Contesting national belonging: An established-outsider figuration on the margins of Thessaloniki, Greece

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The context of reception

4.1 Co-ethnic migrations from the former Soviet Union[66]

The outmigration of Greeks from the former Soviet Union and its successor states is just one instance of the dramatic increase of emigration from this region since the collapse of the Soviet regime. The political liberalization that had been introduced earlier together with *perestroika* had already led to a significant rise in outmigration. The transition policies after the collapse, the unfavourable socio-economic conditions, and the political instability during the 1990s drastically altered living conditions and triggered population outflows of nearly unparalleled volume (Shevtsova, 1992). Within this wider scheme, the ethnic element played a crucial role in determining the volume, origins, and direction of migration flows. In large measure, post-Soviet outmigration concerned migrations of ethnic affinity, i.e. of persons moving to their putative ethnic homelands.

In the final years before the collapse of the Soviet Union, and against the backdrop of rising ethno-nationalism, minorities were increasingly seen as violating the national unity in the Soviet republics. Ideas of national subjects bound to territories became dominant. After the restoration of 'the national order of things' (Malkki, 1995), Russians were supposed to move to Russia, Germans to Germany, Greeks to Greece and so on. Such views were not only embedded in the nationalistic rhetoric of the titular nationalities but had been partly internalized by the minorities themselves. As shown in the previous chapter, part of the leadership of the Greek diaspora supported either mass

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[66] I use the term 'co-ethnic migration' to refer to migrations of people moving to their putative ethnic homelands. The states of the ethnic homelands are referred to as kin states in the text.

migration to the homeland or the foundation of a Greek territory inside the Soviet borders. In areas troubled by ethnic conflicts and rising nationalisms, staying inside titular nations such as Georgia and Armenia was increasingly seen as problematic.

Nevertheless, co-ethnic migrants were not only 'pushed' by the economic and political crisis and deteriorating inter-ethnic relations in their places of residence, but also 'pulled' by a desire to move to 'their true homelands', the places to which they supposedly belonged and where they hoped to find their roots (Vourita 1991; Brubaker, 1994; Popov, 2010). Among the Soviet Greeks, failed attempts to reach their historic homeland in the Interbellum period were narrated to younger generations as efforts to materialize an unfulfilled dream. Now this dream became a real option, to be considered not only for affective but also for pragmatic reasons. Even those who had no illusions about the hardships of migration could imagine the ethnic homeland as a place where they would at least be more accepted and able to live peacefully among their own people. At the same time, immigration was more easily realizable for them since they were entitled to free mobility to and settlement in their imagined homelands. Especially for the Soviet Greeks, as well as the other non-indigenous 'nations' such as the Germans, the Jews, and the Finns, their ethnic origin linked them to the Western World and entitled them to a privileged reception. In the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union, this access to the West was particularly desired.

Migration is not a direct function of someone's aspirations but very much depends on available resources in terms of networks, information, capital, and legal permission (see Carling, 2002). Privileged access to citizenship and the right to settle in their imagined homeland reduced the psychological and material costs of the project for the post-Soviet co-ethnic migrants. Staying in the former Soviet Union or going to their imagined homeland was a dilemma to be faced. Life in the actual homeland was compared with the perceived prospects of life in the imagined homeland. Migration was a pragmatic strategy to resort to in order to escape unfavourable situations as well as to achieve certain goals that appeared unrealisable if they stayed. Leaving the post-Soviet space happened more often among communities with an ethnic homeland outside the borders of the former Soviet Union because it was much easier in the first place. The availability of an ethnic homeland alone may not explain why migration happens, yet it accounts to a large extent for the scale it acquired among the non-indigenous populations of the former Soviet Union.

The kin states' view

Post-Soviet co-ethnic migration to Europe and Israel is a rather complex case of mobility that has engendered a considerable degree of ambiguity concerning its definition. What is the appropriate term for the FSU Greeks, Germans, and Jews who left the former Soviet Union for their ethnic homeland? Are they economic migrants, refugees, or repatriates? The latter term was adopted by the kin states (*pallinostoúntes*, *aussiedlers*, *olim*). 'Repatriation' is claimed to be a separate case of geographic mobility not to be compared with any other kind of international migration. In the rhetoric of the states concerned, it is a 'return' grounded on the right of people to live in the country where they ethnically belong. According to this perspective the historic fatherland has a moral duty to provide preferential access to co-ethnic migrants. The term 'repatriation' is also chosen by the Council of Europe (De Tinguy, 2003) and is favoured by several academics, primarily those addressing 'national audiences' and thus susceptible to ethnocentric bias.[67]
Others are critical to the use of the term 'repatriation' for this case of mobility. Calling co-ethnic migrants 'repatriates' is technically incorrect. Co-ethnic migrants are not returning (as nationalistic rhetoric has it), since they have never lived within bounds of the nation-state that claims them. More importantly, it keeps the dynamics and the many-sidedness of the actual migration out of view and creates false expectations.

Co-ethnic migrants were portrayed by state authorities as rejoining their homeland driven by innate national feelings. Co-ethnicity alone was considered a sufficient reason 'for any true national subject' to move to her/his 'real homeland' after years of being denied the right of 'return'. Within this same logic, the settlement of the 'repatriates' in their homeland was expected to be smooth, or at least much smoother than that of foreign migrants, since repatriates were perceived to be naturally uniting with their compatriots. The difficulties which co-ethnics experienced in adapting to a new social and cultural environment, and the reluctance on the part of the native and immigrant populations to mutually accept each other as their 'own people' (see De Tinguy, 2003), was largely unforeseen by the policy makers of kin states.

In the second half of the twentieth century, ethnicity has come to play a reduced role in shaping Western immigration policies; however, it did not disappear completely. Ethnic favouritism or exclusion conflicts with the liberal principles of public neutrality and equality. It became even more strongly eschewed after World War II, when racism was discredited and a universal human rights regime institutionalized (Joppke, 2005). Although selecting by ethnicity became less

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[67] For the Greek case see for instance (Vergeti, 2003).

legitimate, 'diaspora' favouritism showed resilience. Joppke (2005) shows that the persistence of the ethnic element in shaping Western immigration policies has not been exclusive to the post-Soviet migration experience. Either by directly favouring the migration of certain groups or indirectly by excluding others, ethnic favouritism has been established practice. 'Settler states' such as America and Australia practiced it until the 1970s. It still remains modestly endorsed in some post-colonial states and has been endorsed by states with sizeable diasporas, especially those with a strict ethnic conception of their nation. So-called kin states have sought justification for their favourable treatment towards post-Soviet co-ethnic migration by claiming they have an obligation to protect co-ethnics.[68] This claim is grounded on an assumption that their diasporas are subject to persecution abroad. In this way, repatriates appear as a quasi refugee group.

