

We'll make it together

When "Metoikos" was still at the printer's, the reverberations of the Thessaloniki Summit, of the demonstrations for global justice and the protests against racism and xenophobia had not yet subsided. And the 30-June deadline for the renewal of the Green Cards was hanging like the "sword of Damocles" over the heads of thousands of immigrants, including some of the contributors to this magazine.

The European Union failed to make a comprehensive decision for its migrants that by now number 18 millions, in spite of acknowledgements that they constitute a key player in the economic development of the "aged continent", an answer to its demographic problem and to shortages in its labour force. There was only one aspect of the immigration policy that was clearly settled and received funding to the tune of 140 million euro, involving procedures for dealing with immigration flows through an increased entrance control at the Union's outer borders. One of the positive points at the Summit was the rejection of the British proposal for the establishment of "refugee camps" in non-EU countries, and the European leaders' confirmed intention to develop a common European system for the granting of asylum.

Regardless of the decisions made by the leaders, life continues under the same adverse circumstances for the majority of the migrants, who work and grapple with the daily routine and feel joy at every opportunity they have for entertainment; last month, at the Indian Bazaar on Lycabettus Hill, at the party hosted by Loukianos at Metaxourgeio, the national celebrations of the Philippines at Zappeion Park and at the Festival for the International Immigrants Day held at the Technopolis in Gazi; and next month at the two Festivals that begin on 4 July, one at the Ilissia Park and another at the Fix Park in Patissia.

Immigrants and refugees have many problems, as you will see in the pages of "Metoikos". The European project "Equal" and the Greek labour ministry provide some funds and a few people to offer their services and together with the immigrants reach some ideas and solutions. Nevertheless, what's more important, is the opportunity it offers to immigrants to communicate among them, to organize themselves, to get stronger, to better demand their rights, understand and negotiate their obligations, get incorporated into the host societies, project their cultures and add some colour to the culture of the receiving country.

On the basis of the above, the publication of "Metoikos" was literally an "exercise on paper". Getting over ten nationalities to work together was not an easy task. But with a common objective as our compass and the Greek language as our "lingua franca" we managed to collaborate and obtain this first result. For example, the Russian translation did not make it to the printer's this time, but we are confident it will be there for the next issue. Sifis was the "Godfather" of "Metoikos", a former immigrant himself to Sweden, where Greek immigrants were publishing their very own "Metoikos". Any comments and the response that may ensue will provide us with direction for the future. There might be some adjustments, additions or eliminations, or even a reorientation of the material. Moreover, it will be necessary to have more immigrants and refugees getting active and participating in the publication.

The three issues that will follow will conclude the testing period for the publication. From that point on, the magazine will be "sailing out to open seas" steered by a crew and a captain exclusively from the Communities. The ultimate objective is for the magazine to be self-financed and turned into a social enterprise operating on a partnership basis.

As for me, the person charged with the coordination of this effort, "Metoikos" was a vivid and interesting experience. It sensitized me vis-à-vis the problems facing people from other countries, people who live and work near me, and it enriched me with elements from their cultures. And for this I thank them.

Xenia Theofanidou
Athens News Agency

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The Coordinating Committee of Immigrant Associations, Communities and Unions



The Coordinating Committee of Immigrant Associations, Communities and Unions in Greece was founded in October 2000 by the following immigrant organizations: Philippine Immigrants Association, Bangladesh Workers Union, Bulgarian Community, Ethiopian Community, Egyptian Community, Nigerian Community, Albanian Community, Cultural Albanian Association, Romanian Community, Sudanese Community, Indian Community, KAPA (Active and Cultural Solidarity Center of the Peoples of Turkey and Greece).

The Coordinating Committee was created with the objective to advance and resolve serious problems that faced and are still facing immigrants and refugees, such as legalization, insurance, employment, cultural issues, asylum and conditions at refugee camps.

Accordingly, a coordinated representation to advance such issues was – and still is – more than necessary. This means that the Committee is responsible for monitoring developments regarding changes or revisions to laws and provisions, study and review arising problems, maintain contact with political parties and agencies with specific proposals for the settlement of serious problems, meet with immigrants and pass information to them.

By making a brief account, we can say that we have achieved the following:

- When draft law 2910/01 was published, both during its discussion at the Parliament and during implementation, we put forward specific proposals in the form of memos, which we submitted to all parties in the Parliament, involved ministries, labour organizations and unions. Our final memo was submitted in May 1993.

- In a bid to inform the public about the problems that we are facing, we organized two events. We should note here that, with the exception of certain individual issues, the Greek government did not take our proposals under consideration.

The Coordinating Committee feels that a lot has been achieved, despite any weaknesses in organization, study and projection of issues.

Nevertheless, we are aware that we are still at the beginning and there is still much more work to be done, mainly in the areas of organization and study, in other words in the creation of associations and communities throughout Greece, awareness and projection of problems facing immigrants. Only then, from a more advantageous position, will we be able to actively seek solutions to those problems.

We know this is a long and difficult journey and that we will be confronted with many obstacles. Some may intend to exploit the immigrants movement to serve their own interests, some others, for reasons all their own, will attempt to disorient the movement into idly waiting for problems to solve themselves instead of actively seeking solutions. And all of them, lacking any real contact with the actual problems of the immigrants, will be their self-proclaimed "representatives", however unauthorized.

Finally, we would like to inform all immigrants that for any information or assistance they might need they should contact the Coordinating Committee at Themistokleous Street No 27, office no. 7 (EEDA), from 15.00 to 18.00 hours on Mondays and Wednesdays.

The door of the Coordinating Committee is open to everyone that would like to work toward the organization of the immigrants movement and the advancement and solution of problems that are increasingly becoming more acute.

