

Margarita Kondopoulou

The Greek media and the Kosovo crisis

Kurzfassung: Die NATO-Luftangriffe (24/3/99-10/6/99), welche ein Ende der Misshandlung der albanischen Bevölkerung durch die Serben erzwingen sollten, wurden von einem Großteil der internationalen Staatengemeinschaft unterstützt. In Griechenland jedoch wurden sie ganz anders wahrgenommen. Eine Schlüsselposition für die stark ablehnende Haltung Griechenlands nahmen die griechischen Medien ein. Ihrer Auffassung nach bestand der wahre Grund für die NATO-Offensive in einer Änderung der geopolitischen Landkarte zum Vorteil des Westens, insbesondere der USA.

Der vorliegende Aufsatz geht davon aus, dass sowohl die griechischen als auch die internationalen Medien ihre eigenen (nationalen) Kontexte auf die Kosovo-Krise projizierten. Das besondere Interesse an der Untersuchung der griechischen Medien hat drei gute Gründe:

1. Eine eigenständige Perspektive unterschied die Medienberichterstattung in Griechenland – einem NATO-Mitglied – deutlich vom vorherrschenden Medienkonsens in der westlichen Welt.
2. Die Medienberichterstattung stand in deutlichem Gegensatz zur offiziellen Regierungspolitik, die zwar eine diplomatische Lösung der Krise gefordert hatte, letztlich aber doch die Entscheidung ihrer NATO-Partner unterstützen musste, Serbien zu bombardieren.
3. Das Abweichen der griechischen Medien vom Mainstream der NATO-freundlichen Berichterstattung hat in vielen anderen Ländern ein negatives Bild Griechenlands und seiner Medien entstehen lassen.

Eine Untersuchung der Medieninhalte zeigt, dass die griechischen Medien trotz aller Unterschiede in der politischen Ausrichtung und ungeachtet der Unterschiede in der Paraphrasierung der Anti-NATO-Argumente eine einheitliche Oppositionshaltung einnahmen. Zwar richteten sie ihre Aufmerksamkeit mehr oder weniger auf dieselben Themengebiete wie die Medien in der übrigen Welt, verkehrten jedoch die Argumentationsrichtung in ihr Gegenteil (so wurde z.B. die Schuld für das Flüchtlingsproblem den NATO-Luftangriffen zugewiesen und nicht den serbischen Gräueltaten). Die griechischen Medien nahmen generell eine Antikriegs-, Anti-NATO- und anti-albanische sowie eine im Prinzip proserbische Position ein. Die Untersuchung der Herangehensweise der griechischen Medien an den Kosovo-Konflikt zeigt einerseits deren deutliche Antipathie gegenüber der „humanitären“ NATO-Logik und dem kosovo-albanischen Faktor sowie andererseits eine aus einer Vielzahl von historischen, kulturellen, sozialen und geopolitischen Bedingungen gespeiste Empathie gegenüber den Serben. Darüber hinaus zeigt sie, dass diese Charakteristika mit einem wiederkehrenden Muster von ausgeprägtem Nationalismus übereinstimmen, welches für den Mediendiskurs und die journalistische Praxis im allgemeinen prägend ist.

Abstract: The NATO air attacks (24/3/99-10/6/99) as an instrument of force against Serbia to terminate the abuse of the Albanian population in Kosovo, albeit supported by a significant part of the international community, were received much differently in Greece. Key to the climate of strong disagreement with the campaign was the role of the Greek media. The true reason behind the offensive was, according to them, the change in the geopolitical map to the advantage of the West, and in particular the USA. The underlying argument of this paper is that in the Kosovo crisis the media, Greek (and international), projected their own environment. It is particularly apt to examine the Greek case because of its very unique perspective that differentiated the coverage in Greece – a NATO member country – from the overall world media view. Also, the discussion is pertinent because Greek media coverage disagreed with the official government position, which although advocating a diplomatic resolution of the crisis, had to support the Alliance's decision to bomb Serbia. Furthermore, study of this case is significant because the clash of the Greek media view with the mainstream pro-NATO coverage found in many other countries generated negative views on Greece and its media on the international level. An examination of media content reveals that despite any differences concerning political or other factors, and regardless of the variations in the phrasing of the anti-NATO arguments, the overall media perspective exhibited a unanimous opposition to the bombing campaign. By placing the emphasis more or less on the same thematic areas as the world media, but by crucially reversing the line of reasoning (e.g. the refugee problem was blamed on the NATO bombing raids and not on Serbian atrocities), the Greek media invariably remained anti-war, anti-NATO and anti-Albanian in many particular cases, and in principle pro-Serb throughout. A study of the general media and the specific journalistic approach found in the Greek coverage shows that antipathy toward the NATO "humanitarian" rationale, and to a manifest extent the Kosovo-Albanian factor, and empathy with the Serbs originated from a variety of historical, cultural, social and geopolitical factors. It also supports the view that these characteristics were consistent with a recurring pattern of distinctive nationalism that generally pervades media discourse and journalistic practice.

