The Greek Newspaper Coverage of the Ukrainian War: The Pre-Invasion Phase and the Day of the Invasion

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This paper is a first attempt to look at the Greek media coverage of the Russian-Belarus invasion of Ukraine. Three daily newspapers are used during the period of December 2021-February 2022 to measure the frequency of coverage of the issue during the pre-invasion phase and the first day of the invasion. In addition, a qualitative content analysis is employed to account for the three newspapers' stance on the Russian-Belarus invasion. One conclusion that emerges, which to many would appear surprising, is that all newspapers unequivocally condemned the Russia-Belarus invasion without any strings attached to their position. Since these three newspapers cover a wide spectrum of the Greek political ideology, it appears that despite Greece's long historical, economic, and cultural (religion included) ties with Russia, this invasion was considered unacceptable.

Keywords: Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, Greek Media, War, Public opinion, polls, newspapers

Introduction

In a commentary on 9 March 2022, Doug Bandow of the Cato Institute stated that, "... it is best not to attack people in Europe, which guarantees heavy media attention in Western capitals." He is right. This paper looks at the media attention of the Russian-Belarus invasion of Ukraine in just one such European capital, that of Athens, Greece. The media attention was not favorable to the Russian-Belarus invasion of Ukraine in a country like Greece that has had long and friendly historical, cultural, religious, and economic ties with Russia.

This study is part of a larger project exploring the Greek media coverage of the Russian-Belarus invasion of Ukraine. This paper only examines how three popular Greek newspapers covered the Russian-Ukraine conflict in the pre-invasion phase and the first few days of the war. Both quantitative and qualitative content analyses are used and is based on a similar study by Tumber & Palmer (2004, Ch. 6) of four British newspapers' coverage of the Iraq war during the pre-invasion phase.

The Russian-Belarus invasion of Ukraine is of great interest to the Greek public opinion because there are strong ties with both Russia and Ukraine. In addition, there is a keen Greek interest in Russia's justification of this particular invasion. I have identified a number of reasons as to why this invasion is of great interest to the Greek public opinion at large which are briefly discussed below.

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¹https://www.cato.org/commentary/ukraine-crisis-could-spark-new-cold-war-or-nuclear-war.

Some of these issues are discussed in my previous publications where the interested reader can find many more references.

Firstly, Russia, Ukraine and Greece share the same Greek Orthodox religion. In the last few years, these three churches (Russian, Ukrainian and the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople) do not harmoniously co-exist. In many occasions their differences have been very acrimonious. This has many political connotations, but most importantly it reveals a general Russian hegemonic strategy in countries that consider themselves to be under their own sphere of influence. This important issue of a religion schism is not discussed here despite its importance for the future developments of the Greek-Russian relationships. However, it does affect favorably towards Russia a part of the Greek public who consider the Greek Orthodoxy an important determining factor.

Secondly, a large Greek community lives in both countries. These communities have a very long history going back at least to Greece's Ottoman past, if not in mythical period, as the remnants demonstrate on Snake Island. As a matter of fact, in the first days of the invasion, ten Greeks in Ukraine were killed by the Russian-Belarusian invaders which spearheaded a strong Greek governmental reaction against Russia. In the beginning, Russia, using its favored mean of disseminating fake news, tried to deny any responsibility, but quickly it was more than evident that it was Russia's fault, most probably by an accident, which always happens in wars. Instead of apologizing, they chose to deny it. This made the whole incident even worse. This was an additional factor which may explain the Greek government's strong stance against the Russian-Belarusian invasion.

Thirdly, many Greeks believe that Russia played an important and pivotal supportive role in Greece's War of Independence in the 1820s. On the other hand, Ukraine, especially the city of Odessa, carries an important sentimental value because it was the city where a secret Greek society, by the name of Filiki Eteria (Φιλική Εταιρεία), was established in 1814, aiming at liberating Greece from the Ottoman yoke. Of course, as I have explained in Papanikos (2022a), on the role of foreign powers in the Greek War of Independence, Great Britain played the most decisive role followed by France. The Tsarist Greek Christian Orthodox Russia wanted Greece to be an autonomous part of the Ottoman empire and not a fullyfledged independent state. It was the British who imposed an independent state and the French army that fought for this in the Peloponnesus. It is irrelevant that the British were pursuing their own economic and political interest and the French were inspired by their romantic influence by the glorious past of classical Greece. The fact is that many English and French came and fought side by side with the Greeks against the Ottomans. Since the 1820s the misconception that runs across all Greek generations is that Russia liberated Greece which shows, if nothing else, that Thucydides was right when he warned us that we do not learn from history.

Fourthly, Russia in its Soviet Union version has played an important role in determining the political and military developments in Greece in the 1940s when the communist forces fought the first "hot war" instigating a civil war that lasted almost the entire decade of the 1940s. I have examined these political and military developments in Papanikos (2020a). For reasons which include their anti-US stance, some of these communists hold favorable views of Russia. Some Greeks

support whatever is anti-US and might view this invasion as an act against the US. There is another reason for this which is explained below.

Fifthly, the motives proclaimed by Russia to defend its invasion are similar, if not identical, to the defense provided by Turkey in 1974 when it invaded Cyprus. It has occupied 40% of the island's land ever since. The Russian foreign minister bluntly put it that the Russian-Belarus invasion is similar to the Turkish invasion of Cyprus. He failed to acknowledge that Russia itself was against it and still is. Also, no state, apart from Turkey itself, recognizes the partition of the island by force. The same will most probably apply to the expected partition of Ukraine. Nobody would recognize it apart from Russia itself and a few countries that are under Russian occupation, e.g., Syria.

