



The State Department web site below is a permanent electro information released prior to January 20, 2001. Please see [y](#) material released since President George W. Bush took offic This site is not updated so external links may no longer func [us](#) with any questions about finding information.

NOTE: External links to other Internet sites should not be c endorsement of the views contained therein.



## U.S. Department of State

### Greece Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 1997

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, January 30, 1998.

---

#### GREECE

Greece is a constitutional republic and multiparty parliamentary democracy with an independent judiciary in which citizens choose their representatives in free and fair elections. The Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) holds a majority of parliamentary seats, and its leader, Constantine Simitis, has been Prime Minister since 1996. The New Democracy Party is the main opposition party.

The national police and security services are responsible for internal security. Civilian authorities maintain effective control of all security forces, and police and security services are subject to a broad variety of restraints. Some members of the police and security forces committed human rights abuses.

Greece has a market economy with a large public sector that accounts for roughly 40 percent of gross domestic product. Residents enjoy a relatively advanced standard of living. European Union subsidies, grants, and loans, the latter two directed mainly toward major infrastructure projects, reinforce government economic development efforts.

The Government respected the human rights of most citizens, but problems remain in some areas. Security force personnel sometimes abused suspects during arrests and interrogations and abused illegal aliens. The Government continued to take corrective action to relieve severe overcrowding and harsh living conditions in some prisons. It continued to use Article 19 of the Citizenship Code to revoke the citizenship of Greek citizens who are not ethnically Greek, and Article 20 of the same code was used to revoke the citizenship of some Greek citizens abroad who asserted a "Macedonian" ethnicity. On occasion the Government placed international and domestic human rights monitors, non-Orthodox

religious groups, and minority groups under surveillance.

Some restrictions on freedom of religion persisted; the Government investigated and arrested members of non-Orthodox religions for proselytism. Discrimination against minorities continued to be a problem. The Government formally recognizes only the Muslim minority specified in the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne. It refuses to acknowledge formally the existence of any other ethnic groups, principally Slavophones, under the term "minority." As a result, some individuals who define themselves as members of a minority find it difficult to express their identity freely and to maintain their culture.

## **RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS**

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

#### **a. Political and Other Extrajudicial Killing**

There were no reports of political killings.

In February a policeman was charged with homicide for killing an Albanian migrant in Kastoria who was a passenger in a car that failed to stop when police flagged it down. In April a policeman was convicted of manslaughter and exceeding the limits of self-defense for shooting and killing a man who did not stop for a routine identity check. This marked the first time a policeman has been convicted for such an offense in Greece. There were several reports of shootings on the Greek-Albanian border during the period of armed unrest in the latter country. An indeterminate number of deaths resulted; the incidents were investigated by local officials.

In October a policeman shot and killed an Albanian illegal immigrant who allegedly resisted arrest in Thessaloniki. The policeman claimed that the shooting was accidental.

In 1996 a Romani man was shot and killed by a police officer while lying face down on the pavement at a police roadblock in Livadia. The officer was charged with involuntary manslaughter. The case was pending at year's end.

Shipyard owner Constantine Peratikos was shot to death by masked assailants in May. The "November 17" terrorist organization claimed responsibility for the killing.

#### **b. Disappearance**

There were no reports of politically motivated disappearances.

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

The Constitution specifically forbids torture, and a 1984 law makes the use of torture an offense punishable by a sentence of 3 years' to life imprisonment. This law has never been invoked. However, security force personnel sometimes abused suspects during arrests and interrogations and abused illegal aliens.

Six Albanian immigrants reported that police entered their house and beat them in January. A traffic policeman was suspended from duty in January for attacking a driver in central Athens. An Albanian illegal immigrant was reportedly shot and wounded by police in February; an internal police investigation cleared the policeman and the prosecutor declined to press charges. In March three

policemen in the town of Amfikleia stood trial on charges of beating, torturing, and robbing a group of Indian and Pakistani immigrants. Other credible reports of severe beatings of detainees exist.

