

# Different perspectives

## Locations, protagonists and topic structures in international TV news, 03-04/2006

[www.verfassungsschutz-bw.de/kgi/islam\\_medien\\_arab\\_med\\_almanar.htm](http://www.verfassungsschutz-bw.de/kgi/islam_medien_arab_med_almanar.htm)  
[viadrina.eu.v-frankfurt-o.de/~sk/Berlusconi/Index.html](http://viadrina.eu.v-frankfurt-o.de/~sk/Berlusconi/Index.html)

**E**thnocentrism is a charge that is levelled at the media for a very long time. In the 1960s, the perceived imbalance of reporting – focusing on high-status nations and neglecting most of the so-called “Third World” – gave rise to new approaches in the analysis of the role of news selection and the factors determining international news flow. But the unquestioning application of Western standards to media in other political and cultural environments by the media scholars themselves is a comparable form of a constricted view. **Media Tenor**’s continuing analysis of news shows in an international perspective comparing programs from Germany, the UK, South Africa and the USA allows for a comparison of differing perspectives on the world from different media systems. With the recent addition of Arab satellite TV, Russian, Italian and Swiss programmes this analysis brings new insight.

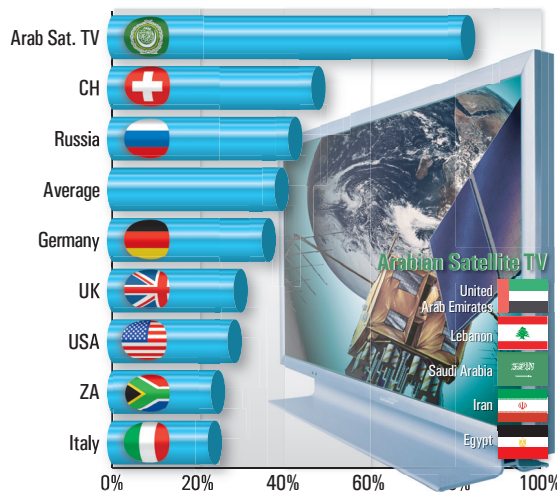
The advance of new pan-Arab satellite TV stations in the wake of the Middle East conflicts has given a new forum to the public in the Arab and North African muslim-populated countries. The cultural hegemony of Islam and the struggle for Palestinian independence and emancipation from the West results in a extreme focus on foreign news not matched by any other national TV programme (**Chart 1**). This tendency is obviously amplified by the news control

exercised by the national governments in Egypt, Iran, Lebanon, Qatar and Saudi Arabia that remain suspicious of the TV stations private and public in their jurisdiction. This is illustrated by the fact that even in the Saudi Arab state TV channel **Al-Ikhbariyah** foreign news account for more than 2/3 of all news stories. In the prototypes of pan-Arab satellite TV, **Al-Jazeera** and **Al-Arabiyah** news relating to their country of origin accounts for less than 5%.

It is rather eye-catching, that the three Russian TV channels incorporated for the first time into an international comparison of news structures, show a above-average share of foreign news than the state-controlled Arab programmes. Their slice ranges from 44.6% in **ORT** and 45% in **Rossija (RTR) News** to 47.8% in **NTW** (Russia). As there could up to now only analysed three weeks of Russian programming, these results are only tentative, but they suggest, that Russian news is rather focused on the national sphere of interest – the so-called “near abroad”, with Serbia, Ukraine, Belarus and even Georgia ranking before the USA or Iraq in terms of visibility.

A similar strong focus on foreign news was displayed by the Swiss public channel **SF**, which is related to the central location of the country amidst several greater nations, that have ancient historical connections with Switzerland. Almost 1/4 of all foreign news stories in the main evening news related to the three big neighbour countries Germany, France and Italy. The **Tagesschau** showed an especially strong interest in the events in Italy, where national elections took place on April, 9<sup>th</sup>. Almost 12% of all reports related to Italy.

