Legitimizing Europe? News Media and the Reporting of European Union Politics

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Introduction

The expansion of European Union (EU) authority and the progress made toward European integration in the late 1980s has led policy-makers and academics alike to examine the appropriateness of power at the European Union level of governance. The very reinvigoration of the European Union, therefore, has brought with it a number of questions regarding the nature and direction of European governance - many visible in the difficulties faced by the EU in the wake of the Treaty on European Union. Perhaps one of the most fundamental of these issues has been that of EU legitimation.

In other words, as the European Union has gained in stature, taking on and aspiring to new functions across the policy spectrum, the issue of its legitimacy has come to the fore. Interest in the legitimacy of EU, this paper argues, leads to the study of news coverage, since media have an important function in the legitimation of political systems. 'If it is true that politics in Western democracies has to be justified in public, it can reasonably be assumed that the public discourse about supranational governance assumes a decisive role in the process of legitimation of European governance structures' (Jachtenfuchs 1994: 17). In other words, understanding media presentation of the European Union is an important aspect of understanding the nature of and reactions to the integration debate. This paper will investigate selected coverage of the European Union in British and German news media between 1985 and 1991 as a means of examining the issue of legitimation within the European Union.

Why Study News Media?

The investigation of legitimation points toward news media coverage for a number of reasons. First and foremost, as communication scholars from Lippmann (1922) to Lazarsfeld

and Merton (1971) to McLuhan (1964) have argued, the news process is not a neutral one. Rather, media have an important legitimation function within political systems, particularly within democracies, where media's own legitimate status allow them to confer authority upon issues, institutions and individuals. Therefore, media coverage of the European Union has the ability to contribute to the image of the EU as a legitimate source of political power.

News media legitimate political systems and processes by constructing the image of authority and accountability that structures of governance require to retain the support of their publics.[1] In the 1940s, Lazarsfeld and Merton described how status-conferral was a key 'social function of the mass media', writing: 'The mass media bestow prestige and enhance the authority of individuals and groups by *legitimizing their status*.'[2] Decades later, Herbert Gans (1980: 60-1) concluded that, '...the news upholds the legitimacy of holders of formal authority as long as they abide by the relevant enduring values, both in public and private realms'. As Ericson, Baranek and Chan (1989: 23) have more recently pointed out:

> ...news is crucial to the constitution of authority in the knowledge structure of society, even if its veracity and contributions to understanding are in doubt. Resources have to be devoted to newswork if one wants to be recognized as an authorized knower, if one's organization wants to both promote and protect its image as accountable, if legitimation work is required to respond to and sustain the myths of one's institutional environment.

The frequency, placement, type, and tone of coverage of particular political institutions or processes, indeed the very selection of stories and sources and the portrayal of conflicts associated with them, contribute to their credibility and status. In short, news media coverage influences the legitimation of politics. EU politics are no exception.

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[1] Significantly, such 'publics' - or recipients of media - can also include other elites.
[2] See Lazarsfeld and Merton (1971: 561). Italics in the original.

Further, as Bob Franklin (1994: 11) has argued, 'Few citizens now have direct knowledge of political matters independent of media'. Yet news media are not only a principle source of information about government, but they are also linked to elite and public opinion formation, both of which are crucial to the political legitimation process. Indeed, media 'are central agents in the shaping of publics' (Dahlgren 1993: 16), at both the elite and popular levels. In addition, studies within the field of agenda setting have shown that public knowledge and beliefs are at least in part a function of news media coverage, particularly when the subject of news is viewed to be less well understood by its audience, such as is the case with EU issues.

Within EU politics, public opinion has been brought 'back in' (Sinnott 1995) in recent years, in large part due to the end of the 'permissive consensus' (Lindberg and Scheingold 1970)[3] about European integration. The presumption of 'permissive consensus' had always offered those responsible for making EU policy a diffuse (albeit passive) public support for the EU and European integration; its demise since the early 1990s has brought to an end a period of consensus about EU governance exclusively by elites (Hayward 1995). As Slater (1994: 155) has pointed out, 'A viable political community needs the allegiance of its mass public as well as that of elites'.

Of course, the case could be made that the *need* for 'the public' was not a factor in the EU from the outset (in part because of the EU's status as an arena of foreign policy[4]), but rather became one only a few decades into the EU's existence - as a result of events after 1985 and particularly after 1991. As Sinnott (1995: 25) has correctly argued, elites, structures, and

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[3]For a discussion of the end of permissive consensus, see Laursen (1994: 297-99).
[4]Dalton and Duval (1986: 133) take this to the extreme, arguing that 'the public events that compromise the foreign policy environment are relatively easily manipulated by political elites', even if they qualify this to a short-term influence.

processes are still central explanatory elements in EU governance, but '...the emphasis on elites was too narrow...and needs to be incorporated in a broader perspective which gives adequate attention to public opinion and political culture'. Arguably, this broader perspective includes news media. While the analysis of news media can not *explain* elite and public opinion, in the sense of quantifying media's impact on opinion (or vice-versa), it is still possible to assume that media both shape and reflect the understanding of politics in the public sphere. In order to explore the question of legitimacy in EU politics, it is useful to explore the communication of those politics in the news media.

