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An Increasingly Awkward Partner? Images of the EU in the Brexit Debate

1.   Introduction

Euroscepticism has notably been on the rise across the European Union (EU), particularly in the context of the Eurozone crisis, as evidenced in particular by the dramatic success of Eurosceptic parties in the 2014 EP election. However, Euroscepticism in Britain, which has been described as the EU's 'awkward partner', and as 'semi-detached' from the EU. has deep roots. It has long tended to be sceptical towards supranational integration in particular, leading the country, for instance, to delay applying for EC membership until the 1960s, and, subsequently, to a series of opt-outs from a wide range of policies including the Schengen agreement, EU social policy and the adoption of the Euro. However, Britain's 'Euroawkwardness' appears to have come to a head recently in the light of the upcoming referendum, due to take place on 23 June 2016, where the British people will be asked to vote on whether they want their country to remain in or leave the EU[i]. Interestingly, there is no clear division between the 'remain' and 'leave' camps along party lines, with politicians from both the dominant Conservative and Labour parties found in both groups.

On this basis, using Foreign Policy Discourse Analysis, a form of discourse analysis based on Foucault's conception of discourse, the paper aims to place the current discourse on Brexit in the broader context of the dominant British discourse on state and nation and Europe. To this end, the paper analyses the discourse of both campaigns by focusing on speeches and articles of cross-party prominent politicians from both groups as well as both campaigns' manifestoes.

2. Foreign Policy Discourse Analysis: An Overview of British Discourse on State, Nation and the EU

2.1   Foreign Policy Discourse Analysis: The Main Tenets

Foreign Policy Discourse Analysis is a form of discourse analysis developed by authors including Wæver (2002, 2005) and Larsen (1997) on the basis of Foucault's approach to discourse. For Foucault, discourses organize knowledge systematically and delimit what can be said and what cannot; the aim of discourse analysis is, therefore, to look for these rules (Wæver 2002: 29). Thus, discourse analysis 'does not try to get to the thoughts and motives of the actors, their hidden motives or secret plans' (Wæver, 2002: 26); instead 'our investigation into meaning has to take place at the level of the language' (Larsen, 1997: 13). Following Foucault, therefore, discourse is seen as forming a system which is made up of a layered constellation of key concepts. They are related in a hierarchical way, 'like a tree with roots, trunks and branches' (Larsen, 1997: 17).

In the context of foreign policy, then, the underlying national discourse on state and nation acts as 'a constraint that shapes the foreign policy of this state, a kind of framework within which the foreign policy of a particular country can take place' (Larsen, 1997: 21). When discussing a Member State's discursive attitude towards a specific EU policy, then, the analysis needs to explore three levels of discourse. Firstly, the dominant discourse on state and nation is examined. Here, questions such as the basic conceptual constellation of state and nation, the perceived connection between the two and the attachment to state and nation, as well as the state's projection of itself onto the world are examined. The issue of how and if one can become a member of the nation in question is also dealt with at this level (Wæver, 2002: 33-36).

Secondly, the relational position of the state/nation *vis-a-vis* Europe is examined. In this sense, the constellation of state and nation constrains how Europe can be thought of (Wæver, 2005: 37). Thus, political discourse should, in its narrative, present a logic of Europe which is compatible with the state/nation construction. Here, very general concepts of the EU are examined, such as whether the EU is primarily constructed as an intergovernmental organisation composed of sovereign states, a single market or a supranational entity (Wæver, 2002: 37-38).

For instance, the EU may be primarily depicted as a *problem-solving entity*, a *rights-based postnational union* or a *value-based community*. In the first view, the EU's legitimacy is seen as lying in its ability to provide pragmatic benefits, particularly economic and security advantages to its members. The second and third views are norm based in that they go beyond pragmatism and see the EU as founded on norms or values; the understanding of the EU as a rights-based postnational union, for instance, sees the EU as a union based on 'universal rights' such as democracy, the rule of law and human rights. The view of the EU as a value-based

community, in contrast, perceives the EU as a community necessarily underscored by a deeper cultural identity, perhaps based on a common history and religious tradition (Sjursen, 2002, 2008) (Schmidt, 2009).

