



ANALYSIS

Ronald Meinardus
June 2025

Greece through German Eyes: Beyond Stereotypes in German-Greek Relations

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Preface

Over the past two decades, numerous surveys have been conducted in Greece to examine the image of Germany among the Greek public. These polls offer a demoscopic snapshot of the highs and lows characterizing the political and diplomatic relationship between Berlin and Athens. The most recent uptick in Germany's favorability among Greeks¹ aligns with the stated objective of both governments to strengthen bilateral relations.

However, there exists a striking asymmetry in the study of public opinion concerning German-Greek relations. While we have fairly precise data on how Greeks have viewed Germany over the past twenty years, until very recently, virtually nothing was known about how Germans perceive Greece and the Greek people - apart from anecdotal accounts in segments of the German media, which, particularly at the height of the financial crisis, often relied on predominantly negative or even racist stereotypes.

This study seeks to address that gap. Based on a representative survey conducted in Germany in March 2025, it investigates the image of Greece among the German public².

At first glance, the data might suggest an overwhelmingly positive German attitude toward Greece. However, the reality is more complex. Deep divides persist between German and Greek perceptions, particularly on issues of primary concern to the Greek side.

¹ Ronald Meinardus: Evolving Perceptions: The Gradual Transformation of Germany's Image in Greece, September 2024, Policy Brief, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Athens.

² Kapa Research: The Image of Greece in Germany. How Do Germans Perceive Greece in 2025?, Athens 2025. Data collection period March 6 – 17, 2025. Sample size and coverage: 1002 respondents, representative of the total population of Germany. The opinion poll was made possible through the support of the following institutions: Deutsch-Griechischer Club Bamberg e.V., Deutsch-Hellenische Wirtschaftsvereinigung DHW, Cologne, Deutsch-Griechischer Verein Philadelphia, Athens.

1.

Through the Tourist's Lens: Greece as a Vacation Paradise

The associations most Germans have with Greece³ closely mirror the imagery conveyed in glossy travel brochures. When Germans think of Greece, they primarily envision an attractive holiday destination: the sea, sunshine, and favorable weather are the terms most frequently mentioned when respondents in Germany are asked what spontaneously comes to mind when they think of Greece.

This characterization applies to nearly half of the respondents in our survey. Ranking second among top associations is Greek cuisine: dishes such as souvlaki, tzatziki, and feta cheese enjoy widespread recognition and popularity in Germany. Greece is also associated with "hospitality" and "vacation." Significantly further down the list - though still present - are associations with "history, culture, mythology," as well as with the country's globally renowned historical landmarks and archaeological monuments. Political references such as "crisis, poverty, bankruptcy" appear only near the bottom of the list - a central finding of this analysis - indicating that such terms rarely intersect with the experiential world of German tourists in Greece.

The overwhelming majority of Germans view Greece through the lens of the tourist: Hellas as a vacation paradise with warm, sunny weather year-round, excellent food, hospitable locals, a fascinating history, and significant cultural and historical monuments that are widely regarded as essential elements of general knowledge. As the survey data clearly demonstrate, Greece is above all perceived as a land of longing - a place where Germans wish to spend "the most valuable days of the year," i.e., their vacation.

