

OPINION

The Other Greek Crisis

BY CATHRYN DRAKE

Athens

As Greece's economic crisis escalates into a war on immigrants, a group of volunteers on a quiet pedestrian street off Exarchia Square—the marijuana-perfumed stronghold of the Greek anarchist movement—is leading the counter-attack.

The Steki Metanaston is a haven of calm and camaraderie in this gritty, troubled city. Inhabiting three decaying wooden houses, two of them squats, the immigrant social center is run by volunteers. The Steki was opened in 1997 under the auspices of Diktio, the Network for Social Support to Immigrants and Refugees. Its main aim is to fight institutionalized racism by providing legal assistance and educating migrants to advocate for themselves.

Run by Nasim Lomani, a soft-spoken young Afghan, the Steki is open in the evenings for free language and computer classes; film, dance and music nights; and chess and cooking clubs. "Business as usual" was Mr. Lomani's response when I asked him how the current environment is affecting the Steki. "But we do have more requests for classes in German, French and English."

I recently attended a Greek-language class, which provided a window on a vibrant immigrant population: people of all ages, from Algeria, Bangladesh, Iran, Nigeria, the Congo, Tanzania, the Comoros Islands, Romania and Germany—hardly the downtrodden group you might imagine from news reports. We were given official-looking slips of paper informing police officers, should they detain us on the street,



Foreigners are increasingly afraid to walk the streets of Athens alone.

that we are affiliated with the center. It's hard to say whether these would sway them in our favor.

The past few months have been rough for foreigners in Greece, many of whom are afraid to walk on the streets alone. Brutal gang attacks are a daily occurrence, and police seem to be providing little or no protection.

At a recent teachers' meeting at the Steki, the conversation turned to concerns about how the political environment and rising criminality are affecting the center's clientele. How could they assuage immigrants' fears about visiting the Steki, and keep them informed and politically active? A big anti-racist rally organized by the Pakistani community was cited as an example of successful mobilization. Last Saturday the Steki and a coalition of political groups, including the far-left opposition party Syriza, led several thousand protesters through the city on a peaceful antifascist march.

For the Greek Council for Refugees, a few blocks down from the

Steki, "business as usual" means helping immigrants without homes or legal status. But also, it increasingly means assisting those beaten by thugs to get treatment at hospitals despite their lack of papers. Such victims are afraid to report attacks to the police, says Panos Christodoulou, the Council's director. Even legal residents are discouraged from filing hate-crime reports for fear of discrimination at local precincts.

The nonprofit group's lobbying efforts have been less effective since the center-right New Democracy government took over in June. The processing of applications has slowed to a standstill due to a lack of manpower. "It's complicated now," Mr. Christodoulou says.

A young Syrian friend who entered Greece nearly six years ago is still waiting for the permanent visa he should have gotten by now. "The time frame for refugee applications is three months from the day filed," says Christos Manouras, spokesman for the Hellenic Police. "If we don't

manage to cope with them in that period, we provide them with a temporary pink slip that is renewed every six months."

Last month my friend asked an immigration officer when he could expect his visa. His reply: "I have no idea."

My friend can't go back and live in war-torn Syria. He speaks fluent Greek and has a full-time job, but he doesn't like his options. "What else do you want? You have everything need!" Mr. Christodoulou says. "I want to be able to go and visit my family and return," my friend says. "Just forget about it," Mr. Christodoulou replies.

Meanwhile a compatriot of the young Syrian is profiting from the situation. He is selling fake Schengen visas at €100 each and arranging travel and other false documents for immigrants seeking to flee Greece. (Getting to Canada cost one man €13,000 recently.)

Pending asylum applications in Greece now number more than 45,000, according to Angelos Syrigos, the secretary-general for population and social cohesion at the Greek Interior Ministry. "Part of the problem," Mr. Syrigos says, "is that one-third of these cases are so old that most of the people have already left the country." Based on arrest numbers over the last few years, he reckons there are about one million illegal migrants in Greece.

A new asylum service, set to start clearing up the application backlog sometime next spring, seems like too little, too late. The principal aim of the New Democracy government has been to reduce the numbers of illegal migrants through police initiatives such as Operation

Xenios Zeus, an arrest-and-deportation sweep. In turn, the European Union has aided a crackdown at the Turkish frontier by providing funds and border personnel.

"We have brought illegal entries down to almost zero," says Mr. Manouras of the Hellenic Police. But this strategy is having clear, costly side effects. Last week saw riots at overcrowded detention centers. On Friday more than 500 migrants held at a police academy in northeastern Greece set fire to their beds.

The big question is why the European Union is not helping Greece by absorbing more of the country's immigrant influx, particularly in light of studies indicating that most European countries will need millions of foreign workers in the near future. It also does not make sense in terms of the 2008 European Pact on Immigration and Asylum, whose dictum is to "implement policies for labor migration that take account of the needs of the labor market of each country."

