A different cup of tea: The European Union has become an inevitable part of British politics, yet it is a topic treated more as a necessary evil than a source of lively debate.

Still the awkward partner?
35 years of British EU membership unbound

Jan Petersen: The case for Europe: lessons to learn
Ian Bache: Below the radar: the quiet Europeanisation of British politics
Bjørn Høyland: The Conservative Party in Europe: an open marriage
Kristin M. Haugevik: The Europeanisation of British security and defence policy
A different partnership?

Thirty-five years after Britain’s entry into the then European Communities (EC), the relationship looks different from both sides of the Channel - yet some of the essential qualities of that relationship remain. This gives rise to rather different accounts of Britain in Europe depending on the perspective of the observer. The present issue of British Politics Review celebrates the anniversary of British membership and draws on a range of thematic contributions to illustrate the many contradictions of Britain in Europe.

Ian Bache’s article on the quiet Europeanisation of British politics gives some key factors to an understanding of how British public policy has become more Europeanised while the British public remains staunchly Euro-sceptical. Atle Wold’s account of the “Metric Martyr” points neatly at some of the remaining rationales for opposing Europe and “the continent” with its excessive bureaucracy and attempts to rule over British common sense.

From the Norwegian side, Jan Petersen and Dag Seierstad give two sharply contrasting accounts of Norway’s position relative to the EU and the way in which debates over EU in Norway take lessons from Britain, and vice versa. While Petersen emphasises the importance of Europe as a supportive family, of relevance also to security, Seierstad points at the virtue of democracy grounded at the local and national levels, a message that should be just as pertinent to Britain.

Among other contributions to our Review is a summary article by Victor Rothwell on the many twists and turns on Britain’s European road from 1973 to the present. Kristin M. Haugvik accounts for the paradigmatic shift towards Europe in Britain’s security and defence policy over the last decade: finally, Øivind Bratberg and Bjørn Høyland discuss two different challenges facing British political parties in Europe. Does Labour contribute to a common European left? And, to point out differences from their continental colleagues, is it wise for the Conservative Party to formally go alone in the European Parliament?

Two prime ministers, and two European speeches

“We have not successfully rolled back the frontiers of the state in Britain, only to see them re-imposed at a European level with a European super-state exercising a new dominance from Brussels.” The statement, taken from Margaret Thatcher’s speech to the College of Europe in Bruges, 20 September 1988, is remembered by many as the essence of Thatcher’s stormy relationship with Europe during the 1980s. The values of market, entrepreneurship and free trade were as important to Thatcher abroad as at it was to her domestic agenda. On this basis she could endorse the Single European Act (1986), introducing a single European market, despite her consistent scepticism to tighter integration. When harmonisation of policies followed which had little to do with openness of trade but instead reflected the ambition of a united Europe, her Conservative government went into disarray, leading ultimately to Thatcher’s own downfall.

Thatcher’s message in Bruges was one of refusing supranational integration but supporting enterprise and competition. Interestingly, her speech harked back to the traditional British role of balancing the continental powers so that national autonomy was protected and no single nation attained superiority. The speech reflected Thatcher’s unscrupulous pursuit of both national and ideological interest.

Almost seventeen years later, another significant British prime minister addressed an EU audience with a presentation of British priorities. On 23 June 2005 Tony Blair’s speech to the European Parliament came prior to the British presidency and in the wake of failed constitutional referenda in France and the Netherlands as well as a bitter dispute over the EU budget (where Britain was indeed accused of national greed and lack of European attachment). Blair’s message to the parliamentarians was clear: “The issue is not about the idea of the European Union. It is about modernisation. It is about policy. It is not a debate about how to abandon Europe but how to make it do what it was set up to do: improve the lives of people. And right now, they aren’t convinced.”

While refraining from the more explicitly nationalist jargon of Thatcher, Blair expressed a number of the same concerns for openness, competition, enterprise and growth - stating, for example, that the EU and WTO should share the same ambition of assisting development and growth, and that the EU should widen its membership to Turkey. Europeanism was made a matter of common sense. As was often the case with Blair, his message in Strasbourg was masterly designed to catch the middle ground, leading him to downplay both national and ideological concerns.
The case for Europe: lessons to learn
By British Politics Review Guest Writer Jan Petersen, Member of the Norwegian Parliament

Jan Petersen has been a Member of Parliament since 1981. Party leader of Høyre, the Norwegian Conservative Party, from 1994 to 2004, he also served as foreign minister in the centre-right coalition government from 2001 to 2005. Petersen's political career has been characterised by a wide range of interests besides a consistent emphasis on foreign affairs. At present he acts as chair of the standing committee on defence.

Thorbjørn Jagland, President of the Norwegian Parliament, Stortinget, and one of the most committed supporters of Norwegian membership in the EU, has reportedly come to the conclusion that Norway will never become a member.

To some extent I understand him. I have been a strong supporter for 45 years, but I too have reluctantly had to admit that our goal is far off into the distance. The polls are bad, too few people really care, and as we are more than halfway in already through an extensive network of agreements: why bother to go that extra mile? Norway, it appears, is doing fine on its own.

Still - I refuse to give up. And I think one important challenge is coming up and that may lead us to think again: The High North. And here autonomy is of little virtue for a small nation.

Last autumn we had a public debate in Norway inspired by a leak from the study on the future of the armed forces to be presented by the Chief of Defence. The essential question was: will NATO cover all our security needs in the north? The Chief of Defence was inclined to think no.

When the study was made public, the debate subsided. But the question is still with us. I do not doubt that NATO's security guarantee is real. But we need to recognise this: some challenges are too limited to be a task for NATO. Seen from the perspective of the Alliance we are supposed to have enough national resources to resolve local challenges, just as the expectation was during the Cold War. Russian bombers flying along the Norwegian coast should always be met by Norwegian fighters - this is something we can not expect our allies to take care of.

This was the point the Chief of Defence wanted to make. Following his line of thought turns our attention toward Europe, where a different, and broader, anchoring of national security has emerged. This does not only concern the EU’s common foreign and security policy, but also the attachment to a family which participation in the EU entails. Some of our challenges and possible conflicts are such that NATO has never been the solution. Those are not about war and peace, territory or military presence. They are about jurisdiction, resources, environment, economic interests – and in these areas the EU have a more wide-ranging alliance to offer.

Seen from the Norwegian perspective, this is about our relations with Russia - that wonderful, but enigmatic country. I still see Russia as a partner with many promising opportunities. Our bilateral relations are incomparably better than in the Cold War years and the increasing people-to-people contacts in the North are pointing in the right direction.

But we also see many worrying signs: lack of political pluralism, media under pressure, a less than constructive role in international politics. We can understand that Russia wants to use its new wealth to re-establish itself as a major power, but it brings uncertainties.

"EU sceptics in Britain often refer to Norway as a shining example of exceptionalism, of self-sufficiency... I would warn against transferring such lessons about the virtue of European detachment between the two countries."

"Norway can hardly provide leadership alone on the international arena, and here we differ profoundly from Britain. Consequently, we must seek partnership and cooperation."