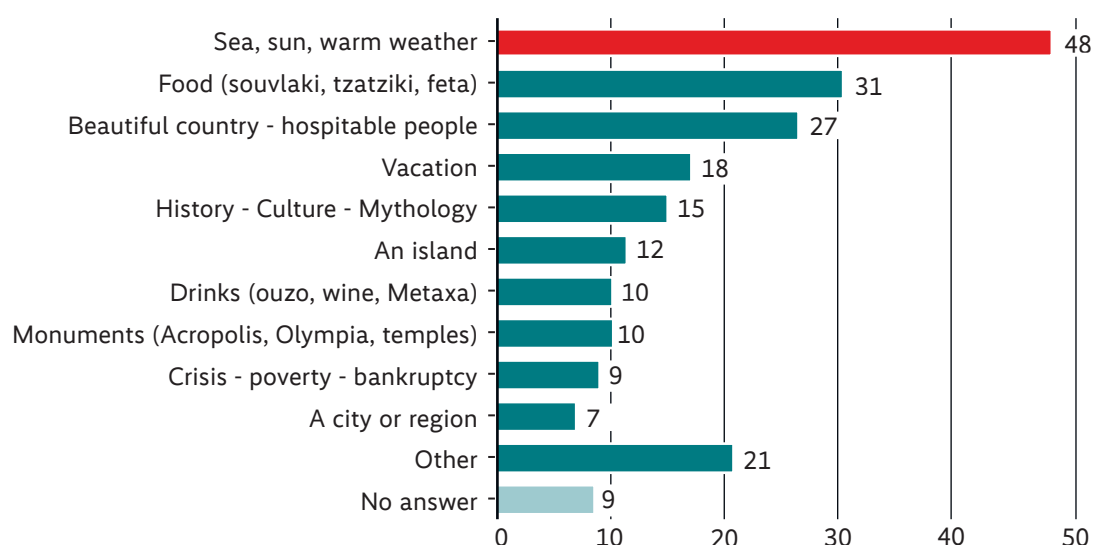
Within this framework, negative associations play at most a marginal role. The shadows of the past, including darker chapters involving Germany - such as the occupation during World War II or the financial crisis of the 2010s - do not significantly shape the image of Greece among the majority of respondents.

Fig. 1

Associations with Greece

What are the first three words that come to mind when you think of Greece?

OPEN QUESTION UP TO 3 CHOICES



Source: kaparesearch.com

³ Table 1.

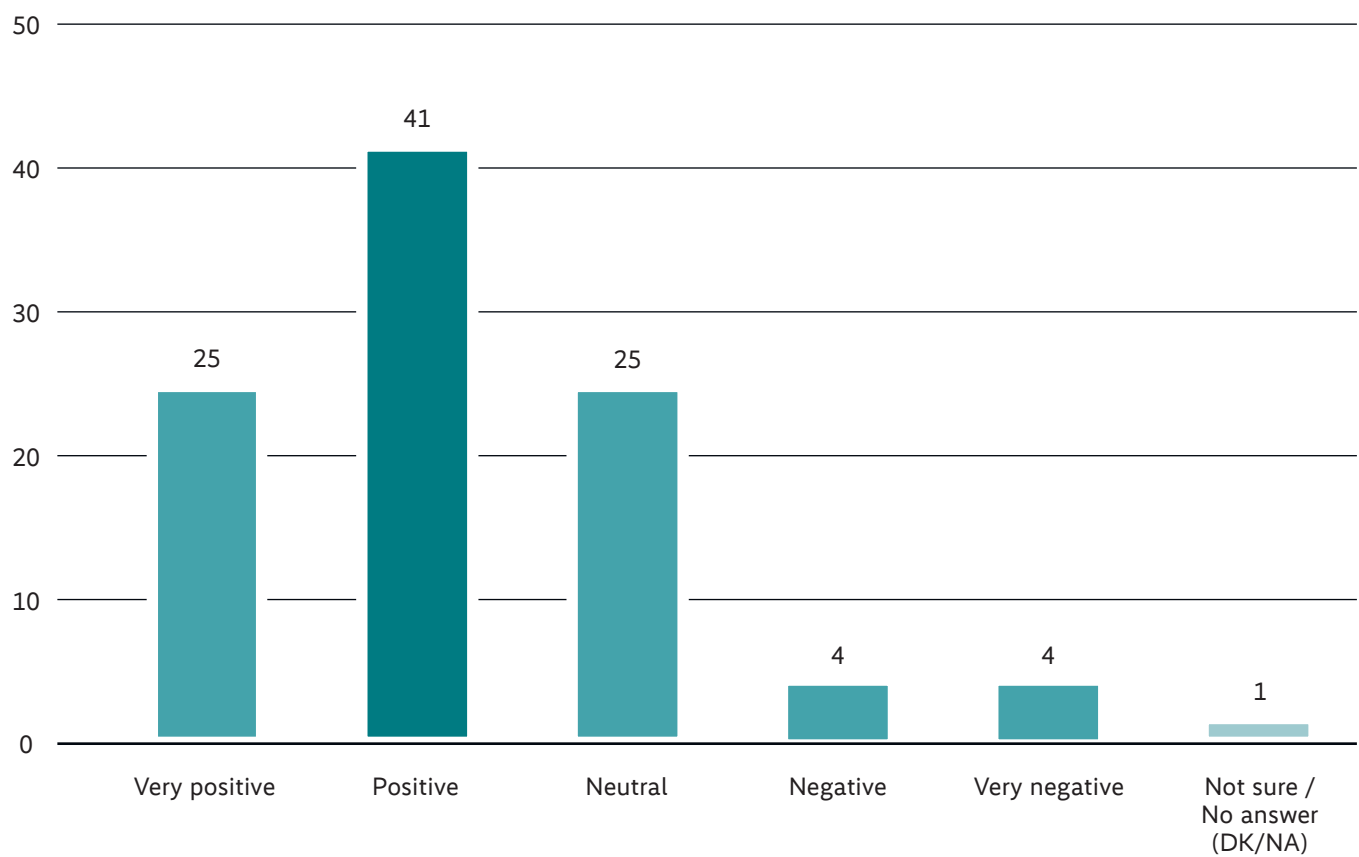
Accordingly, the overall image⁴ is distinctly positive: two-thirds of those surveyed in Germany (66%) report having a “very positive” or “positive” image of Greece. One in four Germans (25%) even state they have a “very positive” view of Hellas. Only a minority - 8% - do not share this favorable assessment. Sympathy for Greece is slightly higher among German men than women (68% versus 63%), and younger Germans tend to view Greece more positively than those of retirement age.

