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***The Economist* and the European Union (1997-2005)**

**An excessive discourse of doubt**

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## ***The Economist* and the European Union (1997-2005)**

### **An excessive discourse of doubt**

The objective of this paper is to bring to the fore *The Economist's* political vision of the European Union from 1997 to 2005. The paper seeks to highlight the broadsheet's position concerning the European integration during the premiership of Tony Blair. The position of the British weekly magazine shows a blatant skepticism and a clear inclination to debunk the euro zone as well as the prospective European constitution. The paper's discourse shows an excessive tendency to refuse the European ideal of a powerful federation and stands for an economic cooperation between the 27 members of the Union. The call for a written document that establishes the fundamental laws and governing principles of the Union has reached an almost feverish pitch in recent years. For decades, *The Economist* has been considered as an indispensable reference for those who are interested in international, political and economic news. *The Economist* has established itself as a journal which aims to reinforce the elite's influence on decision-making in economics, politics and culture in the world. The magazine frequently proclaims its objectivity and its independence as well as its international appeal; nevertheless, the alert reader perceives *The Economist* as a paper which is not so different from the others in that it defends its own cause, advocates its own doctrine and promotes its chosen propaganda.

*The Economist* was founded in 1843 to campaign for free trade, laissez-faire and individual responsibility through the medium of rational analysis applied to facts: its good fortune is that both its principles and its methods remain relevant 170 years later. In September 1843 James Wilson announced the slogan of the paper : “to take part in a severe contest between intelligence, which presses forward, and an unworthy, timid ignorance obstructing our progress”<sup>1</sup>. This phrase is quoted on its contents page has taken editorial stances on many issues over the years. *The Economist* remains, in the second half of its second century, true to the principles of its founder James Wilson, a hat maker from the small Scottish town of Hawick. Wilson believed in free trade, internationalism and minimum interference by government, especially in the affairs of the market.

He founded *The Economist* or *The Political, Commercial, Agricultural, and FreeTrade Journal* in 1843 with the intention of creating a weekly newspaper that focused solely on the economy. Wilson had developed a strong interest in economics at an early age. He firmly supported the classical economists’ views that agriculture was not the major source of countries’ wealth. Instead, nations aspiring to greatness should focus on manufacturing and labor to build up their economy and encourage free trade. Wilson enthusiastically supported the repeal of the Corn Laws and the movement’s emphasis on free trade and laissez-faire policies. The definition of free trade implied the ideal of equal access to trade by every country in the world as governments ceased regulating the economy.

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<sup>1</sup> September 1843.  
*The Economist*

This idealistic notion of free trade involved the absence of tariffs and monopolies and in theory gave each country an equal opportunity in the global market. In reality, the practice of free trade was easier said than done. The extreme centre is the paper's historical position." *The Economist* considers itself the enemy of privilege, pomposity and predictability. The earliest editors of *The Economist* understood, and more remarkably did not resent, the growing US weight and appreciated the "special relation". They held that free trade between Britain and America would be the mechanism for spreading benefits worldwide—a good, powerful and necessary faith, now as then. *The Economist* has greater recognition abroad than at home. *The Economist* vision concerning European union gradually developed over time. Although it consistently stood for the position of a cooperative approach to Europe rather than an integrative approach, its initial opposition to European institutions gradually changed to acceptance over time. The magazine supported a decentralized and cooperative model for European institutions, and democratic accountability.

*The Economist* has been eager to preserve the UK's self-image of a world power. Initially, in the years immediately after World War II, the magazine dismissed and rejected proposals for European institutions such as the European Coal and Steel Community, the European Defence Community, the European Economic Community, and European Atomic Energy Community. From 1957 to the 1980s, the magazine gradually came to accept the idea of the UK as a member in the various European communities. *The Economist* had, and was supportive of UK membership during the initial negotiations for European Union in the 1960s and did not conceal its skeptical attitude of European institutions and did not hesitate to display a pro-American stance. Since the veto of Charles de Gaulle in 1963, *The Economist* had supported an Atlantic Community, both economic and military rather than a European economic union.

In subsequent years, *The Economist* continued to support the idea of UK membership in the common market, and began to suggest that it was an economic necessity. It published weekly evaluations of the cost of both entry and of the European institutions, argued that membership of the European Community was not incompatible with the Commonwealth of Nations, and discussed industrial and technological advantages that could be obtained as a result of membership. One change, however, was that it no longer pursued the idea of radically transforming the Community from within once the UK was a member, but rather suggested that the UK accept the Community as it already was. *The Economist* viewed the second veto<sup>2</sup> of de Gaulle 1967 as a turning point to UK membership; the British had not to stand alone.

