



Diplo Media Report 2023/01

National Centre for Research on Europe

MEDIA REPORT

**Summary of New Zealand Media Coverage of
the European Union: January–December 2022**

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Summary of New Zealand Media Coverage of the European Union: January–December 2022

June 2022 Media report, Dr Serena Kelly and Brittany Baugh, *University of Canterbury, New Zealand*

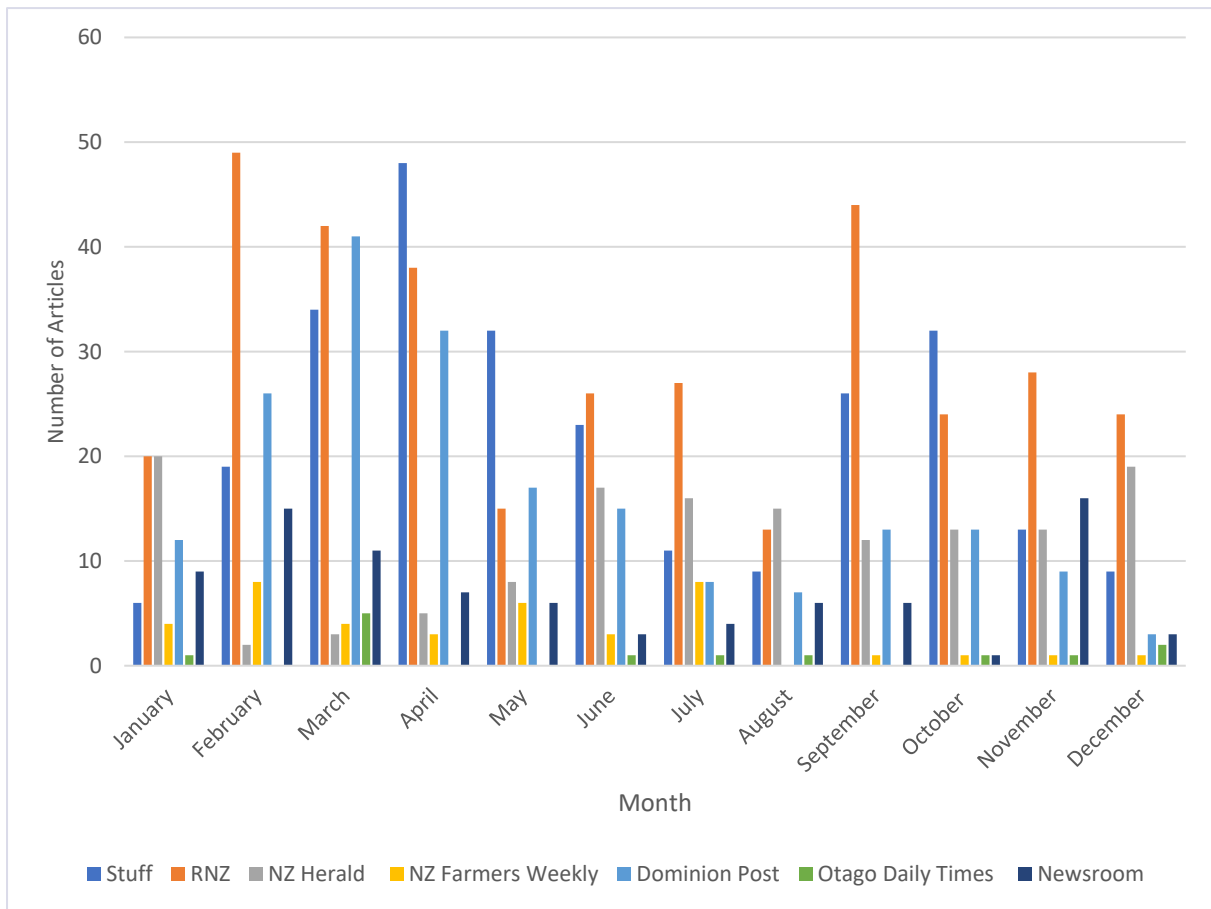
The summary below highlights key points found from the media analysis conducted from leading media outlets in New Zealand from 1 January – 31 December 2022.

