

# **Media Coverage of the Single Currency in Britain: An Assessment of Television News in the First Year of the Euro**

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## Abstract

This paper will focus on television coverage of the single currency in its initial phase, from December 1998 to January 2000. The corpus of news analysed is drawn from the flagship evening bulletins of the BBC and ITN. The paper explores a number of questions. How salient was news about the euro? How does television deal with the issue of Britain's distance from the economic community that 'Euroland' now represents (i.e. what did television tell the public as the pros and cons of British involvement and non-involvement). A particular focus here will be the issue of tax harmonisation - the extent to which this was cast as a threat to the British sovereignty and the manner in which it is seen to constitute a threat to the legitimacy of further moves towards European economic integration. The paper also looks at the extent to which news about the euro is refracted through the prism of domestic party-political debate. Finally, the decline in the value of the euro is assessed, with particular emphasis on how television explained and accounted for the drop, but it will also assess the manner in which the coverage handled the issue of euro interest rate decision-making. The domestic political implications of the structure of coverage are explored and the paper will finish with an assessment of what the analysis tells us in terms of a prospective 'media impact' research agenda.

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## Introduction

The single currency was, is and will continue to be a controversial, divisive and politically salient issue. During the 1992-97 parliament it was clearly problematic for the Conservatives (Gavin and Sanders, 1997) and the euro has remained on the agenda during New Labour's first administration, albeit in a slightly more muted form. The significance of the single currency for the EU's industrial, economic and financial future, cannot be overestimated and not surprisingly a great deal has been written about its genesis, early experiments in convergence and the political, diplomatic and economic developments surrounding the start of trading in January 1999. But the advent of the euro should also be seen as a symbol of all that Europe wishes to become and it is part of a broader move towards European political and economic integration. Seen in this context, it will be all the more worrying for the architects of the euro that the attitudes of the British public towards the single currency have slowly, but markedly, become more jaded and negative (Leonard, 1998; ICM Guardian poll, March 1999; ICM Single Currency poll, January 2000)<sup>1</sup>. With the euro as important as it is at both a institutional and symbolic level, this represents a problem and could potentially reflect on the overall legitimacy of the EU and impede the development public identification with European institutions.

The ebbing away of British public support for European monetary integration and, indeed, for the 'European dream' itself, raises a variety of questions. What is the role here of media in this decline? We know that the British public are likely to be a degree more dependent on media coverage for information about Europe than they might be if we were dealing with domestic considerations (Gavin, 1997; Norris, 2000). But a prior question concerns the relative influence of the principal mass media – newspapers and television. Certainly a number of studies bear testimony to the weight of negative coverage of Europe in the mainstream press (Hardt-Mautner, 1995; Morgan, 1998; Wilkes and Wring, 1998; Anderson and Weymouth, 1999; Brookes, 1999; Norris, 2000). However, the current literature on the impact of the media tends to suggest that at general elections at least, the press has a lesser impact on the public than we might imagine (Curtice and Semetko, 1994; Norris et al. 1999). On the other hand, it is certainly the case that television is the public's most widely used and most trusted source of political information (Independent Television Commission, 1996; Barnett, 1989; Eurobarometer, 49, 1998), and European citizens consistently list television as the most important source from which they receive information about the EU.<sup>2</sup> We also know from a range of studies that television has the potential to influence perceptions about the economy generally (Gavin and Sanders, 1998), that television's European coverage has the ability to set the public agenda (Norris et al. 1999)<sup>3</sup> and that, in some circumstances, reports have the capacity to influence the way the public think about Europe (Valkenburg, Semetko and De Vreese, 1999). So the research suggests that if the media do have an impact on public attitudes, it is likely that television will have the most potential.

Given the potential significance of television, it is surprising that so little systematic analysis has been done of the way British broadcasters portray the EU. There are very few extended analyses of coverage (Morgan, 1998), few touch on European economic issues (Gavin, 2000) and only one has undertaken a quantitative study of the euro (Norris, 2000). The two latter studies suggest that reports on European economic developments are a consistent feature of flagship news broadcasts on the main terrestrial channels. However, it also suggested that 'negative news' tends to outweigh the 'positive'. It could be concluded then, that television news is a rather unlikely platform for the development of positive orientations towards Europe or, indeed, the formation of a British variant of European solidarity or identity. The structure of such coverage is explained not in terms of any hostile intent by the journalists themselves, but rather by the complex development of issues over time and by the intrinsic news value of many of the

stories that reflected badly on Europe. Little work has, however, been done which focuses in detail on the substantive and formal characteristics of coverage of the single currency, or on how the news might reflect on public attitudes. It is this gap that the paper seeks to address.

