

# Ukraine and Greece – Two Diasporas: Engagement and Disengagement with the Homeland at Times of Crisis

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*This article focuses on the interrelationship between homeland and diaspora at times of crisis. It adopts a comparative lens to look into diasporic (dis)engagement with the homeland, specifically analysing the cases of Greece and Ukraine. The main research issues are how crises affect the engagement between homeland and diaspora – taking Greece and Ukraine as case studies – and which the defining contextual factors are that transform the diaspora engagement. The article unpacks the homeland–diaspora nexus concerning two states with different socio-political backgrounds, both going through severe political and economic crises. In so doing, the article gives prominence to the differentiation between the engagement of the two different diasporas with their home countries at times of crisis. Evidence suggests substantial engagement in the Ukrainian case while, in the Greek case, a more mixed attitude – leaning towards disengagement – is apparent.*

*Keywords: diaspora, diasporic engagement, homeland, Greece, Ukraine, crisis*

## Introduction

Diaspora has continued hand-in-hand with the progress of human history. Nevertheless, it has become increasingly fascinating to explore the developments of diasporic communities and their interrelation with the homeland under the prism of globalisation, revolutionary technologies and transnationalism. This has also become obvious in the development of diaspora studies, where a burgeoning literature focuses on the relation between states and their diasporas.

Admittedly, in recent years, there has been an increasing interest in diaspora, with the last decade seeing a wave of diaspora-themed publications and reports. The popularity of these studies is not purely due to academic interest but also results from changes in migration patterns and dynamics in ways that facilitate diaspora engagement. The negative perceptions of migration from poor regions to wealthier countries have been reassessed in recent years. There is also an increasing recognition of the ongoing transnational linkages between

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migrants and their home countries, which has triggered new interest in the role of these diasporas in development (Bakewell 2009). The advances in scholarship demonstrate that ‘diaspora capital’ (Kotabe, Riddle, Sonderegger and Arun Täube 2013: 3) – human, social and financial – may be a useful development resource for migrant-sending countries.

Furthermore, there has been a growing discussion on the reconceptualisation of the prominence of the nation state as a primary actor in the international system. It has even been argued that the nation state has not only been reconfigured by the new transnational actors and innovative communication technologies but has also been eroded (Appadurai 1996). However, even if there is any doubt about the primacy of the nation state, it is still a major reference point when talking about diasporas. As Brubaker (2005: 11) argues ‘...even if the metaphysics of the nation-state as a territorial community may have been overcome; but the metaphysics of “community” and “identity” remain’. The imperceptible thread defining and connecting states and diasporas is identity. Transnationalism and cosmopolitan citizenship do not necessarily translate into migrants’ absence of a strong connection with the homeland whilst also belonging to other communities.

Most importantly, the element that defines the importance of diaspora is the creation of transnational communities and networks facilitated by improved technological advancements (e.g. the Internet) and lower transportation costs. Apart from the increasing ease of creating networks, the new transnational standards have given people the ability to live and function in more than one place. People can belong to and feel connected with more than one country and create economic and social networks there. Additionally, there is a growing awareness of the importance of economic remittances.

Within this context of the growing interest in diaspora and the transformations taking place regarding migration, this article focuses on the interrelationship between homeland and diaspora in times of crisis. The existing scholarship focuses mostly on two goals, namely the interrelation of diasporas with the homeland in cases of conflict and violent crises on the one hand and of democratisation on the other. There is scarce literature about the middle space – namely about the ways in which diasporas relate to their democratic homelands when in distress.

The article adopts a comparative lens through which to look into diasporic (dis)engagement with the homeland. The main research issues are how crises affect the engagement between homeland and diaspora – taking Greece and Ukraine as case studies – and which the defining contextual factors are that transform diaspora engagement. This article thus unpacks the homeland–diaspora nexus concerning two states with different socio-political backgrounds, both going through severe political and economic crises. In so doing, the article gives prominence to the differentiation between the engagement of the two different diasporas with their home countries in times of crisis. The three main analytical elements are, firstly, scrutiny of the engagement between homeland and diaspora at times of economic and political crisis, secondly observation of the crisis as a threshold event and, thirdly, a focus on two democratic countries – Greece and Ukraine. The last point needs to be underlined with regards to its contribution to the diaspora scholarship, which usually focuses on the role of crises as threshold events in conflict, post-conflict and non- or semi-democratic contexts.

## **Theoretical background**

### *The state–diaspora interrelationship*

According to Cohen (2008: 35), ‘we are now long past the stage where the meaning of diaspora can be confined to a description of the forcible of a people and their subsequent unhappiness, or supposed unhappiness, in their

countries of exile'. We endorse Grossmann's approach, where diaspora is viewed as 'a transnational community whose members share a number of attributes such as dispersal or immigration, location outside a homeland, community orientation to a homeland, transnationalism and group identity' (Grossmann 2019: 1267).

The relationship between state and diaspora is defined by an element of plasticity, as it is transforming over time. The distinctive character of this relationship is shaped by the multiplicity of factors (the economic and political climate in both host and home countries, the organisational profile of diasporic communities, the ties between host and home countries, identity issues, etc.) and actors (homeland institutions, citizens in the homeland, diasporic communities, host countries, etc.). The transnational linkage between states and their diasporas can be viewed and analysed through different prisms. State–diaspora relations can be observed through the lens of what Anderson (1998) called 'long-distance nationalism', whereby diasporic communities have the ability and the willingness to participate in the politics (and in many cases the conflicts) of their homelands. Other analysts observe this relationship as a 'part of the emergence of emancipatory post-national, supranational and transnational forms of citizenship' (Delano and Gamlen 2014: 45). Brinkerhoff (2008) puts identity at the epicentre of her analysis of mobilisation strategies. She argues that identity and psychological reasons play a significant role in their 'constructive' or 'destructive' contribution to their homeland. New transnational players have also emerged – such as hometown associations created by immigrants who wish to offer support to their home places, preserve bonds with local communities and keep a sense of community (Orozco and Garcia-Zanello 2009).

