U.S. DEPARTMENT of STATE

Greece

Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - 2007
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Greece is a constitutional republic and multiparty parliamentary democracy with an estimated population of 11 million. In September the New Democracy Party won a slim majority of seats in the unicameral Vouli (parliament) in free and fair elections, and Konstantinos Karamanlis remained the prime minister. Civilian authorities generally maintained effective control of the security forces.

The government generally respected the human rights of its citizens; however, there were problems in several areas. Human rights abuses reported during the year included: numerous reports of abuse by security forces, particularly of illegal immigrants and Roma; overcrowding and harsh conditions in some prisons; detention of undocumented migrants in squalid conditions; restrictions on freedom of speech; restrictions and administrative obstacles faced by members of non−Orthodox religions; detention and deportation of unaccompanied or separated immigrant minors, including asylum seekers; domestic violence against women; trafficking in persons; limits on the ability of ethnic minority groups to self-identify; and discrimination against and social exclusion of ethnic minorities, particularly Roma. Romani children were in some instances relegated to segregated schools and exploited through forced begging and forced labor while law enforcement officials took little action to protect them; Romani adults lacked access to adequate housing, medical care and, in many instances, water, electricity, and waste removal. Non-citizen Roma often faced dire circumstances, living in squalid and inhumane conditions in makeshift camps.

RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Section 1 Respect for the Integrity of the Person, Including Freedom From:

a. Arbitrary or Unlawful Deprivation of Life

There were no reports that the government or its agents committed any politically motivated killings; however, there were two reports that persons lost their lives due to official negligence, recklessness, excessive use of force and/or criminal intent.

In early August a Greek man was injured by the Coast Guard and died after he reportedly did not stop for a boat check. The Coast Guard ordered the suspect to stop; upon his failing to do so, Coast Guard officers opened fire, injuring the man. He was taken to a hospital where he died. Press reports alleged that the deceased was a member of a network smuggling aliens and narcotics to Greece.

In November a border guard shot and killed an Albanian who was attempting to illegally cross the border. The border guard was arrested and the case was pending at year's end.

In June the European Court for Human Rights (ECHR) found Greece in violation of Article 2 (right to life) in connection with the shooting in January 1998 that left Ioannis Karagiannopoulos, a Romani man, an invalid for life.

In July the ECHR unanimously found Greece in violation of article 2 (right to life) and cited several shortcomings in the inquiry into the fatal wounding of the 20-year-old Albanian immigrant Gentjan Celniku by an off-duty police officer in 2001 in Athens. The court awarded the applicants $42,400 (29,010 euros) for damages, costs and expenses.

Unlike the previous year, there were no reports of injury or death from landmines. Sixty-eight persons have died over the previous 16 years in the Evros minefields.

b. Disappearance

There were no reports of politically motivated disappearances.

c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

The law prohibits such practices; however, police forces abused some persons, particularly immigrants and Roma.

In November the international nongovernmental organization (NGO) "Pro-Asyl" declared, after conducting two fact-finding missions in July/August on the Aegean islands of Samos and Chios, that the Greek Coast Guard systematically mistreated newly-arrived refugees. The group alleged that the Coast Guard tried to block immigrants' boats and force them out of Greek territorial waters. Pro-Asyl alleged that passengers were cast ashore on uninhabited islands or left to their fate on the open sea. In one reported case on the island of Chios, the group said that the degree of mistreatment amounted to torture (the reputed behavior included serious beatings, mock executions, electric shocks, and pushing a refugee's head into a bucket of water). Pro-Asyl reported that the police detained all refugees and migrants on their arrival on the islands, including minors, and that without exception, all new arrivals were placed under a deportation order without being given any information about their rights and without legal counsel. In December 2006, the Council of Europe's Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) reported that, based on its 2005 visit to the country, the rights of persons in police detention centers were not respected in practice and that there continued to be widespread use of violence against persons deprived of their liberty. The CPT delegation doctors found that persons who had alleged mistreatment during interrogation or while in border guard stations were found to have injuries consistent with their allegations.

In March police officers reportedly beat Iraqi asylum seekers when they refused to board a bus to deport them to Turkey and instead insisted on filing asylum applications. In August the World Organization Against Torture (OMCT) expressed concern that authorities had not opened an investigation into the incident.

Amnesty International (AI) publicized reports of mistreatment of migrants and asylum-seekers. In September 2006, 40 migrants, including minors, who were attempting to board ships bound for Italy from the port of Patras were reportedly detained at the Patras Port Security Office and officials reportedly beat some of them.

In July the prosecutor ordered an inquiry into videos, aired by YouTube.com and on Greek television, showing seven officers abusing two Albanians in police custody reportedly after their arrest on drug charges, in June 2006. An arrest warrant was issued for two of the officers on felony charges and charges were brought against seven officers for torture and breach of duty. Five officers were suspended from duty.

During the year the ECHR ruled against the government in a number of cases involving police shooting, beating, or otherwise mistreating persons. For example, in January the ECHR found police brutality in the Alsayed Allaham case concerning the beating of a Syrian citizen in September 1998. In May 2007 the court ruled against Greece in a similar case concerning the beating of Dimitris Zelilof in December 2001. In December the ECHR unanimously found Greece in violation of Article 3 (prohibition of torture) and Article 14 (prohibition of discrimination) concerning the assault by police officers and subsequent lack of an effective investigation into the allegations of police brutality and racial motives in connection with the beating of a pregnant Romani woman which led to the miscarriage of her child. Greece was ordered to pay the victim $30,600 (21,000 euros) in damages.

In May a homicide police officer was arrested for attempted rape of a woman while on duty and in his police car. The case was pending at year's end.

AI reported that in 2006 a Bulgarian woman was detained on the island of Rhodes for illegal entry. Two men who allegedly arranged her transfer from Crete to Rhodes were charged with trafficking and pimping. The woman reported that after she was detained a police officer took her to his house, where he raped her. She also alleged that, when she was next taken to the police station, she was raped by another officer. Authorities opened a criminal investigation, and the two officers were charged with rape. The on-duty officer at the station and the police station commander were charged with neglect of duty. The trial was pending at year's end.

Police were more likely to abuse Roma than other minority groups. Immigrants, including Albanians, also accused police of abuse.

The CPT recommended measures to stamp out mistreatment by law enforcement officials that included investigating such allegations thoroughly and, where appropriate, imposing disciplinary and criminal sanctions. The committee also recommended the establishment of an independent police inspectorate and rigorous recruitment and training programs for the police. The CPT made an unexpected follow-up visit to prisons and police detention centers in February, the results of which had not been published by year's end. The visit's objective was to examine steps taken by the authorities to implement CPT recommendations made during its 2005 visit.

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

Prison conditions remained harsh due to continued overcrowding and outdated facilities. As of August, the Ministry of Justice reported that the total prison population was 10,772, while the official capacity of the prison system was 6,019.

There were reports of prison or detention center guards mistreating prisoners. In April protests erupted in several prisons around the country due to overcrowding and in response to reports that guards had beaten a high-profile anarchist in a jail outside Athens. In July inmates of the Diavata Thessaloniki prison alleged that they were beaten by prison guards.

There was one detention center death during the year that appeared to result from police negligence. In April a 20-year-old Albanian committed suicide while in police custody in Ilion, Athens. The young man hanged himself with a belt that had not been taken from him in contravention of detention rules.

In a 2005 visit, the CPT examined the treatment of persons detained by law enforcement authorities, focusing in particular on detention facilities for illegal immigrants in the eastern Aegean and Thrace. The delegation visited prisons, police detention centers, police stations, holding facilities for illegal immigrants, and psychiatric hospitals. In a December 2006 report on the visit, the CPT noted that prisons remained largely overcrowded and that prison violence appeared to be on the rise, that conditions of detention in police facilities generally were unsatisfactory and in certain cases amounted to inhuman or degrading treatment, and that facilities designed for holding suspects for short periods were used for prolonged incarceration. On February 20-27, the CPT made an unannounced follow-up visit to prisons and police detention centers; results of that visit had not been announced by year's end. In accordance with recommendations from the CPT and other international organizations, the government opened two new alien detention facilities, one in Samos in December with a capacity of 285 persons and another 300-person facility in Evros, Thrace.

AI found that minors were among refugees and migrants being held at the detention center on the island of Chios and that the center was overcrowded and lacked toilet facilities. Authorities detained five minors in the city of Volos for 45 days before transferring them to Athens where they were further detained.

The ombudsman for human rights stated in May that the increasing overcrowding was creating poor prison conditions and leading to discipline problems and criminal behavior in the prisons.

