THE IMPACT OF EUROPEAN INTEGRATION ON POLITICAL COMMUNICATION

While the processes of European integration have advanced in terms of a common currency, a common parliament, and policy and legislative harmonisation and convergence, there has been little research on integration in terms of news and information sources. There have been only a few studies on how European affairs are reported in various media in Europe. They involved content analyses of newspaper articles based on simple measures of visibility of European news and the valence of the stories with respect to European Union (EU) institutions. We know of no studies to date that have looked specifically at the role and impact of European integration on domestic political news coverage. This, however, seems an important question as most of what Europeans know about contemporary political issues and developments in the European integration process comes from their own national news media. More than 60 per cent of the citizens across the EU member states name television news and 40 per cent name daily newspapers as the most important sources for acquiring information about European affairs. We know little about political communication and news organisations from a comparative perspective and even less about how news differs cross-nationally in terms of the reporting of domestic and European political affairs. In addition, we have very limited knowledge about how citizens in different European countries react to news about European affairs and processes of integration. Nevertheless, there is considerable concern among publics and elected officials about the potential power of (un-elected) editorial gatekeepers and journalists to exert an influence on public opinion about political institutions and issues, via the daily processes of news selection and presentation.
A comprehensive framework for analysis of the impact of European integration in the realm of political communication needs to take account of developments in four areas: media and political systems, media and political organisations, media content and potential effects, and media audiences and audience characteristics. In this article, we focus, first, on changes in media systems, and, second, on media organisations and journalists’ role orientations. Third, we summarise what is known about news concerning ‘Europe’ and discuss the impact of ‘Europeanisation’ on news content. We identify the conceptual, theoretical and empirical challenges facing students and scholars of political communication in understanding the impact of European integration in member states. We argue that it is important to consider the historical, institutional and media system contexts, and patterns in news content, and conclude by proposing new avenues for research on the link between media coverage of politics and potential effects on audiences.

Research in the field of political communication includes political actors (politicians, parties), intermediary actors (PR agencies, media strategists, spin-doctors), media actors (news organisations, journalists) and the public/electorate. The dynamics of the interaction between these actors can be studied from a variety of angles, including, for example, the role of news in the political process and influence on changes in public opinion. Taking a cross-national perspective offers an escape from the ethnocentrism common to most research in the field of political communication. Such a perspective ‘provides an opportunity to examine how those involved in the political communication process – publics, political parties, and media – behave when operating under different institutional constraints and to consider the consequences of this for democracy’.

Cross-national research has demonstrated the importance of considering the characteristics of the media and political systems in which political communication occurs. An understanding of the historical, institutional and political and media system contexts of political communication shape such a perspective. In this study we focus on Britain and Germany as two countries that represent two interesting cases in terms of European integration. Both countries are large and strong European political and economic players. Germany, on the one hand, is considered to be one of the driving forces behind European integration. Britain, on the other hand, is known for reluctance towards Europe and internal divisions in public opinion about the euro and the European Monetary Union. We discuss the British and German cases drawing on a cross-national study of news about the introduction of the euro.
MEDIA SYSTEMS

At the dawn of the new century, the European broadcasting systems look remarkably different from only two decades ago. There has been a structural shift from national public service broadcasting monopolies towards international and national broadcasting markets with competing public and private outlets. Only 20 years ago, all European countries (with the exception of Britain, Italy and Luxembourg) had only public service broadcasting channels. By 2000, all public broadcasting monopolies had come to an end. This change is important because of the consequences it may have on the provision of public affairs news and information. Research comparing various national broadcasting systems around the world in the early 1980s showed that the more ‘commercial’ the form of financing the system, the less room there was in prime-time schedules for information about political and current affairs. Recent changes in British prime-time broadcasting seem to support these observations. The most notable change occurred in March 1999 with ITV’s decision to reschedule the News at Ten – its flagship main evening news broadcast comparable with the BBC’s Nine o’Clock News – and instead offer a shortened early evening news programme at 6.30 p.m., with a daily 11 p.m. late night news headlines bulletin. This provision of news outside the prime-time viewing hours is structurally similar to what the US networks offer. In the US, with its free market in broadcasting and abundance of channels catering to all sorts of specialised tastes and information, there is not only less visibility of public affairs news in the mainstream media and in prime-time, but also less interest for such information among the public in general. Robert Entman has described the US – with its array of media outlets but few programmes rich in political information – as a ‘democracy without citizens’.

