**Margaret Thatcher and the Rhetorical Road to Brexit**

**Andrew S. Roe-Crines**

**Introduction**

Following the United Kingdom’s failure to leave the European Union in March 2019, it would be worth reconsidering the extent to which Margaret Thatcher’s growing resistance to further integration with the European Economic Community (later the ‘European Union’) helped to inspire a rhetorical narrative towards departure in the years following her Premiership. It will show how this narrative culminated in the EU referendum in 2016 and the moves towards ‘Brexit’ in the following years.

Needless to say other political actors played key roles across the political spectrum, yet for Thatcher it was the importance of core conservative[[1]](#footnote-1) principles such as national sovereignty, its relationship with Westminster, preserving a specific conception of British identity, and a liberal attitude towards economic strategy which inspired her to adopt more Eurosceptic attitudes in the latter years of her Premiership and beyond. Indeed, in conversation with the author in January 2019, Sir John Redwood reflected that…

…after office she moved further in the Eurosceptic direction, listening to people like Sir William Cash and myself warning her of the dangers of more power passing. The lady who had famously campaigned to stay in the EEC in 1975 in a jumper with the flags of the members on it became an important elder stateswoman in the Eurosceptic movement to stop Maastricht and Lisbon. She wanted to keep the UK out of the growing movement to full scale economic, monetary and political union and realised in her later years we needed to leave as it was far distant from the Common Market she had enthusiastically supported (Redwood, 2019).

To demonstrate Thatcher’s shift in rhetorical emphasis, this chapter positions her arguments within the broader traditions of conservative scepticism towards UK membership of the European projects. To do this the chapter will first present a broad overview of the historical development of Conservative Euroscepticism, whilst positioning Thatcher within it. To do so it will emphasise key points advanced by Hayton (2012) and Gamble (1994) that ‘Thatcherism was an attempt to restore the conditions of Conservative hegemony’ by emphasising ‘market liberalism as a dominant public philosophy’ (Hayton, 2012: 9; Gamble, 1994: 4). Then, drawing loosely from rhetorical methodological concepts,[[2]](#footnote-2) this chapter briefly consider the importance of Thatcher’s Bruges speech as a defining moment of Euroscepticism within the Conservative Party, from which many of the arguments used in Thatcher’s subsequent interventions flowed during the premierships of John Major, Tony Blair, and Gordon Brown. Over the course of her time in the House of Lords it will be possible to see a strengthening of her Eurosceptic arguments, which galvanised her ideological follows, thereby posing an intellectual and political challenge to those resisting calls for a referendum on UK membership of the European Union. Ultimately, those calls became irresistible (and politically impossible to ignore), thereby culminating in the vote for the UK to leave the EU in 2016.

**Thatcher and the Historical Development of Conservative Euroscepticism**

Within the Conservative Party there have been three distinct elements of ‘anti-Europeanism’ since the 1950s (Moon, 1985: 20). These elements remained a numerical minority of the Parliamentary Party, given the creation of a European common market as an opportunity for greater economic prosperity. This appealed to the more pragmatic strands of conservative thinking, particularly within the broader context of a changing society linked to a more technologically minded populace.

However, despite initially being a minority view, the Eurosceptic element represented a gradual shift of opinion and attitude between the 1950s and 1980s. Initially positive, this shift became more sceptical as the character of the European project began change. In terms of their broad categorisation, Moon (1985: 20) described Eurosceptics as simply ‘anti-Europeans’ in the 1950s; ‘anti-Common Marketeers’ over the course of the 1960s and into the 1970s; and fully ‘Eurosceptics’ in the 1980s and, subsequently, throughout the 1990s and into the 21st Century. More recently, Heppell *et al* (2017) advanced a fourth category, that of ‘Eurorejectionists’ following the passing of the Lisbon Treaty without a referendum and the rise of UKIP in British politics. This category reflected the complete rejection of the European project because of the substantial challenge posed to the key tenets of British political sovereignty. It is also worth noting that running alongside these elements was the emergence of a shift in the character of the three European project(s)[[3]](#footnote-3) and the growing size of the European Community (Union).[[4]](#footnote-4) Put simply, the early yet simple ambitions of greater economic cooperation had given way to integration in a range of other areas such as political, social, and more recently in areas of defence.

The long tradition of growing anti-Europeanism before Thatcher’s leadership provides something of a political and historical tradition. For example, Anthony Eden noted in 1952 that ‘we know in our bones we cannot’ commit to Europe because ‘Britain’s story and her interests lie far beyond the continent of Europe’ (Eden, 1960: 36). This reflects a more global-facing character within the British character that would be constrained by overly linking its economy to a relatively small number of European countries with diverse economic needs.

