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Perceptions of the EU in the Singapore media in 2011

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Introduction

The EU Centre in Singapore is a partner in the Jean Monnet research project 'After Lisbon: the EU as an exporter of values and norms through ASEM' (2011-12), led by the National Centre for Research on Europe (NCRE) at the University of Canterbury, New Zealand, and supported by the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF). The project seeks to study how the European Union (EU) is perceived at different levels of society in Australia, China, India, Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand, Russia, South Korea, Singapore and Thailand.

This follows an earlier phase of research on perceptions of the EU in the Asia-Pacific during 2002 to 2009, and seeks to assess the impact of the implementation of the Lisbon Treaty on 1 December 2009 – in particular, with its provisions for a new High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy and the launch of the European External Action Service (EEAS).

The current project for Singapore, as with the earlier study conducted by Ma and Turner during 2006-7,¹ consists of three stages. The first stage on media perceptions involved the monitoring of three newspapers and a television news channel, and was

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The EU Centre in Singapore acknowledges with thanks the assistance of Emily Teo and Phua Wang Yu in the data collection process.

¹ Turner, Barnard and Ma Shaohua (2007) 'Seeing the EU in Singapore: media, public and elite representations', in Holland, Martin, Peter Ryan, Alojzy Nowak and Natalia Chaban (eds) (2007) *The EU through the Eyes of Asia: Media, Public and Elite Perceptions in China, Japan, Korea, Singapore and Thailand* (Singapore-Warsaw: University of Warsaw), p. 166-194.

conducted for a six-month period from 1 January to 30 June 2011.² The second stage, on elite perceptions, involves interviews with members of the national elites in the categories of politics, business, civil society and the media. The third and final stage consists of a public opinion survey.

The results of the media perceptions study are presented in this research brief. The data presented here give a sense of how the EU was perceived and portrayed during this eventful and relatively challenging period of financial and sovereign debt crises. By sharing the dataset, the EU Centre researchers hope more interest and research on related topics on the EU can be generated. The graphs and charts may be used according to the conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution-No Derivative Works 3.0 License, and the researchers invite further studies and research to be carried out based on the rich dataset.

Methodology and results

For a news item to be identified as an EU piece, it had to reference the European Union/EU at least once, even if only briefly, or any of the following constitutive EU institutions and terms (or institutions considered related in the study, in the case of ASEM):

European Commission (EC); European Parliament (EP); European Central Bank (ECB); European Court of Justice (ECJ); Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM); eurozone; euro.

Consequently, news items that referenced individual member states *without* any mention of the above terms were excluded from the study. The mention of individual member states within the database of EU news items was, nevertheless, noted and is recorded in Figure 13 below.

The media methodology for the project, as explained in the ensuing sections, was drawn from a 1985 UNESCO comparative media study³ and from studies on EU visibility in the EU media.⁴

² Note however that the Turner and Ma (2007) study conducted the equivalent media perceptions analysis for the entire year of 2006.

³ Sreberny-Mohammadi, Annabelle, Kaarle Nordenstreng, Robert Stevenson and Frank Ugboajah (1985) *Foreign News in Media: International Reporting in 29 Countries* (Paris: UNESCO).

⁴ For a complete listing of these studies, See Holland, Martin, Peter Ryan, Alojzy Nowak and Natalia Chaban (eds) (2007) *The EU through the Eyes of Asia: Media, Public and Elite Perceptions in China, Japan, Korea, Singapore and Thailand* (Singapore-Warsaw: University of Warsaw), p. 32.

Media outlets monitored

The 2011 study monitored the same four media outlets as in the 2006 study. These media outlets were selected based on criteria that were applied to all the country cases surveyed.

Lianhe Zaobao, the Chinese-language newspaper in Singapore with the highest net circulation of approximately 170,000, was chosen as the popular daily. The second newspaper, *The Business Times*, has a net circulation of 34,368 and focuses on financial and business matters. *The Straits Times* – the most widely read of the English-language papers, and indeed any paper in Singapore, with a daily circulation of nearly 360,000 – was chosen as the English-language daily in this study. The Mandarin Chinese Channel 8, with a market share of 34 per cent, is the most watched television channel in Singapore (Table 1).

Table 1: Media outlets monitored

Type of news outlets	Selected outlets	Publication day	Average net daily circulation ⁵ /viewership
Popular daily	Lianhe Zaobao	Daily	169,420
Business daily	The Business Times	Daily except Sunday	34,368
English-language daily	The Straits Times	Daily	359,989
TV news	Channel 8 (Chinese)	10-10.30 pm daily	1,344,530 (34 % of market share) ⁶

Frequency and distribution

During the six-month media research period, a total of 1,055 EU news items were published in the four media outlets monitored (Figure 1). EU coverage was most extensive in *The Business Times*, in which 526 articles were published, and for which the number of monthly pieces always exceeded that of the other media outlets. The level of reporting of EU news of *Lianhe Zaobao* and *The Straits Times* was similar with 250 and 244 articles respectively. Channel 8 News broadcasted a total of 35 news items. Although its 3 per cent share of total news items is very small, it marks an increase compared to the year 2006, where its annual

⁵ Average daily net circulation figures from Audit Bureau of Circulations Singapore (ABC), *ABC Audited Publications as of August 2011: data for the year 2009* (<http://abcsingapore.org/reports.html>, accessed 28/9/2011).