It is true that the diasporas in question have in the past been persecuted due to their origin. Moreover, a considerable segment of their population fled in fear of violence.[69] However, what remains notably arbitrary is the fact that the right to emigrate and the entitlements conferred with it concerned the whole diaspora population, and not only those fearing or having endured persecution. The challenge to be neutral, what Joppke (2005) calls the liberal challenge, was circumvented by the states in question through their refusal to acknowledge post-Soviet co-ethnic mobility as migration. Selecting the term 'repatriation' was not only a reflection of nationalistic assumptions but part and parcel of an attempt to avoid comparisons with other less privileged immigrant groups and to provide justifications for the preferential treatment of co-ethnic migrants.

A complex case of mobility

Although repatriation was claimed by state officials to be completely different from international migration, the problems encountered with the settlement of the 'repatriates' turned out to bear resemblances to those encountered with the settlement of foreign immigrants (Ohliger & Münz, 2003). State officials have in some cases misleadingly traced the reasons for those unforeseen developments to the supposed lack of 'proper' (read: nationalist) motivations of migrants. They

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[68] According to Joppke (2005) the human need for protection is one of the three selection criteria that are legitimate today. The other two are the skills or economic need and the recognition of family ties.

[69] Although as Brubaker argues(Brubaker 1998, p.49), '[f]ear is a capacious concept: there is a world of difference between migration arising from a sharply focused fear of imminent violence and migration engendered by a diffuse fear, concern, or anxiety about one's well-being, or the well-being of one's children, in the future'.

saw them as turning into 'ordinary' economic migrants (for the Greek case, see Voutira, 2004).

However, the division of post-Soviet co-ethnic migrants into either 'repatriates' or 'economic migrants' is based on a false polarity. Both categories are myopically mono-dimensional, reducing to a single reason the complex process that in fact underlies migrants' decisions. A 'wish to return' does not preclude economic or other motivations. In essence, any decision to migrate is prescribed by motivations and expectations of socio-economic improvement. The significant disparities in the volume, direction, and origins of migration within and among the non-indigenous nations of the former Soviet Union shows that the affective pull of the imagined homeland is not enough to induce emigration. Well-rooted and/or socio-economically established populations generally prefer to stay. On the other hand, expectations of socio-economic improvement do not necessarily rule out the significance of ethnic attachments in the decision.

Post-Soviet co-ethnic migrants are neither economic nor ethno-cultural migrants. They are people who have moved to their ethnic homeland hoping to enhance their living conditions (see Popov, 2010). It is equally difficult to collectively categorize the post-Soviet co-ethnic migration as either voluntary or involuntary. It was both triggered by circumstances and was a voluntary act. For the Greek case, the Soviet Greeks fleeing the Civil War in Abkhazia can be placed at one end of the spectrum, and the transnational entrepreneurs from Russia at the other. Reviewing experiences from different times and places, one encounters substantial diversity reflecting the (shifting) limits in immigrants' ability to weigh up their decisions against potential alternatives.

Post-Soviet co-ethnic migration exposes the insufficiency of the most basic conceptual categories in migration studies (see Voutira, 1991; Brubaker, 1998). It is certainly not so qualitatively different (as claimed by kin states) as not to fit within a broader definition of migration. Yet it does not correspond closely to the existing categories. The ethnic link between immigrants and countries of destination lends this form of migration several particularities. A number of them have already been touched upon. In what follows, I will single out three issues that have significant repercussions for the position of post-Soviet co-ethnic migrants in their imagined homeland, and for the ways they relate to the 'natives' and other immigrants in that homeland.

The first issue concerns their preferential migration. Besides favourable access to their ethnic homeland and to citizenship rights, a series of measures were taken by kin states aimed at facilitating their settlement. De Tinguy (2003, p.119) argues that 'repatriates' have been de jure or de facto privileged migrants. This is an

interesting characterization that requires a qualification. Using the word 'privileged' assumes a comparison; migrants may be privileged only when compared with other non-privileged migrants. Moreover, given the context-bound character of migration, the frame of reference for such a relational concept ought to be synchronic, i.e. other immigrants moving *at the same time*. Co-ethnic post-Soviet immigration has taken place together with the so-called new migration in Europe (Koser & Lutz 1998), and co-ethnic migrants are indeed privileged when compared to the undocumented migrants and asylum seekers who comprise the majority of the other immigrants in the destination countries.

Secondly, post Soviet co-ethnic migration to the West was largely intended to be, or quickly turned into, permanent migration (Ohliger & Munz 2003). As already mentioned, for a considerable number of FSU Greek immigrants, especially the pioneers, migration was a one-way move and all bridges were cut with the old homeland. That was also the case for Soviet Jews and Germans. In the course of time migration became less abrupt. Yet for a substantial segment of the latecomers return was difficult due to the gradual vanishing of the communities within which they were located in the post-Soviet space.

Post-Soviet co-ethnic migrants may be nostalgic about their old homeland and some may cherish 'the good old days', but they are aware that their fate is now tied to the fate of their new homeland. For the majority of them, the dream or illusion of the eventual return (Piore, 1980) does not guide their long-term aspirations and as a result their efforts are concentrated at building their social and economic life in the new home. Post-Soviet co-ethnic immigrants may be privileged in comparison to other international immigrants due to their favourable access to the West and, for those with a European passport, free mobility in the EU, but a large number of them lack the option of a return to their old home. This puts them in a different position from other international immigrants whose presence abroad is a continuous negotiation of life prospects both here and there. As a result, post-Soviet co-ethnic migrants are more prone to get frustrated by everyday difficulties since they cannot consider them temporary stages in life.

