

Greece is not alone – tax evasion is a British p...

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I guess it's not too late to mention [I had a piece in Comment is Free](#) yesterday under the above title. Written in haste in Terminal 5, the piece addressed a current Greek tax crisis that we in the UK share:

It's been an open secret for some time that the Greek tax authorities have had access to data on the identity of [Greek residents holding bank accounts in Switzerland](#). It has also been widely known that they have shown a lack of willingness to use this information to tackle those listed. Unsurprisingly, given the [severity of the measures being imposed on Greek people](#), this created resentment that reached the point where [Kostas Vaxevanis](#), a Greek journalist, decided to publish the list of 2,000 names to which he believes the Greek tax authorities have access, but about which he alleges no action is being taken. His reward is to be arrested.

As I noted, the paradoxical nature of this is extraordinary< especially as:

The biggest single leak of names from a bank came from HSBC in Switzerland, whose former chairman is Lord Stephen Green, now a Tory trade minister.

That list from HSBC, and other lists like it, are in the possession of HM Revenue & Customs in the UK. So far no one has come to court as a result. The impression given by the UK tax authorities is the same as the impression given in Greece, which is that these matters should be dealt with rather quietly and subtly, while the bankers and maybe lawyers and accountants, who no doubt played a hand in creating many of these arrangements, appear to be carrying on without hint of remorse or risk of prosecution.

The arrest of Vaxevanis in Greece rightly challenges this cosy position. A man who wants justice to be done has been arrested. In the meantime it is all too obvious justice is not being done, and lame excuses are being offered. It is said that we cannot pay for such lists, or that they were stolen in the first case. But there is a long tradition in many legal systems, including the UK's, of paying for information to secure prosecutions, and of turning a blind eye to the acts of those supplying it. You can be sure that a list of benefit cheats, however secured, would not be treated in the way this list has been.

As ever, there is a rule for the rich and those who offend their codes, and another for everyone else.

The [rest of the article is here](#).