

EUROPEAN MONITORING CENTRE ON RACISM AND XENOPHOBIA
OBSERVATOIRE EUROPÉEN DES PHÉNOMÈNES RACISTES ET XÉNOPHOBES
EUROPÄISCHE STELLE ZUR BEOBACHTUNG VON RASSISMUS UND FREMDENFEINDLICHKEIT



Anti-Islamic reactions in the EU
after the terrorist acts against the USA

**A collection of country reports from RAXEN
National Focal Points (NFPs)**

12th September to 31st December 2001

GREECE

**Information Centre for Racism, Ecology, Peace and Non-Violence
(Infocenter)**

Following the terror attacks in the USA on 11th September the EUMC found that there was a pressing need to closely follow the possible negative repercussions on racial and xenophobic attitudes and events in civil societies in Europe. On the basis of national reports drafted by its RAXEN network of National Focal Points (NFPs), the EUMC produced a first short-term report on anti-Islamic reactions in all countries of the European Union on 9th October 2001.

In order to have a longer term and regular monitoring on attitudes/incidents towards Muslim/Islamic communities and other vulnerable groups, the EUMC decided to follow up the first report and continue to closely monitor the situation at least until the end of the year 2001.

It therefore asked the RAXEN NFPs to produce additional reports, monitoring the situation on a monthly basis until the end of the year; in addition, it asked for a final report analysing the overall developments from 11th September to 31st December 2001.

According to the EUMC request, the reports have addressed in particular the following issues:

- acts of violence or aggression and changes in the attitude of the EU population towards ethnic, cultural or religious minorities (especially Muslim/Islamic communities but also other vulnerable groups or new types of victims), related to the recent terrorist attacks in the USA;
- good practices and positive case studies established in order to reduce prejudice and violence;
- reactions by politicians and other opinion leaders including initiatives to reduce polarization and counteract negative national trends.

In addition to the summary report written on behalf of the EUMC by Prof. Nielsen and Mr. Allen of the University of Birmingham, the following pages contain the original reports submitted by each NFP for the whole period.

Not all reports have been made available from all countries, but the coverage is however complete. The reports are quite varying in size. It should be considered that the Member States have different systems in collecting data: some have implemented a rather elaborated and comprehensive approach, while others have done what they could to get information about the situation in the Member State.

The task of the RAXEN network is to collect reliable and comparable data (including examples of and models for “good practices”) at the European level on the phenomena of racism, xenophobia and anti-Semitism in order to help the EU and its Member States to take measures or formulate courses of action. For further information please visit the EUMC homepage <http://eumc.eu.int>

Vienna, 23 May 2002

PREFACE

After the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in New York we were asked by the EUMC to report on the situation concerning the Islamic communities in Greece. At the time there was widespread concern that the attack, which had obvious religious undertones as the prime suspects were from the start identified as “Islamic fundamentalists”, would provoke negative or even violent responses from organised groups or members of the general public.

The INFOCENTER responded with three reports on September 20, October 19 and November 23. Each report was more extensive and analytical than the previous; as there was more time to appraise the situation. However, since the end of the Afghanistan war and the defeat of the Taliban Islamic fundamentalists, the terrorist issue is no longer affecting public attitudes. Thus, since there are no new developments to report since November 23 on we will present the previous reports, summarise and elaborate on their findings. The presentation of the monthly reports does not contain the references that were in the endnotes; for those please refer to the actual monthly reports.

A. REPORT No 1 – 20th September 2001

1. Have there been any verbal attacks against the Muslim/Islamic community in the media, in the public discourse, in politics?

There have been no direct verbal attacks against either the indigenous or the migrant Muslim communities in Greece.

The recent terrorist attacks against the USA have had mixed effects upon political attitudes in Greece and it is very difficult to provide a complete picture at this stage. On the one hand anti-American sentiments affecting mostly the 30+ age group seem to prevail over anti-Muslim sentiments. On the other hand the younger generation will probably be more likely to develop anti-Muslim sentiments.

