

A Matter of Public Importance? The 'Europe Open for Business' Campaign, British Public Opinion and the Single Market

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Abstract

This article offers a historical assessment of the *Europe Open for Business* campaign, launched in 1988 by Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government and related to the programme to complete the Single Market. The campaign, which delivered a substantial increase in business awareness of the 1992 programme, was a unique propaganda exercise that emphasized the importance the Conservatives attached to the Single Market. However, the campaign was undermined by Thatcher's September 1988 Bruges speech. Using contemporary public opinion data related to the Single Market, the article also argues that it was limited by the decision to target solely a business, rather than public, audience. Through its assessment of *Europe Open for Business*, the article thus contributes to four areas of inquiry: British government propaganda exercises regarding European integration; Conservative Party European policy; the growing literature on the Bruges speech; and broader debates on the role of publics in the European integration process.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the three anonymous reviewers for their constructive criticisms and comments, which have helped significantly improve the article. I am also extremely grateful for the advice and suggestions received for earlier drafts and versions of this paper from Michael Kandiah and Piers Ludlow, as well as those in attendance at the LSE HY509 International History Research Seminar in November 2019.

Introduction

Recent reflections on the United Kingdom's relationship with the European Union have suggested that the lack of a passionate pro-European faction within British politics (Copeland and Copey, 2017) or a 'massive national information and communications campaign' regarding European integration (Westlake 2020, p.179) contributed towards embedding Euroscepticism as a dominant political force. Indeed, outside of the period prior to the UK's accession and the 1975 and 2016 referendums, British governments largely refrained from conducting propaganda exercises related to integration. This was despite the significant developments that altered the EU's competences and frequent, yet unfulfilled promises to hold referendums. However, one major development – the commitment enshrined within the 1986 Single European Act (SEA) to complete the European Community's internal market – did inspire the British government to launch a propaganda exercise. Titled *Europe Open for Business*, this was launched in spring 1988. Yet, save for being feted by David Young, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whose department was responsible for its delivery (1990, pp. 257-8), and being mentioned briefly in former Conservative MEP Ben Patterson's history of his party's relationship with Europe (2011, pp. 141-4), the campaign has received scant attention. By analysing archive material related to *Europe Open for Business* and providing a detailed historical assessment of the campaign, this article fills this gap.

The article contributes to multiple other debates too. The first of four sections assesses the content and delivery of *Europe Open for Business*. Primarily adding to the literature on British government propaganda campaigns regarding European integration, it highlights how some aspects of *Europe Open for Business* were unique. Yet certain features demonstrated continuities with previous exercises. Analyzing the campaign's delivery and its successes – the subject of the second section – also contributes to debates on the Conservative government's European policy in the latter years of Margaret Thatcher's Premiership. Above all, the campaign emphasizes the significance the Conservatives attached to the Single Market programme, even as divides emerged over the direction of the party's European policy. The article then considers *Europe Open for Business's* limitations.

These were primarily influenced by a single contingent factor – Thatcher’s September 1988 Bruges speech, which the third section contextualises further. The fourth section subsequently argues that *Europe Open for Business* was also hindered by decisions to limit its target audience. Contributing to wider literature regarding European integration, evidence is provided of the role British elites saw the public as playing in this process. The decision to target solely a business audience gives credence to the idea that within government a ‘permissive consensus’ was seen to exist. Yet, that certain voices desired a broader Single Market campaign demonstrates some saw a need to get the public onside regarding a development that focused on market liberalization. By analyzing public opinion data regarding the Single Market, this section posits that their arguments were justified – and that *Europe Open for Business* could have been of greater benefit if utilized as a mass public information exercise.

The Campaign

The few propaganda campaigns that British governments undertook regarding European integration possessed similar characteristics (see Aqui, 2020; Gliddon, 2009 and 2017; Mullen and Burkitt, 2004; and Saunders, 2018). Information was delivered in a matter-of-fact tone and the economic benefits of EC/EU membership emphasized. Concerted efforts were made to attract the support of industry. Furthermore, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) was primarily responsible for their delivery. Through its limited aims, technocratic content and cultivation of business support, *Europe Open for Business* shared some of these features. But it also boasted unique qualities. First, rather than being the FCO’s responsibility, the campaign was controlled by the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI). Second, it utilised high- and low-profile means to deliver its message. Together these stressed the importance the Conservatives attached to the Single Market programme (H. Young, 1999, pp.332-4). Yet the campaign’s message, as well as what it did not discuss, reinforce the idea that the party largely saw Britain’s membership of the European Community in transactional terms

(Crowson, 2007, p. 51; Gowland, 2017, pp.98-101). *Europe Open for Business* was clearly a pro-Single Market, as opposed to a pro-European exercise.

