

# WRR

SCIENTIFIC COUNCIL FOR GOVERNMENT POLICY

## **NO NEWS IS BAD NEWS!**

**THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA AND NEWS FRAMING IN EMBEDDING  
EUROPE**

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Our current understanding of public support for (or reluctance towards) advances in European integration sorely misses the role of the media. In today's mediatised society only few citizens experience 'politics' personally. The media play a crucial role in the intersection between citizens and politics, but in the context of European integration, we have only limited knowledge about how they cover European issues and what the effects are on public support for and legitimacy of advances in European integration.

This paper addresses this topic. It focuses on the following elements:

- Recent changes in the media-politics relationship
- News media and European integration: What do we know?
- Effects of news and information on public support for (or aversion to) European integration
- Why do the media matter and what role could they play?
- Current policy initiatives
- Next: Making communication a central component of Embedding Europe.

### **Changes in the media-politics relationship**

This section addresses the proliferation in media outlets, the simultaneous professionalisation of media and politics, the emergence of media distrust and the role of the media in the citizen-governance gap.

### **News and European integration: what do we know?**

This section provides a summary of a decade of research on how European issues are covered in the news (in particular television news) in the Netherlands and abroad. The section also reports specifically on the coverage of the 2005 referendum campaign (based on a large-scale study at The Amsterdam School of Communications Research *ASCoR*, University of Amsterdam). Particular attention is paid to the key features of the Dutch news media's coverage of 'Europe' in an international comparative perspective.

### **Effects of news and information on public support of (or aversion to) European integration**

This section provides an overview of our knowledge about the way in which news media and new information can affect public thinking about, attitudes towards and support for different issues of European integration. Particular attention is paid to the role of news framing, i.e. the way in which issues are presented in the news, and the effects of news frames.

### **Why do the media matter and what role could they play?**

This section demonstrates why the media matter for understanding public sentiments about European integration, in particular in the light of volatile, unstable opinions. It is also argued that neglecting the media in the future may turn the European issue into an arena for populist politicians.

#### Communicating Europe: Current policy initiatives

This section reports on a number of current policy initiatives that are of relevance to the theme. It most notably summarizes the activities of the Wallström cabinet and provides initial reactions and comments on the link with the Dutch situation.

#### Next: Making communication a central component of Embedding Europe.

This section provides, in the light of the previous, a number of suggestions for making communication a central component of future strategies. The recommendations relate to institutional issues (political and media institutions), understanding of journalism and news framing, differentiating between different media and citizens, and to conceptualizing goals to be reached with an embedded communications and media strategy.

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## 1 CHANGES IN THE MEDIA-POLITICS RELATIONSHIP

The interaction between politics, citizens and the media is – at least at the surface – not entirely harmonious:

“Political parties have virtually no members, communication professionals, spin doctors, and news managers stage politics in front of an increasingly cynical, self-referential, horse race driven group of journalists who work in large commercially driven corporations, owned by a small number of moguls who offer a shrinking window of political information to citizens who either avoid politics or have become *consumers* of news and politics, who have no political loyalties, have given up on religion and ideology, are disengaged, disconnected, and change party by the day. This is the populist (and may I add pessimist) account” (De Vreese (2006a)).

While reality is in general less bleak than the summary suggests, in fact, when it comes to Europe, many potential problems seem aggravated. There is virtually no political party organization at the European level (Mair, 2000), there is a lack (rather than an excess of communication professionals) and journalists are rather neglectful than anything else when it comes to Europe. Moreover, citizens across Europe show a decreased participation in European politics (at least in the European Parliamentary elections) and public Euroskepticism is emerging and perhaps even consolidating.

Taking a step back, looking at the media-politics relationship, we can first note that the interaction takes place in a context that has changed considerably over the past decades. While television broadcasting in Europe consisted mainly of publicly funded monopolies in the 1980s, by today all countries in the EU had a dual system of broadcasting with public and private stations co-existing and competing (Brants and de Bens, 2000). During the past 20 years the newspaper market in Europe also changed, and today newspaper readership is in decline though still considerably high in many European countries (Lauf, 2001). The structural developments in the news market are important because of the choice citizens have for finding political news in the available outlets. Private television usually provides less ‘hard’ political news (Blumler, 1997; Pfetsch, 1996) and less news about issues of European integration (Peter and de Vreese, 2004).

Based on extant research from national political contexts, we would expect to find co-existence of two intertwined areas of change: *professionalization of politics* on the one hand and *professionalization of the (news) media* on the other. Literature on the *professionalization of politics* suggests a transition has taken place from campaigns being

short, decentralized and dependent on physical manpower to a stage of permanent campaigning in which campaign professionals such as pollsters, marketing consultants, and spin-doctors play key roles. Norris (1997; 2000) developed a typology of the evolution of campaigning (the typology shares significant conceptual ground with, e.g., Farrell, 1996; Farrell & Webb, 2000). The first phase covers the period from the late 1800s to the 1950s and is characterized by a strong party organization with many decentralized and locally organized campaigns. Volunteers engage in the campaign by distributing pamphlets, canvassing and organizing local party meetings. This first phase is most effectively distinguished from phase two by the arrival of television.

In the second phase preparations for campaigns are lengthier and more extensive and the campaign planning is centrally organized and controlled. The party system undergoes a professionalization transition, electoral research is introduced, and press conferences, staged media events and political style become important. This phase covers the period from the 1950s up until late 1980s/ early 1990s. The third phase, which according to the literature is still emerging, is characterized by an increase in the use of new information and communication technologies, more sophisticated targeting of key voters, increased expenditure on publicity and growing (conscious) use of campaign techniques in government. These are implemented both internally in the party organizations as well as a means of external communication with party members and potential voters. The time horizon of campaigning is redefined towards some level of *permanent campaigning*. Campaign professionals become increasingly important and the electorate is conceived of as existing of segments that can be targeted individually.

Research on the *professionalization of the (news) media* addresses developments in journalism that concur with the changes in politics and campaigning (Swanson & Mancini, 1996). Similarly to the characterization of developments in politics, three phases of political journalism are identified (Blumler & Gurevitch 2000; Kerbel, 1999). In this work it is suggested that political journalism has developed from *issue reporting* via *strategic reporting* to *reflexive reporting*. In the first phase policies and issues dominated the news coverage (Kerbel, 1999; Patterson, 1993). Reporting was generally neutral, politicians appeared as main sources in the news and the overall approach to politics and elections was sacerdotal, that is cautious, respectful, and reactive (Blumler & Gurevitch, 2001). During the second phase, news media focused largely on game/ strategy framing (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997). This means that the media were overly concerned with politics as game (who is ahead?). Key characteristics of this type of news include assertive reporting, a pragmatic approach, journalists (as opposed to politicians) becoming experts, and campaign controversies are in focus (Blumler & Gurevitch, 2001; de Vreese, 2002; 2003). In the third,

emerging phase of political journalism (Blumler & Gurevitch 2001; Esser et al., 2000), the political behind-the-scenes show is important. Key characteristics of this type of news is that it is self-analytical, reflexive, utilizes spin-doctors as sources, and is focused on media manipulation as a key feature. This type of coverage include different types of news (Esser et al., 2000; Johnston et al, 1996): *media performance stories* (how well do the media cover a campaign, is the coverage fair?), *media impact stories* (examining the power of news in the campaign influencing both candidates and voters), *media coverage of campaign* (focusing on candidates' images, personalities, and public appearances), and finally a 'residual' type of news in which policy issues are discussed.

The broad changes described above, however, largely stem from either literature based on the U.S. example or theoretical contributions about the (assumed) negative effects of 'Americanization' of campaigns and the relationship between politics and media. In some cases the U.S. example and a European example are comparatively addressed (Blumler and Gurevitch 2001), but in general there are very few empirical examples from Europe, and the existing ones are based on national accounts (Esser et al. 2000; Gunther and Mughan 2000; Swanson and Mancini 1996). This is striking since there are structural trends in Europe that indicate that campaigns matter. In the context of EU politics a majority of European citizens repeatedly reports using the news media, in particular television news, as their most important source of information (Eurobarometer, 51-56) and the importance of party loyalty is decreasing (van der Eijk and Franklin 1996). Yet hardly any studies have been conducted on the components of political campaigning (except Bicchi et al (2003) and Brants et al (1983)).

