

CHAPTER THREE Immigration to Cyprus

Nicos Trimikliniotis and Corina Demetriou

“Chapter in *European Immigration: A sourcebook* edited by Anna Triandafyllidou and Ruby Gropas, 2006, Ashgate, Aldershot.

Introduction

This chapter discusses the context that has transformed Cyprus from an emigration to an immigration country. It examines public discourse, the legal status, and the social position of migrants and asylum-seekers. This is exposed against the historical and political backdrop of Cyprus, dominated by the ‘national’ problem, which keeps the island divided.

Cyprus abandoned the restrictive immigration policy followed until 1990 in an effort to meet low-skill labour shortages generated by an economic development model based on mass tourism and services. Today, the total number of non-Cypriot residents is estimated to be over 80,000. This represents approximately 10 per cent of the total population which resides in the south of the island, as well as an estimated 10,000 - 30,000 undocumented migrant workers, consisting mainly of ‘overstayers’. Most immigrants are employed in domestic work, the service industry (tourism, trade), the manufacturing industry, agriculture and construction, in low-paid and low-status jobs.

The change of policy resulted from a shortage of labour for low-skilled labour intensive jobs (Matsis and Charalambous 1993). Moreover, the slowing down in economic growth in the 1990s, together with the rise of inflation, formed the basis for abandoning restrictive labour policies. In addition, Cyprus’ path toward accession to the EU and other developments in the international arena influenced the government’s opening up of the labour market (Trimikliniotis 1999). With the change of policy in 1990, the criteria for granting permits were extended and a procedure was outlined for employers to recruit staff from abroad.

The policy assumption was that the employment of migrant workers would be short-term, temporary, restricted to specific sectors and to specific employers. In the end, however, this policy proved to be ill-founded. The institutional framework has failed to properly accommodate and encourage the civic participation of migrants. As a result, these groups of people have not been provided with the space of developing a sense of belonging to Cypriot society. It is only until very recently that debates on the rights of migrant workers and multicultural society have emerged. Nonetheless, these are largely still focused on regularisation rather than on tolerance and integration. Migrants and asylum seekers face a rather hostile environment in society including a hostile media and an unsympathetic immigration regime based on ‘control.’ Having said this, some encouraging signs are beginning to emerge.

Major developments in Cyprus' immigration policy

To appreciate the context of migration to Cyprus one has to locate migration within the politically turbulent historical setting of the island, in which ethnic conflict has prevailed over other issues. Since independence in 1960, the political stage and public debates were dominated by the inter-ethnic relations, the violent clashes between the two constitutionally 'recognised communities',¹ namely Greek-Cypriots (82%) and Turkish-Cypriots (18%), and by the 1974 foreign military interventions which still today keep the island divided.² This chapter will concentrate on the territories controlled by the Republic of Cyprus, which are located in the southern part of the island.

Cyprus had historically been a country of emigration toward richer countries. As is usually the case in former British colonies, many Cypriots migrated to the UK, as well as to other destinations such as Australia, the United States, and South Africa. In fact, the number of Cypriots living abroad amounts to nearly half the island's population. The military invasions of Greece and Turkey in 1974 left the country divided and the society and economy devastated. There was an 18 % fall of the GNP between 1973 and 1975, a 30% rise in unemployment, mass poverty and a loss of 37% of the country's territory.

The 1974 events, by default, created the preconditions for rapid modernisation, in spite of the severe drop in the GDP and the sharp rise in unemployment and poverty. Cheap labour was initially provided by the Greek Cypriot displaced persons, who fled from the north and settled in the south. However the concerted effort by the Government, political parties and trade unions created the conditions for the economic development subsequently experienced and for the labour shortages which resulted.

To meet these shortages, the government began to issue individual visas to migrant workers for employment, which were short-term and restricted to specific sectors. Although the actual developments of the past decade reversed the dominant presumption that immigration would be temporary, a number of institutional devices which had been designed with that presumption in mind, have resulted in an institutional framework with the following characteristics. First, work permits are granted on the condition that each migrant worker is attached to a specific employer without the freedom to change jobs unless the original employer consents to such a change. Second, work permits are granted on an annual basis and with a maximum period of initially six and then four years. Structurally, this produces and reproduces a framework of precariousness and exclusion. Third, evidence of non-compliance by employers with labour laws is abundantly recorded by Parliament reports in 1997, as well as Reports by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (see ECRI 2001 and 2005; Trimikliniotis and Pantelides, 2003; Harakis et. al. 2005). It is worth noting, that few initiatives have taken place to unionise or otherwise organise migrant workers.