EU Legitimacy and the Nation-state

'Legitimacy', Seymour Martin Lipset (1963: 64) has written in *Political Man*, 'involves the capacity of the system to engender and maintain the belief that the existing political institutions are the most appropriate ones for the society....Legitimacy is evaluative'. David Held (1990: 102), approaching legitimacy differently from Lipset, nonetheless has employed a similar definition: 'A legitimate political order is one that is normatively sanctioned by the population'. While the *means* of establishing the belief required for legitimation, or, in Held's words, of providing for the 'normative sanctioning' of a political system, may be disputed, the process of legitimation clearly involves a degree of mobilization around the public evaluation of politics. In short, questions about the legitimacy of a political order, in this case that of the European Union, necessarily empower the public.[5]

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[5]The public are empowered, it might be argued, *regardless* of whether they are genuinely mobilized. As Lang and Lang (1981: 49) have stated: 'The force of public opinion resides in the standard of acceptability or acquiescence to which those who advocate a particular course feel they must pay attention and, in consequence, modify their bargaining position or change their tactics'. In other words, *perceptions* of a concerned, involved, mobilized public can be enough to motivate political actors. For a discussion of the limited empowerment of the public via permissive consensus, for example, see Wallace and Smith (1995: 151).

Traditionally, the nation-state, with its national public(s), has offered the primary framework for the public legitimation of politics. Likewise, the nation-state has also served as the main object in the *examination* of the legitimation process (Weiler, Haltern, and Mayer 1995: 15, 28). Yet if '[t]he great achievement of the late-nineteenth century West European nation state...was to link accountability, loyalty, and legitimacy to authority and power', as William Wallace (1994: 75) has written, then it is perhaps only right that observers of the European Union have begun to assess to what extent the EU, as a supranational aspirant challenging the European nation-state, has acquired such linkages.

In light of this challenge, the EU has always been problematic: neither the EU nor its legitimacy approximate that of the nation-state. Rather, the European Union represents a unique political entity, one developed in conjunction with (but not as a replacement for) existing nation-states. In addition, the EU lacks an obvious *demos* - a public that defines itself according to one common ethnic, national, or linguistic tradition (Neunreither 1994: 311; Weiler, Haltern, and Mayer 1995: 13). The absence of a 'sense of community' in the European Union, which Deutsch et al. (1957: 5) claimed made integration possible,[6] has been combined with a relatively weak system of EU representation in the form of the European Parliament, whose relative impotence has prohibited its legitimation of the entire supranational system of governance.[7] Further, the lack of a European public, or polity, is reinforced by the continued dominance of profoundly *national* conceptions of identity (Fuchs, Gerhards, and Roller 1993) and systems of communication, including political

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[6]See also Deutsch (1953: 70), who has written: 'The community which permits a common history to be experienced as common, is a community of complementary habits and facilities of communication'.

[7]Brigitte Boyce (1994: 461, 470) has argued that in addition to the general low opinion held of the EP, poor voter turnout for EP elections may have further alienated the public from the EU, adding to its legitimacy gap.

communication (Gerhards 1993). Always a source of contention, the issue of EU legitimation has been exacerbated by EU development since the mid-1980s.

Theories of EU Governance: Finding a Place for News Media

In *Public Opinion and International Governance*, Richard Sinnott (1995) has shown that careful attention to European integration theory, particularly as it has developed since the 1980s, provides clues that the study of news media is relevant to understanding EU politics. He has done this by pointing out the importance of political culture variables within EU development. Because of the legitimation function of media, news media are both a source and recipient of such variables and therefore involved in the formation of interests (or 'preferences') within a political system.

Such interests, according to recent theorizing about the European Union, are fundamental to both EU policy-making and decision-making. Indeed, work within both international relations and comparative politics has resulted in three developments that point in this direction. First, liberal institutionalism (Moravcsik 1991, 1993) has emphasized the role of state interests as decisive for EU policy-making. Similarly, the approach of multi-level governance (Sbragia 1992; Sandholtz 1993; Marks, Hooghe, and Blank 1996) has questioned the extent to which the nation-state represents a boundary of influence in the creation of interests and thereby excludes inputs from the European level. In other words, the revisiting and substantial revision of the intergovernmental and neo-functional frameworks of analysis, as a result of EU dynamism over the last fifteen years, have pointed to the enhanced consideration of the role of domestic interests and interest formation. Second, theoretical work has repeatedly pointed to the socially constructed nature of identity and interests (Adler and Haas 1992; Wendt 1994). Third, theories of new institutionalism have emphasized the

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'role of ideas' in policy-making and politics (Bulmer 1994; Kerremans 1996; Pollack 1996; Hall and Taylor 1996). Despite these theoretical inclinations, research agendas designed to explore the aspects of political culture that are involved in interest, identity, or ideational formation have remained limited.

The Method

A number of interrelated questions can be formulated to address news media's legitimation of EU politics. First: How have news media made visible the issue of the European Union? While this question potentially involves several means of measurement, this paper will concentrate on the **frequency** of EU news and the **themes** portrayed in EU coverage. Next, which political actors have been authorized in EU coverage? Media treatment of authority will be explored via the **sources** presented in EU news. Finally, to what extent have media supported or opposed the European Union? Taking into consideration both national and supra-national goals in the European sphere, where have news media place themselves on EU issues? Here, media **opinion** on Europe will be explored through editorials and other news commentary on EU affairs.

Given this framework of inquiry, the paper offers some results of a content analysis of over 1400 news items.[8] Writing in reference to the EU, Manfred Kuechler (1991: 288-9) has argued: 'The dynamics of mass support must be interpreted in context with major political events. To do this in a more than impressionistic manner, systematic content analysis of mass media are needed to reconstruct the shifting political climate'. The content analysis presented here incorporates all news related to the European Union in eight media (the *Guardian, Daily*

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[8]For more information on the content analysis, including the code book, sampling, reliability tests, etc., please contact the author.

