BRITISH PUBLIC OPINION AND MASS-ELITE RELATIONS ON EU ENLARGEMENT: IMPLICATIONS ON THE DEMOCRATIC DEFICIT DEBATE

Oya Dursun-Ozkanca
Elizabethtown College, USA

Abstract

Despite the fact that the public in Britain had predominantly negative attitudes towards the Eastern enlargement of the European Union (EU) in 2004, the British government endorsed this policy. Since the legitimacy of elite actions on EU affairs depends on the level of public support, it is important to study the formation of public opinion and the political communication processes in the European context. Using Flash Eurobarometer survey data, this article first tests the determinants of public support for EU enlargement in Britain. It then examines the nature of the relationship between elites and public opinion on the 2004 enlargement. It concludes that the public discussion about enlargement in Britain was fuelled by hysteria rather than facts, and that the British policymakers failed to both provide the worried public with clear facts on the possible effects of enlargement and take substantive policy decisions to alleviate popular concerns.

1. Introduction[*]

There is very little consensus among scholars concerning what democratic deficit is and even whether or not it exists in European Union (EU) policymaking.[1] Dahl maintains that international organizations are inherently unable to support democratic decision-making.[2] The EU, according to many, is no exception. It is not uncommon to see European elites initiating projects even when most of the public is against such ventures.

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[1] Andreas Follesdal and Simon Hix, "Why there is a Democratic Deficit in the EU: A Response to Majone and Moravcsik," *Journal of Common Market Studies* 44(3) (2006): 533-562; Simon Hix, *What's Wrong with the European Union and How to Fix It?* (Cambridge: Cambridge Polity Press, 2008).

[2] Robert Dahl, "Can International Organizations be Democratic? A Skeptic's View," in *Democracy's Edges*, ed. Ian Shapiro and Casiano Hacker-Cordon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). 19-36.

The EU is on the verge of major sea changes as a result of the 2014 European Parliamentary elections, the crisis in the Eurozone, and the planned future rounds of EU enlargement. Even though 2013 was declared to be the European Year of Citizens by the EU, democratic deficit criticisms have still been prevalent in EU affairs. Since the legitimacy of elite actions depends upon the level of public support for European political processes[3], it is important to study mass-elite relations and political communication processes on European affairs.[4]

While 2014 marks the 10th anniversary of the 2004 enlargement, the literature has so far provided either only aggregate-level studies of public opinion data on EU enlargement or analyses of the influence of media coverage on public opinion about EU enlargement, generally ignoring the determinants of public support for widening or EU enlargement.[5] Since the Eastern enlargement of the EU in 2004 was a vital development shaping the nature and the composition of the EU, the public opinion on this issue commands special attention. Through the accession of 10 new member states and 74.1 million people, it was the fifth and the largest round of enlargement in EU history.

Popular attitudes in EU member states are significant for the success of enlargement.[6] Even though no EU member state has ever conducted a referendum

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[3]   Christoph O. Meyer, "Political Legitimacy and The Invisibility of Politics: Exploring The European Union's Communication Deficit," *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 37(4) (1999): 617-639; Robert Rohrschneider, "The Democracy Deficit and Mass Support for An EU-wide Government," *American Journal of Political Science*, 46(2) (2000): 463-475.

[4]   Oya Dursun-Ozkanca, "French Public Opinion on the European Union's Eastern Enlargement and Public-Elite Relations," *French Politics*, 11(3) (2013): 241-258; Ian Down and Carole J. Wilson. "Opinion Polarization and Inter-Party Competition in Europe," *European Union Politics*, 10(1) (2010): 61-87; John Garry and James Tilley. "The Macroeconomic Factors Conditioning the Impact of Identity on Attitudes Towards the EU," *European Union Politics*, 10(3) (2009): 361-379; Catherine E. De Vries and Erica E. Edwards. "Taking Europe to Its Extremes: Extremist Parties and Public Euroskepticism," *Party Politics*, 15(1) (2009): 5-28.

[5]   For exceptions, see Oya Dursun-Ozkanca, "European Union Enlargement and British Public Opinion: The Agenda-Setting Power of The Press," *Perspectives on European Politics and Society*, 12(2) (2011): 139-160; Dursun-Ozkanca, French Public Opinion on the European Union's Eastern Enlargement and Public-Elite Relations"; Natalia Timuş, "The Role of Public Opinion in European Union Policy Making: The Case of European Union Enlargement," *Perspectives on European Politics and Society*, 7(3) (Sept 2006): 336-347; and Claes H. De Vreese, and Hajo Boomgaarden, "Media Effects on Public Opinion about the Enlargement of the European Union," *Journal of Common Market Studies* 44(2) (2006): 419-436.

[6]   Dursun-Ozkanca, "European Union Enlargement and British Public Opinion"; Erik Jones and Niels Van der Bijl, "Public Opinion and Enlargement: A Gravity Approach," *European Union Politics*, 5(3) (2004): 331-351.

on enlargement, Austria has already pledged to hold a popular referendum on the Turkish membership into the EU. Analyzing the public opinion on the biggest round of EU enlargement has significant repercussions for understanding the public opinion in future rounds of enlargement. Furthermore, scholars are in disagreement about the nature of the public-elite relationship on EU affairs. This article examines the nature of the relationship between elites and public opinion on the 2004 enlargement by focusing on Britain, a key player in EU decision-making. Throughout the debates on the 2004 enlargement, the cleavage between the British elites and the people was strikingly manifest. Only 31 percent of the people in Britain supported the enlargement just before May 2004.[7] Despite the fact that the majority of people in Britain had negative attitudes toward enlargement, the British government endorsed this initiative.