The change of immigration policy in 1990 which opened up the island's doors to migrants was the result of the following factors. On the one hand, economic developments such as the world-wide growth in tourism resulted in economic growth which increased the demand for labour in Cyprus. On the other hand, political developments such as the collapse of the Soviet Union resulted in the migration of labour

¹ Only the Greek-Cypriots and the Turkish-Cypriots are recognised by the Cyprus Constitution as 'communities', endowed with specific power-sharing rights; three other ethnic groups (*Armenians, Latins, Maronites*) are treated as 'religious groups' and have certain 'minority rights' (see Trimikliniotis 2006).

² First there was a military coup which was instigated by an army intervention by Greece with the assistance of local extremists which was followed by an invasion and occupation by Turkey.

from ex-Soviet countries. This was coupled by the migration of a large number of Pontiac Greeks from the Caucasus region who received Greek nationality and were, thus, able to migrate to Cyprus with minimum formalities. In addition, the Gulf war, successive crises in the Gulf region and unrest in Israel and Palestine contributed to the inflow of both economic as well as political refugees from the affected regions.

Prior to its accession to the EU, Cyprus was the only country to allow Russian nationals to enter without visas. This was an initiative taken in an effort to attract businesses, holiday makers and much sought-after capital. This policy has resulted in several thousands of Russians migrating to Cyprus and establishing offshore businesses, Russian schools and Russian churches. Following its EU accession, Cyprus was forced to adopt a more restrictive policy in granting entry rights to Russian nationals. However, many of those who came to Cyprus in the 1990s have settled on a temporary residence visa which is renewed annually.

The policies and practices governing migrant workers from the moment of entry, their working conditions and their legal and social rights, are set out in the agreement between the Cyprus government, the employers organisations (OEV and KEVE)³ and trade unions (PEO, SEK, DEOK and some sectional unions).⁴ This is known as the ‘tripartite system’. The criteria, originally compiled in 1991⁵ and reaffirmed in 2004, stipulate that migrant workers are granted the same employment terms and all other rights enjoyed by Cypriot workers, derived from existing collective agreements and social security schemes. A study carried out by the state Planning Bureau, however, refers to the need to “take into account the element of *temporality* as well as other factors” (Planning Bureau 1989: 3). This allows for a flexibility in the interpretation of the policy. Furthermore the same study recognises that there are “no efficient mechanisms to monitor this” (Planning Bureau 1989: 4). This problem is also recognised in the 1997 Reports of the Parliamentary Commissions on Employment and Social Insurance and on Human Rights.

By and large, as a result of EU accession, and a more active role by NGOs and some trade unions, there has been an on-going debate about the employment of migrant workers in Cyprus, with focus on their labour rights. At the same time, there have also been strong anti-immigrant sentiments expressed in various debates and media discourses (see ECRI 2001, 2005).

In a paper submitted to the tripartite committee on labour issues in August 2005, the Ministry of Labour outlined the basis for a general strategy whose primary goal is to ‘curb’ the ‘uncontrollable influx of foreign workers’ (i.e. third country nationals employed in Cyprus). This strategy is proposed so that a number of ‘principles and aims’ are met:

1. To ‘ensure the security and protection of the state and its citizens and the promotion of the common/ public interest’.
2. To safeguard human rights

³ OEV is acronym for Organisation of Employers and Manufacturers and KEVE is acronym for Chamber of Commerce and Manufacture.

⁴ PEO is the Left wing union and stands for Pan-Cyprian Federation of Labour. Together with the Right-wing SEK (Confederation of Cypriot Labour) they are the largest trade union. DEOK is a small Democratic Labour Federation of Cyprus.

⁵ Circular of the Dept. of Labour of the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance ref. T.E.48/83 dated 02.12. 1991.

3. To cover extraordinary and /or specialised (authentic) needs of the labour market, providing that the preference regime for Cypriot and Community persons is maintained.
4. To cover the strategic developmental goals of the Strategic Development Plan.
5. To ensure the standard policy for the full utilisation of the local human resources, particularly the utilisation of the inactive female population, the prevention and combating of youth unemployment, the encouragement of the extension of working life and the integration of vulnerable groups in the labour market.

