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**Mass media coverage and the reduction of
the legitimacy deficit in the EU.
The Belgian case.**

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Nederlandstalige samenvatting

Deze bijdrage onderzoekt of de Belgische massamedia via hun berichtgeving kunnen bijdragen tot de inperking van het legitimiteitsprobleem van de EU. We starten daartoe met een theoretische bespreking van het concept legitimiteit, dat we definiëren in termen van dimensies, modellen en criteria. De *input*dimensie van legitimiteit veronderstelt dat de politieke autoriteit rekenschap aflegt bij wie geregeerd wordt. Doorgaans staat deze dimensie centraal in het legitimiteitsdebat. In het artikel benadrukken we echter de *output*dimensie. Vanuit die optiek is een politieke autoriteit pas legitiem wanneer het ‘goed beleid’, dat ook als zodanig wordt gepercipieerd door diegenen aan wie het gericht is, voortbrengt. Omdat de Europese Unie (EU) relatief ver staat van de Europese burgers, spelen massamedia een cruciale rol bij het verspreiden van informatie over het EU-beleid. Zonder informatie is legitimering niet mogelijk. Massamedia kunnen met andere woorden indirect bijdragen tot de legitimering van de EU.

Behalve tussen input- en outputlegitimiteit wordt in de literatuur verder nog een onderscheid gemaakt tussen modellen van directe en indirecte legitimiteit. *Directe* legitimiteit vinden we terug in een lidstaat waar de burgers de nationale overheid rechtstreeks verantwoordelijk kunnen stellen voor het gevoerde beleid, bijvoorbeeld via verkiezingen. *Indirecte* legitimiteit is kenmerkend voor internationale organisaties waar legitimiteit indirect, via de lidstaten, wordt toegekend. In deze paper argumenteren we dat beide modellen van legitimiteit relevant zijn voor de EU. De massamedia kunnen de directe legitimiteit van de Unie beïnvloeden door te berichten over zuiver Europese aangelegenheden. Indirecte legitimiteit is in het spel wanneer massamedia aandacht besteden aan de rol van de lidstaten – in dit geval van België – in de Europese beleidsvorming.

Tot slot stellen we dat een legitiem regime aan drie criteria moet beantwoorden: *legaliteit*, *normatieve rechtvaardiging* en *legitimatie*. Het eerste criterium betreft het bestaan en naleven van formele procedures en is als dusdanig weinig onderhevig aan media-invloeden. De twee andere criteria betreffen respectievelijk de sociale acceptatie en de expliciete goedkeuring van de EU door haar onderdanen en door andere soevereine autoriteiten. Op dit punt spelen massamedia wel een rol.

Op basis van deze conceptualisering van legitimiteit argumenteren we dat massamedia via de criteria van normatieve rechtvaardiging en van legitimatie kunnen bijdragen aan de directe en indirecte outputlegitimiteit van de EU.

In een tweede stap identificeren we de problemen die zich in België stellen op het vlak van laatstgenoemde legitimitétsaspecten. Dit doen we aan de hand van gegevens uit de Eurobarometer Studies. We stoten op drie tekorten. Ten eerste is de kennis over de Europese Unie bij het Belgische publiek beperkt (*kennisdeficit*). Ten tweede hebben de Belgische EU-onderdanen niet de idee dat de Unie een impact heeft op hun dagelijkse leven. Ze zijn dan ook weinig gemotiveerd om zich verder te informeren over ontwikkelingen op het Europese besluitvormingsniveau (*motivatiedeficit*). In die zin versterkt het motivatiedeficit het eerder genoemde kennisdeficit. Tot slot vindt een meerderheid van het Belgische publiek het moeilijk om de werking, het beleid en de plaats van de EU in de meerlagige besluitvormingsarena te vatten (*begripsdeficit*). Het gebeurt dan ook dat de EU wordt geëvalueerd op basis van niet-Europees beleid of dat Europese verwezenlijkingen onterecht aan het nationale niveau worden toegeschreven. In dat geval berust de legitimering en normatieve rechtvaardiging van de EU op oneigenlijke gronden.

Massamedia zijn uiteraard niet de belangrijkste, laat staan de enige legitimitéitsondersteunende factor voor de EU. Toch zijn ze niet irrelevant. We stellen in deze bijdrage dat massamedia impact kunnen hebben op de inperking van het tekort aan Europese kennis, motivatie en begrip en zo indirect kunnen bijdragen aan de legitimering van de EU. Door het lezen of beluisteren van Europees nieuws raakt het publiek immers beter geïnformeerd en kan het zich een geïnformeerde mening over de EU vormen. Dat laatste is een absolute voorwaarde om legitimering aan de outputzijde mogelijk te maken. De informatieverstrekking moet wel aan enkele voorwaarden voldoen. Ten eerste is er *voldoende* berichtgeving nodig. Wanneer deze berichtgeving bovendien *regelmatig* verschijnt, blijkt ook de relevantie van de EU. Lezers en luisteraars worden zich bewust van de impact van de Unie op hun dagelijks leven en kunnen langs die weg gemotiveerd worden om zich verder te informeren over de Europese Unie. Op inhoudelijk vlak is het belangrijk dat de EU-berichtgeving niet enkel stilstaat bij afzonderlijke feiten, maar ook context en duiding verschaft. We spreken in dit verband over *thematisch* nieuws. De kennis van het Europese bestuurskundige apparaat, tenslotte, kan worden verhoogd door berichtgeving over het Europese *beleid* en de Europese *instellingen*.

Randvoorwaarde bij dit alles is dat de EU-berichtgeving wordt ontvangen en begrepen. Terwijl de nieuwswaarden nationalisering en personificatie doorgaans als beperkend worden beschouwd, argumenteren we in deze bijdrage dat ze de legitimerende mogelijkheden van de massamedia tot op zekere hoogte kunnen ondersteunen. *Generationaliseerd* nieuws wekt interesse op en wordt gemakkelijker begrepen. Men komt te weten wat de nationale consequenties zijn van Europees beleid of welke rol het eigen land speelde gedurende het besluitvormingsproces. De link met de nationale situatie maakt het daarnaast

ook gemakkelijker om de informatie te interpreteren. Hetzelfde geldt voor *gepersonaliseerd* nieuws. De EU krijgt een gezicht en identificatie met de centrale actor zorgt voor een goed begrip. Nationalisering en personifiëring van het EU-nieuws herbergen echter ook zekere risico's: de kans bestaat dat zuiver Europees nieuws wordt verdrongen en dat Europese gebeurtenissen al te eenvoudig worden voorgesteld. Met andere woorden, slechts een evenwicht tussen genationaliseerd en gepersonifieerd nieuws enerzijds en zuiver Europees nieuws en berichtgeving met aandacht voor de reële complexiteit van het Europese gebeuren anderzijds zal legitimiteitsverhogend werken.

