



## **Cultural Diversity in Greek Public and Political Discourses**

**A European Approach to Multicultural Citizenship: Legal Political and Educational Challenges**

**EMILIE**

**Contract no. CIT5-CT-2005-028205**

**D3 Country Reports on Migration and Multiculturalism Discourses**

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**ELIAMEP**

This version: 12 April 2007

Words: 11,373

### **Table of Contents**

<b>1. Historical Legacies and Contemporary Challenges.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>2. National Identity and Difference .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>3. Migration and the Nation.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>4. National Case Study: The Athens Mosque controversy .....</b>	<b>9</b>
4.2. The debates in the Press.....	10
4.3. The debates in Parliament.....	14
<b>5. The reaction to the Danish cartoon event in Greece.....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>6. Conclusion .....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>7. References .....</b>	<b>21</b>

## 1. Historical Legacies and Contemporary Challenges

Greece's history, its national politics and its society have been determined by the country's position at the crossroads, both in geographic and in cultural terms, between East and West. Greek national identity, (see Roudometof 1999, Tsoukalas 1993) Greek foreign policy and its relations with other countries, particularly with those in its neighbourhood, are profoundly influenced by this positioning (Heraklidis 1995). Greek identity inter-digitates the legacy of the classical period, its Byzantine tradition and Eastern Orthodox heritage, with 'Western' Enlightenment particularly as regards modernity, nationalism and the Nation-State (Tsoukalas 2002). Its particularity lies in the existence of two competing universalisms: that of ancient Greek culture on one hand, and that of Eastern Orthodoxy, on the other. At the same time, its Ottoman past continues to be perceived as a threat towards its identity and independence. In present-day Greece, this is reflected in tense and rather conflictual relations with neighbouring Turkey, and an uneasy perception of Islam. This East-West tension remains an important feature of Greek identity and politics.

Entrapped between Hellenism and *Romiosyne* (Tziovas 1994), the positioning of modern Greece is considered as being of but not in Europe (Triandafyllidou 2002a). Its accession to the European Economic Community/European Union, formalised Greece's western belonging and confirmed that western Europe has been its main political and cultural reference since the creation of the modern Greek state in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Nevertheless, Greeks tend to look at other *Europeans* as 'others' and as 'different' to the foundations of Greek tradition and collective identity (Anagnostou 2005, Kokosalakis 2004). This perception is frequently mutual from other EU Member States, particularly on matters of foreign policy. The most striking example to illustrate this lack of understanding between them is the so-called *Macedonian question*<sup>1</sup> that has occupied a central position on Greece's foreign policy agenda since the early 1990s. Legacies of the past, territorial insecurities and antagonistic identities in the Balkans have not been easily understood by western and northern EU member states, while they have often been exaggerated in Greek politics, largely for domestic political reasons.

The new European context at the eve of the 21st century poses new challenges to Greek national self-understandings. Four issues in particular have triggered shifts and have affected understandings of *difference* and *identity* in Greece.

The first has to do with the European Union's deepening and widening processes. The inclusion of Greece in the first phase of the Euro zone implementation, on 1 January 2002, was more than an economic accomplishment. It has also been used as a symbolic referent of Greece's belonging to 'core' Europe (Psimmenos 2004). Moreover, the 2004 enlargement to Central and Eastern Europe and the shifting of the EU geopolitical, cultural and religious borders farther East has made Greece inevitably less peripheral in the European landscape (Triandafyllidou and Spohn 2003). Both developments make Greek national discourses more firmly anchored in Europe, overcoming to a certain extent the idea of an ethno-religiously defined, compact and unitary national identity with little place for cultural or ethnic diversity.

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<sup>1</sup> i.e. the question of recognition of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia as an independent Republic, the name that this last would take, as well as its nationalist claims to what the Greeks deemed as 'their' national heritage (see also Triandafyllidou, Mikrakis, and Calloni, 1997, Roudometof 1996).

The second factor too is EU related. EU enlargement policy towards Turkey and the Balkans has opened yet another identity and geopolitical challenge for Greece. Enlargement is considered as a vital factor that will contribute and consolidate stability, democracy, good-neighbourly relations and peace in southeastern Europe. As such, it has been defined as a core priority for the Greek governments, supported by a solid consensus across the main political parties. Eurobarometer public opinion results, however, indicate that this consensus is not as equally wide-spread among Greek public opinion that favours EU enlargement to southeast Europe, but rather reluctant towards the entry of Turkey to the EU even if the latter fulfils all the accession criteria.<sup>2</sup> A predominantly Muslim Turkey, a historical threatening Other for Greece, that becomes a member of the 'European family'<sup>3</sup> stirs unresolved identity and geopolitical questions and confuses the *East* with the *West* from a traditional Greek nationalist perspective.

Third, over the last two decades, ethnic, religious and linguistic minority rights have increasingly been a pressing matter in Europe due to the concurrence of two factors. On the one hand, regional legal and institutional frameworks – such as the OSCE and the European Convention on Human Rights – have accomplished progress on promoting the recognition and protection of minorities across Europe. This progress has hesitantly crept into the Greek socio-political reality as well, influencing debates and policies on the position and rights of minorities in Greece. Greece's religious and linguistic minorities have been a very sensitive matter, some of them protected by the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, others disregarded and ignored. This 'sensitivity' has been described by a Greek analyst of political culture Nikiforos Diamantouros (1983: 55) as an indication that the process of national integration has remained incomplete. The disintegration of Yugoslavia and the re-shuffling of nations and borders in the Balkans have brought minority matters at the top of political agendas in Greece's immediate neighbourhood and in Greece itself. Defensive nationalism was re-ignited, irredentist claims, real or perceived, were pronounced, and the Balkan wars in the 1990s at Greece's borders increased the need to address minority matters. Today, formal and informal discrimination remain serious concerns, although majority-minority relations have developed positively since the early 1990s.

Finally, since 1989, Greece has become host to a large number of immigrants that currently account for approximately 10% of the total resident population. Mainly from the Balkans (Albania and Bulgaria), central and eastern Europe (Romania, Ukraine, and Russia) but also increasingly from Asia (India, Pakistan and Bangladesh) diversity has become a fact within Greece's demography. Immigration poses an important challenge to the dominant Greek nationalist discourses. It has slowly obliged the state institutions as well as public opinion to recognise that Greek society has become de facto multi-cultural and multi-ethnic.