While the shift from public monopolies to competitive broadcasting markets coincided historically with the increased pace of European integration processes in the 1980s and 1990s, it is not an easy task to determine the relative influence of European integration on the changes in broadcasting systems. Neo-liberal trends in governance (irrespective of whether left or right was in power) in different European countries and in EC policies in the 1980s undoubtedly contributed to the changes. The changes in party systems, governments and parliaments, which all define the field of political communication, are dealt with at length elsewhere in this volume (see contributions by Mair, Goetz, and Raunio and Hix). Whereas the impact of European integration is perhaps only indirectly related to some of the general changes in the structures of western European broadcasting systems, it is possible to identify a range of direct and specific
impacts of European integration on broadcasting legislation, ownership, and quota restrictions on cultural products. This impact of increased European integration, in turn, shaped the European broadcasting landscape in which political communication takes place.

Broadcasting

Legislation in the field of broadcasting and media was essentially a national policy issue until the early 1980s. International broadcasting legislation was non-existent, with the notable exception of the telecommunications sector addressed in 1987 and 1990 Green Papers on telecommunications and satellite communication and the 1997 Status Report on European telecommunications policy. Media policy and telecommunications policy have a long tradition as distinct areas of policy-making. With new media technologies entering the market and blurring the distinction between distribution and content, the separation in policy-making was insufficient and a new generation of integrated communication policies was required. The rapid growth in the use of the Internet has posed new policy challenges and has raised new issues of copyright and ownership.

The European Community most notably addressed broadcasting in the 1984 Green Paper on 'Television without Frontiers'. As Peter Humphreys notes, the 'initial impulse for a European-level media policy was the optimistic expectation ... that transfrontier broadcasting might give a welcome fillip to the process of European cultural and political integration'. Anthony Weymouth and Bernard Lamizet add to this that much policy-making in this field stemmed from sheer necessity and challenges posed by transnational satellite broadcasting. The 'Television Without Frontiers' Green Paper, eventually adopted in the Directive of 1989 on television broadcasting, was aimed at opening national borders for a flow of television programmes creating a single market for broadcasting, unhindered by national legislation. The core of this Directive was generally in line with the notions of deregulation and liberalism as embedded in the 1992 creation of the Single European Market.

The 1997 update of 'Television without Frontiers' was implemented to address the challenges of primarily digital-related televised services, tele-shopping and regulations on advertising and sponsorship. The directive now addresses such diverse issues as the necessity for major events (particularly sport) to be carried on an unencrypted network, protection of minors, and restrictions on broadcasting violence and pornography. The 'notorious' quota system promoting European programme production, as defined in the 1989 directive, was confirmed (see regulation on content below).
Ownership

The liberal European legislation has fostered a new environment for media ownership, with several cases of large-scale cross-media ownership. Especially strong European publishers have entered the broadcasting market, notable examples being Germany’s Springer and Bertelsmann, and Australia’s Rupert Murdoch. Non-press media companies as well as large businesses have entered the broadcasting scene with Italy’s Berlusconi (Fininvest) and Germany’s Kirch as well-known examples. The emergence of international media conglomerates goes hand in hand with national restrictions on cross-media ownership and European competition legislation. Britain, Spain and the Netherlands, on the one hand, have very restrictive regulations on cross-ownership of press and broadcasting, whereas the Scandinavian countries, Germany and France, on the other, have no or only limited restrictions on cross-media ownership. The situation today seems to be one in which both national and European policy-makers are dealing with cross-media ownership by adjusting current policies to national situations.

Cultural Products

The initial policies of the European Commission concerned with creating a unified European culture were later adjusted towards a more realistic attempt to preserve existing European cultural diversity. With the introduction of the Single Market in 1992, fears that dominant market leaders with a high production of low-cost programmes would gain in strength entered the debate. The fear of North-American market dominance and small countries’ vulnerability to large, competitive, neighbouring countries led to cultural policy intervention. A first step was made by the creation of the ‘MEDIA’ programme aimed at supporting European audio-visual production and distribution by initiating cross-frontier co-operation, prioritising small and medium-sized operators as well as respecting national differences and cultural identities. A second programme, ‘Audio-visual Eureka’, merged cultural and industrial European policies by stimulating production of programmes to feed and create a market for the scheduled introduction of HDTV, while a third programme, ‘Euroimages’, was aimed at stimulating European film and television production.