Essentially, the paper proposes a quota system for each sector and for the country as a whole. For instance, it sets a compulsory quota of 30% for all businesses. The main features of the Government paper include a quota on the employment of ‘foreigners’ both at the national level and at sector basis. It allows ‘foreign workers’ the right to change employer after the first year but within the same job and sector. Moreover, there is a six week maximum period for such a request to be considered. There is a priority-based system in which the first priority in employment, after Cypriots and EU nationals, is given to nationals from acceding countries, followed by third country nationals who can be employed in specified economic sectors and under strict criteria. Furthermore, applications must be made from outside Cyprus. Work permits are granted, as a matter of third priority, to asylum seekers and foreign university students who have been studying in Cyprus for three year courses and may work only upon completion of their first year of study. Media reports refer to the policy as a ‘break’ with the employment of foreign migrant labour. Moreover, the system is prone to fail for the simple reason that quotas do not work; rigidity and bureaucracy are likely to grow even further.

Another development is the introduction of the 2004-2006 Cyprus National Action Plan for Social Inclusion. This Action Plan views ‘immigrants’ as ‘groups at risk’, and recognises that it is a group whose members are “at risk of exclusion.” This follows the 2nd ECRI Report which referred to migrants as “a vulnerable group”.

EU accession has also created ‘Europeanised’ arguments regarding migration. Accession to the EU has allegedly made Cyprus an attractive destination for migrants and asylum-seekers and the response of policy-makers has been to keenly transform themselves to ‘border-guards of Europe’.⁶ Cyprus is a prime instance of a southern European country which functions as the ‘entrance hall’ to the EU and often serves as a ‘waiting room’ for many migrants who have Northern European countries as their final destination (Anthias and Lazaridis 1999: 3).

The Cyprus government failed to transpose Directive 2003/109/EC⁷ prior to the deadline of 23 January 2006. Moreover, the surge of deportations of immigrants who had been in the country for several years prior to the set deadline, received criticisms from the media, the Ombudsman (the national Equality Body under law transposing Directive 2000/43/EC) and from NGOs. A number of Supreme Court decisions⁸ were issued during 2005 and in early 2006 cancelling some of the many deportation orders issued by the

⁶ During the EU Thessalonica summit, the President of Cyprus offered to share ‘expertise’ in dealing with migrants and asylum-seekers with the European Union.

⁷ The Directive requires Member-States to introduce laws granting migrants who have been lawfully in the country for 5 years and over the right to ‘long term residence status’.

⁸ Mahmoud Adil v. The Republic of Cyprus (13.01.2006); Maher Ahmet Baskouj v. The Republic of Cyprus (17.1.2006); Nebojsa Micovic v. The Republic of Cyprus (Case No. 1012/2005, dated 18.11.2005).

Migration Office. In his reasoning for one of these decisions, the judge stated that although non-transposed directives cannot be applied directly, the implementation of the aims and effects of such directives is encouraged, and that national laws must be interpreted in a manner consistent with the directives even if not yet transposed.⁹

Meanwhile, a bill was prepared and circulated for consultation, amending the antiquated law on Aliens and Migration before Parliament. The bill purports, *inter alia*, to grant an extension of one year to visas of migrants who have completed five years in Cyprus until Directive 2003/106/EC on long-term migrants is transposed. As a side-note, it is worth noting that it is certain that when the said directive is finally transposed, the criteria for granting the status of long term migrants will include proficiency in the Greek language.¹⁰

Matters relating to the control of the borders fall within the ambit of the powers of the executive who are under a duty to apply the rights derived from domestic and international law. They are subject, of course, to judicial supervision. The general rubric of judicial control of the executive on matters relating to immigration and nationality falls under the category of proper exercise of discretion. This is under the principle of *legitimacy*, justification of administrative acts, the principles of equality, and natural justice. The interpretation of the law by the Courts and its implementation by immigration officers has shown a tendency to considerably enlarge the scope of state discretion which often leads to discriminatory behaviour. Indeed, immigration officers in Cyprus have already been criticised by the Second ECRI Report for discriminatory behaviour.¹¹

The process of ‘Europeanisation’ has enabled a gradual change in attitude and has resulted in the harmonisation in Cypriot laws.¹² However, the immigration model itself, which is primarily based on the employment of migrant workers on a short-term, temporary and restricted-to-specific-sectors basis, is likely to remain essentially in place. This is mostly due to the fact that the changes brought about by the transposition of the *aquis* involve only the opening up of the doors to European citizens; the restrictive approach towards third country nationals remains (Trimikliniotis and Demetriou 2005). Discrimination occurs in the labour market, education, housing and other services, as well as in the way migrants are depicted by the media. We could safely assume that the structural and institutional aspects of the status of most immigrants are likely to remain those of ‘third country nationals’ (Trimikliniotis and Pantelides 2003).