Many of the general observations from extant research do *not* apply in the context of European politics. A study of the 2004 European parliamentary elections (De Vreese 2006b) showed that campaigns in consensual electoral contexts where political parties differ marginally on most issues of European integration were longer, involved more public meetings, more canvassing, and a more active use of Internet, but most importantly the study demonstrated the staggering absence of most types of resource intensive ('professional') strategies of conducting or reporting politics. The campaign professionalization literature does not apply universally, and virtually not to 'Europe'. The absence of typical professionalization developments does not imply a balanced, cautious and harmonious 'business-as-usual' situation. The absence of professionalization is perhaps in fact part of the problem of 'communicating Europe'.





## **2 NEWS MEDIA AND EUROPEAN INTEGRATION: WHAT DO WE KNOW?**

This section provides a summary of research on how European issues are covered in the news, in the Netherlands and abroad. The section also reports specifically on the coverage of the 2005 referendum campaign (based on a large-scale study at The Amsterdam School of Communications Research *ASCoR*, University of Amsterdam).

Why at all study the way the media cover 'Europe'? In the research on media and the EU democratic and communication deficits, links have been established between media coverage of the EU and public perceptions of EU legitimacy, mass support and citizen engagement in elections. In particular two aspects of EU media coverage should be considered: The EU visibility (or quantity of coverage) and its tone. Greater visibility of European campaigns is related to higher turnout in European Parliamentary Elections (Banducci and Semetko, 2003, 2004). Greater visibility of EU news is related to knowledge gains about the EU (De Vreese and Boomgaarden, 2007), and a greater visibility of pro-EU actors tends to positively influence support for EU membership (Banducci et al., 2002). Finally, negative news about the EU has been found to be related to negative public evaluations of the EU (Norris, 2000a).

Evidence from the 1999 and 2004 European Parliamentary elections and the 2005 referendum in the Netherlands illustrate the state of affairs. The study of the 1999 and 2004 EP campaigns is based on an analysis of the two most widely watched public and private main evening television news shows and three newspapers (two broadsheets and one tabloid) for each of the 25 EU member states in the final weeks leading up to the 1999 and 2004 elections (for details about the study, see De Vreese, Banducci, Semetko & Boomgaarden, 2006).

First the *general news environment* in Europe during the campaign for the 2004 EP elections is analyzed and the visibility and amount of attention devoted to the elections by national news media was assessed. Contributing to a Europeanized national public sphere, increased visibility of the elections in the news gives voters an indication of the salience or importance of the election. In addition, visible news coverage is expected to give voters information about candidates and party positions. Second, the *tone of the news coverage towards the EU* was assessed. The invisibility of the EP in the news and the negative tone in coverage of the EU have been cited as contributing factors to the democratic deficit in terms of negative attitudes about the EU (Norris, 2000b) and low participation in EP elections (Norris, 2000a).

## **2.1 How visible is the EU on the news agenda?**

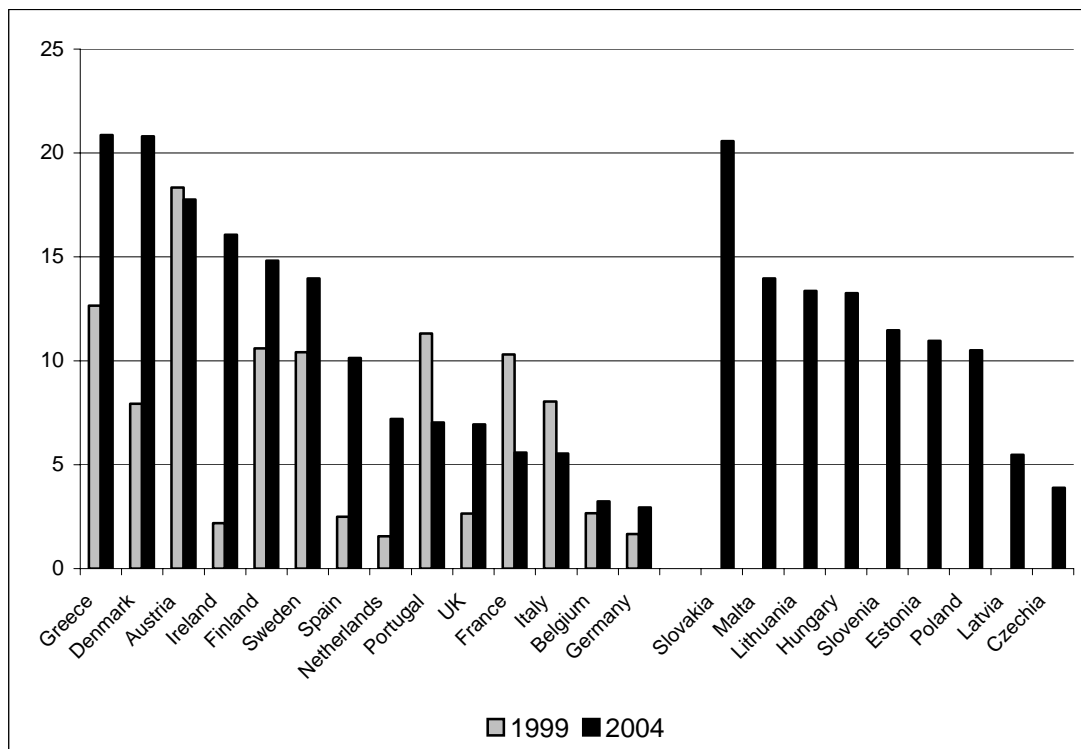
Coverage of European affairs tends to be cyclical in nature with coverage being virtually absent from the news agenda and then peaking around important EU events to vanish off the agenda again (De Vreese et al., 2001; Norris, 2000a). This pattern of news coverage has also been found to apply to EU summits, which are pivotal moments for EU decision making and where news coverage of EU affairs is much more visible than during 'routine periods' (De Vreese and Boomgaarden, 2006; Peter and de Vreese, 2004; Semetko and Valkenburg, 2000). During other key events, such as national referendums on issues of European integration, EU news can take up a substantial part of the news agenda, especially in the final weeks of the campaign (De Vreese and Semetko, 2004). During routine periods, i.e., outside the referendum periods and when there are no scheduled events of the magnitude such as European Council meetings for example, EU politics is marginal in national news (Gerhards, 2000; Peter and de Vreese, 2004; Peter et al., 2003).

While some studies have focused on the Europeanization of the media in a single country (e.g., Koopmans and Pfetsch, 2003), or the coverage of particular cases by media across countries (e.g., De Vreese et al., 2001; Meyer, 2005; Risse and van de Steeg, 2003; Trenz and Münzing, 2003), our knowledge about the way in which EP elections specifically are covered is quite limited. The 1979 campaign was virtually absent from the media agenda until the final weeks before the elections (Blumler, 1983; Siune, 1983). No systematic and comprehensive cross-national study of media coverage was carried out until the 1999 EP elections. In 1999, a research team at *The Amsterdam School of Communications Research* conducted an analysis of the most widely watched television news programs in the then 15 EU member states in the two weeks leading up to the 1999 European elections. The results showed that the average portion of the program (based on time) about the election in the main evening news programs for all EU member states was about 7 percent. Belgium, Britain, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, and Spain devoted even less than 5 percent of news to the elections. Austria, Denmark, Finland, France, Greece, Italy, and Sweden are somewhat above average, spending 8 to 13 percent of news time on European elections (De Vreese et al., 2007; Peter et al., 2004).

