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MASTER'S DEGREE THESIS

*CLASHES OF NATIONAL IDENTITIES: THE CASE OF PONTIAN GREEK  
IMMIGRANTS FROM THE FORMER USSR*

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## ABSTRACT

As a result of the collapse of the Soviet Union, the ethnic identity of minorities was reasserted. The Greeks in former USSR started to identify themselves as a Greek diaspora based on the myth of their rediscovered homeland--Greece.

*The basic research question* in this analysis is whether the Pontian Greek identity can be characterized as a national or an ethnic identity.

*The thesis hypothesis* is that the character of an institutionalized nationalism influences identity formation and may force the evolution of an identity from ethnic to national.

The research will be based on a historical-theoretical approach (*methodology*). The analysis is pursued through the prism of the theory of ethnosymbolism<sup>1</sup> with its existing critique. The Pontian identity will be defined as a hybrid and diasporic identity. Main sources to be used are secondary sources (both English and Russian). However, official data will also be applied (immigration statistics, population censuses).

*The theoretical finding* of the research is that the politisation of the culture (which constitutes the main condition of transformation from an ethnic to national identity) does not necessarily produce aspirations of independence or autonomy. This political claim may also be expressed through the acceptance of a foreign national identity. As a result, the Pontian hybrid ethnic identity finalized into the Greek national identity as Pontians made a political choice to immigrate to Greece through the Repatriation program. The Greek state significantly assisted the process, which makes the Pontian case a 'state-sponsored' nationalism.

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<sup>1</sup>A. D. Smith, major works: *Theories of Nationalism*, Duckworth, London, 1971; *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*. Basil Blackwell Ltd, London, 1986; *National Identity*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1991.

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## INTRODUCTION

The current research is devoted to the identity formation process of the Pontian immigrants from the former USSR. The timeframe of the research stretches from the foundation of the first Greek colonies in Russia to the collapse of the Soviet Union. Due to the size of the paper, the historical analysis will be limited solely to those trends in history, which were significant for the development of Pontian identity.

The research topic can be well expressed in the words of A. Smith: “the problem of continuity of pre-modern *ethnie* and modern nations and of the means by which the latter were formed and created”.<sup>2</sup> *The important questions of the research are whether Pontians were able to develop a national identity and if so, which circumstances triggered such development.*

It will be demonstrated how Pontian identity was changing from ethnic to diasporic identity and finally to a Greek national identity. This process of identity transformation of Pontians has not received proper attention from the researchers of nationalism. Until now scholars focused on the historical analysis of the issue<sup>3</sup>, the immigration policy of Greece towards repatriates<sup>4</sup>, legal aspects of the Repatriation program<sup>5</sup> and assimilation problems of Pontians in Greece<sup>6</sup>.

*The major theories of nationalism with regards to the creation of a nation and national identity have not been applied to the case of Pontian Greeks from the former Soviet Union. The approach of the thesis is new, as a theory of the formation of a nation is applied not to the case of the creation of a nation from the scratch, but to the case of a diasporic nationalism.*

Anthony Smith’s theory of ethnosymbolism<sup>7</sup> will constitute the basis for the analysis. His approaches with regards to the substance, elements of the identity, stages of its evolution, are quite applicable to the case of Pontian Greeks. I would like to stress that the choice of the theory is arbitrary and can be challenged. When applied, other theories might lead to different conclusions on Pontian identity. However, ethnosymbolism treats a national identity as an ethnically rooted cultural phenomenon.<sup>8</sup> In my opinion, this theory offers the proper framework for the understanding of the Pontian community.

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<sup>2</sup> A. D. Smith, *National Identity*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1991, p. viii.

<sup>3</sup> F.e.: V. Agtzidis, A. Popov (see: the list of bibliography).

<sup>4</sup> F.e.: C. Hess, E. Voutira, A. Triandafyllidou, M. Marouf, M. Nikolova (see: the list of bibliography)

<sup>5</sup> F.e.: A. Popov, T. Nikolaidou (see: the list of bibliography).

<sup>6</sup> F.e.: D. Kokkinos, M. Vergeti (see: the list of bibliography).

<sup>7</sup> A. D. Smith, major works: *Theories of Nationalism*, Duckworth, London, 1971; *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*. Basil Blackwell Ltd, London, 1986; *National Identity*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1991.

<sup>8</sup> Smith, *National Identity*, op. cit., p. vii.

Besides, the Pontians of the former USSR constitute an extremely interesting research subject. In comparison with other Greek communities in Russia their national self-consciousness is the most developed one due to their constant aspirations of autonomous existence. Likewise, their identity is a case of a hybrid national identity, as it accumulated elements of other national identities in the Soviet region. The latter factor complicates the case and makes the research more challenging.

## I. Overview of the history of Pontian Greeks in Russia.

### 1. Pontian Greeks and ethnic politics in the Russian Empire.

The analysis in a historical chapter is best guided by the words of Eric Hobsbawm. He assumes it is hard for historians to conduct proper research on the issues of nationalism and refers to Renan:

“As Renan said: “Getting its history wrong is part of being a nation.” Historians are professionally obliged not to get it wrong, or at least to make an effort not to”.<sup>9</sup>

Hence, when writing a historical chapter on a national identity, one should keep in mind that nationalism is extremely flexible. Besides that, such categories as ‘nation’, ‘national identity’, ‘national consciousness’ always have an element of construction, and, in a way, artificiality. It is more significant to study not what type of identity was constructed, but exactly how it was done: what social engineering tools were used; what circumstances triggered the development of the identity.

Through the analysis of historical events one can observe the evolution of the Pontian Greek identity and decide whether Pontian Greeks in Russia are an example of diasporic nationalism (with the historical homeland in Greece), or a community with such distinct cultural and ethnic features that it might qualify as a separate “stateless” nation.

Pontus is region on the north-eastern side of Asia Minor between the rivers of Galis (Kyzyl-Irmak) and Sinope, reaching Khalkida.<sup>10</sup> Greeks came to Russia approximately in VII-VIII centuries B.C., founding first Greek colonies on the Black sea.<sup>11</sup>

Here it is essential to stress that Pontian community is not the only community of Greeks in Russia. Some historians claim that there are six Greek communities in the former USSR with their specific cultural and linguistic features.<sup>12</sup> However, it is important to distinguish at least three groups of Greek population, as mentioned by Ivanova.

First group is the Mariupol Greeks of Priazovie (Romei), who lived in Crimea since Byzantine times. They speak Greek Romei dialect or Crimean Tatar language and were moved to Priazovie in 1770s.<sup>13</sup> Originally the community of Greeks of Crimea was formed

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<sup>9</sup> E. J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1990, p. 12.

<sup>10</sup> See Appendix 1 in the end of the chapter I.

<sup>11</sup> A. L. Zapantis, *Greek-Soviet Relations, 1917-1941*, East European Monographs, New York, 1982, p. 182.

<sup>12</sup> K. Georgiou, ‘On the move: Greek diasporas of Russia and the Black sea’, *The Hellenic Perspective Since 1975*. 4 August, 2009, viewed on 5 September, 2011, < <http://www.neoskosmos.com/news/en/On-the-move-Greek-diasporas-Russia-Black-Sea>>.

<sup>13</sup> Ю.В. Иванова, *Греческое население в Грузии: Современные межэтнические отношения. Документ № 8. Межнациональные отношения в СССР. Исследования по прикладной и неотложной этнологии*, Серия А, Институт этнографии АН СССР, Москва, 1990, с. 7 (U. V. Ivanova, *Greek population of Georgia: Modern interethnic relations. Document № 8. Interethnic relations in the USSR. Research on practical and immediate ethnology*, Series A, Institute of Ethnography of the Academy of Science of the USSR, Moscow, 1990, p. 7 [in Russian]).

out of the Turkish-speakers, who accepted Orthodoxy and of the Greek-speaking Christians.<sup>14</sup> The Second group includes Greeks, who migrated from the Balkans and Aegean Sea in the XVIII-XIX centuries. They speak Modern Greek, originally settled in Georgia, but in 1940s were deported to Central Asia.<sup>15</sup>

The Pontian community of Russia appeared as a result of immigration of Greeks from Asia Minor and Iran, which took place in the XVIII-XIX centuries.<sup>16</sup> This wave consisted mostly of Greeks from Trapesund Empire.<sup>17</sup> They spoke Pontian language (which had not gone through major changes since Ancient times).<sup>18</sup> Some of them, however, spoke Turkish, not Pontian and were called Ouroumi.<sup>19</sup>

Even during the times of the migrations to Russia, there were no precise compact territories where Pontians could settle and live as a closed community. The XVIII-XIX centuries migration was voluntary and predefined by the privileges granted by the Russian government to the foreign settlers. As a result, it was possible to find Pontian communities in different parts of the Empire: Georgia, Southern Russia, others (mostly on the Black Sea shores).

Anthony Smith's Ethnosymbolism pays attention to primordial pre-historical ethnic unities. However, in the case of the Greeks of the former USSR (especially of the Black Sea) it is hard to identify the pure "ethnic Greeks". The geographical location of the Crimea was such that it stood on the major trade routes of the Russian Empire. In this region a united culture of different ethnic groups was created through their constant interaction.

Three main features characterized the Greek communities in Russia since the time of their foundation.

*First*, their tradition of stateness and their focus on autonomous existence were obvious (those two features must be assigned predominantly to the Pontian Greek community). They can be traced back to the Pontian polices (city-states), among them Sinope and Trapesund.<sup>20</sup> In the XI century Pontus became independent from the Byzantine

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<sup>14</sup> В.В. Баранова, *Язык и этническая идентичность. Урумы и румеи Приазовья*, Издательский дом Государственного университета – Высшей школы экономики, Москва, 2010, с. 21 (V. V. Baranova, *Language and Ethnic Identity. Ouroumi and Romei of Priazovie*, Publishing House of the State University – High School of Economics, Moscow, 2010, p 21 [in Russian]).