And we see trouble with a surprising number of neighbouring countries and reather heavy-handed handling of those relationships.

In Norway we have never entertained the idea that in times of trouble we could counter Russia one to one. This recognition was forged at a time when threats and challenges were more uni-dimensional than today. With our relationship with Russia growing far more complex, it now covers a broad range of non-military, yet security-related challenges.

Norway can hardly provide leadership alone on the international arena, and here we differ profoundly from Britain. Consequently, we must seek partnership and cooperation. If the solution is not about military alliances - then what? The obvious answer is EU and the strengh a unified entity of half a billion people will bring to its member countries - members which are committed to supporting each other on the full repertoire of policy domains.

There is another dimension as well: We think the High North is of utmost importance, equally so to Europe, in light of energy policy, fisheries, border security and so on. We have yet to persuade others that it is so. A membership will put the High North more firmly on the European agenda, to the mutual benefit of Norway and the EU.

Some people ask what kind of member Norway would be – would we maintain a British-style reserve against further integration? My answer is a clear no. If we join, we would very quickly be an enthusiastic member. Our experience in international cooperation is that active commitment will bring increased influence for a small country, making it possible to punch above our weight. Our track record in international institutions shows that once we sign on to something, we to do it wholeheartedly.

Norway’s approach to Europe should maintain the concern for efficiency and pragmatism that we share, and always have shared, with Britain. However, if a more safely grounded security identity is our target, Norway, must shelf its reserve and engage with the EU.
The rationale for opposing Norwegian membership in the EU

By Dag Seierstad

Democracy first. On two occasions, by referendum in 1972 and 1994, a majority of Norwegian voters have rejected EU membership. Opposition against the EU has been dominated by groups of the centre-left: there is little organised opposition in Norway of the kind represented in Britain by business interests and the Conservative Party.

Two themes have been fundamental in Norway for the campaign against membership. First, there is the perception that cherished democratic values at the national as well as the local level are best retained outside the EU. Second, there is scepticism in Norway towards the market liberalism embedded in successive EU treaties.

The EU designs a society where local and national communities are replaced by companies and banks as the fundamental building blocks. Our vision of Europe refers to a different understanding of liberty than the four liberties of the EU’s inner market. We look towards the kind of autonomy that retains in local authorities and states the right to limit the market freedoms if it is necessary in order to achieve important social purposes.

The debate seen from Norway is essentially about whether companies or communities should be the units given the fundamental freedom of action within Europe. The departure point for the Norwegian anti-EU movement is that the EU should be limited to tackling challenges that can only be controlled at the international level: cross-national conflicts, environmental problems crossing borders, common minimum standards in the labour market and social imbalances between the regions of Europe.

The four freedoms of the EU require that national, regional or local communities do not intervene into solutions created by free-running market forces. Any regulation of the markets is supposed to take place only at the level of the European Union.

This idea represents the basic democratic weakness related to the European project. Nowhere in western Europe is the lack of free movement any important problem today. On the opposite: there are challenges of a far different nature that are much more important to resolve: rising unemployment, declining welfare states, disintegrating communities, health queues, drug abuse and increasing levels of violence and crime.

These problems can only be resolved through popular commitment to credible social projects, designed to make people take responsibility where they live and work. At all crossroads in the development of the EU more power and more decisions have been transferred to EU institutions. This touches upon the essential core of democracy: the scope for democratically elected power to control decisions of human and social concern. This power is quintessential if democracy is to be meaningful.

Norway is a community of suitable size to develop the initiatives and solidarity needed to fight unemployment, repair our welfare state and develop policies for protecting the environment that can rely on firm support by the citizens. Our arguments may be of a different nature than British EU scepticism. Yet their message is universal as far as the value of the elected representative is concerned. The individual MP in a British constituency should feel this as clearly as do Norwegian parliamentarians.

Supranational arrangements are sometimes necessary, but in order to have grass roots support, they must be limited to the absolutely necessary. Supranationalism in the EU is applied in far too many issue areas, and it limits national autonomy in areas where it should not.

The EU has always been a strange mix of the inter-state and supranational. But the combination affects different countries differently. To small and medium-sized countries the EU becomes gradually more supranational: they can be voted down and must heed to decisions which they have opposed. To the biggest EU countries, EU cooperation is closer to the inter-state model. In order to avoid being voted down, they negotiate to make compromises they can agree upon in order to present them as fait accomplis to the smaller countries.

As an EU member, Norway will be obliged to enter the EU’s monetary union. Norway is the country in western Europe where the euro will be the least appropriate, due to its particular economic structure. We largely export goods that feed into the productive capacity of other countries. For this reason we often need the direct opposite of the macroeconomic policy led by the eurozone, as our economic cycles differ. The success of the British economy, even though it differs from the Scandinavian countries, exemplifies the value of maintaining control over national currency and macroeconomic policy.

Outside of the EU Norway has a right to speak and propose in the world community which both Sweden and Denmark have had to refrain from since entering the Union.

Outside of the EU Norway has a right to speak and propose in the world community which both Sweden and Denmark have had to refrain from since entering the Union.

From this perspective, our EU scepticism is about a belief in autonomy rather than patriotism as such. Internationally, Norway fights for its national interest in trade, fisheries and to support its few industrial champions. But since our economic interests are rather few and limited in scope, we are also disposed to listen to concerns for global solidarity, especially where this reflects popular opinion in Norway. In this regard Norway may be small enough if we wish to mobilise popular support for international activism related to issues such as climate change, hunger and deprivation on other continents and global security.

The option for global solidarity is not always reflected in political action. But the fact that the option exists makes politics a whole lot more meaningful for the common man and woman in Norway compared to the intricacies of EU decision making. The Norwegian Parliament, like Westminster, is far from the individual voter: Brussels, however, is much farther away and too detached from democratic control. If we wish politics more based on solidarity values, and if we wish to take the people with us on that endeavour, we must begin at the level where democratic power is real. This is a thesis of equal significance to both Britain and Norway.
Dilemma unresolved. An unusual set of circumstances had been required to make it possible for the United Kingdom to become a member of the European Economic Community on 1 January 1973. Edward Heath, a politician who was uniquely pro-‘European’ among British prime ministers, had been in office during the crucial year for entry, which was 1971, and France had had a president in Georges Pompidou who was more flexible towards Britain than either his predecessor or his successor and who was worried by West Germany in relation to both its growing economic strength and signs of political assertiveness as embodied in chancellor Willy Brandt’s Ostpolitik.

At the heart of Heath’s pro-Europeanism was that he understood and shared the conviction of politicians on the continent that the Community project was not about free trade or even basic economic prosperity. Its purposes were political: to integrate Germany into Europe on a basis acceptable to Germans and other Europeans and then to be able to have dealings with the United States and the Soviet Union on something like a footing of equality. Heath’s loss of the premiership in March 1974 and his subsequent loss in acrimonious circumstances of the leadership of the Conservative Party nearly a year later ushered in what the late Lord Beloff called the “dialogue of the deaf” between Britain and its continental partners that has continued ever since.

