

THE BBC AND 'EUROPE'

ANALYSIS OF EU COVERAGE IN THE 2010 GENERAL ELECTION

SUMMARY

The reporting of EU issues was a very low priority during this election and the paucity of coverage meant that key topics linked to the EU were not properly explored.

Of the total election coverage, UKIP attracted 1.98%, considerably less than its share of the national poll, which was 3.1%. This meant that party policies were not explored in sufficient depth.

There were few editorial efforts to explore UKIP policies such as withdrawal, and the interviews that did take place with senior party spokesmen were disproportionately aggressive or angled on inaccurate or contentious opposing information.

The thrust of many features was to portray the party as mavericks who based policies on poorly researched data.

Exploration of EU issues amounted to only 3.2% of election coverage across all programmes, and was as low as 2.2% in the flagship Today programme. The BBC seemingly acquiesced to the desire of the main parties to attach low priority to the EU as an election issue.

There were no BBC interviews of the main two parties' leaders about EU issues, and the only curiosity about the Liberal Democrats' strongly pro-EU stance related to its support of the euro.

Extracts from the leaders' debates broadcast on news programmes about EU affairs amounted to less than a thousand words

Only ten BBC correspondent reports were filed about EU topics, and only two of these – by Gavin Hewitt, the Europe editor before the second leaders' debate – covered the EU policies of the main parties in more than a few sentences.