

Part III

Eurosceptic Civil Society

Performing Euroscepticism: The UK Press and Cameron's Bloomberg Speech

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Introduction

UK newspapers have exerted manifest structuring effects over Britain's national debates about 'Europe'. First, the UK newspaper market is dominated by various forms of Eurosceptical sentiment and since the Eurozone crisis in particular has expounded a form of 'hard Euroscepticism' (Taggart and Szczerbiak 2004) which extolls the merits of EU withdrawal. Second, Eurosceptical journalists have popularized a Eurosceptic discourse through which European integration is constructed both as 'over there' and as an implied or explicit threat to British sovereignty interests and national identity (Anderson and Weymouth 1998; Hawkins 2012). Chris Gifford has usefully described this 'populist politics' of Euroscepticism in his account of the ideological manifestations of Euroscepticism in the UK (Gifford 2014, p.6). It draws on an obsession with past conflicts and the Second World War especially, which have provided British Eurosceptics with a range of linguistic weapons to keep their audiences in a 'permanent state of discursive war' (Daddow 2011, pp.109–34) with a malign 'other' across the English Channel (Gifford 2006).

Third, with elite Europhile opinion seeping away in elite political discourse and policy the UK press has been a significant factor in agenda-setting on European issues policy through the 'climate of fear' it has generated against the public espousal of pro-European narratives (Daddow 2012). Comparatively speaking, Britain is home to an 'unusually Eurosceptical media market' especially on the press side: this goes for the volume of Eurosceptical coverage and the bombastic, nationalistic and sometimes xenophobic tone of that coverage (Ford et al. 2012 p.207). Even rhetorically pro-European parties of government, such as New Labour under Tony Blair, responded to implied or real press threats by trying to decrease the salience of the European issue in British politics (Oppermann 2008) and refusing to confront the most hostile media barons such as Rupert Murdoch (Price 2005, p.79; Liddle

2014). By pursuing a strategy of ‘defensive engagement’ over the past two decades (Sherrington 2006) UK politicians have effectively handed over ideational leadership on European matters to a press-dominated UK media which has found since the Maastricht Treaty that there are increasing numbers of opportunities to express opposition to the European project as the EU itself has enlarged and deepened in response to changes in the international system (Usherwood and Startin 2013, pp.3–4). Espousing Euroscepticism has also been good for business (see Wilkes and Wring 1998, pp.200–204). Meanwhile, the UK public continues to be apathetic to the point of hostile on EU matters: ‘a large portion of the population is eurosceptic’ (Gannon 2014, p.212; see also Harmsen and Schild 2011, pp.254–55; Leconte 2010, p.70 and p.113; Hawkins 2012, p.561; Usherwood and Startin 2013, p.6; Vasilopoulou 2013, 161) and there is a plethora of UK civil society actors mobilized against further integration and now pushing the case for withdrawal (FitzGibbon 2013, p.114).

UK media coverage of European affairs reflects a sullen resistance to the EU (Wallace 2005, p.56) rooted in a concern to safeguard a supposedly cohesive and historically resonant ‘British’ identity and sovereignty (see Díez Medrano 2003, pp.128–145) sometimes laced with unpleasant xenophobic dimensions. The press glorifies diplomatic spats between the UK and the EU and/or traditional ‘enemies’ such as France and Germany (Brookes 1999) and regularly alerts readers to ‘the alleged unfinished nature of Germany’s historic expansionist ambitions’ (Anderson and Weymouth 1998, p.68). It also privileges stories about ‘Brussels’ directives which are represented as ‘absurd rulings imposed on the UK by alien institutions’ (Spiering 2004, p.139), in the negotiation of which British representatives apparently have no say. Entertainment and the search for scandal, corruption and salacious gossip take precedence over information about how the EU operates – or sympathy for it (Menon 2004, p.44). Given that the media ‘is citizens’ principal source of information on EU affairs’ (Hawkins 2012, p.561) it is important to account for the structuring potential and effects on national debates of media discourse. This is particularly pertinent in the UK case because even though it has been found that the public can be sceptical of what they read in newspapers and hear on television, this has done nothing to lessen the impact of media Euroscepticism on the UK public’s affective distaste for the EU and its institutions. In short ‘British citizens feel significantly less European than others’ (Bruter 2009, p.1523).

