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INTRODUCTION

One of the important questions in identifying the rationale behind European Union action as ‘a global player’ is: what drives EU Foreign Policy? This is a complex question because EU Foreign Policy is an area where the EU acts on an intergovernmental basis, but which is also affected by policy areas such as Trade, External Relations, Energy, Migration and Asylum, Agriculture, Fisheries, Development Assistance and Humanitarian Aid, where the EU acts at EU level.

The creation of the European External Action Service in 2010 has maybe changed some of the internal architecture in terms of the how of external action and foreign policy; but the underlying questions: why does the EU do what it does in terms of foreign policy, and maybe more importantly, why doesn’t it do the things it doesn’t do, still remain.

QCEA has done work on these questions from time to time. This paper brings together the findings from a research project which has been in the making for some time.

SUMMARY AND KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

The paper starts from the premise that our perception of foreign places is shaped – at least in part – by the news stories we read in the press. This is not to say that other media do not influence our perceptions, nor is it to undervalue personal experience of going to foreign places and meeting people there.

Of course, printed news media are maybe not the most influential media anymore but they are read by decision-makers and their advisors and they are read by the people who vote for them. They therefore are, potentially at least, in a position to shape our perceptions and thus influence how we see the world.

Whether or not there is a direct link (or even an indirect one) between what the media report/write about and foreign policy decisions is a hugely complex question and one which we did not address.

What we did set out to do was to find out how foreign news is presented in printed news media in several EU Member States.

Key findings

What has struck us the most is the fact that foreign stories are dominated by news from the United States. This is true for almost every day and every one of the 23 papers in all 9 countries we reviewed. Given that the US is neither the most populous nor the biggest country in the world this might be surprising. However, it clearly shows a global dominance which is - if not frightening - something to give us pause for thought.

What also struck us is the fact that the EU and its Member States and other Global North countries make up over 50 per cent of the stories. There is just no evidence that even the quality print media take a significant amount of interest in the rest of the world.

Politics is certainly the focus of the majority of the stories, followed by a range of topics grouped by us under the heading of general interest and then followed by the economy. The latter category was very much dominated by the impact of the financial crisis as was to be expected.

So the quality press does reflect a view that its readers are interested in politics and the economy and that this interest goes beyond national borders.

But a closer examination of these stories also shows that again, the USA and the EU and its Member States take the lion's share of the interest although China gets a high ranking when it comes to the economy. And generally, where the economy is concerned, the group of countries which make it into the top is a little different to the group for politics-related stories.

Another important element of politics-related stories is the high degree of interest in elections in other countries - some countries only made it into the list because they had elections at the time.

Looking at news stories which related to particular companies or industries, it is striking that the motor industry still seems to be the one sector attracting significant levels of interest. The energy industry came in very low with only 6 per cent of all the stories relating to specific industries or companies. Given the importance of energy and the impact of energy on the climate, this is both surprising and a matter for concern.

Looking at stories relating to conflict - and overall they make up only 8 per cent of all stories - the countries mentioned most are a little different to the general distribution although the USA is still in the top three (not least because of its involvement in conflicts elsewhere in the world). What is maybe not surprising, but still worth highlighting, is that there are some countries which feature either exclusively (Somalia) or predominantly in this category and not in others. These countries are perceived both by the print media and by their readers as 'conflict-affected countries', i.e. countries about which nothing can be said unless it is about the conflict they are affected by.

The fact that crime - and often quite local crimes - is reported from foreign countries is maybe surprising. The countries which are represented among the crime stories - apart from the USA which tops this category too - are, however, all quite close geographically to the country where the story was reported.

The category 'general interest', which in total was the second largest category, shows an overwhelming proportion of the stories relate to celebrities. This reflects the celebrity culture we live in. This would have been even starker if we had included analysis of sports stories in our research.

Where the stories are placed in the paper is also important; if we have to read too far into the paper to find them we are less likely to do so.

The proportion of stories relating to foreign countries which feature on the front page is pretty limited at around 7 per cent. That means that overall, foreign news is seen as less important or less interesting than domestic news. The notable exceptions are France and Poland.

Whether or not a paper has a section devoted to foreign news also has an impact on the visibility of such news. It is interesting that some papers do not have such sections. Whether that leads to greater awareness of foreign news because it can pop up anywhere in the paper is something we were not able to assess. But it is an interesting question.

Recommendations

This paper is not really one that can come to policy recommendations because it has attempted to assess the situation with regard to the way in which news is reported. However, there are some key points that citizens, media executives and decision-makers might usefully think about:

For citizens and readers:

- Consider how balanced the reporting in the media you read is; what are they not talking about; are they asking you to be interested in what everyone is talking about or are they giving you a cosmopolitan and far reaching diet of news and information?
- Which countries are you not hearing/reading about? Why not?

For media executives

- Given the startling similarities in the stories covered, the countries covered, the issues covered, are quality papers following the herd or going after really interesting stories? What has happened to the exclusive? Where is the investigative reporting? Why are there so few reporters in many of the world's more interesting places (by the look of it)?
- Is the battle for cheap and free news being won at the price of pandering to the advertisers and taking the same stories from the same news agencies for the lowest possible price?
- In countries affected by conflict, it would be good to have some news that goes beyond the conflict; that reflects the culture, the hopes and the aspirations of the people there; reporting that reflects the citizens of these countries as people, equal to us in the global north, as interesting as we are, with a story to tell and with talents and skills which make them unique and worth hearing about.

For decision-makers

- It is easy to follow the headlines. And quite often, political developments look as if they are following the news rather than leading events.
- A much deeper analysis of what is needed in foreign policy might lead to a different emphasis; might lead to different responses to other countries; might pick up on issues that are coming up before they have turned into the crises that make them newsworthy.
- By ensuring that there is real engagement with civil society in third countries through embassies and missions, policy could be much more influenced by the reality on the ground than by its often skewed reflection in the media.

RESEARCH AND RESEARCH APPROACH

The key question we asked ourselves was: how is foreign policy and how are foreign countries portrayed in the European press? And does that inform the way foreign policy is shaped?

OCEA is an NGO with limited resources and we therefore do not claim that this research has been conducted with academic rigour or precision. It is intended to show up some indications of how these questions might be answered.

The approach we took was to randomly chose three weeks during which we monitored (for which read: read from cover to cover) 23 broadsheet newspapers from 9 EU Member States. The three weeks chosen presented themselves because we had access to additional staffing resources during that time. The three weeks were:

- 2 to 6 November 2009
- 30 November to 4 December 2009
- 18 to 22 January 2010

We identified all the articles that had content which related to a foreign country (be that in the EU or beyond); we recorded the broad subject matter, the page it appeared on, the type of article it was, the section of the paper it appeared in and the country (or main country) it related to.

Then came the detailed analysis which is set out below. This has taken significant amounts of time; however, the fact that we are publishing these results quite a long time after collecting the raw data allows us (and we hope our readers) to see the broad picture without being distracted by the immediacy of the stories.

THE PAPERS INCLUDED IN THE ANALYSIS

The choice of papers included in the analysis was driven by several factors: we wanted to have some large and some small Member States, we wanted to have at least one Member State from Eastern Europe and we had to work with the languages we could work with. The final list of papers we agreed on and worked with is:

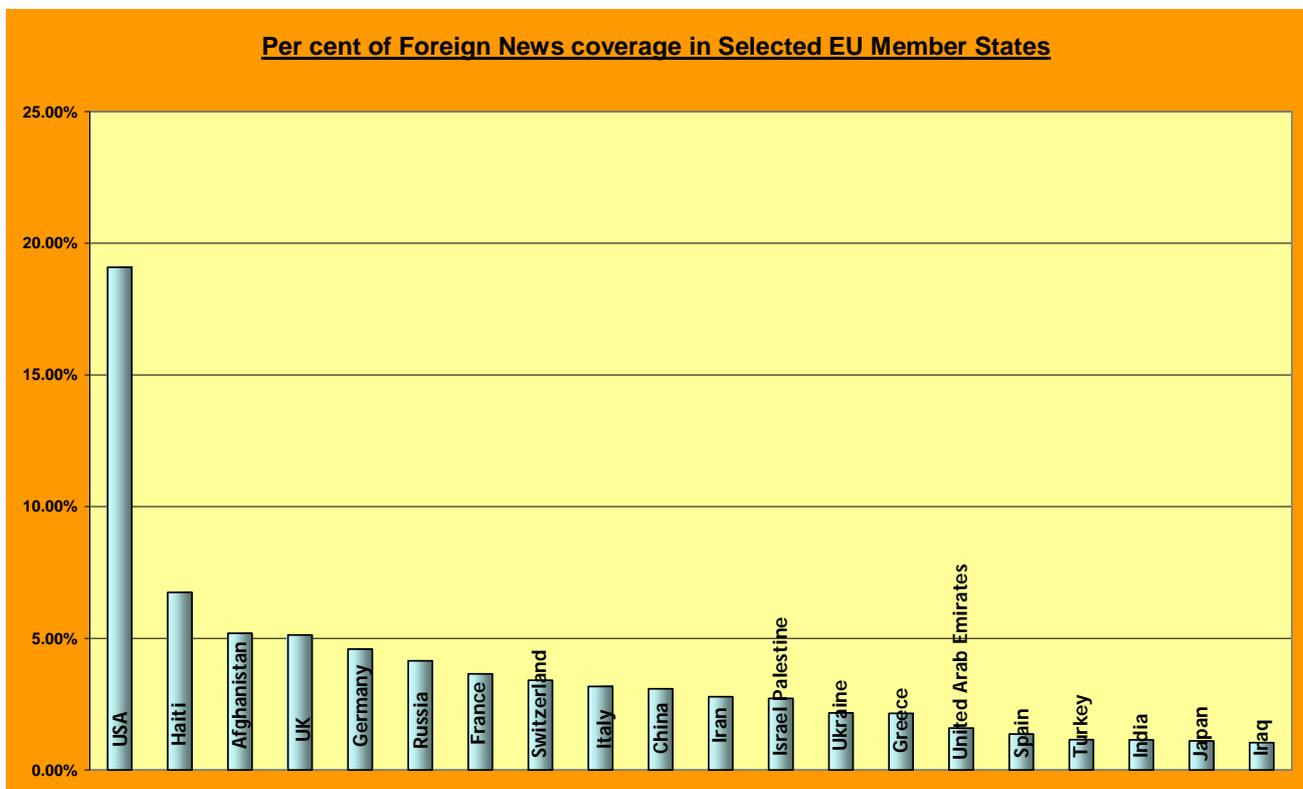
Country	Newspaper
Austria	Die Presse
	Der Standard
France	Le Figaro
	Le Monde
	Libération
Germany	Die Welt
	Frankfurter Rundschau
	Frankfurter Allgemeine
	Süddeutsche Zeitung
Ireland	Irish Independent
	Irish Times
Italy	Corriere della Sera
	La Repubblica