Moreover, in 1951 the Conservative Party had committed in their manifesto to maintaining strong ties with Britain’s imperial holdings and the growing Commonwealth of nations. Indeed, it argued that the Conservatives will protect ‘the safety, progress and cohesion of the British Empire and Commonwealth of Nations’ given ‘in our home market the Empire producer will have place second only to the home producer’ (Craig, 1975: 168-9). In terms of British foreign and economic policy, the Conservatives were clear in their commitment to Britain beyond Europe.

Despite the importance of global trade and a close relationship with the Commonwealth, the greatest concern of the anti-European tendency concerned sovereignty. This was because they believed it extended sovereignty beyond the limits of Parliamentary authority by providing a voice in Europe. For antiEuropeans, this represents a fundamental flaw in the process of pooling sovereignty given it loses Sovereign *power*. The economic rewards are, for those who defend sovereignty, inadequate. Most importantly, the loss of sovereignty also limits the authority of Westminster within its own domestic territory. This is because the power to make decisions over how it is governed would rest with an external body, rather than with Parliamentary representatives selected by the voters to govern. The longer-term impact of this would be the dilution of British nationhood and the risk posed to national (English, Scottish, Welsh, Northern Irish) and regional identities. Given these issues, the strands of Euroscepticism reject the process of integration because of the substantive risks they pose not just to domestic policy and the authority of Westminster, but also by the transfer of Sovereign power and the ability to maintain autonomous rule.

It is important to note, however that Thatcher did not become a Euro*rejectionist* whilst Prime Minister. However, the shift in tone can be identified by the language used to describe Britain’s relationship with the Common Market within the Conservative Party manifesto between 1964-1983 and the period thereafter. Over the course of Heath and Thatcher’s early leadership, the manifesto was broadly positive towards the Common Market, whilst after 1983 it became more sceptical about the UKs continued participation within an increasingly integrationist group (Stevens, 2012).

A key event during the development of Thatcher’s Euroscepticism (and her eventual delivery of her highly critical speech at Bruges) was the negotiation and passage of the Single European Act (SEA). Superficially, Thatcher’s support for the passage of the SEA appeared to demonstrate support for an integrationist process. This needs to be contextualised by the different priorities of the President of the European Commission, Jacques Delors and Thatcher. For Thatcher, the SEA represented an opportunity to push Europe towards a more economically liberal approach that would benefit the UK economy. She saw this as a ‘convergence of economic policy across Europe with that of the British Conservative Party’ which would transform Europe into a free market ‘global hegemonic project’ (Gifford: 2008: 89-94). However it was only after the passage of the SEA through Parliament when the extent of Delors’ preference for further *integration* became clear.

The elements of economic liberalisation within the Act were seen by Delors and other European federalists to be a ‘means to an end’ who used the Act to ensure ‘the British guard was lowered’ (Gifford: 2008: 89). Indeed, Delors ensured that because Thatcher ‘believed her free market agenda had been victorious’, she had ‘underestimated the expansionist elements’ of the Act (*ibid.*). For Delors, the Act represented an opportunity to shift emphasis *away* from liberal economic prosperity and towards the social integrationist dimension of the European project (Geddes, 2005: 123). In January 2019, Sir John Redwood reflected on this saying

I first broached the problem of accruing power in the EEC when as Margaret Thatcher’s Chief Policy Advisor the drafts of the Single European Act came before the government. I recommended strongly that we did not sign away the veto over a wide range of issues. I pointed out how the development of a common market was being used as cover for a large legislative programme to strengthen Europe’s powers. Margaret was persuaded by the Foreign Office nonetheless to sign it. It was some time later that she came to understand how the power grab by the EEC was no necessary part of promoting a freer trading bloc. The push for monetary union alerted her to the imperial aims of the EU and led to the Bruges speech (Redwood, 2019).

For Thatcher, ‘the greater my frustration and the deeper my anger became’ (Thatcher, 1993: 743) when the true extent of the integrationist agenda became clear. It is also worth remembering that whilst Thatcher had secured victories for the expansion of free market economics across Europe, the implementation of the free market principles were largely ignored by individual European countries. This further inflamed Thatcher’s attitude towards the European project.

It was within this context when Thatcher’s anger was translated into the development of her speech to the College of Europe in Bruges. It was the speech which transformed the nature of Euroscepticism within the Conservative Party which began the long push for the UK to withdraw entirely from the European project. It is also worth remembering the shift of attitudes of Eurosceptic conservatives towards those who remained supportive of the UK within the European project. Put simply, Delors was seen to have successfully transformed the character of Europe away from the ideals that made it appealing to economically liberal-minded Conservatives. The transformation produced a community that had more in common with those who advocated social democratic interventionist policies in the micromanagement of individual economies. Consequently, those Conservatives who remained supportive of the project were seen to be ‘complicit’ with the ideological agenda pushed by Delors (Geddes, 2005: 125; Gifford, 2008: 96). Such a shift became a key splinter within conservative thinking on Europe, which Thatcher sought to highlight during her Bruges speech. Indeed, it would be a speech that demonstrated her full ‘awakening to the European threat’ (Crowson, 2007: 53) and the subsequent shift towards mainstreaming Euroscepticism within the Parliamentary Conservative Party (Crines *et al*, 2016: 100-4).