This paper focuses on the debates that have developed in Greece in the past few years as a result of migration-related diversity. Therefore, the core of this paper will focus on the latter factor mentioned above. However, the other three dimensions heavily influence the context against which these debates take place as well as the

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<sup>2</sup> The support for Turkey joining the EU if it fulfils all the criteria is on average in EU25 48% against, with highest percentages against in Austria 81%, Germany and Luxembourg 69%, Cyprus 68% and Greece 67%), Source: Eurobarometre, No. 255, Issue 65.2, July 2006, accessed on 18 October 2006 at: [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs\\_255\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_255_en.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> Olli Rehn, 'Turkey's best response is a rock-solid commitment to reforms,' International Symposium on 'European Social Model and Trade Union Rights within the EU negotiations', Speech in Ankara, 3 October 2006, <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=SPEECH/06/559&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>, accessed on 17 October 2006.

position of the state, other actors (for example the Greek Church) and wider society. Hence, in this paper, we shall discuss the dominant understandings of Greek national identity and in relation to this, the ways in which difference is framed in current public and political discourses. Second, we shall briefly outline the main parameters of most recent challenge to Greek national identity, notably immigration. Immigration largely provides for the demographic context within which discourses about the accommodation of difference are currently taking place. The fourth and fifth section will analyse the parliamentary debates and media coverage regarding the establishment of a mosque in downtown Athens, and the coverage of the Danish Mohammed cartoons affair by Greek media discourses. While the construction of the mosque in Athens is a small national crisis that has triggered public and political debates about the recognition and accommodation of difference, the cartoons' issue has raised more general questions on the values of a democratic society and the tensions that may arise between them in a multicultural society. In conclusion, the paper assesses the main understandings of migration-related cultural difference in Greece and how this has impinged upon dominant national self-understandings among Greek media and political elites.

## **2. National Identity and Difference**

While the early currents of Greek nationalism in late eighteenth century were marked by the influence of the Enlightenment and its ideals (Veremis 1983, Kitromilidis 1990), the first decades of Greece's independence, defined the nation in predominantly ethno-cultural terms, through references to common ancestry, culture and language (Veremis 1990; Kitromilidis 1983 and 1990). The dominant narrative of the nation that was constructed by Greek historiographers in the late nineteenth century, was founded on Greece's classical past, it continued with Christianity and the Byzantine Empire, and concluded with Greece's subjugation to the Ottoman Empire and the national resurrection in 1821. The Greek national community was thus presented as *unique* both in its singularity and universality. Moreover, the united and unique national community was invented and further reinforced through state policies in military conscription, education and culture throughout the twentieth century.

Greekness has been defined as an amalgamate of (belief in) common ancestry, cultural traditions and religion. This triple self-definition provided also for a triple boundary that distinguished Greeks from their neighbouring nations. Greeks were differentiated from Muslims and Jews in the East because they were Christian Orthodox. They were also distinct from the Slavs in the north based on their claim to classical Greek culture. Modern Greece saw itself as the natural heir of the ancient Greek civilization – as if culture is an object, and the nation is its owner (Handler 1988: 142). This feature made this relatively small and economically under-developed country in the southeastern periphery of the continent into a central symbol of the construction of a European civilization (Tsoukalas 2002). Although territorial and civic features have also gained importance through the consolidation of the national territory in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Greekness has been often, even today, defined as a transcendental notion in Greek public discourses (Tsoukalas 1993).

During the 1990s, we have witnessed an increased fetishisation of Greekness and an increasing emphasis placed on ethnic and cultural features of national identity (Triandafyllidou 2007). This form of nationalism may be defined as defensive, reacting to real or perceived cultural and territorial threats to the national integrity. It

was also accompanied by a feeling of distance and alienation from Europe and Greece's EU partners. On the Macedonian question controversy, European governments and public opinion were seen by Greek politicians and public opinion as unable to understand the specific historical context of southeast Europe, detached from Greek concerns and indifferent to Greek interests (Triandafyllidou et al. 1997). Similarly, when the Parliament voted in 1998 to abolish Article 19 of the Greek Citizenship Code that discriminated against Greek citizens of non-Greek ethnicity (notably members of the Muslim minority of Western Thrace), Greek national identity took again a defensive and nationalist overtone. The law for the abrogation of article 19 was voted in full *patriotic* ethos as a measure that had served the national interest but no longer did (Anagnostou 2005). The related government initiatives and parliamentary discussions as analysed in Anagnostou (2005) pointed to a very limited opening of the national political elites' debate towards a civic and territorial definition of Greek national identity that would accommodate the Turkish Muslim minority within Greek society on the basis of equality and respect for cultural diversity.

More recent studies, however, that look into the first years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century note that a more flexible understanding of Greek national identity among citizens and elites is emerging. Kokosalakis (2004), and Anagnostou and Triandafyllidou (2007) suggest that the increasing salience of European policies and symbols, such as the European currency, and the actual experiences of belonging to the Europe Union (such as those of Turkish Muslim minority respondents in western Thrace who had been recipients of EU funds analysed in Anagnostou and Triandafyllidou, op. cit.) reinforce a civic and political value component in Greek national identity. Although the EU is often understood in instrumental terms, both minority respondents in western Thrace (Anagnostou and Triandafyllidou 2007) and majority respondents in other parts of Greece (Kokosalakis 2004) emphasise that Europe is a model for its respect for cultural diversity, indeed a model that can and should be applied within nation-states too, Greece in particular. In sum, the dominant discourses of defensive ethnic nationalism registered in the 1990s have gradually given way to more open definitions of the nation in this decade, where civic and territorial elements play an important part.

Against this background of national identity formation and dominant nationalism discourses, difference in Greece is understood at two inextricably tied levels: ethnicity/nationality and religion. These two aspects emanate from the very definition of Greekness that successfully combined the particularism of the nation with the universalism of Greek Orthodoxy. The Greek understanding of difference is mobilised and enacted with regard to both native minorities and immigrant groups. It is the historical experience of nation formation and difficult relations with neighbouring countries and their co-ethnic minorities within Greece that has shaped the Greek notion of ethnic and religious difference. As is presented below, however, these historically shaped notions of difference are today projected also towards the immigrant populations and relevant immigration legislation.

The dimension of ethnicity is incorporated into the Greek definition of national citizenship that is predominantly based on *ius sanguinis*. As such it is at odds with the presence of a native Turkish Muslim minority in western Thrace. The Greek authorities reject the minority's claim for an ethnic self-definition as Turkish and only accept the existence of a religious minority in line with the provisions of the international Treaty of Lausanne between Greece and Turkey in 1923 (<http://net.lib.byu.edu/~rdh7/wwi/1918p/lausanne.html>). The difficulty to accommodate the minority's claims lies largely within the complex web of Greek-

Turkish relations but has also to do with an understanding that the Greek nation is culturally, religiously and ethnically homogenous (Anagnostou 2003; Anagnostou and Triandafyllidou 2007).

This mono-ethnic definition of national citizenship is particularly reflected in the absence of provisions for second generation immigrants. Thus, on one hand, immigrants of ethnic Greek descent like Pontic Greeks were granted citizenship immediately upon arrival subject to proof of their Greek origins, regardless of the fact that they did not speak the language and were not familiar with Greek customs and mores. On the other hand, children of foreign parents who are born and bred in Greece are considered aliens because they cannot claim Greek ancestry.

