



International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

Distr.: General
28 October 2024

Original: English

Human Rights Committee 142nd session

Summary record of the 4159th meeting

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Tuesday, 22 October 2024, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Ms. Abdo Rocholl

Contents

Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 40 of the Covenant
(*continued*)

Third periodic report of Greece (continued)

This record is subject to correction. Corrections should be set forth in a memorandum and also incorporated in a copy of the record. They should be sent within one week of the date of the present record to the Documents Management Section (DMS-DCM@un.org).

Any corrected records of the public meetings of the Committee at this session will be reissued for technical reasons after the end of the session.



The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 40 of the Covenant
(continued)

Third periodic report of Greece (continued) ([CCPR/C/GRC/3](#);
[CCPR/C/GRC/QPR/3](#))

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Greece joined the meeting.*
2. **A representative of Greece**, resuming her delegation's replies to the questions raised at the previous meeting, said that the procedure for the reception of migrants did not involve detention. Migrants were obliged to remain on the premises of the reception centre for the duration of the registration procedure, which generally took no longer than five days. They could not be required to remain on the premises for more than 25 days. There were three categories of reception centres: Reception and Identification Centres, where migrants were registered, underwent medical examinations and could submit asylum requests; Closed Controlled Access Centres on three islands, which included predeparture facilities under the authority of the national police; and centres that provided temporary accommodation and other services for asylum-seekers on the mainland.
3. **A representative of Greece** said that alternatives to detention were used as a priority in cases involving members of vulnerable groups, such as women and refugee children. Police departments were required to submit monthly reports to the Hellenic Police Headquarters on any problems or deficiencies that they faced. The Headquarters issued orders on matters relating to the health and safety of detainees periodically. The total number of detainees in predeparture facilities was 1,794.
4. **A representative of Greece** said that various measures were being taken to reduce prison overcrowding. The existing infrastructure was being modernized and new facilities were being built, including a new prison in Crete. The Central Transfer Committee met on a regular basis to ensure the best possible distribution of prisoners. The General Secretariat for Anti-Crime Policy worked with the relevant bodies to promote alternatives to imprisonment, such as electronic monitoring.
5. **A representative of Greece** said that the root cause of violence against women had been identified as persistent gender stereotypes. The National Action Plan on Gender Equality included various types of measures to combat gender stereotypes, such as awareness campaigns on sexism in schools and regulations to discourage the perpetuation of stereotypes in the media. The panic button mobile application was designed in such a way as to be visible only to the victim. The quality of the services provided in shelters was monitored by an interdisciplinary team that conducted monthly on-site meetings. Shelter residents were invited to complete anonymous evaluation forms, and their feedback was taken into account. In-service training was provided for shelter staff.
6. **A representative of Greece** said that free legal aid was available to people with low incomes and to victims of certain crimes, such as trafficking in persons, regardless of their income. Victims of domestic violence who were seeking interim measures were also entitled to free legal aid. The authorities were working to expand the provision of free legal aid through agreements with bar associations. Legislation had been passed to ensure that lawyers who had provided free legal aid in recent years would be duly compensated. Significant progress had been made in combating corruption, and provisions on whistle-blowers had been incorporated into Greek law. With the recent amendments to the Criminal Code and the Code of Criminal Procedure, heavier penalties for offences involving violence against women had been introduced and there had been a shift towards a victim-centred approach.
7. **A representative of Greece**, noting that the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic had been a very difficult period, said that only 12 complaints had been filed against police officers for excessive use of force during protests against pandemic-related restrictions.
8. **Mr. Soh** said that he would like to know whether there were plans to overhaul the system for the appointment of senior members of the judiciary and to ensure the involvement of the judiciary in the selection process. He wondered what measures were in place to

safeguard the independence of the judiciary, including by ensuring that senior judges and prosecutors were not exposed to influence from the executive branch.

