



Greece and the Albanian-Greek relations in the Albanian printed media 2014

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Introduction

In December 2013, at the conference “Debating Contemporary Albanian-Greek Relations”, the Albanian Institute for International Studies (AIIS) and the Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy (ELIAMEP), supported by Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, were presenting in Tirana the findings of their studies on Albanians’ and Greeks’ perceptions about each other, about the bilateral relations and about the many other social, political and economic dimension of the Albanian-Greek relations.¹ While the perception picture emerging from the studies was not always positive, the media was persistently underlined as a possible actor/factor responsible for the promotion of stereotypes on both sides of the border. Convinced that there are no singular causes, but rather an amalgam of factor responsible for the way people in these neighbouring countries perceive each other, this empirical study tries to conduct an in-depth analysis into this one important actor: *the media*.

Following this project the Albanian Institute for International Studies (AIIS) has conducted a monitoring of Albanian printed media outlets for a period of seven months, starting from *January 2014 to July 2014*. A similar study is being conducted by the Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy (ELIAMEP) in Greece. What follows in the upcoming pages is the study AIIS conducted on the Albanian printed media outlets and the main findings in relation to the way Albanian media portrays the many dimensions of the Albanian-Greek relations. Although, given the short period of monitoring, this study does not pretend to reach general and representative conclusions on how the Albanian media portrays these relations; it nevertheless gives some important insights on the general picture that the media feeds to Albanians (and not only Albanians) on a

1. The studies are: Alba Çela and Sashenka Lleshaj, *Albanian- Greek Relations from the Eyes of the Albanian Public: Perceptions 2013*, Albanian Institute for International Studies and Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Tirana, March 2014; Ioannis Armakolas, *The Greek Public Opinion towards Albania and the Albanians: Social attitudes and perceptions*, Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy and Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, December 2013.

daily basis. Given the limited timeframe, the quantitative dimension of this study gives modest insights, but on the other hand this is compensated and at the same time enriched by the in-depth analysis of three case studies with important topics covered in the Albanian media during the selected period.

Albanian citizens' perceptions about Greece

The previous study on perception "*Albanian-Greek relations from the eyes of the Albanian public: Perceptions 2013*" reported a mixed picture of how Albanians see Greece and the Greeks. In regard to questions related to the relations between Greece and Albania, the Greek government and the Albanian government, as well as the relations between Albanians and Greeks, around half of the sample would consider these to be normal (45 percent in the first case, 52 percent in the second case and 41 percent in the third case). On a comparative view, although generally considered normal, relation between the Albanians and the Greeks scored the less while relations on the governmental level were perceived more positively.

At the same time, when digging into specific issues, the picture looks more complicated than the generally perceived 'normal' relationship. According to the survey, Albanian citizens thought that there were some important issues to be solved in order for relation between the two countries to improve such as: *the border issue*, with 46 percent of respondents rating it as the first priority; followed by the *Cham issue*, with 77 percent of citizens indicating it in the top three priorities; and finally the *treatment of Albanian migrants in Greece*, with 68 percent of respondents indicating it in the top three priorities. Equally important, while more than half of respondents answered that 'Greece has helped Albania in the past 20 years' the same share answered that 'Greece is still in a state of war with Albania' and that 'Greece intervenes in Albania's internal affairs through the Greek minority', while around 80 percent think that 'the failure to resolve the Cham issue is a huge obstacle for improving relations between Albania and Greece'. Moreover, the majority of respondents answered

that they either disagree or don't have information about the statements that 'Albania and Greece have signed a friendship agreement', 'Greek citizens support Albania's membership in the EU' and that 'the Greek government has supported the process of Albania's integration in the EU'. Finally, although 46 percent of respondents thought that no country was a threat to Albania, 19 percent answered that Greece was a *threat* for the country.

Although the 2013 survey report came with no ambition of having an explanatory power, yet it shortly tried to get some insights on how the above perceptions were formed or influenced by asking people on their personal or family contacts with Greece and the Greeks through questions about travelling and residence experiences in the country. The majority of respondents (57 percent) had been to Greece for short or long-term visit/stay, with 74 percent of them reporting they had worked or lived there for less than 2 years, and 45 percent of them reporting that at least one of their family members lived in Greece. What is more important is that only 6 percent of those that had lived in Greece for more than 2 years described their relations with Greeks as bad or very bad. As a result, although personal experience with Greece and the Greeks could be responsible for Albanian citizens' perceptions over their neighbouring country, this variable is only partially accountable as it is difficult to fully explain the negative views or stereotypes that exist at a time when citizens' reported personal experience in Greece is mainly positive.

Why to monitor and study the media?

While the above study on perceptions was useful *in mapping* and reporting citizens' views, this current study tries to dig into *how* citizens' views are being formed. As it is difficult to single out one responsible factor for citizens' views and perceptions — as it was stated above, the personal experience can have a limited explanatory power, — it is helpful to look at a generally accepted shaper of public opinion such as the media.

This special attention that the study dedicates to the media comes as a result of the strong influence the media has on shaping people's perceptions, opinions and views on many subjects and issues. It has long been argued — and now even axiomatically accepted in communication studies — that “the media is the message”.² Thus, the message is not independent from the medium that transmits it. Most importantly, the way the message gets perceived is as much defined by the shape, connotation and the way the message gets transmitted as by the actual facts it states. Consequently, the media's important role in shaping public opinion makes it an important object of analysis. Through this perspective, the study explores how citizens' perceptions are affected by media through studying the way Albanian news, opinions and features portray Greece, the Greeks and the Albanian-Greek relations.

While today people are increasingly getting informed through online and social media, in Albania printed media is still substantially accessed, although the popularity is diminishing. Nevertheless, apart from Tirana Times whose online account is only accessible through subscription, the selected Albanian newspapers generally publish their printed articles in their online pages as well, thus reaching a wider audience.

2. Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The extensions of Man*, Routledge, London, 1964.

Executive Summary

The January-July 2015 period was very interesting for the Albanian-Greek relations due to the fact that within a short period of seven months a very diverse set of events unfolded, sending different signals in the bilateral relations. These seven months monitoring of the Albanian printed media showed that Greece and the Albanian-Greek relations are constantly covered in the Albanian media: from the Greek Presidency of the Council of EU to the granting of the EU candidate status for Albania; from the solving of issue of toponyms of birthplaces in the Albanian passports of Albanians born in Greece to the killing of an Albanian prisoner in a Greek prison; from high level bilateral visits to the administrative reform in Albania and the claims of the Greek minority. The extent and intensity of coverage depends widely on the topic, its character, its importance for the Albanian-Greek relations, the effect it can provoke in the public opinion, the potential of a certain situation to escalate further, and the momentum of a certain situation or event in one of the countries or in both of them.

This study tried to answer two main questions in relation to the articles published by the Albanian printed media: “*what* are the main issues the Albanian printed media covered during this seven months period in relation to Greece and the Albanian-Greek relations?” and “*how* did the Albanian printed media cover these issues?”. These ‘*what*’ and ‘*how*’ questions provide a general picture of the way Greece and the Albanian-Greek relations are portrayed in the Albanian media along with the main themes that accompany and define this portrayal. The study shows that despite the fact that the coverage of issues related to Greece and the Albanian-Greek relations is generally *situational* – depending on the different issues and cases under consideration – there is a *continuation* of some major themes in the general approach the media has towards Greece and the Albanian-Greek relations which is at worst negative and distrustful and at best hopeful for improvements and a new start.

What is reported?

This study analyzed a sample of 225 articles from three daily Albanian newspapers published in Albanian - Shqip, Panorama and Mapo - and one weekly Albanian newspaper published in English – Tirana Times. The study shows that the Albanian media is very sensitive towards news related to the Albanian-Greek relations given the fact that from the sample we analyzed 213 articles have been published by the three daily newspapers in 7 months, which means at least 10 articles per month/each on average. Obviously, the intensity was not consistent as it depended on the specific issues that were ‘hot’ at the moment and which attracted public opinion’s attention the most. Thus, January, April and June had a relatively high level of articles on issues related to the Albanian-Greek relations, with April being the frontrunner with 61 articles in total.

