Transforming Discourses of ‘Otherness’:
The Role of the Mass-Media in Greek-Turkish Relations

Elena Lazarou
Assistant Professor
Center of International Relations, CPDOC/FGV

elena.lazarou@fgv.br

Draft Paper prepared for the IPSA-ECPR Joint Conference:
“Whatever Happened to North-South?”
Sao Paulo, Brazil, February 16 – 19, 2011
Abstract

This paper examines the role of the media in transforming discourses of ‘otherness’ and as a consequence, influencing foreign policy decisions vis-à-vis states perceived as ‘Others’. The argument is that as an agent with the power to construct discourses of identity, the media hold the potential to re-construct perceptions of the ‘Other’, thus intensifying or transforming discourses of conflict. Adding to that the function of the press as a guide for the formulation of public opinion and, in turn, policy-makers’ decisions, through processes such as priming, agenda-setting and indexing (e.g., McCombs & Shaw; Entmann), it is proposed that the study of the ‘Other’ in the media is crucial in understanding developments in bilateral relations and foreign policy decisions in cases of conflict transformation (Diez 2002). The paper focuses on the case of the Greek press and its role in Greek-Turkish relations, a role described as that of formulating perceptions of ‘otherness’ (Hatzidimos, 1999 et al.) Through an analysis of perceptions of Turkey during ‘moments of crisis’, when discourses of identity are pronounced, the paper proposes that the transformation of ‘Othering’ in the media was crucial in the transformation of the idea of conflict in Greek foreign policy.
Introduction

Discourses of “Otherness” have – explicitly or implicitly – been used to support foreign policy directions and decisions in various geographical and chronological contexts. Some have argued that they do so by establishing a cause/effect relationship between identity and foreign policy while others, following the critical constructivist framework, have understood policy as a representational practice that secures and reproduces identities defined within the Self/Other context (eg. Rumelili, 2004). While the latter observation serves in explaining path dependency and continuity in foreign policy, it fails to explain foreign policy transformation and particularly the transformation of conflict as defined by Diez (2005), in whose definition “the way actors see themselves and relate to each other will have been transformed to such an extent that they will not resort to violent means, and ideally will change their identity so that conflict is fundamentally altered” (Diez et al. 2006: 565-6).

This paper argues that one essential factor in facilitating the process of this ideational and discursive transformation is communication, as represented, among other things, by the media. Using the case of the Greek-Turkish conflict transformation, it isolates the print media as a factor, and examines in detail the construction and deconstruction of discourses of otherness while relating them to two significant foreign policy developments which were critical in the course of bilateral relations and in their transformation from a condition of conflict to one of rapprochement: (i) The Imia/Kardak crisis of 1996 and its follow-up; (iii) The lift of the Greek veto on Turkish accession to the EU in 1999. The final section relates the evolution of discourses in the media to the foreign policy developments.

The media as “discourse transformers”

The idea that the media carry significant power to affect policy outcomes and, consequently, policy transformation is a fundamental assumption of media and communication studies which, more recently, has also been imported in constructivist studies of international relations. According to theories of the public sphere, the mass media are the institutionalized forum of debate, which serves as a central linkage between the public and the institutional structure. In this function, they are conveyors of information about issues and actors according to their professional norms and values. However, the media should not be regarded as merely serving other actors as a channel of communication, a forum for exchange, and a medium of self observation of society, but should also be seen as political actors in the public sphere that legitimately raise their own voice (Page, 1996). They do so in particular by
assigning relevance to issues for public debate, by “setting the agenda”\(^1\), and by expressing their own opinion.

Hudson and Martin (2010) summarize the discussion on the power of the media\(^2\), distinguishing between three different ways of understanding this power, namely as (1) agenda-setting, whereby the media affect policy by highlighting certain issues which become priorities and gain salience in the public debate (for example McCombs & Shaw, 1993); (2) framing, which refers to shaping the way in which events are transmitted and perceived (for example Entman, 1993); and (3) indexing, which suggests that journalists may “privilege some voices over others”, show preference to specific sources of opinion, and thus empower them in the shaping of dominant discourses (for example Bennet, 1990). Therefore, the authors conclude, “media power represents the capacity to produce a picture of the world outside which is accepted as true by public audiences” (Hudson & Martin, forthcoming). This idea, and particularly the concept of framing, suggests that the media hold the power to facilitate change by including new policies in the public agenda and legitimizing them by framing them in a positive context and privileging sources of authority which commend the changes. In this way, these policies become acceptable to the public audiences and, thus, possible options for the executive power, which ultimately relies on public consent in liberal democracies. Thus, within this context, the media may act as agents of change, by promoting new discourses, or, in the opposite case, as veto players, persisting on the reproduction of traditional and path-dependent ideas and discourses, and resisting to policy change.

