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**PERIPHERAL AND  
INVISIBLE?:**

**The European  
Union in the New  
Zealand Media  
2000 - 2002**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Little scholarly attention has been paid to representations of the European Union in international media. Only recently, has the EU recognized the need to account for its images created internally. Although there has been a proliferation of research exploring media representations of the EU within the Union (see Blumler, 1983; Norris, 2000; Gavin, 2000; de Vreese, 2001; de Vreese et al., 2001; Kevin, 2003; de Vreese, 2003; Peter et al., 2003), the EU has so far devoted very little attention to the role of international political communication in representing its growing international salience.

To address the issues of the EU's external 'communication deficit', this study draws on evidence relating to images of the EU produced in NZ newspapers and on NZ television. The EU's influence and interconnections within the Asia-Pacific region have grown in the past two decades (Held, 2001). The EU is a key partner to NZ, being a major investor in the country and its second largest trading counterpart (Clark, 2003). However, NZ public awareness of the scale of EU-NZ interactions is low (Holland et al., 2003; Chaban, 2003). It is this situation that provided the impetus to study the perceptions and representations of the EU in NZ.

This study examines both the formal characteristics and the substantive features of the daily coverage of the EU in 18 NZ newspapers and 14 television news programs in 2000-2002. The findings are compared with the general public perceptions of the EU (Holland et al., 2003). The research is based on the assumption that the content and quantity of EU images routinely created by the news media are reflected in specific categorizations among NZ news consumers. These categorizations become ingrained in public opinion and the national political debate on EU-NZ relations, and have real life implications

ranging from the nature of personal interactions, mass attitudes about foreign policy, and the practice of public diplomacy, to the conduct of foreign policy on a national level (Bartels, 1995; Manheim, 1991, 1994; Peffeley and Hurwutz, 1992).

## **EU-NZ RELATIONS**

As a new 'giant' on the world stage, the EU is becoming an influential international partner for other global regions, as well as for individual countries. The EU is a close friend and a significant partner to NZ, and its relationship with the Union is of paramount importance to NZ (Clark, 2003).

NZ-EU relations are characterized by the pivotal NZ economic interests at stake. For NZ, agriculture is a key industry. The EU is NZ's largest, highest value, and fastest growing market for essential products like butter, sheep meat, apples, kiwifruit, venison and wine. The European market is characterized by its high purchasing ability and its sophisticated consumers who demand quality products — a demand that NZ producers can satisfy. The loss of this lucrative market for NZ would be disastrous. The on-going NZ-EU economic dialogue is complicated by disagreement centred around free trade regulations. Since 1973 when Britain elected to join the EU, NZ has been immersed in semi-permanent negotiations with Europe to 'defend trade interests there and guard against European subsidies' plunder of markets everywhere' (O'Brien, 2003).

The NZ Labour Government led by Helen Clark views Europe as an important reference point for its foreign policy. NZ and the EU have developed very similar approaches to sustainable development, the Kyoto Protocol, the International Criminal Court, the path to peace between Israel and Palestine, and on disarmament and human rights

issues in general (Clark, 2003). Yet, in the view of O'Brien (2003), as 'a small, modern impartial, problem solving, internationalist democracy New Zealand is positioning itself carefully in a see-sawing international context'. Owing to its small nation status, NZ simply cannot afford to favour one ally at the expense of others, and as such, it balances its alliances carefully.

Culturally, NZ sees the EU nations as 'likeminded'. They are developed, prosperous, democratic, and inclusive, and share similar societal values and organization (Clark, 2003). New Zealanders report extensive interpersonal contacts with EU countries (Holland et al., 2003, 19-20), and they feel a particularly strong affinity with the United Kingdom (UK). According to Clark (2003), in 2002 107,000 New Zealanders went on short-term visits to Europe. Included in that flow are significant numbers of young people covered by the extensive working holiday arrangements which New Zealand has with European nations. Young New Zealanders' traditional OE (Overseas Experience) still takes place mostly in the UK and continental Europe, rather than Asia or the United States. Correspondingly, in 2002, New Zealand welcomed 400,000 visitors from Europe.

## **RESEARCH DESIGN**

### ***Research Question***

The economic and political importance of the EU to NZ, as well as its cultural proximity should give rise to a heightened awareness of the EU's significance for NZ. Paradoxically, only 14 per cent of New Zealanders see the Union as an important overseas counterpart, awarding their highest regard instead to Australia (77 per cent), followed by USA (49 per cent), the UK (31 per cent), and Asia (20 per cent) (Holland et al., 2003, 12).

The key factors influencing the formation of public opinion are personal experience, interpersonal communication, general knowledge, personal motivation and media influence (Fiske & Taylor, 1984; Ball-Rokeach, 1985; Lasorsa and Wanta, 1990; Wanta and Wu, 1992; Weaver et al., 1992; Wicks, 1992; Zhu et al., 1993; Livingstone, 1993; Rossler, 1999; Eveland, 2001). In the area of foreign policy, media influence is crucial. While some portions of the populace are actively involved in or with foreign places, the majority of the general public has limited direct personal experience or knowledge of foreign issues, and consequently must experience foreign affairs 'second-hand' (Lasorsa & Wanta, 1990, 804). Being 'removed' from those events, most consumers of foreign news are "dependent 'observers' rather than active 'participants'" (Gavin, 2000, 357). Arguably then, the selection of foreign issues for media coverage, and the assignment of salience to them, has a major influence on news consumers' understanding of those issues.

Our study examined the coverage of the EU as a political and economic entity in NZ national media. The most prominent issues selected for coverage indicated what information was most accessible for consumption. Greater quantities of accessible information, being easily retrieved from memory, tend to dominate judgements, opinions and decisions (Iyengar, 1991, 131). It is against this background that we posed our research question:

What are the leading images of the EU produced by NZ newspapers and NZ television, and how do they compare with the leading perceptions of the EU by the NZ general public?

