

AN ANALYSIS OF TONY BLAIR'S THIRD 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 European Union during his third term of the premiership. After the UK's membership to 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 third premiership plays an important role in understanding UK-EU relations from 1997 to 2007. Tony Blair's Labour government made a huge difference in the EU-UK relationship. The 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 third-term 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, Globalisation, Iraq war, Constitutional treaty, Referendum

INTRODUCTION:

The Labour Party under Tony Blair came to power in the UK after the 1997 UK General election. In its 1997 General Election manifesto, it 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. 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 third 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 third term of the 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 third term as the United Kingdom's Prime Minister,' is basically analytical. The proposed study largely relies 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 the 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 about 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 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 THIRD TERM AS THE UNITED KINGDOM'S PRIME MINISTER (2005-2007):

In the May 5, 2005, UK general election, Tony Blair's New Labour Party fought the election with modest European policy objectives in its manifesto promises. The New Labour Party was re-elected in the election for the third consecutive term with the very lowest parliamentary majority of 65 seats. In this election, Tony Blair was not able to get people's full support for his government's constructive European policy. This election decreased the popularity of the New Labour Party as well as Tony Blair following the 2003 Iraq war.

EUROPEAN POLICY COMMITMENTS IN 2005 New LABOUR PARTY MANIFESTO:

1. Globalisation means that events elsewhere have a direct impact at home.
2. The new Labour case – Domestic interests and international action are entwined more than ever before.
3. Making Europe work better for Britain.
4. The EU now has 25 members and will continue to expand.
5. We will also work to reform Europe.
6. We will continue to lead European defence cooperation.
7. On the euro, we maintain our common-sense policy.

In the 2005 UK general election manifesto, the New Labour Party stressed four important issues. This includes, firstly, approving the EU constitutional treaty through a referendum. Secondly, to promote economic reforms in the European Union countries. This objective was highlighted in the party manifesto, which was basically for the 2005 UK presidency of the EU. The economic reforms include control, regulation, and development in the Doha round, supporting EU membership for Turkey, the Balkans, and other Eastern European countries, and giving attention to EU aid to less developed countries of the world. Thirdly, it also assured enhanced leadership in the European Defence Cooperation Programme. Finally, it also declared to continue a sound policy on the Euro currency. This includes fulfilling the chancellor's five economic tests, parliament's approval, and finally holding a referendum to get people's approval.

In this regard, the French and the Dutch governments held a referendum on the approval of the EU constitutional treaty in their countries. But in the referendum that followed, people rejected the constitutional treaty's implementation in their countries. This greatly affected the implementation of the first manifesto objective into practice, and these developments strongly gave the message to the UK government not hold a referendum for the implementation of the EU constitutional treaty. This gave rise to a new challenge to the UK in the 2005 EU presidency. Later, the EU summit meetings were held in June 2005 by the heads of government of the EU member countries for the implementation of the Constitutional treaty. This meeting gave two years break for the implementation of the Constitutional treaty. It also blocked the EU's 2007-13 medium-term budget before the UK's 2005 EU presidency. Tony Blair gave a historic speech to the European Parliament at Strasbourg on 23 June 2005. In his speech, he called for reform to the social and economic policies of the EU for the future global challenges and criticised the role played by agriculture in the EU budget. This speech was considered an important milestone before the UK's EU presidency in 2005.

The study of the UK's 2005 EU presidency plays an important role in understanding the EU-UK relations during Tony Blair's New Labour government's second term of the EU presidency after the 2003 Iraq war. The New Labour Party government took over the EU Presidency from July to December 2005. During this period, the New Labour government put forward certain manifesto objectives in its EU Policies. These manifesto objectives had been considered very important for the New Labour government in implementing its Constructive European policy. This includes, firstly, having an economic and social reform, which includes the service directive and working time directive. Secondly, having an agreement regarding the EU financial perspectives from 2007. Thirdly, about Sugar market reforms, the New Labour government had the goal to take various policy measures to reform the Sugar industry. Fourthly, the Continuation of the enlargement process, and fifthly, to take the initiative to improve and develop the EU's role in world affairs. This included the eradication of poverty in Africa and in some underdeveloped countries. Finally, it had the goal to resolve the Luxembourg Budgetary deal.

In comparison to the 1998 UK EU Presidency, the 2005 EU Presidency was less successful in implementing the policy objectives. But, regarding Turkey and Croatia's accession to the EU and reform of the sugar market, the New Labour government achieved some success. Regarding financial assistance to the UK Presidency, we can say that both Tony Blair and Gordon Brown showed a commitment by presiding over both the EU and G-8 summits simultaneously. Regarding EU financial perspectives for 2007-13, an important agreement was made with the help of German Chancellor Angela Merkel. According to this agreement, the UK government had agreed to reduce its budgetary rebate. This ultimately, in the long run, greatly affected the UK economy.

During the 2005 UK EU presidency, an informal Hampton Court summit was organised on the issue of the EU's economic competitiveness. But this summit was less successful and failed to implement any policy decisions. At this juncture, the terrorist bomb attacks took place in London on July 7, 2005. This diverted the UK's EU presidency's policy objectives. In response to this attack, in December 2005, the EU adopted a new counter-terrorism strategy to tackle global terrorism. After the UK's EU presidency, there were not many changes in the UK's EU policy objectives, and this situation continued till June 2007.

In June 2007, Prime Minister Tony Blair attended the European Council meeting and discussed the implementation of the 2005 election manifesto promises into practice. This includes putting approval of the Constitutional treaty to a referendum, promoting economic reforms in Europe, leadership in European defence cooperation and continuation of common-sense policy on the Euro. But he could not implement these EU policy objectives into reality. After the UK's Presidency, Germany took over the EU presidency. During this period, the long-awaited EU Constitutional treaty was passed. This was considered a major success after the UK's EU presidency. Overall, the 2005 United Kingdom's EU presidency, especially after the 2003 Iraq war, had a deep impact on EU-UK relations for a very long period.

CONCLUSION:

During his third term as UK Prime Minister, Tony Blair faced a lot of difficulties and hurdles in implementing his ambitious 2005 election manifesto promises into practice. In this context, the study of the New Labour Party's 2005 UK general election manifesto commitments on the European policy agenda plays an important role in understanding the EU-UK relations during Tony Blair's third term of Premiership from 2005 to 2007. The 2003 Iraq War had not only reduced Tony Blair's popularity at domestic and international levels but also sharply divided the EU member countries over various European policy decisions. In this scenario, in

September 2006, UK Prime Minister Tony Blair declared that he would resign from his post within a year.

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