At the third level, the analysis focuses on concrete policies pursued by specific groups of actors, particularly political parties, who argue their positions with reference to levels 1 and 2. Thus, actors might contest each other at level 1 by arguing that their opponents do not offer an appropriate construction of state and nation, or at level 2 by arguing that their construction of Europe will pose a threat to the state/nation constellation, or by pointing out that they have fundamentally misunderstood the realities of the European integration project (Wæver, 2002: 37-41).

2.2   British Discourse on State, Nation and Europe: An Overview

British nationhood is a primarily political, rather than ethnic, construction, centred upon Parliament and the monarchy. In the dominant discourse on state and nation, known as the 'Whig discourse', every Englishman is 'born free', although this liberty is described as hard-won. According to this discourse, the liberties once enjoyed by the Anglo-Saxons were withdrawn following the Norman conquest. Despite some earlier victories, notably the signing of the Magna Carta, the resistance of the English people to absolute rule and tyranny erupted during the Civil War and the settlement of 1688, the so-called 'Glorious Revolution', inaugurated a new age of English liberty (Larsen, 1997: 38). Moreover, the Whig interpretation of history is inseparable from the British commitment to a non-interventionist state, an open market and a free international economy (Wallace, 1986: 383); as Fontana and Parsons note, for instance, according to this discourse, 'In the home of Smith and Ricardo and the cradle of the Industrial Revolution, moreover, economic prosperity had bubbled up in decentralised fashion without coherent state intervention' (2015: 91).

In this context, according to the dominant discourse, the main vehicle for the resistance to absolute power and for harmonising and balancing interests was seen as the English, and later British, Parliament, an institution whose sovereignty was paramount and independence unquestioned, without reference to the British state, people or nation. The monarchy has also played an important role; while Parliament represents internal sovereignty, the monarchy represents external sovereignty, in particular independence from Rome and the Pope and from the European continent since 1066 (Risse, 2010: 82). Both of these traditionally represent national sovereignty, the former by defending individual rights and freedoms, the latter representing British sovereignty from Europe (primarily France) and the Pope.

Thus, Britain has historically not seen itself as an 'organic' part of Europe, its self-image in the dominant discourse rather being that of a world power focused on its empire and, later, the Commonwealth. In contrast to the focus of British foreign policy on 'the open sea', the empire and later the Commonwealth (Larsen, 1997: 52). Indeed, the terms 'Europe' and 'European' began to be used in the English language to define an outside, even alien entity, and the English began to define themselves in contrast to Europeans (Spiering, 2004: 144), while, as Daddow points out, Britain had traditionally carried out a 'limited liability' approach to Europe, acting as a power balancer against continental threats and adversaries (Daddow, 2015: 75).

Therefore, it is perhaps not surprising that Europe has often continued to be constructed as Britain's Other, albeit a usually friendly Other, even after joining in the European integration project. As Schmidt argues, the British political elite has, from the very beginning, 'defined EU identity in opposition to national identity' (2012: 174). While the British political elite saw co-operation among the Continental powers following World War II as a 'dire necessity', they saw the UK as different in that it could pursue other options, including continuing its association with the Commonwealth and cultivating the 'special relationship' with the USA (Spiering, 2004: 137).Thus, rather than joining the developing Common Market, London preferred a larger but looser European Free Trade Area (EFTA), along with six other states that shared both Britain's distaste for supranational integration and its fear of economic discrimination from remaining outside the customs union (Daddow, 2015: 77).