It has been argued elsewhere that if we are dealing with complex and evolving economic phenomena (like the single currency issue) and want to get a full and fair assessment of the structure and form of coverage, we need to look at a fairly broad corpus of news output (Gavin and Goddard, 1996; c.f. Jensen, 1987). Journalists themselves are painfully aware that complex issues cannot be fully explored in a single news bulletin and they are sensitive to the need to explain complicated issues to the public in a balanced and reasonably comprehensive manner over the longer term (Davies, 1998). With these points in mind, it seemed appropriate to cover a fairly broad corpus of televisual news on the single currency - in this instance, fourteen months from the beginning of the December preceding trade in the euro, through to the end of its first full year in late January 2000. The focus was on the mid-week, late evening, flagship news bulletins on BBC and ITN, as these have a reach that extends to millions.

## **The nature of television's euro coverage**

If euro coverage is our focus, a wide range of issues can profitably be addressed. For instance, how did stories connect the euro's evolution to party-political debate in Britain? And if the value of the euro fluctuated, how did news bulletins explain the changes? Finally, how did the coverage connect single currency issues 'outward' to the broader European political and institutional setting and 'inward' to the British economy?

But before we begin an exploration of these issues, we need to place 'euro news' in context and look at its overall saliency. The profile of the coverage can be assessed if we look at Tables 1. and 2.. Euro reporting needs to be placed in the general context of European news. The tables, therefore, make a three-fold distinction between stories which dealt broadly with non-euro related economic matters; coverage which was not 'about' the single currency, but touch upon it at the heart of the report; and, finally, news which dealt directly with the euro. The contours of the coverage are fairly clear. The single currency, as we can see, was a reasonably consistent feature of news coverage on both channels, although ITN, perhaps with a more populist approach, gave this heavy-weight issue less prominence than its rival. The peaks in the coverage were obviously at the onset of trading in the euro in January 1999 and during the European elections in the summer.

The euro might have achieved greater prominence had the French and German bans on British beef imports not displaced almost all other forms of European news in the autumn of 1999 and it has to be acknowledged that by the standards of coverage of the domestic economy (Gavin, 2000) the numbers are small. But it is equally clear from these tables that 'euro news' was a recurrent issue beyond the obvious peaks and troughs. We also need to bear in mind that each bulletin had a viewing audience that ran to millions, and that while we have focused on 'flagship' evening bulletins, there could be significant duplication of stories across the course of any one channel's daily news output. With these points in mind, the obvious question is, how did television news cover the single currency in its formative phase? The emphasis here turns from the 'visibility' of euro news to the substantive and formal characteristics of the coverage.

## The euro and adversarial discourse

One feature that stands out in the coverage is the relative weight given to party-politics and adversarial, party-political clashes. A flavour of the broad distribution of coverage can be gleaned from Tables 3 and 4 which cover the fourteen months studied. The BBC and ITN clearly differ in the emphasis they give to 'party-politics'<sup>4</sup>, but although both stations rather understandably give greater attention to this in the period around the European election campaign, ITN on the whole lingered more often on adversarial politics, while the BBC gave a good deal more space to straight commentary.<sup>5</sup> The positions of the parties on the single currency could not have been clearer from the coverage. Reports consistently highlighted Labour's position that they would only go to a referendum on the euro when entry was in Britain's interests, but that in principal they were in favour and that the country needed to be ready should a vote produced a 'yes' decision. The news fully reported the Conservative stance on the euro, which ruled out entry to the euro in the next parliament, was hostile to Labour's 'Changeover Plan' and tended to emphasise the loss of sovereignty and control over our economy that the single currency would bring. LibDem position was less fully covered in bulletins, but clearly consisted of a pro-euro policy leavened with criticism of the Labour government for not taking a more proactive position in arguing for the single currency.