9. He wished to know what progress had been made towards the issuance of a presidential decree that would establish a statelessness determination procedure and whether the State party was considering ratifying the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. He would be interested to know whether the State party planned to amend the list of documents required to apply for Greek nationality on the basis of birth in Greek territory and non-acquisition of a foreign nationality at birth, especially for children born to stateless parents. He would welcome information on any measures being taken to remove the barriers to acquiring Greek nationality encountered by stateless Roma and to reduce statelessness among Roma.

10. The Committee noted with concern that the Greek authorities continued to reject asylum applications from asylum-seekers arriving from Türkiye and to order their return on the grounds that Türkiye had been declared a safe third country, even though Türkiye had been refusing to readmit asylum-seekers from Greece since March 2020. He wondered whether the State party was planning to reconsider its extensive application of the safe third country concept and what steps were being taken to protect the rights of asylum-seekers and to ensure that they were not left in legal limbo. He would like clarification as to the procedure available to asylum-seekers for challenging the application of the safe third country concept in their individual cases.

11. It would be helpful if the delegation could explain what was being done to enforce article 91 (5) of Law No. 4939/2022, which provided for examinations of asylum applications on the merits in cases where third countries did not permit applicants to enter their territory. He would like to know what legal assistance and other forms of support were available to asylum-seekers whose applications had been deemed inadmissible. Lastly, he wondered how the State party viewed the pending preliminary ruling of the Court of Justice of the European Union concerning the application of the safe third country concept and how that ruling would affect its approach to the issue.

12. **Mr. Yigezu**, drawing attention to numerous reports of pushbacks by the State party that appeared to indicate serious violations of the Covenant, said that he would like the delegation to comment on those reports and to describe the measures in place to prevent such practices and to ensure compliance with the principle of non-refoulement.

13. He would appreciate information on the workings of the various national and European mechanisms, such as the National Transparency Authority, that were responsible for investigating allegations of pushbacks and the outcome of their investigations. He would like to know whether any measures had been taken during the reporting period to provide redress to victims and to ensure that the National Transparency Authority operated independently. He wondered how the State party planned to ensure that allegations of pushbacks and related human rights violations were investigated thoroughly, systematically, effectively, promptly and independently and that perpetrators were held accountable.

14. He would welcome information on the outcome of the cases that had been transferred to the prosecutor of the Naval Court for investigation. In the light of alarming reports of serious failures by the Greek authorities in handling the rescue of migrants and asylum-seekers at sea, he would like information on any measures taken to ensure that the protection of life was prioritized in border control operations and that rescues were carried out in compliance with human rights obligations. Lastly, he would like an update on the status of the investigation into the shipwreck near Pylos.

15. **Ms. Kpatcha Tchamdja** said that, although changes had been made to the legislation on alternatives to military service for conscientious objectors, the Committee remained concerned that alternative service was discriminatory in various ways and that the amended legislation was not in line with international law or international human rights standards. It had been reported, for example, that conscientious objectors performing alternative service were unpaid or received a salary that was well below the statutory minimum wage. She would like the delegation to comment on those concerns and to provide the information requested in paragraph 20 of the list of issues prior to reporting ([CCPR/C/GRC/QPR/3](#)). She would

also like to know what steps would be taken to give full effect to the Committee's Views concerning communication No. 3065/2017 (*Petromelidis v. Greece*).

16. Regarding freedom of religion, the measures taken by the State party in response to the judgment of the European Court of Human Rights in the case of *Papageorgiou and others v. Greece* reflected some degree of progress but were not universally viewed as satisfactory. She would be interested to know what other steps would be taken, in accordance with the Court's judgment, concerning the provision of alternative courses for students who had been exempted from compulsory religious education.

17. She would appreciate information on any measures taken to prevent and eliminate all forms of discrimination in education, especially against Roma children. She wondered what was being done to reduce the number of forced evictions and to ensure that alternatives to eviction, such as the provision of alternative housing, were used. It would be helpful if the delegation could provide data on the number of Roma families who had been relocated from informal settlements to decent housing, as well as information on the progress made under the National Roma Integration Strategy 2021–2030. Lastly, she would be interested to know how many associations representing minority communities had been registered since October 2017, when legislation that allowed for the reopening of non-contentious judicial procedures had been adopted.

