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27th February 2008

BBC and “Europe”

Your Editorial Standards Committee is publishing tomorrow (at last) its decision on Global Britain’s complaint against the Today Programme’s coverage of the EU from September to December 2006. As with previous complaints, that complaint was based on detailed analysis by Minotaur Media Tracking (David Keighley and colleagues).

We have not had time to respond to the ESC’s report in detail, but it is clearly a whitewash. The Committee has adopted without query their independent assessor’s report; I cannot help feeling it is regrettable that they chose someone who was employed by the BBC for 20 years.

Perhaps the most worrying aspect of the ESC’s judgment is its acceptance that programme staff are judge and jury on editorial matters. There is therefore no independent judgment on the real issues underlying the ‘European’ debate, no attempt to find out and expose how the project of European integration is being driven. The ESC does not accept that the BBC, with its uniquely privileged position, should take the lead in this, and make the news agenda, instead of being content to follow the Brussels PR machine. So Mark Mardell, the Europe Editor appointed to provide deeper coverage in the wake of the Wilson Report, appeared only 3 times in the 4 months.

The ESC accepts that nothing much was going on in the period under review, justifying Today’s return to pre-Wilson Report levels of coverage. But much was happening; the whole Constitution was being revived, with its attendant

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issues of immigration, justice and home affairs, over-regulation, foreign policy, national vetoes and much else. Surely the BBC has a duty to expose these things while they are in the melting pot, not just wait until they emerge in the shape of a Treaty which can only be wholly accepted or rejected by Parliament? There was no substantive discussion of the EU Constitution during the entire survey period, and *Today* didn't feature the December 06 Summit at all, except for two brief bulletins.

We have continued to monitor *Today* since December 2006, and I fear the picture remains the same. It managed to spend 4 times as much time on the Glastonbury festival as it did on the June 2007 EU summit. When it did run a feature on the scandal of the Common Fisheries Policy, it omitted to mention that the policy is imposed by Brussels. And so it goes on.

I will write again with a detailed rebuttal of the ESC's report. I hope this will be helpful to you and the Trustees.

Yours sincerely,

Lord Pearson of Rannoch

P.S. And still no BBC debate on whether our EU membership costs or creates "millions of jobs". Like the Government, I suppose it just can't face the answer!