

# "My Lords and Members of the House of Commons" : Britain and the European integration project through the Queen's Speeches

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# “My Lords and Members of the House of Commons”: Britain and the European Integration Project through the Queen’s Speeches

Martin Mik and Jo Angouri

This essay explores the ways in which the relationship with the European Union was framed by British Governments around the time leading to the two UK-wide referenda (1975 and 2016) concerning the British role within the European integration process. Using the Queen’s Speeches as our locus, we combine a political-science reading with a linguistic analysis, paying particular attention to the historicity of the relationship between the UK and the EU as constructed in this public discourse context. We argue that the Queen’s Speech is an unexplored genre which allows for a diachronic analysis of complex political landscapes and show in our analysis both the stability and plasticity of this genre. Our findings, based on an analysis of twenty-five Queen’s Speeches spanning a total period of twenty-six years, shed light on the ways in which membership to the EU is commodified in relation to economic policies. The data illustrate the systematic construction of the EU as an economic union throughout the decades. We discuss and close the essay with the affordances of the Queen’s Speech genre for the study of the UK political system.

Keywords: Queen’s Speech, Brexit, EU, UK, referendum, genre theory

The use of referenda in the British political system is a relatively recent innovation, dating back to 1973. It is indicative that two of the three UK-wide referenda to take place to date (in 1975 and 2016) concern the British role within the European integration process and they both

represent landmark events that have attracted the public eye as well as scholarly attention.<sup>1</sup> The fact that the UK's membership of the European Union is bookmarked by the referenda constituted the motivation for this essay, which is interested in the historicity of the relationship between the UK and the EU as constructed in public discourses. In particular, we focus on the Queen's Speeches, a distinct political genre which has not been researched as yet despite its symbolic role in British politics.

Unlike referenda, other elements of the British political system are deeply embedded in the country's past. The tradition of the State Opening of Parliament was established already by the end of the fourteenth century ("Living Heritage: Offices"). We use here the Queen's Speech as our locus and explore the ways in which Governments framed and commodified the relationship with the European Union around the time leading to the two relevant referenda.<sup>2</sup>

The gap of over forty years between the two referenda poses obvious challenges as the socio-historical contexts have developed and changed dramatically. Socio-economic structures, composition, and focus have all shifted during the intervening period. Uniquely for the UK, however, at both these points of British history there is one constant: the Monarch, Elizabeth II. We are not proposing to scrutinize the Queen's views on the referenda and the UK's part in the European integration project. The Sovereign in the British political system does not share her political views publicly. The Queen's Speeches, however, given their authorship by the Government of the day, provide a unique and

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<sup>1</sup> The first UK referendum took place in 1973, but was limited to Northern Ireland. The people of Northern Ireland were invited to decide whether they wanted to join the Republic of Ireland or remain in the United Kingdom. Two years later, the UK's population was asked whether they wanted to stay in the European Communities. For further information on all UK referenda to date, see "Referendums."

<sup>2</sup> Evidently, the European Union of today is a result of decades of gradual development. The milestone events are the Treaty of Paris, signed in 1951, which established the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) with effect from 1952; the Treaties of Rome, signed in 1957, which established the European Economic Community (EEC); and the European Atomic Energy Community (EAEC or Euratom), with effect from 1958. Although formally independent, these three communities were working jointly. In 1965, this was marked by the so-called Merger Treaty, which rationalized the institutions of the three Communities. *European Communities* therefore refers to all three entities. The European Union was established by the Treaty on European Union (Maastricht Treaty), signed in 1992. Where we discuss elements that cover the European Communities and the European Union, we refer to the European Union as an umbrella term. We refer to the European Communities (or a specific Community) where the references are time-bound, or pertinent to a single body only.

consolidated insight into the unfolding relationship between Britain and the EU.

We focus in particular on *explicit* mentions of Europe and the EU and the ways in which these are framed and commodified. A close reading of direct references to the European Union allows us to highlight differences, developments, and continuity over a long period of time. We do not evaluate whether these references focus on the right areas/messages and we do not compare the speeches to other genres. The Queen's Speech is different from media and campaign speeches as it is a Government agenda enunciated by the Queen. In more detail, although it is the Queen, i.e., the Head of State and – at least in purely formal sense – the most senior actor in the hierarchy of the British political system who delivers the speech, hers is essentially an agentless role. The Queen does not draft the speech; the Government does. Neither does she comment on the societal importance of the content of the speech. However, because of the way the speech is delivered in a highly formalized manner and through the medium of the Sovereign, these speeches differ significantly from other speeches delivered by the Government. We argue that although the event carries ideological significance, this needs to be read in the context of this unique genre and its distinctive power balance between the core stakeholders.

Given the ceremonial and symbolic weight of the Queen's Speech in political discourse, every explicit reference to the EU or Europe holds significant implications with regard to its positioning and contextualization within the speech. To that end, we systematically analyse all the Queen's Speeches delivered around the time of the 1975 and 2016 referenda. Our corpus draws on a detailed analysis of the speeches between 1960-75 and from 2010-19, to identify these elements and the change/consistency in these references over time.

Our analysis confirms that the UK has always approached the EU from an economic perspective but reveals that this is also consistently the case in the context of the Queen's Speech – a ceremonial act and genre that typically attracts a lot of attention from the political arena and is also visible to the public – it would be useful for future research to properly test whether and to what extent this is because of the political content of the Speech. As Peter John and Will Jennings highlight, “[t]he speech provides a high-profile signal, at a particular point in time, of the priorities of the core executive to parliament, to governing and opposition parties, to interest groups, to the media and to the public” (569). The Queen's Speech encapsulates a unique relationship where the presence of the Monarch (whether in person or through representation) is a



condition for the Government's set of priorities to be formally announced. It constitutes a political performative for the Government and an opportunity to perpetuate ideological positioning. The Monarch herself, however, has no role to play in the authorship of the text.

The Queen's Speech is an unexplored genre and combining a historical-political science reading with a linguistic analysis allows us to perform a diachronic and concise analysis of a complex political landscape. The essay is organized into three parts and starts with a brief discussion of our core discursive context before turning to the discussion of the referenda. Reviewing the two referenda and providing a comparison between these two key events that bookmark the UK's membership in the European Union, we close the paper with our general findings and suggestions for future research.