Country	Newspaper
Poland	Dziennik
	Gazeta Wyborcza
	Rzeczpospolita
Spain	ABC
	El País
	El Periódico
Sweden	Aftonbladet
	Dagens Nyheter
United Kingdom	The Independent
	The Times

WHO INTERESTS US – OR WHO IS SUPPOSED TO DO SO?

The first issue we wanted to look at is the question: which foreign countries make it into the news? This was the simplest analysis we did and showed up some interesting facts.

Looked at across all 23 newspapers in all 9 countries, the most mentioned countries were:



What this graph shows, is the stories relating to the country shown as a percentage of all stories relating to foreign countries. The percentage for the United States is just over 19 per cent; Haiti has just under 7 per cent of the stories. This has to be seen in the context of the Haiti earthquake which took place on 12 January 2010 and thus dominated news in the third week of our analysis.

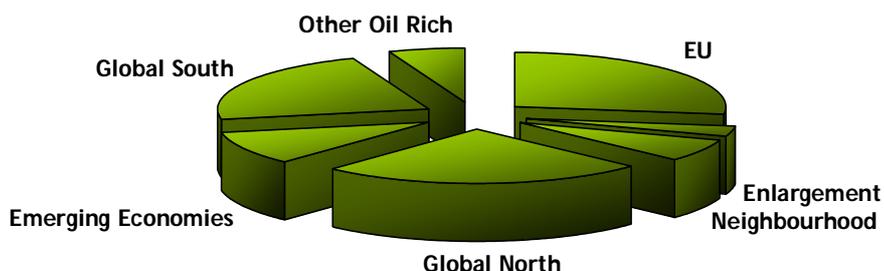
Iraq, the last country shown on the graph, has 1.04 per cent of the stories.

A slightly different approach to the analysis is shown in the graph below. Here, we have grouped all the countries that get a mention in any stories into the groups shown in the following graph. It is interesting to note that the highest percentage of stories in each group is:

Group	Country	Percentage
Global North	USA	19.08
Global South	Haiti	6.74
EU Member States	UK	5.13
EU Enlargement	Turkey	1.15
EU Neighbourhood	Israel/Palestine	2.72
Oil Rich	Iran	2.78
Emerging Economies	Russia	4.14

Group	Countries included in order of ranking
Global North	USA, Switzerland, Japan, Australia, Canada, Norway, New Zealand,
Global South	Haiti, Afghanistan, Honduras, Chile, Pakistan, Somalia, Nigeria, Yemen, Argentina, Mexico, Kenya, Uruguay, Guinea, Venezuela, Vietnam, Peru, Democratic Republic of Congo, Philippines, Tanzania, Mauretania, Rwanda, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Colombia, Bolivia, Burma, Niger, Uganda, Equatorial Guinea, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Thailand, Turkmenistan, Zimbabwe, Cambodia, Madagascar, Senegal, Ecuador, Kazakhstan, Mali, Tajikistan, Falklands, Kyrgyzstan, Sudan/Darfur, El Salvador, Guatemala, Azerbaijan, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Costa Rica, Ethiopia, Ivory Coast, Mozambique, Namibia, Nepal, Burundi, Chagos Islands, Gabon, Ghana, Kashmir, Liberia, Mongolia, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Santo Domingo, Sierra Leone, Chad, Tibet
EU (geographically)	UK, Germany, France, Italy, Greece, Spain, Vatican, Netherlands, Austria, Poland, Czech Republic, Belgium, Sweden, Denmark, Romania, Lithuania, Hungary, Bulgaria, Finland, Ireland, Slovakia, Latvia, Slovenia, Monaco, Cyprus, Portugal, Estonia, Malta
EU Enlargement	Turkey, Serbia, Croatia, Kosovo, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Iceland, Albania, (Former Yugoslav Republic of) Macedonia, Montenegro
EU Neighbourhood	Israel/Palestine, Ukraine, Belarus, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Libya, Georgia, Algeria, Chechnya, Tunisia, Armenia, Jordan, Morocco, Western Sahara
Other Oil Rich	Iran, United Arab Emirates, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Abu Dhabi, Bahrain, Qatar,
Emerging Economies	Russia, China, India, Korea, Brazil, South Africa, Singapore, Taiwan

Foreign News by Group of Countries



What all of this tells us is that the United States is by far and away the most 'interesting' country from the point of view of the newspapers that are read in the 9 Member States we examined. And it is worth remembering that these are broadly broadsheets - i.e. papers which aspire to be newspapers rather than entertainment.

The picture for each of the 9 Member States and for each of the papers themselves is the same in this particular regard. Looking at the percentage of stories from the press in each of the 9 Member States that refer to the USA, the following picture emerges:

Member State	Percentage of Stories relating to USA
Sweden	24.95
Italy	24.13
UK	23.35
Ireland	23.28
Spain	20.84
Germany	18.91
Poland	16.65
Austria	16.62
France	13.34

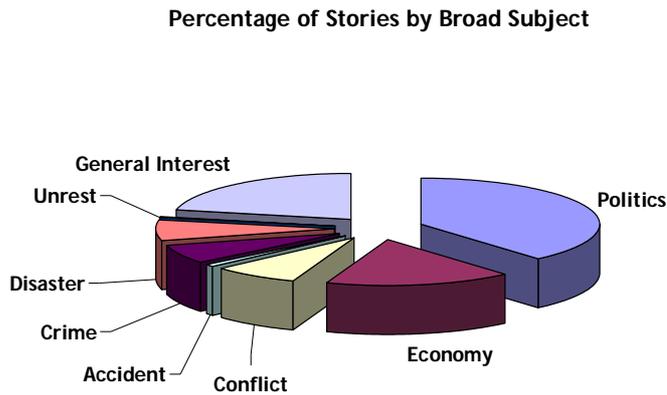
The fact that our view of the world is shaped by our understanding of the perspectives of the USA is therefore not surprising. There is a reasonable assumption that this perspective also has an impact on policy makers. And whilst this does not mean that that foreign policy is dominated by the relationship with the USA, it is dominated by the perceptions of what the USA wants.

WHAT INTERESTS US – OR AT LEAST THE PAPERS

There are of course other questions to be asked: they relate more to the issue of the subject matter of the stories we read. We analysed the subject matter under a number of different headings.

The first level of analysis was to divide stories into: Politics, Economics, Conflicts, Accidents, Crime, Disaster, Unrest, and other. A further analysis then also subdivided the 'other' category (see below).