An Evia man filed assault charges against policemen in November 1996 for allegedly attacking him after he visited a police station to pick up a legal document.

In the 1996 case of a man beaten by five policemen in Iraklion, four of the officers were suspended from duty for 15 days. Charges filed by the individual were still pending. The prosecutor dropped a case relating to a man who died in a Vyrion police detention center in 1996 after concurring with the internal investigation, which concluded that the man had died of a heart attack. Charges are still pending from a 1996 incident in Thessaloniki in which a man charged with robbery was allegedly beaten by police officers.

Conditions in some prisons remained poor due to substantial overcrowding and outdated facilities. The largest prison housed 1,127 inmates, more than double its official capacity, through the first 9 months of the year. As of September 1, the Ministry of Justice reported that the total prison population was 5,477 (of whom approximately 2,150 were foreigners), while total capacity of the prison system was 4,332.

No credible reports emerged of abuses in prisons. In October 80 to 100 illegal immigrants held in the Drapetsona police detention facility staged a hunger strike to protest their detention. The Ministry of Justice expanded the prison construction program announced in 1996 to include a total of seven new facilities. Construction on several of the facilities began during the year.

No Albanian prisoners were repatriated under the 1995 bilateral agreement between Greece and Albania due to the civil unrest that prevailed in Albania for much of the year.

The Government is inconsistent in granting permission for prison visits by nongovernmental organizations.

#### d. Arbitrary Arrest, Detention, or Exile

The Constitution requires judicial warrants for all arrests, except during the actual commission of a crime, and the law prohibits arbitrary arrest orders. Police must, by law, bring a person arrested on the basis of a warrant or while committing a crime before an examining magistrate within 24 hours. The magistrate must issue a detention warrant or order the release of the detainee within 3 days, unless special circumstances require a 2-day extension of this time limit.

Defendants brought to court before the end of the day following the commission of a charged offense may be tried immediately, under a "speedy procedure." Although legal safeguards, including representation by counsel, apply in speedy procedure cases, the short period of time may inhibit the defendant's ability to present an adequate defense. Defendants may ask for a delay to provide time to prepare their defense, but the court is not obliged to grant it. The speedy procedure was used in less than 10 percent of misdemeanor cases. It does not apply to felonies.

The effective maximum duration of pretrial detention is 18 months for felonies and 9 months for misdemeanors. Defense lawyers complain that pretrial detention is overly long and overused by judges. A panel of judges may grant release pending trial, with or without bail. Pretrial detainees made up 31 percent of those incarcerated, contributing to overcrowding problems, according to government sources. A person convicted of a misdemeanor and sentenced to 2 years or less may, at the court's discretion, pay a fine in lieu of being imprisoned.

Exile is unconstitutional, and no cases have been reported since the restoration of democracy in 1974. However, Greek citizens not of ethnic Greek origin who travel outside the country may be deprived of their citizenship and refused readmittance to the country under Article 19 of the Citizenship Code. Article 20 of the Code permits the Government to strip citizenship from those who "commit acts contrary to the interests of Greece for the benefit of a foreign state." Article 19 was applied in 50 cases as of the 9 months ending in September; the Government would not provide statistics on the number of Article 20 cases it pursued in 1997 (see Section 2.d.).]

#### e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The Constitution provides for the independence of the judiciary; recurring public charges suggest that judges sometimes allow political criteria, including the desire to obtain promotion, to influence their judgments.

The judicial system includes three levels of courts, appointed judges, an examining magistrate system, and trial by judicial panels.

The Constitution provides for public trials, and trial court sessions are open to the public, unless the court decides that privacy is required to protect victims and witnesses, or the cases involve national security matters. According to defense attorneys, the latter provision has not been invoked since the restoration of democracy in 1974. The defendant enjoys a presumption of innocence, the standard of proof of guilt beyond a reasonable doubt, the right to present evidence and call witnesses, the right of access to the prosecution's evidence, the right to cross-examine witnesses, and the right to counsel. Lawyers are provided to defendants who are not able to afford legal counsel only in felony cases. Both the prosecution and the defense have the right of appeal.

