

**The BBC and “Europe”**

Survey of the coverage by BBC Radio 4 *Today* Programme of  
UKIP April 24 – June 17, 2004, including the elections to the  
European Parliament.

By Minotaur Media Tracking

## Summary findings

- There was acknowledgement of UKIP as a political force by the inclusion of three interviews with leading party figures – Roger Knapman, Paul Sykes, and Robert Kilroy-Silk, along with numerous other mentions. This was more than in 1999, but not enough to consider properly the party's policies or the rise of euroscepticism as a whole.
- In the reports by BBC correspondents about UKIP, the main analysis was of its impact on the Conservatives. That on Labour was all but ignored. Of course the party was a threat to the Tories; but a major issue of the election was the general rise in euroscepticism to the point where it captured more than 50% of the votes cast for the four main parties, along with reducing Labour to its lowest share of a national vote for 80 years. Yet the poor Labour showing was put down mainly to a protest vote against Iraq, rather than possible disenchantment with europhile policies.
- At the same time, UKIP was excluded from direct involvement in two key features about the election – the *only* two analysing likely voting patterns in England – one about trends in the south-west, the other in Leicester. The thrust of the analysis was on likely problems for the Conservatives. UKIP was treated as a minority party, even though in both areas it was clear from polling (and voting in 1999) that it could (and did) command 20%+ of the vote in parts of the country..
- Questioning of UKIP figures did not properly explore the party's policies. Labour – through Tony Blair and John Reid - put across, unchallenged, that it supported the EU because membership brought Britain massive economic benefits. The Conservatives were carefully interrogated about their case for re-negotiation of treaties and why they thought UKIP was extreme. But there was no exploration of UKIP's case for withdrawal. Questioning instead focused on whether UKIP was a one-issue flash in the pan.
- There were several unfair and highly questionable judgments about UKIP that went unchallenged, with no opportunity for reply. Peter Osborne, for example, called the party one of criminals (citing Jonathan Aitken as a supporter), and the interview was wound up without any balancing remarks. BBC correspondent Norman Smith called the party “celebrity-driven” (deploying no other adjectives), implying that it was all gloss and no substance.
- The party was unfairly bracketed with racism, as it had been in 1999. There was questionable and disproportionate inclusion in the Roger Knapman interview about Robert Kilroy-Silk's remarks about Arabs, that – all things considered – was an unfair attempt suggest the party espoused racist views. And a feature about a Christian think-tank's claim that UKIP's policies were narrowly selfish, noted that leading clerics had also condemned the BNP, firmly lumping both parties together, a connection that continued with the assertions made during the interview..

## **Introduction**

This report assesses whether coverage of UKIP by the BBC Radio 4 programme Today – the corporation’s flagship news programme – in the build-up and immediate aftermath of the elections to the European parliament on June 10, 2004, was fair, impartial and accurate.

The election was a remarkable result for UKIP. Although opinions vary about whether or not support will be replicated in other elections, the party attracted a 16.1% share of the poll, registering a 252% increase in votes over 1999 and coming both ahead of the Liberal Democrats in the constituencies they both contested, and within 6% of the overall share of the governing Labour party. Labour was reduced to its lowest share of a national poll for 80 years, and the Conservatives to their lowest proportion since 1832.

Although many pundits saw the surge in UKIP support as directly attributable to a switch away from the Conservative party – and clearly that was a contributory factor – it is, however, by no means totally clear what actually went on in terms of changed allegiance and voting behaviour. The europhile Labour and Liberal Democrats were politically keen to depict the surge in support as entirely a matter for the Tories and the eurosceptic “right”, but UKIP itself believed that support was drawn from across the political spectrum, and the facts remain that, while the eurosceptic Conservatives lost around 9% of their share of the vote (creating a loss of eight seats), europhile Labour lost 5.4% (and

a reduction of six seats). It is also a fact that, for the first time in European elections, the total eurosceptic vote – at 6.7m for the UKIP and Conservative parties combined - exceeded that for Europhile parties, at a total of 6.3m for the Labour and Liberal Democrats parties.

Against this complex background, it was the duty of the Today programme to interpret the various trends as accurately as it could, and to reflect in full the different strands of opinion and political forces at work.

In the compilation of the report all the programme feature items relating to the election were transcribed and analysed, with special focus on mentions of UKIP.

An important point to note at this stage is that coverage was relatively sparse. Each of the main parties contesting the elections was interviewed, but other coverage amounted to a handful each of one-to-one interviews and items of political analysis. There were only two special reports from constituency areas about likely voting patterns. On the Labour side, for example, there were one-to-one interviews of only Patricia Hewitt, Tony Blair and John Reid. In that narrow context, individual phrases and nuances can take on important significance.

The first conclusion is that in this election, UKIP was acknowledged by Today as a political force, and – as the election neared and it became clear that the party would command more than 10% of the vote - mentioned more frequently than during any other

monitoring period by Minotaur. By contrast, in 1999, when the party attracted 7% of the popular vote, there was just one brief UKIP interview and the party attracted fewer mentions than of the pro-Euro Conservative party, which attracted only 1% of the vote.

During the period from April 24, 2004, when the first interview directly relevant to the elections (relating to the launch of the BNP campaign) was held and June 17, there were three one-to-one interviews with UKIP personnel, namely Roger Knapman, Paul Sykes and, immediately after the results were known, Robert Kilroy-Silk. Although the time devoted to these interviews was less than to the main parties (Michael Howard, for example was interviewed at greater length three times and Michael Ancram twice for the Tories, while the three interviews with Labour figures ran much longer), there was space for the key UKIP figures to put across some of the key political points, and to clarify other matters.

However, there were problems in the main set-piece interviews. The questioning of UKIP was unduly negative. The predominant emphasis of questioning of the party was whether it was concerned only with one issue. There was no parallel attempt to explore the nature and context of support for euroscepticism. An example of the one-sidedness is that both John Reid and Tony Blair said during the campaign – unchallenged - that membership of the EU brought substantial economic benefits to the UK, whereas UKIP itself was never asked directly about the detail of the case for withdrawal, and whether it saw, in contrast to Labour, direct economic benefits to the UK from coming out . This was a very substantial area of debate that was not properly touched upon; the issues involved – in the

interests of balance – should have been explored, but they were not. It is true that both Roger Knapman and Paul Sykes were able to present, in passing, elements of UKIP policy, but they were fleeting fragments, and there was no attempt by interviewers to probe more deeply. The listener was therefore left in relative ignorance of the UKIP case, whereas Labour and Conservatives had ample space to put across their own positions, and the questioning by presenters was designed to explore the dominant themes of their election policies.

Another problem was the decision to devote a considerable portion of the launch interview with Roger Knapman – in which time was severely limited - to asking about whether he agreed with Robert Kilroy Silk's views about Arabs. In the circumstances, this was inappropriate. Although this may seem a relatively small point, it was a defining moment in the overall editorial approach to the party. At the time of the interview, the matter was the subject of a complex BBC internal inquiry. The BBC itself had its own partisan view on Mr Kilroy-Silk's remarks<sup>1</sup> which was at odds with what many in the Arab community thought. The decision to include the question (and that this issue was deemed to have been of such importance to be part of the interview) was angled to ask Mr Knapman, in effect, whether or not he agreed with a controversial (and by implication, racist) remark. In fact, Mr Knapman said he agreed with Mr Kilroy-Silk, but he was also saying in his answer that he did not believe the remark to be racist. But by the very inclusion of the question, a firm linkage was made editorially between UKIP and racism, the implication being that Mr Kilroy-Silk held unacceptable views about the Arabs.

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<sup>1</sup> He was eventually dismissed from his long-running eponymous chat show

A similar link had been in 1999, when, during the sole interview during that campaign of a UKIP figure – in this instance, Nigel Farage – it was noted that the Spearhead BNP magazine supported UKIP.

Further editorial decisions made during the 2004 also bracketed UKIP closely with BNP without giving the party a right of reply, and with insufficient contextual information for listeners judge what was being said. A newspaper review after the election noted that the Independent had published a story claiming that UKIP had reached an agreement with BNP not to contest some seats in Yorkshire. Here, the implication was that UKIP was closely allied with BNP. An interview was held with a spokesman for the Christian think-tank Ekklesia, which had published a report claiming that UKIP's views on nationhood were selfish. The introduction noted that prominent Christians had also attacked the BNP and urged people not to vote for it. By any standard of news judgment, the inclusion of the Ekklesia story was unusual; it is not a think-tank that is prominent in national life. It seems, therefore, that the programme went of its way to include an item that attacked UKIP, and then gave the party no immediate opportunity to reply.

The report shows several other major problems with the coverage. They included:

- UKIP was seen, in editorial analysis by a range of correspondents, as a problem predominantly for the Tories. Of course, the party, as already noted, did draw votes from the Conservatives, and Michael Howard himself was goaded during the election

campaign, into agreeing with a description of the party as being made up of “gadflies and cranks”. But UKIP support did not come entirely from the “right” or the Tory party, and it was simplistic – if not plain wrong - to suggest that it was. Today should have probed deeper and not accepted the europhile efforts to lump all eurosceptic issues together. As Michael Heseltine noted during the campaign, many supporters of euroscepticism are from the left, and there are also, as the programme also recorded, strong anti-EU sentiments among the Liberal Democrats, especially in the south-west. Leading members of UKIP and the Tory party both noted strongly that UKIP support was being taken from across the spectrum. Yet this point of view was scarcely taken into account in editorial comment and coverage.

