Greek Cypriot Media Development and Politics

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Abstract

The article examines the factors and conditions that influenced the development of the Greek Cypriot media in Cyprus. On the one hand it traces the link between changes in the media landscape and on the other it pursues the relationship between politics, technology and economy. It appears that the course of political life contributed to either the increase or decrease of the number of newspapers in connection with their political and ideological positions. Information from power holders or elite groups about conspiracies was often uncritically published and while pluralism does exist, extreme polarisation is observed on critical issues, which limits public debate.

Keywords: Press, media development, politics, Cyprus

> 'The public opinion must learn the truth and the Interior Ministry would facilitate this by issuing an official statement. The people need to know the truth, which will enable them to disapprove in the stronger terms possible those who believe that they could make plans to trouble this country's peace, but also in order to apportion responsibilities and ask that sanctions be imposed on those competent persons, whoever they are, in case all that [information] about a conspiracy would prove just bubbles [groundless]. It's the government's duty to explain immediately and at the same time announce sanctions against the ones and the others according to the results of the investigation on the conspiracy' (Ελευθερία [Eleftheria], 10 August 1960).

The excerpt quoted here summarises the reaction of the newspaper *Eleftheria* to information leaked by official sources to the media about a conspiracy to cause trouble and 'bloodshed' on the day of the declaration of Cyprus Independence, on 16 August 1960. In fact, it highlights the paper's perception of the role of the press. First, the people have the right to know the truth; second, by knowing the truth, the people can position themselves on the specific subject; third, they can on the one hand impute responsibility and, on the other hand ask for the punishment of officials spreading unfounded information. In a single, albeit long sentence, the newspaper laid down the fundamental principles that should govern the relations between the media, the public and the power-holders. In the background of this reaction was the question of the role of some newspapers as mere disseminators of leaked 'information' by official sources. It raises two questions related to the extent to which the principles laid down were properly applied and respected by the press as well as to the nature of relations entertained between the press and the power holders.

The aim of this article is to briefly examine Greek Cypriot media development and interaction with authority, i.e. power holders and elite groups. More specifically, it examines the development of the media in association with politics, political power and other factors that influenced its course. This is a first attempt to delineate the subject, since more extensive research is needed to present a complete account. For obvious reasons due to the language barrier, accessibility, and deeper knowledge of the subject, I could not include in this study the Turkish Cypriot press. The main argument here is that the development of Greek Cypriot media and politics appears closely linked, with the media adequately responding to their watchdog and fourth estate roles in rare cases only.

As in most aspects of the life of the Republic of Cyprus the media developed mainly in two phases, namely the Makarios and post-Makarios eras. The first one began after the Agreements leading to independence (February 1959) and extended through to 1980; the second phase developed from 1980 onwards. Makarios' combined offices as Archbishop and President of the Republic, and his charisma imposed him above all people and institutions (Markides, 1977). This even extended beyond his death in 1977; he turned into the main reference figure, a target or a source of legitimation for the media. Each of the two phases can be divided into specific periods within which media development displays different characteristics. But note that no clear cut boundaries can be set between these periods as the passage from one period to the next is gradual.

Media Development

The state controlled broadcasting channels of the Cyprus Broadcasting Corporation (*Ραδιοφωνικό Ίδρυμα Κύπρου* – RIK[1]) monopolised the airwaves for 30 years; private broadcasting first started operation in 1990 (radio) and 1992 (television), which is a turning point in media development. Both the landscape and RIK were to change fundamentally in the years that followed.

The press operating at the time of the London-Zurich agreements that led to Cyprus independence was to undergo significant changes in interesting ways. Features of its development can be deduced from the study of data relating to new titles published and the life duration of each publication. It is noticeable that three of today's daily newspapers, six Greek plus the only English language daily, were first published before 1959.[2] No old weeklies have survived, other than mouthpieces of trade unions.

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1 Established by the British as Cyprus Broadcasting Service (1953 – Radio, 1957 – TV) changed to Cyprus Broadcasting Corporation upon Cyprus independence.