The report peaks in January, April and June were related to three issues in particular: (1) the Greek Presidency of the Council of EU and the bilateral high level visits between Albania and Greece; (2) the Kareli case: the killing of an Albanian prisoner in a Greek prison; and (3) a mix of issues, although it is mainly related to the coverage of the administrative reform in Albania and the side implications this could have for the Greek minority in Albania. Other issues covered in a more balanced way throughout this seven months period were: the issue of the toponyms of birthplaces in the Albanian passports of Albanians born in Greece, the Cham issue and issues related to the Albanian Orthodox Church.

Furthermore, from the sample we analyzed it looks like the Albanian media widely covers political and socio-political issues — with 62 percent and 30 percent of the sample respectively — which also demonstrates a hunt for *sensational stories* that would produce headlines and thus provoke reaction in the Albanian public opinion. Cultural or economic issues on the other hand look highly neglected representing only 4 percent of the sample we analyzed.

How are issues reported?

By using a basic content analysis with a specific emphasis on connotation this study divided articles in four main categories: positive connotation, neutral connotation, quasi-negative connotation and negative connotation articles. The study found that during this seven months period results were mixed although the *negative connotation articles* were the biggest group with 35 percent of the sample. The neutral connotation articles represented 28 percent of the sample while the quasi-negative articles and the positive articles followed with 24 percent and 13 percent respectively.

Despite the above 'negative' picture, the study showed that reporting in the Albanian media was *situational*, depending on the specific case under consideration, and it varied considerably from case to case. Thus, this period saw the Albanian media moving from 'happy' stories to 'bitter' ones in a very short period as it was the case with the vastly positively covered Greek Presidency of the Council of EU and the bilateral visits in January and February (with 47 percent of articles having a positive connotation) to the vastly negatively covered Kareli case (with 68 percent of articles having a negative connotation) in March and April. In between these stories and all over the period other stories were covered mainly through a neutral connotation as it was the case with the issue of toponyms of birthplaces in the Albanian passports of Albanians born in Greece (45 percent of articles had a neutral connotation).

Thus, given the above picture and especially the vehement way the Kareli case was covered in the Albanian media, the study also considered the general distortion of the data because of such an outlier and unusual case which is not representative of the Albanian-Greek relations in the long-term. Accordingly, if the data was analyzed without the Kareli case, the picture would be considerably neutral, with the neutral connotation articles representing the biggest share with 35 percent of the sample.

Although reporting in the Albanian media was situational depending on the case under consideration, there were some *main themes* throughout

the sample which could be noticed despite the case, especially when articles had a negative connotation. These were:

- (1) *Relations with Greece should be handled carefully as the country cannot be fully trusted.* This theme was present throughout the study in all three case studies that were analyzed especially in the negative connotation categories of each case. In the case of the Greek Presidency of the Council of EU, the bilateral visits and the EU candidate status of Albania, the message was: Greece is a rational actor, aiming at its own interest and will certainly ask something in return for its current support to Albania and the closer ties with Albania. These articles were mainly counterbalancing the more enthusiastic ones on the subject. In the case of Kareli and the toponyms, the message was: the same old Greece that cannot be trusted when it comes to the most sensitive issues with Albania and Albanians.
- (2) *Greece mistreats Albanian migrants in many dimensions.* This category of articles was present in both Kareli and the toponyms case and portrayed Greece as a systematic violator of Albanian migrants, that tortures them, bans them from seeing their families, bans them from entering Greece, makes their lives difficult even when they are born and have lived in Greece since then, violates their basic human rights, etc. This category of articles often was accompanied by a national collective victimization of Albania and Albanians towards Greece. These articles were also aiming at provoking an emotional effect to readers.
- (3) *There is a potential in the Albanian-Greek relations for a long-term partnership.* This theme was present in the positive connotation articles when reporting bilateral visits and the finalization of the agreement that resolved the issue of toponyms. These articles were extensively referring to the novelty of developments with terms such as: 'new start', 'new chapter', 'new partnership'.
- (4) *Albania and Greece can resolve issues but they are far from a 'romantic affair'.* This theme was mainly present in the neutral connotation articles and aimed at balancing enthusiasm for new positive

developments in the Albanian-Greek relations with the issues that are still to be discussed and solved between the countries. This theme was especially present in the case of bilateral visits and Greece's support for Albania's EU candidate status as well as in the May coverage of the resolution of the issue of toponymes.

To conclude, as this study will further show, there are some core persistent themes in the Albanian media discourse, although the emphasis varies in accordance with the situation under consideration and the 'urgency' of events.



Methodology

The chosen primary research method is a basic *content analysis* that is quantitative and qualitative media monitoring. The content to be analyzed is composed of articles from Albanian printed media outlets (a similar analysis is used by ELIAMEP to conduct research over the Greek media outlets). This methodology is commonly used for media monitoring activities, especially during elections and certainly in academia for discourse analysis. AIIS has already used this methodology in a previous project and publication: “*Albania and Serbia: Do perceptions equal reality?*”³

Selecting the sample

This study monitored three Albanian daily printed media outlets — *Shqip*, *Mapo* and *Panorama* newspapers — and one weekly newspaper that is printed in English — *Tirana Times*. This selection was *a priori* made in accordance to the number of copies sold for every Albanian media outlet while *Tirana Times* was selected because of reaching a specific English-speaking community in Tirana, mainly composed of the foreign diplomatic missions and different international organizations in Tirana, in addition to its Albanian readers.

After this initial selection, these media outlets were monitored for a period of *seven months*, starting from January 2014 until July 2014. These 7 months were selected because of the very salient issues the Albanian-Greek relations went through: the Greek Presidency of the Council of the European Union, the intensive negotiations of Albanian officials for Albania to be granted the status of the European Union candidate country, the many bilateral visits of Albanian and Greek high officials in

3. Andi Balla, Filip Ejduš & Megi Llubani, *Albania and Serbia: Do perceptions equal reality?*, Albanian Institute for International Studies and Belgrade Centre for Security Policy, Tirana and Belgrade, 2013.

both countries, the killing of an Albanian prisoner in Greece over alleged tortures, the resolution of the issue of the language of Greek places names in the Albanian passports of Albanians born in Greece — the so called issue of toponyms — as well as the issue of the Greek minority and the administrative reform in Albania, just to mention the most important issues. This amalgam of issues made this seven month period of high interest for exploring the way these issues are reported in the Albanian media.

In order to collect a representative sample of articles, we pre-defined a series of *keywords*, some of which were previously discussed in the 2013 survey such as: maritime borders, Albanian emigrants in Greece, the Cham issue, the Orthodox Church of Albania, the Greek minority in Albania, the Greek soldiers' graveyards, the Greek pensions in Albania and Law of War. Apart from these, in order to expand the reach of as many articles as possible in relation to Albania and Greece as well as to tailor our research to the relevant 7 months the research was covering, some other keywords were added, such as: Greece, the Albanian-Greek relations, Janullatos, Venizelos, Papulias/Papoulias, Omonia, PBDNJ, PDIU, Albanian prisoners in Greece, Ilia Kareli/Kudret Kume, the Greek Presidency of the Council of EU and the issue of toponyms. Through these keywords⁴, a computerized blind search was conducted over a major database of scanned newspaper articles. Given the wide number of keywords used and the accuracy of the method applied in selecting the articles, we believe the sample is representative of the wider population of articles covering different dimensions of the Albanian-Greek relations.

This search resulted in 480 articles of which **225 were relevant articles**. This halving of the number of articles occurred for three reasons: (1) a considerable part of articles were *overlapping* in different keywords, for example those articles that showed up for the Venizelos search, also

4. The search was done with keywords in Albanian in the case of Shqip, Mapo and Panorama and English in the case of Tirana Times. The words were grammatically adopted during search in order for different grammatical form of the words to show up. In the case of Albanian words, the root of the word was used in order to cover the ending change in different case.

showed up for the Greek Presidency of the EU/CE and Greece keywords as more than one keyword was present in the body article; (2) the blind search would not distinguish between a cover newspaper article and its *replication* in the inside of the newspaper and would count the article twice if a specific keyword was found in its title — thus making the article appear in the cover page and inside pages simultaneously; (3) a share of articles were not *relevant* to this research and this happened mainly with those articles that referred to Albania's internal partisan politics, as was the case with PDIU negotiations with other parties or the government in the Albanian Parliament and no reference was made to issues concerning the Albanian-Greek relations, the Greek minority in Albania, the Cham issue, or any other issue that would be of primary or secondary importance or relevance to our study.