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 7.



Empire and in 1204 the Trapesund Empire was founded (later conquered by the Turks).<sup>21</sup> The ability of Pontians to form an autonomous administrative unit found further expression in the attempt to create the Republic of Trapesund in 1916.<sup>22</sup>

*Second*, the Greek communities in Russia have traditionally been involved in trade and other commercial activities. As Stoianovich mentioned, there were two events that directly influenced Greek commerce in the region: a) the concept of freedom of the seas was applied to the Black sea after the Treaty of Passarowitz (1718); and b) the Treaty of Kuchuk Kainarji (1774) opened the Turkish straits to the Russian commerce and allowed Ottoman Greeks to register their ships in Russia. Involvement of Greeks in international and Russian trade rose significantly.<sup>23</sup>

“Among the first merchant ships to fly Russian flag, to bring wines from Aegean to Russian Black Sea ports, to export grains from Ochakov and Odessa to the Mediterranean, were Greek ships manned by Greek crews”.<sup>24</sup>

*Third*, Russian Greeks aimed to preserve their unique cultural identity through the development of folklore, print press publications and education in Greek language. As Ivanova mentioned, whenever Greeks settled in new places, they first built schools and churches.<sup>25</sup> Preservation of their cultural identity was strongly connected to the rise of Greek merchants on the Black Sea. With the development of trade, new ideas came to the Southern Russia, as merchants were attracted by the appeals of Enlightenment and liberalism. Wealthy entrepreneurs were investing in the printing of books, opening new schools in the Black sea region.<sup>26</sup>

Pontian Greek identity was formed under the influence of the constant migration of the community. The major waves of immigration of Greeks to Imperial Russia were the following: 1) after Trapesund was concurred by Turks in 1461; 2) in the last decades of the XIX century when Greek miners from Kars settled in Georgia; 4) after 1821 Greek revolution; 5) during three Russian-Turkish wars (1829-1832); after the Crimean war (1856-1866); after the Russian-Turkish war of 1876 (first mass migration); and after 1916.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Агдзидис, В, Одиссея Понтийских греков. Из истории Понта (фрагмент из книги), с. 6-14 (Agtzidis, V, Odyssey of Pontian Greeks. From the History of Pontos (a book fragment), viewed on 5 September, 2011, <[http://history.kubsu.ru/pdf/gr\\_agd.pdf](http://history.kubsu.ru/pdf/gr_agd.pdf)>.

<sup>22</sup> A. Karpozilos, ‘The Greeks in Russia’, in *The Greek Diaspora in the Twentieth Century*, R. Clogg (ed), MacMillan Press Ltd., London, 1999, p. 138.

<sup>23</sup> T. Stoianovich, ‘The Conquering Balkan Orthodox merchant’. *The Journal of Economic History*, Vol. 20, № 2, June, 1960, p. 288.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, p. 289.

<sup>25</sup> Ivanova, op. cit., p. 11.

<sup>26</sup> Karpozilos, op. cit., p. 140.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 137-138.

Russia annexed numerous territories on the Black sea (the Crimea) as a result of wars with Turkey. The idea of the Russian government was to create a permanent loyal population in the bordering region. To guarantee it, the Greeks, under the order of Katherine II, were given large plots of land, tax exemptions and loans to built houses<sup>28</sup>. Most of the Greeks who resided on those lands were involved in farming (the ‘chernozem’ lands of Southern Russia are considered the most fertile in the country). As Vasilis Kardasis mentioned, “grain was the reason why Greeks stayed there and flourished”.<sup>29</sup> In 1800, the Greek merchants in Odessa, representing only 34 percent of the total number of merchants in the city’s first and second guilds, owned 62 percent of total merchant capital.<sup>30</sup>

Likewise, within the period of tsarist Russia lies an important contradiction with regards to the formation of the Pontian identity. On the one hand, it is obvious that with the development of trade in the South of Russia, modernity came to the region. However, the political system of the Russian Empire was of the premodern type, as referred by Paul A. Globe.<sup>31</sup> The national consciousness of the minorities developed in the conditions of modernity, but ethnicity was not reasserted in the Russian Empire.

Nationalism is a politicized culture.<sup>32</sup> The development of nationalism and demands of political participation of ethnic communities depend on the official state policy and recognition of the rights of minorities. Before 1917 the tsarist authorities with the policy of Russification kept ethnic minorities out of politics, the prevalence of Russian identity over ethnic identity was implied, nationality was not mentioned in the passport, and ethnically based political territories did not exist.<sup>33</sup> It is only logical that in a unitary state like the Russian Empire, where the territories were often gained through the wars, any support of ethnicity was seen as bearing the danger of succession.

This situation resulted in the appearance of hidden nationalism of ethnical groups, including the one of Pontian Greeks. Those nationalisms backfired when many provinces exited the Empire in the period of 1914-1922.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> V. Kardasis, ‘Greek diaspora in the Southern Russia in the eighteenth through nineteenth centuries’, in *Homelands and Diasporas. Greeks, Jews and their migrations*, M. Rozen (ed), I.B. Tauris, London, 2008, p. 163.

<sup>29</sup> Kardasis, op. cit., p. 161.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 165.

<sup>31</sup> P. A. Globe, ‘Three Faces of Nationalism in the Former Soviet Union’, in *Nationalism and Nationalities in the New Europe*, C. A. Kupchan (ed), Cornell University Press, 1995, p. 123.

<sup>32</sup> A. D. Smith, *Nationalism: Key Concepts*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2010, p. 143.

<sup>33</sup> P. A. Globe, op. cit., p. 123.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

## 2. Pontian Greeks under the Soviet rule (1918-1985).

The exact number of Greeks living in Russia when the Soviets came to power is not known. Some researchers point out that in the years between 1916 and 1924 around 700 000 Greeks were living in Russia, the majority of them being Pontians,<sup>35</sup> while others refer to 350 000 Pontians out of 550 000 Greeks by 1917.<sup>36</sup> The prevailing number of Pontians is explained by the fact that throughout the XIX century, when major immigration waves took place, Russia went through several wars with Turkey. As a result, Greeks were fleeing from the region of Pontos in Asia Minor to the Orthodox Russia.

In any case, Russia had a substantial population of a Greek minority even before the USSR was formed, which could be enough to create an ethnically-based constituent entity within the Russian state.

Soviet politics towards Greeks were not continuous. Right after the Soviets came to power, due to the participation in the October revolution, many Greeks had to flee abroad<sup>37</sup> (those who supported Mensheviks, White forces, or the Mahno anarchist movement).

Later, when the collectivization policy was implemented (1929-1933<sup>38</sup>) Greeks were subject to repression for economical reasons. Personal property was confiscated, many Greeks were sentenced to death or exiled to Siberia (or North Kazakhstan)<sup>39</sup> for the reason that they belonged to the bourgeois class. Vlasis Agtzidis gives an example of the Mariupol district, where two wealthy Greek villages were destroyed by the Red Army and their inhabitants executed.<sup>40</sup>

At the same time, the period from 1917 to 1937 was favorable for the development of the Greek identity. The right of ethnic groups to develop their mother tongue and preserve their traditional way of living was promoted by the Leninist ideology.<sup>41</sup> In Georgia, as Ivanova mentions, until 1937 there were around 100 schools with teaching conducted in Modern Greek.<sup>42</sup>

The situation changed drastically when Stalin came to power. Greek language was prohibited from being taught since 1937.<sup>43</sup> Greeks were deported to Kazakhstan,

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<sup>35</sup> V. Agtzidis, 'The Prosecution of Pontic Greeks in the Soviet Union'. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, Vol. 4, № 4, 1991, p. 388.

<sup>36</sup> Karpozilos, op. cit., p. 139.

<sup>37</sup> Karpozilos, op. cit., p. 140.

<sup>38</sup> Encyclopedia Britannica, viewed on 5 September, 2011, <<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/125592/collectivization>>.

<sup>39</sup> Agtzidis, op. cit., p. 373.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> M. Vergeti, 'Pontic Greeks from Asia Minor and the Soviet Union: Problems of Integration in Modern Greece'. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, Vol. 4, № 4, 1991, p. 388.

<sup>42</sup> Ivanova, op. cit., p. 4.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan<sup>44</sup>. A possible reason for massive deportation of Greeks could be their previous claims of self-determination.

Constant repressions and deportations of national minorities were carried out to maintain the fear of the system and its artificial legitimization of the totalitarian regime. Besides, it was a part of Stalin's policy of Russification, in which sense Greeks were not an exception. All the non-titular nations received similar treatment.

The deportations were continuing up to 1949, the year which corresponded with the defeat of communists in Greece.<sup>45</sup> Greece, thus, gained the image of a rivalry capitalist country. In 1949 about 100 000 Pontian Greeks in Caucasus were put under the category of "special exile" and deported to Central Asia.<sup>46</sup> Pontians from Georgia were expelled. Their property was given to Georgians. The government gave grants of up to 10 000 rubles for the Georgians to settle.<sup>47</sup>

In the post-Stalin period, according to the census of 1979, there were 350.000 Pontians in the former USSR<sup>48</sup>. However, this information might be wrong, as in the conditions of the totalitarian regime many half Greeks (children in interethnic marriages) preferred to take the nationality of a non-Greek parent<sup>49</sup>.

