

# THE GREEK CONNECTION(S) *THE SOCIAL ORGANISATION OF THE CIGARETTE SMUGGLING BUSINESS IN GREECE*

## **Abstract**

Despite the fact that cigarette smuggling has a long history in specific contexts it has only relatively recently received some media attention in Greece. It is now suggested that contraband cigarettes represent 8% of the total cigarette consumption in the country, and that the cigarette smuggling business deprives the Greek state of millions in taxes. The purpose of this article, which draws on a variety of data sources and builds upon a previous study of a cigarette smuggling network in Greece, is to provide an account of the social organisation of the cigarette black market in Greece.

## **Introduction**

Cigarette smuggling has recently received increased attention despite the fact that it has a long history in specific contexts (e.g. Italy, see von Lampe, 2005a; Spain, see Torres, 2005). It has been linked with and discussed in relation to other criminal activities, terrorism (Coker, 2003), health (Joossens *et al.*, 2000) and finance. It is estimated that smuggled cigarettes account for 6-8.5% of the total cigarette consumption (Shafey *et al.*, 2002), and that for every truckload of cigarettes smuggled into the EU US\$ 1,2 million in taxes are lost (Campbell, 2004). According to experts on the topic such as Joossens (1999) and von Lampe (2005a; 2006), there are basically three ways of smuggling cigarettes: a) *bootlegging*: buying an amount of cigarettes that exceeds custom regulations. We do not know the exact share of bootlegging in the total smuggling business but, as Joossens *et al.* (1992) suggest, it accounts for a relatively small one. b) *Large-scale smuggling*, and c) *counterfeiting* (Joossens, 1999; von Lampe, 2005a).

The smuggling of tobacco and cigarettes has deep historical roots in the Greek context as the Thessaloniki-Marseilles route was one of the main sea routes for the smuggling of Bulgarian tobacco into Western Europe at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Hozic, 2004). Despite the above however, mild concerns about cigarette smuggling were

expressed only in the beginning of the 1990s, when cigarettes were smuggled into Greece from Albania, and serious ones in 1995, when the first truckloads of contraband cigarettes were intercepted at the Customs of Promahonas on the Greek-Bulgarian border. According to the Greek Minister of Finance and Economics, cigarette smuggling constitutes one of the reasons for the reduction in the state's income in 2005 (Hatzinikolaou, 2005). The evaded taxes from cigarettes seized by the Hellenic Coast Guard only from 1998 to 2004 reach EURO 107,948,634.42 (Hellenic Coast Guard, 2005). In contrast to official accounts that "Greece mainly constitutes a transit and not the destination country for smuggled cigarettes" (MPO, 2005: 19; MPO, 2006) evidence suggests that Greece is a source, transit *and* destination country for smuggled cigarettes.

There are a number of reasons why Greece is an interesting context for the study of cigarette smuggling. Firstly, Greece is the top smoking country worldwide in terms of *per capita* cigarette consumption (Global Link, 2004), and the country with the highest percentage of heavy smokers among the smoking population reaching 17% (BASP, 1994 cited in European Communities & WHO, 1998: 27). Secondly, the country is one of the biggest tobacco producers in the world (Onder, 2002). Thirdly, Greece is a country where cigarette consumption does not appear to be affected by cigarettes prices. For instance, although cigarette prices went up from 1 January 1997, cigarette consumption increased by 2% in 1997 compared to 1996 (Ktenas, 1998). This makes one at least wonder whether, and -if so- the extent to which the need for cigarettes is covered by the black market. Fourthly, it is the low 'tax consciousnesses' among the Greek public, and the fact that the informal economy in the country that accounts for up to 30% of the GDP, is the largest informal economy in the EU (The Economist, 2001). Consequently, cigarette

smuggling may not only be supported by smokers, who buy smuggled cigarettes in what they think as the cigarettes' "real prices" (Hess, 1996: 47) but also supported 'morally' by the smoking population in general. In other words, the "moral status" (Tremblay *et al.*, 1998: 311) of this black market is high. Fifthly, it is the extent of corruption in the country (see Transparency International, 2005) a variable that, according to Merriman *et al.* (2000), is equivalent to the levels of cigarette (tobacco) smuggling. Sixthly, it is the fact that the sector which presents the higher percentage of tax-evading businesses in Greece (67% of the total businesses) is, according to the Bureau for Special Checks (Ypiresia Eidikon Eleghon-YPEE), the tobacco products industry (Dimitrelis, 2006). Related to this is the tolerant environment to cigarette smuggling (particularly the street-level market) in the country. The police do not generally put particular pressure on street-level cigarette smuggling, and this is reflected in the extremely rare references to the phenomenon in the section titled 'Flashback' citing anecdotal accounts of successful actions by the force/service in *Astynomiki Anaskopisi (Police Review)*, the magazine published by the Headquarters of the Greek Police. A notable exception occurred in spring-summer 2004 when police operations against *all* illicit markets at central Athens were intensified due to the Olympic Games held in the country (see *Astynomiki Anaskopisi*, 2004). Moreover, the agencies that are dedicated to financial crime, such as the Bureau for Special Checks (under the wing of the Ministry of Economy and Finance), consider tobacco-related illegal activities as peripheral to their duties. In particular, the Bureau's tobacco-related checks from 18 July 2005 to 30 June 2006 were only 14 in a total of 48,221 checks (YP.E.E, 2006). Finally, cigarette smuggling as a subject of academic inquiry has not received adequate attention in Greece. Currently, there is only a

superficial account of the involvement of Albanians in cigarette smuggling – among other criminal activities – in Greece (Antonopoulos, 2003), a relatively small account of cigarette smuggling in a general textbook on tobacco and smoking by Dodopoulos (2004), and the case study of a cigarette smuggling network (Antonopoulos, 2006).