This general goodwill is mirrored in assessments of the state of German-Greek relations: sixty percent of respondents believe the bilateral relationship is either “good” or “very good,” while only seven percent consider it to be poor.

Fig. 2

Opinion about Greece

How would you describe your overall image of Greece?



Source: kaparesearch.com

4 Table 2.

2.

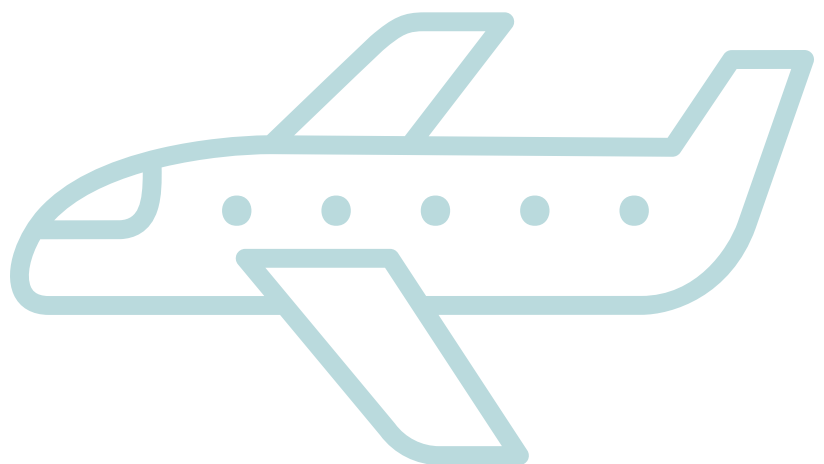
Travel Experience as the Determinant of Perception

The decisive factor shaping public perception - on this point, there is broad consensus among respondents - is direct personal experience through travel to Greece. An overwhelming 88% consider an actual visit to the country essential for forming an informed opinion. Nearly half (46%) of those interviewed in this representative survey have personally traveled to Greece. Among this group, the vast majority returned with either a “very positive” (51%) or “positive” (38%) impression.

What motivates Germans to travel to Greece? The responses largely mirror the previously mentioned associative patterns. The principal reasons for visiting Hellas are, in descending order: the weather (75%), hospitality (61%), Greek cuisine (53%), and the price-to-quality ratio. For older generations in Germany, the dominant motivation is the warm climate; by contrast, younger people are more driven by economic considerations and the comparatively affordable cost of travel in Greece.