Sixthly, modern Greece is a member of the European Union (EU), of the eurozone and of NATO, which carries more responsibilities than any other country in the region. The majority of the Greek public opinion accepts that Greece's future is primarily within the EU and the Eurozone. This has an economic, political, and cultural dimension. After all, many Greeks think that the idea of Europe is a Greek idea starting with the name itself. Young Greeks learn in school that the Battle of Marathon was not a war between Greeks and Perses, but a war between Europeans and Asians, as Herodotus so eloquently told us so. It was a battle between two different civilizations, or of two political systems—that of tyranny and democracy as so expressively was depicted in Aeschylus' tragedy, The Persians, written in 472 BCE. It was a war between autocracy and democracy. 2 Many Greeks think that they have property rights on the idea of Europe and nothing can be called European without the Greeks being included. What is of interest is that many Europeans think this as well³ and, in many cases, they used the same argument, i.e., a United Europe must have Greece as its member at any cost. The truth is that the other Europeans have paid dearly for Greece's membership to the EU and the eurozone. It is also true that the great majority of Greeks do recognize this even though the Greek mass media do not emphasize it as much as it should. Some Greeks, not as many as in the EU case, think that being a member of NATO is necessary for political and military reasons. They contemplate that NATO membership is necessary not so much to protect Greece from a non-aligned force, but to protect Greece from another NATO member, namely Turkey.⁴ This can explain some seemingly

²Exactly the same description is used today to describe the Russian-Belarus invasion of Ukraine. Many commentators see this invasion as a struggle between democracy and tyranny.

³In Papanikos (2022b) I made a similar argument about the concept of "democracy" which in US public opinion is being recognized that its beginning can be found in Greece and particularly the city of Athens which is called the "cradle of democracy". In one way or another this shapes the US foreign policy towards Greece and something that Greece can build on it to develop even better relationships with the US public and not so much with the US government. This relates to one of the five criteria of democracy –that of isopoliteia—as I explained them in Papanikos (2022e).

⁴This by itself shows the uniqueness of Greece which brings headaches to the US foreign policy which is trying to balance its stance between two NATO members, Turkey and Greece. It is not easy at all. The ambiguous Greek foreign policy makes the role of the US even harder. There is a good and bad conspiracy theory. There are many in Greece who strongly believe that the US favors Turkey over Greece. Similar are the feelings in Turkey, i.e., US favors Greece over Turkey. This is a bad application of the conspiracy theory. A good application of the conspiracy theory is that all the US wants is to avoid a conflict between these two friendly nations. Any solution by both countries

contradictory attitudes of the Greek public opinion findings, as explained in the next section of this paper.

For all the above reasons, the Greek public and therefore the Greek press has a strong interest in the deleterious events in Ukraine. The main thesis of this project is that the Greek news coverage of the Russian-Belarus invasion of Ukraine is influenced by (a) the ideological-political perspective of the medium (newspaper, radio, tv channel, social media etc.) and (b) the Greek interest in the conflict for the reasons presented above. Even though the two are interrelated, this paper examines only a small part of the second aspect by looking at how three popular Greek newspapers covered the Russian-Ukraine conflict at the pre-invasion phase and the first day of the invasion. Other aspects will be part of a future research. However, some comments are made on the ideological-political stance of the three newspapers.

I have expressed my views on the Russian-Belarus invasion of Ukraine in three working papers (Papanikos, 2022b, 2022c, 2022d); the first is in Greek and the other two in English. The first was published before the invasion (20 February 2022) and the other two after the invasion of the 24 February 2022. I have received many comments from academics and researchers from many different countries. According to one database (ResearchGate), there were thousands of reads as the latter are measured by the hosting platform itself. I am not going to summarize their arguments here, but I plan to respond to all comments in a future study in which my arguments-interpretations-hypotheses-biases will be corroborated by the actual development of the events. So far, the events, as they develop, do not reject my main theses expressed in my early works, but this, by no means, implies that my analysis of the causes is validated. Some other analysis may explain better what really has been happening. After all, my theses depend on a conspiracy theory which too many scholars find it unacceptable as a scientific method of explaining events, and rightly so.

This paper is organized into five sections, including this introduction. The next section looks at the Greek public opinion using a pollster which measured public opinion beliefs about the Russian-Belarusian invasion of Ukraine. The third section presents the data of the front-page coverage of the three Greek newspapers in the pre-invasion phase and the early days of the invasion. The analysis is quantitative, i.e., how many times the issue appeared on the front page either as a simple reference and/or as a headline. Here, what is important is the coverage (mentioning) itself which constitutes hard evidence of Greek public interest. The fourth section analyzes the content of the front pages of the three newspapers, particularly during the first day of the invasion. This is important because it shows the newspapers' stance on the issue. The last section concludes.

will be accepted by the US. Thus, the solution is totally in the hands of the two countries. US is indifferent as long as there is a peaceful solution. Not because they are nice guys but because this serves better their interests.

