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**RAMSES<sup>2</sup>**

**The Role of the Greek  
Press in Greek-Turkish  
Rapprochement:  
The Coverage of the  
"Annan Plan" for the  
settlement of the  
Cyprus Conflict**

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**About RAMSES2:** RAMSES2 is a Network of Excellence on Mediterranean Studies funded by the European Commission under the 6th Framework Programme. Oxford's contribution to RAMSES2 is a collaborative endeavour of the European Studies Centre and the Middle East Centre, which is run by SEESOX. Launched and coordinated by the Maison Méditerranéenne de Sciences de l'Homme in Aix-en-Provence, RAMSES2 involves 36 academic institutions from Western Europe, the Balkans and the Middle East researching the history, societies and current politics of the wider Mediterranean area. Its ambition is to create a new field of Mediterranean studies by bringing together the hitherto disparate scholarship on the different littoral subregions and countries. Through its activities, the network seeks to supplement the efforts of the European Union to bolster cross-Mediterranean integration via the Barcelona Process, the newly-instituted Neighbourhood Policy as well as the enlargement framework covering now the Balkans and Turkey. RAMSES2 investigates the Mediterranean as a geo-historical space marked by various patterns of exchange and cross-fertilisation in order to transcend the socio-political, economic and cultural fractures characterising it at present.

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The RAMSES2 sub-project run by St Antony's brings together a group of scholars from the European Studies Centre, the Middle East Centre, Maison Française and the Department of Politics and International Relations. The steering committee includes Kalypso Nicolaidis (Chair), Othon Anastasakis, Richard Caplan, Philip Robins and Michael Willis.

# **The Role of the Greek press in Greek-Turkish Rapprochement: The Coverage of the “Annan Plan” for the Settlement of the Cyprus Conflict**

**Nikos Panagiotou**

*“If the decision I made is the one serving my interests, why is the other side also celebrating?”* Cartoon in *Politis* (Cypriot Newspaper), commenting the results of the referendum in the Greek-Cypriot side.

## **Executive Summary**

In 2004 the Annan Plan for Cyprus settlement was presented and negotiated by the two sides. This paper attempts to understand the role of the media and more precisely the role of the press in the construction and deconstruction of a conflict, through the examination of the Greek press coverage of the Annan plan for Cyprus settlement. The aim of the paper is to challenge views that mass media hardly play any significant role in foreign policy issues. According to the main hypothesis of the paper, in the case of the ‘Annan Plan’ the Greek press has played a “protagonist role” by defining the responses of the public in the absence of a clear stance by the Greek government. The conflict and the victor-perpetrator frames applied for the coverage of the ‘Other,’ resulted in undermining the proposed resolution to the Greek public opinion. As the case considered here illustrates mass media role in conflict resolution initiatives is of high importance and as such it should be involved in order to optimize the effectiveness of such initiatives.

## **Introduction**

Mass media affect the way that we participate in the political sphere, through becoming an important source of our knowledge. With a capacity to reach large and influential segments of a given population in the shortest possible time, and provide factual information, analysis and opinion, mass media helps shape popular perceptions of the nature of a society (Katrivesis, 2003). Their role is critical especially in the process by which people develop a view of the world (Gitlin 1980; Hall, 1982; Carragee, 1991). According to William Gamson (Gamson, 1996) media discourse, is one of the three resources that people mobilise to make sense of politics. However personal experience and popular wisdom mediate the influence of media discourses on people's opinions and frames of reference. When it comes to foreign policy issues the media's significance is underlined by the public's 'media-dependency' for political information, due to the lack of direct personal experience. Mass media especially the press not only reports foreign policy issues but often plays an autonomous role, by determining and "constructing" the framework in which such issues are discussed. It is through the press that the interaction of different agendas (public, policy-makers) takes place and shapes the outcome of foreign policy choices.