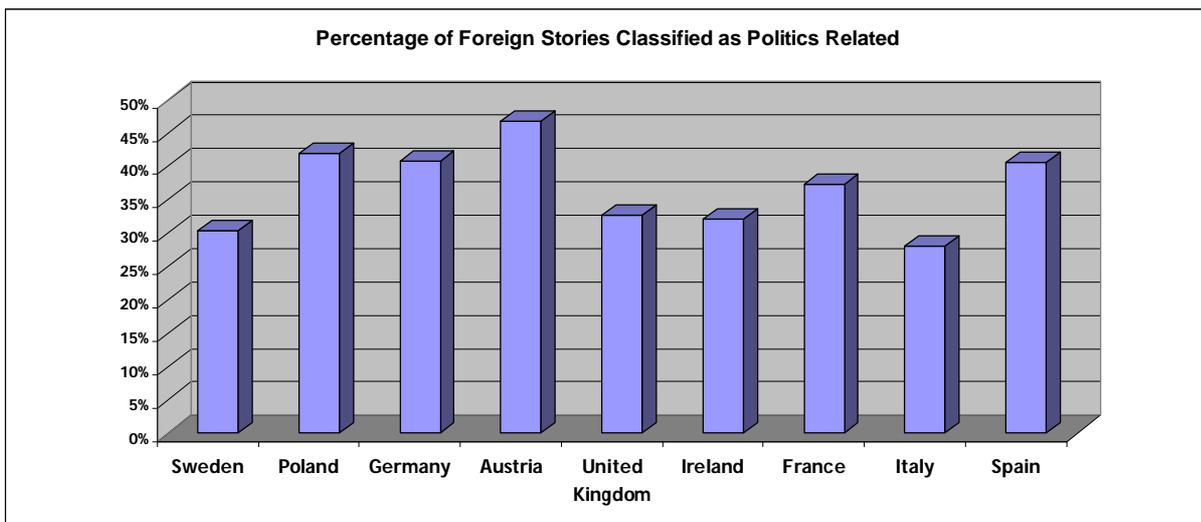
The relative weight of the different categories looks like this:



Politics

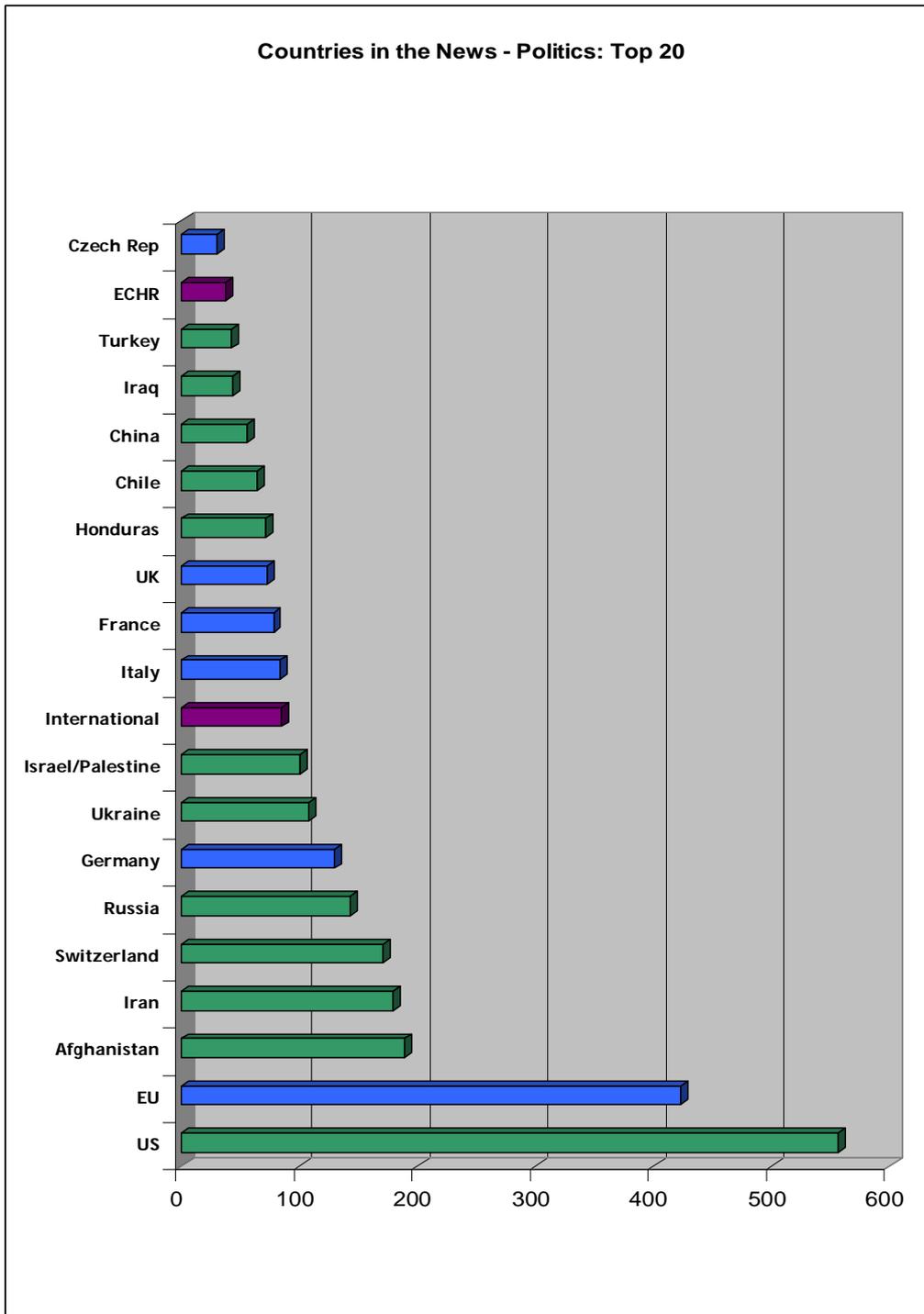
How important is this category

It is reassuring that politics features as the single most important category of stories covered in all countries except Sweden where 30.34 per cent of the stories relate to politics and 34.1 to a variety of subjects classified as general interest. But even with that caveat, there is a significant proportion of foreign news that relates to politics.



Which countries feature in the politics stories

A further analysis of the countries covered in the stories classified as relating to politics, shows the following breakdown:



Again, the US tops the list. Only 5 EU countries feature in the top 20 countries. The EU itself features very highly. This picture may have been affected by the fact that the ratification and coming into force of the Lisbon Treaty actually happened during the second of the three weeks we analysed.

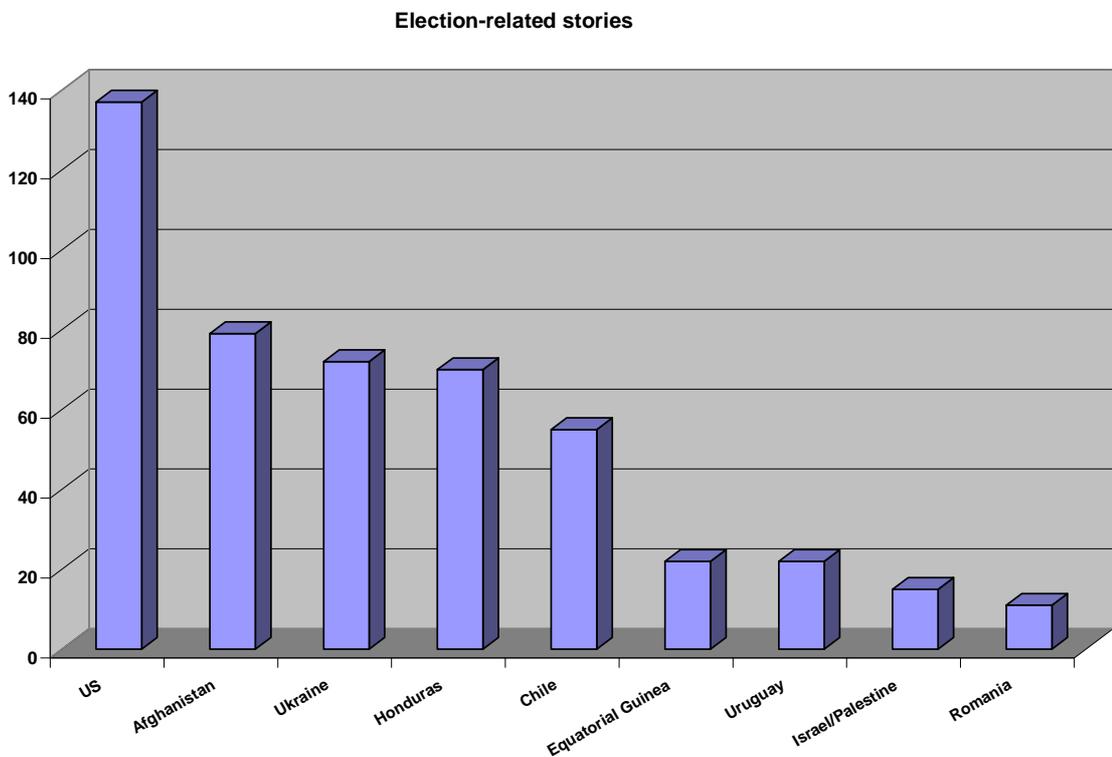
The high rating of Switzerland is entirely due to the referendum on minaret building that happened during that period.

The fact that the European Court of Human Rights featured so highly was as a result of a controversial ruling which was made public during the period relating to the display of religious symbols in public places.