Non-Greek speaking defendants have the right to a court-appointed interpreter; however, the low fees paid for such work often result in poor translation. Foreign defendants who depend on these interpreters frequently complain that they do not understand their trials.

The legal system does not discriminate against women or minorities, with some exceptions: Article 19 of the Citizenship Code (see Section 2.d.) applies only to Greek citizens who are not ethnically Greek; the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs may base its decision on "house of prayer" permit applications by non-Orthodox groups on the opinion of the local Orthodox bishop (see Section 2.c.); non-ethnic Greek citizens are legally prohibited from settling in a large "supervised zone" near the frontier (although this prohibition is not enforced in practice); and a 1939 law (also not enforced in practice) prohibits the functioning of private schools in buildings owned by non-Orthodox religious foundations.

There were no reports of political prisoners.

#### f. Arbitrary Interference With Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence

The Constitution prohibits invasion of privacy and searches without warrants, and the law permits the monitoring of personal communications only under strict judicial controls. However, the number of persons and groups subjected to government surveillance in recent years raises questions about the efficacy of these safeguards.

The security services continued to monitor human rights activists, non-Orthodox religious groups, minority group representatives, and foreign diplomats who met with such individuals. On several

occasions, information about such private meetings was published by the press. Human rights activists also reported the continuation of suspicious openings and diversions of mail. As far as is known, the Government took no steps to stop such practices or to prosecute those involved.

## **Section 2 Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:**

### **a. Freedom of Speech and Press**

The Constitution provides for freedom of speech and the press, and the Government generally respected these rights in practice, but with exceptions. Legal restrictions on free speech remain in force and were used in some cases by the Government.

Articles of the Penal Code that can be used to restrict free speech and the press include Article 141, which forbids exposing the friendly relations of the Greek state with foreign states to danger of disturbance; Article 191, which prohibits spreading false information and rumors liable to create concern and fear among citizens and cause disturbances in the country's international relations and inciting citizens to rivalry and division, leading to disturbance of the peace; and Article 192, which prohibits inciting citizens to acts of violence or to disturbing the peace through disharmony among them. No one was imprisoned as a result of such charges during the year. Those convicted in the past were allowed to convert their convictions into a fine of approximately \$14 per day.

In December Article 191 charges were filed against a Vlach man by New Democracy M.P. Evgenios Haitidis after an incident in 1995 in which the man was seen distributing a brochure of the European Union's Bureau for Lesser Used Languages that listed several dialects spoken in Greece.

The public prosecutor in Florina has invoked these laws on several occasions in recent years in attempts to limit the Rainbow Party's use of Slavic names for Greek towns. In October the trial of four officers of the Rainbow Party was postponed until 1998. The charges under Article 192 arose from a 1995 riot over a bilingual sign hung outside party headquarters in Florina. The case of a Rainbow Party official charged in 1996 under Article 191 for attempting to bring wall calendars into the country that identified Greek cities by their Slavic names is scheduled to be heard in 1998 as well.

On matters other than the question of ethnic minorities, Greece generally enjoys a tradition of outspoken public discourse and a vigorous free press. Satirical and opposition newspapers routinely attack the highest state authorities. Members of ethnic, religious, and linguistic minorities freely publish periodicals and other publications, often in their native language. The Constitution allows for seizure (though not prior restraint), by order of the public prosecutor, of publications that insult the President, offend religious beliefs, contain obscene articles, advocate violent overthrow of the political system, or disclose military and defense information. Seizures have been rare, however; none occurred in 1997.

In June two journalists were charged with "espionage" for printing a classified government document believed to have been leaked by government officials. The examining magistrate imposed \$7,000 (2 million drachmas) bail for each of the journalists and a travel ban based on "demonstrable proof of guilt." The case is ongoing.

In July two journalists were each sentenced to 33 months in prison for "malicious defamation" of Minister of Justice Evangelos Yiannopoulos. The criminal charges were filed by the public prosecutor based on a complaint from Yiannopoulos regarding a series of articles published in July and September 1996 that questioned his participation in the resistance during the Greek civil war.

