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The European Union in the Romanian Online Media

Carolina Rudinschi¹, Mircea Sava²

Abstract: This paper analyzes the way that the image of European Union is reflected in the Romanian online media. The website Hotnews was monitored between 21 January and 21 February 2013. The aim of the analysis is to reveal the amount of space dedicated to the European information, the countries of the EU that are most mentioned, the connotation of the messages on the EU and its member countries in the online media (thematic areas preferred, key issues preferred, coverage of EU Institutions).

Keywords: new media; EU coverage in Romania; EU image in online media

1 Introduction

One of the important levels influenced by the Internet is related to journalistic practices. As Pavlik puts it, “journalism is undergoing a fundamental transformation (...). In the twilight of the twentieth century and the dawn of the twenty-first, there is emerging a new form of journalism whose distinguishing qualities include ubiquitous news, global information access, instantaneous reporting, interactivity, multimedia content, and extreme content customization. In many ways this represents a potentially better form of journalism because it can reengage an increasingly distrusting and alienated audience. At the same time, it presents many threats to the most cherished values and standards of journalism”. (Pavlik, 2001, p. XI)

According to media gatekeepers in Romania, “the Internet is concurrently considered a primary and indispensable source of information, a news and information distribution channel and effective resource of communication with the public, and an information tool for disinformation and manipulation, a technology that killed traditional journalistic practices, a platform that has created Google reporters and copy-and-paste and office-bound journalists.” (Vasilendiu, & Gross, 2012, p. 72)

Also referring to journalistic practices, and to the content that appears in newspapers as well, McNair says, back in 2001 even, that “journalists and editors must compete for market share (ratings, circulation, advertising revenue), which makes them prioritise the popular over the pertinent, the racy over the relevant, the weird over the worthy.” (McNair, *Journalism and democracy: an evaluation of the political public sphere*, apud Venkoo, 2010, p. 28) Stories of public interest have been replaced by stories which interest the public, as Bob Franklin affirms.

On the other hand, as explained by Stromback et al. (2012, pp. 721-726) the best-selling stories are those with emotional impact, those that put the spotlight on sensationalism, conflict, scandal,

¹ PhD. candidate, University of Bucharest, Romania, Address: Regina Elisabeta 4-12 Blvd, Bucharest, Romania, Tel.: +4021 307 7300, Corresponding author: carolina.rudinschi@yahoo.com.

² PhD. candidate, University of Bucharest, Romania, Address: Regina Elisabeta 4-12 Blvd, Bucharest, Romania, Tel.: +4021 307 7300, e-mail: mircea0806@yahoo.com.

personality, rarity and uniqueness, as demonstrated by a study conducted by the authors in 2009 in Sweden.

Having all these changes related to journalistic practices as a point of start, changes which have become increasingly visible in recent years in online media, including the Romanian online media, but also because of the importance of the subjects related to the European Union (which are mostly “hard” news), this study proposes to investigate how the EU and EU institutions are present in the Romanian press, how EU related topics are dealt with, what are the style and the connotations of the messages, but also how much importance journalists give to subjects without considerable traffic compared to “soft” news.

The monitoring for the study was done on Hotnews website, the most accessed mainstream news site in Romania in the period that the study was implemented (January-February 2013). Another criterion for the choice of this site was that the information is presented in a generally neutral way by journalists, except the opinion materials.

The findings of the study are outlined below.

2 EU Coverage in Romanian Online Media

2.1 Space Dedicated to the European Information

Of the total number of news published on Hotnews website between 21 January and 21 February, only 11% (331 out of a total of 3054) referred to the EU, to EU institutions or to one of the EU countries, which shows a very weak approach of this topic, especially given the fact that in the monitored period several events of major interest for Romania took place (including the possibility of accessing the Schengen area).

