

# Mass Communications and Nationalism: The Politics of Belonging and Exclusion in Contemporary Greece

by Roza TSAGAROUSIANOU

Lecturer in Media Studies at the School of Communication and the Centre for Information and Communication Studies of the University of Westminster, United Kingdom.

## Introduction

On 10 December 1992, hundreds of thousands of Greek television viewers and radio listeners in Greece and Cyprus 'witnessed' a massive demonstration of 1,300,000 people against EC recognition of Greece's new northern neighbour under the name 'Macedonia' through its live television and radio coverage. On the same day, members of *Ethniki Stavroforia* (National Crusade), a small extreme nationalist group, entered an Athens magistrate's court and attacked three Greek citizens who were being prosecuted for claiming they were ethnic 'Macedonians'. In contrast to the former, this event received only marginal coverage as both broadcast and print media either ignored it or presented it as an incident of minor importance, partly because that day's mass demonstration, combined with the Greek government's efforts to safeguard the 'national interests' (i.e. the non-recognition of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) at the Edinburgh EC summit was considered to be the most significant by far news item of the day, but also because of the increasing 'nationalisation' of the universe of public debate in Greece, as I hope to demonstrate in the following pages. The markedly distinct media attitudes towards each of these two events were representative of a more general process of permeation of Greek public life - including the mass media - by nationalist discourse since the late 1980s.

This article will focus on some of the ways in which mass communications contribute to the unfolding of and sustain processes of imagination and invention of the 'nation' (Anderson 1983, p. 7; Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983)<sup>1</sup> and will delve into the role of mass communications in the articulation of 'exclusivist' societal definitions of the national community.

At this point, a note of caution is in order: the 'nationalisation' of communications or, more generally, of the universe of public discourse, is not an exclusively Greek, or Balkan phenomenon,<sup>2</sup> as it is often indicated by commentators succumbing to the 'irresistible' orientalist logic that has been awakened by the various forms of interethnic conflict and war in the Balkans. Indeed, as Schlesinger has pointed out it in his analysis of the BBC coverage of developments in Northern Ireland in the 1970s (1978, pp. 205-43), it could be argued that the aban-

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1 It should be emphasised that the proposed link between nationalism and communication should be distinguished from the functionalist communicative approach introduced by Deutsch (1966) primarily concerned with the role of communication in nation-building. In this article, I intend to examine the processes of definition of the nation through 'exclusion' and boundary-setting, and not processes of nation-building in general.

2 The existing research and information on the "nationalisation" of mass communication in former Yugoslavia (eg Radojkovic, 1994; Thompson, 1994; Turkovic, 1994) has led to arguments of this sort.

donment of the normative principle of 'media impartiality' in extraordinary, conflict situations for an - at least partial - adoption of 'national' considerations is not confined to the Balkans, but is also characteristic of 'Western' European and other 'non-oriental' societies.

## I. Nationalism in Greece: Past and Present

Nationalism in Greek society is by no means a new phenomenon. Nationalist rhetoric has been inextricably intermixed with different modalities of Greek national identity since the latter half of the eighteenth century. Nationalism and ethnocentrism had been prominent elements of Greek culture since the emergence of the intellectual movement of the 'neo-hellenic enlightenment' which shaped to a significant extent the modern Greek State and society. They provided the cornerstone of the post-war ideology of *ethnikofrosyni* (national-mindedness) that is, the post-war use of the 'nation' as the main principle upon which the regime based its legitimation, and of the establishment of authoritarian state apparatus. Indeed, this element of ethnocentrism has been reproduced and reinforced in numerous social contexts; through the cultivation of 'patriotism' in the school, the day to day contact with the state bureaucracy, the church, or military service, generations of Greeks have been inculcated the unproblematic continuity and sacredness of the Greek nation.<sup>3</sup> By the same token, social, political, ethnic and religious minorities inside Greece, and other societies outside it were defined as the 'other'; this 'other' being perceived at different times as linked to 'oriental backwardness', the 'communist threat', the 'slavic or islamic danger', 'western imperialism' or a combination of these elements.

