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A case study in news articles, users comments and a Facebook group for Article 3 of the  
Greek Constitution

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## **A case study in news articles, users comments and a Facebook group for Article 3 of the Greek Constitution<sup>1</sup>**

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**Abstract:** This study is concerned with Article 3 of the Greek Constitution and the relations between the State and the Church in Greece. The scientific views expressed regarding the Third Article of the Constitution were examined with emphasis on the public debate that developed around the interpretation of the terms ‘prevailing religion’ and ‘holy canons’. Moreover, the results of two studies carried out are presented in order to approach the issue from a journalistic perspective. The first research was conducted on websites to see how media are contributing to the debate on what Article 3 stipulates. The second research looked at how citizens directly related to journalism and communication perceive the stipulations of this Article. The results revealed how Article 3 of the Constitution is in question in its current form and how, in the future, it could be fairer to all Greek citizens via an open and multidimensional dialogue.

**Keywords:** Constitution, Church-State relations, online journalism, Greece

### **Introduction**

The relations between the State and the Church in Greece have monopolized the public discourse from time to time. Historical, social, and political factors have created a multifaceted debate, which, throughout the years, has provoked conflicts between the Greek State and the Church. From a legal point of view, as Papageorgiou (2013) points out, few branches of law, historical experience, emotional ties, and people’s basic beliefs are imprinted with so much zeal and influence as in ecclesiastical law. Scientific approaches have been

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formulated for centuries by focusing on the interpretation of the first paragraph of Article 3 of the Greek Constitution, resulting in the cultivation of lively dialogue. Clearly, the study of the ideas that have been supported for the relations of the State and the Church in Greece lies within the purpose of this paper. However, it was considered worthy of researching the way online media approach the debate on Article 3, given the key role media play in the public sphere. It is believed that the main purpose of media is to serve the public interest, which is often attributed to the designation of the fourth power. Journalists are engaged in the collection and dissemination of information to the public, and their role in society is directly related to the emergence of topicality and, on the other hand, the problems faced by society. In addition, it was considered important to study the Greek public's discussion on Article 3 of the Greek Constitution. Thus, the current study also collected comments from Greek citizens via a questionnaire.

With regard to the Internet, recent technological developments have led to the expansion of communication network boundaries and information flow, notably through services that websites provide to their users. These technological developments have caused the emergence of the term 'network society'. Castells (2004) argues that the so-called 'network society' is nothing more than a new social structure, made up of networks of Information and Communication Technologies. At the same time, there has been a change in the forms of information due to new methods of communication between citizens-users, who can even contribute to content development. In fact, in some cases citizens became journalists and covered several incidents. This was thought to be a solution to the problem of declining reliability of journalistic coverage (Carr et al., 2014). This development is indissolubly linked to social media, where the produced content (e.g., articles, videos, photographs, etc.) is being created rapidly (Westerman et al., 2014). Moreover, the interaction that social media offers to the public has led to a new, more dynamic relationship with journalists and, thus, it is believed that these new social platforms tend to represent public opinion (Anstead & O'Loughlin, 2014).

In fact, the advent of digital media has shown that the world is made up of heterogeneous information flows. Moreover, mass media can over-emphasize or limit some issues from the public debate, although the relationship of their content with the public is not unique or one-way. For example, policy-makers can disseminate information to the medium spectrum in order to predict how the public responds and how policies need to be shaped to become more effective. Additionally, policy-makers can also predict how their words will be reproduced in different media (Happer & Philo, 2013).

Thus, the first priority of this study was to find if the most prominent news websites in Greece gave in-depth coverage to the importance of Article 3 of the Greek Constitution and its meaning for the separation between the Church and the State. In the meantime, the participation in the comments section of the examined news articles was taken into consideration, as the users who comment on news stories seem to be more active on social media platforms and more interested in hard news content (Kalogeropoulos, 2017). Lastly, in order to approach the public dialogue on the relations between the State and the Church, students and graduates of the School of Journalism and Mass Communications of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki were asked to answer an online questionnaire and reveal their views on the above-mentioned topic.

## **Church in the Public Sphere and the Greek Case**

Before the eighteenth-century, religion was one of the main factors that provoked turmoil amongst communities. This tendency changed after the expansion of the European states and the emergence of states in the Western world. Religion lost its importance and seemed to no longer be an important ideological factor for provoking tensions between different populations until the twenty-first century. At this time, religious bodies across the globe started once again to have a say in politics (Haynes, 2009).

According to Mudrov (2017), Christian Churches have an important role in European integration. Mudrov identified the areas of high, middle, and low influence of Churches in the European Union (hereafter the EU). Therefore, the region with great influence includes Cyprus, Greece, Malta, Romania, Italy, Croatia, and Poland. Middle countries are Germany, Spain, Finland, Ireland, Slovenia, Portugal, Denmark, Sweden, Luxembourg, Slovakia, Bulgaria, and Hungary. Finally, those with low influence are the following: Estonia, the Czech Republic, France, the United Kingdom, Belgium, Latvia, and the Netherlands. Only countries with a homogenous Catholic or Orthodox population are in the high influence area. The Catholic countries are in all three groups, highlighting that the extent of Church influence at the national level does not depend only on the religious parameter. The influence of the Churches in the public sphere is manifested by their degree of participation in European integration. None of the dominant EU Churches is far from the above process. As a result, there is the possibility of intensified interaction with national governments. The influence of the Church varies according to its historical and religious influence. The more supporters it has, the more it can contribute—either positively or negatively—to solving specific issues. Moreover, their importance for European integration is also related to the fact that they have been involved in the early stages of the process. At the same time, Churches operate as non-state actors. For example, Christian Churches contributed to the creation of European and national identities. Finally, there is another important feature of Christian Churches: namely, the Church-State regime, which sometimes contradicts the core of the idea of European integration (Mudrov, 2017).