How is connotation defined?

A central part of this study is the basic content analysis which is conducted through a thorough analysis of every article's *connotation*, main themes and discourse used. Special attention has been paid to defining connotation and the way information is transmitted. The study initially pre-established three main categories to define connotation: *negative*, *positive* and *neutral*, but when the content analysis of articles started, it was clear that a fourth category was needed to make analysis more accurate: the *quasi-negative* connotation articles.

The method used to define articles' connotation was in accordance to the language, tone and specific words usage. This was a peculiar part of the methodology as there were some standards to be set in order for the definition to be consistent and leave as little space as possible for inconsistent interpretation throughout the study. The categorization was done in the following way:

- An article was classified as having a *negative connotation* when: (1) words such as conflict, violation, problem/atic, distrust, mistreatment,

discrepancies, unresolved, etc, were used; (2) there was a noticeable opinion, position or view expressed from the reporter/author of the article and the tone was emphasizing a negative aspects of a situation; (3) there were specific pictures, boxes or highlights that mapped a general negative image to the readers' first impact with the article.

- An article was defined as *quasi-negative* when the first condition was there of the words and language used, but it was difficult to notice the author's stances on the matter and the reporting in general terms was neutral — with many citations and little paraphrasing or sentences that would express and opinion or stance. Nevertheless, this category could not be classified as neutral because of the negative tone that accompanied it and the specific selection from the author/editor of the topic and the one-sided citations, including the physical space given to the article in the newspaper.⁵
- An article was defined as *neutral* when a moderate language was used, there were citations from both sides of an issue and the reporting did not have a vehement tone. At the same time, the picture used and the space given was moderate and did not leave the reader with any special negative or positive impressions.
- An article was defined as *positive*, when: (1) words such cooperation, agreement, partnership, solution, friendship, improvement, support, etc, were used; (2) there was a noticeable opinion, position or view expressed from the reporter/author of the article and the tone was emphasizing a positive aspects of a situation; (3) there were specific pictures, boxes or highlights that mapped a general positive image to the readers' first impact with the article.

Although these standards make classification systematic to a certain

5. Quasi-positive would be the symmetric category, but we assessed there was no need for such a category given the fact that those articles that were reporting positive facts were vastly voicing positive aspects of the issue and there were statistically insignificant cases of moderate positive reporting.

degree, it is impossible in this specific case to entirely objectify the researcher's judgment of the connotation of a specific article.

Selecting case studies

This study assessed that the media monitoring would not be fully completed with the quantitative data on topics covered and the connotation accompanying them, and thus an in-depth analysis of specific case studies was needed to answer the questions that statistical data usually leaves unanswered. Accordingly, three case studies were selected that cover both negative and positive aspects of the Albanian-Greek relations relevant to the January-July 2014 period (not limited only to this timeframe though).

Main findings and analysis

How do the media report on Albanian-Greek relations and how are these relations portrayed? In trying to answer the above question, this chapter provides the core analysis of the study in two main sections. The first section provides the general quantitative information on the articles' nature and spread as well as on the issues' coverage and the connotation findings. The second section focuses on the in-depth analysis of three case studies: (1) The bilateral visits of Greek and Albanian high officials in the neighbouring country; (2) The Kareli case: an Albanian prisoner dies after reported tortures by the prison's guards; (3) The resolution of the issue of toponyms of birthplaces in the Albanian passports of Albanians born in Greece.

The general picture

For the 225 articles, the *spread per newspaper* is as follows: the bigger share is from Shqip with 88 articles, followed by Mapo with 66 articles and Panorama and Tirana Times with 59 and 12 articles respectively. For obvious reasons the Albanian daily newspapers' volume of articles is much higher compared to the weekly English newspaper Tirana Times.

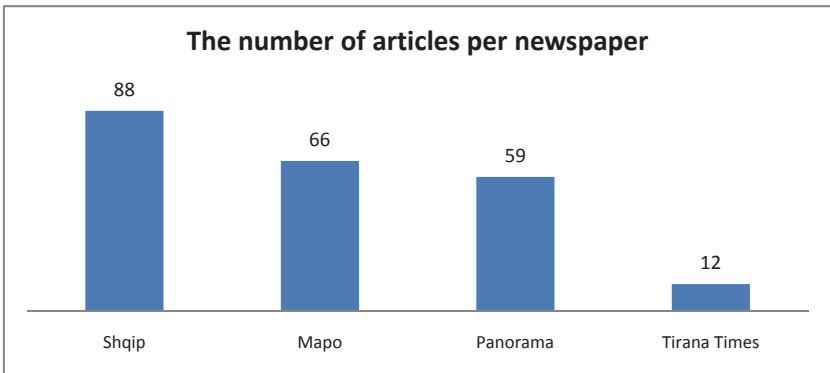


Chart 1

Moreover, articles were classified according to their *focus* in defining whether or not the Albanian-Greek relations (or any aspect of these relations) and/or Greece were the central focus of the articles of this study's sample. From Chart 2 below, it is visible that 85 percent of the sample focused on the Albanian-Greek relations or any issue directly related with these relations and the remaining 15 percent focused on domestic issues of both countries which could have an indirect impact on the neighbouring country or on the Albanian-Greek relations. It should be noted that the majority of those articles that did not have a direct focus on the Albanian-Greek relations but that could affect Greece or bilateral relations were those articles related to the administrative reform in Albania and the Greek minority. In many cases these articles shortly addressed the Greek minority and this community's concerns with the administrative reform, but the articles' focus was different. While these articles were relevant to this research, the study should still report them as a specific category of articles.

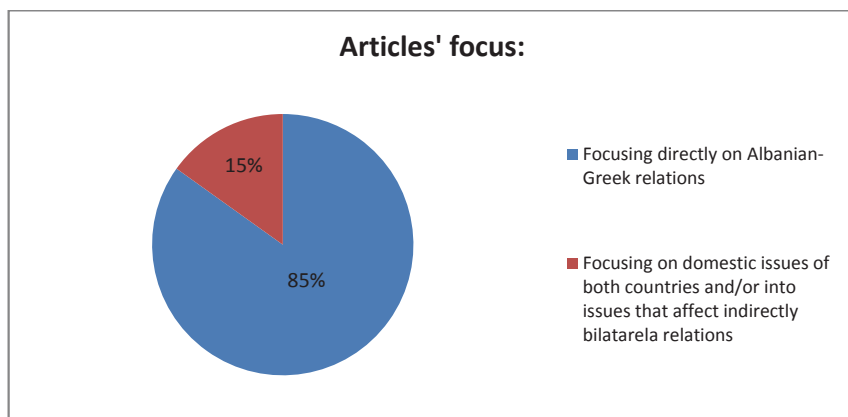


Chart 2

In addition to this basic newspaper-based and focus based categorization, the articles were also grouped in accordance to *the main issues they covered*. Thus, the six main categories of issues covered during the seven months the study monitored are: the Kareli issue; the Greek Presidency of the Council of EU and the high level bilateral visits; the administrative reform in Albania and the Greek minority; the issue of toponyms; the

Cham issue; and the Albanian Orthodox Church. As it is visible from Chart 3, coverage of the Ilia Kareli issue was predominant compared to the rest of the issues with 66 articles. This was followed by 45 articles on the Greek Presidency of the Council of EU and the high level bilateral visits and 44 articles on the administrative reform in Albania and the Greek minority. The coverage of these three issues counted for almost 70 percent of the sample.⁶ The toponyms issue, the Cham issue and the Albanian Orthodox Church were covered by 29 articles, 21 articles and 9 articles respectively. Other issues, from economic matters to historic account of language origins, were covered by 14 articles in total.⁷

As stated in the chapter's introduction, three of these cases will be analyzed in detail in the final section in order to get more insights on the way these were reported in the media.

