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The battle of Bruges: Margaret Thatcher, the foreign office and the unravelling of British European policy

Oliver Daddow^a, Christopher Gifford^b and Ben Wellings ^c

^aSchool of Politics and International Relations, University of Nottingham, Nottingham, UK; ^bDepartment of Behavioural and Social Sciences, University of Huddersfield, Huddersfield, UK; ^cPolitics and International Relations in the School of Social Sciences, Monash University, Clayton, Australia

ABSTRACT

Drawing on newly released archival material, this article reassesses Margaret Thatcher's 1988 Bruges speech, widely depicted to have instigated Britain's drift towards Brexit. It opens by giving an essential recap of the main contents of the speech. Next, the article explains why and how we use the address as a prism through which to see Thatcher's European policy-making in action. The third section tells how the speech was written to show how intra-government fault lines began to surface in its earliest incarnations. We then process trace to the two main battles publicly rehearsed at Bruges: over the Conservative Party's approach to European integration (fourth section); and, reinforcing this, over the desirability of an Anglo-American reading of British history in which 'Europe' occupied a subordinate place (fifth section). Our central claim is that the study of political speeches, including the speechwriting process, can be a compelling addition to our accounts of the ways in which politicians frame policy dilemmas, debate them behind the scenes and manage their political communication to achieved desired policy objectives, in this case opening up Britain's place in 'Europe' for domestic discussion. We therefore contribute to three overlapping domains of inquiry: Thatcher's foreign and European policy decision-making; the Conservative Party and European integration leading to Brexit; and finally, speeches as tools for policy-making and agenda setting.

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Introduction

On 20 September 1988 Margaret Thatcher delivered a long-awaited address on Britain and the future of European integration at the College of Europe in Bruges, Belgium. The Bruges speech as it became known (the contents of which are summarized below) would come to have a dramatic impact across UK and European politics in many ways, not all of which were foreseen at the time. First, Thatcher was already, variously, 'feared, respected, hated, admired' as a 'formidable statesman with whom ... it was dangerous to cross swords' (Millar 1993, 337), and the speech inflamed an already acrimonious debate over Europe's institutional configuration and competencies (George 1996, 192–198; Gamble 2003, 123). Second, by increasing 'horizontal' contestation within government over the

CONTACT Oliver Daddow  oliver.daddow@nottingham.ac.uk

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future direction of British European policy (see Cantir and Kaarbo 2012), the Bruges speech destabilized what was already a fragile Conservative Party unity over Europe (Heath 1998, 706). Although it was not solely responsible (Bale 2011, 22), Bruges contributed to Nigel Lawson's resignation from the Treasury in 1989 (Millar 1993, 342–343) and Foreign Secretary Geoffrey Howe's departure from the Cabinet in 1990 (Crines, Heppell, and Dorey 2016, 104), when he accused Thatcher of 'running increasingly serious risks for the future of our nation' (Britology 2018). Howe's words helped spark the events that led to Thatcher's resignation on 22 November 1990 (Ingham 1991, 380–387; Crowson 2007, 53).

Third, the Bruges speech came to serve as a 'lightening rod for Euroscepticism within the Conservative Party' (Smith 2017, 34), as well as popularizing the British Eurosceptic 'tradition' more generally (Daddow 2015a; Gifford 2014). By mobilizing opponents of the European project (Green 2018), Bruges 'fundamentally altered the way the Conservative Party responded to Europe' (Grob-Fitzgibbon 2016, 443). Fourth, and for that very reason, Bruges helped refashion the UK party system by condemning the Conservative Party to 'a decade of turbulence' (Gilmour and Garnett 1997, 340) and clearing ideational space for political entrepreneurs already active on its Powellite right (Hayton 2017; Turner 2000, 124) to make political capital out of the 'Europe question'. Linked to this (Heath 1998, 706–707), the speech encouraged historian Alan Sked to found the Anti-Federalist League (the forerunner of the UK Independence Party, UKIP) in 1991 to oppose the Maastricht Treaty, and businessman James Goldsmith to found the Referendum Party in 1994, which stood candidates against the Conservatives in the 1997 General Election. Drawing on some of the key language and imagery running through the Bruges speech, these movements developed a 'populist narrative' of Euroscepticism (Tournier-Sol 2015), aided by the penchant for 'Brussels bashing' (Heath 1998, 710) already circulating in the UK media, tabloids and some broadsheets (see Daddow 2012).

For all these reasons, the Bruges speech has come to play a potent role in the UK collective memory of Thatcher and Thatcherism, as well as in public and elite thinking about British European policy (Oliver 2018, 44). 'Infamous' is one description of the address (Crines, Heppell, and Dorey 2016, 51), making it 'probably the most notable of Thatcher's public speeches' (Crines, Heppell, and Dorey 2016, 100). It occupies 'pride of place' in the 'historical lineage of modern Euroscepticism' (Geddes 2004, 195. See also Thatcher 1993) and has served as a 'template' both for modern Euroscepticism (Kenny and Pearce 2018, 117) and many of her successors' speeches on Europe from across the main parties (Daddow 2015a, 2015b). As often happens to lengthy orations of this nature, however (Broad and Daddow 2010), the speech is as popular and well known as it is misconstrued. The move from original speech to lodestone of the collective memory has clearly involved a sifting sieving or filtering process whereby the supposed 'meaning' of 'Bruges' has come to rest on just a couple of lines about 'rolling back the frontiers of the state' (see section five below).

The revival of the Bruges speech by prominent Leave campaigners such as Boris Johnson (rehearsed in Johnson 2014, 30) during the 2016 UK referendum on European Union (EU) (Ross 2016; Green 2018; Helm 2016), its 30th Anniversary commemorations in 2018 (The Bruges Group 2018), the continued witting and unwitting allusions to Bruges by top members of Theresa May's team during the UK's withdrawal negotiations from the EU (see Foster 2018), and the surge of interest in the long-term origins of Brexit (Von Bismarck 2016; *Contemporary European History* 2019) make this a timely moment at which to look again at this explosive but much misunderstood address. This

article's primary purpose is to use newly released archive material to examine what the Bruges speechwriting process can tell us about how the Thatcher government went about resolving its growing European policy dilemmas in 1988. Our new narrative reveals the work that goes into a major set piece address of this nature and, in terms of content, explores how Thatcher and her advisers used the opportunity to begin to challenge previous Conservative compromises on Europe, going well beyond the self-congratulatory coverage of the speech in Thatcher's own memoirs in the process (Thatcher 1993).

We begin by recapping the main contents of the speech on the one hand for those new to it and on the other as a refresher for those already familiar with it. The second section explains how and why we treat the Bruges speech as an example of Thatcher's 'situated agency' in action, and how this informed our research design. The third section provides new insights from the archives into the thought that went into positioning the address to target multiple audiences in the speech's vital formative months. The third section narrates the formative stages of the speech to illustrate how, from its earliest incarnation, intra-government fault lines were starting to surface and play out the Bruges speech. We then analyse the battles publicly rehearsed at Bruges. The fourth section explores the battle over policy direction, centring on Thatcher's disagreements with Howe and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO). The fifth section investigates the battle over history and historical memory, seen in Thatcher's evocation of a stridently Anglo-American as opposed to a Europeanist reading of British history (fifth section).

