

# Media Effects on Public Opinion about the Enlargement of the European Union\*

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## Abstract

Studies of public support for matters of European integration tend either to neglect or inadequately model the role of the mass media. This study investigates how news media content affects public support for the enlargement of the EU. Other influences on support for integration, such as economic evaluations, anti-immigration sentiment, domestic political considerations and cognitive mobilization are accounted for. The study draws on two-wave panel surveys and media content analyses of television news and national newspapers. The results suggest that media coverage of EU affairs matters to change in public opinion about EU enlargement. The effects of the news media, however, are conditional upon the visibility and consistency in tone of the news.

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## Introduction

A substantial body of literature deals with explanations of public support for European integration, and also the importance of public support for integration is increasingly recognized (for example, Meyer, 1999; Miles, 2004). Interestingly, even though several authors have stressed that information, communication and public debate could play a key role in legitimating and shaping public opinion about European integration (Hewstone, 1986; Meyer, 1999; Risse-Kappen *et al.*, 1999), only few studies have in fact made a link

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between the media and public opinion. The limited body of research that deals with news coverage of European integration investigates European Parliament elections (Blumler, 1983; Kevin, 2001) or referendums (Siune *et al.*, 1995) and makes little connection with public opinion.

In communication science, studies have forcefully demonstrated how the effects of different news media outlets are conditioned by their actual contents (for example, Miller *et al.*, 1979; Moy and Pfau, 2000). However, previous research has not convincingly linked public support for European integration to actual media content. This study hypothesizes, firstly, that the media matter for public opinion about European integration; and, secondly, that the effects of media exposure on support for European integration are likely to be conditioned by the specific media content. These assumptions are tested by drawing on a panel survey design combined with a content analysis of the media coverage between our panel waves. The article first reviews traditional explanations of public support for European integration and then elaborates on why the media might matter for public opinion about integration and why public opinion in turn matters for European integration.

### *Europhobe or Europhile?*

Public support for European integration has been explained in terms of cognitive mobilization (Inglehart, 1970), utilitarian and economic considerations (Gabel and Palmer, 1995), satisfaction with the incumbent government (Franklin *et al.*, 1995; Ray, 2003), as well as social-demographic characteristics and political ideological preferences (Gabel, 1998) and perceived cultural threat (McLaren, 2002).

First, the cognitive mobilization hypothesis is based on a positive correlation between higher levels of political involvement and knowledge and support for European integration (Inglehart, 1970, 1977). A second strand of research posits that 'EU citizens from different socio-economic situations experience different costs and benefits from integrative policy' (Gabel, 1998, p. 336). Here, support for European integration is a function of income, education, occupational skills and living in proximity to border regions (Anderson and Reichert, 1996; Gabel and Palmer, 1995).

A third perspective suggests that citizens resort to proxies when formulating their view on integration and that these proxies are likely to be based on national political considerations (Anderson, 1998; Franklin *et al.*, 1994). Given the low level of actual information about the integration process, evaluations of the incumbent government drive opinions about integration (Franklin *et al.*, 1994, 1995). Recent work has demonstrated that reluctance towards integration is also a function of hostility towards and fear of other cultures (McLaren, 2002) and fear of immigration (de Vreese and Boomgaarden, 2005).

A study of public support for European integration must take these explanations from previous research into account. This article argues, however, that in addition to this array of explanatory factors, the role of information provided by the media is substantially important to public opinion formation and change. Two decades ago, Dalton and Duval (1986) demonstrated a link between the tone of the British press and public opinion about European integration at the aggregate level. As Page and Shapiro (1992) argue, the media are more likely to shape our perceptions of international and foreign policy issues than of domestic politics with which we often have direct experience. And indeed, 'very few citizens have first- or even second-hand contact with Community affairs in Brussels' (Dalton and Duval, 1986, p. 127). Given that a vast majority of citizens across Europe repeatedly identify news media as their most important and preferred source of information about European integration (Commission, 2003, pp. 35–60), it is striking that the relationship between media and public opinion about European integration (with exceptions such as Norris, 2000; and Dalton and Duval, 1986) has remained so underdeveloped in the scientific literature.

