

# THE GREEK CRISIS, THE MEDIA AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE EUROPEAN PUBLIC SPHERE

*Prof. George Pleios  
Department of Communication and Media Studies,  
National and Kapodistrian University of Athens*

*Dimitrios Souliotis, PhD Candidate  
School of Journalism, Language and Communication,  
University of Central Lancashire*

In media terms, the Greek economic crisis is an „event“ whose coverage combines elements of the media coverage of both the European Union and the economy. Academic research concerning media coverage of the economy shows that media tends to follow negative events more closely than positive ones<sup>1</sup>. Thus, crisis which is a major negative change is expected to be covered in the media more intensely, in more details and with a high degree of priming. Factors that have the potential to affect the media coverage of the economy (including crisis) are the type of the media (e.g. quality vs tabloid press), the ownership and the political orientation of the media, the sources of information, etc.<sup>2</sup> However, one really important factor is the type of political – media system.<sup>3</sup>

On the other hand, the media coverage of the EU also matters since it has the potential to contribute to public knowledge and to shape public perceptions and attitudes for the EU, its policies and institutions<sup>4</sup>. A wide range of studies in the past pointed out that EU affairs have become more salient in national media during 00's and even before the Greek crisis<sup>5</sup>. According to these authors, this trend materialises in an increase of EU coverage in several member states, especially during the 90s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>6</sup>, as well

<sup>1</sup> Goidel and Langley, 1995; Hetherington, 1996; Kollmeyer, 2004; Soroka, 2006.

<sup>2</sup> Pleios, 2013.

<sup>3</sup> Hallin & Mancinini, 2004.

<sup>4</sup> De Vreese and Semetko, 2004; Lubbers & Scheepers 2010; Elenbaas et al. 2012.

<sup>5</sup> Koopmans and Erbe, 2003; Peter and de Vreese, 2004.

<sup>6</sup> Dereje et al., 2003; Trenz, 2004

as in the emergence of news stories that strongly require a European angle<sup>7</sup>. However, the main body of research shows that in quantitative terms the EU news account for a small proportion of news in national European media with high visibility in key events (e.g. EU summits or European Parliament elections) and low visibility in routine periods<sup>8</sup>. In addition there is a domestic point of view in the news media coverage in member states<sup>9</sup>, while the tone of news is usually negative<sup>10</sup>.

At the same time the media coverage of the Greek crisis to the extent that it is related to the EU, is a great opportunity to test whether a European public sphere, defined as a common communication space, where the EU issues are being covered, portrayed and debated, actually exists. The existence of such a sphere, or even the enhancement of it, would enable all citizens to participate in public debates on EU topics, would streamline the idea of European identity and citizenship, and could contribute to a deeper political and economic EU integration<sup>11</sup>, without of course forgetting that such wider process like economic crisis might also cause wider political changes<sup>12</sup>.

The Europeanisation of the news covered in the EU media could be considered as a sign of the existence or even of the establishment of the European Public Sphere. An indicator that has been used in order to assess that, is the distinction between European articles, Europeanised articles, and articles with a European referential frame in the in the press coverage<sup>13</sup>. In this sense one could find, different types of EU news such as: a) European news characterised by the shared meaning of European events and issues; e.g. these can be meetings of EU official in order to manage the crisis on EU level b) Europeanised news characterised by the secondary impact of European events and issues on national news coverage; e.g. financial crisis in USA and c) national news on domestic events and issues characterised by evolving forms of European monitoring and rhetoric e.g. EU help in managing national dimension of crisis.

## Research questions

Thus, based on the above it's crucial to answer the following research questions:

- 1) Has the Greek crisis led to an increase in the amount of news items in the EU member states referring to Greek economy?
- 2) How the geopolitics of the crisis is portrayed in the European media?
- 3) Is there any reference in the news items in the European dimension of the crisis either as the cause of the Greek crisis or as the result of the Greek crisis?

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<sup>7</sup> Kevin, 2003: p. 126.

<sup>8</sup> Gleissner & De Vreese, 2005; Kandyla & De Vreese, 2011; Peter and de Vreese, 2004; Kontochristou & Mascha, 2014.

