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Housing the Refugees: the Greek Experience and Its Political Pitfalls

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For Workshop 4

Housing the refugees: The Greek experience and its political pitfalls.

Immigration and economic immigrants

In the 20th century the mass movements of population (concerning mainly the geographic mobility for economic reasons) acquired big importance, and they influenced national and international policies.

One result of the big immigratory currents of the 20th century was the uprooting of approximately 400 million people from their homes and their relocation in foreign homelands, with the hope for a better future. Within these immigratory currents are included mainly the economic immigrants but also, in a much smaller percentage, all types of refugees (political, religious, etc.).

Most important is that this human 'river' grows continuously (with a dramatic increase of rate) as time passes: from 1.5 million immigrants annually in the beginning of the century to 10 million immigrants annually in the last decade (1990-2000).

Thus, as this phenomenon extends into the 21st century, we become witnesses of a new immigratory 'opening' of USA and Europe as a way of confronting the ageing of their population and the need to maintain a balance between the economically active and the pensioners (today the proportion is 4,5:1). According to certain estimates (The Guardian, 18-6-2002) the European Union accepts each year 1.2 million legal and illegal immigrants.

It is obvious that globalisation encourages and strengthens these developments. Based on this logic, in Germany, France and Austria immigration is considered again as useful (Alain Morice CNRS, Le Monde Diplomatique No.153, Jan. 2001). Indeed, it is a change of mentality. Already, from the Meeting of Nice, the designated commissioner of the European Union called upon the country members to recognize that the policy of 'zero immigration' applied for the last 25 years is not functional any more and that they should follow a more open policy.

However, the new attitude for immigration does not automatically and obviously ensure the social support of immigrants, or of their various types of human rights. The conditions of residence, work, education, recreation, and other

aspects of their life are problematic. Thus, the freedom of movement of people (as workforce) that is encouraged by the ongoing increasing world economic completion, is circumvented by the restrictions and the conditions that are imposed by national policies.

The situation in Greece

Concerning the economic immigration, at the end of the 20th century, from a country of despatch Greece is changed into a country of reception. The same occurred to other Mediterranean countries such as Spain, Portugal and Italy. This change happened mainly during the 70s and 80s because of the economic growth that was then taking place. The flows to Europe, North America and Australia (that had occurred during the period between the two World Wars at the beginning of the 20th century and the period immediately after the Second World War) stopped and the flows from Central and Eastern Europe, and Middle East begun. Henceforth, the migratory balance is positive.

Thus, from the beginning of the 90s – after the fall of the central and Eastern Europe communistic regimes, as well as the political realignments in the Near and Middle East – Greece began to accept masses of immigrants from its northern and eastern borders most of which are assuredly illegal. Both the Greek authorities and the Greek society were unprepared and surprised by this event, with unfavourable results for the immigrants and the Greek citizens alike. It is evident that with the 1991 legislation (law 1975/91) immigration (under the pretext of illegal immigration) was placed 'under persecution' in all fields of daily life (municipalities, schools, insurance and finance institutions, etc). Greece is the country with the relatively smaller number of legal immigrants and consequently it has the biggest – per capita – problem of illegal immigration!

The institutional frame

The immigratory legislation of the Greek state in the modern era begins with law 1975/91 (that replaced the initial law 4310/1929, after sixty two years of existence) and its specialised application was fine-tuned by a series of Presidential Decrees and Ministerial decisions. This law determines the legal frame for the control of frontier crossings, entry or exit of persons, stay, work, and the deportation of foreigners.

In 1996 came to force law 2452/96 which modifies the previous law and places onto a new base the policy on immigration. Specifically, the presidential decrees

authorized by this law (PD 358/97 and PD 359/97) regulate the processes of legalisation of the immigrants (provisional and limited stay immigration cards, etc).

Roughly, after a five-year period law 2452/96 was replaced by law 2910/2001 (*'Entry and stay of foreigners in the Greek territory. Possession of Greek citizenship and other provisions.'*) which was also modified by a recent law (3013/2002).

More specifically with this law, and amongst other things, the following are determined:

'In each regional administration of foreigners and immigration a three-member Immigration Committee is recommended, which is constituted by two employees of service of foreigners and immigration, from which the one is its head, and one representative of the police force. The Regional General Secretary appoints the members of the Committee, regular and reserve, and the secretary with his assistant... The Regional General Secretary's ruling could recommend in each regional administration of foreigners and immigration moreover up to two three-member Immigration Committees, provided that they are needed for a quicker completion of their work.' *'The Immigration Committee's job is the formulation of opinion for the issuing or the renewal of stay permissions to immigrants...'* (article 9).

'Entry of a foreigner in Greece for study in Higher Education Institutions (A.E.I.), Technological Educational Institutions (T.E.I), in "Higher Religious Faculties and Religious School Units", in the Higher Faculty of Teachers of Mechanical Engineers of the Faculty of Educational Functional Professional and Technical Education, in the Higher Faculty of Tourist Professions of E.O.T., in Technical Professional Schools (T.E.E.), in the school of the Greek language of the Universities of Athens or Thessaloniki or in the Centre of Greek Language Thessaloniki is allowed, provided that the foreigner had already received permission of entry for this reason. Included in the list of studies are the first degrees and the postgraduate degrees, as well as possession of a speciality as in the case of medical studies' (article 10).

'Entry of a foreigner in Greece for training in public or private educational centres (I.E.K.) is allowed provided that the foreigner is accepted by them and is granted a relevant approval of study by the Institution of Professional Education and

Training'. 'Entry of a foreigner in Greece for the study of... programs in laboratories of free study is allowed, provided that the foreigner has been accepted by them and that the relevant laboratory certification stating that the foreigner is accepted for the duration of the relevant program is approved by the relevant service of that Prefectoral Authority' (article 14).

From the above continuous changes in the legislation it appears, on the one hand, the speed of developments in the immigratory movement and, on the other hand, the inexperience, improvisation and haphazard treatment by the Greek state. Thus, for example, the severity of provisions in at least the initial laws, contributed in the reproduction of illegal immigration. It appears that the legislator did not comprehend that Greece had been changed de facto into a country of reception of immigrants, given that the emphasis was initially placed on policing and deportation. And that was so despite the explicit constitutional arrangements for the protection of rights of all that live and work in the country. Following the above some positive measures were taken such as the legalization of immigrants and the transference of the centre of exercise of immigratory policy to the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Public Administration, as well as the completion of the 1st business program for immigrants and the formation of the Immigratory Policy Institute which, however, is at its very early stage.

Quantitative and statistical data

The basic information useful for the observation of the phenomenon are the development in time of the total flow of immigrants, and their geographic distribution in their Greek geographic and administrative units (Regions, prefectures), both as a percentage of the total of immigrants at a national level and as a percentage of the population for each administrative unit. In addition, there is certain basic information from the profile of immigrants (country of origin, education, profession, age, sex, etc.).

Data of immigration to Greece are presented in the census by the beginning of the 80s. More specifically in the 1991 and 2001 census we observe the following results:

1991	167,276	foreigners
2001	797,093	foreigners

Various estimates that are based on OAED's data (Organization for the Employment of the Workforce) and on the 'application for residence' increase the number of immigrants roughly to 1,000,000 out of which a large number are illegal. It deserves to be reported that according to the UN, the population of Greece in 2015 is forecasted to reach 14.2 million people from which 3-3.5 million will be foreigners - immigrants coming from countries other than the European Union (IAPAD's Study for the immigrants).

