



## Conclusion: A New Model of Diaspora Engagement?

*Othon Anastasakis, Kalypto Nicolaidis,  
and Manolis Pratsinakis*

We conclude this book in a highly symbolic year, 2021, the bicentennial anniversary of Greek independence, to muse about a community older than the country itself: its worldwide diaspora. This anniversary reminds us the ties that bind, the ties that continue to connect the diaspora with the homeland as we remember the wealthy Greek merchant communities abroad who funded the pre-independence revival in the West or the secret revolutionary ‘Society of Friends’ (*Phiiliki Etairia*), founded by three young Greeks in Odessa in 1814, which helped spark the Greek revolt. Whether this means that Modern Greece was constructed by and for a trans-territorial national community, at least we learn from history that

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O. Anastasakis (✉) • M. Pratsinakis  
University of Oxford, Oxford, UK  
e-mail: [othon.anastasakis@sant.ox.ac.uk](mailto:othon.anastasakis@sant.ox.ac.uk); [manolis.pratsinakis@compas.ox.ac.uk](mailto:manolis.pratsinakis@compas.ox.ac.uk)

K. Nicolaidis  
EUI School of Transnational Governance, Florence, Italy  
e-mail: [kalypto.nicolaidis@eui.eu](mailto:kalypto.nicolaidis@eui.eu)

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O. Anastasakis et al. (eds.), *Diaspora Engagement in Times of Severe Economic Crisis*, Migration, Diasporas and Citizenship,  
[https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-97443-5\\_18](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-97443-5_18)

Greece and the *homogénia*, a term used by Greek state officials to refer to the Greek world outside its borders, have long been bound in a mutually recognised solidaristic relationship.

To be sure, most Greeks abroad traditionally gathered around their Greek Christian orthodox identity and national language and kept strong links with their roots in their respective local communities. However, the fact that the Greek diasporic communities existed long before the creation of the modern Greek state meant that the inter-generational engagement between Greeks abroad and the homeland was never a straightforward matter of direct identification with a central state. Having said that, various diaspora actors kept a consistent involvement with Greek national politics and Greece's economy or through major benefactions, primarily in education, in the development of the Greek society, nationally and locally. For its part, the Greek state developed institutional links with the diaspora only after the return to democracy in 1974, by establishing new institutions (General Secretariat of the Greeks Abroad, World Council of Hellenes Abroad), as well as financing a number of institutes and operations abroad for the promotion of Greek language and culture. In that way, the state aspired to become the main actor in structuring its relationship with diasporic Greek communities and individuals.

However, when the Greek economic crisis struck, not only was the state its main victim and perpetrator, but most Greek diasporic communities were also left bewildered as to how to help a bankrupt state recover from its unprecedented economic calamity, caught between the Scylla and Charybdis of high deficit and huge external debt. At the same time, the 2009 economic crisis created another wave of emigration, a new generation of diasporans, mostly younger people with high educational attainments who emigrated from Greece deeply disillusioned by their homeland. Given their low expectations that the conditions that led to their departure could be ameliorated soon, most of them continued to harbour ambivalent feelings of repudiation and solidarity towards their country in crisis.

Asking, 'how did the Greek crisis affect patterns of engagement between homeland and diaspora?', we assumed that this particular crisis, a rupture with many past political, economic and social practices in the Greek homeland, would unavoidably have an impact on the homeland's relationship with Hellenes abroad. Our initial stance was premised on the expectation of crisis-engendered engagement with the

homeland, albeit encompassing a diversity of responses in terms of their intensity and impact. On one hand, we expected to find the Greek diaspora as an entrepreneurial and politically progressive economic force for the homeland, a voice in favour of a post-crisis ‘enlightenment’ of a country in desperate need for socio-political and economic regeneration, and even an agent of positive public diplomacy to counter the image of Greece as an international pariah. On the other hand, we knew that there is not one but many Greek diasporas around the world with different socio-political agendas and levels of attachment to Greece and whose attitudes to the crisis would range from total indifference or apathy to activism and commitment.

As illustrated throughout this volume, it is impossible to identify a uniform type of diaspora engagement stemming from the crisis. Nevertheless, we can argue that the crisis did reconfigure this multi-faceted and multi-actored relationship, both by highlighting the outdatedness of the previous system of engagement and by creating new spaces for interaction. We examine them in turn in this conclusion.

