

The European Union in the eyes of India

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Abstract The multifaceted engagement between India and the European Union (EU) has grown exponentially in recent years, leading to a strategic partnership, which is one of the three that the EU has in Asia. Based on a content analysis of three prominent Indian newspapers, which were monitored on a daily basis for a period of 6 months (1 July–31 December 2009), and interviews conducted with political, business, media, and civil society “elites,” this article seeks to analyze and assess the perceptions of the EU in India.

Introduction

India recognized the importance of the nascent European Economic Community (EEC) and was among the first developing countries to establish diplomatic relations in 1963. The non-preferential Commercial Cooperation Agreement that India signed with the EEC in 1973 was expanded by subsequent agreements in 1981 and 1994. India was becoming progressively more interesting because of its policy of liberalization and economic reforms launched in 1991 with consistently high growth rates, acquisition of nuclear weapons (1998), and steadily improving relations with the USA—all this led to recognition of India as a potential global player by the European Union (EU). Annual India–EU summits have been held since 2000, and a strategic partnership was adopted in 2005 along with a new Political Declaration and a Joint Action Plan.¹ The institutional architecture between India and the EU is multilayered, and there are ongoing dialogs and consultations on around 45 issues (Jain 2010).

¹EU–India Joint Action Plan, 7 September 2005. The JAP was revised at the Marseille India–EU summit, 29 September 2008.

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The driving force behind the India–EU relations has been, is, and will continue to be trade and commerce. Bilateral trade in goods had nearly doubled between 2004 and 2008 from €33.52 billion in 2004 to €61 billion in 2008. EU services exports to India amounted to €9 billion in 2008 whereas India exported services worth €7.4 billion to the Union (Eurostat News Release 2009). The EU has been the largest source of foreign direct investment inflows to India. During August 1991 to September 2004, actual FDI from the EU to India was US\$6.72 billion, which accounted for 21.6% of total foreign direct investment in India (The European Union and India 2005). EU investment flows to India doubled in 2007 to €5.4 billion from €2.5 billion in 2006. Indian FDI in the EU soared from zero in 2004 to €10 billion in 2007 and was €2.4 billion in 2008 (Eurostat News Release 2009). The new India–EU trade and investment agreement, which is likely to be signed by the end of the year, is expected to increase bilateral trade to around €160 billion by 2015 (Economic Times 2010).

After independence, there has been a clear domination of Anglo-American imagery in the Indian media and popular culture. For the great majority of Indians, however, most of Europe is a strange land, an exotic place for tourism, to which only a privileged layer of society had had access (Jain 2007a, b). There have been also some studies of how the Indian print media perceived individual EU member states (Vaugier-Chatterjee 2006). However, how the EU is perceived externally has largely been ignored, and there has been inadequate research on perceptions of the EU in India—one of the Union’s three key strategic partners in Asia (Fioramonti and Poletti 2008; Lisbonne-de Vergeron 2006; Dixit 2001).

News media is widely acknowledged to be a principal source of information on foreign events and central to informing public opinion on international affairs (Holland 2005). This article comprises two parts. The first deals with the Indian media representations of the EU in terms of the volume of news and coverage, sources of EU news, focus of domesticity, most visible EU actors, degree of centrality, framing of EU news items, and evaluation of EU news. The second highlights the perceptions of the Indian elites on issues such as the importance of different countries/regions to India, the EU as a global power and international leader, and spontaneous images of the EU. A conclusion then draws some observations and insights.

The visibility of the EU in the Indian print media (1 July to 31 December 2009)

The press is regarded as the fourth pillar of democracy which sustains and strengthens other pillars of the executive, legislature, and judiciary in India. With a population of 1.2 billion, 18 major languages, and over 1,600 regional dialects, India has the largest number of newspapers in the world. As of 31 March 2008, there were 69,323 registered newspapers (English 10,000; Hindi 27,527) with a total circulation of 207,108,115 (Government of India 2010, online).

This study selected three leading Indian newspapers on the basis of their targeted readership for monitoring of news over a period of 6 months (July–December 2009). *The Times of India* was chosen as the English-language daily.² *The Economic Times*

² *The Times of India* has numerous editions printed from different locations including Bhopal, Chandigarh, Chennai, Delhi, Goa, Guwahati, Hyderabad, Indore, Jaipur, Kanpur, Kolkata, Lucknow, Mangalore, Mumbai, Mysore, Nagpur, Patna, Pune, Ranchi, and Surat.

was chosen for the study as it was identified as the leading and most widely read business newspaper.³ *Dainik Jagran* was selected because it is the most widely read newspaper as well as because it is in Hindi, which apart from English, is the official language.⁴ Both *The Times of India* and *The Economic Times* are owned and managed by the Bennett and Coleman Company which, along with its other group companies, is popularly known as the Times Group.

The three newspapers chosen for the study retained their leading positions in readership ratings according to the *Indian Readership Survey* (November 2009). *The Times of India* retained its number one position among English dailies with a readership of 13,347,000. *The Dainik Jagran* continued to be the most popular Hindi newspaper with a readership of 54,791,000. However, the readership of *The Economic Times* marginally declined to 757,000 (livemint 2009).

