

IHF FOCUS: Freedom of expression and the media; conscientious objectors; protection of ethnic minorities; citizenship; religious intolerance; protection of asylum seekers and immigrants.

The most positive development in 1999, with lasting effects, was the consistently commendable work of the Ombudsman's Office, set up in October 1998. The Ombudsman's reports provided official documentation to many long-term human rights violations and offered concrete solutions, some of which were soon after implemented.

In late July 1999, for the first time in Greece's modern history, there was a debate on the possible modernization of the country's minority and citizenship policies. This, however, was aborted after a general backlash among politicians and media.

Several Greek journalists faced charges for criticizing public officials and/or were convicted to prison sentences for libel. Many practiced self-censorship and information was distorted.

Alternative civilian service was made available, yet its application in practice continued to be punitive. Religious minorities faced different forms of discrimination by various local officials.

Some Macedonians born in Greece continued to have problems entering their fatherland. The Roma minority faced numerous evictions, horrendous health and hygienic conditions, as well as social marginalization. Stateless people continued to face harassment by authorities and immi-

grants were confronted with discrimination and xenophobia. The activities of human rights and minority organizations were occasionally met with hostility and predominant "hate speech" in the media.

Freedom of Expression and the Media

In general Greek media were free, but there were still cases of journalists brought to court for alleged crimes related to the exercise of their profession.

Printed Media

Journalists were punished with prison sentences in cases of libel or defamation and prosecuted for the publication of leaked confidential documents.

In a positive development, on 21 January, an appeals court acquitted Yannis Tzoumas, journalist and publisher of *Alithia*, a daily on the island of Chios, who had been convicted in 1998 to four months' imprisonment for defamation of Minister Stavros Soumakis.² In both instances, the courts confirmed the facts as accurate, but the first instance court considered the "harsh style" of the article defamatory. However, the appeals court stated that the article only criticized his behavior, albeit in harsh style. Also, on 28 June, an appeals court converted to a fine a previously imposed 3-year sentence upon the publisher of the daily *To Onoma*, Makis Psomaidis, for aggravated defamation of Minister Costas Laliotis. He paid the fine and was set free.

However, other journalists continued to face charges for their criticism.³

¹ Based on *Greek Helsinki Monitor and Minority Rights Group-Greece, Human Rights in Greece: Joint Concise Report for 1999*, 7 January 2000.

² For details, see *IHF Annual Report 1999*.

³ For a full list of cases, see *Greek Helsinki Monitor and Minority Rights Group-Greece, Human Rights in Greece: Joint Concise Report for 1999*, 7 January 2000, also at <http://www.greekhelsinki.gr>.

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■ On 7 March, the chief prosecutor of the first instance court of Athens brought criminal charges for disclosure of state secrets against those responsible for the publication of a top secret report in the 6 March issue of the country's largest daily, *Ta Nea*. The crime was punishable with imprisonment up to ten years under article 146 of the penal code. The report was written by Greek Ambassador to Kenya G. Kostoulas and covered the events that contributed to PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan's capture by Turkey. In October, reporter George Papachristou and his publisher Leon Karapanayotis answered the charges to the investigating judge. The case was pending at this writing.

■ In March, journalist Manolis Vasilakis was fired by the *Exousia* newspaper for an article in which he examined the role of the nationalist group Network 21 in the Öcalan case. Network 21 members thereafter filed suits for aggravated defamation in civil courts and demanded disproportionate fines of several hundred million drs (several million U.S.\$).

■ On 21 May, Dimitris Rizos was convicted by a three-member appeals court of Athens to 12 months in prison for the repeated aggravated defamation of four members of the board of directors of the rival *Eleftheros Typos* daily. An incriminating interview he gave to a television station in September 1994 did include unsubstantiated allegations of embezzlement of funds. Rizos' sentence was converted to a pecuniary one. He bought the sentence off and was set free.