2 Today's dailies by year of publication: *Cyprus Mail* (English, 1945), *Αλήθεια* [Alithia] (1952 weekly, 1982 daily), *Φιλελεύθερος* [Phileleftheros] (1955), *Χαραυγή* [Haravgi] (1956), *Σημερινή* [Simerini] (1976), *Μάχη* [Machi] (1994 – second period) *Πολίτης* [Politis] (1999).

The study of *Table 1* provides us with interesting data regarding the evolution of the press:[3]

- More than 90 daily and weekly newspapers were published over a 30-year period (1960-1990); three per year on average, but only one in three survived for more than two years. The year with the highest number of new titles per year is 1981, with nine, followed by 1974 with eight, 1985 with seven, and 1964, 1982 and 1987 with six. Interestingly the biggest number of first time publications over a three-year period occurred from 1980 to 1982 with 18 titles, followed by the period 1974 to 1976 with 15 titles.

- In some cases, the proliferation of new titles was accompanied by the disappearance of others that had published for many years; this closing down was not always simultaneous, it could precede or follow by one year.

- A closer look at the development of the press reveals that these phenomena, i.e. the massive arrival and survival or conversely the disappearance of newspapers coincided with significant events, political, social, economic or other.

Significant political events can be associated with changes in the media landscape. Some of the existing media ceased publication, for various reasons, because they could no longer sustain enough audience to justify their existence. Conversely, new media could represent new ideologies and respond to the need to voice and circulate new ideas. In most cases, newspaper enterprises were family businesses, and the launch of a new title could also mean an attempt by the publisher to promote his ideas or gain political influence and authority.

Thus, only four publications (the daily *Μάχη* [Machi], 1960, and weeklies *Εθνική* [Ethniki], 1959, *Θάρρος* [Tharros], 1961, and *Συναγερμός* [Synagermos], 1962) out of those that appeared between 1959 and two years after Cyprus independence survived through to 1974. All four publications were supporters of the pursuance of *enosis*, union with Greece; this pro-*enosis* trend was strengthened by another two dailies, *Αγών* [Agon] and *Πατρίς* [Patris], as this goal from 1964, became the choice of the Greek Cypriot leadership following the collapse of bi-communality in Christmas of 1963. Equally, six newspapers with a 10 to 38-year-long history, ceased publication in between 1960 and 1964, of which *Χρόνος* [Chronos] and *Παρατηρητής* [Paratiritis] had been publishing in Limassol since 1925 and *Αγροτική* [Agrotiki] in Athienou. It seems that after independence the periphery started losing ground to the benefit of news distributed in the capital and eventually echoed island-wide concerns and ideas. The case of *Έθνος* [Ethnos] is also an interesting one as this daily, founded by 'the father' of the traditional right, Themistoklis Dervis, initially supported Yiannis Clerides in the first presidential elections of December 1959. It quickly shifted support for Makarios' candidacy to rally the new power, but this did not help, as it became the first paper to lose the battle for survival only weeks after independence.

In 1964, along with pro-*enosis* titles one populist daily *Τελευταία Ώρα* [Teleftea Ora] and one satirical weekly, *Σατιρική* [Satiriki], also appeared to voice anti-imperialist and anti-*enosis*

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3   The table was compiled from data in Christophorou, 1993 and further research for the period after 1985.

positions. *Τελευταία Ώρα* [Teleftea Ora] published daily to alert news of developing Anglo-American devilish conspiracy plans and imminent Turkish invasion activity. For some months it became a supporter of the Athens dictatorship, that seized power in April 1967, but it ended publication in December 1969 and was immediately replaced by *Μεσημβρινή* [Mesimvrini].

