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Lindsay Aqui, *The First Referendum: Reassessing Britain's Entry to Europe, 1973-75*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020. ISBN: 978-1-5261-4519-2

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Introduction by Eirini Karamouzi, University of Sheffield

Writing the history of Britain and Europe is a task many experienced authors have attempted, and, in doing so, have demolished several myths and offered convincing evidence of the complicated nature of Britain's relationship to European integration.[1] For historians of Britain and European integration, these texts are invaluable for their teaching and research. How much did ordinary Britons care about the UK's membership in the EU? Far too little, most historians long believed. Still, the Brexit campaign and the 2016 outcome sparked public and societal interest like never before. Both Remainers and Brexiteers politicised the history of Britain and EU in an abstract and convenient way that in most cases lacked empirical credibility. The debates on the 'lessons of history,' however is not a phenomenon exclusive to the Britain and Europe affair.

Moreover, it is not just a story of gloom and doom. The rise of academic research on Britain's European policy has been partly a product of the ongoing debate around Brexit and its causes. In these turbulent times, scholars are pushed to popularise historical knowledge and experiment with different modes of storytelling. For historians of Britain and European integration, Brexit is not an invitation for exclusive presentist perspectives. Instead of trying to draw straight lines between past and present events, the growth of the interest in the subject should be an opportunity to widen the agenda of inquiry. Robert Saunders's book *Yes to Europe!* stands out in the critical reception from both the public and academics.[2] The book received praise for adapting a sociocultural approach and using the 1975 campaign "as a window into the political and social history of the 1970s."[3] In a way he offered an alternative way of telling the history of Britain and Europe in the 1970s. Saunders's book is also the main competition to Lindsay's Aqui *The First Referendum: Reassessing Britain's Entry to Europe, 1973-5*, as acknowledged by most reviewers in this roundtable. Coming out first, it could have hindered Aqui's publications plans. But Aqui proves confidently why her contribution has merit on its own. In contrast to Saunders, Aqui delivers a classic piece of diplomatic history on the vexed question of Britain and the European Economic Community (EEC), one which looks primarily at the British team and its interaction with domestic elite stakeholders but also incorporates public opinion polls.

The First Referendum is a revised version of Aqui's excellent doctoral dissertation.[4] It tells a fascinating tale of the first years of British membership in the EEC, and especially the years from 1973-1975. Aqui's research in a multitude of British sources provides original empirical evidence of the primacy of domestic calculations in the formulation and implementation of Britain's European policy. The first difficult years of EEC

[1] See Stephen Wall, T*he Official History of Britain and the European Community. Volume II: From Rejection to Referendum, 1963– 75* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013); Oliver Daddow, Britain, and Europe since 1945. Historiographical perspectives on integration (Manchester University Press, 2011); Helen Parr, *Britain's Policy Towards the European Community: Harold Wilson and Britain's World Role, 1964– 1967* (London: Routledge, 2006); Mathias Haeussler, *Helmut Schmidt and British- German Relations: A European Misunderstanding* (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2019); Piers Ludlow, *Dealing with Britain. The Six and the First UK Application to the EEC* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); James Ellison, *Threatening Europe: Britain and the Creation of the European Community, 1955-58* (London: Macmillan, 2000).

[2] Robert Saunders, *Yes to Europe! The 1975 Referendum and Seventies Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

[3] https://www.theguardian.com/books/2018/mar/29/yes-to-europe-robert-saunders-review-tony-benn-vote-leave

[4] Lindsay Aqui, "Britain and the European Community, 1 January 1973—5 June 1975: Policy, Party Politics and Public Opinion," Ph.D. Thesis, Queen Mary University of London (2018

membership cemented the declinist narrative spiral of the 1970s. But instead of blaming the poor timing, Aqui assigns agency to the British governments and the contradictory expectations raised in their policymaking in Brussels and at home. She also proves the continuity between the Health and Wilson governments in their views of Europe despite their different agendas. She is right to claim that the book offers "a fresh perspective on the diplomacy of the Heath and Wilson governments."

Almost all the reviewers praise Aqui's efforts in closing "a glaring gap in the literature on Britain's relationship with European integration," and offering "a meticulous reconstruction of the European policies of the Heath and Wilson policies." Wolfgang Kaiser is the least enthusiastic of the four reviewers, questioning the originality of Aqui's conclusions. Kaiser expected Aqui to incorporate the story of 1973-75 in the long-term question of Britain and Europe, but Luc-Andre Brunet in turn deemed it wise for Aqui to have avoided taking a position on Brexit and the wider debate of the British EC/EU membership. Both, however, suggest that the over reliance on British sources means that "a full multi-archival international history of the renegotiation remains to be written." Aqui acknowledges the limitations of her approach but does a good job reminding historians of European integration of the importance of national politics in understanding the workings of the EEC and mostly of its enlargement rounds. Indeed, Mathias Haeussler and Helen Parr find remarkable the familiarity of some of the narratives present in the study, in particular the primacy of domestic factors. Carving out a British European policy became a mosaic of divided cabinets, party opposition, and for the most part an ambivalent public and media opinion. For Parr, the Wilson approach to the EEC renegotiations was a turning point: "party politics defined Britain's policy to the EC in a way it had not done before. It perhaps would not do again so insistently until 2016."

Aqui neither advances the teleological tale that Britain was bound to reject the European project nor embraces the "awkward partner" thesis.[5] Reading the book you are left with an impression that in terms of Europe, the British policymakers kept shifting the goalposts on what they deemed acceptable to the country's national interest. The vexed question, which remains to be fully addressed, has become who and what came to define this 'national interest.'

Participants:

Lindsay Aqui is a Leverhulme Early Career Fellow at the University of Westminster, currently writing a prosopography of the British officials and politicians in the European Commission between 1973 and 1992. Prior to joining Westminster, Lindsay was a PhD candidate at Queen Mary University of London and an ESRC Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Cambridge. She is interested in the international history of the UK after 1945, and especially in the UK's relationship with the EU and its predecessors. Her book, *The First Referendum: Reassessing Britain's Entry to Europe, 1973–75*, is published by Manchester University Press (2020).