■ In November, the Public Prosecutor of Mytilini indicted two journalists for defamation and aggravated defamation (articles 362 and 363 respectively of the penal code) after charges were brought by Lesvos police. The two journalists, Stratis Balaskas and George Kondiloudis, had written an article in the *Eleftherotypia* newspaper, referring to alleged relations of

police officers of Lesvos with smugglers in a local olive press.

■ On 6 December, a three-member Misdemeanor Court of Athens convicted Dimitris Rizos, publisher of *Adesmeftos Typos*, for aggravated defamation of Costas Mitsis, publisher of another newspaper with the exact same name, *Adesmeftos Typos*. He was sentenced to ten months in prison and was set free on appeal.

■ Evangelos Yannopoulos, Minister of Justice, repeatedly attacked and insulted journalists or other politicians who had been critical of him by bringing charges against them. On 5 January 2000, Prefect of Athens Theodore Katrivanos was sentenced to 15 months in prison for aggravated defamation, for challenging the minister's controversial resistance record during the Second World War. The minister also brought charges against the communist daily *Rizospastis* for publishing similar arguments and demanded 500 million drs (approximately U.S.\$ 1,5 million) in damages.

Electronic Media

Although most journalists would deny its existence, self-censorship, especially on sensitive "national" issues, was a common practice in order to preserve their jobs and status. The coverage of the war in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia provided several examples in this respect. On 2 April, regarding the closure of the Serbian radio station B92 by the Serb authorities, the Greek state news agency intentionally misinterpreted a statement by the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ).

■ On 11 June, the private Mega Channel television station censored its mandatory pre-electoral program devoted to presentations by small parties, by removing the presentation of Rainbow, the Macedonian minority party. The National Radio and Television Council did not take the sanc-

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tion prescribed by law, while no one condemned this act of censorship.

■ On 21 October, Costas Glykos and Michalis Katsamiras from Halkidiki's Super Channel television station were beaten by a mob led by Mayor Costas Papayannis, in Kasandra, Halkidiki (northern Greece) while covering the mob's attempt to prevent local Jehovah's Witnesses from starting the legal construction of their house of worship. They and the Jehovah's Witnesses sued the mayor and his accomplices for crimes that included inciting to religious hatred. The police never arrest the alleged perpetrators.

■ On 2 December, police raided the offices of the non-profit association Biblical Circle, running Channel Station 2000 Radio, and arrested 73-year-old retired pastor Lakis Regas. He was released the next day. Authorities accused the station of not having the proper operating license, although it was well known that no private radio station had ever managed to obtain one. A trial date was set for 31 January 2000.

On 20 October, demonstrators caught a "cameraman" and brought him to a police station. As a result it was revealed that, at least since 1994, police officers had officially filmed demonstrations and possessed professional cards of photo press agencies as covers. Following media protests, the authorities gave a vague promise they would stop the practice.

Religious Intolerance

The Greek constitution gives the Eastern Orthodox Church the status of an official religion, relegating other religions to a disadvantaged status. Constitutional amendments introduced with a first parliamentary vote in 1998 did not affect this privileged status.

⁴ *Eleftherotipia*, 31 August 1999.

Greece was convicted in the 1990s for the violation of the rights of all traditional religious and/or national minorities (Macedonians, Muslims/Turks, Jehovah's Witnesses, Catholics, Protestants) by the European Court of Human Rights.

Catholics

The Roman Catholic Archbishop of Athens, Nikolaos Foscolos, criticized Greece for requiring army officers to be Orthodox Christians. Referring to the discussions on a future visit to Greece by the Pope, the Archbishop criticized the increasing anti-Catholic and anti-papal spirit in Greece and stated that Greece practiced the medieval principle *cujus regio eius religio* (i.e. whoever rules the country also rules over religion).⁴

The spokesperson of the Archbishop of Athens and the Holy Synod, Theoklitos Koumarianos, openly showed his dislike for the papal visit. In the end, the visit planned for 2000 was canceled.