Telegraph, Sun, and BBC "Nine O'Clock News" in Britain; and the *Süddeutsche Zeitung, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, BILD,* and ARD "Tagesschau" in Germany) during four time periods. News media organizations were chosen based on high circulation/viewership, nation-wide appeal, and comparability across national lines.

Since the study is intended to investigate the nature of European Union coverage and its legitimation of EU politics in Britain and Germany, critical moments in European integration during the period under review were selected for the analysis of EU news. The requirements for these critical moments were a) that they involved both countries equally, b) that they could be compared across time, and c) that they represented points in the debate on European integration when that debate could be expected to be at its most salient - and therefore, to have created an increase in attention to EU affairs. Based on these criteria, the study focused on four key European Councils, the meetings of the Heads of State and Government of the member-states of the European Union. The first two were the European Councils at Milan and Luxembourg, which framed the 1985 intergovernmental conference (IGC) leading to the Single European Act; the final two included the Rome and Maastricht European Councils, which began and ended the IGCs leading to the Maastricht Treaty on European Union. For the purposes of this paper, comparisons across countries and across time will be highlighted.

An Overview: Britain, Germany, and Europe 1985-91

Not only the European Union, but Europe as a whole underwent a tremendous period of change between 1985 and 1991. Therefore, before examining news coverage, it is useful to provide a short (if simplified) overview of developments in EU politics in the period under review, 1985 to 1991, with particular attention to British and German government positions

and public attitudes toward the European Union. Above all, this contextualization of EU news coverage provides a basis upon which the results of the content analysis can be assessed.

In the mid-1980s, a number of factors internal and external to the EU contributed to a climate of dynamism in EU integration and policy-making. The Single European Act, the first treaty change in the EU since the Treaty of Rome, codified this dynamism and launched the Twelve toward a Single Market and further co-operation across a spectrum of policy issues. Following an upswing in EU activity in the late 1980s that was at least in part driven by an activist European Commission, EU member-states planned a second set of treaty changes, initially in pursuit of Economic and Monetary Union as a follow on to the Single Market. However, the demise of the Warsaw Pact and German unification - the implications of which were just emerging as the EU Heads of State and Government met at Maastricht in December 1991 - changed the equation for West European integration. The need to focus on assisting Central and Eastern Europe (particularly in light of inner-EU strife over Yugoslavia), the persistence of markedly different European views of the Gulf War, the onset of recession, and finally public backlash about the Maastricht Treaty all combined to slow the EU train, a condition which has persisted into the late 1990s.

Britain's traditional role as an ambivalent European continued in the 1980s and early 1990s. Despite self-selected moments of good will, such as before the Milan European Council, and a genuine enthusiasm for deregulation, Prime Minister Thatcher was reluctant to sign up to what she saw, varyingly, as a 'federal', 'socialist', or 'identi-kit' Europe. Nevertheless, the momentum created by the 1992 Program and the subsequent event of German unification directed Britain towards a more European orientation. Thatcher's successor, John Major, sought to place Britain 'at the heart of Europe'. Yet by changing just

the tone, not the substance, of Britain's European policy, his government initially proved an equally awkward European, particularly with the looming prospect of a British General Election in 1992. Altogether, Britain's position vis-à-vis its European Union partners did not alter dramatically over the period.

However, German centrality to EU affairs grew in the 1980s, both before German unification and then as a result of it. With a larger German presence on the European stage, the idiosyncrasies of Germany's *Europapolitik* became clear. Germany wanted further European integration, but not on all issues and certainly not at any price. Nonetheless, the German government continued to advocate a more political European Union, especially after German unification. By the early 1990s, Germany was no longer the EU *Musterknabe*, had served briefly as its *Sorgenkind*, and was on its way to becoming Europe's 'giant' - one normally gentle, but with ever-growing authority (Bulmer and Paterson 1988, 1996).

In terms of public opinion, the German public had traditionally exhibited more support for European integration[9] than the British, yet never led among member-states in its pro-European sentiment. In light of the lesser degree of political controversy surrounding the basic commitment to the Europe in the Federal Republic, it is fair to conclude that the German public - in contrast to the British - provided the German government a permissive consensus to make European policy from the establishment of the EU down to the 1980s. However, affective support was stronger than utilitarian (cost-benefit) indicators in both Britain and Germany, and support for the EU in general was at a low in the early 1980s after a period of standstill in EU politics.

Over the course of the 1980s, British public opinion toward Europe became more positive. In effect, this allowed the British to make up part of the ground that stood between

it (and Denmark) and the other member-states. German public opinion, however, changed very little in the 1980s, remaining positive but nationalizing slightly toward the end of the decade (Niedermayer 1995). Finally, pro-European sentiment fell sharply in both Britain and Germany during 1991 and 1992. This is in line with the broader trend toward Euroscepticism across member-states that has been widely interpreted as an expression of a crisis of legitimacy in European Union politics.

Based on this brief overview, it is possible to make some hypotheses about the treatment of the EU in British and German media in the period 1985 to 1991. First, with regard to frequency of news on Europe, it might be expected that German media would devote more attention to EU stories during the 1985 European Councils, given Germany's familiarity with the EU issue and the degree of government interest in the integration process. In contrast, British media coverage of the EU during the 1990-1991 European Councils would likely outpace that in Germany, reflecting the fact that the British debate about Europe was far more advanced than that in other member-states before Maastricht, due to the party political nature of the issue and the British government's persistent battle for opt-outs to the planned treaty. Coverage in both countries could be expected to grow over time, indicating the increasing centrality of the European Union after the mid-1980s relaunch.

