

**The Greek National Intelligence Services: National Security Challenges,
Foreign Espionage, and Illegal Immigration**

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The Greece represents a unique case of engagement with NATO, EU, EMU and Western Defensive and political contraption, but notwithstanding this engagement, the present Government is facing plenty of challenges, including foreign terrorist and espionage networks. The government with its constructive policies is helping law enforcement agencies to address genuin concerns of citizens. The Greece competent agency is National Intelligence Services (NIS) that recently undergone structural reforms-reorganized and now collecting intelligence information through different regional units to keep policy makers update and identify anti state elements that challenging authority of the state. In 2019, Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis appointed new national security

advisor to restructure the NIS and make it fit to the fight against jihadist and radicalized forces across the country.

Moreover, to meet the challenges of cyber war, the Prime Minister also appointed Mr. Panagiotis Kontoleon as the new head of National Intelligence Services (NIS) because as a member of European Union, his government faced serious security challenges from domestic and transnational terrorism that inflicted huge fatalities on civilian population. Like every professional intelligence agency in Europe, the NIS knows the importance of national security and territorial integrity of Greece and understands its moral responsibility in defending the state. More recently, Greece has become home to illegal immigrants who entered the country on fake papers with unknown background-established takfiri jihadist networks to recruit young fighter.

The Greece has been an attractive transit point for jihadists traveling to and from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Libya but the number of these jihadists has not been well documented by the police and intelligence services of the country. In 2015 alone, more than 2,000 jihadists used Greece as a transit point to Iraq and Syria. The CBS News in September 2019 reported clandestine human smuggling networks in Athens. The networks were transporting jihadists to Greece, and then to other European states. However, the EU inspection team of Greek sea and land borders (CNN, Telegraph, and Greek Reporter PBS Frontline, and CTC Sentinel) noted: “serious deficiencies in the carrying out of external border control by Greece, in particular due to the lack of appropriate identification and registration of irregular migrants at the islands, of sufficient staff, and of sufficient equipment for verifying identity documents”. Moreover, Human Rights Watch on 01 March 2020 reported Greece’s Governmental National Security Council (GGNSC) decision about the suspension of access for asylum seekers for a month: “The EU has an opportunity to show it can respond with compassion to the arrival of people fleeing conflict and persecution by putting their dignity and humanity at the center of its response,” said Lotte Leicht, EU director at Human Rights Watch.

To identify these sarcastic and anti-state elements, government needed to retrieve modern surveillance technology, but after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, intelligence agencies retrieved uncontrollable strength by imposing wide-ranging surveillance practices on society as well. This is a modern technological development transformed Greek society into democratization, and institutional

modernization. With the process of this technological transformation process, intelligence infrastructure of the country also embarked its journey from militarized culture of intelligence to civilian and democratic culture of spying, in order to fortify its roots within political and social stratifications. The NIS changed its mood of operation because it faced the threat of illegal migration, terrorist networks, and illicit trade of weapons of mass destruction. The agency has also been playing crucial role in fighting challenging of national security with its professionally designed strategies and security measures since 9/11. Intelligence cooperation, security, stability and prosperity are fundamental goals of all states in contemporary world affairs, while in Greece; more importance has been given to intelligence sharing from European Union member states to expand the range of watchdog to all parts of the country. To achieve the goal of a strong and competent state, the existence of well-trained armed forces, professional intelligence system, and economic power was a must.

I personally found no single report of the NIS corruption in Greece, but there are numerous reports of corruption of EU intelligence agencies available in newspapers and journals. Due to the lack of security sector reforms, corruption, and international engagement, major private and state intelligence agencies in EU failed to intercept and disrupt the exponentially growing networks of radicalised groups and lone wolf attacks; for that reason, increasing number of dangers across borders could not reflect in their policies and strategies. The current waves of lone wolves' attacks in EU are the most extensive and dangerous the continent has ever seen due to massive increase in migrants that caused insecurity and political pressure in Greece as well. By law, all EU member states are regulating organisations of their country's intelligence services and establishing different units to divide responsibilities of military and civilian intelligence agencies in dealing with national security threats.