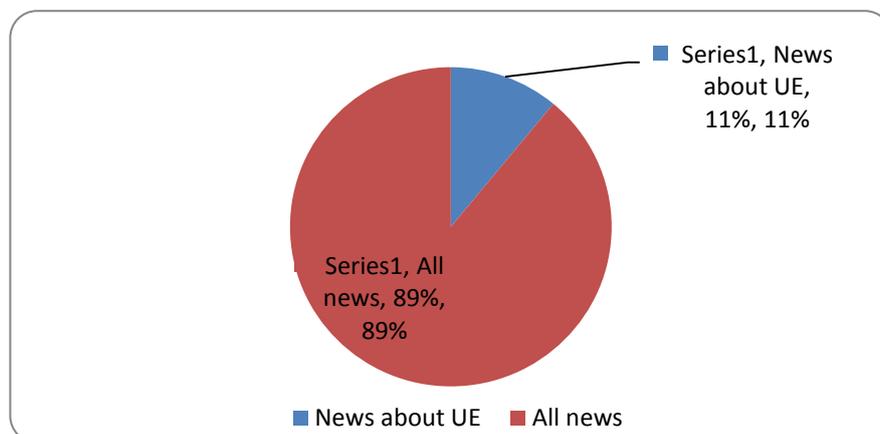


Figure 1. EU Coverage in Romanian Online Media

2.2 Journalistic Genres

Taking into account the specific communication channel - the Internet -, the results regarding the journalistic genres were predictable. As a communication medium were the perishable character of the

journalistic material is high, the speed /up-dating of the information is very important, and less its depth.

Thus, news is the main journalistic genre i.e. - 292 news out of a total of 331 published materials about the EU in the monitoring period. The genres that follow are editorials (25 in number), 9 shorts, 3 interviews and one pamphlet. The results in percentages can be found in the chart below (Figure 2).

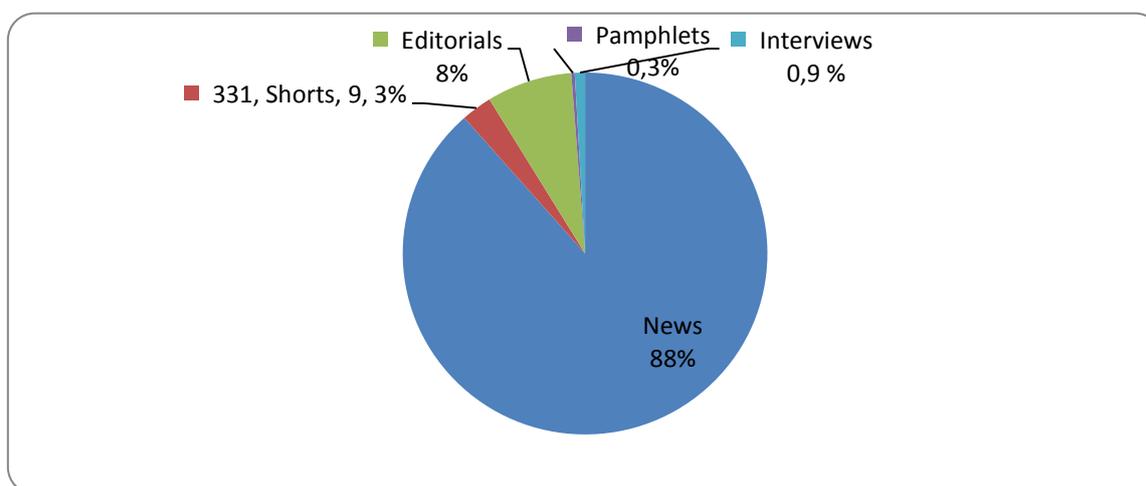


Figure 2. News Genres about EU

2.3. Resources of Information

The trend that we noticed during the monitoring period is that most published materials were taken from news agency portals, the main source of the materials. Also, some of the materials were written by journalists after having attended various events, notably press conferences at which Romanian or foreign officials participated. Thus, 238 news were written by journalists using one source, only 48 were written by consulting two sources. Although one of the essential rules of data collection states that a journalist should verify the information from at least three sources, only 21 such stories appeared in the monitoring period. We found 5 materials in which journalists used information from 4 sources, 4 materials with 5 sources and 3 with more than 5 sources.

This result can be explained by the fact that the majority (nearly 90%) of the published materials were news. As stated above, although we would need 3 sources to ensure the veracity of information, journalists use multiple sources when writing larger in-house materials - surveys, reports, etc. In this situation, because the number of stories retrieved or short news prevails, and because the Internet means speed – i.e. less time for research-, the percentage of single-source material is so great.

Eight news had no clear source from which to understand where the information originates. Results in percentages can be found in the chart below (Figure 3).