**Transforming Euroscepticism**

Thatcher’s speech at the College of Europe can be regarded as a defining moment in the development of Euroscepticism within British political discourse. Rhetorically, this was an *epideictic* speech which drew upon her performative skills as an emotive (*pathos-led*)orator (Crines *et al*, 2016: 159-60). This rhetorical approach can be defined as a ‘tendency towards apportioning blame or praise’ through ‘construction of binary opposites’ in which ‘her view was right and her opponents wrong’ (*ibid.*). From these rhetorical positions, Thatcher delivered her speech from a position of strength. This was partly granted by her position as Prime Minister, but also an impressive record of ideological domestic victories in a range of fields. For example, the re-shaping of the British economy (particularly industrial relations); foreign policy (victory in the Falklands conflict); and her record of electoral victories in 1979, 1983, and 1988 (and having secured a refreshed majority of 101 in 1987) (Butler & Kavanagh, 1992).

A central core of her message to the College was that ‘things *are* going our way: the democratic model of a free enterprise society *has* proved itself superior; freedom *is* on the offensive, a peaceful offensive the world over, for the first time in my life-time’ (Thatcher, 1988a). For Thatcher, it was a model that Europe should seek to adopt. To solicit a degree of support for her message she initially used humour to remind her audience that ‘if you believe some of the things said and written about my views on Europe, it must seem rather like inviting Genghis Khan to speak on the virtues of peaceful coexistence’ (*ibid.*). This simultaneously strengthens her rhetorical *ethos* as a strong figure (the linkage to Genghis Khan being key) who must be listened to given her character.

A further element of her message was that the ‘British are as much heirs to the legacy of European culture as any other nation’ (*ibid.*). This aimed to conceptually divorce Europe from the European Community thereby enabling her to argue the integrationists mischaracterise the political project with a mono-European identity. Indeed, she highlighted this by arguing that ‘Europe is *not* the creation of the Treaty of Rome. Nor is the European idea the property of any group or institution’ and that ‘the European Community is *one* manifestation of that European identity, *but it is not the only one*’ (*ibid.*). She also warned that Europe ‘never will prosper as a narrow-minded, inward-looking club’ and the Community should not be constructed as an ‘institutional device to be constantly modified according to the dictates of some abstract intellectual concept’ (*ibid.*). Moreover, she also attacked the federalist concept by arguing that countries being ‘closely together does not require power to be centralised in Brussels or decisions to be taken by an appointed bureaucracy’ (*ibid.*). Finally, she also reminded her audience that the best way forward was ‘willing and active co-operation between independent sovereign states’ given it would be ‘the best way to build a successful European Community’ (*ibid.*).

Her message attacked the European concept as outlined twice by Delors over the course of the summer. Her contrasting vision was for ‘Europe [to] be a family of nations, understanding each other better, appreciating each other more, doing more together but relishing our national identity no less than our common European endeavour’ (*ibid.)*. This was because ‘Europe will be stronger precisely because it has France as France, Spain as Spain, and Britain as Britain, each with its own customs, traditions and identity’ and ‘it would be folly to try to fit them into some sort of identikit European personality’ (*ibid.*).

In contrast to Delors vision, she sought to present an alternative vision for the European Community that rejected federalism and emphasised economic liberalism and national sovereignty. Indeed, she believed that European cooperation would best be achieved by reframing the debates around liberty, liberal economics, and personal responsibility. To do this she argued that ‘if Europe is to flourish and create the jobs of the future, enterprise is the key… The basic framework is there: the Treaty of Rome itself was intended as a Charter for Economic Liberty. But that it is not how it has always been read, still less applied. The lesson of the economic history of Europe in the 70s and 80s is that central planning and detailed control do not work and that personal endeavour and initiative do’ (*ibid.*). This message reflected the economic changes that were taking place in the UK which had reshaped assumptions about the British economy. She also reminded her audience that a ‘state-controlled economy is a recipe for low growth’ and that the role of government was to ‘widen choice’, ‘reduce government intervention’, and pursue trade policies ‘the European consumer wants’ given ‘they will widen his choice and lower his costs’ (*ibid.*). Consequently, Thatcher’s alternative vision for the Community was to focus on such ‘basic practical steps’ (*ibid.*) and ‘to deregulate and to remove the constraints on trade’ (*ibid.*). It is also worth remembering her most famously quoted line – ‘we have not successfully rolled back the frontiers of the state in Britain, only to see them re-imposed at a European level, with a European super-state exercising a new dominance from Brussels’ – represented a central core to her economic arguments. Indeed, she also argued that ‘it is ironic that just when those countries such as the Soviet Union, which have tried to run everything from the centre, are learning that success depends on dispersing power and decisions away from the centre, there are some in the Community who seem to want to move in the opposite direction’ (*ibid.*). The impact of the speech laid the foundations for the Eurosceptic arguments she would later use whilst no longer Prime Minister. These arguments matured within the various Eurosceptic groups within British politics between 1988 and 2019.