Introduction

The NATO operation in former Yugoslavia between March 24 and June 10, 1999 was, according to the Alliance's official explanation, a necessary means "to put an end to the violent actions undertaken by President Milosevic's forces and to end the humanitarian disaster which is taking place in the region" (www.nato.int/docu/update/1999/0331e.htm). However, the Greek media response to the bombing campaign was immensely different from the media positions expressed in many other countries. Greek press and television dismissed the NATO banner of "humanitarian" intervention during the bombing campaign that was accepted and reflected in the media reports in most NATO countries. The offensive against the Serbs, according to Greek media, was an unjustified action against a sovereign neighboring state whose internal affairs were being used as a vehicle of Western intervention and expansion at the expense of civilians, both in Kosovo and Serbia, and ultimately on the Balkan Peninsula as a whole.

This article will first briefly establish some reasons why the case of Greek media coverage of the Kosovo crisis in conjunction with the NATO action is an important topic. Second, the article will reflect on the ways the Greek media covered and analyzed the Kosovo crisis and the NATO air strikes and will also examine the potential basis upon which the Greek media position was built. Finally, the discussion will attempt to introduce some issues that relate to the Greek journalists' function in the formulation of the particular type of coverage.

1. Why examine Greek media coverage of Kosovo

The clear departure of the Greek stance from the coverage that prevailed in other countries during the air operations makes the issue of the Greek media framework of coverage and interpretation of the events surrounding the Kosovo crisis an important case for a number of reasons. First, because the media in Greece, a NATO member country, "deviated" from the mainstream media coverage found in the vast majority of NATO and other western countries. Second, predictably, as "journalists around the world grappled with the news angle of this conflict [in Kosovo] to make it relevant to their markets" (Goff, 1999, p. 27), the Greek media perceived the NATO air campaign against Serbia in ways dictated by their own environment.

Also, the case of Greek coverage is worth studying because it differed from the universal media perspective for another important reason. Unlike the media in many NATO countries that essentially, and irrespective of any reservations about the effectiveness of the campaign, supported their government's pro-NATO rationale, Greek media did not toe the official governmental line. The Greek government was by no means pro-war, as it consistently advocated diplomacy as opposed to military action (www.primeminister.gr/speeches/199904c.htm). Nonetheless, according to Socialist Prime Minister Costas Simitis, it was also clear that participation in the organization implied obligations which the country, for reasons primarily of national interest, had to fulfill (www.primeminister.gr/speeches/19990428.htm; in Greek).

Finally, it is appropriate to consider the extent to which ideas such as that during the Kosovo crisis "the authorities in Belgrade had one major ally...Greece" (Milev, 1999, 381) have any value or merely constitute an over-simplification of the deeper factors that shaped Greek media coverage. The Greeks' "pro-Serb" attitude was indeed quite often noted by foreign journalists and other commentators who charged the Greek media with a campaign based on "propaganda", misinformation, and bias (e.g. www.guardian.co.uk/Archive/Article/0,4273,3866657,00.html).

2. The Greek media approach to the NATO campaign – An overview

The following section gives a brief look at the general framing of Greek media coverage of the 1999 NATO military campaign in former Yugoslavia.

Press coverage

The overall media coverage of the Kosovo conflict was characterized by an overt anti-war sentiment. Under *ordinary* circumstances we can expect that different newspapers will represent diverse political and ideological viewpoints in treating national and international issues, as Greek publications are conventionally associated with different political interests and ideas. In the case of the Kosovo crisis, there was an open and uniform condemnation of NATO actions against Serbia. Although sometimes differing in intensity and phrasing, Greek newspapers, under these *special* conditions, appeared to agree that the bombings were a demonstration of Western cruelty and injustice, primarily targeted against the Serb population.

The headline illustrations in Table 1 are taken from five Greek daily newspapers, which are representative of both various positions across the political/ideological spectrum of the Greek press, as well as circulation specifics, and demonstrate the level of unanimity in the press regarding military actions taken by NATO.