In 1996 Muslim journalist Abdulhalim Dede was charged under Article 191 and libel laws for an article he wrote about extremist groups in Thrace. In February he was acquitted of violating Article 191 but sentenced to 10 months in prison for libel. In July an appeals court reduced the sentence to 6 months with a 3-year suspension. Dede appealed the decision to the Supreme Court, which had not ruled by year's end.

The Constitution provides that the state exercise "immediate control" over radio and television. The state monopoly on radio and television ended in 1989 and a plethora of private stations quickly emerged. A 1995 law places ownership and technical frequency limits on the electronic media. Until 1997 radio and television stations operated either without licenses or with provisional licenses, usually issued by local authorities. Licensing of radio stations began in late 1996, but the process of licensing television stations only began in September. State-run stations tended to emphasize the Government's views but also reported objectively on other parties' programs and positions. Private radio and television stations operated independently of any Government control over their reporting. Turkish-language television programs are widely available via satellite in Thrace.

The National Radio and Television Council (NRTC), a governmental organization, fined the Antenna Television Station \$350,000 (100 million drachmas) and ordered it to suspend normal programming for 10 minutes daily for 5 days for "violating the code of ethics" and "not protecting juveniles." (The charges stemmed from an episode of an Antenna "reality show" that allegedly prompted a man charged with incest to commit suicide before the show was broadcast.) The Minister of Press and Mass Media approved the Council's decision in September. Antenna appealed the case to the Council of State, claiming that the NRTC acted in an extrajudicial manner and exceeded the limits of its statutory authority, which authorizes it to revoke or suspend licenses but is silent on other penalties.

The Government prosecuted radio Icik, a Turkish-language station in Komotini, for operating without a license in 1994 and 1995. At the trial in February, the station argued that operation of a station without a license was so common that prosecution of radio Icik was unfair. The judge postponed a decision in the case for 14 months, pending reform by Parliament of laws on radio licensing.

In March an appeals court judge dismissed charges brought against actor Vassilis Diamantopolous and professor George Roussis in 1996 for "praising a criminal act" in conjunction with their defense of rioting students on a television talk show. They were acquitted in 1996, but the public prosecutor appealed the decision.

Academic freedom is respected.

#### b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

The Constitution provides for freedom of assembly, and the Government respects this right in practice. Police permits were routinely issued for public demonstrations, and there were no reports that the permit requirement was abused.

The Constitution provides for the right of association, which was respected except in cases involving ethnic minorities. In 1996 the European Court of Human Rights declared a case regarding the Government's refusal to register the "Macedonian Cultural Center" in Florina admissible. The European Court is scheduled to hear the case in 1998.

Government authorities legally recognize the existence of the Muslim minority, but not other minorities (see Section 5). This is contrary to the 1990 Copenhagen document of the then-Conference on Security

and Cooperation in Europe to which the Government is a signatory, which asserts that "to belong to a national minority is a matter of a person's individual choice."

### c. Freedom of Religion

The Constitution establishes the Eastern Orthodox Church of Christ, to which 95 to 97 percent of the population at least nominally adhere, as the prevailing religion. The Orthodox Church wields significant political and economic influence. Although the Constitution provides for freedom of religion, non-Orthodox groups face legal limits on religious practice. The Constitution also prohibits proselytism. Two laws from the 1930's require that to hold services, "known" religious groups must obtain a "house of prayer" permit from the Ministry of Education and Religion, which by law may base its decision on the opinion of the local Orthodox bishop. No formal mechanism exists to seek recognition as a known religion.

In March an appeals court confirmed the 1996 conviction of Hara Kalomiri for operating a Bhuddist place of worship without a house of prayer permit.

