Welfare and Values in Europe:
Transitions related to Religion, Minorities and Gender
(WaVE)

Greece:
Overview of the national situation

by Nikos Kokosalakis and Effie Fokas
1. Introduction

The aims and objectives of the WaVE project are very pertinent in the case of Greece. One of the most conspicuous changes in Greek society in the last decades is the mass influx of immigrants, particularly in the last ten years. This development challenged a homogeneity, which has been considered – especially since the population exchanges with Turkey in the 1920’s – characteristic of Greece. Intimately related to this is the loss of a religious homogeneity in Greece, as the percentages of members of the Orthodox Church of Greece have always been cited as quite high (in the upper 90’s). Greece, like most other cases in the WaVE project, reveals social tensions that arise with increasing ethnic and religious diversity in society, as observed through the prism of welfare: in other words, the competition of increasingly scarce welfare resources leads to similar practical problems in Greece as in other cases. In the Greek case, though, we also see a very strong identity dimension to the problems, as Greek society struggles to come to terms with a situation in which it must share its welfare resources with ‘others’ who are often perceived as a threat to Greek national and religious identity (given not least the strong connection between national and religious identity in the Greek case).

This identity dimension significantly influences the realm of politics. Specifically, there are two sets of relationships which serve to bring identity issues to the forefront of public social and political discussions: these are the relationship between religion and national identity (historically a powerful force in Greek society and symbolically embedded in narratives of the establishment of Greek national independence), and, based on the foundations of the latter, the relationship between church and state. These two sets of relationships profoundly influence the Greek political sphere and, by extension, policies towards minorities in Greece.

There is a great deal of attention, both in the Greek political sphere and in the mass media, to relations between the majority and minorities in Greece. This has also been the subject of a great deal of research, both qualitative and quantitative (namely, the European Values Survey and the European Social Survey). However, the examination of majority-minority relations – and the values embedded in these – through the prism of welfare is quite new to Greek research. Likewise, although there have been studies of the welfare of minorities in Greece (including a number of FP5 and FP6 research projects), of the relationship between religion and welfare (the WREP study), and of gender and welfare (mainly national level research but also comparative European research), the intersections between these three dimensions – minorities, religion and gender – have not, to our knowledge, been examined in the Greek context. It is precisely the intersections which we expect to yield fruitful research, as in the Greek context these three dimensions intersect in very interesting ways, and we expect to learn a great deal about transitions in welfare and values in Greece through this approach.

2. Characteristics of the Greek welfare system

2.1 Historical background
The Greek welfare system is often described as late in developing. Its background is in welfare conceptions that can be traced to the establishment of the modern Greek state in the 19th century, when conservative ideas of social control prevailed and were strongly embedded in a philanthropic ideology: “rehabilitation” of the poor entailed aligning them with the values of a work ethic and the family (Arapoglou 2004, 108). The Church represented the model of philanthropy and, together with the family, formed the social network, which tended to welfare needs. Within this context, the history of church-state relations have had a significant influence on how welfare is shaped in Greece and, historically, there has been a mutual influence between welfare provided by the Church and that provided by the state. The strong links remain today and, consequently, there is substantial interaction in welfare provision between Church and state.

In terms of the establishment of formal state welfare structures, the first of these was IKA (Institute for Social Security) in 1934, followed by OGA (Agricultural Insurance Organisation) in 1961. The welfare state was formally embedded in the 1975 constitution. Beyond this, the Greek welfare system as it stands today began to take its shape in the early 1980s, with the PASOK government. Social spending increased significant in the early 80s (and again during the 1994-2003 period of PASOK rule). The perhaps most conspicuous accomplishment of this government in the welfare domain was the establishment of a unified national health service (ESY).

Greek historical political culture has had strong effects on the Greek welfare system, especially the strongly bipolar nature of the party system and the conflictual character of party politics: like education system reform, progress is often stunted by change in the administration, and welfare is one of the most intense battlefields for Greek party politics. The system of social protection is highly unequal, and those who benefit most play a large role in objecting to and blocking change and progress. As a result, the system can be described as marked by relative continuity since the early 1980’s (Sotiropoulos 2004, 269). For the past 25 years, welfare state reforms in Greece have been a result of interplay between domestic politics and EU influence (Sotiropoulos 2004, 267). The EU has left its mark mainly in the domains of employment policies, vocational training, regional development and, to a certain extent, social assistance. But other welfare reforms have remained mainly on paper, including especially pension reform.

2.2 Contemporary characteristics

Greece falls under the ‘southern European’ model (i.e., in Esping-Andersen’s terms an ‘underdeveloped version of the conservative regime’): specifically, Greece belongs to the conservative-corporatist tradition, with the southern-European specificity of ‘particularist-clientelist’ tendencies. It is relatively restricted in its breadth and also relatively new (most of the current welfare structures were developed after 1981, with the PASOK government). Today, it is characterised by fragmentation and clientelism in the funding and delivery of social protection, resulting in large-scale inequities; cash benefits predominate over other kinds of transfers of services; and pensions form the largest part
of cash transfers. Social spending in 2004 stood at approximately 22% of the GDP, while the EU average is 28%. Compared with EU averages, Greece has a higher unemployment rate; a particularly high youth unemployment rate; ineffectiveness of social transfers in terms of success in fighting poverty; a more unequal income distribution; and a lower female participation in the labour force (Sotiropoulos 2004, 269-271; Matsaganis 2005, 237-8). In terms of comparison with European Union averages in 2005 (based on EU25), Greece had an unemployment rate of 9.8% compared to the 8.7% EU average, and female unemployment of 15.3% compared to the EU average of 9.8%. In the same year, the long-term unemployment rate in Greece was 5.1% compared to the EU average of 3.9%; for females, this rate was 8.9%, compared to the average of 4.5%. In 2004, 20% of the Greek population was at risk of poverty after social transfers (compared with the EU25 average of 16%), and 21% of the female population were at risk of poverty (compared with the EU25 average of 17%). Meanwhile, the total expenditure on social protection in Greece, in 2003, is 26.3%, as compared with the EU25 average of 28.0%.