We would like to emphasize that any assistance required with issues regarding residence and work permits, insurance and pay matters, is provided free by people who have the knowledge and the will, and, above all don't place themselves above the immigrants, but next to their side.

For the Coordinating Committee
Sifis Mavrokefalidis

The "pros" and "cons" about living in a foreign country

All people love their country. All people foster a desire to be able to live at their birthplace, where they feel they belong; to grow up with the habits, the tradition and the culture of their grand-fathers and great-grand-fathers, in the natural environment of their homeland, which, in their eyes, is the most beautiful place in the world, but...

Here comes the "but" for which simple people are not to blame. Others have made the beautiful homelands of their childhood, where they went to school and where their families still live, economically weak, and that has forced them to leave. And it is exactly at this point where the difficulties, the worries and the hardship start. To be in a foreign place where you don't know anybody, where you are a stranger among strangers, where you are nobody. You don't speak the language, you have to start at the bottom, change your habits and you have no home. In spite of your education level people still see you as a "thief", a much lower human being, they don't respect your view and they don't give you a chance to show them what and who you are. They do not allow you to "open up", to show them what you are, regardless of your origins. And all this because there is a handful of people that give your country a bad name by getting in-



involved in robberies and illegal dealings that paint a negative picture for the rest of us.

Let us not forget, nevertheless, that there are people in those foreign lands that have understanding for you, they trust you, they make you feel a little stronger and they make you feel better. People who do not single you out because of your nationality, people who understand that you did not leave your country out of a desire for adventure, but out of necessity.

Such people deserved our appreciation and all our love. But why are they so few in numbers? Why can't everyone see that we are all the same regardless of colour, nationality or religion, that we are not to blame for the economic situation back at our homelands? They should stop killing our souls, they should take us into account and think that this might happen to anyone!

Iviliana Dedeltseva



That day against racism

There has been a lot of ink devoted to racism and there are as many views on this issue as there are people. The general idea is that every human being has a value and that there is a place under the sun for each and everyone. For each and everyone.

Nevertheless, reality is different. In our times, when civilization has made such great advances, there are still racists. Even this day we bear witness to the ugly and unworthy behaviour of racists. There is a place under the sun for each and everyone of us, regardless of colour, religion, language, culture or the God that we believe in. For each and everyone of us. This is the human philosophy, however, reality is different.

On 21 March, on the very same day we held a demonstration against racism, I was at the trolley-bus stop waiting there for a long time for the trolley to show up. A lot of other people were also there waiting. The weather was fine, but people were starting to lose their patience. Finally, the trolley showed up. As always, the least patient hurried up the steps into the bus first, as if though they were afraid they would miss it. Did they maybe want to rest their tired bodies on the trolley seats for a few minutes between stops?

A black man already on the trolley was waiting patiently by the door to descend. He was holding a large bad on one hand and a beautiful wall-shelf on the other. A beautiful shelf, beautifully carved. He was one of those people that make a living by selling African crafts on the street. He tried at some point to get off the trolley, but the people getting on the trolley were blocking the door. He was patient. He did not say that passengers getting off the trolley had priority. He did not raise his voice, he said nothing. He had a tall and full figure. After everyone finally got on the trolley, he started to exit the vehicle but his bag got caught between the two parts of the accordion-door as it was shutting behind him. Instead

of apologizing, the driver got up off his seat and screamed at him:

- Eh, you! Don't you know what the proper order is? People get off first, then the others get on! (He was explaining that to the wrong person)

The black man did not say anything. Some passengers were getting impatient.

- Let's go now, enough with delays!

- Take it outside! Others suggested.

- If you don't know the proper order go back where you came from, the driver went on with his monologue.

- Do you have trolleys there? he continued. Who brought you here anyway, nigger?

The passengers inside the trolley went "A...a..."

The black man was staring in silence. He knew the proper order. He just swallowed his pain and the criticism hurled at him. He kept staring without looking at anything. His eyes reflected goodness. He said nothing. He did not want any trouble. He did not want to explain himself. He did not need to. He kept a dignified silence. On the other hand, the driver went on with his shouting. Finally, at some point he stopped. He went back to his seat, pressed the button and the door finally opened and freed the man's bag. I did not look at the driver's face. I did not want to. People like him have ugly features.

The black man walked away. The passengers inside the trolley went silently into deep thought. I sunk into my own thoughts too. Thoughts about humanity, human rights, culture and upbringing. I felt like screaming out loud:

- My dear people! There is a place under the sun for each and everyone of us!

For each and everyone of us. For even the last person on the Earth.

But I kept my silence. Was that maybe a new way to protest injustice?

- Today is 21 March, a voice in the radio of the trolley announced.

Venelina Marinova

Medical care and the immigrants

The same as in all European Union countries, free medical care in Greece is not for everyone. The only people fully covered by Greece's National Health Services are recipients of social insurance, in other words taxpayers, working either in the public or private sector, who make regular contributions to their Insurance Funds, and naturally pensioners. For immigrants resid-



ing in Greece, the situation is desperate. The Greek government recently legalized the status of most immigrants that had up to that point been working illegally, however, without the right to have access to free health care. When they are admitted into a hospital for treatment they have to pay in cash. But how? Greek hospital bureaucracy does not make things much easier for patients, Greeks or aliens. Moreover, what's worse for the latter, the staff at hospitals, as well as physicians in general, are either aloof, or indifferent or even racist toward their alien patients. There has been a multitude of instances that can attest to that!