British membership of the Community was confirmed by a two-thirds majority in a referendum in 1975. Although this clearly demonstrated wide support for membership in the British public, almost all observers were agreed that that support did not run deep. Proponents of staying in the Community, who are estimated to have spent as much as forty times as much money as their opponents, played down the loss of sovereignty involved in membership and the likelihood that it would increase, and concentrated on the economic benefits of membership and the scope for reducing Britain’s substantial net contribution to the Community budget. Also largely ignored was whether Community supranationalism might make the union between Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom appear redundant.

British relations with the Community and the European Union as it became after the Maastricht treaty in 1991, resolved themselves into two issues. Positively, Britain worked for the completion of free trade in goods, which had been largely achieved by 1987, and services where progress was more difficult. Negatively, at least from a Community standpoint, it sought to minimise Britain’s net contribution to the budget. The two-thirds rebate gained by Margaret Thatcher’s negotiators in 1984, proved to be a victory in a battle, not a war, and in 2005 prime minister Tony Blair made concessions in the wake of the accession of eight east European countries under which Britain’s net contribution will rise from £2.8 billion to £5.5 billion by 2012.

Thatcher’s first foreign secretary, Lord Carrington, has remarked on the lack of sympathy with which his European colleagues responded to British rebate demands in the early 1980s at a time when the state of the British economy remained dismal. Perhaps to them it was a case of being dispayed by British preoccupations with mere money in an essentially political enterprise. In 1997 a senior “Eurocrat”, Theo Jonkers, characterised Britain’s contribution to the Community since 1973 as having been neither “glorious” nor “disastrous”. In 2008 most Eurocrats would probably remain unwilling to say anything more favourable than that.

The Community/Union figured most prominently in British politics between 1988 and 1990, not only indirectly because of what the Community itself was doing and chiefly because it brought Britain’s oldest political party, the Conservatives, to the brink of (self-inflicted) destruction. The Franco-German drive for greater unity, and especially for a European common currency, caused the pro-European Heathite moment in the party (though it did not recognise Heath’s leadership in anything other than perhaps a vague, spiritual sense) to engineer Britain’s entry into the Community’s Exchange Rate Mechanism in October 1990 and Thatcher’s deposition the following month.

These proved to be isolated and Phrygian victories. ERM membership was a disaster for the British economy and therefore something that could not be sustained. In the words of the economists P.J.N. Sinclair and Martine Zanzoso, “The main lesson of September 1992 seemed to be that for Britain, expulsion from a German-dominated currency system was a blessed relief.”

Tony Blair’s public discourse on foreign policy while leader of the Opposition between 1994 and 1997 had been mostly about Europe and the need for Britain to play a central role. (He had said little about Anglo-American relations and nothing about British participation in wars in Africa and Asia.) As prime minister, he at first in practice pursued the intergovernmentalist line of all premiers since 1974 without coming under almost any of the integrationist pressures that had plagued his two most immediate predecessors. He undoubtedly wished to join the euro common currency as it was introduced between 1999 and 2002, but that was vetoed by his powerful chancellor of the Exchequer, Gordon Brown.

Blair sought alternatives to an integrationist Union such as the Anglo-French Partnership of Nations, spoke volumes in a paper on EU reform whose very title, A Partnership of Nations, spoke volumes about which side had won. By then, however, the Conservatives were broken and went down to ignominious defeat in the 1997 general election.

Not daunted, the Conservative Europhiles continued their struggle and, according to one Eurosceptic MP, there were even incidents of Conservative MPs on the two sides of this bitter political civil war spitting at one another. Well might John Major have remarked privately shortly before he became prime minister that Europe was a wolf that threatened to devour the Conservative Party. Major’s achievement was to prevent his party from completely disintegrating while the two factions struggled for victory, which ultimately went to the sceptics. In March 1996 the Government published a white paper on EU reform whose very title, A Partnership of Nations, spoke volumes about which side had won. By then, however, the Conservatives were broken and went down to ignominious defeat in the 1997 general election.

The Community/Union’s Britain dilemma — and the European Union’s Britain dilemma — remain unsolved.
Below the radar: the quiet Europeanisation of British politics  By Ian Bache

European by default? There is a familiar narrative of Britain's relationship with the European Union. It is a story of the "awkward" or "semi-detached" partner, the one that came late and reluctantly to the party and has never fully come to terms with membership. It is a relationship viewed sceptically by the public, treated with hostility by much of the press and one that divides political parties.

Yet while this narrative is important, it is not the whole story. Much of Britain's relationship occurs below the radar of the public, press and political parties. Indeed, until recently it occurred below the radar of much academic research on the EU. For often good reason, the main focus on Britain-EU relations is on the high-profile bargains and the points of conflict. Less interesting to political commentators are the innumerable day-to-day interactions between thousands of policy-makers, politicians and interest groups. Yet it is at this level, below the radar of attention, that much progress is made in Britain's relationship with the EU: that relations are often normalised and, we might say, that aspects of British politics have become quietly Europeanised.

Of course, other departments show far less sign of change and remain one-step removed. Here, the Treasury is a case in point through non-participation in the eurozone. But no Whitehall department can now stand aloof from the EU entirely and beyond Whitehall, change is highly significant.

Relations between local authorities and Brussels, which Whitehall once sought to control, are now routine. Moreover, practices such as partnership and programming that were promoted by the EU regional funds have become embedded in many domestic policies and are now part of the architecture of subnational governance. The regional funds also gave a push to the creation of regional development agencies in England by defining administrative boundaries and creating networks that both informed Labour's plans and accelerated their progress. This intermediate level provides an additional platform from which subnational actors (public, private and voluntary) can engage directly with the EU.

The EU effects on policy are profound in some sectors, less so in others. Again, environment occupies a place at the most-Europeanised end of the spectrum, while on the least-Europeanised end (where there is a prominent EU role) is monetary policy. Elsewhere the picture is more nuanced: competition policy now fits more comfortably with EU practices, but the British approach is more of a hybrid of the EU and US models rather than being truly Europeanised; and, while the EU's regional policy has been highly significant financially and in its effects on practices noted above, it has co-existed with rather than transformed other aspects of British regional policy, such as state aids for ailing industries.

There is a second point to make on how we might broaden the scope of the radar, which is to think more about how non-EU related policies affect EU relations. Most obviously, this points towards Britain's international relations and particular those with the US. Less obviously, it refers to domestic changes that shape the degree of 'fit' between EU and British politics and thus the prospects for an easier relationship. Here, Britain's programme of constitutional reform and particularly devolution provide an important illustration.

On the Europeanisation issue, the effects of EU membership have been significant on British institutions, policies and politics. While some of the key changes, particularly institutional, might be attributed to the Blair government - the mainstreaming of EU affairs within Whitehall departments, the strengthened central coordination machinery - many are not. They are about long-standing processes that in some cases have been in train since membership, but certainly pre-date New Labour.

Within Whitehall, departments such as Environment (currently the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) have very gradually become more proactive and less reactive in relation to EU decisions, not only through an ideological conversion to the European project, but simply because most policies are now made in or with the EU.