Moreover, the Roman Catholic Church has secured its presence in the EU at the diplomatic level through the Embassy of the Holy See in the EU and the presence of Malta's Sovereign Military Order, which is recognized as a diplomatic form by the European Commission, but not by the EU member states. Catholic organizations are dealing with a wide range of relevant activities, including the European Social Center for Jesuits, Caritas Europa, and the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Union (COMECE). Regarding the Orthodox delegations, they are dealing equally with a wide range of subjects. They include representatives of the Churches of Greece, Cyprus, the Patriarchate of Moscow, and the Office of the Interconnection of the Orthodox Church, which belongs to the Ecumenical Patriarchate. In addition, the Protestants also represent themselves through various organizations, such as the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD), the European Evangelical Alliance, etc. There are also universal organizations or institutions such as the Conference (or Council) of the European Churches (WEU) (Mudrov, 2017). In other words, religion is an important element of European integration (Halikiopoulou et al., 2012) and the invention of the Internet resulted in intensifying the research regarding media relations and religion (Andok, 2018).

Greece is believed to be a prominent case in Western Europe for investigating the relations between the Church and the State, as the Church remains an important agent in shaping the public agenda. This characteristic of the Greek Church goes against the main trend of the last years, in which the influence of the Church in politics has been weakening (Halikiopoulou &

Vasilopoulou, 2013). Moreover, Greece is one of the few countries in Europe where the educational system teaches Christian Orthodox Religion as a compulsory course. From time to time, there are very intense public debates about changing the mandatory form of the aforementioned course—without significance until today. Nevertheless, Greek grassroots movements seem to believe that the current legal system of the country is not helping to change the core relations of religious education in the country (Markoviti, 2019). Nevertheless, it should be highlighted that in the case of Greece, the Orthodox Church, and the Christian Orthodox religion are associated with the creation of the country and the struggle against the Ottoman Empire. In other words, they are a core component of the Greek national identity (Halikiopoulou, 2010; Yannas, 2016; Karagiannis, 2009).

Meanwhile, there were cases in which the Greek Church exploited its significant charity mission in order to support its opinions and ideas (Polyzoidis, 2019). Additionally, the term ‘prevailing religion’ (see the relevant section of this study) in the Constitution of the country is linked with the heritage of the Byzantine Empire. It is based on a model regarding the importance of Christian Orthodox Religion and the relations between the Church and the State (Kyriazopoulos, 2001). According to Diamantopoulou, there is another paradox in Greece related to the formal recognition of religion except for Christian Orthodox Religion:

‘Given the fact that there is no formal mechanism or process for a religious group to become recognized as a “known” religion in Greece, and this can usually be achieved through approval of a permit to operate a place of worship serious problems arise with special regard to Muslim immigrants that do not belong to the so-called historic Muslim minority in Western Thrace, which has an official status in Greece, by virtue of the 1923 Lausanne Peace Treaty’. (2016, p. 73)

### **The Framework of State and Church Relations in the Constitution 1975/1986/2001/2008**

As the relations between the State and the Church in Greece are constantly changing, their imprint is possible only at a certain historical moment, while under the Constitution of 1975 they are still directed towards the state supremacy (Konidaris, 2011). This dynamic status often allows deviations from the normal order via State interventions on Church issues (which are often caused or accepted by the Church administration in order to serve its interests), but also with malformations in the ecclesiastical organization. A decisive role in the formation of relations is also played by the individuals who are at the head of the Church and the State administration throughout the years (Konidaris, 2011). In the same vein, it is underlined that the constitutional framework of the relations between the Greek State and the Church cannot be considered to be characterised by stability, because of the great influence it receives from the persons representing the institutions, but also by the state or ecclesiastical policy that is implemented. As a result, the abstract content of the constitutional provisions regulating these relations receives its meaning by the political, historical and ecclesiastical circumstances (Papageorgiou, 2013).

Konidaris (2011) argues that words and phrases in Article 3(1) can be interpreted differently, with serious implications for the final view of what kind of system of Church and State relation exists. There are, at the same time, other constitutional provisions that are quasi-satellites in Article 3 and have a decisive impact on interpretation, such as Article 13(1) and Article 72(1). Specifically, the interpretation of Article 3 in conjunction with Article 13 leads to a more liberal view of the current system of State and Church relations, of

ecclesiastical self-administration and of the power extent of the holy canons. On the other hand, the close connection of Article 3 with Article 72 justifies the view that a state regime prevails and that State and Church relations retrograde (Konidaris, 2011). Stathopoulos (1993) refers to a peculiar system of State and Church relations, which is shaped by interventions of the Greek State in the Greek Orthodox Church and by the interference of the latter in state matters. Moreover, he states that the system of State and Church relations is not for granted under the current Constitution, but it is basically ordinary legislator's responsibility to define it. According to Venizelos (2000), the system of relations in Greece is that of constitutionally regulated relations between the State and the Church. This means that the Constitution limits legislator's and other state bodies' intervention in the Church and that the Church is surrounded by constitutional guarantees as a subject of religious freedom.

According to the prevailing opinion, since 1833 the system of relations between the Greek State and the Orthodox Church is a version of the state supremacy system, the so-called 'state-law rule'. In this system, the State dominates the ecclesiastical, which means that the State intervenes in the Church, but not by violent means. The involvement of the State is bounded by laws and expressed in laws. The Church is a legal entity governed by public law, enjoys preferential treatment, its institutions of organization and operation are drafted in state laws, the State controls and supervises the Church, its acts are recognized as public and the State delegates jurisdictions that are specific to its own authority (Papastathis, 2003).

### **The prevailing religion**

In the first paragraph of Article 3 of the current Constitution, it is stipulated that: 'The prevailing religion in Greece is that of the Eastern Orthodox Church of Christ'. The term 'prevailing religion' is an imperative concept of 'western' origin, which derives its origin from the acute social conflict between Catholics and Protestants and from the period of formation of many national states, largely in relation to the outcome of this conflict (Venizelos, 2000). The concept is historically linked to two considerations. The first is the introduction of a simple and clear criterion for the automatic allocation of Greek citizenship and the constitution of the people of an independent state. The second is the commitment of the future head of the state to the religion of the overwhelming majority of the Greek people, which he ought to have respected (Venizelos, 2000).

