

The Smuggling of Migrants in Greece: An Examination of Its Social Organisation¹

Abstract

The smuggling of migrants is not a new phenomenon but in recent years it has garnered increasing international attention. Within the European context, Greece represents a unique case because of its social, economic, political, and geographic location. Drawing on a variety of information sources, such as interviews with the police, official statistics, informal interviews with migrants in the country, and interviews with two retired migrant smugglers, this article examines the social organisation of migrant smuggling in Greece.

Key Words: social organisation, smuggling, migrants, comparative, Greece

Introduction

The subject of smuggling of migrants has gained international prominence in recent years. In 1994 the United Nations at its third session on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice acknowledged the “increasing activities of transnational criminal organizations that profit illicitly by smuggling humans and preying on the dignity and lives of migrants...” (United Nations Economic and Social Council, 1994). Moreover, the ongoing problem of smuggling migrants from Mexico and Cuba into the United States or former eastern bloc countries into Western Europe has prompted calls by national and international bodies to address such matters. For example, while not a direct indicator, the number of undocumented/irregular² migrants in the United States was estimated at some 8.5 million on the basis of the 2000 Census (Jandl, 2003) while in Europe, estimates for 2000 were around 3 million (Rama, 2002). In early 2005, security chiefs from 34 countries in the Americas met in Trinidad to address, among other concerns, how to deal with the thousands of undocumented migrants, who sneak through the Caribbean countries to gain access to the United States or other parts of Central and/or North America. The interest and perceived need was in-large part triggered by the 9/11 attack in the United States (Olson, 2005). In Europe, it is countries like Spain, Italy, and Greece, which appear to have the highest per capita rate of undocumented and smuggled migrants (Jandl, 2003). Unfortunately, it is virtually impossible to directly quantify or verify (by its nature) the exact number of smuggled migrants. Yet, as is readily evidenced when scanning various media sources we are readily fed a diet of news stories involving the capture or detection of smuggled migrants. For example, in 2000, CNN reported that smuggling Chinese migrants into Canada is ‘big business’ as an estimated 600 undocumented Chinese migrants arrived on Canada’s west coast with some paying smugglers \$60,000 each (CNN, 2000). Furthermore, it is estimated that human smuggling operations worldwide are worth about U.S. \$9.5 billion annually (Richards, 2001). And even though the United Nations called for international cooperation to first address the problem of human smuggling in the early 1990s (United Nations Economic and Social Council, 1994) comparatively little has been done to curb the problem.

Given the general impact of smuggled migrants, this article will focus on the migrant smuggling situation in Greece as it is one of the EU members, which has, based on available information, a very large but unknown number of smuggled migrants. The country is both a destination, primarily for migrants from the Balkan countries and Eastern Europe, and a number of migrants from Asia and Africa, *and* a

transit country, primarily for Kurdish, Afghan and other Asian migrants. We have also chosen Greece because in recent years it has transformed from a country of emigration to a country of immigration, which has experienced a dramatic increase in the number of undocumented and smuggled migrants that is characterised by public officials, media and the public as “problem populations” (Lee, 2005: 8).

Since the early 1990s Greece has been one of the most popular destinations for people from the Balkans, and in particular Albania, as well as a destination for Asians, Africans and Latin Americans. According to the last Greek Census in 2001, the total of *documented* migrants in Greece is 693,837 (ESYE, 2001). Given that the total population of the country is 10,964,020 migrants constitute 6.4 per cent of the total population of Greece. The largest migrant group is by far the Albanians, who constitute 63.7 per cent of the total documented migrant population in Greece, and are followed by the Bulgarians, the Georgians, the Romanians, the Russians, and the Ukrainians. The rest of migrant groups constitute less than 2 per cent of the total migrant population each apart from the general group *Others*, who are the 6.3 per cent of the migrant population (ESYE, 2001). However, not all migrants living and working in Greece are documented. The aforementioned numbers *may* include some undocumented migrants but it is very likely that ignore a number of undocumented migrants.

As we will show later, the strict legal framework of migration in the country, which does not leave the possibility for the ‘legalisation’ of all migrants has created a large group of migrants, who enter Greece either on their own, by an ‘illegal’ way or resorting to human smugglers. Migrant smuggling has been thriving in Greece as well as other countries in Europe, United States, Canada, Australia and Japan, however, the information we have about this trade are immersed into a number of conceptual and methodological problems. In this article we adopt the definition of the United Nations’ *2000 Protocol Against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea, and Air Supplementing the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organised Crime*: “Smuggling of migrants shall mean the procurement, in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit, of the illegal entry of a person into a State Party of which the person is not a national or a permanent resident” (United Nations, 2000: 2). The UN Convention attempts at providing for a clear distinction between smuggling and trafficking in human beings however, as Kelly (2005: 34) suggests, such a distinction “is difficult to maintain in real world contexts”.