### The Queen's Speech as a Genre and a Performative

The so-called Queen's Speech outlines key areas of focus for the Government and unveils forthcoming legislative activity. Naturally, therefore, the political content of the speeches reflects the Government and its make-up. It is the Government that decides when the State Opening of Parliament and the Queen's Speech will take place. As stated, the Queen does not approve nor edit the content of the speech.

The structure and function of the Queen's Speech has attracted very little attention in either political science or linguistics despite the rich body of research on political speeches in both fields of study (e.g., Howarth; Wodak, *Discursive*; Angouri and Wodak). While the political implications of the content of the speeches are always in the media headline, and become subject of academic research (e.g., Jennings and John; John and Jennings), the genre itself has not been researched.

Our analysis has shown that the Queen's Speech meets the necessary conditions for being ratified as a political genre. It has a robust format that changes little over the decades and a stable function within an elaborate ceremony, both of which make it instantly recognizable as a Queen's Speech. We consider the resilience of the format and structure of the Queen's Speeches significant and interesting due to the genre's ritualistic character, which however also has enough plasticity for Government to adjust to their political agenda. Political genres play an important role for the construction, dissemination and/or change of political ideologies; it is therefore a suitable genre to analyse. As such the lack of research on the Queen's Speeches is a gap to be addressed be-

cause it provides an insight into what the Government decides to include and represent as matters of priority and public interest in those specific moments in time.

A political genre does not denote a simple static, textual architecture; as genre theory has shown (e.g., Bhatia; Swales), a genre approach brings together stable and generalized features of a discourse event with the possibility for dynamic change over time or according to the needs of a community. Although genre theorists have been preoccupied with primarily written texts, the approach is suitable for either spoken genres (e.g., Angouri and Marra) or hybrid events such as the Queen's Speech, which is carefully crafted and must be read out verbatim without the impromptu changes or extempores that usually characterize speeches. One of the core characteristics of genres is that they are recurrent and immediately recognizable by the relevant small or large communities in different socio-political contexts. The Queen's Speech is a case in point. The Queen's Speech has a standardized length of 1,000-1,200 words (with some variation) and is organized in three parts as indicated in Figure 1 (see Appendix 1 for a full speech).

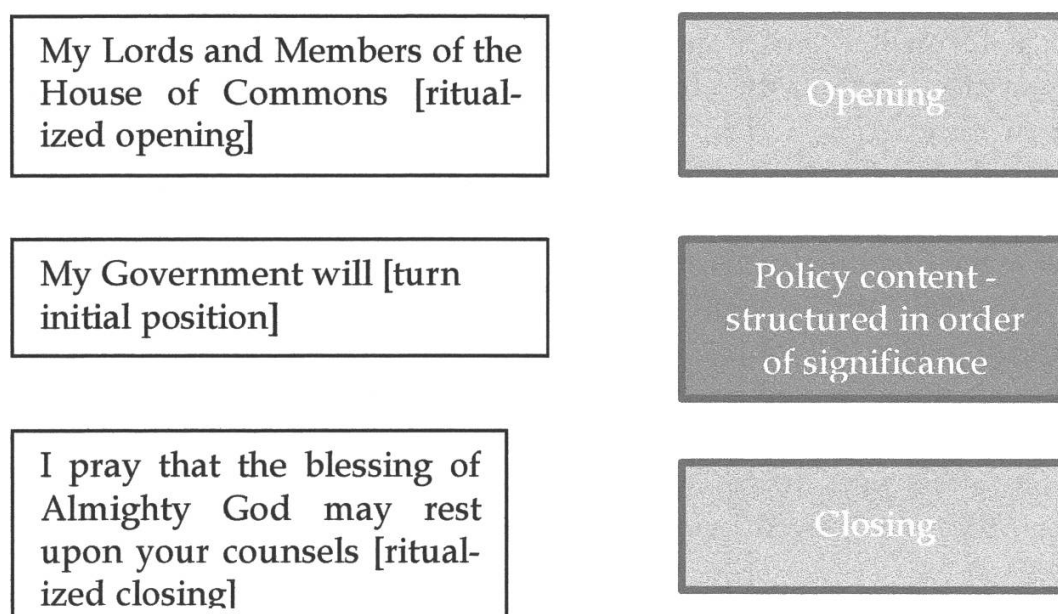


Fig. 1. The Queen's Speech structure

The opening and closing of the speech are stable and perpetuate the unique form of the speech.<sup>3</sup> The Queen's Speech has an established traditional structure and always opens with a standard formula: "My

<sup>3</sup> Genre theorists have used the concept of moves (e.g., Bhatia; Swales) to describe the recurrent and sequentially stable parts of a discourse event.

Lords and Members of the House of Commons.” The closing of the speech is similarly formalized: “My Lords and Members of the House of Commons, other measures will be laid before you. I pray that the blessing of Almighty God may rest upon your counsels.”<sup>4</sup> These two formulae enclose the main part of the speech, within which the Government presents its priorities. It is in this section of the speech that shifts of topic sequence appear over time. The structure of the main part, however, remains stable, and subjects are always ‘My Government’ or ‘My Ministers,’ with a shift to ‘My Ministers’ in subject position when it comes to specific measures and finances.

The recurrent reference to ‘My Government’ in paragraph initial position also foregrounds the standing of the Queen as head of state; the sequential design elevates the role of the speech and by extension elevates Government policy. Genres reproduce important aspects of a community’s identity and its established processes. This is visible in the Queen’s Speech which further perpetuates the role of the Monarchy and the importance of tradition of political systems. It also foregrounds the Governments’ positioning in relation to the political reality of the time.

Further, the Queen’s Speech as a political genre has a specific function: it formally opens a new session of parliament, either following a general election (and therefore a new parliament), or after the prorogation of an existing parliament.<sup>5</sup> It is only after the Queen’s Speech is delivered that the parliament can start working. As such the Queen carries out a clear performative speech act in and through the speech, namely the Opening of Parliament. The Queen’s Speech is part of a ceremony which further highlights its role and symbolism. The ceremony of the Opening of Parliament is steeped in tradition and reflects the long history of the monarchy and the parliament, as well as the evolution of their relationship. The ceremony is televised and captured online, often with detailed commentary on the meaning of individual stages, the roles played by various post holders, etc. All the pomp and

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<sup>4</sup> In some speeches the closing formula has a slightly different order: “Other measures will be laid before you. My Lords and Members of the House of Commons, I pray that the blessing of Almighty God may rest upon your counsels.” See for example: *Queen’s Speech, 27 May 2015* (col. 7).

