



## What can co-ethnic immigrants tell us about ethnic visions of the national self?

### *A comparative analysis of Germany and Greece*

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#### **Abstract**

Nations with a predominantly ethno-cultural self-perception and citizenship based on *jus sanguinis* are under pressure today to adopt more civic-territorial ideas of nationhood, including elements of *jus soli*. Two nations experiencing these trends in Europe but have rarely been juxtaposed are Greece and Germany. Characteristic of both nations is a long reserved privileged access to citizenship and settlement assistance for co-ethnic immigrants from Eastern Europe and recently the Former Soviet Union. This article argues that changes to the way these privileged immigrant groups and their settlement are addressed should also reflect changes to the national idiom. The paper contrasts Greece to Germany and finds that, similarly to developments in its northern counterpart, Greek repatriates from the Former Soviet Union have been an important consequence of the ethno-cultural idiom and reinforced it at times. In the new millennium these immigrants' importance is diminishing in reality, if not on paper. The article concludes that in spite of this and the citizenship reform of 2010, the tendency to see the country as a culturally homogeneous nation is still fairly strong in Greece. The analysis draws on interviews with 'repatriates' in both countries and with national policy-makers in Greece, as well as on newspaper clippings, opinion polls and statistical data, complemented by leading scholarship in the field to date.

#### **Keywords**

Post-Soviet repatriates, repatriation policy, ethno-cultural nations, national identity, citizenship, Former Soviet Union, ethnic Greeks, ethnic Germans, diaspora

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## Introduction

This paper is part of a doctoral research study which investigates in systematic comparative perspective the integration of ethnic Greeks and ethnic Germans from the Former Soviet Union (FSU) in their historical homelands, Greece and Germany, after perestroika<sup>2</sup>. The migration and integration of both groups of 'late re-settlers' or 'home-comers', as they are variously called<sup>3</sup>, exhibits an astounding array of similarities. Following the collapse of communism, members of both groups, long-standing minorities on Russian and later Soviet territory, simultaneously left their places of residence in the Soviet Union and later the independent republics of Kazakhstan, Georgia and the Russian Federation<sup>4</sup> in order to immigrate to what were commonly referred to by political elites and migrants themselves as their 'mother-countries' or ancestral homes. As a result, the post-Soviet 'repatriates'<sup>5</sup> were singled out by both the Greek and German government as the sole receivers of wide-ranging state assistance measures, unavailable to 'ordinary' foreign migrants.<sup>6</sup> Such provisions have made them the most privileged immigrant groups in the country. The size of the migration flow was significant in each of the two cases, compared to the population size of the prospective receiving societies.

Despite their favourable treatment, ethnic Greeks and ethnic Germans from the FSU have faced very similar integration problems after the 'return' to their 'homelands'. These range from more 'structural' phenomena, such as language problems, housing in less affluent areas, residential segregation and severe difficulties entering the labour market with qualifications acquired in the Soviet Union, to factors of more psychological and emotional nature, including mutually felt differences in socialisation, mentality and expectations between newcomers and hosts. These have led to conflicting inter-group relations (Hess, 2008: 1532-1535). As a result, integration problems continue into the first

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<sup>3</sup> From 1993 onwards, the German term used is *Spätaussiedler* (meaning 'late re-settlers'). Official parlance in Greece uses the term *palinnotountes homogeneis*, literally meaning 'people from the same genealogical origin who are returning home again'.

<sup>4</sup> For Greeks and Germans combined, these three countries have sent the highest numbers of 'repatriates'. For Greece, other countries of origin include Ukraine (3%), Uzbekistan (2%) and Armenia (6%) (M-MT census, 2000: 51) and for Germany Kyrgyzstan (4.5%) and the Ukraine (6.7%) (Bundesverwaltungsamt, 2010, [www.bva.bund.de](http://www.bva.bund.de)). See also *Migrationsbericht 2008* (Bundesinnenministerium, 2008, [www.bmi.bund.de](http://www.bmi.bund.de)).

<sup>5</sup> I initially use the term in inverted commas to highlight that it is a contested issue whether these immigrants are really repatriating after having lived abroad for centuries. In the Greek case, the issue is even more complex, as the majority of FSU 'repatriates', the Pontian Greeks, have never lived in Greece, but in the Pontos in Asia Minor from where many of them emigrated to Russia and the Soviet Union and later from there to Greece. Throughout the article, I abstain from using inverted commas for the purpose of better readability.

decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, despite some of the post-socialist wave ‘repatriates’ having arrived over twenty years ago (see Table 1).<sup>7</sup>

**Table 1. Number of co-ethnic immigrants from the former Soviet Union in Greece and Germany<sup>1</sup>**

Year	Ethnic Greeks	Ethnic Germans
1987	169	14.488
1988	669	47.572
1989	5.195	98.134
1990	16.716	147.950
1991	17.331	147.333
1992	19.846	195.629
1993	25.720	207.347
1994	14.737	213.214
1995	14.586	209.409
1996	14.298	172.181
1997	12.381	131.895
1998	5.761	101.550
1999	4.676	103.599
2000	1.307	94.558
2001	*	97.434
2002		90.587
2003		72.289
2004		58.728
2005		35.396
2006		7.626
2007		5.695
2008		4.301
2009		3.292
2010		2.297
Until 03/ 2011		396
Total	Estimate: approx. 200.000	2.262.860

\* data for following years unavailable

Sources:

**Figures for Greece:** Adapted from: General Secretariat (2000), p. 52. **Figures for Germany:** *Info-Dienst Deutsche Aussiedler* nos. 91 (1997), 110 (2000), 118 (2005); *Migrationsbericht* 2004 (figures for 2001, 2002, 2003), various official statements and press releases by the Bundesinnenministerium (German Federal Ministry of the Interior) (1998-2000), *Migrationsbericht* 2009 (German Federal Ministry of the Interior), *Jahresstatistik* 2010 and *Monatsstatistik März* 2011 by the Bundesverwaltungsamt (Federal Office of Administration).

Greek figures include all those registered in the regional offices of the prefectures at the time of the census (*nomarchies*). German figures include all those registered at the Federal Office of Administration (*Bundesverwaltungsamt*). These individuals either possess citizenship or are in the process of obtaining it. The verification and acquisition process varies in length between Greece and Germany and sometimes within each country.

<sup>7</sup> In both cases, ‘return’ migration to the ancestral home has a history that precedes the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe. Considering the Cold War period here for purposes of space, there were numerous smaller waves of Greek and German returnees, permitted to leave the Soviet Union when Greek-Soviet or German-Soviet bilateral relations and the global political climate were favourable. One such emigration wave occurred for example during political thaws under the rule of Khrushchev, initially in 1957, but also later between 1965-67 when approximately 13,500 Greeks were allowed to leave the Soviet Union (Karpozilos, 1999: 154).

Despite the richness of overlaps and analogies, ethnic German and ethnic Greek 'repatriates' from the FSU have hitherto only been studied individually, exploring them in national contexts alone, predominantly by scholars of their own country. By situating them in a comparative framework for the first time, the doctoral research on which this paper is based seeks to explore two so-called conundrums. From the viewpoint of migrants, it traces why, despite equally being the most privileged immigrant group in terms of state support, significant barriers to integration continue to exist. Can a comparative investigation shed any more light on this question? The work also investigates whether integration problems are country-specific or of a more general nature – pinpointing perhaps universal tendencies in ethnic migrations, particularly in the context of post-socialist East-West migration in Europe. Such a contribution responds to calls in migration research to transcend the singularities of national case studies in order to enhance our understanding of what separates general from particular tendencies of migrant integration, particularly in the European context.

This paper looks at a specific aspect of the integration process of repatriates in Greece and Germany. It focuses on the receiving countries, their dominant ideas of nationhood and their relationship with their diasporas from the FSU. The rationale for Greek and German political elites in the late 1980s to allow, even champion, the repatriation of co-ethnic minorities from Eastern Europe had manifold reasons. However, it is unimaginable without a precedence given to maintaining relations with members of common descent living outside national borders. This is typical of nations with a predominantly ethno-cultural self-perception, having institutionalised the 'principle of blood' (*jus sanguinis*) for the award of citizenship. Whereas predominantly civic nations are built around historic territory, a legal-political community, legal-political equality of its members and a common civic culture (Smith, 1991: 11), ethnic nations are more closely premised on real or **imputed** genealogy, actual or **presumed** descent ties, vernacular languages, customs and traditions and the moral and rhetorical potential for popular mobilisation (ibid.: 12-13). Ethno-cultural nations typically award citizenship to children born to a member of the ethnic community, whereas for civic nations the place of birth and an allegiance to political values determines the right to citizenship (*jus soli*). In Greece and Germany, both 'late nations', ethno-cultural components have often, not always, 'won' or taken precedence in debates at important historical junctures. Consequently, *jus sanguinis* has had a strong tradition.<sup>8</sup> Historically, the German nation was seen as an 'irreducibly particular *Volksgemeinschaft*', an organic cultural, linguistic and even racial community (Brubaker, 1992: 1) revolving around the notion of a German 'folk' and its national traditions (*Volkstum*). Similarly, the Greek nation was constructed around ethnic origins, Orthodoxy and the cultural heritage of Hellenism (Venturas, 2009: 125), as well as language (Tsoukala, 1999: 112). In both cases, 'Germanisations' and 'Hellenisations' of foreign residents on national territory and the idea of ethnic homogeneity have played an important part in the history of the nation and its identity. For Greece and Germany, their co-ethnic minorities in the Former Soviet Union belong to

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<sup>8</sup> It is important to note, however, that nations are rarely purely ethnic or civic. Nationhood in Greece and Germany has also included civic and territorial elements.

their ‘imagined communities’ (Anderson, 1991), regardless of whether any factual collective experience existed (Voutira, 2004: 533). In fact, in Greece the very existence of a varied, diachronic global diaspora has predisposed nationality and citizenship towards a *jus sanguinis* logic (Kaurinkoski, 2010b: 2).

