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## MEDIA AND COUNTER - TERRORISM CRISIS Communication Strategies in the EU

Human beings have always needed information to secure their livelihood and to ensure their safety. Nowadays, in the current information age we are constantly bombarded by facts, opinions, speculations, rumor, and gossip from every direction. Media channels carry into our homes each night unsettling images of squalor and death from around the world. Computers draw us into an interactive milieu where email gives, and expects in return, ever more rapid exchanges of information.

by Dr. John M. Nomikos\*

The impact of terrorism on society is largely determined by the way it is presented to the public by the mass media, but the latter's role has never been studied rigorously by state agencies or academics, according to the Research Institute for European and American Studies (RIEAS) based in Athens, Greece. RIEAS is a non-profit research center established by John M. Nomikos under Greek law in April 2006. RIEAS' objective is achieved by publishing its research papers on media-security and terrorism studies, organizing workshops as well as providing analyses via its active website.

Greek think tank (RIEAS) undertakes study of the thorny relationship between terrorism and the media as part of a European Union SAFE COMMS (FP7) wide project. RIEAS is the first Greek think tank to address this void, according to its director John M. Nomikos, speaking during an event of a meeting on Counter-Terrorism Crisis Communications Strategies for Recovery and Continuity. The goal of the project is to assist authorities in the European Union member states better react to terror crises by providing effective communication strategies for the aftermath of terror attacks. Such attacks take place when least expected, as terrorists search for vulnerable targets across Europe and seek to spread fear and panic.

A terror attack instantly becomes breaking news in the media throughout the world. Effective recovery from such an attack depends on a carefully planned and trained communication strategy which would be restore public confidence and enable quick return to normality. RIEAS, as a scientific partner, participates in the EU project along with the rest of the partners which are: Bar Ilan University (Israel) as the project coordinator; the A&B One GmbH in Germany; the University of Ulster in UK; Universidad de Burgos in Spain; and the University of Rousse Angel Kunchev in Bulgaria.

On the Greek side, the media-security and intelligence relationship is intrinsically difficult and the Greek authorities need to form a more sophisticated counter-terrorism communication strategy for the aftermath of terror attacks. Greek press and media traditionally cast terrorism in a different light compared to other states. In the USA, Israel, UK, Germany and France, politicians and



government officials are usually the first to arrive at a press briefing to provide details, explanations and their interpretations of current political events to the media, often emphasizing a coherent government position which is difficult to dispute. In Greece, however, public opinion had been accustomed by the mass media to remain skeptical of the government's official stance during a terror crisis. Greek media are often biased in favor of rival political parties rather than the promotion of public trust and social cohesion.

The major disadvantages the European Union member states face in combating international terrorism is lack of cooperation among the security services to share information which only benefits international terrorists that exploit mass media to spread panic and fear in the international community.

In order to effectively deal with the aftermath of terror attacks, public authorities in the European Union need a counter-terrorism communication strategy comprised of activities aimed at the relevant audiences. This strategy needs to be tested and adapted before an attack takes place and forms an inherent part of crisis management and continuity plans. SAFE COMMS aims to provide public authorities in the EU with an effective and modular communication strategy for terror crises.

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