



Diplo Media Report 2022/02
National Centre for Research on Europe

MEDIA REPORT

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

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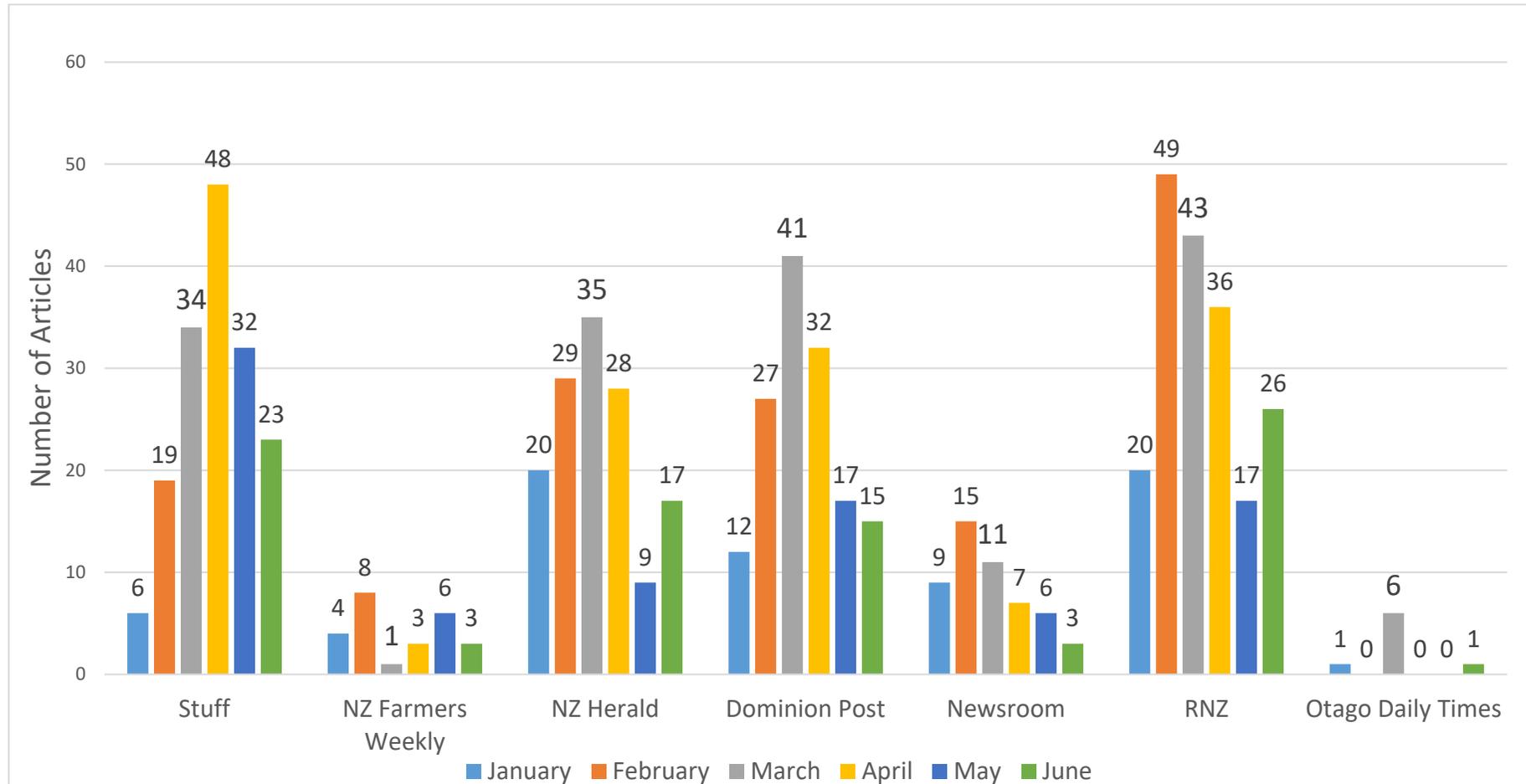
August 2022 Media report, Dr Serena Kelly and Brittany Baugh, *University of Canterbury, New Zealand*

The summary below highlights key points found from the media analysis conducted from leading media outlets in New Zealand from 1 January – 30 June 2022.

