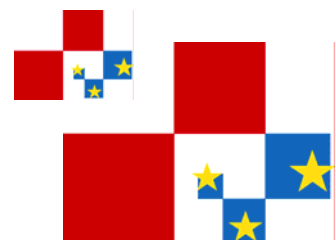


Agenda setting: a study into the EU-Croatia relationship

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Cromwell's statement: "No one ever travels so high as he who knows not where he is going..."

Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance
Robert M. Pirsing

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the existence of the agenda setting for the issue of the EU and Croatian integration process. It used public opinion survey data and content analysis of daily newspapers to assess the importance of seven topics related to the issue on the media and the public agenda in three subsequent periods. The results of the correlation analysis revealed the minimal agenda setting effects of the presentation of seven topics in the media on the perceived importance of those topics in the first period, while there was no support for agenda setting in later periods. A comparison between the topics' importance scores on the media agenda and public agenda showed that the occurrence or absence of the agenda setting was associated with either extensive or minimal coverage of the economy in the media during each period. The minimal evidence of the agenda setting put this study in contrast with many studies which proved the influence of the media agenda on its corresponding public agenda.

INTRODUCTION

The political changes in Eastern and Southern Europe in the last decade of the 20th century gave prospects for participation of new countries in the European integration process. After almost a decade of long struggle to establish a functional statehood, the Republic of Croatia officially started the integration process by signing the Stabilisation and Accession Agreement (SAA) with the European Union (EU) in 2001. From then onward, every Croatian government is fully committed to fulfilment of the political and economical measures outlined in the SAA, since it is an important step towards a full membership in the EU.

In its work program for the period 2000-2004¹ the government emphasized that the integration process and the implementation of the SAA would require political and economic decisions, which will have substantial impact on all aspects of life of the citizens of Croatia. Therefore, in 2001, the government adopted a communication strategy aimed at systematic informing of the public about all aspects of Croatian accession to the EU in order to prepare them for the last step before the accession, which will have to be made by the decision of the citizens at a referendum (Pejčinović Burić 2002).

As part of the communication strategy, the government is interested in keeping a track with the public opinion about the EU and integration process. Hence, the Ministry for European Integration² has been conducting public opinion surveys geared at examining the attitudes and information needs of the public two-times per year since July 2000. In the view of the political communications, the media are considered as the necessary factor in the exchange of the messages between the political actors and institutions on one hand, and public on the other (McLeod, Kosicki, and McLeod 1994; McQuail 1994). Indeed, in the communication strategy, the media and journalists are considered as the main creators of the public opinion, since they are the principal source of information for the majority of population, and they influence the views of the general public in the best and most rapid manner (Pejčinović Burić 2002). Consequently, it can be expected that the public will predominantly rely on the presentation of the issue in the media to base their opinion about it. Therefore, the underlying motivation for this study is to examine the relationship between the presentation of the EU and integration process in the media, and the public opinion on the issue. This study will rely on the agenda setting theory and examine the relationship between the media and the public by looking at the importance of seven topics related to the issue of the EU and Croatian Integration process in three subsequent periods.

Theoretical background

Over the years, mass communication theory and research have been interested in answering the question: What effects do the mass media have? Moreover, "the entire study of mass communication is based on the premise that the media have significant effects, yet there is little agreement on the nature and extent of these assumed effects" (McQuail 1994). In general, effects of the mass media can be understood as "changes in attitudes, ideas and behaviour, which can be attributed to using particular media supplies" (Schenk 2003). In the last thirty years, many studies used agenda setting to explore effects of media on public.

What is agenda setting?

Dearing and Rogers (1996) define agenda setting as a process in which there is a "competition among issues proponents to gain attention of media professionals, the public and policy elites". An issue is defined as "a conflict between two or more identifiable groups over procedural or substantive matters relating to the distribution of positions or resources" (Cobb and Elder 1981). Issues facing social systems are manifold and not all of them are of the same concern to the policymakers, the media and public in some period of time. This is

¹ Government of the Republic of Croatia, *Program of the Government of the Republic of Croatia for the period 2000-2004*, 2000.

² The Ministry for European Integration is the state body which has the mandate to coordinate the information on European Integration in the Republic of Croatia.

why an agenda is formed. Therefore, an agenda is defined as “a set of issues that are communicated in a hierarchy of importance at the point in time” (Dearing and Rogers 1996). Agendas can be found for all constituent parts of the society, from individuals and general public to media and finally the policymakers. Therefore, the agenda setting process is composed of the media agenda, the public agenda and the policy agenda, as well as the interrelationship among these agendas. Dearing and Rogers (1996) distinguish a research tradition for each of these agendas. They call the media agenda setting those studies focused on examining which factors exert the biggest influence on the prominence of the issues on the media agenda. It was found that besides the immediate events and situation, political actors, policies and public opinion related to an issue contribute to its prominence in the media (McCombs 2004). The second research tradition is called policy agenda setting, because it investigates influence of the media agenda and public agenda on the position of an issue on the policy agenda and consequently policy actions regarding it. The final, but the oldest and the richest research tradition entails studying of the influence of the media agenda onto the public agenda. Dearing and Rogers (1996) call it public agenda setting, because “its main dependent variable is the importance of a set of issues on the public agenda”. As such, it provides a framework for this study which is focused on finding the relationship between the media and public agenda concerning the issue of the EU and the Croatian Integration process.

Media agenda – public agenda

Studies into the influence of the media agenda on the public agenda constitute the majority of all agenda setting studies. Moreover, the previously mentioned definition of agenda setting as a process stems from the first conceptualization of agenda setting as the function of media to raise the importance of an issue in the public's mind through repeated news coverage (Severin and Tankard 2001). Agenda setting is grounded on the ideas of Lippmann (1922) and Lasswell (1948) that the media serve as a bridge between “the world outside and the pictures in our heads” and that they shape the “reality” in the minds of the public through the daily selection of news about events and changes in the environment which are beyond public's immediate experience.

Cohen (1963) offered one of the best and the most known notions of the agenda setting function of the media by stating that the press “may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about. The world will look different to different people depending on the map that is drawn for them by writers, editors, and publishers of the paper they read”.

McCombs and Shaw (1972) first introduced the term and systematically studied agenda setting during the 1968 presidential campaign in Chapel Hill. They hypothesized that “the mass media set the agenda for each political campaign, influencing the salience of attitudes toward the political issues” (McCombs and Shaw 1972). The agenda setting can be explored from various perspectives. McCombs, Danielian and Wanta (1995; McCombs 2004) provided a typology of perspectives for studying the agenda setting effects.

The typology is based on the combination of two dimensions: focus of attention and measure of public salience. The focus of attention on the agenda can either be on a set of issues or just a single issue. This dimension corresponds to the distinction made by Dearing and Rogers (1996) between two approaches to the public agenda: (a) hierarchy, in which public agenda consists of a set of issues and it is investigated at a certain point in time, and (b) longitudinal, in which one or few issues are investigated over time. The second dimension, distinguishes between two ways of measuring the salience of issues on the public agenda: (a) aggregate measures that describe the salience for the whole population, and (b) individual measures that describe individual responses about the salience. Therefore, some of the main studies of the agenda setting function of the media are presented further according to the four perspectives.

1. Mass persuasion studies³

This perspective focuses on the set of issues and uses aggregated data to describe public agendas. The first study on agenda setting by McCombs and Shaw (1972) gave evidence to the influence of media on the public agenda in a small community during the presidential campaign. The public agenda was determined by rank ordering the 15 key issues according to the percentages of undecided voters naming each issue in the survey. The media agenda was determined by rank ordering the 15 issues according to the number of news stories devoted to each of them in the nine major news sources used by the voters. A high correlation was found between the importance of issues to the voters and their prominence in the media, which suggested that media have a direct effect on people's perception rather than attitudes. This presented a change in thinking from the, at the time dominant, view of the media's direct influence on audience attitudes and attracted many researches to further explore this level of influence of media on public opinion.

In the consecutive study in Charlotte in 1972, the same authors further explored the causal order between media agenda and public agenda by comparing them across two time periods, June and October. They found the largest correlation between the newspapers' agenda in June and voters' agenda in October, which indicated that the media are more likely to shape the public agenda, then vice versa (McCombs 2004).

Agenda setting was given additional evidence when Funkhouser (1973) conducted a national level study about the issues in 1960s. He has counted a number of stories in three weekly newsmagazines for each year in the decade to obtain a measure of media content. To measure public opinion about which issues were important he used Gallup polls, which asked people about "the most important problem facing America". He found a strong correspondence between the amount of media coverage about issues and the public ranking of those issues. But the research also provided another important finding which was supportive of the influence exerted by the media: none of the issues' salience on the public or media agenda showed any significant relationship to external events.

2. Automaton studies

Few studies looked for evidence for the automaton assumption of agenda setting, which suggests that the individual ranking of the set of issues exactly reflects the agenda of received media content, which would be close to the hypodermic needle idea of media effects (Roessler 1999). The first study of this type was conducted by McLeod, Becker and Byrnes (1974) about six issues on 389 potential voters during the presidential campaign in Madison. They found only marginal support for the hypothesis, primarily because just one issue (Vietnam war) was of the primary concern on the public agenda, but another issue (honesty in government) which was covered heavily in the media did not seem to capture any interest among the individuals. Roessler (1999) also found no support for the hypothesis by testing it in nonelection period and on 900 German citizens.

