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## The question that divided Britain

The lessons of the 1975 referendum in light of  
the 2016 referendum

Bachelor's project in European Studies

Supervisor: Michael J. Geary

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

On Thursday, 5 June, 1975 the first ever nationwide referenda was held in Britain, and the referenda of continued membership in the European Community (EC) was the issue at hand. The public were asked to vote “Yes” or “No” to the following question: “Do you think that the United Kingdom should stay in the European Community (the Common Market)?” Four decades later, the British public had to once again cast their vote on a similar question, namely: “Should the United Kingdom remain a member of the European Union or leave the European Union?” The British referendum on membership held on June 23, 2016 has brought back memories and a recollection of the referenda held 40 years earlier - thus establishing a sense of déjà vu. Even though the results of the referendums turned out to be different, David Cameron should as a former student of history, politics and economics recognize that past history of British politics could offer insight and guidance when it comes to crucial issues concerning the country of Britain, using the words of Santayana; “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.”<sup>1</sup> The 1975 and 2016 referendum resembled each other, in terms of practical implementation but expansions within the European Union (EU) and the development of Internet and social media platforms were crucial distinctions, which shifted the debate.

The research question for the BA dissertation is to look at what lessons the 1975 referendum could provide, if any, for the 2016 referendum. This dissertation set out to examine the story of the referendum from the view of two major political parties in Britain and also how the media presented the debate to the British public.

The aims and objectives of this BA dissertation is to look at how the referenda of 1975 is important for understanding the 2016 referenda. By exploring splits within the Cabinets and the approach of the Labour Party and the Conservative Party, we can see how the European question has refined British politics. Seeing that the 2016 referendum is not an exact replica of the 1975 referenda it is nevertheless important to acknowledge how it has affected British politics and its way of dealing with the European question. The purpose of this BA

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<sup>1</sup> Santayana, George. 1905. *The Life of Reason: The Phases of Human Progress*. New York: Dover Publications.

dissertation is to analyse how knowledge of past history can contribute towards a roadmap for David Cameron and his government.

Throughout this BA dissertation, the work of David Butler and Uwe Kitzinger *The 1975 referendum* has been used as a guide through this process. Their work informed my dissertation by providing the basis of the 1975 referendum; from the renegotiation, campaigning to the outcome. Butler and Kitzinger has set out to tell the story of the 1975 referendum from three perspectives - as a defining moment in Britain's relationship with Europe, an event that evolved the political life in Britain and constitutional modernization.<sup>2</sup> Butler and Kitzinger examines the renegotiation and campaigning, and what the political parties and British public thought of European cooperation. The support for British membership were wide, but it did not run deep. This dissertation will analyse which lessons David Cameron and his government could use the 1975 referendum as a guide, and setting the basis of Butler and Kitzingers work in comparison to the 2016 referendum.

The methodology for this BA dissertation is a comparative analysis focusing on the road leading to the 1975 referendum, where the British Government negotiated a deal with the European Community in advance of the British accession into the Community. In search of better terms of membership, Prime Minister Harold Wilson and his government renegotiated concessions for the UK from other European governments in 1974-1975 followed by a referendum which would decide whether Britain should stay inside of the Community or withdraw after only two years of membership. For the sake of this dissertation, my primary sources have been speeches and newspaper articles dated back to 1975, and I have supplemented my dissertation with supporting secondary sources in the topic.

Chapter one explores different opinions within the Labour Party in relation to the British debate on Europe and how splits within the Cabinet lead to a broad division between party members, and how this affected the campaign and referendum itself.

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<sup>2</sup> Butler, David, and Uwe Kitzinger. 1976. *The 1975 Referendum*. London: The Macmillan Press LTD. 279.

Chapter two examines how the Conservative Party tackled the issue of Europe and the different opinions within the party in 1975. What Looking at Margaret Thatcher and Jeremy Corbyn's roles during the 2016 referendum

Chapter three analyzes the role of the media and how the European debate has changed in light of developments from analogue to digital media. The 1975 referendum consisted mostly of the analogue media, such as newspapers, television and radio broadcasting. The development of Internet and social media platforms in the 1990s-early 2000s, changed the way campaigns, to some extent, were conducted. The 2016 referendum were also dependent on the analogue media, however the development of digital media - social media platforms and the Internet - brought the aspect of online influence into the debate, which the 1975 referendum did not have. Applying explicitly two media-theories, *normalization hypothesis* and *equalization hypothesis* in this chapter will help us understand the importance of Internet in political campaigns.

Chapter four analyzes and compares the 1975 and 2016 referenda and explores how far the 1975 could be considered a roadmap for David Cameron and the 2016 referendum.



## Chapter 2: A question of “Yes” or “No”

It was Edward Heath and his Conservative Government whom first tried to bring Britain into the European Community (EC) in the early 1970s, and Heath led the negotiations which culminated into Britain’s entry into the EC on 1 January, 1973. When the British Parliament were to vote on the European Communities Bill, the Conservative Party did not have the necessary Members of Parliament (MPs) to reach majority, even though they had support of the Liberal Party - which were supporting the process of moving towards Europe. This led to a protest by 69 pro-European Labour Party MPs where they defied the official approach of their own party and voted against their own party. 20 other MPs declined to vote on the matter, thus helping the Heath government push through the European Communities Bill in the House of Commons in 1971. The Labour Party collectively did not back the accession of Britain into the EC in 1973, and Harold Wilson, as the Leader of the Opposition, was very much critical of the terms of entry negotiated by Heath. The main aim of the original terms of entry was to allow European Union laws into the domestic laws of Britain, which allowed for the UK to become a member of the European Community and for the accession of the UK into the three European Communities; the Common Market, European Atomic Energy Community (EURATOM) and the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), through the European Communities Act and European Communities Bill of 1972. Wilson were critical since those acts would mean to hand over authority to a supranational organization. Wilson promised to renegotiate those original terms if the Labour Party returned to power.<sup>3</sup>

The various opinions of the EC within the Labour Party shaped a split inside the party since cooperation between Western European countries became a reality after World War II. The changing attitude of the Labour Party several times during the 1970s came as results of either changes within the Community or changes in perceptions of the Community and its strengths, weaknesses and overall purpose. When Wilson reclaimed his position as Prime Minister after the February 1974 general election, the Labour Party switched to backing British membership as a result of .<sup>4</sup> Following the general election, a minority government (hung parliament)

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<sup>3</sup> Vaughne Miller, “The 1974-1975 UK Renegotiation of EEC Membership and Referendum,” House of Commons Library Briefing Paper no.7253. London: House of Commons Library.