### ***Data***

A number of studies have investigated EU/European images in EU news media – both in newspapers and television (see Gavin, 2000; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000; de Vreese, 2001; Kevin, 2003; Peter et al., 2003; de Vreese, 2003). Some of these studies monitored only brief time periods of routine coverage, while others focused on the coverage of

several 'key' events. In contrast, this study analyzed the daily routine coverage of the EU within 18 NZ newspapers and 14 NZ television news programmes over the three years of 2000, 2001, 2002.<sup>1</sup>

This paper is among the first to describe and compare both the scope and the content of EU coverage in both print and television news outside the EU. This type of analysis proves to be timely, as a recent overview of the impact of Europeanization on political communication concluded that we 'know little about political communication and news organizations from a comparative perspective' (Semetko et al., 2000, 121). Newspapers were chosen as they remain a key source of in-depth political information in New Zealand (Mulgan, 2004, 293). However, while newspaper circulation in NZ has been steadily declining since the mid-1990s (Taira, 2003, 30), television watching remains the most popular leisure time activity of New Zealanders (Statistics New Zealand, 1999). The majority of the NZ public relies on television and newspapers for news on the EU – 41.5 per cent and 27 per cent of respondents respectively (Holland et al., 2003, 23).

### ***NZ television news programs monitored***

Two channels, *TV 1* and *TV3*, produce the NZ television news under consideration. The former channel is part of a publicly funded network, which recently introduced a share of a private capital into its sponsorship. The latter is a privately owned network. Both channels compete for the national market in the field of news production. The study monitored 14 news programs: *TV1 60 Minutes*, *Assignment*, *Backch@t*, *Breakfast*, *Grass Roots Business*, *Holmes*, *Late Edition*, *Midday*, *One News*, *Sunday* and *TelstraClear Business*, and *TV3 3 News*,

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<sup>1</sup> The period of monitoring coincided with the time frame of the research project "NZ Public, Media and Elite Perceptions of the EU" launched in 2002 by the National Centre for Research on Europe, University of Canterbury, NZ.

*Nightline* and *No. 8 Wired*. The television texts were available through the national electronic full-text database *Newztel*.<sup>2</sup>

*60 Minutes*, *Assignment*, *Sunday* and to a degree, *Holmes*, are all weekly current affairs shows with an emphasis on investigative reporting. Each program focuses only on a small number of topics, but with greater detail than the faster paced daily news bulletins. *Breakfast* is TV1's early morning news and current affairs program which combines regular brief news bulletins with interviews and feature articles. *TelstraClear Business* is the nation's only dedicated daily business and financial affairs program. It is a half hour show screening at 6.30am weekdays. *Late Edition*, *One News*, *3 News* and *Nightline* are the four flagship news bulletins of TV1 and TV3, and are the nightly programs espoused as bringing the NZ public the day's most important news and current affairs. *One News* is frequently the highest rating national news program, gaining on average a 19 percent share of the domestic viewing audience.<sup>3</sup> *Grass Roots Business* and *No. 8 Wired* are both weekly agricultural business programs screening in the weekends. Owing to the highly specific nature of these two programs' content, it can be estimated that their share of the total television audience is limited. In the Top 10 rating television programs in NZ, TV1's *One News*, *Holmes*, and *Sunday* are the only featuring news programs.

### ***NZ newspapers monitored***

All newspaper texts were located in the electronic archives available through the *Newstext* full-text database. According to the database, 18 NZ newspapers introduced information on the EU on a regular basis: *The New Zealand Herald*, *The Press*, *The Dominion*, *The Evening Post*, *The Dominion Post*<sup>4</sup>, *The Waikato Times*, *The Timaru Herald*, *The*

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.newztel.co.nz> (accessed December 2004)

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.acnielsen.co.nz/> (accessed December 2004)

<sup>4</sup> This is the newest daily newspaper and was launched in July 2002 following the merger of the capital's two daily newspapers, *The Dominion* and *The Evening Post*

*Sunday Star Times, The Nelson Mail, The Southland Times, The Daily News, The Evening Standard, The Marlborough Express, The Hauraki Herald, The Truth, The Manukau Courier, The Dargaville News, and The North Shore Times.*<sup>5</sup> As will be discussed subsequently, seven newspapers – *The New Zealand Herald, The Dominion, The Evening Post, The Press, The Waikato Times, The Southland Times, and The Dominion Post* – produced 83 per cent of all news on the EU during the monitoring period. These print outlets are the most reputable non-tabloid regional newspapers and are aimed at a broad general audience as well as the regions' business, political and cultural elites. It is these seven newspapers which became the focus of the study.

New Zealand newspapers usually service different regions.<sup>6</sup> *The New Zealand Herald*, printed in Auckland, is distributed in the Auckland Region and the upper North Island.<sup>7</sup> It is also available in Wellington where it is popular with politicians and business people. *The Waikato Times*, based in Hamilton, caters for the Waikato Region and the Bay of Plenty. *The Dominion Post*, published in Wellington, is popular in the Wellington region and central New Zealand. *The Press*, produced in Christchurch, is the largest newspaper in the South Island with widespread readership from Nelson to South Canterbury, and from the West Coast to the Marlborough region. *The Southland Times*, printed in Invercargill, is the principal provider of information for the population throughout Southland and parts of neighbouring Otago.<sup>8</sup>

Independent Newspapers Limited (INL) owned *The Dominion* (circulation 55,000), *The Evening Post* (71,000), *The Dominion Post* (99,229), *The Press* (90,828), *The Waikato Times* (41,849), and *The*

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<sup>5</sup> The *National Business Review* owned by Fourth Estate Holdings was not included into the sample as it is not a daily but a weekly publication. The daily *The Otago Daily Times* owned by Allied Press was not listed in electronic full-text database *Newstext* used in this study, and thus it was excluded from the sample.

<sup>6</sup> The exceptions are the Sunday papers and weekly *National Business Review*

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.nzherald.co.nz/subscriptions/> (accessed November 2004)

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.fairfaxnz.co.nz/publications/index.html> (accessed November 2004)

*Southland Times* (29,371) in 2000-2002.<sup>9</sup> INL's main shareholder was Rupert Murdoch's News Corp, however on 1 July 2003, Fairfax New Zealand Limited took financial control of INL's New Zealand operations. *The New Zealand Herald*, the largest NZ newspaper (208,419) was controlled by Tony O'Reilly's Irish Independent Newspapers until December 2001, and subsequently by Irish Independent Newspapers's Australian subsidiary, APN.<sup>10</sup>

### **Research Procedures**

EU news was defined as political, economic, and cultural news dealing with the EU itself or with people residing in it (Kevin, 2003, 53). News was viewed as not only facts, but also as the 'representations produced in language' (Bignell, 1997, 81). The units that defined the basis for the material selection were newspaper articles and television news stories where the EU was mentioned at least once (even marginally).