3. Natural History

Studies belonging to this perspective focus on "the degree of correspondence between the media agenda and public agenda in the shifting salience of a single issue over time" (McCombs 2004). Winter and Eyal (1981) found strong agenda setting effects in looking at the change of importance for the civil rights issue over 23 years. Public agenda consisted of the percentage of respondents who mentioned civil rights in the answers to "the most important problem" question from 27 Gallup polls and the number of New York Times front-page stories on the issue in each of the six months prior to each poll.

4. Cognitive portrait

This perspective explores the agenda setting effect by looking at the single issue and individual agenda. It is best presented through the work of Iyengar (1982) and his colleagues

³ This perspective was renamed to "Competition" in McComb's book: "Setting the agenda: the mass media and public opinion", 2004.

who conducted experiments to prove the causality of agenda setting. They altered the content on the videotapes of television newscasts in a way that certain issues were given more attention and some other less. Individuals were exposed to these altered newscasts in experimental conditions and then asked to rank the importance of various issues. The finding of several experiments dealing with different issues showed that the respondents ranked those issues higher which were given more attention in the altered newscasts.

Same authors also discovered special ways in which newscast might have impact on individuals which they later conceptualized as framing and priming. Framing means controlling the value preferences on which the public will base their judgments, thus giving a particular meaning to an issue. Priming can be understood as an extension of agenda setting, because it suggests that the media, by giving attention to some issues and ignoring others, can affect the criteria that people use to evaluate political actors (Sheafer and Weimann 2005).

Factors influencing public agenda setting

To improve the understanding of the media agenda influence on the public agenda, many studies have been carried out to establish the conditions or factors under which agenda setting is most likely to work. Many contingent conditions or factors are complex in nature, and therefore not all of them can be comprehensively explained. Nevertheless, those that are usually mentioned or found in the relevant literature are mentioned below.

Time frame

An important question for determining the influence of media content on public perception of the importance of issues is concerned with the time frame needed for the effects to take place. In the already mentioned study of the civil rights issue, Winter and Eyal (1981) found "that the optimal effects span is a four- to six-week period immediately prior to fieldwork", since the strongest correlations were found between one month and two months of news coverage prior to the polls. Wanta and Hu (1994) investigated the time-lag for eleven issues in five different media, local and national television and newspaper, and newsmagazine. The range of optimal time frames varied from one to eight weeks.

Obtrusiveness of issues

Zucker (1978) first proposed that the obtrusiveness of an issue may be an important factor in predicting agenda setting effects. He conducted a study comparing three obtrusive and three unobtrusive issues. The study showed that issues which most people cannot experience directly (unobtrusive) led to a stronger agenda-setting effects than issues that most people can experience directly (obtrusive). However, even for unobtrusive issues more coverage does not have to directly result in increased perceived importance. While assessing the importance of the European integration on the individual level and in different countries Peter (2003) found that more coverage did not automatically increase the perceived importance. The occurrence of the agenda-setting pattern was found to depend on whether the elite opinion was depicted as consensual or polarized towards in the media coverage of the issue.

The need for orientation

To explain why agenda setting occurs, McCombs (2004) referred to the need for orientation, which he defined as a psychological concept that "describes individual differences in the desire for orienting cues and background information". As such, the need for orientation stems from the Uses and Gratifications Theory, which assumes that people are relatively active communication participants who take the initiative in choosing media among other sources to gratify felt needs or desires. Moreover, people's predispositions, interactions and environments have influence on their response to media or messages (Rubin 1994). The need of orientation is conceptualized in terms of: a) relevance of a specific issue to an individual and b) uncertainty of an individual about his position or views on a specific issue, which is linked with gap or a lack of knowledge about an issue. Weaver (1991) has found that the greater agenda-setting effects are observable when audience members have high

need for orientation, characterized by the high relevance and high uncertainty for an issue. Moreover, the degree of media exposure by a sample of individuals is positively related to the degree to which they accept the media agenda.

Definition of the research problem

Most of the research focusing on the nexus between mass media and public opinion is conceptualized as research into media effects. Although the range of issues studied is widely diverse, all those studies have in common that they are “an attempt to understand the relationship between media content and its audience, with or without reference to the term ‘effect’” (Newbold 1995). The influence of the media comes from their ability to create an awareness for certain issues and events, to determine salience and priority of certain issues, thus having effects on audience cognition (Schenk 2003).

As presented earlier, the majority of the agenda-setting studies have been exploring the relationship between media content and its audience by investigating whether the prominence of the issues in the media (*media agenda*) subsequently determines the importance given to them by the public (*public agenda*). Since the first satisfactory report on agenda setting by McCombs and Shaw (1972), the majority of the agenda studies investigated a media agenda – public agenda relationship and have shown that the media may be so powerful that they can construct audience perceptions of the social world (Dearing and Rogers 1996; Newbold 1995).

The focus of this study is to determine if there is a relationship between the importance of topics related to the issue of the EU and Croatian Integration process in the media and the public. Since the integration process into the EU is one of the main policy issues of the Croatian government, daily newspapers, among other media, may be expected to cover the issue extensively. Based on the agenda-setting expectations, the importance given to various topics in daily newspapers should be somehow reflected in how important public thinks those topic are. Therefore, by using public opinion survey data and content analysis of daily newspapers in three subsequent periods, this study is intended to answer the following questions:

1. What is the importance of the topics related to the issue as judged in the public opinion surveys?
2. Is there a change in the results of the public opinion survey over the three study periods regarding: a) importance of information; b) the opinion towards EU; c) expectations from accession; and d) overall amount of information about the EU and Croatian integration process?
3. What is the importance of the issue related topics in the articles, and the change in the three periods?
4. Is the importance of topics presented in the articles related to the importance of topics in the public opinion survey?

CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

Relations between EU and Croatia and integration process

In May 1999 European Commission proposed the creation of the Stabilisation and Association Process as a new framework for closer relations between the EU and Western Balkans countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia and Federative Republic of Yugoslavia). This new context provided a wide-ranging partnership through a new category of agreements, the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA), which outlines a set of political and economical measures that need to be implemented during the integration process.

The opening of negotiations for the SAA depends on specific country's compliance with the relevant political and economic conditions of the EU. Therefore, following the positive assessments of political developments in Croatia, determined by the Parliamentary and Presidential Elections in early 2000, the negotiations for the SAA started in November 2000 (EU Commission 2000). After three official rounds of negotiations and several technical meetings, the negotiating process was concluded and the SAA initialled in Brussels in May 2001. On 29th of October 2001, the SAA between EU and Croatia was signed in Luxembourg and ratified in the Croatian and the European Parliament two weeks later. Since the SAA needs to be ratified in all the EU member states to come into force, Interim Agreement, which applies the provisions of the SAA related to trade in goods as well as those on competition, and intellectual, industrial and commercial property rights has been applied provisionally from January 2002 and entered into force in March 2002.

In December 2002, European Council in Copenhagen confirmed that countries involved in the Stabilisation and Association Process have European prospects. Same month Croatian Parliament adopted the Resolution on the Accession of the Republic of Croatia to the European Union, which implies the consensus of all the political parties about the integration into the EU. Two months later, on 21st of February 2003 Croatia submitted the application for membership in the European Union to which European Commission issued a positive opinion (avis) in April 2004. By that time 12 out of 15 countries ratified SAA in their national parliaments and Croatia already became a member of several EU Programmes.

On 18th of June 2004 Croatia acquired candidate status for membership in the EU. Six months later European Council adopted the decision to start the accession negotiations with Croatia on 17th of March 2005. However, the negotiations between Croatia and the EU were delayed for more than six months due to the insufficient cooperation of Croatian Government with the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia in Den Haag. The main obstacle was Croatian General Ante Gotovina, accused for war crimes, whose arrest, according to the court's main prosecutor Carla del Ponte, Croatian Government failed to achieve. Nevertheless, accession negotiations were opened on 3rd of October 2005, although Gotovina was still at large. He was arrested a month later in Canary Islands in the EU.

Accession criteria

In June 1993, European Council in Copenhagen concluded that "the associated countries in Central and Eastern Europe that so desire shall become members of the Union. Accession will take place as soon as a country is able to assume the obligations of membership by satisfying the economic and political conditions. Membership requires that the candidate country has achieved stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities; the existence of a functioning market economy, as well as the capacity to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the Union and the ability to take on the obligations of membership, including adherence to the aims of political, economic and monetary union" (EU Commission 2004). These were so called Copenhagen criteria for accession into EU and the whole integration process is designed for the accession countries to meet these criteria.

In December 1995, the European Council in Madrid referred to the need “to create the conditions for the gradual, harmonious integration of the application countries, particularly through: the development of the market economy, the adjustment of their administrative structure, the creation of a stable economic and monetary environment” (EU Commission, 2004). In order to help the accession countries, EU formed several pre-accession funds such as CARDS or SAPARD which are supposed to finance various projects aimed at meeting mentioned criteria.

