

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

STUART SMEDLEY 
King’s College London

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 greatly increased business awareness of the 1992 programme, was a unique propaganda exercise that emphasized the importance that 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 a public, audience. Through its assessment of the Europe Open for Business campaign, the article thus contributes to four areas of inquiry: British government propaganda over 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.

Keywords: Single Market; Britain and Europe; Margaret Thatcher; Conservative Party

Introduction

Recent reflections on the UK’s relationship with the EU have suggested that the lack of a passionate pro-European faction in British politics (Copeland and Copsey, 2017) or a ‘massive national information and communications campaign’ about European integration (Westlake, 2020, p.179) contributed towards embedding euroscepticism as a dominant political force. Indeed, outside 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 the frequent, yet unfulfilled promises to hold referendums. However, one major development – the commitment enshrined in 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 the spring of 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 its brief mention in the history by former Conservative MEP Ben Patterson of his party’s relationship with Europe (Patterson, 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 numerous other debates as well. The first of four sections assesses the content and delivery of the Europe Open for Business campaign. Primarily adding to the literature on British government propaganda campaigns on European

integration, it shows that some aspects of Europe Open for Business were unique. Yet certain features demonstrated continuities with previous exercises. Analysing 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 that the Conservatives attached to the single market programme, even as divisions emerged over the direction of the party's European policy. The article then considers the limitations of Europe Open for Business. These were primarily influenced by a single contingent factor – Thatcher's September 1988 Bruges speech, which the third section contextualizes further. The fourth section subsequently argues that the Europe Open for Business campaign was also hindered by decisions to limit its target audience. Contributing to wider literature regarding European integration, evidence is provided of the role that British elites saw the public 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 that some saw a need to get the public onside over a development that focused on market liberalization. By analysing 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 it had been utilised as a mass public information exercise.

I. The Campaign

The few propaganda campaigns that British governments undertook on European integration possessed similar characteristics (see Aqui, 2020; Mullen and Burkitt, 2004; Gliddon, 2009 and 2017; Saunders, 2018). Information was delivered in a matter-of-fact tone and the economic benefits of EC and 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 (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.

The decision to undertake the campaign by the DTI, which was responsible for managing legislation related to the completion of the single market, was a reactive one. It emerged only once the department was alerted to the fact that in late 1987, compared with businesses in France, only a tiny proportion of British businesses had heard of the single market. 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 with just five per cent in Britain (*The Times*, 1987b;

Confederation of British Industry, 1988). Nevertheless, it appeared obvious that British business needed to be better informed. This focused the minds of DTI officials. By 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 were strictly related to the single market. First, the 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 that ‘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 Delors and, via a pre-recorded interview, Lord Cockfield (the Commissioner for the Internal Market and Services) addressed the 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 stated 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, mentioning the benefits of the single market for ‘ordinary people’ – ‘cheaper air fares, more and better services, consumer choice and product safety’ – 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’s acceptance of the College of Europe’s invitation to deliver a speech in Bruges (Daddow *et al.*, 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 on the single market was similar to that

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

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

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

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

of 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 the prospect of an increasingly 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 had invested significant amounts of public money in television advertising (McKenna, 2018, pp. 89–91), it was unsurprising that this 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 the location of Virgin's planned Paris megastore, with the entrepreneur proclaiming: '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' (DTI, 1988c). 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 in the same colour (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 it reflected 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 having been buried under the 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. 11–12).

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

That the single market was viewed primarily through a business-oriented lens was also demonstrated by the fact that the leaflet touched only briefly 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, when drafting this and other documents great care was taken 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 that the DTI produced. These covered over 30 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, the 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 completion of the internal market.¹⁰ Finally, 18 regional breakfasts attended by ministers and to which between 200 and 300 businesspeople were invited, were held across Britain to reinforce the government's message.¹¹

II. A Positive Impact?

From an overview of the various aspects of the Europe Open for Business campaign it is clear that it was 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. The DTI also made certain that the information they thought businesses required was accessible in various formats. By going to such lengths, the Conservatives showed the importance they attached to the single market programme. Support for liberalizing the internal market – and the desire for Britain to lead this venture – are then further emphasized by the measurement and interpretation of the success of the campaign. 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), it could also toast the notion that Britain was seemingly the EC member state best preparing its businesses for the changes taking place.