National foreign policy is an ideal field for the study of these assumptions, as it is high in ideational content, closely related to discourses of national identity and national interests, and framed within a context of values and guiding principles which are embedded in a society. Therefore, for a foreign policy transformation to occur, the mobilization of the media as an agent of change, promoting a new perception of the world and the state’s interests and identity in it, may constitute a necessary precondition. In cases of conflict transformation, this “new perception” goes hand-in-hand with the transformation of discourse of otherness in the framing of the other party.

The role of agent mobilisation is central in social constructivist accounts which emphasise the importance of the human agent in constructing and reproducing social reality; it argues that these agents exist in interdependence with their social environment and the collectively

---


shared system of meanings within that. Thus, it considers a “mutual constitutiveness of agents and structures”, i.e. a bi-directional influence between the two (Adler & Barnett, 1998). Based on this hypothesis, it is possible to claim that collectively shared systems of meanings are susceptible to change through the effects of human agency, and also that the media, as an agent, can create, reproduce and change culture.

This reproduction of reality is consistent with Habermas’s theory of communicative action (1984), which considers communication as agency and suggests that participants in a discourse are open to persuasion by the better argument. This helps explain why foreign policy change (e.g. from a conflict-oriented foreign policy to a policy of rapprochement) can occur. To quote Keohane (2001:10), “actors’ interests, preferences and perceptions are subject to discursive challenges; human and social actors are prepared to change their views of the world if it is rationally proven to them that their interests lie elsewhere in a new given environment”. Consequently, if communication actors view the benefits offered by endorsing fewer discourses of ‘Otherness’ as greater than those resulting from persisting on traditional national discourse (e.g. in foreign policy), they may be persuaded to promote new discursive constructions as dominant, thus executing the role of an ‘agent of change’.

Thus, the ideas of persuasion and transformation are equally central to the understanding of the role of the media in the constructivist research agenda and, for the purposes of this paper, as actors in their own right in the reconstruction of the framing of the “Other” and the subsequent effects on the transformation of foreign policy and bilateral relations. The analysis in this paper will use the case of the Greek media to explore their role as agents in the reconfiguration of discourses on “Turkey’ Otherness”, and in the transformation of the Greek-Turkish relationship from conflict to rapprochement.

Greek-Turkish Relations and the Greek Press: The “Othering” of Turkey

Until recently the scholarly literature has concurred that by and large the Greek press has contributed to the perpetuation of the turbulent relationship between Greece and Turkey by emphasizing nationalism in the Greek public space and by representing Turkey as the ‘Other’, along with the negative connotations that this entails. Thus it has been argued that the mass media have played a significant role in the process of reproduction and reinforcement of ethnocentric and nationalist discourses (Ozgunes & Terzis 2000) and that the conflicts in the Aegean and in Cyprus may have been resolved a long time ago, had it not been for the consistent presentation of hostile images, prejudices and national stereotypes by the mass media (Giallourides 2001). Instead, nationalist patterns in the media have accentuated what Ozgunes & Terzis (2000) have referred to as oppositional metaphors, in the following categories:

(i) “Us” with the great civilization vs. “Them” with historical backwardness;

(ii) “Our” tolerance vs. “Their” nationalistic exaltation

(iii) “Us” the modern civilized society vs. “Them” the uncivilized

(iv) “Us” the giving/accepting vs. “Them” the receiving/frightening.

