



Covering events from January - December 2000

GREECE

Hellenic Republic

Head of state: Konstandinos Stephanopoulos

Head of government: Konstandinos Simitis

Capital: Athens

Population: 10.6 million

Official language: Greek

Death penalty: abolitionist for all crimes

2000 treaty ratifications/signatures:

Optional Protocol to the UN Children's Convention on the involvement of children in armed conflict.



Fourteen people faced legal proceedings for peacefully exercising their right to freedom of expression or religion. Conscientious objectors who refused to perform alternative civilian service of punitive length continued to face trial. There were further allegations of ill-treatment by law enforcement officials. Inadequate investigations into past human rights abuses raised serious concerns about impunity.

Freedom of expression and religion

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- Legal proceedings continued against Mehmet Emin Aga for peacefully exercising his right to freedom of religion and expression. He was tried in June and November in Lamia and Serres on five separate counts for the same offence of "usurpation of the function of a Minister of a known religion". At an appeal hearing in Lamia the sentences were reduced to seven months' imprisonment. In November the Appeal Court in Serres confirmed another seven-month sentence against him on the same charges. Mehmet Emin Aga had been sentenced to a total of 28 months' imprisonment on the same charges in previous years, but had been allowed to pay a sum of money in lieu of terms of imprisonment. AI takes no position on the procedures to be followed for choosing religious leaders or their legitimacy. AI's concern in this case is based solely on its belief that Mehmet Emin Aga was tried for exercising his right to freedom of religion and expression and that, if imprisoned, he would be a prisoner of conscience.
- In June, Hara Kalomiri was sentenced to two months' imprisonment, suspended for three years, for operating a place of worship without a state

licence between September 1994 and March 1995. The charges related to her role as administrator of the Karma Rik Drol-Ling Center of Practical Philosophy and Psychology in Trapezi, Halkidiki. The court considered this to be a "temple of Buddhist cult" because residents "engaged in Buddhist acts of cult, concretely...in meditation". She had initially been sentenced to three months' imprisonment in 1996, but this was reduced on appeal to two months in 1997. In March 1998, the Supreme Court had overturned this decision and sent the case back to the Appeal Court.

- In June, 12 teachers from the ethnic Turkish minority were acquitted on appeal in Patras. In June 1997 they had been sentenced to eight months' imprisonment, suspended for three years, for participating in the Union of Turkish Teachers in Western Thrace. The organization was declared illegal because it had the word "Turkish" in its title. They were charged with inciting mutual hatred between Christians and Muslims in the area by speaking about "Turkish" rather than "Muslim" teachers, and for urging teachers and pupils to boycott classes.

Conscientious objectors

Provisions of the law on conscription continued to fall short of international standards. For example, the length of alternative civilian service remained punitive and its application discriminatory. In September the Parliamentary Committee in charge of reviewing the Constitution made a proposal to amend the current Constitution, which states that "[e]very Greek capable of bearing arms is obliged to contribute to the defence of the Fatherland as provided by law", and to introduce, for the first time, full recognition of the right to conscientious objection. Under existing legislation, those deemed not to have conscientious objector status and to have refused to perform military service can be sentenced to up to four years' imprisonment.

- In June Nikos Karanikas, a conscientious objector on philosophical and political grounds, was acquitted by a Thessaloniki court following a successful appeal against his conviction in October 1995 for "insubordination in a period of general mobilization". He had been sentenced to four years' imprisonment, subsequently reduced on appeal to one year's imprisonment, suspended for three years.

Ill-treatment

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There were further allegations of ill-treatment by law enforcement officials. Many reports involved beatings by police officers at the time of arrest. There were also reports of ill-treatment of asylum-seekers during forced deportation. Despite repeated appeals, the authorities failed to investigate adequately allegations of ill-treatment of Roma by police or to bring those responsible to justice. Impunity for past human rights violations remained a concern.

- In March the authorities confirmed that no disciplinary measures were being taken against police officers suspected of involvement in the shooting and killing of Angelos Celal in Partheni in April 1998. An appeal against this decision was lodged with the Supreme Court. Little or no progress had been made in the investigation initiated in June 1998 into the killing and there were reports that members of Angelos Celal's family had

been repeatedly harassed by police officers prior to his death.

AI country visit

AI visited Greece in June to observe trials and carry out research.