<sup>4</sup> Julie Smith, “The European dividing line in party politics,” *The Royal Institute of International Affairs*, 88 (2012), 1280

together with the support of the Ulster Unionist were formed, seeing as the Conservative Party were unable to form a government with the amount of seat they got - despite receiving more votes. In an effort to gain majority, Wilson announced that a second general election in October 1974 would take place. Wilson took a risk by carry out another general election, seeing that it wasn't certain he would gain majority. However, the Labour Party won and secured a majority government by receiving three more seats. David Cameron pledged to hold a referendum if the Conservative Party won the next general election, in a way this could compare to the promise Wilson took. Wilson pledged to hold a referendum if the Labour Party returned to power, while David Cameron promised to hold a referendum if the public voted to keep the Conservative Party in power during the 2015 General Election. Even though it is not a direct similarity and for the purpose of this dissertation, I think this connection is relevant in understanding the underlying reasons for announcing a referendum.

A year after Britain had joined the EC, the subject of British membership were still highly controversial and anti-European Cabinet members like Tony Benn (Secretary of State for Industry), Barbara Castle (Secretary of State for Health and Social Services) and Peter Shore (Secretary of State for Trade) raised their concerns over the EC. Anti-European Cabinet members either worked independently or through the National Referendum Campaign (NRC), but in fear of being accused of personal attack and boat-rocking together with the concern of Wilson's continued governing over the Cabinet after the referendum, Cabinet members were reluctant to voice their opinion.<sup>5</sup> Anti-European Cabinet members argued that loss of sovereignty and the problems they believed membership of the European Community would have for their transatlantic relationship with the United States of America (USA) would have negative influence on Britain. Throughout their time in opposition and as members of the Second Shadow Cabinet of Harold Wilson, Barbara Castle, Tony Benn and Peter Shore argued against British membership and their attitude towards the European Community did not change.<sup>6</sup> During the referendum campaign, the Cabinet members of the Labour Party which stood on the left side of the party and displayed their negative opinion towards the EC were lead by Tony Benn and Barbara Castle. Cabinet members who opposed

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<sup>5</sup> David Butler and Uwe Kitzinger, *The 1975 Referendum* (London: Macmillan Press LTD, 1976), 114-115.

<sup>6</sup> Paul Martin Gliddon, "The Labour government and the battle for public opinion in the 1975 referendum on the European Community," *Contemporary British History*, 31 (2017), 94

membership did it on economic grounds and loss of sovereignty.<sup>7</sup> On the other side of the debate, pro-European Cabinet members were led by Roy Jenkins (Home Secretary) and they supported Wilson in staying inside the EC based on trade, which would have disastrous consequences for British industry if Britain withdrew; threats of higher prices in food products making it hard to trade with low cost producers outside of Europe and safeguarding the economic interest of the Commonwealth and developing countries for secured access to the British market.<sup>8</sup> Wilson tried to solve the division within the Labour Party by giving into the demands of the anti-Europeans and promised to renegotiate the original terms of British entry into the European Community and hold a consultative referendum in Labour's February 1974 election manifesto. By requesting other EC leaders for concessions in bilateral meetings with other EC governments, Wilson started to renegotiate and discuss Britain's original terms of entry. The major pressing issues concerning the UK were the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), the UK contributions towards the EC budget, the goal of an Economic and Monetary Union, the harmonisation of VAT and parliamentary sovereignty in pursuing regional, industrial and fiscal policies - initially the whole accession agreement. These issues were so problematic for the party because Britain believed that they provided more towards the budget than they received in return, and they were not delighted to surrender sovereignty to a transnational organization where all decisions were taken outside of the UK. The promise of the consultative referendum were adjusted, and in the Labour Party's October 1974 manifesto the promised referendum was guaranteed to be binding - no matter the outcome.<sup>9</sup>

A Cabinet committee was appointed to handle the renegotiations and consisted of Prime Minister Wilson, the Foreign Secretary James Callaghan and other departmental ministers - both pro- and anti-European. The main achievements of the negotiations were shown to the House of Commons in March 1975, and included modifications to the Common Agriculture Policy, a correction of the unfair budgetary commitment where the UK would get £125 million a year in refunds, taking control over Britain's balance of payment through relevant articles of the Treaty of Rome, increased cooperation with former Commonwealth countries

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<sup>7</sup> Michael Cockerell, "EU referendum... lessons from 1975," *BBC News*.

<sup>8</sup> Vaughne Miller, "The 1974-1975 UK Renegotiation of EEC Membership and Referendum," House of Commons Library Briefing Paper no.7253. London: House of Commons Library.