Next, British media might be anticipated to focus on the EU as a story about economics, with German media more interested in the political aspects of EU policy, with policy-oriented issues growing in both countries over time. German media could be expected to use more sources from European Union institutions, as a reflection of Germany's greater degree of European orientation, with British media focusing more on national government or other national sources. However, EU sources would likely increase in both countries' media

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[9]The relevant question in *Eurobarometer* has measured attitudes toward 'further west European unification'.

between the 1985 and 1990-91 period, reflecting the enhanced role of EU organizations as the period progressed. Finally, it could be anticipated that British news media, on the whole, would be much more critical of the EU than their German equivalents, based on the more fundamental conflict within British politics about the nature and aims of European integration.

Some Results: Europe in the News

Frequency

Perhaps the least surprising result is the increase in coverage of EU affairs between the European Councils in 1985 and 1990-91. Coverage increased by two and half-fold (267%) between the IGCs in 1985 and 1990-91. By the time of Maastricht, the quality newspapers examined ran as many as 20 stories per day each about the European Union. This general increase in coverage of European policy is a clear indicator of the dramatic growth in the salience of the issue of European Union politics in Britain and Germany.

In addition, German media had more coverage of the European Union than British media. Not only did the German media have what would seem to be an unusually high number of stories on the Milan summit (N = 174) as compared with the British (N = 72), but they had more coverage of the EU during each European Council examined. In the 1985 period, the frequency of German coverage likely reflected a greater German familiarity with the EU and the centrality of Europe in German politics as compared with the British case. However, another reason for the media attention to EU affairs in Germany at that time was the conflict the EU issue had created - both in German party politics and in Germany's relations with other member-states - as a result of Germany's use of its veto on an issue of agricultural policy just prior to the Milan summit.

By the time of the launching of the 1990-91 IGCs, however, frequency of British coverage of the European story had nearly caught up to that in Germany. While there was approximately one story in Britain for every two in Germany in 1985, by 1990-91, the ratio had approached one to one. Based on the extent of discussion in both British and German media about the European Union - especially at the time of Maastricht - it is not possible to sustain the claim, so often made by politicians *and* experts, that the TEU was ignored in the public domain or that the EU was 'under-debated' or 'under-discussed' in the media. This is especially true in Germany, where media coverage proved substantial, thus refuting the expectation that British controversy about European integration prior to the end of 1990-91 IGCs would have resulted in British coverage outrunning the German. Of course, the results for the 1990 and 1991 European Councils stand in great contrast to the those in 1985, in which both policy-makers and the media, it seems, overlooked the significance of the changes taking place in the EU sphere.[10]

Themes

Heterogeneity characterized the range of themes addressed in the context of EU coverage.[11] No one thematic category dominated the reporting on Europe in either Britain or Germany. In fact, themes remained so diverse that only two achieved more than 10% of total coverage in both countries: *economic and monetary policy* (including the theme *single currency*) and *summit* as a theme itself (see Table One).

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[10]Dehousse and Majone. (1994: 103) and others have argued that the impact of the SEA was largely underestimated at the time.

[11]With more than 140 original categories of themes, it was necessary to regroup themes at a secondary level, resulting in the 21 categories presented here.

Table One: Frequency of themes (in %)

Themes	British Media (N = 1028)	German Media (N = 1298)	All Media (N = 2326)
Shape of Europe	7.8	6.2	6.9
EU Constitutional Issues	7.2	8.3	7.8
European Institutions	4.1	4.5	4.3
European Political Union	1.2	2.4	1.8
Summit	11.1	10.3	10.7
Intergovernmental Conference	2.2	1.3	1.7
British European Policy	8.0	4.5	6.1
German European Policy	1.3	3.5	2.5
Other Member-state European Policy	1.0	2.2	1.7
Domestic Political Institutions	8.4	3.5	5.7
Franco-German Relations	1.5	2.6	2.1
British-German Relations	0.4	0.6	0.5
Single Market - 1992 Program	3.8	3.2	3.5
International Trade	4.6	3.5	3.9
Economic and Monetary Policy	12.9	14.4	13.8
Foreign Policy	5.1	10.1	7.8
Defense Policy	1.9	1.5	1.7
Environmental and Energy Policy	1.9	4.7	3.5
Social Policy	6.4	0.6	3.2
Agricultural and Fisheries Policy	3.1	3.8	3.5
Other Policy Areas	6.2	8.2	7.4
Total	100.1	99.9	100.1

What is perhaps most striking in examining the frequency of themes associated with coverage of the European Union is their similarity in the British and German media - with just a few noteworthy exceptions. First, rather than the EU proving a more economic theme in Britain (where British journalists in Brussels remained 'Common Market' correspondents until the end of the 1980s) than in Germany, economics themes (*economic and monetary policy*, the *Single Market Program*, and *international trade*) were portrayed with similar frequency in both. This contradicts the expected result that the British media, like the Conservative government, were more likely to favor the economic aspects of European integration by thematizing them with greater frequency than the German media.

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Likewise, the German media was no more interested in thematizing the political aspects of the European Union (such as European Political Union, for example) more than their British equivalents. Indeed, most of the themes dealing with what could be described as the position and power of the European Union, as opposed to that of individual member-states (for example, *shape of Europe*, *European Political Union*, and even *European institutions*) were treated with comparable frequency in both countries - amounting to about one-fifth of all coverage. This is an unexpected result, showing that German media were not more prepared to thematize 'EU-centered' issues (as favored themes of the German government) than British media.

