

**INTERVIEWS OF IMMIGRANTS THAT HAVE BEEN IMPRISONED  
IN  
DETENTION CAMPS IN GREECE**

**concerning the conditions of the immigrants' detention  
in the Subdirectorate for the transfer of prisoners in Thessaloniki (Metagon) and in  
Paranesti Camp (in Drama)**



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**T. was released from Metagogon the previous day. M. had been imprisoned in Metagogon and was afterwards transferred to Paranesti Camp, where he took part in the hunger strike that took place in the Camp between 23.3 and 18.4, and he was also our interpreter in Greek.**

It is not an interview in the strict sense and the conversation many times slipped away from the boundaries of the written speech. In order to enhance the understanding of the readers, the questions and the answers have been categorized in the categories of Metagogon, Paranesti Camp and the general ones, while some iconic questions have been added. The footnotes entered by our Assembly are in italics. However, our goal remained that the meaning of the answers is not changed.

## **INCIDENTS**

There was this guy that had been living here for ages. The residence permit that he had from his parents wouldn't cover him anymore, and they say to him that you have to apply for asylum. And they wanted to deport him and he had been in Greece since he was 5 and now he doesn't know what to do and he is waiting to be deported. They deport you and they don't care what is it is going to happen in your country. In several states, undercover cops arrest you as soon as you arrive at the airport and you go to court under the Islamic law. Then you are screwed. And then you may be condemned for 10 years, for life or even with death penalty. In Iran, South Arabia, Libya, China, Syria.

There was this other guy that had signed in order to leave voluntarily in one month. And they arrested him and kept him two more months. But he had said that he would leave! If you don't have any friends outside or a lawyer no one will explain anything to you. He had even paid the ticket with his own money. He was fed up inside Metagogon and he had been there for two months. And he is still waiting to be released. Because when they have us in there, they make money from the things that we buy.

There was one guy in there for 18 months. Then they give him a paper that he has to leave in 3 months. He didn't take asylum. He tried to cross the borders, they arrest him and they say to him 18 months from the beginning (now they did it 6 months again). And he is about to go crazy. He thinks: I have been outside for one month and now they brought me back here, and the chief officer says to him why are you doing like that? It is only 6 months. And one week after the hunger strike had began, it was him and an old man about 60 years old that couldn't walk, it was the third day of the hunger strike, and they released them both. The chief officer said when I can help someone, I do it. It was the second time that they arrested him and the other one was 60 years old.

In Paranesti Camp I had met one guy from Bangladesh that had been in prison for 8 years. Then they brought him to Paranesti and he waited for 20 more months until his papers were ready and he finally got out with a six-month suspension of deportation. A total of ten years in prison. There many examples like this one.

There was a guy in Paranesti who had lost his wife. He had come to Thessaloniki with his brother to find a job. They had rented a house in Athens and there were also his wife, 22 years old, his sister, 20 and another one, 18. The girls didn't even speak Greek at all. They are left alone in Athens and when the boys come to Thessaloniki, they get arrested and they take him to Metagogon. There they take him his cellphone. And they don't give you your phone numbers. I begged them to give me the numbers that I needed but they wouldn't. Two weeks later the guy went to Paranesti. They gave him back his phone, he calls his wife but it is off. They have got lost. He still doesn't know where his wife and sisters are. And he is searching for them through facebook and all, he says their names but nobody knows where they are. I know all these because I was his interpreter to the psychologist. Both brothers are still in Paranesti. He has lost his family, they have no money, nothing.

## SUBDIRECTORATE FOR THE

### TRANSFER OF PRISONERS IN THESSALONIKI (METAGOGON)

-No lager. How long have you been in Greece?

**M:** Since 2001. I came from Iran.

He (T.) has been here for 8 months. He came from Turkey and they arrested him right away. He was released from Metagogon yesterday.

-How long were you in Metagogon?

**T:** For 8 months.

-Do you know how many people are in total in there?