In het laatste deel van deze paper onderzoeken we aan de hand van twee databases (longitudinaal en korte termijn) of de huidige EU-berichtgeving in België beantwoordt aan de vooropgestelde criteria en dus bijdraagt aan de legitimiteit van de Europese Unie. Het betreft mediagegevens over de Europese berichtgeving in Franstalige en Vlaamse kranten en nieuwsuitzendingen. We besluiten dat dit tot dusver niet het geval is. De EU-berichtgeving is schaars en verschijnt onregelmatig, naar aanleiding van een Europese top of schandaal. De uitgebreide berichtgeving in deze periodes kan niet compenseren voor het algemene tekort aan informatie. Duiding en analyse zijn beperkt en negatief nieuws wordt overbelicht. De meeste berichten vermelden aspecten van het Europese beleid, maar slechts zelden is dit het hoofdthema van een artikel of nieuwsitem. Wel gaat er aandacht uit naar de rol van specifieke Europese instellingen. De evaluatie van de nieuwswaarden nationalisering en personificatie is gemengd. We menen dat er een balans bestaat tussen genationaliseerd en zuiver EU-nieuws. Op het eerste gezicht is er ook een evenwicht tussen gepersonifieerd en 'complexer' nieuws en kunnen we besluiten dat de aard van de berichtgeving de lezer of luisteraar prikkelt en informeert. Nadere studie leert echter dat het gepersonifieerde nieuws weinig mogelijkheden biedt voor identificatie omdat de centrale actor doorgaans deel uitmaakt van de politieke elite. Tegelijkertijd wordt er geen duidelijk 'Europees gezicht' naar voor geschoven. We gaan ervan uit dat de meerwaarde van de gepersonifieerde items op het vlak van interesse en begrip bij de ontvanger dan ook beperkt is.

De theoretische conclusie van deze bijdrage luidt dat de massamedia potentieel kunnen bijdragen aan de directe en indirecte outputlegitimiteit van de Europese Unie. Via Europese berichtgeving kunnen massamedia het tekort aan Europese kennis, motivatie en begrip inperken en zo onrechtstreeks een rol spelen bij de normatieve rechtvaardiging en legitimatie van de EU. Met betrekking tot de empirie besluiten we dat tussen 1991 en 2001 de Europese berichtgeving in België niet van die aard was om bij te dragen aan de legitimiteit van de EU.

1. Introduction, research question and outline

Discussions on institutional reform within the European Union (EU) have been going on ever since the first years of the existence of its fore-runners in the 1950s. Until more recently, successive treaty revisions focussed almost exclusively on the expansion of competencies for the European level and on attempts to make decision-making within the EU more efficient and effective. Making the European institutions more legitimate was hardly an issue during the reforms of the Single European Act and the Maastricht Treaty for the simple reason that public opinion in the EU Member States did not seem to bother. This attitude of a lack of public interest changed in the beginning of the 1990s. The failure of the first Maastricht referendum in Denmark (1992) forced European political elites to address the question of public acceptance of the European governance level. Increasing protest against European institutions and its decisions (Imig and Tarrow, 2002), declining voter turnout in European elections (Balme and Chabanet, 2002) and worrying reports from public opinion surveys such as Eurobarometer contributed to a growing attention for the legitimate character of the EU. At the Nice European Council legitimacy was eventually perceived as a serious problem that should be tackled by future institutional reforms. The Nice ‘Declaration on the Future of the EU’ (2000) explicitly recognised the need ‘to improve and to monitor the democratic legitimacy and transparency of the Union and its institutions, in order to bring them closer to the citizens of the Member States¹’. Also the ‘Laeken Declaration’ (2001) stipulated that future institutional reform should deliver more ‘democracy, transparency and efficiency²’. Finally, the Convention on the Future of the EU (2002-03) and the subsequent IGC (2003-04) devoted a whole title to ‘the democratic life of the Union³’. In short, the legitimacy issue clearly has become a top priority on the European agenda. It has also attracted the attention of a growing number of scholars (cf. Beetham and Lord, 1998; Chrysochoou, 1998; Banchoff and Smith, 1999; Arnall and Wincott, 2002), who tried to conceptualise the legitimacy problem in the EU. Many of these authors also offer strategies to increase the degree of legitimacy (cf. Abromeit, 1998; Schmitter, 2000).

This contribution builds on this body of literature that argues that the EU suffers from a legitimacy deficit and addresses the issue of the role of mass media in this respect. The research question is whether the nature of EU coverage by the Belgian mass media helps to decrease the EU legitimacy deficit. In order to answer this question we elaborate in the second section on the concept of

1. Nice Treaty, Declaration 23

2. Presidency Conclusions, European Council of Laeken

3. European Convention, Draft Constitutional Treaty and the Constitutional Treaty

legitimacy, and more in particular on what the concept means in multi-level governance systems such as the EU. We do this by unravelling the concept into dimensions (input and output legitimacy), models (direct and indirect legitimacy) and conditions (legality, normative justifiability and legitimation). In the third section we present our theoretical framework which essentially links some of the outlined legitimacy conditions to mass media coverage through the introduction of three sub-types of deficit: knowledge deficit, motivation deficit and comprehension deficit. We argue that mass media coverage can help to overcome these deficits and hence can help to narrow the overall legitimacy gap, if it lives up to a series of conditions. In this section, we also operationalise the three deficits in concrete media expressions. The fourth section discusses our data in order to assess whether Belgian mass media coverage is of such a nature that it helps to reduce the overall legitimacy deficit of the EU.

2. Legitimacy in multilevel governance systems

Before we introduce our theoretical framework, it is necessary to outline our conceptualisation of legitimacy in the EU. Our concept of legitimacy is based upon the analytical tools of conditions, dimensions and models. The conditions refer to the criteria a political system has to meet if it wants to be considered as a legitimate system; the dimensions refer to the idea that legitimacy has got input and output features; the models refer to the type of political system.

The idea of defining conditions stems from Beetham and Lord. They argue that ‘the starting point for any analysis of legitimacy (...) has to be an acknowledgment of its complexity, and of the full range of factors – rules, normative beliefs, actions and procedures – that contribute to making political authority rightful (Beetham and Lord, 1998: 5)’. Elaborating on these concepts, the degree of legitimacy can be measured by the extent to which a political system meets the conditions of legality, normative justifiability and legitimation. A political system fulfils the condition of *legality* if its political authority is acquired and exercised according to established rules. Examples are the existence of a government as an emanation of a majority in a freely elected parliament and the meticulous elaboration of lawmaking according to constitutional prescriptions. Secondly, *normative justifiability* refers to a political context in which ‘the rules are justifiable according to socially accepted beliefs about what is the rightful source of authority, and the proper ends and standards of government (Beetham and Lord, 1998: 4)’. This means for instance that citizens must accept that different categories of rules are imposed on them by different levels of authority and that they must feel that these levels conduct their policies according to the right ends and procedures. Finally, *legitimation* means that the positions of authority have to be confirmed by an explicit

approval and confirmation of its subordinates and recognised by other legitimate authorities. All three conditions are ideal types: there is no political system that meets all criteria in all details and at all times. It is a matter of degree: the extent to which a political system meets these three conditions reveals the extent to which such a system can be considered legitimate.

Next, it is useful to distinguish between input and output dimensions of legitimacy. ‘Democracy would be an empty ritual if the political choices of governments were not able to achieve a high degree of effectiveness in achieving the goals (...) (Scharpf, 1997: 19)’. The input dimension refers to the fact that those who govern are held accountable before those who are governed. The political authority of a political system should in other words be rooted in the preferences of its citizens, for instance through a directly elected parliamentary institution (government by the people). This input dimension is often emphasised in legitimacy studies. It is, however, only one dimension of legitimacy. A political system can be very democratically organised but not delivering policies which are fully accepted by its citizens. Does this make a system legitimate? This question brings us to the second dimension which is the output legitimacy: political systems must also deliver to their citizens, their policies must be effective (government for the people)⁴, in order for the citizens to accept the authority of the governing institutions.