As regards religion as a dimension of difference, it is worth noting that the Orthodox Church of Greece is constitutionally recognized as the 'prevailing' religion in Greece,<sup>4</sup> while Islam is recognized as the religion of the autochthonous Muslim minority of Western Thrace (northeast Greece). The only other recognized minority under public law is the Jewish one. These distinctions in themselves have restricted religious freedoms in Greece and have led to a series of discriminatory legal and administrative practices. Such practices do not conform with European human rights norms and provisions and have led the European Court of Human Rights to a series of decisions condemning the Greek state on laws and practices that relate to the rights of religious groups and mainly regarding the rights of conscientious objectors, the establishment of places of worship, and especially Muslim community rights (Psychogiopoulou 2007).

The particularity of the Greek approach to religious difference and more specifically to the recognition of Islam arises mainly from the treaty-based protection of the Muslim population of Thrace. The 1923 Treaty of Lausanne frames the protection of the Muslim population's religious rights in minority rights terms<sup>5</sup> and is heavily influenced by the bilateral political relations between Greece and Turkey. National security matters and Greek-Turkish tense relations consequently frame the wider situation of religious rights and educational policies. They also set the stage for the majority population's perceptions and concerns with regard to 'difference' (particularly in religious terms).

### 3. Migration and the Nation

Emigration from Greece came to a halt in the mid to late 1970s after the tightening up of migration regimes in northern Europe and as a result of the country's gradual

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.parliament.gr/politeuma/syntagmaDetails.asp?ArthroID=3>

Greek Constitution, First Part- General Provisions, Relations between Church and State, Article 3.

<sup>5</sup> This Treaty guarantees the preservation of *sharia* (Islamic law) as a separate jurisdiction presided over by the *muftis* (the religious leaders) who provide spiritual leadership, supervise the management of the property of the Muslim community and the operation of religious schools. The use of *sharia* is voluntary and geographically restricted to the regions where this minority population lives. More importantly, however, it replaces the Greek Civil code. The *mufti* decisions acquire legal force after the judiciary confirms their compliance with civil and constitutional principles. Given the extraordinary nature of this freedom the Greek government has persistently attempted to manage the selection process of *muftis*. On this matter, over the past fifteen years, there is significant opposition between the Muslim community and the Greek state given the latter's insistence to have exclusive competence over the selection of the *muftis*. The Greek government's position is that the functions of the religious leaders include legal and administrative decisions and, therefore, must be held by individuals with state recognition and state functions.

economic development. The 1989 geopolitical changes and Greece's EU membership converted the country into a target destination for several hundreds of thousands of, in their vast majority, undocumented immigrant workers from eastern and central Europe (and to a lesser degree from Africa and Asia). These initially irregular migrants have to a large extent settled in Greece and through repeated regularisation programmes (1998, 2001, 2005 and 2007) have now become a largely legal immigrant population. Nevertheless, extended undocumented migration has had large indirect costs related to social exclusion and social pathologies that affected not only the migrant but also the native population (see also Lyberaki and Pelagidis 2000).

Between 1991 and 2001 (2001 national census), the immigrant population of Greece grew exponentially from under 2% of the total population to estimates that range between 10 and 12% ([www.statistics.gr](http://www.statistics.gr); Cortese 2007, Triandafyllidou 2006). Currently there are in Greece 800,000 immigrants registered in the census of 2001 (including both legal and undocumented), and 150,000 co-ethnic returnees from the former Soviet Union registered in a special census of 2000, who have however naturalized through preferential channels. There were also 145,000 applications in the regularization programme of 2005.<sup>6</sup> It is unclear how many of the applicants are new entries or simply people who had not succeeded in obtaining their papers during earlier 'amnesties' or people who had achieved legal status but subsequently lost it because they were unable to renew their permits. It is also estimated that a large number of undocumented immigrants who were present in 2001, did not register at the census, for fear of being identified by immigration authorities. This impressive migrant inflow puts Greece at one of the top positions in Europe in terms of immigrant percentage in the whole population with an estimated 1.2 million of economic immigrants, including co-ethnic returnees, i.e. about 10% of the total population and over 12% of the total labour force.

Main nationalities among the immigrant population include over half a million of Albanian citizens, 150,000 co-ethnic returnees from the former Soviet Republics, 110-120,000 Asians (40-50,000 Pakistanis, about 20,000 Chinese and Filipinos, and about 10-15,000 Bangladeshis and Indians, see Tonchev 2007), 47,000 citizens from the EU15 member states (registered in 2001), 40-50,000 Poles (Christou et al. 2007) and at least as many Bulgarians. At the 2001 census, there were approximately 20,000 Georgians, 17,000 Russians and 10,000 Ukrainians registered. It is estimated that the actual size of these immigrant groups is larger but there are no current reliable data yet available.

Immigration poses an important challenge to the dominant Greek nationalist discourses. The recognition of Greek society as a de facto multi-cultural and multi-ethnic, both on the part of state institutions and the native society has been pressing because of the growing need for suitable policy responses. Unfortunately, Greece's immigration policy continues to remain largely reactive, fragmented and extremely limited in measures promoting integration. Moreover, any efforts at encouraging immigrant acceptance in Greek society are largely predicated on a model of assimilation rather than the public recognition of cultural diversity.

Three examples are illustrative of this. First, today, there are 140,000 pupils (just under 10% of the total school population from pre-school to high school) in the public education system, who are non-Greek citizens yet there are only 26 'intercultural' schools (out of over 15,000 schools in total). The main educational approach towards cultural diversity comes through the special courses aiming at

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<sup>6</sup> The 2007 regularization was ongoing at the time of writing (April 2007).



supporting foreign students in learning Greek. Language acquisition is seen as the main tool for integration and there is no provision for recognising and accommodating the cultural, religious and linguistic diversity of the pupils into the mainstream public education system. Even 'inter-cultural schools' follow the mainstream curriculum.

Second, state authorities remain reluctant to engage into dialogue with immigrant associations and to include them in immigration policy committees and official consultations. The Advisory Committee for immigration policy issues created by law 3536/23.02.2007 is telling of this approach as it does not include immigrant representatives.

Third, the naturalization process. Access to citizenship is part of a state's integration policy and the way it manages migration. The way in which any given country defines the process and criteria through which citizenship is granted defines, to a large extent, where it places the boundaries between 'members' and 'foreigners', between 'insiders' and 'outsiders.' In effect, citizenship policies, or naturalisation processes, have been gradually developing as instruments through which to integrate or (re)admit populations; manage their stay; and grant specific rights to certain groups or restrict state obligations to others (Gropas 2007). In the case of Greece, the naturalisation process is one of the longest in the EU, it is expensive, the process is discretionary and preferential towards individuals of Greek origin (ECRI 2004).

