

2023 Report on International Religious Freedom: Greece

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The constitution states freedom of religious conscience is inviolable and provides for freedom of worship, with some restrictions. It recognizes Greek Orthodoxy as the “prevailing religion.” The Greek Orthodox Church, the Jewish Community of Greece, and the Muslim Minority of Thrace have long held status as official, religious, public-law legal entities. The Roman Catholic and Eastern Rite Catholic Churches, the Anglican Church, two evangelical Christian groups, and the Ethiopian, Coptic, Armenian Apostolic, and Assyrian Orthodox Churches hold religious legal entity status under a 2014 law. Other religious groups, such as Jehovah’s Witnesses, Scientologists, and Baha’is, have civil association legal status. By law, religious officials of known religions and official religious legal entities must register with the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs.

In January, a court in Agrinio acquitted two Jehovah’s Witnesses of proselytism charges. Also in January, police arrested former parliamentarian Petros Tatsopoulos on grounds he “insulted the religious conscience and freedom of worship” of self-characterized conservative patriotic Hellenic Solution party member Filippos Kambouris. In March, police reported having cooperated with the National Intelligence Service (EYP) and Israel’s Mossad to dismantle a terrorist network planning attacks during Passover on a Chabad synagogue and a kosher restaurant in Athens. In April, parliament passed a law prohibiting individuals convicted of certain crimes, including running a criminal organization, from leading political parties or running in national elections. Based on this law, in May, the Supreme Court rejected the application of the self-characterized far-right Hellenes party (founded by the incarcerated leader of the outlawed Golden Dawn party, known for its antisemitic and anti-Islamic rhetoric) to compete in national elections. In June, an appeals court acquitted two human rights activists on charges of “filing a false complaint” of racist and antisemitic hate speech against a Greek Orthodox Metropolitan. Government-appointed acting muftis continued to lead all three muftiates in Thrace, which drew objections from some ethnic Turks and Turkish-speaking members of the Muslim Minority of Thrace. During the year, the government granted permits for the establishment of 14 houses of prayer and revoked permits of nine. In September, the country’s top administrative court reiterated that only non-Orthodox Christian pupils could be exempted from religious education, even though parents and the Union of Atheists filed appeals advocating for “blanket” exemptions on grounds of conscience. In March, the Athens Bar Association (a legal entity of public law) disbarred Konstantinos Plevris, defense attorney of the defunct neo-Nazi Golden Dawn party, for giving Nazi salutes in the courtroom during the trial of a former Golden Dawn member of the European Parliament. In October, the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister publicly condemned as antisemitic the October 7 Hamas terrorist attacks in Israel, including in a series of official social media posts emphasizing the continuing need to prevent antisemitism.

According to the Racist Violence Recording Network (RVRN), an initiative of the Greek National Commission for Human Rights and the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 74 incidents of discrimination and discrimination-related violence were recorded in 2022, compared with 28 in 2021. Of these incidents, police attributed nine such incidents to religious discrimination, compared with 19 in 2021. Because religion and ethnicity are often closely linked, however, it was difficult to categorize many incidents as being solely based on religious identity. In February, media outlets reported unknown individuals physically attacked Imam Achmet, president of the Thrace-based Pomak Panhellenic Association. According to Achmet, ethnically Turkish members of the Muslim Minority in Thrace targeted him due to his outspoken insistence that Pomaks have a cultural identity distinct from that of Turkish members of the Muslim minority, and because he would not succumb to pressures to say he was Turkish. In October, police arrested a Syrian national

who was “behaving strangely” inside a Greek Orthodox church in central Athens; police found a knife in his bag. In January, a mural commemorating the deportation of Jews from Thessaloniki to Nazi death camps during World War II was defaced. In October, unknown individuals painted “Free Gaza/Palestine” and “Jews = Nazis” on the same mural.

The Ambassador and other U.S. embassy and consulate general representatives met with a range of government and civil society leaders to discuss religious freedom, interfaith dialogue, and combating antisemitism and Holocaust denial and distortion. Interlocutors included Secretary General for Religious Affairs George Kalantzis; officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, including the Special Envoy for Combatting Antisemitism; and regional and local government representatives. Embassy and consulate general officials also met with primates of the Orthodox Church; the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Athens; representatives from the Central Board of the Jewish Communities in Greece (KIS); members of the Athens Mosque Committee and members of the Muslim Minority in Thrace; and representatives of the Church of Scientology and the Jehovah’s Witnesses. The Ambassador publicly condemned the January 11 vandalism of a Holocaust mural in Thessaloniki, calling the act “heinous” and “an offense to all.”