Particularly in times of conflict, these oppositional categories have guided the construction of the stereotypes of the “Other” in the media. The analysis of stereotypes has, in fact, been used as the main method to understand the way in which the media - in the wider sense - perform their role in Greek-Turkish relations (Hadjidimos 1999; Giallourides 2001; Millas 2001; Panagiotou 2003; Kostarella 2007; Ozkirimli & Sofos 2008). In these studies, there is a general consensus that the Greek mass media have served to reproduce the established stereotypes regarding Turkey, that is the stereotypes derived from history and literature, and have sometimes reformulated these stereotypes in order to match particular circumstances. In their conclusions it is observed that negative stereotypes of the Turks, which promote the abstract idea of Turkey as the ‘eternal enemy’, are abundant and constant across time: “This coverage works towards the continuation of the dispute, since it constructs a negative image of the ‘Other’” (Panagiotou 2003: 3). As the two countries have been historically posited as the ‘Other’ in their respective nationalist imaginaries, “engaged in parallel monologues in which each is seen as the ‘opposite’ to the survival of the other” (Ozkirimli & Sofos, 2008), the mobilisation of such feelings by the press brings life to the historically ingrained images and creates an environment susceptible to conflict. On the other hand, these deep-rooted
perceptions of Turkey are also seen to limit the press’s options to introduce varying discourses:

The public is prepared to embrace explanations dominated by stereotypes that have been long ingrained by institutions such as school, church and family. Therefore it is very difficult for the press to escape from this process and adopt new approaches (Kostarella, 2007: 30).

In order to comprehend the link between the ‘Turkish stereotype’ and Greek national identity, it is necessary to go back to the historical circumstances surrounding the creation of the Greek state, and the production of Greek nationalism. Greek national identity initially emerged from a “heterogeneous territorial movement” (Smith, 1983:219) aimed at achieving independence in the name of a new identity, which was wider than any existing group identities of the time. As in most of the post-Westphalian nationalisms, this identity was legitimised through its historical - ancient - precedent and the claim of continuity of the nation throughout time in spite of its fragmentation. In other words, the revolutionary movement of Greek independence presented itself as a coalition against a common enemy, the Ottomans (Kitromilides, 1990: 29). Consequently, when the first Greek state was established in 1828 after almost four centuries of Ottoman rule, the main purpose of the nation-state was to forge an ‘imagined community’ with cultural, religious and linguistic bonds (Veremis, 1998: 27). Hence, in the collective Greek consciousness, the Ottoman Empire, and, therefore, the Turkish state as its successor, had historically stood as the main visible obstacle to the perceived continuity of the Greek ethnos and obstructed the flourishing of Greek civilization after the fall of Constantinople. Thus, Ottomans, and later Turks, were constructed as the state’s principal ‘Other’.

The subsequent negative stereotypes of Turkey have particularly involved images of the Turks as (a) barbarian (often referred to as Asian) and inferior in terms of civilisation; (b) untrustworthy and not hesitating to go back on their word (c) fanatical, conservative, as well as fearful of progress and insecure against the West, and (d) anti-Christian and unholy tyrants (Millas 2001). Therefore, direct or indirect allusion to these representations in the contemporary mass media is perceived as detrimental for societal support for rapprochement. Focusing on the perpetuation of these images, the literature tends to attribute a rather negative role for the press in Greek-Turkish relations, and perceive the Greek-Turkish case as an example of “how media promote the oppositional schema of us versus them, when defining national ‘Others’” (Kostarella, 2007: 27), and thus perpetuate conflict. Negative stereotyping ultimately results in ‘hate speech’, defined as “a way of reporting or spreading opinion that is designed to enhance the national self in contrast to the ‘Other’” (Hadjidimos 1999) in the media in moments of tension, further aggravating conflict scenarios.
What appears to permeate the literature is a lack of exploration of the positive impact that the media can have as an agent of transformation. It can be argued that this one-sided approach is a result of the lack of comprehensive and balanced studies of the media in this function. Until recently, the overarching majority of studies have focused on the attitudes of the media in moments of crisis between the two states, the most obvious example being the abundance of scholarly articles on the media discourse surrounding the Imia/Kardak crisis (for example Giallourides 2001; Panagiotou 2003). Given that nationalist discourses become more pronounced in moments of perceived crisis, studies which are limited to timeframes involving episodes of conflict are bound to discover discursive manifestations of pronounced nationalism.

