



## Framing Politics at the Launch of the Euro: A Cross-National Comparative Study of Frames in the News

CLAES H. DE VREESE, JOCHEN PETER,  
and HOLLI A. SEMETKO

*This study of the main evening television news programs in four European countries focuses on the framing of news surrounding a major European event, the January 1, 1999, introduction of the common European currency, the euro. We investigated the visibility of political and economic news in general and of the launch of the euro in particular. We found variations across countries in the emphasis on political and economic news, with the proportion of the newscast normally devoted to these subjects ranging from 45% to 60%. Journalists in all countries were more likely to emphasize conflict (rather than economic consequences) in framing general political and economic news. In the coverage of the launch of the euro, there was a greater emphasis on framing the news in terms of economic consequences. The findings are discussed in terms of influences on framing practices internal and external to journalism and the value of the cross-national comparative approach.*

**Keywords** comparative, conflict, content analysis, economy, euro, European integration, framing, news

The expanding body of empirical research on framing can be divided into studies examining *media* frames and studies focusing on *audience* frames (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Entman, 1993; Scheufele, 1999). Research on media frames has focused primarily on how issues are presented and covered in the news (e.g., Entman, 1991; Norris, 1995; Patterson, 1993; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). Research on audience frames has primarily been concerned with how individuals perceive, organize, and interpret events and issues (e.g., Domke, McCoy, & Torres, 1999; Domke, Shah, & Wackman, 1998; Nelson, Clawson, & Oxley, 1997; Price, Tewksbury, & Powers, 1997; Rhee, 1997; Valkenburg, Semetko, & de Vreese, 1999). Few studies have been specifically designed to examine

Claes H. de Vreese and Jochen Peter are doctoral candidates and Research Associates, and Holli A. Semetko is Professor and Chair of Audience and Public Opinion Research, all at the Amsterdam School of Communications Research, University of Amsterdam. An earlier version of this article was presented at the meeting of the International Communication Association, Acapulco, Mexico, June 1–5, 2000. The authors thank the Danish Research Academy (*Forskerakademiet*) and the Amsterdam School of Communications Research for funding this study.

Address correspondence to Claes H. de Vreese, Amsterdam School of Communications Research, University of Amsterdam, Oude Hoogstraat 24, 1012 CE Amsterdam, the Netherlands. E-mail: devreese@pscw.uva.nl

both frames in the news and the effects of these frames on audiences (e.g., Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Iyengar, 1991; Neuman, Just, & Crigler, 1992).

An indispensable step toward testing the effects of frames in the news is to learn more about the way events and issues are framed in the news, and especially about whether there are common patterns in how the news is framed. Along these lines, Cappella and Jamieson (1997) argue that to enhance our understanding of effects of frames, frames must have identifiable conceptual and linguistic characteristics and be commonly observed in journalistic practice. Consequently, content analyses of news may be considered an important prerequisite for the study of effects of news frames. It makes little sense to investigate the complex processes of news reception and framing effects with frames that are “infrequent, insufficiently described or not a consistent component of the news environment” (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997, p. 49).

Previous investigations of frames in the news have a strong ethnocentric bias, both in terms of the issues examined and the geographical focus of the studies. In general, research on the contents and effects of the news media is often based on national studies, suffering somewhat from “naive universalism” by offering general theoretical propositions based on single-country data (Gurevitch & Blumler, 1990, p. 308). Although comparative research has gained in frequency and scope over the past decades, it still represents communication science’s “extendable frontier” (Blumler, McLeod, & Rosengren, 1992, p. 3). Whenever there is danger of premature generalizations or of a falsely assumed universality of a concept, comparative analysis is warranted (Dogan & Pelassy, 1984; Swanson, 2000).

Studies of frames in the news have often been carried out in relation to a specific event (e.g., Entman, 1991; Mendelsohn, 1993) or a specific issue (e.g., Jaspersen, Shah, Watts, Faber, & Fan, 1998; Nelson et al., 1997; Norris, 1995). Some have attempted to compare the framing of specific events or issues across different media and news outlets (Martin & Oshagan, 1997; Neuman et al., 1992; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000; Simon & Xenos, 2000). Framing has been studied in a temporally comparative fashion, that is, how frames emerge and develop over time (e.g., Patterson, 1993), and in an issue-comparative perspective, that is, comparisons of the framing of different issues (e.g., Neuman et al., 1992). However, little attention has been paid to framing in a cross-nationally comparative fashion.

## Frames in Political and Economic News

The central dimensions of a frame seem to be the selection, organization, and emphasis of certain aspects of reality, to the exclusion of others. Studies of frames in the news have defined frames as “patterns . . . of presentation, of selection, emphasis, and exclusion” (Gitlin, 1980, p. 7). Frames are an “organizing idea” (Severin & Tankard, 1997) or an “organizing theme” (Gamson, 1992), and they “define problems” (Entman, 1993). We may distinguish between *issue-specific news frames* and *generic news frames* (de Vreese, 1999). Issue-specific frames pertain to specific topics or news events, whereas generic frames are broadly applicable to a range of different news topics, some even over time and, potentially, in different cultural contexts. An issue-specific approach to the study of news frames allows for investigation of the framing of particular events in great specificity and detail. It may capture specific aspects of selection, organization, and elaboration that are present in news coverage and pertain specifically to a well-defined issue. However, the high degree of detail and issue-sensitivity renders issue specific analyses difficult to generalize, compare, and use as a base for general

hypothesis and theory building. In contrast, generic frames offer less possibility for examining the framing of an event in fine detail, but they allow comparisons between frames, topics, and, potentially, framing practices in different countries.