In March detainees in the Thessaloniki Police Station awaiting trial filed a complaint requesting their transfer to prisons. Many of them had been held in the station for over two months. In August inmates of a prison in northwestern Greece rioted to protest prison overcrowding. The prison was built to house 80 inmates but held 235 at the time of the riot. In September inmates of the Alikarnassos prison in Crete also rioted due to overcrowding. The prison had a capacity of 250 inmates, but reportedly held 390. At the high security Korydallos Prison in central Piraeus, many pretrial detainees were held with convicted prisoners. To help address overcrowding, authorities opened a new prison facility in March in Domokos, central Greece.

In April the CPT reported to the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly that detention center conditions in Peplos, Thrace, and on the Aegean island of Mytilini were unacceptable and that there were multiple shortcomings at the Chios judicial prison.

In June the UNHCR found that both juveniles and women were held alongside men at the alien detention center in Samos. A new center has since opened on Samos.

In 2006 the Council of Europe commissioner for human rights reported that local and international independent human rights observers were not consistently permitted access to prisons, police detention centers, or detention centers for illegal immigrants. In May the ombudsman for human rights formally complained that, for the two previous years, the Ministry of Justice denied his representatives access to prisons. The Ministry continued to deny the ombudsman access to prisons through year's end. International human rights observers reported fewer problems receiving permission for visits than did local human rights groups, and the International Committee of the Red Cross had a regular program for prison visits. However, there was insufficient access to detention centers for independent organizations wanting to screen for victims of trafficking in persons.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

The constitution and law prohibit arbitrary arrest and detention. However, police conducted large-scale sweeps and temporarily detained large numbers of foreigners, often under crowded and squalid conditions, while determining their residence status.

Role of the Police and Security Apparatus

The police are responsible for law enforcement and maintenance of order within the country and are under the authority of the Ministry of the Interior, Department of Public Order. The Coast Guard is responsible for law enforcement in territorial waters and is under the authority of the Ministry of Mercantile Marine. While the country's law enforcement agencies were generally effective, police did not adequately deal with self-styled "anti-imperialist" anarchists, who used crude gas canister bombs and Molotov cocktails to attack property, government offices, targets representing "Western interests," and the police, particularly in central Athens.

Police corruption continued to be a problem. While a police anticorruption unit investigated alleged abuses, human rights and antitrafficking groups asserted that anticorruption efforts needed to be given higher priority. The ombudsman for human rights and NGOs noted that the Bureau of Internal Affairs' investigations determined culpability in very few cases and that the penalties handed down were disproportionately lenient.

In December the media complained about light administrative sentences, which ranged from 15 days to six months' suspension, given to seven police officers involved in

a police brutality incident against a Cypriot student during the November 17 rallies of 2006. All seven officers were also facing criminal charges in connection with the beating.

In 2006 the Council of Europe's commissioner for human rights reported that few cases against law enforcement personnel were brought before the courts and that courts were lenient in addressing cases involving law enforcement personnel. The commissioner noted that authorities' failure to examine cases of mistreatment by law enforcement personnel remained of particular concern and that the government needed to review the mechanisms to address corruption and allegations of abuse by law enforcement.

In September authorities arrested a Coast Guard lieutenant commander and a junior officer on charges of taking bribes to facilitate the sea transport of illegal migrants through their area of jurisdiction. The Thessaloniki Naval Court convicted the two officers and gave them suspended sentences. Both officers were suspended from their duties.

On October 3, Thessaloniki Security Police announced the arrest of an Air Force officer on charges of forgery. The suspect was arrested for attempting to counterfeit the seals of police stations in Patras and Pyrgos as well as the seal of a police officer serving in the security police department of Thessaloniki. Charges were filed and the matter remained under investigation at year's end.

During the year the Police Bureau of Internal Affairs took several disciplinary measures, including dismissal and suspension, against officers involved in corruption, primarily for forging documents and taking bribes. Most charges against police involved violation of duty, false certificates, abuse of power, corruption, violations with arms and explosives, illegal release of persons in police custody, pimping, and violations related to alien registration.

For example, in May the Bureau of Internal Affairs arrested the director of a police station in Nea Ionia, Athens for accepting a $51,100 (35,000 euros) bribe from the friend of a prisoner. The bribe was to fix the trial outcome and to ensure a favorable decision on appeal that would result in a suspended sentence. The police director was suspended from duty and was awaiting trial at year's end.

The former Ministry of Public Order (now under the Ministry of Interior) conducted regular training to address a variety of problems, including corruption and police abuses. The ministry also issued a code of conduct, booklets and other material to police officers to promote reform.

Arrest and Detention

The law requires judicial warrants for arrests, except when they are made during the commission of a crime, and prohibits arbitrary arrest orders. Authorities generally respected these provisions in practice. Police are required to bring persons who are detained or arrested before an examining magistrate within 24 hours. The magistrate is required to issue a detention warrant or order their release within three days unless special circumstances justify a two-day extension of this limit. Bail is available for defendants detained or arrested on felony charges, unless the judicial officer determines that it would not be adequate to ensure the defendant's appearance at trial or that the defendant is a flight risk or danger to the community.

The law provides that persons in detention have the right to contact a close relative or another third party, to have access to a lawyer, and to have access to a doctor; however, during its 2005 visit to the country, the CPT found that the government did not respect these rights in practice. The CPT heard a number of allegations that access to a lawyer had been delayed for periods of up to three days. In most of these cases, the persons detained--mainly foreigners--alleged that they were mistreated during arrest and interrogation. The CPT received a number of complaints from illegal immigrants in detention that they were provided information sheets explaining their rights in only the Greek language and that they were either coerced physically or threatened with mistreatment to ensure they signed the information sheets.

Defendants have the right to legal counsel. In felony cases the bar association provides lawyers to defendants who prove they cannot afford legal counsel.

Defendants brought to court on the day following the alleged commission of a misdemeanor may be tried immediately under expedited procedures. Although legal safeguards, including representation by counsel, apply in expedited procedure cases, the short time period limited defendants' ability to present an adequate defense. Defendants may request a delay to prepare a defense, but the court is not obliged to grant their request. Expedited procedures were used in less than 10 percent of applicable cases.

The ombudsman for human rights asserted in his 2007 annual report that the number of complaints of police taking citizens to detention centers for arbitrary identity checks, using insulting language and threats of force, and conducting bodily searches in public remained at the same high levels as in the past. Police reportedly targeted persons based on their race, color, nationality, or presence in high-crime areas.

In 2005 the chief prosecutor of the Supreme Court opened an investigation into allegations made by 28 Pakistanis resident in Greece that they were abducted in 2005, hooded, held for up to seven days in a secret location, and interrogated by persons who claimed to be police officers. One of the claimants also alleged that he was beaten. The minister of public order reported that up to 5,000 foreign national residents were legally questioned following the July 2005 London bombings, but that no abuses occurred. In May 2006 the prosecutor filed abduction charges against unidentified suspects after completing a four-month investigation and established that at least 14 Pakistanis were abducted. The case remained pending at year's end.

The law allows pretrial detention for up to 18 months for cases involving alleged felonies and for up to nine months for misdemeanors involving "multiple, accidental manslaughters." Some defense lawyers asserted that pretrial detention was supposed to be reserved for exceptional cases but had become the norm. They also argued that it was excessively long and that although the Code of Criminal Procedure expressly excludes "seriousness of the crime" as a criterion, it is usually the main reason for extended detention in practice. A panel of judges may release detainees pending trial, with or without bail. Pretrial detainees made up approximately 30 percent of those incarcerated and contributed to prison overcrowding, according to figures provided by the Ministry of Justice.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The law provides for an independent judiciary, and the government generally respected this provision in practice; however, observers reported that the judiciary was subject to influence. On several occasions in 2006 and 2007, the ECHR penalized the government for unreasonably long trials and found the Greek court system to be inefficient. During the year a number of judges were under investigation or had been dismissed on corruption-related charges. There were several ongoing corruption-related criminal cases for as many as twenty judges. The judiciary acted more leniently toward those claiming a political motivation for their acts of property destruction (so-called anarchists) than it did for those who did not claim a political motivation. For example, anarchists were frequently given suspended prison sentences in lieu of prison time or punitive fines.

The judicial system consists of three levels of civil courts (first instance, appeals, and supreme), three levels of criminal courts (first instance, divided into misdemeanor and felony divisions; appeals; and supreme), appointed judges, and an examining magistrate system, with trials by judicial panels.

Trial Procedures

The law provides for the right to a fair trial, and an independent judiciary generally enforced this right. Trials are public in most instances, and juries are used in all first and second-degree felony cases. An antiterror statute permits denial of the right to a jury trial in cases of violent terrorism. Defendants have the right to be present and to consult with an attorney in a timely manner. An attorney is provided at public expense if indigent defendants face serious criminal charges. Defendants may confront and question witnesses against them and present witnesses and evidence on their behalf. Defendants and their attorneys have access to government-held evidence relevant

to their cases. Defendants enjoy a presumption of innocence and have the right to appeal. Defendants who do not speak Greek have the right to a court-appointed interpreter. According to several immigrant associations in Athens, the low fees paid for such work often resulted in poor interpretation. Foreign defendants who used these interpreters frequently complained that they did not understand the proceedings at their trials. Defendants often were not advised of their rights during arrest in a language that they could understand. Several complained that they were not shown the Hellenic Police Informational Bulletin, which contains prisoners' rights in a variety of languages, and that they were forced to sign blank documents later used for their deportation.