The coverage of the respective positions of the political parties and the predictable contours of the party political debate are, however, less interesting and perhaps less politically significant than the other forms of cleavage and discord that emerged in news reports. It would have been patently clear even to the less attentive viewer that the Conservative Party still suffered from quite deep seated divisions over the euro and over the issue of 'Europe' more generally. No fewer than twelve separate BBC and ITN bulletins drew attention to a range of conflicts. Among these were defections from the party with a root in euro policy (BBC, 08/01/99), support amongst senior Conservatives for Labour's Changeover Plan or the various Britain in Europe initiatives (ITN 23/02/99, and BBC and ITN 14/10/99, respectively), and calls from those on the right of the Conservative Party to rule out single currency entry entirely (ITN 16/08/99). This sort of coverage might go some way towards explaining the fact that whilst the party's image of disunity had improved since the 1997 general election (Norris and Gavin, 1997 pp.119), even in September 1999 over a third of the population still saw the party as 'divided'.<sup>6</sup>

In contrast, the coverage did not dwell in any significant way on disagreement within the Labour Party on the euro issue. The more politically astute viewers might have detected some of Labour's cabinet-level tensions in Peter Mandelson's or Robin Cook's effusive statements in favour of the single currency (BBC, 28/06/99 and 06/09/99, respectively). But these key players did not really deviate in any significant way from the Labour Party's overarching position of principled, but conditional support, for the euro. Where there was some evident tension was not within the Labour government, but between the administration and its continental neighbours. Here by far the most salient issue was tax harmonisation. In early December 1998 the news touched on the German and French calls for harmonisation within Europe. One headline stated, "The threat to Britain's right to set it's own taxes. Germany's finance minister [Oscar Lafontaine] says Europe's taxes should be decided by the majority in Brussels.", with the story elaborating further on, "Germany's new finance minister believes a single European currency will work better if all European countries standardise their taxes so everyone pays the same rate." (BBC 01/12/98). On the same day ITN's political correspondent closed his report with,

"Well what I think it points out is that there are plenty of people on the continent, and Mr Lafontaine and the French finance minister are among them, who believe

that a single currency leads on to political union and political union in the end does require harmonisation of taxes. And so, if you like, it is a warning that there is a battle ahead, there are definitely moves among people on the continent who would like to see taxes harmonised. But Britain is always going to veto that.”

Reports on both BBC and ITN suggested Lafontaine’s statement had prompted Tony Blair and Gordon Brown to play down the stance taken by Germany and France, and Labour was also set to threaten a veto on any such proposal. But tax harmonisation was a theme returned to during the downfall of Lafontaine (BBC 11/03/99). And in the context of a later story on the euro’s slide in value, the BBC reported, “The German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder has accused Britain of intransigence over its opposition to a Europe-wide tax on savings income. He claims Britain’s resistance is damaging the European Union...” (anchor, 03/12/99).

Now it is important to note that we need to be more than a little cautious in assuming that statements and counter-statements made in the political bear-pit impinge on popular consciousness in quite the way that perhaps politicians hope they might. But the tax harmonisation issue also featured in reports beyond the party-political domain. The issue surfaced in straight journalistic commentary and on the first day of trading a reporter noted, “At Germany’s stock exchange, a reminder to Britain – the single currency is here, tax harmonisation is next.”, followed immediately by Yves-Thibault de Silguy, the European Commissioner’s blunt statement to camera, “It’s just a step. The next step will concern other matters, for instance we have to progress in terms of the tax system.” (ITN, 04/01/99). Later in January the issue resurfaced: “Germany, which has taken over the presidency of the EU, say it’ll use its chairmanship to push for the standardising of some taxes throughout Europe. Britain’s already said it’ll resist any efforts to set minimum European tax levels.” (anchor, BBC, 11/01/99). Finally, in the new year of 2000, in a story flagging the first anniversary of trading in the euro, one source returned to the issue: “It [the euro] means Brussels running our industry, it means common taxation and many other aspects of a fully integrated EU policy which I think would be bad for jobs, bad for our economy, and bad for our terms of living.” (Restaurant owner and member of Business For Sterling, BBC 04/01/00).