, While fewer than their similarities, the differences in the frequency of coverage of certain themes in British and German news media were also telling. The topic *domestic political institutions*, which included stories about member-state parliaments, elections, opinion polls, or referenda, as they related to the EU story, was a good example of this. Here, the British media included more than twice as much coverage of this theme than the German media. This confirmed the British tendency - both in politics and the media - to focus on Parliament and Parliamentary debate, perhaps even disproportionately so, in light of Parliament's relatively limited power in EU affairs.

While this domestic-EU linkage was a clear trend in the UK, it was particularly acute during the Rome summit in 1990. At that time, John Major's elevation to Prime Minister created an atmosphere of both intra- and inter-party political tension over Europe (which after all was the issue that apparently brought down his predecessor). During the Maastricht period, the British government was within a few months of having to call a General Election. This caused a wide spectrum of policy, including European policy, to be interpreted in the British media according to domestic political imperatives. Both moments (Rome and

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Maastricht) created a natural link between party politics and Europe in the news media discussion of Britain's domestic politics.[12] Interestingly, despite German *Bundestag* elections just before the Rome summit in 1990, German coverage of the EU in this period did not thematize German domestic political institutions with any greater frequency. Not only were other issues in Germany more salient (above all, the then-recent event of German unification), but it could be argued that the relative consensus about European integration *as a goal* did not bring it to the fore as an election issue and therefore in connection with *domestic political institutions*.

German media, meanwhile, were much more likely than the British to report on European Union politics in the context of *foreign policy* news. This greater claim to attention for EU foreign policy news in German media would seem to confirm the readiness of German more than British media to emphasize the EU in its foreign policy capacity. For the Federal Republic, where the EU had provided Germany a legitimate framework for foreign policy action for decades, the German media's willingness to conflate EU and foreign policy news reflects a flexibility within the German approach to the question of sovereignty in foreign policy affairs. Therefore, it was an easier step for the German media than the British to regard the EU as a foreign policy actor, and accordingly to cover foreign policy news within an EU frame of reference.

As a final and obvious note on differences in the frequency of themes in both countries, the issue of *Britain's European policy* was a more frequent theme in the British media and likewise, *Germany's European policy* appeared more regularly in the German media. Both cases reflected domestic media interest in their own government's positions on

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[12]This link was more than momentary, however. The European issue has long had an influence on British party politics, although the contestation both within and between parties arguably has become more consistently

EU policy-making. However, *Britain's European policy* was more often thematized in *both* countries than *Germany's European policy*, implying that what the British government was doing vis-à-vis Europe was more newsworthy than the goings on in Bonn. This result also underlines the relatively silent ('gentle giant') role of the German government in EU politics down to Maastricht.

Over time, EU themes also reveal some interesting changes. First - and unexpectedly - *other EU policy* areas declined over the course of the four summits (from 10.4 % of all news during the first period to 6.1 % during the second). In other words, coverage of the various areas of policy handled at the European level did not grow in correspondence to their actual increase over this period. While it might not be valid to extend this result regarding *other EU policy areas* to EU coverage in general (i.e., to coverage outside important European Council periods[13]), it nonetheless shows that 'day to day' policy stories were already significantly present in 1985 news coverage, and were not exclusively the result of greater EU competency after the relaunch. In addition, *European institutions* remained at or below 3 per cent of total news, as themes, and there was no growth in the treatment of topics such as the *Shape of Europe* (*subsidiarity*, *Europe of the regions*, *multi-speed Europe*, etc.) or *EU constitutional issues* (*reform, majority voting, enlargement*, etc.).

Foreign policy, while most dominant during Rome, nevertheless showed a marked increase between the European Councils in the 1985 and 1990-91 periods, from 2.3 per cent to 10.2 per cent of total coverage. Based on this result, it could be argued that by the time of the second IGC it was more common for the EU to be considered a legitimate foreign policy

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visible since the mid-1980s.

[13]Certainly, one could probably correctly assume that the coverage of *other EU policy* did grow as a percentage of overall EU coverage (not just that during summits) during the late 1980s. The best way to establish such a trend over time would be via a longitudinal content analysis of European policy news, rather than through the sample offered here.

actor than five years previously. This pattern concurs with that found by Werts (1992), who has suggested that European Councils after 1989 became fora for foreign policy consideration more than ever before. As was indicated above, the thematization of foreign policy was especially marked in the German media. Additionally, more attention was given to defense issues during the summits which led to the Treaty on European Union, when the integration of the West European Union into the EU apparatus as well as the eventual development of a European defense identity were under consideration. The increasing portrayal of the EU in the context of foreign policy themes suggests that the appearance of consistent public support for further European integration on foreign and defense policy issues[14] - even when support for other EU initiatives has faltered - may at least in part reflect the frequency of media discussion of the European Union in a foreign policy context.

The *Single Market Program* was at its peak as a media theme during the Luxembourg summit, when it was announced as part of the SEA. Yet even at that critical moment in its genesis, the *Single Market Program* as a theme remained under 10 per cent of total media coverage. What is surprising, however, is that as the second IGC(s) began in Rome, the *Single Market Program* - perhaps *the* EU success story of the decade - was seldom evoked as a media theme, achieving just under four per cent of total EU coverage.

In fact, the thematic area that showed the steadiest increase over the course of the four European Councils was that of *economic and monetary policy*, which constituted less than three per cent of all coverage during Milan and almost a fifth of all coverage during the Maastricht European Council. This result makes it possible to argue that the media focused increasingly on the economics of the EU, and on Europe as a fundamentally economic sphere. That the discussion of the Europe Union took place above all in economic terms also points

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[14]See Nugent (1992) for a discussion of British public opinion on these issues.

to the possibility that this type of coverage undermining EU legitimacy: the identification of EU institutions with economic issues, and therefore not (sufficiently) with issues of social welfare, employment, etc., that have been viewed as particularly pressing in all EU member-states in the 1990s.