In May 1999, when the Treaty of Amsterdam entered into force, the political criteria defined in Copenhagen have been “essentially enshrined as a constitutional principle in the Treaty on European Union. Article 6 of the consolidated Treaty on European Union reads: “The Union is founded on the principles of liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and the rule of law.” Accordingly, Article 49 of the consolidated Treaty stipulates that “Any European State which respects the principles set out in Article 6 may apply to become a member of the Union” (EU Commission, 2004). These principles were emphasized in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union that was proclaimed at the Nice European Council in December 2000.

In June 2003 European Council adopted the Thessaloniki Agenda for the Western Balkans where the EU stated “that the pace of further movement of the Western Balkans countries towards the EU lies in their own hands and will depend on each country’s performance in implementing reforms, thus respecting the criteria set by the Copenhagen European Council of 1993 and the Stabilisation and Association Process conditionality”.

Therefore, membership criteria for Croatia include previously outlined political and economic criteria as well as the cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, regional cooperation and return of refugees. In order to meet all these criteria, Croatian government accepted the first National Program for the Integration of the Republic of Croatia into the European Union in 2003. The program consisted of measures (to be) taken in order to implement SAA requirements as well as the measures for the legal harmonization with the EU. In order to do so, several hundreds of laws and regulations were to be changed or be newly accepted, and many regulatory bodies were to be adjusted or implemented.

METHODOLOGY

Usual agenda-setting research is concerned with measuring public and media agendas and drawing conclusions on the relationship between them, by correlating the results of both agendas.

The public agenda is usually measured by public opinion surveys. The researcher must decide “whether to measure saliences through responses elicited from open-ended questions or by using fixed-alternative questions developed from open-ended questions” (McLeod, Becker, and Byrnes 1974). In most of the agenda-setting studies, a sample of individuals is asked a question which was designed by George Gallup: “What is the most important problem facing this country today?”. The relative position of an issue on the public agenda is gauged through aggregated or individual-level responses to such a question. The public agenda can be assessed through just one or several public opinion surveys.

The media agenda is usually indicated by a content analysis of the news media. Media content is analyzed by looking for the number of more or less countable units, such as the number of columns a story has in the newspapers or the number of front-page stories an issue receives. Kiouisis (2004) identified three dimensions of media salience: attention, prominence, and valence. Attention implies that the number of news stories devoted to an issue measures its relative salience on the media agenda (Dearing and Rogers 1996). Prominence refers to “the positioning of a story within media text to communicate its importance” (Kiouisis 2004). Valence can be understood as an affective measure of the salience. It is mostly used in the studies on framing, since it can be reflected in the positive or negative tone a story or an issue receives in the media, or the amount of conflict in a story.

The number of news stories about an issue of study is counted for some period of time, usually before the public agenda is measured, to account for the lag-factor which occurs between the media and its impact on public opinion. Most of the agenda-setting studies code just the number of news reports about an issue, without exploring the exact content of these news stories. However, the exact content of stories allows for a better understanding of the agenda-setting, especially when it is concerned with one issue (Dearing and Rogers 1996).

Research design

Public agenda

In this study, the public agenda was assessed through the secondary analysis of the public opinion surveys' data. Public opinion surveys have been developed on demand of and in cooperation with the Ministry for European Integration of Croatia and the Gfk Market Research Center. The objective of these surveys is to: (a) monitor public attitudes towards the EU and Croatia's accession, (b) examine on which knowledge and information these attitudes are based, (c) inventory which information the public needs/considers important on this issue, and (d) determine the sources of information that are most influential. The main features of the public opinion surveys are:

- Time-span: two times per year, in June/July and December, starting from July 2000.
- Methodology: Gfk Omnibus, which means that a sample of people are interviewed face-to-face about a number of different issues.
- Sample: representative sample of Croatian citizens older than 15, stratified according to the regions (6 regions) and the size of the town (4 sizes) in concordance with the 2001 census. The size of the sample is 1000 respondents in 98 research units and 76 towns. In each research unit, a household is chosen by the "random walk" method and the "main" respondent is randomly chosen from the members of the household who are 15 or older by a method of the latest date of the birthday.
- Representation: the sample is representative for the population with a sampling error of +/- 2.5% and reliable at the level of 95%.

The public opinion surveys consist of a questionnaire with eight closed-ended questions, asking about: (q1) cognizance of the EU, (q2) general opinion towards the EU, (q3) attitude towards Croatia joining the EU, (q4) opinions about the possible consequences of the EU membership of Croatia, (q5) opinion about the amount of information in the media regarding the EU and Croatian Integration process, (q6) importance of information regarding the integration process, (q7) ways of informing and (q8) sources of information.⁴ Since not all questions in the public opinion survey are relevant for this study, only a subset of them will be used and presented further.

Selected questions

The four questions selected for the purpose of this research are:

- (q6) "What would you like to know about the EU? How important would certain information be to you?"
- (q2) "How is your general opinion about the EU?"
- (q4) "What do you think how would the accession to the EU affect Croatia?"
- (q5) "In your opinion, is there enough proper information in the media (TV, radio, newspapers, magazines) about the EU and possible advantages and disadvantages of the Croatian entry into the EU?"

⁴ For the complete public opinion questionnaire, please refer to Appendix.

All selected questions used a four-point scale response sheet as well as the “doesn’t know” option which was filled in by the interviewer if the respondent did not know or did not want to give the answer to a particular question.

The public agenda on the issue of the EU and Croatian integration process was elicited from the survey sample population responses to the q6, therefore this question is presented first. Since it was a closed-ended question, respondents were asked to report on the importance of eight topics about the EU and Croatian integration process. The scale was anchored at one end by “very important” and on the other end by “fully unimportant”. The eighth topic, the influence of the associated membership in the EU on my everyday life, was not taken into consideration during the assessment of the media agenda and consequently it was discarded from the public agenda analysis, too. Finally, the following seven topics were taken as variables for measuring the importance of the EU and Croatian Integration process on the public agenda:

1. Functioning of the EU
2. Conditions for joining the EU
3. Rights and obligations arising from associated membership
4. Influence of the EU on sovereignty, independence of Croatia as the associated member of the EU
5. Influence of the associated membership in the EU on international position of Croatia
6. Influence of the associated membership in the EU on internal political life in Croatia
7. Influence of the associated membership in the EU on the economy

In addition to this main question, the other three selected questions were taken into consideration to give more insight into the public’s view about the issue. To assess the general opinion towards the EU (q2), respondents were asked to rate their opinion on the scale that was set at one end to “very positive” and on the other to “very negative”. Respondents were asked to report their agreement with seven statements about the possible consequences of the accession of Croatia to the EU in q4.⁵ Finally, respondents were asked to choose one of the four answers as an evaluation of amount of information regarding the issue (q5).

Data collection and analysis

Data were collected during the internship at the Ministry for European Integration from October to December 2003. In December 2003, data from eight public opinion surveys were available directly from the GfK Market Research Centre, since they have been conducting surveys. Because of the time limitations of the research, it was decided that data from three consecutive surveys would be used to represent the opinion of the Croatian public towards EU and Croatian Integration process over a period of 1.5 years. The relationship between Croatia and the EU was not institutionalized until the signing of the SAA agreement in October 2001, thus the first four public opinion surveys (2000, 2001) were discarded from the analysis as well as the eighth survey (December 2003) since it was done immediately after Parliamentary elections in Croatia. To conclude, data from the 5th (July 2002), 6th (December 2002) and 7th (June 2003) public opinion survey were chosen to be used in the analysis of this research, thus presenting the 1st, 2nd and 3rd research period. The survey sample, which consisted of 1000 respondents, was taken as the research sample in all three chosen periods.

Prior the actual analysis, data in the scale had to be reversed. This meant transforming scores in scales, so that high scores indicate higher importance, agreement, positive attitude or evaluation of the information and vice versa. Public agenda was assessed through mean scores of the aggregated responses to seven variables constituting answers to q6.

⁵ For statements, please refer to q4 in the public opinion questionnaire in Appendix

Media agenda

As the majority of agenda-setting studies, this study used content analysis as a method for assessing the media agenda (Dearing and Rogers 1996; McCombs and Shaw 1972; Roessler 1999). Berelson (1952) gave one of the first definitions of content analysis as "a research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication" (Hansen 1998). Holsti (1969) defined it as "any technique for making inferences by systematically and objectively identifying specified characteristics of messages". Since one of the objectives of this research was to determine importance of information regarding the EU and Croatian integration process presented in the media, content analysis was decided to be the most adequate method.

Selection of media and sample

Since the beginning of the public opinion survey about EU, television has been found as the most important source of information to the public, daily newspapers as the second, while radio, weeklies and talks with friends have only been mentioned as the most important by a small number of respondents (MEI 2005). In many aggregate level agenda-setting analyses, the media agenda was assessed from the sample of the newspapers. Since the analysis of the television reporting on the EU would require a vast amount of time and resources, it was finally decided to focus the content analysis on daily newspapers.

