

1. GREECE'S IMAGE HAS IMPROVED SO LET'S KEEP IT THAT WAY

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COMMENTARY

BY GEORGE N. TZOGOPOULOS *

Greece has been in the international spotlight for more than a decade. The outbreak of the economic crisis in the last months of 2009 led to an explosion in journalist interest. From being a paradise for tourists and the cradle of ancient civilization in the media discourse, Greece became a perceived synonym for corruption and maladministration. The German media led the chorus of criticism, occasionally inciting stereotyping to boot. Generally speaking though, and in spite of some flaws and exaggeration, the coverage has been fair. A systematic analysis of reports reveals that the international media covered the news and reproduced the political and economic agenda. Amid the darkness for which Greek politicians had been principally responsible, progress and achievements were not ignored. The period from May 2010 until the first months of 2011 under Prime Minister George Papandreou, the early stages of Antonis Samaras' administration and the final part of Alexis Tsipras' time at the helm – with emphasis on the signing of the Prespes agreement – saw journalists acknowledge Greece's economic and foreign policy efforts.

The current phase can perhaps be added to the previous three. The determination of Premier Kyriakos Mitsotakis to impose lockdown measures in mid-March and stop the spread of Covid-19 has been internationally acknowledged. The US media, in particular, have devoted time and space to explain the efficiency of Greece's response to the pandemic and make comparisons with other eurozone countries. Other European outlets have also covered the theme.

Drawing on experience, it is clear that the majority of journalists working in the international media – contrary to domestic speculation in Greece – are not biased against the country. The coverage is negative in bad times and positive in good times. Now it is the Greek government's responsibility to keep up the momentum and prevent setbacks as happened in the past. This is how Greece's international image will be further improved.

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