2022 was an important year for Europe, for a number of reasons: the war in Ukraine continued, and closer to home the EU and New Zealand agreed on their long-awaited Free Trade Agreement (FTA). The following report presents a robust analysis of the media coverage of the European Union (EU) as presented in key New Zealand media outlets during the year 2022. The report systematically analyses all articles published in the chosen outlets across the year, thus demonstrating how the EU has been framed within this time and indicating the potential importance of the EU to New Zealand. The report also discusses similarities and differences with the 2021 dataset.

In total, 1213 articles were identified for our dataset in 2022, with fewer articles published in the second half of the year. Although this total number was substantially lower than in 2021 (which totalled 1683 stories), more sources were analysed in the 2021 dataset. As shown in Figure 1, there were fluctuations in the number of stories published throughout the year. In comparison to the 755 stories in the first half of the year, only 458 stories mentioning the EU were published in the latter half. The highest coverage of stories occurred in March, with a total of 140 stories published. This was juxtaposed by the lowest coverage in August at only 51 stories. The low number in August is in line with previous studies on the EU in New Zealand, and around the world – August is the month when Europe is on holiday, thus less news emanates from its shores.

Dividing our analysis into the two 6 monthly period offers a neat way to demonstrate some of our key findings. The dominant focus of the EU in the first half of 2022 demonstrates that New Zealanders were primarily reading news about the European Union concerning its impact, views and connections to the on-going tensions with the war in Ukraine. As mentioned in a [previous DIPLO analysis](#), this could explain the high volume of stories framing the EU as a minor actor – the EU has not been framed as a major actor in New Zealand news concerning the Ukrainian crisis. This does not, however, explain the overall reduction of stories concerning

Figure 1: Monthly Article Distribution by Publication, 2022



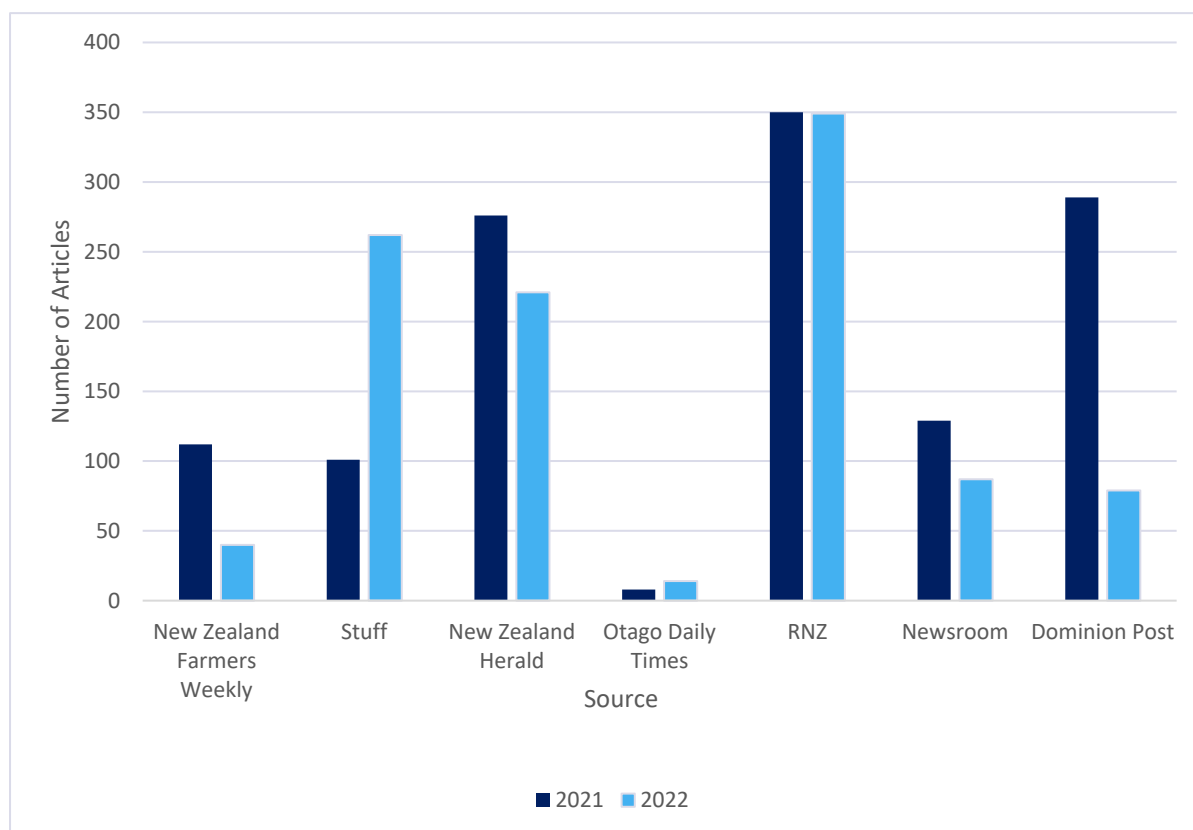
the EU and Ukraine in the latter half of the year. Despite the continuation of fighting in Ukraine, New Zealand editors and readers appeared to lose interest in the issue. This was not a unique phenomenon – it has been reported that Western media lost interest in the war in Ukraine in comparison to other news stories.¹

