

# The high price of ignorance about eastern enlargement

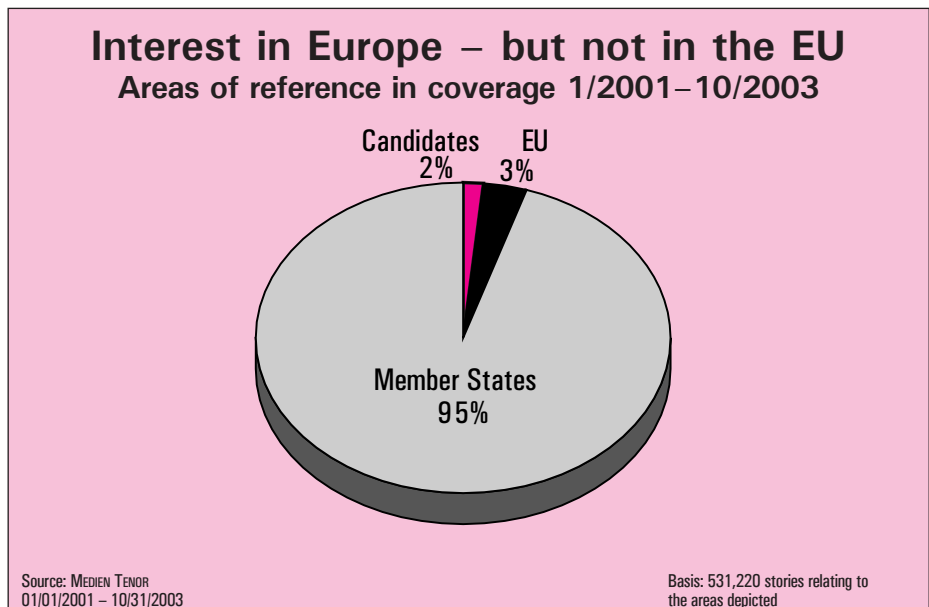
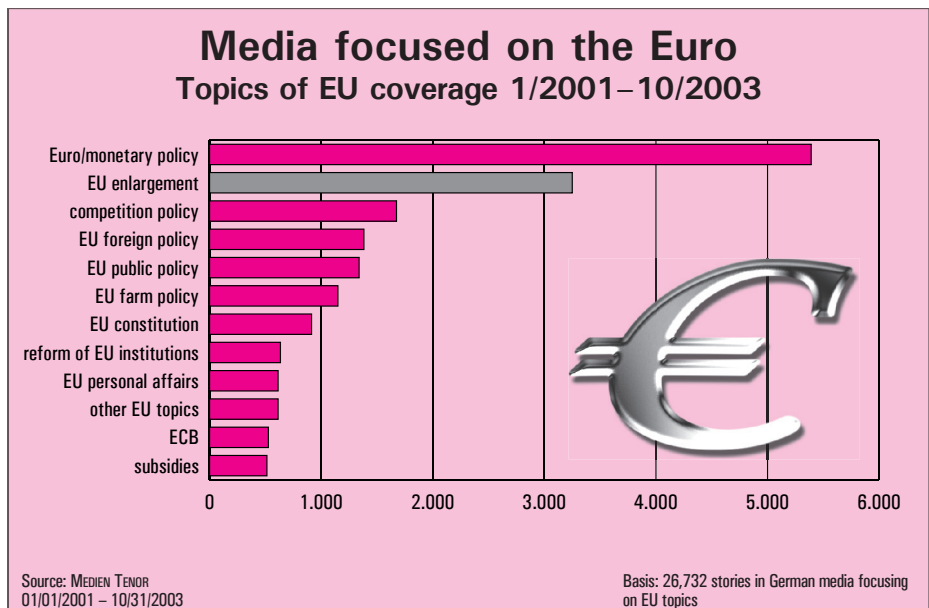
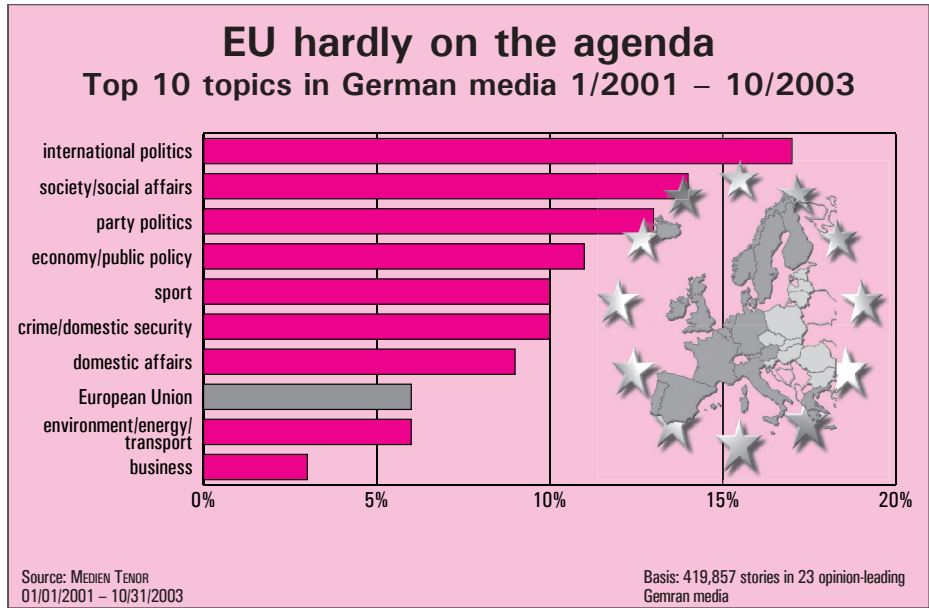
Non-existent coverage of the EU accession candidates in German and British media 01/2001 till 10/2003