Eirini Karamouzi is a Senior Lecturer in Contemporary History at the University of Sheffield. She is the author of *Greece, the EEC and the Cold War, 1974–1979. The Second Enlargement* (Palgrave Macmillan,

[5] Piers Ludlow, "The Historical Roots of the 'Awkward Partner' Narrative," *Contemporary European History* 28:1 (2019), 35–38.

2014*)* and co-editor of the volume *Balkans in the Cold War* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016). She works on the history of European integration, Cold War, Modern Greece and peace movements.

Luc-André Brunet is Senior Lecturer in Contemporary International History at The Open University, where he is also Director of the Centre for War and Peace in the Twentieth Century. His research interests include twentieth-century France, European integration, and transatlantic relations. Among his publications are *Forging Europe: Industrial Organisation in France, 1940-1952* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016) and, as editor, *Star Wars: A Transatlantic History of the Strategic Defence Initiative* (Routledge, forthcoming).

Mathias Haeussler is Assistant Professor of Modern European History at the University of Regensburg. He is author of *Helmut Schmidt and British-German Relations: A European Misunderstanding* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), and *Inventing Elvis: An American Icon in a Cold War World* (London: Bloomsbury, 2021).

Wolfram Kaiser.is Professor of European Studies at the University of Portsmouth in England and Visiting Professor at the College of Europe in Bruges, Belgium. He has published widely in the field of European and international history including *The European Ambition. The Group of the European People's Party and European Integration* (co-author, 2020), *Writing the Rules for Europe. Experts, Cartels, and International Organisations* (co-author, 2014), *Exhibiting Europe in Museums* (co-author, 2014)*, Christian Democracy and the Origins of European Union* (2007), *Using Europe. Abusing the Europeans. Britain and European Integration 1945-63* (1999). He is currently working on the history of the European Parliament**.**

Helen Parr is Professor of History at Keele University and author of *Britain's Policy towards the European Community, 1964-7: Harold Wilson and Britain's World Role* (Routledge, 2006) and *Our Boys: The Story of a Paratrooper* (Allen Lane, 2018).

Review by Luc-André Brunet, The Open University

In 2016, the British electorate voted narrowly to leave the European Union (EU) in a national referendum that Prime Minister David Cameron had promised would be a "once in a generation decision."[6] Indeed, a similar referendum on British membership in the European Community (EC), as it was then known, had taken place a generation earlier, in 1975. There were a number of similarities between the two referenda. In both cases, the British Prime Minister—Cameron in 2016, Harold Wilson in 1975—sought to renegotiate the terms of British membership and to put these new arrangements to the British people; in both cases this was in large part an exercise in managing the pro- and anti-EC/EU wings of his own party. Some of the tactics and arguments of the anti-EC side were similarly reused in 2016: like Conservative MP Enoch Powell in 1975, Tory MP Boris Johnson likened the EC/EU to Nazi dictator Adolf Hitler in the 2016 referendum campaign, while the 2016 slogan 'Take Back Control' echoed the 1975 anti-EC slogan "For the right to rule ourselves." Despite these parallels, the outcome of the two referenda were decidedly different. In 1975, two-thirds of British voters supported the UK's continued membership in the EC, a "once in a generation" decision that would be reversed by the second referendum 41 years later.

It is this "first referendum" which is the focus of Lindsay Aqui's book. Indeed, the author consciously, and quite sensibly, stresses that this book is "written without reference to 'Brexit' and takes no stance on the arguments about 'leave' or 'remain'", leaving readers to "draw their own conclusions about the implications of 1973-75 for the debates that have unfolded since" (17). Readers will unavoidably compare the two referenda, but Aqui provides a balanced and insightful analysis of the first referendum that wisely avoids taking a position on Brexit.

Despite the title's emphasis on the referendum itself, the book covers a period of roughly two and a half years, from the UK's entry to the EC in January 1973 to the aftermath of the June 1975 referendum. In addition, the opening chapter traces the history and historiography of Britain's "road to membership", from the Clement Attlee government's decision not to join the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) that was set up between 1950 and 1952 to Britain finally joining under Prime Minister Edward Heath in 1973. This chapter provides a clear and insightful overview of Britain's relationship with Europe over these two decades, and offers an ideal starting point for students and researchers interested in the topic.

The bulk of the book is divided into three sections. The opening section deals with the first year of British membership in the EC under Heath. The British Government had hoped that joining the EC would reverse the country's post-1945 economic and political decline and boost national economic growth. In the event, the first months of Britain's membership of the EC instead witnessed an ongoing food crisis, a currency crisis in March, strained transatlantic relations after Secretary of State Henry Kissinger's notorious 'Year of Europe' speech in April, and the 1973 oil shock in October, which marked the end of the sustained period of economic growth in Europe known as *les trente glorieuses*. While the Heath Government had joined the Community on the EC's terms, it had hoped to renegotiate some of the less favourable aspects of its

[6] 'UK's Brexit vote a "once in a generation" decision', *The Irish Times*, 24 February 2016.

membership once within the EC—as British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher later explained to her Spanish counterpart Felipe González when Spain was applying for EC membership, joining the Community consisted of "agreeing to a whole lot of things to get in, then once in, trying to undo all the amazing things you agreed to in the first place."[7] In 1973, the Heath government sought to reduce the British contribution by reforming the EC's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and creating the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) to channel funds towards poorer regions in Britain, and from which the UK would be a net beneficiary. Aqui devotes a chapter to each of these two initiatives, and concludes that while Heath's efforts were unsuccessful and his strategy of "join now and negotiate later" had been a poor one (108), these projects were quickly picked up by Harold Wilson's government when Labour returned to power in the February 1974 election.