The Greek Public Opinion

The Greek public opinion is highly divided on any issue. This is true in all democracies. The Russian-Belarusian-Ukrainian conflict could not be an exception. However, this division has its own unique characteristics, which are different from other thorny issues of the past. For example, during the economic crisis of 2008 and the referendum thereafter in 2015, the split of the Greek public opinion over the eurozone and the EU had strong ideological characteristics as I have explained in many papers, but most importantly in my analyses of the 2012 Greek elections (Papanikos, 2012a, 2012b); in my analysis of the January 2015 elections (Papanikos, 2015) where I risked a prediction that within the same year a new election will be called as it actually happened; and in my book (Papanikos, 2014). In the latter, not only had I predicted the referendum of 2015, but I explicitly stated that the question posed will be a confusing one and the result will be a strong "no". What I could not predict is that, despite this, during the same night of the referendum, the Greek government at the time made its famous "kolotoumba"—literally meaning somersault. In the context of the referendum, the strong NO became a strong YES overnight. However, these analyses do not apply to the split of the Greek public opinion on the Russian-Belarus invasion of Ukraine even though some similarities exist, especially the ideological affinity of those who stand along the Russian invasion who most probably are the same who wanted Greece out of the EU and the Eurozone. This comparison, which has great interest, is not examined here and is left to be analyzed in a future study.

As mentioned in the introduction, a large part (but not the majority) of the Greek public opinion is pro-Russian for a number of reasons including the common religion of Greek Orthodox, the alleged role of Russia as perceived by Greeks in their war of independence in the 1820s and the links of Greek communists with the Soviet Union. On the other hand, the same arguments apply to Ukraine. Actually, they are even stronger than the ties with Russia. Ukraine's church is also Greek Orthodox and is in fact more loyal to the Ecumenical Patriarcheon of Constantinople than the Russian Church. On the other hand, in the Greek historical conscious the city of Odessa stands very high as mentioned in the introduction. Thus, from all these points of view it is really very hard for Greeks to show support for one or the other side.

However, there is another split which relates to the anti-US sentiment of the Greek public for many reasons, but primarily because they think that the US did not do anything to prevent the establishment of a dictatorship in Greece in 1967. Some think that the whole coup d' etat was organized by the CIA itself.⁶ President

⁵Actually, this is one of the five criteria of democracy, i.e., isegoria (part of which is the freedom of speech). I have examined the issue of democracy in Papanikos (2022e, 2022f). See also the comments by Meydani (2022) and Petratos (2022). Without isegoria you cannot have political parties and freedom of communication. In other words, without democracy there is no public opinion and therefore no division. It like a cemetery: nobody talks and nobody argues.

⁶In my book about Andreas Papandreou (Papanikos, 2019) –a US citizen and an active follower of the US democratic party—I explained, according to my judgement and interpretation of the available facts, what led to the dictatorship of 1967. Notwithstanding the US interest on the issue, the dictatorship was not a reaction against a potential communist threat and I do not think anyone in

Clinton officially visited Greece in 1999 and came close to apologizing for the US's role during the dictatorship. In any case, the suspicion runs very high in the Greek public opinion of the real intentions of the US in the ongoing skirmishes between Greece and Turkey. This distrust explains why a great portion of the Greek public opinion –not the majority, but a vocal minority— is against whatever the US government is supporting in the international political arena. Thus, even though the current Ukrainian struggle and what it stands for is closer to the long-term national strategic interest of Greece, part of the Greek public opinion supports Russia because by doing so, they demonstrate their antithesis to the US irrespective of what their own national interests are.

The findings presented in Figure 1 can be explained by these arguments. According to a public opinion poll in six EU countries published in POLITICO, 40% of Greeks did not condemn the Russian invasion of Ukraine. From all six countries polled, this is by far the highest percentage. This high percentage is not surprising given the historical, cultural and religious ties with Russia and the anti-US feeling of a portion of Greek public opinion. However, if Greeks were to be reminded that the invasion of Russia-Belarus for all practical purposes is similar to the Turkish invasion of Cyprus as the Foreign Minister of Russia reminded the whole world immediately after the invasion, then their opinion would have been different.

US administration at large had such an opinion. It was rather a conflict between George Papandreou and the Greek King. Those who like conspiracy theories (as I do if they are good) may believe it was a conflict between three US power establishments: the CIA, the Pentagon and the White House. In this "battle", the CIA won. I think the US president was just watching, if he was watching (cared) at all. In any case, to say that the Papandreou's (father and son) were pro-Communist would have been a good joke if the victims were not so many when George Papandreou served as the Prime Minister of Greece during the events of December 1944 when he ordered to fire and kill many communist demonstrators. If the victims were not so many from both opposing sides in the aftermath which lasted up to 1949, one would only laugh hearing that in the US anyone would seriously consider the two Papandreou's as pro-Communist. Further testimony is the fact that when Andreas Papandreou came to power in 1981, he reinforced the Greek-US and the Greek-EU ties despite his pre-election rhetoric. However, all these had an influence in shaping the Greek public opinion against the US government which lasted for many decades and still can be found in a considerable section of the Greek public opinion even though it is declining. As I explained in my paper (Papanikos 2022b), many Greeks now recognize the obvious: the Greek interests are common to US interests. The US public includes a strong Greek-American community and most importantly a considerable number of US philhellenes, unparallel to any other ethnicity, which, unfortunately, has not been exploited by the official Greek foreign policy over the years as I explained in detail in my paper (Papanikos, 2022b).

There are many academics and researchers whom confuse Greek stance with other anti-US attitudes around the world. In many other countries in the world, fanatics hate the people of the US and their way of life. In Greece they love the American way of life but they disagree with US policy if it is not to their liking. They are two completely different attitudes. This important difference in anti-US attitudes is not emphasized and many Greeks with such attitudes do not comprehend the difference.