<sup>9</sup> Vaughne Miller, "The 1974-1975 UK Renegotiation of EEC Membership and Referendum," House of Commons Library Briefing Paper no.7253. London: House of Commons Library.

secured continuing access to the British market and trade and other achievements. The purpose of the renegotiations was an attempt to keep the Labour Party together and renegotiate terms they were critical towards. David Cameron also appointed a Europe Cabinet Committee to deal with issues related to the EU referendum, and pledged a similar commitment in 2013. His promise to guarantee a better deal for Britain before holding a referendum on the European question were, compared with Wilson's attempt, also seen as a strategy to end the debate surrounding British membership for good and to keep the Conservative Party unison in their politics.<sup>10</sup>

The Labour Party decided that they needed to come with a collective recommendation prior to the referendum, but before this decision were taken supporters of British withdrawal from the European Community and the anti-European Cabinet members Michael Foot (Secretary of State for Employment), Tony Benn and Peter Shore pressured Wilson for the opportunity to express their own views publicly ahead of a referendum. In November 1974, they wrote a letter where they conveyed that some ministers would support continued membership whatever the result of the negotiations while others felt that “despite the improvements of the terms may be, the loss of sovereignty implicit in membership would involve paying too high of a price.”<sup>11</sup> Wilson warned the Cabinet members of speaking publicly about the issue, since he wanted the Cabinet to stay on the same side in the referendum. The plan that the Cabinet would stand together with a joint decision backfired when Benn wrote a public letter to his constituents in 1975, where he said he backed Labour's manifesto commitment to renegotiate the terms of entry but he warned that a continued membership would mean “the end of Britain as a self-governing nation”. Even though Benn claimed he had merely explained the situation, other Cabinet ministers believed that Benn had broken the official Cabinet agreement to stay clear of discussing the European question until the New Year, when the collective recommendation of the party was going to be agreed on. Shore did also publicly express his opinion in a speech to the Fabian Society which made it clear that he was at odds with the official Labour Party policy. Instead of punishing Benn and Shore, Wilson issued a note to all of his Cabinet members about some of them “ventilating views on controversial

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<sup>10</sup> Vaughne Miller, “The 1974-1975 UK Renegotiation of EEC Membership and Referendum,” House of Commons Library Briefing Paper no.7253. London: House of Commons Library.

<sup>11</sup> Ollie Stone-Lee, “How Wilson handled his Euro split,” *BBC News*, 29.12.2005.

matters” without having the clearance of Downing Street nr. 10 and made it clear that he “reserve the right to disavow, as representative of government policy, speeches in respect of which those rules have not been complied with”. In January 1975, Benn explained that the letter had not broken the renegotiations but he had merely explained the situation. Wilson disagreed and said the government might “agree to disagree” but until a collective opinion is decided on, there must not be any impression of disorder noticeable for the public to detect. If Wilson had dismissed all of the anti-European Cabinet members, the internal conflict of the Labour Party would have been apparent for the British public and their position of power would have been weakened. The Cabinet officially decided to recommend staying inside the European Community and assured that ministers could campaign against the official government decision, since many had a long-held view on the topic. Opening the debate for ministers to publicly campaign can be seen as a strategy for avoiding more instances like Benn and Shore created and putting the Prime Minister in a position where he must resolve disobedience by firing several of his Cabinet members. Once the collective opinion of the Labour Party were taken, Cabinet members started to declare their intention of campaigning against their own party. Wilson assured the anti-European Cabinet members that even though he waived government collective responsibility it was by no means a licence to build a coordinated programme against the government or try to embarrass their ministerial colleagues.<sup>12</sup> David Cameron followed Wilson’s example of adjourning government collective responsibility and reassured his ministers that they were free to campaign on either side of the campaign.

The subject of British membership and its controversial nature formed Wilson’s decisions regarding the principle of membership; how to address public opinion, the timing of the campaign, willingness to campaign, professed strength of European commitment (in public at least) and to which scale they would campaign.<sup>13</sup> Wilson and James Callaghan (Foreign Secretary) avoided to openly discuss the new deal on EC membership until the Cabinet and the Labour Party had discussed it. He adopted a similar strategy to when he led Britain’s second attempt to join the EC in the 1960s - reluctant and cautious. Updates on the progress

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<sup>12</sup> Ollie Stone-Lee, “How Wilson handled his Euro split,” *BBC News*, 29.12.2005.

<sup>13</sup> Paul Martin Gliddon, “The Labour government and the battle for public opinion in the 1975 referendum on the European Community,” *Contemporary British History*, 31 (2017), 94

of the renegotiation were confined to conversations between Wilson and Callaghan. Wilson and Callaghan intentionally kept certain details of the renegotiations from Cabinet members, who were campaigning against the pro-Europeans, in fear of leaks etc. This left little opportunities for the Parliament and the public of Britain to debate aspects of the renegotiation.<sup>14</sup> In 2016, Cameron should learn from this and more frequently update the public and the Parliament on what progress has been made in order to avoid a growing suspicion that the authority is trying to undermine their opinion and keep Britain in the EU on only modestly improved terms.<sup>15</sup> After settling on the collective attitude of staying in the EC and giving Cabinet ministers the opportunity to campaign for either side, Callaghan declared that the renegotiations ended with success and for the ongoing campaign that was hugely important in order to persuade the British public to vote for staying in the European Community.

The pro-Market margin was a wider one than has ever swept any Government home in British history and despite a successful referendum for the pro-European, the referendum failed to resolve the divisions within the Labour Party. *The Guardian* wrote “The champagne corks of the pro-Marketees were still popping last night as Mr. Wilson returned to Downing Street to face a double crisis involving not only the menacing economic situation but also the continuing unity of his Government and his party.” The result of the referendum was clear; two-thirds voted to stay in the EC. Two days after the triumphant victory for the pro-European side, Wilson’s healing period started immediately and his focus was to rebuild the relationship between the victorious pro-Europeans and the defensive hostility of the anti-European section of the Labour Party.<sup>16</sup> Unfortunately, the strong divisions between the left-wing and the right-wing within the Labour Party made it difficult to retreat back to normal and Roy Jenkins loved working with like-minded Conservatives and Liberals in the referendum campaign that he decided to leave the Labour Party and instead form a new political party; the Social Democratic Party (SDP), which split the Labour Party further.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Paul Martin Gliddon, “The Labour government and the battle for public opinion in the 1975 referendum on the European Community,” *Contemporary British History*, 31 (2017), 94

<sup>15</sup> Matthew Elliott, “Seven lessons from Britain’s 1975 EEC referendum,” *The Telegraph*, 05.06.2015.

