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ISLAMIC RADICALISATION PROCESSES IN GREECE THE ISLAMIC RADICALIZATION INDEX (IRI)

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ABSTRACT

The surge of immigration especially during the course of the past twenty years has created an unprecedented situation, to many analysts a ‘Trojan Horse’ of radical Islam inside the usually tolerant and liberal Western European societies bringing the respective governments now before a fait accompli situation that must be dealt with by all parties involved, that is the societies and governments of the host countries as well as the home countries of these immigrants.

Greece constitutes a unique and interesting case in many ways. First, although a member of NATO, EU, EMU and Western defensive and political mechanisms in general has not so far been the target of an attack or ‘theatre of operation’ for Islamic terrorist groups despite its proximity to the Muslim world of both Asia (Central, South Asia and the Middle East) and North Africa as well as the Muslim populations of the Balkan peninsula.

The scope of this study is to attempt to give a fair description of the background of general immigration trends to Greece since the early 1990s after the fall of the socialist regimes in Central, Eastern Europe and the USSR, the new wave of immigration which can be traced in the early years of the new century and then will move on to the dangers presented by the current situation within Greece given the unprecedented number of Muslim immigrants currently in the country, most of them having crossed the borders illegally hence difficult to be traced in terms of ideology, background, beliefs and intentions.

* The views expressed in this publication are solely those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the International Institute for Counter-Terrorism (ICT).

Introduction: An Overview of immigration to Greece

A) The First Major Wave of Immigrants: 1989-2001

After the fall of socialist regimes across Central, Eastern and SE Europe as well as the USSR between 1989 and 1992, Greece along with other western and southern European countries started receiving an unprecedented number of refugees and immigrants, usually without papers or official claims in view of the rapid developments both within their home countries and in the European Community at large. Most of these immigrants, including the illegal ones, did not constitute a major threat for the social and state security of Greece albeit the criminal map of the country started changing rapidly. The first phase of immigrants' influx especially mainly from Albania and to a lesser extent from Bulgaria and Romania had an impact on certain sectors of employment but also on criminal activities including petty thefts, street crime as well as organised crime which started growing steadily in number of activities and volume. That included prostitution, robberies and drugs smuggling. Although most of the immigrants did not identify themselves religiously were either Christian-Orthodox, atheists (due to the character and history of their regimes) and a small number of Muslims originating primarily from Albania and Bulgaria.

The immediate proximity of Greece to those countries created waves of illegal immigrants who, after the first years, either started blending into society taking up jobs that Greeks would gradually abandon (e.g. in agriculture and construction) or focused on the ever-growing black market and illegal activities including drugs, prostitution as well as smuggling of small arms whereas car theft and other kinds of armed robberies surged. However, the growth Greece experienced (despite harsh measures in order to bring the country's economy and political structures in line to EU and the upcoming monetary union accession) as well as the preparations for the 2004 Athens Olympic Games created thousands of jobs over almost a decade (mid-1990s to 2004) which somehow amplified the situation with regards to illegal activities despite the fact that in absolute numbers crime was continuously on the rise. Although the influx of immigrants continued, there was a certain degree of control over illegal immigration which from time to time included wide-scale police operations (the so-called "broom operations") especially in northern Greece under the K. Mitsotakis conservative government during the early-mid 1990s as well as the subsequent PASOK governments leading to 2004 Olympic Games.

In the same time however, certain political (mainly right-of-the-centre) circles were arguing from an early time that the continuous influx of immigrants from SE and Eastern Europe and the soft treatment by the Greek authorities for purposes of cheap labour would eventually create problems when the unprecedented growth Greece was experiencing would ease once the country had become a full member of EMU as well as when the major projects related to the Olympic Games and Greece's infrastructure in general would come to completion (such projects included the El Venizelos International Airport, Athens Peripheral highway "Attiki Odos", the Rio-Antirio Bridge, Athens Metropolitan and Peripheral Railway, the major East-West northern motorway "Egnatia" and a number of other projects, some of them still under way). Although Greece has always been in the crossroads for many kinds of immigrants from Asia and Africa, up to that point the religious element was not of special concern, as far as central and eastern Europe were concerned, mainly due to the fact that the immigrants from that part of Europe and the former (European) Soviet states were either atheist or not religious in practice and such cultural aspects were of secondary (if of any at all) importance to them. As stated above, non-Christian immigrants were mainly coming from Albania (especially the northern part of the country), Yugoslavia (mainly Kosovo) and to a lesser extent from FYROM (especially the Albanian population there) and Bulgaria.

Greece's history as a rather homogenous country¹ up to 1989 had created a de facto situation for the population, which at large reacted negatively to the sudden and overwhelming wave of immigration. Certain incidents of racist nature did take place in view of crimes committed by some of the immigrants². Nevertheless, many in Greece, especially farmers and factory owners, took advantage of the illegal and legal immigrants by hiring them at a fraction of the normal payroll to work on fields during harvest period or at smaller and larger factories, as in fact did the official state itself using those people for the construction of the aforementioned projects while simultaneously giving them the Green Card³. Greek society for many years was reluctant to accept the new situation and often turned a 'blind eye' to growing problems. A large portion of the

¹ The official censuses up to 1989 always indicated that Greece was a Christian-Orthodox country by more than 98% accepting as non-Christians only the Muslim communities of northern Greece, primarily the populations in Western Thrace. These statistics are highly ambiguous and do not represent the true beliefs of the population as baptism used to be 'mandatory'.

² A large number of immigrants especially those coming from Albania were in fact prisoners that the local regime had freed. A similar situation to Cuba during the 1980s when president Castro had freed a number of prisoners as a response to US efforts to let those people who wanted to leave Cuba come to the US and meet their relatives living in Florida and elsewhere.

³ The opposition New Democracy party during the 1990s and early 2000 was claiming that PASOK exercised this policy in order to secure the votes of these people. In fact, there are claims that the marginal victory of PASOK in 2000 general elections (by one percentage unit) was due to that fact.

population, that is the non-conservatives or right-wing supporters, claimed that due to the history of the country as a place on the crossroads of civilisations placed between West and East 'guaranteed' that these peoples would eventually 'blend in' as did many smaller ethnic groups in fact since 1830 and the creation of the modern Greek nation-state. Conservatives and right-wing supporters claimed that during a time of crisis these people would in fact act against the society and the State in general.

B) The expansion of Islamic presence in Greece: 2001 to date

Whereas most of the first wave of immigrants to Greece were atheists, Christian-Orthodox or secular Muslims, events in the Caucasus, Central and South Asia after mid-late 1990s started creating a unique for Greece situation where steadily large numbers of illegal immigrants coming primarily from Asia through Turkey as well as north Africa through Crete and other sea routes were arriving to the country. These people, Muslim in their vast majority, were mainly illegal immigrants who either aimed at staying in Greece 'until further notice' or trans-passing Greece in order to reach Western Europe. Although illegal immigrants from Asia had been arriving or passing through Greece for many years (mainly since early 1980s after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan through Evros river on the border with Turkey in Thrace and via the eastern Aegean islands close to Turkey with small boats) as well as Pakistan these had usually been in very small numbers and most of them did not intend to stay within the country. Turkish as well as Greek smugglers, owners of small boats in the Aegean were usually the people responsible for transferring those immigrants. However, they merely acted as transporters, receiving money for this but they were not involved in the initial phase of the smuggling, i.e. from the immigrants' own countries. It remains unknown as to what kinds of relations (if any) those transporters had with larger groups, Islamic or not from within the region. Intra-racial and civil conflicts in the former USSR (Tajikistani civil war and the Chechnya situation), the India-Pakistani confrontation over Kashmir region in south Asia and other peripheral conflicts in the Arabian Peninsula and North Africa (MENA region) had traditionally been the sources of illegal immigrants ending up or passing through Greece.

Here we should make a parenthesis and state that the first Muslim, although legal immigrants/refugees to Greece started arriving in late 1970s and early 1980s. The Lebanese civil war and the Iranian Revolution had created the first such waves of immigrants to Greece and Europe at large. However, as stated above these were usually whole families and generally peaceful people, coming legally to Greece and had never created any problems blending relatively easily in the Greek society as they did in France or Britain or indeed the United States, leaving their

countries exactly because those had been overtaken by extremist elements or were significantly shaken by local civil wars and revolutions. The Algerian civil war also created some influx of refugees albeit in very small numbers as far as Greece is concerned. The people coming from Lebanon were mainly Christians whereas the small Persian communities in Greece (mainly Muslims and some Zoroastrians) have traditionally been quite and usually were forced to leave after the Islamic purges within Iran by the Ayatollahs and their proxies. These groups also included some Armenian (Christian) Persians.