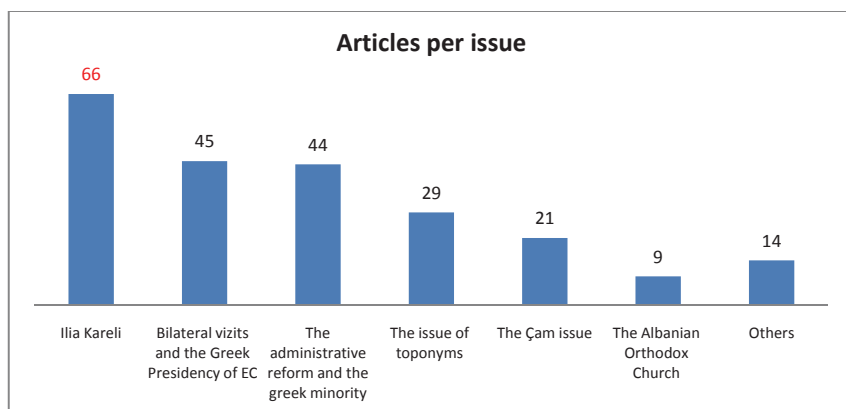


Chart 3

6. It should be noted that the articles on the administrative reform in Albania and the Greek minority were not always directly related the Greek-Albanian issues or the Greek minority, although they were classified as relevant to our study because of secondarily mentioning the way the reform would affect the minority.

7. It should be noted that three articles are overlapping in the category of the Greek Presidency of the Council of EU and the high level bilateral visits with the issue of toponyms because of articles covering both issues. This is the case with the visit of the Greek Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Evangelos Venizelos in Tirana and the discussion of the issue of toponyms. These articles were counted twice as they were grouped in both categories for the in-depth case study.

When it comes to *the monthly spread of articles*, although there is a major peak in April with 61 articles and two smaller ones in January and June with 32 and 34 articles respectively, there are no extreme oscillations, meaning that issues on Greece and/or the Albanian-Greek relation are a constant topic in the Albanian media, despite special developments worth of closer attention. It is interesting to study the peaks as they are related to the main themes/issues discussed above. Thus, the April peak is a result of the wide and intensive coverage of the Kareli issue, while the January peak is related to the Greek Presidency of the Council of EU and the bilateral high level visits between Albania and Greece. The third peak is more of a mix of issues, although it is mainly related to the coverage of the administrative reform in Albania.

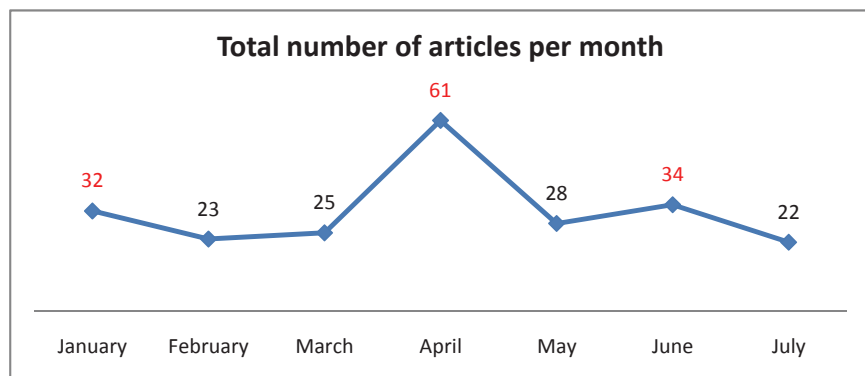


Chart 4

At this point it is important also to notice the *monthly spread of articles per newspaper* in order to see if the Chart 4 general monthly spread is a result of a specific newspaper's coverage or whether it represents a general trend, despite single newspapers. As Chart 5 clearly shows, there is an interesting coherence among the different newspapers' coverage intensity of the issues we studied. If the graph of every newspaper article spread per month would be seen separately, then the same January-April-June peaks would be noticed. Accordingly, the high coverage peaks noticed in the previous chart are an aggregation of all the single

newspapers' peaks in April, January and June. Thus, it is clear that the 'hot' topics of a certain period were paid special attention to throughout the Albanian media and not only from specific outliers. Nevertheless, it is difficult to establish causes and effects at this stage because the above mentioned media coverage popularity of 'hot' topics has probably also contributed for the topics to become 'hot' in the first place.

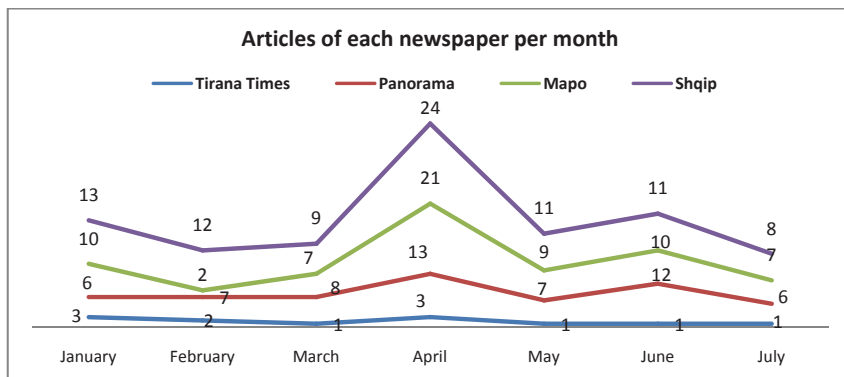


Chart 5

Finally, articles were categorized according to their *nature* into articles that dealt with: political, socio-political, social, cultural and economic issues. Out of 225 articles, 62 percent were dealing with political issues, followed by 30 percent that dealt with socio-political issues and the remaining 8 percent were articles dealing with social, cultural and economic issues. Although the chosen keywords could be partially responsible for the prevalence of articles that deal with political and socio-political issues, a clear tendency can be noticed in the Albanian printed media to publish articles of a political and socio-political nature, which in the case of this study represent 92 percent of the sample.

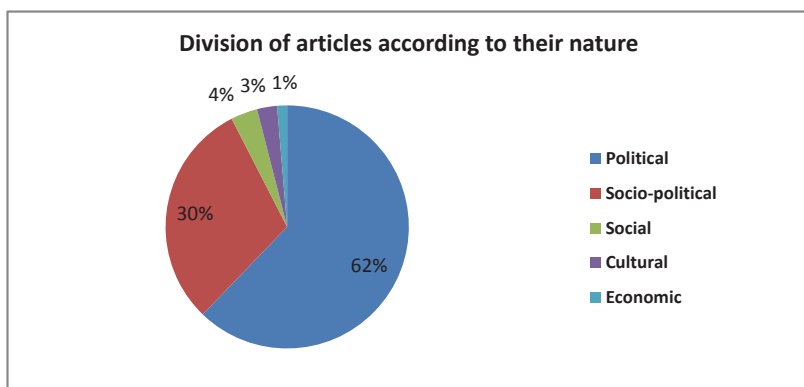


Chart 6

Connotation: how issues were reported

Answering how the Albanian media reports and subsequently portrays Greece and/or the Albanian-Greek relations requires conducting a detailed content analysis over the published articles. Connotation is an interesting tool to explore how issues are covered, how they are reported, how actors are portrayed, what is directly stated and what is being intended by a specific title, topic or information box and finally what is the purpose of such an article, what is the main message the article is trying to give and equally important, what is the logical and emotional reaction the article generally provokes to readers. Thus, defining connotation is a complex endeavour of answering many 'what' and 'how' questions simultaneously.

As explained in the previous chapter on methodology, in accordance to the used language, tone and specific words, as well as the article's visualization and subjective statements, articles were categorized in *four main connotation groups*: Positive, Neutral, Quasi-negative and Negative. Chart 7 visualises the findings from the general classification of 225 articles into connotation groups. Thus, the negative connotation articles are the biggest group that make up 35 percent of the sample followed by the neutral articles with 28 percent, the quasi-negative articles with 24 percent and the positive articles with 13 percent. If we consider the negative and quasi-negative articles on the one side

and the positive and neutral ones on the other, than more than half of the sample (59 percent) are articles with a negative or quasi-negative connotation.

