

AN ANALYSIS OF TONY BLAIR'S SECOND TERM AS THE UNITED KINGDOM'S PRIME MINISTER

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ABSTRACT

This paper mainly explains Tony Blair's Labour Government's policies towards the European Union during his second term of the premiership. After the UK's membership in the EU in 1973, it had not actively engaged in the European Union's policies and implementation process. From 1973 to 1996, the successive UK Prime Ministers followed a negative and sceptical attitude towards various EU policy initiatives, and none of the UK Prime Ministers showed any special interest in improving their relations with the EU. In this context, the study of Tony Blair's second term of premiership plays an important role in understanding UK-EU relations from 2001 to 2005. Tony Blair's Labour government made a huge difference in the EU-UK relationship. His Labour government, from the very beginning, made clear to the UK citizens that their government would take a more proactive and constructive role in the EU policy-making and various developmental programmes. In this context, the study of Tony Blair's Labour government's policies and perspectives towards the European Union gives a better understanding of the United Kingdom and the European Union's relations, policies and perspectives during that period.

Keywords: European Union, United Kingdom, EMU, National interest, Referendum, Single Currency, CAP, CFP

INTRODUCTION:

The Labour Party under Tony Blair came to power in the UK after the 1997 UK General Election. The Labour Party, in its 1997 General Election manifesto, introduced the pro-European policy strategy goals, and this was wholeheartedly supported by the UK people in the election. As a result, the Labour Party won the election by a huge majority of votes in its party history. The 1997 election gave a new direction to the UK's EU policy. Tony Blair's pro-European policy initiatives made a huge change in the EU-UK relations. The crux of the policy was to establish some kind of British 'Leadership' within the EU. The policy of the Labour government of Tony Blair towards EU modernisation and change. It was making a break from the policies of the UK in the recent past, notably its 1983 manifesto of withdrawal from the European Communities, state intervention in the economy and nuclear disarmament. The Tony Blair government succeeded in placing a British imprint upon the EU, but continued as a non-member of the Euro, which in a way restricted its aspirations to play a leadership role in the EU.

RATIONALE OF THE STUDY:

The proposed research will focus on the United Kingdom and the European Union's relations during Tony Blair's second term of the premiership. The stress here is on the UK's policy towards the EU during Tony Blair's period. Secondly, the study aims to understand Tony

Blair's foreign policy in the context of the EU and does not deal exclusively with the EU's foreign policy.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

In light of the above, the proposed research aims to understand the following:

- To understand the reason behind Tony Blair's involvement in the EU during the second term of his premiership.
- To analyse to what extent the UK differs from other EU member states in EU Politics.
- Internal debate in the EU regarding Tony Blair's role in various policies.
- Impact of Tony Blair's policies on the EU and its wider ramifications.

HYPOTHESIS:

- 1) Tony Blair sought to change the role of the UK in the EU. Distinct from his predecessor, he brought about a pro-EU image of the UK.
- 2) Tony Blair also sought to maintain continuity in the UK's policy towards the EU. In core areas, a distinct UK identity was maintained.
- 3) Tony Blair's policy represented an ambivalent attitude towards the EU, supporting the EU where it suited national interest and deviating from the general EU members' position when it did not suit the perceived national interest.
- 4) Tony Blair's policy perspective has had an imprint on the UK's policy towards the EU and has made it difficult for successors to deviate from it.

METHODOLOGY:

This work, 'An Analysis of Tony Blair's second term as the United Kingdom's Prime Minister,' is basically analytical. The proposed study will, to a large extent, rely on primary sources, including official Government documents and publications. The study will also critically examine the secondary sources available on the subject matter, such as books, journals, periodicals, magazines and tertiary sources such as newspapers.

LITERATURE REVIEW:

The Review of literature is an important stage of research as it provides the researcher with an overview of what has been done and what is being done. In this background, there exist several works pertaining to the subject matter of the research that could be usefully employed in the research. This study mentioned a few.

Christian Schwinger (2007), in his book on **Britain, Germany and the Future of the European Union (PALGRAVE MACMILLAN Publications, New York)**, has analysed the role played by Britain in the European Union. And the author also analysed Britain and European integration, Britain under Tony Blair's premiership and also discussed Blair's European policies in different fields.

Alistair Jones (2007), in his book **Britain and the European Union (Politics Study Guides), (Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh)**, analysed the history of the EU, its institutions and policies. The author also analysed the British applications, the referendum on membership and Tony Blair's premiership.

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS:

TONY BLAIR'S SECOND TERM AS THE UNITED KINGDOM'S PRIME MINISTER: (2001-2005)

In the June 2001 UK general election, Tony Blair's New Labour government came back to power with a moderate majority. However, the New Labour Party faced many difficulties in carrying forward the Constructive European policy agenda with other European Union member countries, the promise that was made in their first term of office. The major challenge for the New Labour government was that of joining the Euro currency before 2005. However, there was opposition from some members of the public as well as the Conservative Party, as they considered it a threat to the country's sovereignty and integrity.

The New Labour government considered that membership of the Euro currency was very important and wanted to join the Euro currency after conducting the referendum. However, the Chancellor, Gordon Brown, argued that to join the European Single currency, the UK must pass the five economic tests put forward by the UK Chancellor of Exchequer, Gordon Brown, on October 27, 1997. In this context, the study of the New Labour Party's 2001 general election manifesto commitments on the European policy agenda plays an important role in understanding the EU-UK relations during Tony Blair's second term of Premiership from 2001 to 2005.