Newspaper	Ta Nea
Approximate Readership	55,000
Headline 1 Headline 2 Headline 3	Hecatombs for civilians due to the bombs (30/3/99) Floods of refugees in the Greek villages of Albania (8/4/99) NATO threatens with civilian slaughter (15/5/99)
Conventional (political) view	center to center-left

Newspaper	Eleftherotypia
Approximate Readership	35.000
Headline 1 Headline 2 Headline 3	Invisible slaughter (26/3/99) 1941 Hitler - 1999 Clinton (1/4/99) Human sacrifice in the name of human rights ! (15/5/99)
Conventional (political) view	center-left

Newspaper	Eleftheros Typos
Approximate Readership	23,000
Headline 1 Headline 2 Headline 3	Relentless bombings devastate houses, hospitals, schools, old people's homes, churches, and cultural monuments (5/4/99) Tragedy due to yet another "mistake"! (29/4/99) American trap disguised as UN resolution 9(23/5/99)
Conventional (political) view	right-wing

Newspaper	Kathimerini
Approximate Readership	19,000
Headline 1 Headline 2 Headline 3	Tragedy out of control (1/4/99) Civilians were again targeted yesterday in Pristina (8/4/99) Senseless slaughter with human casualties (15/5/99)
Conventional (political) view	Conservative

Newspaper	Rizospastis
Approximate Readership	5,000
Headline 1 Headline 2 Headline 3	NATO, get out of the Balkans! (31/3/99) War criminals: Americans-NATO-EU(8/4/99) NATO murderers are semi-human beasts (1/5/99)
Conventional (political) view	communist

Source: *To Pontiki*, March 1999

Table 1:
Press headlines

Evidently, putting aside their disparate ideological and political inclinations, Greek newspapers collectively condemned the "humanitarian" rationale, which was overwhelmingly endorsed in other NATO member countries and their media (www.access.online.bg/bn/hotpoints/kosovo99/greece.htm).

However, it is also worth pointing out that even though there was apparent unanimity, both in terms of focus and to a large extent of explanation, there were some differences in phrasing among different newspapers. In general, although the bulk of the stories did sustain an anti-NATO tone across the press spectrum during the air raids, there were also some differences. Several right-wing newspapers developed an extremely nationalistic discourse ("They [Kosovo-Albanians] rape women and burn churches," alleged *Apogevmatini*) by focusing on the so-called "threats" to the Greek minority in Albania. In other cases, for example the newspapers *Kathimerini* and *To Vima*, the overall tone was more moderate, urging the Greek people to be less hot-headed in their reactions (e.g., "Above all we must react calmly," urged *Kathimerini*). Finally, the communist *Rizospastis* unsurprisingly adopted one of the most hard-line approaches, mainly with its categorical criticism of NATO and the American administration (the newspaper even called the Greek Defense Minister "NATO's goon"), which has always been a traditional feature in the newspaper's discourse.

Television coverage

TV coverage of the Kosovo crisis and the NATO air attacks on Serbia throughout the seventy-eight days of the operation essentially portrayed it as a manifestation of Western aggression.

In particular, through the images of devastation experienced by Serb civilians and Kosovo refugees, television coverage set a tone of unanimity, as well as of fervent opposition to the war, NATO and the American administration. The regular news bulletins, numerous scheduled and special talk shows, and many feature programs constituted the main arena for the construction of an anti-war reaction in Greece.

Even though the coverage in Greek newspapers reflected, to at least a limited extent, an attempt to offer a variety of interpretations, TV treatment was generally regarded as expressing unanimous denunciation of NATO tactics. The persistence of television coverage offering a quite one-sided depiction of the events, giving special emphasis to Serb casualties, revealed an additional concern: ratings competition among the TV channels. One of the ways TV channels appealed to viewers was to broadcast breaking-news bulletins. There was an ongoing preoccupation with visual teasers/trailers announcing "dramatic" footage and "documents" that "proved" NATO "atrocities." (It is important to mention, both in terms of content and message, that apart from the reports provided by the channels' own TV crews, a great deal of the footage was taken from the Yugoslav television network. Other media around the world had from the start of the campaign declined to rely on any material coming from a Serb source, and when they did use it, they tended to warn against the "propaganda" it potentially contained). The fact that these "bits" were run, by and large, simultaneously showed the obvious interest in ratings. Interestingly enough, in this race the TV channels did not beg to differ. Rather, they used similar techniques and contents to pursue their goals.

Nonetheless, it is further worth distinguishing between private (MEGA, ANTENNA, SKY, STAR), and public channels (ET 1, NET). The distinction between the two, public and private channels, although perhaps insignificant in terms of overall media coverage, is relevant to note, as private channels have consistently earned a larger individual and combined share of viewers in comparison to public broadcast channels. One of the consistent patterns in the Greek media environment, which was also crucially repeated in coverage of the Kosovo crisis, is that privately-owned channels are more inclined to employ the above techniques (e.g., inserting sensationalistic and "dramatic" elements in their news reports). The state-run channels are regarded as more likely to adopt a relatively balanced and restrained approach.