Over a 6-month period, the three newspapers selected for the study contained a combined total of 235 news items involving the European Union. This is not a very impressive number and reflects the very limited space allocated to the coverage of news related to the EU in the Indian media. Interestingly, there was not a single news item on the Asia Europe Meeting (ASEM) in any of the three newspapers. The primary focus of the Indian media is on national and local news. Since interest levels in international news are abysmally low, only a single page and occasionally two pages are set aside in newspapers for reporting international news, which is mostly on neighbors, Asia, or the USA. The European Union has to vie for a place in this extremely restricted space and only EU news which is either about or specifically related to India has any prospect of being published. A former Press Advisor to the EC Delegation aptly described the situation as follows:

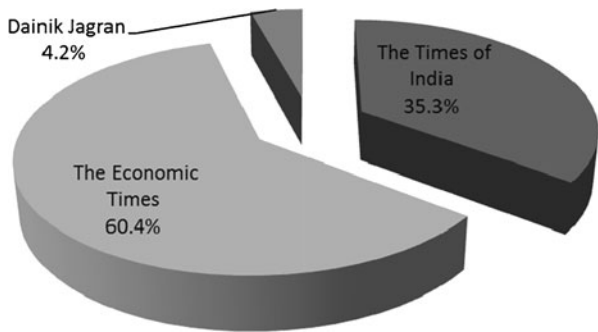
two pages which come right at the end just before the sports pages... cover the foreign news and it is all about...Berlusconi and Sarkozy, and not about their foreign policy or their national policy but about their private lives. That is the news that is coming and nothing else...editors are extremely market-oriented and so if I am publishing a newspaper... let us say in a town like Ajmer, my reader doesn't know what is the European Union...he couldn't be bothered..so you could have the biggest summit of European Union with India but it will manage to get a small column on the thirtieth page in my newspaper and if there is a small road accident, it will be a page one news. Coming to Jaipur it will be slightly different, coming to Delhi it will be slightly different.

Among the three newspapers, the EU was most visible in *The Economic Times* (see Fig. 1) with a total of 142 news items. The EU is predominantly perceived to be an economic power since it has until recently been India's largest trade partner. The great majority of EU news items were related to trade. There were 83 items on a wide

³ *The Economic Times* is published simultaneously from ten metropolitan cities including Mumbai, Delhi, Bangalore, Chennai, Kolkata, Lucknow, Hyderabad, Ahmedabad, Chandigarh, and Pune.

⁴ *Dainik Jagran* was founded by Puran Chand Gupta in 1942 during the Quit India Movement. Its owners are the Jagran Group, which is controlled by the Gupta family and is now headed by Mahendra Mohan Gupta. With its strong brand identity, it is largely considered to be the only Hindi daily which provides coverage to the entire Hindi belt of India. Currently, the *Dainik Jagran's* 37 editions are published across 11 states.

Fig. 1 Distribution of EU news in the three Indian newspapers



variety of themes with substantial coverage of political as well as economy-related news. *The Dainik Jagran*, however, accounted for a meager ten news items because of its marked preference for national and local news. On international issues, it usually deals with India's immediate neighborhood and occasionally publishes articles by experts on its Op-Ed page on themes like non-proliferation, nuclear disarmament, climate change, and the World Trade Organization where the European Union is mentioned only in passing.

Looking at the distribution on a monthly basis from July to December 2009, EU coverage slumped in July (26 news items) but recovered in August (36 news items). Some improvement took place in September (44 news items) followed by a decline in October (33 news items) and November (35 news items). In December, however, EU coverage almost doubled (66 news items) largely because of the Copenhagen summit on climate change.

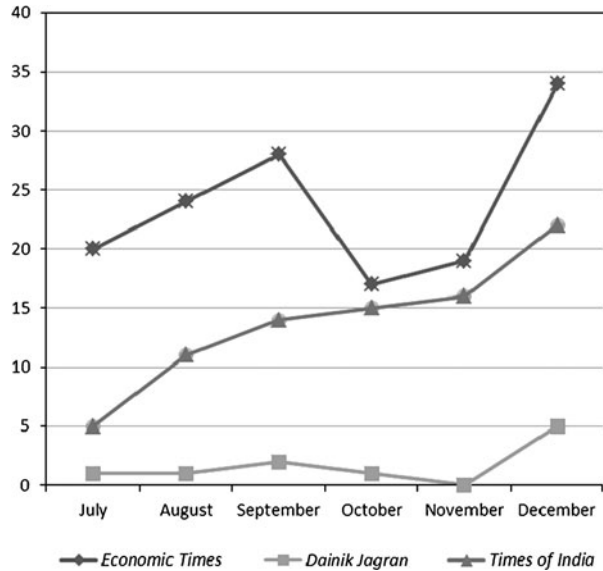
The Economic Times reported 20 news items followed by the *Times of India* which carried five news items while the *Dainik Jagran* had one news item in July 2009 (see Fig. 2). *The Economic Times* published India-related news on trade with the EU in the textile, spice, automobile, and pharmaceutical industries. Both *The Economic Times* and *The Times of India* discussed the ill-effects of the global economic slowdown in July. *Dainik Jagran* carried a solitary news item on the efforts of the G-8 in dealing with the global recession.