EUROPEAN POLICY COMMITMENT IN 2001 NEW LABOUR PARTY MANIFESTO:

1. Labour will be engaged and influential, fighting for the British national interest, as we set out in 'Britain strong in the world'.
2. Referendum on entry to the single currency early in the next parliament if the five economic conditions are met.
3. Labour's position on the single currency was set out by the Chancellor in October 1997 and reiterated by the Prime Minister in February 1999.
4. Long-term Economic stability, lead Economic reform in Europe.
5. Lead a Reformed and Enlarged Europe.
6. Isolation from Europe does not help anyone.
7. To strengthen abroad, in Europe and beyond, to tackle global problems.
8. Reform the Common Agriculture Policy and Common Fisheries Policy.

After its victory in the 2001 UK general election, the New Labour Party formed the second Labour government under the leadership of Tony Blair. During its second term of office, the government made some changes in the cabinet. Basically, these changes were made to develop a constructive goal-oriented EU policy initiative. Jack Straw was appointed as the new Foreign Secretary in place of Robin Cook. But one thing common about them was that both were Eurosceptic leaders. The New Labour government appointed Peter Hain as a minister for Europe to assist Jack Straw on European policy matters.

The New Labour Party in its 2001 UK general election manifesto made a promise of 25 'Steps to a Better Britain'. The New Labour Party's European policy objectives and goals play an important role in developing EU-UK relations. Among them, the major policy objective was to 'Long-term Economic stability and lead economic reform in Europe.' This manifesto's objective was greatly highlighted in the 2001 UK general election. The New

Labour Party's 2001 manifesto positively and practically supported the EU's modest policy objectives.

Overall, during its second term of power, the major source of difficulty arose from international circumstances. The issues developed into prominence mainly in the form of Tony Blair's support of some distinct aspects of the then U.S. President George W. Bush's foreign policy objectives. During this period, UK Prime Minister Tony Blair wholeheartedly supported U.S. President George W. Bush's foreign policy in some key areas. The key areas include 'to build and sustain a more democratic, secure, and prosperous world for the benefit of the American people and the international community.' This led to a great division within EU member countries. Some member countries supported the UK's stand, while others strongly criticised the UK's support for the U.S.A. on certain issues.

The 2003 Iraq war had a great impact on EU-UK relations in many ways. Firstly, it led to divisions within the EU member countries. After the Iraq war, the UK's relationship with two dominant EU member countries, namely France and Germany, declined drastically. After the war, the UK's policy initiatives and their implementation in the EU were opposed by these two countries. This greatly affected the day-to-day functioning of the EU for a very long period. Secondly, after the Iraq war, Tony Blair, as well as the New Labour government's popularity at the domestic and international level, declined drastically. During this period, the Eurosceptic press and the UK Public opinion were also against Tony Blair's European policy. To regain its popularity, the New Labour government introduced various economic reform measures, the enlargement process and various defence and security-related policy initiatives. But all these measures and policy initiatives failed to reclaim his popularity in the UK as well as among EU member countries.

On June 9, 2003, the UK Chancellor of Exchequer Gordon Brown announced the UK's interest in joining the Euro currency with certain conditions. He proposed that the UK clear at least one test to join the Euro currency. In his study, he reiterated the benefits of Euro currency membership to UK financial services. The sustainable Convergence and flexibility tests were considered important tests along with other tests. The New Labour government understood that conducting all these tests and referendums towards membership to the EU's single currency, the Euro, would not regain its popularity for the 2005 UK general election. Against this backdrop, in April 2004, Tony Blair demanded the EU's Constitutional Treaty's approval through a referendum. So, he set aside the treaty as an issue in the June 2004 European election as well as the May 2005 UK general election. In this way, Tony Blair tried to get domestic support to translate his constructive European policy objectives into practice. Notwithstanding this, he did not succeed in implementing his manifesto objectives into practice for various reasons.

CONCLUSION:

The second term was more fractious with partner states because of divisions within the EU that were opened by the Iraq invasion. Although a major protagonist in the divisions, the UK was never isolated in the way that it had been in foreign policy beforehand, for instance, in supporting the US bombing of Libya. It was difficult to identify the major achievements of economic reform in the EU. Instead, it was trying to advance the Lisbon strategy and relevant legislation on the single market and competitiveness in EU politics. The 2003 recommendation against joining the EU was an important step of the Labour government on EU policy that went against its manifesto commitment.

Regarding developing a constructive European policy, Tony Blair's second term of the New Labour government failed in shaping the 2001 UK general election EU policy agenda into

reality. The New Labour government did not pay much attention to implementing the St. Malo initiative for the creation of a European Security and Defence Policy. During this period, along with the UK, other EU member countries, namely, Spain and Italy, also supported the U.S. war on Iraq.

Overall, we can say that, during the New Labour government's second term, it had developed a more constructive and positive European policy strategy in its 2001 UK general election manifesto, titled 'Steps to a Better Britain', by its EU representative Peter Hain. In the initial years, the New Labour government took various initiatives to implement the policy strategies, which were made in its 2001 UK general election manifesto. The Iraq War had a great impact on EU-UK relations as well as Tony Blair's leadership. After the Iraq war, Tony Blair's popularity at the national and international levels declined drastically. The Eurosceptic print media gave negative publicity to Tony Blair's government's decision to hold a referendum on the EU Constitutional Treaty.

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