Lost in Translation?
Images of the EU in Thai and English Language
Newspapers in Thailand

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Abstract

Conceptual studies of the external aspect of the EU’s identity are rare and empirical evidence virtually non-existent. When addressing the EU’s external relations, typically scholars cite a ‘capability-expectations’ gap: great expectations but an inability to match these with EU capabilities. However, sometimes the reverse may be the case, where external actors are aware of the limitations of Europe’s global role causing reduced expectations of EU foreign policy actions. This article adopts this as its intellectual starting point to assess whether “expectations” are too ambitious or too modest and how this contributes to the development of EU’s visibility and public diplomacy.

This article draws on the findings of a broader two-year research project – Public, Elite and Media Perceptions of the EU in the Asia Pacific Region – covering four Asia Pacific countries (two Asian, Korea and Thailand; two Pacific, Australia and New Zealand). The project had a tripartite structure employing multiple methodologies – content analysis of the EU representations in newspapers and TV news; a public opinion survey; and in-depth interviews with leading journalists, politicians and business elites. The motivation of the research was to identify and address the communication defect between the EU and the Asia-Pacific.

Keywords: European Union, Perceptions, Identity, Thailand, Media

I. Contextualising the Study

The failed referenda in France and the Netherlands on the proposed European Union “constitution” in 2005 again brought into focus the EU’s historical flaw – the dissonance between the elite nature of the integration process and the presumption of automatic public consent. The consequential fallout has led to the “period of reflection” which identified the EU’s communication deficit, and in particular European citizens’ apathy, as central to the problem. A less widely appreciated aspect of the communication

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deficit – but one that is arguably of equal importance – was a corresponding external perception deficit of the EU held in third countries. Conceptual studies of the external aspect of the EU’s identity are rare and empirical evidence virtually non-existent. When addressing the theme of the EU’s external relations, typically scholars cite Christopher Hill’s concept of a ‘capability-expectations’ gap, which argues that a gap exists between what the European Union (EU) is capable of achieving on the world stage through its economic, diplomatic and military tools, and what third parties expect of the EU. Hill has revisited his idea recently, adding that sometimes the reverse may be the case, claiming that ‘some outsiders have always been aware of the limitations of European foreign policy’ and he believes that they thus have insufficient expectations of the EU’s foreign policy actions. This article adopts this as its intellectual starting point against which to assess whether “expectations” are too ambitious or too modest and how this contributes to the development of the EU’s visibility and public diplomacy.

This article is drawn from the findings of a broader two-year, trans-national research project entitled *Public, Elite and Media Perceptions of the EU in the Asia Pacific Region: a Comparative Study* covering four Asia Pacific countries: two Asian countries, Korea and Thailand, and two Pacific countries, Australia and New Zealand. The project had a tripartite structure employing multiple methodologies – the content analysis of the EU representations in local newspapers and TV news; a public opinion survey; and in-depth interviews with leading journalists, politicians and business elites. The purpose of the research was to identify and address the communication deficit between the EU and the Asia-Pacific.

**II. Why a Case-Study of Thailand?**

The empirical content of the analysis examines this “external” communication deficit as expressed in one country within a specific region – the Asia-Pacific. The choice of this region was motivated by several factors: the significance of the Asia-Pacific region in a globalising world; the emerging “normative power” role that sees the values, priorities and “image” of the EU exported worldwide; and, the economic, security and political importance of the EU relationship to the Asia-Pacific region.

Of the four countries examined, the Thai media offered the best comparative context for analysing the perception of the EU in both the English and non-English media. Additionally, the importance of the EU-Thai link and the contemporary nature of a number of issues underlined the utility and insights that this particular case might highlight. According to the Thai Ministry of Foreign Affairs the EU constitutes “an important partner, politically and economically. Thailand has positioned the EU as the core

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region within Europe and a key player in the world arena”.3 Through ASEAN, ASEM and bilateral agreements, Thailand has established multi-level relations with the EU. Consequently, there exists a significant historical as well as contemporary relationship to examine.

Yet the relationship between the EU and South-East Asian nations has generally been described as “good but passive, rather than passionate and nowhere near their maximum potential.”4 In addition, EU-Thai relations have been hampered by frictions such as non-tariff barriers and issues relating to Myanmar. It can be posited that one cause of the rather sluggish state of the relationship is the gap between Thailand’s expectations of the EU and the capabilities of the EU to deliver. Regardless of whether expectations are surplus or in deficit, the existence of such a gap presents a threat to the relationship between the two parties. To understand what ‘expectations’ Thailand has of the EU, it is essential to examine how Thailand thinks about the EU and what the Thai perceptions of the European Union are.

III. Research Question

The theoretical approach adopted here is derived from the “common knowledge” paradigm in political communication studies by Neumann et al. This theoretical paradigm focuses on how political information is organised and structured in the public discourses of different media, and how that information compares with public and elite perceptions. This concept advocates examining a ‘three-way interaction of individual, medium, and issue,’ emphasizing ‘the systematic integration of multiple methodologies.’6 It is theorised that the image of the EU currently existing in Asia-Pacific public discourses could be regarded as a political concept based on the knowledge representation structures. Those structures exist as social ones produced and distributed through mass media, education systems and interpersonal communication, and also as a network of connected cognitive structures in a person’s memory.7

Although media exposure to EU issues is just one of many factors influencing public opinion on the EU, the media is often regarded as a crucial factor since in many cases it is an audience’s only source of information about foreign affairs – remote places, peoples, and events. Trevor Barr suggests that ‘we use media to construct our version of what the world is like and what we regard as important issues in society depends in part on how the media choose to represent them’.8 Since the media have a particularly

6 Ibid.: 19.
strong influence on our perceptions of foreign issues, it might be argued that the media exposure can even influence the formation and conduct of foreign policy.9

As a principle source of information for audiences on foreign events, the news media is argued to play a key role in shaping public and elite perceptions on foreign issues, thus influencing the direction of foreign policy. Acknowledging the impact of media on the Thailand-EU relationship, this article examines the perceptions of the leading Thai newspapers on the EU. It will address how these newspapers capture a new kind of international actor like the EU and trace similarities and differences in the presentation of the EU between Thai and English language newspapers.