In the realm of foreign policy political pressure on the media is greater than on domestic issues (Graber 1989:336). The coverage of international news in particular is linked to the stand a government takes on various international happenings (Mermin 1996, Gitlin 1980). A critical though element of press influence on the overall system of foreign policy, I consider is the existence of policy certainty or uncertainty. The absence or presence of this element determines the role of the press in various incidents: *a) the co-operational*, where press discourse is in accordance with the government and political elites 'definition' of the events (political certainty), *b) the protagonist function*, in cases of political uncertainty or in the absence of a clear stance from the political elites, media discourse prevails in the public sphere.

## **Methodology**

In support of my argument I examine the Greek press coverage of the UN Plan for a settlement of the Cyprus issue. The focus on the Annan Plan is insightful due to a number of interrelated reasons. The Cyprus issue is often perceived as dominating all other issues in Greek-Turkish relations (Keridis & Triantafyllou 2001). Because of its protracted

character and international nature the Cyprus issue retains its emotive power in both countries, while the Annan plan represented the most serious effort for a conflict resolution, and as such provoked strong reactions from a significant part of the Greek public opinion and the Greek political environment.

This paper reports on the study of four newspapers based on criteria such as the representativeness of the political spectrum, circulation figures, and influence on the members of the political parties that they are affiliated with: a) '*Vima*', a newspaper with center-right conventional political views, one of the leading newspapers especially its Sunday edition (papers sold in total on April 2006 1.488.136) b) '*Eleytherotypia*', a newspaper with center-left conventional political views (1.416.255 papers sold in total on April 2006) c) '*Kathimerini*', a newspaper with conservative conventional political views that belongs to the right spectrum (1.812.083 papers sold in total on April 2006) d) '*Rizospastis*', the 'official' newspaper of the communist party (245.868 copies sold on April 2006)<sup>1</sup>.

The study is covering the period from March 2004, when the parties began negotiations on the plan in Switzerland to negotiate the plan, to April 2004 when the referendums took place.

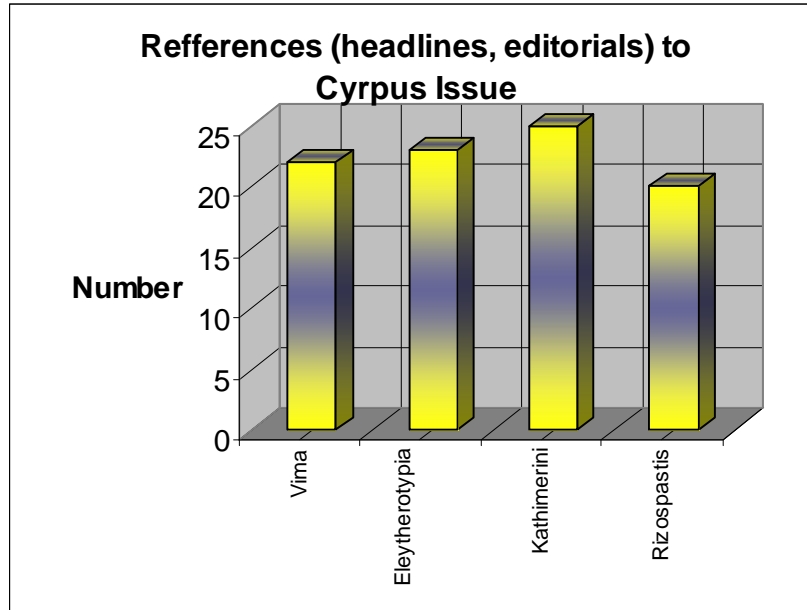
### **The Annan Plan and the stance of the Greek Press**

During the critical period the importance given to Cyprus issue (negotiations in Switzerland, referendums etc) is reflected in the high occurrence of Cyprus-related headlines as well as the number of editorials (Table 1).