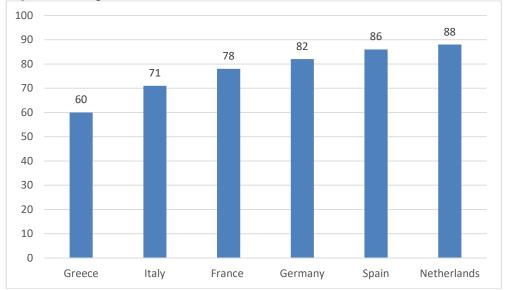


Figure 1. European Public Condemns Russian Invasion (%)

Source: Politico (https://www.politico.eu/article/poll-show-european-back-ukraine-path-to-eu-mem bership/#)

Figure 2 shows that 34% of Greeks justified the Russian invasion even though they consider it unacceptable. I guess the difference of the 6% from the finding reported in Figure 1 can be interpreted that this portion of the Greek public opinion not only considered the invasion understandable, but acceptable as well. The way that the question is posed makes it difficult to interpret the responses. What do the 66% of the Greek public opinion think? Do they think that it is not understandable or that it is acceptable?

Table 1 is of greater interest because it reveals what is really in the back of the minds of most Greeks. The great majority of Greeks (58% in February and 63% in March) support the creation of an EU army. This is much higher than the ones who condemned the Russian-Belarus invasion. It is much higher than any other EU country. Why is this the case and for what purpose? This seems to contradict the previous finding, but it does not.

Almost all of the Greeks who favor an EU army would respond that they want such an army to protect Greece from a potential invasion from Turkey. They do not have Russia in mind, but Turkey. Nobody in Greece fears a Russian invasion as they do in all other countries, which are close to Russia and were part of the Soviet Union's sphere of influence.

34 30 25 19 20 15 13 11 10 9 10 Greece Italy France Germany Spain Netherlands

Figure 2. The Russian Invasion was Unacceptable but Understandable (%)

Source: Politico (https://www.politico.eu/article/poll-show-european-back-ukraine-path-to-eu-mem bership/#)

Table 1. Support for a European Union Army (%)

	February 2022	March 2022				
Greece	58	63				
Italy	27	35				
France	38	51				
Germany	27	36				
Spain	32	51				
Netherlands	26	27				

Source: Politico (https://www.politico.eu/article/poll-show-european-back-ukraine-path-to-eu-mem bership/#)

Even though the subject of this paper is not the public opinion of the EU countries, the results of the pollster show an apparent contradiction between condemnation and action. Countries like the Netherlands, for example, whose public opinion measurements show a strong condemnation of the Russian-Belarus invasion of 88% and 91% in the two figures, only 26% in February and 27% in March supported the establishment of an EU army, which presumably will protect the EU countries on the occasion of a Russian invasion. Rich in words, poor in action. These public opinion results should be used to explain the meaning of the phrase, "put your money where your mouth is". Many EU countries cannot find their mouth when it comes to money. They expect the US taxpayers to pay for the protection of their democracy and freedom.

If the media echoes people's public opinion, as I think they do, then one should expect, on average, a pro-Ukrainian Greek stance on this war. Of course, given the divisiveness of the Greek public opinion, then many Greek newspapers and other media which are available in Greece today will represent all possible views on the

issue. In this paper, I concentrate on the most important ones, which is determined solely by their popularity as measured primarily by their circulation numbers. Some surprising findings emerge even from a newspaper that is traditionally against whatever the US supports and stands for in the international arena.

The Quantitative Content Analysis

Three daily journals (*Kathimerini*, *TA NEA/TO VIMA* and *EFSYN*) are used in this paper's quantitative and qualitative content analysis. These newspapers represent the mainstream Greek public opinion broadly defined to cover the entire political spectrum, excluding the extreme right and the extreme left, which, in Greece is a relatively small percentage of the popular vote of less than 10%. The political parties representing these two extremes publish their own newspapers, but their circulation is very small, even smaller than their votes in parliamentary elections, because many of their supporters read the mainstream newspapers. In any case, these newspapers are the most popular in Greece. All of them have websites which are very popular, and two of them even have their own TV broadcasting stations, which, again, are widely viewed.

The "mainstream" is broadly defined to include all three political ideologies that have dominated Greek politics since the fall of the dictatorship in 1974. *Kathimerini* is a very popular daily newspaper which circulates every day except Mondays. This newspaper can be considered as representative of the right and the center-right political ideology. It circulates as a broadsheet, permitting the coverage of many more issues on its front page. The other two are tabloids. The newspapers *TA NEA & TO VIMA* represent the center and a part of the center left. *TO VIMA* is included because it is the Sunday version of the newspaper *TA NEA*, which circulates every day except Sundays. These two newspapers have their own very popular TV stations that devote many hours to news. The third newspaper is *EFSYN*, which represents part of the center-left and the left political ideology. It circulates every day except Sundays.

Table 2 reports data on the front-page coverage of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict of the three Greek newspapers from 1 December 2021 to 28 February 2022. Not shown in the table is the frequency, which was increasing as the day of the invasion was approaching. *Kathimerini* has continuously covered the issue on the front page from 5 February 2022 until the day of the invasion (24 February 2022). *TA NEA* uninterruptedly covered the Russian-Ukrainian issue on its front page from the 3 February 2022 with one exception of 11 February 2022. However, even on that day, the newspaper was advertising a book of the Russian president's

⁸This distinction of the distribution of the newspapers between tabloids and broadsheet determines different news agendas. As Tumber & Palmer (2004, p. 81) put it, "The tabloid agenda is driven by hard news values, dictating a focus on the major facts of any set of events, with a low degree of analysis of related material but with a relatively strong focus on the main principles that drive policy, whereas the broadsheet agenda is also driven by a desire to present maximum possible background and analytic material." The evidence of this study does not reject their statement.

autobiography. Similarly, *EFSYN* had the issue covered on its front page from 14 February 2022 with only one exception, that of 19 February 2022.