Following a survey of the relevant literature, this article first conducts an individual-level multivariate logistic regression analysis in Britain using *Flash Eurobarometer Survey on EU Enlargement* 132.2[8] (November 2002) to determine the demographic, political, economic, and cultural factors influencing people's attitudes towards enlargement. Building on findings from this quantitative analysis, it then provides an in-depth qualitative study of the public-elite nexus on the issue of EU enlargement through an analysis of primary and secondary sources from 2002 to 2004 to determine if and to what extent the elites responded to the people's enlargement-related concerns in Britain. It aims at shedding light on the nature of the relationship between the British elites and masses on an important EU topic, and concludes with a discussion of the empirical and theoretical implications of its findings. The results of this study become even more important in the context of the speech that UK Prime Minister David Cameron delivered in January 2013 promising to hold a referendum on Britain's membership in the EU. Furthermore, in the upcoming European Parliament elections in May 2014, the UK Independence Party, a major Euro-skeptic party in Britain, is expected to acquire a significant increase in its voting share.[9]

2. Literature Review

This section identifies the findings of the existing literature on both the nature of European public opinion and the relationship between policymakers and European citizens. Demographic characteristics, such as gender and age, are used as

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[7]   European Opinion Research Group, *Standard Eurobarometer* 61, Public Opinion in the European Union (Brussels: European Opinion Research Group, 2004).

[8]   European Opinion Research Group, *Flash Eurobarometer on Enlargement* 132.2, Public Opinion in the European Union (Brussels: European Opinion Research Group, 2002).

[9]   Patrick Wintour, "UKIP is the Party with Most Reasons to be Cheerful ahead of European Elections," *The Guardian*, 10 April 2014.

independent variables in many studies projecting the support for EU membership.[10] Based on the literature on public attitudes towards European integration, one might expect a gender gap in the attitudes toward the EU enlargement.[11] Accordingly, women are expected to be more skeptical towards the EU enlargement.

Besides the demographic factors, this analysis largely draws on a previously developed framework[12] for the construction of the "political," "economic," and "socio-cultural" consequences of enlargement independent variables.[13] Many scholars note that economic factors are important in influencing people's attitudes towards EU integration.[14] Other studies note that cultural variables are more important than economic ones when determining people's attitudes towards European integration.[15] Finally, there are studies that argue that political variables are more important in determining public opinion.[16]

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[10]   Anderson, Christopher J. and M. Shawn Reichert, "Economic Benefits and Support for Membership in the EU: A Cross-National Analysis." *Journal of Public Policy* 15 (1996): 231-249; Gabel, Matthew and Harvey Palmer, "Understanding Variation in Public Support for European Integration." *European Journal of Political Research* 27 (1995): 3-19; McLaren, Lauren M., "Public Support for the European Union: Cost/Benefit Analysis or Perceived Cultural Threat?" *Journal of Politics* 64(2) (2002): 551-566; De Vreese, Claes H. and Hajo G. Boomgaarden, "Projecting EU Referendums: Fear of Immigration and Support for European Integration." *European Union Politics* 6(1) (2005): 59-82.

[11]   Givens, Terri E., "The Radical Right Gender Gap." *Comparative Political Studies* 37(1) (2004): 30-54; Inglehart, Ronald, *Culture Shift in Advanced Industrial Society* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990); Liebert, Ulrike, "Gender Politics in the European Union: The Return of the Public." *European Studies* 1(2) (1999): 197-239.

[12]   Semetko, Holli A. and Patti M. Valkenburg."Framing European Politics: A Content Analysis of Press and Television News." *Journal of Communication* 50(2) (2000): 93-109.

[13]   Semetko and Valkenburg."Framing European Politics: A Content Analysis of Press and Television News".

[14]   Gabel and Palmer, "Understanding Variation in Public Support for European Integration"; Liesbet Hooghe and Gary Marks, "Calculation, Community, and Cues: Public Opinion on European Integration," *European Union Politics* 6(4) (2005): 419-443; Richard C. Eichenberg and Russell J. Dalton. "Europeans and the European Community: The Dynamics of Public Support for European Integration," *International Organization* 47(4) (1993): 507-534; Gerhards, Jurgen and Silke Hans, "Why not Turkey?: Attitudes towards Turkish Membership in the EU among Citizens in 27 European Countries," *Journal of Common Market Studies* 49(4) 2011: 741-766.

[15]   Carey, Sean, "Undivided Loyalties: Is National Identity an Obstacle to European Integration?" *European Union Politics* 3(4) (2002): 387-413; McLaren, "Public Support for the European Union: Cost/Benefit Analysis or Perceived Cultural Threat?"; Hooghe and Marks, "Calculation, Community, and Cues: Public Opinion on European Integration".

[16]   Garry, John, Michael Marsh, and Richard Sinnott, "'Second Order' versus 'Issue Voting' Effects in EU Referendums: Evidence from the Irish Nice Treaty Referendums," *European Union Politics* 6(2): 201-221.

Regarding the elites-people nexus, the democratic deficit argument holds that the EU and its institutions suffer from lack of democracy or legitimacy. Many suggest that the democratic deficit is inherent in the EU's policymaking processes and institutions, and has existed since its inception.[17] They posit that the European elites are not sufficiently responsive to public preferences and scrutiny and make decisions on the EU independent of the popular input.[18] Even in the European Parliament elections the turnout levels have continuously decreased since direct elections began in 1979 (63 percent), reaching the lowest point in the latest elections in 2009 (43 percent).[19] Additionally, there are those who argue that the EU suffers from a legitimacy deficit or a communication deficit; that is, that the EU lacks the ability to generate public support due to the lack of media attention.[20] Studies on Euro-skepticism are a significant part of the debates on the future of the EU.[21]

There are multiple competing arguments in the literature regarding the relationship between European elites and publics. Some note that European citizens' knowledge

[17]   David Marquand, *Parliament for Europe* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1979).

[18]   David Beetham and Christopher Lord, *Legitimacy and the European Union* (London: Longman, 1998); Meyer, "Political Legitimacy and The Invisibility of Politics"; Fritz W. Scharpf, *Governing in Europe: Effective and Democratic?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Liesbet Hooghe, "Europe Divided? Elite vs. Public Opinion on European Integration," *European Union Politics* 4(3) (2003): 281-304; Follesdal and Hix, "Why there is a Democratic Deficit in the EU."

[19]   European Parliament, *Turnout at the European Elections* (Brussels: European Parliament, 2014); available at www.europarl.europa.eu/aboutparliament/ en/000cdcd9d4/Turnout-(1979-2009).html, on 7 January 2014.