The second part of Aqui's book focuses precisely on Wilson's efforts to renegotiate the terms of Britain's membership, which would then be put to a national referendum. Building on her analysis of the Heath Government, Aqui devotes another pair of chapters to the CAP and the ERDF under Wilson. She argues convincingly that "the Heath government's goals, to reduce Britain's financial contributions to the EC through reforms to the CAP and the creation of the ERDF, were taken up by the renegotiation and thus represent an important area of continuity between the European policies pursued under the premierships of Heath and Wilson" (118). Aqui also charts the evolution of the British negotiating position from the "fundamental renegotiation of the terms of entry" promised in the Labour election manifesto –which was fiercely opposed by France and several other members states—to the "cosmetic changes" ultimately achieved (117). Yet Aqui argues that these minor changes were nevertheless important domestically, and played an important role in the referendum (194). That is the focus of the third section of the book, which includes one chapter on the campaign and a final chapter on the outcome of the vote. In this section Aqui demonstrates her skills not only as an historian but as a political scientist, deftly analysing the referendum results and public opinion. Arguing for the importance of the concessions secured by the Wilson government in the renegotiation on public opinion, she points to a Gallup poll from early 1975 that shows while only 33% of Britons would vote for continued EC membership on existing terms, no less than 71% would support membership "if the government renegotiated and then recommended continued membership" (250). As such, while the renegotiation yielded relatively trifling changes to the terms of Britain's membership, it helps explain the outcome of the referendum in favour of remaining part of the Community.

Aqui's study is based on meticulous research in an impressive range of British archives, making use of government documents, private papers, and political party records, among others. This scrupulous approach enables Aqui to trace disagreements within Whitehall and divisions within the British government over relations with the EC. For example, she vividly illustrates how attempts at greater economic integration prompted disagreements between the Cabinet Office, which was eager to maintain good relations with other European governments, and the Treasury, which sought to maintain greater control over the British economy (63), and how Heath's decision to shift responsibility for EC affairs from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) to the Cabinet Office led to tensions between the two departments (97), thereby providing a

[7] Quoted in Eirini Karamouzi, *Greece, the EEC and the Cold War, 1974-1979. The Second Enlargement* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 193.

nuanced account of the inner workings of the British government. If there is a downside to this extensive use of UK sources, it is that Aqui relies almost entirely on British archival sources for discussions of the negotiations between the UK and its EC partners. Chapter Five, a substantial discussion devoted to the renegotiation, contains only a single footnote to the archives of the European Commission, with the rest of the chapter otherwise based solely on British archival sources. While Aqui's deep research in the British archives is commendable and allows her to trace the history of renegotiation, it does mean that rather less is said about the evolving analyses in the capitals of the other member states. While some recent works have considered these issues bilaterally, a full multi-archival international history of the renegotiation remains to be written.[8]

In this brilliant study of UK-EC relations during the first two and a half years of British membership, culminating in the referendum, Aqui places the June 1975 vote in its full political context. By persuasively demonstrating the continuities in the EC policies of Heath and Wilson, she challenges prevalent depictions of Heath as a passionate pro-European and Wilson as a "Commonwealth man" who was ambivalent about the Community, showing how and why both leaders, despite their significant differences, ended up pursuing surprisingly consistent policies towards the EC in the early years of Britain's membership in the EC. This longer view also sets Aqui's book apart from Robert Saunders's recent study of the 1975 referendum.[9] While Saunders focuses on the domestic debate surrounding the vote and the specific context of mid-1970s Britain, Aqui instead traces the political and diplomatic history of Britain's first years within the EC, and how this helps explain the outcome of the first referendum. With its novel approach, its meticulous research, and its persuasive arguments, *The First Referendum* makes an invaluable contribution to the literature on Britain's relationship with Europe. It should be essential reading not only for those interested in the history of European integration and British politics in the 1970s, but also for anyone interested in gaining a fuller historical understanding of the 2016 Brexit referendum.

[8] On West German assessments of the British renegotiation and its impact on British-German relations, see Mathias Haeussler, *Helmut Schmidt and British-German Relations. A European Misunderstanding* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 54-99.

[9] Robert Saunders, *Yes to Europe! The 1975 Referendum and Seventies Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

Review by Mathias Haeussler, University of Regensburg

Lindsay Aqui's excellent new book closes a glaring gap in the literature on Britain's relationship with European integration. While the opening of archives in the 1990s and 2000s had resulted in numerous studies that painstakingly reconstructed Britain's uneasy role in the European integration process from the 1940s to the late 1960s, historical interest in 'Britain and Europe' seems to have faded somewhat over the past few years, whatever the topic's contemporary political relevance. Aqui's book, however, is well worth the wait: not only does it offer a valuable diplomatic history of Britain's troubled first few years inside the European Communities, but it also broadens the scope of investigation by assessing the interplay between European and domestic politics; a difficult yet necessary task when looking at the virulence of British debates over Europe during the period.

As regards British European policy between 1973 and 1975, the book presents by and large a picture of continuity. Although the two prime ministers Edward Heath and Harold Wilson are commonly seen as studies in contrast—the former seemingly the very embodiment of British Europhilia; the latter much more interested in the Commonwealth and the management of the Labour Party—Aqui demonstrates convincingly that the Heath and Wilson governments actually shared much of the same interests and goals in their respective European policies. Both were determined for Britain to become and remain a full member of the European Communities (EC); yet both were also deeply dissatisfied by Britain's unfortunate standing within the EC structures. While the argument about a general continuity between Wilson and Heath has already been made by others as regards the late 1960s and early 1970s, Aqui now takes the story all the way to the 1975 referendum.[10]

The first part of the book addresses Britain's first year of EC membership under the Heath government, focusing in particular on its attempts to reform the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and to set up a regional policy to counterbalance the country's disproportionately high contributions to the EC budget. Prime Minister Heath emerges here as a significantly more revisionist and confrontational figure than previously acknowledged. Although he may have initially accepted the British chief negotiator's famous advice to "swallow the lot, and swallow it now" (35, 274) as regards the EC treaties, he quickly seems to have forgotten about that advice afterwards, regurgitating familiar British complaints almost the minute that membership had been achieved. Unlike his twenty-first-century successor Boris Johnson, Heath may not have publicly declared Britain's desire to have the cake and eat it too, but a few British demands nonetheless touched on the very foundations of the EC, some of which had only been recently and painfully negotiated. Indeed, while Aqui stresses the formidable obstacles against far-reaching EC reforms amidst the crises of the early 1970s, she also hints that the Heath government's strategy would have been unlikely to succeed even under much more benevolent circumstances, given that Britain entered the EC in spite of membership terms "which, from Westminster's perspective, would [later] need to be changed" (108).