In August 2009, *The Economic Times* published 24 news items on the EU. This constituted a marginal increase over the previous month. *The Times of India* carried 11 EU news items, which was double the number of news articles reported in July. *Dainik Jagran* had only one EU news item in August. *The Economic Times* and *The Times of India* focused on the mini-Ministerial held in Delhi in August and on the G-8's pledge to provide aid to developing countries.

Coverage of EU news increased in the third month of analysis (September) with *The Economic Times* and *The Times of India* reporting 18 and 14 news items, respectively. The news items in the former dealt with investigations conducted by the European Commission in the dealings of Sun Microsystems, Airbus, Magna-led Opel, and Intel. Both papers of the Times Group highlighted the emerging rift between the developed and developing countries on climate change. News about global trade negotiations was reported by all the three newspapers.

EU news items in *The Economic Times* declined in October and November while *The Times of India* barely managed to sustain the increase in its coverage. *The*

Fig. 2 Monthly distribution for the media outlets



Dainik Jagran reported only one EU news item in October and nothing at all in November whereas *The Economic Times* dealt with news on banking and trade. *The Times of India* reported on an extremely scattered range of issues in October. *The Dainik Jagran* carried an article on its Op-Ed page urging India not to succumb to the pressure likely to be exerted at the Copenhagen summit on climate change. In November, *The Economic Times* reported on the growth of EU–India trade in textiles, the exit of the Eurozone from the global economic recession, and the continuation of conflict with the EU on issues relating to the liquor and pharmaceutical industry. *The Times of India* reported on important domestic developments within the European Union such as the endorsement of the Lisbon Treaty by the Czech Republic and the commemoration of the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall.

With the world's attention focused on the Copenhagen summit in December 2009, the three Indian newspapers also registered the highest coverage of EU news items in this month. *The Economic Times* reported 34 news items whereas *The Times of India* and the *Dainik Jagran* carried 22 and five news items, respectively. *The Economic Times* and *The Times of India* carried a number of news items on the progress of the negotiations and the position of India and other countries. These news items almost always mentioned the EU on issues of reduction of carbon emissions and measures for tackling global warming. Even the *Dainik Jagran* published four news items on the Union's policies on climate change.

Local and international sources had an almost equal share in the coverage of EU news contributing 39.2% and 37%, respectively. They constitute a total of 76.2% of the total sources of EU news, and hence the majority of the news reported in the Indian newspapers had a credible source underlining the efforts put into obtaining accurate and authentic information. The remaining 23.8% of EU news stories were unattributed, however.

Reuters⁵ has a commanding presence among the international newswires that supply EU news to the Indian print media (see Fig. 3). This validates the widely held belief that Indians tend to perceive the European Union primarily through the British lens. The managements of Indian newspapers also feel that news emanating from the EU is adequately taken care of by “Others”—writers, journalists, academics, editors, businessmen, politicians, and columnists—who contribute news items/articles to the print media.

The contribution of “Others” as part of the local sources is as high as 65% of the EU news in the three newspapers. This category of contributors consists of the people based in India who write on EU news items and are mostly Delhi-based journalists. The rest of the local sources include the Times News Network (more popularly known as the TNN), which is the news agency of the *Times of India* newspaper, and the Press Trust of India (PTI) which is India’s premier news agency and currently commands 90% of news agency market share in India⁶ (Press Trust of India 2010).

The Economic Times does seek to seriously engage its readers in both domestic and international trade apart from news items on what happens inside the country. It therefore tends to utilize all the three sources of EU news with a decisive tilt and dependence upon local news (see Fig. 4). The *Dainik Jagran* almost entirely concentrates on local and national developments for its news content and rarely relies on international news agencies. *The Times of India*, which caters mostly to the urban population keen on keeping abreast of the latest international developments, relies on international sources to a considerable extent.

Half of the EU news items in *The Economic Times* had a local focus (an Indian angle) focusing on the growing stake of India in world trade (see Fig. 5). Almost one third of the news items with an EU focus (29.6%) dealt solely with the functioning of the European Union and its institutions and policies. About 20% of the news items dealt with the G-8, the WTO, the G-77, the Copenhagen summit, etc. in the context of which the EU was mentioned.

The popular Hindi newspaper, *Dainik Jagran*, enjoys wide readership base in all parts of the country in both urban and rural areas. As a result, it is not keen to publish EU-focused news as this would be unlikely to increase its circulation or readership. It prefers to concentrate on news having a third-country focus (where the EU is also mentioned in passing). However, it does publish EU news items with an Indian relevance and focus or India–EU events which take place in India.

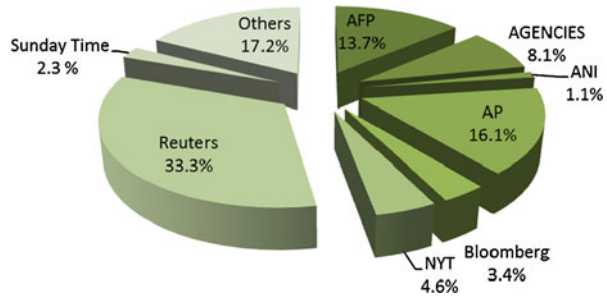
The Times of India, which has a readership catering to different sections of the society covered news items having EU, local, and third-country focus in almost equal proportions. Unlike the other two newspapers, it also covered regional news focusing mainly on events unfolding in Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Baluchistan, and Myanmar (Fig. 5).