**T:** 100 people. 100-120, people come and go all the time. They terrify most of them and they make them sign papers and they deport them. Many people, every week about 10-15 people get deported. They brought me papers, too, so as to sign them, I didn't and they let me go the next day. In Metagogon they force most people to get deported. They lie to you, they give you a paper in Greek and they say you to sign it. They did the same to me. And I say – what am I signing here? Nothing, it's just a paper, sign it (that's exactly what they told me). I was scared and I said to them, tell me what I am signing here, M. spoke a little English so he could tell me. Then I wouldn't sign and the cop was yelling – I have a lot of work to do, get done with it. Usually you sign and then they come and take you by force. This happens all the time in Metagogon. Nobody translates. You take a paper for deportation and you don't what it is.

-Did they let you go with a six-months suspension of deportation?

**T:** Yes.

-How many people are in each cell?

**M:** From 8 to 14 people.

-Are you separated in the cells according to your nationality?

**M:** No, you can't choose. There are people from different countries, Albania, the East. You go wherever they send you. If you fight a lot with somebody, they may send to another cell. I wanted to go to another cell where a friend of mine was, but they didn't let me. There are cases, where there is everybody from the same country and they put one person from a different country who doesn't speak the language. And he might stay in there for months – there was a guy 17 months like that – and he may have nobody to talk to. If they give you number 5, you are going to stay in there till the end. And people have often a different culture, there is also the nerves and the stress and they fight.

-Are there any beds? Bathrooms? How are they?

**M:** No, no, just mattresses on the floor. There are some blankets that have been there for 10-15 years without having ever been washed. Seriously. There are diseases and other stuff in there. The toilet, the bathroom, everything was dirty. They bring people all the time, that they arrest them on the streets, and they might be sick and they all sleep with the same blankets that are never washed. In the morning an old man comes to clean up. He uses some chlorine and he leaves. Is this called cleaning? This is what happens every day. Sick people come in there. We wash our clothes in our hands in the bathroom.

-Do they give you soaps?

**M:** No, we buy them. You buy them, they don't give you anything. Not even medications. Without money, they won't give you even an aspirin. You get nothing. In Paranesti, you can do the laundry every week. In Metagogon there is nothing like that. Generally the detention facilities [*in the police stations*] are horrible – in Efzonous (I have heard, I haven't gone there) it is said to be the worst detention facilities in all Greece.

-How is it there?

**M:** A friend of mine told me that in Efzonous, you go through the doors, the offices are very clean. Then there is a corridor, at the first corner you go down a staircase. Foulness. It is a basement with windows without glasses, just wires, no heating, no bathroom. And dampness, a lot of dampness. In Liti it was the same situation. In the summer I was in Liti for 13 days.

-How is it in there?

**M:** Worse than in Metagogon.

-Are there more people in there?

**M:** Look, Liti [*the detention center in Liti*] is a room. There are two rows of mattresses and between them there is no room to walk. You step on people so as to go in the bathroom which is in the corner of the room. Two people sleep in this corner. And it is very dirty in there. I mean you look at the wall and it is rotten, it is green. Nobody will clean and they won't give you anything to clean. It is forbidden to take things inside, they don't let you have anything in there.

-Like what? Your clothes for example?

- **M:** They only let you have your clothes. Belts, toothbrushes, razor blades, they give them to you for an hour and then they take them back. And they don't give us a cleaner to sweep. They are afraid that we might do something with the cleaner. And you can see the wall that was once painted white and there are all the colors on it from coffee, food and spiders all around. One day the man who sells the food comes to me and asks me, what are you doing? You still here? I say to him, can you see over there where there are spiders stuck? And he was laughing. And I said to him, don't laugh, that's just foolishness by the police. And he answered to me, you talk too much. There was a camera also. They watch at what you are doing in there. And two days later, they took me to Paranesti. The second time I went there, there were minors inside. 17 minors. When I went there, there was no space for me to sleep. I didn't sleep, there was no mattress to sleep. I took a blanket and I slept on the mantel where we eat. Some children slept in pairs on the mattresses. They were all 14, 15, 13 years old.

-Did they tell you how long they had been in there?

