



RESEARCH PAPER

No. 162

JULY 2013

**ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION
A MULTIFACETED NATIONAL SECURITY THREAT:
THE CASE OF GREECE**

(Updated version – 2013)

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Abstract

This an updated version of the initial working paper publicized in 2010. It outlines the main parameters of Greece's immigration issue and dispels some of the myths surrounding it. Moreover, it presents the country's immigration policy of the last two decades and traces the reasons behind its complete failure. Then, the national security threat that has arisen due to the issue's mismanagement is pointed out. Finally, a framework for a new immigration policy is provided.

[Submitted on June 4th, 2013]

Setting the scene

Greece is situated in the southeast part of the Mediterranean Sea. In the north the country borders with Albania, the Former Yugoslav Republic of "Macedonia" and Bulgaria. The neighbor to the East is Turkey, with a small land border in the northeast area of Thrace and the extended sea borders of the Aegean Sea. Africa is to the south and Italy is to the West. Greece has been a member of the European Union since 1980, but, to the country's misfortune, had no land borders with any other EU country until 2007 when Bulgaria joined. Greece's geographical position makes it EU's "gatekeeper" from the South-East. Until the late '80s Greece was largely a homogeneous country with a population consisting of Greek Orthodox (98%), a minority of Greek Muslims situated mostly in the northern area of Thrace, and some smaller communities of Catholics and Jews.

After the fall of communist regimes, a mass influx of illegal immigrants took place, mostly from the neighboring countries of the North. The influx consisted not only of ethnic Greeks from these countries, but also of Albanians, Bulgarians and other Eastern Europeans. The wave of illegal immigrants from the Middle East, South Asia and Africa has increased considerably since 2008, and since 2010 it constitutes the larger part of the annual inflow to Greece (see Table 1). It should be noted that, until 2008, the vast majority of the annual inflow of illegal immigrants to Greece originated from one country: Albania.

The situation had become so serious for Greece that the European Commission's Vice-President Jacques Barrot warned in mid-2009 that "***there is a grave danger of destabilization of the Hellenic Republic due to the completely uncontrollable waves of immigration***"¹.

The US State Department, in its 2012 report on terrorism, emphasizes that "***The porous nature of Greece's borders is of concern. While Greek border authorities try to stem the flow of illegal migration, its ability to control large-scale illegal migration via its land and sea borders with Turkey is limited. The recent political upheavals in North***

¹ A relevant article (*Kathimerini*, 3/7/2009) can be read here (in Greek only): http://news.kathimerini.gr/4dcqi/ w_articles_world_1_03/07/2009_320831

*Africa and the Middle East have intensified illegal migration to and through Greece via the Greece-Turkey border and the Greek Aegean islands*².

How many are the country's immigrants?

According to the latest Ministry of Interior data³ Greece's (mostly ex-post facto legalized) immigrant population is 537,237 people. The vast majority of the residence permits (about 70%) has been granted to Albanians. The Ministry did not provide any figure on the number of illegal immigrants residing in Greece but, instead, it pointed out that the total number of people arrested for illegal entry and/or illegal stay in Greece from 2008 to 2012 is 577,900.

Estimations on the number of illegal immigrants in Greece vary. ELIAMEP, for example, has estimated that the total number of illegal immigrants in Greece was about 470,000 people in 2010⁴. Other estimations reach much higher numbers. The ex-Secret Services Head, former Ambassador and former MP Mr Ioannis Korandis argued in 2009 that there were about 1.8 million immigrants in the country, of whom only 600,000 had participated in the successive regularization efforts⁵. Thus, in his view, immigrants constituted about 15-18% of Greece's population and that 1.2 million people lived in the country completely undocumented.