The treatment and high visibility of this issue is politically important for three reasons. First, the reports emphasise what looks like moves towards enforced tax harmonisation and this chimes with the Conservative Party’s position that the EU is set to undermine British sovereignty on this as on other issues – something that needs to be resisted. The coverage would do little to undermine a Conservative policy stance that if not overtly hostile to the EU was, at best, necessarily guarded and wary. Second, taxation is a particularly sensitive issue in the UK and press were particularly strident in their condemnation of EU moves towards harmonisation. For example, when Oskar Lafontaine broached the issue in December 1998, the Sun rather rudely reproached with ‘Foxtrot Oskar’, but the Mail also led with ‘British veto on taxes under threat’ and in a story critical of the proposal, the Mirror newspaper bellowed ‘Achtung Oskar’. So television highlighted an issue on which the tabloids took a strident, direct and decidedly negative editorial stance, and clearly there was the potential here for the erosion of public confidence in a currency where concomitant ‘tax harmonisation’ was often characterised as ‘enforced tax raising’. Indeed, in some quarters it has been suggested that the emergence of the tax harmonisation issue in early December directly and rather negatively affected the public’s perception of the single currency (Saunders, 1998)<sup>7</sup>.

Thirdly, and perhaps most important of all, in terms of its discursive thrust the coverage seems to set the UK at odds with its European counterparts and casts our continental neighbours in the role of antagonists. The British are embattled, besieged and threatened and the stories

carry over rather negatively into the realm of political sovereignty (or, more precisely, moves toward forced erosion of sovereignty). This has the potential to undermine the notion of communal solidarity, collaborative engagement and negotiation which in some estimations underpin the EU integration process. Other research on media coverage of Europe has suggested that the sort of intra-EU frictions exemplified here is not altogether uncommon in television reporting of Europe (Gavin, 2000). Certainly from a europhile perspective the danger must be that this sort of rhetorical positioning will delegitimise the EU in the eyes of the public and undermine the fragile development of any form of European political identity. The development by the public of a positive orientation towards the single currency or, indeed, towards 'Europe' more generally, seems all the more unlikely in a context where television highlights internal division over tax sovereignty and where the tabloids press take up the issue with all the stridency we might expect.

Nevertheless, it is crucially important to remind ourselves at this juncture that the broadcasters did not in any sense 'make up', fabricate or invent this discourse. They took their cue from the language in which the principal domestic and foreign politicians expressed themselves, as well as from the actions and statements of EU officials and other interested parties. However, this fact does not diminish the damaging potential of the resultant coverage.

## **Explaining the waning euro: causes and consequences**

If tax harmonisation was an important sub-plots in the story of the euro's in its first year, the most commanding feature was the sharp decline in value of the new single currency after a confident and upbeat start. This in itself is significant because the euro is not just a new policy instrument, but represents a potent symbol of the EU's ongoing process of economic and political integration. As one BBC reporter quite rightly put it when the euro began trading, "A confident start here to trading in the euro will radiate way beyond the financial markets. It'll will give fresh impetus to the whole process of European integration." (Jonathan Charles, BBC 04/01/99). Given the euro's symbolic significance, the subsequent slump in its value was a potentially damaging threat to the legitimacy and viability of Europe's economic and political integration process. The euro's slide in value came through quite clearly in the coverage on both channels. That this should have been a salient feature of television reports is neither surprising nor particularly controversial. After all, the euro lost somewhere in the order of 12% of its value against the pound and a full 15% against the dollar in its first year - a change that was both dramatic, and economically and politically significant. So the story was eminently newsworthy and reports about this talismanic symbol of European integration had, in a sense, to be rather bleak.

But the explanations offered by television as to why the euro depreciated are perhaps more significant than the reports of the decline itself. This is because these explanations offer the public a web of cause and effect without which its understanding would be partial, abstracted and at best incomplete. Moreover, the explication of cause and effect can help direct and focus public disquiet and blame, as well as sketching for the audience the sort of remedial or curative actions that are available or appropriate (Peffley, 1984; Abramowitz et al., 1988). With this in mind, we sought to isolate and analyse those parts of the news commentary which offered an explanation for the fall in the euro's value or which dealt with the effects of depreciation whether in Britain or abroad. As in previous research (Gavin and Goddard, 1998) it became clear that explanatory commentary, whilst important, was not a terribly prominent feature of news reporting.<sup>8</sup> However,

the BBC or ITN bulletins are not, nor should we expect them to be, explanatory or pedagogic 'treaties', and a full treatment of complex monetary developments demands a good deal of contextual and clarificatory commentary and description.