### *Issue-Specific Frames in the News*

Studies examining issue-specific frames include, as examples, an analysis of the coverage of the U.S. national budget deficits (Jasperson et al., 1998), an investigation of U.S. press and television network coverage of two international airline accidents (Entman, 1991), and news framing of the Gulf War (Reese & Buckalew, 1995). Issue-specific news frames have also been investigated in the realm of electoral processes. For example, one study examined frames in Canadian television news coverage of the 1988 national Canadian election (Mendelsohn, 1993), while in a European context, a content analytic study of news coverage in the run-up to an urban planning referendum in the Netherlands identified two issue-specific frames in the news (Neijens, 1999).

### *Generic Frames in the News*

One well-known study of generic news frames is Iyengar's (1991) work offering a distinction between "episodic" and "thematic" frames. The episodic frame focuses on particular cases or discrete episodes, whereas the thematic frame "places political issues and events in some general context" (Iyengar, 1991, p. 2). These frames are examples of a more generic conceptualization of a kind of news frame that has the capacity to transcend issue, time, and space limits. As another example of generic framing, in their analysis of political and especially campaign news, Cappella and Jamieson (1996, 1997) identified "strategically" framed news. The strategy frame emphasizes the game aspects of politics and focuses on winning and losing. The authors found that strategically framed news dominates over in-depth, information rich, "issue-framed" news in U.S. news coverage of politics. Similarly, in a study of frames used in different news outlets, Neuman et al. (1992, pp. 74–75) identified "human impact," "powerlessness," "economics," "moral values," and "conflict" as the most common generic frames used by both the media and the audience.

U.S. research has suggested that news about politics and the economy is often framed in terms of *conflict* or in terms of the *economic consequences* of events, issues, and policies (see Gamson, 1992; Graber, 1988; McManus, 1994; Neuman et al., 1992). In a content analysis of more than 4,000 news stories from Dutch national television news, the conflict and economic consequences frames were found to be among the most common frames used in the presentation of political stories (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). Because previous research has established the predominance of the conflict and economic consequences frames in different national contexts, we focus our cross-national comparative study on these two frames.

The conflict frame, as discussed by several researchers, refers to disagreement between individuals, institutions, or countries and emphasizes the points of divergence between conflicting parties (e.g., Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Patterson, 1993). This way of framing events and issues is consistent with research on more general news values, in which the presence of conflict is consistently listed as one of the most important criteria for identifying which events will become news stories (e.g., Eilders, 1997; McManus, 1994; Staab, 1990).

The economic consequences frame reflects a "preoccupation with the 'bottom line,'

profit and loss” (Neuman et al., 1992, p. 63). It has been suggested that news producers often use the consequence frame to make an issue relevant to their audience (Gamson, 1992). “Consequence” and the wide impact of an event have also been listed as central news values for selecting events to become news stories (Graber, 1993; McManus, 1994).

## **Framing Europe**

Given the diversity of political and economic news that we might expect cross nationally, we focused our analysis on a major European event, the January 1, 1999, first-step introduction of the new common European currency, the euro. As it could be anticipated that the introduction of the euro would play an important role in all European countries and receive considerable media attention, this event was an ideal opportunity to investigate framing in a cross-national setting. Using a common event to investigate frames in the news has two advantages. We may obtain better measures for cross-national comparisons of framing of a common European event than would be possible with general political and economic coverage about unrelated domestic events. In addition, the potential occurrence of a generic frame with respect to the coverage of a specific event in the news of multiple countries further substantiates the frame as generic. Beyond this theoretical rationale for focusing on a specific event, there were also more practical reasons for doing so.

Advanced monetary and political European integration represents one of the largest changes in the economic and political scene in Europe since the end of World War II with far reaching consequences for Europe’s role in the world. There is, however, relatively little research about how the European Union is covered in the news (Semetko, de Vreese, & Peter, 2000). This is true even though the media are consistently mentioned by European citizens as their most important sources of information about the European Union (Eurobarometer, 2000). The few studies dealing with the media coverage of the European Union in a cross-national comparative perspective are limited to media monitoring projects. These projects provide only simple measures for the visibility, topical focus, and positive/negative slant of “European” news (e.g., European Commission, 1997; Fundesco, 1997; Norris, 2000).

## **Research Questions**

The goal of this study was to conduct a cross-national, comparative analysis of frames in television news. We examined the topics in the news as well as the extent to which conflict and economic consequences emerged in the framing of political and economic news in general and the framing of the introduction of the euro in particular.

We chose four member states of the European Union (EU) that differ in terms of size and support for the euro/European Monetary Union (EMU). We included two small European countries, one that traditionally favors European integration and takes part in the EMU (the Netherlands) and another that is rather euro-skeptic and not part of the EMU or euro zone (Denmark). Of the two large EU countries in our sample, Germany is generally perceived as pro-EU and is participating in the EMU. Britain is rather euro-skeptic and did not participate in the EMU from January 1, 1999. At the time of the launch of the euro in January 1999, both the Danish and the British Labour governments’ official line was to hold a referendum before the following general election to determine the country’s position on the euro. In both countries, there was considerable

political tension and public disagreement over the question of joining the EMU. There was disagreement between members of the government and the opposition as well as within the largest political parties, and there was also a lack of consensus in public opinion.