<sup>9</sup> Gleissner and De Vreese, 2005.

<sup>10</sup> Gleissner and De Vreese, 2005; Archontaki, 2012.

<sup>11</sup> Trenz, 2004; Kevin, 2003; Koopmans, 2007.

<sup>12</sup> Araghi, F., Frezzo, M. and Karides, 2005.

<sup>13</sup> Trenz, 2004.

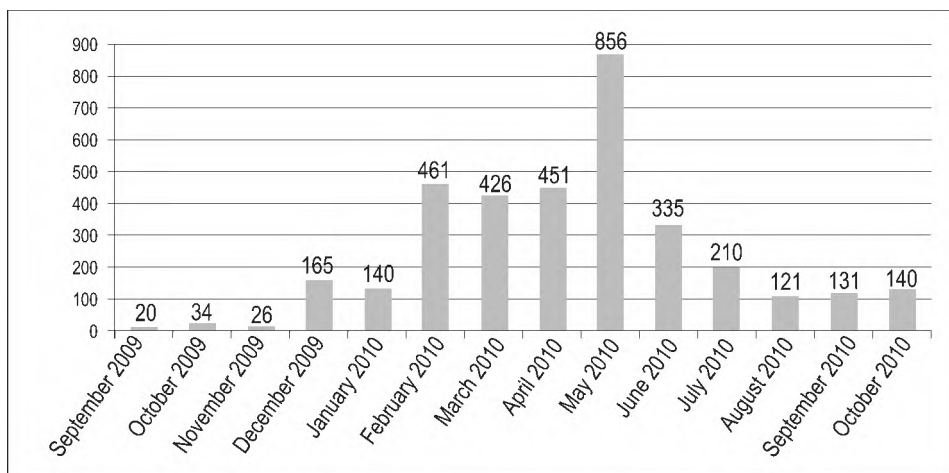
- 4) Is there any reference in the news items, in common EU policies or in the need for creating new EU common policies in order to overcome the Greek crisis?

## Findings and discussion

### *1) Increase of the number of articles concerning the Greek crisis in the EU media*

According to Tzogopoulos (2013) since the beginning of the Greek crisis the number of articles in international media and EU publications on Greek economy has been raising significantly. This significant increase of the media coverage of the Greek crisis becomes also evident in the findings of A. Antoniadis research (2012) (fig.1).

**Figure 1: Increasing number of articles in international newspapers concerning the Greek crisis**

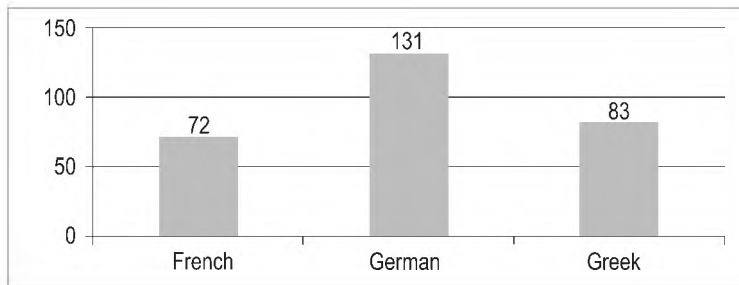


As another research indicates (2010)<sup>14</sup>, German newspapers have been more interested in the Greek economic crisis (fig. 2). The number of the news articles in German newspapers was almost twice as much as the amount of the articles in French newspapers, while the amount of articles in Greek newspapers was lower, despite the fact that the economic crisis was actually occurring in Greece. This could be explained by the dominant position of Germany in the EU establishment and in its management<sup>15</sup> and by the fact that the Greek crisis had important implications for Germany itself, the EU and the position of Germany in it.

<sup>14</sup> Quantitative content analysis with the use of research protocol, and limited discourse analysis of 2 newspapers from each country (1 center-left, 1 center-right). Greece: a) TA NEA b) Kathimerini, France: a) Le Figaro b) La Liberation, Germany: a) Sueddeutsche Zeitung b) Die Welt. Sample: 10% of the articles referring- at least and- to Greek economic crisis, between November 2009 and July 2010.