While the Heath and the Wilson governments shared similar misgivings, they differed drastically about how to best remedy the situation. Whereas the Heath government sought adjustments largely from within EC Community structures, the Wilson government—pushed by strong inner-party divisions and public pressures—opted for the much more confrontational strategy of 'renegotiating' the terms of Britain's entry, and then putting these new terms to the British public in a nationwide referendum. In spite of such different

[10] Daniel Furby, "The Revival and Success of Britain's Second Application for Membership of the European Community, 1968-71." unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Queen Mary University of London 2010.

public posturing, the book nonetheless confirms recent studies that the renegotiations were ultimately a largely cosmetic exercise, and that the renegotiations were conducted with more than one eye on their domestic coverage in the UK.[11] At the same time, Aqui argues that the renegotiations also tried to address in earnest some of the more substantive issues regarding Britain's structural disadvantages inside the EC framework. Indeed, the Wilson government directly picked up some of Heath's earlier demands, which Aqui views as "an important area of continuity between the European policies pursued under the premierships of Heath and Wilson" (118).

In the end, however, both strategies proved equally unsuccessful in changing Britain's standing inside the EC. Heath's results amounted to little more than vague promises over agricultural reform and slow progress towards a (scaled-down) European Regional Development Fund, and while Wilson's 'renegotiation' was enough to convince a largely indifferent public about the alleged advantages of continuing EC membership, it did not result in any far-reaching changes to Britain's position either: at best, Wilson's achievements amounted to "a small step towards alleviating some of the problems that the government had predicted would result from joining the Community" (276). The lack of achievements by both Heath and Wilson may well have convinced Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher to opt for an even more confrontational strategy to address Britain's structural disadvantages within the EC's financing structures a few years later.[12]

What, then, can the reader take away for the bigger story of Britain and European integration since 1945? Above all, it seems to be the British inability to change the basic rules of the European game. What struck me most about Aqui's analyses is the degree to which both the Heath and the Wilson governments over-estimated their power to influence or change the EC's basic mechanisms and underlying political dynamics. Ironically, it seems that Heath may have suffered from even more wishful thinking than Wilson, not least by being placated by vague promises or assurances for future reform during the accession negotiations. Wilson, by contrast, was realistic enough to rule out EC treaty changes almost from the very beginning of the renegotiations—although the effect was that the 'renegotiations' were never likely to amount to any substantial improvement of Britain's standing either.

But what other choice did they have? The lack of any real alternatives to British EC membership is evident throughout the book, and while Aqui writes with great sympathy about her main protagonists, I could not help but think that both Heath and Wilson were fighting a lost cause from the very beginning. Whether they truly realized that is a different question: after all, the British government's tendency to overestimate its own hand, inability to change the basic rules of the European game, and lack of acceptance of that very fact have been recurrent motives in the 'Britain and Europe' story at least since the country's first all-too-conditional application of 1961-3.[13] As Aqui's book shows, these general patterns of British European policy did not simply disappear once membership had been achieved; they persisted well into Britain's first years inside the

[11] Stephen Wall, *The Official History of Britain and the European Community, Volume II: From Rejection to Referendum 1963-75* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 511-90; Mathias Haeussler, "A Pyrrhic Victory: Harold Wilson, Helmut Schmidt and the British Renegotiation of EC Membership, 1974-5," *The International History Review* 37/4 (2015), 768-89.

[12] Haeussler, *Helmut Schmidt and British-German Relations: A European Misunderstanding* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 149-61, 173-82, 188-96; N. Piers Ludlow, "A Double-Edged Victory: Fontainebleau and the Resolution of the British Budget Problem, 1983-84," in Michael Gehler and Wilfried Loth, eds., *Reshaping Europe: Towards a Political, Economic and Monetary Union, 1984-1989* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2020), 45-72.

[13] Ludlow, *Dealing with Britain: The Six and the First UK Application to the EEC* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

EC. Indeed, while Britain may have shaped the EC/EU's subsequent evolution to a much greater extent than is often acknowledged, the country's unease and scepticism over the EC/EU's basic institutional, political, and economic foundations always remained part of the story too.[14] Looking at how it all played out since, one is tempted to ask: Did Britain ever *really* swallow the whole lot?

[14] Laurent Warlouzet, Britain at the Centre of European Co-operation (1948-2016), *Journal of Common Market Studies* 56/4 (2018), 955-70.

Review by Wolfram Kaiser, University of Portsmouth, England

When he announced the post-Brexit deal between the United Kingdom and the European Union (EU) in late 2020, Prime Minister Boris Johnson exclaimed triumphantly, "We have taken back control of our laws and our destiny."[15] Britain, the Prime Minister suggested, was once more a "sovereign" country no longer controlled by a foreign power—or what the Labour anti-Marketeer Douglas Jay had in the 1970s called the "authoritarian system" (207) of the European Communities (EC). If, however, the British people voted for sovereignty—however ill-defined—in the 2016 referendum, why did they elect to remain in the EC 'chains' in the 1975 referendum to begin with?

In this book which is based on her Ph.D. thesis, Lindsay Aqui analyses this intriguing question from an historical perspective, with a focus on the period from the UK's accession to the EC at the start of 1973 through to the 1975 referendum, which appeared to have decided the matter once and for all. She does so on the basis of a thorough reading of multiple archival sources ranging from those of the British government to party archives and private papers as well as some of the European Commission's files. The book effectively relates to literature on the UK and 'Europe' since the time of the first British application for EEC membership. It carefully considers the recent research on Britain's partners and the development of the EC in the period, although excluding publications in languages other than English,[16] which limits the multilateral character of the approach to the topic.

