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Greece

A regularization measure for immigrants is adopted in Greece!

- IV Online magazine - 2023 - IV587 - December 2023 -

Publication date: Tuesday 26 December 2023

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As we know, the Greek Prime Minister never claimed that he had to be elected to block the far right... On the contrary! As of 2019, he has surrounded himself with cadres fresh from fascist parties, going so far as to appoint the son of Nazi ideologue Plevris as minister. In recent years, the anti-immigrant course has at times taken on the tone of a call to murder, as when thousands of refugees repelled from Turkey arrived at the borders, or during last summer's fires, when immigrants were singled out as possible arsonists...

The introduction in a law on social protection of a measure allowing up to 300,000 immigrants to be regularized, passed on the same day that French MPs voted in favour of the shameful national preference law, was bound to cause surprise and reaction, particularly in the ranks of the right (ND: New Democracy). However, the measure adopted is obviously far from meaning free entry into Greece - on the contrary!

30,000 applications for regularization underway

In recent years, tens of thousands of immigrants have been working in Greece under the worst conditions of undocumented workers, whether they be refugees or immigrants who have been unable to obtain or renew their residence permits. It is estimated that some 30,000 applications for regularization are currently in progress, with extremely long waiting times. The legal provisions adopted provide a response to this situation, setting out the following conditions: a residence permit may be granted to any working non-EU immigrant worker - with proof of employment - provided they have been resident in Greece for at least three years as of 30 November. If you lose your job, your residence permit will be revoked. Family reunification is not authorized, but if the family is already present under the same conditions, it will be granted a residence permit valid for as long as the parent(s) are employed. This regularization will be accompanied by social rights that will, for example, make it easier to access healthcare. The measure will be in force for one year and will not be renewed.

An obvious improvement...

Compared to the general situation of immigrant workers in Greece, and when we recall certain episodes such as the treatment of strawberry pickers as slaves, these measures constitute progress, and that is why they were voted for by the entire parliamentary left. It is, of course, for the same reason that the three fascist groupuscules voted against it, with arguments that would not have been denied by a Bardella or a Ciotti... in the gutter. And it was also because Mitsotakis feared that his hyper-majority group would split during the vote that the instruction to vote in favour was given.

Indeed, the extreme right of ND condemned the measure (with the exception of the Minister of Labour) and made it known that they were voting for it out of obligation, while speaking of a serious mistake. Only one member of ND was allowed to vote against it: the ultra-nationalist former Prime Minister Samaras, who is trying to unite behind him the entire fascistoid current inside and outside ND. Hoping to isolate him better, Mitsotakis allowed him to carry out this "whimsical vote" by explaining that, as a former prime minister, he could be granted this right... which Samaras intends to take advantage of to try to get back on his feet.

Responding to the needs of employers

More generally, the right-wing has been very vocal in its opposition to this measure, and even the right-wing press has 'wrapped' its justifications in nauseating rhetoric, as in the newspaper *Eléfttheros Typos*: "Reservations of all kinds are respectable, especially on the part of residents of neighbourhoods where the fear of unfamiliar faces in the neighbourhood is real. However [...], rather than enrolling them in organized crime gangs or radical sections of Islam, it would be better for them (=immigrants) to register with Social Security and pay tax." There's a lot of grumbling and racist venom, but they don't dare go any further, because there's a higher reason for this measure, and the Minister for Migration (!) makes it clear: Greece is short of manpower in a whole series of key sectors, such as agriculture, construction and tourism, and it's estimated that there are 300,000 vacant jobs. Not only have many young Greeks left the land of the memorandums, but many immigrant workers have recently left Greece for countries with less unbearable conditions: Spain and Italy, for example, with its regularization measures... taken by Meloni!

The pressure exerted by employers on the government to facilitate the residence and employment of immigrants is therefore obvious: 63% of companies are finding it difficult to find well-trained workers in technical (non-university) specialities. For his part, the head of the Bank of Greece considers it essential to incorporate immigrants into key sectors where there is a serious shortage of labour (Ef Syn, 20 December). As the KKE (Greek Communist Party) pointed out during the parliamentary debate: "It was not compassion that drove the government, but the need for the big construction groups to find cheap labour".

A measure that does not call into question the government's racist policy

Indeed, a closer look at the preamble to the measure reveals that it is framed by martial declarations to the effect that the fight against the entry of refugees into Greece is not only unchallenged, but remains a priority for this reactionary government. The illegal deportations will therefore continue... To better serve the most racist MPs, the measure adopted is even presented as being in the service of this policy of permanent repression: Minister Kairidis explains that if an immigrant worker loses his job and therefore his residence permit, it will be easier for the police to arrest and deport him...

So, even if the Left could hardly not vote for this measure, it is clear that it bears no relation to previous regularization measures (1997, 2001, 2005) which enabled hundreds of thousands of immigrants to obtain permanent residence permits. And to illustrate the continuation of its policy, the government is in the process of cutting funding for the Helios refugee integration programme (which began with the eviction of thousands of refugees from their homes), with the threat that 4,000 refugees will be made homeless and 500 workers will lose their jobs.

Athens, 21 December 2023

Translated by **International Viewpoint** from [l'Anticapitaliste](#).

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