Other kinds of political events and processes that affected the course of the press were the reshaping of the political and party landscape. It began in 1968 after the pronounced shift by Makarios to the pursuance of independence instead of *enosis* and the ensuing creation of the first post-independence political parties. *Γνώμη* [Gnomi] (1968) and *Τα Νέα* [Ta Nea] (1969) were the first post-independence party mouthpieces, of DEK (National Democratic Party – *Δημοκρατικό Εθνικό Κόμμα*) and EDEK (Unified Democratic Union of the Centre – *Ενιαία Δημοκρατική Ένωση Κέντρου*). During this period, two new apolitical weeklies were also published for the first time, i.e. Ασύρματος [Asyrmatos] and Φακός [Fakos]. Attempts for a new daily (*Πρωινή/Νέα Πρωινή* [Proini /Nea Proini]) representing the voice of terrorist EOKA B were short lived, contrary to the fate of the more pro-Makarios evening paper *Απογευματινή* [Apogevmatini] (1972), published for more than 30 years. The same phenomenon of the publication of new press titles was repeated after the collapse of right wing parties *Ενιαίον* [Eniaion] and *Προοδευτική Παράταξη* [Progressive Front] and the formation of new parties, the centre DIKO (*Δημοκρατικό Κόμμα* – [Democratic Party]) and conservative DISY (*Δημοκρατικός Συναγερμός* – [Democratic Rally]) in 1976, along with the emergence of a new pro-Makarios power team to replace the conservatives. These changes in the party landscape following the blow of the coup against Makarios and the invasion of the Turkish Army, as well as the ousting of Glafcos Clerides from power were accompanied by the gradual disappearance of pro-*enosis*, opposition to Makarios titles that appeared from 1959 to 1964 or later, including the conservative newspaper *Ελευθερία* [Eleftheria]. In the landscape that emerged both the old and the newly published newspapers Ελεύθερος Λαός [Eleftheros Laos], Δημοκρατία [Dimokratia], Δημοκρατική [Dimokratiki], Ελευθερωτής [Eleftherotis] and Ελεύθερη Κύπρος [Eleftheri Kypros] supported Makarios. More important changes were brought about by the reshaping of politics in 1980 after the death of President Makarios. Without his uniting authority, the camp of his supporters fragmented and gave birth to new parties, NEDIPA (*Νέα Δημοκρατική Παράταξη* [New Democratic Front]), PAME (*Παγκύπριο Ανανεωτικό Μέτωπο* [Pancyprian Renewal Front]) and EK (*Ένωση Κέντρου* [Union of the Centre]). More importantly, politics evolved away from the Late President's omnipresence and influence, and genuine party competition started in earnest. The publication of party mouthpieces and other press organs raised the number of daily and weekly newspapers in 1981 to 32, the highest ever recorded (see further Christophorou, 1993).

Along with the above phenomena, the prospect of elections especially after 1980 offered an opportunity for the publication of new dailies or weeklies. Additional publications typically

occurred in the year prior to elections or in the year that the elections took place, but after the elections were over the major part of this press usually disappeared. Such examples were *Ελευθεροτυπία* [Eleftherotypia] of DIKO in 1980, *Κήρυκας* [Kirykas] of EK and *Κυπριακή* [Kypriaki] of PAME in 1981. When elections coincided with the emergence of new political forces, as they did between 1980-1983 and 1987-1988 the increase was even sharper. *Οικονομική* [Ikonomiki], *Επίκαιρη* [Epikeri], *Ελευθερία της Γνώμης* [Eleftheria tis Gnomis], *η Ώρα* [I Ora], *Παρασκήνιο* [Paraskinio], and *Εμπρός* [Embros] were all published in 1987. Similarly, many ceased publication during the same periods. The changing political environment was a contributory factor on the one hand to this proliferation of new titles, while on the other hand the possibility of acquiring public funds for the publication of electoral rolls played a part.

Technological developments together with the cost of modernisation and the benefits that came with it also affected the press. Thus, the dailies gained advantage from the ease that phototypesetting offered and in 1981-1982 they increased publication to seven times a week instead of six, filling the gap of 'dailies-free' Monday. The initial inclusion of 'Monday edition' below the daily title was soon to be removed. The 7/7 decision of the dailies was a deadly coup for all the weeklies as they could ill-afford the competition of papers that disposed more resources and had a regular, daily readership. Eight weekly and one daily newspaper – the more prominent of which were liberal *Κύπρος* [Kypros] (1952), *Σατιρική* [Satiriki] (1964), and *Ασύρματος* [Asyrmatos] (1968) – ceased publication and pluralism received a serious blow. Contrary, however, to several aborted attempts in 1984 and 1985, new weeklies published in 1987 (*Επίκαιρη* [Epikeri], *Ελευθερία της Γνώμης* [Eleftheria tis Gnomis], *Παρασκήνιο* [Paraskinio], and *Εμπρός* [Embros]) had a somewhat better fate, with *Paraskinio* circulating for eleven years and the others for three to four years.

