

Is FTA for 'Up Closer and Personal'?

Reflections on Media and Public Views on the EU in Korea¹

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Abstract: *Due to its geopolitical situation, Korea started its relationship with the EU quite later than with the US, China, Japan and Russia. However, the EU-Korea relationship has grown "slowly but steadily". The studies on the perception of the EU have been conducted since the 2000s. Korean scholars have been interested in finding out the Korean perception of the EU and have participated in the multi-annual international research projects from the beginning. Their extensive data on Korean media coverage on the EU and public opinion surveys present the nature and characteristics of the EU imagery in Korea. EU-Korea relationship has seen a turning point by the signing of a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between the two parties. The EU became more exposed to the Korean media on this occasion, and accordingly, the Korean public now considers the EU as a more important partner than before. Through the detailed explanation and analysis of the existing perception studies in this paper, one can understand how the EU perception has been shaped and changed in Korea over time. One of the major findings is that the visibility of the EU has been enhanced in Korea for sure, but the images have been still seriously prejudiced as an 'economic powerhouse'. Further studies are necessary to examine how to widen the scope of mutual understanding in different fields.*

Keywords: *EU-Korea relationship, EU-Korea FTA, EU perception in Korea, media perception, public perception*

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1. Introduction

The relationship between Korea and the EU is over fifty years old, an age where people tend to look back on their achievements and shortcomings. The Korea-EU relationship is defined by two characteristics. First, it was a “late but steady” development. Compared with other Asian countries, Korea at first was not the most “desirable” partner for the EU. The EU was already very involved with its historical colonies in Southeast Asia. Moreover, China and Japan were already prominent countries in East Asia. Equally, the EU was not a priority for Korea surrounded by the US, China, Japan, and Russia, the Korean peninsula was directly influenced by these countries with most of the geopolitical issues on this peninsula dealt with by the “four big powers”. However, the relationship with the EU developed gradually and steadily over time without encountering any setbacks. Second, the Korea-EU relationship was mainly “economy-oriented”. Since the EU is not a member of the Six-Party Talks,² the EU’s political involvement in the Korean peninsula was limited and Korea developed its relations with the EU through trade. Korea relies heavily on exports for its economic growth, and the EU-28 is the biggest market in the world. For the EU, Korea is the portal to enter the Asian market. Thus, trading has grown to be the most active area of bilateral activity. The EU is currently Korea’s second largest trading partner (after China), whilst Korea ranks eighth on the EU’s trading list. In 2010, Korea and the EU finally concluded a Free Trade Agreement, which took effect on 1 July 2011, the first between the EU and Asia.

Traditionally, the EU has been perceived in contradictory terms—‘economic powerhouse’ and ‘trade giant’, on the one hand, and ‘political dwarf’ and ‘military pygmy’, on the other hand. However, the EU has made various efforts to exert its influence not only in international trade/economy but also in politics and diplomacy. In this respect, it has been keen on promoting its image in the international community including the Asia-Pacific region. The Korea-EU FTA is thus important. During the FTA negotiation process, the Korean government designated the EU a “strategic partner” through which the government aims at diversifying cooperation with the EU to cover not only trade and economy, but also political, social and cultural areas.

² The Six-Party Talks aim to seek a peaceful resolution to North Korea’s nuclear programme and to achieve the denuclearisation of North Korea. The members of the talks are the US, China, Russia, Japan and two Koreas. Since the initial launch in 2003, there have been six rounds of talks until today. The latest talks were held in September 2007.

This paper looks into some reflections on media and public views on the EU in Korea at the time of the Korea-EU FTA settlement. A range of studies examined the perceptions of the EU in Korea (Chaban & Holland, 2005; Park & Kim, 2006; Park & Seo, 2007; Bain *et al.*, 2008; Park & Yoon, 2010; Yoon, Chaban & Chung, 2010; Yoon, 2013). These studies researched EU perceptions in various discourses, and often featured longitudinal approach tracing the change in EU images in Korea from 2004 till 2010. Interestingly, the study periods parallel the FTA negotiation process. The Korean government strategically selected the EU as a negotiation partner in 2003. The negotiations then began in 2007 (MOFAT, 2007) and continued until both parties signed the FTA in October 2010. This led to the Korean media paying increased attention to the EU, and these perception studies reflect this.

In this paper, the key findings from the most recent research period (2011–2012) will be scrutinised. The data collection period is significant in that it covers the post-signing and implementation stages. It is interesting to consider whether or not the Korea-EU FTA has influenced EU perceptions in Korea and the findings of this recent research will provide comparative insights.

2. Theoretical framework

The role of the media in framing public perceptions can be explained by the agenda-setting theory. The idea of agenda-setting was initiated by Walter Lippmann (1922). He did not explicitly mention the term at his time, but his postulation that our cognitive maps of the world are shaped by news media is considered the significant starting point of agenda-setting theory (McCombs, 2004). Further conceptualisation was made by later scholars. According to Cobb and Elder (1983, p. 14) an agenda is “a general set of political controversies that will be viewed at any point in time as falling within the range of legitimate concerns meriting the attention of the polity”. As for the agenda-setting role of the media, McCombs (2004, p. 1) argued that

[t]hrough their day-to-day selection and display of the news, editors and news directors focus our attention and influence our perceptions of what are the most important issues of the day. This ability to influence the salience of topics on the public agenda has come to be called the agenda-setting role of news media.