Following a 1996 European Court of Human Rights decision (Manousakis et al vs. Greece) in which the Court ruled that aspects of the house of prayer authorization procedure were contrary to Article 9 of the European Convention on the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, Prime Minister Simitis ordered the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs to draft new legislation to adapt Greek laws to international human rights norms. Although the legislation has not been finalized, Ministry officials say that they no longer obtain the opinion of the local Orthodox bishop when considering "house of prayer" permit applications. According to ministry officials, all pending applications have been issued.

Muslims who live in the Athens area, including immigrants from the Middle East and Greek citizens of Turkish origin originally from Thrace, complain that the Government has hindered their efforts to establish a mosque and a cemetery in the Athens area.

Several religious denominations reported difficulties in dealing with the authorities on a variety of administrative matters. Privileges and legal prerogatives granted to the Greek Orthodox Church are not routinely extended to other recognized religions. The non-Greek Orthodox must make separate and lengthy applications to government authorities on such matters as arranging appointments to meet with Ministry of Education and Religion officials and gaining permission to move places of worship to larger facilities.

A tax bill passed by Parliament in February created three new taxes on churches and other nonprofit organizations; "public legal entities" were exempted from the property tax requirement. The exemption of the Greek Orthodox Church, a public legal entity due to its official status, from the property tax led many observers to conclude that the legislation was discriminatory. Leaders of some non-Orthodox religious groups claimed that all the taxes were discriminatory, even those that the Orthodox Church had to pay, since the Government subsidized the Orthodox Church while other groups were self-supporting.

Religious instruction in public primary and secondary schools is mandatory for Greek Orthodox students. Non-Orthodox students are exempt from this requirement.

Police frequently detained Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Scientologists after receiving complaints that the individuals were engaged in proselytism. In most cases, the individuals were held for several hours at a police station and then released with no charges filed. Many reported that they were not

allowed to call their lawyers and that they were verbally abused by police officers for their religious beliefs. Mormon church officials allege that police failed in June to intervene appropriately in two separate cases when missionaries were assaulted on the street in central Athens (see Section 5).

In December 1996, an Athens court revoked the operating permit of KEFE (now known as EKDS), the organization representing Scientologists in Greece, on a technicality. The group, which the Government does not recognize as a religion, has since obtained a new operating permit. The court's decision contained extensive criticism of Scientology's beliefs and practices; the Scientologists appealed the decision in order to have that language invalidated. Since October 1996 the Government has summoned 15 members of the boards of KEFE and EKDS to face charges of "unprovoked factual insult."

The Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs launched an investigation into the activities of two teachers in Crete who are members of the Church of Christians, a nondenominational Protestant church. The men are under investigation for allegedly proselytizing their students and for "membership in a para-religious organization." In a letter to one of the men, a ministry official stated that the charges were based in part on a January episode of a sensationalist television program about the Church of Christians. The investigation was still underway at year's end.

In June Parliament passed a law providing an alternative form of mandatory national service for conscientious objectors. The law, which is to take effect in January 1998, provides that conscientious objectors may work in state hospitals or municipal services for 36 months. Conscientious objector groups generally characterized the legislation as a "positive first step" but criticized the 36-month alternative service term, which is double the regular 18-month period of military service.

Although Jehovah's Witnesses are recognized as a "known" religion, the military has consistently refused to exempt their clergy from mandatory military service. This practice was found to be in violation of Articles 5 and 6 of the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms by the European Court of Human Rights in two decisions reached in May, *Tsirlis and Kouloumpas vs. Greece* and *Georgiadis vs. Greece*. While the Government apparently has not yet changed its policy as a result of the Court's decisions, no such cases arose during the year.

Mosques operate freely in Western Thrace and in the islands of Rhodes and Kos, where most Greek citizens of the Muslim faith reside. In Xanthi province 17 Muslims arrested in 1996 for ignoring a stop-work order against adding a minaret to their mosque were sentenced in January to 4 months in jail. In June an appeals court reduced the sentence to 2 months with a 3-year suspension. Renovation of the mosque stopped and the congregation was not allowed access to the site. The Government encouraged the builders to apply for an amended building permit including the minaret; the builders refused, claiming to have a valid permit that was not recognized due to discrimination. In October local officials allowed construction on the mosque to resume.