Sociologists, anthropologists and historians affirm that the axiomatic right of entry for repatriates from Eastern Europe after the fall of communism confirmed or at least corresponded to the ethno-cultural character of the Greek and German nation (Bade, 1990; Brubaker, 1992: 6; Voutira, 2006: 398, Kaurinkoski, 2010b: 2). Other accounts criticise that the special treatment awarded to repatriates has made them the epitome of nations defining belonging in terms of descent and cultural affinity and of an inward looking and closed model of citizenship (Otto, 1991; Christopoulos and Tsitselikis, 2003).

If this is true, then even more can be understood in both countries through the prism of repatriation from the FSU. If repatriates are a symptomatic means of understanding dominant ideas of nationhood, then a changing approach towards them might indicate that changes are occurring to the national idiom itself. The way repatriates are being perceived and addressed may even *contribute* to a modification of the dominant idea of the national self. It is this relationship and these changes that we aim to explore in this article.<sup>9</sup> Why is it an opportune time to undertake such an analysis? In the context of European integration and growing immigration, pressures on ethno-culturally defined nations with birth-right membership to become more inclusive have been mounting. Whereas Germany introduced new citizenship regulations in 2000, Greece has reformed its tradition of *jus sanguinis* recently, in March 2010. The present citizenship law now includes elements of *jus soli* for the first time in Greek history. Three months ago, a department of the Hellenic Council of State appealed against the provisions of this law, declaring it as unconstitutional. This makes the dynamics in the Greek case highly interesting.

Since Greece and Germany have so far rarely been situated in a comparative framework, possibly because arguments about their different geographical size, cultures and economic capacities prevented such endeavours, the article aims to carve out and account for a surprising array of similarities. Although the approach is clearly comparative, the idea is to use the German example as a conceptual vantage point and contrast Greece against it. As a consequence, although primary data will inform both country analyses, more emphasis will be given to exploring the Greek context, because a so themed investigation including primary data is lacking for Greece and because current developments in Greece highlight the timeliness and urgency of such an analysis for Greece in particular.

The investigation builds on an idea by the American sociologist Daniel Levy who has explored representations of ethnic German ‘re-settlers’ and their significance for the German idea of nationhood (1999, 2002, 2003). He maintains that the increasingly negative perception of ethnic German repatriates by the public, the gradual dwindling of official ethno-cultural rhetoric, increasingly restrictive legislation and the growing focus

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<sup>9</sup> This is not to suggest, however, that repatriation is the only force impacting on discourses on nationhood and citizenship regulations. I do suggest, however, that they are significant.

on ethnic Germans' integration problems lead to a lessening significance of an ethnoculturally defined idea of nationhood. After a review of these developments in Germany, this paper asks to what extent similar processes can be observed for Greece. It draws on interviews by the author with repatriates in Greece and Germany and policy makers at federal level in Greece. This is complemented by an analysis of legal texts, newspaper articles and opinion polls. For the doctoral research study underpinning this paper, a total of 47 semi-structured interviews were conducted so far between 2008-2011, in various urban and rural locations in Greece and Germany. All interviews were conducted by the author in languages appropriate to context and interviewee. Migrant interviews were conducted in Russian, either in migrants' homes or at their workplaces, and lasted between 1 and 2.5 hours. Interviews with policy makers and integration programme workers were conducted at the relevant institutions in German, Greek, English or Russian.<sup>10</sup> Rather than claiming representativeness, this qualitative study chose to trace the interrelation between different integration variables and highlight respondents' subjective and interpretative insights.

Finally, it remains to underline that 'nation' and 'national identity' are salient concepts in this paper, but also highly contested terms. Here, we accept Anthony Smith's definition of nation as 'a named human population sharing an historic territory, common myths and historical memories, a mass, public culture, a common economy and common legal rights and duties for all members' (1991: 14). Comprehending 'identity' as a 'sense of self', national identity can be understood as the psychological bonds of solidarity that unite members of the nation (Triandafyllidou, 1998: 595; Smith, 1991: 15), consciously creating their 'sense of belonging' to a territory that is understood as the native land. Where national identity relies heavily on ethnic identity, the two have sometimes been used interchangeably. However, this obscures the fact that the question of overlap is essentially one of the definition of the nation. For civic nations, such as the United Kingdom and France, ethnic and national identity can be two largely unrelated, sometimes overlapping qualities - whereas in Germany and Greece the nation relied/relies on ethnic and cultural criteria.<sup>11</sup> Ethnicity, according to Dietz, is built on four markers: the conception of a common ancestry, a common historical background and collective experiences, a series of shared socio-cultural features, the subjective and conscious avowal to the ethnic group ('self-ascription') and finally, an external perception of the boundaries of the ethnic group ('ascription') (2005: 39). Ethnic identity can be claimed by individuals and groups and can change, diminish or resurge. In this sense, 'ethnicity' becomes a resource and a tool that can be used for the mobilisation of different interests (Esser, 1988: 235ff.)

However, national identity (or nationhood, the national self or national idiom, as I variously call it in this paper) is a 'gradually develop(ing), (...) contingent, conjuncturally fluctuating, and precarious frame of vision and basis for individual and collective action' (Brubaker, 1994: 9), rather than a 'stable underlying cause' (Calhoun, 1989: 59). This

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<sup>10</sup> An assistant translator was present during five interviews with Greek policy makers, administrative staff, social workers and integration programme coordinators in Athens and Thrace.

<sup>11</sup> Also, ethnic groups can be larger than nations, and can lack what the latter possess: a common territory.

makes national identity and by definition the decision about who belongs to the national community and who does not 'discursively constituted' (Levy, 2003: 290) rather than statically given at any point in time. Thus, the 'sense of belonging' itself becomes subject to contestation and malleability, for example by those with the power to define it.

National identity and citizenship regimes appear to be situated in a reciprocal relationship: nationhood finds expression in citizenship regulations while at the same time citizenship regimes consolidate prevailing ideas of the nation. Citizenship is the tool of 'social closure' (Brubaker, 1992: 23) which decides access to membership in the nation. National approaches to citizenship and by extension to immigration thus become powerful indicators of the dominant (but changing and changeable) idea of nationhood. When members of common descent 'repatriate' to the 'motherland', their insertion in society and the approach of the state towards them are a useful prism through which we may access valuable clues about the nation's self-understanding. Brubaker has described such movements as migrations of 'ethnic unmixing' (1998: 1049). They are flows where ethnic affinity and its purposeful activation play a key role in motivating and structuring the movement.

### **Repatriation and national identity in Germany**

Levy identifies three important phases in the re-making of Germany's ethno-cultural idiom in the 20<sup>th</sup> century which rely on a more or less direct relationship between national self-understanding and the 'repatriation' of ethnic Germans from Eastern Europe. They include the immediate post-war decade, the 1960s and 1970s and finally the post-Cold War period (2003: 292-297). These junctures are instructive to look at briefly as they inform our subsequent discussion of developments in Greece.

Following the end of the fascist dictatorship in 1945, national identity in West Germany was rebuilt with reference to a narrative of collective victimhood. Victimisation was legitimised by the German diaspora from Eastern Europe: destitute masses of ethnic German refugees and expellees pouring in during the last years of the war and its aftermath. They had been victims of persecution, expulsion, ethnic cleansing and atrocities committed by the Red Army (Schulze, 2006: 370). As returning diaspora members to an ethnic nation they had multiple functions in post-war (West) Germany. They were employed by political elites as pawns in cold war politics, used as a symbol of the free and superior West, juxtaposed to communism and the atrocities and suppression it was associated with. German Chancellor Adenauer also understood their importance in helping him to sustain the claim that his republic was the only legitimate successor to the German Reich and solely embodied German unity. Refugees and expellees from Eastern Europe themselves lent impetus to this discourse. Throughout the 1950s, they played an active part in West German politics, formed their own party and had a strong lobby in parliament. It was their importance as national (and strategic) symbols and their visibility which influenced legislators to interpret the German citizenship law of 1913 in generous terms, giving full legal equality to ethnic German immigrants and to those still remaining in Eastern Europe (as members of the 'imagined community'). Despite designated state assistance programmes, social marginalisation

continued throughout the 1950s (Schulze, 2006: 371). Although at the end of this juncture, the ethno-cultural idea of the German nation was reinforced, scholars disagree what caused this. Some argue that the privileged treatment of ethnic German repatriates was a reflection of the ethnic tradition leading to a further entrenchment of the ethno-cultural idiom (Bade, 1992; Brubaker, 1992: 6). Others emphasise that pragmatic considerations over political legitimacy against the backdrop of a divided Germany and concerns over the integration of repatriates have been elementary (Levy, 2002: 223; 2003: 293). Evidence remains for the contingency of national identity and the utilisation of key agents and their activities to certain ends in constructing national identity discourse.