Given the high number of media sources in Thailand, the research project had to limit the scope of the media analysis in terms of both time (one year – 2004) and the number of research samples.

The year 2004 was chosen for monitoring because of the number of high profile events that could be anticipated: enlargement in May; European Parliament elections in June; the conclusion of the Constitutional Convention in the same month; and the appointment of the new Barroso Commission in October. It was assumed that the EU’s international profile would be significant and would thus present a good opportunity to measure perceptions directly. The media selection criteria included the reputation, circulation numbers or audience rating, ownership, editorial policies, political diversity, a range of styles (tabloid/broadsheet) and linguistic diversity, and from this, five leading newspapers and two television primetime news bulletins were chosen for analysis. This article focuses on one medium in particular - the five chosen Thai newspapers.10

1. Thai Language Press

- Thai Rath is a mass-oriented newspaper with the highest circulation numbers in Thailand of 1,000,000 copies per day, published by The Watcharapol Ltd.
- Matichon is a newspaper with the highest number of circulation among ‘quality’ newspapers – 200,000-300,000 daily copies – published by The Matichon Group. With a rather progressive editorial policy, it targets the educated and middle-class readership.
- The Manager is a newspaper with the highest circulation among ‘business’ newspapers – approximately 100,000 copies per day. It is published by Manager Media Group, which is owned by Sondhi Limthongkul. The online edition of the paper has been registered among the five most visited websites in Thailand.11

2. English Language Press

- Bangkok Post is one of the two most popular English language newspapers in Thailand with a daily circulation of approximately 75,000 copies. Its major shareholders

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10 Information from the five newspapers is from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Media_in_Thailand.
include the Chiravit family (owners of The Central Group, one of the Thailand’s largest retailers), the South China Morning Post of Hong Kong and GMM Grammy Pcl, an influential media and entertainment firm in Thailand.

- The Nation is another popular Thai English language newspaper arguably with more local flavour and a more progressive stance than Bangkok Post. The newspaper is owned by the Nation Multimedia Group Public Company Limited. Its circulation is in the range of 60,000-80,000 copies per day.

Newspapers were chosen for our analysis because this medium presents a unique opportunity to explore the peculiarities of the framing of complex concepts of international affairs where more than one language is used by the media in one country. Framing by media is here defined following Entman’s definition: the “selection of some aspects of perceived reality to make them more salient in a communication text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, caused interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendations”.

Thus the main goal of this article is to investigate the framing of the concept “EU” by media outlets which use different languages within one country. The leading research question is how different are the frames of the EU created by three Thai-language Thai newspapers in contrast to the frames of the EU created by two English-language Thai newspapers. Does the EU become “lost in translation”?

The underlying assumption of this study is that when we study the framing of complex political concepts by news media we should pay attention to the contextual factors of the text production. One such factor is formulated in the question Who is saying this? This article argues that the language of the media outlet within a country (which, of course, is the result of a particular ownership strategy in the present or a management choice in the past) is one of the crucial factors to consider when we deal with Asian media discourses in general and the EU images in them in particular.

IV. Framing of the concept “European Union”

1. Volume of representation

The volume of news items featuring the EU demonstrated two patterns in the dynamics of press interest in the EU (Graph 1). It was observed that, in 2004, the two English language newspapers, Bangkok Post and The Nation – whose readers are mostly foreign and national elites – featured a higher number of EU news items per month than the three Thai language newspapers monitored. Bangkok Post and, to a lesser degree, The Nation, introduced news relating to the EU almost daily (26 and 20 news items on average per month respectively).

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Conversely, the volume of EU news items published by the Thai language newspapers was, on average, 13 news items per month in Manager, 9 in Matichon and 7 in Thai Rath. It is important to note that Thai Rath, the newspaper with the highest circulation numbers in the country in both language categories, featured the lowest volume of the EU news – 85 news items in total for 2004. This figured is compared to 306 news items in the Bangkok Post, 239 in The Nation, 150 in Matichon and 107 in Manager.

**Graph 1: Distribution of news items per month in five Thai newspapers in 2004**

Proportionally, the news coverage of the EU by English language newspapers was almost three times higher than that by Thai language newspapers (Graph 2). It could be argued that since Thai newspapers, whose readership is the broader Thai public, featured a relatively low volume of EU news, there was a significant disparity between the visibility of the EU in the Thai media in the public and elite spheres.

**Graph 2: Distribution of EU news between Thai and English language newspapers in 2004**
2. Monthly distribution of news

The monthly distribution of news referencing the EU in Thai newspapers revealed a close similarity across the five newspapers irrespective of the language of the outlet (Graph 3).

**Graph 3: Monthly distribution of EU news in Thai newspapers in 2004**

![Graph 3](image)

The volume of EU news coverage gradually increased during the first three months of 2004 when the avian flu epidemic erupted, and peaked during April, May and June corresponding with the EU’s highly anticipated fifth enlargement on the 1st of May and the European Parliament elections in June. The news volume then dropped sharply (partially attributable to the fact that the June-August period is a traditional European vacation time), before rising again in the last three months of the year when there were three prominent events relating to the EU: an EU-Thai dispute concerning the General System of Preferences (GSP) scheme and Airbus, the ASEM summit, and the controversial presidential election in Ukraine where the EU was a key mediator.

3. Focus of domestic contextualization of the EU news

In addition to tracing the dynamics of EU coverage in the Thai print media, this paper also discusses how the EU was presented in the press – what type of actor it was portrayed as in the news. Three factors were seen to trigger the appearance of the EU in news coverage: domestic Thai issues involving the EU; major events in the EU; and major international issues that included information relating to the EU. Correspondingly, EU news were analysed according to a tripartite scheme – EU in the context of Thailand, EU in the context of the EU and EU in the context of the third party.