Unsurprisingly, given the comparatively high visibility of four individual commissioners, the most visible EU official in the coverage of EU news by *The Economic Times* was Baroness Catherine Ashton (as trade Commissioner) who

⁵ Reuters Group, a subsidiary of Thomson Reuters, is a UK-based news service and former financial market data provider that provides news reports from around the world to news media.

⁶ Press Trust of India, About PTI. <http://www.ptinews.com/aboutpti/aboutus.aspx>. Accessed 10 July 2010

Fig. 3 Distribution of international sources of EU news



appeared in 11 news items (see Fig. 6). She was in the news for urging all sides to make an attempt for the successful conclusion of the Doha talks. She was also reported to have made efforts towards the diffusion of the crisis which arose as a result of the seizure of Indian drugs at European ports. *The Times of India* carried a single news item on her assuming the post of High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy but mentioned her as the “Foreign Affairs Chief.” Competition Commissioner Neelie Kroes appeared in five news items in *The Economic Times* and in three news items in *The Times of India*. Both the newspapers referred to her in the context of the anti-trust probe against US software giant Oracle in its takeover of the Sun Microsystems and the dropping of investigations against Microsoft after it agreed to allow customers the choice of opting for rival web browsers. Jean-Claude Trichet, President of the European Central Bank, was referred to in five news items in *The Economic Times* but found no mention in *The Times of India*. European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso was mentioned only once in *The Times of India* in the context of the Irish endorsement of the Lisbon Treaty. *The Economic Times* mentioned him on four occasions—in the context of the EU’s efforts to deal with the global economic downturn, the EU–India summit, the Copenhagen summit, and the India–EU free trade agreement. General Phillippe Morillon, Chief Observer of the EU Election Observer Mission, was mentioned several times in the context of the elections in Afghanistan while EU’s Economic Affairs Commissioner Joaquin Almunia found a brief mention in both *The Economic Times* and *The Times of India* on news relating to the global recession.

Among EU institutions, the most visible EU institution was clearly the European Commission with 27 news items in *The Economic Times* and 15 news items in *The*

Fig. 4 Distribution of sources of EU news across the three newspapers. Lightest colour shading=national news sources, middle colour shading=local news sources, darkest colour shading=international sources

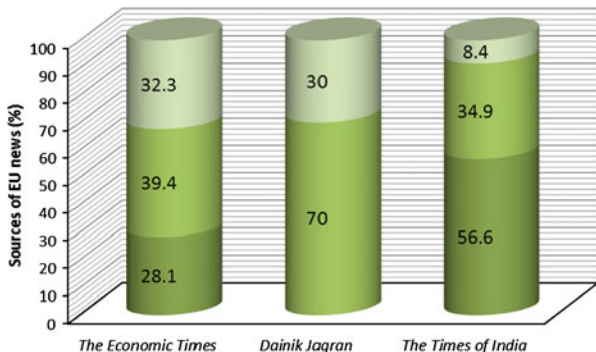
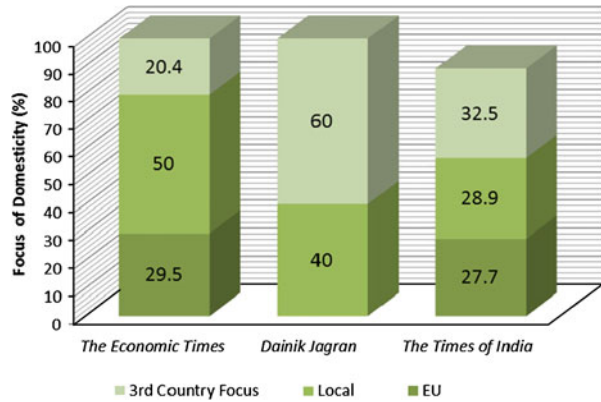


Fig. 5 Focus of domesticity



Times of India (see Fig. 7). The Commission was featured for dealing with numerous issues such as expediting the Doha Round, guarding against greenhouse emissions, garnering support for the Lisbon Treaty, and conducting anti-trust investigations. It is by far the most recognizable and accepted institutional arm of the European Union in India. The rotating EU Presidency held by the Czech Republic during the second half of 2009 was peripherally acknowledged in news items when President Barosso expressed satisfaction at the Czechs having endorsed the Lisbon Treaty. The Presidency as such was not perceived to have had any significant impact on either issues or policies. The ECB was in the news for adopting measures to check speculative borrowing, assisting the Eurozone with the recession, and preventing the Greek banking system from defaulting. *The Economic Times* carried news about Eurostat’s declaration on the stabilization of the unemployment rate in November 2009. *The Times of India* carried several news items in relation to the activities of the European Union’s Anti-Piracy Naval Mission (EU NAVFOR) when a Chinese ship was hijacked by Somali pirates in the Indian Ocean. No EU official or EU institution was mentioned in any of the EU news items that appeared in the *Dainik Jagran*.