## **2.2 How negative is the news about the EU?**

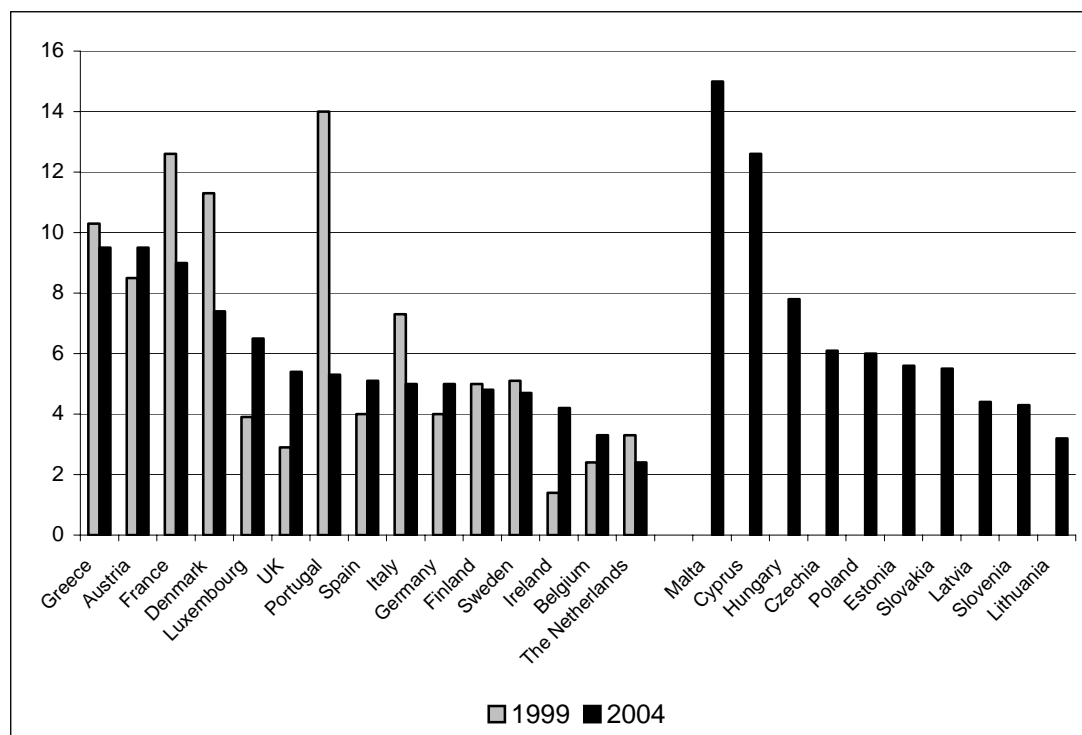
News is largely neutral and the number of explicit evaluations is generally limited, but when evaluations are present, they tend to be negative. This pattern is inherent to the news genre and has been demonstrated to apply generally to political news (Kepplinger and Weissbecker, 1991). Judging the tone of news obviously is always contingent upon the perspective from which the judgment is made and the relation to the overall context. A statement by a politician can be positive or negative for the individual in casu and equally so for another

actor in that news story. In the operationalization of tone in the news we follow the perspective of the actor or institution her or himself. That is to say that a news story in which a representative of an EU institution is said to, for example, 'fail', 'not deliver' or 'postpone unnecessarily' is, in operational terms, considered negative in tone for the EU. In the case of the EU, the pattern towards overall neutral coverage with, if any, primarily negative evaluations, appears to be much the same. Norris (2000a) in her re-analysis of the EU Commission's media monitor reports found that news about several EU policies as well as EU institutions tended to be tilted towards negative evaluations.



NOTE: Values are length-based percentages within the countries and election periods. All stories in television newscasts were included. Values display the proportion of news stories about the EP election and about other EU news. 1999 n=4781; 2004 n=9339.

*Figure 1: Visibility of EU news in television newscasts 1999 and 2004 (De Vreese et al., 2006)*



NOTE: Values are story-based percentages within the countries and election periods. All stories on newspaper front-pages were included. Values display the proportion of news stories about the EP election and about other EU news. 1999 n=2224; 2004 n=8280.

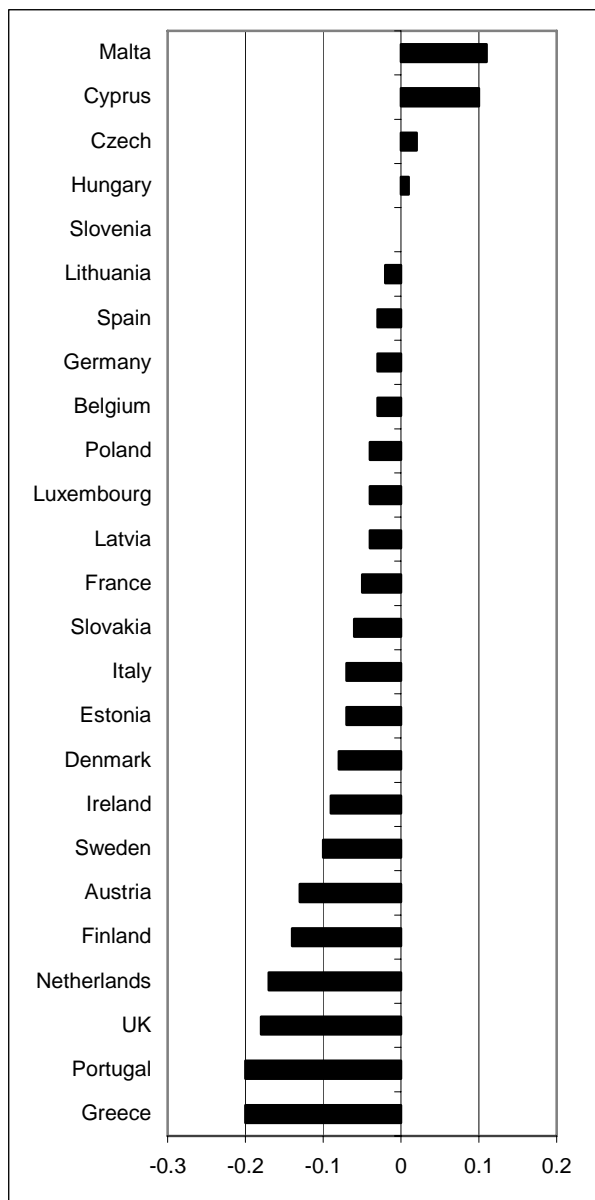
*Figure 2: Visibility of EU news on newspaper front-pages 1999 and 2004 (De Vreese et al., 2006)*

Looking at the Dutch case in Figures 1-3, we can observe the following: 1) Dutch television news held the title 'European Champions in Neglecting Brussels' in 1999 with two news stories (one on *NOS Journaal* and one on *RTL Nieuws*) reporting about the 1999 EP elections. 2) The 'title' was lost in 2004, when the coverage was more than quadrupled (taking the Dutch television news attention almost to the EU average. 3) Dutch newspapers (in both 1999 and 2004) were amongst the papers in Europe devoting the least coverage of the elections. 4) Dutch news about the EU is generally quite neutral, but it ranges among the five most negative in terms of explicit evaluations of the EU (and its institutions).

These findings beg for understanding some of the underlying *explanations* driving these differences. Both the 1999 and 2004 European parliament elections showed considerable variation among the EU countries in the amount of coverage devoted to the European election campaign and the visibility given to EU representatives. Using multivariate analyses we found more coverage of the European elections on public broadcasting channels and in countries where elite opinion about the EU is polarized (Peter et al., 2004).

Looking at routine news coverage on television (Peter & de Vreese, 2004), we found, in a cross-national comparative content analysis of the coverage of European Union politics in British, Danish, Dutch, French, and German television news EU politics to be marginally represented in national television news. EU officials, too, were absent in the news. However, *if* the EU was covered, EU politics was more prominently presented than other political news. Three influences were found to positively contribute to the amount and prominence of EU news: it was more prominent in public broadcasting news programs, in countries with higher levels of public satisfaction with democracy, and during periods around EU summits. The visibility of EU officials in television news was highest in public broadcasting news programs. The findings suggested that, with EU coverage being of limited visibility and without protagonists, the Europeanization of television news coverage is more an illusion than reality.

