

SEE
MORE
Media Observatory Report

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#01. Feb.2023

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ABOUT

SEE MORE:



Introducing the Media Observatory Report (MORE)

The Media Observatory Report (MORE) is part of the multilayered project [“ALGREE — Albania-Greece: Understanding. Connecting. Partnering.”](#) implemented by the [South-East Europe Programme](#) of the Hellenic Foundation for Foreign & European Policy ([ELIAMEP](#)), and powered by the [Open Society Foundation for Albania \(OSFA\)](#) and the [Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom Greece and Cyprus \(FNF\)](#).

What does it mean to be a neighbour? Being neighbours means relations that are more than obligatory; they are necessary. Relations between two neighbouring countries are conditioned by trust, or the lack thereof, but also by the perception people have of one another; the latter is partially, but powerfully, influenced by the media and their stories.

The Media Observatory Report (MORE) aspires to become a stimulus for reflection on how media in Greece and Albania could not only provide a critical account of how the two governments handle unresolved issues, but also a balanced explanation of the other side’s sensitivities, enabling **understanding** to develop between the two peoples. If the media could facilitate an honest dialogue, **connecting** the two societies and enabling the genuine **partnering** of the two states, perhaps our two countries could overcome their painful past and resolve the issues we have inherited from history at last.

MORE does not intend to offer yet another study on the way media in both countries report on the well-known, outstanding issues. Instead, we aim to provide succinct and easy-to-understand accounts of the ways in which the media choose to feed the public agenda with misconceptions, distrust, and negative narratives.

Accordingly, MORE aims to provide food for thought, but also incentives for journalists, opinion makers and publicists to reflect on opportunities missed in the public sphere of both countries; our publication aims to encourage media in both countries to become ‘facilitators’ and help forge a new, dynamic and trusting relationship between the two countries—a strong partnership in the region and within the European Union.

In other words, the purpose of MORE is not to point the finger at the wrongdoings or to hold the media to account for all the inaccuracies, prejudice and stereotyping that still prevail in the public agenda of both countries. Instead, we wish to give a balanced account of what has been reported; what is, deliberately or not, left out; and what is misinterpreted, highlighted or not. We seek to set the record straight, to assess the political significance of the media’s role in influencing the public discourse, and to analyse the extent to which it effects on public opinion in both countries.

Our efforts are driven by the conviction that all state-to-state and society-to-society relations in the Balkans have the potential to develop into cooperative, progressive and forward-looking bonds. For that to happen, understanding each other’s sensitivities, avoiding stereotypes and misconceptions and, eventually, building bridges and relations of trust ought to be the order of the day. Greece and Albania can show their other Balkan neighbours how this is done in the context of the entire region’s integration into Europe.

WHAT



SEE MORE:

What is at stake?

The unprecedented geopolitical turmoil brought about by the Russian invasion and the return of war to Europe is a stark reminder of the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s. Years of war and suffering, democratic backsliding and economic ruin kept the Balkan region in economic and political limbo as the rest of Europe made huge breakthroughs--re-connecting, democratising, developing, integrating.

Members of the political elites and civil society across the Balkan region have realised that there's no more time to waste. The Western Balkans, which are still effectively left out of the European integration process, need to move fast and resolve bilateral disputes, overcome legacies from the past that keep their societies divided, reform problematic institutions, and orientate themselves fully towards the EU. Neighbouring Balkan states, like Greece, are well aware that the stakes are high for the entire region. Consequently, they are determined to contribute rapid integration of the Western Balkans into the European Union. As more than thirty years have now gone by since the start of the Yugoslav wars, the region cannot waste any more decades stuck in politico-economic limbo.

At this critical and volatile juncture, the governments of Albania and Greece seem to have made a strategic choice to push the settlement of their outstanding bilateral issues forward; they have

decided to build a new, dynamic relationship, that will upgrade them from mere NATO allies to genuine partners and, eventually, fellow members in the European Union. A successful partnership between Athens and Tirana can mark the start of a new "European momentum" for the region in the same way that, nearly five years ago, the Prespa Agreement signalled the willingness of Skopje and Athens to leave their bitter spat behind them and show the rest of the region the path to resolving disputes.

But to this end, in the new partnership-in-the-making between Greece and Albania, the political and societal levels need to go hand in hand. Part of the thinking underpinning the Media Observatory Report (MORE) is that the media on both sides have so far failed to deliver on the political and societal need for good relations between the two countries. Out of step with both the rapidly improving situation at the level of official politics and the societal bonds that exist, the media continue to be driven by misconceptions and prejudices. They keep on missing opportunities provided by the two governments to create a space for more healthy reporting and political discourse. And, as is made graphically clear in our Media Observatory Report, the problematic reporting itself influences and shapes public opinion attitudes which, in turn, become an obstacle to cross-border political and societal understanding.



This first issue of MORE is the fruit of monitoring between **May and September 2022**, for which we have selected number of key stories to analyse.

For each story, the Media Observatory Report is providing:

- a. a short background;
- b. a short qualitative analysis of certain media stories (striking examples, news headlines, narratives);
- c. the actual version of events that was reported incorrectly; additionally, a potential alternative coverage;
- d. an assessment of the political significance of the above media choices, their effect on the public conceptions but mostly, their missing opportunities to also play a constructive role in creating a more healthy political discourse;
- e. key takeaways for the political and societal impact of the media coverage.



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1. THE ISSUE

Dendias' visit

Greek Foreign Affairs Minister's visit to Tirana in May 2022:
Media missing the point



1.1. SHORT BACKGROUND

Official visits between the two countries attract plentiful media attention. On the Greek side, it is perhaps one of the rare occasions when media feature stories focusing on Albania. In contrast, in Albania, stories about Greece are more frequent; still, the rare official visits still tend to attract plenty of media coverage, while expectations of the outcome of such visits are typically high.

For Greek Foreign Minister Nikos Dendias, the visit to Tirana on 23 May 2022 was the third time he was visiting Albania in that capacity. It was the first meeting with his new counterpart, Olta Xhacka. Dendias' visit [was part of a tour](#) of the Western Balkans intended "to remind the importance of the region for the EU" (TA NEA, 23 May 2022), ahead of the South-East European Cooperation Process (SEECP) Summit planned for Thessaloniki in June 2022.

1.2. GR MEDIA

A “*turbulent*” press conference: The first joint press conference given by the two ministers did not end well, according to the Greek media. Most headlines focused on the “Cham issue” raised by the Albanian FM and the response of her Greek counterpart, rather than highlighting the latter’s messages in support of Albania’s European ‘bid’ and for the settlement of the maritime borders issue.

For an issue the Greek side considers non-existent, “the Chams” were certainly noticeably present in media stories the day after Dendias’ visit. The main conclusion from the front pages of May 24 was that the press conference was “turbulent” with a hostile exchange of statements on the “Chams issue” initiated by an “aggressive” Albanian Foreign Minister who received “a fierce response” from her counterpart.

An outsider observing the front pages and headlines in the Greek media on May 24 would probably conclude that the two countries were foes whose relations had just fallen to a new low.

For example, the daily **Political** talked about “**Albanian deceitfulness**” (using the word *μαμπουσιιά*, from the Albanian *pabesi*); other indicative headlines were: “An **aggressive** Albanian Foreign Minister” (**Kontra**), “Excessive **provocation** by the Albanians” (**Dimokratia**), “**Veto** to Albania’s European course” (**Estia**). Most of the reports focused on the “Cham issue” and some insinuated or clearly stated, quoting Dendias, that it was a potential “obstacle” to Albania’s European bid.