The purpose of this article, which builds upon a previous study of *a* cigarette smuggling network (Antonopoulos, 2006), is to provide an account of the social organisation of the cigarette black market in Greece, based on a variety sources. Specifically, this article will attempt to: provide an account of the extent and nature of the cigarette smuggling business in Greece including a presentation of the ‘actors’ involved; provide an account of the role of the legal sector and violence in the whole cigarette smuggling business in Greece; describe the sources of cigarettes destined for the black market and the routes contraband cigarettes follow; provide an account of the distribution part of the business. Before moving onto the social organisation of the cigarette black market in the country some attention should be paid to the methodology of the study.

## **Methodology<sup>1</sup>**

This study draws upon a number of official and ‘unofficial’ sources. Initially, we obtained official statistics from the Hellenic Coast Guard in Piraeus and Patras in 2005.<sup>2</sup> These statistics refer to the number of cases of cigarette smuggling, the number of seized cigarette packs (and other tobacco products), the number of arrested individuals (including the number of foreigners involved), the number of seized sea vessels and vehicles, and finally the amounts of evaded taxes for the period 1998-2004.

Secondly, in August 2006 and after lengthy negotiations and the leverage of a police contact from Patras we obtained unpublished aggregated statistics on cigarette smuggling cases, packs of cigarettes seized and evaded taxes from the Customs Authority. These statistics, which are a product of reports from all agencies concerned with cigarette smuggling refer to 2004 and 2005 only.

Next, copies of six *Ypovlitikes Anafores ton Dikografion* (hereafter *pre-trial reports*) were obtained from the Hellenic Coast Guard in August 2006. The pre-trial reports are essentially the reports that the Coast Guard submit to the local public prosecutor along with the preliminary investigation documents. The information that was obtained from these reports includes actors of the cigarette smuggling business, practices involved in securing the merchandise and transporting it etc. In addition, one pre-trial report from the police in Patras was obtained. This report does not refer to cigarette smuggling but to a network of robbers and thieves, who used to operate in pairs or in groups of three or more, and who used to steal cigarettes.<sup>3</sup>

Fourthly, we used the annual reports on organised crime for the years 2004 and 2005 published by the Ministry of Public Order (MPO, 2005; 2006). These reports are based on the compilation of information and data on organised crime by a number of agencies. However, there is no aggregated statistics from all agencies except for the number of interceptions of these smuggling activities that the Ministry of Public Order consider as 'organised'. Lambropoulou (2003) holds reservations as to the validity of the annual reports on 'organised crime' as there are huge differences in the yearly evaluations of, for example, what constitutes 'organised crime' and what 'organised crime structures' are. We share the same reservations and we, therefore, clarify that in

this article we use the annual reports only to collect (part of the) information about sources, routes and brands of contraband cigarettes.

Finally, articles from high-circulation newspapers, financial and business newspapers, and some locally circulated newspapers published from May 1996 to September 2006 were selected. Again, we are aware of the limitations of media representations of ‘organised crime’ (see Rawlinson, 1998), and we, therefore, use these articles to obtain information not on the structure of the ‘entities’ involved in cigarette smuggling but on ‘actors’ and their practices, the role of corruption and the legal sector in the business, and features of the distribution part of the trade. These articles were complemented by 46 press releases from the Ministry of Mercantile Marine (September 1999-June 2006) and 7 press releases from the Bureau for Special Checks (YP.E.E) (July 2004-July 2006).

We have counterbalanced the limitations of official sources by using ‘unofficial’ sources as well. Specifically, we interviewed one retired Kurdish *pusher* and two retired Kurdish *street-sellers*. These interviews, which were conducted in a series of occasions, in a number of settings, and as free-flowing conversations with the participants between September 2004 and December 2004, are part of an ethnographic study with the Kurdish community in a Northern English town.

In addition, we interviewed one retired procurer from Thessaloniki in August 2006. Through this interview information about ‘actors’ of the cigarette smuggling business, procedures, practices, brands and prices was obtained. We also conducted interviews with five Greeks, who have bought and consumed contraband cigarettes, and provided details about the geographical setting of cigarette black markets in Athens and

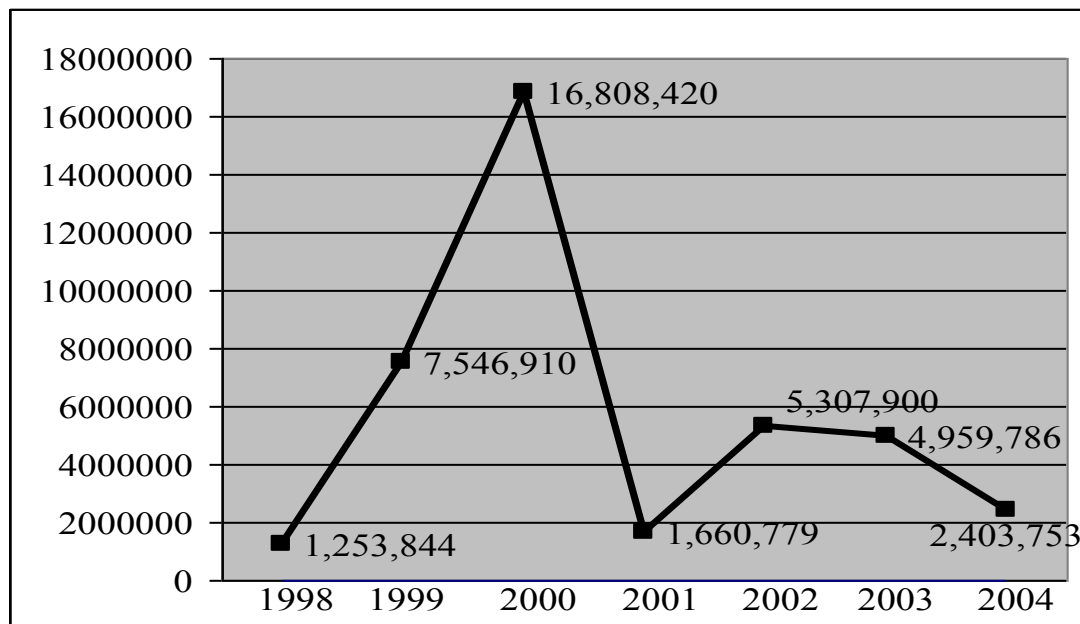
Thessaloniki, information that added considerably to the picture we have established as to the social organisation of the market as well as information about brands and prices.