Dutch 'Europe'-news, both during the 1999 and 2004 EP campaigns and during the 'routine' periods, is characterized by being limited and fairly negative. This pattern is observed at different points in time and in relation to different issues and events. Seen in the light of the international comparison, it can be concluded that the Dutch public broadcaster (NOS), prior to 2004, gave less attention to EU news than most of their European counterparts. However in the last couple of years they seem to approximate the EU average. In terms of the *tone* of the news, the 'negative' bias in Dutch EU news is not different from the coverage of other political issues and actors (De Vreese, 2002). It therefore seems that the negativity is more inherent to (Dutch) news in general than to Dutch EU news in particular.



*Figure 3: Tone of news 2004 (NP and TV together) (explicit evaluations EU, ranging from –1 to +1) by country (De Vreese et al., 2006)*

### 2.3 The referendum

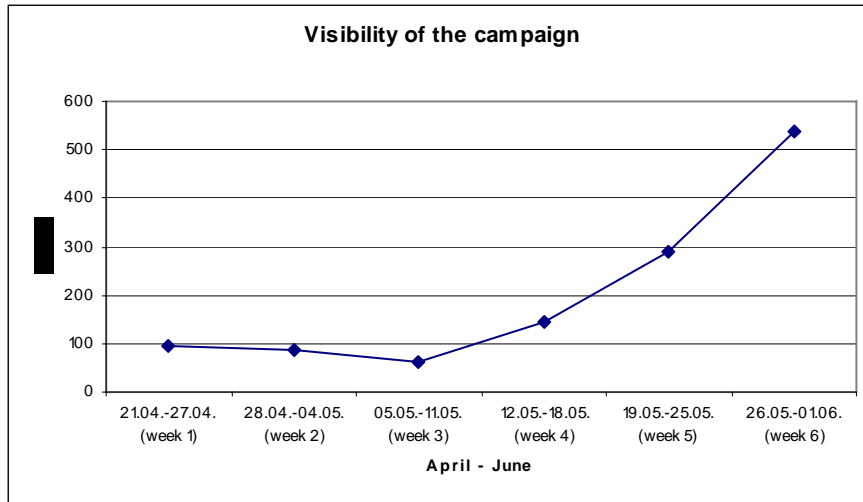
The situation in the Netherlands until 2005 was, based on the previous observations, one of marginal, slightly negative news about Europe. But the 2005 referendum fundamentally changed this picture. The news media covered the referendum extensively; in fact the level of attention was closer to a national (Tweede Kamer) election than a European election (De Vreese & Schuck, 2006; van Praag et al., 2006). The referendum gained momentum at the end of January 2005 when the Dutch senate supported a proposal to hold a referendum on the EU Constitution. The VVD, formerly opposed to referendums, paved the way by backing the proposal and only the CDA and the smaller Christian parties voted against it. Shortly thereafter, in mid February, the Second Chamber agreed upon holding the first national referendum in Dutch parliamentary history. The date was set for June 1<sup>st</sup>.

During March and April the directive by former Dutch EU commissioner Bolkestein about the free movement of services received some attention in public debate. Related to this the symbol of the “Polish plumber”, representing the influx of cheap labour from new EU members, emerged in the French referendum debate and was also discussed in the Netherlands. Throughout this time period (January – April 2005) public opinion surveys show a majority of voters tending to vote in favour of the Constitution by a margin of 9% to 21% (MarketResponse: Rapportage Referendum Europese Grondwet 2005). However, by April still almost every third voter was undecided what to vote for. The No vote noticeably was becoming more *en vogue* and discussed in public debate as a possible scenario.

When the official campaign commenced in late April there were several issues resonating in public debates but no single issue dominated the agenda. In a study at The Amsterdam School of Communications Research *ASCoR*, we found that until three weeks before the referendum an average of about 100 news stories about the referendum were published per week in the national Dutch newspapers (De Volkskrant, NRC Handelsblad, Trouw, Algemeen Dagblad, De Telegraaf), TV news shows (RTL Nieuws, NOS Journaal, Hart van Nederland), and TV current affairs shows (NOVA, B&V, Netwerk, 2Vandaag) (*ASCoR* EU Constitution Referendum Survey 2005).

In the final three weeks of the campaign the news media devoted increased attention to the campaign itself, criticizing especially the YES campaign for its poor organization. Figure 4 below illustrates the increase in media attention for the referendum campaign in the final weeks prior to the referendum, culminating in more than 500 referendum stories in Dutch national news media during the week before the vote.





*Figure 4*

*Note:* Time line shows total amount of referendum news stories per week published in Dutch national TV and newspaper coverage

The vast majority of the Dutch political elite, the governing parties (CDA, VVD, and D66) as well as the major opposition party (PvdA), and all major news media were in support of the EU Constitution. Only the smaller opposition parties have been campaigning against but most of them remained hardly visible during the campaign. Noteworthy exceptions from this were the socialist party SP, the Group Wilders and to some extent also the Christian Union (ChristenUnie). These parties and their respective party leaders and representatives vigorously campaigned against the Constitution and reached high levels of public attention. In addition, independent citizen initiatives such as the Committee Against (Comité tegen) joined the NO camp. Despite these efforts the YES camp was a lot more visible during the campaign and clearly dominated public debate. In particular prime minister Balkenende, Foreign Secretary Bot, PvdA party leader Bos, and several representatives of the VVD received the attention in the referendum news coverage. The prime minister and the foreign secretary also received the most unfavorable and negative coverage (see Table next page).

<b>ACTORS</b>	<b>Frequency actor in the news</b>	<b>Tone towards actor in the news</b>
<b>YES ACTORS</b>		
CDA	64	-,11
VVD	81	-,16
D66	39	-,08
PvdA	55	-,04
Groenlinks	25	-,04
“YES camp”	93	-,44
Dutch prime minister (Balkenende)	167	-,26
Dutch foreign secretary (Bot)	74	-,27
Zalm (VVD)	47	-,19
Nicolai (VVD)	70	-,13
van Aartsen (VVD)	49	-,08
van Baalen (VVD)	26	-,19
Bos (PvdA)	65	-,14
Kok (PvdA)	8	-,38
Timmermans (PvdA)	13	,08
Donner (CDA)	30	-,50
Verhagen (CDA)	31	-,06
Brinkhorst (D66)	38	-,34
Halsema (Groenlinks)	13	.15
<b>TOTAL YES campaign</b>	<b>988 (74,7%)</b>	<b>-0,20</b>
<b>NO ACTORS</b>		
Groep Wilders	62	-,16
LPF	17	+/-0
SP	43	-,07
Christenunie	6	+/-0
SGP	3	+/-0
“NO camp”	93	-,16
Committee AGAINST	18	-,11
van Bommel (SP)	34	+/-0
Marijnissen (SP)	33	-,33
van Dijk (SP)	6	+/-0
Rouvoet (Christenunie)	20	.10
<b>TOTAL NO campaign</b>	<b>335 (25,3%)</b>	<b>-0,12</b>
<b>OVERALL TOTAL</b>		
	<b>1323 (100%)</b>	<b>-0,18</b>

Frequency of YES and NO actors and tone towards YES and NO actors in the news

*Note:* Numbers show frequency of actor appearances in the news and tone towards actors on a scale from -1 (unfavourable) to +1 (favourable).



### **3 EFFECTS OF NEWS AND INFORMATION ON PUBLIC SUPPORT OF (OR AVERSION TO) EUROPEAN INTEGRATION**

The previous section gave an overview of the content of the news about the EU in the Netherlands and beyond. However, when looking at antecedents of public support (or aversion towards) European integration the media are rarely taken into account. A study of how news media and new information can affect public thinking, attitudes towards and support for different issues of European integration obviously needs to be located in the context of other factors that matter for understanding variation in support.