To promote the multinational image of the country, deportations never touched the "constituent nations of the USSR" (those who gave names to the Republics). The question is why the Soviets did not recognize the Greeks as one of the nations of the USSR, like central Russian Mari or the Mordov nations, the size of which could be compared with the population of Greeks in Russia? The languages of those small nations do not have such words as 'state', 'administration', and 'government', which can reflect the lack of tradition of independent state structures. Greeks, as it was already mentioned, had a clear tradition of stateness. Besides, the location of the Greek community in Russia (shores of the Black sea, access to the borders of other states, most fertile soils in Russia) was crucial in deciding the question of self-determination. The partial anti-Bolshevik activity of Greeks during the revolution also had its negative impact.

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<sup>44</sup> Agtzidis, op. cit., p. 378.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 378.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 377.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 378.

<sup>48</sup> T Nikolaidou, op. cit., <[http://www.luisedruke.com/luise/book\\_thess/nikolaidou\\_511\\_528.pdf](http://www.luisedruke.com/luise/book_thess/nikolaidou_511_528.pdf)>.

<sup>49</sup> Ivanova, op. cit., p. 14.

3. The rediscovery of Greek identity in modern Russia: ‘Greek revival movement’.

Two main processes took place after the collapse of the Soviet Union, which directly involved the Pontian community of the USSR.

*The first important trend was the strengthening of the Greek cultural organizations in Russia.* The process of democratization that started in the USSR with Gorbachev “Perestroika and Glasnost” abolished censorship and created a boost for social mobilization. Previously nationalist organizations could not be openly created by national minorities. During ‘Perestroika’ ethnic cultural societies received more freedoms.

In a situation of weakened state institutions, ethno-cultural organizations started to take on some social functions (especially education) in Greek communities. Greek language started to be actively taught in schools as a foreign language.<sup>50</sup> Agtzidis also noticed that in this period Greeks formed mass organizations (the most influential – United League of Soviet Greeks with Gabriel Popov), and even the idea of creation of the Autonomous Greek Republic in the coastal Southern Russia was again discussed.<sup>51</sup> Popov also draws attention to the appearance of Greek cultural organizations in the former USSR in the early 1990s. Their activity included reestablishment of connections with relatives in Greece, providing Greek literature and textbooks, and promotion of Russian-Greek economic activities.<sup>52</sup>

*The second process that started inside the Greek communities in Russia was the growing tendency towards immigration--the external migration (to Greece) and internal migration within the borders of the former USSR to the places Greeks inhabited before the Soviet deportations: Southern Russia, and Georgia.*

There were three main reasons for the migration of Greeks at that time.

*First*, the Soviet policy towards ethnic minorities created the basis for the destruction of the state system itself. Ethnicity in the Soviet Union was made more important than other identities: “national in form, socialist in content”,<sup>53</sup> a record of ethnicity in Soviet passports was obligatory. The country was divided into a number of constituent nations and smaller ethnic groups, including Greeks. Ethnic groups did not have cultural rights

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<sup>50</sup> Ivanova, op. cit., p. 10.

<sup>51</sup> Agtzidis, op. cit., p. 379.

<sup>52</sup> A. Popov, ‘Crossing Borders, Shifting Identities: Transnationalisation, ‘Materialization’, and Commoditization of Greek Ethnicity in Post-Soviet Russia’. *Anthropology of East Europe Review*, Vol. 25, № 1, 2007, p. 34.

<sup>53</sup> D. P. Gorenburg, *Minority Ethnic Mobilization in the Russian Federation*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2003, p. 77.

given to the nations, had problems developing their language (which was not taught in schools and nor used in state institutions) and had no fixed territory of habitation.

*Second*, the influence of the Greek state needs to be taken into account, which will be discussed in details in chapter III. As correctly mentioned by Ivanova, the connection with Pontian organizations in Greece was heating immigration moods among Greeks of Russia.<sup>54</sup> This situation made the Greek communities in the former Soviet Union reconnect with Greece and, eventually, identify themselves as a Greek diaspora.

*The third reason* for internal migration of Pontians can be demonstrated with the help of the 1988 statistical data regarding the dissemination of Greeks in the former USSR<sup>55</sup>:

**Chart 1.**

A.R. of Aphazia (sic) (South Georgia)	50.000
S.R. of Georgia	80.000
Department of Stavroupolis and Krashnodar (sic) S.R. of Russia	100.000
Department of Donets (sic) S.R. of Ukraine	100.000
Armenia	12.000
A.R. of Ossetia	10.000
Republics (sic) of Kazakhstan	135.000

As it is obvious from the chart, after the collapse of the USSR, Greeks found themselves in the territories of new states (or entities claiming independence) with different practices towards ethnic minorities. One of the reasons for Pontian Greeks to immigrate was reemerging Muslim nationalism in the Caucasian and Transcaucasian regions of the former USSR.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Ivanova, op. cit., p. 11.

<sup>55</sup> Nikolaidou, op. cit. <[http://www.luisedruke.com/luise/book\\_thess/nikolaidou\\_511\\_528.pdf](http://www.luisedruke.com/luise/book_thess/nikolaidou_511_528.pdf)>.

<sup>56</sup> D. Kokkinos, 'The Greek state's Overview of the Pontian Issue'. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, Vol. 4, № 4, 1991, p. 313.

Appendix 1.



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<sup>57</sup> Pontos (Black Sea) – Agiasofia, last updated: 6 February, 2011, viewed on 5 September, 2011, <<http://www.agiasofia.com/pontos/pontos.html>>.

## II. The 'transnational' character of Pontian Greek identity.

### 1. Defining the Pontian Greek identity – ethnic or national?

#### a) The concepts of ethnic and national identities.

In order to present and distinguish the concepts ethnicity and nation, I would like to refer to the research of Thomas Hylland Eriksen.<sup>58</sup> He conducted a profound analysis of the issues of ethnicity, nationalism and identity politics.<sup>59</sup> He mentions three factors that influence the characterization of ethnicity.

First, it is hard to define the boundaries of ethnicity:

“Since language, culture, political organization, etc., do not correlate completely, the units delimited by one criterion do not coincide with the units delimited by another”.<sup>60</sup>

Second, “group identities must always be defined...in relation to non-members of the group”<sup>61</sup>.

Third, “when we talk of ethnicity, we indicate that groups and identities have developed in mutual contact rather than in isolation”.<sup>62</sup> Only through communication with other groups can members of an ethnos assign distinct characteristic features to themselves (language, common history, etc.).

In my opinion, those factors can be called conditions for the creation of the subjective element of an ethnic identity, in the absence of which the identity does not exist. This element is well described by Michael Moerman (as referred to by Eriksen) while he observed the identity of the Lue in Thailand: "someone is Lue by virtue of believing and calling himself Lue and of acting in ways that validate his Lueness".<sup>63</sup>

Considering everything mentioned above, I agree with the definition proposed by Eriksen: ‘*Ethnicity* is an aspect of social relationship between agents who consider themselves as being culturally distinctive from members of other groups with whom they have a minimum of regular interaction’.<sup>64</sup>

How then is ethnicity related to the national identity? Without the analysis of the ethnic roots of the national identity, we cannot understand the essence of the nation. Smith asserts that “...we must relate national identity and nationalism to questions of ethnic

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<sup>58</sup>T. H. Eriksen is a professor of social anthropology at the University of Oslo.

<sup>59</sup>T. H. Eriksen. ‘Engaging with the world’, viewed on 8 September, 2011, <<http://folk.uio.no/geirthe/>>.

<sup>60</sup>T. H. Eriksen. *Ethnicity and Nationalism*, Pluto Press, London, 1993, p. 11.

<sup>61</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>62</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>63</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>64</sup>*Ibid.*



identity and community”.<sup>65</sup> Gellner, opposing him, stated that ethnic cultural communities are like navels for nations<sup>66</sup>:

“some nations have it and some do not; and in any case it is inessential, as you can live perfectly well without it”.<sup>67</sup>

The reason I want to advance the ethnic roots argument in this research is because the Pontian national identity, in my opinion, has this navel. I do not claim that Smith’s approach explains every case of nationalism. Just like Gellner’s approach, as he himself claims, might explain 60 per cent or 40 per cent or 30 per cent of the cases,<sup>68</sup> the Smith’s theory may explain the rest (or at least some) of them.

In the light of this argument we can as well treat *ethnic identity* as a collective identity that may, under certain political circumstances and in the times of modernity, evolve into a national identity.

Smith offers the following definition of a *nation*:

“...a named human population sharing a historic territory, common myths and historical memories, a mass, public culture, a common economy and common legal rights and duties for all legal members”.<sup>69</sup>

He also provides a definition of an *ethnic group*:

“...a type of cultural collectivity that emphasizes the role of myths of descent and historical memories and that is recognized by one or more cultural differences, like region, customs, language or institutions”.<sup>70</sup>

On one hand, those two definitions of Smith are very similar. To make his definition of a nation clearer, and to separate it from the definition of an ‘ethnie’, I would offer to add the wording used by Anderson: nation is an ‘imagined community’, a form of ‘social solidarity – horizontal comradeship’.<sup>71</sup> The ‘imagined community’ embraces, in fact, Smith’s ‘common myths and historical memories, a mass public culture and a common economy’.

Furthermore, the rest of the Smith’s definition (‘common legal rights and duties for all legal members’) is problematic. It has been criticized by different scholars. Montserrat Guibernau holds a view that this part of the definition refers to the state instead of the

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<sup>65</sup> Smith, *National Identity*, op. cit., p. vii-viii.