The least controversial and most common set of explanations for the decline of the euro revolved around the relative economic vitality of countries inside and outside the euro-zone ("The [euro] falls are mainly due to euroland's economic problems – plus, the strong dollar hasn't helped the currency's performance.", ITN, 03/12/99). It is difficult to see how this sort of explanation would reflect on Europe, the EU or the euro in any meaningful way either for good or for ill. Likewise, the ECB's role was also reasonably uncontroversial, as well as being one of the least often mentioned explanations ("[ECB's] Raising interest rates would choke the continent's fragile growth. Buying euros to force the value higher could cost billions and achieve nothing. Which all leaves the policy much in evidence at the moment, of talking bravely and keeping your fingers crossed.", BBC, 01/06/99).

But perhaps more damaging to the image of Europe and the EU - and somewhere between relative economic performance and ECB action in terms of news prominence - were those explanations which emphasised the action and statements of European governments, statesmen and EU officials. The latter, it seemed, could provoke a marked slide ("The euro dropped again after he [Romano Prodi] warned Italy might have to leave the currency if it can't get inflation under control.", BBC, 21/06/99). But German and French governments were also amongst the 'culprits'. Their calls for interest rate cuts to boost their ailing economies had, it was suggested, brought them into conflict with the ECB and undermined credibility of the euro (BBC, 04/03/99 and 11/03/99). The problem also extended to particular statements and policies. Schroeder's criticism of Vodafone's hostile bid for Mannesmann spooked the ECB and the money markets (BBC, 03/12/99). Over-enthusiastic state expenditure by the German government in an attempt to artificially, but unsuccessfully, boost the economy also negatively affected the euro's value (BBC, 01/06/99 and 02/12/99). Statements could have a particularly divisive edge where reports again linked the issues to tax:

[Headline] "Germany's Chancellor accuses Britain of damaging Europe as the euro wobbles. [anchor] The German Chancellor, Gerhard Schroeder, has accused Britain of intransigence over its opposition to a Europe-wide tax on savings. He claims British resistance is damaging the EU, but Germany itself has come under fire from the head of the ECB. Wim Duisenberg claims that the recent poor performance of the euro is partly the fault of Germany's economic policies. (BBC, 02/12/99).

Neither the BBC nor ITN can be blamed for giving these explanations a prominent position in their coverage. On the whole, the stories were prompted by the actions and dramatic on-the-record statements by some of the most powerful and significant players on the European stage. But at the same time these stories do tend to highlight internal political and economic tensions within the euro-zone as well as the way the damaging pursuit of narrow national interests could rebound on the value of the euro. They also highlight the sensitivity and fragility of the euro in the context where governments are economically 'irresponsible' (quite a controversial notion in itself if by 'irresponsible' is meant 'interventionist') or where important political actors are injudiciously candid in their comments and criticisms.

The finer detail of the explanations outlined here might well have been lost on the casual viewer, but they become more important in the context of what the commentary said about the impact of the euro's value on the health of the UK economy. For example, the initial buoyancy

of the euro could, it was suggested, bring problems in its wake: "But [although UK interest rates are likely to fall] there are snags on the foreign exchange markets. The pound risks getting weaker as the euro gets stronger. Lower interest rates will be welcomed by business, but they may also trigger a fall in the value of the pound against the euro. And the Bank of England will worry that that could set inflation off again." (06/01/99). But when the euro fell in value there was obviously much that could be said on both sides of the equation, as is evident from the following extract from an ITN bulletin:

"For people in Britain, a weak euro is mixed news. The currency's tumbling value has had significant effects on Britain, mainly because it's making sterling stronger. For industry, the strong pound means tough trading conditions for exporters whose goods are expensive in Europe. But the weak euro also raises the prospect of more British take-overs of the devalued European firms, such as Vodaphone's bid for Germany's Mannesmann. For consumers, it's had some good effects. The weak euro means cheaper European holidays and goods. Whilst the strong pound has increased pressure for British interest rates to fall. City experts say that any damage caused by the euro's is more psychological than economic. But the possibility of further slides will make for nervous financial trading next week." (ITN, 03/12/99).

Comparable, evenly balanced accounts could be found on BBC (BBC, 08/04/99), but taken as a whole, the BBC coverage tended to offer a great deal more commentary on the negative implications for the UK of a falling euro. A few examples should suffice, though others could be offered:

"It [the euro's decline] is embarrassing for Europe's leaders and a real threat to British industry. Companies like the stair-lift manufacturer, Stannah, see confidence returning. Business in Britain is picking up. But their exports are threatened because they're getting priced out of the foreign markets because of the strength of the pound." (BBC, 27/04/99).