One particular feature of incoming migration of the last 15 years, is that it has led to the expansion of the Muslim population in Greece. Albanian immigrants of Muslim faith as well tens of thousands of Pakistanis and Bangladeshis (Triandafyllidou and Gropas 2005: 11) now live in the greater Athens area. Contrary to the Muslim minority of Thrace, the immigrant Muslim population in Athens has not been able to practice their faith in legal premises since the authorization for the establishment of a venue for the Muslim faith has not yet been granted.

According to Royal Decree 1363/1938 and its amendment 1672/1939, the establishment of non-Orthodox places of worship is subject to a government permit issued by the Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs. This government permit is issued following from a non-binding Opinion provided by the Orthodox Church of Greece (OCG). The government decision is based on assessment of whether the religion is 'known', its worship is not against public order and morals, there is no exercise of proselytism and there is a real need for the establishment of a church or other place of worship (Council of State Decisions 721/1969 and 1444/1991). This situation offers rather extensive room for the executive to evaluate what constitutes a 'known' religion, whether there is a necessity to establish a religious venue, or what constitutes proselytism. Furthermore, it offers the potential of a rather wide scope for interference on behalf of the OCG. These points have been at the focus of litigation cases at the Strasbourg Court (Psychogiopoulou 2007).

They have also been pointed out by the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe both in the 2002 Report and in the 2006 Follow-up Assessment Report.<sup>7</sup> In particular, the Commissioner addressed the fact that proselytism in Greece was still subject to criminal sanction putting needless pressure on religious or spiritual groups wishing to share their convictions in a law-abiding manner, without recourse to subversive, coercive, deceptive or improper methods. As regards the places of worship, here too the Commissioner recommended to amend the relevant legislation where the opinion of the Orthodox bishop is required and to vest the Secretary

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<sup>7</sup> Council of Europe, 2002, 2006, see <https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?id=984125&BackColorInternet=99B5AD&BackColorIntranet=FABF45&BackColorLogged=FFC679>, accessed on 10 March 2007.



General for Religious Affairs with sole authority responsible for applying an administrative procedure that could comprise a public enquiry where all interested parties, including the local bishop, would be able to express their opinions. However, given the particular relation between Church and State in Greece where mutual interference in each other's affairs is accepted and indeed even formalized in the case of educational matters through the Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs these recommendations remain as such, simply recommendations.

The establishment of a religious venue for the Muslim population in Athens is perhaps the most sensitive area in terms of popular perceptions and the way the state has attempted to respond to the religious needs of the growing immigrant population. The debates that surrounded the need to construct a mosque in Athens exemplify the difficulty of coming to terms with religious diversity in Greece and are looked more closely in the fourth section below.

#### **4. National Case Study: The Athens Mosque controversy**

There are over three hundred mosques operating in Greece today. Most of these operate mainly in the North. Since Greece gained its independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1821, there has not been a single mosque in official operation in Athens and the wider Attica region. This, of course, does not mean that there are no mosques or practicing Muslims in Greece's capital. According to reports, approximately 130 informal prayer rooms exist across Athens mainly located in private apartments, shops or storage facilities. These 'underground' places of worship cater to the growing number of Muslim immigrants presently in Athens albeit there are no data about their actual numbers. Taking into account the size of the Asian communities in the Athens area (Tonchev 2007), there are at least 100,000 Muslim immigrants in Athens, without including Albanian citizens.

Ambassadors from Arab states have been lobbying the Greek government to construct a mosque in the capital for over three decades. However, the event that provoked a significant public discussion on this matter was not the claim of the Muslim immigrant communities to have an official place of worship. It was the Athens 2004 Olympic Games. In effect, in the context of the preparation of the 2004 Games, the need to provide a space for athletes and visitor belonging to the Muslim faith made the 'Athens mosque' top the political agendas and the press.

Law 2833 was voted in 2000 providing for the establishment of a mosque in the eastern Athens suburb of Paiania. The law stipulated that this mosque would be constructed with the collaboration of the Greek public authorities and representatives of Arab countries. This proposal was based on the law relating to the preparation of the 2004 Olympic Games albeit it was never put into practice. This legislation was presented by the Socialist governing party (PASOK). It encountered the resistance of the Conservative party New Democracy which considered the overall idea unnecessary and ill-designed. The leftist parties (Greek Communist Party and the Alliance of the Left) proposed that the mosque should be built in a central Athens neighbourhood catering to the local immigrant population's spiritual needs.

A second draft law on the subject of establishing a mosque was submitted to Parliament in late 2006 by the then ruling Conservative party New Democracy (Parliamentary proceedings, 12 November 2006: 1230 -1231). This bill proposed the establishment of a mosque in Eleonas, near the city centre of Athens area. It stipulated that the Greek Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs would be

exclusively responsible to construct and finance it, and it would be managed by an Administrative Board appointed by the same Ministry. The mosque would be constructed on public premises – i.e. the Ministry would make available state property in order to provide a space for its construction, and would be responsible for all related expenses.

In the following sections we analyse the press and parliamentary debates. We identify the main actors involved, the themes debates and the central political and value questions raised in the press. The analysis of the parliamentary debates focuses on the argumentation put forward by the different parties with a view to highlighting the dominant understandings of identity and difference and of how migration-related religious diversity should be accommodated in Greece.

## 4.2. The debates in the Press

### *Overview of the Coverage*

Five daily quality newspapers (including their respective Sunday editions if these appear under a different title): *Rizospastis*, *Eleftherotypia*, *Ta Nea*, *To Vima*, and *Kathimerini* have been included in the analysis of the press discourse.<sup>8</sup> These newspapers were reviewed electronically by searching their online electronic archives in early 2007. The analysis covers the period between January 2004 and December 2006 and includes news reports and editorials by each newspaper. Sixty-five articles focusing specifically on the mosque question were identified and analysed in terms of the main themes, actors reported in the coverage and political questions raised in relation to the matter.

The articles of the Communist party newspaper mainly provide for news reporting on the matter. As regards the other four newspapers, there is a strong similarity in terms of the issues covered, the positions presented and the subjects analysed. Out of the five newspapers, *Eleftherotypia* has accorded more attention to the overall debate publishing 26 out of the 66 news stories analysed covering a variety of topics.

The dominant themes in the coverage include the following:

**Table 1: Thematic analysis of the press coverage on the mosque construction**

Theme	Newspaper	No of relevant articles	Total
Establishment of an Islamic centre of study	<i>Eleftherotypia</i>	2	6
	<i>Kathimerini English Edition</i>	1	
	<i>Ta Nea</i>	1	
	<i>To Vima</i>	2	
Informal prayer rooms in Athens	<i>Eleftherotypia</i>	5	7
	<i>Ta Nea</i>	1	
	<i>To Vima</i>	1	
Opinions regarding the establishment and	<i>Eleftherotypia</i>	14	37

<sup>8</sup> *Kathimerini* is a quality broadsheet of centre-right wing orientation (with an English language insert every Friday), *Eleftherotypia*, *Ta Nea* and *To Vima* are of centre-left wing orientation. They are quality newspapers although the language they use is more sensational than that used by *Kathimerini*. *Rizospastis* is the official newspaper of the Greek Communist Party.

