



Italy and Greece: “*una faccia una razza*” also in terror?

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Italy and Greece are neighbour countries with strong cultural ties for thousands of years. It seems like the bonds between Italy and Greece may be expanding also in terrorism.

Recently the terror campaign that is troubling Greece struck the heart of the State. A bomb that arrived to the building of the Ministry of Citizen’s Protection (Former Ministry of Public Order) addressed personally to the minister himself, exploded killing a high rank Police Officer. The victim was going through the minister’s mail for control¹. The responsibility for this attack has been claimed by a new group, though the authorities express doubts about the originality of this claim².

An attempt against the life of this specific Minister has taken place before, but this is the first time that such an operational scheme was used in Greece. It was definitely not an amateur planning, but a very serious one, since the explosive device could be detonated only by opening the envelope- package³. This operational originality brings Greece and Italy close in the eyes of the Greek Anti-Terror Squad. In 1992 the group “Diethnis Allilegkii” (=International Solidarity) used the exact methodology in Italy sending bombs targeting the Carabinieri. It did so, as part of support to Greek Nikos Maziotis, who at the time was imprisoned for a bombing attack and now is arrested again as the major suspect and accused leader of the group “Epanastatikos Agonas” (= Revolutionary Fight). In 2010 another similar attack was planned in Italy on behalf of the group “Atipi Anarchiki Omospondia Lambros Fountas” (=Informal Anarchist Federation Lambros Fountas) asking the prison release of arrested anarchists in France, Italy and Greece. It must be noted that the name of the group connects it with Greek Lambros Fountas,⁴ a terrorism suspect that lost his life during a police chase in March.

Of course it is too soon to speak with certainty about an attack that was organized and launched from abroad⁵. Indeed the cooperation with cells in Italy (or even other countries) is very possible. Yet, the evidence of linkage that exist is not beyond doubt. One must keep in mind that the copy cat phenomenon exists in the world of terror organizations, meaning that a methodology that has been successfully used by a terror group in one country can be used by other groups elsewhere. After all, bombing attacks like this were also planned by the Spanish ETA and even the IRA⁶, so it is not an Italian exclusivity. On the other hand Greece and Italy often go hand by

¹ <http://www1.voanews.com/greek/news/greece/Greece-explosion-Europe-terrorism-06-27-2010-97278264.html>,

² <http://www.ant1online.gr/Society/PoliceBulletin/Pages/20107/0df95af8-2eed-415d-bbc0-82ff9aef3fa3.aspx>

³ http://www.defencenet.gr/defence/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=12848&Itemid=86

⁴ <http://www.i-live.gr/news-antitromokratiki-epithesi-xrysoxoidi/>

⁵ At the same time some believe that even “common criminal” circles may be to blame for the attack, http://news.kathimerini.gr/4dcgi/news/ell_2Kath/edition?fdate%3D29/6/2010 and again

http://www.defencenet.gr/defence/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=12848&Itemid=86

⁶ <http://www.newstime.gr/?i=nt.el.article&id=49460>

hand in protesting, activism and even anarchist and anti-state circles. There could be Greek cells active in Italian soil planning terror attacks back at home, or simply providing support for domestic groups back at home. There is a large number of Greek youth studying and living in Italy and it is not a secret that young students are often the pool for radicalization and recruitment by terror groups. Plus in the past, during violent events in both countries, there were Greeks perpetrators in Italy and vice versa⁷. We must keep in mind also that Italy has an important history in left winged terrorism, with the rhetoric and activity of organizations like the “Brigatte Rosse” been legendary and symbolic for terrorists worldwide. In addition, Italy has been for years a refuge (like France) for Greek people who opposed the political situation in their country. For example, during the years Greece was struggling to overthrow the dictatorship, many Greeks fled to Italy⁸. There, they formed groups that were active protesting and fighting against the situation in their homeland.