Under a 1990 presidential decree, the Government appointed two muftis (Islamic judges and religious leaders) and one assistant mufti in Greece, all resident in Thrace, based on the recommendations of a committee of local Muslim scholars, religious authorities, and community leaders. The Government argued that it must appoint muftis because, in addition to their religious duties, they perform judicial functions in many civil and domestic matters under Muslim religious law, for which the State pays

The Muslim minority remains divided on the mufti selection issue. Some Muslims accept the authority of the two officially appointed muftis; others have chosen two different muftis to serve their communities. In November and December, the Government convicted Mehmet Amin Aga, one of the unofficial muftis, of usurping the authority of the official mufti; Aga was convicted six times in 2 years

of the same offense. The respective sentences were suspended pending appeal.

A 1980 law placed administration of the "wakfs" (Muslim charitable organizations) in the hands of the appointed muftis and their representatives. In response to objections from some Muslims that this arrangement weakens the financial autonomy of the wakfs and violates the terms of the Treaty of Lausanne, a 1996 presidential decree put the wakfs under the administration of a committee for 3 years as an interim measure pending resolution of outstanding problems.

Some non-Greek Orthodox religious leaders assert that their followers face discrimination in reaching the senior ranks of government service. In the military, generally only members of the Greek Orthodox faith become officers, leading some members of other faiths to declare themselves Orthodox. Only two Muslim officers have advanced to the rank of reserve officer.

The Government took no further action to implement or repeal a 1991 law mandating that citizens declare their religion on new EU-standardized identity cards based on European Union (EU) standards, which could be used for internal EU travel. Current identity cards contain a space for religion which may be left blank.

On December 16, the European Court of Human Rights held unanimously that Greek courts had Article 6 of the European Convention on Human Rights by refusing to acknowledge that the Canea Catholic church in Crete had legal personality and therefore the standing to act in legal proceedings. The Court awarded the church \$40,000 in court costs and damages. Human rights observers viewed the decision as a criticism of government policies toward non-Orthodox religions.

#### d. Freedom of Movement Within the Country, Foreign Travel, Emigration, and Repatriation

The Constitution calls for freedom of movement within and outside the country and the right to return. However, Article 19 of the Citizenship Code distinguishes between citizens who are ethnic Greeks and those who are not. Most Article 19 cases involve Muslims from Western Thrace, since only the "Muslim minority" is recognized as having non-Greek ethnicity. Citizens who are not ethnic Greeks may be deprived of their citizenship if it is determined that they left Greece with no apparent intent to return. Determination of intent is made without input from the affected individual; in practice, this law is applied to members of the Muslim community considered to be "undesirable" by the security services. However, immigrants who are ethnic Greeks are normally recognized as citizens and accorded full rights, despite years or even generations of absence.

The Interior Ministry initiates proceedings under Article 19 on the basis of reports by local authorities or by Greek embassies or consulates abroad. Affected persons are not notified of Article 19 hearings and are not permitted to attend. Those who lose citizenship as a result of such hearings sometimes learn of this loss only when they seek to reenter Greece. According to the Ministry of the Interior, 50 persons lost Greek citizenship under Article 19 as of September (compared with 84 at the same time in 1996). Of this number, the Government claims that 36 voluntarily relinquished their citizenship (compared with 35 in 1996). Recent Government statistics indicate that over 7,000 individuals were stripped of their citizenship between 1981 and 1996. Between 1981 and 1991, Article 19 was applied an average of 570 times per year; from 1992 to 1996, it was applied an average of 164 times per year.

Persons who lose their citizenship under Article 19 have the right of "administrative appeal" to the Interior Ministry; they can also appeal to the Council of State and to the Council of Europe. Leaders of the Muslim community complained that the time and expense involved tended to discourage such appeals. In addition some persons who lose their citizenship under Article 19 do not discover that fact

until appeals deadlines have passed. Human rights observers report that an unspecified number of individuals, possibly as many as 2,000, who have been stripped of their citizenship under Article 19 actually live in Greece. As the Government has not issued the affected individuals any alternative form of identity document, they find it difficult or impossible to travel abroad and to obtain government services.