Fig. 6 Most visible EU officials

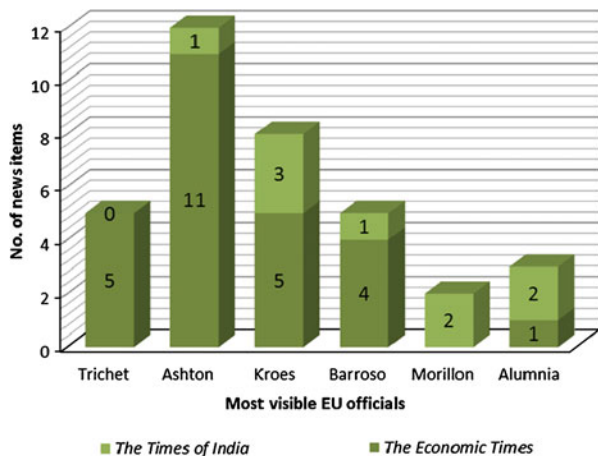
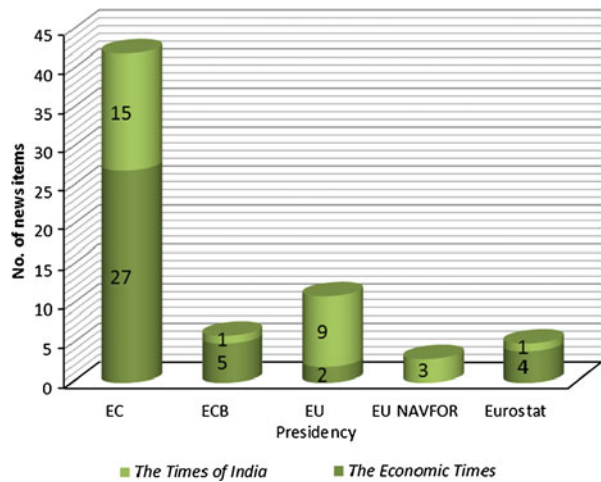


Fig. 7 Most visible EU institutions



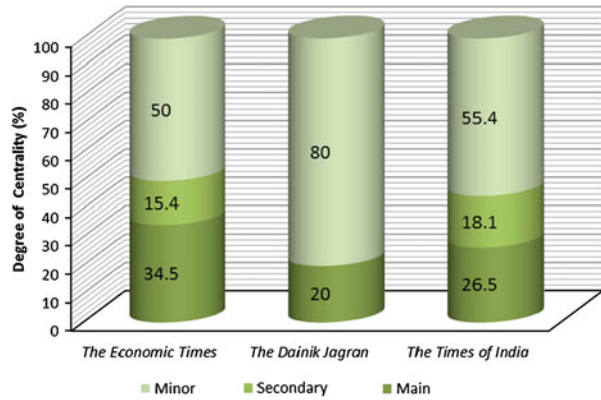
Clearly, the overall visibility of key EU officials as well as EU institutions is far from adequate even in the two papers of the Times Group.

All the three newspapers seem to conform to a single pattern as far as ascribing the degree of centrality is concerned (see Fig. 8). Most news items portrayed the EU as a minor actor followed by reporting of the EU as the main actor while a very small proportion of the news items portrayed the EU in a secondary role. Thus, it would appear that although the Indian media did recognize the EU as a significant actor in world politics, this was not reflected in the news coverage and portrayal of the European Union in the print media.

Perhaps, almost three quarters (73.2%) of the news items in *The Economic Times* portrayed the EU as an economic actor (see Fig. 9). Half of the EU news items in the *Dainik Jagran* dealt with environmental issues (because of the coverage of the Copenhagen summit in December 2009) while 40% of the news reported fell in the economic frame. The news reporting of *The Times of India* was almost evenly balanced among the political, economic, and environmental frames (28.9%, 27.7%, and 26.5% of the news items, respectively). Of the news items reported by *The Times of India*, 15.6% fell within the category of social affairs and mainly dealt with crime, multiculturalism, and migration. The framing of the news items covered by *The Economic Times* proves that India's economic engagement of the EU is comprehensive and that the EU is a major economic partner. The overall framing of *The Times of India* shows a gradual recognition of the growing role and profile of the EU as an economic, environmental, political, and social actor. Interestingly, even though the EU is a donor of development aid to India, there was not a single news item concerning this policy.

An unbiased neutral journalistic reporting tone in the reported EU news dominated all three newspapers (see Fig. 10). However, stories critical of the EU were also to be found. *The Economic Times* and *The Times of India* both had nearly 20% of negative news about the EU, while half of EU news in the *Dainik Jagran* was reported in a negative tone. The positively evaluated EU news had the lowest share of news items. *The Economic Times* featured a modest 14% of positive news

Fig. 8 Degree of centrality



about the EU, *The Times of India* just 6%, while *Dainik Jagran* did not carry a single news item which fell in this category.

The majority of the news across all frames show that the EU was portrayed as a neutral actor in tone for all three newspapers (see Fig. 11). Because the EU was a minor actor in most news items, this did not lead to a detailed reporting on the posturing of the EU on issues. Where a negative reporting tone was evident, the largest percentage fell within the environment frame (32.7%), reflecting the extensive reporting of the rift between the developed and developing countries over climate change where the EU and India found each other on opposite sides. The second highest share of the negative portrayal of the EU was found in the economic frame on account of coverage of disputes and conflicts on various issues between the EU and India in the textile, spice, automobile, software, and pharmaceutical industries. The coverage of the EU as a positive actor was found to be the least in the environmental, economic, and social framing.