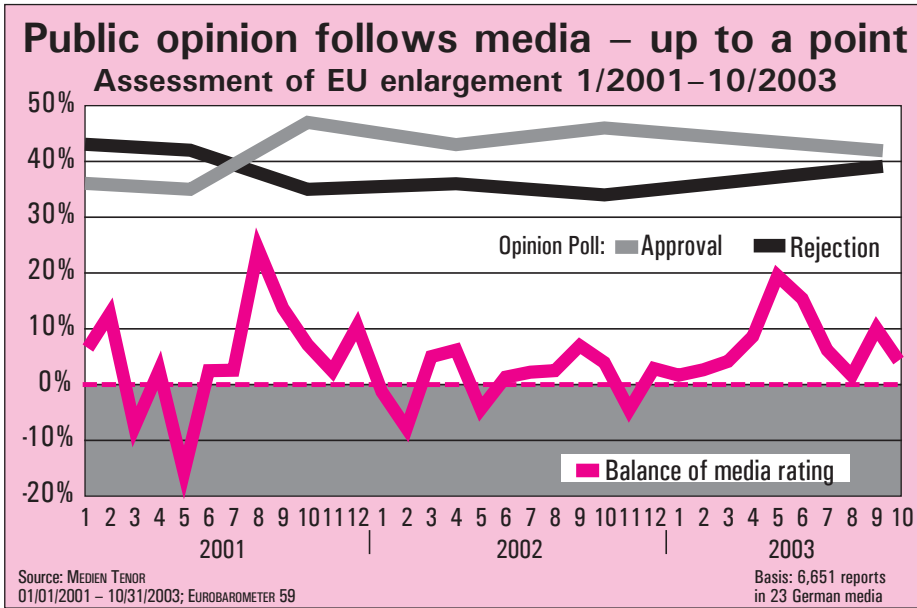
**67%** of Germans feel poorly informed on the European Union's eastern expansion. This is the alarming result of an EUROBAROMETER opinion poll. It is therefore no wonder that many citizens all over the Continent anticipate May 1<sup>st</sup> with skepticism. One of the most prominent concerns is that cheap labor will "flood" the already strained Western European labor markets. Given this tendency of negative popular opinion, who would have the guts to point to the deep traditions, which Czechs, Slovaks, Poles and Balts will contribute to the European orchestra next spring, adding both new and old accents to an already rich ensemble? The long-term analysis of MEDIA TENOR shows that coverage on these topics is far from sufficient to break through the awareness threshold, let alone to overcome prejudices.