Norman Smith, for example, noted on June 7 that UKIP was likely to push Liberal Democrats into fourth place, but his main point was that it was causing “considerable irritation, annoyance and distraction to the Tories”. For good measure, he threw in that the government was “relaxed” because it was not faring as badly as it feared (because of the Tory problems), then that UKIP was drawing energy and support away from Michael Howard. He concluded by saying that the party was having to shore up its “eurosceptic flank”. Apart from that this was wrong in describing euroscepticism within the Tory party as a “flank” (the vast majority of the parliamentary party would describe themselves as firmly eurosceptic), the stress the piece as whole placed on UKIP causing Tory disarray – an no problems for other parties – was a serious distortion.

Two days later, Mr Smith in further analysis of perceived Tory problems, acknowledged in passing that the Tories claimed that UKIP was taking support across the board, but the vast bulk of his piece focused on Tory disarray in the face of UKIP. He claimed that the problem was that the UKIP message resonated with Tory voters, but did not mention any possibility that it might appeal to Labour voters too, or Liberal Democrats. The simplistic approach continued after polling day. On June 11, for example, Iain Watson, in a programme link, suggested that the rise in support in UKIP would hit the Tories, with no mention of any other party:

**We won't get the results until Sunday, but the polls suggest that the United Kingdom Independence Party will tweak the Conservatives' tail. As Iain Watson has been finding out, it puts pressure on the Tory leader Michael Howard to be more eurosceptic.<sup>2</sup>**

•There were several disparaging remarks about UKIP in editorial comment. Although individually, none was of major significance, they added up to serially disparaging picture. Norman Smith said baldly on June 7 that the party was “celebrity-driven”, implying – in the absence of any other adjectives - that it had no other substance. Sarah Montague described UKIP as “blatantly eurosceptic”, when the dictionary definition of ‘blatant’ is ‘offensively noticeable, intrusive; offensively noisy’. She could have used other adjectives. Peter Osborne, during a discussion of the elections results, described UKIP as a party of criminals (referring specifically to Jonathan Aitken, though he claimed there were more he could name). John Humphrys did not have time to challenge this before the programme closed, but the party was given no opportunity to reply.

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<sup>2</sup> 11 June 2004, Conservatives and UKIP, 7.16am

- There was relatively little probing of the impact of UKIP and the rise of euroscepticism on Labour. Tony Blair and John Reid, in the principal interviews of Labour during the campaign, were both asked whether the party would be forced to modify the europhile approach, or had failed in the target to put across the positive message about the EU. When they replied not – and in both cases attributed the rise in euroscepticism to the debate not being put across properly (in effect that people did not understand the issues involved) – they were not heavily pushed. Analysis pieces by correspondents focused almost entirely on the impact of the rise on UKIP on the Conservatives, to the extent that this seems to have been deemed the only real story of the campaign (despite the fact, for example, that the eurosceptic vote rose to record levels). In the only two background analysis features about the campaign – one focused in the south-west and the other in Leicester - it was noted that Labour voters votes were “not rallying to the banner”, but this was put down entirely to the Iraq factor, or poor delivery on public services, rather than disaffection with policies towards the EU. After the election, as already noted, there was focus on the “Tories tail being tweaked and pressures on Michael Howard to become more eurosceptic” but no corresponding discussion of what might happen to Labour.

- There was distortive discussion and undue editorial emphasis placing euroscepticism to the “right” of British politics, typified on June 2 when James Naughtie said that “one of the serious arguments” in the election was “on the right about Europe”. To europhiles who attempt to bracket anti-EU beliefs with xenophobia, it may be convenient to label

euroscepticism – and UKIP as a whole - as a purely right-wing movement. But as Michael Heseltine noted during the campaign, there are many on the left, within the Labour party – and elsewhere - who oppose the EU. Today’s coverage also mentioned briefly – but did not explore further - Liberal Democrats in the south-west opposed to the new EU Constitution. UKIP itself maintained that its support was coming from across the political spectrum, and across social classes. Therefore, the labelling by James Naughtie was misleading. It could be seen as part of the process of pushing UKIP into an “extreme” and over-simplified position in British politics. The fact that it was labelled thus underscores that nowhere in its election coverage did the Today programme seek to examine the roots of the surge in support for UKIP, other than as simple defection from the Tories.

## **Detailed analysis of UKIP coverage**

The first direct mention of UKIP during the election period was at 7.20am on May 12 when Roger Knapman the party leader was interviewed at the launch of the campaign.

Sarah Montague posed the following main questions to Mr Knapman.

**Given enlargement, there's a reduction in the number of seats which Britain has in the European Parliament, so it's going to be tough for you, with your three MEPs, just to keep those in this election, isn't it?**

**Do you have a greater problem than other parties in that you won those seats by smaller margins?**

**...what's your ideal relationship between Britain and Europe?**

**You are seen as a one issue party – I suppose you are a one issue party?**

**And you're launching, of course, a local election campaign on Friday, but it's a problem for your campaigning, is it not, that in those elections people will see you . . . your one issue is Europe, and it's not an issue that – although obviously it concerns some people enormously – it's not one that resonates widely with the public.**

**Robert-Kilroy-Silk, who'll be standing in one of the seats for The UK Independence Party. He's of course said that he sees Arabs as . . . some Arabs as suicide bombers, limb**

**amputators and woman repressors is that something the party would stand alongside him on?**

**Do you agree with him? Including his views of Arabs?**

Mr Knapman's responses, amounting to some 391 words – or 2-3 minutes - were as follows:

**RK: Well, of course, but that applies to all the parties, if I may say so. All we know is that last time, when we came from nowhere to get nearly 8% of the vote and three MEPs, this time we're credible, we've got two and a half times the number of members in the party, we're spending some £2 million, you may have seen some of our billboards, 'Just say no to European Union' which is what most people in this country think.**

**...We think that this is our moment, we think that unlike four years ago, most people in this country want to get out of the European Union and renegotiate it as a Common Market, which is what we thought we were joining in the first place. Precisely that – a trading relationship. But political union is not necessary to achieve free trade.**

**...Switzerland, Norway, all those countries which were going to be impoverished because they couldn't be members of this great political union, somehow they seem to be doing alright. Lucky, lucky Mexico also just got a trading relationship with the EU, actually.**

**...We're a one issue party when it comes to the European Elections, because Europe is very much relevant to Europe, but at the same time, in the general election we had a full nineteen page election manifesto, and I will send you a copy.**

**...European Elections are not about the Iraq war, they're not about cleaning drains or chimneys as the Liberals would have you believe, it's whether or not we continue with Great Britain as an independent country, that's what it's about, it's a single issue but it's a very important single issue.**

**We're thrilled to have him (Kilroy-Silk) on board and we will take on anybody who is the enemy of political correctness, as regards to the quote that you made, I think he's already explained that on several occasions. I agree with him on every aspect that I've ever heard him speak about, we've had . . . Well he's already explained that matter on numerous occasions, and I understand and I don't want to embarrass either him or the BBC, but I understand there's still differences between you and him, and I don't want to discuss that at the present time.**

The interview allowed Mr Knapman to establish clearly that UKIP wanted to pull out of the EU, that he saw the party of having across-the-board appeal, and had a range of policies apart from the central point about withdrawal from the EU. But the thrust of the interviewing in the key exchange with UKIP during the election period was to suggest that the party would be in difficulties because it was fighting on only one issue and because of electoral changes. Mr Knapman was given space to put across his main points of policy, but only in very minimal terms. The main editorial line adopted during the exchange was that UKIP was a one issue party – but when Mr Knapman said it was not, Sarah Montague made no attempt to explore what the other policies it might have. Finally, there was the question about Robert Kilroy-Silk. It took up about a quarter of the interview time, and was a dubious line of inquiry for a number of reasons.

The remarks made by Mr Kilroy-Silk about Arabs (as raised by Sarah Montague in this interview) had led to his suspension (and subsequent dismissal) from his eponymous BBC1 discussion programme. According to the corporation, this was because he had written in a newspaper column remarks about Arabs which senior BBC figures believed were partisan and contentious. Mr Kilroy-Silk strenuously denied that his words were as the BBC claimed, were not relevant to his role as a presenter and were fair comment on a matter of public concern. The remarks generated much public debate, with some agreeing with the corporation. But Mr Kilroy-Silk was also backed by many commentators, including leading figures from the Arab world<sup>3</sup>. At the time of the interview, the dispute had not been resolved between the BBC and Mr Kilroy-Silk, although the BBC had kept his programme off air.

In all the circumstances, this was not a matter of sufficient public importance to warrant such a disproportionate amount of airtime in what could have been - at this stage – the only substantive interview of UKIP<sup>4</sup>. There were many more UKIP candidates than Mr Kilroy-Silk, and though he was high profile, no evidence that his remarks were typical of others standing, or of the party as a whole. In the circumstances, it was not appropriate for the programme to bring it up at this juncture – even if the intention was to set the record straight - because as Roger Knapman pointed out, the matter was still subject to an internal BBC inquiry. The motives for this topic being raised were therefore suspect, and could be interpreted as an attempt to bracket UKIP as a whole as racist. Because of the limited amount of time devoted to UKIP, listeners could well have concluded as a result

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<sup>3</sup> See appended article by Ibrahim Newar, Daily Telegraph (11/1/04)

<sup>4</sup> The Green Party, for example, was only featured once.

of this interview that it was a matter of central importance to the party and its policies, when in reality it was peripheral concern, and of special interest mainly to the BBC hierarchy discussing Mr Kilroy-Silk's future.