#### *How the Media Matter to Public Opinion about European Integration*

Most European citizens perceive the process of European integration as rather complex and abstract. Under such circumstances mediated information is likely to play an important role in opinion formation processes. With public opinion about European integration being volatile, new information can change citizens' opinions and policy preferences (Page and Shapiro, 1992, p. 15). How then can the media matter? 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, it is known 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 and 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 (Miller and Krosnick, 2000). For example, when the news media reported at length on the 1991 Gulf War, US President Bush Senior was evaluated primarily on his war performance. A year later when the news media reported massively on the economy, however, the President's overall evaluation was driven by his handling of the economy (Krosnick and Brannon, 1993). This process can be conditional on individuals'

levels of political knowledge, news exposure and trust in sources (Krosnick and Brannon, 1993; Miller and 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. However, neither priming nor framing studies have dealt with support for policies – such as issues of European integration – as the dependent variable (except de Vreese, 2004; Schuk and de Vreese, 2006).

Public opinion theorist John Zaller (1992, 1996) proposed that if the news media are to impact on public policy preferences, the media content needs to provide a consistent directional bias. A consistent directional bias of news (a ‘one-sided information flow’) may entail a consistent emphasis on either positive or negative aspects of an event or issue. However, if a person is exposed to both sides of an issue, this individual is not likely to be affected by the messages because they cancel each other out. This effect is dubbed a ‘two-sided information flow’.

## I. Hypotheses

This article is concerned with the dynamics behind public support for European integration. Based on previous research it formulates a number of hypotheses about the underlying factors driving support. The study elaborates upon previous research in two ways. First, it adds the role of news media to understanding of public opinion about European integration. Previous attempts to do so relied on media exposure measures without discussing the actual media content (Hewstone, 1986), on underspecified models that did not control for other confounding factors (Norris, 2000), or on aggregate level correlations between the tone of the news and public opinion (Dalton and Duval, 1986). This article concentrates on the dynamics of public opinion and it therefore does not draw on cross-sectional survey data (such as *Eurobarometer*) but rather on a dynamic model of change in public opinion.

It may be hypothesized that the relationship between exposure to media content and policy attitude changes depending on the consistency of the tone of EU news coverage. Following Zaller (1992) it may be expected that a two-sided information flow, in which the advantages and disadvantages of EU enlargement are both prominently present, is likely to result in no media effects, as the different cues cancel each other out. It may also be expected that a consistently negative bias, presenting the EU enlargement in terms of risks and losses, will lead to lower levels of support for the enlargement policy. Individuals will tend to favour the status quo, thereby invoking risk-averse

behaviour leading to lower levels of support. Conversely, it may be expected that consistently positive news coverage of the enlargement, focusing on the potential gains and advantages, will invoke gain-seeking behaviour and thus increase support for enlargement.

Based on previous research a range of predictors are included in the model as control variables. The following relationships between a number of individual characteristics and attitudes and support are hypothesized: men are more supportive; higher educational groups are more supportive; executive and managerial occupations are more supportive (Gabel, 1998); post-materialistic values are related to higher support, (Inglehart, 1990); higher levels of political sophistication are related to higher support (Inglehart, 1970), positive evaluations of the incumbent government are related to higher support (Franklin *et al.*, 1995); positive economic evaluations are related to higher support (Anderson, 1998); centre-ideological preferences (i.e. not strong right- or left-wing in profile) are related to higher support (Gabel, 1998); and anti-immigration sentiment is related to lower levels of support (de Vreese and Boomgaarden, 2005).

These hypotheses are tested in one model, thereby addressing a shortcoming of some previous research on the role of the media that has investigated the relationship between one or two independent variables and support for the EU or European integration while disregarding others. The article is specifically interested in the role of media in the opinion development process. It focuses on television news and newspapers, as these are the two most commonly used sources of information about European integration for a majority of citizens across Europe (Commission, 2003).

## II. Methods

To investigate the effects of news media and the various other hypothesized influences on support for European integration, two data sources were used: first, a content analysis of television news and newspapers in the period leading up to and including the December 2002 European Council meeting in Copenhagen; second, identical two-wave panel surveys, including measures of exposure and attention to various media outlets (subject to the systematic content analysis). Our panel data consist of a pre- and post-Council meeting wave with representative samples of the Danish and Dutch adult population. To ensure variation in the prominence and type of EU news coverage a 'natural experimental design' was utilized. Additionally, panel survey data were collected in two countries. In Denmark the European leaders met for a European

Council meeting while this did not happen in the Netherlands.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, these two countries were sampled because they have a similar level of support for the EU and the level of satisfaction with EU democracy is comparable (Commission, 2003; Karp *et al.*, 2003). The macroeconomic situation in the two countries is also comparable (OECD, 2002).