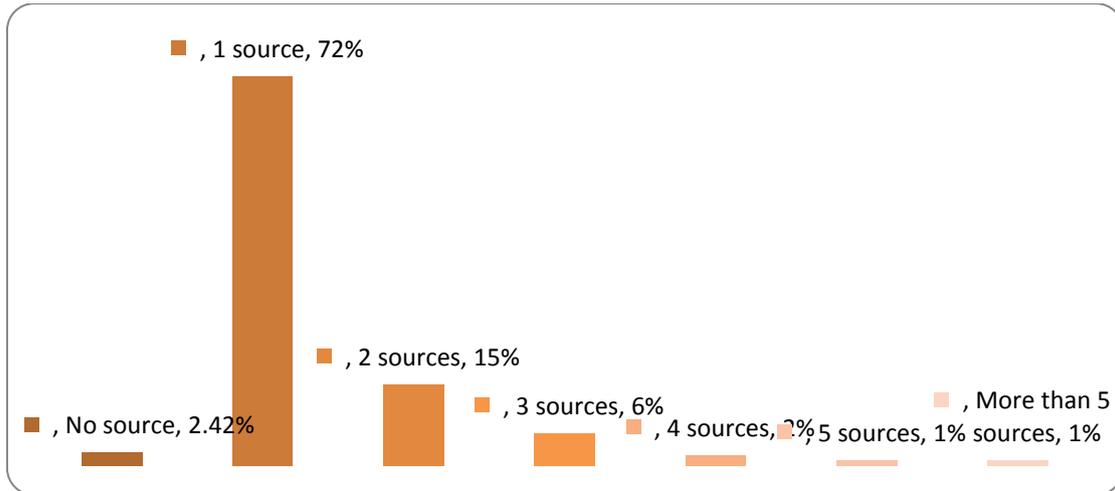


Figure 3. Number of consulted sources

3 The journalistic Authorship and European Correspondent for Romanian Media

3.1 The Journalistic Authorship

Of the 331 articles published about the EU in the monitoring period, only 5 were not signed, which is a plus point brought to the online media in Romania. For percentages, see Figure 4.

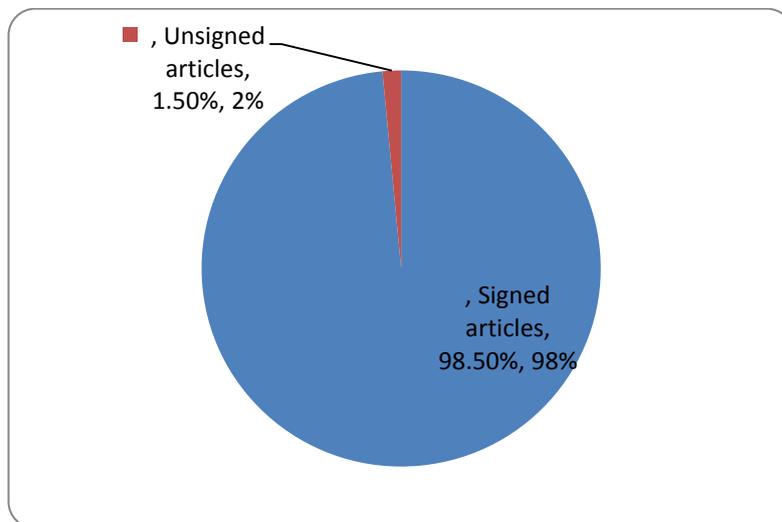


Figure 4. Signed vs. Unsigned articles

4 Mentioned Countries

Because in the monitoring period many prominent events took place, such as: the publication of the justice report for Romania, the horse meat scandal, the anti-Romanians and anti-Bulgarians campaign initiated in the UK, and the possibility of the adhesion of Romania to the Schengen Area, the most mentioned countries were: Romania (233 articles), UK (65 articles), France (58 articles), Bulgaria (49 articles), Germany (36), Netherlands (24). The least covered countries were Malta (one mention) and Cyprus (one mention). For the final results regarding the coverage of the EU countries, see figure 5.