<sup>15</sup> Bulmer & Paterson, 1996 Pedersen 1998.

**Figure 2: Articles on the Greek crisis  
by ethnicity of the newspaper (2009-2010)**



Similar are the findings of another research (Ehtler, 2013) among the German magazines for the period 2009 - 2011 (Table 1). The majority of articles are on economic (299) and political (125) issues and are mostly neutral (252) or negative (189).

**Table 1: Number of articles on Greek crisis  
in German magazines (2009 - 2011)**

Magazine	Number of articles
Der Spiegel	146
Die Zeit	172
Focus	131

A significant increase in the coverage of the fiscal issues and the crisis is also recorded not only in the EU media but also in the Greek media (both in newspapers and TV) (Table 2).<sup>16</sup>

**Table 2: Coverage of fiscal issues  
in the Greek TV news bulletins and newspapers**

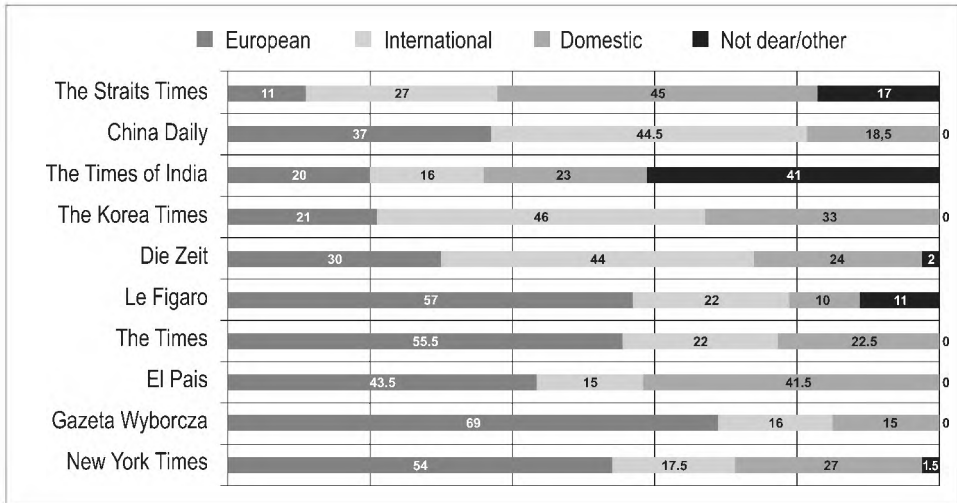
2005	1,60%	TV news bulletins
2010	15,10%	TV news bulletins
2013 - 14	18,80%	TV news bulletins and newspapers

## ***2) The geopolitics of the crisis in the European media***

Given the previous global financial crisis, and according to Antoniadis findings (2012), the Greek debt crisis, in its very beginning, was framed by the international press mostly as an international or as a European crisis (fig. 3). The US, UK, French, Spanish and Polish media focused primarily on the EU dimension of the Greek crisis while German newspapers underlined its international origin.

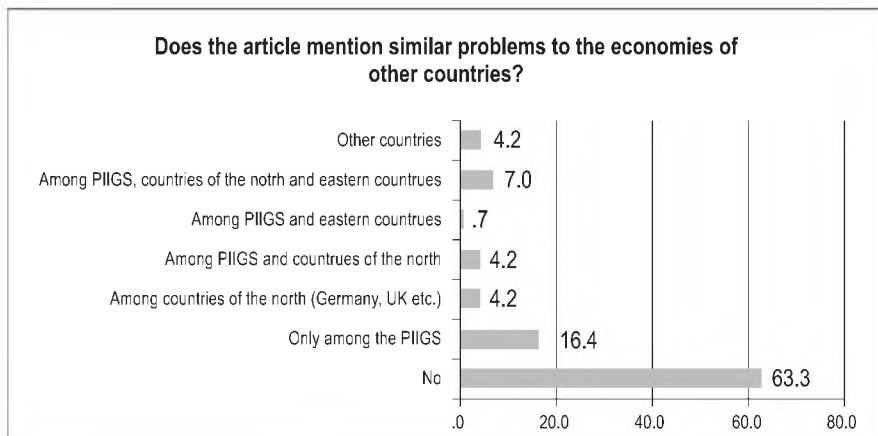
<sup>16</sup> Pleios, 2015.