The issue of protectionist European programme quotas was controversial in the 1980s. The French government, for instance, demanded a 60 per cent European-produced programme quota in broadcasting, so as to
limit import of programmes, mainly from the US. Wolfgang Hoffmann-Riem pointed to the contradiction in the policies creating a liberal, deregulated market, on the one hand, while calling for national, protectionist quota interventions and subsidisation on the other. Both public broadcasters within Europe, who considered the French proposal as a limitation in their programming policies, and US media companies opposed the quota system. The US companies used the argument that quotas would infringe the principles of the international General Agreement of Tariffs and Trade (GATT). However, the 1997 'Television without Frontiers' Directive confirmed the quota system until 2002, when it is to be reappraised and, unless modified, to be continued. Individual member states are given some discretion and flexibility in interpreting and implementing the requirements for European programming, as the article reads that 'member states shall ensure where practicable and by appropriate means that broadcasters reserve for European works ... a majority proportion of their broadcasting time'.

Several observers have noted that the attempts by the European Community to contribute to increased European cultural and political integration have failed. One direction of initiatives was the support of pan-European media channels to increase co-operation in production and exchange of programmes for viewing. The European Commission supported the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) in developing two pan-European channels. Both the 1982 Eurikon experiment and the 1985 'Europa TV', a satellite carrying a pan-European consortium of European public broadcasters, collapsed within a year of their launch as 'neither viewers nor advertisers were attracted by the channel'. These failures gave support to studies documenting that European audiences by far prefer to watch nationally produced programmes in their own language. Two later attempts, Eurosport (a joint venture between Sky and EBU members, launched in 1989) and Euronews (launched in 1993), have proven more successful, but both channels play only peripheral roles in terms of audience ratings and are only accessible via satellite and/or cable television.

While media systems in most European countries have been affected by the initiatives, policies and regulations as outlined above, the impact in individual countries differs somewhat. Britain, for example, seems to have been less affected than its neighbours on the Continent by the trends towards commercialisation and deregulation in the broadcasting market, because Britain has had a competitive market since ITV was introduced in 1954. In terms of production, European policies have fuelled an already innovative production infrastructure by co-funding, for example, Britain's
Channel 4 productions. Germany, on the other hand, experienced the emergence of several new private networks during the 1980s and 1990s. Though German companies have been active participants in pan-European projects, it is still an open question whether the processes of European integration have led to major changes in terms of programming, because the preference for German language programming remains very strong.

In contrast to Britain, which has had competition since the mid-1950s, Germany has had a competitive TV market only since the mid-1980s. The BBC and ITV (now Channel 3) continue to attract the widest audience, while audiences in Germany are more evenly distributed across four channels: the two public broadcasting channels – ARD and ZDF (with about 30 per cent market share) – and the two private networks – RTL and SAT1 (with in total about 25 per cent market share). The German public broadcasting channels clearly provide more news than their private counterparts.

JOURNALISM AND MEDIA ORGANISATIONS

Just as the media systems have changed, so too have media organisations. New technology, new media, new generations of journalists, and the more competitive marketplace all contributed to changes within news organisations. Studies of journalism as a profession and journalists’ norms and values, for example, have revealed interesting cross-national differences. While journalists’ own perceptions of the roles of news media have remained broadly similar in the US over the past decade, differences in the role perceptions have been observed in several European countries. This has important implications for the way in which both domestic and European politics are covered in the news.

Cross-national differences in traditions surrounding the coverage of political parties during elections in broadcast news may also be changing (potentially diminishing) due to changes within news organisations. Broadcasters today pay far more attention to what the audience wants, whereas the public service ethos in the past meant a greater emphasis on ‘educating’ and ‘informing’ the electorate with special attention to what politicians had to offer. Take, for example, the recent comments of a political editor in the Danish public service broadcasting organisation on the low turnout in the 1999 European Parliamentary Elections: ‘It is not our responsibility if the turnout is so low. There have been no issues to cover and we know from our survey that our audience wants to know about fraud and scandals, so that is what we cover.’ In Holland, the second Editor-in-
Chief of Dutch public service broadcasting echoed these sentiments: 'The low voter turnout at recent elections is not our responsibility. An increase in the number of people choosing not to vote is a statement that we must respond to. If the lack of interest is evident, we will also make a deliberate choice not to give the elections too much attention.'

