

# Assessing the Image of Germany in the Greek Media

## Visual analysis of Greek Media Reports on the Role of Germany in the Greek Crisis

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**by**

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**August 2015**

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#### **Abstract**

This study attempts to analyse the representation of Germany in the Greek press during the ongoing economic crisis covering the period 2010-2013. In so doing, it starts with a discussion on the main theoretical aspects explaining the relationship between media and politics in the relevant literature of political communication. It then concentrates on the issue of the European public sphere which is concerned with potential 'European frames' in the portrayal of Germany in the Greek media discourse. Subsequently, the study explores the Greek media landscape and employs qualitative techniques to offer insights on how Greek journalists have interpreted the policy of Berlin during the crisis. In that regard, a case study on the visit of Chancellor Merkel to Greece in October 2012 is included in the analysis. Finally, the paper presents the main findings of the media coverage as well as potential reasons for the media stance.

#### **Keywords**

Germany, Greek media, political communication, crisis, European public sphere

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## Introduction

The relationship between media and politics is a sine qua non parameter for a study relevant to the representation of Germany in the Greek media. Issues of major concern include the way the media understand the world as well as their influence on public opinion. News, events, facts and developments do not have voice to speak for themselves but are reported by an external factor: the journalists. Thus, a research project dealing with media coverage is certainly interwoven with the role of the journalists who produce the news.

The interpretation and depiction of the world by journalists can either mirror the real world or be the product of a process of construction of the news. In a wider context, this dilemma reflects a potential clash between two theories of knowledge: empiricism and constructivism. On the one hand, empiricists focus on the importance of experience. They believe that a real world exists and consider the human mind as 'tabula rasa' on the basis of the observation of John Locke in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. In this way, according to empiricists the data of the human mind can only be formed through the senses and by experience. On the other hand, constructivists believe in subjectivity and in an understanding of the world through a cognitive process emphasising on the crucial role of the human mind. What they argue is that knowledge is the product of humans who interpret the world. Without endorsing any postmodernist views that reality does not exist, this report will be grounded on the notion of constructivism, and therefore, on the construction of the news by the journalists.<sup>2</sup>

Pondering on constructivism, Eric Louw reminds us that a reference to Plato's *Republic* might be useful.<sup>3</sup> In particular, in his allegory of the cave Plato described a scene with a group of chained prisoners, a fire burning behind them and a walkway between the fire and the prisoners carrying various objects the shadows of which were cast on the wall of the cave. The chained prisoners could only see the shadows of the various objects and hear their echoes believing they were real. A prisoner was then released but he continued to believe that the shadows of the various objects were more real than the objects themselves because his eyes were blinded first by the firelight and then by the sunlight. When this prisoner started finally to be enlightened and realised that the real objects were not the shadows, he decided to go back and liberate the other prisoners. Nonetheless, when he went back to the cave his eyes became blind by the darkness and he could see less than the other prisoners. The prisoners decided then to stay there and kill anyone who would seek to bring them to the surface.<sup>4</sup>

What Plato described in his *Republic* had no intention to refer to contemporary media studies. However, his allegory has a tangible resonance nowadays. This becomes obvious if the media take the position of the cave scene. The messages the media transmit can be as problematic for various audiences as the shadows were for the prisoners in the allegory of

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<sup>2</sup> Gaye Tuchman, *Making the News: A study in the Construction of Reality* (Free Press, New York & Collier Macmillan, London, 1978).

<sup>3</sup> Eric Louw, *The Media and Political Process* (Sage Publications, London – Thousand Oaks – New Delhi, 2005).

<sup>4</sup> *Politeia (Peri Dikaiou), Platon: Eisagogi, Metafrassi, Scholia*, Vivlia VII, IIX (Kaktos, Athina, 1992)

Plato.<sup>5</sup> In other words, the audience might only consider as real the messages constructed by the journalists and transmitted by the media as the prisoners thought about the shadows.<sup>6</sup>

## Objectivity in the Media?

The previous reference to Plato's allegory and to the notion of constructivism as a whole raises questions concerning the quality of information provided to the audience by the media, and subsequently the objectivity of the media. Invoking the notion of constructivism and seeing it as central for the implementation of this study implies that the scope for objectivity in the media is limited if not eliminated. Discussing about the limits of objectivity, then, different aspects of the function of the media have to be outlined and separated. These functions vary from deeming the media as a 'watchdog' to considering them as a servant of the interests of the dominant elites.

Firstly, the consideration of the media as a 'watchdog' in Western liberal democracies is related to the ideal norms of professional journalism. The theoretical freedom and independence of the media pave the way for an objective coverage. The main features of the concept of objectivity concern the detachment and neutrality of the journalists towards the object of reporting, the lack of partisanship, the attachment to accuracy and the lack of other motives.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, even if the journalists follow the professional rules of journalism they can hardly be objective in their work. That is because journalists are confronted with a plethora of information, which they have to select the news from. The selection of the news by journalists is necessary for newspapers and radio and TV channels noting that they have specific space or time budget they can use. On these grounds, journalists have to emphasise and deemphasise particular stories. This selection of news certainly limits the chances of an objective coverage.

It has been argued that the selection of news is an inevitable parameter of the journalistic work. The plausible question, which follows, refers to the specific factors which lead or contribute to the choice of specific news. That is because the selection of news by the journalists cannot be easily described as a random reaction to random events.<sup>8</sup> Various journalistic practices and tensions within the newsrooms can play a role. Different news agencies which supply the media with information are also important. The massive growth of the public relations industry should also be taken into account.

In contrast, critical approaches to media studies attribute to deeper causes - to a large extent economic and political ones - the specific choice of news by the journalists. In particular, a large number of media firms are corporations aiming at increasing their profits. This makes the relationship between media firms and advertisers crucial for the economic survival and expansion of the former. In parallel, it should be noted that although most of radio and TV channels and newspapers claim to be non-partisan, they rarely escape from a

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<sup>5</sup> Louw, p. 7.