Looking at the other side of the coin, in many cases homeland governments design policies in order to engage with their diasporas and mobilise them for different purposes. According to Østergaard-Nielsen (2003: 769), the main reason why home countries mobilise their diaspora is to obtain economic or political support through remittances and lobbying. Collyer (2013: xv), says that the motives of a state to engage with its emigrants can include, for example, the 'expected economic benefits from remittances, investment, know-how etc., foreign policy relations with emigrants' host states as well as political support among domestic constituencies that are ideologically committed to ethnic nationhood or socially linked to emigrant communities'. Turkish governments, for example, have employed methods for investment, extended political rights and academic exchanges – i.e. sponsorship of academic chairs (Østergaard-Nielsen 2003: 769), while the Indian government uses a mechanism – the 'Resurgent India bonds' – to raise capital from the Indian diaspora (Chander 2001). Chander (2001: 1014) states that 'Diaspora Bonds represent an important mechanism by which poor nations can tap the wealth of their relatively rich diasporas'. Before India introduced this mechanism, State of Israel bonds engaged in relations with its diaspora in the same way (*ibidem*: 1064). Levitt and La Dehesa (2003) have exemplified – through the cases of Mexico, the Dominican Republic, Brazil and Haiti – the ways in which sending states have shifted their policies towards communities living abroad to ensure that the migrants keep a lasting long-distance relationship with the homeland. Gamlen (2019: 15) argues that 'the recent global spread of diaspora institutions is a particular kind of socially scripted action: states are establishing diaspora institutions in conformity with international models and best practices for sharing responsibility over migration'.

There is a substantial amount of literature focusing on the paths via which states engage with their diaspora for developmental purposes. Studies usually try to unpack the interrelationship between diasporas and their less-advanced homelands with weak economies (Brinkerhoff 2008; de Haas 2006; Ionescu 2006; Kapur 2004; Newland and Patrick 2004; Van Hear, Pieke and Vertovec 2004). It has been argued that remittances constitute a factor of poverty reduction (Newland and Patrick 2004) although it is also said that they are not the sole influence on poverty in home countries. Diasporas also provide foreign direct investment (FDI), have a positive impact on markets, facilitate technology transfer, are a source of tourism and philanthropy and make political

contributions. Finally, diasporas facilitate the transfer of knowledge, attitudes and culture (Newland and Patrick 2004).

### *The homeland–diaspora nexus at times of socio-economic and political crisis*

Diasporas often respond to various economic, political and social crises affecting them or their compatriots. Much is written on the role of the diaspora towards their homelands that face ethnic or civic conflicts, are divided and have fragile democracies. In some cases, the effects of diasporas' involvement, for example, through radicalisation can be negative on domestic conflicts (Adamson 2005; Kaldor 2001; Koinova 2011) and positive when diasporas act as agents of peace (Baser and Swain 2008). Østergaard-Nielsen (2006) points to the 'dark side of diaspora politics', whereby diasporas, such as the Irish, Ethiopians or Turkish-Cypriots, might not accept compromises, as this is part of their exile identity. Diasporas have been criticised for their contribution in financing extremist movements and promoting conflict in the homeland. On the other hand, there are several cases where diasporas have contributed to peace-building by assisting in processes of conflict transformation and engaging in activities aimed at post-conflict reconstruction (Østergaard-Nielsen 2006: 11). In fact, according to Van Hear (2015: 18) 'there has been a shift in perception from ascribing to diasporas a negative influence in supporting conflict (as "peace-wreckers") to the more positive view that diasporas can assist with relief, peace building, recovery and post-conflict reconstruction (as "peace-makers" or "peace-builders")'.

Even though there is some remaining scepticism about diasporas' capacity to help the homeland at times of crisis (Antwi-Boateng 2012; Carter 2005; Cochrane 2007), themes like the growing role of diasporas in development, diaspora mobilisation, diaspora engagement or the contribution of diasporas at times of crisis, prevail in academic and public debate. Furthermore, diasporas engage in civic activism in cases of disasters, whether natural or caused by humans, in the homeland (Koinova 2017). In some cases – and especially in social and humanitarian crises – diasporic communities and individuals coordinate their efforts to offer relief to their origin countries. Diasporas have the capacity to respond quickly and in a targeted manner, using their knowledge and familiarity with the homeland at a social, political and economic level (Kalantzi 2020). For example, diaspora Peruvians, mainly in the USA, mobilised during the El Niño disaster to support their home country (Paerregaard 2010). As we have recently observed, diasporas can also mobilise quickly in a humanitarian crisis. During the Covid-19 pandemic, diasporas were perceived as partners in supporting the authorities tackling the crisis. Diaspora actors have channelled their efforts to assist their homeland with medical equipment, financial resources and advisory support (Kalantzi 2020). Dag (2020), for example, has shown the positive impact which Kurdish diaspora associations have had in diminishing the effect of Covid-19 on their people in the countries of origin. Bashair (2020), too, found that health professionals from Armenia and Sudan share their expertise with diaspora colleagues. The Greek diaspora has launched a fundraising campaign, the 'THI Covid-19 Emergency Response Fund', to raise donations from Greeks and Philhellenes in the diaspora to support the country's public health system, entrepreneurs and vulnerable people (*National Herald* 2020).

Diaspora engagement thus alternates depending on the specific socio-political circumstances and the contextual factors of the crisis, as we are demonstrating in this article. We point to the fact that we need to look at the diaspora as an ever-transformative agency depending on its structural constituents. The special contribution of this piece is to add to the solidified understanding that the role of diasporas cannot be placed in a normative framework but only analysed from a transnational perspective, affected by a variety of actors, agendas and goals. It also scrutinises the transnational character of the diaspora's actions, which have the dynamic to influence political and economic developments in the homeland.