A close observation demonstrated that, again, a split between the English language and Thai language newspapers existed (Graph 4). The EU’s coverage in Bangkok
Post and The Nation was largely presented from a foreign context, both from the EU itself and from third countries. By contrast, the three Thai language newspapers featured a more significant proportion of EU news grounded in domestic issues with this trend being most prominent in Matichon.

Graph 4: Focus of domestic contextualization of the EU in Thai newspapers in 2004

It could be argued then that the Thai elite, who are most likely to access English language newspapers, were more frequently presented with images relating to the EU’s internal affairs and the EU as a global actor, whereas the general Thai public who rely more heavily on the Thai language newspapers were more exposed to EU news that was grounded in the domestic discourse (EU news in Thailand). By comparison, the EU’s internal affairs (EU news in the context of the EU) were generally marginalised in Thai Rath and Matichon, and the EU was scarcely recognised as an important international actor (EU news in the context of the third party) in both Manager and Matichon. The largely business-oriented readership of the Manager, which would arguably be interested in EU internal business developments, may be one possible explanation for the high ratio of the EU-focussed news in this particular newspaper.

4. Sources of news

We observed that in the English language newspapers, international sources of news led the EU coverage – 81 percent of EU news in Bangkok Post and 62 percent in The Nation originated from international news agencies or from overseas authors. This compares to 41 percent of international sources for the EU news in Matichon, 26 percent in Manager, and just 1 percent in Thai Rath.\(^\text{14}\) In contrast, local sources (both

\(^\text{14}\) There is a possible explanation to this very low percentage of international sources detected in the Thai Rath case. We suggest that some of the newspapers’ EU news in the category “N/A” (35%) could have
the local correspondents and the national news agencies) were the preferred sources of information on the EU among the Thai language newspapers: 65 percent of EU news in Manager was of local origin, 64 percent in Thai Rath, and 50 percent in Matichon. That compares to 13 percent of local sources for the EU news in Bangkok Post and 36 percent in The Nation (Graph 5). This indicates an editorial preference in the English language newspapers to rely heavily on international sources when presenting the EU to their largely elite readership, while popular Thai language newspapers mostly depend on local sources in their EU representations.

There are some obvious reasons for this tendency. It is understandable, for example, that a newspaper published in English would rely strongly on English language sources, such as international news agencies, especially for foreign news. International news agencies, which are both well-placed and well-resourced, are a particularly cost-effective source of international (and hence EU) news when compared to the additional resources (travel, translation, etc) required for local reporters to acquire the same news. Another reason for this is linked to the earlier point that Thai language newspapers typically reported about the EU in the domestic context and would hence rely more on local reporters and analysts than the English language newspapers which reported more on EU in the context of the EU and third parties.

Graph 5: Source of the EU news in five Thai newspapers in 2004

When using international sources to access information on the EU, Thai editors of both English and Thai language newspapers drew on a limited number of international news wires; namely Agence France Presse (AFP), Associated Press (AP), and Reuters (Graph 6). Other international sources (for example, BBC, the New York Times, The Financial Times, The Guardian, The Economist, the Dow Jones Index among others) were used only occasionally. It is worth noting that the Western international news possibly originated from international sources. However, since it was impossible to trace the origin of the news (newspaper itself did not attribute origin of those pieces of news), this is only our suggestion.
wires led among the international sources.

**Graph 6: Distribution of the sources of EU news in 2004**

Yet, each monitored newspaper had a different preferred international source of EU news. The two English language newspapers primarily used Reuters as their source of news on the EU – 33 percent of all EU news that appeared in the Bangkok Post and 21 percent in The Nation. In contrast, two Thai language newspapers – Manager and Matichon – preferred AFP as their primary source of information on the EU accounting for 23 percent of all EU news that appeared in Matichon and 11 percent in The Manager (Graph 7). This choice was tentatively explained in an interview with a Thai media representative. One interviewed foreign news editor alluded to the fact that AFP, being a French news agency, writes news in a style of English which is easier to understand for non-native speakers than that of some of the British news agencies.

**Graph 7. Preferred international sources of EU news in Thai newspapers in 2004**

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15 Thai Rath, due to its very low use of international sources (1 percent), was excluded from the analysis.

16 Pongparit, 2005, Interview.
5. Information Inputs

To evaluate the content of news in greater detail, our study systematically assessed the text of news items containing references to the EU. Every sentence containing a reference to the EU was treated as a proposition, our basic sampling unit. Steen\(^\text{17}\) defines propositions as:

“minimal idea units representing the conceptual content of linguistic expressions. They consist of a conceptual predicate and one or more conceptual arguments, in the form of predicate calculus. They have been used in text psychology to get from the linguistic surface structure of the text to the conceptual text base, a linearly ordered and hierarchically organised list of propositions expressing the content of a text in a form that closely corresponds to the language itself … propositions may be seen as miniature ideas or thoughts”.

Three clusters of propositions were identified in the analysed texts: the EU as a political actor, the EU as an economic actor and the EU as an actor in the field of social affairs (Graph 8).

**Graph 8: Distribution of information inputs in Thai newspapers in 2004**

![Graph showing distribution of information inputs in Thai newspapers in 2004]

The above graph presents the distribution of coverage across these three information inputs and reveals that – with the exception of *Matichon* – images of the EU as a political actor led newspaper coverage. The theme ‘EU as a political actor’ was associated with almost 63 percent of all propositions in the *Bangkok Post*, 59 percent in *The Nation*, 57 percent in *Thai Rath*, and 52 percent in the *Manager*. Interestingly, *Matichon*,

a politically-oriented newspaper, represented the EU primarily as economic actor. Economic news referencing the EU constituted 75 percent of all propositions in this newspaper, while political news accounted for only 23 percent, notably lower than the political propositions in the other four newspapers. In Manager, a business-focused newspaper, the presentation of the EU seemed to provide the most balanced view of the EU as both an economic power and as a political actor (51 percent and 43 percent of coverage respectively).

