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**The Role of Media in the Imia/Kardak Crisis: The Importance of  
Media Influence and Its Limitations?**

Athanasios Manis

London School of Economics, UK

## ABSTRACT:

On the 31<sup>st</sup> of January 1996, Greece and Turkey came very close to launch a war due to their disagreement on the status of two uninhabited rocks in the Aegean Sea. Although there were significant differences between the two countries in many issues, including the Aegean, an escalation of the dispute over the Imia/Kardak rocks cannot be solely explained as a result of these. New actors, such as media, played a crucial role in the creation of a suffocating domestic political environment in both countries, in which the weak governments of that period had to prove to their respective audience that they were true guardians of national interests and pride. However, as this paper argues, Media did not fabricate the crisis from a zero point, even if they had an active role into bringing the two countries on the brink of war.

As the title suggests, the main question of concern in this paper is the importance of the media influence on the Imia/Kardak crisis and its limitations. The answer to this question is difficult, since states have a crucial role in the creation of the pre-existed political and historical context. In addition, the interests of both agents, states and media, simultaneously run parallel to each other and intermingle. Yet, this paper maintains that the governments would not participate in a military escalation of the dispute at that time without the involvement of the media. Conversely, the media would not exacerbate the dispute if they were not to operate within the general political atmosphere of Greek-Turkish relations; all the more because the media often went beyond its role in reporting the news by directly intervening in the developments of the disagreement.

# 1. Introduction

It is widely acknowledged nowadays that media play an important role in the formation of state policies along the traditional elements of state power, such as the executive, the legislature and the judiciary. The technological advancement in media sector during the last decades as well as the third wave of democratisation has rendered media an appealing power of influence on public opinions, and, by extension, on the traditional elements of state power. However, the influence is not only top-down, but also bottom-up, especially if one considers that a number of private media exists along a small number of state media. Private media following the rule of market have to be tuned to the expectations of their client-public opinion. In this case, media act as a conduit of public opinions' ideas, sentiments and expectations.

In order to test media's influence on the domain of politics, foreign policy has been selected as the domain where media influence has the least likely effects. Considering the fact that state officials perceive the implementation of foreign policy as prerogative of traditional elements of state power, such as the executive and the legislature, a case study in which media play a crucial role in comparison with past events will shed light on the extent that media influence decisions of foreign policy, as well as on the circumstances under which influence takes place. A good case study to that end is the Imia/Kardak crisis between Greece and Turkey.

The Imia/Kardak crisis erupted in 1996 and was one among many that characterise Greek-Turkish relations during the last fifty years, such as in Cyprus in 1963 and 1974, and in the Aegean Sea in 1976 and 1987.<sup>1</sup> If one opens a Greek or Turkish book of history or a book on Greek-Turkish relations<sup>2</sup>, it is easy to understand the degree to which hostility and competition existed -at least until 1999<sup>3</sup>- at a state level, not to mention at a societal one<sup>4</sup>, between the two neighbouring countries. Therefore, one could ask what an analysis of the Imia/Kardak<sup>5</sup> crisis might add to the understanding of the Greek-Turkish relations, given

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<sup>1</sup> More background regarding these two crises in the Aegean in: Athanasopoulos Haralambos, *Greece, Turkey and the Aegean Sea, A Case Study in International Law*, McFarland and Company, Inc. Publishers, U.S., 2001, pp. 46-49.

<sup>2</sup> More background for history books of both countries in: Hercules Millas, *Ikones Ellinon kai Tourkon, Sholika Vivilia, Istoriografia, Logotehnia kai Ethnika Stereotipa*, Alexandria publications, Athens, 2001, pp. 85-129, 301-327. A survey of the University of Thessaloniki referring to how the Greek students see the Turks: Panagiota Bitsika, "Pos vlepoun oi mathites tous Tourkous" reportage published in BHMA newspaper, 09.12.2007, p. A54 on [http://tovima.dolnet.gr/print\\_article.php?e=B&f=13438&m=A54&aa=1](http://tovima.dolnet.gr/print_article.php?e=B&f=13438&m=A54&aa=1), accessed 21.07.2007. Books referring to the disputes: Athanasopoulos Haralambos, op. cit., pp. 5-13 and Faruk Sönmezoğlu (ed.), *Türk Dış Politikasının Analizi*, DER publications, Istanbul, 2001, pp. 253- 320.

<sup>3</sup> In 1999 at the European Helsinki Summit, Turkey was designated as a candidate member of the European Union with the consent of all European members including Greece and so a first step was made for the improvement of their relations at a political level.

<sup>4</sup> Clogg argues: "...even if a rapprochement between two governments is achieved, it would be a much more difficult and arduous process to overcome the mistrust between two peoples, mutual stereotypes and fears that are fundamental for existing confrontation." As quoted in Mustafa Aydın, *Contemporary Turkish-Greek Relations: Constraints and Opportunities*, in Mustafa Aydın and Kostas Ifantis (eds.), *Turkish-Greek Relations, The Security Dilemma in the Aegean*, Routledge, London, 2004, pp. 23-24.