The aim of this article is to provide an account of the social organisation of migrant smuggling in Greece. This aim is broken down into five objectives. Specifically, to provide: a) an account of the push, pull and facilitating factors of migrant smuggling in Greece, including the legal framework of migration in the country, b) an account of the division of ‘duties’/roles in migrant smuggling groups, c) an account of the methods of recruitment of migrants to be smuggled, d) an account of methods of payment, and e) an account of means and routes of migrant smuggling. But before discussing these issues, it would be appropriate to provide an account of the methodology used in the research.

Methodology

The article is based on four sources of data. The first source of data was interviews with a number of police. The interviews were conducted in July, August and September 2002 in Patras, the capital of the prefecture of Achaia, in the Western part of Greece, with a population of some 300,000 people. Patras was selected for this study because it is considered as the ‘gate’ to Western Europe being situated in the

coast of the Ionian Sea and having sea links with both Albania and Italy, and because in the particular city it was easier for the researchers to have access to police officers and police files. The participants were a snowball sample of detectives (n=26) based at the police headquarters of the city. An interview guide was constructed after informal talks with police officers took part between 20th December 2001 and 10th January 2002. This guide, which was not intended to slavishly direct the interview, was divided into four sections the last one being 'migrant trafficking and smuggling'. Interviews took place at the Patras police headquarters with the exceptions of four interviews that took place in the participants' houses after they requested so. The mean time for the interviews was approximately 75 minutes. All but one interview was tape-recorded. However, at some points the participants, who did not have any problem with the interview being recorded, requested the tape to be turned off. The interviews with the police cast light on the smuggling of migrants in Greece, with Greece both as a destination *and* as a transit country, and assisted us in obtaining data on the phenomenon of smuggling of migrants of a variety of nationalities/ethnic origins.

The second source of information was data in the form of statistics showing the numbers of arrested individuals for migrant smuggling by nationality and the numbers of means of transportation used in migrant smuggling during the first eight months of 2000 and 2001. These statistics were obtained from the Police Headquarters of Ioannina in Northern Greece in the summer 2003. The Prefecture of Ioannina in Northern Greece is the prefecture with the longest borderline with Albania, and, in consequence, it has been one of the most popular smuggling points for the smuggling of Albanians especially until 1998, when the force of Borderguards (*Synoriofylakes*) was established. These statistics were obtained quite easily and without any extensive and time-consuming negotiations taking place, which leads us to think that these data are "trash 'n treasure" (Hagan, 1997: 228). Material discarded as 'trash' by the police, and 'treasure' by the researchers, since they constitute a valuable addition to the methodological jigsaw of the research on the particular topic. Unfortunately however, the statistical data are from January to August 2000 and 2001, and consequently do not allow us to have a picture of the available issues for September to December 2000 and 2001. Moreover, they refer to only two years. The data, although collected by the police of a prefecture neighbouring Albania, shed some light onto certain aspects of the phenomenon of migrant smuggling throughout the whole of Greece.

The third source of information was informal interviews with a number of Albanian and Kurdish migrants (n=20) living in the city of Patras and/or other localities close to Patras, and localities of the Prefecture of Ilia in Western Greece. The reasons why Patras was selected as a research site were mentioned before. On the other hand one of the reasons the prefecture of Ilia was selected is that work opportunities are provided for migrants in the fields. The interviews took place in the period between 2002 and 2004 in a number of instances. The exact location in which these interviews took place depended on the availability of the migrants. In particular, Kurdish migrants were approached and interviewed around the port of Patras, where they tend to gather and wait for a chance to enter a ship and be 'smuggled' to Italy either directly or via Albania; Albanian migrants were approached in public places in which they gather in small villages. The Albanian migrants' accounts provided valuable information on the smuggling of migrants with Greece as a destination country, whereas the Kurdish migrants' accounts provided information on smuggling of migrants with Greece primarily as a transit country.

The fourth source of data, and one that helped in relying not just on official sources when researching organised crime, "...thereby providing a skewed approach to the topic" (Rawlinson, 2000: 353; Hobbs, 2000), is the accounts provided by two Kurdish individuals, who were actively involved in the smuggling of migrants, two *kaçakçı*.³ The first was smuggling people from Asia, and mostly Kurdish migrants, from Turkey into Greece, and the second was smuggling Asian migrants from France and specifically Calais, into the United Kingdom. Although, the second smuggler was not involved in the smuggling of migrants into or out of Greece, he was able to provide insightful accounts about the social organisation of migrant smuggling in general. These interviews were part of an ethnographic research with Kurdish migrants that the first author of the article has been conducting in a Northern English town, and have contributed to our knowledge on the smuggling of migrants in Greece, with Greece as a transit country. Before exploring the actual actors and workings of the smuggling business in Greece, it would be appropriate to pay attention to the push, pull and facilitating factors of migrant smuggling. Most of these factors identify, of course, with the push, pull and facilitating factors of migration in general. It is the strict legal framework of migration in Greece that, as we will see at a later point, does not leave any legal entry alternatives to migrants, and in this sense transforms all migration factors into smuggling factors (see Castells, 2003).

