

## Coverage of European Union Treaties in Canada's National Newspapers

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### ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the coverage of three European Union (EU) treaties by the *National Post* and the *Globe and Mail*. News articles concerning the treaties are categorized as political or economic in focus, and editorials as positive or negative. The article argues that despite typically focusing on the EU as an economic body, the newspapers tend to report on EU treaties as political events, giving little attention to their economic implications. The article also argues that the newspapers adhere to their ideological tendencies when reporting on EU treaties, the *National Post* being more critical of EU integration and the *Globe and Mail* being largely supportive of it.

### Introduction

Treaties are the fundamental units of progress in the European Union (EU). The aim of this paper is to measure the attention that Canadian newspapers pay to this progress and to judge perceptions of the EU revealed through the coverage. This paper comprises an analysis of Canada's two national daily newspapers: the *Globe and Mail* and the *National Post*. Because the second newspaper did not exist in its current national capacity prior to 1998, only the EU treaties of later origins are appropriate subjects for the study. Thus, this paper analyzes coverage of the Treaty of Nice, the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe, and the Treaty of Lisbon. These three treaties sought to move forward the EU process of integration. They are also characterized by some instances of direct voting at the national level—the referenda of Ireland, France, and the Netherlands—and by the various subsequent rejections.

### Background

Overall, Canadian newspapers do not give much attention to EU developments. This point is demonstrated by Croci and Tossutti (2007). The study finds that the *National Post* and the *Globe and Mail* each print fewer than four articles per year with “European Union” or “EU” in the headline (Croci & Tossutti 18). 74 per cent of these articles concern the international position of the EU and 59 per cent focus on economic issues (Croci & Tossutti 18). These figures are not surprising, as the report also concludes that, in general, Canadians principally view the EU as “an important international economic actor” (Croci & Tossutti 23).

The *National Post* and the *Globe and Mail* differ in their EU coverage. *National Post* articles—leaning toward classic liberal ideology—“portray the EU as too interventionist” while the *Globe and Mail* articles—leaning toward reform liberal ideology—“underline the benefits” of EU integration and intervention (Croci & Tossutti 19). Further, *National Post* articles focus on “national experiences in the EU” while *Globe and Mail* articles focus on progress and activity within the EU itself (Croci & Tossutti 19). The report by Croci and Tossutti establishes some key trends and provides a useful background against which to construct a hypothesis for this study.

## Hypothesis

It is unlikely that *National Post* or the *Globe and Mail* will devote much attention to EU treaties. This prediction is based not only on Croci and Tossutti's demonstration of the small amount of overall EU coverage, but also on the fact that when the newspapers do cover the EU, they focus on its role as an international economic player rather than on its internal structure. Any articles that do report on the treaties, however, should concentrate on their international and economic ramifications. Of the two newspapers, the *National Post* will likely give more coverage of the treaties. While treaties might usually fall under the *Globe and Mail's* focus on internal EU developments, the three treaties studied are characterized by debate and rejection at the national level and thus would be of greater interest to the *National Post*. Finally, given the political tendencies of the two newspapers, one may hypothesize on the opinions—this study includes editorials as well as news items—evident in each paper: the *National Post* will reveal its classic liberal stance, focusing criticism on aspects of the treaties that allow higher levels of EU integration and intervention while the *Globe and Mail* will adhere to its reform liberal stance, communicating the advantages of such developments.

## Method

Research was conducted through *Factiva* searches of *National Post* and *Globe and Mail* articles published between 1 January 2000 and 1 July 2008. The keywords used were “Treaty of Nice” or “Nice Treaty”; “Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe” or “European Constitution”; and “Treaty of Lisbon” or “Lisbon Treaty” or “Reform Treaty”. The search included all articles with these keywords appearing in either the headline or the lead paragraph. The lead paragraph parameter allows for the inclusion of articles that do not directly name a treaty in their headline, while ensuring that the articles included give adequate attention to the treaty. The search was also manually refined to eliminate a small number of articles that mentioned treaty names in lead paragraphs but in fact covered non-treaty issues.

Search results included both news articles and editorials. While the editorial is not a standard method of news coverage, it is nevertheless valuable in determining the perception of the EU in Canadian newspapers. Merriam-Webster defines an editorial as “an article that gives the opinions of the editors or publishers” of a newspaper or magazine. Thus, while editorials often assume personal tones, they are reflections of the publication's stance on a given subject.