According to the report of the National Observatory for the employment and the recent census of the National Statistical Service we have the following information:

As for the country of origin of immigrants at the top of the list are the Albanians with roughly 65%. The rest is distributed in various Balkan countries and the Middle East (Bulgaria, Romania, Pakistan, etc).

Regarding the age of immigrants there is a relatively large concentration between 30 and 35 years of age, while the overwhelming majority is concentrated in the productive ages.

As for the educative level, 50% are graduates of secondary education while the 9% of higher education.

Based on the recent 2001 census the distribution of foreigners at regional level is as follows.

Table 1 Distribution of Foreigners (immigrants) in the Greek regions (GD)

Geographical Departments (GD)	Number of immigrants	% of TP of immigrants
Greater Athens Area	376.732	47.26
Central Greece and Evoia	49.187	6.10
Peloponissos	81.679	7.07
Ionian islands	20.524	2.57
Epirus	17.067	2.14
Thessaly	33.782	4.23
Macedonia	125.973	15.80
Thrace	5.743	0.72
Egean Islands	40.911	5.13
Creta	45.495	5.70
Total	797.093	100.00

Source: Census 2001, National Statistical Service

TP= Total Population of foreigners-immigrants in Greece

GD= Geographical Department

Table 2. Foreigners-Immigrants as per % of the total population of each region

Geographical Department (GD)	Number of immigrants	% of TP of each GD
Grater Athens Area	376.732	10.01
Central Greece and Evoia	49.187	5.92
Peloponissos	81.679	7.07
Ionian islands	20.524	9.63
Epirus	17.067	4.82
Thessaly	33.782	4.48
Macedonia	125.973	5.19
Thrace	5.743	1.58
Egean Islands	40.911	8.04
Creta	45.495	7.56
Total	797.093	7.24 of TP of Greece

Source: Census 2001, National Statistical Service.

Spatial planning and infrastructures of support for immigrants. Problems and possibilities of guarantee of sufficient housing.

Immigration to Greece mainly in the 90s occurred in two 'waves'. The first between 1991-97 and the second after 1997. The immigrants of the first wave had come aiming at a direct economic profit with the hope of some returning to their homelands. Their living conditions were in general very bad. They resided in old and abandoned houses without basic services of common utility (water, electricity, etc.) and with high occupancy density. The immigrants of the second wave are of older age, they have much better living conditions and their expectation is that of a permanent stay and integration into the Greek society.

As we observe in the above tables the immigrants mainly settle in the region of the capital 47%. The attraction exerted on the immigrants by the urban regions is justified not only by the need of easier access to the job market and the satisfaction of their economic needs. It is also explained through cultural and social reasons because in the city exists the possibility of easier communication, transmission of experiences and social aggregation between themselves and, therefore, preservation of their culture. There is also the possibility of better integration in the local society through the services and activities (recreational, athletic, educational, etc.) that are offered in the city. Of course that does not mean that the immigrants always make use of these possibilities.

However, independent from the above, the fact is that the urban infrastructures and services for the immigrants in Greece are generally insufficient. Mainly, these infrastructures are not considered to be 'suitable' for the immigrants (e.g. problems with the 'cross-cultural' schools).

Regarding the housing situation and in relation to the other European countries, it should be stressed that in Greece the proportion of the immigrant population not housed is very high due to lack of government care. According to research estimates this housing deprivation concerns the 2/3 of the immigrant population (IAPAD). The conditions of lack of housing are related to conditions of insecurity such as the unregistered renting of residences, the subletting from immigrants to other immigrants with its many consequences, the evictions, blackmails and threats of householders mainly against the illegal immigrants, the dependence on employers that offer roof and breach working rights of immigrants, the lack of basic comforts of hygiene, the ill-treatment of minors and women, the distribution of narcotics, the lack of health care etc.

On the other hand examining law 2910/2001 we observe that as a criterion for the issuing of entry permission it is statutory for the immigrant to have ensured some lodging, however without reference on the conditions and type of lodging based on the international conventions ratified by Greece for the human and social rights (Statement of Human Rights, article 25, and European Social Charter, article 31). Also, in the law there is no mention of the basic constitutional rights concerning the obligation of the state to ensure sufficient housing to all legal residents of the country.

Certainly, the application of housing and other rights requires planning and the bringing together of suitable mechanisms targeting primarily the legal immigrants in order to aid them in the access of safe, secure and sufficient housing.

According to IAPAD's study, the basic objective should be the planning of an institutional frame and specifications for the support of housing, as well as the creation of relevant pilot units that will basically have a preventive role. Particular care should be given to the frail and susceptible groups of immigrants through the provision of a social residence. The necessary actions for the implementation of the objectives should be undertaken by institutions that have the suitable know-how on built-up development and urban and social planning issues (e.g. DEPOS – the Public Enterprise of Urban Planning and Accommodation, Research Centres and Consultant researches).

Even if the region of application of the above activities is the entire Greek territory, particular emphasis should be given to the metropolitan regions of Athens and Thessaloniki as well as the pilot application in two frontier regions. Finally, key to the success of the undertaken activities is the creation of housing

units of support and mediation in the prefectures presenting accentuated problems of accommodation of immigrants.

Repatriating Refugees

According to the Greek legislation, immigrants who arrived and resided in Greece since late '80s and after the collapse of the socialist states in Europe can be distinguished in two categories: the ones of Greek origin and the ones without it. And one could see a clear difference in policies aiming to accommodate the "repatriating Greeks" in their new environment, than the ones targeted to the other immigrants, the former being more in variety, more elaborated and better financed than the latter. Here it should be noted that the officially used term "repatriating" is not correct, since the vast majority of these immigrants have never before lived in Greece, being the descendents of ancient Greek colonies, created in the area since the 8th century AC. The term could apply only to a minority of first generation political exiles who expatriated in Eastern Europe and former Soviet Union during the period 1946-1949, due to the Civil War, and now, they were allowed to come back.

When talking about "repatriating refugees", the reference is mainly made about two periods of the contemporary Greek history: The 1922 Asia Minor disaster, when 1.3 million Greeks living in Ottoman Empire were "exchanged" with 500000 Turks living in Greek territory (to be precise, the critical characteristics for the identity of the "exchanged" were not the ethnic identities but the religious affiliations i.e. Christian Orthodox versus Muslims), and the early 1990s, with the influx of populations from Eastern Europe and former Soviet Union to Greece, after the collapse of communist regimes and the ethnic tensions that arose there right after. Quantitatively, there should be no comparison between these two periods, since the 1.3 million refugees of 1923 comprised a much more serious social problem than the 160000 refugees of the '90s –furthermore, given the specific conditions of each period and the different capabilities due to the time span between them. Nevertheless, the outcomes of the assimilation strategy of 1920s and 1930s seem to be more effective and reliable from the recent one, for reasons that will be analyzed later. "Repatriation" –with a more precise meaning of the term- was also recorded in Greece during the period 1971-1986. During that period, the number of the returning population back to Greece was becoming increasingly higher than the emigrating population, which had reached a total of almost 12 million since the beginning of the 20th century. During this period 1971-1986, 625000 Greek immigrants came back to Greece for staying

permanently. This wave, though, did not create the panic and the urgent needs of the two mentioned before, since returning Greeks were mostly first generation immigrants abroad, with families and relatives still in Greece, and with a clear idea about the Greek reality, coming from their frequent visits in the homeland. Furthermore, they were skilled, used to function in the same social system as in Greece, and financially healthy –and most often better off than the majority of the Greek population. Consequently, there was no urgent need for social and financial intervention from the part of the public sector, and this period was not characterized as one of refugee invasion.