⁶ Calculated as percentage of resident households with televisions (98.6%) x number of resident households (1,145,900) x average resident household size (3.5) x market share of Channel 8 (34%). References: Busch, Werner von (2004) *The Asia Media Directory* (Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung: Singapore), p. 181; Department of Statistics, Singapore, *Statistics: Key annual indicators* (<http://www.singstat.gov.sg/stats/keyind.html>, accessed 28/9/2011).

total share amounted to less than 1 per cent. In absolute terms, its reporting of the EU also increased, compared to a total of 16 items that were broadcasted over the course of the entire year in 2006⁷ (see Table 2).

On average, 176 items were published per month. The weekly average of publications was 41 items.

Figure 1: Monthly distribution of news items

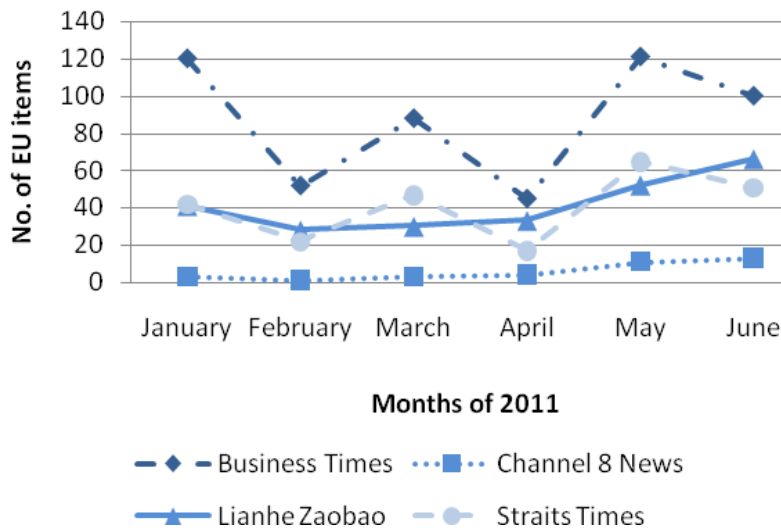


Table 2: Monthly distribution of news items by media outlet

	January	February	March	April	May	June	Total
Channel 8 news	3	1	3	4	11	13	35
Business Times	120	52	88	45	121	100	526
<i>Lianhe Zaobao</i>	41	28	30	33	52	66	250
Straits Times	42	22	47	17	65	51	244
Total	206	103	168	99	249	230	1,055

⁷ Holland et al (2007) *The EU through the Eyes of Asia: Media, Public and Elite Perceptions in China, Japan, Korea, Singapore and Thailand*, p. 168.

Focus of domesticity

The *focus of domesticity* describes the geographical context and relevance of the EU in the news items in relation to Singapore. The news items were coded as to whether they were about the EU itself (coded 'EU'); about the EU in connection with a third country outside of the EU but not in Southeast Asia (coded '3rd Country'); about the EU in connection with one of Singapore's Southeast Asian neighbors (coded 'Regional'); or about the EU in connection with Singapore (coded 'Local').

Overall, about 40 per cent of the news items were about the EU itself, while about 48 per cent were on the EU's relations with a third country. For the breakdown of the figures by news outlet, please see Figure 2 and Table 3.

Figure 2: Focus of domesticity, as a proportion of each outlet

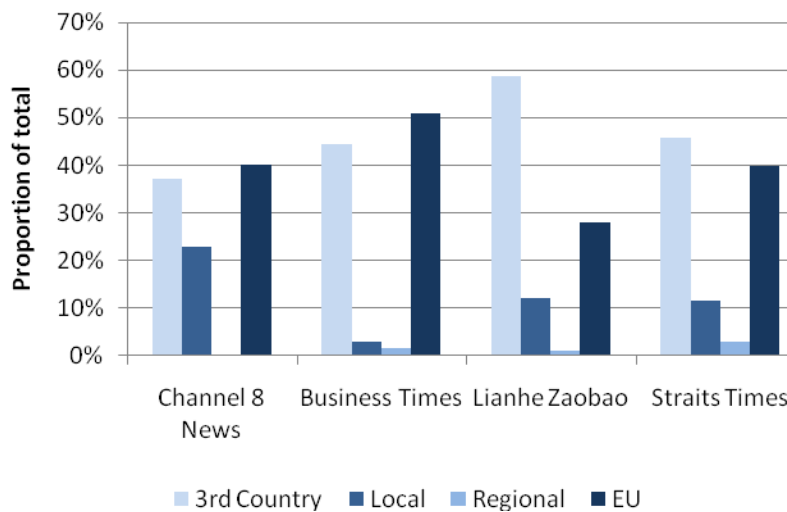


Table 3: Focus of domesticity by news outlet

	3 rd Country	Local	Regional	EU
Channel 8 news	13	8	0	14
Business Times	233	16	9	268
<i>Lianhe Zaobao</i>	147	30	3	70
Straits Times	112	28	7	97
Total	505	82	19	449