Furthermore, the interaction between homeland and diasporas in unstable and conflictual political contexts, where internal or external sovereignty is under threat, has been covered extensively in the diaspora scholarship; however, there is a research and analytical void about stable political contexts. This is particularly useful to the diaspora scholarship, as there is a gap in the literature and research on the interaction of homelands and diasporas at times of crisis – particularly economic and political – in democratic countries. This article adds to the expansion of the theorisation on diasporas who reside in liberal states which engage with homelands not experiencing any challenges to their sovereignty (Koinova 2010: 164).

Through the comparative research that this article offers, we shed light on the diaspora engagement of two countries with different socio-political backgrounds although sharing commonalities in the way in which the homeland addresses diasporic issues. We also highlight the different ways in which the two diasporas reacted to their homeland crisis. Hence, the article fills an existing research gap in the diaspora literature that addresses – through a comparative lens – the interrelationship between homeland and diaspora and the causes for the intensification or weakening of the engagement in these two democratic countries under economic stress or political crisis. It also confirms previous research results whereby diasporas have linkages to different contexts and where their embeddedness in these contexts shapes their mobilisations (Koinova 2018).

In addition, the article enhances the discussion on the role of context and temporality for diaspora engagement, particularly when crises occur. Transformative events<sup>1</sup> have the capacity to alter the way in which diaspora mobilisations are evolving (Koinova 2018) and, in some cases even, like the Kashmiri diaspora in Britain, diasporas emerge in response to specific events (Sökefeld 2006) and crises might increase diasporas' mobilisation (Godin 2018). On the contrary, diasporas might not have the means or the motivation to assist their homeland at times of crisis, in contrast to assumptions related to long-distance nationalism and emotional attachment, as Mavroudi (2018) exemplifies with the Greek and Palestinian cases. Other factors that might counteract any motivation to engage with the homeland are frustration, anger, fatigue or contempt (Shain and Barth 2003).

While we can observe a growing body of literature on crises as social phenomena, not enough attention has been paid to re-conceptualising crises as social phenomena in contexts beyond the 'West' (Resende, Budryté and Buhari-Gulmez 2018). A growing body of scholarship on the Ukrainian diaspora has begun to highlight its response to the Euromaidan movement, including diaspora mobilisation and the influence of diaspora agents (Kolyada and Raicheva 2018; Lapshyna 2019; Malyutina 2014; Melnyk, Patalong, Plottka and Steinberg 2016; Nikolko 2019), the involvement of Ukrainian modern diasporas in shaping democracy from a distance (Oleinikova and Bayeh 2020), the political agency of Ukrainian 'migrant youth' and differences between new and established migrants (Kovalchuk and Korzh 2020), the Ukrainian diaspora use of social media for political activity (Fedyuk 2020) and diasporic nation-building (Kozachenko 2018). As in our findings, Dunin-Wąsowicz and Fomina (2020), who looked at Poland as a case study, argued that the events of 2013/14 were an unprecedented catalyst for the formation of Ukrainian diasporic civil society. It is important, therefore, to address the theoretical and conceptual implications of the diaspora–homeland nexus at time of crisis in order to be able to unpack the relationship between context and agency and to understand the dynamics behind the diaspora's engagement or disengagement from the homeland.

## **Methodology**

This contribution focuses on empirical studies of the Greek and Ukrainian diasporas. We consider Greece, an EU country, and Ukraine, a non-EU country, together with two different types of crisis, one economic and one political, both of which have suffered severe economic repercussions recently. Along with these cases we discuss how a crisis, defined as a major 'threshold event', affected both countries' diasporas.

We explore the mobilisation of the Ukrainian and Greek diasporas and examine how they (dis)engage and contribute economically, socially, politically and culturally to their respective homelands. In addition, we analyse how contexts shape this activism and look at the links which diasporas have with their home and host states and with the different actors. The Ukrainian data are based on the project: *Do Diasporas Matter? Exploring the Potential Role of Diaspora in the UK and Poland in the Reform and Post-War Reconstruction of Ukraine*, which was funded by the British Academy. This study is based on material resulting from a 12-month period of data collection from 2015 to 2016 and from 43 in-depth semi-structured interviews, field observations and a literature survey. Purposive sampling was selected as a strategy for choosing the participants for this study. The interviews were conducted mostly in London and Warsaw and lasted between 45 and 90 minutes. The research complied with the ESRC Framework for research ethics guidelines (2015). The material was anonymised, coded and analysed using NVivo software. Representatives of diverse Ukrainian diaspora organisations, community leaders, business people, activists and volunteers were interviewed.

Regarding the Greek case, the discourse analysis was conducted based on the scrutiny of debates in the Greek parliament between 2009 and 2018, which provided some background information about the interrelationship between the homeland and the diaspora. In addition, the meticulous study of the reports of the Special Permanent Committee on Greeks Abroad, which also coordinates the activities of the parliament with the Council of Hellenes Abroad, provided us with more in-depth information about the problems that the diaspora is facing – e.g. the closure of Greek schools abroad or the political participation – through voting – of Greeks abroad. Moreover, our study is based on extensive secondary research on the Greek diaspora. Specifically, we used findings from the on-going research of the Greek Diaspora Project in South East European Studies at Oxford (SEESOX), which gave us important information about new diaspora's mobility and the modes of the Greek diaspora's engagement with the homeland. We also used data from the EUMIGRE project,<sup>2</sup> which gave us background information about the new Greek emigration. We also used research results and discussions emanating from papers presented at the conference entitled *Homeland–Diaspora Relations in Flux: Greece and Greeks Abroad at Times of Crisis*, which took place at the University of Oxford in June 2018. There, academics and specialists on the Greek diaspora gathered to engage in dialogue concerning the interaction between Greece and its diaspora. Conducting secondary research, we found that most of the papers written about the new Greek diaspora focused on institutional failures (Cavounidis 2016; Frangos 2019), insufficient support by institutions (Mavroudi 2018), the barriers that emigrants encountered in order to engage with the homeland, such as corruption (Papangelopoulos and Merkle 2019) and bureaucracy (Mavroudi 2018) and the absence of the diaspora's moral responsibility (Pratsinakis, Kafé and Serôdio 2020) despite the emotional connectedness (Christou 2011; Pratsinakis *et al.* 2020) and the great potential of the Greek diaspora to economically support Greece (Hugo and Bakalis 2014).

