

DOES THE EGG COME BEFORE THE CHICKEN?

By Special Correspondent

It was recently announced in the press that the Interior ministry is inviting all political parties in parliament to participate in a debate on how to reform the Greek National Police. In a letter to the parties, the minister in charge of the police service invited party representatives to dialogue, outlined the ministry's proposals, and stressed the need for consensus.

As of this writing, there has been no press reporting on the reaction of the parties to this ministerial invitation. It is almost preordained, however, that there will be deep divisions on what to do with the Greek law enforcement's main agency. For the longest time, the police have been mercilessly pummeled by politicians and the media for their perceived brutality, unprofessionalism, and arbitrary ways. This deluge of criticism reached a new crescendo during and after the December Riots, when the police *were instructed from the highest level to watch rather than wade in and restore order*. The results of this disastrous "strategy" we can still see in parts of ravaged Athens six months later.

One of the many peculiar characteristics of Greece's public discourse is focusing the blame on individual actors or entities as if these targets exist in a vacuum or have just landed from outer space. The critics throw punches as if the punching bag is somehow exclusively responsible for its own predicament in some mysterious parthenogenetic process. The police are an excellent case in point. Their ineptitude and lack of discipline make bold headlines in the left-wing press – but there's *never* any attempt to connect the dots and bring into the picture *the politics and politicians* that actually formulate the environment in which the police operate and are placed under demands for firm discipline and scrupulous observance of the law.

As a result, the public debate on the police often touches on the surrealistic. "Social partners," all of them practicing routine indifference toward, or provocative breach of, the "democratic process" – be it through "justified disobedience," political posturing, labor action, corruption, alienation, negligence, dereliction of duty or a combination thereof – are immediately and publicly mortified at how the police fail in their mission; abuse their power; betray public trust; and are criminally liable for a host of offenses.

None of these ready critics though have **the slightest thing to say** about the quality and content of Greek "democracy" in its present statist-bloated, stunted, irrational form; the almost complete lack of civic consciousness in Greek society; and the traditional tolerance, and often the open complacency, of the majority toward borderline behaviors, human-killing terrorism (as demonstrated by the lengthy career of the November 17 terrorist group) and violent protest that invariably results in serious damage to private and government property, whose cost is then entirely placed on the shoulders of those few who are forced to pay taxes in this country.

When "leaders" and other influentials, be it individual politicians, "opinion makers," or pressure groups, are generally indifferent or dismissive of the law, how could they insist on our appointed police apply behaviors the rest of the "establishment" undermines daily as **the measure** in a law-abiding society (that does not really exist)? How could we expect **our** police becoming an island of virtuous robustness and rigorous self-discipline surrounded as it is by a sea of anomy, mass anarchy, and complete disregard of "good neighborly relations?"

National police forces are not foreign transplants. They originate in the society they are called upon to protect. By definition, they cannot escape the incapacities, miscarriages, and abuses society itself generates and, often, tolerates as part of everyday life. Before, therefore, we proceed with "reform," it is imperative to address many separate dysfunctions present in our political and social systems.

Greece cannot overnight acquire a German, Danish, or Dutch police force – because she is not Germany, Denmark, or Holland. Just like the rest of her public sector – corrupt, hydrocephalus, and often law-breaking – her police will continue being plagued by malignancies other countries have cured long ago. "Reform," therefore, cannot grow beyond the frontier established by similar efforts elsewhere in her public sector. Judging on the basis of this latter criterion, Greek police do not appear bound for any spectacular breakthroughs.

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