The government recognizes Shari'a (the Muslim religious law) as the law regulating family and civic issues of the Muslim minority in Thrace.

Political Prisoners and Detainees

There were no reports of political prisoners or detainees.

Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies

There is a generally independent and impartial judiciary in civil matters. There are no administrative remedies available beyond the judicial remedies for alleged wrongs.

f. Arbitrary Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence

The law prohibits such actions; however, these provisions were not always respected in practice.

Police and prosecutors regularly conducted raids and searches of Romani neighborhoods, frequently entering Romani homes without authorization in search of criminal suspects, drugs, and weapons. Local authorities threatened to evict, and evicted, Roma from camps and tent dwellings during the year, often in violation of the law.

Section 2 Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Speech and Press

The constitution and law provide for freedom of speech and of the press, and the government generally respected these rights in practice; however, legal restrictions on free speech remained in force. The law prohibits exposing to danger of disturbance the friendly relations of the Greek state with foreign states, spreading false information and rumors liable to create concern and fear among citizens or cause disturbances in the country's international relations, and inciting citizens to rivalry and division leading to disturbing the peace or acts of violence. However, these prohibitions were very rarely invoked. In most criminal defamation cases, defendants were released on bail pending appeal without serving time in jail.

Individuals could criticize the government publicly or privately without reprisal and the government did not attempt to impede criticism.

In June police confiscated a video art show as "indecent" art. The show's curator Michalis Argyros was arrested and spent one night in jail. He and the creator of the video were charged with breaking the indecency law on the basis of the film, which depicted 1960's era pornography set against the soundtrack of the Greek national anthem. The show curator was acquitted in December.

There were numerous independent newspapers and magazines in circulation and they generally expressed a wide variety of views without restriction.

The law provides that the government exercise "immediate control" over radio and television and establishes ownership limits on media frequencies. However, independent radio and television stations were active and expressed a wide variety of views with little government restriction. State-operated stations tended to emphasize the government's views but also reported objectively on other parties' programs and positions.

The Muslim minority of Thrace, the International Press Institute and the South-East Europe Media Organization complained that a new media law, passed in July, requires radio and television stations to broadcast primarily in Greek to be eligible for the required government permit. They assert that the law will effectively block minorities from accessing information in their own languages.

The law allows for seizure, by order of the public prosecutor, of publications that insult the president, offend Christianity "or any other known religion," contain obscene articles, advocate violent overthrow of the political system, or disclose military and defense information. The government did not charge any individuals with violation of this law during the year.

The law punishes "whoever intentionally incites others to actions that could provoke discrimination, hatred or violence against persons or groups of persons on the basis of their race or ethnic origin or expresses ideas insulting to persons or to groups of persons because of their race or ethnic origin." Two cases were brought to court for expressing allegedly anti-Semitic or racist ideas: a suit filed by Greek Helsinki Monitor (GHM) against the extreme-rightwing newspaper *Eleftheros Kosmos* for having publicly expressed ideas offensive to Roma because of their ethnic origin that was scheduled to be heard in February 2008, as well as another case brought by GHM and the Central Board of Jewish Communities against the newspaper *Eleftheros Kosmos* and former Popular Orthodox Rally party (LAOS) candidate Kostas Plevris for racism and anti-Semitism. In December the court convicted Plevris and sentenced him to a 14-month suspended sentence for inciting hatred and racial violence through his book "The Jews – The Whole Truth". Plevris stated that he will appeal the ruling. *Eleftheros Kosmos* was acquitted.

Internet Freedom

There were no government restrictions on access to the Internet or reports that the government monitored e-mail or Internet chat rooms. Individuals and groups could generally engage in the peaceful expression of views via the Internet, including by e-mail. Internet was available throughout the country and widely used.

There were no developments in the 2006 case against an Internet blog administrator who was charged with libel and defamation, based upon comments that appeared in one of the blogs under his administration. The matter remained pending at year's end. The comments allegedly used the word "stupid" to describe a nationalistic television religious evangelizer who claimed that all things on earth come from Greece and from ancient Greeks.

The case of an Internet artist, who was arrested in 2005 on charges of Internet fraud for creating a satirical web site that described corruption in civil service hiring, was scheduled to be tried in June but the trial was postponed indefinitely.

Academic Freedom and Cultural Events

The government did not restrict academic freedom or cultural events.

b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

Freedom of Assembly

The law provides for freedom of assembly, and the government generally respected this right in practice.

The Police Disciplinary Council gave a 15-day suspension to the police director who in November 2006 severely beat a Cypriot student during a protest commemorating the 1973 student uprising against the military junta.

In June 2006 the UN special rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance called on the government to respond to a human rights activist's allegations that he was illegally held at a police station for four hours in 2005 and told that he was under arrest after participating in demonstrations against the expulsion of Romani children from their school. In June 2007 the special rapporteur announced that he had not received any communication from the government and noted that, if the government would not respond, he would no longer treat the case as an allegation but as a proven fact.

Freedom of Association

The law provides for freedom of association; however, the courts continued to place legal restrictions on the names of associations involving certain ethnic minorities.

In October 2006 the group Home of Macedonian Culture took its case regarding the denial of the organization's legal status to the Supreme Court, where it remained pending at the end of 2007.

c. Freedom of Religion

The law provides for freedom of religion; however, non-Orthodox groups at times faced administrative obstacles or legal restrictions on religious practices.

The law establishes the Eastern Orthodox Church of Christ (Greek Orthodoxy) as the "prevailing" religion. The Greek Orthodox Church continued to exercise significant political and economic influence. The government financially supported the Greek Orthodox Church and paid the salaries and some expenses of the two official Muslim religious leaders in Thrace. Jewish leaders requested that the government pay rabbis' salaries, given its practice of paying Orthodox priests' and Muslim muftis' salaries; the government had not responded to this request by year's end.

The government, by virtue of the status of the Greek Orthodox Church as the prevailing religion, recognizes de facto its canon law. Privileges and legal prerogatives granted to the Orthodox Church are not extended routinely to other recognized religions. Orthodox Church officials refused to enter into dialogue with religious groups that they considered harmful to Orthodox worshippers, and they instructed their members to shun followers of these faiths.

Only Greek Orthodoxy, Islam, and Judaism are recognized as "known religions." No formal mechanism exists to gain recognition as a "known religion." Recognition is granted indirectly by applying for and receiving a "house of prayer" permit from the Ministry of Education and Religion. New religions had problems obtaining these permits.

Several religious denominations reported difficulties dealing with authorities on a variety of administrative matters, including gaining recognition as a "known religion," opening new houses of worship, and moving a house of worship from one location to another.

According to Ministry of Education and Religion officials, applications for additional places of worship were numerous and were approved routinely once a recognized religion received a permit; however, members of the Church of Scientology have not been able to register or build a house of prayer. Two different groups that follow the ancient polytheistic Hellenic tradition have applied twice since 2003 for a house of prayer permit but the Ministry responded to one of the groups saying that it would delay its formal response "due to the seriousness and peculiarity of the matter." Members of Jehovah's Witnesses have five pending house-of-prayer permit requests dating from 2005. The group sent a protest letter to the ombudsman in December 2006, but had received no response by the end of 2007. Members of Jehovah's Witnesses reportedly filed an additional four applications for permits for Kingdom Halls during the year. The group had not received a reply, and construction approval was pending due to bureaucratic delays.

Although parliament approved a bill in 2000 allowing construction of the first Islamic cultural center and mosque in an Athens suburb, construction had not started by year's end. In 2006 the government passed legislation providing for the establishment of a mosque (without a cultural center) in the central Athens neighborhood of Votanikos, as opposed to the initial site chosen in an outlying suburb in Attica. Leaders of the local Muslim community expressed satisfaction with the new proposed location, but submitted a written request for action on the matter to the education and religions minister in October calling the issue "one of grave importance" to the Muslims of Athens, who according to the letter numbered in the "hundreds of thousands." In the meantime, Arab Muslims in Athens established a Muslim Cultural Center at an old abandoned factory in Moschato, Athens. The facilities, which opened in June, included a place of worship for as many as 2,000 persons. This unofficial Mosque operated without a house-of-prayer permit from the Ministry of Education and Religion. Other Muslims continued congregating in dozens of unofficial prayer rooms and were forced to travel to Thrace for official weddings and funerals because there were no official Muslim clerics outside Thrace.

