

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: NCRE Media Workshops

The **Media Workshops** (held, in Wellington, Auckland, Christchurch, August 4-6) organised by Prof. Martin Holland and Dr. Natalia Chaban, presented to NZ media representatives, policy makers and diplomats initial findings from the research project “NZ Public, Elite and Mass Media perceptions of the EU”. The Workshop also launched the publication of the results of the first ever survey of the NZ public perceptions of the EU.

This summary outlines a selection of findings on the prominence of the EU-related issues in NZ news media coverage, and on their salience as perceived by the NZ public. The summary also includes the list of recommendations to NZ media professionals and to the EU Delegation to Australia and New Zealand on how to raise the EU profile within New Zealand.

- **Limited exposure to the news on the EU**

The monitoring of 55 NZ media outlets over three years (2000-2002) indicates “under-reporting” of the EU on NZ television: just 129 news items with an EU reference were found on NZ television news programmes – a figure 14 times less than number of EU texts in newspapers, and 6 times less than on radio. In addition, the nature of broadcast media where news is kept to a brief format implies a less in-depth coverage of the news.

- **Marginal status of the news on the EU Union.**

The EU representations carry a secondary or minor focus in reporting -- news that focuses exclusively on EU affairs represents only 22% of all newspaper texts, and 37% of all TV news texts where the EU is mentioned. The rest of the analysed news is either NZ domestic and economic news with a European dimension, or third country (besides NZ and the EU) political and economic news where the EU is referenced. News on the EU almost never makes it to the front page of the newspapers, thus, arguably readers attach less importance to it.

- **Emotive constraints among the NZ public while accessing news on the EU**

It is difficult to report on the EU in effective and comprehensive way due to its institutional character. The news on the EU in most cases deals with complex decision making processes within the EU and often lacks a sensational or personalised character. Responding to the international trend towards further commercialization, NZ media tend to play down political reporting (news on the EU included).

- **Cognitive constraints among the NZ public while accessing news on the EU**

Individuals have a limited capacity for information processing: the number of issues that people may learn from the mass media is relatively limited. There is evidence that, on average, people can only absorb no more than 7 ± 2 issues at a time from the mass media. The survey exposed a limited and rotating set of issues on the NZ general public agenda, mostly all of them agriculture/agricultural trade/economics related. These were: *EU free and fair trade with NZ; Agriculture and subsidies; Economic relations; the €; Clean green image of NZ in the EU; NZ should be independent and mind its own business; the EU and war in Iraq; Powerful Unity; and UK association.*

- **Limited interpersonal communication on EU related issues**

Only 2.5% of NZ respondents mentioned “word-of-the-mouth” as major source of information about the EU. 21.1% of interviewees never discussed EU related issues, 31.9% of respondents do it rarely, and 31.4% only occasionally. Only 15% of the respondents discussed EU related issues often. This finding suggests that citizens in NZ are not very interested in EU related matters on a daily basis.

- **Limited personal experiences with current and future EU members**

The personal involvements of New Zealanders with the current EU countries and the EU Accession countries were assessed in terms of travel, heritage, friends, relatives and family members living there, knowledge of immigrants from these countries to NZ, and business/professional contacts. The UK was by far the dominant EU country with the most contacts reported, followed by Ireland, Germany, France, Italy, and the Netherlands respectively. EU Accession countries with the most contacts are Hungary,

Poland, the Czech Republic, and Malta. However, the overall number of reported contacts with the EU countries (other than the UK) is relatively low, and it is virtually absent with the EU accession countries.

Recommendations to NZ Media:

- 1. Focus more stories on the EU with a NZ national angle**
In order to gain a bigger NZ audience, the news on the EU has to be grounded in national interests.
- 2. Feature the EU more regularly**
NZ media outlets could consider dedicating the daily/weekly section to EU news. The more space and time given a topic, the more important it is perceived to be by the public.
- 3. Broaden the agenda of the EU coverage**
The lack of wider-range coverage of EU issues remains a concern. Although, trade, economic development and agriculture are prominent topics because of their direct impact on NZ, more areas beyond national boundaries require a European angle. Allowing a wider perspective on EU policies and problems, NZ media could influence similar debates in New Zealand society.
- 4. Give stories that are personality driven**
Personality driven stories tend to attract more public attention
- 5. Present more stories on NZ television**
TV, the most powerful medium, has a huge potential to build connections between audiences and current events -- television by its nature can deal with EU theme in a more attractive and emotive manner. The expansion of the EU coverage could happen not only through the news stories, but through documentaries as well (e.g., a recent initiative of “NZ on Air” is to facilitate the production and broadcasting of the in-depth documentaries).
- 6. Look for venues of cooperation with the EU**
Since it is very unlikely that there will be a change in the resources dedicated to EU reporting from within media organizations, NZ media outlets could consider different lines of cooperation with the EU directly (e.g. NZ-EU Journalism Award Fund, programme grants from DG Press).
- 7. Increase the educational component of media**
Media has a great potential to inform and to educate the general public about the lives of “other” peoples and nations, and “other” ways of life. Media content plays a crucial role in shaping and reinforcing perceptions of international relations, including New Zealand relations with the EU.

Recommendations to the EU Delegation to Australia and NZ

- 8. Further educate NZ media professional regarding European issues**
Keep conducting Media Seminars/Workshops introducing different EU related issues around New Zealand on a regular basis.
- 9. Outline diverse venues of cooperation with the NZ media organizations**
Consider a possibility of offering an exchange fellowship for EU journalists to visit and to cooperate with a NZ media outlet to inform the New Zealand public on EU issues from the authentic perspective.
- 10. Sponsorship of documentaries on EU issues**
Consider co-investing in the production of series of documentaries about the EU tapping into the latest broadcasting initiative of “NZ on Air”.
- 11. Strengthen the role of the PR/media liaisons with NZ in the EU Delegation**
Enhance pro-active attitude on behalf of the EU Delegation in contacting and regularly updating the NZ print and broadcast media leaders in the EU coverage on the latest developments in the EU (e.g., weekly updates to the editors of World/Foreign News sections).
- 12. Address the needs of the NZ school curriculum**
There is a low level of general knowledge about the EU. The Delegation should consider approaching NZ Ministry of Education to facilitate the inclusion of the EU in the modern history and social studies curriculum.