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***State of the Union 2012: UK's European Policy in the Time of
Crisis. Report on first part***

Two years after the General Election of May 2010, which has determined the shape of the UK government, and one year after the referendum and Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish, as well as English Local Elections, which have determined the face of the national, regional and local politics in different parts of the United Kingdom, and which have concluded the present stage of the electoral reform debate, it seems that these are the future of the British Union in the face of the Scottish independence referendum; the future of the European Union in the face of the Eurozone crisis; and the UK's European policy, as well as their consequences, which seem to shape the current political discourse in Britain. Therefore, after holding the 2010 panel and conference on the results of the General Election; and after devoting the 2011 panel to the referendum, national, regional and local electoral campaigns, the 2012 annual panel of the Research Group *BRITANNIA* focused on the UK's position in the face of the European Union, and on other major events setting this principal problem in a broader context.

To accomplish this task, the panel was organised around two parts. In the first, there were two keynote speeches presented by two distinguished members of the British academia: Professor Simon Bulmer of the Department of Politics, University of Sheffield and Professor Tim Bale of the Sussex European Institute, University of Sussex, followed by an extensive session of questions and answers. The second part was organised around five speeches of young researchers of considerable achievements representing Universities of Prague, Warsaw, and Szczecin, followed by a master-class session of questions and answers by Professors Bulmer and Bale.

The panel was inaugurated with a short address by Professor Janusz Adamowski, the Dean of the Faculty of Journalism and Political Science, University of Warsaw. The panellists and the other participants were also welcomed by Professor Franciszek Gołembski, the Chairman of the Research Group *BRITANNIA*. Professor Gołembski's speech was followed by a short presentation of research projects by Dr Wojciech

Lewandowski which were conducted by the Research Group *BRITANNIA* with a special focus on the project of the *Bibliography of British and Commonwealth Studies in Poland*.

The first part of the panel, which was chaired by Dr Przemysław Biskup (Chair of European Studies, University of Warsaw) consisted of two key-note speeches delivered by Professor Simon Bulmer and Professor Tim Bale.

Professor Bulmer's speech was devoted to the analysis of the UK coalition government, the EU and multi-level governance.

In his introduction, Professor Bulmer noted that the formation in May 2010 of a coalition government comprising Conservatives and Liberal Democrats brought together the most Eurosceptic and Europhile parties represented at Westminster. The Coalition Agreement promised a positive approach to the EU accompanied by new safeguards for British sovereignty and, more generally, a difficult balancing-act between the two coalition allies. In seeking to explore the coalition's performance over its first two years in office, it is possible, in his opinion, to see that its attentiveness to domestic backbenchers has increased over time, increasingly overshadowing the promise of a positive approach to the EU. In some ways this development represents a turn 'back to the future', as the backbench rebellions evoke the last years of the second Major Government (1992-1997), when the Conservative prime minister and his government were hostage to a relatively small number of his MPs. However, two decades on there is a distinct change of circumstances. In Professor's view, the Conservative Party is now overwhelmingly Eurosceptic (in various shades – see Professor Bale's contribution) but the government's majority in Westminster is larger than John Major's, thanks to the Lib Dems' support. This circumstance means that the European issue has become something of a flashpoint for Conservative backbenchers' resentment at being in a coalition and having to moderate their own policies. Against this backdrop the

government has pursued a policy of semi-detachment that is arguably more pronounced than any of its predecessors, even John Major's, and the explanation is predominantly to be found in domestic politics. In consequence, the attentiveness of the New Labour era to multi-level governance has been reversed, at least in non-metropolitan England. What will be interesting in the future is how the coalition will deal with the twin challenges of the growing wish on the Conservative backbenches for some kind of re-negotiation of the UK's relationship with the EU, while the Scottish National Party is seeking independence from the UK. The pattern of multi-level governance promoted by the Labour government of 1997-2010 is under strain as the legacies of its more positive (but utilitarian) approach to the EU and devolution of power within the EU are challenged.

