

Business as usual

The media image of the EU in Germany and abroad, 2003 – 2005

Research Links:
http://ue.eu.int/cms3_fo/index.HTM
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The spectacular rejection of the draft constitution for the EU by the people in the Netherlands and in France could have triggered a debate about the direction Europe should head for in the future. But just to the contrary, the visibility of European politics has decreased notably in the summer of 2005 – and not only in pre-election Germany. With little public discussion and business as usual it may take a rather long time for European politics to re-ignite the flame of Europhilia.

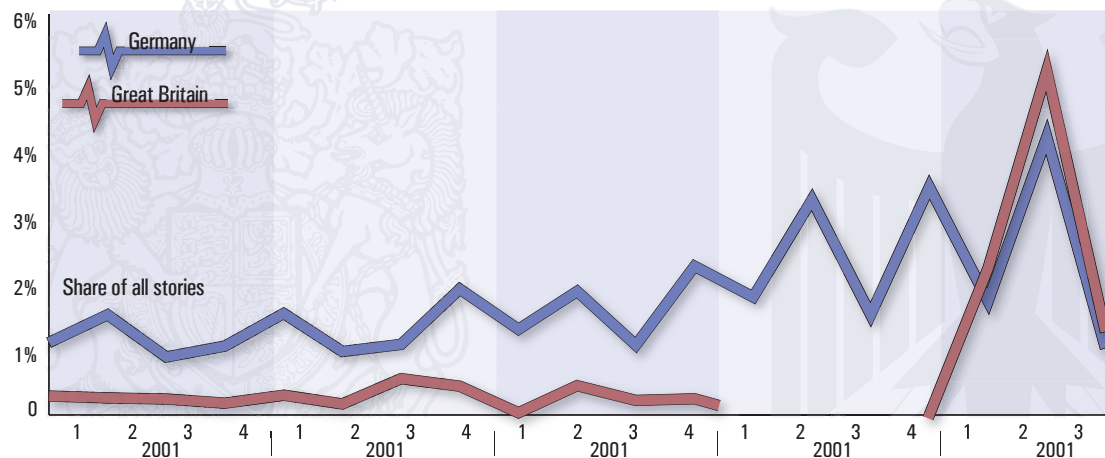
Soon after the Eastern enlargement of the European Union, things started to come apart visibly. The mixed participation in the 2004 elections to the European Parliament indicated an growing rift between official enthusiasm for the “European project” on one hand and the media image of the EU and public opinion on the other hand. In this

coverage of European affairs reached a new apex in June 2005, with about 6% of all news stories devoted to European politics (chart 2). TV coverage in Germany even surpassed the levels of the 2004 reporting about the EU enlargement and the clash between Commission and Parliament (chart 3): In June 2005 about 9% of all news stories in 7 TV news shows mentioned the EU for at least 5 seconds. In comparison, coverage in 4 national newspapers remained below the peak of April 2004, but exceeded TV reporting considerably.

Even internationally the issue of the European Constitution generated some awareness, for instance in Arab satellite TV, whereas reporting in US network news and in South African TV only showed a very small impact of the miscarriage. The pre-occupation of American media with the ongoing war in Iraq probably accounts to a certain extent for this indifference. Nevertheless the role of the EU in international politics and global trade seems to remain an elite topic, especially in the American public, but in Europe too.

1 Share of stories about EU politics, UK and German TV, 2003 – 2005

Negative news gets awareness in Great Britain too



Source: Media Tenor 01/01/2003 – 09/30/2005 Basis: 249,876 stories in 7 Ger. TV news, 76,250 in 4 UK news (no UK data 01 – 12/2004)