Regarding our methodological framework, we acknowledge the limitations posed by using different data<sup>3</sup> and employing different methods for analysing our two case countries and their diasporas' engagement with the homeland. However, both methodologies share commonalities, such as extensive secondary analysis and the scrutiny of statements, interviews and conference presentations. Note, too, that both research methods include the views of 'diaspora entrepreneurs'. Additionally, the findings of our research strongly suggest the Ukrainian diaspora's engagement while, in the Greek case, a more mixed attitude leans towards disengagement – a result confirmed by the SEESOX/DiaNeosis survey on diaspora Greeks in the UK (Pratsinakis *et al.* 2020), the Greek Diaspora Project at SEESOX and other sources (Mavroudi 2018; Pratsinakis and Labrianidis 2017).

## Results

As a first general observation, it is useful to contemplate the fact that a diaspora encompasses diverse communities which are not necessarily homogeneous. Therefore, the relationship between the diaspora and the homeland is not one-dimensional. The second observation is that the participation of a diaspora in homeland matters can take different forms, including economic remittances as well as ‘ideas, practices, social capital and identities that are circulated between sending and receiving communities’, collectively known as ‘social remittances’ (Lacroix, Levitt and Vari-Lavoisier 2016: 1).

### *Diaspora–homeland interactions: the case of Greece*

Examining the case of Greece can be useful for observations regarding both emigration emanating from an economic crisis and also the homeland–diaspora nexus. Greece is an advanced Western economy and consolidated democracy which is undergoing a protracted recession with severe social consequences and major political changes. We therefore pose the following questions:

- What kind of interaction is developing between the homeland and its diaspora in this particular altered environment?
- What is the stance of the diasporans towards their home country?
- Are they interested in keeping ties with their homeland or in disengaging themselves from it?
- Why would they choose to keep either of these positions?
- What are the effects of these choices on the relationship between the two actors and for the country?

The case of Greece is one of ‘crisis emigration’ due to the difficult economic circumstances. In the period before the beginning of the crisis – i.e. before 2008 – Greeks were among the least mobile Europeans. There was a shift in numbers, whereby the effects of extreme austerity, the mistrust of institutions and the disappointment of the political system shaped a completely different mobility picture for Greeks. According to ongoing research for the Greek Diaspora Project in South East European Studies at the University of Oxford (SEESOX), more than 400 000 Greek citizens appear to have emigrated from Greece in the past seven years, heading for various destinations, mainly in Northern and Western Europe. Another significant qualitative transformation before the threshold event of the crisis is that emigration now constitutes a matter of need rather than a matter of choice, as it was before. In these extraordinary circumstances, the role of the diaspora has increased, not only numerically but as an agent with the potential to bring about change and affect domestic affairs.

According to the EUMIGRE study (Pratsinakis and Labrianidis 2017: 98), these Greeks who settled abroad and had mainly left before the crisis, were urged to act and ‘do something’ about it and about the grim socio-economic situation in Greece. For example, there were a number of initiatives in place, such as ‘trying to organise and mobilise the diaspora, debunking negative representations about Greece abroad, informing and supporting potential investors in Greece, assisting emigrants in developing, new innovative business, etc.’ (*ibidem*). Hugo and Bakalis (2014) emphasise that the Greek diaspora has the potential to help Greece economically and suggest that there needs to be policy intervention by the Greek state and research on strengthening the business and economic linkages between Greece and Australia, given the large Greek diasporic community there.

There is an interconnection between Greece and the countries of settlement of the new Greek emigrants in the form of transnational activities, development and the transfer of knowledge (Pratsinakis and Labrianidis 2017: 98). However, there are different barriers that emigrants faced in their efforts to engage in transnational activities with Greece, such as bureaucracy, the lack of transparency in employment conditions and insufficient support by institutions (*ibidem*). Mavroudi (2018: 1309) argues that diasporas do not axiomatically assist their

homelands at times of crisis under the assumption of ‘long-distance nationalism, emotional attachment to the homeland and diasporic obligation’. Specifically, in her analysis of the Greek case during the economic and political crisis commencing in 2008, she discovered that there is a disconnectedness between ‘strong emotional belonging’ and diaspora mobilisation (*ibidem*). The prolonged crisis, the futility of their efforts and the little understanding by Greece’s politicians and elites were some of the constraints of a material diasporic mobilisation (*ibidem*), along with the new diaspora’s disapproval of systemic problems such as corruption. As Papanangelopoulos and Merkle (2019) portray in their research, Greek emigrants of the new diaspora show a lower tolerance of corruption in the homeland, an effect of their experiences in the host country – the Netherlands, Germany and the United Kingdom. Other diasporic Greeks pointed out that they were accustomed to the Australian way of conducting business, finding it difficult to get used to the tax evasion, corruption and mistrust of the state in the homeland (Mavroudi 2015: 181). Similarly, the EUMIGRE research project showed that the most recent emigrants were the least motivated to engage in transnational activities with Greece, either because they felt betrayed by the Greek state and pushed out of the country or because they needed to focus their energy on building their life abroad and any engagement with Greece would be a backward step (Pratsinakis and Labrianidis 2017: 98).