GR Media

Dendias visits Albania

May 2022

“TOXIC” WORDS

“Albanian deceitfulness”
POLITICAL, DAILY

“An aggressive Albanian Foreign Minister”
KONTRA

“Excessive provocation by the Albanians”
DIMOKRATIA, DAILY

“Veto to Albania’s European course”
ESTIA

GR Media Headlines

Dendias visits Albania

May 2022



TA NEA (centre) read: *“A return... of the ‘Chams’ from Tirana”*. Even though the story began with the main purpose of Dendias’ tour in the region—namely, “to secure stability of the Western Balkans, preserving their European perspective”, it highlighted that during his visit to Tirana “thorny issues were not avoided, with Albanian FM Olta Xhacka raising the issue of the Chams and their properties in Greece; Dendias picked up the gauntlet”.

To VIMA (centre) wondered whether *“The Chams issue is putting a brake on Tirana’s European perspectives?”* and underlined that “Tirana always raise the Chams issue at Greek-Albanian meetings. For Athens, however, no such issue exists and, of course, it is not being discussed at all. The Foreign Minister’s reply demonstrated Athens’ discomfort”.

Estia (right wing) urged the Greek government to *“Veto Albania’s European course, if Tirana insists on [raising] the Chams issue”*. Misinterpreting the statement made by the Albanian FM, it wrote: “Albania raises the Chameria issue along with the maritime zones. In fact, Foreign Minister Olta Xhacka sees it as an exchange for accepting the compromis [for the maritime zones].” The report also quoted Dendias’ statement, noting that his message “was simple and direct. If Albania insists on raising the Chams issue and other irrational claims, Greece will veto its accession course to the EU.”

Proto Thema (centre) in its analysis on the reasons *“Why Tirana continues to raise the non-existent Chams issue”* commented that: “Xhacka’s statements showed that Rama’s government continues to use the non-existent Chams issue for electioneering purposes, but also to put pressure on the Greek side.”

GR Media

Dendias visits Albania

May 2022

**“A return... to the “Chams”
from Tirana”**

TA NEA

**“The Chams issue is putting
a brake on Tirana’s European
perspectives?”**

TO VIMA

**“Veto Albania’s European course,
if Tirana insists on the
Chams issue”**

ESTIA

**“Why Tirana continues to raise
the nonexistent Chams issue”**

PROTO THEMA

1.3. AL MEDIA

“Different priorities and ‘pressure’ from Greece”: Albanian media reported extensively on Dendias’ visit and the statements made at the joint press conference with Olta Xhaka. Their coverage was mostly taken up by the statements on the “Cham issue”. The Albanian media were taken by surprise by the ‘tone’ of the Greek FM, who deemed the issue non-existent and warned about the repercussions for Albania’s EU agenda.

The Albanian version of [Voice of America](#) and [Deutsche Welle](#) (neutral), considered the Greek FM’s words to be a **threat**: “Greek Foreign Minister Dendias threatens Albania if it raises the Cham issue”. [Lapsi.al](#) (opposition) also reported: “The lesson from the ‘friendly’ Dendias—Xhaka meeting: that Greece will even threaten us in the middle of Tirana”. According to Voice of America, the Greek authorities have always refused to discuss the Cham issue at bilateral talks, considering it non-existent. However, the Albanian side had been raising it for several years at the Foreign Minister level at least.

Adopting the same tone, media close to the Opposition ([Syri.net](#), [Lapsi.al](#), [Politiko.al](#)) read ‘Dendias’ threat to Albania, should the Cham issue be put forward’.

Other issues, such as the abrogation of the law of war, Albania’s EU integration path, international cooperation (such as Albania supporting Greece’s candidacy at the UNSC) and deepening bilateral cooperation (energy crisis, Greek minority, recognition of Albanians’ pensions in Greece) have received positive coverage across the entire Albanian media spectrum, but have been covered less.

Media analyst Lufti Dervishi pointed out differences in the agendas and priorities of the two ministers in a post published on social networks reported by [Javanews.al](#). The Greek FM’s agen-

da was based around concrete issues and he suggested to his Albanian counterpart that they talk more about concrete issues than big questions. Analyst Enver Bytyçi wrote on [Syri.net](#) that Dendias came to pressure Tirana about the maritime border and Cham issues, threatening to veto Albania’s EU path. Interviewed for **Report TV**, the chairman of the Justice, Integration and Unity party (PDIU, close to the Cham issue), Shpetim Idrizi considered the visit a failure, since it did not produce any results, given that the parties chose to prioritize different issues. However, he thanked the Albanian FM for raising the Cham issue.



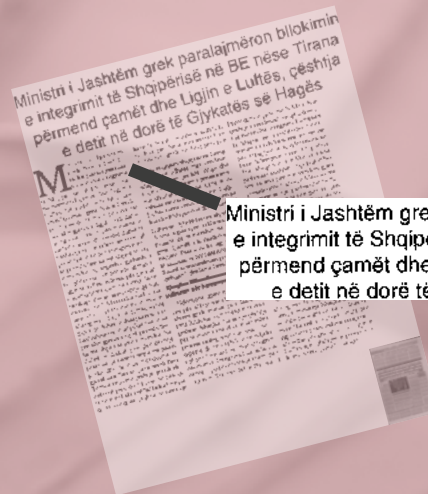
AL Media

Dendias visits Albania

May 2022



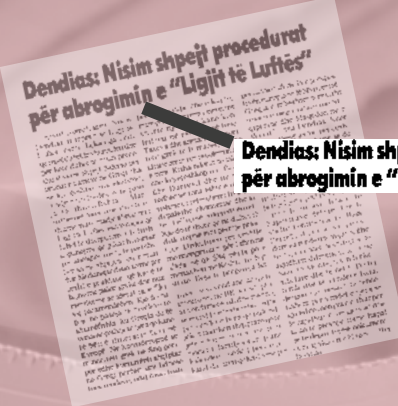
Vizita e ministrit të Jashtëm grek në Tiranë
Prapaskenat për detin, Dendias: Të shpejtojmë dosjen për Gjykatën e Hagës
Dendias sjell në Tiranë mesazhet e Mitsotakis: Do të depozitojmë në Hagë çështjen e zonave detare me Shqipërinë



Ministri i Jashtëm grek paralajmëron bllokimin e integritit të Shqipërisë në BE nëse Tirana përmend çamët dhe Ligjin e Luftës, çështja e detit në dorë të Gjykatës së Hagës



Shqipëri-Greqi, problemet sipas ministrave të jashtëm!



Dendias: Nisim shpejt procedurat për abrogimin e "Ligjit të Luftës"

1.4. SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT

What was actually said: In the last sentence of her remarks, [Xhacka said](#): “We believe and hope that the constructiveness and good will to seek a mutually-acceptable solution to an issue as difficult as that of maritime spaces can serve as an example of the constructive approach our friendly countries can take to starting discussions on other issues too, perhaps, no matter how difficult they may be, which we have inherited from history and from the tragic period of the Second World War. These include the need to abrogate the Law of War, and the issue of the human and property rights of the Cham community”.

Nikos [Dendias responded](#) thus: “I want to be honest with you. This means, discussing real issues, issues the Greek side accepts as extant and not issues that the Greek side considers non-existent. And of course, any attempt to create and discuss non-existent issues will, I fear, have consequences on multiple levels. For example, Greece will have to raise issues that relate, too, to your own accession process”.

Behind closed doors: Reading the two Ministers’ full statements, it is obvious that they discussed various bilateral issues as well as others relating to Albania’s European agenda: the delimitation of maritime borders, the “state of war”, the issue of the property and rights of the Greek minority, and the pensions issue for Albanians living in Greece.

Priorities: The exchange on the “Chams issue” is minor compared to the length of the Ministers’ statements on other issues. In fact, it seems that the Greek delegation wanted to focus more on the maritime border issue; there is a clear indication of “these priorities” on the video with extracts from their statements posted by the Athens News Agency. If the Greek delegation wished to highlight Dendias’ response to his



Photo P7GPMFD © iLixe48 -Envato Elements (adaptation)

counterpart on the Chams issue, it would have chosen to include it [in the video](#), as they did after a turbulent press conference with his Turkish counterpart in April 2021.