To summarize, the manner of organization and reporting on matters pertaining to the EU across news agencies was found to be responsible to large degree for the

Fig. 9 Framing of EU news items

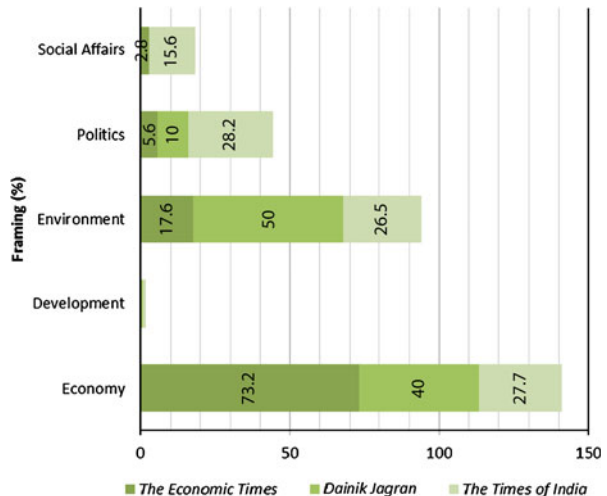
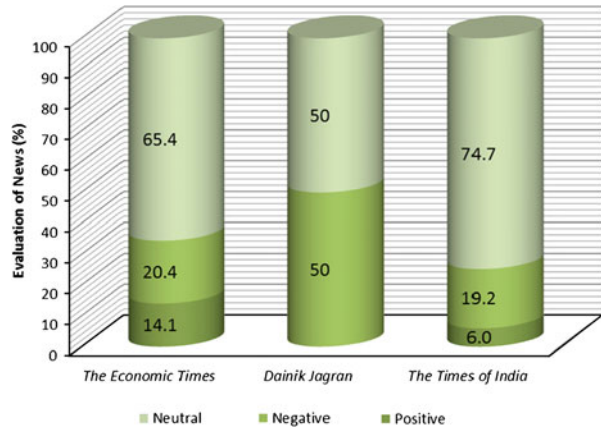


Fig. 10 Evaluation of EU news



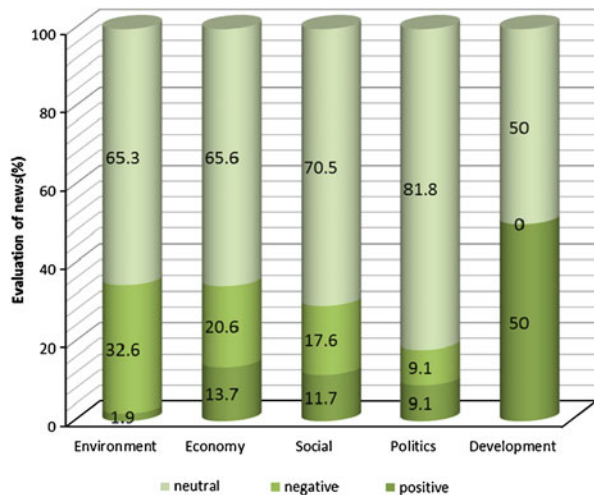
findings of this study. The media elites responsible for this news production acknowledged that they did not have a specific policy targeting the coverage of news pertaining to the European Union. The newsworthiness or marketability of a news item was invariably the deciding factor for reporting a news item, suggesting the absence of a conscious effort on the part of the Indian print media to cover EU news in a focused, comprehensive, and adequate manner.

EU perception among Indian “elites”

A total of 38 Indian stakeholders were interviewed to gauge their perceptions about the European Union. Of these, eight were former/present members of the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha as well as former ministers, ten were affiliated to big businesses, ten belonged to civil society, and the remaining ten were media elites.

The interviewees were asked to compare the importance of the EU to India in relation to a range of other countries and regions. The political elites were

Fig. 11 Evaluation of EU news according to frame



predominantly of the view that the multifaceted engagement of India with the European Union had grown significantly in recent years. However, they refrained from specifying the relative importance of the EU in relation to other countries/regions. The business elites were more forthcoming in highlighting the importance of the EU to India although many of them considered the USA to be the more important for India. However, they generally considered the EU to be a more important economic partner than China and were of the view that the EU tended to provide its Member States a better platform and greater visibility in India.

The civil society elite also regarded the USA to be more important than the EU from the perspective of Indian foreign policy. Relations with China, India's largest trading partner and neighbor, were considered to be very important. Russia has traditionally been a trusted ally and a reliable arms supplier to India while the economic dimension of the relationship with Japan is increasingly growing in importance. The civil society elites also stated that the focus of India's engagement with Europe has been more towards bilateral relationships than dealing with EU as a single entity.

The elites across all categories largely perceived the EU as only playing a global role in some areas, especially as a formidable trade negotiator. Some perceived the EU as a military power since its Member States collectively have one of the largest military budgets of the world. However, others saw the EU as a follower of the USA on global issues pertaining to military and security matters. The European Union was considered a normative power primarily because of its role in global climate negotiations and trade talks and described by some "elites" as a major player in terms of agenda setting and regulating the norms of international behavior. The EU was also referred to as a global power because of the huge strides it has made in the fields of social engineering and democratization. The Union was perceived by some to be a major actor in agenda and norm setting in international relations.