European integration, in particular, has had implications for the European news organisations in terms of their allocation of resources, strategic placement of correspondents and editorial staff, and choices for constructing news stories. The organisation of news desks in media organisations has been largely national, but advances in European integration have led news organisations to respond to the shift towards supranational levels of governance. As the Editor-in-Chief of the BBC Nine o'Clock News put it: 'Earlier we compared ourselves to America, today we are much more likely to compare ourselves to another European country such as Germany or France ... We now have bureaux in Brussels, Frankfurt, Paris, Berlin and Rome and we can tap onto BBC World's correspondents in places such as Warsaw and Vienna.' The implications of European political integration for news organisations is echoed by the Editor-in-Chief of Britain's Channel 5 news programme who said: 'When setting up the programme, we had to decide whether to have a bureau in Washington DC or in Brussels. We opted for Brussels as almost anything that comes out of there has importance, directly, for Britain, much more so than what comes out of Washington.'

The range and scope of implications of European integration for news organisations and journalists are likely to increase in the coming years. More news will come out of Brussels and the European institutions. One interesting aspect will be whether the changes in volume and importance of European news will generate a further redistribution of staff resources away from the national European political capitals such as London, The Hague and Berlin towards Brussels and Strasbourg. Some of the availability and demand for European news may also be addressed by increased use of advanced information technologies such as 'desk-top journalism' which implies access to a wide variety of international information from local journalism headquarters. Information-gathering and distribution technologies will definitely play an important role in defining the future coverage of Europe. The post-graduate European Journalism Centre, for example, has launched a series of courses for journalists on 'Covering Europe from your laptop' in which advantages and pitfalls for dealing with news about Europe from distant locations are addressed.

National news organisations are operating in increasingly international markets and one apparent dimension seems to be the closer links to
'Europe'. The shift in importance of European and Brussels-based news will continue to pose challenges for the organisation of political coverage in news organisations as well as raise new questions for journalistic practices.

MEDIA CONTENT

While the changes in domestic media systems and news organisations can be linked both directly and indirectly to the processes of European integration, little can be said about the changes over time in media content, particularly news, as a result of 'Europeanisation'. Previous research offers little in the way of systematic cross-national comparisons of media content about Europe or European affairs. The most comprehensive cross-national study focused on the first European parliamentary elections in 1979. Looking at the television coverage in both the run-up and the actual campaign period, a cross-national team of researchers found that 'European issues' did not really enter the media agenda before the actual campaign started. With some cross-national variation, it was found that economic topics, comments about the elections and the 'problems, strategies, and mechanics of waging the campaign predominated the television programming in nearly every country'. Although there has been some continuation of this research on news coverage of European elections in individual countries, the 1999 European parliamentary elections presented the first opportunity for cross-national comparative research on the range and quality of political reporting. This research, now under way at the University of Amsterdam, will compare media content across EU countries in the 1999 elections to study the effects of media system differences on media content, as well as the effects of news coverage on public opinion and voting behaviour.

European integration and the EU are not only present in news coverage of genuinely European issues, but also are increasingly an integral part of national political and economic coverage. In a Swedish context, researchers concluded that 'reports concentrating on the national economic consequences of the EU for monetary union' was an important theme in national television news coverage of the economy. In Britain, a similar observation was made, and it was concluded that press releases by economic players, including major European finance houses, were a central element in economic news in Britain. But these studies, valuable as they are, had neither a longitudinal nor a genuinely cross-national comparative perspective.

The EU itself has monitored press coverage of European news in different EU countries for a number of years. The publicly available annual
reports provide one of few cross-national attempts at gauging media attention devoted to ‘Europe’. The reports document the volume and priority of information about the EU and provide an overview of the attention focus of the press coverage. The results of the 1995 and 1996 studies, for instance, both suggest that coverage of EU affairs was focused on economic and financial affairs. Specific issues such as the ‘mad cow disease’ as well as the debate about the enlargement of the EU, along with social matters, also surfaced in the news. These studies, however, were limited in their sampling by including only two, often elitist, newspapers from each European country. This tells us very little about the total news environment’s coverage of Europe, not least because television news was excluded.