The following report is a summary and analysis of New Zealand’s media coverage of the European Union in the first six months of 2022. We found a significant number of articles published in the timeframe, with a total of 755 articles printed over the six month period (an average of four articles per day, or 126 per month) that made mention of the EU or its institutions. Curiously, not every outlet had news peaks on the EU in the same month. As shown in Figure 1, our largest online media outlet, *Stuff*, included the most news items on the EU in the month of April, publishing 48 news items, compared with the lowest coverage in the month of January when only six articles on the EU were located. The comparative low in January could be attributed to New Zealand’s annual holiday period (equivalent to Europe’s August). Of *Stuff*’s April news items, 21 pertained to news concerning Russia’s Ukraine invasion, the majority of which portrayed the EU as a minor actor. *The New Zealand Herald* and *Dominion Post* both featured the highest number of articles on the EU in the month of March. Of the *Dominion Post* articles published in March, 18 out of 41 either featured or had some link to the Ukrainian crisis. Likewise, *The New Zealand Herald* published 34 articles on the EU in the month of March, 11 with an explicit focus on Russia and/or Ukraine. *RNZ*, *New Zealand Farmers’ Weekly* and *Newsroom* had the highest coverage of the EU in the month of February, thus coinciding with New Zealand Foreign Minister Nanaia Mahuta’s visit to Europe, as well as with the start of Russia’s war in Ukraine.

These findings are reflective of our overall assessment of New Zealand’s media coverage of the EU in the first six months of 2022: the coverage was heavily focussed on the Ukrainian invasion, which may have consequently overshadowed other important political developments such as the end of negotiations to sign the EU–NZ Free Trade Agreement (FTA). Below we present more detailed analysis of the collected news items. We outline the media framing of the EU, the Degree of Centrality (prominence of the EU), before finishing with assessments as to how the Ukrainian crisis and EU–NZ FTA have been presented.

Figure 1: Number of Articles per Publication January–June 2022



Media framing of the EU

As shown in Figure 2, the EU was overwhelmingly presented by New Zealand media as a political actor, with 71% of media coverage portraying the EU in this light. New items which portrayed the EU as a political actor ranged from the EU's response to Ukraine and Russia, to Brexit to developments in Mali and Afghanistan. Of the 545 total articles portraying the EU as a political actor, 326 showed the EU acting externally. This finding can be seen as a positive result for the EU, as it shows an EU moving towards becoming a more cohesive foreign policy bloc, away from old tropes common in New Zealand of 'fortress Europe' and 'protectionist Europe'. An example of the EU acting as a cohesive, single actor in regard to Ukraine included the comment that "The NATO announcement came as European Union foreign ministers sought to put on a fresh display of unity in support of Ukraine, and paper over concerns about divisions on the best way to confront any Russian aggression".¹ The EU's action and reaction to Ukraine quickly spilled over into the possibility of Ukraine being granted EU membership. One *Stuff* article noted that "Zelenskyy and some EU supporters want Ukraine admitted to the EU quickly. Von der Leyen described the membership process as "a merit-based path" and appealed for Ukraine to strengthen its rule of law, fight corruption and modernize its institutions".² More discussion is given below on the framing of the EU in regard to Ukraine and Russia.

There was very little focus on the EU's internal politics in the timeframe under consideration, although some attention to the EU's reaction to on-going Brexit negotiations was noted in around 20 articles, demonstrating a continuing interest in Brexit in NZ media. Only five articles had an explicit focus on the Indo-Pacific Strategy, despite the EU's hopes pinned to the Indo-Pacific forum that took place in February this year, an event that was ultimately overshadowed by Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The greatest surprise in the New Zealand media framing was the low number of articles that featured the EU as an economic actor. This was particularly stark given the timeframe under consideration, with New Zealand and the EU in the final stages of FTA negotiations. Only around 10% of the total articles had a focus on the EU as an economic actor. Unlike previous years, when the EU's economy came under scrutiny in the wake of the Eurozone crisis, articles which framed the EU as an economic actor did tend to look at EU external policy more