<sup>5</sup> Prorogation is a process of ending one parliamentary session. The term is also used to denote the period between the prorogation of one session and the State Opening of Parliament, which marks the beginning of a new session. Sessions typically run for a year, although not always. For more details see: “Prorogation.”

circumstance set the stage for the delivery of the Queen's Speech by the Monarch ("State Opening").<sup>6</sup>

For this essay, we analysed all twenty-five speeches delivered within our focus period for their structure and content. We followed the principles of thematic and interaction analysis (Angouri) and analysed references to the EU in terms of the frequent semantic domains found in the speeches as well as the sequential ordering of reference to the EU compared to the content of the speech.

Our analysis shows the stability and plasticity of the genre. Over the decades, the order in which policy areas appear has changed. This is understandable as different Governments will have different priorities based not only on their political persuasion and their manifesto, but also on domestic and global developments. This fluctuation, which is often subtle and takes place over a number of years/decades, can be illustrated by the positioning of references to the European Union in the Queen's Speeches considered in this essay, i.e., in those delivered 1960-75 and 2010-19 inclusive, as captured in Table 1.

As already mentioned, this essay focuses on *explicit* mentions of the European Union only. Due to the ceremonial and symbolic weight of the Queen's Speech, we consider the positioning of a Europe-related paragraph within the speech a way of underlining its level of importance. With the exception of speeches delivered in 2017 and 2019, the EU tended to be mentioned explicitly only once. This may be surprising given the number of policy areas within which the EU has a considerable control. It must be noted, however, that the Queen's Speech sets out business the Government intends to present to Parliament for consideration so that the majority of topics will be in areas where the EU does not play a role – at least directly for people's daily reality. The speeches thus foreground domestic priorities, whether ad hoc or long-term, or areas such as foreign and security policies.

As Table 1 illustrates, the positioning of EU-related items fluctuates over time. From 1960-75 these mentions appeared in the first half of the speech and even among the first ten substantive items in every speech from 1962-75, fluctuating between item number 2 and item number 9. The situation changes dramatically when we re-engage with the speeches from 2010. Between 2010 and 2016 inclusive, explicit mentions of the EU appear in the second half of the speeches, often towards the very end. 2013 is the only year within our focus with no ex-

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<sup>6</sup> Since her accession to the throne in 1952, Queen Elizabeth II delivered all Queen's Speeches bar two: 1959 and 1963 (due to pregnancies).

PLICIT mention of the EU whatsoever. This may be surprising seen out of context, but less so when taking into consideration the extent to which the EU agenda has been embedded in the British political system since the early 2000s. For example, one need only look at the many areas in which EU legislation would have been automatically transposed into the British legislative system. It would therefore only be extraordinary EU matters that would merit specific mention in the Queen's Speech. And these would have to compete with remaining domestic items for 'newsworthiness,' and therefore a more prominent position in the speeches. The situation changes dramatically after the 2016 referendum, when EU-related items rocket to the top of the Queen's Speech. EU membership has never been straightforward in the UK as we will show below.

The sections containing EC/EU mentions are typically structured as distinct paragraphs preceded or followed by references to other alliances, e.g., the North Atlantic Alliance. The detailed analysis of these parts of the speeches shows that the EU is commodified with reference to two concepts, namely economy and security, with the former clearly dominant in the sub-corpus and hence our focus.

The structure of the paragraphs is equally robust. There is consistent use of 'My Government' in initial subject position and use of the active voice in those paragraphs although the passive voice is found in other parts of the speech. Finally, we note a systematic use of verbs indicating action and effort. Taken together, these points foreground the agency of the Government and place them in control of the agenda. This is particularly prominent given that the speech is delivered by the Monarch, who is otherwise agentless. This is the case with other genres (e.g., religious or judicial) for which power is vested upon an orator. Orators are a key felicity condition for the act but they do not have the authority to intervene.

This will be illustrated in the following sections which include excerpts from all speeches delivered between 1960-75 and then again 2010-19.

Year	Overall number of substantive paragraphs	EC/EU Mention Position
1960	30	13
1961	30	13
1962	31	9
1963	25	5
1964	24	6
1965	36	4
1966	30	6
1967	39	6
1968	38	6
1969	38	4
1970	33	3
1971	23	2
1972	29	2
1973	34	2
1974.i	33	3
1974.ii	31	3
1975	37	3
2010	38	28
2012	37	28
2013	39	0
2014	41	37
2015	31	17
2016	40	35
2017	32	1, 2, 3 & 24
2019	19	1 & 2

Table 1. Position of EC/EU mentions in the Queen's Speech by year







### The 5 June 1975 Referendum

The United Kingdom, although invited to participate, refused to take part in the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) as well as the European Economic Community (EEC) and the European Atomic Energy Community (EAEC, or Euratom) in the initial stages of the post-WWII integration process in Western Europe. Although supportive of the integration process, the UK did not regard itself as a part of this process. This position was clearly set out by Winston Churchill in his Zurich speech in September 1946. Not in an elected office at the time, Churchill strongly advocated for a close cooperation between France and Germany in particular, and the rest of Europe more broadly, while

Great Britain, the British Commonwealth of Nations, mighty America – and, I trust, Soviet Russia, for then indeed all would be well – must be the friends and sponsors of the new Europe and must champion its right to live. Therefore I say to you “Let Europe arise!”

Over seventy years later, Dinan (306) put it more directly: “For a variety of cultural, economic, historical, and political reasons, British public and political opinion was largely uninterested in the country’s membership in Europe’s first supranational organizations.” It is important to remember the context. Europe (and indeed the rest of the world) had only just emerged from a protracted global conflict that had cost millions of lives, seen the invention and use of a nuclear weapon, attacked the foundation of world organization, and for many raised concerning questions about humanity. With European countries exhausted by years of war effort, with a challenging recovery ahead, there was no indication how a project aiming to bring together the two key enemies, Germany and France, would end.