"That [the euro's fall to all time low] is tough for UK exporters. This company [Bisley Office Equipment] is a British success story, Europe a vital market, but the pound is now stronger than it was when Britain joined the ERM with such disastrous consequences." (BBC, 01/06/99).

What is more, the depreciating euro could even be a problem for those countries that had taken the plunge: "The BSW steelworks in Kiel has watched the value of the euro fall sharply on the foreign exchanges since the project's launch. The steel manufactured here on the German bank of the river is now cheaper for customers outside Europe to buy. But that doesn't mean the currency's shaky start is good news. The BSW director says the weaker euro might boost sales abroad, but it also pushes up the cost of raw materials, which he must import to make steel." (BBC, 13/07/99).

So overall story of the euro as portrayed on television looks rather dismal. The single currency looks like it has a deleterious impact on British business whether weak or strong, and even in its weakened state looks like a threat to business in those countries that are already involved. The emphasis is clearly negative as far as the euro is concerned and while it is inappropriate to second guess why this particular emphasis is so prominent in the broadcasts, the nature of the coverage is potentially quite damaging to the image of single currency – one of the central pillars of European integration policy.



## Implications

The picture that emerges from this analysis will be rather grim for those who wish to promote the euro or see the EU cast in a favourable light. The British tabloids often openly editorialise against Europe and the euro (Anderson and Weymouth, 1999), and on the other hand, television news often quite rightly emphasises aspects of EU and single currency development that reflect rather badly on Europe and its monetary initiatives. There is no suggestion here that the BBC and ITN are pushing a particular position on the single currency, but the overall climate of reporting is distinctly negative in tenor (see also Gavin, 2000; and Norris, 2000), and in straddling both printed and broadcast media, it looks to be approaching what Noelle-Neumann described as 'consonance' in coverage, i.e. a similarity in coverage across the media which is thought to maximising its influence as selectivity options are reduced (Noelle-Neumann, 1981; Noelle-Neumann and Mathes, 1987). If audiences are also dependent on the media for news about development in 'euroland', this again may amplify the media's ability to influence attitudes (Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur, 1976; Ball-Rokeach, 1985; Gavin, 1997 and Norris, 2000). So the architect of the euro or those who hope that the public will come to evaluation Europe more positively, will have ample grounds for concern.

However, we should not be too quick to jump to the conclusion that in some sense the media are to blame for the sort of coverage the EU and the euro receive. We have argued here and elsewhere (Gavin, forthcoming) that the very significance and newsworthiness of some of the negative developments in European affairs (revolving around statements by politicians, actions by governments or dramatic events) almost dictate that the media coverage will be less than affirmative. There may be two factors that compound the problem for the EU. First, some of the image problems it faces are the product of embedded conflicts of interest and entrenched institutional structures. For instance, those inside the single currency and those outside will differ in their evaluation of the need for and pace of moves towards tax harmonisation. Likewise, those within 'euroland' whose economies are booming (like Ireland) and those which are in less good shape, will differ on which way ECB interest rates should go. Where politicians have to balance domestic and European priorities, as well as play to a domestic media audience, these divergent interests are likely to be expressed, and there is more scope for 'indiscipline' and injudicious or damaging statements that will almost certainly be picked up by the international media. Moreover, whilst national governments seek, where possible, to speak with one voice and get closure and control in their relations with their domestic media, this seems scarcely possible within the 'confederal' structure of the EU where there are a welter of voices, entrenched interests and disparate perspectives.

A second problem may well lie in the nature of the EU's direct and formal relations with the British media in both London and on the Brussels news 'beat'. A number of authors have suggested that for a variety of reasons relations between the media and EU are sometimes strained and tense (Tumber, 1995; Morgan 1995; Gavin forthcoming). So where there are few 'good news' stories to tell about Europe or the euro, or where these stories are too abstract, distant or difficult to get across, the problems in communicating the positive aspects of the euro may well be compounded.

Finally, it is important to note that our analysis of television news content must remain largely silent on the issue of 'influence'. There is strong circumstantial evidence to suggest that

television coverage of Europe may well have an impact on public attitudes towards Europe and the euro, but this is some way short of the sort of evidence that would be needed to make the concrete link between citizen disenchantment with the single currency and negative media output. As argued elsewhere, there is still a urgent need for research on audience engagement with 'euro news', whether this takes the form of aggregate, experimental or qualitative exploration (Gavin, 2000 and forthcoming). This is all the more important where in the not too distant future the Britain public will face a referendum on the single currency in which the media will play a prominent role.