Finally, some data on *bootlegging* in particular was obtained through interviews with 2 *runners*<sup>4</sup> transporting cigarettes from Greece into the UK and one individual bootlegging cigarettes from Greece into Yugoslavia from 1986 to 1991. The first two interviews were conducted in the Northern English town in May 2006 and the third interview was conducted in September 2006 in Patras, Greece.

### **Extent and Nature of the Cigarette Black Market in Greece**

As was mentioned in the introduction of this article, concerns about cigarette smuggling were expressed in the early 1990s. However, aggregated data from all agencies concerned with cigarette smuggling in Greece refers to 2004 and 2005 only. In 2004 there were 415 cases of cigarette smuggling, and 310,961,785 cigarettes were seized, which amounted for EURO 31,736,151.34 in evaded taxes. In 2005 there were 338 cases of cigarette smuggling, and 258,444,000 cigarettes were seized, which amounted for EURO 23,895,039.35 in evaded taxes (Customs Authority, 2006). Coast Guard statistics cover a larger period (1998-2004). From 1998 to 2004 there were 82 cases of cigarette smuggling known to the Coast Guard. The largest number of cases per year and number of cigarette packs seized was in 2000 (20).<sup>5</sup> Within the 1998-2004 period 39,941,392 packs of cigarettes were seized by the Hellenic Coast Guard (Graph 1).

**Graph 1.** Number of Cigarette Packs Seized by the Hellenic Coast Guard (1998-2004)



*Source:* Data obtained from Hellenic Coast Guard (2005)

In addition, 299 packs of tobacco and 1,300 cigars were seized in 2001. Official statistics, as it is well known in the criminological enterprise, possess a number of limitations. Initially, the figures presented above do not provide a picture of the actual cigarette smuggling in the country, but only those cases that the Greek authorities come across. There is certainly a dark figure of cigarette smuggling in the country, and despite the fact that the European Confederation of Cigarette Retailers (cited in von Lampe, 2005a: 12) argues that the illicit market share in Greece in the mid-1990s was 8%, it is impossible, given the quantity and the quality of the current statistical data and the lack of sophisticated efforts, to validate or disprove such a claim. In addition, as is obvious, there have been increases and decreases in the number of cases as well as in the number of seized cigarette packs that do not allow for a possible trend to be apparent at least within these years. But even when trends could indeed be identified, these refer to ‘contextual variables’ (von Lampe, 2004) of this black market than anything else. For instance, this



may reflect the level of intensity of law enforcement in the country or an increase/decrease of law enforcement personnel.

There seems to be a range of ‘entities’ involved in cigarette smuggling that can be placed on a continuum. The smuggling of cigarettes can be conducted by individuals. These individuals are driven by the price disparities between Greece and a number of countries. In our research we came across Greeks travelling to Bulgaria, and specifically Petritsi and Sandanski, to buy cigarettes among other commodities (Terzenidis, 2004). The reason for this, and a form of “criminogenic asymmetry” (Passas, 1999), is the huge price disparities that exist between Greece and Bulgaria. In particular, in 2002 a pack of Marlboro was sold 45% cheaper in Bulgaria than in Greece (Mackay and Eriksen, 2002: 102-109).

However, we also came across bootlegging *out* of Greece. We can provide two cases. The first involves a Greek student at Belgrade, who was smuggling cigarettes bought from the duty free shop on the Greek-Yugoslavian border from 1986 to 1991. He used to buy DM 1,000 in merchandise (hard packs of Marlboro and Camel), and he was transporting them in his and his friends’ luggage. He used to sell the cigarettes in cafés and bars in Belgrade, where the elite (or their families and friends) of the then Yugoslavia used to hang about. Despite the fact that cigarettes in Yugoslavia were much cheaper than in Greece, bootlegging was possible because there was no Marlboro hard pack in Yugoslavia. Consequently, the possession of such a pack was a sign of prestige. In addition, the quality of the Yugoslavian tobacco was much poorer than Greek tobacco. The student used to transport cigarettes in January, after Easter and in September when

he was returning from Greece after the holidays. From every load of DM 1,000 he had a profit of DM 2,000.

The second case involves Greek students at a British university. The owner of a café that is a meeting place for Greek students in a northern English town, gives money to a number of students, and asks them to bring him specific brands of cigarettes (that are consumed in Britain), especially at periods when students return home. Each student, who acts as a *runner*, ‘imports’ 16 cartons of cigarettes in Britain and receives about £30 (US\$ 55/EURO 44) as an ‘importation fee’.<sup>6</sup> The cigarettes are brought into Britain by air and seldom through the Channel Tunnel, and distributed –along with quantities of cigarettes obtained in other ways - to customers in a chain of bars and clubs in the town. The second case suggests that there may be cigarette *bootlegging* conducted by small or large groups with varying strength of ties among the participants.

When it comes to large-scale smuggling, however, *networks*, i.e. fluid and dynamic social systems that consist of patterns of relationships among people/actors (Wasserman and Faust, 1994), and adapt to operational environments (Williams, 1999) and forms of social control (Ruggiero, 2003), are involved. It is important to mention that according to official accounts the whole of the Mediterranean Sea and several Northern European countries such as Britain, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Germany as well as China and the United Arab Emirates is the operational field of a huge cigarette smuggling network (Tzathas and Giogiakas, 1997; Kathimerini, 2005a, MPO, 2005). Networks are linked to each other through individuals involved in both networks (Bruinsma and Bernasco, 2004). The sources of cigarettes and schemes/ways of transportation of contraband cigarettes presented at a later stage highlight this.