Of course Greece is not suffering a dictatorship today, it is a democratic state, and contemporary domestic terrorists have nothing to do with the freedom fighters of the past, who tried to overthrow the colonel’s regime. But it is without question that the country is in turmoil, facing a tough economic situation that brings to surface and accentuates very serious political and social problems. The Greek public opinion expresses anger about the economic measures been taken by the government as a solution to the crisis. The set of measures is seen as oppressive (plus inefficient) and the whole country seems to be in total strike at least once a week, with marches taking place and often ending in conflicts with the Police. A month ago during such protesting that resulted in violence and vandalism in the center of Athens, 3 people lost their lives as they were literally burned alive inside the bank they were working⁹.

This situation unfortunately has created a fertile ground for extremist violent groups to operate, perpetrating dangerous and deadly attacks. They try to take advantage of the frustration felt by Greek people and use the present problems the country is experiencing for the benefit of their rhetoric. For example this new group asking credit for the attack at the Ministry of Citizen’s protection, is trying in its manifesto to legitimize the murderous terror attack by referring to the unbearable new economic measures that will burden Greeks. It also uses a lot of symbolisms taken from the heroic revolutionary past of the Greeks (that of course has no connection to this present terror campaign), like the phrase “he who thinks freely, thinks well” of the national hero and inspirational figure of the Greek Struggle against the Ottomans Rigas Ferreos¹⁰. One can see a clear attempt of the group to exploit both the problems that indeed trouble the reality of the Greeks and their historic passion for freedom.

Despite the fact that Greek law enforcement appeared to have arrested the key-members of the very dangerous group “Epanastatikos Agonas”, the theatre of terror has not stopped its shows. On the contrary, serious attacks have taken place since and

⁷ Greeks travelled to participate in the Genova events of 2001, <http://indy.gr/analysis/7-3c7ronia-apo-ti-genoba-7-3c7ronia-apo-ti-dolofonia-toy-karlo-tzoyliani>, <http://www1.rizospastis.gr/story.do?id=868983&publDate=>. Also Italians travelled to Greece to participate in the marches and protests in Athens regarding the killing of 15 year old Alexandros Grigoropoulos by Greek Police <http://www.ethnos.gr/article.asp?catid=11424&subid=2&pubid=8610841>. And of course Italian anarchists participated in the events of G8 Summit in Greece in 2003.

⁸ <http://www.today.com.gr/ioannina/index.php/2009-06-18-16-20-24/2009-07-14-11-27-32/5112-21--1967----> , <http://www.athensinfoguide.com/gr/history/t9-97-6antijuntamovement.htm> . Alekos Panagoulis, the symbol of the struggle against the junta was one of the many who found refuge in Italy.

⁹ A Molotov bomb was thrown inside the bank by violent protesters; the perpetrators until now are identified by the official research as members of the so called violent “anti-state, anti-authority” circles. See <http://www.tanea.gr/default.asp?pid=2&ct=1&artid=4573177>

¹⁰ <http://www.i-live.gr/news-prokirixi-xtipima-katexaki/>

almost every day new findings in the news speak about the discovery of – thank God not yet exploded- bombs and hiding places. Moreover, regarding the specific attack against the Minister of Citizen’s Protection, there is a lot to investigate on how a package full with explosives managed to be sent by ordinary post office, pass through security checks and arrive at his office virtually undetected¹¹. A hole in the security procedures is obviously to blame and the problem must be fixed. Also, while there is skepticism on whether is true that the attack was planned by Italian “terror-associates”, it would be a good step for the counter- terror research to continue seeing outside Greece and collaborate with other Anti-Terror Teams abroad. It is not only “jihadist” terror that benefits from international cooperation, but also domestic “secular” terrorism. Internet has surely made things easier for terrorists of any type and combating Greek terrorism cannot be done without a broader cooperation with foreign authorities. Our “fratelli” Italian counter- terror experts can prove to be a valuable allying force in the fight against terror.

¹¹ <http://www.topontiki.gr/articles/view/7703>