The Muslim community in Greece is composed of two distinct groups:

- A. The indigenous Muslim community in Northern Greece (Region of Thrace) and the islands of Rhodes and Kos.
- B. Muslim immigrants (mostly unregistered) and asylum seekers coming mainly from Albania, Turkey (Kurds), Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iraq and Iran.

These are some of the arguments that have appeared in the public discourse these days:

→ Right ultra nationalists argue that there is evidence of an “Islamic alliance” stretching from the Middle East to Europe that uses indigenous and migrant Muslims as a “Trojan horse” in order to undermine the dominant Christian European culture. They make no distinction between Islamic fundamentalists and ordinary Muslims and argue for the need of “homogenous” European societies in both racial as well as cultural and religious terms

suggesting that Muslims should be repatriated or -in the case of the local Muslim minority- be kept under surveillance and strict state control.

After the latest terrorist incident in the USA they appear daily on chat shows in TV stations: the USA terrorist acts are cited as proof of a wider “plot” by “Islam” to undermine global political stability and suggest that it should be viewed as a general threat especially by European Christian states. They strongly support a military response from the West and although they do not directly advocate any specific action against Muslims in Greece their rhetoric underlines continuously the “otherness“ of Muslims inciting islamophobia, xenophobia and racial hatred.

→ Left ultra nationalists have traditionally argued that Islamic fundamentalist movements are used by the USA to further its imperialist aims. As evidence they point to American support for (Muslim and “conservative”) Bosnians, Kossovar and Macedonian Albanians during the Yugoslav conflicts (Bosnia, Kossovo, Macedonia) against the (Christian and “socialist”) Serbs.

After the latest terrorist incident in the USA they also appear daily on chat shows in TV stations: They usually put forward conspiratorial theories suggesting that terrorist attacks are part of an imperialist plot and terrorists “agent provocateurs” of the US secret services who have lost control over them. Their fervent anti-Americanism has put them in a difficult position and both their arguments as well as their rhetoric are very weak. Nevertheless their rhetoric also incites islamophobia, xenophobia and racial hatred since they make no distinction between Muslims and Islamic fundamentalists.

The government has made repeated statements carefully distinguishing between Islam and Muslims on the one hand and terrorism on the other roughly on the same lines as the Americans.

2. Have any physical attacks (harassment, verbal abuse, violent acts, etc.) against members of the Muslim/Islamic community been reported (in the media or by human right/anti-discrimination NGOs)?

Not for the moment.

3. In your opinion does it mean an increase or a change of attitudes towards Islamic community and can it be attributed as a reaction after the terrorist attacks in the USA?

In our view anti-Muslim attitudes may show a significant increase in the near future especially among younger people. The terrorist attacks will certainly contribute to this especially as there are several Greek Americans among the victims. Political developments in the Balkans will also influence strongly the formation of public attitudes. However, any military action against Muslim countries that would result in heavy casualties among non-combatants will probably give rise to anti-American sentiments.

B. REPORT No 2 – 19th October 2001

1.1 Acts of violence or aggression and changes in the attitude of the Greek population towards ethnic, cultural, or religious minorities, especially Muslim/Islamic communities but also other vulnerable groups

There have been no reports of direct acts of violence or aggression against either the indigenous or the migrant Muslim communities in Greece.

The Greek police in response to a request by the FBI and Interpol have recently raided a number of unofficial Mosques in Athens in search of several hundred Muslims assumed to reside in Greece (Newspaper Sunday Eleftherotypia 14/10/2001, http://www.enet.gr/online/online_p1_text.jsp?dt=14/10/2001&c=112&id=59545). No mistreatment of any individuals was reported, but NGOs have claimed that such actions may create a climate of mistrust.

1.2 Changes in the attitude of the Greek population towards ethnic, cultural, or religious minorities, especially Muslim/Islamic communities but also other vulnerable groups

The recent terrorist attacks against the USA have had mixed and contradictory effects upon political attitudes in Greece. As we indicated in our previous report there are now more anti-American incidents (anti-war demonstrations, burning of American flags, etc.), rather than anti-Muslim, although this may change in the future depending mainly on political developments in the Balkans.