² The State Department's full report can be read here (in English):

<http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2012/209981.htm>

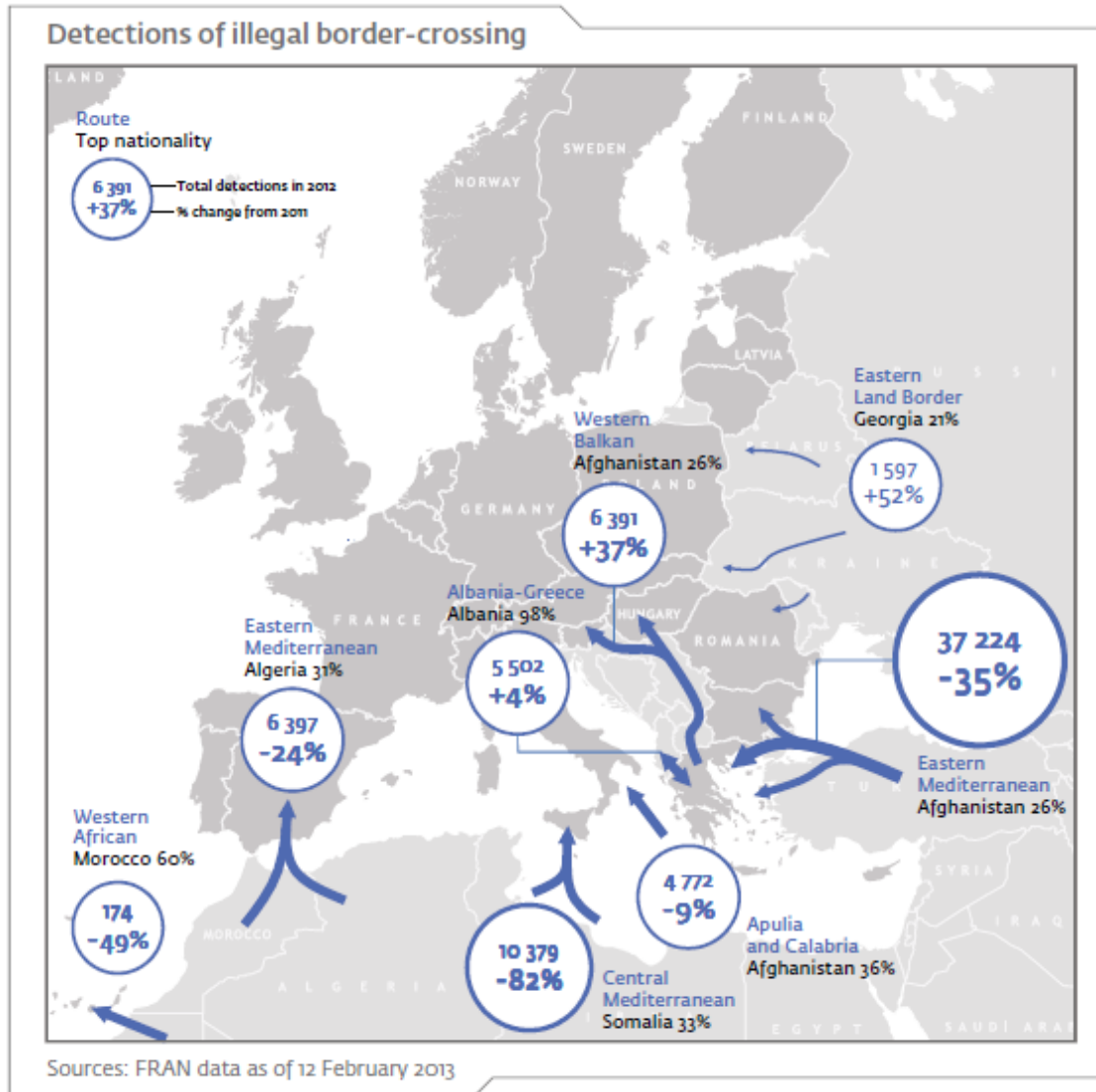
³ A relevant article (*To Vima online*, 26/02/2013) can be read here (in Greek only):