The last analytical tool refers to two different models: direct and indirect legitimacy (Beetham and Lord, 1998). This distinction touches upon the notion that legitimacy is not exclusively tied to the nation state, but can be expanded to all kinds of political systems, especially to international organisations. The model of direct legitimacy derives from the nation state in which citizens can hold their national government directly accountable, for instance through elections and parliamentary representation. Crucial is the direct link between those who are governed and those who govern. Opposite to the direct model of the nation state stands the indirect model of an international organisation. The international governmental level is not only directly linked to the publics of the nation states that constitute the international organisation. In addition, legitimacy can also be created indirectly through the governments of the member states, which then become legitimating authorities themselves.

The latter distinction becomes extremely relevant with respect to the EU, because, as has been argued repetitively, the EU is neither a nation state nor an

4. The distinction between input and output legitimacy runs parallel to the one between formal and social legitimacy (Weiler, 1997; Arnull and Wincott, 2002). ‘The former [formal] is concerned with the extent to which all the applicable legal requirements were satisfied when the entity in question was set up, the latter [social] with the extent to which the allocation and exercise of authority within it commands general acceptance (Arnull, 2002: 3-4)’.

international organisation. It is, with the words of William Wallace, ‘less than a federation, but more than a regime’ (Wallace, 1983). Looking at the EU as a political system (cf. Hix, 1999), and more precisely as a multi-level governance political system (Marks, Hooghe and Blank, 1996; Hooghe and Marks, 2001), allows us to assess its legitimacy more carefully. This conceptualisation is motivated by the observation that no other international co-operation regime is characterised by such a substantive pooling of sovereignty as the EU. The parallel existence of supranational and intergovernmental institutions, the use of the ‘*méthode communautaire*’ and the attempts to introduce a constitutional treaty are crucial features of the political system of the EU. The *verflechtung* of levels of authority and the resulting modes of governance are additional arguments to conceptualise the EU as a multilevel governance system.

The multiple layers and the specific modes of governance ask for a specific application of the legitimacy concept. This implies, first of all, that the EU needs to be legitimised both directly by the European citizens and indirectly by its member states. ‘(...) the legitimacy of political authority in the European political space is an interactive two-level process between the EU and its member states, which cannot be analysed at one level alone (Beetham and Lord, 1998: 16)’. This also means that we can look for the conditions on both the direct and the indirect level. The EU can be indirectly *legitimated* by the member states’ ratifications of the European treaties and by member states’ domestically controlled participation in the EU political arena, more in particular in the Council of Ministers and the European Council. The indirect *legality* of the EU can for instance stem from the fact that the transfer of competencies to the European level is conducted along respective domestic requirements. The condition of indirect *normative justifiability* is more problematic. It is roughly limited to the fact that member states’ governments - as collective actors - can feel that in some policy domains a joint European level can deliver a more acceptable output than they could have reached separately. The latter might perhaps not be too problematic since the condition of *normative justifiability* can also be met in a direct way if European citizens recognise the EU as a rightful source of authority in the domains the EU delivers policy output. Also *legitimation* can be directly guaranteed when European citizens accept the political processes and policy outputs of the EU. Thirdly, direct *legality* can be achieved through direct formal approval mechanisms such as European referenda. In addition, also the *input – output* distinction must be examined in the EU’s multilevel governance political system. Not only the participation of the European public(s) and the member states in the European decision-making procedures must be guaranteed, it is equally necessary that the output of and the European decision-making system itself is accepted by both the European public(s) and the EU member states. ‘Thus, not only output legitimacy, but also input legitimacy, that [is] secured by State and the

European-level institutions, should be emphasised (...) (Menon and Weatherill, 2002: 114)⁵.

All links between conditions, dimensions and models can be visualised by a three dimensional table (Figure 1), which indicates that there are potentially twelve ways in which the EU can suffer from a legitimacy deficit⁶. At the same time these twelve boxes can be approached with a more positive attitude, considering each one of them as potential ways to improve the legitimate character of the EU.

Figure 1: Schematic overview of the legitimacy aspects of the EU

		LEGALITY	NORMATIVE JUSTIFIABILITY	LEGITIMATION
INPUT	DIRECT			
	INDIRECT			
OUTPUT	DIRECT			
	INDIRECT			

In the next section, we will discuss the role of mass media coverage with respect to some of these channels. That mass media is important is confirmed by public opinion research. Eurobarometer 58.1, for instance, showed that the demand for information about the EU through mass media is larger than the perception of the present media supply (see Figure 2). In other words: in general, people ask for more news about Europe, more in particular about the objectives of the EU and about the way to get extra information⁷. In addition, also academic analyses

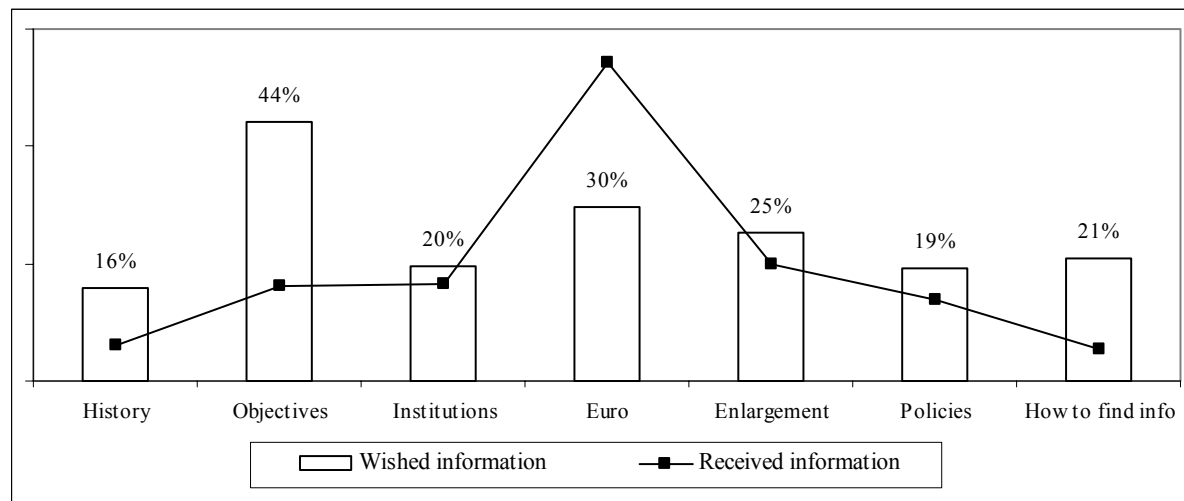
5. Again, we refer to the notion of degrees of legitimacy. Just as it is not possible to assess any other political system as completely legitimate or illegitimate, the EU can have a certain degree of legitimacy, which depends on the fulfilment of the conditions in a direct *or* indirect way. In other words, not all criteria have to be met completely on both levels in order for the EU to have some degree of legitimacy.

6. Some of the boxes in figure 1 may be considered to be somewhat problematic. The legality condition for instance is certainly relevant for input legitimacy, but far less relevant for output legitimacy.

7. This observation must be softened since it is not enough to ask for more coverage. The demand should be genuine and the extra information offered must also be consumed.

point out that media reports are often conceived as the most important input for public opinion with respect to international issues (Peter et al., 2003: 306)⁸.

Figure 2: The public's demand of EU-information compared with the perceived supply by newspapers and television



N for newspapers= 12 252; N for television= 15 595

Source: EB 56.3

3. The relevance of mass media for the EU's legitimacy deficit

As has been outlined above, all conditions, dimensions and models are important and must be reached to a considerable extent for the EU to be granted some degree of legitimacy. Mass media coverage, however, is not equally relevant for all of these.