This study employs a consistent approach proposed by Peter et al. (2003, 306) in which they studied the internal coverage of the EU using a two-fold model of formal characteristics and substantive features. Formal characteristics in this study included the volume and the dynamics of coverage. The substantive features of EU coverage in NZ media were the focus of domesticity, thematic structure, and evaluation. Volume represents the number of stories on the EU that appeared in individual media outlets. Dynamics refers to the number of stories distributed across the years analysed. The focus of domesticity was identified in news stories under three categories: 1) 'pure' EU news, or stories originating in the EU without any involvement of NZ; 2) 'EU news at home', or NZ news characterized by a considerable involvement of the EU; and 3) 'EU news abroad', or EU in the context of news about a third country, neither NZ, nor the EU. This is similar to

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<sup>9</sup>September 2004 figures were from <http://www.abc.org.nz/audit/press.html> (accessed November 2004) for all newspapers, except for *The Dominion* and *The Evening Post* where the circulation is from their final March 2002 audit.

the 'concept of domesticity of EU stories' used by Peter et al. (2003, 310, 313, 318) and the 'domestic or European' focus used by de Vreese (2003, 81, 85-86, 92, 103-105).

One of the traditional approaches used to identify the thematic structure of media coverage is to code only the main topic of the story – the subject to which the news item devotes most of its time (e.g.: Sreberny-Mohammadi et al., 1985, 43-47). Existing studies of the internal EU coverage have not proven an exception to this trend (see Peter et al, 2003, 313; Kevin, 2003, 66-69). Within this approach many minor topics are ignored, however due to space restrictions and severe competition between foreign news, many news stories include more than one theme. Relevant research literature agrees that media content is 'insufficiently theorized and accounted for, or is measured in a relatively superficial manner' (Kosicki, 1993, 105). This is partially due to the nature of detailed content analysis, which is an extremely laborious and rigorous procedure (Sreberny-Mohammadi et al., 1985, 14). Nevertheless, a more systematic method for deeper content analysis is constantly called for. It is crucial to pay attention to the 'totality of information' made available in the news, because much of it may make its way directly or indirectly, to the public (Page, 1996, 112).

In general, the smaller the recording unit, or portion of sampling units scrutinized during the coding process for content analysis, the more reliable and precise the measurement or observation is likely to be (Hofstetter, 1981, 531). In contrast to other studies that chose text as their recording unit, this study systematically accounted for sentences. Selected units contained references to '(the) European Union' or '(the) EU'. Accounted sentences were treated as 'propositional units' (Krippendorff, 1980, 83-87), or units which assumed a certain

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<sup>10</sup> <http://www.apn.com.au/> (accessed November 2004)

structure; specifically, the inclusion of actors, objects, and actions (Holsti, 1968, 6511-653). Based on the action component of this structure, units were regrouped into conceptual clusters that reconstructed the leading *information inputs*; the coherent organization of representations of events and issues that are promoted and transmitted in the news.

Identified information inputs were further studied in terms of *frames*. *Framing* involved the 'packaging' of information (de Vreese, 2003, 5) through selecting, prioritizing and reintroducing certain categorizations in contrast to others – a process that results in the organization and patterning of reality in distinctive ways. Framing is believed to enhance the validity of content studies providing the necessary detail to examine complex incoming information (Ibid., 123). Framing of the concept 'EU' singled out the most frequently mentioned, or *central zones* of each information input.

'Explicit judgements' of the EU in the news story – negative, positive, or neutral evaluations assigned by the media and perceived by the coders – were used by Peter et al. (2003, 313) to establish evaluation. To reduce the amount of subjectivity in coders' judgements as well as to establish underlying assessment patterns, this study systematically accounted for the metaphorical categorizations located in recording units. Connotations accompanying metaphoric categorizations presented a relatively universal system of assigning positive, negative or neutral evaluations to the EU actors, objects and actions.

Finally, the findings of formal and substantive characteristics of media coverage of the EU were compared with the results of the first NZ survey of perceptions of the EU (Holland et al., 2003).