Philhellenism, a cultural and political movement that emerged in Europe during the 18th and 19th centuries, continues to resonate in symbolic terms. Two hundred years ago, German Philhellenes played a supportive role in the Greek struggle for independence from the Ottoman Empire. When asked whether they identify with the concept of “Philhellenism,” 36% of German respondents answered in the affirmative. Another 32% expressed no definitive opinion, while 12% voiced a rather negative stance.

Notably, identification with Philhellenism in Germany is more pronounced among younger respondents than older ones: 44% of those under the age of 34 describe themselves as either “entirely” or “somewhat” Philhellenic. Among respondents over the age of 55, this figure drops to 31%.



3.

Historical Responsibility Acknowledged, but No Support for Reparations

The occupation of Greece by Nazi Germany continues to cast a long shadow over bilateral relations. What significance does this historical episode hold in shaping contemporary German perceptions of Greece? For nearly one-third of respondents, the Nazi occupation plays a “very important” (13%) or “important” (14%) role. Another third report having no opinion on the matter, while 31% state that the occupation is of little or no relevance to their current view of Greece. Here again, age emerges as a significant variable: nearly half (44%) of Germans under the age of 34 consider the occupation relevant to their personal perception of Greece, compared to only 17% of respondents over the age of 55.

Closely related to this issue is the question of how German political leaders should handle the country’s historical responsibility toward Greece - a debate that includes discussions on reparations. Four in ten respondents consider it “important” (24%) or “very important” (16%) that Germany acknowledge and assume historical responsibility vis-à-vis Greece. By contrast, 23% do not view this as particularly important, and nearly one-third (32%) express no opinion on the matter.

How, then, do Germans assess the official position of the German government on the issue of reparations?⁵ Successive German administrations have consistently maintained that the matter is “legally and politically settled.” This position is supported by 37% of respondents. Meanwhile, 17% support the Greek position and view Berlin’s rejection of reparation claims negatively - 11% “negatively,” and a further 6% “very negatively.” A substantial share, roughly one-third, report no opinion.

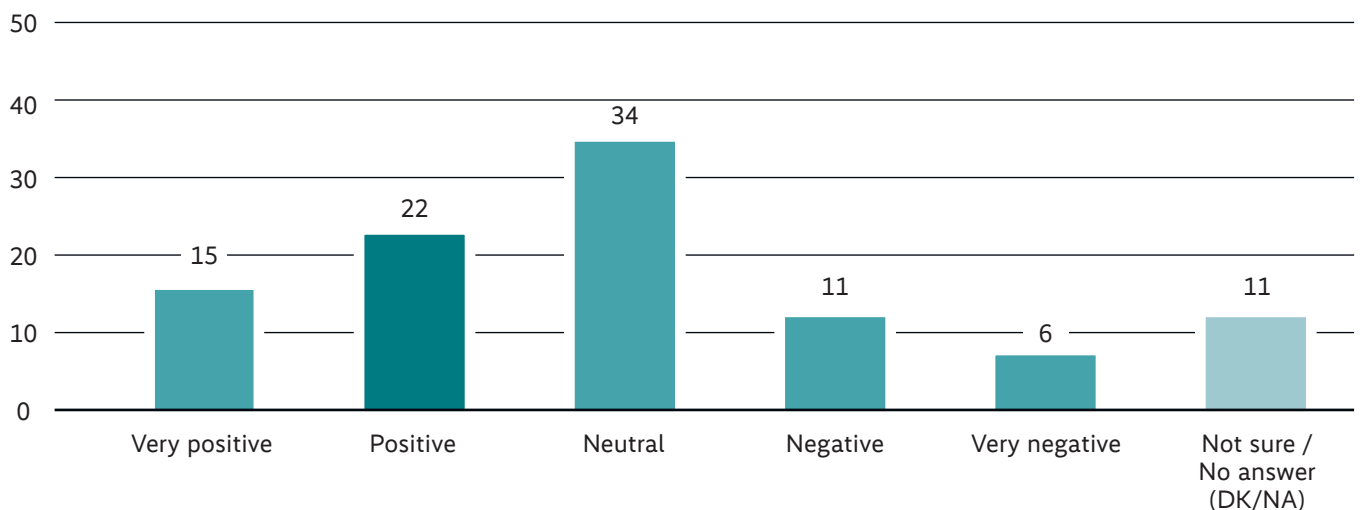
Notably, younger Germans are more inclined to endorse Berlin’s position than their older counterparts: support for the government’s rejection of Greek claims stands at 47% among those under 34, compared to just 29% among those aged 55 and older.

