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**Framing EU Enlargement in Asia-Pacific Media**

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## Framing EU Enlargement in Asia-Pacific Media

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### Introduction

The European Union’s fifth enlargement in May 2004 increased its economic and political weight, making it a more prominent actor in the international arena, as well as in the Asia Pacific and in terms of its relationships with individual countries in the region. However, there is a deficit of studies into the information flow between a newly reshaped EU and the Asia-Pacific.

This paper is part of the EU-funded, trans-national research project *Public, Elite and Media Perceptions of the EU in the Asia Pacific Region: Australia, New Zealand, South Korea and Thailand: A Comparative Study*, aiming to address challenges associated with the EU’s strategic process of long-term international image-construction by examining media, public and elite perceptions of the EU and correlations between them. The research is being conducted in four countries: two Asian countries, Korea and Thailand, and two Pacific countries, Australia and New Zealand, and employs the interdisciplinary research model developed by the study, ‘*Foreign News in the Media*’, administered by UNESCO in 1979.

Acknowledging the power of media in influencing public perception, providing information to the elite, and hence influencing the formulation and conduct of foreign policy,<sup>1</sup> the paper focuses on the media’s framing of the EU enlargement in the media of the Asia Pacific in terms of political and socio-economic implications.

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<sup>1</sup> Brian Buckley, *The News Media and Foreign Policy: An Exploration*, Halifax, Nova Scotia: Centre for Foreign Policy Studies, 1998.

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Owing to a large number of media sources in the four countries which would make the amount of data unmanageable, the research focuses on the daily coverage of the EU in 5 leading newspapers and on 2 main evening television news bulletins of the day in each country, or in total, 28 media outlets in the region.

The selected newspapers are:

Australia: Herald-Sun, Sydney Morning Herald, The Canberra Times, The Australian and The Australian Financial Review

Korea: Cho-sun, Dong-A, Joong-Ang, Metro and Korea Times

New Zealand: The New Zealand Herald, The Waikato Times, The Dominion Post, The Press and The Otago Daily Times

Thailand: Thai Rath, Matichon, Manager, Bangkok Post and The Nation

Please note that due to large amount of news items in Australia and Thailand, the analysis for the year 2004 has not yet completed. In Australia, the press analysis has finished at the month of June and Thailand the month of November.

The selected TV channels are:

Australia: ABC News and Channel Nine News

Korea: KBS news and MBC news

New Zealand: TV 1 and TV 3

Thailand: Channel Seven news and ITV news

The paper aims to give an overview of how the media in the four Asia-Pacific countries capture the dynamism of the fifth EU enlargement, by examining the degree of visibility and the manner in which the event is portrayed. The first part demonstrates the degree of visibility of the EU enlargement in the media of the Asia Pacific, followed by a discussion of how enlargement was framed by the media and what the key sub-issues are. The second part examines who are the faces of EU enlargement. The paper concludes with media evaluation on enlargement and images ascribed to the process.