Responsible for managing legislation related to the Single Market's completion, the DTI's decision to undertake the campaign was a reactive one. It was only forthcoming once the department was alerted to the fact that in late 1987 a tiny proportion of British businesses had heard of the Single Market compared to those in France. The precise extent and nature of French business awareness was unclear, with reports claiming that 'well over 70 per cent of French companies' saw '1992 as a golden opportunity for business' (*The Times*, 1987a) or that '80 per cent of [French] companies know what 1992 means' compared to just five per cent in Britain (*The Times*, 1987b; CBI, 1988). Nevertheless, it appeared obvious that British business needed to be better informed. This focused the minds of DTI officials. In control of its delivery, though liaising with other departments – notably the FCO (upon whose records this article relies)¹, they devised a thorough campaign with two main aims. These were narrow in scope – and strictly related to the Single Market. First, DTI sought to raise awareness 'so that British business understands the importance of 1992 and the completion of the Single Market and plans accordingly'. Second, they aimed 'to develop ... dialogue with business about the real barriers faced by companies, so as to inform official policies'.²

Europe Open for Business was eventually launched on 18 April 1988 in a high-profile event at Lancaster House to which 150 top businesspeople were invited. Demonstrating the event's uniqueness, FCO officials present remarked how 'it was an eye-opener to see the Community given high-cost, high-tech promotional treatment'.³ Meanwhile, stressing the importance attached to the Single Market initiative, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, European Commission President Jacques

¹ DTI records related to the campaign are not yet publicly available.

² The National Archives, UK (thereafter TNA), T 640/646, DTI Advertising Brief, 1988.

³ TNA, FCO 30/7620, Note from Wall to Kerr, 19 April 1988.

Delors and, via a pre-recorded interview, Lord Cockfield (the Commissioner for the Internal Market and Services) addressed attendees. They all outlined the opportunities the Single Market would create. But – given fears about British firms being behind in their preparations – they emphasized the urgency with which business needed to act.

Thatcher's address was intriguing. Hinting at the influence of early historiographical interpretations of Britain's European policy (Daddow, 2004), she mentioned that: 'Too often in the past Britain has missed opportunities' (Thatcher, 1988a). Furthermore, she highlighted the importance of the changes taking place – and why British businesses had to take advantage of them:

It's your job, the job of business, to gear yourselves up to take the opportunities which a single market of nearly 320 million people will offer. Just think for a moment what a prospect that is. A single market without barriers – visible or invisible – giving you direct and unhindered access to the purchasing power of over 300 million of the world's wealthiest and most prosperous people. Bigger than Japan. Bigger than the United States. On your doorstep ... It's not a dream. It's not a vision. It's not some bureaucrat's plan. It's for real. And it's only five years away. (Thatcher, 1988a)

Her speech was clearly directed at a business audience, the benefits of the Single Market for 'ordinary people' – 'cheaper air fares, more and better services, consumer choice and product safety' – being mentioned only in passing (Thatcher, 1988a). Nevertheless, the Prime Minister's words impressed FCO officials. At a time when they were mulling over whether to endorse Thatcher accepting the College of Europe's invitation to deliver a speech in Bruges (Daddow, Gifford and Wellings, 2019, pp. 7-8), Stephen Wall, Head of the European Community Department, commented to Assistant Under Secretary of State John Kerr that her Lancaster House address 'came across as very pro-European, apart from one ad-libbed aside when she said that up until now other countries

had been better at bending the rules than the UK'.⁴ Delors's tone regarding the Single Market was similar to Thatcher's. Claiming that 'a quiet revolution is taking place', he expounded on the economic gains the Single Market would bring across the EC – including the creation of 'at least two million jobs' – as it faced up to the prospect of a more competitive global economy. But in order to reap these benefits, now was the time to act. In Delors's words, 'anyone who waits until 1992 will have missed the opportunities'.⁵

Further high-profile methods delivered the campaign's message. During a decade when the Conservative government invested significant amounts of public money in television advertising (McKenna, 2018, pp. 89-91), it was unsurprising that such a medium was used as part of *Europe Open for Business*. DTI purposely recruited prominent businesspeople, including Richard Branson (Virgin Group), Sir John Egan (Jaguar) and Alan Sugar (Amstrad) to feature in advertisements. Using the voice of business to drive home the campaign's message, these extolled the Single Market's benefits and promoted the government's line about firms needing to prepare. Sugar spoke in simple terms about the virtues of eliminating non-tariff barriers to trade (DTI, 1988a). Meanwhile, an advertisement featuring Branson showed off the location of Virgin's planned Paris megastore, with the entrepreneur proclaiming that: 'Europe already works for us; by 1992, get it working for you' (DTI, 1988b).

Modest, technocratic elements also added substance to the campaign. Prior to the Lancaster House launch, a booklet titled *Why you need to know about the Single Market* was distributed to around 125,000 companies. This was subsequently reissued in September, under the title *The Single Market – An Introduction*. Its contents outlined the opportunities that completing the Single Market would offer, while the booklet opened in an optimistic manner. Alongside two maps of the EC – one showing each member state shaded differently, the other with them sharing the same colour

⁴ TNA, FCO 30/7620, Note from Wall to Kerr, 19 April 1988.