<sup>66</sup> Gellner, Ernest and Anthony D. Smith. ‘The nation: real or imagined?: The Warwick Debates on Nationalism.’ *Nations and Nationalism* 2, № 3, 1996, viewed on 5 September, 2011, < <http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/gellner/Warwick2.html>>.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Smith, *National Identity*, op. cit., p. 14.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>71</sup> B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Verso, London and New York, 1991, p. 5-7.

nation: “the fundamental flaw in Smith’s theory stems from his conflation of nation and state”.<sup>72</sup>

T.K. Oommen also criticizes Smith on similar grounds.<sup>73</sup> Giving the examples of Wales, Scotland and Catalonia, he stresses that

“some nations do not even aspire to or have consciously renounced the aspiration to acquire statehood”.<sup>74</sup>

I would like to point out to the partial invalidity of the critique offered by Guibernau<sup>75</sup> and Oommen<sup>76</sup>. Smith does not confuse the elements of a state and a nation. He gives an ideal definition of a nation, which not all the nations satisfy (for instance, stateless nations). But in a perfect case a national identity must find its expression in an administrative-political union (independent or autonomous).

I would also propose that ‘common legal rights and duties for all legal members’ aspect only points out to the *politisisation* of the ethnic identity. *This aspect, in my opinion, constitutes the major element of the national identity.* In different cases it can be claims of secession and creation of an independent state, or it can be statehood, realized within the borders of another state (autonomy). In any case, the political claim must be present:

“To be fully expressed and developed national identity requires that people, forming the nation, enjoy the right to decide upon their common political destiny”.<sup>77</sup>

In his book ‘National Identity’, Smith as well sees national identity as one of the collective identities with its distinct feature--the ability to unify a community on a political basis.<sup>78</sup>

The subjective element (personal self-identification with a particular community) is also attributed to the nation. Besides, the territorial affiliation, which was identified by Oommen as the most important feature of the nation,<sup>79</sup> needs to be taken into account.

*Still, it is the political character that distinguishes national identity from other collective identities, as well as with an ethnic identity.*

I offer the following definition of a *nation*: an imagined community, sharing a common territorial affiliation, common myths and historical memories, cultural

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<sup>72</sup> M. Guibernau, J. Hutchinson, *History and National Destiny: Ethnosymbolism and its Critics*, Wiley-Blackwell, 2004, p. 127.

<sup>73</sup> T.K. Oommen, *Citizenship and National Identity: From Colonization to Globalism*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 1997, p. 14, 15, 17.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14, 15.

<sup>75</sup> Guibernau, Hutchinson, *History and National Destiny: Ethnosymbolism and its Critics*, op. cit., p. 127.

<sup>76</sup> Oommen, op. cit., p. 14, 15, 17.

<sup>77</sup> M. Guibernau, *The Nation-State and Nationalism in the Twentieth Century*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1996, p. 73.

<sup>78</sup> Smith, *National Identity*, op. cit., p. 21.

<sup>79</sup> Oommen, op. cit., p. 23.

differences with other communities (as perceived by the members of this community) and the members of which have a common view of their political destiny.

b) Pontians: the path from ethnic to national identity.

For an identity to be defined as transnational or a hybrid, first, it needs to be a distinct national identity, meeting all the characteristics of the latter. Hence, the conditions for the appearance of a nation must be present. This represents the most debated issue in the theory of Nationalism. For the purposes of this Master thesis it is sufficient to notice that most researchers agree on the modern character of nationalism and the nation.<sup>80</sup> Whether the nation was constructed from scratch when modernity came to the region, or the nation was 'rediscovered' at that time, the coming of modernity was an important factor for the appearance of the concept of the nation.

I hold the position that the development from ethnic to national identity of Pontians from the former USSR was such that they possessed a distinct ethnic identity for a long time. Pontians already by the end of the nineteenth century had attained all the main attributes of the ethnic community, pointed out by Anthony Smith:<sup>81</sup> 1) *a collective proper name* (Pontians); 2) *a myth of common ancestry* (the relation to ancient Greece, being the descendants of the ancient Greek inhabitants of Pontos); 3) *shared historical memories* (among them the memory of migrations of ancestors from Pontos after the Crimean War (1856-66) and the First World War (after the Russian troops withdrew from Pontos));<sup>82</sup> 4) one or more *differentiating elements of common culture* (Pontian language); 5) an association with a *specific homeland* (South of the Russian Empire – Georgia, Abkhazia<sup>83</sup>); and, 6) *a sense of solidarity for a significant sectors of the population* (by the time of the October revolution “the Pontic population was estimated at more than 350 000 in Russia”).<sup>84</sup>)

Even though the Russian Empire was an absolute monarchy and serfdom was abolished only in 1861, *modernity came to Southern Russia in the nineteenth century*. According to Smith, three processes signified the coming of modernity—administrative, economic and cultural/educational revolutions.<sup>85</sup> It is especially true regarding the Black Sea region in the Southern Russia, which, since the foundation of Odessa in 1794, has

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<sup>80</sup> See: Gellner and Smith, *The Warwick Debates*, op. cit.; Hobsbawm, op. cit.; Anderson, op. cit., <<http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/gellner/Warwick2.html>>.

<sup>81</sup> Smith, *National Identity*, op. cit., p. 21.

<sup>82</sup> Karpozilos, op. cit., p. 138.

<sup>83</sup> Ivanova, op. cit., p. 2, 3.

<sup>84</sup> Karpozilos, op. Cit., p. 139.

<sup>85</sup> Smith, *National Identity*, op. cit., p. 61.

been the center of foreign trade and liberal ideas. The region “was marked by a strong European influence”,<sup>86</sup> which could be the reason why Philike Etairia was founded in Odessa, instead of Moscow, where a similar attempt failed.<sup>87</sup>

It is reasonable now to apply the *stages of transformation of an ethnies into a nation*. These stages, as presented by A. Smith are:

- 1) a movement from passive subordination of the community to its active political assertion;
- 2) a movement to place the community in its homeland, a secure and recognized compact territory;
- 3) a movement to endow the territorial community with economic unity;
- 4) a movement to place the people at the center of concern and celebrate the masses by re-educating in national values, memories and myths;
- 5) a movement to turn ethnic members into ‘legal citizens’ by conferring civil, social and political rights on them<sup>88</sup>.

I would also like to alter the stages of transformation of an ethnies to a nation, offered by Smith. The movement from passive subordination of the community to its active political assertion, mentioned by Smith as a first stage, in fact, constitutes one of the last stages of transformation. As we can see from the example of Pontians, the politisation of their culture<sup>89</sup> happened only after they formed a distinct cultural community and a strong economic unity on the Black Sea.

In short, the following aspects *are important for the formation of the national identity*: [1] territorial affiliation (homeland) and economic unity, [2] common education within the community, [3] the role of intelligentsia, [4] politisation of the community, and [5] recognition of legal and political rights for its members.

The *territorial affiliation* of Pontian Greeks represents the element of construction in their identity. The homeland of the Pontians Greeks should be either in Pontos of Asia Minor (where their ancestors lived since 1 000 B.C.<sup>90</sup>) or in the Black Sea region of the former USSR, based on the territories they historically inhabited. Later, however, this element of national identity was changed with interference of the Greek state, when Pontians discovered their new homeland – Greece.

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<sup>86</sup> Kardasis, op. cit., p. 164.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Smith, National Identity, op. cit., p. 64.

<sup>89</sup> The attempt to create a Trapesund autonomy in 1916.

<sup>90</sup> Ivanova, op. cit., p. 2.

A movement to endow a *territorial community with economic unity* was manifested in the creation of the strongest trade community in Southern Russia (where Greeks controlled majority of export and import trade until 1870s<sup>91</sup>).

The driving force behind the transformation of the community from one stage to another was the educated and politically active class—the *intelligentsia*. In the case of Pontians, they were also the class of entrepreneurs.

Smith described the task of an ethnic intelligentsia in the following way:

“...to provide new communal self-definitions and goals...to mobilize a formerly passive community into forming a nation around the new vernacular historical culture that it has rediscovered”.<sup>92</sup>

Intelligentsia formulates and channels the political claim of the ethnos. Through *education and print press*, it also preserves and develops the communal language. Hastings reflected on the role of vernaculars:

“For the development of nationhood from one or more ethnicities, by far the most important and widely present factor is that of an extensively used vernacular literature”.<sup>93</sup>

Even though the Pontian language was only one of the dialects of Russian Greeks, in the beginning of the twentieth century Pontians had a wide range of newspapers printed in their language: *Spartakos* in Novorossiysk; *Kokinós Kapnas* in Sukhum, and others<sup>94</sup>.

*The intelligentsia not only rediscovers the communal ‘ethno-history’, it also helps to preserve it.* It is relevant to refer here to the Smith’s ‘*cultural wars*’,<sup>95</sup> one of them being ‘*cultural resistance to an imperial cosmopolitanism*’,<sup>96</sup> which is applicable to the case of Pontians.

In 1926 during a Conference of the General Commission for the Regulation of the Language, held in Moscow, it was decided that demotic Greek should become an official language of the Greek minority living the Soviet Union, even though most Greeks spoke Pontic or the dialect of the ‘Rumaioi’ of the Mariupol region.<sup>97</sup> Some scholars asserted that the “recognition of Pontic [as an official language of the community] could be followed by the demands for the creation of an autonomous Pontic Republic in Southern

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<sup>91</sup> Kardasis, op. cit., p. 164.

<sup>92</sup> Smith, National Identity, op. cit., p. 64.

<sup>93</sup> A. Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion and Nationalism*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge and New York, 1997. pp. 2-5.

<sup>94</sup> Karpozilos, op. cit., p. 146.

<sup>95</sup> Smith, National identity, p. 67.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Karpozilos, op. cit., p. 148.

Russia”<sup>98</sup>. That could be the true reason behind the non-recognition of the Pontian language.

*The role of the intelligentsia can also be observed through the political activity of Greek organizations.* Good examples could be the First and Second Panhellenic Congress of Transcaucasia in 1917 and 1919<sup>99</sup>. Furthermore, “Greek communities...had the right to open their own schools”,<sup>100</sup> where teaching was conducted in Greek language.