The same approach to UKIP had also been a hallmark of coverage in the 1999 elections. Then, the third (and final) question of John Humphrys to the then UKIP leader, Nigel Farage (in the one interview accorded to the party), was,

**Does it worry you that you have been singled out for praise by the BNP newsletter Spearhead?**

The conflation of euroscepticism with xenophobia and racism has been the constant goal of Europhiles such as Peter Hain.

The next mention of UKIP was almost two weeks later at 6.47am, on May 24, when, in an item on whether the Constitution would have an impact in voting in the South West (described as "the most eurosceptic region of the UK"), Sarah Nelson, said that the Tory vote faced a double threat, one from UKIP. Ms Nelson, in actuality recorded at a Conservative party event, claimed that "there were at least thirty people in the hall" who did not need convincing that the time was right to pull out of Europe. She added that UKIP, which had done better in the SW than in any other region, were sure they could do better this time round. There was also actuality of Liberal Democrat and Labour candidates, but not direct mention of the UKIP candidate, and no effort to explain why the south-west was so eurosceptic.

This acknowledged that UKIP was becoming a significant issue in the election. But, given that opinion polls were already beginning to indicate the party could push the Liberal Democrats into fourth place – as was noted later in the programme – there was a strong case that there should have been a more direct involvement of UKIP. The party achieved third place, and yet was not brought directly into this key piece about its rise. The result was that it was presented as a “threat” to other parties, rather an entity in its own right, and the party’s message was not communicated directly, despite being one of the major themes of the election. If UKIP was omitted because there would then have been a need to mention other “minority” parties, it spotlights major problem in the coverage of elections, namely that a change in public opinion could not be reflected properly.

Also on May 24, at 7.09am, Lembit Opik, the Liberal Democrat MP, was asked in a brief exchange if he was concerned that a Daily Telegraph poll had found that his party could be knocked into fourth place by UKIP. His response was that other polls suggested otherwise, and he was not pushed further. Again, this was an acknowledgement of the existence of UKIP. But there was no real pressure on Mr Opik to explain the rise, and no discussion here of a key issue of whether the Liberal Democrats europhile policies were becoming an electoral liability.

Five days later, on May 29, at 8.50am, during a discussion of prospects of the election, Peter Osborne, claimed that UKIP and BNP (which he lumped together) were doing well

in the opinion polls because they were basically “negative”, the result of other parties restricting debate about the EU.

The “negative” label, together with the lumping of BNP with UKIP, went unchallenged by presenter Carolyn Quinn. Indeed, she compounded the impression of UKIP being as Peter Osborne had implied by asking the other interviewee, Tory candidate Vanessa Gearson, if she might be damaged by these “more extreme parties who may be saying exactly the sort of things on Europe that they want to hear, and they feel the Conservative party isn’t offering.” Ms Gearson denied flatly that this would be the case on the ground that people in her area (Cheltenham) had a clear understanding of what “extremist” parties were trying to do. The piece as a whole therefore gave the impression that UKIP was not only to be bracketed with BNP, but also was “extremist” in a negative sense. The party was not afforded an adjacent opportunity to correct this (though the issue was put to Paul Sykes five days later after Michael Howard had reinforced the extremist tag).

On May 31, at 7.18am, John Humphrys said that all the big political parties were becoming edgy about UKIP “who want to pull out of the EU and which, according to opinion polls, is going to do well in the elections”. He added that the Conservatives had a special problem in that four members in the House of Lords had had the whip withdrawn for writing a letter supportive of UKIP. In the interview that followed with Baroness Cox, one of the peers, she explained that her actions were designed to stop the surrendering of sovereignty to Brussels, something that “overrides every other party issue”. Mr Humphrys asked her if she wanted to pull out of the EU, but Baroness Cox declined to

answer, stating instead that too much had been given away to the EU, but she was not anti-Europe (clearly meaning the entity distinct from the EU). John Humphrys put it to her that she was anti-EU. Baroness Cox replied that she was very worried about losing sovereignty to the Leviathan of Brussels “where we have a minimal say, a minimal vote and have in effect given away our freedom”. Rather than exploring this point further, Mr Humphrys switched tack, claiming it was all too late as it had been Baroness Thatcher who had signed the Single European Act “taking us further in Europe than we’d ever been”. Baroness Cox said that the need now was to learn from experience.

Immediately afterwards, John Humphrys interviewed Michael Ancram, who contended that Baroness Cox had not said that she wanted to pull out of the EU, the core policy of UKIP, adding that he suspected that she hadn’t properly thought through matter over UKIP. Mr Humphrys accused him of being patronising and contended that Baroness Cox knew fully what UKIP stood for. Mr Ancram then pointed out that Alan Sked, one of the founders of UKIP had said he was going to vote Tory because he saw UKIP as “lightweight”. Mr Humphrys replied that it must be worrying for the Conservatives that opinion polls were showing that UKIP would get 20% of the vote. Mr Ancram asserted that there were three positions in the election, those who wanted to get out, those who wanted more integration and those who wanted to bring back control of issues such as fishing. Mr Humphrys contended that this could not be done without leaving the EU. Mr Ancram disagreed, claiming that treaties had been re-negotiated in the past.

This was the first dedicated sequence that recognised that the opinion polls were showing UKIP had up to 20% support, and it gave space to Baroness Cox to explain why she was worried about the powers of Brussels. As such, the programme again acknowledged the presence and importance of UKIP. But there were a number of problems. Again, there was no direct input from UKIP, an important omission in the context of Mr Ancram's negative claims about the party. Baroness Cox, though she explained why she was concerned about the powers of Brussels, pointedly refused to endorse UKIP's goals directly, and therefore did not put across the UKIP case. Secondly, the main emphasis of the piece was explaining the row within the Tory party. This was partly justifiable; it was watershed of sorts that the whip had been withdrawn. The problem was the extent to which it dominated. There was little attempt to put the support of UKIP by the "rebel" peers into a meaningful context, something that was underlined when John Humphrys, instead of exploring Baroness Cox's assertions about the powers of Brussels, pushed instead that the EU-related problems had been caused by Margaret Thatcher and the signing of the Single European Act.

On June 1, in a two-wayer between Jonathan Beale and James Naughtie at 6.35am, Mr Beale said that Michael Howard would express in a speech later that day alarm about UKIP. Mr Naughtie asked:

**The Liberal Democrats are very troubled by this as well, but in the Conservative ranks, who obviously would be hoping to do very well next week, a rise in UKIP support spells trouble, doesn't it?**

Mr Beale said that the backing by Conservative peers for UKIP and an opinion poll showing UKIP on 14% was “clearly a matter of concern for Mr Howard”. He added that Mr Howard would describe UKIP as extreme and said this was “a clear signal that the Conservatives perhaps underestimated the threat from UKIP and are now worried”.

The emphasis again was on that UKIP was mainly a threat to the Conservatives. The Liberal Democrats were mentioned, but only as a side issue – the thrust was that the Conservative party was in trouble because of UKIP. At this stage, in psephological terms, there was no way of knowing where UKIP was drawing support (and both UKIP and the Conservatives maintained it was from across the board). Therefore, this analysis was not properly balanced, especially in that it did not mention the Labour party at all. It moved further towards suggesting that the Conservatives would “lose” to UKIP. What was going on in electoral terms was more complex and open to different interpretation. Jonathan Beale could have legitimately speculated that people who had not previously voted were being galvanised towards doing so; he could have said that the effect of the rise of UKIP on Labour was difficult to predict at this stage, but there were worries among some eurosceptics within the pro-Constitution stance could be damaging. But he chose not to do so.

The next mention of UKIP was at 7.18am the following day, an interview of Paul Sykes, after Michael Howard had attacked the party as being “extreme”. It ran as follows:

**EDWARD STOURTON: Michael Howard trained his sights on The UK Independence Party yesterday. The Yorkshire businessman Paul Sykes has put his**

voice and his cheque book behind both the Tories and the UKIP in the past. This time Paul Sykes, it's very much . . . they have very much come behind the UKIP, which according to Mr Howard yesterday is a party of extremists...

ES: What do you make of that?

Paul Sykes: Well, I think if you're called an extremist because you want to have your own parliament making your own laws, with the people you've elected, then I'm extreme. If extremists are all the people that are our candidates, which are architects, bus drivers, nurses, they're just ordinary people, then you really ought to cool down about, because a lot of them were his voters, and still could be I suppose.

ES: His point was if people who voted for your party and not the Conservative Party, they would cheer up Tony Blair and achieve very little in terms of the objectives they were trying to promote?

PS: Well, you know, I've listened to the Conservatives for a considerable amount of time, I was a member for over twenty years, and I waited patiently on them coming out with a policy that would clean up the past. I mean what Michael Howard is doing now is trying to promise he will return some of the powers from Brussels, that's his rhetoric at present, but the fact is, Michael - I'm very pleased he's doing some of that, but he was a member of the government at the time these powers were actually passed to Brussels, and all he's doing is trying to bring some of the powers back, to try and put some of his past mistakes right.

ES: In terms of real politics though, you'd have to accept, wouldn't you, and anybody who's listening to this who's considering voting for you would have to

accept, that you're not a realistic party of power, you may talk the talk that you talk, but you're never really going to achieve anything.