1.5. POLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Missing the point & losing an opportunity: The attention the Greek media paid Mr Dendias’ visit was short-lived. And with the exception of the [Avgi](#) (left wing) daily, which devoted a few paragraphs to “the patient Balkans and the danger of a conflagration” on May 29, the Greek media as a whole missed the point of Dendias’ visit, which was to spotlight the importance of the region and, subsequently, of Greece’s role in advancing Albania’s European prospects. Instead, most stories insinuated—though some clearly stated—that Greece should “veto” Albania’s European accession, should it raise “non-existent issues” again.

But what is indeed unfortunate is that the Greek media missed yet another opportunity to act as “facilitators” for the two governments’ obvious efforts to find ways to settle their outstanding bilateral issues, improve the political atmosphere

re and build trust. Instead, most of their stories reproduced the usual narratives, toxic words and expressions that served only to further poison the relationship between the two peoples. (A “measurable” result can be traced in the online comments left by readers below the story in [Pro-to Thema](#)).

On both sides, media also missed the opportunity to highlight an important problem for the Albanian community in Greece: the social security issue, which has been publicly acknowledged by a Greek official for the first time. Very few references were also made to the law on the “state of war” between the two countries matter, an issue that sensitive for Albanians, despite the fact that Dendias acknowledged once again the need “to have it repealed.” Numerous other issues are certainly raised in the press statements of the two ministers, which the media could have focused on to better reflect the positive atmosphere evident during the two politicians’ meeting. But once again the media preferred to focus on a ‘thorny’ issue which was certain to generate discomfort among their readers—an issue that was not aligned with the optimistic mood demonstrated by the two foreign ministers.

Once again, it seems that the media in both countries are reflecting the different prioritization of unresolved issues by their respective governments. To some extent, this also explains the different perceptions of the two peoples’ sensitivities on certain issues, which are also reflected in opinion polls. It is high time media paid more attention to the sensitivities of the other side and/or explained them to their respective societies. The ultimate resolution of all these issues will require considerable political will, but also honest dialogue between the two societies. This is a role which media in both countries could surely undertake or facilitate.



1.5. KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ↳ Greece and Albania are making serious efforts to improve bilateral relations and to focus on the gradual settlement of their various disputes and problems.
- ↳ Thorny issues and disagreements continue to exist. Media on both sides tend to focus far more on controversies and sensitive issues than the actual state of official relations between the two sides should warrant.
- ↳ Also, by focusing almost exclusively on disagreements and on priorities that are perceived to be different, the media is failing to accurately report convergences of opinion and cooperation as well as the consensus displayed by the two countries’ vis-a-vis the region’s geopolitical orientation, which is crucial in the context of the war in Europe.
- ↳ Media on both sides are thus throwing away an opportunity to accurately present the degree to which relations have improved and to which good will has been demonstrated by both governments. The public in both countries continue to be fed a misrepresented view of actual Greek-Albanian bilateral relations by their media.

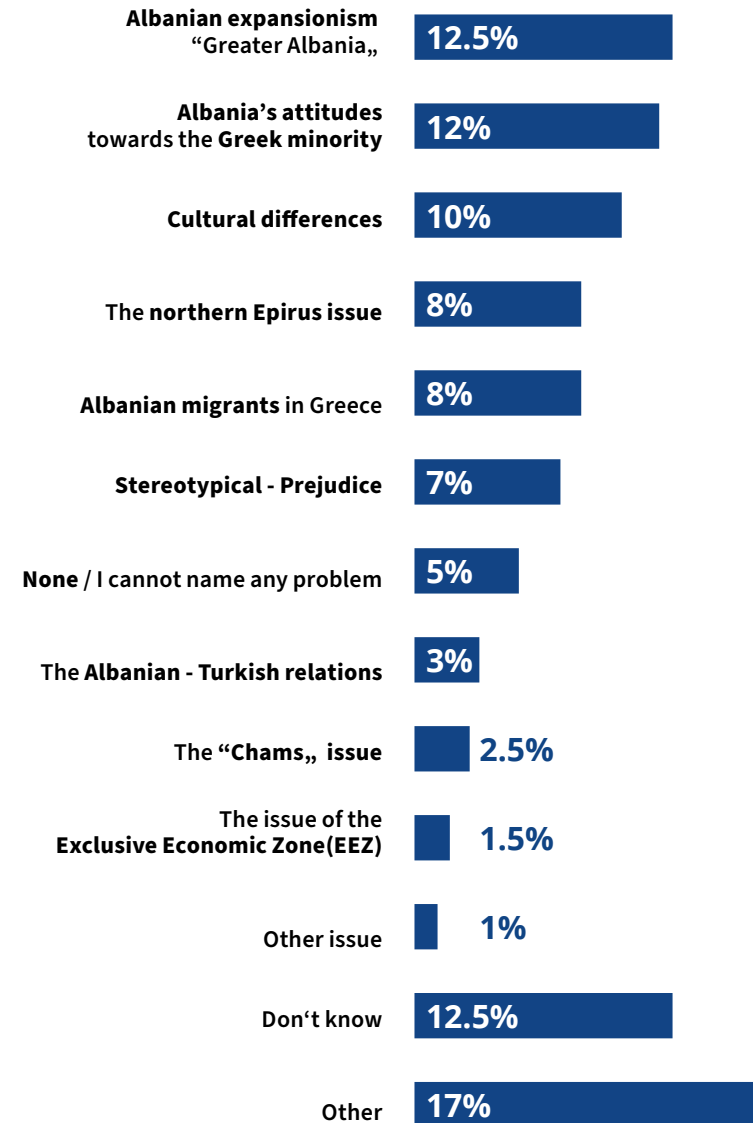
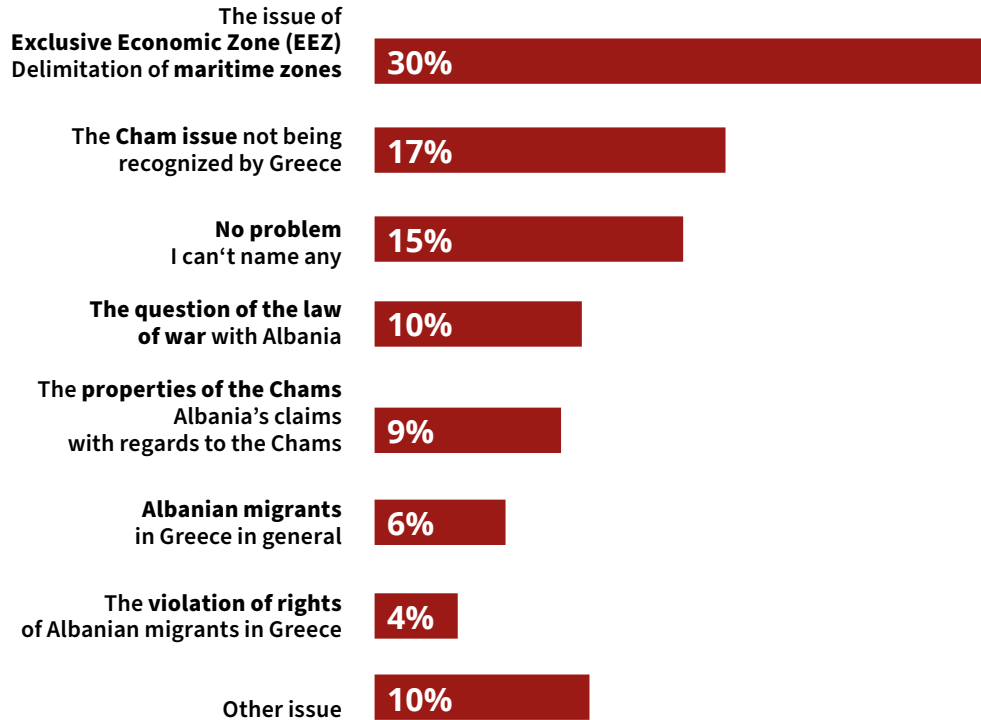


**ALBANIAN
RESPONDENTS**

The problems affecting Albanian-Greek relations



**GREEK
RESPONDENTS**



2. THE ISSUE

The question of maritime borders

Albanian media obsessing over the maritime borders issue



2.1. SHORT BACKGROUND

The lack of a maritime zones deal between Greece and Albania has been a long-standing source of tension in recent years. A bilateral agreement on the issue was reached in 2009, but Albania's Constitutional Court annulled the agreement a year later following a legal challenge by Edi Rama's socialist party, then in opposition. The 2009 agreement was widely regarded in Greece as a diplomatic triumph. Subsequently, the Court's 2010 verdict created a climate of distrust, proving a major setback in bilateral relations.