There is a number of ‘actors’ in the cigarette smuggling business in Greece, just as in the cigarette smuggling and other ‘businesses’ in other contexts. The presentation of the division of labour/‘actors’ does not necessarily mean that these appear in every smuggling network. The ‘actors’ are as follows<sup>7</sup>:

1. *Wholesaler*: The wholesaler in the cigarette smuggling business, just as in the legal businesses, buys and assembles quantities of the merchandise (in this case contraband cigarettes from the ‘procurers’), and distributes them in smaller part to the ‘pushers’. The wholesaler is usually someone with connections in both the country of production of cigarettes, transit countries and, of course, Greece. The wholesalers are Greeks and foreigners. In one case we came across in our interviews with the Kurdish cigarette smugglers, the wholesaler is a Russian owning a number of legitimate businesses in the country, Russia and Germany. In another case the wholesaler was a Polish national wanted by the Greek and German authorities for cigarette smuggling (Mandrou, 1999).
2. *Procurers*: The procurers are primarily Greek businessmen, who buy large quantities of cigarettes from Greek tobacco companies with the intention to export and sell them in Bulgaria and Romania, and then forward it (wholly or partly) to the wholesaler or the pusher. In some cases the role of the wholesaler and the procurer identify. There are, however, non-Greek procurers who are tied to the wholesaler and they reside in countries other than Greece, and specifically countries of the former Soviet Union and Balkan countries.
3. *Pushers*: These individuals have the responsibility of introducing the smuggled cigarettes into the market. The ‘pushers’ could be characterised as ‘line managers’

for the street-sellers and some other actors of the business. We came across pushers from republics of the former Soviet Union, Kurdistan, and Greece. Foreign pushers usually start as street-sellers.

4. *Street-sellers*. The street-sellers are primarily drawn from the migrant community of the country and specifically from the community of migrants (including migrant ethnic Greeks) from the former Soviet Union such as Russians, Ukrainians, Kazakhstani, Georgians, and Armenians. What is also interesting about the street-sellers from the former Soviet Union is that there are a large proportion of middle-aged to old women. There is a ‘chivalry’ hypothesis (Heidensohn, 1994) in this trend since, as one of the participants suggested, “they are women and they are old.... No one will bother them”. This may possibly be the rationale behind the ‘recruitment’ of women in street-selling. However, it could also be argued that the presence of women from the former Soviet Union in the street-level selling may reflect the gender distribution in the overall migrant population from these countries<sup>8</sup>, it must be viewed in combination with the fact that male migrants from the aforementioned countries are heavily involved in this trade and, of course, the limited opportunity structures. Unlike women involved in other trades (e.g. crack cocaine) women involved in the cigarette black market are not viewed by the participants in this study as “having overstepped their feminine bounds” (Dunlap *et. al.*, 1994: 7), and this also highlights, in our opinion, the ‘relative legitimacy’ of the cigarette black market. Street-sellers are also recruited from the Kurdish community of the country (primarily in Athens), and there is a small number of Albanian, Romanian, and Bulgarian migrants recruited. There are a number of Greeks, primarily Greek Roma

(including children), involved in street selling, and we also came across one case of a Pakistani street-seller. Most of the Kurdish street-sellers have a relatively short career in the cigarette smuggling business and this comes as a result of them being highly mobile viewing Greece as a transit country (see Papadopoulou, 2002).

5. *Scouters/Look-Outs*: Scouters/look-outs are there to warn street-sellers about the presence of the police in the area, despite the fact that, as mentioned earlier, the police do not pay much attention to cigarette smuggling. In some cases we came across, the scouter/look out was also operating as a pusher carrying travel luggage or simply a bin bag with cigarettes refuelling his street-sellers. Scouters/look outs also warn transporters about the presence of law enforcement agencies as well members of the public in the area.
6. *The Warehouse Guards*: The warehouse guards are responsible for guarding the warehouses, houses, rooms, etc. rented by the pushers or by Greeks connected in any way with the pushers (if they are not Greeks) that are used as storing places for boxes with cigarettes before they are distributed to the street-sellers or sold to some customers directly.
7. *Legitimate shop and kiosk owners*: In the vast majority of cases these are Greeks, who own a shop or a kiosk in or around the street-selling area and 'operate' as a quick 'refuelling' point for street sellers and/or a place of quickly 'hiding' the smuggled cigarettes. In some cases, medium or small quantities of cigarettes are sold directly by the shop/kiosk-owner.
8. *Thieves/Burglars/Robbers*: These are 'professionals', who steal from warehouses of cigarettes destined for the legal market of cigarettes or from kiosks and other retail

outlets. There are instances in which robberies takes place. For instance, in 2004 the driver working for a cigarette trading company was robbed, and cigarettes and cigars of monetary value EURO 650,000 were stolen (Kathimerini, 2004). The thieves/burglars/robbers are drawn from the migrant community from the former Soviet bloc and less often from Albania. However, cases of groups of Greek robbers and burglars are also present. In the pre-trial report obtained from the Greek police out of the 46 cases of robbery and burglary, 18 involved the stealing of cigarettes from convenience stores and retail outlets in seven prefectures in Southern Greece. Thieves/burglars/robbers are not specialised to cigarettes stealing. Cigarettes are only one of a wide range of commodities stolen.

9. *Drivers/Captains:* Truck and bus drivers and captains of ships under Greek, Cyprus, Russian, Ukrainian, Cambodian, Belize, N. Korean, Bolivian, Togo, and Sao Tome flags have the responsibility of transporting quantities of cigarettes within Greece, into Greece in the case the cigarettes come from other countries, or out of Greece in the case the cigarettes are supposedly or actually exported. According to official figures obtained by the Hellenic Coast Guard (2005), 44 trucks and 1 bus were confiscated from 1998-2004, whereas the number of confiscated sea vessels for the same period reached 50. Some of the trucks used for the transportation of untaxed cigarettes *within* Greece are stolen. The majority of truck drivers are Greeks, and there are a number of Bulgarian, FYROM, Italian, Romanian, Turkish, Polish and Irish drivers. Captains, according to the available evidence, tend to be Greeks, Russians, Ukrainians, and Bulgarians. Drivers and captains are paid a certain amount

per transportation. In one of the cases we came across, the arrested driver was to be paid EURO 1,000 for a transportation of 13,800 Marlboro packs.