<http://www.tovima.gr/society/article/?aid=500163>

⁴ The relevant article (*Kathimerini*, 16/1/2011) can be read here (in Greek only):

http://news.kathimerini.gr/4dcgi/w_articles_politics_100008_16/01/2011_428987

⁵ Mr Korandis' relevant comment was made in an interview with the "*Athens News*" on 26/9/2009



Detections of illegal border-crossing in Europe

Source: Frontex – *Annual Risk Analysis 2013*, p. 22

According to recent Eurostat data⁶ 956,000 foreigners live and work in Greece, representing 8.5% of the country's population. **Only 153,000 (1.4%) come from other EU countries while 803,000 (7.1%) come from countries outside the EU.** The EU average for the total foreigner population is 6.6% while the average for the non-EU foreigner population is 4.1%. This means that Greece has a larger foreign population than the EU average and that this population originates from outside the EU in a much larger scale than the relevant EU average.

The demographic trends are also worrying due to Greece's low birth rate, ageing population and rapid demographic decline. Population projections by former Athens

⁶ "Nearly two-thirds of the foreigners living in EU Member States are citizens of countries outside the EU-27", Eurostat: statistics in focus, 31/2012
http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_OFFPUB/KS-SF-12-031/EN/KS-SF-12-031-EN.PDF

University of Economics and Business Professor Manolis Drettakis⁷ indicate that, at the current rate of immigrant influx, the population of immigrant origin will constitute almost 21% of the total population by 2060.

A self-defeating immigration policy

In the early '90s the centre-right government of the time (1990-1993) was not prepared to tackle the increased immigrant inflow and, in spite of mounting some deportation efforts, it reluctantly tolerated it. With the immigrant population steadily increasing and a black market for cheap labor having been created, the centre-left government which followed (1993-2004) decided to do something about it.

The proposals to the government both from the Police and from a special committee that was set up were to record all illegal immigrants in the country but to offer a chance to regularization only to illegal immigrants who did not originate from neighboring countries. Moreover, the proposals recommended that the scope of the regularization was to be short-term and that it should try to fill existing labor market needs. In 1997 the government decided to offer a chance of regularization to all illegal immigrants (at that time their number was estimated to be about 500,000). This effort was largely unsuccessful as it managed to regularize only half of that population, while the influx of illegal immigrants continued.

The centre-left government decided to offer illegal immigrants a second chance of regularization in 2001 (at that time their number was estimated to be about 650,000). Due to their sheer number and the inadequacy of Greek public administration infrastructure, this effort failed as well. This "policy" of successive regularizations was continued by the centre-right government that regained office in 2004. Two more regularization chances were offered (in 2005 and in 2007) but the situation only got worse. Not surprisingly, while in opposition, the centre-right party had criticised the centre-left government's regularization efforts.

It should be emphasized that the EU had already clearly stated that the decision to take in immigrants, to decide on their numbers and on their skills lies solely within each Member State. Furthermore, the EU was – and still is - firmly against large-scale regularizations and favored the repatriation of illegal immigrants. Specifically, the EU⁸ had pointed out that: "*Within the context of a managed immigration policy the only coherent approach to dealing with illegal residents is to ensure that they return to their country of origin*" (p.19). The EU had also emphasised that "*wide-scale regularisation measures...are not...seen to have a long-term effect in reducing the levels of illegal migrants, instead they may serve as an additional pull factor for illegal migrants...[R]egularisations should not be considered as a way of managing migration flows as in reality they often appear as a negative consequence of migration policy in other areas*" (p.17).

⁷ The relevant article by Mr Drettakis was publicized in "Avgi" on 24/7/2011

⁸ Commission of the European Communities, Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: Study on the links between legal and illegal migration, Brussels, 4.6.2004 COM(2004) 412 final <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2004:0412:FIN:EN:PDF>

As a result of this suicidal “immigration policy”, illegal immigration to Greece has exploded in recent years (see Table 1 below).

ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS ARRESTED

Origin	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Albania	173,957	36,827	35,789	31,637	52,132	57,466	66,818	72,443	63,563	50,175	11,743	10,602
Other	45,641	21,403	15,242	13,350	14,219	37,773	45,546	73,894	62,582	82,349	87,625	66,276
TOTAL	219,598	58,230	51,031	44,987	66,351	95,239	112,364	146,337	126,145	132,524	99,368	76,878

REPATRIATIONS

2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
13,242	11,778	14,222	15,168	20,461	17,650	17,077	20,555	20,342	52,469	17,279	22,117

Table 1: Arrests and repatriations of illegal immigrants in Greece

The year 2001, when the second regularization effort took place, marked the highest number of arrests of the last twelve years for illegal entry and/or illegal stay (almost 220,000). The massive homeland security effort and the increased guarding of the borders due to the 2004 Olympic Games resulted in an all-time low of just 45,000 arrests. The number of arrests started increasing again in 2005 when the third regularization attempt took place and continued rising, reaching the highest of the last eleven years in 2008 and remaining quite high in 2009 and 2010. It is only in the last two years (2011 and 2012) that the flow seems to be ebbing. Nevertheless, during the whole of this period the repatriations of illegal immigrants that took place remained quite low compared to the influx. It should be noted that the decrease in the number of arrests of Albanians for illegal entry and/or illegal stay is - to some extent – due to the fact that since December 2010 the visa regime was abolished for Albanian nationals, who since then are allowed to enter and stay in Greece for three months without a visa.

The data in Table 1 show that the Greek governments shot themselves in the foot by starting the dominoes of successive regularizations. Through this “policy” they sent out the wrong message to the immigrants’ countries of origin. They gave the impression that Greece is “soft touch” and if someone somehow makes it into the country he/she will get a chance of regularization sooner or later. Moreover, Greek governments, by offering regularization, essentially rewarded the breach of the law both by illegal immigrants (illegal entry/stay) and by those who employed them (hire of illegal labour). On the contrary, when Greece was determined to effectively guard the country’s borders and used all its diplomatic clout (i.e. in 2004), it managed to significantly decrease the inflow of illegal immigrants. It should be emphasized that, in its diplomatic efforts during 2004, Greece was supported by the EU and international allies (i.e. the US, Russia etc).

The national security threat in detail

The aforementioned situation has resulted in a (self-inflicted!) multifaceted national security threat against Greece. The most self-evident strand of this threat is that large numbers of people enter and remain in the country illegally and are of unknown origin and motives. Their motives may range from purely economic (employment, higher salary) to quite sinister (criminality, terrorist acts). More specifically, the national security threat takes the following forms:

1) Criminality and ghettoization

The uncontrollable influx and settlement of very large numbers of illegal immigrants in Greece's major cities has resulted in the creation of "no-go areas" and ghettos, especially in Athens' city center! Not surprisingly, criminality is rife and ethnic clashes and riots are commonplace in these areas. Moreover, another symptom of Greece's flawed immigration policy is the very significant contribution of foreigners in serious crimes such as homicides, robberies, thefts and burglaries and rapes⁹. This "contribution" ranges from 37% for rapes to 46% for robberies (data for arrests in 2012). Moreover, according to Ministry of Justice data for 2012, foreigners constituted 63.2% of inmates in Greek prisons (7,887 out of a total of 12,479 inmates)¹⁰. Albanians, being by far the largest ethnic group, are also responsible for a significant part of the imported criminality. According to a confidential Police report¹¹ 42 criminal organizations from Albania operate in Greece. About 3,000 Albanian criminals are active in the transportation and distribution of cannabis and heroin, while 2,500 Albanians are arrested each year in Greece for robberies, thefts and burglaries.