*The Economist* adopts a pro-european attitude since the end of the Seventies, it considers that Britain is in front of five major problems. The reading of the magazine pinpoints two images during that period, that of the Labour who are little favorable to the European project and that of the conservatives who expect to see a fast development of the European question. As far as Thatcher's ideas are concerned the paper admits that "*She has skilfully and rightly enhanced her once dubious pro-european credentials*"<sup>3</sup>. Because of the skepticism which impregnates this image the reader is not convinced by the willingness of Thatcher to participate in a more important British role in the European Union. This analysis from *The Economist*, as for the willingness of the European policy of Thatcher, changes totally when the weekly admits that the iron lady is not as well European as we think of it. *The Economist* admits that the European policy contains before any long-term horse-trading, and while distancing itself from its neutral position.

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<sup>2</sup> *The Economist*, 14<sup>th</sup> october 1967.

<sup>3</sup> , *The Economist*, november 1979.  
*The Economist*

The paper defends the interests of Great Britain in Europe by considering that the European question becomes one of the best vectors. The island mentality gets the upper hand over European Affairs especially during the years eighty. *The Economist* justifies its nationalism by criticizing the excesses of the bureaucracy of the community negotiations. On the monetary question, *The Economist* takes care of presenting a pragmatic strategy, favorable to the principle of a partial membership of the United Kingdom in the European Monetary System, if it does not harm in the interests of the country. The membership in the mechanism of the exchange rate is much more problematic; the newspaper is against the interventions on the exchange rate because it is not in compliance with the rules of the free exchange. The landslide victory of Blair in 1997 opens new horizons since the Prime minister assures with his European policies. When the Labour government came to power in the United Kingdom in 1997, it aimed to pursue a constructive European policy which departed from that of John Major's outgoing Conservative government.

Successive Labour Party manifestoes sought to establish some kind of British 'leadership' within the European Union. Thus the Blair and Brown governments have exploited the opportunities which the EU offers for resolving intractable policy issues: on matters ranging from economic competitiveness through to security and defence policy<sup>4</sup>. On the other hand, this engagement in European Union diplomacy has been bounded by electoral constraints. Thus the domestic strategy of utilitarian supranationalism has been designed to try to depoliticise the European issue in view of the British public's lukewarm attitudes towards integration. Supranationalism has an upstream component (the government's European diplomacy) and a downstream component (managing the salience of the European issue in domestic electoral politics).

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<sup>4</sup> R. Holden, *The Making of New Labour's European Policy*, Palgrave, 2002.

The Labour governments certainly achieved a break from the party's own policies of 1983; that the Blair government can claim notable achievements in placing a British imprint upon the EU; but that little progress was achieved domestically in establishing public support for this more constructive diplomacy. In this respect, *The Economist*<sup>5</sup> refined its project consisting of an economically integrated Europe and a western alliance responsible for political and defense matters. *The Economist* European vision was non-federal but rather economical and advises Blair to be a transatlantic go-between<sup>6</sup>, a staunch defender of the nation, and a skeptic about deep integration<sup>7</sup>. In different articles *The Economist* considers Blair as a politician who is not spooked<sup>8</sup> by the vision of a super-state and invites the prime minister to be a kowtow<sup>9</sup> to the US, a real atlanticist and America most reliable friend<sup>10</sup>.

As far as the constitution is concerned, *The Economist*<sup>11</sup> seems to defend the skeptical position of Blair to hold a referendum about this project.

*Mr Blair's enthusiasm for going into battle in Europe contrasts sharply with his reluctance to engage with the issue at home. While he claims he can win a referendum on the constitution, he knows that victory will be far from certain...However, when asked whether they would back it if Mr Blair called for a yes vote, support fell to 32 %. In practice, Mr Blair can remove himself from the campaign only by ceasing to be prime minister*

In another article the magazine admits that unfortunately, both at home and abroad, the reality of Europe has been a great deal more trying than the young and hopeful Mr Blair could possibly have imagined.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> *The Economist*, 24<sup>th</sup> april 1999.

<sup>6</sup> *The Economist*, 25<sup>th</sup> april 1998.

<sup>7</sup> *The Economist*, 2<sup>th</sup> april 2005, 44.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *The Economist*, 25<sup>th</sup> april 1998, 23.

<sup>10</sup> *The Economist*, 21<sup>th</sup> september 2002, 33.

<sup>11</sup> *The Economist*, 1<sup>th</sup> may 2003, 25.

<sup>12</sup>, 26<sup>th</sup> may 2005,13.