At the same time, a ruling on the official status of the Catholic Church as a legal entity was still pending. In July, a parliamentary amendment simply reconfirmed the implicit recognition of the legal entity status of all Catholic institutions constituted before 1946.

Jehovah's Witnesses

Among the Christian minorities, the plight of the Jehovah's Witnesses gave the greatest cause for concern. They were convicted by the courts, fined or imprisoned, and socially ostracized. Their particular problems were apparently due to, for example, their proselytism, conscientious objection to military service and a variety of public activities, which called into question the interests of the dominant church and the legislative and political system of the state.

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In January 1999, the European Court of Human Rights struck off its list the appeal of a Jehovah's Witness plaintiff who had been under surveillance by the Greek state. This was done following a settlement between Greece and the plaintiff,⁵ with Greece admitting the surveillance and promising that such methods would never be used again. Nevertheless, Jehovah's Witnesses were still frequently summoned to police stations for "identity checks" and faced difficulties in burying their dead in the cemeteries.

■ On 11 July, the Mayor of Kassandreia, Papayanis, incited local residents to hold a protest rally to impede the construction of a lecture hall by Jehovah's Witnesses even though they had the necessary building and other permits. The mob dug a trench around the Jehovah's Witnesses' property using the municipality's bulldozer and then parked cars in front of the property to make access impossible. Building work resumed in October, only to lead to renewed violence. The Ombudsman Office condemned the protests as a challenge to state authority. Eventually, reactions calmed down and the works were completed in November.

■ On 20–22 August, Jehovah's Witnesses faced intolerance by the Orthodox Church when holding their annual public meeting in Larisa (Central Greece). For example, the mourning toll of the bells of local Orthodox churches filled the air, noisy liturgies were held in the open at a close distance and hostile slogans were chanted.

Protestants

Protestants also faced court proceedings on questionable charges.

■ On 5 November, a Salonica court acquitted Yannis Dimitriadis, a pastor of the First Pentecostal Church in Salonica. The

police had charged him with operating a church without a permit, although the church had a license dated 1938 and other necessary permits.

■ On 25 October, a three-member misdemeanor court in Larisa convicted pastor George Yfantidis and Apostolos Rizos, both of the Greek Evangelical Church, to a suspended sentence of six months because they had not put in the entrance of their Christian Education Center a sign with the words, "Laboratory of Liberal Studies." The court argued that since the center's statutes included the possibility to offer foreign language classes, the sign was mandatory. However, no language courses had been held. When the church later asked for a permit to open a house of worship in Larisa, the administration – for the first time – initiated a lengthy and expensive procedure to get a certificate from the urban planning agency for the building plans, before a permit could be obtained.

Old Calendarists

The (New Calendarist) official Orthodox Church, with the acquiescence of the municipal and police authorities, continued to hold the little church of St. Savas on a hill above the Athens suburb of Galatsi, which it had seized from the Old Calendarists in 1998. This was the last of many similar cases since the split between the two Orthodox Churches in the inter-war period.

Jews

On 7 October, the leader of Greece's small Jewish community complained about a letter from George Katsanevakis, the Prefect of Chania, asking why a restored 400-year-old synagogue was being reopened on the island of Crete even though there was only one Jewish resident in the town. In the letter, the prefect wrote he favored it being

⁵ *Tsavachidis v. Greece*

maintained as a monument with historical values, without religious services.

Muslims

See **Turkish Minority**, below.

Conscientious Objection

Article 18.1 of the Law 2510/97 stipulated that civilian alternative service or unarmed military service were available to conscripts who declared that they opposed the personal use of arms for fundamental reasons of conscience based on religious, philosophical, ideological or moral convictions. Some of the law's provisions – including the punitive length of the service, twice as long as the military one – fell short of international standards and its application remained unsatisfactory. In some cases, conscientious objectors (COs) were treated abusively by the state institutions where they worked, including being made to work long hours with very few days off.