More recent in historical memory is the Greek financial crisis and the corresponding German policy response - widely criticized within Greece and closely associated with then-Finance Minister Wolfgang Schäuble. A narrow majority of Germans (44%) hold a “very positive” (15%) or “positive” (29%) view of Germany’s role during the crisis. Only 17% express a negative opinion of Berlin’s crisis-era policy, while nearly one-third (29%) adopt a neutral stance.

Fig. 3

Assessment of Germany’s reparations policy

How do you assess Germany’s reparations policy concerning the occupation of Greece during World War II?



5 Table 3.

Source: kaparesearch.com

4.

Favorable Assessments of Greece Coverage in German Media

During the years of crisis, media coverage attracted increased scrutiny. Scholarly research has demonstrated that media in both Germany and Greece contributed to the dissemination of clichés and negative stereotypes.

How does the German public evaluate media reporting on Greece today? Ten percent of respondents report encountering coverage of Greece in German media “very frequently,” while an additional 13% encounter it “frequently.” By contrast, 37% state that they seldom or never come across media content related to Greece.

The quality of Greece-related reporting is viewed favorably by the German public: four in ten (40%) describe the coverage as either “very positive” (13%) or “positive” (27%). Only 7% believe that German journalists report poorly on the Southeastern European partner country. A narrow plurality (44%) remain undecided on the matter.

A similar pattern emerges in response to the question concerning the influence of media coverage on German perceptions of Greece. When asked, “How has media reporting affected your perception of Greece?”, 36%

responded “very positively” (13%) or “positively” (23%). Only 7% report a “negative” or “very negative” impact, while 46% describe their perception as “neutral,” indicating that media reporting has had little to no effect on their views of Greece and the Greek people.

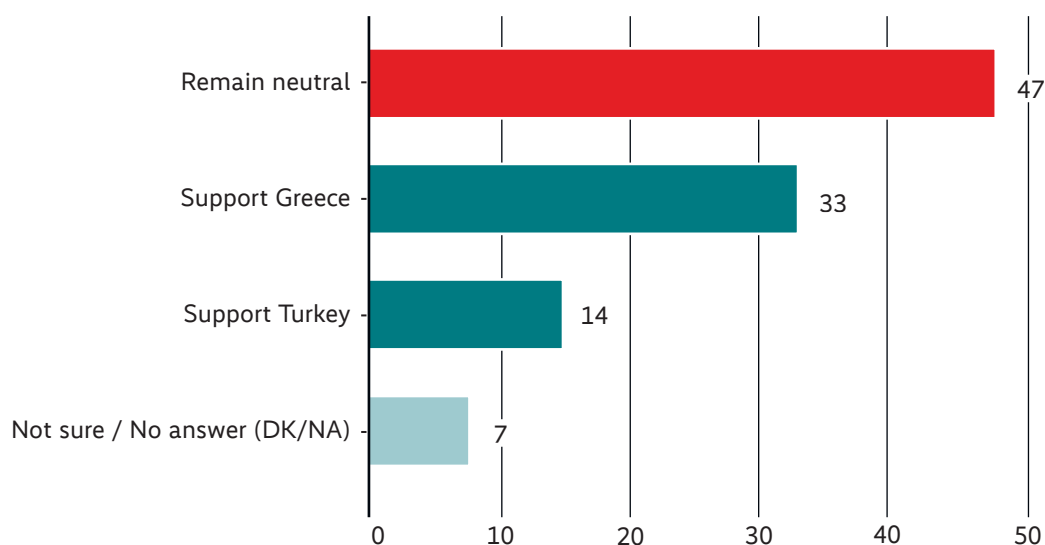
Greece’s accession to the European Community in 1981 also shaped the German-Greek relationship. Two-thirds of Germans consider Greece to be either “very important” (26%) or “important” (38%) for the European Union. Similarly positive responses were recorded regarding Greece’s role as a strategic partner within NATO: nearly two-thirds of Germans view Greece as a “very important” (27%) or “important” (35%) ally in the Alliance.