⁵ TNA, FCO 30/7620, Speech given by Delors, 18 April 1988.

(although with national borders clearly indicated), it declared: 'By 1992 we're going to change this twelve into this ONE'. (DTI, 1988c, pp. 4-5). Overleaf, it emphasized that 'the market for goods and services you offer will increase dramatically' with the potential to access 'over 320 million customers' (DTI, 1988c, pp. 6-7).

But, demonstrating the seriousness the government attached to developments at a European level, the challenges posed to business by greater competition were explained too. Meanwhile, the booklet mostly provided details of the substantive changes that would occur to areas including product standards and public procurement processes, as well as the effects of liberalizing the internal market for different sectors. Each section spelled out how procedures would differ, which trade barriers would be removed and how companies would have to operate. 'Creating the Single Market', it noted, 'will mean a formidable work programme between now and the end of 1992' (DTI, 1988c, pp. 8-14). Although reflecting the campaign's aims, by concentrating on this detail government support for the Single Market was thus underplayed. Consumer benefits were also under-emphasized, this information being buried within detail about legislative changes. For example, in the section on transport services the benefit of 'greater choice and cheaper [air] fares' was listed in the second paragraph, the first being dedicated to explaining the regulation creating the 'freedom to provide shipping services to, from and between member states' (DTI, 1988c, pp. 11-2).

That the Single Market was viewed primarily through a business-oriented lens was also demonstrated by the leaflet only briefly touching upon free movement of people. Speaking to the government's view that the SEA's free movement provisions did not provide such a right to all citizens (Wall, 2008, p. 70), this detailed only that restrictions would be lifted to allow professionals to practise throughout the Community (DTI, 1988c, p. 12). Indeed, much caution was taken when

drafting this and other documents to avoid giving the impression that a universal right to free movement would exist.⁶

Social policy did not feature in the booklet either. Instead, this was dealt with in the Single Market factsheets DTI produced. These covered over thirty topics, providing targeted information to different industries and details on more general matters such as ‘freedom of establishment for the professions’, ‘consumer protection’, ‘working in the single market’ and ‘selling in the single market’.⁷ Again, care was taken when drafting these. For example, given the differences in opinion between the British government and European Commission, discussion of social policy stressed Britain’s preference for labour market flexibility.⁸ In addition to these fact sheets, an Action Checklist was published, guiding firms on the steps they should consider in general business areas to prepare themselves.⁹ A 1992 telephone hotline and the *SPEARHEAD* database – a unique resource similar to a search engine, which companies could access remotely via a subscription – were set up as well. These allowed businesses to obtain precise, up-to-date information about legislative changes related to the internal market’s completion.¹⁰ Finally, eighteen regional breakfasts, attended by ministers and to which between 200 and 300 businesspeople were invited, were held across Britain to further reinforce the government’s message.¹¹

A Positive Impact?

⁶ TNA, FCO 30/7623, Letter from Durbin (Home Office) to Loughhead (DTI), 17 August 1988.

⁷ TNA, FCO 30/7624.

⁸ TNA, FCO 30/7623, Letter from Loughhead to Shaw, 22 July 1988.

⁹ TNA, FCO 30/7620, DTI: Towards 1992: An Action Checklist for Business, 1988.

¹⁰ TNA, FCO 30/7623, Letter from Deft, 4 August 1988.

¹¹ TNA, FCO 30/7622, List of regional conferences.

From an overview of the various aspects of the *Europe Open for Business* campaign it was clearly thorough and well-intentioned. Style in the form of the Lancaster House launch and television advertisements was married with the substantive information available from the detailed literature, *SPEARHEAD* database and 1992 hotline. DTI also made certain that the information they felt businesses required was accessible across multiple formats. By going to such lengths, the importance the Conservatives attached to the Single Market programme was obvious. Support for liberalizing the internal market – and the desire for Britain to be leading on this venture – are then further emphasized by the measurement and interpretation of *Europe Open for Business's* success. From this, not only could the government embrace the realization of a long-term British aim for the Community (Moravcsik, 1998, pp. 319-26; Wall, 2008, pp. 41-3), they could also toast the notion that Britain was seemingly best preparing its businesses for the changes taking place.

According to DTI figures based on telephone surveys of British businesses, awareness of the Single Market reached the target level of 90 per cent in July 1988 – five months earlier than planned (NAO 1989, p. 41). This was a remarkable achievement, particularly given that in November 1987 only 16 per cent had been aware, with this increasing to a third in the first half of March 1988.¹² Additionally, by early 1989 more than half of businesses reported they were taking or considering action to prepare for the internal market's completion, with this reaching 70 per cent among larger firms (NAO, 1989, p. 41). Ministers and officials responsible for the campaign greeted this news with great satisfaction, with David Young claiming in his memoir that it was 'succeeding beyond our wildest dreams' (1990, p. 39).