The following table offers an average picture of the television viewing figures in Greece (before the crisis) and further shows the consistency of viewing trends in terms of audience preferences (first day of the bombings and a month later).

Date	News Bulletin	Channel	Start	End	Cum.Rating
08/03/99	Night News	ET-1	22:59	23:38	2.5
08/03/99	Evening News at 9	NET	20:59	22:10	4.3
08/03/99	Evening News	MEGA	19:53	21:10	30.5
08/03/99	Evening News	ANTENNA	19:50	20:31	24.9
08/03/99	Evening News	STAR	19:45	21:17	12.5
08/03/99	Evening News	SKY	19:52	21:26	22.4
25/03/99	Evening News	ET-1	20:04	20:27	1.0
25/03/99	Evening News at 9	NET	20:59	22:52	6.6
25/03/99	Evening News	MEGA	19:51	21:16	28.0
25/03/99	Evening News	ANTENNA	19:47	21:29	24.5
25/03/99	Evening News	STAR	19:44	21:25	13.8
25/03/99	Evening News	SKY	19:46	21:39	22.0
25/04/99	Night News	ET-1	23:03	23:17	5.4
25/04/99	Evening News at 9	NET	20:59	22:35	5.6
25/04/99	Evening News	MEGA	19:52	21:16	29.5
25/04/99	Evening News	ANTENNA	19:53	21:10	24.8
25/04/99	Evening News	STAR	19:45	21:02	11.4
25/04/99	Evening News	SKY	19:51	21:10	16.8

Source: AGB Hellas

Table 2:
Greek channels' viewing ratings

Key topics

The main topical concerns that dominated Greek media coverage during the Kosovo crisis did not differ dramatically from the foci in other international media. A large number of media stories and analyses evolved around the issues of military operations and refugees, just as in the media around the world. Yet, the framing of the news and consequently the interpretations of the relevant developments as presented in the Greek media were at odds with the mainstream media coverage that appeared in other countries.

For example, as noted earlier, the Greeks rejected the actual logic of NATO, which claimed that the bombings were a necessary tool for protecting the Kosovo-Albanian population against Serbian aggression. Instead, the argument constantly made by Greek media was that the Alliance was fighting an unjust war against a militarily far weaker country under the false pretext of "humanitarianism." What is more, the geopolitical, economic, as well as other threats (e.g., environmental) resulting from the strikes, as represented by the media, left very little doubt that the war was regarded as a factor of instability for both Greece and the Balkans as a whole. Special emphasis was placed on the bitter opposition to the use of Greek territory as a staging ground for NATO operations (an extremely delicate matter for the government, which according to its NATO obligations had to allow the use of Greek territory for such operations).

Despite the occasional admission that there was indeed an issue of potential human rights abuse in Kosovo, the general consensus in the media held the campaign to be unjustified. Other alternatives for resolving the crisis were not seriously considered in the Rambouillet talks, held just before the outbreak of the campaign as an alleged attempt to resolve the crisis via diplomatic means. According to the Greek media view, the failure to resolve the crisis politically was largely

attributable to the essentially anti-Serbian attitude that underlay diplomatic efforts and left no room for substantial and fair negotiation. That is why many of the opinion and analysis articles that appeared in Greek newspapers, as well as interviewees on television news bulletins and talk-shows, maintained that the NATO campaign was intended to further Western geopolitical interests.

Integral to Greek media anti-war advocacy was the extensive announcement and coverage of protest demonstrations in many parts of the country, particularly during the early period of the NATO bombings in Kosovo. The frequently-live broadcast coverage of numerous protest marches and concerts jointly organized by political parties (mainly opposition parties), workers' unions, other activists and groups, as well as the Greek Orthodox Church, demonstrated a united Greek opposition front. In the newspapers, too, such rallies (often ending in front of the American Embassy in Athens) constituted a prominent element of the coverage.

These public protests and their reporting represented another significant aspect of the Greek media stance and certainly of the general public attitude: the rhetoric of solidarity with the Serb people. Despite the call by the government and a few media and other personalities for restrained pro-Serbian demonstrations, *Serbophilia* [sic] was promoted not only by the nationalistic right-wing press, but also to a large degree by most of the media.

There were three key premises behind the exhibition of pro-Serb attitudes, as understood and widely encouraged by the media, separately or in combination: first, as stated above, the fact that the NATO campaign was targeted at the people of a neighboring country that was being forced to suffer major losses in the name of "humanitarianism"; second, the so-called traditional ties between Greece and Serbia and the threat the bombings presented to the viability of the historical, cultural, religious, as well as geopolitical landscape of the Balkans; and finally, the potential danger the campaign posed to the Greek minority living in parts of South Albania, as refugee flows could result in the occupation of these areas by Albanians.