<sup>6</sup> George Tzogopoulos, *US Foreign Policy in the European Media: Framing the Rise and Fall of Neoconservatism* (IB TAURIS, London-New York, 2012).

<sup>7</sup> Dennis McQuail, *Mass Communication Theory: An Introduction* (Sage, Thousand Oaks, 1994).

<sup>8</sup> Peter Golding Peter and Philip Elliott, *Making the News* (Longman, London and New York, 1979).

conservative or liberal bias. Within this context, journalists working for media firms should also be seen as employees of those firms which control their hiring, firing and the news management as a whole<sup>9</sup>. Although they are expected to follow the professional rules of journalism and to be objective, working within constraints, reporters and editors may be under pressure to include specific news stories or to give a particular political nuance in their piece of work. On these grounds, Peter Golding and Graham Murdock have elaborated on a model of political economy and have made a significant point in order to explain the production of the news: they have acknowledged the structured relations between owners and journalists.<sup>10</sup> Golding and Murdock have worked on the interplay between economic organisation and cultural, political and social life.

It should be also mentioned that other models of political communication dismiss the idea of objectivity in the media by considering the media as exclusive servants of the dominant elites. In this case, the discussion mainly revolves around the 'manufacturing consent'.<sup>11</sup> According to the 'manufacturing consent', pro-government propaganda is produced by the media and the independent flow of information is impeded. With particular emphasis to media influence on foreign policy, the 'indexing approach' of political communication is also relevant. On the basis of this approach, the media remain a vehicle of the government but in the case of elite disagreement they could take positions which might affect foreign policy.<sup>12</sup> In the final account, it could be argued that journalists 'participate willy-nilly in slanting the news.'<sup>13</sup> It is for this reason that the notion of constructivism is here endorsed.

## 'Agenda-Setting' Hypothesis and 'Framing'

The theory of constructivism and the limits of objectivity provide an initial framework for an understanding of the role of the journalists. Realising that the presentation of issues by the media can play a role in forming public attitudes and taking relevant media studies literature and political communication research into account, the concept of 'agenda-setting' seems of increased significance for the implementation of the study.

Before the notion of 'agenda-setting' is defined, an attempt to explore historically political communication research on this issue is worth. Walter Lipmann was the first who - without using the term 'agenda-setting' - argued in 1922 that the press could connect the events that occurred in the world and the image of those events in the public's mind.<sup>14</sup> A few decades later, Bernard Cohen pointed out: '[The press] may not be successful much of the time in

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<sup>9</sup> Ben H. Bagdikian, 'The Media Monopoly' in Tumber Howard (ed.), *News: A Reader* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1999), p 151.

<sup>10</sup> Peter Golding and Graham Murdock, 'Culture, Communications and Political Economy' in James Curran and Michael Gurevitch (eds.) *Mass Media and Society* (Arnold, London and New York, 1991).

<sup>11</sup> Edward S. Herman. and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing consent: The Political Economy of the MassMedia* (Pantheon, New York, 1988)

<sup>12</sup> Lance Bennett Lance W. and Robert M. Entman (eds.), *Mediated Politics: Communication in the Future of Democracy* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2001) and Mermin Jonathan, *Debating War and Peace* (Princeton University Press, Princeton – NJ, 1999).

<sup>13</sup> Robert M. Entman., *Democracy without Citizens: Media and the Decay of American Politics* (Oxford University Press, New York and Oxford, 1989). P. 37

<sup>14</sup> Walter Lipmann , *Public Opinion* (Harcourt Brace, New York, 1922).

telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about'.<sup>15</sup> The term 'agenda-setting' was first used by Maxwell E. McCombs and Donald L. Shaw in an article they published in the 1970s.<sup>16</sup> McCombs and Shaw dealt with the presidential campaign of 1968 and undertook research on a sample of 100 undecided voters in Chapel Hill, North Carolina hypothesising that the mass media had set the agenda for each political campaign. They found that the media influenced the public on what issues to think about regarding the political campaigns. Since then, experimental evidence demonstrates that when news concentrate more on a particular issue, it is more likely that people consider that issue as more important.<sup>17</sup>

In this way, the traditional or first level of 'agenda-setting' refers to the capability of the media to set the order of importance of particular issues, and thus, raise the significance of those issues in people's mind steering public opinion. As Maxwell McCombs puts it, 'agenda-setting is a theory about the transfer of salience from the mass media's pictures of the world to the pictures in our heads'. In other words, on the basis of the 'agenda-setting' hypothesis, issues reported by the media become part of the public debate as opposed to issues not reported.<sup>18</sup>

Nonetheless, the first level of 'agenda-setting' does not concentrate on nuances of media coverage. Although the notion of traditional 'agenda-setting' can explain why an object becomes salient in comparison to other objects in people's mind, it does not focus on 'attributes, those characteristics and properties that fill out the picture of each object'. Therefore, a second level of 'agenda-setting' has been developed which deals with specific aspects of media content and aims at outlining how the news agendas of attributes influence the public agenda.<sup>19</sup> The second level of 'agenda-setting' is relevant to the concept of 'framing'. 'Framing essentially involves selection and salience.'<sup>20</sup> To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described'. It should be mentioned that the usefulness of the theory of constructivism becomes tangible while discussing about 'framing'. Constructing the news entails the placement of reality by the media into a frame. To put it in a simple way, what does not appear on a newspaper page is considered as being out of frame.

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<sup>15</sup> Cohen Bernard C., *The Press and Foreign Policy* (Princeton University Press, Princeton New Jersey, 1963), p.13

<sup>16</sup> Maxwell E. McCombs and Donald L. Shaw, 'The agenda-setting function of mass media', *Public Opinion Quarterly* vol. 36, 1972: 176-187.