## The Degree of Visibility

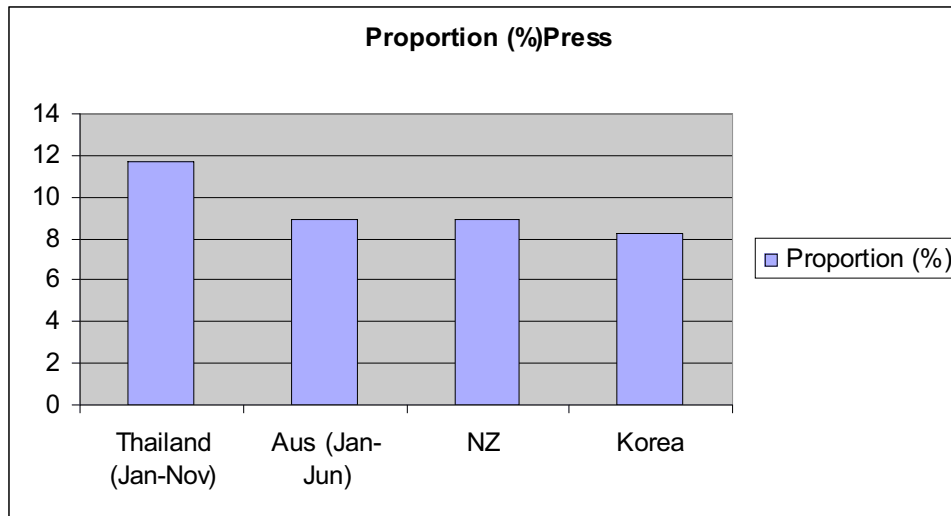


Table1: The proportion of enlargement news in the AP press in 2004

One of the methods to measure the visibility of EU enlargement in the Asia Pacific media is to compare the proportion of enlargement news to the total number of EU news in 2004, reflecting the degree of importance the AP press attached to the event. This chart demonstrates how prominently the identified enlargement news featured across the 12 months of monitoring. When considered as a proportion of the total EU news presented in the press, news on enlargement makes up about 10% in all the four countries with Thai coverage slightly higher and Korean coverage slightly lower than the rest. One may see 10% as a low figure, but it should be considered as a rather high figure here, since news coverage on the EU in newspaper is very diverse. Indeed, enlargement news ranks as the most prominent issue of the year 2004.

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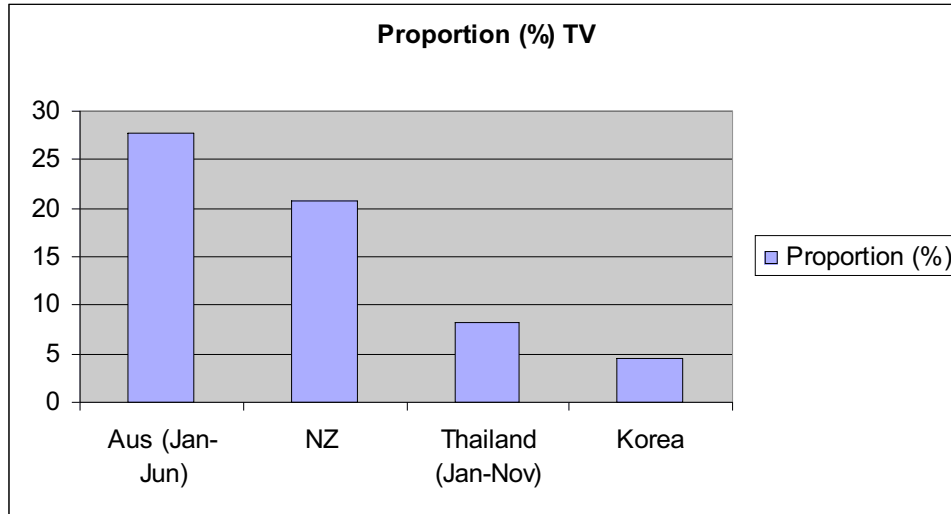


Table 2: The Proportion of Enlargement news in the AP TV in 2004

Turning to TV coverage, there is a split between Asia (Korea and Thailand) and Pacific (Australia and New Zealand). Like the press coverage, enlargement is the most prominent issue in Australia and New Zealand broadcast coverage and shares a very large proportion, about one fourth, of the total TV news coverage on the EU. (27% and 21%)

In Thailand and Korea, however, enlargement news is strikingly less visible. It occupies only 8% of coverage in Thailand and 4% in Korea. Indeed, the paper presented by Jessica Bain in Bangkok 2004 points out that most of EU news items on TV are usually concerned with domestic interests in which the EU has some involvement. In the two countries, enlargement news is eclipsed by other events that are more directly relevant to the home countries. In Thailand, a large proportion of EU news on the TV is attributed to the avian flu that broke out in early 2004 and the consequences of this epidemic for EU-Thai agricultural trade. The Korean coverage spiked in October. This was largely due to the ASEM Summit held during this month and the visit of the Korean President to Europe in October.