The political situation after the Greek civil war (1945-1949) was legitimised through the constitutional assertion of what we could call 'national rights' at the expense of human rights. Political dissent was often classified as 'anti-national' behaviour (*antethniki sympertifora*), and the limits of acceptable political action were set and regulated by the politically dominant Greek army and its nationalist/anti communist allies within the country and abroad (cf. Haralambis 1985, pp. 47-104 and 222-42). Ethnic and religious minorities were either isolated and oppressed, or their very existence was not acknowledged and suppressed as they were considered to be a 'fifth column' within a state which had striven to achieve and convince itself of its ethnic homogeneity for most of the twentieth century.<sup>4</sup>

The fall of the seven-year-long dictatorship in 1974 was hailed as marking the end of authoritarian politics and of the recourse to nationalism for its legitimation. However, ethnocentrism and nationalism have proved to be resilient elements of Greek political culture and in the long term constituted serious obstacles to the process of enhancement of the relatively new democracy. The Greek mass media have been playing a significant role in the processes of reproduction and reinforcement of ethnocentric and nationalist discourse, as they have been sustaining 'official' representations of Greece as being a nation under threat from

3 See for example Frangoudaki, 1979; also for a good general analysis of the historical and cultural aspects of Greek society, see Campbell and Sherrard, 1968.

4 This is by no means exclusive to the Greek nation-state, as most Balkan and Near-East nation-states have emerged from the disintegrating multiethnic Ottoman empire. The twentieth century was marked by attempts to 'rectify' the 'incogruence' between the ethnic map of the area and the imperative of establishing nation-states based on the principle of ethnic homogeneity and monoculturalism.

its neighbouring states and a sense of societal insecurity<sup>5</sup> among Greeks. These representations have been crucial in the formation and maintenance of public attitudes regarding both ethno-religious minorities within Greece, and ethnic and religious groups in neighbouring countries.

## II. Scientific Nationalism in Cultural and Media Discourse

One of the strategies of construction of the 'nation' and its 'other' is the treatment of the 'nation' as an object of scientific knowledge. I would argue that, just as literary, artistic and popular, common-sense discourses, 'scientific' discourses are vehicles for narratives, central in the construction of the social - and in the imagination of the national community as I intend to demonstrate. Scientific discourses are particularly important as they are vehicles for narrating the nation and its 'Other', possibly more convincing than their 'non-scientific' counterparts as they are considered to be 'objective', and have been endowed with the authority of 'science' which is marked by specific language games inherent in the process of scientific investigation.<sup>6</sup> In any case, it should be stressed that the distinction between 'literary' and 'scientific' narrative forms has been the product of a process of more or less arbitrary selection and displacement (Foucault, 1973; Eagleton, 1983) and is by no means natural, or self-evident.

In this article, I will focus on strategies of construction of the nation through historiographical, anthropological and linguistic works and the dissemination of the definitions they produce through the mass media.

This recourse to 'scientific' discourses is not a phenomenon which appears exclusively in Greek society. The 'politicisation of history' (and one might add, of allied disciplines) constitutes a response to 'the ideological dislocations caused by the ending of the cold war' (Füredi, 1992, pp.1-16), and is thus not exclusively a phenomenon which appears only in Greek or Balkan societies. However, it could be argued that in the case of Greece, as in the case of most of its Balkan neighbours, this politicisation occupies a prominent position in the processes of forming and sustaining nationalist discourse and national identity.

Ethno-religious conflict assumes therefore the form of antagonism over history; as competing communities seek to project themselves to the past in an attempt to achieve their retrospective foundation, competing claims to that past are formulated and publicised. In the case of Greece, the phenomenon of scientific nationalism has been characterised mainly by the increasing activity and importance of nationalist cultural and political networks which has manifested itself through three distinct phenomena:

1) The establishment of a number of publishing houses (such as *Elloptia*, and *Risos*) whose 'mission' is to increase 'national self-awareness' through the dissemination of information to the average reader (and not the academic).

2) The reprinting of older 'nationalist' studies on Balkan history, folklore and ethnolinguistics.

<sup>5</sup> For a discussion and definition of the term 'societal insecurity' see O. Wæver et al, 1993.