18. **Ms. Donders** said that she would like to know how the State party ensured that the regulations applicable to civil society organizations were necessary and proportionate, did not have a stifling effect and did not result in indirect discrimination against refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants by limiting their access to services. She would appreciate information on any measures taken to avoid undue delays in the registration of civil society organizations and the denial of registration on unclear grounds.

19. She invited the delegation to explain why the State party considered the restrictive measures imposed on a human rights defender, Mr. Panayote Dimitras, to be necessary and proportionate. The Committee would like to know how the State party ensured that human rights defenders could carry out their work safely and without undue interference or judicial harassment. It would also be useful to know what measures the State party had taken to ensure that the perpetrators of attacks upon human rights defenders did not enjoy impunity.

20. The Committee would like to hear how the State party ensured that the legal requirement for organizers of public assemblies to notify the authorities in advance was not used to curb freedom of assembly. It would be instructive to know what percentage of potential gatherings had been prohibited. She would appreciate confirmation that the authorities limited their discretionary power to prohibit assemblies to such cases where that action was strictly necessary and that such decisions were not based in any way on the gathering's political content. Lastly, she wished to know what steps had been taken by the State party to prevent the imposition of blanket bans on all demonstrations.

21. **Mr. Helfer** said that he would like to receive an explanation of the reasons for the use of water cannons and stun grenades during protests in November 2021 and March 2023. He would be grateful for a description of the measures taken to ensure that police officers used the minimum force necessary in response to demonstrations where tensions were running high.

22. Updated information would be appreciated on the installation and use of surveillance systems, including any efforts to establish clear criteria for identifying the persons and places subjected to surveillance, to limit the time period of data retention and to make information about the systems publicly accessible.

23. The Committee wished to know what specific steps had been taken by the State party to ensure that all police officers consistently complied with the requirement to wear a visible form of identification during public assemblies. It would be grateful for an explanation of how technological measures, such as body cameras, were used in conjunction with uniform identification requirements to ensure that protesters could identify specific officers when allegations of misconduct arose.

The meeting was suspended at 10.50 a.m. and was resumed at 11 a.m.

24. **A representative of Greece** said that, in accordance with the National Recovery and Resilience Plan “Greece 2.0” and Law No. 4871/2021 on the organization and functioning of the National School of Judges, the successful completion of an examination administered by the National School was as prerequisite for candidates for positions as judicial officials in administrative courts, the Council of State, the Court of Auditors, the Advocate General Audit Office and civil and criminal courts. Articles 80 and 91 of Law No. 4938/2022, introducing the new Code on the Organization of the Courts and the Status of Judges, provided that the Supreme Judicial Council for Administrative Justice was to decide on the promotion of probationary officials of the Council of State and on the placement, transfer and promotion of judicial officers of the regular administrative courts. The Supreme Judicial Council for civil and criminal courts decided on the appointment of district and deputy judges and on the assignments, transfers, secondments and promotion of judicial officers of civil and criminal courts. Lots were drawn for an annual term of office to replace retiring members. The president of a court could be replaced by his or her deputy. Article 27 of Law No. 2123/2024 stipulated that the plenums of the Supreme Courts could participate in the procedures for the appointment of their presidents and vice-presidents. Both of the above-mentioned laws took account of European standards on the subject without derogating from the Constitution. As the case of Mr. Dimitras was *sub judice*, she was unable to comment on it.

25. **A representative of Greece** said that the Hellenic Police was under strict orders to protect the fundamental rights and dignity of all migrants and refugees arriving in the country, in particular their right to apply for international protection. No third-country national who applied for or expressed the wish to apply for international protection could be turned away. The requirements of the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the procedures provided for in European Union directives had been codified in Law No. 4939/2022 (Asylum Code). When conducting border surveillance duties, the Hellenic Police fully respected the fundamental rights, in accordance with international and European Union law, of every third-country national who crossed the border illegally. Particular reference was made to the European Convention of Human Rights, the relevant case law and the European Union Charter of Fundamental Rights throughout operations related to border management. Measures to prevent and deter illegal border crossings complied with the Schengen Borders Code. Every allegation of ill-treatment, including alleged pushbacks by border guards, was investigated internally and/or at European Union level. There was no specific Greek law for protecting human rights defenders, as all persons were equal before the law. However, article 82 (A) of the Criminal Code, on offences motivated by racism, defined aggravating circumstances for hate crimes, which could apply to crimes against refugees, migrants, members of the LGBTIQI+ community and members of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as those who had been attacked on the island of Lesbos in 2020.