Muslims are accorded the status of an official minority in Thrace, and the government selects two official Muslim religious leaders, or muftis, there. While part of the community accepted the two officially appointed muftis, some Muslim males "elected" two different muftis.

Non-Orthodox citizens claimed that they faced career limits in the military, police, fire-fighting forces, and civil service due to their religion.

The law specifically prohibits proselytizing and stipulates that religious rites must not disturb public order or offend moral principles. Members of missionary faiths reported occasional instances of police harassment, for example, identity checks and detention under anti-proselytizing laws, but continued to note an improvement during the year. Church officials from missionary faiths expressed concern that anti-proselytizing laws remained on the books, although such laws did not seriously hinder their activities. Police occasionally detained members of the Jehovah's Witnesses for identity checks. In all cases, after one to several hours, the persons were released. Both groups reported that the number of incidents of this kind of interference has decreased dramatically in recent years. Members of Jehovah's Witnesses, however, still reported approximately 30 such detentions during the year.

Religious instruction is mandatory for all Greek Orthodox students in primary and secondary schools, but not for non-Orthodox students. Some schoolbooks contained negative references to Roman Catholicism, Judaism, Jehovah's Witnesses, and the ancient polytheistic Hellenic tradition. In 2006 the ombudsman wrote a letter to the Ministry of National Education and Religions expressing the hope that the Pedagogical Institute (the competent authority for schoolbooks) would proceed with the necessary revision of the controversial chapters in new editions of the schoolbooks. In October 2006 the ombudsman wrote a second letter to the Ministry of Education and Religions, requesting to be informed of the results of his suggestions.

Since schools did not supervise non-Orthodox children while Greek Orthodox children were taking religious instruction, non-Orthodox parents complained that they were effectively forced to have their children attend Greek Orthodox classes. In Thrace the government subsidized public schools for the Muslim minority and two Koranic schools. Turcophone activists criticized the quality of instruction at the minority schools and the state-sponsored Pedagogical Academy that trains teachers. In September 2006 the government began a pilot program of teaching Turkish as a foreign language in five public high schools in Thrace. Turkish teachers expressed reservations about the program and ultimately refused to teach Turkish in these schools. The program remained inactive at year's end.

Societal Abuses and Discrimination

Members of non-Orthodox faiths reported incidents of societal discrimination, such as local Greek Orthodox bishops warning parishioners not to visit clergy or members of these faiths and requesting that police arrest missionaries for proselytizing. Some non-Orthodox religious communities encountered difficulty in communicating with

officials of the Orthodox Church and claimed that the attitude of the Orthodox Church toward their faiths has increased societal intolerance toward their religions. However, with the exception of the growing Muslim population, most members of non-Orthodox faiths considered themselves satisfactorily integrated into society.

The Orthodox Church maintained on its Web site a list of religious groups, including Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, evangelical Protestants, Scientologists, Baha'is, and others, that it considers sacrilegious.

The Roman-Catholic cemetery of Chania was vandalized in October by unknown perpetrators who destroyed tombs and monuments.

The Jewish community has approximately 5,000 members. Expressions of anti-Semitism continued to occur, particularly in the extremist press. The mainstream press and public often mixed negative comments about Jews with criticism of Israel and its government.

On October 5, 2007, while vacationing in Greece, Nick Kolyohin, 24 from Tel Aviv, was beaten by a group of youths, apparently from Albania, in a violent anti-Semitic attack.

On September 17, an ultra-right Greek political party LAOS won 3.8 percent of the popular vote to gain 10 parliamentary seats in national elections. The party leader Giorgos Karatzaferis has publicly stated that the party is not racist or anti-Semitic, but he has frequently denied that the Holocaust occurred, accused "the Pope and the Jews" of a conspiracy against Greece, and at various times claimed that 136 of the country's members of parliament are Freemasons.

Vandalism of Jewish monuments decreased, although in February swastikas were painted on an out-of-use synagogue in Veria and in March swastikas appeared in a cemetery in Ioannina. The government condemned the vandalism but did not find the perpetrators.

The Central Board of the Jewish Communities of Greece and the GHM continued to protest the Easter tradition of the burning of a life-size effigy of Judas, sometimes referred to as the "burning of the Jew," by state agencies including the Athens News Agency, the National Tourism Organization and Agrotouristiki (a government agency used to promote rural tourism). The Jewish Communities and the GHM maintained that this tradition propagated hatred and fanaticism against Jews. The Orthodox Church and the Wiesenthal Center wrote formal objections to this tradition. The Jewish Community also protested anti-Semitic passages in the Holy Week liturgy. The Jewish community reported that it remained in dialogue with the Orthodox Church about the removal of these passages.

Two cases against newspapers for expressing allegedly anti-Semitic ideas remained pending in the courts. On December 18, the Court heard arguments arising from a case brought by GHM and the Central Board of Jewish Communities against the newspaper *Eleftheros Kosmos* and former LAOS party candidate Kostas Plevris for racism and anti-Semitism. In his May 2006 book, "Jews: The Whole Truth," attorney Kostas Plevris glorified Adolf Hitler and called for the extermination of the Jews. He declared himself "a Nazi, a fascist, a racist, an antidemocrat, an anti-Semite." On December 18, the court convicted Plevris and sentenced him to a 14-month suspended sentence for inciting hatred and racial violence over his book "The Jews – The Whole Truth." Plevris stated that he intended to appeal the ruling. *Eleftheros Kosmos* was acquitted of the charges.

The government cosponsored commemorative events in Athens and Thessaloniki in January for Holocaust Remembrance Day. The Ministry of Education distributed materials about the history of the Holocaust to be read in all schools on Holocaust Remembrance Day and informed schools of educational courses available through the Jewish Museum of Athens.

For a more detailed discussion, see the *2007 International Religious Freedom Report*.

d. Freedom of Movement, Internally Displaced Persons, Protection of Refugees, and Stateless Persons

The law provides for free movement within the country, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, and the government generally respected these rights in practice.

The law prohibits forced exile, and the government did not employ it.

The law permits the government to remove citizenship from persons who commit acts contrary to the interests of the country for the benefit of a foreign state. While the law applies to citizens regardless of ethnicity, historically it has been enforced in virtually all cases against persons who identified themselves as ethnic "Macedonians." The government did not reveal the number of such cases, but it was reported to be low, and there were no reports of new cases during the year.

Due to serious bureaucratic problems in the legalization process for immigrants, many aliens were in a semilegal status, holding expired residency permits in the process of renewal. Many of these were subject to deportation without legal process following police sweeps. The law provides for legalization of undocumented immigrants who can prove by a visa stamp or possession of a tax roll number that they entered the country before the end of 2004. Immigrants and human rights organizations complained that out of an estimated 450,000 undocumented immigrants, only 180,000 were legalized under the this provision due to stringent application requirements and because many immigrants did not meet qualifications for legal entry into the country. In June the government established a National Committee for the Social Integration of Immigrants.

Protection of Refugees

The law provides for the granting of asylum or refugee status in accordance with the 1951 UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 protocol. However, the government largely has not implemented a 1999 presidential decree that brought the law into compliance with the standards of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) with regard to asylum procedures. In practice the government provided very limited protection against refoulement, the return of persons to a country where there was reason to believe they feared persecution.

Although the UNHCR observed an attempt by the government for a more realistic and humanitarian approach to refugees during 2007, the office, together with the Greek Council for Refugees, the ombudsman for human rights, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, AI, and the Council of Europe commissioner for human rights, expressed concern that very few applicants were granted asylum and that new arrivals that might include potential asylum seekers were at risk of refoulement. In March the ombudsman for human rights noted that, although the Aliens Police Directorate had made progress in receiving asylum applications, overall the asylum application process remained a problem, primarily due to selective acceptance and processing procedures for asylum applications at the police aliens' sections throughout the country. During 2006 the government granted refugee status to 128 out of 12,267 applicants. The overall refugee recognition rate, including humanitarian status granted to 64 persons, was 1.2 percent. The UNHCR remained concerned over the very low recognition rate.

Although the government cooperated with the UNHCR and other humanitarian organizations in assisting refugees and asylum seekers, the UNHCR, AI, and the ombudsman for human rights expressed concern over the country's asylum policy and practices. They cited a number of specific problems, including a lack of permanent reception facilities with decent living conditions; the use of ad hoc facilities (primarily on the islands when a boatload of refugees arrived); underdeveloped systems to provide for refugee welfare; insufficient counseling to assist in the integration of refugees and asylum seekers; and a lack of appropriate facilities for unaccompanied minors who were potential asylum seekers. In 2006 the UNHCR issued a position paper on refugee protection with 25 recommendations for the government regarding: improvement of reception capacity and living conditions; provision of legal counseling; and protection for asylum-seeking children, women, and victims of human trafficking. In response the government opened three new detention facilities during the year. In March the ombudsman pointed out inadequacies in laws for detaining and deporting underage foreign nationals, including asylum seekers, and a lack of infrastructure and services for handling juvenile detainees who tried to enter the country illegally or sought asylum. In 2006 the ombudsman recommended that the Ministry of Public Order add staff to handle the 50,000 pending asylum applications, simplify asylum procedures, and follow UNHCR recommendations and guidelines. As a result, the government improved procedures for accepting applications at the Attika Aliens Police Division, resulting in a large increase in the number applications received, from 9,050 in 2005 to 12,270 in 2006.