Elections making the news

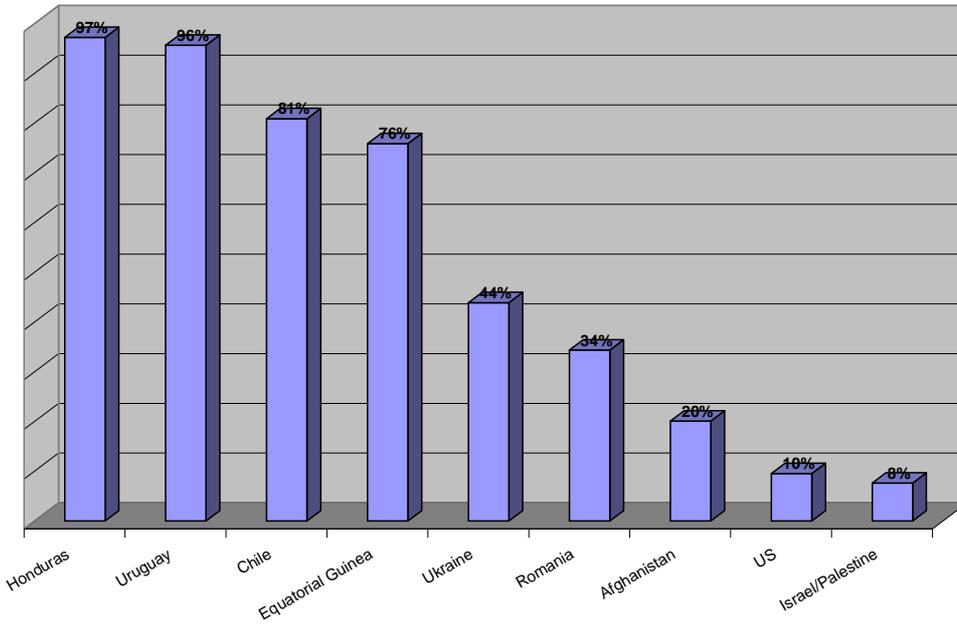
Some countries feature in the news coverage because of elections which were taking place during the period of analysis. In some countries this takes up virtually all the coverage, in others it represents a proportion of the coverage.

The following graphs show the countries where election-related stories featured significantly:



What is, however, interesting, is that in the case of some of these countries virtually all news coverage related to elections. It can be assumed that such countries would have featured far less significantly in the news overall if they had not had elections or election campaigns during the analysis period. But in the case of other countries, this was clearly not the case as the graph below shows:

Election stories as percentage of all stories about country

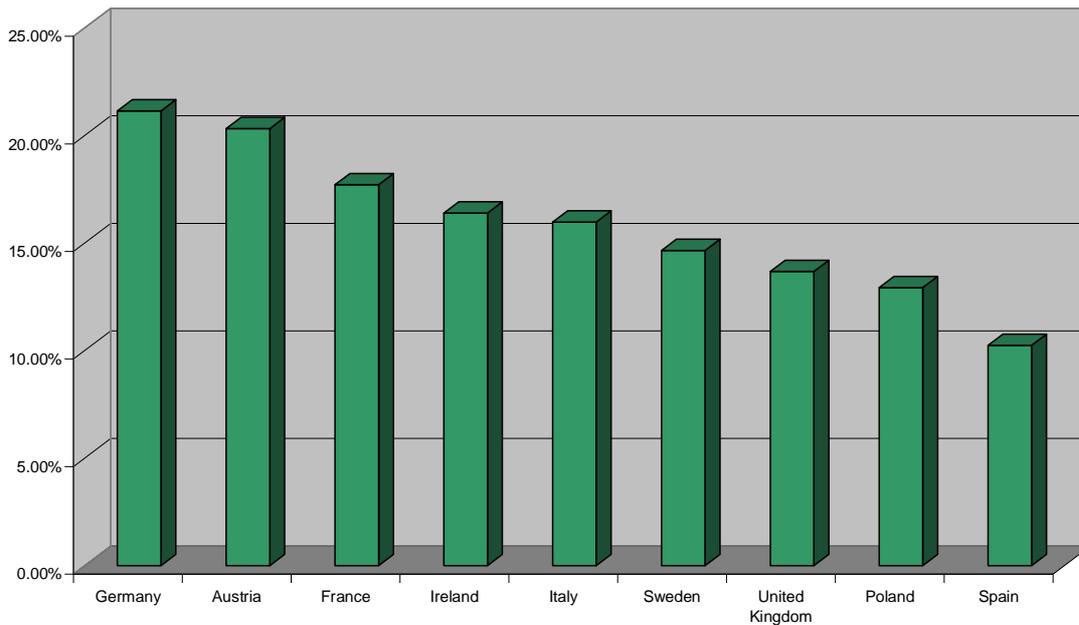


The Economy

How important is this category?

There is also an appreciable difference in the level of interest in economic issues shown by the proportion of stories related to the economy in the papers of different countries. But the overall level of interest in all countries as reflected in our analysis is lower than for politics. The following picture emerges:

Percentage of Stories Relating to Economy



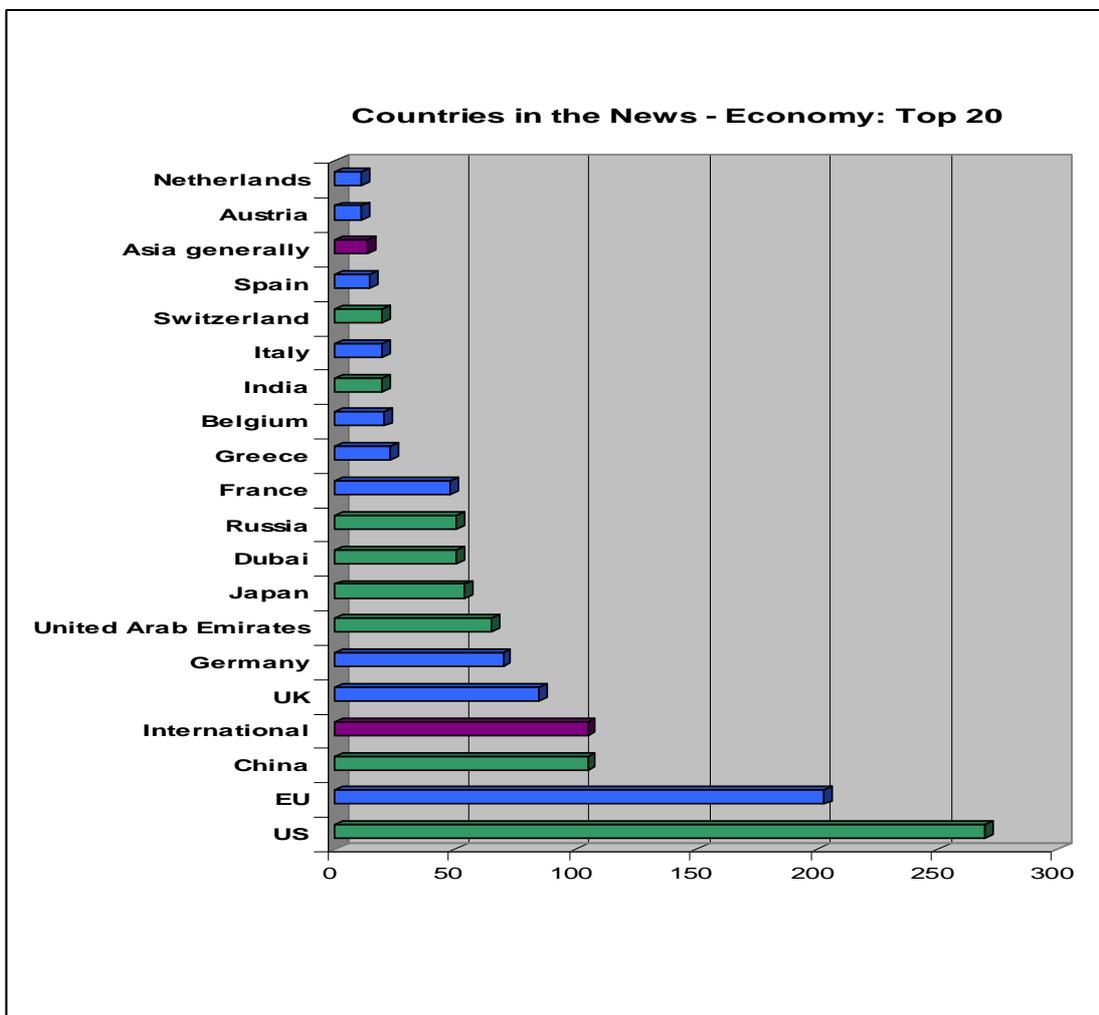
A simple comparison with the graph on page 8 above (relating to the relative importance of stories relating to politics) shows that the level of interest in economics-related stories would appear to be consistently lower and on average around less than half as important as politics.

Which countries feature in the economy-related stories?

As might be expected, the list of the top 20 for stories relating to the economy is different to that for politics. There are more EU countries included - 9 in this case of which 8 are Euro zone countries. The EU itself also scores highly.

The countries that feature in this top 20 list which do not make it into the top 20 under politics is also interesting: the United Arab Emirates, Japan, Dubai, Greece, Belgium, India, Spain, Austria and the Netherlands.