The main argument in what follows is that we can use the study of political speeches, including the speechwriting process, to shed light on the ways in which controversial policy dilemmas are framed, debated and managed (they are rarely conclusively resolved) by the key agents involved in making and communicating policy directions (building on the work of Neumann 2007; Daddow 2009. Applied to the case of British European policy in Broad and Daddow 2010; Daddow 2015a). Reassessing the content of the Bruges speech through an exposé of its 'inner workings' shows how it encapsulated a weak and unsustainable compromise between Thatcher and the FCO over the direction of British European policy after the 1986 Single European Act (SEA). In line with recent opinion, therefore (Green 2018), we contend that the Bruges speech did not in and of *itself* represent unabashed Euroscepticism. Thatcher had no grand plan for Bruges, just as her European policy had tended to evolve on a 'case by case basis' rather than according to a pre-defined blueprint (Powell 2017). However, we agree with the interpretation that by this point in her premiership Thatcher was starting to present the image of a 'gut non-European' (Michael Heseltine's 1988 description interpreted in Young 2008, 282) who was only too happy to promote a vigorous media and public debate about European integration, with Britain's future inside the Community included in that national conversation. Our analysis therefore makes a significant contribution to the academic study of, and policy-facing commentary about: first, Thatcher's foreign and European policy thought; second, the Conservative Party's journey from the 'party of Europe' to the 'party of Brexit'; and, third, agenda-setting through political communication.

The Bruges speech: what did Thatcher say?

There are three things article is *not*. First, it is not a close reading of the Bruges speech as a piece of political rhetoric *per se* (as in Atkins and Finlayson 2014; Crines, Heppell, and Dorey

2016). Second, it is not an investigation into how the speech was spun to UK journalists to promote Thatcher's preferred interpretation of the speech as being 'negative' (Aspinwall 2004, 116) about the Community. Third, we do not measure the speech's impact on UK public attitudes to the European Community before and after its delivery. All of these would be interesting projects for follow-up research but would deflect too much from our aim below, which is to interpret the speech as part of the process of Thatcher's European statecraft in its later years. In other words, we are operating at the nexus between the 'inside' and 'outside' of the speech to promote informed discussion about Bruges's contested place in the post-war history of the Conservative Party and British European policy. We do not construe the speech as an 'origin' either of British Euroscepticism or, over the *longue durée*, of Brexit. However, we suggest it represented an important staging post in this story that remains well worthy of critical reflection. To this end, we believe that a working knowledge of the main contents of the speech will help orient the reader to the nature of the picture we are trying to paint.

This section summarizes the gist of the speech section by section, as faithfully as possible in the available space. Instead, or as well as, taking our word for it, readers are encouraged to peruse the speech for themselves or to watch or listen to it online (see Gendler 2017). The quotes in the following precis are from Thatcher (1988) unless otherwise stated.

- (1) In the 'Introduction', Thatcher opened with a joke about the courage of those who invited her to deliver the address: 'it must seem rather like inviting Genghis Khan to speak on the virtues of peaceful coexistence!'¹ She knew better than anyone the incendiary potential of the speech because, as we will show below, she had worked with her Downing Street wordsmiths to make it so.
- (2) 'Britain And Europe'. One of the longer sections of the speech explored the history of the British in Europe and of Europe in Britain. The themes were interconnectedness between Britain and the continent, the differences between them, and the idea that 'Community' Europe was not the only manifestation of European ideals. As we show below, this was an Anglicized version of 'British' history.
- (3) The 'Europe's Future' part reiterated that Britain's future was inside the Community but highlighted the dilemmas the speech sought to address: the 'practical means' by which Europe could remain the preserve of all its members and how the organization could, as Thatcher saw it, forestall becoming 'ossified by endless regulation'.
- (4) 'Willing Cooperation Between Sovereign States' attacked the potential for the European project to 'suppress nationhood', drawing a comparison between European, American and Soviet political projects in which Thatcher urged more America, less Soviet Union. It included the famous soundbite about rolling back the frontiers of the state.
- (5) 'Encouraging Change'. The theme here was 'practical' change to engender reform in Community practices, particularly on spending and the Common Agricultural Policy to retain 'public support for the Community's future development'.
- (6) 'Europe Open To Enterprise' (one of the two longest sections along with 'Britain and Europe') spelled out the case for greater economic liberalization in the Community because (the Soviet imaginary, discussed below as a forgotten element of the address) 'central planning and detailed control do not work and that personal endeavour and initiative do'. Deregulation and fewer constraints on trade (the Thatcherite

model in Britain) should be the focus for the Community she said, not the establishment of a European Central Bank. Thatcher also reflected on the connection between national borders and national sovereignty, saying ‘we cannot totally abolish frontier controls if we are also to protect our citizens from crime and stop the movement of drugs, of terrorists and of illegal immigrants’.

- (7) ‘Europe Open To The World’ was just a few lines about Europe’s role in the global political economy emphasizing that ‘Europe should not be protectionist’ by removing barriers to trade and promoting the ideal of liberalization to developing countries.
- (8) ‘Europe And Defence’ was rooted in the Atlanticist tradition in British foreign policy, stressing the primacy of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the US commitment as the twin guardians of European security in the Cold War. Thatcher called on Europeans to shoulder a greater share of the Atlantic Alliance’s defence burden and to strengthen the Western European Union (WEU) ‘as a means of strengthening Europe’s contribution to the common defence of the West’.
- (9) ‘The British Approach’ concluded the address by emphasizing the importance of (a classically British) pragmatism grounded in hard international political realities, as opposed to being distracted by ‘Utopian goals’, the aim being to create a European ‘family of nations’ in which each retains its distinctive characteristics.

So this what Thatcher said in Bruges. How did we design the research to explain why she said it and how she framed it? The following section explains how we used the ‘inside’ of a speech to investigate how Thatcher made foreign policy decisions.

Theoretical framework: Thatcher’s foreign policy decision-making

What follows is a piece of interpretivist (Yanow 2000; Finlayson 2017) foreign policy analysis centring on the ways in which leaders use political rhetoric to agenda-set in an ongoing national conversation about a given policy dilemma. The quandary can be a new one altogether or it can be an instance of a leader responding to an enduring policy challenge. The Bruges speech fits the latter category because, despite the 1975 referendum delivering a 2:1 vote in favour of retaining Community membership (Saunders 2018), British European policy was and has always been subject to high levels of contestation inside UK governments and its main political parties (Forster 2002). We treat Thatcher as a ‘situated agent’ (Preston 2010; Alexandre-Collier and Vergniolle De Chantal 2015; Bevir and Daddow 2015; Fontana and Parsons 2015) embedded in various settings (party, parliamentary and the institutions of government), responding to a major policy dilemma – as she saw it, what to do about a European integration process that she believed might be beginning to move in politically problematic directions for Britain.