## The Dynamic Pattern of Enlargement News

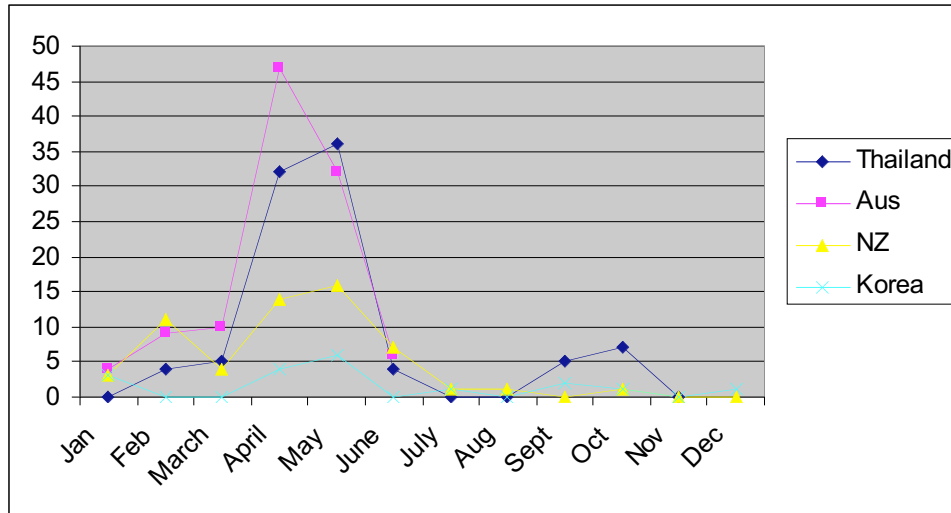


Table 3: The Dynamic Pattern of Enlargement news in the AP press in 2004

This chart demonstrates that the dynamic pattern of enlargement news. It seems that the Asia Pacific press gradually builds the momentum before unleashing the climax in May, followed by some wrap-up of the event. Strangely, though, in Australia, the peak is in April, not May.

Then the amount of enlargement news significantly drops to the point of nearly hitting zero during July-Aug before it rises a little again in September and October, when the EU held the discussion on the future of Turkey's application.

## Framing EU Enlargement in Asia-Pacific Media

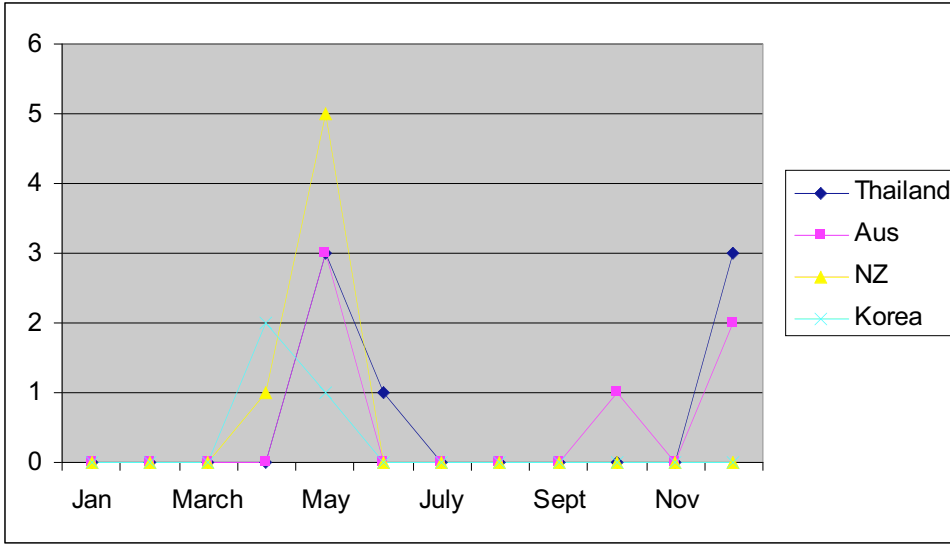


Table 4: The Dynamic Pattern of Enlargement news in the AP TV in 2004

The TV media seems to take a different approach. Unlike the press, they do not spend time in the early 2004 in gradually unveiling EU enlargement. Instead the TV media makes snap reports on the event on the day and the weeks before and after. Enlargement news in the Korean TV, however, reaches the peak in late March, rather than May. In parallel to the press, Thailand and Australia give some attention to the controversy surrounding the future of the Turkish application during the end of the year.

## The Framing of Enlargement

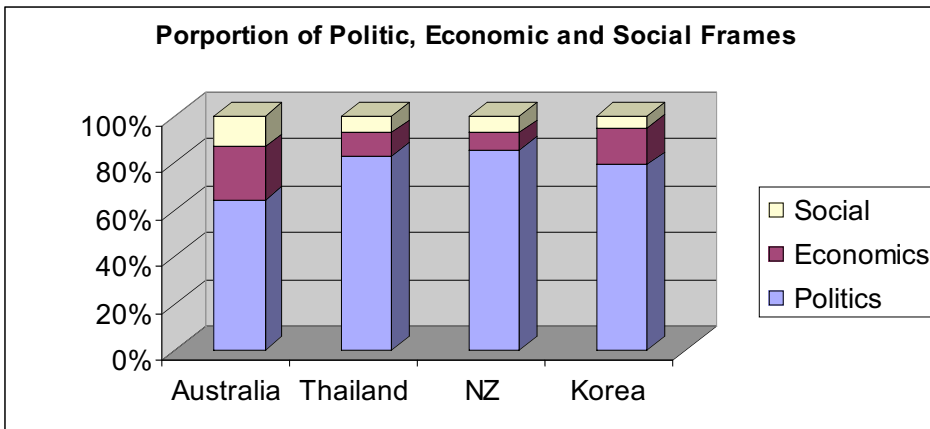


Table 5: The proportion of politic, economic and social frames

EU enlargement has political, economic and social dimension but which aspect is regarded to have more importance for Asia Pacific countries?