Major changes in the 1990s were linked not only to technological advancement (computers, satellites, the Internet) but also to changes in the media landscape, namely the privatisation of broadcasting and the creation of commercial radio and television stations. Commercial broadcasting was introduced as a result of pressure by social forces and local authorities as well as the general climate in regard to technological progress and changes in European media policies. In the press sector, enterprises had already started shifting from family businesses to corporations and, when cross media restrictions were eased early in the millennium, some became all-media corporations. During the earlier period 1959 to 1964, all pro-*enosis* newspapers that survived beyond 1974 were owned by EOKA fighters (N. Sampson – *Μάχη* [Machi] *and Θάρρος* [Tharros]; F. Constantinides – *Συναγερμός* [Synagermos], and N. Koshis – *Αγών* [Agon]). Publishing offered the opportunity to capitalise on influence and authority gained through the owner's participation in the anti-colonial struggle. On the other side of the press landscape, *Εθνική* [Ethniki] and *Πατρίς* [Patris] were the mouthpieces of EOKA fighters also, promoting their radical support for *enosis*. Today, Dias Publishing and Alithia are all-media (Radio, Television and Press) companies, and Phileleftheros is owned, or affiliated to radio and press media.

The competition and the need for investment in technology together with other factors made it almost impossible for a new daily to survive. *Politis*, which was founded early in 1999 is the last daily newspaper to be added to the existing ones, however, the number of dailies was reduced from ten in 1990 to only six in 2010.[4] Newspapers became more than just papers, resembling supermarket multimedia packages; in addition to more pages and a more diverse content, special supplements and magazines, they offer CDs and DVDs as well as more traditional items, such as books. Supplements rarely cover social or political issues, historical events or other. The dominant subjects of publications normally include television programmes, cooking, and lifestyles and are mostly Cyprus editions of magazines published in Greece. It appears generally that the weight of the packet is more important than the content. In addition to the above, the connection of media content to corporate interests and editorial promotion of businesses has since become more than visible.

While the decline of partisan press continued, most of the dailies since the late 1980s have adopted a pluralistic approach in their selection of published political views and in their editorials (Ierodiakonou, 2003; Hadjikyriakos and Christophorou, 1996). That being said, this approach suffered when the issue treated related to the Cyprus Problem and in particular to that of the solution and the way to reach it. A stronger blow hit pluralistic content and positions following the rejection of the Annan Plan in 2004 and the subsequent polarisation between supporters and opponents of the proposed settlement (Christophorou, 2007). Most surprising in the ensuing situation is that following the election of Demetris Christofias to the Presidency, *Phileleftheros* abandoned its traditional choice, to support the governing team, irrespective of who was in power, and since 2008 has been active as an opposition newspaper.

Changes in the broadcasting sector started earlier than privatisation, in 1985, with the enforcement by law (initiated by DISY and AKEL) of fair coverage of political activity by parties and candidates on the public broadcaster, RIK. While in some respects the regulation violated editorial independence, it nevertheless was a pioneer measure as it changed fundamentally the rules of public debate; views other than those of the governing team and parties gained access to the airwaves on almost equal footing (Christophorou, 2003).

The operation of private channels in the early 1990s took place in an almost fully deregulated environment; the laws that allow their establishment provided only the basic framework for licensing and operation and proved insufficient to deal with the complex issues of commercial broadcasting. This made hard the task of the Cyprus Radio Television Authority, established by a new law in 1998, because the regulator had to cut back on broadcasters' practices and 'acquired' privileges that they viewed as their legitimate rights. The enforcement of rules on content aiming at the protection of minors, the audience or consumers, incorporated in Cyprus laws from EU

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4   The Number of daily newspapers was further reduced to five following *Μάχη's* [Machi] decision to publish weekly (27 June 2010).

directives, faced resistance on behalf of broadcasters as being excessively strict. In spite of regulation gaps, the lack of regulation experience and tradition, the new media landscape launched Cyprus into an era of televised democracy (Mavris, 1996).

