Sunday, November 29, 2026
tovima.com

TO BHMA
International edition

Including articles from
FINANCIAL TIMES
THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Abdul El-Sayed Is Already Shaking Up the Senate

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

By Sabrina Siddiqui

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Incoming Democratic Sen. Abdul El-Sayed of Michigan is emerging as one of his party's most disruptive forces after helping propel a challenge to Senate leadership that is gaining steam.

The outspoken former public-health official was among the first to publicly call on Sen. Chris Van Hollen of Maryland to run against Sen. Chuck Schumer of New York for the party's top leadership post when he did so in April.

Please turn to Page 2

FINANCIAL TIMES

A French crisis would be a threat — and opportunity — for Europe

By Martin Wolf

How well will the EU cope with the populist nationalism on the rise across the continent? The bloc is the world's most advanced supranational arrangement. France and Germany are its two indispensable nations. Yet what seems to lie ahead is a high probability of nationalist governments in both, at a time of great economic pressure. This is a particularly significant danger in France, where the far right seems the most likely winner of the presidential election next spring. This could create existential crises for the EU. Yet, as Jean Monnet, one of the EU's founders, wrote: "I have always believed that Europe would be made in crises." The crises now looming are big enough to break Europe — but also perhaps to make it, as he hoped.

Please turn to Page 3



STEFANOS RAPANIS/REUTERS

A Hellenic Coast Guard officer helps a man as migrants arrive at the port of Kaloi Limenes, following a rescue operation on the island of Crete, Greece, November 9, 2026.

TO BHMA International edition

'We are treating people like merchandise'

By Melina Giannakouli

In recent years, Europe has faced increased migratory pressures, driven largely by ongoing conflicts, wars and humanitarian crises across the globe.

In response, there has been a growing push by European governments to tighten migration policies, strengthen border controls and curb irregular migration and migrant smuggling.

Developments such as the Ceuta migrant crisis have further reinforced calls for strict border management, while growing electoral support for far-right parties has added to the political pressure surrounding migration.

Recently, the EU adopted the Return Regulation, a scheme seeking to establish a system for the "return of third-country nationals staying illegally in the Union." Facilitating the fast-tracking of deportations, the initiative forms part of a broader EU effort to tighten migration, which was further reinforced by the European Commission's decision to strengthen the role of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, Frontex, in deportation operations.

Now Greece—along with Denmark, the Netherlands, Austria, and Germany—has spearheaded a new initiative designed to tackle migration in the region, proposing the establishment of a migrant return hub in Rwanda.

Please turn to Page 4

TO BHMA International edition

Not Quite Either, Fully Both: Growing Up in the Greek Diaspora

By Maria Katopodi

It's a line you hear often from Greek immigrants' children who were born and raised in America, Australia or elsewhere abroad. Sometimes delivered as a joke, sometimes not, the sentiment points to something real: an identity split between two cultures, which children of the diaspora learn to handle from a very early age in the schoolyard and among friends. Beneath the split lie two questions that follow them for years: Who am I? And where do I belong?

Danai Siamou-Kaarakainen, a clinical psychologist and psychotherapist who lives in Finland, specializes in migration psychology and is herself the mother of a young daughter, tells *TO VIMA International Edition* that the most common emotional struggle she sees in children and teenagers growing up between two cultures is a persistent sense of not being "enough" of either one.

Please turn to Page 6



Apostolia Mandzoutsos-Kleftogiannis at her business in Melbourne, Australia.



Abdul El-Sayed Is Already Shaking Up the Senate

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Michigan Democrat helps ignite challenge to Democratic Leader Schumer that signals he will unsettle both parties when he arrives in Washington



US Senator-elect Abdul El-Sayed (D-MI) walks on the day of the 120th Congress new member orientation meetings at the US Capitol in Washington, DC, US, November 9, 2026.

KYLIE COOPER/REUTERS

Continued from Page One

About half a dozen Democratic senators have now publicly endorsed Van Hollen's long-shot bid, including most recently Sen. Elissa Slotkin, El-Sayed's more centrist Democratic counterpart from Michigan. They will vote Dec. 1.

El-Sayed's pressure on Schumer suggests he will shift his party's traditional alliances in ways that unsettle both sides of the aisle. His victory in Michigan, where he ran on an unabashedly progressive platform in a battleground state that President Trump carried twice, has handed him a national stage to push an agenda that includes sweeping changes to healthcare, campaign finance and U.S. foreign aid.

In a recent interview during a visit to Washington for a Senate orientation, the 42-year-old epidemiologist was unsparing in his criticism of his own party while firing barbs at Republicans. He argued that voters who put Democrats back in power were looking for something more than a return to the status quo.

"What voters told us is, they hate Donald Trump and Trumpism," El-Sayed said while sitting at his desk in a temporary ninth-floor office space that overlooks the U.S. Capitol. "They didn't tell us they love us. Our job is to go earn our mandate."

GOP opponents see in El-Sayed a worrisome turn for the Democratic Party. "They're going hard left, even to the point of socialism, and that's a real problem, because socialism has wrecked every country [where] it's been tried," said Sen. John Hoeven (R., N.D.).

