

TURKEY AND GREECE IN ALBANIAN MEDIA AND PUBLIC DISCOURSE

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Abstract

This paper explores media coverage and domestic discourse regarding Albania's strategic partners in the period between 2009-2014. The study explores Albania's relations with the two 'strategic partners' as advocated in the official rhetoric: one EU country, Greece and one non-EU neighbor, albeit NATO member, Turkey. Both states have played an important role in relation to Albania's EU integration, and are part of the same regional security complex. Relations with both countries include key sectors of national economies, public diplomacy, security and particularly of regional security, as all three countries are full NATO members. Yet, both Turkey and Greece are portrayed with different frequency and at times through historical stereotypes in the Albanian national media and the parliamentary discourse. The concept of 'strategic partnership' of Albania with these two neighboring countries is investigated against the backdrop of media discourse. The study asks: how are economic interests and security concerns of Albania in relation to Turkey and Greece interpreted domestically and mediated through the media? The key hypothesis is that historical and ethnic-centric and nationalistic stereotypes persist in the public portrayal of Albania's relations with these two countries; yet, these historical and ethnic-centric elements are stronger in moments of domestic political and economic crisis, and vary from one country to the other. Furthermore, the portrayal of Albania's relations with these two countries cannot be extricated from Albania's EU accession: EU accession and conditionality are one key variable in understanding public and media discourse on Albania's partnership with Turkey and Greece. The study will deploy instruments and tools from Critical Discourse Analysis as elaborated by Norman Fairclough and Ruth Wodak. The key objective of the study is to identify 'basic discourses' (Hansen 2006:51), which are the structural positions in a policy debate about 'Albania's strategic partnerships'. A careful selection of a vast range of media texts (both textual and visual materials) is used at the aim of identifying these basic narratives. The two basic discourses can be identified as the historical-cultural discourse and the pragmatist-economic one. The empirical corpus will include texts from three key sources: Parliamentary debates, national press and media debates or talk panels. As both, media and the parliamentary discourse draw legitimacy and authority from different sources (Hansen 2006), a comparison between these two orders of discourses on the question of foreign and security policy is a valuable contribution in the field of international relation generally, and identity and discourse studies in particular.

Key Words: *Public Opinion, Balkans, Europe, Basic Narratives*

Introduction

Greece and Turkey are frequently portrayed in the Albanian media and political discourse as Albania's 'strategic partners'. Whereas Greece has been more steadily present in the media throughout post-communism, Turkey has earned more saliency recently, particularly after the election of the incumbent Socialist-led governing coalition in June 2013 which was followed by a number of diplomatic visits of high-profile officials from both sides. However, reality and political rhetoric with regard to Albania's partnerships in the domain of foreign and security policy do not always add up. In this regard, it is important to interrogate the intermediation of the media in relation to constructing social identities. In this paper, we are particularly interested in exploring the process of constructing Albania's state identity by the media and through media discourse. My initial premise stems from the school of social constructivism in International Relations, which is that Albania's identity in post-communism relies on the social construction of *others*.

Among Albania's *significant others*, we have chosen Greece and Turkey for a variety of reasons: Firstly, they can be studied in the context of neighborly relations. Secondly, all three have various relations with the EU and different degrees of convergence and 'Europeanization' of their foreign and security policies. Greece is an EU and NATO member state. Turkey is a NATO member state, but not an EU member state yet. Albania is a NATO member state but is still in the process of earning the status of EU candidate state.¹ Hence, interrogating the relationship between Albania and these two other neighborly countries cannot be done in isolation from the key variable of 'European integration' and 'EU convergence'. Indeed, in the case of Greece as the only EU member state which is integrally part of the region, its foreign policy in general, and its Southeast European (SEE) policy can be only studied in correlation to the impact of the 'deep Europeanization' that has led to the enhancement of Greece's credibility as an international, or regional actor from the 1990s onwards (Dokos&Tsakiris 2012:8). Thirdly, all three countries have their own regional/Balkan narratives which are strongly present in their foreign policy paradigms, Albania being the most modest in its regional ambitions, Turkey being the most ambitious, and Greece being pushed to the fore of regional dynamic also because of its economic crisis and the opportunities that Southeast Europe presents for its energy sector (Dokos&Tsakiris 2012: 7). All three countries are geographically located in the Balkans; however the 'Balkans' is woven in different ways in their national narratives and it plays different functions: whereas the term itself owes its political connotations to the legacy of the Ottoman Empire, Turkey has recently come to be identified with the region and claim to be part of it, and not an outsider to the region (Grigoriadis 2014: 161). Greece, on the other hand, is a member of the EU and NATO and its official foreign policy discourse does not find it easy to incorporate the 'Balkans' as part of its national and state identity. Instead, one might say that Greece's positioning towards the Balkans is rather ambivalent, as a sense of 'Greekness' in the nineteenth and twentieth century is often forged against the 'Oriental/Balkans' elements (Pace, 2006 :128). In this connection, one may say that Greece's relation to the Balkans is heavily dependent upon the EU-focused center-periphery dynamic between the EU and the Balkans. In other words, Greek political elites and official discourse has accommodated the EU view towards the Balkans as its own in the post-communist period. In relation to Albania, it often claimed to