Conditions for illegal immigrants and asylum seekers detained by authorities were generally unsatisfactory (see Section 1.c.).

The CPT reported that most detention centers for illegal immigrants it visited in 2005 were in a poor state of repair, unhygienic, and lacking in basic amenities. In particular, Coast Guard facilities to house illegal immigrants detained on the islands of Chios and Mytilini were unacceptable. Detainees were held in metal containers lacking functioning hygienic facilities, natural light, and ventilation. The CPT recommended that such containers should never be used to hold persons for more than a few hours and should always be equipped with suitable facilities and ventilation.

In August the OMCT asserted that there had been no improvement in detention conditions at either the Thessaloniki Transfer Center or in the Aliens' Division of the Thessaloniki Police. The OMCT alleged that the conditions amounted to inhuman and degrading treatment.

The ombudsman for human rights found that the country lacked permanent holding facilities for illegal aliens that would meet basic standards for decent living. It found that, on many occasions, the government sought ad hoc facilities whenever a boatload of asylum seekers arrived. After visiting the country, the UNHCR representative in Greece stated that, although some progress had been made in Mytilini and much progress in Samos in providing information, legal counseling and medical care to illegal entrants and registering their asylum claims, there was still an urgent need for interpreters in basic origin languages (Arabic, Farsi etc.). The UNHCR representative and local human rights advocates deplored the conditions of the detention center on Samos, where detainees had no access to a yard. Thirty-eight unaccompanied minors were incarcerated alongside adults; during his visit, the ombudsman also observed seven Somali women (who he thought may have been victims of trafficking) being held in the center. The UNHCR reported in October that the Samos facility hosted more than 390 refugees, over three times its stated capacity of 120. That center has since closed and an improved facility has been opened.

In 2005 the Council of Europe human rights commissioner and the CPT found that a newly constructed short-term detention and transit facility at Petrou-Ralli for persons awaiting deportation was unsuitable for stays over two days. However, in practice persons were confined for three months in cells that contained up to eight persons with only cement beds, very limited access to showers, and brief exercise possibilities. The CPT noted that the facility's design was extremely poor and that it totally lacked communal spaces. During the year authorities continued to use the Petrou-Ralli facility to confine illegal immigrants for up to three months under these conditions.

The UNHCR observed in July an uneven improvement of detention conditions at border areas, and conditions in many areas remained substandard. Moreover, inadequate counseling to ensure the accurate identification of asylum seekers, lack of interpreters in basic refugee origin languages was prevalent, while in July, at the detention center of Mytilini, the UNHCR found unaccompanied minors held alongside adults.

In its 2007 annual report, AI found that the government failed to allow asylum-seekers access to the country and continued to return them to their country of origin, without receiving legal aid or having access to asylum procedures. AI reported that, in September 2006, 118 persons who had been shipwrecked on the island of Crete two weeks earlier were expelled to Egypt without being given access to either lawyers or AI representatives who had requested to meet them.

In June the UNHCR urged the government to do more for Iraqi refugees, who had little or no chance of obtaining asylum.

Stateless Persons

Citizenship is derived from one's parents and not by birth within the country's territory. The Ministry of Interior reported to parliament in 2005 that 46,638 Muslims from Thrace and the Dodecanese islands lost their citizenship when they left the country between 1955 and 1998. The law that permitted this divestment of citizenship was repealed in 1998, and these "stateless" residents are eligible to recover their citizenship as long as they live in Greece. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, by December 2005 there were 25 to 30 persons in possession of government-issued identification documents characterizing them as "stateless." By year's end the ministry reported that all of the 25 to 30 stateless persons had applications pending for citizenship through naturalization. In March the ombudsman for human rights noted that delay in processing applications for recovering citizenship was "excessive and unjustified." According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Interior made no decisions on the applications by year's end. Stateless residents were denied access to state benefits such as social security, medical care, and pensions.

Section 3 Respect for Political Rights: The Right of Citizens to Change Their Government

The constitution and law provides citizens the right to change their government peacefully, and citizens exercised this right in practice through periodic, free, and fair elections held on the basis of universal suffrage.

Elections and Political Participation

The country held parliamentary elections in September; the elections were considered free and fair. Five parties passed the 3 percent threshold requirement and won seats in parliament. Opposition parties functioned freely and had broad access to the media.

Romani representatives reported that local authorities often deprived Roma of the right to vote by refusing to register them. Many Roma had difficulty meeting municipal residency requirements to register to vote.

Voting is mandatory for citizens over age 18, according to the law; however, there are many conditions under which citizens may be exempted, and the government did not apply a penalty for not voting.

There were 49 women in the 300-seat parliament and two women in the 17-member cabinet. A quota system requires 30 percent of all local government candidates to be women. At the three high courts, there were 14 women out of 61 council of state justices, 28 women out of 59 supreme administrative court justices, and three women out of 62 Supreme Court justices.

There were two members of the Muslim minority in the new 300-member parliament; there were no minority members in the cabinet.

In September a candidate for parliament running in Thrace received media attention for identifying himself as a Turk, rather than as a Muslim. When the prime minister was asked about the statement of the candidate, who was from his own party, he replied that individual self-determination is an established right by the European Union but that "collective identification does not agree with the Lausanne Treaty that stipulates that the Thrace minority is Muslim."

A government-appointed regional administrator of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace has statutory responsibility for oversight of rights provided to the Muslim minority in Thrace, but the Ministry of Foreign Affairs retains an important advisory role.

Government Corruption and Transparency

The law provides criminal penalties for official corruption; however, officials sometimes engaged in corrupt practices with impunity. The World Bank's worldwide governance indicators reflect that corruption was a serious problem.

International and domestic NGOs stated that anticorruption efforts needed to be a higher government priority. Mutual accusations of corruption between political parties were a daily staple of political life. Prime Minister Karamanlis has made anticorruption a key element of his party's program, and the government was pursuing an in-depth investigation into judiciary corruption as well as steps to trace and apprehend corrupt tax collectors and law enforcement officers.

Employment Minister Savas Tsitouridis was forced to resign in April when it was revealed that one of his key staff members was under a prosecutor's investigation for suspicious stock exchange transactions. Likewise, his successor, Employment Minister Vassilis Maginas resigned in December, in response to allegations of corruption, including illegal aliens working at his residence.

Media reported that Kilkis mayor Dimitris Terzidis received a six-month suspended sentence on November 20 for breach of duties after the mayor failed to close down three local bars despite police evidence of regulation violations.

In December 2005 the former general director/acting consul at the Greek Consulate in Kyiv, the consulate's messenger, three foreign employees, and a policeman in Thessaloniki were criminally charged in Thessaloniki for allegedly cooperating in issuing approximately 2,500 illegal tourist visas to Ukrainian citizens for $200,000. The case was pending at year's end.

There are income disclosure laws for high-ranking public officials and members of the parliament.

The constitution provides for the right of access to government-held information, and in practice the government granted access for citizens and noncitizens, including foreign media.

Section 4 Governmental Attitude Regarding International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Violations of Human Rights

A wide variety of domestic and international human rights groups generally operated without government restriction, investigating and publishing their findings on human rights cases. Government officials were cooperative with some NGOs. However, the ombudsman for human rights and the GHM characterized the government-NGO relationship as poor. The ombudsman for human rights charged that the government avoided cooperating with NGOs that "could remedy the shortcomings of the administration."

The government permitted the Council of Europe's Committee for the Prevention of Torture to conduct periodic visits to prisons, detention centers, and mental hospitals, most recently in February.

Despite calls by the UN special rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution, and child pornography for the government to appoint a lead person on children's issues, the government has failed to do so. There have been no improvements to the institutional capacity for protecting unaccompanied minors or street children. The government still has not submitted to parliament for ratification the pending bilateral child repatriation agreement with Albania. There have been repeated calls for the state to take specific measures to improve the living conditions of Roma and give Romani children alternatives to street work and prostitution. This problem, however, has remained largely unaddressed, except by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs director in Thrace, who, in recent years, has implemented measures that are achieving a marked increase in school attendance by Romani children. Calls for the creation of an advisory board of civil society and public authorities to coordinate children's policies as well as the creation of a joint Greek–Albanian commission to investigate the "disappearances" from a children's institution from 1998 to 2003 have gone unheeded. These are the same issues raised by the UN special rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution, and child pornography after a November 2005 visit. Yet, the government implemented few, if any, of the special rapporteur's recommendations.

