

GREECE**HUMAN RIGHTS DEVELOPMENTS**

Greece faced criticism for its human rights policies and practices from a range of regional and international actors in 2001. A new immigration bill and the ill-treatment of migrants dominated the human rights landscape and gave rise to a new dimension in rights activism in Greece. In the aftermath of the September 11 attacks in the United States, the Greek authorities further restricted access to asylum procedures for refugees. Ongoing discrimination undermined Greece's progress toward protecting Roma. Resistance to the recognition of ethnic minorities remained a systemic problem, with language rights taking center stage. Criticism of Greece for its poor record on press freedom persisted.

A new immigration bill sparked a heated national debate over immigration policy. A February 2001 draft of the bill lacked an antidiscrimination clause, violated the right to family reunification; failed to address trafficking of persons, failed to acknowledge the basic rights of undocumented migrants, denied undocumented migrant children access to education and health care, and lacked provisions prohibiting the arbitrary detention of migrants or their collective expulsion. After intense lobbying by human rights groups, the law adopted in April contained some improvements, including permission for trafficking victims to remain in Greece pending criminal proceedings against traffickers, access to education and health-care for undocumented migrant children, the right to challenge immigration detention before an administrative court, and a time limit of three months for the detention of migrants who cannot be returned to their home countries. In August, the independent Data Protection Authority called on the government to scrap a provision of the law requiring hospital staff and hotel employees to notify the police if undocumented migrants sought their services because it violated Greece's privacy protection laws.

Detention centers for foreigners in Athens, Hellenikon, and Piraeus came under fire for grossly substandard conditions. A December 2000 Human Rights Watch investigation at the Alexandras Avenue police station in Athens found severe overcrowding, inadequate sleeping accommodations, no access to exercise or fresh air, limited access to medical care, inadequate amounts of food, and a dirty, roach-infested environment. Migrants who had served their sentences but remained incarcerated at Korydallos Prison in Athens also suffered from severe overcrowding. Human rights groups charged the government with arbitrary detention for indefinitely holding migrants who could not be repatriated to their home countries. In two decisions against Greece in 2001, the European Court of Human Rights held that detention conditions at Alexandras Avenue and at Korydallos Prison amounted to inhuman or degrading treatment. In July 2001, the nongovernmental organization Greek Helsinki Monitor (GHM) lodged a complaint with the Greek ombudsman on behalf of detained foreigners who could not be deported to their

home countries, charging that under the new immigration law, any detainee held in excess of three months who could not be deported must be released. As a result of the complaint, seventy detained foreigners were released in late July. In September, GHM lodged another complaint with the ombudsman alleging more illegal detentions of foreigners and substandard conditions in the Hellenikon and Piraeus detention centers.

In June 2001, migrants charged that they were brutally assaulted in a makeshift detention center in Hania, Crete. Hania doctors documented bruises and other signs of beatings on 164 migrants from Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, and Turkey. An initial investigation by the Merchant Marine Ministry completed in August found three Port Authority officials accused of the beatings to have engaged in the “irregular execution of duties.” The men faced disciplinary proceedings but criminal charges had not been brought by the time of writing. Rights groups charged that authorities downplayed the savagery of the attacks, which they claimed amounted to torture.

Migrants continued to face police sweeps and collective expulsion from Greece without the benefit of procedural safeguards. In a potentially positive development, in February, the Greek ombudsman publicly stated that sweep operations and collective expulsions were illegal.

Trafficking of women for forced prostitution remained a serious problem and the government’s response inadequate. Specific concerns included the absence of anti-trafficking legislation, the few prosecutions for crimes related to trafficking, the lack of witness protection programs for trafficking victims, the absence of government-sponsored services for all trafficked women, the detention and prosecution of trafficking victims, and the complicity of police officers in trafficking. A U.S. State Department report released on July 12 gave Greece the lowest rating possible for failing to combat trafficking.

People fleeing the military action in Afghanistan and other refugees and migrants who arrived in Greece in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks in the United States were met with a hostile reception. Fearing a large influx of Afghan refugees, the Greek government severely curtailed access to asylum procedures. In October, Afghan refugees arriving in Athens charged that they were not permitted to lodge asylum claims and were summarily given expulsion orders. The Greek Council for Refugees (GRC) reported that the government had even issued an expulsion order to an Afghani mother with a three-week-old infant. On October 18, the GRC charged that the government was in violation of its obligations under the 1951 Refugee Convention. On November 5, a Turkish ship carrying 714 migrants and refugees from Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, and Turkey—including women and children—was towed to Zakyntos. The Greek authorities initially refused to permit any of the persons from the ship to apply for asylum and relented only after a firestorm of protest from humanitarian, refugee, and human rights groups.

In May 2001 the Greek government took steps to address discrimination with an action plan for Roma, designed to address health, education and housing needs. The first successful resettlement of a Roma community—from the Gallikos River to Gonou—was overshadowed by the inadequate basic services provided to the resettled Roma community. The self-managed Aghia Sofia settlement established

in October 2000 was hailed as an exception to the rule of discrimination against Roma. Praise was short-lived, however, as Roma children immediately faced opposition to their attendance at local schools, in particular from the parents' association of the Halastra Public School, which closed the school in November 2000 in opposition to thirty-two Roma children attending. Problems with access to electricity plagued Aghia Sofia residents throughout 2001 and rights groups charged the state electricity company with discriminatory pricing practices that resulted in power cutoffs.

A January 2001 Greek ombudsman's report found that the municipal authorities' expulsion of Roma and destruction of their homes in the Aspropygos suburb of Athens in July 2000 had violated Greek law. The report recommended that an investigation into the evictions be carried out, but at the time of writing, no investigation had been initiated. In September 2001, municipal authorities demolished six more Romani homes in Aspropygos. The operation was halted only after intervention by the Greek ombudsman and Greek Helsinki Monitor.

