

BBC “Europe and Us” week

Survey: February 18 – 23, 2001

Conducted by Minotaur Media Tracking for Global Britain

Europe and US

Overview Summary

Minotaur Media Tracking monitored in the days February 19-24, a series of programmes broadcast on various parts of the BBC which were described as a “Europe and Us” week – a series of loosely-related programmes whose stated common theme was to illuminate different aspects of the UK’s relationship with Europe.

Given the current controversial nature of that relationship, Minotaur analysed the content of each programme, expecting to find proper balance within each strand between the views of Euro-sceptics and Europhiles.

In its conclusions, Minotaur found that only one main programme, Question Time on BBC1, was completely balanced. The remainder were skewed in one way or another in that they did not weave into their own analysis and presentation sufficient views and information that came from the Euro-sceptic perspective. It also found that the strand lacked coherence and on a cultural level, put forward the largely uncontested view that Europe, the political project, was about delivering more choice for the UK.

Among the findings were:

Referendum Street (BBC1): Minotaur found that this was a deeply flawed exercise – the central part of which was a mock referendum which demonstrated a considerable swing from a “keep the pound” vote to a “pro-Euro” vote – that did not give viewers enough information to decide whether the exercise had been fairly conducted or was likely to be replicated in real circumstances. Further, there is evidence from Theresa Villiers, one of the pro-Pound team, that her team was not given access to as many “voters” as the pro-Euro canvassers.

Newsround (BBC1): This news programme aimed at a younger audience carried between Monday and Friday four items about different aspects of the UK’s membership of the EU. The first, about Referendum Street, gave far more weight and prominence to the pro-Euro vote; the second implied that membership of the Euro might not be of interest to children; the third contained inaccurate journalism that did disservice to both sides of the European debate; and the final strand, aimed at giving an overview of the Euro debate, contained more opinion in favour than against.

Churchill the European (BBC Radio 4): This, presented and written by David Sells, sought to claim that Churchill was a visionary of European unity who had advocated the sort of Europe that was now unfolding. The picture was qualified to some extent by Mr Sells pointing out that Churchill also saw the UK outside whatever scheme of European unity that was agreed. But the stronger drift belonged much more to the current trend by Europhiles to try and re-write history to make Churchill part of their case for a more powerful EU.

Nicky Campbell Phone-in (Radio 5 Live): This programme, from the Republic of Ireland, sought to focus on the topical issues of the UK’s and Ireland’s membership of the EU. But the panel and guest contributors were overwhelmingly Europhile, and Peter Hain, the FO minister, was given substantial time to put, almost unchallenged, the government’s current views on membership. He was followed by David Byrne, the EU commissioner for Ireland, who was challenged slightly more in his adulation of the Union. The only substantial Euro-sceptic perspective came from one panellist, and in a series of calls from viewers. Most of the programme was Europhile in its tone and was not nearly critical enough of the issues involved.

Minotaur found that one programme included in the strand, BBC1’s **Question Time**, was an admirably handled contribution to the Euro – but it stood alone in the even-handedness of its approach, and it was noticeable that this was the only live programme in the sequence.