The law provides for an independent ombudsman. While the government has denied the ombudsman access to prison facilities since 2005, the ombudsman's office otherwise provided an effective means for citizens to address human rights and religious freedom problems. While it could not inspect prisons, the widely recognized office was granted adequate resources to perform its other functions, which included mediating between private individuals and public administration and defending and promoting children's rights.

There were five deputy ombudsmen who dealt respectively with human rights, children's rights, citizen-state relations, health and social welfare, and quality of life. The Department of Human Rights received complaints in 2007 regarding the government's handling of residence and work provisions for immigrants, overcrowding in prisons and detention centers for illegal aliens, unjustified procedural difficulties in acquiring citizenship, excessive and unjustified delays in processing applications by Muslims from Thrace to recover citizenship lost under pre-1998 laws, arbitrary acceptance or denial of asylum seekers' applications, discrimination against aliens, and police brutality.

The government-funded National Commission for Human Rights is an autonomous human rights body. The commission is the government's advisory body on the protection of human rights. During the year it produced a major report on trafficking that highlighted shortcomings in the victim referral system and urged the government to make better use of NGO expertise. In addition, the commission found in 2006 that Roma remained the most discriminated against and marginalized social group in the country.

Section 5 Discrimination, Societal Abuses, and Trafficking in Persons

The constitution and the law prohibit discrimination based on race, gender, disability, language, or social status; however, the government did not respect these rights consistently in practice. Violence against women and children, trafficking in persons, and discrimination against ethnic minorities, particularly Roma, and homosexuals were problems.

Women

Rape, including spousal rape, is a crime. Conviction rates for rape were low for first-time offenders, but sentences were harsh for repeat offenders. According to the former Ministry of Public Order, there were 199 rape or attempted rape cases reported in the first nine months of the year and 176 rape suspects were arrested. In 2006, 271 rapes and attempted rapes were reported. In December 2006 an academic researcher estimated that approximately 4,500 rapes occurred annually in the country, of which only 270, or 6 percent, were reported to the police. Of the reported rapes, only 183 resulted in an arrest. Of the 47 rape cases that reached court, only 20 resulted in conviction. Medical, psychological, social, and legal support from the government and NGOs were usually available to rape victims.

Domestic violence, including spousal abuse, continued to be a problem. The law provides for "ex relatione" prosecution (prosecution by force of law without the need for a victim to press charges) for all domestic violence crimes. Penalties range from two years to 10 years, depending on the gravity of the crime.

The General Secretariat for the Equality of the Sexes (GSES), an independent government agency, estimated that only 6 to 10 percent of domestic violence victims contacted the police, and only a small fraction of those cases reached trial. The GSES claimed that police tended to discourage women from pursuing domestic violence charges, instead encouraging them to undertake reconciliation efforts, and that courts were lenient when dealing with domestic violence cases. In March the Ministry of Public Order distributed to all police stations a manual on how police should treat victims of domestic violence. The GSES, in cooperation with the Ministry of Public Order, continued courses to train police on dealing with domestic violence victims.

The GSES provided counseling and assistance to domestic violence victims. Two GSES shelters for battered women and their children, in Athens and Piraeus, offered services including legal and psychological help. The GSES operated a 24–hour emergency telephone hot line for abused women. A unit of the Ministry of Health and Welfare also operated a hot line that provided referrals and psychological counseling. There were additional shelters operated by the municipality of Athens, the Orthodox Church, and various NGOs for domestic violence victims.

Prostitution is legal at the age of 18. Persons engaged in prostitution must register at the local prefecture and carry a medical card that is updated every two weeks. It was estimated that fewer than 1,000 women were legally employed as prostitutes. Approximately 20,000 women, most of foreign origin, were engaged in illegal

prostitution. According to academics, many illegal prostitutes may be trafficking victims. While there were reports that prostitutes were abused and subjected to violence and harassment by pimps and clients, there were no reports that they were specifically targeted for abuse by police.

The law prohibits sexual harassment and provides for penalties ranging from two months to five years. However, labor unions reported that lawsuits for sexual harassment were very rare. The Center for Research on Gender Equality Issues reported that the vast majority of women who experienced sexual harassment in the workplace quit their jobs and did not file charges. The center estimated that 30 to 50 percent of working women and 10 percent of working men have experienced sexual harassment at their workplace.

Muslim women in Thrace have inferior rights to men under family law, property law, and in the judicial system since these issues are resolved under Shari'a (Muslim religious law). The government recognizes Shari'a as the law regulating family and civic issues of the Muslim minority in Thrace. The first instance courts in Thrace routinely ratified decisions of the muftis who have judicial powers in civic and domestic matters. The National Commission for Human Rights stated that the government should limit the powers of the muftis to religious duties and should stop recognizing Shari'a, because it can restrict the civic rights of the citizens to whom it is applied. In 2005 the UN high commissioner for human rights expressed concern regarding the impediments that Muslim women in Thrace face under Shari'a law. Muslim female activists claimed that because all Muslim women in Thrace were married under Shari'a, they were therefore obliged to acquire mufti consent to obtain a divorce. These decisions were based on interpretations of Shari'a law that do not exist in written form and therefore cannot be appealed. The courts routinely ratified these mufti decisions.

Aside from those of Thrace, women have rights equal to those of men and equality is guaranteed by the Constitution.

The law provides for equal pay for equal work; however, according to official 2005 statistics, women's pay amounted to 81 percent of men's pay. Although relatively few occupied senior positions, women continued to enter traditionally male-dominated professions such as law and medicine in larger numbers. Women were underrepresented in labor union leadership.

Children

The government was committed to children's rights and welfare; however, Romani children continued to face social exclusion and lack of social services. In January the government implemented a law on family violence that among other things forbids corporal punishment of children.

The government does not issue birth certificates for immigrant children born in Greece. In July the ombudsman for human rights urged the government to start issuing special birth certificates for immigrant children and to accept them in all education, social security and social protection-related services. Without a birth certificate, immigrant children face difficulties registering for school and have to apply for residence permits when they reach the age of 18.

The law provides for free and compulsory education for a minimum of nine years. According to the 2001 census, 99.4 percent of school-age children attended school, and most children completed secondary education. However, noncompliance with the compulsory education requirement was a significant problem in the Romani community. Research conducted by the Aghlaia Kyriakou state hospital showed that 63 percent of Romani children did not attend school. The head of a project on Roma education of the Pedagogical University of Thessaloniki stated that less than 10 percent of Romani children of northern Greece finished the nine years of compulsory education and only 3 percent were graduated from high school. There were continuing reports of non-Romani parents withdrawing their children from schools attended by Romani children and of non-Romani parents attempting to prevent Romani children from studying at the same schools that their children attended. In 2006 the European Roma Rights Center and the International Helsinki Federation expressed concern about the placement of Romani pupils in segregated classes in Aspropyrgos, Attica.

Violence against children occurred, particularly against street children. The law prohibits the mistreatment of children and sets penalties for violators, and the government generally enforced these provisions effectively; however, government-run institutions were understaffed, and NGOs complained that they did not have available positions for all children in need of alternative placement. Welfare laws provide for treatment and prevention programs for abused and neglected children and seek to ensure the availability of alternative family care or institutional placement. However, the ombudsman for children's rights claimed in March, after visiting most government residential care centers, that the institutions provided inadequate and low-quality protection for children at high risk of abuse due to a lack of coordination between welfare services and the courts, inadequate funding of the welfare system, and poor staffing of the care centers.

Child marriage was common within the Romani community. Additionally, there were limited numbers of marriages of persons under 18 among the Muslim minority in Thrace and Athens. In 2006 the Council of Europe's commissioner for human rights and the UN special rapporteur reported that they were informed of cases of both early marriages and marriages by proxy. The state-appointed muftis, who may apply Shari'a law in family matters, noted that they did not allow marriage of children under age 15. The government has youth centers, parent counseling, and programs targeted at Romani and Muslim communities that address poverty and lack of education, two factors that were believed to contribute to child marriage.

The Police Division for Internet Crime dismantled 128 networks dealing in child pornography through the Internet in the period between July 2004 and November 2007. They arrested 42 citizens identified as members of networks and charged them with buying and selling child pornographic materials. Charges against 85 other persons have been submitted and are pending in the courts. The country does not have legislation punishing possession and circulation (without selling) of pedophiliac materials. New legislation punishing possession and circulation of such materials has been submitted to the Parliament and is expected to pass by January 2008.

According to the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) and local NGOs, the majority of street children (often indigenous Roma or Albanian Roma) were exploited by family members, who forced them to work in the streets, usually begging or selling small items. The government took few steps to prevent this exploitation.