This paper will examine the policies and projects related to providing immediate and intermediate shelter and permanent housing for the refugees, the up to now outcomes of these policies, and their repercussions for human rights of immigrants. This will be given within a general frame describing the characteristics of the refugees from former Soviet Union and other East European countries, the conditions of their “repatriation”, and the policies and means adopted for their assimilation in the Greek society. In context with the above, the establishment of E.I.Y.A.P.O.E. (National Foundation of Reception and Rehabilitation of Repatriating Expatriate Greeks) –which was the main means of exercising housing policies for the refugees- will be analyzed, its function for about one decade, and then, its dissolution due to ineffectiveness, mismanagement and excessive money consumption.

The initial signs of refugee movements to Greece became evident at 1987, two years after the appointment of M. Gorbatsoff in the position of the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. At this period, ethnic tensions erupted in the then Soviet Union, following a severe economic crisis. The situation deteriorated and populations of different ethnic origins were trapped in wars in several then Soviet republics. Appeals for help from populations of Greek origin at 1989 were followed by visits from the then Greek Minister of External Affairs A. Samaras, in the troubled territories, who directed an open and quite promising invitation for the “repatriation” of local people of Greek origin to the motherland –and even more promising, to the European Union. The motives of this invitation have been criticized since, as rather premature, since promises were given without any previous preparation which would guarantee their materialization. Furthermore, it has also been discarded as a movement to gain useful political support from the refugees, having as an example the equivalent support that Prime Minister E. Venizelos gained from the 1923 refugees, and with

the perspective of nearby national elections. The official Ministerial invitations, combined to the lifting of restrictions of movement of Soviet citizens out of Soviet Union, provoked an increasingly massive incoming movement of refugees in Greece. The number of "repatriating" refugees from the Soviet Republics reached 155.000 until the year 2000, and they came from Georgia (52%), Kazakhstan (20%), Russia (15%) and Armenia (6%). The peak of their arrivals was recorded in the period 1992-1993 and the majority of them resided in Northern Greece (mainly in Thessalonica) and in the broader area around Athens (Attica). Their geographic distribution in Greece and their number of arrivals per year can be seen in the following tables.

Region	Families	Individuals	Percentage of the total (%)
Thrace	6583	22984	14.8
Macedonia	29265	91673	59
Prefecture of Thessalonica	16174	51139	33
Rest of Macedonia	13091	40534	26
Epirus	35	112	0.1
Thessaly	397	1354	0.9
Stereia Ellas	10972	33837	21.8
Prefecture of Attica (Athens)	10779	33204	21.4
Rest of Stereia Ellas	193	633	0.4
Peloponnese	321	943	0.6
Crete	1231	3893	2.5
Ionian islands	19	57	-
Aegean islands	157	466	0.3
Total	48980	155319	100.0

Table 3: Geographic distribution of the repatriating refugees from the former Soviet Union in the Greek Regions (sources: General Secretariat of Repatriating Expatriate Greeks, 2000a: 40-41 and Georgoula et al, 2002:116)

Year	Individuals arrived	Percentage of total arrivals (%)
1977-1986	334	0.2
1987	169	0.1
1988	669	0.4
1989	5195	3.3
1990	16716	10.8
1991	17331	11.2
1992	19846	12.8
1993	25720	16.6
1994	14737	9.5
1995	14586	9.4
1996	14298	9.2
1997	12381	8.0
1998	5761	3.7
1999	4676	3.0
2000	1307	0.8
Not recorded	1593	1.0
Total	155319	100.0

Table 4: Arrivals of repatriating refugees from the former Soviet Union per year (sources: General Secretariat of Repatriating Expatriate Greeks, 2000a:46 and Georgoula et al, 2002:116)

Their criteria of choosing their new residence were the existence of relatives and friends in the same area, the possibility of employment, living in a city instead of a rural area, and a general impression of relatively better quality of life there (General Secretariat of Repatriating Expatriate Greeks, 2000a:44).

Having to face this phenomenon, the then national Greek Government of K. Mitsotakis went on establishing the National Foundation of Reception and Rehabilitation of Repatriating Expatriate Greeks (N.F.R.R.R.E.G. or EIYAPOE in Greek). This was supposed to be a flexible organization, belonging to the wider public sector but autonomous from the time consuming state bureaucracy, with main task the provision of shelter and housing to the refugees. Here, the exclusive target of the foundation should be underlined, supposed to serve only the "repatriating expatriate Greeks" and excluding the rest of the immigrants,

legal or illegal, who had also come in Greece in vast numbers. It also has to be noted that the main focus of the rehabilitation program was on the “repatriating expatriates” from the republics of the Soviet Union, these being either residents there for centuries, or, a smaller number of first or second generation Greeks who fled Greece as left wing partisans after the civil war of 1945-1949 and went to the socialist countries as political exiles. Political exiles from other East European countries were also allowed to return to Greece after the post dictatorship official “national reconciliation policy” of the Greek State¹, but they were not part of the EIYAPOE rehabilitation program².

EIYAPOE was established by Law 1893/1990 under the auspices of the Minister of External Affairs and its tasks and program were then approved. Two years later, with Law 2080/1992, its focus was broadened by including refugees from Albania -who, in this period, were flocking in Greece in vast numbers- but still, only for the ones of Greek origin. It also undertook the responsibility of providing assistance to expatriate Greeks abroad. Thus, according to the new law, EIYAPOE had three sectors of activities:

1. The program for the repatriating expatriates from former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe,
2. The program for Albania and
3. The program for providing assistance to expatriate Greeks still living in the territories of former Soviet Union.

The 1st program was divided in three sub sectors: the housing program, which was considered as the first priority, the education program and the professional training program. The 2nd program was for planning and materializing activities in the regions of Albania with a Greek minority, mainly in the areas of education, culture, technical substructures, regional development, professional training, and social services. The 3rd program was about the same activities as above, but for regions with a Greek minority in former Soviet Union. As it was stated in the beginning, the main focus of this work will be on the housing program for the refugees from former Soviet Union and East European countries.

1: The military dictatorship in Greece lasted from 1967 to 1974. The post dictatorship political climate was generally progressive, and national reconciliation between political left and right was top on the political agenda of all the political parties.

2: There was no significant general national policy concerning the repatriation and rehabilitation of the political exiles and repatriation was examined in an individual basis. Furthermore, there is still a category of political exiles, the ones from the Republic of Macedonia who still are not allowed to return to Greece due to old territorial disputes.

The establishment and function of EIYAPOE seemed to be of major importance for the Greek government who also granted it with special privileges in order to facilitate its smooth function. Thus, according to Law 1947/1991, it was given complete tax exemption, the right to proclaim expropriation for public benefit, and to use public land without exchange.

The internal organization of EIYAPOE was also ambitious: it consisted of a Central Branch and of "Hospitality Centers". The Central Branch was organized in eight Directorates: Personnel, Finance, Technical Services, Education and Training, Supplying and Transportation, Real Estate, Data Processing, and Internal Management and Control. "Hospitality Centers" were allocated in three regional "Inspectorates": of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace based in Komotini with subdivisions in other three prefectures, of Central Macedonia based in Thessalonica with subdivisions in other three prefectures, and of Epirus and West Macedonia based in Ioannina with subdivisions in other two prefectures (map 1). Few years later, many of those subdivisions ceased to operate.