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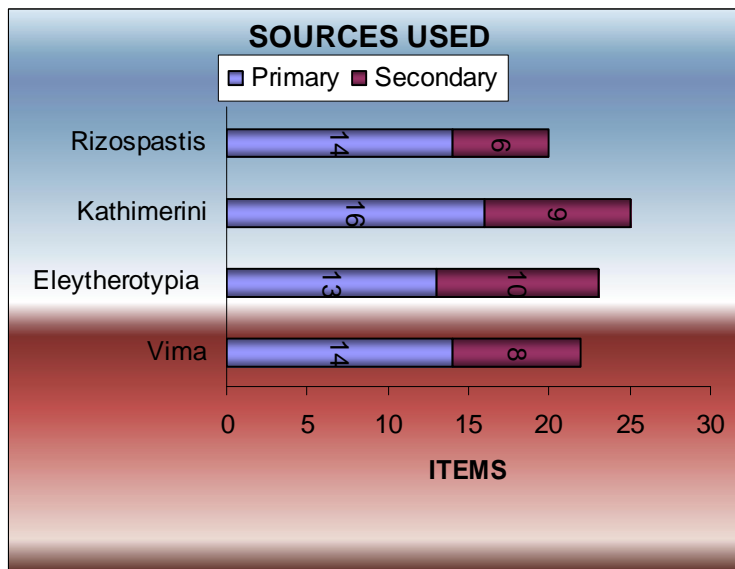
<sup>1</sup>The circulation figures have been taken from [http://www.eihea.gr/default\\_en.htm](http://www.eihea.gr/default_en.htm) accessed at 22/06/2006.

**Table 1**



Regarding the sources used by the newspapers in their headlines articles, the majority of them are primary sources (Table 2). As primary are defined newspaper own sources to cover the events contrary to the 'secondary' sources such as (press agencies etc).

**Table 2**



This choice is related with: a) the 'negative' and suspicious stance towards the way that third parties present this issue as well as the Greek -Turkish relations in general

(journalist, press agencies etc) b) the view of Greek-Turkish relations as a domestic issue whilst it results in the exclusion of the arguments of the `Other`.

The majority of the newspapers that I examine categorize Cyprus issue as a «national issue». As a consequence the relations between the two communities are reduced to an ideological narrative, to an issue that ties up with the `survival of the nation itself` (Irakleidis, 2001). («*The holy case` of Cyprus» Eleyt 16/04, Lucerne as... Zurich? Rizo 27/03/2004, «A patriotic NO to the imperialist plans» Rizo 16/04*).

During the negotiations of the Annan Plan and in general in the period examined, most of the newspapers assumed a role of quasi-diplomats. It is the “rally behind the flag” phenomenon where the need for national unity in the face of the critical of the moments is projected by majority of the newspapers. `No to the divisions` Eleyth. 16/04, `National Unity for Cyprus` Kath.04/04. This is clearly expressed in the following cartoon (Kathimerini 05/04), which calls for national unity, in the face of the `Turkish danger` which posits as `existent` and threatening. Greek society divergence over the proposed plan, between the supporters of the plan and those against it (presented as two roosters), is considered to ignore the real `danger`, Turkey (the threatening, guile fox).



Through the examination of the items it is evident that the construction of Greek-Turkish relations as a `zero sum game` (Panagiotou: 2005), influences to a great extent both the stance of the newspapers examined and the way that the negotiations in Switzerland are reported. “*Turks and Turkish-Cypriots celebrate*” Eleyt.01/04, “*Erdogan is bragged*” Kath 01/04 “*Agony and disappointment in Cyprus*” Eleyth.01/04. “*The Greek Defeat in*