In this context, the decision of the Macmillan government to make an (ultimately unsuccessful) bid for EEC membership in 1961 was an overwhelmingly pragmatic one; in the context of a 'growing sense of national malaise' resulting from economic decline and social divisions, he presented it as a 'commercial move to protect national economic interest', while, in the later, successful bid for membership, Labour Prime Minister Harold Wilson justified accession as 'defending the national interest against interfering foreigners' (Schmidt, 2012: 174) (Daddow, 2015: 77). As Copsey and Haughton argue, then, rather than focusing on a common identity, the dominant British narrative in favour of European integration between the mid-1960s and late 1990s focused on the role of the common market, and later the single market, as a driver for British economic reform (2014: 82).

Overall, however, regarding European integration Britain has been a reluctant European, a 'stranger in Europe', an 'awkward partner', from the start, and has often appeared 'semi-detached' from Europe, sitting 'on the sidelines' of integration (George, 2004) (Daddow, 2015: 71). A lack of identification with Europe in the dominant discourse on state and nation, as well as the importance granted to parliamentary sovereignty, may be largely to blame for this. As Daddow argues, for instance, 'the sense of 'belonging' to the EU 'is always in

doubt' (2012: 1221)[ii]. In Daddow's view, then, there has been an 'outsider tradition' in British European policy, consisting of 'a multidimensional package of narratives that sustains the belief, even among many who profess the benefits of an active European policy, that Britain is a European actor of an exceptional kind' (Daddow, 2015: 72).

In particular, in UK discourse there has been a persistent fear of the development of a European superstate which would threaten the sovereignty of the British Parliament, one of the bastions of British identity (Schmidt, 2006: 18). The Liberal Party and the Social Democrats, which later merged to form the Liberal Democrats, have proved an exception in that both were solidly pro-European from the outset (Watts and Pilkington, 2005: 218-219). The latest Liberal Democrat Manifesto, for instance, suggests that Liberal Democrat discourse on European integration continues to differ markedly from the dominant discourse, particularly when it comes to issues of sovereignty and supranational integration, even declaring itself in favour of federalism, arguably almost a swearword in mainstream British discourse. The manifesto affirms that;

> Setting aside national sovereignty when necessary, we will work with other countries towards an equitable and peaceful international order and a durable system of common security. Within the European Community we affirm the values of federalism and integration and work for unity based on these principles (Liberal Democrats).

On the other hand, as has been noted, the *raison d'etre* of European integration in the dominant discourse has predominantly concerned trade and economics (Wellings, 2015: 35). Thus, Conservative discourse in particular has generally been supportive of 'free market' policies such as the Single European Act, while remaining sceptical of political integration. Margaret Thatcher, for instance, welcomed the development of the Single Market as a 'free enterprise *Europe des Patries'* (Thatcher, 1993: 536). At the same time, Thatcher was also famously sceptical of supranational integration; indeed, according to Fontana and Parsons, she was largely personally responsible for 'setting Britain on a far more anti-European path than it was otherwise likely to take' (2015: 90). In her notorious 1988 Bruges speech, for instance, she warns of 'a new superstate exercising new dominance from Brussels' and that 'willing and active cooperation between sovereign states is the best way to build a successful Community (Schmidt, 2012: 174-175) (Daddow, 2015: 83). Thatcher's successor John Major also argued that 'I believe the Nation State will remain the basic political unit in Europe' and that 'the European Union is an association of States, deriving its basic legitimacy through national Parliaments' (cited in Daddow, 2015: 83). Such discourse is still evident among Conservative politicians today; as Cameron argued in a 2013 speech;

> We have the character of an island nation: independent, forthright, passionate in defence of our sovereignty. We can no more change this British sensibility than we can drain the English channel. And because of this sensibility, we come to the European Union with a frame of mind that is more practical than emotional. For us, the European Union is a means to an end – prosperity, stability, the anchor of freedom and democracy both within Europe and beyond her shores – not an end in itself (Cameron, 2013).