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

⁷TNA, FCO 30/7624.

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

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

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

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

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 (National Audit Office [NAO], 1989, p. 41). This was a remarkable achievement, particularly as in November 1987 only 16 per cent had been aware of the single market, 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 proportion reaching 70 per cent among large 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' (Young, 1990, p. 39).

The campaign also convinced ministers that Britain was ahead of most of its fellow EC member states in preparing businesses for the completion of the single market. Twice, in June and December 1988, FCO Minister of State for Europe Lynda Chalker requested reports from British embassies in EC countries with details about local levels of awareness of the single market and the kind of activities, if any, that governments were undertaking to raise this awareness. 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 other governments were copying elements of the British campaign.¹⁵

Long-term evidence also points to the success of the campaign. Indeed, it was one upon which British officials drew on at least two subsequent occasions. In 1997 – with EU enlargement to the post-Communist states of central and eastern Europe increasingly likely – the DTI and FCO launched 'Central Europe Open for Business'. Clearly deriving its name 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 *et al.*, 2001, p. 39). Meanwhile in the summer of 2019, it was reported that Prime Minister Boris Johnson had 'told

¹²TNA, 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.

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

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

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

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.

However, for all that this evidence points towards the campaign being a success, the reality is less rosy. And by scrutinizing 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, its timing and the negative spin attached to Thatcher’s speech undermined the campaign. Second, decisions regarding the campaign’s target audience provide evidence of the role that British elites saw the public 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 important. However, the DTI – with the support of the FCO – 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 suggest that a broader campaign may have been beneficial.

III. The Impact of Bruges

Delivered on 20 September 1988 during Europe Open for Business’s series of regional events, Thatcher’s Bruges speech (Thatcher, 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 Daddow *et al.*, 2019; Roe-Crines and Heppell, 2020), 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. While it was being drafted, tensions emerged between the Prime Minister’s office and FCO over the speech’s themes and tone (Daddow *et al.*, 2019, pp. 8–9). When it was 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 Heppell, 2020, pp. 210). The 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

However, the critical elements of Thatcher’s Bruges speech were a clear response to the Delors Commission’s growing activism. Delors sought to use the single market programme as a springboard to extend the EC’s reach into other fields, including economic

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

and monetary union and – of particular alarm to Thatcher – social policy. As already mentioned, when producing material for the campaign 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 (Delors, 1988a) and to the British Trades Union Congress on 8 September (Delors, 1988b), the latter 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 Heppell, 2020, pp. 216–17).

Yet, despite repudiating the deeper integration Delors envisioned, the irony is that Thatcher's speech strongly promoted the benefits of economic liberalization in the Community – a theme central to Europe Open for Business. Indeed, Daddow *et al.* show that the section on 'Europe Open to Enterprise' was one of the two longest of Thatcher's speech (Daddow *et al.*, 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 also attempted to counter the spin given to the speech when appearing before businesspeople. 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 campaign.¹⁸

It was however clear 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 because of the choice to target solely a business audience.

IV. Choosing a Limited Audience

Because of this decision, taken following an acrimonious battle between the DTI and Treasury during the planning stages of the campaign, 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 *et al.*, 2019, p. 13), arguments over the Europe Open for Business campaign demonstrated they also existed on the importance of informing the British public about European policy.