Sources

Source were those actors cited (directly quoted) in the news, and therefore whose opinions were made relevant to the EU debate by journalists. These sources were then grouped according to categories (see Table Two). The analysis of sources offers an indication of what types of actors were authorized by the news media as legitimate in the conduct of EU affairs.[15]

The sources studied revealed a clear pattern in the news on Europe: the dominance of sources from the *national government* level, as well as the relatively low percentage of sources from the *European Union*.

Table Two: Sources in EU news (in %)

Source	British Media (N = 371)	German Media (N= 293)	All Media (N = 664)
European Union	16.4	13.7	15.2
National Government	45.8	58.4	51.4
Other National	14.6	11.9	13.4
Regional Government	0.0	3.4	1.5
International	0.5	1.4	0.9
Banking and Business	6.5	6.5	6.5
Experts and Interest Groups	5.7	3.1	4.5
Public and Media	10.5	1.7	6.6
Total	100.0	100.1	100.0

[15]Again, the categories in Table Two reflect secondary groupings of sources.

Despite having a smaller number of overall stories, the British media used more sources within their coverage of the EU than the German media. This greater reliance on sourcing in Britain would have been even more dramatic had the study included all un-named 'government sources' (which in most cases were *national government* sources, for whom off-the-record sourcing was a standard practice, in great contrast to German custom).

Nevertheless, the sources included in the study reflected a relatively similar percentage of *European Union* sources in British and German coverage of the European Union. However, the German media included substantially more sources (over 10 percentage points more, in fact) from *national government* than the British, a result which was *not* offset by the British use of *other national* sources (primarily parliamentarians), where the two countries employed a comparable percentage of sources. This presents an interesting result, indicating that the German media were more likely to rely on spokespersons from the federal government in Bonn than even the (more centralized) British media relied on Number 10, the Cabinet, and Whitehall - *including* the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. This speaks for the German media's designation of overwhelming expertise to federal level actors in the area of EU politics. It also suggests that German media, even more than their British equivalents, were disposed to legitimate national, rather than EU, voices in the coverage of European Union issues.

In addition, the British media were much more likely than the German media to include *members of the public* and the *media* (including specific journalists employed as sources) as authoritative voices on the subject of European policy. This is perhaps evidence that British media both took more account of *public* input into the issue of European

integration than other EU member-states during this period, by allowing the public and the media to participate in the UK European integration debate.

Other differences between German and British sourcing were less substantial, but included the (infrequent) German use of *regional government* sources, versus the total absence of such sources in the British media. The very limited use of *regional government* sources in the German media comes as something of a surprise, since one might have expected the *Länder* to appear in the media as vital regional actors. After all, the German *Länder* had contributed to the very development of a regional focus in EU politics. Their absence in news coverage is particularly unexpected in coverage of the 1990 and 1991 European Councils, when subsidiarity and attempts by the *Länder* to increase their authority at the European level, via the TEU, was a leading issue for the Federal Republic.

In addition, British and German media made very similar use of *banking and business* sources. In this case, if we return to the original level of classification, it is clear that while British media relied more on *business leaders* as sources (6.1 % versus 2.6 % in Germany), German media used bankers with much more regularity (3.6 % of total coverage versus just 0.3 % in the UK). This reflects first and foremost the greater voice of the *Bundesbank* in German coverage of the EU, as well as the reliance of German media on an governmental organ (the German institution responsible for protecting the D-Mark) for sourcing, versus British media's greater interest in private (i.e. business) sources.

When examined over time, patterns of sourcing reflected a slight decrease in the use of *national governmental* sources and no apparent increase in those from the *European Union*. These changes were primarily apparent between the two IGCs, i.e., between the 1985 and 1990-91 periods (see Table Three).

Table Three: Sources per IGC period (in %)

Sources	1985 Milan and Luxembourg (N = 137)	1990-91 Rome and Maastricht (N = 544)
European Union	16.1	14.5
National Government	57.7	48.2
Other National	16.1	12.3
Regional Government	4.4	0.1
International	1.9	4.3
Banking and Business	2.2	7.6
Experts and Interest Groups	1.5	5.1
Public and Media	0.1	7.9
Total	100.0	100.1

Public and media sources tended toward more frequent usage between 1985 and 1991, largely due to their appearance in the British news. *Experts and interest group* sources showed a slight increase by the time of Maastricht, as did *banking and business* sources, with the latter reflecting the great salience of *economic and monetary policy* themes at that time. *Regional government* sources, in contrast, showed little change whatsoever over time, this despite the explicit increase in emphasis on the role of the *Länder* (and the notion of a Europe of the regions) as a corrective to an increasingly integrated, centralized European system of governance.

Opinion

Patterns of opinion - drawn from both direct and indirect commentary in the news - offer an indication of a news organization's stance on Europe. Three aspects of opinion were assessed as being relevant to understanding the evaluative tone of EU coverage: opinion on EU issues, at a general level (Aspect One); opinion on the positions and policy of the EU itself (Aspect

Two); and opinion on the position and policy of national government toward the European Union (Aspect Three). Such aspects could indicate and differentiate between opinion on European Union themes; EU governance (and the position of EU institutions in the promotion of EU policy), and national positions and governance in the EU realm.