10. *'Protectors'*: These are individuals, who engage in the protection of the interests of cigarette smuggling business from extortion gangs, primarily of Albanian and Russian origin. In the current research we came across 'protectors' from the former Soviet Union. In addition, there are a number of Greek protectors, usually operating in groups selling protection (primarily) to night time establishments and who are also known as 'Godfathers' of the Night (Linardou, 2002b). The fundamental difference between Greek (groups of) 'protectors' and 'protectors' of other nationalities is that Greek 'protectors' are *actively* involved in cigarette smuggling e.g. as 'drivers'.
11. *Deputy (Topotiritis)*: The Deputies are foreigners, who live in Greece and supervise the whole cigarette smuggling business when this is coordinated from another country. On 22 December 2000, and within the context of an operation codenamed 'Hellas', an important Sacra Corona Unita 'member' was arrested in Thessaloniki, where he was acting as a deputy of the 'organisation's' smuggling business, and was extradited to Italy (Antoniou, 2001).
12. *Cashiers*: The cashiers collect the money. We did not come across a cashier in the street-level or even in the middle-level cigarette smuggling. The presence of a cashier is usually the case when smuggling networks are involved in other 'organised' criminal activities as well.
13. *Corrupt public officials*: There are numerous references by the participants in this research and the media especially to customs officers employed in the borders with Bulgaria and FYROM, who were bribed to: allow for the importation of contraband

cigarettes in Greece from an number of Balkan and Eastern Europe countries; allow for the exportation and re-importation of truckloads of cigarettes that are to be introduced in the Greek black market; actively participate in the smuggling of cigarettes by, for example, clearing the area chosen for the embarkation of merchandise transported by sea. It is striking that the importation/exportation of merchandise subjected to *Special Consumption Tax* including cigarettes and other tobacco products has not been allowed through the customs on the Greek-FYROM border since 2005. This decision was made by the deputy Minister of Finance and Economy due to the extended phenomena of smuggling (Hatzinikolaou, 2005). In addition, those participants of the research that were actively involved in cigarette smuggling suggested that police officers and coast guards were bribed to allow warehouses of contraband cigarettes to exist, and turn a blind eye when becoming aware of larger quantities of smuggled cigarettes by sea. In some instances, officials are actively involved in the working of cigarette smuggling networks; for instance, the participation of some members of the Underwater Demolition Team of the Greek navy, who were transporting contraband cigarettes from open waters to specific locations (Ta Nea, 2002b). Finally, there have been reports in the Greek press in relation to judges in Northern Greece co-operating with cigarette smuggling networks (Lambropoulos, 2004).

It is difficult to provide a profile of the ‘actors’ involved in cigarette smuggling, as there are big differences between the socio-economic characteristics of these actors in the three separate levels of cigarette smuggling (upper, middle and street-level, as proposed by von Lampe, 2001). Upper level smugglers include a wide range of individuals who lead



respectable lives and have a quite diverse employment background (see also van Duyne, 2003). In our interview with the procurer it was confessed that he got involved in cigarette smuggling because it is a relatively easy way to earn additional amounts of cash that would counterbalance the ‘downs’ in his legitimate business with relatively small risks. We also mentioned earlier the Russian wholesaler, who was the owner of a number of legal businesses in Greece, Germany and Russia. Finally, several articles in the Greek Press were concerned with a respectable doctor in Northern Greece, who was heavily involved in cigarette smuggling (Kantouris, 2005). Some individuals involved in the upper level cigarette smuggling have also been involved in illicit trades of illegal and legal ‘commodities’ such as drugs and fur as well as women trafficking for prostitution (see Antoniou, 2002).

Middle-level smugglers are Greeks and foreigners (from the former Soviet Union and Kurdistan). Some of them may also be legally employed and participate in the cigarette smuggling business to earn additional amounts of money. The common characteristic of the participants in the street-level is their socio-economic marginalisation. In a sense the cigarette smuggling business in Greece reflects – to a considerable extent - the situation in the official Greek economy, as well as the situation in illegal markets in a variety of contexts that present alternatives to the lack of legitimate employment opportunities (Beare, 2003; von Lampe, 2003). The involvement of people from the migrant community in Greece in the lower-level smuggling, e.g. as street-sellers, and house guards or other foreigners as captains and/or drivers leads to a higher risk of apprehension of these individuals, something that lead to the aggravation of the index for cigarettes smuggling. In particular from 2000 to 2004 out of 287 individuals

apprehended by the Hellenic Coast Guard for cigarette smuggling, an outstanding 203 (70.7%) were non-Greeks (Hellenic Coast Guard, 2005). Unfortunately, these figures are not broken down by ethnicity/nationality. However, these figures do not, of course, present the actual representation of foreigners in the cigarette smuggling business in Greece, but the over-representation of foreigners in these positions of the business that are vulnerable to apprehension and specifically transportation of the merchandise.

### **Participation of the Legal Sector**

Cigarette smuggling is another field of inquiry, which exemplifies that there is a blurred distinction between the ‘underworld’ and the ‘upperworld’ (van Duynne, 2003: 306). Firstly, there is a “systemic synergy” (Passas, 2002: 24) between the tobacco industry and the cigarette smuggling business. As von Lampe (2005a: 31, 34) suggests, over an extended period of time, “...large-scale smuggling would not be possible without at least the tacit connivance of the cigarette manufacturers”. It is argued that large tobacco companies as well as local companies export vast amounts of specific brands of cigarettes in countries where there is no large demand for these brands, ‘turn a blind eye’ to cigarette smuggling and sometimes encourage it as a “market entry strategy” (Joossens and Raw, 1998: 66), and ‘exploit’ the issues of cigarette smuggling to put pressure on governments to reduce or stabilise taxation on cigarettes (Joossens and Raw, 1995).<sup>9</sup> It is interesting to note that when increased taxation was imposed on the very cheap Greek brands in 2005, the tobacco manufacturers concerned reacted negatively because they viewed cheap cigarettes as the only means of defence against – among other - cigarette smuggling (Korfiatis, 2005). There is not, however, any clear evidence of the tobacco

manufacturers' involvement in cigarette smuggling in Greece other than the retired procurer's account when the researcher asked him whether the manufacturers in the country know that legal merchandise is to be introduced in the (Greek) black market:

*“A pack of Marlboro really costs 50-70 cents. The rest of it is tax. The tobacco companies are not interested... they get the same money anyway... the tobacco company says ‘come and buy the cigarettes and do with them whatever you like’ ... there are many people involved, intermediaries, sales directors etc....Everyone knows everything, they pretend they know nothing and everyone takes the money...”*

Warehouses, companies responsible for the supply of commercial ships, logistics companies, importation and exportation companies based in Greece, Italy, Britain, Ireland, Albania, and Bulgaria, as well as shipping companies are also involved in cigarette smuggling. In the late 1990s, for instance, the Bureau for the Prosecution of Economic Crime (currently YP.E.E) in Greece found and confiscated hundreds of thousands of cigarette packs at the central premises of a logistics company based in Aspropyrgos near Athens (Kathimerini, 2005b). Airlines are also involved. For instance, a known cigarette smuggler, the Serbian Mose Isa, who was organising the smuggling of cigarettes from Paphos (Cyprus) to Montenegro and from there to other European countries via Greece, was receiving the services of BSL Airlines and its branch in Athens, ‘Kedros’, owned by a former Russian agent (Lambropoulou, 2000). Sometimes, however, these types of business are unknowingly part of the smuggling process. Small businesses are also part of the whole cigarette smuggling business. Earlier it was shown

that legitimate shops and kiosks are used either as refuelling points for street-sellers, or places where one could buy small to medium quantities of cigarettes. Off-shore and fictitious companies primarily in Cyprus but also in countries of the former Soviet Union (e.g. the fictitious company 'Kazakh-Pakistani Joint Venture' in Latvia) are used for the issuance of papers relating to the smuggling business. Legal gambling schemes, the Athens stock market, the property sector and other businesses are used as money launderettes. For instance, a Greek and two of his partners managed to launder £3,000,000 from cigarette smuggling from March 2002 to August 2002 by using a café as a 'window' (Ta Nea, 2002a). Finally, legitimate businesses constitute a forum in which business relationships (either between individual businessmen or between businessmen and employees or even between businessmen and customers) are initially formed and consolidated, and then develop into criminal relations (von Lampe & Johansen, 2004). An example of the above is provided by the procurer who participated in the current study. His network of (legal) business and customers grew significantly in the 1990s. Through his legitimate business he met individuals involved in all sorts of trades, legal and illegal. It was one of his business contacts, who has been collaborating for many years, and who suggested to him to buy a truckload of cigarettes to be supposedly exported to Bulgaria. Moreover, it was the same contact that brought him in touch with a customs officer in the Greek-Bulgarian border.

### **Sources of Cigarettes for the Black Market-Transportation of Merchandise-Routes**

There are a number of sources for contraband cigarettes that are introduced into the black market. Some of these sources are exploited less often and it would be plausible

to argue that they are peripheral to the business. Others constitute the main sources of smuggled cigarettes and continuously feed the market with merchandise. The peripheral sources are burgled legal cigarette warehouses, convenience stores kiosks, and other retail outlets. These warehouses and retail outlets, raided by 'professional' thieves/burglars hold cigarettes destined for the legal cigarette market. As was mentioned earlier, robberies are also committed against employees in these outlets or employees of tobacco companies. When it comes to main sources, contraband cigarettes are shipped from Russia, Ukraine, Turkey, Cyprus and Malta. Sometimes the cigarettes are uploaded in smaller vessels that can reach less busy ports or beaches throughout Greece. Up to 1998, cigarettes used to be smuggled from Albania by speedboats and even luxury sea vessels. Smuggled cigarettes (sometimes counterfeit) are also imported from Bulgaria, FYROM, Romania and Turkey by truck in four different ways. The first involves smuggling cigarettes from the former Soviet Union (reaching Bulgaria by ship) and then forwarded to Greece. The second involves smuggling cigarettes produced in Bulgaria and FYROM into Greece. The third involves Greeks going directly to tobacco companies in Greece and requesting to buy a large amount of cigarettes (usually a truckload) in order to export them to other Balkan countries. The necessary documents are issued, the truckload receives certificates of exemption for *Value Added Tax* and *Special Consumption Tax* as well as proof of exportation, the truck gets out of Greece and returns back to the country supposedly without merchandise (*keno fortiou*). In one case, the legally exported cigarettes produced in Greece were to be re-introduced in the Greek black market via the port of Ammochostos (Famagousta) in the Turkish-occupied part of Cyprus. There are of course cases in which there is a diversion of cigarettes, which do not

get out of Greece at all. Finally, smaller quantities of cigarettes produced in Bulgaria are smuggled into Greece through unguarded passages in the Greek-Bulgarian borders or bootlegged by Greek holidaymakers.

A relatively new way of smuggling cigarettes and other tobacco products in Greece involves internet orders. The merchandise is sent by post or transported by courier services in a number of small shipments primarily for personal consumption without the payment of taxes. It is interesting to note that in an internet search undertaken by the author a website was identified where a prospective customer could buy Greek brands such as *Karelia*, which are consumed primarily by the Greek public.

#### *Greece as transit country*

There have been a number of sources of cigarettes for the black market and a number of schemes/ways of transportation, with Greece as a transit country. One of the schemes involves cigarettes produced in Britain being shipped to Greece, and re-introduced in Britain in trucks through the ports of Piraeus, Thessaloniki, Patras, Igoumenitsa and Corfu, and via Italy. Similarly, cigarettes produced in Britain and the United States are shipped from ports of Northern Europe (Rotterdam, Antwerp) to the port of Piraeus and Patras in Greece. From Piraeus the cigarettes are smuggled by ship to the Bulgarian ports of Varna and Bourgas before they are introduced in the markets of Bulgaria, Romania, Russia, and other Eastern Europe countries. From Patras the cigarettes are smuggled by vessels or trucks to Italy and Albania and from there to other Balkan countries or countries of the European Union. In addition, cigarettes are transported from Mersin in Turkey to Durrës in Albania via Greece. Finally, cigarettes

from the Egyptian port of Damietta and/or the Chinese ports of Xiamen and Shanghai (many of which are counterfeit) are smuggled into Greece by ship and then into FYROM and/or Bulgaria by truck (see MPO, 2005).