**Table 1**  
**BBC European Economic News Issues**  
**(December 1998-January 2000)**

	DEC.	JAN.	FEB.	MAR.	APR.	MAY	JUN.	JUL.	AUG.	SEP.	OCT.	NOV.	DEC.	JAN.
EU Economic <sup>1</sup>	5	3	2	12	2	4	3	7	4	6	18	10	10	3
Touching on Euro	1	4	0	1	1	6	3	1	0	1	3	0	0	0
Single Currency	7	4	3	1	1	1	5	4	0	4	1	0	2	3
Total	13	11	5	14	4	11	11	12	4	11	22	10	12	6
<b>Total 'euro'</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>

**Table 2**  
**ITN European Economic News Issues**  
**(December 1998-January 2000)**

	DEC.	JAN.	FEB.	MAR.	APR.	MAY	JUN.	JUL.	AUG.	SEP.	OCT.	NOV.	DEC.	JAN.
EU Economic <sup>1</sup>	3	0	3	6	1	0	2	4	4	0	15	6	11	2
Touching on Euro	5	1	0	0	0	1	4	0	1	2	2	0	0	0
Single Currency	3	3	1	0	0	1	3	1	0	0	1	0	1	0
Total	11	4	4	6	1	2	9	5	5	2	18	6	12	2
<b>Total 'euro'</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>

<sup>1</sup>Non-euro stories related to issues like the controversy over the EU budget, tax harmonisation and the 'withholdings tax', the costs of farm subsidies, the end of duty free shopping, the impact of EU intervention on competition, the US trade war with EU and, from October onward, the French ban on the sale import of British beef.

**Table 3**  
**BBC News on the Euro - Party-Politics vs. Non Party-Political**  
**(December 1998-January 2000)**

	PRE- ELECTION	MAY/JUNE	POST- ELECTION	Total
Party-political	5	13	9	27
Non-party-political	18	2	10	30
<b>Total</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>57</b>

**Table 4**  
**ITN News on the Euro - Party-Politics vs. Non Party-Political**  
**(December 1998-January 2000)**

	PRE- ELECTION	MAY/JUNE	POST- ELECTION	Total
Party-political	7	8	6	21
Non-party-political	6	1	2	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>30</b>

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## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> The ICM figures can be gleaned from the following web site:  
**[www.icmresearch.co.uk/reviews/pollreviews.htm](http://www.icmresearch.co.uk/reviews/pollreviews.htm)**.
- <sup>2</sup> An average of just under 70% of citizens across European countries name television as the most important source of information and a majority also identify television as their preferred method for receiving information about the EU (Eurobarometer, 53, 2000).
- <sup>3</sup> This is an agenda setting power the press signally failed to exert (Norris et al, 1999).
- <sup>4</sup> By 'political coverage' is meant stories that were predominately or exclusively about party-politics and political debate. Stories in this category focused on a range of sub-themes: policy stances and statements on the euro from all the political parties; attempts by Government and Opposition to position themselves in relation to one another; party manifesto commitments that touch on the euro; and friction or division within the parties.
- <sup>5</sup> Among the 'non-political' themes were, gearing up for the euro, agreeing its value and the first days of trading; coverage of the declining value; movement out to links with the issue such as tax harmonisation, sovereignty, European integration, as well as prices and interest rates; reports on the ECB and its role; the experiences of various countries with the euro; as well as the implications for the euro (and/or its value) for British businesses – and, to a lesser extent, the UK public.
- <sup>6</sup> MORI 'Political Attitudes in Britain for September 1999'. The details of this survey can be obtained from the MORI web site: **[www.mori.com/polls/1999/t990927.shtml](http://www.mori.com/polls/1999/t990927.shtml)**
- <sup>7</sup> The transcript of this article is available at the following web address:  
**[www.mori.com/polls/1998/pdf/ssbdec98.pdf](http://www.mori.com/polls/1998/pdf/ssbdec98.pdf)**
- <sup>8</sup> Here it is perhaps worth noting that the BBC commentary offered a great deal more explanatory exigesis than did ITN.