<sup>17</sup> Shanto Iyengar et al., 'Experimental demonstrations of the not-so minimal consequences of mass media', in *American Political Science Review*, vol. 76, 1982, pp. 848-58.

<sup>18</sup> McCombs, p. 68

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, pp.71 and 85.

<sup>20</sup> Robert M. Entman., 'Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm,' *Journal of Communication*, vol. 43, no. 4, 1993, pp. 51-58

## European Public Sphere Relevant

Going further, a study relevant to the representation of Germany in Greece during the ongoing economic crisis is also relevant to the concept of the European public sphere. That is because it concerns communications regarding one member state of the European Union - Greece - , which are of increased significance in the interest of further European integration and stronger economic governance. In particular, references to Germany in the Greek media could provisionally denote whether a European frame is evident or not in the discourse. The discussion is on the whole relevant to literature on the democratic deficit the EU suffers from and the investigation of remedies.

A brief look at the structure and main bodies of the EU shows that its citizens can be represented only by the members of the European Parliament whom they elect directly every five years. However, EU citizens cannot be represented by the European Commission, the European Council and the Council of Ministers. Thus, a first explanation of the EU democratic deficit is related to its institutional framework. The dynamics and development of European integration have as a result that EU member-states transfer gradually their sovereignty to the EU. The functions of the nation-states diminish and the political responsibility is transferred to supranational bodies. It can then be argued that according to the 'orthodox view': 'the democratic deficit of the Union derives from the fact that the transfer of national parliamentary responsibilities to the governmentally appointed Commission and the intergovernmental Council has not been matched by a commensurate increase in the competences of the European Parliament'.<sup>21</sup>

On the grounds of the 'orthodox view', the lack of democracy in the EU only depends on the role of the European Parliament. To put it differently, the democratic accountability of the EU might theoretically be enhanced if the powers of the European Parliament would be increased. It is true that the functions of the European Parliament have been expanded in the last years. Nevertheless, the steady extension of powers of the European Parliament has only been partially successful in tackling the democratic deficit of the Union.

Taking into account that this deficit cannot be only tackled in an institutional way, other suggestions have been made by scholars.<sup>22</sup> As Loukas Tsoukalis explains: 'Direct elections to the European Parliament have not generated any Europe-wide debates on issues dealt by EU institutions; and such debates that have taken place have been confined to small sections of the political elite, experts and intellectuals. European construction remains an affair for the cognoscenti; the people are expected to follow'.<sup>23</sup> In particular, Tsoukalis goes beyond the need for an institutional reform of the EU and implies that a forum of interaction and intermediation between public authorities and people might be beneficial.

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<sup>21</sup> Chrysochoou Dimitris N., *Democracy in the European Union* (Tauris Academic Studies, London – New York, 1998)

<sup>22</sup> Carlos Closa, 'European Union Citizenship and Supranational Democracy' in Weale A. and Nentwich M. (eds.) *Political Theory and the European Union: Legitimacy, Constitutional Choice and Citizenship* (Routledge, London, 1998) and Cathleen Kantner, 'Öffentliche Politische Kommunikation in der EU. Eine Hermeneutisch-Pragmatische Perspektive' in Ansgar Klein, Ruud Koopmans, Hans Jörg Trenz, Ludger Klein, Christian Lahusen and Dieter Rucht (eds.) *Bürgerschaft, Öffentlichkeit und Demokratie in Europa*, (Opladen, Leske und Budrich, 2003), pp. 213-229.

<sup>23</sup> Loukas Tsoukalis, *What Kind of Europe?* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2003)

The potential creation of a European public sphere is linked to the shaping of a European citizenship and possibly identity within a European polity. The EU has made steps towards the formation of an EU citizenship. Specifically, the Maastricht Treaty introduced the concept of EU citizenship, which entailed, inter alia, the right of EU citizens to participate in the political life of EU member-states different from their own, to reside freely anywhere in the EU and to enjoy consular protection in any EU member-state's embassy in a third country.<sup>24</sup> Despite those provisions, however, the chances for popular participation of EU citizens still remained low. The increased significance of the creation of a European public sphere then is that it could theoretically go beyond already existing attempts – as the above-mentioned – for coping with the EU democratic deficit. That is because a European public sphere might lead to the formation of a transnational demos within the EU. This transnational demos would be composed of members who would not be fragmented and mutually alienated citizen bodies but would have a new type of collective identity. In this way, a politically aware transnational demos might be capable to direct its democratic claims to and via EU central institutions.<sup>25</sup>

However, the creation of a European public sphere and a transnational demos are not easy tasks.<sup>26</sup> It is here where the role of the European media comes to the forefront. The media - along with cultural institutions and various events, rituals and narratives – have contributed to the construction of national identities (Anderson, 1983; Gellner, 1983). In particular, according to Benedict Anderson, the nation is as 'an imagined political community' and the development of the identity of such a nation is tied to the spread of communication systems.<sup>27</sup> Within the context of the EU, the media could theoretically play a similar and analogous role to the role they played in nation-states. The cultivation of a European identity by the media, as it happened with nation-states can become a tangible reality taking the following factors into account. First, the concept of identity itself is not considered as fixed but is an ongoing project<sup>28</sup>. And second, the public sphere is not necessarily restricted to the nation-state. In this way, in a changed economic, political and media environment marked by globalisation, the creation of a transnational public sphere could help to engender transnational political identities.<sup>29</sup>

Within this framework, the difficulty for the ideal of the public sphere to be achieved has created a lively debate concerning its existence, especially nowadays. On the one hand, there are scholars who accept the idea of the existence of a public sphere. For instance, Peter Dahlgren writes: 'it is meaningful to speak about a public sphere that does exist today,

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<sup>24</sup> Fiorella Dell'Olio, *The Europeanization of Citizenship* (Ashgate: Aldershot, 2005), p. 69 and Tsoukalis, p.37.