Other schemes involve the transportation of cigarettes by plane. Cigarettes intended for consumption in the legal cigarette market of Cyprus are smuggled to Spain (Vitoria) by plane via Serbia (Belgrade), Montenegro and Greece (Athens) (Lambropoulou, 2000). It is not known whether these loads of cigarettes are to be consumed in Spain or introduced in other European markets.

#### *Greece as a source country for contraband cigarettes*

As was shown earlier, contraband cigarettes produced in Greece are re-introduced in the Greek black market. However, Greece is also a source country for smuggled cigarettes that end up in other countries' black markets. In two of the bootlegging cases mentioned in the current study cigarettes were smuggled from Greece into the then Yugoslavia, and Greece into the United Kingdom, respectively. Moreover, cigarettes produced in Greece are introduced into the Iranian and Iraqi black markets through very complex transport routes involving Cyprus, Jordan, and Turkey (WHO, 2003). Relatively recently, the case of Greece as a counterfeit cigarettes production country came to the forefront due to two cases. The one involves a factory of counterfeit cigarettes found out by the Greek police in 2005 in Thessaloniki. More than two million cigarette packs with health signs in English and French were found, which made the authorities assume that these packs were intended for the British and French black markets (Tsigganas, 2005). The second case involves investigations being made in the country, which revealed that

counterfeit cigarettes were produced in Greece and sent to Italy for packaging before they were introduced into Western Europe black markets (JTI, no date).

Irrespective of whether Greece is a source, transit or destination country, the smuggled cigarettes may be concealed by legal merchandise such as timber, oranges, bottles of olive and sunflower oil, frozen foods, soda water, marmalade, doors, bricks, restaurant supply products, electrical appliances, furniture, vases, paintings, clothes, raw leather, pulped paper, boilers, toys, and other products subjected to low taxation in containers, hidden in special crypts or even in petrol distribution and fridge-trucks.

### **The Distribution of Contraband Cigarettes in the Greek Black Market**

As with some other illicit markets, there is an 'open' and a 'closed' market. 'Open' markets are those on the street and other public places. In Athens, for instance, the open market for contraband cigarettes exists on specific streets in the central business district of Athens or in public markets (*laikes agores*) in specific areas throughout the whole city on specific days of the week. There is also an open market in the centre of Piraeus. In Thessaloniki the open market for smuggled cigarettes takes place in Aristotelous Square as well as in public markets in the centre of the city and western suburbs of the city, where there is a high concentration of ethnic Greeks from the countries of the Soviet Union. Other open markets, although much smaller in extent, existed in large Greek cities such as Patras, Heraklion and Larissa in the mid-1990s (see Zotos, 1996); however, they were not in the same form as the ones in Athens and Thessaloniki, where the cigarette black market is highly observable and street-sellers regularly approach potential buyers.



The other form of the market is the 'closed' market, which is hidden, not highly observable, is concerned with larger quantities of smuggled cigarettes, and one in which it is the customer that approaches the smuggler in the vast majority of cases. Closed markets' participants obtain smuggled cigarettes from a number of sources from individual bootleggers to large smuggling networks. Closed markets are based in houses, apartments and other storing places or in shops. Our research revealed a number of outlets such as CD shops, groceries, haberdasheries and kiosks selling smuggled cigarettes only or selling smuggled cigarettes 'under the counter' as well as legal cigarettes in both Athens and Thessaloniki. In many cases, especially in Athens' central business district, it is the owners of the kiosks who let prospective buyers know that black market cigarettes at lower prices are *also* available. There is a closed market in smaller cities and towns as well as in British holidaymakers' destinations in Greece such as Corfu, Zakynthos, Kos and Rhodes. In Kavos (Corfu), for instance, cigarettes are sold in small convenience stores for 5 cent per cigarette. We do not know however, whether this closed market, which is primarily directed to British holidaymakers, is 'exploited' by local Greeks as well. Contrary to the open market, the closed market is not confined in specific areas of the city but is largely dispersed geographically. A buy in the closed market takes place either after an arrangement between a street-seller or a pusher and the potential customer. Many times this arrangement is made in public space where selling and buying in general takes place, such as public markets. A buy is also made after an introduction of a new customer by a known closed market customer. Regular customers may even have the merchandise delivered by telephone order.

There is a wide variety of brands distributed in the cigarette black market – both open and closed – including popular and less popular brands. The popular brands, which constitutes the bulk of the cigarette black market include the Greek Assos Filtre, Assos International, Karelia, Karelia Filtre, Karelia Slim, Karelia Slim Ultima, Karelia Lights 100mm, George Karelias & Sons, GR Lights, BF Lights, BF Ultra, BF Ultra One, BF Super Lights, Leader and the international brands Camel, Silk Cut, Cooper, Cooper Lights, West, Pall Mall, Winston, Marlboro, and Marlboro Lights. Smaller quantities include the brands Cortina, Lucky Strike, Chesterfield, Davidoff, Old Navy, Rothmans, Benson & Hedges, Lambert & Butler, and Philip Morris.<sup>10</sup> There are also unknown (to the Greek public) brands from the former Soviet Union, Bulgaria and other East European countries, which are introduced in the market in extremely small quantities, and it is hypothesized, are targeted to a part of the migrant community from these countries.

The absence of formal mechanisms regulating the whole illegal market structures and functioning (Arlacchi, 1998) including the price of the commodity at stake is clearly reflected in the cigarette black market. Although the cigarettes are sold much cheaper than those in the legal market there is no fixed price in the black market. Specifically, popular brands are usually sold 50% cheaper, although the black market price may even be 30% of the legal market price. Sometimes street-sellers sell packets of 4-5 packs of different brands. A discount may be given to closed market customers buying medium to large quantities of cigarettes. According to the participants in the black market, the prices have remained the same over the last few years. What could possibly be hypothesised by this is that the (already limited) interceptions have had little –if at all - effect on the cigarette black market in the country.