Another data source for the analysis of how European affairs have been covered in newspaper and television news in the EU countries are the monthly Monitoring Euromedia reports. Drawing on these data, Pippa Norris concluded with respect to the period from January 1995 to autumn 1997 that most European issues received minimal coverage in the news media.41 If there was coverage, then it cyclically peaked around the EU summits. Throughout routine periods, however, coverage of European affairs remained ephemeral. The predominant topics in the 33-month period discussed by Norris were monetary union and EU development; in other words, issues that journalists could use for further analysis. Norris also noted that the coverage during this period was sometimes neutral, but had usually a modest, yet consistent, negative-leaning slant.42

As the number and depth of studies focusing on the coverage of European news are limited, it is useful to look at studies of coverage of national elections in various European countries to gain some idea of the influence of European integration on domestic political communication. While comparative survey data have been collected over several decades, comparable time-series of media content are rare. On the basis of what exists from various national election studies, one may conclude that ‘Europe’ as a subject in the news did not feature until fairly recently. Coverage of Germany’s 1990 national election, British elections from the early 1980s and early 1990s, and Dutch elections in the early 1990s shows that Europe was on the periphery of the campaigns.43 In the most recent elections, however, such as Britain in 1997, and Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands in 1998, ‘Europe’ moved centre stage or at least provided the backdrop against which much of the political debate occurred.

A comparative analysis of the main subject of both press and television news coverage of the 1992 and 1997 British elections revealed that the
category ‘foreign affairs’ (defined as ‘Europe and the EU, relation with foreign countries’) increased its share of the campaign topics from one to six per cent on television and from 0 to 12 per cent in the press. In the 1998 German national elections, campaign conduct and the economy rated as the by far most extensively covered issues with foreign policy/Europe as number three. Foreign policy/Europe accounted for an average of seven per cent of the television news stories about the election, compared to six per cent in British television news. The Dutch national elections of 1998 also had a strong focus on Europe, in particular via the French–Dutch power-play surrounding the nomination of Dutchman Wim Duisenberg as the first President of the European Central Bank, which received extensive coverage. Europe also surfaced in national political discussion in relation to recent elections in Scandinavia, though in a more indirect manner. During the national Danish election of 1998, for instance, eight per cent of the electorate mentioned European integration as one of the most important problems facing the nation. Immigration and refugees were more prominent issues in the media coverage, but as political observers have noted, these issues were inherently ‘Europe-related’ as much of the debate on immigration was centred on the impact of the EU-based Schengen agreement.

One fundamental problem when examining the visibility of European issues in relation to national elections over time is the lack of comparable data. Thus, it is often difficult to extract in a reliable and systematic fashion data that would show the role Europe played at earlier national elections. Europe-related matters are often found in discussions of immigration, the environment, and the economy, for example. What were once domestic issues is now some combination of domestic and European issues. Studies of media content and effects in national election campaigns have to date not been designed to capture this shift, neither in terms of media content nor in terms of voters’ perceptions of issues. A related difficulty is that the definition of Europe and the EU has continuously been changing. Not only has the number of member states expanded, but the whole concept of Europe has changed in the aftermath of the political changes in 1989. Moreover, European policy-making is not a process that is easily distinguished from national policy-making.

Another shortcoming of studies on the visibility of European issues in the media has been a lack of integrating theoretical frameworks. In an attempt to address this weakness, a more recent study of national news media coverage of European affairs during the period surrounding the 1997 Amsterdam ‘Eurotop’ Summit drew upon the concept of framing.
analysis of news content identified five predominant frames in the news and subsequent experimental studies assessed the effects of these frames on readers' thoughts about the introduction of the euro. One part of the content analysis involved analysing the frames used to report political news and European news in Holland. Reliable scales provided evidence of the key frames used in news stories in the major national news outlets. The most common frame in the news was the responsibility frame, and it was more evident in the 'serious' news outlets in the press and television, which presented more political and economic news, than the 'sensationalist' (or less serious) outlets. Responsibility for causing or solving social problems can be attributed to the individual or to the government. Results showed that in Holland responsibility was often attributed to the government. The predominance of the responsibility frame in Dutch national media outlets suggested the importance and potential influence of political culture and context on the framing of problems and topics in the news. In Holland, where there continues to be a strong and relatively undisputed social welfare state, the government is expected to provide almost all the answers to social problems.

News stories about Europe were also framed in terms of conflict and economic consequences. The conflict frame was the second most common frame in Dutch news. The emphasis on conflict in the news reflected the political tension surrounding the 'Eurotop' summit and a general emphasis on the disagreements among the various political parties and within the Dutch coalition government. The economic consequences frame reported an event, problem or issue in terms of the consequences it would have economically on an individual, group, institution, region or country. The analysis of Dutch news surrounding the Amsterdam 1997 Summit showed that news about European integration was more often framed in terms of economic consequences than domestic political news.

