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RE-INTEGRATION CENTRE FOR MIGRANT WORKERS

# **Migration and Economic Crisis:** the case of Greece

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# **Migration and Economic Crisis:**

#### The Case of Greece

#### 1. Introductory Remarks

Before discussing the repercussions of economic crisis in Greece on migration, I feel it is significant to shortly present some remarks concerning the economic crisis in Greece.

Among the EU countries, Greece is the one on which the current crisis has the greatest impact.

If the global economic crisis is due to a large extent to the so called, financialization of the economy, in the Greek case the economic policies followed by the Greek governments over the last 30 years have also contributed a lot in the appearance of the crisis. These policies have led to the almost complete des-industrialization of the economy, the abandonment of the agricultural production that at the moment represents the 2,5% of the GDP and the transformation of the Greek economy to an economy of offer of services with most significant pillars those of construction, tourism and the merchant marine.

The substitution of private investment by state investments, the increase of the number of public servants (13% of the total active population, against 2-2,5% in the other EU countries), bureaucracy, corruption, clientelism, excessive state expenses, the growth of underground economy and the postponement of the adaptation of the economy to the technological challenges have led to the paradox of a state, which does not produce, which in the frame of the formal labour market offers low incomes, but which manages to secure high living standards through the method of excessive external borrowing by both the state and its citizens.

The yearly operational public expenses in Greece amount to 120 billion euros, while the wealth produced amounts yearly to just 60 billion euros.

So Greece is a poor country, with a non-productive economy, but with wealthy citizens.

Currently Greek economy is under the control of the so called Troika, in which participate the IMF. As it is well known, the policies and the measures put forward by EU and the IMF are characterized by the interest in the stability of euro and the possibility of paying back the debt as well as the exhauberant interests of the debt, rather than the recovery

of the economies of the countries stricken by the crisis and the well being of their citizens.

Thus they have imposed on Greece very strict measures resulting to the loss of 30% of the income of wage earners, bankruptcy of private enterprises, increase of unemployment at a level that Greece has not known since the decade of sixties and insecurity for the future, as despite the strict measures the debt has been doubled

Citizens have thus lost their trust in the political system and are demonstrating on a daily basis by thousands in the city centres of numerous Greek cities, while members of parliament and of the government do not dare to appear in public, as people gather around expressing their disapproval through slogans or even throwing egss and yoghourt, to the point that of various occasions they were forced to escape by the back door with the help of the police.

It is in this context that should be understood what I will present in the following concerning the relation of the economic crisis with migration in Greece and the role of the Church and its Ministry among migrants and indigenous at a time of crisis.

Due to shortness of time, I will present my reflections in the form of points, hoping that they can become a stimulus for further discussion.

## 2. The Greek economic crisis and its impact

- 1. The impact of economic crisis is not the same in all countries. But also in each country it is differentiated on the basis of the region and economic sector.
- 2. The impact of economic crisis on the immigration population is being differentiated on the basis of the time of arrival in the immigration country, the legal status, the sector of employment and elements of the individual biography.
- 3. In Greece the crisis had an important impact on:
  - a. The volume and the synthesis of the migratory flows
  - b. The offer and demand of labour and the levels of unemployment of both indigenous and migrants
  - c. The income of workers, which being reduced, leads in an impoverishment of the Greek workers, in a decrease of migrant remittances and the dependency of numerous households from the income of their female members

- d. The attitudes and the feelings so much of the Greek society towards migrants in general, as of the 'old', established, migrants towards the newcomers
- e. The governmental policies, especially concerning the undocumented migrants.

#### 3. The impact of the crisis on the migratory flows

#### 3.1. The impact on migratory inflows

- a. The social phenomenon of migration has always been linked with some sort of crisis. Migration constitutes an answer to the crisis and is to be understood as a strategy of survival<sup>1</sup>.
- b. Social and political turmoils in Africa and Middle East (Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, Palestine, Somalia, Erythrea, Lybia, Syria etc.) in connection to the intensification of the global economic crisis have contributed to the increase of pressures of the migratory flows at the southern borders of EU, all particularly Greece and Italy.
- c. According to FRONTEX, which is active with a force of 175 men at the East-North borders of Greece, the 90% of the established irregular inflows to EU is taking place at the Eastern sea borders and the North land borders of Greece.
- d. Migratory flows to Greece have always had an irregular character. Speaking of regular migrants in Greece we mean migrants that arrived irregularly and have been subsequently regularized. Most of migrants have initially been integrated in the underground economy to move later on into the formal economy.
- e. In comparison to the initial immigration flows of the nineteen-nineties, recent immigration flows have a completely different, ethnic, cultural, and religious composition. Their radical 'otherness' and their disinterest to integrate into Greek society have raised reactions equally on behalf of the Greek population and the 'old' migrants.

