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The Notion of *Europe* in British Conservative Parliamentary Speeches

Abstract

This article addresses the use of the word *Europe* in parliamentary speeches by the leaders of the Conservative Party in the United Kingdom. A special focus is on the speeches in which former party leader Iain Duncan Smith, in office from September 2001 to November 2003, mentioned the word “Europe”, since he later also featured prominently in both the pro-Brexit campaign and the still ongoing Brexit debate. Both the number of occurrences of the word *Europe* and its use and collocations are taken into account in the analysis. In concrete collocations, *Europe* is connected with ‘possibly positive in the future’ and ‘negative status quo’.

Sommaire

Cet article adresse l’usage du mot *Europe* dans le discours parlementaire mené par les leaders du parti conservatif au Royaume-Uni. L’ancien leader Iain Duncan Smith, qui continue à participer au débat autour le départ du Royaume Uni de l’Union Européenne jusqu’à ce jour, est le personnage central de cette analyse. L’usage et les collocations du mot *Europe* seront analysés. On verra que, dans des collocations concrètes, le mot *Europe* est lié à ‘possiblement positif dans l’avenir’ et ‘status quo négatif’.

Zusammenfassung

Der vorliegende Artikel beschäftigt sich mit dem Gebrauch des Wortes *Europe* in den Reden von konservativen Parteivorsitzenden im britischen Parlament. Der Fokus liegt hierbei auf dem ehemaligen Vorsitzenden Iain Duncan Smith, der sich bis heute in die anhaltende Brexit-Debatte einmischt und unbeirrt für einen raschen und kompromisslosen Austritt aus der EU eintritt. Sowohl der Gebrauch als auch die Kollokationen des Begriffs werden analysiert. In konkreten Kollokationen zeigt sich eine Verknüpfung von *Europe* mit ‘möglicherweise positiv in der Zukunft’ und ‘negativer Status Quo’.

1. Introduction

How do politicians in the UK use the term *Europe* in parliamentary discourse? This question is especially relevant because the relationship between the UK and the continent has been and is very controversial. The “Brexit” referendum last year has certainly added importance to this research area, with negotiations still underway at the time of writing this article.

Adopting Chilton’s view that there is a “deep link between the political and the linguistic” (Chilton 2004: xi) and a constructivist view of language in general leads me to the hypothesis that to understand the current positions of the British Conservative government, we have to understand what “Europe” means to them and how the leaders of the Conservative Party have been using the term. This paper will focus on Iain Duncan Smith, who was party leader from September 2001 to November 2003. He became a prominent pro-Brexit as a Cabinet minister under David Cameron (see e.g. Mason 2016) and continues to contribute to the ongoing debate, advocating a hard Brexit if the EU does not make concessions to the UK (see e.g. Groves 2017).

2. Research Design

My research questions are, therefore:

- How is the word *Europe* used in political discourse?
- Is it used as a synonym for the EU or to refer to the continent? Is the UK included in the notion or imagined as outside of it?
- Which collocations are frequently used in connection with the term “Europe”?

The data I analysed in order to answer these questions are speeches made by Conservative Party leaders in parliament. The period from 1997 to 2010 was chosen because many important events happening in European politics during this time made it likely that the concept of Europe would be discussed in Parliament. This includes the Amsterdam Treaty, the proposed EU constitution but also the big enlargement in 2004. A corpus consisting of all documented speeches made by party leaders in parliament was thus drawn up, followed by a lexical search for occurrences of the word *Europe*. After this quantitative analysis, all the instances in the relevant speeches were then analysed individually.

3. Results

Overall, Conservative Party leaders made contributions to 867 debates in Parliament between 1997 and 2010. The word *Europe* was used 441 times in the speeches by Conservative party leaders. It was used in 129 different speeches. This means the term *Europe* was mentioned in roughly 15% of all contributions. Since all five opposition leaders used it, we can conclude that there was a pretty constant discussion of the term over the researched period.

Focusing now on Iain Duncan Smith in particular, it emerged that he referred to *Europe* even more often, when speaking about relative numbers: Out of the 102 speeches he made overall during his term of office as party leader from September 2011 to November 2013, he mentioned *Europe* 65 times, in a total of 21 debates (see Table 1). This means he talked about this term in 20,5% of all the speeches he made in parliament.