After 2001 the events in Afghanistan as well as the crises in several places in Central, South Asia, MENA as well as sub-Saharan Africa started creating a unique situation for Greece. The government opted not to react heavily on these as other governments did (primarily France and Italy) and, due to political cost and the reaction of the people (who however lacked background knowledge about the possible dangers this influx could have) Greek authorities were reluctant in using excessive force, i.e. sinking or threatening to sink the boats with immigrants or simply prohibiting them to approach the mainland on humanitarian grounds. The influx through Turkey (which traditionally has done very little to put a halt to the situation-see sections below) along Evros river border in northern Greece and the Aegean Sea routes started growing steadily and by 2004 the Greek urban centres and major ports (like the port of Piraeus, Salonika and mainly Patra in western Greece, which links Greece to Italy) started concentrating large numbers of illegal immigrants, mainly Afghans, Pakistanis, Bangladeshi, and North. Contrary to the people from SE and Eastern Europe these were almost exclusively illegal who were either seeking asylum in Greece (encouraged by the governments' linear stance) or wanted to reach Western Europe. This situation steadily got out of hand and from several thousands per year (although statistics have usually been ambiguous) current statistics (as we will see further on) talk of more than 100,000 people coming to Greece each year in view of recent regional developments. One of the reasons regarding this linear view have been the left-wing parties (mainly Synaspismos or SYRIZA and to a lesser extend the Communists) mainly without a certain plan, simply on 'humanitarian grounds' have been using the tolerance of Greek society to press on the various governments not to react heavily on the situation. This climate has brought the Greek state and society today before a *fait accompli* situation and since the early 2000 (mainly in central Athens) the situation got out of hand. The security restructuring with foreign aid for the 2004 Summer Olympic Games did improve the situation albeit only temporarily. Theft, robberies, drugs smuggling and prostitute handling have been the main activities of these people whereas a classic endeavour is illegal pedestrian 'markets' and traffic lights begging. Lately, there have been ever-growing incidents of

intra-immigrant clashes mainly between Asian Muslims and Albanians, as both claim traditional 'posts of business'. As we will see further on, the last couple of years have seen a rapid increase in claims for human rights, including the creation of mosques in Athens and other urban centres and an ever-increasing pressure on governments since 2000 to give out green cards and grant asylum to the continuous influx of illegal immigrants. It's worth noticing that up to last year the EU had also been rather reluctant in helping Greece deal decisively with the illegal immigration as well as pressuring Turkey to put a halt to the passing through towards Greece and Europe at large. The Greek diplomacy has not been very persistent in posing this issue as a prerequisite for Turkey's EU acceptance negotiations.

Muslim Communities in Greece

A) Traditional and Historic Communities

The indigenous Muslim population of Greece is mainly located in the region of Western Thrace and in some islands of the Dodecanese in the Eastern Aegean mainly on the islands of Rhodes and Kos. This minority considers itself mostly of Turkic origin although the Greek state has been reluctant in accepting that fact and does not recognise them as an *ethnic* minority but merely as a religious one. They belong to the moderate Hanafi, Sunni tradition of Islam. They number approximately 140,000 people living predominantly in the cities of Komotini and Xanthi and the areas around these cities⁴. Ethnic groups of the population include Pomaks as well as Muslim Roma, although most of the Roma in Greece live around major urban areas and are usually Christians. The local Muslim population of Thrace has not created any serious problems thus far in terms of specific incidents, although the Turkish consulate in Komotini has been active (even more so lately) in calling Turkish government officials and diplomats to talk and communicate with "their community" as they claim this is an ethnic (Turkish) minority. A relatively recent incident in November 2004 created violent reactions from the local community including stoning and invectives of actors and TV crews when for the purposes of a TV series a woman (the leading actress) walked into a Mosque in the village of Echinós. Although many people there took part in the riots (lasting 1-2 days) the courts summoned only four people, two of them found guilty

⁴ See US Department of State Country Information: <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2006/71383.htm>

getting 9-month imprisonment with deferment in 2007⁵. The incident, although a minor one within the general framework of Islamist-related violence, showed however that the local communities are more conservative than most people within Greece believed and levels of tolerance can easily be breached.

Outside Thrace and the few islands of the Aegean, most of the Muslim community is to be found in Salonika while small numbers of Muslims have traditionally lived around Athens. The Arvanites, another ethnic group initially brought in what is today Greece by the Byzantines and later the Ottomans, have been mostly converted to Christianity as they opted to remain within the newly established Greek state back in 19th century after the revolution of 1821 and Greece's formation as a nation state. Arvanites used to live primarily in Attica region around and inside Athens, Evoia island, the islands of the Saronic Gulf (off the coast of Attica) and in Eastern Peloponnese including the old city of Nafplion, Greece's second capital after the revolution, while there are several villages almost exclusively inhabited by them in all of Sterea Ellada region, i.e. southern Greece, below Thessaly region. The relatively small numbers of traditional Muslim communities in Greece, mainly concentrated in the north, prevented them from living aggressively (although no reason for aggression existed) and have been largely living in isolation, although the main political parties (primarily PASOK, New Democracy and some leftist ones) have had several MPs throughout the years (albeit no more than 2-3 at any given moment) in the Greek parliament representing those communities in the north. It is interesting to note that local leaders such as the Muftis are appointed by the Greek state⁶; however, they are usually (and unofficially) pre-approved by the community and enjoy its support. Almost exclusively all Mosques in Greece are to be found in Thrace while a couple exist on Rhodes and Kos islands.

B) Post-1989 Communities

The Muslim Association of Greece (MAG) states that currently the number of legalised Muslims in the country is roughly around of 830,000-1,000,000⁷ people. It also indicates that many of those people have come to Greece since the early 1970s while a rapid increase in the numbers of many

⁵ Matios, Aristidis. "Double Conviction for Echinus Riots" (Greek), Makedonia Publications, 24/10/2007 <http://www.makthes.gr/news/media/7970/>

⁶ Konidaris, Ioanis M. "False Muftis and False Politics" (Greek), To Vima, 4/6/2006, <http://www.tovima.gr/opinions/article/?aid=173675>

⁷ Muslim Association of Greece (MAG) "About Muslims in Greece" <http://equalsociety.com/en/islam/about-greek-muslims/>

certain Muslim minorities, such as the Pakistani one, occurred after 1991. Because official census with regards to immigrants has only started lately (the latest being in 2001, while also it has been problematic to determine exact numbers of legal and illegal immigrants) there is usually great confusion with regards to both the exact numbers as well as the composition of these communities. Beyond the unreliable census data, estimates on the number of Muslims in greater Athens region vary between 120,000 to 200,000⁸ people. However, reports of total number of illegal immigrants, largely unknown as to their origin or ethnic group, speak of about 470,000 people⁹, some of them bringing the total number of immigrants to around 1,500,000 or possibly even 2,000,000 people, Muslim in their vast majority according to secondary, unofficial sources¹⁰. Officially there are some 500,000 certified Muslim legal immigrants in Greece now of which 300-350,000 live in Athens¹¹. Albeit illegal, most of these people have a growing number of representative communities - most of them set up after 2001 while some existed since the early 1990s.

The geography of illegal and other immigrants today is more scattered and although Athens and other major urban centres constitute their main hub, they can also be found throughout the country, simply in places where they can work (often related to agricultural production). The peculiarity about the Greek capital in comparison to other European ones is that the vast majority of Muslim and other immigrants (including African, Chinese and East European) are in fact concentrated in the very centre of the city, which, especially during the night can become intimidating for Greeks as well as tourists. People from SE and South Asia are also to be found in lower middle class central areas of Ag. Panteleimonas (very close to the central Omonoia Square) and the neighbourhoods of Kolonos and Metaxourgio. Places like the area surrounding the National Theatre (south of Omonoia Sq.), the central railway station of Athens, the neighbourhood of Patissia (where the National Polytechnic University is) and the places east of the ancient Agora are common 'hubs' of primarily Muslim immigrants.

⁸ Evergeti, Venetia and Hatziprokopiou, Panos. "Islam in Greece: Religious identity and practice among indigenous Muslims and Muslim immigrants", CRONEM 6th Annual Conference June 2010, University of Surrey, [URL:http://www3.surrey.ac.uk/Arts/CRONEM/Conference-2010/Presentations/EvergetiHatziprokopiou.pdf](http://www3.surrey.ac.uk/Arts/CRONEM/Conference-2010/Presentations/EvergetiHatziprokopiou.pdf), p.2

⁹ Defence News, "How many are illegal Immigrants in Greece-A critical view of ELIAMEP Study, 17/1/2011, http://www.defencenet.gr/defence/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=16875&Itemid=86

¹⁰ Zougla News, "What is the number of Illegal immigrants in Greece?" (Greek) 10/2/2011, <http://www.zougla.gr/page.ashx?pid=80&aid=272526&cid=122>

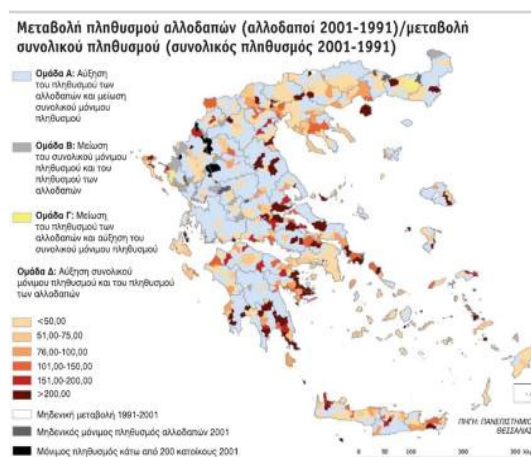
¹¹ Greek News. "Islam in Greece" (Greek, also available in English), 26/9/2005, <http://www.greeknewsonline.com/?p=3768>

With regards to the geography of immigrants all over the country, a study conducted only recently by Professor Virona Kotzamani from the Laboratory of Demographic and Social Analyses of the University of Thessaly in central Greece (published in the authoritative newspaper Eleftherotypia¹²) shows that Muslim immigrants are living primarily in Attica (mainly Athens) and the counties (nomoi) of Evoia, Veotia while also a good number exists in various places of Crete and some Aegean Islands. The research shows that only 28 municipalities (out of 1034) all over Greece seem to have no immigrants at all while in 165 municipalities immigrants make up more than 10% of the population (national average being 6.79%). Another key point is that 20-35% of births in 2004 and 2005 came from immigrants, predominantly Muslim ones.