<b>location of the Mosque</b>	<i>Kathimerini English edition</i>	4	
	<i>Kathimerini</i>	3	
	<i>Rizospastis</i>	2	
	<i>To Vima</i>	4	
	<i>Ta Nea</i>	10	
<b>Funding and procedural aspects relating to the building and functioning of the Mosque</b>	<i>Eleftherotypia</i>	4	11
	<i>Kathimerini English edition</i>	2	
	<i>Rizospastis</i>	1	
	<i>To Vima</i>	1	
	<i>Ta Nea</i>	3	
<b>The history of the establishment of the Mosque in Athens</b>	<i>Kathimerini</i>	1	3
	<i>Eleftherotypia</i>	1	
	<i>To Vima</i>	1	
<b>Lack of a Muslim cemetery</b>	<i>Ta Nea</i>	2	2
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>65</b>

Note: For a full list of the articles analysed, see Annex I.

The actors most frequently cited by the press include religious authorities (the Church of Greece and in particular the Archbishop of Athens Christodoulos, and the bishop of Paiania), state authorities (the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs), local government (the Mayor of the City of Athens and the Mayor of Paiania), and Muslim organisations (representatives of the Pakistani immigrant association). Clearly the debate is dominated by institutional actors representing the dominant majority (Christian Orthodox Greeks) while the minority whose religious needs were to be addressed (Muslim immigrants) was represented through the Pakistani community organisation only and some personalised stories of individual migrants published in *Eleftherotypia*, (22/03/2004, 21/03/2004, 04/04/2006) and *Ta Nea* (31/07/2004) providing personal accounts of migrants' difficulties to practice their religion.

The establishment of the mosque is accepted, in principle, by all sides. It is considered as a necessary venue for the needs of the population practicing the Muslim faith, and as a reasonable religious freedom. With the exception of the bishop of Thessaloniki who takes a more critical approach overall, all other parties agree with the need for this mosque. However, the questions and issues that are raised in the subsequent debates illustrate that there is a significant underlying unease about the matter. The questions raised by the press include: Where should it be built? What would the symbolic implications be regarding each possible location? How would the local majority population react to its construction? What would be the 'dangers' of this construction?

The press coverage focuses on the national political and religious elites. There is an extensive coverage of the disagreement within the political elite. Such disagreements are personalised and take place not only between parties but also within them. In other words, the left-right wing dimension is largely irrelevant in organising the opinions of Greek politicians in favour or against the construction of a mosque in Athens. Similarly a lot of attention is paid to the opinions expressed by the Archbishop of Greece, Christodoulos, which are always in full support for the establishment of this mosque but are inter-digitated by the press by comments suggesting that this support is hypocritical, covering up the fact that the Church is discreetly obstructing its establishment. Attention is paid also to disagreements within

the religious elite since other archbishops oppose Christodoulos warning of the 'dangers' involved in the construction and operation of a mosque.

The opinions and positions of the Muslim immigrants that are directly concerned with the issue are relatively marginal to the overall debate. *Eleftherotypia* only reports on them, including interviews with immigrants and immigrant representatives exposing their opinions and needs to have a formal place to pray and a cemetery to bury their dead. Their opposition concerning the establishment of the mosque in the suburbs of Athens is also emphasised.

An important theme in the coverage is 'the foreign factor' and the perceived potential threats related to the construction of the mosque. The press links the religious aspects of Islam (the building and functioning of a mosque in Athens) with the question of national security and the relationship between Turkey and Greece, short-circuiting the debate. The 'foreign factor' issue disorients the debate moving the focus from the question of values to the issue of security. The construction of the mosque becomes part of the larger security debate that is related to Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism in general and the Turkish Other in particular. These threats are sometimes explicitly expressed while other times they are alluded to through rhetoric questions. In other words, the question of the mosque becomes intertwined with Greece's most significant Other, Turkey, and the West's most significant threat, violent Islamic fundamentalism.

In a few articles reviewed, the basis on which to accommodate migration-related cultural diversity is debated. One of the articles in *Ta Nea* (28/03/2006) includes an interview with the Greek Minister of Foreign Affairs and the matter of the mosque in Athens is placed within a much wider context. Minister Bakoyannis expresses her support for the timely establishment of the mosque in central Athens because she considers this as being part of the wider dialogue between Europe and the US on the one hand and the Muslim world on the other. Stressing the need for this dialogue to be substantial and credible, she noted that the construction of this mosque would enable Greece to participate as a constructive partner in this dialogue. Similarly, another article in *Eleftherotypia* (08/04/2006) emphasises that Orthodoxy and Islam lived side by side for centuries and rejects the automatic clash between these faiths and sees current socio-economic exclusion and underdevelopment as the roots of fundamentalism. Although these articles call for a dialogue between religions and cultures and express a willingness to recognize and accommodate religious and cultural diversity in Greece, they include no reflection on the fact that many European citizens and residents are Muslims nor a re-consideration of what it means to be Greek today.

During 2006, the press emphasized that the mosque should be built and that a denial to build it would constitute a violation of basic rights and freedoms as these are stated in the Greek Constitution. Thus, the matter of whether or not the Church of Greece (COG) would grant its assent was considered irrelevant. The large conservative quality daily *Kathimerini* argued that even the issuance of an 'opinion' on the part of the COG was unconstitutional and a violation of religious rights and freedoms (*Kathimerini*, 30/04/2006). In the same article, the absolute association between Greece and Orthodoxy was rejected (*Kathimerini*, 30/04/2006). Some articles (*Eleftherotypia*, 23/05/2006; *Eleftherotypia*, 15/04/2006; *Ta Nea* 22/07/2004) stressed the need to disassociate between religious and national identity since citizenship is a legal, public matter, whereas religion was considered to belong to the realm of private life. It was also argued, the mosque should be built for the religious needs of Muslims, regardless of nationality. This line of reasoning adopts a

Republican viewpoint of the type traditionally supported by French elites and state institutions: religious freedom and respect of religious diversity were considered as important political principles. However diversity was to be recognized and accommodated only as an individual private matter and not as an issue associated with the recognition of collective rights. In this context, the establishment of a temple of worship for persons belonging to other religions was considered necessary in a 'European' and democratic country like Greece in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In numerous statements, the terms 'tolerance' and 'democracy' were repeated providing for a clear political framing of the issue however, the question of citizenship and of how Greek citizenship could and should be pluralized in response to the changing character of Greek society was not mentioned by any newspaper.