#### *The 'declaratory' interpretation*

The interpretation of the term 'prevailing religion' has led to lengthy discussions in the context of scientific dialogue. The prevailing opinion supports that it is a simple proclamation that Greeks, in their vast majority, are Christian Orthodox. Consequently, the term is descriptive rather than normative (Papageorgiou, 2013). As early as the middle of the 19th century, Saripolos wrote that the 'prevailing religion' does not in any way mean the extraordinary rights of the Orthodox Church to the protection of laws, and cannot have any other meaning, except that the Holy Catholic Orthodox doctrine is the most prominent in Greece (Dimitropoulos, 2001). Under the 1975 Constitution, the 'declaratory' version was strengthened, due to the assessment that there was a 'relaxation' in the relations between the State and the Church, as religious provisions changed (Dimitropoulos, 2001). Similarly, Stathopoulos (1993) argues that the constitutional legislator simply states that this religion is the 'numerically dominant', the one followed by the overwhelming majority of the Greek people. Lastly, according to another point of view, this provision holds a declaratory

character, but not without regulatory implications, such as celebrations, ceremonies, public holidays or clergy payments (Chrysogonos, 2000; Troianos, 2000; Tsatsos, 1993).

#### *The 'regulatory' interpretation*

On the other hand, another viewpoint identifies the prevailing religion with the official religion of the State. Poulis (2007), for example, argues that the reason why the constitutional legislator has established a 'prevailing' religion is that it is followed by the overwhelming majority of the Greek people, i.e. the cause is not the same as the result. According to Papastathis (2003), prevailing religion means that a) the Orthodox cult constitutes the official religion of Greece or religion of the territory or Church of the State; b) the Church which expresses this cult has its own legal existence. It is a legal person of public law regarding its legal relations and its various organizations and (c) the State approaches it with increased interest and it enjoys preferential treatment which does not ipso jure extend to other cults and faiths. This, however, does not mean that the prevailing religion is dominant or that this preferential treatment is contradictory to the constitutional principle of equality. Furthermore, Karasis (2010) underlines that the constitutional provisions, granting the Orthodox Church a special treatment, make it the official state religion.

#### *Systematic interpretation of provisions*

Alongside the two above-mentioned views, there is also a series of arguments dealing with the relationship of the prevailing religion and religious freedom through the systematic interpretation of the relevant provisions. According to Tsatsos (1993), the regulation of the whole issue of religious activity (Articles 3(1) and 13(1) to (4)) shows a decisive distinction between two separate cycles of legal problems. The first is the legal position of the Churches operating within the Greek territory, which is regulated in Part One, Section II and belongs to the Organization of the State, while the second is the legal position of the believers of the various Churches, is settled in Part Two and falls entirely on the issue of fundamental rights. From this systematic interpretation of the constitutional regulation, it is argued that a possibility of special arrangements in favor of the Church, but not a privilege in favor of the believers is founded.

### **Holy Canons**

The second and third sections of the first paragraph of Article 3 stipulate that: 'The Orthodox Church of Greece, acknowledging our Lord Jesus Christ as its head, is inseparably united in doctrine with the Great Church of Christ in Constantinople and with every other Church of Christ of the same doctrine, observing unwaveringly, as they do, the holy apostolic and synodal canons and sacred traditions. It is autocephalous and is administered by the Holy Synod of serving Bishops and the Permanent Holy Synod originating thereof and assembled as specified by the Statutory Charter of the Church in compliance with the provisions of the Patriarchal Tome of June 29, 1850 and the Synodal Act of September 4, 1928'. Due to its essential importance to the self-administration of the Church, the problem of the extent to which the Constitution enshrined the holy canons has also been under study both in case law and in legal theory since the early 19th century (Papageorgiou 2013). Three main viewpoints have been supported, aiming to solve this interpretative issue which regards the ecclesiastical origin provisions that organize and regulate the inner life of Church.

According to the first one, the Constitution guarantees without exception all holy canons, whether they have dogmatic content or simply refer to the administrative organization of the Church (Papageorgiou, 2013). Legislator is not allowed to regulate dogmatic and administrative matters of the Church in deviation from its holy canons (Dimitropoulos, 2001), so laws that are against their provisions are unconstitutional (Papastathis, 2003). The second view distinguishes holy canons into doctrinal and administrative ones, with the former being constitutionally and unchanged and the latter being non-regulated and freely modifiable by the legislator (Dimitropoulos, 2001). Therefore, the common legislator can freely regulate all those issues pertaining to the administration and organization of the Church (Papastathis, 2003). Slightly diverging from the second one, the third view supports that the only purpose of this provision is the dogmatic unity of the Church of Greece with the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the other Orthodox Churches. It is, therefore, possible to modify by law any rule, even one of the Ecumenical Council, if this law does not contravene the Orthodox doctrine (Papageorgiou, 2013).

The case law of the Council of State originally moved steadily in the context of the second view. Positing that constitutional guarantee is not extended to the administrative holy canons, it held that they may be amended for the common interest of the State and the Church (Papageorgiou, 2012). After the 1952 Constitution implementation, however, the Council introduced a distinction into fundamental and non-fundamental institutions and decided that the ordinary legislator cannot amend fundamental administrative institutions, which are those that have been established in a steadfast and enduring way within the Church (Papageorgiou, 2012). Finally, under the current Constitution, the same Court differentiated its legal substantiation. Thus, now drawing an argument from Article 13, it added that the right to religious freedom also protects the followers of the prevailing religion, safeguarding those holy canons (Papageorgiou, 2012). Council of State decision no. 5057/1987 reverted to the original legal horizon of Article 3 and considered that canonical institutions that do not refer to doctrine and worship are, for example, the administration and management of the ecclesiastical property. These issues are evolving under the influence of time and social conditions. Therefore, it is inevitable that they change for the benefit and the shared interest of Church and State (Papageorgiou, 2012). Furthermore, Venizelos (2000) notes that, under Article 13(1), all holy canons of the Orthodox Church of Greece are protected by the Constitution, whether they refer to doctrine or to administration, because this is the only way to ensure religious freedom for the believers of the prevailing religion as well. This position does not contradict, but is reinforced by the stereotyped wording of Article 3 which does not discriminate in dogmatic and administrative canons.