<sup>5</sup> Imia and Kardak is the name that is used in Greek and in Turkish respectively for a set of two small uninhabited islets situated 6 miles off the coasts of the Greek island Kalymnos and 3.5 miles off the Turkish coasts. Regarding the names see Krateros Ioannou -Anastasia Strati, *Dikaio tis Thalassas*, second edition, Sakkoulas publications, Athens-Komotini, 2000, p. 486.

mutual misperceptions and conflicting interests, which have created great antagonism between the two countries, and brought them to the verge of war several times.

One possible reason for further analysis of the Imia/Kardak dispute, apart from the fact that the crisis added an “unknown” until then dispute to the Aegean problem or problems<sup>6</sup> as far as the *status quo* of islets and rocks is concerned, is the role that media played as a distinctive actor in both countries, by competing in or contributing to the states’ attempts to implement their respective foreign policies. Thus, an examination of this case will give us the opportunity to assess the role that media played in the conduct of Greek and Turkish foreign policy during this particular event, and subsequently to draw some conclusions concerning the interrelation of foreign policy and media.

At first glance, the crisis could be divided into two parts, although both parts are interrelated. In the first part, the vessel accident happens, the secret exchange of verbal notes follows, in which the Greek-Turkish disagreement over the status of Imia/Kardak rocks is expressed, and finally the freeze of the dispute for “unknown” time evolves, while in the second part, media bring the whole problem to the forefront, they actively promote tension, aggravation of the difference follows, the two countries are on the brink of war, and finally American diplomatic intervention comes up and disengagement of both countries from the crisis occurs.<sup>7</sup>

## 2. The Imia/Kardak Crisis as a Media Made Crisis

### 2.1 In What Ways Do Media Influence the State Foreign Policy?

During the last century, many analyses based on empirical observation and scientific investigation have been written about the influence of media on peoples’ thinking, especially after the wide use of television in western countries. Generally speaking, there were periods of time when the media effects were exaggerated, i.e. after the end of the First World War and afterwards till the end of the Second World War, when the political propaganda had triumphed, and periods during which researchers described media as having very limited powers of persuasion, i.e. in the 1950s and the 1960s.<sup>8</sup> Finally, there is another period starting

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<sup>6</sup> The Greek side regards the demarcation of the Continental shelf as the only controversy that both countries have to negotiate for, while Turkey proclaims that this is not the only one claiming that the extension of territorial waters, the airspace limits of 10 nautical miles, the FIR (Flight Information Region) and the demilitarisation of the eastern Aegean Islands are also part of the Aegean dispute. See Şule Kut , *Türk Dış Politikasında Ege Sorunu* in Faruk Sönmezoglu (ed.), op. cit., p. 253. Also, Mehmet Ali Birand, *Türk-Yunan Sorunları Çözülmez...* in Semih Vaner (ed.), *Türk-Yunan Uyuşmazlığı*, Metis publications, Istanbul, 1990, p. 11. As well as in: Stelios Perrakis, *Oi Ellinoturkikes dienexeis sto Aigaio, to plaisio dieuthetisis tous kai i prooptiki tou Diethnous Dikastririou* in Stelios Perrakis (ed.), *Aigaio, Exelixis kai prooptikes epilisis ton ellinoturkikon dienexeon*, N. Sakkoulas publications, Athens-Komotini, 2003, pp. 128-129.

<sup>7</sup> For the description of the events the following sources are used: Kourkoulas Alkis, *Imia, Kritiki Prosegisi tou Tourkikou Paragonta*, Sideris I. publications, Athens, 1998, pp. 27-56. Krateros Ioannou-Anastasia Strati, op. cit., pp. 490-492. Katharina Hadjidimos, *The Role of the Media in Greek-Turkish Relations- Co-production of a TV programme window by Greek and Turkish Journalists*, Robert Bosch Stiftungskolleg für Internationale Aufgaben Programmjahr 1998-1999, pp. 8-9, on <http://www.greekhelsinki.gr/pdf/Greek-Turkish-Media.PDF> , accessed 12.07.2007. Şule Kut, *Türk Dış Politikasında Ege Sorunu* in Faruk Sönmezoglu (ed.), op. cit., p. 259.

<sup>8</sup> The “magic bullet theory” refers to the first period and the “limited effects theory” to the latter. See more in Jian-Hua Jonathan Zhu and Deborah Blood, *Media Agenda-Setting Theory: Review of a 25-Year Research Tradition*, City University of Hong Kong, Vol. 8, spring 1996, pp. 105-107. On Hong Kong Journals Online,

from early 1960s during which scholars took a very cautious approach to the results of the two aforementioned ones supporting the happy medium by accepting small effects, while at the same time methods had to be more precise and additional factors regarding the real ability of media to influence were taken into account.<sup>9</sup> This discourse to define the role of media within societies is crucial and continues to be debated in the light of new empirical observations and scientific research.