The third characteristic concerns post-Soviet co-ethnic migrants' high expectations of life in the imagined homeland. International immigration negatively affects the political and social status of people by turning them from members of ethnic majorities to members of ethnic minorities. For post-Soviet co-ethnic migrants the reverse is true. Their 'repatriation' signified at least formally an upward move in terms of their group's socio-political position, since they have migrated to a country where they share the same ethnicity as the dominant group. Having endured the negative aspects of minority status, post-Soviet co-ethnic

migrants expected that in their ethnic home they would have considerably more opportunities for progress in all domains of life. Those expectations went hand in hand with idealized perceptions about the return to the fatherland. The pioneers in particular were making a move into the unknown, hoping to find their 'true home'. The privileged character of their migration together with their ideas about life in the West heightened their expectations further.[70]

The Greek case in perspective

These interrelated features characterize post-Soviet co-ethnic migration, albeit with variations in the degree to which they hold true for each national case.[71] Together with their Soviet origin, these features constitute a background which all such immigrants have in common, and which influences their interaction with the native populations in all receiving countries. However, there are also differences. Inquiring how the Greek case compares to other countries places it in perspective and highlights its specificities more clearly.

The framing and reception of post-Soviet co-ethnic migrations has had two dimensions: an ethnic and a moral one (De Tinguy, 2003). Privileged immigration was firstly the outcome of a strict ethnic conception of the nation; the underlying idea being that diasporas are parts of a trans-territorial nation and that, because of this, ethnic descent alone is an adequate criterion for admission into the state. To this, a moral element was added, with kin states declaring responsibility towards co-ethnics who had suffered abroad and who were perceived to be still at risk of being repressed. As already mentioned, the moral argument of responsibility towards co-ethnics was also used as a justification to defend the privileged character of this migration against charges of not complying with 'liberal' ethics of neutrality. Its ideological background, however, was not uniform across countries. For Germany and Finland it was related to the idea that those two countries are responsible for the past sufferings of their co-ethnics.[72]

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[70] To that point we should add the fact that the promises made by state officials of kin states about measures to facilitate their settlement were overvalued by post-Soviet co-ethnic migrants due to their being accustomed to state interventionism (Papaioanou, et al., 2008). Soon immigrants understood that the work and housing stability they once enjoyed in the Soviet Union could not be guaranteed by any of the Western states.

[71] Regarding the privileges conferred to co-ethnic migrants, differences concern the kind of the measures as well as their quality and quantity. Policy priorities as well as state capacities play a role here. The Greek state, as will be illustrated in detail in the following chapter, having a relatively weak welfare system and inefficient public institutions, carried out ad hoc measures with a limited impact. Policies in Israel, Germany, and Finland may have also proved inadequate in several domains but on the whole were much more comprehensive.

[72] Germany feels responsible for the suffering of Soviet Germans. Those are thought to have been

This was not the case for Israel and Greece (De Tinguy, 2005). For the latter countries the responsibility towards post Soviet co-ethnics was not perceived as compensation for past iniquities but simply as an intention to provide protection.

The ethnic dimension has been more significant for Greece and Israel. Solidarity with the diaspora is a basic founding characteristic of both nation states. For Israel, immigration of co-ethnics is actually the raison d'être of the state. Israel is also a more complex case in that the moral and ethnic dimensions appear intertwined in the official rhetoric, making it difficult to tease them apart. The self-description of the nation, and of the state that represents it, is couched in terms of diaspora experience and collective suffering, so that being Jewish becomes equivalent to being persecuted (Joppke, 2005). However, the Israeli Law of Return is addressed to all Jews irrespective of whether they have suffered due to their origin. Being a refuge to Jewry, Israel is also a quintessential ethnic state. Similarly, the Greek nation state has been formed by and for a wider and dispersed Greek world. This is something that throughout its history has never been challenged. Indeed, as described in chapter 2, defining the contours of the Greek world was a much more fluid and opportunistic process than demarcating the limits of Jewry. However, the Greek state has also functioned and is self-perceived by Greeks as a refuge for the Hellenic World.

The special relations Israel and Greece have with their diasporas prescribes that any co-ethnic's immigration ought to be, at least officially, welcome. At the same time the long history of co-ethnic migration and refugee inflows that helped build those nations underlies the positive reaction towards the massive migration of Soviet co-ethnics in the early 1990s. In both countries 'repatriation', perceived as a natural sequel to previous co-ethnic inflows labelled as such, was treated as an asset for demographic, economic, and political reasons. This perspective has been most consistent in Israel. Having conflictual relations with its neighbours, and being an ethnically divided state where the share of the Jewish community in relation to the Israeli Arab community is declining, the demographic element alone suffices for promoting the migration of co-ethnics.

The Greek state was more ambivalent in that respect. As will be shown in the following chapter, the optimistic expectations of the initial reception plan were rethought in the course of time. Gradually, in the context of a general reconsideration of the Greek policy towards its diaspora, more voices were heard in favour of supporting the Greek communities in the Soviet successor state so

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caused as a result of WWII, which Germany had initiated. For the case of the Ingrian Finns, Finland wishes to compensate for their surrender to the USSR after their evacuation to Finland in 1943/44 (De Tinguy, 2003).

that they would remain there. However, this did not entail a radical shift in the policy approach. Restriction, attempted through stricter requirements on the proof of one's Greekness, was officially legitimated with the aim of curbing the migration of false co-ethnics rather than discouraging 'real FSU Greeks' to settle in the country. The policy reconsideration did not go so far as to cancel the privileges for those co-ethnics who wished to 'return'. In contrast, privileged migration in Germany[73] was meant to accommodate a unique historic event, the expulsions and repressions that ethnic Germans suffered in the aftermath of World War II (Joppke, 2005). This episode is now considered closed and FSU Germans coming after 2010 will not be entitled any of the privileges conferred on their predecessors. For Germany, 'repatriates' have returned to being 'normal' migrants.

A final issue that needs to be highlighted here is the way migrants are ethnically characterized by kin states. FSU Jews move to Israel because they are Jews, FSU Germans to Germany because they are Germans. Similarly, FSU Greeks are entitled to privileged access to the Greek state due to their Greekness. However, in Greece co-ethnics are not only seen as Greeks but as Pontics too. In this respect the Greek case resembles the Finnish case, where FSU Finns are not simply Finns but also Ingrians. As will described in chapter 7.2, the real or imagined Pontic origin of FSU Greeks differentiates them from non-Pontic Greeks and mediates their relations with the native Greeks.