The emergence of a new research agenda, guided by the assumption that non-governmental actors, including the media, have acted as promoters of the post-1999 rapprochement, has begun to reverse these potentially erroneous findings. Scholars who have engaged consistently with the image of Turkey in Greece, analysing the media in times of both turmoil and stability in bilateral relations, detect a shift towards abating the negative references to the ‘Other’ (Ker-Lindsay 2000; Millas, 2001; Rumelili, 2005). In fact, it has been observed that, while the Greek media had traditionally legitimated hardliner policies against the ‘Other’, since the earthquakes in 1999 their influence has turned toward a progressive support of rapprochement (Rumelili 2005). However, the tendency to focus on the reporting of the 1999 earthquakes in order to deduce wider conclusions regarding the stance of the press errs on the opposite side of the studies that have focused on the Imia events. The climate of compassion and friendship brought about by natural disaster may have enabled the media and the public to overlook the historical disputes and the relevant stereotypes, but only temporarily. In order to assess whether a more permanent discursive change has taken place there is a need for a more in-depth analysis of discourses and narratives on Turkey in the mass media across time and events.

Attempting to contribute to this new wave, this paper examines the evolution of the ‘Turkey/Other’ discourse in the Greek press at selected timeframes throughout the crucial period from 1997 to 2000 when Greek foreign policy towards Turkey departed from a “conflict” scenario. The analysis of discourses and presentation of narratives is based on empirical work which begins roughly from the 1996 Imia crisis, the most critical near-war incident between Greece and Turkey in the 1990s, and ends a few months after the December 1999 decision of the Greek government to support Turkey’s EU candidacy. The newspapers examined are the leading dailies, *Ta Nea*, *Eleftherotypia*, *Kathimerini* and *To Vima*, which accounted for the majority of readership in the periods examined.\(^4\)

---

\(^4\) Statistics drawn from the Greek Daily Newspaper Union databases (www.eihea.gr) and the European Journalism Centre.
Turkey as the archetypal “Other”: The Imia/Kardak crisis and the European Council of Luxembourg (1996-1997)

Following the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Eastern block, Greek foreign policy in the 1990s focused intensely on enhancing the ties between its region, the Balkans and Southeastern Europe, and the European Union, of which it constituted a member since 1981. Turkey, as the archetypal “Other”, constituted an exception to the general attitude of bringing Europe to the region. Nowhere was this most pronounced in political and public discourse, as well as in the media, as in the time surrounding and following the events of the Imia/Kardak crisis in 1995/1996. The events, briefly summarized, started on 25th December 1995, when a Turkish cargo boat run aground on a group of rocks of the Eastern Aegean which fall within the disputed waters between Greece and Turkey and are known as Imia in the former and Kardak in the latter. The Greek authorities had offered to assist, but the Turkish captain had refused their assistance claiming that the accident had occurred in Turkish territorial waters. After a series of negotiations, a Greek tug boat had towed the Turkish boat to the Turkish port of Gulluk. Following the incident, the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in a verbal address to the Greek embassy in Ankara, had asserted for the first time that the islets constituted part of Turkish territory. This led to a further exchange of verbal and written addresses, wherein the Greek side maintained that the islets were granted to Greece by virtue of a bilateral agreement between Italy and Greece in 19325.

Soon after, in January 1996, reporters of the Turkish newspaper Hurriyet brought down the Greek flag that the mayor of the nearby island of Kalymnos had raised on the Imia islets and replaced it with the Turkish one. Following that, Greek soldiers brought back the Greek flag, an action which Turkish Prime Minister at the time, Tansu Ciller, pronounced a casus belli. Greek and Turkish warships began gathering in the disputed area and, on the 31st of January 1996, Turkish soldiers landed on one of the two islets. The crisis was resolved with the intervention of the USA, with Bill Clinton urging both sides to return to the status quo ante (Kourkoulas, 1997). In spite of the eventual prevention of armed conflict, the event accentuated the conflict and rivalry between the two parties, which manifested itself in other field, such as the diplomatic one. Most characteristically, the conflict played out in the negotiations for Turkey’s accession to the European Union (EU) in the European Council of Luxembourg in 1997. While expectation had been that the EU would formally accept Turkey

as a candidate for membership, the Greek veto played a decisive role in denying Turkey candidate status. As will be shown in the next paragraphs, the media sought to justify the veto by “Othering” Turkey, not only towards Greece but also in relation to Europe, based on its comportment throughout the Imia/Kardak crisis.