Arnold Oleko

The problems of refugees in Greece

The Struggle and Cultural Solidarity Centre of the Peoples of Turkey and Greece (KAPA) is informing you that the numbers of political prisoners in Turkey are in the thousands. Three years ago, many political prisoners in Turkish jails began an indefinite hunger strike to protest against confinement in the so-called "white cells", isolation cells measuring 2 x 3 square metres each. The intent of that initiative is to express solidarity to political prisoners in Turkey and Kurdistan.

Political refugees in Greece, originating from various countries and mainly from Near and Middle East areas (Turkey, Iraq, Pakistan), face a series of problems:

1. Our stay in Greece is under a status of continuous uncertainty

2. Our work permits involve a series of difficulties, while the cost for the permit is beyond our financial means

3. When we first enter Greece, some times we are detained for 5 or even 6 months at police precincts under unacceptable conditions

4. First-time asylum seekers receive the first response to their application - normally negative - from the Public Order Ministry the soonest within 18 months, and the second in approximately three years.

5. Only 0.4% of asylum seekers receive a positive response to their applications, a very limited percentage that increases our concern about the future. There have been cases of political refugees expelled back to their countries of origin.

6. Therefore, we have a "de facto" illegal status, without any documents from the Greek authorities that could legalise our presence. The result is that some of us get arrested and detained at police precincts for several months.

7. Some political fugitives, who originate from countries with police states or dictatorial regimes, reach Greece with serious health problems, and the absence of documents to legalise their status often brings further consequences. Some of them die and they are taken back home by their friends in coffins.

8. The living conditions at refugee reception centres, such as the ones in Lavrio, 55 km northeast of Athens, and Thessaloniki, northern Greece, are unpleasant. Conditions are cramped with two or three families accommodated in one room.

9. There are political refugees from Turkey, who have either undergone torture or have participated in the major on-going hunger strike at jails in Turkey or Kurdistan, and therefore, they have serious health conditions with unforeseen consequences.

**For K.A.P.A.
Emine Ozcan**



In 2000, a group of Bulgarian immigrants, full of enthusiasm, decided to start an association. Iliana Illiera and Cvetko Vakinski were the founders. Today numbering 200 members, the Bulgarian Community in Greece acquired legal entity status on 10 July 2001.

The goal of the Community is to project the cultural issues and other affairs that involve Bulgarian immigrants in Greece, including numerous problems with employment and work permits. The Bulgarian Community represents a shelter for Bulgarians and a venue for celebrating national and religious events. Our Community has been the subject of many articles in the Bulgarian press.

Members can come here and learn Greek or share their concerns with fellow Bulgarians. The Community maintains ties with Bulgarian Communities in other countries (Egypt, Bangladesh, Albania, Romania, Ukraine, Turkey) and participates in the Coordination Committee of Immigrant Associations, Communities and Unions in Greece. It took an active part in the Festival Against Racism in July 2002.

The Community grows with each day and serves as the unifying link among Bulgarian immigrants, struggling for better living standards, freedom and friendship among peoples.

Bulgarian community in Athens

Directions for a more pleasant stay abroad...

Yes, finding yourself alone in a foreign land is a terrifying experience. Nevertheless, a lot of people make that choice for educational reasons or for purely economic reasons. The first thing one should do is get adjusted. This could translate into getting used to new types of food, learn new rules of social behaviour, try to live in a brand new way. People living abroad should avoid comparisons with their homelands, they should focus on the good things that the new place offers them, they should learn the language and that way start feeling more relaxed sooner.

Feelings of sadness, homesickness and occasional tears are not uncommon during the first months. It is natural for people to think about everything that they have left behind. The best way to beat sadness is to try and get used to the new programme and environment. Most of us work as house helpers and we live together with some family. An open communication and good relations with the family members is very important. You should get familiar with the house rules and find out the extent of your participation in house work from the very beginning. Finally, it would be wise to get a written agreement that will include important issues, such as the hours of work, times of rest and payment terms. This can spare you from future disappointments. Sometimes, despite your earnest efforts, problems may appear and you may be asked to leave the house where you work. If this happens, with calm and reason you can talk things out with your hosts. You should be willing to admit to any mistakes that you might have made; this may lead to a change of heart on their part.

For some problems you may need assistance from a third party. Local communities of fellow patriots and your country's embassy are always prepared to assist you. Therefore, it would be good to keep close contact with them. In spite of various difficulties or problems, living in a foreign country may turn out to be a good experience, but when you return home with new ideas don't expect your friends or your family to suddenly change their ways, and don't get disappointed when they fail to share your enthusiasm.

Taking residence in a foreign country for long is a serious decision and before you make it make sure that there are good grounds for it, and be prepared to tackle the difficulties that you will face. As with all important decisions in your life, it would be wise to make a prior assessment of the cost.

Iviliانا Deledtseva
Bulgarian Community





The story of a fur coat

It had never crossed my mind that my life would be tied to Greece. Oh, yea! For ten years now I have been living in Greece.

I had told myself long ago, that for my 40th birthday I would treat myself to a trip to Greece to buy a fox-fur coat. The economic crisis in my country had barely started at that time, and we still had everything. Our refrigerators were always full. We used to say in Bulgaria at the time: "I can't wait for this crisis to end so that our refrigerators can empty!"

That was back in 1992. At that time, on Athinas Street in Athens, the present site of the water fountains opposite the City Hall (there were no water fountains there then, the place was full of ancient ruins and some structures covered with nets) we would open up our stands right on the sidewalk. I wanted to buy the fur coat of my dreams, so I put up my own stand.

