

Greece condemned for discriminating against Macedonian minority

Read the [interview](#) with one of the main plaintiffs Mr. Sideropoulos (in Macedonian) after the judgement!

Read also the press release by the [Macedonian Human Rights Movement of Canada](#).

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PRESS RELEASE

13/7/1998

NEW CONVICTION OF GREECE BY THE EUROPEAN COURT ON MINORITY ISSUES.

INADMISSIBLE ATTITUDE OF THE (GREEK STATE-OWNED) MACEDONIAN NEWS AGENCY.

The cooperating organizations Greek Helsinki Monitor and Minority Rights Group - Greece point out that the unanimous conviction of Greece by the European Court of Human Rights, on 10/7/1998, is the tenth conviction of the country for violation of the rights of minorities which live in it.

Greece was convicted for the violation of the freedom of association (Article 11 of the relevant European Convention), because the Greek courts did not allow in 1990 the establishment of the "Home of Macedonian Civilization" (as translated in English by the European Court).

Between 1993 and mid-1997, Greece was convicted seven times for violations of the rights of Jehovah's Witnesses: the cases concerned either convictions by Greek courts for proselytism (1 case), for refusal of their clergy to do military service (3), for the opening of a house of worship (1); -or expulsions of pupils from school for refusal to participate in parades (1). In another case, Greece settled and allowed a house of worship to operate to avoid another conviction.

In the course of the last seven months, Greece was convicted for the violation of the rights of three other minorities. In December 1997, for the refusal to recognize the legal personality of the Catholic Church of Chanea (Crete); in February 1998, for the conviction of Protestant military personnel for proselytism of civilians; and now, in July 1998, for the establishment of an association by ethnic Macedonians. There has been no conviction yet only for the Turkish minority, as a case of the former

deputy Sadik was rejected, despite the positive recommendation of the Commission, for strictly procedural reasons (non-exhaustion of legal remedies in Greece).

The most important argument of the recent Court decision is its position towards the Greek courts' and state's view that the Home of Macedonian Civilization was not allowed to be established as its founding members did not aim simply at a cultural activity but at supporting the view that there is a Macedonian minority. The latter is known to be considered "non-existent" in Greece, an argument documented by the Greek courts and state with evidence full of "scholarly" quotes even from texts dating from the Nazi occupation period: "a guide to Salonika written by German historians and archaeologists during the last world war states that..." In countering this argument, the European Court mentions the binding character for Greece of the OSCE documents which the country has signed and which have usually been considered merely declaratory and without any legal value. The Court states that the aims of the Home are "clear and legitimate" and adds:

"Even supposing that the founders of an association like the one in the instant case assert a minority consciousness, the Document of the Copenhagen Meeting of the Conference on the Human Dimension of the CSCE (Section IV) of 29 June 1990 and the Charter of Paris for a New Europe of 21 November 1990 – which Greece has signed – allow them to form associations to protect their cultural and spiritual heritage."

We consider as an important development that, the day after the publication of the Court decision, six newspapers (Avgghi, Ethnos, Eleftherotypia, Exousia, Kathimerini, and Rizospastis) covered the news in a correct journalistic way, something that happens for the first time with respect to decisions of such "sensitivity," that usually go deliberately unnoticed. They were certainly helped in that by the news items of the two state agencies, the Athens News Agency and the Macedonian News Agency (MPA), which reported immediately and accurately the related news item of the French News Agency of 10/7. It was therefore surprising to see that the MPA gave the impression to have "regretted" the first objective coverage: on 11/7 it released two lengthy and in essence rebutting items. In them, Greece's conviction was completely downplayed (in the first) or totally omitted (in the second), as the purpose of these items was to show, as the title of the third and last item showed, that:

"European Court Of Justice: The Defense Of The Greek Character Of Macedonia Is Greece's Legal Right."

In the text of that news item, that title is explained by way of distortions of, and by turning upside down the text of the court decision (even with the use of quotation marks to make the forgery more convincing). The item also distorts the meaning of the reference to the OSCE decision while it presents mainly the views of the Greek courts (which are naturally stated in the text of the European Court), but in ways that could give the impression that they are adopted by the latter. Finally, we need to point out that MPA chose to include in its 11/7 English language bulletin only the distorted news item on "Greece's vindication" confirming the impression that the first, objective coverage of the matter was "outside editorial policy."