Britain had its Commonwealth with long-standing political and economic ties, connecting Britain tightly to markets across the globe. Britain emerged victorious from WWII, which helped to maintain its fading global power status – in the eyes of some at least. Nevertheless, Britain participated in various European endeavours in the post-WWII period, e.g., the foundation of the Council of Europe, or the formation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), which was to play a key role in securing peace in Europe during the Cold War. However, Britain’s engagement was limited to developments based on an intergovernmental approach; projects with supranational elements, necessitating at least partial surrender of national sovereignty, did not appeal. It is

easy, with the benefit of hindsight, to blame the then-contemporary leaders for their short-sightedness, but it is important to remember the picture of the day. Subsequent developments within the European project, namely the idea of a common market, but also agricultural policy, would be considered a threat to British trade with the Commonwealth (at the time more significant than British trade with European countries). Britain attempted to create a counter to the European Communities (EC) by negotiating the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), which came into existence in 1960, but without the EC member states and on a much looser footing. In the Queen's Speech delivered on 1 November 1960, the situation was captured very briefly as follows:

[My Government] will continue to cooperate with their partners in consolidating the European Free Trade Association. At the same time they will work towards the political and economic unity of Western Europe, on a basis satisfactory to all the Governments concerned. (col. 3)

It was the British businesses whose calls led to the British Government's change of approach and the decision to apply for EC membership. The first application for membership, submitted in 1961 by the Government of Harold Macmillan (Conservative), was based on an expectation of retaining a preferential relationship with the Commonwealth and, ideally, expanding this preferred status to existing members of the European Communities. This was not an easy negotiating position to have at the beginning of accession talks. The Queen's Speech of 31 October 1961 presented the item with hope, but even in this formal statement the complexity of the task is made clear by references to both the Commonwealth and the EFTA:

My Government will make every effort to bring to a successful conclusion the negotiations which they are undertaking with the European Economic Community and will at all times maintain close consultation with the interests involved in the United Kingdom and with the other members of the Commonwealth and of the European Free Trade Association. (col. 3)

Just one year later, on 30 October 1962, the Queen's Speech provided an update on the on-going negotiations, which again highlighted the importance of accession, but also the challenges in reaching a deal that would work for the UK, the Commonwealth, and the EFTA:

My Ministers recognise the great political and economic importance of the development of the European Communities and the opportunities which

British accession to these Communities would bring. In close consultation with the other members of the Commonwealth and of the European Free Trade Association, and having full regard for those interests in the United Kingdom which are particularly concerned, they will use every effort to bring the current negotiations to a conclusion acceptable to Parliament. (col. 3)

To make matters more complicated, there were strong personalities that played a key role in the negotiations. Most notably, the President of France, Charles de Gaulle, who eventually vetoed the first British membership application in January 1963 (see Milward for a detailed discussion of the initial stages of the British approach to the European integration process). The veto was reflected in the Queen's Speech in October 1963,<sup>7</sup> which also outlined the Government's subsequent steps in light of unsuccessful accession negotiations:

My Government deeply regretted the interruption of the negotiations for the accession of the United Kingdom to the Treaties of Paris and Rome. They have continued to work for a wider European unity. They have proposed that the work of the Western European Union and the Council of Europe should be further developed, and have continued their efforts to strengthen the European Free Trade Association. (*Prorogation* col. 1296)

In the following years, until the re-opening of negotiations in 1967, the Queen's Speeches included limited references to cooperation on the Continent. Thus on 3 November 1964, the Queen's Speech included a statement announcing that "[m]y Government will continue to play a full part in the European organisations of which this country is a member and will seek to promote closer European co-operation" (col. 10). A year later, on 9 November 1965, a more specific statement featured with an emphasis on trade and the economy:

My Government will continue to work for the greater unity of Europe. They will seek to strengthen the European Free Trade Association and to promote co-operation between the Association and the European Economic Community, and the establishment of a wider European market. (col. 2)

Finally, on 21 April 1966, the Queen's Speech included a clear indication of preparedness for renewed entry negotiations:

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<sup>7</sup> This speech is the only one within our focus not delivered by Her Majesty the Queen but by the Lord Chancellor, on her behalf. The format of the speech, however, remains unchanged.

My Government will continue to promote the economic unity of Europe and to strengthen the links between the European Free Trade Association and the European Economic Community. They would be ready to enter the European Economic Community provided essential British and Commonwealth interests were safeguarded. They will work for tariff reductions under the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade and for an expansion of Commonwealth trade. (col. 10)

The Queen's Speech delivered on 31 October 1967 heralded the new negotiations of membership following the second British application:

My Government look forward to the early opening of negotiations to provide for Britain's entry into the European Communities. The closest consultation will be maintained with Commonwealth Governments, the Governments of the European Free Trade Association and the Republic of Ireland. (col. 2)

However, this anticipation was cut short just a couple of weeks later in November 1967 by President de Gaulle, who vetoed the second British application, submitted by the Labour Government under Harold Wilson. The Queen's Speech delivered on 30 October 1968 included a simple statement showing the Government's determination to continue with the application, when the circumstances are more positive: "My Government will maintain their application for membership of the European Communities and will promote other measures of cooperation in Europe in keeping with this" (col. 2). British accession negotiations to the Communities had to wait until after de Gaulle's resignation in April 1969 and his replacement by Georges Pompidou. This turn of events was reflected in the Queen's Speech of 28 October 1969: "My Government will maintain their application to become full Members of the European Communities and desire an early commencement of negotiations. They will take a full part in promoting other measures contributing to European unity" (col. 4). However, the negotiations did not start until after the EC member states finalized the Common Agricultural Policy arrangements and pledged to work towards deeper integration, namely through possible monetary policy and common approaches to foreign policy.

The enthusiasm behind the opening of accession negotiations under a Conservative Government led by Edward Heath, as well as the importance of the step, were reflected in the Queen's Speech of 2 July 1970:

My Government have welcomed the opening on the 30th of June of negotiations for membership of the European Communities. In these negotiations they will seek to reach agreement on terms fair to all concerned and will remain in close consultation with our Commonwealth and EFTA partners and with the Irish Republic. (col. 9)

The statement appeared as the third item in the speech, immediately after a list of planned state visits and Britain's key international objectives. This marks the highest ranking of an item related to the European Communities since 1960. Such items tended to make their appearance halfway through the speeches in the early 1960s, rising to the top ten from 1963 onwards (appearing fourth to sixth out of over thirty items on average, as illustrated in Table 1). From 1970 to 1975 inclusive, items related to the European Communities appear in either the second or third paragraph of the speeches.

