

The Aegean crises' effects on social behaviour. Stereotyping the alterity: the case of the Greek printed media (1974-1996)

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Abstract. *The paper revisits the main characteristics of the Greek-Turkish relations, taking as its point of departure the Greek-Turkish dispute over the Aegean continental shelf (1974-1996), as in that period, a list of mutual grievances on issues of high politics still remained intact. The article examines how the main Greek Dailies: "Kathimerini", "Eleftheros Typos", "Ta Nea", "Makedonia" and "Rizospastis" covered Aegean crises of 1976, 1987 and 1996. An effort is made to analyze the position of the above-mentioned newspapers on the Aegean energy crises and to show the Greek media behaviour towards the Turkish people. Do the Greek printed media use ethnic stereotyping to exaggerate the conflict and the crises? Our purpose is to remonstrate that the Greek daily press produces and perpetuates stereotypes on the Turks through textual and visual messages at least for the duration of the crises. The front page articles of the major Greek dailies contain textual messages that stereotype Turks by their concentration, frequency and omissions. The methodology applied for this particular research is the qualitative and quantitative analysis of the content of the above-mentioned newspapers' front pages during the Aegean crises of 1976, 1987 and 1996.*

Key words: Aegean crises, stereotype, alterity.

JEL Codes: Z10

1. Historical background

The research we refer to is intended as an analysis of the events that marked the Greek-Turkish relations during the Aegean crises of 1976, 1987 and 1996. The dispute is related to oil exploration and exploitation rights in the Aegean Sea and thus to the sovereignty over certain areas in the Aegean. After World War II, the diplomatic relations between Turkey and Greece underwent a crisis almost every ten years, because of the interethnic conflict in Cyprus and of the disagreement regarding the sovereign rights of the two states over some regions of the Aegean Sea. The debut of this period of diplomatic crises was marked by the 1955 riots in Cyprus and Istanbul, when clashes took place between the Turkish Cypriots and the Greek Cypriots and, respectively, between Turkish population and the population of Greek origin, and the end of it was marked by the December of 1995 crisis, which stroke between Ankara and Athens regarding the sovereign rights over Imia islets – two rocks in South-East Aegean.

The tensions revived in 1974, in a time of world energetic crisis, and took the shape of an energy dispute. This dispute referred to the disagreement over the interpretation and application of international law and, by way of consequence, to claims over some parts of the Aegean continental shelf, said to be rich in oil and minerals. The main causes of this dispute were the inexistence of an official delimitation of the Aegean continental shelf and the different positions adopted by the Governments of Greece and Turkey in this matter. On the one hand, Turkey's position was that the Greek islands in the Eastern Aegean were not entitled to a continental shelf region and the delimitation line of the continental shelf should be, from

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North to South, through the middle of the Aegean. The logic followed by the Turks was that the Aegean should be shared in equal parts between the two states, in order to have equal economic and defence opportunities in the specific area. In respect to the so-called “isolation” of the Greek islands by the Turkish territorial waters, the Turkish Government assured the authorities in Athens that the communication of the islands with the Greek continent would not be affected by these changes. On the other hand, Greece’s position was in favor of the delimitation of the continental shelf using the *median line* between the Greek islands in Eastern Aegean and the western shores of Turkey. As one can imagine, this entailed the reaction of the Turkish Government, which declared that Turkey had the right to be entitled to a larger continental shelf area, as the Greek islands in the Eastern Aegean were prolongations of the Anatolian Peninsula and did not have a continental shelf of their own.

In the summer of 1976, the tensions took the shape of a crisis when the Turkish research vessel *Sismik I* was sent out in the Aegean Sea to conduct oil research in the disputed continental shelf – considered by the authorities in Athens to be Greek. At the moment, Turkey and Greece appealed to the UN Security Council and to the International Court of Justice at the Hague and both international bodies had urged the neighboring states not to make use of violence in solving the Aegean Sea issues and to continue the bilateral negotiations in order to achieve a solution in the best interest of both countries. But in 1987 and 1996, after many years of either failed bilateral negotiations or inactivity, the Aegean dispute rapidly turned into diplomatic conflicts, which could have had a negative impact on the peace and security in the wider region of Eastern Mediterranean. The two neighboring countries found themselves again ahead of an imminent armed conflict.