### THE LIMITS AND FAILURES OF THE PRE-2009 DIASPORA ENGAGEMENT

The first overriding message shared by the contributors of this volume is that the depth of the crisis challenged the resilience of earlier patterns of engagement at a time when a framework facilitating the diaspora’s contribution to Greek affairs was needed the most. Several chapters address the limits and failures of the previous system in institutional, economic, political and geopolitical terms. For instance, the diasporic institutional landscape of Consulates, the World Council of Hellenes Abroad, and the Foundation for Hellenic Culture were the first victims of austerity and had to shrink most of their activities abroad. On this point, Frangos and Anastasakis show how the World Council of the Hellenes Abroad was already waning while the crisis gave it the final blow, leading to the ultimate termination of its operations.

Kitroeff argues that Greek-American communities—among the most dynamic and pro-active in the diaspora—proved less able and willing than expected to come to the rescue of the Greek state due to assimilation but also to the perceived and actual lack of capacity on the part the Greek state to guarantee an accountable and transparent way of handling

philanthropic contributions from abroad. This cautious attitude and lack of trust was not only due to the legacy of past unsuccessful attempts, but also to the further discrediting of the Greek state in the period of the crisis. The Ecumenical Patriarchate, Grigoriadis adds, traditionally a focal point of diaspora activity, especially with the Greek-American community, also failed to mobilise the kind of philanthropic support which would have made a real difference to many segments of the Greek impoverished society. The Patriarchate itself had to cut down its budget in light of declining revenues from Greece, in particular given that the Archdiocese of America had its own qualms and was proving unable to deliver any significant financial support.

The limited economic support from established diasporic communities could potentially have been partly counterbalanced by the resurgence of large-scale emigration. In the past, primarily in the post-World War II period, emigration was encouraged by the authorities not only as a means of taking the pressure off from the labour market but also so that remittances would help address balance of payments issues. In contrast this time around, the vast emigration of half a million mainly young Greeks, had limited impact on unemployment. And, as Pratsinakis, Nicolitsas and Faure argue, remittances from recent emigrants were thin, while the combined effect of the prolonged recession along with the loss of an often highly educated labour force risked imposing a cycle of underdevelopment on the Greek economy.

As a result, a discourse gradually emerged that the crisis-led flight of young and educated Greeks symbolised Greece's economic and political downfall, pointing to grim prospects for the future. Hence, the return of the 'brain drain' generation has been deemed a *sine qua non* for Greece's regeneration, with successive governments making all sorts of promises to provide incentives for repatriating Greek professionals who left, bringing the Diaspora back as it were. Unsurprisingly, when such promises are not met, they lead to mutual recriminations and the further politicisation of the issue of return.

In the meanwhile, we ask, to what extent do mainland Greeks really understand and engage with the needs and preferences of this 'new Diaspora'? What would they find out if they did? In their contribution, Pratsinakis and Kafe answer that aspirations to come back 'home', at least in the short term, remain low. Expatriates do not seem to endorse the same kind of ethos of return than earlier generations of migrants. This may be due to the fact that this crisis changed perceptions of emigration from

the earlier traumatic experience of forced desertion of the homeland into an opportunity for change and better life abroad. Those young migrants left not only disillusioned about Greek institutions and their prospect for a bright future in Greece, but also without the sense that this would be an all-or-nothing choice as it had been for their forefathers, when the ease of communication and travel makes it so much easier to keep contact with Greece.

There is however a counter-narrative whereby the new emigration while a blow to Greece, also led to positive change in homeland diaspora relations through the revitalisation of diasporic communities abroad. Relatedly, when many young Greeks voted with their feet to escape the crisis, they also took their voting rights and political preferences with them, making the diaspora vote an issue that could no longer be ignored. As a result, and as argued by Anastasakis and Kalantzi, the law on the facilitation of the diasporic vote in 2019, despite the many restrictions and conditions that it entailed, significantly reshaped homeland diaspora relations, strengthening the political ties between diasporic Greeks and their homeland. This is indeed, one of the ways in which migrants remain members of a transnational political community rather than exclusively integrate in their new societies.

Importantly, the flow of monetary remittances towards Greece may have been relatively limited but expatriates expressed willingness to contribute to Greece in other ways such as through knowledge transfer, participation and contribution to civil society organisations, engagement in partnerships with professionals and institutions in Greece as well as by transferring social remittances to Greece, as the chapters by Pratsinakis and Kafe, and Papangelopoulos and Merkle show. As the latter argue, interaction between the ‘new diaspora’ and the people back home is not always harmonious but we can confidently say that patterns of engagement have begun to shift rather dramatically and constructively.