In the past two weeks, El-Sayed has offered a glimpse of his priorities during meetings across his state and the nation's capital. At a retirement event hosted by a local United Auto Workers chapter in Dearborn, Mich., he reaffirmed his support for proposals including property-tax freezes for seniors. Addressing a congregation at a Black church in Detroit, he pledged to overhaul the healthcare system by creating a Medicare-for-All insurance plan. And in a surprise appearance at a gathering of Muslim leaders in Washington, he reinforced the need to rein in U.S. military aid.

Last week, El-Sayed launched a political-action committee that will help him build his network and stake out a more influential role in the Democratic Party ahead of the 2028 presidential election.

The moves are part of an effort to consolidate support and stand out in a Congress with an unusually large incoming freshman class. He tapped Brenda Abdelall, a former aide to former Vice President Kamala Harris's presidential campaign who also served in the Biden administration, to lead his transition team.

Republicans are already working to make El-Sayed and other progressive Democrats a liability for the party as it prepares to take control of the House and Senate. The Republican National Committee seized on Van Hollen's challenge to Schumer to highlight tensions between the party's establishment and its left flank, portraying his backing from El-Sayed and other progressives as evidence of Van Hollen's ties to what they describe as the party's most radical members.

El-Sayed, during his interview with The Wall Street Journal, offered a glimpse of how he plans to navigate the Senate alongside some of his fiercest Republican critics. They include Sen. Ted Cruz of Texas, who during the campaign called El-Sayed "a jihadist" and warned that "Americans will die" if El-Sayed were elected. El-Sayed is the first Muslim elected to the U.S. Senate.

"He's an a—hole," El-Sayed said of Cruz. "But if he's the a—hole from Texas with whom I have to work, I'll work with the a—hole from Texas. I'll still call him an a—hole. But if we're going to get some things done, let's get some things done."

Asked about working with El-Sayed, Cruz said he would "work with anyone who's doing positive things for America" while reiterating claims he aired during the campaign that El-Sayed supported the Muslim Brotherhood, a charge El-Sayed has denied. Cruz declined to comment on El-Sayed's characterization of him.

In recent interviews, other Senate Republicans were divided on whether they could find common ground with the Michigan freshman. Sen. Rick Scott of Florida said El-Sayed's push for Medicare-for-All would "destroy the Medicare program."

Sen. Bernie Moreno (R., Ohio), the chair of the National Republican Senatorial Committee who during the campaign said El-Sayed "should be nowhere near Washington," said Friday that he had called to congratulate the Democrat on his victory. The pair busted each other's chops about the college-football rivalry between Michigan and Ohio State. Moreno said he could envision working with El-Sayed on policies supporting U.S. automakers and other efforts to lower costs. "We'll see what kind of senator he wants to be," Moreno said.

Sen. John Kennedy (R., La.), who campaigned alongside El-Sayed's opponent Mike Rogers and suggested El-Sayed "sleeps in a bin Laden jersey," said he had no problem working with the incoming Democrat.

El-Sayed's race brought to the fore the debate over U.S. support for Israel and served as a test of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee's political influence. The group and its affiliates spent nearly $30 million backing his primary opponent, Rep. Haley Stevens , and close to $10 million to boost Rogers in the general election.

In the interview, El-Sayed said his opposition to unconditional military aid isn't specific to Israel and applies to countries including Egypt, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. He said strategic partnerships should be conditioned on other nations upholding international law.

"We do not pay our taxes in this country to buy bombs and tanks for other countries," he said. "We should not be subsidizing other countries' militaries while our kids' schools crumble."

Disagreements over El-Sayed's position on Israel have continued to draw scrutiny from more moderate Democrats. They also contributed to Stevens's decision to withdraw her endorsement of El-Sayed and back Rogers just two days before the election, a move that made her a pariah among Democrats.

Senate Democrats will use a secret ballot next month when they pick either Schumer or Van Hollen as their leader. Schumer has said he has locked down the votes he needs to hold on to the post.

El-Sayed's support for Van Hollen didn't stop him and Schumer from sharing a friendly interaction when the Democratic leader posed with incoming freshmen at the U.S. Capitol last week.

"I'm very friendly with everyone," El-Sayed said. "Unless it's JD Vance ."

Even those two political rivals, who clashed on the campaign trail, are discussing the possibility of sitting down together, according to representatives in both of their offices.



ELIZABETH FRANTZ/REUTERS

US Senator-elect Abdul El-Sayed (D-MI) walks following a weekly Democrat policy luncheon on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC, US, November 10, 2026.

TO BHMA

Articles republished from
FINANCIAL TIMES

© The Financial Times Limited 2026. All Rights Reserved. Not to be redistributed, copied, or modified in any way.
To Vima/ OT is solely responsible for providing this translation, and The Financial Times Limited does not accept any liability for its accuracy or quality.