In 2022, the EU was most visible in newspaper articles published online by *Radio New Zealand (RNZ)*. This trend was consistent with the high numbers of *RNZ* articles in 2021, making it the source in which the EU had the highest visibility across the two-year period (as seen in Figure 2). Interestingly, the number of articles published by *Stuff* with coverage of the EU more than doubled in 2022 to over 250 articles, from 100 in 2021. *RNZ* and *Stuff* are unique in the dataset, as the other five sources saw a reduction in stories pertaining to the EU. The number of stories published by the *Dominion Post* decreased by almost two thirds compared to 2021 dropping from 289 to 79 in 2022. *The Otago Daily Times* was the least visible news outlet in our dataset, with 14 stories across the year, an average of little more

¹ Sabbagh, Dan (2022) Ukraine fears Western Support will fade as media loses interest in the war, *The Guardian*, 12 June. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jun/12/ukraine-fears-western-support-will-fade-as-media-loses-interest-in-the-war> (accessed 29 June 2023)

than 1 story per month. While this was an increase from 2021, it remained the outlet with the lowest coverage of the EU in its news reporting.

Figure 2: Number of Articles Per Source, 2021–2022



In order to provide a detailed examination of how the EU is understood in the New Zealand media, and the potential impact this has on New Zealand perceptions of the EU, this report outlines the dominant framing of the news items, the degree of centrality of the EU, and the evaluation of the EU in the collected dataset. The resultant discussions are inclusive of the previous [DIPLO media report for January to June 2022](#). A brief discussion of other identified trends in the data includes discussions around the continued visibility of Brexit in New Zealand as well as other important international partners (such as China) in the media coverage.