### 1 Share of foreign news in international comparison

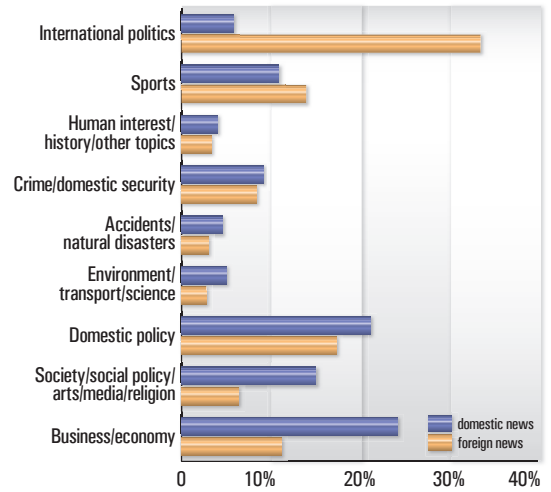


Share of all new stories

Source: Media Tenor 03/01 – 04/30/2006 (Russian TV – 03/24/2006)

Basis: 39,828 news stories in 34 news programs from 13 countries

### 2 Topic structures in international and domestic news



Share of all new stories

Source: Media Tenor 03/01 – 04/30/2006 (Russian TV – 03/24/2006)

Basis: 39,828 news stories in 34 news programs from 13 countries

Elections and crime cause Italian introspection

In the other countries in the sample the share of foreign news stayed below 40%, with Italian RAI Uno channel producing the most inward-looking program in connections with the national elections mentioned above. South African news focused on domestic affairs even more than US news, although news from Iraq might be considered as some form of domestic news with the focus on the American troops deployed in Mesopotamia. 12.4% of all news stories, about 40% of US TV foreign news reported from the occupied country.

**Drama and human touch**

News values theory presumes that different aspects of “newsworthiness” develop a cumulative effect. With the different aspects of proximity – political, cultural or economic – having a especially strong influence on news selection, other aspects like negativity or prominence would need to be exceptionally strong to lift news from abroad into the news. This phenomenon is conventional wisdom, insofar the number of victims seems to grow proportionally with the distance from the location of the accident or crime. But a comparison of the topic structures of domestic and foreign news shows different results.

About 1/3 of all foreign news – defined as news focusing on foreign countries – dealt with international politics or foreign affairs as viewed from the perspective of the home country of the news organisation (chart 2). With the ongoing insurgency in Iraq, the aggravating conflict between Iran and the international community and the upheaval in the Palestinian territories there were several hot spot galvanising media and publics all over the world.

Another focal point of foreign news is sports with international events catching a higher share of all top-

ics in most of the analysed countries with the exception of the USA. The United States prove themselves as a world of its own on this field too. The indifference of the Americans towards soccer was noted by the Economist as “another example of American exceptionalism”.

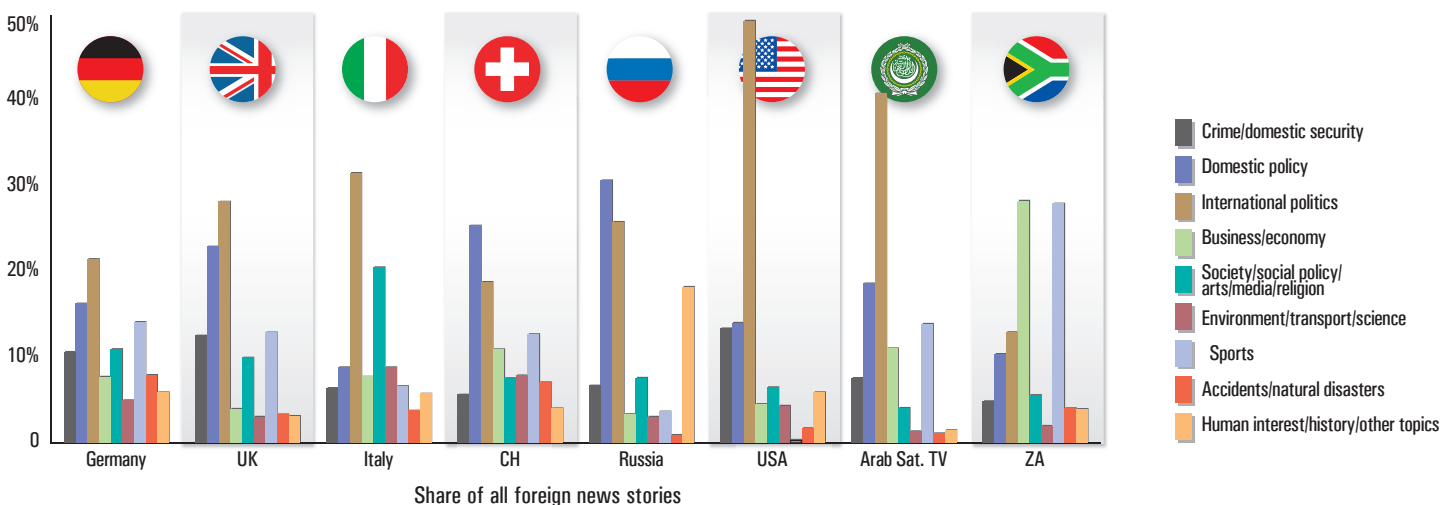
On all other fields of reporting, international coverage did not exceed domestic coverage at all. There was definitely no higher share of crime or disaster reports in news from abroad than in the coverage of domestic affairs. Contrary to the perception of an ever increasing process of economic globalisation, business news remained more domestic in outlook than all other topics. This hold true for all analysed countries, even for the Arab news channels, where the programs with the most marked pan-Arab orientation showed the least interest in economic and business issues.