Firstly, mass media is particularly relevant for the output legitimacy of the EU. In order to make their political system more legitimate, European authorities should not only deliver policies that can stand the test of acceptance, they also need to make clear to their citizens that their policies deserve to be accepted. They must, in other words, communicate their policies to make them known and potentially also accepted by the European public(s) (De Vreese, 2003b: 5). One of the most obvious channels for this communication is mass media since newspapers and especially television reach a vast audience. At the same time, coverage of the policy-outputs and the preceding decision-making processes may also increase input legitimacy since the information offered by mass media may trigger citizens to become more involved in national and European

8. This is mainly the case for less educated people or for people with only low interest in the EU. Others will be more easily confronted with other information sources or will search for it themselves (Perse, 2001: 93).

decision-making arenas by participating in European elections and national referendums on European issues. In addition, more media coverage of the opportunities for citizens to become involved in European decision-making may also result in more participation and ultimately in more input legitimacy.

Secondly, with respect to the conditions, mass media are especially relevant for the achievement of normative justifiability and legitimation⁹. This issue is crucial for our argument and will be elaborated upon in detail in the next section. In short, it comes down to the idea that the dissemination of information through mass media can generate more knowledge about the European institutions and policies and can therefore potentially create more recognition of the European governance level as a rightful source of authority (normative justifiability) and potentially also more acceptance of its policies (legitimation).

Thirdly, also the direct – indirect distinction is relevant with respect to mass media coverage. This raises issues such as the most appropriate level of mass media (European or national newspapers and television channels) and the most useful objects of the coverage (European or nationally mediated institutions and output) to make the European political system more known and perhaps ultimately more accepted. Since our data cover Belgian mass media data, we will be dealing with the national level of mass media¹⁰. Their coverage, however, can target output on both levels: they can deal with the European level, such as the European Commission or the constitutional treaty or with the national mediating level, such as the national MEPs or the transposition of European directives in national law. Ultimately we argue here that national coverage of both European issues and nationally mediated European issues may lead to an increased direct legitimation of the European level as well as an increased indirect legitimation of the European level through an increased acceptance of the mediating national level.

Above, we claimed that mass media coverage is especially relevant for the normative justifiability (do Europeans accept the European level as a rightful source of authority?) and legitimation (does the European public accept the political processes and outputs of the European governmental level?) conditions of legitimacy. The rest of this section will examine to what extent these two conditions are problematic by presenting public opinion data and by linking

9. The condition of legality is far less relevant for mass media since it basically refers to the legal prescriptions for political actors that play a formal participatory role in decision-making procedures.

10. While it would be useful to replicate our analysis for other Member States in a comparative analysis of several indirect media levels, it would be very difficult to conduct analysis of the direct media level since, except in some elitist forms, hardly any Europe-wide newspapers and television channels exist.

these data to the theoretical concepts of knowledge deficit, motivation deficit and comprehension deficit. We will argue that newspaper and television coverage of the EU can help to reduce these deficits and ultimately also the overall legitimacy deficit. This section will conclude with an operationalisation of these three deficits.

The existence of the EU doesn't seem to be unambiguously justified and legitimated by its inhabitants because only 54 per cent of the Europeans think that their country's membership of the EU is a good thing (EB 63). The problem is slightly reduced because only 15 per cent think that their country's membership of the EU is a bad thing. The main problem, however, is that almost one out of three does not have a clear opinion, indicating that their country's membership is neither good nor bad or that they do not know what to think about it. We will argue that this substantial proportion of undecided answers is related to the lack of knowledge to formulate an opinion, to the lack of motivation to think about the EU in order to make an evaluation of the system and to a lack of comprehension about what the EU does and how it works.

Firstly, we examine the knowledge deficit, which points to a poor level of knowledge about the EU among EU citizens. This issue has been broadly discussed in the literature: it was found that people know little about the EU (objective knowledge) and that they make a very low estimation of what they know (subjective knowledge) (Niedermayer and Sinnott, 1995: 288; De Vreese, 2003a: 67; Hudon and Sorbets, 2000: 5). More recent data confirm that only 27 per cent of the Europeans give themselves a score higher than 5 on a knowledge scale from 1 to 10 (EB 59). Some authors argue that a low level of both objective and subjective knowledge leads to uncertainty, indecision and ambivalence (Sinnott in Mak, 2002: 34) and that this is problematic because knowledge is regarded as a legitimating instrument (Janssen et al. in Karp et al., 2003)¹¹. Our own calculations, which are based on Eurobarometer data, support this argument: although the correlations were only moderate, knowledge and EU-support are positively associated in a significant way¹². In addition, knowledge is often considered to be a precondition for a valuable opinion (Glynn et al., 1999: 27; Hudon and Sorbets, 2000: 15). There is a broad agreement in the literature that only informed people can control and potentially legitimise a public institution. According to these scholars knowledge is an indispensable aspect of legitimacy (Hauttekeete et al., 2002: 7; Iyengar and

11. Other authors argue that knowledge can also lead to lower acceptance because knowledge makes people aware of positive as well as negative aspects (Golding in Hauttekeete et al., 2000:9).

12. We computed ordinal measures (dyx) for the relations between objective and subjective knowledge on the one hand and general, instrumental and affective support for the EU on the other hand. See annex 1.

Reeves, 1997: 212; Mak, 2002: 34; Olsen, 2003: 104; McCormick, 2002: 145). Taking all this into account, we argue that the knowledge deficit is problematic for the normative justifiability and legitimation conditions of EU legitimacy.

With respect to the motivation deficit, the perceived low relevance of the EU is a crucial parameter because it does not stimulate people to search actively for information. Some authors also point to the need for more attractive information to persuade people to participate in discussions on Europe (Mak, 2002: 34). A clear illustration of this motivation deficit can be found in the answers to the Eurobarometer question 'Decisions taken by the European Union have an impact on my daily life'. Although the relevance of the EU to people's daily life is obvious, only half of the respondents agree with the statement, while 37 per cent explicitly disagree and 13 per cent is undecided (EB 59). We argue that the motivation deficit reinforces the knowledge deficit since unmotivated people are not inclined to gather information to build up knowledge. As such the motivation deficit reinforces the problematic degree of normative justifiability and legitimation of the EU. In short, with respect to knowledge and motivation, we argue that, if mass media offer information that is able to motivate people to learn more about the EU, they indirectly help to reduce the normative justifiability and legitimation problem of the EU. The reason is that mass media are an effective channel to disseminate European news: firstly because of their broad audience and secondly because television and newspapers are, especially according to public opinion research, the most preferred and the most frequently used information sources on the EU (EB 58)¹³.

Thirdly, we discuss the comprehension deficit. A precondition for the acceptance of the EU, its institutions and its policies is some degree of comprehension of the European political system. When people are asked explicitly about their acceptance of the present competences and policies of the EU, the agreement with the current division of competences is rather high. At a first glance, this would point to some degree of acceptance. Looking in more detail, however, some dissatisfaction is clearly revealed. Agriculture policy, for example is one of the most Europeanised policies but 47 per cent of the Europeans think that it would better be dealt with at the national level. On the opposite, defence policy is still mainly a national competence although 52 per cent of the European public would prefer a European defence policy. The comprehension problem comes clearly to the surface when, a moment after having accepted, for example, poverty or unemployment policies as national competences, many respondents state that exactly these should be European priorities. Many Europeans do not seem to be able to make a distinction between

¹³13. 64% of the Europeans mentions television as their preferred information deliverer on the EU, 38 percent mentions newspapers (EB 58.1).

competences or levels of authority. This is very relevant because it makes the EU often subject to an evaluation of the wrong policies. Also the contrary happens, as discussed in the White Paper on European Governance: ‘Where the Union does act effectively, it rarely gets proper credits for its actions. People do not see that improvements in their rights and quality of life actually come from European rather than national decisions (CEC, 2001: 7)’. We argue that this comprehension deficit can be reduced by information about European competences and policy outputs. In short, if mass media offer information on the content of policies based upon a clear distinction of competency levels (Mak, 2002: 230), they indirectly contribute to the legitimation of the EU, through the potential creation of more normative justifiability and legitimation.