<sup>25</sup> Dimitris N. Chrysochoou., *Democracy in the European Union* (IB TAURIS), London – New York, 1998), pp. 87 and 91.

<sup>26</sup> See the research findings of MEDIADEM European project conducted by ELIAMEP. Findings are available at: <http://www.mediadem.eliamep.gr/>.

<sup>27</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (Verso, London, 1983) and Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Blackwell, Oxford, 1983)

<sup>28</sup> Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity* (Polity Press, Oxford, 1991)

<sup>29</sup> John Downey John and Peter Koenig, 'Is There a European Public Sphere? The Berlusconi-Schultz Case', *European Journal of Communication*, vol. 21, no.2, 2006, pp. 165-187

but by any standard of evaluation it is in a dismal state'.<sup>30</sup> On the other hand, other scholars, such as James Curran and Nancy Fraser put the empirical status of the public sphere into question and recognise only a normative one. For example, Colin Sparks who is also sceptical for the existence of a public sphere argues that the media are only poor representatives of the public sphere.

Obviously, a significant restraining factor for the existence of a public sphere is the distortion of the quality of information provided to various audiences by the media. This point as to its causes has been explained above. At this stage, however, another dimension to the non-existence of a public sphere has to be given which goes beyond the problem of censorship imposed to the media by either the state or the market. This is related to the real chances of citizens for representation and political participation through the media. These chances do not seem to be adequate for a satisfactory participation of the people in political life nowadays. That is because only limited room for public access to the dominant media is available; this room is restricted to specialised channels or letter pages.<sup>31</sup> This obstacle can be partly overcome in the modern era of communication technologies and the rise of internet but communication research on the matter is not yet sufficient.

## The Greek media scene

The former editor of *Financial Times*, Richard Lambert argued in 2003 in *Foreign Affairs* that 'newspapers and magazines tend to reflect and reinforce the views of their readers'.<sup>32</sup> This observation finds particular resonance during the current economic crisis and the ongoing disagreement between Germany and Greece. In today's uncertainty, media coverage certainly shapes negative attitudes. That kind of attitudes can be easily outlined with an analysis of opinion polls conducted in both countries. The results are rather depressing if not worrying and affect both countries and not only one of them.

Starting with the image of Germany in Greece, a poll organised by the Athens based VPRC company in February 2012 and published in *Epikaira* magazine provides a useful source for discussion. In particular, 32.4 percent of Greeks associate Germany with Hitler, Nazism and the Third Reich while 41 percent feel angry and frustrated. Furthermore, 79 percent consider the role of Berlin as negative or rather negative and 76 percent as hostile, while 81 percent of the respondents have a negative opinion for Chancellor Angela Merkel. It is also worth-mentioning that 91 percent of the respondents consider the claim for the payment of war reparations by Germany as fair and 77 percent agree that the country exerts a 'Fourth Reich policy'.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Curran James, 'Rethinking the Media as a Public Sphere' in Dahlgren Peter and Sparks Colin (eds.) *Communication and Citizenship* (Routledge, 1991).

<sup>31</sup> Sparks Colin, 'The Internet and the Global Public Sphere' in Bennett Lance W. and Entman Robert M. (eds.), *Mediated Politics: Communication in the Future of Democracy* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2001).

<sup>32</sup> Richard Lambert, 'Misunderstanding Each Other', in *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2003.

<sup>33</sup> George Tzopopoulos: 'It's Germany stupid! The Greek German Misunderstanding', EPIN Paper, No 33, June 2012, pp. 6-9.

Looking at the image of Greece in Germany, a survey conducted by Harris Interactive in August 2012 and published in *Financial Times* in the next month has produced interesting findings. Specifically, 54 percent of respondents in Germany did not then believe that Greece should stay in the common currency area, while 19 percent remained unsure. Furthermore, only 26 percent strongly agreed or somewhat agreed that eurozone members should do more to help Greece and 74 percent were not confident that the country would ever repay its bailout loans.

It is obvious that a misunderstanding gap marks Greek-German relations. On the one hand, the majority of Greeks consider Germany as responsible for the stalemate in their national economy and the continuous introduction of austerity measures. On the other hand, many Germans see Greece as a special case in Europe, being by far worse in its performance compared to other periphery states, namely Ireland, Italy, Portugal and Spain, and threatening the existence of the eurosystem. This contradiction is particularly painful for Europe.

The main logic of the European architecture is that different states are working together to achieve common goals. In theory, the principle of co-operation should prevail. But it is this 'co-operation parameter' which has taken a contradictory dimension during the crisis. Are Greeks thankful for the financial assistance provided by Germany? The answer - as penetrated in the media discourse - is negative. Greeks believe that Germany seeks to establish a sphere of economic influence in their country. Exceptions certainly exist but the general tendency remains problematic.

## Visual Analysis of the Greek crisis

Many media organisations in both Greece and Germany have actively participated in the rise of tensions between the countries. Although the aim of this FRAGMEX report is to analyse the stance of the Greek media, this cannot be successfully implemented without a reference to German ones.<sup>34</sup> That is because Greek journalists have often tended to reproduce the negative content of their German colleagues in their effort not only to attract the attention of their readers but also to strongly criticise Berlin for its policy towards Greece in a critical period for the economic survival of the country. This is not the case with positive stories which do not naturally serve the same journalistic goal.

In order to better analyse the image of Germany in the Greek media discourse, a qualitative analysis of main Greek newspapers – based on typicality – can offer a useful research technique. These newspapers include, *Kathimerini*, *To Vima*, *Eleftherotypia*, *Proto Thema*, *TA NEA*, *Eleftheros Typos*, *Avgi*, *Ethnos*, *Imerisia*, and *Dimokratia*. Along with these principal sources, some other noteworthy examples of the coverage of Germany in Greece are also explored even if they do not include the afore-mentioned sources in order to facilitate a broader discussion. Specifically, an online search of the lemma 'Germany' has been made, while cover-pages have been also examined.