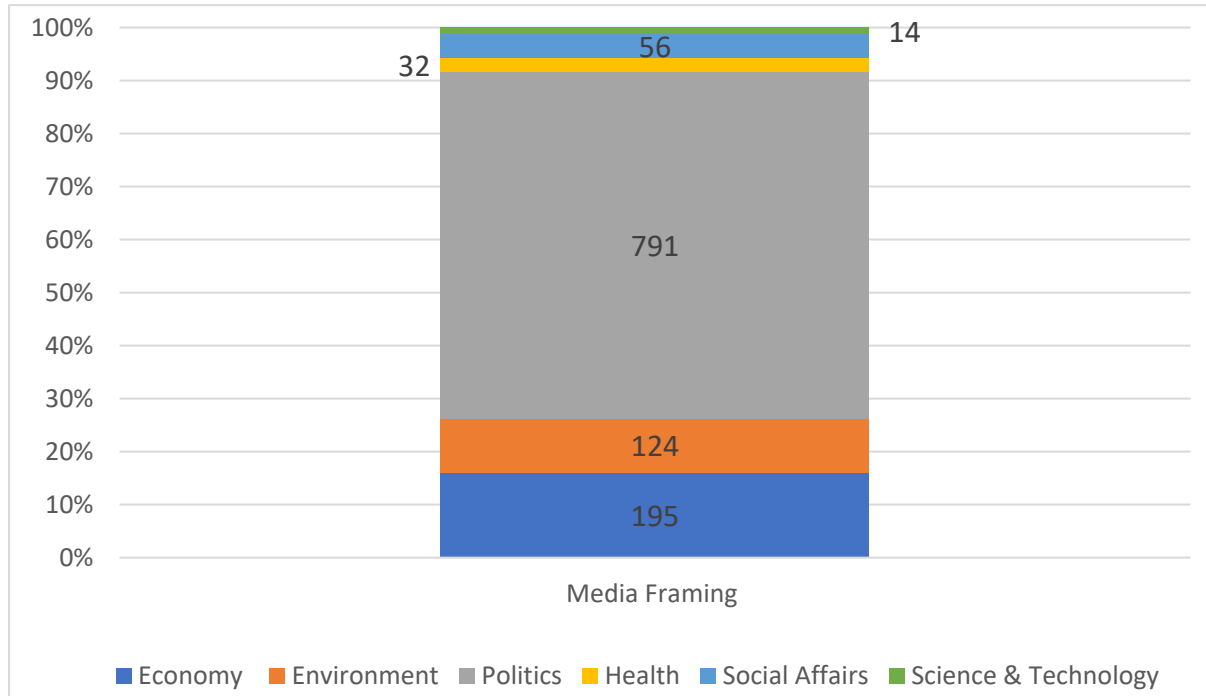
Media Framing and Evaluation of the EU

In order to understand the dominant narratives New Zealanders were reading concerning the European Union in 2022, each article was defined according to six categories or ‘frames’: Politics, Environment, Health, Science & Technology, Social Affairs and Economy (see Figure 3).

In 2022, the majority of news items published in New Zealand news framed the EU as a political actor, with 791 stories or 66% of the total stories. The dominant focus on war in

Ukraine in the first half of the year helped to emphasise this narrative -- the majority of Ukraine news stories were framed under Politics.

Figure 3: Media Framing, January–December 2022



Of the 791 political news stories, 403 of these pertained to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. 315 Ukraine-dominated news items were published from January to June. In contrast, only 88 were located in the July to December dataset. 310 out of the 403 stories on Ukraine framed the EU as an external political actor and 280 of the stories framed the EU as a minor actor.

The EU was framed as a major or secondary actor in 301 of the stories, which demonstrates a recognition of the EU's connection with, and continued role in, dealing with Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The least visible coverage in the dataset was under framing of the EU as a Science & Technology actor, accounting for only 14 articles in the 2022 data. Coverage of the EU's health policy was also low, with 32 stories.

Analysis of the portrayal of the EU in New Zealand's media focused on those articles in which the EU was presented as a major or secondary actor. The evaluation was overwhelmingly neutral across all six framing categories, as seen in Figure 3. Health and Science articles portrayed the EU neutrally, whilst the other four framing categories included both positive and negative evaluations. The majority of the negative evaluations were framed under articles pertaining to the EU as an economic actor and were predominantly focused on trade, generally in reference to the EU–NZ FTA. Negative evaluations were more prominent than positive

articles. Negatively charged news items totalled 11.25%, while positive evaluations were the lowest at 6.6% of the stories. This shows that coverage of the EU generally frames the EU as neutral which is positive for enforcing the concept of media neutrality. This is positive in comparison to the 2021 data as the number of positive evaluations rose from 4.4% to 6.6% and the number of negative evaluations decreased from 22% to 11.25% in stories framing the EU as a major or secondary actor.

Degree of Centrality

The centrality of the EU’s presence in New Zealand media was also analysed (Figures 4–10). The EU was predominantly presented as a minor actor across the seven sources analysed, totalling approximately 60% of the total stories in 2022. Out of 1213 stories analysed, 480 framed the EU as a major or secondary actor. The *New Zealand Farmer’s Weekly* had the highest ratio of major to minor and secondary centrality stories in 2022. Over the 12-month period, *Farmers Weekly* was most likely to frame the EU as a major actor, linked primarily to the EU–NZ Free Trade Agreement. *Stuff*’s news coverage had the highest number of stories framing the EU as a major actor at 88 stories -- around 33.5% of its total. Articles framing the EU as a secondary actor were the least frequent -- 14.5% of the media coverage.