Push, Pull and Facilitating Factors

A great deal of the migrant smuggling nexus in general has to be seen as a part of wider changes in the world that have also become the roots for the large migrant movements from East to West, and from South to North. There are push and pull factors with the push factors being more "instrumental in encouraging migration waves" (Beare, 1999: 21), and much stronger than the obstacles provided by the restrictive legal frameworks of the transit countries and the countries of destination (Tailby, 2001a). It should be noted that more than one push or pull factor may be responsible for the migration of individuals and/or groups each time (see Wang, 2001).

Push Factors

a) Poverty

The income per capita in large number of countries, such as Albania, has been less than US\$ 1,000 in the early 1990s, and at the same time the job opportunities have been extremely scarce due to the closing down of large state-owned production units, the lack of legal framework of business activities and land owning, as well as the lack of a relatively healthy bank system (Kule *et al.*, 2000; see also Karathanos, 2003). Kule *et al.* (2000) argue that economic reasons are the first set of reasons for the Albanian migration in the 1990s (86.6 per cent of Albanians migrated in the 1990s because of economic reasons).

b) Armed conflicts, unstable political situations, genocide

Examples of armed conflicts, unstable political situations and genocide that led to displacements of population are many. The war in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s, the civil wars that tore apart Georgia and other countries during the first years of the 1990s and 2000s (IOM, 2001a; 2001b) as well as the war in Kosovo a few year ago, and the killing of Kurdish people by the former Saddam regime in Iraq, and in Turkey, have all had a great impact on the lives of people, and led to large migration waves to neighbouring countries, and countries of Western Europe.

c) Demographic Pressures

In the mid-1980s about 50 per cent of the population of the non-European countries of the Mediterranean basin were aged under 15 years, while a significant percentage of the population of the four European Union Mediterranean countries (Greece, Italy, Spain and France) were 65 years or older (Fakiolas, 2000). Moreover, a large part of the Albanian population is very young. Specifically, Papparizo (1999) estimates that 15-20 per cent of the population of this country is young, when the equivalent European index is 13 to 15 per cent. The above suggest that young people face enormous difficulties in securing employment, given that there is also economic and developmental stagnation (see Purcell, 1993).

d) Environmental Degradation

Environmental degradation has a huge effect on the (quality of) life of people. In China, for example, 2 million people have died from bad air quality since 1994 (Becker, 2004), which is one of the reasons that have led thousands of Chinese people to migrate to Europe, North America and Australia. The effect that environmental degradation has on the decision to migrate is evident in another study by Denisova (n.d.) in which it was found that one of the most important factors of migration from the Ukraine were the accidents at the nuclear reactors in the country.

e) Vulnerability of Women to the Local Culture

The vulnerability of women to their homeland's local culture is an important contributing factor to the migration of women. In some parts of northern Albania, when the last male of a family dies, a woman from this family begins dressing and generally functioning as a man in the local society because of the informal code of conduct, the *Kanun*, requisitions (Vesilind, 2000).

Pull Factors

a) The financial (and political) stability of Greece

Greece, as a full member of the European Union since 1981, has been enjoying financial (and political) stability. The country is seen as an oasis in the turbulent Balkans, where there is a clear need for survival due to –among a plethora of reasons - the extremely low wages. It was estimated, for example, that in the mid-1990s the average Albanian wage was approximately \$3 per day, whereas in Greece the wages of undocumented Albanian workers would fluctuate between \$6 and \$10 per day in rural areas, and between \$15 and \$20 in the greater Athens area (Migration News, 1997 cited in Droukas, 1998: 359).

b) The nature of the economic activity in the Mediterranean members of the European Union

The economic activity in the Mediterranean members of the European Union, such as the small-scale family business, agriculture, the traditional existence of the informal economy, as well as the relatively insufficient control on the part of the state, create all the conditions conducive to the development of a cheap labour manpower supply (Mingione and Quassoli, 2000 cited in Psimmenos, 2001: 101). The informal economy of Greece that accounts for up to 30 per cent of the GDP, and is the largest informal economy in Europe (The Economist, 2001), constitutes a very important pull factor for migrants. This informal economy, primarily composed of small-scale family businesses, is in need of cheap, unskilled or semi-skilled labor

based on migrants in order to survive, since young people in Greece are not willing to obtain employment in unglamorous and underpaying sectors of employment.

Facilitating Factors

a) The media

The media facilitate the whole migratory process, and play a key role in 'promoting' and mediating mass migration from Eastern Europe, Asia, Africa and Latin America to the rich industrialised world. According to Andreucci (1999), from the mid-seventies when televisions began to be available on the black market, the Albanian people were able to tune into the state channel of *Radiotelevisione Italiana* (Italian Radio-Television). Similarly, they were able to tune into *Elliniki Radiofonia Tileorasi* (Greek Radio-Television), and view the way of life in Greece.

b) Technological progress and means of transportation

The development of the means of transportation has made migration much easier than previously, and the "infrastructure development and the increasing international air traffic have lowered the cost of travel" (Schloenhardt, 2001: 336) for long journeys.