While European integration is seen in pragmatic terms in this speech – as a 'means to an end' – this end, importantly is not limited to economic and/or security benefits but also includes normative ends such as securing freedom and democracy. Thus, in Conservative as well as Labour discourse the EU is also seen as a guardian of 'universal values' such as freedom, democracy or human rights; it is therefore perceived not only as a problem solving entity but also as a rights-based postnational union.

While the Labour Party, at least in recent decades, has been more pro-European than the Conservatives, it also continues to insist on a primarily intergovernmental EU, and to promote flexible labour markets rather than the social welfare model supported by some continental socialists (Watts and Pilkington, 2005: 232-233). Former Prime Minister Tony Blair, for example, argued that 'The driving ideology is indeed a union of nations not a superstate subsuming national sovereignty and national identity', and worried about the propensity of Europe 'to drift into the visionary waters of a European superstate' (cited in Daddow, 2015: 82-83). Thus, despite his comparatively 'Europhile' outlook, Blair saw active involvement in the EU as vital for Britain's interests, rather than due to any deeper sense of European identity: 'If we want to stand up for Britain then we have to be in Europe, active, constructive, involved all the time. We have to negotiate tough and get our way, not stand aside and let other European countries make the decisions that matter to us' (Blair, 2000).

The Labour Party's 2015 manifesto suggests that a pragmatic approach continues to be dominant. The manifesto's section on 'Europe' opens with a notable focus on prosperity, security and the national interest;

> Labour believes that our membership of the European Union is central to our prosperity and security. It is why we will work to change the EU, so that it operates in the best interests of our country. And it is why we will re-engage with our European allies to protect our national interest after five years of Britain being sidelined in Europe and isolated abroad (Labour, 2015).

Although the manifesto mentions the need to 're-engage' with the EU, there is no suggestion that this should lead to a more supranational Europe. Indeed, the manifesto includes a bid for a 'red-card' mechanism to strengthen the influence of national parliaments over European legislation. Importantly, while the manifesto argues that Brexit is not a priority for the party, it promises that futher transfers of sovereignty to Brussels will be accompanied by an in/out referendum (Labour, 2015).

In this context, the dominant British narrative on Europe is ambivalent between portraying European integration as a threat to national sovereignty and Great Power status on the one hand and as a necessity for economic and geopolitical reasons on the other (Diez Medrano, 2003), roughly corresponding to what Larsen refers to as the 'interstate co-operation' and 'essential co-operation' discourses (Larsen, 1997: 62-64). The dominant discourses on both left and right tend to be sceptical of further supranational integration, viewing it as leading to a potential European 'superstate' which would threaten national sovereignty, and thus prefer a more intergovernmental EU. Moreover, as has been pointed out, Britan's participation in the EU has generally been justified in pragmatic terms, although the EU has also been supported using normative arguments focusing on 'universal values' such as democracy or freedom. Notably however, value-based arguments speaking to a conception of the EU as a value-based community founded on a shared European identity and culture are rarely used, with the exception of Liberal-Democrat discourse.

3 British Discourse on the EU in the Context of the Brexit Referendum

Cameron's vision of a reformed relationship with the EU, and his decision to call a referendum, can be explained both by the rise of the hard Eurosceptic United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) and by the Eurosceptic element in the Conservative Party itself. The rise in popularity of UKIP, which started out as a 'single issue' party advocating British exit from the EU, in itself raised the issue saliency of continued EU membership (Copsey and Haughton, 2014: 83). However, the success of UKIP was not the only factor provoking a rise in Euroscepticism in the Conservative Party, a party which had long been characterised by divisions over the EU. As Gifford argues, for instance, the Conservative leadership's decision not to call a referendum on the Lisbon treaty, as well as the Euroscepticism of many of the 2010 intake of Conservative MPs, and the onset of the Eurozone crisis, were instrumental in the mobilisation of Eurosceptics in the party, which put Britain's continued EU membership centre stage (Gifford, 2014: 513).