I filled it with things that I had brought with me from Bulgaria, ranging from canned food-items to clothing. Everything we had brought with us was selling fast due to the difference in prices. I did not speak a word in Greek. It was there where I learnt how to trade in Greek drachmas. I was on my way to becoming a business woman! Early in the morning, along with the rest of the women, we would take over the best spots. A lot of people would walk by our stands, speak to us in Greek and bargain. There I was, trying to communicate with them in Russian!

One day, a man and his wife stop by my stand and start looking through the merchandise. He picks something and then he looks at me. The woman looks at me too. She picks something up and then she puts it back. They are just looking. More people come, some of them foreigners. People go by, they look, they talk. I cannot keep any eye on all of them.

Sometimes I lose them from my eyesight.

"If they rob me I will not be able to buy my coat", I am thinking.

The Bulgarian comic hero Bai Ganio was right when he was saying "They will rob you and then go find them!"

I say "Ne, ne" in Bulgarian. They look at me politely and continue to go through my merchandise. "Ne, ne", I repeat and by now I start to get angry. They look at me in astonishment, they put my things down and they go away mumbling. It took me some time to realize that I should have said "Ohi" (which means "No" in Greek), since my Bulgarian "Ne, ne" means "Yes" in Greek.

My business went pretty well, though, and I was able to buy my fur coat.

A few years later we found out what a real economic crisis meant. At that time, our refrigerators were totally empty. Prices went up, electricity went up, everything did. I was back at my teaching job, just like before. The municipality rationed some coupons to help us pay for electricity. I qualified for coupons, so I went there and stood in line. It was winter time and very cold. I had on my fur coat, it was the only coat I had. When I finally made it to the head of the line, the municipality clerk fixed her eyes on my coat and snapped at me:

- Shame on you! You are expecting to get assistance wearing a fur coat?

- I am entitled to assistance, I told her. I have nothing else to wear.

She checked her books. Indeed I was entitled to assistance. What a shame! I was working and the money was not enough. And what about the people who were jobless? Because many factories and banks had been shut down.

Later I came to Greece. I learnt Greek. I was a literature teacher.

Venelina Marinova
Bulgarian Community

Old and new communities

The opening of the borders in 1990 after the collapse of the Soviet Union, has brought into Greece people from the neighbouring Balkan states and ethnic groups, among others. The pre-existing communities of immigrants included those who had chosen to relocate to Greece to further their studies, to work or because they had married a Greek. But is this community ready to accept the often hopeless newcomers of recent years?

The answer is "No".

The communities of other times were mainly of a cultural nature, religious or education-



al, while the needs of contemporary immigrants are based on survival.

I would propose the establishment of a newcomer branch in each community, to provide shelter to new immigrants who are not unionized or part of any organized interests, but have an immediate need to comprehend the Greek laws that apply to them.

One more task for the new communities is the translation of new laws and a better coordination between them through committees and - why not - a federation. This would enable them to improve the living conditions of their members and finally those of their host country.

Rondika Panetescou
Romanian Community

On every cloud there is a silver lining

It is hard for immigrants to find jobs. At the beginning you are not familiar with the language, you have no acquaintances, and then, there is always something missing until you find what you are looking for.

I was lucky enough to find humane and legal employment as a chambermaid at a luxury hotel. Unfortunately, the hotel eventually closed. It was more convenient for the employers to lay off 60 workers and take their bread and their jobs away. It was financially convenient for them.

At that point in my life I started looking for a job at hotels. "If only I could find a job at some hotel, I will be fine", I would say to myself. I started going from one hotel to the other filing applications (luckily I could write Greek!)

One day someone told me about a large hotel that was undergoing renovation and would open in a couple of months. It was located on a central road, a mere 15 minutes from my rental home. "Finally!" I thought to myself and entered the hotel full of hope. The entrance was on a small and narrow street, almost blocked with bags of cement and construction material.

- Where could I go to file an application for chambermaid? I asked at the hotel, in my best Greek.

They pointed to a man nearby. I repeated my question to him.

- There will be no foreigners working in our hotel. This is a first-class hotel, he replied looking away from me.

I stood there motionless.

- And I am a first-class foreigner, I finally told him and "nailed" him with my green eyes.

He glanced at me and I started to realize that his male instincts started to take over. Like he was thinking "well, maybe once..."

I turned around and left.

I did not take the time to explain to him why I was a first-class foreigner. It would probably be a waste of time to explain to someone like him that I spoke several foreign languages, that I had a degree in literature, that I had worked as an educator at my country, that I was a university graduate, and that I was very good, fast and efficient as a chambermaid.

What would be the point in explaining all that to him? He was just another fellow repeating what they told him to say. He had to make a living too, a job is nothing to be taken lightly. It is people like him, though, that fail to realize that I too have children to raise, that we too have to eat.

But, as they say...

It was not even one month later when one morning my phone rang and the voice on the other end asked:

- Excuse me, are you still interested in the job you applied at "such and such" hotel?

I jumped up off my seat. They were calling me from a hotel that was even surpassing my wildest dreams!

- Yes, of course! I managed to say.

- Well, stop by here tomorrow and bring your passport...

- OK, thank you! I whispered.

THANK YOU! So, there is a God, after all! That's the way life is. Something "bad" is followed by something "good". Of course sometimes a thought crosses my mind and I wonder: What happens when a lot of "bad" is piled up? How much of "good" would have to follow? Just for the sake of keeping the race going!

Venelina Marinova
Bulgarian Community

Struggling for the

■ by Mohavia Ahmet – Yousef Azer Samuel

Ibrahim came to Greece from Sudan three years ago in the same exact way that hundreds of thousands arrived here: by crossing the borders without a visa or any other documents. He was luckier than many others, since he was neither hunted down, or arrested or deported. In June 2001, the Greek government decided to grant legal status to all the illegal immigrants. Ibrahim got a residency permit and a work permit. Just like thousands of his lot, he had to request the renewal of both permits before the end of that year, an unbelievably difficult, time consuming and cumbersome process, which he nevertheless completed. Since that time, he has been waiting for the renewal of his permit that has not been issued yet.