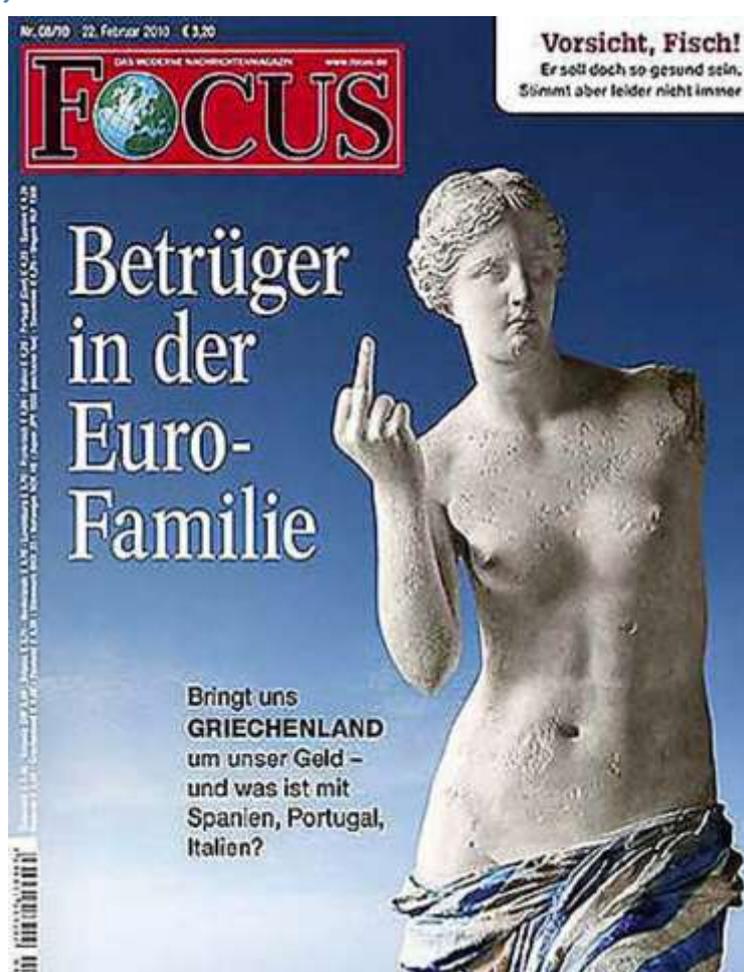
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<sup>34</sup> George Tzogopoulos, *The Greek Crisis in the Media: Stereotyping in the International Press* (Ashgate, 2013).

### a. The initial misunderstanding: January 2010 – June 2012

Following the publication of *Focus* magazine front-page portraying Aphrodite of Melos begging for money, Greek newspaper *Eleftheros Typos*, decided to respond in a similarly offending way. In particular, the Greek conservative paper published the image of the Goddess Victoria holding a swastika, which was highly symbolic.<sup>35</sup> In parallel with this, it should be mentioned that the cover-page of *Focus* magazine is often used in Greece as an indication of the supposed German hostility vis-à-vis the country. The front-pages of *Focus* magazine and *Eleftheros Typos* published in February 2010 do symbolise the beginning of the Greek-German ‘media war’ during the ongoing crisis.

#### *Focus*, February 2010



<sup>35</sup> George Tzogopoulos: 'It's Germany stupid! The Greek German Misunderstanding', EPIN Paper, No 33, June 2012, pp. 6-9.

*Eleftheros Typos, 23 February 2010*



Apart from bizarre front-pages, the main frame of the Greek media coverage of Germany in the first months of 2010, was that Berlin had been reserved in providing financial assistance to Greece. The perceived reason was the regional election which would take place in May 2010 leading the German government to delay critical decisions on the bailout of Greece and the natural support of the eurozone. On 24 March 2010, for instance, *TA NEA* argued that the stance of the German Chancellor could not easily change from the wait and see stance.<sup>36</sup> Approximately one month later, on 22 April 2010, *Kathimerini* newspaper asserted that the activation of the bailout mechanism might be further delayed due to domestic constraints in Germany.<sup>37</sup>

In parallel with the bailout programme itself, the Greek media were not economical in diagnosing a German hegemonic policy in negotiations on the future of Greece and the eurozone. In other words, they saw a significant German influence on the European

<sup>36</sup> *TA NEA*, 'A struggle to change the will of Merkel', available at: <http://www.tanea.gr/news/greece/article/4566731/?iid=2>, 24 March 2014

<sup>37</sup> Kostas Karkagiannis, 'Germany can delay the activation of the rescue programme', <http://www.kathimerini.gr/391209/article/oikonomia/ellhnikh-oikonomia/h-germania-mporei-na-ka8ysterhsei-thn-energopoihsh-toy-sxedioy-diaswshs>, 22 April 2010.

economic policy vis-à-vis the country. As the Sunday edition of *Eleftherotypia* reported on 28 February 2010, ‘a German umbrella and discipline’ mark the new fiscal pact. On that day, the main title of the newspaper was ‘Heil...measures’.<sup>38</sup> This representation of Germany was apparent not only in the first months of the Greek crisis but on a continuous basis. Some months later, for instance, the Managing Director of *To Vima* newspaper Antonis Karakoussis saw ‘Germans as destabilising Greece’.<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, *Eleftherotypia* asserted that German tanks (Panzer) would invade Greece. This was its main title after the European Summit of 26-27 October 2011.<sup>40</sup>

Symbolically, the Greek-German misunderstanding had penetrated the media discourse to the degree that even sport newspapers discovered a battle between the two states on the occasion of the football game between Olympiacos F.C and Borussia Dortmund for the group stage of Champions League. On 18 October 2011 the sport title *Gavros* urged the players of Olympiacos F.C. to ‘kick Germans in order to make Greece smile and humiliate the Fourth Economic Reich’. The main picture in its front-page was that of Chancellor Merkel in a Nazi uniform. Remembering the football game between the national teams of Greece and Germany for the quarter-finals of the European championship in June 2012, the hostile coverage was also evident. Greek titles saw the game from an almost political perspective<sup>41</sup> while German ones ironically commented on this dimension.<sup>42</sup>



*Gavros*, 10 November 2011

<sup>38</sup> *Eleftherotypia*, 28 February 2010

<sup>39</sup> Antonis Karakoussis, ‘Germans are destabilising Greece’, <http://www.tovima.gr/politics/article/?aid=398126>, 30 April 2011.