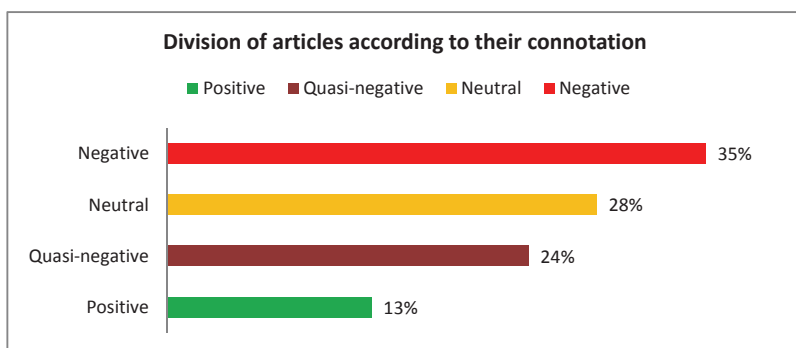


Chart 7

If we have a look at the connotation distribution per newspaper in Chart 8 it can be noticed that for Panorama and Shqip the negative connotation articles have the biggest share with 42 percent and 38 percent respectively. Furthermore, the negative and quasi-negative connotation articles in these newspapers make up for more than half of the respective samples in these newspapers. Mapo has an equal distribution of negative, quasi-negative and neutral articles with 29 percent for each of these categories. Half of Tirana Times' articles are neutral and 1/4th of its samples' articles have a positive connotation. Tirana Times' moderate coverage can be explained with the specific audience this newspaper seeks.

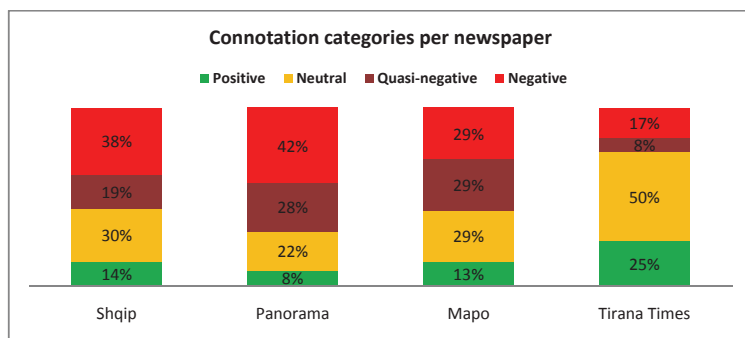


Chart 8

The seven months covered by this study were quite active in terms of the new and ongoing developments in the Albanian-Greek relations, but at the same time it is difficult to generalize on the Albanian printed media reporting on Greece and the Albanian-Greek relations by looking at these seven months exclusively. It is especially important to notice that at some point in this timeframe happened a not very common episode for the two countries: the Kareli case. This case — as it will be discussed in detail in the next section — was extensively covered in a negative and quasi-negative way throughout the Albanian media, thus making our general data on connotation significantly shift towards the negative side of the connotation spectrum. Although this is not an artificial shift — given the fact that this is the actual coverage of the story — it is nevertheless a single-spotted extreme event which is not necessarily representative of broader trends of the modalities and connotation of media coverage in Albania.

In order to have a better picture of the usual and more common coverage of the Albanian-Greek relations or issues related to them, below it is visualized the connotation spread without the articles on the Kareli case. From Chart 9, it is clear that the Kareli case had an important effect on the general connotation spread of the study's sample. Accordingly, the more 'normal' picture of the Albanian printed media coverage is a *neutral* one, although the negative and quasi-negative articles make up to 47 percent of the sample.

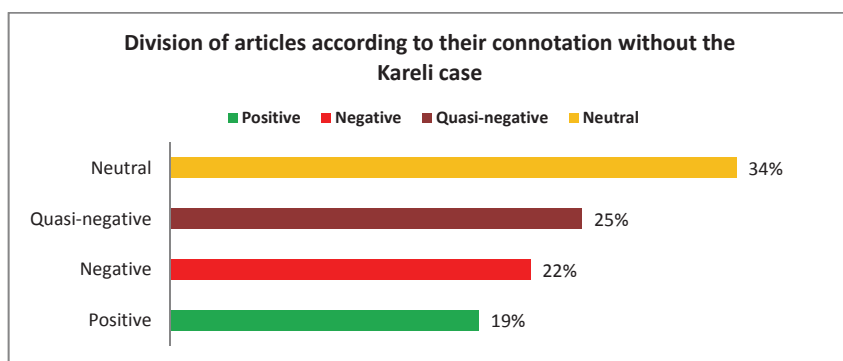


Chart 9

Case studies

After getting a sense of the general picture of the Albanian media coverage of many issues related to the Albanian-Greek relations over a seven months period, this section will give some more insights into how specific cases were reported and will analyze the specific themes that accompanied their coverage. The order these case studies will be analyzed is chronological, starting from the beginning with the Greek Presidency of the Council of EU and the bilateral visits of Greek and Albanian high officials in the neighbouring country in January and February, to go on with the Kareli case in late March and April and finishing with the resolution of the issue of the toponyms, which was disused throughout the seven months period until being resolved in May.

The reason why these three stories were chosen to be analyzed in more detail, apart from the media attention they attracted, is also because of representing three different dimension of cooperation or conflict in the Albanian-Greek relations: the *happy* story, the *bitter* story and the *mixed* story. Thus, the in-depth analysis will explore how the Albanian-Greek relations and Greece as a country are portrayed when three different stories are under considerations. Are there cleavages depending on the specific 'hot' story of the moment or is there a continuation in the image the media transmits to the audience?

1. The happy story: the Greek Presidency of the Council of EU and the bilateral visits of Greek and Albanian high officials

Situational background

From 1 January to 30 June 2014 it was Greece's turn to hold the rolling Presidency of the Council of the European Union. The start of the Hellenic Presidency of Council of EU was met with enthusiasm by the Albanian state officials who were hoping for Greece to be an active advocate of granting Albania the much pursued EU candidate country status. Prior to the Hellenic Presidency, in December 2013 the Council of the EU had postponed the decision on granting Albania the candidate status for the end of June given the requirements from the United Kingdom, Netherlands, Germany, France, the Czech Republic and Spain to see further progress in Albania with reforms.

The beginning of January 2014 found Albanian high officials with an already prepared lobbying agenda for the main European capitals, especially towards those countries that had been skeptic in December. As Greece had expressed its support for Albania's candidate status even before, the Greek Presidency of the Council of EU would thus serve to reinforce the momentum Albanian officials were hoping to get for their national cause. This actually proved to be the case as Albania was granted the EU candidate country status on June 24, 2014 and this was mentioned as one of the achievements of the Greek Presidency of the European Council.⁸

Apart from the candidate status of Albania, there was an already flourishing momentum in the Albanian-Greek bilateral relations with intensive high level visits going on between Tirana and Athens since the previous year. There were some important bilateral issues to be solved such as: the delimitation of the maritime borders and the renewed efforts in finding a solution after the

8. Gr2014eu, *Results of the Hellenic Presidency of the Council of the European Union 1 January – 30 June 2014*. Online: <http://www.gr2014.eu/home?page=1>.

Constitutional Court of Albania nullified as non-constitutional the previously reached Agreement for the Delimitation of the Greek-Albanian Continental Shelf and Maritime Zones of April 2009;⁹ the preservation of the memorial cemeteries of WWII Greek soldiers in Albania; the situation of Albanian migrant in Greece; the law of war in Greece; on the and the most recently emerged issue of the inability to travel to Greece of Albanians born in Greece because the toponyms of the birthplaces in their Albanian passports were written in the Albanian language;¹⁰ etc.

As a result of the above mentioned bilateral and EU-related issues, intensive visits took place between high officials in Albania and Greece during January and February. The first visit for 2014 was held in 14-15 January 2015 by the Albanian Defence Minister, Mimi Kodheli in Athens following an invitation from her Greek counterpart, Dimitris Avramopoulos. Apart from the meeting with the Greek Defence Minister, Avramopoulos, where more technical issues of cooperation in the field of defense were discussed, Kodheli also met with the the Prime Minister of Greece, Antonis Samaras and the President Karolos Papoulias.¹¹

The second visit was held on 5 February 2015 when the Albanian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ditmir Bushati visited Athens in the context of the 16th meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Adriatic-Ionian Initiative and also at the strategic conference of the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR). Bushati met with the Greek President Karolos Papoulias, Prime Minister Andonis Samaras and his counterpart, Evangelos Venizelos. Besides regional issues, Bushati spoke about bilateral concerns with Athens, including the joint maritime border and Albanian immigrants.¹²

9. International Boundary Research Unit (IBRU). (2010). Albanian constitutional court nullifies maritime boundary agreement with Greece. *Durham University*. Online: https://www.dur.ac.uk/ibru/news/boundary_news/?itemno=9534&rehref=%2Fibru%2Fnews%2F&resubj=Boundary+news%20Headlines.