The relationship between the role of the public sector, private companies, NGO’s and the family varies significantly across the spectrum of welfare services. In very general terms we can say that the Greek system is based on a public-private mix, relying heavily on the family in nearly all aspects of welfare provision, with a public medical system, which yields increasingly to private care schemes, and a fairly weak social capital structure (little volunteer activity, with the exception of the Church context). Certainly the Greek family structure has played an enormous role in informal protection, acting as a ‘social shock absorber’ in many areas of social need (Matsaganis et al, 2003).

2.3 Current challenges and debates

A poignant problem facing the welfare system today, and which is expected to continue in the near future, has to do with insufficient pensions and with the factors which are intimately related to this: an aging population; low birth rates and hence fewer contributions to the funds by the working population; increased activity of women in the work force; and, therefore, a new gap in care for the elderly. Social security as a whole is considered a central challenge facing Greek society. In general (and certainly this applies beyond the Greek case), there is a great deal of connectivity between challenges to the welfare system. For example: increasing immigration to Greece raises the potential contributions to pension schemes, but also raises the problem of extending benefits to third-country nationals; meanwhile, increased female employment also raises contributions to pension schemes, but leaves gaps in care for the elderly who are currently insufficiently covered by their pension schemes, and who are increasingly cared for by immigrant women (many of whom are third-country nationals). We see here, then, the ‘intersections’ between the various dimensions addressed by the WaVE project.

Certainly pension reform has been one of the most potent areas of welfare debate in recent years, and the problem of insufficient pensions continues to be at the top of the agenda. Difficulties in introducing and implementing pension reforms are indicative of the stalemate often characterising general welfare reform efforts. Beyond this, poor quality care in public hospitals (overcrowding especially) is a much-discussed welfare
dilemma; and the widening gap between the rich and the poor is increasingly a focal point of media attention (in February 2006 plans to cut public spending led to waves of strikes and protest in Athens).

In the extent to which education is considered a welfare issue, education reform – at almost all levels of education – has been central to political debate, culminating in a series of long-term strikes and of protests throughout Greece in the autumn of 2006. Although this spate of debates began over the issue of remuneration of the teaching staff, it spread to include a number of related problems (including racism in schools, discussions of the failures of the system of universal tertiary education, etc.).

There are other important welfare issues which are not so widely debated and which deserve mention in order to highlight the underlying power structures, which influence whether or not an issue reaches the public agenda in a compelling manner. For example, homelessness of refugees and immigrants (as well as of Greek citizens) stands as a pertinent problem in Greece in its own right, exacerbated by the lack of official data (and, linked to this, an official definition) and, more importantly, by the administrative and political views which underlie the problem of weak data. A result is a stumbling block in the documenting of the rise of both visible and hidden homelessness in Greece (Arapoglou 2004).

Likewise, there are a number of gender-related welfare issues which are not particularly high on the agenda of public debate, but which are especially important and challenging policy issues. Four such issues are still low rates in female employment; trafficking/prostitution of migrant women; violence against women; and poor personal security for migrant women working in domestic care.

There are so many inherent contradictions in the system that reform in one general direction is neither possible nor constructive. Meanwhile, the system suffers from gridlock in reforms as these are always heavily contended in the public debate, due not least to the many incompatible claims of various groups. Given the urgency for reform in the system as a whole as it pertains to the majority community, within this context policies towards gender equality fall behind on the priority list. This is much more the case for immigrant groups (in fact, Greece is considered one of the worst destinations in Europe specifically for refugees). In other words, if the needs of the average Greek citizen are not met by the welfare system, the problem is exaggerated for immigrants to Greece. (It is important to emphasise that minorities’ experience of the welfare system varies significantly from one minority group to another, and certainly those with citizenship fare relatively well as compared with undocumented immigrants.)

3. Religious composition of Greece

3.1 Historical overview and current situation

For the contemporary religious situation in Greece the Treaty of Lausanne (1923) was a historical landmark. Following the defeat of Greece in Asia Minor and the burning
of Smyrni (a Greek-populated town in contemporary Turkey, in August 1922) over one million Greek Orthodox refugees fled to Greece. The treaty ratified the exchange of populations in the Balkans and more than half a million Muslim Turks moved from Greece to Turkey. This turned Greece into the most homogenous national state in the Balkans, from 43% Greek Orthodox in 1912 to 89% in 1924 (Pentzopoulos, 1962: 125-140).

Official statistics for the religious groups in the country today are not available because the Statistical Service of Greece has not been including the declaration of religious affiliation in the census since 1951. There are, however, estimates but these are also constantly changing because of migration flows into the country over the last twenty years. From 1950 to 1990 the nominally Orthodox in Greece were estimated at over 95% of the total population. Although between 1950 and 1974 more than a million Greeks emigrated abroad, most of them Orthodox, many of them returned after 1980 and from 1985 many Greeks came from the countries of the Soviet Union, mainly from the area of ‘Pontos’ (the Black Sea).

With the collapse of the socialist bloc a sudden and massive wave of immigration started mainly from Albania but also from Bulgaria, Romania and Poland. This influx of immigration affected the religious composition of the country as most of the immigrants were non-Orthodox. In addition to the immigrants from ex-socialist countries there have been Muslim inflows from the Middle East and from North Africa.

Muslims constitute by far the largest non-Orthodox religious group in the country but of these only around 100,000 (those who live in the Western Thrace), are recognised officially as a religious minority. Their rights have been clearly established by the Treaty of Lausanne (1923), and they are all Greek citizens. Ethnically 50% of them are of Turkish origin, 35% are Pomaks (Slavic speaking) and 15% are Roma (http://www.mfa.gr/foreign/musminen.htm). The rest of the Muslims (over 500,000) came recently as immigrants from Albania, the Middle East, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Africa. These are not Greek citizens and many of them are not regularised as they have not acquired yet a residence and work permit. The majority of them live in Attica and other big cities and some live in the rural areas. Most of them are practicing but they do not have mosques.

The second major non-Orthodox group in the country is the Catholic minority. Again about 50,000 are ethnic Greeks and Greek citizens and live mainly in Athens and in the islands of Syros and Tinos. To these must be added about 5,000 Catholics of the Eastern right (Uniates). In additions there are of 100,000 Catholics, immigrants who came from the Philippines, Poland and other countries.