"[T]he main focus on Britain-EU relations is on the high-profile bargains and the points of conflict. Less interesting to political commentators are the [...] day-to-day interactions between thousands of policy-makers, politicians and interest groups. Yet it is at this level [...] that much progress is made in Britain's relationship with the EU..."

Last but certainly not least has been the EU’s effect on the behaviour of organised interest groups. The shift in policy competences to the EU level has been accompanied by the transfer of activities in line with the maxim “where power goes, interest groups follow”. Generally this activity runs alongside continued attempts at influencing domestic political actors either for direct return or for the ability of these actors to shape the EU's agenda.

Alongside this pull factor a number of social democratic constituencies in local government, the trade unions and the voluntary sector were pushed towards Brussels in the 1980s by the Thatcher governments. It is no coincidence given its overlapping membership with these groups that the Labour party transformed its position on Europe in this period and took an EU-friendly approach into government. For those people who enjoy such things, there is a delicious irony here in the fact that the individual that ultimately did more to Europeanise British politics was none other than Margaret Thatcher.
A number of constitutional changes introduced by the Blair governments have brought Britain closer to continental models and specifically to the EU’s multi-level governance system. Devolution is most obvious here, but this is also illustrated by giving independence to the Bank of England (which fulfills a requirement for Britain entering the euro), the adoption of proportional voting systems for the newly-devolved institutions, the introduction of a Freedom of Information Act and the modernisation of the House of Commons.

Devolution itself is driven primarily by domestic factors, although there is no doubt that the evolution of the EU has created a space in which regional and subnational interests are more confidently articulated. Devolution provides a more contested interpretation of the national interest in the EU context and a more diverse set of arrangements through which domestic interests are projected and EU policies implemented.

Placing these changes alongside the more consensual politics these devolved institutions aspire to, and which are promoted by the increased prospect of coalitions under the proportional voting systems, it is easy to see how in a space of a decade Britain has the embryonic features of a more continental European system and style of politics. Of course, for such change to occur takes time and it is important to note that while such developments are occurring at the subnational level, Westminster remains firmly majoritarian and confrontational.

To sum up, there is much more to Britain’s relationship with the EU than first meets the eye. To get a truer sense of the relationship we have to look beyond the sensational to the mundane and beyond EU issues to the domestic. Let’s be clear, Britain’s transformation from an awkward partner to one at ease with Europe is far from complete. Public and press hostility remain crucial to understanding the relationship and the political parties are either unable or willing to confront this hostility in any consistent or sustained manner. As such, what the radar catches matters enormously, but if we are to understand the underlying processes and trends, it is certainly not all that matters.

This article is based on the findings of _The Europeanization of British Politics_ by Ian Bache and Andrew Jordan (eds), Palgrave, 2006 and _Europeanization and Multilevel Governance: Cohesion Policy in the European Union and Britain_ by Ian Bache, Rowman and Littlefield, 2008.

Britain in Europe - a bibliography

**Europeisation.** The literature on Britain’s relationship with Europe has evolved over the last decade from one of largely historical accounts towards more theoretical contributions.

The _Europeanization of British Politics_, edited by Ian Bache and Andrew Jordan (2006) represents an excellent example. This volume accounts for British interaction with the European level as a two-way process where the EU affects the British political system while Britain also contributes to decision making in Brussels. The analytical focus covers both policy areas and institutions.

A less theoretical overview of Britain and the EU is given in Andrew Geddes’ _The European Union and British Politics_ (2004), which sums up historical and contemporary aspects of Britain’s relationship with Europe.

For an adventurous venture into British political history and the path towards British exceptionalism today, Andrew Gamble’s _Between Europe and America: the Future of European Politics_ (2003) is worth a closer look.

Some of the more specific thematic contributions on Britain in Europe are listed below.

**Historical accounts of Britain’s relationship with the EU:**

**Political positions towards Europe:**
- David Baker and David Seawright (eds.) _Britain For and Against Europe: British Politics and the Question of European Integration._
- Martin Holmes (2001) _The Eurosceptical Reader._
- Dick Leonard (2001) _The Pro-European Reader._
- Roger Broad (2001) _Labour’s European Dilemmas Since 1945: from Bevin to Blair._
- David Purdy (2003) _Eurovision or American dream? Britain, the Euro and the Future of Europe._
The Europeanisation of British security and defence policy

By Kristin M. Haugevik

From observer to partner. Throughout the history of European integration, Britain has often been described as a “reluctant European”, less willing to take part in the European project than many of its continental colleagues. This has particularly been true when it comes to security and defence policy, where Britain decided to stay on the sidelines from the first ideas about closer European security and defence collaboration began to surface in the late 1940s.

With that as a point of departure, it was therefore somewhat unexpected when Britain’s then new Prime Minister Tony Blair in 1998 initiated the framing of a common security and defence policy for the EU together with the French President Jacques Chirac. The agreement between the two old European archrivals has later been described as a milestone in the development of a European Defence Community (EDC) in 1951. Since Britain was more vulnerable to attack by air than by land campaign, it made more sense to focus on the alliance with the United States than establishing a new pact with Europe. Besides, the British government did not believe a supranational institution could provide a better defence against the Soviet Union than could the intergovernmental NATO.

The EDC plans were eventually abandoned, but shortly after, Britain was among the initiators behind the Western European Union (WEU), an intergovernmental forum with military functions explicitly integrated in NATO. This, of course, suited Britain very well. In practice, the WEU functioned as a negotiating table between Britain and the EEC countries, France, Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg and Italy.

In order to fully understand the significance of this shift, it is critical to understand the two dominant premises for British security policy since the Second World War. The first of these premises is that of transatlanticism, which refers to Britain’s observable preference for the United States and NATO over other partners on questions of national security. The second premise has to do with anti-federalism, in this case meaning Britain’s inherent unwillingness to surrender national sovereignty to supranational institutions such as the EU, especially when it comes to security and defence.

In 1945, following the two world wars, it became clear to most European countries that something had to be done to secure future peace and stability on the European continent. Thus, when Britain and ten other European countries – among them Norway – founded NATO in 1949, the underlying motivation was to attend to the transatlantic link and commit the United States to the territorial defence of Europe.

Yet, to many European countries, NATO was not a sufficient solution to the cardinal question on how to “keep the Americans in, the Russians out and the Germans down”. Therefore, plans to establish an all-European device to secure peace on the European continent gradually began to smoulder. When the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) was established in 1951, the underlying philosophy was that by creating economic interdependence between its members, going to war against one another would become unfavourable.

Britain officially supported the establishment of the ECSC, but declined to participate itself. Furthermore, Britain announced that it would not be interested in contributing British forces to a European army when the French government introduced plans to establish a European Defence Community (EDC) in 1951. Since Britain was more vulnerable to attack by air than by land campaign, it made more sense to focus on the alliance with the United States than establishing a new pact with Europe. Besides, the British government did not believe a supranational institution could provide a better defence against the Soviet Union than could the intergovernmental NATO.