It may thus be argued that despite its common association as a regional economic grouping, in the year 2004 the EU’s political dimension became more visible than its economic actions, both to the broader Thai public as well as to the country’s business and political elite. This might be attributed to a number of unusual events during that year highlighting the EU’s political role, such as the changeover of the Commission (October) and the European Parliament elections (June), events that only occur every five years. The terrorist attacks in Madrid (March) were another unusual and tragic event that generated much international news attention for the EU, reports of which were typically classed for the purposes of our analysis as ‘political’.

The theme ‘the EU as a social actor’ was scarcely visible in all five newspapers – 9 percent of all EU news in Thai Rath, 4 percent in Manager and Bangkok Post, 3 percent in The Nation, and only 2 percent in Matichon. It would appear from this, that the EU lacked a ‘human dimension’ in Thai newspapers in 2004.

5.1 Informational Input ‘EU as a political actor’

Examining the theme ‘EU as a political actor’ more closely, two sub-categories of EU political action became evident in the newspapers’ coverage: the internal and external affairs of the EU. Internal affairs refers to the establishment of the Union, encompassing issues such as the integration process and enlargement as well as administration issues like the EU’s decision-making processes, summits and legislation. External affairs deal with the EU’s relations with other countries, regions and organisations as well as the EU’s global diplomacy role. The distribution of the frames “EU’s internal affairs” and “EU external affairs” across the newspapers is represented in Graph 9.

Almost all of the sampled newspapers, excepting the Bangkok Post, stressed the EU’s external relationships. When shown as a political actor in the Thai print media, the EU was primarily seen as interacting extensively with third parties such as Thailand, ASEAN and the United States, and through its engagement in the international arena in areas like the campaign for the Kyoto Protocol ratification and unrest within Iraq.

As can be seen from the above chart, Matichon particularly gave clear priority to the EU’s external affairs over the internal changes within the Union. The readers of the Bangkok Post by comparison, were exposed to EU internal issues proportionally more frequently than readers of the four other monitored newspapers. This may advocate a priority of this newspaper to educate its Thai audiences on complex international developments (including EU internal dynamics). Another possibility may be drawn from a profile of the newspaper’s readership. It is read by the leading decision makers in Thailand, but it is also promoted as the “voice and mirror of Thailand”, and, thus, is read

by members of the international community involved with Thailand. It could be argued, that this cosmopolitan readership is more motivated to follow the EU’s internal developments. Another possibility is the nature of news sources selected by the editors of the Bangkok Post – that is, the Western news agencies (e.g., Reuters and AFP) which are more prone to introduce EU news in the context of the EU -certainly than they are to introduce EU news in the domestic (Thai) context.

Graph 9: Distribution of representations “EU’s internal affairs” and “EU external affairs” in Thai newspapers in 2004

5.1.1 Frame, “EU’s external affairs” of the information input “EU as a political actor”

A closer examination of the print news coverage on EU external affairs demonstrated that the topics most visible across all the sampled newspapers were issues relating to the EU-ASEAN relationship and the related issues of friction between the two parties over the prospect of Myanmar’s participation in the ASEM summit. It should be noted that the year 2004 coincided with the fifth ASEM summit during which there were many heated debates over the legitimacy of Myanmar’s participation in the summit. News relating to the discord between the EU and ASEAN members, including Thailand, was periodically covered from early 2004 until October when the summit was held in Vietnam.

It was further observed that the English language newspapers featured a broader range of topics than their Thai language counterparts (Table 1). Bangkok Post and The Nation stressed such topics as the EU’s role in Iran’s nuclear affairs, EU-US relations, the EU’s role in the Ukraine presidential election and Middle East conflicts, particularly the Iraq War and Israel. While not addressing EU global interactions to the same extent as the two English-language newspapers, Thai Rath covered broadly similar topics to these two newspapers. The notable profiling of the EU in its interactions with China in Manager can be attributed to the fact that Manager contains a special one-page section which regularly features China and could have incidentally highlighted EU issues as
well as the fact that the EU was also featured in the paper’s international news section as one of China’s interlocutors.

Table 1: The most visible topics of the frame “EU’s external affairs” of the information input “EU as a political actor”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bangkok Post</th>
<th>The Nation</th>
<th>Manager</th>
<th>Matichon</th>
<th>Thai Rath</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EU and ASEAN - Myanmar Issues</td>
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<td>EU-Iran</td>
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<td>EU-US</td>
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<td>EU-China</td>
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<td>EU-Ukraine</td>
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<td>Middle East/Iraq</td>
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<td>Global diplomacy</td>
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It could be concluded then that readers of Bangkok Post, The Nation, and to a lesser degree Thai Rath, were exposed to the various roles of the EU in the international arena. Readers of Manager instead saw a heightened involvement of the EU with the rising power of China, and Matichon readers were presented information relating to the EU’s involvement in their region.

5.1.2 Frame, “EU’s internal affairs” of the information input “EU as a political actor”

An exposition of the EU’s internal affairs’ coverage indicated that the predominant issue across all five sampled newspapers irrespective of the language of reporting was the fifth enlargement of the EU which saw eight Central and Eastern European and two Mediterranean countries accede to the Union in May 2004 (Table 2). The coverage of this topic was particularly intense between April and June. Indeed, in two newspapers – Bangkok Post and The Nation – the issue was the most dominant of all EU-related news in 2004.

Table 2: The most visible topics of the frame, “EU’s internal politics” of the information input “EU as a political actor”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bangkok Post</th>
<th>The Nation</th>
<th>Manager</th>
<th>Matichon</th>
<th>Thai Rath</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EU Enlargement</td>
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<td>EU Constitution</td>
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<td>Turkish application</td>
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<td>EU administration</td>
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<td>Internal politics of Member States</td>
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<td>History</td>
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Aside from EU enlargement issues, as with the external politics issues, *Bangkok Post* and *The Nation* again featured a more diverse range of EU internal affairs topics than did the Thai language newspapers. *Bangkok Post* featured the greatest variety of topics with particularly detailed information on EU internal affairs and the political situations of its member states relating to the EU, such as internal legislation and elections both at national and supranational levels.