In the Soviet zone and the GDR, the relationship between the state and the 're-settlers' (*Umsiedler*) was complex. Proportionally, East Germany had to integrate more expellees than the West – its population increased by almost one fourth (Reichling, 1995). Whereas expellees in the East also benefited from state integration policy, their self-expression and political representation was suppressed. Schwartz argues that the GDR was not equipped or willing to deal with the emotional and cultural consequences of expulsion (2000: 158). Politically, the conundrum was arguably greater. The GDR bordered the areas where expellees had been forced out. Initially lacking legitimacy as a state, it was seeking to find its identity as the new Eastern Germany. Therefore, political elites needed to eliminate any hopes the expellees might have had of return and suppress any of their 'nationalist' aspirations (Ther, 2002: 56). The creation of a new 'socialist nation' and a specific GDR citizenship did not allow for a confrontation with their memories (Schulze, 2006: 370), until the end of the East German state in 1989.

In West Germany, the German ethno-cultural idiom started to lose significance with Chancellor Brandt's *Ostpolitik*. Rapprochement towards Eastern Europe was publicly condemned by the expellees, making them appear conservative and out of tune with the climate of the time but also fuelled negative public perceptions of them (Levy, 2003: 293). A series of student and civil rights movements in the late 1960s, also known as the '68er', lead further impetus to this. The protests condemned the infiltration of German society with remnants of the Nazi past, associated with a grotesque escalation of the ethnic view of the nation. These events and perceptions further encouraged a renunciation of an ethno-cultural view of the nation and one of its prominent embodiments, the expellees and their organisations. In public perceptions, the 'datedness' of expellees' claims intensified and was labelled, together with the ethno-nation, as inappropriate for a new time.

After a brief period characterised by a heightened sense of national particularism, typical of the early years after the breakdown of the bipolar order, the German tradition to see the nation as an organic community bound by descent and culture further weakened. Throughout the 1990s, co-ethnic returnees from Eastern Europe and their ethnic unmixing again influenced this process. Often relatives of those who had 'returned' in earlier waves immigrated to Germany based on their ethnic affinity. Throughout the Cold War and up until the end of 1992, immigration of co-ethnics from the former Soviet Union was part of a broader process of co-ethnic immigration from



socialist countries in Eastern Europe. Poland, Romania and the (former) Soviet Union represented the most important sending countries. During the Cold War, most Germans immigrated from Poland and Romania, from where emigration was comparatively easier than from the USSR. In 1990, in the year following the collapse of socialist systems in Eastern Europe, for the first time Germans were coming in almost equal numbers from Poland, Romania and the USSR, totalling almost 400.000 immigrants (*Migrationsbericht* 2009: 54).<sup>12</sup> The conservative government in power made appeals to welcome the co-ethnic brethren 'with open arms', arguably also motivated by their attractiveness as potential voters.<sup>13</sup> However, the government also understood that against the background of a weakened ethno-cultural vision it needed to complement its 'ideological' rhetoric with an emphasis on the benefits the repatriates would bring to German society (Levy, 2003: 294). Notwithstanding and despite opposition from the social democratic party (SPD), the view propounded by the ruling party appeared indisputable: repatriates from the East were Germans towards which the state had a constitutional duty of care. Thus, initially, the 'resettlers' continued to be readily incorporated into the national community, by acquiring German citizenship easily and being recipients of extensive state assistance measures.

Eventually, however, the 'utilitarian' rhetoric that was used to rally support for the returnees' economic contribution to Germany backfired (*ibid.*). Against the background of high unemployment, mass immigration, a public budget crisis and problems with available housing, Germans showed little solidarity with their 'brothers from the east'. A survey by the *Osteuropa-Institut* in Munich yields the following results as early as 1990. When German immigrants from the Soviet Union were asked whether they felt that they were welcome in Germany, only 7% answered 'yes', whereas the majority said they were partly welcome and over one third clearly felt unwelcome (cf. Dietz, 1995: 170). Over 46% perceived that they had experienced some form of discrimination on the basis of their origin, most commonly from neighbours or in the workplace (*ibid.*: 168-169).

Locals fused their ideas about repatriates with the image they had of ordinary foreign migrants and increasingly thought of the former as another category of immigrants. Particularly from 1993/4 onwards, when the composition of the immigration stream changed to increasingly include non-German family members, the newcomers' 'self-ascription' (Barth)<sup>14</sup> appeared Russian, not German – and their 'ascription' by the local Germans followed suit. As a result, repatriates were more readily seen simply as Russians than as fellow Germans (*Allensbacher Jahrbuch der Demoskopie*, 1993-1997;

<sup>12</sup> This year also represents the peak year for the total immigration of Germans from Romania. Between 1950 and 1997, a total of 430.000 Romanian Germans migrated to Germany. As for those who remain in Romania, the last official census in 1992 counted 119.646 individuals of German descent, consisting of two main groups: the 'Siebenbürger Sachsen' (settled in the central Romanian highlands) and the 'Banater Schwaben' (settled in West Romania). Today, it is estimated that around 100.00 Germans remain in Romania because of family ties (cf. *Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung*, 'Aussiedlermigration in Deutschland', 2005).

<sup>13</sup> See for example: *Der Spiegel*, 8/1989, 'Reden nix deutsch-kriegen aber alles.'

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Barth, F. 1969. Ethnic Groups and Boundaries.

author's fieldwork). More than the functional approach of the government, however, migrants' visible otherness and public use of Russian contributed to this.<sup>15</sup>

To this day, it is not uncommon to hear the derogative term 'Russian blocks' (*Russenblöcke*) for the blocks of flats where ethnic Germans live densely together, some of which are provided by the state as social housing flats.<sup>16</sup> In Oldenburg/Holstein, a small town in the German federal state of Schleswig-Holstein, ethnic Germans concentrate in one particular street, the *Ostlandstraße*. Sharp-tongued locals have unofficially re-labelled this street as 'Stalinallee' (Stalin Boulevard).<sup>17</sup> However, especially throughout the 1990s, also areas where ethnic German immigrants built their own houses were stereotyped as 'Little Kazakhstan'. Similar labelling processes occurred in Greece at the same time and will be touched upon later.

Those who had been socialised under the Soviet system differed from local Germans in terms of behaviour, appearance and mentality. Social tensions grew between hosts and repatriates not uncommonly involving feelings of envy and suspicion on part of the native population for what was regarded as undeserved entitlement to 'compensatory' state support. A key explanatory variable was a lack of information about the newcomers. A survey conducted for the Ministry of Labour, Health and Social Welfare analysing how much native Germans knew about the new arrivals demonstrated that the latter lacked an in-depth knowledge of the history of German minorities in Europe (Becker, 1988: 28,35,41). This was part of the reason why native Germans failed to muster the ethno-cultural solidarity policy-makers had hoped for. However, Germans immigrants from the former Soviet Union, just as their Greek counterparts, also harboured at best a vague idea of the country they aimed for, prior to immigration.

"I remember my grandmother speaking of 'Germany' – she always said it in a slightly toneless, respectful voice [imitates it]. She always had tears in her eyes when she spoke of Swabia, the region where she was born. I do not exactly know what I thought of Germany. I do not think I had an idea. My aunt who went to Germany in 1987 told me that everything was so tidy, the streets, the houses, and that there was order ('*Ordnung*'). She told me that there were cute-looking houses, and everyone had a little garden. I wanted to see this."<sup>18</sup>

Necessarily, migrants in Germany, as in Greece, found reality very different and not uncommonly disappointing. One female interviewee told me:

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<sup>15</sup> Ethnographic fieldwork in central and northern Germany (involving rural and urban locations in the former GDR and West Germany), between 2008-2009.

<sup>16</sup> A case in point is the 'Rieth' area in Erfurt, observed by the author between 2007 and 2011. There is a larger share of social housing available in this area, dominated by blocks of flats built during the 1970s in the GDR. Flats offered as social housing are often spatially concentrated. This and the wish of many Germans from the FSU to live together are two factors explaining their high spatial concentration.

<sup>17</sup> Author's fieldwork in Schleswig-Holstein, July-August 2008.

<sup>18</sup> Author's interview, Oldenburg, Holstein, 16 August 2008.

“I can see now that before I left our village [in Kyrgyzstan – author’s remark], I idealised Germany, because things were getting more and more difficult around us day by day. Of course you build yourself a world.”<sup>19</sup>

Another woman admitted in the press: ‘I saw Germany through rose-coloured glasses’.<sup>20</sup> Quickly, the newcomers learned and learned to resent being called and treated as ‘Russians’.