A French crisis would be a threat — and opportunity — for Europe

A far-right victory could spark fiscal chaos, but it might end up strengthening the EU



Continued from Page One

The latest FT averages of French polls show Marine Le Pen (on the far right) on around 35 per cent in the first round and Jean-Luc Mélenchon (on the far left) on around 17 per cent: so the fury seen on French streets is not limited to protesters. Le Pen wins against all potential rivals in the second round.

In his disturbing recent book, my colleague Victor Mallet notes that if a victorious Le Pen were merely to imitate Viktor Orbán's disruption and disobedience, she would create, in the words of Mujtaba Rahman of the Eurasia Group, "the greatest crisis in the EU's history". France might refuse to recognise many EU laws and agreements. It might also break with the bloc's consensus on foreign policy, not least by moving closer to Russia. Yet it could also swiftly find itself in a fiscal crisis that would, in turn, create a dangerous threat to itself. Mélenchon would be at least as dangerous.

The French fiscal danger is threefold: first, its deficits and debts are high; second, the domestic politics of fiscal retrenchment is brutal; and, third, France will depend in extremis on support from the ECB. It is not hard to imagine that a crisis could go very badly under a nationalist government elected by voters fiercely opposed to any "austerity".

At the end of last year, French gross public debt was 116 per cent of GDP, up from 66 per cent in 2007, while Germany's was only 63 per cent. The former was still well below Italy's 137 per cent. But the French fiscal deficit was 5.1 per cent of GDP, against Italy's 3.1 per cent, and its primary fiscal deficit (before interest spending) was 3 per cent against Italy's primary surplus of 0.5 per cent (see charts). Not surprisingly, France has been under the EU's "excess deficit procedure" for some years.

In its November 17 forecasts, the European Commission predicted French growth of 0.4 per cent this year and 0.6 per cent in 2027, fiscal deficits of 5.5 per cent of GDP this year and 5.4 per cent in 2027 and gross public debt of 123 per cent by 2028. What makes the deficits so difficult to curb is that total spending is 58 per cent of GDP (the second highest in the EU). As my colleague John Burn-Murdoch has explained, "In 2024, the French government spent more on pensions than on education, policing, housing, infrastructure and defence combined." It is politically unable to cut pension spending. Yet raising taxes still higher would surely be crazy.

French interest rates are lower than those of the US or UK. But they are higher than those of the former crisis-hit Eurozone countries. The interest burden on the government is also bound to rise from 2.6 per cent of GDP this year as the old bonds mature. France has the same inflation risk as other Eurozone members. So, its adverse spreads must reflect country-specific risks.



The question then is what would happen if, under a new government, investors were to flee from French debt. In July 2022, the ECB announced its "Transmission Protection Instrument". This would allow it to buy public sector debt of a member in trouble. But doing so would be conditional on the member's compliance with the EU's fiscal framework. For a member state subject to the excess deficit procedure, the decision would be political. In the case of France, it would be doubly political: the country is far too important to abandon; but others might feel it is too expensive to save. It is not hard to imagine what Germans (or those in other "frugal" countries) would feel if they thought they were signing a blank cheque to hostile French nationalists via the ECB.

Much would depend on how the new president behaved. Le Pen has herself suggested a "golden rule" to limit national debt to 60 per cent of GDP and reduce the public deficit by 0.5 per cent of GDP annually, with a view to reaching "close to a balanced budget". Given the scale of the task and the desires of her supporters for more spending, such a voluntary turnaround seems unlikely. More likely would be the onset of a severe crisis and so a moment of truth.

In 1981 François Mitterrand was elected on a dirigiste and Keynesian economic platform. Subsequently, both of these planks were abandoned as impractical and undesirable. These reversals ultimately led to the creation of the euro. No doubt this was partly because Mitterrand himself was so sympathetic to the European cause. But it was also because he recognised there was no longer a future for France as a great power outside what was to become the EU. A Europe of individual nation states is ultimately an irrelevant Europe. This is far truer today, with an indifferent US, a risen China and a rising India.

The French right and left of today are different from those of the 1980s, as is France itself. But, given subsequent history, especially the creation of the euro, they could face an even more brutal choice than Mitterrand rather quickly: tough fiscal stringency or the risk of "Frexit". The crisis that is likely to arise would be the sort of event that Monnet himself predicted. If so, it just might turn out to be the French right's fate to strengthen the EU, not weaken it.

© 2026 The Financial Times Ltd. All rights reserved. Please do not copy and paste FT articles and redistribute by email or post to the web.

TO BHMA International edition

‘We are treating people like merchandise’

Greece joins four EU countries in a plan to transfer rejected asylum seekers to Rwanda, raising questions over accountability, migrant safety and whether the controversial scheme can avoid the failures of previous attempts



Migrants raise their hands as they are gathered following a rescue operation, at the port of Kaloi Limenes, on the island of Crete, Greece, November 9, 2026.

STEFANOS RAPANIS/REUTERS

Continued from Page One

The groundwork for the initiative was laid in September in Copenhagen at a Core Group meeting attended by Greek Migration and Asylum Minister Thanos Plevris and his counterparts.