**Thatcher’s post-Premiership Eurosceptic Rhetoric**

Outside of the House of Commons, Thatcher was afforded opportunities to use her position as a former Prime Minister to push forward arguments over UK membership of the European Union on a range of other platforms. She was no longer constrained by the protocols, duties, or concerns of the office of Prime Minister. Nor was she as concerned with the need to maintain unity within the Conservative Party, given she was no longer leader. Therefore she was able to make arguments in a more forceful manner which hitherto may have been unadvisable for electoral and/or concerns over party unity.

Needless to say she remained a very significant voice within the Conservative Party and enjoyed the support of MPs who felt her departure was a consequence of the growing discontent in the Party towards Europe. The manner of her departure had left a bitter taste in the mouths of her supporters. Moreover, events such as the Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM) crisis appeared to validate her view that economic integration was likely to be more disruptive than more sympathetic pro-EU voices had suggested. As a broader observation, she continued to inspire Eurosceptic sentiment in the House of Commons and beyond from her position within the House of Lords, particularly in the face of the pro-EU Conservative leadership led by John Major and his difficulties over the passage of the Maastricht Treaty; the formation of the Referendum Party and the sense of validation it gave those who believed the European project was overreaching its original objectives, and also the broader issues Major faced over party management and maintaining an effective statecraft model which culminated in the 1995 leadership challenge and the subsequent consequence of leading a divided party until the 1997 general election and beyond.

As a member of the Lords, Thatcher used the authority of her position and of being a former Prime Minister to deliver a number of speeches, interviews, and articles that expressed her growing discontent towards European integration. In such speeches, she continued the theme of growing discontent towards Europe that she emphasises in her Bruges speech. For example, in 1992 she delivered a speech where she opposed further integration with Europe by arguing ‘we will have more harmonious relationships between the states of Europe if they continue to have room to make their own decisions and to follow their own interests’ (Thatcher, 1992a). At a time when the Cold War had recently ended, and Germany had re-united, here Thatcher is arguing that greater autonomy is vital to ensure that the post-Soviet Union world avoids the trap of too much integration with large international bodies. Indeed, that space is vital if relations between individual states are to be peaceful, thereby curtailing the risk of resentment that closer union may bring.

Moreover, she was also by no means squeamish about conflating the problem with other ideologies that have led to military conflict. For example, she later argued in Korea that ‘large numbers of less desirable ‘isms’ have come and gone — Fascism and Communism among them: they will not be missed. And if Socialism and European Federalism joined them soon I would be even more pleased’ (Thatcher, 1992b). Here Thatcher is using *pathos-*led (emotive) arguments to conflate the European project with dangerous utopian ideologies that have led to the deaths of millions. This demonstrates Thatcher’s belief the risk of largescale integration of nations and the impact on democratic accountability was highly undesirable in the maintenance of global stability. Put simply, the further institutions are from those who are being governed, the less likely it is to remain democratic. Thus for Thatcher comparing European Federalism with fascism and communism was a warning that so called ‘ever closer union’ was a risky trajectory that may produce an undesirable democratic deficit.

Rhetorically, Thatcher also drew upon *logos* (empirical evidence) to demonstrate the economic benefits of a looser connection with Europe. Indeed, during a speech entitled *The Principles of Thatcherism,* she argued ‘whereas Britain lagged behind other European Community countries in the 1960s and 1970s, in the 1980s our economy grew faster than all of them’ and that ‘three and a quarter million jobs were created between March 1983 and March 1991 — a bigger increase than in any other European Community country. And living standards grew to record levels: not just for the rich or even the not so rich but for those on average earnings and indeed on half average earnings’ (Thatcher, 1992b). This argument strives to texture her ideological principles with an evidence-based foundation to legitimise its conclusion – ie, that the European Union was holding back economic prosperity.

She continued by making the argument that ‘in spite of having to face down a year-long coal strike in 1984 the total number of strikes fell sharply’ (*ibid.*). These *logos*-based arguments aim to highlight the successes of economic liberalisation in contrast to growing European collectivisation. This is designed to not just critique collectivist economic ideals, but to argue despite highly visible displays of protest the longer-term trajectory of the British economy was a story of improvement. Indeed, she went to argue ‘a further reason for our failure to keep control of inflation was that we shadowed the Deutschemark, pursuing exchange rate stability at the expense of monetary discipline’ (*ibid.*). Here Thatcher is striving to convince her audience that economic problems following the 1987 crash was the result of European policy making, rather than the decisions of Treasury, and that economic improvements were possible when sterling was disconnected from the shadowing of European currencies. Given the debates Major was having with his Cabinet and Parliamentary Party at the time the speech was delivered, her intervention was designed to provide succour to those pursuing Eurosceptic positions against the then Prime Minister.