The “Imia/Kardak crisis” led to Greece and Turkey being confronted with the possibility of armed conflict, became the focal point of media attention for several months. In fact, it has been argued that the Imia crisis could have been avoided had it not become so public. The sudden involvement of the media boosted an otherwise minor dispute between Greek and Turkish Ministries. The inflammatory role of the media in dramatizing the crisis was later condemned by a number of prominent politicians.

Maintaining the narratives which have traditionally characterised Greek-Turkish relations, the press framed bilateral relations within a discourse of conflict and animosity, suggesting that war between the two countries should not be treated as an unlikely event and blaming it on what was perceived as traditionally hostile and imperialistic Turkish ambitions reflected in Turkish foreign policy. Reports were accompanied by apprehension about Turkish imperialism which reflected clearly the stereotypical assumptions about the Turkish “Other” such as the following commentary in To Vima:

Only those unaware of history cannot see, or pretend that they do not see where Ankara ‘is going’ with all of this: simply, it aims to reverse everything, which will enable it to revive the infamous Ottoman Empire, […] The ‘homme malade’ as the Europeans referred to the Sultan’s Empire, has now become the most dangerous source of infection for the whole Mediterranean and Middle Eastern area (To Vima 21/12/1997).

The discursive construction of Turkey as Europe’s ‘Other’ permeated the Greek press which emphasized that Turkish policy making, societal values and dominant attitudes clashed with the basic premises of what was understood as ‘European’. This idea was promoted by the consistent publication of statements by politicians and experts who spoke of “Turkey’s insistence on disregarding all the values which form the contemporary European civilization” (To Vima 21/12/1997) and emphasized the existence of a wide-spread European belief that Turkey was not European or, as Ta Nea phrased it, “a perception on a Pan-European level that this state does not belong to the core of Europe” (21/12/1997).

This ‘labelling’ of Turkey was often attributed to its refusal to endorse the ideas and principles on which the EU had based its construction. As argued in Ta Nea, “while many

---

6 For more on the notion of Turkey as Europe’s ‘Other’ see Diez, T. (2004); Neumann, I. (1996); Neumann, I. (1999); Triandafyllidou, A. (1998); Robins, K. (1996)
EU states wish for closer ties with Turkey, they are however particularly annoyed with Ankara’s denial to take a step back and to accept principles that are taken for granted in any civilized western country” (Ta Nea 11/12/1997). In this context, the view held by the press was that becoming part of Europe would be up to the Turkish state itself. Repeating the words of the Greek Commissioner, To Vima explained:

It is up to Turkey itself to prove with actions that it is interested in a close relationship with the EU, to actively prove that it respects the basic values of European society. Turkey must realize that good neighbourly relations and cooperation with Greece are a fundamental condition for the upgrading of its relations with the EU (To Vima 14/12/1997; A20).

The suggestion deriving from this statement was that better relations with Greece, would make Turkey more ‘European’ and vice-versa, that a more European Turkey would pursue rapprochement. Consistent with this view was the papers’ criticism of Ankara’s manner of rejection of the Luxembourg Conclusions: “in essence what Ankara rejected was not the stabilization of its relations with Athens on the basis of Greek terms, but the acceptance of the general principles which guide the European states” (To Vima 21/12/1997).

The picture painted of Turkey’s disregard of international law and its inability to cooperate was accompanied by a diametrically opposed image of Greece as a crusader fighting for international principles, cooperation and peace. This was illustrated, for example, in a To Vima interview which quoted Commissioner Christos Papoutsis saying that “Greece must continue to demand consistently that Turkey respect International Law […] We must make clear that Greece is interested in the creation of relations of peace, stability and cooperation in the whole region” (To Vima 14/12/1997: A20).