Racist views and discourses do not necessarily take the form of open verbal attacks. The same message “Foreigners out” – “Ausländer Raus” that could under certain conditions constitute in itself a criminal act in Greece (Article 1 of the 927/1979 Act of Parliament that defines any public incitement to acts that could cause any discrimination against persons or groups because of their race, national origin, or religion a criminal act), can easily be disguised as an “analysis” of the consequences of the presence of immigrants and minorities in Greek society, like the threat they are supposed to be for public safety, unemployment, etc without this act considered as criminal or politically condemnable.

Since the terrorist attacks nationalists began appearing more frequently on television commenting on the “aggressive and violent nature” of Islam and interpreting “Muslim behaviour” in this light. They see terrorism as a “natural” ingredient of the Muslim religion and warn of the “threat” to Greece constituted by the existence of the Muslim minority and what they define as separatist activities (free exercise of religious and cultural rights).

The government, the Greek Parliament, politicians and opinion leaders have made repeated statements condemning terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism, but also carefully distinguishing between Islam and terrorism.

Also, it should be noted that a small section of the press published anti-Semitic articles concerning the rumour that Jews were not among the victims of the New York terrorist attacks (for instance the leading article of the newspaper Hora (18/09/2001). The ultra nationalist party LAOS launched a combined anti-Muslim and anti-Semitic campaign through its TV station (TV-Asty) that was echoed by the newspaper Hora. The effect of this campaign cannot be considered politically significant.

2. Good practices and positive case studies established in order to reduce prejudice and violence

There have been no such examples yet. The INFOCENTER is at the moment preparing the publication of a leaflet explaining Islamic religion and culture for primary and secondary schools. The Network of Social Support to Migrants and Refugees is also planning a similar campaign.

3. Reactions by politicians and other opinion leaders including initiatives to reduce polarization and counteract negative national trends

Politicians and opinion leaders from all political parties condemned the terrorist incidents without reservation.

A significant number of influential politicians, however, also declared their sympathy with the Arab world and dissociated terrorism from the national liberation struggles of people like the Palestinians.

1. The Foreign Minister of Greece Mr. George Papandreou met with the Ecumenical Patriarch Vartholomeus in Istanbul to discuss the organisation of an international summit meeting of all religious leaders in 2002 under the auspices of the European Union. This proposal has already been discussed with Israeli Foreign Minister Mr. Perez, the Palestinian leader Mr. Arafat, the Russian Foreign Minister Mr. Ivanov and the President of the European Commission Mr. Prodi. The objective of this meeting will be to develop a climate of mutual understanding between mainly Islam and Christianity. Archbishop Christodoulos, head of the Church of Greece, announced a similar initiative proposing a meeting in Athens of various Muslim, Christian and Jewish representatives.

2. The Archbishop of the Church of Greece Christodoulos in a recent speech claimed that we should not confuse Islam with terrorism: "This terrorism is not the true image of Islam. We must not develop hate even suspicion against the Muslim world who are moderate peace loving people." The Archbishop warned of the terrible risks of extremism involved in considering Muslims collectively responsible for the acts of a few terrorists. Collective responsibility he said is a terrible concept that historically has led to the perpetration of crimes.

3. Many prominent members of the Muslim Community in Greece like the Muftis, Minority Members of the Greek Parliament, and representatives of Muslim minority groups and organisations have made public statements condemning terrorism and disassociating terrorist activity as well as Islamic fundamentalism from the Muslim faith. The Mufti of the city of Komotini in Thrace in an extended interview that was published in all national newspapers criticised openly Islamic fundamentalism and condemned terrorism, which he characterised as a crime against humanity, but also any form of war and aggression. He argued that Al Kaida is conducting "kital" (an unjust war of destruction) and not "jihad". The Chairman of the Muslim Organisation of Alexandroupoli, a city in Thrace with a sizable Muslim minority, in recent statements openly condemned both terrorism as well as those states that use the Koran against the interests of their own people. He added that the Muslim community in Greece lives in friendship and peace with Christians. Hassan Patsaman, publisher of the Muslim religious periodical "Invitation to Justice" also condemned terrorism, but was also critical of the USA indiscriminate bombings that result in the deaths of innocent civilians.