Finally, the survey inquired into German attitudes toward Greece’s disputes with Turkey⁶. A narrow majority (47%) believe that Berlin should remain neutral and refrain from intervening in the conflict between the two Aegean neighbors. One in three respondents favor German alignment with Greece, while 14% support siding with Turkey.

Preferred stance of Germany on the Greek-Turkish affairs

Fig. 4

Greece perceives Turkey as a threat. How should Germany position itself in Greek-Turkish affairs?



Source: kaparesearch.com

5.

“A Longstanding Passion”

Greece continues to be a favored travel destination among Germans. In 2024, German tourists set a new record: more than 5.2 million Germans visited the country - an increase of nearly 15 percent compared to the previous year. While Greece still ranks behind Spain and Italy in absolute visitor numbers from Germany, its growth trajectory has been steadily upward for years.

According to the Greek National Tourism Organization (GNTO)⁷, the country's promotional strategy focuses on projecting an image that emphasizes natural beauty, rich history and culture, and the renowned hospitality of the Greek people. “The aim is to present Greece as a premier travel destination and to increase tourist numbers,” states the GNTO office in Frankfurt when asked about its communications strategy.

Greek tourism marketers have ample reason for satisfaction: the brand image they have crafted for the “product” Greece aligns closely with how the German public perceives the country. “Greece is the postcard idyll - the vacation ideal that comes to mind when one imagines enjoying excellent weather and food,” says Andreas Höffken, a fourth-generation German-Greek and senior official at the German Hotel and Restaurant Association (DEHOGA), who has long been active in fostering German-Greek relations⁸.

Greece is also a place of longing for many older Germans. The number of German retirees choosing to spend their later years in Greece has been growing for years. Many have invested their savings in real estate. According to a 2022 study, more than 250,000 German pensioners are considering purchasing a home or apartment in Greece⁹.

Germany's fascination with Greece has deep historical roots. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe - Germany's preeminent poet, who famously “sought the land of the Greeks with his soul” but, unlike the millions of modern-day tourists, was never able to reach his idealized destination - is regarded as an early admirer of Hellas.

In today's world, the classical ideal of Greece has largely given way to the imagery of commercialized mass tourism. Yet despite criticism of its excesses, mass tourism continues to lay the groundwork - on a massive scale - for intercultural contact. It is a phenomenon often described, with some justification, as “people-to-people diplomacy.”

As this study empirically demonstrates, such encounters - numbering in the millions - have had a lasting effect on the perceptions of those involved. When it comes to the image of Greece in Germany, mass tourism is by far the most influential factor. Nearly nine out of ten respondents in this survey report that visiting Greece was (very) important in shaping their view of the country. An even larger share - 89% - state that they had a (very) positive experience during their trip.

For Greece, mass tourism represents its most effective form of “soft power”: the ability to influence others not through coercion or military force, but by attraction and shared experience. For Germans, the many visits to Greece are the decisive reason why they hold such a favorable view of the country and its people.

⁷ Personal communication with the author.

⁸ Personal communication with the author.

⁹ Kathimerini, 13. October 2022.

6.

Little Room for Contemporary Challenges

The German image of Greece leaves little space for nuance. It is shaped predominantly by broad, mostly positive themes; negative associations are largely excluded. Political problems, economic crises, social tensions, or the darker chapters of history do not easily fit into the prevailing clichés of a country that, for the vast majority of Germans, represents a vacation paradise - and not much more.

