



**Report on the discussion organised by ELIAMEP with
representatives of NGOs and immigrant organisations in Greece
Thursday, 30 March 2006**

In the context of the project Communicating EU values in Greece, ELIAMEP organized an open discussion with representatives of immigrant associations, NGOs activists, asylum and refugee organizations, human rights experts and journalists. The scope of the discussion was to identify core challenges in three areas: the social, economic and cultural inclusion of immigrants in Greece; the role of the EU in developing an active civil society and European citizenship, and issues of discrimination based on racism and xenophobia in today's changing European societies. The aim of this initiative on behalf of ELIAMEP was two-fold: first to include the insight and input of NGO and immigrant representatives on current migration and integration challenges in Greece, and second to engage in a discussion on European values and the future of the EU with third country nationals that reside within the European Union.

Approximately forty experts, civic activists, academics, PhD students and journalists participated in this extremely interactive day-long debate that was held at the premises of the Representation of the EU Commission in Athens.

The discussion was launched by a brief presentation by Anna Triandafyllidou, Senior Research Fellow, ELIAMEP on the current challenges and problems of Greek migration policy. The emphasis was placed on the need to manage the regularisation process and the entire range of migration issues (entry, stay, administrative matters, procurement of legal documents, repatriation, etc) with greater realism; on the need to improve the use of administrative resources and set up a proper data-base; and ultimately, to coordinate and upgrade efforts aiming at the integration of immigrants in the host society. This latter issue was stressed given that Greek society has changed profoundly and rapidly in the past fifteen years due to immigration. With third-country nationals reaching approximately 10% of the population, a more dynamic approach to social inclusion is pressing. In this context, looking at best-practices in other Member States and looking at what has worked or failed would be useful for Greece's migration management.

The session then concentrated on the ways in which immigrant civil society is organized in Greece. Liza Schubert who is researching on immigrant associations described the main activities and areas within which most immigrant associations are engaged in, their characteristics in terms of membership, the scope of their activities, the degree of participation and collaboration. Moawia Ahmet from the FORUM of Migrants in turn focused on the main activities of the FORUM that is an organized network of immigrant organizations of various nationalities: to try to influence policy-making, and to strengthening the immigrant communities. Mr. Ahmet expressed the desire of the FORUM to acquire a consultative role on policy-making and taking

matters that affect the immigrant population. Dimitra Malliou from the Panhellenic Network of Immigrant Women presented the specific challenges that women immigrants face primarily because of the nature of employment they are involved in, and because of the higher degree of job-insecurity that is associated with informal employment in which they tend to be employed in (i.e. house-care, care for the elderly, baby-sitting, etc). Issues of gender equality were also raised alongside the fact that there exist very restricted measures to support single-parent households and particular health risks that women face (i.e. during pregnancy, etc). Overall, it was stressed that self-help organizations have been set up mainly on immigrants' own initiative and not through the proactive support of official authorities.

The debate that followed illustrated to a significant extent the integration challenges faced by third-country nationals. The need for the EU and its member states to explore more appropriate policies regarding immigrants was underlined in order for immigrants to be able to engage in longer-term planning for themselves and their families – something that is a basic human need. Special emphasis was placed on the need to provide particularly for the second and third generations both in terms of naturalization rights and in terms of education and to secure religious rights in freedoms in today's multicultural societies. Finally, the under-utilisation or even loss of resources was noted given that the immigrant population tends to have rather high levels of education even though they are employed in low-skilled jobs.

The afternoon session was devoted to looking at civic activism and civil society across the EU member states. Ruby Gropas, Research Fellow, ELIAMEP presented the comparative findings of the EU-funded POLITIS project that explores civic participation of naturalized citizens and foreign residents in the 25 EU Member States. The major migration trends across Europe were discussed along with a presentation of the factors that encourage and discourage civic activism on behalf of immigrants. The contribution by Miltos Pavlou on the experience of the European Migration Dialogue Initiative in Greece brought up the political will factor in developing a proactive, dynamic and inclusive migration policy. The conclusions that can be drawn from the European Migration Dialogue is that Greek public authorities are facing difficulties in efficiently responding to the current social trends, and that implementation of European directives in this field is still far from optimal.

Citizenship, civil society and immigrants was at the epicentre of Dimitris Christopoulos' presentation. Mr. Christopoulos from the Research Centre for Minority Groups of the Hellenic League for Human Rights discussed access to political rights and citizenship for third country nationals and underlined that citizenship has more to do with a set of values and less with ethnic identities and national legacies. Limitations and privileged access to citizenship was discussed in the context of the second and third generations, co-ethnic returnees or descendents of these, as well as naturalisation through marriage, asylum, etc.

The event was organized with the support of the European Commission

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Andreas Takis, Deputy Ombudsman for Human Rights and Harris Simopoulos, Legal Expert with the Greek Ombudsman focused on the legal dimensions of discriminatory practices. Moreover, reference was made to the first foreign advisory board that was set up in the city of Kozani as a significant step in the participation of third country nationals at local-levels. The principles of equality and non-discrimination in view of current migration pressures were also explored by Dimitris Parsanglou from the ANTIGONE network. These legal and theoretical perspectives of equality and non-discrimination were complemented with the experience of Nadina Christopoulou and Spyros Koulocheris from the Greek Council for Refugees. A discussion was launched on the conscious and subconscious constructions associated with the term ‘foreigner.’ The closing debate thus concentrated on practices that institutionalize discriminatory behaviour and on the xenophobic stereotypes that condition the treatment of the ‘other.’

To conclude, the need to concentrate on education, to manage migration from a more longer-term and inclusive perspective and to encourage the civic participation of third country nationals in the host society were underlined as key priorities.

This event also provided ELIAMEP with the opportunity to present and distribute the booklets it has produced on “Europe: a community of values.” These are information leaflets that inform on the EU’s evolution, the Charter of Fundamental Rights, and the rights and freedoms of European citizens and third country nationals. These are available in Greek, Albanian, Bulgarian and Russian.

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