- **M:** Some of them had been there for two months. When I went to Paranesti, some of the minors were there. And then they would let them go. Now from the 80 people [*minors*] that were in Paranesti, there is no one left. It is empty.

-What about the food?

-**M:** We used to buy our food. An old man used to cook. They gave us 5.80 euros every day and with this you had to spend the whole day. You buy the breakfast too: they brought us juice, milk, all 4-5 days expired. Biscuits, croissants, everything. In the noon there comes the lunch. It is not that bad, it's ok:

you pay 2.80 for a dish, there are 4 different choices plus a salad and some bread. In the evening they bring nothing.

When they have us in there, they make money from it. These things that they sell to us, from what I understood, they take them from a supermarket and they are expired, or the juices, we opened them and they stank. And you take it, you pay for it, and then you say to them it stinks, and they say to you, I don't care you should have told it right away. I used to buy milk every day and it was always expired. And they used to laugh at me, don't buy these things you are going to die. Even the cigarettes. It was obvious, they were too old or the tobacco was very dry. The 5.80 that they give you are not enough. A coffee, water, because the water inside was not drinking. I don't know what is the problem with that water, but it caused itching. Then, with the 3.80 you take your lunch and some bread. If you smoke it is your problem. It is a big problem. If you want to take a card for your cellphone it is 15 euros. So as to speak for 10 minutes, to do your work with somebody outside. It is desperation. Lawyers, friends. He (T.) used to buy a card once a week, so as to speak with his family in Turkey for 8 minutes. Many people who smoke, didn't eat for one day so that they could save some money to get cigarettes for 3 days.

-What were the prices of the food?

-**M:** The water, 1.5L, 40 cents. IL of expired juice 1 euro, a small sandwich 80 cents. Coffee and chocolate 30 cents. Cigarettes, the regular price. They brought to us the ones that were to be thrown to the garbages. The food is cooked everyday in a tavern. The first month was ok. Many people were asking and I was asking for rice. They used to bring it to us. Now T. says that things have changed and they bring the same food every time. Pasta, couscous, a plate of beans. Always beans. One day it may be chicken, with some sauce and another plate may be lettuce with some very. Just a little feta. This used to cost 50 cents. And some bread, a small slice of bread also 50 cents. All together 2.80 and for anything you take double you pay more.

-How is everyday life in Metagogon?

**-M:** We woke up at 10-11, this is the time when the marker comes and you buy your breakfast. You have nothing else to do. Outside each cell, on the opposite wall, there is a TV and they have the remote control. It is forbidden to watch the news. In the morning they put on a channel where you watch how to feed kids. One guy, from Argentina, was watching this for 8 months and he was shouting – cop, I don't want to go out, just switch this channel, this thing can drive you crazy.

-What about the behavior of the cops?

**-M:** Horrible, horrible. You can't talk. When you ask a question two or three times they get angry and many times, when you continue, they take you out of the cell, they beat you and they take you back inside. This guy that killed himself (*11 February 2015*) that's why he killed himself. For what other reason? We were both in there, in different cells but we heard what happened. He was shouting everyday because he needed his medicine, asking them to tell him what was going on, why was he in there. After a week, they separate him from the other people that were in the cell with him, and they take him to cell all alone.

-Was he asking when he was going to take his medicine or when he was going to get out?

**-M:** He asked for his medicine and they wouldn't give it to him, he probably didn't have any money to buy it, to pay for it. He took some medicine for his heart, I don't know exactly what it was. And the last thing I heard was that he was shouting and they put him in a cell all alone for six days. And one day, a friend of mine from Albania, who knew other people in there, told me “my phone had broken down, I went to make a phone call and they take me where this guy was, I was talking on the phone for half an hour, I turn around and the guy had hanged himself”. They used to beat him every day, when he was shouting and asking for his medicine and asking when he would go out, they used to take him out of his cell and beat him. Then they said that he was crazy.

-Did the chief police of Thessaloniki come to get informed about what had happened?