The campaign convinced ministers that Britain was ahead of most of its fellow EC member states in preparing businesses for the completion of the Single Market too. Twice, in June and December 1988, FCO Minister of State for Europe Lynda Chalker requested reports from British

¹² TNA, FCO 30/7622. Such a large increase seems too good to be true. Unfortunately, detailed data tables are not available in the existing archival material to verify this.

embassies in EC countries containing details about local levels of awareness regarding the Single Market and the kind of activities, if any, that governments were undertaking to raise this. The report received in June identified Britain and France as 'leading the race' and, although British awareness levels were yet to match those in France, the UK government's campaign had 'the edge in terms of comprehensiveness of our data base, the services available to businessmen and regional coverage'. Elsewhere, action was limited. Spain was reported as having had a low-key campaign in operation since December 1987, while Denmark, Ireland and the Netherlands were preparing to launch activities in the autumn.¹³ Six months later the report's tone was even more triumphant. 'It is clear', it proclaimed, 'that the UK is well in the lead, both in the quality and the breadth of our Single Market campaign'. While other member states were reported as having kickstarted their own activities, it was the UK that was ahead 'in giving concrete advice to businesses on how to prepare for 1992'. What is more, British activities served as a template for campaigns elsewhere, with materials produced in Denmark and Germany 'clearly based on the DTI introductory booklet and briefing pack'.¹⁴ Officials even mentioned being approached at EC Council meetings by their counterparts in other member states with requests for material and, in some instances, were directly told that governments were copying elements of the British campaign.¹⁵

Long-term evidence points to *Europe Open for Business's* success too. Indeed, the campaign was one which British officials drew upon on at least two subsequent occasions. In 1997 – with EU enlargement to the post-Communist states of central and eastern Europe an increasingly likely prospect – the DTI and FCO launched *Central Europe Open for Business*. Clearly deriving its name

¹³ TNA, FCO 30/7622, Note from Duffield to Wall and Private Secretary for Chalker, 28 June 1988.

¹⁴ TNA, FCO 30/7626, Note from Lownds to Arthur, Kerr and Private Secretary for Chalker, 20 December 1988.

¹⁵ TNA, FCO 30/7623, Letter from Stow to Abraham, 3 August 1988; and TNA, FCO 30/7624, Letter from Baxendale to Meadon, 12 September 1988.

from the campaign related to the Single Market, this comprised publications and events promoting the opportunities available for businesses, with the aim of doubling British exports and increasing investment in the region (Lippert, Hughes, Grabbe and Becker, 2001, p. 39). Meanwhile in the summer of 2019, it was reported that Prime Minister Boris Johnson had ‘told civil servants to use the “Europe Open for Business” publicity drive of 1988 as a template’ for his government’s *Get Ready for Brexit* campaign (*The Times*, 2019).

From achieving its primary short-term aims ahead of schedule, to seemingly placing Britain in the lead in communicating to businesses the changes taking place to complete the Single Market, to being used as a template for subsequent campaigns, the view expressed by David Young regarding *Europe Open for Business*’s achievements therefore appears justified.

A Qualified Success?

However, for all that this evidence points towards the campaign being a success, the reality is less rosy. And by scrutinising the factors that limited its achievements, two important contributions are made. First, further insight is gained into the consequences of Thatcher’s Bruges speech. Although the message at the heart of *Europe Open for Business* was emphasized in the Prime Minister’s September address, the timing of and negative spin attached to Thatcher’s speech undermined the campaign. Second, decisions regarding the campaign’s target audience provide evidence of the role British elites saw the public as playing in the European integration process. Attitudes within the Treasury implied that informing the British public about changes occurring at a European level was not considered to be important. However, the DTI – with the FCO’s support – believed there would be benefits in a wider campaign that delivered information to the public at large. The Treasury’s stance largely won out. Yet opinion polling data suggests a broader campaign may have been beneficial.

The impact of Bruges

Delivered on 20 September 1988 during *Europe Open for Business's* series of regional events, Thatcher's Bruges speech (1988b) was the primary factor that impacted upon the campaign's success. What proved in the long-term to be a vital reference point for Eurosceptic forces in Britain, in the short-term stymied the momentum of the government's own Single Market campaign.