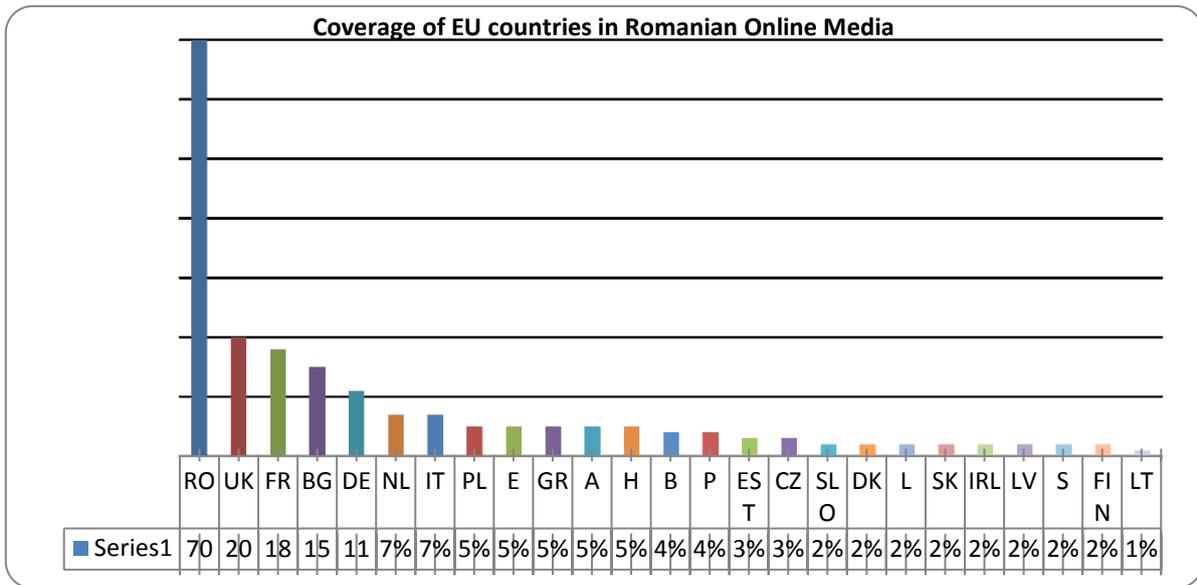


Figure 5. Coverage of EU countries

5 The Connotation of the Messages on the EU and its Member Countries

In this subcategory we considered necessary to provide not only the journalist's attitude to the subject, but also the nature of the subject. We have adopted this variant based on the monitoring results, according to which almost 90% of the materials are news, so the attitude could not be other than neutral, with few exceptions, as demonstrated by the figures below.

Of the total number of articles published, the journalists' attitude was neutral in 296 materials, positive in 17 materials, and negative in 15%. Regarding the topics covered, 201 had a negative connotation (economic, social, health, justice problems, problems of the EU countries in general, the scandal in which several EU countries were involved in the monitoring period - the campaign against Romania and Bulgaria, initiated by UK, the horse meat scandal, the results of the report on justice, published at the time). However, there were 79 positive news, and 45 - balanced.

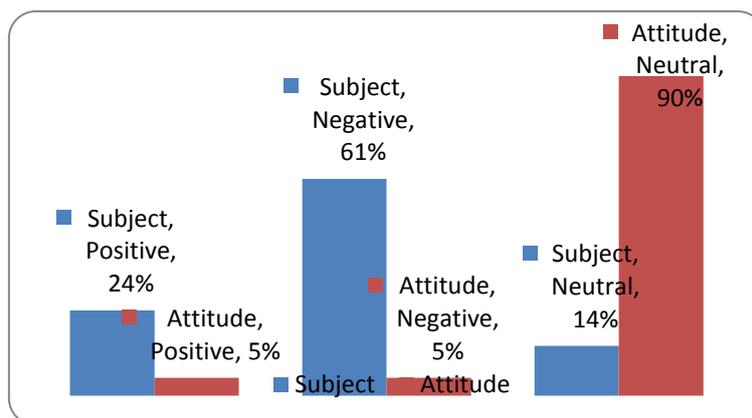


Figure 6. The connotation of the message

6 The Priority Areas of EU Information and/or its Member Countries

6.1 Thematic Preferred Areas

Most materials published between January 21 and February 21 2013 focused on the economic (152), and category of materials related to politics came second (97). There were 37 materials published about justice, trial and murder.

There were 35 social news published, in which the news about countries of EU are included, followed by news about science (4), health (3), art (2) and transport (1). How materials were distributed in percentages can be seen in Figure 7.

