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Small Countries, Big Opportunities: Challenges and Solutions for Greece in Cyberspace

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Abstract

Comprehending the continuities and discontinuities of Greek [Hellenic] identity in the global media and the general political scene requires an analysis of the media coverage of the last months of 2008 and its implications for Greece's image domestically, but more importantly abroad. Greece relies at least in part on tourism for its economic survival precluding a certain nation-branding, an imaginary identity for internal and external consumption, which the Olympic Games maintained and reinforced by tooth and nail.

This paper suggests that by combining a. theoretical and empirical research on *small states* and their idiosyncrasies in relation to world system behaviour (e.g. Katzenstein 1984, 2002), with b. methodology and theory from *cyberconflict* analysis (Karatzogianni, 2006; 2008; 2009), we can create a first map of the real, virtual, and imaginary Greek identity as currently being transformed in the global political arena by both mainstream and alternative media in cyberspace. This way we can chart a first picture of Greece's current position in the international arena and in cyberspace; analyse the consequences of December 2008 for the Greek imaginary, Greece as a brand, Greece as a European partner; and map the basic problems, conflicts and protagonists and the communication tactics they adopt. For instance, during the riots, drawing on Wolfsfeld (1997), we had two central media frames offered, one of 'law and order' supported by the government and the more mainstream media and political parties, and another of 'injustice and defiance' which permeated a great part of public opinion and fuelled a cycle of protests.

In that sense, the 'law and order' frame proved less successful nationally, and was not readily picked up internationally. Further, in the bigger picture, and despite the embryonic state of information communication technologies in Greece, the digital gap combined with the generational gap creating major political upheaval, pointing to the internet's crucial role in the political and social participation of the younger generation in the future. This generation has reacted in diverse ways to the anomalies and failures of a political system steeped in nepotism, corruption and family politics. Some have remained apolitical and apathetic altogether, having lost all hope for change, others have become dependent on their own family's political choices, while others have been excluded economically, or have voluntarily delinked from the state wholesale through lifestyle activism.

This fragmented generation and their riots in combination with online activism has created the kind of political energy, which if not harnessed, channelled and communicated to the political, social and economic elite, Greece will continue to exist at the edge of chaos. Global and domestic media have shifted precisely there the Greek imaginary identity, while online activists and the online Greek diaspora instigated an unprecedented mobilisation beyond the narrow ethnoreligious blinders, party politics, or the bankrupt ideology of the nation-state.