*Cyprus Issue*” *Eleyth* 03/04. The outcome of these negotiations is counted and projected by ‘Eleytherotypia’, ‘Kathimerini’ as a backhanded Turkish victory, while for ‘Rizospastis’ stands as “A provocative injustice against Cyprus” 01/04 “A rope for Greek-Cypriots”30/03. In that context the rejection of the plan is considered as inevitable “The rejection is inevitable” *Kath.*02/04. The opposition to the proposed plan, was “played upon the historical significance of the very word “oxi”, which in Greek does not only mean no, it means no to foreign interference”(Martin 2006:57). Only ‘Vima’, takes a more neutral position, since it holds a discreet stance in favor of the Annan Plan as the most realistic choice in order the Cyprus issue to be resolved. “The road opens...”28/03, “A sovereign state in a sovereign island” 04/04). Regarding the evaluation of the Annan plan by the others newspapers examined, their stance, as happens in ‘Vima’, is informed by their political preferences. Especially ‘Rizospastis’, following the Communist Party decision is against the agreement a stance that is projected as patriotic duty and act “A plan-trap for the people of Cyprus” 11/04, “The Yes of partition” 17/04. ‘Kathimerini’ stance almost in the same line with the government, is neutral-negative towards the Annan Plan “Everything is difficult in the Cyprus Problem” 27/03, “A Greek No to the Annan Plan” 01/04, “A long before ago announced NO” 18/04. The following cartoon is characteristic of the way that ‘Kathimerini’, evaluated the proposed plan.



(*Kathimerini*, “Annan equation”).

‘Eleytherotypia’, as it results by the analysis of its headlines and editorials, is also against the proposed plan. Regardless its center-left conventional political views, its stance comes in contrast with that of the socialist party (PASOK), that favored the acceptance of

the plan. This case underlines the evolution that took place in the 1990s and later, as Greek press in particular and the mass media in general function more autonomous and with a media-centric logic.

In contrast with the clear-cut stance adopted by the parties in opposition, the absence of a clearly government placement regarding the referendum is reflected in the headlines and editorials. “Karamanlis adopts neutral stance although the criticism of Mitsotakis” *Eleyth*.10/04 “Government distance itself from a decision” *Vima* 11/04. This is explicitly featured in the following cartoon of Kathimerini (*President of Cyprus: Good morning, Prime-Minister of Greece: Whatever you say I just side up*)



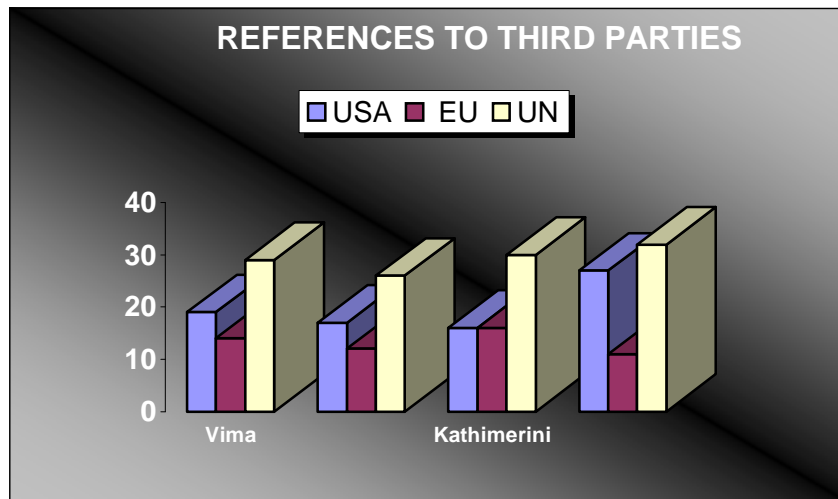
In this case as it happened in Imia/Kardak crisis 1996, I suggest that the role and the views of the press predominated the public sphere during this period, influencing to a great extent the reactions of the public opinion. This situation consist the protagonist role of the press in the public sphere (Panagiotou: 2005). As that is described the phenomenon where mass media discourse prevails in the public sphere due to the political uncertainty or the absence of a clear government stance. This element is especially important since it elects the role of mass media in foreign policy.