With Britain's relationship with 'Europe' being so tense, and continuing to expose domestic fault-lines over many issues, not just those directly related to the country's EU membership, much has been published about the topic.[17] Indeed, Robert Saunders recently published a brilliant and very detailed study of the 1975 referendum.[18] This makes it challenging to add any new insights on this aspect of Aqui's topic. Instead, the book's main contribution lies in a meticulous reconstruction of the European policies of the Heath and Wilson governments and their attempts to change the EC from within—in policy fields like the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), regional policy, and the budget as well as during the Wilson government's 'so-called' (in standard EC usage at the time) 'renegotiation' to prepare the ground for the 1975 referendum.

Aqui claims that both governments developed consistent policies to rectify the structural disadvantages of the EC set-up for the UK as a latecomer to this form of European integration. She argues that both Conservative and Labour party supporters of EC membership could easily agree on the core objectives: reforming the CAP that was placing the UK at a disadvantage in terms of the operation of the common budget as well as leading to price rises for agricultural commodities; the development of a regional policy with transfers to poorer regions (including in the UK, like Scotland) partly to rectify the negative budgetary consequences of the CAP;

[15] https://www.lbc.co.uk/news/uk/boris-johnsons-brexit-deal-speech-in-full/ (accessed 23 October 2021).

[16] See, for example, Claudia Hiepel, *Willy Brandt und Georges Pompidou. Deutsch-französische Europapolitik zwischen Aufbruch und Krise* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2012).

[17] For historical perspectives based on archival research see, for example, Stephen Wall, *The Official History of Britain and the European Community. Vol. II: From Rejection to Referendum, 1963-1975* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012); Alan S. Milward, *The Rise and Fall of a National Strategy, 1945-1963. The UK and the European Community*, volume 1 (London: Frank Cass, 2002); Wolfram Kaiser, *Using Europe, Abusing the Europeans. Britain and European Integration, 1945-1963* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999).

[18] Robert Saunders, *Yes to Europe? The 1975 Referendum and Seventies Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2018).

and trade relations with the Commonwealth countries, especially New Zealand, which Prime Minister Harold Wilson considered to be crucial for winning the referendum. Aqui traces the British government's attempts to change the EC's course on these issues. She ascribes their lack of success in achieving major changes in large part to unfortunate contextual circumstances such as the 1973 oil crisis and U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger's 'Year of Europe,' which once more exacerbated continental European fears (especially in France) of the UK as the trojan horse of the U.S.

While Aqui's study offers many useful insights on the details of British European policy-making, the book does not make any particularly strong claims to challenge the state of the field. The idea that UK governments had a "long-term strategy" (7) for changing the EC from within is not new. In trying to pursue their 'national interests' (however defined) British governments frequently failed to take the preferences of their partners sufficiently into account, however. This structural issue of British European policy is not addressed sufficiently or systematically enough in this book. While Aqui claims a strong continuity from Edward Heath to Wilson in terms of how they defined Britain's 'interests,' she does not challenge the prevailing view that Wilson was mainly motivated by tactical considerations geared towards keeping his party, which was more deeply split than the Conservatives, together and in government.[19]

The book raises some other more fundamental issues. One is its tendency, and that of much of the British historiography on the issue,[20] of analysing Britain from a 'British' perspective, which does not sufficiently take into consideration the preferences and actions of other governments or political actors, either in terms of the state of the literature or archival sources. This at times leads to unconvincing and inconsistent arguments. For example, while Aqui claims that "it cannot be said that Heath was ignorant of the challenges [of changing the EC from within]" (275) she also rightly points out that he "failed to understand that the Franco-German relationship was a core pillar of German foreign policy" (85). This, however, was one key reason for the German government's refusal to support any major CAP overhaul.

It would have been helpful if the book had engaged in the larger debate about structural factors impacting Britain's relations with 'Europe' and the agency that British governmental and other political actors actually had, both in terms of convincing voters of the benefits of EC membership and their partners of the need to reform the organisation for reasons other than rectifying the UK's disadvantages at the expense of their own interests. This is something that Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher successfully did ten years later when instead of merely insisting on getting 'my money back' at the 1984 Fontainebleau summit, she strongly supported the internal market agenda as a strategy to make the EC economy more dynamic and competitive again.[21]

But the book's greatest weakness arguably stems from the fact that four years after the 2016 referendum it does not engage with long-term questions of Britain and 'Europe' over time. If Heath believed that with EC accession "a very exciting time is beginning" (1) and Wilson thought that the 1975 referendum marked "the end of 14 years of national argument" (4), why is it that this vote did not close the debate and that the

[19] See, for example, Helen Parr, *Britain's Policy towards the European Community: Harold Wilson and Britain's World Role, 1964-1967* (London: Routledge, 2006) for the first phase of Wilson's first premiership.

[20] Notable exceptions to this pattern include the works cited in footnote 3 above as well as N. Piers Ludlow, *Roy Jenkins and the European Commission Presidency, 1976-1980* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

[21] As discussed in a broader multilateral context in Laurent Warlouzet, *Governing Europe in a Globalizing World. Neoliberalism and its Alternatives following the 1973 Oil Crisis* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018).

'exciting time' has come to a rather abrupt end with unforeseeable consequences for the UK, the EU or their bilateral relationship? This is the big question waiting to be answered by historians of Britain and 'Europe.' It will require more than a short-term approach to understanding the details of governmental policy-making and diplomacy.

Review by Helen Parr, Keele University

Lindsay Aqui's book is aptly named. The 1975 referendum on Britain's continued membership of the European Community (EC) was the first UK-wide referendum. There have been two UK-wide referenda since, and nine in regions of the UK. In 1975, referenda were viewed with suspicion: the device of "dictators and demagogues" as Margaret Thatcher said in her first major speech as leader of the opposition.[22] By 2016, direct democracy had a legitimacy and a history, and, contrary to 1975, voters overturned the preference of the government of the day.