In the three Thai language newspapers, EU internal affairs received relatively low attention. Enlargement was not as extensively reported as in the English language newspapers and only the *Manager* expressed some interest in the developments of the EU constitution. It could be claimed that without a ‘key’ event like the enlargement, EU internal affairs would rarely feature in the Thai press. Interestingly, *Thai Rath* appeared to have some interest in presenting information about the history of Europe to their readers – arguably for those readers, the EU may have become lost in the depths of the European continent’s history.

### 5.2 Information Input “EU as an economic actor”

In the information input “EU as an economic actor”, all five sampled newspapers irrespective of the language of reporting paid significant attention to the avian flu crisis and the impact of this pandemic on Thai chicken exports to the EU and, to a lesser degree, Thai discontent about the EU’s scheme for Thai shrimp exports (Table 3).

Unlike the political frame, there was no split in economic news coverage content between the English and Thai newspapers. Like *Bangkok Post* and *The Nation*, *Matichon* and *Manager* were also interested in the EU’s internal economic arrangements, including the state of EU economic and monetary policy, as well as the EU’s activities in international trade, for example, the Union’s role in the WTO, the computer industry, and trade relations with the US. It was notable that while *Matichon* was disinterested in a diversity of EU political news coverage, in the economic frame topics featured by this newspaper were highly varied. Only *Thai Rath* showed a lack of interest in reporting EU economic news that was not grounded in the Thai domestic discourse.

| Table 3: Information input “EU as an economic actor” |
|--------------------------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Industry                             | Bangkok Post     | The Nation       | Manager          | Matichon         | Thai Rath         |
|                                     | Shrimp           |                  |                  |                  |                  |
|                                     | Computer/IT      |                  |                  |                  |                  |
| Agriculture                         |                  | Avian flu        | EU-US trade relations | EU-Thai trade relations |
|                                     |                  |                  |                   |                   |                  |
| Trade                               | EU-US trade relations | EU in international trade/WTO |
| State of Economy                    | EU economic growth/decline |                  |                  |                  |                  |
| Business/Finance                    | EU Finance/Monetary policy/euro | Competition regulations |                  |                  |                  |
5.3 Information input “EU as an actor in the social affairs field”

The ‘EU as an actor in the social affairs field’ frame was the least represented EU news category in all five newspapers. It constituted less than 5 percent of all EU news items in the sampled newspapers, and the topics themselves were so varied that it was difficult to find a commonality across any newspapers. The frame included issues ranging from the EU’s sponsorship of scientific research, activities organised by the European Commission Delegation in Thailand such as the EU Film Festival, and environmental protection to sports like football. Only one common topic could be found in the two English newspapers. The Bangkok Post and, to a lesser extent, The Nation, both gave limited attention to EU internal social issues such as welfare and social legislation.

6. Evaluation

Using a systematic coding process, this study examined the prevailing attitudes of the news authors towards the EU as an international actor and their distribution according to the language of the newspaper. The evaluations detected were coded as either positive, neutral or negative (Graph 10).

Graph 10: Evaluations assigned to the EU representations in Thai newspapers in 2004

Graph 10 illustrates the representations of the EU in Thailand’s leading national newspapers, and shows that those representations carried a predominantly neutral evaluation – approximately 66 percent of all articles in the monitored Thai press. The English newspapers featured slightly more normative news, that is, news deemed to be either positive or negative rather than neutral. This distribution of evaluation may possibly be explained by the Thai journalism tradition discussed by Duncan McCargo, namely, the clear distinction in most Thai newspapers between news reports and opin-

ions. Thai journalists usually restrain themselves from making evaluative comments in news items in a ‘news reports’ section, but use sharper assessments in an ‘opinion’ section. The EU news under observation was mostly featured in ‘news reports’ sections. Another possibility for sharper evaluations in the English language newspapers may be the origin of the news – Western sources which, as demonstrated earlier, were used extensively in the English language newspapers. These sources tend to employ news values of conflict and controversy to secure their readership and attract the interest of ‘news hunters’ from international media outlets. In such a context, more disparate evaluations are portrayed.

When making an assessment of its actions, the press in Thailand, irrespective of the language of reporting, were inclined to attach negative connotations to the EU – 30 percent in The Nation and 27 percent in Thai Rath and Matichon, followed by 26 percent in Bangkok Post, and 15 percent in Manager. This may correlate to the fact that the most exposed issues in Thai newspapers were issues relating to tensions between EU and Thailand arising from the avian flu crisis and Myanmar’s legitimacy in the ASEM summit. Manager, however, was the only newspaper of the five that featured a more weighted distribution of positively and negatively charged EU news (a 12:12 percent ratio). It should be noted that most positive news items in Manager were attributed to articles about the fifth enlargement, portraying celebrations of the event. A more visible negative slant in news reporting could also be attributed to a general tendency of news media to prioritise negative information. Negativity prevails in news media since negative messages carry more weight than positive ones, owing to their prurient appeal to the public memory.20

It could be concluded then that in 2004, the Thai press typically neutrally assessed the EU but once evaluations were made they were more inclined to portray the EU negatively. Though Manager’s output represented a balance between negative and positive attitudes, most of the positive news items belonged to a one-off significant event – the enlargement.

V. Images of the EU (Cases of Content Analysis)

What follows is a selection of metaphors highlighting more detailed portrayals of the EU by the Thai press. To compare how the detailed framing of EU images occurs in newspapers and how it relates to the language of reporting, this paper chose to explore the three most visible topics that were found in all five newspapers in 2004; namely, the avian flu, EU-ASEAN relations and the EU’s fifth enlargement.