We therefore call upon the Director of MPA and the supervising Minister for the Press Mr. Reppas, who have both shown in the past correct "sensitivity" on such matters, to make their views public on this issue, which does not happen for the first time, in a way that will exclude its repetition in the future. Thus, they will avoid the international negative exposure of Greece as a country where the state media can use principles of "journalism" which can be found only in authoritarian regimes.

The complete text of the Court's decision can be found at its Internet address:

<http://www.dhcour.coe.fr/eng/SIDIROPOULOS%20&%20OTHERS%20ENG.html>

THE MACEDONIAN NEWS AGENCY NEWS ITEM

[08] EUROPEAN COURT OF JUSTICE: THE DEFENSE OF THE GREEK CHARACTER OF MACEDONIA IS GREECE'S LEGAL RIGHT

Web Posted: 16:35 GMT+2

Strasbourg, 11/07/1998 (MPA) It is the legal right of the Greek authorities and the country's courts to face every attempt aimed at disputing the Greek character of Macedonia and its residents as well as, its territorial integrity, according to a European Court of Justice ruling that was issued after examining an appeal that challenged the Greek court decisions based on which, the establishment of an association in Florina, north-western Greece had been rejected because it indirectly raised the Macedonian issue.

The refusal of the Greek courts to recognize the association named "The House of the Macedonian Culture" in Florina was based on law and sought legal purposes, mentions the European Court of Justice, even though it found that in the specific case the restriction of the freedom to associate was not necessary. The court observed that if the association's founders goals were illegal they could be faced by dissolving the association in question based on article 105 of the Civil Code.

The European Court of Justice in Strasbourg examined the case after an appeal by four people, who adduced their alleged "Macedonian national origin" and "Macedonian national conscience".

The European Court of Justice recognized as legitimate the Greek courts right to face what they judged to be an intention to challenge the Greek identity of Macedonia and its people as well as, the country's territorial integrity, taking under consideration the situation existing at that period of time (1990) in the Balkans and the political differences between Greece and FYROM. In the decision is made a specific reference to Greece's complaints over the threat that FYROM's hostile propaganda was posing at the time of the events, its attempt to claim that the name Macedonia was Slav and the inclusion of certain articles in FYROM's Constitution toward that purpose as well as, the systematic promotion of the nationalist idea of a "united Macedonia".

THE FRENCH NEWS AGENCY NEWS ITEM

Greece condemned for discriminating
against Macedonian minority

Fri 10 Jul 98 - 15:55 GMT

STRASBOURG, July 10 (AFP) - The European Court of Human Rights on Friday condemned Greece for having banned an association called "The House of Macedonian Civilisation."

Four people brought the case on behalf of a group of about 50 people who said they were of ethnic Macedonian origin and had a "Macedonian national consciousness."

The Court ruled that Greece had violated the applicants' right to liberty of association.

The plaintiffs come from Florina, northern Greece, near the border with Macedonia. It awarded the applicants a total of 40,000 drachmas (13,300 dollars) in costs. They had been claiming nearly 100 million drachmas in damages and costs.

The Greek administration and court had refused to register the association, ruling that its objective was to create a Macedonian Slav state with access to the Aegean Sea.

The appeal court in Thessalonica based its decision on the belief that the group wanted to challenge the Greek identity of the northern Greek region of Macedonia, challenging the country's territorial integrity.

The European Court of Human Rights ruled that Greece was wrong to ban the association, since it was not without means to pursue its leaders if the activities did indeed prove to be dangerous.

Since Macedonia's independence from Belgrade in 1991, Athens has disputed its right to use that name, saying it implies that the Skopje government has territorial designs on the northern Greek province of Macedonia.

It took until March this year for a Greek government spokesman to refer to the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) as "Macedonia of Skopje".