The immigrant population of Cyprus: Demographic and Social Features

Within sixteen years there has been a large increase in the total number of legally employed and undocumented migrant workers. As the tables below indicate, there is a discrepancy in the figures for migrant workers provided by various Government Departments and the Statistical Service. The Cypriot authorities have supplied an annex to the Third ECRI Report on Cyprus in which they refer to the rise in the number of non-Cypriots from 20,000 in 2000 to 75,000 in 2005. This number “includes an estimated 15

⁹ *Nebojsa Micovic v. The Republic of Cyprus*.

¹⁰ Interior Ministry official Giorgos Giorgallis was quoted in *The Cyprus Mail*, 24 July 2005.

¹¹ The 2nd ECRI report reads: “Concern is also expressed at reports of discriminatory checks on the part of immigration officers of non-whites coming to Cyprus.”

¹² Directives 43/2000 and 78/2000 were transposed via new legislation came into force on 1st May 2004, upon accession into the EU.

per cent of illegal immigrants and another 7-8 per cent of average asylum seekers”, as well as Europeans and non-Europeans of various categories. It does not, however, include “a considerable number of visitors”, such as retired persons, students and those on permanent residence permits. According to the Asylum Service of the Ministry of Interior there are a total of 22,963 asylum seekers.¹³

[INSERT Table 4.1: Economic Indicators and Migration

Table 4.1 provides a breakdown of the total number of migrants into different categories. Each one of the categories listed is independent of the other, in the sense that there is no overlap. It is noteworthy that the category of migrant workers with work permits does not include Greek nationals, offshore company personnel, or Pontiac Greeks who, once granted Greek nationality, are entitled to enter and work in Cyprus with few formalities. It is, thus, not entirely clear who is actually included in the category ‘EU nationals’ which appears below.

[INSERT Table 4.2: Categories of Migrant Workers in Cyprus]

[INSERT Table 4.3: The Archive of Population and Migration Figures]

[INSERT Table 4.4 Distribution of Migrant Workers in Sectors of the Economy]

Table 4.4 was given to the social partners by the Department of Labour in July 2005. There is some variance with the figures provided by the Statistical Service. Moreover they do not include (a) EU nationals, (b) the Greek-Pontiacs, (c) students, (d) Asylum-seekers and refugees and (e) any estimate of the undocumented workers.

There are two categories of Greek passport holders: migrant workers from mainland Greece and Pontiac Greeks who have immigrated to Cyprus from the Black Sea via Greece. Through a bilateral agreement with the Greek government, Greek citizens (including Greek passport holders of Pontiac origin) enjoy permanent residence rights as well as the right to work in Cyprus. In the offshore business sector, the majority of non-Cypriot employees originate from Central and Eastern Europe, mainly, Russia, and the former Yugoslav Republics.

Most domestic workers originate from South East Asia and especially the Philippines, Sri Lanka and India. The main sector categories in which migrant workers are employed, are: agriculture, manufacturing, construction, hotels, restaurants and trade. In the latter three sectors, the majority of migrant workers originate from Central and Eastern Europe and particularly the Balkans. In the former three sectors, which are low skill, low-status and hard working environments, a significant number of Asian workers are employed.

According to the Cyprus Statistical Service Demographic Report, in 2003 there were 10,353 ‘short-term immigrants’¹⁴ and 16,779 ‘long-term immigrants’¹⁵. Generally speaking, long term immigrants work and reside under a more favourable regime. Their salaries tend to be higher and many have their families with them. Depending on the

¹³ Information provided by the Ministry of Interior on 10 January 2006.

¹⁴ The definition provided by the Statistical Service for this term is “persons entering Cyprus with the intention of remaining less than one year”.

¹⁵ Long-term migrants are defined by the Statistical Service as “persons entering Cyprus with the intention to settle, or to stay for one year or more”.

length of their stay, long term migrants have a better chance of getting acquainted with rules and procedures and of joining trade unions.