Further Professor Bulmer analysed **the historical context of the UK-EU relations**. One of the most influential interpretations of the UK's relationship with the EU, although now dated, was Stephen George's study entitled *An Awkward Partner*.¹ It captured the way that the UK had had a series of diplomatic conflicts with European partners after its entry into the European Communities in 1973, at the third attempt. The conflicts were often exacerbated by domestic dissent within the ruling party, by strong criticism from the official Opposition within Westminster's adversarial political system, and, occasionally, by both simultaneously. Another study, more explicitly looking at a domestic politics explanation for British European policy explored its pattern of semi-detachment and highlighted the significance of national (external) and parliamentary (internal) sovereignty as eruptive factors that had never enabled the development of a permissive consensus towards integration in public opinion of the kind that had prevailed in most of the founding member states.² More recent interpretations have focused on the Europeanization of British politics, whilst recognising that this

¹ S. George, *An Awkward Partner: Britain in the European Community* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

² S. George (ed.), *Britain and the European Community: The Politics of Semi-Detachment* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).

process had been less successful in the political parties.³ Professor Bulmer recalled the study of the Europeanization of British central government which revealed that successive governments had tended to be well-organised to deal with the EU in reactive mode ('reception') but had often failed to make a major impact on debates in Brussels because the 'projection' of policy had been hampered at times by partisan division.⁴ During the New Labour period (1997-2010) greater projection was evident, especially in the early years of Tony Blair's premiership.⁵ Ian Bache has argued that the EU structural funds had promoted multi-level governance in Britain.⁶ At the same time, the Labour government's own policies had promoted multi-level governance through devolution to Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, as well as Greater London and English Regional Development Agencies.

Next, Professor Bulmer moved to analyse **the performance of the coalition government in the face of the European integration**. As noted above, the Coalition Agreement was a balancing act aiming to satisfy the Lib Dems' wish for the coalition to be a positive participant in the EU, exploiting the policy opportunities that it affords, while respecting the much more Eurosceptic policy that had been contained in the Conservatives' manifesto. Whilst committing the coalition to this positive orientation, much of the rest of the Agreement followed a different script promising: no further transfer of sovereignty under the current government; a 'referendum lock' to ensure future transfers would require public approval; and a sovereignty bill to make clear that

³ I. Bache and A. Jordan (eds), *The Europeanization of British Politics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2006).

⁴ S. Bulmer and M. Burch, *The Europeanization of Whitehall: UK Central Government and the European Union* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009).

⁵ S. Bulmer, *New Labour, New European Policy? Blair, Brown and Utilitarian Supranationalism*, "Parliamentary Affairs", Vol. 61, No. 4 (2008), pp. 597-620.

⁶ I. Bache, *Europeanization and Multilevel Governance: Cohesion Policy in the EU and Britain* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008).

Parliament in Westminster retains ultimate authority. Other commitments were more specific, such as not to join the Euro in the current parliamentary term; to defend British interests in the medium-term budgetary negotiations; to look at EU criminal justice legislation on a case-by-case basis; and not to be party to the establishment of a European Public Prosecutor. Thus, the coalition's European policy was not just about its diplomacy with partners but perhaps even more about domestic measures to entrench national and parliamentary sovereignty.

In some aspects the EU context promised less trouble for the Coalition Government in the aftermath of the implementation of the Lisbon Treaty in November 2009. EU treaty reform seemed to have reached an end; integration seemed to have reached a plateau; the Franco-German 'motor' of integration had lost momentum; provisions for differentiated integration gave options for British non-participation in some policy areas (the Schengen zone and the Euro); and the EU was entering an introspective as the Euro-zone crisis broke in early 2010. At the same time the Conservatives had had to abandon some of their manifesto promises that had suggested early conflict with EU partners, notably to repatriate powers from the EU on criminal justice, as well as on social and employment matters. However, the coalition's balancing act had to be attentive to backbench opinion in the Conservative Party, which had become overwhelmingly Eurosceptic by 2010 and some of its members were quite prepared to rebel. In the first six months of the new government there were 15 Conservative rebellions on Europe involving 60 different MPs, and with on one occasion 37 rebels. After 18 months the number of rebellions had grown to 22 rebellions.⁷ The most dramatic backbench revolt took place in October 2012, when no fewer than 81 backbench Conservative MPs voted for a referendum on EU membership, ignoring the government's position which was to oppose the motion (which originated from an on-line petition signed by over 100,000 people). Although defeated by a vote of 483 to 111, the Conservative rebellion fuelled Euro-scepticism still further with ramifications for the coalition's European diplomacy.