While this approach to Turkey’s ‘Otherness’ left open the possibility of change towards a more European Turkey, elsewhere in the papers more essentialist arguments for Turkey’s ideational misfit with the EU found their way into the public discourse. These arguments drew on history, but also on the Islamist and Kemalist traditions of the Turkish state, in order to accentuate the divide marked by the Aegean and disperse the idea that Turkey held a rightful place among European states. Indicatively, soon after the European Council, one op-ed argued that:

Neither the Ottoman Empire previously, nor Turkey during the twentieth century has been accepted by the West as ‘west’. They do not belong in what Voltaire called the ‘Big Democracy’[…] For Westerners Turkey is a foreign, ‘different’ place, a culturally, socially, institutionally, but also geographically ‘exotic’ place (Ta Nea 19/12/1997).
Turkish Islam also featured in the discussion of the country’s western identity in the Greek papers, which commented on the clash between “the Muslim tradition and the western way of life that many in Turkey have adopted” (*Ta Nea* 31/12/1997) as a problematic situation. The antagonism between Islamists and the military establishment in Turkish politics was heavily criticized as a non-European phenomenon and was used to argue that Turkey did not resemble a European state guided by the principles embedded in the EU Treaties: “They have generals, they have the National Security Council and they have Islamists” (*Eleftherotypia* 24/12/1997) was the general idea repeated often. *Eleftherotypia* spoke of a Turkish “inability to adapt to western standards” (22/12/1997). Further commentary concluded that “Turkey cannot change its organisational ‘philosophy’ and the way the state is run without serious and radical social, political and economic reforms; only then would there be a completely ‘European Turkey’” (*Kathimerini* 15/12/1997). On a less optimistic note, *Eleftherotypia* suggested that even the strengthening of ties with Europe would not prevent Islam from threatening Turkey, which justified “Huntington’s view that Turkey [would] remain a divided country” (*Eleftherotypia* 22/12/1997).

Finally, the human rights issue also featured prominently in the discourse on an uncivilized, non-Western Turkey. The striking antithesis between the principles and values that Europe was considered to represent and the violation of those principles in Turkey was used to accentuate the perceived ‘Otherness’. The revelation of the methods of torture used against Turkish leftwing journalists in *Ta Nea* was accompanied by the comment “at the same time that Turkey claims a place in Europe, the journalist Ilan Karatepe reveals: in the Turkish prisons they are crucifying people!” (*Ta Nea* 23/12/1997). The conclusion, once again, repeated this exclamation from another paper: “How in the world can the medieval regime of Ankara ask to be accepted in the club of well-mannered Europeans?” (*Ta Nea* 20/12/1997). A “military establishment which, more and more openly, holds the power” (*Kathimerini* 29/12/1997), “an increasing wave of religious fanaticism” (*Ta Nea* 30/12/1997) and an
unstable political, economic and social situation were recurring phrases which captured the construction of Turkey as an ‘Other’ to the idealised notion of Europe.

The paper also reported that Turkey was engaging in “intensive diplomatic efforts to show a better face to the outside world” (Ta Nea 3/12/1997) but the phrasing suggested that the effort was hypocritical, as did another commentary a few weeks later, where, using stronger language, the author exclaimed:

How can a country where there is no freedom of expression give any promises for improvement on the human rights front? There is no respect for ethnic minorities, with the continuing genocide of the Kurds inside and outside of Turkish soil. (And then they expect them to apologize for slaughtering the Greeks of Pontos, the Greeks of Constantinople and the Armenians, as if they were a civilized people). (Ta Nea 20/12/1997, bold in original).

With these discourse in place, the prospect of a dialogue between the two countries and in general policies to diffuse the conflict were pushed out from the dominant discourse as not constituting a policy option when dealing with ‘an unreliable’, ‘expansionist, ‘brutal’ Other (Panagiotou 2003). Nor, with such strong Othering in place within the public sphere, could any government succeed in introducing a new foreign policy paradigm more prone towards rapprochement in relations with Turkey.