In the early to mid-1980s many affluent Lebanese, Kuwaitis, Palestinians and people from other Arab countries arrived in Cyprus following the collapse of Beirut and the general unrest in the Middle East. These were not migrant workers, but business and other affluent people. More people from the Gulf area arrived in Cyprus during the Gulf war, most of whom left Cyprus and returned to their countries of origin as soon as stability in these countries was restored.

In the early 1990s, many eastern Europeans, both business people as well as temporary workers, started migrating to Cyprus following the collapse of the Soviet Union. These were mostly from Russia, former Yugoslavia (primarily Serbs), Bulgaria, and Romania. Serbs and Russians were, to a large extent, welcomed by the Greek-Cypriots because of their common religion (Christian Orthodox). The 1999 war in Yugoslavia brought an additional number of Yugoslavians (Serbs) to Cyprus. A small number of the Eastern Europeans in Cyprus are affluent businessmen or highly educated persons occupying managerial positions in the offshore industry, residing under a temporary residence permit. This type of permit is easily renewable so long as they operate or hold a position in a business enterprise in Cyprus.

Naturalisation

By 31 December 2003, 2,295 persons had acquired citizenship in Cyprus by naturalisation and 9,018 by marriage. In general, the Cyprus government is cautious over granting citizenship to non-Cypriots allegedly because this is an issue that touches upon demographics. Demographics is one of the several dimensions of the Cyprus problem and is at the centre of heated debates (Trimikliniotis 2006).

Law 141(I) 2002 stipulates that a non-Cypriot who resides lawfully in the country may acquire citizenship via naturalisation under certain conditions. The Interior Minister may grant citizenship to an adult and 'fully able' 'alien' applicant, if the Minister is satisfied that the applicant meets a number of criteria. Such criteria include lawful stay in the country for the preceding 12 months preceded by an additional uninterrupted stay of 7 years, 'good character' and 'intention to reside in the Republic. However, satisfying the Interior Minister is not sufficient. The law vests the Council of Ministers, the highest body in the executive hierarchy, with the discretion of granting, or not, citizenship. In practice, this discretion tends to be exercised by declining citizenship applications.

Immigrant Rights and their Participation in Public Life

The current institutional framework hardly provides the space for the civic participation of immigrants. It is, therefore, hard to differentiate between restrictive and encouraging legal conditions. There are obviously 'restrictive conditions' that prohibit political participation in elections (restrictions in voting, in standing for office), unless full citizenship is granted, but there are no formal prohibitions of membership in parties and organisations, rights for self-organisation, public rallies, etc, although there have been cases where the contract of employment of migrants in certain sectors prohibited involvement in political activity. Overall, the situation in Cyprus can be described as rather disappointing on the issue of the civic participation of migrants, however, there are some encouraging signs. The rights guaranteed under the Constitution and the ECHR are

generally respected, with some exceptions. Nevertheless, migrants face a tough regime because, on the whole, issues relating to their stay are considered as falling outside of these. The recently enacted anti-discrimination legislation transposing Directives 43/2000 and 78/2000 has had some impact on the situation of migrants in Cyprus. Nevertheless, the areas impacted by these new laws are mostly employment-related and only indirectly affect migrants' level of civic participation.

The main focus of the migrant support and solidarity NGOs in Cyprus is to protect the basic rights of migrants in terms of regularisation and labour disputes. Lack of funding and understaffing, however, restricts the activities of many NGOs. It is worth noting that the promotion of encouraging conditions for civic participation such as foreigners/ immigrant committees, quotas and subsidies to ethnic organisations have not been on top of their agendas. Over the last years, some migrant support initiatives have developed. However, the sector remains small and the media does not always give it the space and attention it requires.

A number of public awareness campaigns and discussions have taken place, aimed at disseminating information about the harmonisation process and the changes brought to the field of non-discrimination. These, however, have not gone beyond the anti-racism discourse and into the sphere of promoting civic participation (see Trimikliniotis and Demetriou 2005).

The Institutional Framework

The right to freedom of association and membership in trade unions is guaranteed by the Constitution and the laws on trade unions. Although the insistence of trade unions that upon entry to Cyprus, migrant workers ought to enjoy the same rights as Cypriot workers is reflected in the 'Criteria', in practice there are violations of the rights of migrant workers, particularly in sectors that are not unionised. Complaints of non-compliance by employers are regularly filed with the Ombudsman's office (see ECRI Reports 2001 and 2005; Trimikliniotis, 1999; Trimikliniotis and Pantelides 2003).