During her Bruges speech, Thatcher made clear her positions over national identity and civic pride. This was a theme she returned to after her time as Prime Minister. This was because, for Thatcher, national pride was very close to her heart. Indeed, she described this as ‘the pride we all feel in our own nations’ (*ibid.*). As noted during her Bruges speech, European nations each have a deep sense of pride in their identity which, for Thatcher, was threatened by the EU and closer integration. When outlining her ideological position, she argued ‘an attempt to create a European super-state out of the present nation states of the European Community would fuel nationalism and risk conflict’ (*ibid.*). This was a warning that one of the core principles of the European project risked creating the very backlashes that it aimed to prevent. Rhetorically, this was a *pathos*-driven argument that was designed to instil a sense of urgency in her message. Indeed, she continued by arguing that ‘true internationalism consists of co-operation between nations: the false internationalism, of which we see too many signs today [in Europe], attempts to multiply international bureaucracies while paralysing international action’ (*ibid.*). This was an attempt to reframe the ideas of international co-operation around the importance of enduring sovereign states. Within this context, for Thatcher the European Union was becoming excessively bureaucratic, undemocratic, and a risk to European peaceful cooperation. This was because she believed (and inspired others to believe) that the project had gone well beyond the original remit of economic cooperation (certainly following the passing of the Single European Act, and then the Maastricht Treaty) and more towards political and cultural harmonisation between several incompatible states that lacked a shared history.[[5]](#footnote-5)

In terms of the internal ideological debates, under the Major leadership there had been a sense that ‘Thatcherism’ as a brand had become electorally problematic. The abandonment of the Poll Tax, closer (but not close) industrial relations, and a more collective style of government gave the impression of a break from Thatcher’s style of leadership. Moreover, it appeared to signal a return to more of a *One Nation* style of Conservatism and that Thatcherism as a governing style (if not economic approach) was consigned to history. In terms of Europe, this change of approach would be expressed by fostering closer relations with EU in the post-Maastricht period, and that whilst eschewing social policy,[[6]](#footnote-6) that closer connection would allow the UK to influence the continued development of the EU. However, for Thatcher, this was an intellectually disingenuous strategy. During her *Keith Joseph Memorial Lecture* entitled ‘Liberty and Limited Government’ in 1996, she argued that ‘as far as I can tell by their views on European federalism, such people’s creed would be better described as ‘*No Nation* Conservatism’ (Thatcher, 1996). ‘No Nation Conservatism’ is the absence of sovereignty needed to be an independent state.

She also argued that any government ‘embracing European federalism — through the European social chapter and, above all, the European single currency — could deal a terminal blow to the traditions of British parliamentary democracy’ (*ibid.*). These arguments represent the core of what Thatcher believed the UK should be. Indeed, the European project signified a slow yet clear tendency towards the embrace of more government by design, whilst ‘the limitation of government is *still* the great issue of British politics’ because of the European Union’ (*ibid.*). This was a point she sought to strongly emphasise, arguing ‘the main challenge to limited government comes not from within these shores at all, but rather beyond them — from the European Union’ (*ibid.*). For Thatcher, the EU was no longer about trade, rather it was *itself* a form of ‘nation-building’ which would have its own legal system, defence, and currency. She attacked these moves by arguing that ‘the European Court… is increasingly undermining our judicial system and the sovereignty of our Parliament’, that ‘proposals are being made for common European defence’, and that ‘most important, of course, is the proposed single European currency which, as John Redwood has argued, would be a major step on the way to a single European nation’ (*ibid.*). For Thatcher, what was once a ‘common market’ had now adopted the appearance of a new federalised nation that the UK had not agreed to be part of. It is also interesting to note that in her argument, she sent an implicit message to Major that ‘the Prime Minister will have the support of all of us who wish to see these dangerous and damaging proposals resisted, and the present trends reversed, as he argues Britain’s case at the forthcoming intergovernmental council. And we look forward to a successful outcome’ (*ibid.*). This acted as an instruction to oppose any of these moves, which represents a strong use of her rhetorical *ethos*.

Thatcher’s interventions over the Major period were about sovereignty and power. This reflected the core messages of her Bruges speech. As a core point, she maintained that ‘vital as the issue of *self*-government is, it is *limited* government that concerns me today. For the European Union not only wishes to take away our powers; it wishes to increase its *own*.’ The growth of the EU’s powerbase comes at the expense of member-states who continue to integrate. It is, for Thatcher, a continuing process. She continued by arguing that ‘a common European citizenship and greatly expanded the remit of the European Commission, shows the outlines of the bureaucratic superstate which is envisaged. And Maastricht [was] the beginning, not the end of that process’ (*ibid.*). This use of *pathos* is an attempt to warn her audience of a broader trajectory of integration. The warning concerns what the EU was at the time of delivery, and what it intended on becoming into the 21st Century. Again, this is because of the lack of visible accountability and the imposition of a single European identity through legislation and the transfer of sovereign power from member-states to itself. For Thatcher, this represented ‘the emergence of a whole new international political class’ that comprised of politicians who had, she argued, ‘failed in their own countries, and so have tried their luck overseas’ (*ibid.*).