**Figure 3: Framing of the Greek crisis by the international press**



But quickly after the EU interference, under the leadership of Germany, the framing of the Greek crisis started to change. The Greek crisis was then understood by the EU media first and mostly as a domestic crisis and second as a part of the crisis of the so called PIIGS (Portugal, Italy, Ireland, Greece, Spain) which are characterised by big state sector in economy, extended welfare state policies, big agricultural sector, etc (fig. 4). This understanding by the media actually reconfirmed the mainstream explanation of the crisis, both in economic and political theory, that the Greek crisis was not a part of EU or global crisis but it was specifically national due to the structural weaknesses of the Greek economy and economic policy.<sup>17</sup>

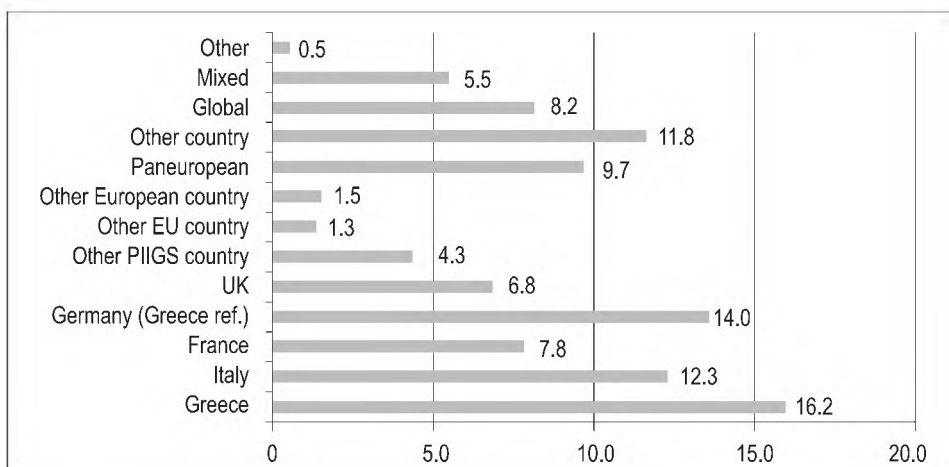
**Figure 4: Articles mentioning similar economic problems in other EU countries (2010)**



<sup>17</sup> Pleios, 2013.

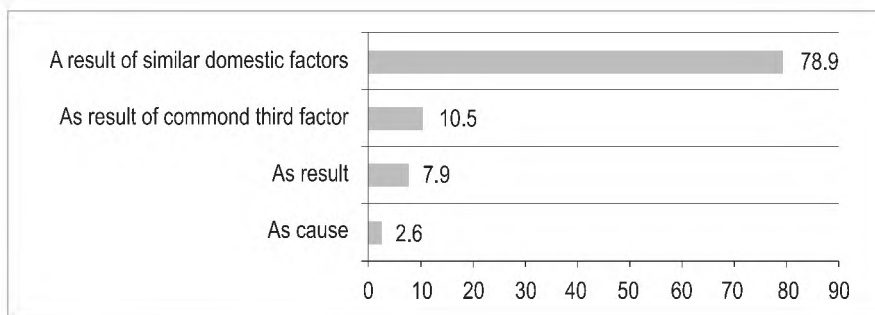
Similar framing existed in the years following the beginning of crisis (fig. 5). However, it is very important to notice that the media concentrated more on the crisis in Greece and less on other PIIGS countries, in comparison to the coverage in 2010 or before that.

**Figure 5: Countries that the articles focused on, concerning the economic crisis (2011)<sup>18</sup>**



According to other research findings, during 2013-2014, the journalistic approach to the question about the geopolitics of crisis hadn't changed significantly (fig. 6). The domestic structural approach had rather been strengthened<sup>19</sup>.