⁷ For more details on the rebellions, see: www.revols.co.uk.

The EU affects all the ministries and ministers of Her Majesty's government, so it is worth commenting briefly on the *dramatis personae* of European policy. It is Prime Minister Cameron who has had the highest policy profile because of the importance of the European Council meetings, particularly during the Euro-zone crisis. Although a modernizer within the party, his ambiguous politics seem to be that of a Eurosceptic modernizer. This posture is something of a contradiction in terms, since modernization issues like the environment can scarcely be pursued independently of the EU. Foreign Secretary William Hague has pursued a foreign policy of putting the EU in its place within a wider geographical framing of foreign policy. Europe Minister David Lidington, by contrast, has been pro-active within the EU but has scarcely had any public profile. Of the Lib Dem ministers Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg has occasionally acted as a multilingual fire-fighter after eruptions in British relations with the EU, while Christopher Huhne, who resigned as Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change in February 2012, was arguably the most active minister exploiting the EU as an opportunity structure, namely to combat global warming.

Internationally, European policy is not just a case of dealing with the EU, and it is worth mentioning that David Cameron forged good relations with President Sarkozy of France. This was reflected in joint initiatives in defence, although much more a matter of bilateral cooperation than the Blair-Chirac initiative of 1998 that led on to the European Security and Defence Policy. The relationship was also prominent in support for deposing Muammar Gaddafi in Libya: a policy where German reluctance weakened efforts at a collective EU approach. Other notable alliances with EU partners have been less consistent. A grouping of Cameron and his counterparts from France, Germany, the Netherlands and Finland came together to push for a frugal approach to the EU budget. A stranger grouping of prime ministers of Iceland, Norway, Latvia, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Lithuania and Estonia attended a January 2011 summit in London calling for a northern European alliance. Noticeably, relations with Chancellor Merkel have been

relatively cool. The reasons for this are various but one contributing factor has been another aspect of the Conservatives' alliance-building policy, namely David Cameron's withdrawal of his party from the European People's Party-European Democrats: the former, largely Christian-Democratic grouping in the European Parliament that was seen as too pro-integrationist. Instead, the Conservatives helped to create a new grouping, the European Conservatives and Reformists, which is smaller and much less influential in the EU institutions than the EPP-ED. Merkel was unimpressed by this move when Cameron was still leader of the Opposition, and little has changed since.

What have been the key features of British EU diplomacy? Apart from those mentioned above, they have largely been characterised by resistance to EU policy or by distancing the UK. The symbolic row over the annual budget in late 2010 enabled the government to "stand up to" Brussels (while still experiencing a backbench rebellion). On the Euro-zone crisis the government has not sought much constructive engagement to help broker a solution. Instead, it has tried to impress on the Euro-zone states that they need to get their house in order. The December 2011 veto of the Fiscal Pact underlined the government's position as an onlooker — rather than a participant — in this key area of European policy. Cameron was always conscious that British participation in any treaty might require approval by referendum, and in the aftermath of the largest backbench rebellion, he had limited flexibility, although lack of policy coordination was also seen as a cause of British isolation. And whilst some (including Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg) saw the veto as a failure of British diplomacy, the populist Euro-sceptic media managed to present it as a triumph and the government's opinion poll ratings improved as an apparent result. The repeated lecturing of Euro-zone partners about sorting out their problems at one and the same time cultivates the impression domestically that any break-up of the currency would have nothing to do with the UK even though the impact on the economy would be severe, while irritating Euro-zone states who are fully aware of the crisis without British advice. One of the few positive initiatives in connection

with integration arose when David Cameron expressed support for Turkey's accession on a visit to Ankara in July 2010.