Opinion, which was offered on average in just over 27 % of the news evaluated, tended to appear most frequently on the general level (Aspect One - that of EU issues), less so as directed at the European Union (Aspect Two), and even less in addressing the approach of national government to Europe (Aspect Three). Compared with British media, German media offered more frequent general opinion on EU themes (37.1% versus 31.3%) and more frequent opinion on the European Union itself (28.3% versus 24.3%), while evaluative commentary on national government EU policy-making was almost the same in both British and German media (22.6% and 19.1% respectively).

When opinion did occur, the modal media opinion on European Union topics (Aspect One) during the eight weeks examined was 'more negative than positive' (which, as a single category, appeared in almost half of all cases).[16] When opinion on EU themes was linked to the EU positions and institutions itself, it tended to be even more negative than general opinion, with over one quarter of all evaluations falling into the 'mainly negative' category. In contrast, however, when the news media offered opinion about their own national government's position on EU themes,[17] opinion tended toward the positive end of the scale (see Table Four).

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[16]Here, the results reflect *only* cases in which media had a discernible opinion, i.e., when the category 'no evaluation' was excluded.

[17]Media opinion on 'own government' or 'own national government' approach to EU policy referred to *either* British media commentary on British government policy regarding Europe *or* German media commentary on German government policy regarding Europe.

Table Four: Media opinion: all media, British media, German media (in %)

Degree of Opinion:	(Aspect One) General EU Issues			(Aspect Two) EU Policy/Position			(Aspect Three) National Policy/Position		
	All (N=287)	British (N=116)	German (N=171)	All (N=220)	British (N=90)	German (N=130)	All (N=172)	British (N=84)	German (N=88)
Mainly Positive	5.9	6.9	5.3	6.8	5.6	7.7	25.0	33.3	17.0
More Positive than Negative	13.9	13.8	14.0	14.5	12.2	16.2	22.7	29.8	15.9
Even Mix Positive and Negative	19.5	23.3	17.0	19.5	18.9	20.0	15.1	14.3	15.9
More Negative than Positive	43.2	34.5	49.1	33.2	26.7	37.7	27.9	17.9	37.5
Mainly Negative	17.4	21.6	14.6	25.9	36.7	18.5	9.3	4.8	13.6
Total	99.9	100.1	100.0	99.9	100.1	100.1	100.0	100.1	99.9
Net Opinion	-40.8	-35.4	-44.4	-37.8	-45.6	-32.3	10.5	40.4	-18.2

The breakdown of opinion by country yielded some interesting results. In light of the more conflictual nature of the EU issue in British politics, it is perhaps not a great surprise that British media contained more 'mainly negative' (i.e., very critical) opinion on general EU themes than German media. German media, nevertheless, expressed more negative opinion on EU themes overall. Both countries presented approximately one fifth of all general opinion in positive tones ('more positive than negative' plus 'mainly positive'), but British media offered more mixed opinion than German media.

In opinion that was directly related to the positions and activities of the EU, British media showed a much greater trend toward negative opinion than German media. More than one third of all British opinion on the EU itself fell into the 'mainly negative' category, versus just one sixth in the German media. British media also contained more negative opinion

overall, as measured in net opinion.[18] However, despite the differences of degree in negativity, one should not lose sight of the fact that news media *in both countries* were negatively disposed toward both these aspects of EU news. In the case of German media, the finding that media was critical of EU affairs (and on a level comparable with the British media) stands in stark contrast to official government positions on European themes and institutions.

A remarkable difference did exist, however, in media opinion on national government's (i.e., London's or Bonn's) positions and policies toward the EU. Here, the British media as a whole expressed opinion very much in favor of the Conservative government's handling of EU issues,[19] while the German media tended to comment about Bonn's EU politics in a more negative fashion. This indicates a basic consensus within the British media in favor of the British government's (often contentious) approach to European Union issues, but a greater sense of dissatisfaction within German news media with the activities of the Bonn government towards the EU. The disapproving position of the German media took two forms. First, it was critical of the Kohl government for making EU policy in 'bad faith' - for not recognizing (or admitting) that the process of European integration would be more difficult and expensive than the German government had claimed and would involve disadvantages for the Federal Republic. Second, criticism in the German media in Aspect Three of opinion involved the critique that the German government *had not achieved enough* in the European sphere. In other words, this criticism of the Kohl government contained an

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[18]Net Opinion is an indicator for the relative orientation - positive or negative - of opinion on EU news. It is measured as follows: the sum of 'Mainly Positive' and 'More Positive than Negative' categories minus the sum of 'Mainly Negative' and 'More Negative than Positive' categories.

[19]Although the media type level of analysis is not here examined, the case of *Guardian*'s opinion on Europe is exceptional enough to merit attention: not only was the *Guardian* positive in its opinions toward the EU (Aspect Two), it was negative toward the Conservative government's European policy, making it the exception among the British media studied.

implicit pro-European position: Europe was desirable, but Germany's European policy had failed. Either way, negative opinion about the German government involved a questioning of its authority and efficacy vis-à-vis EU politics.

The results also showed some clear trends over time. First of all, the increase in frequency of opinion on EU and national policy and positions was significantly greater than the general jump in coverage between the two periods.[20] This shows that both the EU's and, significantly, national government's handling of EU issues became issues more worthy of opinion in both British and German news media. When then two summits associated with each IGC period were taken together, general opinion toward EU themes grew more negative over time, from an average net opinion of -26.3 for the 1985 period to -44.4 for that of 1990-91. In addition, an interesting pattern appeared in Aspect One opinion: it tended to be only moderately negative during the 'first' European Councils of an IGC and much more negative during the final one, during which most critical decision-making took place. In other words, overall opinion was more critical during the crucial final summits that clinched both treaty negotiations.