Source of finance	Amount of financing (EURO)	Percentage of total (%)
Ministry of External Affairs (Regular budget)	116,041,086	49.9
Extra subsidies	15,471,753	6.9
Ministry of Finance	4,501,834	1.9
Partial Sum	136,014,673	57.7
Social Rehabilitation Fund of European Council (S.R.F.E.C.)	31,248,716	13.4
European Union subsidies	20,446,075	8.9
Subsidies of various organizations	3,753,485	1.6
Donations	460,748	0.2
Interest from capital	38,154,072	16.4
Tax returns / interest	2,074,835	0.9
Others	334,556	0.1
TOTAL	232,487,160	100.0

Table 5: EIYAPOE finances and sources of finance 1991 – 2001
(sources: EIYAPOE 2002: 65, G. Georgoula et al 2002: 124)

Finances were also a strong point of the organization, at least at the beginning of its function. Sources of finance for EIYAPOE were the Ministries of External Affairs and of Finance, the Social Rehabilitation Fund of the European Council (S.R.F.E.C.), several European programs, and various other sources such as grants, interest from capital, donations etc. The total amount of finances for the decade 1991-2001 is shown in Table 5, and the temporal distribution of these finances is shown in Table 6.

Source of finance	1991-1993	Yearly Average	1994-1999	Yearly Average	2000-2001	Yearly Average	1991-2001	Yearly Average
Ministry of External Affairs (Regular budget)	17,168,012	5,722,671	76,868,672	12,811,445	22,004,402	11,002,201	116,041,086	10,549,190
Extra subsidies	15,383,712	5,127,904	88,041	14,673	-	-	15,471,753	1,406,523
Ministry of Finance	-	-	1,027,146	171,191	3,474,688	1,737,344	4,501,834	409,258
Social Rehabilitation Fund of European Council	22,180,484	7,393,495	9,071,167	1,511,862	-	-	31,248,716	2,840,792
European Union subsidies	11,228,173	3,742,724	9,088,775	1,514,796	129,127	64,563	20,446,075	1,858,734
Subsidies of various organizations	3,263,390	1,087,797	478,357	79,726	11,738	5,869	3,753,485	341,226
Donations	334,556	111,519	123,258	20,543	-	-	460,748	41,886
Interest from capital	22,908,290	7,636,097	15,031,548	2,505,258	214,233	107,116	38,154,072	3,468,552
Tax returns / interest			2,074,835	345,806	-	-	2,074,835	188,621
Others	5,869	1,956	278,797	46,466	49,890	24,945	334,556	30,414
TOTAL	92,472,486	30,824,162	114,130,596	19,021,766	25,884,078	12,942,039	232,487,160	21,135,196

Table 6: Temporal distribution of EIYAPOE finances during the period 1991 – 2001

(sources: EIYAPOE 2001:62-65, G. Georgoula et al 2002:125, authors' elaboration)

The above financial scheme covered all the activities of the organization. Money from the Social Rehabilitation Fund of European Council, in particular, were given as loans, exclusively for housing projects for the refugees and they were covering 40% of the total budget of each housing project, while the rest 60% was supposed to be covered by national contribution. From table 4 it can be seen that during the period 1994 – 1999, incoming money from S.R.F.E.C. were drastically reduced, and at 2000 – 2001 they were finally stopped. It was said that this happened when European Council officials found out that the money given were given to refugees as rent subsidies, instead of constructing permanent residences. It can also be observed that EIYAPOE finances followed a relatively sharp decline during this decade and the housing sector was particularly hit because of the interruption of S.R.F.E.C. loans –among other things. As will be seen later, this affected not only the quality of EIYAPOE services but also alienated the refugees who felt insecure with the gradual abandonment of a policy so crucial to them. A clear indication of the shortage of funds for the housing program is that while the total cost of it for the decade 1991 – 2001 was estimated at 205,429,200 EURO (EYIAAPOE 1996a:28) from which the 123,257,520 EURO (60% of the total) should have been the national contribution, it was only the amount of 136,014,673 EURO which was given from the part of the Greek government to cover all EIYAPOE activities, as shown in table 3. This means that only part of this amount went to the program of repatriating expatriates from former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, and again only part of the latter was spent for the housing program.

In fact, despite the initial rhetoric about the increased effectiveness of the new organization, there were awkward signs, casting doubts about the reliability of the operation right from the beginning. Although the organization and funding of EIYAPOE started at 1990, the housing program delayed for more than three years, since all planning and constructions of the first Reception Centers for the refugees were made by a special service of the Greek army (SYKEA). This service preexisted of EIYAPOE, was dealing with reconstruction projects and, according to Law 1262/92, was supposed to be automatically dissolved after the establishment of EIYAPOE. Nevertheless, even after the establishment of EIYAPOE, the construction of the first permanent refugee settlements was also given to SYKEA with the 27.2.1992 ministerial decision of the ministers of National Defense and of External Affairs, which went on organizing the project, signing contracts and

supervising works. This went on until 2.7.1993, when the permanent dissolving of SYKEA was announced, and EIYAPOE finally took over (EIYAAPOE, 1996a:59). There was speculation that SYKEA was kept for as long as it was needed for some developing companies to get contracts for the housing project. Nevertheless, when one would expect that even after this delay the Foundation would take over in signing contracts, supervising projects etc., it went on granting its own responsibilities in running housing projects, to other agencies as DEPOS (National Foundation of Housing and Urban Planning) or VIPETVA (the construction branch of the) which in no case were better suitable for this type of activities. This made the ability of the Foundation to intervene in the phases of planning and construction too indirect and became harmful for the project.

Housing program of EIYAPOE

Characteristics and location

The accession of repatriating refugees in the housing and rehabilitation program of EIYAPOE was a matter of personal choice for them. A restrictive term, though, was that the ones to be accepted in the program should have their passports stamped in the Greek Consulate with the indication "Repatriation". People on tourist visas were not allowed to participate in EIYAPOE programs³.

The first elements of the planning phase of the housing program of EIYAPOE were the definition of the stages and structural parts of it, and the specification of locations of these parts. According to what was planned, the rehabilitation of repatriating expatriates in the sectors of accommodation and housing should follow four stages (EIYAAPOE 1996a:36):

1. Initial reception in "Hospitality Centers" and stay there for 15 – 30 days⁴.
2. Temporary stay for another period up to six months in "Reception Settlements".
3. Moving in rented accommodation and
4. Establishment in permanent residences.

3: This restriction was lifted later, initially by providing the possibility for the ones on tourist visas to get the "repatriating" status from specific civil departments in Greece, and then by extending the right to participate in EIYAPOE programs in people who came in Greece on tourist visas before 1/1/2000 (General Secretariat of Repatriating Expatriate Greeks 2000a:25, 31 and interviews).

4: According to Law 1893/1990 about the establishment of EIYAPOE, this initial 15 - 30 days stay could be prolonged under special circumstances for as long as the Executive Board of EIYAPOE would decide.