The citizens' feeling of a lack of information correlates perfectly with the virtual absence of coverage on EU topics. MEDIA TENOR analyzed 678,541 news pieces in 23 opinion forming media in Germany as well as 89,049 pieces in four British television news programs between January 1<sup>st</sup> 2001 and October 30<sup>th</sup> 2003. The results show that neither the EU as a whole, nor the eastern enlargement play any perceivable role. The growing importance of the EU and its enlargement is not reflected in media reporting. Only 5% of overall coverage was spent on EU topics. The heart of this focused on the respective ratings of the Euro, the financial policy of the European Central Bank or the fiscal behavior of member states.

### German media are not an engine for the EU

Despite the low presence of the topic 'EU enlargement', its coverage has had an effect on public opinion. The analysis shows that, with a small time lag, the public assessment of the European Union trails the journalists' respective changes of opinion. For example, after an initial skepticism towards enlargement, in the last three years the media's attitude towards the EU gradually turned more positive on average, as the opposite graph demonstrates. With this evalu-

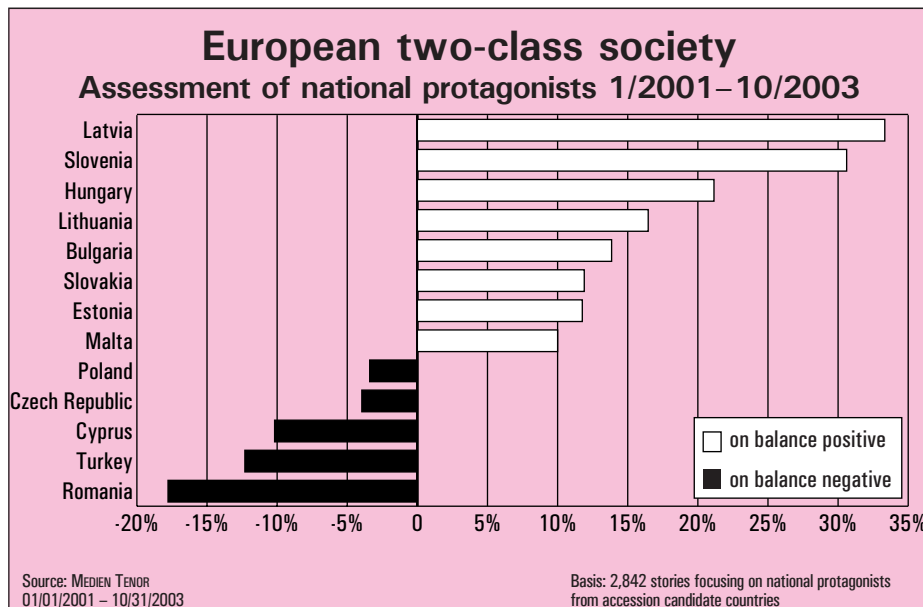
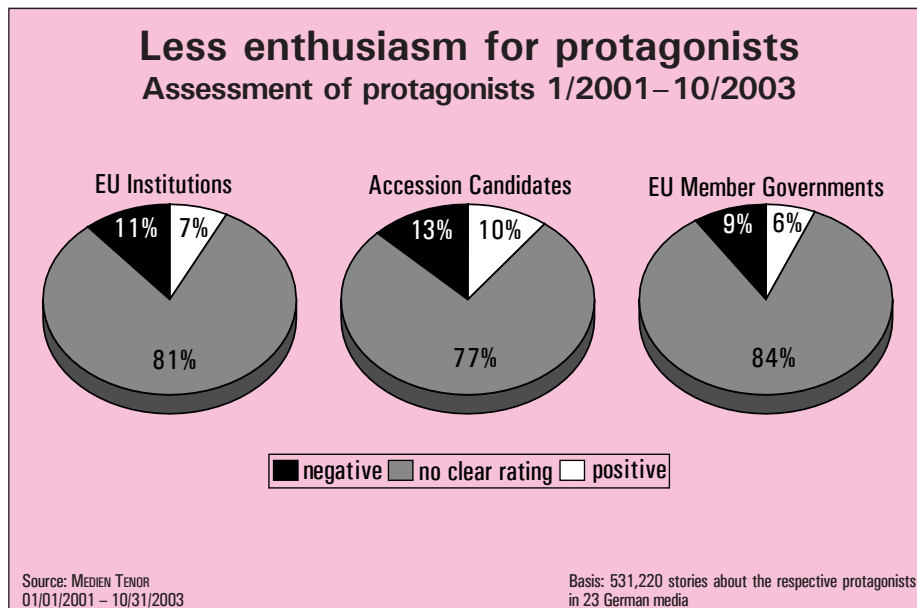




