

BRIEF SUMMARY

This study demonstrates that the coverage of the EU in the European press affects the knowledge and attitude towards the EU of the average European newspaper reader. This outcome is the more relevant now that the EU is steadily growing in size and impact, but conversely is confronted with a general decline in public support. The legitimacy of the EU is challenged. The question asked here is whether or not media can play a role in bridging the gap between 'Brussels' and the European citizen.

During the time-frame of the research (1994-2006) the amount of EU coverage in the European press has steadily grown. The number of positive EU issues in the news however has diminished considerably. The effect-analyses demonstrate that EU coverage contributes to higher levels of EU knowledge among readers, but also to a more negative attitude towards the EU. The quality press, with a small market share in all member states, produces relatively large amounts of EU news with a wide variety of issues. Its readership demonstrates a modest, positive effect on levels of EU knowledge and of EU support. The widely read popular and tabloid press produces low to medium levels of EU reporting and a more unfavorable outlook on the EU. Readers of the popular press are relatively more affected by EU news in their evaluation of the EU, and these effects develop in a negative direction.

By and large, the European press contributes to a decline in public appreciation for European integration. The gap has become wider, the democratic deficit larger.