Given the number of frames identified in the politics category, it is fair to say that the Asia Pacific press views the enlargement process primarily as a political affair. Interestingly, this may imply that AP press gives more importance to political than economic impact of enlargement, although it can be argued that in enlarging a single market area, the economic effects are more direct and tangible. Moreover, although the EU tries to add 'human faces' to the process, the social aspect is still somewhat under-represented.

### **Prominent Sub-issues**

Enlargement is a big event involving various sub-issues, for example, changes in EU administration, specific problems of certain member states and changes in EU relations with third countries. It is interesting to see which of these issues becomes the highlight of the enlargement coverage.

Interestingly, the most prominent sub-issue in the press, other than general fact and comments on EU enlargement, is not one that has direct implications for the home countries such as the economic impact of enlargement on the home countries. It is the Cyprus conflict. The fact that news concerning the age-old animosity between the two communities of Cyprus (the Greek and Turkish Cypriots) and the futile attempts of the EU and international bodies to end the division of the island becomes the second most prominent news in Australia, New Zealand and Thailand reflects usual characteristics of the making of 'foreign news.' Priorities are given bad and dramatic, rather than peaceful news.<sup>2</sup>

Apart from the Cyprus conflict, the Australian press prepared their readers very well for enlargement by featuring a series of news providing further background of the ten countries. The Thai press was active in capturing dramatic events like the May Day

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<sup>2</sup> Natalia Chaban, The Perception of Asia Pacific Media on the EU, a presentation on 11 February 2004 at Chulalongkorn Univeristy, Bangkok

celebration and the controversy surrounding the Turkish application which occurred in late 2004. One of the issues the New Zealand press was interested in was migration problems arise from enlargement. Indeed, my analysis of the EU as a political power in the media shows that New Zealand seems to have a particular interest in the migration issues of the EU. The Korean press, the least active in enlargement coverage, gives quite a balanced presentation on important issues like the celebration, fact and analysis and impact on trade relations between Korea and the EU.

As for TV news, the salient topic in all the four countries is enlargement celebrations, Unlike the press coverage, the Cyprus conflict is not given attention at all. It may not be practical for the TV media to report unfamiliar conflicts in a remote place like Cyprus, since it is difficult to summarise the complicated background and history of Cyprus conflict within a very limited time frame without losing the audience's attention.

### **Major EU Actors in Enlargement**

Being a *sui generi* body, one of the well-known problems about the EU is the ambiguity concerning representations of the organisation. This section will examine who are prominent actors in Enlargement news.

It is not surprising to find out that the most prominent type of actors were those related to member states (comprising of present member states, accession countries and officials from those countries), as member states are usually the most visible actor in the EU political news, in which most of the enlargement news is categorised. What is striking is the gap between the member states and EU bodies. Member states and related actors appear ten times more frequently than EU agents.

Among accession countries, given that the Cyprus conflict is a prominent issue, it is not surprising that Cyprus is the most visible, followed by Poland. Then, if the Cyprus conflict, a specific problem of a country, is excluded from analysis, it is fair to say that Poland was the face of ten new member states. Turkey was the third most visible, owing to its engagement in the Cyprus conflict and its widely debated membership prospects. Last but not least, the Czech Republic and Hungary, other old powers from Central Europe, received less attention than Poland but still higher than the rest of applicant countries.

Among fifteen old member states, Germany appeared the most frequently, followed by Britain and France. The finding is quite surprising because in the general politics frame, Britain is usually the most visible actor, followed by France and then Germany. Hence, in the context of enlargement, Germany is perceived as the most significant actor. This reflects common ideas about Germany's greater and Britain's smaller role in the enlargement process.

However, although Germany was more visible than UK and France but when it came to country leaders, Tony Blair and Jacques Chirac turn out to be more visible than Gerhard Schroeder; Schroeder was not as noisy as the other two leaders.

Apart from 'the big three,' other member states who received press attention were Greece, and, to a lesser extent, Ireland and Austria. Owing to its key role in the Cyprus conflict, Greece's appearance in the news rises to the fourth. Ireland comes fifth, since the country held the EU Presidency during the enlargement day. Last but not least, it is quite surprising to see Austria stand out in enlargement news, as the country is usually quite invisible in general political news.