<i>Name of Debate</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Hansard Volume no.</i>	<i>occ.</i>
Engagements	28/11/2001	375	2
Engagements	12/12/2001	376	1
European Council (Laeken)	17/12/2001	377	9
Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting	06/03/2002	381	3
European Council (Barcelona)	18/03/2002	382	8
Engagements	10/04/2002	383	1
AMENDMENT OF THE LAW	17/04/2002	383	2
European Council (Seville)	24/06/2002	387	10
Engagements	17/07/2002	389	1
European Council	28/10/2002	391	10
Engagements	04/12/2002	395	1
European Council (Copenhagen)	16/12/2002	396	3
Iraq	18/03/2003	401	1
Iraq and European Council	24/03/2003	402	1
AMENDMENT OF THE LAW	09/04/2003	403	1
Engagements	21/05/2003	405	1
European Council	23/06/2003	407	2
Engagements	10/09/2003	410	1
Engagements	17/09/2003	410	1
Engagements	29/10/2003	412	5
Engagements	05/11/2003	412	1
<i>Total: 21 debates</i>			<i>65</i>

Table 1: List of Speeches by Iain Duncan Smith mentioning Europe

In some of those speeches, the word occurred more than once; the debates on the European Council summits in Laeken, Barcelona, Seville as well as a “normal” one in Brussels stand out, as does one session of Prime Minister’s Questions (titled “Engagements” in the official report, the *Hansard*) right at the end of Iain Duncan Smith’s term of office. It can be concluded that the term *Europe* is a meaningful term which is often discussed in the British Parliament. Yet what is this *Europe* that is mentioned so often? This question will be addressed in the following, looking at all the occurrences individually and using examples by to illustrate the findings.

This second analysis step led to the exclusion of 9 occurrences of the word *Europe* from the corpus, because it was either used in a quote of someone else’s speech (4 cases), or simply referred to the name of a Secretary of State, the “Minister for Europe” (5 cases). The remaining 56 instances were then analysed in more detail, determining from the context in which sense the word *Europe* was used in each case. The topics or rather policy areas addressed in connection with the word *Europe* were the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), the EU enlargement, and the Constitution treaty.

In the following, extracts from the five speeches by Iain Duncan Smith containing the most numerous occurrences of the word *Europe* will be analysed as examples before the more general results will be summarised. In the first of these speeches”, Iain Duncan Smith sharply criticised the outcome of the Laeken European Council from December 2001 (my emphasis in bold):

“I shall quote from the declaration: “Over the last ten years, construction of a political union has begun”. Furthermore, the document asks, How [sic] can the authority and efficiency of the European Commission be enhanced? Is that really what **the nations and the people of Europe** have been crying out for: enhanced significance and power for the Commission and deeper political union? [...]

Notwithstanding the Prime Minister's words, the document discusses dismissively the importance of national Parliaments. It says: The national parliaments also contribute towards the legitimacy of the European project. I thought they were **the legitimacy of anything in Europe**, rather than just contributing to it. Again, for those at Laeken the European project came first. They go on to say that they want to see **Europe more involved** in foreign affairs, security and defence". Yet again, deeper and deeper integration. [...]

Secondly, the Prime Minister cannot believe that he has moved the argument into **a federal Europe** rather than away from it in signing up to what is becoming a European constitution. [...]

As the Prime Minister said, **the future of Europe** does matter: it matters immensely. The Prime Minister has agreed to the establishment of a convention that is supposed to involve a balance of agreement **about where we are going on Europe**. Will he now say whom he intends to put on that body, from the national Parliament? We have already heard that the hon. Member for South Shields (Mr. Miliband) will be part of the praesidium, as they call it; and I read today that the right hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) might be on it. There seems to be no end of attempts to find a job for the right hon. Member for Hartlepool. Two weeks ago, he was going to be Mayor of London; now he will be on the praesidium **in Europe**. Is the Prime Minister prepared to open up the debate by offering such a post to somebody from the Conservative party, who would have a different view? [Interruption.] I challenge the Prime Minister: he says that he **wants a decentralised Europe**, so is he prepared to appoint to the praesidium somebody from the Conservative party who has a different view of the direction that we should take? If not, we know very well that he has no intention of seeing any change.