Bilateral talks started up again after a 'frosty' period under the new Greek government led by Kyriakos Mitsotakis. Following a meeting between Greek Foreign Minister Nikos Dendias and Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama in Tirana on 20 October 2020, [it was announced](#) that the two countries would be turning to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to resolve the dispute over their maritime borders in the Ionian Sea. For the dispute to be referred to the ICJ, the two sides need to reach a special agreement (*compromis*) that will define both the terms of their submission and the procedure followed. To date, neither government has made public the progress made in the relevant talks.

2.2. AL MEDIA

Calls for caution and transparency: The reaffirmation of the commitment to refer the delimitation of the maritime zones to the ICJ during the Dendias' visit to Tirana in May 2022 was welcomed by the media, including those close to the Opposition.

Even after the visit, media continued to report on interviews and statements made by political representatives of both countries about the next steps that would need to be taken to address the issue, as well as criticism of the government made by the Opposition and various analysts. The main Opposition leaders, Sali Berisha and ex-President Ilir Meta, have repeatedly accused the government of a lack of transparency and for ceding ground to Greece, while analysts such as former diplomat Shaban Murati have criticised the government for its efforts to reach an understanding with Greece and advised 'vigilance' in the negotiations, given Athens' significant leverage over Tirana.

Meta an obstacle? **Klan TV** (pro-government), [reporting](#) on 27 May on an interview (**Skai fm**) in which Dendias said that the ICJ submission procedure would take place after the election of the new Albanian president, said that the current President—Ilir Meta, in office until July 2022—would not grant authorization to the Albanian PM.

Commenting on Dendias' visit, Ilir Meta denied obstructing the submission of the agreement to the ICJ, accusing Rama of not keeping him abreast of relevant developments. [Shqiptarja.com](#) (pro-government) criticized Meta of responding to an interview in the Greek media (implying he gave too much attention to the media), without anyone having asked him for a reaction.

Both [Shqiptaria.com](#) and [Panorama](#) reported another interview which the Greek FM gave to

Naftemporiki on June 18. Asked if there could be rapid developments regarding the maritime agreement after the election of a new Albanian president, Dendias answered that Rama had a key role to play in addressing the issue.

"Does Greece extend 12 miles or not?" **Balkan Web/News 24** and other media [reported](#) the interview (for **Newsbomb.gr**) in which Dendias said that Greece has unilaterally extended 12 miles into the Ionian Sea, and that there was nothing to discuss, except for some technical details that the parties would take to the ICJ.

[Lapsi.al](#) (opposition), [Gazeta Dita](#), Top Channel (pro-government), and [Euronews Albania](#) all reported on the interview (quoting Greek media) which the Greek PM gave on 11 September at the Thessaloniki International Fair: *"Mitsotakis: to The Hague [ICJ] after we have expanded our maritime border by 12 miles"*. He said: *"I want to concretely state that a preliminary agreement has been made to go to The Hague [ICJ], even for the definition of the Exclusive Economic Zone, but only after we have extended our maritime borders to 12 miles"*.

In **Shqiptarja.com** (pro-government), an article by [journalist Ardit Rada](#) blamed the opposition media for spreading disinformation regarding the extension of the maritime border to 12 miles.

The fact-checking platform "**Faktoje.al**" [reported](#) on 22 September that articles published in Albanian media which stated that Greece has requested its maritime border to be extended "by another 12 miles" from the Albanian sea were **untrue**. Specifically, a story published on 19 September in "[Gazeta Korrekte](#)", which focused on Dendias' statements under the title *"They are demanding another 12 miles from the Albanian sea / The issue with Greece is going to The Hague"*. **Faktoje** revealed that the article's title misinterpreted the interview Dendias gave the Greek newspaper "[Parapolitika](#)" on 17 September, in

which he recalled the 2021 [decision by the Greek parliament](#) to extend the nation's borders from 6 to 12 miles in the Ionian Sea. Faktoje confirmed that there is no direct connection between Greece's 12-mile extension in the Ionian Sea and the referral of Albania and Greece's bilateral issues to the ICJ.

"Don't trust Greece": Former diplomat Shaban Murati has written frequently for **Gazeta Dita** (pro-government) on the maritime border issue. In an [Op-Ed](#) entitled *"serious strategic concessions, a dark point during Dendias' visit to Tirana, which was not commented on"*, Murati writes inter alia that Albanian diplomacy suffers from an inferiority complex, and that Rama is hiding what he is negotiating with Greece from the public, for fear that it will contravene the decision taken by the Constitutional Court. Moreover, Murati has argued that Albania should refuse to discuss the Greek minority issue until Greece stops denying the existence of the Cham issue.

Writing for [Gazeta Dita](#) on July 20 (*"The Greek trap in the EU Negotiating Framework for Albania"*), Murati argued that the negotiating framework for accession to the EU obliges Albania to find solutions to any border dispute before joining the EU. For Murati, this is Greece enforcing its will on Albania's EU path, thereby turning Greek demands into conditions for EU accession.

AL Media

Maritime borders

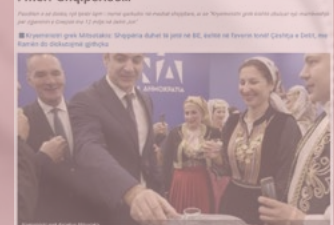


Meta trembet nga ministri grek Dendias dhe i jep llogari: "Nuk pengova unë çështjen e detit në Hagë! Kam dhënë çdo autorizim dhe mbështetje, por qeveria nuk më informonte"

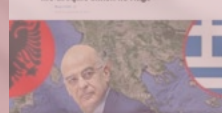
Presidenti i Republikës Ilir Meta ka dalë në një konferencë për shtyp për t'u përgjigjur ministrit grek Nikos Dendias pas një interviste që ai ka dhënë në shtypin grek pas vizitës në Shqipëri. Në mënyrë të habitshme, presidenti Meta i jep llogari ministrit grek për çështjen e detit, duke u justifikuar se ai nuk ka penguar dërgimin e çështjes në Hagë.

■ Deti mes Greqisë dhe Shqipërisë në Hagë, Dendias për mediat greke: Po presim të ikë Meta, nuk ka dhënë autorizim

SHËNIM / Sajesa antishqiptare: 12 miljet që Greqia i merr Shqipërisë...



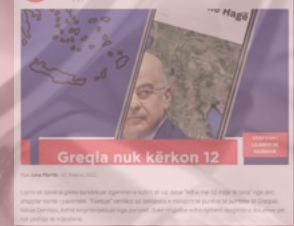
Kërkojnë edhe 12 milje të tjera nga deti shqiptar? Mësohet se çështja me Greqinë shkoi në Hagë!



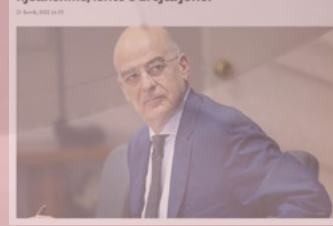
Mitsotakis: Në Hagë me Shqipërinë pasi Greqia të ketë marrë 12 miljet



Greqia nuk kërkon 12 milje të tjera nga deti shqiptar



Kufiri detar, surprizon ministri i Jashtëm grek: Është bërë 12 milje në Jon dhe në mënyrë të njëanshme, ishte e drejta jonë!