These different approaches in prioritizing the Russia-Ukraine issue are also reflected on the total front-page coverage reported in Table 2. During the December 2021-February 2022 period, Kathimerini published 69 issues. In 55 of them, or 80% of the total, the Russia-Ukraine issue was covered on the front page. The simple mentioning of the subject appeared in 48% of the total issues circulated during this period and 32% appeared as a headline, which, in many cases included a picture, attracting the interest of its readers. The newspaper TA NEA and its sister Sunday newspaper TO VIMA was published 84 times during this period, of which 13 were issues of the newspaper TO VIMA. The Russian-Ukrainian theme covered 57% of the front page of the two newspapers, both as simple news (36% of the total issues published) and as a headline (21% of the total number of issues). The newspaper EFSYN was published 71 times during this period. In 65% of them, the Russian-Ukrainian issue was not mentioned at all on the front page. Ten times out of 71 issues, the Russian-Ukrainian theme appeared as a headline and all were after the 14 February 2022, which includes the four days of the invasion. All these days were covered by the newspaper as headlines. However, this was true for all newspapers.

Table 2. General Front Page Coverage of the Russian-Ukrainian Issue from 1 December 2021 to 28 February 2022

	Kathime	rini	TA NEA (EFSY	N
Front page Coverage	Number of issues	%	Number of issues	%	Number of issues	%
No Mention	14	20	36	43	46	65%
Simple Mention	33	48	30	36	15	21%
Headline	22	32	18	21	10	14%
Total	69	100	84	100	71	100

Source: Author's calculations.

Another important issue is whether the Russian-Ukrainian conflict was linked to direct Greek interests. In this case, what was investigated was not only that the issue was covered on the front page, but Greece was explicitly mentioned. It did not include the general mentioning of the EU and/or NATO of which Greece is a member as well. Table 3 reports the number of times and the percentage of the front-page coverage of the issue with a specific reference to the Greek interest.

Table 3. Front Page Coverage of the Russian-Ukrainian Issue Mentioning Greek Interests from 1 December 2021 to 28 February 2022

	Total Issues	Mentioning	Mentioning	
		Greek Interests	Greek Interests	
		(total)	(%)	
Kathimerini	69	14	17	
TA NEA & TO VIMA	84	11	16	
EFSYN	71	6	8	

Source: Author's calculations.

The two newspapers – *Kathimerini* and *TA NEA/TO VIMA*—covered the issue emphasizing Greek aspects in 17% and 16% of the total issues respectively. These low numbers are not so surprising because a general analysis of the entire content of the two newspapers –not reported in this paper—will show that Kathimerini has a broader global perspective in all its themes relative to other newspapers. This is also true for the Sunday newspaper TO VIMA even though it is a tabloid; their readership is different. Kathimerini's form of circulation as a broadsheet relative to the other two newspapers which are published as tabloids, explains the global perspective of its coverage. Similar evidence was reported by Tumber & Palmer (2004) for four British newspapers covering the war in Iraq. Furthermore, a more thorough analysis will show that even on the front page, Kathimerini publishes a commentary-a sort of editorial—which provides a more informative international perspective of any issue covered. During this period, I have identified 11 such editorials (actually 9 plus two very important comments with pictures), or 16% of the total issues, which were published on the front page and relate to the Ukrainian-Russian topic, with or without a Greek interest. These are briefly discussed in the next section of this paper.

The quantitative content analysis of the front pages of the newspapers has a qualitative dimension as well. When a newspaper decides not to cover the issue at all, it may be interpreted that the editors have decided that this issue is not important for the Greek public. After all, without coverage (a quantitative aspect), nothing can be said about the newspapers' stance on the issue (a qualitative aspect) apart from the obvious fact that there is no interest and other news were considered more important. With this in mind, the following section provides preliminary, but, I think, irrefutable evidence as of the three newspapers' stance on the Russian-Belarus invasion of Ukraine.

The Qualitative Content Analysis

This section is devoted to the stance of the three newspapers on the issue of the Russia-Ukraine conflict. As mentioned in the previous section, *Kathimerini*, because of its type of broadsheet, provided a few commentaries; some will be analyzed in this section. It seems that this newspaper had the most informative coverage of the conflict, which a good conspiracy theory alleges is primarily due to its inside information.

If the full coverage of the issue is taken into consideration, the Russia-Ukraine conflict was more neutral and less controversial than other areas of political conflict in Greece. One possible explanation is that these three newspapers draw its readership from a wide ideological spectrum with ambiguous opinions about the issue. Even though it is very difficult to contain these newspapers into specific areas of interest, I may risk to say that, even though it is not so obvious to the average reader, *Kathimerini* echoed mostly the US point of view, while *TA NEA & TO VIMA* mostly reverberated the EU positions/stance on the issue and *EFSYN* mostly chose to ignore the issue altogether, even though in general, in all its political themes, the newspaper expresses an anti-US stance rather than a pro-Russian one.

The above qualitative analysis applied to the pre-invasion phase. Once the invasion took place, then all three newspapers were unequivocally against the Russian-Belarus invasion. I analyze in detail how the invasion was covered by the three newspapers on their front pages the day after the Russian-Belarus invasion of Ukraine. For all three newspapers, their first issue after the war circulated on Friday, 25 February 2022.

