

# Strong reputations on difficult issues

## The federal ministry for health and social affairs had the best media image 2002-2005

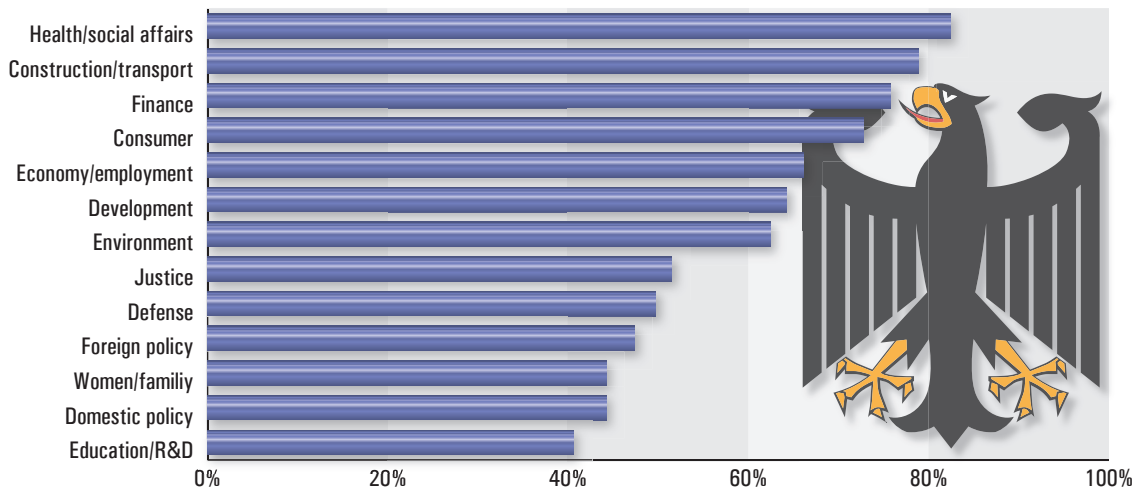
Whether or not the federal ministries do their job, and how well, is up for debate. Yet what the media thought of each of the ministry's expertise can be measured by analyzing the media image of the federal ministries. Such an analysis shows the extent

the daily flood of news briefs and opinions. A reliable expert offers clarity and contributes to a more varied political coverage, if he can make himself heard.

From its continuous analysis of coverage in a total of 38 media outlets, **Media Tenor** chose 540,000 articles and television news stories from between October 2002 and June 2005, which focused on one of the ministries or their political field. In addition to that, 2,5 million single statements from the analysis of political coverage were examined since January 2003.

Research Link:  
<http://www.bundesregierung.de/Bundesregierung/422/Bundesministerien.htm>

### 1 End result: The ministry for health and social affairs reached 82.4% of the total score



Source: Media Tenor

10/01/2002 - 06/30/2005

Basis: 100 percent = 165 basis points

to which the opinion forming media take a ministry seriously, regardless of the personality of the corresponding minister. In the expiring 15th session of the German Bundestag (lower house of parliament), one of them managed to do so unexpectedly: The ministry for health and social affairs. It had to deal with many controversial issues, among them preparing a contested healthcare reform, which was only passed after long nights of negotiations between the government and the opposition. In the end, it also served as a whipping-boy for the way the reform was put into practice.

Nevertheless, compared to other ministries of the red-green government, it had the best media image in the past three years. The **Media Tenor** data show that journalists of the opinion forming media in Germany considered its staff members to be reliable experts in the field.

And this is important, because when political media coverage declines, democracy falters as well. At times when Germany is facing important decisions, diversity of information is crucial for citizens to decide whether or not they are ready to accept reforms. But diversity is also a question of expertise. Journalists complain that reliable experts are hard to find in

Given this broad database, **Media Tenor** was able to determine which of the ministries (the chancellery was not part of the analysis) contributed the most to diversity in political coverage.

The coverage on the federal ministries was compared with the help of 11 criteria: How much coverage did the ministries themselves – compared with their corresponding ministers – attract, thereby establishing a separate identity and significance? Which ministry attracted most of the media attention on the central issues in their area of responsibility? Which of them was quoted most frequently? And which ministry was assessed especially positively, not only directly but also compared to the image of its corresponding minister? Each of the criteria was analyzed on the news story level – that is when the focus of the story was the actual ministry – and also on the statement level, when it was merely mentioned in the piece.

**Graph 1** shows the end result: The ministry for health and social affairs reached 82.4% of the total score, that is it did well on many points. Other ministries with challenging agendas ranked second and third: The ministry for construction, transport, and Eastern development, which was administering the

disaster of the flawed road pricing system for trucks, and, this is a real surprise, the finance ministry, whose head is almost by default the scapegoat of German politics.