The surveys were fielded about three weeks ahead of the summit and immediately after the summit.<sup>2</sup> The response rates in Denmark were 77.9 per cent in wave 1 and 82.8 per cent in wave 2 with a net sample of 1,288 respondents participating in both waves. In the Netherlands response rates were 70.9 per cent in wave 1 and 63.3 per cent in wave 2 with a net sample of 2,136 respondents participating in both waves.<sup>3</sup> To assess the quality of our data the standard *Eurobarometer* 'support for country's EU membership' question was included in our survey. Sixty per cent of our respondents in Denmark and 66 per cent in the Netherlands reported considering the membership of their country in the EU a good thing. This compares to 61 per cent and 69 per cent respectively in *Eurobarometer* 58, for which field work was carried out in October 2002.

### Survey

The *dependent variable* is an index of support for the enlargement of the European Union. We draw on an eight-item index forming a scale of EU enlargement support. Questions were answered on five-point agree–disagree scales and included questions such as 'The enlargement of the EU is important for the future of the EU'.<sup>4</sup> The items were recoded when appropriate to form a

<sup>1</sup> A previous study showed that the 1997 summit in the Netherlands had significant effects on public opinion (see Semetko *et al.*, 2003).

<sup>2</sup> The specific fieldwork days were as follows: in Denmark, wave 1 21–8 November 2002; and wave 2 14–18 December 2002. In the Netherlands, wave 1 19–26 November 2002; wave 2 17–21 December 2002.

<sup>3</sup> In Denmark, the sample was drawn from the *GfK Denmark* database. A nationally representative sample of 1,807 Danish adults (age 15+) individuals was invited to participate in the study out of which 1,444 replied (response rate 77.9 per cent). The same sample was approached in wave 2 and generated a recontact response rate of 82.8 per cent. In Denmark the questionnaire was a postal self-administered paper and pencil questionnaire. Response rates of this magnitude are not unusual for survey research in Scandinavia, where actual turnout is also high (Granberg and Holmberg, 1991). In the Netherlands, the sample was drawn from the *ITM International* database with more than 55,000 respondents. A nationally representative sample of 5,321 Dutch adults (age 15+) was invited to participate in the study out of which 3,375 did participate (response rate 70.9 per cent). Of these 2,136 participated in the second wave, resulting in a 63.3 per cent response rate. In the Netherlands the questionnaire was administered through the internet. By using a similar questionnaire layout in the two countries, potential problems due to question and response category layout were taken into account (Dillman, 2000). Unlike *Eurobarometer*, the study is not a cross-sectional survey instrument. This allowed the authors to study change at the individual level. Moreover, the media exposure and attention measures in *Eurobarometer* do not allow for a compelling link between survey measures and analyses of media content to be made. Studies drawing on data collected outside the *Eurobarometer* instrument are therefore a welcome addition to our knowledge base.

<sup>4</sup> The other questions were as follows: (1) Generally speaking I think the enlargement of the EU is a good thing. (2) The EU should be enlarged with countries from the former eastern bloc such as Lithuania and Poland. (3) The EU should be enlarged with Turkey. (4) Denmark or the Netherlands will experience more advantages than disadvantages from the enlargement. (5) For me personally, the enlargement brings more

scale of EU support.<sup>5</sup> The means and scale consistencies were as follows. In Denmark, wave 1  $M = 3.10$ ,  $SD = 0.84$ ,  $\alpha = 0.92$ ; wave 2  $M = 3.26$ ,  $SD = 0.81$ ,  $\alpha = 0.93$ . In the Netherlands, wave 1  $M = 2.87$ ,  $SD = 0.68$ ,  $\alpha = 0.87$ ; wave 2  $M = 2.84$ ,  $SD = 0.70$ ,  $\alpha = 0.88$ .

The *independent variables* included gender (coded as female = 1), age (in years), education,<sup>6</sup> and occupational status.<sup>7</sup> Ideological preference was tapped by a ten-point left–right self-placement measure. To test the ‘cognitive mobilization’ hypothesis (Inglehart, 1970), an index of political sophistication was used. This is a combined measure of political knowledge and political interest. Political values were assessed using standard measures tapping post-materialism (Inglehart, 1990) by asking respondents to rate the two most important tasks of the government (see Appendix).

