p. 139, 273.

For the BBC, however, having to cover the issue with its election hat on caused problems. Some of these stemmed from Enoch Powell, who did not have a quiet year. He announced in February that he would not be seeking re-election as a Conservative MP, and went on television to reveal that he had voted for Labour because of their EEC stance.[8] He then returned to the House of Commons in October 1974 as a Unionist MP for South Down, in Northern Ireland.[9] During the first campaign, 'all television and radio networks headed their news bulletins … on 25 February with his attack on Britain's membership of the EEC'.[10] Coincidentally (or perhaps not), Powell made this speech on the same day that a pre-arranged *Panorama* programme dealing with Britain and European integration was due to be broadcast.[11] This caused concern for campaign managers within the Conservative party, with Lord Carrington telephoning Swann because he feared 'among other things, that an extract from Powell's speech might be included live in the programme'.[12] Heath also relayed his concerns about the programme to the BBC.[13]

Their worries were assuaged as Swann confirmed that the programme had been entirely pre-recorded, but it showed the perils for the BBC of utilising pre-recorded programmes during election campaigns. In this instance, based on news values, excerpts from the Powell speech should have been included in the *Panorama* programme but because of it being pre-recorded that proved impossible. It is hard to see on what grounds Carrington can have argued that the speech should not be included, other than ones of simple self-interest. At this stage, the issue was essentially a party-political one – the Conservatives complained only because they thought showing Powell's speech would harm their campaign. The impact, however, was to encourage the BBC to prioritise the party-political side of the European issue.

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[8] R. Shepherd, *Enoch Powell: A Biography* (London: Hutchinson, 1996), pp. 444, 447.
[9] C. Schofield, *Enoch Powell and the Making of Postcolonial Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 264.
[10] A. Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom Volume V: Competition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 981-2.
[11] *Ibid*, p. 982.
[12] *Ibid.*
[13] G. Clark, 'BBC goes ahead with programme featuring Mr Powell despite intervention by Prime Minister', *The Times*, 26 February 1974, p. 1.

A similar phenomenon occurred around the October election. Christopher Jones, when interviewing Shirley Williams, asked her a question about Britain and the Common Market 'which had publicly re-opened a split in the Labour Party's leadership'.[14] The Board of Governors were concerned that this may have negatively impacted on the Corporation's relationship with the party – already under strain with Wilson harbouring many complaints over his lengthy tenure as party leader – and were relieved that relations with Labour remained 'peaceful'.[15] The issue was *not* how the BBC covered the Common Market issue directly, but the knock-on effect that this coverage could have on relations with the parties who would decide the future of the BBC, with Home Secretary Roy Jenkins having earlier that year commissioned the Annan inquiry into the future of broadcasting.[16]

In the case of the Shirley Williams interview, the BBC was simply conducting standard journalism, which could always cause issues for political parties. But it showed the potential potency of the European issue for laying open divides within the Labour party, and therefore the need for the BBC to treat it delicately given the practical realities within which it was operating (a reality in which the government effectively dictated its funding level). Crucially, at this time the prospect of a referendum was still in the future and so politics was operating largely as normal, within the party-political sphere – the BBC had to reflect that. While complaints had to be seen off, they were largely easily dismissed because they were of non-existent party bias, rather than being about the merits of European integration coverage.

[14] Minutes of Board of Governors meeting held on Thursday 26 September 1974, WAC R1/42/2.
[15] *Ibid.*
[16] Briggs, *Competition*, pp. 995-996.

Renegotiation

While Labour had committed to renegotiating the terms of Britain's membership of the EEC in both the February and October elections, they had not been a prominent issue in either and summer 1974 was a quiet period for the negotiations.[17] The renegotiations were formally begun by James Callaghan at a Council of Ministers meeting in Luxembourg in April 1974, then largely conducted over summits in Paris and Dublin, in December 1974 and March 1975 respectively.[18] They were then approved by the Cabinet and MPs in March and April.[19] Britain's monetary contributions were the primary focus of the renegotiations; not an issue that would seem to allow for pro-Marketers making much headway in rebuffing the key argument of anti-Marketers, that membership meant an important loss of sovereignty. The two sides were talking at cross-purposes.[20] Other issues up for renegotiation were the Central Agricultural Policy (CAP), European Monetary Union (EMU), Value Added Tax (VAT) and national independence on regional, industrial and fiscal policies.[21]

From Labour's return to government in February 1974, the BBC were aware of the likelihood that renegotiations would begin and be followed by a general election or a referendum on European integration. Steadily after the February election, and then more quickly after the October election, they duly increased their EEC coverage.[22] Some special programmes were broadcast, including, on *Midweek*, 'several long films on the progress of re-negotiation … [featuring] the important meetings of the negotiators in Luxembourg, Brussels and finally in Dublin'. But senior BBC officials at the time recognised that these programmes considered EEC issues 'as they affected the British political scene', rather than on their own merits. Party-politics was not just part of the programme; it was

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[17] L. Aqui, *The First Referendum: Reassessing Britain's Entry to Europe, 1973-75* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), p. 149.
[18] House of Commons Library, 'The 1974-75 UK Renegotiation of EEC Membership and Referendum', 13 July 2015, briefing paper 7253, p. 4. Accessed online at https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-7253/CBP-7253.pdf on 15 March 2022.
[19] *Ibid.*
[20] Aqui, *The First Referendum*, p. 130.
[21] House of Commons Library, 'The 1974-75 UK Renegotiation of EEC Membership and Referendum', p. 4.
[22] Director's paper, 'The BBC and the EEC Referendum', July 1975, WAC R78/1451/1, p. 51.

the key prism through which everything was viewed.[23] While the renegotiations were ongoing, and especially after Labour secured their parliamentary majority, the BBC always worked with one eye on the referendum. There was a consciousness that the renegotiations were a relatively ordinary news story and could be treated as such, while the referendum would be a new and unprecedented event in British political history.

This sentiment was mirrored, to some extent, by external actors. George Thomson (British Commissioner to the EC) and Christopher Soames (Vice-President of the European Commission), for example, spoke to Noel Harvey (the BBC's Brussels Representative) on 12 November 1974 because they wanted to invite Curran and Swann to dinner with them. This was because 'they would like to discuss (lobby you about!) the likely coverage by the BBC of Britain in or out of the EEC, between now and the referendum' and especially the 'editorial questions' that were dependent on the attitude taken by the government after renegotiations were concluded.[24] As well as further demonstrating the BBC's relationship with the 'insider' pro-Marketers compared to the 'outsider' anti-Marketers, this incident also shows that the government's focus was already turning to the big question that would follow the renegotiations.

Looking ahead

The same was true for the BBC. Internal discussions about referendum coverage began in earnest in November 1974. At a NACA meeting on 1 November, 'ENCA [Editor, News and Current Affairs] led a discussion on the problems likely to arise from coverage of the proposed referendum on Britain's membership of the EEC. The difficulty was acknowledged of securing a fair representation of the differing views on this subject when each of the main political parties was so deeply divided, although it was noted that these problems had largely been overcome in the casting of the major television and radio

[23] *Ibid*, p. 20.
[24] Memorandum from Brussels Representative to DG, 'EEC: Messrs Thomson and Soames', 12 November 1974, WAC R78/1451/1.

debates prior to Britain's entry into the EEC'.[25] The BBC consciously drew here on satisfaction with the nature of their previous coverage, and began to consider what would be 'fair' for referendum coverage. However, we also see here a first hint of something that became a key failure during the campaign – their failure to try and separate the Yes or No question from the party-political context.

In addition to drawing on their own previous coverage of the 'in or out' question from the early 1970s, NACA were quick off the mark in seeking other precedents. At a time when Curran was stressing the need 'for all concerned to think ahead to the special output which would be needed around the time of the EEC Referendum', NACA personnel were searching for ideas on their wider coverage.[26] While several other countries had held referenda on EEC membership or expansion earlier in the 1970s – France, the Republic of Ireland, Denmark and Norway – it was the latter two that were investigated to see whether the BBC could learn any lessons from the broadcasting coverage of those referenda. In the end, it was decided that 'no useful precedent' could be drawn from any of those referenda because in Denmark and Norway the broadcasters did not have to deal with deep divisions within the major parties – a helpful consequence of their electoral systems.[27] It was deemed too difficult to extract the in or out question from party politics in the UK.

However, some people outside the BBC thought there *were* lessons to be learned from these referenda. Neil Marten, for example, had observed Norwegian TV during their referendum and thought they did an 'excellent job' with 'serious discussions', and he hoped that the BBC and IBA would follow their lead.[28] The only conclusions that NACA drew at this stage from coverage of other referenda was that they should disavow one aspect of Norway's coverage: there 'the policy had been to disregard political party affiliations and to secure a 50/50 balance in all programmes dealing with EEC matters in the final two or three months before the Referendum'. Within NACA, 'the meeting felt that this practice was

[25] Extract from NACA minutes, 1 November 1974, WAC R78/1451/1.
[26] Extract from NACA minutes, 22 November 1974, WAC R78/1451/1.
[27] Extract from NACA minutes, 29 November 1974, WAC R78/1451/1.
[28] Listener Rack B11, March 6 1975, WAC R78/1451/1.

too stringent for emulation by the BBC'.[29] In hindsight, this was a remarkable conclusion to draw – the BBC had previously enforced a far more complex rule on 'balancing' European integration coverage, at the start of this decade. And in the end, the BBC *did* resurrect and then settle on a 50-50 balance for the referendum – though they dropped the idea of ignoring 'political party affiliations'. But at this time, before those decisions were made, the BBC was proactively exploring its options for covering the referendum most effectively. They were in an aggressive stance, focused on providing the best service possible rather than prioritising the defusal of potential criticisms. Their search for precedents could have gone further, however – they ignored the Republic of Ireland's referendum, Northern Ireland's 1973 poll on whether it should remain part of the United Kingdom, and other referenda in English-speaking countries and territories including Australia and Gibraltar.[30]

At this stage, no decision had been made as to how the BBC would approach its referendum coverage. Curran noted on 29 November that they 'must lay down … ground rules for this coverage publicly and in good time', but this period was all about considering what those rules might be.[31] A lack of archival material means we are not privy to precisely how that decision was made, but it is important that Curran's priority quickly became finding a rule for the BBC to follow – what that rule was mattered less than simply having a rule in place. This would enable Curran to deflect any criticism of BBC coverage during the campaign, as he could point to a defensible rule.

In January 1975, with the renegotiations in full flow, the BBC sought to improve their coverage of EEC politics. Television News created a unit 'consisting of the Chief European Correspondent and several reporters and members of the editorial staff, under the command of a Senior Duty Editor, charged with no other duty but the responsibility for coverage of EEC matters until the

[29] Extract from NACA minutes, 22 November 1974, WAC R78/1451/1.
[30] These referenda were mentioned by politicians and campaigners for a referendum. See P. Goodhart, *Full-Hearted Consent: The story of the referendum campaign – and the campaign for the referendum* (London: Davis-Poynter, 1976), *passim*.
[31] Extract from NACA minutes, 29 November 1974, WAC R78/1451/1.

Referendum was held'.[32] Their task was 'to accumulate and concentrate information and attitudes about the EEC', and they researched and wrote a number of papers on the workings of the EEC.[33] In doing so, the BBC was able to provide viewers with information that would help them come to an informed view of the renegotiations and on the issues surrounding the coming referendum. A Board of Management paper reviewing the BBC's referendum coverage summarised the contribution of TV News and their new unit thus: 'apart from reporting the progress of the Summit itself, Television News took the opportunity on successive days and as the news suggested, to remind its audience of the relevant principles and practice of the Treaty of Rome countries, and to assess in relation to the Government's own declared aim the varying degrees of success or failure in the re-negotiations'.[34] The aim was to get into the nitty-gritty of the EEC and Britain's relationship to it; it was assumed that impartiality would come as a matter of course, and there was no hesitation about making an independent judgement on the success (or otherwise) of the government's renegotiations. 'Balance' was not yet a key consideration; providing hard facts was.

This did not mean that the BBC were unconscious of the accusations of bias that were likely to come. As early as January 1975, Curran 'warned Editors … to be reluctant to accept facility visits to Brussels for the time being', in case it brought criticism from anti-Market campaigners.[35] This was an early sign of the BBC cowering in the face of campaigners; it would not have been difficult for the BBC to defend the use of facilities in Brussels but they decided to take the easy route out instead. The BBC was deliberately avoiding actions it believed would improve its coverage to stave off criticism from anti-Market campaigners.

[32] Director's paper, 'The BBC and the EEC Referendum', July 1975, WAC R78/1451/1, p. 25.
[33] *Ibid.*
[34] *Ibid*, pp. 25-26.
[35] Extract from Board of Management minutes, 27 January 1975, WAC R78/1451/1.

We saw in the last chapter that the BBC had initially implicitly accepted EEC membership as a settled matter. When that changed, it led to some difficulties with programming. For example, in early 1974, Open University radio and television programmes on the Common Market had been broadcast and it was expected that these would be repeated during 1975. The OU themselves were keen that the programme be repeated unaltered, noting that 'the Course has the virtue of being explanatory at a time when arguably that is one of the functions required from the screen', and threatening that 'a decision [not to repeat the programmes] will cause difficulties in the partnership between BBC and OU for some time'.[36] However, the BBC were more concerned about the possible perils of showing such a programme when the issue of European integration was so fraught politically. The ENCA therefore wrote to the Director of Programmes (DP), and the first paragraph demonstrated how significantly BBC programme policy on the EEC had changed within a year:

> If we were setting out to produce a new series, in the light of the approaching referendum, a different series would be made. While some of the programmes are balanced internally and contain opponents of the Community (Powell, for instance) others are not balanced. These were written in a spirit of continuing membership, and in places imply that the Community is a good thing; but they do not campaign.[37]

We see that the BBC was now shifting to a focus on 'balance' – easy to defend from critics, but restrictive when seeking to make programmes that would best inform, educate and entertain viewers and listeners. While the BBC did not cancel the repeats – the ENCA instead recommending that 'it might be worth considering an introductory announcement explaining when they were made' – the pattern for the future was set.[38]

Having initially been keen to proactively search out precedents, find examples of good practice when broadcasting a referendum and avoid strict rules on how coverage should be, the BBC had gone into its shell. Lessons from other

[36] Memorandum from Head of Open University Productions to ENCA (Desmond Taylor), 'The Open University EEC Course', 31 January 1975, WAC R78/1451/1.
[37] Memorandum from ENCA to DP, 'Open University: EEC Programmes', 4 February 1975, WAC R78/1451/1.
[38] *Ibid.*

referenda were ignored, there was a desire to find an easily defensible rule for 'balancing' coverage, and avoidance of criticism became the foremost priority – providing the information required for the public to be well-informed on the issues raised in the renegotiation and referendum was secondary.

Preparation for the referendum: impartiality

As we have already seen, the BBC did not feel there was an adequate precedent that they could follow for the referendum. It was the first nationwide referendum in the United Kingdom, and an overwhelming sense of newness surrounded proceedings – the debate among politicians about whether a referendum should be held had taken half a decade to reach a conclusion. However, there was also an awareness that the public might be tired of voting after two general elections within the previous twelve months. These two contrasting points – the newness and the sameness – are key to unpacking the BBC's attitude towards the referendum.

The most important decision the BBC had to make was around impartiality. In the 'Great Debate' on the EEC earlier in the 1970s, the Corporation had found rules that worked both for them and for the political parties in allocating broadcasting time between Labour and Conservative pro- and anti-Market politicians. However, in the referendum campaign the parties themselves would take a back seat to the two cross-party organisations – BIE and the NRC. The old rules couldn't be resurrected, and a new way of apportioning time on the airwaves had to be found. As with general elections, a separate Committee would allocate time for the equivalent of Party Political Broadcasts, but the BBC had to make their own decision about the allocation of time in its news and current affairs programmes. Their search was for a rule that could be defended, that would blunt criticism from the Yes and No campaigns provided all understood the reasoning behind it, believed it to be fair, and were confident that the BBC was implementing it properly.

Only two possible rules were considered. One was to split coverage 50-50, and the other was to weight time based on the number of pro- and anti-Market MPs. The latter would, in practice, give significantly more time to the Yes campaign – on 9 April 1975, 63 percent of MPs had voted in favour of Labour's renegotiated terms of British membership.[39] Splitting time 50-50 had the benefit of being very easily defensible, and would almost mirror the BBC's normal method for dividing time between Conservative and Labour politicians in day-to-day political coverage. The NRC could have no grounds for complaint, given they would gain more time on air than under the other plan, and neither side would be able to harbour a grievance about not being given a fair hearing. This plan also more readily reflected public opinion, which did not, on balance, support membership between early 1973 and late February 1975.[40] The BBC were themselves aware of this, Peter Scott telling a NACA meeting in January 1975 'that he detected some signs of differences in emphasis between the various parties at Westminster and in the country. The Parliamentarians were not necessarily representative of grass roots opinion on this issue'.[41]

It was harder to defend the idea of balancing time based on parliamentary opinion, but some aspects commended it. Britain remained a parliamentary democracy, and elected politicians would be the dominant voices in this campaign – if time was split 50-50, leading pro-Market politicians may receive less coverage than otherwise less prominent anti-Market politicians. This method respected the role of political parties and recognised the overwhelming pro-Market opinion of the leaderships of all three major parties. It accommodated those politicians, such as Denis Healey, who held more ambiguous opinions. This policy would also be no more difficult to implement than the 50-50 balance, but would almost certainly be criticised by the NRC, who were looking to broadcasting for a 'fair hearing' at a time when the press was almost universally hostile to their position (the *Morning Star* was the only

[39] D. Butler and U. Kitzinger, *The 1975 Referendum* (London: Macmillan, 1976), p. 52.
[40] A. King, *Britain Says Yes: The 1975 Referendum on the Common Market* (Washington DC: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1977), p. 92.
[41] Minutes of NACA meeting, 3 January 1975, WAC R3/59/1.

national newspaper to urge its readers to vote No).[42] Such a mechanism was also open to criticism for taking its steer from Parliament at a time when Parliament had delegated its decision-making powers directly to the people.[43] It might have reeked of an Establishment stitch-up. Ultimately, the decision would reflect where the BBC took its conception of the political context from: did it come from public opinion, or did it come – as usual – from Parliament? The very concept of 'impartiality' relies on there being a political context to be impartial within, and here the context of public opinion was very different from the context of parliamentary opinion.[44]

The decision between these two options forms the crux of this section; but it is important to recognise that the rule itself was less important to the BBC than the simple fact of *having* a rule. Rather than thinking about how they could provide the best coverage possible, the BBC was considering how it could avoid and deflect criticism. This will be a recurrent theme.