Cameron's promise to call a referendum was preceded by the 2011 EU Act, which was intended to prevent further 'ratcheting' of EU control over British policy, and promised a referendum on any piece of EU legislation that was deemed to encroach on British sovereignty (Welllings, 2015: 39). It was also preceded by the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office's announcement that it would carry out a 'balance of competences' review which was intended to consider if it would make more sense in each policy area where the EU had shared or exclusive competence for the UK government to act instead of the EU (Copsey and Haughton, 2014: 76).

However, Cameron himself stated that he would argue in favour of continued EU membership if a reform of Britain's relationship with the EU was agreed upon. The eventual agreement included a treaty change which means that the UK is no longer bound to 'ever closer union' with other EU member states. In addition, the UK was granted power to limit EU migrants' welfare benefits, including an 'emergency brake' on migrants' in-work benefits for four years when there are 'exceptional' levels of migration, which the UK will be able to operate for up to seven years, as well as changes to child benefit for the children of EU migrants living overseas, which will be paid at a rate based on the cost of living in their home country. Finally, the deal gave the UK the possibility to enact an 'emergency safeguard' to protect the City of London, to stop UK firms being forced to relocate into Europe and to ensure British businesses do not face 'discrimination' for being outside the Eurozone (BBC, 2016b). While the agreement required concessions from Cameron, who had originally wanted a complete stop to child benefit for the children of EU migrants living overseas, and a 13 year period for the 'emergency brake', Cameron declared himself satisfied with the deal, and agreed to campaign for continued British EU membership.

The makeup of the 'Britain Stronger in Europe' group, the only group which applied to officially represent the 'Remain' campaign (Stewart and Watt, 2016), notably cuts across boundaries of traditional party politics. The website of the campaign focuses on pragmatic arguments for Britain remaining in the EU, emphasising the economic and security advantages and arguing that EU membership helps increase Britain's influence in the world. There is, in contrast, little reference to normative arguments relating to fundamental rights or to a broader cultural identity. The following extract from the website, for instance, focuses on the 'better leadership' that continued EU membership would provide (the other arguments are classified under 'better economy' and 'better security'. The arguments are concerned with strengthening Britain's global influence; the only mention of a sense of belonging is a rather vague reference to Europe as 'our continent';

> We want Britain to be a leader in the world, we need to be in Europe helping to take the big decisions – not sitting on the sidelines, powerless…Being part of Europe means we have stronger leadership on the world stage, enabling us to shape the future – influence through participation. Britain is not Britain unless we are outward-looking, engaged in our continent and leading in Europe.To leave Europe would mean less influence on the world stage, and less say in the future. We are stronger in Europe than on our own (Britain Stronger in Europe, 2016).

Similarly, Cameron's own arguments for staying in the EU in the context of the referendum also tend to be largely pragmatic in nature, with little evidence of rights or value-based arguments. He argued, for instance, that 'We should be suspicious of those who claim that leaving Europe is an automatic fast-track to a land of milk and honey' (BBC, 2016b) and, he warned of the economic shock that Brexit would provoke;

> Let's just remember what a shock really means. It means pressure on the pound sterling. It means jobs being lost. It means mortgage rates might rise. It means businesses closing. It means hardworking people losing their livelihoods (Stewart and Watt, 2016).

Similarly, in a recent article in which he puts forward his reasons for supporting continued EU membership, he also exhibits a pragmatic approach, stressing the security and economic benefits of continued EU membership. Beyond geographical ties, there is, then, little emphasis on a shared identity between Britain and Europe; indeed the pronoun 'we' is used exclusively to refer to Britain, while Europeans are merely 'our neighbours';

> If you vote to remain in Europe, I can clearly describe what you're voting for. Our trade links with a reformed Europe and the wider world will grow; we'll keep on working with our neighbours to make our country safer; and Britain will continue to help set the rules of the market of 500 million people on our doorstep, and have a say over the future of the continent to which we are geographically tied. That's the picture of 'in' – positive and definitive (Cameron, 2016).