Freddy came to Greece from Congo 15 years ago, the legal way. For years he kept renewing his permit without any major problems, going through a process that was very familiar to him, the same as to all of the "old" immigrants. In May 2001, Freddy submitted a request to renew his permit and received the relative "document receipt". Before he was issued his renewed permit though, both the law and the competent ministry changed, and he was notified that in the future, the permit would be issued by the Periphery, not by the Greek Manpower Organization. He had to wait for the files to be transferred to the new agency. Meanwhile, he would have to re-submit the necessary documents for the renewal. Freddy stood in line along with thousands of legal and illegal immigrants, and he submitted the documents. Once more, he was not given a permit, but only a "document receipt". Since that time (2001), Freddy has been waiting for a permit that has not been issued to this day.

Newcomer Ibrahim from Sudan and the "old" immigrant Freddy from Congo are not but two of the approximate 550 thousand old and new, legal and illegal immigrants that have been waiting to receive their permits for two years now, without knowing when or from where or where they should go.

At the interior ministry, now the authority responsible for immigration, deadline extensions for temporary certification are a routine. The ministry

“Immigrants who are either self-employed or involved in trade are the hardest hit by this situation”

officials saw that the permits would not be issued on time. There have been three extensions to the deadline so far, and given all facts, past 30 June, the date of the most recent extension, the immigrants will have to wait for at least another six months.

The ministry was supposed to start delivering the permits last October. Later, it said the process would start in February and would end in April. A little later, Interior Minister Costas Skandalidis said during a conference that his ministry was going to issue 600-650 residence permits by year-end, but he gave no exact starting date for this effort. Deputy Interior Minister Lambros Papadimas just this month told the Equality Commission of the Greek Parliament that his ministry next month would complete the business plan for the immigration electronic record. He went on to explain that this record comprised a network which would link the Greek provinces with the ministries of interior, public work and labour and that it was designed to prevent



duplication of permits. Nevertheless, he failed to mention when this process would start. Kalyva, the manager of the agency responsible for Section A of Athens located on Theatrou Steet in central Athens admitted that the process for the issuance of permits was very slow. She said that her agency had delivered only 4,500 residence permits so far and that 5,000 more were ready to be delivered, but she gave no specific dates. She said delays with the dispatch of the document files by the municipalities and the long time required by the public ministry to review the documents before her agency can issue the permits, were the reasons for this situation.

The ministry, in spite of failure to issue the permits on the dates it had announced, continued with revisions to the new law to such degree that this is not the same law as voted two years ago. The first revision was effected last April through Law

GREEN CARD

2 YEARS OF LEGALIZATION OR ...ON THE MARGINS WAITING FOR THE UNKNOWN



“Immigrants who are either self-employed or involved in trade are the hardest hit by this situation”

2013/2002, followed by a second revision in November of the same year through Law 3074/2002, which was in turn followed by a third revision on 7 May 2003 through a Law titled "Organisation and voting rights exercised by voters registered in municipalities other than the municipality of their permanent residence, and other provisions". It is expected that by summer-end the law will be revised for the fourth time regarding family reunification

and years required for eligibility for permanent residence permit, and, finally, the transfer of the authority for the receipt of applications from the municipalities to the Citizens Service Centres.

Immigrant organisations and Greek NGOs are waging a struggle for an improved immigration policy, but they spoke of failure of past revisions, as well as of future ones, to lead to solutions for the actual problems identified upon application of the law.

Due to multiple revisions, most immigrants are not in a position to have a clear knowledge of the required process. The staff at the municipalities either ignore or refuse to apply the law because they have not received any explanatory circulars or because they have received verbal guidance instructing them against the implementation of certain articles in the law. Immigrants are facing big problems with their employers who deny them a work contract or refuse to pay their insurance contributions, two key pre-conditions for the renewal of residence permits issued to immigrants. Moreover, they are often unable to convince the staff at public services that the temporary certificates in their possession hold the place of legitimate residence permits. Meanwhile they are deprived of their natural right to travel to other countries outside their own, since the temporary certificates are good for travel in their places of origin and Greece only. Immigrants who are either self-employed or involved in trade are the hardest hit by this situation. Many were financially ruined because they failed to meet certain obligations which required the existence of a residence permit. Hundreds of families were separated because Greek consulates abroad refuse to implement the instructions regarding the issuance of entrance visas to family members of immigrants already in Greece.

The perpetuated stalemate regarding the immigration question, led organizations such as the Ombudsman to place it on high priority. According to press reports, the Ombudsman's human rights section chief Kaminiis said that countless proposals had been submitted for improvements to the law, but they fell on deaf ears, and he insisted that the main problem has to do with ineffective organization and lack of coordination among the services involved. Although the interior ministry is responsible for immigration policy, at least six other ministries and twice as many public agencies share the responsibility for the implementation of the immigration law. Accordingly, the legalization process is in fact a chain of links, and when one of the links breaks, the immigrants lose their legal status with nowhere to complain.

As hardships continue while time goes by, the sense of hopelessness intensifies and the immigrant's dream for stability in life is fading away. Immigrants are forced to scorn at social struggles and the labour organizations that had enthused them in the beginning. The sense that "there is nothing that can be done" has caused a waste in efforts to unite immigrants and the collapse of significant immigrant organizations. Accordingly, most immigrants are forced into the margins waiting for the unknown.