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

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

If the DTI had its way, a campaign aimed at the general public would have taken place. The decision to target this audience was made 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 oriented 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, Howe argued that support from the Trades Union Congress 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 the DTI had already obtained significant funding to promote its 'Enterprise Initiative', which provided consultancy services to small and medium-sized companies. The Treasury was therefore reluctant to meet spending demands for Europe Open for Business and questioned the merit of using television advertising.²² A spat between Young and Chief Secretary to the Treasury John Major ensued in the spring of 1988. This came to a head when a forthright letter from Major was leaked to the press (*The Times*, 1988).²³ Treasury officials were also dismissive about the campaign's aims in internal correspondence, and the target of achieving 90 per cent awareness for the single market was 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 that provides evidence to suggest that integration was seen in the department as a matter purely for elites. Rejecting the DTI's desire to undertake a campaign with a broad 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

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

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

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

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

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

²⁴TNA, 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).

As evidenced by the use of television advertising, the Treasury compromised to some degree over the means by which the campaign message was delivered. However, as noted above, the advertisements' content made it clear that they were intended for a specialist audience. The television airtime purchased also aimed to target men in the 'AB' managerial and professional socioeconomic 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 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 broad 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 (Lindberg and Scheingold, 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 voters (Flickinger, 1995, pp. 200–1). Additionally, responses to a Eurobarometer survey question asking whether the genesis of the single market would be a good or bad thing (data which did not appear to be on the radar of those assessing the effectiveness of the Europe Open for Business campaign), showed that attitudes at an overall population level in Britain were more positive than negative.

However, other available evidence implies that a broader audience for Europe Open for Business could 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 when Labour, under the leadership of Neil Kinnock, moved in a pro-EC direction away from the pledge it made at the 1983 general election to withdraw (Tindale, 1992). Third, the commitment to complete the internal market – even if it had been achieved through an intergovernmental conference that 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;

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

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.

Howe, 1984; and British Prime Minister, 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 10 Britons reported that they were aware of the single market programme compared with 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 having 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 that the single market would be a bad thing.

Data available from Eurobarometer studies 28, 29, 30 and 31 on whether specific aspects of the single market would be advantageous or not also emphasize why a different style of campaign may have had merit. As Table 2 shows, 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 subgroups. 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, as was the case across the Community (Dalton and Eichenberg, 1993), were features that would be of clear benefit to consumers – including the possibility of buying 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.

²⁶These 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.

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

	<i>Advantage</i>	<i>Disadvantage</i>
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.

A public campaign could therefore have provided short-term advantages by promoting the ways in which 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 genesis as a good thing, if developments at a European level – and the reasons the British government supported these – had 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 Maastricht Treaty was signed 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. Although mainstream parties made a 'flurry of referendum commitments' over developments that included the single currency and the Constitutional and Lisbon treaties (Westlake, 2020, pp. 23–5), they did not fulfil them. 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 about European integration contrasts with the approach of 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. However, unlike in Britain, referendums and the public campaigns that go with them have been a regular feature during the course of their EC/EU membership – including over 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 over the Maastricht Treaty (June 1992) and the 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 EU – a feature that came to blight the British experience.

Reverting to the Europe Open for Business campaign, 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 that the government believed the single market would benefit consumers – not just elites, while the changes taking place fitted 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 and 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 DTI) and the high-profile methods used to communicate its message, Europe Open for Business possessed unique characteristics.

Second, analysing its content and successes demonstrates the importance that 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' (Conservative Party, 1999, p. 12). However, its importance ended in January 2017 when Prime Minister Theresa May (2017) made it 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 this platform that he won a handsome majority in the December 2019 general election, enabling the Conservative Party (2019) 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 the Europe Open for Business campaign 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 further 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 over European integration.

This tension related to the choice of audience for the campaign. 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' (Young, 1999, p. 333; Wall, 2018, p. 289) was thus squandered.