Aqui's meticulously researched book subtly reassesses the first years of Britain's membership in the European Community. It does so by regarding the 'terms of entry' as a serious diplomatic matter. The 'terms of entry' featured prominently in Britain's applications for membership in 1961 and 1967, during the renegotiation of 1974-5, surfaced again during the budgetary debates of the early 1980s, and were echoed as Britain opted not to join the Euro in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Scholars have often seen the terms as a party political question, a way for Prime Ministers to convince sceptical Cabinet colleagues and MPs to support British membership of the European Community.[23] Of course, partly political they were. The terms were also, as Aqui demonstrates, issues that made it difficult for British governments to accept, and to sell to the public, Britain's membership of the EC. The main 'term' was the level of payment Britain would make into the agricultural budget, which connected to food prices and the amount Britain might get out of a regional development fund. British budgetary contributions were proportionately high, as the amount was calculated in part depending on the level of agricultural imports from non-Community markets.

In 1961, Conservative Prime Minister Harold Macmillan had negotiated with the Europe Six to see 'if the conditions existed for membership'. He wanted to find ways to preserve trade in agricultural produce with the 'old' Commonwealth.[24] When Labour leader Hugh Gaitskell said that membership would throw away "a thousand years of history" he meant in part that it would overturn Britain's policy of cheap food, enabled by Commonwealth trade.[25] By 1967, Labour Prime Minister Harold Wilson accepted a different strategy in attempt to enter the Community. Influenced by Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) officials who were now experienced in dealing with the Community's institutions, Wilson accepted the *aquis communautaire* subject to limited safeguards, and the pro-European Conservative Prime Minister Edward Heath continued this approach.[26] As Britain's chief negotiator Sir Con O'Neill put it, Britain had to "swallow

[22] Robert Saunders, *Yes to Europe! The 1975 Referendum and Seventies Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 7.

[23] Richard Griffiths and Stuart Ward (eds), *Courting the Common Market: The First Attempt to Enlarge the European Community 1961-3* (London: Lothian Foundation Press, 1996); George Wilkes (ed.), *Britain's First Failure to Enter the European Community, 1961-3: Crises in European Atlantic and Commonwealth Relations* (London: Frank Cass, 1997)

[24] Piers Ludlow, *Dealing with Britain: The Six and the First UK Application to the EEC* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

[25] Roger Broad, *Labour's European Dilemmas: From Bevin to Blair* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), 52

[26] Helen Parr, *Britain's Policy towards the European Community, 1964-7: Harold Wilson and Britain's World Role* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006); Melissa Pine, *Harold Wilson and Europe: Pursuing Britain's Membership of the European Community* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2007).

the lot" for the sake of the political and economic benefits membership would bring (35). Officials anticipated that Britain would be better placed to fight for its interests from inside the EC.

Aqui shows that they did not find it so easy to do that once Britain joined in 1973. 1973 was a difficult year to join the EC. The growth years were over, and the EC faced a currency crisis, a food crisis, and the erratic diplomacy of U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger's Year of Europe. Aqui gently revises the historiography on the topic, suggesting, I think rightly, that Britain would have found adaptation to the 'terms of entry' difficult and perhaps unpopular, even in more auspicious circumstances. She shows that contrary to criticisms that Heath bungled the Year of Europe and was unable to curry favour with the Americans or the Europeans, in fact the priority that he gave to potential political community in Europe was welcomed in France and Germany.[27] However, Britain's inability to commit to the European currency snake, despite Heath's political willingness to do so, stalled the Community's ability to progress to the second stage of economic and monetary union (EMU) (63). Britain also found it harder than anticipated to extract concessions on the agricultural budget, or to compensate for Britain's high payments by gains from the initiative that Heath pressed for, the European regional development fund. One year on from membership, the second Cabinet Secretary and Head of the European Unit, Sir Patrick Nairne, commented that Britain might have to adjust its expectations and "come to better terms with the Common Agricultural Policy CAP" (90), while veteran diplomat and permanent representative to the EC Sir Michael Palliser acknowledged that membership had "not been all plain sailing" (108).

Harold Wilson's Labour party won both general elections in 1974, compelling Britain to renegotiate the terms of membership and to hold the first UK-wide referendum on staying in. The renegotiations centred on the same sticking points: the level of the contribution Britain would make into the agricultural budget, the price of food, the amount Britain might receive from the regional development fund, and the extension of import arrangements for Commonwealth products, particularly from New Zealand. Aqui shows, convincingly, that diplomats were able to temper Foreign Secretary James Callaghan's instinct for adversarial negotiation, threatening British withdrawal from the treaties. Rather, Palliser suggested that Wilson argue to his EC partners that public opinion could not support the status quo and that therefore Britain was negotiating in good faith, so as better to convince the public to vote yes. In this way, diplomats melded Britain's approach into a more emollient strategy, one which resembled previous diplomacy. As a result, Britain did achieve something in renegotiation. Aqui shows that Britain did not make too much headway with food prices but could argue that this was because of the global crisis, not EC membership. The government was able to secure a longer transitional period for New Zealand's exports, and a rebate mechanism that would be triggered if any member state's contribution to the budget exceeded a proportion. This established the principle that the budgetary contributions were a problem, groundwork upon which Margaret Thatcher could later, idiosyncratically, build.

However, although there was continuity in the way British diplomats, who were now versed in EC affairs, approached the Community, it is hard to see this Wilson government in the same vein as what had gone before. If Heath had won in 1974, there would have been neither a renegotiation, nor a referendum. Wilson adopted the policy of renegotiation and referendum because of the opposition to EC membership largely from the left wing of his party, which increased its calls for an alternative economic strategy following the

[27] Catherine Hynes, *The Year that Never Was: Heath, the Nixon Administration and the Year of Europe* (Dublin: Dublin University Press, 2009); Daniel Möckli, *European Foreign Policy during the Cold War: Heath, Brandt, Pompidou and the dream of political unity* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009).

election defeat in 1970. The left were joined by those from the party's right and centre like Douglas Jay or Peter Shore who believed in the historic policy of cheap food and thought that Britain's sovereignty was undermined by participation in a European supranational institution. A more instinctively pro-European prime minister might have tried to hold the sceptics at bay, but it would have been difficult. Wilson chose renegotiation and referendum because he wanted to use the public vote to retain Britain in the EC while keeping the Labour party together. His attitude to the renegotiation was, Aqui shows, almost disinterested. He was worried only about domestic affairs and ignored the details on the question of the budget, settling for West Germany's poor first offer because he thought that the public was only really interested in Commonwealth trade. It is difficult not to believe that this policy both damaged Britain's relations with the EC, as Mathias Haeussler has argued, and created problems for British domestic politics over the longer term.[28] The Labour party split in 1981, partly over Europe, and the emphatic victory for the government in 1975 might have contributed to Prime Minister David Cameron's confidence that in the 2016 referendum, history would repeat itself.