The EDC plans were eventually abandoned, but shortly after, Britain was among the initiators behind the Western European Union (WEU), an intergovernmental forum with military functions explicitly integrated in NATO. This, of course, suited Britain very well. In practice, the WEU functioned as a negotiating table between Britain and the EEC countries, France, Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg and Italy.

“While the British reluctance to grant sovereignty to the EU remains and although NATO’s position as the “cornerstone” of European defence is still emphasised, these arguments now appear less black and white than they used to.”

Britain’s transatlantic and anti-federalist preferences were particularly evident during Margaret Thatcher’s eleven years as British Prime Minister (1979-1990). Thatcher and US President Ronald Reagan enjoyed a close friendship, both at a personal and a political level. At the same time, the Iron Lady’s aversion to European integration was well-known. The way she saw it, “all Britain’s problems have come from mainland Europe and all the solutions have come from the English-speaking nations across the world”. She would certainly not let anyone bring “European federalism in by the back door”.

Britain’s approach to European security and defence remained largely unchanged also during Thatcher’s successor, John Major’s, time in office (1990-1997) – despite the fact that Major reportedly had a more reserved relationship with US President Bill Clinton than Thatcher had had with Reagan and George Bush. However, following the Bosnian War (1992-1995), both Clinton and Major seemed to recognise the need for “some type of European solution”. When Britain signed the seminal Maastricht Treaty in 1992, which formally established a foreign and security pillar within the EU, it was therefore on the premise of American approval and with the British prerequisite that decision-making on foreign and security issues would remain intergovernmental.

It was against this backdrop that Blair, when he first came into office in 1997, had to formulate an approach to the emerging European security and defence policy. The first indications that major changes were afoot came in mid-1998, when the British Ministry of Defence recognised the EU’s “vital role in helping to preserve and extend economic prosperity and political stability, including through the Common Foreign and Security Policy”. In the months that followed, Blair made it clear that the time had come for “fresh thinking” with regard to European security and defence.

The shifts in rhetoric prepared the ground for a shift also in practice: When the abovementioned Saint Malo-declaration between Britain and France was signed in December 1998, many were surprised by the offensive wording of the agreement, which stated that the EU must have the “capacity for autonomous action, backed up by credible military forces, the means to decide to use them, and a readiness to use so, in order to respond to international crises”.

The use of the word “autonomous” was by many considered as path-breaking in a British context, as it indicated that the EU in the future might take military action without assistance from, and perhaps even without consulting with, NATO. Yet, it would be an underestimation of Blair to suggest that the choice of wording was not carefully thought through. It is more likely that he wanted to carry into effect his promise from the electoral campaign that “a new government would mean a new approach in Europe”.

Almost ten years later, Britain has arguably upheld a more active approach to European security and defence policy. While the British reluctance to grant sovereignty to the EU remains, and although NATO’s position as the “cornerstone” of European defence is still emphasised, these arguments now appear less black and white than they used to. With regard to British anti-federalism, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office observed in 2006 that the sharing of sovereignty in the EU had worked to “the benefit of the UK and our partners”, pointing out the need for a more effective EU role in the world. Furthermore, Britain’s transatlantic ties have become increasingly tense in recent years. In fact, the British public’s displeasure with the Anglo-American alliance in Iraq and NATO’s difficulties in Afghanistan are two factors that could strengthen the EU as a key actor in British security and defence politics.
Unhelpful scepticism.

Upon becoming the new leader of the British Conservative party, David Cameron pledged to take the Conservative members of the European Parliament out of the European Peoples’ Party (EPP), which is the party umbrella for centre-right parties of the EU member states.

The reason was that the EPP was perceived as being too integrationist for the taste of the new leader. The Conservatives would be freer to promote their vision of British Euroscepticism if acting outside of the dominant party group of the centre-right, was Cameron’s claim.

While humming to the tune of British Euroscepticism, the idea of pulling the Conservatives out may not be such a good strategy as one could be led to believe. The underlying rationale for withdrawing from the EPP was that the party would henceforth stand freer to vote in line with their ideological beliefs. The problem with this line of reasoning is that the British Conservatives are already free to vote against the rest of the EPP in cases of disagreement. All of the main party groups have a standardised procedure for dealing with dissent inside the party group.

The legislative cycle in the European Parliament is, in principle, organised around four-week cycles. The representatives have the first week to cultivate the relationship with the national party and their constituencies. The second week is devoted to committee work. The third week is the party group week. During this week the national party delegations meet to discuss and agree on common positions on the issues that have emerged from the committees. On most issues the recommendations from the party group leader on a committee are adopted by the group as a whole, or a consensus is reached as result of a discussion.

However, if some national delegations are unprepared to support this common position, for ideological, domestic or other reasons, they may declare their intention to defect from the party group position on the vote. Indeed, during the fourth week, the plenary session week, defecting fractions of the party group are often provided a slot during the debate on the issue to express to the whole of the European Parliament and to the public why they intend to vote differently from the rest of the party group. In most cases, this is completely unproblematic, as votes are rarely sufficiently close for the vote of a national delegation to make a difference.

Do members of the British Conservative Party make use of this possibility to defect from the rest of the EPP or are they squeezed to conform with centralised positions adopted by the EPP leadership? To answer this question, we must look closer at the actual voting decisions in the European Parliament. The below figure is a spatial map of the coalitions that formed on recorded votes in the European Parliament from July 2004 until March 2007, in total 2,115 votes by 705 MEPs on a range of different issues. Each dot represents an MEP. The closer two dots are to each other the more likely it is that they vote the same way.

The first dimension is the basic left-right dimension: here, a range of parallel issues distinguish social democratic and socialist parties on the one hand from Christian democratic and socialist parties on the other. Liberals in the European Parliament tend to place themselves between these two camps. The second dimension can be interpreted as preferences over the speed of European integration. Those placed towards the lower end would like to slow down or halt the integration process, while those towards the top end would like to increase the speed of integration.

The blue dots toward the upper right corner represent the members of the EPP group to which the Conservatives are affiliated. While most other members of the group are quite close along both dimensions, we see that there is a distinct subgroup of MEPs who share the position of the rest of the EPP when voting on issues along the left-right axis, but not on the pro-anti integration axis. Upon closer investigation, it becomes clear that this group consists almost exclusively of members of the British Conservative Party.

The British Conservatives hence do already make use of the possibility to defect from the EPP on integration issues, which is where they essentially disagree with conservatives or Christian democrats from the continent. It is therefore difficult to see what they have to gain from forming a new and more exclusive group of the Eurosceptic centre-right.

Indeed, they may have more to lose than gain. Committee chairs, and the responsibility of drafting EP positions on legislation at the committee stage, are allocated among the party groups in proportion to their size. As EPP is the biggest party group, it also has the largest share of these spoils. And, with the British Conservative Party representing one the biggest party delegations within the group, their MEPs currently enjoy a large share of these spoils.