November 1974 brought the BBC's first discussion on the matter with Roy Jenkins, in his capacity as President of BIE. Swann and Jenkins discussed the BBC's plans for coverage, and it was noted that Jenkins 'had shown understanding of the BBC's editorial problem and had undertaken to see that his colleagues and officials would be aware of it'.[45] There is no mention of Jenkins' own opinion on what kind of balance was preferable. After this meeting, there is a hiatus in the records until the new year. 1975 brought a new attitude from the BBC, as they became far surer of their position. On 15 January, Curran told Jolyon Dromgoole, Chief of Broadcasting at the Home Office, that 'once the Referendum period had started we should almost certainly wish to arrange our balance in terms of equal access to the microphone and cameras for the

[42] C. Seymour-Ure, 'Press' in D. Butler and U. Kitzinger, *The 1975 Referendum* (London: Macmillan, 1976), 214-245, p. 216.
[43] In theory, the referendum was not binding, but there was widespread agreement that its result must be implemented.
[44] In addition to the balance in support for Yes and No differing between the public and their parliamentary representatives, so the emphasis each campaign placed on different issues differed between their public and elite supporters.
[45] Minutes of Board of Governors meeting, 21 November 1974, WAC R1/42/2.

supporters and the opponents of Market membership'.[46] This was not a definite decision, but it is the first record of Curran or Swann expressing a clear view on the matter.

Early 1975 also saw both campaigns making representations to the BBC for 'fairer' coverage of their side. At the first NACA meeting of the year, it was declared that 'there was increasing pressure from anti-EEC sources to broadcast their views', suggesting that they believed pro-Market supporters had been able to make their case over the long-term in a way that had been impossible for their campaign.[47] Lord Wigg and Lord Shinwell (both Labour anti-Marketeers) protested at the BBC's coverage of EEC issues, 'showing that some sections of the Labour Party already believed the BBC to be biased in favour of membership'.[48] Curran and Christopher Frere-Smith agreed that the anti-Marketeers would be happier than the pro-Marketeers with a 50-50 balance.[49] It is a mark of how the BBC's political context was so shaped by parliamentary politics that it was considered inconceivable, even by the anti-Market campaign, that the percentage of time allotted to each campaign could be granted based on public opinion (and therefore giving more time to the No campaign than the Yes campaign). The BBC's perception of the political context was overwhelmingly shaped by parliamentary politics.

Presciently, at the same meeting 'Peter Scott was more worried about calls for equality of representation within each party'.[50] The BBC remained very concerned by parliamentary politics. Even when faced with a once-in-a-generation referendum – the first national referendum ever held in the United Kingdom – party politics were fundamental. Of course, the debate surrounding Britain and European integration had been dominated by party politics since it first rose onto the political agenda in the post-war era. But the BBC could have

[46] Record of telephone conversation between DG and Jolyon Dromgoole, 15 January 1975, WAC R78/1451/1.
[47] Minutes of NACA meeting, 3 January 1975, WAC R3/59/1.
[48] Minutes of Board of Governors meeting, 9 January 1975, WAC R1/43/1.
[49] Minutes of NACA meeting, 10 January 1975, WAC R3/59/1; Minutes of NACA meeting, 24 January 1975, WAC R3/59/1; Minutes of NACA meeting, 10 January 1975, WAC R3/59/1; Minutes of NACA meeting, 24 January 1975, WAC R3/59/1.
[50] Minutes of NACA meeting, 10 January 1975, WAC R3/59/1.

framed the referendum as one between two sides who took positions on a great issue. They could have operated, for campaign purposes, as if party distinctions were unimportant in deciding who to give coverage to – did there need to be a balance between Conservative and Labour figures on both sides? Indeed, creating this artificial balance may have disrupted their commitment to impartiality through granting excessive airtime to (for example) Conservative anti-Market supporters, such as Neil Marten, giving the false impression to listeners and viewers that this was a more prominent view within the Conservative party than it actually was. Balance was being prioritised above impartiality, and the referendum was being framed as just another political campaign. Dipak Nandy, who analysed the BBC's referendum coverage at the time, agreed with this, writing that 'the BBC seemed to feel the tug of conservatism and routine, to see the referendum as a general election and to treat it, wearily, as such'.[51]

January also saw the press begin to speculate about the BBC's coverage. In the *Times*, Geoffrey Smith described broadcasting as one of the 'most critical areas' in the referendum campaign, and said the BBC were moving towards a 50-50 balance.[52] He thought consideration should be given to setting up a new referendum commission which could independently establish guidelines for broadcasting during the campaign.[53] He said that although 'the BBC and the IBA will naturally be jealous of their editorial prerogatives … it might be an advantage for them and a reassurance for the public if there were an officially appointed umpire to whom they could turn for guidance as to whether any particular practice would be fair play'.[54] Discussed at a Board of Governors meeting, the minutes note that Smith's article was discussed, but no views are recorded.[55] We do have the views of Peter Shore, whose heavily underlined copy of this

[51] D. Nandy, 'The Media and the Messages' in R. Jowell and G. Hoinville, *Britain into Europe: Public opinion and the EEC 1961-75* (London: Croom Helm, 1976), 77-91, p. 81.
[52] G. Smith, 'Making sure of fair play when broadcasters move in on the EEC referendum', *The Times*, 23 January 1975, p. 16 in LSE SHORE/10/1.
[53] *Ibid.*
[54] *Ibid.*
[55] Minutes of Board of Governors meeting, 23 January 1975, WAC R1/43/1.

newspaper cutting suggests he strongly supported the 50-50 idea, and was keen to see it replicated with equal funding given to each campaign.[56]

The day after Smith's article, there was a meeting between Curran, Swann and Jenkins. At this meeting, Swann explained they were leaning towards a 50-50 balance but added that 'there might be some opportunity, as the Director-General suggested, to reflect the balance of Parliamentary opinion which might be expressed in the vote on the resolution presented to the House of Commons to approve the renegotiated terms.[57] By this stage, the BBC was almost set on a 50-50 balance but continued to want there to be a place for the pro-Market leanings of the Commons.

However, it is worth noting that Jenkins himself held a different memory of these meetings with the BBC. According to his testimony two decades later, the BBC initially argued that the political context in which they were to be impartial should be shaped by parliamentary opinion. He told a witness seminar in 1995 that:

> The BBC … was totally impartial; and they were impartial, if I may so, because I as Home Secretary told them to be. They came to me and suggested that perhaps the coverage ought to be in accordance with the vote in the House of Commons. I said that that would not do at all, each side must have equal time. As a result I then found myself in the curious position in my capacity as president of the "Britain in Europe" campaign of being bitterly complained to by Heath, [William] Whitelaw and others that they were being given no coverage at all, when minor pipsqueak figures were portrayed on television night after night after night, in the early stages of the campaign.[58]

Jenkins' memories are not supported by the available written evidence, and at a BBC Board meeting in February 1975 it was stated that Jenkins 'now inclined to the view that 50:50, without party weighting, was the right balance to aim at', implying that Jenkins himself had previously been in favour of a parliamentary

[56] G. Smith, 'Making sure of fair play when broadcasters move in on the EEC referendum'.
[57] Note of conversation between DG and Home Secretary, 24 January 1975, WAC R78/1451/1.
[58] R. Broad and T. Geiger (eds.), 'Witness Seminar: The 1975 British Referendum on Europe', *Contemporary Record* 10:3 (1996), 82-105, p. 98.

weighting.[59] But Jenkins' memories do reveal that, in the opinion of the Yes campaign's key supporters, the principle of 50-50 balance was not harmful to their cause, and are a reminder that it was far from inevitable that a 50-50 balance would be agreed upon.

With preliminary discussions out of the way, by February it was almost time for a final decision to be made. The government published their White Paper titled 'Referendum on United Kingdom Membership of the European Community', which covered broadcasting and ensured the BBC retained full editorial control. It wrote that 'the campaigning organisations, the press, radio and television can all be expected to provide an ample supply of information about the Community', and stated that 'the Government are confident that the IBA and BBC will exercise editorial discretion designed to ensure that here is a fair balance between the opposing views in news and feature programmes'.[60] Notably absent from the White Paper was a specification that there would be a 50-50 balance. This was apparently a result of lobbying by Jenkins and Lord Harris, both pro-Market Home office ministers. Harris told political editor Hardiman Scott that 'some Ministers wanted to define the role of the broadcasting organizations tightly in the White Paper, but he and the Home Secretary were very much against this'.[61] The BBC expected this would be the case too. In a separate meeting, 'Percy Clark said there was a possibility that the Bill setting up the Referendum might contain a clause to ensure balance in broadcasting. I expressed incredulity, particularly in view of the thoughts about Ministerials [with Wilson wanting to claim one after renegotiations, and Thatcher claiming right of reply]. Mr Jameson said he thought such a clause

[59] Minutes of Board of Governors meeting, 6 February 1975, WAC R1/43/1.
[60] Her Majesty's Government, *Referendum on United Kingdom Membership of the European Community* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office), Cmnd. 5925, February 1975. Accessed online at https://www.cvce.eu/en/obj/white_paper_published_by_the_british_government_regarding_the_referendum_on_the_united_kingdom_s_continued_membership_of_the_eec_february_1975-en-e3b99468-b27d-46d8-b000-d06c13db0b87.html on 17 November 2023.
[61] Memorandum from Political Editor (Peter Scott) to DG and CA to DG, Note of conversation during drinks with Lord Harris at Home Office, 17 February 1975, WAC R78/1451/1.

unlikely'.[62] And so it proved. The final White Paper trusted the broadcasters to make up their own minds on allocating broadcasting time.

February was also the month in which Curran and Swann met with the leading protagonists from the Yes and No campaigns. On the 7th, they met with Con O'Neill and Geoffrey Tucker from BIE. Their 'view was that the distribution of straight information about the EEC favoured the pro-Market case' and they 'very much hoped that we would not allow criticism to prevent us from putting out such information'.[63] They 'did fear that in leaning over backwards too far to avoid prejudice, we might be denying to the public information to which they had a legitimate right'.[64] David Marquand too, spotted the potential issue. He asked the BBC to consider separating informational programmes about the EEC from those debating the pros and cons of the Yes and No arguments.[65] His lobbying was unsuccessful, and O'Neill and Tucker's fears proved well-founded. The BBC shied away from too many informational programmes, focusing instead on providing the pro- and anti-Markets arguments that were already being regularly proposed in the newspapers.

The NRC, meanwhile, first properly discussed broadcasting arrangements with Swann on 12 February. They hoped that the 'BBC's policy of fair treatment' would begin that very day, saying that 'until now the Committee [of the NRC] had felt the BBC to be biased in favour of the Market'.[66] The NRC wanted a 'straight division of time between the Anti-Marketeers and the Pro-Marketeers', with no allowance made for party.[67] They also wanted both organisations to be able to nominate their own speakers for programmes, which Swann, strongly supported by Curran, said the BBC would resist – a notable contrast with 1970-72 when the BBC had encouraged the pro-Market campaign to do this.[68]

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[62] Chief Assistant to Director-General, minutes of meeting at 12 Downing Street, 7 February 1975, WAC R78/1451/1.
[63] Record of conversation between DG, Sir Con O'Neill and Geoffrey Tucker, 7 February 1975, WAC R78/1451/1.
[64] *Ibid.*
[65] Letter from David Marquand MP to Roger Bolton, 11 February 1975, WAC T67/94/1.
[66] Minutes of meeting between BBC and NRC, 12 February 1975, WAC R78/1451/1.
[67] *Ibid.*
[68] *Ibid*; Interview with Percy Clark, 1975, David Butler, Nuffield papers.

Lord Harris at the Home Office also 'suggested that the Umbrella organisations might undertake the choice of speakers for the programmes'.[69] The BBC resisted this suggestion though did say that they would consult the organisations on speakers. Speakers raised problems for the BBC – at the same meeting with Harris, 'Mrs Clarke, having heard John Mackintosh in successful action against a less articulate anti-Marketeer, said that she had realised how much depended upon the choice of individual speakers' and there were also criticisms that Neil Marten appeared too often given how few Conservative MPs shared his views on European integration.[70] The BBC was faced with a tricky choice – should they go for the best speakers, and therefore re-use politicians like Marten, risking presenting a distorted picture of events, or should they spread out the speakers for both sides, and risk having weak speakers, especially on the anti-Market side? This problem would have been easy to avoid if they took up the NRC's suggestion of taking no account of party when selecting speakers.

Extra-parliamentary political actors were considered too, with the NRC pushing the trades unions case in particular as a key part of providing 'overall balance in the treatment of the issues'.[71] Swann recognised the difficulties in achieving 'balance in programmes which dealt with individual sections of the community', because it would artificially distort the picture in programmes about e.g. farmers and trades unionists.[72] But Swann also 'said that there was some danger in what was being proposed that the BBC might be invited to ignore the political parties. If the views of the TUC, the NFU, and the CBI were to be set out, then Party opinion had also to be exposed'.[73] Later in the meeting, Harrison again pushed the claims of trades unions, stressing that 'in his view … [they] spoke for the great majority of working people, those whose jobs were threatened or whose hopes of Regional development were likely to be disappointed if Britain remained in the Market. The BBC ought not to regard the political unanimity of the major Parties as representative of public opinion. The Trades Union

[69] Memorandum from the Chief Secretary to CA to DG and ENCA, 'Board Meeting', 8 May 1975, WAC R78/1451/1.
[70] *Ibid.*
[71] Minutes of meeting between BBC and NRC, 12 February 1975, WAC R78/1451/1.
[72] *Ibid.*
[73] *Ibid.*

movement was more representative'.[74] Swann's response was that 'the BBC could not undervalue the part to be played by the elected representatives of the people' – even at a time when those representatives had effectively delegated their decision-making power on this issue to the public.[75]

The NRC were already airing some complaints with the News. Frere-Smith drew attention to a news bulletin which had referred to 'a statement on Moscow Radio, urging Britain to get out of the Market', and asked why that had not been balanced by a statement saying the opposite from Peking Radio.[76] 'The juxtaposition seemed strange to Mr Frere-Smith except in terms of that unconscious bias which he believed to exist within the BBC' – Swann said 'he would examine the matter further'.[77] Reporting back on these meetings with BIE and NRC to the Board of Management, Curran said that pro-Marketeers had 'not so much protested as registered apprehension', while anti-Marketeers 'had made a number of accusations at a meeting with the Chairman'.[78] The BBC did not, at this stage, tell the NRC that they would be using a 50-50 balance, even though in a meeting with Lord Harris at the Home Office a few days later, he would accept that 50-50 was 'the only possible' solution for the BBC.[79]

Despite their evolving policy, there were reminders that balance did not necessarily equal impartiality, with the divisions between and within major parties a constant thorn in the BBC's side. At a NACA meeting in January, it was recognised that creating an 'artificial balance' rather than reacting 'to the news as it happened' would 'in any case be very difficult to do … in view of the differences within each of the main political parties'.[80] This was particularly an issue at this stage for the BBC due to the ongoing renegotiations, but it reflected the BBC's continuing refusal to see the referendum as a simple 'yes' or 'no'

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[74] *Ibid.*
[75] *Ibid.*
[76] *Ibid.*
[77] *Ibid.*
[78] Extract from minutes of Board of Management meeting, 17 February 1975, WAC R78/1451/1.
[79] Memorandum from Political Editor to DG and CA to DG, 17 February 1975, WAC R78/1451/1.
[80] Minutes of NACA meeting, 3 January 1975, WAC R3/59/1.

contest. Instead, it was always viewed within the wider party-political context. They were aware of the problem around balance, and at this stage did not deem it necessary for 'balance' to be imposed to maintain impartiality, though that would later change.

It is notable, however, that concerns continued about how the EEC debate would affect the BBC's usual near-50-50 balance between Labour and Conservative politicians. In February 1975, for example, NACA noted that more Labour politicians were now appearing than Conservatives, and that 'the EEC dispute within the Labour Party had accounted for some of the discrepancy'.[81] This demonstrates how the EEC issue would never be separated from party-politics – the BBC felt that 'balance' on the latter remained an overriding concern. As a news organisation, it is inevitable that internal party conflict – news-worthy at any time, as demonstrated across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in Britain, all the way back to the split in the Conservative party over the repeal of the Corn Laws – will garner much coverage. Certainly, it is not plausible to balance this – if one party is united and one disunited, they cannot give equal coverage to a party being united, because it is simply not a newsworthy event. Usually, the united party given less coverage would have no cause for complaint – they are happy to see internal divisions within their opponents picked away at. But on an issue that was ostensibly non-party-political, this raised concerns. For example, if internal party divisions were prioritised in the coverage, this would lead to increased coverage of Labour pro- and Labour anti-EC opinions, at the expense of Conservative pro- and anti- opinions. This would be a concern, given that the reasons for politicians within each party holding their views varied widely – for example, a number of anti-Market Labour MPs thought the EEC was a capitalist conspiracy, a view not held by Conservative anti-Marketers.