This chapter adds to research into the British press and European integration by adding a new case: newspaper coverage of David Cameron’s Bloomberg speech, delivered in

London on 23 January 2013. Few speeches by a UK prime minister have been as eagerly anticipated as this because speculation about the future of Britain's relationship with the EU had been intensifying in salience throughout the first half of the coalition government (Gannon 2014, pp.222–23). The Eurozone crisis (see Serricchio *et al.*, 2013), concerns about the scale of immigration to the UK from an enlarged EU and the rise of the UK Independence Party (UKIP – see Chapter 7) inflamed Eurosceptic Conservative backbench opinion which had already formed the view that Britain was dangerously 'shackled to the corpse of Europe' (Hannan 2012). The chapter treats the Bloomberg speech as a ten day political drama which unfolded in three 'acts', using qualitative discourse analysis of the press coverage to answer three research questions over its three parts respectively. One, how did UK newspapers anticipate the contents of the Bloomberg speech? Two, what did Cameron say in his address? Three, how did newspapers report the Bloomberg speech? The chapter advances the central argument that press coverage of the Bloomberg speech can be treated as part of the ongoing cultural 'performance' of Euroscepticism in Britain which has strongly structural (but not deterministic) effects on how newspapers frame European policy debates for their readers. It concurs with Simon Usherwood and Nick Startin's verdict that UK press coverage of European affairs is 'one-sided' (Usherwood and Startin 2013, p.10) and highly resistant to permeation by pro-European voices. An already hard UK press scepticism has become even harder and as the Bloomberg speech coverage indicates, many UK journalists now actively look forward to a possible British withdrawal from the EU.

Act I: the build-up to Bloomberg

Momentous political speeches attract a good deal of press attention and are accompanied by days' worth of briefing or 'spinning' from ministers looking to build coalitions of support behind the projected policy positions set out in the address (see Donaldson 2013). UK press coverage of the Bloomberg speech fitted this pattern of extensive scene-setting with supporters and opponents lining up on each side of the debate to have their say. The newspaper reportage examined in this chapter was located by a search of the Nexis database for the terms 'Cameron' and/or 'EU' and/or 'Europe' and/or 'Bloomberg' for the dates 14–25 January inclusive. This was supplemented by a separate search of the *Financial Times* archive because this newspaper does not feature on the Nexis database. The articles retrieved were from national and regional newspapers across Great Britain and Northern Ireland, including newspaper blogs. All newspapers feature in the data analysis sections below

irrespective of position within the market judged by sales or readership numbers because the chapter is interested in the broad texture of the coverage indicated by the key themes journalists privileged in their reporting.

In the build-up to the speech the press coverage converged on three themes: its timing, likely contents, and potential ramifications for British European policy. The first theme concerned the timing and fed representations of Cameron as a dithering and weak leader. In the *Guardian* Nicholas Watt opined that the speech was ‘delayed by months amid Tory divisions and concerns on the continent that Britain is moving to the exit’ (Watt 2013a). It was time Cameron put a stop to his ‘dither over the EU’, Stephen Pollard commented in the *Express*: ‘Its shambolic scheduling is a reflection of the subject matter itself’ (Pollard 2013). ‘Embarrassing’ was how Kate Devlin described the scheduling in *The Herald* (Devlin 2013). *The Times* wrote of ‘a chaotic air to the final preparations’ (Watson and Charter 2013a). Their disquiet came from repeated changes of date for the speech. The Downing Street Twitter feed initially announced that the speech would take place in the Netherlands on 18 January (Hall 2013a). Following the hostage crisis in Algeria in which six Britons died (an event noticeable by its almost total absence from the press coverage) Cameron was forced to put the speech back to 21 January (Donaldson 2103), but this was ruled out because it coincided with Barack Obama’s Inauguration Day in the US (Dominiczak 2013).

However, the revised date of 22 January was found to clash with the 5th anniversary of the signing of the Franco-German Elysée Treaty. This was manna from heaven for Cameron’s critics and hard Eurosceptical newspapers such as the *Mail* which gleefully reported that ministers were ‘aghast that the timing of the speech has been shifted to appease the Germans’ (Chapman 2013; Chorley 2013b). Negative frames accenting Cameron’s weakness and the need to be suspicious of ‘the Germans’ (*Sun* 2013a) were repeatedly used in Eurosceptical reportage. Jason Groves’s explanation was emblematic: ‘changing the date to appease the Germans ... German Chancellor Angel Merkel is believed to have raised the issue with Mr Cameron at the weekend, warning him that it would be seen as a serious diplomatic slight’ (Groves 2013). Merkel (or ‘Berlin’) was widely reported to have ‘reacted angrily’ at news of the 22 January date (Groves 2013; Watt 2013a). All in all, wrote Jason Beattie in the *Daily Mirror*, it was a ‘humiliating rebuke’ by Merkel (Beattie 2013a). *The Times* front page for 15 January likewise suggested that Cameron had been ‘forced’ to bring the speech forward ‘under pressure from Germany’ (Watson and Charter 2013a).