Before any analysis about the influence of media on foreign policy is made, it would be useful to clarify what is meant by the word “influence” in the following paragraphs. Influence is the ability of the medium to corroborate or change the degree of interest or the perception of individuals over a specific issue according to the intended purpose of it (medium).

As far as foreign policy is concerned, there are no specific theories which focus exclusively on the influence of media on it. Yet foreign policy can be considered as part of politics with its own specificities and therefore important theories, such as the “agenda-setting” and the “agenda of attributes” can help in assessing the role of the Greek-Turkish media in the crisis. In this section, a theoretical framework is constructed in order to assess the role of media as a key factor in the development of the crisis retrospectively.

As it is well known, the conventional role of media in democracy is to inform the citizens about a variety of issues and it is the same conventional role that gives the medium the “power” to influence the political life of a country through their complex relation with citizens, who are theoretically true holders of the political power. In addition, media often play an important role in providing information such that they themselves become a symbolic forum of discussion. Accordingly, the media define the basic characteristics of public issues, but what circumstances are created for this dynamic to occur?

More specifically, in 1972 the Chapel Hill study carried out by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw inaugurated a new era in the field of studying media influence. These two researchers introduced the idea of “agenda-setting” through a survey of the U.S. presidential election in 1968 which revealed that there is a connection at a first stage between the political issues emphasized in the news media and what the voters thought to be the central issues in that election.<sup>10</sup> In other words, it was proven that consistent publicity of an issue can draw significant social attention to it.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, editors and broadcasters have the ability under specific circumstances to create a “pseudo environment”, as Lipmann, a journalist and scholar of the 1920s had called it, where social reality is whatever the media consider crucial and to be discussed by society. As Bernard Cohen put it in 1963, “the press may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about.”<sup>12</sup>

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<http://sunz1.lib.hku.hk/hk/hkjo/accept.jsp> , accessed on 12.06.2007. Also, for more background regarding these two periods see Denis McQuail, *The Influence and Effects of Mass Media*, in James Curran, Michael Gurevitch, Janet Woollacott, John Marriott, Carrie Roberts (eds.), *Mass Communication and Society*, Edward Arnold in association with the Open University Press, London, 1989, pp. 72-74.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., pp. 73-74.

<sup>10</sup> Maxwell E. McCombs and Donald L. Shaw, *The Agenda-Setting Function of the Press*, in Doris A. Graber (ed.), *Media Power in Politics*, CQ Press, second edition, Washington, D.C., 1990, p. 76.

<sup>11</sup> More about the empirical evidence of the agenda-setting see Ibid., pp. 76-78.

<sup>12</sup> University of Twente, *Agenda Setting Theory*, Netherlands, on [http://www.tcw.utwente.nl/theorieenoverzicht/Theory%20clusters/Mass%20Media/Agenda-Setting\\_Theory.doc/](http://www.tcw.utwente.nl/theorieenoverzicht/Theory%20clusters/Mass%20Media/Agenda-Setting_Theory.doc/) , accessed 04.09.2007.

In addition, Lipmann himself had pointed (1922) in one of his articles about the press that “only at these points where social conditions take recognizable and measurable shape do the body of truth and the body of news coincide.”<sup>13</sup> He believed that the press emphasizes parts of real life that are interesting for various reasons, such as the finite ability of it to conduct investigations and to present them to the public as well as the press’s need to make profit, and the same happens with political issues and international news.<sup>14</sup>

In 2002, McCombs argued that media not only define the agenda of issues that will be debated more or less in the grass-roots, but also our understanding and perspective of the topics in the news.<sup>15</sup> The main idea is that in subjects that are presented by media, some attributes are highlighted more while others remain in obscurity. Hence, the idea of the “agenda setting” was supplemented with the idea of the “agenda of attributes”.<sup>16</sup>

Of course, there are factors which determine the degree of applicability of these two ideas. The theory which explains fluctuations in the degree of media influence is the “contingent theory”.<sup>17</sup> According to this theory, there are three sets of contingent conditions, i.e. audiences, issues and media characteristics.<sup>18</sup>

Starting with the audience characteristics, the need for orientation is the factor which makes the audience to seek more information from the media. The theory maintains that the stronger the need for orientation, the more powerful the effects of the “agenda-setting” and, at a later stage, the effects emerging from “the agenda of attributes”. However, the need for orientation varies from individual to individual and it is defined by two components, relevance and uncertainty.<sup>19</sup> Relevance has to do with the degree of interest of individuals in a matter at hand. If the individuals are highly interested in and their uncertainty, which concerns the degree of their knowledge on a specific issue, is also high, then the need for orientation is high as well and therefore their susceptibility to news media is greater. More specifically, relevance concerns the effects of the “agenda-setting”, as the more interested a person becomes in issues that media present, the easier for media to shape his/her day-to-day agenda, while the more uncertain the person is, the more likely his/her perception to be moulded by the “agenda of attributes”. Relevance is the initial defining condition that regulates the level of need for orientation, whereas uncertainty plays the first role in the “agenda of attributes”, since its degree is connected with peoples’ need to obtain information. Naturally, to what extent the citizens place reliance on media as their primary source of information, meaning whether media have prestige among public opinion enters at this juncture. For example, media which are run by a dictatorship have much less prestige than media which exist at a comparatively more democratic and open society.