Abdullah Dede, publisher of the newspaper “Trakianin Sesi” also condemned terrorism, but also questions the bombings against innocent civilians.

4. Muslim Members of the Greek Parliament issued statements condemning terrorism and accusing the Al Kaida organisation of mass murder.

5. The ultra nationalist party “Greek Front” has issued posters warning of the danger of Muslims in Greece being terrorists and citing “statements” (taken totally out of context) by the representative of the Pakistani Migrants in Greece attempted to incite racial hatred and fear. According to this poster thousands of Muslim migrants constitute a security threat, as they are possible terrorists and should be incarcerated and deported immediately.

C. REPORT No 3 – 23rd November 2001

INTRODUCTION

In Greece the most important effects of the September 11 terrorist attacks and the ensuing war in Afghanistan do not seem to have led to anti-Islamic or anti-Muslim reactions, but rather, as we had already indicated in our previous reports, to the development of strong anti-American public sentiments. These do not indicate a “pro-Islamic” stance.

In Greece, throughout October, instead of demonstrations of solidarity with the USA – “Standing against terror - standing with the USA” – such as those that took place in various European cities, a series of anti-American and anti-war demonstrations were staged in Athens, Thessalonica and other Greek cities organised by the parliamentary and extra parliamentary left, trade union federations and some local authorities. Although the demonstrations were not massive, estimated participation ranging from 2.500 to 10.000, they were attended by important national and international personalities, such as Mikis Theodorakis and consequently received extensive media coverage. Opposition to the war in Afghanistan was also linked to strong opposition to the stricter legislative and other measures taken or planned by the Greek government and the EU to combat terrorism.

As the war developed the number of Afghan refugees and other migrants entering Greece illegally through its sea border with Turkey increased. This led to the development of positive public sentiments of compassion for the plight of refugees, a cautiously xenophobic rhetoric on the part of the right wing main opposition party New Democracy and government measures designed on the one hand to provide humanitarian aid to refugees and migrants on the other hand to develop means that will effectively block their entry into Greece.

1.1 Acts of violence or aggression against ethnic, cultural, or religious minorities, especially Muslim/Islamic communities, but also other vulnerable groups as a result directly or indirectly of the terrorist attacks

There have been no reports of acts of physical violence or aggression against either the indigenous or the migrant Muslim communities in Greece.

Two relatively small TV stations (“Extra” and “Tileasty” (former Telecity) that attract low audience ratings continued to air long chat shows that disseminate a populist version of mixed anti-American, nationalist, anti-Islamic and racist discourse. It must be noted that on

these chat shows “Extra” channel occasionally hosts also representatives of migrant or anti-racist organisations in panels otherwise dominated by supporters of racist views.

A serious act of violence was committed allegedly against US interests in Greece. Specifically a bomb exploded next to the American Express Bank in a shopping center in mid afternoon. There were no casualties; a women in a nearby school bus sustained minor injuries. The incident was not highlighted in the media.

1.2 Changes in the attitude of the Greek population towards ethnic, cultural, or religious minorities, especially Muslim/Islamic communities, but also other vulnerable groups

1.2.1. Political discourse, media treatment and public attitudes - general

From the end of September until today mainstream media and consequently political discourse has focused and revolved around the question of the consequences of the war in Afghanistan and the “war against terrorism” in general. The key issues that were highlighted in several broadcasts and articles were:

1. The underlying causes of terrorism (desperation of social groups in economically underdeveloped regions that suffer from perpetual armed conflict, e.g. Palestine, Sudan, Somalia, Eritrea, Afghanistan, etc)
2. The effects of the war in Afghanistan (global political instability, environmental consequences, collateral damages and victims, refugees, etc.)
3. The effects of the new legislative and other measures and instruments against terrorism on the democratic and civil liberties in Europe.