In order to contribute to a reduction of the motivation, knowledge and comprehension deficits, mass media coverage needs to live up to a series of criteria. These criteria must be understood as the operationalisation of the optimal coverage by mass media. A first condition is the *quantity* of EU-coverage. We argued that the low knowledge and comprehension levels of European issues can indirectly contribute to low public acceptance of the EU. Because of the distance between the EU and its citizens and because of the complexity of European integration people are very dependent on mass media to gain EU knowledge and comprehension (Soroka, 2001: 2; De Vreese, 2003a:1; Norris, 2000: 185, Perse, 2001:93). In short, the EU’s legitimacy can increase when mass media offer a substantial amount of information. The *regularity* of EU-coverage is related to this. If EU-coverage is confined to only a few occasions, it is unlikely that the EU will be regarded by European citizens as an important governance level or as a level with substantial impact on their daily lives. Regular reporting can also help to get people motivated to become more conscious of the relevance of the EU, potentially increasing the knowledge of the EU and therefore also potentially increasing its legitimacy.

Secondly, we make a distinction between episodic and thematic coverage (cf. Ghanem, 1996). The former refers to a description of one specific event without reference to the broader context; the latter refers to profound reports that pay attention to precedents, consequences, actors and so on. Although factual episodic news is necessary to follow the daily events within the European institutions, we assume that thematic news is more effective to inform the public about, for example, objectives and policies of the EU (cf. Iyengar, 1991).

Next, we turn to the criterion of coverage of EU policies and EU institutions. Decent policies remain worthless as legitimacy increasing instruments when they are unknown by the public (De Vreese, 2003b: 5). A similar argument can be made with regard to the institutions. The existence and the output of the European Commission, the European Parliament, the Council of Ministers and

the European Council can hardly be accepted by the general public if these institutions are insufficiently known.

Finally, mass media coverage remains useless if people don't read, hear, remember or understand the information offered by newspapers and television. This is especially problematic with respect to the EU because of the complexity of the system, the difficult terminology and the distance of the institutions (cf. De Vreese, 2003b: 65-67). The deficits can be lowered when European news items are sufficiently but not too much *nationalised* and *personified*. Many authors argue that domesticated and personified stories which give the EU 'a face' and which cover the national implications of a European event or decision catch extra attention and understanding (Berganza, 2000: 2 and 5; De Witte, 1991: 37; Hauttekeette et al., 2002: 3; Perse, 2001: 148). The coverage of European news with a balance between national and European aspects and a balance between the complex European reality and the concrete personified implications for European citizens is the most optimal in terms of the reduction of the deficits and indirectly also of legitimacy gap.

To summarise, this section showed that the EU suffers from a legitimacy deficit with respect to two conditions that are susceptible to mass media influence: normative justifiability and legitimation. We argued that mass media coverage can help to reduce the legitimacy gap because it can contribute to reduce the underlying knowledge, motivation and comprehension deficits by offering more information, on a frequent basis, of a thematic nature, focusing on policies and institutions, and securing a balance between nationalised and personalised issues on the one hand and factual information on the other hand. Figure 3 summarises these criteria. The extent to which Belgian mass media meet these criteria, is discussed in the next section.

Figure 3: Overview of the criteria for mass media coverage to increase the EU's legitimacy

1. Quantity and regularity of coverage
2. Enough thematic news about real and relevant, positive and negative events in the EU
3. Enough news about the contents of European policies
4. Enough news that discusses the role of European institutions
5. A balance between nationalised reports and factual information
6. A balance between personified reports and factual information

4. Belgian mass media coverage of the EU

The assessment of mass media with respect to a reduction of the EU's legitimacy gap is based on a case-study of Belgian news media¹⁴. Because Belgium is a federal country with a highly decentralised societal system, we collected media data for both the Dutch and the French speaking region. Our analysis is based on two datasets. The first database is a longitudinal dataset consisting of basic information about the articles on the front pages of three Flemish newspapers (*De Standaard*, *De Morgen* and *Het Laatste Nieuws*) and two French speaking newspapers (*Le Soir* and *La Libre Belgique*) in the period between 1991-2000 (36.729 articles). This dataset also contains all items on the television news of the two main Flemish (*VTM* and *VRT*) and the two main French speaking channels (*RTBF* and *RTL-TV1*) in the period 1993-2000 (59.887 news items). An analysis of only front pages of newspapers and only items of main news programmes makes conclusions somewhat limited. It may be possible that European news items appear more regularly inside the newspapers or in other news magazines. Our dataset does not allow to say anything about this. However, holding in mind the idea that this paper deals with the possible legitimacy enhancing effect of mass media, the data we use are very relevant. We argue that exactly front pages and main news programmes should be under scrutiny building on the assumption that the general public absorbs more from this kind of general coverage than from specialised items.

The second dataset is more specified but covers only a short period. It consists of articles and news items about the EU, the WTO and the antiglobalist movement. The data are from the same television channels and newspapers plus the articles in four extra French speaking papers (*l' Echo*, *La Dernière Heure*, *Vers l' Avenir* and *La Nouvelle Gazette*) and five extra Flemish papers (*De Financieel Economische Tijd*, *Het Belang van Limburg*, *De Gazet van Antwerpen*, *Het Volk* and *Het Nieuwsblad*). This dataset covers the weeks around the Laeken and Doha summits (5 - 17 November and 10 - 23 December 2001 respectively, 3145 items)¹⁵.

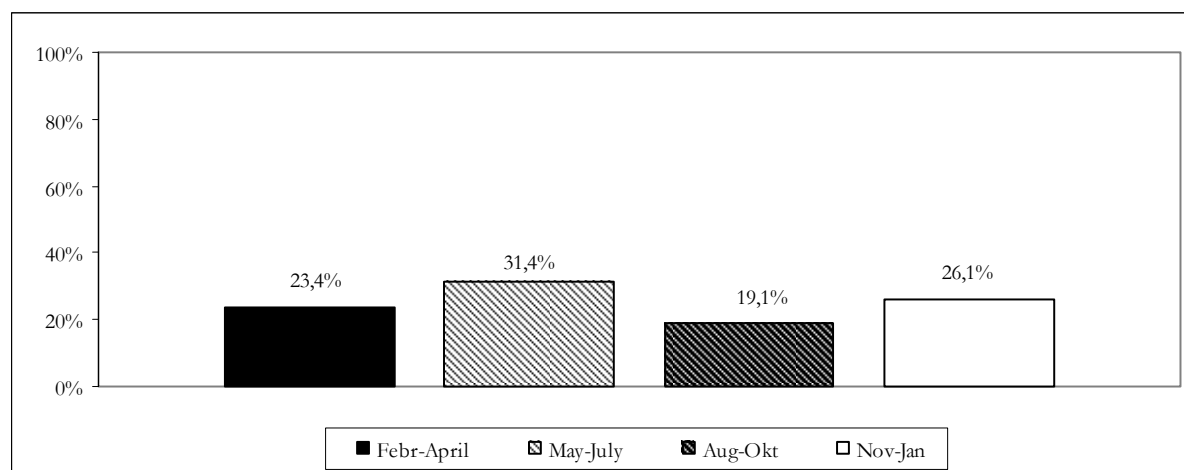
Let us first take a look at the *quantity and regularity* of EU coverage. Despite the quite high information demand, our longitudinal data set clearly indicates that Belgian media supply is very poor in number: only 3 per cent of the news items on television and on the front pages of the newspapers is devoted to the

¹⁴ These data were collected for a research project that dealt with the Belgian media coverage of the EU and the WTO. This research was commissioned by the Belgian Federal Services for Scientific Policy, whose support is thankfully acknowledged.