**Figure 6: How was the Greek crisis related to the crisis in other countries in the articles (2013-2014)**



<sup>18</sup> Content and discourse analysis was conducted in 600 articles from the web edition of 10 EU newspapers: Ta Nea and Kathimerini (Greece), La Repubblica and Corriere de la Serra (Italy), Liberation and Le Figaro (France), SudDeutsche Zeitung and Die Welt (Germany), Guardian and Daily Telegraph (UK), from October 2008 (USA financial crisis) to April 2011 (Greek fiscal/debt crisis).

<sup>19</sup> Identity of the research conducted by the Laboratory for Social Research in Mass Media: 5.000 night bulletins of 6 nationwide TV channels, and 4.665 articles from 6 newspapers aired and published in 2013 & 2014 years with use of content analysis.

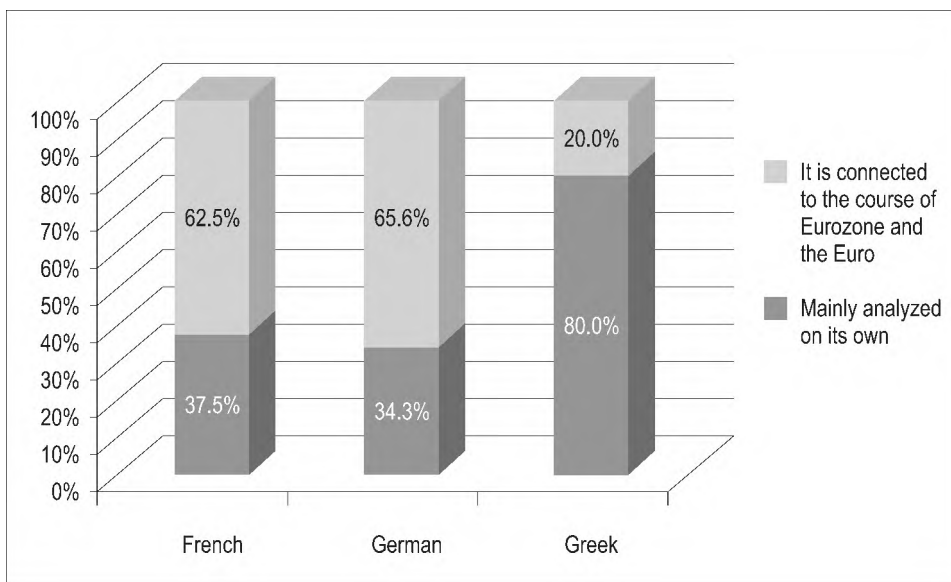
### 3) *The European dimension of the Greek crisis*

We aim to answer the question whether the Greek crisis was perceived by the EU media as a part of a larger European economic crisis, and that's why the media referred to it in combination with the developments in the economies of the other EU member states.

As it has already been seen the international media, in the beginning of the crisis, framed the Greek crisis as a European crisis, while later on they focused on the domestic (Greek) dimension of it. Thus, when the media referred to the causes of the Greek crisis, they referred to the causes deriving from the Greek mindset (2010 - 2011) or from the structural political and economic weaknesses of the country (2012 - 2015).

In the above mentioned 2010 research, it was proved that the German and French newspapers reported the Greek economic crisis as connected to the course and the future of the euro and the Eurozone, in contrast to the significant majority of the Greek articles that did not report the European dimension of the problem (fig. 7).

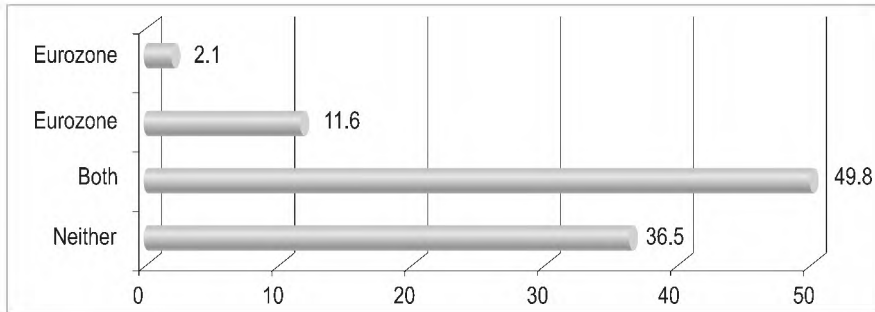
**Figure 7: Articles connecting the Greek crisis to the course of the Eurozone or the Euro per ethnicity of the newspapers**



Relevant research in other international media showed that, in a specific extend, the Greek crisis had early enough been correlated and linked to the EU - a fact that facilitated the interference of the EU in the management of the crisis.