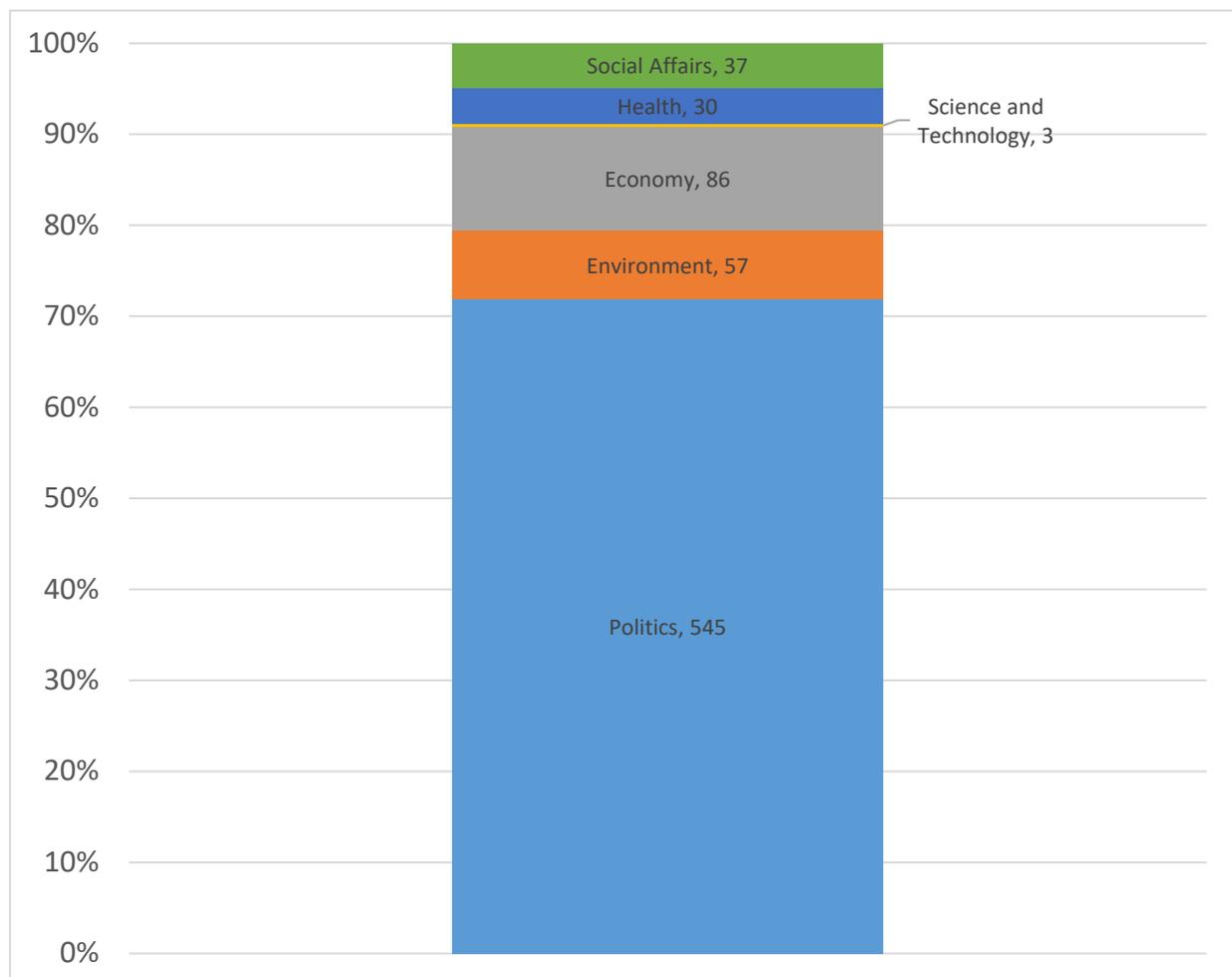
¹ Cook, Lorne (2022) US puts 8500 troops on heightened alert amid Russia tension, *Stuff*, 25 January. <https://www.stuff.co.nz/world/300502948/us-puts-8500-troops-on-heightened-alert-amid-russia-tension> (accessed 17 August 2022)

² Keyton, David and Leicester, John (2022) Russia using more deadly weapons in war, Ukrainian and British officials warn, *Stuff*, 12 June. <https://www.stuff.co.nz/world/europe/300611068/russia-using-more-deadly-weapons-in-war-ukrainian-and-british-officials-warn> (accessed 17 August 2022)

generally (e.g. sanctions), with a specific focus on Free Trade negotiations. Discussion around FTA negotiations were a particular feature of the *New Zealand Farmers Weekly*, which, unlike most other outlets under consideration, had a strong emphasis on publishing the opinions and research of local journalists.

A positive result for the EU was the relatively large number of articles that concerned the EU as an environmental actor (55 total). Eighteen of these articles concerned EU domestic environmental policy in which the EU was a major actor, and implementing policies to combat climate change such as the Commission’s ‘Fit for 55’ and energy policy. The remainder of the environmentally focussed articles pertained to internal New Zealand developments, meaning that the EU was sometimes used as a reference point for New Zealand’s own climate change policies.