**-M:** 2 days later. Some guys, I think from the Social Center/Immigrant's Place asked me and I told them that he wasn't crazy at all. 4 people. When I was talking to them the chief police was behind us and he heard us. He wasn't speaking, they were really scared with what had happened. Some of us were afraid to speak or they couldn't because they don't speak Greek. 5-6 of us spoke and told that he wasn't crazy.

But the police wrote in the papers that he was crazy. And he wasn't.

-And the situation is still the same? The cops keep beating?

**-T:** This week that I was there they were saying that somebody would come for inspection. He hasn't gone yet. They came and they painted the doors from the outside, but from the inside they are still rotten. Everything they do is only superficial.

-Are there any minors in the Metagogon?

**-M:** There were, for now I don't know. One day, they brought a child that I knew, from Drama, 17 years old. He stayed in Drama for 6 months he turns half past 17 and a problem in his heart appeared, he was in pain. They brought him to Metagogon, he stayed with us for a week. One day they come and say to him, you are free to go. He was happy, he takes his bag and off he goes. When I go to Paranesti for the second time, I find him there, and I ask him, what are you doing here? Didn't you get out? He said to me that as soon as he got out of the door they arrested him and took him to Paranesti. Because I am under 18 and they can't let me go. I must wait here until I turn 18 and then they will let me go. That's what they do. When he turned 18, 20 days later they let him free. He stayed about 9 months inside. We had many incidents like that.

They came one day, 40 days ago, and they asked us if there was any room to bring a kind, from Syria, 13-14 years old, to stay for a night and leave in the morning. We were joking, have you opened a playground here, you assholes, you should be ashamed. We said that we had no problem, but how can you bring a child in here with us, can't you think what is going on in here? He stares at us, then says ok ok and leaves. I don't know where they took the kid. Did they keep it on his own until the morning? Will he go to court? I don't know. Because we could only see until the wires, we couldn't see what happened beyond them.

-Are there any penal prisoners in Metagogon?

**-M:** No, only for a few days maybe, and then they take them to a prison.

-What about women? Are there any women in the detention centers?

**-M:** No. I only know about Metagogon, here in Thessaloniki. Two years ago, I was waiting for the truck to take me to Metagogon. There were two cells in an L shape and there were 10 women prisoners.

-What about inside Metagogon?

**-M:** In Metagogon there are two rooms for women, not big ones.

-Where was that?

**-M:** Near Dentropotamos. I don't know well. Once that I was passing by on bus, I understood that it was there. But I am not familiar with the area. They arrested a family, they took the man to Metagogon, about the rest we don't know where they took them. I was in Metagogon for three months, a lamp had been blown and they didn't change it. We entered the room without a lamp and they say that still there is no lamp there. We had a phone and it had broken down and they still haven't fixed it.

-Do you know what happens to the minors and their parents? Do they separate them?

**-M:** If they arrest them together, they keep them together. If there is room in the open structures, they take them there. There are structures like that in Patra, here in Thessaloniki, in Athens and two more but I don't know where. I have heard that there is no room there, that they are too crowded. They wait for enough space to be available, and then they send them there from detention facilities, from everywhere.

-So the minors that are in the detention facilities now, they have come without parents?

**-M:** Yes.

-Otherwise they don't separate them?

**-M:** If they are with parents, no they don't. They leave them with their family. I haven't seen a family with little children stay inside for a long period. They keep them for a couple of days but then they let them go. In Kos [*Greek island*] came 200 people in the last week, it showed it on TV. I came from there too, when I came 14 years ago and I slept two days there. I saw, it they were keeping there 200 people with a

bathroom for all of them and one person to clean the place. So what can they do? They will pay for a hotel for a couple of days waiting to see what the state will respond [*to their application for asylum*]. Families pay to stay in hotels.

-Can you make phone calls to people outside Metagogon if you want to?

**-M:** Outside every cell there is a phone. Ours, outside cell number 6, had broken down when I was still there. When we want to make a phone call, we have to tell them two hours ahead, they will tell the chief police to see if he will give us one or half an hour, to take us to other cells so as to speak for 10 minutes and then back to our cells. And this happened once a day, and many times they said to us that they had a lot to do and they didn't have enough time and that we should try tomorrow. I had the same problem. Every time I wanted to make a phone call, I had to tell them two hours ahead, to fight with them or to beg them to let me make a call for 10 minutes.