On the 6th of November 2018, Ieronymos, the Archbishop of Athens and all of Greece and the Prime Minister of Greece, Alexis Tsipras, announced a new deal between the State and the Greek Church that seems to pave the way for the final separation between these two entities. The priests will no longer be considered as civil servants, but they will still be paid by the State (BBC, 2018). Meanwhile, the ‘Church will not oppose moves to make the State ‘religion neutral’ and would drop any claim to property once taken over by the State’ (BBC, 2018).

## **Methodology**

Two studies were conducted to explore more in depth the actual legal aspect of the Article 3 and the separation of the Greek Church and the State. In the first study, the content analysis as a method was chosen as it describes the characteristics of the data and identifies the important



relationships of the content under consideration. In addition, since the categorization and general rules applied are both practical and theoretical on scientific bases, the probability of finding valid results through research is increased (Riffe et al., 2005). The search was conducted using the Google Web Search Engine within five days (3/02/2018-7/02/2018). The search language was Greek and the region was Greece. The search for the articles was set for the period from January 1, 2000 to December 31, 2018. This selection was made to investigate references to Church and State relations starting from the ‘Battle of Identities’. At that time, a large crowd of believers participated in rallies to promote the displaying of religion on the Greek identities. The former Archbishop Christodoulos, at the end of August 2001, announced the gathering of more than three million signatures for a referendum on the optional display of religion on new identities. The keywords used for the search were ‘prevailing religion’, ‘separation of State and Church’, ‘holy canons’ and ‘autocephalous Church’, in Greek.

Following the classification of the websites of Antonopoulos and his colleagues (2012; 2015), the websites were divided into four categories (Table 1): a) Mass Media (as Mass Media were defined the websites hosting more than one medium such as radio, television, etc.), b) Portal (the websites that have only online presence as news web portals), c) Newspaper (the websites of Greek newspapers) and d) Television Station (the websites of the Greek Television Stations).

**Table 1.** The news website of the research.

<b>News Website</b>	<b>Type of medium</b>
alphatv.gr	Television Station
antenna.gr	Television Station
dikaiologitika.gr	Portal
kathimerini.gr	Newspaper
makeleio.gr	Newspaper
news247.gr	Mass Media
protothema.gr	Newspaper
skai.gr	Mass Media
star.gr	Television Station
tilestwra.com	Portal
vice.com/gr	Mass Media
zougla.gr	Portal

In total, for each category, the top three sites were selected in the above-defined category from the list of top sites in Greece based on the ranking on the alexa.com website. The filter under which the aforementioned search was conducted was ‘by relevance’. As active participants in the discussion of State and Church relations were considered the users who made at least a comment. According to Kalogeropoulos and his colleagues (2017) the users who comment on news stories tend to be more active on social media and to be more interested in hard news content. The search on the websites aimed to collect the data for answering the first research question of the study. Furthermore, the comments of the users on these articles along with the collected articles were analyzed in greater depth via content

analysis to provide feedback also for the second research question of the this research (for the research questions see the end of this section).

Moreover, a survey was conducted using an online structured questionnaire to collect citizens' views on the issue under consideration. It was desirable for the sample to consist exclusively of journalists/communicators. For this purpose, an invitation to participate in the questionnaire was posted exclusively to a closed Facebook group, which during the survey period numbered 1650 members. The group members were students (undergraduates and graduates), employees and professors of the School of Journalism and Mass Communications of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (AUTH). In order to gain access to this closed group and the posts that are made, users need to be related to the School. Then, after check, administrators allow him or her to access. The survey lasted from February 22, 2018 to February 28, 2018. It should be mentioned that on the fourth day of the week the survey was reposted again on the Facebook group to attract more participants. The overall views of the Facebook group posts regarding the survey were 252 (at the time of measurement - Facebook post views change over time) and those that replied to the questions of the survey were 53 participants. During the posting of the survey, the group members were informed for its scientific purposes, so as to be sure about the anonymity provided.

Altogether 53 unique users participated in the survey. In checking the reliability of the responses, it was found that 15 of the participants may not have answered honestly and their answers were not taken into account. In particular, the reasons for deleting the answers to the specific questionnaires are listed: One of the participants stated that he or she was born in 2018. One of the respondents answered that he had completed the high school, while he was born in 1991, a response that was considered inaccurate and was not included in the final sample, based on the distinction of the age groups that follows. In addition, a user answered 'Maybe' and two others replied, 'I do not know or I do not want to answer' to the question whether they responded with honesty to the previous questions. Finally, there was also the question 'Do they spray us?'. Seven users who answered 'Yes' were not included in the survey. This was also the case for three persons who replied 'I do not know or I do not want to answer'. It has to be noted that the people who believe in conspiracy theories 'tend to present lower levels of trust, higher levels of religiosity, and lower levels of education, in relation to citizens who do not believe in conspiracy theories' (Mancosu et al., p. 331). In addition, they seem to believe mostly their vision (Bakalaki, 2016) and not to trust the authorities (Wood & Douglas, 2013). Thus, it was believed that they could not be trusted as the spraying question is related to the 'Chemtrail' conspiracy theory (Bakalaki, 2016).

The questionnaire about Article 3 focused also on participants' demographic characteristics. 38 participants aged between 18-52 years old were asked about content, representation of Greek citizens in the constitutional article and the need of changes in it. The demographic questions included attitude about separation of State from Church, worship frequency, participant education, sex and birthdate. The questionnaire is linked with the third and fourth research questions of this study (see below). Those research questions are associated with the opinions of the students and the graduates of the 'School of Journalism and Mass Communications' and identify the differences between them. At this point, it should be mentioned that the answers could be given by using a desktop computer or laptop, 'smart' mobile phone or tablet. The 'School of Journalism and Mass Communications' group has equal proportions of participants in a large-scale age group. This study investigated all groups of categorical variables. The age of respondents was computed on 05/01/2019.