Acknowledgements

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

Correspondence:

Stuart Smedley, King's College London,
Department of Political Economy,
Bush House North East Wing,
30 Aldwych, London, UK, WC2B 4BG.
email: stuart.smedley@kcl.ac.uk

References

- Aqui, L. (2020) 'Government Policy and Propaganda in the 1975 Referendum on European Community Membership'. *Contemporary British History*, Vol. 34, No. 1, pp. 1–21.
- British Prime Minister (1984) 'Europe – The Future'. *JCMS*, Vol. 23, No. 1, pp. 73–81.
- Confederation of British Industry (1988) 'Europe Sans Frontières'.
- Conservative Party (1979) '*Conservative Manifesto for Europe 1979*'. (London: Conservative Central Office).
- Conservative Party (1999) '*In Europe Not Run by Europe*'. (London: Conservative Party).
- Conservative Party (2019) '*Get Brexit Done: Unleash Britain's Potential*' (London: Conservative and Unionist Party).
- Copeland, P. and Copesey, N. (2017) 'Rethinking Britain and the European Union: Politicians, the Media and Public Opinion Reconsidered'. *JCMS*, Vol. 55, No. 4, pp. 709–26.

- Copsey, N. and Haughton, T. (2014) 'Farewell Britannia? 'Issue Capture' and the Politics of David Cameron's 2013 EU Referendum Pledge'. *JCMS*, Vol. 52, No. S1, pp. 74–89.
- Crowson, N.J. (2007) *The Conservative Party and European Integration since 1945: At the Heart of Europe?* (Abingdon: Routledge).
- Daddow, O. (2004) *Britain and Europe since 1945: Historiographical Perspectives on Integration* (Manchester: Manchester University Press).
- Daddow, O. (2012) 'The UK Media and "Europe": From Permissive Consensus to Destructive Dissent'. *International Affairs*, Vol. 88, No. 6, pp. 1219–36.
- Daddow, O., Gifford, C. and Wellings, B. (2019) 'The Battle of Bruges: Margaret Thatcher, the Foreign Office and the Unravelling of British European Policy'. *Political Research Exchange*, Vol. 1, No. 1, pp. 1–24.
- Dalton, R.J. and Eichenberg, R.C. (1993) 'A People's Europe: Citizen Support for the 1992 Project and Beyond'. In Smith, D.L. and Ray, J.L. (eds) *The 1992 Project and the Future of Integration in Europe* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe), pp. 73–91.
- Delors, J. (1988a) 'Speech to the European Parliament', Brussels, 6 July. Available online at: <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/113689>. Last accessed 10 June 2020.
- Delors, J. (1988b) 'Speech to the TUC ("1992 – The Social Dimension")', Bournemouth, 8 September. Available online at: <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/113686>. Last accessed 21 January 2020.
- Department of Trade and Industry, DTI (1988a) 'Europe Open for Business – Alan Sugar Advertisement' [video file]. Available online at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bWmBMjbOeY4>. Last accessed 7 January 2020.
- DTI (1988b) 'Europe Open for Business – Richard Branson Advertisement' [video file]. Available online at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-6650XoSnFk>. Last accessed 7 January 2020.
- DTI (1988c) 'The Single Market – An Introduction'.
- FitzGibbon, J. (2013) 'Citizens against Europe? Civil Society and Eurosceptic Protest in Ireland, the United Kingdom and Denmark'. *JCMS*, Vol. 51, No. 1, pp. 105–21.
- Flickinger, R.S. (1995) 'British Political Parties and Public Attitudes towards the European Community: Leading, Following or Getting Out the Way?' In Broughton, D., Farrell, D.M., Denver, D. and Rallings, C. (eds) *British Elections and Parties Yearbook 1994* (London: Routledge), pp. 197–214.
- George, S. (1998) *An Awkward Partner: Britain in the European Community* (3rd edition) (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Gliddon, P. (2009) 'The British Foreign Office and Domestic Propaganda on the European Community, 1960–1972'. *Contemporary British History*, Vol. 23, No. 2, pp. 155–80.
- Gliddon, P. (2017) 'The Labour Government and the Battle for Public Opinion in the 1975 Referendum on the European Community'. *Contemporary British History*, Vol. 31, No. 1, pp. 91–113.
- Gowland, D. (2017) *Britain and the European Union* (Abingdon: Routledge).
- Hooghe, L. and Marks, G. (2009) 'A Postfunctionalist Theory of European Integration: From Permissive Consensus to Constraining Dissensus'. *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 39, No. 1, pp. 1–23.
- Howe, G. (1984) 'The Future of the European Community: Britain's Approach to the Negotiations'. *International Affairs*, Vol. 60, No. 2, pp. 187–92.
- Ipsos MORI (1988) 'Issues Index: Trends 1974–1987'. Available online at: <https://www.ipsos.com/ipsos-mori/en-uk/issues-index-trends-1974-1987>. Last accessed 6 January 2020.
- Ipsos MORI (1997) 'Issues Index: Trends 1988–1997'. Available online at: <https://www.ipsos.com/ipsos-mori/en-uk/issues-index-1997-2006>. Last accessed 6 January 2020.
- Lindberg, L.N. and Scheingold, S.A. (1970) *Europe's Would-be Polity: Patterns of Change in the European Community* (London: Prentice Hall).