I will start with the newspaper of the left, the *EFSYN*, because it is of great interest how they covered the invasion. During the pre-invasion phase, the newspaper had an indifferent, slightly anti-US stance on the issue. My interpretation is that the newspaper—which appeals to many strands of the Greek intellectual left—has a general anti-war stance. This part of the public opinion believes—for whatever reason—all wars are initiated by the US. Russia would never dare to invade a European country and start a war in Europe. Again, for unexplained reasons they considered Russia as a pro-peace country. The newspaper was taken by surprise which might explain its strong condemnation of the Russian-Belarus invasion of Ukraine.

One would have expected that the newspaper would play a blame game. Surprisingly, its front page totally and unequivocally criticized Russia without any strings attached to its position. On the top of its front page (see the appendix for the front page of the newspaper), it had in large capital font: 'NO TO THE INVASION OF UKRAINE' and then with lower case letters that Russia opened Pandora's Box. It was also mentioned that all political parties of Greece condemn the invasion. It cites on the front page what the president of the Hellenic Republic said, along with the prime minister and the leader of the official opposition. All of them condemned the Russian invasion beyond any doubt. At the right of the front page, the newspaper printed four photographs from demonstrators in Russia, Germany, Greece and Portugal all with banners against the war. Also, on the front page there was reference to the military advancement of the Russian army; the economic sanctions to be imposed by the EU, the USA and Britain; the economic impact on the financial markets; the markets of energy and goods; and the antiwar demonstrations all over the world including in Russia itself. At the bottom of the front page the newspaper with capital large font wrote: 'NO TO WAR.' Contrary to the other two newspapers' front pages which are presented below, EFSYN on the front page had no other issue but the Russian-Belarus invasion of Ukraine. My interpretation of this strong reaction, as mentioned above, is that the newspaper in general is propeace and never expected that Russia would invade Ukraine. Most probably, the editors of the newspapers thought that the whole story was a usual US propaganda.

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⁹As a matter of fact, this interpretation squares well with my own conspiracy theory approach to this invasion. According to it, it is the US which prompted Russia to invade Ukraine. Prompting has two interpretations: a strong and a weak one. The strong alleges that the US and Russia are in full agreement as to the extent of this invasion. The victims will be the rest of the world. The weak version is that the US acted alone and tricked Russia into invading Ukraine. In this case, all countries of the world, including Russia, are the victims. The only winner will be the US. This presupposes that there are no accidents like a full-fledged nuclear war. A conspiracy theory is like a myth or a story. The only thing which is required is to have a good narrative and some elements of truth. It must have good and bad guys.

Quite possible they felt somehow betrayed by this Russian action of violence and they showed it with strong front-page coverage.

The other two newspapers presented the invasion extensively, but not exclusively (see the appendix for their frontpages). It was in their headlines and provided many analyses. It is of interest that both newspapers devoted space to discuss the economic implications of the invasion, emphasizing the impact on Greece's economy. Contrary to *EFSYN*, this shows a self-centered approach, i.e., a Greek economic perspective. Both newspapers condemned the Russian invasion, but again, not as strongly as the *EFSYN* newspaper. *Kathimerini* had a more extensive and analytical approach. Its broadsheet print permitted the publication of two analyses: a short one called "main article" and a larger one called "commentary". The short one used very soft language which argued that borders do not change using violence and that Greece, once again, should be on the right side of history and choose not to be neutral and rather align itself with its allies without explicitly mentioning them. There was not a direct reference to Russia, but a general statement that Greece's stance should be in accordance with international law.

The longer article on the front page had a stronger title, "geopolitical earthquake". This article also used moderate language, but is critical of both Russia and the US because the latter gave a bad example by supporting non-democratic regimes using force and invasions in the past. It concludes that Russia will be alone in this war and its economy cannot support its aspirations. Again, for a newspaper which many think take a pro-US stance, such a position on the first day of the Russian invasion comes as a surprise. The anti-US newspaper, *EFSYN*, had no mention of the US and did not play the blame game. On the other hand, the alleged pro-US newspaper, *Kathimerini*, blamed the US for its past for leaving a bad example for Russia to follow. On the other hand, the newspaper *TA NEA* does not seem to take a very strong position against the Russian invasion either. Instead, it chose to analyze what the economic and the military impact of the invasion will be.

In concluding the above content analysis of the front pages of the three newspapers, all of them condemned the Russian invasion. However, what comes as a surprise is the language and the focus used by each newspaper. One would have expected stronger language by the pro-government, pro-US newspaper, but instead it was the left-oriented newspaper of *EFSYN* which used stronger language. One explanation might be that a part of the Greek public supports Russia because of its historical and cultural ties with Greece. Most probably this readership is more conservative and traditional than the average Greek public. Thus, *Kathimerini* and *TA NEA* echoed this part of the Greek public opinion by choosing to use softer language in condemning the invasion. Nevertheless, all three newspapers had a clear anti-Russian message for their readers.

As mentioned above. *Kathimerini* published a series of commentaries on the front page during the December 2021-Febrauray 2022 period. The commentary of the next day of the war was analyzed above. The rest of this section is devoted to the other commentaries. Some of them were prophetic.