I conclude that Pontians with the active role of their intelligentsia had moved through stages 1-4, mentioned by Smith, before the Soviets came to power.

The last and the most important aspect in the creation of a national identity—*politisation of the ethnic community*—presents a corner stone of transition from an ethnic to a nation. Only with political and administrative power over its members, can the community attain full affiliation to the homeland (possession or a claim of possession) and create an economic and legal unity with full rights and duties for its members.

Adrian Hastings also referred to politisation as a distinct feature of a nation:

“A nation is a far more self-conscious community than an ethnicity... it possesses or claims the right to political identity and autonomy as a people, together with the control of specific territory”.<sup>101</sup>

During the years 1916-1919, there were two attempts by Pontian Greeks to achieve political autonomy (and, thus, politicize their community). The first one was undertaken when Russia occupied Trapesund area in 1916. The autonomous Trapesund republic was created and dismantled in two years with the withdrawal of Russian troops.<sup>102</sup> Another attempt took place when Greeks in Transcaucasia (most of them Pontians) formed a National Assembly and negotiated the independence of Pontos with the Republic of Georgia.<sup>103</sup>

*Those attempts of political determination proved that Pontian national self-consciousness already existed at that time.* If the aspirations of independence were realized, Pontians could become a separate nation, similar to the current Abkhazia.

The development of Pontian identity slowed down during the Soviet times. The Pontian Greeks were prevented from attaining even partial autonomy and it was extremely hard to preserve the Pontian Greek identity. It needs to be mentioned that in 1930 the

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid., p. 151.

<sup>99</sup> Zapantis, op. cit., p. 185.

<sup>100</sup> Karpozilos, op. cit., p. 140.

<sup>101</sup> Hastings, op. cit., p. 2-5.

<sup>102</sup> Karpozilos, op. cit., p. 138-139.

<sup>103</sup> Zapantis, op. cit., p. 185.

Greek national district (*raion*) in Krasnodar krai was created, but was abolished during the Stalin times.<sup>104</sup> Overall, the political claim of autonomy was not successful and Pontian nationalism faded in the system of Soviet ethnic federalism.

*The culmination of the development of Pontian identity in Russia came with the collapse of the Soviet Union.* In the 1980-1990s, the Pontian community (or at least a large part of it) made an independent political choice to immigrate as repatriates to Greece. The number of Greek immigrants from the former USSR to Greece reached 150.000-200.000 by the year of 2001.<sup>105</sup>

*In this period, the Pontian Greek identity in Russia attained the form of a national identity, but no new nation was formed. Their political choice was to become a part of the Greek nation.*

The politisation of the Pontian ethnic identity and its transformation to a nation (that is, acceptance of the modern Greek identity) happened only because the Pontian community had an ethnical basis to make this claim: Pontians or not, they were still Greeks, and they were seen in the former USSR as Greeks.

“The Greek character of the Pontians is such a clear fact that none could doubt it, since it is a historical precept that South Russia and especially the Black Sea coasts in their whole extent, have been inhabited for over than 2.500 years by the Greek colonies and have been the centre of a tremendous cultural and commercial activity.”<sup>106</sup>

Hence, Pontians made this political claim on the basis of the ethnical roots of their national identity, which proves the validity of Smith’s theory in this case.

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<sup>104</sup> Popov, op. cit., p. 35.

<sup>105</sup> C. Hess. ‘Post-Soviet Reparation and Nationhood in Germany and Greece’. *Political Perspectives*, vol. 4 (2), 2010, p. 34.

<sup>106</sup> T Nikolaidou, op. cit., <[http://www.luisedruke.com/luise/book\\_thess/nikolaidou\\_511\\_528.pdf](http://www.luisedruke.com/luise/book_thess/nikolaidou_511_528.pdf)>.

## 2. Pontian Greeks from Russia and a ‘long-distance (diasporic) nationalism’.

“Diaspora communities are becoming prominent actors in international politics”<sup>107</sup>, they are both the “new type of consciousness and symptoms of globalization”.<sup>108</sup>

Even though the concept of diaspora is a broad term and has been subject to different interpretations, it will, nevertheless, be argued that *Pontian Greek nationalism can be characterized as a case of a diasporic nationalism* with all the consequences for the construction of the individual national identity.

The term diaspora has its linguistic roots in the Greek language and is based on a translation of the Hebrew word<sup>109</sup>. With the root *speiro* (to sow) and the preposition *dia* (over), in the Ancient Greece, the word referred to migration and colonization.<sup>110</sup>

In regards to the current topic of research, it is necessary to demonstrate the analysis of the term “diaspora” in the Russian political science and in the literature abroad.

One of the most extensive researches on the issue has been produced by Valery Tishkov.<sup>111</sup> He refers to the widely used in Russian literature definition of the term “*diaspora*” as a community of people of a definite ethnic or religious identity, which lives in a country or a region of new inhabitation.<sup>112</sup> He claims that this definition is too broad, as it doesn’t take into consideration the historical circumstances and the personal identification factors.<sup>113</sup> The latter is the subjective element, which already was pointed out as a necessary element for the construction of a national identity.

Tishkov insists that two categories should be excluded from the definition of a diaspora. First, we have to exclude from the “exterior diasporas” all those, who are completely assimilated.<sup>114</sup> Second, the term “diasporic people” in Russia is often applied to the “internal diasporas” – communities of Russian citizens that are not of Russian ethnicity and live out of

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<sup>107</sup> Z. Skrbis, *Long-distance Nationalism: Diasporas, Homelands and Identities. (Research in Migration and Ethnic Relations Series)*, Ashgate Publishing Company, Brookfield, VT, 1999, viewed on 5 September, 2011, <<http://www.filg.uj.edu.pl/~wwwip/postjugo/files/153/04-Skrbis.diaspora.pdf>>.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> L. Anteby-Yemini, W. Berthomière, ‘Diaspora: A Look Back on a Concept’. Short introduction to the book *2000 ans de diasporas*, Lisa Anteby, W. Berthomière and G. Sheffer (eds), Presses Universitaires de Rennes, Rennes, 2005, viewed on 5 September, 2011, <<http://bcfrj.revues.org/index257.html>>.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> An academician of the Russian Academy of Science, PhD in Social Sciences (History).

<sup>112</sup> В. Тишков, *Реквием по этносу: исследования по социально-культурной антропологии*, Наука, Москва, 2003, с. 435 (V. Tishkov, *Requiem on Ethnos: research on socio-cultural anthropology*, Science, Moscow, 2003, p. 435 [in Russian]).

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., p. 436.



the borders of the ethnic republics of the Russian Federation.<sup>115</sup> In his opinion, they cannot be counted either, as they are the original inhabitants of those territories.

While it is possible to agree with his opinion about the interior diasporas, his approach to exterior diasporas must be questioned. He precisely refers to Pontian Greeks as falling into the first category (old and fully assimilated ethnic communities)<sup>116</sup> and proposes that they cannot be called a diaspora in a strict sense. However, if the Pontians of Russia were fully assimilated, they would not immigrate as repatriates to Greece. The rivalry Soviet regime with the mass repressions and deportations of Greeks forced Pontians to revive their Greek identity and attain a new status of a Greek diaspora.

Gabriel Sheffer, as referred by L. Anteby-Yemini and W. Berthomière, proposed three criteria, which could be used for a definition of “diaspora”:

1. The maintenance and the development of a collective identity in the “diasporised people”;
2. The existence of an internal organization distinct from those existing in the country of origin or in the host country;
3. Significant contacts with the Homeland: real contacts (i.e. Travel remittances) or symbolic contacts (preserved myths of homeland).<sup>117</sup>

The maintenance of the collective identity by the Pontians and the existence of the communal organizations with the constant communication with Greece and support by the Greek state were already mentioned above. These criteria, to my mind, are not enough to assign a diasporic character to a community.

L. Anteby-Yemini and W. Berthomière points out to six elements that help identify a diaspora, which were originally offered by William Safran.<sup>118</sup> He defines *a diaspora* as follows: expatriate minority communities that:

1. are dispersed from a original “center” to at least two “peripheral” places;
2. maintain a “memory,” vision or myth about their original homeland;
3. believe they are not – and perhaps cannot be – fully accepted by their host country;
4. see the ancestral home as a place of eventual return when the time is right;
5. are committed to the maintenance or restoration of this homeland, and;
6. of which the group’s consciousness and solidarity are “importantly defined” by this continuing relationships with the homeland.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., p.438

<sup>117</sup> Anteby-Yemini, op. cit., < <http://bcfj.revues.org/index257.html>>.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

Those criteria are not universal either, not all the diasporas meet them. Another problem – this definition implies existence of one center, from which diaspora originates. *Pontian Greeks, due to their hybrid national identity (that includes elements of different identities), have no common center of a diasporic origin.* Due to the constant migrations of Pontian Greeks, several generations of Pontians were already born outside of Pontos.

However, the two elements, mentioned by Safran, constitute, in my opinion, basic features of a diaspora, which are: “3. believe they are not – and perhaps cannot be – fully accepted by their host country; 4. see the ancestral home as a place of eventual return when the time is right”;<sup>120</sup>

Those two elements must be combined with the three characteristics, offered by Sheffer (mentioned above) in order to create a comprehensive definition of a diaspora.

*Pontian Greeks is a complex case of a diasporic nationalism.* It is possible to track their connection with Greece since the Russian tsarist times. Greece always supported Greek refugees in Russia (for instance, in 1919 the Russian Empire<sup>121</sup>). However, the ultimate affiliation with Greece (with the partial denial of the Russian identity, when Pontians had to prove their ‘Greekness’) happened only after the collapse of the Soviet totalitarian regime.