Among other things, these arguments in effect maintained that the victims of the crisis were primarily Serbs. They were "martyrs in an unjust war," and despite the fact that extensive coverage of the refugee problem was presented, the Greek media explained that Kosovo-Albanians were fleeing as a consequence of NATO bombing raids. Also, the consensus among the majority of the reports and the debates on television talk-shows, as well as on the opinion pages of the press, was that news about the persecution of the Albanian population by the Serbs, which other international media were then disseminating, was highly and intentionally exaggerated and misleading.

The "Slobodan Milosevic" topic represented a very crucial disagreement between the way the Greek and other international media saw the crisis. In contrast to many reports in other NATO states, in which the Serb president was portrayed as another "Hitler" or an "evil dictator" who, like Saddam Hussein in the Gulf War, had victimized his people in the pursuit of power, the greatest share of the Greek media toned down Milosevic's negative image. They instead tended to support his status as a democratically-elected leader and referred to him as "the President of Serbia." Any criticism directed against Milosevic was mitigated by identifying him as an "enigmatic" and "controversial" figure. What is more, the depiction of American and British leaders as "Nazis," a noticeable feature in a large part of the coverage, created an even wider gap between Greek and other media perspectives worldwide.

3. Motivations behind the Greek media view

According to Stefanos Pezmantzoglou (2001), during the bombings "the image of the refugees" in the Western media made public opinion "identify with" NATO humanitarian intervention, "overlooking the consequences – material, environmental and human" and treat them as mere "collateral damage." Yet, he also acknowledges that in Greece media images of the damage caused by NATO bombing not only encouraged an "understandable revolt" against NATO, but also prompted, "if not identification, certainly psycho-mental [sic] empathy with the Milosevic ethnic-cleansing regime" (pp. 12-13). But what was the *raison d'être* behind the profoundly anti-NATO, anti-American, anti-war, pro-Serb and to a noticeable degree anti-Albanian media coverage?

As indicated by the quantitative and qualitative analysis of Greek newspapers' contents made by the Department of International and European Studies at Pantion University in Athens (Giallouridis and Kefala, 2001), the Greek newspapers' point of view was "pro-Serbian and at the same time opposed to the war in Yugoslavia; perspectives that are not identical" (p. 152). The latter conclusion appears to be fair and significant, since it suggests that the key issue was opposition to the war in practice. Yet, it may also imply that though there was an acknowledgement of the problem in Kosovo, a great number of media reports and analyses maintained a pro-Serbian stance, despite the, in many cases, "silent" admission that the Serbs had indeed persecuted some of the Albanian population?

As the crisis developed, the overwhelming, especially television, media preoccupation with images of destruction, both in the form of refugee footage and graphic illustrations of Serb casualties, coupled with a blatantly anti-NATO outlook, increased the concern of the authorities, in fact at a very early stage. The National Broadcasting Council (ERS), an

officially independent body with the authority to define and intervene in media activities, on April 5th issued a series of directives. These guidelines required the media, among other things, to abide by journalists' codes of ethics, present balanced reports and avoid biased coverage focused on spectacles rather than information (*Kathimerini*, April, 6, 1999, p. 17). This unprecedented development showed clearly that something was amiss with Greek media coverage.

But on the same subjects of ethics as well as the coverage of NATO bombing raids, the Journalists' Union of the Athens Daily Newspapers (ESIEA) argued at the Conference for Journalists in South-Eastern Europe (Ochrid, Macedonia, June 24-26, 1999) that "Greek journalists did their duty, showing great responsibility and respect for the journalistic code of ethics" (www.greekhelsinki.gr/english/pressrelease/1-7-1999.html).

The media workers argued that they supported ethically and impartially motivated reporting. Yet in the same statement/report they went on to claim that:

"In Greece there are no different ethnic media, since the Greek nation is one. Moreover, it is unique in Europe, reaching 100% homogeneity according to findings by international organizations and other official forums dealing with such issues..." (ibid.).

And that:

"In Greece regions of ethnic tension or conflict do not exist and we do not have to solve problems in similar crises. Citizens of the Greek State are all who bear Greek nationality, irrespective of origin and religion." (ibid.).

The last two points on the issues of the "homogeneity" of the Greek nation, "irrespective of origin and religion," as well as the absence of "ethnic tension" are very important, as they appear to be arguments used as justifications for the way the media reported the war. However, the truth is that there *are* ethnic minorities in Greece, the largest being the Albanian. A large share of the media at the time of the Kosovo crisis did not conceal their apparent concern about the influx of Albanians from Kosovo into Greece and Albania. And this concern at certain points reached the level of hysteria.