To test the impact of domestic political considerations, the respondents’ assessment of their national government was used on a five-point scale ranging from ‘very bad’ to ‘very good’. To assess the utilitarian perspective, the respondents’ occupational status was included; in addition a measure of prospective economic evaluations was used (following Anderson, 1998) ranging from ‘a lot worse’ to ‘a lot better’. The measure of anti-immigrant sentiments was a five-item index (see Appendix). The items were recoded when necessary to form a scale of anti-immigrant sentiment.

Finally, a combined measure of exposure to television news and newspapers and attention to ‘news about the EU’ was included. Attention was included given the potential inaccuracy of relying solely on exposure measures (Chaffee and Schleuder, 1986).<sup>8</sup> An additive measure of television news and newspaper exposure was used given the similarity between the media outlets in each of the countries. This is shown in the description of the results of the content analysis.<sup>9</sup> The index includes number of days watching television news (0–7)

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advantages than disadvantages. (6) The enlargement of the EU will have negative effects on the Danish or Dutch economy. (7) The enlargement is necessary for peace in Europe. (8) The enlargement should wait until the current Union functions better.

<sup>5</sup> A PCA with varimax rotation confirmed the single-factor loading and yielded one factor with an Eigen value of 5.08, explaining 56 per cent of the variance.

<sup>6</sup> Respondents’ reported level of completed education was recoded due to differences in the educational systems (see the Appendix for further details).

<sup>7</sup> For occupational status we follow Gabel (1998, p. 343) who summarizes that ‘manual labourers and the unemployed will be less supportive of integration than executives and professionals’. These two groups were therefore included as dummy variables in the analysis. A more elaborate model including unemployed, manual workers, managers, housewives /men, white-collar workers and executives separately (see McLaren, 2002) yielded no different results. The recoded categories were included for presentational reasons.

<sup>8</sup> Note, however, that using the exposure measure only (without the attention to EU news measure) or an interaction between exposure and attention yields very similar results and in no way substantively alters the conclusions.

<sup>9</sup> A greater diversity in terms of the news media coverage would favour using our detailed exposure measure to each of the different outlets but given the similarity an additive index is used.

and reading a newspaper (0–7 in Denmark and 0–6 in the Netherlands) plus attention to EU affairs (ranging from 1–4).

A lagged term for support for EU enlargement at wave 1 is used (see Markus, 1979, for discussion of the use of lagged specifications in panel data). This makes it possible to control for the level of initial support and to assess change during the period between the two waves. The means, standard deviations and internal consistency of our scales as well as the specific wording of all items can be found in the Appendix.

### *Content Analysis*

To assess the visibility of EU news, a content analysis of television news and daily newspapers was carried out in the period between the two waves of the survey.<sup>10</sup> The sample consisted of the most widely watched public broadcasting news programmes *DR TV-Avisen* (9 pm) in Denmark and *NOS Journaal* (8 pm) in the Netherlands and the most widely watched commercial television news programmes *TV2 Nyhederne* (7 pm) in Denmark and *RTL Nieuws* (7.30 pm) in the Netherlands. A total of 1,477 news stories was coded from these four outlets.<sup>11</sup> The newspaper sample included the front pages of the five most widely read dailies in Denmark (*Politiken*, *JyllandsPosten*, *Berlingske Tidende*, *BT* and *EkstraBladet*, all published Monday to Sunday) and in the Netherlands (*de Volkskrant*, *Telegraaf*, *NRC Handelsblad*, *Algemeen Dagblad* and *Trouw*, all published Monday to Saturday). A total of 1,797 newspaper articles were analysed.<sup>12</sup> This sample of news outlets covers the most important sources of political information and includes broadsheet and tabloid newspapers, as well as public service and private broadcasting news programmes.

The content analysis was completed by two native Dutch speakers and two native Danish speakers (all were graduate students at the University of Amsterdam). Coders were trained and supervised frequently and the inter-coder reliability test conducted on a randomly selected sample of 50 news stories yielded 84–100 per cent inter-coder agreement for the measures relevant to this study.<sup>13</sup> The visibility of ‘news stories about the EU enlargement, Euro-

<sup>10</sup> The content analysis was conducted between 25 November and 16 December 2002.