10. This final issue will be explained in more detail in the third case study.

11. Ministry of Defense, Republic of Albania, *Defence Minister Kodheli official visit to Greece, 14-15 January 2014*. Online: http://www.mod.gov.al/arkiv/eng/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2470:defence-minister-kodheli-official-visit-to-greece-14-15-january-2014&catid=320:activitis-a-analysis&Itemid=661.

12. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Minister Bushati travels to Athens in the framework of*

The last visit of this series was held on 20-21 February by the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Greece, Evangelos Venizelos¹³ in Tirana as part of his Balkan tour in the framework of the Greek Presidency of the Council of EU. Apart from the core meeting with his Albanian counterpart, Bushati, where bilateral and EU-related issues were discussed, Venizelos also met with Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama, President Bujar Nishani and Parliament Spokesmen Ilir Meta.

General quantitative data on coverage

Media's attention towards the Albanian-Greek bilateral visits and the Greek Presidency of the Council of the EU in terms of amount of articles was as follows: Shqip published 21 articles, Panorama published 11 articles, Mapo published 8 articles and Tirana Times published 4 articles (Chart 10).

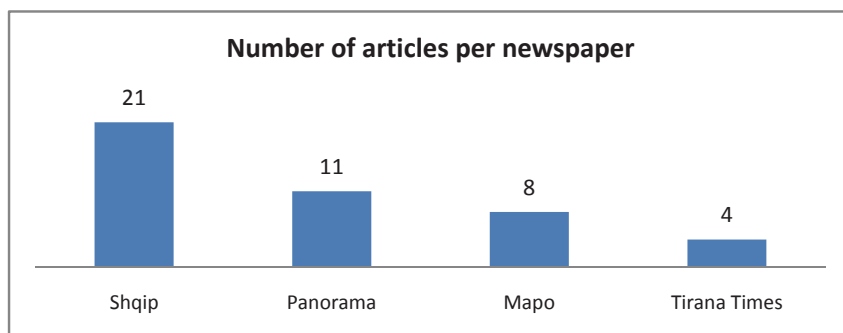


Chart 10

As mentioned in the previous section, the January and February coverage peak of articles related to the Albanian-Greek relations was mainly a result of the media's focus on this topic. Chart 11 shows that during January (with 18 articles) and February (with 19 articles) media was

All Ministerial Meeting, (February 04, 2014). Online: <http://www.punetejashtme.gov.al/en/press-office/news/minister-bushati-travels-to-athens-in-the-framework-of-aii-ministerial&page=9>.

13. It should be noted that Venizelos visited Albania even in October 2013, thus prior to this series of meetings.

intensively dealing with the bilateral visits, while on March, May and June less attention was paid to these issues although there were some articles on the candidate status and the Greek Presidency of the Council of EU as the decision on the status was approaching.

It is interesting and important to notice that in April not a single article on this topic was published in the media we studied. As the second case study will show, media at the time was focusing on another ‘hot’ topic — the Kareli case — that was far more sensitive to the Albanian public opinion and left no space for coverage of the positive developments in the Albanian-Greek relations.

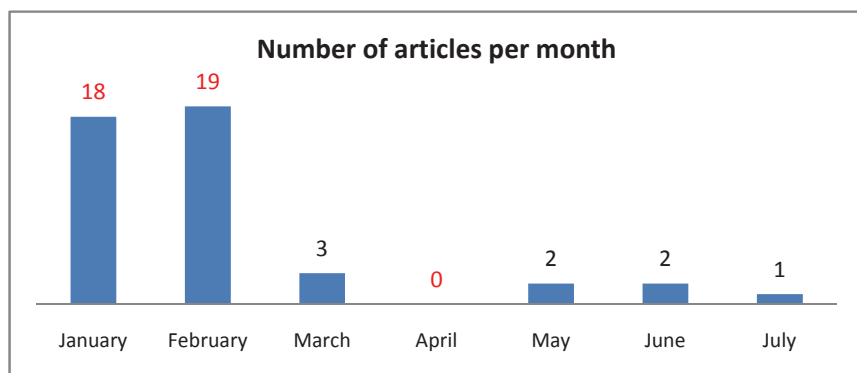


Chart 11

Connotation

How was the Greek Presidency of the Council of the EU and the following high level bilateral visits covered throughout the Albanian printed media and which were some of the main themes accompanying its coverage? From Chart 12 it is clear that almost half of the articles on this topic had a positive connotation and 38 percent neutrally reported on the issues. Only 16 percent of articles discussed or reported the issue through a negative or quasi-negative connotation.

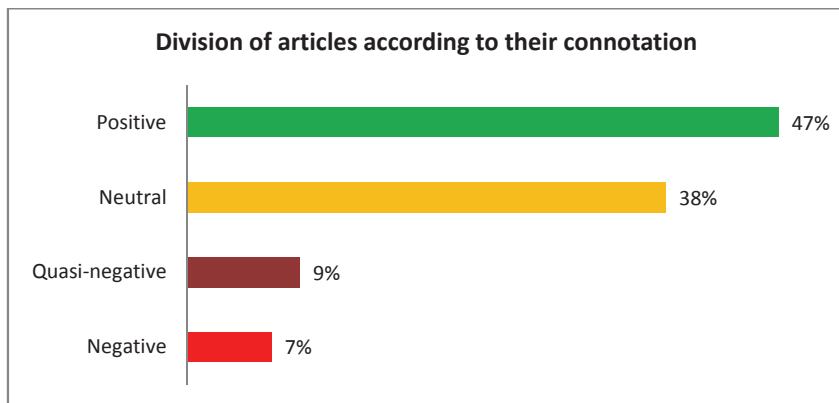


Chart 12

The positive language that accompanied the coverage of this topic emphasized three main themes: *resolution of bilateral problems, a new chapter in the Albanian-Greek relations and the partnership potential*. Throughout the articles over the meetings in Tirana and Athens, the most common words and phrases to describe the meeting results were: positive spirit, final resolution, bilateral cooperation, strategic partner, support for the status, the opening of a new chapter, friendly nations, warm atmosphere and trust. This general euphoria was visible even from titles and headlines such as “Samaras welcomes Bushati: A trusting atmosphere for the open issues”, “Greece promises lobbying for the status”, “Venizelos: Toponyms, a final solution” and “Greece: the EU status of Albania within our Presidency”. Moreover, the space dedicated to these articles was quite broad, some of which made it to the first pages of the newspaper.

The neutral reporting had more moderated tones, balancing enthusiasm over the new developments with the bilateral issues both countries still need to resolve. This balancing language was visible even in the titles and headlines such as “Greece offers the status but asks for the soldiers’ cemetery”, “The Agreement of 2009, Venizelos: after negotiations we hope it will enter into force” and “Bushati: The Sea Pact according to the

international law". Part of this neutral reporting were also interviews of Bushati, Venizelos and Niko Peleshi, the Albanian Deputy Foreign Minister, whose language was moderate, diplomatic and politically correct especially when referring to issues that are still opened between the two countries.

Although the negative and quasi-negative connotation articles were a minority, it is worth having a look into the main themes they covered which are: Greece offers help only to take something in return and there are unresolved issues that were intentionally left out of the negotiations. These articles' titles also demonstrate this tension: "Toponyms: Bushati fails in the negotiations with Venizelos", "Be careful of Greek presents", "The maritime border: Greece insists on the anti-constitutional pact" and "Unforgivable that Chameria was not mentioned". Hence, both Greek and Albanian officials were portrayed negatively in these articles, but while Albanian officials were portrayed as incapable of mentioning or resolving issues, Greek ones were seen as working through an obscure pre-set agenda.

2. The bitter story: the Kareli case

Situational background

Ilia Kareli — also referred to as Kudret Kume (his Albanian name) — was an Albanian prisoner in Greece who was found dead in his cell after reported tortures by prison guards at Nigrita prison where he was transferred after killing a prison guard at the prison of Malandrino. The events started at the end of March 2014 at the prison of Malandrino where Kareli — a detainee of the prison — stabbed Giorgos Tsironis, a prison guard. He declared that he committed this act after repeated denials from the prison officials to give him permission to visit his ill mother. Kareli was transferred immediately at the prison of Nigrita for safety reasons where he was found dead on the same day from what were later confirmed as tortures.