Media, Power and Elite Groups

Eleftheria's comment at the beginning of this article shows that the relations between the power holders and the press in the first years of independence were marked by incidents that cannot be enviable either by democratic power or by decent media. In fact, the dissemination and publication of rumours in an uncritical manner started during the transitional period,[5] as early as in summer 1959, which marked also a first rift between the Makarios and Grivas camps (Ierodiakonou, 2003). Conspiracy theories in relation to internal politics or the Cyprus Problem or other issues have since then been abundantly published or aired. Even single democratic procedures and candidacies to political offices were connected to conspiracy and dark forces aiming at the destruction of the island. The fear of losing power led Spyros Kyprianou in 1978 to the 'disclosure' of a conspiracy against him and Cyprus, claiming a link between Tassos Papadopoulos, then Greek Cypriot negotiator in the inter-communal talks, a foreign diplomat and others. Similarly, in the year 2006, the press published information – first appeared in Athens and indirectly endorsed by the government spokesman about a conspiracy to oust Tassos Papadopoulos through the candidacy of Demetris Christofias.[6] On many occasions as was the case during the first years of independence, information originated in 'official' or government sources, but on other occasions the media created their own stories and theories. A prominent example was the 'discovery' by media in 1994 of the so-called 'Oxford group' – Greek and Turkish Cypriot academics and others – presented as secretly working to impose a solution in Cyprus against the interests of the people. Political leaders followed the media in denouncing this small group, implying that a handful of persons could promote and even impose a solution.[7]

The publication of conspiracy theories and similar information, particularly in times of scarcity of information sources, would create among the public a feeling, or the certainty that the leaders, the state and eventually Cyprus were threatened by some specific or vague or mysterious forces; political opponents were often the targets when the issue was about internal politics, sometimes with connections to dark outside forces, privileged targets as well. Even the European Union and its officials were often, both before and after the accession of Cyprus, presented as conspirators or enemies of Cyprus (Christophorou *et al.*, 2010).

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5   The transition to independence started in April 1959 with the formation of a transitional government and ended on Independence Day, 16 August 1960.
6   See newspapers, 27 June 2006.
7   ANT1 television channel broadcast the 'news' and almost all newspapers followed. See, newspapers, 27 September 1993.

In earlier years, the dissemination of such information by the press was most often built up on the initial 'news' which made the threat bigger and the danger imminent, often leading to popular mobilisation in support of the leaders. Publicity on telegrams and messages sent massively in support of the power holders (Ierodiakonou, 2003) further created a snowball effect with the ball being large enough to smash the whole island.

No doubt, several plans combined in some cases with underground activity have been developed in the 50 years of Cyprus independence. The phenomena described in the previous paragraphs, however, contributed to turning the grim atmosphere of Cyprus politics into a chaotic one. Demonising the other or their views led to a culture of non-tolerance and unavoidable conflict.

With regard to support for *enosis* or to Makarios in the 1960s, press positions were rather antagonistic, with media and groups of people each trying to prove that their support only was genuine. Personal or group interests and ideologies developed into polemics and enmity, while initial support to Makarios by *Agon* and *Machi* for example was opportunistic in order not to oppose the popular leader and lose readers.

The press generally supported the positions of the government on important issues, denying or refuting in some cases fundamental rights of the people, groups or individuals. For example, such was the case in connection with holding elections and the right of citizens to be candidates in opposition to the governing team or the leader. In the Republic's former years and in 1976, in the name of 'unity', the press supported that elections should be avoided, to the benefit of course of those in power, or that some people and formations had no right to be candidates (Hadjikyriakos and Christophorou, 1996). Even in recent years, contesting elections has been surrounded by suspicion in media reports as to the reasons behind it or its purpose.[8] On another note, the official views and positions have often been adopted as the only existing and acceptable truth and those that dare to object to it could face persecution.[9] The media not only tolerated such behaviour by power holders but they even endorsed it, simply denying freedom of opinion.

Under the above circumstances, a very strong pressure for consensus has been developing, crushing in some cases and silencing dissident or moderate voices (Christophorou, 2008, pp. 96, 97).