The assumption behind situated agency in the study of political decision-making is that even powerful (or *seemingly* all powerful), conviction politicians such as Thatcher – or, after her, Blair (Dyson 2009; Daddow 2011) – do not have complete freedom of action to do or say as they wish (applied to Donald Trump’s foreign policy-making in Porter 2018).

Treating Thatcher as a situated agent therefore meant we needed to get a feel for how Thatcher went about speechwriting in general and how she tackled the Bruges speech in particular. To do this we triangulated insights from the relevant secondary literature against primary source material in the archives to ground our narrative about Thatcher’s

agency in and over the institutional decision-making structures in which she operated. Prime ministers, especially those in commanding positions such as Thatcher in 1988, possess a strong capacity to shape where their governments go policy-wise, backed by a wealth of political capital they can expend justifying their policy choices publicly through speeches, parliamentary debates, statements, press conferences and in official documents. Put succinctly, what a UK prime minister says *matters*, particularly on politically salient or contentious topics when the need for tightly controlled government communication is key (on the discursive construction of the Theresa May government's 'Global Britain' idea after Brexit see Daddow 2019). This article therefore advances the work on 'cue theory' (see Eshbaugh-Soha and Linebarger 2014) by suggesting that when a UK prime minister delivers a piece of oratory, especially on a contentious topic such as 'Europe', it can heighten attention to a theme or issue, and the leader's own stance on said issue, to a level unreachable to any other actor in the UK political system.

Accounts of how Thatcher penned her speeches, including Bruges, did, nevertheless, persuade us of the appropriateness of putting Thatcher front and centre of this account, even as a 'situated agent'. Before we read the speechwriting papers, our research revealed that throughout her time as leader of the Conservative Party, Thatcher was minutely involved in debating the substance and tone of her addresses with her trusted team of amanuenses during lengthy speechwriting marathons in the Downing Street study or Cabinet room. She had several speechwriters during her career, one constant throughout 1979–1990 being Edward Heath's former speechwriter, West End playwright and director Ronald ('Ronnie') Millar. He became one of her most trusted and eloquent 'wordsmiths', as she referred to those involved in putting together her addresses (Millar 1993, 241). Millar explains (1993, 280–281) that 'The Thatcher method was to be involved personally in all major speeches from the beginning at virtually every stage of their development'. The magnitude of the Bruges speech was certainly not lost on her team and she put it in the hands of her Private Secretary Charles Powell who became its 'prime architect' (Millar 1993, 319; Powell 1988a). Powell acted as principal drafter as well as gatekeeper to Thatcher when the FCO proffered its thoughts, criticisms and drafting amendments.

Our use of archives triangulated against memoirs from the key players fleshes this out in full. But before we turn to the two main battlegrounds being fought over by the different agents involved in drafting the Bruges speech, we detail the initial skirmishes during the speech's formative months, which provide rich context for making sense of the contents of the final product.

Initial skirmishes: the pre-history of the Bruges speech

The Thatcher governments were the first to keep speechwriting files. They gave us a detailed picture of what one of the central characters involved, Foreign Secretary Geoffrey Howe (1994, 537), describes as the behind-the-scenes 'tussle' to produce, through extensive personal lobbying and inter-departmental redrafting, an address that would satisfy an increasingly Eurosceptical Thatcher and her more moderate critics in the FCO and elsewhere in government. As we shall see, the final address resolved these dilemmas in distinctive ways, some of which become apparent from the speech's earliest days in the wordsmiths' pipeline. So what was the relevant pre-history of the speech?

Invitation and acceptance

The story began at the end of March 1988 with a letter from the Rector of the College of Europe at Bruges, Professor Jerzy Łukaszewski, inviting Thatcher to be guest of honour and speaker at the opening ceremony of the 1988 academic year, the fortieth anniversary of the College's opening. The UK Ambassador to the EC, David Hannay, passed the letter of invitation to John Kerr, Assistant Under Secretary in the FCO responsible for EC relations, accompanied by a recommendation to accept from the then President of the European Parliament, the UK Conservative Henry Plumb (Member of the European Parliament 1979–1999). Recent acrimony over, for instance, Britain's contribution to the European budget was still fresh in the memory and there was evidently a good deal of eagerness amongst Britain's European partners for Thatcher to provide some clarity over her thinking on future British European policy. Hannay duly reported that Łukaszewski saw the occasion as a chance for Thatcher 'to spell out her own vision of the future of Europe rather than leaving the field clear to others to propagate the myth that her attitude was an entirely negative one'. London's initial reaction focused on practicalities: 'I think we should give this a run', wrote Kerr on Hannay's letter when he put it into the system, 'though I don't fancy its chances: mid September/early Oct[ober] is a busy time for No10' (Hannay 1988). It is important to reflect on the contingency that the Bruges speech may never have been delivered had Thatcher's diary not permitted.

On 22 April 1988, Stephen Wall (Head of the European Community Department in the FCO and Howe's Principal Private Secretary) went back to Kerr with the suggestion that Thatcher accept on the grounds that 'the occasion would be a suitable one for a speech'. The Western European Department, Southern European Department, News Department and Policy Planning Staff were all reportedly supportive. Wall himself seems to have been the least enthusiastic, minuting 'I do not think we should try to sell the idea too hard. There are no overriding reasons why the Prime Minister should make a speech in Europe at present'. Presciently as it transpired, Wall feared opening Pandora's Box because the College of Europe, and especially its Rector, was seen at the time as a hotbed of European federalism. Kerr, however, was undeterred: 'Worth a run, I think' he wrote laconically (Wall 1988a).

Consequently, on 27 April 1988, Lyn Parker, Howe's Private Secretary, wrote to Thatcher's Private Secretary, Charles Powell, apprising him of the invitation and the FCO's endorsement that Thatcher speak in Bruges. The letter noted that the College of Europe was funded by contributions from member states, including a small sum of £2500 from the FCO (around £4000 today). It put the case 'for a major speech setting the seal on the reforms we have secured in the Community, looking forward to the Single Market in 1992 and bringing Britain's economic success to the attention of a wide European audience'. The letter continued, 'while there is no difficulty about saying "no"', acceptance would be advisable if the Prime Minister wished to make a European speech in 1988 (Parker 1988a). Powell replied in short order, the next day, that Thatcher was willing to commit and asking for 'a very good draft for the speech by the second half of July' (Powell 1988a). Within a month of the invitation, the wordsmiths had begun preparing the Bruges speech. In an indication of the inextricable interplay between structure and agency in the practice of politics, Powell later recalled (2017) it was 'a case of the opportunity creating the speech rather than the speech representing a long-planned strike at

the heart of European theology'. By 1988 the Delors Commission was driving the agenda for further European integration, and there was much work to be done at the time to fill what was perceived at home and abroad to be a strategic 'vacuum' at the heart of British European policy.