In the next step a decision had to be taken which daily newspapers to take into consideration. The decision was guided by the ratings given to specific daily newspapers as an answer to the question about the most important source of information in the public opinion survey. The biggest share of respondents rated *Večernji list* and *Jutarnji list* as the most important daily newspapers. As these newspapers are the two with the largest readership share (41% and 28% respectively) and represent a direct competition one to another on the market, the choice of *Jutarnji list* and *Večernji list* seemed rational. The privately owned *Jutarnji list* is closer to 'tabloid' style, while the *Večernji list* is a broadsheet. To measure the importance of topics related to the EU and Croatian Integration process, the unit of the analysis were articles mentioning EU, which were published either in *Jutarnji list* or in *Večernji list*. Articles were obtained from the Presscut agency in Zagreb, Croatia, which was contracted by the Ministry for European Integration to provide media clippings of the issue. Articles were cut from the rest of the paper and scanned, so they were delivered in PDF format and accompanied with an Excel sheet, specifying date of issue, newspaper, title, author, size of an article and PR value of an article.

Time span

In the final step, a time span for the selection of the articles had to be determined. Previous researches found the optimal time span for agenda-setting effects to be about one month (e.g; Roessler 1999; Wanta & Hu, 1994; Winter & Eyal, 1991). Therefore, a time span for the selection of the articles for the content analysis was set to one month before the beginning of the terrain action of the survey until its completion, for each of the three research periods.

Final research sample

The final research sample for the content analysis of articles about EU and Croatian Integration process in each research period is presented in the Table 1.

Table 1. Sample of articles according to research periods

Research period	1	2	3
Time-span	01.06. – 10.07.2002	05.11 – 24.12. 2002	05.05 – 18.06.2003
Duration of period in days	40	49	44
Number of articles	42	100	46

Analytical categories

The purpose of the content analysis in this study was to measure importance of topics about the issue in articles, thus constitute media agenda. If a comparison was to be made between media and public agenda, the same variables had to be used. In that regard, seven topics about the EU and the Croatian Integration process to which respondents had to give importance ratings in the survey, were employed as the main categories in the content analysis of articles about the issue.

Nonetheless, upon looking at the relevant documents about Croatian integration process and its relationship with the EU (e.g. SAA agreement, Government's Action plan for European Integration, EU-Commission reports on Croatia), reviewing articles in the sample, as well as consulting with few political and media analysts, such main categories were regarded to be too broad in meaning for articles to be coded into them directly. Therefore, various subcategories were made and assigned to each of the main categories. Subcategories were conceptualized as sub-topics that can be associated with and further explain main categories, i.e. topics. Consequently, this meant that the coded content was latent, thus the one that shifts the focus to the meaning underlying the elements on the surface of a message and even more on the coder's interpretations of the meaning of the content (Potter and Levine-Donnerstein 1999).

An overview of subcategories per category as well as their definitions can be found in Appendix. Finally, the codebook for the media agenda was divided into three parts. The first part was constructed for coding of structural details, the second part for the overall orientation of the article towards the EU as well as Croatian integration process and the third part for the sub-topics⁶.

Coding procedure and data analysis

Preliminary observations of articles indicated that a single article could be coded for more than just one sub-topic. Therefore, articles were coded for the prominence of sub-topics. The prominence was measured according to the title and approximation of the amount of sentences and space related to the particular sub-topic. To obtain a more levelled presentation of the content within articles, every sub-topic mentioned in an article was given scores from 1 to 3 according to the following criteria:

- 1 – sub-topic is mentioned in at least one sentence or more, but in less than 1/3 of the article.
- 2 – sub-topic is mentioned in at least 1/3 of the article and not mentioned in the title.
- 3 – sub-topic is mentioned in at least 1/3 of the article and mentioned in the title

However, this coding of articles for prominence meant that an article was receiving the same scores whether it was taking the whole page, just a paragraph or being published on the front page or top of the page. Since articles were cut out of the newspaper, placement could not have been taken into account in the final assessment of the importance. PR value was considered as an option, but since it presented only the actual size of an article (in cm²) multiplied by the average price of an ad in the newspapers and not taking into account the page on which article was published, it was found to be of no more use than actual size of the article. Hence, importance of the sub-topics in articles was gauged by multiplying scores given to an article with the actual size of article (in cm²), in fact, by weighting coded prominence by article size. In order to avoid big numbers in results, size of the article was first normalized to from 0 to 1, by looking for the maximum size among all articles in all three research periods and dividing each article's actual size with that maximum value.

First, the analysis was done by summarizing weighted scores given to articles in each of the three research periods by sub-topic. Next, sub-topics sums were summarized together according to the topic they belong to for each research period. Finally, results were corrected

⁶ For a complete codebook, please refer to Appendix.

for the difference in the research period duration by dividing the topic sums with the number of days in a research period and multiplying the result with the average number of days (44). Therefore, these corrected results presented overall importance of topics in the media, thus constituting media agenda. The overall importance results were presented as topic sums and percentages of sub-topic per topic in each research period.

Pilot research and reliability testing

Since it is recommended to conduct pilot analysis to check for the inadequacies and/or inconsistencies of the categories (Hansen, 1998), in this study two preliminary analyses were done on a complete sample. After the first, definitions of the subcategories were refined and some of the subcategories discarded from the analysis or merged with another category in order to yield better results. Also, the eighth topic offered as an answer to q6 in the survey (influence of the associated membership in the EU on my everyday life) was discarded as the category because it was not receiving any score in any research period. In the second preliminary analysis, the criteria for the prominence scores were tested by distinguishing between 1/3 and 1/2 of the approximation of the space a sub-category was taking in an article and decision was made to weight prominence with the size of an article.

It is important to point out that reliability test was not conducted. Research was carried out in the Netherlands and a second coder with a sufficient knowledge of Croatian language could not have been found. Therefore, results of the content analysis could not have been checked for the consistency, which in turn may question the objectivity of the content analysis (Holsti, 1969).

Media agenda – public agenda

In order to establish if there was a relationship between the media and the public agenda in each period, Pearson correlations were calculated between the topics sums indicating importance in the media and mean results of topics from the survey indicating importance on the public agenda in each research period. In addition, Spearman's rank order correlations were calculated between the topics' ranks on the media agendas and the public agendas. On the media agenda, ranks were assigned to the topics according to their sums. Therefore, the topic with the highest sum was given the highest rank (1) and the topic with the lowest sum the lowest rank (7). In order to assign ranks to the topics on the public agenda, first a one-way ANOVA analysis with Bonferroni and Tukey post-hoc tests was applied to test if there was significant difference between topics' mean scores. Then, the separate ranks were given to those topics whose mean scores were found to be significantly different, and the same rank to those that did not significantly differ one from another in the results of the Tukey test.

RESULTS

Public agenda

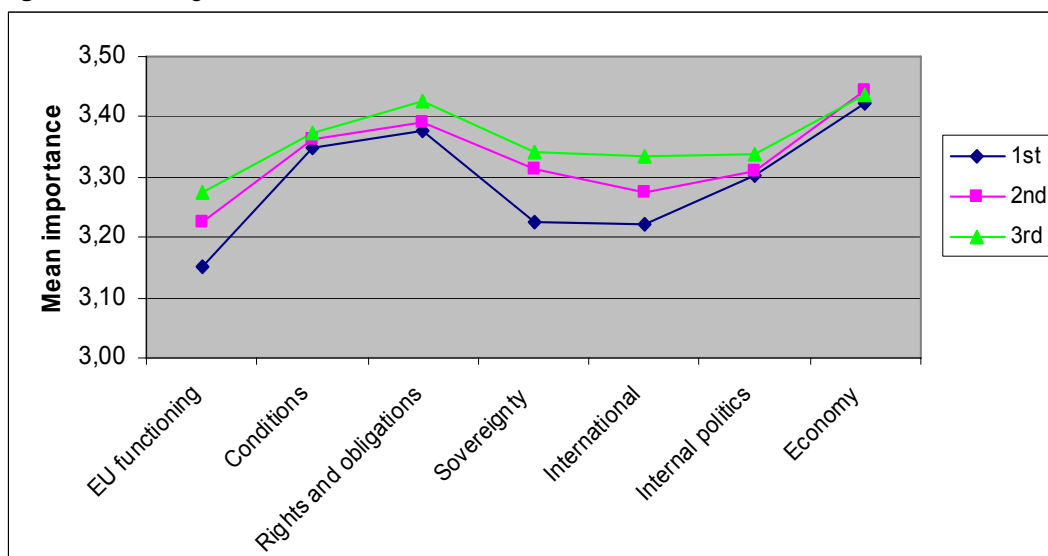
Public agenda is gauged through mean scores of respondents' ratings of importance of information about the seven topics. Table 2 shows that mean scores of the seven topics under q6 are high, indicating that all topics are highly important to public for their understanding of the EU and Croatian Integration process. Results indicate a stable distribution of importance scores between the topics, with the information about influence on economy being the most important and the information about EU functioning being the least important in all three research periods (Figure 1). However, one-way ANOVA indicated significant difference in opinion over three periods for: information about EU functioning ($p < .05$), influence on sovereignty ($p < .05$) and international position of Croatia ($p < .01$), while there was no significant difference in terms of importance of other four topics between periods. Post-hoc comparison using Tukey test was performed for topics with significant results to indicate between which periods mean scores are statistically different. For all significant topics, mean scores in the first period are significantly different from those in the third period, while the second period does not differ significantly from either first or third period, as presented in the significance column in the Table 2.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics and ANOVA* results for q6, q2 and q4 in each research period