Professor Bulmer made a remark that both Cameron and Hague had sought to widen British foreign policy influence beyond the EU with trips to India and China amongst others. Hague has given little support to Baroness Ashton and the EU's foreign policy role. The EU seems to lack prominence in Britain's new National Security Strategy and in the government's security and defence review. In foreign and security policy the government seems to be trying to unravel some of the slow progress made at EU level (and supported by previous British governments). The EU's significance in British foreign policy is being scaled back.

Finally, attention must be focused on the domestic cornerstone of the coalition's European policy, the European Union Act. It provides for a referendum throughout the UK on any proposed EU Treaty or Treaty change that would transfer powers from the UK to the EU. It ensures that an Act of Parliament would have to be passed before a "ratchet clause" or a "*passerelle*" (bridging clause) in the EU Treaty could be used. If the *passerelle* involved a transfer of power from the UK to the EU, approval by referendum would be required before the government could agree to its use. The Act also affirms that EU law takes effect in the UK only because Parliament wills that it should. In other words, Parliament is sovereign. The EU Act is therefore a potential obstacle to the EU's future evolution, although it does not bear upon Croatian accession or the Fiscal Pact; in the latter case due to the UK not being a participant.

In his evaluation of the relations between the UK and the EU, Professor Bulmer pointed out that many British governments have had problems balancing the need to play a cooperative game with EU partners while having to keep backbenchers content. The main exceptions to this rule were the early period of Mrs Thatcher's government, prior to the Bruges speech, and almost the entire New Labour period. The reversion to conditions comparable to those of John Major's latter period of government has become clear particularly in the second year of the coalition, as the October 2011 debate on a

referendum on Britain's membership of the EU has fuelled Eurosceptic opinion on the backbenches. And the balancing act is more complex than during Major's premiership because the Lib Dems must be appeased if the coalition is not to collapse, while the Conservative Party is now predominantly Eurosceptic in orientation. It is increasingly clear that the internal politics of the Conservative Party are a key driver of the coalition's European policy. Domestic political incentives in Westminster are trumping utilization of the EU as a means of achieving British national interests. In consequence, the UK is now once again semi-detached from the EU: absent from the Euro-zone and with the government preferring to be a critical spectator rather than playing an engaged role in helping to find solutions; absent from the Schengen zone; and with the EU downgraded in British foreign policy. The symbolism of sovereignty is clear both externally and, via the European Union Act, internally. Older interpretations of Britain's relations with the EU deserve re-reading.⁸

Within the UK the abolition of Regional Development Agencies in England has rolled back one of the manifestations of multi-level governance to which the EU structural funds had contributed, with cultivation by the Labour government. A new multilevel governance is practised by the coalition, characterised by a reduced commitment to the EU as a policy arena and a relaxed approach to the devolved nations while speaking in favour of the continuation of the United Kingdom. Euroscepticism is strongest where the Conservatives and, in European elections, the United Kingdom Independence Party are strong, i.e. England. Beyond England, multi-level governance continues in recognition of the different political constellations that prevail. The biggest test for the coalition is offered from Scotland, where the governing Scottish National Party is pushing for independence. Of course, Scottish First Minister Alex Salmond has a long way to go to convince Scottish public opinion to favour independence, with the

⁸ For instance, S. Bulmer, *Britain and European Integration: Of Sovereignty, Slow Adaptation and Semi-Detachment*, in: S. George (ed.), *Britain and the EC*, pp. 1-29.

polling organization YouGov reporting in May 2012 that only 33 per cent favoured this position. But as Salmond tries to increase this support and lawyers debate the modalities of Scotland obtaining/retaining EU membership in the event of a vote for independence in 2014, the Conservative Eurosceptics make the following connection: if Scotland can have the vote to leave the UK, why cannot the UK (or what remains of it) have a vote on leaving the EU? Labour's legacy of the Europeanization of British politics and the creation of multi-level governance could potentially face unintended outcomes.

