Why European tv news matters: a cross-nationally comparative analysis of tv news about the European Union and its effects
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Part I

Television news coverage of the EU

This part attempts, first, to establish the basic parameters of television news coverage of the European Union and, second, to identify patterns underlying the coverage. To offer an encompassing picture of how television news reports about Europe, news coverage is investigated during three different periods: during the 1999 European election campaign (Chapter 2) and during summit and routine periods throughout 2000 (Chapter 3). As has been mentioned in section 1.2.2, without a detailed account of the coverage, it is not possible to comprehensively study effects of television coverage on opinions and fears about the EU and European integration.

There is also a more general rationale for focusing on the content of the coverage as a study in its own right. In modern democracies, media generally play a crucial role in bringing politics to citizens (e.g., Entman & Bennett, 2001; Kaase, 1998; Marcinkowski, 1998; Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999; Wilke, 1998) and they may be particularly relevant to bridging the gap between usually abstract and remote EU politics and EU citizens (Blumler & Thoveron, 1983; Schulz, 1983b). Television news may be important in this process due to its widespread use for information about the EU (Eurobarometer 51-56). However, there is little research on whether television news provides people with the possibility to, in principle, inform themselves sufficiently about EU politics. European parliamentary elections are a key event of democracy at the EU level presenting EU citizens' only chance to express a direct opinion on European matters. Chapter 2 will show to what extent television news transmits this key event of democratic participation at the EU level to EU citizens and whether EU citizens have, in principle, the opportunity to inform themselves about EU affairs from television news. Politics has increasingly become Europeanized (e.g., Gerhards, 2000; Lepsius, 1990; Wessels, 1997) and the changes in the political landscape of the EU have been fundamental. Chapter 3 will illustrate whether television coverage conveys this large-scale development to EU citizens. The two chapters, then, will tell us to what extent processes of enormous political relevance are represented in television coverage. Both chapters approach the television coverage of the EU from a cross-nationally comparative perspective. At the current stage of research, this perspective seems the most appropriate as outlined in Chapter 1. However, the choice of a cross-nationally comparative perspective also entails that other comparative aspects (e.g., comparisons across time, comparison between election and non-election coverage) will not be the focus of the two chapters.

Because this analysis of the television coverage of the EU does not only aim the description of the basic parameters of coverage, but also at an initial explanation of what may shape the coverage, both chapters adhere to the same structure. First, the basic parameters will be described. Second, in a more explanatory account, I will attempt to detect patterns underlying the coverage.