By altering the date again, the *Express* concluded, Cameron had ducked ‘a diplomatic row with the French and Germans’ but would use the speech to instigate ‘a fight for a new relationship with the EU’. To hammer home the ‘Us versus Them’ military metaphor, Hall had Cameron embarked on a ‘diplomatic blitz to try to stop the speech opening a rift with Britain’s allies (Hall 2013a). Elsewhere, Cameron’s discussions with Britain’s EU partners were described as a ‘charm offensive’ (Devlin 2013; Watson and Charter 2013a) or a ‘diplomatic offensive’ (Dominiczak 2013) to prepare the ground for a new UK relationship with the EU. Several journalists, particularly those traditionally on the left of centre, quoted Labour Shadow Foreign Secretary Douglas Alexander’s verdict on the timing of the address: ‘When it comes to Cameron’s speech on Europe, he can’t seem to decide on a date, let alone a policy. It’s a shambles’ (quoted in Beattie 2013a; see also Warrell 2012; Barnes 2013). In sum, newspaper coverage of the timing of the speech did not paint Cameron in a positive light. He was seen to be changing his position (physically in terms of venue and rhetorically in the speech itself) at the behest of a powerful coalition of forces arrayed against him: his party, big business and Britain’s EU partners (Crichton 2013).

The second theme of press coverage in the build-up to the speech was its likely contents. Using on-the-record Downing Street press briefings and Cameron’s pre-speech round of radio and television interviews, the press was well able to divine that Cameron would announce a referendum on Britain’s EU membership at Bloomberg. There was a clear link between the press descriptions and the prior views on Europe advanced by the newspaper. All the newspapers reported the key factual point that the referendum or ‘plebiscite’ (Straw 2013) would be ‘on Europe’ (Grice 2013; Groves 2013), on ‘UK membership the European Union’ (Crichton 2013; Watt, 2013a) or ‘on our membership of the club’ (Chu 2013). From here the journalists were free to speculate on the likely timeline and precise commitment to be made. In some cases it was reported the referendum would be on the ‘new settlement with Brussels’ (*Belfast Telegraph* 2013) Cameron would announce ‘after trying to renegotiate Britain’s deal with Brussels’ (Groves 2013; see also Hall 2013a). Traditionally less Eurosceptical newspapers tend to avoid the shorthand ‘Brussels’, with the negative connotations that word evokes in the British context. *The Guardian* for example recorded that the renegotiation would be on ‘the terms of Britain’s EU membership’ (Watt 2013a).

The idea behind the negotiation, journalists felt, was for ‘a new deal with Europe’ (Devlin 2013), with ‘Britain to repatriate powers from the European Union’ (Waterson 2013; see also Warrell 2012; Watt 2013a). Eurosceptical newspapers such as *The Daily Telegraph* described this as being about taking ‘some powers from Brussels to Britain’ (Dominiczak 2013) and wrote of Cameron’s plan ‘to retrieve powers from Brussels’ (Beattie 2013). The renegotiation was also described as an arduous process ‘of clawbacks of power from Brussels’ (Beattie 2013a; Chorley 2013a; Lawson 2013), illustrating how UK journalists tend to assert a huge imbalance in power relations between the UK (a defiant but less powerful supplicant) on the one hand and the EU (an unforgiving and more powerful hoarder of power) on the other. *The Manchester Evening News* summed up the general tone by writing that Cameron wants to ‘repatriate some sovereign powers from Brussels back to Britain’ (Ferguson 2013). Other Eurosceptical opinion shone through in the claim that the renegotiation would ‘offer a chance for Britain to establish a more arms-length relationship with the bloc’s 26 partners’ (Waterson 2013) and ‘a chance to reject the new terms in a referendum’ (Watson and Charter 2013a). *The Daily Mail* looked forward to the opportunity to fashion a ‘looser, more trade-based relationship with Brussels’ (Chapman 2013). The withdrawalist position was at its strongest in *The Daily Star*’s coverage of 15 January, which spent 200 words on the cost to the UK taxpayer of Members of the European Parliament before recording as an afterthought that the prime minister ‘is under mounting pressure for a referendum on quitting Europe’ (Nicks 2013). Some column inches were given over to expert opinion on the kinds of EU reform that might suit Britain in any renegotiation (Straw 2013), but it was the potential for withdrawal that featured most prominently.