In Professor Bulmer's view, while Cameron lectures EU leaders that the Euro-zone "either has to make-up or it is looking at a potential break-up", UK's EU partners might think this soundbite is equally applicable, first, to the United Kingdom itself and secondly, to the UK's forty-year relationship with the EU!

The second key-note speech was delivered by Professor Tim Bale of the University of Sussex and was entitled *On the way out? The party politics of UK membership of the European Union*.

In Professor Bale's opinion, the UK is on the road to leaving the EU. In his view, this does not mean that it will happen, but it does mean that it might. The reason lies not so much in the balance of power between Britain's political parties as the balance of power within one particular political party – the Conservatives. The Tories are moving, seemingly inexorably, from 'soft' Euroscepticism (a critique of the EU and how it currently functions) towards 'hard' Euroscepticism (the belief that membership of the EU is inimical to the national interest).

Path dependence⁹ is the idea that a *critical juncture* can occur which sets in motion a *self-reinforcing sequence* which locks in a *sub-optimal outcome*. In this case (according to supporters of European

⁹ See: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Path_dependence.

integration at least), the sub-optimal outcome is the UK leaving the EU, while the self-reinforcing sequence is a series of postures and decisions adopted since May 2010 which have further widened the gap between Britain and its EU partners, all of which stem from a critical juncture which we can trace back to late September 2005. It was then that Liam Fox (who went on, albeit briefly, to become Defence Secretary in the British government¹⁰) was vying with David Cameron and David Davis to become the next Tory leader, and decided to promise publicly that, if elected, he would withdraw the Conservative Party from the EPP-ED group in the European Parliament. Davis – an old hand and a former Europe minister – refused to be drawn. Cameron, however, allowed himself to be rattled and rushed to match Fox's promise, worrying that any failure to do so might result in melting support and increase in popularity of his young, right-wing rival.

It was a promise that those around Cameron, and he himself, probably came to regret. But it was not one he could renege on. In 2009 the Conservative Party detached itself from the EPP-ED and helped, along with the Law and Justice from Poland and the Czech Civic Democrats, to found the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR)¹¹. It also set a chain of events that has led to worsening relationships with our European partners and an Act of Parliament which ensures that any substantial step forward towards EU integration will trigger a referendum on the issue or the treaty at hand that will probably result in a no-vote and all that that entails. The episode sent a signal to Tory Eurosceptics that their leader, when it comes to the crunch, can be pushed around. Moreover, it suggested that, if it comes to a choice between, on the one hand, what the Party (and a substantial part of the electorate) wants and, on the other, what the country (in the view of most experts) needs, then Cameron – in marked contrast with most of his predecessors as Prime Minister – may actually choose the latter rather than the former.

¹⁰ *Defence Secretary Liam Fox Quits*, BBC News, October 14, 2011: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-15300751>.

¹¹ See: <http://ecrgroup.eu/>.

So what does the Conservative Party actually want? At a minimum, it wants no further transfers of sovereignty from the UK to the EU and it wants no explicit large scale contribution to any Eurozone bailout arrangements. But most members of the Party want rather more than that. They want a repatriation of powers from Brussels back to London, focusing first on labour market / health and safety regulation but with the eventual aim of relegating membership to some sort of glorified free trade agreement – the “common market” that, according to Eurosceptic lore, was all the British ever signed up to in the first place. For a growing minority within the Conservative Party, however, simply stopping the rot and supposedly winding back the clock is not enough. Instead, it wants an in/out referendum on the UK’s membership of the European Union. It also wants the Conservative Party, or at a minimum its individual members, to be allowed to campaign for Britain being ‘better off out’.