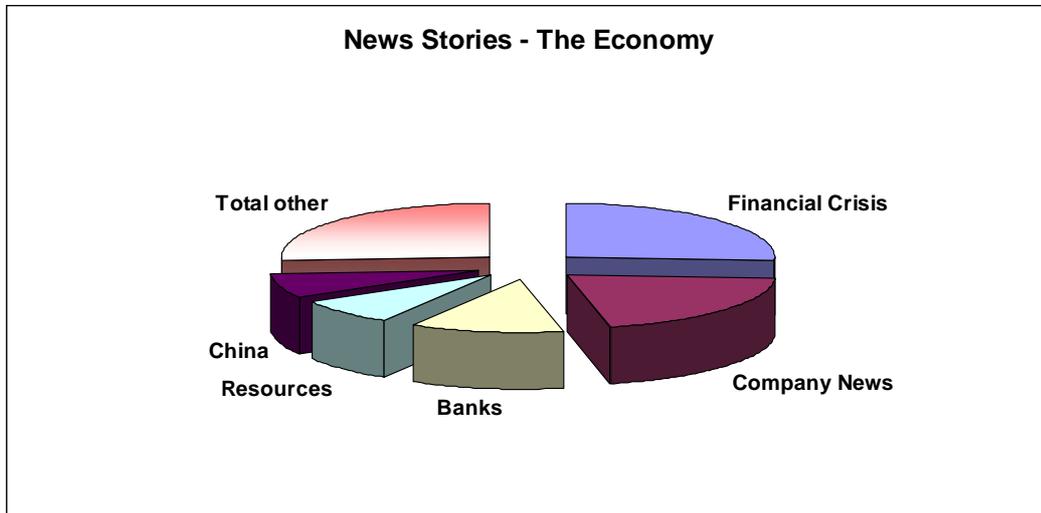
But again, the US tops the list.



Which economic issues made it into the news?

The top four issues which were covered were in order of frequency: the financial crisis, news items relating to specific companies, items relating to banks, and stories relating to resource such as gold, oil, gas and so on. The next most important issue was the economic influence of China.

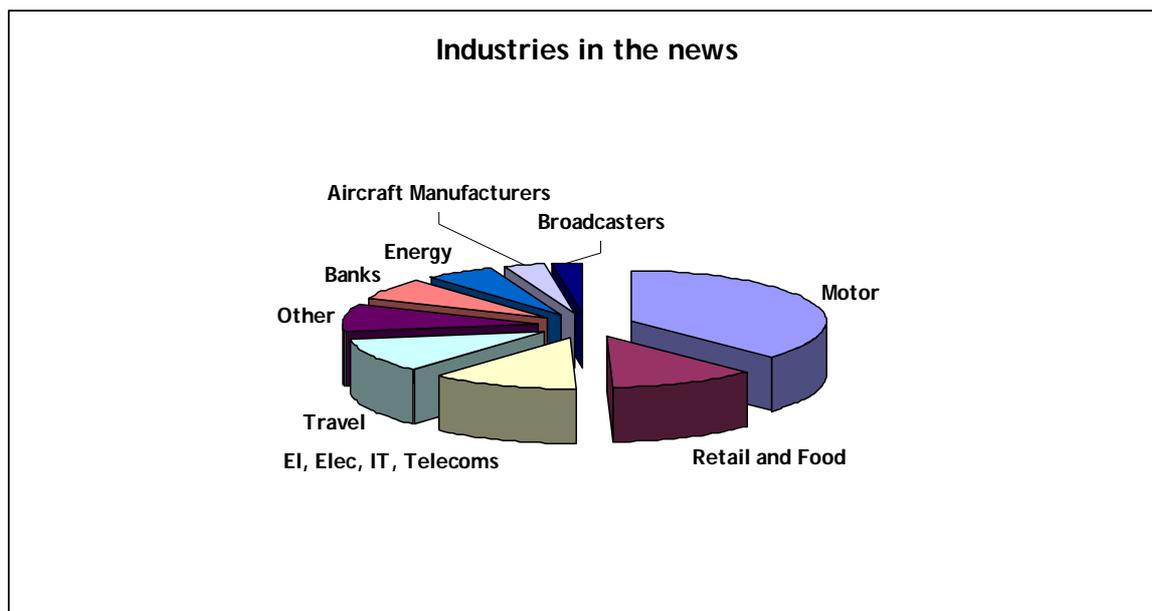
The graph below shows that these 5 categories represent around 74 per cent of all the stories relating to the economy and this is a clear indication that at the time, these issues were dominating the press. Most of them still are.



The question that this raises is whether in fact, issues such as specific markets, other regions of the world (other than China), employment, tax issues and the like ought not to attract more attention in the news. For example, the potential of African economies - or indeed African economies per se - rated well below 1 per cent of the stories.

This coupled with the geographic distribution of stories shows a significant bias towards Northern developed economies and limits the perspective dangerously despite the challenges which globalisation presents.

Finally, it is interesting to see which industry sectors rate most highly in terms of news relating to specific companies. A brief analysis of those stories classified as 'Company News' in the graph above into different industry sectors shows the following distribution:

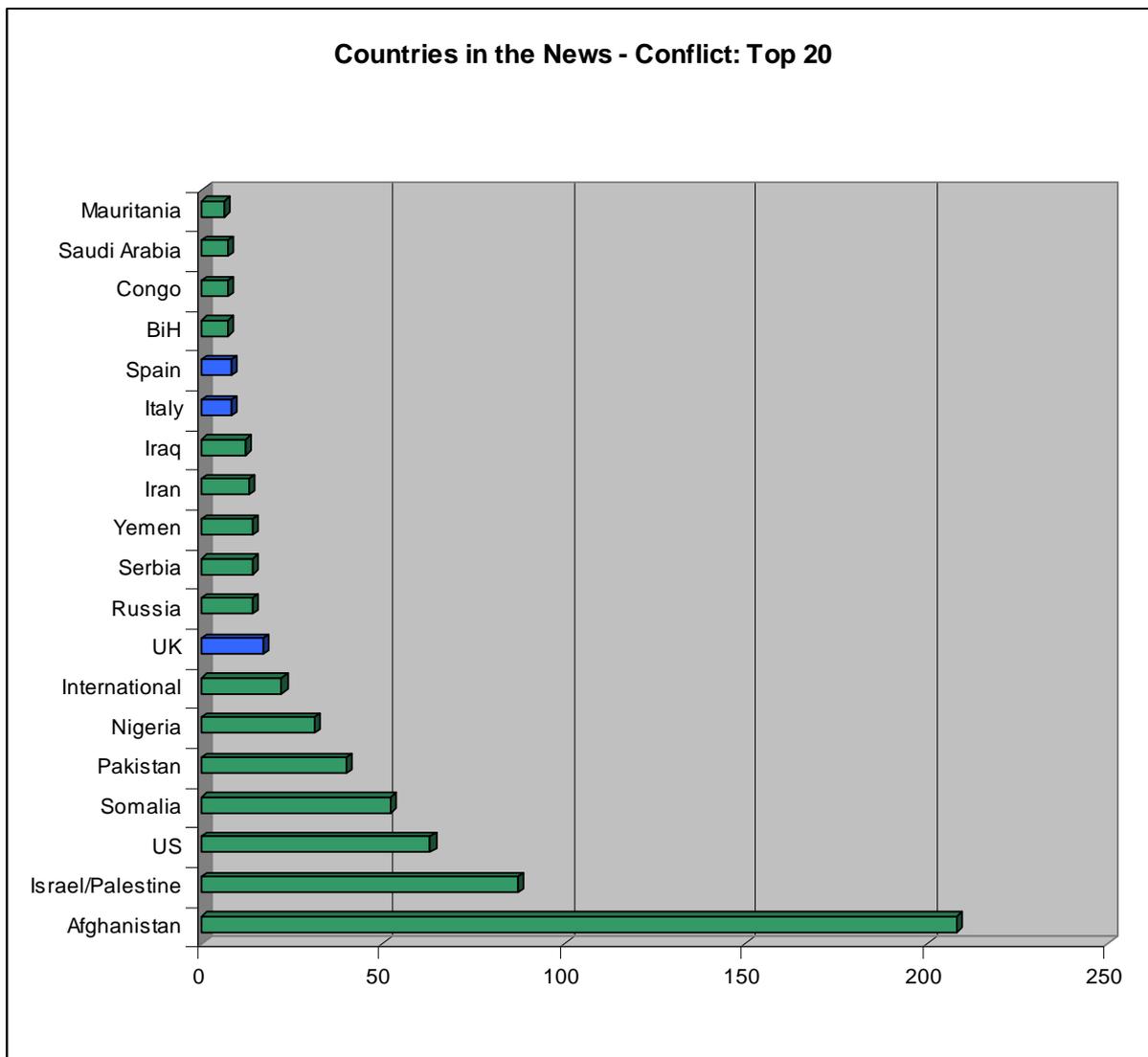


Even allowing for the fact that both General Motors and Kraft Foods were undergoing some high profile changes during the time of the analysis, this is a very interesting picture. The stories relating to the motor industry were not all related to General Motors by any means and indicate the focal point which the motor industry represents; sadly, the stories were not primarily (or even at all) focused on the carbon footprint of the motor industry and its products; the relatively high level of interest in the travel sector supports the assumption that mobility and the fortunes of those companies which make us mobile is of significant interest to those who determine what is news. But clearly, that also affects the perception of the audience of the news.

Conflict

Looking at stories relating to conflict - which represents a not insignificant proportion of foreign news - it is interesting to see both which countries are reflected in these stories and how that compares to the ranking of countries in terms of their conflict susceptibility.