ation, the majority of journalists rather followed the progress in the countries' legal integration and the different steps of enlargement, as outlined by the press releases of official Brussels authorities. In 2001, for example, positive assessments were on the rise after the session of the European Council in Gothenburg, at which the time frame for the entry negotiations was decided. The difficult negotiations of Copenhagen in December 2002, however, caused a rather negative echo. This year the positive coverage on enlargement primarily follows the successful referendums in the ten new member countries and the signing of the accession treaties in Athens.

#### National governments make use of Brussel's negative media image

Journalists report when the Heads of State invite them to. In the absence of a specific event, the readiness to report on one of the most important future challenges for the European Union drops dramatically. Accordingly, public opinion on the EU turns negative at times when journalists neglect their duty to report. The image of the new member countries and of the EU in general appears to depend on the success or failure of selected EU summits. But these are more likely to reinforce clichés and prejudices in public opinion than to provide material for sustainable news presentation. The latest German example of disregarding the Maastricht criteria shows how national governments take advantage of this information vacuum, presenting their simplified version of the role play "Bad Brussels Guys versus Good Berlin Guys".



#### Two-class society of accession candidates?

The Latvian president Vike-Freiberga, looking at the status of the new member states, calls for preventing a two-class society within the European Union (HANDELSBLATT, October 29<sup>th</sup> 2003). The MEDIA TENOR analysis, however, shows that this is already in place in the media. While some of the candidate countries have a rather positive image in the German opinion leading media, others show a clear deficit – not only looking at the value judgements on them, but also at the minimal amount of media coverage. It is true that, on average, journal-

ists portray the process of enlargement rather positively. But they evaluate the countries themselves differently, both within and outside of the context of the EU. The Latvian president as well as the economic “powerhouse” Slovenia and the officials responsible for the two new member states should not have to worry about their image in the German media. Coverage of their government and business representatives is primarily positive. More worrisome, however, is the overall lack of reporting on them.

