

Raising Children in Greece

This is a talk about the low birth rate in Greece, the possible reasons for it, and some steps that could be taken to encourage families to have more children.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

For several decades now, the newspapers have been telling us that the birth rate in Greece is dangerously low. Not enough children are being born to maintain the population.

Until quite recently – even today in some cases – this discussion was usually accompanied by data on the much higher birth rates in various neighbouring countries. Journalists would propound doomsday scenarios of a depopulated Greece surrounded by powerful, overpopulated neighbours. The conclusion was usually an appeal to Greek women to do the patriotic thing and start having more babies immediately.

It is true that the birth rate in Greece is comparatively low. But this does not necessarily constitute a national emergency. Birth rates are low in other European countries as well. It seems to be normal for the birth rate to fall as economic development increases.

It is also unlikely that this trend will be reversed by an appeal to the patriotism of Greek women. There are very practical reasons why young people hesitate to have children, reasons that have nothing to do with any lack of patriotic sentiment. It is simply not easy to raise children in Greece today.

For one thing, in most young married couples, both husband and wife work outside the home. A generation ago, they might have relied on grandparents to provide child care and help with the household. Today, however, young couples often live far from their own parents, often in an entirely different city, and they can no longer expect grandmother to do the babysitting.

Secondly, having children costs money. Aside from clothes and food, children need schooling and health care, and both of these can become quite expensive, since the services provided free of cost by the state are not always very satisfactory.

A better way to increase the birth rate might, then, be to make it easier for young families to raise children. This could be done by providing child care facilities at low cost, and then by making sure that public education and health care are more adequate. In that way, parents would not have to rely on the private sector to supplement inadequate public services, and it would be easier to raise children.

Being a parent is a serious responsibility. It takes 20 years, or more, to raise a family. So, it is understandable that young couples hesitate to commit themselves if they cannot be sure of some practical support from society.

Thank you.

(400 words)