The present subchapter has served to highlight that FSU Greek migration is not a unique case of geographic mobility. It occupies a place in post-Soviet migration at large, specifically within the segment that concerns migrations characterized by ethnic affinity. However, FSU Greek migration will not be treated here as a case via which to explore post-Soviet co-ethnic migration in general. That is not the aim of the present study. This higher analytical level can only contribute marginally to providing insight into the development of local interethnic relations in Greece. Besides shared characteristics, each national case presents peculiarities constituting in essence a different context of reception. Immigrants are categorized by kin states, interest groups, and locals in the context of dominant national narratives and images. At the same time they are placed within a wider national history of old and contemporary migrations. Together with the national policy specificities, they shape the context of reception for the immigrants.

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[73] German policy was more selective and restrictive from the outset. Criteria of eligibility, such as language proficiency, were set to prevent unwanted immigration as early as the beginning of the 1990s (Munz, 2003) and the entry of FSU Germans had been regulated by increasingly restrictive governmental policies in the same decade (Dietz, 2000).

4.2 Migration policy for FSU Greeks

'Repatriation' as a demographic and economic resource for the state

In January 1990, the Greek authorities established a special body, the National Foundation for the Reception and Resettlement of Repatriate Homogenís Greeks [74] (henceforth the National Foundation), to plan and carry out the settlement of the co-ethnics – in Greek, *homogenís* – from the former Soviet Union.[75] The dramatic rise of FSU Greek immigration after 1989 made a new organization necessary to manage what was initially conceived of as a national crisis. However, concerns about the size of the phenomenon, which the Greek state initially perceived as unmanageable, soon subsided; the 'national crisis' was reconceptualized as an opportunity.

> '[T]he widespread acceptance of the Pontians[76] by the other Greeks in our society; the unanimous support from all political parties; and the willingness of the Government to face up to this problem but most of all the vigour and dynamism of the Pontians themselves'

would, in the words of the director of the new foundation, turn a major national challenge into an asset (Kokkinos, 1991, p. 399). The above quote illustrates the main assumptions underling the perception of FSU Greek migration as a resource for the Greek state. Let me first inquire into how precisely 'the dynamism and vigour' of the 'Pontians' was conceptualized by state officials and policy makers, and in what ways the government was willing to face up to the 'problem'.

The National Foundation designed and implemented a rural settlement plan in the region of Thrace, to which the influx of FSU Greeks would be channelled. Funding was to be secured from EU and state resources. Thrace, an economically underdeveloped area and home to the Muslim minority, is the most eastern part of mainland Greece, bordering with Turkey to the east and Bulgaria to the north. The rationale for selecting this region was directly related to the vulnerable position of the region in Greek political and economic geography. The settlement of FSU Greeks aimed at demographic and economic revitalization of the area as

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[74] Εθνικό ίδρυμα υποδοχής και αποκατάστασης αποδήμων και παλιννοστούντων ομογενών ελλήνων.
[75] Thenceforth, the reception of repatriates fell within the tasks of the General Secretariat for Greeks abroad.
[76] The people from Pontos (Póntii) are referred to as both as Pontic Greeks and Pontian Greeks in English.

well as an alteration of its religious and ethnic composition in favour of the Christian population. The policy goals were set with a particular image of the newcomers in mind. As articulated in the 1992 annual report of the foundation:

> The repatriates are people with low economic claims and demands, and therefore they can accept without any kind of complaint even the most difficult form of life in the border regions (National Foundation 1992 in Voutira, 2003b, p. 150).

> Their presence in these regions will be able to create in and of itself an economic revitalization and this will generate the 'pull' for a return migration among the local population that has emigrated(National Foundation 1992 in Voutira, 2003b, p. 150).

What made policy makers hold such optimistic views about the newcomers' presumed loyalty to these plans and acceptance of their ascribed role for the revitalization of the area? Turning to the interwar refugee experience for legitimacy and inspiration, the National Foundation (Voutira, 2003b) attempted to duplicate what is claimed in the official state historiography to be 'the greatest achievement of the contemporary Greek state' (Andriotis 1999, pp. 163). Namely, the settlement and adaptation of the 1.2 million 1920s refugees.

Although the population exchange and the uprooting of the Orthodox Christian population that followed the Great Catastrophe is lamented as one of the most tragic moments in contemporary Greek history, it is also acknowledged as an event that decisively fostered the development of the nation state. With the demise of irredentism after the Great Catastrophe, Greece found itself in an emergency situation of unprecedented scale, and the rehabilitation of the refugees was represented as the new national struggle. In hindsight, this struggle was claimed as a victory because of pragmatic and effective state planning and a 'dynamic refugee population, devoted to the nation, that managed despite all odds to tame their fates and inject new blood into the old Greece'. The positive effects of successful re-establishment and incorporation of the uprooted were traced in different domains. The most widely and immediately recognized was the ethnic impact. The Hellenization of Greek Macedonia turned Greece into one of the most homogenous nation states of the Balkans (Mavrogordatos, 1983). In essence, the entire planning of the refugee resettlement, which prioritized rural settlements in the northern and north-eastern frontiers of Greece, was geared towards defending and consolidating this area (Kontogiorgi, 2006).

Following this same logic, 'the return' of co-ethnics from the former Soviet Union was treated by policy makers and gradually represented in the press and in public

forums as a resource for solving the 'national issue of Thrace' (Voutira, 2003). In the perception of the officials, the repatriation of FSU Greeks could, in the manner of the 1923 model, foster the Greek character of this region[77] and provide the necessary rural population and labour force for its economic revitalization. The presence of FSU Greeks in the country was not considered as a liability, as a group that only needed support, but as a population from which support could be drawn. The Greekness of the newcomers was taken as a certificate of their devotion to serve the interests of the state even if they would have to endure significant hardships. Their reading of the history of 'the successful rehabilitation and assimilation of the 1920s refugees' left the policy makers in little doubt about the eventual success of their project. However, as will be described in what follows, their expectations were not met.