<sup>11</sup> The entire news bulletin was coded. This included 554 stories from *TV-Avisen*, 458 stories from *TV2 Nyhederne*, 220 stories from *NOS Journaal* and 245 stories from *RTL Nieuws*.

<sup>12</sup> The entire front page of each newspaper was coded. If stories commencing on the frontpage continued inside the newspaper, these stories were coded in full. A single headline (with no adjacent story) was not coded. Bullets (a headline and a few short, but full sentences) were included. The following number of articles was coded per newspaper: *Politiken* 260, *JyllandsPosten* 224, *Berlingske Tidende* 223, *EkstraBladet* 90, *BT* 89, *de Volkskrant* 214, *NRC* 231, *AD* 186, *Telegraaf* 135 and *Trouw* 145. The low number of articles from *EkstraBladet* and *BT* is due to the tabloid format of the newspaper and the layout of the front page which includes only one or two stories per day.

<sup>13</sup> The inter-coder reliability test was performed in pairs of coders for each language. The reliability test was conducted on 25 Dutch and 25 Danish news stories, randomly selected from the news outlets included in the study.

pean integration and the EU' is reported.<sup>14</sup> To assess the tone of these stories a measure of explicit evaluations of the EU enlargement was used. For each news story it was recorded whether it portrayed the enlargement in a neutral way, in a favourable way (highlighting advantages, opportunities and/or positive aspects), in an unfavourable way (highlighting disadvantages, risks and/or negative aspects), or in a mixed manner (combining favourable and unfavourable aspects). A mean evaluation for each news outlet was calculated ranging from minus one to plus one by subtracting the number of negative evaluations from the number of positive evaluations and dividing this by the total number of stories mentioning the EU enlargement.

### III. Results

At the aggregate level support for EU enlargement changed significantly in Denmark while it remained constant in the Netherlands. On our five-point index Danish support jumped from 3.10 to 3.26. This increase is about 5 percentage points and is significant, not only in statistical terms, but also substantially. A five per cent increase in support for public policy is noteworthy (Zaller, 1992), especially for divisive issues and, for example, in the case of European integration can be the difference between a 'yes' or a 'no' outcome in a referendum. In the Netherlands, by contrast, the level of support remained stable between the two waves (2.87 and 2.84).

This article now turns to the news media coverage in the period between the two waves. It is particularly interested in assessing the visibility and tone of news about the EU. Figure 1 shows that the visibility of news about European integration increased slightly in the Netherlands during the three weeks between the first and the second survey wave. The visibility increased dramatically in Denmark, in particularly on national television news which carried more than 175 news stories about European integration in the third week during the actual summit.

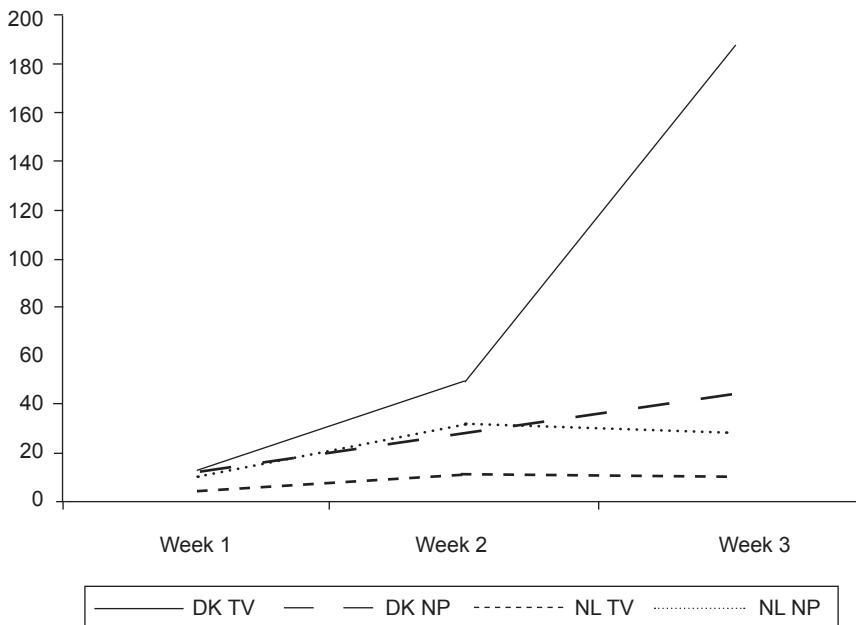
Looking at the evaluative tone of the news using the scale ranging from minus one to plus one, it was found that Dutch news outlets were overall mixed in their evaluation. Television news included both positive and negative evaluations and had an overall mean of  $-0.31$ . Newspapers also included positive and negative evaluations and had an overall mean of  $+0.04$ . Danish news all had an overall positive score on their coverage of the EU enlargement with television news at  $+0.31$  and newspapers at  $+0.09$ . Both also included negative evaluations but these were significantly outnumbered by the positive evaluations. In conclusion, Danish news media (both television and the press)

