

GREECE

Working Session 2: Tolerance and non-discrimination II – Review of the implementation of commitments on promotion of mutual respect and understanding

Madam Moderator,

Fully subscribing to the EU statement, I would like to make a statement in my national capacity.

As many other OSCE participating States, Greece is confronting, for the first time in its history, the phenomenon of racist and xenophobic attacks, associated with a political party represented in the parliament. Over the last period, there has been indeed an increase in the number of attacks against foreigners but also against Greek citizens. The recent fatal attack against a Greek national has deeply shocked and appalled the Greek society as a whole. In times of economic crisis, extremist, neo-Nazi organizations or individuals, attempt to exploit the anger or the discontent of some segments of the population to advance their hateful social and political agendas. In addition, the situation prevailing in Greece has to be seen against the background of an unprecedented rise in irregular migration (reaching, for many years, some 100.000 persons on a yearly basis), due to the geographical position of the country, as the main gateway to the European Union.

The Greek authorities are fully aware of the need to combat any racist or xenophobic acts, which undermine the values underpinning the Greek society. A number of measures have been taken at the level of law enforcement, criminal legislation and the justice system, such as:

- a) the establishment of specialised police departments and offices
- b) the registration of alleged incidents of racist violence
- c) the possibility of imposing heavier penalties for hate-motivated crimes
- d) the appointment of a special prosecutor for investigating racist crimes

After the recent heinous events, the Minister of Public Order referred more than 30 relevant criminal cases to the judiciary, which are to be investigated possibly under stricter provisions relating to criminal organisations. The Government is also considering strengthening the legislation to the same effect.

At the same time, there has been an unequivocal condemnation of such acts by the highest political authorities, which has conveyed a message of zero tolerance for any manifestation of racism or xenophobia. Moreover, any possible misconduct within the ranks of law enforcement agencies will also be thoroughly investigated and punished.

Madam Moderator,

We should also underline that there is an equally imperative need to reverse the social conditions that have allowed for the emergence of such extremist acts. The defences of any given society against hateful rhetoric and extremist acts can be weakened, as a consequence of a lasting, ongoing economic recession, rising unemployment which can, in turn, lead to the dissolution of their social fabric.

To combat effectively the scourge of neo-Nazi violence, especially in a country like Greece that contributed decisively – paying a heavy toll in blood – to the historic vanquishing of Fascism and Nazism, apart from the decisive measures that the Government is committed to take, the root causes should be effectively addressed.

Madam Moderator,

A few days ago the 3 OSCE Personal Representatives on Tolerance paid a joint visit to Greece upon invitation by the Government. This demonstrates the willingness of my Authorities to effectively address these worrisome phenomena and to have an open and honest dialogue with the relevant OSCE Institutions. We look forward to their recommendations and we call upon all participating States that haven't done so to consider inviting the three Personal Representatives of the Chair-in-Office.