The question why some people embrace the notion of European integration while others oppose it has generated a considerable amount of studies (for an elaboration of the overview below, see de Vreese & Boomgaarden 2005). Understanding variation has been explained in terms of cognitive mobilization (e.g. Inglehart, 1970), utilitarian and economic considerations (e.g. Gabel and Palmer, 1995), satisfaction with the incumbent government (e.g. Franklin, et al., 1995; Ray, 2003), as well as social-demographic characteristics and political-ideological preferences (e.g. Gabel, 1998a). More recent explanations include feelings of national identity (Christin and Trechsel, 2002; Marks and Hooghe, 2003; Hooghe and Marks 2005), national pride and territorial identity (Carey, 2002), perceived cultural threat (McLaren, 2002), and fear of immigration (De Vreese and Boomgaarden, 2005).

**Cognitive mobilization.** Inglehart's (1970) original idea implied that citizens with high cognitive mobilization are more at ease with a supranational entity. Later Inglehart (1977) argued that citizens who have a political value system favoring non-material values (such as self-fulfillment and concerns with democracy) above material values (such as financial security) are more favorable towards European integration. The first group, dubbed as post-materialists, is likely to perceive European integration as a vehicle for social reform and tends to consider politics at a more abstract level, which – according Inglehart – promotes support for the EU. This idea was demonstrated using bivariate analyses of Eurobarometer data, but – as, for example, Gabel (1998a) has suggested – the conclusions are at best tentative given the lack of consistent empirical support in the data and the absence of controls for other, potentially confounding factors such as education. Later analyses have found only limited support for this idea, either by limiting the argument to original member states only (Anderson and Reichert, 1996) or by controlling for a number of the explanations outlined below (Gabel, 1998a).

**Cost/ benefit analysis.** The second group of studies posits that “EU citizens from different socio-economic situations experience different costs and benefits from integrative policy” (Gabel, 1998a: 336). These studies explain support for European integration in terms of

income, education, occupational skills, and proximity to border regions (e.g. Anderson and Reichert, 1996; Gabel and Palmer, 1995). Anderson (1998) showed that, when contrasting economic and political effects, economic variables were in part mediated by political variables. This, he suggests, calls for an inclusion of political variables to understand variation in popular support.

**Domestic politics and support for European integration.** The key political variables come from the domestic political realm. The argument is that given the low level of actual information about the integration processes, citizens are likely to resort to proxies when formulating their view on integration, and these proxies are likely to be based on national political considerations (Anderson, 1998; Franklin et al., 1994). In particular the importance of government approval and support for incumbent political parties has been considered. Franklin and colleagues (Franklin et al., 1994; Franklin et al., 1995) even go on to say that domestic political considerations drive not only opinions about integration but also voting behavior in European elections and national referendums on European issues: “referenda conducted in the context of national party politics, with the government of the day urging ratification of a treaty they have themselves negotiated, will inevitably be contaminated by popular feelings about the government” (Franklin et al., 1994: 102).

**National identity and threats to national and cultural integrity.** A number of recent studies suggest that citizens’ feelings of national attachment and their perceptions of threats to the nation state and to the nation’s interests and cultural integrity are potential considerations when expressing support for the EU (Kritzinger, 2003). Marks and Hooghe (2003) differentiate between cultural and economic threats and find these, when controlling for economic evaluations, to have a significant impact on EU support. McLaren (2002) argues that reluctance towards integration is a function of the perceived *cultural threat*. She contends that it is the “changing nature of the nation and the nation-state that will lead many Europeans to be critical of the EU – since this institution is likely to be seen as contributing to this change” (McLaren, 2002: 554). Her argument is, given that European citizens have been socialized to accept the power and sovereignty of the nation-state, that the idea of advanced European integration, which implies a potentially weakened role for the nation state and redistribution of sovereignty, provides a threat to this symbol. Threats may come from non-national changes in society, including immigration and globalization.

**Immigration.** De Vreese and Boomgaarden (2005) extended McLaren’s (2002) argument that it is the threat posed by outsiders that fuels public anti-EU integration sentiments, rather than merely identity-based considerations. Recent political developments and changes in the political landscape in a number of European countries have implications for political

attitudes. Therefore it is important to consider attitudes beyond support for the incumbent government as a reference point for citizens when expressing their opinion about European integration. Europe has experienced an increase in popularity of anti-immigrant and often anti-EU populist political parties. We know that on the individual-level anti-immigration sentiments are among the core predictors of support for populist parties (Lubbers et al., 2002; Van der Brug et al., 2000), indicating that in recent years anti-immigration sentiments moved to the forefront of politically relevant attitudes. The popularity of populist anti-immigrant parties serves as an indicator for the relevance and significance of immigration-related attitudes for political opinion formation.

De Vreese and Boomgaarden (2005) have shown that Europeans holding negative attitudes towards immigrants show a greater readiness for categorization of others in general, which is likely to yield unfavorable evaluations of these out-groups. As European integration increasingly brings together people from different countries, regions, cultures, and arguably with different religions and ethnicities, this sparks negative assessments of these groups and therefore people holding negative attitudes towards immigrants are more likely to reject the idea of further European integration. Not in-group favoritism but rather a negative out-group bias, indicated by hostility towards immigrants, matters for understanding support of the EU.



#### **4 EUROPEAN INTEGRATION, PUBLIC OPINION, AND THE MEDIA**

With public opinion about European integration being volatile, new information can change citizens' opinions and policy preferences (Page & Shapiro, 1992, p. 15). Indeed, "where people know and care little about the issue, and where it is remote from their everyday experience of life and their values, then the impact of the media may be greater" (Newton, 2006, p. 218).

New information, as provided by the media, can therefore contribute to public thinking about and support for or aversion against different aspects of European integration. To the extent that public support is seen as part of the legitimacy of European integration, the media play an important (in)direct role in affecting citizens as to which topics to consider and what to think about these when conceiving of European integration. How then may the media matter? In media effects research, agenda-setting, priming, framing and persuasion as a result of tone of the news are amongst the most applied concepts to understand media impact on public opinion formation (McLeod et al., 2002).

Agenda-setting theory suggests that issues that are salient on the media agenda are likely to be high on the public agenda (see Dearing and Rogers (1996) for an overview). In the case of European integration, we know that European issues are generally low on both the media and the public agenda. When issues of European integration rise on the media agenda, however, these can become more important to citizens, in particular those heavily exposed to news media (de Vreese & Semetko, 2004). Still, the importance of an issue tells us little about whether or not individuals support integration in either diffuse terms or specific policies.

Priming theory suggests that the news media can alter the ingredients by which citizens evaluate political leaders (e.g., Miller & Krosnick, 2000). For example, when the news media reported elaborately about the 1991 Gulf War, US President Bush Sr was evaluated primarily on his war performance. A year later when the news media reported massively about the economy, however, the President's overall evaluation was driven by his handling of the economy (Krosnick & Brannon, 1993). This process can be conditioned by individuals' level of political knowledge, news exposure, and trust in sources (Krosnick & Brannon, 1993; Miller & Krosnick, 2000). In the case of European integration, we know that a referendum on an integrative issue— if salient on the media agenda – can be the prime ingredient by which citizens evaluate the government (de Vreese, 2004).

Framing studies have demonstrated how citizens make sense of issues in the news depending on which aspects of an issue are highlighted. Framing goes beyond considering what topics are dealt with in the news to understanding *how* these topics are covered. The variety of definitions of news frames in both theoretical and empirical contributions is considerable (De



Vreese 2005). Gitlin (1980, p. 7) defined frames as “persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation, of selection, emphasis and exclusion by which symbol-handlers routinely organize discourse”. Gamson and Modigliani (1989) referred to frames as ‘interpretative packages’ that give meaning to an issue. At the core of this package is “a central organizing idea, or *frame*, for making sense of relevant events, suggesting what is at issue” (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989: 3, italics in original). By virtue of emphasizing some elements of a topic above others, a frame provides a way to understand an event or issue. In this vein, Cappella and Jamieson (1997, p. 47) suggested that frames activate knowledge, stimulate “stocks of cultural morals and values, and create contexts”. In doing so, frames ‘define problems’, ‘diagnose causes’, ‘make moral judgments’, and ‘suggest remedies’ (Entman, 1993).