Net opinion toward national government, as it dealt with the EU, also became less positive over time: for Milan and Luxembourg, it stood at 33.3, while it dropped to 6.2 during Rome and Maastricht. Therefore, in contrast to the net positive nature of opinion on national government handling EU policy, there seemed to be a developing sense of disillusionment with the way national government handled the EU issue. This suggests that there may well be a linkage between media coverage of Europe at these key points in European integration

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[20]Whereas about 21 per cent of all news studied appeared in the first period (leading to the SEA) and 78.5 per cent during the second (Rome and Maastricht negotiations), about 85 per cent of all opinion on the EU and national government EU policy was made during the European Councils associated with the Maastricht Treaty.

the emerging perception of the inability of national government (which was commented on in less satisfactory tones over time) to legitimate the European political sphere.

Conclusion

Europe's 'relaunch' after 1985 and subsequent slowdown after 1992 have placed discussion of EU legitimation prominently on academic and policy agendas. This paper has sought to examine the issue of legitimation by examining the treatment of the European Union in the British and German news media during high points in the EU debate between 1985 and 1991. News media treatment of Europe, it has argued, is relevant to inquiry into EU legitimacy because of news media's own legitimation function and because of media's position in the opinion-building and interest formation processes. The latter have appeared with increasing regularity as key aspects of theories of European integration and governance.

News on EU issues grew dramatically between the two IGCs studied, showing that the EU issue did achieve greater salience in both British and German media. European Union news was also more frequently portrayed in the German media than the British, although the gap between the two narrowed over time. The relatively limited appearance of the EU story in the British news in 1985 indicated a general lack of Europe's newsworthiness in the British media at that time, which stood in contrast to its treatment in the German news. This likely reflected both the 'normalcy' of the EU tale in Germany (i.e., its higher position within the news hierarchy) at that time, but also the special interest in German media in the outcome of Germany's unprecedented use of its veto. By the time of the summits at Rome and Maastricht, the European Union was a leading news theme in both British and German media. Indeed, qualitative observation indicates that, during Maastricht, European Union issues were

a principle theme - versus other news - in all media studied. In short, the EU theme had become very visible in both British and German news.

The analysis of EU news themes builds a heterogeneous picture of the European integration debate, as it existed in the British and German news media. One overall impression of thematic patterns is that they were unexpectedly similar in both countries. Indeed, in both Britain and Germany, *economic and monetary policy* was the largest single category of news on Europe. EU visibility, therefore, was above all in an economic news context. The topic of foreign policy grew substantially over the two negotiation periods, outrun only by the tremendous growth of economic-related news. These results could begin to explain both substantial public support for further foreign and security policy cooperation, as shown by Eurobarometer, and some of the legitimacy problems the EU has faced in its role as a political (and not merely an economic) actor.

European Union sources comprised one-fifth or less of all sources of EU news, limiting their authoritative voice vis-à-vis the European Union. While British and German media offered a relatively similar frequency of *EU* sources overall, German media provided a much higher percentage of *national government* news sources than the British. On this basis, it can be concluded that German media reinforced the authority of federal governmental officials in Bonn in the EU political process, even more than the British media did in the case of London. This is a surprise in the context of the European policy and policy styles adopted in both countries. On the whole, however, the conclusion can be drawn that media use of sources reinforced the authority of national government much more than EU actors.

The overall trend in general opinion of EU issues, Aspect One, was negative, although German media were more negative than British in this case. Specific opinion toward the EU itself was also negative, as measured in net opinion, with the British media more extreme in

their negative leanings than the German.[21] In the last aspect of opinion that was evaluated, that of national government policies and positions toward Europe, there was little similarity in the opinion presented in the British and German media, as British media was overwhelmingly positive and German media largely negative. Viewed over time, European Union news triggered more evaluative commentary during the second treaty negotiation (Maastricht) than the first, but the trend in general opinion was toward more negativity. Finally, opinion on national government became much less positive from the first treaty change to the second. This points to a growing media dissatisfaction with the way both London *and* Bonn made European policy. On the whole, both British and German media offered a critical contribution to public debate of EU issues during key moments in EU politics.

These results of the study confirm the central role of national government in media coverage of EU politics in both Britain and Germany. Nonetheless, it is certainly true that the amount of EU coverage grew tremendously between the two IGCs. In addition, there were signs in the media of the increased stature of the EU - for example, media opinion about EU institutions and policies was much more critical during the second IGC than the first, showing that Europe had become something worth being critical about. Yet in thematic terms, the European Union was a story about economics, markets, and money, and not about political integration or other policy areas. Not only did European institutions remain negligible as topics in the news, but EU sources were also very limited. Rather, the sources reported in EU news were largely national figures identified in their national capacities.

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[21]However, the left-of-center quality newspaper in Britain, the *Guardian*, was a clear exception, in the British media and overall, as it was the only news media organization to offer net positive opinion on EU institutions, policy, and positions.

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Finally, media opinion toward European issues was critical toward the European Union - a result that applied in the Federal Republic as well as in the United Kingdom. In short, neither country's news media functioned as a proponent of European Union politics - *regardless* of the position toward the European Union adopted by government at the national level. While increased news attention to seemed to foster an enhanced public discourse on the European Union and European integration in both Britain and Germany, bringing Europe into the public eye, it is possible to conclude that the nature of news coverage during decisive moments in EU affairs did not substantially legitimate a European sphere of governance, with likely implications for the legitimation process in the EU overall.

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