Map 1 below shows the distribution and other major statistics of the immigrants in Greece:

Explanation of colours¹³:

The blue colour (Group A) shows regions where we have an increase of immigrants' births with a simultaneous decrease of Greek births. The grey colour (Group B) shows a decrease in both immigrant births as well as Greeks' while the Yellow colour (Group C) shows the opposite-an increase in Greek births and a decrease in immigrants' births. Group D, the beige colours becoming red and deep red underneath show the increase in the total population of Greeks and otherwise throughout the country. The period for all these statistics is from 1991 to 2001, i.e. before the big influx of illegal immigrants following US-led operations in Iraq and Afghanistan and other major developments.



¹² Delvinioti, Eleni "The Geography of Immigration" (Greek-Map), Eleftherotypia 19/1/2011, <http://www.enet.gr/?i=news.el.article&id=242814>

¹³ Ibid

Muslim Organisations and their leaders in Greece

Outside Thrace where local organisations and mosques have existed for years, most of them financed by Turkey, there are currently a few official and pan-Hellenic Muslim associations in the country in the form of NGOs, while there is a growing number of local-based “centres”, usually around private mosques or ‘cultural centre’ organisations¹⁴. Various embassies operate cultural centres and schools as well, however they usually are monitored and well known. The most established organisation is MAG¹⁵, founded in 2003 with links to the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood¹⁶. President of the MAG is Naim El-Ghandour an Egyptian-born Muslim who lives in Greece since the early 1970s and has acquired Greek citizenship. His wife Anna Stamou a Greek convert to Islam is a member of the board of advisors of the organisation¹⁷. She is also the administrator of the islamfriends.gr website and also works for greeksrethink.com, an English website appealing to the international community founded by Iman Sotiria Kouvali a Greek-Canadian convert to Islam. The website ora-islam.gr is the online ‘educational’ platform of MAG. Another major organization with alleged ties to the Muslim Brotherhood is the Islamic Cultural Centre of Athens (or Greek-Arabic cultural Centre), established in 2001 originally in Ampelokipi, an area within walking distance from the centre, while in 2007 it moved to the sea-side suburb Moschato close to Piraeus (no traceable website listed). The move was achieved by a Saudi businessman named Al-Fauzan who bought in 2006 an old textile factory building at the price of €2.5 million, in order to host the Greek-Arabic Cultural Centre. The 1,800m² building also provides a place where Muslims can pray and serves as a semi-formal mosque, in fact the first in Athens after 170 years. The building has a capacity to host about 3,000 worshipers¹⁸. Another ‘organization’ with ties to the Muslim Brotherhood is a virtual one. The website islam.gr is an online platform for the MB in Greece. The administrator of the website is Shadi Ayoubi, a Lebanese journalist and correspondent of the Al Jazeera in Athens¹⁹. Finally, another website related to Islamist activities and propaganda is <http://islamforgreeks.org> while several blogs and

¹⁴ See Islamic Finder website:

<http://www.islamicfinder.org/worldIslamicCountry.php?more=more&startPoint=0&endPoint=50&country=greece&lang=>

¹⁵ MAG’s website: <http://equalsociety.com>

¹⁶ Banoutsos, Andreas. “The Muslim Brotherhood and Greece”, RIMSE, 13/3/2011 <http://rimse.gr/?p=226>

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ Tsasis, Thomas; “They took the Mosque in their hands” (Greek), 22/6/2007 http://archive.enet.gr/online/online_text/c=112,dt=22.06.2007,id=45124756

¹⁹ Giannarou, Lina. “The Unknown Islam in Greece on the net” (Greek), 19/3/2008 http://news.kathimerini.gr/4dcgi/_w_articles_ell_100062_13/09/2008_284648

other minor websites 'come and go' periodically on the net.

A recent revelation by Wikileaks of US Dept of State telegrams, showed that already since 2009 the former Ambassador of US to Greece, Mr. Daniel Speckhard, had noted the danger of the formation of extremist Islamic cells and the use of the country as a traverse point of terrorists from the Middle East to other European countries taking advantage of the overall tolerance of the Greek society and the deep belief (for many historical, political, social and personal reason) that Greece is not in danger with regards to the creation and activity of extremist organisations in the country.

Several points however must be taken into account in order to understand today why this belief has actually led to the relaxation of the national anti-terrorist units and intelligence community and why this situation can lead to a crisis. The intelligence community in Greece is primarily compromised by the National Intelligence Agency or EYP (www.nis.gr), the anti-terrorist department of the Hellenic Police²⁰ (www.astynomia.gr) while the MoD has no official intelligence agency/unit but only a directorate (literally an office with no more than 10 people in total working in it) that primarily monitors weapons acquisitions and movements, mainly by Turkey (in some cooperation with EYP but mainly through OSINT information and SIGINT info by the military). The absence of well-organized departments within EYP (which mainly focuses on the leftist terrorist organizations in Greece and espionage by Turkey and to a lesser extend activities by Albanian and FYROM-related political entities in the north), the limited existence of designated and 'declared' Muslim immigrants and organised centres in the country for many decades and the belief that Greece cannot constitute a target due to the traditionally 'good relations' with the Arab world fuelled this relaxation of the official State while with regards to the political scene most political parties did not recognize, at least until recently, the existence of such threats. Also, because of all the above beliefs and the immense influx of illegal immigrants the authorities have only recently realized that Greece, albeit not a target at least so far, can and most probably is being used as a transit point and as a 'safe haven' for organization using the country for supporting operations as well as recruitment, not so much of Greek citizens (despite the propaganda of some of the aforementioned websites and centres that Greeks increasingly convert to Islam-no such trend can seriously take place) but of the countless Muslim illegal immigrants coming from Africa, the

²⁰ This unit although primarily deals with local terrorist and "anarchist" groups does not have the structure and quality to deal with the problem of Islamic extremism.

Middle East, and Asia²¹.

It is understandable that although these prominent individuals living in Greece and the various organizations that exist did not and could not create problems even up to seven years ago when the country held the Olympics, taken into account all the above elements such as the poor organization of the security forces, lack of respective knowledge at the high-ranking levels of the intelligence, police, the armed forces and of the ignorance of the political establishment, the situation slowly and unnoticeably has reached today a crucial point. Recent developments in North Africa as well as Turkey's stance and the rapprochement between Greece and Israel primarily for geopolitical and energy purposes, are creating a constantly changing situation. As reports about the future of *registered* (mainly Muslim) immigrants in Greece indicate numbers above 2,150,000 people²² (excluding the long-established Muslim communities) and with the ethnic Greek population remaining largely the same during the past decade one can only realize the emerging problem and the need for much closer monitoring of all the above entities and their leaders. As per usual, the ones refusing closer cooperation with the State and regular checking mechanisms must be considered suspicious. It's also peculiar to notice that information about potential extended attacks or riots by Al-Qaeda and other related groups in Athens usually come from the Right. Specifically, the leader of the LAOS (Popular Orthodox Alarm) party and old member of the neoliberal New Democracy party, George Karatzaferis has spoken lately of a specific threat by some 5000 (allegedly) Al Qaeda affiliated Afghans, as he claims, living in the centre of Athens who could "create mayhem" at any given moment²³. This is currently a minority parliamentary party in its second term in the national assembly which, however, in light of recent developments gains constantly power. Because these statements come primarily from right-wing parties the majority of the population disregard them and although there are usually exaggerations, there is always a 'drop of truth' in their statistics. We will deal with the issue of specific threats later on in our study.

²¹Defencenet news. "Immigration out of Control" (Greek), 14/3/2011, http://www.defencenet.gr/defence/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=18276&Itemid=86

²² Ibid

²³ Proto Thema Newspaper "Prime Minister of Greece says 'A Shame not to have a Mosque'" (Greek), 10/12/2010 <http://www.protothema.gr/politics/article/?aid=94967>

Mosques and Activities of Islamic Centres

A) The Issue of constructing a major mosque in Athens

The issue of places of worship other than Christian churches in Greece has been one of the 'taboos' of Greek society and politics for decades. In places where the majority, if not the 'totality' were supposed to be Christian-Orthodox, local societies including priests usually fiercely react in view of plans put forward for the construction of any place of worship other than a church. Regions in northern Greece where traditional Muslim communities are do, of course, constitute an exception. The region of Thrace has roughly 300 mosques²⁴.