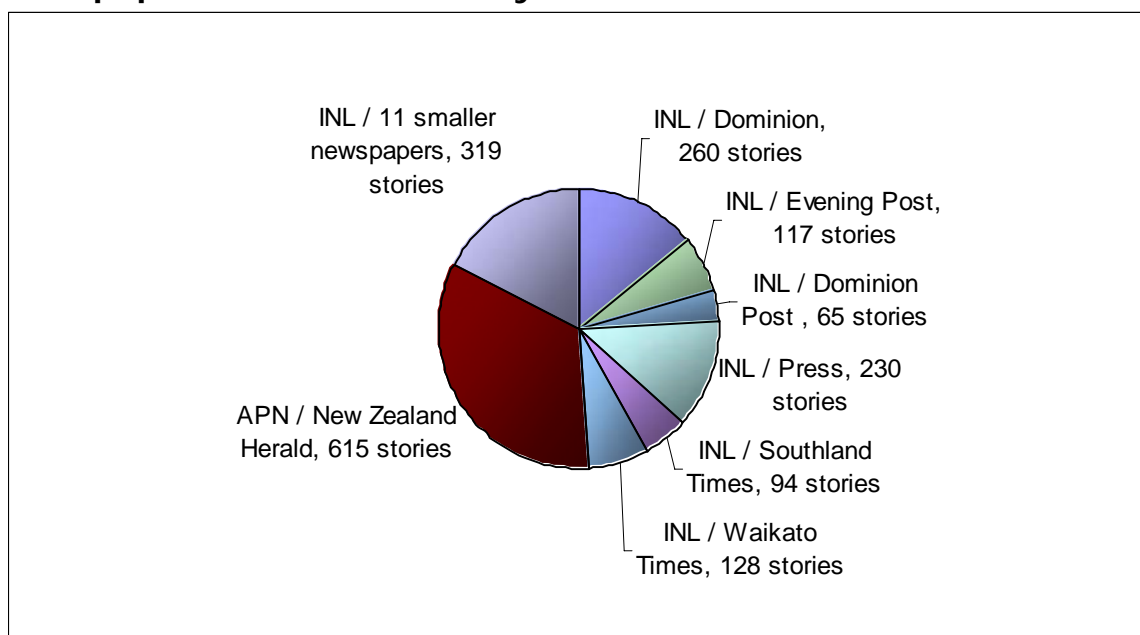
## RESULTS

### *Formal characteristics*

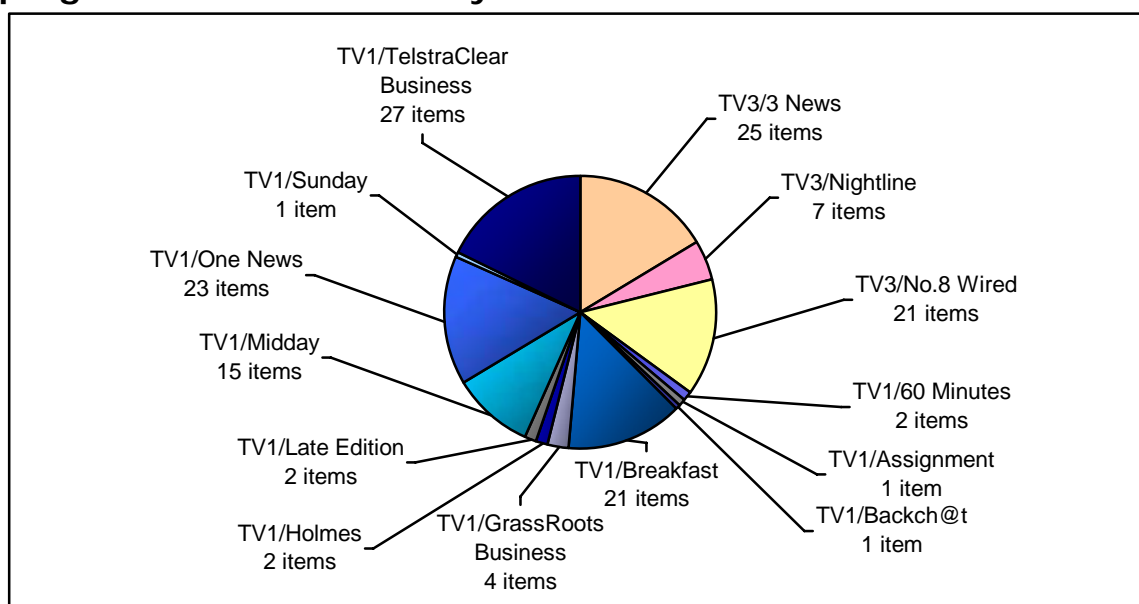
Our analysis located 1,828 news items in NZ newspapers and 152 NZ television stories mentioning the EU over three years, 2000-2002. The coverage of NZ newspapers led NZ television by a wide margin: the number of EU news items in the printed media was 12 times greater than that of television during the monitored period. The 'episodic' nature of television news (Iyengar, 1991, 14) assigned 'non-crisis', peaceful foreign news on the EU an inconsequential degree of coverage. The contrastingly 'thematic' nature of newspaper coverage (ibid.) allows more space and time to foreign news with a 'surplus compassion' status (Hilgartner and Bosk, 1988).

Eighty-three per cent of newspaper EU coverage came from the seven NZ dailies discussed above, while the remaining 17 per cent was shared between 11 smaller newspapers. *The New Zealand Herald* led the EU coverage in the country – 34 per cent of the total EU coverage during the observed period. *TV1* news programs led EU coverage on television – 63 per cent (Figures 1 and 2).

**Figure 1. The number of EU articles in seven New Zealand newspapers between January 1 2000 and December 31 2002**



**Figure 2. Number of EU articles on 14 New Zealand television programs between January 1 2000 and December 31 2002**



The divergent volume of EU coverage between NZ newspapers and television news programs could be partially explained by the effects of ownership. European public service television channels usually screen more news on the EU (Kevin, 2003, 176-7; de Vreese, 2001, 301), and this was pattern was confirmed in NZ also, by the larger volume of EU coverage on state-owned *TV1* in comparison to the independent commercial channel *TV 3*.

All newspapers in NZ are privately owned. *The Herald's* comparatively dominant focus on quality international news reporting stems from the priorities of its owners. The improvement of editorial content and quality of the paper were considered by The Irish Independent Newspapers Company (which owns *The New Zealand Herald*) to be one of the key justifications for increases in the paper's cover price. Clearly this has influenced the *Herald's* coverage of key international actors, such as the EU. In contrast, Murdoch papers (INL being a component of Rupert Murdoch's media empire) have become known for a low investment in serious foreign news (Guttenplan, 1997, 18-19). Individual INL newspapers were found to cover the EU significantly less than other newspapers monitored: *The Dominion* had 14 per cent of