In this context, he has emphasised that Britain would retain its national sovereignty in a reformed EU. Notably, regarding the removal of the 'ever closer union' clause, he attempted to appease Eurosceptic opposition by saying 'Let me put this as simply as I can: Britain will never be part of a European superstate' (BBC, 2016b).

Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn, while supporting continued EU membership, has also taken a principally pragmatic approach, and has focused especially on the economic benefits the EU provides for 'ordinary people', including workers, consumers and small businesses, as well as its greater ability to act in the context of international issues such as the refugee crisis and environmental problems. In the context of Cameron's reform deal, for instance, Corbyn, while noting that Cameron 'had done nothing to protect jobs and fight low pay', argued that, 'We will be campaigning to keep Britain in Europe in the coming referendum, regardless of David Cameron's tinkering, because it brings investment, jobs and protection for British workers and consumers' (BBC, 2016b). Similarly, in a speech to the British Chamber of Commerce, Corbyn again focused on the economic advantages of staying in the EU;

> We should be laying the foundations for a modern economy now. That applies not only within states but between states too; climate change, the refugee crisis, raising standards for workers and consumers and dealing with the minority of companies that seek to avoid their taxes. These are all issues that can only be resolved by working with our partners in Europe, not ditching them. This is why we are campaigning to remain in the EU because we believe, like 60 per cent of businesses the BCC surveyed, that the EU is the best framework for trade and cooperation in the 21st century (Sparrow, 2016).

In contrast to the 'Remain' campaign, the 'Leave' campaign has been characterised by rival groups and factions, leading the *Guardian* newspaper, alluding to a famous scene from Monty Python's *Life of Brian,* to satirically ask whether the 'Leave' campaign was led by 'the "Brexit People's Front" or the "People's Front of Brexit" '(Dean, 2016). Interestingly, again, there is no clear division along party lines, not only between the 'Remain' and 'Leave' campaigns but also within the rival factions supporting Brexit.

The 'Leave' campaign has been contested by 'Vote Leave', on the one hand, which won the bid to be the official campaign, and which is supported by a cross-party group including 'Conservatives for Britain', 'Labour Leave' and 'Business for Britain', and, on the other hand, 'Grassroots Out', which is also a cross-party group, comprising 'Leave.EU', backed by UKIP leader Nigel Farage, and including UKIP, Labour, Conservative and DUP politicians (BBC, 2016c). A third 'surprise' group to join the bid to be the official representative of the 'Leave' campaign was the Trade Unions and Socialist Coalition (TUSC).

In comparison with the 'Remain' campaign, which largely focused on the economic and security benefits of continuing within the EU, the 'leave' groups have tended to focus more on issues of sovereignty and

democracy, in addition to economic factors, as arguments in favour of leaving the EU. Here, the implication is that the EU is an undemocratic superstate and that it is only by leaving that Britain can regain its sovereignty, freedom and global competitiveness. The website of the 'Vote Leave' campaign, for instance, argues that the EU was 'too slow' and cumbersome 'to cope' with issues of economic competitiveness and technological development in an increasingly globalised world (Vote Leave, 2016: 3-4). It was also argued that leaving the EU would give Britain, which, it was claimed, was largely ignored within the EU, a greater international voice. Moreover, the website claimed that EU membership was undermining democracy, by taking 'control' out of Britain's hands:

> Britain has lost control of many things that are fundamental to what Abraham Lincoln called 'government of the people, by the people, for the people'. The nineteen Eurozone countries now constitute a majority in the EU that routinely outvote Britain. Our loss of control harms public services, entrepreneurs, and taxpayers… Our relationship with the EU is undermining prosperity, democratic accountability, and friendly international relations (Vote Leave, 2016: 7).