While in certain unions the percentage of migrant workers is very high¹⁶, there are no third country nationals elected in the leadership of any trade union. This presumably reflects the discouragement felt due to the short-term nature of their stay in Cyprus.

A highly controversial clause has found its way in the specimen agreement which some migrant workers applying for a work permit in Cyprus are requested to sign. This clause expressly prohibits the political participation of migrant workers and is often used by employers in order to prevent migrant employees from becoming members of a trade union, thus arbitrarily classifying trade unionism as a 'political activity'. The Cypriot Constitution grants the right of political participation and the right to be a member of a trade union to all, citizens and non-citizens alike, rendering the said contractual provision unconstitutional. However, this is hardly ever brought to the attention of the migrant applying for a work permit and if and when a migrant discovers the unconstitutional dimension of this provision, the cost of pursuing such case through the Courts is probably higher than the benefit it will render. The Ombudsman issued a recommendation,

¹⁶More than half of the members of SEGDA MELIN-PEO (agricultural and port workers) are migrants; more than one third of the construction workers of PEO are also migrants; about one third of SYKSKA-PEO (tourism trade union); one in six of SEMMIK-PEO (metal and wood workers union); one in six in SEVETTYK (clothing, commerce and trade workers and nurses).

pursuant to a complaint, criticising the aforementioned contractual condition. This recommendation, however, has yet to be complied with by the authorities.

Another important dimension of Cyprus' accession to the EU is the anti-discrimination laws purporting to transpose Directives 2000/43/EC and 2000/78/EC.¹⁷ However, in order for the new rights and procedures to have any impact on the situation of migrants, a certain degree of awareness, literacy and knowledge of Greek are necessary, which are lacking at the moment. In the case of a recourse to the Courts, money and time are also needed. Besides, as foreseen in the Directives, these laws have no application in issues relating to entry visas and work permits of third country nationals in Cyprus, where discriminatory treatment continues to be widely practiced.

Public and Media Discourses

There is a regular pattern, largely media generated, highlighting the 'negative' social consequences from the presence of migrants in Cyprus, the dangers from 'excessive numbers, the 'floods', 'chords' or 'waves' of migrants who are allegedly just waiting for the opportunity to 'move in' and exploit the opportunities that are available to them (work, social welfare, education etc). Studies show that such patterns have repeatedly emerged since 1990 (Trimikliniotis 1999, 2001; 2005b; Harakis, et al., 2005). In recent years, the ghettoization and general poor accommodation of migrants has attracted a lot of public comments. Some have been critical to the authorities and others have had racist connotations. For instance, whilst in 2004 the Mayor of Limassol highlighted the problem of the impoverished ghettos of migrants and called on the state to recognize the contribution of migrants to Cypriot society and economy, in 2005 the Mayor of Nicosia told the press that the accommodation conditions of migrants 'downgrade' the city. This statement attracted criticisms from the national Equality Body and the Commission on Journalistic Ethics who issued reports on the matter.

1. The connection with unemployment: 'welfare-chauvinism' and the 'job-stealing frame'

Discourse connected with this frame appeared after 1990 with the change of migration policy. At the time, a xenophobic attitude was adopted mainly by trade unions and individual politicians (see Trimikliniotis, 2005b) connecting the inflow of migrant workers to the 'rise' in unemployment among Cypriots.

2. 'Social problems'

"Social problems resulting from the presence of foreign workers" such as marriages of convenience in order to secure the right to stay in Cyprus, the "suffering of underage children as a result" as well as "affairs mainly between Cypriot men and female workers" many of which lead to "the break up of marriages."¹⁸

3. Metaphorical connections

Connection is made in some press articles between migrants and disease, crisis, and dirt. Headlines have appeared with phrases such as "Foreign workers are a real cancer" or quoting the then Interior Minister's remarks "Foreign workers are an

¹⁷ The Equal Treatment (Racial or Ethnic Origin) Law 2004 No. 59(I)/2004 (31.1.2003); The Combating of Racial and Some Other Forms of Discrimination (Commissioner) Law No. 42(1)/ 2004 (19.03.2004) (See Trimikliniotis 2005a).

¹⁸ In reply to questions by journalists, the government's Social Welfare Department 'expressed concern' about such cases (*Ergatiko Vima* 08.09.1993).

unsalvageable cancer” or referring to undocumented workers as “a gangrene”, a “plague” or a “headache”.