Map 1: Organization and activities of EIYAPOE in Greece

(source: Tsetsiou 2000:130)

During the first two stages the refugees would stay in a collective environment, completely protected and organized in order to get basic assistance and information and start an adjustment process in the political, social, economic and cultural conditions of their new environment. The other two stages of rented accommodation and permanent residences are under conditions of individual, independent living, where the adjustment of the refugees to their new life style is completed.

The location choice for the housing projects was based more in political than in social criteria. Although in the initial plans of EIYAPOE was to help refugees settle in all Northern Greece⁵, finally the implementation of all EIYAPOE programs was concentrated in Thrace, in Northeastern Greece. The reasons for this were that in this area there is a Muslim minority whose political influence and demographic increase, the Greek government wanted to counterbalance by directing the refugees to reside there⁶ (Kritikos 2002). The negative elements of this choice were that refugees who were residing there, had serious problems in finding employment, and this led many of them to avoid joining the program and move straight to Thessalonica or Athens.

For the first stage of the program, the first three "hospitality centers" were created in Athens (Agios Ioannis Rentis) with a capacity of 250 persons, in Thessalonica (Lagadikia) with a capacity of 350 persons and in Thrace (Dionysos Evros) with a capacity of 150 persons. The first two were gradually abandoned after a short period because of unpredicted problems, since the refugees who were accepted there, refused to leave Athens and Thessalonica in order to move to Thrace for the second stage of the program. Consequently, the two new hospitality centers were made in Thrace: in Soufli and in Dikaia, with capacity of 200 persons each. Parallel to these, temporary hospitality centers were also created during the peak periods of arrivals of refugees, mainly in student hostels and in hotels. Most of them were in Thrace, but few of them were also made in central Greece (prefectures of Larissa, Imathia, Fthiotida etc.). For these, EIYAPOE did not provide any reasoning for the choice of their location, allowing, thus, speculation about preferential deals with some hotel owners.

At the second stage of the program, refugees were moved from hospitality centers to "Reception Settlements". Their creation was financed by national funds, and loans from Social Rehabilitation Fund of European Council. EIYAPOE was the official proprietor of the settlements and their function was in cooperation with the local municipalities and prefectures. During their stay there, they could attend language and training programs; there was child care and education, medical care etc. There were five reception centers (EIYAAPOE 1996a:42) which were created between 1991 and 1993:

5: This was reflected in the locations of the first Hospitality Centers and Reception Settlements which were spread in all Central and Northern Greece (map 1). Some of them continued operating even after the exclusive implementation of all EIYAPOE programs in Thrace and became permanent settlements.

6: Another characteristic of this area was, then, the low level of development. Ten years later, the pace of development has been accelerated but Thrace still is among the poorest areas in the European Union

Zigos, Kavala with a capacity of 1000 persons.

Sapes, Rodopi with a capacity of 750 persons.

Palagia, Evros with a capacity of 800 persons.

Farkadona, Trikala with a capacity of 500 persons and

Evmiro, Xanthi with a capacity of 450 persons.

In the third stage refugees were moved from reception settlements to individual residences, mostly rented, in order to gradually get used in how to manage their own lives in an everyday situation. Their rent, bills for electricity, water etc. were subsidized but they were responsible in making the payments themselves. Subsidization would cease as soon as the financial situation of the refugee families allowed it.

The final stage was the establishment of refugee families in permanent residences which were coming in their possession in various ways: by financing their purchase from the free market through low interest loans from EIYAPOE, by partly financing their construction in permanent settlements in EIYAPOE sites, or by buying ready houses in local municipalities which were constructed by EIYAPOE.

Policy phases of the program

The implementation period of the housing program of EIYAPOE 1991 – 2001 can be distinguished in three phases which signify different policy orientations, different financing schedules and different impacts on repatriating refugees.

- The first period was from 1991 to 1993 and emphasis was given to the reception of the refugees as well as to the organization of EIYAPOE and planning of its activities.
- The second period was from 1994 to 1999. The focus of activities was on creating permanent housing settlements, and providing permanent residences to refugees.
- Finally, the last period was from 2000 to 2001 and the activities of the Foundation were restricted to complementary actions in support of the policy of "aftostegasi" according to which, refugees are expected to get actively involved in completing the construction of their residence. This is also the last period of EIYAPOE, which ceased to exist after December 2002 and legislation was introduced to arrange for the transfer of its property, responsibilities, pendencies etc. to other agencies of the public sector. The dismantling of the Foundation came as the conclusion of a

severe financial crisis which provoked criticism for ineffectiveness and mismanagement.

A more detailed description of these phases will follow in order to give a better insight of the development of the housing project and the way that it affected the repatriating refugees.

The first period 1991 – 1993 started with the creation of the “Hospitality Centers”, the temporary “Hospitality Centers” (see page 12 above) and the “Reception Settlements”. The Foundation had limited saying on these, since it was SYKEA who materialized most of them. The Hospitality Centers of all kinds played a very important role in the reception of the refugees but they proved to be very costly, so as to put in jeopardy the next phases of the program. This first period of functioning of the Foundation the total cost of Hospitality Centers came up to 1,814,000,000 drachmas in 1991 values (EIYAAPOE 2002) (or 12,320,525 Euros in today’s value), and the annual cost per person was fluctuating between 572,000 and 940,000 drachmas in 1991 (3886 and 6385 Euros respectively in today’s value). The high difference in variations was due to the occasional use of hotels as temporary Hospitality Centers (see also page 12). Furthermore, the annual “hospitality” cost per person increased 65% in 1992 and 49% in 1993 and the number of refugees increased 150% from 1992 to 1993 (Georgoula et al 2002:134). The Reception Settlements –which were the second stage of the rehabilitation/housing process of refugees- were less costly than the Hospitality Centers: they were made of prefabricated houses which were previously used to temporarily accommodate population after earthquakes. Their total cost operating cost⁸ came up to 1,989,000,000 drachmas (13,509,110 Euros in present values) – which is slightly higher than the equivalent of Hospitality Centers- but the annual cost per person was fluctuating between 164,000 and 279,000 drachmas in 1991 (1109 and 1895 Euros in present values respectively) and was reduced even more until 1993. (Georgoula et al 2002: 135).

7: The above amounts of money in drachmas reflect a reality at the beginning of ‘90s when the inflation was running at a rate of more than 20%. Today’s inflation rate is around 3.5% and the conversion in Euros has been done for 2004 prices by multiplying them with a coefficient reflecting inflation during all these years.

8: This cost does not include the cost of moving the houses on site and the total cost of technical infrastructure in the Reception Settlements of Zigos, Sapes, Palagia, Evmoiro, and Farkadona which reached 2,989,000,000 drachmas (8,771,827 Euros) and were paid mainly from the Ministry of Planning, the Environment, and Public Works.

During this period, besides the Hospitality Centers and the Reception Settlements, the Foundation went on renting houses for the third stage of the rehabilitation/ housing of the refugees (see page 13). The contracts were made between the owners of the houses and the Foundation –not the refugees themselves- since this was considered positive for the credibility of the transaction by the owners. 700 residences were rented in Thrace until the end of 1993 and given to refugee families. The annual cost per rented house in 1993 was between 332,000 and 397,000 drachmas (1730 and 2069 Euros respectively in present values) which was much lower than the cost of Hospitality Centers, but higher than the cost of Reception Settlements. Here should also be mentioned that, according to the program, the Foundation was subsidizing the rent of the refugee families, depending on the financial situation of the refugees⁹. A complication in this stage of the program was that very often, the repatriating refugees refused to pay for the other expenses of their houses (electricity, water, maintenance etc.) which was their formal responsibility, but it ended up to be paid by the Foundation. In this way, the rented accommodation stage became something equivalent to the Reception Settlements, and it did not work towards the gradual adaptation of the refugees to their new environment, as had been initially planned.