Degree of centrality

The *degree of centrality* measures the extent of focus on the EU within a given news item. Items were coded as to whether the EU was the *major* focus, a *secondary* focus (where at least half of the article was concerned with the EU) or a *minor* focus (where the EU was often mentioned together with other countries or regions) in the news item.

Although the exact segmentation into different degrees of centrality differed across the news outlets, they share the common characteristic that the number of news items with a minor focus always exceeded that of items with a major focus. On the whole, almost 50 per cent of all news items had a minor EU focus, while 25 per cent of all pieces took a secondary EU focus, and another 25 per cent a major EU focus. The exception was Channel 8 news, in which 60 per cent of all items reported the EU as a minor focus, while only 6 per cent with a major focus. With nearly 30 per cent of all pieces having a major focus, *The Business Times* is a front runner in terms of major focus EU reporting (Figure 3). Table 4 shows the corresponding absolute values for each outlet.

Figure 3: Degree of centrality, as a proportion of each outlet

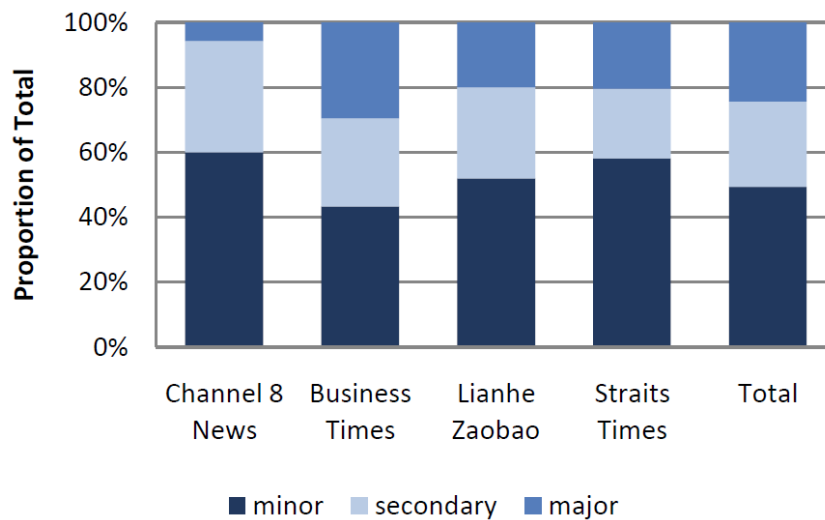


Table 4: Degree of centrality: absolute values

	Minor	Secondary	Major
Channel 8 news	21	12	2
Business Times	228	143	155
<i>Lianhe Zaobao</i>	130	70	50
Straits Times	142	52	50
Total	521	277	257

Framing

The *framing* of the EU in a given news item indicates whether the EU was reported as a political, economic, social or environmental actor. The frames used here were therefore as follows – ‘Economy’, ‘Social Affairs’, ‘Politics’ and ‘Environment’.

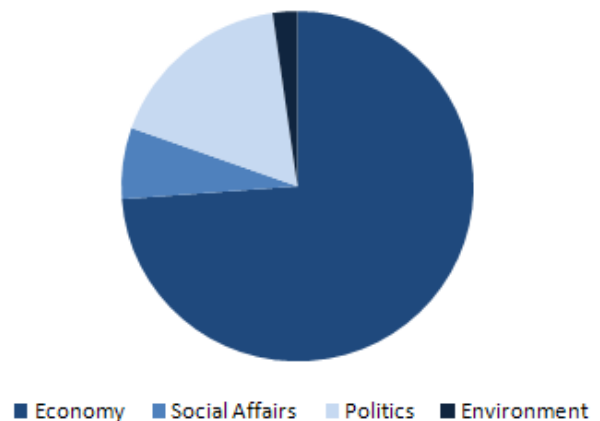
A multi-faceted news-making event can be framed in different ways, and here, the coding of framing depended on which aspect of the EU the news item focused. An article about the EU and Libya in the light of the events of the Arab Spring would fit broadly into the frame of ‘Politics’ if it concerns EU sanctions, but if the focus is instead on the wave of immigration to Europe as a result of turmoil, its framing would then be ‘Social Affairs’. Each item is therefore counted only once in this exercise.

