



**Confidential**

Meeting with BBC news and news-related Editors  
to discuss their coverage of “Europe”.

Thursday 30<sup>th</sup> September 2004  
10.30am – 12.15pm

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**Present:**

**For the BBC:** Mark Damazer, Deputy Director of News (Chairman of meeting); Kevin Backhurst – Editor *10 O’Clock News*; Roger Mosey – *Head of TV News*; Sue English – Head of Research; Fran Unsworth – Head of Political Programming; Peter Clifton – Editor of *News on-Line*; Mark Popescu – Editor of *News 24*; David Jordan – Chief Advisor, Politics; Peter Barron – Editor of *Newsnight*; Kevin Marsh – Head of *Today*; Sean Curran – Political Correspondent, Deputy Editor, Parliamentary Programmes.

**Our Team:** Rodney Leach (RL); Ian Milne (IM) - author of *A Cost Too Far?*; Andrew Cowgill (AC) – *British Management Data Foundation*; David Keighley (DK) – *Minotaur Media Tracking*; and Malcolm Pearson (MP).

**Background**

The meeting appears to have been offered by the new Chairman and Director General of the BBC as an alternative to sending the usual brush-off replies, dictated by Management, to MP’s letters and enclosures of 7<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> July 2004 (previously circulated).

**Minutes**

Mark Damazer started by claiming that the BBC had no editorial view about the EU question. He agreed that the coverage had sometimes not been full enough. He therefore agreed MP’s suggested agenda of:

1. “Millions of jobs depend on our EU membership”
2. “The EU has kept the peace in Europe since 1945”
3. Narcolepsy – narrowness of cover
4. The suggestion of general Europhile bias

RL led for our team by emphasising that he was not a ‘come-outer’ and by saying how trusted the BBC was by the British people and worldwide. However it appeared culturally sympathetic to the European project. Only some 20-25% of the population now held a similar view, with some 65% broadly Eurosceptic. RL defined mainstream Euro-scepticism ‘integration has taken place, should go no further and ought to some extent to be rolled back’. He said this view was rarely heard on the BBC. This appeared to be generally agreed.

### **1. “Millions of Jobs”**

Some 45 minutes discussion then took place on ‘millions of jobs’. Damazer said we could not expect the BBC to challenge this statement every time it was made; it would depend on context, etc. We fully accepted this, provided it was vigorously challenged when the type of programme, interview, etc. made it possible. MP pointed out that it had only been challenged once since the BBC issued guidance on 2<sup>nd</sup> June that it should be challenged (on *Today*, 19<sup>th</sup> June, John Humphries versus Neil Kinnock who entirely failed to justify it), and that Mandelson had been allowed to do it twice on the day of his appointment as a Commissioner. Sue English (Head of Research) was defensive about RL’s statement that no-one vaguely literate in economics or business now believed that a single job would be lost if we did not sign up to EMU or the Constitution. MP said the same went for leaving the EU itself. Our general feeling was that the message did start to sink in, and that the BBC may try to do better in future.

### **2. Peace**

The Editors were obviously shocked at the suggestion that the EU was not responsible for peace in Europe since 1945. After some discussion RL conceded that its influence had been ‘marginal’. Not clear to what extent this sunk in, but Damazer did agree that the soundbite should be challenged ‘when appropriate’ in future.

### **3. Narcolepsy.**

MP gave the example that during the elections to the EU Parliament, the appointments of Barroso as President of the Commission and Mandelson as a Commissioner, the BBC never explained the functions and powers of the Parliament (very little) against those of the Commission (enormous), so people can’t really have known what they were voting for, or what was at stake with the Barroso/Mandelson appointments. One Editor, who we suppose should remain nameless, challenged the fact the Commission has the monopoly to propose legislation – he thought the Council of

Ministers had that power (and some of his colleagues appeared to share this important misconception). AC put them straight. We agreed that the EU is regarded as boring, especially thanks to its terminology, but maintained that people were interested when they understood that their right to elect and dismiss those who make their laws was at stake. MP suggested the BBC should run a “*Yes, Minister*” series on the EU, for which nothing would need to be invented. This was greeted with some hilarity – but could not come from the News department. Damazer ended by repeating that he agreed they should try to offer wider coverage. (The danger here is that in doing so they will rub in the Europhile message?)

#### 4. **General Europhile bias.**

We got quite bogged down in a defensive critique of some of DK’s methodology. Damazer tried to say (again) that ‘bean counting’ was irrelevant. We insisted that a consistent ratio of 2:1 in favour of Europhiles over 5 years was indeed significant. Damazer asked whether the Conservative party should be regarded as ‘mainstream’ Eurosceptic, in RL’s original definition, and we agreed it should be – and it therefore should not be lumped with UKIP and other ‘come-outers’ in interviews. He also agreed they should approach a wider selection of people for interviews and discussion; RL and Vote No offered to help there.

#### **Conclusion**

We felt they were expecting a tough confrontation about leaving the EU, and were somewhat relieved by RL’s less extreme approach. Generally we felt the meeting could not have gone much better, because if they can accept even RL’s position, that would be a huge step forward. DK is to meet separately with Sue English to discuss the future ‘methodology’ of his monitoring. **It is clearly essential to keep this up; the meeting would not have taken place without it.** MP is to lunch and keep in touch with David Jordan (Chief Advisor, Politics).

Time will tell.

MP 3/10/04  
And revised 25/10/04