To estimate the size of that minority within the parliamentary Conservative, we need only to go back to October 24, 2011, the day the House of Commons voted on a motion which proposed that the UK should hold a referendum on British membership of the EU. The government’s official position was that it was opposed to the idea and that Conservative MPs should vote against it. Yet, in spite of a three-line whip to that effect, some 81 Conservative MPS voted in favour of the referendum, while (according to expert estimates¹²) some 14-19 abstained instead of voting against it. Undoubtedly, the rebellion would have been smaller if the vote had been on a piece of legislation rather than a motion. On the other hand, had those with government jobs been allowed to vote according to their consciences, it might have been bigger. Accordingly, the figures give us good reason to believe that there are around one-hundred Tory MPs who, at the very least, are located towards the hard end of the hard-soft sceptical continuum. This

¹² *The Conservative Euro Revolt: 10 Points to Note*, Ballots and Bullets: Blog of the School of Politics and International Relations, University of Nottingham: <http://nottspolitics.org/2011/10/25/the-conservative-euro-revolt-10-points-to-note/>.

represents just over 30 per cent of the parliamentary Conservative party.

If we put this into a historical context, we can see the significance of this vote. The biggest single parliamentary rebellion that Margaret Thatcher faced on European policy (on the Single European Act) was made up of 10 MPs, constituting just 3 per cent of the parliamentary party. John Major and his government faced a big rebellion of 41 Conservative MPs (12 per cent) during the ratification of the Maastricht Treaty in 1993. Moreover, six out of every ten rebels in October 2011 had been newly elected to Parliament at the previous year's general election. This suggests that hard Euroscepticism is not a thing of the past, but the wave of the future, predicated on the fact that it has, since the 1990s, been all but impossible to gain selection as a Conservative candidate for a winnable seat unless one is a declared Eurosceptic (and the harder, the better).

That vote in the House of Commons was one reason why Cameron **torpedoed the idea of the EU's Fiscal Compact to become a full-blown treaty two months later in December 2011**¹³. There were, of course, other reasons why he refused to sign it, such as his inexperience in international negotiations, lack of preparedness, his desire to protect the City of London from excessive European supervision, and even his own (and his Chancellor's) Euroscepticism. But it is, undoubtedly, the case that domestic politics came into it: the need to appease and assuage Conservative backbenchers was certainly prominent if not uppermost in Cameron's mind.

Worse (if one supports the UK's membership of the EU) was to follow: Cameron returned from the bust-up in Brussels as a hero – at least as far as most Conservative MPs and most Conservatives in the country were concerned. He became even more of one when the Party's opinion poll ratings suddenly improved – not only, it seemed, had he done the right thing but was rewarded by voters for doing it. This was exactly

¹³ *David Cameron Blocks EU-Wide Deal to Tackle Euro Crisis*, BBC News, December 9, 2011: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-16104275>.

what many Eurosceptic Conservatives had always argued: the harder the line the government took, the more the Party would get credit for it from the public. In fact, the spike in Tory fortunes turned out to be a temporary blip. But Euroscepticism is a mindset and therefore either impervious to evidence or highly selective in its use of it. Calls for hardening the line against Europe are always accompanied, for instance, by claims that, unless it does so, the Conservative Party will sacrifice sufficient support to the UK Independence Party (UKIP) to see it lose large numbers of seats to Labour at the next election – something which is **theoretically possible**¹⁴ but **practically pretty unlikely**.

Conservative Eurosceptics are now focusing on committing their party to include the promise of a referendum on UK membership of the EU in its manifesto. It is unclear whether they will succeed, but **there is some evidence to suggest that the Chancellor of the Exchequer (who is also supposedly still the government's chief strategist) is minded to agree**¹⁵. Even more interestingly, there are some in the opposition Labour Party who argue, **wisely or otherwise**¹⁶, that, before he does so, Labour should steal a march on him and declare its support for a referendum.

If there is to be one, runs their argument, better that Labour look brave enough to take the initiative and, in so doing, potentially create problems for the Conservatives by exposing divisions not between

¹⁴ *With all this talk about UKIP....*, Blog of Professor Matthew Goodwin, School of Politics and International Relations, at the University of Nottingham: <http://www.matthewjgoodwin.com/2012/04/with-all-this-talk-about-ukip.html>, and: R. Ford, M.J. Goodwin & D. Cutts, *Strategic Eurosceptics and Polite Xenophobes: Support for The United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) in the 2009 European Parliament Elections*, "European Journal of Political Research", Vol. 51, 2012, pp. 204-234.