In August 1999, the ombudsman issued a series of constructive recommendations, including the partial “demilitarization” of alternative service; abolition of the unconstitutional provisions for changing the status of a CO back into that of a draftee; decrease of the length of the service; introduction of the same special categories of shorter service as for military service; and the inclusion of NGOs in the groups of institutions in which such service can be carried out. The government promised vaguely to implement some improvements before the end of 1999 but did not, in fact, do so.

Protection of Ethnic Minorities

In late 1997, Greece signed the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities but had not ratified it by

the end of 1999. Officially, Greece continued to acknowledge the existence of only one “religious” minority, the “Muslims” of Thrace.⁶

■ On 9 November, an Athens court postponed for 2000 the trial of Sotiris Bletsas, member of the Society for Aroumanian (Vlach) Culture. He was indicted under Article 191 (distribution of false information) of the penal code. In 1995, he had distributed a publication of the European Union's Bureau for Lesser Used Languages which mentioned the minority languages in Greece.

In late July, Foreign Minister George Papandreou started an unprecedented campaign to change the traditional position of the state regarding its ethnic minorities. He, among other things, acknowledged the right to claim any ethnic minority identity – also Macedonian – without fear of consequences. He said that “no one challenges the fact that there are [in Greece] many Muslims of Turkish origin.”⁷ At the same time, the Ministry of the Interior leaked to the media a plan to radically change the citizenship policy, so as to allow immigrants, after some years of residence, to qualify for legal residence, including those from neighboring countries or of Muslim faith. The plan even aimed to settle the issue of ethnic Macedonian political refugees, who had fled as a result of the civil war in the late 1940s and were banned from Greece.

Coincidentally, on 23 July, three Turkish minority deputies in the Greek Parliament, three Macedonian, seven Turkish and three human rights NGOs made a public appeal for the recognition of a Macedonian and a Turkish minority, the unconditional ratification of the Council of Europe's Framework Convention, and the respect of these minorities' rights.

⁶ Whose fundamental rights were formally guaranteed by the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne.

⁷ *Klik*, 26 July 1999.

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The reaction to this progressive stand was a near-unanimous verbally violent public reaction against the appeal, replete with xenophobic statements and some defamatory personal attacks against the signatories.

On 23 August, Max van der Stoep, OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, also contributed to the debate, setting out Greece's obligations as regards minority rights. In his final remarks, he stressed the importance of the OSCE Copenhagen Document for persons belonging to the Muslim and other minorities in Greece.⁸

Turkish Minority

In 1999, the state revised its estimate of the "Muslim" minority population downwards, from 120,000 to 98,000 people. The Muslims' most serious problem continued to be the continual prosecution of their elected muftis.

■ Mehmet Emin Aga, elected by the Muslim minority as Mufti of Xanthi in August 1990, faced continual prosecution. After the passing of a 1991 law allowing the Greek government to appoint mufti, Aga was charged with violation of article 175.2 (pretense of authority) of the penal code. His crime was to have issued 42 messages to Muslims on religious holidays, signing them as Mufti of Xanthi. As of the end of 1999, first instance courts had convicted him to a total of 139 months' imprisonment. Appeal courts had reduced some of the sentences. At this writing, four new cases were also pending against him. Aga spent six months in prison and bought off the balance, at considerable financial cost.

On 14 December, the European Court of Human Rights convicted Greece for the similar case of Ibrahim Serif. Serif was

elected Mufti of Komotini in 1990 by Muslims. He was subsequently convicted by a Greek court for pretense of authority for messages he had issued, and for wearing the mufti's clothes. The European Court held unanimously that this was a violation of article 9 (freedom of thought, conscience and religion) of the European Convention on Human Rights. Local monitors hoped that Greek courts would now use this case to acquit Aga from identical charges.

There were also instances of harassment of secular Turkish minority leaders:

■ On 23 April, the Appeals Court of Thrace confirmed a 1986 first instance court verdict to dissolve the Turkish Union of Xanthi (founded in 1946) because "it created confusion about ... the citizenship of its members as to whether they are Muslims with Greek citizenship or Turks in nationality and citizenship ... and that a Greek association serves the aims of a foreign state, that is the prevalence of Turkish ideals."