<sup>16</sup> *The Guardian*. “Twin crisis clouds Europhoria,” 07.06.1975.

<sup>17</sup> Michael Cockerell, “EU referendum... lessons from 1975,” *BBC News*.

Wilson stayed in power until 1979, when “The Winter of Discontent”<sup>18</sup> ended in a vote of no confidence. The Labour Party lost by one vote, where the results mandated a general election in which the Conservative Party won.

The splits within the Labour Party and criticism towards the original terms of entry, lead to the promise of a renegotiation and referendum. The divisions between Cabinet members shaped the delivery of the referendum, and put party members up against each other. When the outcome was clear, Wilson had the task of bringing his party back together.

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<sup>18</sup> See more on “The Winter of Discontent” in “Crisis? What Crisis?: The Callaghan Government and the British 'winter of Discontent'” (2013) by John Shepherd

### Chapter 3: The split of the Conservative Party

It was Prime Minister Edward Heath and his Conservative government that were responsible for pursuing the reactivated application which successfully concluded Britain's accession into the EC on 1 January 1973.<sup>19</sup> Heath was a committed pro-European whom put the relations with Europe before the special transatlantic relationship, and in an attempt to highlight the importance of the British entry, the Conservative newspaper *The Illustrated London News* wanted to mark Britain's entry into the European Community. Heath acknowledged that British entry would mean so much more to Britain than free trade and economic issues, it would also mean joining a community of people and benefit from a closer partnership with western European neighbours which will all work together rather than separately. "The Community which we are joining is far more than a Common Market. The European Community is a community of peoples, and in joining this new association of nations we are committing ourselves [...] to a close partnership with our western European neighbours in which we will all work together rather than separately."<sup>20</sup>

In the 1974 February General Election Conservative Manifesto Britain's foreign policy and attitude towards Europe and the World "to preserve peace and maintain the security and prosperity of the British nation."<sup>21</sup> The manifesto insisted that even though it was still too early to see how the extensive implications this historical step forward affected Britain, it was clearly that British national interest was better secured, both economic and political, within the European Community than they would have outside of it. The Conservative Party emphasized that the Community had developed and evolved over time and the Conservatives were almost completely satisfied with the package of the Community, but was open for "seeking changes where these are desirable."<sup>22</sup> The Conservatives settled the dangers of withdrawing from the European Community in their October 1974 manifesto, where they were certain that "withdrawal would confront us with the choice of almost total dependence on others or retreat into weak isolation. We reject such a bleak and impotent future for

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<sup>19</sup> Bill Coxall, Lynton Robins and Robert Leach, *Contemporary British Politics* (Macmillan International Higher Education, 1998), 40.

<sup>20</sup> Edward Heath, "Message from the Prime Minister," *The Illustrated London News*, December, 1972

<sup>21</sup> The Conservative and Unionist Party. "Firm Action for a Fair Britain." 1974.

<sup>22</sup> The Conservative and Unionist Party. "Firm Action for a Fair Britain." 1974.



Britain.”<sup>23</sup> The manifesto continued to adopt their foreign policy target of “preserving peace and maintain security” from the 1974 February manifesto and put extra focus on the positive aspects of the Common Market and the dangers of withdrawal - the abandonment of export opportunities, the decline of industrial development and the loss of jobs. Aspects of an eventual withdrawal that would give Britain less power and influence in the world. The Conservatives were frightened of a negative outcome of the 1975 referendum considering the uncertainty Britain would face if the partnership with Europe would break down into nothing. Britain would be left as an outsider - having nothing to say and the possibility to influence European politics would be of the table.

Margaret Thatcher (Leader of the Conservative Party and Leader of the Opposition) supported British membership in the European Community during the 1975 referendum, and her stance on Europe could be summed up in three words; “Yes, yes and yes.” She fought to keep Britain a part of the European Community and the benefits that it brought with it. During a television interview, she demanded that the British public used their voting rights; “it is absolutely vital that everyone should turn out in this referendum and vote yes. So that the question is over once and for all. We are really in Europe and ready to go ahead.”<sup>24</sup> Considering the key role Thatcher played in the 1975 campaign for keeping Britain in the European Community, one can see the role of Jeremy Corbyn (Leader of the Labour Party) during the 2016 campaign in comparison to Thatcher’s. There were much speculation on whether Corbyn would support the Remain-campaign in the 2016 referendum, since he had voted to leave the European Community in the 1975 referendum. Corbyn has said himself that “it is perfectly possible to be critical and still be convinced we need to remain a member”. One should think that his personal dilemma with the European Union would make him support the Leave-campaign, but after a meeting with the Party of European Socialists in Brussels; Corbyn stated that the Labour Party were committed to campaigning to stay in the European Union.<sup>25</sup> Corbyn recognize the need to change Europe, but the future challenges of climate change, cyber-crime, terrorism and huge refugee movements requires a collective international action through the European Union, which is vital in facing these challenges.

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<sup>23</sup> The Conservative and Unionist Party. “Putting Britain First.” 1974.

<sup>24</sup> Michael Cockerell, “EU referendum... lessons from 1975,” *BBC News*.