I can assume that *the formation of Pontian identity as a Greek diasporic identity started after the 20s Party Congress in 1956*, when “authorities allowed a number of exiles who had retained their Greek citizenship to migrate to Greece”.<sup>122</sup> At that time, even those Pontians, who did not have a Greek citizenship started to see Greece as an alternative homeland. Those changes pursued into the perestroika period with the mass migration of Pontians to Greece in 1987-1989.

It is true that a lot of Pontians immigrated in order to improve their social and economic status. But definitely, many of them immigrated for political reasons – in search for their new homeland. It is useful to mention here the survey, referred by Apostolos Karpozilos: “Among the reasons given for their settlement in Greece, according to a questionnaire survey conducted on a sample of 1216 Pontians, were ‘return to the fatherland (89 per cent), ‘family reasons’ (40 per cent), and ‘improvement of standard of living’ (35 per cent)”.<sup>123</sup>

*Bringing up the notion of the diasporic nationalism allows us to tie together the process of formation of the national identity of Pontian Greeks and their self-determination as a*

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Karpozilos, op. cit., p. 140.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., p. 154.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., p. 154-155.

*Greek diaspora.* Previously I concluded that the national identity cannot finalize unless the clear claim as to the political destiny of the community is made. The self-identification of the Pontian community as a Greek diaspora represented such necessary political claim, which signified the transformation of Pontian ethnic to Greek national identity.

3. Pontian Greek identity as a ‘hybrid national identity’.

“Social learning and environmental influences, as well as personal experiences play a role in shaping language and identity. Their construction is fluid, flexible and context-dependent”.<sup>124</sup>

In my opinion, a *hybrid national identity* can be defined as a case of an identity that incorporates elements of other national and ethnic identities, which influence the self-identification of a person and his assimilation in a particular community.

Smith points out to the paradox of ethnicity: the coexistence of flux and durability.<sup>125</sup> The flux of the ethnic identity of Pontians is in their ability to get partially assimilated, but only partially.

*The Pontian identity always had a potential to become a hybrid identity.* First, in the Tsarist Russia, when Pontians settled on the Black Sea, they had a status of foreigners; their communities were founded as foreign Welfare organizations<sup>126</sup>. A great number of Greeks in Russia preserved their Greek citizenship and, thus, maintained legal and political connection with Greece.<sup>127</sup> Some Greeks retained the status of foreigners during the Soviet Union as well<sup>128</sup>. And when they immigrated to Greece, Pontians, preserving the Russian citizenship<sup>129</sup>, again tried to live between two homelands. Historically, the Pontian community always had an image of an alternative homeland; they never got fully assimilated.

*I think that one of the factors for the creation of a hybrid identity is the loss of communication with other members of the original community.* This idea is relevant to the one expressed by T. Eriksen when he draws attention to the “importance of the ethnic relation, minimum of contact within the group for an ethnicity to emerge”.<sup>130</sup> I think not only to create ethnicity, but also to preserve it; the communication within the group is needed.

Pontian community from the former USSR historically travelled through different homelands: Pontos, Southern Russia, Central Asia and, eventually, Greece. Moreover, during the Stalin deportations the freedom of movement was highly limited. For example,

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<sup>124</sup> E. Mariou. ‘The contextual nature of ethnic, cultural and linguistic identity development in the host country’, viewed on 5 September, 2011, <<http://www.surrey.ac.uk/cronem/files/conf2009papers/Mariou.pdf>>.

<sup>125</sup> Smith, National Identity, op. cit., p. 38.

<sup>126</sup> Karpozilos, op. cit., p. 140.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> T Nikolaidou, op. cit., <[http://www.luisedruke.com/luise/book\\_thess/nikolaidou\\_511\\_528.pdf](http://www.luisedruke.com/luise/book_thess/nikolaidou_511_528.pdf)>.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid; see also: Popov, op. cit., p. 29.

<sup>130</sup> Eriksen, Ethnicity and Nationalism, op. cit., p. 12.

the movement of the Greeks who were exiled to Central Asia was restricted to 5 km of where they lived and worked.<sup>131</sup>

On every new place of habitation (Georgia, Kazakhstan, etc.), the Pontian identity incorporated different elements. Ivanova, with regards to the Greeks of Georgia, pointed out that all of them speak Russian, some of them study in higher education institutions in Georgian; in Central Asia Greeks usually learn local languages, but try to preserve their vernacular<sup>132</sup>.

Hence, we can observe that *Greeks from different republics of the former USSR lost communication with Greeks from other Republics and tried to assimilate (for social and economic reasons: to study, find a job) in the communities they lived.*

By the time of the dissolution of the USSR, the identity of Pontians, even within the borders of the USSR, has been extremely diverse. It can be said the identity became too individualized and stopped being a communal identity.

“The stronger and more persistent the preexisting ethnic identity, the more likely was any nation that might emerge to be based on that identity”.<sup>133</sup>

I have already concluded that *Pontians did not create an independent nation, but made a political choice to adjust to the Greek national identity.* I would like to claim that *this fact signifies the weakness of the identity and its vulnerability, imbedded in its character as a hybrid identity.* Otherwise, it would not need the assistance of the Greek state.

The connection with the new homeland, sponsored by the Greek state, and, later - opportunity for the Pontians to immigrate, strengthened their identity; it became strong enough to transform into a diasporic identity. At the same time, when the Pontian community in Russia self-identified itself as a Greek diaspora in the USSR, their national identity did not immediately crystallized into a solid identity, it was still pursuing its hybrid character with all the elements of Russian, Pontian, Kazakh, Greek, other identities.

It is important to mention further *the consequences that stem from the hybrid character of the Pontian national identity.*

1) *The problems of assimilation* of Pontians in the Greek society represent, in my opinion, the most important consequence. Those problems are based very often on the fact

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<sup>131</sup> Karpozilos, op. cit., p. 154.

<sup>132</sup> Ivanova, op. cit., p. 3-4.

<sup>133</sup> Smith, National Identity, op. cit., p. 71.

that Pontians are confused (by mistake or on purpose) with other immigrants from the post-Soviet space:

“the stereotypical label of ‘Russopontian’ prevails in Greek society...[and] carries negative connotations”.<sup>134</sup>

At the same time it is necessary to distinguish Pontian Greeks from: a) Russians (even though they also speak Russian); b) Georgians (even if a great number of Pontians were settled in Georgia and immigrated to Greece from this country); c) other kinds of Greek immigrants from Russia (Ouroumi, Romei, etc.); d) other Pontian Greeks (who immigrated to Greece directly from Asia Minor after 1923). This kind of confusions can be found even among the researchers. For instance, C. Hess refers to all the Greeks from the former USSR as ‘Pontian Greeks’.<sup>135</sup>

2) *The ability of the person to choose among many homelands* is one of the side effects of a hybrid national identity. On their historical journey (from Pontos through Southern Russia and Central Asia to Greece) some Greeks got assimilated. For example, in 1930s there was a major exodus of Greeks from Caucasus and Southern Russia.<sup>136</sup> Still, as referred by Apostolos Karpozilos, “those who stayed were Pontic Greeks...who believed that their ethnic roots lay not in Greece, but in the land of Pontos and the Black sea”.<sup>137</sup> In the 1990s as well, not all the Pontians from the former USSR immigrated to Greece. If we compare the statistics given by T. Nikolaidou (in 1988 there were more than 400.000 Greeks living in the former USSR<sup>138</sup>) with the one provided by Hess (by 2001 the number of Greek immigrants from the former USSR reached only the number of 150.000-200.000<sup>139</sup>), it is clear that half of Russian Greeks chose not to immigrate. Interethnic marriages also played some role,<sup>140</sup> as pointed out by Ivanova.

3) *The cultural heritage and the original language of the community can be lost* and it was rightly called “the loss of ethnicity or tendency for its weakening”.<sup>141</sup> This is the result of the absence of a historically predefined homeland and dissemination of the community in different parts of the world. It is obvious that identities of those Pontians

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<sup>134</sup>E. Mariou. ‘The contextual nature of ethnic, cultural and linguistic identity development in the host country’, viewed on 5 September, 2011, <<http://www.surrey.ac.uk/cronem/files/conf2009papers/Mariou.pdf>>.

<sup>135</sup>C. Hess, op. cit., p. 34.

<sup>136</sup>Karpozilos, op. cit., p. 140.

<sup>137</sup>Karpozilos, op. cit., p. 141.

<sup>138</sup>T Nikolaidou, op. cit., <[http://www.luisedruke.com/luise/book\\_thess/nikolaidou\\_511\\_528.pdf](http://www.luisedruke.com/luise/book_thess/nikolaidou_511_528.pdf)>.

<sup>139</sup>C. Hess, op. cit., p. 34.

<sup>140</sup>Ivanova, op. cit., p. 4.

<sup>141</sup>Ibid., p. 14.

who stayed in the former USSR and those who left for Greece will develop in completely different ways.

These are just few consequences of the hybrid character of the Pontian identity. It's worth mentioning that the bigger the number of identities a person accepts inside his national identity, the harder it becomes for him to imagine himself as a member of any ethnic or national community exclusively.

### III. The Pontian case – the influence of the nationalisms involved.

#### 1. The character and elements of the Pontian Greek nationalism.

“The nation and national identity are the creation of nationalism and its proponents”.<sup>142</sup>

We need to understand which types of nationalism are involved in the process, in order to comprehend the appearance of a national identity.

The Pontian Greek identity has been influenced by the nationalist policy of the Russian state long before Soviets came to power. However, only during the Soviet times the influences were so crucial that they predefined the way the Pontian nationalism was developing. The Soviet policy towards national minorities was, in fact, the reason why some nations (as well as the Pontians) were not able to develop their stateness and could barely prevent their ethnicity from extinction.