		Sample			Mean (SD)			F	Significance**		
Research period		T1	T2	T3	T1	T2	T3		T1	T2	T3
Information importance (q6)	EU functioning	971	938	957	3,15(0,87)	3,23(0,78)	3,27(0,81)	5,519	x		x
	Conditions	970	935	963	3,35(0,81)	3,36(0,75)	3,37(0,77)	0,304			
	Rights and obligations	969	930	961	3,38(0,79)	3,39(0,75)	3,43(0,71)	1,029			
	Sovereignty	969	929	958	3,22(0,86)	3,31(0,77)	3,34(0,77)	5,425	x		x
	International	958	930	950	3,22(0,84)	3,28(0,76)	3,33(0,72)	5,011	x		x
	Internal politics	968	932	955	3,30(0,84)	3,31(0,76)	3,34(0,74)	0,6			
	Economy	972	935	959	3,42(0,77)	3,44(0,70)	3,44(0,69)	0,211			
Opinion about EU (q2)		921	873	884	3,03(0,68)	3,01(0,65)	3,05(0,69)	0,779			
Expectations from accession to the EU (q4)	Great progress in general	947	918	938	2,98(0,83)	2,98(0,78)	3,04(0,80)	1,936			
	Progress, development of economy	951	915	931	3,02(0,80)	3,04(0,76)	3,04(0,79)	0,148			
	Higher living standard	943	917	919	2,89(0,87)	2,91(0,82)	2,92(0,89)	0,24			
	Joint market and open borders	942	913	933	3,31(0,73)	3,28(0,67)	3,29(0,70)	0,411			
	Cooperation and progress in science and education	948	910	926	3,21(0,76)	3,23(0,70)	3,17(0,74)	1,463			
	Problems in domestic economy	922	896	911	2,88(0,94)	2,86(0,89)	2,90(0,92)	0,364			
	Partial loss of Croatian independence	906	901	904	2,57(0,98)	2,67(0,96)	2,70(0,96)	4,682	x		x

*df=2 in all one-way ANOVA analyses

** significance determined at 0.05 level

Figure 1. Public agenda over time

The results of the analysis of public opinion survey show that public held strong and relatively stable opinions about the other questions as well. Going further in the results presented in Table 2, it is striking to find that there is no significant difference between research periods in terms of the opinion about EU. Results indicate that the opinion towards the EU is mostly positive.

The last part of Table 2 shows results about consequences of accession of Croatia to the EU. In all three periods respondents agreed that accession will have positive consequences. This was expected, considering the overall positive opinion towards EU. Opinion about positive consequences was stable over time, since no significant difference was observed between three periods. The public also agreed about two negative consequences of accession: problems in economy and partial loss of independence. Although, one-way ANOVA revealed no significant difference among the means for problems in economy, difference between periods was significant for the partial loss of independence ($p=.009$). Partial loss of independence was viewed as a more probable consequence of EU membership to the respondents in the third period than to those in the first period ($M=2.70$, $SD=.96$; $M=2.57$, $SD=.98$).

Table 3 summarizes the respondents' evaluation of the amount of information available in the media on the EU and Croatian integration process. The biggest share of respondents in all three periods thought that there was not enough of proper information in the media on the EU and advantages and disadvantages of Croatian entry into the EU. Although that opinion was shared by more than half of the decisive respondents in July 2002 (T1), a moderate shift towards positive evaluation of the amount of information can be observed primarily in December 2002 (T2) and later in June 2003 (T3).

Table 3. Percentages of responses about amount of proper information on EU in the media

Research period		T1	T2	T3
Amount of information	Quite enough	8,8	13,9	17,2
	Mostly enough	25,5	36,5	29,8
	Not enough	52,4	42,6	44,0
	No proper information at all	13,3	7,0	9,0
Total	N	956	934	949
	%	100,0	100,0	100,0

Additionally, Kruskal-Wallis test revealed significant difference in evaluation levels between three research periods ($\chi^2(2)=64.41$, $p=.01$), while Mann-Whitney U tests showed

that significant difference in opinion is between first and the second period ($Z = -7.5$, $p = .01$) and first and the third period ($Z = -6.35$, $p = .01$). However, no significant difference was found between results of the second and the third period.

Overall, results suggest that all topics are seen as being of a very similar and high importance on the public agenda. Influence of the Croatian integration on economy is considered slightly more important and the EU functioning slightly less important in comparison with the other topics. Nevertheless, the level of importance of topics on the public agenda is almost unchanged over time. The change in importance scores is visible for the EU functioning, international position of Croatia and sovereignty, but only in a period of a year (T1, T3), rather than among two consecutive periods. The public opinion about the EU is mostly positive and stable over time. Consistent with the opinion about the EU, are the positive expectations from the accession. Though, there is a visible raise in concern about the loss of independence in a period of a year (T1, T3). In contrast to the previous results, the public mostly thinks that there is not enough information about the EU and integration process in the media, although a slight improvement in the public evaluation of the media coverage is also visible over time (T2, T3).

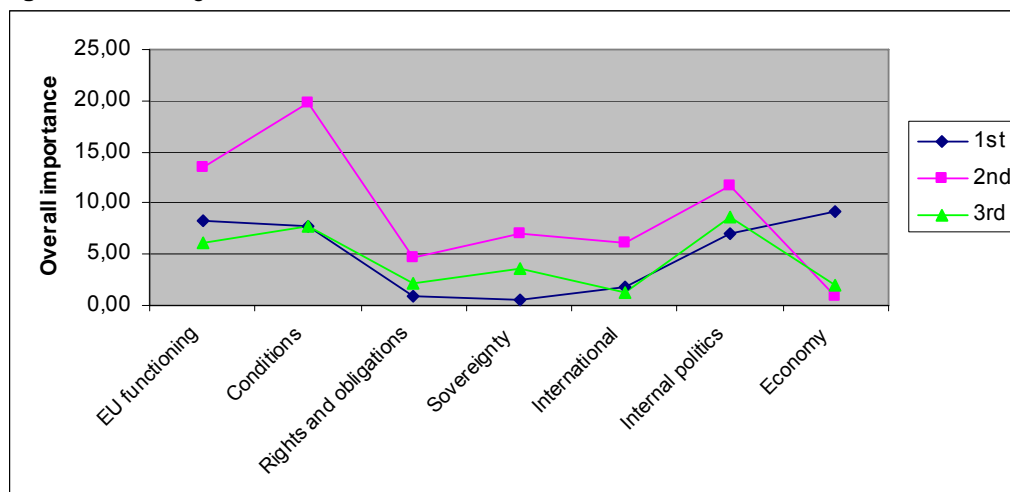
Media agenda

The media agenda results are presented in Table 4, as the overall importance scores of topics in each of the three research periods. Comparison of the results over time indicates increase in importance scores for all topics, except economy in the second period in comparison to two other periods (Figure 2). This can be attributed to the increase in the number of articles dealing with the issue in that period (see Table 1). Nevertheless, results show that conditions, internal politics and EU functioning were continually the most important topics over time. Other topics received much lower scores in importance measure in all periods, with sovereignty being the least important topic in the first ($\Sigma = 0.62$) and international in the third period ($\Sigma = 1.18$). The most intriguing results are related to the economy. While this topic was found to be the most important from the articles during the first period ($\Sigma = 9.2$), it shifted to be the least important in the second period ($\Sigma = 0.92$) and slightly improved in score in the third period ($\Sigma = 1.91$), but kept the low importance. This "downsizing" of economy's importance in later periods is in line with the increased tendency of the media to focus attention on the political criteria for Croatian membership in the EU, primarily because their fulfilment is the first step for advancement in the integration process⁷.

Table 4. Media agenda in each period

Topics	T1(Σ)	T2(Σ)	T3(Σ)
EU functioning	8,30	13,51	6,19
Conditions	7,81	19,78	7,69
Rights and obligations	0,95	4,71	2,22
Sovereignty	0,61	6,93	3,67
International	1,77	6,09	1,18
Internal politics	7,04	11,66	8,56
Economy	9,20	0,92	1,91

⁷ Croatia presented its application for Membership of the European Union on 21 February 2003 on the grounds of Article 49. of the Treaty on the EU, which states that "any European State which respects the principles set out in Article 6(1) may apply to become a member of the Union". Art. 6.1 states "The Union is founded on the principles of liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the rule of law, principles which are common to the Member States."

Figure 2. Media agenda over time

More details about the importance of topics are visible from the results of the contribution of each sub-topic to its topic in each of the three periods. Contribution was calculated by dividing a sub-topic score with its topic overall importance score in a period and it is presented as percentages in Table 5.