[20]   Hans-Jorg Trenz, "Media Coverage on European Governance: Exploring the European Public Sphere in National Quality Newspapers," *European Journal of Communication* 19(3) (2004): 291-319; Meyer, "Political Legitimacy and The Invisibility of Politics; Christoph O. Meyer, "The Europeanization of Media Discourse: A Study of Quality Press Coverage of Policy Coordination since Amsterdam," *Journal of Common Market Studies* 43(1) (2005): 121-148; Martin Gleissner and Claes H. De Vreese, "News About the EU Constitution: Journalistic Challenges and Media Portrayal of the European Union Constitution", *Journalism* 6(2) (2005): 221-242; Claes H. De Vreese, *Framing Europe: Television News and European Integration* (Amsterdam: Aksant Academic Publishers, 2003); Neil T. Gavin, "Imagining Europe: Political Identity and British Television Coverage of the European Economy," *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 2(3) (2000): 352-373; Pippa Norris, *A Virtuous Circle: Political Communication in Post-Industrial Democracies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

[21]   John Garry and James Tilley. "The Macroeconomic Factors Conditioning the Impact of Identity on Attitudes Towards the EU," *European Union Politics*, 10(3) (2009): 361-379; Catherine E. De Vries and Erica E. Edwards. "Taking Europe to Its Extremes: Extremist Parties and Public Euroskepticism," *Party Politics*, 15(1) (2009): 5-28; Aleks Szczerbiak and Paul Taggart. *Opposing Europe? The Comparative Party Politics of Euroscepticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

of European-level politics is limited when compared with their knowledge of national political affairs.[22] They argue that "many people are ill-informed" and "slow to see the relevance" of European affairs in their own lives.[23] Earlier works on European public opinion note the emergence of a permissive consensus on European affairs.[24] The permissive consensus theory holds that an ill-informed and disinterested European public has generally been positively predisposed toward European integration, giving political elites a blank check in EU decision-making. Permissive consensus is expected to survive so long as EU affairs remain distant from the daily lives of the European citizens. Nevertheless, as noted by one scholar, the permissive consensus among the European citizens can no longer be taken for granted.[25] As the EU starts to influence the daily lives of the European citizens, the expansion of EU membership becomes increasingly conducive to opposition from the public.[26] This leads to the emergence of the constraining dissensus argument, implying the constraining role of public opinion on EU affairs.[27]

The policy mood argument suggests the primacy of public opinion for policymakers.[28] It holds that the elites "are keen to pick up the faintest signals in their political environment," and respond to electoral pressure.[29] The cue-taking

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[22]   Klaus Schoenbach, "What and How Voters Learned," in *Communicating to Voters: Television in the First European Parliamentary Elections*, ed. Jay G. Blumler (London: Sage, 1983). 299-318; Jay G. Blumler, ed. *Communicating to Voters: Television in the First European Parliamentary Elections* (London: Sage, 1983).
[23]   Blumler, *Communicating to Voters*, 4.
[24]   Leon N. Lindberg and Stuart Scheingold. *Europe's Would-Be Polity: Patterns of Change in the European Community* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1970); Ronald Inglehart, "Public Opinion and Regional Integration," *International Organization* 24(2) (1970): 764-795; Martin Slater, "Political Elites, Popular Indifference and Community Building," *Journal of Common Market Studies* 21(1) (1982): 69-87.
[25]   Sarah B. Hobolt, *Europe in Question: Referendums on European Integration* (Oxford University Press, 2009).
[26]   Eichenberg and Dalton, "Europeans and the European Community: The Dynamics of Public Support for European Integration."
[27]   Cees Van der Eijk and Mark Franklin, *Choosing Europe? The European Electorate and National Politics in the Face of the Union* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1996); Simon Hix, *The Political System of the European Union* (London: Macmillan, 1999); Liesbet Hooghe and Gary Marks, "A Postfunctionalist Theory of European Integration: From Permissive Consensus to Constraining Dissensus," *British Journal of Political Science* 39 (2008): 1-23.
[28]   Benjamin I. Page and Robert Y. Shapiro, "Effects of Public Opinion on Public Policy," *American Political Science Review* 7(1) (1983): 175-190; Lawrence R. Jacobs, *The Health of Nations: Public Opinion and the Making of American and British Health Policy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993); John G. Geer, *From Tea Leaves to Opinion Polls: A Theory of Democratic Leadership* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).
[29]   James A. Stimson, Michael B. MacKuen and Robert S. Erikson, "Dynamic Representation," *American Political Science Review* 89(3) (1995): 543-564.

argument, on the other hand, changes the causal direction in the previous argument, and claims that cues presented by political elites provide citizens with cognitive shortcuts that help them decide what is in their interest.[30]

Some works in the literature on EU mass-elite relations conclude that higher polarization between elites on EU issues leads to more negative public opinion among citizens, as they are exposed to more intensive debate upon EU policies.[31] As one scholar puts, "elite attitudes to membership decisively infiltrate national economic evaluations and the subsequent utilitarian judgments citizens pass on the Union."[32] On the other hand, as another study concludes, European politicians are sensitive to their electorate and their interests when they take decisions on EU enlargement.[33] As illustrated by this review, scholars are in disagreement about the nature of the public-elite relationship, in general, and the existence of democratic deficit in EU policymaking, in particular.

3. Methodology

The analysis in this article aims to shed light on the determinants of public support for enlargement as well as the relationship between the elites and public opinion. It does so by combining quantitative and qualitative methods. It employs quantitative methodology to examine the public opinion on enlargement. *Flash Eurobarometer Surveys on Enlargement* is the only available survey series measuring public attitudes on different aspects of the 2004 enlargement. Using *Flash Eurobarometer Survey on EU Enlargement* 132.2[34] (November 2002) raw data made available through the University of Cologne's Central Archive for Empirical Social Research Data Service (ZA), and drawing on the existing literature on the determinants of public opinion on EU affairs, a logistic regression is conducted to analyze the relationship between the support for EU enlargement and various demographic factors and expectations on various consequences of the enlargement at the

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[30]   Clifford J. Carrubba, "The Electoral Connection in European Union Politics," *Journal of Politics* 63(1) (2001): 141-158; Hooghe and Marks, "Calculation, Community, and Cues: Public Opinion on European Integration."