<sup>14</sup> This was defined as 'a story is about the EU, its institutions, policies, politics etc. when these terms are mentioned in at least two complete, independent sentences'.

had a considerable amount of coverage with an almost consistent (one-sided) positive bias. Dutch citizens who were exposed to both television news and newspaper coverage received a two-sided information flow. Dutch citizens who were only exposed to television news and did not read any newspapers were exposed to a one-sided (negative) information flow.

Turning to the multivariate analysis in which the explanatory value of the different predictors of support for European integration is assessed simultaneously, the following was found when controlling for support for EU enlargement at time 1. A significant positive coefficient in Table 1 denotes a positive effect on change in support for EU enlargement, whereas a significant negative coefficient denotes a negative effect on change. In both countries the strongest positive predictor was a positive economic outlook. Anti-immigration sentiments were, as expected, significant negative predictors of support. Government support was a positive predictor (significant in Denmark) and political sophistication was positively predicting support in both countries. In

Figure 1: Visibility of European Integration in National Newspapers and Television News



Source: Authors' own data.

Note: Number of stories about the EU, enlargement and European integration. The n for Danish television during the three weeks is: 14, 50 and 188. For Dutch television, this is 4, 11 and 1. For Danish newspapers this is 12, 29 and 43. For Dutch newspapers this is 10, 32 and 28.

addition, a significant and positive effect of news media exposure on support for enlargement was found in Denmark (in the country that had a consistent positive coverage). No significant effect of exposure to news media in the Netherlands, in which the coverage was two-sided, was found. These findings confirm the research hypotheses. However, for respondents in the Netherlands that were exposed only to television news (and did not read any newspapers) a marginal negative effect on change in support was found. This group was not exposed to a two-sided message flow but rather one-sided (negative) flow. This finding therefore also confirms the expectation about the impact of media messages under the condition of a consistent information flow.

## Conclusion

This study provides evidence on a key assumption in the literature on public opinion formation about European integration: the media matter. However,

Table 1: Regression Analysis of Support for European Union Enlargement

	<i>Denmark</i>		<i>The Netherlands</i>	
	<i>Std Beta Coefficient</i>	<i>Standard Error</i>	<i>Std Beta Coefficient</i>	<i>Standard Error</i>
Gender (female)	0.01	0.03	-0.01	0.02
Age	0.06 **	0.00	0.02	0.00
Education	0.03	0.02	0.02	0.02
Unemployed / blue collar	-0.00	0.04	-0.01	0.02
Executive / managers	0.02	0.04	0.00	0.02
Left ideological preference	-0.02	0.05	-0.01	0.03
Right ideological preference	-0.00	0.04	-0.01	0.02
Anti-immigration attitudes	-0.05 *	0.00	-0.10 ***	0.00
Post-materialist values	-0.02	0.02	-0.02	0.01
Political sophistication	0.04 #	0.01	0.04 *	0.01
Evaluation incumbent government	0.05 *	0.02	0.02	0.01
Economic evaluations	0.08 ***	0.02	0.16 ***	0.01
Media Exposure and EU attention	0.04 *	0.01	-0.02	0.00
Support for EU enlargement (t1)	0.78 ***	0.02	0.69 ***	0.02
N	940		2,048	
R <sup>2</sup>	0.73		0.67	

*Source:* Authors' own data.

*Notes:* OLS regression. Entries are standardized beta coefficients and standard errors.