Given the comparative approach, all of our research questions will be addressed in a cross-national perspective. First, to gain an initial idea about the characteristics of the news in the four countries and to assess the proportion of news that concerned the introduction of the euro and political/economic news in general, our first set of research questions was:

*RQ1a*: How visible is political and economic news in comparison with other topics in the news?

*RQ1b*: How visible is news about the introduction of the euro?

Second, we investigated the extent to which journalists emphasized conflict and economic consequences in reporting political/economic news and news about the launch of the euro. Therefore, our second set of research questions was:

*RQ2a*: To what extent do journalists frame political and economic news, and in particular news about the introduction of the euro, in terms of conflict?

*RQ2b*: To what extent do journalists frame political and economic news, and in particular news about the introduction of the euro, in terms of economic consequences?

In addition to assessing the presence of particular frames, we also took a closer look at the content of the news about the introduction of the euro. Our goals were to gain more insight into the national news coverage and acknowledge the importance of integrating the journalistic production process as well as the political, economic, and social context of news frames (see Gamson, 1992; Neuman et al., 1992). Such a perspective enriches the understanding of news frames and acknowledges that frames are the result of interactions between journalists, sources, and the broader political and media system context (Pan & Kosicki, 1993).

## **Method**

### *Media Sample*

For most Europeans, television news is the most common source of information about developments in Europe (Eurobarometer, 2000). For each of the four countries, therefore, we analyzed the main evening news programs on the two most widely viewed channels. In each case, this meant the news programs of one public broadcasting and one private network.<sup>1</sup>

### *Period of Study*

A total of 10 days was included in the content analysis. This sample was divided into two five-day periods, one period around the introduction of the euro (from December 31, 1998, to January 4, 1999)<sup>2</sup> and a constructed routine period consisting of five weekdays in January 1999.<sup>3</sup> The distinction between an “event period” and a “routine period” was applied in order to compare the visibility of different topics in the news between the two periods (Research Questions 1a and 1b). The distinction is also an acknowledgment of the extraordinary nature of the period around the introduction of the euro that included only one regular weekday.

### **Coding Procedure**

An international team of coders was centrally trained and supervised at the University of Amsterdam. The unit of analysis and of coding was the news story. A news story was defined as a semantic entity with at least one topic delimited from another story by a change of topic. All stories in each news bulletin were coded. After repeated pretesting of the codebook, 213 English (BBC  $n = 110$ , ITN  $n = 103$ ), 209 Danish (TV Avisen  $n = 104$ , TV2  $n = 105$ ), 308 German (ARD  $n = 135$ , RTL  $n = 173$ ), and 238 Dutch (NOS  $n = 105$ , RTL4  $n = 133$ ) news stories were coded. Questions were resolved at regular meetings and in the researchers' supervision of individual coders. Intercoder reliability tests were conducted for the measures listed below on a randomly selected subsample of 10% of the news stories from the four countries ( $n = 97$ ), and the relevant figures are reported subsequently.

### **Measures**

*Topic.* In order to study the visibility of political and economic topics in European news in comparison with other news, all news stories were coded using a detailed topic list with nine main categories and several pertinent subcategories.<sup>4</sup> To distinguish between genuinely political/economic and nonpolitical/noneconomic stories, we included a screening question about the political/economic nature of the topic that led the coders to the appropriate categories. A story about spending cuts in the health sector, for example, may be a candidate for both the categories of "politics" (in terms of social politics) and "social welfare." The additional screening question ensured that all political or economic stories were coded in the categories "introduction of the euro," "politics," and "economy" and that the remaining categories contained exclusively nonpolitical/noneconomic stories. The percentages of intercoder agreement for the topic measures were at least 95% for the British stories, 92% for the Danish stories, 82% for the Dutch stories, and 75% for the German stories.

To assess the relative visibility of the different topics, we measured the length in seconds of the news stories. This is a more accurate measure of the visibility of topics than the number of news stories because the different news programs are of varying lengths and some programs opted for only a few rather lengthy stories, whereas others opted for more and shorter stories.

*News Frames.* For operationalization of the conflict and the economic consequences frames, we drew largely on measures developed by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000). The conflict frame scale consisted of four items: (a) "Does the news story reflect disagreement between parties/individuals/groups/countries?" (b) "Does one party/individual/group/country reproach another?" (c) "Does the story refer to two sides or to more than two sides of the problem/issue" and (d) "Does the story emphasize the achievements and/or actions of an individual/party versus the achievements and/or actions of another individual/party?"<sup>5</sup> The economic consequences frame scale consisted of three items: (a) "Is there a mention of the costs/degree of expense involved?" (b) "Is there a reference to economic consequences of pursuing or *not* pursuing a course of action?" and (c) "Is there a mention of financial losses or gains now or in the future?"

All of the above questions had to be answered with yes (1) or no (0) and were applied to all stories except stories about "weather/sports" and "other topics." The percentage of agreement between coders for the conflict frame items ranged from 73% to 100% for the British news stories, from 92% to 100% for the Danish stories, from 85%

to 100% for the Dutch stories, and from 75% to 94% for the German stories. Agreement percentages between coders for the economic consequences frame items were between 89% and 100% for the British news, between 82% and 100% for the Danish news, between 88% and 92% for the Dutch news, and between 80% and 94% for the German news.

### **Data Analysis**

To examine how visible political and economic news was in relation to other news in Europe, we recoded the subcategories into the above mentioned main categories. The time spent on a particular topic in a country was computed as a percentage of the total time devoted to all stories in the newscasts because absolute amounts of time varied, reflecting the different lengths of the different news programs.