There is disagreement in the literature about the *conceptualization* of frames. Some theoretical arguments support the use of the narrow definitions (e.g., Scheufele, 2000; Shah et al., 2001). The vast majority of framing studies, however (more or less explicitly), apply a *broader* definition of frames. *Conceptually*, a broader notion of news frames is indebted to a definition of a frame as “a central organizing idea or story line that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events, weaving a connection among them. The frame suggests what the controversy is about, the essence of the issue” (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989). In short, *a frame is an emphasis in salience of different aspects of a topic* (de Vreese 2002; 2005). Indeed most issues – political and social – cannot be meaningfully reduced to two identical scenarios. Political, economic and social events and issues are presented to citizens as alternative characterizations of a course of action (Sniderman & Theriault, 2002). When conceiving of, for example, oil drilling, citizens may be presented with frames such as economic costs of gas prices, unemployment, environment, US dependency on foreign energy sources (Zaller, 1992). Frames are parts of political arguments, journalistic norms, and social movements’ discourse. They are alternative ways of defining issues, endogenous to the political and social world.

In terms of *operationalization*, Cappella and Jamieson (1997) suggested four criteria that a frame must meet. First, a news frame must have identifiable conceptual and linguistic characteristics. Second, it should be commonly observed in journalistic practice. Third, it must be possible to distinguish the frame reliably from other frames. Fourth, a frame must have representational validity (i.e. be recognized by others) and not be merely a figment of a researcher’s imagination (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997, pp. 47; 89). The question remains *what* (which components) in a news story constitutes a frame? Entman (1993, p. 52) suggested that frames in the news can be examined and identified by “the presence or absence of certain keywords, stock phrases, stereotyped images, sources of information and

sentences that provide thematically reinforcing clusters of facts or judgments”. Along these lines Shah et al. (2002, p. 367) refer to “choices about language, quotations, and relevant information”. Gamson and Modigliani (1989) identify ‘framing devices’ that condense information and offer a ‘media package’ of an issue. They identify (1) metaphors, (2) exemplars, (3) catch-phrases, (4) depictions, and (5) visual images as framing devices. The most comprehensive empirical approach is offered by Tankard (2001, p. 101) who suggests a list of 11 framing mechanism or focal points for identifying and measuring news frames: (1) headlines, (2) subheads, (3) photos, (4) photo captions, (5) leads, (6) source selection, (7) quotes selection, (8) pull quotes, (9) logos, (10) statistics and charts, and (11) concluding statements and paragraphs. In sum, scholars within the empirical approach to measuring frames agree that frames are *specific textual and visual elements* or ‘framing devices’. These elements are essentially different from the remaining news story which may be considered *core news facts* (Price et al, 1997).

While newsmakers may employ many different frames in their coverage of an issue, scholars agree that this abundance in choice in how to tell and construct stories can be captured in analyses as certain distinctive characteristics and particular frames recur. In order to synthesize previous research and the different types of news frames that have been suggested, a more general typology or distinction with reference to the nature and content of the frame can be used. Certain frames are pertinent only to specific topics or events. Such frames may be labeled *issue-specific frames*. Other frames transcend thematic limitations and can be identified in relation to different topics, some even over time and in different cultural contexts. These frames can be labeled *generic frames* (de Vreese, 2002).

In relation to EU news it has been demonstrated that certain news frames, typically carrying a specific valence, can impact support for integration (e.g., De Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2003; Schuck & de Vreese, 2006). Two examples to illustrate the processes at work: De Vreese, Peter and Semetko (2001) discussed in particular the role of *conflict* and *economic consequence* framing. Conflict frames involve emphasizing different aspect of an issue and highlighting differences of opinion. This frame is frequently used in the coverage of European politics (de Vreese 2002). The frame can affect audiences so that the more thoughts are generated about EU politics and more positive and negative considerations come to mind (de Vreese 2004).

Schuck and De Vreese (2006) examined the news framing of the 2004 European Union enlargement in terms of risk and opportunity and the effect both frames had on public support for the enlargement. A content analysis showed that EU enlargement was portrayed as a controversial issue, but with an overall balanced tone of coverage. Risk and opportunity

framing played an equally prominent role in the news. An experiment examined the impact of both frames on support for EU enlargement and showed that the opportunity frame produced higher levels of support compared to the risk condition. This framing effect was moderated by political knowledge. Individuals with low levels of political knowledge were more affected by the news frames and more susceptible to risk framing.

In relation to the issue of Turkish membership, we have (except Schuck & de Vreese, 2006) scant evidence about the news coverage and framing of previous enlargements of the EU. Based on media monitoring by the European Commission, Norris (2000) reports that 'EU development' (including enlargement) was an important issue in the media between 1995 and 1997 and that the coverage was, on average, negative in tone. However, these data say little about the *framing* of the issue in the news and its potential impact on public opinion.

Political elites and media have framed earlier EU enlargements in terms of economic implications. The issue of Turkish membership, however, touches on a number of different aspects. The European Commission lists issues of economic conditions and political criteria as key parts of the negotiations (COM(2004) 656) and political parties across Europe also highlight on the one hand economic framing and on the other hand political framing of the issue. Similarly, the *Volkscrant* (October 2004) provided an overview of the membership issue and outlined important economic, geo-strategic, and cultural considerations. This is an issue-specific notion of framing. The frames bear great similarity to the frames identified by the authors of the Turkey WRR-paper (July 2005).

In a study at The Amsterdam School of Communications Research *ASCoR* three studies designed to investigate the presence and effects of news media framing on public support for membership of Turkey in the European Union were conducted (De Vreese et al., 2006). The news media framing of the issue was assessed through a content analysis of national newspapers and television news. Several frames in the political, economic and cultural realms were identified. These frames all carried an inherent valence that framed the issue in either positive or negative terms. A first experimental study showed significant differences in the level of support between respondents who had received a positive news frame and respondents who had received a negative news frame. The results of a second experimental study corroborated the first study, but demonstrated that negative news frames yielded stronger effects than positive news frames and that exposure to news frames can affect public policy support even in a multivariate test controlling for other influences. This indicates that public approval of Turkish EU membership is partly contingent on the information about the issue provided to the public.

In addition to the framing of news, the *tone* of news, i.e. explicit evaluations of the EU (and its institutions and policies) can also affect public opinion formation. In a study, based on two wave panel surveys and media content analyses, we provided evidence to a key assumption in the literature on public opinion formation about European integration: the media matter. However, the role of the news media in this process is a conditional one. News media mostly matter in a situation in which citizens are exposed to a considerable level of news coverage with a consistent evaluative direction. In the case where the news media coverage was considerable in amount and consistent in tone (in this case *positive*) we found respondents – in line with our expectations – to be gain-seeking and endorse the enlargement of the EU (De Vreese & Boomgaarden 2006). In the situation where news media messages were less visible and mixed in character we did not find the news media to exert an influence on the dynamics of public opinion formation. This evidence corroborates Zaller's (1992) two-sided information flow hypothesis that suggests that mixed cues are likely to cancel each other out while a consistent and pervasive directional news bias may shift public opinion.