[81] Minutes of NACA meeting, 14 February 1975, WAC R3/59/1.

Curran met key members of the NRC including Marten, Douglas Jay and Bob Harrison again on 5 March, to discuss 'practical points' around the BBC's coverage.[82] At this stage, Curran first committed definitively to a 50-50 position on the arguments, which the NRC was content with.[83] However, Harrison was keen to stress their hope that 'the BBC would take full account of the depth and range of the interest in the issues of the organised working-class movement', and suggested that the BBC should consult over their 'choice of TUC speakers' to avoid the risk of selecting extreme speakers.[84] Curran expressed no substantive objections to this. NRC concerns were limited to relatively minor issues – for example, 'Mr Frere-Smith asked whether, in view of that bias in the Press, the BBC would suspend the daily newspaper summaries'.[85] Curran told him that they would not be, but that the BBC was conscious of the possible trap.

The NRC had every reason to be content with the BBC's plans; indeed, at this time the anti-Market side were quite pleased with the BBC – at a Board meeting, 'Lord Greenhill said that he had been somewhat disturbed by Lord Wigg's [who was anti-Market] pronouncement that he was better pleased with the BBC's balance than he had been'.[86]

The NRC were also pleased to be listened to in February over an *It's Your Line* incident with Walker-Smith. The BBC were open about the fact that the NRC had persuaded them, with a Senior Press Officer admitting it – that Walker-Smith, though he would have been an excellent advocate for the view that membership meant lost sovereignty, was not in favour of a No vote and so wasn't suitable to be used.[87] Curran also told Marten that it was arguments put forward by him and other anti-Marketers that had persuaded him.[88] The focus was on finding someone who was fully committed to the anti-Market cause,

[82] Minutes of meeting between BBC and NRC, 5 March 1975, WAC R78/1451/1.
[83] *Ibid*; Minutes of Board of Governors meeting, 6 March 1975, WAC R1/43/1.
[84] Minutes of meeting between BBC and NRC, 5 March 1975, WAC R78/1451/1.
[85] *Ibid.*
[86] Memorandum from Chief Secretary to CA to DG on Board Meeting, 20 March 1975, WAC R78/1451/1.
[87] Memorandum from Senior Press Officer to Senior Press Office on Derek Walker-Smith, undated, WAC R78/1451/1.
[88] Letter from Charles Curran to Neil Marten, 21 February 1975, WAC R78/1451/1.

rather than someone who could make the best argument. This shows how balance was prioritised over using the best speakers. For Marten, 'the relief, for an anti-Marketeer, at having an opportunity to get one's views across, is great' given the lack of support from the press.[89]

It was not until 24 April that Curran told the public about the BBC's plans for maintaining impartiality, when he appeared on *Midweek* – to be interviewed by Ludovic Kennedy – and *PM* to discuss the BBC's approach to the referendum campaign.[90] During these appearances, he outlined the reasons for the BBC's decision to go for a 50-50 balance in light of their 'standard guide line' of 'the balance in Parliament' being removed – he saw the situation as one in which 'the parties in a sense … have opted out' of the referendum.[91] This is a remarkable view given how entirely the BBC failed to separate the referendum from ordinary party-politics. Interestingly, at this stage he seemed to suggest there was no need for a 50-50 balance within individual programmes, stating 'it won't happen that a newsworthy speech is made every night by each party and can be reported similarly [sic] but on the whole over the Campaign we would hope to get that right'.[92] Curran was conscious of 'balance' in other arenas too. For example, he noted that far more MPs were pro- than anti-, which would mean they would likely make up a greater percentage of guests on programmes, and he thought the same was true of members of the House of Lords.[93] However, he was aware this could cause problems when using guests from outside of parliamentary politics. With fewer MPs on the anti-Market side, TUC and trades union representatives were likely to feature regularly – yet pro-Market trades unionists would then be unhappy if they felt they were not being heard from enough. These were all potential issues that Curran had in mind while preparing for the referendum, and they show the importance he attached to trades unionists as political figures. This was, admittedly, in part a pragmatic decision based on the desire to balance overall opinion 50-50 and the different balance in Parliament:

[89] N. Marten, 'Listener Rack D7: How to be fair about the referendum', 6 March 1975, WAC R78/1451/1.
[90] *Midweek* transcript, 24 April 1975, WAC R78/1451/1.
[91] *Ibid*; *PM* transcript, 24 April 1975, WAC R78/1451/1.
[92] *Midweek* transcript, 24 April 1975, WAC R78/1451/1.
[93] *Ibid.*

Curran told a GAC meeting in April 1975 that 'within one side, there would be a reflection of the predominant Parliamentary opinions in favour of staying in Europe, and within the other there would be a smaller Parliamentary representation, but a greater representation of other interests'.[94] This is a crucial comment, showing how the BBC could retain a 50-50 balance while also reflecting parliamentary opinion. But it had built-in dangers too, as it could lead to a situation where trades unions were seen as being universally anti-Market (and business representatives being seen as universally pro-Market). The BBC was taking a more expansive view of the political than normal, but trying to fit this wider conception into a slightly restrictive formula.

Curran was clearly influenced by the two 1974 general elections. He described the referendum as 'a very important occasion which deserves special treatment but special treatment means enlisting the interest of the audience, not boring the pants off them and I think we could easily risk doing that by having too much'.[95] He said that he was going on programmes to outline the BBC's plan for the campaign because it was 'an unprecedented event' with 'no guide lines' – he thought 'that the audience ought to know by what standards we are trying to proceed so that they can judge whether in the event we succeed'.[96] Curran wanted the public to judge how the BBC implemented their guidelines, not the guidelines themselves – which were defensive and risk-averse, preventing innovation and (at times) information. Balance overtook impartiality as the primary consideration, and the referendum was viewed through the prism of party politics. Curran himself recognised their defensiveness, saying he would be 'enormously' glad when the referendum was over.[97] He said that 'what we've got to try and do is at the end convince reasonable people that we've tried to do a fair job'.[98] What was missing from this and other pronouncements was any explicit commitment to doing the *best* job – fairness was prioritised over making good programmes.

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[94] Extracts from minutes of General Advisory Council meeting, 23 April 1975, WAC R78/1451/1.
[95] *Midweek* transcript, 24 April 1975, WAC R78/1451/1.
[96] *Ibid.*
[97] *PM* transcript, 24 April 1975, WAC R78/1451/1.
[98] *Ibid.*

On April 28, Curran again told viewers and listeners that there would be 'some sort of 50-50 division of time and opportunity'. In his retrospective look at the campaign, Anthony Smith wrote that 'news bulletins would deal with *events* as they arose, irrespective of which side the interpretation of particular occurrences happened to favour; but even in news bulletins the reporting of *speeches* would be conducted under the 50-50 guideline … but the *argument* would be reported in such a way as to achieve equality by the end of the campaign'.[99] Balance was everything.

Immediately prior to the BBC making their 50-50 decision public, the GAC were told of it. A paper was prepared for the GAC's meeting on 23 April. This underlined the importance attached to balance, as it opened with the statement that 'the single principle underlying the BBC's television and radio coverage of EEC/Referendum affairs is that pro-market and anti-market views should be afforded equal broadcasting time'.[100] This is remarkable in making clear that this was the focus – not impartiality, not providing the best information and arguments possible to listeners and viewer, just 50-50 balance.

At that meeting, the GAC expressed their feeling that there was 'need for exposition of the facts about the EEC', which Curran was wary of because he thought 'it had to be recognised that the mere fact of explaining the EEC was a kind of argument in its favour'.[101] However, the GAC were explicit on this – they felt that people were becoming confused by the abundance of politicians putting the case for both sides, and what they wanted was 'simple objective information about the EEC, the Commission, the Council of Ministers, and their procedures'.[102] Sir Frederick Bishop thought that 'the BBC would lose an opportunity which was in its line of duty if it failed to provide coverage which was purely analytical and dispassionate', and Sir Norman Graham argued that

[99] Emphasis in original text. A. Smith, 'Broadcasting' in D. Butler and U. Kitzinger, *The 1975 Referendum* (London: Macmillan, 1976), 190-213, p. 192.
[100] Paper, 'the BBC and the Referendum Campaign', GAC 468, 22 April 1975, WAC R78/1451/1.
[101] Memorandum from Chief Secretary to CA to DG and ENCA, 'Board Meeting', 24 April 1975, WAC R78/1451/1.
[102] Extract from minutes of General Advisory Council meeting, 23 April 1975, WAC R78/1451/1.

surveys showing ignorance of the EEC on a large scale meant that 'what was needed was quite elementary informative problems'.[103]

Curran, however, resisted this pushback. Even in March, Mrs Clarke on the GAC had been talking of the need for informative material, and Curran had responded that 'it had to be remembered that such information could cumulatively represent a powerful argument for staying in the EEC – simply by being itself'.[104] The end result would be more time given to debate, and less to hard facts.

The result of the publicly-stated decision to aim for a 50-50 balance between the Yes and No campaigns was constant checks to ensure the BBC were, indeed, achieving this. Balance was tightly enforced. A post-referendum review of the coverage from the Board of Management noted that 'all programmes were required to render centrally, every week, a detailed tally of speakers used; these were studied meticulously and any necessary "tuning" adjustments were made immediately in order to conform to the mandatory BBC editorial requirement that the pro- and anti-E.E.C. views should be given equal broadcasting time'.[105] This had in fact begun earlier. As early as February, the BBC were aware that BIE had 'set up a monitoring unit', and Swann 'rather gathered that the anti-marketeers had or were about to do likewise'.[106] BIE rigorously recorded every item about the Common Market on radio and television, in regular programmes including the news as well as in special programmes, with details about which topics were covered, who the speakers were, and occasional comments about what it meant for the pro-Market campaign.[107] For the BBC, this was seen as a prompt for 'us to keep a careful tally from now on on everything that we do in

[103] *Ibid.*
[104] Memorandum from Chief Secretary to CA to DG and ENCA, 'Board Meeting', 20 March 1975, WAC R78/1451/1.
[105] 'The BBC and the EEC referendum', note by DPA, 21 January 1976, WAC R78/1451/1, p. 45.
[106] Memorandum from Swann to Curran, 'Re. Peter Scott's note', 19 February 1975, WAC R78/1451/1.
[107] See, for example, 'Monitoring Comments', 12 March 1973, PA BIE/8/5

order that we can respond instantly to the criticisms that will certainly come'.[108] This tally-keeping shows the BBC in defensive stance, trying to prevent criticism they thought would come rather than focusing on making the best programmes.

This was evident in issues such as the one discussed at the Board of Governors meeting on 24 April 1975:

> Mr. [George] Howard said that in a recent edition of "Farming" the producer had gone to undue lengths to balance a speaker in favour of membership when the truth was that within the agricultural community opinion was a long way from being divided 50:50. D.G. said that he had given specific instructions about this kind of editorial decision. Staff were required to reflect opinion as it was. Balance had to be achieved over the total argument, but not by pretending that each and every group was divided 50:50 when it was not.[109]

This idea that everything didn't *have* to be 50-50 was expressed regularly by Curran at this time. For example, he argued that during the campaign 'where news was concerned the BBC would cover it as it came, but that it would reflect opinions about the issue 50:50'.[110] That was true prior to the campaign, and when he was speaking in April, but by the time the campaign proper swung into motion, the 50-50 balance within news bulletins, for example, was rigidly kept to. Viewers and listeners got no real sense that the Yes campaign was conducting far more campaign events than the No campaign, because the news would cover one event from each.

Issues also arose later about coverage of the referendum as it related to Labour in particular. A note from Peter Hardiman Scott, then Political Editor, is especially revealing. He wrote:

> There was a conversation between the Prime Minister's Press Secretary (Joe Haines) and CA to DG, in which Haines sought our agreement that we would not use Labour MPs of opposing views in the same programme. This was an attempt to get the BBC to agree to the guidelines which the Prime Minister had laid down for his Ministers [in

[108] Memorandum from Swann to Curran, 'Re. Peter Scott's note', 19 February 1975, WAC R78/1451/1.
[109] Minutes of Board of Governors meeting, 24 March 1975, WAC R1/43/1.
[110] Extract from minutes of Board of Management meeting, 21 April 1975, WAC R78/1451/1.

> fact, rather more expansive as the guidelines applied only to ministers, not all MPs]. In a letter to Haines of 14th April, the BBC undertook not to go out of its way to create confrontation, but where it arose naturally we would not ignore it. Neither could we agree not to juxtapose recordings of Ministers with opposing views, but we would not intercut interviews in a way that would give the appearance of confrontation when it didn't exist. Politicians invited to appear in referendum programmes would be fully informed of the context in which they were appearing.[111]

This lobbying of the BBC on party-political grounds happened more formally, too. They remained deeply involved, for example, in the Committee on Party Political Broadcasting and the decisions it made about Party Political Broadcasts (PPBs). The Conservatives and Liberals, for example, applied 'strong pressure … for more and shorter broadcasts', while the party whips wondered if BIE could delegate their broadcasting time to the parties.[112]

It is unsurprising that this party-political lobbying continued, but we can see within it some of the key flaws in the BBC's coverage of the referendum. There was little attempt to separate the referendum from the world of party politics, and to treat it as a grand constitutional event about a foundational issue which would say something to the world about how Britain viewed itself. There was a failure to adapt to the short-term context of the referendum, and a failure to find the nuance in the debate. People were either 'pro' or 'anti', with nothing in between, and the simplistic 50-50 mechanism meant that the most prominent politicians were often those with the strongest views. 'Balance' was the watchword, not impartiality. Quality was sacrificed to try and avoid criticism. The BBC shied away from producing informational programmes, at precisely the time they were most needed, for fear of being seen as pro-EEC. All these trends became obvious in the preparation for the referendum, which took a long time despite not coming up with any innovative ideas, and stuck instead to the most basic principles. There was a failure to think about what would serve audiences best; only a desire to have a rule that would help protect the BBC itself, and that came operation even prior to the campaign proper.

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[111] P. Hardiman Scott, 'Notes on the referendum', 18 June 1975, WAC R78/1451/1.
[112] *Ibid.*

CONCLUSION

What began as an optimistic, innovation-seeking exercise for the BBC ended in competent disappointment. The BBC understandably stuck to its party politics-centric view throughout the two general election campaigns of 1974, and quickly sought to plan for the coming referendum as soon as those were done and dusted.

In its early stages, at the end of 1974, it proactively searched for precedents in other EEC nations, sought to find examples of best practice, and aimed to avoid strict rules on how coverage should be presented. There was a focus on providing information to voters, and serving them was the priority.

However, these far-sighted objectives were quickly lost. Precedents within the UK and other English-speaking nations were ignored, as were lessons from EEC nations, and the BBC reverted to a defensive stance – what rule could it implement to defend itself most easily? That meant a 50-50 balance, previously rejected, and it meant ending any possible attempts at treating the referendum as an issue removed from the day-to-day arena of party politics. A weary electorate would have been unlikely to come to the view that this was a grand constitutional issue based on the BBC's coverage. There was a failure to adapt to the short-term context, or to understand the nuances of the debate. The reversion to a simplistic 50-50 mechanism meant those with strongest views often became the most prominent voices, and quality was sacrificed in the name of avoiding criticism – informational programmes, initially prioritised, became actively avoided. The BBC prioritised protecting itself over serving its audience, the British public.

CHAPTER 6: 1975
THE REFERENDUM

After almost six months of discussions about *how* to cover a referendum, the BBC now had to put its plans into action. As the campaign proper began, the future of the country was at stake, and a multiplicity of visions were on offer, divided into two camps. In the end, the victory was a comfortable one for the Yes campaign, with 67 per cent of voters endorsing the view that Britain's interests were best served by remaining in the EEC. There was a distinct lack of enthusiasm, however, following the two general elections of the preceding year, and membership of the EEC continued to remain a matter of much debate throughout the 1980s and 1990s. But, for the 1970s at least, the matter seemed relatively settled. It was the culmination of the debate that had begun after the Second World War, when the 'European project' began with Britain on the sidelines, and the first evidence of a long-term answer to the membership question that had been ever-present in British politics since Harold Macmillan had launched the first application in 1961.

This chapter will examine how the BBC covered the 1975 referendum campaign, looking at its normal news and current affairs programming as well as its special offerings, and the issues that came to the fore in its coverage. After the handwringing about impartiality that was evident in the preparation, it will consider how the BBC managed impartiality on a day-to-day basis as its coverage came under the microscope, and the impact of their management on how viewers perceived their programmes.