“The Germans, they quickly has us pegged as Russians. There (meaning the village where the respondent had lived with his parents in Siberia), we were the Germans, or worse, the fascists. They called us the Fritz-s (*nas nazyvali fritsy*)<sup>21</sup>. In the village where I lived they said: Ah, there comes the Fritz. And here in Germany, we are the Russians.”<sup>22</sup>

In order to alleviate existing and pre-empt further social tensions, but also as a result of the budget crisis in the early 1990s and to gain control of what soon appeared an uncontrollable extent of co-ethnic immigration from Eastern Europe, a number of changes were introduced from 1992. Not only did they mark a contrast to what had just recently appeared as unconditionally ‘open arms’, they also significantly altered the immigration process from ex-socialist Eastern Europe. A new law passed in 1992, ‘regulating the consequences of the Second World War’ (*Kriegsfolgenbereinigungsgesetz/KfBG*), stipulated that from 1<sup>st</sup> January 1993 applicants from Poland and Romania had to convince German authorities that as a result of the Second World War, they were still subject to discrimination and expulsion pressure (*Vertreibungsdruck*) in their countries of residence on the basis of their German descent. Whereas the continued existence of such a pressure was globally assumed for the successor states of the Soviet Union<sup>23</sup> (where amongst other things ethnic conflicts prevailed at the time), it was harder to prove its existence (and urgency) in Poland and Romania. Therefore, with the coming into force of the *KfBG*, immigration from the latter two countries was effectively stopped. To corroborate this effect, whereas in 1990 133.872 Germans repatriated from Poland and 111.150 from Romania, in 2009 only 45 and 23 immigrated respectively (*Migrationsbericht* 2009: 55).

Also, legislation regarding repatriates became increasingly restrictive.<sup>24</sup> Whereas during the Cold War, repatriates received ‘re-settler’ status on presenting their papers at the German border, the German identity of applicants and commitment to German national traditions were now more concretely scrutinised. The commitment to financial

<sup>19</sup> Author’s interview Erfurt, 3 August 2008.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. *Der Spiegel* 1/2008: ‘Im Osten schimmert die Hoffnung’ (p. 38).

<sup>21</sup> Fritz is an older German men’s name which was still widespread at the time of the war. It is the short form for Friedrich.

<sup>22</sup> Author’s interview, Lübeck, 26 August 2008.

<sup>23</sup> The argument is compounded by the fact that to this day the Germans of the Soviet Union have not been fully rehabilitated. See also Bergner, 2008: 2.

<sup>24</sup> The government announced for example that there will be no separate housing programme for post-1989 co-ethnic immigrants from Eastern Europe.

support measures was reduced and in 1996 language tests were introduced in the successor states of the former Soviet Union to permit only those with a basic command of German to immigrate (Klekowski von Kloppenfels, 2002: 113-116).<sup>25</sup> Restrictive legislation was publicised, further challenging the idea that repatriates played a specific role for the German nation. When repatriates appeared in public discourse, it was more in the general context of immigration, rather than in ethno-cultural or privileged terms (Levy, 2003: 295).

To verify this point, I conducted a analysis of articles related to German immigrants from Eastern Europe between 1989 and 2011 in the popular news magazine *Der Spiegel*. It yielded the following results. Initially, besides providing first information about the newcomers<sup>26</sup>, rocketing mass immigration, not just of co-ethnics from Eastern Europe but also from the former GDR and of asylum seekers, lead to debates about how the 'social system of Germany' could cope.<sup>27</sup> At the same time, tendencies of segregation, a different mentality and visibly different values especially among the strongly religious Mennonite and Pentecostal German immigrant communities were discussed.<sup>28</sup> From 1992/3, the extent of immigration continued to be debated also in the context of Germans remaining in the FSU, including the (slim) chances for their territorial autonomy.<sup>29</sup> Continuously high numbers of immigrants split traditionalists (typically conservative forces) and reformers (more often the social democratic party) about the accuracy of such a generous welcoming ('immigration without taboos') and the need for a citizenship reform to move away from an exclusive *jus sanguinis* (which eventually followed in 2000).<sup>30</sup> Ethnic Germans continued to be discussed in the context of general migration, integration and, increasingly, parallel communities. They were often contrasted to asylum seekers.

Latest in the mid-1990s, the main focus shifted to repatriates' integration problems, confirming Levy's argument. '*Die gespaltene Stadt*' for example picks up on ghetto formation, returnees' social isolation, communities where native Germans are marginalised and notes the break in migrant profiles.<sup>31</sup> When pre-migration language tests were introduced, subliminally, the ambiguity of official policy was pinpointed. Finally, from the late 1990s until today, the focus clearly rested on what continue to be the most visible signs of non-integration: a widespread lack of language skills among 'repatriates', their segregation and sustenance of parallel societies or 'societies with society'<sup>32</sup>, ongoing social tensions between locals and immigrants. Above all, there was

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<sup>25</sup> In earlier decades, a lack of German language skills had been seen as a confirmation that the repatriate in question had been subject to assimilation pressure in the Soviet Union, and had ultimately confirmed his/her status as a repatriate German. All these new measures directly reduced the number of naturalisations.

<sup>26</sup> *Der Spiegel*, 37/1989, 'Verlorenes Paradies an der Wolga'.

<sup>27</sup> *Der Spiegel*, 3/1990, 'Schwebendes Volkstum'.

<sup>28</sup> *Der Spiegel*, 18/1990, 'Unzüchtige Welt'; *Der Spiegel* 12/1990, 'Hier redet man Russisch'.

<sup>29</sup> *Der Spiegel*, 42/1992, 'Nur ein Spalt'; *Der Spiegel*, 42/1992, 'Der Traum ist aus'.

<sup>30</sup> *Der Spiegel*, 11/1993, 'Ein einzig Volk von Blutsbrüdern'; *Der Spiegel* 14/1993, 'Die Fahne des Blutes'.

<sup>31</sup> *Der Spiegel*, 10/1996.

<sup>32</sup> *Der Spiegel*, 06/1999, 'Alles ist besser als Kasachstan'.

continued concern about social isolation and severe criminality especially among young males who do not want to speak German and prefer the in-group.<sup>33</sup>

Interestingly, some of the most recent articles pinpoint two telling developments in the integration of co-ethnics and their families from the former Soviet Union. On the one hand, a number of politicians of the Christian Democratic Party (CDU) endorse the facilitation of immigration restrictions for co-ethnics again, especially for family members, by favouring an abolition of the language tests introduced in 1996. This is hoped to provide much needed new voters<sup>34</sup>, but also exhibits the functionality of policy interests.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, the increasing desire of some 'returnees' to 'inverse-return' back to their areas of previous residence, mostly Russia and Kazakhstan, is discussed, also as a sign of what is perceived as a 'partly unsuccessful repatriation policy'.<sup>36</sup> As time went on, the frequency of articles relating to co-ethnic immigrants decreased.

As repatriates moved from a 'national symbol' to a 'social subject', the ethno-culturally defined idea of nationhood in Germany was further weakened (ibid.). It was not long before Germany overhauled its long standing tradition of *jus sanguinis* in 2000 to add elements of *jus soli*, easing the naturalisation of foreigners. It also became more tolerant towards dual citizenship (without championing it)<sup>37</sup>. This was the first major citizenship reform since 1913 and represented a marked break with Germany's longstanding tradition of defining belonging to the national community in terms of genealogy. The greater inclusiveness it allowed for showed clear signs that Germany was coming to terms with the reality of having become an immigration country. Embracing Germany's multicultural diversity also reverberated into wider society, indicating that important reference points of national identity discourse had changed. This does not mean that repatriates from the FSU were the only factor generating these changes, however, they played a key part. While an already weakened ethno-cultural idiom at the beginning of the 1990s initially necessitated the additional employment of functional rhetoric about the economic benefits of repatriation, eventually the lessening significance of repatriates and the increasing focus on their integration problems contributed to a rethinking of some of the fundamentals which had defined belonging and regulated membership in the nation for all of the twentieth century.

However, while Germany has clearly recognised its status as an immigration country and embraces a more political concept of the nation, the future of multiculturalism in the country is still uncertain. At the time of going to press, the weak

<sup>33</sup> *Der Spiegel*, 3 June 2004, 'Die verlorenen Schafe von Marzahn'; *Der Spiegel*, 1 April 2005, 'Die Russen von Cloppenburg'.

<sup>34</sup> *Der Spiegel*, 3/2006, 'Runter von der Bremse'.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> *Der Spiegel*, 1/2008, 'Im Osten schimmert die Hoffnung'.

<sup>37</sup> The new German Nationality Act (*Staatsangehörigkeitsrecht, StAG*) was passed in the lower house of parliament on 19 March 1999 and came into force on 01<sup>st</sup> January 2000. It was followed by the Immigration Act of 2004 (see Hailbronner, 2006: 213-251).

integration especially of Turkish and Arab immigrants in Germany gives new impetus to an ongoing immigration and integration debate.<sup>38</sup>

### Repatriation and national identity in Greece

Not only was the Greek nation built on similar ethno-cultural premises to the German nation, historically it made a crucial distinction not just between citizens and non-citizens, but also between those of common Greek Orthodox descent (*ομογενείς/ homogeneis*) and of other descent (*αλλογενείς/ allogeneis*). Both terms originate from the term *genos* (race, phyle). This resonates with the distinction between those who are indigenous to a territory (autochthons) and those considered foreign, possibly even a threat to it (allochthons). Characteristically, the Greek term for nationality is *ithageneia*<sup>39</sup>, indicating the importance of co-ethnic descent in the Greek definition of nationality.

Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, both Greece and Germany experienced similarly strong influxes of co-ethnic refugees. Although they occurred at different times, they were both a consequence of the ethno-cultural idea of nationhood and reinforced it in turn. As a result of persecution and the 1922/23 forced population exchange between Greece and Turkey an estimated 1.2 million Greeks from Asia Minor and the Pontos<sup>40</sup> fled to Greece (Hirschon, 2003: 14). This is comparable to the mass migration of Germans from Eastern Europe to Germany between 1944-1947 – not in absolute numbers, but in the impact these co-ethnic immigrations had on the receiving societies. With the mass entry of ethnic Greeks in 1922 and 1923, Greece achieved large scale ethnic homogeneity (Pentzopoulos, 1962: 126) – which reinforced an important pillar of Greek national identity, the idea of a nation made up of ethnic Greeks of Orthodox faith.

Similarly to Germany in the 1960s and 1970s, after the end of the military dictatorship in Greece in 1974, the country experienced a public backlash reaction against nationalist rhetoric. Its intensity, however, could not be compared to similar reactions in Germany. Nazism had not developed and spread from Greece, but from Germany, with all known repercussions for European history. I suggest therefore that although a distancing from ethno-cultural rhetoric might have occurred in Greece temporarily, the absence of fascist dictatorship meant that there was a less complicated confrontation with the ethno-cultural idea of the nation. I thus tentatively suggest that the ethno-cultural narrative of nationhood experienced less of a rupture. In fact, starting from the 1980s, the social democratic party (PASOK) developed an active interest in emigrant Greeks and encouraged their repatriation to Greece.<sup>41</sup> The government, however, was mostly interested in the Greek diaspora in Western Europe (and to some extent Northern

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<sup>38</sup> See also the debate kick-started by the social democratic politician Thilo Sarrazin on the failing integration and 'integrate-ability' of Muslims in Germany and German Chancellor Merckel's recognition that immigrants need to do more to integrate, especially learn German, and that therefore, multiculturalism had failed (see speech at the 'Deutschlandtag der Jungen Union').

<sup>39</sup> Emphasis added in bold to highlight semantic derivation.

<sup>40</sup> The 'Pontos' is a historical region which comprises the southern shores of the Black Sea.

<sup>41</sup> The 'General Secretariat for Greeks Abroad' was established in 1982 in order to coordinate measures and achieve greater coherence in addressing diaspora Greeks.

America) (Venturas, 2009: 127-128). At the same time, there was noticeable silence, even neglect, towards the Greeks in the Soviet Union. Part of this was attributable to the sensitive relationship between the Soviet Union and Western European states during the Cold War (Notaras, 2001: 231). However, in 1986, deputy foreign minister Giannis Kapsis appealed to the Soviet ambassador in Athens to re-open talks about the Greeks in the Soviet Union (ibid.). In the same decade a housing programme for Soviet Greeks was initiated, aiming to settle Soviet repatriates in northern Greece, in the regions of Macedonia and Thrace (Notaras, 2009).<sup>42</sup> Just to contrast, in Germany, it was decided that no such preferential housing programme would be devised. This, however, needs to be seen against a stronger welfare state which was nevertheless able to include newcomers in its basic social security provisions. Social housing, for example, exists only to a very limited in Greece on the whole.

**Table 2. Immigrant population in Greece, 1991 and 2001.**

Population	1991	2001
Total population	10.260.000	10.964.020
Documented Foreigners in Greece (and in %)	167.000 (2%)	797.091 (7%)

Source: National Statistical Service of Greece, 2001, also cited in Triandafyllidou and Gropas, 2005: 5.

**Table 3. Nationalities of the main immigrant groups in Greece.**

Breakdown of foreign and foreign-born population in Greece by main nationality group in 2001	In numbers
Total number of documented foreigners	797.091
Of which approximately:	
Albanians	438.000
Pontian Greeks (from the FSU)	155.000-200.000*
Nationals from (then) EU-15	47.000
Bulgarians	35.000
Georgians	20.000
Romanians	20.000
Russians	17.500
Cypriots	17.000
Poles	13.000
Pakistanis	10.000
Ukrainians	10.000
Indians	10.000
Undocumented immigrants	200.000

Sources: National Statistical Service of Greece, 2001; General Secretariat for Repatriating Greeks, 2000: Estimates by Triandafyllidou and Gropas, 2005: 7. \* Kaurinkoski estimates the figure to be closer to 200.000 (2010a,b).

Just as for Germany, 1989 presented the decisive turning point also for Greece, not merely in terms of Soviet (and later post-Soviet) repatriation, but in generating a series

<sup>42</sup> Author's interview with Director of Housing Programme, Gerassimos Notaras, Agricultural Bank of Greece, Athens, 23 June 2009.

of changes which would eventually lead to the overhaul of both countries' citizenship laws towards a more inclusive model. Greece and Germany experienced mass immigration (see Tables 2 and 3), of which repatriates from the FSU were not the only but a central part. Repatriates played an instrumental role in bringing about Greece's 'turnaround' (King and Black, 1997) to an immigration country (Lazaridis, 1996).

Like in Germany, the early 1990s were a period of heightened national feelings in Greece, exemplified by the heated debate over the Macedonian question (Triandafyllidou et al., 1997). Diamanti-Karanou (2003: 29) maintains that during these years 'there was a general wish among the Greek population and several Greek politicians to 'free' all Greeks living under totalitarian regimes and bring them to Greece'. This paralleled, if perhaps not as publicly and explicitly, the national duty political elites in Germany expressed towards their repatriates from Eastern Europe. It ties in with accounts we have of politicians, such as Giorgos Papandreou, attending the 'Conference of the Greeks of the former Soviet Union' where the return of Soviet Greeks was actively encouraged and promises were made by members of governmental and non-governmental organisations about housing and other settlement assistance (ibid.). According to the Greek newspaper *Ta Nea*, the Foreign Ministry also issued invitations (*Ta Nea*, 4 October 2003). This stands in curious contrast to the fact - which scholars and even policy-makers agree on - that Greece appeared unprepared for the arrival of ethnic Greeks of the Soviet Union (Kokkinos, 1991a,b; Voutira, 2003: 149). One hypothesis able to shed more light on such a seeming paradox is that in Greece the distance between official rhetoric and actual policies is a more common and informally 'accepted' part of the societal consensus than in Germany.<sup>43</sup> Be that as it may, in the early years, just as in Germany, the view that the Soviet repatriates belonged to the national 'core' was undisputed (Voutira, 2004: 535) and naturalisation was simple: the presentation of a Greek repatriation visa acquired at the Greek embassy in Moscow was sufficient. Ethnic Greeks were naturalised en masse (Fakiolas, 2001; Christopoulos, 2009: 118-121; see Tables 4 and 5). The acquisition of citizenship by way of presenting a repatriation visa constituted one characteristic of the privileged treatment the repatriates received – exemplary for Greece which did not award similar treatment to any other immigrant group, be it of shared genealogy (*homogeneis*) or foreign descent (*allogeneis*).

However, similarly to Germany, the Greek state employed utilitarian rhetoric towards the settlement of repatriates from the FSU. To some, functional interests were the *only* motive in encouraging the immigration of ethnic Greeks from the ex-USSR (Venturas, 2009: 135).<sup>44</sup> In an attempt to recreate the 'success' of the settlement of Asia Minor Greeks in Macedonia and Thrace after the population exchange of 1922/23, Soviet Greeks were to be settled in these still underdeveloped regions – to revitalise and 'hellenise' them, just as had been expected of those who came at the beginning of the century. The *National Foundation for the Resettlement of Repatriate Greeks* (EIYAPOE)

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<sup>43</sup> This also implies that the newcomers from the former Soviet Union who were used to a different type of state system might not have been familiar with this.

<sup>44</sup> Koliopoulos and Veremis highlight that at the beginning of the 1990s, Greece experienced very low birth rates which impacted on its decision to welcome repatriates from the FSU (2007: 225).



publicly stated that ‘the repatriate are people with low economic claims and demands, and therefore they can accept without any kind of complaint even the most difficult form of life in the border regions’ (1992: 8). It was hoped that ‘their presence in these regions will be able to create (...) an economic revitalisation and this will generate the ‘pull’ for a return migration among the local population that had emigrated’ (ibid.: 6; cited by Voutira, 2003: 150).<sup>45</sup> Voutira (ibid.: 151) observes that from 1992, the Soviet Greeks were represented in the media and public discourse as a key political asset able to solve ‘our national development issue in Thrace’.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, Kaurinkoski reminds us that Soviet Greeks count as an important electoral force in Greece and ‘return visas’ and indeed Greek citizenship was awarded to a number of repatriates to this end, regardless of their origin (2008; 2010b: 6).

**Table 4. Total number of naturalisations of repatriates from the Former Soviet Union in Greece, 1989 – 1999.**

Attica	34.335
East Macedonia and Thrace	32.242
Central Macedonia	49.905
Western Macedonia	1.665
Thessaly	1.535
Epirus	228
Ionian Islands	34
Western Greece	124
Peloponnese	550
Central Greece	741
Northern Aegean	91
Southern Aegean	150
Crete	3.143

Source: Christopoulos, 2009: 120, based on research at the Ministry of the Interior.