Although the press makes no direct association between the building of a mosque for the needs of the Muslim residents of Athens, who are economic immigrants in their vast majority, and the religious rights or freedoms of the native Muslim minority of western Thrace, there are several questions raised by journalists and academics in the press that point to the short-circuiting of the two discourses. For instance, the questions were raised: in which language the prayer would be held, how the imam would be elected (pointing to the internal differentiations among Sunni and Shiite Muslim immigrants), whether the Greek state should pay for the imam's salary and the management expenses of the mosque under the principle of equality between all creeds. Also the more security-related questions of how to avoid that the mosque would come under the influence of Muslim religious leaders from other regions, or where the imams would be trained and educated, pointing to the need for a religious school in the context of Greek public higher education. The implicit fear here was that of the 'foreign factor' if the imams were educated in neighbouring Turkey.

Clearly although the views constitute a step forward for dissociating religion from the state and emancipating state authorities from the Church of Greece, the underlying themes of the debate reproduce stereotypical perceptions of Islam and Muslim difference. The increasing presence of Islam is *de facto* connected to threats of Turkey and of an indirect means through which Turkish influence, intervention and national interests will be promoted within Greece. It is equally connected to threats of fundamentalism and by consequence international terrorism. It thus raises another aspect of national security, which comes to complement other dimensions of insecurity (identity, social unrest and polarization of society, etc).

One proposal put forth was the creation of a Greek Muslim Institute that would represent the Muslim communities in Greece and would manage the Athens mosque. Yet this proposal was associated with a series of questions as to how to prevent that it become financed (in part or in whole) by 'foreign' actors that would thus have a '*strong and dangerous weapon at their disposal. Because, we agree with the establishment of a mosque in Athens, but we do not intend to allow the creation of an international centre for educating terrorists (or at the very least fanatic enemies of our western world)*' (Kathimerini, 30/04/2006). Actually such proposals that are meant to promote the institutionalization of Muslim immigrant minorities are impregnated with a 'foreign threat' and (in)security discourse. In short, Islam and Muslims are, in one way or another, presented in the logic of antagonism and the infamous 'class of civilisations' approach.

During 2006, the press reports the reactions of the Muslim population of Athens to the voting of the new law for the establishment of the mosque. These were mildly positive acknowledging that: '*at last we acquire a religious roof, like is the case in all other European capitals*' (Ta Nea, 26/07/2006). Muslim residents are also

reported to approve the location of Elaionas near the centre of the city and hence near the areas where they live. The press reported also some divergence of opinions among the Muslim population regarding the issue of the imam's appointment. Greek Muslims were reported to be in favour of a Greek *imam* appointed by the Greek Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs to head the mosque. Immigrant Muslims, particularly the Egyptians and Pakistanis who are the largest communities of Muslim immigrants, wished the *imam* to belong to their community arguing that a common language between the imam and the faithful was necessary. Thus, they argued that each large community of Muslims should have its own imam. Moreover, there was some disagreement between the Sunni and Shiite communities as to who would 'lead' the mosque. Even though the overwhelming majority of Muslims in Greece are Sunni, objections were raised as to how they would be forced to work together. Nonetheless, in their statements the representatives of the various groups stressed that efforts would be made to reach an internal consensus. Reporting on the Muslim residents of Athens appears to be sensitive to internal differences within the community and the need to accommodate these too.

#### 4.3. The debates in Parliament

A debate held in the Hellenic Parliament on the 7<sup>th</sup> of November 2007 (*Πρακτικά Βουλής, Σύνοδος Γ', Συνεδρίασης 12'*: 880 -905) concentrated on the bill for the establishment of a mosque in Athens. This section does not aim at summarizing all the issues discussed during the parliamentary session but rather to highlight some of the rationales that were presented by the main political parties during this debate in support of the mosque's construction or relevant concerns that were raised.

The government framed its bill in reference to respect for human rights, tolerance towards difference and a continuous and multi-level dialogue between civilizations and religions (Parliament proceedings: 880). This was also seen to be in agreement with national historical experiences of the Greek nation that emphasized the role of religion and the importance of protecting religious identity and rights. Thus the bill was supported in full patriotic ethos:

*"...The best example is the Greek citizen who deserves to be proud because historically, he has deeply experienced restriction of his rights, persecution and the limitation of his religious identity and the attempt to annihilate Greekness and Orthodoxy. Consequently, our historic identity fully understands the importance of religious tolerance. (...) This is why we have understood the mutual and inter-related relation between the principles of human dignity and humanity (...) this is our civilization, this is our historic legacy."* (880)

The need to respond to the immigrant populations' religious needs was presented as a historic duty and as a responsibility to demonstrate the democratic credentials of Greek state and society. The refusal to proceed with the construction of the mosque was presented as a cultural retreat, a 'victory of xenophobia' and an unnecessary confirmation of Huntington's clash of civilizations (881). Moreover, the Minister of National Education and Religious Affairs who has the responsibility for all matters relating to the mosque underlined that this mosque is a constitutional responsibility of Greece and a response to the needs of the Muslim residents of

Athens and is in no way associated with any dimension of Greek foreign policy, nor is it similar or in any way connected with the Muslims of Thrace of the Treaty of Lausanne (896). The argumentation of the Conservative party reinforced thus the representation of Greece as a European democratic country – it is worth noting that this issue was also emphasized in the press discourse – and also distinguished between the Greek-Turkish entanglement within which the Muslims of Thrace are caught and religious diversity related to immigration.

The discourse on the part of the socialist PASOK opposition party was similarly framed in terms of fundamental freedom protection. However, the Socialist party also emphasized the need to safeguard cultural pluralism, difference and multiculturalism (881) at a time when globalization threatens to flatten differences. References to Greece's close ties with the Arabic world were also referred to as further reasons supporting the mosque (890). The Socialist party raised two critical points though. First, it accused the government of failing to recognize and appropriately accommodate the religious, linguistic, national and ethnic diversity within the Muslim immigrant population. Second, it accused the government for adopting a statist and top-down approach without engaging into dialogue with the representatives of the immigrant population to allow them to express their needs and wishes on the matter.

The two far left parties – the Greek communist party (KKE) and the Alliance of the Left (Synaspismos) – while supporting the creation of the mosque focused their arguments on the fundamental need to proceed with a complete separation between the Greek state and the Church (883-885). In agreement with the Socialists, the Alliance of the Left also denounced the statist character of the mosque's management, which apart from anything else testified to the state's intervention in religious affairs. However, the Alliance of the Left also adopted a more conservative discourse pointing to the need to avoid situations where extremist 'Bin Laden type fundamentalists' might control the mosque as is the case in 'all other European cities'(885).

