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World Report 2010 - Greece

Events of 2009

The socialist party Pasok returned to power after winning a parliamentary majority in October elections, defeating the New Democracy party in power since 2004.

Demonstrations and riots broke out around the country in December 2008 and January 2009 after a police officer shot and killed a 15-year-old boy in Athens. Human rights groups complained that police used excessive force during crowd control, including during otherwise peaceful demonstrations. In June the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture noted persistent allegations of police abuse of criminal suspects during arrests and interrogations.

In February Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights Thomas Hammarberg criticized "grave and systematic deficiencies" in Greece's asylum procedure. Fewer than 1 percent of asylum claims are granted at first instance, and in June the government abolished the right to lodge an appeal against rejection except in very narrow circumstances, leading the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to discontinue cooperation with the process. The government also increased immigration detention time limits to as long as 18 months.

Migrants are kept in deplorable detention conditions. The European Court of Human Rights condemned Greece in June for the unlawful detention of a Turkish asylum seeker in 2007, finding also that the conditions of his detention amounted to degrading treatment. The newly elected government closed the notorious detention center on Lesbos Island in November.

The authorities failed to protect unaccompanied children, who were routinely detained for prolonged periods, often with adults, and subjected to mistreatment. Authorities offered little or no assistance to migrant children who are vulnerable to exploitation and trafficking.

Greece launched a crackdown on migrants between June and August, systematically apprehending asylum seekers and other migrants, and summarily expelling many of them to Turkey where they are at serious risk of ill-treatment and refoulement.

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