Agenda-setting explains why and how certain issues are perceived by the public to be relatively more important than others. The agenda-setting process comprises three key components—media agenda, public agenda and policy agenda, and they influence each other (Dearing & Rogers, 1996). The news emphasised by the media comes to be considered as an important issue by the public who read, hear, and see the news may want to exert their influence on policymakers. Advancement of a policy initiative by the policymakers would then lead to prominent news coverage. In this mechanism, ‘exposure’ is an important aspect. Exposure of an issue through media enables any “hot” issue for the media to be transformed into a “hot” public agenda (Dearing & Rogers, 1996). In this respect, agenda-setting is basically a “political” process that involves ongoing competition among issue advocates who wish to gain attention from media, public and policymakers. Many technical devices are used by media in deciding the salience of news topics.

Mass media, as a news provider, often use a set of cues which determine the salience of an issue (McCombs, 2004). Newspapers, for instance, have a set of cues including news placement, the length, and the size of headlines. Sometimes visual imagery such as a photo is also used as a cue. Television has more limited capacity to deliver the salience of news topics. Even one mention by a newscaster can be very influential, and the close-up shots and subtitles are important additional cues.

The public perceive the salience of news topics, advertently or inadvertently, in response to a set of cues from mass media. As a certain topic is repeatedly covered, the public come to perceive it as a more salient issue than the others. The public place their focus on the issue, this topic becomes the salient issue in the public mind. In this way, the salience of news will eventually lead to the creation of public opinion on that issue.

However, the media’s emphasis on certain issues does not always determine what the public considers important. By focusing on the mental attitude of the audience, Neuman and others premised that audiences are not always attentive, but rather inattentive to the message of the news agenda and put forward the ‘common knowledge paradigm’ to overcome the limitations of the media’s agenda-setting role (Neuman, Just & Crigler, 1992). Its central assertion is that even where there is a disjuncture between the media’s emphasis of its agenda and the public’s reception of it, extensive news coverage will eventually be transferred into public concern. When an agenda is exposed to constant media coverage, “common knowledge” on that information aggregates gradually into the public agenda of shared knowledge and perspectives. Whether the audiences

are interested or uninterested in that agenda, the news media would influence them in the end (Neuman, Just & Crigler, 1992).

This article is predicated on the working assumption that media exposure plays a decisive role in forming public opinion, especially when the media covers the issues on foreign countries and events. By referring to the particular case of EU coverage in Korean media, this study examines EU visibility in Korea. In particular, the Korea-EU FTA has been the most salient issue in the media in recent years. The following analysis of the specific features of the EU news in Korea addresses three questions: How has the FTA issue affected the Korean media coverage on the EU? What characteristics can be found in the EU news coverage in Korea? And has the FTA really brought the EU closer to the Korean people's mind?

3. Some findings from existing research

As mentioned above, research has been conducted on a regular basis to analyse Korean media's perception and public opinion on the EU (Table 1).

Table 1. Media perception and public opinion researches in Korea

Sequence Number	Research Period	Media Analysis	Public Survey
1	2004	X	X
2	2006	X	X
3	2009–2010	X	
4	2011–2012	X	X

Note: Public survey was not conducted in 2009–2010.

There have been four media studies and three public survey studies:³ cumulatively they illustrate the longitudinal evolution of Korean media and public perception on the EU. These findings have been reported in various publications. The results of the first study on media and public perceptions in Korea appeared in Chaban and Holland (2005). Park and Seo (2007) analysed the results of media perception and public survey in 2006. Four media outlets were selected—

³ However, the public survey was excluded in the third research in 2009–2010.

Chosun Daily, *Maeil Business*, *The Korea Herald*, and *KBS News 9*, and were monitored for the whole year to collect EU-related news. Yoon, Chaban and Chung (2010) examined the comparative analysis of EU perceptions in Korean television channels. Two representative Korean television channels—*KBS* and *MBC*—were selected and monitored from 1 January and 30 June in 2009. All EU-related news from all the news programmes on these two channels were collected and analysed. Most recently, Yoon (2013) comprehensively examined the major findings from the perception studies conducted so far.⁴ After collecting new data in 2011–2012, this paper provides updated findings on the media and public perceptions in Korea. For media analysis, the data was collected from 1 January to 30 June 2011. A third public opinion survey was conducted in March–April 2012. Before going into the analysis of the new data, this section will highlight some key findings from these previous studies.

3.1 Media perceptions of the EU in Korea

In the 2006 study, a total of 940 news items was collected from four news outlets in 12 months of monitoring. This was a substantial increase from the 2004 study which collected just 289 items for the whole year.⁵ *Maeil Business Daily* recorded the largest volume among the four outlets in reporting EU news (41%). *KBS News 9* showed the smallest volume (3%), which reflects the time-constraint nature of news broadcasting. Korean newspapers (*Chosun* 37%, *Maeil Business* 41%) were in general more active in covering EU news than the English-language newspaper (*The Korea Herald* 19%). Figure 1 indicates the distribution of thematic frames of the EU news (press and television) coverage in the 2006 coverage. A clear contrast is evident: almost half of the entire EU reported news (press and television) in 2006 was economic (49%) in nature. Next to the economic frame, political (31%) and social (17%) frames were the most common. News related to the environment (2%) and development (1%) was almost invisible.