Figure 2: Framing All Stories January–June 2022



Degree of Centrality

As mentioned in [previously published media reports](#), the degree of centrality is a way of gauging the importance or prominence of the EU in New Zealand’s media coverage. As demonstrated in Figures 3–9, the majority of news items pertaining to the EU in the first six months of 2022 portrayed the EU from a minor perspective. Both the Otago Daily Times and Newsroom presented the EU in a minor way in 75% of news items. This is contrasted with RNZ, Stuff and New Zealand Herald which presented the EU as a minor actor in around 53% of news items. Stuff was more likely to include articles in which the EU was a major actor (29%). This finding is a positive one for the EU, as Stuff is an important player in the New Zealand media scene, and articles which portray the EU as a major actor are more likely to impact the reader’s perceptions of the EU. The emphasis of minority articles about the EU in the New Zealand media can be connected to the high coverage of the war in Ukraine, in which the EU was mentioned but was often not the major player of the article.

Figure 3: NZ Farmers Weekly Centrality

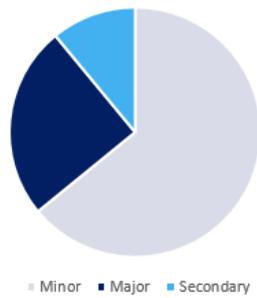


Figure 4: Otago Daily Times Centrality

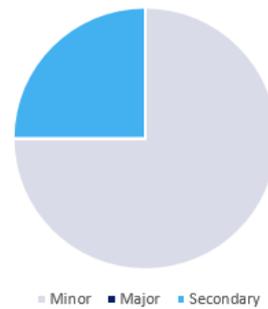


Figure 5: RNZ Centrality

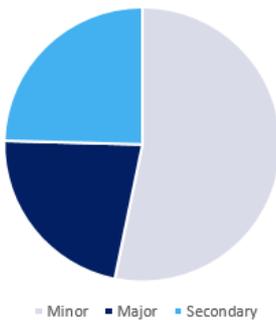


Figure 6: Stuff Centrality

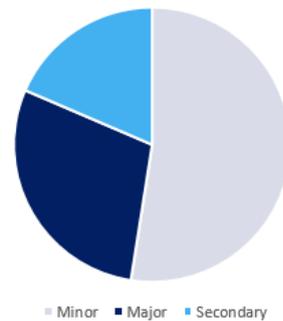


Figure 7: Newsroom Centrality

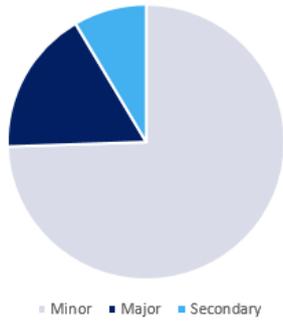


Figure 8: New Zealand Herald Centrality

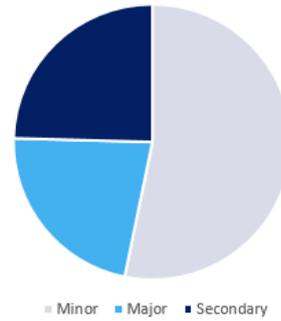
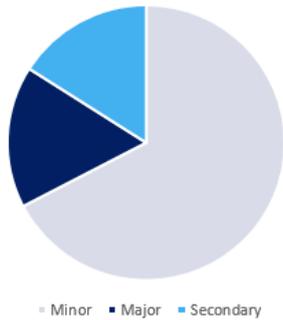