 $<sup>^1</sup>$  Ιωάννα Δρόσου, 'Οικονομική Κρίση Και Μετανάστευση: Οι Μετανάστες Φεύγουν;'  $E\pi o\chi \acute{\eta},\, 30\text{-}05\text{-}2010.$ 

f. Today in Greece there is over 1,5 million migrants, while according to estimations in the frame of a research conducted by the police, in 2014 the number of immigrants will raise to 2.142.348, among whom the 1.219.089 will be irregular<sup>2</sup>.

#### 3.2. Impact on the migratory outflows

- i. The economic crisis has led so much to tendencies of repatriation of immigrants as of emigration of Greeks.
- ii. Concerning migrants, a limited tendency of return to their countries of origin is to be observed<sup>3</sup>. A tendency to return appears mainly among the unmarried migrants and the migrants from neighbouring Balkan countries who could easily come back to Greece in case of improvement of the situation<sup>4</sup>.
- iii. Migrants from Asia and Africa and those who are in Greece with their families, try to prolong their stay.
- iv. The reasons for staying are the economic and political situation in their countries of origin, social integration in Greece and the schooling of their children. To be mentioned that young migrants that have grown up in Greece consider Greece as their home country and refuse to return to a country they do not know. Refusal of adolescent or young adults to return may retain the entire family in Greece.
- v. Certain migrants with university degree still estimate that their employment, even in lower status job positions in Greece provides them with a better income than that they could earn in the home country working on the basis of their degree<sup>5</sup>.
- vi. In general it is being established, particularly in case of Albanians, that the decision to return is even harder than the decision taken 30 years ago to migrate to Greece.

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 $<sup>^{2}</sup>$  Το Ποντικι, '2.000.000 Μετανάστες Μέχρι Το 2014', ΤΟ ΠΟΝΤΙΚΙ, (10-03-2011).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Αντώνης Φωκίδης, 'Οι Οικονομικοί Μετανάστες Εππιστρέφουν Στην Αλβανία. Νέκρωσε Η Οικοδομή, Γυρίζουν Στην Πατρίδα', Ελευθεροτυπία, 20 Σεπτεμβρίου 2010.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Ibid.

 $<sup>^5</sup>$  Ρούσκα Μπόσκοβα, 'Μεταναστευτική Πολιτική Της Ευρωπαϊκής Ένωσης - Η Περίπτωση Της Ελλάδας', Διπλωματική Εργασία (Πάντειον Πανεπιστήμιον Κοινωνικών και Πολιτικών Επιστημών, 2008).

- vii. A significant part of Asians and Africans, particularly among the newcomers, try to move forward to Europe (actually in the first place to UK, Belgium, France and Spain).
- viii. Efforts of the government to create initiatives of return through return subsidies, failed.
  - ix. Concerning Greeks, the economic crisis has reinforced the tendency to emigrate, particularly among those with university education<sup>6</sup>.
  - x. Relative researches among samples from 2.000-5.000 respondents provide evidence that at least 300.000 young people with university degree have started the procedure of emigration towards UK, Belgium, France, USA and Germany.
  - xi. The number of Greek emigrants during the first decade of 2.000 is estimated to be 500.000. Greece has not known such outflows, since the decade of the nineteen-sixties.
- xii. The difference between the emigration of Greeks in the decade of the nineteen-sixties and that of today is that then it was unskilled «guest workers» that migrated, while now we have to do with a brain drain of highly educated youth, whose studies in important academic institutions in Europe and USA have been financed by their parents at the time of economic floressence.