The initiative to make Rwanda the “return hub” for European deportees was announced at a press conference held on November 16 on the sidelines of the annual conference of the International Centre for Migration Policy Development in Vienna. The plan aims to transfer migrants who have exhausted all legal avenues to remain in the bloc to third countries. The scheme applies to rejected asylum seekers in the five participating countries. The initial pilot and testing phase will involve the return of single men, while diplomatic sources told the AFP news agency that the hub is expected to accommodate approximately 100 people, potentially allowing each of the five participating countries to send around 20.

Under the proposed arrangement, those transferred to Rwanda would be given the “opportunity” to integrate into Rwandan society, voluntarily return to their countries of origin, or travel to another country that they can legally enter.

A coalition of 47 organizations, including two Greek NGOs—INTERSOS Hellas and the Greek Council for Refugees (GCR)—has called on European governments to abandon the proposed return hubs, warning that transferring responsibility for migrants to third countries risks undermining fundamental rights and accountability. For their part, the participating countries have described the arrangement as an “equal and mutually beneficial partnership,” with Rwanda’s Interior Ministry stating that the parties are working closely with international partners, including the European Commission, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) to ensure that the process is lawful, ethical and consistent with international human rights law.

A memory from the past

However, Rwanda is no stranger to such schemes. Similar attempts to use Rwanda as a destination for transferred migrants have been pursued previously by the UK and Israel, while the country has also entered into arrangements with the United States. The earlier UK scheme proved particularly controversial: following its attempted implementation, the UK Supreme Court ruled in 2023 that Rwanda could not be considered a safe third country to which asylum seekers could be transferred.

The arrangement eventually collapsed. Following the UK’s decision to scrap the deal, which included payments to Rwanda to help cover its costs, the Rwandan government brought a case before the Permanent Court of Arbitration, alleging breaches of the agreement. An international arbitration panel in The Hague subsequently rejected Rwanda’s multimillion-dollar claim against the UK. While the legal flaws of the UK-Rwanda scheme became apparent in 2023, the current European proposal is not, based on the available information, unlawful.

Speaking in an interview with *TO VIMA International Edition*, Professor Maria Gavouneli, President of the Greek National Commission for Human Rights, clarifies distinctions between the two proposed plans. “You might recall that in the original, the UK was supposed to export people not just after the identification process was over, but also while they were waiting for the final decision on the asylum process,” she said. “This is not the case here. The idea is that you have exhausted all remedies available in the EU context.”

The facilities Rwanda had built under the UK agreement remained in place following the deal’s abandonment, Dr. Gavouneli emphasizes. “They are stuck with these hubs... and now the European Union comes along and says okay, since you have the facilities in place, why don’t we pay you more money to use these facilities. Overall, I would argue that this is not the most ethical or decent approach.”

Criticisms of the scheme have highlighted the humanitarian implications, despite the safeguards put in place for human rights protection. Dr. Gavouneli emphasizes that, taken point by point, there is nothing unlawful with the current plan, which is far better constructed than the original idea. “They have come up with all sorts of guarantees. For instance, there will be no underage people sent over. They are trying not to break up families, so what they are essentially trying to do is return young males who might be willing and able to work.”

Nevertheless, while noting that the plan’s compatibility with human rights law is not a black-or-white matter, she stresses deep concerns about its implications. “We are treating people like merchandise, putting them on a plane and transferring them from one side of the world to another, to a place they have absolutely no connection with... How different is that from what the traffickers are doing? I’m deeply worried about that.”

Beyond her legal and practical concerns, Professor Gavouneli was especially critical of what she describes as the inherent cruelty of the scheme. “What I most certainly object to is that the plan is inefficient, ineffective and extremely expensive but also very, very cruel. And when you talk about cruelty in situations like this, you need to have some kind of conversation about whether it is cost-effective.”

Rwanda as a destination for Europe’s returns

The choice of Rwanda as a migrant’s “second chance” is made even more contentious by the country’s human rights record.

Rwanda has made strides since the 1994 genocide in improving its profile and international status. This has involved participating in various initiatives, including Formula 1’s plan to return to Africa with a Grand Prix in Rwanda early in the next decade. Nonetheless, concerns remain over restrictions on dissent, alleged ill-treatment in detention facilities and the government’s reported support for armed groups in neighboring countries, such as the M23 in the Democratic Republic of Congo, which led the US to impose sanctions on Rwanda’s defense ministry.



A view of The Hope Hostel accommodation in Kigali, Rwanda June 10, 2022.

JEAN BIZIMANA/REUTERS



LEONHARD FOEGER/REUTERS

Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen, Austrian Chancellor Christian Stocker, Interior Minister Gerhard Karner, German Interior Minister Alexander Dobrindt, Greece's Minister for Asylum and Migration Thanos Plevris, Denmark's Minister for Immigration and Integration Morten Boedskov, Dutch Foreign Minister Tom Berendsen and Rwanda's Interior Minister Vincent Biruta attend a press conference in Vienna, Austria, November 16, 2026.

The Return Regulation specifies that agreements are permitted only with countries that respect international human rights standards and prohibit refoulement—conditions critics say Rwanda fails to meet.