There were others who expressed the view that the EU was still at an "experimental level." Some called it an "emerging power." A Deputy Editor of an English daily suggested that if the permanent seats of Britain and France on the UN Security Council were replaced by a single EU seat, the visibility of the EU as a global power would be boosted. The elites also stated that the EU suffered from the inability to project power beyond its borders and its policies on migration tarnished its credentials as a global power.

The EU was considered to have the "potential" to emerge as a leader in international politics especially after the end of the Cold War. Welcomed as a "good formulation," the EU was generally perceived as a passive leader. Incoherence and inconsistency in EU policy in various spheres were highlighted because they lacked "a unitary will" in foreign policy. Consequently, the elites largely perceived the EU to be a "soft power" and was found wanting in making the necessary changes in areas of "hardcore" politics. The discord within the EU at the time of the Iraq War and its hesitation in taking a bold stand during the Copenhagen climate negotiations proved for some that the Union still had a long way to go for being recognized a leader in international politics. At best, some elites felt that the EU would continue to be recognized as "a big player in a great game but not the leader."

Some "elites," however, recognized the EU as a leader in international politics. To that end, they cited the positive role it has played in Afghanistan and its efforts to

improve relations with Iraq. The role played by the EU in bringing about large-scale democratization in Central and Eastern Europe was also appreciated. It was also asserted that the economic might of the EU provides it the fillip to emerge as the leader in international politics.

India–EU relations

“Elites” across all categories invariably expressed the view that economic issues continue to be crucial in defining EU–India relations. The business elites asserted that the European Union’s attempts to link trade with “extraneous” issues like labor standards and environment created obstacles in negotiations. Unresolved issues pertaining to the textile, spice, and pharmaceutical industries, they pointed out, needed to be resolved as a priority. The business elites also felt that China’s exchange rate and burgeoning trade surplus were a cause of common concern for both the EU and India.

The media elites highlighted that discussions pertaining to civilian nuclear cooperation and technology transfer had emerged as issues of considerable importance, whereas the political elites mentioned terrorism, tourism, development, free movement of labor, WTO, and climate change negotiations as the main issues of current concern. Facilitating the movement of students seeking education as well as efforts towards non-proliferation and disarmament also found frequent mention.

Free trade was seen to take precedence over all other issues to be kept in mind in the course of developing India–EU relations. It was asserted that trade imbalances that tended to favor the EU should be done away with gradually. Given India’s competitive advantage in skilled manpower, Indian elites urged that efforts be made to ease visa restrictions and legalize greater immigration of the skilled workforce in the EU. Some elites suggested that EU standards ought to be kept in mind in the course of policy making relating to manufacturing, sale, and distribution of goods and services. The Spokesperson of a leading national political party urged that

a comprehensive viewpoint should be taken and we should dwell in areas where we have our strength, whether its leather, textiles, gems and jewellery which are our important export-oriented aspects and they have an advantage on scientific and engineering goods. We need to share agreed degree of technical knowhow, transfer of technology and all these things are essential for an overall growth of the relationship.

The Delegation of the European Commission in Delhi (established in 1983) was almost completely invisible to the political elites. None of the business elites interviewed had any interaction or direct contact with the Delegation. Those political and business “elites” who were aware of the Delegation were dismissive of its role commenting “No use to me” and “None, they can’t do anything for me and my organisation.” The business elites suggested that the Delegation should facilitate the exchange of information and promote a better understanding of the European market.

Civil society “elites” were the most aware of the activities of the Delegation. Some had contact with the Delegation through its publications, website, and by means of assistance provided for developmental activities. However, a number of civil society “elites” complained that the Delegation was excessively bureaucratized

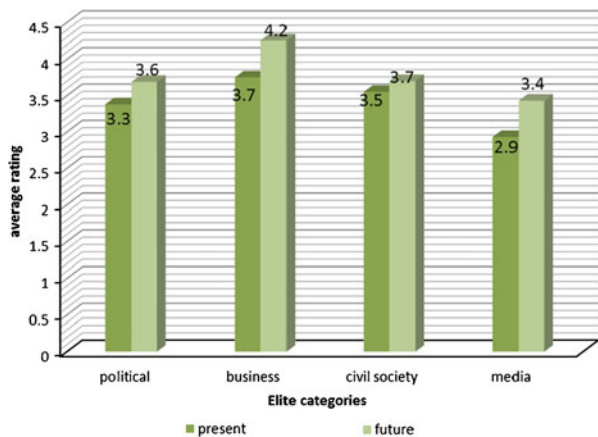
and this hindered any meaningful engagement with it. Some suggested that the EU should consider funding NGOs directly rather than approach them through governmental ministries.

The “elites” were also asked to rate the importance of the EU to India both in the present and future. There was a uniform increase across all categories. Business “elites” were the most optimistic for the present as well as the future and seemed confident of a robust growth in India–EU trade relations (see Fig. 12). Conversely, the media elites were the most hesitant in acknowledging the importance of the EU in areas other than trade and climate change negotiations. This finding is consistent with the lack of a holistic and less than adequate coverage of the EU by the media.