Conditions favouring or pressing for unanimity and one voice, until the 1980s, led to polarisation (see also Kitromilides, 1981), where a marginal role was left to one or two newspapers that would articulate different views or act as opposition to the government. Those newspapers, consistently expounding a negative editorial style and tone had never allowed a creative or

8   Such was the case of Christofias' presidential candidacy, presented as the means to oust Papadopoulos and make possible a solution against the interests and will of the people.

9   The most recent example is the amalgamated presentation of the supporters of the Annan Plan as people who were bribed by the Americans to promote the Plan, a claim put forward by former President Tassos Papadopoulos in 2004.

productive exchange of views or ideas – a true dialogue (Ierodiakonou, 2003). Thus, the most prominent feature of media has been an account and reflection of the picture of political forces, enhancing polarisation and strained relations, mostly leading to polemics (on polemics, see Foucault, 1984) rather than to a productive exchange of views and ideas. Today, with the abundance of media and pluralism, polarisation between official and opposing views has been modified. While pluralism is evident at first view, a closer look reveals that on core issues polarisation prevails. True political forces have access to the media to voice their views and positions; however the selection of news, or persons that speak or are invited, or excluded, all reveal that media follow agendas of their own, favouring persons or elite groups with similar or identical positions to theirs and/or including token opposition (Christophorou *et al.*, 2010).

Some media or journalists were paid by internal or foreign sources. Such examples were newspapers receiving funds from Athens to promote *enosis* in the 1960s and early 1970s. The creation and publication of *Patris* was funded by the Greek Government of the time, of Georgios Papandreou.

Conclusion

Media, as an agent which contributes to and is also dependent on social processes, developed in close relation to politics and major events. In the years up to the mid-1980s, political processes, such as elections, and developments that had an impact on the course of the island had a greater influence on media life. Since the mid-1980s, economy and technological advancements increased their role and influence and along with the decline of ideologies led to the disappearance of many newspapers, particularly the party mouthpieces and the weeklies.

Media practices turned them into propagators of power or elite group views, at times promoting designs targeting their opponents through the dissemination of unfounded information and conspiracy theories. This resulted in extreme polarisation and ultimately led to conflict.

The imposition through law of obligations to RIK to offer access to parties and candidates (1985) and the end of its monopoly on broadcasting in the 1990s increased dramatically the flow of information and dialogue. Moreover, the lack of substance and real debate is a major shortcoming.

It is undeniable that the early years of physical attacks against journalists and newspapers have gone since the 1960s. Information flow and dialogue on daily, mostly 'inoffensive' issues are normally taking place, in a decent and honest manner. When, however, the issue at stake is a 'significant' one or involving important interests, calm and critical approach of information usually fails, and is replaced by extremism and the will to annihilate opposing views and, if possible, opponents as well. Conditions of polarisation prevail and reflective views are crucially absent or drowned in the cacophony.

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Table 1:		Number of Newspapers Published or Closing Down		
Year	Start	Two years or more lifespan	End	Two years old or More
1959	3	17, 2	0	
1960	3	16, 20	4	14, 11
1961	1	19	1	
1962	4	13	4	37
1963	3	2,	3	12, 38
1964	6	6, 30+, 20, 12	2	15
1965	3		5	
1966	1		1	
1967	0		1	
1968	3	16, 6, 3	0	
1969	4	20	4	6
1970	2		2	2
1971	2	9	0	
1972	3	25+ Apogevmatini	3	
1973	1		2	6
1974	8	16, 2, 17, 7, 8, 4	5	68, 23, 19
1975	4	5	2	26, 12
1976	3	35+ (Simerini)	5	
1977	2	4	1	
1978	0	4	2	4
1979	1	31	0	
1980	3	16, 20	4	9, 19, 20
1981	9	2, 10	7	6, 4, 7
1982	6	15+ (Romiosyni)	4	8
1983	1		5	2, 2, 31, 15
1984	1		2	20
1985	7		1	
1986	0		4	
1987	6	3, 5, 5, 10, 4	1	
1988	3		2	
1989	2		2	20, 16
1990	0		3	5, 3, 4
1996 - 8	n.a	n.a.	Eleftherotypia (16), Agon (24), Paraskinio (11)	
Table compiled by Christophoros Christophorou, 2010.				

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