1.2.2. Anti Islamic reactions

The limited anti – Islamic discourse that continued to appear in the media addresses nationalist rather than religious, cultural or social issues. Muslims in neighbouring countries (Albania, Bosnia and FYROM) are targeted; they are presented in certain media discourses as a possible “security threat” through their alleged association with international terrorism. In a number of broadcasts and articles it was claimed that terrorist organisations had infiltrated and effectively controlled the UCK Albanian paramilitary organisation that was active first in Kosovo and later in the FYR of Macedonia. In a similar spirit further implicit or explicit allegations were made concerning the possibility of terrorist agents operating freely in these neighbouring republics.

1.2.3. Reactions concerning migrants and refugees

The rising number of refugees and migrants that can at least partly be attributed to the war in Afghanistan has influenced strongly the political debate concerning illegal migration and has also led the government to take three specific initiatives.

The first initiative concerns the development of three Reception Plans according to which migrants and refugees will be given humanitarian aid (food, shelter and medical attention) pending a hearing that will determine their status as asylum seekers or their deportation as “illegal migrants”.

The second initiative concerns a proposal by the Greek government that is on the agenda of the December 2001 EU Summit to establish a European Monitoring Centre of Migration based in Greece that will be mandated to monitor migration and propose effective policies for its management. During the same Summit the Greek Prime Minister is expected

to ask the Member States to formulate a common effective EU policy for the management of the migrant flow. Furthermore, the government is planning to seek urgent EU financial assistance in an attempt to block the continuing refugee and immigrant influx from Turkey. According to the European Council Directive 2001/55/EC “when the number of those who are eligible for temporary protection following a sudden and massive influx exceeds the reception capacity... the council shall, as a matter of urgency, examine the situation and take appropriate action, including recommending additional support for member states affected promoting a balance of efforts between member states in receiving such persons and bearing the consequences thereof.”

The third initiative concerns the strengthening of border security and improved cooperation with neighbouring countries. Specifically the Greek government signed on November 6 2001, a Protocol with Turkey that will allow both countries with a 14 day notification to accept readmission to the respective country of the persons that have entered it illegally. Human rights NGOs have been highly critical of this Protocol which they claim will allow the deportation of political refugees from Turkey especially Kurds before their asylum application has been examined by the authorities. Foreign Minister George Papandreou estimated that millions of Afghans, Iraqis and Pakistanis will eventually make their way to Europe in the next few years.

According to evidence provided by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees there are almost 15.000 Afghan refugees on the Turkish coast waiting to cross the sea to the Greek islands. On a daily basis 70 – 80 refugees arrive by any means on Greek islands. The Greek Council for Refugees and other NGOs have repeatedly stated that they have no more resources to accommodate the increasing numbers of refugees. They have also accused Greek police and port-police authorities of refusing to allow refugees to apply for asylum in violation of the 1951 Geneva Convention, ratified by Greece in 1959.

2. Good practices and positive case studies established in order to reduce prejudice and violence

The initiative of the Greek Foreign Minister Mr. G. Papandreou and the Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarchate concerning the organisation of a extraordinary summit between Christian, Muslim and Jewish senior religious officials has been favourably received and a summit meeting will be held on December 19 – 20 in Brussels under the aegis of the European Union and Commission President Romano Prodi to discuss the problems of global poverty and inequality. While ongoing contacts will determine both the participants and the final agenda of the conference, there have been positive responses from Cardinal Walter Kasper, of the Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity at the Vatican, and the Cardinal of Vienna. Rome's Catholic community of Sant' Egideo, known for their own religious conferences, will attend. Contacts with Protestants will be made through the World Council of Churches, and the Archbishop of Canterbury has also been informed. Rabbis from France, Eastern Europe, Israel and American Rabbi Arthur Schneier, founder of the Appeal of Conscience Foundation, are expected to attend. On the Muslim side, the Grand Mufti of Syria, Sheikh Ahmad Kuftaro, is the first major religious figure expected to attend the Brussels conference. Metropolitan Emmanuel of Rhigion, the patriarchate's liaison to the European Union who since September has undertaken interfaith dialogue issues, has travelled with Greek Foreign Minister G. Papandreou to Pakistan, India and Iran for talks with regional religious leaders.

