

On-the-spot coverage from Greece

Greek students describe social crisis facing youth

Our reporters
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The economic crisis resulting from over half a decade of EU-IMF dictated austerity measures has forced hundreds of thousands of Greeks to leave the country in search of work and better prospects. More than 200,000 Greeks are estimated to have left the country in the past few years in the biggest wave of emigration since the Second World War.

According to the results of a recent study by the European University Institute (EUI) in Florence, many of those who left the country were highly qualified students unable to find suitable work in Greece. According to the study, the exodus began in Greece in 2011, peaked in 2012, and has continued ever since.

Based on the sample study, 89 percent of the émigrés had degrees in such diverse fields as engineering, finance and business management, information technology and computer sciences. Forty-eight percent were under the age of 30, and 49 percent were between 31 and 45.

Those taking part in the survey gave some of their reasons for quitting the country. "What prompted me to leave? The fact that there are zero opportunities for people my age, the political and the social crisis, as well as the rise in the popularity of Golden Dawn [the neo-Nazi political party]," declared one respondent.

"Greece today has become a country I don't want to be a part of," said another.

Commenting on the exodus of qualified young people, Aliki Mouris, a sociologist at the National Centre for Social Research said, "It is a huge loss of human capital whose affects will only begin to be felt in the next decade."

A WSWS team spoke to students last week at the National Technical University (Polytechnic) in Athens.

Just inside the main entrance are the twisted remains of the iron gate, which was crushed by a tank in 1973 when the Greek army sought to disperse students barricaded inside who were calling on the Greek people to rise up against the military junta. Twenty-three people died in the subsequent uprising.

The junta was toppled just one year later and a law passed banning the police and army from entering the Polytechnic. The coalition government led by Antonio Samaras overturned the law and last November police and special forces, using tear gas and batons, stormed the Polytechnic to disperse protesting students.

Alex is a student at the Polytechnic who already has a degree in physics and is studying for a second degree in architecture. He told the WSWS he is working three to four hours per day in a technical office to subsidize his studies.

"I do not expect any quick solution to the crisis after this election. I expect the crisis to continue for another decade. It is affecting all of society, all social layers. Health and education have all been cut. The efficiency and provision of services is declining continuously, along with standards of living. I agree that Greece is being used as a test case for implementing austerity in other European countries."

"It is anticipated that Syriza will win the election Sunday, but they will not fulfill all their promises. The organization consists of many voices, all pulling in different directions. It is thoroughly opportunist. When Syriza fails, I do not know what will come next. It is a mystery to me, but it will be a political mess."

Konstantinos is in the third year of his studies in architecture. He has only been able to continue his studies because of the support of his grandparents, but

like millions of other retired workers in Greece, they have had their pensions cut too.

“I know of friends and relatives who have to work very hard to finance their studies. My brother is studying geology but has to work many hours in a cafeteria for very little pay in order to get by. I realize there are very few jobs for architects now and it will be very hard for me to get work when I finish.”

When asked what he thought about Syriza, Konstantinos declared, “They promise a lot of things, but they are selling dreams. When it comes to negotiating with Europe, they have nothing in the hand. I plan to vote The River [See: Greece’s “The River” party: A populist fraud]. After the election, either of the two main parties [i.e. Syriza or New Democracy] will have to find a coalition partner, and I hope The River will be able to mediate as coalition partner and find acceptable solutions.”

Vassiliki is a young architecture student in the first year of her studies. She said she has no prospects of finding work when she finishes her studies. “I expect to go abroad, but I do not know if I can go to a country in Europe. I know the situation is getting worse in Europe.

“I know of young people who wanted to study in universities outside of Athens but are unable to do so because they are totally dependent on support from their parents. In some cases, that means they cannot study at all. I still have not decided who to vote for on Sunday, but I have no confidence in any of the political leaders. Syriza is full of PASOK people and figures from the past.”

Alkisti, 35, is doing a master’s degree and has been studying for seven years at the architecture school. When asked about the general living conditions, she replied, “The situation is getting worse and we are denied any dignity. The measures the government has introduced have increased the economic pressure, and people are suffocating. It is even worse for younger people. They are withdrawing funding for public education, and in some departments there is no paper for photocopying.

“We also do not have enough professors—that is a big problem here. I am not too badly off, because I live in my grandparents’ house, but I still need two jobs to keep me going. I work part time as an architect on very bad terms, and I also teach Spanish.

“At the same time, I am expected to pay very high

taxes. I pay a great deal for the new form of property tax introduced in 2009, and I also have to pay a lot of money for my social insurance. I have no idea how it will be when I finish my studies. I know there is very little demand for architects, because the construction sector has been so badly hit.”

Mariza and her friend are both 23 years old. Mariza has studied for six years. “We face big problems every day. There is a lack of teachers, and there have been lots of strikes and protests which we have supported. Of course, we are against the new law, which allows illegal incursions on the Polytechnic grounds. We do not support this decision by the government.”



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