The Parliamentary proceedings show a cross-party consensus as regards the need to establish a mosque in Athens. In addition, all the members of Parliament across the political spectrum recognized the important contribution of Greece's immigrant population to the country's economy and the need for the state to make the necessary accommodations for this population to be able to enjoy its fundamental rights and freedoms. As such, the immigrant population was accepted as a permanent feature of Greece's multicultural society (893). However, given that immigration is no longer a new phenomenon in Greece, that the formal establishment of a mosque has been on-going for the past three decades and that there are over 70 informal prayer rooms in Athens, the politicians' statements in favour of its establishment in Athens may be characterized as outdated or at the very least long overdue. This suggests that the formal establishment of an Islamic religious venue continues to be approached with caution and that there is a reactive approach to cultural diversity challenges.

#### **4.4. Concluding Remarks: A Common Discourse between the Press and the Political Elites**

The majority of the Muslim population in Athens is neither Turkish nor of Turkish origin, they are economic immigrants or asylum-seekers from the Middle East and Southeast Asia. This demographic 'detail', however, does not appear to have been



relevant for the development of the mosque debate. The construction of the mosque in Athens was associated with Greece's Ottoman past, the Cyprus and Aegean disputes, Turkey's aggression towards Greece (in political and military terms), and the situation of *Hagia Sofia* in Istanbul. These issues were sewn into the press and political debate even though they have no direct relevance to the issue. The location of the mosque in the Athens centre was also framed by some journalists and religious leaders as symbolic of the 'Turkish threat' and or the 'Ottoman jug' that Greece experienced for four centuries.

There exists a distance between the positions expressed and the arguments put forward at the local and the national level. Local authorities and the representatives of the local church reported extensively in the press take the role of 'defending' the native population from the imposition of a religious establishment that constitutes a symbol of past oppression and a threat to Greek national identity and unity. The phobia elements are played up both by the local politicians and clergy through questioning the longer term consequences of the mosque's presence and tapping into the current threat of international terrorism.

The opposite position is taken mainly by the Holy Synod as well as the official government representatives, and in particular the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and the main representatives of the left-wing parties, as these are reported in the press or expressed in Parliament. In agreement with the Socialist and Conservative party discourses in Parliament, the Holy Synod frames its support for the mosque construction with reference to the value of democracy, religious freedom, constitutional rights and 'the state's duty to ensure respect and tolerance towards difference' (*Kathimerini*, 16/04/2006).

Similarly to the Holy Synod, the discourse of the main political parties and that of the main institutional actors (Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs and Ministry of Foreign Affairs) framed the mosque construction as a matter of respect for religious freedom and a fundamental constitutional obligation of Greece. However, the argumentation was not limited to a rights-duties value dimension. The practical necessity of the mosque was framed in patriotic terms, as supporting the national interests. The Minister of Foreign Affairs for instance argued that for Greece to have the authority to pressure Turkey and other countries to respect human rights and European values, Greece cannot deprive the right to religious worship in an appropriate venue to hundreds of thousands of legal residents. She noted: '*We are asking for the re-establishment of the Halki Theological School in Istanbul and at the same time we do not even have a mosque in our capital.*' (*Ta Nea*, 28/03/2006). This inconsistency and double-standards was pointed out less as a value question and more as a weak point preventing Greece from successfully promoting its national interests and thereby a matter that needs to be remedied.

Alongside this patriotic framing of the mosque bill, there was extensive reference to the fact that religious freedom is a core value and a right that ought to be able to be exercised freely by all. There is in principle support for the rights of the 'other.' However, such declaratory statements were not followed up by concrete proposals to speed up the establishment of the mosque. Moreover, they were rarely disassociated from statements of 'but... there are other issues that need to be taken into consideration (i.e. location, funding, ulterior motives, etc)' that in effect hampered the process and demonstrated a significant degree of Islamophobia. Value statements referring to democracy, respect of fundamental rights and religious freedoms were largely of a declaratory nature and did not involve any actual re-consideration of Greek identity. On the contrary, the latter was perceived as uniform

and cohesive, contrasted to the Muslim Other. The press and parliamentary debate show that cultural and religious difference is not in any way accepted as part of national culture and identity. Rather it is perceived as a reality that has fallen upon Greek society and that has to be accommodated in line with the constitutional principles of Greece and with a view to supporting national interests. Indeed this line of argumentation has many similarities with the arguments put forward in the Parliamentary debates regarding the abolition of article 19 of the Greek citizenship code (Anagnostou 2005).

## 5. The reaction to the Danish cartoon event in Greece

Our analysis of how migration-related cultural difference is perceived, constructed and accommodated in Greece could not ignore the recent crisis over the publication of the Mohammed cartoons.<sup>9</sup> Although the cartoons were described at some length in the context of providing the background to reactions around the world, no Greek newspaper reprinted the cartoons.

The same five dailies as above were reviewed electronically in order to identify all articles that were published on a subject relating to the Mohammed cartoons in 2006: *Rizospastis* (far left), *Eleftherotypia* and *Ta Nea* (centre left), *To Vima* (mainstream centre left), *Kathimerini* (mainstream centre right). All 41 articles that were retrieved were published in February 2006. News reports, feature articles and editorials are included in the data set.

The Greek press largely approached the crisis from a descriptive viewpoint. The cartoons themselves were described, the reactions of different Muslim countries were presented, the reactions of the Danish and other European governments were also described as were the positions of various newspapers or media groups. These descriptions were imbued with sensationalist and exaggerated adjectives suggestive of the hysteria of those days.

The main themes identified in the newspapers were: Demonstrations/protests, actions and reactions; Diplomatic measures and other official actions; EU and the cartoon question; The press and the cartoon question; Religion and the cartoon question. These were reported in the following frequency in the newspapers:

**Table 3. Overview of newspaper articles on the cartoon debate by thematic cluster and date.**

Theme	Newspaper	No. of articles	Total
<b>A. Demonstrations/protests, actions and reactions</b>	Kathimerini	9	29
	Rizospastis	3	
	To Vima	1	
	Ta Nea	6	
	Eleftherotypia	10	
<b>B. Diplomatic measures and other official actions</b>	Kathimerini	5	13
	Rizospastis	1	
	To Vima	1	
	Ta Nea	3	
	Eleftherotypia	3	

<sup>9</sup> For more information on the Mohammed Cartoons crisis and media debates see Kontochristou et al. (2006).

<b>C. EU and the cartoon question</b>	Rizospastis	2	9
	To Vima	1	
	Ta Nea	2	
	Ta Nea	4	
<b>D. The press and the cartoon question</b>	Kathimerini	5	19
	Rizospastis	3	
	To Vima	1	
	TA Nea	5	
	Eleftherptypia	5	
<b>E. Religion and the cartoon question</b>	Kathimerini	2	16
	Rizospastis	3	
	To Vima	1	
	Ta Nea	5	
	Eleftherotypia	5	

Note: For a full list of the articles analysed, see Annex II.