In the case of crime, with the exception of Italian RAI Uno news, the differences between domestic and foreign ranged between 3.1% in Germany and 0.2% in Russia. Crime topics exceeded the 10% mark only in the foreign coverage of German, UK and US news (chart 3). In Italy, on the other hand, about 27.6% of domestic news dealt with crime issues, as the corpse of the kidnapped 17 months old Tommaso Onofri was found on April 2nd. This drama on its own accounted for 10% of all news in the two months analysed.

This gruesome story points to another feature of TV reporting – the trend to personalise issues, conflicts and problems. The actors before the camera and the journalists behind it join forces in the ongoing process of personalising all aspects of reporting. This holds true for politicians and business people as well as for the journalists themselves. The life comment

**Sports and commodity prices galvanise South African TV**

**3 Topic structures of foreign news in international comparison**



Source: Media Tenor 03/01 – 04/30/2006 (Russian TV – 03/24/2006) Basis: 19,848 foreign news stories in 34 news programs from 13 countries

from the correspondent in front of the prime minister's office has become an necessary part of TV reporting, even when this journalists might be less informed about the policy matters discussed behind the walls of the government buildings than his colleagues in the studio. About 2/3 of all news stories on TV mentions or depicts at least one person, that can be identified, for at least 5 seconds. In foreign news this share is with 65% slightly higher than in domestic coverage with 61.8%. Most marked was this trend in Swiss news, whereas in South Africa, the US, Italy and the Arab programs personalisation was higher in domestic news.

**Government TV**

The power of personal presence as a channel for communication with the electorate and the people is well known to the leading politicians in the world. But there are notable differences between the analysed countries. Whereas the British prime minister Tony Blair centered in about 2.6% of all news stories in three **BBC** news programmes, Angela Merkel in 0.7% of the newscast in seven private and public TV news shows, Vladimir Putin garnered 4.7% of the reporting in two public and one officially independent news programmes in Russia. George W. Bush displayed an even stronger position in US news with a share of 6.8%. Naturally Italian news focused strongly on the two contenders for the job of prime minister, the media savvy Silvio Berlusconi, who owns the leading private TV stations and exercised a stronger influence on the **RAI** public TV programme, and former EU president Romano Prodi: With a share of 5.5% Berlusconi grabbed nearly double the awareness in **RAI Uno** of Prodi with a share of 2.9% of all stories.

But whereas Blair and Bush had to endure severe criticism in their national news programmes, Berlusconi and Putin managed to evade negative news, as did Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and King Abdualh of Saudi Arabia in their Nile News and Al-Ikhbariyah TV stations. At least in the two months analyzed, German chancellor Angela Merkel enjoyed a positive coverage, but this can be judged as an anomaly in view of **Media Tenor's** long-term analysis of political reporting in Germany, which is characterised by a marked negativism in comment and in the reported quotes of political protagonists about their opponents.