## **The Role of Violence in the Cigarette Smuggling Business**

Despite that violence tends to be viewed as an integral part of illegal trades, and as a feature that is important for the ‘smooth’ running of such activities, violence in the higher levels of the market and in the area of street-selling is extremely rare. This may be one of the reasons why cigarette smuggling, even in its most obvious form of street-selling, is tolerated by the public and the police. However, instances of violence have been noted. For example, one of the informants argued that he personally witnessed a couple of instances of violence against Russian female street-sellers, who attempted to sell their merchandise in a small radius from the assailants’ selling point. The general absence of violence from the cigarette smuggling business can be attributed to the fact that violence jeopardises the market by attracting unnecessary attention on the part of law enforcement agencies, and is therefore “bad for business” (Pearson and Hobbs, 2001: 42). Von Lampe (2002), who has investigated the cigarette smuggling business in Germany, informs us that fighting between rivaling Vietnamese gangs extorting money from street-sellers in Germany, provoked a well-organised response on the part of the authorities that greatly affected the street-level sales. The general absence of violence could also be attributed to the fact that extortion gangs, as mentioned earlier, are themselves actively involved in cigarette smuggling (Linardou 2002b).

However, there are fights, even deadly ones, among groups from the former Soviet Union with conflicting interests (not only cigarette-related) in the area of Menidi (in Athens), an area with a high concentration of migrants from the former Soviet Union and, as the Kurdish participants in this research have suggested, a storing spot for large

quantities of cigarettes. It is suggested that this fighting does not affect the cigarette smuggling business as it does not take place in the areas of street-selling.

### **Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations**

In contrast to the official view that Greece is a transit country for contraband cigarettes, Greece is a source, transit *and* destination country for this commodity. The current study has identified a number of features of the cigarette smuggling business in Greece. There is a range of 'entities' involved in cigarette smuggling - individuals, groups with varying participation and strengths of links, and networks - that can be placed on a continuum. In addition, there are specific 'actors' in the cigarette smuggling business in Greece including the corrupt public officials, and the legal sector. Although the majority of people arrested for cigarette smuggling by the Coast Guard are foreigners, this does not necessarily reflect the foreigners' involvement in this trade but their involvement in these 'posts' that are vulnerable to (aggressive) law enforcement. There are a number of sources for contraband cigarettes, some of which are core and regularly used, and others peripheral. There are also a large number of schemes and routes of transporting contraband cigarette in, through and out of Greece. In respect to the distribution of contraband cigarettes, there is an 'open' and a 'closed' market. The open market exists in the centres of Athens, Thessaloniki and Piraeus or at public markets in specific areas throughout the whole city on specific days of the week. According to media references there used to be an open market in contraband cigarettes in Patras, Heraklion and Larissa in the mid-1990s. The 'closed' market, on the other hand, is not

geographically limited. Finally, violence is not an *integral* part of the cigarette smuggling business in Greece.

The current study has been able to provide a picture of the social organisation of cigarette smuggling in Greece based on the available evidence. Surely, further research is suggested in order for knowledge gaps on the topic to be filled. Specifically, we recommend additional research on the cigarette smuggling business in general, including forms of bootlegging. What is also recommended is research on the role of limited opportunity structures for migrants in Greece, and its role in their involvement in the (cigarette) black market. It is our opinion that this will contribute to a counterargument to the trend of viewing ethnicity/migrant status as “an independent compelling force affecting the crime pattern” (Bovenkerk *et al.*, 2003: 36) by the media, politicians, the police and the public. In a similar vein, the ways, reasons and conditions under which specific (ethnic) groups such as migrants from the former Soviet Union have evolved as ‘specialists’ in the cigarette black market in general or in specific levels of the business deserve research attention. Why, for instance, are there Russian and not Albanian pushers? Finally, research should be conducted on the conditions that do not favour open cigarette black markets in smaller Greek cities and towns. Given that there is no aggressive law enforcement on street-selling of contraband cigarettes and that other illegal trades are present on public spaces even in small cities and towns (e.g. pirated CD/DVD), why are there not observable, regular street-level contraband cigarette markets in cities and towns other than Athens and Thessaloniki? Research, of course, should be coupled by improvement of the data (collection) on the issue as well as the wide dissemination of the available public information by the relevant authorities. An

understanding of the extent, social organisation and dynamics of the cigarette smuggling business is an important step towards more effective tobacco control framework in Greece and elsewhere.

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> A longer version of the methodology section is available from the author.

<sup>2</sup> As of 22 September 2006 there was no statistics referring to 2005 and 2006.

<sup>3</sup> The names of the arrestees were erased from the reports provided to the researcher.

<sup>4</sup> We adopt this term from von Lampe (2005a) and we later explain what a 'runner' is.

<sup>5</sup> This is in accordance with other countries such as Germany (von Lampe, 2005a), Netherlands (van Duyne, 2003) and the EU-15 as a whole (European Commission, 2004).

<sup>6</sup> 16 cartons (3200 sticks) is the limit up to which cigarettes are considered for personal use by British Customs (von Lampe, 2005a).

<sup>7</sup> A similar presentation appears in Antonopoulos (2006).

<sup>8</sup> According to the 2001 Greek census (ESYE, 2001), the majority of Russian (62%), Ukrainian (74%), and Georgian (57%) migrants in the country are women. The gender imbalance is even bigger with regards to residence permits. Specifically, 80% of Russian, 80% of Ukrainian and about 65% of Georgian migrants with residence permit are female (Mediterranean Migration Observatory, 2004)

<sup>9</sup> Greece is one of the countries that supported the European Commission's lawsuit against Philip Morris and RJ Reynolds alleging these tobacco manufacturers were involved in cigarette smuggling in the European Union.

<sup>10</sup> Other brands have been found during interception of loads by the Greek authorities such as Sovereign, Dorchester International, Dunhill, Regal, Marble, Eston, Raquel, Yes, More, Cartier, 555, Superkings, L&M, Victor, and Parliament. These were destined for the cigarette black market in other countries such as Britain; however, we do not exclude the possibility of part of small number of these brands to be distributed to the Greek black market although we do not possess such information.