The third theme of the newspaper coverage in the build-up to the Bloomberg speech was the likely consequences for British politics and party management. Two issues featured especially prominently. One related to critical comments made about the prospect of a referendum by Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg who warned that uncertainty about Britain’s membership of the EU could have a ‘chilling effect’ by chasing away foreign investment and threatening job creation at an already difficult time for the economy (*Belfast Telegraph* 2013; Watson and Charter 2013b). The editorial in Scotland’s *Daily Record* and *Sunday Mail* (2013) saw the referendum as a cynical attempt to ‘appease [Conservative] backbenchers’ and warned its readers to ‘prepare yourself for years of economic and political uncertainty as the Tories wrestle Britain into the ground over Europe’. Fed by politicians on the Liberal Democrat side such as Clegg and the government’s Business Secretary Vince

Cable who made a pro-European speech just before Cameron's (see Winnett 2013), talk of economic 'uncertainty' repeatedly featured in national press discourse in the build-up to the speech (for instance Chu 2013; Chapman 2013; McRae 2013). Regional newspapers found local experts to support this view (see Ferguson 2013). A small minority of articles noted comments about the security dimension and the 'dangers of abandoning EU justice measures' via a bungled renegotiation or withdrawal (Barnes 2013; Watt 2013a).

Some voices attacking concerns about 'uncertainty' were heard on both sides of the debate, showing how finely balanced the economics of membership have come to be, especially since the Eurozone crisis. On the withdrawalist side, for example, the *Daily Telegraph* used the views of the anti-Euro lobby group Business for Sterling to argue that 'uncertainty' only mattered to long-term planning decisions by big businesses; small businesses were much more hostile to 'mountainous rules and regulations' in the Single European Market: 'An uncertain future is preferable to an imprisoned one' (Warner 2013). Do not listen to the outmoded 'Eurofanatics' in the Conservative and Labour Parties, *The Sun* editorialized, because they lack credibility on the Europe question (*Sun* 2013a). On the pro-membership side, space was given during the build-up to the views of Will Straw, Associate Director of the Institute for Public Policy Research who argued that short-term uncertainty was acceptable because 'in the longer term it will settle a question that has hampered Britain for years' (Straw 2013). The economics of UK membership were clearly subservient to the prior views on 'Europe' advanced by the commentator or newspaper concerned.

The second party management issue related to Cameron's use of the Bloomberg speech to manage intra-government and intra-party squabbles, prompting more EU friendly publications – particularly outside English press circles – to bemoan how European policy had again been hijacked by an 'extremist band of right-wing Little Englanders who have seized the mainstream Tory agenda' (*Daily Record* and *Sunday Mail* 2013). The question of membership was 'straining relations with the Tories' strongly pro-EU Liberal Democrat coalition colleagues' (*Belfast Telegraph* 2013). Clegg was widely reported to have described Cameron's proposed renegotiation as 'a false promise wrapped in a union jack' (quoted in Watt 2013a), so *The Mail* saw 'an increasingly ill-tempered coalition row' in the offing (Chapman 2013). By far the most coverage, however, centred on Conservative Party divisions, framing it as yet another stage in the party in-fighting that broke out after the overthrow of Margaret Thatcher in 1990 (Watt 2013a). Some journalists tried to divine the

scale of the Conservative revolt. The *Daily Mirror* estimated that 78% of Conservative Members of Parliament (MPs) ‘want out of the EU’ (Beattie 2013a), a dramatically larger number than that estimated in *The Guardian* and *The Times* which put it at ‘about 30’ of the total, or 10% (Watt 2013a; Watson and Charter 2013b). Most newspapers avoided quantitative analysis and opted for qualitative research. Key to the reporting were the views of Eurosceptical Conservative backbenchers. Cameron was said to be struggling to contain them and ‘under intense pressure’ to ‘use the threat of potential exit from the EU to drive a hard bargain with Brussels’ (Groves 2013; see also Barnes 2013).

Former Conservative leader and ‘one of the Cabinet’s staunchest Eurosceptics’ Iain Duncan Smith was ‘said to be deeply unhappy to have learned that [the speech] has already been written’, having been promised by Cameron he would be consulted (Chapman 2013). Some Conservative backbenchers were calling for an immediate referendum without renegotiation (Waterson 2013). Others, such as prominent Eurosceptic MP Bill Cash, aligned with Clegg and pro-EU Conservative MPs to argue that a referendum without renegotiation would present a ‘false choice’ (Bill Cash, quoted in Hall, 2013a; see also the pro-EU Conservative voices featured in Watt 2013a). Other political voices putting pressure on Cameron included Nigel Farage, leader of UKIP, who hinted at Conservative defections to UKIP should the speech not go down well (Crichton 2013; Dominiczak 2013). *The Express*, in turn, urged a referendum to pull UKIP voters back towards the Conservative Party (Pollard 2013; see also Watt 2013a), while a *Sun* editorial warned that Cameron’s ‘delaying tactics are playing into the hands of the fast-rising UKIP’ (*Sun* 2013b). Helen Warrell in *The Financial Times* (2012) concluded that to head off the UKIP threat Cameron needed to ‘make more effort to boost British sovereignty over Brussels’ (see also Parker 2012). Labour Party leader Ed Miliband was noted to have ruled out a referendum (Lawson 2013; Pollard 2013). He therefore received only the odd mention because his arguments were so far out of line with what had become a majority press opinion in favour of a public vote with or without a renegotiation. Having investigated the three main themes dominating the press coverage in the build-up to the Bloomberg speech (timing, contents and domestic politicking) the chapter will now outline the main contents of the speech, before moving on to study how the press reacted to it.