*The Economist*

The Economist considers Blair as the safest the most loyal friend of Americans, because he plays the role of pivot or intermediary between both banks of the Atlantic Ocean. We can perceive through this representative lexicon that The Economist is for the European integration, however he advises the government of Blair to be all eyes before opting for the euro; this is why the weekly wished that the referendum is delayed as much as possible. It was planned that the British cut on the European question from 2000, but according to The Economist, Blair is the "magician", that is the illustrious defender of the third way, the real talented speaker, the one who makes a success of the agreement concluded with Ireland, and who delays the term for cause. *The Economist* highlights the idea that every new event convinces the sceptics that monetary union is a folly to which Britain would be mad to subscribe. The same event convinces the euro's champions that it is an opportunity from which Britain would be mad to abstain.<sup>13</sup>

In addition, the magazine puts forward different arguments to doubt about the prospect of the euro: “ *Leading Britain into the euro could be the most fateful decision he will take* ”<sup>14</sup>. The paper goes further and deems that the British people seem not to have an appetite to ditch the pound sterling and join the single european currency<sup>15</sup>. To enrich its argument, *The Economist* presents to the readers the opinion polls conducted by MORI in December, 2000, according to which 46 % of the British wish to stay in the European Union, while 43 % are downright against and more than 11 % remains undecided. On the other hand, as regards the single currency, 22 % wish to join the club of the countries of the Eurozone whereas 70 % are against and 8 % are undecided.

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<sup>13</sup> *The Economist*, 7<sup>th</sup> november 1998, 54.

<sup>14</sup> *The Economist*, 27<sup>th</sup> february 1999, 51.

<sup>15</sup> *The Economist*, 19<sup>th</sup> february 2000, 35-36.



These figures consolidate the reasoning of the newspaper as far as the British consider themselves European, but refuse to be full members of the Eurozone; in fact, *The Economist* prepares the reader to doubt about European union and the existence of a unified currency. In this respect, the paper pinpoints the idea that Blair would be lauded as the man who hold his nerve and preserve the transatlantic alliance<sup>16</sup>. According to *The Economist*, Britain is outward-looking, free trading, usually liberal and a strategic partner with America not a counterweight.<sup>17</sup>

The following cartoons bring to the fore *The Economist's* excess of hesitation or doubt about the European project. Political cartoons for any newspaper are indispensable. It is a visual medium that engages the audience, helps them understand and interpret the political, social and economic scene in the country and the world. The political cartoons lately have gained much importance and have a raised standing in a newspaper. Bill Emmott, the previous editor of *The Economist* (1993-2006) considers that: “*What cartoonists do is to distort the truth about a politician or other public figure, accentuating some of their features in order to create a sort of new reality, a new truth, about them*”.<sup>18</sup> Peter Schrank, one of the famous British cartoonist admits that he has a message to convey : « *Our aim is to promote the political cartoon by way of amusing, informing and educating. Cartooning in Britain has an unrivalled heritage going back over many hundreds of years. From Hogarth through Gillray via Will Dyson Low and Vicky to the present day, cartoonists have had a major impact on readers* ».

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<sup>16</sup> *The Economist*, 15<sup>th</sup> february 2003,35.

<sup>17</sup> *The Economist*, 26<sup>th</sup> may 2005, 23.

<sup>18</sup> Bill Emmot, « The true nature of national identity ». See the website <<http://www.billemmott.com/article.php?id=14>>, on 10th may 2012.

Political cartooning is essential for a newspaper to put out a point of view, which may differ from one of its own. Cartoons that can help them understand the mood of the country benefit people. Political cartooning is inspired by the situations around the cartoonist, what he sees and believes are portrayed through the sketch he creates. Apart from a great sense of humour, a cartoonist is required to understand the political scene and make a commentary on the situation, but to refrain from making it of bad taste. The cartoonist is required to make an informed decision on his cartoon that will appear the next day. The currency of the cartoon is what makes it different from other comic strips, a cartoonist tracks the stories of the day and makes his cartoon accordingly. Cartoons are often slapstick and exaggerated, yet aim at making a realistic appeal.

### Cartoon 1

#### You've got a small problem



*The Economist* 19<sup>th</sup> June, 2004

In this cartoon *The Economist* shows us that the European Union, represented by an old train I in difficult position. It could no longer move forward; the irony is that the problem is not

small since the old machine is at standstill. *The Economist* makes the problem appear trivial and insignificant, however it is the opposite. The project of a constitutional text seems thorny and tricky to realize. The cartoon projects implicitly an image or a vision that the magazine is eager to display and which buttresses the paper's perception of Britain in Europe.