Table 5. Percentages of sub-topics per period

		T1	T2	T3
	EU institutions	28,72	25,27	28,29
	Enlargement	43,68	63,60	56,82
	EU economic	18,74	5,32	0,00
	EU foreign	8,86	5,81	14,89
EU functioning		100,00	100,00	100,00
	Court for war crimes	0,00	28,71	19,33
	Minorities	0,00	7,23	15,89
	Media	0,00	1,37	10,52
	Regional cooperation	46,78	11,91	33,36
	Harmonization	23,86	4,45	12,10
	Economical	28,25	11,20	3,24
	Procedural	1,10	35,13	5,56
Conditions		100,00	100,00	100,00
	Funds & help	8,44	43,26	37,34
	SSA implementation	84,51	51,18	33,83
	Administrative reform	7,05	5,56	28,83
Rights and obligations		100,00	100,00	100,00
	Western Balkans	10,73	58,63	45,88
	Individual accession	89,27	41,37	54,12
Sovereignty		100,00	100,00	100,00
	Reactions	100,00	100,00	100,00
International		100,00	100,00	100,00
	Parliament	31,27	16,55	14,65
	Political parties	0,00	48,42	5,54
	Government	68,73	32,09	68,13
	President	0,00	2,94	11,68
Internal politics		100,00	100,00	100,00
	Investments	14,76	74,45	19,69
	Economical effects	85,24	25,55	80,31
Economy		100,00	100,00	100,00

In all three periods, enlargement and EU institutions contributed more than 70% to the overall importance of the EU functioning. While EU institutions contribution is almost unchanged in two later periods, results indicate a significant increase in prominence score of enlargement, being at its peak in the second and slightly decreasing in the third period. This is expected since articles were writing about the countries presiding the EU as well as referring to enlargement process of the EU, which is consequently related to the estimations for Croatian accession.

When it comes to conditions, it is interesting to be noted that there is no contribution from cooperation with the war crimes Tribunal, minorities and media in the first period, which suggests that these conditions were not at all mentioned in articles during the first period. However, the most prominently presented conditions for Croatian entry in the EU in the same period were: regional cooperation (46,78%), economical (28,25%) and harmonization of Croatian legislation with EU legislation (23,86%). In the second period results show a significant increase in prominence scores for the cooperation with the war crimes Tribunal and procedure, a moderate for minorities and a slight for media, which was consequently leading to the lower prominence of other three conditions.

These results are consistent with the media coverage during this period. Many articles focused on the discussion whether Croatia should submit the request for membership and expectations about EU's reaction to it. Such media coverage consequently lead to a more prominent coverage of conditions, as the criteria for the assessment of Croatian integration process, as well as influenced the increase of importance of information on the international position of Croatia, which was characterized as EU officials or experts' reactions to Croatian integration (see Table 4).

Results for sub-topics characterizing importance of internal politics show that the government can be seen as the most prominently presented actor in the first and the third period, which was expected since Croatian integration into the EU is one of the Government's main policies. However, political parties which were not at all mentioned in the first and were poorly presented in the third period, were the most prominently presented in the second period. Articles from the second period covered a dispute among the two biggest political parties about the "ownership" over the idea that the Resolution on the Accession of the Republic of Croatia should be adopted in the Parliament. At the same time, the National program for the integration of the Republic of Croatia for 2003 was to be adopted in the Parliament too, which resulted in a number of articles devoting the coverage to the different parties' views over the whole integration process. The results also suggest increase in the level of the president involvement with the Croatian integration process in the third period, since the president was not at all mentioned in the articles from the first period and was poorly mentioned in the second period. Parliament was mostly mentioned when new laws were to be elected as part of the SAA implementation or harmonization of Croatian legislation, therefore this dependency found in articles, is reflected in the change of contributions results through periods.

Importance of sovereignty was presented through sub-topics which were in fact coding whether Croatian accession should be dependable on the progress of other countries of the Western Balkans or based on its individual accomplishments. Results indicate that in the first period articles were predominantly presenting the idea of individual accession. However, in the second period, Western Balkans was more prominent in the articles than the individual accession, while the contribution is reversed in the third period.

As the last, the results indicate that the economical effects were predominantly contributing to the importance of economy in the first and the third period, but investments replaced them in the second period.

Finally, the main findings on the media agenda are presented further in brief. The number of articles taken into the analysis shows that the coverage of the EU and Croatian integration process was by far the most extensive in the second period, while being almost the same in the first and the third period. This change in attention to the issue during the second period had a striking effect on the relative position of the economy, and a moderate effect on the position of the sovereignty in the media agenda. The economy went from being

the most important topic in the first period to being the least important in the second, while the sovereignty climbed up to be of the moderate importance in the media agenda, and these results were relatively unchanged in the third period. The position of the other topics on the media agenda is relatively stable over time. The conditions, internal politics and EU functioning were found to be consistently much more important in the presentation of the issue, while the rights and obligations and the international were of relatively low importance during all periods.

Media agenda-public agenda

A general view of the relationship between the media and the public agenda is obtained by comparing the results in Figure 2 with those in Figure 1. While a change in topics' importance can be observed between media agendas over time, importance of topics is almost unchanged on the public agenda over time. This would suggest that there was no influence from the media on the public opinion with regard to the seven topics over time.

For each research period, Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated between the overall importance scores of seven topics in the media and the mean scores of those topics in the public to test the relationship between the media and the public agenda.

Table 6. Pearson's correlation between media agenda and public agenda in each research period

Research periods	Correlation coefficients	Significance*
T1	0,20	ns (.67)
T2	-0,41	ns (.36)
T3	-0,43	ns (.34)

* significance tested at $p < .05$ level
ns= not significant

As results in Table 6 show, there was minimal and positive correlation between the topics on the media and public agenda in the first period, while the correlation was moderate and negative in the two later periods. However, none of the found correlations was significant at $p < .05$ level.

In terms of agenda setting, the results for the first period suggest minimal effect of the presentation of seven topics in the media on the perceived importance of those topics. But, the negative correlation coefficient observed in the two later periods, suggest that the increase of importance of topics on media agenda is associated with the lower perceived importance of those topics in the public, which gives no support for the agenda setting about the EU and Croatian Integration process in those periods.

Since there is no real difference in the mean importance scores between the seven topics on the public agenda over time, it seems that the difference in correlations coefficients between the periods is fully dependant on the results of the media agenda. Topics on the media agenda show a clear divide in the overall importance scores between: (a) the high scores for the conditions, EU functioning and internal politics on one hand, and (b) low scores for the sovereignty, international and rights and obligations on the other. Therefore in this study, even the indication of the agenda setting effects, which fully rests on the positive correlation coefficient, seems to be dependant on the position of the economy on the media agenda. In that regard, indication of the agenda setting effects in the first period, though insignificant and very low, is considered to be due to the extensive coverage of economy in the daily newspapers, making it the most important topic. Consequently, the minimal coverage of economy (see Table 4) led to the negative correlation between the media and public agendas in later periods.

The relationship between the media and the public agenda in each period was additionally tested by applying the Spearman's rank order correlation analysis. The ranks of the topics on the media agenda and the public agenda used for the analysis are presented in Table 7. The results of this analysis (Table 8) indicate minimal agenda setting effects in the first period and show no support for the agenda setting in two other periods. Therefore, these

results are supporting the findings from the Pearson's correlation analysis in essence. However, it is interesting to be noted that there is a difference in the size of the value between the ρ and r coefficients in the second and the third period. The higher ρ coefficient in the second period suggests more strongly the lack of correspondence between public ranking of the topics and the presentation given to those topics in the articles. In the third period, the ρ is lower, which indicates that the lack of correspondence between agendas is minimal.

Table 7. Ranks of the topics on the media and the public agenda per period

Topics	T1		T2		T3	
	M	P	M	P	M	P
EU functioning	2	7	2	7	3	7
Conditions	3	2,5	1	4	2	4
Rights and obligations	6	2,5	6	2	5	2
Sovereignty	7	5	4	4	4	4
International	5	5	5	6	7	6
Internal politics	4	5	3	4	1	4
Economy	1	1	7	1	6	1

*media agenda

**public agenda

Table 8. Spearman's rank order correlation between the media agenda and public agenda in each research period

Research periods	Spearman's ρ coefficients	Significance*
T1	0,21	ns (.66)
T2	-0,63	ns (.13)
T3	-0,19	ns (.70)

* significance tested at $p < .05$ level

ns= not significant

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This study examined the existence of the agenda setting for the issue of the EU and Croatian integration process. It used public opinion survey data and content analysis of daily newspapers to assess the importance of seven topics related to the issue on the media and the public agenda in three subsequent periods.

The results of the correlation analysis revealed the minimal agenda setting effects of the presentation of seven topics in the media on the perceived importance of those topics in the first period, while there was no support for agenda setting in later periods. A comparison between the topics' importance scores on the media agenda and public agenda showed that the occurrence or absence of the agenda setting was associated with either extensive or minimal coverage of the economy in the media during each period.