The semantic tool of metaphors was chosen to illustrate the imagery of the EU being presented to Thai audiences. Lakoff and Johnson21 argue that we consciously and subconsciously rely on metaphors embedded in everyday language to inform our under-

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21 Lakoff, George and Johnson, Mark, Metaphors We Live By, Chicago: University of Chicago, 2003.
standing of the world. They are a primary conceptual construction which play a central role in developing thought, and as such, can leave strong and long-lasting impressions on readers who may be unaware of the use of metaphors. Precisely because of their often hidden presence in ordinary language (including that of the news media) metaphors possess a particular potency. Metaphors provide vivid and efficient descriptions. As such, they are often employed by the media and in public policy as they are known to be powerful tools in influencing, and even manipulating public perception.

Typically, Thai media consumers do not have first-hand experience of the EU and thus, it is argued, rely more heavily on the messages and images they receive from external sources – such as the metaphorical imagery located in the Thai news media.

1. Case I: The avian flu in the context of the Thai-EU trade relations

The leading metaphorical pattern in the news items discussing the EU in relation to the avian flu outbreak in South East Asia was the personification of the EU whereby the Union was given human features and attributes. In the Thai language newspapers the EU was depicted as someone who, in interacting with Thailand, became easily anxious and would react aggressively for self-protection. The Thai language newspaper Manager, for example, reported that “scared of the bird flu, the EU issued an extension of Asian chicken ban.” Additionally, “the EU seemed to be eager to ban Thai boiled chicken.”

English language newspapers used personified categorizations to show a more pro-active defensive position of the EU. For example, the EU’s impact on the Thai poultry industry was described in terms of physical assault: “Top importers like…the EU have slapped bans on Thai poultry.”

2. Case II: EU-ASEAN relations

On the topic of EU-ASEAN relations, the majority of the located metaphoric evaluations again personified relations between the two regional groupings. More specifically, the EU and ASEAN were depicted as having a personal relationship. This relationship was repeatedly described by English language newspapers as troubled. It was depicted for example as a “sour relationship” in need of an improvement or upgrade or a way out. The two sides were noted to be in a state of “battle” or separated by “rift”. With the exception of coverage about the Burmese (Myanmar) junta, the EU was often blamed as the party responsible for the troubled state in the relation-

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22 ‘อียูหวั่นหวัดนก สั่งแบนไก่เอเชียตอีก 3 เดือน’, (Manager, 15 September 2004).
23 ‘อียูจ้องแบนไก่ต้มสุกจากไทย’, (Manager, 23 November 2004).
24 ‘Top importers like Japan and the EU have slapped bans on Thai poultry’, (The Nation, 26 January 2004).
26 ‘Quiet diplomacy is expected to resolve a spat’, (Bangkok Post, 22 March 2004).
27 ASEAN’s hard mentality is only emboldening Rangoon, (The Nation, 28 June 2004).
28 ‘Quite diplomacy is expected to resolve a spat’ (Bangkok Post, 22 March 2004).
29 ‘ASEAN still bogged down,’ (The Nation, 29 March 2004).
ship between it and Thailand. The EU’s hard stance on Myanmar was viewed as a major obstacle in the path of smooth relations with ASEAN. As one news item claimed, the EU had “blocked the Asian side from nominating Burma to join” ASEM. ASEAN was reported to be patient but the EU was considered to have “crossed a line by trying to dictate to them who should be included in their side of the ASEM forum”. The EU was also portrayed as a person advocating “double standards”.

Thai language newspapers were more reserved in their portrayals of EU-ASEAN interactions and did not depict the interactions in the obvious terms of battered relations employed by their English language counterparts. Still, the EU was shown as an entity that advocated discrimination, a body that patronised ASEAN, and an institution that was ready to react in a hostile manner if its demands were not met.

3. Case III: The Fifth Enlargement of the European Union

The portrayal of the EU by the leading newspapers in Thailand on the topic of the 2004 enlargement featured a more diverse range of metaphorical categories than the former two topics. Both metaphors of personification and metaphors of space and movement were traced in abundance in both English and Thai language newspapers. Moreover, in contrast to the two previous cases where negative evaluations of the EU prevailed, Thai print media coverage on enlargement often featured a balanced presentation of both the positive and negative sides of enlargement.

English language newspapers highlighted themes of physical separation and overcoming this division. The EU was sometimes depicted as a continent being first divided in the course of history, then as coming together and overcoming the split, and then as a unified space becoming divided internally with parts growing further apart. For example, while “political leaders and ordinary people hailed the final closing of Europe’s east-west divide”, “many tough issues still face the enlarged EU…not least the economic disparity between the east and west”.

English language newspapers also used spatial metaphors to characterize EU enlargement portraying it as a path or road. It was often presented in Bangkok Post as “the end of a long and difficult journey”.

Metaphors of human relationships were common in enlargement news in English language newspapers. The EU and its member states were often depicted as a family or as neighbours. The Eastern and Central European countries were presented “returning to

30 ‘Quiet diplomacy is expected to resolve a spat’ (Bangkok Post, 22 March 2004).
31 ‘Working to put ASEM back on the radar,’ (The Nation, 11 June 2004).
32 ‘Burma tops agenda for ASEAN ministers’ (The Nation, 29 June 2004).
33 ‘EU has double standards’ (The Nation, 25 June 2004).
34 ‘ยิ่งยุ่งยุ่งยุ่งนั้น รัฐบาลเป็นสมาชิกอาเซียนดิ่งทะเลภูเขา’ (Manager, 19 April 2004).
35 ‘ยิ่งยุ่งยุ่งยุ่งนั้น รัฐบาลเป็นสมาชิกอาเซียนดิ่งทะเลภูเขา’ (Manager, 24 June 2001).
36 ‘ยิ่งยุ่งยุ่งยุ่งนั้น รัฐบาลเป็นสมาชิกอาเซียนดิ่งทะเลภูเขา’ (Manager, 4 April 2004).
37 ‘ยิ่งยุ่งยุ่งยุ่งนั้น รัฐบาลเป็นสมาชิกอาเซียนดิ่งทะเลภูเขา’ (Manager, 9 October 2004).
38 ‘Closing the east-west divide-EU flags fly across Malta, Cyprus, eight former Soviet states’ (Bangkok Post, 2 May 2004).
39 ‘A continent once again united’ (The Nation, 2 May 2004).
40 ‘EU welcomes new states’ (Bangkok Post, 1 May 2004).
[their] European family”. However, relations in this EU family were not always described as amicable. It was considered that the unequal partnerships between “the rich west” and “the poor newcomers” could escalate into “an ill-tempered battle”.