c) The opening up of the economy and the removal of foreign travel restrictions

The opening up of the economy and the removal of foreign travel restrictions are heavily related to technological progress and means of transportation referred to above. According to Sassen (2001) the governments of the affluent and powerful states have recognised the need for the removal of any kind of barriers in relation to the movement of capital, products, information, and services, and have pursued the intensification of financial globalisation.

d) Geographic proximity between Greece and migrant sending countries

Greece is at the crossroads where Europe, Asia and Africa meet, and apart from being a final destination for migrants from Asia and Africa, it is considered the 'gateway' to Western Europe. It has a hundred inhabited and thousands of uninhabited islands, and a coastline of 15,000 kilometres. Moreover, the northern part of the country borders with Albania, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), Bulgaria, and the European part of Turkey.

e) The migration systems approach- the role of social networks among migrant communities and other ties

The facilitating factors that have been mentioned so far, as well as the push and the pull factors relating to migration, have been criticised by a number of authors as insufficient and simplistic (Schloenhardt, 2001: 337). Schloenhardt (2001) suggests that other links, such as historical and political connections between the sending and the receiving countries, social as well as religious ties. The decision, for example, of Indians, Pakistanis and West Indians to migrate to Britain was facilitated by the fact that the Indian sub-continent and West Indies were – among others – former British colonies. Similarly, the large minority of ethnic Greek Albanians in southern Albania facilitated – to an extent - the decision of a number of Albanian migrants to come, live and work to Greece.

Apart from the important facilitating factors such as the media, technological progress, the advancement of the means of transportation, the opening up of the economy and the removal of foreign travel restrictions, and the proximity of Greece

to migrant sending countries, there is also the legal framework of the transit and destination countries that facilitates migrant smuggling. It is worth paying attention to the legal framework of migration in Greece.

The Legal Framework of Migration in Greece

Potter (1994: 40) has suggested that “organised crime is an ongoing and continually developing social process”, and indeed migrant smuggling in Greece, just as in other countries, has to be seen as an integral part of the general social, historical and legal context of the country (see Zhang and Chin, 2002). An important part of this context is the legal framework of migration in the country. Since 1991, when the first Law on Aliens (L. 1975/1991) after Greece was transformed into a country of *immigration*, was introduced, migration has been identified as a national security issue, migrants have been criminalised and excluded, and had basic human rights denied. The Law on Aliens 2910/2001, for instance, although it should be credited with providing some rights to the migrants, such as the right to be informed in a language they understand during detention or safeguarding some other civil rights, such as social security, and obligatory nine-year education for migrant children (even undocumented), it still encourages the identification of migration with a public order and national security issue. Moreover, the lawful residence of the migrants, who were not already residing in the country before 2001, is very difficult. Migration to Greece continues to be seen either as a static phenomenon ending when the new law was enacted, or as the temporal point distinguishing who can stay in Greece and who cannot, thus influencing “the opportunity structure of undocumented migrants” (Engbersen and van der Leun, 1998: 217). In so doing, it provides for the creation of an army of disgruntled migrants that would do anything in order to escape hunger and/or persecution, and enter the country, and even resort to migrant smugglers and suffer infringement of their right during the smuggling process. The account by Rebwar, a Kurdish migrant from Iraq and the first author’s close friend, highlights the situation:

“...the kaçakçı do good. How could we come here if it wasn’t for the kaçakçı...?” (Interview with Kurdish migrant).

The rigid migration framework in Greece, which is far from exceptional (see Pratt, 2005), the securitisation of irregular migration in the country and the contribution of Greece to the ‘broad zone of exclusion’, *Fortress Europe* (Green and Grewcock, 2002: 88), is embodied – among other - to the high numbers of migrants deported from Greece. Specifically, it is estimated that from 1991 until the first half of 1999 1,820,000 migrants were deported, the majority from Albania (Theofilipoulos, 1999). In addition, the rigid legal framework of migration is embodied in the low number of asylum applications compared to other countries of the EU as well as the small percentage of successful applications, which has fluctuated from 26.6% to 2.7% throughout the 1990s and early 2000s (Antonopoulos, 2003b). As Jandl (2004) has shown in his study in Austria, there is indeed a statistical relationship between migrant smuggling, illegal migration and the asylum system.

The Social Organisation of Migrant Smuggling in Greece

Migrant smuggling is usually committed by groups and in some cases individuals (especially when there is no need for great sophistication in the smuggling operation). It could be safely argued that when it comes to the smuggling of Asian migrants, all

smuggling groups and/or individuals 'cooperate' (without even considering it) in an attempt to bring the bulk of the Kurdish migrants from Asia to Western Europe, and in particular Germany and the United Kingdom, which are the most popular destinations according to the migrants (see Robinson and Segrott, 2002). This takes place via a smuggler-to-smuggler approach that does not allow irregular migrants to be lost (Içduygu and Toktas, 2002). The above also highlights the fact that Greece is both a destination and a transit country. We generally agree with İçduygu and Toktas' (2002) view but we come to add that this chain is sometimes broken during the journey (e.g., due to policing operations), and other individuals, groups and networks, who have no connection with the smugglers of the initial stage, take over in the smuggling migrants.