The minimal evidence of the agenda setting puts this study in contrast with many studies which proved the influence of the media agenda on its corresponding public agenda (e.g. McCombs and Shaw 1972, McCombs 1977, Sheafer and Weimann 2005). It is considered that this study can contribute to the understanding of the agenda setting, only with regard to the use of the secondary public opinion data and the influence it has on the study design and the final assessment of the occurrence/absence of the agenda setting, as well as reviewing some other limitations of this study.

The analysis in this study was based on the closed-ended question about the importance of seven topics related to the issue, which was found to be the only and therefore, the most suitable question for assessing the public perception on the issue in terms of the agenda setting. While the public agenda was directly assessed through the

respondent ratings of the importance of those topics, the presentation of those topics in the media was analysed indirectly, through one or more sub-topics related to every topic. Taking into account that there was no second coder to confirm the reliability of the content analysis regarding the association of between sub-topics and topics, it has to be mentioned that such design raises the questions of the internal validity of the content analysis, but also the analysis of the question from the public opinion survey. Even if the content analysis was proved to be reliable, there would still be a chance that the respondents' perception of the association between the sub-topics and topics is not the same, which in turn could lead to the lack of correspondence between the topics importance on both agendas. This problem could have easily been resolved with the use of the open-ended instead of the close-ended question.

Another point to consider in reviewing the reasons for the findings of this study is that the media agenda was gauged from the analysis of the presentation of the topics in just one media, the daily newspaper. Since there is no clear indication in the literature that the newspapers are more powerful than television in conveying the issue salience on to the public (McCombs 2004), it is plausible expectation that the analysis of the television presentation of the topics could have shown more influence on the perception of importance of those topics among public. Even more so, the public opinion surveys consistently show that the television is the most important source of the information about the issue (MEI 2005). Therefore, the future research should include television, but the other media too, in order to test the validity of this study and in that way allow more arguments on the agenda setting about the issue of the EU and Croatian integration process.

Additional validation of the findings in this study should be done with regard to the time frame taken into the analysis. The three subsequent periods taken for the analysis in this study represent the early stage of the integration process. In order to test the validity of this study and provide overall assessment of the occurrence of the agenda setting for the issue, the future studies should extend the time frame of the research to other periods in which the public opinion and the media coverage on the issue can be analysed. Also, the time frame taken for determining the influence of the media agenda on the public agenda can be considered as one of the main factors for the findings on the agenda setting in this study. The surveys were done on the semi-annual basis, so an important event influencing the importance of topics in people's mind could have easily been reported prior the one month long period on which this study decided to measure the association between the media and public agenda. Therefore, the longer time frame for the assessment of the media agenda should be considered in the future analyses in order to provide more insights on the association between the topics on the agendas.

The final consideration is related to the need for orientation. Judging from the overwhelmingly positive public attitude towards the EU and positive expectations from the accession, the EU seemed to be a very much acceptable reality to the public. The results also showed that the public was highly interested in all the aspects of the integration process in general and its influences on Croatian economy in particular. This high interest on the side of public was understood as the lack of knowledge and understanding on their side about the issue, which in turn can be seen as the indication of the high uncertainty among the public when it comes to the issue. In that regard, it could have been expected that the public will turn to the media to fill in the gap in understanding and reduce the uncertainty about the issue. Judging from the results of the media agenda and the predominantly low public evaluation of the amount of information in the media about the EU and integration process, this seemed to be the case.

The partial explication of the public dissatisfaction with the media coverage on the issue can be found in the findings from the content analysis in this study. The analysis revealed a strong tendency in the daily newspapers to focus on the political aspects of the EU and Croatian integration process, since the most important topics over time were the EU functioning, conditions, and internal politics. Their importance was mostly characterized by the prominent coverage of: the enlargement process and EU institutions for the EU functioning, then, the regional cooperation and the cooperation with the war crimes Tribunal

among other conditions, and finally, the actions of the governments for the internal politics. Therefore, it seems interesting to consider the studying of the agenda setting regarding just these few sub-topics, which in essence present issues in their own kind. That would consequently imply a creation or use of a more detailed public opinion survey. It would also be interesting to analyze which issues, events and actors attract more media attention as well as how the media tend to frame their reports on them.

On the ground of what has been presented earlier, this study can be considered to provide a very general indication of the relationship between the media and the public opinion regarding the issue of the EU and Croatian integration process. It points out to the need for the future research in order to validate its findings. It also suggests the use of the open-ended question for measuring the salience of the issue among the public.

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APPENDIX

The public opinion survey questionnaire

1. Have you ever heard of the European Union?

INTERVIEWER: IF YES: How would you mark your cognizance of the EU?

SHOW THE CARD AND READ THE ANSWERS! ONLY 1 ANSWER IS POSSIBLE!

Cognizance of the EU	JUST 1 ANSWER
I've never heard of the EU	1
I've heard of the EU, but don't know what it is exactly	2
I know what EU is, but know nothing more	3
I know a lot about EU; which are the member countries, how EU functions, which are the advantages and disadvantages of the EU, etc.	4
Doesn't know, can't answer	5

2. European Union is the community of 15 Western European countries in which countries collaborate in the fields of economy, culture, education and other fields.

How is your general opinion about the EU; towards the EU do you have, in general:

Very positive, mostly positive, mostly negative or very negative opinion?

INTERVIEWER: SHOW CARD AND READ THE ANSWERS! ONLY 1 ANSWER IS POSSIBLE!

Opinion about European Union	JUST 1 ANSWER
Very positive	1
Mostly positive	2
Mostly negative	3
Very negative	4
Doesn't know, can't answer (DO NOT READ)	5

3. European Union puts before all the countries certain economical, legal and political conditions for joining to that union. Some of the conditions are opening of the market, reform of the legal and economical system, introduction of the new laws, cooperation with The Hague Tribunal (the court in The Hague) and etc.

Are you FOR or AGAINST the accession of Croatia into the EU, under those conditions?

For	1	=> PNP 33a!
Against	2	=> PNP 33b!
Doesn't know, can't answer (DO NOT READ)	3	=> PNP 34!

4. In February this year, 2003, Republic of Croatia has submitted a request for the membership in the EU, so we expect to get the status of the candidate country by the summer of the next year, 2004.

What do you think how would the accession to the EU affect Croatia? Please, tell me if and how much do you agree or disagree with each statement I will read to you.

INTERVIEWER: SHOW THE CARD AND READ ONE STATEMENT AT THE TIME! ONLY 1 ANSWER IS POSSIBLE FOR EACH STATEMENT!

Accession of Croatia to the EU will mean for Croatia...

Accession of Croatia to the EU will mean for Croatia...STATEMENTS	I fully agree	I mostly agree	I mostly disagree	I fully disagree	Don't know (DON'T READ)
Great progress in general	1	2	3	4	5
Progress, economic development	1	2	3	4	5
Higher standard of living	1	2	3	4	5
Common market and open borders	1	2	3	4	5
Co-operation and progress in the area of science and education	1	2	3	4	5
Possible problems in economy; higher competition of imported goods of the lower price and higher quality, which could jeopardize Croatian manufacturers and economy in general	1	2	3	4	5
Partial loss of the independence of Croatia; conveyance of the part of the sovereignty	1	2	3	4	5

5. In your opinion, is there enough proper information in the media (TV, radio, newspapers, magazines) about EU and possible advantages and disadvantages of the Croatian entry into the EU?

INTERVIEWER: SHOW THE CARD AND READ THE ANSWERS! ONLY 1 ANSWER IS POSSIBLE!

Yes, there is quite enough of the proper information in the media	1
Mostly there is enough of the proper information, but I would like to have them more and that they are clearer and more detailed	2
There is not enough of the proper information; there should be much more of them and they should be much clearer and detailed	3
There is not proper information at all	4
Doesn't know/can't answer	5

6. What would you like to know about the EU? How important would certain information be to you?

INTERVIEWER: SHOW THE CARD AND READ ONE STATEMENT/INFORMATION AT THE TIME! ONLY 1 ANSWER IS POSSIBLE FOR EACH STATEMENT!!

Information about EU		Very important	Mostly important	Mostly unimportant	Fully unimportant	Doesn't know (DO NOT READ)
A	Functioning of the EU	1	2	3	4	5
B	Conditions for Croatia joining the EU	1	2	3	4	5
C	Rights and obligations arising from associated membership	1	2	3	4	5
D	Influence of the EU on sovereignty, independence of Croatia as the associated member of the EU	1	2	3	4	5
E	Influence of the associated membership in the EU on international position of Croatia	1	2	3	4	5
F	Influence of the associated membership in the EU on internal political life in Croatia; state of the democracy, human rights, relationship to minorities, etc.	1	2	3	4	5
G	Influence of the associated membership in the EU on the economy	1	2	3	4	5
H	Possible influence of the associated membership in the EU on my everyday life	1	2	3	4	5

7. In which ways do you personally inform yourself about the events in the country?**INTERVIEWER: SHOW THE CARD AND READ THE ANSWERS! SEVERAL ANSWERS ARE POSSIBLE!****8. Which is to you, the most important source of information about the events in the country?****INTERVIEWER: SHOW THE CARD! SEVERAL ANSWERS ARE POSSIBLE!**

IF THE RESPONDENT SAYS TV, NEWSPAPERS OR MAGAZINES IN QUESTION 37.a. OR 37.b.,MAKE SURE TO ASK "Which ones?"!