The FCO, Thatcher's soundings and outline sketch

In the FCO, Wall sought advice on what to include in the speech from two main sources. First, the Policy Planning Staff (PPS) sent some notes to Wall on 14 June. They were heavily philosophical, covering such issues as: the rights and responsibilities of the state and individual in Europe; the concepts of 'state' and 'nation' (on which more below); and the merits of economic liberalization over harmonization. In what would prove to be an influential thought in the speech proper, the PPS argued that 'Progress today rests on *moving with* world tide of deregulation, openness and competition, not going against it' (Harrison 1988, original emphasis).

Second, Wall received some defence and security themes for consideration from Paul Lever, Head of the Security Policy Department. The crux for Lever was that 'Europe needs to develop its identity in security as in other areas'. That security touches on the 'very essence of sovereignty', however, meant a different 'model' was required from that guiding integration in other areas such as the economy. He urged that NATO and the Atlantic Alliance remain the bedrock of European security, but under that protective umbrella the EC should enhance its role and capabilities through the Western European Union (WEU) (Lever 1988). The defence and security angle was fully written into in the 'Europe and Defence' section of Thatcher's address (see above).

While this preparatory work was underway in the FCO, Thatcher was taking her own soundings. In early June she met with the Europhile historian of Spain and Latin America, Hugh Thomas, then Director of the Centre for Policy Studies, a Conservative think-tank actively involved set up to 'think the unthinkable' (Millar 1993, 245) in researching and promoting ideas associated with 'Thatcherism' (Margaret Thatcher Foundation 2018). The 'Europe' speech, as he described it, received top billing on the meeting agenda Thomas sent Thatcher on 2 June, followed by items relating to politics, policy and the funding and administration of CPS. Annexed to the schedule was a two-page document titled 'Where is Europe Going?', part of a speech Thomas had recently given to Spanish businessmen ('most of whom were asleep because it was delivered after lunch') (Thomas 1988).

This meeting between Thatcher and Thomas proved pivotal to what was said at Bruges in three regards. First, Thomas was supportive of a European project that offered 'the possibility of independence alongside international cooperation'. Second, Britain had historically fought against the uniting of Europe under a 'single power'. This was inspired by, and reinforced, distaste for any continental scheme prefaced upon 'harmonization'; Britain preferred the retention of 'national differences' and 'diversity in unity'. Third, plans for 'open frontiers', a common currency and a European Central Bank should be resisted because they 'have not, it seems to me, been thought through'. What Thomas defined as 'federalist' thinking was, he wrote, thirty years out of date, meaning Britain needed to shift the terms of the debate towards the Gaullist tradition of a 'Europe of Nations' (Thomas 1988). To illustrate how far Thatcher took on board these views, on his record

of the 9 June meeting, the prime minister's Political Secretary, John Whittingdale, flagged up her take-home points: (i) 'must be positive in order to knock down federalist ideas' and (ii) 'United Europe not European Union' – National provincial cultures v[ery] important-must not be lost' (Whittingdale 1988). Thomas's critique of the European project is, we contend, foundational to an interpretation of the Bruges speech for two reasons. First, it became the source of the policy battles that erupted between Thatcher and the FCO covered in the following section of the article. Second, it showed Thatcher how she could stage her account of a heavily Anglicized version of British history in support of her preferred direction for British European policy, examined in the final section of the article.

By 29 June, Wall had drafted and sent to Kerr a seven-page draft outline of the Bruges speech, titled 'Enterprise and the individual'. It focused on the rediscovery of the 'spirit of enterprise in the UK' and how this should be applied in Europe, via 'liberalisation *within* [*sic*] Community framework'. It argued that we 'must not overlook achievements of 30 years of EC existence', but times had changed. The creation of the single market 'will enhance national unity without sacrificing national identity' and 1992 should be framed as being as much about 'personal freedom as industrial development'. It incorporated Lever's security and defence agenda (see above) but ended on a characteristically British note of caution: 'Britons suspicious by nature of constitutional models'; they sense the 'danger of an approach which sets a distant goal', preferring 'practical goals' and a return to the wisdom of those who drafted the Treaty of Rome (Wall 1988b; original emphasis).

Intriguingly, by the summer of 1988, the FCO was still reticent about showing its ideas for the Bruges speech to Thatcher, because 'the No10 market for constructive language on the Community may still be poor'. However, opined Kerr in a letter to the FCO Permanent Under Secretary, Patrick Wright, (1988) 'we can delay no longer' (Kerr 1988a). One month on from Wall's opening gambit, therefore, the FCO sent Powell a beefed-up version for consideration by Thatcher's team. It was now titled, rather verbosely, 'The Europe You Will Inherit: Enterprise, Freedom and the Individual'. It stuck closely to Wall's script with one notable addition. Before the closing remarks on British pragmatism and suspicion of grand visions, it struck a positive note about Britain remaining a 'proud member' of Europe and rejected 'accusations that British are insular' despite rightly being proud of 'our island history' (Parker 1988b). The 'good first draft' that Powell had requested was finally in the Downing Street system where Thatcher and her team could get to work putting her inimitable stamp on the text. The battles this produced inside government are covered in the next two sections. We begin with the policy battlegrounds and the Howe-Thatcher divide in particular.

Policy battlegrounds in the Bruges speech

The fundamental schisms that were to engulf the Conservative Party from Maastricht onwards emerged in nascent form in the tensions between the FCO and Downing Street in drafting the Bruges speech. They demonstrate how a contemporary right-wing Euroscepticism began in the high politics of UK government leading to a breakdown of the governing consensus on Europe, before subsuming the Conservative Party and eventually, with Brexit, the wider political and public arenas (well covered in Heath 1998, 706–708). While the dominance of Thatcherism ended divisions on domestic policy, the

Europeanist legacy of the Macmillan/Heath tradition had continued to define Conservative statecraft. In explaining the Conservative splits on European integration, Baker, Gamble, and Ludlam (1993) have argued that the upper echelons of the Conservative Party, Cabinet Ministers, in both the Thatcher and John Major administrations, were firmly committed to interdependence in terms of external policy, of which EC membership was a central plank.

Conversely, much of the Conservative Party, including Thatcher herself, was ideologically drawn to a more traditional conception of national sovereignty, with Britain free to pursue an open seas policy as part of Anglo-America rather than being locked into an organized Europe (Baker, Gamble, and Ludlam 1993, 424). As Millar explains (1993, 358), Thatcher 'believed in a Common Market but not a Common Country. Sovereignty, whether in small or large amounts, bit by bit, or one fell swoop, was not to be surrendered'. These strategic divisions in the Conservative Party had been relatively contained during the Thatcher years mainly because of the consensus at the top of the party on the free market and small state following the removal of the 'wets' from key Cabinet positions in 1981. Moreover, Thatcher's formative role in negotiating the heavily British-influenced (Von Bismarck 2016) SEA – the first significant alteration to the 1957 Treaty of Rome – seemed to confirm the view that integration was primarily an economic project and a bulwark against continental statism. Crucially, moreover, that same British input meant that the SEA appeared to have aligned Thatcherism with 'core' European integration, the single market being 'a project close to her heart' on which Thatcher set her sights after resolving the acrimonious budget rebate question at the Fontainebleau European Council of June 1984 (Von Bismarck 2016).