According to official statistics obtained by the police, the vast majority of the arrested migrant smugglers in Greece are Greeks. Specifically, they constituted 58.4% of the arrested smugglers in the first eight months of 2000, and 53.2% in the first eight months of 2001. Albanian nationals are also heavily involved in smuggling of migrants primarily from Albania. In particular they accounted for 16.1% in the first eight months of 2000, and 25.2% of the arrestees in the first eight months of 2001. The third nationality in terms of arrested migrant smugglers is the Turks since they accounted for 7.4% and 6.9% of the total arrested human smugglers in the first eight months of 2000 and 2001, respectively. The Bulgarians, Iraqi, Romanians, and Russians are also involved, and the rest of the nationalities are only cases of involvement into migrant smuggling. These statistics are cited here indicatively. Due to their significant limitations, these statistics should be treated cautiously. The official statistics miss out accounting for a large number of persons operating in countries other than Greece, something that completely distorts the image we have for the smuggling networks. Kurdish migrants in Greece as well as the Kurdish migrant smugglers, for instance, suggested that in the groups they were participating there were Pakistani, Syrian and Turkish (as well as Greek) smugglers involved in a well-coordinated effort. Thus the fact that most of the individuals arrested for smuggling of migrants in Greece are Greek nationals, may in fact be the result of availability/accessibility of these individuals to the Greek authorities.

There is a division of duties in migrant smuggling groups, although many times the duties that each member has to carry out differ from operation to operation, from time to time, from place to place, and from group to group. There is also a case in which a member of a smuggling group may have more than one duty. However, there are some 'roles' within each group that remain stable over time. These roles, some of which can be identified in smuggling groups in other contexts (Schloenhardt, 1999; Zhang and Chin, 2002) are:

(a) The '*leader*' (primarily for the Albanian groups). The 'leader' has a 'managerial' position in the group, and he is concerned with the planning of the operation. The 'leader' is not necessarily a hardened criminal, and given that many Albanian groups have a familial basis the 'leader' may be the father or the eldest brother or cousin. There are of course, exceptions, which are rather surprising given the strong patriarchal structures of the Albanian society. In one case we came across, for instance, the 'leader' was a middle-aged Albanian woman, who could be reached in a specific place in the town of Vlorë that, as it is also identified in other studies (e.g., Hajdinjak, 2002), is a migrant smuggling hotspot.

(b) The '*recruiters*'. In the majority of the cases the recruiter is someone, who lives permanently in the country of origin of the migrants or the transit country, and has a very good knowledge of the language, and the peculiarities of each country

and/or specific locale, or even know the migrants personally. They also collect the initial fees for the transportation of the irregular migrants. In many cases the recruiters, and specifically those in the transit countries, are smuggled migrants themselves.

(c) The *transporters/guides*. They are concerned with transferring, or at least, assisting migrants in the journey. There may be more than one transporter throughout the whole journey, or one for every country that needs to be crossed in order for the migrants to enter Greece. There may also be a number of transporters/guides even within the same country. There are also transporters/guides leading the irregular migrants from the borders or Greek islands in the mainland, and into the large Greek towns and cities such as Patras. In most of the cases, the transporters/guides assisting migrants to travel from the borders and islands to mainland, and towns and cities are of Greek origin. In our research there is abundant evidence that taxi drivers, especially those working near the land borders of Greece act as transporters for the smuggling groups. We came across one case in which the transporters were a couple of high-school students from the island of Lefkada. They were traveling up to Igoumenitsa (the capital of the prefecture of Thesprotia bordering with Albania) to give passage to undocumented Albanian migrants from that town to Preveza. This transportation is also known as a 'ride' (*koursa* in Greek).

(d) The *scouters (propombe)*. These are individuals, who have the responsibility to provide specific information about the checks of the police, the body of Borderguards, and the army. When there is internal smuggling of migrants, smuggling on Greek territory, the scouters often travel in a distance from the following vehicle that carry the smuggled migrants and communicate with it via mobile phone warning on possible checks. The scouters, according to the police and the interviewed smugglers, are either Greeks, and specifically people with knowledge of the localities or documented and undocumented migrants, who have lived in Greece for a lengthy period, so as to enable them to know the localities and feel comfortable when moving around. Albanian migrants in Greece, for instance, have been a reliable pool of 'actors' for the smuggling of migrants and other organised criminal activities (see Antonopoulos, 2003a).

(e) *The hotel/house/apartment owners*. These are responsible for providing accommodation to migrants while they wait to be smuggled to either another location within a country or to another country. The hotel/house/apartment owners are particularly useful for the smuggling groups in those cases when small groups of migrants need to be gathered before they are smuggled to the next destination. The hotel/house/apartment owners are, again, either local people or migrants, who have lived in the country for a considerable length of time. One of the smugglers interviewed for this study was based in Istanbul, one of the most important assembly points for smuggled migrants (EUROPOL, 2004), and was working closely with a Turkish individual providing accommodation to Kurdish, Iraqi, Afghani, Iranian, Pakistani, Indian, and African migrants before having them transported to Greece by a sea vessel. The hotel/house/apartment owners are a clear indication of the ways in which the blurring of the boundaries between the *legal* and the *illegal* is promoted by strong market forces (Ruggiero *et al.*, 1998).