Possible sources of information	37.a. Ways of informing	37.b. The most important source of information JUST 1 ANSWER
T V ; Which shows?	1	1
- Središnji Dnevnik HTV-a	2	2
- CCN vijesti	3	3
- Vijesti HTV-a	4	4
- Otvoreno HTV-a	5	5
- 24 sata NOVE TV	6	6
- Vijesti RTL-a	7	7
- Dobro jutro Hrvatska	8	8
- Regionalna panorama	9	9
- Neka druga informativna TV emisija	10	10
R a d i o	11	11
Daily newspapers; Which?	12	12
- Jutarnji list	13	13
- Večernji list	14	14
- Vjesnik	15	15
- Slobodna Dalmacija	16	16
- Novi list	17	17
- Glas Slavonije	18	18
- Dnevnik	19	19
- Neke druge dnevne novine	20	20
Magazines and weeklies? Which?	21	21
- Nacional	22	22
- Globus	23	23
- Feral Tribune	24	24
- Fokus	25	25
- Some other magazine	26	26
I n t e r n e t	27	27
Talks with friends/acquaintances	28	28
Something else ; what ?	x	x
Nothing; doesn't follow the events in the country	30	30

Definition of the analytical categories

Main categories

Closed answers to the question about the importance of information in the public opinion survey are taken as the main categories for the content analysis of the newspaper articles:

1. Functioning of the EU
2. Conditions for joining the EU
3. Rights and obligations arising from associated membership
4. Influence of the EU on sovereignty, independence of Croatia as the associated member of the EU
5. Influence of the associated membership in the EU on Croatian position on the international level
6. Influence of the associated membership in the EU on internal political life in Croatia
7. Influence of the associated membership in the EU on the economy

Sub-categories

Sub-categories present themes which can be associated with the main category. In such a way they provide further explanation of the meaning of the main category and therefore, can be more precisely coded from the content within the article.

Sub-categories for the functioning of the EU:

1. EU institutions – refers to the function or action of any EU institution, e.g. EU Parliament, Council of Ministers, EU commission, countries presiding the EU).
2. Enlargement Process – refers to any information about the accession of the 10 new countries into the EU (admitted in May 2004), candidate countries (Turkey, Bulgaria and Romania) and estimations for the accession of Croatia.
3. EU economical policies – refers to the monetary union, joint economical policies (e.g. agricultural policy) and their effects.
4. EU foreign policy – refers to the EU as the political entity on the international level and its relationship with the other nations or disputes in the EU about the foreign policy of a particular member country.

Sub-categories for the conditions for joining the EU:

- 1) War crimes Tribunal in The Hague – refers to any information on the cooperation of Croatian Government with the Court.
- 2) Minorities' rights – refers to the information on the protection of the minorities' rights and the return of the refugees.
- 3) Freedom of the media – refers to election of the laws to assure the restructuring of the Croatian Radio Television into the public television and freedom of media in general.
- 4) Regional Cooperation – refers to any information about the cooperation with the other countries from the ex-Yugoslavia, Albania and other countries in the region or Croatian participation in various regional initiatives and forums.
- 5) Harmonization of the Croatian legislation with the EU legislation – refers to the process of electing laws that have to be in concordance with the directives from the EU Commission and *acquis communautaire* (legal framework of the EU).
- 6) Economical – refers to the assessment of the level of compliance with the Copenhagen economic criteria (e.g. indicators of GNP, price stability, liberalization of trade, competitiveness index) as well as the Maastricht criteria (e.g. inflation rate, currency stability, public debt and budget deficit).

- 7) Procedure – refers to any information concerning the procedure for the integration into the EU (e.g. ratification of the SAA agreement, request for the membership).

Sub-categories for rights and obligations arising from the associated membership

- 1) Funds and help – refers to information about availability and usage of the pre-accession funds from the EU (CARDS, SAPARD, PHARE, TEMPUS) as well as any other form of help from an EU member country (e.g. donations, counseling, education).
- 2) Implementation of the SAA or SAA interim agreement – refers to the information on the concrete action taken or to be taken to meet the SAA or the SAA interim agreement.
- 3) Public administration reform – refers to the information about the change in the public administration system (e.g. creation of the new body or the restructuring of the existing one).

Sub-categories for influence of the associated membership in the EU on sovereignty

- 1) Western Balkans – mentioning Croatian integration into the EU with reference to the other countries of ex-Yugoslavia and Albania.
- 2) Individual – mentioning Croatian integration into the EU based on its individual accomplishments.

Sub-category for influence of the associated membership in the EU on international position of Croatia

- 1) Reactions – EU officials and experts reactions to any part of the integrations process or action of the Croatian government regarding it as well opinion polls in the EU or a member country regarding Croatian integration process.

Sub-categories for influence of the associated membership in the EU on internal political life

- 1) Parliament - parliamentary discussions and actions of the parliament representatives and members about integration process.
- 2) Political parties – political parties' views and proposals over the integration process or evaluation of activities regarding it.
- 3) Government – activities of the Prime Minister, Minister for European integration or any other member of the government related to the integration process (e.g. lobbying, multilateral and bilateral meetings, informing the general public).
- 4) President – activities or reactions from the president of Croatia related to the integration process (e.g. bilateral and multilateral meetings or conferences).

Sub-categories for influence of the associated membership in the EU on Croatian economy

- 1) Investments – refers to any information on the possibilities for investments, realized investment or the economic agreements with a particular EU member country.
- 2) Economical effect – refers to any information on the possible or observed changes in the functioning of the whole economy or economic entities as a result of the integration process (e.g. new laws on economy, measures).

Codebook for the EU-Croatia daily newspapersStructure

1. In what newspaper did the article appear?
 - 1) Vecernji list
 - 2) Jutarnji list
2. In which period of the study did the article appear?
 - 1) first period: 01.06. – 10.07.2002
 - 2) second period: 05.11 – 24.12. 2002
 - 3) third period: 05.05 – 18.06.2003
3. On which page was the article published?
4. In which section did the article appear?
 - 1) front page/news of the day
 - 2) internal politics
 - 3) foreign politics
 - 4) economy
 - 5) commentary pages
 - 6) special editions
 - 7) other
5. What is the format of the article?
 - 1) news report
 - 2) reportage
 - 3) interview
 - 4) commentary or editorial
 - 5) analysis
6. What is the size of the article (in cm²)?

Overall orientation of the article

7. Is the article orientation towards the EU:
 - 1) positive
 - 2) negative
 - 3) neutral
8. Is the article orientation towards the Croatian integration process to the EU:
 - 1) positive
 - 2) negative
 - 3) neutral

Sub-topics

Each of the articles is coded for the most prominently presented sub-topics. The prominence of the sub-topics is assessed according to the title and the approximation of the amount of sentences related to the particular theme. Therefore, sub-topics are given value from 1 to 3 according to the following criteria:

- 1 – sub-topic is mentioned in at least one sentence or more, but in less than 1/3 of the article.
- 2 – sub-topic is mentioned in at least 1/3 of the article and not mentioned in the title.
- 3 – sub-topic is mentioned in at least 1/3 of the article and mentioned in the title

9. Does the article mention any of the following sub-topics for functioning of the EU? If yes, code according to the criteria. If not, do not code.

- 1) EU institutions
- 2) Enlargement Process
- 3) EU economical policies
- 4) EU foreign policy

10. Does the article mention any of the following sub-topics for conditions for joining the EU? If yes, code according to the criteria. If not, do not code.

- 1) War crimes Tribunal in The Hague
- 2) Minorities' rights
- 3) Freedom of the media
- 4) Regional Cooperation
- 5) Harmonization of the Croatian legislation with the EU legislation
- 6) Economical
- 7) Procedural conditions

11. Does the article mention any of the following sub-topics for rights and obligations arising from the associated membership in the EU? If yes, code according to the criteria. If not, do not code.

- 1) Funds and help
- 2) Implementation of the SAA or SAA interim agreement
- 3) Public administration reform

12. Does the article mention any of the following sub-topics for the influence of the EU on sovereignty, independence of Croatia as the associated member of the EU? If yes, code according to the criteria. If not, do not code.

- 1) Western Balkans Croatian
- 2) Individual

13. Does the article mention reactions as defined as the sub-topic for the influence of the associated membership in the EU on international position of Croatia? If yes, code according to the criteria. If not, do not code.

- 1) Reactions

14. Does the article mention any of the following sub-topics for the influence of the associated membership in the EU on internal affairs? If yes, code according to the criteria. If not, do not code.

- 1) Parliament
- 2) Political parties
- 3) Government
- 4) President

15. Does the article mention any of the following sub-topics for the influence of the associated membership in the EU on Croatian economy? If yes, code according to the criteria. If not, do not code.

- 1) Investments
- 2) Economical effects
- 3) effects of the newly elected laws regulating economical issues