A key figure in the 'Vote Leave' campaign, Boris Johnson, Conservative Mayor of London, similarly described the EU as an 'anachronism' which 'costs us a huge amount of money and subverts our democracy'. Using vocabulary implying that EU membership entails some sort of slavery or imprisonment, he argued that the 'Remain' campaign think Britain 'doesn't have the guts' to burst out of the 'shackles' of the EU and that those in favour of Brexit should 'hold our nerve and vote for freedom' (Hughes and McCann, 2016).

In this context, Johnson describes the increasing use of QMV and the expansion of the EU's competences as 'legal colonisation';

> As new countries have joined, we have seen a hurried expansion in the areas for Qualified Majority Voting, so that Britain can be overruled more and more often (as has happened in the past five years). We have had not just the Maastricht Treaty, but Amsterdam, Nice, Lisbon, every one of them representing an extension of EU authority and a centralisation in Brussels.… We are seeing a slow and invisible process of legal colonisation, as the EU infiltrates just about every area of public policy (Johnson, 2016).

Similarly, the arguments of employment minister Priti Patel, another important figure in the 'Vote Leave' campaign, have also been based on issues of sovereignty, democracy and 'freedom' from EU membership. In the context of setting up a pro-Brexit women's group, Patel argued that British women who voted to leave the EU were like 'sufragettes' as they are fighting for 'our democratic freedom', and noted that the suffragettes did not fight for the vote to see 'those decisions surrendered to the EU's undemocratic institutions and political elite'. In contrast, in Patel's view, 'Our campaign to take back control from the EU will enhance our democracy and empower women in this country' (Swinford, 2016).

Like 'Vote Leave', 'Grassroots Out' and 'Leave.EU' have also based their pro-Brexit arguments both on economic issues and on questions of sovereignty and democracy. At the launch of 'Grassroots Out', for instance, former (Conservative) Defence Secretary Liam Fox argued that the EU had eroded British sovereignty; 'If you cannot make your own laws or control your own borders you are not an independent sovereign nation … It is time to look forwards and outwards... It is time to take control of our own destiny' (BBC, 2016d). Similarly, Farage, along with two of the other founding members of 'Grassroots Out', Conservative MP Tom Purseglove and Labour MP Kate Hoey, used terms that, like Johnson's, alluded to Brexit as freedom from slavery or imprisonment; 'The referendum 'represents a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for the UK to throw off the shackles of EU membership and stand proud again in the world' (2016).

In a recent speech, Farage also emphasised pragmatic arguments, putting forward that EU membership was detrimental to Britain not only in terms of sovereignty, democracy and the rule of law but also in terms of the economy and free trade;

> If the question in June was, should we join the EU, we'd have to tell the British people you have to surrender the control and sovereignty of your parliament and have 75 percent of your laws made somewhere else. Your supreme court will not be supreme; you will be overruled by a court of Luxembourg made up by people who aren't even judges. You will have to give up your fishing grounds, including in some places 200 miles of the North Sea. And you must cut your links with the Commonwealth and the wider world because you are no longer fit to negotiate your own global trade deals. Oh, and by the way for all of this you will be paying 55 million pounds a day as a membership fee (Farage, 2016).

The introduction to the 'Leave.EU' campaign website also focuses on both pragmatic and normative arguments in favour of Brexit. Firstly, the campaign argues that EU membership is disadvantageous for Britain's economy, emphasising the 'staggering membership fee of £15 billion per year' and Britain's 'massive trade deficit with Germany, France and nearly every other European country', while perhaps rather dubiously noting that 'If 3 million UK jobs depend on our membership of the EU, then even more jobs in Europe depend

on *our* economy..' (Leave.EU, 2016). The website also, however, uses normative arguments, suggesting that the EU has developed into an undemocratic, corrupt superstate, and that Brexit would 'free' a British public which 'didn't vote for … a 'United States of Europe'; one that would go on to crush our democracy, and in the process create a class of politicians clearly in it for themselves' (Leave.EU, 2016). While the arguments are similar to those used by Vote Leave, then, the tone is notably more populist, unsurprisingly given the influence of the populist UKIP on the campaign. Thus, it goes on to argue that the EU is an elite organisation which is out of touch with the thoughts and wishes of 'ordinary people'; 'We will always be a part of Europe. But the EU is run for big business, big banks and big politics - not for ordinary people' (Leave.EU, 2016).