The failure of French intelligence agencies before the 14 July 2016 terrorist attacks in Nice was mainly due to the lack of its coordination with law enforcement agencies to prevent the truck runner. The consecutive failure of German intelligence agencies to intercept the lone wolves and religiously motivated Muslim extremists before they translated their ferments and resentment into a violent action raised important questions. British intelligence is still following the world wars I and II militarised intelligence mechanism and failed to effectively address national security challenges. However, amidst this

inconsistent collective engagement between the three states, German intelligence spied on France, British intelligence spied on Germany, which prompted distrust. One reason behind these failures is that intelligence and law enforcement agencies of the three states operated in opposite directions and in a complex legal environment. There was huge difference between these agencies over the perceptualisation of war against domestic radicalization.

The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) in its comprehensive research report (2015-Surveillance by intelligence services) highlighted infrastructure and operational mechanism of security services in the EU and noted weaknesses of their mutual intelligence sharing on law enforcement level: “In some Member States, such as France, Germany, Italy, Romania and Poland, civil intelligence services are further divided into two separate services, mandated with a domestic or foreign scope. Moreover, some Member States grant intelligence-like means to units specialised in a defined threat, such as organised crime in Spain, corruption in Poland or the fight against terrorism in Hungary. Another key element to consider is the extent of the relationship between security services and law enforcement. Indeed, an organisational separation between intelligence services and law enforcement authorities is commonly considered a safeguard against the concentration of powers into one service and the risk of arbitrary use of information obtained in secrecy. The organisation of the intelligence community in each EU Member State is closely linked to historical developments, wars and external threats. The intelligence community is therefore greatly diverse”.

In Germany, intelligence has been separated from the function of the police, in Estonia, adversely, security police is working as an internal security services (Kaitsepolitseamet-KAPO) in 2001, while recently in Sweden (2015) the intelligence agency (Sakerhestpolism-SAPO) was reinvented and reformed to make it fit to the fight against internal and external challenges. The EUAFR report also indicated that Austria, Denmark, Finland, Ireland, and Latvia made exceptions to this rule; “they included where the body responsible for conducting intelligence activities belongs directly to the police and/ or law enforcement authorities”. The nature and power of intelligence agencies in all EU members’ states is a crucial yardstick of the rule of law. This applies equally in Greece recognized in the EU law.

However, on 27 February 2020, twenty-three European states decided to launch a new intelligence forum for the continent on intelligence gathering and sharing, the reason that their own states intelligence agencies are reluctant to share national secrets with Europol. According to the detailed report of journalists, Jacopo Barigazzi and Rym Montaz: “The new Intelligence College in Europe (ICE) is not intended to be an intelligence-sharing platform, but rather a space for the intelligence community to compare notes on crosscutting intelligence-related issues like Islamist and far-right terrorism, European jihadists in Syria, and cyber and data security”. However, the UK exit out of the EU intelligence (Eurojust) will not weaken the agency as there are 27 more EU agencies are in the field, and intelligence cooperation among EU member states will grow, but some states may not share their national secrets. For example, on 18 December 2019, European Digital Rights (EDRi) noted important points from the recent report of Dutch Military of Intelligence and Security Service CTIVD that the Dutch secret services had been regularly violating the law when sharing intelligence with foreign services:

“A report issued by the CTIVD revealed that the secret services do not necessarily act in accordance with the law when it comes to sharing (sometimes sensitive) information with the intelligence agencies of other countries. Ten instances were found in which the Dutch secret services had illegally provided raw data to foreign services, disregarding what is already a fairly weak legal regime for information sharing. The services’ casual attitude towards existing legal frameworks and their reluctance to be more meaningfully regulated may set a dangerous precedent for the relationship between intelligence agencies and democratic oversight in the Netherlands”. European Digital Rights reported.

Relationship of the NIS with other EU intelligence agencies helps it in maintaining the process of intelligence sharing intact. This relationship further strengthened resolve of the NIS management to adopt offensive mood of operation against lone wolves, extremist and jihadist groups. Recent reform and restructuring of intelligence community in Greece further expanded the role of NIS to include both domestic and foreign intelligence operations, but most of the current intelligence problems within the country whether they relate to questions of ethics and privacy, are old dilemma. After the London, Madrid, Paris, Munich and Nice attacks, the NIS was facing internal threats of extremism and foreign espionage networks and their relationship with local religious and ethnic groups, but the agency successfully intercept, undermined and identify

these elements within immigrants before they carried out attacks against civilian and military installations.