Among the noteworthy findings of this study is the fact that, ten years after the peak of the financial crisis - which, more than any other event since Greece's return to democracy fifty years ago, severely disrupted German-Greek relations - only one in ten Germans now associate Greece with terms such as "crisis," "poverty," or "bankruptcy." Younger Germans, in particular, are even less likely than older cohorts to connect the country with this dark episode when thinking about Greece today.

This polling result can, with some optimism, be interpreted as a positive sign: negative stereotypes are not necessarily permanent. For much of the 2010s, negative preconceptions heavily shaped Germany's perception of Greece. Media narratives frequently focused on mismanagement, corruption, and alleged laziness among the Greek population. Unlike the image of Germany in Greece - which has been regularly studied and analyzed in recent years - there is a lack of longitudinal data on German attitudes toward Greece. As a result, our understanding of how the widespread (and well-documented) negative coverage in German media may have influenced public opinion remains largely speculative, relying on anecdotal evidence.

Since Greece's gradual economic recovery, which began with the coming to power of the Nea Dimokratia government in 2019, negative terminology has largely disappeared from German media reporting. It is reasonable to assume that this shift in media tone contributed to the overwhelmingly positive image of Greece that now prevails among the German public.

What happened in the past between Germany and Greece occupies, at most, a marginal position in the minds of most Germans - and is of little interest to the broader public. This may be seen as a readiness to forget or suppress the past - an attitude that appears to significantly shape German views of Greece. On the Greek side, this readiness to move on from historical experience is less pronounced. Our studies on the image of Germany in Greece confirm that many people in Greece have not yet fully processed the at times traumatic experiences associated with Germany.

7.

Diverging Perspectives and Polling Fault Lines

Despite the differing availability of data, it is instructive to consider German perceptions of Greece alongside Greek perceptions of Germany. A comprehensive view offers valuable insight into the quality of the bilateral relationship.

A first observation concerns the asymmetry in mutual sympathies: Germans hold a significantly more favorable view of Greece than Greeks do of Germany. According to the present study, 66 percent of Germans express a positive or very positive opinion of Greece. By contrast, the most recent survey on Greek perceptions of Germany¹⁰ found that only 31 percent of Greeks held a similarly favorable view. Even that figure represented a marked improvement compared to the October 2022 survey¹¹, when German popularity in Greece stood at a modest 16 percent.

A second striking finding is that Germany's favorable image of Greece is concentrated in areas largely free of political controversy - what might be termed "comfort zone" topics, typically associated with pleasant travel experiences. The picture changes, however, when it comes to issues that have been the subject of political contention between the two governments and are correspondingly reflected in public discourse. In recent years, three key areas have strained German-Greek diplomatic relations and contributed to the persistently negative sentiment toward Germany in Greek public opinion:

1. The legacy of German war crimes during the Nazi occupation and their political and legal redress;
2. The German government's stance during the financial crisis;
3. Berlin's role in the Greek-Turkish disputes.

In all three areas, the survey data reveal stark divergences in how Greeks and Germans interpret the past and present.

As discussed earlier, four in ten Germans believe that Germany bears a historical responsibility toward Greece. Yet only a minority - 17 percent - disapprove of Berlin's official and restrictive position on reparations. The fault lines between German and Greek perspectives on this crucial issue become statistically visible when placed in a comparative framework: according to the survey conducted in Greece, 77 percent of Greeks cite Berlin's policy on reparations as a primary reason for their negative view of Germany.

Major differences also emerge regarding the evaluation of Germany's role during the financial crisis. While 83 percent of Greeks say that Germany's policies at the time have contributed to their negative image of the country even a decade later, the current survey shows that 44 percent of Germans view their government's handling of the crisis positively. Among Germans under the age of 34, one in two even believes that the Greek financial crisis had a positive impact on bilateral relations.

