

THE UNENDING SAGA OF GREEK POLICE REFORM

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In recent years, Greece has experienced rapidly expanding criminal challenges. Illegal immigration, coupled with a crippling economic crisis that is still ravaging the country and rapid expansion of so-called “common” crime, have created the most favorable conditions for criminals, both native and imported. In turn, the Greek National Police (EL.AS) increasingly face uncertainties on crime control, enforcement complications, and a hard political slog as they continue to search for better solutions.

Traditionally, Greek law enforcement has been subject to a perpetual “national” problem: politicization. Even a cursory look at recent history demonstrates the insurmountable crises that EL.AS continue to face from time to time because of political grandstanding and the exploitation of crime prevention efforts by political parties.

Since political hindrances won’t be diminishing any time soon, police leaders and the rank and file need to find ways of managing an often impossible situation. This is easier said than done, however. A tug-of-war continues between politicians and those in law enforcement who are genuinely trying to address professional problems and the need for modern methods of policing.

One of the most prominent challenges Greek law enforcement faces is that of gathering, analyzing, and disseminating criminal intelligence. The problem is hardly new but it has become exaggerated in recent years as EL.AS try to cope with a radically different crime fighting environment in an age of uncertainty.

A recent law, passed by parliament in March 2014, reinvigorated an old idea in re-energizing a ponderously named Center for Collection and Management of Criminal Intelligence, known by its Greek acronym KE.SY.DEP.

KE.SY.DEP's main stated purpose is the centralization of collection and analysis of sensitive criminal information and, then, its dissemination to police consumers in a steady, timely and regulated manner.

Passing laws, of course, solves few, if any, problems. The true crux of the matter lies with in-house operational culture, outside interference, and divides that arise from ill-conceived competition between police actors supposedly dedicated to the same objective.

Greece is not unlike other countries where similar challenges of less cooperation, service rivalries, and political expediencies prevent the "system" from implementing a truly holistic approach to criminal intelligence. These complications, which frequently deteriorate into a political free-for-all, result in distorting harsh facts of life and promoting a "virtual reality" for the purpose of political exploitation.

Reports from the EL.AS rank and file have been positive about the KE.SY.DEP implementation. Aside from this though, the same reports stress that the latest announced government plans for a "complete re-organization" of the police services has been largely empty talk. These reports emphasize that, for yet another time, advice and proposals from the men and women on the front lines have been effectively sidelined by the politicians.

Still, provided that KE.SY.DEP continues to expand, there are opportunities ahead: better staffing of sensitive departments with properly trained personnel; emphasis on team work -- a prominently weak point thus far; expansion of analytical tasks to target specific crime patterns and criminal enterprises; integration of modern technologies into crime fighting; and overall re-modelling of anti-crime philosophies to the benefit of every day policing as well as special operations to defeat larger criminal schemes like human trafficking, arms smuggling, narcotics distribution, pedophile rings and cross-border grand fraud.

Greece has failed in the past to exploit the experiences of other countries with successful police methods and hands-on practices. Any meaningful EL.AS re-organization, to be applied both "vertically" and "horizontally," must return with a passion to learning from others with proven strategies and tactics.

Since criminality won't decline by itself any time soon, it is imperative that Greek law enforcement adopts a policy model that stresses knowledge, timeliness, education, "hard" analysis, top-ranked training and the "big picture" in order to create realistic crime-fighting options for today and well into the future. There is no other way.