This announcement of opened negotiations preceded a comment on the importance of maintained security via NATO structures and a specific comment on the Commonwealth. However, it maintains its references to the key issues that had marked the UK's relationship with the Communities in earlier periods: the Commonwealth, the European Free Trade Association, and specifically the relationship with the Republic of Ireland.<sup>8</sup> This brief statement in the 1970 speech also refers to a number of difficult areas the UK would need to negotiate, such as the Common Agricultural Policy and the Fisheries Policy. However, the negotiations – opened in 1970, a decade after the first UK application was submitted – benefited from a number of developments that positively impacted on the process. Over a ten-year period, countries of the Commonwealth were able to take steps to prepare for the anticipated accession of the UK to the European Communities and the potential impact on their trading relationships. Equally, EFTA member states had time to find a way of cooperating with the Communities. A number of EFTA members joined the UK in applying for EC membership too. Of the founding EFTA member states, apart from the UK, Denmark and Norway were also negotiating membership.<sup>9</sup> The Republic of Ireland, which enjoyed a privileged relationship with the UK, also applied for member-

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<sup>8</sup> The Republic of Ireland negotiated EC entry previously, but did not complete the process due to the French veto of the UK application.

<sup>9</sup> Although Norway concluded its entry negotiations successfully, the people of Norway rejected accession in a referendum. The United Kingdom and Denmark, together with the Republic of Ireland, eventually joined the EC without Norway.



ship, removing a possible obstacle to the UK's accession. The importance and complexity of the UK-Republic of Ireland relationship was such that it was mentioned in the 1967 Queen's Speech as a crucial element of the accession negotiations. A scenario in which UK application would be successful whereas an Irish application declined would present challenges similar to the issues surrounding exit arrangements during Brexit talks.

The optimism of entry negotiations was shown again in the Queen's Speech delivered on 2 November 1971, which heralded the signing of the Instrument of Accessions in the second paragraph of the speech (immediately after the list of forthcoming state visits, traditionally the first topic):

In their external policies My Government will protect and advance the nation's interests. They hope, following the successful conclusion of negotiations, shortly to sign an Instrument of Accession to the European Communities after which legislation will be laid before you. It will be their purpose to maintain the North Atlantic Alliance, sustain the Commonwealth association and uphold our other friendships and alliances through-out the world, while continuing their efforts to achieve international agreement on arms control and disarmament. (col. 1-2)

The Government was careful to mark their continued commitment to both NATO and the Commonwealth, but the positioning of the European Communities at the beginning of the speech suggests this was indeed the primary focus.

This was further underlined during the next Queen's Speech, delivered on 31 October 1972. The European Communities, and the UK's forthcoming membership, again occupy the second position (immediately after the state visits) and use wording that makes clear that the Government wanted to play a major role in the Communities:

My Government will play a full and constructive part in the enlarged European Communities. They look forward to the opportunities membership will bring, for developing the country's full economic and industrial potential, for working out social and environmental policies on a European scale, and for increasing the influence of the enlarged Community for the benefit of the world at large. (col. 1)

The Government outlined the key areas it wanted the UK to benefit from and to participate in at the European level. Its focus on economic, social, and environmental areas was stated explicitly. The Communities' role in the world arena, however, was left ambiguous: was the UK

allowing the Communities to increase their influence in the world, or was the UK benefiting from joining the Communities to increase (or maintain) its world influence?

Following the accession of the United Kingdom on 1 January 1973, the Queen's Speech of 30 October 1973 gave the Communities not only a very prominent position (second only to overseas visits), but also a level of detail regarding the Government's focus:

In co-operation with other Member States My Government will play their full part in the further development of the European Community in accordance with the programme established at the European Summit in October 1972. This programme includes progress towards economic and monetary union; measures for the establishment of a regional development fund; and co-operation in foreign policy between Member States. My Government's objective throughout will be to promote the interests of the individual, whether as citizen or as consumer. (col. 1-2)

This segment of the Queen's Speech dedicated to the UK's role within the Communities – most extensive so far – suggests the Government's active commitment within the Communities, taking on board agreements reached before its accession and highlighting areas of particular interest. The Economic and Monetary Union and the Regional Development Fund occupy a prominent place in the speech, followed by foreign policy and the rights of an individual as a close third. The fact that these particular aspects of membership are highlighted through the speech illustrates the British focus on the economic aspects of the integration project and reservations towards integration in other areas, often presented as a loss of sovereignty, a theme present in the UK-EU relations since the 1960s all the way through to the 2016 referendum and beyond (for a full discussion of the UK-EU relationship see for example: George; Wall; Young).

1974 saw two Queen's Speeches delivered following a change in Government, with Labour led by Harold Wilson taking office in March 1974, and another one taking place in October of the same year following a snap election that also returned a Labour Government. Both speeches mark a change in the standing of the European Communities item – the international arena takes precedence over Europe. More importantly, the new Government signals its dissatisfaction with the membership deal. This reflects the Labour Party's stance, which was more critical at the time than that of the Conservative Party (with, however, significant differences of opinion within each party). The original membership conditions negotiated by the Conservative Government of Ed-



ward Heath made the UK a net contributor to the Communities' budget. The Common Agricultural Policy, agreed before the accession of the UK, was tailored to the needs of the original member states and not suited to the UK. These are just two of the issues the original accession conditions presented. Harold Wilson, leader of the Labour Party, was critical of these membership conditions, deemed detrimental to the UK; and Labour election manifestos in 1974 included a promise of a membership conditions renegotiation.

The first speech was delivered on 12 March 1974 and announced the Government's intention to renegotiate the UK's terms of entry to the European Economic Community: "My Government will seek a fundamental renegotiation of the terms of entry to the European Economic Community. After these negotiations have been completed, the results will be put to the British people" (col. 7). The speech also held a promise of a first-ever nation-wide referendum in which the people would decide whether the UK should remain in the Communities or not. The second speech was delivered on 29 October 1974 and confirmed this pledge. The UK's role in international attempts to address inflation and high oil prices, its dedication to the United Nations, and the importance of the Commonwealth – all came before the European Communities:

My Government will energetically continue their renegotiation of the terms of the United Kingdom's membership of the European Economic Community. Within twelve months the British people will be given the opportunity to decide whether, in the light of the outcome of the negotiations, this country should retain its membership. (col. 7)

There is an indication of optimism and hope that renegotiations can be concluded successfully and swiftly. The negotiations did take place, but changes to the membership conditions were minimal. The renegotiated conditions, however, were presented as a success to the British electorate. The promise of a new regional policy, pushed for by the UK (already under the Conservative Government of Edward Heath) and agreed by the EC, was the most tangible success as it targeted poorer areas of the Communities, a number of them in the UK, securing direct EC funding. This new policy ensured a tangible route of EC finances back to the UK. However, despite suggestions of an improved situation, the issue of British contributions to the EC budget remained high on the agenda even beyond a 'rebate' negotiated by Margaret Thatcher.