Some 33 years ago the then-Prime Minister of Greece, Konstantinos Karamanlis had promised the King of Saudi Arabia Khaleb that he oversee the construction of a mosque in Athens' northern suburbs (one of the richest regions of the capital)²⁵ while twenty-five years ago the PM, Andreas Papandreou, the father of the current PM of Greece George Papandreou, had first promised to build a mosque in Athens within a general climate of rapprochement with the Arab world including his good relations with Yasser Arafat and Muammar Gaddafi²⁶ which has costed Greece dearly with regard to its international relations in the past. The issue has lately become interlinked with the illegal immigration and the growing number of Muslim immigrants who, since they do exist (some of them for more than twenty years) the argument goes should have a place of worship. Most of the people in Greece understand this, yet, many of those argue that the vast majority of the Muslim populations since they are illegal immigrants should not have been there, hence, by constructing a major mosque in central Athens implies social recognition. This is a vicious-circle kind of argument. Since many illegal mosques, 'places of worship' and 'cultural centres' do exist, the building of a major mosque accompanied by a cultural centre would put everything in perspective, create a proper (i.e legal) place of worship which can be also monitored better.

Since the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the final depart of the last Muslims living in Attica region, Athens is the only European capital with no proper mosque. The government of George Papandreou has decided (with a consensus of almost all parliamentary parties) to proceed with

²⁴ See International Herald Tribune via NY Times http://www.iht.com/articles/ap/2006/10/06/europe/EU_GEN_Greece_New_Mosque.php

²⁵ Kalafatis, Alexandros "Greece Fears Immigrant Unrest", Presseurop, 29/5/2009 [Http://www.presseurop.eu/en/content/article/11841-greece-fears-immigrant-unrest](http://www.presseurop.eu/en/content/article/11841-greece-fears-immigrant-unrest)

²⁶ Ibid.

the creation of a major mosque and cultural centre either in the central Votanikos area or in the area of Paiania, a distant suburb of Athens in the centre of Attica region -not very densely populated and easily reachable today by the peripheral motorway (Attiki Odos) and the regional metro network (Proastiakos). There have been many arguments as to the choice of the area exactly. Paiania is not densely populated hence, some groups claim, the area will become a Muslim hub, or 'ghetto' after the construction of the Islamic centre and mosque. In the case of Votanikos, this ancient neighbourhood of Athens which was transformed into an industrial area for many decades, the groups and political parties support it is too close to the centre including the ancient Agora and that it will also become a ghetto taking into account that most of the immigrants in Athens are to be found nearby where they work, legally or not. The new, social-liberal mayor of Athens Giorgos Kaminis, the first mayor supported by the ruling PASOK socialist party since 1979, made -during the debate prior to the elections- the building of the mosque and Islamic centre in Athens one of his top priorities claiming that the non creation of such a place would only increase the number of semi-legal, 'underground' mosque-like entities (usually supported by various organisations) as did the independent but again government-supported new mayor of Salonika, Giannis Boutaris²⁷ who has also claimed however that he will boost the Jewish heritage of the city for cultural and tourism-related purposes.

Nevertheless, the problems with radical or suspicious organisations are not related so much with the construction of major mosques in or around the big cities of Athens and Salonika. They are linked to the existence of many unmonitored, even unknown illegal centres that operate as worship places and can be found anywhere-from basements in apartment buildings to old factories in former industrial areas even in the very centre of Athens and other cities and towns throughout Greece. Those places, often let for good money by Greek owners (there was a case of a 87,000 euro fine for the usage of a warehouse as a mosque in 2009)²⁸, are unmonitored and although they usually do not provoke the neighbourhoods (i.e noise, large gatherings outside, etc) it is very difficult to control or even observe what activities exactly are taking place within. Often, they operate under the title 'cultural centre' or as Arabic language schools. Public opinion is divided between the construction of a major mosque (outside central Athens) and the creation of a few smaller ones. The first group claims that the creation of many mosques would create more problems in the neighbourhoods they will be in while for the creation of a major one the

²⁷ Zoomnews website, "Boutaris-Davotoglu: A Mosque in Salonika", 10/3/2011, www.zoomnews.gr/?p=76204

²⁸ TVXS Website "87000 Euro Fine for turning a warehouse into a Mosque" (Greek), 27/4/2009 [Http://www.tvxs.gr/news/ελλάδα/πρόστιμο-87000-ευρώγια-μετατροπή-αποθήκης-σε-τζαμί](http://www.tvxs.gr/news/ελλάδα/πρόστιμο-87000-ευρώγια-μετατροπή-αποθήκης-σε-τζαμί)

argument is, as mentioned above, that the area in which it will be build will eventually become a ghetto. However, according to opinion surveys since 2006 the positive opinions for the construction of a major mosque are on the rise²⁹. Recent events such as the first massive prayer by some 13,000 Muslims in the very centre of Athens³⁰ (conducted by Egyptian Muftis who came specifically for the event) on 16 November, 2010, have apparently pushed the public opinion closer to the acceptance of the construction of a major mosque, outside the centre, rather than the more central (ancient) area of Elaionas where the government is also thinking to build a mosque with a capacity for 500 people which has received very intense criticism despite the fact that the once olive tree forest of ancient times, a holy place for ancient Greeks became later an industrial area.



The map shows the usual origin of Muslim immigrants. The left column (blue columns) reads the number of applications for permanent residency received³¹

B) Illegal mosques: numbers, identity, financing

The number of illegal mosques and other centres in Greece, mainly in Athens, has been of particular concern and has been linked (not without reason) during the past decade with the increasing influx of illegal immigrants. These, largely unmonitored places of worship - partly the result of the absence of major and legal centres - are usually funded by external sources most of them unknown by the police and State security services (which lack knowledge and expertise on Islamic extremism and culture in general³²). The Muslim Association of Greece (MAG) claims that the total number of Muslims living in Athens right now (legal and illegal) have reached the number of some 700,000 people³³, “the same as in London” as the article of Mr Antonis Furlis reads. Mr Psarianos, who contested the recently-created regional government post of Greater Athens

²⁹ See a major survey about Islam and Greek society’s opinions by a prominent public opinion company: <http://www.publicissue.gr/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/islam-analysis-2010.pdf>

³⁰ To Ethnos Newspaper “13000 Muslims Pray in Athens”, 16/11/2010 <http://www.ethnos.gr/article.asp?catid=11424&subid=2&pubid=41838991>

³¹ Antoniadou, Maria. “The Map of Islam in Greece” (Greek), To Vima 14/2/2010, <http://www.tovima.gr/relatedarticles/article/?aid=315192>

³² It is interesting to note that Greece never had a specific National Security Strategy.

³³ Furlis, Antonis, “Mosque in Athens on the Eve of the Election?”, MAG, 8/11/2010, [Http://equalsociety.com/en/2010/11/mosque-in-athens-at-the-on-the-eve-of-the-elections/](http://equalsociety.com/en/2010/11/mosque-in-athens-at-the-on-the-eve-of-the-elections/)

(supported by leftist parties and neutrals) said the total number of Muslims in Greece (except those in Thrace) can be as much as 1,000,000 people³⁴. It is thus understandable that the existence and constant creation of new, illegal places of worship will only continue. Many have called this phenomenon the Islamic 'Trojan Horse' which Greece must now deal with. It has been a timeless characteristic of the Greek State to deal with a problem only when it becomes imminent and, usually, irreversible. As many studies indicate, Greece lacked a long-term plan to deal with illegal immigration (both in controlling the influx and amplifying the situation within Greece)³⁵.

According to some reports there are at least 100 illegal mosques operating only in the Athens metropolitan area³⁶ while other reports lower the number to 70 (inside Athens) and around 65 in the rest of the country³⁷. It is very difficult to identify and 'designate' the background of those mosques (whether they are Sunni or Shiite-related), however according to the president of MAG, Naim El-Gandour, there are numerous Wahhabis who have come to Greece during the latter years and recruit young immigrants from within these illegal mosques and centres. Mr El-Gandour said specifically that "we are trying to isolate them...but it will ultimately be the government's omission should the situation get out of hand"³⁸. However, it was Mr El-Gandour who has repeatedly visited one of the illegal mosques close to Attiki Square, in the very centre of Athens which has now become a hub of Muslim immigrants and the central point of numerous attacks against citizens, usually for petty theft, while last year the wider, central, neighbourhood of Agios Panteleimonas became the 'theatre' of numerous incidents involving extremist right-wing organisations and protests against illegal immigration. The immigrants affiliated with the illegal mosques are mainly of Afghan, Kurdish, Iraqi, Bangladeshi and Pakistani origin while also some Palestinian communities have been operating their own centres.