This period the way that the ‘Other’ Turks and Turkish Cypriot are ‘reported’, is constant with the way that is presented in Greek-Turkish relations (Panagiotou 2003). More specifically there is a selective presentation and emphasis on “irrational”, “offensive” and “aggressive” aspects of the claims of the ‘Other’. Its arguments either are not presented, or characterised as residing outside of lawful solutions. In contrast the

Greek-Cypriots arguments are praised as in accordance with international law. The antithetical scheme employed in this case, is Greece’s rightful claims against claims that are based on threats sought to be justified through bargaining. This scheme is part of the wider conflict frame that characterizes newspapers reports regarding the proposed plan.

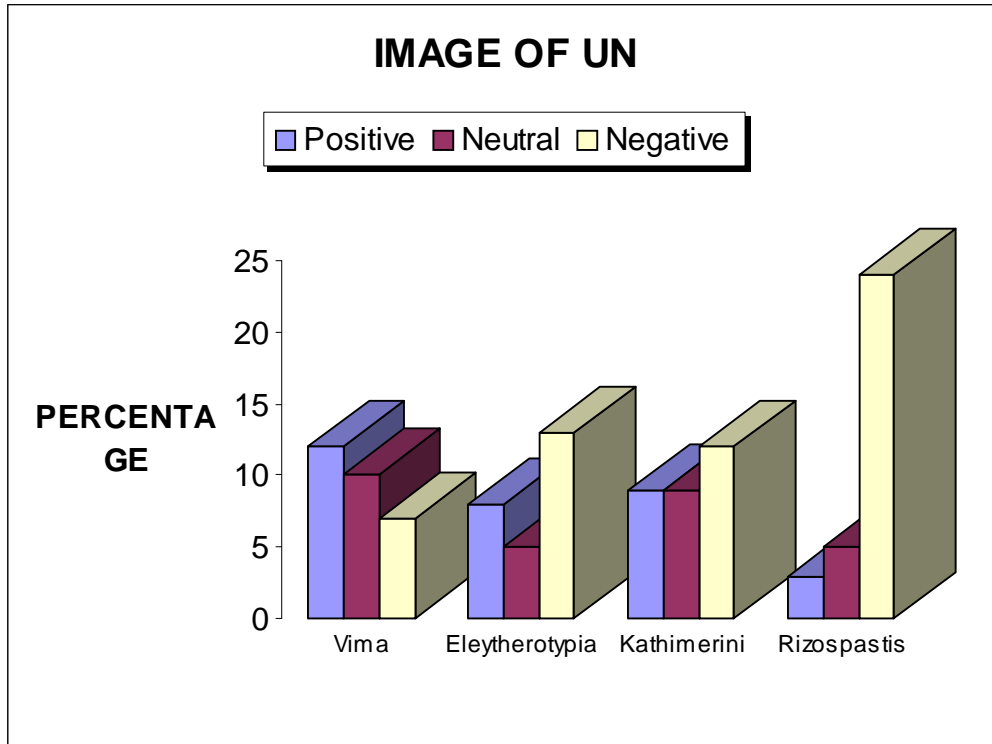
In the newspapers examined there is a significant number of references to third parties (UN, EU, USA) (Table 4). The majority of them refer to the UN (40%) as expected, an important number though of them refer to USA (28%) and to the EU (22%).The latter reflects the affect that the European prospect had upon the Cyprus issue.

**Table 4**



The way that UN image projected is influenced by the stance that each newspaper adopts towards the Annan plan (Table 5).

Table 5



Regarding third parties representations these can be characterized as emotional. These images might explain the anti-American or even sometimes anti-Western stances of the Greek public opinion. Representations of USA, E.U. are affected by what I call the ‘Syndrome of the Great Powers’(Panagiotou 2005). It is a product on one hand, of the realization of the importance that these countries have in the international system, while from the other it is based on emotional representations that are drawn from their role in modern Greek history. These images still have a big impact on the way these countries are depicted by the Greek press.

The emotional representation of foreign policy issues though takes another form. Countries are categorised as friends or foes of Greece. In an imaginary way it is the rebirth of Philhellenism as is to be found during the war of independence against the Ottoman Empire, by intellectuals and artists.(Panagiotou 2005) This way of reporting transmits false impressions and enables the categorization of countries between philhellene and non-philhellene. It does not allow the critical evaluation of policies while it blanket undermines the image of organizations or countries in the public opinion.