The first piece of advice from the FCO policy unit for the speech neatly summarized the nature of the compromise regarding 'Europe' on which Thatcher appeared to have settled prior to the Bruges speech. Europe, it suggested, was changing the role of the state, allowing the expansion of liberty 'against might of member-states'. Crucially it was market 'liberalization' rather than European harmonization that was extending freedom in Europe. In addition, market liberty also enabled cultural diversity, as 'states diminish in power but variety of peoples, cultures and languages enriched' (Harrison 1988). The Thatcherite agenda of deregulation, openness and competition was, in this view, consistent with a process of European integration that embedded a wider liberal cosmopolitanism, even if Thatcherism's economic liberalism was contained within a strong nationalist and socially conservative framework. In contrast, state power was conceived in terms of a European tradition of *dirigisme*, which constrained market freedoms. From this perspective, the pursuit of interdependence and the erosion of national sovereignty were fully compatible. The problem as far as the FCO was concerned was not the Community and its institutions but member-state resistance to deregulation and liberalization. The Community was here conceived positively as the vehicle for the pursuit of British economic interests, if not wider values. Hence, the draft speech sent from Wall to Powell on 29 July contained no criticisms of the Commission, 'federalism' or warnings about the possible creation of a 'United States of Europe' (Wall 1988b). While wide ranging, the central theme was individual freedom, its defence within the transatlantic partnership, and its pursuit through market liberalization and pragmatic reform, exemplified by the British approach. However, the speech that was returned to the FCO after a month was very different.

In Downing Street's counter-draft the opening section outlined Britain's contribution to Europe over 200 years, which, as discussed in the next section, formed and framed the strategic historical rationale for a distinctly British vision for the future of Europe. English traditions of 'individualisms, of freedom under the law and of common sense' (Powell 1988b, 14) were emphasized, whilst the imperial legacy was summoned in order to challenge European inwardness: 'Yes, we have looked also to wider horizons – and thank goodness we did, because Europe would never have prospered and never will prosper as a narrow, inward-looking club' (Powell 1988b, 15). In a rhetorical twist, this was immediately followed by the most pro-European sentiment in the speech, in the line: 'Britain does not dream of an alternative to a European Community or of a cosy, isolated existence on its fringes. Our destiny is in Europe, as part of the Community' (Powell 1988b, 17).

This had been a consistent Thatcher refrain throughout her time in office. For example, in a March 1980 speech she said it was in 'Britain's interests, and in the interests of Europe as a whole, that Britain should remain a member of the Community' and 'nothing will move me from that belief' (quoted in Crines, Heppell, and Dorey 2016, 49). Yet clearly something *had* moved her by 1988 and in the Bruges speech she constructed the British approach as part and parcel of a Eurosceptic conception of the Community, or more precisely the European Commission. In this sense, the draft should be read as a direct political intervention attacking Jacques Delors, Commission President, and his agenda for further integration (Gowland 2017, 102). On 6 July 1988 Delors had told the European Parliament that he expected 80% of economic and social legislation to be of community origin within ten years (Delors 1988a). Then, two weeks before the Bruges speech, Delors told the British TUC Conference that he wanted to see collective bargaining at the European level and that social protection was central to his vision for integration (Delors 1988b). Delors' interventions encouraged Thatcher to the view that despite their brief, constructive alignment on the SEA, Delors 'did not share the British hopes for "Thatcherism on a European scale"' (Von Bismarck 2016).

Thatcher's riposte to Delors was powerfully evident in the August draft, with its reference to 'those in the Commission in Brussels' who seemed to want to take Europe in the direction of reviled countries 'such as the Soviet Union' (Powell 1988b, 29). The Cold War strategic context and aversion to Soviet political economy loomed large for Thatcher in the Bruges speech (we summarize this as the Bruges speech's 'Soviet imaginary') as they have continued to do for Conservative politicians since. Thatcher had first visited the Soviet Union as a member of Heath's Shadow Cabinet in 1967 and as prime minister returned in 1987, one of her advisers reporting that it 'confirmed her view that communism was an alien creed, contrary to human nature' (Renwick 2013, 8). The dominant FCO narrative of the Community as a highly effective vehicle for liberalization was overshadowed by a language of threat that echoed Thatcher's Cold War and anti-Soviet priorities, supporting David Green's observation (2018) that 'To the extent that many Tories thought much about Europe at all in the 1980s, it was more about the Warsaw Pact than the European Economic Community' (confirmed in Powell 2017). This was neatly captured in the preliminary version of what was to become the most infamous phrase in the speech:

Let me say bluntly on behalf of Britain: we have not embarked on the business of throwing back the frontiers of the state at home, only to see a European super-state getting ready to exercise a new dominance from Brussels. (Powell 1988b, 30)

In the final version the meaning was subtly changed to foreground the threat from Brussels to a Britain newly liberated from state dominance:

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.

This line was part of a general attack on federalism, evidently reflecting Thatcher's soundings with Hugh Thomas, described in the previous section, which was embodied in the supranational institutions of the Community, namely the Commission and European Court of Justice. The over-extension of their powers ('insidious' in the case of the Commission) was viewed as an attack on the political independence of national governments (Powell 1988b, 27). In contrast, sovereign governments, elected by their people and subject to their national parliaments, were held up as the legitimate basis for European decision-making (Powell 1988b, 31). A 'Europe of Nations' was starkly envisioned in opposition to European supranationalism.

Once returned to the FCO, John Kerr attempted to tone down some of the more critical language, crossing out references to the Commission's attempts to extend its powers and create 'European super-state' (1988b, 30). Tellingly, Kerr wrote that the criticisms of European federalism were based on a 'non-sequitur' because 'if anything federalist theory implies decentralisation and economic liberalism: look at the US' (1988b, 25). Kerr's comments clearly informed Foreign Secretary Howe's intervention. His criticisms of Powell's August draft were set out in a minute from Stephen Wall on 1 September:

The Secretary of State's overall comment is that there are some plain and fundamental errors in the draft and that it tends to view the world as though we had not adhered to any of the treaties. Nor does the speech accommodate the diversity of visions of Europe – even in one country. (Wall 1988c)

In a minutely detailed deconstruction of Powell's draft, Howe challenged the exclusive conception of national sovereignty contained in the speech, arguing that while a stronger Europe would not mean a super-state 'it has and will require the sacrifice of political independence and the rights of national parliaments. That is inherent in the treaties' (Wall 1988c). The FCO then began to redraft the speech and consult with other government departments in order to garner support for its counter-draft. Clearly, the FCO knew it was in a battle and wanted to bandwagon with other Whitehall departments to face-down the prime minister and Powell in Downing Street. Number 10 initially proved responsive to the FCO view that the initial draft was too controversial. Kerr thus reflected on a job well done, commenting that a new version had taken on 80% of their suggestions. He further forecast that 'our damage limitation exercise is heading for success' and that 'the Bruges speech is unlikely to cause trouble with Community partners' (Kerr 1988c). However, Wall (2008, 79) explains that Kerr's optimism was misplaced because the final version circulated by Number 10 was subsequently amended before it was delivered. Howe similarly recollected in his memoirs that the version delivered by Thatcher contained 'a number of sections where original Powell draft of 31 August had actually been strengthened', castigating its 'caricature and misunderstanding' of the Community (Howe 1994, 537).