■ On 19 October, 12 Turkish minority teachers⁹ appeared before the Appeal Court for their appeal of a suspended sentence of eight months handed down by a lower court in 1997 for the violation of article 188 of the penal code (participating in an association the aims of which are contrary to criminal provisions). In 1994, they had signed a union document that included the name, "Union of Turkish Teachers of Western Thrace." The union had been dissolved in November 1987, following the Supreme Court confirmation of a ruling that the word "Turkish" could be used to refer only to citizens of Turkey and that calling Greek Muslims "Turkish" endangered public order. The case was postponed *sine die*.

⁸ <http://www.osce.org/inst/hcnm/news/stat-hcnm-99.htm>

⁹ Case of Raif Oglu et al.

■ The minaret of the mosque in Kimmeria (in the Xanthi district of Thrace) remained unfinished after authorities refused to allow its building according to the extension plans approved by them in 1996.

In March, the Holy Synod of the Church of Greece announced the introduction of a special monthly financial benefit only for Thracian Christian families with three or more children. The Thracian Muslim population was excluded from the benefits. The church said this was done “to fight the area’s major demographic problem.”

Macedonian Minority

Besides the censorship of a pre-election televised program of the Macedonian minority party,¹⁰ the campaign and the views of that party were ignored by Greek media, including those that made brief mention of them in the previous European election in 1994. The party received 5,000 votes, compared to 7,500 in 1994.

The Home of Macedonian Culture failed to obtain registration, as no lawyer in the district of Florina, where it had its headquarters, agreed to handle the case. Greece had been convicted in 1998 by the European Court of Human Rights for having denied registration to the organization.

Roma Minority

In 1999, numerous communities of Roma tent-dwellers were evicted or threatened with eviction. In most cases, Roma living in the Greater Athens area were affected because of the up-coming 2004 Olympic Games: the need to build new sports facilities was given priority and Roma were evicted from those areas or hindered from settling there.

The state’s reaction to a major September earthquake that devastated many of these areas provided ample evidence that Roma had been discriminated against. While quake victims were quickly relocated to decent settlements, Roma living for years in destitute settlements in the same areas were still not resettled and, in one case, were bluntly evicted. In most other Roma communities, the situation remained unchanged and unsatisfactory.¹¹

■ The relocation of the largest Roma tent-dwelling community from the district of Evosmos/Gallikos to Gonou (Salonica), planned as the first real “model settlement”, was supposed to be finalized by late November 1998. However, it continued to make slow progress, with the Ministry of Public Health providing insufficient funds for the development of a new infrastructure.

■ In February, local authorities in Aspropyrgos (Attica), escorted by the police and district attorney, set fire to five Roma lodgings of the Nea Zoe settlement in Aspropyrgos, where 100 families had lived since 1990. The illegal act was based on a decision of the Town Planning Service to pull down only Roma housing even though the whole residential area – inhabited also by non-Roma – did not comply with the town plan. A relocation to Ano Liossa was rejected officially because of the construction of Olympic sports facilities and because the municipality claimed it could not cope with more than the “internationally accepted quota of 8 percent of Roma to achieve their successful integration.”

■ In Halandri (Attica), 13 out of 30 families of a local Roma settlement received eviction orders after a trial *in absentia*. The fam-

¹⁰ See *Freedom of Expression and the Media*.

¹¹ For full details on Roma evictions, see *Greek Helsinki Monitor and Minority Rights Group-Greece, Human Rights in Greece: Joint Concise Report for 1999, 7 January 2000*, also at <http://www.greekhelsinki.gr>.

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ilies were charged with trespassing an area with no infrastructure where they had lived for about 20 years. After strenuous negotiations, the Roma were granted leave to remain until the end of April 1999 and the government promised to subsidize a 6–12-month lease of the land until a permanent solution was found. However, the municipality did not take action, claiming the owners of the land could not be located.