(f) The *enforcers*. This applies mostly to the Albanian smuggling groups. The enforcers are individuals with the responsibility to use violence in order to safeguard the smuggling business. Again, in a case we came across, an Albanian woman, who was smuggled into Greece in the first half of the 1990s mentioned:

“... we got into a boat, we were keeping our head down, and there was someone with a Kalashnikov, who was telling us to be quiet...”. (Interview with migrant).

However, we have come across some cases of maritime smuggling of irregular migrants from Asia and Africa, in which smuggled migrants were responsible for the ‘policing’ of the rest of the migrants on the boat.

(g) *The corrupt public officials.* The corrupt public officials are those who either provide assistance during the smuggling process (e.g., employees in Greek embassies and consulates in countries of the former Eastern bloc and/or employees of the Prefecture authorities in Greece, who provide ‘green cards’) or other, who are being bribed to turn a blind eye (e.g., corrupt police officers, port police officers, etc.). The corrupt public official is not usually a core member of a trafficking group, however, as Williams (2001: 76) suggests, “he is a vital node in the criminal network”.

The presentation of these members or, better, duties within the smuggling groups does not necessarily mean that these exist in *every* smuggling group.

Recruitment of migrants

The recruitment of the migrants to be smuggled into the transit and destination countries is a relatively easy task for the ‘recruiters’ as their work is most of the times known to the local community in general and the prospective smuggled individuals in particular. As one of our participants argued:

“[finding a smuggler]...is very easy. It’s not difficult at all. In my village in Kurdistan I know what everyone is doing... everyone knows what the others do and what their job is...we know who the kaçakçı are”. (Interview with migrant).

It could be safely argued that rather than the recruiter approaching ‘clients’ most of the times it is the other way around; the client approaches the smuggler either him/herself or through his/her social cycle in the source country. In the transit country similar processes exist as generally the undocumented and smuggled migrants constitute separate, excluded and ethnically coherent communities. However, in the transit countries, the recruitment of migrants to be smuggled involves *both* the migrants approaching the smuggler(s) and the smugglers approaching migrants in areas where migrants gather (e.g., reception centres, parks, car parks, port areas, etc.). Prospective smuggled migrants, whether in the source or a transit country, are instructed as to the place they should gather and are given a specific date and time of departure. Competition as to the assembly point, especially in geographically limited areas, has led to conflicts between (ethnic) groups. In Patras in 2002 an Afghan migrant was killed in an Afghan-Kurdish conflict over better positioning of migrants in relation to the ships traveling to Italy.

Payment

A large part (at least half) or whole of the payment is usually received by the smuggler before the journey something which, of course, does not guarantee that the ‘client’ will reach his/her destination or, if so, alive and safe. Prospective smuggled individuals sell property (e.g., house, cars, fields, jewelry, etc.) or borrow money from relatives and friends in the country of origin, transit or destination countries in order to find cash for the journey. A Kurdish migrant interviewed, was sent money by his brothers in Britain and Greece for the journey from Iraqi Kurdistan to Greece.

If cash is not available then property is handed to the smuggler. Many times, when the irregular migrants are on route to a transit or the destination country

intermediaries are used for payments. These intermediaries may be the smuggler's relatives, the migrant's relatives or even established businesses in the transit and destination countries, which are usually owned by individuals of the same ethnic origin of the smuggler or the migrant. In Patras, for instance, the intermediary who was responsible for the payments or part of payments of smuggling fees was the owner of a shop in the port area.

There is, of course, no standard price for smuggling someone into or out of Greece. This largely depends on the distance, the means of transportation, the difficulties faced by the smugglers, the time of the year and the weather phenomena, and the presence of the army, the coast guard and/or the border police, and generally the complexities of the journey. Very interestingly, our interviews with migrants and migrant smugglers revealed that the price depends on the nationality of the irregular migrants as well, with Kurdish migrants paying less than migrants of other nationalities (e.g., Indians). We hypothesise that this is the case because of the number of Kurdish individuals involved in the smuggling of migrants in Greece. In our research we came across huge variations in the smuggling fees (e.g., from US\$ 100 to 1000 for the same journey) something that is also put forward by İçduygu and Toktas (2002) in relation to smuggling of migrants through Turkey; however, we are in the position to cite some average prices for specific routes/distances that were mentioned by the police, the migrants, and the retired smugglers. These are (per person):

- From Albania, Kosovo, FYROM and Bulgaria to Greece – about US\$ 150-600.
- From Iraq, Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan to Greece – about US\$ 3,000-7,000
- From Istanbul to Athens – about US\$ 2,000-2,500.
- From Minor Asia in Turkey to a Greek island of the Aegean Sea – about US\$ 500-2,000
- From the Greek-Turkish borders (Evros river) to Athens or Patras – about US\$ 800-1,200.
- From the Greek-Albanian border (Thesprotia) to inland Greece - \$500-\$1,000.
- From Patras to Italy (cities of Bari, Brindisi and Ancona) or from Patras to Italy via Albania – about US\$ 1,000-2,000.