The 1987 crisis stroke in March, between the governments of Turkey and Greece, after the Greek Government announced its intent of nationalizing North Aegean Petroleum Company that was prepared for drilling operations in the most contested Aegean continental shelf area. The authorities in Ankara announced their intent of conducting drillings in the same region – east of the Greek island of Thasos – in the continental shelf considered to be Greek and thus stirring up old animosities. As “in the Mediterranean people easily get their blood up” (Kosmadopoulos 1984, p.204), this state of facts had not been accepted by the Turkish Government which, on its part, decided to proceed with oil research in the same disputed areas of the Aegean. The principle followed by the Turkish authorities was very simple: if Greece afforded itself to conduct research in the disputed areas, then Turkey could have done the same thing.

The diplomatic crisis of 1996 had its roots in an incident that took place in Eastern Aegean, when a Turkish vessel went ashore on one of the Imia islets, which were under Greek sovereignty. The captain of the vessel refused the help offered by the Greek coastguard, arguing that Imia belonged to Turkey. The Greek government and the press did not make this incident public, until late January 1996, when some Turkish journalists debarked on one of the Imia islets and raised the Turkish flag. This incident revived the bilateral tension between the two neighboring countries and took the form of a crisis that, fortunately, ended as well without the use of armed force, as the two previous crises.

The aim of our research is to show that in moments of crisis, the Greek press indirectly sustained the bilateral conflict by creating and promoting stereotypes about the Turks. In all the Greek daily political newspapers that we here analyze, the stereotypes in Greek-Turkish relations refer to the hostility and offensiveness of Turkey, which is perceived as a state that takes advantage of the Greek Government’s goodwill. Turkey’s actions are presented as offensive and the Greek Government’s decisions are considered wrong because they lead to compromise. In this sense, Turkey’s actions may show the fact that the Aegean Sea is perceived by Ankara as an area of claims and therefore, the Greek side may be perceived as a pole of negotiations and compromises. Turkey’s actions and motives are considered *claims*, a term that strips from

the start the Turkish arguments of any possible legal validity. Instead, Greek actions are deemed legal and, naturally and obviously, they purpose to defend Greece's national interests and sovereign rights.

2. Stereotyping the alterity in the Greek printed media

As previously said, the crises of 1976 and 1987 were caused by the research vessel *Piri Reis or Hora or Sismik I*, which seem to have become almost a brand in the sense that, as in the past years, one has only to read this name to understand what the situation is about. More, in the 1996 crisis, the Greek press promotes another stereotype, by which Turkey is assigned responsibility for both fueling the crisis and solving it and this can be explained by the fact that Turkey considers the Aegean dispute as a bilateral issue and not a unilateral, offensive action towards Greece. Under these circumstances, Greece is presented as a victim.

Although some newspapers like *Kathimerini* or *Makedonia* do try to be neutral / positive to bilateral dialogue, the language used in its articles envisages some doubts about Turkey's will to solve the dispute in the Aegean area. The use of such terms as *defiance*, *tension* and *escalation*, which are characteristic for describing Ankara's actions regarding the Aegean, emphasizes Turkey's determination. Turkey always *asserts and pretends* (*Kathimerini*, July 22nd, 1976), while Greece *firmly answers to threats* (*Kathimerini*, July 17th, 1976) and *fights* for its rights. More, in the 1976 crisis, the lead story of July 24th headed *Demirel is fishing votes with the help of Hora* (*Kathimerini*, July 24th, 1976), describes the traditional Turkish festivity that took place at the vessel's launch almost like a strange ritual due to lamb sacrifice. The center-right *Kathimerini* criticizes the Greek government, but in the 1996 crisis tries to keep the people united: *No step back to pressures* (*Kathimerini*, January 31st, 1996).

Another important newspaper on the Greek market is *Eleftheros Typos*; it is a publication that focuses on the story (feature) and the headlines dominating are *negative* and printed with large letters, which make the front page attractive. This newspaper uses strong and accusative headlines and quantities or numbers to express the intensity of the problems presented. Thus, in its edition of February 22nd 1987, the title on the front page writes: *Desertion worth 700 billion! This is the price we will pay for Andreas' cowardice* (*Eleftheros Typos*, February 22nd, 1987). The article talks about the 300 million barrels worth 700 billion which represent the oil reserve in the eastern area of Thasos Island and which will be *sacrificed to the Turks* by the Greek Prime Minister. It is considered that the Turks launch clear and continuous threats by sending their research vessel *Sismik I* for oil prospection in the most sensitive area of the Aegean Sea continental shelf. More dramatic than other newspapers on the Greek market, the daily *Eleftheros Typos'* technique is to use strong to violent front page headlines to demonstrate the diachronic threat coming from Turkey.