For the frame-scaled items, we used Cronbach's alpha to assess the reliabilities. The alphas for the conflict frame were as follows: Britain,  $\alpha = .67$ ; Denmark,  $\alpha = .74$ ; Germany,  $\alpha = .70$ ; and the Netherlands,  $\alpha = .81$ . The alphas for the economic consequences frame were Britain,  $\alpha = .57$ ; Denmark,  $\alpha = .70$ ; Germany,  $\alpha = .77$ ; and the Netherlands,  $\alpha = .61$ . As we had included only three items and as item-total correlations were consistently positive, we considered the alpha for Britain acceptable for the purpose of our study.

For each of the two frames, multi-item scales were formed by adding the scores of each item and dividing the total by the number of relevant items. Thus, the values of each scale range from 0.00 (frame not present) to 1.00 (frame present). A high score on the conflict scale meant that the story was presented in a fashion that emphasized the disagreement between story actors and their reproaching one another. Typically, such a story referred to two or more sides of a problem and/or stressed the achievement of one story actor versus another. A high score on the economic consequences scale indicated presentation of a story in terms of expenses, financial gains and losses, and general economic consequences of an action. To determine whether the emphasis on these two frames differed between countries and political/economic stories and stories about the introduction of the euro, we compared means of the two scales.

### **Results**

Our first set of research questions concerned the visibility of political and economic news in relation to other news. The percentage of television news time in each country devoted to different topics during the routine news period and the period surrounding the launch of the euro (the event period) was compared. Table 1 shows that during the routine news period the percentage of news time spent on political and economic topics ranged from a low of 45% of the news in Germany to a high of 60% in the Netherlands, with Denmark (49%) and Britain (56%) in between. Apart from political and economic news, societal stories (such as stories about crime, trials, poverty, or sensational topics without political or economic implications) took up a considerable portion of time in the four countries. During the routine news period, this ranged from 17% in Germany to 29% in Denmark, with the Netherlands (18%) and Britain (23%) in between.<sup>6</sup>

During the event period in each country, which was an unusual time in the news because of the New Year celebrations, there was somewhat less political and economic coverage than during the routine period. During the event period, 38% of news in Germany and Denmark was devoted to political and economic topics, including the

**Table 1**  
Percentage of time devoted to different topics in German, British, Danish, and Dutch news

	Germany		Great Britain		Denmark		The Netherlands	
	Event: euro intro (n = 150)	Routine (n = 158)	Event: euro intro (n = 91)	Routine (n = 122)	Event: euro intro (n = 94)	Routine (n = 115)	Event: euro intro (n = 115)	Routine (n = 123)
Euro intro	18	1	20	1	26	5	23	2
Economy	3	13	3	5	2	10	5	10
Politics	17	31	31	51	10	34	23	48
Society	22	17	10	23	30	29	26	18
Social welfare/education, etc.	4	2	1	8	18	9	1	4
Agriculture/environment, etc.	3	4	1	2	6	3	2	1
Disasters	7	8	16	2	6	5	7	1
Sports/weather	23	23	17	8	3	6	13	13
Other	4	1			1		2	2
Total percentage	101	100	99	100	102	101	102	99
Total time (sec)	10,152	10,474	7,426	14,408	10,217	15,010	9,871	11,277

*Note.* Percentages do not sum to 100% due to rounding errors.

introduction of the euro, and this reached highs of 51% in the Netherlands and 54% in Britain. A considerable portion of the political and economic news during the event period was devoted to the introduction of the euro, ranging from about one fifth in Germany (18%) and Britain (20%) to about one fourth in Denmark (26%) and the Netherlands (23%). The coverage of the euro was entirely event driven and disappeared almost entirely in the immediate aftermath of the launch.

In sum, Table 1 shows that during the routine news period, there was a range of 45% to 60% of news devoted to political and economic topics, and this compared with 38% to 54% during the event period. The major political and economic event did not increase the overall amount of time devoted to political and economic news in any of the countries we studied, although we need to keep in mind that the event occurred during the politically quiet time of the New Year's weekend.

Our second set of research questions concerned the relative emphasis on conflict and economic consequences frames in political and economic stories and stories about the introduction of the euro. Table 2 shows the mean visibility of the frames in the four countries, distinguishing between all political/economic news stories and stories about the euro. Conflict was more prominent than economic consequences in political/economic news stories in all four countries (with the visibility of the frame ranging from  $M = .35$  in the Netherlands to  $M = .43$  in Denmark and Germany). When considering stories about the introduction of the euro, the reverse is the case: Conflict was almost always less important than economic consequences in these stories.

German and Danish television journalists put a stronger economic consequences spin on the coverage of all news than their British and Dutch counterparts. For example,

**Table 2**  
Presence of conflict and economic consequences frames  
in German, British, Danish, and Dutch news

	Conflict		Economic consequences	
	Political/ economic stories ( $n = 344$ )	Euro introduction stories ( $n = 66$ )	Political/ economic stories ( $n = 344$ )	Euro introduction stories ( $n = 66$ )
Germany	.43 (.32) ( $n = 96$ )	.17 (.17) ( $n = 18$ )	.21 (.33) ( $n = 96$ )	.56 (.34) ( $n = 18$ )
Great Britain	.42 (.30) ( $n = 85$ )	.19 (.29) ( $n = 13$ )	.09 (.22) ( $n = 85$ )	.15 (.22) ( $n = 13$ )
Denmark	.43 (.33) ( $n = 63$ )	.19 (.30) ( $n = 18$ )	.24 (.38) ( $n = 63$ )	.37 (.24) ( $n = 18$ )
The Netherlands	.35 (.33) ( $n = 100$ )	.10 (.29) ( $n = 17$ )	.17 (.24) ( $n = 100$ )	.20 (.30) ( $n = 17$ )

*Note.* Values are means; figures in parentheses indicate standard deviations and number of cases.

in Germany economic consequences were most visible in the stories about the introduction of the euro ( $M = .56$ ), and, although less evident in political/economic stories ( $M = .21$ ), they were nevertheless more visible than in Britain (where the comparable figures were  $M = .15$  for stories about the introduction of the euro and  $M = .09$  for political/economic stories).