[31]   Hooghe and Marks, "Calculation, Community, and Cues: Public Opinion on European Integration"; Ray, Leonard, "When Parties Matter: The Conditional Influence of Party Positions on Voter Opinions about European Integration," *Journal of Politics* 65(4) (2003): 978-94; Steenbergen, Marco, Erica Edwards, and Catherine De Vries, "Who's Cueing Whom? Mass-Elite Linkages and the Future of European Integration," *European Union Politics* 8(1) (2007): 13-35.

[32]   Tamvaki, Dionysia, *Legitimacy and EU Enlargement Policies: Differentiation in Elite Attitudes and Public Support for Integration* (VDM Verlag, 2008).

[33]   Serrano, Omar, *The Domestic Sources of European Foreign Policy: Defence and Enlargement* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013).

[34]   European Opinion Research Group, *Flash Eurobarometer on Enlargement* 132.2, Public Opinion in the European Union (Brussels: European Opinion Research Group, 2002).

individual level.[35] This analysis helps determine which consequences of EU enlargement received the highest attention during the public opinion formation process. Then, a qualitative analysis through examination of the British elite discourse as well as newspaper coverage of EU enlargement in *The Times*, *The Guardian*, *The Daily Mail*, and *The Daily Express* from 2002 to 2004 is conducted to determine whether the British elites paid attention to the consequences of enlargement the British people anticipated.

4. Public Opinion Analysis

The dependent variable, the reference category in the binary logistic regression, is the public support for EU enlargement. It is drawn from Question 2 of *Flash EB* 132.2 which asks: 'Are you, personally, totally in favour, rather in favour, rather opposed or totally opposed to the enlargement of the European Union?' The dependent variable is coded as a dichotomous variable: 1 denoting support for enlargement (combining 'totally in favour' and 'rather in favour' answers) and 0 denoting no support (combining 'rather opposed' and 'totally opposed' answers).[36]

The independent variables used in this analysis are derived from the *Flash Eurobarometer Survey* 132.2 to test which factors affected the public support for EU enlargement. These included demographic variables such as gender (with female coded as 1 and male coded as 0) and age (with 15-24 coded as 1, 25-39 coded as 2, 40-54 coded as 3, and 55+ coded as 4), as well as political, economic, and cultural variables for determining the public support for enlargement. The political variables included awareness of EU enlargement (Question 1, coded as 1 'yes' and 0 'no'), perceptions of national importance of enlargement (Question 6, coded as 1 combining 'very important' and 'rather important' answers, and 0 'rather unimportant' and 'not important at all'), perceptions of personal importance of enlargement (Question 7, coded as 1 combining 'very important' and 'rather important' answers, and 0 'rather unimportant' and 'not important at all'), perceived impact of enlargement on peace (Question 8-1, coded as 1 'rather agree' and 0 'rather disagree'), perceptions of enlargement as moral duty (Question 8-2, coded as 1 'rather agree' and 0 'rather disagree'), perceptions of enlargement increasing the EU's power in the world (Question 8-3, coded as 1 'rather agree' and 0 'rather disagree'), perceptions that enlargement will decrease the significance of [our

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[35]   Additionally, a goodness-of-fit test using chi-square is conducted to test whether the model was a good fit for the data or not. All variables included in the analysis, with the exception of gender, are statistically significant. Hence the null hypotheses assuming a normal distribution are rejected for all variables but gender.

[36]   The dependent variable is recoded as a dichotomous variable, as the results of the ordered and binary logistic regression analyses were similar. The analysis in this manuscript reports the binary logistic regression results for the sake of simplicity of interpretation. All "don't know" answers are coded as missing variables in the analysis.

country] in Europe (Question 8-5, coded as 0 "rather agree" and 1 "rather disagree"), perceptions that enlargement will make it difficult to take decisions in the EU (Question 8-6, coded as 0 "rather agree" and 1 "rather disagree"). The economic variables included perceptions that enlargement will be very costly for [our country] (Question 8-4, coded as 0 "rather agree" and 1 "rather disagree"), perceptions that enlargement will expand markets (Question 9-1, coded as 1 "rather agree" and 0 "rather disagree"), perceptions that enlargement will increase unemployment (Question 9-6, coded as 0 "rather agree" and 1 "rather disagree"), perceptions that enlargement will decrease the standard for social welfare in [our country] (Question 9-7, coded as 0 "rather agree" and 1 "rather disagree"). The cultural variables included perceptions that enlargement will make the EU more remote from citizens (Question 8-7, coded as 0 "rather agree" and 1 "rather disagree"), perceptions that enlargement will increase immigration to [our country] (Question 9-2, coded as 0 "rather agree" and 1 "rather disagree"), perceptions that with enlargement it will be easier to control illegal immigration (Question 9-3, coded as 1 "rather agree" and 0 "rather disagree"), perceptions that enlargement will make it harder to tackle crime and drug trafficking (Question 9-4, coded as 0 "rather agree" and 1 "rather disagree"), and finally, perceptions that enlargement will make the EU culturally richer (Question 9-8, coded as 1 "rather agree" and 0 "rather disagree").[37]

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[37]   As Flash Eurobarometer 132.2 survey questionnaire does not have a direct measure on the education levels of respondents, this analysis does not include education among independent variables.