The only official place for worship, the Arab Hellenic Centre for Culture and Civilisation in Moschato area (funded by the Saudi El Faouza) which opened back in 2007 is believed to be Sunni-dominated although the thousands of worshipers visiting the centre (1000 people were present in its opening with the Egyptian Imam Omar Abde Kafi conducting the first prayer) do come from all factions of Islam, including non-Arab immigrants. Contrary to the financing of the planned major

³⁴ Antoniadou, Maria, To vima <http://www.tovima.gr/relatedarticles/article/?aid=315192>

³⁵ Nomikos M, John '*Illegal Immigration and Organised Crime in Greece*', RIEAS Research Paper No 144, August 2010

³⁶ Strategy Report, "Rapid Islamisation in Greece" (Greek), 15/11/2010, <http://www.strategyreport.gr/?p=5112#more-5112>

³⁷ Epikera (online) "Athenians Demand a Mosque Beyond the Walls" (Greek) 2/12/2010, http://www.epikera.gr/epikairo.php?id=5045&category_id=0

³⁸ Strategy Report (as above) <http://www.strategyreport.gr/?p=5112#more-5112>

mosque, financing of other centres such as the Moschato one usually comes from unidentified sources and, even those which are known it is not clear whether the purveyors act alone or in co-op and with the support of third sources.

Some notable mosques and centres others than those referred to in this study earlier or the ones affiliated with the Muslim community in northern Greece (Thrace and the city of Salonika) on are *The Imam Mosque* in central Athens (near Koliatsou square), the *Al-Saleheen Mosque* in Kalithea suburb, not far from the centre with a sea front near Piraeus port, the *Al Salam Mosque* again close to the centre in Neos Kosmos area (with links to MAG), the *Al Gorabaa Islamic Society* in central Kato Patissia area, *Al Farouk Mosque* in Athens, *Al-Tawba Mosque* in Pangrati area, the *Al-Tawaheed Islamic Society*, *El-Rahman Association* associated with www.islamforgreeks.org website, *Masjed al-Nuor* in Athens and Chania town in Crete, the *Masjed Al-Rahma* also in Chania, the *Masjid Athina* in Athens, the *Masjed Qibaa* in Chania, Crete, the *Masjid Al Jabbar* in Psiri central area of Athens, the *Masjid Al-Andalus* in Piraeus, one of the oldest centres (the first in Piraeus and second oldest in Athens established in 1981), the *Masjid Al-Ikhlās* in Kypseli central neighbourhood of Athens, the *Masjid Bilal* in Athens, the mosque *Darrul Aman* in Omonia central square of Athens, the mosque (official?) of Heraklion in Crete, the mosque in Peristeri suburb of Athens, the *Muslim Association of Crete* also in Heraklion (unknown if associated with MAG), the *Mustafa Mosque* on the island of Rhodes, the *Sallahadin Aiubi* in central Athens, the *Simon Riding* centre in Athens while some other centres and mosques can be found in Athens, Piraeus and Salonika such as the *Palestinian Community of Salonika*, first Arabic and Islamic community in Salonika which also operated an Arabic language school.³⁹ Finally Saudi Arabia and Kuwait have in the past declared they would finance the construction of mosques and centres in Greece.

Border Issues and External Involvement

A) Support of Local Communities from Abroad

Most of the centres and mosques described in the previous section are financed by various sources or individuals, such as the Saudi businessman who decisively supported the creation of the major Islamic centre at Moschato area. While it is certain money from abroad do support various (non-official) centres there has not been so far specific vocal support from certain

³⁹ See Islamic Finder info on the Palestine Community of Thessaloniki: <http://www.islamicfinder.org/getitWorld.php?id=38170&lang=>

countries. Imams from Egypt have been coming to Greece steadily in later years to conduct religious ceremonies and prayers (such as the massive prayer of November 2010 described in the previous section). Nationalistic-religious support however is strong by two regional countries: Turkey and Albania. Turkey's support of the Muslim minority in Thrace⁴⁰ has been a matter of diplomatic dispute for decades (some political parties, usually right-wing claim the Turkish consulate of Komotini is in fact working as a supportive centre for the local communities trying to boost Turkic nationalism and subsequently Islam)⁴¹. Lately, Turkey has been supporting the creation of a major mosque in Athens and has portrayed this as a human rights issue vis-a-vis the Greek claims for the re-opening of the Chalki School in Turkey which ceased to operate in the 1950s and it has become an international issue as the UN is pushing for its protection and re-opening, as a school or a museum. Another issue of concern, at least since the early 1990s, is the fact that Turkey has constantly been reluctant prohibiting illegal immigrant smuggling (predominantly Muslims from south, central Asia and the Middle East). There are two main 'gates': the northern borders between Greece and Turkey along Evros river in Thrace (see following section on the construction of the fence and Frontex activities) and the main islands in the Aegean Sea along the Greek-Turkish sea border. Despite aspirations to join the EU, Ankara has constantly been idle in acting decisively and promptly to arrest the smugglers of immigrants (as well as drugs and weapons) and limit their influx to Greece. This issue has only lately become an element of dispute and discussion between Brussels, Greece and Turkey.

While usually Turkish involvement has primarily revolved around the Muslim community in Thrace, the Albanian involvement is more multidimensional and 'operates' in a more 'clandestine' way. Despite the fact that it is not a purely religious (Islamic) support it does have an Islamic parameter as Christian Albanians (both the orthodox ones who might have ethnic Greek origin and the catholic ones, sometimes with links to Italy) are not involved in ethnical claims or have religious related demands. There have not been any major incidents of religious violence or terrorist acts by Albanians in Greece, however, there is an evolving situation since the beginnings of 2000 related to the north-western Greek region of Epirus with Albanian claims on Greek territory. Along with the Kosovar terrorists of UCK another organisation, the UCC [Tsamouria (Chamouria) Liberation Army], has had territorial claims on the north-western (South) Epirus region an area of major Albanian populations until WWII. This terrorist organisation has in fact

⁴¹ See Defencenet, News, 26/11/2010
http://www.defencenet.gr/defence/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=15753&Itemid=86

claimed ownership of land and houses and has officially requested the assistance of a large UK-based law firm specialising in international law to claim back the 'lost properties' that 'were passed' to the Greeks after WWII⁴². The group, like UCK, is a nationalist-religious (Islamic) one which can cause serious problems since, according to the National Intelligence Service (EYP), there is information of several locations throughout western and north-western Greece with hidden weaponry including pistols, rifles, hand grenades and chinese AK-47s. One such crypt was found out, accidentally, in a forest of Epirus around 2011 New Year's Eve⁴³. The president of the PDIU party, Shpetim Idrizi recently stated in Lajm newspaper that a group of people in Albania have hired a British law firm to look into claims of ethnic cleansing and persecution by the Greeks during and after WWII and also about the rights of the Albanian population (the "Chamourians") in the area and the financial liability of Greece towards these populations⁴⁴. In the same interview Mr. Idrizi continues by saying that this is the "Albanian century" and after Kosovo it is the turn of Albanians in FYROM, Presevo (Serbian province) and Chamouria. Another quantity of weaponry was found in the NE Acharnes area of Athens⁴⁵. Three Albanians were arrested and brought before justice. The weapons were four rifles, one other machine gun, two AK-47s, 25 grenades, one smoke bomb and 297 bullets. The three Albanians caught by police were 18, 20 and 36 years old respectively. It is not certain that these three individuals are linked to UCC but there is evidence the weapons were related to the ones found in the crypt of the forest in Epirus region. Another recent incident which occurred on 29 November 2010 involved a 46 years old Turkish national, Taskirad Mahmood, who was found with his son en route in a private car carrying one AK-47 and ammunition in Thrace. Taskirad Mahmood had been convicted in the past for several crimes including homicide, weapons possession, theft, prison break, possession of military weaponry and others⁴⁶, all committed in several Greek regions. They were arrested by the Greek authorities but there is no evidence they will be deported to Turkey.

Regarding Islamic terrorism in the whole SE European region, Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman warned the PM of FYROM during his recent visit to Israel in March 2010 that there is a very serious danger of Islamic terrorists operating there without excluding the possibility of an attack. The British Europol Chairman Rob Wainwright during a meeting with the previous Greek

⁴² Defencenet, "Declaration of Freedom Struggle by UCC" (Greek), 3/3/2011, http://www.defencenet.gr/defence/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=17981&Itemid=86

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Defencenet, "Big quantity of Weapons in Albanian Hands", 20/12/2010, http://www.defencenet.gr/defence/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=16297&Itemid=86

⁴⁶ Defencenet "Ethnic Turk Arrested with Weaponry", 30/1/2010, http://www.defencenet.gr/defence/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=15820&Itemid=86

Public Order Minister M. Chrisochoidis also confirmed these warnings. According to the same analysis, the Greek Police Anti-Terror Unit and the National Intelligence Service estimate that 25-30 Greek nationals linked to domestic terrorist organisations travelled in 2009 and 2010 to the Middle East to receive training on practices and weapons operation probably, the article states, by Hezbollah operatives⁴⁷.