-Couldn't you have cellphones with you in Metagogon and in Liti?

**-M:** Neither in Metagogon nor in Liti. The first day you arrive there, you turn off the cellphone, they put it in a box with the rest of your things and they keep it in the office. Only in Paranesti. There, if the cellphone has a camera, they brake it. They use a screwdriver and they break the camera so that you don't record anything in there. But we had Internet.

-If a hunger strike takes place in Amygdaleza or in another detention center, do you learn it? Is there this communication?

**-M:** If it takes place in Metagogon, it is difficult, I cannot call there. Somebody from there has to call me, like T. used to call me when he was in there, or another friend of mine from Iran. If they have a card for their cell phone they call. In Paranesti you learn it easily.

-Do you know if any hunger strikes have taken place in Metagogon?

-**M**: There was a guy from Iran who had created a political documentary and they were after him for that and that's why he left his country. They arrested him in Greece. He made a 33 days hunger strike in Metagogon. They beat him very much. They woke him up at nights and threw to him buckets with water. This happens only in Greece. In Iran there is dictatorship, there the state is very strong but if somebody starts a hunger strike in jail they don't beat him. While, here in Greece, especially if you have no experience, they beat you immediately to stop so that no one learns about it.

## **Incidents inside Metagogon**

There was this guy that got itching on his skin. For a week he was asking to take him to the hospital. They wouldn't take him so that he wouldn't pass his disease to others in the hospital and then they released him, he is out now. Without taking him to the hospital and giving him medicines, they released him and said to him go.

They had brought a guy from Bulgaria, who had a problem I don't know what and he couldn't go to the toilet. And for a week they wouldn't take him to the hospital and he kept lying down. The rest of the prisoners kept shouting to the police and helping him anyway they could. After a week, the guys that were in the same cell with him, helped him go to the hospital.

They guy I was telling you about last night, from Egypt, he has something at his hand. He can't wash his clothes. And you have no other way, you have to do it in a bucket in the bathroom. He finds it difficult to clean himself, too. And they keep him inside for about 5 months. He has applied for asylum because he can't go back to Egypt and they tell him that they will deport him. He has paid 300 euros to a lawyer and he has done nothing.

## PARANESTI

-Inside the camp, do they separate you according to your citizenship?

**-M:** No. As you saw, in every row there are 7 containers. In one of them there is a mosque and a washing machine. Every room can use the washing machine two days a week. There you can choose who you are staying with. There are 12 people in every room, if there is enough space you go there.

-If somebody starts a hunger strike, will you all learn about it?

**-M:** Yes, easily because we all have cell phones and the rooms are close to each other. Now the guy from Egypt still continues the hunger strike *[from 23 march]*. He goes on with the hunger strike, they took him to the hospital and two days ago he called me and told me that the doctors had prescribed him 5-6 medicines and they only give him one. When you need to take medicine and you don't have money, they don't care. Whatever is your problem they give you an aspirin. Now you may have a problem to your stomach, they won't give you medicine for this, it may cost 5 euros, they won't pay for it.

-If a hunger strike begins in Amygdaleza or in another detention center, will you learn about it?

**-M:** Yes, in Paranesti you can because everybody has cellphones.

-Couldn't you have cellphones with you in Metagogon and in Liti?

**-M:** Neither in Metagogon nor in Liti. The first day you arrive there, you turn off the cellphone, they put it in a box with the rest of your things and they keep it in the office. Only in Paranesti. There, if the cellphone has a camera, they brake it. They use a screwdriver and they break the camera so that you don't record anything in there. But we had Internet. We had some cellphones where we could put 100 every night and have wifi and facebook. But we couldn't have cameras inside.

-What do you mean, they only let you have access to the Internet at night?

**-M:** It wasn't them who gave us access to the Internet. Some guys had broken a password and that's how we had Internet. Every night after 12.

-That is to say in secret.