¹⁵ For more details on the datasets (data collection, periods, coding, etc.) we refer to Baetens, et al., 2004: 165-218.

EU. This small amount of coverage is completely in line with the low amount of foreign news in general (Hauttekeete et al., 2000: 2; De Vreese, 2003a: 165; Sinardet et al., 2004: 24-26). In our datasets, foreign news makes up only 32 per cent of newspapers' front page articles and 30 per cent of television news items. Moreover, EU news only makes up 9 per cent of the international articles on the front pages and 7 per cent of the international items in the television news. The data also show that, despite the general low coverage, there are periods of extensive reporting. Peaks and drops in the coverage were found to follow the same pattern as the European agenda: especially the European Councils in June and December attract extensive media coverage on front pages and television news. Aggregation of the news per quartile around these summits confirms this thesis, showing more EU news in the second and fourth quartile.

Figure 4: The media coverage on the EU per quartile (Percentage of total news reporting on the EU between 1991 and 2000)



N European news = 2 134

Source: Longitudinal database on news reporting on television and in newspapers between 1991 and 2000, University of Antwerp

These findings are confirmed by the short time dataset which shows a clear difference between November (the WHO-Summit in Doha) and December (the EU-Summit in Laeken): only 20 per cent of the European news is situated in the first period, while 80 per cent is covered by the second period. In addition, it was found that during the EU-summit mass media also provided more basic information about the EU-institutions, thus not only covering the summit itself. Other authors have found similar results. Based on a longitudinal dataset concerning six European countries Norris comes to the conclusion that the average EU-reporting is low but much more extensive in periods of key summits (Norris, 2000: 188). Also Peter et al. (2003: 307-308) found little difference between the EU member states: in most countries media coverage of the EU is very low and only key events can temporally heighten media-attention.

Next we turn to the question whether these periods of extensive reporting compensate for the on average low attention. Is the extensive coverage sufficiently profound to increase citizens' knowledge? Does it provide thematic news and does it cover news related to EU-policies and EU-institutions?

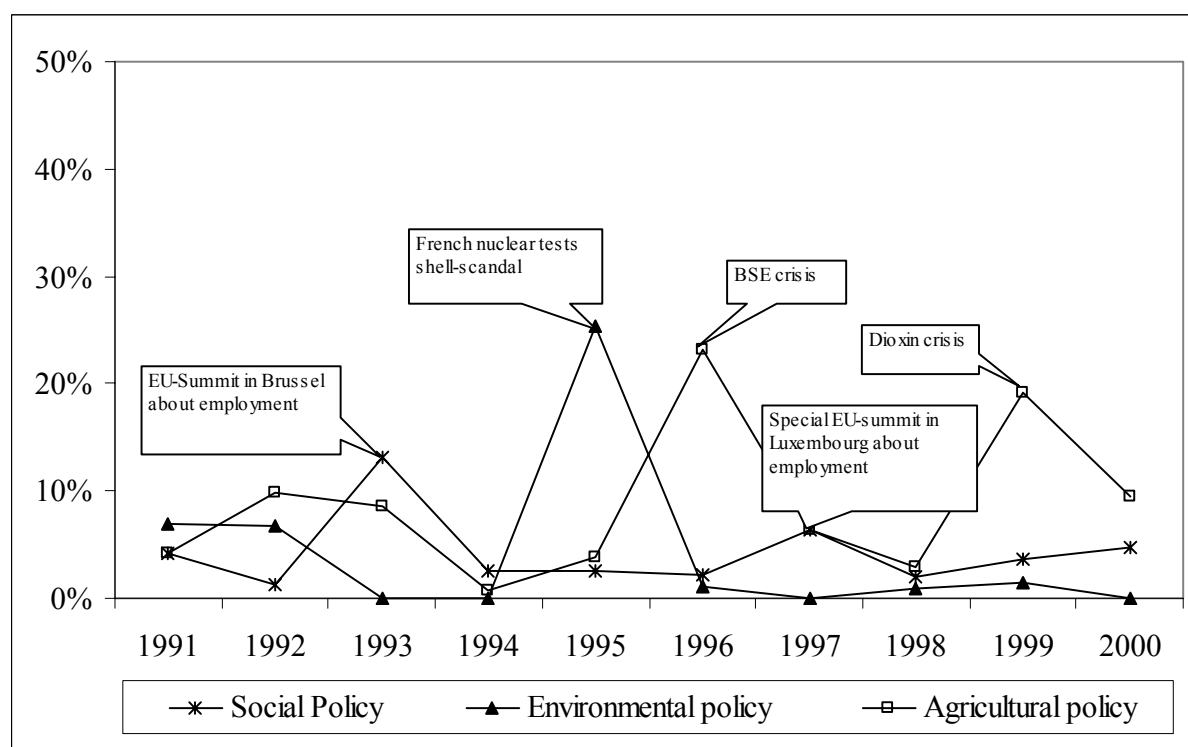
In the short time database we made the previously introduced distinction between *episodic and thematic* news. Episodic are those items that contain information on a specific event that happened within 24 hours before publication; thematic are those items that describe or interpret the context of a specific event based on information of a longer period of time. Making abstraction of the reports on the Laeken Summit, 45 per cent of the EU-coverage can be defined as thematic. However, from all reports on the Laeken Summit, 79 per cent has an episodic character. This means that, in total, only 25 per cent of the EU-news provides contextual interpretation on top of factual information. A more detailed analysis of the contents of the EU-news reveals that the emphasis lies on the coverage of sensational events. This can be illustrated by the Flemish media coverage of the European elections in 1999. The elections itself were never a self standing theme on television¹⁶ and only consisted of 13 per cent of the EU-articles on the front page of the newspapers. On the contrary, 18 per cent of the EU-articles and 23 per cent of the EU-television news items dealt with the dioxin crisis, while 20 per cent and 23 per cent respectively in newspapers and on television discussed the fraud scandal and resignation of the Santer Commission. These findings are not that surprising, however, since they correspond with the news value of issues like scandals, drama, conflict, novelty, etc. (De Vreese, 2003a: 32, 52, 55). The point here is that these items do not enable the public to make an informed evaluation of the EU. Our data are also confirmed by Norris who constructed a measure for directional bias of EU-reports, in which quarrels between member states, the sluggishness of the euro, inefficiency and extravagance of Brussels, etc. were mentioned as examples of negative news. Norris came to the conclusion that, although the degree of negative bias remained moderate, newspapers as well as television news usually adopted a Euro-sceptic tone. The Belgian news was even described as strongly negative (Norris, 2000: 196-198).