PS: Well I don't think that's true. I mean, the fact is this, that all we've done is started to have opinion polls done and talk direct to the people. They've been excluded from the debate, they can see how the polls are now, there's people fed up with politics altogether. They've never been spoken to for thirty years, they've never had a vote on this subject, one direct vote on whether Britain should remain in the European Union or leave. They've always been told, 'everything will be fine, just leave it to us', I mean you've mentioned Tony Blair – have you found him in this European election? He's not had a word to say. Isn't there something hauntingly funny about this European election? Why is it we are gaining all this ground if public opinion is not with us?

ES: I suppose I'm really trying to direct the question towards the performance of MEPs from UKIP in the European parliament. What have they actually done to change things? What could they do?

PS: Well, let's say one particular thing: when the British MEPs voted to lift the borders of Britain to the migrant workers, open-ended, forever, amen, a couple of months ago, a month ago, they UKIP members were the only three that voted 'no' to that. All the British MEPs voted 'yes'. Now surely on something as fundamental as border control of your own nation, there should have been a referendum on that, but that's how we've gone on. For thirty years, we've had four major treaties signed off, transferring power from Britain to Brussels without one single direct vote of the British people. And all we're doing . . . it's a campaign, I agree with you, we're not wanting to set the world on fire, we're not wanting to be a ginormous political party, the British people . . . the reason we're gaining so much support is

**because we've done opinion polls, and we are merely voicing the opinions of the British people . . .**

**ES: Paul Sykes . . .**

**PS: . . . it's up to the Conservative Party and the others to listen. The people are very frustrated about our situation, with who governs Britain . . .**

**ES: Paul Sykes, we must leave it there.**

**PS: We can't see in the European Union and remain . . .**

**ES: Paul Sykes, we must leave it there**

The interview more than doubled the space allocated to UKIP and its policies, and Mr Sykes, in 542 words, or around three and half minutes, was allowed both to put forward several key points about the party, as well as reject the “extremist” tag bestowed by Mr Howard. As such, it was an important acknowledgement of the increasing evidence that UKIP was likely to win more votes. Yet the exchange was relatively brief, compared, for example, to the time given to Mr Howard - in two subsequent interviews - to expound his view that UKIP was full of gadflies and extremists. In addition, the tone of the interviewing remained curiously negative, as if UKIP was an aberration. There was only brief acknowledgement – other than that Mr Sykes had been selected for interview - of what the party appeared to be achieving in terms of an electoral breakthrough. It could have been said, for example (as had been mentioned in the earlier interview with Lembit

Opik), that opinion polls were beginning to predict consistently that one of the biggest upsets in British electoral history was in the pipeline: for the first time in living memory in a national poll, that Liberal Democrats were being pushed into fourth place. But there was no mention of these factors. Equally, there was no attempt to explore in the questioning the party's policies – and thereby, what could lie behind the growth in support. Instead Edward Stourton concentrated almost entirely on the suggestion that the party was not a viable force. Of course, this gave Mr Sykes the opportunity to say that it wasn't, and he did, but the questioning could have been framed to be less negative and more exploratory. A further issue was that BBC correspondents covering the election had noted elsewhere the negative reaction that both the Labour party and the Liberal Democrats appeared to be drawing to their campaigns. Yet there was no attempt here (or elsewhere) to explore this in relation to the impact that UKIP might be having. The emphasis was entirely on the effect of UKIP on the Conservatives.

The next mentions of UKIP were in an interview of Michael Howard was on June 2 at 8.10am following his speech describing the party as “extremists”. James Naughtie in the set-up, said that one of the serious arguments in the elections was “on the right about Europe”, with Michael Howard claiming UKIP was extreme because it was making gains in the opinion polls. He added that a briefing document from central office sent to candidates had described UKIP as a party of “cranks and gadflies, riddled with infighting and conspiracy theories”.

The latter was a major charge against UKIP that went beyond the simple “extremist” claim put to Mr Sykes earlier in the programme. It was given huge prominence in this piece, but it was never put directly to any member of UKIP. The charges were subsequently (within this interview) mildly tested by James Naughtie, who pointed out that many Conservatives (presumably regarded as more “moderate”) supported the party’s message. But this was not sufficient tempering to create reasonable balance. The impression of unreasoned extremism was reinforced by Mr Howard when Mr Naughtie pushed him on whether he specifically agreed with the Central Office description of UKIP. Given that the programme itself had already firmly associated UKIP with racism (in the questioning of Roger Knapman about Robert Kilroy-Silk), the absence of balancing comment from someone within the party, or closely associated with it, was a serious omission.

In other parts of the interview, Mr Howard was directly challenged that UKIP was taking votes away from the Conservatives. He replied that UKIP might be taking support from the other parties as it was not clear where their backing was coming from. James Naughtie did not test this, and the contention was not subsequently put directly to other parties. Mr Naughtie added that because the Conservatives had signed up to EPP group, UKIP could point out that the party was supporting a political entity which favoured greater integration with the EU. Mr Howard responded that part of the deal with EPP was that it was made explicit that the Conservative party did not support further integration, but did want to work to make the EU more effective.

Mr Naughtie then put it to Mr Howard that many members of his party who were “natural Conservatives” were being tempted to vote for UKIP because he had “demonised the EU”, forcing people to feel that they had to choose between integration or getting out. Mr Howard contended that this was “claptrap of the sort you hear from Labour and Liberal Democrats”, adding that Mr Naughtie was letting them off the hook because he was pursuing this issue at the expense of the real area of concern, which was that the minister for Europe, Denis McShane, had signed a document which aimed at more integration. Mr Naughtie moved the subject back to UKIP, noting that one Tory MP had called the Conservative position “too gradualist”, and then asking:

**Are you certain there are no Conservative MPs who hold the extremist view – as you describe it – of pulling out of the EU?**

Mr Howard did not answer directly, stating that it was his job to set out the policies of the party.

This was a pressured exchange in which Mr Naughtie sought to establish why Mr Howard had dubbed UKIP “extreme” and whether, if that was the case, Mr Howard had himself (through the party’s EU-related policies) triggered a drive towards UKIP through “demonising” the EU. In doing so, Mr Naughtie was, to a point, following the terms of the debate in relation to withdrawal and UKIP that had been set out by Mr Howard himself. However, the job of the programme is not to follow blindly or uncritically the agenda of political parties. Here, the editorial approach fell into two traps. The first was in the set-up, in describing the debate triggered by UKIP as “on the right”. This suggested

that the debate about UKIP was entirely one that concerned UKIP and the Conservatives (and perhaps the BNP). In fact, there is no objective evidence yet that establishes where support from UKIP is from<sup>5</sup>. The Conservative vote (in percentage terms) fell more than that of Labour. But on such a low turn-out, it may equally be that, as Paul Sykes contended, a class of voters who had been disenfranchised for 30 years were turning out to vote again. These people may have been drawn from any part of the political spectrum. Of course, Mr Howard himself, in framing the speech describing UKIP as “extremists”, was acknowledging to some extent concerns that his party’s vote would be hit. But he also believed – as he stated within this interview – that support from UKIP was being drawn from Labour as well. Therefore, for Today to characterise this issue as being “on the right” was both misleading and not objective. It boxed those who were worried about the EU into an over-simplified pigeon-hole and reinforced the impression that UKIP supporters were “extremists and cranks” of the right.

The second trap was that the questioning not only slavishly followed Mr Howard’s agenda, it amplified it. It was Mr Howard himself who had tagged UKIP as “extremists”. But James Naughtie went further. He implied that Mr Howard had triggered support for them because he had “demonised” the EU. In framing the question, there was an assumption that support for reform of the EU would not exist unless it had been so demonised. Such a question could not have been deemed reasonable – either in the word chosen or the drift of the thinking - had not Mr Naughtie believed that Mr Howard’s

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<sup>5</sup> Although figures such as Peter Hain are keen to suggest that those against the European project are “xenophobes” from the right.

approach attacked the EU unreasonably, and therefore that support for UKIP was based only on “demonisation”. This was serious over-simplification of the issues involved.

BBC correspondent Norman Smith was the next to mention UKIP, on June 7 at 6.32am. In a “two-wayer”, he described the emergence of UKIP as “celebrity-driven” and said it was possibly pushing the Liberal Democrats into fourth place as well as causing “considerable irritation, annoyance, and distraction to the Tories”. He added that the other “big story” was the relaxed approach of the government as they thought they would not do as badly as they had at first feared. John Humphrys then asked:

**Well, quite because if UKIP does well, that shoves the Liberal Democrats back, presumably, could even be into fourth place as you say, and then it’s the Tories who have to prove it.**

**NS: Yes, and UKIP undoubtedly is drawing a lot of energy time and support away from Michael Howard. I mean to some extent the Tory campaign, at the outset the great hope was that they were going to be able to deliver a real blow against Tony Blair, but they had their trump card snatched from their hand right at the outset when the prime minister promised that he would hold a referendum on the European Constitution, and although the Tories say they did not have to pulp thousands of their election leaflets, I think there’s no doubt they did have to pretty radically revise their strategy. And since then their campaign has frankly lacked momentum, they’ve lacked a clear line of attack on the government, they’ve been distracted by trying to shore up their own eurosceptic flank against in-roads made by UKIP, and also the fact is they are defending a high in the local elections and so, it’s going to be very difficult for them to make further significant advances. So, in that context it does look like it could be a hard night for Michael Howard.**

There were several problems with this supposedly objective assessment. The first was the glib description of UKIP as “celebrity-driven”. If this had been qualified by a statement that one of the factors in the rise could have been the association with celebrities, it would have been justifiable. But as it was, this was a bald statement and it looked as if Mr Smith was contending that the only reason for support was the “celebrities” who were supporting the party<sup>6</sup>. The second problem was the continued emphasis on that UKIP was affecting mainly the Conservative vote. There was passing mention of difficulties for the Liberal Democrats, but none at all in relation to Labour, and the overwhelming focus was on the Tories. Mr Smith actually implied that Labour were out of the woods, thereby suggesting that the impact on it of UKIP was inconsequential. The third problem was that euroscepticism within the Conservative party was described as relating to a “flank”, implying, by the choice of word, that it was a minor component. In fact, the vast majority of the parliamentary party and supporters (according to polls) are eurosceptic. It is Europhiles, if anything, who are a party “flank”. The inaccurate choice of words distorted the nature of the problem facing the party, making it sound – in turn – that UKIP was a sore on the backside rather than a genuine electoral option.