In framing the introduction of the euro in terms of economic consequences, Germany and Denmark emphasized the implications of the launch for the domestic macroeconomy and for individual businesses. Danish TV-Avisen, for example, opened its bulletin on January 4, 1999, with a story about a company whose competitive position was allegedly threatened by the introduction of the euro, which would give international competitors an advantage in terms of currency stability and savings on money transfers. In Denmark, the euro was seen as a major market player, and the introduction was watched with some anxiety and trepidation. One Danish journalist put it this way during the newscast: "The debut of the euro on the world stage marks one of the most important steps towards a United States of Europe." Leading politicians were openly in favor of joining the common currency as soon as possible, and it was public opinion and opposition groups that, in the government's view, were holding the country back. The Danish Prime Minister was seen saying: "We need to be in and the sooner the better." The Minister of Finance echoed this view: "We do not want to have another referendum until public opinion says the answer will be 'yes.'"

Coverage of preparations for the launch of the euro was prominent on the German channels. German news focused on the implications of the euro for both consumers and the economy as a whole. German news explained, for example, the effects of the introduction of the euro on cashless payment, transferring money abroad, and intercountry price comparisons. Several times, both ARD and RTL referred to the exchange rates and emphasized the importance of "Euroland" for Germany's economic prosperity. On the day of the introduction of the euro, German news pointed out the gains of the euro against the dollar and the positive effects of the euro on the German share index and the stock markets. Germany's ARD and RTL pointed out that the euro had conquered the finance market with a "dream start" (RTL) and that the German share index had reacted like "fireworks" (ARD). The only elements of conflict were brief and were contrasted with, for example, a visual of children from the 11 "Euroland" countries sending balloons into the sky. More typical of the coverage was the unanimous emphasis on the euro as a stability factor within the European Union and as another step toward European integration with an overall optimistic and positive tone.

Journalists in Britain and the Netherlands were less focused on economic consequences than their counterparts in the other two countries, and this was evident in both political/economic stories and stories about the introduction of the euro. Dutch news also highlighted the conversion work in the financial sector but was less concerned than German news with the economic consequences of the euro for the Dutch economy. The only mention of economic consequences was the implications for businesses forced to put in extra hours to complete conversion and software. NOS News opened with the headline "Spectacular Introduction of the Euro," but the lead story began "The most spectacular was that there was nothing spectacular at all" [accompanying visual of corks popping]. The only emphasis on conflict in the Dutch news concerned the "political disagreement" around the Wim Duisenberg "issue."<sup>7</sup> NOS News described the issue this way: "The Duisenberg issue is a typical example of the European Union. The economy is fine, but the political disagreement constantly threatens to disrupt." RTL4 News reported in a similar vein: "The turbulence around Duisenberg does not say a lot about the

stability of the new currency, but it does say a great deal about the political weaknesses in this cooperation. The big test will come when a country does not follow the agreements on finance policy, creates disputes, and threatens the euro.”

Britain discussed the launch of the euro in terms of the potential economic repercussions for the British pound sterling. Although economic consequences were not at the forefront of the coverage, reporters at both the BBC and ITN mentioned the future prospect of a diminished role for the British pound on the world market and noted that the pound sterling may stand on the sidelines while future battles would be waged between the U.S. dollar and the euro.

## **Discussion**

The visibility of political and economic topics in comparison with other news on mainstream evening television news programs on the two most widely viewed channels in each of four European countries was investigated during a routine news period and the period surrounding the launch of the euro in January 1999. We found that approximately half of the television news time was devoted to political/economic topics in each country during the routine news period, and this was somewhat lower during the euro launch event period that occurred during a politically quiet weekend, the first weekend in the New Year. In the four European countries, large and small, ranging in population from five million in Denmark to 80 million in Germany and including countries both inside and outside of the euro zone, the major event of the launch of the euro occupied one fifth to one fourth of main evening news.

We also investigated the extent to which journalists emphasized conflict and economic consequences in the framing of political topics including the major event of the launch of the euro. We explored the conflict and the economic consequences frames in relation to political and economic news in general and in relation to the coverage of the introduction of the euro in particular. Overall, the results suggest that television journalists in all of the countries were more likely to emphasize conflict in reporting political/economic news, but that in the coverage of the euro launch journalists in most of the countries emphasized economic consequences more than conflict.

This descriptive study enables us to compare the use of the two frames in both a cross-topic perspective (regular political/economic news versus euro news) and a cross-country perspective. More specifically, the study allows us to offer some tentative suggestions concerning what might influence the use of particular frames. Such an initial step seems necessary given that a more recent overview of framing research concludes that “no evidence has yet been systematically collected about how various factors impact the structural qualities of news in terms of framing” (Scheufele, 1999, p. 109). With respect to news selection, Shoemaker and Reese (1996) list a number of potential influences that may guide how an issue is framed in the news. We focus here on two sets of potential influences, one internal to journalism and one external to journalism. Internal influences include journalists’ role perceptions and their personal and professional values on an individual level, and organizational features and constraints on an institutional level. External influences encompass the nature of the issue covered and particularities of the economic-political context.