In fact, this trend did not change much over time. The data analysis of television news in 2009 also revealed that economic news was the most common EU

⁴ There are other important publications concerning the EU perceptions in Korea: Park & Kim, 2006; Bain *et al.*, 2008; and Park & Yoon, 2010. However, they examined the Korean elites' perception of the EU, which is not the main concern of this paper.

⁵ In fact, it is difficult to make a direct comparison between the results of the 2004 study and those of the 2006 study, because the former monitored seven news outlets (five print media and two television media outlets). However, the 2006 study collected EU news more than three times from fewer outlets. This implies for sure that the EU became more visible in Korea over time.

theme. Figure 2 illustrates the distribution of thematic frames of EU news in 2009 on two Korean news channels—*KBS* and *MBC*.⁶ The 2009 analysis showed a similar trend to 2006. In 2009, a total of 94 television news items was collected. Out of the data, there were 65 items for economic news (69%) and 25 for political news (27%). Social news only accounted for 4 per cent only.

Among the economic news items, FTA-related news was the most frequent topic in 2009. The data collection period spanned Korea-EU negotiations on the FTA. It is thus unsurprising to see the high number of such news items that year (Table 2).

Table 2. Contents of EU economic news on Korean television in 2009

Contents	Number of Articles	Percentage
Korea-EU FTA	53	81
EU's criticism on the US Buy America clause	4	6
EU's guidelines for financial order in the world	2	3
EU-US beef dispute	1	2
EU's imposition of fines on Intel	3	4
Economic outlook of the EU	1	2
EU's reinforcing protectionism	1	2
Total	65	100

Source: Modified from Yoon, Chaban & Chung, 2010, pp. 309–310.

In summary, with the vast majority of economic news on Korean television concerning the Korea-EU FTA, the EU is expected to be mainly viewed as an economic entity in Korea. Moreover, the Korean public might be inclined to consider the EU above all as an FTA partner with Korea.

⁶ The data was collected from 1 January to 30 June 2009 and all the news programmes of the two channels were monitored. There were 13 news programmes on *KBS* and 7 on *MBC*. During this six-month period, 94 EU news items were collected from these news programmes.

3.2 Public perceptions of the EU in Korea

A public opinion survey was conducted in 2004 and 2006. The methodology for the 2004 survey involved telephone interviews, and 401 respondents participated in the survey. The 2006 survey was conducted online and 403 respondents participated. A number of questions were common to both the 2004 and 2006 surveys, although other questions were added to the 2006 survey.

In both 2004 and 2006, respondents were asked to rank those countries that Koreans consider important to their country. The responses of the 2004 and 2006 surveys are displayed in Table 3:

Table 3. Country of importance to Korea at present

	2004	2006
1	US (65%)	US (25%)
2	China (47%)	China (22.1%)
3	Japan (44%)	Japan (18.7%)
4	North Korea (10%)	Europe/EU (12.6%)
5	UK (5%)	Asia* (10.8%)
6	Europe/EU (3.5%)	

Note: Asia excludes China and Japan.

Sources: Modified from Chaban & Holland, 2005, p. 24 and Park & Seo, 2007, p. 152.

In 2004, Europe/EU was far behind the US, China and Japan. Indeed, it was even considered less important than North Korea and the UK. However, in 2006 Europe/EU scored higher. The US, China and Japan were still considered more important than Europe/EU, but the latter was perceived to be more important than Asia. The Korean public's regional orientation did not change much, but it is noticeable to see more visibility of Europe/EU in people's opinion.

In both surveys the respondents were also asked to rank the countries that would be important for Korea in the future on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is not important at all and 5 is very important (Table 4).

Table 4. Country of importance to Korea in the future

	2004	2006
1	China (4.3)	China (4.73)
2	Japan (3.7)	Japan (4.42)
3	US (3.5)	US (4.14)
4	Europe/EU (3.3)	Europe/EU (3.9)
5	Asia* (3.2)	Asia* (3.88)

Note: Asia excludes China and Japan.

Sources: Modified from Chaban & Holland, 2005, p. 26 and Park & Seo, 2007, p. 153.

In terms of ranking, there was not much change between the two surveys. China was considered as the most important country for the future of Korea, followed by Japan and then the US. The EU/Europe was positioned lower than the US, although higher than Asia (excluding China and Japan). Again, in the Korean public's mind, China, the US, and Japan are more important for their country than the EU/Europe.

Another question which was repeated was to identify the sources of information about the EU (Table 5). The respondents' answers in the respective studies were as follows.

Table 5. Sources of information about the EU

	2004	2006
1	TV news (73%)	TV news (31%)
2	Newspaper (52%)	Newspaper (30%)
3	Internet (41%)	Internet (22%)

Sources: Modified from Chaban & Holland, 2005, p. 47 and Park & Seo, 2007, p. 156

The most common information sources were television news, newspaper and the Internet. This preference did not change between 2004 and 2006. In 2006 respondents also listed television programmes (6%), magazines (5%) and word of mouth (5%) as additional information sources.