The first commentary of the period was published on 2 December 2021. This was written on the occasion of the Greek Prime Minister's visit to Russia on 8

December 2021. The article is well written and emphasized the economic relationships between Greece and Russia which, however, are subject to the political relations between the West and Russia. It is of interest to note that this article cites the general secretary of NATO as saying that if Russia invades Ukraine, NATO will not intervene. Even if you do not plan to do it, you should not state it because gives the wrong (?) signal to Russia. It tells them that they can invade and there will be no military reaction from NATO. What was the purpose of this statement? Is it deterrence or encouragement?

The next commentary appeared on 15 December 2021. Again, it is repeated that there will be no military support for Ukraine if Russia invades. What comes next as a real surprise is what the commentary suggests: Ukraine should yield to some of Russia's demands. The article is devoted to one particular economic sanction, that of SWIFT, which the newspaper, very prophetically, suggests will be very damaging for Russia, but for Europe as well and will reinforce the US dollar. Thus, a good conspiracy theory suggests that if the invasion is good for US and bad for Russia and Europe, then the US has no interest in discouraging it. ¹⁰

On 11 January 2022, the newspaper covered the meeting of the Russian and US deputy Foreign Ministers in Geneva. The Russian minister said that Russia does not plan an invasion. The newspaper comments that this creates a small window to diplomacy.

The next commentary appeared on the 12 January 2022 and was devoted to the role of the EU which, from an international political point of view, is very weak. As a result, and despite its strong economy, Europe is not seated at the same table as Russia and the US in the discussions of the future political architecture of Europe. The article blames Europe for not having a common foreign policy and its own military force. It appears that the invasion solved both problems. The EU developed a strong common foreign policy and the discussion now is about creating an EU army.

The next commentary was published on 20 January 2022. It dealt with the issue of the Ecumenical Patriarcheon of Constantinople and how Russia wants to use it to serve its own political ambitions in the area. This split extends to the Ukrainian church because the Ecumenical Patriarcheon recognized it as an autocephaly (independent) church, and thus has created political skirmishes which added to the discontent that some Greeks felt about Russia.

The next piece is not commentary but front-page coverage of the meeting of the Russian and US foreign affairs ministers. It was published on the 21 January 2022. The newspaper chose to emphasize that the US president's alleged statements that there are small- and large-scale invasions was misinterpreted. Somehow, this

Compare this with the Afghanistan.

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¹⁰To take my conspiracy further from what I said in Papanikos (2022d), the US did not expect such fierce resistance from the Ukrainian people. They thought that everything would be over in a few days. As I said in my paper, US fears its own domestic public opinion, which now strongly opposes the Russian-Belarus invasion and asks US to act. Similar are the effects in other capitals of the western democratic world. The US government as well as the German government are in a very difficult position. If the Ukrainians did not resist, everything would have been much easier.

confirms a conspiracy theory that the US would not object a Russian invasion because this serves its own strategic interests as I explained in Papanikos (2022d).

The commentary of the 27 January 2022 is more philosophical and echoed something that has appeared in many analyses elsewhere in the western world. The difference between Russia and the US is a conflict of two completely different political worlds. It is a struggle between a system of autocracy and collectivism against a system of democracy and individualism. And the commentary concludes that it is from this prism that the Ukrainian crisis should be analysed. A very good commentary, but it is far away from the interests of the average reader of the newspaper.

The next commentary of the 10 February 2022 is devoted to the French president's visit to Russia. However, what is of interest is the announcement by US officials that Russia will invade Ukraine within the next two weeks. The next commentary on 17 February 2022 discusses the US prediction that Russia will invade Ukraine on the 16 February 2022 and concludes that predictions are risky to make. Another conclusion of the article is that whatever happens in Ukraine, both Russia and the US will emerge as winners.

The next two commentaries appeared over the next two days of the invasion, the 25 and 26 February 2022. The first was analysed above and the second is devoted to the refugee crisis.

The analysis of these commentaries which appeared on the front-page show that the pre-invasion stance was more neutral by *Kathimerini* than one would have expected. This is also true for the other two tabloid newspapers. In many cases they chose to ignore the issue. The actual invasion changed everything and all three newspapers unconditionally condemned the Russian-Belarus invasion. The same stance continued in the post invasion phase, but this is still ongoing and an analysis should wait until the invasion is over.

Conclusions

The analysis of the three Greek newspapers' front-page coverage of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in the pre-invasion phase and the first day of the invasion reveals some unexpected observations. Firstly, all newspapers unequivocally condemned the Russian-Belarus invasion of Ukraine. Secondly, the newspaper which usually echoes the left ideas in Greece and anti-US feelings used the strongest language to condemn the invasion. The other two newspapers, especially the one which is allegedly pro-US, used softer language and a sort of blame game on the US's past behavior of invading countries thus setting a bad example and essentially a 'go-ahead' message to Russia. My interpretation is that this was done to appease a conservative right-wing readership who still strongly values the historical and cultural ties with Russia. In other words, we condemn Russia but we do the same thing for the US. Then, it becomes a matter of principle and not a pro-Russian (anti-US) anti-Russian (pro-US) stance.

As this paper is part of a larger project, future research should look at the other mass media in Greece, especially the TV channels and the newspapers which express more extreme positions in favor of Russia. It would be of interest in the latter case if the readership of these newspapers increased after the invasion.

In addition, the dynamics of the shaping of the Greek public opinion should be researched. The Russian-Belarus invasion of Ukraine may mark the beginning of a permanent shift of the Greek public away from favoring a pro-Russian Greek foreign policy resulting to fostering even further the ties with the EU and US. There are many voices for a common EU policy when it comes to foreign policy, to the dependency on energy sources and to defense.