The Laeken Council was about a greater move towards a European state. I am reminded of the words of Humpty Dumpty. When I use a word, he said, it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less ... The question is ... which is to be master—that's all. Over the weekend, we learned that the Prime Minister acquiesced, once and for all, **in making the master of this process Europe**, not the nation state.” (“European Council (Laeken)”, 17/12/2001).

In this speech, the word *Europe* is used as a synonym for the EU and two different versions of it are presented: one that the speaker, Iain Duncan Smith, approves of, namely an EU whose legitimacy emanates from the “nations and the people of Europe” and which is organised in a way that he characterises as “decentralised” later in the speech. And the opposite version, where supranational elements like the EU Commission take precedence and the EU is an actor of its own who gets “more involved” in policy areas like foreign affairs. This personification of the notion of “Europe” is interesting in that it verbally creates a political opponent which advocates of the first version of “Europe” should therefore watch with suspicion. The last sentence in the speech repeats this meaning in that “Europe” is framed as the “master of this process” instead of the nation states, where legitimacy and the power to act and decide on the future development of the EU should be based. This predicament is further elaborated in two mentions of “the future of Europe” and the question of the direction any such future development: the central question Iain Duncan Smith frames is “where we are going on Europe”. Here, the pronoun *we* together with the preposition *on [Europe]* suggests that *Europe* in this case stands not only for the EU as a political project, but that it is a topic which also includes the UK’s role in the EU and the policies the UK government adopt vis-à-vis the danger of the whole project possibly going in a direction the speaker does not approve of.

Later in the same speech, the preposition *in* is used, which indicates that the word *Europe* is used here in a geographical sense. In this particular case, where the Convention on the Future of Europe is referred to, a body charged with developing a draft EU Constitution, it is additionally used as a metonymy for the city of Brussels, where this body was located.

In the next speech, occasioned by the next European Council meeting, Iain Duncan Smith uses the word *Europe* in the sense of the member states of the European Union. This time it is not the institutions in Brussels but the totality of member states and the economic situation in them. Using

the United States as a counterpart to compare to, Iain Duncan Smith criticised the pension crisis and service price levels “[i]n Europe” before he goes on to personify “Europe” again as an actor on a global scale, and an actor who has to compete with other big actors but who has not risen to this challenge. Instead, he claims that “Europe has gone backwards”, casting the EU as unfit for the task and thus implicitly criticising the policy decisions taken both by the supranational and intergovernmental elements making up the EU. He finishes with criticism of the British Prime Minister’s alleged lack of influence “in Europe”. Here, the preposition does not refer to a geographical location but the institutions in which the national governments have a say, such as the Council of the European Union. The majority decisions taken there are obviously not to the taste of the opposition leader speaking here.

“What about the serious crisis in pensions? **In Europe** that has been going on for years. [...]

In Lisbon the aim was ‘a fully liberalised and competitive telecoms market by the end of the next year.’ That was 2001. Two years later in Barcelona, we are told that ‘further progress is needed.’ A telephone call **in Europe** costs three times as much as in the United States. Where was the make or break there?

Lisbon was about **making Europe more competitive**. Since then, **Europe has gone backwards**. [...] The Prime Minister claims to be at the centre of European decision making. After the last summit, he said: ‘Europe needs Britain to be engaged and Britain needs to have influence in Europe.’— [Official Report, 17 December 2001: Vol. 377, c. 27.] Let us look at the facts. On asylum, he has lost the bilateral agreement with France that Germany and Denmark retain. On Zimbabwe, the Commission, the Belgians and the French have all rolled out the red carpet for Mugabe. Where was the Prime Minister's influence? Is that what he calls **having influence in Europe**? I doubt it. At Nice he gave up the veto in more than 30 areas. What influence did he gain in Barcelona from any one of those? None. [...]” (“European Council (Barcelona)”, 18/03/2002)