\*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ , #  $p < 0.10$ .

the role of the news media in this process is a conditional one. News media mattered only in a situation in which citizens were 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 positive in tone we found respondents – in line with expectations – to be gain-seeking and endorse the enlargement of the EU. 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 which suggests that mixed cues are likely to cancel each other out while a consistent and pervasive directional news bias may shift public opinion.

These conclusions are based on two-wave panel surveys and media content analyses in two different contexts: one in which a significant political event took place and one in which it did not. This quasi-experimental design enabled an assessment to be made of the differential role played by the media in the public opinion formation process. The role of the media in the context of other factors driving public support for European integration was investigated. At the bi-variate level the findings give credit to most previous studies, but in the change model of public support for the EU enlargement, economic considerations, anti-immigration attitudes and political sophistication emerged as the most important factors.

Economic considerations have been articulated strongly in the literature on public support for the EU (Gabel and Palmer, 1995; Gabel, 1998). Partial evidence of this argument was found in the multivariate analysis. The findings corroborate Anderson (1998) who found economic evaluations to be significantly linked to the level of support for EU membership. Immigration-related attitudes emerged as a strong negative predictor for support (de Vreese and Boomgaarden, 2005; McLaren, 2002). The article investigated the effect of news coverage of EU matters on support for EU enlargement. It did not investigate attitudes towards immigration as a function of media coverage, but it is known from previous research that the media can inform attitudes about immigration and race (see, for example, Gilens, 1996, 2000; Kellstedt, 2003). Likewise, media coverage of the economy can significantly influence perceptions of the economy (Hetherington, 1996). If news media can invoke anti-immigration sentiments and affect economic perceptions and if these sentiments and evaluations in turn fuel attitudes towards European integration, then this calls for research investigating the reciprocal nature of this relationship.

In both countries political sophistication was a positive predictor of support for EU enlargement. This finding corroborates Inglehart's (1990) argument about the positive relationship between cognitive mobilization and support for

European integration. However, the findings seemingly challenge conclusions by Karp *et al.* (2003) who found political sophistication to be negatively associated with satisfaction with EU democracy. They argue that low knowledge citizens rely more strongly on evaluations of domestic political institutions as proxies when evaluating EU institutions, while high knowledge citizens can distinguish between the two and evaluate EU institutions independently from the perception of domestic institutions. Political sophistication was found to be related positively to support for EU enlargement. These seemingly opposite findings were reconciled by stressing that highly knowledgeable citizens are both more likely to support the idea of advanced integration, but are also more likely to reflect and think critically about the democratic nature of the EU institutions.

The study also found that evaluation of the domestic government was a positive predictor in both countries. The relevance of domestic political considerations for general EU support, however, has been confirmed in most studies (Anderson, 1998; Franklin *et al.*, 1995; Gabel, 1998; McLaren, 2002). These findings are confirmed. However, the relationship was found to be significant only in Denmark. This difference is ascribed to the timing of the study during which Denmark had a stable government – which is more likely to function as a benchmark for EU related attitudes – while the Netherlands had a government that had resigned and already announced new general elections.

Our study focuses on the impact of the media in shaping public attitudes. Obviously this influence should not be exaggerated and must be understood in the context of other influential factors. Contextual factors, such as the fact that the Danish government held the EU presidency, impacted on the level of political activity and in turn on media attention. Media activity can be contingent upon government activities, but there is no clear-cut causal relationship between the two. Specifically, in the Danish case, previous research has shown that the media may operate autonomously and independently from political parties during, for example, an election campaign (de Vreese, 2003). During the election campaign for the European Parliament in 1999 Danish news media were somewhat negative about the EU (even though politicians campaigned with a positive message). This suggests that the tone of the media coverage can also be independent from the tone set by government or other political actors. The two are obviously not fully independent from each other, but more cases (countries) and other data would be needed to unravel this process in its totality.

The study most importantly has lessons about the role played by the media in the process of public opinion formation about European integration. European integration is increasingly a divisive issue in most Member States. Public opinion polls consistently report substantial pro- and anti-integrationist

sentiments on both diffuse support for membership and on specific policy issues such as the single currency, EU enlargement and the potential EU membership of Turkey (Commission, 2003). Moreover, national referendums on European issues are often close races and have resulted in both negligible 'yes' and 'no' majorities. Investigating the role of the media in such campaigns is an interesting next step for research to take in order to understand public opinion on European integration as the sum of both pre-existing political dispositions and new information, provided by the mass media.