The Bruges speech was a powerful intervention in the emerging conflict over the direction of the second wave of integration from the SEA onward (the first wave being Treaty of

Rome to SEA). In this context, it was the most Eurosceptic aspects of the speech that were most pertinent and which were subsequently singled out for debate. At a different juncture, or delivered by a different leader, the Bruges speech might have been read as a standard defence of a Europe of nation-states anchored to a renewed commitment to Britain's European trajectory. Nevertheless, coming when it did, and from whom it did, the address represented a major challenge to the normative idea that further integration should include a significant extension of supranationalism. It was those aspects of the speech that were briefed to the press by Bernard Ingham, Thatcher's Press Secretary (Wall 2008, 79). References to the 'frontiers of the state' being 're-imposed at a European level' and 'a new European super-state exercising power from Brussels' proved to be 'dynamite' by 'sending explosive shock waves around the EC' (Wall 2008, 81). As Powell pointed out in a later interview, 'she [Thatcher] really took the view that Europe had gone far enough – indeed, too far – in the direction of extending its powers in international life and she wanted to set out an alternative vision of Europe' (Powell 2007).

We contend, therefore, that the intense exchanges over the drafting of the speech encapsulated the two opposing visions at the centre of government over Britain's place in Europe and the world that, to 1988, had coexisted uneasily within the Conservative Party. The FCO under Howe's leadership endorsed the 'Community Method' and understood its implications for traditional notions of national sovereignty. Moreover, this was viewed as being consistent with a liberalization agenda that would help bring to an end the state domination of national economies. As Howe was later to elucidate, his conception of the Community owed much to Winston Churchill's post-war thoughts on European unification (ironically given that Churchill was Thatcher's political hero and saw herself as his heir):

... it is also possible and not less agreeable to regard it as the gradual assumption by all nations concerned of that larger sovereignty, which can alone protect their diverse and distinctive customs and characteristics and national traditions. (Churchill 1950, cited in Howe 1990a, 686)

According to Howe, the Community was neither a single state nor a union of states but an evolving 'voluntary association of states based on the common evolution of joint policies recognised in and sustained by law ... It is sui generis' (1990a, 683). Its practices entailed a unique form of interdependence between states that respected and enriched the diversity of nations and their interests.

In this regard, Howe's view was consistent with a large section of the political class that fully recognized the importance of new systems of governance beyond the nation-state in line with an open regionalism:

... regional blocs such as the EU are not mere protectionist fortresses, but part of a wider system of new and essentially healthy forms of governance and regulation of the global economy. They remain open to world trade and subject to its rules. (Baker, Gamble, and Seawright 2002, 414)

Howe and the FCO accepted the erosion of sovereignty whilst championing the role of states in creating institutions that could meet the challenges of globalization. It was precisely this nuanced understanding of European integration and its benefits for Britain that

was challenged by a Thatcher's proto-Eurosceptic discourse, as he made clear in his resignation speech (1990):

We must at all costs avoid presenting ourselves yet again with an over-simplified choice, a false antithesis, a bogus dilemma, between one alternative, starkly labelled 'cooperation between sovereign member states' and a second, equally crudely labelled alternative, 'centralised federal super-state', as if there were no middle way between them.

The divisions and tensions in the Conservative Party that had broken out by 1990 were still contained at the time of the Bruges speech. While the speech made many concessions to the pro-Europeanism of the FCO, an ideological opposition to federalism and its embodiment in the European institutions became the dominating frame in the final address. Up to the Bruges speech, most in the Conservative Party had seen the Community as an opportunity structure for the pursuit of free market policies, a position that dovetailed neatly with domestic politics because of the dominance of left-wing Euroscepticism in the Labour party, embodied in its Europhobic 1983 general election manifesto which called for withdrawal from the Community. However, by 1988 the Labour party, and movement, had begun to pivot towards Europe, as Delors courted them with his vision for a 'Social Europe'. However, for Thatcher and her key advisors, the problem with the Community was not simply its potential to pursue more social policies but that a dangerous centralizing authoritarianism was integral to its federalist institutions and ambitions. While Howe and the FCO might have shared Thatcher's opposition to a more social and interventionist Europe, they believed this was dependent on the contingencies of Community politics, which the British government was in a powerful position to influence. In contrast, whilst reiterating Britain's commitment to the Community, its centralizing tendencies were no longer a matter of politics but an immutable characteristic of its institutional architecture.

The extent to which this Eurosceptic message dominated the interpretation and reaction to the speech was evidence that Kerr's 'damage limitation' exercise ultimately failed. In the end, the speech could be claimed as a victory for Number 10. Certainly, as far as Powell was concerned it was an exceptional political triumph attracting more support than any other 'since her time in Downing Street' (Young 1998, 350). For Howe, Bruges represented a *volte face*; he bemoaned that Thatcher had 'began readopting arguments which she and I had had no difficulty in rebutting in debates over the SEA only a couple of years before' (Howe 1994, 538). He maintained (Howe 1994) that she had positioned herself with 'the gallant but misguided back-bench group of Enoch Powells, Robin Tutons and Derek Walker Smiths, who had fought so long and hard against the European Communities Bill in 1971'.

In fact, the Bruges Speech ushered in a more extensive Eurosceptic mobilization within the Conservative Party than had been seen in the early debates on membership. In February 1989 the first major new Eurosceptic organization, the Bruges Group, was formed to continue the challenge to European centralization that Thatcher had initiated at Bruges, using a selective reading of her words as a Eurosceptic manifesto. By 1991 the Bruges Group had 132 Conservative backbenchers as members, including ex-ministers and Thatcher loyalists such as Norman Tebbit (1989) and Nicholas Ridley. Despite being notionally independent from the Conservative Party, the Group provided a platform for Thatcher's supporters to mount sustained attacks on the European project at critical junctures (Lamont 1999, 10; Crines, Heppell, and Dorey 2016, 100–101). As Green has argued,

therefore, the appropriation of the speech meant that “Bruges” quickly found itself adopted as a shorthand badge of hostility to Europe’ (Green 2018). The historical battlegrounds traversed by Thatcher at Bruges gave opponents of European integration plenty of ammunition to fire at the Community, as the next section demonstrates.