During this period, besides rented accommodation, the Foundation also explored the market for permanent accommodation. The steps –either in sequence or alternative- followed for that, were: a. finding and acquiring land to develop, b. buying ready houses, c. constructing houses in land yielded to the Foundation, and d. create permanent settlements.

Acquisition of land, in particular, was not proved successful. Until 1993, the Foundation acquired 714 ha of public land, a great percentage of which, was not suitable for construction of houses, either due to the geography of the terrain, or due to administrative restrictions (protected areas, green belts etc.). From the remaining, the highest percentage was agricultural land, quite isolated from other urban centers. The reasoning that prevailed and led in this choice was that new permanent settlements should be relatively independent and self sufficient (Kritikos 2002). Most permanent settlements were built on agricultural land, while some others were built on areas just besides existing Reception Settlements

9: Very indicative for the mistrust between the Foundation and the refugees was the fact that, while according to Foundation sources the rent subsidization reached 70,000 drachmas (364 Euros in present values) per month, according to refugees' claims this was never higher than 58,000 drachmas (302 Euros in present values).

(Evmoiro in the Prefecture of Xanthi, Sappes in Rodopi, Palagia and Giannouli in Evros, and Zigos in Kavala). The Foundation did not participate in planning and construction of the settlements (see also pg 10) and this was a negative factor for the quality of the produced outcomes (the example of Zigos is very indicative). Since there was a deficit of residential land because of the above, the Foundation went ahead to buy land and houses in the housing estates of EKTENEPOL, near Xanthi and Komotini. In this way, the shortage of land was dealt, but the finances of the program started exhibiting a much more serious shortage.

The system of granting permanent houses to refugees became also a matter of controversy. Houses which were to be built in permanent settlements, as well as the ones to be bought by the Foundation would be given to refugee families as "chrisidaneio" which meant that these families would live in the house for 20 years and then they would have the right for its complete ownership. This measure was supposed to discourage refugees to move away from Thrace to major urban centers (Athens or Thessaliniki) and keep them in the place of their residence (Kritikos 2002). The process of choosing which families would get a house was bitterly disputed. Until 1994, the choice was made according to social criteria by a committee with Foundation officials as members,. After demonstrations and criticism because of phenomena of favoritism and deliberately opaque procedures, the system changed to a more objective evaluation with indicators and weights, and ballot.

As it concerns the architectural design of houses, three types were finally approved, for up to 5 persons (with area 95 sq.m.), 7 persons (115 sq.m.), and 9 persons (125 sq.m.). These types were suppose to be implementable in every housing project, and this created some serious problems at least in one case, as will be seen later.

Stage of housing program	Families involved	Individuals involved
Hospitality Centers	175	609
Reception Settlements	845	3259
Rented Residences	700	3071
Permanent Residences	155	663
Total	1875	7602

Table 7: Involvement of refugees in EIYAAPOE housing program during the period 1991 – 1993. (Source: EIYAAPOE 2002:17, Georgoula 2002:143).

During the second period 1994 – 1999, the Foundation put the focus of its activities on permanent accommodation for repatriating refugees, and on the creation of permanent housing settlements. The Hospitality Centers gradually had their role reduced. It is indicative that while during the period 1991 – 1993 they reached a peak of 1050 refugees being served there, at the end of 1999 there were only 169 of them. The Reception Settlements were also gradually dismantled in order for the refugees to be moved in rented accommodation. The move to this stage during this period was massive and beyond previous expectations, since at 1993 there were 3071 refugees who stayed in rented houses and at 1997 their number increased to 15000 (4029 families). The expenses for subsidizing the rents also increased to 2,646,000,000 drachmas (7765224 Euros) at 1997, and the annual cost per family was also double than the equivalent of the first period. These uncontrollable expenses brought criticism to the Foundation, which started looking increasingly as problematic, corrupt and ineffective. Even worse, they provoked social tensions between refugees and local societies who thought that refugees were getting unacceptable privileges. Under these conditions, the Ministry of External Affairs put pressure on the Board of Directors of the Foundation who, in turn, decided to cut back the subsidies. The reaction of the refugees and their organizations was immediate, and they demonstrated and occupied the offices of the Foundation in the cities of Alexandroupoli, Komotini, Kavala, and Xanthi, asking for the invalidation of the decision (Alisanoglou 1998). The outcome of the negotiations that followed was that cutbacks would have to be made in subsidies of refugee families who were financially strong. The categorization would be based in criteria set after cooperation between the Foundation and the refugee organizations (www.papandreou.gr 1998b). Consequently, the expenses due to rental subsidies were reduced up to 50% since 1999, partly due to the cutbacks and partly due to the gradual development of the fourth stage of the housing program, which involved moving of refugees to permanent residences.

The methods used by the Foundation for materializing the permanent residence stage of the housing program were the following (Kritikos 1996:31):

1. Purchase of developed land (mainly in housing estates) near the cities of Xanthi and Komotini.
2. Transformation of the Reception Settlements of Evmiro in Xanthi, Sapes in Rodopi, Palagia in Evros, and Zigos in Kavala to permanent settlements.

3. Preparation of urban plans and consequent creation of housing settlements / estates on land, property of the Foundation.
4. Construction of prefabricated houses in rural municipalities, not exceeding in numbers 10% of the total number of houses of the municipality.
5. Purchase of already built houses and flats in apartment buildings.
6. Purchase of houses and flats under construction, which were to be modified and finished according to guidelines set by the Foundation.

The first housing settlements were ready to be used at 1995, in Evmoiro, Sapes and Giannouli in Evros. The capacity of these settlements and their cost are given in Table 8.

Area	Number of residences	Total cost in EUROS
Evmoiro (Xanthi)	88	2,072,660
Sapes (Rodopi)	281	7,165,520
Giannouli (Evros)	61	1,780,450
TOTAL	430	11,018,630

Table 8: Residences and costs of permanent settlements (until 1995).
(sources: Kritikos 1996:32)

The time spent for the construction of the above was considered excessive and the Foundation tried to justify this by claiming delays due to the legislative framework for public works. Consequently, it tried manuevring between legislation for public and private sector, with often awkward outcomes. Nevertheless, at the end of 1999 the number of residences in permanent settlements reached 693.10 and purchase of houses and flats ready to be used reached at 239. (EIYAAPOE 2002:21).

A recapitulation of the process of the housing program at the end of the period 1994 – 1999 is exhibited in table 9.

10: Even though houses in these settlements were granted to refugees, many things are still in abeyance, such as: the official assignment of public spaces to the municipalities which would organize and take care of them, the complete construction of technical infrastructure, construction works in the houses such as insulation, athletic facilities in some settlements etc. (Lascarakis 2002:6)

Stage of the housing program	Families	Individuals
Hospitality Centers	71	169
Reception Settlements	333	1066
Rented Accommodation	3732	14031
Permanent residences	1064	4991
Total	5200	20257

Table 9: The housing program of EIYAAPOE at the end of the period 1994 – 1999. (source: EIYAAPOE 2002:20, Georgoula et al 2002:156).

