

Tribune  
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## Balkanising Europe is not the answer

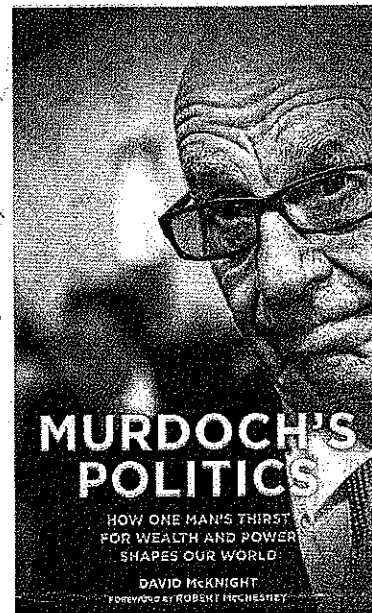
*The Passage to Europe: How a Continent  
Became a Union by Luuk van Middelaar*  
Yale University Press, £25

*Murdoch's Politics: How One Man's  
Thirst for Wealth and Power Shapes our  
World by David McKnight*  
Pluto Press, £12.99

Europe has never been a question of identity but, rather, of interest. For most of the post-1945 era, Europe outperformed Britain in economic growth, and the balance of power was maintained by Nato, not the Royal Navy. But, from Harold Macmillan to Margaret Thatcher, our leaders understood that being in Europe added value.

This is no longer the case. Luuk Van Middelaar has written by far the best, accessible and thoughtful account of Europe as was, and is, and as he hopes will be, that we have seen in years. Written first in Dutch and then translated into French and now English, it is a profound narrative of European politics and, at the same time, a philosophical discussion of what Europe means. For that reason, it will not be read by our political elites. Half of them want out of the European Union; the other half imitate the three wise monkeys and see, speak and hear no Europe.

In 1990, the British Government spent £25 million on its "Are EU Ready" campaign to educate us about the single market. Today, our offshore-owned press spends that every month in wall-to-wall anti-EU coverage. Simon Jenkins, the doyen of the smarter Europhobe writers in *The Guardian*, puts the blame for EU unpopularity on the euro. Yet opinion polls show three out of five Greeks want to keep the euro. Luckily, we have a control on eurozone problems, namely the United Kingdom. The rest of Europe sees Britain outside the euro and on the point of leaving Europe. Yet here we have economic misery, a devalued pound unable to boost exports, increasing poverty, regional disparities, destructive attacks on public services and the growth of populist, xenophobic politics. Youth unemployment in Sweden is at 28 per cent, so not using the euro appears not to be a panacea. The clumsy, crude approach by the EU's



dominant centre-right ruling elite which controls the Commission, Council of Ministers and Parliament, needs to change but Balkanising Europe is not the answer.

However, if the granddaddy of our offshore press owners gets his way, Britain will be the first big nation to leave Europe. David McKnight is an Australian left intellectual. He has written a really good, accessible book about Rupert Murdoch. What drives him is political influence.

When Rupert first came to England and bought the *News of the World*, he was courted by Harold Wilson. In 1970, *The Sun* supported Labour, just as it did when Tony Blair emerged as a winner, and just as it didn't when it was clear Gordon Brown was a loser. Murdoch likes inside influence and access. The best way to treat him would be like Prince Hal, on becoming Henry V, telling the blustering, braggart Falstaff: "I know thee not, old man". But Murdoch turns the strongest political beast into a crawler.

Murdoch does not know who will win the 2015 general election, but he does know that Ed Miliband delivered a dagger thrust to his *modus operandi* when he called time on Murdoch editors such as Andy Coulson and Rebekah Brooks. But the Murdoch snake was scotched, not killed. It is preparing like a cobra from the deep to strike back. His chosen terrain is Europe and Murdoch will do all to boost UKIP and get Britain out of the EU. His daily and Sunday tabloids, as well as *The Times* and *Sunday Times*, are lining up in a fight to the death to get us out. That will be Murdoch's final revenge and his homage to his heroine, Thatcher.

Denis MacShane