Finally, a word on the issue of Turkey - a topic that permeates nearly all dimensions of Athens' foreign policy. Previous surveys have found that roughly three-quarters of Greeks accuse Berlin of siding unilaterally with Ankara in Greek-Turkish disputes. Put differently, there is a widely held expectation in Greece for greater German solidarity in Greece's confrontations with Turkey - whether in the Aegean, the Eastern Mediterranean, or regarding Cyprus. In Germany, however, only 33 percent support German alignment with Greece, while nearly half (47 percent) believe that Berlin should remain neutral in the conflict.

¹⁰ See footnote 1.

¹¹ Ronald Meinardus: Partners, Not Friends. Greek Public Opinion(s) on Germany, Analysis, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Athens 2022.

8.

Greece in Germany: The Positive Role of the Diaspora

For the vast majority of Germans, travel to Greece remains the single most important factor shaping a favorable image of the country and its people. Yet beyond these time-limited visits to the “land of longing,” Germans maintain a wide array of Greece-related connections within Germany itself. According to survey data, the most common site of German-Greek interaction is the Greek restaurant. For nearly two-thirds (58%) of respondents, dining at a Greek establishment in Germany represents their most significant point of contact with Greece. This is followed by personal relationships with Greek individuals, as well as engagement with Greek culture and music. Eleven percent of respondents report having long-term relationships with people of Greek origin.

The German saying “*Liebe geht durch den Magen*” - “Love goes through the stomach” - resonates strongly in this context. The role of Greek cuisine as a vector of sympathy has also been recognized by the Greek National Tourism Organization (GNTO): “Food plays an important role in Greek culture and is also highlighted in GNTO advertising as a key aspect of Greek tourism,” the organization states. Andreas Höffken of the German Hotel and Restaurant Association (DEHOGA) estimates that there are currently around 3,300 Greek restaurants in Germany, though no precise figures or academic studies exist. Nevertheless, he asserts that these establishments fulfill a central, even “national,” role: “Greek restaurants play a significant role in shaping Germany’s image of Greece. A visit to such a venue can, at best, offer guests a kind of miniature vacation.”

Argyris Papazoglou, who operates a successful restaurant in a small city in western Germany, offers a practical insight into the informal, patriotic role many Greek restaurateurs assume: “Give a Greek some ouzo and a *meze*, and you’ve won his heart. That’s what we try to convey every day. With a good glass of Greek wine, it’s easier to win someone over for Greece.”¹²

This form of “gastrodiplomacy,” although not formally coordinated by the Greek state, is a noteworthy component of the broader cultural presence of the Greek diaspora in Germany. The origins of the now estimated 500,000-strong Greek community in Germany date back to the 1960s, when large numbers - primarily from northern Greece - migrated as “guest workers”. Owing to their high level of integration, Greeks in Germany are often described as an “inconspicuous minority.”

Among the general population, Greek migrants and their descendants enjoy a largely positive reputation: over two-thirds (72%) of respondents state that the Greek diaspora is well or very well integrated. A broad majority of Germans express support for greater political engagement on the part of this community, which has found a second home in Germany.

Greater participation by Greeks in Germany in political life would not only deepen the already substantial integration of the community. More active engagement in political parties and parliaments is also a prerequisite for ensuring that Greek interests and perspectives gain a stronger foothold in German political discourse.

¹² Communication with the author.

About the author

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Greece through German Eyes: Beyond Stereotypes in German-Greek Relations

This report presents the first survey of its kind on how Germans perceive Greece. Based on representative polling data of 2025, it reveals a largely positive image shaped by tourism, cultural interest, and personal encounters - while political conflicts and historical legacies remain mostly absent. Germans overwhelmingly associate Greece with leisure, not crisis. The study highlights an asymmetry: Germans view Greece more favorably than Greeks view Germany. The latter perception is shaped by unresolved grievances - Germany's stance on WWII reparations, its dominant role during the financial crisis, and its perceived bias toward Turkey in regional disputes. The report also explores the understated role of the Greek diaspora in Germany, not least in gastronomy, as an informal vehicle of soft power.

Further information on this topic can be found here:

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