Figure 9: Dominion Post Centrality



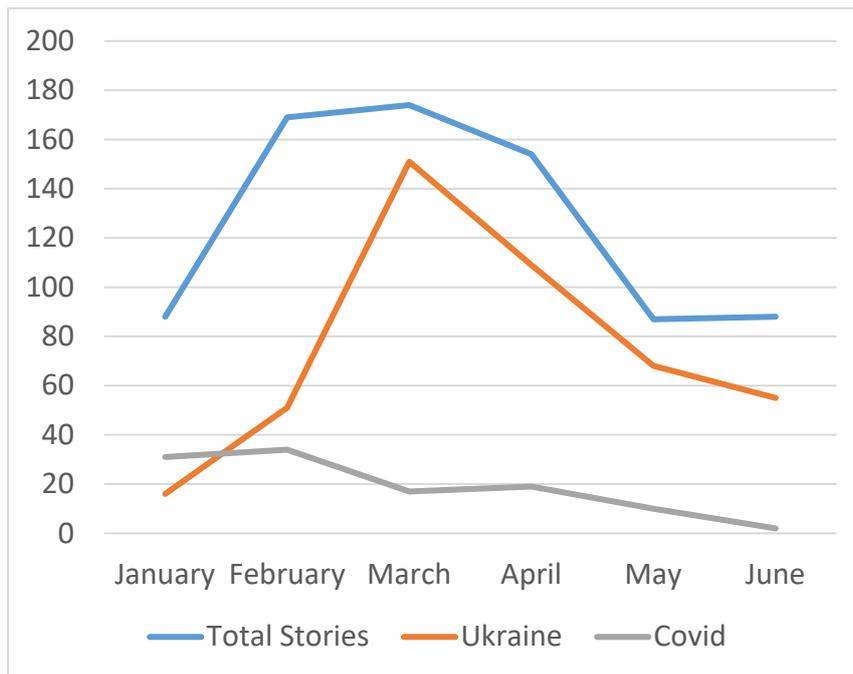
Discussion – Ukraine and the EU–NZ FTA

As previously noted, the unexpected and catastrophic nature of the Ukrainian crisis meant a media saturation of events in Ukraine, at the expense of other developments that may have been deemed ‘newsworthy’.³ Indeed, not only did Ukrainian developments tend to take over media agendas, but one article claimed that it became the most politically important item for the EU, ahead of climate change: “Before Ukraine, the EU put climate at the ‘top’ of its political agenda”.⁴ As demonstrated in Figure 10, news items which mentioned both the EU and Ukraine peaked in March, with an overwhelming total of 151 news items published. The EU was predominantly featured as only a minor actor, meaning that although the EU was often portrayed as a single voice and actor in relation to the crisis, its overall visibility was lower than it could have been. Positively for EU integration efforts, Ukraine’s quest to become a candidate country to the EU, alongside Moldova, received media coverage, but it was not always viewed positively, with one author noting the internal divisions that would stop Ukrainian membership.⁵

³ See for example, Kelly, Serena (2022) *The European Union and Mahuta: New Zealand’s Media Coverage*. DIPLO Media Report 2022/01. <https://com451615347.files.wordpress.com/2022/03/diplo-media-report-2022-01.pdf> (accessed 17 August 2022)

⁴ Pagani, Josie (2022) We should dump the net zero carbon goal, *Stuff*, 18 March. <https://www.stuff.co.nz/opinion/128082010/we-should-dump-the-net-zero-carbon-goal> (accessed 17 August 2022)

⁵ Tharor, Ishaan (2022) Ukraine war brings an unusual moral edge to the World Economic Forum, *Stuff*, 26 May <https://www.stuff.co.nz/world/europe/300597650/ukraine-war-brings-an-unusual-moral-edge-to-the-world-economic-forum> (accessed 17 August 2022)

Figure 10: Stories Mentioning the Ukraine January–June 2022

The high number of articles mentioning Ukraine could also potentially be a reason for the lack of reporting on the EU–NZ FTA. In total, 49 articles made at least a passing reference to the on-going EU–NZ FTA negotiations, that were finally concluded on June 30. Therefore, the timeframe under consideration offers insights into how NZ media viewed the final stages of the discussions. New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern was quoted at the beginning of the year stating “Our eye is on the prize with EU this year. I was in talks even over summer, so that’s an agreement that I know will continue to make a difference for exporters and will be a big focus”.⁶ Subsequently, there were three senior ministerial NZ visits to the EU: Ardern, Foreign Minister Nanaia Mahuta and Trade Minister Damien O’Connor. The trips to Europe were particularly significant given that New Zealand had been locked down for two years during the COVID-19 pandemic. Further, the French Presidential election in April was mentioned as a potential stumbling block on the road to securing the deal. Political manoeuvres were also cited in helping to secure the deal. As one article published on the RNZ website claimed:

Ardern performed an historic U-turn on the principle of autonomous sanctions by passing the Russia Sanctions Act in March, before making equally symbolic defensive and lethal aid commitments to Ukraine – and even deploying a small number of New Zealand troops to Europe. Nevertheless, the idea that New Zealand’s alignment with

⁶ Scotcher, Katie (2022) Omicron will be a ‘different’ foe, PM Jacinda Ardern warns, *RNZ*, 20 January. <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/political/459876/omicron-will-be-a-different-foe-pm-jacinda-ardern-warns> (accessed 17 August 2022)

the EU's position on Ukraine could have an impact on the free trade agreement (FTA) has always lingered below the surface.⁷

The timeframe under consideration means that reports on the final deal reached have not been covered. Yet during the six month lead up to the FTA announcement, it appeared that New Zealanders remained reserved and sceptical about the prospects of the FTA, thus indicating that Euroscepticism remains in New Zealand, despite many positive developments in the bilateral relationship.

⁷ Miller, Geoffrey (2022) Can Jacinda Ardern save New Zealand's free trade deal with the EU?. *RNZ*, 27 June. <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/on-the-inside/469862/can-jacinda-ardern-save-new-zealand-s-free-trade-deal-with-the-eu> (accessed 17 August 2022)