The issue characteristics in turn refer to the notions of “obtrusiveness” and “unobtrusiveness” as they were defined by Zucker.<sup>20</sup> As specified, an issue is obtrusive when the public or the individuals have direct contact and personal experience with it, whereas unobtrusive issues

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<sup>13</sup> Walter Lippmann, *Newspapers*, in Doris A. Graber, op. cit., p. 41.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., pp. 39-41.

<sup>15</sup> Maxwell McCombs, *The Agenda-Setting Role of the Mass Media in the Shaping of Public Opinion*, Conference at London School of Economics, *Mass Media Economics 2002*, 29.07.2002, p. 5 on <http://sticerd.lse.ac.uk/events/mme2002.asp>, accessed on 12.06.2007.

<sup>16</sup> More background regarding the empirical evidence Ibid., pp. 5-8.

<sup>17</sup> Jian-Hua Jonathan Zhu and Deborah Blood, op. cit., p. 115.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>19</sup> Maxwell McCombs, op. cit., p. 9.

<sup>20</sup> Jian-Hua Jonathan Zhu and Deborah Blood, op. cit., p. 117.

concern “remote” from daily life issues.<sup>21</sup> Accordingly, media cannot do much in changing the perception of individuals on issues with which they have a day-to-day relationship, such as unemployment or inflation.<sup>22</sup> For instance, even if the media propagate with zeal that the economy is sound in a country where the majority of the people cannot make a living, the influence will be very limited. Correspondingly, media will have much more influence on issues, such as foreign policy, where, because of the complexity and the Olympian side of the subject, people accept more easily information from the self-declared “experts”, the media.

Lastly, the characteristics relate to the different types of media and their respective influence on the public. McCombs and Shaw reported on (1972) the influence of local newspapers, national newspapers, newsmagazines and television networks, arguing that national newspapers show the strongest “agenda-setting” effects, followed by television.<sup>23</sup> Several other studies conducted in the 1970s and one in 1989, have confirmed what is mentioned above regarding the primacy of national newspapers in “agenda-setting”.<sup>24</sup> However, more recent studies deny the previous results and contend that, since the public spends more time watching television than reading newspapers and people have greater confidence in the former, television has much more influence than previously thought.<sup>25</sup>

Ultimately, whichever study represents the reality more accurately, the “agenda setting” and “agenda of attributes” have limited effects in societies where many different types of media exist (plurality), given that they have conflicting interests. In practice, we can imagine that it is not possible to mould a uniform “agenda-setting” and an “agenda of attributes”, when various media propagate their own “agenda-setting” and “agenda of attributes”. The only exception to that would be in societies where various media existed, however, strong stereotypes and perceptions of an issue pervaded all levels of society, and therefore a tendency to create a uniform “agenda-setting” and “agenda of attributes” would emerge. This seems to be the case, especially with “sensitive” issues referring to the foreign policy, as with Greece and Turkey. The lack of knowledge about the “Others” and about the complexity of the decision making of foreign policy, even if there are different perceptions of how foreign policy must be conducted, gives way to strong stereotypes which pre-exist or emerge in order to fill the aforementioned lack, and which in the end do not allow any productive dialogue within society and political circles for the most appropriate decision at a specific period of time.

## ***2.2 The Role of the Media as a Key Factor in the Escalation of the Crisis and its Limitations***

It remains to be examined what the role of the Greek-Turkish media in this crisis was, as the basis of the crisis was the existing climate in Greek-Turkish relations and more specifically the totally different approaches to the Aegean problem, as well as that the governments, at a first stage, did not want to make a great fuss of it at that specific time. Was media’s role only conventional and “decorative” as source of information, in the sense that they brought the

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 117.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 118.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 119.

<sup>24</sup> More background about those studies in Ibid., pp. 119-120.

<sup>25</sup> More background about recent studies in Ibid., p. 120.

issue to the forefront, an issue, as Mr. Millas pointed out<sup>26</sup>, that the governments did not want to cope with and media simply dredged it up? Or should one think that media did not play the role of a detached information provider, which covered the dispute, and furthermore that they tried in the way they presented the whole event and more importantly by intervening in it directly to create great tension, public interest and in the end better economic results for their companies? In other words, did media contribute decisively in the creation of a suffocating diplomatic context, where the two rivals could not even freeze their difference and they needed the intervention of a superpower to do so?