Historical battlegrounds in the Bruges speech

The Bruges speech was replete with history, which was put to work in the service of an Anglicized reading of British and European history that justified the controversial future vision for integration set down in the ‘straight’ policy elements of the speech. The first two and a half pages of the eight-page speech outlined Thatcher’s view of Britain’s relations with continental Europe since the time of the Romans and trans-Atlantic history since the seventeenth century. Including references to the past scattered throughout the remainder of the speech, we calculated that fully one-third of the speech was given over to outlining a version of history that would support Thatcher’s preferred view of the best future course for British European policy. We further found that Thatcher’s narrativization of Britain’s past was strongly influenced by her deliberations with Hugh Thomas at the formative stages of the speech, considered earlier in the article. This, we suggest, was ‘history with a purpose’, a performative framing of the past that, as Thatcher herself admitted, was ‘no arid chronicle of obscure facts from the dust-filled libraries of history’ (Thatcher 1988). Indeed, Thatcher’s historical excavations at Bruges support Ashplant, Dawson, and Roper’s (2000, 13) view that ‘the power of dominant memories depends not simply on their public visibility, but also on their capacity to connect with and articulate particular popular conceptions, whilst actively silencing or marginalizing others’.

The function of the historical opening to the speech was thus crucial in legitimizing the vision of European integration that was constrained by Thomas’s Anglo-American worldview in which Thatcher and her Downing Street team had become invested. It operated as a ‘strategic narrative’ (Miskimmon, O’Loughlin, and Roselle 2014) that strongly framed the prime minister’s guiding ‘British’ principles for the future of European integration that ran throughout the speech *in toto*. This dynamic was in evidence during the speech when Thatcher told her audience that it was ‘to NATO that we owe the peace that has been maintained for over 40 years’ (Thatcher 1988). Without confronting the counter-narrative openly, this claim marginalized what Ian Manners and Philomena Murray have called the ‘Nobel Narrative’ (Manners and Murray 2016, 185). This refers to the fact that in 2012 the EU was awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace underscoring a weighty story that it has been the primary factor in the absence of inter-state conflict in (Western) Europe since 1945. Shifting the focus from Europe’s officially sanctioned account of its achievements to NATO so early in the speech signalled the extent to which the Bruges speech was, equally with European integration, an expression of Thatcher’s Atlanticism, her credentials as a Cold War warrior and a critique of the limitations of European integration inspired by the ‘founding fathers’. In short, Thatcher’s account of international history at Bruges was designed to persuade audiences of the achievements and merits of the English-speaking peoples. This section will now explore the three main historical battles Thatcher fought at Bruges to illustrate how she went about legitimizing her policy preferences by appealing to supposedly ‘timeless’ themes and issues in British history: British exceptionalism; Atlanticism and Britain’s martial past; and the normative desirability of empire(s) and free trade.

British exceptionalism

The first battle Thatcher managed to win in terms of the historical framing of the Bruges speech was to impose a binary reading of British and European identity/history on the final draft. Despite Howe and the FCO's efforts to moderate such a polarizing interpretation – and notwithstanding the claim that the British were 'as much heirs to the legacy of European culture as any other nation' (Thatcher 1988) – the theme of a certain and lasting incompatibility between Britain and Europe ran throughout the speech. At this time, the EC/EU's 'democratic deficit' was an argument more associated with Europe's parliamentarians rather than outright critics of European integration. However, the speech set about contrasting Anglo-Britain's political development with turbulent, ruptured and uncertain continental European governance, laying the foundations of arguments that were more fully developed into a fundamental incompatibility by Eurosceptics in the following decades. Notwithstanding Thatcher's later conversion to the idea of an in-out referendum on EU membership and the uncertain legitimacy of popular sovereignty in the British political tradition, (Gifford and Wellings 2017; Wellings and Vines 2016), a major theme at Bruges was the divergence of the British from the European experience of representative democracy. Her overall theme was that democratic traditions were more deeply entrenched in Britain than on the continent, promoting a certain depth of 'incompatibility' between them.

Although it is beyond the purview of this article to explore the English-British question in detail, it is worth noting that, by anticipating the strength of Eurosceptic sentiment amongst English-identifiers, as opposed to those who saw themselves as 'British' (Henderson et al. 2016, 2017), Thatcher's 'Eurosceptic version' of British-European history was unself-consciously a form of English exceptionalism. The references in the speech to 1688 (the 'Glorious Revolution') and 1215 (Magna Carta), rather than 1690 (Battle of the Boyne) or 1320 (Declaration of Arbroath), gave centrality to English, rather than British or 'four nation' history, by recalling the political compromise between Crown and Parliament that became the hallmark of the English and later British system of government. Such a framing imported a dominant English view of history into nascent right-wing Euroscepticism, only weeks after Thatcher's 'Sermon on the Mound' in Edinburgh on 21 May 1988 and just months before the controversial and short-lived introduction of the Poll Tax in Scotland, which re-energized Scottish nationalism in both its unionist and secessionist guises. Her reference to the 'British Crown' being passed to William of Orange and Queen Mary seemed to show due respect to the European forebears of the British monarchy. Intriguingly, however, it also conflated the English and Scottish crowns with a moment in English, rather than Scottish, history. The reference to Magna Carta added longevity helped legitimize the English-British system in the face of the innovation of post-1945 European governance that had emerged through the integrationist experiment.

Atlanticism and Britain's martial past

It was the College or Europe's presence in Flanders that allowed Thatcher to segue into the second of her dominant tropes: war memory and the claim that the British had contributed to Europe 'in a very special way' (Thatcher 1988). The coverage of Britain's martial past in the speech provided more than a hint of the British exceptionalism to come in the

remainder of the address by subtly unpicking the ‘Nobel narrative’ Europe as a ‘zone of peace’ and the product of collective efforts (see above). Reflecting the balance of power tradition that emerged in British foreign policy during the Wars of Spanish Succession at the beginning of the eighteenth century (Black 2000, 179), Thatcher (1988) told her audience, using an idea straight from Thomas, that:

Over the centuries we have fought to prevent Europe from falling under the dominance of a single power. We have fought and died for her freedom. Only miles from here, in Belgium, lie the bodies of 120,000 British soldiers who died in the First World War.

This permitted Thatcher to make the associated assertion that ‘Had it not been for that willingness to fight and die, Europe would have been united long before now – but not in liberty, not in justice’ (Thatcher 1988).

Most importantly, it allowed an Atlanticist memory of twentieth-century conflict to inform the vision for Europe’s future which, for Thatcher, should be the most important pillar of the European edifice. The language in the speech surrounding America’s relationship to Europe constantly sought to bind the West through common ideals from outside as well as inside Europe. For example, she said ‘European values have helped make the United States of America the valiant defender of freedom which she has become’ and portrayed the West as ‘that Europe on both sides of the Atlantic’ (Thatcher 1988). Thatcher was clearly open to the possibility that this ‘community’ could one day be joined by European nations currently under Soviet domination, highlighting the Cold War context within which her consideration of West European integration was playing out in 1988.