<sup>25</sup> Tom Moseley, “In quotes: Jeremy Corbyn and the EU referendum,” *BBC News*, 14.04.2016.

Thatcher's more openly public attitude and statements have probably persuaded several voters to vote, compared with Corbyn whom were criticised for not participating enough during the campaign and campaigning "half-hearted".<sup>26</sup> To settle the European question once and for all would mean that British politicians could focus on crucial domestic issues instead of battling over the European question.

During the campaign of 1975, Thatcher presented the case for staying in the European Community in the *The Guardian* 9 April 1975. Thatcher, whom had been very vocal throughout the campaign, conveyed that the British membership were a political case of peace and security - which according to Thatcher was the predominant case in this debate. By having a dynamic partnership with Europe, future generations would have better prospects for future well-being and betterment of mankind inside the Community and Western countries stands unable to destroy itself, as it had done in the two previous world wars. The role of the Common Market has opened windows and gave Britain a leading role in the world, regarding the superior impact the Community has on the rest of the world. Britain profits from the benefits of the Community when it comes to secure funding from the European Community to British institutions and the effect multi-national companies has on British jobs and investments. A British withdrawal, caused by a potential negative result in the referendum, would lead to consequences like a higher percentage of unemployment and reduced financial support from the European Community and multi-national companies.<sup>27</sup>

"The Conservative Party has been pursuing the European vision almost as long as we have existed as a Party." Thatcher declared that the Conservatives need to lead and play a vigorous part in the campaign to keep Britain in Europe. She stressed that "we must do this even though we fight the Government on other issues."<sup>28</sup> As the newly elected leader for the Conservative Party, Thatcher projected a strong pro-European view and that she considered the European Community as a powerful group of nations, whether or not Britain decides to remain or leave. When weighing up the positive and negative consequences, including the loss of sovereignty, Thatcher concluded that it was better to remain a member of the

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<sup>26</sup> BBC News, "EU referendum: Corbyn tells activists 'I did all I could'," 25.06.2016.

<sup>27</sup> Margaret Thatcher, "Case for staying in - by Mrs Thatcher," *The Guardian*, 09.04.1975

<sup>28</sup> Margaret Thatcher, "Speech to Conservative Group for Europe: opening Conservative referendum campaign" (Speech, St. Ermin's, Westminster, April 16, 1975), Margaret Thatcher Foundation.

European Community, seeing that it will still be powerful - independent on British membership or not. Corby did also see it this way. Even though he were reluctant and opposed to membership in 1975, he believes that the right choice for Britain would be to remain inside of the EU. The results of the referendum imminently made a majority of the political elite pleased, but as the European institutions changed and expanded further, she began to adopt negative views on the European project. Which, consequently, paved the way for the future ideology of the party.

## Chapter 4: How digital development changed political campaigning

How political campaigns have been fought, has always been closely related to what kind of media one has been able to advertise information through. The *normalization hypothesis* suggests that social media reflects established power structures and that powerful political actors continue to be powerful in social media - if they do not become even more powerful. The *equalization hypothesis*, on the other hand, states that social media make it easier for more marginalized parties and unknown candidates to reach voters. Small political parties have greater challenges in getting coverage in the analogue media. Therefore, they have greater motivation to talk directly to voters or interact through social media.<sup>29</sup> Internet and social media did not revolutionize our society until the 1990s and early 2000s, and the analogue media, such as newspapers, television and radio broadcasting were the main conveyor of information from both sides of the debate to the British public during the 1970s and the 1975 referendum. The analogue media; newspapers, television and radio broadcasting, had very little user influence on the public since it is a one way communication - information given from the analogue media to the public. The public has little impact in what type of information they are given, and to influence politicians the public had to send letters and communication tools that took a long time to reach out, and after the rise of social media it has become a greater focus on the user's effect on this interaction. Through emails and various social media platforms; Twitter and Facebook, the two-way communication between politicians and the public has become easier, both in receiving information and asking questions through those platforms. Internet has led to more direct communication and is more private and personal than earlier.

It is crucial that information told by the press is constructed fairly and unbiased, in order to consider how much coverage they would give each side of the campaign and which coverage they should get. Controversy surrounding the development of press coverage and the unequal treatment of the two sides, gives us an understanding of how the campaign progressed in direction of favouring the campaign that wanted to stay inside the European Community. The balance between anti-Market coverage and pro-Market coverage ended up being uneven with 54% pro-European coverage and 21% anti-coverage - alongside neutral content in the

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<sup>29</sup> Ida Aalen, *Sosiale medier* (Bergen: Fagbokforlaget, 2015), 199-200

remaining percentages.<sup>30</sup> In contrast to the 1975 referendum where the two sides was named pro-Market and anti-Market, the debate in 2016 named the two camps; Remain and Leave. This clearly shows that the debate in 2016 focused more on the whole prospect of the European Union (EU), and not only the current Internal Market. The European Union has developed from a purely economic union has advanced into an organization covering a number of policy areas like environment, health, external relations, security and migration, while still growing into a even substantial economic union.<sup>31</sup> In 1975, the debate surrounding the European Community concentrated mainly on the effects of staying in or withdrawing from the Common Market. The media disliked the idea of a referendum from the beginning. Having viewed the Common Market issue through three elections, the media felt that the issue was more past history and in no need to be raised again. Another reason of their disapproval towards another round of Common Market debate were the prospect of their decision to favour membership ten years prior to the 1975 referendum and they had not changed their views since then. They were still in favour of membership.<sup>32</sup>

The views of Fleet Street (synonym for the British press) and how they were to cover the referendum was dominated by three various perspectives. Firstly, a substantial amount of the press saw the referendum as direct reaction of divisions within the Labour Party. The intention of newspapers supporting the pro-Market campaign were to exploit the internal divisions of the Labour Party by focusing on personalities who were pleading for a no vote. Tony Benn, became the most talked about personality in the media in view of his enthusiasm for nationalisation and attacks on newspapers owners. When the polls started to turn against the anti-Marketees, Benn decided to use his position as Secretary of Industry to make a claim about the effects on our membership on the economy; “it’s half a million jobs lost and a huge increase in food prices caused by the Common Market.” *The Daily Telegraph* called it “The Benn factor” and he became known as “the minister of fear” since some of his expressions and arguments could be seen as a technique of scarring the public into voting “No”. The media disapproved his methods, since there was no guarantee that his claims were

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<sup>30</sup> Seymour-Ure, “Press” In *The 1975 Referendum*, ed. David Butler and Uwe Kitzinger, 224. London: The Macmillan Press LTD, 1976.