The results of the SEESOX survey on the Greek diaspora in the UK (2020) point in a similar direction, whereby it is observed that there is a differentiation between strong emotional attachment to and the comparatively weaker moral responsibility towards the motherland. There is a strong sense of an emotional bond with Greece but there is an absence of a moral obligation to contribute financially or in other ways because of the diaspora’s disappointment with homeland’s political institutions and long-term problems such as bureaucracy and corruption. The feeling of cultural affinity (Mavroudi 2018) and emotional connectedness (Christou 2011) is not an adequate prerequisite for Greeks to engage with the homeland at times of crisis. This is also confirmed by the decrease in remittances from the diaspora to Greece between 2009 and 2012 while, at the same time, the emigration flows tripled (Faure 2017). This decrease in remittances is positively correlated with the level of trust in the Greek political, institutional and banking system during the crisis period (*ibidem*).

In order to comprehend the interrelationship between Greece and its diaspora during the crisis, it is important to examine the political and economic context before the crisis started. In other words, the tools to unpack the positionality of the homeland towards the diaspora and *vice versa* can be found in the years before the crisis. The institutional shortcomings and the absence of a clear diasporic strategy are the defining elements of the era that followed. The already deficient diaspora policy framework, characterised by short-termism, was further negatively affected by budgetary cuts. For example, in the past (the 1990s and 2000s) several diaspora community organisations received economic support from the General Secretariat for the Greeks Abroad (GSGA) – a special government agency created to deal with emigrants’ problems and help them to organise themselves. However, nowadays (since 2010) such funding has been considerably reduced – a development relating to budget cuts and new bureaucratic requirements (e.g. organisations need to acquire a Greek tax identification number (AFM) in order to request funding) (Cavounidis 2016: 97). Reductions in the GSGA budget also had an impact on the funding of Greek educational programmes abroad, hence the funding of these programmes is a priority in countries with low GDP *per capita*, in which the local diaspora cannot sustain these programmes with its own resources, typically countries of the former Soviet Union (2016: 96). Furthermore, another important institution dedicated to connecting and supporting the global Greek diaspora – the World Council of Hellenes Abroad (SAE)<sup>4</sup> – had been showing signs of decay before the crisis, with a number of structural deficiencies (Frangos 2019).

As a general comment, when looking at the pre-crisis era with regards to the position of the state towards the diaspora, pathologies of the Greek political system contributed to an inefficient diaspora policy. The homeland regarded its diaspora as an extension of itself, as an overseas segment of a transterritorial nation (Kitroeff



1989). Domestic party politics and conflicts were reproduced abroad as well. The conflict between the two major political parties, the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) and Nea Dimokratia, led to ‘big divisions in the diaspora’ (Prevelakis 2000: 182). Moreover, using the diaspora as leverage for promoting foreign policy interests (e.g. the dispute over the Macedonian name<sup>5</sup> and the situation in Cyprus) has been a constant practice. Also, in the pre-crisis years, parties mobilised the diaspora vote by financing flights during election time for voters not residing in Greece in exchange for their support. The issues that dominated the diaspora debate pre-2009 were the facilitation of the expat vote and cultural and national issues.

Looking at the crisis years – i.e. after 2008 – the engagement with the diaspora that the homeland and specifically the political elites sought to establish was not special or particularly enhanced (Kalantzi and Anastasakis 2018). This is demonstrated through the frequency of the parliamentary dialogue regarding the Greek diaspora, which did not intensify (*ibidem*). It is also obvious in the absence of any particular new plan or the drafting of any new (*ibidem*). As Mavrodi and Moutselos (2016: 45) also note, the absence of specific laws targeting recent migrants and passed by the Greek parliament since 2008 mirrors the absence of an institutional framework for the Greek diaspora. Indicatively, despite the fact that the GSGA’s main goal is diaspora engagement, there has not been any systematic attempt to attract diaspora investment (Cavounidis 2016). Also, although a draft bill concerning SAE was discussed in the Special Permanent Parliamentary Committee for the Greek Diaspora, there was a lot of disagreement between the political parties concerning the re-establishment of plans for the Council (2016: 102). The SAE has been inactive since 2010 and, although its refounding has been discussed several times, it has not yet been achieved. In January 2019, the Syriza MP and President of the Special Permanent Committee on Greeks Abroad, Alexandros Triandafyllidis, submitted a proposal for the relaunch of the SAE to the Greek parliamentary committee. In July 2020, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Nikos Dendias, in his letter to several big Greek diasporic organisations, talked about the re-establishment of the SAE and said that that this reform reflects the Greek government’s goal to maximise the national benefit to be gained from the power of the diaspora Greeks.

Furthermore, one of the recurring subjects in the Greek parliament during the crisis years has been the issue of brain-drain and the much-needed policies to be implemented to halt it (Kalantzi and Anastasakis 2018). Another of the most prominent issues that have dominated public and political discourse during the crisis years has been the political participation of Greeks abroad. In particular, the issue of the voting rights<sup>6</sup> for Greeks abroad, which reappeared at the forefront of political debate and which has been more vigorously discussed in the Greek parliament than in the pre-crisis period. In fact, the crisis in Greece was one among a multitude of complex factors that led to the facilitation of the diasporic vote.

Apart from the discussion of the new wave of emigrants and the diaspora vote, there has been an on-going dialogue in academic and business circles about the crisis-driven Greek entrepreneurship, the creation of new networks and the synergies between homeland and diaspora – i.e. through skills and knowledge transfer, the expansion of diasporans’ businesses in the homeland by opening branches there, investments and the transformation of brain-drain into brain-gain. The involvement of the diaspora in the advancement of the Greek economy, its wider political participation – through, for example, its contribution to policy debates and public life – and its philanthropic activity, all have the potential to impact tangibly on the economic, political and social life of Greece. Throughout the crisis, there has been an increasing involvement of the Greek technocratic and academic diaspora, which has been active in the Greek policy debate via op-ed articles, conference participation and television appearances. There are also several entrepreneurial and philanthropic initiatives that were established in order to support Greece at the time of the economic crisis, an example of which is Reload Greece, an organisation which, through different activities and programmes, supports the new generation of entrepreneurs in the establishment of ventures with a social and economic impact in their home country. Then there is the Hellenic Initiative (THI), a philanthropic organisation with a mandate to assist Greece in difficult times

which was first established in the US by prominent Greek-Americans and members of Greece's transnational elite. Relatedly, diaspora and transnational foundations contributed to state agencies during the crisis, particularly for social welfare and public health purposes (Kamaras 2018).