Figure 1. The Impact of Independent Variables on the Changing Probability of Supporting the 2004 EU Enlargement

■ Changing Probability of Supporting Enlargement
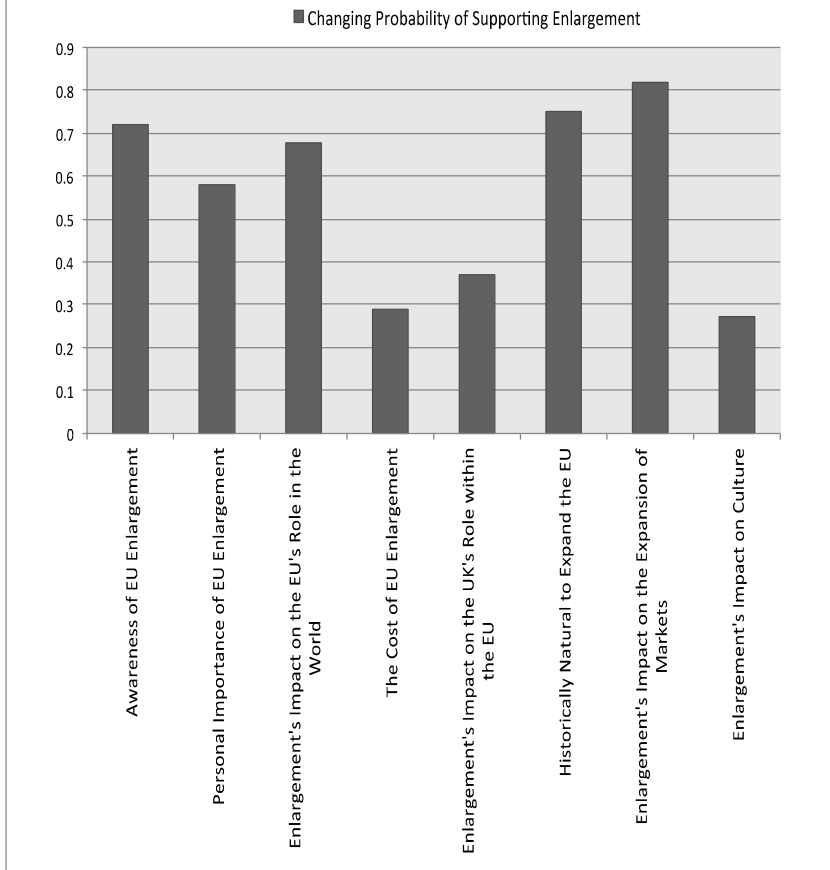
As illustrated in Figure 1 and Table 1, for every one-unit increase in people's perceptions of the positive impact of enlargement on the expansion of markets, their odds of supporting enlargement increase by a factor of 4.480 (p < 0.01). This is by far the strongest statistically significant and positive relationship in this multivariate analysis. This finding implies that the anticipated economic consequences of EU enlargement were vital when the British people developed their opinions on enlargement.

Table 1: A Model of Public Support for EU Enlargement in Britain

	British Support for EU Enlargement
Awareness of EU Enlargement	2.521***; 0.72 (0.263)
Personal Importance of EU Enlargement	1.372**; 0.58 (0.154)
Enlargement's Impact on EU's Role in the World	2.101**; 0.68 (0.328)
The Cost of EU Enlargement	0.400**; 0.29 (0.343)
Enlargement's Impact on UK's Role within the EU	0.577*; 0.37 (0.285)
Historically Natural to Expand the EU	2.979***; 0.75 (0.276)
Enlargement's Impact on the Expansion of Markets	4.480***; 0.82 (0.391)
Enlargement's Impact on Culture	0.363***; 0.27 (0.304)
Constant	0.288*; 0.22 (0.698)
Observations	568

Source: *Flash Eurobarometer Survey on Enlargement 132.2* (November 2002). Entries are odds ratio coefficients and probability statistics with standard errors in parentheses. ****p < 0.01; ***p < 0.05; *p < 0.10 (two-tailed tests)

The attitudes as to whether or not it is "historically natural to expand the EU" are the second strongest statistically significant variable in this analysis. For every one-unit increase in people's perception that the enlargement of the EU is historically natural, their likelihood of supporting enlargement increases by a factor of 2.979 (p < 0.01). This is not an unpredicted finding, as many people in Britain saw the Eastern

enlargement process as a turning point signifying the reunification of the European continent.

Furthermore, as more people became aware of enlargement, their likelihood of supporting enlargement increased. For every one-unit increase in the awareness of enlargement, the odds of "supporting this development increase by a factor of 2.521 ($p < 0.01$). This finding highlights the significance of communication. If political elites communicate EU affairs more effectively, and inform the people about the EU developments, popular support for such initiatives may be expected to increase.

For every one-unit increase in British people's expectations of a positive impact of enlargement on the EU's power, the odds of supporting enlargement increase by a factor of 2.101 ($p < 0.05$). In other words, if people believed that enlargement would contribute to the power of the EU in the world, they became more likely to support enlargement. When people thought that enlargement would be costly for their country, their likelihood of supporting enlargement decreased by a factor of 0.400 ($p < 0.01$). Additionally, when the British people thought that enlargement would make the UK less important in the EU, their likelihood of supporting this issue decreased by a factor of 0.577 ($p < 0.1$).

Another notable finding is that while people's perception of the importance of EU enlargement for Britain did not play a statistically significant role in affecting their likelihood of supporting the issue, people's perception of the personal importance of EU enlargement played an important role. For every one-unit increase in the perception of enlargement as personally significant, the odds of supporting this development increased by a factor of 1.372 ($p < 0.05$). In line with the findings of a major work in the literature[38], people in Britain demonstrated a tendency to engage in personal cost-benefit analyses when forming their attitudes on this particular policy issue.

Additionally, there is a strong but negative relationship between the support for enlargement and the perceived impact of enlargement on culture. For every one-unit increase in the perceived impact of enlargement on culture, the odds of supporting enlargement decreased by a factor of 0.363 ($p < 0.01$). This is arguably due to the British people's concerns regarding the possible effects of post-enlargement immigration in their society and culture. As noted by one scholar, the British press coverage created a sense of panic regarding increased prospects of immigration into Britain, emphasizing the adverse effects of enlargement on the British culture and society.[39]

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[38]   Hix, *What's Wrong with the European Union and How to Fix It?*
[39]   Dursun-Ozkanca, "European Union Enlargement and British Public Opinion."