Act II: the Bloomberg speech

By the standards of the average political speech the Bloomberg speech was long. At over 5,500 words it was nearly 40% longer than Margaret Thatcher's infamous, standard-setting Bruges speech of September 1988 which came in at 3,400 words (Thatcher 1988). Outlining the Bruges speech is necessary to understanding how far and how faithfully the press reported it in the aftermath.

Cameron divided his address into five parts, prefaced by a historically themed introduction which reviewed the part European unity played in removing the scourge of war from the continent and speaking of new challenges to be confronted. The opening part, titled 'Deliver prosperity, retain support', echoed the Bruges speech by explaining that Britain is an 'island' nation geographically and psychologically, but one which retains an inextricable set of connections to the continent of Europe in security and trading terms (all references in the remainder of this section are from Cameron 2013). The subtext of this part was that he was not being 'un-European' by proposing different visions for Europe's future, but setting down an alternative perspective on Britain, which could 'play a committed and active part' in the organization. The second part explored the 'three major challenges' confronting Europe: the Eurozone crisis, Europe's competitiveness in the global economy, and the EU's democratic deficit – the 'growing frustration that the EU is seen as something that is done to people rather than acting on their behalf'. Only 'far-reaching change', he urged, would address the scale of these challenges effectively.

The third and fourth parts of the speech laid out Cameron's five-step vision for '21st century European Union'. First, he tackled competitiveness and the completion of the single market, with a sideswipe at the inefficiency of the EU institutions. Second, he urged flexibility to accommodate diversity amongst a large and expanding membership, not all of whom want or need to play a full part in all areas of integration, such as the Eurozone or common military action in places such as Syria. Significantly, Cameron wanted to remove the aspiration of 'ever closer union' from the wording of future treaties: 'for Britain – and perhaps for others – it is not the objective'. Third, Cameron drew on the need for 'flexibility' to argue 'that power must be able to flow back to Member States, not just away from them'. This is the classic Thatcherite Conservative argument against 'harmonisation', whether for rules governing the single market or on 'the environment, social affairs and crime'. Fourth, the prime minister put the case for 'a bigger and more significant role for national parliaments' to enhance the EU's democratic accountability. The final part of his vision

encompassed ‘fairness’, for Eurozone insiders and outsiders alike. Reiterating that Britain would not be joining the single currency Cameron suggested that Britain wanted to safeguard the ‘integrity and fairness’ of the single market in the face of Eurozone reforms, mainly by being involved in agreements on new rules for the functioning of the single market in the future.

The middle of part four of the speech was the *raison d’être* and the most politically contentious portion of the speech: how to solve these problems. Public disillusionment, misunderstanding, referendums promised but not held: all of these had led to support for the EU in Britain becoming ‘wafer thin’, reported the prime minister. A referendum, he went on, had to be held at some point so it may as well be soon, rather than ‘simply hoping a difficult situation will go away’. But the referendum would only be held after a renegotiation of better terms of membership for Britain and the dust on the new Eurozone treaties had had time to settle: ‘It is wrong to ask people whether to stay or go before we have had a chance to put the relationship right’.

The fifth and final part of the speech, ‘real choice’, extemporized the merits of holding a referendum after a renegotiation with an ‘updated European Union’. This, Cameron said, should be via a new treaty, although he recognized that there was little appetite for this amongst many current member states. He then changed voice to address the British people directly: ‘We will have to weigh carefully where our true national interest lies’. He acknowledged that Britain would still be affected by EU trade and strategic choices, even as a non-member (he rejected the Norway/Switzerland option), and on balance he predicted that Britain’s global ‘influence’ would be weaker outside than in. At the end of the speech Cameron showed himself to be in favour of British membership of a drastically reformed EU. Next, the chapter will study how the press reported and reacted to the Bloomberg speech.

Act III: the aftermath

Act I of the Bloomberg speech drama saw a relatively cohesive set of press opinion assessing the background to the speech and its likely contents, principally focussing on the domestic political implications. After the speech, opinion was divided on both the ‘meaning’ of the speech and the implications for the future of British European policy. Some of the commentariat, such as Conservative MEP Daniel Hannan, judged it to be ‘the most Eurosceptic speech ever by a British prime minister’ (Hannan 2013). Majority opinion,

however, was that the speech was sufficiently nuanced to require less in the way of ‘soundbite’ analysis. This section analyses press coverage of the speech in three parts: how journalists dealt with the speech itself; domestic reaction; and international reaction.

