

# The Image of Greece in the European and the International Press, 1992-1994

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## RÉSUMÉ

Cet article élabore la question de la construction de l'image de la Grèce dans la presse étrangère. Il essaie de mettre en relief les faits historiques nés dans les conditions internationales, au sortir de la Guerre Froide dans leur concomitance avec les éléments de continuité appartenant au niveau des mentalités collectives. Dans une telle perspective, les articles et les éditoriaux sur la Grèce sont examinés en tant que tels mais aussi comme une partie de la propagande occidentale concernant les Balkans et la guerre dans l'ex-Yougoslavie. Cet article tend aussi à évaluer implicitement le discours de la presse à travers l'analyse de la thématique et du contenu des articles.

## ABSTRACT

This paper examines the image of Greece as it is formed in the foreign press. I shall hereby attempt not only to expose the critical convergence of historical events occurred after the end of the Cold War but also to put into perspective those elements of continuity that reside in the realm of collective mentalities. Thus, the writing of articles and the editorial line concerning Greece are examined both independently and as a part of Western propaganda with regard to the Balkans in general as well as the war in former Yugoslavia. This paper also aims at evaluating briefly those articles with respect to their viewpoint and subject-matter.

In the space of these notes, I shall attempt to expose the image of Greece, as it has been formed in the international press, by means of the methodology that the historian of the present applies with the purpose of reconnecting meanings and of revealing the underlying system through the evident nature of facts. Neither the acceptance nor the rejection of the resulting image of Greece are included in the objectives of this study. Thus, the way in which the foreign and domestic policy and the interweaving political interests - as concurring factors - affect the publicity of the said image, would be the objective of yet another study regarding the international relations, and not the images, as well as the collective attitudes and mentalities which are the main concern of this essay.

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The nationalistic nature of the rhetoric against FYROM that prevailed in Greece from 1991 until recently, along with the policy of non-recognition, the trade embargo as well as the trappings of the Greek foreign policy, gave rise to a series of comments and articles where the Greek stance was described as foolish and stubborn. Greece has also been criticized whenever there was a reference to Greek nationalism, irredentism, and the alleged territorial claims forwarded by Greece as far as smaller Balkan countries were concerned. In 1994, *Le Monde* accused Greece of violation of the human rights and oppression of the religious minorities while the "racial and anti-semitic" aspects of the Greek society were underlined. In the same year, *The London Times* demanded that Greece should be relieved of the presidency of the European Union due to the fact that, because of the application of the trading embargo, the treaty, legislation, and wider interests of the E.U. were violated. The "aggressive" policy of Athens towards "Macedonia" was specifically considered to be incompatible with its status as a member of the European Union. However, there have been repeated references to the scheduled partition of "Macedonia" by Serbia, Greece and eventually other Balkan countries.

The incident of Episkopi that took place in April 1994, the flight of Thomas Vrakas over Albania and the trial of the five members of "Omonia", also gave rise to certain comments in the Western press regarding the "Greek provocativeness". *Le Figaro*, being ironic to the threat of Skopje, referred to the new "Balkan orthodoxy" and the isolation experienced by the Greeks because of the "superiority complex" that characterized them. It will be a rather common place if we suggest that the foreign press treated with mistrust Andreas Papandreou's administration after the general elections of 1993 as well as the assumption of the European Union's presidency by Greece later on that year. Yet, certain remarks that appeared in articles of that period, such as those of *The Economist* are quite interesting. It has been suggested that Greece no longer presented the interest it used to during the Cold War as a pluralistic cell within the communist southeastern Europe, but it was still the potential channel through which the former communist Balkan countries could communicate with modern life. The columnist ventures also the prediction that Papandreou, being a genuine socialist leader, would appear uncompromising but would finally agree to share the name of Macedonia with the neighbouring country from the North, provided that there would be no change of borders. The columnist went on considering Papandreou as a third-world-type nationalist and attributed the "chauvinism" that caused the "Macedonian turmoil" to the Right. As for the incident of Episkopi, most newspapers adopted the accusations against Greece launched by Albania; even *The European* which was rather

sympathetic towards the fears of Greece on the issue of Skopje, objected to the sending of Turkish peacekeepers to Bosnia, and, at length, it falls under the category of the moderately-disposed-towards-Greece newspapers - along with *The Herald Tribune* and *The Independent*. However, this does not necessarily mean that they adopted the Greek positions, since *The Independent* criticized the Greek foreign policy and was ironic towards the Minister of Foreign Affairs Theodoros Pangalos. *The European* maintained a negative attitude towards Greece on the matter of the royal property and the way the Greek government behaved towards Constantine.