The share of the coverage of the different frames can be seen in Figure 4. Of all frames, the economic one received by far the most media coverage, with nearly three-quarters of all articles framed as such. Political articles account for another 17 per cent of all news outlets, whereas social affairs only make up 7 per cent, and environmental issues 2 per cent of all news items.

Table 5: Framing (all outlets)

Frame	Total
Economy	780
Social Affairs	68
Politics	183
Environment	24

Figure 4: Framing (all outlets)



Furthermore, the broad frames were broken down into *sub-frames*, the number of which differed for each frame depending on the breadth of subject matters dealt with.

Of the economic sub-frames, one stood out prominently – more than 500 news items were grouped in the sub-frame ‘State of Economy’, pertaining to economic growth or slowdown. These constituted 65 per cent of all economic news items. The number of news items on ‘Business/Finance’ (147 items), pertaining mainly to banking, taxation and competition laws, and ‘Trade’ (64 items), pertaining mainly to free trade agreements, rank

second and third respectively. Other sub-frames used were ‘Agriculture’, ‘Energy’, ‘External’, ‘Industry’ and ‘Transport’ (Table 6).

On social affairs, the following sub-frames stood out – ‘Migration’ (17 items), ‘Health (Care)/Food Safety’ (16 items), ‘Values/Norms’ (9 items) and ‘Education/Research’ (7 items) were the most frequently mentioned themes (Table 7). The high number of ‘Health (Care) and Food Safety’ news items can be accounted for by the E. coli outbreak in Germany in May 2011.

Political news items concentrated on the EU’s external role – the ‘External’ sub-frame accounting for nearly 75 per cent of the politics frame (Table 8). The most dominant topic here related to Libya. Internal political matters were mentioned in about 25 per cent of the politics frames, with nearly half of these articles reporting on the race for the European Central Bank (ECB) presidency.

For environmental news items, the two sub-frames were ‘External’ and ‘Internal’ with regard to the environmental issues the EU was reported to be trying to resolve. The media in Singapore was most focused on the EU’s external role in environmental issues (Table 9), particularly in its push to implement its emissions trading scheme on all flights into and out of Europe, which was reported in a negative light.

Table 6: Sub-frames for ‘Economy’

Agriculture	30
Business/Finance	147
Energy	3
Industry	23
State of Economy	507
Trade	64
Transport	6

Figure 5: ‘Economy’ frame

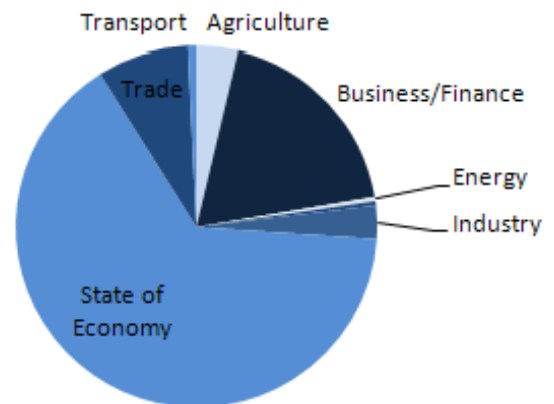


Table 7: Sub-frames for ‘Social Affairs’

Agriculture	1
Art/Entertainment	4
Crime	3
Demography/Population	2
Diversity/Multiculturalism	1
Education/Research	7
Health (Care)/Food Safety	16
Migration	17
Social Legislation	3
Travel	2
Values/Norms	9
Welfare	3

Figure 6: ‘Social Affairs’ frame

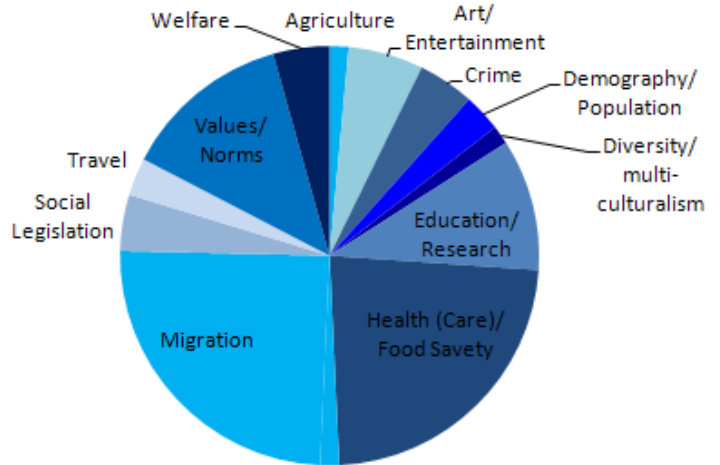


Table 8: Sub-frames for ‘Politics’

