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

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Abstract

The article outlines the main parameters of Greece's immigration issue and dispels some of the myths surrounding it. 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, the article provides the framework for a new immigration policy which, in order to be successful, must incorporate European and international best practices and must be compliant with the European Pact on Immigration and Asylum.

[Submitted on 21 August 2010]

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. To the south lies Africa, 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 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 in the last three years, constituting about half of the annual inflow to Greece (see Table 1). It should be noted that, contrary to popular belief and to journalistic spin, the other half of the annual inflow of illegal immigrants to Greece still originates from one country: Albania.

Frontex, in its latest Risk Analysis¹, notes that “As a corollary to the sharp decreases registered in Italy and Spain, **the number of detections of illegal border crossing in Greece rose from 50% of the total EU detections to 75% of the total. In 2009, the Greek land border sections with Albania and FYROM represented the largest share of the EU total, with 36,600 detections (34% of the EU total), followed by 22,000 detections in the Aegean Sea (21% of the EU total)**” (p. 12).

The situation has become so serious 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**”².

¹ FRONTEX “Extract from the Annual Risk Analysis 2010”, Risk Analysis Unit, Reference nr: R023, Warsaw, March 2010 – available at: www.ed4bg.eu/files/ARA_2010_extract_24_May2010.pdf

² A relevant article (*Kathimerini*, 3/7/2009) can be read here (in Greek only): http://news.kathimerini.gr/4dcqj/w_articles_world_1_03/07/2009_320831



The routes of illegal immigration to Europe – Source: *Ta Nea* 31/3/2010

How many are the country's immigrants?

According to the latest official data Greece's immigrant population is about 1,150,000 people, 300,000 of whom are ethnic Greeks from neighboring Albania and the ex-USSR. This leaves about 850,000 non-Greek immigrants, 600,000 of whom have a residence permit through consecutive regularizations. It should be noted that, according to recent unofficial estimates, 140,000 regularized immigrants cannot meet the criteria for the renewal of their residence permits³.

The remaining 200,000-250,000 are the official estimate of the illegal immigrant population in the country. This number is widely disputed as the relevant study by IMEPO (the Hellenic Migration Policy Institute⁴), which is based on 2007 data, is tainted by two severe flaws which result in the considerable lowering of the estimated number of illegal immigrants. When these two flaws are corrected, the new estimate – with the same hypotheses - is 546,000⁵. Moreover, in the years following 2007 the inflow of

³ The relevant newspaper article (*Kathimerini*, 22/7/2010), can be found here (in Greek only): http://news.kathimerini.gr/4dcqj/w/articles_ell_1_22/07/2010_408840

⁴ The IMEPO study can be read in full at:

http://www.imepo.gr/ClientFiles/documents/AENEAS_IMEPO_RESEARCH_2008_GR_000.pdf

⁵ A comment on the IMEPO study by the author can be read here (in Greek):

<http://www.e-grammes.gr/article.php?id=3660>

illegal immigrants peaked and it is reasonable to assume that the population of 200,000 illegal immigrants – as estimated by IMEPO – has increased (probably significantly).

In this light the estimate of the immigrant population by the ex-Secret Services Head Mr Ioannis Korandis should not be taken lightly. Former Ambassador Korandis – now an MP – has argued that there are about 1.8 million immigrants in the country, of whom only 600,000 have participated in the successive regularization efforts⁶. This means that immigrants constitute about 15-18% of Greece's population and that 1.2 million people live in the country completely undocumented.

About 55% of the regularized immigrants come from neighboring Albania (a country with a grudge against Greece), followed by 5% from Bulgaria. As mentioned earlier, in the last few years the numbers of illegal immigrants from Africa and Asia are also rising. They come either through the eastern borders with Turkey or cross the Mediterranean Sea in small boats.