### NEW FIELDS OF ENGAGEMENT

This leads us to our second observation on the crisis impact, namely the emergence of new spaces of engagement between diaspora and homeland. According to Kamaras’ contribution, the decline in state funding has opened up space for transnational diaspora philanthropy, thus enhancing the professionalism and transparency of civil society actors, a sector traditionally tied to the Greek state. Such philanthropy has also enhanced

policy and normative pluralism in Greece, clearly spilling over to the country's politics. Conversely, Tinios argues that the increased transferability of pensions and other social rights within the EU, which can now be accumulated abroad, will ultimately affect incentives for return and the diaspora's attitude to policy reform in Greece, in particular the need for pension reform as one of the sectors most affected by the crisis. A change towards a more migration-friendly system to allow for more mobility but also to bring back capital, labour and pensions in Greece, Tinios argues, ought to be the way forward in the post-crisis environment.

Anagnostou, for his part, approaches this new space through the angle of national rebranding by the Greek-American diaspora itself, to counter the tarnished image and negative stereotypes that dominated the global coverage of their Greek homeland. Delving to a more micro level, Chryssanthopoulou explores the ways Australian Greeks hailing from the border small island of Castellorizo have supported their region of origin economically and culturally thus helping transform the very meaning of Castellorizian collective identity, both in the diaspora and on the island. This shift in turn has informed world-linked philanthropic initiatives and engagement with the island. Her chapter also illustrates the need for considering the rather insufficiently studied subnational, ethno-regional dimension, which adds to our understanding of the emergence, development and varied features not only of diaspora-homeland interaction, but also from a more horizontal viewpoint, diaspora-to-diaspora relations.

Finally, and in this vein, Grigorakis and Kataiftsis discuss the role of transnational diasporic networks in shaping economic action at times of economic hardship. Their chapter raises the issue of diasporic entrepreneurs, networks and start-ups leading to new attitudes towards business and innovation. Greece as a latecomer in this new mentality has had to adapt to a better use of internet services to support their businesses, while traders tried to engage in export activities by using diasporic networks and new methodologies.

From a wider geopolitical perspective, homeland and diaspora relations are embedded within a multipolar international environment, characterised by the rise of emerging great powers, which challenge US hegemony and open up more destination spaces. Up until recently, Greeks chose to emigrate to places where past generations of émigrés had already settled, in the United States, Germany, Australia, Canada, with free movement within the EU providing further incentives for intra-European migration. No wonder that the majority of Greeks went to Germany, Britain,

Netherlands while also discovering Central and Eastern European countries like the Czech Republic or relocating their businesses in the neighbouring Bulgaria, Romania or Albania where the opportunities and taxation were more advantageous. But in keeping with the changing ‘geography of opportunity’ of our times, Greeks also tried new destinations in the lands of Qatar (where the Greek community now includes between 3000 and 5000 people), Saudi Arabia (which attracted Greek doctors by offering much higher wages), Singapore and Shanghai. While these destinations have not been explored by the book they are deserving of further study, primarily from the point of view of similarities and contrasts with the more traditional destinations we examined, in the ways these newly found diaspora communities engage with the homeland, or fail to do so.

### TOWARDS A NEW MODEL OF DIASPORA ENGAGEMENT? POLYCENTRICISM, PRAGMATISM, EMPOWERMENT

As we take stock of the limits and failures of the old system and the creation of new spaces of interaction, can we talk of a new post-crisis model in the relationship between Greece and its diasporic communities abroad? This book offers a tentative yes. In our view, as the old habits are laid bare, and new spaces are introduced, Greeks at home and abroad are progressively crafting a new model of engagement. In closing our investigation, we suggest that to reach its full potential, such engagement ought to rest around three principles, namely polycentrism, pragmatism and empowerment.

**Polycentrism.** The post-crisis environment gives us the opportunity to rethink the positioning of Greece away from a state-centric model, with diasporic satellites evolving more or less close to the homeland, towards a polycentric model, where Greece only constitutes an important pole within a transnational space of Hellenism. This view is embedded in a wider discussion on the need to move beyond statist paradigms in the study of diaspora engagement (Karabegovic, 2018; Koinova, 2017). As we observe the old state-centred territorial approach progressively being replaced by networks of interdependence between homeland and diaspora agents and horizontally between the Hellenic diasporas themselves, we need to ask how these new patterns may build on rather than replace pre-existing connections. We offer many examples in the book pointing to emergent ways where the state may be retreating from its position as a

financier and mobiliser of resources, thus recalibrating its role as only one of several enablers for strengthening the ties that bind. In a period of drastically reduced fiscal spending by Greece's state, diaspora engagement at the subnational level of particular localities and regions and diaspora philanthropic and volunteer engagement with Greek civil society organisations are two such pointers. This decentring of the state as the main actor in the formulation and mobilisation of diasporic stances may be in fact a welcome development. It remains to be seen what kind of new actors are emerging in the Greek transnational diasporic picture.