Forming a rival party group with a handful of MEPs from other countries will not only reduce the influence of the Conservative Party in shaping the position of EPP on most legislation; it will also mean that MEPs from the Conservative party will obtain less influential roles than they currently enjoy as a large delegation within the largest party group. The move will reduce the overall size of EPP, and hence their total share of committee spoils. These spoils will not be given to the Conservative party in a much smaller group, as it is first allocated amongst the party group on the basis of their total size, not the size of any one national delegation. The biggest winner would therefore be the Party of European Socialists. The consequence of David Cameron’s pledge would be a strengthening of the integrationist and social democratic influence in the European Parliament.

The behaviour of British politicians on the European scene has often been deemed irrational, and as such the Conservative Party has a long tradition to heed to. However, if realpolitik and pragmatism are still essential Conservative values, Cameron and his party should stop and think again.
Could Labour contribute to a progressive agenda in Europe?

By Øivind Bratberg

Labour on European soil. What is the social democratic vision of Europe? If there is such a vision, what could be the contributions to it from the British side of the Channel? Both questions are worth asking as the last fifteen years have brought renewed vigour to the idea that social democracy may have something to offer at the EU level. The Union, it seems, has changed character from an essentially free-market arena to a regulatory regime where the left can finally fight for its own political values.

While this perception of a European political space has been a core idea of the French socialists, for example, since the years of Mitterand, it has taken the British left much longer time to accept it. Historically, social democracy was closely attached to the nation-state, where macroeconomic control and public welfare were essential concerns. British Labour has been even more oriented towards the domestic level than most of its European sister parties. As most other leftist movements, it had its share of internationalism during the inter-war years, with the League of Nations, the Russian Revolution and the rise of fascism as important issues, and with a party leader in James Ramsay MacDonald who was much concerned with international affairs.

Perhaps, the self-sufficiency of the British left had a clearer point of departure with Clement Attlee’s post-war government (1945-51), which was given the task of rebuilding Britain and forging a welfare state. Except for the emerging dismantling of the Empire, Attlee’s government never put much emphasis (and certainly little ideological emphasis) on foreign affairs. Although Britain was linked to the continent through NATO and collective defence, to Labour the idea of party political alignment at the European level was irrelevant.

To these circumstancs of the post-war era we may add a set of more permanent causes of Labour’s uneasy relationship with the European left. Interestingly, some of these features seem today to be in a process of change, which may suggest that the relevance of Europe to Labour—and vice versa—could be on a different and altogether more promising track.

The first bar to a genuine engagement between Labour and its European sister parties relates to the particularities of British social democracy. From its beginning as the Labour Representation Committee in 1900, the party has been a remarkable blend of trade unionism, ethical socialism and progressive reform. The party has been, in other words, a very broad movement, uniting everything from communists to the British breed of Christian socialists.

No real split occurred in the party over the Russian Revolution; no revolutionary schemes were seriously conceived. In its parliamentary politics, the Labour Party of the first industrialised country of the world proved to be a mature, yet near-sighted wanderer - more concerned with supplying the kitchen tables and keeping factories at work than with the ideological or internationalist dimension of politics.

Secondly, while Labour has been a party of the left it has also been deeply affected by the British economic model, where the virtues of the market, personal liberties and a taste for the self-made man have been far more prevalent than on the European left.

“While Labour has been a party of the left it has also been deeply affected by the British economic model, where the virtues of the market, personal liberties and a taste for the self-made man have been far more prevalent than on the European left.”

On the ideological side, consider Anthony Crosland’s classic The Future of Socialism (1956). Where was Europe in Crosland’s vision of social democracy, other than as an irrelevance to the pursuit of essentially national goals? Later, especially during the 1970s and early 1980s, the British left would distance itself even more from Europe, conceiving of the Common Market no longer as an irrelevance but as a threat against social democracy at the national level. The force of this argument would of course be severely weakened by eighteen years of Thatcherism when Labour found that Brussels could actually be a source of mitigating some of the harsh effects of the free market economy.

Labour’s change of approach to Europe was a combined effect of Thatcher’s policies at home and the changing powers of Brussels. During the last decade-and-a-half, the EU has moved from a common market to a Union where foreign and security policy, defence, currency and many aspects of home affairs (such as asylum and immigration) are now subject to inter- or supranational decisions. Meanwhile, enlargement has brought a whole number of Central and East European countries into the fold.
What have these new policy areas done to Labour's approach towards the EU? Accounts typically focus on British awkwardness: reluctance to contribute financially, non-participation in the Schengen area as well as the euro. What is typically forgotten is how Britain under the present Labour government has contributed to selected areas such as the Lisbon process (designed to enhance the EU’s competitiveness), the common foreign and security policy (where Britain and France play the major roles) and on enlargement (where the British approach has been far more constructive than that of France). Meanwhile, Britain's economy has fared consistently better over the last decade than the eurozone, Blair and Brown's economic model has become something of an ideal - some would say, due to its non-ideological appeal and focus on growth and stability.

If we return to our three traditional barriers for Labour in Europe it is obvious that key factors in the relationship have changed. On the first point, the particular nature of British social democracy: the twenty years since the mid-1980s have seen a cautious Europeanisation of Labour. This implies a more cooperative approach to its sister states. The emphasis on competitiveness, and enterprise and industry should go. While Labour under Blair and Brown have moved Britain and its fellow member states towards a closer unity on the issues discussed above. Meanwhile, Blair's old ally Peter Mandelson holds the key post as EU Trade Commissioner. At a time when the guidelines for world trade are under continuous negotiation, this is a very powerful position indeed. Few political leaders have greater influence than Mandelson over how globalisation is to be handled, what kind of regulation the international market place should be subject to and how developing countries should be assisted. The Commissioner's role is most evidently displayed in the WTO process where he alone represents the block of EU member states.

Mandelson's role also has significance for the Party of European Socialists (PES), the umbrella organisation for social democratic parties in the European Parliament. Adaptation and renewal have been ever-returning topics on the agenda of the left. Under the leadership of Poul Nyrup Rasmussen, former Danish prime minister, the PES seems to have arrived at a consensus where what is often called the Scandinavian model represents an ideal. Flexicurity is the convenient term for how Denmark has responded to the challenges of globalisation: a highly flexible labour market, with much emphasis on education and a qualified workforce. This is supported by a limited welfare state with strong incentives to work.

If this description of flexicurity sounds familiar, it is also because its principles have been essential to New Labour's reformulated policies. The concept of the enabling state captures this attempt at making the individual capable of catering for his or her destiny, with welfare playing the role of keeping people in work. This is a curious mix of strands from the British social democratic tradition with liberalism and the work ethic that was so successfully exported to the United States.

Now, there are different ways of discussing the relevance of social democracy in today's EU, and much of what is communicated by Mandelson and Nyrup Rasmussen amounts to recommendations for national parties rather than policy being decided at the EU level. This is also where the leadership of Tony Blair as well as Gordon Brown is particularly relevant. Leadership by example has always been a standard British trademark, and there is much in this also in the way Labour under Blair and Brown have approached party alliances in the EU. Exporting the British model is an obvious concern for Brown today, especially since he on supranational issues is handicapped by Britain's non-participation in the euro, Schengen and other key areas of cooperation.