The next example highlights the use of the word “Europe” both as a synonym for the EU again, when he negates the reaching of the UK government’s goal of “leading in Europe”. Then, he uses the same term in the sense of a group of member state leaders, “the rest of Europe”. This phrasing implies that the UK is a part of this group, but also apart in that the “rest” does neither agree with nor support the UK’s policy goals. The UK is thus a kind of outsider, isolated from the other group members. Duncan Smith then states that there is not even unity in the British Cabinet when it comes to a common position on European policies, thus further criticising the alleged lack of power of the British PM. Speaking metaphorically and bringing in a geographical sense, he phrases this as a failure “to carry his own Cabinet to Europe with him”. This refers to Brussels as the metonymy for the seat of the EU institutions and the location of many summits where the national leaders can voice their opinions. Additionally, “Europe” appears as a heterotopia here; it is a distant place where one has to travel to and where a power struggle takes place in which the UK has a weak position:

“None of those things, however, can obscure the underlying message from Seville: that for all the Prime Minister's talk of leading **in Europe** and winning the argument, he has once again lost the argument and been left behind. [...] The Prime Minister not only **failed to carry the rest of Europe** with him—he could not even **carry his own Cabinet to Europe** with him. [...] Does the Prime Minister agree with NATO's supreme commander **in Europe** when he says that NATO should have primacy over the Euro army and that his deputy should have strategic control over EU-led operations? [...]” (“European Council (Seville)”, 24/06/2002)

In the last part of the speech, the geographical sense of “Europe” is meant when Duncan Smith mentions NATO, but in this case the word “Europe” is completely decoupled from any reference to the EU (which is explicitly referred to with the words “Euro” and “EU”) but only describes the difference to the US-dimension of NATO. Since non-EU members such as Norway, Albania or Turkey are members of NATO, this separation of meanings makes sense but also highlights the multi-faceted and sometimes frankly confusing meaning dimensions of the term “Europe”, which very much depends on the immediate context in which it is used, even by the same speaker in a single speech.

In the next example, a further speech on a European Council meeting, Duncan Smith starts by using the term *Europe* as an umbrella term referring to all policies pursued within the framework of the EU by pairing it with the preposition *on*:

On Europe, I congratulate the Danish presidency on keeping EU enlargement on track. [...] The prospect before us is of a **new Europe built on co-operation between stable democratic nations and the prosperity of open markets**—[Interruption.] I know open markets make Labour Members very uncomfortable but they will have to live with them.

The choice will be between an **old Europe that is always seeking to centralise power** or a **new Europe that is apparently about open markets and less regulation**. In that context, it is a pity that the Prime Minister allowed **the forces of old Europe** to sideline him so convincingly at Brussels. [...] (“European Council”, 28/10/2002)

In the following, the Conservative leader at the time uses *Europe* as a synonym for the EU and outlines his vision of how it should work in the future: he wants to see “Europe” as a space of stability, where democracy is prevalent and the nation is the centre, not a supranational organisation. This vision of a “new Europe” is also cast as a space of prosperity, and he gives his opinion that this can be reached by having open markets. Contrasting sharply with this “new Europe”, Duncan Smith outlines the characteristics of the “old Europe”: this obviously undesirable version of the EU “is always seeking to centralise power”. This personified political actor pursuing its own goals of accumulating more power by concentrating it at the centre (an implicit hint at Brussels, presumably) takes on a threatening quality when it is strengthened with “the forces of old Europe”. This implies that there are some opponents who are willing to defend this system (and they are framed as strong enough to “sideline” the UK in the process).

The last example contains further references to the UK as part of the group of EU member states or at least part of the group of countries located in the same part of the world, such as in the comparison of crime rates in the following parliamentary contribution:

Figures released by the Home Office last Friday show that people are more likely to suffer crime in Britain than in **any other country in Europe** or north America. So will the Prime Minister tell us which country has the **highest level of violent crime in Europe?**

[...] The Prime Minister must be **the only person in Europe** who thinks that the European constitution has no constitutional implications for Britain. Does he agree with the French Prime Minister, who said recently that any true European would want a referendum? [...] Let me remind the Prime Minister—because he has a very short memory—what the constitution actually provides for. It provides for an elected president, a European foreign minister, control over asylum policy, a charter of fundamental rights, and a European army—all of which the Prime Minister says is only a tidying-up exercise. That is why the German Foreign Minister has said: This is the most important treaty since the formation of the Common Market". Why is the Prime Minister **the only leader in Europe** who will not tell the truth to his own country? (“Engagements”, 29/10/2003)