26. **A representative of Greece** said the Hellenic authorities’ actions at sea fully complied with the State party’s obligations under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea and the International Convention on Maritime Search and Rescue. Allegations of pushbacks and mistreatment of third-country nationals were thoroughly investigated by the Hellenic Coast Guard and by independent prosecutors and authorities. Since 2015, officers of the Greek Coast Guard had rescued 254,000 persons. There was a mechanism for reporting incidents and lodging complaints with the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex).

27. **A representative of Greece** said that the Hellenic Coast Guard was subject to a three-tier supervisory system consisting of internal investigations, independent monitoring and judicial proceedings. It thus had a robust disciplinary mechanism to investigate any allegations or complaints of violations of fundamental rights. When a complaint was received, an administrative investigation was launched; if it was found that no offence had occurred, the case was closed. However, it could be reopened if new information came to light. If the administrative investigation disclosed any violations, the process for imposing disciplinary sanctions on the perpetrators would be initiated. At the same time, the findings of the investigation would be forwarded to various authorities, including the Public Prosecutor’s Office and/or the Ombudsman, especially in cases involving possible misconduct. The activities of the Hellenic Coast Guard were also subject to close monitoring by the National Transparency Authority. The tragic incident off the coast near Pylos was

being investigated by the Naval Court of Piraeus and the Greek Ombudsman. The Hellenic Coast Guard granted access to its files to concerned parties who could then verify the alignment of its operational practices with international standards. Cooperation with national stakeholders, civil society actors and international organizations was an integral part of the search and rescue system. A memorandum of cooperation with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees enhanced operational effectiveness and the follow-up treatment of migrants. Article 40 of Law No. 4825/2021 established a clear regulatory framework for the participation of NGOs and civil society organizations in the maritime search and rescue operations of the Hellenic Coast Guard. The main aim of that framework was to ensure the safety of persons in distress. That law was not intended to discourage private support but, on the contrary, to maximize the results of such cooperation in order to ensure that migrants and other persons in distress at sea received the highest standard of assistance.

28. **A representative of Greece** said that efforts to ensure the exercise of the right to public assembly were part of a broader effort to promote the culture of human rights in keeping with international recommendations. The provisions of Law No. 4703/2020 were designed to safeguard that right within a reasonable institutional framework based on the principles of necessity and proportionality. It clearly defined the power of the police and ensured judicial protection for those affected by police measures. Observance of its provisions was monitored continuously, weekly reports were sent to the Greek Ombudsman for information or possible further action, and procedural safeguards had been introduced. A public assembly could not be prohibited or dispersed unless the competent police or port authority provided convincing reasons for doing so and obtained the prior approval of the presiding judge and prosecutor of a first instance court. Article 12 of that law, which allowed the organizer of a public assembly to appeal against a decision to prohibit, break up or restrict it, offered further protection against any potential misuse of police authority. In 2023, only 3 out of 4,626 small-scale rallies had been banned. The numbers had been equally small in previous years. The Hellenic Police prioritized the use of soft methods of crowd control such as mediation and communication. Tear gas and riot squads were used only as a last resort when violence occurred between demonstrators or the police were attacked. The 34 cases of alleged excessive use of force against demonstrators and journalists during the COVID-19 pandemic had been the object of administrative investigations. Of those cases, 10 had been referred to the Greek Ombudsman for review, 4 were ongoing, 4 were awaiting trial, a decision on stronger disciplinary sanctions was pending in 1 case, 3 had resulted in lesser disciplinary sanctions and 12 had been closed. The Hellenic Police had ordered a preliminary administrative investigation into allegations of the excessive use of force by the police on 17 November 2020 in Athens. The findings of that investigation had been sent to the Ombudsman for a review of the procedural aspects and merits of the case. The Ombudsman had requested a further investigation, and the case was therefore ongoing. Further action would depend on the findings of that investigation.