This cartoon indicates Blair's position between both sides of the Atlantic; the prime minister seems to play his pivotal role between Europe and America.

## Cartoon 2

*Public support for war continues to fall. But that is not Tony Blair's biggest worry*

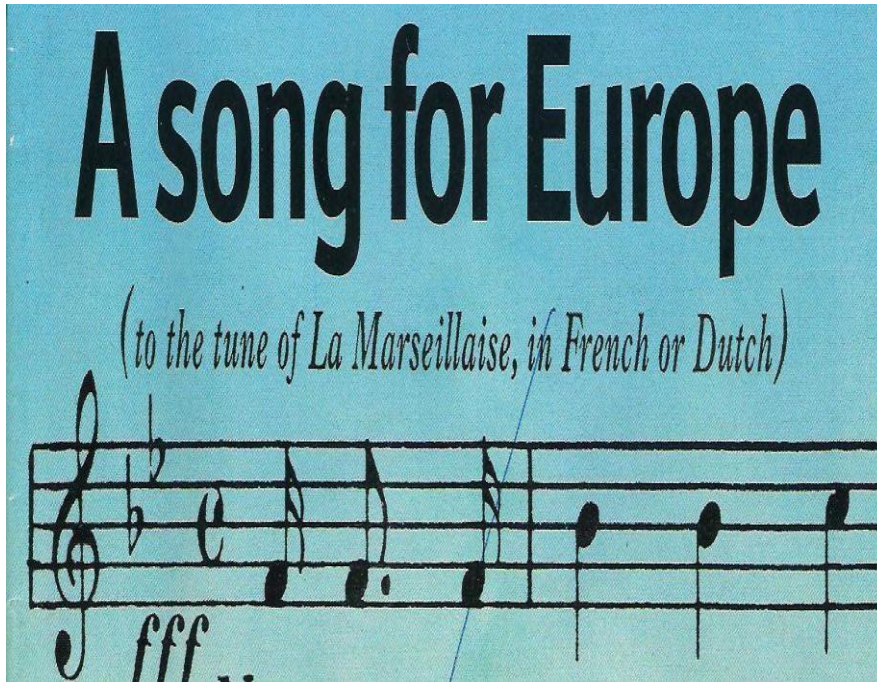


*The Economist*, 15<sup>th</sup> february 2003

The bridge which is about to fall from the European side represented by president Chirac, the German Chancellor Schröder and the Belgium Prime minister. The special relation with the Americans buttress Blair's inclination to keep a certain distance with Europe. *The Economist* supposes that the American side from which president Bush is standing is still safe and could be the unique alternative for Blair.

The message is clear-cut and blatant, Europe does not embody a real alternative for the British prime minister; there's an invitation to move to the American ally.

### Cartoon 3



*The Economist*, 28<sup>th</sup> may 2005

**No, non non non non no-n no-n**

This cartoon which is a music score is represented by the French word “non”, or “no ” to the constitution. In fact *The Economist* anticipates the French and the Dutch referendum. The message of the Economist is clear; a defeat for the constitution would not be the catastrophe that some Europhiles seem to think: life would go on. The French are to vote on the 29<sup>th</sup> may 2005 and the Dutch on 1<sup>th</sup> june. The magazine considers the constitution impractical for a union of 25 member states, all with interests and ideas of their own. This cartoon unravels a subjective and biased view from the magazine.

#### Cartoon 4



*The Economist*, 28<sup>th</sup> may 2005

This cartoon represents the weather vane which indicates the direction of the wind. The message here says no and implies that the French people are not sure to vote for the European constitution. The cartoon shows a cloudy and probably windy weather, this ironically presages a negative response and a no or a French “non” to the constitution. Nothing is innocent in this cartoon; *The Economist* is critical of France and of president Chirac whose authority would be weakened, leaving him vulnerable on both sides. At home he would face pressure to demand more social concessions from Brussels. The fellow Europeans would feel embarrassed and could imagine that France had let down the cause.