Prominent Greek scholar and analyst, Dr John M. Nomikos in his recent analysis of NIS and Greece security mechanism noted important aspects of the country's make-headway intelligence tactics: "From the outset, the new agency was dominated by the military. The fierce anticommunism that dominated Greek politics in the immediate postwar years led the new agency to focus on continuing to pursue and suppress "anti-state activities" by the Left. It was not until after the fall of a military junta, which ruled Greece between 1967 and 1974, which NIS was gradually "civilianized" and was re-established as a nominal foreign intelligence agency theoretically focused on the international environment and its threats to Greek security. Despite the various legislative steps to make NIS a true externally focused "CIA," NIS's old reputation as a tool for the suppression of domestic political "threats" has persisted. NIS's reputation is further tarnished by in-house bureaucratic problems, labor unionist issues, and ever-present political clientelism".

Having realized the importance of technological development and intelligence sharing, the Greece National Intelligence Service developed and updated technological means regarding communications surveillance and monitoring, but this way of untraditional surveillance mechanism received deep criticism from civil society and intellectual forums as its lack of legal and political oversight caused misunderstandings between the state and political leadership. Analyst Dr. John M. Nomikos has also noted modernizational developments within the organizational structure of NIS to make the agency fit to the fight against terrorism, radicalization and foreign espionage networks across the country:

"Today, according to recent Greek media reports, NIS is again at the point of "thorough modernization" and "rebuilding from the ground up." Reputedly, PM Mitsotakis is "determined" to do so, yet, as the same media reports point out, existing tendencies and legacy practices won't be swept aside easily. Professor John M. Nomikos understands that "Intelligence gathering, analysis, and interpretation are now based on sophisticated technical means. Top-to-bottom computerization requires advanced data handling skills and systems dexterities. NIS must radically overhaul its human resources requirements and begin hiring according to up-to-date personnel guidelines, while simultaneously fast-tracking the (early) retirement of legacy personnel". Having read out these

requirements, the Greek intelligence specialist Dr. John M. Nomikos spotlighted the NIS lack of professional approach to the intelligence gathering and process, and lack of intelligence gathering technology as well.

Dr. John M. Nomikos also identified weaknesses of organizations infrastructure of the NIS, which exhibits power and influence of private, bureaucratic and military stakeholderism within the NIS units. Political interference and nepotism are two consternating issues, Dr. John M. Nomikos identified, are strong impediments in the way of reincarnation and organizational of the NIS. The lack of strong intelligence networks in government departments, political and religious stratification confined the NIS within four walls. The interoperability side of the agency identified by Dr. John M. Nomikos is weak and its intelligence sharing system on law enforcement level is irksome. However, my study shows the existence of several foreign intelligence networks including the networks of Turkish intelligence operating in Greece. These foreign espionage networks are precarious security challenge. Protecting civilian and military installations from terrorist and hostile states by NIS has been a complex challenge in yesteryears. Terror attacks in Europe have triggered broad measures allowing National Intelligence Services (NIS) to cast ever-wider nets in the hope of protecting the state. These aggrandiements affected a variety of fundamental rights in the country protected by European Union privacy and data protection.

The present National Intelligence Services (NIS) of Greece has a wide mandate and broad powers of arrest. These powers have been criticized by civil society while experts, but without this kind of operational mechanism, terrorist and extremist networks cannot be undermined. Most intelligence agencies in EU project have been entrusted with the same task of identifying national security threats and providing true intelligence information to policy makers. However, in Greece, the NIS's role in updating policy makers is of great importance, and this way of intelligence operation also needs to be broadly identified to avoid ambivalence. Experts Dr. John M. Nomikos suggests that National Intelligence Services (NIS) needs to be transformed into a complete civilian service to make the agency an ultimate professional service, but lack of transparency, limited political and legal oversight confined the agency to specific regions in the country.

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