Finally, TUSC discourse attempts to distance itself from 'Vote Leave' and 'Grassroots Out' by arguing that it is the only campaign that represents 'ordinary people', the others being dominated by right-wing and big business interests. For the Socialist Party, for instance, one of the main members of TUSC, the EU itself is also dominated by big business, which seeks to maximise its interests through the Single Market, while imposing 'endless austerity' on its ordinary citizens, and abusing their rights by supporting 'zero-hour contracts, low pay and 'flexible' working as part of its structural adjustment programme'. However, issues of democracy are also mentioned; while the European Parliament is viewed as a potentially democratic institution, it is the European Council , a 'Capitalists' Club' in the view of the party, that 'takes the vast majority of EU decisions' (Sell, 2016).   Similarly, Joseph Choonara, a leading member of the Socialist Workers Party, another member of the coalition, argues that;

> Power in the EU rests on two pillars. The first consists of unelected bureaucratic institutions such as the Commission and the European Central Bank. These are not really susceptible to any democratic pressure. Climbing these hierarchies involves proving one's loyalty to the ruling classes of Europe. The second pillar is the European Council, formed of the heads of governments from around the EU. This cannot be reformed at the European level, because these leaders are elected in national elections (Choonara, 2016).

Conclusion

The preliminary research presented in this article suggests that the Brexit debate can, by and large, be understood in the context of the dominant British discourse on state and nation and on Europe. In particular, as expected, there is no evidence of ethical-political arguments referring to a shared European cultural identity even in Remain discourse; neither, with the exception of Liberal Democrat discourse, is there support for closer EU integration. Indeed, the main arguments used in support of continued EU membership are pragmatic in nature, focusing especially on the financial and security benefits provided by the EU. There is, however, little evidence for moral arguments based, for instance, on the EU as an anchor for democracy and human rights, although such arguments have been traditionally used alongside pragmatic ones in support for the EU in Conservative as well as Labour discourse.

The arguments in favour of Brexit, in the discourse of both major 'Leave' campaigns, the official 'Vote Leave' campaign and the competing 'Grassroots Out' group, have also focused on pragmatic arguments for leaving the EU, notably on economic arguments, by framing Britain as an economic 'loser' from EU membership. However, moral arguments based on democracy, sovereignty and freedom are also prominent in 'Leave' discourse; notably, the EU is depicted as an undemocratic, bureaucratic superstate, and Brexit is represented as an opportunity for Britain to retrieve its sovereignty and freedom. Such images are also evident in the discourse of the third 'Leave' group third group, the socialist TUSC. Perhaps ironically, although TUSC aims to differentiate itself from the other two 'leave' groups, its language is strikingly similar to that used by 'Grassroots Out', in which the populist right-wing party UKIP plays an important role; both groups portray themselves as defending 'ordinary people' from a big business dominated EU.

In conclusion, then, it can be argued that the prospect of Brexit does not appear to be a 'critical juncture' provoking fundamental changes in British political discourse, either at the level of the dominant discourse on state and nation or at the level of discourse on Europe. Instead, Brexit discourse seems to fit in with the traditional British dichotomy on European integration, between portraying European integration as a threat to national sovereignty on the one hand and as a necessity for economic and geopolitical reasons on the other.

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[i] This is not the first time Brexit has been put to referendum in the UK. A previous referendum, in which the British public voted to remain in the EC, was held in 1975, two years after Britain's accession (BBC, 2016a).

[ii] Wellings (2015: 35), on the other hand, understands British Euroscepticism as also belonging to a broader tradition of English populism which, as Kenny notes, signify 'a sullen, two-fingered response to the political establishment and its values' (cited in Wellings, 2015: 35).