One additional question in 2006 explored the Korean public's personal images on the EU. Table 6 offers some sample responses; multiple answers were allowed, and the answers were grouped according to image type.

Table 6. *Personal images of the EU in the mind of the Korean public in 2006*

Type of Image	Specific Images Mentioned
Country & Place	France, UK, ASEAN, Turkey, Switzerland, Belgium, the Netherlands, US, Korea, Germany, Paris, Italy
Economy	The euro, economic bloc, tariff alliance, EEC, trade, huge market, free tariff, Mark (Deutsch Mark), FTA balancing power against US, money
Character	Large nation, developed nations, superpower, United States, order, community, conservative, egoism, exclusive, selfish, freedom, multiracial and multicultural, justice, peace, jealousy, internal difficulties, a model for an Asian community, world unification, welfare, tradition, war, discrimination, alliance, indifference
Symbols	EU flag
Living & Life	Eurorail pass, travel, social security, no visa, soccer, tax
International Organisation	IMF, NATO, UN, OECD
Others	Turkey's EU membership, Caucasians, nations trying hard to join the EU, nations that do not want to join the EU, nations which must be defeated, nations which are not very close, a good relationship, birds of a feather flock together, railroad connection in Europe, environmental regulations

Source: Modified from Park & Seo, 2007, p. 156.

The answers were interestingly diverse. The first significant point is that the respondents tended to be confused about individual European countries, for example, mentioning Switzerland and Turkey which are not part of the EU. Second, economic considerations seemed to be quite strong in people's perceptions, with many responses related to trade, markets, tariffs, and money. The euro was also mentioned. Third, the Korean public tended to have contrasting impressions of the EU—on the one hand, the EU was described as a model example for an Asian community where an alliance fosters multiculturalism, justice and peace. On the other hand, the EU was considered selfish and exclusive. Therefore in the Korean public's mind, the EU constitutes merely a regional economic bloc distant from Korea physically and mentally, but one with a steady and good relationship.

Based on these findings from the previous studies on media and public perceptions, there are three important conclusions. First, the EU is often

confused with European countries. Second, the EU is predominantly recognised as an economic entity and trading partner. Third, although the EU is a distant trade partner, there is potential for improving the bilateral relationship further, as the EU is seen to possess many desirable characteristics, such as a model regional community as well as a place of welfare, freedom, justice and peace.

4. Methodology

The 2011–2012 study is composed of two parts—media analysis and public opinion. As for the media analysis, four Korean news media—*Chosun Daily*, *Maeil Business Daily*, *The Korea Herald* and *KBS News 9*—were selected. These are not only the most representative media outlets in Korea, but also the same outlets analysed in the previous studies. The monitoring period extended from 1 January to 30 June 2011 and represents the most recent data in the studies of EU perceptions in Korea. Consequently, the analysis of this data provides insights into changes in the Korean media images of the EU. The data was analysed against six criteria—*volume*, *news source*, *primary frame*, *focus of domesticity*, *degree of centrality*, and *evaluation*. *Volume* means the total frequency of EU news reportage. *News source* is characterised by two types—international sources (e.g., international wire, foreign correspondent) and local sources (e.g., local agency, staff reporter, local correspondent posted in foreign countries). *Thematic frame* refers to the main topic of the news contents. *Focus of domesticity* refers to the place where the news is happening. It could be within the EU, in Korea, in East Asia (region) or in a third country. In each case, the news is classified either as EU news, local, regional or third country news. *Degree of centrality* indicates to what extent the EU is featured in the news contents. There are ‘major’, ‘secondary’ and ‘minor’ sub-divisions under this category.⁷ *Evaluation* indicates the tone assigned to the EU representation in media. It is either positive, neutral, or negative.

The second element—the public opinion survey—was conducted in March–April 2012 by a professional social research group TNS (with an online sample size of 1,002). The questionnaire included both identical questions from the previous survey as well as new ones. The survey questions included the importance of the EU for Korea, its global importance, sources of EU information and personal images on the EU.

⁷ For further details see Yoon, Chaban & Chung, 2010.

Since 2006, both Korea and the EU took a series of steps to implement an FTA on schedule for 1 July 2011. Each side had to complete the parliamentary ratification process according to their own legal requirements. In this respect, the first half of 2011 was very timely for data collection. The Korean media paid greater attention to this ratification process as well as the anticipated impact of the FTA on the Korean economy. Similarly, the year of 2012—March and April, in particular—was an appropriate time to conduct a national online survey, because the implementation of the FTA meant that the Korean public was exposed to a substantial volume of EU news on Korean media.

In other words, the data collected in 2011–2012 for media and public perceptions are highly reliable for analysing how FTA influenced the perception of the EU in Korea. By applying the same methodology consistently, the results from previous studies and this new study can be compared. Since the Korea-EU FTA was the most striking issue in the bilateral relationship over the past five years, the comparison will highlight the impact of the FTA on the EU's visibility in Korea.