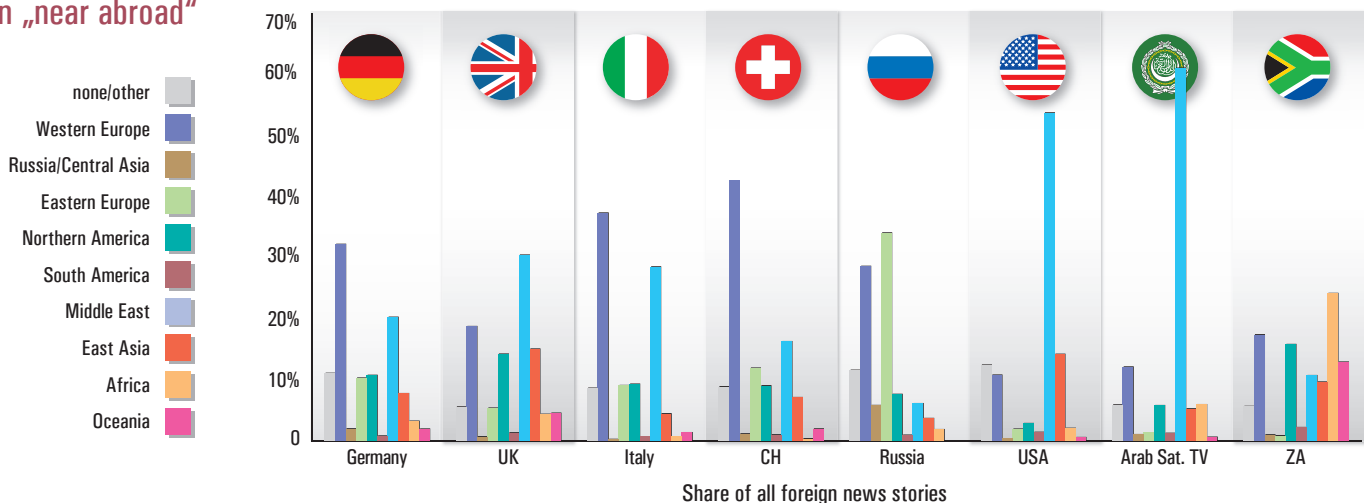
**War and peace**

In the 1960s news values theory presumed a preponderance of so-called high status nations in international news. After the end of the cold war, only the USA has retained its status, whereas Russia and France have lost international influence and visibility. In four of the seven non-US countries in the media sample the USA ranks first or second as location; US protagonists account for 12.3% of all actors in international coverage. Russian, Italy and the Arab stations show less interest in news from the US. Thus regional orientations show up in the differences between European, American, African and Arab programmes, but they are overshadowed by the Iraq drama, which continues to dominate international news for several reasons (chart 4).

With the controversial history of the Gulf wars, the ongoing flow of brutal pictures, provided by an abundance of suicide bombers and TV teams, a steady repetition of bad news is guaranteed. Although US and Arab news look at the Iraq conflict in opposing perspectives, the struggle remains the defining issue

Russian TV focuses on „near abroad“

**4 Regional structures of foreign news in international comparison**



Source: Media Tenor

03/01 – 04/30/2006 (Russian TV – 03/24/2006)

Basis: 19,848 foreign news stories in 34 news programs from 13 countries

in international coverage for both parties. With 50% to 60% of all foreign news originating in the Middle East for these two countries, there is virtually no room left for profound information from other parts of the world. But in European perspective, the world consists only of Europe, America and the crisis region Middle East too. Only **BBC** news showed a serious interest in East Asia, but news from Africa, South America, Russian and Central Asia played no role in the media world of all countries analysed.