The last period of EIYAAPOE operation was from 2000 to 2001. This period signifies a basic change in housing policy from the part of EIYAAPOE. The system of "aftostegasi" is introduced, the basic principle of which, is that the repatriating refugees are financially assisted to participate in the making of their own accommodation. During the same period, there is an effort to terminate the abeyances of the previous periods, although without the desired success. The Reception Centers gradually stopped operating, but in the Reception Settlements, at the end of 2001 there were still 378 families of refugees, living in prefabricated –looking like bunkers- houses, in rather degrading conditions. Rented houses also existed, reaching at 3506 at the end of the same period, but being gradually reduced year by year. It is indicative that during 2001, there were 69 new contracts for rented accommodation and 403 discontinuances of existing contracts. The construction of new houses, either in permanent settlements or in individual constructions at this period, stopped completely from the part of the Foundation, but purchases of ready houses and flats continued. In the number of 239 purchases of houses until 1999, another 111 were added, reaching at the end of 2001 at 350.

The system of "aftostegasi" was adopted at the beginning of this period and was part of a general strategy aiming at rehabilitation of repatriating refugees. Its implementation was not aimed only at refugees participating in the housing program of EIYAAPOE, but at all repatriating refugees, in every part of Greece. It was introduced by Law 2790/2000 which was also dealing with issues regarding possession of Greek citizenship, training and education, professional restitution etc. In housing the refugees, in particular, it provided for financial assistance of the type of low or no interest loans, part of which of up to 30%, was given as a

grant. With these loans, refugees could either buy houses or flats from the free market, or built a house in land of their own, or built their house in land granted to them by the Foundation, or buy and restore existing houses or flats, old or half finished. In all cases, guarantor of the loan is the Greek State, something that gives credibility to the whole transaction. This process also provided for having the architectural design either made or paid by the Foundation and issuing construction permit for free, or, in case that the refugee undertakes the permit process, to have insurance expenses reduced by 50%. The amount of loan, the percentage of grant, the figure of interest –or the exemption of it- and the terms and type of assistance, in general depend on the location of the house to be obtained: according to this law, the locational distribution of refugees in Greece has to follow some rational patterns and be under control, so national territory is divided in four zones, each with a different “weight” in terms of the possible assistance. Zone A is the most favourable and it contains Thrace, East Macedonia, and North Aegean islands. At the opposite end, zone D is the least favourable one, containing Athens, Thessaloniki, Pireaus, Patras, and Herakleion, which are the biggest cities in Greece and refugees are discouraged to go and live there. An essential condition for getting a loan is also the obligation of the applying refugee family to live in the particular house for a minimum of 15 years before they get the right to rent it to someone else, or the loan has to be paid back in full. Finally, another element of the policy of “aftostegasi” that has to be commented, is the decentralized process of this policy, since the involved departments of the public sector belong to the Regions, Prefectures and Municipalities –the local administration- and not to the Ministry of External Affairs –the central administration- anymore. Important role for the dispatch process of “aftostegasi” also plays the General Secretariat of Repatriating Expatriates in creating a data bank with available building plots in every prefecture, covering the expenses of building materials for zone A, providing assistance for the bureaucratic procedures etc. (General Secretariat of Repatriating Expatriates 2000b: 11).

For the implementation of “aftostegasi” in cases that building plots were granted to refugees by the Foundation, EIYAAPOE acquired land from various sources and in various places. Land was either bought in housing estates (Kritikos 1996:30), or was attorned by Ministries and organizations of the public sector to the Foundation, or granted/leased to the Foundation by local authorities, or purchased in individual plots from the free market.

In comparison to the other policies and methods used in EIYAAPOE housing program, "aftostegasi" seemed to be much more operational. Until 2002, 1703 building plots had been transferred to refugee families in order to build on them, 1000 building permits have been issued, and in almost half of them, construction has already started. At the same time, 2754 applications for loans were made until 2002 (1655 from refugees in EIYAAPOE program and 1099 from refugees not participating in it), 2069 of them were approved (1321 for refugees in EIYAAPOE program and 748 for others), and 1597 have been processed. (Panoilias 2002).

"Aftostegasi" has been praised as a method which drags the refugees out of a passive attitude –that would be the case if they were given ready and free houses)- and forces them to get involved in procedures of the free market society. Furthermore, since they make the choices about designing and constructing their residencies, they usually get other refugees involved too, such as architects, engineers, builders, trade companies for building materials etc. and thus, create jobs for them. Furthermore, with "aftostegasi" the process of housing the refugees has been speeded up, since there are no more bureaucratic delays affecting high numbers of houses –as was often the case with construction companies being contracted to build permanent settlements- and building or buying a house individually, as a process is much more flexible.

"Aftostegasi" was rightfully characterized as an improvement from the previous policies of EIYAAPOE, but it still had its not-so-slight drawbacks. As has been mentioned earlier, the Foundation acquired land from various sources, in order to provide building plots to the refugees for building their houses. In the hastiness of promoting the implementation of "aftostegasi" upon the success of which, the Foundation laid the justification of its own existence, loans were granted, building plots were attained, building licences were issued and construction of houses started, without having planned and constructed the technical infrastructure in advance. It is indicative that in Komotini, where land was bought in an urbanized area and "aftostegasi" proceeded as fast as possible, many refugee houses are ready while there are no contracts yet with construction companies to built the infrastructure (roads, water supply, drainage and electricity networks etc.). In Xanthi, respectively, even the studies for the infrastructure networks are not ready, while in Palagía, in Evros, there are no funds for the equivalent works. A main reason for these inadequacies was that these tasks were assigned by the Foundation to the technical services of the local municipalities, which often were unprepared for responsibilities of this kind. So, there were delays in preparation

of the studies, in submitting the appropriate files for funding to the Regional departments, in running the procedures for contracting companies for the constructions etc. The assignment of important tasks from the part of the Foundation to other organizations –although EIYAPOE was typically able and obliged to process them- seemed to be an inherent pathogenesis, from its first period of operation (see also pg. 9).

Along with “aftostegasi”, some other measures were introduced to facilitate and encourage the housing rehabilitation of the refugees, that besides their controversial nature, they also fueled social tensions among local societies. According to them, illegal constructions made by refugees would be legalized, and no fines would be imposed. The effects of this in a society where illegal construction has been a serious wound for the last thirty years, can be easily imagined.

In 12 years of operation (1990-2002), EIYAPOE could never reach the levels of efficiency, managerial ability, and social recognition for which it was established. To the contrary, criticism was escalating against its excessive spending, ineffective policies, delays and mismanagement from local societies, central government, and the refugees who participated in its programs. Inevitably, with the last article of Law 3072/2002 (article 15) the dissolution of the Foundation was declared. An indication for its dissolution was given two years earlier, when immigrant and refugee issues were dealt by Law 2790/2000 in a comprehensive way, without maintaining for the Foundation its up to then crucial role. A common ministerial decision, related to Law 3072/2002, was issued by the Ministers of Finance, External Affairs, and the Internal Affairs and Public Administration, defining the way that property, liabilities, engagements etc. of the Foundation would pass to the equivalent Region. Regions, in their turn, were responsible to transfer to refugees all parts of EIYAPOE property, related to their housing. Housing settlements passed to the administrative jurisdiction of local authorities, which became responsible for maintaining their public space, infrastructure networks etc.¹¹

¹¹ There is also reference in the ministerial decision, about sources of finance for the municipalities in order to deal with the obligations fallen on their shoulders because of the matters in abeyance in almost all these settlements. The reference was, though, vague and ambiguous, so local authorities were very uneager to accept these new responsibilities.