Ministry of Public Order data which were presented in the Parliament¹² show that the number of foreign criminals has risen dramatically in the last 15 years. More specifically, the Police had recorded 6,094 foreign criminals in 1998 and their number more than tripled to 20,265 in 2012. Albanian criminals constituted 54% of the total number of foreign criminals in 1998 (3,294 people). Their number in 2012 had risen to 4,655 (a 41% increase) but their part of the total fell to 23% due to the sharp increase in the presence of criminals from other nationalities (Pakistanis, Bulgarians, Romanians)

⁹ The relevant statistical data can be found on the Hellenic Police website at:

<http://www.astynomia.gr/images/stories/2013/statistics13/epikrateia1.xls>

¹⁰ The relevant Ministry of Justice data can be found here:

<http://www.ministryofjustice.gr/site/el/%CE%A3%CE%A9%CE%A6%CE%A1%CE%9F%CE%9D%CE%99%CE%A3%CE%A4%CE%99%CE%9A%CE%9F%CE%A3%CE%A5%CE%A3%CE%A4%CE%97%CE%9C%CE%91%CE%A3%CF%84%CE%B1%CF%84%CE%B9%CF%83%CF%84%CE%B9%CE%BA%CE%AC%CF%83%CF%84%CE%BF%CE%B9%CF%87%CE%B5%CE%AF%CE%B1%CE%BA%CF%81%CE%B1%CF%84%CE%BF%CF%85%CE%BC%CE%AD%CE%BD%CF%89%CE%BD/%CE%93%CE%95%CE%9D%CE%99%CE%9A%CE%9F%CE%A3%CE%A3%CE%A4%CE%91%CE%A4%CE%99%CE%A3%CE%A4%CE%99%CE%9A%CE%9F%CE%A3%CE%A0%CE%99%CE%9D%CE%91%CE%9A%CE%91%CE%A3%CE%9A%CE%A1%CE%91%CE%A4%CE%9F%CE%A5%CE%9C%CE%95%CE%9D%CE%A9%CE%9D%CE%A0%CE%9F%CE%99%CE%9D%CE%A9%CE%9D.aspx>

¹¹ The relevant article was publicized in "To Vima" on 20/3/2010

¹² The relevant Ministry of Public Order announcement can be read here (in Greek only):

<http://www.hellenicparliament.gr/UserFiles/67715b2c-ec81-4f0c-ad6a-476a34d732bd/7951287.pdf>

Εστίες παραβατικότητας στην «καρδιά» της Αθήνας

Τα ναρκωτικά, η παρουσία μεγάλου αριθμού παράνομων μεταναστών, το παρεμπόριο και η πορνεία είναι τα μεγάλα στοιχεία υποβάθμισης του ιστορικού Κέντρου σύμφωνα με τον χάρτη που κατήρτισε ο Δήμος Αθηναίων.



The ghettos in Athens city center – Source: *Kathimerini* 4/8/2010

2) Integration? What integration?

The fact that a large and increasing number of people enter the country illegally and manage to remain makes their integration more difficult. Moreover, the fact that the vast majority of these people originate from countries outside the EU is a factor that further impedes integration. Finally, bearing in mind the relevant experience of other European countries such as the UK, France and the Netherlands, the fact that the vast majority of these people comes from Muslim countries will hamper any effort for their comprehensive integration.

Integration will also not take place because the vast majority of immigrants in Greece entered the country illegally and have been ex-post facto regularized. Thus, the stance

of the native population towards them is very negative. Immigrants' disproportionate participation in serious crime and the ghettoization of several parts of Athens city center only enhance this negative stance. According to a recent poll by Kapa Research¹³ 73.9% of Greeks agree that the presence of immigrants increases violence and criminality and 75.4% of Greeks approve of the "Xenios Zeus" operation for the combating of illegal immigration. The same poll revealed that 47.3% of Greeks favor the repatriation of immigrants who are in the country illegally or are not useful while a further 7.9% wants all immigrants to return to their countries of origin.

Thus, it should not come as a surprise that significant parts of Greece's immigrant population (even of second generation immigrants) do not seem to integrate in Greek society. A study by the National University of Athens¹⁴ indicated that the majority of first generation immigrants and a very significant minority of second generation immigrants (40-50%) have difficulties integrating.