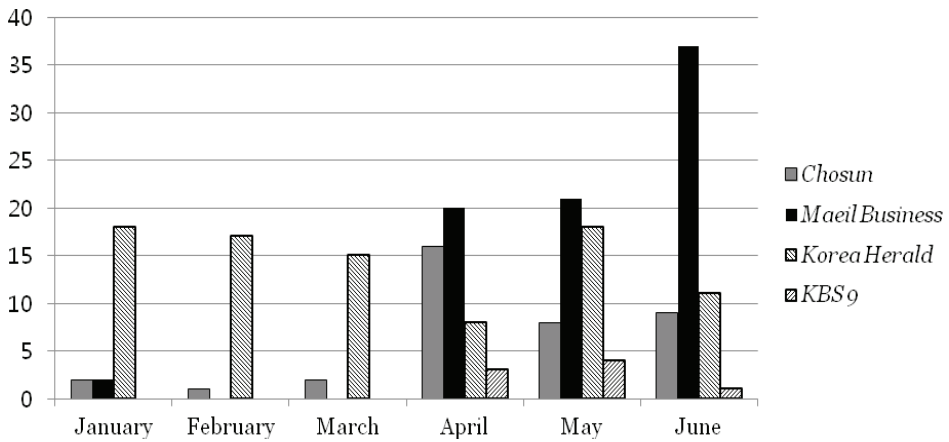
5. Major findings & discussion

5.1 Media images

From 1 January to June 2011, a number of 213 news items were collected from the four media outlets. In terms of total news volume, *The Korea Herald* was top reporting 87 news items in the first half of 2009, followed by *Maeil Business* which reported 80 items. Chosun reported 38 items. The least volume was recorded by *KBS* which covered only 8 items. However, since *KBS News 9* is a television news programme unlike the other three print media, it is not surprising to see such low frequency of coverage for EU news given that this programme operates under strict time limitations. For easier understanding of the monthly changes over time, see Figure 1.

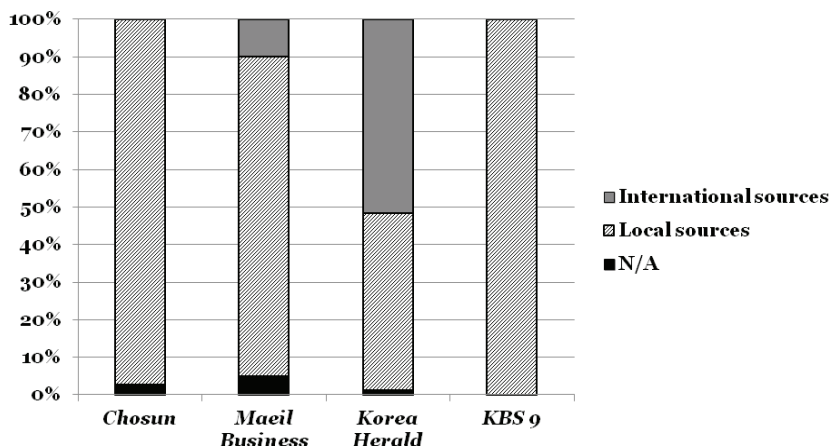
As for monthly frequency, the first three months recorded quite a low number of articles compared with the last three months. The major issue during January–March was the eurozone crisis. This issue continued to be reported in April–June as well, since the crisis continued to affect the global economy. There were almost no reports on the FTA during this time (after being signed in October 2010 by the heads of states, there was no visible issue on this topic for a while after this event).

Figure 1. Monthly volume of EU news in different outlets



Given the importance of news source in news production, the four outlets were classified by the type of news sources. There were two dominant types—international sources and local sources (Fig. 2). International sources refer to leading international wires such as Reuters, AP, AFP, Bloomberg, Xinhua, etc. Local sources include home news agencies (e.g., Yonhap), in-house staff reporters, or local correspondents posted in overseas countries. In some rare cases, the news sources were not identifiable.

Figure 2. Sources of EU news



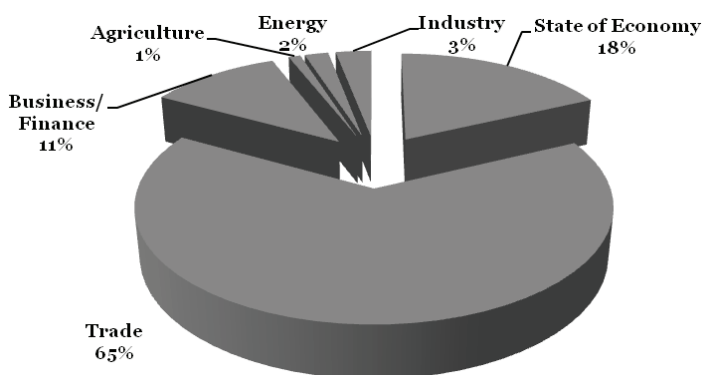
EU news in Korea relied heavily on local sources. It was in general staff reporters or overseas correspondents who wrote and reported EU news. Only *The Korea Herald* used both international sources and local sources. Such a

tendency affected the whole news production including thematic frames, focus of domesticity, degree of centrality, and evaluation.