<sup>40</sup> *Eleftherotypia*, 28 October 2011.

<sup>41</sup> On 22 June 2011, the day of the football games, Greece’s most prestigious sport title *Sportday* was urging the players of the Greek national team to make Germans bankrupt!

<sup>42</sup> *Bild*, ‘Griechen giften gegen Deutschland’, Available at: <http://www.bild.de/sport/fussball-em-2012-polen-ukraine/em-2012/griechen-giften-gegen-deutschland-24700614.bild.html>, 17 June 2012, accessed September 2012.

The ire of some Greek media against the policy of Berlin suggesting austerity measures and especially the motivations of German chancellor Angela Merkel did lead them to discover hidden intentions. These included Berlin's perceived will to create spheres of economic influence to Greece as well as to buy Greek state properties at very low prices in order to dominate the country. Within this context, in a period when new austerity measures had to be passed in the Greek Parliament in February 2012, *Dimokratia* newspaper followed the paradigm of *Gavros* sport paper and also depicted the Chancellor in a Nazi uniform.

*Dimokratia*, 12 February 2012



### ***b. After the twin elections***

The coverage of Germany in the Greek media was highly negative from the beginning of the economic crisis until the twin elections of May and June 2012. Even if the tone of the newspapers was not similarly aggressive, the main conclusion for the audience might be that 'Germany was highly responsible for the Greek drama and EU's emphasis on austerity. Nevertheless, after the formation of the new coalition government of New Democracy, PASOK and the Democratic Left party, and especially from mid-September 2012 onwards some media not only in Greece but also in Germany have started to follow a milder approach.

The interview granted by the then Greek Prime Minister Antonis Samaras to *Bild*<sup>43</sup>, which was published by the German tabloid on 22 August, led to an initial break of ice between the two sides. Talking to *Bild*, which had clearly disagreed with the Greek bailout in the first months of 2010, Samaras attempted to invest in a new communication strategy and share

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<sup>43</sup> Paul Ronzheimer, 'Die Drachme wäre eine Katastrophe für uns', available at: <http://www.bild.de/politik/ausland/antonis-samaras/griechenlands-premier-ueber-schulden-sparen-und-euroausstieg-25779000.bild.html>, 22 August 2012, accessed September 2012.

with the important tabloid the common struggle of Greece and Germany for the future of Europe. A few days later, during his visit in Berlin to talk with Chancellor Angela Merkel he met with the editors of the German tabloid including Kai Diekmann, Nikolaus Blome, and Paul Ronzheimer.<sup>44</sup> Mr Samaras also gave an interview to *Süddeutsche Zeitung* communicating the Greek positions to the German public.<sup>45</sup>

Some Greek media responded positively to the initial political attempt for the improvement of Greek-German bilateral relations. Specifically, following a few statements by German politicians in support of Greece – including Chancellor’s Merkel emotional reaction that ‘her heart bleeds’ for the country –, the daily *TA NEA* saw a change in Berlin’s approach. This newspaper published two interesting drawings of Merkel.<sup>46</sup> In one of them the Chancellor dressed in Greek traditional uniform was holding a Greek flag.

In the other one, she was portrayed as crying for the Greeks. In the latter case the main editorial of *TA NEA* was entitled: ‘Do it like the Chancellor’.<sup>47</sup>

*TA NEA*, 10 September 2012



<sup>44</sup> Paul Ronzheimer and Daniel Biskup, ‘Sie wollte ich treffen, sagte Samaras zu Bild’, available at: <http://www.bild.de/politik/inland/antonis-samaras/griechenland-premier-zu-besuch-bei-bild-25862838.bild.html>, 25 August accessed September 2012.

<sup>45</sup> Alexander Hagelüken and Christiane Schlötzer, ‘Die Deutschen bekommen ihr Geld zurück’, available at: <http://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/griechenlands-premier-samaras-die-deutschen-bekommen-ihr-geld-zurueck-1.1447818>, 22 August 2012, accessed September 2012.

<sup>46</sup> See the frontpages of *TA NEA* on 10 September and 18 September 2012.

<sup>47</sup> *TA NEA*, ‘Do it like the Chancellor’, available at: <http://www.tanea.gr/kyriothro/?aid=4752876>, 18 September 2012, accessed September 2012.

TA NEA, 18 September 2012



Positive as they are the signs of change in the coverage since mid-August 2012, they are not sufficient to justify claims for a U-turn. This is because the majority of Greek journalists, who had been accustomed to a convenient environment of mutual hostility between Greece and Germany, were arguably prepared to follow a different stance and abandon their previous logic. In other words, they continued to employ the convenient theory synthesised around the supposed economic superiority and domination in Berlin’s policy vis-à-vis the Hellenic Republic. Columnist George Delastik, for instance, downplayed the importance of the first official meeting of Mr Samaras in Berlin, considering comments stressing this importance as propaganda.<sup>48</sup> Likewise, the September volume of the magazine edited by George Tragas *Crash* depicted Merkel as ‘Godmother’.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>48</sup> George Delastik, ‘How Germans are negotiating’, available at <http://www.ethnos.gr/article.asp?catid=22792&subid=2&pubid=63703951>, 28 August, accessed September 2012.