4. The connection with the country's size

‘Cyprus is too small to absorb the current number of foreign workers’ is a phrase often heard in public discourse. The social paradigm on which this statement rests is derived from the ‘host-immigrant’ model theory according to which migrant workers are considered a ‘threat’ to the fabric of society.

5. The connection with the Cyprus problem

The argument often invoked to justify the restrictive immigration policies is that Cyprus is semi-occupied by the Turkish army, its ‘national survival’ is under threat and the settlement of foreigners must be restricted so that its demographic character is not altered.

This is intended to be juxtaposed to Turkey’s policy of encouraging the settlement of Turkish nationals in the occupied north of Cyprus, the number of which by now far exceeds that of the local population, thereby rendering the resolution of the 40-year old conflict even more complicated than what it was at first.

6. National Culture and Heritage versus ‘Alien Cultures and Religions’

The concern with migrants as ‘carriers of different attitudes, principles and values’ who have the potential to ‘influence social institutions’ is a widespread notion. This is marked by a failure to contextualise the issue within the current social reality of globalisation and multi-culturalism.

7. Connection with criminality: The conflict-criminality frame

The ‘connection’ between immigration and criminality is one of the media’s favourite themes, also used by populist, right-wing or ethno-nationalist politicians, as well as by the police. This practice has been repeatedly criticised by the national Equality Body. The Media often record such statements made by politicians or the police without criticising their underlying message and usually accompany the text with photos of dark-skinned persons in handcuffs, thereby reinforcing the connection.

8. ‘Illegal’ immigrants and asylum seekers

Undocumented workers are frequently the subject of media reports which, although in some cases sympathetic, generally tend to portray them as a menace. This is in line with the view often expressed by the trade unions and the authorities. A conclusion that may safely be deduced is that the media tend to be sympathetic when covering heart-breaking stories of individual migrants and less sympathetic or even at times xenophobic when they refer to migrants as a group or a section.

9. Ill-treatment

A small number of media reports started appearing, mostly following Cyprus’ accession to the EU, in which the ill-treatment of migrants by their employers and by the police was highlighted. These reports are often merely recording statements to that effect made by the National Equality Body, NGOs, and international bodies such as ECRI and UNHCR.

It may generally be deduced that left-wing and liberal journalists and politicians take a more sympathetic look on migrants and migration, although it is impossible to generalise. The discourse of the right-wing trade union SEK has generally been more xenophobic than that of the left-wing trade union PEO whose reservations were more focused on negative employment and welfare impact. Nonetheless, prior to 1995 PEO

also used phrases like ‘the danger of alien cultures’ and blamed immigration for the rise in unemployment among locals. Over the years and particularly following Cyprus’ accession to the EU, discourses have become a little milder and less xenophobic, as social partners began to accept that immigration is an inevitable and, in some respects, necessary reality. Left wing trade union PEO, the employers’ union OEV and in some contexts right wing trade union SEK and now acknowledge that there is no connection between immigration and unemployment amongst Cypriots. The view publicly expressed by the Ministry of Labour and the other social partners continues to connect immigration with unemployment, often invoking studies which are not made publicly available. However, references to ‘alien cultures’ have been toned down.

Concluding Remarks

Since 1989, Cyprus, a country divided by ethnic conflict, has moved from being a country of emigration, to one of immigration. It remains a largely racist and xenophobic society and at a structural, institutional, and political level, vital changes are required to address this problem. Third country migrants are routinely dehumanised and are reduced to mere economic instruments performing menial tasks that Cypriots will not perform. Also, migrants from acceding countries as well as EU countries are now very much part of the labour force in society at large. The educational system has not been able to properly integrate and meet the needs of an increasingly multicultural society as it is by design an ethnocentric system (Trimikliniotis 2004).

To discuss the integration and civic participation of migrants requires a serious change in the whole way in which migrants are perceived and are structurally located in Cypriot society. In particular, it requires a radical reform of the current system: the immigration model for migrants ought to shift from the short-term temporary model to a policy of granting long-term status to migrants who have a vested interest in adapting and producing in Cypriot society. At policy level, the whole approach to immigration policy must break away from the ideology of ‘control’ and, in particular, border control and move towards a more proactive and positive approach towards immigrants and immigration. The basis of the model of reception of migrant workers ought to be based on a multi-cultural model that promotes dialogue, equality, belonging, and respect for difference.