The referendum on the membership of the European Communities took place on 5 June 1975. The people were asked the following question: "Do you think that the United Kingdom should stay in the Euro-

pean Community (the Common Market)?” (*Referendum* 2986). The wording of the question is peculiar as the United Kingdom joined European Communities. This is captured in the Act of Parliament that marks the accession, the *European Communities Act 1972*: “the Communities’ means the European Economic Community, the European Coal and Steel Community and the European Atomic Energy Community” (Part I). By a 67.2% majority, the voters decided that the UK should stay in (“Living Heritage: Parliament”). Although Government ministers were allowed to express publicly their preferences – collective responsibility was suspended for the referendum, whereas in normal circumstances cabinet ministers are expected to defend an agreed Government position, whatever their personal stance – the support from Prime Minister Wilson and other pro-European ministers was prominent. The ‘Yes’ camp was supported by a majority of the Conservative Party and other UK parties too (Miller).

A return to a more positive messaging can be detected in the Queen’s Speech delivered on 19 November 1975, just over five months after the referendum: “My Government will play their full part in the European Economic Community, devoting particular attention to the achievement of a common approach to the world’s political and economic problems” (col. 2). However, the Communities are referred to after both the United Nations and the Commonwealth, and the Government indicates that “the world’s political and economic problems” and ways of addressing them are the Government’s priority now. The speech also specifically refers to the European Economic Community, rather than the European Communities as a whole. This further shows the importance of the economic unity over political cooperation aspirations. Together with the wording of the referendum question (and the direct mention of the Common Market) it suggests that the matter was regarded as a primarily economic agreement.

A close look at the concept of unity specifically in the speeches is quite indicative of changes during the years leading to the 1975 referendum. The summary below shows these conceptual shifts:

political and economic unity of Western Europe (1960) → wider European unity (1963) (followed by reference to efforts to strengthen the European Free Trade Association) → greater unity of Europe (1965) (followed by efforts to strengthen the European Free Trade Association and to promote co-operation between the Association and the European Economic Community, and the establishment of a wider European market) → economic unity of Europe (1966) → European unity (1969 – last reference to unity).

Although the referendum turnout was 64%, the outcome did not resolve the issue once and for all; divisions on the topic have survived (Dinan). The challenging context of the British accession, i.e., having to accept the Common Agricultural Policy as a *fait accompli*, budgetary contributions, the Common Fisheries Policy, combined with deep divisions on the topic within the British political elites before and after the first referendum, resulted in a perpetual state of questioning the membership, its benefits, and the European Communities as a whole. This unease is present from the 1970s to this day and forms a context to the next UK-wide referendum on the topic of the European integration project and the British role within it.

### The 23 June 2016 Referendum

The next UK-wide referendum on the country's membership in the (now) European Union did not take place until 2016. However, already in the maiden Queen's Speech of the Cameron coalition Government in May 2010, there is a clear nod to Eurosceptics: "My Government will introduce legislation to ensure that in future this Parliament and the British people have their say on any proposed transfer of powers to the European Union" (col. 6). This arrangement, the European Union Act 2011, put in place by a coalition Government of Conservatives (with a significant number of Eurosceptic MPs) and largely pro-EU Liberal Democrats, did not diminish voices criticizing the EU and questioning the benefits of British membership.

The UK's membership in the European Union is not specifically mentioned in the Queen's Speeches again until 4 June 2014. The Queen's Speech of 9 May 2012 makes a reference to the forthcoming EU enlargement only:<sup>10</sup> "My Government will seek the approval of Parliament on the anticipated accession of Croatia to the European Union" (col. 3). In the 2014 speech, the Queen states the Government's determination to "promote reform in the European Union, including a stronger role for member states and national parliaments. My Ministers will also champion efforts to secure a global agreement on climate change" (col. 4). The 2014 speech is an example of the EU item being bundled up with a policy development in another area, in this instance climate change. The wording is ambiguous as to whether the Government desired to champion these efforts within the EU, or whether this

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<sup>10</sup> There was no Queen's Speech in 2011.

was an entirely independent topic. Both courses of action can be found elsewhere in Queen's Speeches.

In the 1970s mentions of the European Communities competed with international matters for the top place in the opening paragraphs of the Queen's Speeches (always behind state-visit announcements). In the 2014 speech, the European Union remark precedes the state visits, but both appear towards the very end of the speech. The state-visit announcements now conclude the main body of the Queen's Speech and are followed by a ritualized closing. The EU mention appears in penultimate position in the speech. This trend is apparent through the Queen's Speeches since 2010. Whereas in the 1960s and the first half of the 1970s mentions of the European Communities tended to be among the top ten items, in the early 2010s mentions of the European Union appear in the second half of the Queen's Speeches. The situation changes in 2017 and 2019 when European-Union-related items jump to the top of the speech (1-3 and 1-2 respectively) as Brexit dominates British politics.<sup>11</sup>

Following the May 2015 general election and the creation of a Conservative Government led by David Cameron, the European Union featured two thirds into the Queen's Speech delivered during the State Opening of Parliament ceremony on 27 May 2015:

My Government will renegotiate the United Kingdom's relationship with the European Union and pursue reform of the European Union for the benefit of all member states. Alongside this, early legislation will be introduced to provide for an in/out referendum on membership of the European Union before the end of 2017. (col. 6)

It shared a message with the people that the United Kingdom would prefer to renegotiate its membership rather than leave the European Union. Furthermore, it not only promised to conduct this in the interest "of all member states" but also the British people, as they are given the opportunity to vote Leave or Remain. The Cameron Government mirrored many of the approaches taken by the Wilson Government in relation to the 1975 referendum. For example, they offered a specific timeline for the referendum and although both Governments formally supported Britain staying in, the Queen's Speeches attempted to balance the pro-European and Eurosceptic tensions on both occasions; instead, the principle of collective cabinet responsibility had been suspended

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<sup>11</sup> There was no Queen's Speech in 2018.

(Scott; Cameron). The Cameron Government initiated negotiations with the European Union without delay and the outcomes were announced in February 2016.<sup>12</sup> However, the final ‘deal,’ although presented positively by the Government, was far from what the Conservative manifesto promised and – crucially – what the Eurosceptics within the party wanted.