■ In October, the municipal council of Rio (a Patras suburb) decided to evict Roma living in or near the University of Patras area, for their alleged high criminality. The university president agreed with the eviction “to protect the university’s international image.” Only the prefecture’s action prevented the order from being carried out.

■ In Nea Alikarnassos (Crete), the municipality started an eviction procedure against 102 Roma families in March. The action was based on a 1997 town council resolution and claims that the area was going to be reconstructed. However, relocation did not proceed and an NGO proposal to transfer them to a former military barracks met with opposition. On 12 November, a Heraklion county court concluded that the eviction decision was evidently abusive and cancelled the eviction protocol.

In March 1999, a group of NGOs – including Greek Helsinki Monitor (GHM, IHF members) and Minority Rights Group-Greece (MRG-G) - submitted to the Prime Minister’s Office for Quality of Life a draft law for the creation of self-managed Roma settlements, with a view to improve their living conditions and their smooth integration into society. This proposal was already being implemented in the settlement of Agia Sofia Gonou (Thessaloniki). But the Ministry of the Interior, which was responsible for submitting this bill to parlia-

ment, did not look into the matter. It arbitrarily cancelled the formation of a Committee for the Problems of Roma Tent-Dwellers, established at the agreement between the Ministry of the Interior, NGOs and Roma organizations in mid-June 1999.

According to the medical charity Médecins du Monde¹², Roma tent-dwellers in Greece faced more serious health problems than Roma elsewhere in Europe and their access to the Greek health system was made more difficult than in other countries. In addition, Roma did not trust hospitals and emergency rooms.

Roma still faced abuse by police officers. Officers indicted in 1998 for homicide or torture remained in office and proceedings continued. Few Roma of compulsory schooling age (6 to 15 years) attended school, a fact that was largely a result of the indifferent, if not racist, attitude of state officials. At the September 1999 Vienna OSCE Review Meeting, the Greek delegation’s response to GHM regarding the situation of Roma was nevertheless commendable for its sincerity and the carefully worded but fair criticism of the Roma leaders’ inability to help solve the problems of the Roma population.

Citizenship

Christian Roma and most Muslim Roma whose ancestors were born in Greece were granted citizenship in the 1970s (most Roma had been stateless until then). But some Muslim Roma (self-identified as Turks) were forced by the police to continue to acquire expensive alien’s residence permits valid only for one year: on them police authorities mentioned they were of “undefined” citizenship and of Turkish nationality (i.e. ethnicity).

¹² *Médecins du Monde, ROMEUROPE Program, June 1999.*

■ The police department of Komotini refused to grant a stateless identity document (as obliged by the UN) to Durgut Sezgin even after the ombudsman's intervention eight months after the application had been submitted. They claimed that the reference to an undefined citizenship had been a mistake, and required Sezgin to prove that he was not a Bulgarian citizen in order to consider him stateless even though they had such documents on file. Sezgin was born in Greece and had never left the country. Greek authorities based their argument on birth certificates (in Greek) that Sezgin's parents had been forced to sign, as most illiterate Turkish-speaking Muslims did lest they ran into trouble with powerful local authorities. His 1990 application for Greek citizenship, moreover, is still pending in violation *inter alia* of article 1 of the 1973 UN Convention for the Reduction of Statelessness, that Greece ratified in 1977.

In 1998, around 100 ethnic Turks previously made stateless under the now abolished article 19 of the citizenship code received identity documents, valid for two years. They had been unjustly stripped of their citizenship as they had never settled abroad, a prerequisite of article 19. In 1998, then Foreign Minister Theodore Pangalos and other authorities stated that within a year most or all of the stateless people living in Greece would be offered Greek citizenship. In 1999, Minister of Interior Vaso Papandreou and the Greek delegation to the OSCE Review Conference reiterated that commitment. However, by the year's end, no steps had been taken to this end and, what was worse, authorities were refusing to renew stateless identity documents.