DOMESTIC SERVICES

The campaign: the programmes

Lindsay Aqui has argued that 'newspapers were the main media outlet through which the campaign engaged with voters'.[1] Yet only television and radio were able to provide truly national events that were directly transmitted to millions upon millions of households, most notably the Oxford Union debate. A study of the referendum by Leicester University's Centre for Mass Communications Research found that half of respondents 'regarded television as their main source of news', with 66 percent trusting it more than newspapers, and the BBC's viewership and listenership was far greater than that of any single newspaper.[2]

The BBC's centrality intensified when strike action took ITV off the airwaves for a significant part of the campaign; the BBC themselves were conscious of needing to take 'additional care' in light of their reduced competition.[3] BIE argued that the strikes made their complaints about supposed BBC bias more important than usual.[4] The lack of an alternative station meant viewers were stuck with whatever the BBC was showing, making it harder to avoid referendum coverage. Audience research conducted with the same panel of respondents on several occasions during the referendum process demonstrated this – between 9th and 11th May, with the campaign about to start, only 23 percent had recently seen programmes about the referendum (excluding the news), whereas three weeks into the campaign, between 30th May and 1st June, 73 percent had done so.[5] There was a relatively late start to the BBC's coverage compared to the press – in both of the sets of interviews, 65 percent had recently read newspaper articles on the referendum, with no growth between the two.[6]

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[1] L. Aqui, *The First Referendum: Reassessing Britain's Entry to Europe, 1973-75* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), p. 220.
[2] D. Nandy, 'The Media and the Messages' in R. Jowell and G. Hoinville, *Britain Into Europe: Public opinion and the EEC 1961-75* (London: Croom Helm, 1976), 77-91, pp. 79-80.
[3] Minutes of NACA meeting, 23 May 1975, WAC R3/59/2.
[4] Letter from Con O'Neill to Charles Curran, 25 May 1975, WAC R78/1451/1.
[5] BBC, 'Studies of the impact of the radio and television coverage of the EEC referendum campaign', January 1976, WAC R9/778/1, p. 67.
[6] *Ibid.*

Discussion about programmes to be broadcast during the campaign began early. On 19 February, Martin Wallace (Head of Current Affairs Group, Radio) circulated a detailed memorandum with details of how radio planned to cover the referendum.[7] He struck a very different note on informational programmes to Curran, stating that 'there is a need for exposition of the facts on which the electorate should base their vote'.[8] Wallace, closer to producers than Curran, wanted more informational programmes while Curran wanted fewer.

From the beginning, there was a consciousness of the 'need to ensure that Referendum programmes should not be thrust too relentlessly at the audience and become unduly obtrusive in the scheduling overall, to the point where the less committed developed a resistance to them instead of finding in them a source of information and of interest'.[9] This was particularly pertinent given the two general elections that had occurred in the previous year, and the surfeit of political programming that accompanied them. Given this situation, it was 'decided that the majority of the coverage should be included in the regular current affairs output rather than be featured in special programmes'.[10]

Phone-ins were one major feature of the campaign. *It's Your Line*, for example, took on a referendum-centric tone. Tony Benn wrote in his diary on 14 May 1975 that:

> I did an hour-long *It's Your Line* … with Reginald Maudling on the Common Market. Very good questions with Robin Day in the chair and everybody being terribly careful. All Maudling said was "Rubbish, nonsense. I agree with Shirley Williams" and "I prefer the Foreign Office to Mr Benn" – he didn't put forward one single argument. I was probably the only anti-Marketeer in the studio or rather in the whole control room, because the BBC is a hotbed of pro-Market people.[11]

[7] Memorandum from Head of Current Affairs Group Radio to C.R4, 'EEC Referendum Coverage', 19 February 1975, WAC R78/1451/1.
[8] *Ibid.*
[9] 'The BBC and the EEC referendum', note by DPA, 21 January 1976, WAC R78/1451/1, p. 20.
[10] *Ibid.*
[11] T. Benn, *Against the Tide: Diaries 1973-76* (London: Arrow, 1990), p. 377.

It's Your Line reflected rising tempers during the campaign, and it led to criticism from Christopher Frere-Smith:

> He said that, at the very end of the programme [the first in a series on the EEC], a call had been taken from a spokesman of the EEC in London, but he had embarked on a statement rather than a question. Mr Frere-Smith said that the incident … perhaps illustrated a latent bias in the BBC. There might, however unwittingly, be a feeling that the Pro-Marketeers were respectable and the Anti-Marketeers not. He believed that there should be guidelines for production staff. Sir Michael said that he was sceptical about the worth of additional guidelines beyond those already in existence. Whatever one did would not rule out the occasional errors and confusions.[12]

There was, at least, a limit to the BBC's strict rules. Frere-Smith's eagerness to criticise reflected the rising temperature. At a NACA meeting, 'Walter Wallich noted that the first of the EEC "It's Your Line" programmes had led to an unusually ill-tempered reaction from a small number of listeners who were obviously totally committed to one side or other of the argument'.[13] This reflected the fact that some voters were extremely passionate about the issue of EC membership, while for others it was a low salience issue. It also reflected that engagement among listeners during the referendum campaign was higher than it had been during the two general election campaigns of the previous year; in 1975, an average of two million people listened to each broadcast of *Referendum Call*, far more than had listened to *Election Call* in 1974.[14] People were keen to hear about the issue they were being asked to vote on.

One programme that was well-received by listeners was *Referendum Call*, broadcast on Tuesday 20th May between 9.05am and 10am on Radio 4, where 'the large majority of listeners responded very appreciatively' to a programme that they felt gave them useful information about the Common Market and helped them 'to sort out the pros and cons of membership'.[15] Enoch Powell was the chosen speaker, and even those who disagreed with his views appreciated

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[12] Minutes of meeting between BBC and NRC, 12 February 1975, WAC R78/1451/1.
[13] Minutes of NACA meeting, 7 February 1975, WAC R3/59/1.
[14] A. Smith, 'Broadcasting' in D. Butler and U. Kitzinger, *The 1975 Referendum* (London: Macmillan, 1976), 190-213, p. 209.
[15] BBC, 'Studies of the impact of the radio and television coverage of the EEC referendum campaign', January 1976, WAC R9/778/1, p. 8.

his eloquence and way of responding to questions, which ensured 'new information' was heard and that 'points [were] clarified' for listeners, which was deemed 'very helpful to those making up their mind'.[16] Some listeners thought it the best broadcast they had heard on the referendum, making a range of issues clearer and Powell responding to questions put by the public rather than by professional journalists or commentators.[17] Criticism of interviews was rife, and opinion was especially negative surrounding Harold Wilson's interrogation by Robin Day on BBC One on Friday 23rd May, which was 'hardly as positive and forthcoming about the EEC and the Government's economic policy as many would have liked'.[18] There was a desire for facts and answers to the questions that ordinary people had, and viewers and listeners did not appreciate programmes that failed to deliver these.

Opinion on phone-ins was not universally positive. Listeners to Jimmy Young's discussion on the referendum, at lunchtime on Wednesday 21st May on his Radio 2 show, found it made 'a refreshing change from phone-ins'.[19] While some listeners disliked the referendum being 'thrust upon' them in the middle of the day, others found it useful to hear about the issues from people who were not politicians, with Sir Henry Plumb (president of the National Farmers' Union) and Mary Blakey (among others) as guests – although most thought the latter unimpressive and one even said that she 'did more harm than good to her own case.[20]

Programmes certainly helped some people decide which way to vote. *Newsbeat*, on Radio 1 on Thursday 22 May from 12.30pm, saw David Steele and Tony Benn answer questions put to them by listeners.[21] Given this format, its inherent focus was on providing the information that listeners could themselves use to inform their decision-making. Analysis of its questions gives us an insight into the concerns of younger adults – 'one or two listeners admitted they had "made

[16] *Ibid.*
[17] *Ibid.*
[18] *Ibid*, p. 10.
[19] *Ibid*, p. 9.
[20] *Ibid.*
[21] *Ibid*, p. 10.

up their minds as a result" of hearing about these concerns.[22] There were, however, some complaints that referendum coverage had spilled onto Radio 1 from the other stations.[23] The coverage on *Newsbeat* was at least tailored to the audience – it 'offered six programmes … on Referendum subjects in which two speakers … answered questions from an audience of young people'.[24] Yet they also pushed the boundaries of what their listeners might want, with the same programme also broadcasting 'two special reports examining the experience of Norway and of Denmark in relation to the EEC'.

The prevalence of phone-ins contributed to a surfeit of programmes hearing from political campaigners, while experts were few and far between – one example being five reports given by John Simpson on *From Our Own Correspondent* on Radio 4 about the EEC as an organisation.[25] There was also *Controversy* on BBC2 on the 20th and 21st May, which heard from Andrew Shonfield on the first night and from William Pickles on the second night.[26] Far more programmes simply picked a pro-Market politician and an anti-Market politician, and had them debate – this was the formula used by *Woman's Hour*, *Newsbeat*, *It's Your Line, The Jimmy Young Show* and *The Great Debate*.

Panorama also ran with this, with high-profile debates featuring Roy Jenkins against Tony Benn and Shirley Williams and Enoch Powell, and the highest profile debate of the entire campaign, at the Oxford Union, was run on similar lines.[27] This was a conscious decision by the BBC. The Board of Management paper reviewing coverage of the referendum wrote 'one must first of all repeat that BBC Television and Radio have of course covered the issue of Britain and the EEC over many years, of which 1962-63 and 1970-73 represented the previous peaks. A very large number of expository programmes, some of them of considerable length, had been mounted during that period'.[28] The BBC felt

[22] *Ibid.*
[23] *Ibid.*
[24] 'The BBC and the EEC referendum', note by DPA, 21 January 1976, WAC R78/1451/1, p. 13.
[25] *Ibid*, p. 17.
[26] *Ibid*, p. 23.
[27] *Ibid*, pp. 22, 24-25.
[28] *Ibid*, p. 51.

that 'expert' and factual material on the EEC found its way into programmes more effectively when it was interspersed into discussion and debate programmes, rather than when entire programmes were devoted to it, with the Board of Management report mentioning documents prepared by Dominick Harrod (economic correspondent) and Charles Wheeler (chief Europe correspondent) for the aid of other staff members.[29] The report added 'much of this information found its way into programmes but as material illustrative of particular points rather than in indigestible blocks'.[30]

But there remained an inherent concern about a fact-based style of broadcasting, with the report arguing that there was a 'substantial limitation on the amount of information which the BBC could safely convey to its audience since there were extraordinarily few ascertainable facts on which all were agreed' and that 'into this contentious field it was not easy for an impartial broadcasting organisation to enter', because the facts were often not neutral.[31] The Report ends in defence of the BBC, writing 'the BBC had necessarily to adopt a cautious approach to this issue, not from timidity but as a consequence of its determination to remain strictly impartial in a public argument where comparatively few statements could be made that were not challengeable and contentious. But it did not duck the main issues. As … this paper has shown they were during the period of the campaign examined in considerable detail in a wide variety of programmes.'[32] We see here a conflict in its duties – their duty to 'remain strictly impartial' seemingly taking precedence over their duty to 'inform, educate and entertain'.

The BBC explicitly sought to avoid 'expert' discussion during the campaign in favour of hearing from politicians – and it did this explicitly because it was concerned about a backlash from anti-Market campaigners, rather than because it thought the facts were unascertainable. On 25 April, A. M. Mackie sent a letter to Charles Curran 'to express the hope that the BBC will be putting on

[29] *Ibid*, p. 53.
[30] *Ibid.*
[31] 'The BBC and the EEC referendum', note by DPA, 21 January 1976, WAC R78/1451/1, p. 53.
[32] *Ibid*, p. 54.

programmes of factual information about the European Economic Community, its institutions and the way it works'.[33] The response from Peter Hardiman Scott, political editor, was revealing. He wrote that 'we have given a good deal of thought to the possibility of doing factual programmes about the EEC during the … Referendum Campaign, and have come to the conclusion that it is not quite as easy as it appears'.[34] He went on: 'A series of programmes about the institutions of the Community and the way they work, done at this time, could easily be construed as BBC advocacy for staying in the Community. In short what I'm saying is that, although we, like you, may recognise the need for factual programmes about the working of the Community, they are unlikely to be seen as impartial factual accounts by the Anti-Marketeers at this particular time. Even facts from the EEC are not always seen as facts by its opponents. It's a difficult situation'.[35] The BBC's courage had deserted it. It was shying away from doing what it thought the country 'needed', because it was worried about receiving criticism. An apparent commitment to impartiality (but, in reality, to balance) was being prioritised over its commitment to providing voters with the information they needed to make an informed decision.

This is, however, a rebuke to Tom Mills' argument that the BBC was too pro-Establishment – the BBC was here concerned about criticism from those outside the party mainstream, like Powell and Benn.[36] The BBC said that it had provided very detailed information about the EEC over the previous 15 years – and indeed it had. However, the public had never been asked to cast a vote based solely on their EEC views, and it had never been a salient issue at any general election. And at this crucial time, when the public were more likely than ever to pay attention to programmes about the EEC and factual information about it, the BBC actively shrunk from providing it. It is also far from certain that factual programmes about the EEC would have been inherently pro-European; details of how it worked could add to the anti-Market arguments around sovereignty,

[33] Letter from A. M. Mackie to Charles Curran, 'EEC – Information Programmes', 25 April 1975, WAC R78/1451/1.
[34] Letter from P. Hardiman Scott to A. M. Mackie, 'EEC – Information Programmes', 1 May 1975, WAC R78/1451/1.
[35] *Ibid.*
[36] T. Mills, *The BBC: Myth of a Public Service* (London: Verso, 2020), pp. 3-4.

for example. The only examples Scott could provide of 'information' programmes on the EEC were *Midweek Goes to Market*, *Europe – Year of Decision* and *Woman's Hour*.[37] He reiterated the need for the BBC to stick to a 50-50 balance to avoid criticism, and thought that 'even then, to quote the Director-General the other day, I think we're "on a hiding to nothing".'[38] The BBC's attitude throughout the campaign was negative, not positive – always asking 'how can we avoid criticism?' rather than 'how can we make the best programmes possible?'.

Regional broadcasting was another major area for referendum coverage, enabling the issue to be debated as it pertained to local areas, but raising further queries about managing impartiality. Radio Humberside had broadcast programmes in which each local MP was able to broadcast their views on the Common Market, and Ian Trethowan was concerned that this could cause problems. He wrote to the manager of Radio Humberside that:

> Your ten MPs split six pro and four anti. You feel that this is balanced near enough. But what if it had been seven to three? Or nine to one? I assume you will make sure that "Morningtide" is completely balanced during the last month … and that the nearer you get to polling day the more you will tend to balance within each individual programme.[39]

What is striking in this letter is that it never uses the term impartiality, instead only referring to 'balance'. We see here how the 1975 referendum developed an emerging trend in BBC political broadcasting – the tendency to view 'balance' between two opposing campaigns as impartiality. The nuance of the earlier debates around whether the BBC should give 50-50 coverage to each campaign or should instead base its level of coverage on the degree of support for each campaign among MPs, was now gone, with the BBC fully committed to a 50-50 'balanced' approach. The steer for 'impartiality', at least on this issue, did not now come from parliamentary opinion but from elsewhere. It could be argued that the programme was made in the most impartial way possible – reflecting

[37] Letter from P. Hardiman Scott to A. M. Mackie, 'EEC – Information Programmes', 1 May 1975, WAC R78/1451/1.
[38] *Ibid.*
[39] Letter from Ian Trethowan to Manager, Radio Humberside, 'Referendum plans', 2 May 1975, WAC R101/106/1.

the views of local MPs as they were, rather than distorting them by aiming for a precise 50-50 balance. It would hardly have undermined the 'truth' if Radio Humberside had based the percentage of time given to each side solely on the views of local MPs elected by their constituents (the station's listeners).

Even away from regional broadcasting, attention was given by national programmes to the effects of EEC membership on the ground. *Talking Politics* on Radio 4 took a close look at Brent in London, while *Analysis* (also on Radio 4) headed to South Yorkshire and *Midweek* studied the campaign in Coventry and Warwickshire.[40] On a larger scale, *Westminster* on BBC2 provided 'an examination of the special problems of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland' as they related to the EEC.[41] Of course, the 20 local radio stations that now existed under the BBC aegis were to the fore in this, keeping 'their audiences in very close contact … with the public debate as it affected their own localities'.[42] There was comprehensive coverage: 'Some [stations] had a regular Referendum package in their morning news and current affairs sequences' and 'each station provided a number of special programmes'.[43]

The national regions – Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland – all had leeway to present the referendum in a different light from the national output. Their tasks were, in some ways, even more difficult than for the BBC as a whole. BBC Wales, for example, 'had to ensure a similar balance between the groups campaigning solely in Wales [to that ensured in national broadcasts], in a situation where the Welsh Labour Party, Plaid Cymru and the Welsh Trades Union Congress were all broadly anti-E.E.C.'.[44] Similarly, in Scotland the SNP were anti-EEC which 'called for careful handling', though Scotland stuck to the national output more closely than Wales.[45] The post-referendum Board of Management report gave no details on how balance was maintained in Northern

[40] 'The BBC and the EEC referendum', note by DPA, 21 January 1976, WAC R78/1451/1, pp. 18-20.
[41] *Ibid*, p. 23.
[42] *Ibid*, p. 30.
[43] *Ibid.*
[44] *Ibid*, p. 32.
[45] *Ibid*, p. 34.

Ireland other than to say that 'opportunities were given to both sides to state its case'.[46]

All three national regions failed to use their opt-outs to the fullest extent, but did produce a number of programmes tailored to the referendum as it affected their specific area. Similarly, 'it was not felt that the English Regions should play a special role in connection with the referendum since most of the issues were national ones'.[47] Local broadcasting around the referendum was most evident in local radio, but lacking slightly elsewhere – though there was still an attempt to cover 'local speeches and controversy' in regional programming.[48] The relative dearth of special programmes in regional broadcasting did not go unnoticed, with 'some criticism of inadequate coverage at a meeting of the Midlands Advisory Council'.[49]

Regular programmes adapted to the campaign. *Midweek at the Market* was broadcast on BBC One on 13th-15 May, dealing, respectively, with the impact of EC membership on industry and industrial relations; on regional development; and on sovereignty and the EC institutions.[50] Viewing was low, estimated at under three percent of the population; far lower than the 14 per cent, for example, who tuned into an interview with the Prime Minister about the referendum.[51] However, those who did tune in to *Midweek* thought it covered very significant issues in plenty of depth and without bias. This was a programme to which viewers said that 'both sides of the question were so well argued that I am now even less certain than before – can I vote "well – yes and no?"', while others found the issues 'too complex' to be described easily in this programme.[52] While it delivered on viewers' desire for factual information about the referendum, it did not help them to make up their minds.