As to our cross-topic perspective, we found that, in euro stories, the conflict frame was less dominant than it was in political and economic news in general. Conversely, the economic consequences frame was more present in euro news stories than in political/economic news stories. Two (external) issue- and context-specific factors may play a

role here. First, the introduction of the euro was a success. None of the scenarios of crashing stock markets or panic came through in the news surrounding the launch. The launch was carefully prepared and staged, and it went very smoothly, so there was no basis for strong journalistic focus on conflict. Second, although the introduction of the euro was a much debated issue in some of the countries, the issue had been fought out years before in countries such as Germany and the Netherlands. Hence, the actual introduction of the euro was simply the implementation of long-term planning. Even in Britain and Denmark, both of which are outside the euro zone, the debates about the euro lacked the quality of conflict because the existence of the euro had already become a reality. In these countries, then, the discussions centered on the question of what it would mean to not belong to the new "euroland." According to our findings, this led to a focus on how the people and the country were affected by the euro in financial terms, as expressed in the emphasis on economic consequences in euro stories. In Britain, for example, this meant an emphasis on concern over the potential importance of the euro and the U.S. dollar, while journalists speculated that the once mighty British pound might be perceived as less of a world player in the same way that the older generation may have lamented the decline of the British empire.

Our cross-countries perspective revealed similarities among the countries concerning the emphasis on conflict in the framing of political/economic news. Possible explanations may be found in factors internal to journalism such as professional routines and values and journalists' perceptions of their roles. The cross-nationally consistent pattern of framing political/economic news in terms of conflict is in line with research on news values from various countries pointing out the importance of conflict in journalistic reporting (e.g., Bennett, 1996; Eilders, 1997; McManus, 1994; Price & Tewksbury, 1997; Shoemaker & Reese, 1996; Staab, 1990). Emphasizing the conflict-related aspects of an event or issue by framing it in terms of conflict may justify the publication of a news story above and beyond its intrinsic news value. With respect to the conflict frame, our cross-nationally consistent pattern extends and specifies the finding of a more general convergence of journalistic traditions in Western democracies (Weischenberg, Löffelholz, & Scholl, 1998).

Despite the consistencies noted, there nevertheless appear to be interesting differences between European journalistic traditions, at least concerning the framing of news in terms of economic consequences. In our cross-national comparison of the news coverage of the euro launch, framing news in terms of economic consequences emerged as more important in two of the countries we studied. An emphasis on the economic consequences of an event or issue suggests a more interpretative perspective in news reporting. The difference between British and German news in the degree to which journalists focused on economic consequences finds resonance in comparative research on journalistic cultures. Köcher (1986) suggested that German journalists, in comparison with their British counterparts, perceive themselves as more opinionated and interpretative and less as mere transmitters of facts. Thus, Köcher pointed out that German journalists may be more appropriately thought of as "missionaries," whereas British journalists could be considered "bloodhounds."

The existing literature does not provide a conclusive answer to how journalistic role perceptions might be linked to national framing practices. Surveys of journalists drawing on several identical news items are not fully comparable because of inconsistencies in the response categories provided to the journalists. For example, a majority of journalists in Britain and Germany agree that one of their roles is to analyze and interpret events, but the question wording and response categories on available surveys do

not allow for direct comparisons (Weaver, 1998). In a recent comparative study of the political roles of journalists, British broadcast journalists were described as neutral and passive relative to German broadcast journalists, who were classified as advocates and active, leading to the conclusion that “German journalists are more actively involved in the construction of news frames” (Patterson, 1998, p. 23). This conclusion resonates with the study conducted by Köcher (1986) based on surveys of journalists conducted in the early 1980s but runs somewhat contrary to the results of those who have conducted more recent surveys of German journalists (e.g., Schoenbach, Stuerzebecher, & Schneider, 1998).

The presence of the economic consequences frame in Danish stories on the euro dovetails with a recent study of Danish news coverage of the 1999 European elections, where it was found that television journalists took a highly proactive and interpretative role. Danish news not only devoted more time to the European elections than Dutch news but also paid more attention to the consequences of different European issues. This is because, in comparison with their Dutch counterparts, Danish television journalists in the European election campaign more often saw it as part of their role to explicate the consequences of advanced European integration and focus on the economy and financial fraud of European political institutions (de Vreese, 2000).

Our study is first of all a baseline from which to consider the future of political news in Europe and the ways in which journalists emphasize conflict and economic consequences in the reporting of political and economic news. A cross-national comparative perspective may be fruitful and render the invisible visible, especially with respect to the extent to which factors internal and external to journalism influence the emergence of frames in the news. In regard to understanding differences in news coverage, the importance of the national institutional, political, and social contexts in which news is produced (i.e., external factors) and the importance of cross-national differences in journalistic practices, norms, and roles in different cultures (i.e., internal factors) are well known (Patterson, 1998; Weaver, 1998; Weaver & Wilhoit, 1996). Future research should further explore the link between framing practices and journalists’ role conceptions as well as the interaction between journalists’ norms and practices and the influence of elite and interest groups.