The third religious minority in Greece are the Jehovah’s Witnesses. They are ethnic Greeks and Greek citizens and recognised as minority. The fourth group is the Protestant Churches consisting of various denominations amounting to around 30,000 members. The fifth group is the Jews, around 5000, also Greek citizens. Finally there is an assortment of small groups such as: the Baha’i Faith, the Adventists; the Unification
Church, Scientology, Followers of the Greek Pantheon, etc. None of these groups exceeds 1,000 members and they are Greek citizens.

A major Orthodox group (over 500,000), which is not considered a minority, is that of the Old Calendarists. These have separated from the Church of Greece from 1923 when the country and the Church adopted the new Gregorian Calendar.

3.2 Legal provisions for religious minorities

The official organisation and recognition of all religions in Greece falls within two major categories: Legal Persons of Public Law and Legal Persons of Private Law. In the first category belong: the Orthodox Church of Greece; the Jewish community, and the Muslim Community of Thrace. In the second category belong all the other groups mentioned above as long as they have an officially recognised place of worship by the Ministry of Education and Religions. Another categorisation is ‘known religions’ (Greek Constitution, Article 13, 2) and ‘other religions’. ‘Known religions’ are: the Orthodox Church, the Old Calendarists, the Catholic Church, Islam, Judaism, the Protestant Churches, the Jehovah’s Witnesses, and the Adventists. ‘Other religions’ applies to any other religion. For ‘other religions’ to become known they must be granted a license for a place of worship by the Ministry of Education and Religions after consultation with the local bishop of the Orthodox Church in whose diocese the official place of worship is going to operate.

In the above framework most religious minorities mentioned above are organised in denominations and have various associations. The Muslims of Thrace have numerous mosques, are entitled to the welfare provisions of the state and have their own schools. The Muslim immigrants lack Mosques and gather for worship in various houses and have established various national associations (for immigrants generally available on line: http://www.migrantsingreece.org/who.asp). The Catholics have their own places of worship and partake in the welfare services as Greek citizens and have established some schools. Catholic immigrants from the Philippines, Poland and elsewhere use the Catholic Churches and have their own associations. Most Protestant Churches have their official places of worship and the minor ones and the various sects have their own informal places for meeting and worship. The Jehovah’s Witnesses have places of Worship in cities and towns and a major centre in Athens. The small Jewish community is organised in Athens and Thessaloniki.

As indicated above, old established religious minorities in Greece, both Muslim and Christian, partake in state welfare but they also have their own services. The quantity and quality of such services is unknown and is a matter for research. Immigrant minorities also have their own associations, which may fulfil welfare functions but the number and the functions of such associations is also a matter for research. The situation in this area is certainly fluid as the embodiment, let alone integration, of immigrants in Greek society is an open and yet uncertain process.
4. Characteristics of the Orthodox Church of Greece

4.1 Historical developments

The Orthodox Church of Greece was officially established as an autocephalous church in 1833, shortly following the establishment of the modern Greek state with independence won from the Ottoman Empire. The decision of the Greek state to establish an autocephalous church was very much motivated by political, rather than theological, concerns and meant a close link of religious and national identity as well as of church and state.

The formal relationship between church and state today is set out in article 3 of the Greek Constitution, which states that ‘The prevailing religion in Greece is that of the Eastern Orthodox Church of Christ’\(^1\). Under the Greek legislature the Orthodox Church is a Legal Person of Public Law. This fact leads to a number of practical implications. The Orthodox Church has served until recently (1982) almost as department of the state performing civil functions as registrar of births, and marriages. Law 1250/1982 recognised the option of civil marriage, which was, until then, non-existent in Greece. The close connection of Church and state meant in fact the subjugation of the first to the latter, which the Hierarchy accepted for various ideological, ethnic and economic reasons. As a consequence the Church suffered from and was always involved in the political upheavals of the state. Thus, up to 1975 the change of government often meant changes in the Synod and almost invariably a change of the Archbishop.

Over the last thirty years Greece’s membership in the EU and the efforts of governments to modernise the state and Greek society have brought new tensions in the relationship of the two institutions (Manitakis, A. 2001; Dimitropoulos, P. 2001). Such tensions are enhanced by the fact that Greek society is becoming increasingly pluralistic whereas the Church seems to insist in maintaining its ethnocentric role (Prodromou, E. 2004). Tensions in Church and state relations, however, tend to reflect tensions within Greek society. The policy of the Simitis government to remove the mention of religious affiliation from new civil identity cards since the year 2000 was vehemently fought by the Church hierarchy which seemed to have strong ground support with Orthodox believers (Makrides, V. 2005). Such tensions have brought again the issue of the separation of Church and state into public debate by the media and the Press, but the government does not intend to include this issue in the proposed revision of the Constitution. It could, of course, be proposed for inclusion by any of the opposition parties.

The power of the Church derives from its influence on Greek society. Apart from the fact that Orthodoxy remains an important component for ethnic identity, popular religiosity, at personal and collective levels, seems to be deeply rooted in Greek society.

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\(^1\) Interestingly, another point in Article 3 states that text of the Bible ‘shall be maintained unaltered. Official translation of the text into any other form of language, without prior sanction of the Autocephalous Church of Greece and the Great Church of Christ in Constantinople, is prohibited.’ This has significant implications for Protestant minorities in Greece.
Indicative for this is the high participation of the public in festivals, holy Week, Easter, and the cult of the Saints and Virgin Mary. Also, Greece is perhaps unique in Europe in the universal practice of the rights of passage within the Orthodox Church. It is inconceivable that parents would leave their children un-baptised even if themselves have only tentative, nominal connection with the Church. The collective ethos is such that even those Greeks who are indifferent to religion, or claim to be agnostics or atheists, do nevertheless participate in the rites of passage, i.e., baptisms, funerals and weddings. Since legislation for civil marriage came to effect only around 4% (on average) of the marriages conducted avail themselves to that option and many of these do have a church ceremony later. Only recently was a bill passed by parliament allowing cremation in Greece; the Church has strongly opposed this development for years. However, as a compromise with the Church, the bill only applies to the non-Orthodox.

4.2 Current leadership and activities

Church and the state in Greece are also deeply interconnected at the symbolic level of civil religion as well as at the organisational and economic levels. At national holidays as well as at formal political occasions such as the swearing of the President or of a new or reshuffled government the Church is formally officiating. Conversely at major religious services and festivals representatives of the state and in some cases the Prime Minister do have to formally participate. The current Archbishop (Christodoulos, in position since 1998) has had a particularly conspicuous presence on the political scene (not least due to the aforementioned ‘identity card crisis’ and its aftermath, in terms of its effects on individual politicians).