In 2006 the ombudsman for children's rights, after several visits to a children's institution for orphans and for children from difficult family situations in Lasithi, Crete, stated that while there were some improvements, the situation remained highly problematic due to understaffing and deficient care. The ombudsman found that the institution employed four unskilled persons to care for 27 children with many personal and social problems. The ombudsman highlighted that continuing to operate the institution would be very dangerous for the children living there.

Trafficking in Persons

The law prohibits all forms of trafficking in persons; however, significant numbers of women and children and smaller numbers of men were trafficked to and within the country for the purposes of sexual exploitation and forced labor.

According to NGO estimates, there are 13,000 to 14,000 trafficking victims in the country at any given time. Major countries of origin for trafficking victims included Nigeria, Ukraine, Russia, Bulgaria, Albania, Moldova, Romania, and Belarus. Women from many other countries were trafficked to Greece and, in some cases, were reportedly trafficked on from Greece to Italy and other EU countries as well as to the Middle East.

NGOs reported a decrease in the number of Albanian children trafficked to Greece in 2006 and 2007; however, there were reports that Albanian Romani children continued to be trafficked for forced begging and stealing. Albanian children made up the majority of children trafficked for forced labor, begging, and stealing. In February 2006 the government concluded a protocol with Albania on the repatriation of Albanian child trafficking victims; however, parliament had not ratified the protocol by the end of 2007.

Women and children arrived as "tourists" or illegal immigrants and were lured into prostitution by club owners who threatened them with deportation. Unlike the previous year, there were no reports that traffickers kidnapped victims from their homes abroad and smuggled them into the country.

The law considers trafficking in persons a criminal offense and provides for imprisonment of up to 10 years and fines of approximately $14,600 to $73,000 (10,000 to 50,000 euros) for convicted traffickers. Penalties are harsher for traffickers of children. The government continued to investigate cases of trafficking and secured convictions for traffickers.

In 2007 police conducted 42 trafficking investigations (30 sexual exploitation cases, 11 labor exploitation cases and 1 illegal adoption), down from 70 in 2006. They brought charges against 121 suspected traffickers, down from 206 arrests in 2006. Twenty-five defendants (spanning nine separate multi-defendant cases), were convicted of trafficking related charges, while three were acquitted. Sentences imposed on convicted traffickers remained weak; moreover, the majority of convicted traffickers remain free on bail for five to six years while their convictions are appealed.

During the year the government participated in international investigations in cooperation with regional authorities, including the Southern European Cooperative Initiative. The Ministry of Public Order continued working on a transborder police action plan for regional antitrafficking cooperation.

Some police officers reportedly were involved in trafficking rings or accepted bribes from traffickers, including organized crime networks. During the year charges were filed against three police officers--two of them senior--relating to trafficking complicity. At year's end no trial date had been set. The former Ministry of Public Order's Bureau of Internal Affairs investigated charges of police involvement in trafficking cases. A Greek diplomat in Ukraine reportedly facilitated trafficking by issuing visas with little documentary evidence and no personal interviews to women subsequently identified as trafficking victims, according to a lawsuit filed in April 2006 by the GHM. The diplomat remained in jail awaiting trial at year's end.

While the immigration law provides for a "reflection period" for trafficking victims facing deportation, the screening and referral process did not adequately identify and protect most vulnerable potential victims. In August the National Commission for Human Rights in a special trafficking report suggested extension of the reflection period to three months. The commission also found that the current victim referral system was informal and suggested enactment of a comprehensive referral system that would include an analytical list of duties of all involved institutions in the referral process. Some trafficking victims were prosecuted for immigration violations, sometimes alongside their traffickers. A few trafficking victims and NGOs that supported them stated that inadequate police protection for victims who were witnesses in trials meant that those victims lived in constant fear of their traffickers. A few victims were provided with the reflection period and testified against their traffickers. One hundred trafficking victims were identified by government authorities in 2007, an increase over the 83 victims identified in 2006, but still below the 137 victims identified in 2005.

Police continued to detain trafficking victims who were minors as criminals or repatriated them without ensuring proper reception by their home country authorities.

During the year the government continued training programs for prosecutors and public administration officers, including social workers, psychologists, nurses, police personnel and justices. The government also conducted training programs in conjunction with international organizations, including the Council of Europe and International Organization for Migration.

Persons with Disabilities

The constitution and law prohibit discrimination against persons with physical and mental disabilities in employment, education, access to health care, or the provision of other government services, and the government effectively enforced these provisions. The law mandates access to buildings for persons with disabilities; however, authorities enforced this law poorly. In 2006 members of parliament, rapporteurs to a special parliamentary committee on the disabled, reported that the lack of accessibility forced persons with disabilities to stay home and led to serious social exclusion. Only 5 percent of public buildings were fully accessible to persons with disabilities; most buildings with special ramps did not have special elevators and lavatories. The deputy ombudsman for social welfare handled complaints related to persons with special needs, especially related to employment, social security, and transportation.

The Ministry of Welfare estimated in 2006 that there were 180,000 to 200,000 children with special education needs, of whom only 18,585 attended school in 2004 due either to a lack of special schools in their area or deficient accessibility. The National Confederation of Persons with Disabilities reported in February that the education system for persons with disabilities fostered discrimination and social exclusion and that, as a consequence, 90 percent of the children with disabilities were excluded from the mandatory 9 years of education. The confederation reiterated in 2007 that education was not available for persons with serious disabilities and that many persons with disabilities were either forced to leave schools due to lack of accessibility or were receiving very low quality education at the special schools. The confederation stated that of the 10 universities in Athens, only two were accessible to persons with disabilities.

In 2006 the deputy ombudsman reported that nearly 60 percent of persons with disabilities had been unable to gain affirmative action employment to which they were entitled because they were misinformed or inadequately informed about the supporting documents they needed to provide and because of unclear interpretations of the law itself. In December the deputy ombudsman stated that unemployment of persons with disabilities, estimated to be approximately 84 percent by the National Confederation of Persons with Disabilities and the Human Resources Employment Organization, was the greatest social problem for persons with disabilities and recommended that the government prepare new legislation to improve existing laws.

In May the ombudsman for human rights reported that 94 percent of persons confined in mental hospitals were there under a prosecutor's order. He went on to note that, in 84 percent of these cases, the decision to confine patients was not supported by a court decision as required by law. As a result, the rights of mentally ill persons were not effectively protected. The ombudsman further found that 97 percent of mentally ill persons had been transferred to mental hospitals by the police, sometimes handcuffed and escorted as "dangerous persons" rather than as patients.

National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities

Roma continued to face widespread governmental and societal discrimination including systematic police abuse; mistreatment while in police custody; regular raids and searches of their neighborhoods for criminal suspects, drugs, and weapons; educational discrimination; and forced illegal evictions. In 2006 AI criticized the government for its treatment of Roma, stating that Romani families continued to be targeted for eviction and home demolition and that Roma faced discrimination and racist attacks by both representatives of local administration and society. Other international human rights organizations and officials, including the European Committee of Social Rights, the International Helsinki Federation, the UN special rapporteur, and the Council of Europe commissioner for human rights, have identified numerous shortcomings in government policies with regard to the Romani community, including failure to provide for a sufficient number of dwellings for settled Roma or camps for Roma who follow an itinerant lifestyle, systematic eviction of Roma from sites or dwellings, segregation of Roma into substandard housing that lacked water, sanitation, and other basic services, denial of access to education for Romani children, and denial of access to health and social programs.

The law prohibits the encampment of "wandering nomads" without a permit and forces Roma to establish settlements outside inhabited areas and far from permanent housing. There were approximately 70 Romani camps in the country. Local and international NGOs charged that the enforced separation of Romani settlements from other inhabited areas contravened the country's commitments under the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.

There were frequent police raids on Romani settlements and reported harsh police treatment of Roma. In March 2006 the ombudsman for human rights, after visiting areas in Athens, Patras, and Thessaloniki, reported a series of cases that reflected inherent societal and law enforcement discrimination against Roma.

Local authorities continued to harass and threaten to evict Roma from their camps or other dwellings. In June and September 2007, according to GHM, 135 Romani families were forcibly evicted, some twice within a few days, in Athens, Patras and Halkida, without the relevant procedural safeguards being respected. Hundreds of other Romani families were threatened with similar evictions in Greater Athens, Patras, Crete and Rhodes. A number of Roma in Athens and Patras were also being prosecuted for infringements of law arising from their homelessness, as well as facing lawsuits from individuals whose land they trespass due to the persistent lack of housing or a relocation site where they would be safe from eviction.

In July more Albanian Romani families living in squalid conditions in communities around Votanikos, Athens, were evicted, paid nominal sums, or threatened in order to

clear the property for construction of a soccer stadium. The families were not presented with a court eviction order, and were evicted without any provision for their relocation in what the Athenian authorities referred to as a "cleaning operation." In November, the European Roma Rights Center called the evictions a "blatant violation of international human rights and housing law," and decried the fact that no provisions for adequate permanent or even temporary accommodations were made for the evicted families.