### **Appendix: Overview of Independent Variables**

*Gender:* Female = 1; male 0.

*Age:* In years.

*Education:* Recoded into four categories, comparable across the two countries, ranging from 1 (primary school), 2 (high school or equivalent: about 13 years of training), 3 (BA or three years' vocational training or equivalent: 16 years) and 4 (masters or postgraduate training: 19+ years).

*Low occupational status:* Recoded dummy variable. Occupation was recoded based on *Eurobarometer* occupational classifications (see *Eurobarometer* 60). Unemployed and blue-collar workers were recoded as 1, otherwise 0.

*High occupational status:* Recoded dummy variable. Occupation was recoded based on *Eurobarometer* occupational classifications (see *Eurobarometer* 60). Executive and managerial occupations were recoded as 1, otherwise 0.

*Left-wing political ideology:* Self-placement on left–right scale where 1 equals left and 10 right between 1 and 3 = 1; otherwise = 0.

*Right-wing political ideology:* Self-placement on left–right scale where 1 equals left and 10 right between 7 and 10 = 1; otherwise = 0.

*Political sophistication:* A combined measure of political knowledge and political interest. Five questions tapped political knowledge. (1) What is the number of Commissioners in the EU Commission (open-ended, correct [20] coded as 1, otherwise as 0). (2) What is the name of the current President of the European Commission (open-ended, correct [Prodi] coded as 1, otherwise as 0). (3) What is the name of the Danish or Dutch Commissioner (open-ended, coded as 1 or 0). (4) Which country currently holds the Presidency of the EU? (correct answer 'Denmark' coded as 1; otherwise coded as 0). (5) What is the number of countries seeking membership of the EU? (correct answers 10, 12 and 13 coded as 1; otherwise coded 0). A single item ranging from (1) no to (4) high tapped political interest. The sophistication index ranges from 1–9. Denmark  $M = 5.02$ ,  $SD = 1.60$ ; the Netherlands  $M = 3.54$ ,  $SD = 1.64$ .

*Anti-immigrant sentiments:* Five-item index measuring anti-immigrant sentiment. Denmark  $M = 17.13$ ,  $SD = 4.14$ ,  $\alpha = 0.83$ , the Netherlands  $M = 17.02$ ,  $SD = 3.91$ ,  $\alpha = 0.82$ . (1) Immigration is good for the labour market. (2) Immigrants' children cause problems in the schools that they attend. (3) Immigrants enrich Danish or Dutch culture. (4) Members of immigration groups misuse Danish or Dutch social welfare. (5) Their religion is a threat to our way of living. The items were recoded when appropriate to form a scale of anti-immigrant sentiments.

*Post-materialist:* Two questions in which the respondent was asked to rate the two most important tasks of the government. The options were (1) Maintain law and order (materialist). (2) Give citizens a greater say in important government decisions (post-materialist). (3) Control prices (materialist). (4) Protect freedom of expression measures (post-materialist). The ratings were recoded to range from 1 (two materialist choices), 2 (one materialist and one post-materialist choice), 3 (one post-materialist and one materialist choice) to 4 (two post-materialist choices). Denmark  $M = 2.12$ ,  $SD = 0.82$ , the Netherlands  $M = 2.29$ ,  $SD = 0.98$ .

*Evaluation of domestic government:* A scaled measure ranging from 1 to 5 where 1 equals very bad, 3 neither good nor bad and 5 very good. Denmark  $M = 3.65$ ,  $SD = 1.08$ ; the Netherlands  $M = 3.25$ ,  $SD = 1.06$ .

*Economic evaluation:* A scaled measure ranging from 1 to 5 of economic expectations in the coming 12 months, where 1 equals a lot worse, 3 neither worse nor better and 5 a lot better. Denmark  $M = 3.65$ ,  $SD = 1.08$ ; the Netherlands  $M = 3.07$ ,  $SD = 0.82$ .

*Media exposure (additive) and attention to the EU:* Number of days watching television news (0–7) and reading a newspaper (0–7 in Denmark and 0–6 in the Netherlands) plus attention to EU affairs (ranging from 1–4), additive index ranging from 1–17/18 Denmark ( $M = 15.74$ ,  $SD = 3.51$ ), the Netherlands ( $M = 12.52$ ,  $SD = 3.49$ ).

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