According to recent Eurostat data⁷ 906,000 foreigners live and work in Greece, representing 8.1% of the country's population. **Only 158,000 (1.4%) come from other EU countries while 6.7% come from countries outside the EU.** The EU average for the total foreigner population is 6.2% while the average for the non-EU foreigner population is 3.9%. 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. According to Eurostat data⁸ Greece's population grew by 35,000 people in 2009, 27,000 of whom were immigrants. The immigrant inflow to Greece is much higher than the EU average (2.4 compared to 1.7 per 1,000 inhabitants). Moreover, population projections by former Athens University of Economics and Business Professor Manolis Drettakis⁹ indicate that, at the current rate of immigrant influx, the population of immigrant origin will constitute almost one third of the country's young and active age groups. By 2060 immigrants will constitute almost 32% of the population of the 0-14 year olds and more than 29% of the 15-64 year olds.

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.

⁶ Mr Korandis' relevant comment can be read in an interview (*Athens News*, 26/9/2009) here (in English): <http://www.athensnews.gr/articles/13357/26/09/2009/2705>

⁷ The relevant Eurostat report can be read in full here (in English): http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_OFFPUB/KS-SF-09-094/EN/KS-SF-09-094-EN.PDF

⁸ The relevant newspaper article (*To Vima*, 28/7/2010) can be found here (in Greek only): <http://www.tovima.gr/default.asp?pid=2&ct=1&artid=345665&dt=28/07/2010>

⁹ The relevant article (*Eleftherotypia*, 3/12/009) can be read here (in Greek only): <http://www.enet.gr/?i=news.el.article&id=108267>

The proposals to the government both from the Police and 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. It should be noted that, while in opposition, the centre-right party had criticised the centre-left government’s regularization efforts.

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 EU¹⁰ 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).

¹⁰ 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://ec.europa.eu/justice_home/doc_centre/immigration/studies/docs/com_2004_412_en.pdf

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

ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS ARRESTED

Country of Origin	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Albania	173,957	36,827	35.789	31.637	52.132	57.466	66.818	72.443	63.563
Other	45,641	21,403	15.242	13.350	14.219	37.773	45.546	73.894	62.582
TOTAL	219,598	58,230	51.031	44.987	66.351	95.239	112.364	146.337	126.145

REPATRIATIONS

2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
13.242	11.778	14.222	15.168	20.461	17.650	17.077	20.555	20.342

Source: Greek Police and Ministry of Interior data

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 for illegal entry and 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 legalization attempt took place and continued rising, reaching the highest of the last eight years in 2008 and the second highest in 2009. At the same time the repatriations of illegal immigrants that took place remained quite low compared to the influx.


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).

Unfortunately, the present government seems to have learnt nothing from the continuous failures of previous regularization efforts. As it has been reported in the press¹¹ the government plans to offer some sort of (temporary) legalization to illegal immigrants who cannot be repatriated. This, of course, constitutes another de facto regularization.

Linked to the issue of illegal immigration is that of asylum seekers. Undisputedly, the treatment of asylum seekers – especially those with a valid asylum claim – must comply with international law. Nevertheless, the vast majority of asylum claims turn out to be bogus and are filed only as an effort to hamper deportation. Moreover, as the relevant data show (see Table 2 below), Greece receives a very high number of asylum seekers compared to the country's population. Asylum seekers, especially bogus ones, can pose a potential security threat. According to UK Home Office data¹², out of the 717 men and women who have been arrested since 2001 as suspects for participation in terrorist groups, 182 (i.e. 25%) had filed an asylum claim.

▶ Αιτήσεις ασύλου που υπεβλήθησαν

	Σύνολο 5ετίας	Διαφορά μεταξύ 2008-2009	Αριθμός αιτήσεων ανά 1.000 κατ.
 Ελλάδα	82,240	-20%	7,4
 Ιταλία	81,870	-42%	1,4
 Ισπανία	25,730	-34%	0,6
 Γαλλία	187,250	19%	3,0
 Βρετανία	118,840	25%	1,4
 Βέλγιο	68,110	40%	6,4
 Αυστρία	76,400	23%	9,1
 Τουρκία	36,930	-40%	0,5
 ΗΠΑ	249,950	-1%	0,8
 Ε.Ε. των «27»	1.150,980	3%	2,3
ΣΥΝΟΛΟ*	1,725,570	0%	1,5