<sup>49</sup> See the coverage of *Crash* magazine, September 2012, vol. 16.

### c. *The visit of Merkel to Athens in October 2012*

The divided approach of the Greek media regarding Germany after the twin election was apparent when the Chancellor decided to visit Greece in October 2012. As this visit can be considered as an interesting case study, two main approaches are discovered in the discourse. On the one hand, the visit was mediated as an opportunity for the Hellenic Republic to improve its relationship with Germany and invest in political support towards the former in order to stay in the eurozone and possibly achieve a prolongation period. On the other hand, this visit was considered by some journalists as an indication - if not confirmation - of Merkel's will to control Greece and promote German national interests.

An analysis of the front pages of Greek national newspapers on Tuesday 9 October and Wednesday 10 October 2012 outlines the afore-mentioned differentiation in the coverage. Leading titles *TA NEA* and *Kathimerini* emphasised the importance of the visit while other papers such as *Dimokratia* and *Avgi* did not see any real and tangible help coming from the part of Germany. An analysis of commentaries published in the press also sketches out the afore-mentioned differentiation. Economic newspaper *Imerisia* for instance, asserted in its editorial that 'Merkel's visit opened a new page' while George Delastik wrote in his article for *To Ethnos* that 'Merkel gave nothing to Samaras'.<sup>50</sup>

The double-sided coverage of Merkel's visit reflects the flourishing debate among Greek political elites following the announcement of her decision to visit Greece on Friday 5 October 2012. Although leaders of the three parties of the governing coalition considered the visit a positive development, members of the opposition ones expressed their skepticism and anger. In particular, the leader of SY.RIZ.A Alexis Tsipras encouraged people to participate in demonstrations against Merkel and Independent Greeks wanted to organise a protest in front of the German Embassy but finally only attempted to give an anti-austerity statement to the German Ambassador. For their part, the Golden Dawn thought that Merkel's visit symbolised the slavery of Greek people and the Communists saw it as an attempt of the Chancellor to spread fear and silence in the country.

In spite of the disagreement as to the objectives and results of Merkel's visit, all Greek journalists seemed to find consensus on the important role Germany can play for the survival of the Hellenic Republic. However, the coverage almost connoted that it is Berlin's exclusive responsibility to kick off the Greek economy and save the country. During the press conference, for example, the Chancellor was initially asked by a Greek journalist of the National Television (ERT) whether the patient (Greece) will be able to recover, stand up and possibly run. From a neutral perspective, it seems bizarre to ask the leader of another country something like that. The mediation of Merkel's visit reinforces the view that not only Greek politicians but also Greek journalists have failed to realise the necessity for a 'national ownership of reforms' to overcome the crisis.

Along with different frames around which Merkel's visit was covered by Greek media, a tone of populism and tabloidization was largely evident. In the most remarkable example, *Proto Thema* newspaper, which has the highest circulation every Sunday, greeted Merkel with the lemma 'Heil' in its edition on 7 October 2012. Many Greek journalists also commented ironically on the green jacket of Angela Merkel remembering that she also wore it while

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<sup>50</sup> George Delastik, 'Merkel gave nothing to Samaras', *Ethnos* newspaper, available at: <http://www.ethnos.gr/article.asp?catid=22792&subid=2&pubid=63722451>, 10 October 2012.

attending the football game between Greece and Germany for the quarter-final of the European championship. Additionally, journalist George Tragkas, who has been already fined for publicly insulting the Chancellor, once again talked about a ‘German domination / Fourth Reich strategy’ in his daily talk show at *Kontra TV Channel* in the evening of Tuesday. Last but not least, the anti-German demonstrations, which took place in Athens, were extensively reported by all Greek media.

*Proto Thema*, 7 October 2012



#### *d. After the Merkel visit*

The coverage of the visit of Angela Merkel to Greece in October 2012 was indicative of the representation of Germany until the end of 2014 when an early election was called paving the way for the SY.RIZ.A win on 26 January 2015. The relevant improvement in the political Greek-German relationship impacted on the media discourse. This of course did not entail that provocative comments or front-pages had been absent from the coverage. A characteristic example was the front-page of *Crash* magazine in April 2013 when its publisher George Tragkas presented Chancellor Angela Merkel and Finance Minister Wolfgang Schäuble as Guantanamo prisoners using the title ‘WANTED’.

Additionally, the anti-German media coverage after the visit of Merkel to Greece continued to be synthesised around the impact of the policy of austerity. The columnist of *To Vima*,

George Malouchos went even further when he accused Germany for high profits imposing this policy of austerity and pretending to save the country.<sup>51</sup> Moreover, *Avgi* newspaper which reflected the view of SY.RIZ.A, greeted the German Finance Minister with the title 'Ave Schäuble: Moribund Greek people are greeting you'. For its part, *Eleftherotypia* stigmatised Schäuble for the Greek drama and encouraged him to look at specific data including the reduction of the Greek GDP, the increase of unemployment and negative turn of economic sectors such as industry and tourism. The newspaper also portrayed the German Finance Minister as an 'oppressor'.

*Crash Magazine, April 2013*



<sup>51</sup> George Malouchos, 'Greek rescue: The most profitable German investment', <http://www.tovima.gr/opinions/article/?aid=527569> 27 August 2013.

*Avgi Newspaper, 18 July 2013*



*Eleftherotyia, 18 July 2013*



As it was mentioned, above, however, several Greek newspapers had already started to follow a different approach regarding Germany. *TA NEA*, for instance, used a drawing of Schäuble asserting that he was prepared to 'bring presents to Greece'. Apart from the improvement of the political atmosphere, *TA NEA* and also other titles including *Kathimerini* reflected a relevant optimism for the future. That is because the international interest in Greece was steadily diminishing in international media as the country managed not only to create a surplus but also to regain the confidence of its international partners. It is not a coincidence that when Chancellor Merkel revisited Athens on 11 April 2014 newspapers such as *Kathimerini* concentrated on her congratulations message.<sup>52</sup>

*TA NEA*, 18 July 2013



<sup>52</sup> *Kathimerini* front-page, 12 April 2014.