Another section of the Citizenship Code, Article 20, permits the Government to strip citizenship from those who "commit acts contrary to the interests of Greece for the benefit of a foreign state." While the law as written applies equally to all Greeks regardless of ethnic background, to date it has been enforced only against citizens who identified themselves as members of the "Macedonian" minority. The Government would not reveal the number of Article 20 cases it pursued in 1997. Dual citizens who are stripped of Greek citizenship under Article 20 are frequently prevented from entering the country using the passport of their second nationality.

Greece maintains restricted military zones along its borders. Until 1995 authorities controlled entry into the zone along the northern border with Bulgaria even for local residents, causing the mostly Pomak inhabitants of the region to complain that their freedom of movement was restricted. The Government removed the sole remaining checkpoint into the village of Exinos in 1995 and no longer enforces the entry restrictions for citizens. Regulations concerning the zone remain in force for foreigners, however, and in 1997 several were refused official permission to enter the zone.

Ethnic Greek immigrants, including those who came from the former Soviet Union since 1986, normally qualify promptly for citizenship and special assistance from the Government. The returnees were settled initially in Western Thrace, where government programs encouraging them to remain have met with limited success. Most move to Athens, Thessaloniki, or other cities, where job prospects are better.

The Government offers asylum under the terms of the 1951 Geneva Convention. It cooperates with the local office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees. Parliament passed new legislation in 1996 amending the sections of the Aliens Act that relate to refugees and asylum. The legislation is scheduled to be implemented in 1998, after necessary presidential decrees are completed. The new legislation abolished the requirement that asylum seekers submit their applications immediately after entering the country.

Individuals recognized as refugees under the terms of the Geneva Convention are eligible for residence and work permits necessary to resettle permanently. In the first 8 months of 1997, 2,369 individuals submitted applications for refugee status, an almost three-fold increase over the corresponding period in 1996. Eighty-five individuals were recognized as refugees during the first 8 months of the year; of those refused refugee status, 38 were granted temporary residence on humanitarian grounds until return to their countries of origin becomes possible.

Credible reports indicated that the Government at times deported asylum seekers back to their country of origin before they could submit formal applications for asylum.

The Government does not recognize the concept of first asylum. Thousands of individuals from Turkey, Iraq, and Iran enter Greece illegally each year; only a small percentage eventually apply for official refugee status. Some of those who do not apply remain illegally, often living in government camps where conditions vary from adequate to very poor. Others proceed on to Western Europe, often applying for asylum there. The Government does not usually seek out such individuals for deportation; as Greece and Turkey do not have a readmission agreement, the Government finds it practically impossible to deport individuals who enter Greece from Turkey.

In June Greece and Albania exchanged instruments of ratification for the seasonal employment agreement signed in 1996 in an effort to regularize the status of the approximately 250,000 Albanians working illegally in Greece.

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

Greece is a multiparty democracy in which the Constitution provides for full political rights for all citizens and for the peaceful change of governments and of the Constitution. The Government headed by Prime Minister Constantine Simitis of the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) won in free and fair elections in September 1996. Parliament elects the President for a 5-year term. Voting is mandatory for those over age 18, but there are many conditions that allow one not to vote, and penalties are not applied in practice. Members of the unicameral 300-seat Parliament are elected to maximum 4-year terms by secret ballot. Opposition parties function freely and have broad access to the media.

Although there are no legal restrictions on the participation of women or minorities in government or politics, representation of both at the higher levels of political life remains low. Women held 2 ministerial positions in the Government and only 1 of 29 subministerial positions. Of the 300 members of Parliament, 17 were women. Women are underrepresented in the leadership of the two largest parties. The head of the Communist Party is a woman.