<sup>6</sup> For the language games involved in scientific discourse see Lyotard's analysis of scientific knowledge (1984, pp. 18-36)

3) The emergence or re-emergence of writers and researchers focusing on the so-called 'national issues' ranging from international relations to social anthropology and the activation of prominent personalities within nationalist cultural networks, including well-known nationalist politicians and intellectuals who, since the early 1990s have been enjoying considerable publicity and access to the mass media, thus being able to reach a wide readership/audience, extending far beyond the academia

It should thus be emphasised that 'scientific nationalism' is not confined to the production of 'scientific' texts for use within the academia. Rather, it encompasses the production and diffusion of 'scientific' discourses which promote particular versions of the nation and its 'other' through both 'specialist' and 'popular' media. It is characteristic that in April 1992 the five most popular non-fiction books in Greek book shops were all about the geopolitical and ethnological situation in the Balkans.<sup>7</sup>

Even outside the 'Top 5' books, one cannot avoid noticing the publication of numerous new books and articles claiming to constitute authoritative contributions to the 'scientific' support of Greece's 'national issues'. Several of these publications concentrated on the issue of the 'artificial' character of the Macedonian state and nation (cf. Andriotis 1991; Martis 1991) although there is an increasing volume of publications focusing on other related topics like the issue of the ethnic, linguistic and demographic characteristics of Tsamouria, an area of North-Western Greece, often mentioned as a part of 'Greater Albania' by Albanian nationalists, or of Western Thrace where Greece's Muslim minority is concentrated (cf. Papadopoulos 1992; Magriotis n.d.).

Most of these studies are based on an uncritical approach to historical and anthropological research, and are geared towards pinpointing linguistic, historical, or anthropological evidence of continuity of the Greek nation, or towards proving the Greekness of minority groups within Greece. Thus, a reified notion of history is produced, in accordance to which the hybridity of national, ethnic and religious cultures or the discontinuities and gaps characterizing history are suppressed to the benefit of a static and naturalised view of 'national' history. The popularity of these specialists, and the publicity attracted by their work, interviews and lectures makes scientific nationalism a very significant factor in the reproduction of nationalist discourse.

Most arguments introduced by nationalist historians or political commentators are characterised by the naturalisation of contemporary political alliances, and the organisation of selective remembering of historical alliances and relationships among the Balkan states.<sup>8</sup> This homogenisation of national communities, the naturalisation of historical contingency, and the ensuing typification of nations support stereotypical 'common-sense' assumptions regarding the current situation in the Balkans and constitute aspects of a strategy with alarming repercussions. Scientific nationalism has contributed to the essentialisation and reification of history, and to the introduction and reinforcement of racist distinctions by setting arbitrary and closed criteria for the recognition of ethnicities and nations. The implication of this closure in the universe of public discourse, is the

7 'Hit List: Greece', *The Guardian*, 10 April 1992, p. 29

8 Lazaridis, 1991a, and 1991b; these claims have been recycled in the daily press and broadcast media.

denial of the existence, or the symbolic elimination of the others, be they an ethnic or religious minority, or a whole national community.

### III. Media Performance, Public Rituals and Moral Panics

Another aspect of contemporary Greek nationalism, closely related to mass communication, is the construction of the nation and its enemies through the enactment of public rituals such as nationalist rallies and demonstrations and their media coverage, or the creation of moral panics through particular ways of representation of minorities and refugees in Greece. The enactment of public rituals, or the creation of moral panics based on media representations of ethnic/religious difference have played a quite significant role in the assertion of a sense of national unity and to the suppression or, in the case of the latter, exclusion and criminalisation of dissent regarding the 'national issues'. Here I shall focus on the media coverage of two mass rallies which, as I shall argue, could be treated as representative cases of public rituals, and on media representations of the 'Other', with particular reference to the Albanian nationals in Greece, to Islam in the Balkans and to the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