**Virtually no information about “real life” in the candidate countries**

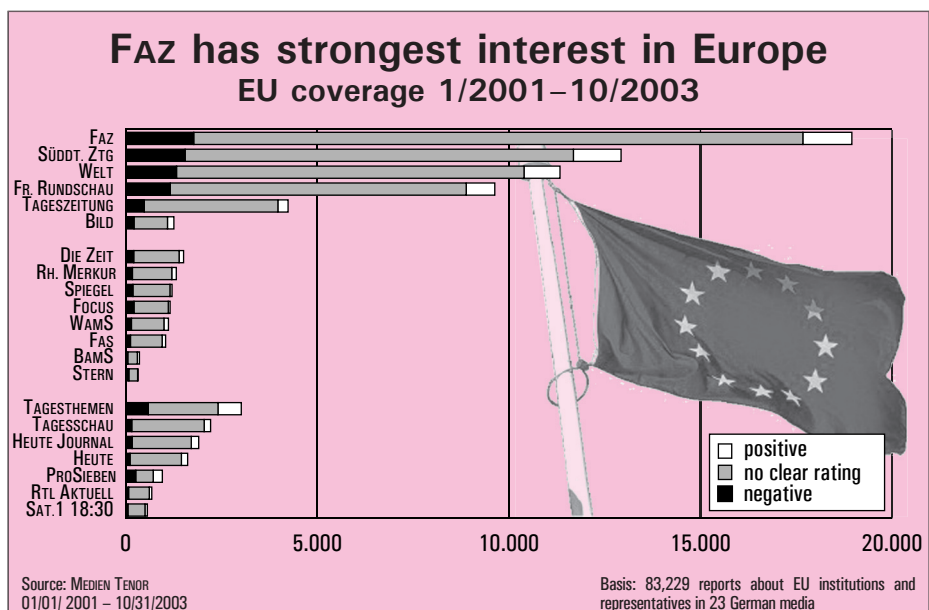
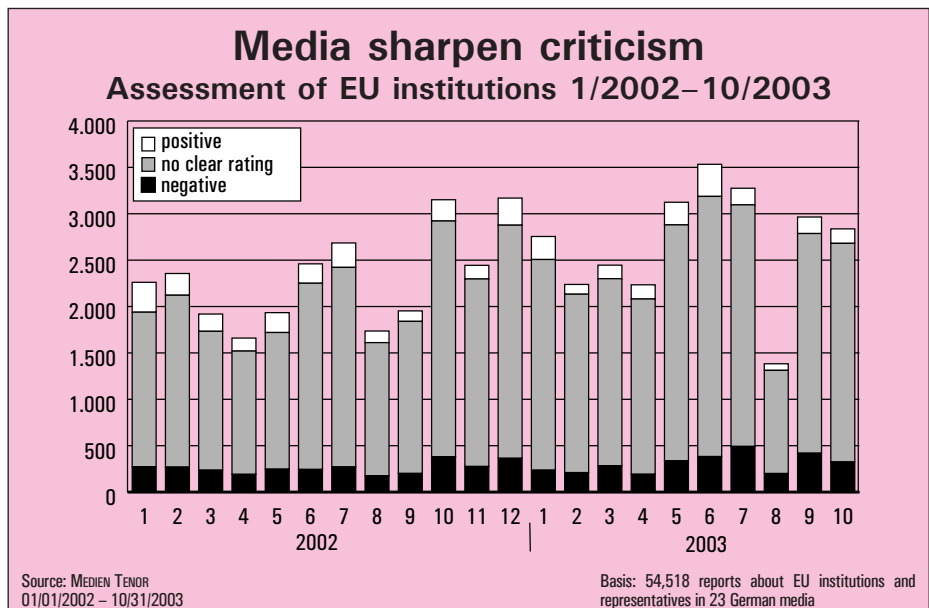
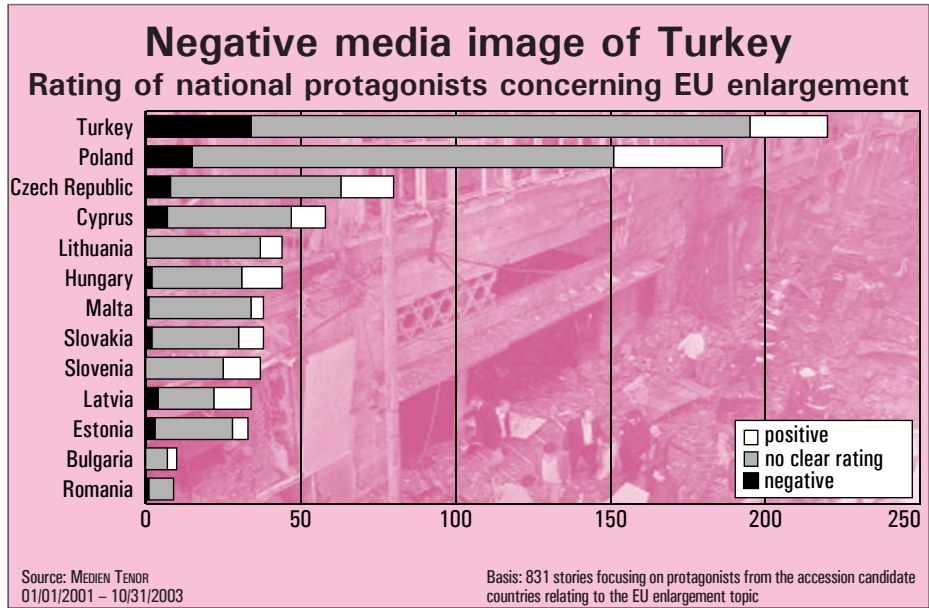
Most of the new member countries suffered from a general media absence. Throughout the entire period of analysis of almost three years, only 1% of coverage dealt with the domestic realities in the countries. Accordingly, information on them with regard to EU enlargement remains scarce. With this level of coverage it would be too much to expect that EU citizens were adequately prepared for the new situation. Fears of costs or labor immigration are the natural consequence. It is also conceivable that citizens of the old member states will start to oppose the enlargement as soon as they will realize, looking at the amount of money in their pockets, that the enlarged community does not come for free.