In 2011, the total of 213 news items are classified by their thematic frames—186 out of them were economic in focus (87%), including the FTA and the eurozone crisis. There was a yawning gap between the number of economic news and political news with the latter accounting for 9 per cent coverage. In a significant addition, news on social affairs and environment correspondingly accounted for 3 and 1 per cent only.

At this point, it is useful to compare this result with those of 2006 and 2009. The overall structure of the primary frame has not changed significantly over time. The leading frame was ‘economic’ but more importantly, the proportion of economic frame has increased sharply over time. It was 49 per cent in 2006, rising to 87 per cent in 2011. Thus it can be argued that the EU has become more economically visible in Korea during the last five years, and that the Korea-EU FTA has played a crucial role in reinforcing such visibility.

Figure 3. Subcategory of EU economic news



What, then, are the key topics of the economic news? The 186 economic news articles were again classified by sub-category: six sub-categories were identified—*state of economy*, *trade*, *business/finance*, *agriculture*, *energy*, and *industry* (Fig. 3). *State of economy* includes the news on decline, growth, or slowdown of economy as well as economic crisis. *Trade* refers to the FTA, export subsidies and WTO-related news. As for *business/finance*, news on banking, taxes was included. *Agriculture* included the news on dairy, poultry and fruit. *Energy* news reported issues of energy production and sourcing as well as related policy. *Industry* included the news on different types of industries such as IT, textile, car, food, etc. Out of 186 economic news items, the number

of trade news was 120. This accounted for almost two-thirds (65%) of the total economic news. Again, the majority of the trade news concerned FTA issues (117 out of 120). This represented 98 per cent of the total trade news, and 55 per cent of the total EU news.

Figure 4 illustrates the focus of domesticity of the collected data. *EU news* means the news report focused solely on the EU without involving any other countries. *Local news* means domestic news items that involve the EU in the context of the country of the news outlets—Korea, in this case. *Regional news* refers to the EU news reports that involve the Asian region. *Third country news* means the EU news that involve a third country (neither the EU nor Korea). Overall, local news was the most dominant focus of reporting. In other words, EU news in Korea was, in fact, characterised by Korean news reports that featured the involvement of the EU. Only in *The Korea Herald*, more than half of the total news items were 'pure' EU news.

Figure 4. Focus of reporting EU in Korean media

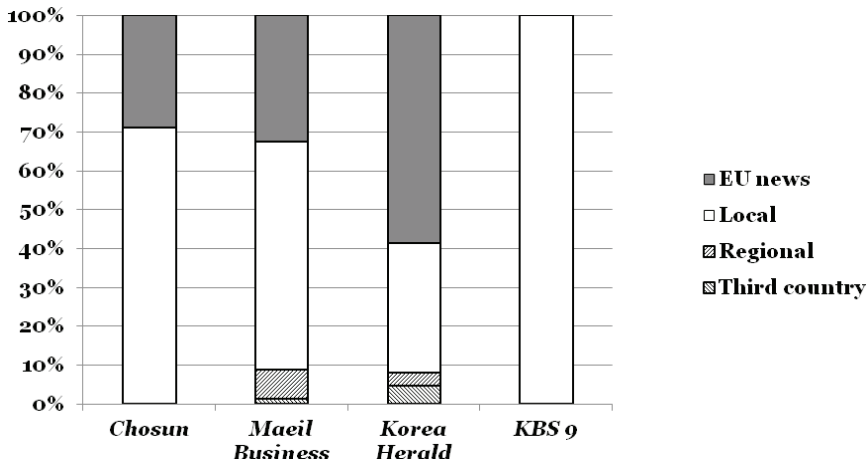


Figure 5 illustrates the degree of centrality of the collected data. The majority of news was reported from a 'minor' perspective. This means that the EU was mentioned in the news report only as a minor reference. More than half of the news in *Chosun Daily* and *Maeil Business* and all of the *KBS* news were from the minor perspective. Only *The Korea Herald* reported EU mainly from the major perspective by focusing solely on events in the EU.

Evaluation of the EU representations in the four outlets was categorised according to three types—negative, neutral and positive (Fig. 6). Representation of the EU in the four news outlets carried a predominantly neutral evaluation.

All of the *KBS* news and 97 per cent of *Maeil Business* news were considered neutral. *Chosun Daily* and *The Korea Herald* featured both positive and negative perspectives in their reports, with positive images being slightly more visible than the negative ones.

