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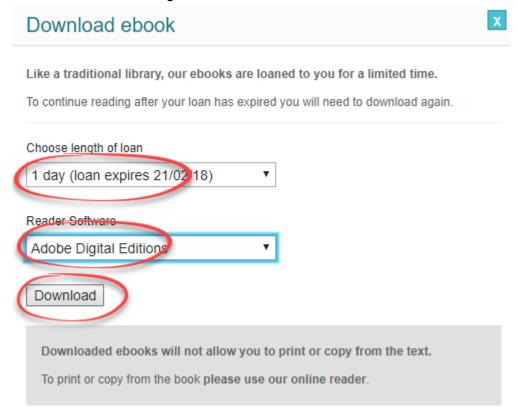
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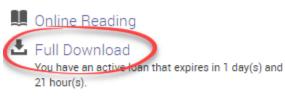


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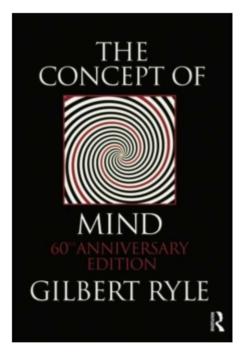
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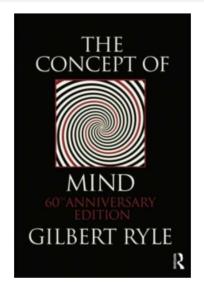
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1

Introduction: Feast and Famine

moner: Just think. Which one of these stories do you believe? Woodcutter: None makes any sense.

(Rashomon, Akira Kurosawa, 1950)

The European Union occupies a central position in the politics and economic life of its 28 members and an important one in much of the rest of the world. Few other institutions of governance have such a contested role, and its very existence is increasingly called into question by uncompromising critics, while a growing constituency want it radically reformed. A debate on the legitimacy of the EU's action has always existed and has been quite trenchant in the past, but it has never reached the current level. The EU public has never been so engaged with and opinionated about the EU project as it is now: news media have to take this into account.

media have to take this into account.

It is clearly important that citizens from the 28 EU countries understand what effect the EU Commission, the Parliament, and the Council of Ministers have on their lives —what policies they discuss and approve, what relationship they have with national governments, what assistance they offer to the member states, how much they pay to them, what power they have and what powers they seek to have.

The findings of this study of the journalists whose job it is to cover the institutions of the EU are contradictory. Until the economic crisis hit Europe in the late 2000s, with severe effects on many of the member states and a major threat to the viability of the 14-year-old euro currency used by the 18 member states in the eurozone, most national media covered the EU much less than their own political centres of power, which in some cases meant that they covered it very little. News editors and producers came to

view European stories as boring for readerships and viewers. Even after the crisis broke, the coverage remained patchy, and in some cases suffered from a lack of understanding of the issues and mechanism under discussion, and/or a lack of sufficient staff to give more than a sketch of even critically important

under discussion, and/or a lack of sufficient staff to give more than a sketch of even critically important issues.

On the other hand, the amount published about and by the European Union is vast. The Union's institutions are lavish with news announcements, with briefings, with prepackaged but often detail-rich interviews with commissioners; think tanks in Brussels and in all the main capitals pour out analyses and advice; the many specialised journals and websites are knowledgeable, up-to-the-minute, and distant enough from their subject to be critical; the global newspapers and wire services continue to support relatively large and active bureaux, whose output enjoys a high reputation.

The problem is with the larger public which is only sporadically interested in politics and public institutions. In times of crisis or of important decisions, the attention reaches a peak, but in good times news coming from Brussels is the first to disappear from newspaper pages and from TV programmes. This seems to us the largest problem facing the news media which have the responsibility of covering the EU: its very structure and mode of operation renders the task of engaging the general European public with it, in journalistic terms, difficult.

Thus 'who caress' becomes a pertinent question, and the consequences of the general lack of interest in the EU – except at times of crisis, which have brought a more critical, even hostile, attention than before – underpin much of the report's findings. It is first on the list below: but other issues, also set out briefly here and treated in greater detail in the main body of this study, also seem to us to be major ones facing the journalism of the European Union.

A note on the form of this report. It relies on a series of interviews done by the two authors – mainly Cristina Marconi – over a period at the end of 2013 and the first months of 2014. Most of the interviewees are journalists. Though we refer to some of the large academic and expert literature on the EU and the news med

Who Cares?

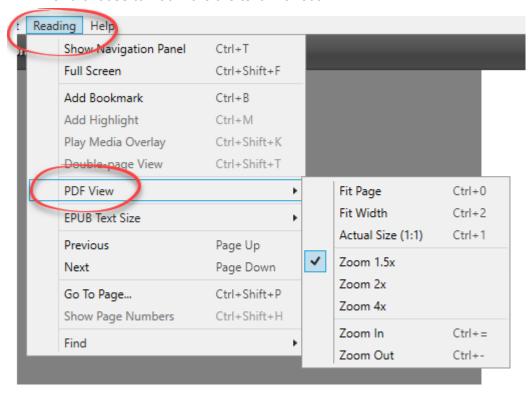
The problem of interesting a wide public has different facets.

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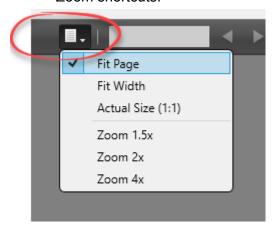
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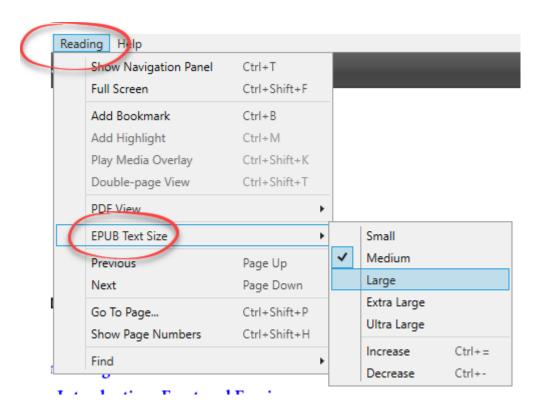


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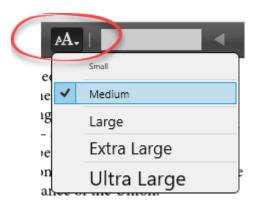


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