There are two additional variables that had a statistically significant but negative relationship with the support for EU enlargement. The first one is the cost of EU enlargement: for every one-unit increase in the perceived cost of enlargement, the odds of supporting enlargement decreased by a factor of 0.4 ($p < 0.05$). The second one is the enlargement's impact on the role of the UK within the EU. This is perhaps due to the Euro-skeptic nature of the British public opinion, documented well by previous studies.[40]

All in all, as illustrated by Table 1, most of the statistically significant variables are related to the economic consequences of enlargement, such as the cost of EU expansion of membership, personal significance of enlargement, and the impact on the expansion of markets. For instance, people's perceptions of the impact of enlargement on the expansion of markets contributed to their support for enlargement. In other words, a cost-benefit analysis framework has been predominant in the way the British people formed their opinion on enlargement.

In conclusion, people's expectations about the effects of enlargement on their daily lives played a major role in determining their attitudes toward enlargement. The anticipated economic consequences of EU enlargement weighed heavily in determining people's likelihood of supporting EU enlargement.[41] Without contextualization, the results presented here do not add much clarity to the elites-masses relationship. The following section adds some flesh to the empirical findings in this study by providing a qualitative analysis that places the EU enlargement debate in a larger political context and looking into the declarations made by British political elites and articles the British newspapers published on the topic from 2002 to 2004.

5. Analysis of the Elite-Mass Nexus on EU Enlargement

In democracies, public opinion sets parameters on policymaking. As one study notes, there is "little doubt that people have a strong sense of what issues the government ought to be addressing."[42] While the 2004 enlargement was preordained, the European citizens in general and the British people in particular

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40   See, for example, Andrew Geddes, *European Union and British Politics* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004) and Dursun-Ozkanca, "European Union Enlargement and British Public Opinion."

41   However, as these results are derived from public opinion data from November 2002, they should be treated cautiously. For instance, while at the time of *Flash EB 132.2* the popular support levels for EU enlargement were much higher in Britain (54 percent), they have considerably decreased as the enlargement date approached.

42   Frank R Baumgartner and Bryan D. Jones, *Agendas and Instability in American Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993). 2.

still had to be convinced that their general interests were being guarded and concerns being addressed.

As the British people became more aware of the impact of European integration on their lives, they became more concerned about the potential disadvantages of enlargement and demanded recognition of their concerns. Immigration became a very controversial topic in Britain during the enlargement debates, more so as the enlargement day approached. To illustrate, in the final *Standard EB* survey conducted just before the Eastern enlargement in 2004, immigration was listed by 41 percent of the British respondents as the most important topic the EU is facing at the moment.[43]

The negative implications of increased immigration on the welfare state, healthcare system, and culture were discussed with increased frequency in the public discourse on enlargement. As noted by one study, "people feared the arrival of cheap labour from the new Member States, or that enlargement would increase drug trafficking and organized crime in Britain."[44] References to the effects of enlargement on markets were also fairly frequent in Britain. The favorability balance generally tilted in the negative direction when these economic and social consequences of EU enlargement were discussed. The high salience of immigration-related and economic concerns during the enlargement debates in Britain justifies a detailed look at these issues to determine whether the British elites did an effective job responding to such concerns.

Britain has always been regarded as unique in having a continuing aversion or skepticism towards European integration.[45] It is often characterized as a reluctant or awkward member of the EU.[46] Europe is frequently viewed as a threat to British national sovereignty.[47] An exception to the traditional Euro-skepticism of British policy is vivid on the issue of enlargement.

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[43]   European Opinion Research Group, *Standard Eurobarometer* 61, Public Opinion in the European Union (Brussels: European Opinion Research Group, 2004).
[44]   Dursun-Ozkanca, "European Union Enlargement and British Public Opinion": 154.
[45]   Simon Bulmer, "Britain and European Integration: Of Sovereignty, Slow Adaptation, and Semi-Detachment," in *Britain and the European Community: The Politics of Semi-Detachment*, ed. Stephen George (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992). 1-29; Helen Wallace, "Britain Out on a Limb?," *Political Quarterly* 66(1) (1995): 47-58.
[46]   Stephen George, *An Awkward Partner: Britain in the European Community* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); David Gowland and Arthur Turner, *Reluctant Europeans: Britain and European Integration 1945-1998* (New York: Longman, 2000); Geddes, *European Union and British Politics*.
[47]   David Baker, "Britain and Europe: The Argument Continues," *Parliamentary Affairs* 54(2) (2001): 276-288.

Each EU Member State uses the European framework in a way to maximize their national interests.[48] The British political elites clearly supported enlargement due to Britain's "obligation as an advanced democracy," provision of "a bigger market for Britain", and for contributing to the "stability and security of the region."[49] As noted by one analyst, there has been consensus among the British elites toward enlargement, as it served to divert attention away from deepening in the EU.[50]

Moreover, before coming to power in 1997, the Labour Party had already emphasized its strong support for EU enlargement while in opposition. Furthermore, the 2004 enlargement was expected to shift the internal balance of power in favor of the UK, as the new members primarily pursue pro-American and pro-British foreign policies. Britain also did not share the concerns of those EU member states that are in closer geographical proximity to the acceding countries.[51]

Despite the government support only 31 percent of the British people supported enlargement.[52] There are two main reasons for the lack of British public support for enlargement. First of all, not many people were informed about the EU enlargement. According to *Standard EB* 61, 30 percent of the British people were uninformed about enlargement, which is, however, substantially higher than the EU15 average of 20 percent.[53] This illustrates the deficiency in the flow of information from the elites to the British people. The second reason is the fact that the immigration issue was central during the EU enlargement debate. The British press was instrumental in escalating the sensitivity of the public on the issue of immigration. As the British tabloid press and opposition increasingly framed the enlargement issue from the immigration angle, immigration-related concerns increased.