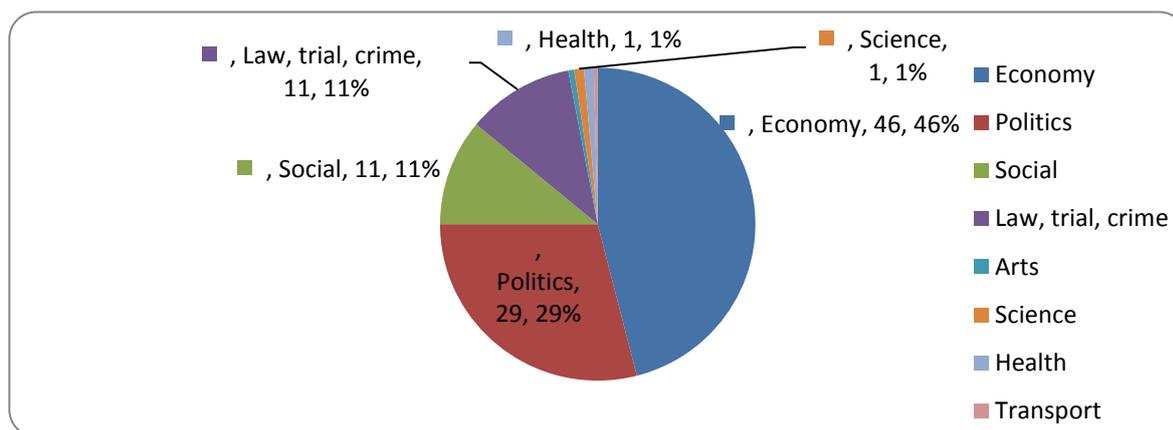


Figure 7. Thematic preferred areas

6.2 Key Issued Preferred

We also carried out an analysis of the directions that are the most covered in the articles published. The results can be found in Figure 8.