**NEWS AND THE EURO: A CASE STUDY OF BRITAIN AND GERMANY**

We conducted a cross-national comparative study of the television news coverage of the introduction of the euro in a number of European countries. The 1 January 1999 launch of the common European currency provided an opportunity for an interesting case study of the news coverage of a key European event, with potentially wide-ranging implications for domestic economies and politics.

Only 11 of the current 15 EU member states participated in the EMU from January 1999. Two of Europe's most important political and economic
players, Britain and Germany, took opposite stands on the introduction of the euro. The British government chose to stay outside EMU and the euro, whereas Germany was not only in from the beginning, but played a key active role in bringing about the 1 January 1999 launch. An analysis of the television news coverage in Britain and Germany around the introduction of the euro revealed some important national differences in the way this common European key event was covered.

The majority of news stories about the euro were concentrated between 31 December 1998 and 4 January 1999. The following qualitative analysis is based on 35 English and German TV stories about the introduction of the euro; 11 on the BBC and ITN and 24 on ARD, ZDF and RTL. Despite the fact that these stories were connected to a common event, news organisations put considerable national spin on the topic. The national spin in the news media reflected the positions of the countries with respect to their support for the euro. News in both countries followed the chronology of the introduction of the euro, in other words, the appearance of the euro first on the Asian stock markets, then in Europe and then in the US. All provided pictures of the champagne corks popping among EU finance ministers and the pie as it was being smashed in the face of the entirely unsuspecting Dutch Minister of Finance by an ‘anti-authoritarian protester’. All provided fleeting coverage of the public euro event in Frankfurt, which was a major public relations effort, and according to German news involved ‘10,000 people [who] were eager to form the euro symbol, with moderate success’. All mentioned the enormous costs borne by companies and governments for the conversion, and described how companies were working through the night to be ready for the launch. Finally, all noted that the launch meant there was now a currency to compete against the dollar, which had been world-dominant for so long. Only Britain couched this in terms of the negative repercussions it could have for the pound’s place in the world.

British news reported the launch of the euro with some anxiety and trepidation, judging from the reports in the main evening news. News reports presented the launch in terms of the potentially severe economic repercussions for the domestic macro-economy and for individual businesses. There was a strong focus on the ‘bottom line’ and the economic consequences for Britain. It was noted how the common currency would be more powerful than their own and it was viewed as having the potential to diminish the importance of the pound on the world market, with the future battles being waged between the dollar and the euro. In that way, British news reporters noted, it represented a much bigger step toward integration
than Britain wanted to take, and it was a fundamentally important step over which Britain had no control. British news sought to educate viewers about the economic facts of the euro, not only what it meant for the 11 countries that were in, but more specifically what it meant for them, the countries that were out.

The British television reporters went so far as to explain why people should not run out to refinance their mortgages in euros, despite the much lower interest rates, and advised keeping UK mortgages in pounds sterling because of the ‘uncertainty’ of foreign exchange rates. British reporters also went shopping in Euroland to show how the price of groceries and various household goods compared with British prices, and found the prices lower in euros. It appeared that the educative role of the British news was especially tailored towards reinforcing (or at least not challenging) the government’s and the country’s official position on the euro, and people were advised to take a wait and see approach before opening bank accounts in euros or buying a home with a euro mortgage.

British news claimed that London was the financial centre for Europe even though the country remained outside the euro. It failed to note that German news claimed Frankfurt/Main to be Europe’s new financial capital. British news did, however, pay special attention to Germany’s role in, and reaction to, the launch of the euro, emphasising the stability it would bring to the German economy. One story had full screen headshot coverage of an undubbed and unsubtitled impressive German soundbite from Chancellor Gerhard Schröder’s televised New Year’s address. Viewers were then told that the German Chancellor described the euro as ‘the key to the twenty-first century’ and that Germany was at the forefront of this development.

In comparison with the British tabloid press, British television’s comparatively objective coverage of Germany’s reaction to this event should be understood in the context of the general public’s concerns about Britain possibly taking a backseat to Germany in the Europe of the future. It also followed a period of excessively negative and actually insulting coverage of Germany in Britain’s screamingly opinionated tabloids, especially since the time of the British beef crisis a few years ago. The Sun’s notorious front-page headline on the resignation of German Finance Minister Oskar Lafontaine – ‘VEE HAF VAYS OF MAKING YOU KVIT’ – is but one more recent example of this anti-German attitude in the British tabloids.