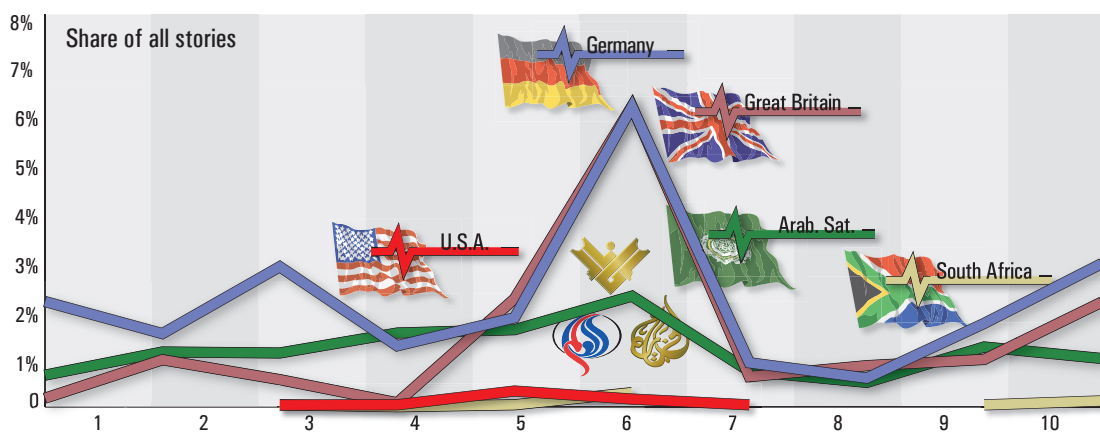
issue a broad public debate about the draft constitution for Europe prepared by the European Convention might have been a good chance to revive the discussion about the common ground in European politics. At least in German TV news European affairs loomed larger since the the second quarter of 2004 (chart 1) – but after the high-profile confrontation between the European Commission and the Parliament in Strasbourg TV in October 2004 coverage of European politics decreased notably, not only on TV (chart 3).

Controversy evolves as one of the strongest news values, at least in EU coverage: With the approach of the French referendum on the constitution, TV

Shell Shock

One indicator of this is the virtual breakdown of the public discussion about European affairs in the summer. After the disappointing results of the referenda in the Netherlands and in France TV coverage of EU politics in Germany and the UK dropped to a level below a share of 1% of all news stories. This standstill of discussion reflects rather unfavourably on leading European politicians, who are probably inclined to sit out the crisis. Characteristically the impact of controversy on EU coverage is evident in this drop too: The toning down of the impact of the referenda on the implementation of the Constitution and the long silence after the French “Non”

2 Visibility of the EU in international TV news: Protagonists, 01 – 10/2005



Quelle: Media Tenor

01/01 – 10/31/2005

Basis: 155,889 reports in 26 German and international TV news shows

European protagonists receive more reporting on Arab TV than in the US

is reflected in the decrease of visibility, even allowing for the impact of election reporting in Germany. The focus on EU topics – the share of news stories dealing primarily with EU affairs – went down even more than the share of news stories making reference to the EU. Although one should allow for a certain period of re-orientation in the political elite both on national and on European level, this silence might not be very helpful in the long run, because it is surely not sufficient to revive public support for the process of European unification.

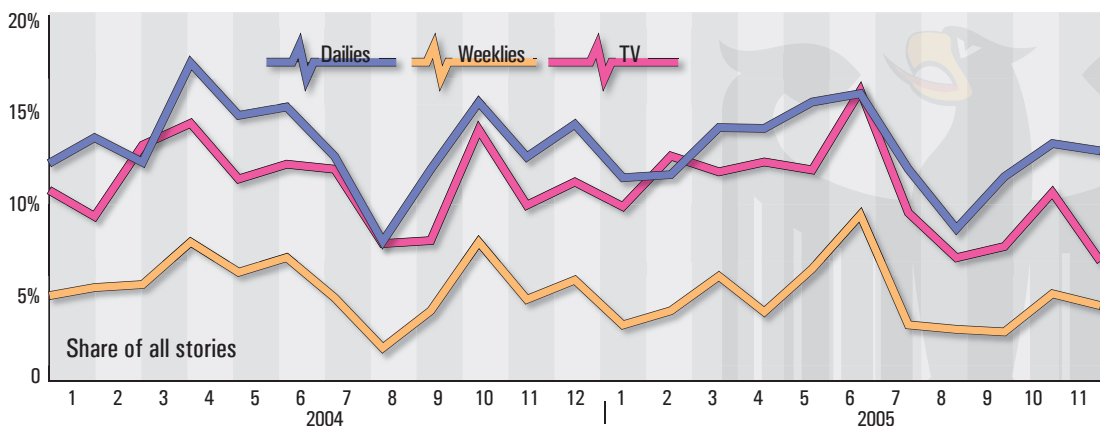
Criticism continues

Although EU affairs ran low on the media agenda in the later Summer of 2005, there was no improvement in the tone of coverage towards the EU and its institutions. Since September 2004 coverage in the leading German dailies has been critical, and **Focus** and **Spiegel** reported negatively about the EU throughout the last 23 months (chart 4). Even the