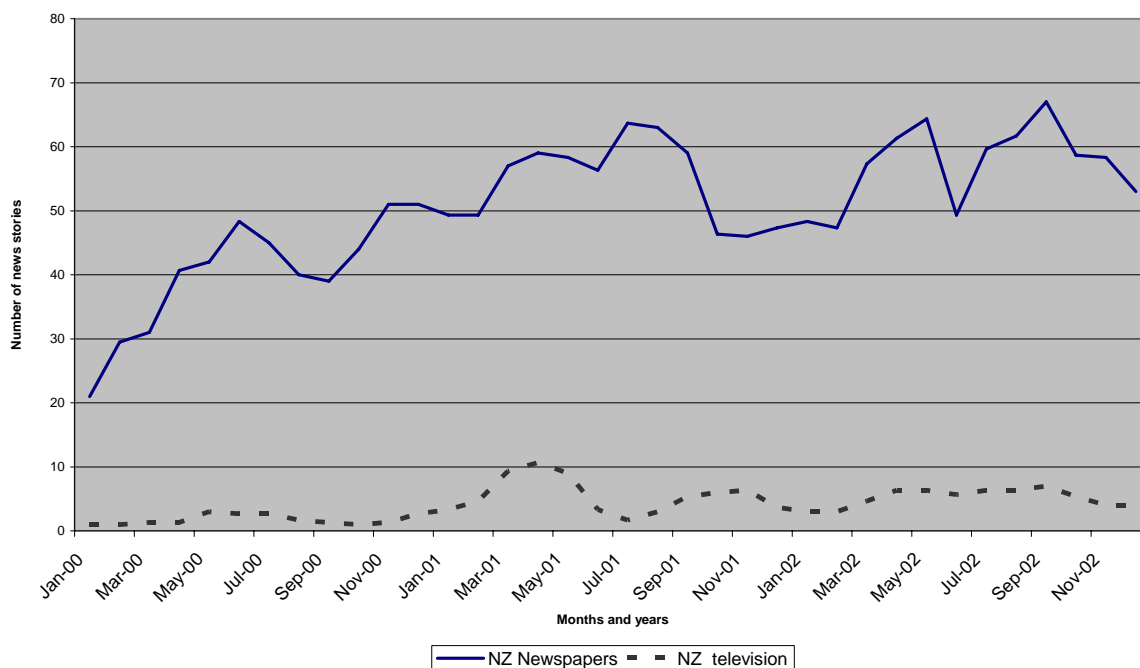
total coverage, *The Press* had 13 per cent, *The Waikato Times* had 7 per cent, *The Evening Post* had 6 per cent, *The Southland Times* had 5 per cent, and *The Dominion Post* had 3.5 per cent. 17 per cent of the remaining total coverage was distributed between 11 local newspapers belonging to INL.

The EU was continuously represented in the NZ media with 51 stories on average per month in print news, and 4 news items on average per month on television. NZ newspapers and television news programs followed a common pattern of 'peaking' coverage at times of particular interest.

EU news peaked around such 'real-world' events as: the introduction of EU quotas on Hoki fish for NZ (April 2000); the EU's involvement with conflicts in Fiji and the Solomon Islands (June/July 2000); EU international trade issues (September 2000, November 2001, October 2002); the EU and the peace negotiation process in the Middle East (October 2000, September 2002); the EU's involvement with the Kyoto protocol ratification (November 2000, July 2001); Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) or 'mad cow' epidemics in the EU (December 2000/January 2001); Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) epidemics in the EU (February/March 2001); the EU and September 11 (September 2001), Euro introduction (December 2001/January 2002); the EU and elections in Zimbabwe (March 2002); the EU and discussion around genetic engineering and the organic food market (July 2002); the EU's executive decision around dairy export subsidies (July/September/October 2002); the EU's new cheese/wine regulations (September/October 2002); and the EU's meat market conditions (July 2001, October 2002) (Figure 3).

To capture the changes in the direction of the EU coverage and to smooth out volatile data we used a three month moving average. Results are presented in Figure 3.

**Figure 3. Number of articles per month on EU in NZ newspapers and NZ television using a 3 month moving average**



As the majority of news stories identified covered recent or current events, the news selection criterion of ‘timeliness’ can clearly be seen to have had the most influence over the coverage of the EU in the NZ print and broadcast media. This was complemented by the reporting criteria of ‘prominence’, when important NZ people and organizations were involved, and of the geographic ‘proximity’ of foreign policy events (Stephens, 1993; Shoemaker and Reese, 1996). When these three criteria coincided there was an increase in the number of articles on EU.

***Substantive characteristics***

EU news in the NZ media was largely ‘refracted’ (Kevin, 2003, 122) through a national angle in reporting, with more than half of the located newspaper and television news stories representing the EU were presented in a NZ context (Table 1).

**Table 1. National versus international focus of reporting EU in NZ newspapers and on NZ television, January 2000-May 2002**

|                                     | New Zealand | EU        | 3 <sup>rd</sup> Party |
|-------------------------------------|-------------|-----------|-----------------------|
| NZ newspapers<br>(seven newspapers) | 58% (1061)  | 23% (420) | 19% (347)             |
| NZ TV                               | 60% (91)    | 35% (53)  | 5% (8)                |

The first number in each cell depicts the percentage of stories for each focus; the figure in parentheses is the total number of stories per focus.

Three information inputs were found to constitute the cognitively complex image of the Union presented through NZ newspapers and NZ television. Those inputs are: 1) *EU as a political power*, 2) *EU as an economic power*, and 3) *social affairs of the EU*. The concept 'EU' introduced through both NZ print and television media encourages a perception amongst news consumers of the Union as a predominantly economic force (Table 2).

**Table 2. Information inputs of the concept 'EU' in NZ newspapers and on NZ television, January 2000-May 2002**

| Information input               | NZ newspapers<br>(18 newspapers) | NZ TV     |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------|
| <i>EU as an economic power</i>  | 51% (1,515)                      | 62% (119) |
| <i>EU as a political power</i>  | 40% (1,189)                      | 19% (37)  |
| <i>social affairs of the EU</i> | 9% (243)                         | 19% (36)  |

The first number in each cell is the percentage for the specific information input; the number in parentheses is the number of propositions per input.

Further content specification of the inputs revealed that the input *EU as an economic power* was not only the most visible of the three inputs, but also the most complex.