As I have suggested, media coverage of mass rallies could be treated as public rituals, that is, activities of a symbolic character which draw on customary and familiar elements of the hegemonic culture and are intended to add spiritual and emotional communion to a sense of political unity (see Elliott, 1980, pp. 141-7). In this context, I shall focus on the media coverage of two demonstrations and mass rallies which took place in Thessaloniki (14 February 1992) and Athens (10 December 1992) in order to demonstrate the national/popular unity against the international recognition of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. According to moderate estimations, the rallies were attended by over 1,000,000 and 1,300,000 persons respectively and received extensive media coverage. Although these rallies were not formally organised by the state, they were facilitated by a significant degree of state cooperation. Civil service offices, organisations of the public sector, state owned or controlled enterprises, secondary schools and higher education institutions allowed their employees to take time off and participate to the rallies. In both rallies, 'national' symbols from classical, hellenistic or more recent Greek history were prominent featuring on flags and banners, while the speakers stressed the national/popular unity demonstrated by the turnout at the rally, and the 'plebiscitary' character of the latter. In the case of the Athens rally, its plebiscitary character was more explicit as the participants were invited to pass a 'popular' resolution to be presented to the Edinburgh summit meeting which was to discuss the possibility of recognition of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. The rallies received extensive coverage by the mass media as most state and private television and radio stations transmitted the events live, in addition to their inclusion in the regular news slots of the day. What is more, the Athens rally was broadcast live in the Republic of Cyprus, as one of the Greek television and radio stations, ANT1, persistently reminded its audience, throughout its joint broadcast with RIK (the Republic of Cyprus Public Service Broadcasting Corporation). The television coverage of the rallies complemented the rallies themselves as it transformed the participants/audience into protagonists/enunciators. Instead of focusing on the speakers, the cameras focused on the audience, wandering over the masses of people, zooming on banners and flags featuring national and religious symbols, or on groups of eager participants. More precisely, particular emphasis was placed on the transmission of visual evidence of the unity and 'unanimity' of the 'people', the centrality of national and reli-

gious symbols in the space occupied by the masses of participants and, consequently, the size and importance of the event. Generally, the rallies were represented as a celebration of national/ popular solidarity, as a rediscovery of the national community.

Another area in which the role of mass communication has been significant is that of the construction of the nation and its enemies through the creation of moral panics premised upon particular ways of representation of minorities and refugees in Greece. Media representations of ethnic/religious difference has been central in the construction of a particular notion of national identity premised on the suppression or exclusion and criminalisation of other ethnic and religious groups. Here I will examine briefly three sets of strategies of media representation of the 'Other', one referring to the representation of Albanian nationals in Greece, the second to the perceived threat of Islam in the Balkans, and third to the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

Following the collapse of the state socialist regime of Albania and the relaxation of border controls between that country and Greece, Albanian nationals - members of the Greek minority as well as ethnic Albanians - crossed the Albanian-Greek border to Greece in search of employment. The initial reaction among the public and opinion leaders was positive and the mass media concentrated on the humanitarian aspects of these migrants. However, this initial reaction was soon to radically change as a result of the mobilisation of public fears regarding the increase of crime rates and its convergence with the anti-immigration rhetorics of nationalist circles. In this process, the mass media played a significant role as they publicised 'definitions of the situation' which were central to these processes. After a short 'period of grace', the media focused on the issue of 'Albanian criminality'. As early as in 1991, in search of sensational news items, print and broadcast media, carried news stories about the alleged spread of an organised 'Albanian mafia' in Greece. These stories, albeit unfounded, were given some credibility due to the routine attribution of any unresolved crime to this 'Albanian mafia'. In the period between December 1991 and May 1993, apart from the regular news reports in which 'Albanians' were alleged to have been involved in crimes, there have been several special 'investigations' of the so-called 'Albanian Mafia' - without however any credible evidence emerging. Some of the headlines of these investigations in the Greek press are indicative of the attitude of the media towards Albanians in Greece: 'Greece is appalled and scared. Send the monsters away' (*Apogevmatini*, December 1991); 'Albanians: a bomb in our hands' (*Apogevmatini*, September 1992); 'Freedom to robbers and criminals: Albanians are legalised in Greece' (*Eleftheros Typos*, May 1993); 'Albanians landing to Crete' (*Eleftheros Typos*, May 1993); 'Thousands of Albanian illegal immigrants in Macedonia. An atmosphere of terror and fear among the local population' (*Ethnos*, May 1993).