Hostility toward Albanians in general was obvious in several news articles, particularly in right-wing newspapers, which, as mentioned above, warned about the "influx" of massive numbers of Albanians into the country, with whom the Greeks would have to deal for an indefinite period of time. Also, the presence of refugees in Albania would, according to some nationalistic voices, lead to disturbances in many Greek-dominated villages.

The important issue in question is that the particular Greek attitude (i.e., empathy with the Serbs and not with the Kosovars) made the media significantly selective and biased as far as their neighbors were concerned. But this was not unique. Rather, it repeated a pre-existing pattern. Prior to the Kosovo crisis the Greek media had regarded ethnic wars in former Yugoslavia (mainly in Croatia and Bosnia) as posing the typical threat that ethnic wars pose to neighboring countries. The media recorded these wars with an underlying sense of the importance of the events for the whole Balkan Peninsula, reinforcing messages about the impact they had for the other Balkan countries as well. Fundamentally, though, the media content was much more concentrated on the Serbs' ordeals than on the Croats' and Bosnian-Muslims' losses.

The prime reason why the Serb side was "more appealing" was (geo)-political. Although there was "sympathy and compassion" for the refugees, a stronger and independent Albanian presence in the Balkans – or indeed any major changes in the borders of any neighboring Balkan country – could be the starting point for more unrest and a change in the geopolitical status quo in the region.

Moreover, the issue of "nationality" was indeed part and parcel of a series of factors that shaped opposition to the bombing raids and the pro-Serbian attitude. By and large, the cultural, historical, religious and geopolitical dynamics that defined coverage epitomize the general position of the Greeks in Balkan affairs. Stated briefly, the Greek Orthodox confession, shared with the Serbs, and the historical, cultural and geopolitical antipathy between Greeks and Albanians were decisive factors influencing Greek coverage.

This amalgamation of diverse elements of Greek society – which took the form of a united front consisting of left-wing, right-wing, religious, cultural and sport groups and associations, to name only a few – and the promotion of the idea of collective consensus via the media was crucial. It led to a conviction that "most mass media in Greece *chose* to act in the name of a blurred leftist position tinted by blue and white [the colors of the Greek flag and the symbolic colors of the right-wing party, New Democracy]" (Giannouloupoulos 1999, 28; my emphasis) in an attempt to cultivate a shared attitude. The phenomenon led the Greek columnist and author Takis Michas (2002) to call the unlikely partnership an "Unholy Alliance."

It has been suggested that, on the whole, "the permeation of political and cultural life in Greece by nationalist discourse has affected the mass media, which have become one of the spaces where the construction of the Greek nation as a natural, homogenous, organic community has taken place" (Tsagarousianou 1996, p. 136). During the Kosovo crisis,

despite the fact that Greece was at least not directly involved, nationalism took the form of a Balkan patriotism and a defense mechanism against the invasive, paternalistic and imperialistic Western intentions which were believed to lie behind the NATO air-campaign. Also, many Greek people, although their country belongs to NATO, believed that NATO and the USA were extensively involved in the establishment of the seven-year military dictatorship in Greece in the late 1960s and early 1970s, as well as the invasion of Cyprus by Turkish forces in 1974.

4. Kosovo and Greek journalists

The official media standpoint was demonstrated by the following statement signed by all the major Greek media unions on the second day of the NATO campaign, indicating their view from the outset of the air strikes.

"Greek journalists and press employees condemn NATO's air attacks upon Yugoslavia's cities and villages, which constitute a grave blow to peace. They call for an immediate halt to the bombardment and for a political solution" (www.esiea.gr/gd/2arxeio/1999/03/06.htm).

In the aftermath of the crisis, the journalists – themselves crucial players in the media reproduction of the distinctly anti-war, anti-NATO, and considerably pro-Serbian perspective – publicly and repeatedly defended the correctness of their actions. In addition, symptomatic of the view that Greek journalists had provided more thorough coverage than their western colleagues was a symposium organized in March 2000 by ESIEA. Although the conference had the general title: *War and Information: The Kosovo Experience*, the speakers (including the renowned media historian and author of *The First Casualty*, Phillip Knightley, as well as journalists Robert Fisk and John Pilger, who took a different position from the mainstream international media perspective), talked about the bias and misinformation promoted by Western media. Yet, no real or in-depth reference was essentially made to any questions about the Greek media and whether the Greek media treatment of the crisis had any major or minor defects.

Another symposium organized in March 2000 by the Department of Mass Media of Aristotle University of Thessaloniki on how Greek media covered news of the Kosovo crisis, and particularly on the role of journalists themselves, was a more to-the-point attempt to address the issues raised by Greek media treatment of the NATO campaign. The publication of a book, *Mass Media and the War in Kosovo* (Panagiotarea, 2000), containing the lectures and discussions held during the conference, offers quite revealing insights regarding the principles that governed news coverage by the Greek media by showing openly that the consensus among media professionals was not entirely uniform.