Officially, the initial post-1989 mass immigration and naturalisation of repatriates in Greece and in Germany confirmed the ethno-cultural ideas of Greek and German nationhood, although not merely purely ‘ideological’ (ethnic) considerations but also pragmatically defined national interests, such as the attractiveness of the newcomers as voters, influenced the official approach (in this case, pragmatically complementing it). The latter gained in strength as mass immigration went on, for various reasons which differed in Greece and Germany. The result, however, was largely the same. It jointly included a) a decrease in specially granted privileges, b) the growing situation of post-Soviet co-ethnic immigrants and their families within wider debates about immigration and c) ongoing integration problems and the public perception of repatriates as ‘just another immigrant group’.

1994 is commonly seen as a turning point in Greek policy towards co-ethnic ‘returnees’ from the FSU (Voutira, 2003: 152; 2004: 536; Venturas, 2009: 130ff). Analogous

<sup>45</sup> In later publications, such assumptions are visibly absent (cf. EIYAPOE and EIYAAPOE – *Ekthesi Pepragmenon* 1991-1995 and 1991-2001).

<sup>46</sup> See for example *Ta Nea*, 6 June 1993; *Thessaloniki*, 8 July 1994.

responses to German state policy can be observed. From 1992/1993 and 1994/1995 respectively, both countries aimed to contain, regulate and control the inflow of repatriates. Whereas in Germany, the main rationale was to gain control of incoming numbers and to create better capacities for repatriates' social integration, Greece's motivation was more complex. There were foreign as well as domestic policy considerations.

From 1994 onwards, Greece considered it more important if its diasporas, particularly in the Balkans and the Caucasus, remained in their countries of residence, 'serv[ing] the country from afar' while remaining closely tied to Greece (Venturas, 2009: 133). On a geo-economic level, Greece anticipated the growing significance of the Black Sea region, primarily as a passage for oil and natural gas pipelines. This was going to lead to a widening of political relations between states in this area and the EU. Greece foresaw itself as a possible intermediary, central to furthering the European integration process in these areas and/or playing a role in EU energy policy (ibid.: 130, 132). The Greeks settled in the Black Sea region were envisaged, and indeed acted as, initial contacts and orientation aid for Greek businesses wanting to extend into these areas (Lesser, 2005). During an interview I conducted at the headquarters of the World Council of Hellenes Abroad (SAE) in Thessalonica in 2006 it was evident that the focus was on assistance programmes (such as medical aid provision) for Greeks remaining in the Soviet Union while there were no provisions for, or information about, Greeks from the FSU already in Greece.<sup>47</sup>

Domestic considerations, however, probably had a greater influence on changing the policy approach. Not long after their arrival, public perceptions of the ethnic Greeks from the Soviet Union turned negative. Like in Germany, people lacked sufficient knowledge about their ethnic and historical background (Hess, 2008: 1532) and readily associated them with Russians immigrants. Such rejection was hurtfully experienced by repatriates in both countries alike. Consider these statements:

"I recognised that of course we would be different from the local [German] population in terms of mentality and other features. But I did not think they would see us simply as Russians, a foreign, immigrant population."<sup>48</sup>

"We are Greeks, true Greeks, like the rest here. We identified as Greeks in the former Soviet Union, that was the identity we kept and nurtured. And now, we are some sort of half-Greeks or no Greeks at all?"<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Author's interview, Thessalonica, 28 June 2006.

<sup>48</sup> Savoskul, 2006: 243.

<sup>49</sup> Author's interview, Kallithea, 9 June 2008. One of Sheffer's (1991:83) characteristics of a 'diaspora' is that its members believe they can never fully be accepted by their host society. Interestingly, these interview excerpts show that what occurs with post-Soviet Greeks and Germans is an inverted (repeated?) phenomenon upon return. After decades and in some cases centuries abroad, they have understood that they are not considered equal in the homeland (see also: Hess, 2004). A further investigation of how and why Soviet Greeks and Germans maintain diasporic practises would be interesting but goes beyond the scope of this paper.

In Greece, the identification of ethnic Greeks as ‘Russians’ was magnified over the decade of the 1990, as more and more Russian and Slav-speaking foreign immigrants entered the country, many of them illegally.<sup>50</sup> To some extent this is understandable. Menidi, a stigmatised, working-class suburb of Athens, gathers many immigrants, old and new. How is a native Greek able to distinguish the ethnic Pontian Greek family, consisting of ‘verified’ Greek citizens who had striven to preserve their Greek identity in Georgia against pressures of assimilation, from their Georgian friend and now next-door neighbour, the woman from Tbilisi? She was trafficked to Greece illegally through Turkey because she had no money left to pay the mortgage for her house and now cleans houses in the wealthy Athenian district of Ekali, not far from Menidi.<sup>51</sup> Among themselves, they all speak Russian. Another incidence when doing fieldwork in Athens brought this point home to me: Russian was the *lingua franca* when wanting to converse with a variety of different migrant groups (ethnic and non-ethnic) in an aim to survey the immigration situation in the country’s capital.

However, it is not merely migrants’ tangible Russian-ness that lead to a deterioration in perceptions about them. Increasingly, they were identified as ‘working-class’ immigrants. Natalia, an ethnic Greek woman from Georgia, resident in Thessalonica, sums this up poignantly:

“The locals here, at the beginning they were interested in us.” (...) “For example they asked me where I came from, and what I was doing here.” (...) “When we started trading on the streets, they became suspicious (...) and now none of them cares anymore who we are and where we come from. ‘Rossopontioi’ [Russian Pontians] they call us, while we are really ‘Ellinorossoi’ [Greek Russians].”<sup>52</sup>

Being either concentrated in neighbourhoods of low social prestige or living in segregated communities<sup>53</sup> nurtured this image.<sup>54</sup> However, the option to trade one’s goods on open-air markets (*laikes agores*) was not always a free choice. Initially, Greek immigrants from the FSU were not allowed to import large sums of cash but could bring with them small household utensils, such as pots, pans, bed linen, towels etc. Having understood from earlier migrants that those goods could be sold on weekly markets, many families stocked them in large quantities before coming to Greece. Earning a livelihood in this way was crucial to many, as the Greek state did not offer social welfare provisions as comprehensively as the German state, especially not in the big

<sup>50</sup> It did not help that repatriates continued their use of Russian as a vernacular in public places which irritated many local Greeks (Kaurinkoski, 2010b: 3)

<sup>51</sup> Fieldwork in the Athenian municipalities of Menidi (Archanon) and Ekali in June 2008 and 2009.

<sup>52</sup> Author’s interview, Kalamaria, Thessalonica, 4 April 2007. The word ‘Rossopontioi’ is insulting to many repatriates from the FSU because it implies that above all they are Russians, of Pontian origin, rather than Pontian Greeks who lived in Russia (more correctly the Soviet Union).

<sup>53</sup> Examples in and around Western Thessalonica include settlements in Nikopoli, Euxinoupoli and Galini.

<sup>54</sup> This is a regrettable as many of them have good qualifications (which are often not recognised and/or unuseable on the Greek and German labour markets). See also: Kassimati, 1992; Vergeti, 2003; Laurentiadou, 2006; Hess, 2008.

cities where most repatriates wanted to live. However, earning a livelihood by trading had a price. As one woman poignantly said:

“And in the minds of the locals, a thought took hold forever: ‘The Pontians are all traders’”.<sup>55</sup>

The rejection of post-Soviet repatriates as fellow citizens had two repercussions for the ethno-cultural definition of Greekness. On the one hand, it undermined it. Given that Greek national identity is preoccupied with the notion of ethnic homogeneity, the co-ethnic immigrants from the FSU who claimed a rightful membership in the nation and were yet so visibly different threatened the very idea of this homogeneity, perhaps more so than foreign immigrants (Tsoukala, 1999: 111). On the other hand, their persistent rejection by the public was a way to uphold (though perhaps not indefinitely) the ethnically pure vision of the Greek nation with the ‘native born mainland Greek’ as the ideal reference point.

By the mid-1990s, it became apparent that ethnic Greek repatriation had a problem with illegality, to a much greater extent than Germany had ever experienced. A number of ethnic Greeks had arrived on tourist visas ‘to come and see what Greece was like and decide then whether to stay or not’. One such example is my informant Larissa who arrived in Thessalonica in 1992 from a small town in Georgia for a ‘trial’ summer vacation and then decided to settle in Greece’s second largest city.<sup>56</sup> <sup>57</sup>Like Larissa, some co-ethnic immigrants overstayed on their tourist visas and became de-factor illegal immigrants, despite their entitlement to Greek citizenship. Moreover, owing to the corruption of authorities in the FSU, non-Greek residents had bought ‘ethnicity papers’ and immigrated as ethnic Greeks. One such case was published by a Greek newspaper, fuelling the public perception that repatriates had come to make undeserved claims on the Greek state (*Ta Nea*, 27 August 1999). Very similarly to Germany, this resulted in social envy and tension-fraught relations between native mainland Greeks and ‘the other natives’ (Hess, 2008: 1519). A rise in criminal incidents involving Greeks from the FSU worsened already tense relations. This needs to be seen against the sharply risen and now ubiquitous presence of migrants in the country, which Greeks feel to be threatening: in early 2010 59% thought migration is harming Greece (*Public Issue*, 1338). Incidences of fraud and non-Greeks taking advantage of Greek citizenship damaged the idea of an ‘ideologically pure’ homecoming from the FSU and weakened the potential of the repatriates to function as a national symbol.