29. **A representative of Greece** said that the police could conduct surveillance only of a general nature during outdoor gatherings and could not make sound recordings or video recordings that focused on particular persons. The equipment of special operations units was therefore not used when such gatherings were held. Its use was permissible only in the event of serious offences committed in locations removed from such gatherings by persons who were not actually participating in them. In those cases that equipment could be employed to focus on particular persons and make sound recordings in accordance with the relevant legal provisions.

30. **A representative of Greece** said that the National Management Plan for Public Outdoor Assemblies provided for special arrangements to be made for journalists. A liaison officer was assigned and a special area was set aside for journalists to use during demonstrations, where they could also receive first aid if needed. A representative of the Ministry of Citizen Protection had presented the Management Plan to representatives of journalists' unions and media professionals, who had had the opportunity to exchange views with the police and gain a better understanding of how the police operated during such events.

31. **A representative of Greece** said that, since the major refugee crisis of 2015, the Greek Asylum Service had significantly expanded its operational capacity. It now had

26 offices across the country, some of them on the islands on the front line of migration flows. Staffing levels had also been increased. As a result, the 2019 backlog of 222,000 pending asylum applications had been reduced to 18,500 by the end of August 2024. Fast-track procedures had been introduced for asylum-seekers coming from safe third countries. With stricter deadlines for submission of applications and for the issuance of decisions, as well as digitization, which had improved system accessibility and facilitated data management, the average processing time of applications had been cut from four years in 2019 to 102 days in 2024.

32. Under the new legislation, all first-instance negative decisions on the merits of an application and any discontinuation decisions issued by the Asylum Service incorporated an order for the applicants' return. The decision also set deadlines for voluntary departure from the country. Before a negative decision was issued, the risk of refoulement was duly considered.

33. All applicants for international protection had the right to challenge an adverse decision, and the appeal had suspensive effect. There were 20 independent appeals committees operating under the Appeals Authority of the General Secretariat for Migration Policy of the Ministry of Migration and Asylum. Each comprised a single judge or a panel of three judges. Judges had a renewable three-year mandate. An applicant whose appeal was rejected could file for annulment of the decision with the local administrative court within 30 days.

34. In 2023, refugee or subsidiary protection status had been granted to 873 applicants, or 7.54 per cent of the 11,575 appeals cases examined, compared to 424, or 3.78 per cent of 11,198 appeals, in 2024.

35. As a means of preventing the ill-treatment of refugees and asylum-seekers, the Fundamental Rights Officer of the Ministry of Migration and Asylum made a preliminary assessment of asylum-seekers' complaints of violations of their human rights, referred admissible complaints to the National Transparency Authority or other competent authorities and monitored the progress of complaints.

36. Greece had designated Türkiye as a safe third country for asylum-seekers whose countries of origin were Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Somalia or the Syrian Arab Republic. That determination had been based on a review of up-to-date, reliable information regarding the human rights situation in that country. However, there was no universal presumption of safety, and the designation of a country as a safe third country did not preclude the individual examination of an asylum application on the merits in the first instance. If an application was rejected as inadmissible based on the safe third country principle, an appeal could be filed with the Appeals Authority; free legal assistance was provided for that procedure.

37. Since March 2020, Türkiye had failed to respond to requests for readmission of persons from those countries of origin whose asylum applications had been rejected. It was therefore in breach of its obligations under the European Union-Türkiye Statement of March 2016. Persons thus obliged to remain in Greece did not find themselves in legal limbo; they could submit a further application for asylum, which would be assessed on the merits. Out of some 3,600 such applications made between June 2021, the date of entry into force of the first joint ministerial decision, and 31 August 2024, 74 per cent had been deemed admissible and considered on the merits.

