

Images beyond war and terrorism

Why Israel's tourism sector may be seeing the end of the tunnel

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The Israeli tourism industry has reasons for hope: In 2004 and especially in the first quarter of 2005, the number of tourists to Israel rose significantly. In particular German visitors came to Israel more often. The **Media Tenor** analysis of coverage on the Middle East illustrates an important factor in this development: German prime time television news provide a large part of the information and images that help people to decide in favor of or against a tourist destination – with drastic consequences for the countries concerned.

Graph 1 shows the relationship between the news selection of German television journalists and the number of German visitors to Israel: In the years 1999 and 2000, crisis coverage on Israel was a share of less than 20% to all reports. The number of German tourists in those years was the highest in the entire period of analysis. By the year 2002, however, the importance of crisis coverage in German television news quadrupled to a share of over 80%. In turn the tourist numbers dropped to a quarter of what they were in 1999 and 2000.

Through October 2005, the share of news on assassinations, military actions and conflicts continued to go down compared to the previous year, and the Israeli tourism ministry was able to

announce yet another rise in tourism numbers – especially from Germany. Still, **graph 2** gives an impression of how unstable this development is: After a suicide attack on October 27th, the attack and the Israeli reaction became the most important element of the media image of the region in that month.

The long-term trend shows that television journalists reflected the advances in the peace process through their news selection: Since September 2004, the coverage on attacks or Israeli military actions was declining. Instead, the focus was more and more on domestic policy issues.

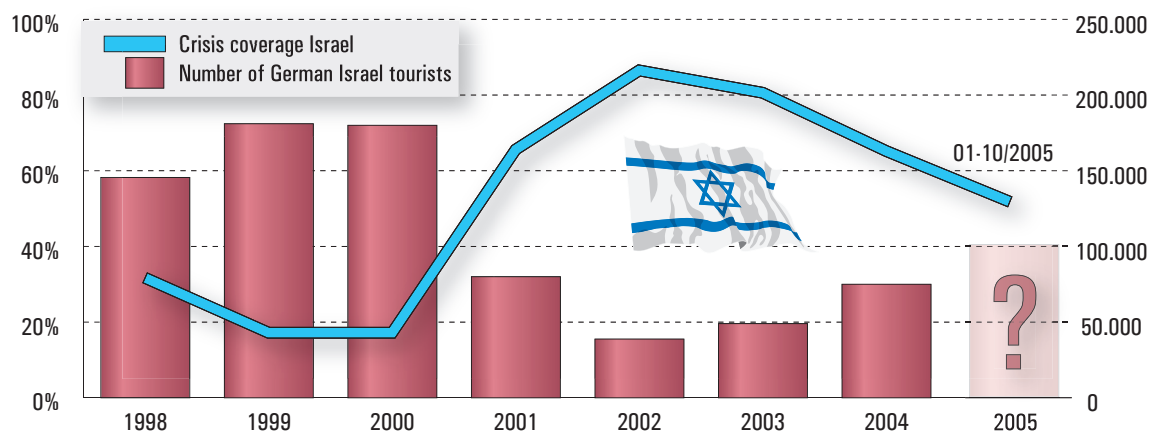
There are no winners

In March 2004, the Israeli ambassador to Germany, Shimon Stein, called the media image of the situation in Israel “distorted”, referring to the disproportionately high share of crisis coverage – a finding that the **Media Tenor** data confirm. Pro-Israeli media critics claim that the portrayal of Israelis and Palestinians in this conflict was also “distorted”. **Media Tenor** analyses have partly confirmed this (see **Media Tenor** German edition No. 147), as far as news selection is concerned. Israeli military and retaliatory actions, for example, are covered on a larger scale than suicide attacks, resulting in a reporting that confuses cause and effect. Since the end of 2004, following the decline in overall crisis coverage in the region, the relationship has evened out, however. Looking at the assessments of Israeli and Palestinian protagonists in **graphs**

Agenda setting effect: crisis coverage and tourism to Israel 1998-2005

“The media-made, distorted image on Israel sometimes creates the impression that the whole country is under an immediate threat of terrorism.”