The next mention of UKIP came at 8.10am during an interview of Charles Kennedy. John Humphrys opened by noting that we didn’t normally get terribly excited about European elections, but then “UKIP started recruiting some big names and notching up some big

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<sup>6</sup> The only “celebrities” mentioned as supporting the party in Today items were Joan Collins and Robert Kilroy-Silk. It was highly contentious to suggest that hundreds of thousands of voters were being swayed by such endorsement.

figures in the opinion polls – some of them suggest they will push the Liberal Democrats into fourth place in the elections”. Mr Kennedy denied that the rise of UKIP was worrying because his party would achieve a higher share of the vote than in 1999, a position he maintained after Mr Humphrys had pushed that he was likely to come fourth to a party “nobody had heard of three years ago”. Mr Kennedy also said his party was not about to change its pro-EU stance. Mr Humphrys asserted that the fervent support of the EU had been shown to be “extremely dangerous for you now”, because the public’s view toward Europe had changed and he needed more votes, but Mr Kennedy maintained there was no appetite for change among party supporters, and suggested that part of the problem was that the government had not been pushing the case for Europe sufficiently. Mr Kennedy also denied that he had attempted to shift the attention of voters away from Europe and towards Iraq.

During the interview, one of Mr Humphrys’ basic assumptions was that there was a new mood of euroscepticism among voters and he pressed Mr Kennedy to provide reasons why his “fervent” support of the EU was continuing. This was, to some extent, an acknowledgement of the growing importance of UKIP. But this was offset by the intro, which glibly and over-simplistically linked the rise in UKIP to “big names”, as if support was not based on the principles involved but the presence of celebrities on the party slate. He also did not challenge Mr Kennedy’s assertion that euroscepticism was based on ignorance, another gross over-simplification.

James Naughtie interviewed Tony Blair on June 8 at 8.10am. He said in the intro that all parties were concerned about the rise in UKIP “and its anti-EU message”, adding that the election results were unpredictable. But he then changed emphasis, saying that for Labour “it was inevitable that the issue of Iraq would play a part”, before focusing his first questions on the government’s record. He then contended that it was “inevitable” in a European election “when people don’t seem to take much of an interest in what the parliament they’re electing really does, or what sort of shape it has” that the poll would be a sort of referendum on government. Mr Blair himself said that the European parliament did matter because it decided legislation that affected business and industry. Mr Naughtie responded that during his leadership “more people than at any time since 1975 – if the opinion polls are true - saying ‘no’ to the EU. Not just that they don’t like some of the things coming out of Brussels, but they don’t want to be in it at all.” Mr Blair indicated partial agreement before saying that he had called a referendum to trigger debate about Europe and adding

**Is it actually sensible when 60% of our trade is with Europe, when millions of jobs are with Europe for us...to get out of it?**

Mr Naughtie did not respond to this sweeping claim but asked if he thought the rise in UKIP would help him, Mr Blair said he would leave psephology to the experts, referring to the starting of the debate. Mr Naughtie said that people were taking an anti-EU stance because they did not like the Constitution and saw that his party had signed up to a pamphlet urging greater integration. Mr Blair maintained that when people knew what was in the Constitution – as opposed to what they were told – it would be different,

adding that the government would not yield on its red lines relating to tax, foreign policy and the social services. He added that the Constitution was necessary because of enlargement and the need for a different way of working, and then stated it would not make sense to pull the UK out of the decision-making process of the biggest economic market in the world, which, he claimed, the Tories were planning to do.

James Naughtie also acknowledged in this interview that euroscepticism, as expressed in dislike for the Constitution, was a significant force. But there were serious flaws in the overall approach. Mr Naughtie let pass without challenge the sweeping claim by Mr Blair that 60% of Britain's trade and millions of jobs depended on the EU, and that the government was defending without qualification the areas it had designated as 'red lines'. Both were highly contentious statements which clearly were a central plank of Labour's approach to the election – and which eurosceptics including UKIP contested vigorously - but neither was challenged either here or elsewhere. This was the only interview of the prime minister during the election period and only the second of a senior Labour figure, and it was a major omission that Mr Blair was not pinned down more in such central issues. Analysis of the way Michael Howard was repeatedly tackled over his central claim that treaties could be re-negotiated shows that much more rigour was applied to the eurosceptic case than to the Europhile one. Mr Blair was also allowed to state without challenge, as Mr Kennedy also had, that euroscepticism was based principally in ignorance. Further, he dodged answering the issue of the signing of the pro-integration pamphlet. Mr Howard was subsequently told that this matter had been put to the prime minister (and Labour) and it was therefore not a legitimate issue for him to raise. In fact,

a major concern of eurosceptics was simply swept aside without substantive comment by Mr Blair, and the eurosceptic issues raised by Mr Howard were therefore effectively marginalised.

On June 8 at 7.20am, Sarah Montague, after noting that Michael Howard had made a speech criticising Labour's stance on the Constitution, asserted:

**He won't make any mention of UKIP though and with very good reason if the latest opinion polls are anything to go by. With two days to go until polling day, it appears that some Conservatives are being seduced by the blatant Euro scepticism of UKIP.**

She added that there could also be bad news for Labour because the core vote appeared not to be rallying to the banner. In a report from Leicester that followed, Ian Watson claimed that members of the Conservative club did not want to discuss the European elections "with more nudges and winks than a Monty Python sketch". He noted that a new opinion poll showed that 47% of Conservatives wanted to leave the EU and 75% of all voters wanted a referendum on the UK's membership of the EU. He added that the same poll showed that Michael Howard could get less votes than in 1999, before adding opinion from a Populus pollster who claimed that Michael Howard had failed to reach a broader base of voters "who weren't obsessed with European elections. On the other hand they didn't really prepare themselves for the UKIP threat" The pollster added that William Hague had had a simple slogan for the 1999 "in Europe but not run by it", but Mr Howard had not. Mr Watson then included actuality from the leader of the Conservatives in Leicester, who said that people voted differently in European elections

and there should be no changes of policy if UKIP did well. Mr Watson said that the Liberal Democrats claimed that the Labour vote would not turn out while Labour, though admitting that Iraq loomed large, hoped that the traditional vote would stay loyal. The spokesman stated:

**The dilemma for those who are natural Labour supporters is to weigh up what is happening in Iraq against a vote for Labour to continue to work in health, education and so many areas that affect people's lives.**

The Populus pollster did not mention Europe in relation to Labour, but said the problem was to persuade people they were delivering on public services.

The item acknowledged that UKIP was causing a serious impression in the election, and was ostensibly framed to discuss the threat to the votes of all three major parties. But in reality, UKIP was seen yet again as only having an impact on the Conservative vote: a division within the “right”. It was not even mentioned in connection with Labour and the Liberal Democrats, as if euroscepticism was of no consequence whatsoever to them. As such, this was a seriously skewed and misconceived report. The quotes chosen from the pollster amplified the impression. On the one hand he chastised the Conservatives for talking about Europe too much (and not appealing to the broader electorate) on the other, he said a major problem was that they didn't have a EU-related slogan for the election. He added that Labour's problems were based on a lack of delivery on social services, with no mention of the possible impact of support for the new Constitution, or the party's refusal to acknowledge the importance of euroscepticism.

A further problem was in the use of language. Sarah Montague described UKIP as “blatantly eurosceptic”. The dictionary definition (Collins) of ‘blatant’ is “offensively noticeable, intrusive; offensively noisy”. Several other words could have been chosen – such as “obviously”, or “deeply” or even “fully”. The actual choice showed discourtesy and bias against euroscepticism. Also questionable was the description of Tories being like a “Monty Python sketch”. There could be only one intention: to suggest that the divisions within the party had descended to farce. It conveyed a party totally at war with itself. No such similar descriptions were applied to the Labour party, and as such, it was another seriously biased piece of reporting, deliberately designed to convey the impression that of the three major party campaigns – although all were facing some problems – the Tories, and the eurosceptic camp, alone, were in total disarray.