Tellingly, with regard to policy learning it is often the centre right that has been listening most closely to Labour's message in Europe. José María Aznar and Silvio Berlusconi were both courted by Blair, while Brown today preaches the New Labour message about market flexibility and targeted welfare to Angela Merkel and Nicolas Sarkozy. Labour, it seems, has placed itself close to the political centre in Europe.

Few if any on the European left have embraced globalisation and international trade to the extent as Labour. Indeed the French socialists would, for example, not accept much of Labour's prescribed policies in Europe. Yet, British common sense holds a strong force of argument, particularly where one can speak from a position of superior economic growth. Tony Blair [...] brought an initially hostile European Parliament close to a standing ovation with his ideas of where Europe should go."

"[T]he French socialists for example would not accept much of Labour's prescribed policies in Europe. Yet, British common sense holds a strong force of argument, particularly where one can speak from a position of superior economic growth. Tony Blair [...] brought an initially hostile European Parliament close to a standing ovation with his ideas of where Europe should go."

If this description of flexicurity sounds familiar, it is also because its principles have been essential to New Labour's reformulated policies. The concept of the enabling state captures this attempt at making the individual capable of catering for his or her destiny, with welfare playing

Peter Mandelson, EU Commissioner for Trade: Few leaders have greater influence over the scope and direction of globalisation. © European Community, 2008
The Metric Martyr and the awkward dimension of Britain’s membership

Imperial measures. Britain’s relationship with the EU has often been described as that of an “awkward” or “reluctant” partner. It has been argued that the British have never quite warmed to the idea of a community for close European cooperation and that their decision to apply for membership was caused more by dire necessity than any real enthusiasm for the project.

The British view of the EEC and later EU was then, and remains today, primarily one of a “necessary evil”, and while not all Britons see themselves as Eurosceptics, the British approach to the EU – once a member of the community – has often been one of non-cooperation or reluctance to accept further integration.

Few examples serve as a better illustration of this awkward aspect of Britain’s membership than the story about the Metric Martyr, Steven Thoburn.

Steven Thoburn was a greengrocer who became famous in 2000 for selling his fruit and vegetables in imperial measurements, that is, the old British measurements which were meant to have been gradually phased out in favour of the metric system following Britain’s entry into the EEC in 1973.

Using the imperial system to measure loose quantity products such as fruit & veg was illegal according to an EU directive (though arguably permitted by an Act of the British Parliament) and in April 2000, Thoburn received a warning from the Sunderland City Council Trading Standards Officers that his scales would be confiscated if he continued to price and sell his goods using the imperial system. Thoburn, however, refused to comply, insisting that he only wished to use a system his customers were familiar with.

In July 2000, two Trading Standards Officers accompanied by two Policemen came to Thoburn’s stall and seized his scales. Thoburn decided to demand their return, and the case eventually ended up in court. By then, Thoburn had gained the support of organisations such as the British Weights and Measures Association, the UK Independence Party, some members of the Conservative Party and, notably, the Sun newspaper which launched a “Free The Sunderland Scales”-campaign.

An ad hoc organisation entitled “The Metric Martyr Defence Fund” was set up to provide financial support for the legal action, but solid finances not with standing, Thoburn’s legal campaign proved unsuccessful. He first lost his case in the Magistrates Court, then appealed to the High Court where he also lost, before he and his legal team took the case to the highest court of appeal in the UK – the House of Lords.

The Law Lords, however, upheld the conviction of the High Court, which meant that all options for appeal within the UK legal system had been exhausted. Thoburn and his legal advisors now decided to pursue legal action outside of the UK, by claiming that the refusal to let Steven Thoburn use imperial measurements was an infringement of his right of free speech, and the case was brought before the European Court of Human Rights at Strasbourg in 2002.

Two years later, the court dismissed Thoburn’s case, and any plans of a continuation of the campaign came to a halt when Thoburn died suddenly of a heart attack in March 2004.

Shortly afterwards The Defence Fund issued a “Tribute to Steven Thoburn”, of which the following is an excerpt:

"In a way, the people inhabiting the island of Britain have never really been or become Europeans, and the sense of being set apart from Europe is underlined by the view that there is a “European” way of doing things...

However, he became the first person to be charged and prosecuted under the Metrification Regulations for ‘selling a pound of bananas.’ What was exposed in the court case that followed and subsequent appeals highlighted the fact that laws made by Brussels now had supremacy over British law, but Steve was determined to fight to clear his name. The case was rejected by the European Court of Human Rights a few weeks ago, but Steve vowed to continue the fight, declaring, ‘we may not beat the Government but we will win in the court of the people.’

His relentless battle became a symbol for upholding the British way of life.(1)

Apart from the rather glaring inconsistency and paradox which lies in Thoburn and his advisors decision to take their case to the European Court of Human Rights, following their defeat at the highest court of appeal in Britain, the arguments they raised point towards several more generally held British objections to the EU.

The most obvious is the question of Parliamentary Sovereignty versus the supremacy of EU law over the legislation of individual member states. Is it acceptable that an institution outside the UK – which is not accountable to the British electorate – can pass legislation that supersedes laws passed by the Crown-in-Parliament as the sovereign body within the UK?

Rebels. Steven Thoburn and his fellow Metric Martyr and supporter Neil Herron (Thoburn to the right) selling bananas “by the pound” © BBC, 2002

(1) Tribute to Steven Thoburn: http://www.metricmartyrs.co.uk/dynamicPage.aspx?id=56
Continued: The Metric Martyr...

This points towards the alleged democratic deficit within the EU, and raises questions as to how traditional “British Liberties” can be secured if Parliament is no longer sovereign within the UK.

On a cultural level, the issue of metrification touches on a longstanding British feeling of separateness, and of being different from continental Europe.

There is still among many Britons a sense of “us and them” with respect to continental Europe, which is perhaps best illustrated by the use of the terms the EU and Europe as synonyms in British debates on issues relating to the community.

In a way, the people inhabiting the island of Britain have never really been or become Europeans, and the sense of being set apart from Europe is underlined by the view that there is a “European” way of doing things, which is fundamentally different from and inferior to the “British” way. Nowadays this is more apparent than in the supposed overly bureaucratic nature of the EU and its institutions.

The “continental” love of rules and regulations down to the minutest detail is neatly contrasted with the pragmatic and common sense-approach of the British. As the campaigners against metrification argued: what is the purpose of forcing the British to use the metric system? Recent developments whereby the EU might relax the ban on imperial measures seem to indicate that they may well be winning this particular argument.

British Politics Society, Norway – 2007 in retrospect

March on. In view of its promising and inspirational inaugural year, the board of the British Politics Society, Norway entered 2007 with great optimism and many plans for the society’s future.