In another interview with *TO VIMA International Edition*, Dr. Apostolos Veizis, Executive Director of INTERSOS Hellas, one of the two Greek NGOs among the 47 signatories condemning the scheme, was asked whether choosing a different third country as the destination for the proposed return hubs would address the concerns surrounding the initiative. In reply, he stressed that "Austria's own asylum authority reports torture in detention, arbitrary arrests and impunity within the security services in its country information on Rwanda. In 2023, the UK Supreme Court found a real risk of refoulement, noting that people sent to Rwanda under the earlier Israeli deal were regularly moved on covertly to Uganda. In Rwanda, courts are not independent of the government, security forces have arrested and detained persons arbitrarily and without due process, complaints of ill-treatment are routinely disregarded, and the country has not demonstrated an ability to ensure fair procedures and adequate protection for people forcibly transferred from another country. Above all, it remains unclear how oversight could work. Choosing a different third country would be just as problematic."

Furthermore, while the Return Regulation aims to set up an independent monitoring mechanism, it does not clarify what happens when violations fall outside the scope of the agreement. This is problematic as it limits the EU's power to facilitate and ensure the good treatment of migrants. "By relying on third countries to take on its protection obligations, the EU makes itself dependent on non-EU states, enabling third countries to leverage migration in line with their own political agendas. At the same time, such agreements, negotiated amid deep power asymmetries, shift responsibility onto countries that already host more refugees with far fewer resources. They reduce African agency and erode the promise of an equal EU–Africa partnership. By placing its own return agenda above the priorities African countries have recently set out, the EU undermines its credibility as a trusted partner," Dr. Veizis says.

The call by the 47 organizations to abandon the initiative echoes a concern also raised by Dr. Veizis: "Rebranding such arrangements does not change their reality: they are forced transfers which push people outside the EU into countries that often have shown disregard for their rights, blurring the lines of responsibility and jurisdiction." A recurring criticism is that such an agreement allows partner countries to evade accountability for human rights. "All the deals the EU has made with Turkey, Lebanon, Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, Rwanda and many other countries are used by those countries' leaders to keep EU governments in a position where they cannot hold them accountable," Dr. Veizis says.

A gap in accountability

The proposed initiative also raises broader questions about accountability, particularly given the criticism several EU member states, including Greece, have faced over their own treatment of migrants and asylum seekers. According to Dr. Veizis, poor reception conditions, overcrowding, inadequate healthcare, limited interpretation services and a lack of basic sanitation are not simply the result of insufficient resources; they form part of a deliberate deterrence strategy.

Externalizing migration management risks further distancing European governments from their obligations by moving both migrants—and the responsibility for protecting their rights—beyond EU borders and public scrutiny. Rather than providing a solution, such arrangements may exacerbate the vulnerabilities of displaced people, exposing them to smuggling and trafficking networks, violence, extortion, torture and other human rights abuses.

Rather than addressing existing shortcomings in reception and asylum procedures, Greece risks endorsing a model that transfers responsibility elsewhere, Dr. Veizis argues. "Greece is among the signatories of an initiative calling for the revision of the EU Directive. As governments pursue a broader tightening of migration and asylum policies, it is a sad 'joke' ... to argue that the existing arrangements are placing increasing pressure on public services, housing and education systems."

With crucial elections in several European countries next year, Dr. Gavouneli warns of the implications of putting migration higher on the agenda. Such discussions, she notes, "create a lot of hostile reactions, hate speech and xenophobia." She also fears that any more conservative policy responses to the topic might send Europe down a dangerous path. "Any concession to this kind of argumentation, any idea that somehow the far right is right in developing these reactions, sounds extremely risky to me."

Dr. Veizis concurs, stressing that far-right wins in the upcoming elections would dramatically alter the bloc's political landscape. "On paper, the EU is renewing its commitment to equality," he says. "In practice, EU policies are accelerating border militarization, increasing defense spending, and dismantling social protections, with marginalized and racialized communities bearing the brunt."

As migration continues to dominate political agendas across Europe, Rwandan Interior Minister Vincent Biruta pushed back against criticism from NGOs, challenging them to propose an alternative to the initiative rather than simply condemning it. Asked how he would respond to Biruta's remarks, Dr. Veizis stressed that the responsibility for proposing alternatives lies with the EU, which needs to reduce reliance on irregular routes and smuggling networks. "The EU's mainstream migration policies focused on border securitization, externalized containment and returns can be replaced by community-based alternatives to detention, legal pathways and safe passages, expanding resettlement, humanitarian corridors and family reunification."

With the plan still in its infancy, questions remain about how the initiative can be implemented and to what extent human rights safeguards can be guaranteed. Dr. Gavouneli notes that while a general outline exists, the exact terms of the agreement have still to be agreed upon. "Clearly, a lot of work still needs to be done on clarifying the practical issues," she says. "This is the first indication of what the scheme is all about. We don't know the particulars, and they might well change along the way. I still have my doubts about whether it will actually happen."

Although Dr. Gavouneli remains unconvinced that the initiative will materialize, she questioned the rationale behind its underlying deterrence approach. "We are trying to discourage people from coming to Europe, and we are willing to pay enormous amounts of money per head."