External	136
Internal	47

Figure 7: ‘Politics’ frame

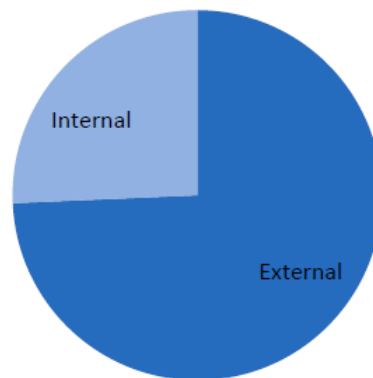
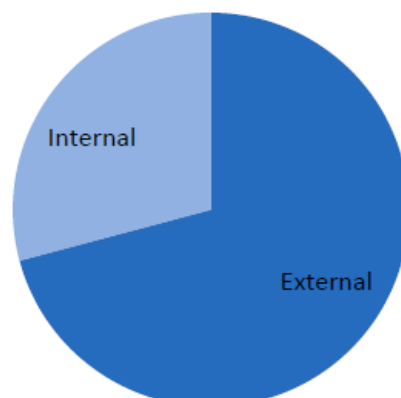


Table 9: Sub-frames for ‘Environment’

External	17
Internal	7

Figure 8: ‘Environment’ frame



Evaluation

The news items were coded ‘positive’, ‘negative’ or ‘neutral’ depending on their tone and judgment towards the EU and its institutions (thereby, its *evaluation* of the EU). In the 2006-7 study it was found that most newspaper articles (80 per cent) about the EU were neutral.⁸ This trend was not drastically changed in 2011 despite all the ‘bad news’ of the eurozone debt crisis, with ‘neutral’ items accounting for about 60 per cent of the total. Here it should be highlighted that it is the news items’ evaluation and portrayal of the EU and its institutions that were being assessed in this exercise, as opposed to the economic and financial *situation* in the EU which of course was manifestly negative.

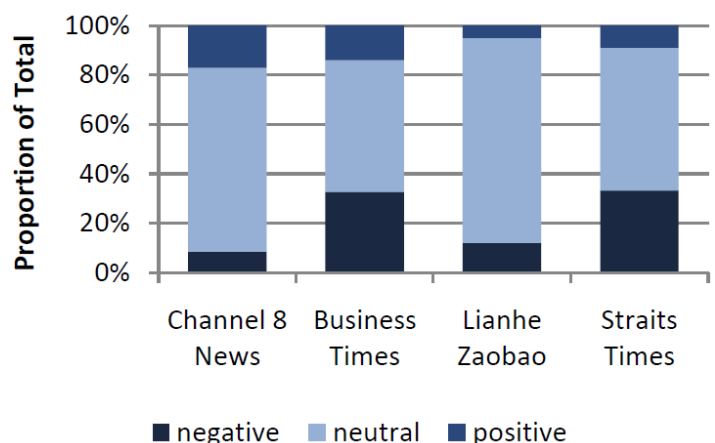
Nonetheless, 25 per cent of articles were ‘negative’ – an increase from the year 2006, where fewer than 10 per cent were ‘negative’. 11 per cent of news pieces reported the EU positively, which is less than in 2007 where the number was close to 20 per cent.⁹ *The Business Times* and *The Straits Times* had a perceptibly larger share of ‘negative’ news items, which amounted to a third of all of their total shares (Figure 9).

Additionally, a break-down of the evaluation category into the topical frames (Figure 10) would help determine whether negative or positive news items were associated with a certain topic or event. It was found that the majority of news items across all topical frames was coded ‘neutral’.

Table 10: Evaluation

	Negative	Neutral	Positive
Channel 8 news	3	26	6
Business Times	172	280	74
<i>Lianhe Zaobao</i>	30	207	13
Straits Times	81	141	22
Total	286	654	115

Figure 9: Evaluation



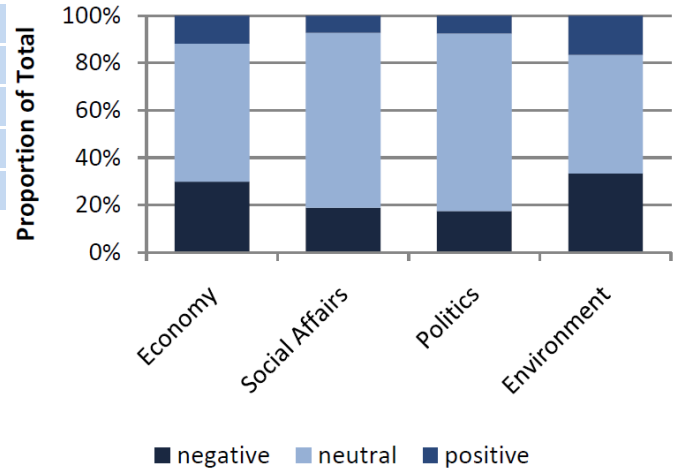
⁸ Holland et al (2007), p. 173.