As recent evaluations of the speech reveal (see Roe-Crines and Heppel, 2020; and Daddow, Gifford and Wellings, 2019), the story of Bruges began in March 1988 – coinciding with the launch of *Europe Open for Business* – when Thatcher was invited to deliver an address at the College of Europe. During its drafting, tensions emerged between the Prime Minister's office and FCO regarding the speech's themes and tone (Daddow, Gifford and Wellings, 2019, pp. 8-9). When being finalized in early September, DTI officials also weighed in with criticism, with David Young expressing concern that the likely reaction to Thatcher's speech would 'distort the real message' (Roe-Crines and Heppel, 2020, p.210). DTI's *Europe Open for Business* campaign provides a clear explanation for the department's desire to see the Prime Minister tone down her rhetoric. Indeed, while not explicitly mentioning its ongoing campaign, the letter outlining the DTI's concerns endorsed the draft speech's 'emphasis ... on the deregulatory, liberalising approach to the Single Market'.¹⁶

The critical elements of Thatcher's Bruges speech were a clear response to the Delors Commission's growing activism though. Delors sought to use the Single Market programme as a springboard to extend the EC's reach into other fields, including economic and monetary union and – of particular alarm to Thatcher – social policy. As already mentioned, when producing material for *Europe Open for Business* care was taken to set out the British government's position on social policy. Furthermore, themes related to deeper integration and the extension of Community competence into the social sphere were absent from the speech Delors delivered at the campaign's opening. But they were central to those Delors gave to the European Parliament on 6 July (1988a)

¹⁶ Thatcher MSS, Churchill Archive Centre: THCR 5/1/5/569 f347, Letter from Thornton (DTI) to Powell, 12 September 1988.

and to the British Trades Union Congress (TUC) on 8 September (1988b), with the latter speech being particularly provocative to the Prime Minister. Thatcher's criticism of attempts to 'reimpose at a European level' the 'frontiers of the state' her government had sought to remove subsequently became the most widely remembered aspect of the Bruges speech. And thanks to the spin attached to these lines, her Bruges address also came to be interpreted as being anti-European (Roe-Crines and Heppel, 2020, pp. 216-7).

Yet, despite repudiating the deeper integration Delors envisioned, the irony is that Thatcher's speech strongly promoted the benefits of economic liberalization within the Community – a theme central to *Europe Open for Business*. Indeed, Daddow, Gifford and Wellings show that the section on 'Europe Open to Enterprise' was one of the two longest of Thatcher's speech (2019, pp. 5-6). Unsurprisingly, this was a theme to which the *Europe Open for Business* campaign attempted to divert attention. DTI's hastily updated briefing notes demonstrate this. Officials drafted lines to take if asked to respond to questions including: 'Hasn't the Prime Minister called into question our commitment to the Community?' and '[Has the] Prime Minister undermined the Single Market campaign?'. These stressed that Thatcher's message had, in fact, reinforced that of *Europe Open for Business*.¹⁷ Ministers attempted to counter the spin given to the speech when appearing before businesspeople too. At an event in Glasgow on 3 October, Lynda Chalker declared:

I am sure that you will have read about the Prime Minister's major speech on Europe last week. You might be forgiven for missing this in the press comment but the Prime Minister underlined that our destiny is in Europe, as part of the Community. And one of her central themes was a strong commitment to Europe open for business ... This is very much the message that we are stressing throughout this country in our *Europe Open for Business*

¹⁷ TNA, FCO 30/7625, DTI note on Prime Minister's Bruges speech.

campaign.¹⁸

It was clear though that the negative spin placed on Thatcher's words created difficulties for the campaign. Those overseeing *Europe Open for Business* were forced to fight against the tide. And this was a battle made harder courtesy of the choice to target solely a business audience.

Choosing a limited audience

Because of this decision, taken following an acrimonious battle between the DTI and Treasury during the planning stages of *Europe Open for Business*, only a limited audience received a positive interpretation of Thatcher's speech. Thus, just as the Bruges speech's planning revealed tensions within government 'over Britain's place in Europe and the world' (Daddow, Gifford and Wellings, 2019, p. 13), arguments over *Europe Open for Business* demonstrated they also existed over the importance of informing the British public regarding European policy.

If the DTI had its way, a campaign aimed at the general public would have taken place. A decision to target such an audience was determined when ministers and officials were planning its scope. Subsequently, the brief sent to advertising agencies wishing to pitch for the campaign contract stipulated that the Department wanted 'a major campaign to ensure that the UK public and British businesses are aware of and prepare themselves for the completion of the Single Market'.¹⁹ DTI's reasons for wanting a public campaign are opaque, a fact hindered by the current unavailability of its own documents related to *Europe Open for Business*. But the idea also had the support of the pro-EC orientated FCO, whose reasoning provides insight into the advantages foreseen in such an approach. Writing to David Young in March 1988, Foreign Secretary Geoffrey Howe stated that generating 'wide public awareness' was 'essential if we are to gear up our businesses'. Additionally,

¹⁸ TNA, FCO 30/7624, Chalker's speech to Single Market conference at Glasgow, 3 October 1988.

¹⁹ TNA, T 640/646, DTI Advertising Brief, 1988.