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Христос Сидеропулос за спорот против грчката влада

Победа на македонскиот народ

Грција треба да се однесува како демократска земја. Да не прифати нас како народ што живее таму и да ни ги даде човековите права

Деновиве Европскиот суд за правата на човекот го заврши процесот Сидеропулос и другите против грчката влада, започнат пред околу осум години, а кој откако ги помина сите судски инстанци во Грција својата завршница ја доби на 10 јули во Стразбур. Европските судии во својата одлука рекоа дека Грција го прекршила членот 11 од Еворпската Конвенција за правата на човекот со кој се регулира правото на слободно здружување на граѓаните, осудувајќи ја државата да им исплати 4 милиони драхми на тужителите, во рок од три месеци. Главниот иницијатор на процесот, многупати осудуваниот Македонец во Грција заради неговото јавно признание за етничката припадност, Христос Сидеропулос, одлуката на Еворпскиот суд ја оценува како голема сатисфакција за Македонците во Грција и охрабрување за натамошната борба за нивните права.

Господине Сидеропулос како после се, ја доживувате одлуката на Еворпскиот суд од Стразбур

- Случајот беше еден спор со грчката влада за кој ние не посакувавме да стигне до таму, да ја судиме Грција. Зошто како лојални граѓани на таа држава требаше да се држиме до сите рамки... како граѓанин. Но Грција не ја прифати нашата желба да си формираме наше културно друштво и така откако ги поминавме сите судски степени во државата стигнавме на Европскиот суд. Таму судот едногласно рече дека има Македонци во Лерин и дека можат да си формираат друштво. Јас тоа го гледам како една победа на македонскиот народ. И ќе продолжиме ние не само во Лерин. Ова е почеток и во другиот македонски градови во Грција Македонците да си прават културни центри.

Освен негувањето на етничките белези во тие културни центри дали ќе имате и други барања до грчката држава на пример во образованието?

Образование за Македонците и црква, имаме ставено како барања во ОБСЕ, во ОН и во други меѓународни институции. Ние очекуваме од Грција да ги прифати, зошто не сакаме и овие барања да стигнат повторно во Еврпскиот суд, за да победиме сигурно таму. Мислам дека за ова Грција ќе размисли многу подобро. И ќе прифати, зошто одиме во нов век, со нови мисли, и Грција треба така да се однесува, како демократска земја. Да не прифати нас како народ што живее таму и да ни ги даде човековите права.

Според вашата проценка колку етнички Македонци има во Грција сега.

Етнички Македонци во Грција има над еден милион, но не сите се чувствуваат така. Дали се 500-600 илјади, помалку или повеќе, не се знае, зошто на пописот што се прави секои десет години нема прашање за етничката припадност на граѓаните. Тоа не можам да ви го кажам точно. Но верувам дека денес над еден милион Македонци живеат во Грција.

Б.Г., Нова Македонија, 16 јули 1998

Press Release – July 20, 1998

Macedonian Human Rights Movement of Canada

Border Crossing into Greece – Association of Refugee Children from Aegean Macedonia

The Second World Reunion of the Association of Refugee Children from Aegean Macedonia began on July 15, 1998 in the Republic of Macedonia and was scheduled to end with an historic trip to Edessa (Voden) Greece on July 19, 1998.

The former child refugees, evacuated from Greece during the Civil War of 1946-49, have consistently been denied entry into Greece simply because they assert their Macedonian ethnic identity. Former child refugees who assert a Greek identity have been allowed to return to Greece.

Several hundred Macedonians, under the supervision of a number of human

rights organizations including the Greek Helsinki Monitor, the Macedonian Helsinki Committee and the Rainbow Party, attempted to cross the border from the Republic of Macedonia into Florina (Lerin) Greece on the morning of July 19, 1998. After being held up unnecessarily for several hours at the border and having their personal belongings examined, most of these people were allowed entry. The Greek government seemed intent on delaying the celebrations planned in Edessa (Voden) as the expression of Macedonian culture is not tolerated in Greece.

However, approximately 30 people, including the executive of the Association of Refugee Children from Aegean Macedonia (from Canada) were denied entry and given no reason by the Greek government. These people do not have criminal records and as Canadian citizens do not require visas to visit Greece. The Greek government turned them back only because of their involvement in Macedonian organizations overseas and because they assert a Macedonian ethnic identity.

The MHRMC and ARCAM call on the international community to condemn Greece's actions and to apply pressure on the Greek government to comply with all human rights conventions to which it is a signatory and allow these ethnic Macedonians to freely cross the border into Greece.

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