**44 βιομηχανικές χώρες.*

Table 2: Asylum claims in the last 5 years (*Kyriakatiki Eleftherotypia*, 3-4/4/2010)

¹¹ A relevant article (*To Vima*, 15/7/2010) can be read here (in Greek only):

<http://www.tovima.gr/default.asp?pid=46&ct=32&artId=309200&dt=15/07/2010>

¹² Leppard D. and Walsh G. "Britain lowers terror alert", *The Sunday Times* 21/8/2005

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 areas¹³. 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 rapes¹⁴. This "contribution" ranges from 33% for homicides to 51% for thefts and burglaries (data for arrests in 2009). Albanians, being by far the largest ethnic community, are also responsible for a significant part of the imported criminality. According to a recent confidential Police report¹⁵ 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.

¹³ The most recent major incidents took place in Athens city center at the end of May and in Patras in early July. Relevant newspaper articles can be read here (in Greek only):

<http://www.tovima.gr/default.asp?pid=46&ct=1&artId=303540&dt=27/05/2010>

<http://www.tovima.gr/default.asp?pid=46&ct=1&artId=303684&dt=28/05/2010>

<http://www.tanea.gr/default.asp?pid=2&ct=1&artId=4583081>

¹⁴ The relevant statistical data can be found on the Police website at:

http://www.astynomia.gr/images/stories/2010/310110stats_egklh_2009.pdf

¹⁵ A relevant article (*To Vima*, 20/3/2010) can be found here (in Greek only):

<http://www.tovima.gr/default.asp?pid=46&ct=32&artId=295093&dt=20/03/2010>



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 and stay in the country 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 integration.

Integration will not take place also 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. High criminality of immigrants and the ghettoization of several parts of Athens city center only enhance this negative stance. According to a recent poll by Kapa Research¹⁶ 51.6% of Greeks consider immigrants as “a threat” and only 30.6% as “an opportunity”. Moreover, 79.3% of Greeks believe that immigrants who live in this country are “too many”. Furthermore, an extended survey in 2007¹⁷ indicated that Greeks have the most negative feelings towards Albanians, who constitute by far the largest ethnic community.

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 recent study by the National University of Athens¹⁸ indicates 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 first trimester of 2010¹⁹, unemployment was higher among people of foreign nationality than among Greeks (14.5% and 11.4% respectively).

3) Albanian nationalism

According to a recent survey by Gallup’s Balkan Monitor²⁰ 70.5% 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”. Moreover, the right to vote in local elections offered to legalized immigrants and the lowering of the threshold to Greek citizenship will offer political leverage to any nationalist claims which may arise.

¹⁶ The relevant article (*in.gr*, 22/12/2009) can be read here (in Greek only):

<http://www.in.gr/news/article.asp?lngEntityID=1088229>

¹⁷ The main findings of this survey can be read here (in Greek only):

<http://www.vimaideon.gr//Article.aspx?d=20071207&nid=6794303&sn=%CE%9A%CE%A5%CE%A1%CE%99%CE%9F%20%CE%A4%CE%95%CE%A5%CE%A7%CE%9F%CE%A3&spid=1478>

¹⁸ The study can be found here (in Greek only):

http://www.imepo.gr/ClientFiles/pdfs/ethnotiki_tautotita.pdf

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/>

¹⁹ The NSS’ relevant press release can be read here (in Greek only):

http://www.statistics.gr/portal/page/portal/ESYE/BUCKET/A0101/PressReleases/A0101_SJO01_DT_QQ_01_2010_01_F_GR.pdf

²⁰ The survey’s findings by country can be viewed here (in English):

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



Map of Greater Albania

As noted above, 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” on March 21st²¹, sources from the Ministry for Citizen’s Protection estimate 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.

²¹ A reference to the “Proto Thema” article can be found here (in Greek only): <http://www.inews.gr/60/3000-kalasnkof-sta-cheria-alvanon-stin-ellada.htm>

4) Muslim fundamentalism

Until now Greece does not seem to have a particular issue of Islamic fundamentalism. Nevertheless, as aptly described in the latest State Department report on terrorism²², “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 clashes²³.