As the speech progresses to address the planned EU Constitution, Duncan Smith attacks the Prime Minister as “the only person in Europe” downplaying the consequences of it. Again, the British national leader is cast as a natural member of the community of “person[s] in Europe”, even though he is presented as the odd one out once more and thus isolated from the opinions held by rest of his group. The same pattern appears in the last sentence, when there is a slightly more exclusive meaning of *Europe* in so far as now only “leader[s] in Europe” are mentioned as the group the PM belongs to but is once again isolated from by his position on the EU Constitution.

4. Conclusion

A conclusion that can be drawn from the analysis of the speeches by Iain Duncan Smith is that the notion of *Europe* is a multifaceted one in British parliamentary discourse insofar as it is used with

varying meanings in different contexts: in the overwhelming majority of cases (52), the term was used when in fact the European Union (EU) or some aspects relating to the EU were meant. Only 4 occurrences referred to a purely geographical location, where the word *Europe* was used to designate a specific location that did not relate to (prospective) EU member states.

In the cases where *Europe* was used meaning ‘EU’, we need to further differentiate between the usage of the term *Europe* to designate selected EU institutions or indeed only the leaders of EU member states, the EU as an organisation as a whole, which is then often personified, or the totality of member states of the EU. Occasionally, also the population included in the EU (“people of Europe”) are mentioned, taken to mean all EU citizens.

It can be said that each mention of the word *Europe* can include a slightly different meaning and angle, and the usage of *Europe* as a kind of umbrella term can lead to confusion among listeners. The lack of transparency and clarity can also contribute to the impression that *Europe* varies its shape and is therefore hard to grasp, which can also help to blur the accountability attributed to specific actors and makes it easy to generalise and merge the different perspectives into one.

Overall, however, the term *Europe* as such was largely used in a quite neutral way, simply as a synonym for ‘EU’, by the Conservative party, that is to say the word is not negatively connotated as such all the time. How the EU was then framed in the different cases can be seen by looking at the way the term was predicated, i.e. which verbs, adjectives and nouns are used to define the meaning in more detail (Gibbins 2014: 11-12). Here, the main interest was generated by the collocations “new” and “old”, which were used by Iain Duncan Smith to further define “Europe” when used as a synonym for the EU. On the one hand, positive connotations framed a good, ideal version of Europe in the future, a “new” version of the EU, which was characterised as flexible, open, efficient and a lean organisation enabling frictionless trade among its members, an organisation which refrains from taking power away from nation states. Collocations like “a decentralised Europe” and phrases like “a Europe that is more competitive” or “a new Europe rooted in its nation states” illustrated this. The Conservative Party leader presented this as the dominating vision and policy goal in parliamentary speeches, but also as an ideal that was not reached.

However, this positive vision of a possible future shaped by the British Conservatives implied criticism of the status quo, which was indeed often cast as the exact opposite. Negative connotations included Europe as a “superpower”, which “is always seeking to centralise power”, or the spectre of a “federal Europe”. In addition, Iain Duncan Smith said that “Europe has gone backwards”. The unwanted Europe in its state at the time of speaking thus stands for a centralising power, a federal superstate, a rival or opponent; in fact a dangerously power-hungry other. A clear dichotomy between two opposing models of the EU thus appeared in the speeches.

Furthermore, the UK was cast as a member of a European community even if the overall context was almost always negative, for example when Iain Duncan Smith alleged that Tony Blair “failed to carry the rest of Europe with him”. The other EU member states are titled “the rest”, but this means that the UK is thought to be an integral part of the EU as well. On the other hand, there were also five instances where the word “Europe” was used to designate the other EU member states but excluded the UK. In these cases, the EU member states were framed not as partners by the Conservative leaders, but as opponents or rivals.

In conclusion, I argue that a certain conception of Europe lies at the heart of the Conservative take on the EU in the United Kingdom. If a discourse reality is constructed through parliamentary

speeches where European institutions are conceived of as an actor challenging British power and sovereignty though integration, opposing the same seems logical. This is the case with the former Conservative leader Iain Duncan Smith, who seemingly holds on to this view until the present.

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