

Sir Christopher Bland

Chairman, BBC

Broadcasting House

Portland House

London, W1A 1AA

20th January 2000

Dear Sir Christopher

**The Minotaur Report on the BBC's national news coverage of the
European Elections, 9th May – 12th June 1999**

Thank you for your letter of 18th October 1999, which, after analysis by Minotaur, we find as unsatisfactory as your previous letter of 22nd July. In that letter, you will recall, you claimed that the UK Independence Party had been fairly treated in general, and particularly in **On the Record's** minority parties' report. Analysis of the transcript showed that the reverse was true.

In your second letter of 18th October you say that *"in considering whether the programme (**On the Record**) was balanced over that period, it is worth bearing in mind that the interview with William Hague was much the longest of the four at over 23 minutes, and Jack Cunningham's was only 12 minutes."* You presumably have not been advised that Margaret Beckett was also on this programme and was accorded some 3,600 words. Jack Cunningham spoke some 2,800 words, and William Hague, as the only Euro-sceptic on the programme, some 3,900. On our arithmetic, **On the Record** gave the Labour Party 60% more airtime than the Conservative Party, which is not what you imply.

In other words, on the rare occasion when you do try to justify the BBC's position by refuting the Minotaur Report factually, your replies are misleading.

The BBC also seems to be blissfully unaware that about half the British people now appear to favour leaving the EU altogether, and that there are sound economic and political arguments for the UK to stand alone or to join an expanded NAFTA. (More than 60% appear to be against abolishing the pound and joining EMU). Yet, given your treatment of UKIP, this wider perspective was simply not examined during your coverage of the Euro-elections.

This Euro-sceptic attitude from so many of the British people is understandable when one considers recent research which suggests that only 10% of our economic activity may be involved with the EU (declining and in deficit), with a further 10% being involved with the rest of the world (increasing and in surplus), and the remaining 80% taking place

within the UK itself. We enclose a recent Global Britain summary of this (and we note that Anatole Kaletsky has reached the same conclusion – see *The Times*, 7th September 1999).

We also enclose our recent analysis of opinion polls in this country, which we hope you will find enlightening, and a *Daily Telegraph* article of 31st December 1999, which we know to be accurate, which reports the US International Trade Commission's enquiry into the possible advantages of the UK leaving the EU and joining an expanded NAFTA. If the BBC's coverage of the European issue was genuinely 'wide-ranging' – let alone 'impartial or fair' – we would have thought that by now you would have given these questions a serious airing with knowledgeable protagonists. Yet, as far as we are aware, you have never done so and, as far as we can judge from your letters, you have no intention of doing so. Indeed, you continue to refuse even to meet us and discuss the Minotaur Report with its authors.

In his letter to us of 14th December 1999 (a copy of which you were sent), we were reminded by the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport that the Broadcasting Standards Commission is empowered to consider issues of fairness in programming. We are therefore sending our file to the Commission and to some of the other interested parties who were clearly damaged by your coverage of last year's European elections.

Yours sincerely,

Lord Stoddart of Swindon (Labour)

Lord Harris of High Cross (Independent)

Lord Pearson of Rannoch (Conservative)