

# Mediating a Greek Success Story?

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Eurocrisis in the Press

By *George N. Tzogopoulos*

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Antonis Samaras

On 17 May 2013 the German tabloid newspaper *Bild* portrayed on its front page Greek Prime Minister Antonis Samaras as a successful politician who has managed to save the country from chaotic default and an exit from the eurosystem. This constitutes a symbolic example of the improvement of Greece's international coverage in recent months. Similar cases can also be found in the media discourse. *The Wall Street Journal*, for instance, concentrated on Mr Samaras' attempt to stabilise the national economy and cool political tempers. For its part, *Die Welt* praised the Greek Prime Minister for his courage and spirit in times of recession. Existing problems such as the rise of the neo-fascist Golden Dawn party and the impact of unemployment on young people partly attract the attention of foreign journalists. But their general stance vis-à-vis the country seems to have entered a new era.

The relatively positive image of Greece in the international media discourse has to be principally attributed to its determination to implement necessary reforms and deliver. As it had also happened in the period between May 2010 and November

2010, when the then centre-left government of George Papandreou was showing initial dynamism to apply the bailout terms, the international media now observe a similar tendency. On 13 July 2010, for example, French newspaper *Le Monde* regarded Greece in its print edition as the 'good student' of the European Union who had learned from mistakes of the past and could be a model for other problematic members of the eurozone. At that time, the PA.SO.K government was insisting on the need to liberate closed professions in spite of opposition by trade unions.

There are two main reasons that explain the optimism penetrating the current coverage. The first is the ongoing survival of the coalition government – led by conservative New Democracy and supported by PA.SO.K and the Democratic Left party. The cohesion of this government had been significantly doubted in autumn 2012 during voting procedures in the Parliament on new austerity measures. And the second reason is the significant reduction of the Greek twin deficits, the budget and the current account one. German politicians have not been economical in acknowledging this reality. [Speaking in the Bundestag](#) on 30 November 2012, German Finance Minister Wolfgang Schäuble framed – for the first time – the debate on Greece on the basis of the country's achievements and not failures or omissions.



An [analysis](#) of the coverage of the Greek crisis by the international media since October 2009 suggests that journalists tend to follow developments and use international surveys and the domestic press as a source of information. Writing for *Foreign Affairs* in April 2012 I deconstructed the argument that their majority had been – a priori – biased against the country, as many Greek officials were openly suggesting. By contrast, I found signs of objectivity in their work on the basis of Greece's poor performance regarding issues such as corruption, competitiveness, underground economy and public spending. In parallel with this, the so-called 'credibility deficit' of politicians could not but play a negative role. I recall a live interview I gave for 'The Hub' a few days after the first Greek national election on 6 May 2012, in which *BBC* anchorman Nik Gowing emphasised the question of whether

political interests were being put ahead of national ones!

In the aftermath of the second national election of 17 June 2012 Greek pathogenies have not been eliminated. As the [Financial Times](#) recently put it in an editorial, 'a deeper political transformation is required'. For foreign journalists covering the country, however, a sense of routine and fatigue has started to dominate their work. Even personal stories dealing with corruption or tax evasion can hardly be of high interest to their editors or audiences. In parallel with this, credit should be given to the personal communication strategy of Greek Prime Minister Antonis Samaras who is prepared to regularly grant interviews actively demonstrating the will of his government to remain committed to the path of reforms and privatisation. In August 2012, for instance, he personally arranged [a meeting](#) with the editorial team of *Bild* newspaper in Berlin in order to elaborate on the [Greek-German misunderstanding](#).

It is premature to suggest that foreign journalists are mediating a Greek success story. A country suffering from recession, unemployment, the rise of extreme political parties and widespread public pessimism about the future, has a long way to go in order to change its course. But, on the other hand, a window of opportunity is now open. Valuable time has been offered for Greece to benefit from the current international climate in order to meet its fiscal targets and return to growth. It is in the hands of the coalition government to positively surprise international media leading them to rebrand the lemma 'Greece' and disassociate it from terms such as '[fakelaki](#)' and '[rousfeti](#)'.

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