The gradual re-establishment of the livelihoods of FSU Greeks in Thrace was supposed to be accomplished through housing, labour market inclusion, and language training. Participation in the plan was voluntary and every FSU Greek entering the country on a 'repatriation visa' was entitled to it. The reception of the newcomers was carried out in steps. Immigrants were briefly accommodated in hospitality centres and then transferred to so-called reception villages. These were perceived as 'the main instrument with which to obtain the social grafting of the new arrivals to the tissue of [the native society]' (Kokkinos, 1991). Immigrants, both children and adults, were provided with a number of everyday facilities and services, and attended language and orientation courses geared towards their smooth adaptation to the education system and the labour market. Having concluded this phase, adult participants were supposed to be able to find work. The duration of their stay at the reception villages was planned to be six months; however, for a number of immigrants it turned out last several years, due to the inability of the foundation to implement the plan effectively. From that point onwards, the National Foundation's support focused on housing.

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[77] The Muslim population of Thrace was, together with the Orthodox populations of Istanbul and of the islands Imvros and Tenedos, excluded from the 1923 compulsory population exchange by the Lausanne Treaty. The treaty provided these minorities a number of rights in order to preserve their religious and ethnic character. In Greece, repressive measures and practices from the Greek authorities initially targeted only the Pomak subgroup of the Muslim population in Thrace. However, progressively after the 1955 pogrom of the Greeks in Istanbul, the complete Muslim population in Greece became victim of administrative and institutional discrimination (for a thorough analysis of the Greek Muslim minority, see Troumpeta, 2000). FSU Greek settlement started during a period of politically heated debate around 'the Thrace issue'. The newly formed Muslim party 'Equality, Friendship and Peace', had united the ethnologically diverse Muslim population of Thrace and won a seat in parliament, further raising governmental concerns about the demographic balance in the area and the threat of Turkish irredentism and influence in Greek politics.

After a while, unfavourable cost-benefit calculations led to the curtailing of the initial orientation phase.[78] Finding a job proved particularly difficult for FSU Greeks and the training seemed to do little to help in that direction. The problems were primarily structural, relating to the local economy. In Thrace, widespread unemployment made inclusion of the new settlers in the labour market difficult. Moreover, the division of the job market among various Muslim groups had created economic niches which it was difficult for an outsider to enter (Voutira, 2003b). It gradually became obvious that the government had made plans without realistically considering the development potential of the area. As a response to this problem, it initiated a subsidized employment scheme, while promoting access to positions in the public sector in Thrace and Macedonia. Both measures met with limited success.[79] Grants were also given to newcomers wishing to set up their own personal business. However, as this measure was contingent on EU funding, the financial support reached only a limited number of people. Only 607 entrepreneurial initiatives were subsidized, of which 411 were in agriculture (Vergeti 2003).

Although housing was a clear priority in the national resettlement plan, the authorities encountered significant problems in that domain too. The aim was to provide permanent residence to all participants in houses bought or built by the National Foundation. However, this process progressed very slowly. The urgent need to move the immigrants out of the reception villages necessitated the makeshift solution of subsidized rent in the private housing market.[80] For the majority of the participants this proved to be the end stage in their housing trajectory. By 1998, a total of approximately 1,200 housing units had been given away, covering the needs of about one fourth of the participants (Papaioannou, et al., 2001). The output represents a huge deviation from the goal set for the construction of 13,000 urban and semi-urban houses and 2,000 rural houses (Kokkinos, 1991).

Despite the inefficiency of the strategies applied, and the insufficiency of the funding,[81] there was one more major problem that hindered the successful

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[78] In 1994 only 25% of the participants in the programme had attended the seminars for vocational rehabilitation, while a larger percentage had attended seminars on the Greek language (Psarou, 2004).

[79] Concerning access to the public sector, despite their promotion FSU Greeks lacked several prerequisites such as language or certified diplomas, and most importantly the connections with political parties (πολιτικὸ μέσο) that are commonly essential for such appointment.

[80] The National Foundation had difficulties in acquiring the necessary state funding to secure the contribution from the Council of Europe's social fund. At the same time the adoption of strategies deviating from the actual plan (subsidized rent) and its inability to deliver according to the programme further hindered its funding potentials.

[81] The National Foundation was also criticized for extravagant operational expenditure, centralism,

implementation of the resettlement plan. Thrace, especially its semi-urban or rural areas, was not an appealing destination for repatriates. FSU Greeks preferred to settle in urban centres where employment opportunities were greater (Voutira, 2004; Lavrentiadou, 2006). It was primarily the prospect of homeownership that made participation in the resettlement plan attractive to FSU Greeks, and in some cases had even induced their emigration from the former Soviet Union. Yet the circulation of information about delays in housing constructions made FSU Greeks realize that homeownership was not guaranteed. This made the resettlement plan even more unpopular. By 1998, fewer than 20,000 people had participated in the programme of whom less than 18,000 eventually settled in Thrace. This amounted to less than 15% of the actual FSU Greek population in Greece at that time.

Taking into account that the National Foundation was incapable of successfully carrying out the programme for even a significantly reduced number of people, an obvious question comes to mind: How did politicians and functionaries think they would be able to carry out the programme for the expected larger number of people? Somehow, the officials had not found it necessary to reflect on their expectation that one major condition would already be fulfilled: that FSU Greeks would be willing to tolerate difficult and makeshift conditions before they were provided with what they had been promised.

However, neither the Greekness of the repatriates nor their 'vigour and dynamism' could secure their fealty to the insufficiently organized routes to incorporation set up by the state – contrary to the policy makers' expectations. The vast majority of FSU Greeks followed individual strategies and/or used the help of family and kinship networks already settled in Greece. The available data suggests that their choices were justified. According to a survey carried out by Vergeti (1998) in 1996 in Thrace (Xanthi) and Athens (Menidi), housing conditions may have been better for those settled in Thrace, but those who settled in Athens experienced less unemployment, and homeownership (attained mostly through processes of unauthorized construction; see chapter 5.2) was much more common. These findings are corroborated by a study carried out by Lavrendiadou (2006) in 1998-1999. In her sample unemployment was also found to be less widespread in Athens, and those who settled there had higher incomes compared to those settled in Thrace.