When participants accessed the questionnaire, they saw the following text:

'Please read the Article 3 of the Constitution of Greece:

1. The prevailing religion in Greece is that of the Eastern Orthodox Church of Christ. The Orthodox Church of Greece, acknowledging our Lord Jesus Christ as its head, is inseparably united in doctrine with the Great Church of Christ in Constantinople and with every other Church of Christ of the same doctrine, observing unwaveringly, as they do the holy apostolic and synodal canons and sacred traditions. It is autocephalous and is administered by the Holy Synod of serving Bishops and the Permanent Holy Synod originating thereof and assembled as specified by the Statutory Charter of the Church in compliance with the provisions of the Patriarchal Tome of June 29, 1850 and the Synodal Act of September 4, 1928.

2. The ecclesiastical regime existing in certain districts of the State shall not be deemed contrary to the provisions of the preceding paragraph.

3. The text of the Holy Scripture shall be maintained unaltered. Official translation of the text into any other form of language, without prior sanction by the Autocephalous Church of Greece and the Great Church of Christ in Constantinople, is prohibited’.

According to the aforementioned information, this research seeks to explore more closely what is being published on the prominent media websites in Greece in relation to Article 3 of the Greek Constitution and see if the users tend to comment on the articles in order to express their opinions. Furthermore, this study wanted to reveal also the opinions of the students and graduates of the School of Journalism as this topic is associated with their field of expertise.

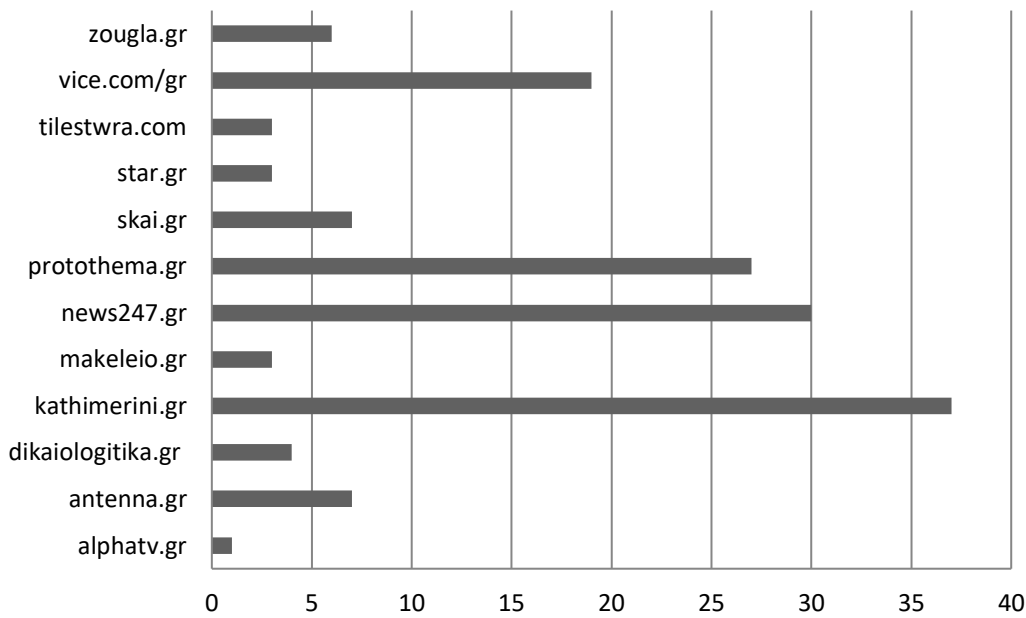
Hence, the following questions arose:

- Research Question 1: Are the examined news websites extensively involved in covering and explaining in details what Article 3 of the Greek Constitution stipulates?
- Research Question 2: Do users actively participate in the discussion of State and Church relations?
- Research Question 3: What is the opinion of the questionnaire participants for the examined topic?
- Research Question 4: Are there differences in proportions of the participants by categories in questions of the study?

## Results

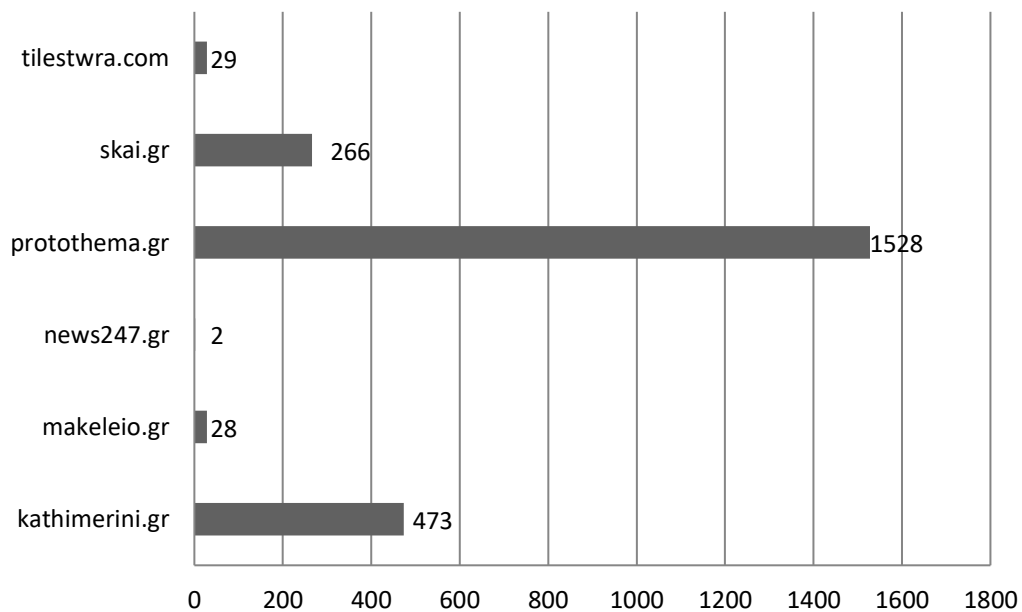
The sample of the news articles for the research consisted of 147 articles: 1 (alphatv.gr), 7 (antenna.gr), 4 (dikaiologitika.gr), 37 (kathimerini.gr), 3 (makeleio.com), 30 (news247.gr), 27 (protothema.gr), 7 (skai.gr), 3 (star.gr), 3 (tilestwra.com), 19 (vice.com/gr), and 6 (zougla.gr). The majority of the news articles was in the category that is defined as Newspapers (67/147), followed by the Mass Media (56/147), the Portal (13/147) and the Television Stations (11/147) (Figure 1).