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<sup>55</sup> Pontians is used here to refer to the Greeks from the FSU who ‘repatriated’ and were in the main Pontian Greeks. The way she uses the word ‘traders’ implies a working-class image. Quote taken from: ‘*Maska – Istorii emigrantov v Gretsii*’, 2006.

<sup>56</sup> Author’s interview, Kalamaria, Thessalonica, 11 June 2009.

<sup>57</sup> This very different from Germany where hardly any cases are known to me at present of immigrants who arrived on tourist visas for vacations. Over half of the total repatriate population in Greece arrived from Georgia, the relative proximity of these countries should partly account for this difference. Other factors include different document verification processes and in extension administrative traditions in Greece and Germany.

Like in Germany, legislation towards repatriates from the FSU became less generous, especially vis-à-vis citizenship acquisition. I suggest that in Greece this was mainly connected to the bribery and document falsification, the general context of changes in diaspora policy and tense relations with local Greeks, rather than direct concerns over numbers. A memorandum by the General Secretary of the *Secretariat of Repatriating Greeks*<sup>58</sup>, Christos Kamenidis, indicates that the functional aspects of repatriates' settlement policy continued throughout the mid-1990s: repatriates were still to be settled in the poorer regions of Northern Greece in order to 'revitalise' these areas (Kamenidis, 1996). Also, in view of jealous reactions by local Greeks, repatriates were expected to pay part of the costs (Kaurinkoski, 2010b: 7). However, I also found evidence to suggest that, at least from an official perspective, by the mid-1990s, there was no less ethno-cultural rhetoric vis-à-vis FSU repatriates, at least not in official statements of the main governmental body responsible for their settlement. Soviet Greeks were still seen as co-ethnic brethren in need of special assistance. During an interview with Mr Kamenidis, ten years after this memorandum, he confirmed that the post-Soviet repatriates were to this day the 'new refugees' of Greece, because of the suffering they had endured and the uprooting that had marked their history. In speaking about the rationale for the policies his office devised, he asserted that this experience undoubtedly entitled them to the support of the Greek state – and to a better integration effort than the EIYAPOE had mustered.<sup>59</sup>

However, concerns over paper falsifications lead, perhaps needed to lead, to a gradual distancing from an embracing rhetoric and had a direct impact on legislation and citizenship acquisition. Law 2790/2000 transferred the final decision about the Greek origin of applicants to Greece (whereas Germany transferred the initial selection and verification process to the Former Soviet Union). Special committees were introduced, in the country of origin *and* destination, which verify the Greek ethnicity of the applicant during interviews, in addition to assessing supporting documents (article 2-4). Law 2910/2001, passed one year later, changes important sections of this law and upgrades others. Whereas the previous law spoke of the 'ethnic Greek origin' of the applicant (η ελληνική καταγωγή του ενδιαφερόμενου), the new law changed this to his/her 'capacity to be an ethnic Greek' (η ιδιότητα του ενδιαφερόμενου ως ομογενούς). This reflects an age-old idea in the Greek citizenship tradition, the idea about the 'quality of being Greek' and reactivates the controversial, though not uncommon, ideological assumption that the Greek from mainland Greece is the ideal-type Greek and reference point of all emigrant Greeks (Damanakis, 1999: 6). Greek legislators moved from requiring *documentation* to insisting on 'evidence' (article 76, paragraph 3; cf. also Voutira, 2004). This evidence measures, up until today, the Greek national consciousness of the applicant, a possession of which is a direct key, though not a guarantee, for obtaining Greek citizenship as a co-ethnic immigrant from the FSU. Committees have the final authority to decide which criteria they use for their assessment.

<sup>58</sup> This body, part of the Ministry of Macedonia and Thrace and located in Thessalonica, started operating in late 1994 and is the second state actor, after the EIYAPOE, to take on repatriate settlement in Greece.

<sup>59</sup> Author's interview, Aristotle University of Thessalonica, Department of Agriculture, 15 July 2006.

The degree of arbitrariness has become a tool to willingly restrict the number of naturalisations for Soviet Greek immigrants. Despite the widespread assumption often made in academic and public discussions that obtaining citizenship for post-Soviet repatriates is fairly easy, numerous interviews with migrants in Greece have produced an alternative view. The right to citizenship, especially for later arrivals after the mid-1990s, when the state actively tried to contain the immigration and naturalisation of the Soviet ‘home-comers’, is by no means a guarantee anymore. One couple recounted that the wife was accepted as a Greek citizen, whereas her husband, also of Greek origin, was denied naturalisation despite the fact that they had lived and immigrated together. The family reflected that very likely his paperwork was deemed ‘insufficient’, but no official reason was stated about the refusal of citizenship.<sup>60</sup> In many cases, migrants tell of long and tiresome fights with the bureaucracy.

Greece, like Germany, has found ways to restrict the number of naturalisations it grants to its co-ethnic returnees from the FSU. Notwithstanding, compared to other co-ethnic and non-ethnic migrants, both groups are still the most privileged immigrant groups in both countries.

**Table 5. Number of naturalisations in three most densely populated prefectures, before and after 1994.**

Region	Naturalisations 1989 - 1994	Naturalisations 1995 - 1999
Attica	23.278	9.311
Central Macedonia	21.122	17.807
East Macedonia and Thrace	12.661	13.582*

Source: own calculations based on data by Christopoulos, 2009: 120.

\* The high number of naturalisations in East Macedonia and Thrace in the late 1990s, compared to the early 1990s, can be explained by the continuing interest of the Greek state to settle repatriates from the FSU in these areas. In the other two most densely populated regions Attica and Central Macedonia, which include the two largest Greek cities respectively, the number of naturalisations notably decreased in the second half of the 1990s.

There is evidence to suggest that in the new millennium ethno-cultural references linger on officially, for example in legal texts and the assumptions they are based on, and occasionally have impact on sporadic practical measures singling out post-Soviet repatriates over other migrant groups (see example below). However, there is a gap between such privileging on paper and the reality in which repatriates from the FSU are less topical today and are often addressed, if at all, together with other vulnerable groups in Greek society. For example, in 2003, the Social Democratic party established so-called ‘KEP’ centres (citizens advice bureaux) to which members of ‘sensitive categories’ such as farmers, women, repatriates and Roma can turn for help (*Kathimerini*, 31 October 2003). Repatriates were referred to as ‘professionally unstable and socially vulnerable groups’ (ibid.). Although officially they are still addressed in ‘privileged terms’, practically, they have become ‘social subjects’, just as in Germany. When they are addressed, their integration problems stand in the foreground. As a consequence, they have become more like ‘ordinary’ (foreign) migrants. Let us look at some data.

<sup>60</sup> Author’s interview with Pontian Greek family, Thessalonica (Kalamaria), 2 July 2009.

The last targeted housing programme for repatriates finished in 2005.<sup>61</sup> A statement by a senior official of the Ministry of the Interior in 2009 who wishes to stay anonymous is indicative of the official approach towards repatriates in present-day Greece:

“The ‘homogeneis’ (repatriates) are today like any other migrant group in Greece who has problems: they can not find work easily, at least not well-paid jobs, they have usually little money to live on, and some of them still face housing problems.”<sup>62</sup>

They or any issue pertaining to their national significance or their integration problems have not been major topics during recent election campaigns. A survey of the daily headlines of the main Greek newspapers over the last three years reveals that specific news coverage on Greeks from the FSU has greatly diminished. Before that, if repatriate-related issues surfaced, it was primarily to highlight their integration problems or issues of non-acceptance (*Ta Nea*, 4 October 2003), just as in Germany. On May 13<sup>th</sup> 2010, the Deputy Minister of the Interior preliminarily agreed to pay out monies promised during the previous 2004 rent subsidy programme (some of which was not actually rewarded) and perhaps extend this form of housing support indefinitely (*Eleftherotypia*, 13 May 2010). At the meeting it was also envisaged to appoint specific experts to tackle the remaining integration problems faced by repatriates. Primarily, bureaucratic hurdles in obtaining citizenship were emphasised, which acknowledges the difficulties of many of my informants. This could be seen as an indicator that repatriates’ integration problems might gain relevance under the new social-democratic government. Developments are impossible to judge at this point in time. However, it seems more likely that this is a final step to solve problems caused by long-standing structural problems of the Greek administration. It seems that overall, in 2011, the ‘co-ethnic home-comers’ have lost their relevance in society, at least as a privileged group of fellow blood brothers to whom the state feels or propagates a specific obligation (regardless of the rationale that historically underpinned such a rhetoric of solidarity).

A year ago, in March 2010, it was the newly elected social democratic government of PASOK which overhauled Greece’s citizenship regulations towards a more democratic and inclusive version incorporating new elements of double *jus soli* (Law 3838). In Germany, ten years earlier, these reforms had also been initiated by a social democratic government. According to those in charge,

“... [immigrants] are an integral part of the Greek society. It’s a reality and we can not ignore it. Naturalisation of foreigners to this extent comes as a natural consequence of an integration process which takes under consideration this reality.”<sup>63</sup>

<sup>61</sup> According to an interview with Deputy Minister of the Interior, Mrs Theodora Tzagri, 3 May 2010. 14 days after the interview, however, a Greek newspaper reported that it was agreed to extend this programme, perhaps indefinitely (*Eleftherotypia*, 13 May 2010).