Rather than investing in improving conditions in their countries, which would allow them to stay on, or returning people to countries with which they have an established connection, the proposed approach would transfer them to a third country with which they have no such ties.

Ultimately, she questions both the effectiveness and the justification of such a policy: "I appreciate the fact that people would always like to have something better, and that is why migration has been part of the human condition throughout history. But at the end of the day, a cruel and extremely expensive and ineffective proposal doesn't seem like a reasonable suggestion to me."



TO BHMA International edition

Not Quite Either, Fully Both: Growing Up in the Greek Diaspora

For the children of the Greek diaspora, identity has long meant living between two worlds. Three women in Australia, the United States and Finland talk about language, belonging, and why they no longer feel the need to choose

Continued from Page One

"One of the biggest challenges is that a child may feel they are seen as different in the country where they are growing up because of their background, while in their parents' country of origin they are treated as a foreigner because they don't speak the language as fluently or don't know certain cultural codes," she explains. "As a result, they may come to feel that they never fully belong to either side."

This, she adds, ties into questions of social identity, self-esteem and a sense of belonging. "In some cases, we see what we call an internal conflict between different parts of a person's identity."

Shaped by time and place

For the children of the diaspora, growing up between two cultures was never a uniform experience. It was shaped by the decade they were born into, and by how ready or unready their adopted country was to make room for them.

Apostolia Mandzoutsos-Kleftogiannis, who grew up in Melbourne in the 1970s and 1980s, recalls facing racism throughout her school years. She grew up in a part of the city where a large cluster of Greek migrant families lived, whose children "all went to school together and built a close bond due to our culture, religion, and community."

Outside this safety net, however, "the wider community, especially the Anglo-Saxons, viewed us as outsiders and a threat to their culture, way of life, and jobs. In our neighborhood it was rare to see migrant and Anglo children become close friends. At school there was always tension between the Anglo children and the children of migrants, and there was great animosity towards us from the wider community," she notes.

"There was a risk of verbal and physical abuse on a daily basis growing up," she adds. "But our generation rarely experiences racial attacks today. Europeans are now viewed as having played a crucial role in rebuilding Australia through their hard work and ability to adapt to a new nation, and we have finally been accepted as Australians."





BRITTANY BEKAS

Apostolia Mandzoutsos Kleftogiannis with her children.

Nicole Shubalis is a Greek-American chef and content creator living in Crete.

Nicole Shubalis, a young Greek American, grew up in Chicago in the '90s and 2000s. While she may have had an easier time navigating two cultures in a city profoundly shaped by a large, thriving Greek community, the journey was not entirely smooth.

"Growing up between two cultures wasn't always easy, especially when you're young and just want to fit in. There were times when I felt different from my American friends because of our customs, expectations, and family dynamics. Greek parents can be very protective, and there were definitely things my friends were allowed to do that I wasn't. I think there were moments growing up when I wanted to feel more American, simply because that was the world around me," Nicole explains.

Though their journeys differ, as do the eras in which they unfolded and the obstacles they faced, the children of the diaspora past and present tell strikingly similar stories about growing up between two cultures. Again and again, the same threads emerge: the Greek language, the food on the table, the primacy of family, the tight-knit Greek community and the enduring role of the Church.

Motherhood and memory

Danai, who has lived in Finland since 2013, says it was motherhood that truly reshaped her relationship with her Greek identity. "When I became a mother, I realized it was no longer just about me," she says. "My Greek identity was something I wanted to share with my child, knowing all the while that she would experience it differently from how I did."

It was only then, she adds, that she began to grasp how deeply language, memory and cultural identity are bound up with a sense of continuity. "When I speak Greek to my daughter, I'm passing on more than words. I'm giving her a way to connect with part of our family's history and culture. Motherhood also confronted me with a particular kind of nostalgia and loss: for what I left behind, and for what my child will never know the way I knew it."



Apostolia with her Greek-born mother and husband Phillip Kleftogiannis.

The language that binds

Perhaps more than any other single factor, language has shaped every generation of the Greek diaspora.

For Apostolia, it was woven into the rhythm of childhood. "One day a week after school, we went to Greek school and Greek dancing. It was an opportunity to catch up with our Greek friends," she recalls. "We spoke nothing but Greek at home and with family and friends, and the local Greek school helped us develop our language skills. Our strict upbringing ensured that we learned Greek culture and traditions. Now, as adults raising our own children, we recognize their value and importance and are grateful to our parents."

When it came to raising her two second-generation Greek-Australian children, Apostolia took a different approach. "We exposed our kids to both cultures, so they can see and experience the benefits of both," she explains. "Rather than forcing our children to attend Greek school, they chose to go because they grew up around us and grasped the importance we place on being Greek."

Both her children, she says, "understand the language and speak it," though they have a little difficulty holding a deep conversation. Yet the deeper inheritance has endured. "They have the knowledge of our culture and faith, and respect for their roots. They've traveled back to Greece and feel the same as us when we arrive: that part of them belongs there."