¹ In October 2013, the EU Commission recommended Albania positively for the candidate status. It is expected that the country obtains its candidate status in late June 2014, upon the unilateral decision of the EU Council to grant the status.

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be the country's mentor and doorway to the EU. However, a number of unsolved security problems have continuously hindered Greece's mentoring role for its non-EU neighbors, such as Albania: in the nineties, Albanian-Greek relations have been heavily influenced by the dynamics of immigration as the Albanian immigrants presented a 'security issue' for the Greek public (Karakatzanis 2012). Despite the increasing number of Albanian immigrants returning to Albania because of the economic crisis in Greece in the last couple of years, the Greek public opinions still points at the 'Albanians immigrants in Greece' as the main major problem that affects relations between Greece and Albania the most (Armakolas 2013). In addition, other pending issues of 'hard security' such as the Agreement on the Delineation of the Greek- Albanian Continental Shelf and Maritime Zones or as commonly referred to by the Albanian media and public the issue of 'maritime borders', and the Cham minority question. Last, but not less important, are questions of identity, such as the relation between the Orthodox Church and the Albanian nationhood and citizenship. Against these salient themes, the study is a systematic investigation of the key state identities articulated by the Albanian media.

Aim of study:

The study aims at identifying the basic discourses of the debate on Albania's relations with Greece and Turkey, and particularly on Albania's strategic partners. In other words, it aims at bringing to the fore the dominant themes and positions in the media and public debate regarding Albania's relations with Turkey and Greece. Furthermore, it aims at exploring how is the Albanian state identity portrayed and constructed in the Albanian media through its representations of Albania's others, which is Albania neighbors. Furthermore, we are interested to see how national identity (Albanian) stands vis-à-vis regional identity (Balkan) and European identities. As both the 'Balkans' and 'Europe' are crucial identity markers to both, Greece and Turkey regarding their individual identification in world politics, we can then investigate Albania's public discourse in relation to Greece and Turkey as a discourse which is inherently about belonging to or distancing from Europe and the Balkans. As the study builds on the study of media discourse, and relies primarily on textual and visual materials, its logic is not one of mechanical causality and inference. Instead, the study looks for *causal mechanisms* and *causaleffects* of media discourse in the general public debate about Albania's foreign policy in post-communism.

Research Topic:

The study lies in the intersection of media studies and constructivist approaches to foreign policy analysis. The study does not build on the conventional approaches on the study of impact of public opinion on foreign policy analysis. On the contrary, it regards both media and political orders of discourse (Fairclough 1994) as sites of production of social identities, in our case, of Albania's state identity in relation to its significant others. As such, it is hereby believed that by looking at the most stabilized identities as articulated in the media discourse, or the main structural positions in the public debate on Albania's strategic partners, one can better understand and predict the prevalent foreign policy paradigms (Brighi 2007) in relation to Albania's partnerships and closer relations with its neighbors.

Research Question:

The study investigates which is the dominant discourse regarding Albania's strategic partner, and what identity and policy options does this discourse articulate? This question includes a few sub-questions, such: how stabilized is the notion or the identity marker of 'strategic partner' for Turkey and Greece? How do the media construct temporally and spatially the identity of Albania on the one hand, and Greece and Turkey on the other, and the relations between them? What other extra-media and extra-political genres are used to the aim of this construction?