To begin, let us review the contours in the coverage of the address itself. In general the newspapers did not quote lengthy passages of the speech or reproduce it in its entirety. However, there were some interesting patterns in the soundbites and other passages used by journalists to convey the ‘essence’ of the speech to readers below the headline that the prime minister had pledged an in/out referendum. First, it was observed that Cameron wanted ‘to transform the terms of Britain’s membership of the EU by calling for the UK to be exempted from its founding principle: the creation of ever closer union’ (Watt 2013b). Cameron’s ‘rejection’ of the touchstone sentiment of the Treaty of Rome was quoted most approvingly in Conservative Eurosceptic newspapers such as *The Mail* which saw the speech as ‘an historic ultimatum to Brussels’ – hand back ‘key powers’ or Britain will head for ‘the exit door’ (Chorley 2013a; see also Allen 2013). Second, there was some attention to Cameron’s ‘five principles’ for a reformed EU (Hall 2013b; Watson and Savage 2013). Third, there was a strong press focus on Cameron’s mention of Britain as an ‘island nation’ – ‘bang within’ the faulty tradition of UK exceptionalism, noted novelist Marina Lewycka in the *Independent* (2013). Taken in isolation Cameron’s ‘island’ reference was reported as a defence of ‘British scepticism towards the EU’ (Hall 2013b). Put in context, however, newspapers more sympathetic to the EU pointed out that Cameron actually said ‘ours is not just an island story – it is also a continental story’. Thus, argued *The Guardian* leader, ‘the PM went out of his way to avoid pull-up-the-drawbridge-at-Dover slogans’ (*Guardian* 2013; see also Ackrill 2013; Hoggart 2013).

Fourth, there was a fair (but by no means headline) recognition that Cameron wanted Britain to remain inside the EU following a successful renegotiation and much emphasis was put on his pledge to campaign ‘heart and soul’ for a yes vote if workable EU reforms could be put in place (Allen 2013; Beattie 2013b; Mason 2013). In *The Times* Roland Watson and Michael Savage (2013) worried that ‘Parts of his speech sounded like the opening address of the 2017 “yes” campaign’. Finally, there was some comment on gaps in the speech because ‘It was what Mr Cameron did not say that was interesting’ (Settle 2013). Echoing a strong line of questioning from the post-speech press conference question and answer session, *The Guardian* (see Watt 2013b) and *The Express* wanted to know how the prime minister would

vote 'if his blueprint for changes is rejected', and wanted more details on 'exactly what powers he wanted to claw back from Brussels' (Beattie 2013b). *The Independent* felt similarly unenlightened: 'the visitor certainly tore up the old rules. As to what the new ones will be, we left as we arrived, in the dark' (Macintyre 2013). *The Guardian* editorial bemoaned that 'dig down and this promising topsoil gives way to dust' and that Cameron was without an explanation for how 'his new Europe would create recovery' (*Guardian* 2013). Even more gloomy voices than this were heard. For instance, Peter Dixon, chief UK economist at Commerzbank, said that 'A referendum won't solve anything. We will be semi-detached members of Europe whether we have the referendum or not' (quoted in Elliott 2013). On the one hand, then, the press was sympathetic to the idea of a referendum and felt the speech would give Cameron a 'brief boost'. On the other hand, readers of all newspapers were left with the impression that the renegotiation plan lacked substance (see *Guardian* 2013).

Away from the contents of the speech, press reportage was devoted to the reaction at home and abroad. It was obvious, wrote *The Guardian*, that the 'speech's real concern, however, was not with economics but politics – the politics of a restive Tory backbench, an insurgent UKIP and a mostly Europhobic press' (*Guardian* 2013). The 'Tory Hell's Angels who are giving him such a hard time' was how Simon Hoggart described the main audience for Cameron's address (2013), *The Express* approvingly observing that they had been involved in the strategy unveiled at Bloomberg (Hall 2013b). *The Mail* added that the speech had 'put pressure on Labour and the Lib Dems to back him or explain why the public should not have a say on EU membership' (Chorley 2013a). In rank order on the domestic side the press focussed on Conservative reaction, coalition reaction, business reaction, then Labour, the UKIP and 'other' voices, so we will treat them in that order.