The organisation of the Church is nationwide. According to the Constitution, it is administered by the Holy Synod of the Hierarchy of all Bishops, which meets once a year or in cases of emergency, and the Permanent Synod, consisting of twelve bishops for the ongoing administration of the Church. Both Synods are presided by the Archbishop of Athens and all Greece who is a prominent public figure. The Church of Greece consists of eighty dioceses, each administered by a bishop, corresponding to the eighty prefectures of the country except Crete, the Dodecanese and Mount Athos, which have their own ecclesiastical regimes. Each bishop is autonomous and has all the parishes and the monasteries within his diocese under his jurisdiction. The bishops are elected by the Synod of the Hierarchy and their appointment is formally confirmed by the state, which pays their salaries. The parish priests are ordained by a bishop but they are also formally appointed by the state, which pays their salaries. There are around 10,000 priests paid by the state. Meanwhile, all Greeks baptised in the Orthodox Church are members automatically and their parish is that which is near their residence, to which they may or may not have any formal contact.

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2 It should also be noted that a number of dioceses remain formally under the canonical supervision of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, thus requiring the approval by the Ecumenical Patriarch of new appointments of bishops; in 2003 a conflict arose between the Church of Greece and the Patriarchate over the failure of the former to initially seek and receive the Ecumenical Patriarch’s approval of the candidate lists for the election of the bishops in such dioceses.
The Church has its own financial board, which administers its considerable immovable and fluid assets, but no public knowledge exists as to what exactly they are. Dioceses and monasteries have their own properties and the income from the parishes goes to the dioceses, with around 16%, which goes to the state for the pension fund of the clergy. As mentioned above the bishops and the parish priests are paid by the state but periodically in the past substantial property was transferred from the Church to the state. The whole problem of ecclesiastical finances and property is an opaque controversial issue with periodic tensions between Church and state and in many respects involves also the provision of welfare by the Church.

4.3 The Church’s welfare activities

The Church has a de facto significant place in the national welfare system, which some trace to the indeed strong role played by the Orthodox Church in welfare and philanthropy during the Byzantine era. In practice, this role developed especially in the post-war reality of relatively wealthy/well-endowed Church operating in a climate of extreme destitution.

Church welfare activity is decentralised (based in the individual dioceses) and, in many cases, it is developed in partnership with local public services. Such partnership however is based on informal (and usually interpersonal) links. Due to its decentralised character, the role of the Church in welfare provision, and in its relation to the state structures, varies considerably across dioceses.

It should be noted that civil society and, by extension, volunteerism, are relatively weak in Greece (following a southern European pattern); accordingly, within this context the organised activity within the framework of the Church philanthropic and charity work is more conspicuous than it would be with more developed civil society structures. After the state, the Church is the second major actor in welfare provision in the country. In many ways Church and state are interacting (Diellas 2003) but the Church has its own ‘Synodical Committee for Social Welfare and Benefits’ and seven central organisations for various aspects of welfare provision at national level and abroad. At the diocesan level each diocese has its own scheme varying in the aspects and the volume of provision from one diocese to another. However, despite the national and diocesan organisation of Church welfare, the actual needs are such that the system is hardly adequate. By far more significant is the informal role of the Church in serving material and spiritual need at local level. This does not concern only the poor and the needy but people from all walks of life, who turn to Church and/or religion in extreme conditions of personal and family problems, illness, and death. Popular religiosity and the cult of the Saints and the Virgin, well embodied as they are in the ethos of the Church, serve as sources of comfort to which people turn on various occasions. In fact it is this aspect of the Church to which much of its strength in Greek society belongs.
5. Welfare, religion and gender

5.1 The positions of women and men in Greek society

According to the typology often used in gender studies, Greece is a ‘strong male-breadwinner state’. Expectations of the male as the primary bread-winner and of the female as home-maker and carer for the children and the elderly continue to prevail in Greece, despite drastic changes in this social structure and in the relationship between women and men in society, making this typology increasingly untenable. Certainly the importance of the family structure continues to be strong (e.g., according to a 1993 Eurobarometer survey, 99.4% of the population ranks family as their top priority on the value scale. At that time, Greece had amongst the lowest divorce rates in European Community (second only to Italy), and the lowest rates of one-parent families) (Papadopoulos 1996). However, birth rates are also amongst the lowest in Europe and marriage rates are declining, as couples increasingly cohabitate and rely on two incomes, meanwhile delaying childbirth.

At the same time, Greece has amongst the lowest rates of female participation in the labour force. In 2001, 48.8% of Greek women were in paid employment (with the European average at 60.1%) (Vlachantoni 2005). In other words, if as noted above the Greek family acts as the social safety net in the context of a weak welfare system, Greek women play a large role in providing needs in the home.

5.2 Gender policies

In general, taxation and social entitlements are based on individual rights, but there are some significant exceptions. For example, parents of four or more children receive a monthly allowance from the Ministry of Welfare (though, it must be noted, the sum is so minimal as to be completely inconsequential). Mothers of four or more children who are either married or above 23 years of age are granted a life-long pension. Such family-based entitlements stem from the demographic problem in Greece and are designed to boost population growth by providing financial incentives (or, combating disincentives though, as noted above, the sums are so minimal that they cannot be expected to make a difference in birthrates!).

There are also several entitlements specific to single parents: single-parent families with a certain income and below are entitled to an allowance, which increases incrementally with each child beyond the third (Matsaganis 2002, p.163). Single parents are also allowed six extra days of annual leave, and their access to social support structures is facilitated (e.g., day care and housing benefits); they are also aided in access to employment through extra points given them in examination contests, and through prioritisation in programmes offered by the Ministry of Labour. Most recently, a policy offering priority status for single mothers for housing subsidies was also extended to single fathers.