Figure 1. The news articles of the research.



Additionally, the comments of each article were examined, considering that Antonopoulos et al. (2015) have proven that comments can influence either positively or negatively users' opinion. The total number of the comments for this study was 2.326 (Figure 2).

Figure 2. The number of comments.



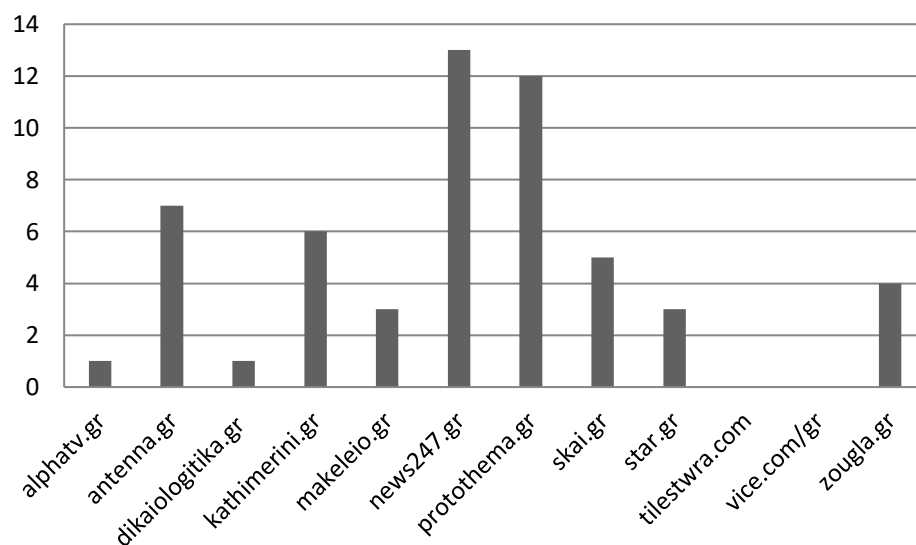
However, it is worth mentioning that many websites did not allow commenting. The news websites alphatv.gr, antenna.gr, dikaiologitika.gr, star.gr, vice.com/gr and zougla.gr did not offer the possibility to comment on the article, so that users can only read what is written and

not contribute to it. In addition, news247.gr, which has just 2 comments in a total of 30 articles, offered commenting only through the Facebook social network. Besides, in 23 articles of kathimerini.gr, such as in the ‘Separation of State-Church’ and ‘Anthimos: I pray for Tsipras more than for others’, by the authors NK Karapidakis and Stavros Tzimas respectively, comments have been deactivated. The website with the most comments was protothema.gr (1,528 comments) and the one with the least was news247.gr (2 comments). What’s more, although kathimerini.gr had the most articles (37 in total), it did not show a large number of user comments (473 comments). Finally, it is worth mentioning that the users commented many times on the content of skai.gr (the 7 articles of the news outlet had 266 comments).

All comments were also examined to see if there was hate speech in their content. According to the Council of Europe’s Committee of Ministers’ Recommendation (97), hate speech is defined as: ‘all forms of expression which spread, incite, promote or justify racial hatred, xenophobia, anti-Semitism or other forms of hatred based on intolerance, including: intolerance expressed by aggressive nationalism and ethnocentrism, discrimination and hostility against minorities, migrants and people of immigrant origin’. In addition, based on Kalogeropoulos and his colleagues (2017) the users who comment on news stories tend to be more active on social media and to be more interested in hard news content. Out of a total of 2,326 comments, 39 users have expressed hate speech: makeleio.gr 7 comments, protothema.gr 26 comments and tilestwra.com 6 comments. These user views were included in this category as they contained abusive words/expressions and aggressive behavior: ‘antichrists anti-deists and atheists and Islamic monkeys Syrizakedes [members of Syriza political party]’, ‘WHY DON’T YOU SHIT US, YOU MASTURBATOR’ (sic) (Examples of comments translated from Greek).

It was also investigated whether and to what extent anonymous articles are published, taking into account the findings of the Pew Research Center (2017), according to which anonymity activates bad behavior and contributes to facilitating non-civil dialogue in the shared online environment. In addition, citizens may be more closely monitored and cases of repression of freedom of speech can take place, shaping social dialogue towards a particular direction. According to the results, the news website that published most anonymous articles is news247.gr (13/30), where almost half have not been signed by an author. At the same time, all the articles on the antenna.gr, alphas.gr, makeleio.gr and star.gr were anonymous. Moreover, it was interesting that vice.com/gr published only signed articles. Even in the three articles that were found not to have a clear editor, there was the distinct mark ‘VICE Staff’. As far as the tilestwra.com site is concerned, all the articles that have been published came from other websites and that is why the article source was cited. From the studied sample, only the websites of TV stations seemed to be those which systematically did not show the name of the author (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Number of anonymous articles on each news website



Regarding the content of the articles, there are no more than five articles that are providing some insights about Article 3 and the actual legal meaning of the separation between the Church and the State. Three of them are from [kathimerini.gr](http://kathimerini.gr) ('The separation of State – Church', 2005, 'The issue: the release of the Church by the State', 2016, and "'Open Dialogue' on Church-State Relations", 2017), one from [protothema.gr](http://protothema.gr) ("Holy Synod: 'No' to the separation of Church-State", 2017), and one from [vice.com/gr](http://vice.com/gr) (Church and State: 'A Love That Lasts Forever', 2017). The two articles of [kathimerini.gr](http://kathimerini.gr) are written by scholars who provide a deeper view regarding the actual meaning of the separation between the Church and the State. The last one is about an event that discussed publicly the examined topic with experts of the issue. The article from [vice.com/gr](http://vice.com/gr) provides many insights in relation to the separation of the Church and the State by presenting even changes in Article 3 proposed by the government (Figure 4).