Nicole is candid about the gap. "The one thing I wish I had worked harder at was the language. My Greek isn't nearly as good as I'd like it to be," she admits. "But I think being Greek is about much more than speaking the language perfectly. It's about your values, traditions, and the connection you feel to your roots."

According to Apostolia, the biggest challenge in keeping Greek alive is living in a multicultural country. Mixed marriages, she adds, make it even harder to keep the language going.

Beyond language, tradition and history, Danai cherishes the everyday patterns of Greek culture—and hopes to pass them on to her daughter. "The warmth in human relationships, the hospitality, the sharing, the spontaneous expression of feelings, the sense of community and the importance of being present in each other's lives. Above all, I'd like her to hold on to that very Greek sense that people don't always need a special reason to get together, share a coffee and spend time with one another."

Never quite one or the other

As a psychologist, Danai explains that cultural identity is not a fixed trait we are born with. Rather, it takes shape through our relationships, through language, family and school, and through our experiences of social acceptance or exclusion.

A child growing up between two cultures must gradually learn to bridge different cultural frames of reference. "In psychology, we use the term bicultural identity integration to describe the degree to which a person experiences their cultural identities as compatible or as conflicting," she notes.

Nicole, who was born in the United States but has settled permanently in Greece and built her career there, knows what it feels like to never quite belong to either side. "The moment I open my mouth, people can usually tell I wasn't raised here," she says. "My Greek needs work, and my American accent gives me away almost immediately. Sometimes I'm treated like a Greek, but other times I'm very much the American. What's interesting is that in America, I was always the Greek girl. Now that I live in Greece, I'm often the American girl. It's a funny position to be in, because you can feel connected to two places without fitting perfectly into either one."



Danai Siamou-Kaarakainen, a clinical psychologist and psychotherapist who lives in Finland.

Danai also points to a phenomenon known as cultural frame switching. "Children learn to adapt their behavior, their language and the way they express themselves to their surroundings," she says. "That ability is not a problem in itself—it can actually be a valuable social resource." The difficulty arises, she stresses, only when they feel forced to hide or reject parts of who they are to fit in.

Apostolia knows what that feels like. "During my husband's military career in the Australian Air Force, we traveled to parts of Australia, like Darwin, where European culture was foreign to Anglo families," she recalls. "To fit in, or to avoid embarrassment, I disconnected myself from our Greek background and took on an identity that felt foreign."

"Very often, the problem isn't that an individual belongs to two cultures," Danai notes. "It's that their environment demands they choose only one."

'I am both'

But how do the children of Greek emigrants understand their identity today? And do they really have to choose one identity over the other?

"I believe that for the generations to come, Greek identity will be less tied to geographical borders and more to emotional, cultural and family connection," says Danai. For many who emigrated as adults, she adds, Greece was the place of their first socialization, "where important parts of our personal identity were shaped."

"For our children, however, being Greek may just be one of multiple identities that coexist within them," she explains.

Modern migration does not necessarily weaken identity; it can also redefine it. "I think the next generation may not need to answer the question 'Are you Greek or Finnish?' in the way we understand it," Danai says. "They may be able to say 'I am both,' without feeling they have to prove they are authentically one or the other."

Asked about her own cultural identity, Nicole says: "I'm Greek-American. I was born and raised in Chicago, but I live on Crete now. I think that answer represents who I am perfectly. Chicago will always be part of my story. It's where I grew up, built my career, and spent most of my life. But Greece is where my roots are, and now it's also where I'm building my future. I don't feel that I have to choose one identity over the other. Both have shaped the person I've become."

Apostolia is equally clear. "I don't believe we were ever torn between the two cultures. We live primarily in our Greek culture, but also accept and blend into Australian culture. We are deeply proud of both." As for her adult children, she says that they "will always recognize themselves as Greek Australians."



Apostolia with her husband and children.

Io Angeli: 'In painting, you have to be able to turn and look inwards'

Despite her long career as an artist and many years in education, Angeli retains something of the uncompromising, near-anarchic spirit that refuses to reconcile itself with certainties

By Panos Kougias



Artist Io Angeli poses in front of her artwork.

The artist shared a few glimpses of her sketches and work space.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY PANOS KOUGIAS

When her grandfather went hunting on Lesbos, young Io Angeli would go with him, even though she was far from the ideal companion. Every time she saw a bird, she'd start shouting out warnings: "Fly away, birdy, fly away!" I'd suggest reading the interview that follows with this brief anecdote in mind, as the spontaneous reactions of her childhood seem, I think, to shed light on the sensitivity that defines Angeli's personality still. A sensitivity which is rooted in the orange, lemon, bitter orange, and pomegranate trees of her childhood home, and extends to the finches, rams, and flower-filled gardens from which she never ceases to draw inspiration. It's one of those memories which, though shared in the spur of the moment, reveals more about a person's temperament than any lengthy autobiographical account can ever hope to.

Angeli's relationship with nature runs through a great deal of her painting, without confining her to representations of the natural world. In "Smoke on the Water," her new one-woman show at the Zoumboulakis Galleries, she engages with the ability of things to change, to shed their fixed boundaries and assume a different form. The title, borrowed from the song by Deep Purple, came to her when she saw the works gathered together and recognized in them the tension between the permanent and the transient.