2.3. GR MEDIA

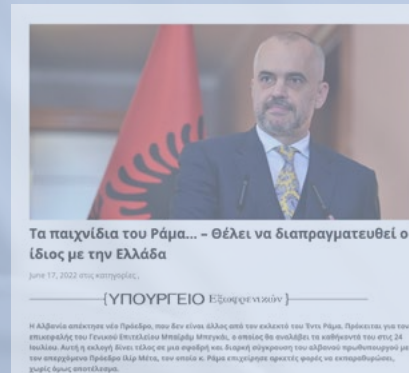
Not an issue of public discourse: The media never focused on the significance of the initial agreement to refer the issue to the ICJ. The issue has not been a matter of media or public discourse, since it has never elicited reactions from the Opposition. Few articles have sought to explain what the settlement of this outstanding issue could bring to both countries. Generally speaking, the media have presented the 2020 agreement with Albania in the way the Greek government wishes it to be presented: that is, as an example of solving problems with neighbours on the basis of International Law.

Asked in an interview with **“Parapolitika”** on June 4 on when the compromise with Albania would be signed, Dendias said that both sides had vowed to speed up the legal process, but once again emphasized the ultimate goal and what Greece would like it to reflect: “We are providing a clear example to the wider region of how disputes should be resolved. Always through international law and the law of the Sea, in particular.”

No progress: The Greek government never publicly explained the reasons why no substantial progress was made in the technical talks on the compromise for almost two and half years following the initial agreement. Some stories were published, especially in the right-wing opposition newspapers **Estia** and **Dimokratia**, which presented the opposition of Albania’s President Meta to the issue as the main obstacle.

Cultivating a climate of suspicion: On July 17, the **Paron** daily (leftist) published **“Rama’s games: he wants to negotiate with Greece himself”** adopting the rhetoric of the Albanian Opposition. On the election of the new Albanian president, the paper reproduced narratives that cultivate a clima-

GR Media Maritime borders



te of distrust towards the Albanian political elite in general and PM Rama in particular. Following the election of the new president, Bajram Begaj, it wrote that *“The stakes for Albania are high now, as there are no more excuses (...) Now we will see if Mr. Rama is really sincere, or if he simply wanted to put Athens to sleep and secure its support for the EU against commitments he is not willing to act on.”*

Awkwardness: Generally, the Greek media do not report on domestic reactions to and criticisms of Rama vis-à-vis the maritime border issue. When stories are published in the Albanian media about the controversies a joint ICJ solution gives rise to on the political scene in Tirana, a certain awkwardness can be discerned in the Greek media. This, coupled with a lack of in-depth knowledge of the Albanian political reality, mean that Greek media usually republish articles without further comment. This was the case with Murati’s Op-Ed for **Gazeta Dita** on July 21. News websites including [in.gr](https://www.in.gr) simply translated his article under the headline: *“Albanian analysis: the Greek trap in the EU Negotiating Framework for Albania”* without any further explanation of the arguments presented by the former diplomat.

2.4. ALGREE: Alternative Coverage

A balanced account: Within the media monitoring period, only one Op-Ed—in **TA NEA** on July 30—gave a balanced account of the significance of the 2020 agreement. Under the headline “*Delimitation of the continental shelf: Greece-Albania and the International Court of Justice*”, International Law expert Professor Petros Liacouras [explained in a simple but comprehensive way](#) the pros and cons of any referral to the ICJ. *Inter alia*, Liacouras stressed that “Every judicial settlement is legitimized by the principles and rules of international law that underpin it and feed into a final and binding decision. However, as a rule, it is not always win-win”.

The op-ed is important because it not only explains the legal process in an easy-to-understand manner, it also—and mainly—informs the public about—and prepares it for—its possible outcome. This should have been an integral part of Greece’s foreign policy’s strategy prior to any international settlement, and a duty on the part of Greek governments; alas, it is usually left to only a few academics and analysts who assume responsibility for explaining complicated international processes without any explicit pro-Greek bias. There is a marked absence of impartial analyses of similar questions in the Greek media.

This is also the case on the Albanian side, where many media use half-statements or partial news in their reports with a single objective: that they serve as clickbait. The risk of an alarmist narrative being created about relations between the two countries, which politicians or particular groups could then misuse, is high.



PUBLIC OPINION POLL: OSFA/ELIAMEP, 2021
Relations between Albania & Greece

The issue of the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)
as one of the problems affecting Albania-Greek relations



30% **1.5%**



**ALBANIAN
RESPONDENTS**



**GREEK
RESPONDENTS**

2.5. POLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Different perceptions—unique importance: The bilateral decision to address the ICJ will remove a major obstacle to establishing a healthier relationship between Albania and Greece. What is not fully explained by the media, especially on the Albanian side, is that the ICJ referral represents the best chance of a comprehensive and equitable arrangement being secured through a ruling by a neutral and legitimate international body. Establishing the legitimacy and suitability of the international judicial process in the eyes of the public will raise the level of trust between the two countries and societies. This is especially important on the Albanian side, since the maritime borders appears to be both more salient and more emotive there at the level of public opinion.

Overall, media on both sides tend to cover the issue with a party-political or national bias which often leads to the stoking of an emotional public's fears. But since neither government makes any effort to raise public awareness of the significance of the issue, or to make the public more receptive to the outcome of the ICJ ruling, it is hard for the media to play that role unaided.

The media could, however, focus reflect on the many benefits for bilateral relations and the Balkan region as a whole; that is to say, the media could stress the geopolitical significance of resolving the issue, which would send a strong message to the region to strive to solve disputes in a period of geopolitical turmoil. It could also point out that settling the issue will be important for the region's EU integration process, given the benefits that accompany it in terms of political and economic cooperation. Finally, media could urge both governments to be more proactive, transparent and genuinely willing to reach an agreement soon.



2.6. KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ↳ Albania and Greece have initiated a process that will remove a key issue from the list of their bilateral problems. The international judicial procedure is the most suitable and legitimate process, given also the partisan and emotional way this question manifests itself in the two societies.
- ↳ The highly technical and complex nature of the problem is being exploited by some media and analysts to sow discord and weaken trust between the two sides.
- ↳ The Albanian media in particular often publish half-truths and unsubstantiated analyses and claims about Greece's supposed "real intentions", cultivating a narrative of the Greeks working to trick Albania into accepting a deal that is damaging to its national interests.
- ↳ The two governments need to be more proactive in explaining the process and its benefits and educating the public about both.
- ↳ Media need to be more cautious and understand what is at stake for both countries and the entire region, if it loses its pro-Western geopolitical orientation.
- ↳ Governments, experts and media must work together to improve the public discourse and, build and consolidate an atmosphere of bilateral trust.

3. THE ISSUE

Turkey - Albania relations

Greek media obsessing over Turkey–Albania relations



3.1. SHORT BACKGROUND

For many years, the Greek media nurtured the narrative that Turkey was behind Edi Rama’s decision to legally challenge the 2009 maritime borders agreement.

This narrative was fed by sporadic statements by members of the Albanian Opposition, controversial statements by Turkish public figures (but not officials), and nationalistic voices in Greece. There is no proof whatsoever that Rama’s decision was dictated in any way by Ankara.

Additionally, the Greek media are typically suspicious of bilateral meetings and military agreements between Albania and Turkey. In general, they tend to portray Tirana as a proxy for Turkish interests in the region and its “malign” aims vis-a-vis Athens.