Figure 4: Stuff Centrality N=262

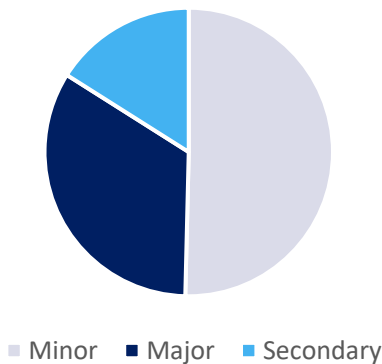


Figure 5: RNZ Centrality N=349

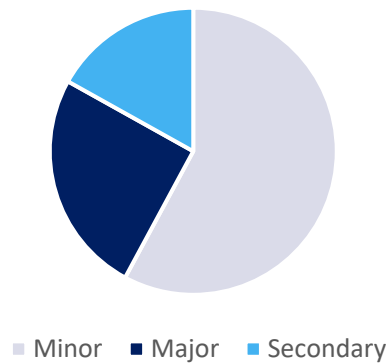


Figure 6: NZ Farmers Weekly Centrality N=40

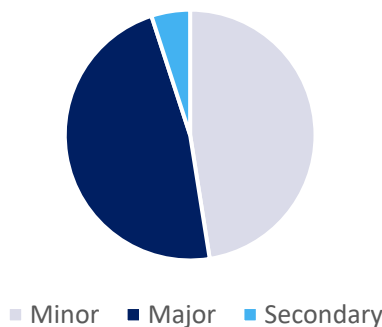


Figure 7: NZ Herald Centrality N=221

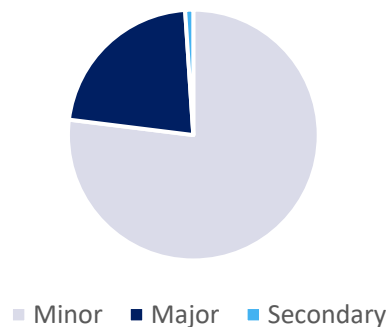


Figure 8: Otago Daily Times Centrality N=13

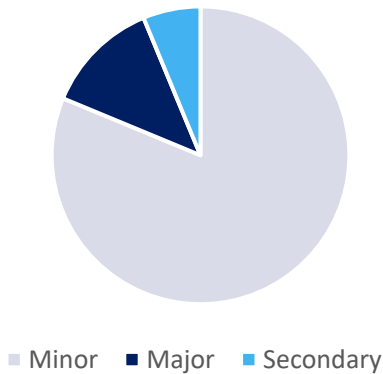


Figure 9: Newsroom Centrality N=87

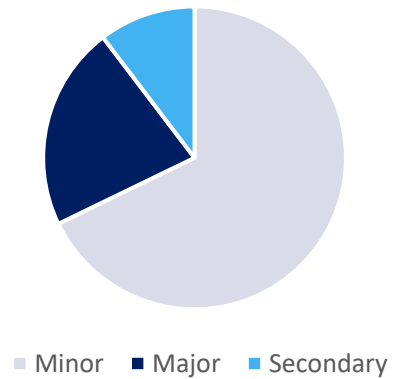
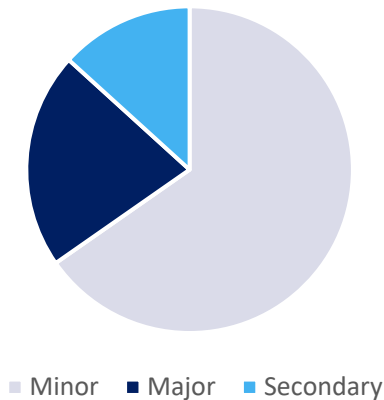