In contrast to the British reports, German television news looked for conflict and problems but had difficulty finding them. In fact, news in Germany viewed the introduction of the euro as a positive development
with positive consequences for the national economy, but also as a non-event in terms of public interest. ZDF noted ‘The Euro conquered the international finance market with a dream start. The German share index reacted with fireworks’. Showing politicians having difficulty opening the champagne in celebration of the launch of the new currency, Germany’s RTL reporter said ‘little troubles sweeten the pleasure’. They then briefly showed Danish people demonstrating against the euro and then, as a contrast, how children from 11 ‘Euroland’ countries sent balloons into the sky. ZDF news said ‘price stability was the most important goal’ and that the ‘typically German fear of inflation’ was ‘not justified’. German Minister of the Economy Müller described it as ‘a stable currency valid throughout Europe’. German journalists concluded it was an event that mattered largely only to politicians and bankers. Politicians were seen celebrating, bankers were seen working, and the general public were seen as not thinking very much about it. One reporter noted that ‘There was only limited interest in the euro’, and a person on the street said: ‘It is simply a different sense of, well, community.’ The ZDF reporter then concluded: ‘At the moment, however, the sense of community is confined to cashless payment.’

The qualitative analysis of the coverage in Britain and Germany surrounding the launch of the euro suggested that this European event played an important role in defining the national news agenda. Similarities in the choice of topics of the news stories, however, did not mean that the event was reported similarly. The national news media played an active role in providing a national spin on this major event. Nevertheless, our qualitative analysis of the news in Britain and Germany suggests that a conflict frame and, in particular, an economic consequences frame were most common across all television news programmes. These two frames were also found to be quite visible in an earlier study of Dutch coverage of European and EU events. These frames also were shown to have direct framing effects on the thoughts Dutch readers had about the euro.

THE MEDIA, PUBLIC OPINION AND EUROPEAN INTEGRATION – AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research on the links between public opinion, news and European integration will benefit from media effects theories. This may also enrich our understanding of European integration in that it encourages a perspective which not only focuses on what Europe does with the citizens, but also on what the citizens do with Europe. Theories concerning media agenda-setting/building, priming and framing provide a basis for theory-
building research on news and European integration. We conclude with a brief discussion of these theories and avenues for research.

The basic idea of agenda-setting was formulated in 1963 by Bernard Cohen, who investigated the power of the press to influence public opinion about foreign affairs: 'The press may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about.' After Max McCombs and Donald Shaw first advanced the agenda-setting hypothesis in 1972, more than 200 investigations have provided empirical evidence that the visibility of an issue in the news influences the perceived importance of that issue by the public. Agenda-setting refers specifically to the visibility and perceived importance of a problem or issue due to its visibility or salience in the news. Agenda-setting is limited to visibility, and does not include the valence or evaluation of that issue in the news or by the public.

With respect to public opinion and European integration, one interesting aspect to investigate is to what extent the mere frequency of the coverage of European affairs influences how important European citizens consider those affairs to be. One would expect that the higher the frequency of European affairs is on the media agenda, the higher the perceived importance of those issues will be on the public agenda. Equally important is the question of how media, public and European policy agendas are related to one another: Do politicians react to the media and public agenda? Or do politicians shape the media and public agenda and, if so, how do they try to get their issues and messages across? A focus on the interrelatedness of policy, media and public agenda aims at a process usually referred to as agenda-building in which journalists and news executives play an essential role. Agenda-building and agenda-setting might prove useful for tackling questions such as whether Europeanised politics can produce Europeanised media contents (or, possibly, vice versa) and if that translates into a Europeanised public agenda. Another question may centre upon whether Europeanised politics are mediated or mediatised politics and to what extent the European policy agenda and public agendas differ.

Whereas agenda-setting is merely concerned with the perceived importance of an issue, media priming goes further by positing that frequently covered issues also become the basis for citizens' evaluations of political parties, leaders and institutions. Media priming emphasises that what is available in the media and most readily accessible in people’s minds is given greater weight in the formation of evaluations. Support for the priming effect has been found in different methodological and topical settings. With respect to public opinion and European integration, one
interesting question is whether and to what extent the predominance of a
certain issue (such as, for example, common foreign policy in the wake of
the Kosovo war) has influenced the overall evaluation of European
politicians and institutions. Another avenue to pursue might focus on the
idea of the ‘Europeanisation’ of politicians, such as the increased visibility
of politicians in the context of Europe, for example during the EU
presidency of a country. Yet another aspect worth investigating is whether
the success or failure of EU policies, initiated by a politician, affect his or
her evaluation in the domestic arena. One might also ask whether those
policies have an impact on the public’s evaluation of a politician concerning
his or her general ability to push European integration further. It could be
expected that negative news about European integration, echoing topics
such as bureaucracy, fraud and agriculture, may fuel a negative and cynical
perspective of politics and current politicians in other areas, and one might
ask whether news contents and effects differ cross-nationally.

