The External Image of the European Union

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The survey The External Image of the European Union has been conducted in the framework of the Jointly Executed Research Project 5.2.1. (Normative Issues) of the GARNET Network of Excellence Global Governance, Regionalisation and Regulation: the Role of the EU - (EU 6th Framework Programme 2005-2010; Contract No. 513330). The survey also received financial support from the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. 11 researchers, based in Australia, Canada, China, Egypt, Germany, Japan, Italy, South Africa and New Zealand were involved.

The results of the research project were presented at the EU Commission on 19 April 2007, in the presence of Janez Potočnik (Commissioner for Science and Research), Peter Dröll (Mr Potočnik’s Head of Cabinet), José Manuel Rodriguez (Director General DG Research), Claus Sørensen (Director General DG Communication), Eneko Landaburu (Director General DG External Relations), Odile Quintin (Director General DG Education and Culture); Christin Leffler (Head of Cabinet of Vice-President Wallström), Miloslav Ransdorf (Member of the European Parliament), Graham Watson (Member of the European Parliament), Manuel Carvalho (Counsellor for Institutional Affairs, Permanent Representation of Portugal), Francesco Fedi (President of COST - European Cooperation in the Field of Scientific and Technological Research), Martin Grabert (Director of COST - European Cooperation in the Field of Scientific and Technological Research).

Aims of research
The research had four main aims:
• to evaluate the degree of academic information already available on how the EU is perceived outside its borders;
• to analyse open sources (newspapers, websites, official documents, available opinion polls) so as to produce new research on the topic;
• to evaluate if these perceptions vary across geographic areas of the world, countries, and target groups within countries;
• to assess the gap between the EU’s self-representation and external views.

Methodology and deliverables for the “Pilot Study”:
1) Country reports: we selected a sample of countries from each continent: Canada, Brazil, Australia, China, India, Japan, Egypt and South Africa.
   Target groups: we selected four target groups within each country on which to focus attention: political elites, public opinion, the press and organised civic society.
   Sources: we gathered information on the image of the EU within each target group by: (i) reviewing the very limited academic literature available and (ii) analysing the open sources available, with particular attention to press analysis. Each researcher chose a research strategy targeted at the needs of the country s/he was analysing.

2) Transversal reports: (i) the image of the EU among senior servants in the Commission Delegations; (ii) the image of the EU among NGOs taking part in world gatherings.
   Sources: direct interviews; questionnaires; open sources.
Main Results

- Fragmented knowledge: Lack of systematic research (with very few exceptions); scattered sources.
- Limited visibility in the press.
- Limited knowledge of the EU (particularly among certain target groups, such as civil society and citizens at large).
- Degree of knowledge and appreciation correlated to degree of education and younger age (in most countries but not in China).
- Good degree of confidence by the public in the EU but frequently lower in comparison to other organisations/states.
- EU not widely perceived as a world power, nor as a future one.
- Frequent calls for “more EU” - frequently as a counterbalance to the US (e.g. civil society and press Egypt; Brazil; public opinion Canada).
- Low/to very low visibility in the media (e.g. Australia, Canada, China, India, South Africa).
- General perception of “Europe” (more than the EU), influenced by historical relationships with individual European countries (e.g. former colonial empires).
- EU largely seen as an economic giant.
- Images of the EU are split:
  - **positive images**: the EU as “strategic opportunity” for the partner countries; a trade giant; a supporter of multilateralism or at least multipolarism; a model of regional integration; and a possible counterbalance to US hegemony, a protector of the environment;
  - **negative images**: an actor whose policy is severely influenced by its own security or economic concerns; a neoliberal actor in its external relations; and a protectionist power (CAP).

EU’s self-representation is called into question. Moreover:
- Little evidence of the EU being widely seen as a “normative power” exporting universal values of democracy and human rights.
- No evidence of the EU still being regarded as a social model to be imitated.
- No public reward for EU’s development cooperation policy.

On the basis of this research a number of **conclusions** can be drawn:

- There is a strong need for new, methodologically strong, research projects, and a direct role for the Commission in collecting information (e.g. through the Commission’s Delegations; negotiating the inclusion of questions on the EU in Regional Barometers).
- There is a need to develop research strategies in order to evaluate if and how external images influence the internal process of identity formation among the Europeans. What do the Europeans know of how others see them and their institutions? How do the European media assess the reputation of the EU? Those are neglected questions in the “EU identity” literature.
- This academic work, however, cannot substitute a more direct role by the EU institutions in reducing the rhetoric/expectations/performance gap (e.g. by working on (i) communication & public diplomacy; (ii) by improving the EU’s coherence & credibility; (iii) by capitalising on the existing cultural message of Europe).

Output


Follow-up

- A section on *The External Image of the EU* at the 2007 General Conference of the European Consortium for Political Research (Pisa, 6-8 September 2007).
- A new round of research with a larger sample of countries, including Israel, Syria or Jordan; Russia; the US; Argentina; Indonesia; and a central African country.