Another technique used especially by the editors of *Eleftheros Typos* is to present negative declaration of Turkish high military officials to emphasize Greek government's lack of rapid response or inactivity. For example, on March 27th 1987 edition, the information about the Turkish threat is quite disturbing: it is said that Turkey is threatening to proceed with oil prospection in the Aegean and General Kenan Evren and other high military officials are taking control of the situation. These declarations are used in order to demonstrate that the information is objective and comes from both sides of the Aegean; the intention is to show that, in the end, the victory is neither Greek nor Turkish. The use of these declarations is harmful, as they are perceived by the readers as the official position of Turkey as a state and not as individual declarations. This assertion leads to stereotypes, as Turkey is seen as a country that provokes threats and is ready for conflict and war.

A detail observed in the publications we here analyze is the use of the name *Hora* for the Turkish research vessel that provoked the 1987 crisis, as it was used in the 1976 bilateral crisis for the same vessel.

It seems this name has become a stereotype in Greek-Turkish relations, as it underlines that the Turkish threat is continuous, stirs up old and negative memories and induces the readers the same mood as in the 1976 Aegean crisis, regardless the new circumstances. As a general rule for *Eleftheros Typos*, the events are exacerbated. Turkey seems to take advantage of the Greek's weakness and the *enemy's* victory is gained by the weaknesses of the *other*. As seen in other Greek newspapers of that period, it appears to be a dominant stereotype: the Turks are perceived as provocative, ready to attack and ready for a bilateral *bazaar* (negotiations) regarding the Aegean continental shelf issue, while the Greeks are considered as defenders of their sovereign rights and of the international law. Even if the public's reception is a "varied and messy experience" (McQuail 2009, p.398), these stereotypes are easily and widely absorbed in times of crisis.

Ta Nea is supportive of the Greek Government's decisions and criticizes the Opposition's bondage to the Americans. This critique comes naturally from the stereotyped wish to unite all national political ranges against the "common enemy" in moments of crisis. The editors promote the critique addressed to the Turks while self-criticism is missing. In those few cases that the Turks' opinion is made public, it happens only to promote the Greek opinion, by antithesis, as the Turkish arguments are always presented in a negative manner. More, the Turkish opinions lose their "weight" from the start, being displayed in a negative way and sometimes being connected to negative, extremist declarations of Turkish high military officials. This practice has unfortunate results on the readers, as selected fragments of declarations could carry a defamatory meaning.

The bilateral conflict is always presented in black and white: the Greek position is considered politically correct and pacifist, while the Turkish position is seen as warlike, violent and threatening. The stereotype of the "threat from the East" is overused; Turks are made responsible for causing the Aegean crisis, as Turkey seems to aim at becoming a regional power (which it already was). The quantitative analysis shows that the promotion of the Greek's position and arguments regarding the conflict only serves Greece's interests, as not promoting the position of the "other" part offers no alternative thinking and thus no other truth.

A striking headline is the one on March 31st, 1987 edition; *Ta Nea* writes: *Ozal gives in* (*Ta Nea*, March 31st, 1987) and the column is headed "In principle, he accepts Papandreou's proposal". The paper refers to Ozal's decision to accept the appeal to the International Court of Justice at The Hague, in order to solve the Aegean issue, but the headline induces the feeling of a supreme national victory (as seen in March 30th edition) upon the Turkish threat. The verb "to give in" (in Greek: ενδίδω) may be interpreted as humiliating for the Turks and overestimated for the Greeks. It is used in the context we presented above, that is that Turkey is always presented as a traditional foe. At this point we can conclude that this publication's choice of lead stories often reflects its socialist loyalties, i.e. to PASOK government. The way headlines or banner headlines are formulated indicates a display of populism, which is a quite usual characteristic for a large number of Greek newspapers. By its definition, the populism is a political attitude in favour of meeting the wishes of the people, even if that is detrimental to its real interests. In the spirit of this assertion, one may say that these headlines strengthen the tension between the two neighbouring countries instead of diffusing it, as reader's interest in front page lead stories is stronger compared to other stories.