In a recent study by Kontochristou et al. (2006: 7), their content analysis indicated that reporting on the cartoon crisis was a consistent albeit not dominant feature of coverage. They noted, however, that there was an increase of news reporting, during the days of coverage but especially after the outbreak of the event. The Mohammed cartoon crisis was a front-page story and numerous pages were devoted to the story on the inside pages. A closer look at the titles indicates that emphasis was placed on the violence of the reactions on the part of Muslims worldwide. Anger, Muslim fanaticism, death and intolerance at a global level are highlighted. The second most frequent theme in the headlines was with reference to the freedom of expression either calling for its protection or questioning its limits.

With regard to the content of the articles, the study of the Greek news coverage of the Cartoons crisis conducted in the context of this study confirms the findings of Kontochristou et al (2006) suggesting that:

- (a) violent events or diplomatic actions have a high news value and as such took front place in the Greek media attention placing the Cartoons events in the frontpages and headlines of Greek newspapers;
- (b) the Cartoons crisis was framed by the newspapers as ideologically neutral: it attracted the attention of both right and left-wing newspapers in Greece roughly equally;
- (c) the reporting made Muslim authorities and Muslim protesters prominent actors in the discourse.

Indeed, the principal attention was focused on the violence, the demonstrations and the protests, as well as the international consequences of the publication of the cartoons in Denmark. The violence of these demonstrations was undoubtedly sensationalized particularly in the more centre-left newspapers not just in the titles but also in the articles as well with detailed accounts of deaths and injuries in various cities (Beirut, Mogadishu, Kabul, Karachi, Jakarta) around the world. The diplomatic measures and official reactions to the crisis world-wide ranked second in terms of most common theme in the press. There was extensive reporting on the reactions of other EU governments and politicians (mainly Denmark, Austria, the UK and Italy) and the statements of EU Commission officials. The refusal of Danish Prime Minister Rasmussen to apologise for the cartoon was one of the main items reported and so were the official statements of French and British politicians expressing their understanding for the offense caused by these cartoons. There was just as much

reporting on the reactions of the Turkish government, Indonesia, or Iran where condemnations against the insensitivity cartoons were in most cases followed by quotes expressing anger against the West.

The freedoms of the press and questions regarding the limits of the freedom of expression were the third most common theme identified in these articles. There was frequent reference to the positions of journalists, politicians or academics who officially expressed their support to the Danish journalists on the basis of the media's independence. Interestingly, there are descriptions of which countries or newspapers decided to re-print the cartoons (*Kathimerini*, 02/02/2006; 04/02/2006; *Eleftherotypia* 06/02/2006), however, there is only one statement in all the newspapers reviewed on the reasons that led to these cartoons not being reprinted in Greece. *Ta Nea* (04/02/2006) states that it considered whether or not to re-print the cartoons and argues that:

*"(...) their publication would have been an appropriate answer to those fanatics who request their prohibition. At the same time, however, reprinting these cartoons several months after their first publication would involve an element of exhibitionism. (...) The important matter here, is the possibility of choice. The truth is that setting limits in cases such as this is not an easy matter. Adherents of a religion cannot claim that because they consider images of the Prophet to be blasphemous then the same should be the case for everyone else. Similarly, images of Mohammed with a bomb as a headscarf are provocative (...) Muslims have a right to protest against these cartoons and boycott the journals that publish them. Anything else, however, is outside the scope of legal protest and falls within the remit of censorship imposed through threat"* (translated from Greek).

Although in their overwhelming majority the cartoon affair is reported on with a degree of distance as an event happening elsewhere with little direct influence or involvement on the part of Greece, there are some opinion editorials that engage in the cartoon affair in a way that makes it relevant for the Greek situation as well. In one case (*Eleftherotypia* 06/02/2006), the core theme is the extent to which religion ought to be allowed to censor freedom of expression in a democratic society. Here, religion is approached regardless of faith denominations and its intervention in free speech and artistic expression is deemed illiberal and counter-productive in democratic societies. References are made to condemnations of 'blasphemy' on the part of the Christian churches across Europe or specifically in the Greek case the prohibition by the Greek Church for any Greek to watch the "Last Temptation of Christ." In another case (*Ta Nea*, 07/02/2006), there is a call to all to not consider the evolution of events as a clash between Christianity and Islam and further strengthen the position of fundamentalists but to realize that this is the result of a tension within Islam (i.e. between moderate and fundamentalist elements).

To conclude, in the reporting of the cartoon crisis there is less a domestic debate on the tensions between freedom of the press and sensitivity towards another religion's symbols and more extensive reporting. The principle of freedom of expression is the value that appears to be explicitly and implicitly supported in the media reviewed. As regards the reaction by the Muslim actors, the discussion focuses more on the need not to 'sacrifice' democratic principles to fundamentalist elements and religious censorship and less on matters of ethic responsibility to not offer gratuitous offense. The Mohammed cartoons are to a degree also considered in bulk

with other cases that provoked religious reactions, such as the fatwa against Salman Rushdie for the 'Satanic Verses', the condemnation for blasphemy against the Austrian cartoonist Gerhart Hunderer for his book the 'Life of Christ', or similarly in Greece against the movie 'The Last Temptation of Christ.' This suggests a position of wider rejection against religiously motivated censorship in European democratic societies on the part of the Greek press. This appears to be prioritized over a discussion on the challenge of accommodating religious and cultural sensitivities with rights and freedoms in multicultural Europe since the bulk of the reporting presents this as a confrontation between Europe (almost amalgamated with the West) and the 'Muslim world' in the Middle and Far East.

## **6. Conclusion**

Debates on the accommodation of cultural and religious difference are slowly developing in Greece. The focus of these debates remains, for the time being, concentrated on recognizing the diversity that exists within Greek society and providing for the institutional and public space for it to be expressed. This recognition and hesitant accommodation of cultural diversity is promoted in democratic as well as patriotic ethos by reference to constitutional principles but also as a means to promote national interests. It does not yet fully involve an in-depth debate on how to accommodate these differences in ways that are sensitive to the internal distinctions of the population that does not belong to the majority. For example, the distinctions within the Muslim immigrant population are only gradually being acknowledged and the decision to construct one mosque in Athens that will be able to respond to the religious needs of all Muslims regardless of denomination, national or ethnic background is an indication of this. The fact that most of the cartoon crisis reporting focused on the reactions of fundamentalist Muslims and significantly less on the unease with the offence caused to the moderate Muslim population in both Europe and abroad is another. Clearly, there is no re-consideration of the dominant national self-understanding. Difference is perceived as part of the Greek society but external to the nation. The challenge of migration-related diversity is yet to be fully addressed in institutional terms. Its integration into the self-definition of the nation however is for the time being not even raised as a public issue.

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