A number of events and defining moments that signified the EU in economic, political, and social arenas were primed in contrast to other events. Propositions given a higher frequency in representation formed the *central zones* of the concept 'EU'. The distribution of central zones with the attached evaluations categorized according to information inputs is presented in Tables 3, 4, and 5.

| <b>Table 3. Central zones of information input <i>EU as an economic power</i></b> |            |                                     |            |
|---|------------|-------------------------------------|------------|
| Central zones (NZ newspapers)   | Evaluation | Central zones (NZ television)       | Evaluation |
| EU's economic growth/decline  | negative   |                                     |            |
| Euro introduction   | neutral    |                                     |            |
| EU as a trade power   | negative   |                                     |            |
| EU as a market for NZ wine  | neutral    |                                     |            |
| EU as a market for NZ organic produce   | neutral    |                                     |            |
| EU as a market for NZ lamb  | neutral    |                                     |            |
| EU as a market for NZ dairy   | negative   |                                     |            |
| EU and CAP / agricultural subsidies   | negative   | EU and CAP / agricultural subsidies | negative   |
| Cattle disease epidemics (BSE, FMD)   | negative   | Cattle disease epidemics (BSE, FMD) | negative   |
|   |            | Travelling/Tourism                  | neutral    |

One of the most prominent images of the EU in NZ media was its depiction as a world trade power. News coverage is based on its 'serviceability to important domestic power interests' (Herman & Chomsky, 1988, 35). Accordingly, EU-NZ interactions were portrayed predominantly in terms of agricultural trade: primarily with the EU as a market for NZ lamb, dairy, wine and organic produce. The EU is NZ's leading market for key agricultural products; it accounts for 16 per cent of NZ exports, and supplies close to 30 per cent of the country's foreign investment (Statistics New Zealand, 2003). When described through the media in bilateral trading terms, the EU is often depicted as a demanding trade counterpart ready to pay more for the highest quality agricultural products. Additionally, it is portrayed as taking active steps to ensure that its food quality and safety standards are met by NZ, as seen, for example, in the coverage given to EU inspections of NZ abattoirs, EU regulations for food labeling, EU animal welfare

regulations, EU demands for meat tracking measures, or EU consumer stated preferences for organic food.

Another leading theme in EU media portrayals which parallels agricultural trade is the devastating cattle disease epidemics that spread throughout the EU in 2001-2002. These were portrayed as having destroyed the European meat industry while simultaneously opening many new opportunities for NZ meat producers.

A visible theme in the depictions of the EU as a trade power was discussion around the role of the Union's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and agricultural protectionism. Although NZ removed its own agricultural subsidies in the 1970s and 1980s, NZ agricultural producers continue to compete against their European counterparts who enjoy an unprecedented degree of EU financial support. NZ has been immersed in a state of semi-permanent negotiations with the EU on the subject of agricultural subsidies since the UK joined the EU in 1973. Despite the significant CAP reforms and reduction in subsidies that the EU has implemented in recent years, the theme of distorted trade remains an important part of the stereotypical EU representations in NZ media. In the case of this study, the EU was presented as an authority in the world trade arena which has the power to change things (particularly during the WTO rounds), but which fails to take the more drastic action required to improve its own subsidy situation. It is little wonder that the quantity of Euro supporting an average French cow is one of the more popular clichés:

Readers should note that European Union consumers and taxpayers give the average French cow NZ\$5 a day in assistance and that this is more than the daily income of each of the world's poorest 2.8 billion people (*The Dominion*, 2001).

The introduction of the Euro, although prominently highlighted in newspapers, was almost invisible on television.

EU political representations were the second most visible theme after economics. The margin of difference between the two themes was insignificant in NZ newspapers; 1515 economic propositions compared with 1189 political. On NZ television however, the divergence was marked: 119 economic propositions compared to 37 political.

| Central zones (NZ newspapers)   | Evaluation         | Central zones (NZ television)       | Evaluation |
|---|--------------------|-------------------------------------|------------|
| EU Integration  | neutral / positive |                                     |            |
| EU Enlargement  | negative           |                                     |            |
| National security (ECHELON scandal) + Borders control against illegal immigration | neutral            | National security (ECHELON scandal) | negative   |
| Far-right parties' activation in the EU countries                                 | negative           |                                     |            |
| EU military activities  | neutral            |                                     |            |
| EU reaction to September 11   | neutral            | EU reaction to September 11         | negative   |
| EU relations with the USA   | neutral            |                                     |            |
| EU and ratification of Kyoto protocol   | negative           |                                     |            |
| EU and Middle East  | negative           |                                     |            |
| EU sanctions against Zimbabwe   | neutral            |                                     |            |
| EU actions towards the Balkan states (the Kosovo conflict)                        | negative           |                                     |            |
| EU relations with the Pacific countries   | negative           |                                     |            |

Only two prominent themes in political representations overlapped in both media: firstly, the EU and the ECHELON network scandal; and secondly, the EU's reaction to the attacks on America on September 11. ECHELON is a global spy system which captures and analyzes virtually every phone call, fax, email and telex message sent anywhere in the world. ECHELON is controlled by the US National Security Agency and is operated in conjunction with the Government Communications Head Quarters of the UK, the Communications Security Establishment of Canada, the Australian Defense Security Directorate, and the General

Communications Security Bureau of New Zealand.<sup>11</sup> NZ's involvement in this controversial international organisation spiked the media attention. The EU was pictured in this coverage as a party seeking justice. The European Parliament was shown as enquiring into the legality of ECHELON's communications intercepts, and whether these constituted a violation of citizens' privacy and the sovereignty of nations. It also demanded a justification for the alleged use of ECHELON to conduct commercial espionage against continental European countries.

The events of 9/11 were cataclysmic, and coverage of such events attracts undivided media attention. The international character of the conflict and the chain reaction of events around the world brought the EU into NZ's sphere of interest. The EU was described as an entity expressing condolences to the people of the United States, as well as a body introducing stricter internal security measures.

The important EU internal political development of enlargement was invisible on NZ television. The external politics of the EU were also underreported by the broadcast media. In contrast, NZ newspapers centralized a greater variety of topics representing EU's external affairs. The Union was presented as an active participant in Kyoto protocol ratification, where it was shown as wrangling with the US in a fight to improve the world's environment. Other issues that gained the print media's attention were the EU's relations with Pacific countries (the EU was described as a prominent aid giver who demanded stringent concessions in return for its assistance, as well as providing a possible model for Pacific integration), and EU actions in the Balkans (EU involvement in the Kosovo conflict described the EU as a powerful diplomatic voice). The latter description echoed portrayals of the EU as a significant contributor to the Middle East 'negotiation quartet'.

