

**Reforming the Greek intelligence-security community:  
new challenges  
– editorial –**

**Prof. John M. NOMIKOS**

Director Research Institute for European  
and American Studies (RIEAS) Athens, Greece.

e-mail contact: [rieasinfo@gmail.com](mailto:rieasinfo@gmail.com)

Intelligence organizations are complex, sophisticated entities with very specific operational, managerial, and administrative requirements. An intelligence organization has a deeply layered job description that involves a mind-boggling number of priorities. In Greece, this most critical business of national intelligence has been addressed for the most part in a bureaucratic, fragmented way heavily influenced by the surrounding environment of political instability and bitter partisan politics. Greece's central intelligence bureau, now called the National Intelligence Service (NIS) has seen various incarnations depending on the political climate of any given period under study. Its predecessor, the Central Intelligence Service (CIS) was primarily deployed in domestic political infighting, suppressing communists and persons of "anti-national ideology," an involvement that reached its crescendo during the military dictatorship of 1967-74.

The period of the junta influenced deeply the way Greece's political elites came to regard the country's main intelligence agency and how they sought to bring it under strict government control. The restoration of democracy stirred many virulent antipathies and pressure for settling old scores. In 1986, a re-organization brought onboard many desirable characteristics, including the effective "de-militarization" of the service and the creation of a permanent position of a central intelligence director. The period leading up to the 2004 Athens Olympics witnessed further efforts to augment capabilities and streamline operations.

In 1999, Greek central intelligence came, for the first time in its history, under a non-military chief, a career ambassador whose appointment was hailed by the politicians of the day as yet another must-have "safeguard" in keeping the intelligence service focused on its "democratic"

obligations. Career ambassadors continue to hold the post, with only the briefest of intervals between July and October 2009, when chief of intelligence was... a senior prosecutor!

Greece is surrounded by unhappy neighbours, stuck in the middle of one of the shakiest regions of the world, faced with a clear and not too subtle Turkish threat, and exposed to an unstoppable wave of illegal arrivals that could be carrying dangerous operatives concealed within the throngs nobody can realistically expect to monitor, this country urgently needs a re-think of its overall intelligence policy and act without delay.

Unfortunately, one of the first steps of the Greek government was to place NIS under the ministry for Citizen's Protection, a cabinet department attempting to bring under the same umbrella all of Greece's law enforcement, civil defence, and intelligence resources. Subordinating intelligence agencies to cabinet ministries, instead *of keeping intelligence separate, independent, and directly accountable to the highest authority of the State*, has been cited more times than we care to remember as one significant step in the *wrong direction*.

Greece is not a great power where a "safe" political appointee as head of intelligence is surrounded by cohesive, established, loyal, and thoroughly professional communities of long-serving analysts, agents, and field operatives, thus allowing him/her to occupy most of his/her time with lofty oversight and cabinet antics. Greece's predicament is very different. It is such that even the heaviest "hats" need to put their energies full time behind pushing the cart. The government has indeed promised this is one of its primary aims. Under the current financial, political and social crisis, it remains to be seen how the government will pursue further the necessary reforms of the National Intelligence Service (NIS).