5.3 The Orthodox Church and gender issues
Concerning the official theological/ethical position of the Church about welfare, minority religions and gender, this must be sought within wider Orthodox theology. It is not customary within the Orthodox Church as a whole to state official theological positions on specific social issues, and issues of human rights generally are grounded in the theology of the person (Zizioulas, 1975; 1994). Welfare provision is theologically understood within the mission of the Church in the world as *Diakonia* (service), which is grounded both in the scriptures as well as in worship as the Eucharistic gathering of the people of God. *Diakonia* itself has an eschatological dimension as the pursuit and promotion of the Kingdom of God in the world (World Council of Churches, 1980). This theological position is central and linked to all aspects of welfare provision in the Orthodox Churches (see [www.orthodoxdiakonia.net](http://www.orthodoxdiakonia.net) and [http://www.goarch.org/en/ourfaith/articles](http://www.goarch.org/en/ourfaith/articles)).

With regard to gender the Orthodox Church of Greece and worldwide has been rather conservative and cautious of the feminist movement without opposing it openly. Within Orthodox theology women are respected with Virgin Mary as a prototype but the ordination of women to priesthood is unequivocally rejected on theological grounds without well worked out theological arguments (Limouris, 1992).

The general stance of the Church on issues of gender is largely pre-modern. It espouses the equality of the sexes (on the basis of the theology of the person) but does not take a proactive stance in the promotion of gender equality and perceives the role of women, especially in the family, as clearly different to that of men. In fact traditionally the Church has been one of the main institution which has contributed to patriarchy within the family and, perhaps, in society at large. Nevertheless, the women’s movement has prompted the Orthodox Church of Greece and the Orthodox Churches internationally to organise various conferences on the subject. The Church of Greece has in fact established a ‘Special Synodical Committee on Women’s Issues’ but this mainly concerns the women’s role in the Church, which falls short of taking a proactive role in promoting gender equality in society let alone formulating any policies to that effect.

### 6. The minority presence in Greece

#### 6.1 Immigration patterns

During the last fifteen years the number of ethnic and religious minorities in Greece has grown very rapidly. Immigrants of various nationalities have been entering the country since 1990, most of them illegally. The foreign population living in Greece in 2001 was 762,191 (797,000 without Greek citizenship), but this number is estimated to be much higher as many illegal immigrants escaped census registration (Kasimis and Kasimis 2004:3, available online [http://www.migrantsingreece.org/files/RESOURCE_125.htm](http://www.migrantsingreece.org/files/RESOURCE_125.htm)).

This has resulted in the formation of loosely connected foreign national groups in the country, with elementary or no organisation of their own. In 1997 The Greek
authorities invited all those immigrants who were in employment to register and legalise their status (Presidential decrees 358/1997; 359/1997). By the year 2000, 371,641 had applied for the ‘white card’ (residence permit). Their nationality was as follows: Albania 241,561 (65%); Bulgaria 25,168 (6.8%); Romania 16,954 (4.6%); Pakistan 10,933 (2.9%); Ukraine 9,821 (2.6%); Poland 8,631 (2.3%); Georgia 7,548 (2.0%); India 6,405 (1.7%); Egypt 6,231 (1.7%); Philippines 5,383 (1.4%); Moldavia 4,396 (1.2%); Syria 3,434 (0.96%); Russia 3,119 (0.8%); Bangladesh 3,024 (0.8%); Iraq 2,833 (0.8%); Armenia 2,734 (0.7%); Yugoslavia 2,335 (0.6%); Nigeria 1,746 (0.5%); Ethiopia 931 (0.2%). (http://www.migrantsingreece.org/files/STAT_11.bmp). The actual number of foreign nationals in the country at present is estimated at over a million without official statistics to confirm or deny this number.

Over the last four years there is also a growing Chinese community in Greece. Their number is estimated to be between 15,000 and 18,000. They appear to have elementary organisation, with a weekly Chinese language newspaper published in Athens.

All the nationalities mentioned above have established some elementary association with an office, address and a telephone. (http://www.migrantsingreece.org/who.asp) Some, like the Albanians, have various associations; others, such as the Armenians, have well and long established communities, associations and Armenian Orthodox Churches in Athens and other major cities.

Given that the (relative to the past) religious diversity in Greece is attributable mainly to immigration, it is useful to consider patterns of immigration in the country. Greece has historically been a country of outward migration, with a large wave between 1890-1914 and another one after World War II (1947-1970). During the last twenty years, however, the country has become a receiver of immigrants from all the nations mentioned above. First, 1985 to 1991 around 30,000 immigrants came from the ex Soviet Union, from the area of Pontos (Black Sea) (Kasimati, 1992:68). These are Orthodox, of Greek ethnic origin, and few of them had fled from Greece during the Civil War. By now most of them have acquired Greek citizenship after special provision by the government, being of the same ethnic identity and religion as the majority.

The second wave of migrants came mainly from Albania in the early 1990s but the inflow continues to the present basically due to the reunification of the families. Albanians account for 57.5% of the total (Kasimis and Kasimi, 2004:4). According to the 2001 census the Balkan countries namely Albania, Bulgaria and Romania have been the main countries of origin. There was a third wave of immigration from the late 1990s to the present from other Balkan states, the former Soviet Union (Georgia, Russia, Ukraine, Moldavia, etc.) and Iraq, Pakistan and India.

According to the 2001 census over half of the immigrants live in Greater Athens (Attica), with 206,000 Albanians (444,000 throughout Greece, accounting for 57% of the total of migrants) (Baldwin-Edwards, 2005:3) Albanians are spread throughout the country, working mainly in construction but also in agriculture and the women mainly in
domestic service. Immigrants from other places of origin are also concentrated in Attica (about 50%). The rest are spread in other urban centres and around 15% work in the country. Men, mainly from Pakistan, increasingly seek work in the countryside. Women, from Bulgaria, Russia and the Philippines work almost exclusively in domestic service. Africans, very small groups, from each country, are predominantly in Athens and some in Thessaloniki. The Chinese, mainly in Athens and all the major cities, have concentrated in retail trade, mainly clothing. Immigrants in general are engaged in wage labour (90%) but some are self-employed (6.5%). They are employed mainly in construction (24.5%): in domestic work (20%); in agriculture (17.5%); and commerce, hotels and restaurants (15.7) (Kasimis and Kasimi, 2004:5).