Howe argued that support from the TUC leadership should be cultivated for both political advantage and to help 'spread the word at all levels' of business and industry, the implication being that trades union backing was a route to generating awareness and support among rank-and-file workers.²⁰ The rationale for targeting the public was also elucidated by Adam Fergusson, the Foreign Secretary's Special Advisor on European Affairs, who wrote to his Minister that 'if we do not carry the whole nation in this, we shall invite division and failure. It may be unnecessary to enthuse schools and housewives at this stage but the UK's workforce in factory, office and shop is an essential target'.²¹

But pressure from the Treasury ultimately narrowed the campaign's focus. This was partly influenced by the Treasury's disquiet with DTI's overall advertising expenditure. In January 1988 DTI had already obtained significant funding to promote its 'Enterprise Initiative', which provided consultancy services to small and medium-sized companies. The Treasury were therefore reluctant to meet spending demands for *Europe Open for Business* and questioned the merits of using television advertising.²² A spat between Young and Chief Secretary to the Treasury John Major ensued in spring 1988. And this came to a head when a forthright letter from Major was leaked to the press (*The Times*, 1988).²³ Treasury figures were dismissive about the campaign's aims in internal correspondence too, the target of achieving 90 per cent awareness for the Single Market being ridiculed by Mark Call, an advisor to Major, because the figure was 'thought to be higher than the public awareness of the name of the Prime Minister'. But Call's letter also revealed a more fundamental attitude towards the importance of communicating developments in European integration to the public – and one which provides evidence to suggest integration was seen within the department as a purely elite matter. Rejecting the DTI's desire to undertake a campaign with a

²⁰ TNA, T 640/646. Letter from Howe to Young, 24 March 1988.

²¹ TNA, FCO 30/7618, Letter from Fergusson to Howe, 18 March 1988.

²² TNA, FCO 30/7618, Letter from Major to Maude, 17 March 1988.

²³ TNA, FCO 30/7619, Letter from Major to Young, 29 March 1988.

broader target audience, he wrote: 'There may be a case for a campaign to spread the enterprise message to the public at large, but I am unconvinced of the need regarding the Single Market. Businessmen certainly need some years' lead time to make preparations, individuals do not'.²⁴

As evidenced by the use of television advertising, the Treasury compromised to some degree regarding the means with which *Europe Open for Business* was delivered. However, as outlined, the advertisements' content made it clear that these were intended for a specialist audience. The television airtime purchased also aimed to target men in the 'AB' managerial and professional socio-economic group (NAO, 1989, p. 40) – a niche demographic. Furthermore, it can be seen from subsequent correspondence between ministers and interested members of the public that the Treasury view had won out and that this was a propaganda exercise that would not move beyond speaking solely to businesspeople. Instead, it was reasoned that 'the best persuasion that we can offer [to the public] is to let people experience directly the benefits ... that the Single Market will bring'.²⁵

When considering broader theories of European integration, certain evidence exists suggesting there was no need to take the Single Market message to the public at large. Liberalizing the European market was more of an elite concern, with non-governmental support coming from business groups (Moravcsik, 1991, pp. 21-34). Furthermore, seeming to justify Lindberg and Scheingold's arguments regarding the *permissive consensus* – that policymakers could move in an integrative direction without incurring opposition (1970) – during the 1980s there had been a significant growth in public approval of EC membership in Britain. Party support was no longer a dividing line either given the increase in positive attitudes towards the Community among Labour

²⁴ TNA, T 640/646, Letter from Call to Major, 24 March 1988. The 'enterprise message' refers to the DTI re-branding itself as 'the Department for Enterprise' after Young assumed the role of Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (D. Young, 1990, pp. 257-8).

²⁵ TNA, FCO 30/7623, Letter from Maude to Richard Simmonds, 29 July 1988.

voters (Flickinger, 1995, pp. 200-1). Additionally, Eurobarometer data from a question asking whether the coming into being of the Single Market would be a good or bad thing (which did not appear to be on the radar of those assessing *Europe Open for Business's* effectiveness), showed that attitudes at an overall population level in Britain were more positive than negative.

Yet other available evidence implies that a broader audience for *Europe Open for Business* may have been beneficial. In the short-term it could have generated awareness of how the market liberalizing aspects of the Single Market programme would benefit consumers. Meanwhile, in the long-term it could have encouraged the start of a more measured public dialogue about European integration in British politics.

The prevailing political climate suggested that the Conservatives would have been capable of framing a public debate about the Single Market on their own terms. As outlined, public approval of EC membership had increased. This combined with four other factors to create a favourable environment. First, European integration had a low level of public salience (Ipsos MORI, 1988, 1997). Therefore, with few voters informed about the issue, it was arguably easier for the government to sell its vision for the Community without generating controversy. Second, political competition over Europe had receded with Labour, under the leadership of Neil Kinnock, moving in a pro-EC direction and away from its pledge made at the 1983 general election to withdraw (Tindale, 1992). Third, the commitment to complete the internal market – even if achieved through an Intergovernmental Conference the government would have preferred to avoid – represented a triumph of Conservative influence in Europe, the ‘creation of a genuinely common market’ having been an aim expressed repeatedly during Thatcher’s leadership (see Conservative Party, 1979, p. 16; Howe, 1984; and *Europe – The Future*, 1984). Finally, the Thatcher government was in a position of strength, boasting a strong majority and the ability to implement radical domestic economic reforms – which were nakedly marketed to the British public (George, 1998, p.174; McKenna, 2018, pp. 90-1).