At this juncture, it should be mentioned that by the end of the 1980s and early 1990s, the monopoly of state television had broken and private channels started broadcasting in both countries.<sup>27</sup> This was a significant development, since an important part of mass media entered the free market and therefore news would be subject to the “law of high ratings”. In other words, the “blessing” of the audience for the news presented would be the main target, an audience which had a well-established negative perception in the field of Greek-Turkish relations.<sup>28</sup>

In any case, the Greek-Turkish media played a key role, as it is shown by the events, in two specific ways during the second phase of the crisis. First, the great majority of media agencies monopolised the public discussion with stereotypes without any serious attempt to analyse in depth the diplomatic, political and legal context in which the difference occurred. In other words, the dispute was simplified by both sides into two antagonistic forces, Greeks and Turks, moral and immoral, good and evil. Secondly, not only they influenced the way people conceived this specific disagreement through a biased presentation, but also intervened directly in the dispute creating news and not simply describing it.

More specifically, according to the media monitoring report<sup>29</sup>, a majority of Greek newspapers<sup>30</sup> raised tension with sensationalist headlines and analyses. Indicatively, the right wing newspapers Eleutheros Typos, Apogeumatini and Adesmeutos Typos wrote “(...) scenarios (...) of terrorism and Turkish provocation in Thrace”, “the Turks want an island of ours” (25/1) and “they grow insolent. The Turks ask for more islands” (26/1) respectively.<sup>31</sup> The same newspapers developed more acrimonious speeches, after Turkish journalists removed the Greek flag<sup>32</sup> from one of the two Imia/Kardak rocks, such as: “Brutal provocation. The Turks humiliated us” (EL.T., 29/1), “Invasion of Turks” (AP., 29/1) and

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<sup>26</sup> Recorded interview via telephone with Mr. Hercules Millas, Professor at the University of Athens in the department of Turkish Studies, Evia, 17.08.2007, min. 3:55-4:05.

<sup>27</sup> The first Greek private channel was founded in 1989 and the first Turkish one started broadcasting via satellite from abroad in 1990. In 1993, after the amendment of Article 133 of the Turkish constitution, which was banning the private broadcasting, Turkish private channels started operating within Turkey. For Greek television see Katharina Hadjidimos, op. cit., p. 18. For Turkish television see Human Rights Watch, *Turkey: Violations of Free Expression in Turkey*, Human Rights Watch, New York, 1999, pp. 28-29.

<sup>28</sup> See footnote 4.

<sup>29</sup> For the Greek media see Vasiliki Neofotistos, *The Greek Media on the Imia/Kardak Conflict*, in Mariana Lenkova (ed.), *“hate speech” in the Balkans*, The International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights (IHF), 1998, pp. 71-77. On <http://www.greekhelsinki.gr/pdf/hatespeech.pdf>, accessed 25.06.2007 and for the Turkish media see Ferhat Kentel, *The Turkish Media on the Imia/Kardak Conflict*, in Mariana Lenkova, op. cit., pp. 77-81.

<sup>30</sup> A great exception was the small in circulation leftist newspaper Avgi. See Panayote Elias Dimitras, *The Apotheosis of Hate Speech: the near-success of (Greek and Turkish) media in launching war*, in Mariana Lenkova, op. cit., pp. 67-68.

<sup>31</sup> Vasiliki Neofotistos, *The Greek Media on the Imia/Kardak Conflict*, in Mariana Lenkova, op. cit., pp. 71.

<sup>32</sup> It should be reminded that the Greek flag had been planted there by the Mayor of Kalymnos and other officials on the 25<sup>th</sup> January 1996.

“The Tourkalades [prejorative for Turks] scallywags (...) the scoundrels” (AT., 30/1). In addition, the centre-leftist newspapers, such as Eleutherotypia, Nea and Ethnos, followed the same pattern although not using such speeches with the exception of Ethnos newspaper: “They ask for new borders in the Aegean! The Turks start a slanging match” (EL., 30/1), “Bayrak[Turkish word for flag]-provocation” (N., 29.1) and “Agents’ assault on rocky islet! Turkish provocation aiming at the islands of the Aegean.” (ETH., 29/1).<sup>33</sup> The Greek channels, especially the private ones, kept the same pace with the newspapers by using a dramatic tone in every news broadcast and made things worse by airing the footage of the replacement of the Greek flag with a Turkish one several times.<sup>34</sup>

On the Turkish side, it is apparent that the Turkish media did not use as much “hate speech” as the Greek media. However, they cultivated a “going-to-war” attitude<sup>35</sup>, presenting Greece, as a “spoilt child” that should learn its lesson.<sup>36</sup> Hürriyet newspaper, one of the most well-known newspapers in Turkey, on the 28<sup>th</sup> January had as its front title “War Flag” (Bayrak Savaşı)<sup>37</sup> and on the 30<sup>th</sup> “This flag will go down” meaning the Greek flag<sup>38</sup>. The very same newspaper on the 31<sup>st</sup> January had on its front cover a comparison of the military forces of the two countries and on the top of it the title “We are superior” (Biz Üstünüz).<sup>39</sup> Also, Sabah newspaper had an article with the headline “Turkey Can Overwhelm Greece in 72 Hours”.<sup>40</sup>