3.2. AL MEDIA

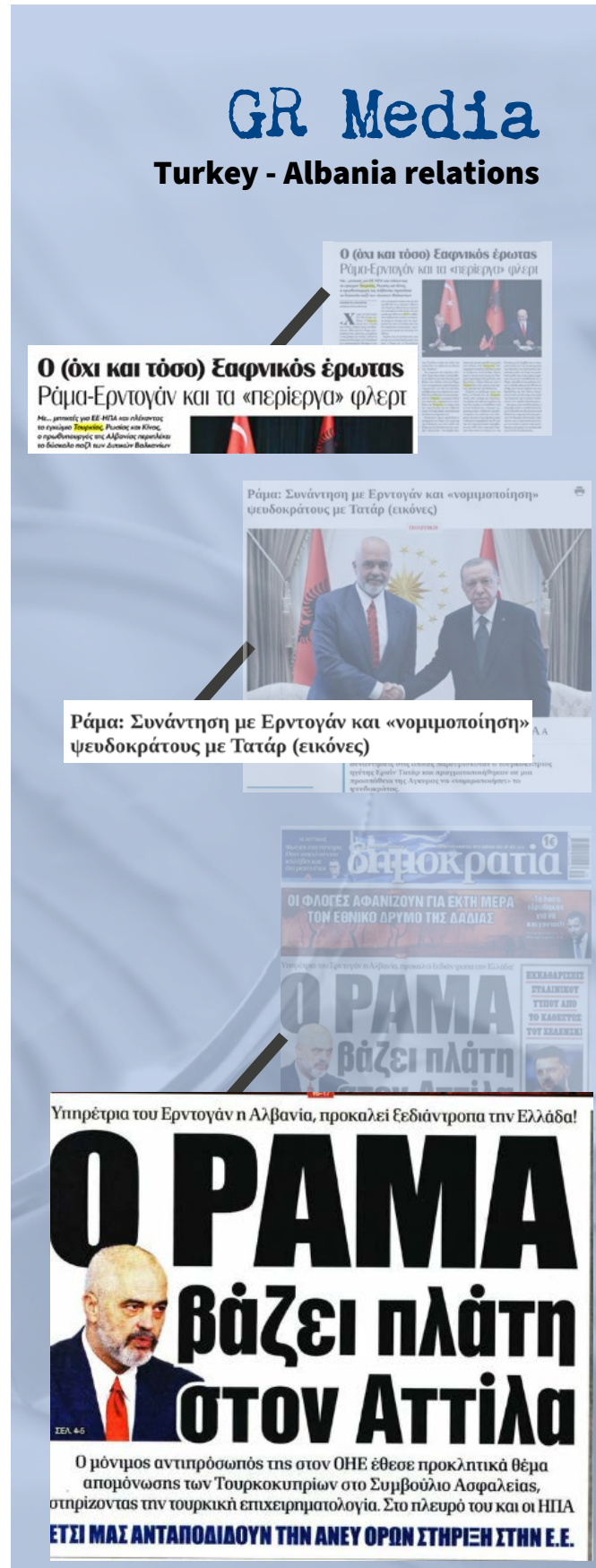
“Between friendliness and a critical stance”: During the monitoring period, Albanian media reports on Albania–Turkey relations focused on bilateral issues, without mentioning the maritime border issue with Greece as being on the agenda or Rama’s relationship with Erdoğan. Some criticism was levelled at the Albanian government, by the opposition media in particular, for allegedly violating human rights in extraditing members of the Turkish Opposition at Erdoğan’s explicit request. Moreover, the Albanian media regularly reported on the tensions between Greece and Turkey, but in a neutral tone and without taking sides.

3.3. GR MEDIA

A “love affair”: A typical example of how Greek media interpret relations between Edi Rama and Turkey’s Tayyip Erdogan is provided by the article entitled *“Rama’s (not so) sudden love with Erdoğan and the ‘odd’ flirt”* published in **Manifesto** (centre-right) on August 26: “Ankara’s attempts to interfere in the region are no secret. Especially when it comes to Albania, it’s all about talks behind closed doors and Tirana’s stance on the maritime borders issue towards Athens. Greece agreed 12 nautical miles with Italy, but Rama performed a... dribble, choosing the Constitutional Court option to essentially serve Turkey’s interests”.

A “brotherly” meeting: On August 9, Rama travelled to Turkey at Erdoğan’s invitation to attend the opening ceremony of the Islamic Solidarity Games. Rama posted on Facebook that he would have a “brotherly meeting” with Erdoğan to discuss the progress of their bilateral cooperation.

Taking their cue from Rama’s words, Greek media highlighted the close relationship between



the two leaders. For Greek media, Rama's words corroborated the view they already held: that the two leaders and countries are very close. Greek media also commented that the Albanian PM participated in "a show which sought to provide legitimacy and recognition to the Turkish Cypriot leader, Ersin Tatar". The Greek media published photos of Edi Rama present—together with other officials—in the same room as the Turkish Cypriot leader. The media [portrayed](#) this as evidence that Rama recognized the authority of the Turkish Cypriot leadership, and was providing it with legitimacy.

"Erdoğan's servant": The front page of [Dimokratia](#) (right-wing) on 26 July carried the headline *"Attila (referring to Turkey's 1974 invasion of Cyprus) has Rama's backing"*, with the sub *"Albania, Erdoğan's servant, is unashamedly provoking Greece: This is how they repay us for our unconditional support in the EU"*. The story quotes Cypriot media and a Greek website ([slpress.gr](#)): "Following the Albanian FM's attempt to raise the Chams issue and the unacceptable events in the Albanian parliament when our country was accused of genocide, as well as the constant give and takes with Ankara, the Albanians have now accused the Republic of Cyprus of „isolating“ the Turkish Cypriots. This incredible incident took place at the meeting of the UN Security Council last Wednesday, July 20, when Albania's permanent representative to the UN raised the issue of the so-called isolation of the Turkish Cypriots."

3.4. SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT

On the Rama-Erdoğan meeting: The public was made aware of the two leaders' meeting in early August through a post by the Albanian premier on Facebook, in which he referred vaguely to progress made of common projects without naming them. Albania media even reported that the meeting had turned sour when Rama refused when Erdoğan demanded that Albania take measures against the *Gulenists*. This was left out of the Greek media stories, as it does not serve the Greek narrative of Tirana pushing Ankara's interests.



Photo P7GPMFD © iLixe48 - Envato Elements (adaptation)

Intervention at the UN for Cyprus: The debate at the United Nations took place on July 20, on the occasion of the renewal of the mandate for the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) following a report by the UN Secretary General. For the first time, the US and the UK raised the issue of the economic isolation of the Turkish Cypriots, who are completely dependent on Ankara.

Albania's permanent representative to the UN simply aligned with the positions of Washington and London, rather than taking the opportunity to push a Turkish agenda, as the Greek media presented Albania as doing. Indicatively, the Greek media failed to mention that the initiative to raise the issue of the Turkish Cypriots came from the Americans. We should also not forget that relations between the US and Greece are currently at their best in decades; so the Greek media are blaming Tirana for an initiative that was actually made by the power Athens views as its closest ally in its difficult relationship with Ankara.

Lastly, the [final wording](#) of the UN document was toned down, simply mentioning the need to "reverse the isolation of the Turkish Cypriots". It is worth mentioning that there was no reaction from Nicosia.

3.5. POLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Distorting reality: The above stories are not rarities in the Greek media's reporting on Turkey-Albania relations. They are striking but typical examples of the tendency on the part of many Greek media to distort political reality and the level of diplomatic, political and economic relations between Tirana, Athens and Ankara. Right-wing dailies such as **Dimokratia**, whose coverage we have seen above, excel at misrepresenting official relations between Albania and Turkey. That said, the entire spectrum of the Greek press, including the typically less nationalist leftist dailies, tends to be biased against the Albanian government, when it comes to the question of its relations with Turkey.

Without reliable sources or documented proof, many Greek media tend to depict Albania as a quasi-enemy which serves Ankara's "malign" interests against Athens in one way or another. The Greek media almost never provide an informed analysis of the rationale behind Albanian foreign policy positions, and typically exaggerate Albania's relations with Turkey. Moreover, they almost never analyse the reasons why Albania may sometimes rely more on Turkey for aid, rarely pointing out the absence of similar support from the EU or Greece. In the absence of explicit media mechanisms to combat disinformation and hate speech in Greece, reports like the above will continue to fuel negative perceptions and distorted narratives and ideas about Albania and its relations with both Greece and Turkey. Importantly, the Greek media's misrepresentation of relations between Albania and Turkey is also enabled by the failure of the governments and political elites in both countries to provide adequate reassurances about each other's intentions, and also by their failure to work towards building mutual trust.