But these days, the 2003 Dublin Regulation—which requires that immigrants be processed in the country of arrival and sent back there if caught elsewhere—seems to be the guideline of preference in Europe. This, despite a recent decision by the European Court of Human Rights that returning refugees to Greece constituted a civil-rights violation.

With Greece now taking in more than 90% of Europe's illegal immigrants, this arrangement is simply stoking the fires of discontent and scapegoatism. The clock is ticking for Europe to start acting like a real union.

Ms. Drake is a freelance writer based in Athens.

Morsi as Master

[Global View]

BY BRET STEPHENS



You have to admire Mohammed Morsi's sense of timing. Or, rather, his confident indifference to it.

Early last week, the Egyptian president and Muslim Brother brokered a cease-fire between Israel and Hamas with the assistance of the Obama administration. On Wednesday, a story in the New York Times gave the blow-by-blow account of the negotiations from Mr. Obama's angle.

"Mr. Obama told aides he was impressed with the Egyptian leader's pragmatic confidence," the Times reported. "He sensed an engineer's precision with surprisingly little ideology. Most important, Mr. Obama told aides that he considered Mr. Morsi a straight shooter who delivered on what he promised and did not promise what he could not deliver."

Going on in this gushing vein, the Times concluded: "As for Mr. Obama, his aides said they were willing to live with some of Mr. Morsi's more populist talk as long as he proves constructive on substance. 'The way we've been able to work with Morsi,' said one official,

'indicates we could be a partner on a broader set of issues going forward.'"

A day after this era of good feelings had begun, Mr. Morsi awarded himself dictatorial powers. The worst that White House spokesman Jay Carney would say is that the administration is "concerned."

Mr. Morsi's decision ostensibly comes in response to his dissatisfaction with Egyptian judges, many of them holdovers from Hosni Mubarak's regime, who have handed down too many acquittals or soft sentences in trials of ex-regime figures. Worse, those same judges may dissolve the Islamist-dominated assembly that is drafting a new constitution, much as they dissolved the Islamist-dominated parliament in June, shortly before Mr. Morsi's election.

Mr. Morsi's solution was to issue a decree giving him the right to supersede any judicial rulings of which he disapproves. He promises to revoke the decree once a new constitution is approved and Egypt's political transition is complete. Egyptians are supposed to take it on trust, as is the rest of the world. It's a bad bet.

From the start of Egypt's revolution in January 2011, observers have consistently underestimated the strength and ambition of the Muslim Brotherhood.

First, the story was that the

Brotherhood had been late to the party in Tahrir Square and therefore wouldn't reap the political spoils. In fact, it reaped nearly all of the spoils.

Next, that the Brotherhood would be faithful to its declared promise not to contest the presidential election. It broke the promise without paying a penny of a political price.

The West underestimates the Muslim Brotherhood. Yet again.

Later, that even after its victories at the polls the Brotherhood would respect and remain subservient to the country's true (and secular) masters in the military. Mr. Morsi sacked Egypt's top military leaders within two months of coming to office, replacing them with men who owed their loyalty to him.

Then, that the Brotherhood would defend the usual rules of diplomacy, such as protecting foreign embassies. It took a furious phone call from Mr. Obama to move Mr. Morsi to protect the U.S. Embassy from a mob that came close to sacking it.

Finally, that the country's dependence on foreign aid and

tourism will curb the government's appetite for naked power grabs. But Mr. Morsi's power grab came just two days after Egypt had initiated, though not finalized, a \$4.8 billion loan from the International Monetary Fund. Mr. Morsi already won \$1 billion in debt forgiveness from Washington intended to bolster Egypt's "transition to democracy."

It is true that Mr. Morsi adopted a less strident position toward Israel during this month's brawl in Gaza than some expected. There were also reports Monday afternoon that Mr. Morsi had somewhat amended his judicial decree, though not when it comes to the constitutional assembly. If true, it is evidence of Mr. Morsi's canniness and tactical flexibility. Moderation is another matter.

Even now, Western analysts continue to misread Mr. Morsi, imagining that his primary political challenge is to improve the Egyptian standard of living. Not so. His real challenge is to consolidate the power of the Brotherhood.

So far, he's passed every test. His domestic opponents know they cannot match the Brotherhood's strength in the streets. The army lacks the appetite, and probably the means, for an Algerian-style coup and bloody civil war. The West, including Israel, is trying to make the best of things and will go

further to accommodate Egypt's new pharaoh than he will go to accommodate them. Everywhere Mr. Morsi looks, he is the master.

It may take some time for the West fully to appreciate the ugliness of Egypt's new regime. For now, it is enough to appreciate its potency and intelligence. Mr. Obama was right to praise Mr. Morsi's "engineer's precision." He would be a fool to imagine that such precision can be divorced from an ideology for which Mr. Morsi once went to prison, and which now rests in his hands to impose.

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