Nonetheless, the most significant development regarding the coverage of the crisis by the Turkish media was the fact that Hürriyet daily newspaper sent a group of journalists in order to replace the Greek flag with a Turkish one, to take pictures and to film the whole event. The incident was reproduced by the Greek media many times, as it had happened with the act of the Greek mayor few days before. In a very ironic way, the Greek and the Turkish media had built a “holy alliance across the Aegean”, as the Association of European Journalists (AEJ) observed, during the crisis and they were leading the two politically weak governments to a war.

In order to understand better how this could happen, the media theory mentioned above will be employed for the better understanding of this case. First, media in both countries succeeded at a first stage to define the “agenda-setting” and at a second the “agenda of attributes” in a period of internal political crisis in both countries. Relevance and uncertainty was very high and subsequently the need for orientation was also high. This happened, because the dispute concerned the Greek-Turkish relations, a high profile issue in both countries. Furthermore, the public did not know anything about what the Imia/Kardak rocks, what had happened on them and what the exchange of verbal notes was about, and as consequence the uncertainty was also high. Moreover, the presentation of the exchange of verbal notes by the absolute majority of media in a dramatic way did not let any possibility for several agendas. In other words, all the media had suddenly focused on the events of the Imia/Kardak rocks and as a result, the public did the same.

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<sup>33</sup> Vasiliki Neofotistos, *The Greek Media on the Imia/Kardak Conflict*, in Mariana Lenkova, op. cit., pp. 72.

<sup>34</sup> For more background Ibid., pp. 71-77.

<sup>35</sup> A prominent exception was the Yeni Yüzyıl newspaper and some journalists in other newspapers in Ferhat Kentel, *The Turkish Media on the Imia/Kardak Conflict*, in Mariana Lenkova, op. cit., pp. 79-81.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., pp. 77-78.

<sup>37</sup> Front cover of Hürriyet newspaper, 28.01.1996, on

<http://arsiv.hurriyet.com.tr/arsivweb/sayfagoster.asp?id=1743&sayfa=01> , accessed 18.07.2007.

<sup>38</sup> Front cover of Hürriyet newspaper, 30.01.1996, on

<http://arsiv.hurriyet.com.tr/arsivweb/sayfagoster.asp?id=1745&sayfa=01> , accessed 18.07.2007.

<sup>39</sup> Front cover of Hürriyet newspaper, 31.01.1996, on

<http://arsiv.hurriyet.com.tr/arsivweb/sayfagoster.asp?id=1746&sayfa=01> , accessed 18.07.2007.

<sup>40</sup> Ferhat Kentel, *The Turkish Media on the Imia/Kardak Conflict*, in Mariana Lenkova, op. cit., pp. 78.

In addition, the uniform stance of the Greek and Turkish media towards the “Others” characterized by aggressiveness and an attempt to present the “opponent” as irrational and impudent made it very easy for them to create a general “agenda of attributes”, namely to create a general perception for the ongoing dispute. The broadcast of provocative actions in which media were the protagonists or the film-makers, and at the same time the “unobtrusiveness” of the issue helped also towards this direction. The result was that in each country a suffocating political environment was created. On the one hand, the two public opinions were seeing the opposite state as the aggressor, and on the other hand, two weak governments were trying to prove to their respective audiences that their rights on the rocks are not negotiable. In any case, the governments could not easily freeze the dispute and negotiate in the long run, as was the case during the first phase of the disagreement. Yet, does the fact that Greek and Turkish media took the lead in the second phase of the dispute means that it was the media influence that account for the crisis solely?

The answer is definitely negative, since relevance, a constitutive element of an effective “agenda-setting”, is firmly connected with what pre-existed in the peoples’ minds, and in this case, the great hostility that existed between the two countries during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, drew additional attention to the dispute. Furthermore, how the events evolved confirms the idea that media acted within a certain context and that they did not fabricate it from zero point. Specifically, the decision of Hürriyet newspaper to intervene directly consists of an international “novelty” in the field of media role in foreign policy in the sense that a group of journalists preceded any reaction of the Turkish state in a disputed area. This action becomes more important for the understanding of the “freedom” that Turkish media felt that they had, as Mr. Sami Kohen said<sup>41</sup>, at that specific juncture if we also consider that it embarrassed the Turkish state in a period of time during which the free expression was under significant restrictions; several journalists were imprisoned and newspapers, radio and television stations had been closed down.<sup>42</sup> The fact that the newspaper decided to act like that as well as the fact that the Turkish state did not take any measures against the journalists and the newspaper itself, prove categorically that Turkish media were acting within the context of the Turkish establishment and, as Mr. Nuri Çolakoğlu explained, the move was popular and welcome.<sup>43</sup>