## Notes

1. The news programs were as follows: for Britain, BBC’s *9 O’Clock News* (public) and ITN’s *News at Ten* (private); for Denmark, DR’s *TV-Avisen* (public) and *TV2 Nyhederne* (two thirds privately funded, one third publicly funded); for the Netherlands, NOS *8 uur Journaal* (public) and *RTL Nieuws* (private); and for Germany, ARD *Tagesschau* (public) and RTL *RTL Aktuell* (private). Previous studies in the four countries have identified important similarities but also some key differences between the public and private news programs in their coverage of elections (e.g., Norris, Curtice, Sanders, Scammell, & Semetko, 1999, for Britain; Hjarvard, 1999, for Denmark; van Praag & van der Eijk, 1998, and Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000, for the Netherlands; and Gerhards, Grajczyk & Klingler, 1999, and Semetko & Schoenbach, 1994, for Germany).

2. On January 1, 1999, the euro was officially launched in 11 (excluding Denmark and Great Britain) of the 15 countries of the European Union, including Germany and the Netherlands. On January 4, 1999, the euro was officially traded as currency on the international stock markets. Due to technical difficulties, the evening news of TV2 on December 31, 1998, was not included in the analysis.

3. The “routine period” was constructed using the following weekdays: January 5–8 and 11, 1999.

4. The main categories were introduction of the euro (e.g., preparations for the euro, exchange rate, European Monetary Union), politics without introduction of the euro (e.g., elections, social politics, relations between states), economy without introduction of the euro (e.g., unemployment, budget, wages and earnings), society (e.g., crime, trials, culture), social welfare/education/science/technology (e.g., welfare cuts, schooling, inventions), agriculture/environment/energy/traffic (e.g., farming, nuclear energy, public transport), (natural) disasters (e.g., earthquakes, epidemics), and sports/weather and “other topics.”

5. Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) did not use this last item in their analysis. However, Cappella and Jamieson (1997) argue the centrality of assessments of publicly elected figures’ performance in news. This is why the item was included after pretests.

6. Sports and weather was also a common component of both the routine news period and the event period. The amount of time devoted to these topics during the routine period varied from a low of 6% in Denmark to a high of 23% in Germany, with Britain (8%) and the Netherlands (13%) in between. It should be noted, however, that in Germany weather and sports are placed within the news bulletin, whereas in the other countries special segments following the main news bulletin treat weather and/or sports.

7. Duisenberg, a Dutchman, was appointed to lead the European Central Bank for a term of eight years, and he took office at the time the euro was launched. His appointment had been the subject of much debate because he was supported strongly by the Germans but initially rejected by the French, who insisted that a Frenchman have the seat after only four years.

## References

- Bennett, W. L. (1996). *News: The politics of illusion* (3rd ed.). New York: Longman.
- Blumler, J. G., McLeod, J. M., & Rosengren, K. E. (1992). *Comparatively speaking: Communication and culture across space and time*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Cappella, J. N., & Jamieson, K. H. (1996). News frames, political cynicism, and media cynicism. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 546, 71–84.
- Cappella, J. N., & Jamieson, K. H. (1997). *Spiral of cynicism: The press and the public good*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Dogan, M., & Pelassy, D. (1984). *How to compare nations: Strategies in comparative politics*. Chatham, NJ: Chatham House.
- Domke, D., McCoy, K., & Torres, M. (1999). News media, racial perceptions, and political cognition. *Communication Research*, 26, 570–607.
- Domke, D., Shah, D., & Wackman, D. B. (1998). “Moral referendums”: Values, news media, and the process of candidate choice. *Political Communication*, 15, 301–321.
- Eilders, C. (1997). *Nachrichtenfaktoren und rezeption. Eine empirische analyse zur auswahl und verarbeitung politischer information* [News factors and reception: An empirical analysis of the selection and processing of political information]. Opladen, Germany: Westdeutscher Verlag.
- Entman, R. M. (1991). Framing US coverage of international news: Contrasts in narratives of the KAL and Iran air incidents. *Journal of Communication*, 41(4), 6–27.
- Entman, R. M. (1993). Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm. *Journal of Communication*, 43(4), 51–58.
- Eurobarometer/European Commission. (2000). *Eurobarometer: Public opinion in the European Union* (Report No. 52). Brussels: Directorate-General X.
- European Commission. (1997). *Euromedia Monitoring 1995–1997*. Brussels: Union for Public Opinion and Research, Directorate-General X.A.2.
- Fundesco/AEJ Annual Report. (1997). *The European Union in the media 1996*. Madrid: Author.
- Gamson, W. A. (1992). *Talking politics*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Gerhards, M., Grajczyk, A., & Klingler, W. (1999). Programmangebote und Spartennutzung im Fernsehen 1998 [Television program and use of television content in 1998]. *Media Perspektiven* 8/99, 390–400.
- Gitlin, T. (1980). *The whole world is watching*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