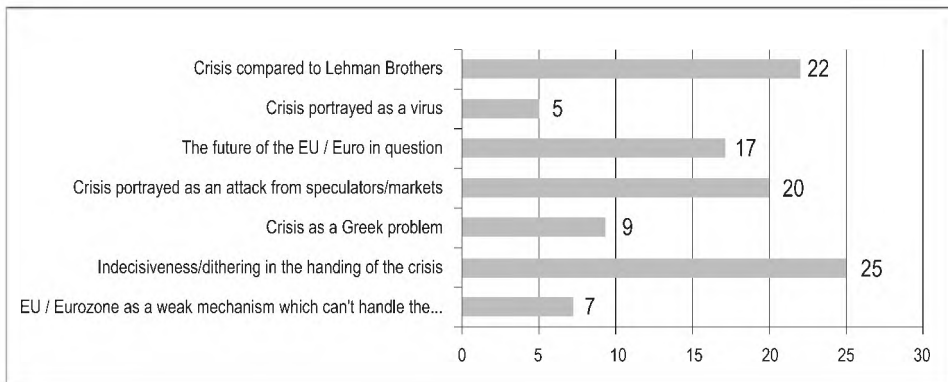
As it is shown by Papathanassopoulos (2015) the Greek crisis was associated in the news articles with both the problems of the Eurozone and the EU and the structural weakness of Greece (fig. 8).

**Figure 8: Is the Greek crisis associated to the problems of the Eurozone and the EU?**



Another research (Souliotis, 2013) shows that also in the UK press the Greek crisis, in its early beginning (2010) has been linked to the indecisiveness and the weaknesses of the EU to handle the crisis, and to doubts about the future of the EU and the euro (fig. 9).

**Figure 9: How was the Greek crisis connected to the EU, in the UK press?**



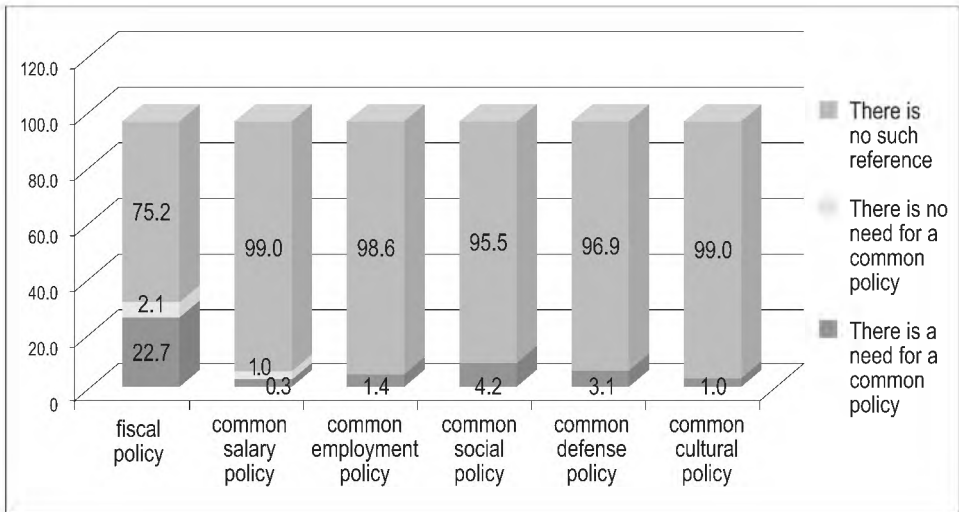
#### ***4) Is there need for common EU policies?***