The countries covered most frequently in terms of conflict issues are shown in the graph below:



In many ways this list is not surprising, although the fact that Iraq does not score highly, may be. The high score for the UK is explained by the Iraq enquiry ongoing at the time and the continuing involvement in Afghanistan.

This list includes a number of countries involved in conflicts but where the conflicts are not in their territories. This makes it not directly comparable with published lists of conflict-affected countries, the Global Peace Index and similar comparisons. This can be done, if those countries involved in conflicts outside of their territory are excluded. The following table makes this comparison.

Country	Ranking in QCEA analysis	Global Peace Index ¹ (20 least peaceful countries - 1 is least peaceful)	Foreign Policy index of Fragile States ² (top 20)
Afghanistan	1	19	7
Israel/Palestine	2	17	
Somalia	3	18	1
Pakistan	4	13	10
Nigeria	5	5	
Russian Federation	6	12	
Serbia	7		
Yemen	8		18
Iran	9		
Iraq	10	20	6
Bosnia & Herzegovina	11		
Democratic Republic of Congo	12	15	5
Saudi Arabia	13		
Mauritania	14		
Sri Lanka	15	1	
Niger	16		
Turkey	17		
Croatia	18		
Kenya	19		14
Lebanon	20	8	

¹ Vision of Humanity, Global Peace Index GPI Map - 2009, accessed on 2 January 2012 at: <http://www.visionofhumanity.org/gpi-data/#/2009/scor/>

² Foreign Policy, The Failed States Index 2009, accessed on 2 January 2012 at: http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2009/06/22/2009_failed_states_index_interactive_map_and_rankings

Myanmar	Not in top 20	2	13
Burundi	Not in top 20	3	
Ethiopia	Not in top 20	4	16
Country	Ranking in QCEA analysis	Global Peace Index (20 least peaceful countries - 1 is least peaceful)	Foreign Policy index of Fragile States (top 20)
Colombia	Not in top 20	6	
North Korea	Not in top 20	7	17
Central African Republic	Not in top 20	9	8
Georgia	Not in top 20	10	
Zimbabwe	Not in top 20	11	2
Chad	Not in top 20	14	4
Sudan	Not in top 20	16	3
Guinea	Not in top 20		9
Ivory Coast	Not in top 20		11
Haiti	Not in top 20		12
Nigeria	Not in top 20		15
Bangladesh	Not in top 20		19
East Timor	Not in top 20		20

The three lists differ quite widely; there are only 5 countries that appear on all three - though with different rankings: Afghanistan, Somalia, Pakistan, Iraq, and the Democratic Republic of Congo; there are 8 countries that feature in the news in the three weeks we analysed but on neither index for 2009: Serbia, Iran, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Saudi Arabia, Mauritania, Niger, Turkey, and Croatia.

Somalia is the only country which only features in stories relating to conflict during the period of the analysis.

Other categories

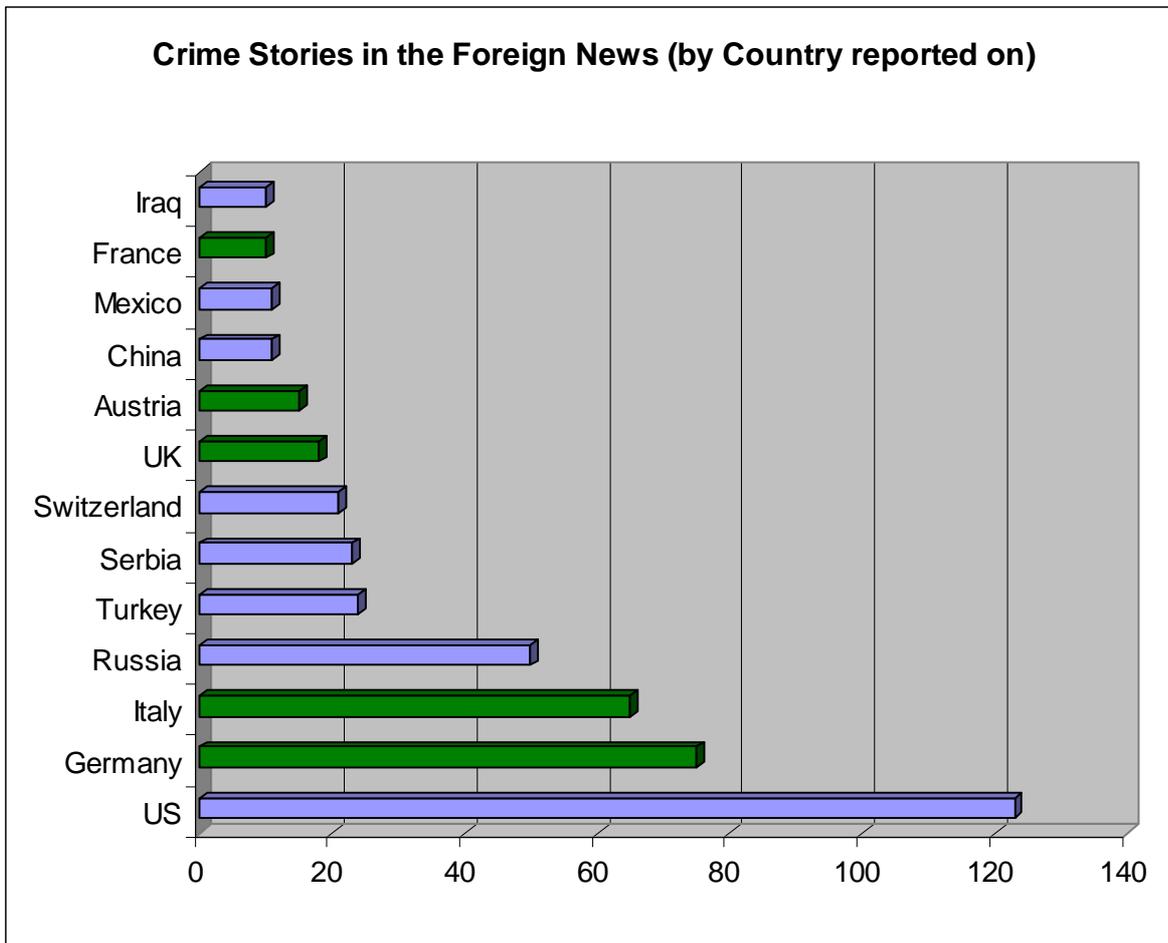
The other categories we examined were: Crime, accident, disaster, unrest, and general interest (see graph on page 8 above).

Of these, the category disaster is disproportionately affected by the Haiti earthquake which happened during the analysis period. We have therefore not done any further analysis of this category.

The categories 'unrest' and 'accident' turned out to have so few stories that further analysis was not possible.

The category 'crime' ranked quite highly with nearly 7 per cent of all stories. The distribution of countries covered in those stories shows that - again - the USA tops the list. Other countries with 10 or more stories relating to crime include a number of EU Member States and countries which are either bordering EU Member States or are in the process of negotiating membership of the EU or both. This group includes Russia. Apart from the US, the only countries about whose crime there is a significant amount of reporting outside of the EU or its immediate neighbours are China, Mexico and Iraq.

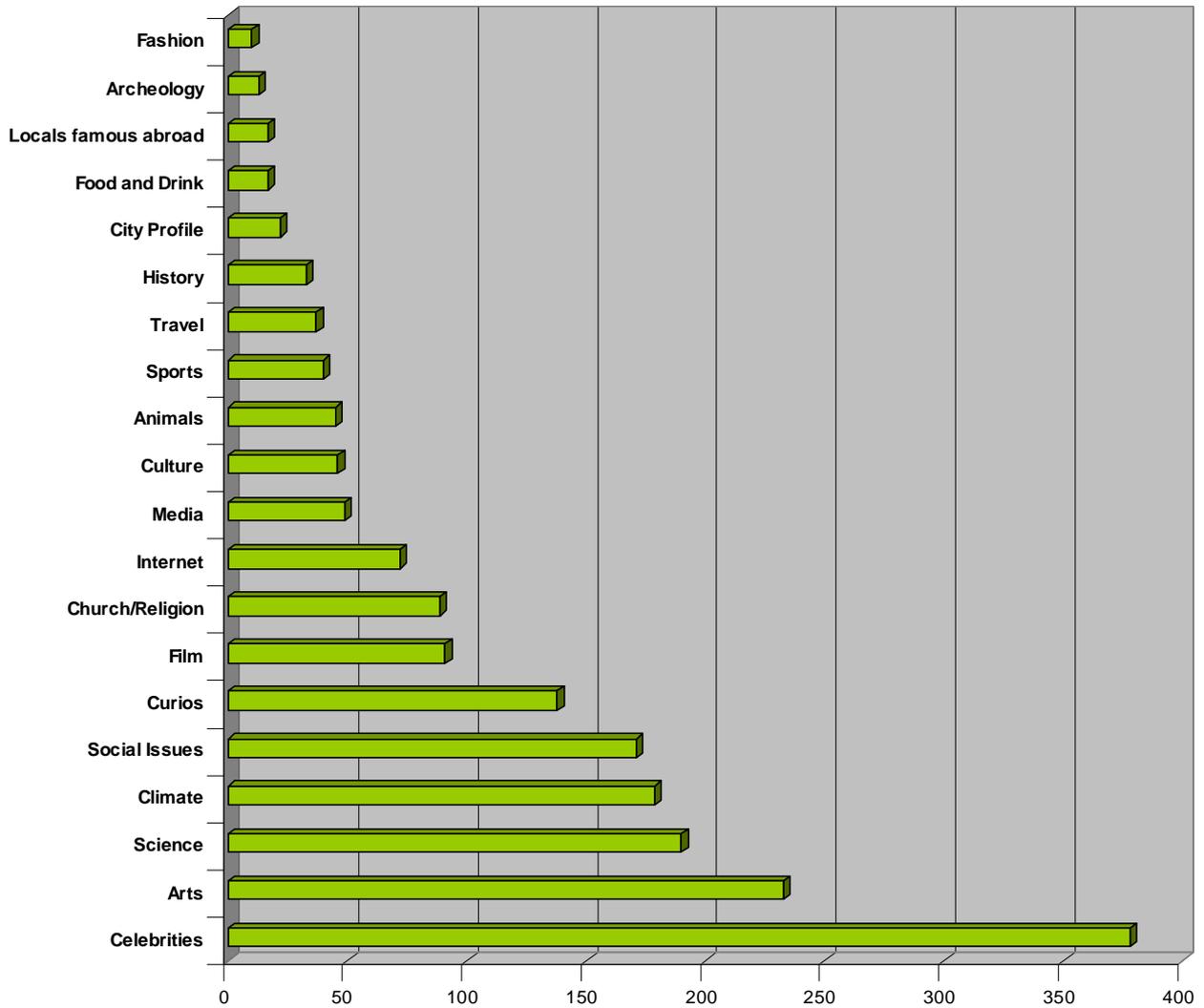
The graph below shows this:



