

Furore ignored as 'roughing-up' of EEC goes on

Comparison with de Gaulle not an insult, says Thatcher

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By Simon Heffer in Luxembourg

AN UNREPENTANT Mrs Thatcher yesterday continued what has been interpreted by senior Europeans as "a roughing-up" of leading EEC politicians as part of a campaign to keep Brussels's hands off Britain.

In Luxembourg on the second day of her four-day European tour, she remained in uncompromising mood in spite of the furore she has caused in European capitals, saying in a speech which was an abridged version of the one she delivered in Bruges on Tuesday that a centralised European government would be a nightmare.



'At this rate Government ministers will be banned from away fixtures in Europe'

Anger and disbelief in Europe

By Alan Osborn
Common Market
Correspondent
in Brussels

EUROPEAN politicians and newspapers reacted to Mrs Thatcher's Bruges speech with anger, sadness and disbelief.

In West Germany, the national press agency DPA spoke of Mrs Thatcher as having launched "a real crusade against European unity". The Right-wing daily Die Welt had a headline saying Mrs Thatcher "harped on the national view".

The leading French newspaper Le Monde said that what Mrs Thatcher said was not new and had been stated "in her usual raw and provocative style."

But the paper commented that "what she said had its uses", noting that many of the points she raised would have to be tackled in advance to the 1992 single market.

In Denmark the reports of Mrs Thatcher's speech were not prominent, but correspondents in Copenhagen said there was likely to be strong and largely favourable comment later.

In terms of public opinion, Denmark leads Britain in its dislike of the Common Market and moves for European union.

The Greek Prime Minister, Mr Andreas Papandreou, said his government, as the president-in-office of the EEC, would seek Mrs Thatcher's "exact meaning of her vision of Europe."

He said, in a BBC interview, that the stand taken by Mrs Thatcher was "difficult to understand and worrying". Greece would want a formal declaration of Britain's approach through the EEC Council of Ministers.

European Commission spokesman declined to comment on the Prime Minister's expression of policy which puts the Government directly at odds with the goals set out by the commission's president, M Delors.

He is reported to be considering a detailed response, but yesterday he merely issued a bland statement saying that "what unites us more important than what divides us."

EEC officials said that, while most decisions required to achieve the single market could be taken by majority vote, several key elements, and most notably the proposal for harmonising indirect tax rates, had to be agreed unanimously.

"If Britain does not agree to the approximation of VAT and excise duties, internal frontiers between the member states cannot be abolished and a vital element in the 1992 plan is missing," said one senior official.

"It is possible in theory to proceed with plans to create a European central bank and common currency without British support but the 1992 plan for a single market without frontiers will be gravely weakened unless there is British participation," he added.

Asked by reporters why the leaders of other major EEC countries had not raised similar objections about loss of sovereignty, Mrs Thatcher said: "Because they tend to talk in generalities. I am one of the few people to ask, 'What do you mean by that?' when they talk of European union."

She reaffirmed Britain's commitment to the single European market, saying Britain had not needed to be issued with directives about conforming with the spirit of 1992.

In her only direct reference to her Bruges address, she told correspondents: "I'm very pleased with the reaction to the speech. It's making people think."

At a lunch given in her honour by Luxembourg's Prime Minister, M Jacques Santer, she said that over the past 10 years the Community had made great progress towards creating a genuine single market.

"But in these great changes which are taking place," she added, "we must ensure that we do not allow Europe to become entangled in a new network of rules and regulations which stifle initiative and enterprise."

"Those countries like the Soviet Union which have tried to run everything from the centre, are now learning that success depends upon dispersing power and decisions away from the centre."

"It would be absurd for us in Europe to move in the opposite direction. A centralised European government would be a nightmare."

"We have not rolled back the frontiers of the state at home only to see them re-imposed at a European level."

"No, our future must lie in willing and active co-operation between independent sovereign governments, each answerable to their national parliaments."

"Of course we want Europe to be more united, of course we want to work more closely together, but it must not be at the expense of individuality, the national customs and traditions which have made Europe great in the past and are the best hope for its future."

"Whatever the theoreticians may say, the reality is that our people want to be European, but they want to be Luxembourgers or Britons too, with control of their own destinies in the hands of their own elected representatives."

Questioned by reporters about the comparisons made by the Belgian Foreign Minister, Mr Leo Tindemans, between her obstinacy and Gen de Gaulle's, she replied: "De Gaulle was a considerable personality. It's certainly not an insult."

At a press conference to round off her nine-hour visit to Luxembourg, she said she had achieved a high level of agreement with M Santer. "It's not surprising that Luxembourg and Britain should be very close to each other. The

peoples of both countries are very proud of their identities."