## Appraisal

The media are the main battleground where the current economic crisis is being played out. The whole debate on their role, however, cannot but have some limits. Although journalists have often incited hostility between Greece and Germany, a critical question arises as to who sets the agenda. Normally in periods of crises the media do not tend to challenge but to follow political elites. This is also the case with the ongoing drama for the Hellenic Republic and the European Union. If we journey back to developments from October 2009 onwards we will easily realise that the problem starts from politicians – who are unable to prevent the reaction of markets – rather than from journalists. Greek politicians have blamed Germany and their German colleagues have often accused Greece threatening it with an expulsion from the Eurozone. Can journalists ignore this debate? Is it possible for them not to use their national politicians as a source of information?

The main job of journalists is to report the news. There is no question that they have many times exaggerated in their coverage overemphasising provocative and intriguing comments. While messages the media transfer stem from the rhetoric of political elites in Greece and Germany, they are only partly responsible for the problem. Many media organisations in both Greece and Germany have benefited from the populism of politicians for their own purposes, regularly reinforcing that kind of views. In the final account, media organisations are enterprises and commercialisation cannot but affect their coverage. Especially in the case of Greece almost all media are struggling for their economic survival and therefore their insistence on populism is not surprising. Furthermore, the theoretical background and training of various journalists have not necessarily guaranteed a thorough as well as a comprehensive coverage and analysis of the crisis. Journalists have sometimes opted for the selection of easy solutions such as the exchange of accusations between the two countries and the publication of stories containing bizarre elements.

## The Greek political scene

In the context of the Greek crisis, Greek politicians have often criticised Germany. There is a plethora of examples highlighting the stance of Greek politicians towards their German partners. A striking one is the phrase used by President of Greece Karolos Papoulias on 15 February 2012. Referring to the German Minister of Finance, Mr. Papoulias said: ‘I don’t accept that my country is vilified by Mr. Schäuble. I don’t accept it as a Greek person. Who is Mr Schäuble who can humiliate Greece?’ In similar cases, the leader of the right-wing party LA.O.S, George Karatzaferis, focused on ‘German domination’ while the leader of the left-wing SY.RIZ.A, Alexis Tsipras, concentrated on the ‘economic chauvinism of Ms Merkel’. In an additional example, former member of PA.SO.K and later independent MP, George Dimaras sent an aggressive letter to Chairman of the Legal Committee of the German Parliament, Siegfried Kauder, on 30 January 2012. He argued, inter alia, that ‘thanks to Greece, Germans have been transformed from cruel and uncivilized Goths into an orderly nation.’

Various Greek politicians have also invested in emotionalism in their attempt to criticize Berlin. They have frequently invoked the issue of World War II reparations, arguing that Germany had failed to respond to its financial obligations. In an interview with *BBC* on 25 February 2010, the Vice-President Theodoros Pangalos commented: 'They [the Nazis] took away the Greek gold that was in the Bank of Greece, they took away the Greek money and they never gave it back'. And, he concluded: 'I don't say they have to give back the money necessarily, but they have to say thanks. And they [the German government] shouldn't complain much about stealing and not being very specific about economic dealings'. On that basis, the emotional message sent by Greek political elites is that the Hellenic Republic has been imprisoned in a labyrinth by a country with a catastrophic and unforgivable past.

## The main responsibility

The analysis of the responsibility for the current Greek-German misunderstanding principally lies with politicians. As far as the Greek side is concerned, Greeks have continuously condemned Chancellor Merkel and Finance Minister Wolfgang Schäuble for the slow death of the Hellenic economy. The demonisation of the Memorandum of Understanding drafted in May 2010 and Germany has domestically generated the illusion that an alternative – except for the loans from the European Union and the International Monetary Fund – is available. This illusion has created among Greeks falsified hopes for less austerity and has caused waves of reaction against Berlin.

Greek politicians have largely blamed foreigners and especially Germany in order to find an appropriate scapegoat. In parallel with this, they have sought to demonstrate to Greek citizens – and therefore to their future voters – that they have been struggling to protect salaries and pensions against the aggressive and tenacious Troika. On these grounds, negotiations between the Hellenic Republic and its international creditors have been perceived as a 'zero-sum' and not a 'win-win' game. The main intention of the Greek political personnel has been to adapt the Manichaean doctrine and present themselves as the 'good' ones and foreigners – mainly Germans – as the 'bad' ones.<sup>53</sup>

In such an anti-German climate fuelled by the political rhetoric of Greek politicians domestic media have naturally adapted a similar stance. In their majority, highly politicised and often dependent on financial support by the state, it has been expectable to follow the agenda set by the national political personnel and put the blame on the most important state of the Eurozone. All in all, it seems that during the current crisis anti-Germanism has taken the position of anti-Americanism in the media discourse. This anti-Germanism in the coverage takes an even greater dimension taking into account that a significant part of Greek society is indeed suffering by unemployment and poverty and needs to construct an enemy it can easily attack and accuse publicly.

Last but not least, the demonization of Germany in Greek discourse – in spite of different tinges of coverage after September 2012 – entails that the notion of the European public sphere has been almost absent. The creation of a European identity with a constructive role of the journalists seems rather a utopia. While for the majority of Greek journalists Germany

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

is responsible for the eurozone crisis, for their German colleagues it is Greece which fuels the problem. Within this context a European phenomenon has been largely interpreted as a bilateral problem.



**ΕΛΙΑΜΕΠ**  **ΕΛΙΑΜΕΠ**

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