

The British Perspective of the Maastricht Treaty: Using Descriptive Narratives to Analyse Political Speeches Before and After Maastricht's Coming of Force

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Introduction

- Maastricht Treaty: greater European integration and establishing the European Union (EU)
 - However, its significance can certainly be argued
 - Since the treaty's formation and coming into force: widespread acceptance of its overall concept and that of the EU has been far from unanimous
 - The reluctance to 'follow suite' and follow the Germanic and Francophobic philosophy, typically, has come from that of their British counterparts
- the British political perspective towards the Maastricht treaty is of interest

Study Aim

- to further the understanding of the (opposing) British opinion towards European integration in general and the EMU and the Social Charta in detail
- To accomplish this, the methodological approach of descriptive narratives will be applied to four political speeches, two before and two after the treaty's coming into force with alternating speeches from Labour party and the Conservative party

Methods

- In order to conduct the analysis, the four aforementioned speeches include:
 - Neil Kinnock 1991 (Labour)**
 - John Major 1991 (Conservative)**
 - John Major 1992 (Conservative)**
 - John Smith 1993 (Labour)**
- To a large extent, the selection process was on the basis of availability

Methods

- the speeches were evaluated utilising the methodological approach of **descriptive narratives**
 - help to explain “the relationship between individual stories” (Sendelowski 1991: 163)
- The speeches were analysed with help of **discourse analysis**
 - examine the notions + perceptions of the political leaders
 - discourse: set of linguistic categories relating to an object (Bryman 2012: 528)



Methods

Keywords: pound, euro, European Monetary Union, Social Charta, opt-out, currency, sovereignty, European Central Bank, Bank of England, national interests

Analysis 1. Neil Kinnock 1991 (Labour)

- Speech was held in the House of Commons, one day after the Maastricht Summit
 - Strongly criticises Major's role during the negotiation of the Maastricht Treaty
 - Holds a strict positive view on deeper European integration
 - Welcomes EMU and Social Charta
 - Fears an isolation of Britain in Europe due to the opt-outs
 - Fears a lack of power: less influence on decisions in the EU
- British interests will be served best by full involvement and a maximum of influence



Analysis 2. John Major 1991 (Conservative)

- He followed Margaret Thatcher as Prime Minister and led the Conservatives from 1990 until 1997
- Major oversaw Britain's longest period of economic growth and was known to be a more pro European politician than Margaret Thatcher
- The speech we selected was his first as Conservative Party leader in 1991 outlining his vision for the party



Analysis 2. John Major 1991

- Major is in favour of the European idea
 - Outlines his belief in Europe
 - Underscores that his opinion is supported by people in charge of Britain's "prosperity"
 - Using his economic expertise and the wish for a fostering British economy to market the Idea of a closer European Union
- However, he is not free of scepticism
 - Does not want that Britain will loose its power to make own decisions
 - He states that he will not agree on deeper integration at Britain's expense

Analysis 3. John Major 1992 (Conservative)

- The speech was held after the Conservative's election victory and the signing of the Maastricht Treaty
- Outlines chances that go along with an “ever closer Union”
 - Prosperity by establishing a common market
 - Peace (healing the scar dividing Europe)



Analysis 3. John Major 1992

- Addresses concerns about the European Union
 - Losing the ability to make decisions (giving up sovereignty)
 - sticking to agreements made by other Member States
 - Fears to lose Britain's flexibility and freedom
 - He wants to keep the British currency

Analysis 3. John Major 1992

- Generally pro-European
- Critical about the other Member States
- Critical about giving up sovereignty
 - In favour of economical benefits but sceptical about “duties” that come along with these benefits
 - He prefers to follow the intergouvernmental method without loosing national sovereignty
 - Britain’s interests will come first



Analysis 4. John Smith 1993 (Labour)

- The final speech evaluated was addressed by the at-the-time Labour leader John Smith in 1993
- Post-imperial speech held in Brighton where John Smith was outlining the key agendas he believed put the Labour party ahead of their rivals, the Conservatives.



Analysis 4. John Smith 1993

- With current international issues being of particular interest, Smith uses a discussion of these to remind the audience of their importance, the internationalist dimensions of the Labour Party
- Giving mention to such issues from the offset already gives notion to Smith's perspective on the importance of international politics
- Smith highlights how the rule of a Conservative Government, with particular respect to neglecting international politics, has led to various negative consequences for the country.

Analysis 4. John Smith 1993

- Following the 'trash talk' aimed towards the current economic affairs the Conservative government has left the country in, Smith once more establishes his position over the Social Chapter
- The stance of both Smith is that of the EU being a strong and powerful socially enhancing tool which they wish to make most of
 - Smith wants Britain to be more involved in European politics
 - He focuses more on social issues in the EU and less on economic ones

Conclusion

- The narratives of the Labour and the Conservative leaders differ during 1991 and 1993
- Labour leaders (Kinnoch and Smith):
 - want Britain to be more involved in European integration and think that the opt-outs will harm Britain
 - European integration seems to be the only viable answer to Britains economic issues
 - Kinnock and Smith do not differ in their perception

Conclusion

- Conservative leader (Major):
 - He is pro-European, however, he is more sceptical than the Labour leaders
 - Prefers a stronger intergovernmental cooperation between independent Member States
 - Sceptical about the other Member States
 - He does not want to give up national sovereignty and want to pursue Britain's interests
 - Major is strongly driven by economic interests

Discussion Questions

- 1) To what extent do the personal characteristics of the political leaders influence the parties' perspectives towards the Maastricht Treaty and deeper European integration?
- 2) In what way might relate the former Conservative's perspective of John Major to the current Conservative's perspective of David Cameron?