While the Government generally respects citizens' political rights, there are sometimes charges that it limits the right of some individuals to speak publicly and associate freely on the basis of their self-proclaimed ethnic identity, thus impinging on the political rights of such persons. In the 1996 parliamentary elections, however, three Muslim deputies were elected in Thrace, one each from PASOK, New Democracy, and the Coalition of the Left. Romani representatives report that local authorities sometimes deprive Roma of the right to vote by refusing to register them.

In 1996 the Government transferred responsibility for oversight of all rights guaranteed to the Muslim minority under the Treaty of Lausanne (including education, zoning, administration of the wakfs, and trade) from elected local governors to the government-appointed periferiarch of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace. The periferiarch is a regional administrative official appointed by the Government. Minority members charged that the transfer reduced their ability to use the democratic process to influence decisions that affect them. They also charged that the transfer opened the possibility of unequal application of local laws, because it created a situation in which Muslims and non-Muslims must go to different government offices to apply for documents such as building permits. The Government stated that it made the change because Greece's treaty obligations could be administered more effectively by the central authorities.

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

The Government allows domestic human rights organizations to operate, but cooperation with them varies. In principle it does not prohibit foreign diplomats from meeting with officials and other citizens, including critics of official policy. However, the security services on occasion monitor contacts of human rights groups, including listening in on conversations held between those groups and human rights investigators and diplomats. The security services have also questioned monitors' interlocutors in the aftermath of meetings, reports of which have subsequently appeared in the press. Official government documents regarding the activities of human rights monitors have also been cited in the press. Monitors view this activity as a form of intimidation that deters others from meeting with investigators.

## **Section 5 Discrimination Based on Race, Sex, Religion, Disability, Language, or Social Status**

The Constitution provides for equality before the law and the full protection of individual life, honor, and freedom irrespective of nationality, race, language, or religious or political belief. Government respect for these rights in practice is uneven.

### **Women**

The incidence of violence against women that is reported to the authorities is low, but Athens' Equality Secretariat, which operates the only shelter for battered women, believes the actual incidence is "high." According to the Ministry of Public Order, 183 cases of rape were reported in 1996 (latest statistics available). The General Secretariat for Equality of the Sexes (GSES), an independent government agency, asserts that police tend to discourage women from pursuing domestic violence charges and instead undertake reconciliation efforts, although they are neither qualified for nor charged with this task. The GSES also claims that the courts are lenient when dealing with domestic violence cases.

A government shelter and a residential facility for battered women and their children provide relevant services in Athens, including legal and psychological advice. Battered women can also go to state hospitals and regional health centers, although these facilities are often not adequately staffed to handle such cases properly.

According to the police, trafficking in women for prostitution, mostly from the former Soviet Union, Albania, Bulgaria, and Romania, has increased sharply in recent years. The MPO reports that of the 185 foreigners arrested for prostitution without a license in the first 9 months of 1997, 50 were from Albania and 78 were from the former Soviet Union. Police estimate that foreigners constitute 2,000 of the 5,000 prostitutes in Greece.

Women enjoy broad constitutional and legal protections, including equal pay for equal work. However, the GSES and the unions maintain that women receive lower salaries overall than men because they are hired for lower-level jobs. The National Statistical Service's most recent data (the fourth quarter of 1996) show that women's salaries in manufacturing were 69 percent of those of men in comparable positions; in retail sales, women's salaries were 85 percent of those of men in comparable positions. These same groups claim that women face a "glass ceiling" when they are considered for promotions in both the public and private sectors. Although there are still relatively few women in senior positions, in recent years women have entered traditionally male-dominated occupations such as the legal and medical professions in larger numbers.

### **Children**

The Government is committed to providing adequate basic health and education services for children. Education is compulsory through the ninth grade and free through university. Penal law prohibits the mistreatment of children and sets penalties for violators, while welfare legislation enacted in 1992 established preventive and treatment programs for abused children and for children deprived of a family environment; it also sought to ensure the availability of alternative family care or institutional placement.

Several government organizations have responsibility for children's issues. The National Welfare Organization, which has a nationwide network of offices, is active in the field of child protection. The General Secretariat for Youth, a part of th