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<sup>11</sup> <http://fly.hiwaay.net/~pspoole/echelon.html> (accessed November 2004)

Representations of the EU as a social power were the least visible in NZ newspapers and on NZ television. This information input featured the shortest list of central zones (Table 5).

| Central zones (NZ newspapers)                       | Evaluation | Central zones (NZ television) | Evaluation |
|---|------------|-------------------------------|------------|
| Social legislation                                  | negative   | Social legislation            | negative   |
| Immigration to the EU                               | negative   | Culture matters               | positive   |
| Political and Economic protests of people of the EU | negative   |                               |            |

The central theme of immigration to the EU echoed the internal NZ debate on the same issue. Additionally, NZ's historical alliance with the nations of the EU, which it perceives as likeminded Western developed nations, was challenged by the EU's tougher immigration policies, and in particular the tightening of immigration regulations. These policies were strongly scrutinized by the NZ media.

NZ newspapers and television also presented articles on EU social legislation, primarily on the issue of the 'welfare state', another 'hot' topic in NZ. As a state with a diminishing welfare support, NZ is looking globally for more efficient models of social protection. Two models – European and American – have been considered. The current Labour government in NZ is focusing on the advantages of the former, while the conservative opposition pushes for the latter. In such a climate of political debate, it is unsurprising to find that EU representations in this field were contradictory, reflecting the political leanings of the article's author.

Finally, the theme of cultural matters was more visible in NZ television news than it was in newspapers. This can be seen as an example of the 'softening' of news on television that is, according to Atkinson (1993; 1994), a response to the commercialization of modern media. The EU was presented as a world culture 'hub' of diverse interests – from modern music to fashion, with NZ musicians and designers successfully conquering European stages and catwalks.

### ***Comparison with the general public opinion***

Respondents to the first NZ survey that measured New Zealanders' opinions on the EU indicated which economic, political and social issues related to the EU concerned respondents the most. When asked to identify a perceived level of impact of those issues on NZ, the respondents distributed preferences in a specific pattern (Holland et al., 2003, 16-17). Firstly, economic issues with a New Zealand angle were perceived to be the most important. The second most important group of issues was categorized as a view of the EU as an international actor. The third group of issues, which rated lowest in terms of perceived impact on NZ, was combined under the heading category 'Internal EU issues' (Table 6). The respondents had to rate their perceived impact from 1-10 where 1 was not important at all and 10 was very important.

| <b>Table 6. Level of perceived importance</b>   |              |   |              |   |              |
|---|--------------|---|--------------|---|--------------|
| (on the scale from 1 to 10, where 1 is not important at all and 10 is very important) |              |   |              |   |              |
| <b>Group 1:</b><br><i>Economic issues with a New Zealand angle</i>                    | <b>Level</b> | <b>Group 2:</b><br><i>The EU as an international actor</i>    | <b>Level</b> | <b>Group 3:</b><br><i>Internal EU issues</i>                  | <b>Level</b> |
| Cattle disease epidemics  | 7.45         | EU support for reducing carbon gas emissions (Kyoto protocol) | 6.44         | EU Enlargement  | 5.65         |
| EU as a market for NZ meat  | 7.24         | EU role in the Middle East and Iraq conflicts                 | 6.43         | Far right parties in Europe becoming more active              | 5.62         |
| EU as a market for NZ dairy   | 7.17         | European countries forming one union                          | 6.37         | Immigration to the EU   | 5.52         |
| EU and European agricultural subsidies  | 6.98         | EU dealings with the USA                                      | 6.36         | Introduction of the new European currency, the Euro           | 5.35         |
| EU actions as a world trade power   | 6.96         | EU actions as a political power                               | 6.14         | Economic and political protests by people in the EU countries | 5.33         |
| EU as a market for NZ organic produce   | 6.81         | EU dealings with the Pacific countries                        | 5.93         |   |              |
| EU as a market for NZ wine  | 6.78         |   |              |   |              |
| EU economic actions   | 6.53         |   |              |   |              |
| EU food labeling regulations  | 6.45         |   |              |   |              |

Respondents were asked which issues should be kept in mind when the New Zealand government is developing trade or government policy relating to the EU. Of the 731 comments recorded (ibid. 28), the most common related to free and fair trade (185 comments), the importance of NZ independence from EU interference (76), the advantage of New Zealand's 'clean, green' image when dealing with the EU (74), economic relations (52), and agricultural subsidies (49).

## DISCUSSION

Two patterns of EU coverage were observed in this study. In 2000-2002, NZ newspapers balanced their representations of the EU as an economic power (1,515 propositions) with representations as a political power (1,189 propositions). Portrayals of the EU as a social force were the least visible in this medium (243 propositions). By contrast, NZ television featured the EU largely in economic terms (119 propositions),

while political and social representations were less dominant (37 and 36 propositions respectively).

Economic representations, agricultural and trading themes in particular, led NZ reporting of the EU in both media. A constant and compelling depiction of the EU as an economic power was evident in NZ media even during periods of major EU involvement in international political events. In the political arena, the EU was presented as an actor performing in two directions – internal decision making and international interactions. The latter theme was more visible than the former.

Despite its status as the most powerful modern medium, and its role as the principal source of information on the EU for the New Zealand public, television generated a very small number of the EU news texts in this study. Whereas NZ newspapers featured a greater variety of themes in the EU portrayal, NZ television presented its viewers with an extremely limited perspective on the EU. This neglect of EU news on television may partially explain why only 14 per cent of New Zealanders view the EU as an important overseas partner to NZ.

Trends in NZ coverage of the EU were found to be similar to the respective trends in the EU's internal coverage: the low share of the EU stories (Norris, 2000, 186-190; Peter et al., 2003, 321); the heavier newspaper coverage in comparison to television (Kevin, 2003, 55); public service channels featuring more news on the EU than private ones (Kevin, 2003, 176-7; de Vreese, 2001, 301); a predominance of economic and financial affairs topics (Fundesco, 1997; Norris, 2000, 192-193; Kevin, 2003, 101); and a neutral or moderately negative evaluation (Siune, 1983; Leroy and Siune, 1994; Norris, 2000, 196). The current problem of the EU's internal 'communication deficit' – that is, the underutilization of the communicative potential of EU

institutions, the weak links between European level governance and the national systems of political communication, a low visibility of the EU in European national media, and the scarcity of research reflecting EU's communication patterns<sup>12</sup> – is reaffirmed in the above listed media trends. Arguably, the similar tendencies discovered in the external coverage of the EU could signal the existence of an EU external 'communication deficit'.