## 4. Impact on the labour market

1. The decrease of investments, the measures of a hard austerity and the option of following a taxation oriented counter-development policy have led to the stagnation of labour market, the closing down of medium size enterprises, drastic loss of jobs, rapid

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Βασίλης Χιώτης, '«Θέλω Να Φύγω Από Την Ελλάδα». Τέσσερις Στους Δέκα Έχουν Ήδη Εεκινήσει Ενέργειες Για Να Μεταναστεύσουν. Σύμφωνα Με Δημοσκόπηση Της Κάπα Research, Επτά Στους Δέκα Πτυχιούχους Αει Ή Τει Θα Προτιμούσαν Να Εργαστούν Στο Εξωτερικό', ΤΟ ΒΗΜΑ, 29-08-2010.

increase of unemployment and pauperization of the population, with 20% living below the threshold of poverty<sup>7</sup>.

- a. For the first time since 1991, a very important loss of job positions is being recorded in manufacturing, commerce, constructions, but also in technical and scientific jobs. (EKKE Social Portait 2010)<sup>8</sup>
- b. The unemployment rate was in March 2011, 16,2% which corresponds to 811.000 unemployed people. The highest unemployment rate is to be found among young people (age cohort 15-24). Such a high unemployment rate has not been experienced since the decade of nineteen-sixties<sup>9</sup>.
- c. Concerning migrants, it is well known, that in times of economic downturns migrant workers are among the most vulnerables, and that this is accentuated in the case the crisis is global in nature and unemployment is globally on the rise<sup>10</sup>.
- d. However in Greece, despite the fact that economic crisis has impacted all particularly on the sectors, where migrants are employed<sup>11</sup>, the unemployment rate among migrants is at the

<sup>9</sup> Γιάννης Βασιλακόπουλος, 'Στο Ζενίθ Η Ανεργία', *ΤΟ ΒΗΜΑ*, 01-06-2011, Ελληνική Στατιστική Αρχή, 'Έρευνα Εργατικού Δυναμικού. Αποτελέσματα Δ΄Τριμήνου 2010', in Μελέτες Αγοράς Εργασίας (ed.), (Αθήνα: ΕΛΣΤΑΤ, 18-03-2011).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Χρίστος Παπαθεοδώρου et al., Οικονομική Ανισότητα Και Φτώχεια Στην Ελλάδα: Συγκριτική Ανάλυση Και Δθαχρονικές Τάσεις, ed. Παρατηρητήριο Κοινωνικών Ινστιτούτο Εργασίας Γσεε, Οικονομικών/Δημοσιονομικών Εξελίξεων, Φτώχειας Και Ανισοτήτων (Επιστημονικές Εκθέσεις (Reports) / 1, 1; Αθήνα: INE ΓΣΕΕ και UADPhilEcon, 2008) 1-68 pp.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Ε.Κ.Κ.Ε., *Κοινωνικό Πορτραίτο 2010* (Αθήνα: Ε.Κ.Κ.Ε., 2011).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Ibrahim Awad, *The Global Economic Crisis and Migrant Workers: Impact and Response*, ed. International Migration Programme (Geneva: ILO, 2009), Assane Diop, 'Preface', in Ibrahim Awad (ed.), *The Global Economic Crisis and Migrant Workers: Impact and Response* (Geneva: ILO, 2009), v-vi pp, Demetrios G. Papademetriou, Madeleine Sumption, and Will Somerville, *Migration and the Economic Downturn: What to Expect in the European Union*, ed. Migration Policy Institute (Transatlantic Council on Migration. A Project of the Migration Policy Institute; Washington: Migraion Policy Institute, 2009) 1-17 pp, Demetrios G. Papademetriou and Aaron Terrazas, *Immigrants and the Current Economic Crisis: Research Evidence, Policy Challenges, and Implications*, ed. Migration Policy Institute (Washington: mpi, 2009) 1-35 pp.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Το "Ξανθιώτικο" Blog Κλαπανάρας, 'Χώρα Μεταναστών Η Ελλάδα Του 21ου Αιώνα', in Κλαπανάρας (ed.), *Το 'ξανθιώτικο blog"* (2011; Ξάνθη, 01-06-2011).

moment lower than that of the indigenous<sup>12</sup>. This is to be attributed to the fact that migrants are more ready to accept work with partial social insurance coverage and conditions of quasi-irregularity. To be noted that an increasing number of indigenous becomes ready to work under such conditions.