An inquiry was opened after the events and the Greek media was the first to closely monitor the case. The media broadcasted pictures and videos of Kareli at the prison of Nigrita while he was being escorted at his cell in very bad conditions. These pictures and videos were widely distributed in the Albanian media as well.

At the beginning of April, after the autopsy and further investigation, 13 prison guardians were brought to the court facing charges of tortures leading to death. Among them was also the head of the prison guard union, Haris Konsolidis. According to Greek Reporter portal, the court decision 189/2014 states that:

“The Albanian inmate Ilia Kareli who, on the 25th of March, 2014, fatally wounded the correctional worker of the Manadrinos prison, Giorgos Tsironis, was transferred on the 27th of March, 2014, from the General Detention Center of Malandrinos to the Detention Center of Nigritas. On his arrival in Nigrita jail and during the duration of his stay in the waiting area from 15.55 until 18.32 when he was led to his prison cell, correctional

workers of the Nigrita jail subjected the prisoner to systematic and continuous torture in order to punish him for the death of their colleague. As a result of their actions they caused the Albanian prisoner bruising and a fracture of the sternum. The specific fracture and the acts of torture which they systematically subjected him to were sufficient to cause the death of Ilia Kareli from cardiac arrhythmia a few hours later.”¹⁴

Ilia Kareli’s corpse was handed over to the Albanian authorities following their request to conduct an autopsy. At the end, Kareli was buried at his birthplace in Fier, Albania.

General quantitative data on coverage

The Kareli case was the most covered story over the seven months period this study monitored. The number of articles per newspaper is: Ship has 25 articles, Panorama and Mapo have 19 articles each and Tirana Times has 3 articles on the case.

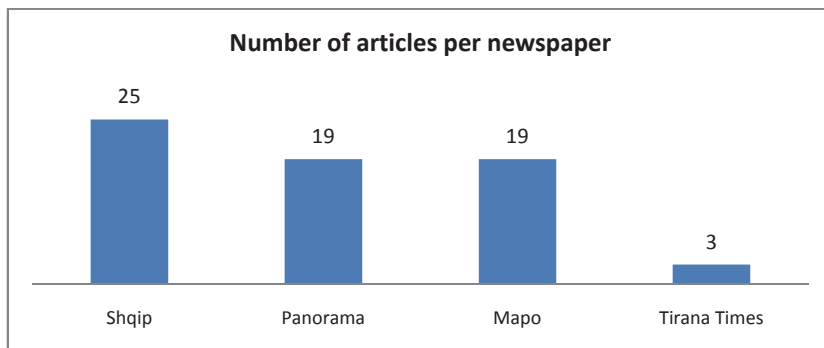


Chart 13

During March and April, Albanian media focused extensively on the Kareli case. From the printed media monitored for this study, 12 articles were published in March and 47 articles were published in April, whereas the

14. Dafne Tsagari, Thirteen Prison Guards Tried For the Death of Albanian Inmate. *Greek Reporter* (October 23, 2014). Online: <http://greece.greekreporter.com/2014/10/23/thirteen-prison-guards-tried-for-the-death-of-albanian-inmate/>.

few articles in May, June and July (7 in total) were mainly follow ups on the court decisions in Greece.

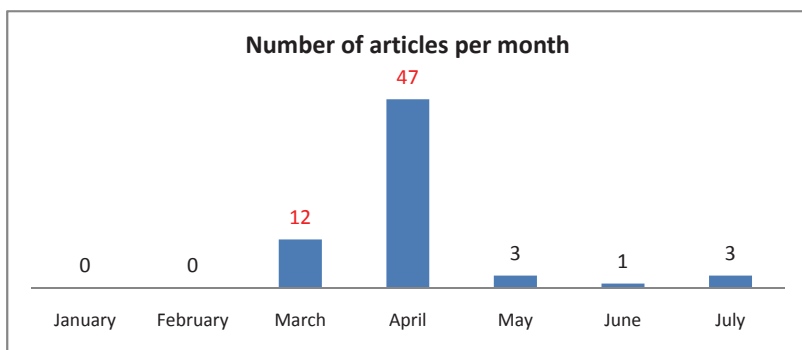


Chart 14

Connotation

How did the Albanian media report on the widely and extensively covered Kareli case and what were the main themes that accompanied this coverage? It is no surprise that the case was widely covered in a negative way throughout the Albanian media, making detection of variation in connotation very difficult. Nevertheless, although the general coverage of the situation was done through negative tones (68 percent of the articles), almost a quarter of the articles (24 percent) had a quasi-negative connotation, and 8 percent had a neutral connotation. Thus, 1/3 of the sample covered the case in a more moderate way compared to the majority. No article had a positive connotation.

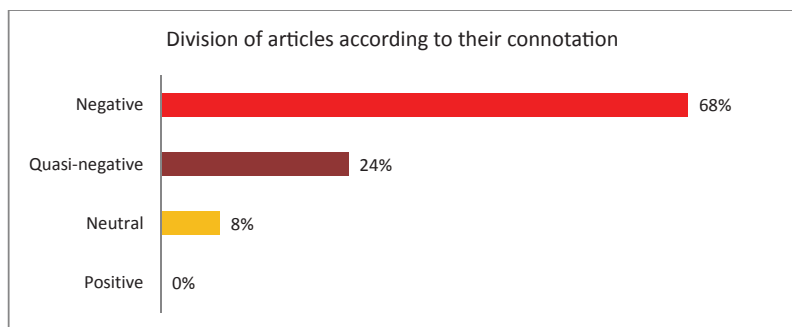


Chart 15

When analyzing the language used to cover the Kareli case, it is difficult to detect an intentional negative portraying of the situation in a description that will inevitably use word and phrases such as death, torture, beating, prison, killing of an Albania prisoner, etc. Thus, the connotation of the story is pre-set by the circumstances to a considerable extent. Nevertheless, it is important to see what and how has been reported in the Albanian media, that goes beyond stating the actual facts.

In the biggest group of articles classified as having a *negative* or *quasi-negative* connotation, there are three major themes that defined their connotation:

(1) *Reporting the case by relying on a horror effect*: which means a very detailed description of injuries, torturing techniques and what could be called as ‘the last minutes of Kareli’s life’, accompanied by pictures that could in some circumstances be censured. These articles were more aiming at a shocking effect than reporting the case. Many of them covered the whole two pages space and had big pictures. Typical headline of this category are: “The autopsy shows the tortures: 15 injuries in the body of Kume, broken skull and removed nails”, “The Albanian was tortured for 3 hours in the ‘fridge’ room”, “The massacre against Kareli, more pictures from the torture emerge” and “They put him on the electric chair, they took one eye out and they broke his chest”. Speculations were also present in some articles and they were reported as facts.

(2) *Reporting the case by relying on an emotional and ‘national’ effect*. This theme was also very present throughout the articles on Kareli and it mainly covered reports from the ‘Albanian’ side of the story, hence aiming at a broader national victimization. These articles focused on his family, his mother, how he was denied permission to visit her as well as the many people at his funeral, the national flags, etc. These articles were extensively citing his mother and trying to give an emotional dimension to the issue by portraying Kareli as one of the many victims among the Albanian migrants in Greece.

This ‘nationalization’ of Kareli as the last case of a broader phenomenon,

especially when it comes to Greece, was mostly present in the articles that reported on his funeral and how the ceremony was full of people and Albanian flags. This last element is very interesting as it shows a kind of heroising process taking place in making Ilia Kareli the centre of a broader cause by emphasizing his Albanianess. Some common headlines of this category of negative connotation articles were: “Kume accompanied with dozen red and black flags”, “No permission to visit his mother, he kills the Greek guard”, “8 years without seeing my son, they wouldn’t let me meet him at the prison” and “The mother of the Albanian killed in the Greek prisons: they wouldn’t let me meet my sun”.

