

Roundtable ANTIGONE NGO and research project ACCEPT PLURALISM

The non governmental organisation ANTIGONE and the research project ACCEPT PLURALISM, which is co funded by the European Commission, have organised on 20 December 2010 a Roundtable on Cultural Diversity in Greece. The Roundtable was held on the occasion of the World Migrants Day on 18 December.

In his welcome speech, the President of the Greek Committee for Human Rights Kostis Papaioannou noted how important it is to debate diversity in Greek society and to recognise migrants as effective members of the society. He noted that Greece is entering the new decade with a new citizenship law but also facing important challenges of irregular migration, human rights and asylum as well as regarding migrant integration.

The first session of the Roundtable was chaired by Filios Stangos, a well known Greek journalist, expert on European issues. He noted that this discussion is particularly timely reminding the audience about the continuing and still not satisfied quest of Athens' Muslims for an official mosque in the city. The issue has made the news on 18 November, when, on the occasion of the 'Id Muslims have prayed publicly in many of Athens' central squares.

Anna Triandafyllidou, professor (part time) at the European University Institute in Florence and Scientific Co-ordinator of the research project ACCEPT PLURALISM has discussed how different European societies deal with the issue of the cultural and religious diversity. Prof. Triandafyllidou emphasised that the question 'how much diversity can be accommodated within European secular and liberal democracies' is a rhetorical one since it has no definite answer. The quality and quantity of diversity that can be accommodated varies among different societies and in time.

Anna Triandafyllidou introduced the British model of multiculturalism drawing attention to the fact that Britain accepts not only individual but also collective difference despite the critics that multiculturalism has suffered during the last decade and after the rise of international terrorism in Europe and globally. In Britain diversity tends to be integrated into institutions and policies and in the longer run changes the definition of what it means to be British.

In France by contrast all citizens are asked to adhere to a common civic culture that is based on the principle of *laicite*', notably of the complete separation of church and state. In this Republican model citizens are invited to merge into the dominant political culture while leaving their cultural and religious traditions in the home.

The speaker has emphasized that both models have important merits as well as some weaknesses, while they both adopt a generous naturalization policy seeing citizenship as a tool rather than as a prize for integration.

Anna Triandafyllidou has also commented upon the recent declaration of Chancellor Angela Merkel that multiculturalism has failed in Germany, clarifying that Germany has never adopted a multicultural model. Actually German integration policy is based on the idea that if (migrant) children do well at school, they will be smoothly inserted into the job market and hence will be

successfully integrated into society. However, this view has not yet given the results that it was hoped to produce as second and third generation migrants in Germany continue to feel marginalised.

As regards another important immigrant host country and formerly a forerunner of multiculturalism, the Netherlands, it remains actually a puzzle how it has passed so quickly from a model of multicultural integration to a model of intolerance towards cultural and religious diversity

Anna Triandafyllidou has presented schematically the notion of tolerance that the ACCEPT PLURALISM project studies:

Tolerance is defined fundamentally as: X tolerates Y where X does not approve of Y
X has the power to interfere with Y but refrains from doing so.

A main advantage of tolerance is that it can be applied to a wide range of issues and can thus help appease social tensions. The disadvantages of tolerance include that it does not reply to the quest of minorities and migrants for respect of their diversity and for integration of their own features in the self-definition of the nation and the polity.

There are two types of tolerance towards difference:

Liberal tolerance: not interfering with practices or forms of life of a person even if one disapproves of them

Egalitarian tolerance: refers to institutional arrangements and public policies that fight negative stereotyping, promote positive inclusive identities and reorganise the public space in ways that accommodate diversity

The research project ACCEPT PLURALISM

- investigates empirically in 15 European countries and
- discusses the moral and political reasons

for which we ask that specific individuals/groups/practices are

- tolerated while they should not be granted toleration
- tolerated and we should grant them toleration
- tolerated but for which we should ask that they are accepted, respected and recognised

Commenting briefly on the case of Greece the speaker emphasised that the Greek nation was traditionally understood as homogenous (Greeks were of Greek ethnic origin and of Christian Orthodox religion). However this self-definition has been slowly changing given that the Greek nation state has de facto become culturally diverse: 10% of its population is currently composed of immigrants (of first and second generation) and minorities. Native minorities (Turks and other Muslims in western Thrace, Slav Macedonians of the Greek region of Macedonia and Greek Roma populations) are numerically small but are perceived by elites and other citizens as largely 'problematic' as they contrast the self-definition of the nation as mono-cultural and mono-religious in its origins.

