

# ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION FROM THE EAST – LIFTING THE BURDEN FROM THE GREEK STATE?



**Kostakos Panos**

(PhD Candidate, Department of European Studies and Modern Languages, University of Bath, UK)

Copyright: [www.rieas.gr](http://www.rieas.gr)

**Note:** Kostakos Panos is also a RIEAS Senior Analyst.

Illegal immigration is regarded by states and international institutions as one of the key emerging security threat. Numerous initiatives by IGOs and NGOs have been undertaken to deal with this phenomena. In the case of Greece the situation is perhaps much more serious since the country represents the final frontier of the European Union and the Common Market. Pointedly, over the past years Greece has emerged as a key entry and transit hub as well as a destination country for illegal immigrants. Consequently, there is a pressing need to manage this emerged trend. From a policy-making perspective there is a fundamental conceptual dilemma of a political nature that must be considered for developing effective frameworks for the management contemporary transnational security threats including illegal immigration. Does illegal immigration poses a security threat to the Greek state or to the fabric of the nation? What institutional design fits best to transnational security threats? The position of this article is that clear boundaries between threats directed against

the survival of the state and the nation should be established and that illegal immigration constitutes a threat to the later. The policy implication of this approach is that the key pillar against illegal immigration should rest in managing the phenomenon outside the jurisdiction of the Greek state. Additionally, it is argued that changing the discourse and missions of institutions to adapt to this reality, could lead to more effective policy-making and policing in a number of area.

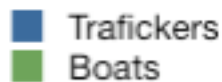
### **Defining and managing threats**

Non-military threats against the state are defined as those activities labeled by state institutions and the international society of states as illegal. A tentative list of activities and groups challenging the state includes: deviant behaviour and ordinary crimes, organized crime, white collar and economic crimes, political crimes and endogenous or foreign extremist organizations (acts of terrorism). Such activities pose a threat to the state by challenging its ability to establish its legitimacy and the rule of law, maintain social order, impose norms of conduct, and retain the monopoly of violence and the monopoly of protection over its subjects and territory. Responsive mechanisms to address such problems are defined by the constitution and issued through the legislative powers of the state. The goal is to establish deterrence mechanisms enforceable through the judicial and executive powers for the suppression of threatening behavior.

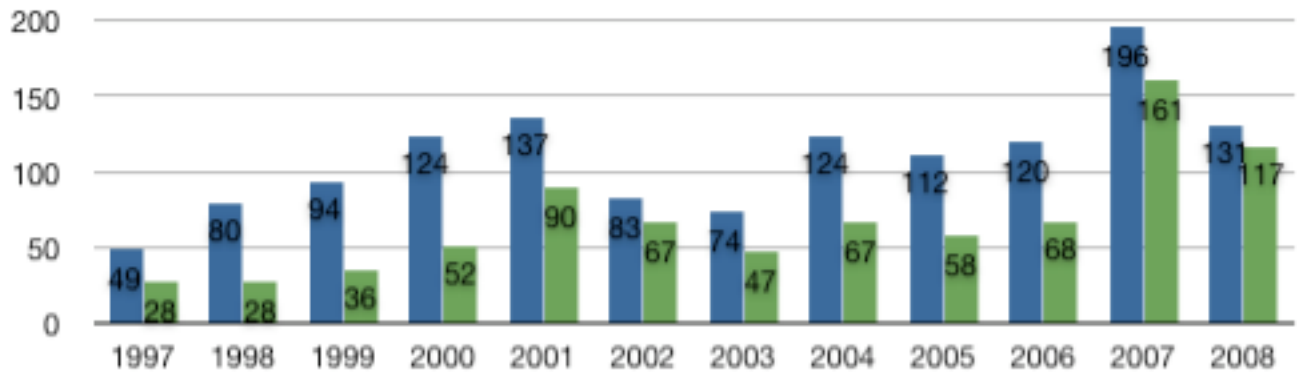
Threats against the nation are more fundamental and less tangible since they challenge the value system and culture that holds together a shared identity within the country. Accumulation of activities that jeopardize and challenge the nature, perverseness and scope of this shared identity, contribute to the destabilization of the nations' cohesion and unity. In an era were threats against the nation and the state are pervasive, the task of dealing with security threats should be informed by a balanced approach marked by a clear differentiation between threats against the state and nation. Institutions with legitimacy to deal with security threats should do so by developing specialization in their tactics, methods and focus against state or national threats.

### **The current approach**

The current institutional design in Greece seems to favor a statist approach that relays heavily on traditional law enforcement and deterrence mechanisms against crimes related to illegal immigration. As are result the state and the political system maintains a tight grip over developments, missions and goals. Over the past ten years, there has been a significant increase in the arrests of people who facilitate smuggling of immigrants via sea routes. There is also a constant increase in the number of boats that are been confiscate by the Greek Coast Guard (table 1).