The articles bring to light characteristics like patriotism, pride and sacrifice that keep the people unite and maintain the coherence of a state in times of danger. This is often observed in *Eleftherotypia* newspaper; its editors condemn the Opposition's attitude, as it is considered as damaging to the national interest. This is a usual stereotype for the government supportive newspapers, where any resistance and reluctance to the governmental decisions is a subversive element of a united nation. One can easily observe that the *rally 'round the flag* effect is present in Greece in times of crisis.

Stereotyping the Turks is business as usual. Stereotypes maintain and promote bilateral rivalry and don't give the *other* a chance to express or argue his position or view. Greece's position is presented as legal and compliant to international law, while Turkey's actions are considered illegal and dangerous. Greece is insisting on the common appeal to the International Court of Justice for the delimitation of the Aegean continental shelf, while Turkey is in favour of a dialogue. The *dialogue* requested by Ankara is considered as a bargain, a *bazaar*, an illegal action and has a negative impact on the bilateral relations. As the present crisis is compared to the one that emerged in the summer of 1976, the name of the notorious research vessel is constantly changing from *Sismik* to *Hora*, thus underlining the continuity of the Turkish threat in the Aegean. One can also observe that on the front page of certain editions Cyprus question is brought to present and this is a usual technique to point out the illegitimacy of Ankara's actions, as Cyprus still remains one unsolved issue.

Makedonia is the only newspaper we here analyze that has in general a neutral position towards the developments in the Greek-Turkish dispute. Although *Makedonia* is a high quality newspaper, published in Thessaloniki, stereotyping the Turks remains an important characteristic of this daily, but it not as obvious as in other publications. The editors underline Ankara's expansionist views: With his declarations, *Özal reveals once again his expansionist views. The Government says no dialogue can take place (Makedonia, February 4th, 1987)*. One can easily see that the editors of the daily *Makedonia* tend to focus on the *persons* (Özal, Papandreu, Mitsotakis or Turkish high military officials) and not on the *country*. It seems to be logic to mention certain politicians on the front page titles and articles, as the politicians decide on the foreign policy. But there is something that must be mentioned at this point: although certain Turkish politicians manage the decision making process in Turkey, stereotyping is intended for the Turkish people as a whole. Turkish policy is seen as the new-Ottomanism, deceitful, treacherous (in Greek: δόλια) because Turkey's dictatorship means violation of human rights, which is against all fundamental elements of Europe as a community. As seen in other publications analyzed in this article, Turkey's actions are seen as provocations, while Greece's are seen as defense actions and attempts of reaching a *détente*.

At a first glance, one can see that *Rizospastis*, the official instrument of the Greek Communist Party, is more concerned with stereotyping the third parties involved in the Greek-Turkish dispute rather than with stereotyping the Turks and that is an obvious phenomenon on the front page of this publication. The United States, NATO and Western Europe are blamed for the crises in the Aegean and for covering the Turkish claims, as deemed talking about the newspaper of the Communist Party. Turkey is considered the US guardian in the Eastern Mediterranean and thus Washington and NATO are backing Turkish actions while having their own interests in the region.

3. Conclusions

The Aegean crises of 1976, 1987 and 1996 ended before turning into major conflicts and the immediate consequences were good for the two people, as their leaders engaged themselves on the way of constructive dialogue and good neighboring.

Regarding the newspapers' position on the Greek-Turkish disputes, it is important mentioning that the stereotypes about the Turkish side can be found on the front page and this is a usual characteristic of the Greek newspapers' discourse in this period. The use of political cartoon on the front page is an often and unexpectedly strong example of stereotyping the other, being either Turk or, in some cases, American. The dialogue between the two states is considered harmful and is not promoted as it is seen as a betrayal because Turkey is regarded as Greece's *traditional* foe. Turkey's will to start a bilateral dialogue is considered suspicious and serves just the purpose of acceding to the EEC forum. As stated before, the newspapers promote only the Greek position and one can observe that one-sided argument is very

effective in reinforcing opinions in readers' perception. In the Greek press, the use of explicit opinions seems to be more persuasive than the implicit ones and these have effect on the minds of at least some of its readers.

Further research and analysis are required in order to compare it with other Greek daily newspapers of nationwide distribution.

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