The category 'general interest', though representing a fairly high proportion of the total number of stories, once further analysed showed too many different types of stories to allow for meaningful further analysis. A very brief analysis shows that there is significant interest in celebrities - not a surprise - but also in topics such as the arts, science, the climate and social issues.

The graph below provides more detail:

General Interest Stories



HOW INTERESTED ARE WE IN FOREIGN NEWS

Where do we find the foreign news?

To see whether foreign news is considered important or not, it is also worth looking at where the foreign coverage is in the paper.

This is not that easy because there are differences in the way different papers approach this. The highest proportion of pages devoted to and identified as foreign pages were found in Dziennik (at 25 per cent), the UK Independent (at 20 per cent) and in El País (at 16.7 per cent).

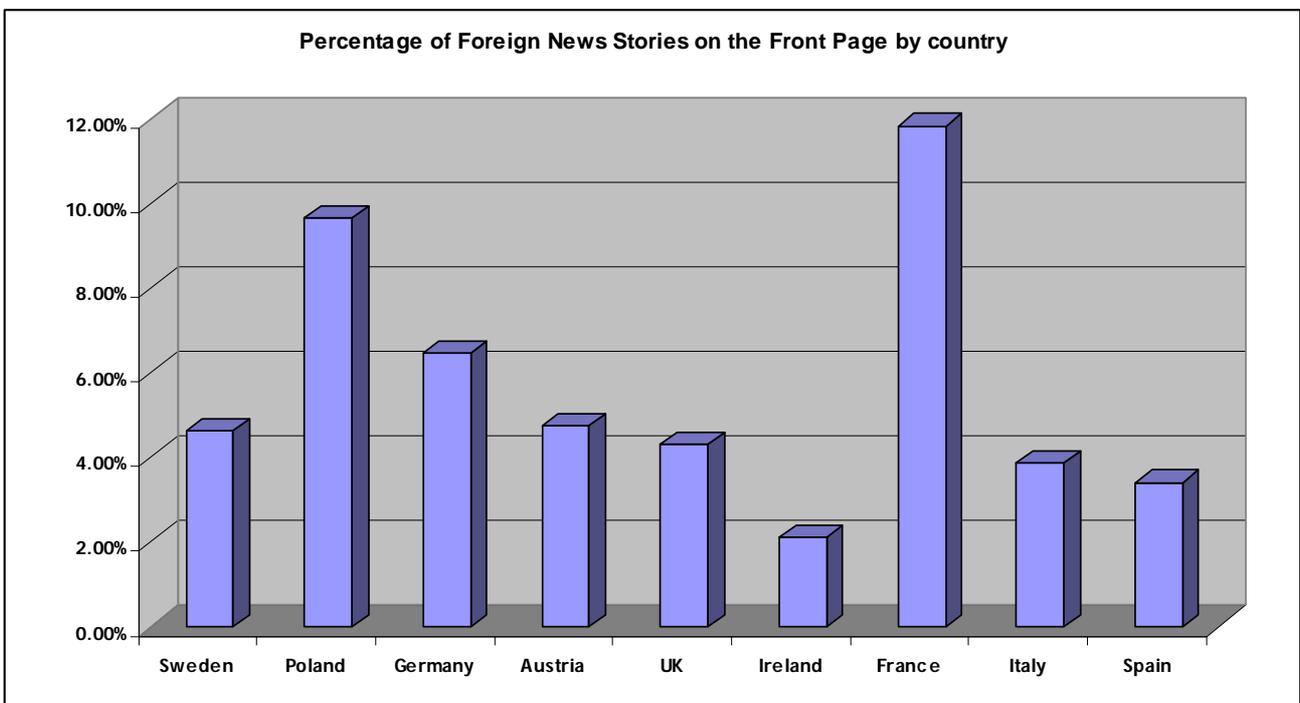
The lowest percentages were found in Aftonbladet, the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, the Süddeutsche Zeitung, the Frankfurter Rundschau, and the UK Times. In all these cases there were no pages specifically identified as 'foreign news'. This reflects, however, a relatively even spread of foreign stories in all sections of the paper.

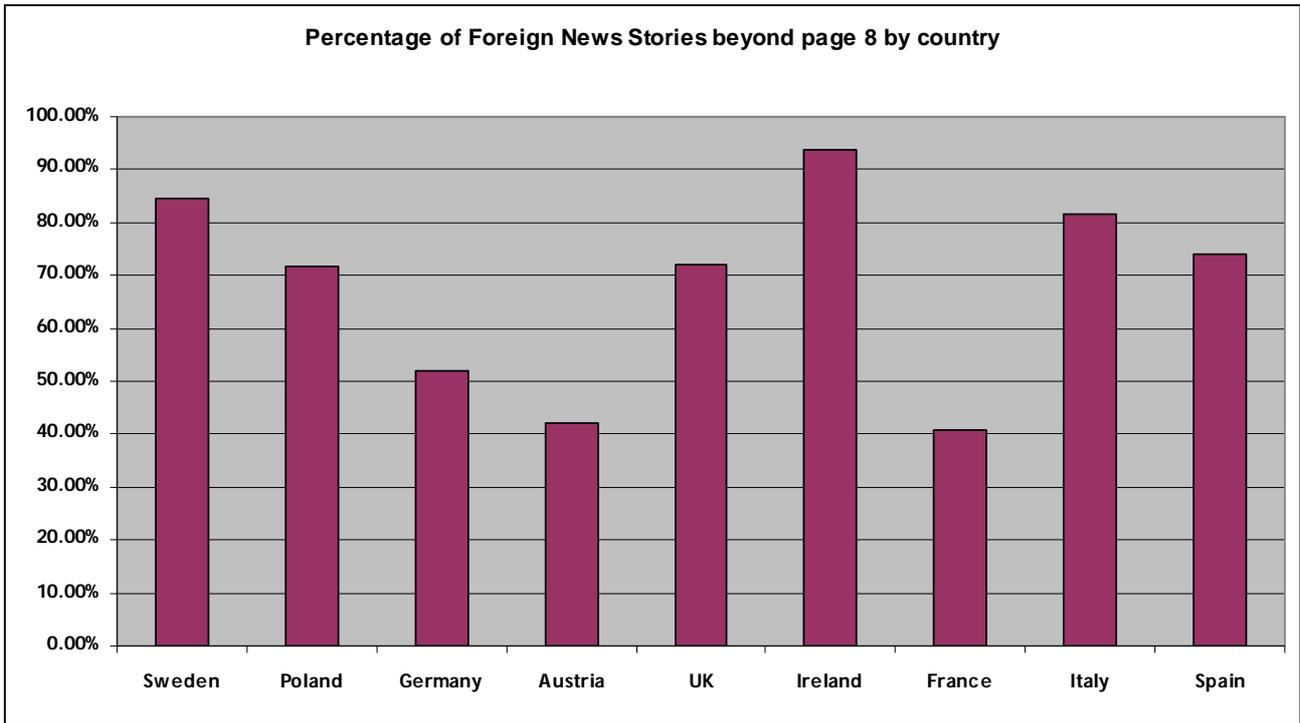
Is it on the front page?

Even in papers that have clearly identified foreign sections, there are instances when foreign news makes it to the front page.

Overall, 6.3 per cent of foreign stories made it to the front page; 15 per cent were found on pages 2 to 5, 16 per cent on pages 6 to 8 and the rest, 63 per cent were buried beyond page 8.