Finally, integration efforts are also offset by the fact that unemployment among foreigners is much higher (and rising) than among Greeks. According to the National Statistics Service Labor Force Survey for the fourth quarter of 2012¹⁵, unemployment was much higher among people of foreign nationality than among Greeks (36.9% and 25% respectively). Moreover, according to National Statistics Service data on the levels of poverty, the vast majority (58.3%) of the foreign population between the ages 18-64 years' old is in danger of poverty. The percentage for Greeks is 29.7%¹⁶.

3) Albanian nationalism

According to a 2012 survey by Gallup's Balkan Monitor¹⁷ 75% of Albanians support the formation of Greater Albania. Albanians consider a part of Northwest Greece in the Epirus region (called "Cameria" by Albanians) as part of Greater Albania (see map below). Thus, the presence of an increasing number of Albanians in Greece could offer Albanian nationalists a large recruiting pool of fighters (or sympathizers) for the "liberation" of "Cameria".

¹³ The relevant article (*To Vima*, 11/11/2012) can be read here (in Greek only):

<http://www.tovima.gr/politics/article/?aid=483398>

¹⁴ An article by the author commenting on the study's findings can be read here (in Greek only):

<http://dikaioopolis.gr/2010/05/20/ensomatosi-metanaston/>

¹⁵ The relevant press release by the National Statistics Authority can be read here (in Greek only):

http://www.statistics.gr/portal/page/portal/ESYE/BUCKET/A0101/PressReleases/A0101_SJO01_DT_QQ_04_2012_01_F_GR.pdf

¹⁶ The relevant press release by the National Statistics Authority can be read here (in Greek only):

http://www.statistics.gr/portal/page/portal/ESYE/BUCKET/A0802/PressReleases/A0802_SFA10_DT_AN_00_2011_01_F_GR.pdf

¹⁷ The survey's findings by country can be viewed here (in English):

<http://www.balkan-monitor.eu/index.php/dashboard>



Map of Greater Albania

Several opinion polls conducted in previous years¹⁸ showed that Greeks have the most negative attitudes towards Albanian immigrants and the events of September 2004 should always be kept in mind. Then, after a soccer match between Albania and Greece, extended clashes took place between Greeks and Albanians in many areas of Athens, Piraeus and Thessaloniki and in the cities of Corfu, Rhodes, Volos, Larissa, Corinth, Tripolis and Nafplion. One man was left dead and there were at least 50 wounded from the clashes.

Finally, according to an article which appeared in the newspaper “Proto Thema”¹⁹ in 2010, sources from the Ministry for Public Order estimated that 3,000 Albanians who live in Greece own AK-47 rifles and unknown quantities of ammunition. It should be noted that the majority of those Albanians reside in Greece legally.

4) Muslim fundamentalism

So far Greece does not seem to have a particular issue of Islamic fundamentalism. Nevertheless, as aptly described in a 2009 State Department report on terrorism²⁰,

¹⁸ For example see the “*To Vima ton Politon*” Kapa Research opinion poll commissioned by “To Vima” newspaper. The poll took place in November 2007 using a very large sample consisting of 10,000 Greeks

¹⁹ A reference to the “Proto Thema” article can be found here (in Greek only):

<http://www.inews.gr/60/3000-kalashnikov-sta-cheria-alvanon-stin-ellada.htm>

²⁰ The State Department’s full report can be read here (in English):

<http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2009/140885.htm>

*“Greece is increasingly an EU entry point for illegal immigrants coming from the Middle East and South Asia and there was concern that **it could be used as a transit route for terrorists traveling to Europe and the United States**. The number of illegal immigrants entering Greece, especially through the Aegean Sea, increased dramatically in 2008 and 2009, with more than 100,000 illegal immigrants, nearly half of whom originated from North Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia, arrested each year”.*

It should be noted though that in May 2009 Athens witnessed the first incident of a “clash of civilizations” on Greek soil when hundreds of Muslim immigrants clashed with the police and with locals for two days, after an alleged tearing-up of the Quran by a police officer during a stop-and-search operation. Bus stops, 5 shops, one bank and 57 cars were smashed in and the city center’s main squares and streets were turned into battle zones for hours. 46 immigrants were arrested, 7 immigrants and 7 police officers were wounded during the clashes²¹.