In the Kosovo crisis, journalists practiced a particular sort of professionalism that was affected greatly by "self censorship," as journalists Tellidis and Papahelas have pointed out (Panagiotarea, 2000). This primarily derived from their sub-conscious "national commitment" to defend and sustain a set of beliefs that corresponded to the mentality overwhelmingly dominant in Greek society.

The above-view fits into the general conception of the Greek media and their treatment of international news. Serafim Fintanidis, managing editor of the Greek newspaper *Eleftherotypia*, provides a broader argument regarding the way the Greek media deal with international affairs. He has said that, "the first choice of a journalist – whether he works for a newspaper or television or a radio station – is his neighborhood" (1999, p. 40). If that is the case, then what happened in the case of Kosovo crisis coverage was a usual and therefore accepted reality.

What's more, another prominent Greek journalist, Panos Koliopanos, managing director of the radio news station *Flash*, maintains that overall Greek media suffer from "introversion," which in effect results in acting as a serious "brake on understanding international developments" (1999, p. 55). These two perspectives imply that the Greek media treated news of the Kosovo crisis as a "regional," and to a large degree "domestic" matter and formed their response to NATO involvement accordingly.

Likewise, the media, and consequently their employees, the journalists, in practice fear that since they have already, through a long and consistent process, "instructed" the public on the mainstream views of national political affairs, whatever differs from "Greek-centered ideals" and is therefore contrary to pre-existing norms will be dismissed by the people (i.e., readers and media audiences) (Koliopanos, 1999, pp. 56-57), thereby creating great commercial anxieties.

The extent of media responsibility for the creation of such an "ethnocentric" and "patriotic" climate can also be discerned in other cases of major "national" crises and problems with neighbors. The first is the "battle" over the "Macedonian affair" in the early 1990s, where a great share of the media fought against the prospect of FYROM officially adopting the name of "Macedonia," since this belonged exclusively to the Northern part of Greece. The second, in the mid 1990s, is the "crisis of Imia," where Greece and Turkey claimed the right to call a group of small, uninhabited islands in the Eastern Aegean Sea Greek and Turkish respectively. On both occasions a considerable number of journalists – encouraged by the general political climate of patriotic rhetoric – promoted a highly nationalistic perspective claiming that this represented national sentiment which was familiar to the public anyway. Although the official governmental

position in the current crisis was caught within a web of an awkward balance between the national sentiment of resentment against the Alliance and the country's commitment to its NATO duties, the same pattern was repeated in Kosovo, where according to journalist Nikos Georgiadis, "Greek journalists were once again called upon to play the role of the collective consciousness of the nation" (Panagiotarea, 2000, p. 112). So, popular (or rather populist) rhetoric and views that readers and audiences find "comfortable" as news criteria did seem to have a big impact on coverage.

Another important point relates to the issue of "self-censorship" during the Kosovo crisis and the relationship of journalists with the media that employ them. Savidis has claimed that "there has to be a distinction between the journalist and the media he or she works for" (Panagiotarea, 2000, p. 96). This view suggests that the journalists who covered the war had to adapt their reports to the particular priorities and perspectives of their media employers. It also implies that although a number of journalists reported the news as thoroughly as possible, some chief editors or other authorities back home adjusted their reports in line with prevailing views, as these were seen as corresponding to popular perceptions.

In the war zone, the approximately fifty Greek journalists who were sent (a significant number, especially in comparison with the numbers of correspondents sent from other "more powerful" countries) to cover the events in former Yugoslavia, allegedly received better treatment from the Serbs (Panagiotarea, 2000, p. 63). This is generally considered to be true, despite the arguments of some Greek journalists that everybody had the same degree of freedom and access to key areas, as well as resources. Greek journalists deny that there was any restriction or distortion of the facts at all, either in Greece or in Serbia (Raptis, 2000, p. 174), resulting from their presumably "friendly" relations with Serb authorities.

Nonetheless, there were obvious cases, mainly in the press, of opinion articles and reports that displayed a different view from the conventional anti-NATO and pro-Serbian discourse. For instance, Richardos Someritis of the newspaper *To Vima*, was one of the few who, in his regular editorials, talked with passion about Serb atrocities and the adoption by the Greek media of an extremely pro-Serbian stance. Another journalist, Christos Tellidis, correspondent for the daily newspaper *To Ethnos*, found himself in an uncomfortable position. As he himself has said, when he reported news about the Kosovo-Albanians and the severe abuses they suffered, the newspaper for which he worked – an example of the typically Greek mainstream coverage of national and international affairs – censored some of his "most revealing reports" on Serbian atrocities (Panagiotarea, 2000, p. 92). However, the majority of Greek journalists attacked colleagues who attempted to express a different point of view, both publicly and privately. Someritis, for example, was charged with "irrationality" and "paranoia" (Raptis, 2000, p. 175).