- Lippert, B., Hughes, K., Grabbe, H. and Becker, P. (2001) *Britain and German Interests in EU Enlargement: Conflict and Cooperation* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs).
- May, T. (2017) 'The Government's Negotiating Objectives for Exiting the EU: Prime Minister's speech', London, 17 January. Available online at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/the-governments-negotiating-objectives-for-exiting-the-eu-pm-speech>. Last accessed 15 January 2020.
- McKenna, A.Z. (2018) *100 Years of Government Communication* (London: HMG).
- Moravcsik, A. (1991) 'Negotiating the Single European Act: National Interests and Conventional Statecraft in the European Community'. *International Organization*, Vol. 45, No. 1, pp. 19–56.
- Moravcsik, A. (1998) *The Choice for Europe: Social Power and State Purpose from Messina to Maastricht* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press).
- Mullen, A. and Burkitt, B. (2004) 'Spinning Europe: Pro-European Union Propaganda Campaigns in Britain, 1962–1975'. *Political Quarterly*, Vol. 76, No. 1, pp. 100–13.
- National Audit Office, NAO (1989) *Publicity Services for Government Departments* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office).
- Patterson, B. (2011) *The Conservative Party and Europe* (London: John Harper).
- Roe-Crines, A. and Heppell, T. (2020) 'Legitimising Euroscepticism? The Construction, Delivery and Significance of the Bruges Speech'. *Contemporary British History*, Vol. 34, No. 2, pp. 204–27.
- Saunders, R. (2018) *Yes to Europe! The 1975 Referendum and Seventies Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- Thatcher, M. (1988a) 'Speech Opening Single Market Campaign', London, 18 April. Available online at: <https://www.margareththatcher.org/document/107219>. Last accessed 7 January 2020.
- Thatcher, M. (1988b) 'Speech to the College of Europe ("The Bruges Speech")', Bruges, 20 September. Available online at: <https://www.margareththatcher.org/document/107332>. Last accessed 21 February 2020.
- The Times (1987a) 'It's a French Knock-out', 17 November, p. 12.
- The Times (1987b) 'CBI Chief Urges "Courage" on Single European Market', 16 December, pp. 6.
- The Times (1988) 'Young Questioned over Advertising', 31 March, p. 2.
- The Times (2019) 'Boris Johnson takes a PR Tip from the Iron Lady', 30 July. Available online at: <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/johnson-takes-a-pr-tip-from-the-iron-lady-bfk25pbqq>. Last accessed 7 January 2020.
- Tindale, S. (1992) 'Learning to Love the Market: Labour and the European Community'. *Political Quarterly*, Vol. 63, No. 3, pp. 276–300.
- Wall, S. (2008) *A Stranger in Europe: Britain and the EU from Thatcher to Blair* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Wall, S. (2018) *The Official History of Britain and the European Community, Volume III: The Tiger Unleashed, 1975–1985* (Abingdon: Routledge).
- Westlake, M. (2020) *Slipping Loose: The UK's Long Drift Away from the European Union* (Newcastle: Agenda).
- Young, D. (1990) *The Enterprise Years: A Businessman in the Cabinet* (London: Headline).
- Young, H. (1999) *This Blessed Plot: Britain and Europe from Churchill to Blair* (London: Palgrave).