The results of this study are analyzed in two ways. First, the results are presented for a quantitative comparison of the amount of coverage given to the treaties by each newspaper. Second, the nature of the coverage is analyzed: articles of each newspaper are compared by treaty and classified according to whether the primary focus is economic or political. In the case of editorials, the tone is classified as critical of the EU integration process or as uncritical/positive.

## Analysis of results

**Table 1**  
Number of articles concerning EU treaties

	Nice		Constitution		Lisbon		Total
	<i>News</i>	<i>Editorial</i>	<i>News</i>	<i>Editorial</i>	<i>News</i>	<i>Editorial</i>	
<i>National Post</i>	2	2	5	8	4	2	23
<i>Globe and Mail</i>	3	0	6	2	3	3	17
Total	7		21		12		40

As hypothesized, the *National Post* printed more articles on the three treaties than did the *Globe and Mail*. It printed 35 per cent more articles on the subject, and more than double the number of editorials.

### Nice

**Table 2**  
Treaty of Nice coverage

	News and Editorials		Editorials only	
	<i>Political</i>	<i>Economic</i>	<i>Critical</i>	<i>Uncritical</i>
<i>National Post</i>	4	0	2	0
<i>Globe and Mail</i>	2	1	0	0
Total	6	1	2	0

The newspapers devoted fewer articles to the Nice Treaty than the other treaties, and all but one of these articles were of a political focus. This was contrary to expectations, as it was anticipated that the newspapers would concentrate on the economic effects of the treaty. Instead, each of the seven articles pivots around one of two events: the first and second Irish referenda. Yet the coverage of these events is somewhat incomplete. The *National Post*, for example, reported on the first referendum only after the 'No' vote had been confirmed, while the *Globe and Mail* gave no report on the 'Yes' victory in the second referendum. This sparsity of coverage in both newspapers presents Canadians an incomplete story, leading to a potentially inaccurate perception of the EU.

The single article of economic focus was a *Globe and Mail* report comparing NAFTA with the EU market created through the Nice Treaty, and discussing the effects of the treaty on global trade. More articles like this had been expected.

Only the *National Post* printed editorials on the Nice Treaty. Its editorials are extremely critical of the EU integration process. Their titles—“The EU steamrolls its members” and “The death of the nation state”—are telling of the attitude presented in each: they attack the perceived loss of freedom for individual states that comes with the EU. They criticize the notion of a “continental superstate with diminished sovereignty for independent member states” (*National Post* 23 June 2001), as well as the democratic mechanisms of the EU. One editorial indicts the second referendum (“How can a referendum be undemocratic? Here’s how”) and alleges that “Dublin... rigged the vote” to obtain a ‘Yes’ (*National Post* 25 October 2002). Overall, the editorials present the EU as a corrupt leviathan operating in the interest of the system itself and the elites at its helm instead of the individuals it is intended to serve. In its coverage of the Nice Treaty, the *National Post* is faithful to its classic liberal ideology.

A trend worth noting in *National Post* coverage is its emphasis on the communist history of Eastern European countries granted admission to the EU through the Nice Treaty. In four articles there were five mentions of the word “communist”, as well as a reference to the “Iron Curtain”. The *Globe and Mail* makes no such comments. It is possible that this diction reflects antipathy on the part of the *National Post* towards any socialist presence in the EU.

### Constitution

**Table 3**  
European Constitution coverage

	News and Editorials		Editorials only	
	<i>Political</i>	<i>Economic</i>	<i>Critical</i>	<i>Uncritical</i>
<i>National Post</i>	11	2	7	1
<i>Globe and Mail</i>	6	2	0	2
Total	17	4	7	3

Nearly one quarter of the newspapers’ coverage of the European Constitution was economic. The *National Post* economic articles focused on economic causes for the rejections while the *Globe and Mail* economic articles focused on the international economic impact of French and Dutch rejections. Such international economic commentary had been more highly expected.

Politics still dominated the coverage. The majority of the articles reported on the French and Dutch referenda, although the newspapers collectively printed five articles in the early stages of the Constitution’s drafting, reporting on its development and on early national reactions. The *National Post* has also printed several articles on the treaty since its rejection, while the *Globe and Mail* has printed none. As with the earlier Irish referenda, however, this coverage was incomplete. In fact, neither newspaper reported on the treaty until it had been rejected. Again, such partial coverage may present Canadians a distorted image of the EU.