Accordingly, when the winter issue of British Politics Review was published in the beginning of February; the newsletter’s number of pages had been tripled from a modest four to an ambitious twelve. The issue was entitled “A relationship under construction: 300 years of Anglo-Scottish Union”, and offered a wide range of articles on the 300th anniversary of British Union. The distinguished group of writers was topped by Sir Malcolm Rifkind, one of the Conservative Party’s most prominent spokesmen on Scotland, and Thorbjørn Jagland, President of the Norwegian Storting. Other contributors included Richard Wyn Jones, Director of the Institute of Welsh Politics at the University of Wales; Annette Grotli, journalist with the Norwegian national broadcast (NRK) and Helle Linne Eriksen, a former MA student of British civilization at the University of Oslo.

The 300th anniversary was also marked with two events under the auspices of the British Politics Society. At the end of April, BPS co-hosted a feast of traditional British cuisine with the Department for British Union. The distinguished group of writers was topped by Sir Malcolm Rifkind, one of the Conservative Party’s most prominent spokesmen on Scotland, and Thorbjørn Jagland, President of the Norwegian Storting. Other contributors included Richard Wyn Jones, Director of the Institute of Welsh Politics at the University of Wales; Annette Grotli, journalist with the Norwegian national broadcast (NRK) and Helle Linne Eriksen, a former MA student of British civilization at the University of Oslo. The society was immensely proud to have the University of Dundee; Allan Macinnnes from the University of Aberdeen; Bill Miller from the University of Glasgow and Charlie Jeffrey from the University of Edinburgh. The four offered their accounts of the British Union historically and today. The speeches were followed by a Q&A-session, led by chairman of the day Atle L. Wold.

In the beginning of May, the spring issue of British Politics Review was published. This time, the overall topic was the rise, fall and resurgence of British liberalism. Among the many prominent contributors to this issue were two former leaders of the British Liberal Democrats, Lord Ashdown and Charles Kennedy. In addition, first class commentaries were offered by former party leader of the Norwegian liberal party Venstre, Odd Einar Dernæ; senior lecturer at the Department of Modern Languages at the University of Umeå, Philip Grey and Ph.D fellow at the Department of Political Science at the University of Oslo, Dag Einar Thorsen.

With the change of political leadership in London from Tony Blair to Gordon Brown in June, the prospects and challenges facing the new prime minister and his cabinet was a natural choice of topic for the summer issue of British Politics Review. This time, our special guest writer was former Norwegian minister of finance, Per-Kristian Foss, who offered his views on Gordon Brown’s legacy as British chancellor. Other guest writers included post-doctoral researcher at the Department of History at the University of Bergen, Sissel Rosland; research associate at the Center on International Cooperation at the New York University, Richard Gowan; former senior lecturer in British Civilization at the University of Portsmouth, David J. Hutchinson; publishing editor of Fagbladet forlaget, Jan Erik Miestad, and senior research fellow at the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, Andreas Selliass.

By the end of August, the society accomplished its first ordinary Annual General Meeting. (Due to one of the board members’ unexpected relocation to Japan at the beginning of the year, the AGM was postponed from April.) At this meeting, Kristin M. Haugevik and Atle L. Wold were re-elected as, respectively, vice president and scholarly responsible for another year. Other key topics on the agenda included the acceptance of the society’s annual accounts for 2006 and budget for 2007. Furthermore, it was unanimously decided that the membership fee would be increased from 50 NOK to 100 NOK for one year as from 1 October 2007.

In mid-November, the autumn issue of British Politics Review was in print. This time, the relationship between the British monarchy and democracy was the centre of attention, opening with special guest writer Labour MP Jeremy Corbyn’s fundamental question as to whether Britain is in fact a democracy. Furthermore, interesting articles were offered by journalist and royal commentator Carl-Erik Grinstad; NRK correspondent in London Kari-Grete Alstad and historian Trond Noreen Isaksen. In addition, Dag Einar Thorsen reprised his guest role from the spring edition of British Politics Review.

The British Politics Society, Norway received financial support in 2007 from the Department of Political Science and the Department of Literature, Area Studies and European Languages at the University of Oslo. In addition, we had income from paying members (35 at the turn of the year). The available funds in 2007 have been directed at covering the expenses for everyday management. The society’s main expenditure continues to be the printing and distribution of British Politics Review, which currently has a distribution of approximately 200 paper copies, in addition to electronic distribution.
Britain in Europe 1973-2008
still the awkward partner?

British Politics Society, Norway, in collaboration with the Department of Political Science at the University of Oslo, will host a seminar to mark the 35 years of British EU membership.

Time: 15 April 2008 at 10:15-12:00
Venue: Aud. 3 Eilert Sundts hus, Blindern (University of Oslo)

Programme:
10:15 – 10:20 Welcome by Øivind Bratberg, President of British Politics Society, Norway
10:20 – 10:40 Elisabeth Walaas, State Secretary: Opening address
10:40 – 11:10 Kenneth Clarke, Member of Parliament: Britain’s European dream
11:10 – 11:30 Ian Bache, University of Sheffield: The quiet Europeanisation of British politics
11:30 – 12:00 Questions and debate, chaired by Atle L. Wold

Elisabeth Walaas is State Secretary in the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. She was deputy head of the Norwegian delegation to Brussels from 2001 to 2004 and has also served as ambassador to Croatia prior to her present role.

Rt. Hon. Kenneth Clarke is a British Conservative Member of Parliament for Rushcliffe and a former Home Secretary (1992-93) and Chancellor of the Exchequer (1993-97) in John Major’ Conservative governments.

Dr. Ian Bache is a Reader at the Dept. of Political Science, University of Sheffield. Among his many publications on Britain and Europe he recently authored Europeanization and Multilevel Governance: Cohesion Policy in the European Union and Britain (2008).

Chair: Atle L. Wold
Senior Lecturer, Dept. of Literature, Area Studies and European Languages, University of Oslo and scholarly responsible, British Politics Society, Norway

All readers of British Politics Review are heartily welcome.
Registration by e-mail to: Øivind Bratberg: oivind.bratberg@isv.uio.no

Membership
Would you like to become a member of the British Politics Society, Norway? Membership is open to everyone and includes:
- Subscription to four editions of British Politics Review
- Access to any event organised by the society
- The right to vote at our annual general meetings

Your membership comes into force as soon as the membership fee, NKR 100,- for one year, has been registered at our account 6094.05.67788.

For more information see our website at www.britishpoliticssociety.no

Forthcoming edition of British Politics Review
What remains of Britain’s imperial legacy and what is the significance of the Commonwealth today?

The next issue of British Politics Review looks upon some of the essential characteristics of the British Empire. We will investigate some of the ambitions and driving forces behind the imperial verve as well as the ways in which the Empire was implemented.

From a contemporary perspective, we ask what remains of Britain’s post-colonial ties and what has been the role of the Commonwealth as point of departure for foreign policy initiatives and venue for political coordination. In essence, to what extent can Britain benefit from its Commonwealth ties in its search for a maintained relevance in international politics today?

British Politics Review will look closer at both the historical and contemporary dimension of Britain’s global role.

Contributions on the subject from readers of British Politics Review are very welcome. Please get in touch with the editors for further details.

The spring edition of British Politics Review is due to arrive in May 2008.