3.6. KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ↳ Albania and Turkey maintain friendly relations. These relations have their own dynamics and logic which can be understood, analysed and explained, but are not necessarily—or, indeed, are not typically—impacted on relations between Athens and Tirana, or for that matter, the turbulent relationship between Athens and Ankara.
- ↳ The fact that there is nothing extraordinary or unique in the Albania-Turkey relationship is also corroborated by Albanian opinion poll findings.
- ↳ However, Greek media tend to over-emphasise the bond between Tirana and Ankara and completely misrepresent Albania as a proxy of Turkey in the region. In turn, such narratives tend to undermine any efforts made to build trust between Greece and Albania and recycle anti-Albanian prejudices and negative stereotyping.
- ↳ The governments in Albania and Greece are also partly responsible, given their failure both to offer each other reassurances about their intentions and to provide sufficient support to efforts seeking to build trust between the two societies.
- ↳ There is a dire need for political and media initiatives to reverse prejudices in foreign policy thinking and media reporting.

4. THE ISSUE

Albania's EU integration

Media on both sides missing the political significance of the issue



Row of chairs (ID140631848,
©Mikhail Mishchenko
-Dreamstime.com

4.1. SHORT BACKGROUND

Following numerous postponements, Albania and North Macedonia finally began their EU accession talks on 18 July. The news was warmly welcomed by Athens as a significant development for its foreign policy, which has been supportive of the Western Balkans' EU integration since 2003.

The Greek Alternate Minister for European Affairs, Miltiadis Varvitsiotis, attending the first Intergovernmental EU Conference with Albania and North Macedonia, spoke of an [important day](#) for both Europe and Greece. However, he also stressed that negotiations should speed up "in order to provide substance and completion for key national demands, namely the faithful implementation of the Prespa Agreement and the protection of both the national and property rights of the Greek national minority in Albania."

The Albania media reported and welcomed Athens' support for Tirana's EU integration process. However, there were articles which viewed Greece with suspicion and advised the Albanian government to take care with the EU negotiating framework, because Greece could add bilateral issues to it.

4.2. GR MEDIA

National interests come first: The statement by the Greek Alternate FM on July 19 perfectly sums up the way Greek media usually report on the European perspectives of neighbouring countries. Stories or op-eds highlight the importance of their EU accession, but usually filter this through Greek national interests.

On July 20, **Political** (centre right) wrote: *Varvitsiotis reminded them (Albania and North Macedonia) of their obligations.* Taking a different tone, **TA NEA** (centre) talked about “A new page for the Balkans: Athens appears satisfied with the opening of accession talks for North Macedonia and Albania”. And a story in **Liberal** (centre right) on “The compromise that opened the accession talks of North Macedonia and Albania” noted that “Greece needs to link the course of accession negotiations with the situation of the Greek National Minority in Albania, the issue of their property, education, and equal representation in the country’s social, economic and political life.”

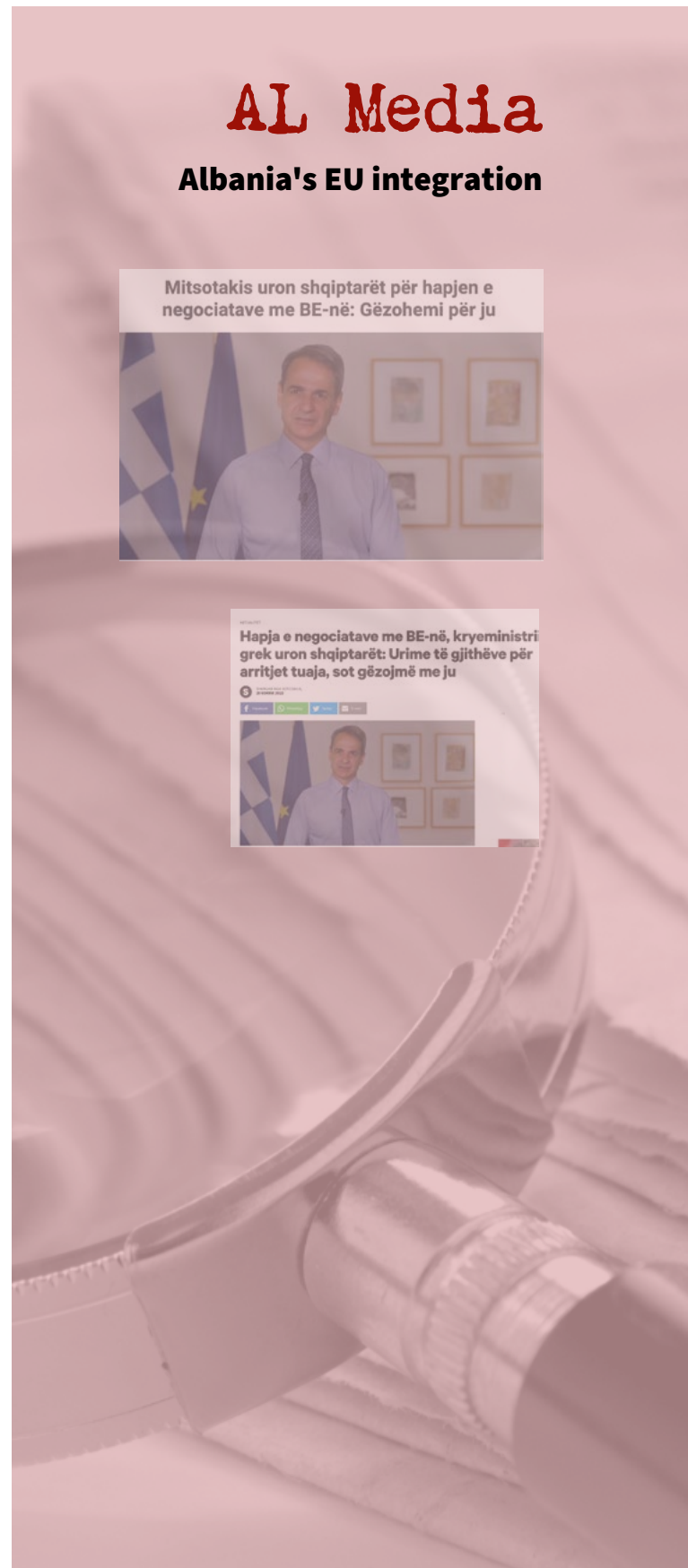


4.3. AL MEDIA

“Greece, a strong supporter of Albania’s EU integration”: Greece has always been one of the strongest supporters of Albania’s EU integration process. This is constantly repeated during meetings and in messages like the one sent by the Greek Foreign Affairs Minister, Nikos Dendias, during his visit to Tirana on 23 May.

Euronews Albania (neutral) reported the full statement he made at the joint conference with his counterpart Olta Xhaçka: *“Greece fully supports the start of negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia. It is absolutely ready to provide technical assistance”*.

The Greek PM’s message to the Albanians on the opening of EU negotiations on 28 July received good media coverage: *“Today, we rejoice with you because we believe that you deserved it. As your close neighbour, Greece wishes you the best. Congratulations, Albania!”* ([ABC News](#), pro-gov, [Gazeta Sot](#), opposition).



4.4. POLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Missing the wider picture: The above examples are indicative of how Greek media typically report on the Western Balkans' European perspective, even though Greece has been one of the most outspoken supporters of their EU accession. Media coverage exhibits little interest in the benefits for the Western Balkans or in the region's European future. Reporting is often positive, though it does not provide an in-depth analysis of why the region ought to have a European future. Moreover, few analyses focus on the benefits the region's inclusion in the EU will bring for Greece and the EU.