<sup>31</sup> European Union, “The EU in brief.” Sourced 08.05.2019 from [https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/eu-in-brief\\_en](https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/eu-in-brief_en).

<sup>32</sup> Seymour-Ure, “Press” In *The 1975 Referendum*, ed. David Butler and Uwe Kitzinger. (London: The Macmillan Press LTD, 1976), 214.

legitimate and with every false statement he became a target of the media. Roy Jenkins called Benn out on this, and suggested that Benn's approach was to think of a number and then double it, to make it seem more serious than it was.<sup>33</sup> *The Guardian* simply wrote that "the pros console themselves with the thought that every time the big Benn mouth opens it makes more yesses than noes."<sup>34</sup> Secondly, the leader columns had a tendency to stress the primacy of political, not economic considerations. The *Guardian*, the *Daily Telegraph* *Financial Times*, the *Daily Express* and the *Daily Mirror* were all troubled that the debate had been turned into "a row about jobs, prices and percentages" instead of stressing the "intellectual, moral and spiritual value" of the Common Market, along with the ideal of Europe as "an outgoing will of Britain to move towards nations who belong to the same European family." Third, there was a vast understanding in the media that jobs had become the central issue of the campaign, together with sovereignty, food prices and the balance of trade. Newspapers considered the level of arguments unsatisfactory. For example, the *Financial Times* remarked that the debate was unsatisfactory and the *Daily Telegraph* labelled the campaign "lower, more trivial and less honest than the average general election campaign".<sup>35</sup> Similar to the 1975 campaign, the media criticised and denounced both campaigns in the debate for the lack of facts in 2016.<sup>36</sup>

When the results of the 2016 referendum came out in favour of leaving the European Union, David Cameron announced his resignation as Prime Minister and he identified Internet as an "amazing pollinator" that "turns lonely fights into mass campaign; transforms moans into movements; excites the attention of hundreds, thousands, millions of people and stris them to action."<sup>37</sup> As a result of widespread Internet connections, the 2016 debate accumulated another aspect which the 1975 referendum did not have the opportunity to practice.

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<sup>33</sup> Seymour-Ure, "Press" In *The 1975 Referendum*, ed. David Butler and Uwe Kitzinger. (London: The Macmillan Press LTD, 1976), 181.

<sup>34</sup> Roy Greenslade, "Did national papers' pro-European bias in 1975 affect the referendum?," *The Guardian*, 04.02.2016.

<sup>35</sup> Seymour-Ure, "Press" In *The 1975 Referendum*, ed. David Butler and Uwe Kitzinger. (London: The Macmillan Press LTD, 1976), 229.

<sup>36</sup> Julie Firmstone, "Newspapers' editorial opinions during the referendum campaign" in *EU Referendum Analysis 2016: Media, Voters and the Campaign*, ed. Daniel Jackson, Einar Thorsen and Dominic Wring (Political Studies Association & Loughborough.)

<sup>37</sup> Vyacheslav Polonski, "Impact of social media on the outcome of the EU referendum" in *EU Referendum Analysis 2016: Media, Voters and the Campaign*, ed. Daniel Jackson, Einar Thorsen and Dominic Wring (Political Studies Association & Loughborough.)

The analogue media in 2016 covered the referendum similar to how they did in 1975, but the press were heavily skewed towards the Leave-campaign. The *Daily Mirror*, *The Guardian* and *Financial Times* were heavily pro-Remain, while the *Daily Express*, *Daily Mail* and *Daily Star* advocated for the Leave-campaign. The Remain-campaign largely focused on a single issue - the economy, with a negative tone and there were only a few individuals (Cameron and George Osborne, Chancellor of the Exchequer) whom portrayed the Remain-campaign throughout the campaigning period. The Remain-campaign campaigned with an overall negative tone and avoided to use positive language, even though they were encouraging Britain to stay inside the EU. The Leave-campaign were better with balancing the amount of critique towards the current status quo with positive information about how British sovereignty could blossom in a post-Brexit world.<sup>38</sup> The media also focused massively on the politicians and campaign representatives such as David Cameron and Boris Johnson. This may have changed the course of the campaign to focus more on the political game, rather than concentrate on the serious issue at hand. Another concerning factor for the Remain-campaign were the lack of visibility from the Labour Party as a result of their lack of engagement in the campaign.<sup>39</sup>

In an effort to gain new voters and mobilize their already established voters, the 2016 campaign was hugely affected by the way campaigners took advantage of social media platforms, like Twitter and Facebook. The Remain-campaign and Leave-campaign took advantage of social media to pass on their message during the campaign. Eurosceptic voters were generally more active on social media than Remain voters. The dominance of the Leave-campaign on social media platforms was a product of more simple and memorable messages like #Brexit, “Vote Leave” and “Take Control”.<sup>40</sup> The power of these types of messages is that they are easily remembered after they are read, and even though the Remain-campaign and Leave-campaign were fairly evenly matched in deploying similar

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<sup>38</sup> David Levy, Billur Aslan and Diego Bironzo, *UK Press Coverage of the EU Referendum*, (Oxford: Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism in association with PRIME Research,) 2016.