Although state support was to a large extent provisional on settlement in Thrace, those who preferred not to participate in the resettlement plan in Thrace were able to benefit from a few measures that were implemented for all 'repatriates'

and being overstaffed (Papaioannou et al 2001).

from the former Soviet Union. FSU Greeks received a small allowance supporting their initial settlement and were exempted from import duties. Greek language courses for adults as well as vocational training and programmes for promoting entrepreneurial activity were also set up outside Thrace in the context of EU-funded programmes. These reached only a minority of the total FSU Greek population. For FSU Greek students, reception classes were organized at schools and a few intercultural schools (Διαπολιτισμικά σχολεία)[82] opened, mainly in Thessaloniki and Athens. All FSU Greeks are eligible for free medical and pharmaceutical care from public hospitals. However, they cannot transfer their pensions nor is their previous work experience in the former Soviet Union officially recognized. The elderly receive the Greek basic pension from the public insurance organization OGA.

More substantially, FSU Greeks can easily acquire Greek citizenship and thus become eligible for any social benefit to which a Greek citizen is entitled. The 2130/1993 Law formalized the procedure of 'verification of nationality', which was introduced by a ministerial decision in 1990 aiming to ease and regulate the acquisition of citizenship by FSU Greeks. This is a summary mode of acquisition; citizenship rights are granted on proof of the applicant's descent through documents certified by the Greek consular authorities in the country of origin (Christopoulos, 2005). However, entering the country on a tourist visa – which had become very widespread from the mid 1990s onwards – meant exclusion from this privileged process. FSU Greeks who arrived on a tourist visa commonly overstayed the official period, formally becoming illegal immigrants. As such they were not entitled to any benefit, nor to participation in the resettlement plan.[83]

Five years after the implementation of the resettlement plan its inefficiency was acknowledged and a change of approach was deemed necessary. A new state actor, the General Secretariat of Returning Diaspora Greeks (henceforth, General Secretariat), was assigned to complement the activities of the National Foundation – whose role gradually shrank – by expanding the scope of the settlement policy westwards to Eastern Macedonia. The General Secretariat provided legal assistance to FSU Greeks, social support to economically marginalized families, and attempted to connect the unemployed to the labour market.

At the same time, the legal status of the FSU Greeks was represented as a problem that required action. There was a general acknowledgement that, on the one hand, people could acquire a repatriation visa through illegal means, while,

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[82] These are special schools were at least 45% of the total student population are children of immigrants and in which the principles of intercultural education are implemented.
[83] They could only receive the free health care to which every person of Greek descent is entitled.

on the other, a number of people who could rightfully claim Greekness did not wish to apply for repatriation visas or could not acquire them because they lacked the necessary funding. To counter this problem, the General Secretariat (2000) provided 'certifications of Greek descent' to undocumented FSU Greeks. In the period 1996 to 2000, 2,372 such certifications were given, although there was no legal framework for such a process.

Concerning the National Foundation's resettlement plan, the deficiencies of the policy were recognized, without, however, challenging the core of the approach. Co-ethnic repatriation from the former Soviet Union was still represented as a 'gift from god'[84] whereby contemporary Greece could solve its 'huge demographic problems' in the 'vulnerable regions of Macedonia and Thrace' (Kamenidis as cited in Voutira, 2003b, p.152). To that end a more flexible model of self-settlement was adopted. Families who undertook agricultural settlement in those areas were provided with land and interest-free loans, which were subsidized for up to 30% of the total amount.[85]

Social exclusion and the reconsideration of policy goals

Yet the new measures did not prevent the further clustering of FSU Greeks in Athens and Thessaloniki. Gradually, the presence of FSU Greeks became visible in these places. The majority of native Greeks first came into contact with their ethnic sisters and brothers from the former Soviet Unions through the open street markets. The right of repatriates to import and sell assets from their household without having to pay import duties, in combination with the existence of a network of relations at the country of birth which insured the steady supply of new merchandise, led a number of people to work as vendors of goods from the former Soviet republics in the open street markets (Lavrentiadou, 2006; Papaioannou, et al., 2001; Spilok-Malanda, 2007). At the same time, their social networks drove FSU Greeks into specific neighbourhoods. The low living standard in those neighbourhoods and the physical separation of Soviet and native Greeks exemplified the failure of Greek policy and raised concerns about the formation of 'ghettos' and the marginalization of the newcomers.

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[84] The representation of the newcomers is impressively analogous to the Israeli case even in the use of phraseology. According to Prime Ministar Yitshak Samir, immigration from the former Soviet Union should be interpreted as a miracle and welcomed as a godsend (Tinguy 2003).

[85] Support in the form of remission from state levies was also given to individuals who had built or renovated their house irrespective of its location.

From the early 1990s, several researchers highlighted the vulnerable socio-economic position of FSU Greeks (Hatzivarnava, 2001; Kasimati, 1998; Mavrea, 1998; Terzidis, 1995; Vergeti, 1998). According to these authors, further political intervention was required to prevent ongoing social exclusion. These studies drew on empirical material from research carried out during the first years of immigration, and none adopted a longitudinal approach to provide evidence regarding the dynamics of their incorporation. Given that the passage of time can lead to the attainment of greater parity of life chances, it could be that the grim picture painted by the authors was characteristic only of the first years of settlement.

A large-scale survey carried out in Athens in 1998-1999 (Halkos & Salamouris, 2003) focusing on employment trajectories reveals that some ten years after the beginning of the mass influx of FSU Greeks, problems still remained acute. Halkos and Salamouris (2003), who reported on the survey, claimed that the demographic profile of their sample should have ensured the swift labour market inclusion of the FSU Greeks of productive age, with some (low) additional costs for professional retraining where necessary. However, the reported mean unemployment rate (across all population age groups in both sexes) was over three times higher than the official unemployment rates for Greece. Although it is too early to draw definite conclusions, it seems that migration resulted in significant downward economic mobility for FSU Greeks.