According to GHM, the government should also introduce the possibility to grant citizenship to the few thousand former Greek citizens living abroad as state-

less, while allowing unhindered entrance to Greece to those who had been stripped of Greek citizenship under articles 19 or 20 of the Citizenship Code, almost all of whom were ethnic Turks or Macedonians.

Protection of Asylum Seekers and Immigrants

In recent years, some 500–700,000 immigrants settled in Greece, mostly illegally; two-thirds of them were Albanians, and most belonged to minority religions, but no official figures were available. In 1998, a legalization procedure for those immigrants was launched, eventually involving some 230,000 people applying for residence permits. Only some 85,000 of these were granted permits by the end of 1999.

On 3 July 1999, all foreigners found in the streets were rounded up by the police and, even if holders of legal residence documents, taken to police stations and fingerprinted for possible matching against pending criminal cases. Illegal immigrants were expelled from the country, with TV crews filming the operation. Over 300 intellectuals signed a protest petition, but only the outcry of the Greek farmers, worried about their crops in the absence of a cheap foreign labor force persuaded the government to return to old practices and release the immigrants. Similar, less well-publicized "sweeping operations" recurrently took place throughout 1999.

Xenophobia and, especially, Albanophobia were present too in 1999. Nurtured by statements linking illegal immigration to rising criminality, they often led to violence against immigrants. The worst case was that of "racist serial killer" Kazakos, who, in the night of 21 October, shot seven immigrants, killing two and injuring five, of which three sustained lifelong disability injuries. In two cases he had an accomplice.

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Human Rights Defenders

The actions and statements of some Greek authorities regarding human and minority rights undermined Greek foreign policy and hurting Greece's interests. While trying to refute information on abuses in Greece, Greek diplomats also resorted to defamatory comments about the members of GHM and MRG-G, particularly their spokesman Panayote Dimitras, and tried to challenge their credibility.

■ On 4 May, a three-member misdemeanor court in Xanthi convicted GHM spokesman Panayote Dimitras to a suspended 5-month prison sentence for defamation of minority lawyer Orhan Hadjiibram. Dimitras was never properly summoned and was nevertheless tried in absentia. The court considered defamatory a GHM statement critical of Hadjiibram's handling of the stateless issue, even though it stated that the facts therein were true. He was acquitted on appeal on 12 January 2000.

■ On 8 December, GHM Stateless Section Coordinator Aysel Zeybek was harassed on the Greek side of the border with Turkey. A security officer subjected her to a lengthy, abusive and humiliating check. Zeybek filed a complaint with the Ombudsman.

■ On 21 September, the reports of the GHM and MRG-G, presented at the 1999 OSCE Review Meeting disappeared from the OSCE distribution table. Suspecting that these had been removed by Greek diplomats, NGOs protested to the Greek delegation and the action was not repeated.

The July public appeal for the recognition of Macedonian and Turkish minorities triggered the harshest reaction from politicians and nearly all media. The initiative was condemned as "very provocative and from all aspects repulsive"¹³; "an insolent provocation that stains the 25th anniversary of the restoration of democracy in our country" and "Turkish propaganda."¹⁴ The daily Kathimerini engaged in the most blatant misinformation, calling the initiative, among other things, an "unprecedented provocation with criminal consequences at the expense of Hellenism by 'unknown' individuals who are obviously playing the game of the nationalist circles of Ankara and others." The National Radio and Television Council refused to order a television channel to provide GHM's spokesperson with a copy of a program where the latter was reportedly slandered, so that he could take legal action. However, on 29 July, Foreign Minister George Papandreou called these reactions "harsh, an indication of fear and panic." ■■■

¹³ By the former PASOK Minister of Macedonia and Thrace, Stelios Papathemelis.

¹⁴ By the President of the socialist splinter group DIKKI, Dimitris Tsovolas.