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[46] *Ibid*, p. 36.
[47] *Ibid.*
[48] *Ibid.*
[49] *Ibid*, p. 37.
[50] BBC Genome, May 1975.
[51] BBC, 'Studies of the impact of the radio and television coverage of the EEC referendum campaign', January 1976, WAC R9/778/1, p. 3.
[52] *Ibid*, pp. 6-7.

This was a common theme with other programmes too. Radio 4 broadcast *The Referendum in Wales* on Sunday 18th May, and audience research's summary of responses concluded that 'they said, the cases for and against Britain remaining a member of the EEC were so forcefully and persuasively argued, the claims of one side refuted so emphatically by the other, that it became increasingly difficult for the "don't' knows" to make up their minds'.[53] Some found it beneficial for its focus on Wales alone which showed the issues in a new light, while another wrote that 'a plain, objective statement of (a) what we gain and (b) what we lose by retaining membership of the EEC would be much more helpful than interminable arguing'.[54] The issue for the BBC, of course, was that there was no agreement on what the benefits and problems of membership were.

The programmes gave plenty of time to senior politicians, including new Conservative leader Margaret Thatcher. She appeared on BBC One's *Talk In* on Friday 16th May, and many viewers expressed their interest in seeing how the new Leader of the Opposition would 'stand up to the searching questioning' of her interviewer, Robin Day. Most were impressed by how she came across personally, but there was little discussion of how watching the programme had impacted (or not) their views on the EEC – this was a programme that was perhaps more important for party politics than for the referendum itself.[55]

The public were even more impressed by Edward Heath when he appeared in *A Question of Europe* on BBC1 on Tuesday 3rd June. Dipak Nandy, reflecting on the referendum, disapproved, writing that it was 'not the most imaginative example of the BBC's approach to programme viewing' because it was simply broadcasting live an ongoing debate that had been organised by the Oxford Union, rather than an original programme.[56] But viewers thoroughly enjoyed it, and even Nandy admitted that it was 'compulsive viewing'.[57] This was a debate broadcast live from the Oxford Union on the motion 'This house would say

[53] *Ibid*, p. 8.
[54] *Ibid.*
[55] *Ibid*, p. 7.
[56] D. Nandy, 'The Media and the Messages' in R. Jowell and G. Hoinville, *Britain Into Europe: Public opinion and the EEC 1961-75* (London: Croom Helm, 1976), 77-91, p. 82.
[57] *Ibid.*

"Yes" to Europe', and attracted a huge audience of almost 11 million viewers.[58] Viewers largely found it 'very entertaining', with speeches given by Barbara Castle, Peter Shore, Jeremy Thorpe and Edward Heath.

Given the favourable reaction and large audience, it is likely this programme helped decide more votes than most others – and it is obvious which way those votes would have gone, because 'it was generally agreed that the pro-Europeans were *infinitely* better than the "anti-Marketeers"'.[59] Barbara Castle, for example, was deemed 'unprepared' and 'out of depth' whereas Heath's speech was a 'forceful, obviously sincere, advocacy of the European cause – delivered entirely without notes – showed true statesmanship and, it was often said, raised the debate to a level far above petty personal issues or party politics'.[60] This was a remarkably positive view of Heath, who had regularly been criticised during his ten years as party leader for being dull or uninspiring – but European integration was the political subject that enthused him more than any other, and his television appearances during this campaign were viewed far more positively than his appearances in previous general election campaigns. Even Castle herself echoed this sentiment, writing in her diary that 'the most remarkable phenomenon of the evening was Heath. The audience was all his, and he responded to it with a genuineness which was the most impressive thing I have ever seen from him … they gave him a standing ovation at the end, and he deserved it'.[61] Of her own performance, she wrote merely 'I knew I had been a flop'.[62]

Regular BBC news and current affairs programmes also dealt with the referendum. The *Today* programme, for example, continued its habit of presenting programmes from European cities, despite recognising that this 'might be taken by anti-marketeers as evidence of pro-European bias' because

[58] Smith, 'Broadcasting' p. 212.
[59] Emphasis added. BBC, 'Studies of the impact of the radio and television coverage of the EEC referendum campaign', January 1976, WAC R9/778/1, p. 11; Aqui, *The First Referendum*, p. 218.
[60] BBC, 'Studies of the impact of the radio and television coverage of the EEC referendum campaign', January 1976, WAC R9/778/1, p. 11.
[61] B. Castle, *The Castle Diaries 1974-76* (London: Book Club Associates, 1980), p. 406.
[62] *Ibid.*

'it was … felt important to have the views of permanent citizens in Western Europe on the advantages or disadvantages to their countries of membership or non-membership of the E.E.C.'.[63] This was a rare and welcome sign of the BBC disdaining a defensive approach, and aiming to produce the best programme possible without fear of criticism.

When it came to the news, Television News 'quickly decided that a professional and specialist unit of some kind would be needed to accumulate and concentrate information and attitudes about the E.E.C' and so set up a group which included 'the Chief European Correspondent and several reporters and members of the editorial staff, under the command of a Senior Duty Editor, charged with no other duty but responsibility for coverage of E.E.C. matters until the Referendum was held'.[64] Radio news also set up a 'Referendum Campaign Unit', though only 'for the final stages of the campaign' and with a different remit – 'to organise coverage, prepare output and ensure that a proper balance was maintained'.[65]

It is worth repeating in full what the attitude of the television news programmes was to the referendum and maintaining impartiality across it. This is verbatim from the post-referendum Board of Management paper:

> The amount of time given to the opposing views on the value of the E.E.C. was precisely logged (in minutes and seconds) beginning in January, and was kept in general balance throughout. News editions were not, of course, subject to the inhibitions placed on other programmes of a strict 50/50 balance between the two sides but were able to include items within bulletins purely on the criteria of newsworthiness. Once the campaign proper began on 19 May, however, news bulletins had to be balanced in their reports of meetings and press conferences conducted by the rival organisations and their supporters: other referendum items continued to be included in, or rejected for, bulletins on professional assessment of their news value, whether or not that led to some occasional imbalance.[66]

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[63] 'The BBC and the EEC referendum', note by DPA, 21 January 1976, WAC R78/1451/1, p. 12.
[64] *Ibid*, p. 25.
[65] *Ibid*, pp. 27-28.
[66] *Ibid*, pp. 26-27.

There is plenty to unpack here. Firstly, there is the sheer attention to detail that went into measuring the amount of time devoted to each side of the debate in seconds. It shows the fear within the BBC about the criticism they may receive unless they were very careful about their coverage, and shows that the priority was maintaining balance, not impartiality. Secondly, there was a disjuncture between news and current affairs in their approach to impartiality – the latter had to follow a self-imposed rule of balance within each programme, while the former only tried to ensure balance over the entire course of the campaign. If maintaining balance simply over the entire course of the campaign was good enough for news, why was it not good enough for current affairs?

The attempt by the news to prioritise balance over broader impartiality caused further issues, as they had to 'watch for pseudo-events created for obvious propaganda purposes' and there was a 'comparative lack of speakers on the anti-E.E.C. side'.[67] There was also a huge disparity in the number of public meetings run by each side – in one week there were 134 BIE meetings and only 27 NRC meetings – but 'this difficulty was overcome by persistent efforts to ensure that the "antis" received equal coverage'.[68] This was balance undermining impartiality, giving the impression that there was no difference between the number of meetings held by each side.

The programmes: the issues

The existing literature on the referendum often focuses on examining which issues were most prominently debated during the campaign. This section will consider how the BBC's programming reflects or rebuts the claims made by other historians. Lindsay Aqui, for example, argues that 'it cannot be said that the public did not consider sovereignty when making their decision in 1975'.[69] This is an intriguing claim, because it contrasts with the oft-repeated claim that sovereignty was an issue systematically ignored by pro-Marketeers in the 1970s.

[67] *Ibid*, p. 27.
[68] *Ibid.*
[69] Aqui, *The First Referendum*, p. 262.

Was sovereignty an issue that was prominent in the BBC's broadcasting? Thanks to other analysis carried out elsewhere, we can also compare the BBC's coverage of the referendum to that of the newspapers. For example, the Referendum Information Unit found that the cost of food was the issue with the most column inches devoted to it in seven of the ten weeks of the campaign.[70] Did the BBC focus on day-to-day issues like this or look at the broader arguments for and against European integration?

Two of the more interesting findings from the BBC's audience research on the referendum concerned the issues brought up during the campaign. Answers to a first question showed that respondents 'statements about what they saw as the "real deciding factors" [in the referendum campaign] hardly differed at all from those given by people who neither listened to nor viewed any Referendum programmes'.[71] The real differences in the issues deemed 'deciding factors' came between Yes and No voters, with the former focusing on 'the political and defence arguments particularly that Britain is too small to continue on her own and that staying in the EEC is a good precaution against future world wars', and the latter on 'arguments that concerned direct effects on their everyday lives'.[72] This would suggest that the BBC's referendum coverage had little impact on the prominence of various issues.

However, that view is undermined by responses to the second question, where respondents were asked about the factors that been important in their own decision on how to vote.[73] There was a noticeable disparity between the issues that were 'important factors' among voters who had watched much BBC coverage, and those who had watched comparatively little. Interestingly, no such disparity was visible among people with different radio listening habits.[74] Those factors which were deemed important far more frequently by those who watched

[70] Morland, 'Summary of enquiries received by the Unit for the week ending 30 May', 2 June 1975, TNA CAB199/57.
[71] 'Studies of the impact of the radio and television coverage of the EEC referendum campaign', viewing report, January 1976, WAC R9/778/1, p. 41.
[72] *Ibid*, p. 42.
[73] *Ibid*, p. 44.
[74] *Ibid.*

television programmes about the referendum 'several times a day' compared to those who watched referendum programmes less often than once a day included 'keeping control of resources such as coal and oil' (46 percent against 28 percent); 'enabling Britain to take effective political decisions on her own' (33 percent against 18 percent); and 'preserving the present role of the monarchy' (25 percent against 16 percent).[75] It is easy to see how this disparity may have influenced voting – those who thought it important to 'keep control' of national resources or to most effectively be able to take political decisions independently as a nation would have been more likely to vote No based on those views.

We can see here the BBC's role as an agenda-setter, rather than an institution simply talking about the issues that other agenda-setters wanted to talk about. It helped shape the debate, and allow viewers to make their own judgment on what issues were most important during the referendum campaign.

As ever, though, this was only to a certain extent. Audience research interviews showed that 'there were few changes from mid-April to mid-June in what people saw as the "real, deciding factors", suggesting the media had a limited role in agenda-setting (though they would of course have played a role even before coverage reached saturation point during the campaign).[76] The report even noted that 'an example of a point that <u>was</u> aired in several programmes but which did not "register" with many people, it seems, was that "trade with the EEC is falling, whilst with the rest of the world, it is rising".'[77]

Individual programmes also played a role in which issues voters thought important, at least in the short-term. Audience research noted in their report that those who had watched Wilson on *Talk-In* were more likely to mention 'the opportunities for British industry in the EEC', while those who tuned into Enoch Powell on *Referendum Call* were more likely to 'admit to mistrust of foreigners and foreign alliances'.[78] Meanwhile, 'the importance of EEC

[75] *Ibid.*
[76] *Ibid*, p. 78.
[77] Emphasis in original. *Ibid.*
[78] *Ibid*, p. 80.

membership for avoiding future wars' was mentioned more often by those who had watched Benn and Jenkins tussling on *Panorama*, and those who had watched the PM on *Nationwide*.[79] The BBC had an agenda-setting role, and the politicians it chose to appear on its programmes affected the issues that voters saw as important. This shows the importance of the 50-50 rule and the decision to maintain some guidelines around balancing the representatives of different political parties.

The campaign: impartiality

Given the passion evident within both campaigns, it was always likely that they would find much to criticise in the BBC's output, despite the Corporation's plans for maintaining impartiality. Aqui has noted that 'some members of the NRC suggested that the BBC was biased', while Jenkins received complaints from senior figures including Heath and Whitelaw that they were not given enough airtime and too much was given to 'pipsqueak' figures from the NRC.[80] Saunders found that BIE 'hounded' the BBC throughout the campaign about 'the slightest flicker[s] of perceived bias'.[81] These complaints reflect the impossibility of the BBC's situation: NRC figures would be judging the BBC to be 'impartial' based on whether broadcasting reflected the balance of public opinion, while BIE figures would judge the BBC as being 'impartial' based on whether broadcasting also reflected the balance of elite, or Westminster, opinion. A 50-50 balance was a reasonable compromise, but it left room for complaints from both campaigns.

Lord Harris, from the pro-Market campaign, did 'lodge two reservations about the handling of programmes', but minutes from a Board of Governors meeting at which this was discussed noted Curran saying that 'Mr Scott' had 'dealt with both matters to Lord Harris' satisfaction'.[82] Sadly, more detail is not provided.

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[79] *Ibid.*
[80] Aqui, *The First Referendum*, pp. 219-220.
[81] R. Saunders, *Yes to Europe! The 1975 Referendum and Seventies Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), p. 126.
[82] Minutes of Board of Governors meeting, 8 May 1975, WAC R1/43/1.

Did Scott, under Curran's supervision, take any action? If not, did Harris effectively back down?

At the same meeting, Lord Greenhill 'referred to four instances in which, it was alleged by his informants, bias had been shown against the pro-market cause'.[83] Several examples were given, all of which Curran felt were unfair. However, Curran still 'said that he would look into the allegations, but he did not accept the criticism that "Nationwide" was lacking in an ability to deal with serious issues seriously'.[84] It is revealing that these suggestions of bias were dealt with at the very top of the BBC. Curran and the Board of Governors were aware of the BBC's vital role in the referendum, and once they had set in place their plans for a 50-50 balance in maintaining their obligation to impartiality, they were determined to see that it worked in practice. It shows the seriousness with which the BBC took the referendum; among senior officials, it was treated similarly to a general election. Complaints from Roy Jenkins were also dealt with at the most senior level. In May, Jenkins called a meeting with Swann because he 'wished to convey the anger of the pro-Marketeers at the absence of television coverage of the major pro-Market rally in Manchester on 10 May'.[85] It is unknown what the Chairman's response was, but 'by the conclusion of the meeting … Mr Jenkins had been amicable'.[86]

In the heated context of the referendum campaign, it may be expected that maintaining impartiality was a thankless task for the BBC. This was not the case. In May, Tony Benn made a speech 'accusing the BBC of bias in its coverage of the referendum campaign'.[87] Perhaps in part reflecting the usual party-political tensions, but also as a reassertion of the BBC's value, more than 20 Conservative MPs expressed their 'confidence in the ability of the BBC to present both sides of this argument impartially' and criticised Benn for 'setting himself up as censor of the BBC', likening him to 'a male Mary Whitehouse'.[88] It is rare for politicians

[83] *Ibid.*
[84] *Ibid.*
[85] Minutes of Board of Governors meeting, 22 May 1975, WAC R1/43/1.
[86] *Ibid.*
[87] PA telex, 8 May 1975, WAC T66/126/1.
[88] *Ibid.*

to come out in open defence of the BBC, and so this rebuttal of Benn's claims is noteworthy even given the party-political context. The comparison to Whitehouse is suggestive; Whitehouse has not yet featured in this thesis – her constant criticism of the BBC focused on moral issues, and she didn't comment on European integration. Yet we see in the comments by Conservative MPs an attempt to demonstrate the 'outsider' status of both Whitehouse and Benn, fighting against 'the Establishment' from outside its walls.

It was not only Conservative MPs who stood up for the BBC during the campaign, and felt them to have done a good job. When Swann met Harold Wilson on 16 May, he may have feared that he would come in for criticism as Wilson had been a vocal critic of the BBC throughout his leadership of the Labour party. His fears would only have been amplified when Wilson 'at first expressed his concern that the Government's case for continued British membership of the EEC had not been properly presented'.[89] There was a feeling in government that their perspective was, at times, lost between the binaries presented by BIE and NRC, who were often asked by producers to suggest speakers – a danger this thesis has recognised, of prioritising balance over impartiality and a true representation of how things stood.[90] However, at this meeting Wilson's views were couched in the language of compromise – he 'believed the BBC was preserving admirably' the '50:50 balance between the pro- and anti-Marketeers' – and Bernard Donoughue, head of Wilson's Policy Unit, understood that the meeting had gone 'well'.[91] After the campaign, too, Wilson wrote in his memoirs that the BBC had been 'absolutely right' in its aim of achieving balance between BIE and NRC even if it meant less airtime for those with more ambiguous stances, including himself and James Callaghan.[92]

[89] Minutes of Board of Governors meeting, 22 May 1975, WAC R1/43/1.
[90] Memorandum from Michael Harman to News Editor South, 'Market Forum', 20 May 1975, WAC R78/1451/1.
[91] Minutes of Board of Governors meeting, 22 May 1975, WAC R1/43/1; B. Donoughue, *Downing Street Diary: With Harold Wilson in No. 10* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2005), p. 384.
[92] H. Wilson, *Final Term: The Labour Government 1974-1976* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1979), p. 106.

Whereas the anti-Market campaign was dominated by a few leading outsiders, the pro-Market campaign could call upon the services of a wide array of popular, mainstream politicians. According to Anthony Smith, in broadcasts relating to the referendum between 1 May and June 4 Tony Benn was the most prominent anti-Market politician, making an astonishing 52 appearances. In comparison, Roy Jenkins, the most prominent pro-Market politician only made 27 appearances, roughly half that of Benn.[93] If familiarity breeds contempt, then this was bad news for the anti-Market side. BBC audience research based on an interview panel convened on four separate occasions suggests this was the case. Interviewees were asked on each occasion which spokesmen they could name who were putting their points of views across.[94] The only two politicians who ever topped this were both from the Yes campaign – Heath and Jenkins.[95] The 50-50 split underlined the huge cast of talent that the pro-Marketers could call upon, in comparison to the small ensemble of the anti-Market campaign. This was a problem for the BBC, as they noted that there were 'only a very few people of quality on the anti side and how you stretch that out is proving very difficult to handle'.[96] The 50-50 division reinforced the advantages of the pro-Market side while highlighting the disadvantages experienced by the anti-Market campaign.