**-M:** In secret. From some cops that didn't have Internet and they did it this way and we learned it, too. One said I don't have Internet I have to pay for it, and we said to him write this password and you will have, he was laughing. He said "Do you have Internet", we said "We have". My cellphone didn't have wifi so I had to pay 5 euros and so I had Internet.

-If somebody had health problems, how did they deal with it?

**-M:** When somebody had to take a surgery and had some serious trouble that had to go to the hospital, they let them go after two days. Lately that we were inside, many people went out like that.

-Did they let them go with the the 30-days paper (the department note)?

**-M:** No, with the six-months paper. And for the ones that don't have a residence permit and insurance, they tell them to pay themselves for the surgery. A guy was released because of his eyes, he couldn't see or something like that. And he should have a surgery, it costed a lot of money. He told them, I don't need anything just let me go, I have money. They would let him go and I think that he is in Italy now. And he will do the surgery in Germany, I don't know where exactly, where his brother lives. A guy that was released the same time with me, he had three screws, we knew that. Then, when he went to the hospital they found out that he had 8 screws. The chief cop comes and shows me the radiography and tells me that he had 8 screws and that he thought that we were trying to fool him so as to let him go. And after two days they released him. He participated in the hunger strike with us.

-The people that have been in detention centers, where do they go afterwards, what is the plan?

-**M:** Most people say, why stay here? They don't give us papers, we can't find a job.

-And where do they go?

-**M:** They find ways to go to Italy. Many go also to Germany, Belgium, England. Ok, for England they have to pay a lot of money, 8-10 thousand euros. From here to Italy it's 5,000 by truck. From Serbia on foot, by taxi it's 3,000 euros. If you want by boat, it's 4,000. by plane it's another price. You understand? Every route has it's own method and it's own price. For Italy a certain price, for France another, if you want to go to Germany it is 5,000 euros for sure. From here, from Greece. Let alone how much they payed to reach here. From Turkey to Greece they pay 2,500-3,000 or even 4,000 for some who don't know.

-How and whom you pay, does he find you? Do you know from one another?

-**M:** You find somebody who works for him. You find the second at rank guy, the first one you never meet him. You make the arrangement, you leave the money to the people who know him, who do this job and keep the money. And they take the money in installments, like banks. In many occasions money are lost, you give the money and they lose it and they earn a lot of money this way. From a lot of people. They collect 5-10 thousand from 20 people, they erase the phone numbers and then you can never find them. This happens.

-How do you find the lawyers? Is it common that you give them money and they do nothing for you?

-**M:** A lot, a lot of money. Usually, somebody know a lawyer, and somebody else asks him do you know a lawyer? He give him the phone number. Many lawyers take the money, do nothing and after a month they say that nothing can be done.

T. didn't know the situation and now he has to pay as much money. He has already paid 2,600 to get out. Two days ago, when he got out, he paid 1,500 for one court. And I called the lawyer and asked him what do we have to do now and he said he would call us back. He has the envelop with all the papers of T. Now we don't know when he will call. In a month, in two months, in ten days, we don't know. Now T. is thinking that if he is to stay in Greece he has to find another lawyer and pay more money.

-Are you thinking about staying in Greece? Do you want to?

-**M:** If we find jobs, yes. If T. gets papers, residence permit, he will stay, otherwise, because his brother is in Italy, he will go there. Now he will go to Athens and rent a house and wait for the court. He came out yesterday, he doesn't know.

-Do you have to appear in a police station every 15 days?

-**B:** I have to appear every 2 months, when the decision for the residence permit is issued.

-**T:** Mine is different (a six-months suspension of deportation). In these 6 months the lawyer will call me to tell me when the court takes place. They I will have to go to a commission, what will decide if I will take the permit or not. What B. has been doing for the last two years. Now with Syriza the procedures are quicker.

-Do you see a different with Syriza [*as a government*]?

-**B:** I had been waiting for years for my papers, for the decision of the commission. Now I took them in a month. And many other people that I know, Albanians who had no papers for 10 years, now they took them within a month. I had been waiting 9 months for the commission.

BECAUSE OF  
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