

**"Greece and the World
at the Dawn of 2006"**
Report of a Listening Post
held on 11th January



Encouraging The Reflective Citizen

Part 1. THE SHARING OF PREOCCUPATIONS AND EXPERIENCES

In part 1 of the Listening Post members were invited to share their experiences and preoccupations in a variety of social roles that they occupy in their everyday life. This part was also of usefulness in 'breaking the ice' between the members of the whole group, as the event was an unknown experience for all members involved. A dynamic atmosphere soon developed and most members shared several of their everyday social thoughts and concerns.

Part 2. IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR THEMES

The aim of part 2 was to collectively identify the major themes of Part 1. The group was temporarily broken up in four, smaller sub-groups and subsequently these sub-groups later reported their identifiable topics to the original large group. Among the themes brought back by each of the smaller sub-groups, three predominant clusters emerged:

1. The first theme was concerned with the pollution of the natural environment.

This observation was associated with state provisions and state laws and in to what degree these two were enforced or adhered to. There was a general feeling that the laws are there but they are neither accepted by the citizens nor applied by the state, this led to a 'citizen vs. state' view and how the state is, legendary, ineffective in providing for the citizen. At the same time concerns were voiced on how citizens themselves are lacking basic environmental education as well as the drive and motive to self-mobilise and adopt a more productive relationship with their environment. As a member put it, 'Where is the citizen's responsibility?'

2. Another emerging theme was concerned with the role of the [Greek, Christian-Orthodox] church and religion in our lives.

Its social and spiritual place were discussed, in addition to its political role. Some members expressed concerns that the role of the Greek church, as it stands, feels dated and aggressively exclusive to 'non-believers'; while others voiced their recognition for the social support that the institution provides, spiritual guidance and national unity [against the ever-present Turkish, Muslim neighbours].

3. The last predominant theme was somewhat of a surprise. It emerged at the very end of Part I from a member's side-comment, 'What about racism?'

In the subsequent discussion on the emerging themes all members came back with racism in society as a predominant theme, for the very reason that it was not discussed or because it was so silently discussed. The collective disregard of such a predominant topic in our everyday lives made a stark impression on most group members. The concern on this topic could best be described with a phrase, from a member, 'Are we all alike?'

Part 3. ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS FORMATION

In this part of the Listening Post members were working with the data gathered from Parts I and II, with the aim to collectively identify the underlying dynamics - conscious and unconscious - that may be predominant at the time of the group meeting. As well as developing hypotheses as why they might be occurring at the moment. As such at this point the members are working with their 'psychological' or 'internal' world.

This part proved the most challenging and tiring for all group members. But all were committed in making their best effort, through an engaging discussion, to make sense of this [LP] unique experience. In this last part the group agreed on three main hypotheses that bear significant relation to each other:

Analysis and Hypothesis 1

Analysis:

There was a consensus in the group that economic immigrants, for the last 10-15 years, have been increasingly involved in our everyday lives. But the more their numbers grow, the less people seem to be identify with/recognise them. So, "are they *really* our co-citizens?" The feeling was that they are not experienced as such. But more likely like 'foreigners' or a foreign body in society that inevitably becomes a depository of fears, aggression and suspicions. As such they are felt as second-degree citizens, not worthy of competing for similar job opportunities as the local population ("us") and mostly experienced as not trusting and frightening.

Hypothesis:

Thus the changes in the last decade, as to the considerable influx of economic immigrants in Greek society, have made members of society fearful, uncertain and guilty as to how to deal with this new situation. The social group deals with these emotions by splitting/separating itself into sub-groups (like, 'us vs. them' or 'proper citizens vs. immigrant inhabitants') and subsequently evacuating and disowning (as seen in the collective "forgetfulness" of the racism topic in the LP group) these uncomfortable feelings in the 'foreign' sub-group.

Analysis and Hypothesis 2

Analysis:

While in Part II the topic of racism was reported on its own (maybe even further evidence of the previous hypothesis), the environmental theme came about with several other associations. So connected to the pollution of the natural environment, were issues of lack of "social education", unfavourable comparisons with other European countries, concerns on the decline of working opportunities and on the distant relationship between State and Citizen. Mostly leading to the question "Is there really a

'Greek phenomenon' and what may be its future, if any?" The latter phrase, 'Greek phenomenon', is a common social phantasy that connects to the uniqueness of the Greek situation and how this uniqueness justifies most unfavourable differences with other European nations. In this case, the group put that phrase under examination. In doing so it emerged that this phrase, 'Greek phenomenon', in addition to defensively displacing the shortcomings of the wider social situation also includes a valuable element of the local social experience which members of society feel closely identified with, i.e. the Greek quality of life or the 'way we do/enjoy things around here' or even (the social perception of modern) Greek culture itself. In that respect there was a collective recognition of an underlying social anxiety as to the pollution/spoiling/irreversible change of the (Greek) environment, in its natural, political, professional and cultural dimension.

Hypothesis:

The sudden, abrupt and, sometimes, abusive changes in the natural and social surroundings have induced upon members of society a collective realisation of an ever-present, but underlying, identification with the archetypal/traditional experience of the Greek quality of life. The emerging feelings of pride and affection towards this object (local quality of life) gradually motivate citizens in taking steps towards its protection [sometimes resulting in moves as seen in hypothesis 1] as well as its reparation.

Analysis and Hypothesis 3

Analysis:

Issues of social unity and change were also relevant in the discussion on the role of the church and religion in modern society. In discussing this issue the members of the group agreed on separating between the notion of religion and the active role of the church. The former more closely associated with its spiritual aspect and seen more as a matter of individual choice and practice. While the latter experienced more as a social institution with an increasing political side. Although the issue of the church was not consciously connected at all to modern conflicts (like the so-called "war on terrorism"), it was nevertheless deemed relevant as a continuation of older conflicts at a time when the modern Greek state was emerging out of long-standing Ottoman rule. During that time (almost two centuries ago) Church and state acted and behaved as one, as such the Church had a strong say in political, educational and social matters. This relationship has survived through the decades and, in many ways, still exists today on the unspoken premise that it "keeps the nation united". But recent changes and influences from the global exchange of information, values and lifestyles via the Internet, or through increasing numbers of citizens getting educated abroad and coming into contact with different cultures as well as through respective numbers of non-Greek citizens coming into (a previously highly homogenised) social group. Have produced an "opening" in society, resulting in the re-examination of the ways it defines itself as a coherent social group and as such of the relation between the State and the Church, the role of the latter in formal education (school) and the social adherence to the basic constitutional premise of 'freedom of religious beliefs and practices'. The group also realised that the issue of religion and the Church is very deep rooted in the Greek social unconscious, making it very hard to even start describing the feelings around it (favourable or otherwise), let alone agree on current and future attitudes towards it. As such a position where there was "space for discussion" and mutual exchange of views and beliefs was one that all sides felt comfortable with.

Hypothesis:

The recent "opening" of society to global trends, values and views inevitable causes ripples to long-standing social, unconscious, beliefs of identification and unity; such as the central role of Church in the modern State. This causes the members of society to lessen their idealisation and unquestionable adherence to the practices/role of the Church and - gradually but consensually - open a 'reflective space' for discussion and exchange of ideas.

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