Yet the anti-Marketers were also surprisingly free from complaint. Neil Marten told the BBC after the campaign that his side of the debate 'had no complaints' with the coverage they had received from the BBC.[97] The public likewise viewed the BBC's coverage as impartial. Few saw any bias, although those who did perceive some felt this was to the advantage of the pro-Market side – importantly, 'even those [opinion poll respondents] favouring staying in the EEC felt the bias to be, if anything, in their favour'.[98] Some writers on this period have also spotted perceived bias: Charles Moore argues that the Yes campaign was 'a cross-party coalition, secretly supported by the BBC and backed by most

[93] Smith, 'Broadcasting', p. 194.
[94] 'Studies of the impact of the radio and television coverage of the EEC referendum campaign', January 1976, WAC R9/778/1, p. 70.
[95] *Ibid.*
[96] 'Note of telephone conversation with Joe Haines on 14.5.75', WAC R78/1451/1.
[97] Minutes of Board of Governors meeting, 19 June 1975, WAC R1/43/2.
[98] 'Studies of the impact of the radio and television coverage of the EEC referendum campaign', January 1976, WAC R9/778/1, p. ii.

of the establishment', and Brendan Simms argues that public opinion in 1975 was generally in favour of leaving the EEC, 'however, thanks to the efforts of the European movement, the Information Research Department of the Foreign Office, various MPs, elements of the BBC and the force of the argument itself, most Britons were persuaded to change their minds'.[99] Thus, he suggests that 'elements of the BBC' assisted the Yes campaign and helped lead public opinion in that direction too.

Moore and Simms' comments do not reflect contemporary judgements. The anti-Marketers were 'certainly well satisfied' with the balance achieved – happy to receive a fair hearing, unlike in the press – and the NRC made only one complaint during the campaign, about a sole news bulletin, which was swiftly withdrawn following the BBC's explanation.[100] Some individuals did telephone in complaints about the lack of time anti-Marketers were given on radio news bulletins one Saturday, but these were insignificant.[101]

There were some complaints from BIE, who 'sometimes seemed to feel that reporting of its activities was being artificially restricted, to the detriment of its cause'.[102] This is unsurprising, given that they were running far more events than the NRC but only receiving the same amount of coverage – their representatives … protested several times during the campaign that certain of their meetings had not been covered in bulletins'.[103] The post-referendum Board of Management report notes that one of their complaints, however, was on a completely different subject – 'over an edition of "Newsday", where the use of a pro-EEC industrialist and an anti-EEC trade unionist was challenged on the

[99] C. Moore, *Margaret Thatcher: The Authorized Biography Volume One: Not For Turning* (London: Allen Lane, 2013), p. 306; B. Simms, *Britain's Europe: A Thousand Years of Conflict and Cooperation* (London: Allen Lane, 2016), p. 190; B. Harrison, *Finding a Role? The United Kingdom 1970-1990* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 20-38.
[100] P. Hardiman Scott, 'Notes on the referendum', 18 June 1975, WAC R78/1451/1.
[101] Letter from Charles Curran to Con O'Neill, 27 May 1975, WAC R78/1451/1.
[102] 'The BBC and the EEC referendum', note by DPA, 21 January 1976, WAC R78/1451/1, p. 45.
[103] *Ibid*, p. 46.

ground that it made it look as though industry in general was on one side of the argument and the whole of the Trades Union movement on the other'.[104]

Given the wide coverage given to both industrialists and trades unionists in other programmes, it is hard to credit this criticism and indeed 'this protest was rejected' with the BBC refusing to accede to BIE's demand that they use two trade unionists.[105] The BBC were, indeed, rather frustrated by the regular BIE complaints. In a terse letter to Con O'Neill, Charles Curran wrote: 'when you suggest … that I have regarded your representations as nothing more than a desire to achieve equality with complaints received from the anti-Marketeers, you do me an injustice which I simply am not prepared to accept'.[106] He resoundingly rejected all of O'Neill's complaints, and wrote that 'the issue is of crucial importance to the editorial independence of the BBC, and I see no possibility of compromise or of concession'.[107] There was a retrenchment of the BBC's commitment to impartiality, and much effort was put into reducing criticism during the campaign – but also into resisting what criticism did arise. The simple 50-50 rule that was put in place was successful in allowing senior figures to rebuff criticism.

'Balance' became a key tool in this resistance. In some cases, the 'balance' even worked in favour of BIE – on 13 May it was noted that over the previous week television news had given 42 minutes to the pro campaign and only 35 minutes to the anti campaign.[108] BIE themselves thought that the BBC 'kept a fair overall balance, with, if anything, a slight tilt in favour of Britain staying in Europe'.[109] They even found that 'almost without exception, senior editorial staff were for staying in'.[110] There was, however, a notable loosening of ties between the BBC

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[104] *Ibid.*
[105] 'The BBC and the EEC referendum', note by DPA, 21 January 1976, WAC R78/1451/1, p. 46; P. Hardiman Scott, 'Notes on the referendum', 18 June 1975, WAC R78/1451/1.
[106] Letter from Charles Curran to Con O'Neill, 30 May 1975, PA BIE/8/2.
[107] *Ibid.*
[108] Note of a meeting with Sir Con O'Neill and Douglas Hurd MP, DG and CA to DG, 13 May 1975, WAC R78/1451/1.
[109] Memorandum from Con O'Neill to Eric Robertson, 'Britain in Europe Broadcasting Department (Monitoring)', 10 June 1975, PA BIE/1/5, p. 2.
[110] *Ibid.*

and the pro-Market campaign compared to 1970-73, and perhaps O'Neill's frustrations stemmed, in part, from feeling like they had less influence than in recent years.

O'Neill was no more measured in his own letters to Curran. In one, on 6 May, he spent a full two pages outlining a single incident in *Nationwide* on 28 April.[111] In another, he wrote:

> Let me assure you, as emphatically as I can, that the complaints I have made to you … represent strong feelings of grievance and indignation felt on the highest level in Britain in Europe, and shared by our political leaders from all three parties, at what they regard as a failure of the BBC to give fair representation to our campaign, and its over-anxiety in the interests of its own interpretation of balance to elevate insignificant episodes and arguments developed on the anti market side into a new significance they do not intrinsically deserve, often at the expense of coverage for significant themes and events in our campaign.[112]

It is also no surprise that he drew Curran's ire, for he wrote that for the *Newsday* programme being complained about: 'We feel that the way in which the BBC insisted in "balancing" this particular programme was thoroughly misleading; we feel it was an instance in which the BBC should not merely have consulted us – as they did – but also have accepted our view – which they did not'.[113] The letter ended by expressing 'our strong hope that in matters where political as opposed to editorial judgement is involved, as in this case, the BBC should not merely consult Britain in Europe, but should pay some regard to the views they express'.[114] Interestingly, BIE *had* prevailed on the trade union representative John Whitehorn, to 'withdraw from the programme in favour of Mr Roy Grantham', their preferred unionist.[115] However, the producer at the BBC refused to accept this and ensured Whitehorn featured – clearly, he felt he had to re-assert his editorial independence in the face of a wave of criticism.

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[111] Letter from Con O'Neill to Charles Curran, 6 May 1975, WAC R78/1451/1.
[112] Letter from Con O'Neill to Charles Curran, 30 May 1975, PA BIE/8/2.
[113] *Ibid.*
[114] *Ibid.*
[115] *Ibid.*

Away from the umbrella organisations, there was only one party-political complaint during the campaign, from Wilson himself. In one *Midweek* programme, a recorded interview with the anti-Market trade secretary Peter Shore was broadcast as well as a 'live studio discussion' with Roy Hattersley, pro-Market Foreign and Commonwealth minister.[116] Wilson believed this was against the BBC's commitment 'not artificially to create a confrontation between Ministers of opposing views'.[117] According to Joe Haines, 'the Ministers did not fully understand what the programme was to be about, and that if we [the BBC] insisted on using film of Shore it would result in strained relations' and Wilson seeking to discuss it with Swann after the campaign – always a worry for the BBC with licence fee negotiations never too far away.[118]

The complaint was made rather forcefully; a BBC minute noted that Haines was 'in a politically threatening mood' and that 'if the BBC go ahead with the Midweek programme on Thurs. 15th he would regard it as totally unreasonable'.[119] The BBC's response was hesitant, despite Hardiman Scott's saying 'he thought Joe totally unreasonable'.[120] While they generally rejected the criticism and reiterated to the government that Shore had had no problem with the programme, the Corporation 'decided not to withdraw the Shore interview unless specifically instructed by him, since to do so would unbalance the programme'.[121] It is clear from minutes of a conversation between Scott Hardiman and Brian Wenham that they would have withdrawn Shore from the programme if he had asked for this.[122] He made no such request, and the programme was broadcast as intended. However, it is unclear why the BBC felt the need to offer a way out to Shore. If the BBC believed they had stuck to the terms of their commitment to the government, there is no reason why they

116 'The BBC and the EEC referendum', note by DPA, 21 January 1976, WAC R78/1451/1, p. 46.
117 *Ibid*, pp. 46-47.
118 'Note for dossier on EEC', 14 May 1975, WAC R78/1451/1.
119 *Ibid.*
120 *Ibid.*
121 'The BBC and the EEC referendum', note by DPA, 21 January 1976, WAC R78/1451/1, p. 47.
122 'Note of a telephone conversation with Joe Haines on 14 May 1975', 16 May 1975, WAC R78/1451/1.

should not have simply rejected the criticism – instead, they offered a way out. Notably, in Hardiman Scott's memorandum of 18 June 1975 about the referendum and the promises made by Haines pre-campaign about coverage, he noted that the BBC had agreed that 'politicians invited to appear in referendum programmes would be fully informed of the context in which they were appearing'.[123] This was already going a substantial way further than necessary, yet here the BBC were going even further in the face of government criticism by leaving it open to Shore whether they would broadcast the programme as is, or not.

The press, meanwhile, were almost universally full of praise for the BBC's impartiality, and various articles were mentioned at the 12 May Board of Management meeting.[124] An article in the *Guardian* was expected to 'probably be helpful to the BBC', while the *Evening Standard* commented that the BBC's commitment to maintaining balance had been 'only tediously apparent'.[125] Also according to the *Guardian*, Labour's Home Policy Committee (chaired by Tony Benn) had praised the 'fairness of the coverage'.[126] The press also commented on Christopher Frere-Smith writing to Swann, disappointed that the BBC had not covered an Enoch Powell speech – though the meeting noted that it had 'in fact been reported on BBC Local Radio' and that Frere-Smith was very experienced in 'trying to tell the BBC what to include in the news'.[127]

Part of the BBC's success in avoiding criticism came from taking complaints seriously, and admitting when they were wrong. Evidence of the seriousness with which the BBC treated allegations of bias is the personal involvement of Curran and Swann in methodically investigation and then responding to those complaints.[128] In one example, 'DG said that he had now written to Sir Con O'Neill who had protested at words spoken by Bernard Falk in an edition of

[123] 'Notes on the Referendum', P. Hardiman Scott, 18 June 1975, WAC R78/1451/1.
[124] Extract from minutes of a Board of Management meeting, 12 May 1975, WAC R78/1451/1.
[125] *Ibid.*
[126] *Ibid.*
[127] *Ibid.*
[128] E.g. Memorandum from Chief Secretary to CA to DG, ENCA, 'Board Meeting', 22 May 1975, WAC R78/1451/1.

"Nationwide", dealing with the CAP. DG had felt that the words were clumsy, but reflected a lack of editorial judgement rather than any malignant purpose'.[129] In the letter to O'Neill, Curran had written that he 'was not entirely happy with this report' himself, but also that he did 'not think' that the relevant issue of the Common Market intervention buying system had 'been consistently misrepresented by the BBC'.[130] He had been very specific in his response, down to the level of individual words from the programme – some of which he thought had been used legitimately, others which he thought sounded 'emotive' and were therefore 'clumsily expressed'.[131]

The seriousness with which BBC producers and programme staff took their duty to aim for impartiality is evident from minutes of contemporaneous meetings. It was noted in March that some staff were already 'tying themselves in knots' trying to ensure the BBC remained neutral, with those working on a programme about pig marketing worrying about their compliance with the objective of impartiality. European integration had a habit of being relevant everywhere, permeating every aspect of the BBC's programming – it required constant vigilance to prevent criticism.[132]

And, despite some minor complaints, it paid off. The BBC's coverage was seen as a success on its own terms; it was widely viewed as having maintained its neutrality. The Corporation had set out to defuse any potential accusations of bias, remaining in defensive stance throughout the campaign and prioritising balance over a broader impartiality. But it had come at a cost. The number of factual programmes had been reduced, and there was a risk of presenting a misleading view of events by enforcing a strict balance. It was the culmination of the gradual shift that had been taking place over the preceding 20 years, from creative, thought-provoking programmes, to a focus on avoiding criticism.

[129] Memorandum from Chief Secretary to CA to DG, ENCA, 'Board Meeting', 22 May 1975, WAC R78/1451/1.
[130] Letter from Curran to O'Neill, 12 May 1975, WAC R78/1451/1.
[131] *Ibid.*
[132] Minutes of Board of Governors meeting, 6 March 1975, WAC R1/43/1.

The campaign: aftermath

Behind the scenes, the Board of Management commissioned detailed audience research on the BBC's coverage of the referendum, which gives us the best available insight into how audiences perceived and reacted to the BBC's coverage. Both the raw data, provided by Louis Harris International, and a report containing the analyses of that data, are accessible in the WAC and will be utilised here to enable a deep understanding of how audiences themselves perceived the BBC's coverage of the referendum. The initial raw data from Louis Harris was dated 1 May 1975, with the fieldwork taking place between 15 and 20 April – over a month before polling day – and involving over 1,000 adults.[133] Three further waves of fieldwork took place, between 9-11 May, 30 May-1 June and 13-15 June, and the results from these waves of fieldwork are found in the final report of the four waves.[134] That final report also contains information drawn from a small panel of people who were interviewed on multiple occasions by Audience Research, and a separate national survey that took place after the referendum.[135]

One of the first questions asked in the research for the report related to the amount of coverage provided by the BBC of the referendum. Were people happy with it? We know that the BBC was keen to restrict coverage given the two general elections the previous year, when people had complained about there being too much political coverage. In the first wave of responses, only 14 percent thought there was too much while 30 percent thought there was not enough.[136] By the final week of the campaign, these figures had reversed but nearly half still felt that the amount of coverage was 'about right' – a good sign for the BBC that they were in tune with the public's demands for coverage.[137]

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133 'The referendum and its coverage by the media: first wave', Louis Harris International, Introduction, WAC R78/1451/2.
134 'Studies of the impact of the radio and television coverage of the EEC referendum campaign', viewing report, January 1976, WAC R9/778/1.
135 *Ibid*, p. 1.
136 'The referendum and its coverage by the media: first wave', Louis Harris International, Table 2A, WAC R78/1451/2.
137 'Studies of the impact of the radio and television coverage of the EEC referendum campaign', viewing report, January 1976, WAC R9/778/1, p. i.

Even more positively, only six percent thought in retrospect that there had not been enough coverage – better to err on the side of giving the public too many programmes on a matter of national importance, than to give them too little.[138]

People were, then, generally satisfied with the amount of coverage provided by the BBC. But were they satisfied with the coverage itself? The BBC were very keen to know whether the public were happy with their impartiality, or whether they thought the Corporation had shown any bias. At the end of the campaign, 80 percent of respondents were satisfied with the unbiasedness of BBC television and radio coverage – slightly more than were content with the unbiasedness of ITV, independent local radio and BBC local radio.[139] Where bias was perceived, it was generally seen to be in favour of a Yes vote – this was the case even among those who were themselves in favour of staying in the EEC.[140] This suggests an element of truth, but should not be overblown – the vast majority on both sides of the debate were impressed by the BBC's impartiality, and only one tenth thought that the BBC's coverage was rarely or never trustworthy.[141] Indeed, some thought the BBC were, if anything, too impartial – 'a not uncommon reaction … was that the opposing points of view were so well argued that the broadcasts were frustratingly inconclusive'.[142] That was, perhaps, the natural end result of broadcasting that focused on opinions rather than facts. The BBC's report concluded that 'it was this very prodigality [of coverage] that offered the means by which widely differing views could be seen to have been expressed'.[143]

While the results were largely positive for the BBC, they took the time to explore in detail the opinions of the 152 respondents who stated that they were dissatisfied with the BBC's television coverage of the referendum.[144] Of those respondents, 40 percent thought coverage was biased in favour of staying in, 11

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138 *Ibid.*
139 *Ibid*, p. ii.
140 *Ibid.*
141 *Ibid*, p. iii.
142 *Ibid*, p. i.
143 *Ibid*, p. 21.
144 'The referendum and its coverage by the media: first wave', Louis Harris International, WAC R78/1451/2, Table 13A.

percent thought it was biased in favour of staying out, 30 percent thought it wasn't biased, and 19 percent gave no opinion.[145] The most common reasons for dissatisfaction with the coverage were bias and not giving enough information, suggesting that the BBC could have provided more factual information for viewers and listeners to make their decision.[146] There was a clear demand for information about the Common Market from the trusted national broadcaster.