Let us now take a look at the amount of European *policy news*. Our datasets deliver mixed findings in this respect. In the short time dataset policy aspects are mentioned in 74 per cent of the EU-news, in 88 per cent of the basic coverage

15. We must add here that 1999 was also a national election year in Belgium. There was probably somewhat more European election news on television, but only in the margins of national election news. Berganza (2000) investigated this phenomenon for the Spanish media concluding that the simultaneous organisation of national and European elections reinforced the idea that the European elections are of secondary importance.

and in 55 per cent of the summit reports. These findings are, however, complemented by other data from the longitudinal file¹⁷. During the ten years of coding respectively only 23 per cent (newspapers) and 27 per cent (television) of European news was mainly spent on policy subjects (agriculture receiving most of the attention). Combining the findings of the two datasets, we conclude that policy issues are broadly mentioned but that they are not often the central topic of a news story. In addition, attention for policies isn't constant at all, neither does it seem to follow the legislative agenda and again we discover sporadic peaks associated with sensational happenings. BSE and dioxin crises, for instance, increased the news coverage on agriculture in 1996 and in 1999; the French nuclear tests on Mururoa and the Shell Brent Spar story did the same with the news on environmental policy in 1995 (see Figure 5).

Figure 5: The coverage of European policy in the newspapers between 1991 and 2000



N social policy= 161

N environmental policy= 81

N agricultural policy= 212

Source: Longitudinal database on news reporting on television and in newspapers between 1991 and 2000, University of Antwerp

16. In the long-term file we used general codes such as European integration, European finance, enlargement and policy codes.

We point out that ‘simple’ legislative decisions such as the voting of a European directive don’t reach mass media in the same way. We argued before exactly the latter kind of news is expected to make people more aware of the European contribution to national or regional legislation (cf. CEC, 2001: 7) potentially indirectly increasing normative justifiability and legitimation of the EU.

Next, we turn to the degree of *institutional specification* in the news reports. When people are asked about their appreciation of the European institutions, most of them don’t get any further than naming the (main) institutions. A vast majority is unaware of the decision making procedures of the Union (EB 59). To measure the amount of references to institutions, we scored the actors that were mentioned in the short time database. In 65 per cent of the EU-reports a specific organisation of the EU-structure is mentioned. Most mentioned (in 28 per cent of the European news items) is the European Commission. The European Parliament only appears in 10 per cent of the EU-reports. This is quite remarkable because it contradicts with public opinion research that points to the EP as the best known institution (EB 59). This paradox puts some nuances to the importance of mass media: they are important information sources, but not the only source. The EP, for instance, might be well known because of its resemblance to the national parliaments and due to European election campaigns. Also other authors have found that European institutions are often mentioned by mass media, but rarely in a neutral way that can generate knowledge and a balanced evaluation of their functioning (Anderson and Wiyomouth in De Vreese, 2003b: 9).

Summarising so far, we conclude that Belgian media-reporting on the EU is characterised by low quantity and regularity, and by frequent attention to sensation, scandals and events like European Councils. Profound basic information on EU policies and institutions is underrepresented. This leads to the preliminary conclusion that mass media don’t deliver the information that can generate knowledge for a balanced evaluation of the EU.

As has been outlined above, building knowledge and comprehension about the EU cannot be successful without first motivating people to learn about the EU. In this respect, Perse discusses the difference between active and passive learning. The first can only take place when people themselves search for information and are really motivated to assimilate new information. For passive learning one has to conquer the lack of interest by bringing attractive and comprehensible information (Perse, 2001: 132). We assume that active learning about the EU is quite unlikely because many people aren’t even aware of the relevance of the EU to their daily lives. That leaves us with attractive and understandable coverage of the EU. Above, we argued that a considerable amount of nationalised and personified news can be helpful in this respect.

In the literature *nationalisation* is considered to be a typical feature of international news reporting (Berganza, 2000: 2; De Vreese, 2003: 70, etc.). News agencies are found to select foreign issues with national stakeholders or national consequences because this would make reports more relevant and interesting for their audience (Berganza, 2000: 2). Besides more interest of the public one also expects a better understanding and recollection because people's existing knowledge of the national context can help to interpret new foreign information (Perse, 2001: 148). However, nationalised news can have other consequences as well: if journalists only report on 'national-European' events, they neglect the pure European but evenly relevant events. There is, in short, a need for a balance between nationalised EU-news that catches the attention of an unformed and often uninterested public on the one hand and pure EU-news that just 'has to be known' (De Vreese, 2003a: 180).

In our long-term data set, almost half of the television items on the EU (47 per cent) contained the name of one or more Belgian actors; this was also the case for 31 per cent of the articles on the EU (see table 2)¹⁸. The European figures are much higher than those for other foreign news¹⁹.

Table 2: The mentioning of Belgian politicians and organizations in foreign and European news

(Percentage of nationalised news compared to the full amount of European/foreign news on the respective Flemish media)

	Television news	Newspapers
News about EU	47%	31%
Foreign news minus EU-news	12%	16%
Total foreign news	16%	18%

N television news about EU= 1 151; N foreign television news= 13 024;

N EU-news in newspapers= 994; N foreign news in newspapers= 7 510

Source: Longitudinal database on news reporting on television and in newspapers between 1991 and 2000, University of Antwerp

17. There are many possible ways to measure the nationalisation of news topics. Some scholars look at the news section where the story appears or at the used rhetoric (Berganza, 2000: 6). Others look at the location where the story took place in combination with the location depicted as mainly affected (Peter et al., 2003: 313). We use a broad conception of nationalisation by looking at the Belgian actors (politicians and organisations) mentioned in the news.

18. For this analysis we didn't take into account the domestic news items of foreign countries.

This high level of nationalisation of EU-news is not only due to the low interest in international topics. If that is the case, nationalisation figures of the foreign news should be similar to those of EU-news, or even stronger. The difference between the two types is probably more linked to the more or less universal relevance of the EU to Belgium, compared to the more variable links between foreign events and the Belgian context. Overall, we tend to evaluate the findings positively in terms of a balance between nationalised and non-nationalised: the nationalised stories enable the public to understand the events while the non-nationalised leave room for *pur sang* European news. Above, we assumed that acceptance of the EU could benefit from more profound understanding.

A last element concerns the *personification* of EU-reports. We define this concept as the presence of particular people on whom the news focuses, whether these are politicians, citizens or others (cf. Berganza, 2000: 5). The personification issue is important in two ways. First of all, the focus on political figures can give the EU a face. This way the ‘distant Union’ comes closer to its inhabitants (Berganza, 2000: 5), supporting a greater understanding and a higher degree of involvement (De Witte, 1991: 37). Secondly, personification makes it possible to place an average citizen in the middle of a story, stimulating identification of the audience with that particular protagonist (De Witte, 1991: 37). This approach leaves less space for complexity and profound analysis but the reference to an individual’s life and the concretisation of the event makes the report interesting and comprehensible for its readers (Hauttekeete et al., 2002: 3). In short, personification makes it more plausible that the report will be heard and remembered (Perse, 2000: 97). Similar to the balance sought between nationalised and non-nationalised, one has to be aware of the tension between the demand for complexity²⁰ on the one hand and the public’s demand for recognizable news on the other hand. This balance is not easy to define, but we claim that the personified stories need to be counterbalanced by reports with attention to complex reality and to the combined action of several actors on different levels (cf. De Vreese, 2003a: 180).