Based on the above analysis, we need to make two important points on the interrelationship between Greece and its diaspora. Firstly, the positive Greek political and public discourse about the diaspora was not reflected in policies that would mutually benefit both the homeland and the diaspora. The diaspora also had certain expectations from the homeland, based on political rhetoric but also on the fact that the younger generation, in particular, had been and was obliged to leave the home country for a better life. From the point of view of the diaspora, there has been a diffused feeling that Greece remembers its 'children' abroad whenever there is a crisis. Secondly, engagement by a segment of the diaspora, as portrayed above, did not outweigh the diaspora's wider sense of bitterness and disconnection with the homeland. Certainly, the involvement of some diasporans – e.g. from the business world and academia – in assisting the homeland illustrates the ways in which Greece can benefit from its diaspora, if it builds up a consistent policy framework.

#### *Diaspora–homeland interactions: the case of Ukraine*

Ukraine has also been going through a series of interconnected political and economic crises, notably the Euromaidan protests in 2013, the annexation of Crimea by Russia and the Russian military aggression in Eastern Ukraine in 2014.<sup>7</sup> These events have been summarised as 'the Ukrainian crisis' – understood as a prolonged 'classic crisis' that has a potential impact on the post-Cold War international order (Menon and Rumer 2015).

In the years prior to the Euromaidan protests, political instability and endemic corruption triggered not only a movement for democratisation and deeper ties with the European Union among increasing elements of the Ukrainian society but also migration aspirations among a significant part of the population. This was a typical voice/exit/loyalty situation, as conceptualised by Hirshmann (1970). Ukraine already has one of the largest diasporas in the world, while the resident population has continued to decline since the 1990s, partly due to the high emigration rate (Düvell and Lapshyna 2015).

For many years, the migration discourse in Ukraine was dominated by a negative image of migration. Emigrants are often perceived as 'traitors/betrayers of the nation' and 'defectors' – those leaving an independent Ukraine rather than staying to help 'build the new Ukraine'. Even remittances are often discredited as 'easy money' 'corrupting those left behind' or stimulating rise in property prices in Ukraine (Solari 2010: 222). However, during the Euromaidan protests in 2013 and their aftermath, the Ukrainian diaspora, through its widened participation, mobilised a considerable spectrum of support for the home country which, in turn, contributed to a certain positive shift in the perception of Ukrainian emigrants and the diaspora more generally.

Euromaidan not only resulted in a change of government but also triggered a Russian military intervention, which subsequently left Ukraine in an economic downturn, with thousands killed and millions of citizens displaced. These dramatic events in Ukraine have mobilised activists, volunteers, associations, various NGOs and foundations and triggered a powerful wave of diasporic activities throughout the world. They also transformed the Ukrainian diaspora from a more inward-looking one to a more outward-looking community which, as a result, is now engaging more with Ukrainian affairs.

Endorsing Koinova (2018), we can argue that the Ukrainian crisis has all the preconditions for being considered as a critical juncture for the country and for its diaspora. The critical transformative events in 2014, Euromaidan and, following that, the Crimea annexation and the war in Eastern Ukraine, changed the homeland–diaspora nexus. Similar to our findings, a recent study by Nikolko (2019) showed how the Ukrainian crisis of 2014–2015 further solidified the bond between the Ukrainian diaspora in Canada and the homeland and produced a long-lasting impact.

Drawing on interviews with the Ukrainian diaspora and observational research on the Ukrainian diaspora engagement in the UK, the following findings were identified. The Ukrainian diaspora in the UK is quite segmented and diverse, depending on their age, social class, skills, religion, migration motives, migration status and period of stay. Generally, all the segments engage in different activities, have different target groups and spheres of influence and complement one another. Despite their segmentation and some related tensions, there still is a dialogue and collaboration between the conventional old and the new diaspora. By ‘old diaspora’ we refer specifically to the community of post-World War II immigrants and their descendants. The ‘new diaspora’ we understand migrants from an independent Ukraine, who left the country in large numbers from 1991 onwards. They have different characteristics from those who have lived in the UK for the longer period of time. What they have in common are concerns about affairs in the country of origin, Ukraine. Notably, all diaspora groups contribute to their home country. Many low-skilled or even undocumented migrants actively contribute to activities such as the provision of humanitarian aid.

Euromaidan, the annexation of Crimea and the war in Eastern Ukraine have inspired many members of the old diaspora and newcomers alike to get involved and to make powerful contributions to Ukraine. The old diaspora in London refers mostly to the Association of Ukrainians in Great Britain, which is the largest representative body for Ukrainians and those of Ukrainian descent. It has been actively engaged in transnational protests in London. At the beginning of the Euromaidan movement, solidarity activities were organised but, when matters turned violent, humanitarian aid became their main field of activity.

New diasporas set up solidarity groups like ‘London Euromaidan’ or ‘British-Ukrainian Aid’ while others organised demonstrations and public awareness-raising events or collected money and engaged in Ukrainian matters. Notably, many are providing Ukrainian soldiers and volunteers with military and medical aid, whilst others are collecting humanitarian aid and helping internally displaced persons. For instance, British-Ukrainian Aid (BUAid, formerly known as Ukraine Aid) is a group of UK-based volunteers who are supporting the needs of people affected by war and the humanitarian crisis. It raises funds to purchase the spare parts necessary for the production of prosthetics which are urgently needed by those who have lost their limbs during the war in Eastern Ukraine, it provides financial assistance for children in need and collects donations of warm clothes, shoes and food, it seeks cooperation with UK medical institutions that are better equipped and resourced to address the needs of the wounded and injured and it helps internally displaced persons in Ukraine.