Scientific Methods:

The study builds on Critical Discourse Analysis, particularly Norman Fairclough's analysis of media discourse (Fairclough 1995; also Fairclough 2001) and studies of International Relations and foreign policy analysis which build on Fairclough's model (i.e. Hansen 2006). Critical Discourse Analysis includes a wide range of techniques to study textual materials and link it casually and interpretatively to the broader social economic and cultural structures. I use primarily the techniques and theoretical insights of Norman Fairclough's type of CDA which focuses primarily on genre, intertextual elements, authority, and lastly, material aspects of the production of texts such as who writes, how it has been produced and what is the general political view/affiliation of the media which produces this text. Genre is important as it provides different legitimation criteria and authority of texts; in this regard, op-eds can have more authority and articulate more establishes/stabilized identities than genres like reporting. Visual materials, on the other hand, such as documentaries, and TV shows combine text and non-textual materials. As Lene Hansen argues, visual materials are quicker in mobilizing perceptions as they articulate stabilized identities (Hansen 2011).

A vast range of media materials (both print and visual) have been used to map the key narratives regarding Greece and Turkey and Albania's relations with them. The *sampling* technique has been convenient sampling, in the sense that the media material has been organized around specific events, official agreements, inter-state incidents, as well as has largely relied upon the salience and recurrence of themes related to the 'Orthodox Church', 'Cham Issue', 'minorities', 'immigrants in Greece', 'pan-Ottomanism', 'Oriental'. Although the study is not quantitative and there has been no counting of words and phrases in a formal and statistical way, a number of key phrases and words have been pre-determined in order to identify the *salience*, *intensity* and the *degree of stability* of a certain discourse regarding Turkey and Greece. They are very explicit articulations of identity (see below). Prior to the selection of texts, a full List has been compiled; it included an exhaustive number of dates of visits of state officials, incidents, agreements and other landmark moments in the diplomatic relations between Albania and the two other countries. This List was then used as a guide for the selection of media materials and for identifying the salience of themes and representations in a temporal plane. Materials have then been sorted according to basic genres, such as: news reporting, op-ed, interviews (of officials and politicians) and debate panel shows.

The sample from the press includes five main newspapers: *Shqip*, *Panorama*, *Mapo*, *Zëri i Popullit* and *Rilindja Demokratike*. The three first ones are chosen because they are independent and mainstream. The two latter ones are chosen because of their party affiliation: As such they might help to explore the interplay between political and official discourse on Albania's partners on the one side, and media discourse on the other. Issues from each newspaper have been chosen

within the time span of 2009-2014. As far as TV debate shows are concerned, two national TV channels, *Top Channel* and *TV Klan*, are selected.

Data Analysis:

The corpus of texts is divided according to key themes of Albania's relations with Turkey and Greece, such as immigration, economy and energy, EU integration, minority rights, territory and statehood, religion and the (historical) past. With regard to *genre*, there is a *sequential* difference between textual materials of the print media and TV debate panel shows. The selection of the latter is based primarily on conventional sampling, referring primarily to the title of the panel show. One can suggest that a specific theme is chosen for a panel show by an editorial team *only after* it has been first covered and already fuelled a debate in the print media and in the news. In this regard, one can say that for a theme to be chosen as the theme of a TV panel show, it has to become part of the broader debate and, to some degree, to reflect stabilized positions in that debate. Hence its choice for a TV show shows a relative high degree of stability (of the discourse) and saliency. The aim of this analysis is to identify 'basic narratives' or the ideal type representations (Hansen 2006:52) of Turkey and Greece in the Albanian media. In line with Hansen's model, the basic discourses are built on 'explicit articulations of key representations of identity' (2006:53) in debates on Albania's partnerships and relations Turkey and Greece. These explicit articulations in our case include 'partner', 'enemy', 'European', 'Balkan', 'brother', 'ally', 'neighbor'.

Findings:

We can conclude that the discourse of Greece and Turkey as 'strategic partners' is not explicitly articulated in the Albanian media. The marker of 'strategic partner' is extensively used in the official foreign policy discourse with regard to Turkey as from 2013 onwards. The incumbent government has increasingly used the marker of 'strategic partner' in both official and non-official events. Yet, for a discourse to become *stabilized* it needs draw from a variety of genres and be articulated explicitly throughout these genres. This means that although a portrayal of Turkey as a 'strategic partner' may stem from the political and official field, it needs to be picked up and elaborated by other fields, such as the media and through different genres, such as editorials, media reports, panel debates etc. As far as Greece is concerned, it can be suggested that the concept of 'partnership' is steadily interrogated against Greece's relations with Albania. In this sense, 'Greece's partnership with Albania' is constantly contested by the discourse of 'Greece as not a genuine European' as far as economy, human rights and peaceful neighborly relations are concerned.