euphoria about EU enlargement did not rub off on the two opinion-leading weeklies. But their evaluation of the EU and its institutions deteriorated notably during the run-up to the referendum debacle. In March and April 2005, the average rating of the EU dropped below -0.3 on the scale ranging from -1 to +1; a value not even surpassed, when the expected negative outcome of the referenda in France and the Netherlands materialized.

On the other hand, TV news painted a balanced picture of European protagonists during the winter months from November 2004 to February 2005. This is rather remarkable in view of the generally negative attitude towards political protagonists on TV, which is partly due to the negative tone of quotes from the political actors themselves. Generally speaking the EU enjoyed a short honeymoon after the confirmation of the Barroso Commission, before anticipation of the negative referendum outcomes took hold. When the Dutch and French voters rejected the Constitu-

3 Share of all stories that refer to the EU for at least 5 lines/seconds, 2004/05



Quelle: Media Tenor

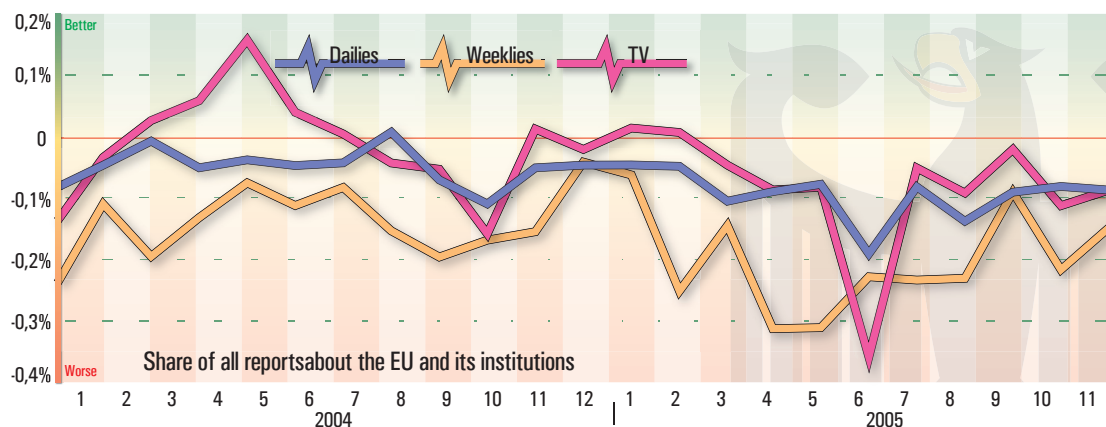
01/01/2000 – 11/20/2005

Basis: 301,271 stories in 4 German dailies, 7 TV programmes and 2 weeklies

Referendum debacle accounts for all-time high on German TV news

Focus and Spiegel lead the critics throughout the years

4 Average rating of EU and EU institutions, 01/2004 – 11/2005



Quelle: Media Tenor 01/01/2004 – 11/30/2005 Basis: 49,806 reports (at least 5 lines/seconds) about the EU/EU institutions in 13 German media

tion, evaluation on German TV dropped to the lowest point since January 2003 (cf. MEDIA TENOR No. 149). Whereas the evaluation of the EU in the leading dailies and on TV news recovered rather soon, overall rating of the European Union stayed clearly negative until the end of November in the leading German media. The EU thus got the worst from both worlds, a media image combining low visibility with negative tone. Although journalists seem to be rather supportive of the EU in their opinion peaces (cf. Pfetsch 2005), the overall media image of European protagonists did not profit from this positive attitude.

Elections in 2004 did the share of media awareness of the legislative body exceed the mark of 10%. On the other hand about 30% of the EU coverage in German media focused on the European Commission and another 10.7% on the European Council including its Presidency. The European Council loomed larger in the media than the Parliament in every single month since January 2004 (chart 5). Attention to the proceedings of the Parliament was highest on TV news with a share of 14.4%, reflecting the event-driven news selection typical of this medium.