38. The admissibility procedure entailing the application of the concept of a safe third country was not incompatible with the Covenant. Firstly, applicants could challenge the application of that concept on the grounds that the country was not safe for them personally given their individual circumstances or on the grounds that the legal criteria underpinning the designation as a safe third country were not met in their case. Secondly, all available information indicated that the principle of non-refoulement was observed by Türkiye. Thirdly, there was a right of appeal.

39. In a decision of 4 October 2024, the Court of Justice of the European Union had ruled that member States could not reject an asylum application as inadmissible on the basis of the concept of a safe third country in cases where they had established that the asylum-seeker

would not be allowed to enter the territory of a country designated as safe. The Court had accepted, however, that a country might be listed as a safe third country even if, despite its legal obligation, that third country had, in general and without any prospect of a contrary development, suspended the admission or readmission of those applicants to its territory. The Asylum Service and the Ministry were now awaiting an interpretation by the Legal Counsel of State in order to determine the next operational steps.

40. **A representative of Greece** said that, pending the establishment of a specific statelessness determination procedure, statelessness was assessed during the asylum procedure. Case officers followed special guidelines and were given special training to deal with such cases. Appeals committees had been instructed that an applicant who was unable to demonstrate nationality should be deemed stateless. Nearly all asylum applicants identified as stateless were recognized as refugees, and their residence permits and travel documents indicated their stateless status.

41. **A representative of Greece** said that Greek citizenship was granted without discrimination as to ethnic origin, race, gender or on any other grounds. Children born to Roma parents acquired Greek citizenship on the same basis as children born to Greek parents. Statelessness among Roma born in Greece could have resulted from a failure to register the birth.

42. Since 2018, babies born in a maternity hospital to women who had no identity documents were automatically registered free of charge based on the woman's own declaration of identity and taking into account any documentation that might support that declaration. Registration established legal and biological filiation.

43. Any stateless person or person of indeterminate citizenship born in Greece acquired Greek citizenship by birth, regardless of ethnic origin, in accordance with the principle of *jus soli*. That provision also applied to persons whose access to their parents' citizenship was barred by the respective national legislation and to persons whose parents were unknown.

44. Under the Citizenship Code, proof of identity could also be based on travel documentation issued after a decision granting international protection status on the basis of unknown citizenship. The same applied to persons recognized as refugees or granted subsidiary protection. The citizenship procedure was facilitated for such persons and for stateless children under certain conditions. Also under the Code, in certain individual situations of statelessness, the Ministry of the Interior could grant citizenship.

45. The question of ratification of the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness should be considered bearing in mind that the Citizenship Code not only prevented statelessness but encouraged dual citizenship and had eliminated the risk of loss of citizenship.

46. **A representative of Greece** said that it was important for NGOs working in the area of international protection, migration and social integration to be regulated and registered in accordance with international criteria of transparency, accountability and security. NGOs were a key component of the reception and asylum system, as stipulated in national legislation transposing European Union asylum directives. The NGO registration process was free of charge and based on clear criteria. In the year to date, 10 applications had been submitted, of which only 1 had been rejected. The process took from 20 to 30 days, on average. The legal framework had been simplified: it was no longer necessary for NGOs to re-register every three years; further simplifications were expected by the end of the year.

47. **A representative of Greece** said that the procedure for exempting school students from compulsory religious studies courses was designed to respect individual rights while complying with national and international legal frameworks, including the Greek Constitution, the European Convention on Human Rights and the European Union General Data Protection Regulation. Students exempted from religious education could also be excused from school prayer and church services. The procedure provided clear guidelines for students' families, and personal data were handled in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation. The school was responsible for providing constructive educational activities for exempted students in a supportive learning environment. Religious education was seen as an essential component of education's overall mission to develop free,

responsible citizens by fostering critical thinking, ethical reasoning and respect for diverse beliefs and values. The same principle guided the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs in its efforts to provide a suitable subject of study for exempted students and offer alternative opportunities that met the diverse needs of those who did not participate in religious education because of their beliefs or backgrounds.