This paper is not intended as a criticism of the NZ media for failing to meet an 'ideal' standard of EU coverage. The EU's 'communication deficit' cannot be blamed solely on international media professionals. Foreign news production faces many challenges – high costs in production and a limited group of attentive consumers being the most problematic. It takes an additional effort on the part of the news handlers to attract attention to 'peaceful' foreign news that overtly has no direct effect on general audiences. Nevertheless, interviews with NZ media gatekeepers showed that the NZ media editorial policies did not, and would not, allocate any additional resources or staff to cover EU related issues, or, more broadly, for any foreign issues. In the view of news producers, a European presence in the NZ media will continue to decline, as a result of a general feeling among media professionals that NZ audiences are simply not interested in European issues.

Competition for resources between international news results in the 'uneven' representation of world affairs (Wu, 2000, 110-121). News with a primarily EU dimension in NZ media was found competing not only against news from other regions (e.g., US, Australia), but additionally against news about its individual member states (e.g., UK, France, Germany, etc.), and even against news about 'Europe' (as

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<sup>12</sup> Some characteristics of the EU 'communication deficit' were identified by de Vreese in his on line report "Communicating Europe", April 2003, <http://fpc.org.uk/publications/73> (accessed December 2004)

opposed to news about 'the EU')<sup>13</sup>. Owing to the degree of competition, EU news tended to be eclipsed. We suggest that although 'Europe' is a relatively visible concept in NZ media (mostly due to the national interest in sports), the concept of 'the EU', as a unified international actor, is marginalised in the news output of NZ newspapers and television.

One of the strategies to engage an audience's interest in 'peaceful' international news is to introduce a 'national hook'; that is, to ground foreign news in familiar domestic discourses (Kevin, 2003, 132; Ginsberg, 2002, 52-53). The NZ media representation of the EU provided a case study for the 'domestication' of foreign news. The NZ-EU coverage 'peaked' around events relating foremost to NZ – more than half the located texts in newspapers and on television presented the EU in the context of NZ interests. The obvious advantage of this media strategy of 'localizing the world' is that the distant EU becomes easier for NZ general audiences to relate to. However, not every important development in the EU can be presented in tandem with NZ domestic issues. Consequently, as this study has found, the EU media portrayal lacked diversity, particularly on NZ television, by continually and extensively presenting the Union foremost as an agricultural trade actor.

Economic factors are known to be the leading predictor and the most influential determinant of foreign news coverage in general (Wu, 2000, 122, 124), and as such, the significant presence of the EU in NZ media discourse in an economic context may in part be explained by the reality of EU-NZ interactions. However, the predominance of these particular representations may also be consistent with a peculiarity of the news construction process: news producers are more inclined to

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<sup>13</sup> In the monitored period, 194 television sports news texts mentioned 'Europe'. However references to 'the EU' are not typical for *Sport* sections, and thus, they did not enter the sampling pool.

use widely shared interpretations of complex political concepts as news audiences are more ready to accept familiar and understandable images (Lau, Chiu, and Lee, 2001, 354-359).

Despite the usefulness of familiarity in news construction, diversity, on the other hand, is crucial to the success of the news media as a social forum (Comrie, 1999, 44). By allowing a wider perspective on EU policies and problems and by increasing the educational power of the media, NZ news producers could influence internal debates in NZ society. For example, the formidable 'agricultural trade bias' in EU representations in NZ media may be viewed as countering NZ's intention of positioning itself as a 'knowledge-based' society. In order to support this position, it can be argued that an 'EU angle' needs to be applied to more areas of NZ national endeavors – industry, business, IT, science and technology, to name a few.

A strong negative slant in evaluations assigned to the EU was a surprising finding of this study. This negativity could be explained by a combination of several factors. Firstly, negativity prevails in news reporting in general; negative messages carry more weight than do positive ones, owing to their prurient appeal to the public memory (Manheim, 1998, 106-107). Secondly, the socio-cultural polarizations of 'Us' as 'Good', and 'Them' as 'Bad' assigns negative evaluations to any 'Other', and the EU is the 'Other' to NZ. In addition, the EU is often introduced either as an economic rival or as a demanding economic partner to New Zealand. Both roles intensify its negative perception. Abundant neutral representations of EU economics are crucial for facilitating a more positive attitude towards the EU as an important trading partner among the NZ business and economic communities.

Images of the EU as an agricultural trading partner to NZ with mild to strong negative connotations were conveyed by NZ newspapers and television more frequently and continuously than any other EU image. Due to the media influence, this information became 'more readily accessible for application to attitude objects' (this being the EU in our case) (Domke et al., 1999), and could be relatively easily retrieved from the collective memory. The first national survey of New Zealanders' perception of the EU through the media of press and television has proved that these images have tended to dominate general public judgements and opinions, and have contributed to the foreign policy debate in relation to the EU.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

News about a nation's 'Significant Others' is a key provider of information and communication for the general public. This analysis is among the first to investigate and interpret representations of the EU outside the Union, and to compare them with the general public perceptions. News on the EU was found to be peripheral in NZ newspapers and almost invisible on NZ television. When it did make the news, the EU was overwhelmingly portrayed as an economic power, particularly in agricultural trading terms. As economic coverage was largely connected to a material gain or loss for NZ, neutral to negative evaluations dominated. Given that audiences are more susceptible to frames that are strongly present in the news, there is a strong possibility that the NZ public will associate the EU solely with sophisticated economic demands and rivalry. Should the NZ media continue to be reluctant to represent the multifaceted transformations of the EU in a systematic way, the NZ's public awareness of the benefits and challenges of the new evolving EU will be likely to remain impoverished. Likewise, should the EU not address its external communicative deficiencies in a timely manner, a further gap between

the EU's intention to be recognized as an authority in the international political arena, and the actual public perceptions of the EU in the world as nothing more than an economic 'muscle', will grow.

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