The speech was delivered on the morning before the weekly round of Prime Minister's Questions in the Parliament and the press uniformly noted the Conservative Party's 'delight' on seeing Cameron, their 'conquering hero' (Newton Dunn 2013), enter the debating chamber (Beattie 2013b; Settle 2013). 'Tory MPs were jubilant', remarked Hall in *The Express* (2013b), 'they greeted Cameron with massive cheering and waving of order papers' (Hoggart 2013; see also the almost word for word repetition of that description in Chorley 2013a; Macintyre 2013). 'Tory eurosceptics were thrilled to have secured a referendum' wrote Joe Murphy in the *Evening Standard* (2013). Several newspapers reported

that opinion-forming Eurosceptic Conservatives such as Mayor of London Boris Johnson had aligned themselves behind Cameron's position (Mason 2013; Murphy 2013). Unsurprisingly fellow Cabinet ministers involved in the preparation of the speech, such as Chancellor George Osborne, were also quoted as backing the policy (see Mason 2013).

Conservative Party delight was mirrored by disappointment amongst Liberal Democrat members of the coalition government: 'Coalition at war on Europe' ran the headline in *The Daily Mirror* (Beattie 2013b). The speech 'stoked coalition tension with the Lib Dems', recorded *The Express* (Hall 2013b). At Prime Minister's Questions Clegg was said to be 'glum looking' (Macintyre 2013), 'slunk in his seat' (Settle 2013) and outside the chamber expressed 'undisguised contempt for the address' (Hall 2013b). Just as in the build-up to the speech, Clegg's widely quoted opinion was 'that years and years of uncertainty because of a protracted, ill-defined renegotiation of our place in Europe is not in the national interest because it hits growth and jobs' (quoted in Chorley 2013a; Murphy 2013; Watson and Savage 2013). Clegg was echoing business opinion which continued to centre its critique of Cameron's policy on the economic uncertainty it would generate. The key voice heard in the reporting was that of Martin Sorrell, chief of advertising group WPP, speaking at the World Economic Forum in Davos, who described the referendum as a 'fifth grey swan ... It is at least neutral, it is at worst negative. It can't be positive. You've just added another reason why people will postpone investment decisions' (quoted in Ahmed and Armitstead 2013; see also Elliott 2013). Other business leaders expressing concern about the uncertainty a referendum would bring included Roland Rudd, chairman of Business for New Europe (Beattie 2013b), Roger Carr, president of the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) (Elliott 2013), John Cridland, director-general of the CBI who gave a 'cautious response' to the speech (Murphy 2013), former CBI director-general Howard Davies (Elliott 2013), and Andrew Cahn, former head of UK Trade and Investment, who feared an 'investment chill' (Beattie 2013). The odd dissenting business voice favouring a referendum was heard, but these were in the minority (Ahmed and Armitstead 2013).

On the domestic politics of the speech *The Times* heralded it as a step in the direction of the 2015 general election campaign because it had conveniently put Labour into disarray: 'Labour spent yesterday seeking to clarify the party's position' which was uneasily balanced between Ed Miliband's decision to rule out an in/out referendum now, but to leave open the possibility of one in the future (Watson and Savage 2013). By ruling out a plebiscite *The*

Mail judged that Miliband ‘risked a party split’ (Chorley 2013a), with one ex-Labour government minister quoted as saying Miliband had ‘got it wrong’ (Kate Hoey in Wilson and Schofield 2013). However, Miliband did manage to find common ground with Clegg and big business and land some hits on Cameron over the dispatch box, with his accusations that the prime minister was ‘going to put Britain through years of uncertainty and take a huge gamble with our economy’ (quoted in Chorley 2013a). UKIP’s Nigel Farage welcomed the referendum pledge but said it did not need to be preceded by a renegotiation: ‘By kicking the can down the road for up to five years that doesn’t deal with the immediacy of many of the threats and problems that our membership of the EU presents’ (quoted in Chorley 2013a). For UKIP, the Bloomberg speech went just about far enough but not fast enough.

If the domestic reaction was mixed, international reaction was more one sided: Cameron ‘drew fury from Europe’ (Murphy 2013). French commentary was reported to have been particularly scathing and the Bloomberg speech was ‘immediately ridiculed by the French government’ (Allen 2013; Chorley 2013a). France’s Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius was widely quoted from an interview given just before the speech was delivered: ‘If Britain wants to leave the Europe we will roll out the red carpet’ (Beattie 2013b). He added a sporting metaphor: ‘If you want to join the football club, you can’t then say you want to play rugby’ (Chorley 2013a; Murphy 2013; Newton Dunn 2013). French reaction prompted *The Guardian* (2013) to represent the speech as a policy gamble that might unwittingly backfire: ‘Paris could prove much more relaxed about a UK exit than he presumes’. Several other ‘brickbats’ and a ‘storm of protest’ (Hall 2013b) were heard from other European capitals and around the world, pouring water on Cameron’s strategy. For example, Guy Verhofstadt, leader of the Liberals in the European Parliament, said Cameron was ‘playing with fire’ (quoted in Murphy 2013; see also Allen 2013; Beattie 2013b; Chorley 2013a). Spanish Foreign Minister Jose Manuel Garcia-Margallo accused Britain of ‘dragging its feet’ and warned about the economic consequences of withdrawal (in Allen 2013). Meanwhile, Ireland’s Deputy Prime Minister Eamon Gilmore put the case for a continued British presence inside the EU (in Allen 2013). *The Telegraph* pointed out Barack Obama and his ‘Eurofederalist advisers’ had again come out in favour of Britain’s EU membership but said that it contradicted the more than half of UK voters who would vote to leave the EU in a vote (Gardiner 2013).

