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Scientific Conference «City, crime and insecurity in times of economic crisis»

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Scientific Conference «City, crime and insecurity in times of economic crisis» Report by Ilias Koromilas, *Panteion University Athens*

The Postgraduate Programme of Panteion University, “The Contemporary Criminality and its Confrontation”, the Konstantinos Karamanlis Institute for Democracy and the National Centre for Social Research (EKKE), organized a scientific Conference under the thematic “City, Crime and Insecurity in Times of Economic Crisis”, on January 30th, 2013, at the *Athens 984 Radio Station* auditorium, at Technopolis- Gazi.

Opening speeches were given by the President of the Konstantinos Karamanlis Institute for Democracy, Mr. Yannis Michelakis and the Minister of Public Order and Citizen Protection, Mr. Nikos Dendias.

Presentations were given by

- Prof. George Kaminis, Mayor of Athens with the topic “The problem of violence in Athens”
- Mrs. Christina Zarafonitou, Professor of Criminology and Director of the Programme of Postgraduate Studies in Criminology at Panteion University with the topic “Fear of crime, victimization and quality of life at the Greek capital”
- Mrs. Ioanna Tsiganou, Director of Research at the National Centre for Social Research (EKKE) with the topic “Economic crisis and crime”
- Mr. Iakovos Farsedakis, Emeritus Professor of Criminology at Panteion University and Chairman of the Legal Department at the European University of Cyprus with the topic “A criminologist’s approach to the phenomenon of contemporary criminality in Athens”
- Mr. Eleftherios Economou, former Minister of Citizen Protection and Honorary Chief of the Greek Police with the topic “Fighting lawlessness in practice”.

The event was coordinated by Mr. Aris Tolios, journalist and attended by representatives of the academic community and ministries, politicians as well as a large number of citizens.

Both the President of the Institute for Democracy Konstantinos Karamanlis, Mr. Michelakis, and the Minister of Public Order and Citizen Protection, Mr. Dendias, thanked the organizing committee of the conference, and highlighted the necessity of dealing effectively with violence and lawlessness in the center of the Greek capital, which in turn should be based on the universal application of laws, Athens Mayor, Prof. Kaminis focused on the growing political violence, briefing on the nation’s recent history. Additionally, he condemned the violent behavior inside Greek universities and the actions of ferocity of the political party of *Golden Dawn*, which expands in the neighborhoods of the erstwhile middle class. He argued that the inability of Greek Security Forces to protect the country’s external borders, result in large populations of illegal immigrants being channeled in the neighborhoods of Athens. Finally, he noted that the Municipality of Athens could exercise criminal policy, only if it operated under the standards of a Metropolitan Municipality, such as the one of New York City.

The Professor of Criminology at Panteion University, Mrs. Christina Zarafonitou, focused on a body of research evidence in national and European level, which link the fear of crime to complex social phenomena in contemporary megacities. The findings of a recent research on the perception of ghettos at the center of the Greek capital indicate the role of environmental

and social degradation in the quality of life and its association with insecurity. Moreover, the residents' fear of crime was significantly higher, compared to the more "bourgeois" neighborhoods of the city. As a final point, Professor Zarafonitou analyzed the macro-social phenomena, which are likely to influence significantly and shape an environment of crisis and clash as well as crime-breeding factors.

Mrs. Ioanna Tsiganou, EKKE Research Director of Research at EKKE, upointed out that almost all econometric analyses, statistical reports and studies of several criminologists link the crisis with an increase of crime rates.t Nevertheless, no such connection is confirmed by analogous UN studies in countries that have befallen into similar economic calamity. Thus, despite the pessimistic findings, Mrs. Tsiganou asserted that social consensus, solidarity and citizens vigilance are elevated, a fact that makes us rethinke of poverty as the only crime-generating factor a the social pathology of crime is not linearly generated by the crisis.

Emeritus Professor of Criminology, Mr. Iakovos Farsedakis, described the deterioratinn aspects in both the quantity and quality of crime in Athens, with the omnipresence of violence. Referring to the natural laws of saturation / super-saturation, he explained how crime rates increase, proportionally, in times of crisis and tension. Professor Farsedakis analyzed the parameters of social homogeneity / heterogeneity, while crime rate increases, when value systems of different social subgroups mingle together, resulting in the dwindling of informal social control; a phenomenon we are currently facney in the multicultural city of Athens. He presented the conditions of transition to criminal behavior and the importance of applying unremitting criminal policy, while highlighting the special importance of prevention, the role of which isd confirmed byr the findings of UN research, which show the percentage of effectiveness state intervention in the long run, in relation to the type of intervention.

The former Minister, Mr. Economou described the situation in the city of Athens, focusing on the problems caused by illegal immigration, global organized crime and terrorist organizations. He noted that Athens has become ag ticking health bomb, while our country receives 80-90% of immigrants planning to trek into the European Continent, with the Greek police beinn the only actor to deal with this phenomenon. Finally, he emphasized the necessity to revise the legal framework relating to criminal policy, and underlined the significance of security as a civil right to be enjoyed by every citizen.

Following Mr. Economou's speech, discussion was generated while the organizers announced the publication of the proceedings of the conference.