Another field where the diaspora plays a significant role and contributes to the homeland is the promotion of Ukraine abroad. The Ukrainian Institute in London is an important platform for promoting knowledge about Ukraine, Ukrainians, their culture and history and the country’s current affairs and religious life; it also runs a Ukrainian-language school and initiates public discussions.

Another example of the Ukrainian diaspora’s contribution to the homeland is a project entitled *Leadership Education And Development* (LEAD) by the Young City Club of the London non-profit organisation Ukrainian-British City Club. The project invites Ukrainian students to spend ten days in London, where it exposes them to professional environments to gain insights into the work ethics and corporate culture of the UK’s public- and private-sector institutions. Through participation in workshops, case studies and group projects, participants explore the concepts of transparency, compliance and public governance.

In another case the ‘Ukrainian Youth Association in Great Britain’ organised several summer camps for children who had lost a parent during the war. The Association of Ukrainian Women in Great Britain provided Ukrainian soldiers with medical aid and warm clothes and sent Christmas gifts to the children who had lost a parent during the war.

The Ukrainian diaspora also turned out to be a source of soft power for the country – for instance, it acted as the country’s ambassadors and cultural diplomats abroad. Their lobby raised international attention for the war in Ukraine and countered misperceptions of Ukraine and Russian misinformation.

Bringing together the observations presented in this article, we can see that the diaspora claims to be recognised by the Ukrainian government as an important stakeholder which actively transfers social, cultural and technological capital that can have an impact on Ukraine's development. From our interviews with different representatives of the Ukrainian diaspora, it became clear that the Ukrainians who are volunteering, through their daily activities, transmit fundamental European values such as respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, transparency, equality and the rule of law. European values are not only cultivated by the Ukrainian diaspora in the UK but are disseminated in interactions with state and non-state actors in Ukraine. As in our findings, Oleinikova and Bayeh (2020) in their book on the example of post-Euromaidan Ukraine, showed how modern diasporas contribute to shaping democracy from a distance and how, through their political activity, they are becoming increasingly democratised themselves.

In terms of any future post-crisis activities of the Ukrainian diaspora in the UK, the activists claimed that they 'would still be active' [UK4].<sup>8</sup> They suggested that they have to communicate with the governments in Ukraine and the UK in order to help the Ukrainian government to support its economic and political stability and to continue its dialogue with the British government in a bid to keep up its support of Ukraine.

Crucially, according to the interviewees, one of the main constraints on diaspora contributions is that the Ukrainian authorities hardly ever recognise and engage with its diaspora and have been almost absent from these diaspora activities. A senior representative of the old diaspora explained: 'There is a department (responsible for the diaspora) in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs but I've seen that absolutely very little has been done. When the Minister for Foreign Affairs was in London he did not meet with the diaspora. It was a signal' [UK14].

Ukraine's lack of collaboration with Ukrainians abroad was strongly criticised by the Ukrainian diaspora in the UK. Almost all our interviewees emphasised that the Ukrainian government and the diaspora should work together and utilise each others' strengths for synergy. As expressed by the representatives of the Ukrainian diaspora:

*The Ministry for Foreign Affairs has to elaborate a concept of collaboration with the Ukrainian diaspora in different countries. The diaspora has to participate in this programme of elaboration. A road map and action plan should be prepared together. We are ready to represent Ukraine abroad and work effectively in the lobbying for Ukraine's interests. On the other hand, feedback is very important for us. We want the Ukrainian authorities to react to our criticism, to work better and more efficiently [UK4].*

Apart from the lack of commitment by the origin country, several interviewees pointed to the weak role of the Ukrainian Embassy in London:

*Unfortunately, our (Ukrainian) Embassy in London is very passive [UK1].*

*The Ukrainian Embassy is not doing enough. I attended many events organised by other Embassies – Colombian, Brazilian, American. They are offering cultural and educational programmes representing their countries. The Ukrainian Embassy does nothing. It is not right that Ukraine is not represented [UK 16].*

Based on these findings, we can conclude that the Ukrainian diasporic community in the UK has an interest, willingness and potential to support the development of its homeland beyond the transfer of remittances to their families. It has made significant contributions to Ukraine's economic, social and political development and provided relief assistance in response to the crisis. These are indeed crucial and there is significant potential to do much more.

## Concluding remarks

Comparing the two cases – Greece and Ukraine – and their interrelationship with their diaspora reveals certain similarities and differences between them. These are two countries that went through severe economic and political crises. In the case of Greece, the unprecedented financial crisis and severe austerity immobilised the country on all fronts. Unemployment and the lack of prospects for the younger generation were two of the most prominent negative effects. Impoverishment, salary cuts, the rise in taxes, loss of confidence in the Greek economy and general social and political instability were forming the country's profile. One of the most destructive elements of the crisis that had a huge effect on the exodus of people from all educational and financial backgrounds was the absence of predictability for the future, visible prospects and hope.

The Ukraine crisis erupted in early 2014, when Ukrainian anti-government protests were followed by political upheaval and international crisis. The Euromaidan revolution and the intervention of Russia – the annexation of Crimea by Russia and the war in the east – as a consequence also plunged Ukraine into an economic crisis. Living standards in Ukraine plummeted to levels not seen since the early 2000s in a country that was already among the poorest in Europe. Ukraine has faced a sharp GDP contraction, high inflation and increased unemployment. Further to the politico-military turmoil, the Ukraine crisis soon resulted in a humanitarian emergency, with many internally displaced persons. These events in Ukraine triggered a wave of diasporic activities throughout the world.