<sup>39</sup> David Levy, Billur Aslan and Diego Bironzo, *UK Press Coverage of the EU Referendum*, (Oxford: Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism in association with PRIME Research,) 2016.

<sup>40</sup> Hänska-Ahy, M and Bauchowitz. “Tweeting for Brexit: How social media influenced the referendum.” In *Brexit, Trump and the Media*, ed. Mair, J, Clark, T, Fowler, N, Snody, R and Tait, R. 27-30. Bury St Edmunds: Abramis Academic Publishing, 2017.

digital approaches. The critical difference between them was that the Leave-campaign did a better job to target its voters.<sup>41</sup> After the Remain-campaign lost the referendum, many expressed their skepticism of Cameron and the Remain-campaign for ignoring the value of social media. Sceptics believed the Remain-campaign lost the referendum as a result of regarding social media as something that had no real connection with the real political world and they overlooked the importance of capturing the essence of the debate.<sup>42</sup> Instead of responding the Leave-campaign with more relatable emotional messages, the official Remain-campaign maintained their strategy with calculated ration arguments and a tide of economic forecast. Remain supporters considered that Britain would never vote to leave the EU and they disregarded the power of social media as only a place where trolls and teenagers would “troll” others, whilst the Leave-campaign were consistent and undeniable in their approach across social media platforms.<sup>43</sup>

The development from analogue media to digital media brought with it both advantages and disadvantages. The analogue media continued to have a major influence on the public and newspapers shifted their attitude from positive to negative, but new social media platforms made it easier for political parties and the two different campaigns to reach new and indecisive voters - which ultimately lead to the victory of the Leave-campaign in 2016.

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<sup>41</sup> Andrew Mullen, “Leave versus Remain: the digital battle” in *EU Referendum Analysis 2016: Media, Voters and the Campaign*, ed. Daniel Jackson, Einar Thorsen and Dominic Wring (Political Studies Association & Loughborough,) 2016.

<sup>42</sup> David Levy, Billur Aslan and Diego Bironzo, *UK Press Coverage of the EU Referendum*, (Oxford: Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism in association with PRIME Research,) 2016.

<sup>43</sup> Vyacheslav Polonski, “Impact of social media on the outcome of the EU referendum” in *EU Referendum Analysis 2016: Media, Voters and the Campaign*, ed. Daniel Jackson, Einar Thorsen and Dominic Wring (Political Studies Association & Loughborough,) 2016.



## Chapter 5: Conclusion: Cameron's calculated gamble

David Cameron's initial approach to the European question were through avoiding it for as long as he could - and this proved to be successful in opposition, but in government it was damaging. Events have repeatedly placed the European question at the heart of British politics. The 2009 Euro crisis laid structural pressure over Europe within British politics, and especially the Conservative Party, leaving the reputation between the EU and the UK in a poor condition. The government were aware of the danger the crisis poised to the UK economy. The deepening of the euro crisis and the EU's treatment of Greece strengthened a growing euroscepticism within the media, public opinion and inside of the Conservative Party, which often left the government weak domestically.<sup>44</sup> The reaction became the expanding incoherence of the government's policy as it aimed to promote Britain's national interest in the resolution of the euro crisis and to handle the growing Conservative requirement for an in/out referendum.<sup>45</sup> In a "cast-iron pledge", Cameron disclosed the importance of EU and its formation after Europe were damaged by its second catastrophic conflict in one generation. Cameron's Bloomberg speech drew parallels to British behaviour and perception to further argue why the EU and Britain has had a powerful relationship and the leading role Britain has had in the Enlightenment, the Industrial Revolution to the defeat of Nazism. The perspective of Britain as "an argumentative and rather strong-minded member of the family of European nations" generate an impression of how egocentric Britain are when British interest are on the line.<sup>46</sup> The EU is built on a dynamic and changing environment to hold of further advancements that will only produce more of the same issues, instead of advocating change and act accordingly. Cameron also acknowledged why raising the challenging question about the future of European and Britain's role when the backing of Europe is already narrow; it is essential that the difficult questions are raised, since that's the only way to solve questions about the future. If those questions are not asked, they will not be solved either.

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<sup>44</sup> Hussein Kassim, Scott James and Shaun Hargreaves Heap, "The UK and the Eurozone crisis: preferences and preference formation in a euro area out," *EMU Choices Working Paper Series 2017*, [https://emuchoices.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/2017\\_Working-Paper-KassimScottHH.pdf](https://emuchoices.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/2017_Working-Paper-KassimScottHH.pdf)

<sup>45</sup> Roger Liddle, *The Europe Dilemma: Britain and the Drama of EU integration* (London: Policy Network, 2014), 195.

<sup>46</sup> David Cameron, "EU Speech at Bloomberg."

In both referendums there are similarities and comparisons to be made. I will point out three major similarities when it comes to the way Wilson and Cameron approached the European question; by promising the public a referendum, suspension of ministerial responsibility and the use of similar arguments in both referendums. Harold Wilson promised to renegotiate the original terms of entry prior of a referendum. The underlying reasons for promising a referendum ahead of the 1974 General Election was because the Labour Party opposed British membership of the European Community on the terms negotiated by the Conservative Party and to keep divisions within the Labour Party to a minimum. David Cameron guaranteed a referendum ahead of the 2015 General Election in order to settle the European question and keep the growing eurosceptic views within the Conservative Party moderate.