Figure 5. Centrality of EU in Korean media

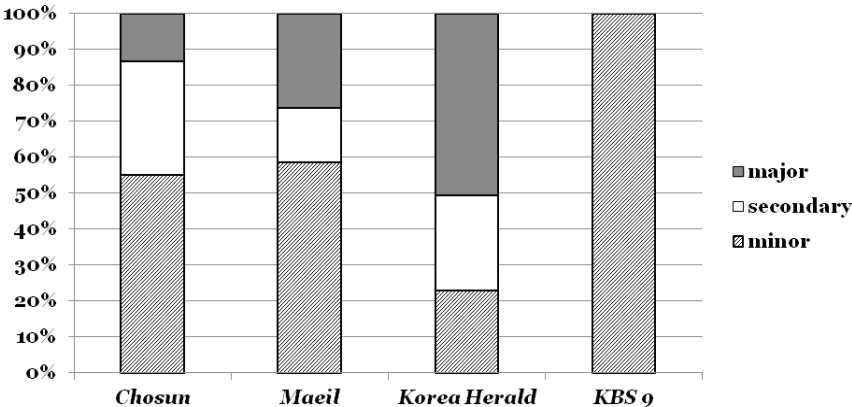
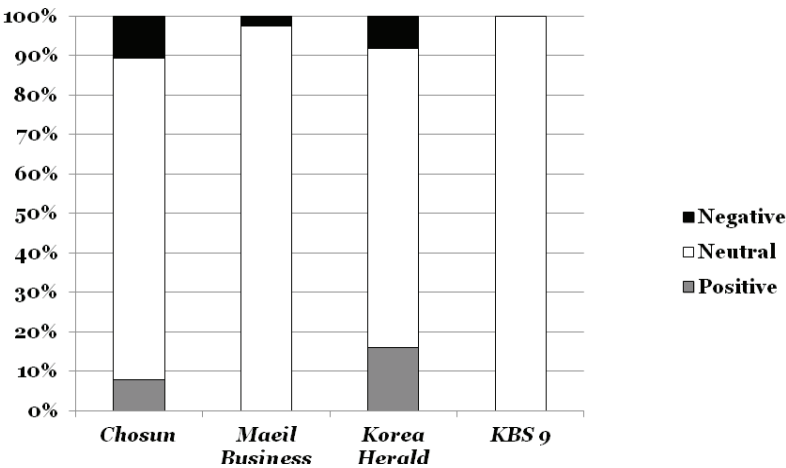


Figure 6. Evaluation assigned to the EU representation



The conclusion highlights two points. First, the economic frame as the primary frame remained unchanged in the 2011 study. Since the first EU perception study in Korea, this has been the main frame of EU news. As the process of the Korea-EU FTA negotiation continued, the economic orientation of EU news intensified. Second, different outlets featured the EU news in different ways. The difference between the Korean-language media (*Chosun Daily*, *Maeil Business* and *KBS News 9*) and the English-language media (*The Korea Herald*)

was especially evident. The former group mostly used local sources, whereas the latter used both local and international sources for news production. While the former reported the EU mostly in the context of Korea, the latter reported EU inside the EU as well as in Korea. The Korean-language media reported the EU mainly from the minor perspective while the English-language media reported the EU from all three different perspectives (and mostly from the major perspective). Additionally, the EU in the Korean-language media was depicted mainly as a minor actor, whereas the English-language media depicted the EU as a major actor as well as a minor actor. Despite these differences, however, the stereotypical image of the EU in Korean media was that of an economic actor who became more present but remained curiously reticent and refrained from voicing an opinion. Such imagery became more pronounced on the occasion of the FTA. In light of this, the next section will discuss how such stereotypical images affected the Korean public perceptions on the EU.

5.2 Public perception

As noted already, in the 2012 survey questionnaire, there were questions that had been asked in previous surveys as well as new additional questions. The questions included the importance of the EU for Korea, the information sources on the EU, spontaneous personal images of the EU, and overall assessment of personal perceptions of the EU. As for the importance of the EU for Korea, the respondents were asked to rank different countries in terms of their importance for Korea. The ranking by the participants was quite similar to that found in the 2006 study. The US was ranked number one, followed by China and Japan (Table 7). EU/Europe ranked fourth and Asia (excluding China and Japan) followed.

Table 7. Rankings of important countries for Korea at present

Rank	Country	Figures in 2006	Figures in 2012
1	US	25%	28%
2	China	22.1%	22%
3	Japan	18.7%	12%
4	EU	12.6%	11%
5	Asia	10.8%	8%

Interestingly, the rank of the countries has not changed over time. In the 2006 study, the regional orientation was quite strong and the EU/Europe was

considered important behind the regional big powers. The same tendency did not change in the 2012 study. Moreover, more people considered the US the most important for Korea, with the percentage favouring Japan dropping significantly from 18.7 per cent to 12 per cent. Although the total percentage of the three top countries slightly declined (from 65.8% to 62%), this does not mean that the EU came to be considered more important than before. The percentage of respondents who considered the EU/Europe as the most important partner for Korea fell from 12.6 per cent to 11 per cent. While not a big decline, the FTA itself did not seem to enhance the contemporary visibility of the EU for the Korean public.

However, there was an interesting change in the ranking of countries deemed to be important for Korea in the future. Table 8 describes these findings using a scale from 1 to 5 (1—not important at all, 5—very important).

Table 8. *Rankings of important countries for Korea in the future*

Rank	Country in 2006	Rate in figure	Country in 2012	Rate in figure
1	China	4.73	US	4.59
2	Japan	4.42	China	4.52
3	US	4.14	EU	4.21
4	EU	3.9	Asia	4.07
5	Asia	3.88	Japan	4.03

The first remarkable change was that the US ranked first in the 2012 survey. China was regarded as still important, but Japan’s influence dropped significantly. Its importance was lower than Asia (excluding China and Japan). Whereas the EU ranked fourth in 2006 after China, Japan and US, the EU moved one step higher in the 2012 study into third position only after US and China. Japan ranked fifth. This implies that, although EU is not strongly visible at present, the Korean public can see potential in the Korea-EU relationship in the future.