Indeed, there was plenty of criticism in the foreign press on the "rigid" Greek policy during Constantinos Mitsotakis's administration as well. For example, *Le Figaro* demanded that there should be sanctions against Greece on the ground that it did not fully apply the measures against Serbia whereas it blocked the recognition of Skopje. In his notorious article, Strobe Talbott wrote about the resurgence of the Greek "expansionist aspirations" in the previous century. Talbott also accused Mitsotakis's government of "paranoia and myopia", because they could not see that the "financial strangling" they imposed on Macedonia could cause nationalistic conflicts - even worse than those that took place in Bosnia - and Greece would eventually be caught in a war with Turkey and other Balkan countries. In January 1993, President Clinton appointed Talbott as special adviser for the newly established independent countries, a leading position in the State Department. In his articles, which backed the policy of intervention, Talbott also suggested that if the Western Alliance could not handle the crisis in former Yugoslavia, its existence would be pointless after the end of the Cold War. Supporting his view he referred to the Gulf War and claimed that the worldwide outcry in combination with diplomatic and financial means did not manage to keep Saddam Hussein away from Kuwait, which only the massive multinational expeditionary forces achieved.

The similarities of the Western propaganda practiced during the war in former Yugoslavia and the propaganda promoted just before and during the Gulf War are as many as the divergences. In 1990-91, public opinion was influenced by the negative metaphor of the Vietnam war, whereas for the period under discussion here, the Western propaganda could make excellent use of the positive aspects of the Gulf War. Although this war signified an instant mutation of East/West conflict to a new cold war of North against South, propaganda was founded on a familiar, explicit and clear, ideological background: the fight for freedom and democracy. The main argument was that the USA were fighting against the "totalitarian Iraqi dictatorship" that had invaded Kuwait with the purpose of destroying this "freely elected democratic state". Through that

type of ideological propaganda the enemy was identified with the leader, and it was directly intended for the people of Iraq, urging them to drive the tyrant out. Although contemporary historical and social factors of the post-Cold War era have established modern conditions for the development of propaganda, the logic of cold war propaganda discourse is still evident in certain cases, since propaganda operates in a context determined by social as well as historical factors. The emphasis has remained though focused on the "humanitarian purposes" and the assumption that a "secure environment" should be established.

For example, the image of the nationalist leader is constructed on the basis of the archetype of the communist leader. Also, as the "small and helpless" Kuwait, and the Bosnian Muslims needed international aid to secure their freedom against the "invader", so did the "nationalist" (*ethnikofron*) Greece during the Cold War, in order to safeguard the "endangered civil liberties of the free world". The repetition of this discourse on the protection of the weak against the violence inflicted by the powerful, gave the opportunity to the American post-Cold War propaganda to promote and legitimize the role of the U.S. as the major world power following the collapse of the Soviet Union. It is noteworthy that, although the dominant image of Greece was that of the poorest and the most chaotic country in the European Union, Talbott presented it as one with considerable influence on both sides of the Atlantic, despotic and uncompromising that put an impediment to the progress of Skopje - this new country with a democratic and pluralistic political system established in spite of its multiethnic identity.

However, the logic of the good and bad nations as well as that of the old rivalries amongst nations, which had not been promoted during the Cold War when Greece was considered to be a faithful ally and a victim of the communist conspiracy, reemerged together with the mutations due to the war in former Yugoslavia and with a certain image of the Balkan environment and of Greece itself. For many thinkers of the 19th and 20th century, Greece was a liquid, unsteady and explosive region that had nothing in common with Western societies as far as rationalism, sense of order and harmony were concerned. Many held the view that the future of Greece was mainly determined by its geographical position, and also that the Balkans were a political and cultural region, very different from Western Europe.

The contemporary image of Greece and the Balkans is often formed under the heavy shadow of history in a way that its reliability can be questioned. We can establish the conservation of old stereotypes when we compare two articles written within a forty-nine year spell. The French *Carrefour* wrote: "Macedonia - the country of the political hatred and the tradition of endless guerilla wars", while forty-nine years later, Xavier

Raufer, under the headline "Macedonia: a long tradition of terrorism" wrote in a similar mood about the very tradition which defined Macedonia as a land of cruelty and terrorism and the history of Balkans as an affair of hostility and intolerance, adding that never before in the history of Europe did a group of states, entirely and jointly, denied the existence of a neighbouring country.