Aqui concludes by looking at the referendum campaign, adding details about the mechanics of the campaign to Robert Saunders' recent *Yes to Europe*.[29] She argues that the Britain in Europe (BIE) campaign had far greater resources than the National Referendum Campaign (NRC). The anti-marketeers were divided, and while Enoch Powell and Tony Benn were prominent political figures they had little in common and could be seen as extreme. The prime minister's support for staying in the EC, Parliament's endorsement of the renegotiation, the fact that British policy had been aiming for membership since 1961, and the favourable press probably also swayed voters to vote yes. As for the public, it is difficult to know what they felt. Aqui cites polling data but is rightly careful in making judgements about this. Voters, she says, were uncertain about what their vote might mean. By setting the vote in the political and social context of the 1970s, Saunders argues that voters' endorsement of membership was substantial, but Aqui's position is closer to David Butler and Uwe Kitzinger's 1976 argument that support for continued membership was wide but not particularly enthusiastic.[30] In that, the public echoed the views of politicians, who shaped the ways EC membership was understood by the British public.

Overall, Aqui shows how important this period was. She emphasizes the continuity in Britain's diplomatic approach to the EC and she is right to do so. This subtly illuminates the successes, and raises new questions, about the Heath period. It shows the detailed problems underpinning negotiations on the terms of entry. In fact it suggests that the 1974 Wilson government was a turning point. Party politics defined Britain's policy to the EC in a way it had not done before. It perhaps would not do again so insistently until 2016, when, of course, the outcome of the referendum was different.

[28] Mathias Haeussler, *Helmut Schmidt and British-German Relations: A European Misunderstanding* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

[29] Saunders, *Yes to Europe!*

[30] David Butler and Uwe Kitzinger, *The 1975 Referendum* (London: Macmillan, 1976).

Response by Lindsay Aqui, University of Westminster

It is immensely rewarding to know that *The First Referendum* is being read and largely well-received. Thank you to my reviewers, Luc-Andre Brunet, Mathias Haeussler, Wolfram Kaiser and Helen Parr for their willingness to engage with my research, and to Eirini Karamouzi for writing the introduction. I'm grateful also to the H-Diplo team for organising the roundtable and for their patience, especially as my maternity leave meant that my response arrived later than planned. My reviewers' comments have provided much for me to think about; I set out my reflections in this response.

When I first began to think about a project on the UK's relationship with the European Community (EC) in the 1970s, the possibility of a future referendum on membership had only just been mooted by Prime Minister David Cameron in his Bloomberg speech.[31] By the time I started my Ph.D. thesis at Queen Mary University of London and decided to focus on the years from 1973 to 1975, it was clear that the United Kingdom, or at the very least the Conservative Party, was headed for a major clash over the question of European Union (EU) membership. Soon after I began my doctorate the date for the referendum was announced and when I was halfway through my studies the UK voted to leave the EU. *The First Referendum* was then based upon my doctoral research (although it included new findings and excluded some aspects of the thesis) and was published in 2020, the same year that the UK formally left the EU.

The First Referendum was titled as such in partial reference to the argument that, following the Brexit vote, the UK needed a 'second' referendum on the eventual exit deal. But 2016 was not in fact the first time the British public had been asked to vote on 'Europe.' The title, as Parr points out, highlights the momentous and alien nature of the vote in 1975 as the UK's first-ever national referendum, a context with which some of my readers would be unfamiliar. By the time the electorate went to the polls in the summer of 2016, the UK had held three nation-wide plebiscites (two on Europe and one on the use of the Alternative Vote system). In addition, there had been several regional referendums, the most recent of which was the 2014 vote on Scottish independence.

Despite the context surrounding my dissertation and its transformation into a book, I chose not to frame my study of 1973–75 around the events that took place more than 40 years later.[32] Robert Saunders' takes a similar position in his excellent book on the 1975 referendum *Yes to Europe!*, which was also written during the era of the 2016 referendum. [33] While I do not doubt that the events of the seventies had some bearing on the referendum in 2016, it would, in my view, be too simplistic to draw a straight line between one and the

[31] David Cameron, "EU speech at Bloomberg," 23 January 2013. Available online: https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/eu-speech-at-bloomberg.

[32] Lindsay Aqui, "Britain and the European Community, 1 January 1973 – 5 June 1975: Policy, Party Politics and Public Opinion," PhD Thesis, Queen Mary University of London (2018).

[33] For a discussion of the relationship between 1975 and 2016 see Robert Saunders, *Yes to Europe! The 1975 Referendum and Seventies Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), Epilogue: "We are all Europeans Now."

other. As Brunet argues, *The First Referendum* is not a book about the past justified by the events of the present.

One of the strongest claims of *The First Referendum* is that of continuity between the diplomatic aims pursued by prime ministers Edward Heath and Harold Wilson. As I set out in the introduction to the book, both prime ministers sought to change the terms of entry, which had been negotiated by Heath's government in 1970-71, to secure a more advantageous deal for their country. They wanted to reduce the UK's contributions to the EC budget through various means: reforming the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP); creating a European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) from which the UK would be a net beneficiary; and, in Wilson's case, changing the nature of the calculations behind the EC budget. Thus I aimed to demonstrate that, rather than viewing the transition from Heath to Wilson as a period of disruption from a prime minister who spent years trying to secure membership to his successor who risked it all with a referendum, as is the case with several studies of the period, it was possible to see both prime ministers as pursuing the same goal by different means. The desire to change the UK's terms of entry was, in my view, one of the greatest forces shaping British relations with the EC between 1973 and 1975: as Parr puts it in her review these relations were a "serious diplomatic matter." As Kaiser points out, the idea of the UK pursuing a "national strategy" is not new. Alan Milward first proposed the national strategy thesis in his study of the UK's first application for EEC membership.[34] However, the reconcepualisation of the UK's diplomacy in the EC during the early and mid-1970s as a period of continuity is, I hope, a new contribution to the literature on 'Britain and Europe' and a fresh perspective on the diplomacy of the Heath and Wilson governments.