Thai language newspapers used similar metaphorical categorisations. Spatial metaphoric evaluations were used by Thai language print media - EU enlargement was seen as a “thorny path that has just begun”, as were human emotions to describe enlargement. Although joy and happiness were pervading the EU with every country celebrating this historic event, Thai Rath warned the EU of a “political hangover” after the party.

VI. General Public and National Elite Images of the EU

In addition to monitoring the Thai media, the study also investigated the knowledge and opinions towards the EU held by the Thai public and elite. For public opinion, this involved a nation-wide telephone survey (a random sample of 400 people), and for the elites it involved face to face in-depth interviews with a range of the country’s business, political and media elites (sample of 20 interviewees). One of the questions asked of respondents from both categories was what three spontaneous images of the EU came to mind when they heard the words, “the European Union” or “EU”.

The findings of this question are interesting for this particular paper because of their striking difference from the results of the media monitoring. While the Thai print media was predominated by coverage of the EU’s political capacities, such imagery was not reflected in the understandings of the EU by the Thai public or elite (Graph 11 and Tables 4 and Table 5).

Graph 11: Spontaneous images of the EU (public opinion survey)

40 ‘In Europe, East and the West meet’ (The Nation, 2 May 2004).
41 ‘Party Over: Enlarged EU faces early challenges’ (Bangkok Post, 3 May 2004).
42 ‘อียูยุคใหม่: กำลังสำคัญที่ต้องจับตา’ (Matichon, 3 May 2004).
43 ‘อียูขยายปีเคлом 25 ประเทศ’ (Thai Rath, 2 May 2004).
Table 4: Spontaneous images of the EU mentioned more than once by Thai elites

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Images</th>
<th>Number of times mentioned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trade, trade barriers, economic protectionism, inward looking market</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic unity, high trade bargaining power</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Euro</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One of the three big in the world, one of the three ‘pillars’, balance to the US</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High living standards, unique lifestyle</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civilization, high level of development</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High product standards, GMO concerns</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political unity, confederation of independent states, example of integration</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disunity (internal problems, internal conflicts)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader in technology</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: Spontaneous images of the EU mentioned only once by Thai elites

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Images</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ASEM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completely different from us</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Airbus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU festival in Bangkok</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complex decision making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free movement of labour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bureaucracy / Brussels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bloc of European countries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Troika” - the UK, Germany and France</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nice place to live and visit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Big</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old powers looking to restore their greatness</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although issues relating to the EU’s internal and external political activities were the leading themes across all five of the monitored Thai newspapers in this study, images of the EU’s economic and trade power prevailed in the minds of the Thai public and elite. For the elite, these images were not necessarily positive ones but were instead framed largely in terms of the perceived trade barriers and economic protectionism of the EU, as well as the role of the Euro.

The leading image of the EU as a political actor amongst Thai elites was a vision of the EU as a prospective counterweight to the US, but this meaning was generally linked to a concept of a tri-polar world, in which the EU was one of three global forces
together with the US and the Asia-Pacific (often represented by China and Japan).

Images of the EU as an actor in the social sphere were particularly visible on both the Thai public and elite agendas – culture, education and a high level of living standards led the list of spontaneous images. The EU was seen by the Thai public and elites as being a technological leader in the world, and the Thai public also saw the EU as a desirable destination – with tourism being the second most conjured image when thinking about the EU.

VI. Discussion and Conclusions

Aiming to capture the image of the EU as it is portrayed in the Thai press, this paper finds certain differences as well as similarities between the Thai English-language newspapers largely read by foreign and national elites (Bangkok Post and The Nation), and the Thai language newspapers read by the broader public (Thai Rath, Matichon and Manager).

The most notable difference in the EU presentations was the degree of visibility. The EU was three times more visible in the two English newspapers in the year 2004 than it was in the Thai language newspapers, implying a gap between the visibility of the EU in the Thai media targeting the public and elite spheres.

Additionally, whilst all the sampled newspapers (with the exception of Matichon) saw the EU primarily as a political power, in the English newspapers it was viewed primarily in the context of foreign affairs, both in the European and international arenas. It could be argued that Bangkok Post and The Nation saw the importance of the EU grounded in an international context, not in a domestic one. Conversely, the Thai language newspapers featured the EU largely in the local or regional context.

These two distinct patterns of framing the EU may be grounded in the different preferred sources of the EU news (international news agencies for English language newspapers and local sources for Thai language newspapers) as well as different profiles of the respective readerships. Thai national and international elites are the primary readers of the two English newspapers. Since elites, in general, are well travelled and well educated, a cosmopolitan angle in a news media outlet targeting elites is to be expected. By contrast, media outlets targeting the general public usually need an additional “hook” to secure an audience’s interest to foreign news about remote and seemingly irrelevant places. One such “hook” is grounding international news in domestic discourses and connecting foreign events to local happenings.

Both strategies in international news reporting (i.e., “cosmopolitanism” and the “national hook”) have certain advantages and disadvantages. The former strategy presents foreign counterparts in detail, but risks alienating the average reader who tends to have no first-hand experience with foreign places, peoples and events. The latter strategy attracts local readers, but risks overlooking important foreign developments that have no local ties.44

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44 Ginsberg, Thomas, “Rediscovering the World: September 11 Showed All Too Clearly What a Terrible Mistake it was for America’s News Media to Largely Ignore Foreign News,” American Journalism Re-
Yet, several similarities in the presentation of the EU by the English and Thai newspapers were identified. While the specific foci of the EU political news coverage differed, the focus of economic news coverage across the five newspapers was similar. It appeared that the framing of the EU as an economic power in both English and Thai language newspaper followed almost identical lines - the EU was presented as an important economic power whose internal development and role in international trade affect both the Thai and world economies significantly.