It is interesting to note how Thatcher criticised the Labour Party on this basis. She argued that ‘it is no surprise to me — as someone who always recognised the Socialist destination of this Euro-federalist dream — that now the Labour Party welcomes it all so warmly’ (*ibid.*). For Thatcher, the EU was becoming a destination for socialists who have failed electorally. Indeed, ‘what they can’t achieve in an independent, free enterprise Britain, they can hope to secure in a Euro-federalist Britain, whose people’s instincts are ignored and whose parliamentary institutions are over-ridden’ (*ibid.*). This conflation of the EU with the aims of the Labour Party sought to galvanise Conservative opposition to both and to illustrate the ideological differences between conservatism and a seemingly socialist EU. She summarised these as ‘self-government, limited government, our laws, our Parliament, our freedom’ (*ibid.*). For Thatcher, these represented the core pillars of conservatism and that the European Union is fundamentally incompatible with them. She continued by arguing that ‘if we Conservatives explain that [these pillars] are now in peril, they will not be lightly surrendered’ (*ibid.*). For Thatcher, this was very much a question of national survival as well as economic and political questions.

This conflation was a position she continued pursuing into the 1997 general election. Although the Major government appeared to be taking the Party out of office following a turbulent term of office, Thatcher used her time campaigning for the Conservatives around the UK. Whilst speaking in Christchurch and Altershot in April 1997, she used a combination of *logos* and *pathos* to argue ‘I am for Britain. And I think we are giving too much to Europe. Our fish. 80 per cent of the fish bearing waters are ours, we only get 30 per cent of the fish. They export more goods to us than we do to them. We give them £10 billion year’ (Thatcher, 1997). This argument aims to highlight the disparity in the relationship between the UK and the EU.

Moreover, she also sought to warn that Labour would push this relationship even further towards Europe. She argued that ‘within seven weeks of the election decisions will be taken in Europe at the Conference at Amsterdam between the heads of all governments which will decide our destiny. And it is important that everyone knows that and the Prime Minister has given a lead to say we are for a Europe of nation states’ (*ibid.*). This was a warning to whoever emerged as Prime Minister following the election that they would need to decide how the relationship continues to develop. For Thatcher, the line given by Major would be the more effective that Blair’s staunchly pro-EU position, which she believed would risk the future of the UK and its independence. Indeed, she continued by arguing that ‘a nation state to me means that you keep or recover your own Parliamentary sovereignty, you keep or recover your own legal sovereignty and you keep charge of your own financial affairs and currency’ (*ibid.*). Here Thatcher is suggesting that membership of the EU will not remain static, and that moves towards further integration will likely be undertaken by Brussels and that the UK should eschew such moves.

Put simply Thatcher appeared at this point to have embraced a more rejectionist perspective that would endorse a re-evaluation of the UK’s relationship with the EU which would necessitate the holding of a UK-wide referendum. Indeed, on Maastricht she argued that ‘I think that when one looks at the extent of the powers which are being handed over, it would be disgraceful if we denied them that opportunity’ to vote (Thatcher, 1993b). And ‘of course we can get a referendum up and running’ because ‘it is much better to accept that the referendum is an appropriate instrument the more powers go away, [and that] the more we have in fact to ask the people’ (*ibid.*).

By 2007, this position had strengthened as seen by her calls for a referendum before the passing of the Lisbon Treaty by Gordon Brown. Here, Thatcher ‘wholeheartedly support[ed] *The Sun’s* campaign for a referendum on the new EU treaty’ because ‘the British people are being told that the changes in the Treaty are not important, that they are technical’ and that ‘we have either blocked or gained opt-outs in all the worst cases’ (Thatcher, 2007). However, ‘we’ve heard it all before only to see more and more powers grabbed by Brussels’ (*ibid.*). She also cautioned Brown not to ‘believe the assurances from Brussels’ because ‘they gave similar ones to me’ and that he should ‘be bold and let the British people have the final say’ (*ibid.*). Ultimately, the Treaty was passed without a referendum. The perception that the ‘Treaty is a blueprint for a European Constitution in all but name, a Constitution which has already been rejected’ remained a significant factor in the image of the EU painted by Eurorejectionists over the following years (*ibid.*).