Women immigrants in the shadow of their men

■ By Dimitra Malliou-Bogo

Being an immigrant is hard. Being an immigrant and a woman is sad. You experience inequality at your country of origin and later also in Greece, as a matter of fact at a higher degree. You are often added to your husband's documents, as if you do not have your own personality.



The big problems confronting the immigrant women on a daily basis stem up from the root of that inequality and they paint a bleak picture of their existence and their image in the society they are trying to join.

1. The majority of immigrant women work in closed areas as housekeepers, babysitters or nurses to old people. Their first "friend" is the lady employer (if there could be real friendship in such relation). They do not participate in social life, therefore, they have no-one to talk to about the exploitation and the abuse they suffer. They very seldom make use of the legal avenues available to them for the protection of their rights. The need to survive does not leave any room for being selective with jobs. Accordingly, getting a job comparable to their training or studies remains a dream.

2. Something else that remains a dream is getting an individual residence or work permit. This makes them work "under the table" and feel as their husband's shadow. The residence permit is usually granted to the "leader" of the family and not automatically to the wife. Moreover, in the event of a divorce, women run the risk to be expelled, which makes them even more dependent on their husbands.

3. The absence of health care and social insurance are two enormous problems that they face on a daily basis. This adds to their sense of insecurity and taxes their mental and physical health. Pregnancy and the absence of insurance has resulted in dramatic situations, such as the mother who was forced to "kidnap" her baby from the nursery ward because she was not insured and did not have money to pay the hospital.

“Immigrant women are experiencing exclusion due to their gender. They are subject to exploitation more often than men are, and they experience inequality within their own gender since they are paid much less than Greek women for the same job”

4. The long hours they put into their work deprives them of their natural right to raise their children. Quite often immigrant mothers leave home in the morning when the children are still asleep, to return home at night when they are again in bed. They feel guilty for raising their children in unsuitable conditions, in small and sunless apartments in the basement of buildings. They do not receive any allowance for them. Although they are doing great at Greek schools, children immigrants are deprived of the joy of summer camps.

5. The knowledge of the Greek language is necessary for immigrant women to integrate into the Greek society, however, they cannot do that by staying at

home. Their lack of Greek language knowledge may hinder communication with their children.

6. They cannot participate in social life for reasons that point to discrimination and racism. They are not members of any unions or associations or any cultural organizations for immigrants, they are forgotten by the state mechanism. Due to their exclusion, immigrant women are not informed about any integration programmes and they do not believe that they exist. But even when they find out about them, they cannot join them: before they join they are required to have a residence permit or a work permit or an unemployment card.

7. Immigrant women who get to Greece ahead of the family face difficulties with family reunification when they try to bring their husband, their children or their parents. They cannot look after their parents for the very reason that they look after other aged people that need them.

8. In Greece, the cradle of civilization, not only they do not have the opportunity to get education, but they run the risk to forget even what they used to know due to their employment at lower jobs. Surveys have shown that 25 to 30 percent of immigrant women are university graduates. True, there is free market and carrier orientation programmes, but real opportunities are scarce and the results from the multitude of special programmes are poor.

9. Immigrant women are experiencing exclusion due to their gender. They are subject to exploitation more often than men are, and they experience inequality within their own gender since they are paid much less than Greek women for the same job.

10. Another problem they face is white slavery and sexual exploitation that threaten all immigrant women. The problem of prostitution has tragic dimensions; the society as a whole should contribute toward its solution.

In closing, I would like to appeal to all women organizations, and to others, for their assistance to immigrant women who constitute the most vulnerable section of the Greek society.



SOS Hotline for Victims of Domestic Violence



Open Horizons for BUJAR ALIMANI

Bujar Alimani had not slept the night before our scheduled appointment. A Greek friend was hospitalized and it was Bujar's turn to stay up the night with him.

Bujar does not feel a foreigner in Athens or in Greece. He says Athens is the second largest "Albanian" city with approximately 200,000 immigrants from Albania, while another 300,000 are scattered throughout the rest of Greece. On the contrary, when after ten years of absence he returned to his hometown Patos, a town near Fieri, he felt a stranger in his own home, his own room and bed.

How did you get here in Greece?

The same as the majority of my compatriots, through unmapped mountain passages on the borderline between the two countries. The date was 14 July 1992, and as we trekked along the border I was musing to my self that this was the anniversary of the fall of the Bastille.... Up until 1996 I would live and work illegally anywhere I could find work. Meanwhile, my parents and my brothers had moved to Greece; as a matter of fact my brother is married to a Greek now.

Which was your most difficult experience during your "illegal" days?

The ordeal of the Green Card. The long lines, the documents, the deadlines, the interviews... Today, everything seems so distant. I traveled to Italy from Greece on a Schengen visa, at the invitation of the 4th Short Film Festival in Venice. I simply showed my Albanian passport to the border guard and when I saw admiration in his eyes about the purpose of my trip, I felt serene and proud. When your life slowly starts to follow a regular pace, after a long absence of normality, you feel special joy and satisfaction.

When did you first work in the movies in Greece?

In 1997 I worked as assistant director to Giorgos Koras and Christos Voupouras in the "Miroupafsim". Then came Sotiris Gortsis's "Brazilero", and a number of other short films.

It did not take you long to make your own movie, and as a matter of fact to get an award at last year's Festival in Drama.

It took a lot of work and sacrifice. I gathered together all my courage and money to make "Katoi". My requests for funding from the Albanian Film Center went unanswered. We kept it at low budget, 25,000 euro, thanks to the friendly participation of almost everyone in the film and the good prices I landed on the equipment.