This provision of information and increasing public knowledge of EC-related matters was arguably the BBC's main task during the campaign. They succeeded in part, due to the quantity of programming put on. Nearly three quarters of people watched one or more referendum programmes every day (or stated that they did), and the seven percent of people who said that they remained 'very confused' about the issues pertaining to the referendum were also significantly less likely to have regularly consumed programming as the other 93 percent.[147] However, when respondents were asked questions about the EEC it became clear that ignorance remained rife. This was a disappointment for the BBC – the report states that 'broadcasting may have contributed a little to dispel ignorance'.[148] Notably, regular radio listeners consistently showed a greater knowledge of the EEC than regular television listeners, and it was those who initially knew the least about the EEC who had the greatest increase in knowledge during the campaign.[149] The evidence is strong that BBC programming, especially on radio, brought about a limited improvement in public knowledge about the EEC.

This was important for a public who recognised that they didn't fully understand the subject they were being asked to vote upon. Only eight percent declared themselves to be completely clear about the advantages and disadvantages of Britain's EEC membership, with 50 percent declaring themselves 'rather' or

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145 *Ibid.*
146 *Ibid*, Table 13B.
147 'Studies of the impact of the radio and television coverage of the EEC referendum campaign', viewing report, January 1976, WAC R9/778/1, p. iii.
148 *Ibid*, p. iv.
149 *Ibid*, p. 76.

'very confused'.[150] Post-referendum research also discovered that 'those who remained unclear to the end used the broadcast coverage less than did those who were by then clear'.[151] There was no evidence of any desire among those who had always been confused to seek out broadcast coverage in order to clarify the issue.[152] The BBC's opportunity to clear up confusion on EC-related matters was always limited – there will always be some who don't want to listen – but there were many who were receptive. And it seems that the BBC's coverage did a good job of helping those people make their minds up, even if public knowledge of the EEC remained low. In the end, about half felt themselves to be clear on the issues involved.

The audience research also asked which programme formats viewers and listeners found most effective in coming to their own conclusions on the issues. Of the various programme formats, respondents felt that interviews with politicians were most useful in gaining useful information about the referendum issue, followed by the comments of reporters.[153] This shines another positive light on the BBC's coverage, given the number of referendum programmes that were interviews with politicians. People believed that the coverage had helped to show them the sort of people that the leading campaigners were, but only a minority thought that it had helped them decide which way to vote.[154]

Only around five percent of respondents changed their mind on which way to vote and believed that broadcasting had contributed to this decision, with far more thinking that broadcasting had confirmed their existing views.[155] The report is clear that personal influences – especially discussions with family and friends – were far more important in helping people decide which way to vote than broadcasting was.[156]

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[150] 'The referendum and its coverage by the media: first wave', Louis Harris International, Table 21A, WAC R78/1451/2.
[151] Emphasis in original. 'Studies of the impact of the radio and television coverage of the EEC referendum campaign', viewing report, January 1976, WAC R9/778/1, p. 87.
[152] *Ibid.*
[153] *Ibid*, p. iv.
[154] *Ibid.*
[155] *Ibid.*
[156] *Ibid*, p. 53.

Audiences were asked how helpful coverage had been in five respects: 'explaining what the main arguments of the pro and anti organisations were'; 'showing what sort of people the leading campaigners were'; 'helping you to make up your mind which way to vote'; 'telling you about the EEC and how it is run'; 'suggesting how the voting in the Referendum would be likely to go'.[157] Strikingly, the second least popular option was 'telling you about the EEC and how it is run', reinforcing the view that people wanted more of this kind of coverage.[158]

Over the course of a week, the average respondent watched or listened to 5.3 referendum programmes, with 2.1 of those being pro-EEC programmes (i.e. an official campaign broadcast, or an appearance of a Yes-supporting politician in an interview), 1.7 being anti-EEC programmes and 1.5 being neutral programmes.[159] While most interviewees said they had seen 'roughly equal numbers of both the pro- and anti-EEC broadcasts enquired about … almost all the remainder of the Yes's say they saw more pro- than anti- programmes, whereas the remaining No's were fairly evenly split between those who saw more pro- than anti-broadcasts. It would seem that there may have been some deliberate avoidance of anti-EEC programmes by the Yes voters'.[160] This would, presumably, have made it less likely that those who voted Yes would change their mind during the campaign itself, because they were less exposed to the alternative view.

Another topic of interest for viewers and listeners was the politicians themselves. Throughout the campaign, it was those politicians supporting the Yes campaign who came across most favourably in broadcast programmes. While most people had been satisfied with the balance of speakers provided by the BBC, 'Mr Heath and Mr Jenkins had been the most appreciated contributors to the debate'. This was quite a turnaround for Heath, who had just been replaced as leader of the Conservative party and had a reputation for coming across as rather stilted in

[157] *Ibid*, p. 37.
[158] *Ibid.*
[159] *Ibid*, p. 80.
[160] *Ibid.*

the media. In a referendum on a topic that was prone to sudden changes in public opinion and on which most people felt ill-informed, it may have been key to the Yes sides victory (and the margin of that victory) that their politicians came across more effectively in broadcasts.[161]

In addition to the comprehensive audience research, the Board of Management themselves wrote a detailed report on the BBC's coverage of the referendum, a draft of which was circulated in July 1975 before the final was distributed in January 1976.[162] This is an important document, representing the considered consensus among senior BBC officials.

This paper recognised the significant problems that a nationwide referendum posed for the BBC, including the numerous controversies that they had to face: 'quite apart from the primary source of contention about whether Britain should remain within the E.E.EC., and which cut right across party lines, there were other major differences – for instance, as to whether there should be a referendum at all'.[163] It makes clear their understanding that differences would have to be managed between and within parties, and in other political organisations such as the trades unions.[164] Certainly, the report makes clear from the outset that the BBC had a thorough understanding of the potential pitfalls involved in broadcasting the referendum, and the complex political context in which the referendum was taking place, with many interested parties holding different loyalties and different degrees of opinion. They had to negotiate this minefield at a time when the political parties had delegated responsibility to the public to make a binary choice that inherently limited the terms of the debate.[165]

However, we can also observe here the thought process that led the BBC to take a formulaic approach to 'balance' as a way of achieving impartiality, rather than

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[161] Minutes of Board of Governors meeting, 3 July 1975, WAC R1/43/2.
[162] 'The BBC and the EEC referendum', note by DPA, 21 January 1976, WAC R78/1451/1, p. 1.
[163] *Ibid.*
[164] *Ibid*, p. 2.
[165] D. Butler and D. Stokes, *Political Change in Britain: The Evolution of Electoral Choice* (London: Macmillan, 1974, 2nd edn.), p. 278.

the more daring approach to European integration coverage that they had exhibited previously:

> A search for landmarks in this uncharted sea was a necessity for the BBC, not from any feeling of helplessness (since it had declared at an early stage that it was ready to take on itself the whole responsibility for fairness) but because it was important for it to be seen to establish a straightforward and readily understandable position in relation to all the competing interests and their adherents.[166]

There was also a recognition that the BBC's task was made far easier than it would otherwise have been by 'the fact that the great majority of the pro- and anti-E.E.C. bodies were persuaded over the period of the campaign to combine forces in two "umbrella" organisations'.[167] It was tricky enough balancing the competing bodies without there being multiple pro and anti campaign organisations.

The BBC were also worried about the potential problems that could arise from Wilson's injunction that Cabinet ministers not appear on the same programme together. However, they showed greater fight in the face of this, refusing to take any responsibility for enforcing it and saying that they would be willing to show dissenting Cabinet views in the same programme (from recorded clips), only recognising that 'care would of course be taken not to intercut interviews so as to give an impression of confrontation where none existed'.[168] Interestingly, the report suggests that the BBC themselves had a role in bringing this policy of Wilson's to an end – ministers were allowed to confront each other on the same programme from 1 June, and from 22 May the government no longer sought to prevent the BBC from using recorded clips of dissenting cabinet ministers.

These decisions came after the 'friendly and informal meeting' between Wilson and Swann on 16 May, at which Wilson raised concerns that the televised coverage was portraying an unduly polarised referendum, with more time than

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166 'The BBC and the EEC referendum', note by DPA, 21 January 1976, WAC R78/1451/1, p. 2.
167 *Ibid*, pp. 2-3.
168 *Ibid*, p. 6.

appropriate given to those who were very strongly pro- or anti-EEC.[169] Removing the injunctions was therefore a way for the government to ensure the 'middle ground', or more agnostic, view which it held itself was heard more often. This was one complaint that Number 10 had, with Joe Haines telling the Hardiman Scott in a telephone call on 14 May that 'the pro side is not being put over by the Government'.[170] Interestingly, the BBC's response was 'don't think that that has escaped us', indicating they were also conscious of a potential problem but perhaps unsure of what to do with it given their commitment to balance and the need to give time to more strident pro-market views.[171]

The report gives an insight into how the BBC managed impartiality and 'balance'. Notably, 'it was agreed that news bulletins should be compiled purely on the basis of news value until the start of the official campaign period' on 19 May.[172] In reality, however, another minute explains that the BBC 'had, in fact, begun this balancing [of campaign speeches] rather earlier than originally intended. We had thought of beginning when the campaign began officially on May 19, but since it was obvious that the campaign had virtually begun long before that date, so had we begun to maintain a balance'.[173] From the 19 May onwards, 'they were required to balance reports of meetings conducted by the rival organisations' and 'in general programmes a 50/50 balance should be kept overall although in the period before the start of the referendum campaign proper that balance need not necessarily be achieved within each programme or programme item'.[174]

ITA enacted similar guidelines, and this follows a pattern established in general election coverage, but it is worth asking why the BBC felt the need to change from selection of stories by news values, when they certainly would not have thought their coverage of the referendum prior to the official campaign period

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169 *Ibid*, p. 7.
170 'Note of telephone conversation with Joe Haines on 14 May 1975', WAC R78/1451/1.
171 *Ibid.*
172 'The BBC and the EEC referendum', note by DPA, 21 January 1976, WAC R78/1451/1, p. 8.
173 Note of meeting with Sir Con O'Neill and Douglas Hurd MP, DG and CA to DG on 13 May 1975, WAC R78/1451/1.
174 'The BBC and the EEC referendum', note by DPA, 21 January 1976, WAC R78/1451/1, pp. 8-9.

was anything other than impartial.[175] The move from selection based on 'news values' to selection based on balance was a clear demonstration of their reluctance to invite criticism, and their prioritising of balance first and foremost, ahead of impartiality.

This prioritisation at times risked reducing the quality of programmes and increasing the polarisation of the debate. A case study here is the *It's Your Line* programme, broadcast on Radio 4 on 25 February and discussing the theme of sovereignty. Originally, the Conservative MP Sir Derek Walker-Smith had been invited to give the anti-Market view, having voted against entry to the EEC in the Commons.[176] However, although he still maintained that EEC membership meant a loss of sovereignty, 'he had decided that it would be wrong for Britain to withdraw from the treaty obligations which it had since contracted'.[177] The producers therefore decided to withdraw the invitation to Walker-Smith, replacing him with the inveterate anti-Marketeer Neil Marten, already highly prominent in referendum media coverage.

The incident shows how balance was the overwhelming priority – Walker-Smith was presumably invited because he was believed to be the best option for explaining why EEC membership could be seen to reduce Britain's sovereignty, but was removed because of the fear it would open the BBC up to criticism. So, instead, they turned to a politician who already featured regularly because they needed someone who fit the bill of being both a No campaigner and of the view that EEC membership undermined Britain's sovereignty. At a meeting between Curran and the NRC, this incident was discussed: Curran said that he did not respond to threats, and felt one may have been made in the discussion with the NRC around the programme, and the NRC said 'that the episode … showed the value of the NRC as consultants' – suggesting they wanted a relationship with the BBC similar to that earlier enjoyed by BIE.[178]

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[175] J. Potter, Independent Television in Britain Volume 3: Politics and Control, 1968-80 (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989), p. 168.
[176] 'The BBC and the EEC referendum', note by DPA, 21 January 1976, WAC R78/1451/1, p. 15.
[177] *Ibid.*
[178] Minutes of meeting between BBC and NRC, 5 March 1975, WAC R78/1451/1.

There is also reference to the internal debate mentioned by Roy Jenkins, where there was some dispute as to whether the BBC should take its lead from parliamentary opinion, which was strongly in favour of continued membership. There was an instinctive desire to do this, and therefore to move away from a 50-50 balance, yet in the end the BBC had to go for 50-50 balance 'without special provision for the Parliamentarians' for 'the purely practical' reason that it 'was the only readily defensible position for the BBC to adopt'.[179] This shows how the BBC was stood in a defensive posture; it was concerned for what it could defend, not what it truly thought was best for maintaining impartiality. A seemingly more important reason for maintaining 50-50 balance – that the government and Parliament had chosen to take the decision *out* of Parliament and therefore parliamentary opinion should not be taken into account in determining broadcasting time – was treated as being of only secondary importance.

Jenkins' memory that the BBC was considering something other than a 50-50 balance is supported by CA to DG's note of the Wilson-Swann meeting on 16 May. At that meeting, 'the Chairman explained how, at one time, it had been considered that we might have to reflect something of the party balance in the Commons but in the end we had decided that we had no alternative but to adopt the 50/50 formula'.[180]

And when it came to determining the amount of referendum coverage, the BBC were caught between two poles. On the one hand, this was 'a unique event with vastly important consequences for the future of this country', and on the other, there had been two general elections the previous year and the BBC had already given 'a tremendous amount of programme time' to the EEC, 'particularly during the unsuccessful negotiations under Mr. Macmillan's premiership and the successful ones under Mr. Heath', and during the 'whole process of re-

[179] 'The BBC and the EEC referendum', note by DPA, 21 January 1976, WAC R78/1451/1, p. 9.
[180] 'Note of a meeting between the PM, the Chairman and CA to DG', 16 May 1975, WAC R78/1451/1.

negotiation'.[181] Perhaps inevitably, the final decision on programme time fell between these two stools.

On impartiality, one section of the Board of Management report in particular makes obvious the prioritisation of balance over impartiality. This is a section which argued 'there are three main questions to be asked when considering the BBC's Referendum coverage', which were:

(a) Was it balanced and fair?
(b) Was there too much, or too little, of it?
(c) Was sufficient time devoted to explanation of facts and of issues as compared with interviews with, and argument between, the leading personalities involved?[182]

Notably absent from this is any mention of impartiality. Balance was useful as a way of maintaining impartiality, but it had become a replacement objective. Intriguingly, the BBC *did* use the term impartiality in their ongoing audience research throughout the campaign as to how their coverage was perceived by the public.[183] That research suggested the public, largely, thought the BBC had indeed remained broadly impartial and the BBC found this 'encouraging'.[184] Perhaps the strongest evidence to support this judgment is slightly less scientific: 'correspondence and telephone calls to the BBC from the general public on the subject of bias were at a much lower level than is customary during and after a General Election'.[185] The pursuit of balance had evidently paid off in that respect.

There was some post-campaign criticism of coverage from official sources. Notably, Jeremy Thorpe suggested to Curran 'that the Liberal Party had been under-represented in the campaign coverage'. Curran disagreed with this, and wrote back detailing the 'number of appearances by leading Liberals in BBC

[181] 'The BBC and the EEC referendum', note by DPA, 21 January 1976, WAC R78/1451/1, p. 10.
[182] *Ibid*, p. 42.
[183] *Ibid*, pp. 44-45.
[184] *Ibid*, p. 44.
[185] *Ibid.*

programmes and to certain invitations to Mr. Thorpe himself which he had had to decline'.[186] Other Liberals too had turned down invitations – 'BBC Scotland made continuous efforts over two weeks to get David Steel to join the Glasgow panel on the result programme, but eventually had to settle for Bill McKenzie, the party's Scottish organiser' – and the BBC certainly could not be accused of ignoring them.[187]

The BBC were satisfied, then, that their coverage had been balanced, and were pleased that it had not brought the amount of criticism they feared might be inevitable.[188] While the BBC erred on the side of caution in their programming – both in the quantity provided, and the types of programmes broadcast – generally people had few complaints. It was a job done, albeit defensively and from a Corporation that was often following rather than leading. But the BBC had negotiated the hurdles that arose from the unique constitutional nature of the referendum and come out the other side with relatively little criticism, which is what they had been hoping for all along.