On June 9, in a two-wayer between James Naughtie and Norman Smith, Mr Smith again mentioned that Mr Howard was trying to shore up his “eurosceptic flank”. As previously discussed, euroscepticism does not represent a flank of the Tory party, but almost all of it. The second use emphasised that the description was deliberate and designed to suggest that euroscepticism was a minority cause. Mr Smith added that Tory MPs were “incredibly touchy” about UKIP. He stated:

**Quite simply, UKIP. You only have to mention the word UKIP to a Tory MP and it’s a bit like creeping up and saying ‘boo’...and though they say we are over-inflating their poll ratings and that UKIP are taking votes across the board, I think the real concern is that the UKIP message resonates with many ordinary Conservative party members, and they feel**

**that this election – it's for the European parliament, they are not particularly motivated by the European parliament – they can indulge themselves a bit, they can underline their opposition to Europe by voting for UKIP.**

Mr Naughtie asked if Michael Howard's difficulty was that if he tried to "burnish" his eurosceptic credentials, he risked people saying that they might as well vote UKIP. Norman Smith agreed it was the point, and noted that pro-EU MP Ian Taylor had said so, claiming that Tory voters were being pushed into voting UKIP. Mr Smith also noted that Michael Ancram had been "chased around the television studios" by a party activist who claimed that 80% of the party wanted to leave the EU. He described this as an 'extraordinary spectacle'. Mr Smith concluded:

**And that's the real difficulty Michael Howard has got, trying to stop a haemorrhage of votes to UKIP.**

This analysis clearly acknowledged – by default – that UKIP was a growing force. It did not say why, though it portrayed the rise in support as entirely an issue affecting the Conservative party. Clearly, by this stage, it was evident that a big story of the election would be that the Tory vote would not be as high as in 1999. But the rise in UKIP was not entirely attributable to dissatisfaction within Conservative ranks and it was both disingenuous and inaccurate to portray it as such. There was no mention in the analysis of other parties. The continued assumption was that voting UKIP was an "indulgence" – as if those involved had no real appreciation of the issues. And at the same time, there was a continued suggestion that the problem engendered by the rise in UKIP was some kind of

farce. After the previous day's comparison to Monty Python, in this instance, Norman Smith said that Michael Ancram had been involved in an "extraordinary spectacle", when all that was involved was one party activist. Such attempts to inject colour into political reporting are dangerous if they are not accompanied by a sense of perspective, and not balanced by similar references to the other side. As it was, the impact was again to suggest that the eurosceptic case was somehow strange or farcical.

The day before the election, on June 9 at 8.10am, John Humphrys – in an interview with Michael Howard – continued with the impression that UKIP was only affecting the Tories. He stated:

**His main (problem) one in the European elections goes by the name of UKIP – the party that wants to pull Britain out of Europe. The polls suggest that they are taking a huge amount of support from the Conservatives. Mr Howard seems himself to be taking them seriously, he's made a couple of speeches attacking them.**

Mr Humphrys put it to Mr Howard that UKIP "appeared to be dominating the election". He asked if it was "a bit sad" to be on the run from Robert Kilroy Silk and Joan Collins. Mr Howard responded that he was keen to talk about Europe and others weren't. The exchange shifted to whether treaties could be re-negotiated,. With Mr Humphrys contending they couldn't and Mr Howard that they could. The questioning eventually moved to that if Mr Howard could not get his way, he would not be able to stay within the EU. Mr Howard said that he would not use the possibility of withdrawal as a

negotiating ploy, and, under further questioning appeared to say that leaving the EU was not an option. Mr Humphrys suggested that such a stance created problems for him because it

**...left...the sceptics in your party nowhere to go – or sceptics not necessarily within your party, those who are sceptical outside your party, who might otherwise have voted for you, saying ‘well it looks as though we are going to vote UKIP because we want to send a message’.**

Mr Howard said that it was not his party's position that he wanted to pull out of Europe, and appeared to endorse that that would be the case in all circumstances. Mr Humphrys suggested that his position was therefore the same as Labour's. Mr Howard responded that it was only the Conservative party that wanted to stay in the EU but did not want the Constitution, or to become as integrationist as Labour, as defined by Denis McShane's signing of an integrationist pamphlet.<sup>7</sup>

The interview continued the impression that UKIP was a threat only to the Conservatives. It again bracketed the rise of UKIP with their celebrity endorsement, thereby underlining the implication that it was not based on principle but gloss. The degree of pressure exerted on Mr Howard was significantly greater than that applied to Mr Blair during his equivalent interview, reinforcing that the problems raised by UKIP were nothing to do with Labour and its europhile policies.

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<sup>7</sup> Mr Humphrys, as previously noted, wrongly contended that this had been dealt with in the interview with Tony Blair.

The day after the election, before the European results were known (June 11), Sarah Montague introduced a report from Iain Watson which included the observation that although the results would not be known until Sunday, the polls “suggest that the UKIP will tweak the Conservatives’ tail. ...it puts pressure on the Tory leader Michael Howard to become more eurosceptic”. Mr Watson claimed that “eurosceptic sharks” were now circling Mr Howard and said that they had been incensed by an interview he had given on Wednesday (of that week) in which he had indicated to John Humphrys that he would not raise the threat of leaving the EU in the negotiations over reverting fishing rights to the UK. Mr Watson claimed that as a result, Mr Howard had faced what “an eurosceptic MP” had claimed was substantial revolt, triggering a letter from Mr Howard to make it clear that if negotiations did fail, legislation would be introduced in the UK to take over full control of fishing policy. Mr Watson said that Mr Howard maintained there was nothing new in the policy – it having been stated elsewhere – but then observed that former minister Ian Taylor was worried that it would put the Tories on the “slippery slope” to EU withdrawal and had called for the letter to be withdrawn. He included actuality from Mr Taylor saying that a can of worms had been opened. Mr Watson said that eurosceptics took the opposite view, and noted that Lord Pearson of Rannoch – who had lost the party whip when he had decided to back UKIP – had claimed that if Michael Howard had taken a staunch line on Europe at a national level “he may have prevented some defections”. Mr Watson said that the MP Bill Cash believed it was possible to regain fishing without leaving the EU. Mr Watson concluded:

**Next week, the Conservative leadership want to talk about public services and show they are not obsessed by Europe. But with an EU summit in the offing, do you fancy their chances?**

The item again focused on the impact of the results on the Conservatives, and suggested that they alone would have their tale tweaked. It especially focused on divisions within the party over the EU and concluded that the party was “obsessed” by the EU. The divisions did exist, and the party’s tail was tweaked by the results. But there was no equivalent exploration of problems for Labour, no analysis of why they were also likely to be electorally punished, or of divisions on the approach to the EU.

Also on June 11, it was put to Liam Fox, the Conservatives party joint chairman, that UKIP had been a threat to the party. She asserted:

**...many of your supporters have been frustrated at the way you have dealt with it, or arguably by the way you haven’t dealt with it.**

Mr Fox responded that UKIP had taken votes from all parties, and that his party had made gains in the local elections. Ms Montague said the full damage “they inflict on you” would be known at the weekend, and then mentioned the letter from Michael Howard explaining what would happen if the party did not win its way on fisheries. Mr Fox maintained that Mr Howard had mentioned the policy in several speeches and that there was therefore nothing new in the letter. Ms Montague pushed aggressively several times that Mr Howard had not spelled out the policy on the Today programme, but Mr Fox stuck to his original point.

On the one hand, this was an attempt to clarify matters in relation to the policy towards fisheries, and the item succeeded in doing so. As in the earlier sequence, this was again placing special emphasis on UKIP as a threat to the Conservatives. Mr Fox, like Mr Farage, pointed out that the party was taking votes from other parties, but this was not reflected in the structure or presentation of features.

The next mention came towards the end of the programme in a discussion about the election results. James Naughtie put it to Andrew Marr that if the Tories “run into problems with UKIP on Sunday”, it would help Mr Blair. Andrew Marr responded that although the local election results were miserable for the government, Monday would be “a pretty rough day” for the Conservatives. Later, Mr Naughtie asked pollster Nick Sparrow for his sense on the way the European argument was playing. Mr Sparrow said that UKIP was likely to do well, with support in the mid teens. He added that people had been waiting for an opportunity to stick two fingers up at the EU.

This was a relatively short sequence, but the focus was entirely on the Tories doing badly at UKIP’s expense. There was no attempt to gauge where the UKIP support might be coming from.

. The following day (June 12), James Naughtie, noting that Tony Blair had been battered by the local election results, asked Andrew Marr who important it was for Labour to see a strong UKIP performance “how strange this sounds – to knock some of the shine of Mr Howard’s success”. Mr Howard said it was very important because it

would provide the story on Monday when Labour MPs returned to Westminster and started to talk to each other. He added:

**But...it matters very much if we are talking about the Tories in real problems again over Europe, particularly if the Tories then start to go to war with each other , as they have done so enthusiastically in the past, then that does help the PM, no question.**

Clearly, there was a degree of truth in what Mr Marr observed. However, the analysis was again too one-dimensional in its perception that the rise in UKIP was entirely a Tory problem – even to the extent of it actually helping Labour. There was also an assumption that there could be internal strife within the Tory party. Obviously there are divisions within the party over the EU, but there was no attempt here to put them into context or proportion. The impression given was that this was matter that only affected the Tories.

Earlier in the programme, John Andrew when discussing the London mayoral elections, note that UKIP had attracted 14% of the vote – a doubling since the last election. He added:

That's going to be very worrying for Michael Howard, and of course Tony Blair will be grateful that the pressure then goes on to Michael Howard, because the question for him will then be, if they do lose support to UKIP, UKIP gets more seats, will the Tories have to accept a more eurosceptic stance? And could that reopen old wounds again, of course.