In July and August 2006, GHM and the Council of Europe commissioner for human rights reported that the Municipality of Patras demolished the homes of 18 Greek and Albanian Romani families in two settlements near the city while the owners were away for seasonal work. The municipality also served the two settlements' remaining families with notices of emergency police eviction and proceeded to conduct forced evictions.

Romani representatives reported that some local authorities refused to register Roma as residents or that the Roma were unable to satisfy overly burdensome registration requirements. Until registered with a municipality, citizens cannot vote or exercise other civil rights, such as contributing to social security or obtaining a marriage, commercial, or driver's license. It was estimated that 90 percent of Roma were not covered by the social security system because they were unable to make the required contributions. Indigent Roma were entitled to free health care provided all citizens; however, at times, the distance between encampments and public health facilities hindered their access.

Government ministries continued projects to address the chronic problems of the Romani community, including training courses for civil servants, police, and teachers to increase their sensitivity to Romani problems; the development of teaching materials for Romani children; the establishment of youth centers in areas close to Romani communities; and the deployment of mobile health units and community social workers to address the needs of itinerant Roma. However, Romani community representatives reported that these programs either did not always reach their communities or were of limited effectiveness.

Neo-Nazi groups reportedly launched two attacks during the year against immigrants. Five Pakistanis were injured and one was hospitalized at an attack on November 30 on a western Athens house rented by Pakistani immigrant workers. The Greek-speaking neo-Nazi skinheads entered the house after kicking and smashing doors and windows. A similar attack took place in October but without injuries. Police did not find the perpetrators and said that it was investigating the allegations. No results were announced by year's end.

Albanian immigrants, who made up approximately 5 to 7 percent of the population, faced widespread societal discrimination, although Albanian community representatives said that it was slowly decreasing. Immigrants accused police of physical, verbal, and other mistreatment. They also reported the confiscation and destruction of personal documents, particularly during police sweeps to apprehend illegal immigrants. AI, the GHM, and the deputy ombudsman for human rights alleged that complaints of police mistreatment of Albanians were rejected as unfounded, although their authenticity was supported by documents such as certificates from state hospitals concerning recent injuries and issued shortly after the complainants' release from police stations.

Community leaders reported that it was difficult for ethnic Albanians, and others, to be granted citizenship, even after all objective citizenship requirements had been met. In June Albanian immigrants living in Thessaloniki complained to the ombudsman about the long waiting list and obstacles in their efforts to obtain or renew a residence permit in Greece. Many Albanians hold only a temporary document that proves they have applied for a permit but does not allow them to travel to Albania.

Government procedures for granting citizenship are confidential, and the Ministry of Interior is not obliged to explain the reasons for rejecting an application. Community leaders noted that the ministry rejected the applications of immigrants who believed they met all citizenship criteria. Reapplication is discouraged by the $1,400 (1,000 euros) nonrefundable application fee. During the year the ombudsman for human rights noted that delays in the citizenship procedures were excessive and unjustified. In one case, a woman's application has been pending since 1991.

A number of citizens identified themselves as Turks, Pomaks (Slavic speaking Muslims), Vlachs, Roma, Arvanites (Orthodox Christians who speak a dialect of Albanian), or Macedonians. While some members of these groups sought to be identified as "minorities," or "linguistic minorities," others did not consider that these identifications made them members of a "minority." The government considers that the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne provides the exclusive definition of minorities in the country and defines the rights they have as a group. In accordance with this view, the government recognizes only a "Muslim minority." It does not officially confer status on any indigenous ethnic groups nor does it recognize "ethnic minority" or "linguistic minority" as legal terms. However, the government affirmed an individual right of self-identification.

Many individuals who defined themselves as members of a "minority" found it difficult to express their identity freely and maintain their culture. Use of the terms *Tourkos* and *Tourkikos* ("Turk" and "Turkish") is prohibited in titles of organizations, although individuals legally may call themselves *Tourkos*. To most Greeks, the words *Tourkos* and *Tourkikos* connote Turkish identity or loyalties, and many objected to their use by Greek citizens of Turkish origin.

Some members of the Pomak community claimed they were pressured by members of the Turkish speaking community to deny the existence of a Pomak identity as separate from a Turkish identity.

The government did not recognize the Slavic dialect spoken by persons in the northwestern area of the country as "Macedonian," or as a language distinct from Bulgarian. Most speakers of the dialect referred to themselves as "natives." A small number of Slavic speakers insisted on using the term "Macedonian," a designation that generated strong opposition from the ethnic Greek population. These Slavic speakers claimed that the government pursued a policy designed to discourage use of their language. Government officials and the courts denied requests by Slavic groups to identify themselves using the term "Macedonian," because approximately 2.2 million ethnic (and linguistically) Greek citizens already use the term to identify themselves.

Other Societal Abuses and Discrimination

The NGO Greek Homosexual Community (EOK) alleged that police often abused and harassed homosexuals and transvestites and subjected them to arbitrary identity checks and bodily searches in public places.

There were no reports of discrimination against persons with HIV/AIDs.

Section 6 Worker Rights

a. The Right of Association

The law provides that all workers, with the exception of members of the military, have the right to form and join unions of their choice without any previous authorization or excessive requirements, and workers exercised this right. Approximately 26 percent of nonagricultural salaried employees were union members. Approximately 30 percent of the total labor force was unionized. There were no unionized agricultural employees.

b. The Right to Organize and Bargain Collectively

The law allows unions to conduct their activities without interference, and the government protected this right in practice. The law generally provides for the right to bargain collectively in the private sector and in public corporations, and unions exercised this right freely. The law provides for the right to strike, and workers in the private sector and in public corporations exercised this right in practice. Police have the right to organize and demonstrate but not to strike.

There are some legal restrictions on strikes, including a mandatory notice period of four days for public utilities and 24 hours for the private sector. The law mandates a skeleton staff during strikes affecting public services. Courts may declare a strike illegal; however, such decisions were seldom enforced. Unions complained that this judicial power deterred some of their members from participating in strikes. Courts declared some strikes (of transportation workers, air traffic controllers, garbage

collectors, and others) illegal during the year for reasons such as failure of the union to give adequate advance notice of the strike or a union making new demands during the course of the strike, but no workers were prosecuted for striking.

c. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The law prohibits all forced or compulsory labor, including by children; however, there were reports that women, children, and occasionally men were trafficked for commercial sexual exploitation or labor.

d. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment

The laws protect children from exploitation in the workplace and prohibit forced or compulsory labor; however, the government did not adequately protect children, including Roma, who were trafficked for commercial sexual exploitation as well as exploited in nontraditional environments, such as begging on the street.

The minimum age for employment in the industrial sector is 15 years, with higher limits for some activities. The minimum age is 12 years in family businesses, theaters, and the cinema. These limits were enforced by occasional spot checks and were generally observed. However, families engaged in agriculture, food service, and merchandising often had younger family members assisting them at least part-time.

Child labor was a problem, although international and local observers agreed that the number of working children had decreased in recent years. A number of children begged or tried to sell small items in the streets. The government and NGOs reported that the majority of beggars were either indigenous or Albanian Roma.

Local children's advocates estimated that a large number of the 150,000 children under 18 years of age who dropped out of school every year ended up in the labor market, often under squalid conditions.

There were reports that children from Albania were trafficked and forced to beg; however, antitrafficking NGOs reported a decrease in this abuse as more Albanian parents entered the country legally with their children. Some parents forced their children to beg for money or used their children as props while begging for money.

The labor inspectorate is responsible for enforcement of labor legislation; however, trade unions alleged that enforcement was inadequate due to serious labor inspectorate understaffing.

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

The national minimum wage of approximately $42 (29 euros) daily and $960 (658 euros) monthly provided a decent standard of living for a worker and family. Officially, wages should be the same for local and foreign workers, but in practice there were reports of undocumented foreign workers being exploited by employers, receiving low wages and making no social security contributions.

The maximum legal workweek is 40 hours in the private sector and 37.5 hours in the public sector. The law provides for at least one 24-hour rest period per week, mandates paid vacation of one month per year, and sets limits on overtime. Premium pay and authorization by the Ministry of Employment is required by law for overtime work.

The law provides for minimum standards of occupational health and safety. The Greek General Confederation of Labor characterized health and safety laws as satisfactory but stated that enforcement by the labor inspectorate was inadequate. Workers do not have the legal right to remove themselves from situations that they believe endanger their health; however, they have the right to lodge a confidential complaint with the labor inspectorate. Inspectors have the right to close down machinery or a process for up to five days if they see safety or health hazards that they believe represent an imminent danger to the workers.

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