In August, the police verbally ordered Roma from the Kalakonero area on Rhodes to vacate their settlement by September 3 or have their homes demolished. No demolition occurred though the residents were informed subsequently by authorities that a process of relocation for the settlement had begun. The Roma filed a complaint with the Greek ombudsman alleging that the pending eviction was illegal because contrary to Greek law the community had received no official relocation plan.

Municipal authorities equipped with a bulldozer entered a Romani settlement in the Glykada Riganokampos area of Patras on August 29 and destroyed four sheds that had housed Romani families. The affected Roma subsequently filed a complaint with the Greek ombudsman alleging that municipal authorities had no right to enter the settlement because the land belonged to the University of Patras.

An international outcry followed the trial of a member of the Society for Aromanian (Vlach) Culture in February on charges of "disseminating false information." Sotiris Blatsas was sentenced to fifteen months in prison and fined 500,000 Greek drachmas (U.S. \$1,400) because he distributed a publication of the European Union's European Bureau for Lesser Used Languages (EBLUL) at an Aromanian festival in July 1995. The EBLUL document listed minority languages spoken in Greece. Conservative New Democracy Deputy Eugene Haitidis pressed charges against Blatsas. Numerous intergovernmental and human rights organizations, including EBLUL, condemned the Blatsas conviction as a violation of free expression. After two postponements, an appeal date was set for December 18, 2001.

DEFENDING HUMAN RIGHTS

Human rights groups generally operated without interference from the government. In August the government denied access to the Hellenikon Holding Centre to representatives of Greek Helsinki Monitor who were attempting to verify complaints of substandard detention conditions. The organization filed a complaint with the Greek ombudsman.

THE ROLE OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

United Nations

In its March assessment of Greece's record on discrimination issues, the U.N. Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination failed to acknowledge Greece's systematic discrimination against Roma, Albanian migrants, and other minorities or to make specific recommendations to assist the government in remedying these violations.

In May, however, the U.N. Committee against Torture issued conclusions severely critical of Greece, including findings of the use of excessive or unjustifiable force by police when dealing with minorities and foreigners; harsh detention conditions, in particular the long-term detention of undocumented migrants awaiting deportation and asylum-seekers in police stations without adequate facilities; and severe prison overcrowding. The committee recommended that steps be taken to prevent and punish trafficking of women and other forms of violence against women.

Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)

In January 2001, the OSCE organized a visit to Greece by representatives of the Ukrainian government to establish a program for the repatriation of Ukrainian women trafficked to Greece. The OSCE expressed concern that Greece had no special mechanism for differentiating between illegal immigrants and trafficking victims.

Council of Europe

In June 2001, the chairperson of the specialist group on Roma and gypsies of the Council of Europe visited Roma communities in Greece and publicly condemned the poor living conditions of many Roma, finding many Roma lived in a situation of "institutionalized apartheid" in Greece.

Twice in 2001 the European Court of Human Rights found Greece had violated the rights of foreigners in detention. In *Dougoz v. Greece* (March), the court found that a Syrian national was held in detention in two police stations (Alexandras Avenue and Drapetsona) in conditions amounting to inhuman or degrading treatment and that the detainee was not afforded an effective opportunity to challenge his detention. A U.K. national brought the charges in *Peers v. Greece* (April), in which the court held that detention conditions in Korydallos Prison amounted to inhuman, or degrading treatment.

European Union

An April European Parliament report on the exercise of fundamental freedoms in the European Union criticized Greece for discrimination and ill-treatment of the Turkish, Roma, and Albanian minorities, and the failure of Greek authorities to abide by final judicial decisions.

In February 2001, the Council of the European Bureau for Lesser Used Languages (EBLUL) expressed deep concern over the conviction of Sotiris Blatsas for distributing EBLUL literature and called the conviction an apparent violation of free expression.

United States

In its first annual trafficking in persons report, issued in July 2001, the State Department gave Greece the lowest rating possible—along with Burma, Pakistan, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, and Turkey—for failing to combat trafficking, to acknowledge publicly that trafficking is a problem, to implement comprehensive antitrafficking legislation, to prosecute traffickers, to punish traffickers when they were tried, or to address corruption in the police and border control, which the report called “a major problem.”

The U. S. State Department’s *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2000* noted that human rights problems in Greece included substandard detention conditions and occasions of arbitrary detention for foreigners awaiting deportation; the failure to combat trafficking of women for forced prostitution and police corruption in trafficking; ongoing discrimination against minorities, in particular Roma; and continuing abusive prosecutions under Greece’s criminal defamation laws.

Relevant Human Rights Watch Reports:

Trafficking of Migrant Women for Forced Prostitution into Greece, 7/01

Human Rights Watch Critique of Greek Immigration Bill, 2/01

Urgent Concerns: Conditions of Detention for Foreigners in Greece, 12/00

HUNGARY

HUMAN RIGHTS DEVELOPMENTS

While the majority of Hungarian citizens enjoyed a full measure of civil and political rights and the benefits of a modernizing economy, those on society’s margins continued to face discrimination and abuse. The poor treatment of the country’s Roma remained the key concern, despite E.U.-funded government efforts to improve their status, while anti-Semitism and hostility towards gays persisted. Prison overcrowding and police misconduct continued to draw international criticism. Despite some improvements, the state response to violence against women remained inadequate. Asylum seekers faced long periods of detention before their claims were heard, and few were granted refugee status.

The situation for many Hungarian Roma remained precarious. With average life expectancy ten years shorter than the rest of the population and an unemployment