Despite her long career as an artist and many years in education, Angeli retains something of the uncompromising, near-anarchic spirit that refuses to reconcile itself with certainties. She approaches her work as a constant quest for new forms and expressive possibilities, while her anxieties about the world extend beyond the bounds of art. In the course of our conversation, she looks back at the demanding freedom she experienced while studying in London, recalls her teachers, and voices particular concern about a society that increasingly deprives young people of the right to reconsider their choices. Because, for Angeli, nothing seems fixed in stone—in her life, or in her painting.

When you started on the works that now form 'Smoke on the Water', did you know they would end up being an exhibition?

No. One work leads to another—that's how you end up with a group. I never start out saying "I'll do an exhibition." I work, I notice how the pieces interconnect, then see what could form a cohesive body of work. In this case, three distinct groups emerged, one of which relates to water. I am interested in how stable yet fluid things are; how permanent they seem to us, while they're actually fleeting. That's the idea behind the title.

Why did you go for 'Smoke on the Water',?

I had to see all the works together before I could decide which ones would stay and which ones wouldn't. I considered all sorts of options before settling on it. It also dates from a time in my life when I was really into rock music. The song in question refers to a real incident that inspired the Deep Purple track. So I like the paradoxical nature of the image. How can there be smoke on the water?

You are also showing your sketchbooks. Why now?

When I started sketching, I didn't know where it would lead. The drawings started to gravitate toward their subject matter, and at some point I realized they'd taken on a life of their own. They had become a body of work which I could exhibit. I usually do a lot of drawings that stay in the drawer. But I felt these ones stand on their own.

What image comes back to you from your summers on Lesbos?

Our garden at home. It was an incredible garden, a paradise of orange, lemon, bitter orange, almond, walnut, and pomegranate trees—anything and everything you can imagine. But it's not just the garden; I also remember the fields I used to run through as a little girl. I would go with my grandfather when he set off hunting and yell, "Fly away, birdy, fly away!" to scare them off.

What do you remember most vividly about Dimitris Mytaras as a teacher?

He was generous with his time and knowledge, and had an exceptional talent for communicating with his students and encouraging them. I also remember an amusing incident he figured in. One time, I was working on a large-scale piece with kraft paper and pigments. Rena Papaspyrou, who was teaching in the studio at the time, pointed out a spot for me to rework. Then Mytaras came along, thought that particular spot very good, and suggested I take a fresh look at a different one. Which is when I realized the creator has to decide what they love for themselves—so I owe him that.

How did attending the Royal College of Art in London change the way you looked at things?

First of all, the contact with different cultures. You saw how differently a Japanese artist, for example, approached their work. Over there, you were alone in front of a canvas, a piece of paper, sometimes nothing at all. You had to search for your own sources. To turn your eyes inwards. I struggled at first. It wasn't enough just to make something. They also required you to be in a position to explain your every choice. If you put a face in the work, who was it, and what was your relationship with it?

You also studied set design. What drew you to that?

I always liked space and being able to think in three dimensions. I had also dabbled in set design in Athens. I was very interested in the theater, including the processes leading up to the performance. But I didn't work as a set designer in the end. I mainly taught, though I did assist on a few short films.

Your 1995 work *Landscape in Danger* is in the collections of the National Gallery. What was on your mind when you were working on it?

It was a work made with coarse materials, warm colors, ochers, and a large match. Forest fires had started to become very frequent at that time. I was also preoccupied with construction and everything that was being done to the landscape.

You sound anxious when you speak about your students. What has changed for them?

In the past, it was easier to correct a mistake. You could leave one school and try out another. Many kids don't enjoy that kind of latitude today. We cannot require a seventeen-year-old kid to know what they're going to do for the rest of their lives. That's such a heavy burden. And it is sad when a young person cannot attend a school for financial reasons. Education is our future. There are kids who truly want to learn, who soak up everything you give them, yet we clip their wings.

Do you keep up with what's happening in painting in Greece today?

Of course. There are all sorts of fascinating things going on both in Greece and abroad. There are young artists who genuinely interest me. It is also heartening that there is a public that is interested in painting and buys artworks.

What do you look for most in the faces you paint?

Expression. That which lies beyond the outline or the likeness. A face can also function like a landscape.

You have said that you find answers to your questions through painting. What remains unanswered after Smoke on the Water?

How we carry on, grounded in certain givens but blazing new trails. I don't think of the works I show as finished. They're fluid; they can continue and evolve. That encourages me. Like flowing water. It can be a stream; it doesn't need to be a torrent. The important thing is that it remains alive.

**Io Angeli's solo exhibition *Smoke on the Water* is on view at the Zoumboulakis Galleries (20 Kolonaki Square, Athens) until December 19, 2026. Opening hours: Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday 11:00 a.m. – 8:00 p.m., Wednesday and Saturday 11:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m. Closed Sundays and Mondays. Admission free. Information: 210 3608278.