In general, arguments regarding "different" opinions and those who expressed them, both during and in the aftermath of the NATO campaign, were, and still are, fairly heated and irresolvable. Socrates Tsihlias's claim that the "truth" about the war was told almost exclusively by Greek journalists, as they were the only ones who disclosed the real causes and effects of the bombings (Panagiotarea, 2000, p. 81), sum up to a fair degree what was, and is, seen as the dominant view in Greece. (For more information on the debate over Greek media/journalists and the coverage of the Kosovo crisis see www.klik.gr/146/index.htm; in Greek)

5. Summary and Conclusion

From the onset of the NATO air strikes against Serbia in spring 1999 and throughout the campaign, the Greek media maintained a distinct and uncompromising anti-war outlook on the events taking place, both in the air space and on the ground of former Yugoslavia. This view was different from most media perspectives in other NATO member states. It was infused with reports and interpretations that contrasted with the mainstream coverage in other countries, was rather disapproving of the Greek government's position, seen as shaped by NATO orders, and provoked accusations by many foreign commentators of being pro-Serbian.

The content and angle of the Greek media coverage (both print and broadcast) undeniably suggest that the general framework was anti-NATO. Regardless of voices calling for a less fervent reaction, especially in the press, the focus was placed on the victimization of the Serbs by the Alliance (mainly via graphic and evocative television footage), which not only "pretentiously" used "alleged atrocities" as a pretext to intervene in order to serve its geopolitical goals, but also created more problems for the overall region (including the widespread refugee problem).

The general Greek media viewpoint was founded on a distinctive approach that saw the NATO operation as an act of aggression not only against Serbia, but also against the geopolitical order in the Balkans. Furthermore, the professed common cultural and religious characteristics shared by Greece and Serbia led to a view, adopted mainly – but not only – by right-wing newspapers, which evoked nationalistic sentiments and sided with the Serbs. This was most apparent in the context of the "dangers" for the Greek minority in Albania. These features, coupled with typically popular opposition to American influence in Greece, appeared to guide Greek media coverage to a great extent.

The endorsement of the fairly nationalistic discourse by a large proportion of the media was decidedly promoted by Greek journalists. Even though some journalists expressed different opinions, blaming Serbian authorities for crimes committed against Kosovo-Albanians, a great majority of the profession, especially on the official level, has continued to defend Greek coverage of the Kosovo crisis.

While it would appear simplistic and certainly risky to identify journalists with their employers or other superiors – as news content does not entirely depend on their reports, but also on editorial decisions and other mechanisms – still it is argued that they in fact played an extremely significant role in creating the particular discourse. Driven mainly by their conventional role of supporting domestic interests and values, they supported an anti-war, anti-American and significantly pro-Serbian media attitude.

Reflecting on Goff's view, as cited at the beginning of this paper, what becomes apparent is what Giannouloupoulos has said: "[In the Kosovo crisis] Greek journalists could not afford to act otherwise than to collect and present the material of their reports as both the producers and the consumers of the news" (1999, p. 27).

Any issues that call for further investigation, not only in relation to Greek coverage, but also in respect to media coverage of the Kosovo crisis and NATO air operations in other countries (as indeed the coverage of other military conflicts around the world), need to be addressed in view of the understanding that "media do not exist outside the political and social world they describe" (Allen and Seaton 1999, p. 4). This case study indicates that Kosovo was treated by the Greek media in line with distinct critical social, cultural, and political predispositions. The next phase of this discussion should proceed with an in-depth examination and deconstruction of these predispositions. Only this kind of analytical approach could potentially challenge and explicate the conditions that guide the production of conflicting types of coverage of world events in relation not only to Greece, but also to international media.

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On the author. Margarita Kondopoulou has worked as a journalist for several years for Greek radio stations and magazines. She has a BA in English Literature from the American College of Greece (Deree) and an MA in Mass Communications from the Centre for Mass Communication Research (CMCR)/University of Leicester, UK. Currently she is an associate tutor in the MA by Distance Learning course at the Centre for Mass Communication Research (CMCR)/University of Leicester, UK, and working on her PhD thesis on the comparative analysis of the Greek and British press coverage of the Kosovo crisis. She has published several articles on this topic.

Address: Distance Learning Office, Centre for Mass Communication Research, University of Leicester, PO Box 6359, Leicester, LE1 7YZ, UK. e-mail: <mailto:mk38@le.ac.uk>