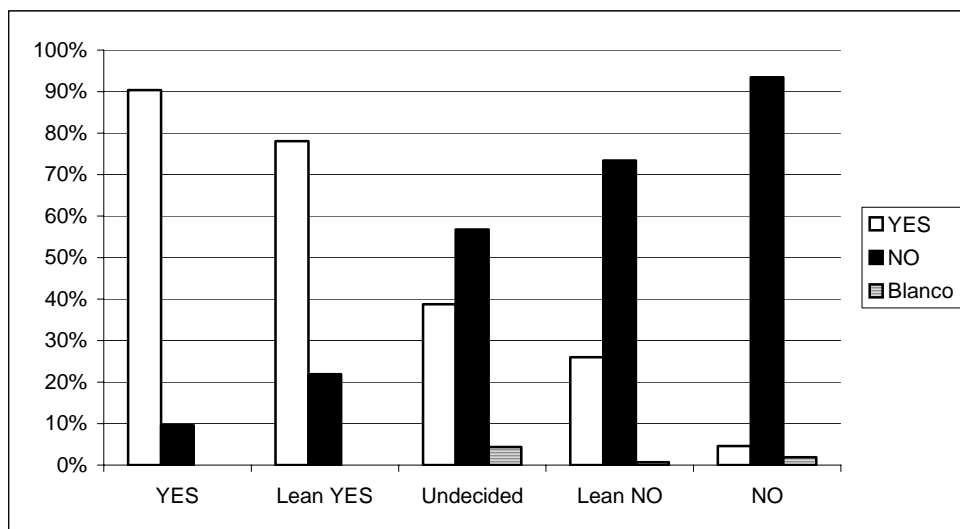


## 5 WHY DO THE MEDIA MATTER?

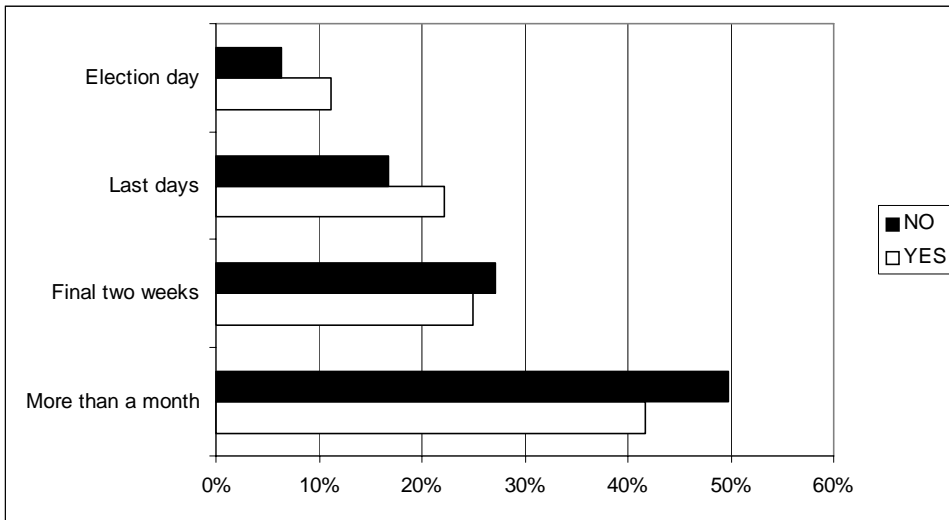
One reason for the media to matter is that many citizens do not hold particular strong attitudes towards European integration (see also Newton 2006; Saris 1997). This observation was confirmed during the 2005 referendum campaign in the Netherlands, when voters both changed opinions often during the campaign and also took their final voting decision relatively late in the campaign.

Figure 5 demonstrates the significant amount of vote switching in the Dutch electorate. While opinion polls during the campaign showed a relatively stability at the aggregate level in the final weeks of the campaign, our data demonstrate that about 30% of those initially planning to vote Yes and also 30% of those initially planning to vote No changed side during the campaign. Figure 6 shows that a large part of the electorate decided rather late in the campaign what to vote. This number is higher than in national elections where there is also an increase in the number of voters decided late in the campaign.

In a situation with considerable vote switching, instability, and late decision-making, on a topic of low salience and involvement, new information may play an important role (De Vreese & Semetko, 2004; Schuck & De Vreese, 2006). Neglecting this baseline as a starting point would be a mistake.



*Figure 5: Volatility (vote switching) in the Dutch EU constitutional referendum: Vote choice at wave 2 compared to vote intention at wave 1* Note: Bars show percentages of respondents voting either yes or no at wave 2 compared to their initial vote intention at wave 1.



*Figure 6: Yes and No voters in the Dutch EU constitutional referendum and their time of decision-making*

*Note:* Bars show percentages of Yes and No voters and their time of decision-making concerning their vote in the Dutch EU constitutional referendum.

## **6 WHO IS TO BLAME? THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA**

This paper outlines a number of the key features of the news media's coverage of European affairs and the relationship between media content and (changes in) public opinion and, implicitly, the legitimacy of European integration.

The paper – very deliberately – takes the media coverage of European issues as the starting point. And almost as a given fact. This position comes from the observation of strong market-driven forces and developments in the media and communication landscape (Semetko et al., 2000) which imply that any discussion of alternative roles and responsibilities on the side of the media are less likely to materialize in significant change. Hereby the 'prime responsibility' becomes a political one with problems to be addressed (or solved) on the side of institutions, parties and politicians.

This position is obviously debatable and the position has more nuances. The media's role in society, in the communication science literature, can be seen as a pure market driven business, a 'business with a public interest' or a special business that requires government intervention, legislation and provisions. In other words, ideas ranging from a notion of the media as acting in 'self-interest' to the media acting in the 'public interest' (McQuail, 1992). Hallin and Mancini (2004) distinguish three models of media systems in the western world which all foresee a different role for the media. In the first model, the Polarized Pluralist model (found in most Mediterranean countries) there is strong state intervention, the media industry (in particular the press is heavily subsidized) and 'obligations' and expectations from political side for editorial content is possible (but not necessarily desirable). In the second model, the Liberal model (found most pronounced in the US and Britain), the market domination is strong, the level of professionalization is high, and the possibility for political influence (except in cases of the press where the party-paper parallelism remains high) is minimal. The third model, the Democratic Corporatist model (found in north-western Europe, including the Netherlands), is characterized by state intervention in the provisions of public broadcasting and press subsidies, but also a strong degree of professionalization and editorial autonomy from political influences.

The different legal provisions and conceptions of the role of the media in society have implications for the degree to which media content and journalistic approaches to, for example, the EU can be influenced. In a market driven, corporatist model as in the Netherlands, expectations about the coverage of economic and political issues (including European integration) can only be set for public broadcasters (and the partially subsidized segments of the press).



Increasing the visibility of EU news in such a system can therefore only be achieved indirectly. First and foremost by making it politically more relevant, which (again) places the responsibility on the side of 'politics' and only in a second place by on the one hand ensuring that editors and journalists are sufficiently aware of and trained to cover European issues and on the other hand by feeding the media with information which fit the formats of different media and outlets.

Should efforts to increase visibility of European affairs be successful, there is the legitimate concern that these efforts will only reach those who are already politically interested and predisposed for paying attention. Nonetheless, the efforts are necessary to create a general news and information environment in which the EU has a (more central) place on the agenda. It is common knowledge, that the media monitor each other's agenda and are influenced by elite media which is why it is crucial to be established in the leading outlets. However, beyond the public broadcaster it would be almost naïve to seriously expect that any media outlet would be responsive to a call for additional attention to the EU.

The 'minimal' and slightly negative Dutch EU news provisions are not exceptional, but they *do* range among the lowest in the EU. The *diagnosis* made by Dutch journalists that EU news is complex, of little interest to the audience, distant and with no identifiable news momentum (De Vreese 2001; 2002) is echoed by colleagues in other countries. However, the *solutions* to these observations do differ. In other contexts, for example in Denmark, the perceived absence of audience interest and the perceived complexity of EU issue have led broadcasters to focus *more* on EU issues to raise the general audience knowledge and awareness bar. In addition news organizations pursued a pro-active EU news editorial policy and conducted polls to assess which topics their audience considers of particular importance in relation to the EU (De Vreese 2003). This points out that while the perceived problem may be shared, the media organizations' strategies for dealing with it are very different.

## **7 COMMUNICATING EUROPE: CURRENT POLICY INITIATIVES**

The notion that the legitimacy of continued European integration hinges upon public support is not exactly new, but it is only in recent years that the importance of communication and interaction with citizens has become part of the agenda. So what's on the agenda? The most comprehensive initiatives ever to put 'communication' on the agenda stem from Commissioner Wallström's Cabinet that has been in charge of Plan D (for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate) and of the White Paper for a European Communication Policy.

