

Chapter 4

ANALYSIS OF THE EUROPEAN MEDIA

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Introduction

Media landscapes in the ten partner countries are quite different. In some countries (e.g. Germany), a multitude of print products dominates the media, whereas in others (e.g. Slovenia) only a few print products exist – simply because of country size and number of inhabitants. The project partners selected relevant daily newspapers (local, regional, national, tabloid) and magazines, if available. Internet newspapers and journals as well as internet coverage of broadcasters were also considered. A detailed analysis of the media data of each country is presented in the respective country reports.

Methodological aspects

Print or online editions of the daily newspapers and magazines were monitored for articles related to GM-food and GMO issues respectively. Whenever accessible, electronic press clipping services were employed. Similar key words were used in all countries, including (translated into local languages): genetically modified, genetic modification, GM, GMO, GM-food, GE-food, Frankenfood, (GM)-labelled. Details of media selection and data collection in each of the partner countries are presented in the detailed country reports.

The articles were differentiated into three categories:

- news reports, including local, regional, national and international news;
- debate/comment articles, including opinions, editorials and letters to editors;
- other articles published on consumer pages, science and technology pages, etc.

Evaluations have been done on the basis of the three categories: news, comment and letters

Article contents were classified as positive (pro-GM), negative (anti-GM) or neutral/balanced. The criteria were:

- the item offered a message that was clearly pro-GM or anti-GM although sometimes containing a *brief* or *subsidiary* mention of the opposing view;
- the item was “neutral” in the sense of straight news reporting with no overall pro- or anti-GM conclusion or “balanced”, meaning that opposing viewpoints were presented with roughly equal weight.

Results

Media traditions vary greatly among the ten Member States participating in the project. Large countries (Czech Republic, Germany, Greece, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain, Sweden and the UK) tended to have more titles than small ones (Estonia, Slovenia). Moreover, regionalism is important: Germany has more regions (*Länder*) than the other countries and

this is reflected in the number of regional titles although Spain and the UK also have distinct regions, each with their own titles. In small countries (Estonia, Slovenia) separate regions with their own media are less significant.

Within the project timeframe, a total of 280 daily newspapers were monitored. As shown in Fig. 1, the majority were regional and local dailies although national publications were, of course, very important in terms of readership and influence. The investigation included 13 tabloids.

In addition, 37 magazines (political, science, women's', etc.) were screened. Some partners recorded data from broadcasting; thus, 14 TV stations and 13 radio stations were monitored (see Fig. 1). Altogether, the survey of the media landscape in the ten countries delivered an adequate basis for the evaluation. comprehensive survey of the media landscape of the ten countries.

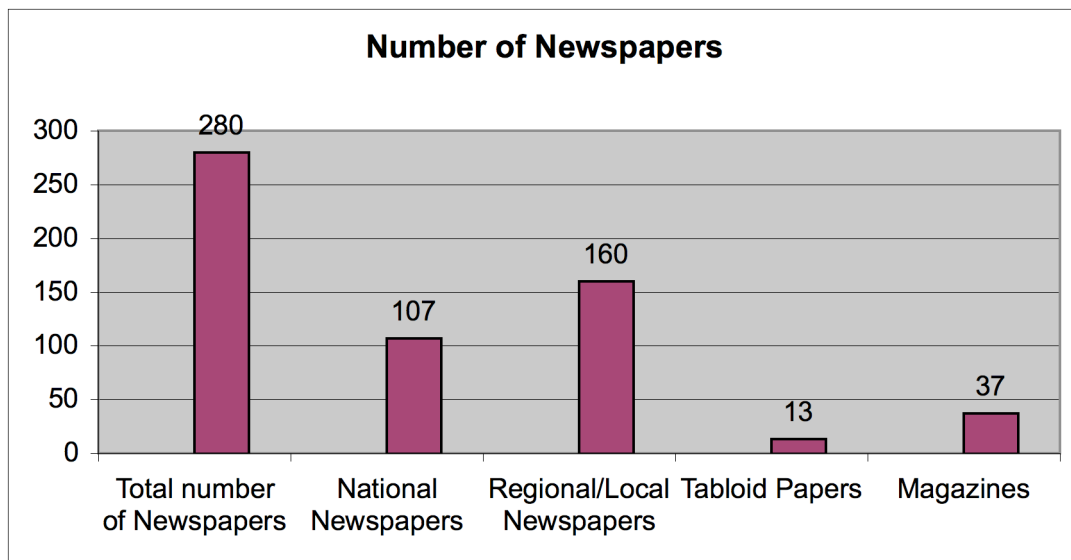


Fig. 1. Print media analysed

In the 20 months from July 1, 2006 to February 29, 2008, articles were logged, categorised and summarised monthly. An overview of the number of articles collected in the partner countries and the average number per month is shown in Table 1. Due to the unequal number of media outlets selected, the overall number of articles varied widely. However, except in Germany and the UK, the average number of articles was low, varying between 2 and 11. In Germany and the UK the monthly averages were 54 and 35 items, respectively. The high German figures are very likely attributable to the amendment of the German Genetic Engineering Law that attracted considerable media interest while the UK media have shown a high level of interest in GM issues for the past decade and respond vigorously to each new development.