Initially, Wilson wanted the Cabinet and its members to take on a collective opinion which would have portrayed a unity within the Party. This did not happen. After much pressure from his ministerial colleagues, Wilson eventually gave his ministers the opportunity to campaign for either side in the debate. Wilson was reluctant of this approach, but were precise in that the only way to triumph over the anti-Europeans within the Labour Party were to move past the party and rather appeal to the country at large.<sup>47</sup> In the campaign leading up to the 2016 referendum, Cameron were pressured by the Leader of the House of Commons, Chris Grayling, into suspending collective responsibilities after Grayling and other senior ministers contemplated resigning if Cameron made it mandatory to campaign for Britain to remain in the EU.<sup>48</sup> If Wilson and Cameron had pressured their ministers into campaigning for Britain to stay in the EU, the trust in both Wilson and Cameron as a Prime Minister and Party Leaders would have decreased and the splits within the parties would have been more evident than before. It is important to appear as a united group in the eyes of the public, since party divisions shows growing distrust, which again makes it more difficult to push through domestic legislation in government.

The use of similar arguments in both referendums, primarily concerning jobs, economic considerations, sovereignty and the future of Britain's voice in international affairs and

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<sup>47</sup> William Keegan, "Hot air and in-out EU referendum? It's 1975 all over again," *The Guardian*, 18.05.2014.

<sup>48</sup> Laura Hughes, Steven Swinford and Peter Dominiczak, "EU Referendum: David Cameron forced to let ministers campaign for Brexit after fears of a Cabinet resignation," *The Telegraph*, 05.01.2016.

optimism for a prosperous and peaceful time. Inside of the EU, Britain have had a powerful voice as one of EU's biggest member countries. Taking part in decision-making and agenda setting has secured Britain's role as an influential member of the EU. The ability to run their own affairs was one of the most important and pressing issues of the 1975 campaign. The anti-Marketeers warned the public of the Common Market a a "plan to merge Britain with France, Germany, Italy and other countries into a single nation", to which "Britain would be reduce to only a province" and even if the pro-Marketeers wanted to secure Britain's place in the European Community; the "pooling" of sovereignty with eight other member states were acknowledged by the pro-Marketeers. To soften this issue, they assured voters that the British way of life and traditions would not be under threat.<sup>49</sup> Loss of sovereignty and a shifting center of power from Britain to Brussels again concerned the British public in 2016. The Leave-campaign defended their negative standpoint claiming that British membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the United Nations (UN) Security Council are more powerful establishments in relation to defence, security and influence on the world stage. Standing outside and choosing to not participate in decision-making and instead leaving the EU would weaken Britain's leadership role in Europe and the world.<sup>50</sup>

Aspects of the 1975 referendum and the 2016 referendum showed that even though there were similarities that contributed towards a feeling of déjà vu, the overall results did not reflect the result of 1975. The political landscape within the EC/EU and Britain can be seen as a reason for why the results of the 1975 referendum and 2016 referendum did not mirror the same outcome. In 1975, the EC consisted of 9 member states in comparison to the 28 member states it consists of today. A smaller group of member states made it, in the first place, easier for the UK to renegotiate the original terms of entry and to reach compromises on issues they brought to the table since they had fewer countries to negotiate with. In 2016, Cameron had to negotiate with 27 other member states, whom all have different views on the issues brought up by the UK. The political issues were also much more comprehensive in 2016 than they were in 1975. The expansion of political areas concerning the EU has made renegotiations more difficult since everything is more connected and intertwined.

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<sup>49</sup> Brian Wheeler, "EU referendum: Did 1975 predictions come true?," *BBC News*, 06.06.2016.

<sup>50</sup> BBC News, "EU referendum issues guide: Explore the arguments." 29.04.2016.

Wilson stood on the victorious side of the 1975 referendum and ensured that Britain would still be a member of the European Community for four decades more. The results ended with a majority large enough to temporarily defuse the debate among the public and political parties about membership, and it offered an appearance of public consent to the remaining countries in the Community, an appearance that in some respects were misleading. Wilson resumed his power and position as Prime Minister after the referendum. Cameron aimed to do the same in 2016. He fought for Britain to remain a member of the EU, and argued that Britain would make a mistake if the vote ended in defeat. Standing outside of the EU and choosing to not participate in decision-making would weaken Britain's leadership role in Europe and the world.<sup>51</sup> Withdrawal could in the long-run affect the practical availability of future partners and friends, when it comes to diplomatic interlocutor, foreign policy "allies" and commercial partners seeing that Britain's attractiveness are reduced as a direct result of a withdrawal. A positive outcome of the referendum could point the British government into the direction of commit to further integration, within the terms of the 2016 renegotiations. Since the results ended negatively, in the eyes of the Remain-campaign, future British governments will have to up their effort to produce cooperative agreements with other countries.<sup>52</sup> Cameron resigned his position as Prime Minister following the negative outcome of the referendum. Cameron announced his resignation outside Downing Street nr.10 immediately after the British people had voted to take another path than the one he was supporting. Instead of continuing his period as Prime Minister after this political setback, he acknowledged that the country would require fresh leadership to take Britain into the next direction, and that he could not represent Britain in the coming period where withdrawal negotiations to determine Britain's future relationship with the EU would take place. This was not the case for 2016, where the Remain-campaign and Cameron lost to a more organized and appealing campaign. Cameron called the referendum a "calculated gamble" which was aimed at silencing the Eurosceptics in the Conservative Party for a generation, but the negative result showed that there were underlying problems within the Conservative Party.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> BBC News, "EU referendum issues guide: Explore the arguments." 29.04.2016.

<sup>52</sup> Spyros Economides and Mareike Kleine, Britain as a Global actor after Brexit: Report of the hearing held on 1st March, 2016, (London: LSE European Institute, 2016) .

<sup>53</sup> Heather Stewart, Rowena Stuart and Rajeev Syal, "David Cameron resigns after UK votes to leave European Union," *The Guardian*, 24.06.2016.

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