Just for the record, Bujar Alimani was the director, Christos Karamanis was in charge of cinematography, Alexandra Khouri did the editing, Nikos Vougioukos was the sound specialist and Stavros Xarhakos composed the music for the film. The cast included Mario Borokotisi, Alim Bekiri, Redian Moula and Antonis Vlisidis.

Did the prize pave the way for you?

Yes, things are rolling much easier now. The prize

Bujar Alimani was born in Albania in 1969. He studied painting and theater direction at the Academy of Arts in Tirana. He has been in Greece since 1992. He assisted in the direction of films such as "Miroupafsim", "Brazilero" and "Cold-Hot". His own film "Katoi" won first prize for Best Balkan Film at the 8th Short Movie Festival in Drama. For the past few years he has been working as stage technician at "Hora Theater". He is married to Tefta and their daughter Sabrina is a first grader.



The making of "Katoi". Direction and screenplay by Bujar Alimani



was accompanied by 3,000 euro that covered part of the expenses, but mostly it came as a vindication and a reward for the efforts I made without any support from the state. Invitations followed for participation in international short film festivals in Cologne, Hamburg and Warsaw.

What are your plans for the future?

I have given a proposal to Channel ET3's Equal for a film on immigration and immigrants living in Greece. Pretty soon I will give a proposal to the Albanian Film Center for a movie on Vendetta.

Do you miss your country?

You know, I have been here for almost the same number of years as I was there. Home is the language, your friends, everything that you know. Now I speak fluent Greek, I have my own people here. Even though I have lost some old friends, I have made many new ones, and good ones. Every time I approach the outskirts of Athens driving back from a trip, I say "We are

almost home". And given the opportunity, I swear and I gesture just like a Greek. The same as Greeks, I get angry and frustrated with the public services and the delays with our legalization. On the other hand, this is the only place where I could live or create; where I could see my longings, my passion and ideology realized. The road is long, but there are rules and I am familiar with them. There are no such rules in Albania. And if there are any, I am not familiar with them. A job and a salary at an Albanian TV channel are not good enough as my vision for the future.

Xenia Theofanidou

“When your life slowly starts to follow a regular pace, after a long absence of normality, you feel special joy and satisfaction”



Culture Containers

■ by Bujar Alimani



Throughout time, people in all human communities are in a perpetual and extensive exchange process. This continuous give-and-take is carried out instinctively representing a human need, an unavoidable phenomenon and a precondition for coexistence.

Assessments on the exchange are not made on the basis of size or power inherent in each country. All people carry the same weight, although this fact is absent from all theories on globalization. A nation's worth is measured on the basis of that nation's overall contribution in various areas in life.

When people leave their homeland they carry with them significant socio-political "baggage" that they add to the cultural legacy of their host nation, thus making a contribution toward the development of the mosaic of values on the planet.

Most instances of massive immigration flow involve people who left their homelands in search of a better fortune. The immigration phenomenon is not new. For centuries now, immigrants have been acting as "containers" filled with values, although they are treated as an amorphous mass or as just cheap labour. Fully conscious of the cargo that they carry, they are willing to offer it, desiring to push forward with the exchange process. Nevertheless, they feel insulted when they are often en-

countered with suspicion as to the contents of their cargo.

In spite of centuries-old immigration history, the western world's doubt, indifference, hesitation and fear toward immigrants continue to exist. This attitude is irrational for social as well as for cultural reasons. Isolating foreigners and grouping them inside ghettos does not benefit anybody. On the contrary, their integration into the culture and the society of the countries where they live and work is an obligation that should be met by both sides. Luckily, immigrants themselves enforce their integration into host societies by becoming living examples and proving that values are not the monopoly of nations, but the monopoly of the human mind and soul.

Europe has been for centuries now built on the foundations of the values of a splendid human community, a really fascinating mosaic. In this new century, let us focus our attention to those people who in a short time thirstily soaked up the culture of their host countries. To those who intelligently and readily keep in pace with their host societies, leaving behind them many of the things they once loved.

Indifference and hesitation toward the "containers" of values, the human cargo of the Europe of Man, do not have a place in the historical mosaic of the European peoples.

Indian Bazaar

The Indian Bazaar, an event dedicated to the World Refugee Day, took place on 19 June at the open-air theater on the Lycabettus Hill, a centre-Athens landmark.

Featuring the traditional eight-fakir group, the Musafir and popular clarinet virtuoso Giorgos Magas and his band, the event started at eight in the evening taking visitors to a journey into the rich Indian smells and tastes, music and dance.

Festivities were concluded with a mix of Greek and Indian sounds performed by



Magas and his musicians, a proof that coexistence is feasible.

Islamic Art Museum at Kerameikos in Athens

An Islamic Art Museum, housed in a turn-of-the-century building near the ancient centre-Athens Kerameikos cemetery, will open in June 2004.

The Museum will showcase one of the most significant collections of Islamic art owned by the Benaki Museum in Athens, comprising 8,000 samples of ceramic art, metalwork, jewellery, weaving, woodcarving, glassware, bone sculptures, inscribed tombstones and small arms, as well as an inlaid marble décor from a 17th century mansion in Cairo.



What we want knows no frontiers

Spresa Trebitska is from Albania. She gives a small account about the Greek language classes she attended this year. The classes were organized by the Educators Team "Desks in the Back", an initiative for education without discrimination within the framework of the Support Network for Refugees and Immigrants.

One step before the end, or each step nearer the end. It is nice to know people bound to you by common history. We leave our countries full of dreams, nothing else counts. What we want knows no frontiers, and when we reach the place where we think our dreams will come true, then truth hurts. Some times they hurt our feelings. Some other times we find support somewhere and we all gather there. Like this year.