Apart from looking at each member state separately, there is also another way to look at the pattern on prominent actors on enlargement. Looking at the data from the geographic aspect reveals an interesting point, as the leading actors shift from the usual 'big three' or 'the Franco-German partnership vs. Britain, the odd man out of the club' to the area located at the 'heart' of the newly enlarged Europe -- the Germany, Austria, Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary ring. It will be interesting to follow up this change and to observe whether it is only applied for this particular issue or if, in fact, it is the first sign showing the shifting of power poles within the EU.

With regards to EU agencies, the former EU President Romano Prodi seemed to be regarded the official voice of EU bodies in enlargement news. Enlargement Commissioner Gunter Verheugen was recognised for his role as one of the mediators in the Cyprus conflict. The Commission, usually the most prominent actor of all EU agencies, was the third most visible EU agency. Last but not least, the Delegation and Head of Delegation in Thailand and the Delegation in Australia and New Zealand seized

enlargement as a chance to publicise themselves quite well, considering that they are usually not visible in the news.

## Evaluation

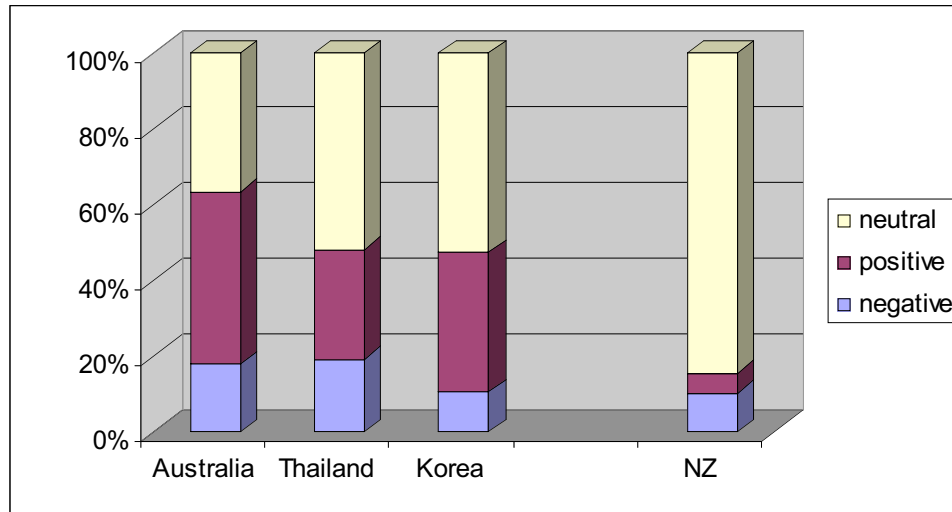


Table 6: The Asia Pacific Media evaluation on Enlargement

To see a complete picture of the perceptions of Asia Pacific media on EU enlargement in the four Asia-Pacific countries, this section will discuss the evaluations and manners ascribed to the enlargement process.

The chart demonstrates the overall evaluations of the EU as it appears in the context of the enlargement in each country. In Australia, there was quite a fair balance among three types of opinion (positive, negative and neutral) but once journalists made a judgement, enlargement was often portrayed in a positive light. In Thailand, New Zealand and Korea, neutral presentation of the EU were predominant but once an evaluation was done, the Thai and Korean press were more inclined to speak of EU enlargement in a positive tone whereas the New Zealand press typically employed a negative tone.

This may be because Enlargement was seen in Australia as a historical event of the EU as well as an economic opportunity for Australia from as a wider single market. New Zealand, however, seemed to be pre-occupied about internal EU problems arising from enlargement particularly in relation to migration. Also, the country was not as optimistic

as Australia about trade opportunities. Rather, New Zealand was afraid that new member states would become their trade rivals in the old EU market. The Thai and Korean press saw the enlargement process primarily as 'foreign' affairs and preferred to simply report the situation. Apart from their journalist culture which refrains reporters from 'leading' readers by comments<sup>3</sup>, they may have felt that they were not in the position to provide criticism on this issue. A higher share of positive to negative news was due to the press of these countries' eagerness to share the joy of European people on the May Day with their readers.