How does the socio-economic position of FSU Greeks compare to that of other immigrants? Restricting our focus to the city of Thessaloniki and using data from the 2001 census, the Albanian immigrant population provides an interesting point of comparison. The two immigrants groups started arriving in Greece approximately at the same period, both emigrated from former command economy countries, their numbers in the city are comparable,[86] while together they constitute more than half of the total immigrant population. Of course there are significant differences, of which the most prominent are the privileged status of the FSU Greeks and the positive framing of their migration in media and political discourse. Their favourable reception is in sharp contrast to the institutional exclusion and stigmatization with which Albanian immigrants were faced. It is logical to expect that FSU Greeks would have attained a better socio-economic position, an assumption that is further supported by the differences in

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[86] My analysis here draws on earlier work presented in (Labrianidis, et al., 2008). This includes the estimation of the number of FSU Greeks as Greek citizens born in the countries of the former Soviet Union. This methodology underestimates the total FSU Greek population as it does not include those who had not naturalized by March 2001 nor their children born in Greece. The data presented are thus susceptible to this bias. Moreover it should be noted that the Albanian population includes a minority of immigrants of Greek descent.

the education levels of the two groups. Education levels appear to be higher among FSU Greeks in comparison both to Albanians and also to the indigenous population. Among FSU Greeks, 9.2% have not completed primary education, as compared to 12.7% for local Greeks and 14% for Albanians. As for higher education, 19% of FSU Greeks have had a university education, as compared to 18.7% among the local population and 7.6 among the Albanian immigrants.[87]

However, for both immigrant groups their education level is not translated into a labour market position that matches their qualifications. The work that migrants do in Greece is mainly manual, physically demanding, often of a servile character, and, for the majority, in low-skilled positions unrelated to their educational attainments (Cavounides, 2006). While immigrants constitute no more than 11% of the Greater Thessaloniki population, they represent about 30% of the labour force working in unskilled jobs, nearly one third of whom are FSU Greeks. FSU Greeks have a slightly higher share of employers and the self-employed in comparison to Albanians; a small minority of self-employed FSU Greeks have even achieved high-income earnings by means of entrepreneurial and transnational economics. Yet the vast majority of the working population of FSU Greeks (88%) are wage earners just like Albanians and other immigrants in the city. Moreover, the unemployment rate is significantly higher for FSU Greeks than Albanians, whose employment figures are comparable to those of native Greeks.[88]

For FSU Greeks, immigration and resettlement entailed coming to occupy the lowest position in the labour market together with other immigrants. This was a substantial declassing and deskilling experience. Their case is particularly striking not only because of their high qualifications but also in the light of their privileged reception. The weak state institutions may have proved incapable of coordinating and implementing the plans successfully, yet the difference in terms of access to rights and benefits between them and non-Greek immigrant groups who arrived as undocumented migrants in the same period remains substantial. It seems that non-transferability of human capital, discrimination in the labour market, and inadequate language skills have blocked the social mobility of FSU Greeks to an equal measure with other immigrants. The oversupply in low-skilled

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[87] A large number of the Albanian population has completed some form of technical/professional education.

[88] The fact that access to unemployment benefit is provided to FSU Greeks due to their citizenship rights cannot account for this difference. Unemployment allowances are provided only for those who are able to prove they have legal work and many FSU Greeks were working informally. Moreover, they are offered for a limited period and are in any case not enough for someone to support his/her living.

jobs during the 1990s and 2000s resulted in a new division of the labour, with the migrants partly replacing the indigenous lower strata.

In 2001 the overall privileged situation of FSU Greeks was reflected only in housing. FSU Greeks were recorded having considerably higher rates of homeownership compared to Albanians. Acquiring their own house was a central strategy for FSU Greeks. It attested symbolically their establishment in the ethnic homeland and provided them security in the face of job instability and insecurity. Eventually, the majority of FSU Greeks managed to acquire their own housing, similarly to most native Greeks. In this domain the role of the state did appear crucial. It turned a blind eye to the processes of unauthorized construction that took place from the early years of migration (see chapter 5.2), and issued state funded housing loans through the 2790/2000 law.

The 2790/2000 law was supposed to set the legal and institutional framework for the incorporation of FSU Greeks in all domains of society. However, in practice most emphasis was placed on housing. With the law, the coordination of the settlement and the management of social incorporation of FSU Greeks was passed to the Ministry of Interior, Public Administration and Decentralization. Two years later the General Secretariat and the National Foundation were abolished. Greek state policies continued prioritizing housing schemes due to its inability to provide any substantial help in the labour market.

The limited success of the rural settlement policy and the ongoing clustering of FSU Greeks in the big urban centres forced the state authorities to change their policy approach. A 'zoning' programme was implemented, dividing the country into four regions. The new scheme attempted to channel FSU Greeks into the more scarcely populated and less dynamic regions through the prescription of economic incentives. The aim was decentralization, rather than exclusively settlement in the north-eastern border areas which was promoted by earlier policy measures. In zone A, which included Thrace, Eastern Macedonia, but also the islands of the Northern Aegean, the privileges remained as before. Subsidised housing loans were also given in the other zones, but the state subsidy decreased progressively and was minimal for zone D, which encompassed the big urban centres of the country. The zoning system again proved insufficient to prevent the concentration of FSU Greeks in Athens and Thessaloniki. The majority of repatriates preferred to settle or remain in one of the two big cities. There (Zone D), every family was entitled to a housing loan of 60,000 euros with an interest rate that was subsidized up to 40%. Those loans were prescribed for a four year period (2001-2005), and were extensively utilized by those FSU Greeks who had not yet managed to solve the issue of their housing.

Besides the prescription of the housing loans schemes, the 2000 law marked a new phase in the legal inclusion of FSU Greeks. The so-called *homogenís* identity card was introduced with the aim of countering the felt problem of extended illegality among FSU Greeks. In essence it formalized a practice that had already been unofficially implemented by the General Secretariat with the distribution of a 'certification of Greekness'. The new document, tantamount to semi-citizenship, provides all but voting rights. It is issued to those who do not wish to acquire Greek citizenship in order not to lose their existing rights, or to those who need an intermediate document before the acquisition of citizenship.

Major changes were also implemented in terms of citizenship acquisition. On the one hand, in accordance with the new conceptualization of its diaspora[89] and due to the failure of the resettlement plan, it was no longer a policy goal to encourage FSU Greek migration. On the other hand, not much was done to restrict immigration. As already mentioned, the General Secretariat continued to conceive of the repatriation of FSU Greeks as a way to solve the demographic problems of the country. It was only in 1996, with the establishment of the Centre for the Study and Development of the Hellenic Culture of the Black Sea, that the new policy towards the diaspora started being pursued. In this vein, the 2000 law introduced the provision of citizenship without the prerequisite of settlement in the country. During the press conference where the law was presented, the president of the parliamentary committee of Greeks abroad explained the aims of the measure as follows (Niotis, 1999):

> Until presently the attribution of citizenship was only possible through repatriation. It was like the fatherland was urging them to abandon their home to come to Greece in order to be provided with the self-evident, the recognition as Greeks equal under the constitution... This [the new mode of citizenship acquisition] is a big change because the reasons why Greeks from the Black Sea have been emigrating, which resulted in the diminishing of their presence in an area of vital importance for Greece and Europe, has been poverty, the collapse of the former Soviet Union states and the insecurity that those Greeks have felt fearing that something may happen in their unstable sociopolitical environment confining them there once more. Providing them the Greek citizenship and the ability to work freely in Greece, the Greek state frees them from the insecurity nexus, incorporates them in the national corpus and supports the continuation of their life there, if this is what they aspire to.