We conclude that apart from these two large countries, the general media interest in GM-food and related issues is rather low.

Table 1. Overall and monthly average numbers of GM-related articles monitored in partner countries

country	total no. of articles in 20 months	average no. of articles per month
Czech Rep	185	9
Estonia	45	2
Germany	1078	54
Greece	128	6
Netherlands*	148	7
Poland	216	11
Slovenia	77	4
Spain	98	5
Sweden	185	9
UK	692	35
average		14.2

* Netherlands: only media items in general newspapers were considered. Items published in the Agricultural Newsletter (*Agraisch Dagblatt*) were disregarded because of its emphasis on agriculture and the greater likelihood of GM reporting.

The monthly distribution of media items in some of the partner countries revealed a clear event-driven coverage of GM food. The following newsworthy events stimulated media interest in more than one country:

- September 2006: unapproved GM-rice (LL 601) from the US was detected in supermarkets. This issue was taken up in Germany, The Netherlands, Sweden and the UK.
- March 2007: EU approval of GM corn was debated after a research report claimed that the GM-corn could pose health risks to humans. Subsequently, the credibility of the research report became into focus of the debate. Media interest was raised in mainly Germany and Sweden.

More than two-thirds of the published items were news-related, followed by comment/debate and then letters (see Fig. 2).

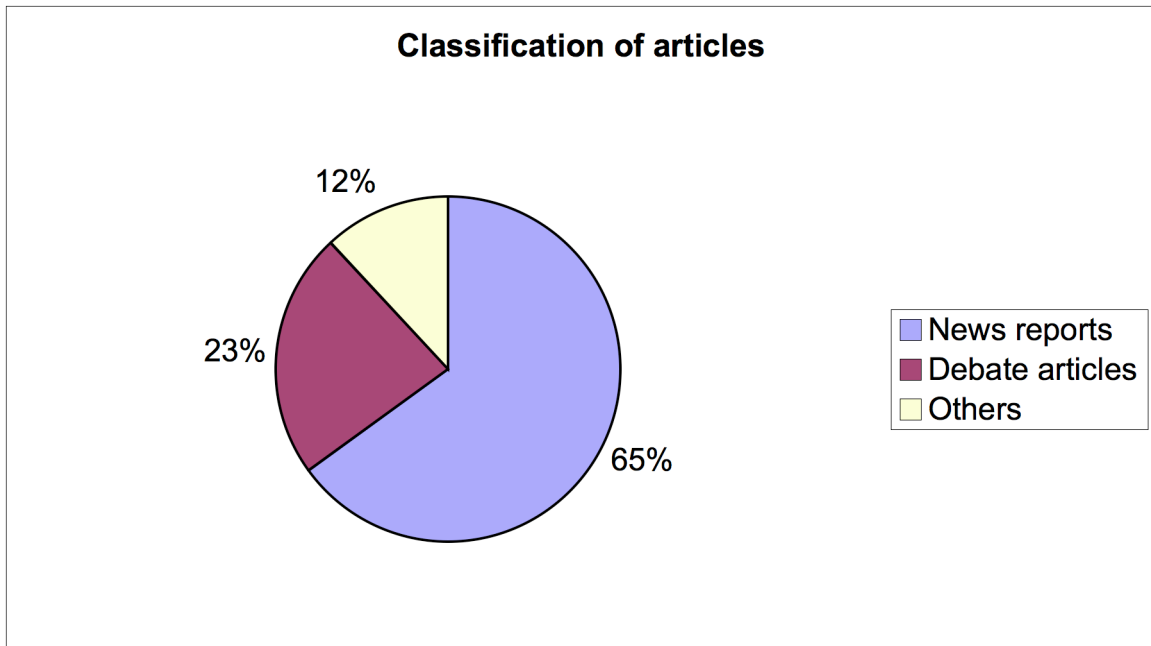


Figure 2. Article categories

The original intention had been to classify items according to their headlines but that was soon abandoned. Headlines were often more provocative and more negative than the article itself. Analysing solely the headlines would have rated a much higher number of articles as negative. Content, not headlines, thus became the sole criterion for classification.