The naturalisation policies of the Greek state were until recently (March 2010) based on the *ius sanguinis* principle almost exclusively while migrants have been largely assimilated into a social and political underclass. Greek society has been largely characterised by intolerance towards diversity: a large part of the public opinion considers that difference does not belong to the Greek nation and that it puts into danger the national culture that should remain genuine and ‘clean’ of foreign influences. The non existence of participatory institutions for migrant populations has contributed towards making the social and political integration of migrants even harder, concluded professor Triandafyllidou.

The second speaker, Ahmed Moavia, coordinator of the Hellenic Migrant Forum, a person with a long experience in civil society organisations in Greece has commented on the difficult period that Greece and Europe overall are going through and how these affect the social integration of migrants. He emphasised that the common European guidelines concerning the promotion of integration mainly concern the learning of the language of the destination country but this is not sufficient. He also noted that the social and political integration of the second generation is crucial for the future of European countries and that many northern European countries, the old ‘hosts’ of migration, have now realised how important this issue is. Concluding his talk Ahmed Moavia put forward a question: what is diversity? What is difference in each society? How does each of us perceive and experience difference? This is one of the questions that researchers should concentrate their efforts on.

This first panel concluded with a brief written statement by the vice Minister of Labour, responsible for migration matters, Anna Dalara, who was eventually unable to attend because of the prolongation of the Ministerial meeting that afternoon. The vice minister emphasised that the government aims at combating the social exclusion and poverty among the migrant population and wishes to integrate them as equal residents and citizens into the country. Ms Dalara stated that the ministry is now conducting a nation wide survey, parallel to the 2011 census, with the aim of researching and registering the entire migrant population of the country and the creation of a Panhellenic Migration Map that will help the design and implementation of social policies targeting specifically the needs of this population. In addition the vice Minister noted that the government will help the empowerment of migrant civil society organisations because strong, well organised and institutionally recognised civil society actors are crucial to the implementation of a successful migrant integration policy.

The debate that followed was lively and concentrated on a number of politically important and scientifically challenging issues including:

- what multiculturalism is? Are we all to some degree multicultural to the degree that all families and all societies include a degree of diversity in their history and make-up?
- What is the institutional criterion for recognising a migrant population as a ‘new minority’? what does social integration or social insertion mean?
- What is diversity? Difference? Otherness? How important are the terms that we use to talk about these phenomena and can we find a common terminology across Europe?
- Is emigration and immigration used by sending and receiving countries for their own foreign policy?
- What is liberal tolerance and what are its moral and political justifications?

The second panel of the Roundtable concentrated on the question of citizenship and the newly reformed citizenship and naturalisation policies of Greece (the relevant law was voted in March 2010 and has just started being implemented).

The panel was introduced by Michalis Tremopoulos, vice president of ANTIGONE and Member of the European Parliament, who emphasised that Greek citizens' attitudes towards diversity are at times contradictory. The results of a recent survey have shown that 87% of those surveyed believe the country can take no more migrants and 85% believes that minorities are a threat to the nation. However, at the same time, 80% of those surveyed replied that their relationships with immigrants, at the individual level, have been smooth. These partly contradictory views indirectly confirm a still widespread belief among native Greeks that the Greek nation is a unique, indeed a 'brotherless' nation and that migrants and minorities 'threaten' to 'contaminate' this national uniqueness. Twenty years of massive immigration have not managed to significantly alter these views and to embrace diversity as part of the contemporary national self-definition, concluded Mr Tremopoulos.

The panel was chaired by Niko Ago, journalist, of Albanian origin. Mr Ago noted that we often look at our own religious traditions as something positive, good, something to cherish and be proud of while the religious traditions of the 'others', notably the Muslims, are seen as bad, dangerous, fundamentalist.