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[89] This new conceptualization, first proclaimed in 1994, prescribed that Diaspora Greeks abroad could better serve the multiple economic and political interests of the state from abroad.

Illegal hellenizations and the FSU Greek vote

In no case has the Greek state gone so far as to set admission quotas or enforce any other active measures, such as language tests in the migrants' areas of origin, to contain the migration of FSU Greeks. Moreover, no legal framework anticipates a future equalizing of the legal status of potential FSU Greek immigrants with that of other immigrants. Such measures were pursued in Germany, where a complete reconsideration of the policy towards the co-ethnic migration from the former Soviet Union took place (Hess, 2008; Joppke, 2005). In Greece, the privileged admission of FSU Greeks has never been questioned. FSU Greeks are still welcome to come to the fatherland 'if they aspire to'. Sustaining strong ties with the diaspora remains a prime state goal.

However, citizenship acquisition under the new law did not become as easy as may be inferred from the above quotation; in practice it became more difficult. Stricter regulations and checks on the certification of documents that prove the applicant's Greek descent were implemented and formalized. Furthermore, the possession of 'Greek consciousness' was introduced as an extra pre-requisite in the determination of Greekness, and thus in the attribution of citizenship rights. Special committees are charged with the task of examining not only the descent of the applicant but also their Greek identity.[90] Officially, those measures were not supposed to pose obstacles to the attribution of citizenship to FSU Greeks, but were undertaken to curb immigration of non-Greek migrants and the prevention of attribution of citizenship to 'false co-ethnics'.

After the mid 1990s, information about a restricted number of cases of so-called illegal Hellenization (παράνομες ελληνοποιήσεις), i.e. the attribution of citizenship to 'false Greeks', hit the media. These claims contributed to the reconsideration of whether the repatriation process was unassailable, and the gradual application of more strict checks on the documents presented by the applicants for the citizenship verification process. According to the president of the parliamentary committee of Greeks abroad, during the 1990s, 440 decisions for citizenship attribution were recalled due to forged or lacking documents. This number also includes people of 'real Greek' descent who had not managed to acquire the necessary documentation or had done so through illegal means (Niotis, 2001).

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[90] No in-depth research has yet been carried out on how 'national consciousness' is actually assessed and what weight should be attached to tests for the attribution of citizenship. Voutira (2004) provides evidence of participants' having very different experiences. This possibly mirrors the inability of the state to set transparent criteria through which to assess something which is as vague, subjective. and arbitrary as 'national consciousness'.

After 2000, however, the scale of the phenomenon attained completely different proportions in the press and public discourse, and the issue acquired the dimensions of a major political scandal. In the 2000 elections, the political party PASOK (Πανελλήνιο Σοσιαλιστικό κόμμα) retained power with an extremely thin margin over the New Democracy party (Νέα Δημοκρατία).[91] On the 12th April, three days after the national election, the headlines of national papers affiliated to the latter party, such as *Adesmeftos Press* and *Vradini*, made reference to suspicions of adulteration after accusations of thousands of illegal Hellenizations. According to information that circulated through official and unofficial sources, a large number of non-Greek people had acquired Greek citizenship without being entitled, and on top of that people had been transferred from the former Soviet Union to vote.

A state attorney was authorized to carry out an investigation into irregularities in the process of citizenship verification and look into the political responsibilities behind these processes. The inquiry resulted in a rather confusing document presenting information about legal and practical insufficiencies but failing to provide any figures as to the extent of the phenomenon. No evidence of election adulteration was provided, and this was officially accepted by all opposition parties. The New Democracy party, although clarifying that they reject any accusations of election adulteration, suggested that a parliamentary committee be convened to look into the issue of illegal Hellenizations. According to the then president of the party, this was proposed 'as a means for improvement of state institutions rather than as an assessment of political liability'. The proposal was rejected twice and since then the issue has officially been considered closed.

What did happen in the 2000 elections was that the majority of FSU Greeks voted for PASOK, the party that had just introduced the new law on repatriation. Since the election results were determined by a marginal 72,400 vote difference, in the perception of several native Greeks PASOK had won the elections because of the 'FSU Greek vote'.[92] Moreover, a number of FSU Greeks with Greek passports living in Cyprus were indeed subsidized to come to vote in the elections. Although this has been a common practice for the two major political parties,[93] it was most probably the first time that they had appealed to this segment of the Greek diaspora. From that point onwards the 'FSU Greek vote'

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[91] After the fall of the military junta of 1967–1974 and until the eruption of the financial crisis in 2009, the Greek political system was characterized by the absolute dominance of those two parties that alternated one another.

[92] The provisions for the distribution of housing loans were very positively received by FSU Greek community as a way to solve their housing problems.

[93] Expatriates are given cheap or free round tickets to Greece to come and vote in elections provided that they enrol in the party associations.

became a field of fierce political competition between the two major political parties. Before the elections a 'siege of the Russo-Pontics' took place (To Vima, 2007). Returning to the quotation from the managing director of the National Foundation, the cherished 'unanimous support from all political parties' was also partly challenged. The moral right of the state to provide support to Greeks returning home was indeed not questioned. However, the incorporation of FSU Greeks became a field of opportunistic political contestation aimed at the repatriate vote. Both political parties promised subsidized projects, positive action, foundation of schools and nursing homes, and so on, only to forget them, and only remember them at the time of the next election campaign.

Yet what about 'the widespread acceptance of the Pontians by the other Greeks in our society'? Being the main focus of this book, this issue will be extensively discussed in the following chapters in relation to the findings of my ethnographic research in Nikopoli.