Concerning the information sources for EU news, the participants selected television news, the Internet and newspaper as their major information channels (multiple answers were possible). Two-thirds of the respondents stated that they got their information from television news (66%), and more than half of them said they got information from the Internet (55%). Newspapers were selected by almost half of the respondents (49%). Therefore, the pattern of getting

information on the EU has largely remained constant over the five-year period.

The participants were also asked to provide three spontaneous images towards the EU. The responses are described in Table 9.

Table 9. Personal images of the EU in the mind of the Korean public in 2012

Type of Image	Specific Images Mentioned
Country & Place	Greece, UK, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Ireland, Czech Republic, Sweden, The Netherlands, Switzerland, 27 countries, Rome, sBrussels
Economy	Euro, eurozone, economic integration, single market, economic alliance, economic bloc, trade, FTA, money, British pound, economic community, financial crisis, depression, default, single market, monetary unit, Greece's bankruptcy, financial deterioration, recession, wealth disparity
Character	Community, collaboration, developed countries, freedom, complicated, beautiful, romantic, powerful, big, aristocratic, conflict, closed, exclusive, selfish, weakness, tradition, peace, friend, history, cooperation, shabby union, war
Symbols	EU flag
Living & Life	Travel destination, football, sightseeing, Eurostar, Europass, Eurail, heritage sites, Christianity, excessive welfare
International Organisation	IOC, OECD, NATO, IMF, ECB, EP
Others	Human rights, culture, luxury goods, Treaty of Lisbon, Ban Ki-moon, Angela Merkel, Roman Empire, gentleman, prince

There are some overlaps between the 2012 images and those of 2006. For example, key Member States of the EU—France, the UK and Germany—as well as economy-related terms were commonly mentioned. Some international organisations (OECD, NATO and IMF), symbols (EU flag) and travel-related terms were mentioned in both surveys as well. However, because of the ongoing eurozone crisis, more financial images appeared in this study. EU institutions like ECB and the EP were also new mentions, reflecting their greater visibility in the Korean media because of eurozone crisis and Korea-EU FTA. Individual countries such as Greece, Spain, Ireland, and Italy were mentioned in 2012 because they were the eurozone member states at the centre of the crisis.

When it comes to the overall self-assessment of perceptions of the EU, more than half of the participants stated they have a 'somewhat positive' image of the EU (54%). However, more than one-third (37%) mentioned that they were 'neither positive nor negative' about the EU. Only 6 per cent were very positive and 3 per cent very negative. While it may be encouraging to see the majority of the public having a positive perception, the neutral group of 37 per cent is quite a substantial proportion, and one that might quite easily be influenced by contemporary bilateral developments in Korea-EU relations.

In summary, this analysis has raised four main points. First, there is a new possibility for enhancing EU perceptions in the mind of the Korean public. But crucially, this will be seriously influenced by the further development of the bilateral trade partnership and the outcome of the euro debt crisis. Second, the Korean public relies on television news, the Internet and newspapers as their information sources on the EU. Their reliance on TV news and the Internet is remarkable and the EU's external image strategy should consider this. Third, the Korean public's perception of the EU has not changed much over the last five years. However, contemporary issues inevitably introduce subtle updates to the image and the media's role is crucial in bringing those updates to the attention of the Korean public. Fourth, the study revealed that there is still a substantial number of people who do not have a strong image on the EU, and the External Action Service's strategy should target this group.

6. Conclusion

This paper has examined the question of whether or not the Korea-EU FTA has affected the Korean perception towards the EU in 2011–2012. The results of media analysis and public survey in 2011–2012 raised three main points. First, it seems that the visibility of the EU has been moderately enhanced. Two incidents should be given credit for this—the euro debt crisis and the FTA. Since Korea's media covered these issues constantly, the EU is no longer seen as a "distant" actor, but a partner whose situation can directly influence the Korean economy. Arguably, this explains why the Korean public ranked the EU higher than Japan when assessing foreign countries' future importance for Korea. In their images on the EU, there were quite a few crisis-related and FTA-related terms (see Table 9).

Second, although the visibility of the EU became enhanced, it is still questionable whether this perception reflects a fully-fledged understanding of the EU. As

mentioned above, the Korean public gets information on the EU mostly from mass media. Although the volume of news has increased, the news content remains quite superficial and somewhat biased. As shown in Figures 8 and 9, more than half of EU news reported by the Korean media were in fact EU news stories that were directly related to Korea-EU FTA. There were less EU news purely on the EU. Overall, EU news articles were mainly written by local sources: only a quarter was from international sources. The EU was depicted as a minor actor in quite a substantial number of the news articles: only in one-third of the articles was the EU depicted as a major actor. It is no wonder, then, that there is a sizeable group of people in Korea who do not judge their perception towards the EU in either positive or negative terms.

Third, and finally, there are many other issues in which the EU is involved and which are globally important—development, environment, external relations with other countries, etc. But these issues are not dealt with by the Korean media. This is probably because the news sources for international news are not diversified yet. This certainly affects the image of the EU as a global actor in many fields. Further studies could discuss such an issue and how this could be improved in order to enhance the better understanding of the EU in Korea.

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