6.2 Immigration legislation

The sudden influx of immigrants in such large numbers, proportionately to the population of the country, caught the authorities somehow by surprise and unprepared to face the situation. Certainly, there was lack of adequate legal framework and the infrastructure in services and institutional structures were elementary. Given also the general bureaucratic and largely inefficient character of the Greek public services the process of regularisation and legalisation, let alone integration, of the immigrants encountered great difficulties.

As most of the immigrants were initially unregistered (‘illegal’), the first concern was how they could be legalised. Thus, the first Act 1975/1991 concerned the ‘entry-exit, residence, employment, expulsion of foreigners and procedures for the recognition of the status of refugee for foreigners’. To implement this act, Presidential Decrees 358/1997 and 359/1997 invited immigrants to submit documents to acquire a ‘white card’ i.e. temporary residence permit. Out of the 371,641 who registered for the ‘white card’ (temporary residence permit) only 212,860 received a ‘green card’ (work and residence permit). According to Kasimis and Kasimi (2004:6), ‘It is estimated that less than half of the immigrants were registered during the first regularisation programme’. The administrative process to acquire the ‘white’ and ‘green’ cards was arduous and extremely bureaucratic. In fact the policies were contradictory. In order to acquire the ‘green card’ one had to produce, among other documents, a certificate of 150 days paid contributions to national insurance (IKA), but how could one who was not registered and was working illegally produce such a certificate? To acquire the ‘white card’ applicants had to produce documentation to show that: they were residents in the country for at least one year; they were of good health; they had a clean police and court record; and had paid forty working days national insurance contributions (IKA) in 1998.

In 2001 the Parliament passed another Act 2910/2001 concerning ‘the admission and residence of foreigners in Greece and the acquisition of Greek nationality through naturalization.’ Through this policy unregistered immigrants could be legalised and expired work permits of those registered after 1997 could be renewed. Applicants were given six months to provide the required documentation for the acquisition of the work permit, which was a precondition for obtaining a residence permit. This policy was aimed also at employers who, on employing any immigrants, they had to issue an official
contract, i.e. to pay official national insurance contributions to IKA etc. Along with the rest of documents (health, police etc.) applicants had to have a certificate of national insurance contributions paid for at least 200 working days and a copy of a contract with an employer along with a payment of 147 euro for each person over the age of 14.

By August 2001, the six month deadline, 351,110 applicants had submitted documents for the acquisition of work permit, which was a precondition for obtaining a residence permit. Yet, the process of implementing the policy proved exceedingly cumbersome, bureaucratic and slow. The government extended temporary residence to the applicants till October 2003 but even by then a backlog of applications had not been processed and with another act (3202/2003) residence permit was extended for two more years from January 2004, meanwhile new unregistered immigrants keep entering the country clandestinely. There is now substantial literature highlighting not only the structural and bureaucratic difficulties of the implementation of the policies of regularisation of the immigrants (Kasimati, K. 2003) but also the extraordinary difficulties of developing any indicators of integration (Baldwin-Edwards, 2005).

There have been many protests by various organisations of the immigrants as well as by other NGOs and the Greek ombudsman’s reports have been very critical of the public services in their handling of cases of the immigrants. Amnesty International also in its report on Greece (2005) has been outspoken against the processes of handling the problem of asylum seeking in the country.

To date the whole process of regularisation, let alone integration, of recent immigrant minorities in Greek society is far from satisfactory. Immigrants have to wait for long hours in long queues, often to meet unfriendly and even prejudiced public servants to tell them to come again tomorrow because their documents are not right. In many cases they have to spend much of their meagre resources to pay lawyers to handle the complex process of their regularisation. It takes up to ten years before a foreigner immigrant can actually become a Greek citizen. In theory, if he/she has acquired work and residence permit is entitled to all the welfare benefits and services available to Greek citizens but in practice in order to get those permits and benefits ‘A mix of personal financial and managerial incentives seem to motivate officials’ behaviour towards implementing discriminatory and quite racist policies which, according to their opinion safeguard Greek society against the incoming “threat”’ (Psimmenos, I. and Kasimati, K. 2003: 368). Research now in progress in the area of care, health and education shows that the problems encountered by immigrants are considerable. Psimmenos (2006) argues that the social context and the organisational structures of the social services generate the social exclusion of the immigrants. It must be stressed, however, that Greek citizens themselves are far from satisfied with the way the social services function especially in the area of health.

The government designed an ‘Action Plan for the Social Integration of Immigrants for the period 2002-2005’. The policy, amongst other things, included measures for training and integrating the immigrants into the labour market, improving their access to the health system, centres for immigrant support, and improvement of
cultural exchanges among ethnic communities. Yet, the implementation of the ‘Action Plan’, apart from the obstacles outlined above, was also stalled by the demanding budget for the preparation and carrying out the Olympic Games and also by the intervening Parliamentary Elections of March 7, 2004 (Kasimis and Kasimi, 2004:7).

Research has shown that the contribution of migrant labour to the Greek economy has been significant. Although unemployment over the last five years in the country at large is over 9%, immigrants have filled a gap in jobs, which native Greeks seem reluctant to take up. So, manual work in the construction industry and to a certain extent in agriculture is now taken up by immigrant males and the domestic service is filled by women. On the other hand high skilled and professional occupations ‘appear to be largely closed to migrants, whatever their educational qualifications’ (Cavounides, J. 2006).

6.3 Debates on immigration

Over the last fifteen years there is a constant debate about immigration in Greece. As the influx was sudden, and given the specificity of Greek identity (Kokosalakis and Psimmenos, 2005) Greek society seemed unprepared to face a transformation towards a pluralist model. An increase in criminality, especially in house burglaries with violence, in the early 1990s was attributed to immigrants mainly from Albania and Romania and as the media treated these phenomena with a certain degree of sensationalism, a climate of xenophobia seemed to be rising in the country (Kasimati, K. 2004). The media seem to frame migration discourses in Greece within an ethnocentric context (Triandafyllidou, A. 2001:103-106). The main voices in the discourse are politicians, academics, policy makers, sometimes churchmen and often immigrant representatives. The tone and the degree of ethnocentricity vary from one participant to another but the general assumption seems towards integration/assimilation rather than integration/diversity model. The debates are usually focusing on tension rather than cohesion. Two theatrical plays showing this season are critical of Greek society by highlighting the experience and the viewpoint of the immigrants.