Both countries acknowledge (Ukraine recently so) the potential importance of the diaspora in their economic development or with their political participation; however both appeared to not have consistency and a long-term vision concerning policies concerning their diasporas. Symbolically both countries acknowledged the importance of their diaspora; Greece was always consistent on this, in contrast to Ukraine which, for a long time, employed a negative rhetoric and image of its diasporans. In the case of Greece, in political and public discourse, diasporic Greeks had a positive profile. The positive rhetoric was in contradiction with the country's policy-making; for example, the diasporic vote was facilitated only recently (December 2019). The diaspora's expectations were high as, firstly, there were promises by the Greek government and, secondly, the homeland had always had expectations of the Greek diaspora, counting on the latter for their financial or other support, such as lobbying for foreign policy issues. This contrasts with the Ukrainian case where, for a long period of time, Ukrainians abroad were often perceived rather negatively. Emigrants were often seen as deserting their country. The diaspora, on the one hand, were perceived as beggars who constantly wanted something and, on the other, as a 'cash cow' [U42]. In addition, in the past the Ukrainian diaspora has been blamed for offering unsolicited advice to people back home. All these inevitably contributed to the fact that many Ukrainian diasporans do not have high expectations of their homeland government.

In any case, during the crises, neither country managed to develop policies to mobilise and efficiently engage with their diaspora in order to uplift the economic and political environment. The main reasons were the lack of active commitment by the home country, the mistrust between governments and political activism of some diaspora organisations, insufficient funding, underdeveloped diaspora institutions and a lack of political will. In both cases, the diasporas, which have grown in size due to the special circumstances in the home country, are a source of potential economic, political and cultural support. Specifically for Greece, the political and economic landscape has been one of the defining factors of the weak diaspora policy framework. The financial crisis further ingrained the problematic aspects of the Greek economy in general and the diaspora-related finances in particular. Budgetary cuts had an effect, for example, on the closure of consulates while the reduction of funding by the General Secretariat for Greeks Abroad had an impact on the financing of Greek educational programmes abroad.

Already, we can see that networks between diasporans and those in the home country operate through family, friendships and professional relationships. In the case of Greeks who left the country between 2008 and 2018 in order to search for better prospects, much research shows (as analysed above) that some of them prefer to disengage with the mother country, either out of frustration and bitterness or in order to build their new lives undistracted by the problems back home. The cultural affinity and strong bonds with the homeland that reveal themselves, for example, in the sustainability of strong networks, were not factors adequate enough to counterbalance the negative feelings of the diaspora about the chronic socio-political problems in Greece. During the crisis, a diaspora's feelings are intense but do not necessarily translate into direct action, especially when there is prolonged crisis, as in the case of Greece. As the SEESOX/DiaNEOsis survey (2020) revealed, Greeks in the UK feel emotionally attached to Greece – and feel a moral responsibility to 'their own people' who live there – but they do not feel any moral obligation to help Greece either financially or by any other means because of the country's unreliability in terms of its political system and institutions. The involvement of some academics, technocrats and philanthropic initiatives from the diaspora during the crisis represents only a section of the Greek diaspora and does not counterbalance the wider feeling of disengagement from the homeland. Any such engagement would highlight how Greece can benefit from its diaspora through a consistent and long-term policy-making that will focus on institutionalising informal networks and sporadic diaspora contributions.

In the case of Ukraine, we observed somewhat different effects of the crisis on its diaspora. The crisis had a very strong mobilising effect on Ukrainians abroad and significantly revitalised diasporic life. Euromaidan and its aftermath mobilised activists, volunteers, associations, various NGOs and foundations and triggered a powerful wave of diasporic activities. By reacting to the crisis, the Ukrainian diaspora transformed from being a more inward- to a more outward-looking community which, as a result, is now engaging more with but also claiming a stake in Ukrainian affairs. Thus, the Ukrainian diaspora can be viewed as an important stakeholder in helping Ukraine to respond to major events. The question that remains to be answered in further research is whether such diaspora engagement remains sustainable in the post-crisis period.

Thus, this comparison of these two countries and their relationship with their respective diasporas at times of crisis has, at best, a mixed outcome, illustrating that there is no simple path-dependence between crisis and diaspora engagement; crises at home do not necessarily result in diaspora engagement but the nexus depends on a whole host of factors. However, it has also become evident that these factors can be politically influenced and that there is scope for improving these relationships and engaging constructively for the sake of the diaspora contributing to improving matters in their country of origin whilst enhancing the position and self-esteem of people abroad.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Koinova (2018) instrumentalises the concept of 'transformative events' in diaspora scholarship and argues that they can transform the trajectory of already existing diaspora mobilisations. The term 'transformative event', as used in social movement scholarship, is 'a crucial turning point for a social movement that dramatically increases or decreases the level of mobilisation' (Hees and Martin 2006: 249).

<sup>2</sup> The full title of the project is *New European Mobilities at Times of Crisis: Emigration Aspirations and Practices of Young Greek Adults*. It was carried out between 2015 and 2017 and was based at the University of Macedonia, Thessaloniki, Greece.

<sup>3</sup> In the Greek case, we have used qualitative and quantitative data from different projects, scrutinised debates in the Greek Parliament and reports from the Special Permanent Committee on Greeks abroad

and studied secondary data. In the Ukrainian case, we have used findings from interviews and secondary data.

<sup>4</sup> The SAE had an advisory role to the Greek state on diaspora matters.

<sup>5</sup> The dispute about the use of the name ‘Macedonia’ occurred between Greece and the country now known as ‘The Republic of North Macedonia’ between 1991 and 2018.

<sup>6</sup> Facilitation of the voting rights of Greek citizens residing abroad has been a recurring issue in political and public discourse and a long-term request by the diaspora. In 2019, the Greek parliament voted in – by an overwhelming majority – a long overdue law which allowed Greeks in the diaspora to vote from their place of residence.

<sup>7</sup> The significance of Euromaidan for Ukraine is related to a geopolitical factor. Due to Euromaidan and post-maidan developments, Ukraine shifted from being ‘multi-vec-tored’ to being clearly pro-European and hence a pro-democratic official self-designation (including ongoing efforts to join the European Union and NATO) (George G. Grabowicz quoted in Minakov 2018).

<sup>8</sup> [UK14]: UK refers to the UK, 14 is the number of the respondent. [U42]: U refers to the Ukraine, 42 is the number of the respondent.


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