Of course, Cypriot society is undergoing a transformation due to economic, social and political reasons. Following EU accession, it is rapidly becoming increasingly ‘Europeanised’. In addition, the opening up in 2003 of the sealed checkpoints dividing north and south has brought Cypriot society in contact with the other ethnic community which lived so close and yet so far apart for over forty years. Racism and exclusion in Cyprus requires comprehensive measures for institutional reform, as well as a re-working of the political and ideological discourses that define the ‘nation’, citizenship and ‘belonging’. Moreover, accession to the EU should be seen as a challenge to improve, modernise and question practices, policies, institutions, and practices which are in need of reform. Rather than viewing the harmonisation with the EU merely as a technocratic process, it should be approached as a challenge in order to be able to move forward, particularly when it comes to matters that affect the lives of vulnerable groups in society. In this sense, harmonisation must be seen in the broader context of tackling intolerance,

bringing about social equality, participation, solidarity and understanding to enhance the best resources of Cypriot society and its people, including its migrants.

References

- Anthias, F. and Lazarides, G. (1999) 'Introduction', Anthias, F. and Lazarides, G. (ed.) *Into the Margins: Exclusion and Migration in Southern Europe* (Altershot: Avebury).
- ECRI (2001) *Second Report on Cyprus. European Commission against Racism and Intolerance*, Council of Europe, Strasbourg, 03.06.2001.
- ECRI (2005) *Third ECRI Report on Cyprus*, adopted on 16.12.2005, Strasbourg 16.05.2006, Council of Europe.
- Harakis, K et al (2005) *Αντικοινωνική Συμπεριφορά των Νέων στην Κύπρο: Ρατσιστικές Τάσεις [Anti-social Behaviour of Youth in Cyprus and Racist Trends]*, (Athens: Sakoulas).
- Matsis, S. and Charalambous, A. (1993) 'The Demand and Supply Dimensions of the Labour Market: The Issue of Foreign Labour', Demetriades, E. I., Khoury, N. F., Matsis, S. (ed.) *Labour Utilization and Income Distribution in Cyprus*, Department of Statistics and Research, (Nicosia: Ministry of Finance Cyprus), pp 23-54.
- Planning Bureau (1989) *Study on Labour Shortage. A Note on Importing Labour from Abroad*, September 1989, Nicosia.
- Trimikliniotis, N. (2006) 'Nationality and Citizenship in Cyprus since 1945: Communal Citizenship, Gendered Nationality and the Adventures of A Post-Colonial Subject in a Divided Country', Bauböck, R, Perching, B. and Sievers, W. (eds.) *Citizenship Policies in the New Europe*, IMISCOE series, (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press).
- Trimikliniotis, N. (2005a) *Report on Measures to Combat Discrimination in the EU Countries: Report on Cyprus, 2005, for EU Commission report on behalf of Human European Consultancy and the Migration Policy Group*, at http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/fundamental_rights/policy/aneval/legnet_en.htm#coun
- Trimikliniotis, N. (2005b) 'Socio-political Developments and Impacts - Cyprus Report' Workpackage 5, in: *The European Dilemma: Institutional Patterns and the Politics of 'Racial' Discrimination*, Research Project Xenophob, EU Fifth Framework Program 2002-2005.
- Trimikliniotis, N. (2004) 'Mapping Discriminatory Landscapes: Ethnic Discrimination in a divided Education System', *The Cyprus Review*, 16:1, Spring 2004, pp. 53-86.
- Trimikliniotis, N. (2001) 'Europeanisation and Modernisation: Locating Cyprus in the Southern European Context', *The Cyprus Review*, 13:2, Fall 2001, pp. 47-74.

- Trimikliniotis, N. (1999) 'Racism and New Migration to Cyprus: The Racialisation of Migrant Workers', in: Anthias, F. and Lazarides, G. (ed.) *Into the Margins: Exclusion and Migration in Southern Europe* (Altershot: Avebury).
- Trimikliniotis, N. and Demetriou, C. (2005) 'Active Civic Participation of Immigrants, Cyprus', *POLITIS: An Inquiry into the Civic Participation of Naturalised Citizens and Foreign Residents in 25 Countries* <<http://www.uni-oldenburg.de/politis-europe/download/Cyprus.pdf>>
- Trimikliniotis, N. and Pantelides, P. (2003) 'Mapping Discriminatory Landscapes in the labour market', *The Cyprus Review*, 15:1, Spring 2003.