Pontian nationalism in Russia was a “*peripheral nationalism*”,<sup>143</sup> which is the kind of nationalism that “emerges not from the state, but rather from nations or parts of nations, included in a large state”.<sup>144</sup>

Paul A. Globe noticed that even if Lenin and Bolshevik party believed that ethnicity was a “survival of the past” and meant to disappear, they on the contrary, provided the support for ethnicity and transformed it into a national identity.<sup>145</sup> I would explain this phenomenon in the following manner.

“*Ethnic organization and identity*, rather than being “primordial” phenomena radically opposed to modernity and the modern state, *are frequently reactions to processes of modernisation*”.<sup>146</sup>

If we connect this with the assertion that Soviet state industrialized the country<sup>147</sup> and modernization continued, the strengthened ethnical identity of the minorities was inevitable.

The Pontian Greek nationalism in the Tsarist Russia can be classified as an *emerging classical nationalism* (with a desire ‘to achieve greater autonomy and eventually independence’), using the typology offered Paul A. Globe.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> Smith, National Identity, op. cit., p. 92.

<sup>143</sup> Guibernau, The Nation-State and Nationalism in the Twentieth Century, op. cit., p. 70.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> Globe, op. cit., p. 123.

<sup>146</sup> Eriksen, op. cit., p. 14.

<sup>147</sup> L. Freedman. Book review of *The Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914-1991*, E. J. Hobsbawm, viewed on 5 September, 2011, <<http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews/review/28>>

<sup>148</sup> Globe, op. cit., p. 128.



Pontian nationalism in Russia Empire and former USSR can also be called a ‘*stateless nationalism*’. T. Eriksen, defines ‘nations without a state’ or ‘proto-nations’ as the groups that have political leaders who claim that they are entitled to their own nation-state, have more substantial characteristics in common with nations, are territorially based large groups and differentiated according to class and educational achievement.<sup>149</sup> The evolution of the Pontian community from an ‘ethnie’ to a nation was presented in Chapter II. Notwithstanding all the efforts, Pontians (who in 1917 constituted 350 000 of all 550 000 of Greeks in Russia<sup>150</sup>) failed to attain any kind of stateness, even within the Russian borders, let alone independence.

Further, the Pontian Greek nationalism in Russia was a *non-radical nationalism* in its essence (in comparison with other nationalisms that came at loose after the collapse of the USSR). This fact can be explained by two factors. In the formation of the Pontian identity the major role was played by the Greek middle class in the Southern Russia – the point originally suggested by Paul A. Globe.<sup>151</sup> Besides, the Pontian nationalism during Soviet times already took direction towards diasporic nationalism, not towards autonomy or independence, which also explains its moderate character.

During the Soviet times Pontians became the unrecognized minority and their nationalism was suppressed, especially with the coming of Stalin. As a result, Pontian nationalism in the Soviet Russia can be characterized as ‘*nationalism in resistance*’, the Pontian identity in the Soviet Union was victimized.

Smith points out to the case of ethnic extinction – the disappearance of an ethnie<sup>152</sup> with genocide, mentioned as one of them. He also refers that policies and actions can be genocidal in their consequences, rather than in their intentions.<sup>153</sup> In my opinion, it was exactly the case of Stalin policy towards Greeks and other non-titular minorities. Even though Stalin prosecutions were not aimed exactly at the elimination of the Greek community in Russia, they resulted in the death of 50 000 Greeks.<sup>154</sup>

I would also refer to the ‘disruptive culture change’ phenomenon (war, conquest, exile and enslavement)<sup>155</sup> as a factor that changes the character of nationalism. In case of Pontians those disruptive culture changes were: the October revolution in Russia (when

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<sup>149</sup> Eriksen, Ethnicity and Nationalism, op. cit., <<http://folk.uio.no/geirthe/Ethnicity.html>>.

<sup>150</sup> Karpozilos, op. cit., p. 139.

<sup>151</sup> Globe, op. cit., p. 132.

<sup>152</sup> Smith, National Identity, op. cit., p. 30.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> Agtzidis, op. cit., p. 372.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

many Pontians escaped the country through the Black Sea), the collectivization policy of the early Soviet state (were deprived of their properties); political repressions during Stalin times (when Greeks avoided declaring their Greek ethnicity) and the collapse of the USSR. Those are some corner-stone events that formed Pontian Greek identity.

All those circumstances did not result in the extinction of Pontian minority in Russia, but stimulated their quest for a new homeland (Greece) eventual transformation of Pontian nationalism into the diasporic nationalism.

2. The role of the Greek state in the production of the 'transnational Greekness'.

The process of identity formation in the Pontian community of the former Soviet Union can be best described as a state-sponsored nationalism. However, I would like to give a new meaning to this term. A state-sponsored (state-driven) nationalism is widely understood as a case when the state first emerges (attains independence) and then plays a key role in the formation of the nation.<sup>156</sup> Anthony D. Smith's view is similar. He refers to the state-sponsored route of the transformation of ethnic communities into nations when those communities are being united by the centralised and bureaucratic state.<sup>157</sup>

The Pontian nationalism, however, can be called a state-sponsored nationalism for the following reason: *Pontians, in the situation as it was, after the collapse of the USSR, would never become a nation and would not develop a national identity without the interference of the Greek state.*

It needs to be taken into account, as already mentioned above, that no new nation was created. The role of the Greek state in the transformation of the Pontian identity was the following. It welcomed Pontians for immigration as repatriates, gave them a chance to rediscover their true homeland and become the legal and political members of the Greek community. The "elements of artifact, invention and social engineering"<sup>158</sup> were applied towards Pontian national identity by the Greek authorities.

Greeks, wherever they lived in Russia, were organized into cultural communities that were constantly supported by the Greek state (f.e., on the issues of migration of Greeks to Caucasus after 1918<sup>159</sup>) or by the Pontian communities in Greece<sup>160</sup>. Starting from the 1980s, the social democratic party (PASOK) developed an active interest in emigrant Greeks and encouraged their repatriation to Greece;<sup>161</sup> in 1984 the governmental department for 'Diaspora Hellenism' was founded<sup>162</sup>. As Popov stressed, the general policy of the Greek state was the facilitation of the resettlement of Greek immigrants<sup>163</sup>.

The actual politisation of the Pontian culture (when national identity appears) happened as a result of this support. But it was not the direction towards formation of an

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<sup>156</sup>Globe, op. cit., p. 123.

<sup>157</sup>Smith, National Identity, op. cit., p. 68.

<sup>158</sup>The terminology was used by E. Hobsbawm in regards to the process of the creation of the nation: Hobsbawm, Eric J. Nations and Nationalism Since 1780. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990, p. 10.

<sup>159</sup>Ibid., p. 138.

<sup>160</sup>As Ivanova mentioned, Greek communities in Russia were connected with Pontian communities in Thessaloniki (Ivanova, op. cit, p. 10).

<sup>161</sup>C. Heb, 'What Can Co-ethnic Immigrants Tell Us About Ethnic Visions of the Nation Self? A Comparative Analysis of Germany and Greece'. *Journal of Comparative Research in Anthropology and Sociology*, vol. 2, № 1, Spring 2011, viewed on 5 September, 2011, <<http://compaso.ro>>

<sup>162</sup>Popov, op. cit., p. 30.

<sup>163</sup>Ibid., p. 29.

independent state or a political autonomy. It was the way to the diasporic nationalism and, later, towards immigration to Greece. The Greek repatriation Program started to operate since 1990, when the Ministry of Foreign Affairs formed the National Foundation for the Reception and Resettlement of Repatriated Greeks<sup>164</sup>.

In order for the Pontians to immigrate, they had to accept the image of the Greek national identity or the 'high culture'<sup>165</sup>, offered by the Greek state.

“The maintenance of the kind of high culture...is linked to the state as a protector and usually the financier or ...the quality controller of the educational process which makes people members of this kind of culture”.<sup>166</sup>

*This legally constructed image of Greekness was based on the ethnic character of Greek nationalism* and will be discussed in the next subchapter.

Another question that needs to be addressed in this subchapter is why the Greek state was welcoming the 'transnational' Pontian identity? The state immigration policy is often driven by political, economical, other state interests, rather than willingness to implement social justice, discover true Greeks and guarantee them full rights.

Popov mentioned two possible reasons, explaining the interest of the Greek state in Repatriates. First, the Greek state settled the repatriates mostly in provinces of Macedonia and Thrace, creating the 'buffer zone' against the external threat.<sup>167</sup> Ironically, the Pontians performed the same function, like they did in Russia, when they were welcomed for settling by Katherine the Great<sup>168</sup>. Second, they were potential voters in parliamentary elections,<sup>169</sup> which may also explain the interest of the Greek authorities.

The Greek state thus helped the Pontians to finalize their political claim as a community. The Pontian nationalism in the former USSR eventually became a state-sponsored diasporic nationalism.

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<sup>164</sup> Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>165</sup> The term used by Gellner (Gellner and Smith, *The Warwick Debates*, op. cit., <<http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/gellner/Warwick2.html>>).

<sup>166</sup> Gellner and Smith, *The Warwick Debates*, op. cit., <<http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/gellner/Warwick2.html>>.

<sup>167</sup> Popov, op. cit., p. 31.

<sup>168</sup> Kardasis, op. cit., p. 162.

<sup>169</sup> Popov, op. cit., p. 38.

3. The ethnic character of the Modern Greek nationalism – conflict with overlapping identities.

While analyzing the formation of the Pontian identity we have to take into consideration that this identity appeared as a result of interaction of three nationalisms: Russian, Greek and Pontian. The first two are institutionalized nationalisms and had major effect on the formation of the identity due to possession of political and legal means. Here I will focus on the effect of the modern Greek nationalism.