B) Frontex Operations and the Issue of the Fence in Thrace

While Greek authorities have been cooperating with Europol and other European agencies throughout the past decade regarding the issue of immigrants (and Turkey's stance vis-a-vis this problem), border control has been dealt by the Greek army and specific police units which, however, should not be taken as the equivalent of border units operating in Europe or the US. From 2006 a small Frontex unit has been helping the ill-equipped Hellenic Coast Guard⁴⁸ along the Greek-Turkish sea border line without however decisively decreasing the number of smuggled immigrants from Turkey and Asia. The absence of a sound and solid pan-European anti-immigration policy (and subsequently of a Greek anti-immigration policy) has contributed negatively to the current situation which would be fair to say has gone largely uncontrolled during the past ten or so years. It is estimated that 90% of all illegal immigrants to Europe coming from the East are passing through Greece⁴⁹. In 2010, for yet another year there was a steady increase of incoming immigrants, mainly from central and south Asia. According to official sources some 47,000 people came in the country only from the Evros (Thrace) border and some 6,000 from the sea border with Turkey in the Aegean sea. Of these the vast majority remained the ones of Afghan origin (or coming from Afghanistan) numbering some 28300 people, while Palestinians were second with approximately 8800 people. Algeria followed with some 7500 people, Somalia ~6500, Iraq ~5000 and Bangladesh with a bit more than 3200 people⁵⁰.

This overall rapid increase in combination with recent violence and incidents such as the one involving Afghan and Pakistani immigrants who had been in Greece for several years and who took over some buildings for a few months in early 2011 in Athens (first the Law School of Athens

⁴⁷ Strategy Report "The Foreign Connections of Greek Terrorism", (Greek) 22/3/2010 <http://www.strategyreport.gr/?p=826>

⁴⁸ Defencenet, "Frontex Becomes Permanent" (Greek), 10/2/2011 http://www.defencenet.gr/defence/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=17462&Itemid=86

⁴⁹ ELLAS blog, "Massive influx of Immigrants in view of Frontex Operatins", (Greek) 1/11/2010 Based on Ethnos Daily. See: <http://ellas2.wordpress.com/2010/11/01/μαζική-εισροή-μεταναστών-από-την-τουρ/>

⁵⁰ See newscode.gr "2010 sees more illegal immigrants to Greece" (Greek) 2/2/2011 <http://www.newscode.gr/ellada/story/ayxthhke-o-arithmos-paranomwn-metanastwn-sthn-ellada-to-2010>

University and then the historic Neoclassical villa “Hypatia” in central Athens creating major controversy and crisis within the government and society) turned many citizens in favour of the government’s plans to build a high fence at the Greek-Turkish border line along Evros river in Thrace where the borders do not go along the river. According to two opinion polls conducted by the (major) companies Alco and Public Issue for the dailies ‘Proto Thema’ and ‘Kathimerini’ respectively, Greek citizens clearly welcome the plan. The first poll indicated that 73% of the people replied positively or rather positively in building the fence and according to Public Issue’s poll 59% of the people were generally in favour. The Public Issue poll also showed that more than half of the responders (56%) admitted that the fence will decrease the number of immigrants’ influx⁵¹. The fence, currently under construction and in combination with the Frontex force now permanently in Greece (see below) will be running for approximately 8 miles (12.5-13 Km) along the Greek-Turkish land borders.

The Frontex force, as mentioned above, first came to assist the Coast Guard in 2006, however, a decisive reduction of immigrants was not evident although a number of smuggles (mainly Turkish as well as Greek) were arrested. In November 2010 a force of 200 special Frontex guards were stationed along the borders in Thrace and since then the overall influx of immigrants has been decisively reduced (on a monthly basis) by 30%⁵² (December stats). Lately has become known that Frontex will be now permanently stationed in Greece⁵³ with its home offices opening in Piraeus city (the port city close to Athens) something that public opinion as well as officials have generally welcomed. It is worth noticing that both Frontex forces as well as the fence are also designed and aimed at hardening the smuggling of drugs and weapons, generally believed to be the main financing sources of terrorism both ‘domestic’ (extreme Left) as well as Islamic not only in Greece but throughout the European Union.

⁵¹ Defencenet.gr, “Greek Support the construction of the Fence” (Greek), 16/1/2011
http://www.defencenet.gr/defence/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=16862&Itemid=86

⁵² Koutsouba, Marina “A Decrease of Immigrants due to Frontex”, (Greek), 25/11/2010, <http://www.cosmo.gr/News/Hellas/298804.html>

⁵³ Defencenet.gr “Frontex Becomes Permanent”, (Greek) 10/2/2011
http://www.defencenet.gr/defence/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=17462&Itemid=86



The map above shows where the fence will be build (yellow line) while the blue line is the Evros river between Greece and Turkey which constitutes most of the border (Google maps).

Specific Incidents and Threats

Although no verified Islamist terrorist attack has ever occurred in Greece, the latter years have seen an increased, mainly background activity. This activity has so far been on logistical, recruitment and accommodating basis as many experts in Greece and abroad agree the current situation regarding immigration combined with the existence of the illegal immigrants has created a hub of uncontrollable, 'loose', individuals who act and operate freely making the transposing of people from Asia and the Middle East through Greece easier while also looking to recruit Islamic radicals for operations beyond the Greek borders. The last section of this paper will be looking at specific incidents with possible direct or indirect links to Islamic terrorism, as a threat to Greece itself and subsequently Europe, as most of the illegal immigrants going to Europe (app. 90% as we saw earlier on) come through Greek territory.

The pinnacle of effective security measures in Greece was the period leading up to the Athens Olympic Games in 2004. Systems such as C4I and special surveillance including small airships with telecommunications monitoring capabilities were floating over the greater metropolitan area of Athens, not without claims regarding personal data security by several groups and mostly left-wing political parties. Alert levels were high and there was close cooperation between the Hellenic intelligence and anti-terrorist units with European and US agencies. Due to constitutional concerns however and under the pressure from many social groups and NGOs and also with the fear of political cost the conservative government (which was elected in March 2004, several months

before the games begun) ceased the operation of many of these systems including surveillance cameras on the main arteries of Athens as well as the C4I system which later became part of the Siemens scandal which still constitutes a great debate within the Greek political establishment.

For the purposes of inter-agency cooperation regarding the games and the period following 2004 Greek and foreign authorities had under surveillance and monitoring several individuals and organisations as they had also intensified their efforts to dismantle any remaining links to extreme leftist organisations.

However, as years went by this close cooperation between Greek and foreign agencies was gradually amplified although certain links existed primarily with regards to the re-emergence of some leftist terrorist groups (such as the Revolutionary Struggle and the Nucleus of Fire) but also regarding the emerging situation with Islamists who were coming or passing through Greek territory.

Starting from 2003 the most prominent incidents or information regarding direct or indirect Islamic activity in Greece are:

- An authoritative article⁵⁴ reported that as early as 2003, even before the organisation of the Athens 2004 Olympic Games, a Muslim association with the name 'El Rahman' associated (at least at that time) with islamforgreeks.org website was set up which today numbers approximately 1500 members, mostly Greek converts to Islam. The founder and President of the association is Mohi Eldin Ahmed Ali along with his son Ahmed Eldin who had studied Islamic Theology in Cairo as well as journalism in a private college. The organisation, according to the article, active since 2003 has been promoting radical Dawa and operates mainly through the net. Other people related to this organisation include two Greek converts who in 2011 joined Ahmed Eldin. Those are Abu Jassur and Hamza who follow Salafi-Wahhabism along with another Greek convert Abu Alia who according to Radio Free Europe has also been active in the Balkans possibly linked with an organisation named Poziv u Raj (Invitation to Heaven) launched in Bosnia in 2010.
- In 2005 on 13 September Greek authorities arrested a Muslim terrorist from Morocco, Anwar Mazrar who was wanted by the French and Moroccan authorities for involvement in an

⁵⁴ Banoutsos, Andreas "Radical Dawah online in Greece", 27/2/2011, <http://rimse.gr/?p=212>

extremist muslim organisation allegedly affiliated with Al Qaeda, active in North Africa. According to French intelligence he was initially active in France, where he was recruiting operatives in order to set up a network. He then left France and re-entered the EU through Turkey (with a fake French passport) by bus where, after a signal from the French intelligence, was arrested by the Greek authorities⁵⁵.

- Following the arrest of Mazrar, Europol requested by the Greek authorities to intensify their efforts to locate more extremists who could possibly use Greece as a safe haven or entrance point to the EU. According to sources two Imams were under monitoring for recruiting people at some of the illegal mosques and centres described earlier on. There have also been arrests of ‘Hellenized’ Arabs in Britain, Italy and Holland. Finally, according to the same sources in 2007 an important signal from BIA, the Serbian Intelligence Agency, indicated the possible operation of Salafist-related extremist groups in Greece, most of them coming from Bosnia, Albania and Kosovo where they were active during the wars of early-mid 1990s and 1999 NATO bombardment against Serbia in combination with UCK’s activities against the Serbian forces⁵⁶.
- A more minor incident of Muslim violence erupted in 2009 after the arsonist attack by extreme right-wing groups against an illegal (lower ground) mosque/centre in central Athens on 23 of May⁵⁷. About 700 people participated in angry demonstrations clashing with the police. While the president of MAG, El-Ghandour heavily criticised those clashes as well as the arsonist attack (possibly by ‘Golden Dawn’ or Chrysi Avgi affiliated members), he insisted that these phenomena were a result of the absence of a major Mosque in the Greek capital.