- e. Agricultural production relies almost completely on the migrant labour<sup>13</sup>. During the last years irregular employment of newcomers has increased and work under trafficking for labour conditions is becoming all the more frequent. The other way round unemployment has led numerous Greeks to return to their home village and try to establish high standard agricultural units, frequently being involved with ecological productions.
- f. Women migrants being employed in domestic work, in the and the health sectors are less stricken unemployment<sup>14</sup>. Thus, numerous immigrant families, stricken by the crisis in the labour market, have come to rely on the income brought to the household by their female members.
- g. The economic crisis has contributed to the overall deterioration of the employment conditions, prevalence of flexible and precarious forms of labour. A research by EKKE refers to 2.000.000 workers working under conditions of precariousness<sup>15</sup>. This leads to the phenomenon of 'poor workers'. Greece presents the second highest proportion (14%) of 'poor workers' in EU.
- h. Crisis in the labour market leads to a dramatic increase of those working in the underground economy.
- 2. The repercussions of losing their jobs are particularly serious for immigrants, as this may lead to the loss of their residence permit. Given that in Greece very few migrants have managed to acquire

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Jobst Koehler et al., *Migration and the Economic Crisis in the European Union: Implications and Policy*, ed. Iom (Brussels: IOM, 2010) 1-205 pp.

<sup>13</sup> Κλαπανάρας, 'Χώρα Μεταναστών Η Ελλάδα Του 21ου Αιώνα'.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Iom-Indipendent Network of Labour Migration and Integration Experts, *Migration*, Employment and Labour Market Integration Policies in the European Union. Comparative Study. Summary of Pre; Iminary Findings (Brussels: IOM, 2010).

<sup>15</sup> Αχιλλέας Χεκίμογλου, 'Δύο Εκατομμύρια Επισφαλείς Εργαζόμενους Μετρά Το Εκκε! Έρευνα Σε Συνεργασία Με Το Ινστιτούτο Κοινωνικής Πολιτικής Παρουσιάζει Αύξηση Των Ανισοτήτων Σε Όλα Τα Επίπεδα', ΤΟ ΒΗΜΑ, 23-06-2010.

the status of long term residents, the renewal of their residency depends of the number of social insurance stamps they manage to collect during the year. It is estimated that around 25% of the migrants have lost their regular status<sup>16</sup>.

- 3. Under the pressure not only of the NGO's and pro-migrant organizations, but also the hunger strike that 300 migrants undertook last year, the government is studying the reduction of the number of social security stamps required for the renewal of the residence permit<sup>17</sup>.
- 4. Another repercussion of economic recession and unemployment usually refered to in relation to migration is the decrease in the migrants remittances. From informal sources we have the information that migrants tend to send less money back home. However, in the case of Greece it is not possible to calculate the change in the flow of remittances because among many Balkan migrants the habit is to send the money not via bank transfers but through relatives and friends.
- 5. Another relative repercussion of the crisis and of the anxiety of what will come next is that many Albanians have transferred their bank deposits from Greek to Albanian banks<sup>18</sup>.

### 5. the reactions of the society

1. The presence of a large number of irregular migrants; the daily arrival of hundreds of trafficked person at the centres of the cities, Athens in particular, that lack of reception structures and of infrastructures; together with the absence of a coherent migration policy and the inability to implement any decision taken<sup>19</sup>; the problems related to the access to the asylum procedures, with a

 $^{17}$  Μαρία Δεληθανάση, 'Μείωση Ενσήμων Για Άδεια Παραμονής', Καθημερινή, 21-04-2011.

 $<sup>^{16}</sup>$  Μαρία Δεληθανάση, '«Χάνουν» Τις Άδειες Παραμονής. Το 25% Των Νόμιμων Αλλοδαπών Αδυνατεί Να Τις Ανανεώσει Λόγω Οικονομικής Κρίσης', ΚΑΘΗΜΕΡΙΝΗ, 23-12-2010 23-12-2010.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> Φίλιας Στάγκος, 'Γιατί Αλβανοί Μετανάστες Μεταφέρουν Τις Καταθ'εσεις Τους Πίσω Στην Αλβανία - Ανταποκριτές', in Http://Www.Ioniansports.Gr/News/69-News/2408-Ws------Video- (ed.), *ionian sports* (28 Απρι λίου 2010).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> Νίκος Νουρής, 'Μετανάστευση: Δημιουργική Κριτική - Αποτελεσματική Στρατηγική', (http://www.sigmalive.com/ekloges2011/announcements/365129; Λευκωσία: SigmaLive.com, 2011).

backlog of more than 42 000 unproceeded asylum claims, not to mention the thousands more people who have not yet been able to submit their application<sup>20</sup>; the increase of criminality and expansion of prostitution that has rendered the city centre of Athens unsafe and almost inaccessible during the evening<sup>21</sup>, but also during the working hours, has raised the indignation of the population, particularly of the inhabitants of the city centre - be they Greek or established migrants. This has given rise, among others, to xenophobic and even racist reactions as well as to the emergence of a moral panic.