(3) *Reporting the case by pointing out the responsibility of the Greek state and institutions.* This category of articles was mainly composed of editorials, opinions and interviews (these were mainly reported through a quasi-negative connotation). The general tone was cooler compared to the previous categories and applied a more rational logic. These articles generally saw the Greek state and institutions as responsible for the case and some highlighted the fact that they considered the current events only part of a wider trend of how migrants — and especially Albanian migrants — are treated and have been treated in Greece. The most common headlines of this category of articles included: “The Greek state is a hybrid of Neo-Nazism and Talibanism”, “Ilia Kareli was killed by the Greek institutions and not only by individuals!” and “The killing of Kareli, an ending warned 17 years ago”.

On the other hand, the neutral articles, although in a small minority of 8 percent, were more cautious in stating facts and leaving out additional stances. The coverage was shorter and had a balance in between reporting the events that led to Kareli’s death and the measures being taken by Greece to investigate the case and condemn those responsible. An example of a headline from this category of articles is: “The head of the Greek prison: I tortured Kareli”.

3. *The mixed story: The issue of toponyms*

Situational background

On May 12, 2014, the Greek and Albanian Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Evangelos Venizelos and Ditmir Bushati, reached an agreement on the use of the expression of geographical names (toponyms) of Greece in the documents of Albania. The agreement was signed in Brussels although negotiations went on for months and the agreement was previously discussed in Thessaloniki on May 8. The agreement — as the preceding problem that led to its signing — was consistently considered technical by both sides, but very important.

The situation leading to the agreement was as follows: in the Albanian passports of Albanian migrants born in Greece, the name of their birthplace was written in the Albanian language instead of the English language. For example, it was written Selanik, Athinë, Kostur, instead of Thessaloniki, Athens, Kastoria. This situation became problematic especially after 2011 when Albanian citizens were issued new biometric passports following the visa free regime with Schengen countries. Initially, the Greece consulates in Albania started to reject the signing of the birth certificates of Albanian children born in Greece to further ban border-crossing and the renewal of residence permits in Greece. The situation became tense especially at the end of 2012 and throughout 2013 given the fact that the citizens under question were mostly children or young adults born of Albanian migrants after the 90s who were born, living and working in Greece.

The agreement consisted on Albania issuing new passports for Albanians born in Greece where the birthplace name would be in English, thus following the standards of “the geographic denominations deposited by all UN countries, and also the standards of ICAO (International Civil

Aviation Organization)".¹⁵ On the occasion of Eastern 2014, Greece issued a memorandum to allow these citizens to temporarily enter/exit Greece with their current passports and the agreement extended the validity of this memorandum until January 2015 when the deadline is set for these citizens to acquire the new passports.

General quantitative data on coverage

It should be noted that the issue of toponyms went on for years and this study monitors only the media coverage of events from January 2014 to July 2014. During this period, the issue of toponyms was mostly covered by Shqip which had 19 articles, followed by Panorama with 7 articles and Mapo and Tirana Times with 3 articles in total.

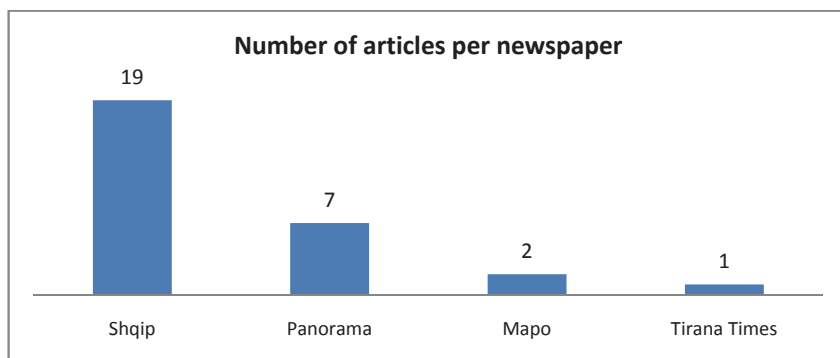


Chart 16

Given the fact that the issue of toponyms was ongoing and not really happening in a specific moment to classify as a 'hot' topic over a certain period, the monthly distribution of articles is also quite spread. Thus, the topic was considerably covered in January and February (with 13 articles in total) as part of the bilateral visits of high state officials and highly

15. Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Al), *Resolution of the issue of toponyms: Statement of Foreign Minister Ditmir Bushati on the issue of toponyms*. (May 15, 2014). Online: <http://www.punetegashtme.gov.al/en/press-office/news/resolution-of-the-issue-of-toponyms&page=2>.

covered in May (11 articles) with the signing of the agreement in Brussels.

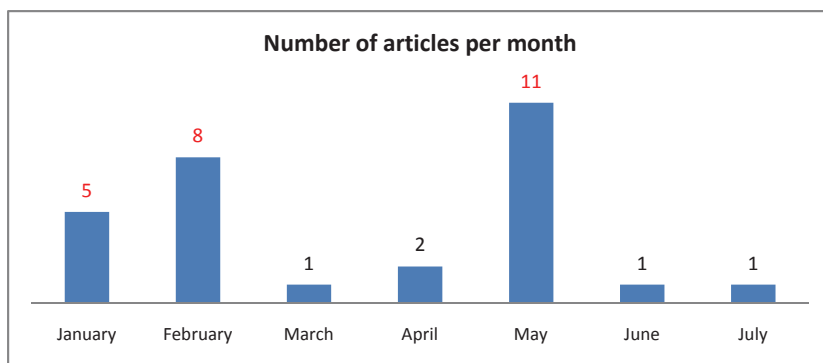


Chart 17

Connotation

As this study monitored articles from January to July 2014 the situation was already less tense during this period. The majority of articles (45 percent) covered the situation through a neutral connotation. The negative and positive articles were exactly of the same amount in percentage with 24 percent each. The quasi-negative articles constituted 7 percent of the sample.

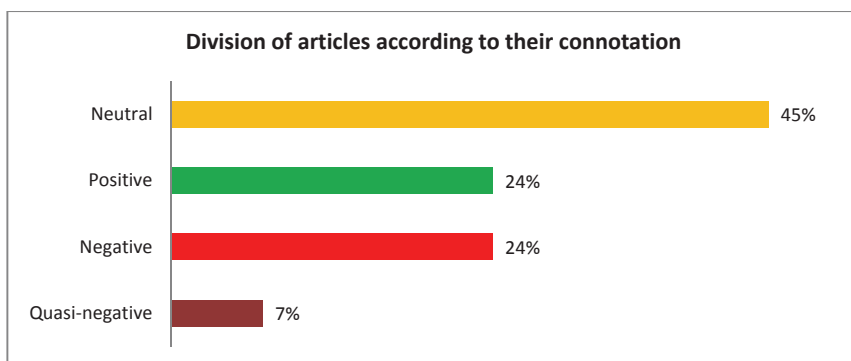


Chart 18

The group of neutral articles mainly focused on *technical issues*. They were present throughout the coverage period and vastly cited statements

from state officials which were moderate throughout this period. Typical headlines from this category were: “The toponyms: the two options in the negotiations with Greece”, “Toponyms, Sapnua: we will intervene to avoid problems at the border” and “Albania and Greece reach agreement on passport birthplace spelling”. Many articles in this category were not headlines, mainly positioned at the end of the newspaper pages and not occupying much space.

The group of positive articles had a strong tone of *resolution* and emphasized the fact that this solution was going to be permanent. Accordingly, terms such as resolution, permanent solution, without problems, good example and partnership and cooperation were among the most used in these articles. These positive articles were mainly published in May when the agreement was reached. Typical headlines included: “Toponyms, Bushati: Our pact with Greece, a model for other countries too”, “Thessaloniki, Bushati meets the emigrants: Toponyms near to a practical solution” and “Venizelos: Final solution to the toponyms”.

The group of negative articles analyzed or presented the issue as a *political rather than technical* one. These articles were generally covering the situation on the ground at border points and stating personal stories of Albanian migrants that could not pass the border because of the toponyms in their passports. Many comments and opinion articles treated the toponyms as another episode of what they saw as a consistent policy of Greece towards Albanian migrants. Very few negative connotation or quasi-negative connotation articles blamed or rather considered the Albanian state responsible for the situation. Thus, the general message of these articles was clear: Greece is to be blamed! Common titles from this category were: “Tavo from Gjirokastra, toponyms: Thousands of Albanians are suffering the consequences of politics”, “Flux at the border because of toponyms, emigrants: We are waiting since four hours” and “Greece does not renew permits, toponyms are the reason”.

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