Even if there were thoughts that this action was not right in terms of deciding to replace the state in a sensitive issue and in terms of basic journalistic ethics, it would be difficult for the Turkish government or some political circles to denounce it in a climate of pervasive nationalism and stereotypes promoted by the media themselves. It is worth notify that the contradictory report of the High Council on Radio and Television (RTÜK), in which the Council refers to the act of the journalists as “...a “mistake” [quotation marks in the text] which crossed the line of the journalistic duty”. However, in the same report the Council says that “it is not realistic for a journalist to be expected -even if it is desired- to take the role of a neutral “third person” [quotation marks in the text] in an issue, such as the integrity of his own country, which carries the meaning of life [very important]”, and that “the mistake of the action does not carry characteristics that cast their shadow on the respect of their

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<sup>41</sup> “The media influence (...) in terms of embarrassing the government” in Mr. Sami Kohen, Columnist of Milliyet newspaper on issues of international relations, Istanbul, 18.07.2007, min. 9:52-10:04.

<sup>42</sup> More background about the controversial role of the High Council on Radio and Television (RTÜK) see Katharina Hadjidimos, *op. cit.*, pp. 14-17. Also for more background regarding imprisoned journalists on free expression charges and the closure of radio and television stations see Human Rights Watch, *op. cit.*, pp. 30-31 and pp. 49-50.

<sup>43</sup> Recorded interview with Mr. Nuri Çolakoğlu, Vice President of the Doğan Group and Columnist of the Turkish Daily News, Istanbul, 15.07.2007, min. 5:08-5:15.

[journalists'] profession".<sup>44</sup> Thus, it is more than apparent that the Turkish media acted in conformity with the basic ideas of the establishment and that state institutions in charge of the behaviour of the media were not disposed to condemn such an act. One might ask, as Mr. Nuri Çolakoğlu did, what happened in the case of the mayor of Kalymnos, who took the decision to plant a Greek flag<sup>45</sup>, or even more what happened in the case of the Skai television station, which filmed Greek warships' departure from their anchorage in Salamina during the Imia/Kardak crisis and broadcast it? The answer is that the Greek state also turned a blind eye.

To sum up, Greek and Turkish media played a key role during the second phase of the dispute in that they played the role of a "magnifying glass" in the Greek-Turkish disagreement about the rocks. They did not create the disagreement, as it was there from the first phase of the dispute, yet media demonised every act of the "Others" without making any attempt to analyse the different incentives of each factor, states, media and individuals. On the contrary, they moulded the perception of their audiences on the basis that their country had absolute right, when simultaneously different legal interpretations existed.

Lastly, one might point out the degree to which media pushed the two states varies, since in Turkey non political bodies such as the army play a fundamental role in the decision-making of foreign policy issues through the National Security Council.<sup>46</sup> Thus, media could not influence the foreign policy of Turkey through the Turkish public opinion. Perhaps this is true, but we have to consider also Mr. Tüzecan's negative answer to my question on whether the government or the National Security Council could pursue unpopular policies without the support of media.<sup>47</sup> It should be added that popularity is significant for the Turkish army, especially in moments when it believes that it has to act against internal "threats", as it was the case after the elections of 24<sup>th</sup> December 1995, when the Islamist Welfare Party became the biggest party with 21.4 per cent of the vote.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Cem Işıklar, *Ege'de Casus Belli*, Ankara, 2005, pp. 137-138. Report of the High Council on Radio and Television (RTÜK).

<sup>45</sup> Recorded interview with Mr. Nuri Çolakoğlu, op. cit., min. 5:12-5:20.

<sup>46</sup> The Article 118 of the Constitution provides that the National Security Council "determines measures that are deemed necessary for the preservation of the existence, independence, territorial integrity and indivisibility of the state and maintenance of stability and security of the society". For more background regarding the structure of the National Security Council (MGK) and its responsibilities on foreign policy issues see Secretariat General of the National Security Council, *The NSC and the Secretariat General of the NSC (1983-2003)*, on [http://www.mgk.gov.tr/Ingilizce/Tarihce/tarihce004\\_en.htm](http://www.mgk.gov.tr/Ingilizce/Tarihce/tarihce004_en.htm) , accessed 10.09.2007. Also, see Human Rights Watch, op. cit., pp. 33-34.

<sup>47</sup> Recorded Interview with Mr. Temüçin Tüzecan, Communication Director of Hürriyet Daily Newspaper, Istanbul, 18.07.2007, min. 8:35-8:50.

<sup>48</sup> For more background regarding the rise of the Islamists during that period see Erik J. Zürcher, *Turkey, A Modern History*, new revised edition, I.B. Tauris publications, London, 2003, pp. 310-315.