Figure 10: Dominion Post Centrality N=196



The EU in NZ media: Trends

Despite Brexit occurring on the 31st of January 2020, it remained a salient issue in the New Zealand media in 2022. In total, 37 stories mentioned Brexit, at an average of around 3 stories per month. Although this provided less coverage than the 307 stories published in 2021, it nevertheless still remained a visible topic in the media. In 2022 the media coverage of Brexit is attributable to reportage on changes to the Northern Ireland Protocol, to which the EU was closely aligned. Of the 37 stories which featured Brexit, 29 focused on Ireland. The UK Prime Minister at the time, Liz Truss, was quoted in an article published on *RNZ* that the UK can “only make progress through negotiations if the EU are willing to change the protocol”². There

² RNZ (2022) UK reveals plan to ditch parts of EU Brexit deal, 14 June. <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/world/469118/uk-reveals-plans-to-ditch-parts-of-eu-brexite-deal> (accessed 29 June 2023).

was no solution reached in June 2022, and talks between the EU and Britain resumed in October on matters pertaining to fixing the Northern Ireland Protocols checks³.

Regarding the presence of actors in the media in relation to coverage of the EU, China and Russia were the most frequent. China was mentioned in 72 stories whilst Russia was mentioned in 504. The increase of Russian visibility has already been attributed to the Russian invasion of the Ukraine. However, the visibility of China was not linked to this. Only 15 out of 72 of the stories linked China to Russia. The other 57 stories contained sentences relating to the EU in relation to climate change and to the FTA. 15 of these stories also correlated with coverage of COVID-19, addressing the ongoing impact of the outbreak.⁴

Conclusion

In sum, our detailed analysis of media coverage of the European Union in key New Zealand outlets in 2022 notes that the year held significance for Europe due to ongoing events such as the war in Ukraine and the long-awaited Free Trade Agreement between the EU and New Zealand. In total, 1,213 articles were identified for the dataset, a decrease from the 1,683 stories in 2021, with fluctuations in coverage observed throughout the year. Notably, August showed a decline in coverage, aligning with the trend of reduced European news during the holiday season.

There was dominant focus on the EU's role in the ongoing tensions with the war in Ukraine in the first half of 2022. During this period, the EU was primarily framed as a minor actor in New Zealand news concerning the Ukrainian crisis. However, despite the continuation of fighting in Ukraine, there was a decline in stories concerning the EU and Ukraine in the latter half of the year. This trend, while notable, is not unique, as it reflects a broader global pattern of waning interest in the Ukrainian conflict.

RNZ emerged as the source with the highest visibility of the EU in its online news articles, consistent with its performance in 2021. Conversely, *Stuff* significantly increased its coverage in 2022, publishing over 250 articles about the EU compared to 100 in the previous year. The remaining five sources, however, saw a reduction in EU-related stories, with the *Dominion Post* experiencing a particularly notable decrease.

³ RNZ (2022) UK's Sunak takes first trip to Northern Ireland as PM, 16 December. <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/world/480901/uk-s-sunak-takes-first-trip-to-northern-ireland-as-pm> (accessed 29 June 2023)

⁴ RNZ (2022) NZ working with Singapore on 'supply chain resilience' for exporters-Ardern, 20 April. <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/political/465577/nz-working-with-singapore-on-supply-chain-resilience-for-exporters-ardern> (accessed 29 June 2023)

Framing categories were crucial in understanding how the EU was portrayed. The majority of news items categorised the EU as a political actor (66% of total stories), again with a notable emphasis on the war in Ukraine. Conversely, the EU was infrequently framed as a Science & Technology (1.1%) or Health (2.6%) actor. The evaluation of the EU's portrayal was predominantly neutral when it was presented as a major or secondary actor. Negative evaluations slightly outweighed positive ones, with negative news items totalling 11.25% and positive ones at 6.6%. The degree of centrality revealed that the EU was predominantly presented as a minor actor across various media sources, with the exception of the *New Zealand Farmers Weekly*.

The report also touched on the continued presence of Brexit in New Zealand media in 2022. While it received less coverage compared to 2021, Brexit remained a salient issue, primarily due to reportage on changes to the Northern Ireland Protocol. Additionally, Russia's visibility was closely linked to its invasion of Ukraine, while China's presence was associated with climate change and the EU–New Zealand Free Trade Agreement.