¹⁵ M. Hall, *EU Vote Is a Step Closer as Osborne Backs Call for Referendum*, Express.co.uk, June 1, 2012: <http://www.express.co.uk/posts/view/323762/Now-EU-vote-is-a-step-closer>.

¹⁶ A. Painter, *Indecision in the National Interest*, LabourList.org, May 20, 2012: <http://labourlist.org/2012/05/indecision-in-the-national-interest/>.

Eurosceptics and Europhiles (for there are virtually none of the latter left) but between those Tories who, at the moment at least, still only want reform of the EU and those who actually want to leave it.

The Labour Party is not Europhile, in the sense of being obviously federalist. It is aware of the dangers of being seen as too euro-friendly and whenever possible tries to avoid the subject. This is obviously increasingly difficult: given the troubled times we live in, not talking about the EU at all is almost impossible. Labour, therefore, does its utmost not to be seen as a soft touch, primarily by stressing that it was a Labour government that kept the country out of the single currency. It also declares whenever it gets the chance that it has no more desire than the Conservatives to contribute to any bailouts.

As it has been already mentioned, the Labour Party is overwhelmingly reconciled to British membership of the EU. Some 19 Labour MPs voted for a referendum in October 2011 – around 7 per cent of the parliamentary party. Moreover, some of those voting for one did not do so because they want the UK out of the EU but because they believe in giving people a say on the issue. And none of those 19 Labour MPs was from the new intake in 2010, suggesting that whatever Euroscepticism still lingers in the Labour Party belongs to history, not to the future. In short, the idea that Europe divides both main parties is an outmoded cliché. It now divides them more strongly from each other than it has done for years.

As for the Liberal Democrats, they remain theoretically the most Europhile party, but their credibility on this issue (as on most others) is shot to pieces. According to Professor Bale, the leadership seems practically unwilling or unable to prevent its coalition partner pulling the UK away from Europe and alienating its European partners. However, this does not mean the Liberal Democrats can be ignored. If the next election produces another hung Parliament, however much their parliamentary contingent is reduced, the Liberal Democrats could still be “Kingmakers”, choosing whether it will be the Conservatives or Labour that leads another coalition government or perhaps forms a minority administration.

Yet, according to Professor Bale, whichever party takes over in 2015, the prospect of the British public getting a say on the UK's membership of the EU seems likelier now than it has been for a long time. If there is a Conservative government, either because the Liberal Democrats choose to renew the coalition or because the Conservatives get a small majority, Cameron (or his successor) will find it difficult to resist internal pressure – even assuming for the moment that the promise to hold a referendum fails to make it into the Tory manifesto. If that promise does, in fact, become part of the Conservative's platform, then it will almost certainly appear in Labour's manifesto, too, meaning that even a defeat for Cameron will not prevent a vote. For Europhiles this is the nightmare scenario – a vote on Europe under a possibly unpopular Labour government facing a Conservative Party which, if past form is anything to go by, will be even more sceptical in opposition than it already is in office.

If there is an in/out referendum on membership, **the smart money still says that a strong campaign focusing on the economic consequences of exit could still win the day for supporters of the EU**¹⁷. But the result is far from guaranteed. In other words, while the UK leaving the EU is not yet inevitable, and perhaps not even probable, it is now a serious possibility – one that all those who still believe that Britain belongs in Europe have to acknowledge and for which they need to plan accordingly.

The first part of the panel was concluded by a lively discussion open to members of the public.

The panel report was prepared by Dr Przemyslaw Biskup on the basis of his notes and the extended abstracts prepared by the speakers. The Organising Committee wishes to express their

¹⁷ P. Kellner, *Will Britain Vote to Leave the EU?*, YouGov, May 21, 2012: <http://yougov.co.uk/news/2012/05/21/will-britain-vote-leave-eu/>.

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