Means and routes of smuggling migrants

A very popular means of smuggling migrants into Greece has been on foot. The smugglers were guiding the migrants through unguarded passages on the mountainous terrain of the Greek-Albanian border or through the natural border between Greece and Bulgaria, the Rodopi mountain range especially up to 1998. Non-governmental organisations from the FYROM inform us that traffickers use the 'green frontier' (the unguarded frontier at the lake Doirani and Gevgellia on the Greek-FYROM border (IOM, 2001c). There are also a number of migrants, who enter Greece by crossing the river Evros in the Greek-Turkish border. But, as our research and other accounts (e.g., European Race Bulletin, 2001) have shown, there are minefields in areas along the river, and a number of migrants have lost their life trying to cross through the fields⁴ in addition to the lives of migrants lost in the sea (Fekete, 2003). Because the Greek-Turkish border is heavily guarded the smugglers use the Turkish-Bulgarian border, and smuggle migrants via Bulgaria (see also

Lambropoulou, 2003). The Muslim minority in southern Bulgaria has contributed to the link between Bulgarian and Turkish smugglers.

A very popular way of transporting migrants is by truck or car. This is a popular way of transporting migrants from Romania and Bulgaria, who do not have legal documentation. In such cases most of these migrants are transferred in fridge-trucks and/or in trucks or cars with special crypts. Once inside the Greek territory smuggled migrants are transported to other location by trains, motorcycles, taxis and cars. In a case reported by a detective the police stopped a car with six irregular migrants to find two more in the trunk.

The third way of transportation is by sea vessels such as rubber speedboats and fishing boats or even passenger boats. This used to be a very popular method for the Albanians in the beginning of the 1990s, and before the Greek Coast Guard intensified their security patrol in the Corfu-Albania straits. This method is now used by smugglers, who own ships, boats or yachts to transport a number of migrants from the coast of Turkey to the Greek islands of the Aegean Sea or even Greek mainland. According to the police interviewed, in some cases sea vessels from African countries, mostly from Egypt, and the Eastern Mediterranean (Syria and Lebanon) meet Greek vessels south of the island of Crete, the undocumented migrants board on the Greek vessels and are smuggled into Greece, usually Crete or another island of the Aegean. Sometimes the vessels cross the Aegean Sea and reach Italy without disembarking migrants on Greek soil.

In 2001, a terrifying story hit the covers of the Greek and international newspapers. *Brenler*, a 50-meter Turkish flagged smuggling ship with approximately 1,000 mainly Iraqi-Kurdish migrants (including pregnant women and 300 children) was towed in the island of Zakynthos after the engines stopped working in the middle of the Ionian Sea. The smuggling ship was heading to Italy (Geortzoglou, 2001; Smith, 2001).

Maritime smuggling of migrants out of Greece (from Patras to Italy or to Italy via Albania) still flourishes. Maritime smuggling of migrants has relatively recently become *the* trend in migrants smuggling in Greece, something also recognised by İçduygu (2004), as well throughout the world. Apart from the existing sea links between places, the long Greek coastline and the thousands of Greek islands, the reasons for this trend include the difficulty in the policing the sea area, the bigger profits for smugglers since one maritime operation may involve hundreds of migrants, and the lack of need for great operational sophistication (Tailby, 2001b).

In addition to being a destination point for many of the migrants, reports suggest that for some Greece simply represents a transition point to another country such as Italy (e.g., Papadopoulou, 2002; 2004). Interviews with Kurdish migrants in the city of Patras, the third largest port in Greece, and a 'gate' to Western Europe, revealed that Albanian groups approach Kurdish and Afghani migrants, who are smuggled into Italy via Albania. This started after the establishment of the body of Borderguards (*Synoriofylakes*), and the intensification of checks by the Greek Coast guard in the late 1990s. The police at the Police Headquarters of the Prefecture of Achaia who were interviewed, were either unaware of the migrant smuggling activities of Albanian organised crime groups in the city or, it is hypothesised, they considered it as a way of diverting a large number of primarily Kurdish and Afghani migrants out of Greece. One of the police interviewed mentioned another incident, which reveals that apart from being a popular destination for migrants it is also a transit country. Hence, what is happening in Greece is part of a transnational phenomenon:

“In 1997 we found a dead body near Titan⁵. When we searched the body we found that the victim, a Kurdish migrant, had sewed Greek drachmas, Italian liras, German marks and American dollars in his belt. This showed us the route he wanted to follow...”. (Interview with the police).