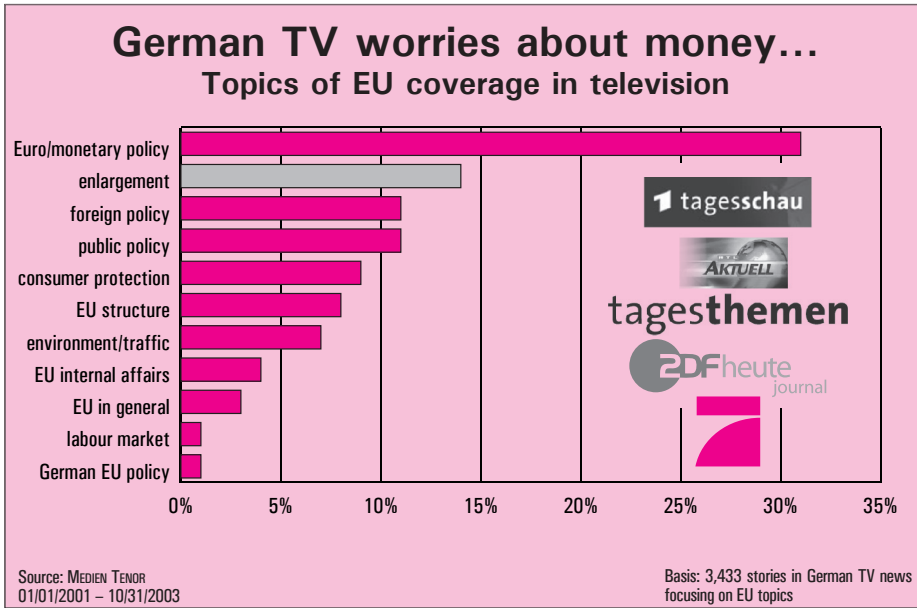
**Focus on Turkey – not on Eastern European candidates**

The enlargement process will not be finished on May 1<sup>st</sup> 2004. It is therefore worth looking at the media presence of the subsequent candidates. Their situation is even worse. Of this group, Turkey is portrayed most negatively. Ankara has not yet started official entry negotiations with the EU, but if Chancellor Gerhard Schröder’s suggestions after the most recent terror attacks in Istanbul were followed, it would already be accepted into the club in 2004. The portrayal of the terror attacks in Turkey as well as its position before and after the war in Iraq reduced the focus on the topic of enlargement.