The years 2010 and early 2011 have seen the most activity regarding Islamist related incidents and information coming out of the Greek media and that fact has put the Greek authorities on the highest alert since the period of the 2004 Olympic Games due to constant information flow from, primarily, western agencies and authorities regarding increased activity of Islamic extremists.

In more detail:

- The incident of the 14 parcel bombs sent from Greece in late October/early November 2010 to the offices of Nicola Sarkozy in France, Angela Merkel in Germany and Silvio Berlusconi in Italy as well as several embassies within Greece (such as the embassies of the Netherlands, Belgium,

⁵⁵ “Actionnemesiis “Serbian Intelligence Warns Greek Authorities on Islamic Terrorism in Greece” (Greek), 30/1/2007 http://www.actionnemesiis.com/v2/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1217&Itemid=53 From the newspaper “Ta Nea”

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Kalafatis, Alexandros “Greece Fears Immigrant Unrest”, Presseurop.eu, 29/5/2009, <http://www.presseurop.eu/en/content/article/11841-greece-fears-immigrant-unrest>

Mexico and Switzerland) and agencies abroad such as Interpol, the European Court of Justice and other institutions has been denied any links to Islamist terrorism by the Greek government and authorities⁵⁸. The government spokesman Petalotis said that *“it is our (Greek government’s) own strong conviction that international terrorism is not involved with all these actions that generate a bad image for the country at a time when we are struggling to show our international partners and worldwide public opinion that Greece is moving on, that it is a country of security and a country of stability”* (quote from the same article). Foreign leaders who had the bombs sent to them, such as German Chancellor Angela Merkel also denied involvement of international Islamic terrorism and disconnected the issue with similar incidents like the parcel bombs sent to the US from Yemen, as the wave of the parcel bombs was attributed to Greek leftist and ‘anarchist’ extremist groups.

- The most important incident to date involving Islamic terrorist activity in Greece was the arrest of Ghaleb Taleb by the Greek police after an important article by the Italian daily Corriere Della Sera in early 2011⁵⁹. Ghaleb Taleb, or “the boy”, a Lebanese-Palestinian member of Fatah-al-Islam was arrested in the northern suburb of Pendeli in early February 2011 (possibly on February 12). The police acted swiftly after the publication of the Italian daily, however as police sources say Taleb was under surveillance for several months as he had applied twice, as the first application was rejected, within 2010 for a permanent residence permit and the anti-terror unit of HELAS (Hellenic Police) as well as EYP (Intelligence Service) had information from foreign agencies regarding his activities. According to sources⁶⁰, Taleb had not acted so far in terms of conducting an attack, however, he was sent to Greece in order to finance, equip and accomodate other operatives and was using Greece as a base to provide fake IDs and information to several individuals (some of them entering Greece as illegal immigrants) who were then sent to western and northern European countries. While officially HELAS has been reluctant to provide more information it has become known that Taleb or “the foreigner”, who was arrested along with another individual about whom there is not much information (possibly Greek), had come to replace an earlier operative of Fatah-al-Islam in Greece, Muhammed Musa, who left after he was detained for a short period in 2009 as the situation was deemed “dangerous” by his ‘superiors’. Taleb was in charge of a group of individuals dispersed throughout northern Europe as well as France and Bulgaria. Some of them including two other

⁵⁸ Athens News “Government: Parcel bombs not linked to international terror”, 3/11/2010, <http://www.athensnews.gr/portal/1/32997>

⁵⁹ ekathimerini.com “Suspected Lebanese terrorist caught in Athens”, 14/2/2011, http://www.ekathimerini.com/4dcgi/_w_articles_ws1e1_1_14/02/2011_378128

⁶⁰ ekathimerini.com “Police Detain Palestinian Terror Suspect”, 14/2/2011 http://www.ekathimerini.com/4dcgi/_w_articles_ws1e1_1_14/02/2011_378320

Lebanese individuals had tried in 2006 to place a bomb in a train in Germany⁶¹. As there was no sufficient evidence by the Greek police with regards to his terrorist - related activities, Taleb was officially charged with illegal residency and possession of false documents. Information is not yet clear on whether Taleb and Fatah-al-Islam were actually planning a hit within Greece but, taken the relaxed state of Greek society in general and the absence of serious Islamic terrorist activities in the past, experts say that the organisation found a 'safe haven' in the country for further activities in Europe.

- The above incident is linked to a wider situation involving other suspects under surveillance during the last years by both HELAS' anti-terror unit and EYP. It has become known⁶² that during the past decade Greek authorities had under surveillance some 40 individuals about whom there were assumptions by their home authorities that were somehow linked to Al Qaeda affiliated cells. Finally, according to the same sources there are around 500 individuals under relaxed monitoring by the authorities in Greece for suspicious activities without however evidence they are affiliated, in one way or the other, with Islamic terrorism.
- Finally, a more long-term issue with possible national security concerns is the increased administrative power the Muslim minority is getting in northern Greece. After the major reshaping of Greece's administrative divisions by the ruling PASOK government with the introduction of elected governors (the Kalikratis Programme which became during the past year the topic of many debates leading to local and regional elections of Autumn 2010), the region or "peripheria" of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace has become the one with the largest (after Greater Athens and Piraeus region) Muslim minority primarily due to the existence there of the traditional Muslim community as explained in the first section of this study. The regional elections were won (with a clear majority after the second round) by the government-supported alliance called Kenoniki Symachia ('Social' or 'Community' Alliance) led by the now regional governor Aris Giannakidis. Mr. Giannakidis' alliance won the elections largely supported by the local Muslim minority of Thrace. Representatives of the self-described Turkish minority in an article published in the Turkish-speaking daily Birlik now demand that some of its members are put in specific positions in the regional government and in particular to fill in the position of the regional administration's spokesman⁶³. The interesting as well as worrying part of the story

⁶¹ GR Rporter, "Greek Police Arrested a Pakestinian Suspected of Contacts with Terrorist Organisation", 14/2/2011, http://www.grreporter.info/en/greek_police_arrested_palestinian_suspected_contacts_terrorist_organization/4073

⁶² Karaivas, Giorgos "40 Suspected Al Qaeda Individuals in Greece" (Greek), Newsit, 13/2/2011 [Http://www.newsit.gr/default.php?pname=Article&art_id=64565&catid=4](http://www.newsit.gr/default.php?pname=Article&art_id=64565&catid=4)

⁶³ Defencenet, "Extremists of the Minority Demand share of power in East Macedonia and Thrace" (Greek) 22/11/2010, http://www.defencenet.gr/defence/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=15645&Itemid=86

is that this particular group is supported by the Turkish consulate of Komotini and self-describes itself not only as a religious but as an ethnic minority as well, mirroring the rhetoric of the Turkish consulate there and the Turkish government overall during the past decades. The newspaper specifically states in its article “we wish Mr. Giannakidis’ a good term in office and we hope that he clearly displays his stance and logic regarding the Turkish minority of the region”⁶⁴.

There is a clear danger that in order to sustain his majority and secure future elections Mr. Giannakidis and his alliance may give in to the pressures of the extremist (i.e. clearly pro-Turkish) elements of the community hence creating a completely legal and ‘within-the-state’ framework for a friendly, towards other Muslims and possible Islamists, administration which can possibly, in due course, provide safe haven for various individuals and organised groups of unknown origin or intentions towards Greece.

Conclusion

This study has thus far shown this is a pivotal time for Greece and the region at large. Recent, still unfolding developments in the MENA region constitute a serious challenge for the Greek as well as other regional governments which must not address the problem of immigration and subsequently the emergence, establishment and build up of extremist Islamic elements and terrorist cells within European countries. As we have seen, given the trends of immigration and the current situation in the country, Greece has come to a state that must now face a problem that has gone largely unnoticed during the course of (at least) the past two decades. Old norms and beliefs of both the Greek political establishment as well as the people and society at large need to be reexamined and reevaluated and new, bold and long-term strategies must be put in place before the problem expands deeper into the often conservative yet rapidly changing Greek society. This study has indicated that, given the background and the historic as well as geographical position of Greece, it will take a very balanced and delicate handling by the State to overcome current problems and be prepared for the future. This handling will have to include the society at large including the already existing and traditional Muslim communities which, having a closer cultural proximity to the Islamic element can contribute in controlling and improving the

⁶⁴ See link to Newspaper: Gitsin, Sala “**PASOK Ve Yannakidis’ Turk Azinlik Kurtardi**”, 14/11/2010, http://www.birlikgazetesi.info/?pid=21&id_aktualno=42

situation, become part of the solution and not the problem. For example, having anti-Islamic teachings or 'warnings' at schools cannot offer too much as most of the young Muslims who live in the country attend their own educational establishments.