The danger of „contagion“ of the Greek crisis to the other Eurozone states as well had set the issue of overcoming the crisis, not only for the protection of Greece but also for the protection of the Eurozone. This intervention could be done in two ways - by the management of the crisis by the European institutions that already existed, and on the other hand by the establishment of new ones (or more precisely, by deepening of the EU integration beyond the common currency). The conservative and liberal economic and political thinking, as it supports the minimum state intervention, tends to adopt the first approach by considering that the institutions which already exist are adequate. The more radical economic and political thinking, on the other side, tends to adopt the second approach. This status,



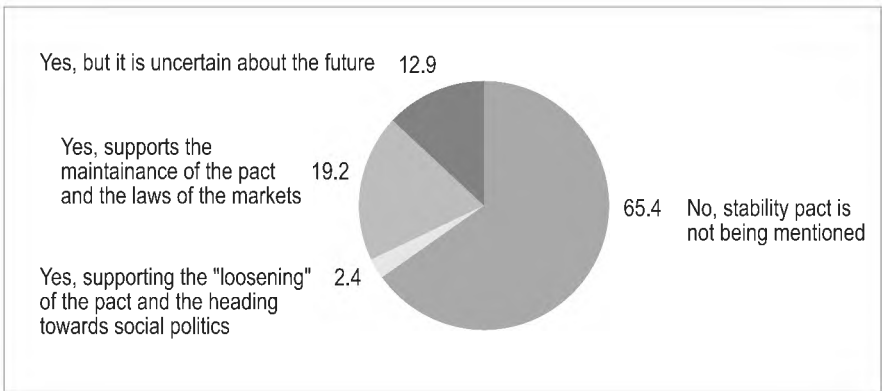
independence of the type of the media and in general of the communication and political system, is also reproduced by the media which tend to focus more on the first more conservative and liberal approach, that was also adopted by the leader state of the EU, Germany. According to the 2010 research, the majority of the Greek, French and German media does not refer to the need for common EU policies. There is just a small exemption concerning the fiscal policy, where 1/5 of the news items reports that there should be common EU policy (fig. 10).

**Figure 10: Articles referring the need for common EU policies**



There are even less news items concerning the adoption of a more completed form of integration of the EU. However, there is a larger number of news items with references to the need of compliance with the Stability Pact as a measure in order to overcome the crisis (fig. 11)

**Figure 11: Do articles mention the stability pact?**



In total, there is not a significant number of references to the need of common policies; however, as soon as this happens, there would be references concerning the adoption of the already existent rules, as these are set in the decisions of the EU institutions, and as they are supported by the German and other dominant policies in the EU.

## Conclusions

The aforementioned empirical studies, examining the coverage of the Greek crisis by a sample of EU media, provide us with results which are not only related to the views of the EU media for the Greek crisis, but are also related to the views of the EU media for the EU itself, its organisation and its future, and the relationships among the member states. Based on these studies we can argue that:

1. There is an increase in the amount of news items which refer to an emerging new European issue which is the Greek crisis and the consequences of it for the EU, beyond the EU issues that have traditionally been covered by the EU media.
2. This new issue is not a temporary or cyclical one, but rather permanent and constant.
3. In the ongoing process of covering and dealing with the Greek crisis, a thick network of relationships between actors (e.g. Eurogroup member states, EU member states, political parties, national parliaments, research centers, media, journalists) is emerging.
4. The media coverage of the Greek crisis, in spite of being affected by the official EU information sources, acquires its own negotiation and framing of the issue, in a way in which in many cases affects, directly or indirectly (e.g. Germany) the function of the political system, through its impact to the public opinion. Thus, each side interacts within and through the media not only with the other side but also with the relationship between the other sides, by intensifying the network of their mediated relationships, and by having an impact in the media content.
5. In the media coverage of the Greek crisis, the issue of the implementation of common EU policies and of the deepening of the EU integration is more or less, set. Regardless of the extent to which the aforementioned idea, or the idea of the intensification of the function of the already existent EU institutions, is adopted the seriousness of the Greek crisis and the creation of a network of relationships within the media, and out of the media, (in some cases this network itself is being covered in the media) leads to the enhancement of the European public sphere, both in media and out of the media level-however, this is out of the scope of the current study.

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