As suggested by one scholar, "the most direct barrier to information about immigration is the scarcity and ambiguity of official data."[54] Even the report that the Home Office commissioned complains about "the lack of good data" on

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[48]   Andrew Moravcsik, "Preferences and Power in the European Community: A Liberal-Intergovernmentalist Approach," *Journal of Common Market Studies* 31(4) (1993): 473-525.
[49]   Atsuko Ichijo, "Nation and Europe in the British Public Discourse: The Cases of Media and Political Elite Debates," EURO NAT Project, Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, November 2002: 46.
[50]   Charles Grant, *Europe's Blurred Boundaries* (London: Centre for European Reform, 2006).
[51]   Kirsty Hughes and Edward Smith, "New Labour-New Europe?," *International Affairs* 74(1) (1998): 93-104.
[52]   European Opinion Research Group, *Standard Eurobarometer* 61.
[53]   Ibid.
[54]   Gary P. Freeman, "Modes of Immigration Politics in Liberal Democratic States," *International Migration Review* 29(4) (1995): 883.

immigration and forecasted that migration to Britain as a result of the EU enlargement would be "relatively small," at between 5,000 and 13,000 immigrants per year up to 2010.[55] The right-wing group, Migration Watch UK, on the other hand, claimed 40,000 people a year would enter the UK from Eastern Europe. As Pat Cox, President of the European Parliament at the time, noted,

> it is greatly to be regretted that – at a moment of such historic significance for Europe – so much of the debate has been reduced to accountancy and mere hype, speculation and unsubstantiated claims about migration.[56]

Against the background of confusion and uncertainty on immigration, the media increasingly referred to the negative implications of enlargement on immigration and the welfare system.[57] Yet, the British political elites failed to effectively address these inefficiencies in the information flow to the public.

In 2004, while many other EU members, such as France, Germany, Austria, and Italy, banned migrants from accession countries for transitional periods, Britain and Ireland were the only EU countries willing to open their borders to workers from accession countries. British tabloids heavily criticized this open door policy. Many articles criticized government's soft approach on asylum and immigration. To illustrate, referring to a British government advertising campaign in Slovakia asking people not to come to the UK, *The Daily Mail* asked: "Are ministers living in the real world?"[58]

The Conservative Party frequently criticized the Labour Party for having an ultra-liberal asylum seeker-immigration policy. Conservative Party leader Michael Howard continuously called on the government to follow the example of its EU counterparts and impose restrictions on immigration from accession countries. For the Conservative Party, immigration was an important policy area in which the British people give the Conservatives higher marks than the Labour Party government. In other words, the opposition party leaders were successfully engaging in cue-taking, and influencing public opinion in Britain.

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[55]   Christian Dustmann, Maria Casanova, Michael Fertig, Ian Preston and Christoph M. Schmidt, "The Impact of EU Enlargement on Migration Flows," *Home Office Online Report* 25(03) (2004): 58.

[56]   *The Guardian*, "Blunkett Urged to Resist Immigrant Crackdown," 24 February 2004.

[57]   Ekaterina Balabanova and Alex Balch, "Sending and Receiving: The Ethical Framing of Intra-EU Migration in the European Press," *European Journal of Communication* 25(4) (2010): 382-397.

[58]   *The Daily Mail*, "A Pounds 50 Fare to Britain and No Return," 25 February 2004.

Furthermore, increased political salience may change public indifference to issues,[59] as it may make the public, political parties, the organizers of societal cleavages "more involved in an issue."[60] As a result of the heightened alarm from the media and the opposition on immigration-related consequences of enlargement, people became concerned about this issue. As May 2004 approached, the British public started prioritizing the issue of immigration in the context of the EU enlargement debate. According to a public opinion survey conducted by *YouGov* on 3 April 2004, 46 percent of the respondents identified "immigration and asylum-seekers" as "the most important political issue" in the country, while only 29 percent identified "the war on terrorism" as such.[61] In the same survey, 80 percent of the respondents maintained that the "present Government's policies on immigration and people who seek asylum in Britain" was not tough enough.[62] Another public opinion survey carried out by *Ipsos MORI* in 2003 suggested that 85 percent of the people in Britain disagree that the Government has immigration under control.[63] While two thirds of the UK respondents saw immigration policy as being a domestic affair, the majority of the EU (52 percent) saw it as an issue that should be handled jointly within the EU.[64]

Opponents of enlargement feared increased unemployment with the arrival of cheap labor from the new member states or increased drug trafficking and organized crime in their country – issues that were frequently emphasized by newspapers such as *The Daily Mail*. Many British citizens feared that migrants from the new member states would exploit their welfare systems.

The subsequent response of the UK government to the popular concerns regarding the migration-related consequences of enlargement is an effective illustration of the policy mood argument. Confirming the expectations of the policy mood argument, due to their re-election considerations, the governing elites responded to public pressure in the final months prior to enlargement, and proposed several (albeit limited) changes in the immigration policy to signal their commitment to addressing people's enlargement-related concerns.

In February 2004, only three months before enlargement day, British Prime Minister Tony Blair accused Conservatives of trying to exploit public concerns about

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[59]   Baumgartner and Jones, *Agendas and Instability in American Politics*.

[60]   Terri E. Givens and Adam Luedtke, "The Politics of European Union Immigration Policy: Institutions, Salience, and Harmonization," *Policy Studies Journal* 32(1) (2004): 150.

[61]   YouGov. "Mail on Sunday Survey," 3 April 2004.

[62]   Ibid.

[63]   Ipsos MORI. *British Views on Immigration*. 10 February 2003.

[64]   European Opinion Research Group, *Standard Eurobarometer* 59. Public Opinion in the European Union (Brussels: European Opinion Research Group, 2003).

immigration and discredited the tabloid scare stories.[65] The government made changes to its liberal policy towards asylum and immigration, and adopted a number of limitations to the free movement of labor. It imposed welfare access restrictions on those coming from Eastern Europe. British Home Secretary David Blunkett announced the new policy:

> migrants to Britain who are resident for less than a year will need to prove they have a job or can support themselves without access to state benefits before they register for work.[66]

Immigration Minister Beverley Hughes maintained that the new measures would enable "managed migration" and protect the British benefits system.[67] These new measures point out the relevance of the policy mood argument in the British elite-mass relationship.