Although, as this study has pointed out, there has been some increased activity and a number of warning signs of the existence and organisation of radical Islamic elements in the country, Greece has so far been excluded as a target by Al Qaeda or other terrorist organisations. A recent essay by Tech Central Station⁶⁵ has alarmed many analysts as well as the Greek MFA and the Intelligence Service. This essay, known to US decision makers such as Donald Rumsfeld as early as 2005 (that is before its completion) indicated that indeed Al Qaeda and similar organisations are using Greece as a base for further activities in Europe and that they indeed take advantage of the tens of thousands of illegal immigrants who until last year faced little resistance or obstacles by authorities as the latter were simply unable to decisively react. The paper also stresses the fact that the numerous illegal mosques and 'centres' have become hubs of Wahhabism and Salafist elements. The now permanent Frontex team in Greece and the building of the fence in Thrace have been met with a general consent of the Greek public and so far have somewhat improved the situation, at least as far as that particular entry point is concerned. The geographic proximity of Greece to the Arab world and Asia, the reluctance of Turkey to react (if not her unofficial 'accommodation' of the infiltrators) and the ongoing conflicts in MENA, Central and South Asian regions are problems and facts that cannot and will not change single-handedly nor will they end in the foreseeable future. It is a fact that despite all the above Greece has not so far been a target of Al Qaeda or similar groups. The reasons for this has not been the preparedness of the Greek State but rather a number of other factors; Greece has not participated actively in the wars of Iraq and Afghanistan, although in the latter case there are some units for supporting and medical purposes. Greek culture and Greeks in general (as a nation and people) have a positive reputation in the Arab lands from Central and South Asia to Morocco even deep in sub-Saharan Africa. Hence, as experts like Panos Kostakos of the Jamestown Foundation argue a strike against Greece lacks the symbolism Al Qaeda needs as cultural ties and heritage go as far back as Alexander the Great and Al Qaeda uses historic and cultural elements to justify and link its activities with its rhetoric and goals⁶⁶. However, this does not anymore immune Greece as developments in the wider regions are rapid and the country offers a fertile ground, a 'soft base' for background, supportive

⁶⁵ Strategy Report "Danger for Islamic Terrorism due to high immigration influx", (Greek), 12/11/2010, <http://www.strategyreport.gr/?p=5029>

⁶⁶ Kostakos A. Panos (2007) "*The Threat of Islamic Radicalism to Greece*", Terrorism Monitor Vol. 8, Issue 37

activities by several groups affiliated with Al Qaeda or extreme Islamic ideology in general. The geographic proximity of Greece to MENA region and Asia, the soft (even non-existent until recently) anti-immigration policy and the public sentiment in correlation with the political cost (as few, if any politicians and political parties even recognise this specific problem) have provided a futile ground for making Greece a soft base as we saw in the case of Ghaleb Taleb and the existence of several illegal mosques and centres. Even the absence of a central mosque in Athens and the delay of its construction have had negative effects in that respect. Recent demonstrations and public prayers have shown that the 'ticking bomb' of fanaticism and violent reactions can go off at any time and with any cause.

Current and future threats that can swell the problem and in fact 'blow it out of proportion' include the illegal immigration and the weak control of borders, especially eastern and southern sea borders, the ongoing revolutions and new waves of immigrants from MENA region, the Macedonian name dispute with FYROM in conjunction with extremist Albanian claims (by groups such as UCC as well as the predominantly Muslim Albanians living in FYROM) on Greek territory, the radicalisation of ethnic Turkish Muslims of Northern Greece (although the threat of that is extremely low at least as the situation currently stands) and the equation of the emerging Greek-Cypriot-Israeli relations and cooperation especially with regards to oil and natural gas extraction from the Aegean Sea and Eastern Mediterranean. Beginning from the latter, what Greece should now do within the overall framework of regional security is to materialise this trilateral rapprochement within the geopolitical theatre of Eastern Mediterranean. Without creating enmities with the Arab world at large, something that will have a rather negative effect for all parties involved, Greece should become part of a positive 'axis of the willing' that will work as a political, diplomatic and security embankment against Islamic terrorist activity in Greece and subsequently Western Europe. Within the framework of an honest and pragmatic dialogue between Greece, Israel and Cyprus the respective governments should press the moderate and secular regional states of the wider region for a positive cooperation. That includes the regimes that are currently emerging in North Africa and other states where developments have been rapid during the last months. Turkey's role in this can also be crucial. As terrorism and extremist Islam have now acquired a transnational character, the contribution and cooperation of respective agencies and governments is deemed as necessary as, even when referring to Greece, the overall problem cannot be dealt single-handedly and goes beyond the boundaries of a single state. Without Ankara for instance willing to contribute in order to put a halt to the ever increasing

hordes of various Muslim nationalities transposing its territory to end up in Greece and Western Europe, the problem of illegal immigration of potentially radical character can never cease to exist. The Greek government should now use its cultural appeal and diplomatically cooperate with the respective countries (such as Pakistan, Gulf States, Bangladesh, Lebanon, Egypt) where most of the immigrants (especially of radical Islam) originate from in order to clarify the situation and bilaterally take the necessary measures 'putting' them into a general framework of cooperation and making them part of the solution rather than the problem. The importance and role of Turkey cannot be left aside especially if Ankara wants to have a positive role and pursue its European future. Greece should directly link this issue with the neighbouring country's aspirations not only for an EU membership (a distant prospect as the situation currently stands with the AKP government in power) but for a wider positive role as a stabilising factor rather than the opposite.

International cooperation aside, the greatest and boldest steps must be taken within Greece and by the Greek government with the greatest possible support of the society given the currently very fragile relations between the populous and the State in view of the harsh economic measures and the economic situation. Building fences or strengthening border control can be but one of the solutions and certainly it neither tackles the problem of the already existing communities in Greece nor the issue of radicalisation. Whereas the influx of refugees or immigrants is an international and regional issue the amplification of radical Islamist sentiments and behaviour within the country can only be dealt with long term and parallel policies in the political, security as well as social and economic spheres and education. As many experts argue and as previous policies have indicated⁶⁷ the first step the Greek government can take once has created fair control of its borders and has increased proper and effective security measures, is to gradually include those who obtain papers and legally reside in Greece into the country's free market structure. In other words, capitalism and the liberal economy can be a first step towards amplifying and eventually limiting extremist behaviour. Unless specific individuals come solely for the purposes of conducting terrorist attacks or to use Greece as a soft base for further activities in Western Europe (in which case it is up to the country's security services to take action), the rest of the people who eventually acquire legal documentation should be guided towards economic and social participation and get involved in economic activity that will eventually create burdens and make them "think twice" should they desire to be part of any radical groups. That said, the free

⁶⁷ For an example of policies of assimilation in Turkey see: Tugal, Cihan (2009) "*Passive Revolution: Absorbing the Islamic Challenge to Capitalism*", Stanford University Press

market is not panacea, it creates however opportunities which can be taken advantage of by the usually young Muslim populations currently living in the country who can constitute a dynamic working force. Although Islam teaches a measured and moderate way of life, considering that immigrants usually seek a better life and turn to radical behaviour if they are denied one, opportunities for economic activity can work as an opportunity for most of immigrants currently in Greece before they turn radical. Those individuals must integrate and be assimilated into the Greek society and economy at large. The building of a major mosque for example is deemed necessary in order for the Greek authorities to legitimately hunt down and close all the illegal 'places of worship' where radical teachings including Wahhabism are taking place. It will arguably take several years before people who have recently come feel even remotely part of the Greek society (especially outside metropolitan areas). Policies of assimilation can take years. The examples of bigger and more cosmopolitan countries such as Germany, France or the United Kingdom are good examples although those countries' history and imperial past is obviously substantially different from that of Greece. It is obvious that many of the illegal (Muslim and not only) immigrants currently residing in Greece should be deported. Nevertheless that is all but easy. Also, monitoring or tracking down half a million people is also practically impossible. While the ratio of people who enter the country and those who are forced to leave should very quickly change 'in favour' of the latter, the State should in the same time slowly start with identifying and checking all the illegal mosques and other 'unidentified' cultural centres. Simultaneously the security services and the police should start identifying any religious leaders and "preachers" since it is through their own activity and propaganda that extremist Islamic ideologies are propagated and spread. With regards to the general framework of immigration policies it would be wise for the Greek government not to discriminate or classify those on religious merits. Illegal or legal Muslims in Greece come from various ethnic backgrounds and countries. Their attitude and religious culture can differ considerably and this is something that should be exploited by the authorities as religion usually offers a safe haven to anyone who otherwise fails to become an active part of society. Although minds cannot be controlled, the State should make efforts to educate them. Authorities and the State in general including the educational establishment and various institutions and NGOs, must tackle the very roots of radicalisation and shake the very foundations of this kind of ideologies and behaviour by proving them unfruitful while proposing a more liberal and 'western' way of life. In the long run, we have to win the hearts and minds of those who initially come for a better life than simply intimidate or isolate them. Improving the situation in their home countries is also a long-term, cooperative and important step.

As terrorism is the ideology and the 'weapon' of the weak in ideas and causes, proper education can amplify the urge for such behaviour. Embracing the rich Greek culture and becoming, or at least feeling part of a free and liberal society one has less reasons to resolve to violence and terrorism. Those who do, should obviously be punished. Although assimilation efforts and educating people are long-term policies, they can possibly be the only true remedy for Greece and Europe at large in the fight against radicalisation.

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