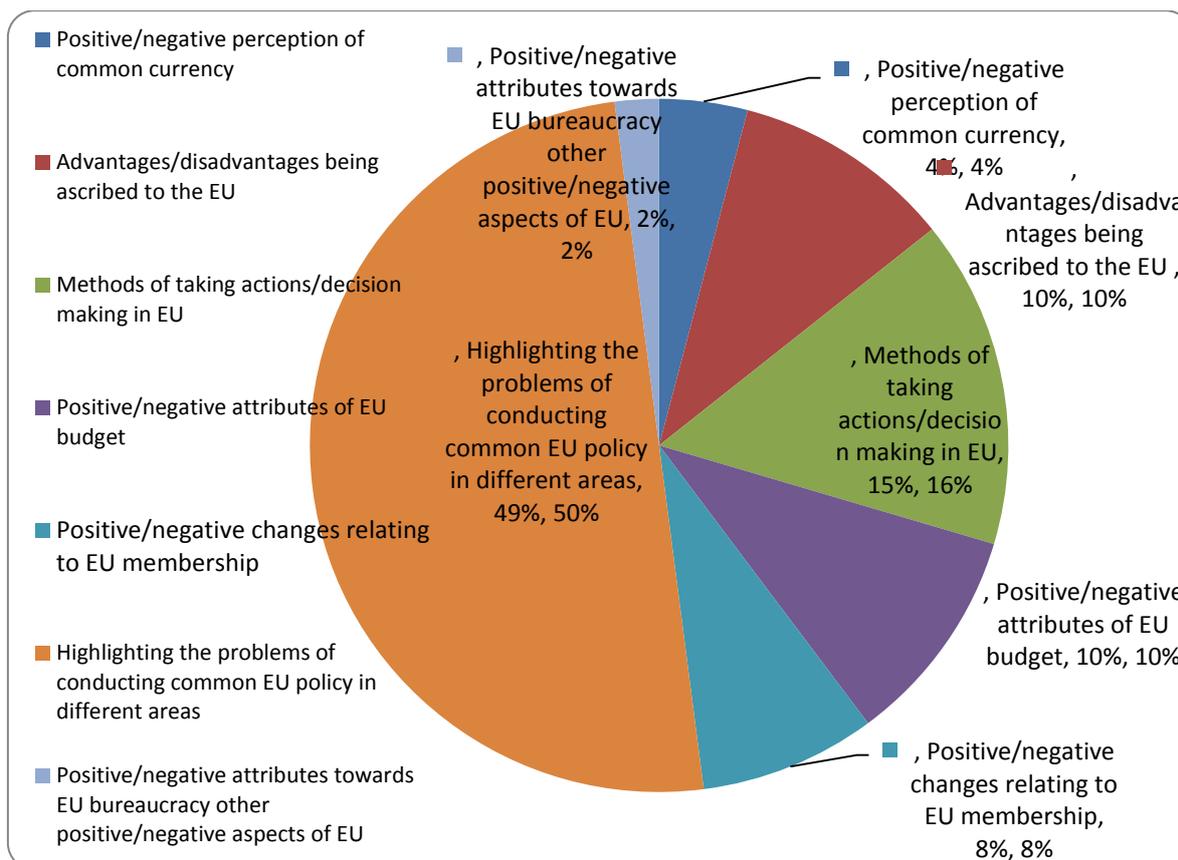


Figure 8. Key issued preferred

6.3 Coverage of EU Institutions

In this section we present the main European institutions that were mentioned in the materials published in the monitoring period.

We want to mention that we have not included in the analysis private companies or institutions that do not belong to the EU. This is because the topic was the presentation/representation of EU in the Romanian media.

The results are: the European Commission has been mentioned the most often (157 times), given that in the monitoring period the report on justice for Romania was published. EU was in second place, with 120 references, and then the following institutions: the European Council (28), the European Parliament (25), the Central European Bank (10) and the EU Court of Justice (2). The results are presented in figure 9 in percentage.

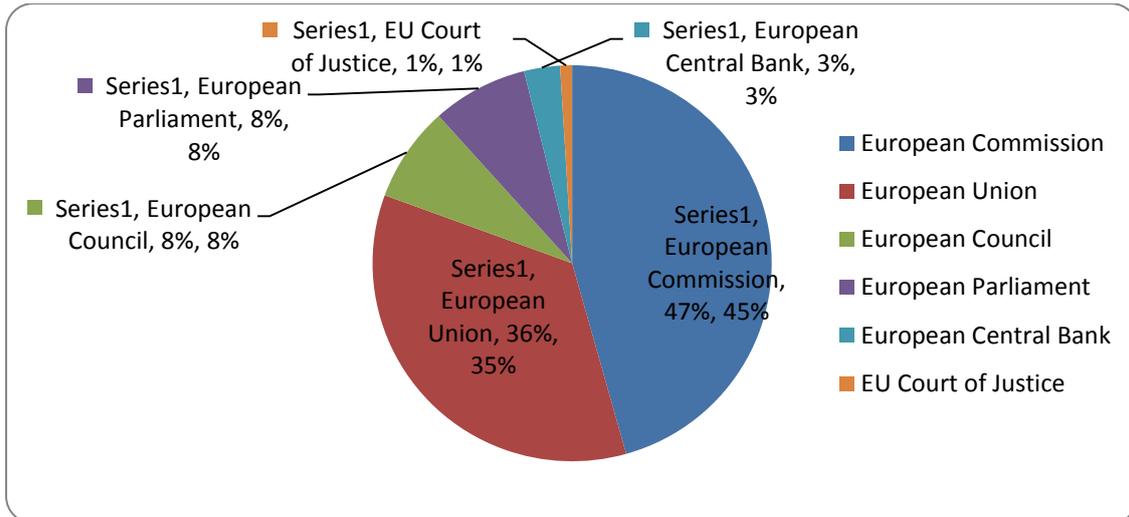


Figure 9 – Coverage of EU Institutions

7 Conclusions

Based on the data mentioned above, we can say that one of the most visited news sites in Romania, Hotnews, dedicates only 11% of its space for news about the EU, most of the materials being short news, sometimes insufficiently explained, a fact that confirms the statements of the authors cited in the introduction of this paper. Most of the articles are signed, however over 72% contain a single source of documentation, a situation that is attested by Vasilendiu & Gross in their work on journalistic practices in Romania. The topics discussed relate primarily to Romania, UK, France, Belgium and Germany. The aspect that we can consider to be positive is that over 90% of news are treated in a neutral manner, mainly because the majority were economic and political news. 50% of the news aimed at highlighting issues of common policies, the European Commission being the most quoted EU institution, followed by the EU as a whole.

8 Acknowledgements

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