Although at the general official level immigrant minorities seem far from being integrated into Greek society (Baldwin-Edwards 2005), at the informal everyday life immigrants and natives seem to coexist amicably without tension. This may derive from the fact that every Greek has immediate experience of such interaction as there is hardly any Greek household, which has not employed an immigrant either for domestic work or manual labour. This in itself, however, is not evidence that the majority of the Greek population has accepted immigrants as others, equals in a plural society.

The dimension of religion does not influence debates on immigration directly, but the issue of the Muslim immigration, especially, does influence debates about church-state relations. Albanians as the largest of immigrant minorities, although most of them are nominally Muslims, ‘seem to favour an assimilation strategy, with flexibility about religion, adoption of Greek names, baptism of their children as Orthodox.’ (Baldwin-Edwards, 2005:38). But religion is certainly a strong issue especially for Muslims from the Middle East, Pakistan, India and Africa. For these minorities and others the state is
responsible for granting licenses for places of worship and the rights of passage such as funerals. Such questions have involved the media and the Church in debates and although religion in general and Islam in particular does not seem to be a causal factor for tension in Greek society, certainly the boundaries drawn by religion between minorities and the Greek Orthodox majority are very clear. This is evident and by the very high popularity enjoyed by two television series on Greek Orthodox/Turkish Muslim identity.

6.4 Minority welfare and rights

The question of the establishment of places of worship by minority religions in Greece has been controversial. There is in fact a tension implicit in the Constitution between Article, 3 quoted in section 5.a, which characterises The Orthodox Church as ‘prevailing religion’ and the rights of religious minorities as stated in article 13 which states: ‘1. Freedom of religious conscience is inviolable. The enjoyment of civil rights and liberties does not depend on the individuals’ religious beliefs. 2. All known religions shall be free and their rights of worship shall be performed unhindered and under the protection of the law. The practice of rights of worship is not allowed to offend public order or the good usage. Proselytism is prohibited. 3. The ministers of all known religions shall be subject to the same supervision by the State and to same obligations toward it as those of the prevailing religion...’.

In theory this article safeguards completely religious freedom both in terms of belief and practice but there are certain qualifications in terms of ‘known religions’ and by the prohibition of proselytism. ‘Known religions’ (see above, b.) should not have any difficulties in establishing their places of worship but in practice Jehovah’s Witnesses, for instance, on various occasions have been denied this right and have brought their cases to the European Court of Human Rights which in certain cases condemned Greece. In fact, between 1985 and 2001, 16 decisions of the Court for Greece concerned religion. (http://www.nchr.gr/category.php?category_id=53). In order for a minority religion to acquire a license for a place of worship there are many bureaucratic and legal entanglements, which in certain cases are made worse by the negative attitude of local bishops. There is still in force a necessity Law 1363/1938 and a Royal Decree 20 May/2 June 1939 which concern non-Orthodox places of worship and this legislation permits the intervention of administrative, political and ecclesiastical authorities which make cumbersome and difficult the issuing of licenses of places of worship for minority religions. It is a legal offence, for a minority religious group, to build and/or operate a place of worship without a license, which it must obtain from the Ministry of Education and Religions. The Minister, however, in order to issue such license needs consulting documents from the local police, the mayor of the town or the borough, and from the local bishop and in certain cases from the Synod of the Church of Greece. The issuing and gathering of such documentation can cause endless delays and even denial of granting a license. In the latter case the applicants have the right to appeal to the Council of State but even when they are successful the ratification of the decision of the Council may take a very long time. The European Court of Human Rights has found the specific legislation mentioned as creating serious obstacles for the establishment and functioning of non-Orthodox places of worship. The National Committee for Human Rights (2001:4)
proposed the abolition of article 1, para 1 and 3 of Royal Decree 20/2.6/1939 and also the de-penalisation of operating a place of worship without a license. These recommendations, however, have not been implemented to the present day. Meanwhile other organisations such as Greek Helsinki Monitor and Amnesty International USA have issued critical reports for religious freedom in Greece.

As noted above, outside Thrace there are no active mosques, as such; rather, Muslims worship in other buildings (often private apartments). This fact is hotly debated, as Greece is the only European country with a capital city, which has no active mosque. This was also especially a focal point around the time of the Olympics held in Athens in 2004: the mosque meant to be built in Athens in time for the Olympics never materialised and, though after the initial objections of the Church and some fundamentalist Orthodox Associations, the Church agreed for the building of such and agreement also has been passed by the Greek Parliament itself, the problem of where to build such a mosque persists. There are ‘difficulties’ to build it in the centre of Athens due to ‘lack of a big enough cite’ and also due to the objections of various organisations for ‘cultural reasons’. An earlier suggestion to build the mosque somewhere near the Airport ‘Eleftherios Venizelos’ was opposed by some Church leaders including the Archbishop of Athens because the passengers arriving to Athens ‘would think they are entering an Islamic state’. A suggestion reopen an old mosque called Temenos in the heart of tourist area in Monastiraki (Athens) seems also to raise objections (Kathmerini, 2.4.06, p.21). The Church nevertheless has offered to provide a site of its own in the area of Schisto outside Athens for the Muslim Community to use it as cemetery.

Meanwhile the demand for mosque(s) for the Muslims in Greater Athens and other major cities increases. Muslims, of course, are worshipping in unofficial places, many of them without license, without surveillance or legal proceedings by the authorities, but the need for the establishment of official mosques remains urgent.

7. Religious minority-majority relations

The space in which minority-majority relations take place is largely influenced by the situation described above, in terms of the strong relationship between Orthodoxy and Greek national identity, and between church and state. These relationships have served to create a climate in which religious and ethnic minorities are, at best, ‘others’ who may serve a purpose in the Greek economy, or may have found a refuge in Greece from persecution, or extreme poverty, in their home countries, but who are not considered part of the Greek social fabric. To a large extent this perspective applies to Greek society as a whole; it may also be deduced from attitudes and activities of the Church. Still, it is important to try to distinguish between the Church and society in general, in so far as minority-majority relations are concerned.

7.1 Attitudes and activities of the Church

The attitude of the Orthodox Church of Greece to minority religions in general is rather distant and varies from one group to another. Christian minority religions, with the
exception of Roman Catholics and Anglicans, are considered heretical from a theological point of view. Roman Catholics and Anglicans are not considered heretics because they have retained the Apostolic succession and other basic Christian doctrines such as the Trinitarian but they are schismatic because they are not in Communion with the Orthodox Church.