**Pragmatism.** Turning from the centrality of the Greek state to a more polycentric mode, we argue that the latter's renewed credibility in the eyes of Greeks abroad remains a prerequisite for any kind of renewal. Policy aims should be framed in such a way as neither to appear patronising nor to treat diaspora Greeks as owners of resources that can 'be tapped', but rather as partners in a shared mission. We need to move from the vision of the 'savior diaspora' to a more pragmatic understanding of diasporic needs, aspiration and resources. As they revisit or even to some extent design anew the diasporic relationship, public and private actors in Greece must pay greater attention to identifying the areas where expatriates continue to be frustrated about lags in necessary action, the continued need for reform, and the desire to grab opportunities as they arise. Such a renewed focus needs to be as inclusive as possible, addressing both recent emigrants and established communities, even as this may sometimes create tension, especially due to inter-generational gaps in expectations. It also needs to take into consideration, much more systematically the concrete proposals emanating from the diaspora itself and to support bottom-up initiatives. As Brinkerhoff argues, the aim should be to target interventions to those members of the diaspora who are already mobilised, willing and able to contribute (Brinkerhoff, 2012). While this point was already floated in the mist of the Eurozone crisis, we believe that the post-crisis, more-stable environment provides a strategic opportunity to put such a pragmatic approach in practice on a day-to-day basis.

**Empowerment.** Last but not least, engagement must be continuously predicated on what we know of the widely different experiences prevailing among diasporans, shaped as they are by their diverse sense of transnational belonging, and by the ways they embrace plural cultural identities and multiple loyalties and affiliations. These diasporic populations, taken individually and collectively, are *par excellence* dynamic and fluid social entities whose continuous transformation is not an intrinsic consequence



of migration, but rather the product of social constructions and fluctuating processes of mobilisation (see Sökefeld, 2006). Diasporas come and go, and may return again, existing for the most part as silent transnational imagined communities. We live in an era when communication technologies and social media, despite their potential pitfalls, are making it easier than ever to foster transnational virtual communities which in turn can bring new face to face encounters into being. If this is true, empowerment of those who define themselves as part of the Greek diaspora through the practices of their everyday lives need to find platforms where they can be heard and listen to others. The internet is already spurring the creation of online diasporic agoras and thus promoting dialogue and exchange that may ultimately shape a virtual diasporic community from the interaction of Greeks across the world. The SEESOX diaspora project which we initiated during the years of crisis has sought to contribute to this emergence through the Greek diaspora map (<http://seesoxdiaspora.org/the-greek-diaspora-map>) which we hope to develop into a fully fledged transnational multi-level digital platform. The emerging younger diasporic generations (descendants of earlier migrants or new migrants themselves) will play a crucial role in multiplying such initiatives.

To what extent are these developments and recommendations specific to the Greek case? This is of course a vast question which touches on the field of diaspora and migration studies in general. But what we can say from our specific vantage point is that while Greece has suffered an exceptionally deep and long crisis, asymmetrical comparisons with Portugal, Ireland and Ukraine were offered in this book precisely in order to show that inter-country comparisons can nevertheless be fruitful, especially with similarly small size countries with disproportionately large diasporic populations. After all, Ireland and Portugal were both hit by the same Eurozone crisis, saw their young generations flee their countries as a result of rising unemployment and received bailouts, albeit for a shorter period and without such severe conditionality as in Greece. We find that both countries used the crisis as an opportunity to accelerate the pace and intensity of their diasporic engagement both in their legislation and their policies and that there may be fruitful lessons to learn from them too. Turning to our third case, the severe political crisis and Russian invasion in the mid-2010s aroused a wave of diasporic mobilisation in favour of Ukraine's Euromaidan moment and democratic politics, and changed the national attitudes towards emigration to more positive representations. Beyond these three countries, we hope and believe that the issues discussed in this book are

relevant for other diasporic experiences, and that some of the lessons that we draw can provide a useful fulcrum for developing the kinds of ties in the world that might support better understanding across borders, a dedramatisation of migration issues and thinking of diasporic actors as agents of interdependence in transnational space.

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