M Santer said they had had "very fruitful discussions about some problems in our bilateral relations". In an obvious reference to Mrs Thatcher's Bruges speech, he added: "We in Luxembourg are aware we can only survive in a greater community."

He emphasised though that he was speaking as the head of government of the EEC's smallest country.

Surprisingly, Mrs Thatcher found M Santer quite sympathetic towards her attitude on EEC centralisation. He expressed his own opinions, but conceded that Mrs Thatcher had a valid point.

He outlined global issues upon which Britain and Luxembourg are at one. Then, discussing Europe, he said: "Without any doubt we have to unite in order to survive."

"Only through the progressive union of its peoples, large and small, will Europe maintain its freedom as well as its civilisation, its liberties, the well-being of its civilisations, its prestige and its influence in the world."

M Santer qualified that view by stressing the need for "specific liberties" to be safeguarded. "I have noticed for some time that our communitarian instincts are not taking into account a proper pluralism of our Community to a desirable extent any more."

The line being purveyed by Downing Street was that Mrs Thatcher was on a mission to "make people think" about what lay behind rhetorical phrases such as "European unity". But that is not how it was received on the Continent yesterday.

Leading European officials did not hide their feelings—similar to those expressed by Labour's Foreign Affairs spokesman, Mr George Foulkes—that Mrs Thatcher's main concern was to defend her own constitutional rights as British Prime Minister from the incursions of Brussels.

Her fears about Euro-domination surfaced in the context of television.

During their talks, M Santer raised the EEC demand that all nations broadcast a quota of at least 50 per cent of Euro-produced television. The industry is

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one of the Grand Duchy's leading foreign exchange earners.

Mrs Thatcher argued that, in television as in many other concerns, Britain should make up its own mind and observe free market principles.

She raised similar objections to EEC attempts to impose a directive on television standards and on the frequency of commercial breaks. In a pointed criticism of EEC regulatory practice, she said: "Advertisements are a matter for the consumer."

Brussels insists that long programmes like feature films should be shown uninterrupted, with advertising before and afterwards. Mrs Thatcher said she favoured the "natural break" system, and had told M Santer so.

The matter—as well as the code of practice on broadcasting standards—will be discussed at the Council of Europe in Stockholm in November. Britain would prefer all broadcasting standards to be resolved there by convention rather than be left to the EEC to impose its will.

Mrs Thatcher spelt this out to reporters, using the point to illustrate her dislike of the EEC seeing itself as "Europe".

"One wants broader agreement than with just 12 countries of the EEC," she said.

The Council of Europe contains 21 members and Mrs Thatcher is anxious to secure commitments on high broadcasting standards to include potential broadcasters to Britain from outside the EEC.

She said: "We are very keen to have a code of practice on actual standards of television. We don't want channels to go pornographic."

Mrs Thatcher and M Santer reached significant agreement on tax harmonisation. Their view was that taxes on capital can and should be harmonised, and VAT can be, but should not.

In the afternoon, the Prime Minister visited the Astra satellite installation at Bettendorf. She was briefed on the system—part owned by Thames Television and Mr Rupert Murdoch—that will beam Mr Murdoch's Sky Channel to Britain.

She was told how the satellite will be launched in December from French Guyana, using an Ariane rocket, and will begin broadcasting next February.

On satellite broadcasting, Mrs Thatcher told reporters: "We believe we have a duty to protect people from pornography and violence. Certain sorts of violence and sex should not be permitted to be shown."

She said she hoped the Council of Europe would reach an agreement to make it an offence to

advertise on channels showing unacceptable programmes.

● Our Media Correspondent writes: Mrs Thatcher's comments on television advertising will be welcomed by ITV, which says proposals which have been put forward could cause losses of millions of pounds in revenue.

Advertisers feared the proposed system of placing advertisements in "time blocks" and eliminating "natural breaks" in programmes would reduce the impact of advertising and create a downmarket trend in a search for larger audiences.

The proposals are favoured by West Germany, where advertising is concentrated in the press rather than on television.

But the British refusal to countenance European advertising proposals is balanced by the Government's need to sign a convention on broadcasting which gains valuable Continental agreement on standards of taste and decency on satellite television.

Mrs Thatcher said that some people alleged that more channels financed by advertising or subscription would lead to programmes of lower quality.

"We do not necessarily accept that. But what I am worried about is that it is possible that some channels may wish to portray pornography or violence and some of the things that we have ousted from the videos."

"We believe we have a duty to protect young people, indeed all people, from this. The picture that goes into your living room is the most powerful form of communication known on this planet."

Earlier this month, Mr Renton, Home Office minister in charge of broadcasting, advanced a compromise proposal on advertising breaks, in which each country would select its own system, provided there was less than 7.5 minutes of advertising an hour.