- Graber, D. A. (1988). *Processing the news: How people tame the information tide* (2nd ed.). New York: Longman.
- Graber, D. A. (1993). *Media power in politics* (3rd ed.). Washington, DC: CQ Press.
- Gurevitch, M., & Blumler, J. G. (1990). Comparative research: The extending frontier. In D. L. Swanson & D. Nimmo (Eds.), *New directions in political communication: A resource book* (pp. 305–325). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Hjarvard, S. (1999). *Nyheder i konkurrence* [News in competition]. Copenhagen: Samfundslitteratur.
- Iyengar, S. (1991). *Is anyone responsible? How television frames political issues*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Jaspersen, A. E., Shah, D. V., Watts, M., Faber, R. J., & Fan, D. P. (1998). Framing the public agenda: Media effects on the importance of the federal budget deficit. *Political Communication*, 15, 205–224.
- Köcher, R. (1986). Bloodhounds or missionaries: Role definitions of German and British journalists. *European Journal of Communication*, 1, 43–64.
- Martin, C. R., & Oshagan, H. (1997). Disciplining the workforce: The news media frame a General Motors plant closing. *Communication Research*, 24, 669–697.
- McManus, M. (1994). *Market driven journalism: Let the citizen beware?* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Mendelsohn, M. (1993). Television frames in the 1988 Canadian election. *Canadian Journal of Communication*, 18, 149–171.
- Neijens, P. (1999). Campagne, media en publieke opinie [Campaign, media and public opinion]. In P. Neijens & P. van Praag (Eds.), *De slag om Ijburg* [The battle over Ijburg] (pp. 139–152). Amsterdam: Het Spinhuis.
- Nelson, T. E., Clawson, R. A., & Oxley, Z. M. (1997). Media framing of a civil liberties conflict and its effect on tolerance. *American Political Science Review*, 91, 567–583.
- Neuman, W. R., Just, M. R., & Crigler, A. N. (1992). *Common knowledge: News and the construction of political meaning*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Norris, P. (1995). The restless searchlight: Network news framing of the post-cold war. *Political Communication*, 12, 357–370.
- Norris, P. (2000). *A virtuous circle: Political communication in post-industrial democracies*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Norris, P., Curtice, J., Sanders, D., Scammell, M., & Semetko, H. A. (1999). *On message: Communicating the campaign*. London: Sage.
- Pan, Z., & Kosicki, G. M. (1993). Framing analysis: An approach to news discourse. *Political Communication*, 10, 55–75.
- Patterson, T. E. (1993). *Out of order*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Patterson, T. E. (1998). Political roles of the journalist. In D. Graber, D. McQuail, & P. Norris (Eds.), *The politics of news, the news of politics* (pp. 17–32). Washington, DC: CQ Press.
- van Praag, P., & van der Eijk, C. (1998). News content and effects in a historic campaign. *Political Communication*, 15, 165–183.
- Price, V., & Tewksbury, D. (1997). News values and public opinion: A theoretical account of media priming and framing. In G. Barnett & F. J. Foster (Eds.), *Progress in the communication sciences* (pp. 173–212). Greenwich, CT: Ablex.
- Price, V., Tewksbury, D., & Powers, E. (1997). Switching trains of thought: The impact of news frames on readers' cognitive responses. *Communication Research*, 24, 481–506.
- Reese, S. D., & Buckalew, B. (1995). The militarism of local television: The routine framing of the Persian Gulf War. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 12, 40–59.
- Rhee, J. W. (1997). Strategy and issue frames in election coverage: A social cognitive account of framing effects. *Journal of Communication*, 47(3), 26–48.
- Scheufele, D. A. (1999). Framing as a theory of media effects. *Journal of Communication*, 49(1), 103–122.
- Schoenbach, K., Stuerzebecher, D., & Schneider, B. (1998). German journalists in the early 1990s: East and West. In D. H. Weaver (Ed.), *The global journalist* (pp. 213–227). Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

- Semetko, H. A., de Vreese, C. H., & Peter, J. (2000). Europeanised politics, Europeanised media? European integration and political communication. *West European Politics*, 23(4), 121–142.
- Semetko, H. A., & Schoenbach, K. (1994). *Germany's "unity election": Voters and the media*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.
- Semetko, H. A., & Valkenburg, P. M. (2000). Framing European politics: A content analysis of press and television news. *Journal of Communication*, 50(2), 93–109.
- Severin, W. J., & Tankard, J. W., Jr. (1997). *Communication theories: Origins, methods, and uses in the mass media* (4th ed.). New York: Longman.
- Shoemaker, P. J., & Reese, S. D. (1996). *Mediating the message*. White Plains, NY: Longman.
- Simon, A., & Xenos, M. (2000). Media framing and effective public deliberation. *Political Communication*, 17, 363–376.
- Staab, J. F. (1990). *Nachrichtenwert-Theorie. Formale struktur and empirischer gehalt* [News value theory: Formal structure and empirical content]. Freiburg, Germany: Alber.
- Swanson, D. L. (2000). The homologous evolution of political communication and civic engagement: Good news, bad news, and no news. *Political Communication*, 17, 409–414.
- Valkenburg, P. M., Semetko, H. A., & de Vreese, C. H. (1999). The effects of news frames on readers' thoughts and recall. *Communication Research*, 26, 550–569.
- de Vreese, C. H. (1999). *News and European integration: News content and effects in cross-national comparative perspective*. Research Report. Amsterdam School of Communications Research, University of Amsterdam.
- de Vreese, C. H. (2000, August). *The battle over the news agenda: A cross-national analysis of political television journalism in the 1999 European Parliamentary elections*. Paper presented at the meeting of the American Political Science Association, Washington, DC.
- Weaver, D. H. (Ed.). (1998). *The global journalist*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Weaver, D. H., & Wilhoit, G. C. (1996). *The American journalist: A portrait of US news people and their work*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Weischenberg, S., Löffelholz, M., & Scholl, A. (1998). Journalism in Germany. In D. H. Weaver (Ed.), *The global journalist* (pp. 229–256). Bloomington: Indiana University Press.