## Conclusions

The Greek press does not usually determine the foreign policy agenda, but it clearly wields a large amount of influence by defining “success” and “failure” insofar as the public is concerned. It provides and mediates the meaning of the action in foreign policy. Its influence is greater in foreign policy issues: a) since the lack of personal experience leads to the public’s reliance upon the information that receives from the mass media and b) due to the fact that “*the absence in Greek foreign policy decision making system, of an institutional systemic structure for the planning of foreign policy leads to the predominance of persons (ministers). This phenomenon increases the importance of mass media, since foreign policy is practiced having as supreme criterion the maximisation of electoral impressions.*” (Ioakeimidis, 2003: 97).

In the case that I examined, press played a protagonist role. Due to the absence of a clear-cut line by the Greek government, the role and the views of the press regarding the Annan Plan dominated the public sphere, and influenced to a great extent the reactions of the Greek public opinion. Its negative stance (*65,6% in favor of NO Eleytherotypia, 17/04*) to a big extent should be correlated with the way that the mass media in general and the press in particular have covered the plan. The absence of personal experience regarding this issue, and a clear-cut stance from the Greek government are the reasons that extended the influence, press discourse had upon Greek public opinion. The conflict frames employed, via the headlines as well the cartoons, guided public opinion to favor the rejection of the proposed plan. These findings challenge the views held by several scholars that the press is manipulated or it is simply a supporter and follower of the foreign policymakers (Paletz&Entman, 1981; Herman&Chomsky 1988;Hertsgaard, 1988)

For the majority of the newspapers examined, I suggest that the negative evaluation of the proposed resolution was influenced by the specific discourse for the Cyprus issue that has dominated the Greek public sphere from 1974. According to that discourse, it was thought that any future UN intervention would take only into consideration and justify ‘Our’ side expectations while putting aside the “Other” and its ‘truths’ as well. Additionally that dominant discourse excluded the fact that any UN intervention would leave out the political, military, and other realities that have been

shaped after the Turkish invasion. These beliefs resulted to the creation of what I call the “Annan Plan phenomenon” that dominated the Greek and Greek-Cypriot public sphere during the period examined. This phenomenon refers to the reactions of the public opinion in conflict situations where its long nourished expectations and anticipations collapse, when faced with the diplomatic reality. This phenomenon might offer an additional explanation of the reasons for the plan rejection by the proposed plan was rejected by the Greek-Cypriot side despite the fact that its “*basic framework -bi-communal, bi-zonal federation-were not new*” (Anastasakis, Bertrand, Nikolaidis, 2004:2).

The way that Greek press covered the Annan plan verifies White (1970) findings that two nations in conflict are prone to develop mirrored negative images of one another. The stance of the newspapers was influenced by ‘national identity’, since it favoured and extended national stereotypes for the ‘Other’. In the construction of these images other factors of equal importance contributed as well especially many of the representations were influenced by the newspaper’s political affiliation. The importance of headlines in the Greek press for dramatizing events can be attributed to their aim to increase circulation. In regards of third parties, its coverage was affected by emotional representations, such as the categorisation to friends or foes of Greece. In that context, the images that are conveyed to the public do not represent the complexities of international relations and are easily exploited.

As it has been shown the role of the press, and mass media in general, is central in the construction and deconstruction of a conflict. Mass media “*helps and hinders the efforts of policymakers to control and end conflicts*”, (Gilboa, 2002:ix) and as such it is more than necessary to involve them in any effort to resolve a conflict. As Zinnes (1968) suggests, the perceptions of international conflict in most cases are more significant than the actual conflict itself. Bearing that in mind and the limitations of this paper, it becomes apparent that more studies need to be undertaken to further our knowledge on the role and the impact of mass media influence in protracted conflicts.

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