*Shimon Stein,
 Israeli ambassador
 to Germany*

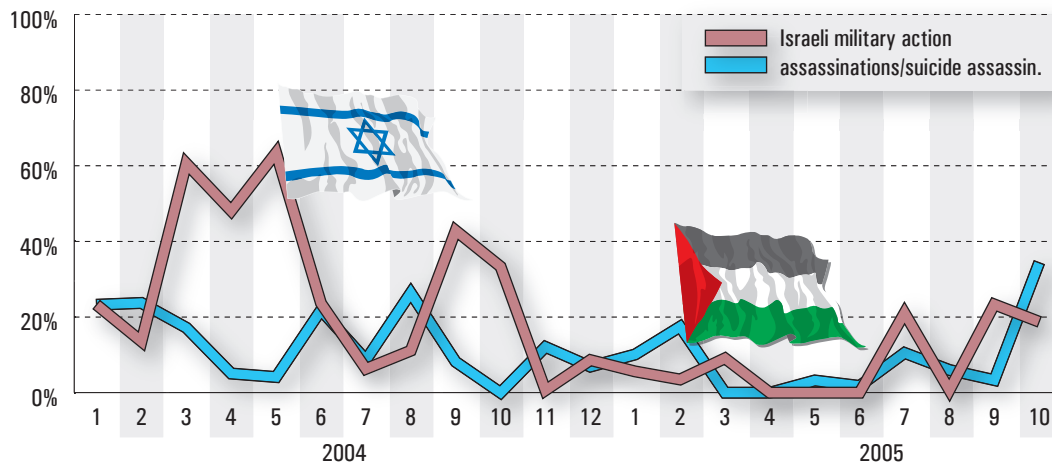


Share of crisis coverage on Israel (in percentage); number of German tourists to Israel

Source: Media Tenor/Central Bureau of Statistics, Israel
 01/01/1998 – 10/31/2005

Basis: all news stories which are mainly referring to Israel/Palestine,
 in 7 German TV news shows

Israeli military actions and Palestinian attacks in the coverage



Share (in percentage); 100 percent: all the topics of news stories on Israel and Palestine

Source: Media Tenor
01/01/2004 – 10/31/2005

Basis: Basis: 1,727 news stories which are mainly referring to Israel/Palestine, in 7 German TV news shows

3 and 4 it becomes obvious that both sides of the Middle East conflict end up losing in the media: Suicide bombers shape the image of the Palestinians, and the image of Israeli protagonists is also predominantly negative. sm

Basis:

Media: ARD Tagesschau and Tagesthemen, ZDF Heute and Heute Journal, RTL Aktuell, Sat.1 News, ProSieben News-time

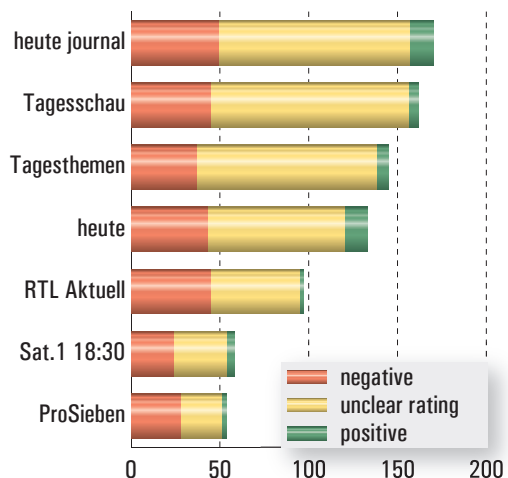
Time: 01/01/1998 – 10/31/2005

Analysis: All news stories, which are mainly referring to Israel and Palestine, in this media; assessment of main protagonists in this news stories

Other sources: Central Bureau of Statistics, Israel; Deutsche Rundschau, Interview with Shimon Stein, March 2004

Open question: How will the renewed intensification of the Middle East conflict in the last quarter of 2005 affect media coverage and subsequently tourism to Israel?

Presence and assessment of Israeli protagonists in TV news

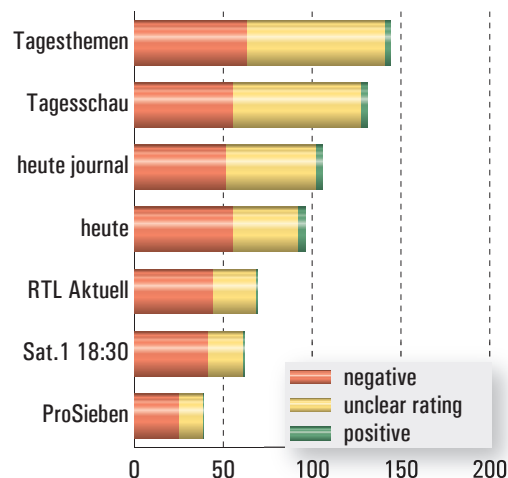


Assessment of the main protagonists in each news story

Source: Media Tenor
01/01/2004 – 10/31/2005

Basis: 1,727 news stories in 7 German TV news shows

Presence and assessment of Palestinian protagonists in TV news



Assessment of the main protagonists in each news story

Source: Media Tenor
01/01/2004 – 10/31/2005

Basis: 1,727 news stories in 7 German TV news shows