In the case of Albania, Greek media typically report statements made by Greek officials which highlight the Greek position on the rights of the Greek minority. Additionally, conservative media go so far as to urge Athens to use its veto against Albania, if Tirana will not comply with Greek demands or interests, which include the maritime borders issue or Albania's purported close relations with Turkey. In general, the Greek media miss the opportunity to highlight the many benefits which a European Albania could bring, both for the country itself and for the Albanian people's relations with their neighbours in the region.

For their part, Albanian media fail to take advantage of two significant opportunities: first, to inform the Albanian public that Greece is a strong advocate for Albania's European future; and second, to reflect on what Albania's European integration would mean for the actual relations between the two countries, and the opportunities for cooperation it would give rise to.



4.5. KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ↳ Greece and Albania are in full agreement about their own and the region's geopolitical orientation. Greece is also a strong supporter of EU membership for Albania and for the entire Western Balkans.
- ↳ This alignment offers an excellent opportunity for the two countries to base their future partnership on the solid foundations of European integration.
- ↳ But media coverage remains narrow in perspective on both sides, and primarily focuses on the national interest. It fails to report and/or analyse the benefits which European integration could be expected to bring for Albanian society, bilateral relations, and the Western Balkans as a whole.
- ↳ This is reflected in public opinion, where attitudes are more ambiguous than the actual shared vision of EU membership warrants.

5. THE ISSUE

Elina Tzengko's success story

Society shows the way



5.1. SHORT BACKGROUND

Elina Tzengko, the European javelin champion born and raised in Greece by Albanian migrant parents, won the gold medal at the European Championships in Munich on August 18.

5.2. GR MEDIA

“A success story”: Initially, Greek media warmly embraced Tzengko’s victory, but failed to report on her family’s ethnic background. News websites (naftemporiki.gr, paron.gr, cnn.gr) and sports newspapers called her a “golden champion”, the “queen of Europe”.

But after Elina Tzengko spoke about the hardships faced by her personally and by her family, and about the difficulties they encountered getting Greek citizenship, echoing the experiences of many children born to migrants, media stories started to highlight this unresolved problem. Her [interview](#) in athletesstories.gr was reproduced by other news websites, while quotes from her personal story appeared in multiple media.

Some media reports talked about Tzengko’s acquiring of Greek citizenship as a personal “odyssey” while forced her to miss international events, in which she had no right to take part, until 2018, when she was granted Greek citizenship. As she revealed in her interview, it was a long and psychologically painful process.

On August 26, **Avgi** newspaper published an article entitled “If you don’t become a champion, you never become Greek” containing [research](#) by Generation 2.0 which revealed how several children of migrants were not granted Greek citizenship easily, because that is a privilege enjoyed by good athletes like Tzengko alone.



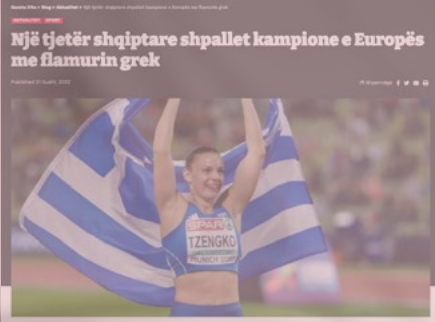
5.3. AL MEDIA

“Yet another Albanian success story”: The majority of the media reported Tzengko’s victory using the word ‘Albanian’. [Gazeta Dita](#): *“Another Albanian is declared European champion under the Greek flag”*. [Shqiptarja.com](#): *“After Luiza Gega, another Albanian is declared European champion, but under a different flag”*. The same outlet reported that Tzengko stopped talking about her Albanian roots after her victory, which is evidently untrue.

Albanian media also reported details about Tzengko’s life and family, her hard-working parents, her long bureaucratic struggle to get Greek citizenship, even though she was born in Greece. [Koha Jone](#) reported her mother’s story, focusing on [negative messages](#) she received: *“European champion for Greece, the Albanian Elina Xhengo: I received negative messages from the Greeks”*. [Gazeta Panorama](#) used a [clickbait title](#): *“A 19-year-old Albanian wins the gold medal in European Athletics... for Greece”*.

AL Media

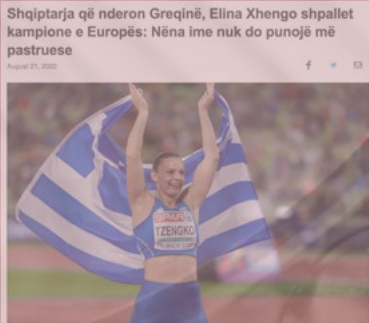
Elina Tzengko's success story



Pas Luiza Gegës, një tjetër shqiptare shpallet kampione Europe, por me flamur tjetër

Atletja shqiptare Luiza Gega bëri një performancë të shkëlqyer në 2 javë mëna me pengesa dhe u shpallte kampione Europe. Por Gega nuk ishte e vetmja shqiptare që fitoi në finalët e Kampionatit europian të atletikës.

■ U shpall kampione në hedhjen në shishtë për Greqinë, Elina Xhengo. Kam marrë edhe mesazhe negative, e bëjme sërish kam origjin shqiptarë.



Një 19-vjeçare shqiptare fiton medaljen e artë në Europeanin e Atletikës... për Greqinë

Aug 21, 2022 | 21:34

5.4. POLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Raising public awareness: Elina Tzengko's story is important, because social stories about Albanians living in Greece are widely reported by the media in both countries, but are very often crime-related. This has a significant negative impact, since it reproduces negative stereotypes about the Albanian migrant community in Greece, which is almost universally highly and successfully integrated into Greek society. Focusing on positive stories helps to set the record straight about the actual situation of the vast majority of people of Albanian origin living in Greece. Understanding their plight and legal limbo will also help build relations of trust between the two societies.

Deliberately or not, the Greek media did not initially focus on Tzengko's origins. She was representing Greece at the championships and her medal was celebrated, without second guessing, as a Greek victory. However, following her revelations about the difficulties she encountered getting Greek citizenship, most Greek media focused on the problem which is shared by many other children of migrants: namely, that they do not enjoy equal rights with their Greek peers when they turn 18.

These stories raise public awareness not only about bureaucratic problems that need at long last to be resolved, but also the many ways in which

migrants and their families have enriched Greek society. The interest and warmth that Tzengko's story generated among the Greek public show how widely accepted the integration of Albanian migrants in the Greek society nowadays is.

In Albania, too, the majority of media comments were positive and respectful of her success as a young Greek citizen. Nonetheless, there were cases in which the media opted for clickbait or to feed their audiences nationalistic titles. However, most stories reflected the general public mood in Albania that Albanians are well integrated in Greek society.



PUBLIC OPINION POLL: OSFA/ELIAMEP, 2021
Relations between Albania & Greece

About the **Albanian migrants & their integration in Greece**



All Albanian respondents think that Albanian migrants have contributed to both Albania and Greece's economic development.



The vast majority of the Greek respondents support that the Albanian migrants do not pose a threat to Greece (74%).



Similarly, 97% of the Albanian public opinion agrees that Albanian migrants do not pose a threat.

ALBANIAN RESPONDENTS



OTHER: 2%: Don't know/ Didn't answer

Children of Albanian migrants who grew up in Greece are fully integrated in the Greek society.

GREEK RESPONDENTS



OTHER: 1%: Don't know/ Didn't answer



5.5. KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ↳ Despite the turbulent past and numerous legal and administrative obstacles, Albanians present an excellent example of a highly-integrated migrant community, which has contributed to Greece's economic development and enriched Greek society culturally.
- ↳ But media in both countries continue to focus more on incidents that downplay the importance of this "human bridge" between the two societies, while their narratives continue to reproduce the prejudices and negative stereotypes the two societies have about each other.
- ↳ Stories like that of Elina Tzengko and many others like her need more media attention, if the actual societal situation is to be more accurately represented, and to increase the mutual understanding and trust between the two societies. Such messages would also comprise a meaningful response to racist and stereotypical treatments of migration by certain Greek media.

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About this publication

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