⁹ Ibid.

Table 11: Evaluation, by frame

	Negative	Neutral	Positive
Economy	233	454	92
Social Affairs	13	51	5
Politics	32	137	14
Environment	8	12	4

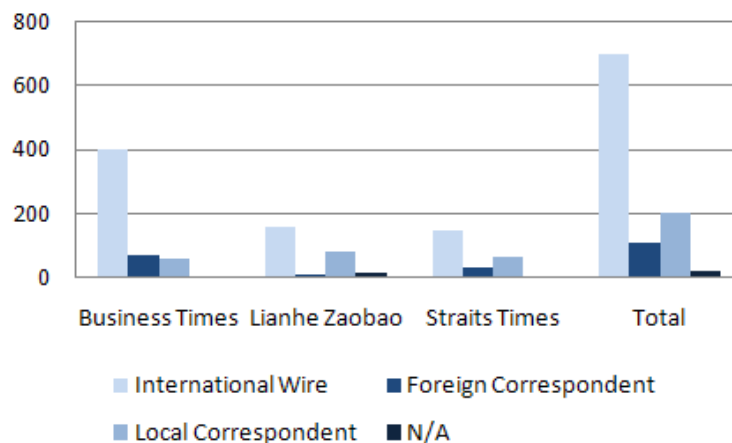
Figure 10: Evaluation, by frame



Sources

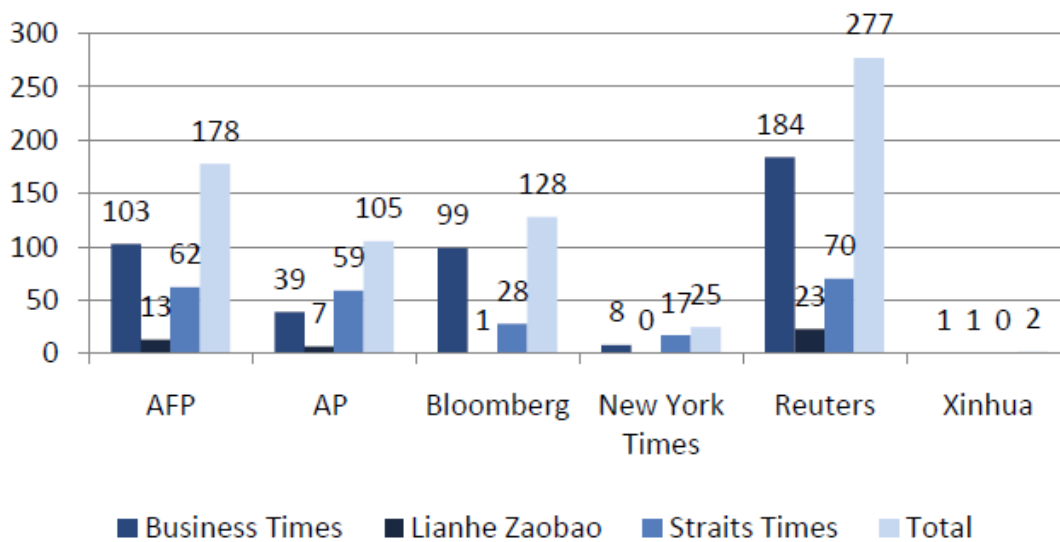
The *sources* for the news items were categorised into ‘international wire’, ‘foreign correspondent’ (which would include both overseas correspondents of the Singapore media as well as foreign correspondents of foreign media) and ‘local correspondent’ (as in Singapore-based). Not all news items indicated their source and therefore for about 5 per cent of items it was coded ‘N/A’. International wires emerged clearly as the main source for EU new items in all three newspaper outlets. The sources of the Channel 8 news items could not be determined, and consequently this media outlet is omitted from Figures 11 and 12 below.

Figure 11: Sources of news



Reuters was the most extensively used news wire agency for all newspapers. Out of 700 articles, 277 indicated Reuters as a source, sometimes in a mixture with other sources (Figure 12). *The Business Times* used international wires most extensively as a proportion of its overall number of news items, with the most commonly used wires being Reuters, Bloomberg and then Agence France-Presse (AFP), in that order. Interestingly for the Chinese-language *Lianhe Zaobao*, China’s news wire Xinhua was only used once. Some news items used more than one of the international wires as a source.