The hardest country to ‘pin down’ in terms of a consistent line on the Bloomberg speech proved to be Germany, its positivity even moving *The Sun* to run an editorial listing ‘Ten reasons to love Germany’ (Harvey 2013). UK newspapers noted, seemingly to their surprise, that Chancellor Angela Merkel – ‘the EU’s most powerful leader’ (Newton Dunn 2013) was ‘prepared to talk to the UK about its concerns over the EU’ (Beattie 2013b) with a view to finding a ‘fair compromise’ to keep Britain inside the organization (quoted in Hall 2013b; see also Allen 2013; Chorley 2013a). *The Guardian* interpreted her ‘guarded’ response as a success for Cameron’s pre-speech briefings (Watt *et al.* 2013). Merkel’s neutral-to-positive reaction was, apparently, only surpassed by Netherlands Prime Minister Mark Rutte who praised Cameron’s ‘sharp analysis’ (in Newton Dunn 2013). *The Guardian*, however, contradicted *The Sun* by reporting that Rutte ‘sat on the fence’ along with French President Francois Hollande: ‘Cameron’s only whole-hearted backing came from prime minister of the Czech Republic’ (Watt *et al.* 2013). German Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle, however, was universally reported to have been vehemently critical: ‘Cherry-picking is not an option’ (quoted in Allen 2013; Beattie 2013b; Newton Dunn 2013; Watt *et al.* 2013). Finally, Gunther Krickbaum, head of the Bundestag’s European Affairs Committee asked bluntly: ‘Cameron said that he wants Britain to shape the future. How can you shape the future if you put the car in reverse while other regions of the world are on the fast lane?’ (in Allen 2013). This is a good illustration of the kind of unremittingly hostile international reaction most frequently heard in the UK press coverage of the aftermath of the Bloomberg speech.

Conclusions

This chapter has examined press coverage of David Cameron’s Bloomberg speech by treating it as a drama in three acts: build-up, speech and aftermath. The data analysed above was drawn from a very wide range of national and regional/local newspapers. The intention was to generate an in-depth picture of how reports of the speech interplayed with existing newspaper editorial positions on the British and ‘Europe’. The main conclusion from the analysis in the chapter is that newspaper narratives – now relatively well established in the reportage – perform the following ideological tasks for newspaper readers: they represent the EU as ‘other’; they engender fear and concern about intrusions by faceless ‘Brussels’ bureaucrats on British daily life, freedoms and sovereignty; they obsess about French and German intentions by summoning memories of past antagonisms to speculate on future aims;

they assess Britain's European policy dilemmas principally and sometimes only through the lenses of domestic party politics; they present British leaders as powerless and self-serving; and they posit that Britain's identity is an 'awkward' and semi-detached entity within the EU. 'Hard' Euroscepticism remains the default setting for the vast majority of UK newspapers, with a form of 'soft' Euroscepticism pervading the rest of the coverage.

The second conclusion, deepening the previous, is that press coverage of the Bloomberg speech did open up some albeit limited space for 'dissident' Europhile voices to be heard, either those pressing for the British to remain inside the EU or those critiquing Cameron's policy as a dangerous 'gamble' with the economy. However, as with pro-Europeanism in Britain in general, these voices were few and far between and did not lessen the general tenor of the coverage, particularly in the most widely read titles such as *The Sun*, *Mail* and *Express*, that the referendum was a vital opportunity to reject UK membership once and for all. The third conclusion is that although there was an evident press focus on the same themes, issues, debates and soundbites, the factual content of the coverage was very much subservient to the ideological preferences of the newspaper. The same 'voices' commenting on the Bloomberg speech before and after Cameron delivered it were heard, but some were interpreted very differently depending on newspaper outlet (note the clashing views on Rutte's reaction to the speech and the different interpretations placed on the speech by instant commentators (Gannon 2014, pp.222–23). What all this suggests is that Cameron's diplomacy with EU leaders and institutions during a potential renegotiation of the UK terms of membership will be as complex as will be his management of the European issue at home (see Pentland 2014, p.19). Whatever the political strategy adopted on European policy after the 2015 election, any British prime minister will have a considerable task persuading the public because vast swathes of the opinion-forming press continue to doubt that Britain's best future is inside the EU.

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