My reviewers make two main criticisms of my work. The first is that *The First Referendum* examines Britain from a British perspective. The book and its source base are undoubtedly Anglo-centric. As Brunet points out, a full multi-archival international history of the renegotiation remains to be written. Thus, with the exception of Haeussler's study of the renegotiation and Anglo-German relations,[35] there remains an important gap in the literature, and future studies that engage with archival sources from across the EC's capitals will hopefully offer more insight into the ways British diplomacy was seen and the wider international constraints on the renegotiation. The decision to use only a small number of sources from other EC countries and the EC's institutions themselves was due to the nature of the project. I decided that rather than focus solely on the diplomatic aspects of UK-EC relations in the period from 1973 to 1975, I also wanted to incorporate a discussion of the domestic political situation in the UK. This was not least because of the importance of the 1975 referendum to my study. Thus, I chose to look at a broad range of sources from within the UK, pulling together private political papers and state archives to tell a story that incorporated the domestic and the diplomatic aspects of UK-EC relations. Through this approach I hoped to distinguish my book from Saunders's work, which delved into the wide range of people and ideas involved in the European debate in 1975, but also from much of the literature on "Britain and Europe" which has tended to focus on high diplomacy.[36] Nevertheless, my approach has its downsides. The agenda is now set for future historians to

[34] Alan S. Milward, *The Rise and Fall of a National Strategy, 1945-1963. The UK and the European Community*, volume 1 (London: Frank Cass, 2002).

[35] Mathias Haeussler, *Helmut Schmidt and British-German Relations: A European Misunderstanding* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

[36] Saunders, *Yes to Europe!*

employ a multi-national, multi-archival approach to say more about how British diplomacy was perceived by the UK's partners in the EC.

The second criticism, raised by Kaiser, is that the book does not engage with long-term questions of Britain and Europe over time. Readers seeking explanations for Brexit that begin in the 1970s will not find them in my book. I do not, however, doubt the significance of the subject. Barring a future re-entry to the European Union, the story of the UK as a member of the EU is now complete, and historians of that relationship may well wish to devote future research to understanding the immediate causes and long-term structural forces that were at work in 2016. It is an enormous task that will require an understanding of the details of government policy, diplomacy, and much else. It is my hope that studies of shorter periods, such as that offered by *The First Referendum*, will be valuable contributions to future, more wide-ranging pieces of research that explore UK-EC/EU relations from entry to exit.

There are two possible future research questions to which *The First Referendum* might contribute. The first relates to the ways the imperatives driving the decision to join the EC impacted the UK after accession was achieved. Successive post-war governments had hoped that membership in the Community would boost the economy and offer the UK a clear post-imperial role. This was true for Heath, yet despite his enthusiasm for the European project his sense of *how* to achieve those ambitions once inside the Community was unclear and the government's records reveal little sense of strategic vision. Officials who worked closely on European policy, especially in the Cabinet Office and the UK's Permanent Representation to the EC (UKREP), felt that this had been detrimental during the first year of membership. They advised the prime minister to think about areas where the UK could develop new policies, such as a common energy policy, that would be beneficial to the whole EC. This advice arrived at the end of 1973, and, when Wilson became prime minister in February 1974, the government's energies were redirected to the renegotiation (108-109).

But why, given Heath's enthusiasm, was there no long-term planning? This may have been in part because Heath was focused on short-term achievements that would allow him to quickly demonstrate to the public that joining the Community had been the right choice. Furthermore, the EC's vision for itself was in flux in the 1970s: for example, its commitment to economic and monetary union was looking unlikely to be realised in the way it had been envisioned in the preceding decade. The priorities driving the UK's negotiations to leave EU can be seen in a similar way. The immediate goal of 'getting Brexit done' was often prioritised over the terms of the deal or framework for the future relationship, especially under Prime Minister Boris Johnson's leadership. The pursuit of 'global Britain' remains an ill-defined goal and it is unclear what kind of future relationship the UK wants with the EU. If it is the case that 'short-termism' has been an enduring aspect of UK-EC/EU relations, it is worth understanding that it was a feature from the start.

Kaiser raises a second possible research question related to the longer story of UK/EC-EU relations. If accession began with what Heath called an 'exciting time' and the referendum ended '14 years of national argument,' why was this positive moment not long-lasting? Part of the explanation for why Heath's exciting time came to an end lies in the way the UK saw the terms of membership during 1973–75 and after. As

Haeussler asks at the end of his review: "Did Britain ever *really* swallow the lot?" The question is a reference to the advice of the UK's chief negotiator during the accession talks, Sir Con O'Neill, which was to "swallow the lot, and swallow it now" (35). The UK, he argued, was better off accepting the terms and trying to change the Community from within. I hope my book makes clear that neither Heath nor Wilson accepted the terms of entry in 1973–75. If we look forward to the 1980s, recent studies of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's attempts to get her 'money back' via the negotiation of a budget rebate suggest that the terms remained controversial.[37] Even now, as Prime Minister Liz Truss's government attempts to pass domestic legislation that would empower it to unilaterally override parts of the Northern Ireland Protocol, it seems that the UK is unable to accept the terms of its exit. The importance of Britain's 'deal' with Europe should not be under-estimated.

[37] Haeussler, *A European Misunderstanding*, 157–161 and 188–196 and Piers Ludlow, "A Double-Edged Victory: Fontainebleau and the Resolution of the British Budget Problem, 1983–84," in Michael Gehler and Wilfried Loth, eds., *Reshaping Europe: Towards a Political, Economic and Monetary Union, 1984–1989* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2020), 45–72.