Almost two thirds of “elites” across all categories admitted their ignorance of the ASEM process as well as the 2008 ASEM summit held in Beijing. Many pointed out that India had been one of the late entrants to the ASEM process; consequently, ASEM had not yet succeeded in grabbing the attention of the Indian media and remained a low-key affair. Some regarded ASEM as a positive process seeking to bring Asia and Europe together and enabling India to engage within an Asian framework with and within Europe. However, one civil society representative felt that ASEM had a long way to go before it caught up with regional organizations like the Association for South East Asian Nations. It was felt that ASEM had not emerged as an effective platform since it had not succeeded in resolving any long-standing problem. A former Union Minister felt that ASEM is a “diplomatic sideshow with no real content.” Some felt that ASEM needed to become more visible to enable the average Indian to understand the importance of the EU in the Indian as well as Asian context. The last ASEM summit held in Beijing was considered to have had an overall positive effect as India attended a summit for the first time. Overall, “elites” felt that ASEM should be given more time to establish itself and prove its utility.

Perhaps surprisingly, the “elites” painted an overwhelmingly positive picture when asked about the three spontaneous images that came to their mind when thinking about the EU. No significant trend was visible regarding the spontaneous images of the European Union that differentiates between the various categories of elites. The response to this question was overwhelmingly positive with a few

Fig. 12 Importance of the EU to India’s “elites” in the present and in the future



negative comments made by one or two elites across all categories. The dominant images of all “elites” were clearly the Euro, the Schengen visa, borderlessness, the brotherhood and unity that emerged after the Second World War and of the EU being a unique experiment. There were only a handful of negative notions about the Union. The elites in general were skeptical about the political strength of the EU as an actor and about its relative significance and strength compared to the USA. The negative images of “elites” were as follows: the EU was economically strong and politically weak, lack of cultural engagement between India and EU, the TRIPS agreement, seizures of generic pharmaceutical products, arrogance about European prosperity, stability and human rights, not very understanding about the compulsions of the other parts of the world, and political questions regarding Turkish membership of the European Union.

Conclusion

The Indian elites’ perceptions of the EU have been and continue to be essentially conditioned by the Anglo-Saxon media, which impedes a more nuanced understanding of the processes and dynamics of European integration as well as the intricacies and roles of EU institutions (Jain 2009a, b).

The European Union suffers from weak visibility and low profile in India. The EU is clearly under-reported in India. The coverage of EU is both sparse and sparing and often tends to be event-driven. Because of the acute competition for space, the Union always tends to be accorded the lowest or last priority. In most cases, when news items do appear on the European Union, an Indian angle is imperative. There is virtually no interest in the nitty-gritty of EU internal wrangling because it is perceived as a hive of technicalities, proliferating regulations and as flat as the Brussels landscape. Surprisingly, the annual India–EU summit held in New Delhi on 6 November 2009 failed to get even a single reference in the three newspapers chosen for this study even though there was a concrete deliverable—the signing of an agreement on fusion energy research. News on EU development assistance is also not of much interest since the aid is project specific. How many times can one write about it? The EU is simply not “sexy” enough to evoke passion and interest in the Indian print media.

There are striking similarities between the findings of the “EU through the Eyes of Asia” project conducted in other Asian countries (Holland et al. 2007; Chaban et al. 2009) and the results obtained in India in terms of the limited media coverage of the EU with a predominant focus on India-related, especially economic and trade issues, appreciation for the Euro as an international currency, reservations about the EU as an effective actor in international politics, the comparatively greater importance of the USA in the Indian foreign policy calculus, and greater focus on bilateral relations with key EU Member States rather than the EU as a collectivity. Awareness of the ASEM process was found to be extremely low primarily because India became a member only recently. Economic and political aspects of the relationship with the EU generally tended to overshadow social and cultural dimensions.

The English-language press carries the great bulk of foreign news as well as news about the European Union. However, there is a glaring lack of articles on the critical

political, socio-economic, and cultural challenges faced by the contemporary European Union in the English-language press. Most of the articles on Europe are informative and descriptive, rather than critical; they tend more to record the event than to analyze it (Jain 2007a, b: 39). The bulk of the news and views about the EU comes to India through agencies. There are only a few exceptions, but generally this is the case because there are hardly any Indian correspondents (except a few who are freelancers and live there) among the 1,200 foreign journalists in Brussels. Almost all newspapers post correspondents in London, which is hardly the best way to understand and interpret EU developments.

The present study is of considerable importance in view of the growing political dialog between India and the European Union since misperceptions tend to adversely affect mutual cooperation and dialog. Three policy recommendations can be made. *Firstly*, the European Commission and the EC Delegation in New Delhi needs to strengthen its Press Section and calibrate its media relations. It is not a question of the lack of resources, but more a question of devising more imaginative ways to market and package information about the EU. *Secondly*, it is necessary to revive the EU media seminars for journalists from the print and electronic media, which were launched in 2001 but discontinued from 2009. While gains from such events cannot be quantified in terms of whether they generated more news items on the EU, they contribute significantly in overcoming the information deficit among journalists who are multipliers in raising awareness about the EU. *Thirdly*, the EU has mostly focused on English-language dailies which are read by the elites with the result that Hindi and vernacular language dailies are ignored. One needs to explore possibilities of preparing and circulating news items on the EU in Hindi and key regional languages. Ready-made stories have a better chance of publication than bland press releases. It is essential to explore innovative ways of how the EU can better target and synergise its media and communication strategies in key strategic partners like India in order to enhance its visibility and overcome stereotypes and misperceptions. The challenge, however, is to find a balance between EC constraints and needs of the Indian media.

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