Figure 12: Sources of news – international wires



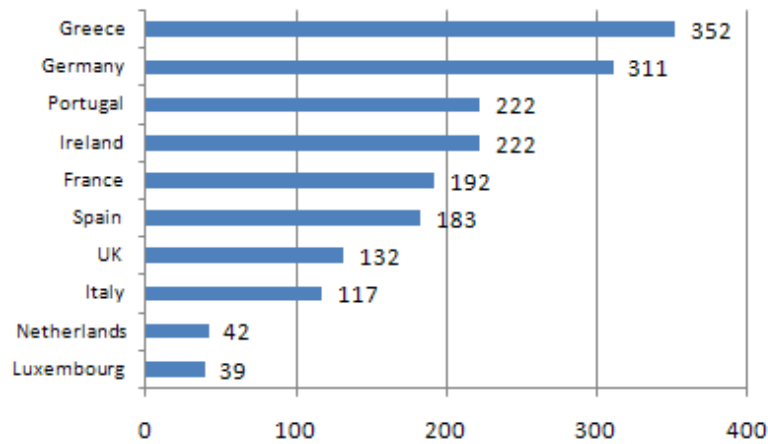
Visibility

The *visibility*, or the number of times each EU member state, EU official, EU member state official and EU institution was referenced explicitly in the articles, can be used to answer the question: what or who is the face of the EU in the Singapore media?

EU member states

Not surprisingly, Greece received the most media attention with 352 articles mentioning it. All 27 member states of the EU were each mentioned at least once. Figure 13 shows the ‘Top 10’ list of the most frequently mentioned EU member states. Since one article can reference several countries, the number of member states mentioned exceeds the number of articles.

Figure 13: Most visible EU member states



EU officials/leaders

On the whole, while more than 60 EU officials were named in the news items, over half of them were mentioned only once or so in passing. Jean-Claude Trichet, the President of the European Central Bank (ECB) from 2005 to the end October 2011, was mentioned 92 times (or 9 per cent of all news items), more than thrice as often as Olli Rehn, the European Commissioner for Economic and Financial Affairs. In comparison, the most visible EU official in 2007 was Javier Solana (then the EU’s High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy), who was mentioned in about 5 per cent of new items.¹⁰ José Manuel Barroso, the President of the European Commission, was referenced in 22 items. Four EU officials were mentioned more than 10 times – Lorenzo Bini Smaghi (member of the executive board of the ECB), Jean-Claude Juncker (in his capacity as President of the Euro Group – this count does not include mention of him as Prime Minister of Luxembourg), Catherine Ashton (High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy) and Herman Van Rompuy (President of the European Council) (Figure 14).

EU member state officials/leaders

German Chancellor Angela Merkel was the most visible EU member state official with references in 65 news items (Figure 15). The second most visible official was Greek Prime Minister George Papandreou (40 news items), followed by French President Nicolas Sarkozy (37 news items). Germany’s Federal Minister of Finance Wolfgang Schaeuble was mentioned 26 times. The next most frequently mentioned officials were Christine Lagarde (French Minister for Economic Affairs, Finance and Industry before assuming the presidency

¹⁰ Holland et al (2007), p. 171.

of the International Monetary Fund [IMF] in July 2011), Mario Draghi (governor of the Bank of Italy and designated to become ECB president on 1 November 2011), David Cameron (the British Prime Minister), Axel Weber (President of the Deutsche Bundesbank until the end of April 2011), José Sócrates (Portuguese Prime Minister until June 2011) and Jean-Claude Juncker (in his capacity as Prime Minister of Luxembourg – this count does not include mention of him as President of the Euro Group).