Greece, like any other state, has an institutionalized nationalism. Greek foreign politics (towards the Greek diasporas abroad) and interior politics (towards the immigrants inside the country) are predetermined by the character of the nationalism, institutionalized on the official level. I will claim that the character of the Greek nationalism explains the reasons why Greece was, on the one hand, assisting the Pontian repatriates from Russia in their settlement in Greece. On the other hand, it was complicating the process of immigration.

Even though in the modern world there are no pure ethnic or civic nationalisms,<sup>170</sup> Greek nationalism has a predominantly ethnic character. I would define the current Greek nationalism as an ethnic nationalism with irredentist elements. It is not, however, irredentism in its pure form. Official claims of Greek irredenta were cancelled after the Asia Minor Catastrophe. Nevertheless, the modern Greek nationalism inherited a strong irredentist legacy – the ability to interpret the borders of a nation in the widest possible manner (The theory of unity of all Greeks in time and space – a part of the Greek *Megali Idea*<sup>171</sup>).

“The Greek state sees Greek diasporas as its potential citizens”.<sup>172</sup> This fact made possible the repatriation of all the Greeks from the USSR, even those (Pontians), who do not have any territorial affiliation with Greece, who never lived in Greece and whose ancestors are coming from the territory of modern Turkey (Pontos of Asia Minor). Possibly, the acceptance of Pontians of the former USSR was a symbolic way for the Greek state to pursue the unrealized dream of Asia Minor.

*At the same time, welcoming all the repatriates, the ethnic Greek nationalism dictated very strict rules as to who can be called a ‘Greek’. Very often Greeks were facing*

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<sup>170</sup> Ibid., p.13.

<sup>171</sup> J. Koliopoulos. T.Veremis, *Greece The modern sequel. From 1921 to the present*. New York University Press, 2002.

<sup>172</sup> Popov, op. cit., p. 30.

difficulties in receiving the Repatriation visa.<sup>173</sup> Historically, the homogenization policy played an important role in the construction of the Greek national identity<sup>174</sup>. *The repatriation visa can be called an attempt to homogenize the repatriates.*

Anthony Smith mentions that ethnic model puts the stress on the presumed descent, rather than territory.<sup>175</sup> Liah Greenfeld also referred that “Ethnic nationalism sees nationality as determined genetically”.<sup>176</sup> This was the approach applied to Pontians from the former Soviet Union by the Greek state.

*The criteria of Repatriation were the following:* documented proof of ethnicity (of the repatriate or at least one of his parents) – *jus sanguinis* principle, demonstration of cultural/ethnic affiliation with Greece (knowledge of customs, traditional food, etc.); knowledge of the history of Greece, contemporary Greek politics, of the Modern Greek language.<sup>177</sup> The language condition, it must be mentioned, was flexible, as the Repatriation program provided language courses upon the movement to Greece<sup>178</sup>.

Thus, the ethnic character of the Greek nationalism did not allow loose criteria of ‘Greekness’. The purpose of the category ‘*homogens*’ (applied to the Greeks from the former USSR) was “to give the qualification of the Greek citizenship to those people, who...live permanently abroad and ‘behave’ like Greeks”<sup>179</sup>. It was an official assessment of the Greek national consciousness of the repatriates.

The problem, however, was that *it is not possible to apply strict ethnic criteria to a hybrid identity*. As Nikolaidou justly mentioned, there was confusion between legal concepts and social reality<sup>180</sup>. The social reality is that the Pontian identity is hybrid. As a result, the *Greek national consciousness of Pontians is not intense, it overlaps with other identities*.

In order for the Greek state to accept Pontian repatriates from the former Soviet Union the institutionalized Greek nationalism had to be moved closer to the civic model, attaining such elements as “historic territory, legal-political community, legal-political equality of members, common civic culture and ideology”<sup>181</sup>. *The official Greek ethnic nationalism was not flexible enough to accept those Pontians who could not officially*

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<sup>173</sup> Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

<sup>175</sup> Smith, National Identity, op. cit., p. 12.

<sup>176</sup> L. Greenfeld. ‘Nationalism in Western and Eastern Europe Compared’, in *Can Europe Work? Germany & the Reconstruction of Postcommunist Societies*, S. E. Hanson and Willfried Spohn (eds), University of Washington Press, Seattle & London, 1995, p. 20.

<sup>177</sup> Popov, op. cit., p. 31.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>179</sup> T. Nikolaidou, op. cit., <[http://www.luisedruke.com/luise/book\\_thess/nikolaidou\\_511\\_528.pdf](http://www.luisedruke.com/luise/book_thess/nikolaidou_511_528.pdf)>.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

<sup>181</sup> Smith, National Identity, op. cit., p. 11.

*prove their Greek descent.* The fact that they often had to hide their Greek identity in the Soviet Union was not taken into account.

The policy of the Greek state, however, was moving in a different direction. In 2000 the repatriation visa was abolished and Greek Consulates in Russia were entitled to issue Greek passports to those willing to immigrate, without actual return/resettlement in Greece<sup>182</sup>. The criteria of 'Greekness' stayed strict. The difference was that now the Greek state decided to grant Greek citizenship without the privileges (of accommodation, employment assistance) under the Repatriation program.

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<sup>182</sup> Popov, op. cit., p. 31.

## CONCLUSION

The thesis is written on the *clash of two approaches* – the ones of nationalism and history. Historical analysis aims at the correct interpretation of historical events. Nationalism, on the contrary, is flexible. Still, the final result must be an objective assessment. Otherwise the research would lose its scientific value.

The purpose of the research was to analyze the evolution of the identity of the Pontian Greek immigrants from the former USSR and characterize it. *The historical presentation of the case demonstrated the major trends* in the history of the Pontian community in Russia. The stress was put on the events which influenced the formation of the identity (for example, economic development of Greek communities in Southern Russia, claims of autonomy, Soviet deportations).

The categories of ethnic, national identities were presented, as well as the description of their constituent elements. *The theory of Ethnosymbolism*<sup>183</sup> with its existing critique was put under scrutiny. *Some elements of the theory were revised and altered* (definition of a nation, stages of transformation from an ‘ethnie’ to a nation).

It was concluded that it is necessary to put stress on *politisation of culture as a main condition for the development of a national identity. The politisation of the culture does not necessarily produce aspirations of independence or autonomy. This political claim may also be expressed through the acceptance of a foreign national identity.*

*In the case of Pontian Greek immigrants from the former USSR this political claim was finalized in their desire to immigrate to Greece, become legal and political members of the Greek community. That was the process of transformation of the Pontian ethnic identity into the Greek national identity.*

A big part of the analysis was devoted to the *decisive role of the institutionalized Soviet and Greek ethnic nationalisms* on the Pontian identity. Based on those influences the Pontian nationalism itself was characterized.

The contradictory processes during the Soviet period – both suppression of the identity and its reinforcement through victimization did not allow the Pontian identity to develop gradually. Moreover, the identity attained the hybrid character mostly due to the mass deportations in the Soviet times.

The state Greek nationalism with its ethnic character had serious impact. The Greek state supported its co-nationals in Russia and thus strengthened their Greek identity. At

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<sup>183</sup> A. D. Smith, major works: *Theories of Nationalism*, Duckworth, London, 1971; *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*. Basil Blackwell Ltd, London, 1986; A. D. Smith, *National Identity*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1991.



the same time, adopting strict ethnic criteria of repatriation, Greek authorities created significant legal barriers for immigration.

As for the characterization of the Pontian Greek hybrid identity, the conclusion should be the following. The hybrid character of the identity predefines its weakness. Without the assistance of the Greek state the Pontian identity would never be able to evolve into a national identity in the former Soviet Union. Besides, the hybrid character of a national identity results in social and legal opportunism (living between two homelands) and creates problems in assimilation.

Getting back to the arbitrary choice of ethnosymbolism as a guiding theory, I would like to point out the following. Even though the process of the formation of a nation can be seen differently by other scholars of nationalism, the politisation of culture has always been stressed as a main condition of transformation from an *ethnie* to a nation<sup>184</sup>. This argument was not borrowed from Smith and is widely-recognised. Hence, it is possible that other theories of Nationalism will lead to similar conclusions, when applied to the Pontian identity. In any case, the additional research on the matter is much desired.

*Two other aspects of the Pontian identity must be offered as subjects of further research.*

Firstly it is the hybrid character of the Pontian Greek identity. The term ‘hybrid identity’ is itself a new phenomenon in the studies of nationalism. The hybrid identity exists as a result of the processes of globalisation and transnationalisation. With regards to Pontian Greeks it might be interesting to focus not only on the problems of assimilation, caused by the hybrid identity, but also on the dangers of extinction of Pontian community in Greece, preservation of their original Pontian language and culture. The negative image of ‘Russoponti’ in Greek society is wide-spread. The situation makes Pontians deny their Pontian identity (which is already not strong, being hybrid). This process is similar to the one which took place during the Soviet times, when Pontians avoided declaring their Greek descent.

Another challenging issue of research could be the comparative analysis of the further identity development of those Pontians who stayed in the former USSR and the identity of those who decided in favor of immigration. Their identities obviously took different routes.

I would like to finish my conclusion with the words by T. Eriksen:

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<sup>184</sup> For example, Hastings: Hastings, op. cit., p. 2-5.

“Since our concepts, for example ethnicity and nationalism, are our own inventions, we must not assume that the actors themselves have the same ideas about the ways in which the world is constituted - even if they are using the very same words as ourselves”<sup>185</sup>.

Hence, the true character of the Pontian Greek identity can be understood only from the inside of the community. And in this case the result will depend on the Pontian community you choose – the one who stayed in Russia, in Georgia, Central Asia or the one that immigrated to Greece. We can get as many Pontian identities as the number of the communities we have.

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<sup>185</sup> Eriksen, op. cit., p. 17.

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