

Hard-Earned Scientific Luxury

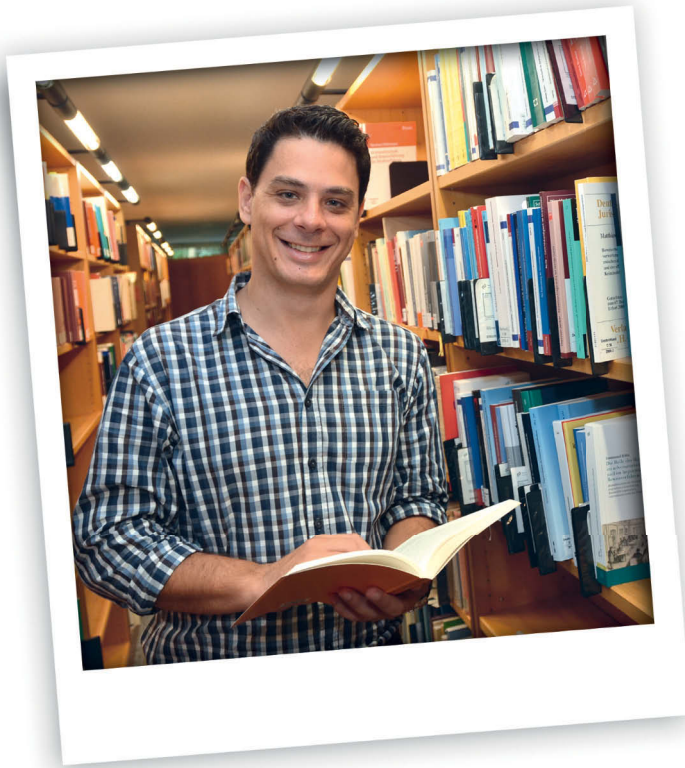
Scientists from 55 countries around the globe work at the Max Planck Institutes. Here they relate their personal experiences and impressions. Emmanouil Billis from Greece conducts his research at the Max Planck Institute for Foreign and International Criminal Law in Freiburg. It's not only the excellent working conditions there that have fired his enthusiasm: also the friendly environment makes Germany feel like a second home to the 31-year-old scientist.



For as long as I can remember, books have held a particular fascination for me. This gradually led to a growing interest in scientific research, especially where social and legal issues were concerned. Some years later, as a young law student, I was told that Germany had the best books in the world's best libraries. In fact, I recall these very words of one of my university professors: "If you wish to become a jurist and a legal scientist in Greece, you should definitely start in Germany."

"Well, maybe for a few years," I said, "and then I'll come back with all the academic skills I need to become a professor. I will then be able to use the knowledge I will have gained abroad where it is really needed." This is a typical career path for Greek researchers. After all, a lot of Greek scientists have earned their doctorates in Germany – primarily due to the deeply rooted humanistic and academic traditions that unite the two countries. This is particularly clear in my research field, which is criminal law. At the same time, however, I must point out that the Greek university system produces outstanding scientists and practitioners. There's a good reason why Greece has a very high proportion of researchers and academics working at the world's best universities.

After studying law and practicing it for a few years as an attorney, in 2009 I finally set off on my long-planned adventure abroad. First I headed to Bonn, where I intended to do my



Emmanouil Billis, 31, studied law from 2001 until 2008 in Thrace and Athens; he was admitted to the Athens Bar Association as a lawyer in August 2007. Between 2009 and 2010 he took part in the LL.M. program at the University of Bonn, where he defended his LL.M. thesis on procedural law and the European Convention on Human Rights before obtaining his doctorate at the Faculty of Law of the University of Freiburg within the framework of the International Max Planck Research School for Comparative Criminal Law. Since September 2010, Emmanouil Billis has been a member of academic staff at the Max Planck Institute for Foreign and International Criminal Law. His current tasks include preparing the country report for Greece as part of the "International Max Planck Information System for Comparative Criminal Law" project.

master's, just as the debt crisis in Greece hit the European headlines for the first time. It was in those days that I began to hear some odd comments from time to time, over a beer or when meeting strangers, when I told people where I came from. You know – the usual.

I come from a Greek middle class family, and it was this social class that was hit hardest by the tax increases – cutbacks and layoffs have been the general norm all this time. It was therefore a luxury for me, albeit a hard-earned one, to study at a German university. And you can't call me lazy, any more than you can call an entire generation of qualified graduates lazy who are unable to find a job in their home country because of the budget cuts.

But Bonn would be just the beginning for me in Germany – even then, my objective was to move to Freiburg and to the Max Planck Institute for Foreign and International Criminal Law, with its outstanding library and some of the finest legal scientists in the world. Besides the excellent working conditions, what I loved about the institute was that turned-up noses and ironic remarks had no place there; there were only well informed inquiries, concern and curiosity about how Greece can possibly overcome its problems, how my family was coping back home, and so on.

Of course, it's not easy to grasp the whole situation, as it isn't easy to establish a place for yourself anywhere in science. At home, though, this has become practically impossible. We want to do research, but we can't – at least not for the moment, and not for the next ten years, it seems. There are so many fundamental problems that need to be overcome before scientists who were trained abroad can come home again.

The traditionally outstanding education system that I benefited from in Greece is in urgent need of regeneration and financial support. And yet, despite the gloomy outlook, I know one thing: while the conditions abroad may be my best option for the moment, I will definitely go back in the next few years. My scientific future is in Greece. And coming back to the words of my professor: that's why I came to Germany in the first place.