Nevertheless, the press was quick to criticize these policies. Many media reports emphasized that the fact that such measures were taken at the last minute demonstrates that the government was panicking about the imminent immigration from Eastern European countries. Negative framings of the tabloids are hardly surprising: the British press generally is notorious for its anti-EU and right-wing populist coverage.[68] For instance, regarding the newly announced policy changes, *The Daily Mail* noted that "[Blunkett's] plans that [immigrants] must register for work and pay taxes will be unenforceable and impossible to police."[69]

To make things worse, Hughes resigned due to a scandal over the handling of visa applications from Eastern Europe in the beginning of April 2004. This scandal further fuelled the bitter criticism by tabloids and the Conservative Party. As the immigration concerns escalated, the government announced that it was suspending all visa applications from Bulgaria and Romania, candidate countries that were planning on joining the EU in 2007. This, once again, demonstrates the validity of the policy mood argument in the British context.

On 27 April 2004, with only a few days left before EU enlargement, Blair announced that "now is the time for controlled migration" and maintained that the British government's strategy against illegal immigration aims to secure the British borders and "prevent abuse by those who entered the UK legitimately but then attempt to

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[65]   *The Guardian Unlimited*, "EU Enlargement: Facts and Fears," 23 February 2004.
[66]   *The Guardian*, "Blunkett Urged to Resist Immigrant Crackdown," 24 February 2004.
[67]   Ibid.
[68]   Peter J. Anderson. and Tony Weymouth, *Insulting the Public? The British Press and the European Union* (New York: Longman, 1999); Tony Harcup and Deidre O'Neill, "What is News? Galtung and Ruge Revisited," *Journalism Studies* 2(2) (2001): 261-280.
[69]   *The Daily Mail*, "A Pounds 50 Fare to Britain and No Return."

stay on illegally."[70] Blair stated that the government is "putting tighter rules to restrict migrants' access to benefits and housing."[71] While Howard accused Blair of "blind panic," the then Shadow Home Secretary David Davis criticized the government by arguing that the new announcement is "a panicky response."[72] On 29 April 2004, only two days before the enlargement date, the government put in place a package, to become effective on the day of enlargement, consisting of measures to enable people to work legally in the UK labor market. The Home Office announced the details of the Worker Registration Scheme applicable to citizens from the Central and Eastern European accession countries (excluding those from Cyprus and Malta) that wanted to come to the UK to work. Individuals from these countries were required to register under this scheme within one month of starting a new job in Britain.

In other words, the British government attempted to respond to the concerns of the people, and introduced several regulations for its open doors policy at the last minute. However, these limited attempts on the part of British elites to shape the public opinion were not effectively communicated to the public and failed to address the main enlargement-related concerns of the people.

6. Conclusion and Discussion

As shown in the analysis above, British people engaged in a cost-benefit analysis when forming their attitudes on EU enlargement. They were interested in practical issues that would affect their everyday lives, such as jobs and social welfare. The anticipated economic consequences of EU enlargement weighed heavily in determining people's likelihood of supporting EU enlargement.

Against this background, populist right-wing party leaders and sensationalist journalists scared the people about an "avalanche" of immigrants that are desperate to come to Western Europe. Accordingly, public discussion about the Eastern enlargement in Britain was fuelled by hysteria rather than facts. It was almost impossible for the public to receive a balanced view on the immigration and unemployment-related implications of the Eastern enlargement. Consequently, the British public gradually became skeptical of enlargement. While support for enlargement hit its highest point in autumn 2002, it decreased significantly afterwards. There was a 23 percent decrease in the British public support for enlargement from November 2002 to March 2004.[73]

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[70]   *The Guardian Unlimited*, "Blair's Migration Speech," 27 April 2004.
[71]   Ibid.
[72]   Ibid.
[73]   European Opinion Research Group, *Standard Eurobarometer* 61.

Nevertheless, policymakers neither took substantive policy decisions to alleviate popular concerns, nor provided the worried public with clear facts on the possible effects of enlargement on immigration, employment, and social welfare. They have only introduced minor cosmetic changes to their policies. The fact that the British government reacted to the question of immigration provides limited evidence that public preferences influenced policymaking. Thus, the policy mood argument seems to be relatively more effective, when compared to the cue-taking argument. But the British elites failed to shape the public opinion on enlargement, as the support levels were quite low immediately before the enlargement day. As the analysis above also illustrates, if elites communicate EU affairs more effectively with the public, popular support for such initiatives may be expected to increase.

When considered generally, the British elites went ahead with the approval of enlargement, despite the low popular support for the policy. This conclusion is also reinforced by a recent study on immigration, which argues that immigration policies in Britain are "determined in a relatively autonomous way by political elites."[74] The disregard of the public opinion by elites on such an important policy issue critically demonstrates the existence of democratic deficit. As concluded by many studies before, this analysis demonstrates that there was limited public communication in Europe.[75]

In conclusion, since the incorporation of public feedback was limited, there was a breakdown of political communication between the political leaders and people. While people were eager to hear what their leaders offered to address several possible enlargement-caused problems, the leaders used abstract language attracting attention instead to the positive impact of enlargement on EU's power in world politics or peace and prosperity in the European continent. In order to build support for the EU project, the elites need to focus on delivering visible solutions to the problems European citizens care most about. This analysis is an initial foray into the relationship between the public opinion and policymaking in the context of the British take on EU issues. Its results become more important in the wake of debates in Britain regarding a possible "Brexit" from the EU. Nevertheless, it does not take into account the variation in public opinion across time. Future studies should analyze changes in public opinion on EU enlargement. Regarding the democratic

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[74]   Statham, Paul and Andrew Geddes, "Elites and the 'Organized Public': Who Drives British Immigration Politics and In Which Direction?" *West European Politics* 29(2) (2006): 248.

[75]   Joseph H. Weiler, *The Constitution of Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Meyer, "Political Legitimacy and The Invisibility of Politics"; Meyer, "The Europeanization of Media Discourse"; David Ward, "The Democratic Deficit and European Union Communication Policy: An Evaluation to Commission's Broadcasting Policy," *The Public* 8(1) (2001): 75-94; David Ward, *The European Union Democratic Deficit and the Public Sphere: An Evaluation of the EU Media Policy* (Amsterdam: IOS Press, 2004).

deficit debates, subsequent research in this field should build controlled analytical models using time-order analysis to see how the elites and public opinion interact with each other over time. All in all, it is yet to be seen whether the British elites will eventually become more responsive to the opinions of the masses when it comes to taking decisions regarding EU affairs.

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