How does the Belgian mass media cope with the dimension of personification? For every article or news item in the short time database we searched for the central actor, defined as the most mentioned individual or organisation. Next, we concentrated on those stories that focus on one individual. This was the case for 40 per cent of the articles and 42 per cent of the news items on television; 82 per cent of these individuals are people from the political elite, 8 per cent are representatives from civil organisations and 7 per cent are members of these organisations.

19. Without information on the context, the precedents, etc. of the event people’s knowledge will be incomplete and superficial (Hauttekeete et al., 2002: 4).

These proportions are not strange to the media coverage in general (Iyengar and Reeves, 1997: 104) but they have got clear implications for the two aspects of personification. Firstly, the high proportion of politicians raises the question of a clear representative, a European face. Undoubtedly there was one in the weeks around the Laeken Summit. At that time Belgium held the presidency of the EU, which increased the media interest in the EU and in the performance of the Belgians (De Vreese, 2003b: 29). In addition, Belgian mass media put forward the Belgian prime minister as the representative of the EU. He was central to 34 per cent of the personified EU-stories; the Belgian minister of foreign policy to 14 per cent of these reports. However there are indications that the presence of Belgian ministers in the EU-news was not permanent but decreased after the Belgian presidency. In addition, no alternatives show up. Theoretically members of the European Commission or MEP's could play an important role as 'faces of the Union', because, contrary to the president of the (European) Council(s) their term of office is quite long and their European role quite clear. Belgian mass media, however, do not perform in this way: our data contain less than one per cent of personified articles about MEP's and only 6 per cent about commissioners. Secondly, we address the question whether the audience can identify with the experiences of a central individual in a story. Underlying is the idea that people with low knowledge about the EU remember more easily new information when they can interpret it building on their daily life schemes and referring to their own experiences (Perse, 2001: 97). In other words, average people remember mostly stories about average people. Our data, however, point to exactly the opposite. Not a single story puts the 'man or woman in the street' in the middle and only the 7 per cent of the personified reports deal with members of civil organizations, the latter group somewhat corresponding with ordinary people and thus serving the purpose of identification. On a more sophisticated level, the data reveal similar findings: only 11 per cent of the EU-news deals with individuals or groups that are hit or influenced by the reported event and only 7 per cent of the reports has got a real human interest character. As has been pointed out before, also with respect to personification a balance has to be struck between personified stories and factual information. At this moment, however, Belgian mass media don't offer a balance, hence not stimulating people's interest to learn or to make up their mind about the EU.

5. Conclusions

This paper set out with the question whether EU-coverage by Belgian mass media is of such a nature that it decreases the legitimacy deficit of the EU. In the second section we argued that the degree of legitimacy in the EU depends on the extent it meets three conditions (legality, normative justifiability and

legitimation) in two dimensions (input and output) and on two levels (direct and indirect). Next, we refined our design by stipulating that the potential role of mass media is most relevant with respect to the output conditions of normative justifiability and legitimation. In the third section, we argued that, if the functioning and policies of the European institutions have legitimating potential, mass media can play a roll in the dissemination of relevant information in order to motivate people to gain knowledge and build comprehension about the EU. We operationalised the criteria in which the knowledge, motivation and comprehension deficits can be reduced by mass media in terms quantity, regularity, attention for thematic news, policies and institutions, and balanced coverage of nationalised and personified news. In the fourth section we assessed the way Belgian mass media met these criteria from in the period 1991-2001, based on a short term and a long term dataset on Belgian EU media coverage.

Our main conclusions are summarised in Figure 6. With respect to the quantity and regularity of the coverage, our data support the findings of previous studies. The Belgian mass media coverage between 1991 and 2001 does not offer the information the public needs to get motivated to gain enough knowledge and comprehension for a balanced evaluation of the EU. In addition, we found the reports on the EU to address little attention to thematic issues and much to sensational news and particular events. With respect to the contents of the news, the amount of news about European policies was considered to be quite frequent and this was even more the case for reports on European institutions. In total, however, frequent and profound information on the EU was found to be low. Finally, our data revealed that the amount of personified stories was low, therfor having little chance to make people interested in the stories and to motivate them to gain more knowledge of European issues. The amount of nationalised stories was considered to be more in line with what is theoretically seen as necessary to attract interest and to build motivation.

Figure 6: Belgian mass media coverage of the EU and its impact on the EU's legitimacy

1. Quantity and regularity of coverage	--
2. Enough thematic news about real and relevant, positive and negative events in the EU	--
3. Enough news about the contents of European policies	+/-
4. Enough news that discusses the role of European institutions	+
5. A balance between nationalised reports and factual information	+
6. A balance between personified reports and factual information	-

The overall conclusion is that mass media coverage in Belgium, in the period from 1991 to 2001, did not meet the criteria that are seen as necessary to build motivation and comprehension. In other words, mass media coverage of the EU did not have a decreasing impact on the legitimacy deficit of the EU, more in particular with respect to the output dimension of normative justifiability and legitimation. From 1991 to 2001, regularity and quantity of EU coverage, attention for reports on policies and personified stories, and the balance between factual information on the one hand and nationalised and personified reports on the other hand were not of the kind to increase comprehension and hence to increase legitimacy .

From our data we can only draw conclusions for the Belgian case in the period from 1991 to 2001. In the literature, however, we did not find any evidence that the Belgian case would be an outlier compared to other Member States (cf. Norris, 2000 and Peter et al., 2003 with respect to media coverage and Eurobarometer with respect to public opinion). In addition, it should also be clear that future research is necessary to refine our findings. Among the strategies for future research, we would especially recommend more exhaustive and comparative data collection (complete newspapers and TV coverage) and more theory driven hypothesis building and operationalisation (e.g. with respect to thresholds).

Annex 1: Associations (dyx) between support for the EU as dependent variable and objective and subjective knowledge as independent variables

	Objective knowledge	Subjective knowledge
General Support (good thing → bad thing)	-0,054**	-0,089***
Instrumental support (advantageous → not)	-0,041	-0,015
Personal consequences of the EU (much more advantages → much more disadvantages)	-0,170***	-0,148***
Identity (only Belgian → only European)	0,134***	0,184***
Satisfaction with democracy (very satisfied → not at all)	-0,053*	-0,098***

* $p \leq 0.05$ ** $p \leq 0.01$ *** $p \leq 0.001$

Source: EB 59.1 except for personal consequences, EB 58.1

The exact content of the questions is expressed below. Non-responses were coded missing. Objective and subjective knowledge were recoded in respectively 3 and 4 categories so that every category consists of a similar proportion of respondents.

General support:

‘Generally speaking, do you think that Belgium’s membership of the European Union is a good thing, neither good nor bad, a bad thing?’

Instrumental support:

‘Taking everything into consideration, would you say that Belgium has on balance benefited or not from being a member of the European Union?’

Personal consequences of the EU:

‘Do you think that Belgium being a member of the European Union has brought you personally many more advantages, more advantages, as many advantages as disadvantages, more disadvantages, many more disadvantages?’

Identity:

‘In the near future, do you see yourself as Belgian only, Belgian and European, European and Belgian, European only?’

Satisfaction with democracy:

‘On the whole, are you very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied... with the way democracy works in the European community?’

Objective knowledge:

‘Have you ever heard of ... (list of 10 European institutions)?’

Recoded to knowledge about 0-4 , 5-7, 8-10 institutions

Subjective knowledge:

‘Using this scale (1-10) how much do you feel you know about the European Union, its policies, its institutions?’

Recoded to scores between 1-2, 3-4, 5,6, 7-10

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