These percentages vary between papers and between the 9 different countries. The graphs below show these differences for the percentage of stories on the front page and the percentage of stories beyond page 8:





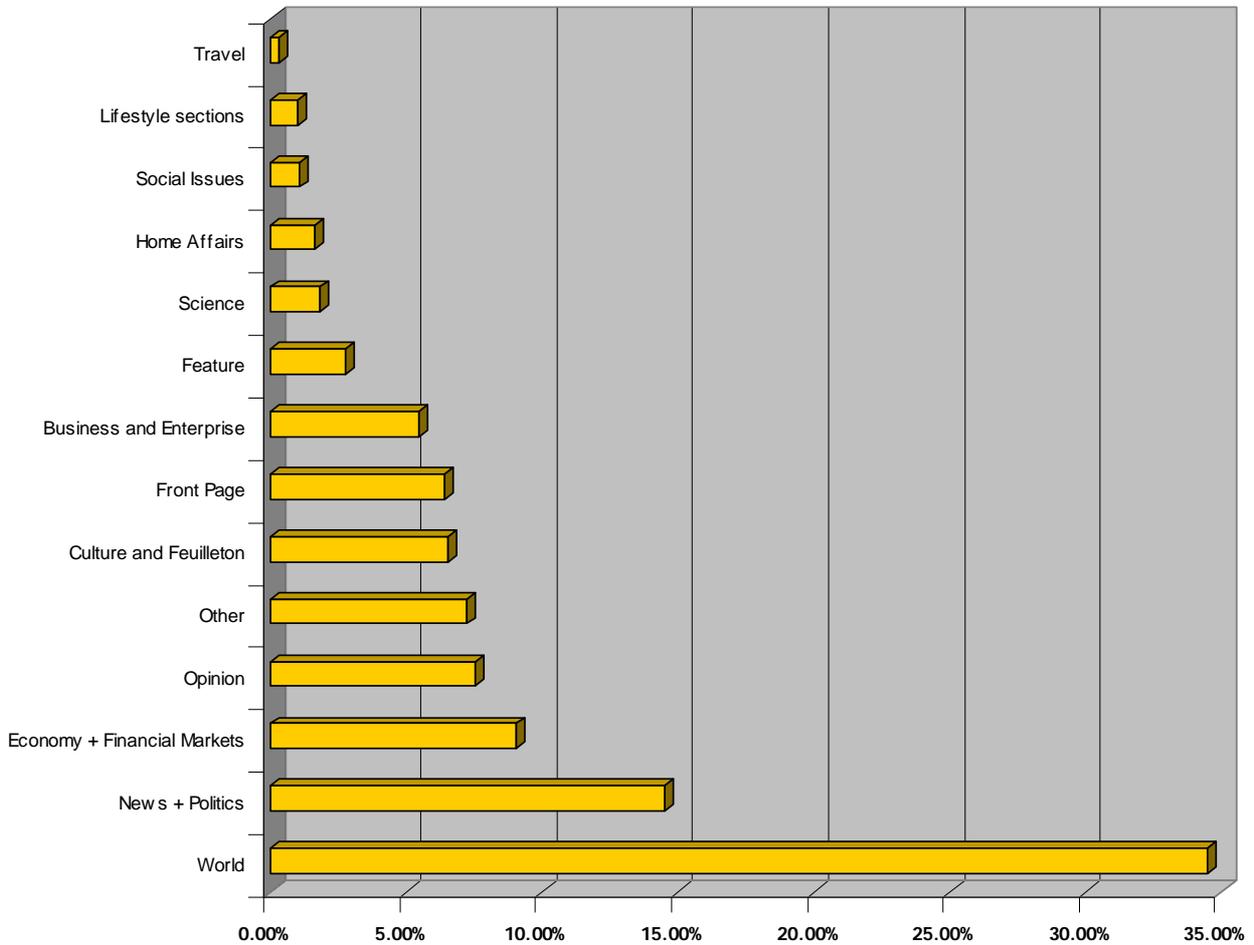
Is it foreign policy?

Furthermore, it is interesting to see which sections of the paper the stories are placed within. This determines how readers perceive the stories. The question here is: are most foreign stories to do with politics or not. The picture that emerges is that this is by no means clear. And it has already been shown that although a sizable proportion of the stories can be classified as politics there is also a broad range of stories which related to many other issues. That is, of course, reflected in the placement of the stories in the paper.

The most popular section of the paper for stories relating to foreign news stories are sections called 'World' or similar. That says something about geography, but not about the nature of the content. The distribution across types of sections of the paper is shown in the graph below.

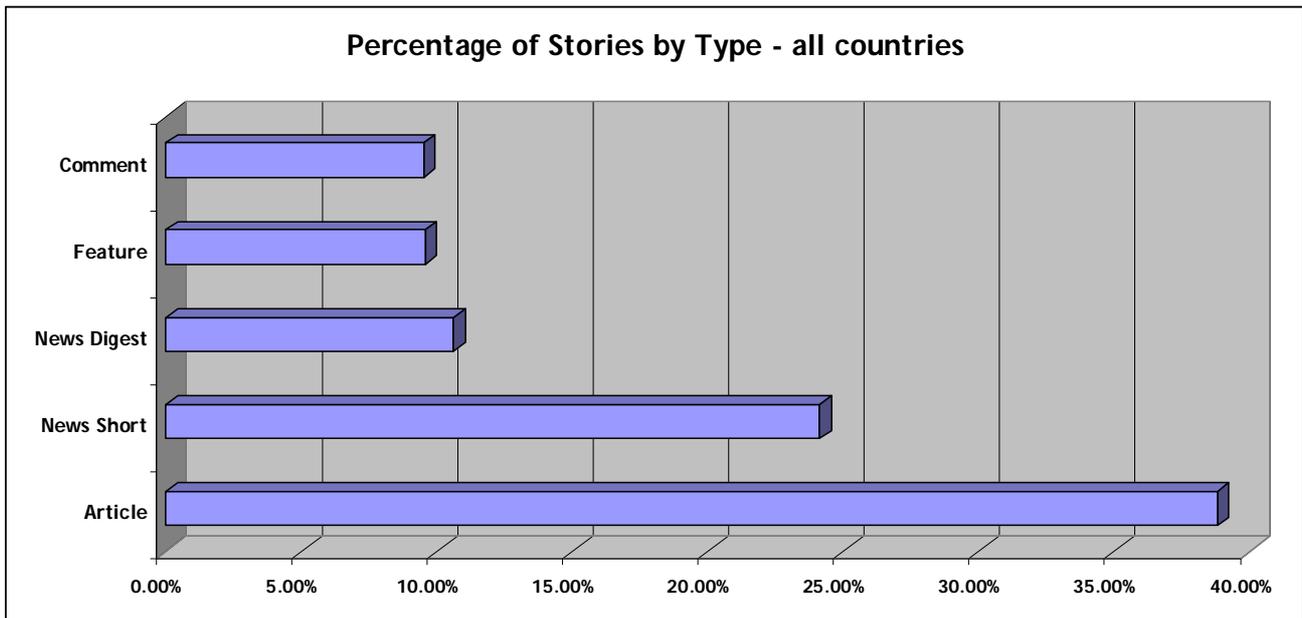
What the graph does show is that there is opportunity to find out about news from foreign countries in different parts of newspapers in all of the newspapers we examined. This may suggest that there is a wide range of different types of foreign stories that grab the attention of readers which may reflect a generally healthy interest in places we think of as 'abroad'.

Percentage of Foreign News Stories by Section of Newspaper - all countries



What kind of story?

It is also interesting to see what sort of stories foreign news is packaged as. The graph below shows the most common types of stories:



By article we talk about a piece that spans at least two columns in the paper and is of substantial length; it may or may not have a picture to illustrate it. It will have a proper headline which informs the reader of the content.

News shorts are much shorter pieces which will be very limited in content but would still have a headline and would still be news.

A news digest is a column of single paragraph stories which run to usually no more than 4 or 5 lines and give the merest suggestion of what the story is about; quite often they are found in the earlier pages of the paper and then refer to a longer story later on.

A feature would be a piece that is illustrated and runs to one or more pages.

A comment is an opinion piece by either the editor or another journalist.

Between them, these five categories of story types make up over 92 per cent of all stories. Other categories such as interviews, reviews, letters, pictures, obituaries, caricatures, essays and debates make up only just under 8 per cent between them.

A FINAL THOUGHT...

We have looked at printed newspapers. Even when we were doing the research in 2009 and 2010 it was quite challenging to actually obtain hard copies of all these papers in Brussels. For some of them we had to obtain a printable version on the internet and download it, in some cases page by page. We used the paper version because this allowed us an analysis of the placement of different pieces; so long as readers use paper versions the placement of stories matters because stories that are buried in the back pages are less likely to be read.

But of course, paper newspapers are less and less likely to be the most used source of news and information. The internet allows far greater choice about what we read and what we don't read because it is much easier to filter.

But it still matters that people receive accessible and informative news of other countries and other peoples. How this is done will depend in large measure on the willingness of journalists and the owners of news media to engage with the world around us in a creative way, and not simply follow the herd.