48. **A representative of Greece** said that conscientious objectors could perform an alternative to military service lasting up to 15 months, as compared with 12 months of military service. That was in line with article 2 of the European Social Charter, whereby the duration of alternative service should not exceed 1.5 times that of military service. The extended period was not considered punitive but was based on the principle of proportionality: alternative public service work was less demanding and was usually performed under better conditions. As to the case of *Petromelidis v. Greece*, having reached the age of 45, Mr. Petromelidis had ceased to be subject to conscription, whereupon the administrative sanctions against him had been lifted.

49. **A representative of Greece** said that registration of print and electronic media under the terms of Law No. 5005 of 2022 on strengthening the publicity and transparency of print and electronic media was not compulsory. However, it was a prerequisite for obtaining State advertising. The conditions to be met by media wishing to register were designed to enhance the protection of journalists. Media could be excluded from the registries and thus from State advertising for a period of two years, but only where careful scrutiny of an application revealed that media owners had been subject to criminal sanctions or that they had failed to properly protect journalists. The journalists' unions had approved of that penalty. However, exclusion did not prevent media owners from submitting a fresh application each year. To date, 400 print media and 480 electronic media had been registered.

50. The Ethics Committee was an independent body whose members all had media experience and expertise. It could receive complaints and worked to counter all forms of incitement, promotion, dissemination or justification of violence, discrimination or hate speech.

51. **A representative of Greece** said that, with regard to the safety and empowerment of journalists, under a memorandum of understanding signed in 2022 between six governmental bodies, a task force bringing together government, academia, the media and journalists' unions had been set up to consider issues such as working conditions and gender-related challenges. One landmark result of its work had been the creation of an international training and research centre focusing on the safety of journalists and media professionals, notably war correspondents and those covering law enforcement operations. Other outcomes included legislation passed in 2024 penalizing persons who incited violence against journalists covering sports events and a new collective labour agreement for those working in the public media that included provisions on promoting gender equality and on combating harassment of female journalists. The task force took the issue of manifestly unfounded or abusive court proceedings (or strategic lawsuits against public participation, commonly known as SLAPPs) very seriously, and the Panhellenic Federation of Journalists' Unions intended to contribute to consultations on a European Union directive on the question.

52. **A representative of Greece** said that discussions were under way to design a new programme, with European Union funding, to establish the judicial procedures necessary to enable Roma to acquire identity documents.

53. As to housing for the Roma population, the General Secretariat for Social Solidarity and the Fight against Poverty had conducted a mapping operation in 2021 which had identified three types of housing occupied by Roma, ranging from shacks and settlements with no, or very basic, infrastructure to dwellings making up part of the urban fabric. With a view to improving that situation, the legislative framework provided for temporary relocation and infrastructure improvements, to be funded with €15 million from the public purse. More than 200 families were currently being relocated and seven municipalities had been approved for infrastructure funding.

54. In the area of education, in order to reduce the early school dropout rate, the Ministry of Social Cohesion and Family had tied the receipt of welfare benefits to school enrolment

and attendance. The measure had been effective, as the number of Roma pupils in compulsory education had increased steadily, rising from 15,000 in 2022 to more than 19,000 in 2024.

55. **A representative of Greece** said that the Code of Civil Procedure had been amended to enable the reopening of legal proceedings in cases where the European Court of Human Rights had found a violation of article 11 of the European Human Rights Convention. That new provision applied only to organizations that had appealed to the Court and whose appeal had been upheld.

56. Freedom of association was governed by the Constitution, international treaties such as the Covenant and the Civil Code. There was no specific legislation on minority associations or organizations. In the previous 10 years, more than 200 associations had been created by members of the Muslim community, had been registered with the local courts and were operating freely.

57. **Ms. Donders** said that she would appreciate the delegation's comments on information before the Committee concerning human rights defenders who had been subjected to smear campaigns, harassment and threats, and she wished to know how the State party tackled such situations.