Framing analysis shares with agenda-setting research a focus on the
relationship between public policy issues in the news and the public
perceptions of these issues. However, framing analysis ‘expands beyond
agenda-setting research into what people talk or think about by examining
how they think and talk about issues in the news’. 62 Although there is no
single definition of news frame or framing, the ones that have been
employed centre on three aspects: selection, organisation and emphasis. A
frame then selects particular aspects of reality (thereby excluding others),
organises those aspects around a central idea and, thus, puts emphasises on
how to look at and interpret those aspects. 63 Framing effects refer to changes
in evaluations, judgements and interpretations as the result of aspects made
salient through selection, organisation and emphasis. Linking the framing
concept to public opinion and European integration requires an
identification of the predominant frames in the coverage of European
affairs. Consequently, it can be asked whether the frames the media apply to
European affairs translate into patterns the public uses to interpret those
affairs. Do the media employ a European perspective or do they emphasise
us vs. them aspects? Is news about European integration overly concerned
with the ‘bottom line’ of EU policies, for example, focused primarily on the
economic consequences for citizens and countries? A next step would be to
investigate the extent to which those frames are mirrored in public support
for further European integration or the opinions concerning the reduction of
national sovereignty in decision-making. A recent study suggested that
news frames did provide the audience with direction on how to conceive of
European issues, such as the introduction of the euro. 64
These brief suggestions for future research on the relation between media content and public opinion may help us to understand European integration not only as a top-down process but also as a bottom-up process. By focusing on the effects of the coverage of Europe, the process of European integration is ultimately reconceptualised from a too simplistic unidirectional flow with European integration as independent variable to a more reciprocal model with European integration as both an independent and dependent variable.

NOTES

4. For a historical discussion of news coverage of politics in the US see, for example, T. Patterson, Out of Order (New York: Alfred A. Knopf 1993).
8. The content analysis of the introduction of the euro was funded by The Amsterdam School of Communications Research ASCoR and The Danish Research Academy. It is integral to a larger study of news and European integration which includes two Ph.D. projects, one by Jochen Peter and one by Claes H. de Vreese.
9. For a discussion of the initial rationale for a public service system see P.J. Humphreys, Mass Media and Media Policy in Western Europe (Manchester: Manchester University Press 1996).


26. Sepstrup, *Transnationalization of Television in Western Europe*.


28. Ibid.


32. Ibid.


37. The four-year research programme is funded by grants from the Dutch National Science Foundation (NWO) to Holli A. Semetko, Klaus Schoenbach and Cees van der Eijk.
42. Ibid.
49. H.A. Semetko and P.M. Valkenburg, ‘Framing European Politics: A Content Analysis of Press and Television News’, Journal of Communication 50 (2000), pp.93–109. This research was supported by a grant from the Royal Dutch Academy of Sciences (KNAW) to Holli A. Semetko and Patti M. Valkenburg.
51. This is in stark contrast to the US, where television news has been blamed for encouraging viewers to attribute responsibility for social problems such as poverty to the individual rather than the system or the government. S. Iyengar, Is Anyone Responsible? How Television Frames Political Issues (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press 1991).
52. Semetko and Valkenburg, ‘Framing European Politics’.
53. Ibid.
54. Valkenburg et al., ‘The Effects of News Frames on Readers’ Thoughts and Recall’.
55. In a singular and exceptional study linking media coverage about the European Union to public opinion, it was reported that a press, persistently sceptical towards the new currency, had damaged early confidence in the euro. Monthly fluctuations in the direction of the news coverage of that issue were related to changes of public support for the new currency. Yet in contrast to that rather issue-specific public opinion, an effect of the news coverage on more general attitudes towards the EU was not found – although the tone of the news about the EU was modestly, but consistently, negative; see Norris, A Virtuous Circle.
60. de Vreese, ‘Public Broadcasting in Transition’.
64. Valkenburg *et al.*, ‘The Effects of News Frames on Readers’ Thoughts and Recall’.