Two more incidents indicate the increasing clout of Muslim communities’ presence in Greece. In November 2010 the Muslim communities held a public prayer in Athens’ central squares despite having been denied permission by the relevant authorities. In September 2012 riots broke out in Omonia square between Muslims and the police during a Muslim protest for a video which appeared on YouTube and was considered as blasphemous for their religion.

Moreover, with the rise in numbers of illegal immigrants originating from Muslim countries where radical Islam thrives (i.e. Pakistan, Bangladesh, Afghanistan) the pool of potential recruits for extremist imams is increasing. In 2010 “Kathimerini” newspaper²² claimed that the number of unofficial mosques operating in Greece (excluding Thrace where native Muslims live) is on the rise. In 2010 there were 75 unofficial mosques (compared to 68 in June 2009), 23 of which had been founded by Pakistani and 15 by Bangladeshi immigrants. According to the same newspaper there were indications that the number of Muslim extremists reaching Greece through illegal immigration is also increasing. More recently, Ministry of Education Secretary Mr George Kalantzis commented that the population of Muslim immigrants in Attica is about 150,000 people, of whom only 28,000 have legal residence permits and the number of active illegal mosques is estimated to be about 120²³.

²¹ Reports of the incidents can be read here (in Greek only):
<http://www.in.gr/news/article.asp?lngEntityID=1016429&lngDtrID=244>
<http://www.enet.gr/?i=news.el.ellada&id=47040>

²² The relevant article (*Kathimerini*, 24/4/2010) can be read here (in Greek only):
http://news.kathimerini.gr/4dcgi/_w_articles_ell_1_24/04/2010_398765

²³ Relevant articles can be read (in Greek only) here (*Kathimerini*, 7/4/2013):
http://news.kathimerini.gr/4dcgi/_w_articles_politics_1_07/04/2013_516709
and here (*Ta Nea*, 9/4/2013):
<http://www.tanea.gr/opinions/all-opinions/article/5010891/h-anagkaiothta-toy-temenoy/>



Another show of their growing strength - The mass prayer of Muslims in main squares in Athens in November 2010 took place despite the fact that the relevant authorities had not granted them permission – Source: *Eleftherotypia* 17/11/2010

5) A fusion of (3) and (4)

About 70% of Albanians are Muslims. They may not be as religious as Muslims in Pakistan or Egypt but there may well be a case of fusion between Albanian nationalism and Islamic fundamentalism in the future. Such a fusion is beneficial to both sides: 1) Albanian nationalists would have more support in promoting their goals. Such a support could range from funding and diplomatic guidance to weapons and even to mujahideen groups fighting on the Albanian side out of Muslim solidarity (as was the case of Muslim volunteers fighting on the Albanian side in Kosovo), 2) Islamic fundamentalism would also benefit as it would gain another foothold in Europe (after Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo). This scenario should not be considered as “extreme” or “improbable”. Stranger alliances have been formed in the past!

A clear indication that the trail of thought outlined above is close to reality is offered by the data on the people for whom the Police requested the lifting of the telecommunications confidentiality during 2004²⁴. This is of special importance as in 2004 Greece mounted the largest national security effort due to the Athens Olympic Games. During 2004 the police made such a request for **425 suspects**, of whom:

- 65 were suspected for participating in organized crime (30 Greeks, **35 foreigners**)
- 14 were anarchists

²⁴ “Police request the lift of confidentiality for 425 people”, *To Paron* 21/8/2005

- the remaining **346** were suspects on **national security reasons**. More specifically, **112** were **Pakistanis**, **70** were **Iraqis** and **34** were **Arabs** – all suspected for links with international terrorism. **105** were **Albanians** – suspected for collaboration with the Albanian National Army on the issue of Cameria, while there were also 13 suspects from FYROM.