<sup>62</sup> Author’s interview, Department for Social Integration, Ministry of the Interior, Athens, 26 June 2009.

<sup>63</sup> Author’s interview with Deputy Minister of the Interior, Mrs Theodora Tzagri, 3 May 2010.

As in Germany, the naturalisation of foreigners becomes easier (reduction from ten to seven years of lawful residence and the introduction of a transitional five years residence requirement). The law allows second-generation legal immigrants to vote in local elections. Children born to foreign parents in Greece who have spent six years in Greek schools can also apply for Greek citizenship. Moreover, deadlines are introduced for administrative decisions. With all that, however, the official notion of the privileged co-ethnic on grounds of his 'inherent' Greekness is further upheld, alluding to his Greek identity in terms reminiscent of Geertz' primordialism. During our interview, the Deputy Minister of the Interior comments:

"It is a reasonable distinction between 'homogeneis' and 'allogeneis' which is included in the provisions of the new legislation since the knowledge of the Greek language, history and civilisation is a necessary prerequisite for someone applying for citizenship. As a prerequisite the knowledge of the Greek language in the case of the 'homogenon' [person with co-ethnic descent] has already been fulfilled because their Greek descent that helps them develop what we call a 'Greek consciousness'."<sup>64</sup>

As discussed above, despite these legal provisions perpetuating the privileging of the co-ethnic over the foreigner, they do not reverberate into tangible provisions, except for a few practical measures (for example the rent subsidy programme and a much lower naturalisation fee for repatriates than for foreigners). This gap is compounded by the fact that repatriates from the FSU are still not accepted by their fellow countrymen as the co-ethnics they are on paper.

Overall, the gap between rhetoric and practice in relation to repatriates is curiously symptomatic of a wider tendency. A close reading of the new law and its implementation guidelines and an interview about its rationale with the Deputy Minister of the Interior has led me to the assumption that for all its progressiveness and the break it constitutes with Greece's long standing tradition of *jus sanguinis*, there is one aspect in which the new legislation does not differ: it remains faithful to the idea of Greece as a cultural nation. Although the new citizenship law eases legal provisions for the naturalisation of foreigners and breaks away from purely descent-based criteria, the 'pass criteria' for Greek citizenship are still vaguely defined and emphasise as prerequisites cultural consciousness and an awareness of the genesis and evolution of the Greek nation. According to the Ministry of the Interior, the reasoning behind it is as follows:

"This knowledge ... (about major events in the history of the country that shaped up its course in time and formed what we call the 'Hellenic consciousness') ... will be a major asset for the immigrant himself since it will help him understand better the social environment in which he chose to live [which] will also prove valuable for the host society since its coherence will be further enhanced."<sup>65</sup>

Recent developments emphasise the intensity of the debate this reform has fuelled. A department of the Greek Council of State (the Supreme Administrative Court

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<sup>64</sup> Author's interview with Deputy Minister of the Interior, Mrs Theodora Tzagri, 3 May 2010.

<sup>65</sup> Author's interview with Deputy Minister of the Interior, Mrs Theodora Tzagri, 3 May 2010.



of Greece) has declared the citizenship law passed in 2010 as unconstitutional. The department deems that it runs counter to the need ‘to preserve the ethnic homogeneity of the state, among other things, also via the establishment of a citizenship law, the provisions of which are based primarily on the fixed principle of the law of blood, *jus sanguinis*, i.e. the descent from Greek parents’.<sup>66</sup> The judges argue that only Greeks should be allowed the right to vote in local elections and citizenship should be reserved for individuals of Greek descent. They also question the validity of criteria for the acquisition of citizenship, arguing that citizenship has been awarded to individuals who were not of sufficient Greek consciousness.<sup>67</sup> Officially, their ruling wholly exempts repatriates from the former Soviet Union as they are seen to have absorbed Greek consciousness on the basis of their bloodline, however far back it reaches.

On the basis of the material explored in this article, I suggest that in the same way in which rhetoric about the privileged co-ethnic immigrant from the FSU on paper differs from his situation in reality, there continues to be an attachment to the cultural idea of the nation (whereas the insistence on its ethnic homogeneity has diminished), sometimes *despite* the fact that the immigrant population in Greece is growing and thus, calls for a more civic-territorial notion of nationhood are likely to continue. Indeed, the continuing formal framing of repatriates in ethno-cultural, almost essentialist, and advantageous terms, is a symbol of the enduring power of cultural notions with regard to the acquisition of citizenship and national identity discourse. However, it seems unreasonable to assume that this is an exclusively unidirectional process. It appears most likely that we are witnessing (and will continue to witness) an increasing conflict between traditionalist and reformist forces in Greece, between those who insist on Greece’s ethnic homogeneity against the reality of mass immigration and a multicultural Greece and those who take the latter as an incentive to begin to rethink some of the ethno-national parameters which have long defined Greek national consciousness. What corroborates this point is that Greece, like Germany ten years ago, has created the first comprehensive legal framework dealing with the consequences of having become an multicultural immigration country. It is participating, hopefully not just on paper, in attempts to facilitate greater social cohesion.<sup>68</sup> Based on the selected evidence examined in this paper, it seems reasonable to assume that mass immigration and the permanent settlement of migrants as well as the diminishing relevance of repatriates from the FSU have contributed to this. Although for the moment they seem to have done less to challenge a cultural vision of Greek nationhood, debates are now being fought which may have seemed unrealistic twenty years ago.

## Conclusion

Our juxtaposition of the Greek and German approach to repatriation and national identity discourse reinforces the assertion that a nexus exists between ethnic ‘returnees’ and an

<sup>66</sup> Mandravelis, P., ‘The blood and the law’, *Kathimerini*, 3 February 2011.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., cf. also ‘Court questions legality of citizenship law’, *Ekathimerini*, 2 February 2011.

<sup>68</sup> “[It is] part of our political vision of social cohesion and (...) a contributing factor to social development.” Deputy Minister of the Interior, Mrs Theodora Tzagri, 3 May 2010.

ethno-cultural view of the nation. This paper has demonstrated that for ethno-cultural nations diasporas and 'repatriations' are useful not just as a means of accessing valuable clues about the dominant view of nationhood but also as a gauge for changes they undergo.

The comparative analysis of the Greek and German case relied on primary data such as author's interviews, press reviews, opinion polls, as well as a comparative review of secondary literature, setting the author's material against previous findings by Greek, German and international scholars. The analysis highlighted the contingency and malleability of national identity discourse and its reliance and utilisation of key groups or symbols deemed indispensable to this discourse. It showcased that for nations with a historically strong ethno-cultural self-understanding diasporas and migrations of ethnic unmixing are such key variables. Varying combinations of ethno-cultural symbolism and functional political and economic rhetoric have informed Greek and German national identity discourses vis-à-vis their 'repatriates' from Eastern Europe and specifically the former Soviet Union. A series of ostensible similarities in both countries' official approach towards these minorities strengthens the claim that such discourse is continually readjusted and shifts according to circumstance. In the wake of changing reference points of national identity definition, the usefulness and usability of these key players can change concomitantly.

Policy makers in Greece and Germany (and co-ethnic migrants themselves) demonstrate the mobilisation of ethnicity. Ethnic self-ascription and ascription play important roles in this process of mobilisation. Despite formal rhetoric, repatriates' presumed autochthonous identity was rejected by local Greek and Germans, impacting in turn on their function and credibility as a national symbol. Our case studies illustrate that such forces, in combination with pressures of non-ethnic immigration and changing policy objectives, have the potential to influence national identity discourse, resulting in changes to citizenship regulations.

Developments reviewed in Germany and particularly in Greece are testimonies to the fact that the pressures of modernity and inclusivity are salient demands able to transform discourses of nationhood in ethno-cultural nations. These countries' ethnic identity is confronted and interacts with other identities, such as being an EU-member state, an important regional player and part of a globalising world affected by large scale immigration. However, especially as our exploration of Greece demonstrates, such pressures have to be managed against the ethnic and cultural tradition and relationship with repatriates. They have to be negotiated against old loyalties and entrenched convictions, sometimes generating conflicting currents. Whereas the pressures to 'modernise' an ethno-cultural self-conception can present themselves quite straightforwardly, even inevitably, the response is a gradual and complex process involving a redefinition of deep-rooted mentalities. Greece stands as an example that formal measures, such as citizenship reforms, are only the beginning of such a process with a yet undeterminable outcome.

Finally, this paper raises interesting questions about formal and informal boundary making. They are at the heart of questions about belonging and membership in the

nation. In the process of redefining what it means to be Greek or German, old distinctions of we-they, natives and foreigners, become blurred. Such re-negotiations often lead to uncertainties and deliberation among the public and elites. Greece shows that repatriates are able to add to this complexity as their public rejection resulting from their presumed similarity and visible otherness intensifies the debate about belonging and access to the nation. The current controversial 'opening' of the ethnic principle with a concurrent maintenance of the cultural idea in Greece shows that formal and informal boundary constructions continue to influence policy making in Athens. At the same time, the tensions which these developments generate highlight once more how salient such constructions are in debates which re-negotiate national identities.

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