It is well known that there has been a long historical antagonism and even enmity between the Orthodox and the Roman Catholic Church. Much of that ethos had passed from theology and religious ideology to politics and society. In fact its atiology was mainly political. There is much residue of that legacy within the Hierarchy of the Church of Greece today. Indicative to it is the fact that they objected to the visit of Pope John-Paul in the country in 2002, which was realised in the end as a state visit and many bishops also objected to archbishop Christodoulos visiting the Vatican. As a result of this legacy relations between the Church and the small Catholic minority in the country are rather cool.

Relations with the Muslim minority of Western Thrace are formal and guided by the Treaty of Lausanne and subsequent legislation. In certain aspects there is co-operation between the local bishop and the Mufti. Archbishop Christodoulos also has made several positive gestures towards economic immigrants and refugees many of whom are Moslems (Forum, 2006, online at http://www.phorum.gr/viewtopic.php?p=8370). The Muslim Community has the legal status of Legal Person of Public Law.

The small Jewish community is well accepted by the Church and is also recognised as a legal person of Public Law.

Relations with the Protestant minorities are cool. In fact for small protestant Churches, which are considered heretical the attitude traditionally has been negative and even hostile as they have been perceived as a threat and an intrusion to the religious ethos and the cultural homogeneity of Greek society. The Church has been especially outspoken in the past against Jehovah’s Witnesses and much of that attitude still remains. The Church is especially against small unrecognised cults and para-religious groups, which attempt to gain adherents in Greek society.

In this context, it must be noted that the Church has tremendous indirect influence over the experience of minorities in Greece (i.e., beyond its direct interaction with minorities) through its role in influencing negative public attitudes towards ‘others’, in general, and towards religious ‘others’ in particular. It certainly plays a very significant role in the difficulties faced by religious minorities in operating places of worship (see below), but also in Jehovah’s Witnesses’ harsh treatment under Greek law (and especially practice) for their conscientious objection from military service.

Despite the cool or generally negative stance of the Church towards religious minorities individually, in practice, its welfare services are open to all. During the sudden influx of immigrants in the early 1990s most parishes were open providing food, clothing
and arranging temporary shelter. Many Albanians in fact became Orthodox and were baptised, a practice supported by an unspoken policy of the Church to this effect.

7.2 Attitudes and activities of minority religions

As noted above, the attitude of the Church towards minority groups varies from one group to another. The same applies of the minority groups’ attitudes towards the majority (towards the Church, and towards society more generally). To a certain extent the variations reflect those in the Church’s attitudes, and those of the society in general, towards different minority groups. However, there must certainly be also other factors involved, and in-depth research is required for insight into such factors.

Likewise, minority activities in relation to the majority largely depend on external support available to the religious minorities. This is strong in the cases of Christian minorities in Greece, and only for some Muslim groups with maintained links with religious leaders in their home countries. Such activities also depend, of course, on the relative level of social and financial [attainment] in Greece: many Muslim immigrants work in agriculture and struggle to make ends meet; they are less likely to mobilise for religious rights and, rather, are satisfied at present to worship in informal spaces which simply operate as mosques.

At the national level negative attitudes amongst minorities towards the majority in general are not detectable: rather, only particular grievances on specific issues are expressed and, again, sporadically. For example, the poor distribution of welfare services to immigrant groups is a conspicuous problem in Greek society, though there are not widespread or vocal protests against this (riots on the scale of those which took place amongst mainly immigrant communities in Paris in 2005 are difficult to imagine in a Greek context).

8. Conclusions

Having examined relevant literature and documentation on our topic, a basic conclusion of this state of the art report is that welfare, values, gender and minority/majority relations in the country are in a state of flux. Welfare, in the broad sense, has entered a new phase in the context of wider socio-economic change and the increasing presence of immigrants in the country. All this produces various forms of social tensions and an upheaval in the realm of values. Traditional values related both to religion and the Greek ethnic identity are being challenged in the framework of a new pluralist social reality and in everyday life, which brings the majority face to face with its conceptions and prejudices of the other.

As noted at the outset, the WaVE research conducted in Greece is expected to generate important insight into some of the most critical problems facing contemporary Greek society. The specific time when the project takes place is conducive to the detection of transitions in society, and of values related to these transitions. The challenges posed by mass immigration and relatively sudden de-homogenisation of Greek
society make this a critical moment for being able to grasp values which lead to cohesion within society, or to tensions. Moreover the increasing presence of minorities in the country seems to generate a mirror image of the moral fibre and the deeper moral condition of society itself. Meanwhile, the project takes place in a period of deep transition, since the minority status of many new residents in Greece is in the process of change with various stages of EU integration (first experienced by the Poles in Greece, and now to be experienced by the Romanians and Bulgarians).

Already preliminary research conducted at the local level indicates that the research will help to dispel generalisations about particular minority groups. Attitudes and activities of Muslims towards the majority, and of the majority towards the Muslims, varies significantly: in many areas, there are greater similarities between the Roma and the Albanians than between Albanians and other Muslim groups. The particular range of minority groups present in the locality under study allows an examination of four different Muslim groupings, two Orthodox-faith ethnic minority groups, and two Roma groupings. This situation is not dissimilar to the diversity of minority groupings at the national level in Greece. In-depth examination of it will offer significant insight into the differences in social cohesion or social tension generated by such factors as particular time of migration of the group (year, or decade), relative access to and ease with the Greek language, specific employment activities of the groups, EU relations with the country of origin, etc.

Finally, the Greek case study is one of only two majority Orthodox faith cases in the WaVE project. The comparison with the Romanian case will be very interesting for an understanding of the differing impacts of different historical trajectories in the relationship between church and state, on the issues studied in the WaVE project. To what extent does a continuity in strong church-state relations in Greece lead to different results from Romania (where this relationship was halted in during soviet rule) in terms of the relations between majority and minority communities? Also, in what areas will Greece bear greater similarity to Italy rather than to Romania, due to more similar socio-cultural, southern European bearings, or to similar politico-historical trajectories (including decades of membership in the EU)? The WaVE project promises a context in which such fruitful comparisons can be made.
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