Another European solution?

In mid-October 2008 the European Pact on Immigration and Asylum²⁵ was signed by the EU Member States. The Pact pointed out that:

- immigration policy should “*take account of the priorities, needs and reception capacities determined by each Member State*” (p. 4)
- “*it is for each Member State to decide on the conditions of admission of legal migrants to its territory and, where necessary, to set their number*” (p. 5)
- immigration policy should be designed “*with due regard to the acquis communautaire and Community preference, bearing in mind potential human resources within the European Union, and using the most appropriate resources, which take account of all the needs of the labour market of each Member State*” (p. 5)
- “*illegal immigrants on Member States' territory must leave that territory*” (p. 7)
- Member States should “*use only case-by-case regularisation, rather than generalised regularization*” (p. 7)

Greece’s immigration policy of the past 20 years clearly failed on all five aforementioned points. Greek governments never even tried to estimate the actual needs of the labor market in immigrant and unskilled labor and never tried to estimate the carrying capacity of the country’s infrastructure. Thus, Greece never actually set an approximate number for immigrant workers needed, which could be reviewed on a regular basis. Moreover, Greece failed miserably in the repatriation of illegal immigrants and, finally, it applied the self-defeating policy of ex-post facto regularization - not once but four times.

The present government’s efforts are in the right direction but it remains to be seen whether there is a comprehensive immigration policy behind them. So far the present government is trying to minimize the inflow of illegal immigrants and increase their repatriation. Still, these efforts fall short of their goals as the arrests for illegal entry and/or illegal stay remain much higher compared to the repatriations of illegal immigrants. Moreover, the government has not commissioned a scientific report on the actual needs of the labor market in immigrant labor and on the carrying capacity of the country’s infrastructure and population. Such a report would be a stepping stone for the rationalization of Greece’s immigration policy based on facts and not on wishful thinking.

²⁵ The full text of the Pact can be read (in English) here:
<http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/08/st13/st13440.en08.pdf>

Is there a way out for Greece? A final word

Greece does not have many alternatives in order to effectively deal with its immigration issue. Either the country continues the failed policies of half-measures, ex-post facto regularizations, good intentions and wishful thinking or the government becomes realistic and tackles the real dangers that have emerged as a result of the issue's mismanagement in the last 20 years. In order to implement a realistic approach the government should:

- Estimate the labor market needs for migrant labor on a regular basis
- Estimate the country's infrastructure carrying capacity as far as population is concerned
- Guard the land and sea borders much more effectively
- Improve the repatriation rate of illegal immigrants. This can be achieved through a mix of diplomatic efforts, bilateral agreements, concerted EU efforts and repatriation programs. Special focus must be given on an agreement with Turkey which is one of the main transit countries of illegal immigrants to Greece and, thus, Europe
- Rationalize (i.e. decrease) the number of legalized immigrants by not renewing residence and work permits of non-EU citizens and by introducing voluntary repatriation programs
- Ensure the compliance of employers to labor legislation especially as far as illegal labor is concerned. Enforce harsh penalties to those who employ illegal immigrants
- Refrain from new regularization efforts
- Set national security and community cohesion as its main immigration policy-making criteria

Unfortunately, the main obstacles to the aforementioned policy framework are the chronic dysfunctions of the Greek state mechanisms and a lack of political will. These two factors are the main reasons behind the continuous and rapid deterioration of the immigration situation in Greece. The current economic crisis adds the shortage of funds to the equation. A European focus on Greece's compliance with the essence of the EU Pact on Immigration and Asylum will ensure that Greece designs and implements a viable immigration policy that protects Greece's (and EU's) national security and increases community cohesion. EU support of Greece's efforts through funding is imperative, but EU overview of the drawing up and implementation of a coherent immigration policy is essential.

About the Author

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