This was the most one-sided piece of analysis to date. It continued the assumption that only the Tories would be affected by the UKIP vote, and suggested that the party might have to become more eurosceptic, in the process risking further infighting. There was no counter-assumption that a more eurosceptic vote by the electorate could both affect Labour and force it to become less Europhile. This was as much a possibility – given the party has a strong anti-Constitution group – as that of the Tories “reopening old wounds”. This omission underlines the weakness of the coverage. Although UKIP was being acknowledged as a significant political force, there was absolutely no analysis of the rise of euroscepticism and the impact it might have on the strongly pro-EU policies of Labour and the Liberal Democrats.

An interview with Robert Kilroy Silk on June 14, was prefaced by a report from Tim Franks ostensibly about the rise in the number so eurosceptics in the elections, and the low turnout. He noted that Pat Cox, the outgoing parliament president, had said that only one 14<sup>th</sup> of the votes had been for eurosceptics, and though they might make the headlines “they will not make the majorities. An MEP said that there was not desire for a centralised Europe, while a spokesman for the parliament said that things would be done to address the low turnout.

Edward Stourton then asked Mr Kilroy Silk if he would be a “proper MEP” in the sense of playing a part in the parliamentary process. He responded that he and his colleagues would attend to make the case for civilised withdrawal. . Mr Stourton said that the problem with a protest vote was how to take the case forward. Mr Kilroy Silk denied it

had been a protest vote, and claimed that people had voted for the party because they hadn't told lies and wanted to withdraw from the EU. He added that it was "extremely patronising" to suggest people who had voted out of deep commitment had wasted their vote. Edward Stourton said that 83% had voted for parties who wanted to stay in the EU. Mr Kilroy-Silk said that in his constituency, 26% had voted for him, with slightly more voting for a Tory candidate who was "extremist" and wanted to pull out. Mr Stourton said that he had not used the word "extremist" and maintained that the majority had voted for parties who wanted to stay in. Mr Kilroy Silk – claiming that Mr Stourton was not allowing him to answer points – said that in the East Midlands 26% had voted for a single issue party who wanted to pull out of the EU. He added that what had happened with the other parties votes was less clear because their supporters had a variety of motives. Edward Stourton said he had interrupted because Mr Kilroy Silk had wrongly claimed that the Tories wanted to pull out of Europe. Mr Kilroy Silk said he had meant to say that the Conservatives were eurosceptic, with many supporters coming towards the UKIP line. Mr Stourton asked why the party's share would not go back down to 1.5% at the next general election. He said that the vote had risen, and there was no evidence that it would go down.

This was the third interview of a UKIP member during the election period, and in the short space allocated to it, it was an important feature in that it acknowledged, to an extent, the party's success. Mr Kilroy-Silk was able to put across strongly that the party had achieved 26% of the vote in his constituency, and further, to deny the allegation that the success had purely been protest-based. But the questioning remained curiously

negative, locked more or less in the same paradigm as at the beginning of the campaign. In addition, the prefatory piece from Tim Franks had been constructed to show that despite a general growth of eurosceptic parties, the impact on the European parliament would be minimal. The main line was that the party was too small to count. There was no attempt to explore with Mr Kilroy-Silk what the support might mean in terms of actual policies towards Europe – whether the growth in euroscepticism might impact on the government’s approach to the Constitution, for example. Of course, it was important to establish what the new MEPs would do, but there were a host of other matters that could have been examined.

The next mention of UKIP was on June 14 when the bulletins said bluntly that both the Conservatives and Labour had both lost votes to UKIP, with 17% of the vote.. Jonathan Beale noted that “for the first time ever” Labour and Conservatives attracted less than half of the total votes cast, with the Conservatives down 10 points in their share of the vote. He noted that Liberal Democrats had boosted their vote by 2%, but was still “left trailing in most of the seats in England and Wales to UKIP.

This was a disingenuous and skewed piece of reporting that was over-simplistic. First, there was no certainty that UKIP had taken votes from both Labour and Conservatives; at this stage, it was impossible to know. A simplistic approach of pointing especially at Conservative losses and correlating them with UKIP gains was adopted. But other

commentators were already warning that, with a large increase in the numbers voting other factors might have been at work, including the possibility that people who had not voted before had been galvanised into doing so by UKIP. There was no mention at all of another complicating factor, that, despite the fall in share, both the main parties had actually won considerably more votes than in 1999. The overall thrust of the item was to suggest that UKIP had done well at the Tories expense, fostering, in turn, the impression of splits in the eurosceptic camp. That is what Labour wanted people to believe (as exemplified by John Reid in his results reaction interview), but it was not something supported by the psephological facts as then known.

The interview with John Reid was prefaced by a results package which was introduced by saying that although Tony Blair had tried to end Europhobia, the opposite had been achieved “we are a nation to the EU than ever”. It then acknowledge that “most votes had gone to the sceptics – “the Tories who are opposed to a constitution and a single currency and...to UKIP, who of course want to pull us out altogether. The more enthusiastic parties, Labour and the Liberal Democrats, polled many fewer”. Gary O’Donoghue outlined the UKIP gains “at the expense of the two main parties” before including a clip of MEP Nigel Farage claiming that his party had allowed some people to re-enter the democratic process “who for the past ten years have been voting for nobody”. He added that the entire political class wanted to go in one direction but the electorate in another. Mr O’Donoghue observed that although the Liberal Democrats had done less badly than the rest, this was “not a cause for celebration”. He added that for the Tories – who had lost nine seats and “crashed” to 27% of the vote – there was a worrying new

phenomenon, “in the shape of UKIP eating away at their right flank”. Liam Fox claimed that the rise in UKIP was an “increased sense of resentment” that the government was pushing for the Constitution. Mr O’Donoghue, noting that the Labour share of the vote was the worst for more than 80 years, said that, with such a result, it would be hard for Tony Blair to meet his EU counterparts and say he could deliver a ‘yes’ referendum vote.

There were several problems with the package. The first was the description of the vote as “Europhobia”. Such labelling projects anti-EU sentiment in a negative, irrational light – akin to the use by Peter Hain of “xenophobia” to describe eurosceptics. The piece acknowledged that eurosceptics had won the majority of the vote, but its inclusion here underlined that this important fact was not included elsewhere (for example in the bulletins). Here was also inclusion – in the Nigel Farage quote – of that UKIP support could have been drawn from other than Tory ranks. Again, its inclusion here underlined the omission in the bulletins and elsewhere. Mr O’Donoghue also appeared to ignore the possibility in his simplistic claim that UKIP was “eating away” at the Tories’ “right flank. Irrespective of where the votes came from euroscepticism within the Tory party is – as previously pointed out – not simply a flank. The final problem was that the reasons for the decline of the Labour vote were not discussed at all. The result was that the overall impression left behind by the of the feature was that the rise of UKIP was entirely within the ranks of the right in politics...the Conservatives’ “right flank”. This was misleading, simplistic and to some extent inaccurate. Of course some UKIP supporters were drawn from the Conservatives. But a potentially much more interesting issue was the extent to which those votes were drawn from Europhile party supporters. Although

the feature did not acknowledge that eurosceptic votes had outnumbered those for the Labour and Liberal Democrat parties, there was no analysis of the reasons, other than the facile deduction of problems within the Tory “right flank”.

These shortcomings allowed John Reid, in the interview with him that followed, to make preposterous claims about the election results.

John Humphrys asked Mr Reid what had gone wrong. He acknowledge fleetingly that things had gone wrong but immediately then claimed that it had been a disastrous night for the Tories (as Gary O’Donoghue had flagged). He claimed that the Labour problem was due to a Europe wide “protest vote”, before repeating that the Conservatives had had a disastrous night. He then claimed that the Labour party was “pretty united” and then simply “united” in support for the Constitution and

In believing there are enormous benefits from the European Union, so it gives us a challenge over the coming period, both in practical domestic politics, and arguing the case for Europe.

He added that for the Tories the results gave “not just a challenge but a crisis”,

Because they are the people who have pandered to the sort of sentiment that UKIP are now cashing in on, and they are well known not to be united, but beneath the surface, pretty radically divided with some people wanting to reform Europe in the Tory party and

most of them justly wanting to get out. So I think they have an impending disaster coming.

Mr Humphrys did not challenge any of these assertions, but put it to Mr Reid that Mr Blair had failed in taking Britain into the heart of Europe. Mr Reid said he was not sure because, he claimed, European elections were traditionally used as a protest vote and the same thing had happened throughout Europe. Mr Humphrys said that in Europe people had voted for Europhile parties. Mr Reid stuck to his guns, saying that this wasn't the case in Poland . He added that when it came to the general election, people would vote on the domestic agenda, where it was seen that Labour could deliver. He said that on Europe, Tony Blair had said there would be a referendum on the Constitution, and Labour would be able to argue its case as a united party, and that Europe had brought the benefits of “prosperity, employment, all of the jobs, the trade that comes, millions of jobs in this country.” Mr Reid added that the Tories had been “pandering” to the idea that individual treaties could be r-negotiated and now faced a crisis “because they have a party to the right”. John Humphrys said he wanted to talk about Labour, but Mr Reid insisted that he had to talk about the different choices, and therefore the Tories. Mr Humphrys then maintained he was traducing the Conservatives, because their policy was not to pull out of Europe and to do the kind of negotiating that Mr Blair had done in the past. Mr Reid said if that case he looked forward to meeting the Tories and meeting the challenge from UKIP “instead of pandering to them”. He added that he still felt the current Tory stance was trying to look both ways. He repeated that the Labour party believed that the EU “brings huge and undoubted benefits and that the Constitution –

providing the government's red lines were met – would also help. Mr Humphrys asked if he would ignore the vote for UKIP, then spelling out whether or not they would acknowledge the strength of public opinion wanting to leave the EU. Mr Reid said the response would be by arguing the case for the EU,

There are unequivocally and unambiguously huge benefits for this country to being in Europe. In terms of jobs, millions of jobs depend on it, in terms of our prosperity, our trader our standard of living.