Figure 14: Most visible EU officials

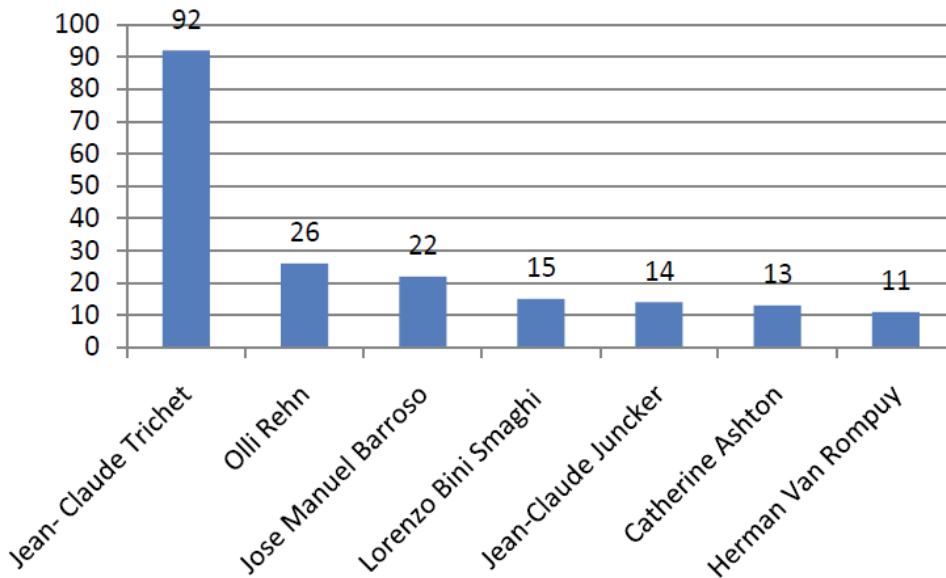
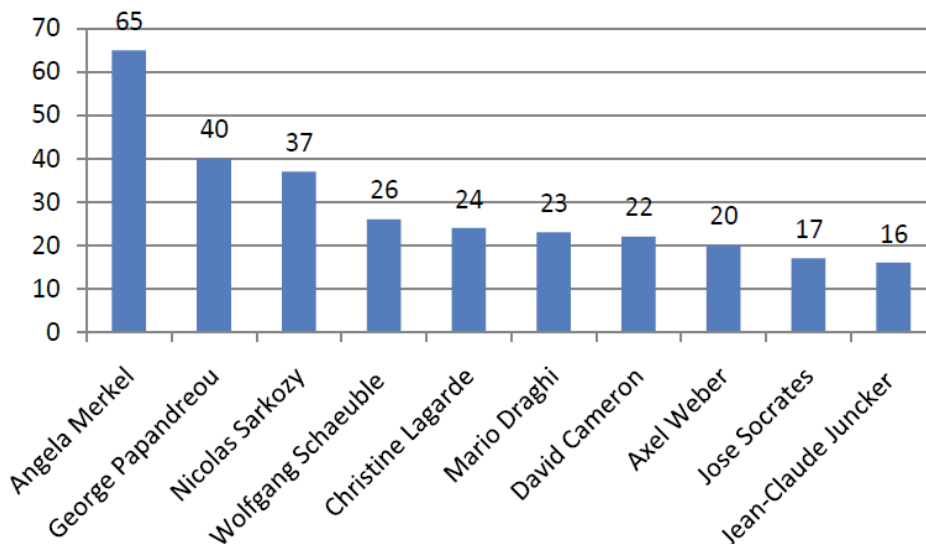


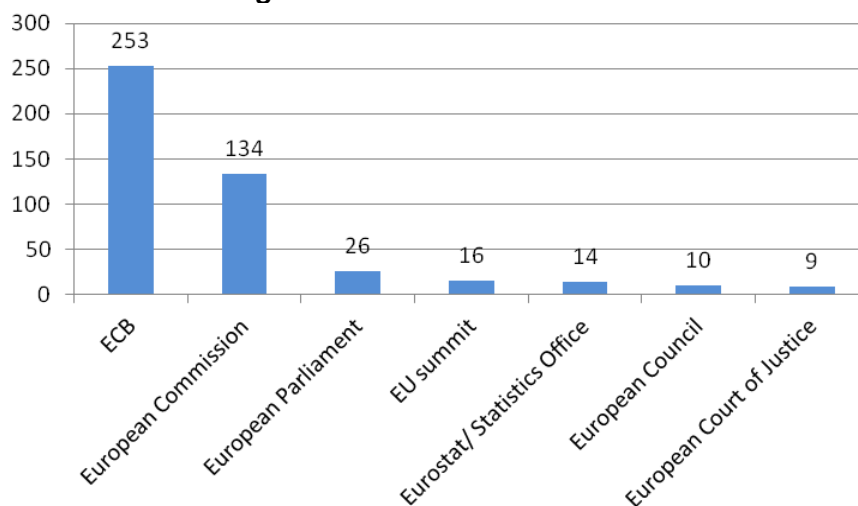
Figure 15: Most visible EU member state officials



EU institutions

Of all EU institutions, the ECB was mentioned in nearly a quarter of all news items. The European Commission was mentioned in more than 10 per cent of articles (134 news items), whereas the European Parliament (26 items), ‘EU summit’ (a term used by the media to refer to any summit of EU leaders convened to discuss special issues such as the eurozone debt crisis) (16 items), Eurostat (the Directorate-General of the European Commission tasked with providing statistical information on the EU) (14 items), the European Council (10 items) and the European Court of Justice (9 items) also received a number of mentions (Figure 16).

Figure 16: Most visible EU institutions



Conclusion – further research agenda

Far from writing conclusions as to how the EU is perceived in Singapore, this research brief is only a preliminary step to answering the question. Indeed many other questions may be formulated from here – how exactly have external perceptions of the EU changed, if at all, since the implementation of the provisions of the Lisbon Treaty? What kind of results might be yielded if say the perception of the United States or China is to become the subject of the same methods of study? As much as the study is about Singapore’s perceptions of the EU, it is perhaps also instructive in understanding how Singapore perceives the outside world. The latter can be more gainfully studied when the results from the other nine countries surveyed in the research project are released, and when further studies of Singapore’s perceptions of other world actors like the US and China are conducted.

For these reasons, it is hoped that this research brief, as a repository of a rich set of unique data, can spur deeper research into various questions from the EU’s role in Asia to Singapore’s worldview on global actors and perspectives on ‘actorness’.



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