Figure 4. The proposed changes in Article 3 from the Greek government according to vice.com/gr.

κάλυψη της προεκλογικής υπόσχεσης πως θα υπάρξει πραγματικός διαχωρισμός.

**Άρθρο 3**  
 1. Η Ελληνική Πολιτεία είναι θρησκευτικά ουδέτερη. Επικρατούσα θρησκεία στην Ελλάδα είναι η θρησκεία της Ανατολικής Ορθόδοξης Εκκλησίας του Χριστού. Η Ορθόδοξη Εκκλησία της Ελλάδας, που γιορτάζει κεφαλή της τον Κύριο ημών Ιησού Χριστό, υπάρχει αναποσπαστα ενωμένη δογματικά με τη Μεγάλη Εκκλησία της Κωνσταντινούπολης και με κάθε άλλη ομόδοξη Εκκλησία του Χριστού τρείς απαραίτητα, όπως εκείνες, τους ιερούς αποστολικούς και συνοδικούς κανόνες και τις ιερές παραδόσεις. Είναι αυτοκέφαλη, διοικείται από την Ιερά Σύνοδο των εν ενεργεία Αρχιερέων και από τη Διαρκή Ιερά Σύνοδο που προέρχεται από αυτή και συγκροτείται όπως ορίζει ο Καταστατικός Χάρτης της Εκκλησίας με τήρηση των διατάξεων του Πατριαρχικού Τόμου της κθ' (29) Ιουνίου 1850 και της Συνοδικής Πράξης της 4<sup>ης</sup> Σεπτεμβρίου 1928.  
 2. Το εκκλησιαστικό καθεστώς που υπάρχει σε ορισμένες περιοχές του Κράτους δεν αντικαθίστα στις διατάξεις της προηγούμενης παραγράφου.  
 3. Το κείμενο της Αγίας Γραφής τρείται αναλλοίωτο. Η επίσημη μετάφρασή του σε άλλο γλωσσικό τύπο απαγορεύεται χωρίς την έγκριση της Αυτοκέφαλης Εκκλησίας της Ελλάδας και της Μεγάλης του Χριστού Εκκλησίας στην Κωνσταντινούπολη.

16

*Ερμηνευτική δήλωση: Η αναγνώριση επικρατούσας θρησκείας δεν επιφέρει καμία δοσμένη συνέπεια σε βάρος άλλων θρησκειμάτων*

The article from protothema.gr presents the opinions of the Holy Synod about the examined topic:

‘Article 3 currently works in competition with Article 13, as it has consistently been interpreted so far by the courts under Article 3, the State may also legislate on internal religious issues of the Orthodox Church and without the latter's consent, and therefore the Church does not have the full rights of religious autonomy derived from Article 13 for other religious communities...’ (Translated from Greek)

The rest of the examined articles almost exclusively deal with the separation between State and Church in the context of the current political affairs by providing conflict opinions and statements from the state officials, the opposition parties, and the Church. Those statements do not analyze what Article 3 says. They just express their endorsement or opposition regarding the separation of the Church and the State.

Regarding the results of the second survey, 65.8% of the participants replied that they did not know the actual content of Article 3 of the Greek constitution. The minority (34.2%) knew its content. The respondents were asked also if Article 3 represents equally the Greek citizens of the country. The majority of them (71.1%) replied negatively, 18.4% answered affirmatively and 10.5% that did not know and so could not answer to the question. In the question about if there is a need of modifying Article 3, 60.5% replied that there is definitely a need for modifying. On the contrary, only 10.5% answered that they do not want the Article to change and 21.1% believed that it needs to be deleted from the Greek Constitution. 7.9%

decided to say that they did not know and therefore could not answer. Furthermore, almost all participants believed that there must be a separation between the Church and the Greek State (84.2%) and only 13.2% had a different opinion.

From the 38 participants, 47.4% answered that they do not worship, 23.7% worship every six months, and 15.8% every three months. Another respondent replied once a month (2.6%), three users (7.9%) replied that they worship once a week and one (2.6%) constantly worships. 39.5% of the participants had received their degree from the Department of Journalism and Mass Communications of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, 31.6% had a Master degree and 28.9% had just finished high school. Regarding the last question, which concerned their date of birth, the oldest participant stated that he/she was born in 1966, while the youngest was born in 1999. Participants were divided into four age groups according to their birth date. The first group was born from 1966 to 1988 and had eleven participants. The second group, with ten participants, was born from 1989 to 1994. The third group, with eight participants, was born from 1995 to 1996 (third and fourth-year students) and the fourth group was born from 1997 to 1999 with nine participants (first and second-year students). Lastly, 78.9% of the participants were women and 21.1% men.

Table 2 shows that the mean age of respondents is 27, median 25. The age of participants ranged between 19-52 years old. The first percentile (25 % of answers) lays less than 21.75 age value, 75 percentile after 30. The histogram showed that the age of participants is not normally distributed. There was a higher count of younger participants and a lower count of older.

Table 2: Age of participants

N	Valid	38
	Missing	0
Mean		27.0000
Median		25.0000
Std. Deviation		7.20735
Skewness		1.542
Std. Error of Skewness		.383
Kurtosis		2.789
Std. Error of Kurtosis		.750
Minimum		19.00
Maximum		52.00
Percentiles	25	21.7500
	50	25.0000
	75	30.0000

The percentile division of ages presented in Table 3 divided ages into four categories with 8-11 observations in each. This allowed the comparison for mean values of ordinal and numeric scales using this variable as categorical. This age division was not suitable for chi-tests of variables with more than two categories, because the expected count of responses in a category could be less than five (this is the minimal count of observations for a good fit of chi-tests). That's why the age division by young and adult participants was made as second variable Age Groups 2. Division on two groups allowed computing chi-tests with reliable power for variables with four or less count of categories (Table 4). Moreover, other significant disproportions and associations for four age categories were not found.