- 2. The endurance of the population is under strain and social coherence is endangered. This is taken advantage of not only by extreme right groups, but by the political parties as well, with the exception of the left.
- 3. The initiative of the Church to offer free meals (10.00 daily), clothing, medication and sanitary ware to poor migrants has produced reactions on behalf of impoverished Greeks and the Church was led to generalise its assistance so that avoid discrimination and prevent tensions.
- 4. Competition and tensions are also to be observed between established migrants and newcomers. Newcomers are ready to undertake work under much lower pay than that migrants were used to and even under conditions of extreme exploitation. As a result, there are fights and even murders, even among co-ethnics, to avoid the damping of wages and of working conditions.
- 5. It should be noted here that the anger exhibited by the Greek population is against the memorandum, the measures of austerity that have proved ineffective, the draconian cuttings of income and the increase and introduction of new taxes, and hence it is channeled towards the politicians, the government and the Troika. It is only to a small extent that it is addressed towards migrants, who are rather seen as co-sufferers than used as scapegoats. Whatever reactions develop against migrants, they are linked with the absence of coherent migration policies and the absence of assistance to migrants that are considered to be at the root of all evils.

 $<sup>^{20}</sup>$  Nicole Itano, 'Southern Europe's Immigration Test: Progress and Backlash in Greece', *TIME*, (18 February 2010).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> Ibid.

6. Worth noting is the interest exhibited by the old established migrants towards Greek families that are stricken by the crisis. There are cases for example that Albanians offer their services for free to Greek families.

#### 6. The role of the Church

- 1. Under the present conditions it is evident that the classical ways of responding to problems through providing food, clothing and other material assistance, so necessary that is, or providing training opportunities can not be effective. Such an assistance will very quickly reach its limits.
- 2. Similar is the case of the policies concerning the sensitization of the population on issues of racism, xenophobia, respect of the difference, equal rights for the migrants. Under conditions of economic crisis and increased unemployment their effectiveness is compromised.
- 3. So much the economic recession as the international migration have a global character. It is evident that problems with global dimensions cannot be dealt effectively and sustainable at the local level. The tendency of EU to put the blame so much for the overindebtedness as for the unsatisfactory dealing with irregular migration on the countries affected themselves is unfair.
- 4. The Church of Greece has realized that in parallel to its the social and philanthropic mission it is required to have a say and address a pastoral word to the population that is described as being taken by the feeling of insecurity and is full of fear, due to the realization that beyond the economic recession «the country seems to be no more free, but is actually governed by our creditors». The issue has been discussed in October 2010 in the Assembly of the Hierarchy and a statement of four pages has been compiled which is to be red in the 8.000 parishes of the Orthodox Church and has been published in the Church' Press and the Internet.
- 5. The main points in the statement are the following:
  - At the root of the Greek, but also the global economic crisis is the corruption of institutions and the society.
  - The economic crisis is the fruit of the spiritual and moral crisis.

- A novel theologising on the politics, the money, the market, the consumer society and the financial crash is needed for a responsible pastoral work of the Church.
- The Church should reflect on its own responsibility for the crisis
- The need is stressed to return to the christian values and to the ascetic way of life that could counteract consumerism and lead to the liberation from the superfluous.
- Concerning migrants and all particularly the irregular migrants, the Church should stress that migration should not be viewed exclusively as a threat to be dealt with policing and restrictive measures, but that there is a need to work together with migrants for their social, economic, political and religious integration.
- [By the way it is worthwhile mentioning that The local Church at Evros, a Prefecture at the North Eastern borders of Greece, opposed itself to the raising of the fence that would prevent irregular migrants to pass from Turkey to Greece].
- The Church should denounce the fact that during crises politicians and administrators tend to blame migrants for the emerging problems, thus fueling xenophobic reactions.

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