Public opinion data specifically related to the Single Market (which again is not referred to in available documents relating to *Europe Open for Business*) also supports this argument. From 1988

to 1992 between six and seven in ten Britons reported that they were aware of the Single Market programme compared to an average of a third who were not.²⁶ As Table 1 shows, lacking awareness of the Single Market acted as a clear barrier to holding a positive outlook about its prospects. A concerted effort to inform and raise awareness among the entire population could therefore have generated further positive sentiment – particularly as Britons who were unaware of the 1992 programme were typically no more likely than those who were aware to believe the Single Market would be a bad thing.

[INSERT TABLE 1 HERE]

Data available from Eurobarometer studies 28, 29, 30 and 31 regarding whether specific aspects of the Single Market would be advantageous or not also emphasizes why a different style of campaign may have had merit. Features that represented a potential security threat or loss of sovereignty – in particular the elimination of customs controls and the opening up of public procurement processes – were divisive. However, other aspects appeared uncontroversial with majorities considering them to be an advantage across virtually all sub-groups. Perhaps surprisingly, this included the opportunity for any citizen of an EC country to go and live or work in another member state. Most beneficial though, as was the case across the Community (Dalton and Eichenberg, 1993), were those features which would be of clear benefit to consumers – including the possibility to buy products lawfully sold in another member state, being able to make payments without complication across the EC and the removal of capital controls, allowing holidaymakers to travel with any amount of money they wished.

²⁶ These proportions were likely inflated by the question being asked after other general questions about the EC. No time period was included in the question either, nor was there any assessment of the type of detail survey participants were aware of.

[INSERT TABLE 2 HERE]

A public campaign could therefore have provided short-term advantages by promoting the ways individuals could benefit from the Single Market. These were seemingly popular. But, as the first section of this article has shown, while alluded to in *Europe Open for Business* campaign material, they were under-emphasized. Furthermore, given the relationship between awareness of the Single Market and seeing its coming into being as a good thing, had developments at a European level – and the reasons the British government supported these – been clearly explained in literature targeted at the public, it could even have generated greater general approval of the Single Market programme.

A further, long-term benefit of a public campaign is that it would have taken place before European integration became a highly politicized, contentious issue, and – at least in Britain – prior to the completion of the media’s journey to a position of ‘destructive dissent’ (Daddow, 2012). Across member states the politicization of European integration led to a rise in public Euroscepticism. And, as Hooghe and Marks (2009) argue, after the signing of the Maastricht Treaty in 1991 governments increasingly felt the need to accommodate public preferences when determining policy, including through the greater use of referendums. The first of these consequences was clearly evident in Britain where Eurosceptics dominated the integration debate (Copsey and Haughton, 2014). However, the second was not. Despite mainstream parties making a ‘flurry of referendum commitments’ regarding developments including the single currency and Constitutional and Lisbon treaties (Westlake, 2020, pp. 23-5), these were not fulfilled. And when the 2016 referendum on the UK’s EU membership and the preceding public campaign took place, the stakes could not have been higher.

Britain’s avoidance of public campaigns relating to European integration contrasts with the experience in Denmark and Ireland (see FitzGibbon, 2013). Like in Britain, Danish governments have

long held reservations about advances in integration, while the public mood in both Ireland and Denmark has at times stood against such developments. Unlike in Britain though, referendums and the public campaigns that go with them have been a regular feature during the course of their EC/EU membership – including regarding the constitutional changes necessitated by the SEA. Denmark and Ireland’s openness to exposing their EC/EU relationship to public scrutiny has also led to referendums returning results that went against government advice, as occurred in Denmark regarding the Maastricht Treaty (June 1992) and single European currency (September 2000), and in the initial Irish referendums on the Nice (June 2001) and Lisbon (June 2008) treaties. However, these outcomes have not resulted in sustained questioning of the countries’ continued membership of the EC/EU – a feature that came to blight the British experience.

Reverting back to *Europe Open for Business*, a public propaganda exercise would not have been followed by a referendum. But using a fact-driven campaign focused on the Single Market to educate an ill-informed yet, at the time, broadly pro-EC electorate may have served a purpose in the long-term by initiating a more measured dialogue about matters European. It bears repeating too that the government felt the Single Market would benefit consumers – not just elites, while the changes taking place fit with the Conservative Party’s economic ideology as well as their view that European integration could deliver practical gains.