In the very long term, this invasion might make Europe great again. A United Europe, as I mentioned in Papanikos (2022c), is much stronger than Russia and in some aspects stronger than the US. What it lacks though is a political unity and a committed leadership. Unfortunately, in the modern world, a few Athenians and Thespies cannot fight for Europe as they did in the Battle of Marathon. Even in that battle the two city-states were fighting alone for all Greeks and Europeans alike. Today this would have been equivalent if Germany—the strongest nation in EU was fighting to defend European values along with a small country, e.g., Greece. I think the commitment of Germany to spend more on military—actually more than what Russia is spending—and, given the superior German technology and industrial advancement, makes it more than capable of defending Europe. It does not need even the small country of "Thespis", but Greece must play this role. It owes it first to itself and its glorious past. Most importantly it can play a leading role and is legitimized as no other country in the world to act in the name of democracy and freedom. The public opinion of the free world will follow as it seems that it follows now the heroic resistance of Ukrainian people. Historical Greece can show to the world that this war is not against Russia at all and of course not against Russian people, but it is a battle against a bad tyranny, a bad autocracy and a bad oligarchy. There are good tyrants, good autocrats and good oligarchs but I leave to examine this issue in a future research.

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APPENDIX: Front Pages of Newspapers

Front Page of Kathimerini on 25 February 2022

EISPRAXIS ΗΛΕΚΤΡΟΝΙΚΟΣ ΦΑΚΕΛΟΣ ΟΦΕΙΛΕΤΩΝ







Ο ΠΡΟΕΔΡΟΣ ΤΟΥ ΙΣΡΑΗΛ ΧΕΡΤΣΟΓΚ: Η ΣΧΕΣΗ ΜΑΣ ΕΝΔΥΝΑΜΩΝΕΤΑΙ



Ημερήσια Πολιτική και Οικονομική Εφημερίδα

ΑΘΗΝΑ, ΠΑΡΑΣΚΕΥΗ 25 ΦΕΒΡΟΥΑΡΙΟΥ 2022

Η πιο σκοτεινή ώρα της Ευρώπης

Ρωσική επέλαση προς το Κίεβο – Κυρώσεις από ΗΠΑ, Ε.Ε.



για τσουνάμι ακρίβειας και επιπτώσεις στον τουρισμό Σελ. 5, 22, 23, 27, 28

Πόλεμος και οικονομία EEA. S

«Πώς έχασα το τσεκ IV».

που πόννη Σουλιώτη, από τη ΖΑΠΟΡΙΖΙΑ ΣΕλ. 3 «Ο κόσμος τρέχει, ακούμε βόμβες». Ελληνες της Ουκρανίας μιλούν στην «Κ» Σελ. 4 Μίνι κραχ στα χρηματιστήρια Σελ. 29

APOPA ETHN «K»

ΚΩΣΤΑΣ ΥΦΑΝΤΗΣ Η επώδυνη πραγματικότητα Σελ. 6 ΤΙΜΟΘΙ ΓΚΑΡΤΟΝ ΑΣ Η Ευρώπη θα αλλάξει για πάντα Σελ. 7

ΣΗΜΕΡΑ

ΜΕ ΚΟΚΚΙΝΟ ΔΑΝΕΙΟ

Επιδότηση έως €210 για ευάλωτα νοικοκυριά

ΘΕΩΡΕΙΟ

Νέο δόγμα στο ΝΑΤΟ

Αλέξανδρος Ισαρης: πέθο

Μήνυμα επιμονής στις διεκδικήσεις

Νέες υπερπιήσεις από Τουρκία

ωρες μετά την ενάρει των πραξών στα ρωσοσυκραν νορα. Η Αθάνα παρακολο ψικραμμία αλλά και ετοι το συνεκιζόμενη τουρκικ τοποίπση, στο πεδίο καί ρητορικά, μόλιε λίγα 24ω; τις διαδικασίες ελληνοτοι διαλόγου. Σελ. 6



ΜΑΘΙΟΥ ΜΠΟΓΔΑΝΟΣ Kuvnyoc αρχαιοκαπήλων

Ο βοηθός εισαγγελέα του Μανκάταν μιλάει στην «Κ»

KYPIO APOPO

Με την πυξίδα της Ιστορίας

ΣΧΟΛΙΟΙ ΤΟΥ ΝΙΚΟΥ ΚΩΝΣΤΑΝΤΑΡΑ

Γεωπολιτικός σεισμός

ος πολλές κώρες, τι φιλελεύθης πλημος κραίο ομισμόπετείω έντονος, οποδινα-μεθείας Ο ΟΗΕ. Η Κατιστέρουβη, όμες, το τέχει το ΟΗΕ. Η Κατιστέρουβη, όμες, το τέχει ένα συνεμένη. Ο Πουίτα συτιμετών πίζει δύο συνικεβέλατοι εμποδεται πώρο μένα τοικομά πλειστούδιουμε πο μένα τοικομά πλειστούδιουμε πο τον στιμέζες, τι Κίνα, έχει επινδώσει απο συνεμόμενο αυτίθερούπτο και ονόπτυξο. Με τες ΗΠΑ και την ΕΕ. να συσπερώνον τοιλιμέτε το Κίνα, έχει επινδώσει στι ντια, με της Κένι να καπάζει το δικό της συμφέρου, ο Πούπτο -παρότι επικέθευ-νος- θα ένται μένας.

Επιστροφή στα γραφεία



Front Page of TA NEA on 25 February 2022



Front Page of EFSYN on 25 February 2022