According to some official statistics referring to the first eight months of 2000 and 2001, there are a variety of means of smuggling used for smuggling over land. They include (for both years): private cars (57.8% of the seized means of transportation used in migrant smuggling), private trucks (21.2%), public transportation-cars (11.9%), public transportation-buses (1%), state-owned trucks (1.4%), tractors (0.6%), and motorbikes (1.1%). The means for migrant smuggling by sea is obviously sea vessels (4.8%), however, no detailed information is provided about the type of the vessel. Again, due to numerous limitations of the official statistics, this data must be treated with great caution.

The only available statistics on the percentage of migrants who enter Greece by crossing land, sea or the river Evros in the Greek-Turkish border comes from a study on the representations of Greek police officers and migrants about each other (Papakonstantis, 2000). According to Papakonstantis (2000) the vast majority of undocumented migrants enter Greece through the mountains (75.5%), 13.9 per cent enter the country by crossing a river, and a further 10.5 per cent by crossing sea. However, it should be mentioned that not all migrants who participated in that study were smuggled.

Summary/Conclusion-Recommendations for Future Research

Smuggling of migrants is an illicit ‘trade’ that came to fill the gap of alternatives for legal entry in Greece, as well as in other countries of Western Europe, North America, and Australia. It is a market-product of “formal judicial prohibitions” (Arlacchi, 1998: 203). Our research has identified:

- There are three sets of factors that play an important role in the flourishing of smuggling of migrants in Greece as well as in the rest of the world: push factors, pull factors, and facilitating factors that are the same with the migration factors. The legal framework of migration in Greece since the early 1990s occupies a central role to the migrant smuggling nexus, since it has limited legal channels of entry into Greece, and in consequence has transformed all migration factors into migrant smuggling factors.
- In each smuggling ‘group’ there are specific duties. The majority of the people arrested for migrant smuggling by the Greek authorities are Greek, followed by Albanian, and then the Turkish.
- The recruitment of migrants is a relatively easy task since the recruiters are known to the local communities in the source and transit countries.
- Prospective smuggled migrants sell property, borrow money or hand in property prior to the journey. When the irregular migrants are on route, intermediaries are used for the payments. The price for the journey varies considerably depending on the distance, the means of transportation, the time of the year and the weather conditions, the presence of the army/coast guard/border police, and generally the complexities of the journey.
- Migrants are smuggled on foot, by cars, trucks and motorcycles, and by sea vessels. According to official statistics obtained by the police, most of the means of transportation used for the smuggling of migrants into Greece are

private cars, private trucks, private transportations cars and sea vessels followed by 'other means'.

Based on our research, description and analysis we recommend additional research on the social organisation of smuggling of migrants in, through, and out of Greece. Some information is provided in the remarkable research has been conducted (e.g., Papadopoulou, 2002; 2004), however, there is a need for more in depth knowledge of the phenomenon. This is especially pertinent with regard to the structure of the migrant smuggling groups so that we can better identify the typology of these crime groups so as to facilitate more effective strategies on the part of law enforcement agencies (UN Office on Drugs and Crime, 2002).

More ethnographic research and other types of analysis (see Natarajan, 2000) are needed in order for the relationships within the context of the network(s) to be identified. Perhaps a coordinated effort by researchers and experts on the topic in the whole region of Balkans and Turkey as well as the Mediterranean basin, would shed abundant light onto the transnational dimension of this trade. Research on the topic is significant not only in terms of "intellectual curiosity" (Zhang and Chin, 2001: 48) but also in terms of providing impediments to this trade, and protecting (potential) victims. Research on the social organisation of migrant smuggling should be coupled with rigorous data collection, which is extremely poor especially when it comes to migrants (see Antonopoulos, 2005).

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Notes

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² By undocumented or irregular migrants we mean in this article the people who migrate for a variety of reasons, and do not possess the necessary official documents (visas, permits, etc.). The terms undocumented and irregular are used interchangeably in this article. According to Heckmann (2005), there are three basic forms of irregular immigration: a) illegal crossing of a border, b) crossing of a border in a seemingly legal way, and c) overstaying after the expiration of legal documents. Irregular migration can be self-organised however, in a very large number of cases particularly in those cases where distances are great, smuggling 'services' are bought (Heckmann, 2005). A large but unknown number of undocumented/irregular migrants are smuggled, and all smuggled migrants are undocumented.

³ According to Papadopoulou (2002), the *kaçakçı* are individuals, who organise the smuggling of humans by basically being "drivers in both sending and receiving countries" (Papadopoulou, 2002: 3). In the ethnographic research conducted by the first author it was found out that the term *kaçakçı* is used, perhaps metaphorically, by Kurdish people to indicate an individual, who is engaged in any organised criminal activity or generally a 'mafioso'. Thus, for example, a cigarette smuggler is also a *kaçakçı*.

⁴ Informal talks with numerous Greek soldiers serving at the Greek-Turkish border at Evros River suggested that the Turkish army releases arrested irregular migrants at the area and divert them into possible minefields in order to identify their location. We are not however, in the position to check the validity of this suggestion.

⁵ A cement company's plant in the greater area of Patras. This plant is a reference point for the area.