As this moral panic unfolded, a shift was taking place in media definitions of the identity of Albanian citizens involved in illegal activities. More precisely, an analysis of the coverage of crimes allegedly perpetrated by Albanian citizens by three popular tabloids (*Apogevmatini*, *Eleftheros Typos* and *Ethnos*) and the evening bulletins of the two major TV private channels (*ANT1* and *MEGA*) during May 1993, indicated that when the alleged perpetrator of an illegal act was Greek-Albanian, he/she was invariably identified as 'Albanian'. This practice was quite deliberate as the distinction between Albanian Greeks and other Albanians was retained and reminded on other occasions. It could be argued that the word 'Albanian' was used by the mass media interchangeably with the term 'criminal'; in

this way Albanians are stereotypically defined as not only ethnically different but also as socially undesirable and dangerous.

A not very different moral panic has also been present since 1991 when news items and interviews regarding the formation of an 'Islamic arch' or 'transversal'<sup>9</sup> to the north and east of Greece started appearing quite frequently in the Greek media. These were obviously intended to 'remind' the imminent geopolitical isolation of Greece from the rest of Europe. In addition, hints at the alleged 'islami-sation' of the republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina (or of its leadership) have been quite frequent during the TV coverage of the war in Bosnia. It is characteristic that during May 1994, in the evening news bulletins of *ET1* (Channel One of the Greek public broadcasting corporation) and *ANTI* (one of the two major commercial stations), the Bosnian government was associated with Saudi Arabia, as most news bulletins featured reports referring to Bosnian Muslims - including the republic's president Alija Izetbegovic - leaving Sarajevo for the annual hadj to Mecca, emphasising that all their expenses were paid by Saudi Arabia. In the same period, *ANTI* also presented the refusal of the religious leader of the Bosnian Muslims to meet with the Serb Patriarch in Sarajevo as an act of intransigence. This frequent evocation of the alleged Islamic threat to Greek security and culture adds a religious element to a set of relations primarily characterised by ethnic and geopolitical antagonism.

In the majority of the material reviewed, not only is Islam represented as antagonistic to Christianity; it also carries the connotation of the 'barbaric Orient' as opposed to Western values and civilisation, but more significantly, it connotes Turkey, and its geopolitical penetration into the Southern Balkans, and thus into Europe. Through this process, the European credentials of Christian Greece are asserted and reinforced, whereas Greek identity becomes inextricably linked to its antagonistic relationship to Turkey and its allegedly islamic, hence non European, Balkan neighbours. In addition, Greeks are reminded that they are a 'nation in danger', fighting for its survival against its numerous national foes.

Finally, as far as media representations of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia are concerned, two complementary sets of strategies of discursive positing can be discerned. The first banishes the Macedonian republic and its people from the realms of history and politics. It is characteristic that the mass media have been reproducing the official discourse regarding the new state, referring thus to the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia as 'statelet' (*kratidio*) -- a term applied to a small, inferior political entity, not enjoying full rights of sovereignty and self-determination. Other, alternative, terms are also highly indicative: 'Skopje', 'pseudo-state', 'Skopjean entity', all derogatory terms which do not allude to any sort of recognition of a political entity. As far as the inhabitants of the Republic are concerned, they are called 'pseudo-Macedonians', while more populist media (especially, but not exclusively, newspapers) have occasionally referred to them as 'barefoot' (*xipolitoi*) - a term connoting poverty and lack of culture -- and 'gipsy-skopjeans'. In addition to this, the dispute between Greece and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia has been most often personalised as Ma-

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9 This very popular term in Greece is used in order to emphasize the existence or formation of a chain of islamic states and regions in the Southern Balkans (Turkey, regions containing Turkish/muslim minorities in Western Thrace and Southern Bulgaria, Kosovo, Bosnia, Albania). Although Macedonia is not an Islamic state, it is consistently depicted in the Greek mass media as part of this Islamic arch, mainly on the basis of the good relationship the Republic of Macedonia enjoys with Turkey.

cedonia has frequently been referred to as 'Gligorov's state' and its policies 'Gligorov's policies'. In this way the new state is represented as the product of the personal ambitions of its current leader, and the socio-political dynamics which led to its formation are concealed. Thus, the Republic of Macedonia and the Macedonian nation do not exist; rather, they are artificial entities, the product of personal ambition and conspiracy.