This study offers several explanations for the striking difference between media and public perceptions demonstrated in this paper. Arguably, a possible explanation for the dominant perception of the EU as an economic actor in the images of both the public and elites, contrary to the dominant image of the EU as a political actor in the media, may be found in the nature of news reporting in Thai language newspapers. The print outlets most popular with the general public presented the EU in its economic frame with greater diversity than in the two other frames (EU as a political power and EU as an actor in the social sphere). Moreover, both popular and elite newspapers employed this more diversified framing of the EU as an economic power. This framing included extensive attention to such topics as EU finance systems, EU monetary policy, the Euro, EU economic growth and/or decline, EU-Thai trade relations, EU in international trade in general and the EU role in the WTO in particular, EU achievements and policies in the information technologies industries, EU actions towards exports shrimp, and, finally, the avian flu in Thailand and EU actions in this regard.

This seems to somewhat conflict with our empirical finding that the EU was more prominent as a political rather than economic actor in all newspapers except Matichon. The more diversified framing described above refers to a greater number of topics in the economic category, but this list of topics was drawn from a smaller pool of articles compared with the number of articles in the political category. Fewer topics in more articles in the political category suggests a higher concentration of particular messages (and perhaps images) in that category, and it could be assumed that such intensified portrayals of certain messages would have a greater impact on readers than would a diverse but perhaps splintered image. It could be posited that the concept of filtering is coming into play in this framing of the EU. There is a significant body of research that suggests that, despite the messages that readers are exposed to, they are able to filter the incoming information for messages that they consider to be of higher relevance and which conform to their existing beliefs. In this case, we would suggest that economic concerns more directly affect the daily lives of ordinary people. Though the Thai public are exposed to a smaller quantity of such news, these images adhere in their minds more, whereas high level political meetings amongst ‘Eurocrats’ and Asian politicians seem not to hold the same readily recognised relevance. In a “catch-22” situation, the lack of media images of the EU acting internally (with the exception of EU enlargement issues)

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45 Curtice and Semetko, for example, investigated the influence of the press on election behaviour and, finding only limited newspaper effects over the long term, concluded that “many electors still appear to view newspaper reports (and watch television news) through a partisan filter that enables them to ignore politically uncongenial messages.” See J. Curtice and H. Semetko, ‘Does it Matter What the Papers Say?’, in A. Heath et al, Labour’s Last Chance? The 1992 Election and Beyond, Dartmouth, London, 1994: 56.
could be explained by the fact that EU internal affairs are thought by media producers to have little relevance for Thai people and thus such news tends to be underrepresented.

Another possible explanation could be in the nature of stereotypical imagery – even if the news media has somehow shifted the accents in the way it represents the EU to reflect the EU’s growing political role in world affairs, the existing dominant perceptions of the public are more difficult and slower to change. Arguably, influenced by the previous media framings, the public still see the EU as an “economic giant”.

Another explanation for the discrepancies between media and public priorities assigned to the meanings of the EU may lie in the fact that news media, although a very important source of information on foreign counterparts, is still just one of many factors that can influence public opinion. Research indicates that factors such as personal involvement and interpersonal communication significantly shape the context and potentially influence public attitudes, cognition, and behaviour. This position could serve as one possible explanation of why the meanings of the EU in terms of tourism, technology, and education were more visible in public opinion on the EU, despite receiving little coverage in the press. Arguably, these meanings still represent tangible concepts that the public can recognise and associate with. Such issues may become more easily recalled due to a reasonably high level of personal exposure of Thai people to Europe in terms of travelling to Europe for tourist, work, or education purposes, having friends or family members living in an EU country as well as conducting business with Europeans and hosting European tourists in Thailand.

Both the English and Thai language press presented the EU from a predominantly neutral perspective. However, when an assessment was made, the newspapers in both language categories were inclined to negatively evaluate the EU. A general tendency of the news media to prioritise negativity in order to attract audiences’ attention could be to blame. Another possibility may be that the most visible topics of EU news were that news featuring tensions between EU and Thailand or the EU and ASEAN. The detailed analysis of imagery in terms of metaphors revealed that the EU’s portrayal was far from one of a benevolent partner – instead, the EU was depicted as a nervous person who would resort to aggressive measures for self-preservation when confronting a threat (e.g. avian flu), or as a difficult, self-interested and patronising partner (e.g. when it comes to EU-ASEAN relations).

It is fair to conclude that portrayals of the EU in the leading Thai and English language newspapers of Thailand broadly paralleled the different approaches taken by the news media when targeting different audience groups. In the case of Thailand, the obvious linguistic difference indicated a deeper difference between the targeted readership – national and international elites in the case of English language newspapers, and the general public in the case of Thai language newspapers. We argue that in the schol-

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47 For reviews see, Fiske & Taylor, 1984; Ball-Rokeach, 1985; Lasorsa and Wanta, 1990; Wanta and Wu, 1992; Weaver et al., 1992; Wicks, 1992; Zhu et al., 1993.
arship of the external imagery of important foreign partners (the EU to Thailand in our case), the analysis should include a more profound insight into the contextualisation of the produced images.

With news media being one of the major influencing factors in forming opinion of the general public as well as elites’ opinion on foreign counterparts, this paper illustrates several convincing correlations of the most visible media representations of the EU with the dominant associations assigned by both the general public and the national elites to the meanings of the EU in Thai public discourses. This research is also intended to serve as a contribution to the emerging debate on how to strengthen EU’s public diplomacy effort, an important tool in the package of instruments available to the EU to overcome its ‘communication deficit’ and grow as an international soft power.

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