**Experts are assessed positively**

The supposed problem cases among the ministries were assessed more positively than expected, both on their own and in comparison to their corresponding minister. **Graph 2** shows the results of this comparison. The finance ministry leads this statistic. Certainly, since the beginning of 2003, it attracted hardly any positive statements in the media (only 0,9% of the almost 20,000 statements were positive). The 6,4% share of negative statements gave it a negative bal-

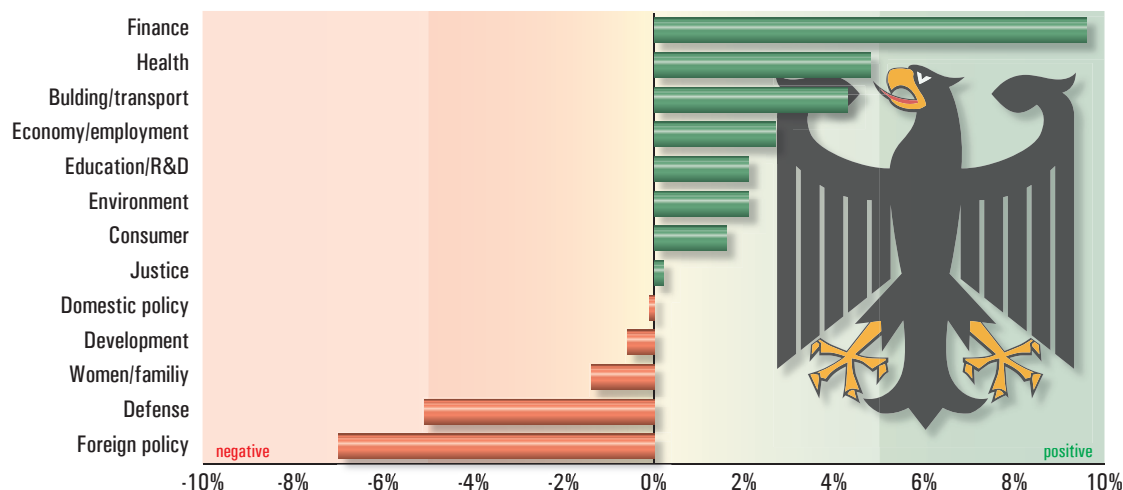
ance of -5,5. But compared with the assessment of the finance minister Hans Eichel (-15) it looks good: The media's criticism focused on the head, not on the department, whose expertise was not put into doubt.

The overall winner ranks second in this statistic, while the ministry for foreign affairs brings up the rear. Throughout the so-called visa affair, its minister Joschka Fischer (Bündnis 90/Grüne) contributed to shifting the blame onto his staff.

**Experts are quoted**

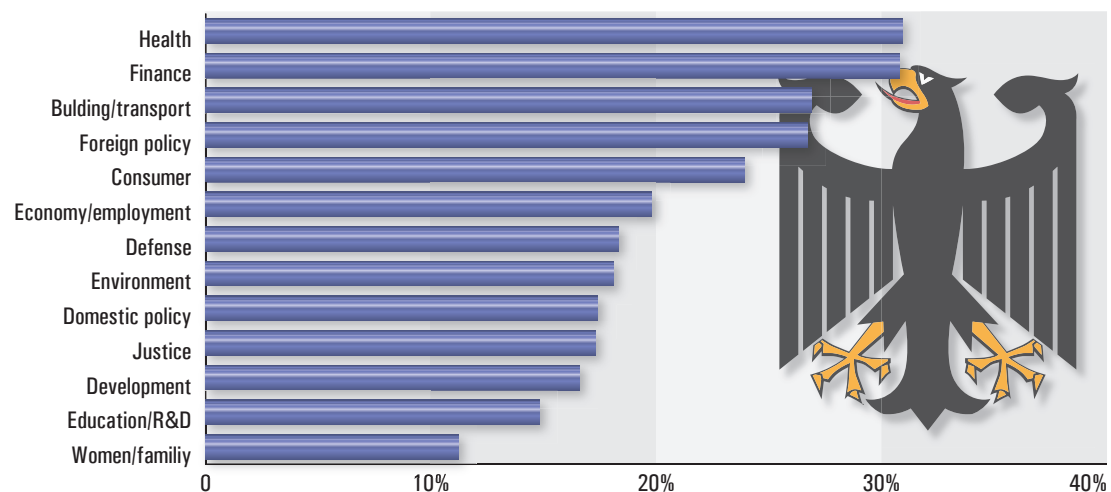
All three ministries fare well in the quotation category: **Graph 3** illustrates the quotes in relation to the minister. This criterion was supposed to measure to what extent the ministries were able to shape their