**Conclusions**

This chapter has demonstrated the validity of Sir John Redwood’s contention that Margaret Thatcher’s change of attitude towards the European projects in the latter years of her Premiership was a key voice in towards inspiring a political trajectory and discourse that culminated in Brexit. This was because the forceful delivery of her speech to the College of Europe, Bruges legitimised Euroscepticism as a mainstream position within Conservative Party politics and, through the response of the media, amongst political commentators and observers. Whilst she was no longer Prime Minister, her strengthening Euroscepticism and sympathies for an electoral test (by way of a national referendum) remained part of the UKs political discourse. Indeed, it was a position growing in rhetorical strength.

As the European Union continued to integrate further, UK political leaders attempted to cool the perception of loss of sovereignty by securing opt-outs. Yet, the broader trajectory towards further integration alarmed Thatcher, particularly during the passage of the Lisbon Treaty. By this point, her Eurorejectionism was validated by the constitutional ambitions of the Treaty, and also the federal mentality of leading figures within Brussels. Consequently, when it was signed without an electoral test, those who Thatcher had inspired pushed further for a referendum on continued UK membership. The result of that referendum (a majority of the electorate voting for Brexit) was, as Sir John Redwood observed, the result of Thatcher focusing on the loss of sovereignty and national identity during her Bruges speech and her subsequent interventions. Needless to say Thatcher was but a single voice in the road towards Brexit, yet she was an important one that inspired a new generation who conflate Eurorejectionism with the core principles of Thatcherism – ie, economic liberalism, defence of sovereignty, a global outlook whilst retaining a respect for the key tenets of British national identity.

**References**

Atkins, J., Finlayson, A., Martin, J., and Turbull, N. (2014) *Rhetoric in British Politics and Society*, Basingstoke: Palgrave.

Butler, D. & Kavanagh, D. (1992) *The British General Election of 1992*, London: Macmillan.

Craig, F. (1975) *British General Election Manifestos 1918-1970*, London: Macmillan.

Crines, A., Heppell, T., & Dorey, P. (2016) *The Political Rhetoric and Oratory of Margaret Thatcher*, Basingstoke: Palgrave.

Crines, A. (2013) ‘An Analysis of George Galloway’s Oratorical and Rhetorical Impact’, *Politics*, 33 (2) 81-90.

Crines, A. (2014) 'The rhetoric of neoliberalism in the politics of crisis', *Global Discourse*, 5 (1), pp. 116-129.

Crowson, N. (2007) *The Conservative Party and European Integration since 1945: At the Heart of Europe,* Abington: Routledge.

Daddow, O. (2012) ‘The UK Media and Europe: from permissive consensus to destructive dissent’, *International Affairs*, 88 (6) 1219-36.

Dean, J. (1988) ‘Maggie Makes Europe Mad’, *The Daily Mail,* 21 September.

Delors, J. (1988) ‘Debates of the European Parliament’, 2-367, 137-61, 6 July.

Eden, A. (1960) *Full Circle: The Memoirs of Anthony Eden*, London: Cassell.

Finlayson, A. (2012) ‘Rhetoric and the Political Theory of Ideologies’, *Political Studies*, 60 (4), 751-67.

Fontana, C. & Parsons, C. (2015) ‘One Woman’s Prejudice: Did Margaret Thatcher cause Britain’s Anti-Europeanism?’, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 53 (1), 89-105.

Gamble, A. (1994) *Free Economy and the Strong State*, Basingstoke: Macmillan.

Garry, J. (1995) ‘The British Conservative Party: Divisions over European Policy’, *West European Politics*, 18 (2), 170-189.

Geddes, A. (2005) ‘Europe’ in Hickson, K. (ed.) *The Political Thought of the Conservative Party since 1945*, Basingstoke: Palgrave.

Gifford, C. (2008) *The Making of Eurosceptic Britain: Identity and the Economy in a Post-Imperial State*, Aldershot: Ashgate.

Gowland, D. (2017) *Britain and the European Union*, Abington: Routledge.

Harrison, D. (1988) ‘Foreign and Commonwealth Office Planning Notes: Possible Themes’, *The Thatcher Foundation*, <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/111776>, 14 June.

Hayton, R. (2012) *Reconstructing conservatism? The Conservative Party in opposition, 1997-2010*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Hayton, R. & Crines, A. (2015), *Conservative Orators from Baldwin to Cameron*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Heath, E. (1998) *The Autobiography of Edward Heath: The Course of My Life*, London: Hodder & Stoughton.

Heffer, S. (1988) ‘Thatcher signals fight to stop EEC superstate’, *The Daily Telegraph*, 21 September.

Heppell, T., Crines, A., Jeffery, D. (2017) ‘The United Kingdom referendum on European Union membership: The voting of Conservative Parliamentarians’, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 55 (4), 762-78.

Heseltine, M. (2000) *Life in the Jungle: My Autobiography*, London: Hodder & Stoughton.

Howe, G. (1994) *Conflict of Loyalty*, London: Macmillan.

Lawson, N. (1992) *The View from Number 11*, London: Corgi.

Moon, J. (1985) *European integration in British Politics 1950-63: A study of issue change*, Aldershot: Ashgate.