On 18 May 2016, the Queen’s Speech limited itself to a brief announcement, towards the end of the speech, that “[m]y Government will hold a referendum on membership of the European Union” (col. 3). With just over a month until the referendum and significant differences within the Government and the Conservative Party, the brevity and the neutral tone of the announcement are perhaps not surprising. Although the Government formally supported the Remain outcome, there were a number of key personalities within the Conservative Party opposed to continued membership and the Government, namely the Prime Minister, did not have sufficient control over the Party to enforce a clear and unified stance without risking an internal rift that could have destabilized the entire Government. The strength of the ‘rebels’ can be illustrated by the fact that the principle of cabinet collective responsibility had been suspended by the Prime Minister in relation to the referendum. The referendum date was set for 23 June 2016, just over a year after the general election and the pledge in the 2015 Queen’s Speech. In the referendum, the voters were asked to answer the following question set out in the *European Union Referendum Act 2015* (Chapter 36): “Should the United Kingdom remain a member of the European Union or leave the European Union?” 72.2% of all eligible voters took part in the referendum and, as is well known, 51.9% to 48.1% voted in favour of the United Kingdom leaving the European Union (Electoral Commission).

A year later, on 21 June 2017, the topic of the European Union soared to the top of the Queen’s Speech, prepared by a Conservative Government led by Theresa May. Arrangements to be put in place to enable Brexit dominate the entire speech:

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<sup>12</sup> The Cameron Government managed to secure an agreement that the Treaties would stipulate that the UK was not obliged to partake in further political integration. The agreement also included a provision for national parliaments to be able to mount a challenge to EU legislative proposals. There was an acknowledgement that cooperation of Eurozone countries should not disadvantage non-participating EU states. Additional agreements were reached, amongst them the EU agreed to address the burden of regulation on competitiveness and the single market. (*Best of Both Worlds*; European Council).



My Lords and Members of the House of Commons, my Government's priority is to secure the best possible deal as the country leaves the European Union. My Ministers are committed to working with Parliament, the devolved Administrations, business and others to build the widest possible consensus on the country's future outside the European Union.

A Bill will be introduced to repeal the European Communities Act and provide certainty for individuals and businesses. This will be complemented by legislation to ensure that the United Kingdom makes a success of Brexit, establishing new national policies on immigration, international sanctions, nuclear safeguards, agriculture and fisheries.

My Government will seek to maintain a deep and special partnership with European allies and to forge new trading relationships across the globe. New Bills on trade and customs will help to implement an independent trade policy, and support will be given to help British businesses export to markets around the world. (col. 5)

The reference to the *best possible deal* and to *business* and *markets* indicates, yet again, the interest in framing the country's future outside the EU in specific economic terms.<sup>13</sup> There is little reference to other possible connections with the EU in terms of values or common heritage. The framing of the relationship between Britain and the EU at this time balances a commitment to 'exiting' with maintaining, or attempting to maintain, involvement with the EU's financial character.<sup>14</sup>

A further mention of the referendum result appears towards the end of the same speech in a reference to one of the key elements discussed during the 1970s accession period: "My Ministers will ensure that the United Kingdom's leading role on the world stage is maintained and enhanced as it leaves the European Union" (*Queen's Speech, 21 June 2017* col. 6-7). The turn to the *world* may be read as Britain resuming a role that had been constrained within the context of the EU or even an indirect reference to the potential impact for the EU given Britain's self-perception of the strength of its historical ties with the Commonwealth and other Alliances.

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<sup>13</sup> In the Queen's Speech, throughout the years, membership to the EU has been commodified in relation to economic policies. The EU is constructed as, primarily, an economic union. This is a consistent thread in the speeches of core politicians during the Brexit years (see Wodak, *Politics*).

<sup>14</sup> We have written elsewhere that the implications of associating the 'economy' with "essentialised common-sense inferences of monetary resources, fiscal policies and simplified representations of institutions and transactions between countries, banks and supranational bodies" (Angouri et al.) feeds into the micropolitics of fear and discourse of populism that we observe to be on the rise in Europe and elsewhere in the world.

Overall, Brexit has dominated British politics since the 2016 referendum. It remained at the top of the agenda during internal British discussions before the UK formally triggered Article 50 and exit negotiations, during the negotiation process with the European Union, as well as during a protracted process of considering deals reached by the UK Government. During the process, Britain saw another change of Prime Minister, this time in 2019 when Boris Johnson replaced Theresa May. It was following the December 2019 general election that the last Queen's Speech to date was delivered.

The 19 December 2019 Queen's Speech retained the focus on Brexit, as it opened the speech:

My Lords and Members of the House of Commons, my Government's priority is to deliver the United Kingdom's departure from the European Union on 31 January. My Ministers will bring forward legislation to ensure the United Kingdom's exit on that date, and to make the most of the opportunities that this brings for all the people of the United Kingdom.

Thereafter, my Ministers will seek a future relationship with the European Union based on a free trade agreement that benefits the whole of the United Kingdom. They will also begin trade negotiations with other leading global economies. (col. 7)

The future relationship with the EU is again defined in terms of trade but, unlike the speech in 2015, it states that the agreements should lie in the interest of "the whole of the United Kingdom." This continues the emphasis and interest in maintaining some relationship with the EU's financial policies but with a clearly inward-looking perspective.

The genre of the Queen's Speech will continue to balance form stability and content agility according to the needs it serves. As such it provides the academic community with a robust live corpus for capturing the nuances of a relationship which, so far, has been firmly positioned on economic priorities in an ideologically significant domain. Despite differences in the wider socio-political context, the speeches are consistent in that they frame the UK-EU relationship in economic terms and not on other grounds, such as shared European values. A linguistic analysis of the text has provided evidence of these patterns while a historical-political approach has provided the context within which this is significant.