Still, 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. Moreover, according to sources of “Kathimerini” newspaper²⁴, the number of unofficial mosques operating in Greece (excluding Thrace where native Muslims live) is on the rise. There are 75 unofficial mosques (compared to 68 in June 2009), 23 of which have been founded by Pakistani and 15 by Bangladeshi immigrants. According to the same newspaper there are indications that the number of Muslim extremists reaching Greece through illegal immigration is also increasing.

It seems that the government chooses to ignore the possibility of a Muslim fundamentalist threat. Circular 13 of the Ministry of Interior²⁵ lays down in some detail the way Citizenship Committees should inquire whether an applicant for Greek citizenship adequately meets all the necessary criteria. The circular emphasizes that the Committee should not ask questions regarding the political, philosophical and religious views of the candidate. One can only wonder how the committee will be able to trace elements of political extremism and/or religious fundamentalism without asking such questions!

²² The State Department’s full report can be read here (in English):

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

²³ 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>

²⁴ The relevant article (*Kathimerini*, 24/4/2010) can be read here (in Greek only):

http://news.kathimerini.gr/4dcqj/w_articles_ell_1_24/04/2010_398765

²⁵ The circular can be read in full here (in Greek only):

http://www.ypes.gr/UserFiles/f0ff9297-f516-40ff-a70e-eca84e2ec9b9/egiklios_13_10_ith.doc

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 2004²⁶. 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
- 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/international solution?

Recently, when Greece faced the prospect of economic collapse and bankruptcy it had to resort to EU and international aid in the form of a loan by the EU and the IMF. As successive Greek governments have turned out to be incapable of pushing forward with the necessary reforms and of strictly managing the country's progress, the EU and the IMF have to oversee the whole process and ensure that Greece complies with the relevant requirements. It seems that such may be the case for the issue of illegal immigration as well.

The EU has already laid the framework for a policy on immigration. All that is needed – and Greece definitely lacks – is the political will to implement it. This framework can be found in the European Pact on Immigration and Asylum²⁷ which was signed by the EU Member States in mid-October 2008. The Pact points out that:

²⁶ “Police request the lift of confidentiality for 425 people”, To Paron 21/8/2005

²⁷ The full text of the Pact can be read (in English) here:
<http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/08/st13/st13440.en08.pdf>

- 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 - and it seems that the current government is ready to embark on a fifth attempt!

Thus, it seems logical that the EU must ensure that Greece’s immigration policy complies with the EU Pact in the same way the EU and the IMF ensure Greece’s compliance on matters of the economy. In this light John Nomikos’ proposal²⁸ that the EU should put more effort in strengthening the network of Immigration Liaison Officers (ILO) in Member States points a step in the right direction. This way intelligence-sharing among Member States will improve and best practices in the fight against illegal immigration and in the improvement of the repatriation rate will be promoted.

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. A realistic approach must result in a complete overhaul of current policies and a U-turn on current immigration management. In brief, Greece should:

- Estimate the labor market needs for migrant labor on a regular basis
- Estimate its infrastructure’s carrying capacity as far as population is concerned
- Guard its 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

²⁸ For a detailed analysis see: John M. Nomikos, “Illegal Immigration and Organized Crime in Greece”, RIEAS: Research Paper: No.144, (August 2010), available at: <http://www.rieas.gr/images/rieas144.pdf>

- repatriation programs. Special focus must be given on the agreement with Turkey²⁹ 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 policymaking 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. 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 and state security and increases community cohesion.

²⁹ The new bilateral agreement regarding the readmission to Turkey of illegal immigrants who make it to Greece through the Turkish borders was signed recently by Greek Minister for Citizen's Protection Mr Michalis Chrysochoides and the Turk Minister of Interior Mr Beşir Atalay. This simply emphasizes the complete failure of the previous agreement and Turkey's unwillingness to deal with the issue effectively. The relevant press release by the Ministry for Citizen's Protection can be read here (in Greek only): http://www.yptp.gr/index.php?option=ozo_content&perform=view&id=3211&Itemid=440&lang=

About the Author

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