A second set of representational strategies posits the 'enemy' as existent and threatening. Here, the 'enemy' is represented as a homogeneous, internally undifferentiated entity poised to deprive the Greek of its territory, identity and history. In the case of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the symbolic unification of the 'Skopjeans' behind the label of 'evil nationalists' is achieved by the simplification of the political map of the country. It is characteristic that the Greek mass media consistently ignore the political divisions of Macedonian politics by treating the views of Macedonian nationalists in the republic and the diaspora as the views of 'Skopje' or the 'Skopjeans' (as the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and the Macedonians are called). The consequence of this strategy has been the representation of the citizens, the political forces, the government and the Slav-Macedonian diaspora organisations as an undifferentiated entity; its constituent elements being treated as 'equivalent' in terms of their expansionist policy and chauvinism.<sup>10</sup> As a result, the simplification of the political field into two antagonistic forces, Greek and Macedonian, moral and immoral, good and evil. This division in turn, facilitates the closure of the universe of political discourse in Greece; through the displacement of more complex representations of the Macedonians, nationalist discourse achieves the elimination of diversity in Greek politics and society. Thus, whoever transcends the boundaries of the universe of political discourse is represented as part of the 'enemy', and is therefore excluded from the national - and therefore political - community.

### **Conclusion: Nationalism, Mass Communication and the Politics of Exclusion in Contemporary Greece**

On the basis of the media and cultural representations I outlined above, it can be argued that Greek nationalist discourse incorporates apparently contradictory strategies which however, deny with consistency the existence of the 'enemy'.<sup>11</sup>

Through the demonisation of the 'other' and the restriction of the possibilities of recognising internal complexity and plurality, the Greek mass media have contributed to the construction of national identity in such a way that it is decoupled from freedom and plurality. In the light of these developments, I would argue that the Greek mass media have been reinforcing the binary divisions between "good" and "bad" which prevail in popular consciousness and in the na-

<sup>10</sup> For a discussion of the notion of *equivalence* see Laclau and Mouffe, 1985, pp. 127-34.

<sup>11</sup> This, occasionally reaches the extreme denial of the physical existence of the "other". Such is the demand of extremist nationalist circles in Greece, for the government to pursue a policy of achieving a common border with Serbia. Although this demand does not reflect the mainstream of public opinion in Greece, or government policy as the Western European and North American press is often suggesting, it has become a powerful weapon in the hands of nationalist elites, whose discourse has taken a not insignificant position in the universe of political discourse.

tionalist imaginary promoted and sustained by certain institutional actors in Greece, and playing a significant role in the maintenance and strengthening of obstacles to the formation of a pluralistic social and political map, as the imperative of national unity which they have been promoting consistently dissimulates structured inequalities, and displaces representations of 'difference'.

In this context, the 'other' is perceived as the aggregate of internal and external opposition, in the form of an imaginary 'enemy'. Internal dissidents and political adversaries are therefore transformed into national enemies as the achieved simplification of the 'political' does not allow room for diversity and difference within the framework of national politics. Instead of recognising the centrality of self-expression, and of identity definition nationalist discourse is set against the formation and maintenance of public spaces (including the mass media) for representation and identity negotiation, independent from state institutions or the party system. Indeed, restricted access to the Greek mass media and the systematic publicising of official definitions of the situation and of nationalist discourse have achieved the closure of the universe of political discourse in general.

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**Summary: Mass communications and nationalism: the politics of belonging and exclusion in contemporary Greece**

*This article focuses on the ways in which the prevalence of nationalist discourse in the communication process has affected political and cultural life in Greece after the end of the Cold War. It is argued that through the emergence of scientific nationalism, the enactment of public rituals, and the creation of moral panics based on media representations of ethnic/religious difference, the 'political' is simplified allowing no room for diversity and difference within the framework of national politics. The Greek mass media have been sustaining 'official' representations of 'Greece' as a nation under threat which have been crucial in the formation and maintenance of public attitudes regarding both ethno-religious minorities within Greece, and ethnic and religious groups in neighbouring countries and have undermined the formation and maintenance of public spaces (including the mass media) for representation and identity negotiation, independent from state institutions or the party system.*