With regard to specific themes associated with Greece and Turkey, the most salient ones are: immigration, economy and energy, EU integration, minority rights, territory and statehood, religion and the (historical) past. Not all themes are evenly salient for each country. Whereas immigration, minority rights, religion and territory/statehood are mainly associated with Greece, Turkey is most often represented through religion and the historical past. Both countries representations are associated with economy and energy, as well as with EU integration. However there are notable differences: when reproduced in the media without further comments and interpretation, which is in the news reporting sections, Greece is portrayed as playing a crucial role in Albania's accession process. Yet, in the op-eds and debate panel genres, the role of

Greece is limited to economy (positive) and to immigration (negative). Its role in Albania's accession is minimized. Furthermore, the question of minorities only becomes salient and negatively represented around elections times and in relation to questions of statehood and political conflict, and Greece's role in Albanian domestic politics. This concurs with the results of a survey conducted recently on Albanian-Greek perceptions. According to the authors, Alba Cela and SashenkaLleshaj, 'the context in which the Greek minority in Albania is mentioned has less to do with their traditional presence especially in southern communities and more to do with their representation by political forces, their alleged connection with Greek politicians and the issue of Greek pensions' (2014:29). In this connection, one can suggest that popular and media perceptions converge to a large degree, or rather than media does not challenge dominant popular perceptions. Turkey, on the other hand, is represented in association with the historical past (negative) and with economic collaboration (positive). This was the case particularly during 2012-2013, and particularly in genres such as TV debate shows.

In the debate on Albania's partnerships with Greece and Albania, we can identify two *basic discourses*: the cultural and the historical narrative on the one hand, and the economic and pragmatist one on the other. According to the former, Greece is not quite European and is more 'Balkans' than European. Turkey is largely identified with history and the construction of Turkish state identity in the Albanian media is done along historical and almost primordial lines. This means that the Balkans and Europe are not overlapping identities, but rather clashing patterns. Furthermore, while Albanian media presents Albania as a country on the way to fulfilling its European identity, Greece is not portrayed as 'genuinely European', which means that its state identity is still impinged upon cultural and historical understandings of nation-state, relations with others and world politics. In relation to identities such as 'Mediterranean', 'European' and certain national identities, Thomas Risse suggests that there is a logic of 'concentric circles' in play (quoted in Stetter 2013: 57). This means that a certain state builds its identity vis-à-vis its others in a non-contradictory or 'friend-enemy' pattern, but rather through the reconciliation of differences between self and many others, of various degree of 'otherness' (Hansen 2006) or friendliness. This pattern, however, does not quite apply to the construction of Albania's relations with Turkey and Greece, on the one hand, and with Balkans and Europe on the other. Instead, Europe on the one hand, or rather the EU, and Greece and Turkey on the other, stand in opposition to each other. The data of the study suggests that this is more explicitly the case for Turkey and Europe and less explicit and salient for Greece and Europe. This is logical, given the historical-primordial construction of Turkey in media discourse. As far as the second basic discourse is concerned, it associates Greece and Turkey with two trade partners. In these representations, the two countries are pragmatic choices of Albania. Yet, the former discourse dominates the media debate and simple articulations of Albania's relations with the two countries simply in terms of the economy are isolated, and primarily stemming from official texts—of foreign policy officials and politicians—which are reproduced in the media.

Conclusions:

This paper looked at the most explicit and established representations of Turkey and Greece in the Albanian public and media discourse. Building on Critical Discourse Analysis tools and the model provided by Lene Hansen, the study identified two key positions in the debate on Albania's relations with Turkey and Greece, or two basic discourses: the cultural-historical discourse, which interrogates Albania's relations with these two countries against the historical

past, recent and not so recent. In this discourse, neither country is properly 'Europe' and 'European'. The second basic discourse is that of economic pragmatism and collaboration. Here, the articulation of 'partnership' is more present, but not quite stabilized. The materials suggest that the former discourse still prevails in the Albanian media. It remains to be studied whether this basic discourse permeates the field of foreign policy.

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