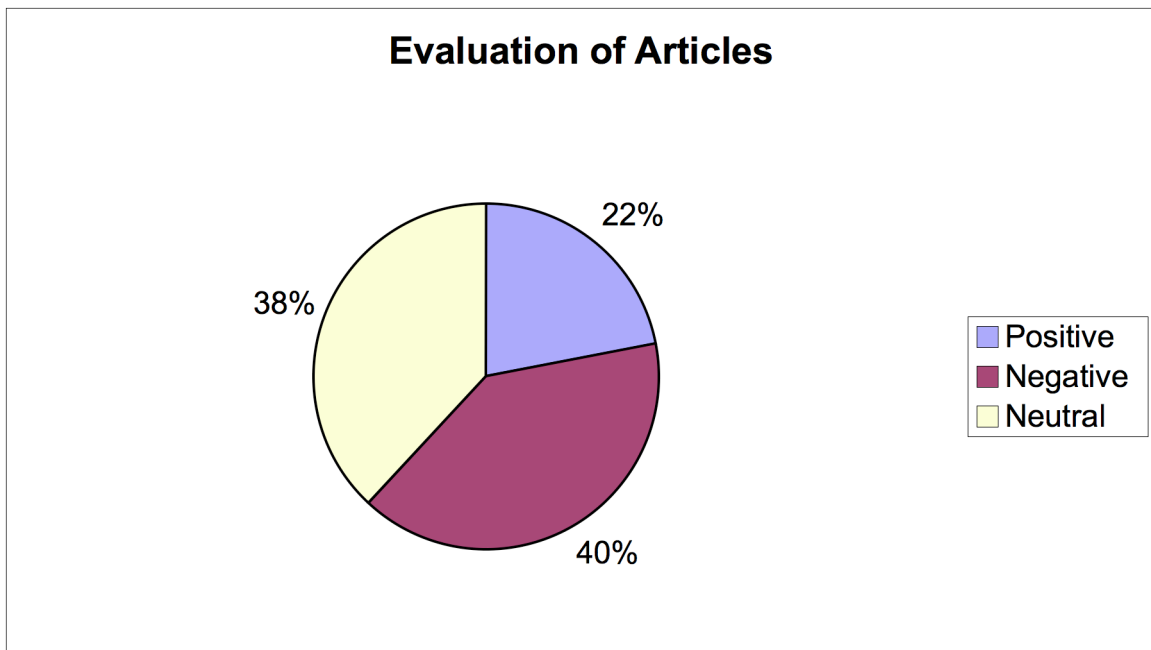


Figure 3. Classification of article content

Table 2. Evaluation of articles

country	positive articles (% of total)	negative articles (% of total)	neutral articles (% of total)
Czech Rep	27	33	40
Estonia	16	42	42
Germany	18	48	34
Greece	6	86	8
Netherlands	7	5	88
Poland	67	13	20
Slovenia	8	59	33
Spain	15	40	45
Sweden	17	49	34
UK	38	25	37
totals (%)	22	40	38

Fig. 3 shows a fairly similar percentage of articles with neutral or negative content, whereas only 22% revealed a positive attitude towards GM-food. With a majority of publications classified as news reports (see Fig. 2), one might expect a greater proportion of neutral articles. Three countries were exceptions from this pattern (Table 2): in Greece the majority of articles had a negative content whereas in Poland, the majority had a positive tenor. In the Netherlands most articles were neutral, with the majority of media items (>90 %) being news reports.

It should be noted that by their very choice of items to publish – and certainly by the headlines they carry – straight “news” reporting can also carry a positive or negative connotation. A report of a statement from a source claiming a new “benefit” from some aspect of GM-technology would be scored as positive: the newspaper or broadcasting station had chosen to publish the item when they need not have done so and others, perhaps, had indeed not published it. Conversely, the report of an opposition source claiming a new “risk” from the technology would, on the same grounds, be scored as negative.

Conclusions

As the average frequency of articles was judged to be low, and the majority of them categorised as news reports, it is reasonable to conclude that media interest in GM food and related issues is limited in the partner countries. However, specific national or local events do raise interest, mirrored by an increased number of articles and reports for short periods.

Overall, it is clear that public debate on GM foods in the partner countries is subdued. With a majority of articles classified as neutral or negative, the evaluation revealed more or less of a negative attitude towards GM-food and agribiotechnology by editors and/or journalists.

This media survey was formally completed in May 2008; since then there has indeed been an upsurge in interest. We note elsewhere the remarkable change in the balance of favourable/unfavourable reports on GM which has occurred in the UK in the past year (see Chapter 16, page 16-10) and, to a lesser extent, in Estonia, the Netherlands, Poland and elsewhere. Some of this renewed interest is no doubt driven by the recent global rise in food prices, actual reported food shortages in some of the poorer countries as well as claims and comments that GM technology might contribute to lower food prices and to a resolution of what some are calling a “world food crisis”.