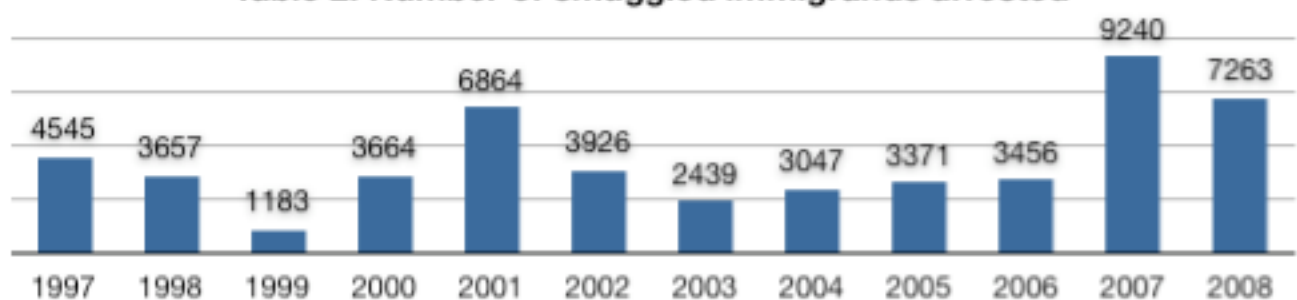
**Table 1: Number of arrests and confiscations 1997-2008**



Source: Hellenic Coast Guard

Despite recent misfortunes, it seems there is a constant and stable supply of smugglers and resources to replace those incapacitated. Interviews with high ranking officers from the Coast Guard also indicate that the modus operandi of the Turkish networks has over the past years showed signs of qualitative improvements. The flexibility, adaptability and capacity of smuggling networks to provide reliable services to an ever demanding market due to recent conflicts is demonstrated by the increasing number of illegal immigrants arrested. It is indicative that the number of arrested immigrants as reported by the Coast Guard within a period of ten years has doubled (table 2). Thus, although the Greek state seems to be effective in neutralizing shadow actors, the overarching dark networks that protect and promote illicit activities in the neighboring country remain immaculate. There are however limits on the extent the Greek state can afford to rely to this approach.

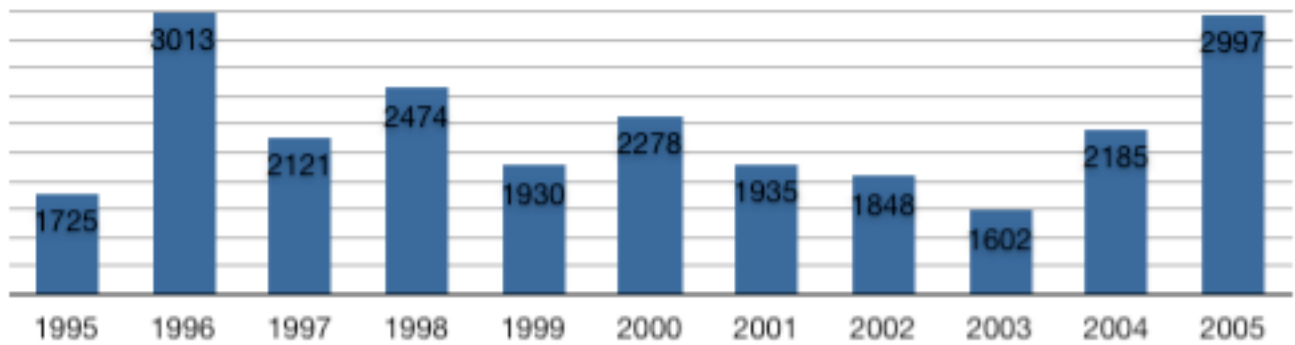
**Table 2. Number of smuggled immigrants arrested**



Source: Hellenic Coast Guard

The influx of illegal immigrant from the Northern borders with the Balkans as well as the eastern Borders with Turkey has resulted to a significant increase of people convicted for illegal entry, stay and exist (table 3). This number represents a high percentage of the total conviction rate. As recent events have shown, the existing prison system in Greece has virtually collapsed and dealing with immigrants through the state systems it is rapidly becoming an issues of human rights violations. In a nutshell it seems that a boomerang effect takes place when the limits of a policy is been exhausted by overwhelming events.

**Table3: Poeples Convicted 1995-2005**



Source: Greek National Statistics Agency (unpublished)

### **Institutional change**

Illegal immigration is a modern transnational security threat that requires significant resources to be utilized inside and outside the jurisdiction of the Greek state. The Coast Guard and the National Intelligence Service (NIS) are both institutions that contribute to the management and prevention of transnational threats. However, their hybrid and uncertain identity may provide significant obstacles. A recent survey shows that Coast Guard officers have a differential view of their role and professional identity. More than half of the interviewees (63.6%) stated that they perceive their job as law enforcement. Additionally, 58.8% perceive themselves as 'police officers' whereas 21.2% as 'army officers' (To Ethnos: Oct 2008). The same hybrid approach is also found in the discourse presented by the NIS. The mission and responsibilities of NIS include intelligence gathering and analysis related to the following issues: 'The protection and promotion of the political, financial, military and – generally – the State's national strategic interests. The prevention and confrontation of activities constituting a threat against the democratic regime, fundamental human rights, the territorial integrity and national security of the Greek State, as well as national wealth. The prevention and confrontation of the activities of terrorist organizations and other groups of organized crime.' (NIS)

It seems that there is an overlap in the missions and a lack of specialization on behalf of institutions that have the accumulated knowledge, legitimacy and resources to deal with emerging transnational phenomena. The close association of state and national threats derives from the traditional statist approach and culture of the post-junta political system in Greece. The present debate over the issue of constitutional reform is a unique timing to open the debate about how institutions should adapt to new and emerging transnational security challenges. Unfortunately, as long as such issues are not discussed our ability to assess the risks and benefits of a 'different path' will also be limited and uncertain.

### **References:**

To Ethnos (17-11-2008) Thalassa ta Problimata gia Limenikous. Accessed: <http://www.ethnos.gr/article.asp?catid=11424&subid=2&tag=8334&pubid=1868822#Tha>

National Intelligence Service (NIS), website, <http://www.nis.gr/portal/page/portal/NIS/Mission>

Greek National Statistics Agency, archive research.

Hellenic Coast Guard, website, <http://www.yen.gr/en/yen.chtm?prnbr=23685>