**Distrust towards “Islamic” or “authoritarian” Turks**

Most journalists are skeptical on this issue, questioning the country’s politi-



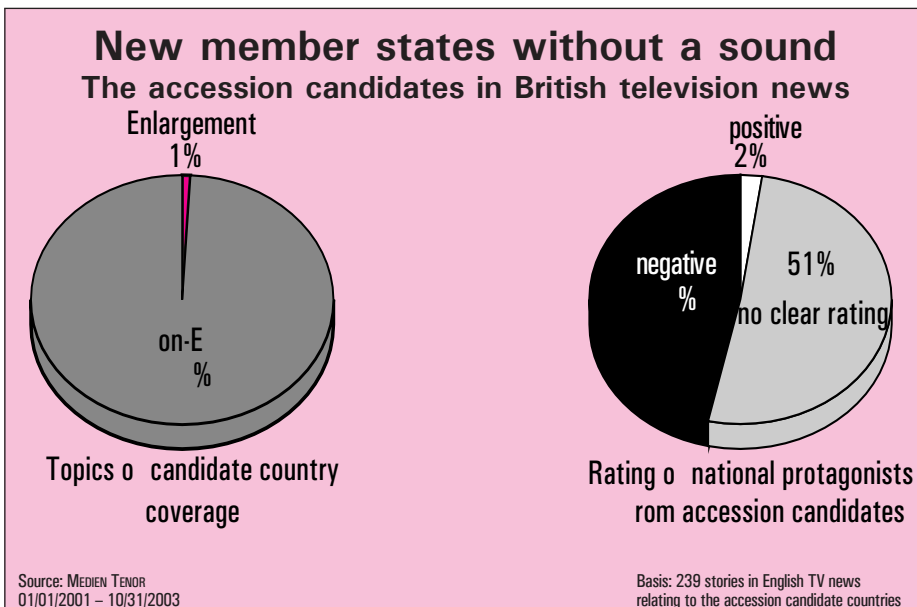
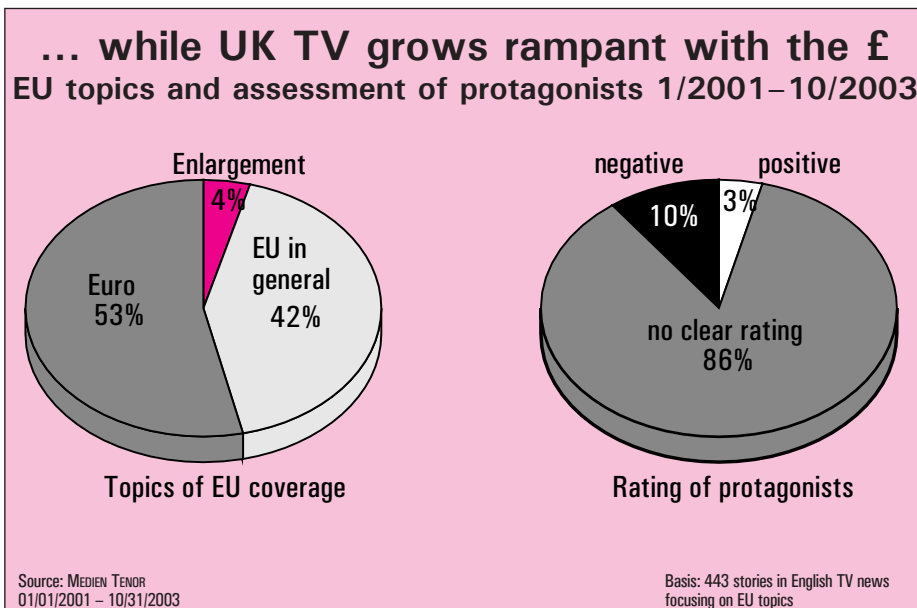


cal and economical stability as well as its commitment to human rights. This skepticism might increase after the most recent events in Istanbul. According to the latest EUROBAROMETER opinion polls, Turkey's request for joining only meets little enthusiasm within EU member states. Among Germans interviewees, the opposition against accepting Turkey is particularly strong. A similar correlation between public opinion and media portrayal is also evident in the coverage on Poland or Romania.

#### The British view on enlargement reveals even less awareness

German journalists are certainly not the only ones to provide inadequate coverage. Television news coverage in England shows even less interest in and enthusiasm towards the new EU member states. The low quality of EU coverage on BBC and ITV news programs is reflected by how little the British know about the Union and its eastward expansion program. In several subsequent years, they fared badly in respective surveys (see EUROBAROMETER 58). Germany is obviously not alone in neglecting the EU as a topic. In neither country has the EU Commission succeeded in making its citizens welcome the new member states. In so far as public consent to EU enlargement is not a nice decoration but a necessary condition for the success of the project, the national politicians, the EU bureaucracy and the media have done a terrible job

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#### Basis

**Media:** BERLINER ZTG. (2003), BILD, FAZ, FRANKFURTER RUNDSCHAU, SÄCHSISCHE ZTG. (2003), SÜDDEUTSCHE ZTG., TAZ and WELT; FOCUS, SPIEGEL, STERN, RH. MERKUR, ZEIT, BILD AM SONNTAG, FAZ SONNTAGSZEITUNG (since 2002) and WELT AM SONNTAG (since 2002), ZDF HEUTE, ZDF HEUTE JOURNAL, ARD TAGESSCHAU, ARD TAGESTHEMEN, RTL AKTUELL, SAT.1 18:30, PROSIEBEN NEWS; BBC SIX O'CLOCK NEWS, BBC TEN O'CLOCK NEWS, ITV EARLY EVENING NEWS, ITV NEWS AT TEN

**Period:** 01/01/2001 – 10/31/2003

**Polls:** EUROBAROMETER, EUROPEAN OPINION RESEARCH GROUP EEIG

**Analysis:** Evaluation of the politics and business sections in the print media, complete analysis of TV news. Examination of all stories dealing with the accession candidates as main protagonists and analysis of all reports describing the EU or its institutions for at least 5 lines/sec.