**2 Rating of ministries in comparison to their corresponding minister**



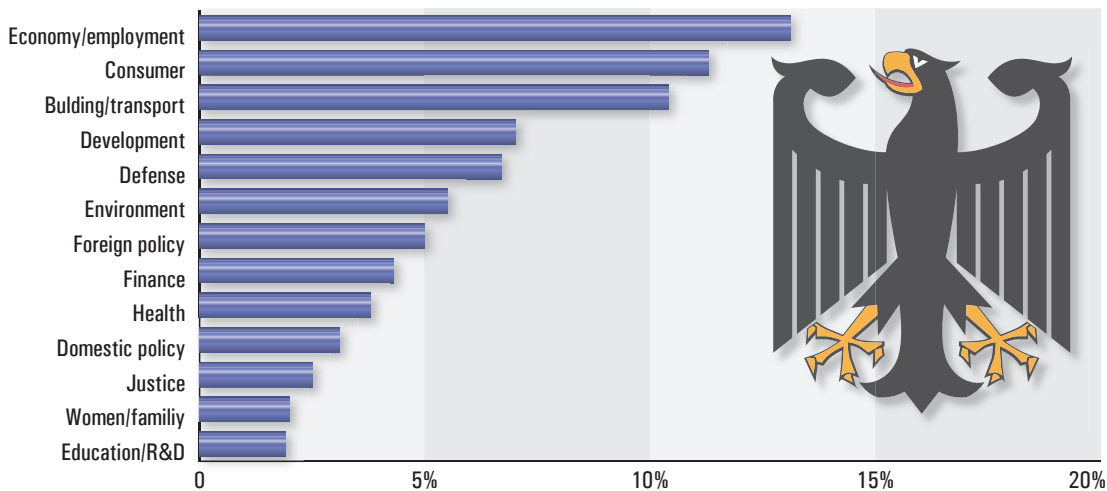
Source: Media Tenor 10/01/2002 - 06/30/2005 Basis: A total of 577,111 statements about federal ministries and federal ministers

**3 Quotes: To what extent the ministries were able to shape their own media image?**



Source: Media Tenor 10/01/2002 - 06/30/2005 Basis: A total of 307,150 statements about federal ministries and federal ministers

#### 4 Extent to which ministries were the focus in news stories on their areas of expertise



Source: Media Tenor

10/01/2002 - 06/30/2005

Basis: A total of 457,517 statements

own media image. Journalists, in their coverage on the federal government, normally quote the corresponding minister in at least two thirds of all cases. The staff of the health and finance ministry, however, managed to be quoted more frequently in comparison to their ministers than their colleagues in other departments. The family ministry comes last in this statistic, with only one quote from the ministry for every nine statements by minister Renate Schmidt (SPD).

Of course, this statistic is based on the analysis of all the media outlets. In specific cases, the results are quite varied: The weekly media **Spiegel**, **Stern**, **Rheinischer Merkur** and **Super Illu** hardly ever gave a quote from the ministry when writing about it, while the share of quotes was particularly high in the coverage of the daily newspaper **FAZ** and the TV magazine **Frontal 21**.

#### Experts dominate topics

The ministry for health and social affairs was less successful in shaping the agenda in its area of responsibility. This analysis looked at the extent to which the ministries were the focus in news stories on their areas of expertise or were mentioned or quoted in political coverage on those issues. Included in the analysis was the area of responsibility, in which the ministry – not the minister – attracted the highest share of the coverage. Special topics such as the visa affair or the Tsunami were excluded from the analysis.

**Graph 4** shows the result of the coverage on the ministries. When the media reported on the competitiveness of the German economy, the economy and labor ministry was addressed in 13.1% of the statements from or about political protagonists. The health

ministry barely placed in this statistic. A share of only 3.8% in the coverage on healthcare policy illustrates that, in the case of this reform topic, journalists rather focused on parties and the minister.

In the end, this result shows that even the ministries with a comparatively positive media image had a hard time positioning themselves on their central topics. Especially in healthcare, there continues to be much need for reform in Germany. The coverage in the opinion forming German media often suffers from a lack of continuous, fact-based discussion of this topic. Expertise is badly needed. It remains to be seen whether the ministry for health and social affairs in the new government will be able to place its respected voice more often in the media than up until now. Ret.

#### Basis:

**Media:** Bild, Berliner Zeitung, Die Welt, F.A.Z., Frankfurter Rundschau, Sächsische Zeitung, Süddeutsche Zeitung, taz; Focus, Spiegel, Stern, Super Illu, Die Zeit, Rheinischer Merkur, Bild am Sonntag, Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung, Welt am Sonntag;

ARD Tagesschau and Tagesthemen, ZDF heute and heute journal, Deutsche Welle TV News in German and English, RTL Aktuell, SAT.1 News, ProSieben Nachrichten; Bericht aus Berlin, Fakt, Kontraste, Monitor, Panorama, Plusminus, Report (BR und SWR), Berlin direkt, Frontal 21 and WISO;

Deutschlandradio (6 o'clock news)

**Timeline:** 10/01/2002 – 06/30/2005

**Analysis:** 31,146 stories about German Federal Ministries and/or Ministers