

Athens 17/06/2014

First, I would like to thank you for the kind invitation to me and to the Institute that I represent, which gives me the opportunity to talk about our Institute as well as to discuss with you about the immigration issue in Greece, its development, the impact it has on the country and about its future, both in Greece and in Europe.

SHORT PRESENTATION OF IMEPO

The IMEPO was founded in 2011 as a non-governmental organization. It's aims are to:

- Monitor and record the development of the migration phenomenon in Greece, especially in the areas of education, work, residence, social inclusion, social care, etc.

- Conduct research on migration, in cooperation with Universities and other institutions in Greece and elsewhere.

- Implement European projects and actions in order to raise the awareness of the society on

this issue, in collaboration with government agencies and other non-governmental organizations.

- Promote cooperation between European Union States, the respective international organizations, and the civil society, to undertake joint actions in order to tackle the effects of the migration phenomenon.

In this context, IMEPO is recognized as an official Institution and it is regularly invited by the UN DESA (Department of economic and Social Affairs) to attend the annual meetings in New York, where it has an active role in the relevant discussions with its own proposals.

We organized a close meeting, in cooperation with the American Migration Policy Institute (MPI) and SPP (School of Public Policy) of the Central European University in May 2013, where an exchange of proposals took place on how to deal with the immigration issue in Greece. This meeting was also attended by the European Union Commissioner Mrs. Malmstrom, international experts and by representatives of the Greek Government.

We participated in the implementation of the European program "Migration Policy 2" in collaboration with Universities and other institutions from Greece and another six European Union States.

We work closely with the MOSCOW UNESCO CHAIR every year, for organizing conferences on issues of immigration and inter-cultural education.

THE IMMIGRATION ISSUE IN GREECE

In the last twenty five years Greece has changed, from a sending, to a migrant- receiving country.

According to the official 2011 Census, the total number of immigrants, legal and illegal, in Greece, amounts to 912.000. Out off them, 440.000 are legal, of which 68% are of Albanian origin (300.000). The remaining are illegal immigrants, and the figure is probably greater than 500.000, since it is very difficult, even impossible, to spot them.

On the other hand, it is true that the number of legal immigrants who entered Greece last year has significantly decreased. This is due to the economic crisis and to the better guarding of the borders with Turkey, as well as to the construction of the fence in Thrace.

But the number of those who come to Greece via Turkey and the sea borders continues to be large, over 16.000 in 2013, while the total number of illegal migrants, the same year, was close to 40.000.

Despite deportations, a large number of undocumented immigrants are trapped in the country.

What I mean by this, is that these people are released, as they cannot be kept on the reception camps after a stay of 18 months maximum, so they try to move to Athens and to other cities and ports in an attempt to go to other European countries.

PROBLEMS

The situation is, therefore, that more than 500.000 illegal immigrants have gathered in Athens and other major cities of Greece, who do not have the possibility to leave Greece or to be legalized.

These immigrants make use of public goods and services (education, health, social benefits, transportation) although the country does not receive any subsidy for them by the EU, because no such fund exists . Because of the economic crisis, they cannot have a job, and this results, in many cases, delinquent behavior episodes.

Unfortunately, the other European Union States do not accept any responsibility in dealing with this problem, on the claim that it is an issue which must be resolved by Greece alone.

The vast majority of legal immigrants are here for more than 10 years.

.The last major legalization took place in 2005 and as previously mentioned in the vast majority of them they are Albanian nationals and are indeed integrated into the Greek society.

But the last two years because of the economic crisis a significant number returned to Albania

because of failure to find work in Greece.

At the same time a large number of young and highly educated Greek people migrate in other countries of the European Union as well as in the United States of America, Canada, Australia and elsewhere.

This creates an additional problem in Greece because the indigenous population is constantly decreasing furthermore due to a low birth rate, while at the same time,

the number of immigrants increases either due to the continuous entry of new persons either due to the fact they have more children.

This perspective along with the above problems creates an unpleasant situation in Greece, so that the political party of Golden Dawn takes advantage of this .

It is therefore likely to observe in the short term, a social explosion in Greece that could have effects on other European countries.

SUGGESTIONS

In our view, there are, at least, two situations in which the EU should as soon as possible to help Greece .

A. Create a new financial package for “trapped” undocumented immigrants

In the country, until they find their way back.

B. immigrants entering Greece and detained in the reception centers, can remain there for a year and a half, at most.

If their being sent back is not achieved, they should be released, and apparently remain in the country.

The overall responsibility and the management of these people, we believe, it is not a question only of Greece but of the whole of Europe so it is necessary to find a way, to share responsibility proportionally among all European States in order to speed up the procedures.

Finally, a lot of, discussion is required both for the signing of agreements for sending migrants to the countries of origin as well as for monitoring the agreements with neighboring countries from which illegal immigrants are entering.

Thank you very much and we look forward to your comments and your questions.

Alexandros Zavos

President IMEPO