Ultimately, the vision of freedom set out in the speech was an Anglo-American one which others could join if they so wished. She evoked an idealized ‘America’, such as that on offer in Charles Dickens’s *Martin Chuzzlewit* (2010), constructing it as a place where people went to avoid intolerance and constraints and to seek liberty and opportunity (Thatcher 1988, 4). This implied a coded rejection of the Community approach via the dismissal of the vision of Europe associated with the post-war ‘founding fathers’ of integration from Robert Schuman and Jean Monnet onward. Again drawing on her discussions with Thomas, Thatcher rejected the ‘federalist’ vision of European integration by stating that ‘Europe’ could not be reduced to the European Community alone (Thatcher 1988). Presaging both the eastern enlargement of the EU, but also the fault-line between ‘old’ and ‘new’ Europe as the Cold War ended and security challenges shifted away from central Europe (Levy, Pensky, and Torpey 2003), Thatcher reminded her audiences that beyond ‘that east of the Iron Curtain, people who once enjoyed a full share of European culture, freedom and identity have been cut off from their roots’ and that ‘we shall always look on Warsaw, Prague and Budapest as great European cities’ (Thatcher 1988).

Empire(s) and free trade

The third battle Thatcher managed to win over the FCO at Bruges was over the framing of empire and Britain’s imperial past. Thatcher struck an initially conciliatory tone by saying that ‘Too often, the history of Europe is described as a series of interminable wars and quarrels. Yet from our perspective today what strikes us most is our common experience’ (Thatcher 1988). But more often than not the speech departed from the standard

'European' script with these lines being representative of the veneration of Empire the FCO had tried to have removed or watered down at the drafting stage: 'For instance, the story of how Europeans explored and colonized – and yes, without apology – civilised much of the world is an extraordinary tale of talent, skill and courage' (Thatcher 1988, 1). The British Empire was not mentioned explicitly, partly as a result of those critiques from the FCO, although the reference to imperial Rome served to underscore the point about the *mission civilizatrice* of empire that was made at the outset of the address. Generic allusions to imperial pasts were, therefore, liberally sprinkled through the speech: Thatcher was no Empire apologist. For example, the Mongol Empire was alluded to in the speech's opening joke about Genghis Khan (see above). The Norman and Angevin empires were invoked in what Arthur Aughey has identified as the 'joking, but not joking' tone used to speak about English nationhood (Aughey 2007, 163), when Thatcher made a comparison between EC 'restructuring' and the Norman Conquest (Thatcher 1988). Imperial violence was nowhere to be seen in this benign account of what empires could achieve.

Above all, however, the another empire invoked at Bruges was economic: the another empire of free trade, which again supported Thatcher's British-first conception of international history. Flanders' wool trade with England was referenced early, not only as a nod to historical ties with the host region, but to suggest that the longevity of this connection was more legitimate than the novel 'protectionism' of the European Community. It was part of the 'Europe open to enterprise' principle of Thatcher's vision for Europe and an implicit agreement from the FCO drafters that she 'go with tide of deregulation' (Harrison 1988). Even the reference to the Zeebrugge ferry disaster at the outset of the speech carried with it an implicit reference to this *zeitgeist*: the ship that capsized in February 1988 was called the *Herald of Free Enterprise*. As with the account of Britain's martial past, Thatcher's imperial mindset carried with it the baggage of British exceptionalism rooted in an Anglo-American rather than Europeanist tradition.

Conclusion

That the Bruges speech would, over time, become a key point of reference for British elites, the media and public when they debated 'Europe', its trade-offs and opportunities for the exertion of British agency after 1988, owed much to Thatcher's skill at framing an Anglo-American dominated conception of British history and governance that she began rehearsing towards the end of her time in office. In studying these battlegrounds, this article supports a key observation from the work on leaders as norm entrepreneurs (Davies and True 2017, 704), which suggests that UK prime ministers are catalysts who, variously: put new policy issues onto the agenda; reframe established policy dilemmas; make an issue resonate with the public by casting it as a 'problem to be solved'; and build coalitions with other relevant actors to push their agenda institutionally and through the media (Breuning 2013). Leaders are also situated agents who do not have unremitting 'control' over policy outcomes, even if their influence over government messaging is pivotal to what gets said and how.

The opening of the Thatcher archives on the production of the Bruges speech allowed us to bring the history of the speech to bear on our understanding of the various domestic and European policy dilemmas Thatcher felt she was facing in 1988. We did this by depicting Thatcher as a 'situated agent' exerting powerful but not definitive agency over the

framing and content of British European policy at this time. Our historically-informed rendering of the speech makes it clear that contingency as well as strategy went into the writing of this speech, which became a process for managing Conservative Party tensions over Europe as much as an exercise in staking out fixed or long-standing ideals. Process tracing from the pre-history of the Bruges speech to its final contents permitted us, first, to confirm a lot of what is already known about the address, and, second, to take the analysis in new directions by showing how the government's European policy skirmishes were taken from backstage to front-stage in a sustained assault on Delors's vision for European integration. We added important new characters to the story, especially Hugh Thomas, and revived key elements of the speech too often lost in reductive accounts of what it supposedly did or did not say.

Ultimately, we conclude that the Bruges speech was a product of two forms of contestation: policy contestation within government about the cross-cutting issues of the future of shape of the Community and Britain's place within it, and contestation over the most appropriate way of framing British and European history to manage the Europe question in British politics. Conservative Party divisions were evident in the frank debate that played out over Bruges between Howe and Thatcher's team. Our reading of the Bruges speech, particularly its account of the European 'dilemma' Thatcher felt she needed to face down in 1988, indicates that the speech cleaved to a narrative of Britain's exceptional history, its martial past and strategic links across the Atlantic, constructed in opposition to a federalizing Europe. In setting things up in binary, oppositional terms, Thatcher's team had gained the upper hand on Howe and the FCO's more 'Europeanized' inclinations, even though elements of British history told through the lens of its European past did make their way into the final address.

The inclusion of several noteworthy conciliatory, 'Europeanized' passages in the Bruges speech proved to be a Pyrrhic victory for the FCO. Very quickly, a strong narrative took hold about the Bruges speech, that it was Eurosceptical from start to finish, a narrative in part moulded by Thatcher's increasingly questioning attitude to the Community after the speech which gathered momentum and acclaim from Eurosceptics after her resignation in 1990 (see Powell 2017). The fundamental dilemma for the Conservative Party was captured by Howe when he questioned whether it was possible to sustain the party's continued commitment to 'a sensible European course' and 'tap a vein of populist and nationalist opinion in the opposite sense' (1994, 539). With the Conservative Party's transition from the 'party of Europe' to the 'party of Brexit', the dilemma remains.

Note

1. As an interesting aside, the joke's analogy had been changed from the FCO's outline draft of 1 September which had read 'it must seem rather like inviting King Herod to speak on the subject of nursery education' (Wall 1988c).

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ORCID

Ben Wellings  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-4621-2431>

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