He maintained that the Tories had been playing footsy with the position because they were saying on one hand there were benefits of being in Europe, but on the other, they wanted to re-negotiate treaties.

Mr Reid's goal was clearly damage limitation, and he achieved it. He was allowed here to get away with metaphorical murder (of facts). He maintained, broadly, that the Labour party was totally united on Europe; that membership of the EU brought massive advantages to Britain; that support for UKIP would melt away once "the debate" on Europe was started; and that for the Tories, the result was catastrophic, with the party increasingly divided and the policy towards Europe wholly impractical. Every point he made was highly contentious – especially the "massive benefits" of membership of the EU – but John Humphrys scarcely challenged him, only pushing on Mr Blair's "failure" to persuade people over the EU. Mr Reid was not challenged either on his questionable assumption that eurosceptic opinion would change as a result of "debate". There were

several major assumptions on which he could have been challenged but wasn't. This was a government which had just received the lowest share of a national poll for 80 years, and whose party was divided over acceptance of the Constitution. There was clear evidence (mentioned in the set-up) that the vote had been more eurosceptic than Europhile, but this was not even put to him. Of course, politicians put the best possible gloss on every defeat. But the job of the interviewer is to penetrate that gloss. Here, it was scarcely even attempted.

Also on June 14, Iain Watson, prefacing a discussion by political commentators about the results, noted that both main parties had taken a battering in the polls. He added that Labour was keener than ever to get away from Iraq, "and the Conservatives have to show that while they have a policy on Europe they are not obsessed by it". He said that as a result both parties would attempt to shift the agenda on to domestic matters. John Humphrys then asked Peter Osborne who had lost. He responded that UKIP had clearly won, and all the other parties had lost. He claimed it was a "massive statement of disenchantment" with the way the political class talked its own language "and won't listen to what voters say".

**And Europe is a classic example of this, where for years, fifty percent of the voters want out, they've always said it; and supposing a mainstream politician says 'we want out of Europe', they treat him like a paedophile or a lunatic, and they are humiliated. And I think that's what it is, a huge renunciation of the political class.**

Mary Ann Sieghart said she agreed with what Mr Osborne had said, but felt the electoral significance of the European elections was nil. She claimed it was a one in five years chance to kick politicians in the face

**All those UKIP voters, they're not going to vote UKIP at the next general election, because...the choice is broadly between Conservatives and Labour and a vote for UKIP is a wasted vote. Nor will the next general election primarily be about the issue of Europe, it will be about health and education and crime and asylum.**

John Humphrys asked if the result would have an impact on how the main parties conducted themselves in the build-up to the election. Ms Sieghart said that it would be a great mistake for the Tories if they did, and argued that they should not take note of pressure to become more eurosceptic. Peter Osborne asserted that “much broader lessons” needed to be learnt, and noted that it was an amazing statistic that less than half the voters had voted for either of the main parties. He noted Tony Blair’s alleged failure to say what he meant on Europe, and on other issues like race and immigration. Ms Sieghart repeated that there was a danger of over-reacting, and claimed that proportional representation gave people a great sense of liberation because it allowed people not to vote for the main parties. Peter Osborne disagreed saying that people had voted for

**a collection of sort of convicted criminals and perjurers....We're talking about UKIP, B-movie actresses, Jonathan Aitken, is one of their leading supporters, I could go on... rattle through plenty more. John Humphrys did not seek to challenge this, saying that time was against him, but wound the discussion up.**

The set-up again painted UKIP and euroscepticism as a Conservative problem; for Labour the only issue relating to the European elections was deemed to be Iraq. This was simplistic and one-dimensional. Balanced political reporting would have brought other factors into account. Peter Osborne and Mary Anne Sieghart were entitled to their views on the significance of UKIP and the elections, and Mr Osborne made an interesting point about the disconnection between Westminster politics and voters. Nevertheless, his description of UKIP as a party of criminals and perjurers (anchored as it apparently was in the support of Mr Aitken) was a questionable allegation that deserved more right of reply than was given.

Further mentions of UKIP came in newspaper reviews on June 15 and June 16. In the first, the item led with the Independent's claim that there were at least 10 things the party did not want the wider electorate to know, including a poor attendance record of their MEPs and an alleged co-operation between BNP and UKIP in Yorkshire over the fielding of candidates. In the second, it was noted that the psychologist Raj Persaud, also in the Independent, had written that there were parallels between UKIP and the hooligans who besmirched Britain's reputation. He claimed that both groups "achieve success" by cultivating an 'us and them' mentality.

Both these extracts were strong attacks on UKIP for which there was no balancing comment in the programme. Both sets of opinion bracketed the party firmly with racism and totally unreasonable behaviour, exactly as its enemies would have wished. Paul Sykes had had the opportunity before the election to comment on the track record of the

1999 intake of MEPs, but this was more than a fortnight prior to these latest remarks, and therefore could not be counted as balancing.

On June 19, Today carried an item that Ekklesia, described as a “Christian think-tank” had come out against UKIP. The introduction noted that before the election, a number of Christian leaders had urged people not to vote BNP. Sarah Montague first asked director Jonathan Bartley why UKIP was “unchristian”. He responded that it was at odds with the Christian vision of a community of nations.

Where Christian believe that...one day, the barriers between nations will come down, and there will be respect for diversity...things that have divided us will be eradicated.

He added that that the debate regarding the EU had been “essentially very, very selfish” in that politicians were making decisions about the euro and the Constitution in terms of what was best for Britain.

**Now that’s a very selfish approach and that is actually typified by the UKIP, who take it one stage further and say, let’s come out of the community altogether**

Sarah Montague did not challenge his assertions, but asked instead whether Christianity was against the nation state full stop. Mr Bartley responded that Christianity accepted nation states, but added

**Where I think making the distinction between nation states and nations is important is nation states are backed by force and Jesus...rejected violence....So what you have got is a celebration of nations, but actually saying the nation state is merely a stepping stone on the way to where we are going..**

Sarah Montague said that many UKIP members “would like to think they are Christian”. Mr Bartley accepted that many Christians would have voted. But he claimed that there was a poverty of thought in churches over Europe, and so far all that had been achieved was a name check for Christianity in the Constitution. He added:

**That’s pretty poor really, there is a wealth in Christian orthodoxy about, for example, looking at Europe not in terms of Britain’s interests but in terms of the most vulnerable in the community.**

He maintained that decisions about the euro, for example, impacted the third world “but those interests are just not taken into account”.

This was an extraordinary piece to round off the coverage. It was a major attack on mainly focused on UKIP – saying that its stance was both morally wrong and selfish. Sarah Montague mildly challenged the assertion in the second question, but by focusing on UKIP, further concentrated the attack on the party. Mr Bartley was allowed to mount a full-scale attack on UKIP without any opportunity for reply. This was so fundamentally serious that it warranted the immediate opportunity of a response, either in this sequence itself, or later in the same programme. What the Christian church thinks about politics is

relevant, but the views of Christian thinkers are not in any sense politically objective, and therefore their inclusion should be subject to the normal processes of achieving impartiality. Here, this was not attempted or achieved. The impact was to single out UKIP as especially selfish, and once more to bracket (by juxtaposition) the party with the racist views of BNP.

## **Kilroy-Silk is right about the Middle East, say Arabs**

**By Ibrahim Nawar**

*(Filed: 11/01/2004)*

**Ibrahim Nawar, an Egyptian, is the Head of the Board of Management of Arab Press Freedom Watch, a non-profit organisation based in London that works to promote freedom of expression in the Arab world.**

"I fully support Robert Kilroy-Silk and salute him as an advocate of freedom of expression. I would like to voice my solidarity with him and with all those who face the censorship of such a basic human right.

"I agree with much of what he says about Arab regimes. There is a very long history of oppression in the Arab world, particularly in the states he mentions: Iran, Iraq, Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, as well as in Sudan and Tunisia.

"These regimes are not based on democracy and their legitimacy comes from military dictatorships or inherited systems. The basic right of an individual to voice his or her opinion is not granted in any kind of form in the Arab world.

"In Saudi Arabia, for instance, there have been seven Saudi editors sacked from their jobs for criticising the regime since March 2002. In Algeria, we are currently fighting 70 defamation cases against journalists who spoke out against the state.

"I would also agree with Mr Kilroy-Silk's comments on the oppression of women by totalitarian Arab states. Women in Saudi Arabia even have to struggle for the right to walk unaccompanied in the street or to drive a car.

"It is worth remembering, however, that there are individual Arabs who do work hard to defend human rights and one cannot make a blanket generalisation about Arab people. We support Mr Kilroy-Silk's comments specifically in reference to Arab regimes because we are against the oppressive policies supported by rulers in the Arab world.

"I condemn the decision to axe his programme and call for the BBC to reinstate him forthwith. Indeed, the treatment of Mr Kilroy-Silk is very worrying because it indicates that censorship is now taking place in liberal, Western countries like the United Kingdom. These countries should instead be setting an example to the oppressive Arab regimes that violate freedom of expression on a daily basis."