### Images

The evaluations by the Asia Pacific press on enlargement as discussed above was made by identifying the prevalent attitude in a piece of news, which will immediately have impact on readers. Still, apart from making direct comments, perceptions of the press towards the EU was also reflected in their choice of words or the images they used in describing the enlargement. Indeed, metaphors are also a very powerful tool in influencing the perception of readers. They are a primary conceptual construction and play a central role in developing thought. Metaphors can leave strong and long-lasting impressions on readers because they sink into the mind unconsciously. Readers usually do not recognise them. Metaphors are often used by public media and public policy and they can influence or manipulate the public perception and communication.<sup>4</sup> Recognising the power of metaphors, this next section will try to find what images the press frequently ascribed to the EU enlargement and whether the images differ across the four countries.

Despite different languages and cultures, the finding turned out that there were no real differences in the four Asia Pacific countries. The similarity may be because the press in all the four countries are sharing the same standing point, that is, 'outside looking in'. In addition, it is interesting to see that some of the images conveniently represented two sides of enlargement: positive and negative. These images are like two sides of the same coin. Examples of this kind of 'parallel' images are illustrated below.

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<sup>3</sup> Duncan McCargo, *Politics and the Press in Thailand: Media Machinations*, (Bangkok: Routledge), 2000

<sup>4</sup> George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1980

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Sometimes, the EU was presented a place to enter, with description like 'the EU threw open its gate' for Eastern European countries, or 'the EU's still open wide to the Balkan countries.' Nevertheless, these images can also be regarded as negative, since they also tacitly hint the idea of 'Fortress Europe' with the EU presented as a restricted area where the door is open only once in a while for a selected few.

Moreover, the EU is sometimes presented as a closing space with description like 'the end of the division of Europe.' Still, journalists argue that other kinds of 'gaps' remain, such as economic or social gaps between new and old members, making the EU look like an area where there is division within the unity.

Human emotions are also used to describe enlargement. Although joy and happiness were pervading Europe while every country was celebrating, a Thai newspaper, *Thai Rath*, warns the EU of a 'political hangover' after the party.

Other press in Asia Pacific also observed that old member states somehow look 'uncomfortable, fearful, and even hysterical' over migration concerns. New members also feel 'worried, exhausted and lethargic' from the pressure to close the remaining 'gaps'.

Images of human relationships were also often used to describe enlargement, particularly clubs or families, for example, countries from the Eastern countries were about to 'reunite with the family of Europe' or be 'welcomed to the club'. Though these images suggest the idea of harmony and solidarity, some may note that the word 'club' is not necessarily positive, as it implies restriction to serve the privileged. Again the image of 'Fortress Europe' is reinforced.

Moreover, this newly reunited family was, in fact, not happy. The metaphors suggested that if the EU was a club, the members would not really be happy together, for they would be bound to fight over EU budget.

Last but not least, there is an interesting image from an Australian newspaper. Enlargement was not simply going to be a family row or a club fight. *The Australian* declared that it was going to escalate into 'war':

'A glance at the British tabloids, however, would have many outsiders concluding that tens of thousands of foreigners were gathered across the Channel awaiting a May Day invasion'.

## **Conclusion**

As part of its aspiration to become a prominent actor in Asia Pacific the EU has engaged in the strategic process of international image-construction. Among EU's major concerns are that the Union's visibility in media is low and is often ascribed to negative views.

The good news is that enlargement seems to be the event that efficiently helped to raise the public profile of the EU. Enlargement attracted lively interest from the Asia Pacific media, the news ranking as the most prominent issue of all EU news in the year 2004 (with an exception of Thai and Korean TV). Although preferring to stay neutral and employ parallel images that conveniently balanced the positive and negative sides of enlargement, when they did make an overall judgement, the Asia Pacific media (except New Zealand) was incline to speak of enlargement in a positive tone more than a negative tone.

Moreover, since the Asia Pacific media regard EU enlargement primarily as a political process, the audience may start to recognise the political importance of the EU. The findings of this research project presented in February argued that the Asia Pacific media gives more space to EU economic rather than political news in New Zealand, Australia and Korea. The enlargement coverage, however, helps to correct this imbalance and helps the public realise that the EU is not as just an economic grouping but also as political actor.

In general, it is fair to say that the May 2004 enlargement created a rather good impression about the EU on the Asia-Pacific public.

Nevertheless, the fifth Enlargement of the European Union is just a one-off event and is now completed. Nothing can guarantee how long these optimistic perceptions will last. Controversy and difficulty concerning the Turkish application also implies that the enlargement process may not always end with joy, celebrations and fireworks.

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**For further information about the research project, please go to the website:**  
<http://www.europe.canterbury.ac.nz/appp/>