**The “Other” Reconsidered : Opening the Door to the EU (1999)**

As a follow-up to the process launched in Luxembourg, the European Council met in Helsinki in December 1999 to discuss enlargement within the wider scope of the European Union’ future. Following intense debate regarding the approach that the Luxembourg Council had taken towards the Turkish accession, the EU overcame the long-lasting ambiguity over the Turkish case. While the depiction of Greek-Turkish relations in the Greek press remained rather consistent in the years between the Luxembourg and Helsinki European Councils, it is, however, possible to discern some elements of a more positive discourse on Turkey in the 1999 press in contrast to that of 1997. This change was manifested through the endorsement of the position that, by withdrawing the veto on Turkish accession and engaging Turkey in pre-accession negotiations, Greece would open up the path for stability, development and peace in the Balkans. In contrast to the narrative cultivated in the previous years, this proposition was as groundbreaking as the Foreign Ministry’s policy change itself. However, it ran the risk of not appealing to public opinion and appearing unconvincing when juxtaposed to centuries of cultivation of the narrative of Turkey as an enemy and the “Other”.
One mechanism employed by the press to moderate this problem was to transform Greek perceptions of Turkish intentions, with a particular focus on Turkish politicians. Thus, the papers highlighted the positive efforts of certain Turkish government officials, and particularly of the Turkish Foreign Minister, as well of particular Turkish milieus which Eleftherotypia described as “the Europhile powers of the neighbour and all those who wish to escape the control of the armed forces and to build a democracy, as we know it in the West” (13/12/1999). This acknowledgement was captured in the words of the Greek Foreign Minister which were reported in most Greek news sources in the week before the European Council: “If things go well in Helsinki and Turkey becomes a candidate state, this will be to a great extent thanks to Turkey’s Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ismael Cem” (Ta Nea 08/12/1999). Eleftherotypia described Cem’s upcoming visit to Athens as initiating a ‘new era’ (13/12/1999) and spoke of a ‘historic turn’ (12/12/1999) in the Turkish establishment, while To Vima welcomed Papandreou’s statement that “whatever the result of Helsinki, I hope that we will continue in this new course, this new opportunity, the new climate that has evolved between the two countries” (To Vima 08/12/1999) and Kathimerini made reference to ‘new horizons’ opening up for the country after Helsinki (Kathimerini 12/12/1999).

As a consequence of this shift, the war-related narrative of Turkey as the archetypal ‘Enemy’ changed fundamentally from 1997 to 1999 and the idea that Turkey could attack at any minute was slowly abandoned. Nevertheless, it would be naïve to suggest that suspicion of Turkish intentions evaporated from the Greek media discourse. It would perhaps be safer to claim that such attitudes were less pronounced, or that they were addressed alongside the suggestion that through the EU Turkey’s ‘comportment’ could be controlled. Thus, conditionality acquired increased significance. Ta Nea, for example, emphasized that “the inflexible stance held by Turkey on the issue of bilateral relations with Greece […] would] be maintained with greater stubbornness in case the EU [recognised] Turkey as a candidate state for accession without first witnessing the realization of the conditions that have been set” (Ta Nea 04/12/1999). These conditions referred to the criteria agreed upon by the European Council in Copenhagen and Luxembourg7, but also to the demands that Greece was about to put forth in the Helsinki Council in exchange for the withdrawal of its veto, namely agreeing on a specific roadmap for Turkish accession, getting the candidate states to recognize the jurisdiction of the ICJ in bilateral disputes (so as to take the matter of the Aegean to that

---

7 The Copenhagen Criteria and excerpts from the Luxembourg Conclusions were repeatedly cited in the press, even without commentary, in way of a reminder of what the collective EU stance was on the Turkish issue. All four major dailies published the criteria in one form or another on the weekend of the 11th and 12th December 1999.
level), and securing Cypriot accession without the prior resolution of the Cyprus problem as a precondition.

In spite of the more positive climate, the persecution of PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan and the events following his flight had a strong impact on the negative perception of the Turkish state and offered the Greek press a chance to highlight the contradictions between conditions in Turkey and in Europe, particularly in the area of human and minority rights. Consequently, the Kurdish issue became an important part of the discourse on Turkey as the ‘Other’, but in a more ‘EU-specific context’ this time. Turkey’s stance towards the Kurdish minority was treated as an indication of Turkey’s inability to comply with EU norms, as well as with the legal demands of the European Court of Human Rights not to execute the PKK leader. It was also framed as an incompatibility of principles and values between Turkey and Europe.