The latest incident of migrant and refugee trafficking involved a Turkish ship carrying 714 migrants and refugees from Kurdistan and Afghanistan destined for Italy that was forced

to dock in the Greek island of Zante due to bad weather conditions. The atrocious conditions on the boat and the plight of the people on it attracted the full attention of the media for a number of days. The international and national media acclaimed the hospitable behaviour of the local population led by the Mayor, Prefect and Bishop, while an isolated alleged racist incident by a member of the port-police led to a nationwide public outcry.

The INFOCENTER in cooperation with the Greek Council for Refugees has prepared a nationwide awareness and fundraising campaign in schools that will begin on December 10, anniversary of the UN Declaration of Human Rights.

The UN High Commission for Refugees is also carrying out a nationwide fundraising and informative campaign on Afghan refugees.

The political party “Coalition of the Left and Progress” announced that it would symbolically adopt a refugee family from Afghanistan from those that have arrived illegally in Greece by sea from Turkey. The leader of the party Mr. N. Kostantopoulos congratulated the local authorities and the people of Zante for setting an example of compassion and humanity.

3. Reactions by politicians and other opinion leaders including initiatives to reduce polarization and counteract negative national trends.

The reactions by politicians and other opinion leaders have been examined in the previous sections.

A small number of influential politicians both from the right and the left have in the past two weeks made repeated statements criticising “populist anti-Americanism”.

FINAL SUMMARY – September – December 2001

1.1 Acts of violence or aggression towards ethnic, cultural, or religious minorities, especially Muslim/Islamic communities but also other vulnerable groups

There were no acts of violence or aggression reported by any NGO or minority or migrant organisation on any members of the Muslim community in Greece throughout this period.

1.2 Changes in the attitude of the Greek population towards ethnic, cultural, or religious minorities, especially Muslim/Islamic communities, but also other vulnerable groups

A limited anti-Islamic discourse continued to appear in the media addressing nationalist rather than religious, cultural or social issues and targeting Muslims in neighbouring countries (Albania, Bosnia and FYROM) as a possible “security threat” through their alleged association with international terrorism. There is no evidence of this rhetoric affecting the attitudes and behaviour of the Greek population towards Albanian or other Muslim migrants living in Greece, but such a possibility cannot be ruled out for the future.

At any rate leading members of both the indigenous and the migrants Muslim communities were quick to condemn the September 11 terrorist attacks against the US, to stress that such acts are contrary to the Koran and the teachings of Islam and to pledge their support to the government in its decision to stand by the anti-terrorist alliance.

2. Good practices and positive case studies established in order to reduce prejudice and violence

The Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarchate organised under the aegis of the European Union and Commission President Romano Prodi an extraordinary summit meeting between 83 Christian, Muslim and Jewish senior religious officials on December 19 – 20 in Brussels to discuss the terrorist incidents and reaffirm their opposition to terrorism and determination to fight against it.

The INFOCENTER in cooperation with the Union of Teachers in Private Education and the Greek Council for Refugees continues a nationwide awareness raising and fundraising campaign in schools that started on December 10, anniversary of the UN Declaration of Human Rights.

The UN High Commission for Refugees is also carrying out a nationwide fundraising and informative campaign on Afghan refugees.

The political party “Coalition of the Left and Progress” announced that it would symbolically adopt a refugee family from Afghanistan from those that have arrived illegally in Greece by sea from Turkey. The leader of the party Mr. N. Kostantopoulos congratulated the local authorities and the people of Zante for setting an example of compassion and humanity.

3. Reactions by politicians and other opinion leaders including initiatives to reduce polarization and counteract negative national trends

The reactions by politicians and other opinion leaders have been examined in the previous sections. Summarising we may conclude that opinion leaders have on the whole been careful in distinguishing between religious and political activity, thus separating terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism from the mainstream religious traditions of Islam. Their influence has been instrumental in preserving a positive climate towards Muslims in Greece.