58. While acknowledging that freedom of assembly was duly regulated by law, she would be interested to know more about its enjoyment in practice and, in particular, how often demonstrations were completely prohibited and whether, in such situations, it was really necessary to ban a demonstration or whether less severe measures such as restrictions on time or location could be considered. She would also like to know how associations and individuals were informed about the relevant procedural guarantees in such cases and their application.

59. **Ms. Kpatcha Tchamdja** said that she would like to know if there was any impediment to the clearing of Mr. Petromelidis's criminal record. It was her understanding that his convictions were still on record.

60. **Mr. Yigezu** said that he would appreciate the delegation's comments on numerous reports, including by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture, regarding pushbacks of migrants at the border. He found it difficult to reconcile the State party's reference to the principle of non-refoulement in individual cases with what amounted to collective returns, sometimes involving the excessive use of force. In that context he would also welcome information on the outcomes of the various cases brought before the National Transparency Authority or, if they had not been resolved, the timeline for their resolution.

61. In the light of the delegation's replies concerning improvements to infrastructure in places of detention, he would also be interested to hear its comments on the recent European Court of Human Rights judgment finding conditions of detention in the State party that amounted to inhuman and degrading treatment.

62. **Mr. Soh** said that he would appreciate further clarification of the State party's plan to finalize and implement a statelessness determination procedure. In addition, he would like to know whether there were any plans to revise the procedure for appointments to the most senior judicial positions in order to incorporate additional safeguards against undue influence from the executive branch.

63. **A representative of Greece** said that, as noted earlier, there was no specific legislation on the protection of human rights defenders but, under the legislation protecting members of groups having certain identifiable characteristics, such as race, colour, descent, ethnic or national origin, religion or membership in a vulnerable community, all persons, whether or not they fell into one of those specific categories, were entitled to bring complaints of violations of their rights. Thus human rights defenders were also protected.

64. **A representative of Greece** said that notifications concerning public outdoor assemblies were evaluated on a case-by-case basis, taking account of the current social and political situation and information provided by the competent services within the framework of the principles of necessity and proportionality. Restrictions were imposed in accordance with the law and relevant regulations, always bearing in mind the constitutional right of peaceful assembly. Where there were concerns for the safety of protesters, alternative

solutions such as a change of venue were proposed by the police. The decision as to whether to ban an assembly or place other restrictions on it in order to protect public order and decisions regarding the deployment of police officers were governed by the new institutional framework for assemblies and the new police management philosophy. The aim was not to break up assemblies but to guard and protect them in order to facilitate the legal exercise of the right of assembly without disrupting social or economic affairs in accordance with the guidelines on managing public outdoor assemblies.

65. **A representative of Greece** said that one of the major improvements introduced under the new Penitentiary Code, which made reference to the European Convention on Human Rights and other international instruments, was the right of persons in pretrial detention or convicted prisoners serving their sentence to lodge complaints with the Sentence Enforcement Court about their conditions of detention and/or medical treatment. Where the complaint was found to be justified, the court ordered all appropriate measures to be taken to ensure compliance with the regulations on detainees' living conditions. Financial compensation could also be awarded and the prison term could be reduced, taking account of the number of days of detention spent in adverse conditions.

66. **A representative of Greece** said that pushbacks of migrants were in no way a part of the policy of the Greek Government. The rules were clear, and such actions were completely illegal.

67. **A representative of Greece** said that the question of smear campaigns targeting human rights defenders was an important and sensitive one. However, it was important not to prejudge the existence or otherwise of such a campaign. The law protected the rights of all, including human rights defenders, but not every judicial measure taken against a human rights defender was by definition a smear campaign. Any such allegations needed to be considered by independent courts as part of judicial proceedings that afforded all due process guarantees for the accused person based on a presumption of innocence.

68. **A representative of Greece** said that he wished to thank the members of the Committee for the frank exchange of views and the opportunity to demonstrate the progress made in his country.

69. **The Chair**, noting that a very wide range of subjects had been discussed and valuable information provided, thanked the delegation and all other persons involved in making the meeting possible.

The meeting rose at 12.50 p.m.