Conclusion

As a largely forgotten exercise, the *Europe Open for Business* campaign may appear like a minor footnote in the story of the UK’s engagement with European integration. But through an analysis of documents regarding the campaign, as well as contemporary public opinion data related to the Single Market, this article contends that it was a noteworthy initiative. Indeed, this research contributes to multiple debates.

First, the article contributes towards literature on government propaganda related to European integration. As demonstrated, the campaign’s limited aims, its focus on the practical,

economic benefits of integration and its cultivation of business support meant there were a series of continuities with previous exercises. However, based on the government department responsible (the Department of Trade and Industry) and the high-profile methods used to communicate its message, *Europe Open for Business* possessed unique characteristics.

Second, analysing its content and successes underpins the importance the Conservatives attached to the Single Market programme, as well as their support for a practical advance in European integration. In subsequent decades, this remained the case: even as Euroscepticism became a dominant force within party ranks, they claimed the Single Market as having been ‘pioneered by British Conservatives’ (1999, p. 12). However, its importance ended in January 2017 when Prime Minister Theresa May made clear that the UK’s future EU-relationship ‘cannot mean membership of the Single Market’. Her successor Boris Johnson kept this commitment – and it was on such a platform that he won a handsome majority in the December 2019 general election, enabling the Conservative Party to *Get Brexit Done* and achieve the aim expressed in the title of its manifesto.

Ironically though, Britain’s departure from the EU revived the relevance of the *Europe Open for Business* campaign. And, appearing to learn a lesson from history, the current Conservative regime has sought to promote its policy of exiting the Single Market to a wide audience. This decision stands in stark contrast to that taken in 1988, when it was determined *Europe Open for Business* should be aimed solely at businesses rather than the public. This was one factor that made the campaign only a qualified success. Margaret Thatcher’s September 1988 Bruges speech was another. The release of documents related to its planning has encouraged greater critical analysis of Thatcher’s speech. And this article contributes towards this literature by expanding upon the context in which the Bruges speech took place and by identifying an additional source of friction between government departments regarding European integration.

This tension related to the aforementioned choice of audience for *Europe Open for Business*. Arguments related to the *permissive consensus* can be seen to have prevailed as it was determined

that it was not necessary for the public to be informed about the Single Market programme. However, based on an analysis of public opinion, this article contends that a broader, public pro-Single Market (rather than pro-European) exercise would have had both short- and long-term benefits. An opportunity – in a favourable climate – to generate mass awareness about a development in European integration that had the government's backing, was seen to benefit consumers and delivered 'Thatcherism on a European scale' (H. Young, 1999, p. 333; Wall, 2018, p. 289) was thus squandered.

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Table 1 – British Public Attitudes Towards the Coming into Being of the Single Market, By Awareness (%)

| | 1988 | 1989 | 1990 | 1991 | 1992 |
|--|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Among Britons aware of the Single European Market | | | | | |
| Good thing | 54 | 52 | 50 | 49 | 42 |
| Neither good nor bad thing | 24 | 29 | 33 | 38 | 35 |
| Bad thing | 16 | 11 | 11 | 9 | 15 |
| Don't know | 6 | 8 | 7 | 5 | 8 |
| Among Britons not aware of the Single European Market | | | | | |
| Good thing | 30 | 25 | 22 | 26 | 25 |
| Neither good nor bad thing | 35 | 34 | 32 | 40 | 34 |
| Bad thing | 12 | 13 | 11 | 8 | 17 |
| Don't know | 24 | 27 | 35 | 25 | 24 |

Source: Eurobarometer Mannheim Trend File (2005).

Note: Data filtered to adults in Great Britain aged 18 and over.

Table 2 – Perceived Advantages and Disadvantages of Aspects of the Single Market (%)

| | Advantage | Disadvantage |
|---|------------------|---------------------|
| Elimination of customs controls when crossing frontiers | 45 | 49 |
| The opportunity for any citizen of an EC country to go and live in any other EC country | 68 | 26 |
| The opportunity for any citizen of an EC country to go and work in any other EC country | 76 | 18 |
| The possibility to buy in one's own country any product lawfully sold in other EC countries | 75 | 16 |
| Bringing closer together the rates of VAT applied in the various countries of the EC | 59 | 26 |
| The ability to make payments without complication within the whole EC | 78 | 8 |
| The ability to take any amount of money with you when you travel to other EC countries | 80 | 12 |
| The possibility to buy land or property throughout the Community | 68 | 22 |
| The possibility to open a bank account in any EC country | 74 | 16 |
| The possibility for a contractor from another EC country to be in charge of public works in our country if his offer is cheaper at the same level of quality | 49 | 42 |

Source: Eurobarometer 28 (1987), 29, 30 (both 1988) and 31 (1989).

Note: Data filtered to adults in Great Britain aged 18 and over. Don't know responses not included in table.