## Cartoon 5

# Where to file Europe's new constitution

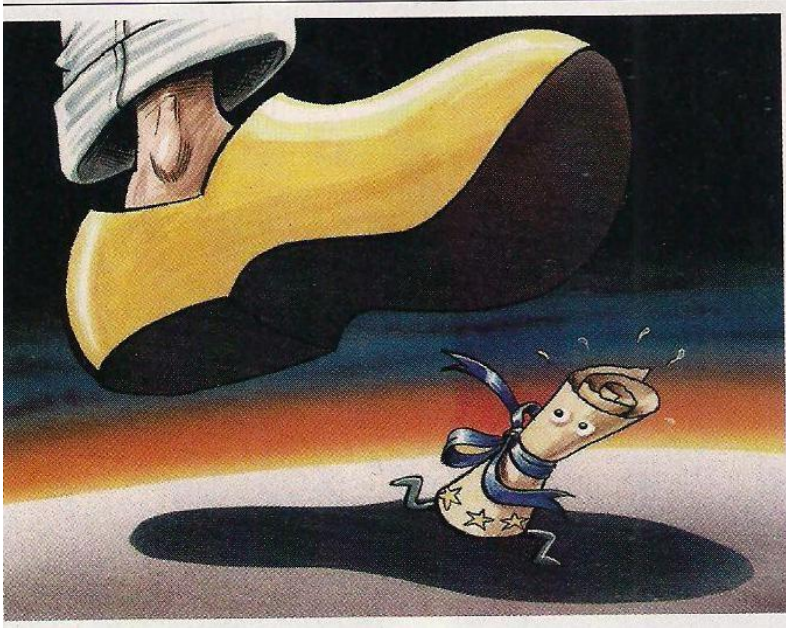


*The Economist*, 27<sup>th</sup> June 2003

*The Economist* admits that Europe's constitutional convention has produced a lamentable piece of work. The magazine considers that the draft is riddled with botched compromises, anomalies and absurdities. The draft constitution makes the union's constitutional architecture harder to understand. The magazine deems that the Union's governments should take it up for exactly as long as it takes to dump in the nearest bin<sup>19</sup>. The message implied here is conspicuous; *The Economist* does not welcome this text and prepares its readers to doubt its legitimacy.

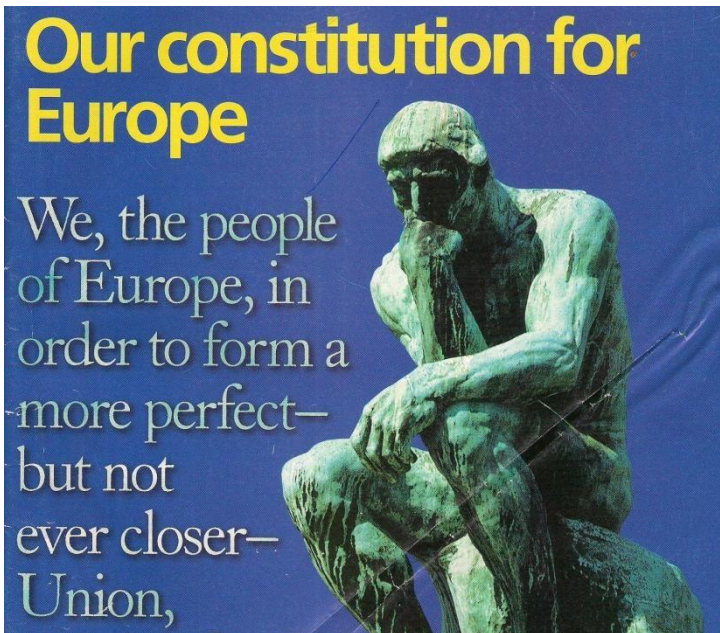
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<sup>19</sup> *The Economist*, 27<sup>th</sup> June 2003.



*The Economist*, 21<sup>th</sup> may 2005.

This cartoon shows a Dutch trampling or crushing with his shoe the constitution draft; the ironic aspect of the cartoon is pointed out by the insignificant size of the draft and the apparent impressive shoe. The message is blatant, the Dutch will not accept to say yes to this european text. *The Economist* explains the reasons that may push the Dutch to refuse the constitution during their referendum. They seem disgruntled with the European Union and according to the magazine the Dutch like their British counterparts fear that their country may be turned into a province of a European province of a European superstate.



This cartoon reminds us of the preamble to the American constitution written in september 17th 1787 by the Founding Fathers. The American text says : *We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America*<sup>20</sup> This cartoon is full of irony and sarcasm, the message here is an invitation to refuse the text because a closer union would mean total disappearance of independence and sovereignty. *The Economist* refutes a text or a draft that may neglect the rights of the people. The following cartoons as well as the different positions of the paper discourse show an excessive tendency to refuse the European ideal of a powerful federation and an inclination to gloss over the ideal of a federal state in Europe.

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<sup>20</sup> See the website about the American constitution  
:<[http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/constitutionworkshop/images/Constitution\\_Pg1of4\\_AC-txt.pdf](http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/constitutionworkshop/images/Constitution_Pg1of4_AC-txt.pdf)>



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