Yet, after the collapse of state socialism, the challenge in this historical moment was the radicalization of the democracy; accordingly, Greek nationalism was interpreted as a "nationalism of the centre" fighting against peripheral nationalisms, while Greek positions were considered as violating the right of the small countries to self-determination. General Charles G. Boyd, Deputy Commander in Chief, U.S. European Command, from November 1992 to July 1995, shifted the terms of the debate on the war in former Yugoslavia, expressing the heretic opinion that the war was neither a fight of good versus evil, of aggressor against aggrieved, nor the inevitable product of centuries of ethnic hatreds, but rather a result of ambition, fear and incompetence - local and international. He noted that history was used as a pretext so that the responsibilities which the major powers bore for the war could be concealed. The opposite, dominant version of the war was that of the exclusive responsibility of the Serbs. Jean Daniel advocated the military solution and considered the argument that nothing could break the resolution of these people, to be an excuse for the legitimization of the American inertia. Yet, there were various critics of Clinton administration's unwillingness to commit America to fight for The Bosnia; and various sceptics questioning the credibility of the U.N. and the Atlantic Alliance.

The question to what extent these collective representations that are a result arise from impulsive or prefabricated proceedings, cannot be partially answered. However, the impulsive creation of collective attitudes can depend on the weight of the past and the realization of an unconscious - up to then - disposition or stance. Attitudes are sure to change just like the social and cultural framework that defines these changes. On the other hand, the heterogeneity of the belief-system and the multiplicity of the social differentiations are taken for granted. Still, these do not rule out the existence of common perceptions and a shared mentality in the Western world, which can be conveyed through attitudes, cognitive or affective, on various notions such as democracy and freedom.

Thus, we could suggest that the dominant image of Greece is fragmentary and lacks autonomy, since it is mostly a product of how the attitude of Greece towards both the belligerents of former Yugoslavia and the Balkan neighbours is perceived. It should be noted parenthetically that the way newspapers judge Greek policy also depends on the image

they have constructed for themselves (auto-image) by the countries that control information. Greece is represented in the press in terms of a limited set of topics which are dealt with in such a way as to emphasize "the problematic and fragile economy" of Greece, "the inefficiency of the government", the "failure" of the Greek presidency of the E.U., and the divergence of Greece from the policy of her fellow members, the progress and the European culture. Other topics relevant to contemporary Greek institutes or civilization have low priority or do not even exist.

Overall articles concerning Greece can be divided into two categories. The first one includes pieces that reach the boundaries of political mythology and are aiming at shaping perceptions and a certain imagery based on a small number of slogans such as "Greece is the bully of the Balkans" (*Spectator*) or "the worst fly behind the ear of working Europe" (*El País*). The share of these kind of articles - apart from the needs of the propaganda it promotes - echoes the views of a part of the public opinion which, after the collapse of the dividing lines of the Cold War, appreciates its "differentia" in a way that heterogeneity is excluded. In these image-oriented articles, the features differentiating the Greeks from the rest of the Europeans are of "anthropologic" and "anthropomorphic" nature: the Greek people are governed by the Dionysian element, and are unconcerned with the serious problems they face, such as pollution and traffic. Namely, the Greeks are innocently pleased, arrogant towards their neighbours and, according to some other characterizations, "shorter and uglier than the average European".

The second category consists of articles about Greece appearing in the quality press. The keystone of these analyses is often an ideologically explicit, negative view on nationalism held by the writers. The article of professor Mark Mazower - "Classic errors in the Balkans" - falls under the same category. Here, the average Greek is drawn as a man overwhelmed by nationalistic feelings but not aware of his past. In addition, the story by Christophe Chiclet and Philippe Lobjois concerned with the Greek right-wing extremists, the action of the Front for the liberation of North Epirus, two other secret organizations aiming at the liberation of Slavonic Macedonia, as well as the role of the Greek Orthodox Church. However, the tendency for generalization becomes obvious in this article as this is reflected in the final remark of the writer, according to which, all said above took place in a state-member of the NATO and the European Union. Even quality press often covered these issues in a way that reproduced an already constructed image; the main difference in this type of issue-oriented journalism relies on the discourse, seen rather as "a form of language use and communication" and not as "social meaning and socio-cultural, political, and ideological practice". Its racial discourse is enacted in a form of "subtle and indirect discrimination". The phenomena of grey

propaganda also fall under the same category of articles: the information that appeared in *Le Monde* and reported that the five of "Omonia" who were on trial in Tirana had been amongst the commandos that attacked Albanian quarters on April 10, 1994. There was also the caption of a photograph published in the *Historia* magazine which was taken during the demonstration held in Athens on the 10th of December, 1992 and said that Greek nationalists demanded the annexation of Skopje to Greece.

