Figure 1.2. DATA-BASED INVESTIGATING: Accuracy of Information 1

Successful data-based investigating (or empirical problem solving) requires commitment to the accuracy of information. Although humorous in tone, the following article conveys a serious message about this matter.

EM9526: The Globe and Mail, June 28, 1995, page A11

EURO-LIES / *Yes, the EU does put carrots on a par with peaches. But it's one of the few tales about bureaucracy gone bonkers in Brussels that is true. Most of them are myths made up by the British press.*

Why Europe says the carrot is a fruit

Reducing both the size of government and its role in people's lives is all the political rage. Witness the swearing in Monday of an Ontario premier so dedicated to downsizing that his Cabinet is the province's smallest in 30 years. As this story shows, however, there are times when the bureaucracy stands falsely accused.

BY DANA MILBANK
The Wall Street Journal
London

IT is hard to pinpoint the exact moment when the European Union went bonkers. But there are some clues.

Perhaps it was when the EU required fishing boats to carry at least 200 condoms so European fishermen would practise safe sex. Or maybe it was when the bureaucrats from Brussels outlawed asymmetrical Christmas trees. By the time EU packaging rules criminalized the curved cucumber, the Eurocrats clearly had lost their senses.

Not that Europe's new government stopped there. Last February, Brussels sprouted an addict on sexual harassment that struck down Valentine's Day cards. Now the EU wants to do away with Britain's double-decker buses and its beloved pull-chain toilets.

"There is no absurdity of which the European Community is not capable," fumes Eamon Butler, director of the libertarian Adam Smith Institute in London.

Adds *Sunday Telegraph* columnist Christopher Booker: "The whole thing has turned into a mad, bureaucratic Alice in Wonderland crossed with Kafka."

Yet what is really Kafkaesque is that each of the stories has only a remote relationship to reality. The EU calls them "Euromyths" – 129 different half-truths and falsehoods – promoted by Euroskeptics such as Messrs. Butler and Booker, and splashed in the press.

If Europhobes succeed in ridiculing Eurocrats, it might set off a Euroscare and induce Eurosclerosis and disunity. That would be a big Europroblem. So the EU has hired grown men and women to spend their days reassuring an alarmed public that the EU has no plans to do away with paper carriers, small bananas, knotty oak trees, saucy postcards and any pizza that isn't 11 inches across.

All 15 members of the EU have their Euromyths. The Austrians feared the EU would force them to eat chocolate made with blood. The French worried about EU plans to ban certain maggots as bait because they suffer *le stress* on a fishing hook. Italians complained about a fanciful plan to paint all taxis white.

Others feared the EU would require nudity on beaches. And the Germans wrung their hands over a non-existent edict changing the size of garbage cans.

BUT when it comes to Euroyths, or opposition to the EU generally, this sceptered isle stands alone. The EU blames the British press for 80 per cent of Euromyths. Coupled with politicians' perennial hostility toward the EU, the myths seem to be the latest way to express centuries of hostility, particularly toward Germany and France, the drivers of European unity.

"It's a sort of ancestral rejection of all that is continental by British and English public opinion," says Lindsay Armstrong of France, who runs the EU's Rapid Response Service in an uphill battle to counter the stories.

He admits the British campaign helped kill Europe's "harmonization" policy that aimed to create single standards.

Part of the problem comes from the natural clash between the British legal system, which is based on conflict, and the Continent's, which relies on consensus and mediation.

But Euroskeptic Timothy Evans, author of a report on EU attempts to ban such things as flavoured chips, thinks Euromythology runs deeper: It is a way of expressing self-doubt over a perceived loss of culture, sovereignty and industry. "Rather than getting to grips with what it is to be British, it's a lot easier to say: 'Damn foreigners, undermining our prawn cocktail crisps.'"

The Sun, a British tabloid, won patriotic points for claiming that a standard-length European condom (there is no such thing) wouldn't be large enough for British men.

The British are even defensive about their toilets, which the British Bathroom Association says were invented by Thomas Crapper a century ago. Britain may have to drop building codes that effectively protect the toilet from foreign competition. "Brussels could flush U.K. loos down the pan," ran a recent headline in *The Times* of London.

Stranger than fiction

Truths: The EU aggravates its image problem by doing some truly Orwellian things. For example, Brussels really does classify carrots as fruit. The regulation was adopted so that Portugal's carrot jam could continue to be sold. The EU also limits lawnmower noise.

Half-truths: Perhaps the EU didn't actually ban skiing when snow is less than 20 centimetres deep, but the European Parliament did raise the possibility of such a prohibition.

Brussels didn't require donkeys to wear diapers on Eurobeaches, but it won't award its Blue Flag to beaches that admit the animals.

Damned lies: Directorate General 10 in Brussels is the bureaucracy's truth squad. But the task is complicated because most myths have a grain of truth:

- Condom-wearing seafarers? A misreading of a directive listing medicines to be kept on board (condoms not included).
- Symmetrical Christmas trees? Something like this was proposed by a trade association, not the EU.
- Cucumbers? Curved ones aren't banned, just classified differently, for packaging reasons.
- Prawn cocktail crisps? An oversight, quickly repaired.

(*continued overleaf*)

SOME myths are completely fanciful, like the one about the EU banning square gin bottles; this started as an April Fool's joke in *The Times*. Also in this category is a supposed plan to require zoos and wildlife parks to use an elephant symbol regardless of whether they have an elephant.

Other myths are misunderstandings of EU laws, as with the Wild Game Meat Directive. Brussels meant the law to apply to commercial hunters, to make wild game more hygienic. But Mr. Booker, in his column in *The Telegraph*, labelled it "yet another wonderful example of Eurolunacy, that these Brussels officials could seriously insist on stalkers carrying a fridge up a 3,000-foot Scottish mountain and paying for a trained vet to accompany them." Replied the EU: "Absurd."

Another Euromyth type is the one caused by an overzealous interpretation of EU rules, such as when the EU issued a waste disposal directive. That prompted a story in *The Observer* that began: "From the authors of the EC directives that banned curved cucumbers and defined the carrot as a fruit, now this: Feeding stale bread to the Queen's swans is illegal."

The article had outraged quotations from the manager of Her Majesty's 40,000 swans, and it claimed that charities would need a $3,000 licence to give away bread to the homeless or the birds. The EU said it didn't define bread as waste and blamed the British government's interpretation.

Indeed, the Brits often seem to outregulate Brussels. "Some strange new zeal has gotten into the British bureaucracy," says Mr. Booker. "Somehow you feel a virus has got loose and it's getting worse and worse."

With rules like these, it is hard to separate Euromyths from Eurotruths. When London lawyer Simon Jeffreys issued a statement to the media on the eve of Valentine's Day warning that the sending of unwanted cards could qualify as sexual harassment under EU law, he meant it to be "tongue in cheek." The British press, of course, played along. "If you can paint someone up as ridiculous, no opportunity will be lost in doing so," he explains.

The folks at Directorate General 10, the damage-control crew in Brussels, weren't amused. DGX, as it's known, fired off a heavy-handed response, branding Mr. Jeffreys' gag a "wholly speculative proposition" and citing Commission Recommendation 92/131/EEC and some gobbledygook about the "principle of equal treatment within the meaning of Articles 3, 4 and 5 of Directive 76/207/EEC."

Eurocrats, Mr. Jefferys concludes, "have no sense of humour."

© 1995 Dow Jones & Co. Inc.
All rights reserved.

1996-04-20