**Table 3.** Age groups by percentile division.

Age	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
18-21	9	23.7	23.7	23.7
22-24	10	26.3	26.3	50.0
25-30	8	21.1	21.1	71.1
30+	11	28.9	28.9	100.0
Total	38	100	100	

**Table 4.** Results of chi-tests and association tests for AgeGroups2 variable.

	AgeGroup2	Art3Content	Art3Represent	Art3Modifying	StateChurch	WorkshopFreq	Studied	Sex
AgeGroups2	1							
Art3Content	0.732	1						
Art3Represent	0.558	0.114	1					
Art3Modifying	0.602	0.844	0.005**	1				
StateChurch	0.585	0.446	0.881	0.034*	1			
WorkshopFreq	0.849	0.023*	0.035*	0.025*	0.5	1		
Studied	0.000**	0.705	0.549	0.035**	0.092~	0.552	1	
Sex	0.426	0.058~	0.169	0.269	0.925	0.515	0.275	1

\*\*=0.01 significance, \*=0.05 significance, ~-border of significance 0.05-0.1.

## Conclusions and Discussion

With regard to the first Research Question (RQ1), the first study revealed that the examined news outlets do not extensively cover the topics related to Article 3 of the Greek Constitution. This is apparent not only from the small number of relevant articles found to have been published over the last 18 years (the research included the articles that were online from January 1, 2000, to December 31, 2018), but also from the fact that among these 147 articles, almost none detail what is stipulated in Article 3. In addition, the positions of the current (February 2018 at the time of the research) members of the coalition government of Radical Left Coalition (SYRIZA) and Independent Greeks (ANEL), as well as the fights with the opposition parties on the issue of segregation, seem to attract media interest. Thus, there is a focus on the statements of politicians rather than the analysis of Article 3, likely trying to create conflict stories. This finding aligns with the relevant media literature as “research has shown that conflict framing is one of the most important mechanisms of political news reporting” (Bartholomé et al., 2015, p. 438). It also aligns with the findings of Hatzimihail (2015), who argues that there is no focus on the actual matter of the separation between the Church and the State, which is the legal aspect. It seems more to be a tool for polarization using a rhetoric of denunciation that is likely opposed to the power of Church.

However, there are also a few new pieces that try to provide a different perspective on the above subject. For example, [vice.com/gr](http://vice.com/gr) published an article titled “What Should Greece Do for the Ultimate Separation of the Church from the State?” This article presented the views of

some members of Europe's atheist and agnostic organizations. The survey results also indicate that print newspapers (67/147) have more strongly emphasized the coverage of the issues related to Article 3 of the Constitution in comparison to other media.

Moreover, it could be argued that there is significant interest among users, since 147 articles examined were found to contain 2,326 comments. In particular, it was noted that newspaper websites gathered almost all users' comments (2,001/2,326). The number, in fact, looked significant, considering that in half of the examined websites (alphatv.gr, antenna.gr, dikaiologitika.gr, star.gr, vice.com/gr, and zougla.gr), comments were not allowed. Amongst these, 39 comments were found containing hate speech, which, among other things, according to George (2016), is also a form of propaganda that encourages even physical attacks towards targeted groups and individuals (RQ2).

Summarizing the answers in the online questionnaire and the users' comments from the School of Journalism and Mass Communications, it is clear that only one-third of the respondents replied that they are aware of the content of Article 3, while only 18.4% believe that this Article fairly represents all Greek citizens. It is also worth noting that 10.5% argued that Article 3 should not be amended, while 84.2% of respondents believe in the separation of the State from the Church. In addition, it is noted that 47.4% of participants said they do not worship. Finally, with regard to the commentary of Article 3 by participants, only one of the 17 participants stated that "there are other issues that should be of concern to us first," while in all other replies there was an interest in the existence and the content of the Article. Of the eleven participants who were asked to comment on what shape this Article should take, nine stated that there must be a future amendment. The discussion for the State and Church relations in Greece revolves mainly around the concept of separation, which is a major factor in Article 3 and its possible abolition or amendment (RQ3).

There were differences in study level and age groups. The people who mentioned the need for modifications of Article 3 are far more numerous than those who do not want changes. There were only eight males in the sample, and that is the reason why there is a difference on the border for sex and content. However, it seems that male participants are more aware of the content of Article 3 than females. According to the crosstab, people who are less religious know less about the content of the article. Comparing to other answers, people who got a degree from the School of Journalism and Mass Communications thought that article had to be deleted. It seems that people who believe in the unity of State and Church have fewer suggestions for the modification of Article 3. However, the subsample is very small and this result is not solid enough. Furthermore, participants who referred to article modifications also reported about non-equal representation. Moreover, participants who seem to be more religious do not want the Article to change, in comparison to people who believe in Church and State separation. Lastly, the differences which were found for ages seem adequate (RQ4).

The research of online media proved that articles from the country's top media companies do not cover (either frequently or in detail) issues related to Article 3 of the Greek Constitution. Their focus is almost exclusively on the issue of the separation between the State and the Church, which is somewhat dictated by timeliness. It seemed to be an attempt to follow developments rather than setting the daily agenda. At the same time, it is noted that, although commenting is not encouraged by all news outlets, users are willing to express their views, as can be seen by a large number of comments in the relevant online articles. In addition, several media companies publish anonymous articles, thereby supporting or promoting unacceptable behaviors and non-civil dialogue (Pew Research Center, 2017). Additionally, the questionnaire participants seemed to be in favor of abstract changes in Article 3 of the Greek Constitution, as it is thought to be an important issue for the current society. This research proves that there is a tendency for action in the relation between the

State and the Church in Greece. Meanwhile, it enhances the relevant bibliography and reveals that there are Greek citizens who are ready to support the separation between the State and the Church. Regarding the limitations of the study, it should be mentioned that broader research including more participants and media organizations would reveal more specific results. Additionally, a different scientific approach could shed light also on various sides of the examined topic. Lastly, a future study could be the content analysis of the collected comments from the news media of this study in order to see more clearly what the users believe about the examined topic.

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