While the human rights issue received particular attention, due to the recent events surrounding the Ocalan ‘fiasco’, other narratives on Turkey’s ‘Otherness’, such as religion, were noticeably absent in the 1999 press, particularly when compared to two years earlier. This observation suggests that the acceptance of Turkey as a potential EU member on the state-level was - to an extent - reflected in the public communicative discourses in the mass media.

Consistently with earlier narratives, Turkey continued to be depicted as lacking respect towards the international and European legal systems. The view of Turkey communicated through the Greek press was that of a state refusing to accept the norms governing the EU and its relations with potential candidate states. While other applicant and candidate states were portrayed in a constant effort to comply with the EU criteria and to adapt their internal and external policies to what was considered ‘EU standard’, thus becoming players in a game set out and refereed by the EU, Turkey was depicted as wanting to enforce its own rules by pursuing a strategy of threats, a strategy that it had consistently followed in its relations with Greece. The words ‘threat’ and ‘blackmail’ found their way into the discussion on the Helsinki negotiations frequently, as in Ta Nea, which reported that:

The spirit of … civilised negotiations within the EU is now being threatened by Ankara. The Turkish President Suleyman Demirel in his crudest blackmail up to now warned that ‘if Greece adopts a negative position [in Helsinki], the current climate of rapprochement will come to an end and our relations will be characterised by tension (Ta Nea 07/12/1999: 5).

By suggesting that both Europe and Greece constituted recipients of Turkey’s threats and disrespect, the Greek media constructed two mutually reinforcing narratives: on the one hand,
the conflict was represented as a European rather than a bilateral one; on the other, the ‘Us’ (Europe) vs. ‘Them’ (Turkey) idea was accentuated, depicting Turkey as incompatible with the EU ‘way of doing things’.

In spite of this persistence, Greek media discourses surrounding Turkey’s course towards accession in the EU up to 2005 when accession negotiations were officially opened, have been characterised by an increasing appreciation of Turkey’s effort to transform, suggesting that “Otherness” can also be used as the basis of discourses of rapprochement when discussed within a context of effort for mutual understanding. Such an approach, should it permeate the public sphere, prepares the ground for subtle, gradual policy change as has been the case with Greece and Turkey. In this sense, media is an important component which ‘foreign policy decision-makers take into considerations as they develop their policies’ (Naveh 2002:2) since it both constrains leaders and officials yet provides them with opportunities to advance their goals (Gilboa 2002).

It is, therefore, possible to argue that the brief overview of the Greek case on which this paper is based, indicates that the Greek press has acted as a mediator for new foreign policy discourses towards Turkey gradually after 1997. Traditional attitudes towards Turkey in the Greek press have been consistent with the construction of the ‘Turk’ as the ‘Other’, and were therefore in contrast with the official discourses of rapprochement adopted gradually through the reorientation of Greek foreign policy in the period studied here. In spite of obvious inertia due to longstanding foreign policy path-dependency based on the perception of Turkey as a threat, the transformation of the discourse in the press is discernible. It corroborates the hypothesis that the media, as agents of discourse transformation with the ability to bring about change in perceptions and ideas, carry the power to facilitate or hinder conflict transformation discourses by either promoting traditional or alternative identity and policy paradigms. Had the press continued to promote the representation of Turkey as an enemy as strongly as before, and to withhold narratives of rapprochement the evolution of Greek foreign policy towards Turkey would probably present us with a very different picture.
References


Rumelili, B. (2005). ‘Civil Society and the Europeanization of Greek-Turkish Cooperation’. *South European Society and Politics*, 10(1), 43-54

Rumelili, B. 'Constructing Identity and Relating to Difference: Understanding EU's Mode of Differentiation' Review of International Studies, 30 (Jan 2004),


Newspaper Articles:

Eleftherotypia: 01-31/12/1997 & 01-31/12/1999 & 01-30/06/2003

Kathimerini: 01-31/12/1997 & 01-31/12/1999 & 01-30/06/2003

Ta Nea: 01-31/12/1997 & 01-31/12/1999 & 01-30/06/2003

To Vima: 01-31/12/1997 & 01-31/12/1999 & 01-30/06/2003