Some only knew a couple of words in Greek, some others not even that, but we found a way to understand each other. The language of necessity is the same for everyone. There are good people everywhere, people with a great heart that don't discriminate. People like them give us hope to realize our first dreams. This is how we got to know each other. We learnt about other countries, their culture, and most importantly, we learnt how not to be racists. It felt like my childhood all over again. No room for words here.

One step before the end and a great "Thank You" to my teachers for their efforts, their time and everything they taught us. Life goes by fast, you guys. Life is beautiful and short. Hurry up and catch up with it. All of us made a short stop at this school. We learnt all we could. And if this is not enough, it is definitely a lot. Nothing ends here, something else is beginning. One thing I will always want to remember from my days here is the feeling of respected that I received. They understand what we go through. While there, I was never made to feel embarrassed over who I am. I felt pride about my country and everything about me.

I wish that all of you realize your dreams. Don't feel embarrassed to give your real names.

I saw my little star fall and I made a wish for everyone. You do the same, the whole world should make a small wish. Look at your fellow human beings with more love. That will make all of us feel better.

Good luck!



Eighth anti-racism festival

The Anti-Racism Festival will be held for the eighth consecutive year from 4 to 6 July at the Ilissia Park, opposite the Students Dormitories in Athens, with the participation of 40 refugee and immigrant organizations and twice as many Greek associations.

Serving as a link between the Immigrant Communities and the Greek anti-racism organizations, the Festival is the outcome of hard work carried out by the Coordinating Committee of Immigrants and Greek Anti-Racism Organizations, the Greek Forum of Immigrants, the organizations and their Communities.

The same as last year, this year also the Ilissia Park will come alive with people and debates, for evenings of multi-cultural encounters and creation.

Visitors will have the opportunity to come into contact with the cultural wealth of the immigrants homelands and meet a multi-cultural society with an increasing presence in Greece.

Take your family and your friends to the Festival, and let us all show that a different world is possible, that we can realize our dreams for:

- n Better living and working conditions in Greece for everyone
- n Legalization and integration of all immigrants
- n Political asylum to refugees
- n Open borders in Europe
- n A world without war, without slaughter, without exploitation, without poverty
- n A world for our children without racism, without fanaticism or dictatorships
- n A democratic and multi-cultural world with solidarity and respect for all

*Free entrance for immigrants

A Festival for the Refugees

The Greek Council for Refugees and the Welfare and Political Protection Organization of Amarousion, in cooperation with the Technopolis of the Municipality of Athens organised a four-day festival featuring cultural and educational events, held from 19 to 21 June in Athens.

The festival was held on the opportunity of the World Refugee Day on 20 June, within the framework of the action plan "New Beginning" of the Community Support Framework 2001-2006, and included exhibitions of paintings, comics, photographs, children's books and student projects.



Philippine independence day

The Philippine Association KASAPI along with the Philippine Embassy in Athens on 7 and 8 June celebrated the 105th anniversary of their country's independence from Spanish rule. Held for the fourth consecutive year at central Athens Fokianos training track field, the celebrations were attended by the majority of the Philippine community in Athens and their Greek friends. Tens of children clad in national costumes participated in the religious parade holding banners with slogans for independence, followed by the children's choir and concerts by immigrant bands. Tasty bites and trinkets from various regions in the Philippines were handed out to visitors from several of the 30 stands scattered on the grounds of Fokianos. As

KASAPI President Joe Valencia said "Following 340 years of colonization, in June 1898 the people revolted and demanded their independence. This is a very important day for us and we wanted to give it the significance it deserves."

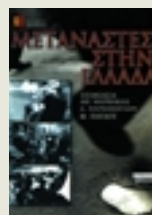


BOOKS

Immigrants and immigration

Four new books are enriching our knowledge about the "man next door", the economic immigrant. The collector's volume **"Immigrants and Immigration – Economic and Political Aspects"** (Haris Naxanis, Michalis Chletsos, Patkis Publications, 2001) focuses on recording the phenomenon of immigration. **"Immigrants in Greece"** of Political Concern Association "Nikos Poulatzas" (Ath Marvakis, D. Parsanoglou, M. Pavlou, Greek Letters Publications, 2001) provides an analysis of immigration in Greece, giving the podium to the immigrant communities in Greece. **"Immigration in the Balkans-Social Exclusion in Athens"** (Papazissis Publications, 2001), Iordanis Psimenos

presents a survey on immigrants (mainly from Albania) in central Athens, while the **"Legal and Socio-political Dimensions of Immigration in Greece"** (Gabriel Amitsis, Gabriella Lazaridi, Papazissis Publications, 2001) reviews institutional interventions and the rights of immigrants in Greece, the dimensions of the social and economic exclusion of immigrants, as well as the economic and social integration of immigrants and repatriated immigrants, and questions vis-à-vis the impact of immigration on the foreign policy and the security of the host country. It is a common consensus that Greece, a former exporter of workers, was caught unprepared during the early 90's arrival of the first immigrant flow



that was mainly due to the collapse of the Soviet Union, the dissolve of the former Yugoslavia and conflict in the Balkan region. The initial reaction of the Greek authorities was an attempt to control immigration mainly through repressive measures. Police sweeps carried out in the center of Athens are still fresh in everyone's memory. The problems created by that tactic were partially counterbalanced by the launch of an immigrant legalization process

in 1998. What is the political purpose of documenting and legalizing immigrants, the protection of their rights or control measures to the benefit of Greek economy, one may ask. The answer provided by scientists is clear: The Greek state should, even though belatedly, grant to immigrants all the rights it grants to the rest of the citizens within the framework of a multicultural society.

Vicky Christi



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