A relationship between historical and linguistic approaches is not new for discourse analysts. The Discourse Historical Approach (DHA) in particular, developed over decades by Ruth Wodak and others, is exactly built on the need systematically to analyse the relationship between



the historical trajectory of texts and contexts. This, however, often remains within the remit of critical-discourse analysts. An interdisciplinary reading such as the one we provide here equips us to access different layers of complex phenomena such as the UK-EU relationship. Although linguists could say more on the texts and political historians could say more on the context, it is the synergy of disciplines that has enabled us to show the robustness of patterns in micro (textual-linguistic) and macro (historico-political) terms. The historical-political approach here has been successful in contextualizing the speeches. The linguistic perspective has shown the genre's distinctive nature and symbolic role in perpetuating the delicate relationship between ceremonial speech and political manifesto; it is a performative act which can be carried out only by the Queen while the Government retains the power of authorship. More broadly the analysis adds to our understanding of performative acts and provides evidence of the significance and stability of economic ideologies that have been associated with EU membership diachronically and frame current pro- and anti-European discourses in the UK. The genre offers fertile ground for further investigation from this perspective. We have made a start in this essay and hope that further studies will follow.

Appendix 1: *Queen's Speech, 31 October 1961*

The QUEEN, being seated on the Throne, and attended by Her Officers of State (the Lords being in their robes), commanded the Gentleman Usher of the Black Rod, through the Lord Great Chamberlain, to let the Commons know, "It is Her Majesty's pleasure they attend Her immediately in this House."

Who being come, with their Speaker:

Her Majesty was pleased to speak as follows:

*1,004 words –  
typically  
standardized length*

*My Lords and Members of the House of Commons* *ritualized opening*

*"My Husband and I": standardized preface*

*"My Husband and I look forward to our coming journey to West Africa.*

*consistent reference to future visits*

*"It gives Me much pleasure that My Husband is to visit the countries of Latin America next year and that Princess Alexandra is on her way to South-East Asia and the Far East.*

*"I shall be glad to welcome President Sukarno of Indonesia on a State visit to this country.*

*standardized*

*"My Government will continue to*

*change of subject*

give resolute support to the United Nations. They believe it to be essential for the future of the world that the authority of this organisation should be sustained, and that it should be enabled to carry out the tasks assigned to it under its Charter.

*consistent reference to the support to the United Nations after change of subject*

“The improvement of relations between East and West remains a primary object of My Government’s policy, and they will continue to seek peaceful co-operation with all countries.

“My Government will seek, in conjunction with their allies, to achieve by negotiation a settlement of the Berlin question which will preserve the security and freedom of the people of West Berlin.

*consistent reference to the North Atlantic Alliance early in the speech*

“The North Atlantic Alliance is now more than ever essential for the continued safety of Europe and the world. My Government will continue to play their part in keeping it and the other regional pacts to which we belong strong and united. The close friendship between this country and the United States will be maintained and, in co-operation with My allies, My armed forces will continue to contribute to the prevention of war. Legislation will be proposed giving power to retain for an additional six months certain National Servicemen who are serving full-time, and to recall for a

similar period National Servicemen who have a liability to part-time service. In addition, the reserve organisation of My army will be reviewed.

“My Government will continue to work for the success of the Geneva Conference on Laos and for the maintenance of peace in South-East Asia.

“Guided by the principles agreed upon between the Prime Ministers of the Commonwealth countries at their last Meeting, My Government will do their utmost to achieve general and complete disarmament under effective international control. In spite of the action of the Soviet Union in continuing to conduct nuclear tests on a massive scale in defiance of world opinion, My Government will persevere in their endeavour to promote an international agreement on the discontinuance of tests of nuclear weapons.

“A measure will be laid before you to amend the law to accord with the new status of South Africa.

“Legislation will be introduced to enable Southern Rhodesia to be granted a new Constitution.

“Bills will be introduced to provide for the independence of Tanganyika and of Uganda and for constitutional changes in the West

Indies.

*“My Government”  
in initial subject  
position + active  
voice when topics  
are associated with  
the EU/EC*

“My Government will make every effort to bring to a successful conclusion the negotiations which they are undertaking with the European Economic Community and will at all times maintain close consultation with the interests involved in the United Kingdom and with the other members of the Commonwealth and of the European Free Trade Association.

*indicates action +  
effort*

*reference to other  
alliances precedes or  
follows reference to  
Europe*

*“Members of the House of Commons*

“Estimates for the public services will be laid before you in due course.

*standardized phrase  
in the middle or  
towards the end of  
the speech*

“My Lords and Members of the House of Commons

*“My Ministers” in  
subject position  
when there is  
reference to  
“policies” (opposite)  
or “expenditure”  
(two paragraphs  
below)*

“My Ministers will continue to direct their policies towards maintaining the stability of sterling. They will seek to strengthen the balance of payments by the measures already announced, including especially the vigorous promotion of exports. Legislation will be laid before you to raise the limits of the liabilities to be assumed by the Export Credits Guarantee Department.

“My Ministers will continue to seek the co-operation of both sides of industry in the better co-ordination of the national effort with a view to promoting faster economic growth,

while maintaining stability in prices and a high and stable level of employment.

“They will seek to keep public expenditure within limits justified by the national resources. Continuing efforts will be made to secure a better relationship between increases in incomes and in national productivity.

“My Government will introduce a Bill to give effect to the proposals already submitted to you for the re-organisation of the undertakings under the control of the British Transport Commission.

“A Bill will be introduced to ensure the orderly development of privately-owned industrial pipelines.

“Proposals will be laid before you to amend the law relating to teachers’ salaries, school-leaving dates and the award of grants to students.

“My Government are resolved to maintain a stable, efficient and prosperous agricultural industry. They will lay before you a Bill to implement their proposals on the Report by the Committee on the Fishing Industry and on drift netting for salmon.

“Legislation will be proposed to amend local government financial

arrangements in Scotland; to secure better distribution of Scottish housing subsidies and amend the law relating to housing in other respects: and to make certain amendments in the licensing law of Scotland.

“Proposals will be laid before you for improving the machinery for administering criminal justice with a view to securing greater expedition and efficiency.

“Legislation will be introduced to control the immigration to the United Kingdom of British subjects from other parts of the Commonwealth, and to give powers for the expulsion of immigrants convicted of criminal offences.

“A Bill will be introduced to improve the provision for supplementing workmen's compensation and to make certain alterations in the administration of the schemes for family allowances, national insurance and industrial injuries.

“Plans will be laid before you for the development of the hospitals over the next decade, within the framework of the National Health Service as a whole.

“Authority will be sought for the establishment of national training councils for health visitors and



social workers.

*invitation to take a  
decision*

“You will be invited to approve a measure designed to promote greater safety on the roads.

“Other measures will be laid before you in due course.

*standardized phrase  
preceding closing*

“My Lords and Members of the House of Commons

“I pray that the blessing of Almighty God may rest upon your counsels.”

*ritualized closing*

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