### 3. Some Conclusions regarding the Interaction between Foreign Policy and Media in the Case of Imia/Kardak Crisis

The Imia/Kardak crisis was a singular case in the history of the Greek-Turkish crises in the sense that different phases of it cannot solely be explained by the disagreements and interests of the two rivals, and more specifically the go-to-war attitude of the two states for two uninhabited rocks during important internal political fluidity. Therefore, we need to focus on the eagerness of media to compete each other in the field of nationalism.

Around the world, maritime disputes exist and some of them with very significant issues at stake, such as oil<sup>49</sup>, but the majority of them do not result in a military crisis or war. Either they are “frozen” or there are negotiations between experts, or they are submitted to the International Court of Justice. Some examples include the dispute of five littoral countries over the oil and gas-rich Caspian Sea<sup>50</sup> and the dispute between Norway and Russia about their maritime limits in the Barents Sea and Russia's fishing rights beyond Svalbard's territorial limits within the Svalbard Treaty zone<sup>51</sup>. In addition, as Mr. Kourkoulas pointed out, “if this event (Imia/Kardak dispute) happened between Finland and Sweden, (...) the press would not be bothered....there would be an interest (by media) about how the arbitration would end.”<sup>52</sup> In the same way, his colleague, Mr Kohen stated that “probably without such a fuss, with some kind of secret diplomacy or silent diplomacy the question could have been resolved.”<sup>53</sup> Thus, it is apparent that the media intervened directly with specific acts or indirectly through the “agenda-setting” and the “agenda of attributes” between the states in the first occasion (direct intervention) and between the states and their respective public opinions in the latter one (agenda setting and agenda of attributes).

On the other hand, the substratum of foreign policy is not created by media at the same time that crisis occurs; but rather it is a pre-existing nexus of political “elements”, such as national interests that states promote, political currents and ideologies which pervade societies, perceptions that are already constructed in these societies and objectives in general that are projected by several institutions and in the end all together build this substratum. Thus, the examples, which Mr. Çolakoğlu gave regarding the limits that media have into defining basic concepts in societies, strike the right note. He says that “one should not exaggerate the influence of media, because when you look at the Soviet Union for 75 years using every media available, they passed on certain ideas, certain way of thinking to the people or they thought they did, but the moment the climate changed the people of Russia turned around in twenty two seconds”<sup>54</sup> and he continues with a rhetorical question about how many Greeks or Turks would convert into Catholicism if a Catholic radio would start broadcasting.<sup>55</sup> In the end, he concludes that “If there is no base among people for anything that you are trying to sell the media are totally ineffective. But if there is something which is looming in their heads

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<sup>49</sup> For more background see Global Security Organisation, *International Disputes*, on <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/disputes.htm>, accessed 07.09.2007.

<sup>50</sup> For more background see Energy Information Administration, *Caspian Sea*, January 2007, pp. 9-10, on <http://www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/cabs/Caspian/pdf.pdf>, accessed 07.09.2007.

<sup>51</sup> The World Factbook (CIA), *Norway*, on <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/no.html>, accessed 07.09.2007.

<sup>52</sup> Recorded interview with Mr. Alkis Kourkoulas, Head of the Athens News Agency in Turkey and columnist of the BHMA newspaper, 20.07.2007, Istanbul, min. 5:37-5:59.

<sup>53</sup> Recorded interview with Mr. Sami Kohen, op. cit., min. 13:18-13:28.

<sup>54</sup> Recorded interview with Mr. Nuri Çolakoğlu, op. cit., min. 10:32-10:57.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., min. 10:58-11:20.

and if you grab that then you can really mobilise the masses through the media.”<sup>56</sup> As he previously pointed out, this is where media interact with the substratum of foreign policy. Either because media are private and want to make profit or because they are state media and have to highlight the problem in accordance with official policy, they reflect and amplify the pre-existing substratum of foreign policy.

Finally, my conclusions about the interaction between foreign policy and media by no means intended to indicate the need for restrictions on media’s access to foreign policy issues, or that foreign policy must be conducted for the people without them by a small group of experts. On the contrary, as the Imia/Kardak crisis proved, media do play a significant role under specific circumstances, and as such, editors, journalists and columnists must take their profession seriously. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the U.S. President, Woodrow Wilson, in his renowned *Fourteen Points Speech* declared that “open covenants of peace, openly arrived at, after which there shall be no private international understandings of any kind but diplomacy shall proceed always frankly and in the public view”.<sup>57</sup> This is exactly where media can contribute in by shedding light on all the aspects of a conflict or a dispute or a diplomatic process, because in the end, it is the democratic right of every citizen who lives in a pluralistic democracy to have an as much as of a complete picture of what is happening around him/her.

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., min. 11:21-11: 40.

<sup>57</sup> Woodrow Wilson, *Fourteen Points Speech (1918)*, on <http://usinfo.state.gov/usa/infousa/facts/democrac/51.htm> (US Department of State), accessed 11.09.2007.

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