Dimitris Christopoulos, assistant professor at Panteion University in Athens and President of the Hellenic League for Human Rights presented the basic models of citizenship and naturalisation in the European Union noting the difference between the so called German 'ethnic' model and the so-called French, Republican, civic model. He noted of course that these are ideal types and that real policies lie somewhere in between these two. Prof. Christopoulos noted that citizenship models are based on national traditions (which are dynamic and changing, as he emphasised), codified into laws and implemented through administrative procedures. A nation can change his self-definition and in relation to that its citizenship law for reasons of political expedience or out of political realism. Both reasons were valid in the case of Greece. Nonetheless Dimitris Christopoulos noted that the most important change introduced by the new citizenship law was the fact that it introduced basic administrative rules into the processing of naturalisation applications. Notably it has set a time limit within which the state has to reply to the applicant and, second, it has imposed that the state needs to explain the reasons for a negative answer to the applicant. He noted that citizenship policy is a question of political will and a fundamental expression of democracy in a nation-state and not just a theoretical or normative issue about political rights.

The second speaker in this panel was Eda Gemi, researcher and coordinator at the Cultural Association of Albanian Migrants 'Steki'. Ms Gemi noted that the change in the citizenship law in Greece is very important but that it is only the beginning of it. She noted that often second generation migrant children are asked to prove their Greek consciousness in ways that native Greeks are not. She emphasised that the question that they are often asked: "do you feel more Greek or more ...Albanian/Georgian/Ukrainian/Pakistani?" is the wrong question because it indirectly argues that you cannot be both things at a time. You cannot be both Albanian and

Greek at the same time indirectly noting the still predominantly monocultural and mono-ethnic definition of the Greek nation.

Ms Gemi presented briefly the very recent results of her PhD research regarding issues of migrant integration and the question of citizenship. The results of the study show that the people surveyed, almost independently of their country of origin, perceived Greek citizenship in instrumental terms, as a means to avoid insecurity of stay, the bureaucracy of continuously renewing stay permits and proving their employment, and also as a way to secure the future of their children in the country. Many have put into question whether even after naturalising they will ever be treated as equals to the Greeks. They rather believe that they will remain as second class citizens like they are now considered as second calls residents or workers.

The third speaker, Andreas Takis, Secretary of State for Population and Social Cohesion Matters in the Ministry of Interior and former vice Ombudsman with a long experience in the sector of human rights noted that the word 'minority' in Greek etymologically refers to being a 'minor' 'not being able' 'having special needs' and has a negative connotation from the outset. He noted that minorities may be numerically small and politically powerless but that sometimes minorities may locally be a majority. These are important considerations he noted if we are to study tolerance empirically.

Andreas Takis argued that there are two basic responses towards diversity. The first is to maintain diversity and allow it to flourish and the second is to seek to assimilate diversity into the majority culture. In addition this basic choice between maintaining or assimilating diversity is complicated by the individual or collective character of diversity. Thus we should consider this 2x2 matrix when designing citizenship policies.

Mr Takis, one of the main architects of the new Greek citizenship law, said that this new law is inspired by the early currents of Greek Enlightenment and the Chart of citizenship rights of Rigas Feraios and aims to give a civic meaning and not only ethnic or cultural to Greek citizenship. He noted thought that the law can never foresee all the complex cases that administrative practice is faced with. Even though the circular that helps interpret the law and apply it to the concrete cases he appreciates that naturalisation committees are faced with a challenging task in examining each case and accepting or indeed rejecting a citizenship application.

The debate that followed was particularly lively starting with the discussion of a few concrete examples of people who applied for obtaining the Greek citizenship and in which the relevant committee found it difficult to take a decision as some applicants fulfilled all the conditions but did not espouse specific values that are perceived to be widespread in Greek societies (such as for instance gender equality). Mr Takis in line with Ms Gemi earlier agreed that the citizenship law has only been a first step and that its concrete impact on Greek society will depend on its implementation by the public administration.

The Roundtable was concluded in a warm climate of dialogue with the hopeful observation of one of the participants that despite the difficult times that Greece is facing important steps are

taken (and more are needed of course) with regard to the acceptance and integration of cultural diversity in Greek society.