Hesitant Parliamentarisation

The biggest deficit in EU coverage stems from the lack of truly European parties and the ensuing deficit of communicative power for the European legislative. Only 5.3% of all descriptions dealt with the EU Parliament and solely in the context of the European

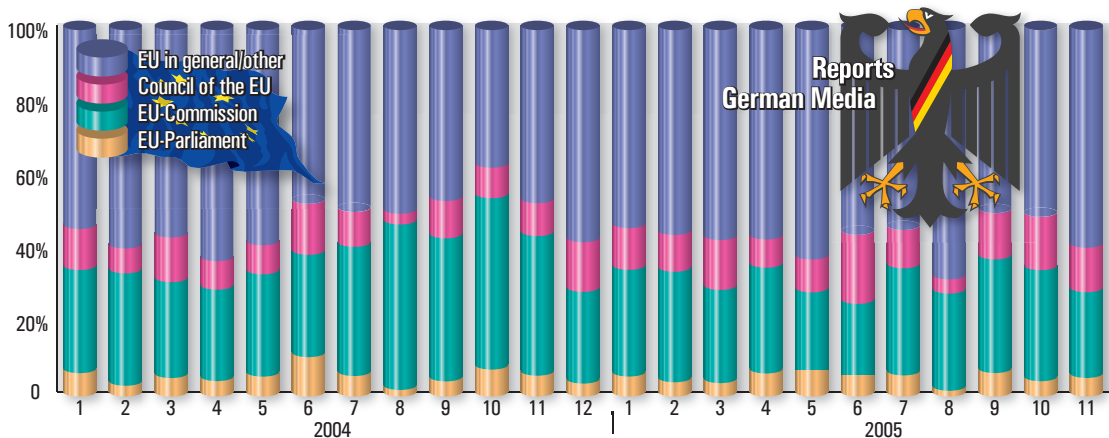
Image gains for Strasburg

From January 2004 to November 2005 the evaluation of European actors was notably less polarized than the tone towards the EU at large. This might be indicative of the continuing positive disposition of journalists and national politicians towards the European idea, which increasingly conflicted with reality

Pfetsch, Barbara: National Media in Europeanized Public Sphere: The Openness and Support of the Press for European Integration, Paper presented at the State of the Art Workshop, organized by the Network of Excellence CONNEX "A European Public Sphere: How much of it do we have and how much do we need?", Amsterdam, December 9-10, 2005

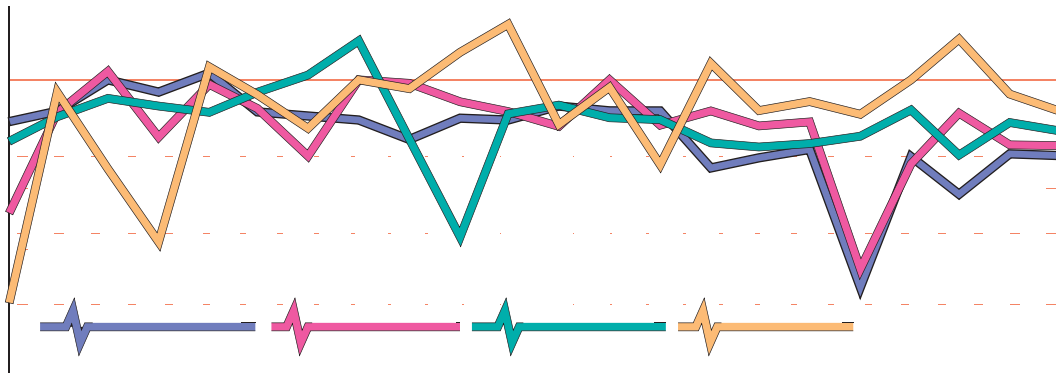
The Parliament could not extend its visibility in a sustainable way

5 Media visibility of EU institutions, 01/2004 – 11/2005



Average rating (-1/+1)

Quelle: Media Tenor 01/01/2000 – 11/30/2005 Basis: 49,806 reports (at least 5 lines/seconds) about the EU/EU institutions in 13 German media



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