EXTERNAL SERVICES

In many ways, the challenges faced by the External Services in broadcasting the referendum were similar to those experienced domestically. In late May, for example, the FCO got in contact with A. S. Kark to say that Sir Anthony Meyer, a Conservative MP, was concerned about a radio programme that 'presented a very distorted picture'.[189] About Wales and the Common Market, he suggested that it portrayed Welsh trades unions as being universally anti-Market. This was strongly disputed by Christopher Bell, head of productions and planning for the World Service, who said that most of Sir Anthony's complaints were 'incorrect' and that the programme was 'reasonably balanced' as part of their broader

[186] *Ibid*, p. 47.
[187] Memorandum from Head of Current Affairs Group, Radio to C.A. to D.G., 'Liberals in the referendum campaign: radio current affairs programmes', 19 June 1975, WAC R78/1451/1.
[188] 'The BBC and the EEC referendum', note by DPA, 21 January 1976, WAC R78/1451/1, p. 49.
[189] Telex from I. May to A. Kark, 29 May 1975, WAC E40/797/1.

coverage.[190] Balance was indeed a continued focus, with David Witherow (editor of External Services News) saying that they took 'great care to preserve a 50-50 balance', with a 'close check on every story expressing a pro or anti view' in the three months leading up to the debate, and a balance within each news programme for the final week only.[191] Balance was a key priority, but not as strict as on domestic services. Remarkably, the XS too received few complaints – Mr Witherow stated that he had received no complaints of any bias throughout the entire campaign.[192]

However, the programming itself was rather different. Instead of focusing on the party-political context, it was treated as a grand national debate about a complex yet crucial matter. Frank Barber, head of central current affairs talks, said that they gave 'less emphasis to the minutiae of the campaign argument', and instead sought to explain 'the longer-term historical importance of what was taking place'.[193] The Arabic Service too had the 'general philosophy … that this was primarily a reporting operation with such explanatory comment as was considered necessary for an audience which was unfamiliar with the issues and most of the concepts'.[194] And the Eastern Service treated it 'as an important landmark in Britain's political evolution', with the Persian Service in particular giving 'special attention to the democratic process in action'.[195] The Latin American Service, meanwhile, looked at 'the sectarian factors and mental attitudes that lay behind the various arguments for and against' – this was the BBC with its thinking cap on, delving in-depth into what it recognised was a serious issue.[196] It recognised the particular interests within each country – speaking to Mexican listeners about a possible economic cooperation agreement

[190] Letter from C. Bell to C.E.S., 'Sir Anthony Meyer's complaint', 29 May 1975, WAC E40/797/1.
[191] 'The BBC and the EEC referendum', note by DPA, 21 January 1976, p. 39, WAC R78/1451/1, p. 39.
[192] Memorandum from D. Witherow to M.D.X.B., 11 June 1975, WAC E40/797/1.
[193] Memorandum from F. Barber to C.E.S., 10 June 1975, WAC E40/797/1.
[194] Memorandum from Head of Arabic Service to C.O.S., 9 June 1975, WAC E40/797/1.
[195] Memorandum from M. Dodd to C.O.S., 11 June 1975, WAC E40/797/1.
[196] Memorandum from A. Palaus to C.O.S., 12 June 1975, WAC E40/797/1.

with the EEC, and to Hindi listeners about the effect on immigration into Britain – while also recognising the unique democratic process that was happening.[197]

In part, this was because there was a greater discussion of the international implications of Britain's decision. Alexander Lieven, controller of the European Services, said their task was to 'highlight the significance of the various issues involved in terms of the world at large', while in Eastern Europe they highlighted 'the processes of free speech and popular consultation'.[198] But the Cold War information war was secondary to simply broadcasting the referendum on its own terms – this was a far cry from 20 years earlier, when everything was subordinated to the conflict with Communist Europe. The importance of the Cold War as a framing device was in decline, with the 'free world versus communist world' binary no longer at the forefront.

Only the External Services, ironically, conducted a thorough examination of what a referendum – and this referendum in particular – meant for the British political constitution. Unlike the domestic services, the External Services continued to be imaginative in their broadcasting about European integration. They sought to educate people, make them think, understand the broader issues behind it rather than the party-political context that dominated domestically. Balance continued to be important, but it was never the overwhelming priority as it became on domestic services.

For example, in their daily press reviews, the External Services – unlike Radio Four – looked at the editorial lines taken by British newspapers. This meant it was 'impossible overall balance' and, according to the Board of Management report, 'to have sought to do this artificially clearly would have been wrong'.[199] This is a revealing line for what it says about the broader BBC's attitude. There was an acceptance that creating artificial balance would create a distorted picture of events, yet this is precisely what happened domestically when news items were

[197] *Ibid*; Memorandum from R. Gregson to M.D.X.B., 16 June 1975, E40/797/1.
[198] Memorandum from A. Lieven to M.D.X.B.., 17 June 1975, WAC E40/797/1.
[199] 'The BBC and the EEC referendum', note by DPA, 21 January 1976, WAC R78/1451/1, p. 41.

chosen for balance rather than news value and politicians were chosen on a 50-50 basis rather than reflecting the Westminster consensus. Terrified by criticism domestically, the External Services showed that the BBC could reach beyond short-term worries towards discussion about a broader vision of Britain and its place in the world.

CONCLUSION

The national referendum on EC membership was a unique event in British politics. Never before had the electorate been asked to vote on a single issue, and never before had the political discourse been required to adapt to a campaign run along those lines. It posed a challenge for the media, one which the BBC spent ample time preparing for. The Corporation adapted their ordinary election coverage to ensure sufficient was provided, and gave a more prominent voice to leaders in business and trades unions, but there was a lack of imagination in programming and a failure to understand the distinctiveness of a referendum. Coverage lacked an understanding of the fundamental innovation that the referendum presented in the British constitution – a failing that, to be fair, was shared elsewhere, including by Parliament itself.[200]

There was also a failure to extract the referendum from the hurly-burly of party politics. It could have been an opportunity to present the issue as one that should be taken entirely on its own merits – as a crucial question for the long-term future of the country. Instead, the BBC failed to separate it from ordinary party politics, and became bogged down in enforcing their rules on party-political balance. The Corporation was motivated primarily by fear of criticism, which they sought to avoid at all costs, and only secondarily by producing good programmes. On its own terms, this strategy succeeded in avoiding criticism, but it was a risk-averse move. Balance took priority over impartiality, and the BBC shied away from providing informative programming at precisely the moment that the public needed it most, for fear of appearing biased. Excuses that the

[200] P. Goodhart, *Full-Hearted Consent: The story of the referendum campaign – and the campaign for the referendum* (London: Davis-Poynter, 1976), p. 54.

BBC had provided plenty of this factual programming in the past were just that. In the end, it marked a culmination of the trend seen over the last 20 years – a move from creative, forward-thinking programme about the grand idea of European integration, into a stifling party-political environment that put paid to innovation.

Yet the BBC was working within a difficult situation. A complex issue had been reduced to a binary choice, and this necessarily placed a degree of pressure on the BBC to simplify their coverage too. Rules on balance gave them a way to defend themselves, but led to fresh challenges in dealing with those who did not sit neatly in either the Yes or No camps – those who fell somewhere 'in between' struggled to get their voices heard. There was also more attention being paid by the press and public to 'balance' on the BBC than ever before, and so the desire to retreat into conservative coverage and avoid criticism was understandable.

While the BBC's handling of the referendum made sense, it can be seen as an opportunity missed. They could have framed the question as one of profound constitutional significance for the country, rather than as a matter of party politics. They could have refuted the dominance of the political parties – who had made the decision to call a referendum – and avoided a self-imposed requirement to impeccably maintain 'balance' between competing organisations. They could have moved away from their Westminster-centric view, and reflected the more sceptical views of the wider nation. Experts could have been heard from more often, rather than constant arguments between politicians. The BBC chose not to go down any of these brave routes, showing its inherent conservatism and concluding its journey through the increasingly politicised issue of European integration.

CONCLUSION

The writing of this thesis began in the fallout from the 2016 referendum on British membership of the EU, and was prompted by the need to understand why the British public thought the way that they did about European integration.

With the sustained attack experienced by the BBC in 2016, from both sides of the debate, it was important to assess how it had to come to this, and to consider how the BBC had handled this long-lasting issue in previous decades.

The thesis set out to explore the BBC's handling of European integration as an issue from its formative years after the Second World War, through to the referendum in 1975 that seemed to settle Britain's long-term place in the EC. It sought to explore what we can learn from this about British perspectives on European integration, but also what we can learn from this about the BBC itself, helping us to understand why public opinion has taken the views that it has on the European issue. How did the BBC, with its editorial independence and duty to maintain impartiality, deal with the never-ending shifts on European integration, and the evolving power of parties, leaders and political groups?

Throughout, the thesis has shown both the BBC's supreme qualities and its occasional shortcomings, its ability to adapt, and its inter-dependence with the government and political parties, which is in many ways part of its much-vaunted independence and pursuit of impartiality. It has shown how the BBC moved from a wide-ranging, innovative, debate-leading position in the formative years of European integration, to a defensive, narrower posture as the 1975 referendum approached.

In the early years, from the end of the Second World War up to and including the first British application to consider EC entry, the BBC worked with a great deal of freedom from political pressures. It focused on providing creative, deep and forward-thinking programmes that gave experts an opportunity to make the case for entry, at a time when such opinions were rarely heard in public discourse. Party-political constraints were almost invisible, particularly before Labour came out in opposition to membership in 1962, and the BBC fostered a thoughtful public debate. This was in part due to the European background of many of its staff and senior officials, a large number of whom had served on the Continent during the Second World War and knew and understood European countries and their cultures. Combined with the BBC's internationalist

inclinations, the Corporation intuitively and quickly grasped the potential importance of the European integration project at a time when the British government seemed to ignore it. Its deep institutional knowledge and internationalist background was allowed to flourish.

This free-thinking and broad-ranging debate was, in part, the product of a BBC culture that allowed producers a great deal of freedom from top-down diktats, enabling them to follow their own passions, enthusiasms and interests. Impartiality was always the goal, but rigid balance was neither a goal nor enforced. Instead, the aim was to present the truth across its programming, with a multiplicity of views being heard on issues ranging across the economic, geopolitical, cultural and social spheres at a time when linear viewing and listening meant that audiences could be expected to encounter a wide range of programmes. There was an attempt to create a debate around where Britain fit into Europe, how it related to the Continent, and what the future of the country looked like.

This was the case both on the domestic services and in the External Services, which portrayed the Common Market in optimistic terms, and also recognised the potentially huge political and cultural impact on the continent. While the government imposed constraints on this broadcasting, with swingeing cuts enacted to services to Western Europe, the BBC had developed a great deal of independence in how it carried out its duties, and continued to be a diplomatic actor in its own right. It had carved out this role during the Second World War, and developed it further during the Cold War. European integration was constantly subsumed into the BBC's Cold War effort, used as part of a broader argument about the superiority of democratic societies to the Communist countries in the East of the Continent. European staff, and staff who had served in Europe during the Second World War, brought an internationalist perspective and instinctual pro-Europeanism that ensured the External Services too conducted a wide-ranging debate.

But, as the issue of European integration gradually became party-political from the early 1960s, there was a slide away from this aggressive, front-facing posture. Scrutiny of the BBC's broadcasting in this area increased, and its *de facto* freedom decreased.

This brought a transitional period between 1963-1967, where the Corporation continued to lead a national debate on the issue, recognising its importance and continuing a discussion at a time when many politicians would have preferred to store it away as high-level policy that the public could avoid. There was no fear about exposing emerging intra-party divisions on the issue, and experts were heard from without undue worry about any perceptions of bias – a wide range of perspectives continued to come across.

Yet this was beginning to change. More and more often, it was party politicians who spoke to the public via the BBC about European integration. The role of producers as mediators between the political world and the public audience declined, and senior officials began to take more of an interest in the issue as they sought to stave off a small but growing volume of criticism from politicians who wanted balance. The terms of the debate became smaller, moving away from the idealistic and cultural arguments that had been common in the early years, and onto the pragmatic, economic arguments that would predominate in the coming years, propounded by party politicians.

It was a struggle for the BBC to adapt to the ever-changing party-political context. Its conception of political neutrality was used to accounting for balance between the parties, but the issue became much harder when there were widespread divisions within each major party too. With the party leaderships united in support for the principle of membership from 1966, dissenting voices had to come from other civil society groups too, complicating the issue further. But the BBC was focused on Westminster politics, and took its steer from political leaders, meaning that opponents of membership had to battle to be heard. There was a reluctance to listen to political outsiders – making up the

majority of the anti-Market campaign – and a natural tendency to listen to political insiders, those who were most prominent in the political world.

The instinctive pro-Europeanism of staff members, especially in the External Services, began to be considered. Other nations were presented at times with a distorted picture of British opinion, that suggested there was a consensus in support of British membership despite significant public unease about the idea of entry at a time when the imperial legacy continued to loom large. Senior controllers of European Services believed it to be in the national interest for Britain to join, and so enacted policies that effectively supported government policy. European integration continued to be used as a tool in the BBC's ongoing Cold War efforts, rather than simply on its own terms – it remained an example that the BBC used in the Communist West to display the superiority of free and democratic societies.

The BBC's understanding of the connection between European integration and other foreign policy issues continued to develop, with incidents such as the Bidault Affair building a recognition among senior officials that it was an issue intricately connected to bilateral relations and wider geopolitical concerns. Not only the XS, but the domestic services too, were diplomatic actors, recognised as such by foreign governments – more caution was required from the BBC.

That caution was always increasing, and the period between 1968 and 1972, as entry approached, saw an ever-more stringent policy of 'balance' applied to the BBC's coverage of European integration. A response to political pressures, it narrowed the definition of impartiality but was seen as a useful, easily-defendable tool for maintaining impartiality, and ensured the BBC could more easily adapt to the constantly changing positions of the party leaderships and include those with more ambiguous stances.

Despite these measures, however, criticism continued. All sides sought to persuade the BBC to give more airtime to their own speakers. Having rules on balance was important for the BBC in blunting these attacks and ensuring that

they could point to an easily defensible argument. Increasingly, criticism came from pressure groups rather than the parties themselves – a trend that would only continue in later years.

This period up to the agreement for entry also demonstrated the closeness between the BBC and senior politicians in pro-Market circles – contrasting with a lack of closeness between the BBC and senior anti-Market politicians, who were often political 'outsiders' such as Tony Benn and Enoch Powell. BBC staff became closely engaged with pro-Market circles, and the Corporation had heavy pressure exerted on it from these groups. Government deliberately sought to influence BBC programming in a way almost unheard of in previous eras and on previous issues. The creation of the secretive ECIU, and their attempted involvement in programme-making, enabled pro-Marketers to cooperate with the BBC in a way that was denied to their anti-Market opponents, often 'outsiders' and excluded from these inner circles. Yet the BBC's output clearly remained impartial, using these networks to their benefit in providing the most informative programmes possible to the public rather than being pushed into taking a more pro-Market stance than required.

This period also saw a significant increase in the importance of external broadcasting about European integration, now on its own terms rather than being wrapped up largely in a Cold War veneer. For the first time, the focus became to project Britain's distinctive views on European integration, rather than projecting the wider Western Cold War arguments. The BBC fought for the ability to do this too, beating off a government attempt to further reduce services to Western Europe – not just an institution naturally defending itself, but an institution recognising the importance to Britain of broadcasting to these nations at this time.

Entry in 1973 brought a wave of programmes around European integration, heralded by the 'Fanfare for Europe' where entry was portrayed as a decision made with a national consensus, rather than with a significant level of opposition – an attempt to unify after a period of division.

The BBC saw an opportunity to unify on a grander scale within the XS, where the BBC used its diplomatic influence to try and persuade government of the merits of a Common Market radio service – aimed at encouraging a European consciousness among residents of member countries. This was not the BBC following the government line, but building upon it, and playing an active role that met with support from the FCO. While the plans were stymied by Labour coming to power in 1974, it demonstrates the BBC's instinctual leanings and its level of diplomatic independence, and helps dislodge the 'awkward partner' narrative of Britain's relationship with European integration. It was never inevitable that Britain would become the 'awkward partner'; a different future had been possible. This key national institution, closely linked to the British state, actively sought to become an enthusiastic partaker in the European project – in a way, returning to its old paternalistic role, now with the EEC rather than the Empire.

With their plan dashed by Labour's promise of a renegotiation and referendum, however, focus turned again to the renewed domestic debate that was to come, and the political novelty that the plebiscite constituted. For the first time, British politicians had decided to delegate a particular decision to the public, posing another challenge for the BBC as it sought to maintain impartiality. Initially, the BBC sought to be innovative, looking at examples of other referendum campaigns from abroad, but instead it went back to its entrenched policy of strict 'balance'. It simply wanted a rule that could be defended easily – internal discussions focused on how to avoid criticism rather than how to best serve the public or make the best programmes. No real attempt was made to separate the referendum from its party-political context.

The result was coverage that didn't rise to the challenge of considering the issue in the round, as one that would have far-reaching implications for Britain's sense of its own national identity and its place in the world. With the exception of questions around sovereignty which, contrary to the judgments of some future politicians and historians, was discussed at some length, the debate was narrowly focused on the matters deemed important in day-to-day politics, especially the

economy. Informational programming was minimised, politicians themselves dominated. Experts found it harder to get on the airwaves, and took a significantly less prominent part in proceedings than they had in earlier years.

Ultimately, the BBC prioritised protecting itself in a fast-moving environment moving with novel political alignments. There was nothing *wrong* with its programming, but it wasn't ambitious, innovative, or creative. It was an attempt to avoid criticism and, while it largely did this, the BBC failed to lead the national debate as it had done previously – instead, it simply followed the debate laid out by politicians, even at a time when those politicians had delegated decision-making to the British public.

Impartiality was conceived, defended and practised as the narrower and thinner concept of 'balance', which was strictly enforced as a defensive mechanism. In fact, senior officials very rarely used the words 'impartiality' or 'neutrality', as if their duty was to 'balance' in the first place – it was no longer just tool for achieving impartiality, but was seen as synonymous with it.

It marked the end of a gradual trend that had been operating over the previous fifteen years, back to the first application for entry. Initially leading the national debate, creating a wide-ranging and free-thinking discussion, the BBC was now following an existing debate, not seeking to extend its boundaries.

It provided commendable and competent coverage of the referendum, coverage that it would be hard to argue was not impartial. Yet, as the broadcaster at the centre of national life, it failed to grasp an opportunity to lead the debate again, to treat this once-in-a-generation vote as an important debate for the future of the country, and as a vote that would reveal how the public saw their country's identity. Ironically, at a time when MPs had delegated their responsibility for decision-making on this issue to the public, it was the MPs who took up more of the broadcasting time on the issue than ever. The BBC, focused on Westminster, continued listening to those 'insiders' when the 'outsiders' were finally having their say. There was a lack of bravery around the Corporation –

an instinctive conservatism, and a self-preservatory instinct that helped it navigate the tricky waters of a question has defined the last seventy years of British political history.

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