Moore, C. (2015) *Margaret Thatcher: The Authorised Biography – volume two, Everything She Wants*, London: Allen Lane.

Norton, P. & Aughey, A. (1981) *Conservatives and Conservatism*, London: Temple Smith.

Palmer, J. (1988) ‘Thatcher sets face against united Europe’, *The Guardian*, 21 September.

Parker, L. (1988) ‘Recommends Thatcher Address College of Europe in Bruges’, *The Thatcher Foundation*, <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/111774>, 27 April.

Redwood, Sir J. (2019) *Conversation with the author*, January 7.

Rose, R. (1976) *The Problem of Party Government*, London: Penguin.

Social Survey – Gallop Poll (1966) ‘British Attitudes to the EEC 1960-63’*, Journal of Common Market Studies*, 5 (1), 49-61.

Stevens, D. (2012) ‘Issue evolution in Britain: The debate on European integration 1964-2010’ *European Journal of Political Research*, 52 (4), 536-57.

Thatcher, M. (1988a) ‘Speech to the College of Europe, Bruges’, *The Thatcher Foundation*, <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/107332>, September 20.

Thatcher, M. (1992a) ‘Europe’s Political Architecture’, *The Thatcher Foundation,* https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/108296, May 15.

Thatcher, M. (1992b) ‘The Principles of Thatcherism’, *The Thatcher Foundation,* https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/108302, September 3.

Thatcher, M. (1993a) *The Downing Street Years*, London: Harper Collins.

Thatcher, M. (1993b) ‘House of Lords – European Communities Amendment Bill), *The Thatcher Foundation*, https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/108314 , June 7.

Thatcher, M. (1996) ‘Liberty and Limited Government’, *The Thatcher Foundation,* https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/108353, January 11.

Thatcher, M. (1997) ‘Remarks campaigning during 1997 general election (Christchurch and Aldershot), *The Thatcher Foundation*, https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/111361, April 9.

Thatcher, M. (2007) ‘Message to *The Sun*: Supports campaign for referendum on EU treaty’, *The Thatcher Foundation*, https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/111065, September 29.

*The Sun* (1988) ‘We Stay British’, *The Sun*, 21 September.

Thomas, H. (1988) ‘Notes for Discussion with the Prime Minister’, *Centre for Policy Studies*, Thatcher MSS, Churchill Archive Centre, THCR 2/11/3/6 part 2 f18, 2 June.

Toye, R. (2013) *Rhetoric – A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Turner, J. (2000) *The Tories and Europe*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Wall, S. (1988) ‘Invitation to the Prime Minister: The College of Europe’, *The Thatcher Foundation*, <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/111773>, 22 April.

Wall, S. (2008) *A Stranger in Europe: Britain and the EU from Thatcher to Blair*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Whittingdale, J. (1988) ‘Notes of Thatcher-Thomas conversation re Bruges Speech’, Thatcher MSS, Churchill Archive Centre, THCR 2/11/3/6 part 2 f16, 6 June.

Wood, N. (1988) ‘Thatcher hints at “identikit” Europe union’, *The Times*, 21 September.

1. Norton & Aughey describe conservatism as ‘the desire to have a faith based upon permanent political principles that will inform and guide the activities of statesmen’ and that ‘Conservatism is a habit of mind which naturally disposes members of the party to perceive what is necessary in changing circumstances’ (Norton & Aughey, 1981: 15-16). They also cite Richard Rose who argues ‘principles introduce a persisting “non-random” element into the decisions of government’ (Rose, 1976: 287) which ‘can be extended into the discussions within the party’ (Norton & Aughey, 1981: 17). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The analytical approach of this chapter will be methodologically informed by the Aristotelian modes of persuasion (ethos, pathos, logos). Respectively, these refer to the character/credibility (ethos) of a speaker; to their use of emotional arguments (pathos); and to their use of statistical and/or empirical evidence (logos). This analytical approach has proven methodologically robust in the scholarship of Atkins *et al* (2014);Crines (2013, 2014); Hayton & Crines (2015); Finlayson (2012), Toye (2013), amongst others. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Common Market; European Economic Community; European Union. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. In 1957, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands signed the Treaty of Rome. In 1973, Denmark, Ireland, the United Kingdom and Greenland joined (Greenland later left in 1985 following a dispute over fishing rights; and the UK left in 2019 following a vote in 2019 over concerns regarding uncontrolled immigration and excessive integration beyond economic spheres). Further expansions occurred when Greece joined in 1981, Portugal and Spain in 1986, Austria, Finland, and Sweden in 1995, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia in 2004, Bulgaria and Romania 2007 and Croatia 2013. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The subsequent passing of the *Treaty of Amsterdam* (1997); *Treaty of Nice* (2001); and *Treaty of Lisbon* (2007) continued the integrationist processes. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. John Major’s government opted out of the Social Chapter of the Maastricht Treaty. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)