The self-defined strategic principles underlying the initiatives are 1) listening to citizens (taking their views and concerns into account), 2) communicating how EU policies affect citizens' everyday lives, and 3) connecting with citizens by 'going local' and addressing citizens in their national and local settings. While these principles may appear somewhat trivial, they do in fact represent and embody a real change of taking 'communication seriously' within the EU institutions. As Meyer (1999) noted there was – prior to the mid 1990s – virtually no interest in or awareness of media coverage of European politics from the side of EU institutions. In that sense, the Wallström Cabinet should be applauded for putting it on the agenda with considerable effort.

Some reflections on the ongoing initiatives:

- 1) Late yes, too late? The initiatives seem a decade late. This however cannot be blamed on the initiators who were just assigned this portfolio a few years ago. The observation that the improved awareness is long overdue raises the question if it is too late? The crucial thing seems to be not to treat communication initiatives as separate from 'regular' policy work. The communicative aspects of any proposal should be considered. Communication in itself is neither sufficient nor interesting.
- 2) Dual strategies. A distinction should be made between short-term and long-term goals. While educational programs etc may be excellent to achieve certain things, these are likely to be long-term. Short-term goals should be aimed at raising the visibility of Europe in debates, however not just in debates about European issues, but also in national policy discussions that have an international (often European) perspective.
- 3) End goals. The final goal of increased communication efforts should not be to make citizens love the EU. The aim must be to equip them with sufficient knowledge and

awareness to appreciate the role of Europe in global and regional developments and to have sufficient considerations available to form a (quasi-)informed opinion.

- 4) **European public sphere.** The communication efforts must discard the notion of a monolithic pan-European public sphere. Citizens in Europe prefer national (news) media and efforts should not be geared at pan-European initiatives (unless seen as marginal, complementary tools for feeding into national public spheres).
- 5) **Knowing.** Too many discussions about Europe, media and public opinion are based on assumptions. There is a genuine lack of knowledge about differences in how they media treat European issues and how this affects public debates and public opinion. The White Paper's reference to a Media and Public Opinion Monitor should be taken seriously to move this debate further.

## **8 NEXT: MAKING COMMUNICATION A CENTRAL COMPONENT OF EMBEDDING EUROPE.**

This section provides, in the light of the previous, a number of suggestions for making communication a central component of future strategies. The recommendations relate to institutional issues (political and media institutions), understanding of journalism and news framing, and about conceptualizing goals to be reached with an embedded communications and media strategy.

Taking off from the perspective that communication and interaction is crucial for public understanding and potentially support of European issues (which in turns creates political legitimacy), a number of observations can be made. Several observations apply in general, some are specific to the Dutch situation post-2005 where a Euro-debate is emerging, along with Euroskepticism, after decades of silent consensus.

1. **Institutions.** European issues are not well embedded in national political structures. This in effect implies that news about Europe is often neglected, in lieu of perceived relevance for the nation and the local context. A number of EU countries have active and important Parliamentary European Affairs Committees (EAC) (including for example Denmark). This committee has high profile members, discuss issue elaborately ahead of e.g. Council meetings, have agenda-setting authority and can initiate debates and highlight diverging policy preferences. The Dutch EAC at present does not serve such a function. An active, high-profiled, well embedded EAC puts 'Europe' effectively on the national Parliamentarian agenda. This raises the profile and salience of issues discussed and thus 'improves' the news value. It provides journalists and editors with a 'news momentum' which is often lacking in the EU decision making procedure. Finally, it puts an issue on the (news) agenda prior to decisions being taken so that debates are not carried out post-hoc.
2. **Europe needs faces.** The EU (and national-level bodies of governance that relate to EU issues) need high profiled, professional, and charismatic speakers. Some of these are already available: Commissioners and a few MEPs. However also individuals at the national level need to possess these qualities.
3. **Understanding journalism.** As discussed previously 'Europe' for a long time was either unaware of or uncaring about public opinion, public debate and the role played by media and journalists. To embed 'Europe' in national debates a baseline understanding of journalism is required. Journalists make choices. Not only about

which issues to cover, but also about how to cover them. And journalism handbooks and academic literature all emphasize the omnipresence of *conflict* in news. If an issue is presented as consensual (as European was typically done in the Netherlands) there is essentially nothing to report about. The process of European integration has political implications. These should be highlighted and the issues politicized. Only if there is a difference of opinions about the best trajectory to pursue there is news. Related to this is the need for 'redefining' what EU news is about. News about Europe is not only news from Brussels. A news story about policy discussions regarding common rules on asylum seekers need not be told by a stand-up reporter in front of a Brussels building, but can more effectively be told from a small village on the East coast of Italy or from one of the Canary islands where boats arrive and the *implications* of policies are tangible. This is an important perspective for both journalists and editors, but it is of equal importance for policy makers and politicians.

4. Different media, different goals. Thinking about 'the media' and European integration is flawed. The FT and NRC reach different citizens than SBS6's Hart van Nederland. In thinking strategically about how to embed EU debates in the media, it is therefore important to pursue differential goals through different media. The internet is a wonderful forum for those who opt to search for information. In addition, given the absence of space and time constraints, the net can provide a place for documentation and depth information which can contribute to the accessibility and transparency of any institution. The national television news shows reach a large (though decreasing) audience, but constitute a key forum to flag and highlight EU issues. The national press, in particular the broadsheets, provide more information than the television news shows. This has implications for preparing statements and considering how to affect the agenda and how to define and frame issues on the agenda.
5. Different people, different effects. The need for information varies across different segments of citizens. This is also pertinent to consider. Different age cohorts have very different notions of the EU and European integration and the reasons for this project. Similarly immigrants to EU countries do not necessarily share common points of reference for thinking about the EU and their primary information sources do not always include mainstream media outlets in their 'new' home countries. It is consequently important to contextualize information about the EU. Very concretely, research has shown that adding one-two sentences about the historical reasons and developments of the EU to a newspaper article positively affects the support for integration and increases the legitimacy of the project (Boomgaarden & De Vreese 2003).

6. It's a chance. Increased communicative efforts come at a risk. As argued above, the end goal is not to make citizens love the EU, but to equip them with sufficient information and cues to take a stance. However, we should take into account that citizens dislike being patronized by silly information campaigns and that even though the increased efforts result in a more viable public discussion, we might find as a consequence that euroskepticism increases. The more some people hear about 'Europe' the more they dislike it (De Vreese 2006b). Current research does not allow for making clear predictions about who is more or less likely to be affected negatively by additional information, but there is no longer a clear-cut relationship between higher knowledge levels about the EU and support for integration (as suggested by Inglehart (1970) and refuted by e.g., Gabel (1998)). However, this chance has to be taken and it is a political challenge to argue the pro's and con's. Not meeting the challenge is not a viable strategy. The days when 'no news was good news' are over. As for a counter argument, it is possible to advocate the advantages of *not* making efforts to increase news coverage and communication related to European affairs. However, at the current stage of development of the EU where public support (at times needed in direct forms during referendums) is a necessity, no communicative efforts are likely to contribute to increases in alienation, increases in elite-citizen gaps, erosion of the legitimacy of the process and to creating a political space for populist politicians to tap on to. A non-proactive approach gives away the agenda-setting power (to put European issues on the agenda) and (perhaps more importantly) the framing power (defining what European issues are about) to voices that often represent minority standpoints, on the fringes of the political spectrum.
7. Politics and the media: Who is responsible? On the one hand European politics needs committed and responsible politicians. It should not be a stage for national politicians to take credit (when they believe they have performed well) and give blame (when they have performed less well and need a scapegoat). If European issues are treated as political second-rate issues the result will be third-rate media coverage and no public debate. On the other hand, a successful public debate (which is a potentially different thing from EU support) requires committed, trained editors and journalists who can 'think outside' the standard editorial toolbox and priorities and see (and be made to see) the importance of European integration for an increasing number of aspects of life.



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