A quantitative account of the housing program of EIYAAPOE, covering the whole period of its operation, can be seen below (General Secretariat of Repatriating Expatriates 200a: 40, EIYAAPOE 2002: 61, Panoilias 2002).

Population of repatriating refugees accommodated in the areas of EIYAAPOE activities (Thrace, East Macedonia): 8140 families (27700 persons).

Population of repatriating refugees, participating in the housing program of the Foundation: 6225 families (20257 persons) (72% of the total population accommodated in these areas).

Building plots granted to refugees (until 31/12/2001): 1438.

Unfinished residences¹² granted to refugees (until 31/12/2001): 43 in Evmoiro, Xanthi, and 114 in Zigos, Kavala.¹³

Residences not distributed yet (until 31/12/2001): 5 in Xanthi and 7 in Komotini.

Approved loans: 2069.

Processed loans: 1597.

Quality of refugee residences¹⁴: 46% of good quality.

50% of average quality.

4% of bad quality.

Evaluation of EIYAAPOE housing program and impact on the refugees

In an effort to estimate the problems that seriously affected EIYAAPOE housing program and evaluate the attempted solutions, one should start from the first period of the operation of the Foundation 1991-1993. At the end of this period it was obvious that the selected sites for Reception Settlements and consequently, the proposed sites for housing settlements had a major disadvantage: being mostly in rural and often isolated areas, provided limited opportunities for employment, and especially to refugees that were living and working in urban centers in former Soviet Union. Hence, many refugee families were reluctant to establish themselves permanently in these areas and either went straight to Athens and Thessaloniki, or they tried to do it at a later stage, after being through the first stages of the housing program, jeopardizing thus, or violating the regulations of the Foundation. This seemed to be an inherent problem of the policy of the Foundation which tended to ignore the professional and cultural past of the refugees by treating all of them as unskilled workers, and did not try to

12: Supposed to finish by the refugees, either by paying for the expenses, or by putting personal work on it.

13: Definitive certificates of houses to refugees have not been given yet in Zigos, since the ballot procedure was twice invalidated because of refugee reactions.

14: Information according to a statistical research by EIYAAPOE, where 1818 residences were inspected.

look at individual and particular characteristics, and combine them with suitable alternatives for their housing rehabilitation. It also seemed that by exclusively implementing the EIYAAPOE housing program in Thrace, the Foundation and the Ministry of External Affairs formulated a policy serving a questionable “national need”¹⁵ and ignored the real needs and the well being of the refugees.

Scheduling of the various stages of the program was completely out of target, since the objective of transferring 7000 refugees per year from Hospitality Centers and Reception Settlements to the next stages of the program (rented accommodation and permanent residences) was proved impossible. Delays due to inability to find appropriate residential land forced refugee families to stay in Hospitality Centers for many months, instead of the initially planned 15-30 days, and in Reception Settlements for years, instead of the initially planned 6 months. These delays had very negative consequences for both, the living conditions of the refugees, and the finances of the program.¹⁶

Even after the acquisition of housing land, huge delays were also imposed to the housing program due to the bureaucratic procedures concerning approval of urban plans, contracting for works etc. (Kritikos 2002). Although this was used as an excuse, one could positively claim that the Foundation beared part of the responsibility for these delays, since, instead of assuming these tasks with its own personnel and resources, it was conveying crucial responsibilities to other public organizations (see also pages 9, 22), which simply would not do the job properly and on time. It is indicative that in the case of the permanent settlement of Zigos in the Prefecture of Kavala, EIYAAPOE had contracted DEPOS (National Corporation of Urban Planning and Housing) for managing and supervising the constructions of new houses. The standard architectural designs for three types of houses were given to DEPOS in order to make the necessary changes and adjust them to the physical terrain. DEPOS did not make the adjustments, the construction company went ahead with the unchanged plans, and there was mass production of houses with illegal basements which appeared due to the slope of the terrain. This, of course halted the whole project because none of the involved

15: In Thrace there is a Muslem minority which has traditionally been treated by successive Greek governments with suspicion, as a potential ally of the neighbouring Turkey in cases of tension between the two countries. Repatriating refugees settled in Thrace, according to this policy, could be used to counterbalance the Muslim influence there.

16: It is indicative that in many Reception Settlements refugees had to stay for years in prefabricated houses with no provision of heating. So, during the harsh winter of Thrace, they were trying to warm up these houses by keeping the electric stoves and the ovens on. This, of course, did not warm the places properly, and, at the same time, ejected the electricity costs –which were paid by the Foundation- sky high.

parts was eager to assume responsibility and pay the fines for the illegal constructions. (Voudiklaris 1999, Syropouloy 2004).

Another problem which became very serious at the end of the second period of the housing program (1994-1999), was the excessive expansion of the costs for rented accommodation, which was partly created because of the effort of the Foundation to invert the delays of the previous stages of the program. This did not only jeopardize the financial situation of the Foundation but also provoked severe tensions between the Foundation and the refugees (see also page 17).

Finally, this period was also characterized by the maneuvering of the Foundation between legislation for public and private sector, with often awkward outcomes.(see page 18).

The third –and last- period of the program (2000-2001) was characterized by the system of “aftostegasi” which was, in general, more effective than the previous systems and policies adopted. The negative point of the implementation of “aftostegasi” was, as mentioned earlier, (see page 21) the delays in studying, financing and constructing the technical infrastructure in permanent settlements, where refugees had already gone ahead in building their houses. “Aftostegasi” was preserved as a method –and it is still used- even after EIYAAPOE was dismantled.

As a general evaluation for the whole housing program, one can say that at the end of it, there was a very limited number of refugee families with permanent accommodation (see page 23), in comparison to the number of families who participated in the housing program. Furthermore, the high number of families that still live in rented accommodation –and given the present financial constraints- poses some serious questions about the possibility of ever coming close to the initial objective of the program, to guarantee permanent accommodation for most of the refugee families.

In general, the housing program, as it worked, was not the much needed policy for refugee rehabilitation with long term effects and social content. It was rather an emergency measure to cover immediate needs. There was even speculation that in the way it was set up, it was mostly to serve political tendentiousness such as to gain immediate political support from the repatriating refugees, to create an organization which could attract European funds, and to accommodate

political friends in it. The way that the Foundation was staffed is quite indicative. At 1992 there were approximately 400 employees, the great majority of whose was low ranking personnel (secretaries, drivers, guards etc.) while engineers, psychologists, social workers etc. were almost non existing (there were only 4 engineers in the Foundation at that time (Kritikos 2002)) and administrative costs were extremely high.

During its operation, EIYAAPOE was also accused for preferential treatment towards some construction companies (Voudiklaris 1999:6), for unjustified payments to hotel owners for renting rooms for refugees, for excessive estimates in the prices of purchased houses and flats and so on. Furthermore, there were cases that preferential treatments and peculiar transactions with private companies were made by the subcontractors to which EIYAAPOE had conveyed management of its projects. (Voudiklaris 1999). Finally, there was interruption of the grants and loans which the Foundation was getting from the Social Rehabilitation Fund of European Council, after 1996, since, whereas these money was supposed to be used only for constructing houses in new settlements, it was used for renting and buying ready accommodation.