The *National Post* showed great interest in the Constitution. It printed eight editorials on the subject, seven of which negative. Again, the titles reflect the *National Post*’s editorial antagonism towards the EU: “Europe’s new house of cards”, “Eurocrats reinvent the past”,

“Fighting the Euroschemers”, “Europe isn't up to the challenge”. The editorials tend to attack a perceived elitism at the upper levels of the EU. They pit “the arrogance of Europe’s elites” against average citizens in an undemocratic struggle where “Eurocrats...simply cannot understand why people prefer to control their own destinies” (*National Post* 10 January 2004 and 8 June 2005). Recalling the repeat referenda of the Nice Treaty, one editorial speculates that the EU forces nations to “vote again until they get it right” (8 June 2005). The *National Post* evidently felt a great need to expose democratic inadequacies in the EU, and in classic liberal form defends the rights of the individual in the face of the EU bully.

The editorials from the *Globe and Mail* demonstrate the newspaper’s tendency towards reform liberal ideology. The editorials do not ignore the loss of sovereignty that comes with EU development, but they do not portray it as negative. One editorial outlines the benefits of EU integration in comparison to “North America’s remarkable reluctance to build a community” (*Globe and Mail* 27 May 2003).

*Lisbon*

**Table 4**  
Treaty of Lisbon coverage

	News and Editorials		Editorials only	
	<i>Political</i>	<i>Economic</i>	<i>Critical</i>	<i>Uncritical</i>
<i>National Post</i>	4	2	1	1
<i>Globe and Mail</i>	6	0	1	2
Total	10	2	2	3

Only the *National Post* has focused on economic aspects surrounding the Lisbon Treaty, reporting on its relation to the Irish economy. The coverage was still markedly political. The *National Post* only began reports on the treaty in the days leading up to the Irish referendum. The *Globe and Mail* began reports earlier, during the treaty’s development. The focus of both newspapers’ coverage has been a repeat of the coverage of previous treaties, focusing on the Irish referendum and subsequent rejection.

The *National Post* has assumed a more balanced tone concerning the Lisbon Treaty, with one critical editorial and one uncritical. However, the critical editorial is especially scathing. Its title, “A Triumph for Democracy”, refers to the Irish ‘No’ vote.

As with the Constitution coverage, the *National Post* focuses on the heroism of the individual versus the EU foe. The article condemns the practice of repeat referendums—giving the impression that it has happened many more times than once—and calls it the “‘Zimbabweanization’ of European politics” (16 June 2008).

The *Globe and Mail* has also been more balanced on the Treaty of Lisbon, featuring one critical editorial which, like those of the *National Post*, claims that EU leaders “intend to subvert democracy” (*Globe and Mail* 14 June 2008). However, this subject also inspired two of the most pro-EU editorials in the study, in which the authors expressed enthusiastic approval of the Lisbon Treaty (*Globe and Mail* 15 December 2007 and 19 June 2008).

## Conclusion

Coverage of EU treaties by Canada's national newspapers was surprising in some ways but predictable in others. In contrast to the overwhelming majority of coverage that economic issues receive in EU coverage by the *National Post* and *Globe and Mail*, and contrary to the hypothesis of this study, very little attention was paid to that dimension of the treaties. In fact, only 17.5 per cent of the articles were economic in focus, with each paper devoting virtually equal proportions of their treaty coverage to economic issues. The coverage by the *Globe and Mail* was closer to expectations in that it discussed the impacts of the treaties on the international market, but overall there were far fewer such articles than anticipated.

Clearly the majority of the articles had a political focus. While a number discussed the politics and provisions of the treaties themselves, most were concerned with speculation on and coverage of the national referenda. One of the possible explanations for this concentrated coverage is quite simple: the national votes were much more exciting than the treaties themselves. Newspapers of all levels of credibility are, after all, businesses that profit from garnering public attention. The results of this study would be quite different if House of Commons discussion were analyzed instead. It should be noted, though, that Canadian coverage is often sparse and incomplete; this may create incorrect perceptions of the EU.

The *National Post* surpassed the *Globe and Mail* in total treaty coverage. This was expected, as the *National Post* typically pays more attention to nation-level EU developments and the three treaties observed, because of the national referenda, fell into that category.

Finally, both newspapers adhered to their political tendencies. The *National Post* was almost exclusively critical of the EU integration and intervention. It regularly characterized individuals and nations as victims of an overly powerful and undemocratic EU. The *Globe and Mail*, with one exception, also performed as expected in this area. In general, it supported the EU and its treaties.

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