Conclusively, we could suggest that is the age of *fin-de-millennium* politics when the stability, order and orthodoxies of the Cold-War era have come to an end and have been discredited, the image of Greece - a country regarded as anachronistic and with an anti-Western perspective - is constructed around notions of unfamiliarity with the ideals of the new era, of attachment to the past, intolerance and arrogance.

## NOTES

1. *Time*, 12-10-1992 (article by Strobe Talbott)
2. *Newsweek*, 1-6-1992 (article by Scot Sullivan)
3. *El Pais*, 2-1-1994, *Newsweek*, 27-1-1992. See also, Xavier Gautier, *L'Europe à l'épreuve des Balkans*, Jacques Bertoin, Paris, 1992, p.16 ("...une Grèce schizophrène") et *Libération*, 12-2-1994.
4. *Time*, 12-10-1992, *Newsweek*, 27-1-1992.
5. See also, *Le Monde*, 29-3-1994 and for the national stereotypes in the Greek press, Roy Panagiotopoulou, "Kataskevi ethnokentrikon stereotipon apo ton typo sto paradigma tou Makedonikou zitimatos" (The construction of ethnocentric stereotypes by the Press in the case of the Macedonian issue), in *The Greek Review of Social Research*, 1996, n 89 (forthcoming).
6. 16-10-1993.
7. 15 to 21-4-1994.
8. 18 to 24-3-1994.
9. 25 to 31-3-1994.
10. 18 to 24-3-1994.
11. 22 to 28-4-1994. See also for the same matter, the similar attitude of the *Sunday Times*, 17-4-1994, *El Pais*, 29-8-1993 and the *Time*, 16-5-1994.
12. *Time*, 12-10-1992.
13. 25-11-1991.
14. Garth S.Jowett, Victoria O'Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion*, Sage Publications, 1992, 2nd Edition, p.252.
15. Arthur and Marilouise Kroker (eds), *Ideology and Power, in the age of Lenin in ruins*, St.Martin's Press, New York, 1991, p.XIV.

16. *Ibid.*, p.250.

17. John G.Reilly's article about the american public opinion in the nineties, showed that the resultant from the rivalry between the two great powers anxiety had disappeared and public opinion was mainly interested in Russia, while President Yeltsin proved to be one of the most popular European leaders in the U.S.A. (*Foreign Policy Quarterly*, Spring 1995).

18. *El Pais*, 2-1-1994.

19. *Time*, 12-10-1992.

20. *Historia*, Oct. 1995.

21. *Foreign Affairs*, Sept.-Oct. 1995, pp.22-38.

22. *Nouvelle Observateur*, 1 to 7-12-1994. For the french policy on that issue, see *Politique Étrangère*, Hiver 1995/96.

23. *Time*, 7-2-1994 (article by Christopher Ogden).

24. *Time*, 12-12-1994.

25. *European*, 22 to 28-4-1994.

26. *El Pais*, Nov.1993 (special Sunday edition for Greece).

27. *Observer*, 27-3-1994 (article by Helena Smith). The attitude of the French press towards Greek diplomacy has undoubtedly been negative since 1981 when Greece joined the E.U. as a full member. Claude Imbert remarked (*Le Point*, 11-12-1993) on the occasion of the taking over of the U.S. presidency by Greece that Giscard d'Estaing, who was regarded as the main advocate of Greece's accession into the U.S., had taken under his protection a country-agitator (See, Jean Catsiapis, "L'image de la Grèce dans l'opinion publique française", in *Études Helléniques/Hellenic Studies*, Vol.3, No. 2, Automne 1995, pp. 5-16.

28. For the selection and treatment of new topics regarding the political discourse on ethnic affairs in the USA, see Teun A. van Dijk, "Elite Discourse and the Reproduction of Racism", in Rita Kirk Whillock, David Slayden (eds.), *Hate Speech*, Sage Publications, 1995, pp.1-27. See also, Kosta Gouliamos, "Ethnic Media: Breaking the Ghetto Politics", in *Études Helléniques/Hellenic Studies*, Vol.3, No.2, Autumn 1995, pp.25-40.

29. *Nouvelle Observateur*, 26-10 to 3-11-1993 (article by Henri Guirchoun).

30. *The Guardian*, 25-3-1994.

31. *Evenement du Jeudi*, 11 to 17-8-1994. See Brian McNair, *An Introduction to Political Communication*, Routledge, London and New York, 1995, pp.68, 90-91. See Teun A.van Dijk, *op.cit.*, p.4.