**Clash of cultures**

At least the different world views of pan-Arab and Western media gives an explanation for the increasing hostility between the two cultures. Although hostility towards the US increased in the wake of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the defining issue has been the Palestine conflict. News from the Palestine received nearly the same amount of reporting than from Iraq. In their concentration on these conflicts, there are only little differences between the stations (chart 5). Only **Al-Jazeera**, which has achieved a status comparable to that of Western TV stations, and the government-controlled Saudi-Arab station **Al-Ikhbariyah** display an interest into other regions worth mentioning. This one-sidedness of reporting in terms of news selection, not to speak about the political attitudes displayed by these stations, is evidence of the incompatible perspectives of Arab and Western TV. The high popularity of these stations can be traced back directly to the single-minded pursuit of Arab and Palestinian positions. TV programming all over the world is thus characterised more by the differences than by the common ground. Common standards of objective information and journalistic quality remain an elusive goal. ck

**Basis:**

**Media:**

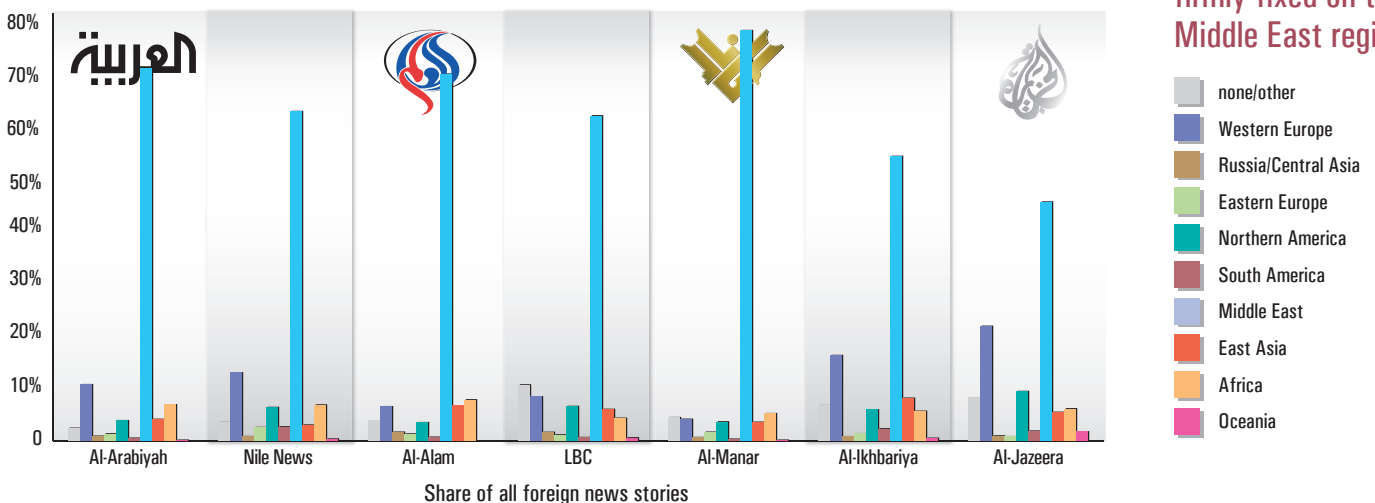
Arab satellite TV	Al-Alam (private)	Al-Arabiya (private)	Al-Ikhbariya (public)	Al-Jazeera (private)	Al-Manar (private)	LBC (private)	Nile News (public)
Germany	ARD Tagesschau (public)	ARD Tagesthemen (public)	ProSieben News (private)	RTL Aktuell (private)	SAT.1 News (private)	ZDF heute (public)	ZDF heute journal (public)
Italy	RAI 1 News (public)						
Russia	NTV news (private)	ORT news (public)	RTR news (public)				
South Africa	Afrikaans News (SABC2/public)	English News (SABC3/public)	E-TV News (private)	Africa News Update (SABC3/public)	News @ 10 (SABC3/public)	News @ One (SABC3/public)	Sotho News (SABC/public)
	Zulu/Xhosa News (SABC/public)						
Switzerland	SF Tagesschau (public)						
United Kingdom	BBC 1 Six o' Clock News (public)	BBC 1 Ten o' Clock News (public)	BBC 2 Newsnight (public)				
USA	ABC news (private)	CBS news (private)	Fox news (private)	NBC news (private)			

Period: 01.03. – 30.04.2006 (Russian media - 24.03.2006)

Analysis: Evaluation of locations, main protagonists and topic structures on story level.

Even Al-Jazeera's outlook remains firmly fixed on the Middle East region

**5 Regional structures of foreign news in Arab satellite TV**



Source: Media Tenor

03/01 – 04/30/2006

Basis: 10,452 foreign news stories in 7 news programs from 6 Arab countries