Section I.

Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 10.5 million (midyear 2023). According to most recent polls, 81 to 90 percent of the population identifies as Greek Orthodox, 4 to 15 percent as atheist, and 2 percent as Muslim.

Approximately 140,000 Muslims, including Alevi Muslims, live in Thrace; they are largely descendants of the officially recognized Muslim Minority according to the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne. This group includes individuals of Turkish, Pomak (Slavs who converted to Islam during the Ottoman Empire and whose language is a mix of Bulgarian, Greek, and Turkish), and Roma origin. According to the Pew Research Center, an additional 520,000 Muslims – mostly asylum seekers, refugees, and other migrants – live in the country; more than half live in Athens.

Members of other religious communities that together constitute less than 5 percent of the population include Old Calendarist Orthodox, Catholics (mostly Roman Catholics and smaller numbers of Eastern Rite Catholics), Protestants, including Pentecostals, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Jews, members of polytheistic Hellenic religions, Scientologists, Baha’is, members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Sikhs, Seventh-day Adventists, Buddhists, and members of the International Society of Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON). Independent and media sources estimate Ethiopian Orthodox number 2,500 and Assyrians fewer than 1,000. According to the Armenian Orthodox Archbishop, approximately 100,000 Armenian Orthodox live in the country.

Section II.

Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The constitution recognizes Greek Orthodoxy as the “prevailing religion.” It states freedom of religious conscience is inviolable and provides for freedom of worship with some restrictions. The constitution prohibits “proselytizing,” defined as “any direct or indirect attempt to intrude on the religious beliefs of a person of a different religious persuasion with the aim of undermining those

beliefs.” This prohibition is rarely enforced. The constitution prohibits worship disturbing public order or “offending moral principles.” It allows prosecutors to seize publications that “offend Christianity” or other “known religions,” which are defined as groups with at least one valid permit to operate a place of prayer or worship.

The law provides up to two years in prison for maliciously attempting to prevent or disrupt a religious gathering or for engaging in “insulting action” inside a place of worship. A 2019 amendment to the penal code abolishes articles criminalizing malicious blasphemy and religious insults. The constitution states public education should support “the development of religious conscience among citizens.” Greek Orthodox priests and government-appointed muftis and imams receive salaries from the government.

The constitution states that ministers of all known religions are subject to the same regulations as Greek Orthodox clergy. It states individuals are not exempt from compliance with the law because of religious conviction. Under the law, religious officials of known religions and official religious legal entities must register with the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs.

The Greek Orthodox Church, the Jewish Community of Greece, and the Muslim Minority of Thrace have long-held status as official, religious, public-law legal entities. The Roman Catholic Church, Eastern Rite Catholic Church, Anglican Church, two evangelical Christian groups (the Evangelical Church of German-speakers and the Greek Evangelical Church), and the Ethiopian, Coptic, Armenian Apostolic, and Assyrian Orthodox Churches acquired religious legal-entity status under a 2014 law, which outlines how additional entities can acquire such status. This application process requires documents proving the group has “open rituals and no secret doctrines,” a list of 300 signatory members, a qualified leader who is legally in the country, and proof (e.g., each group’s charter of association) the entity’s practices do not threaten public order.

The law provides an alternate method to obtain government recognition: a group with at least one valid permit to operate a place of worship acquires legal protection as a “known religion” and has benefits that include exemption from taxes and municipal fees for property used solely for religious purposes. The terms “houses or places of prayer or worship” are used interchangeably; it is at the discretion of a religious group to determine its term of preference. Membership requirements for house of prayer permits differ from the requirements for official recognition of religious legal entities. Local urban planning departments must certify facilities meet minimum safety standards. Once a house of worship receives the required approvals, the religious group must submit a description of its basic principles and rituals and a biography of the religious minister or leader to the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs for final approval. The application for a house of prayer or worship permit requires at least five signatory group members. The leaders of a religious group applying for a house of prayer permit must be Greek citizens, EU nationals, or legal residents of the country and must possess other professional qualifications, including relevant education and experience. A separate permit is required for each physical location.

A religious group qualifying as a religious legal entity may transfer property and administer houses of prayer or worship, private schools, charitable institutions, and other nonprofit entities. Alternatively, some groups have opted to retain their status as civil society nonprofit associations acquired through court recognition prior to the 2014 law. Under this status, religious groups, including Jehovah’s Witnesses and Bahai’s, may operate houses of prayer and benefit from real estate property tax exemptions, but they may face administrative and fiscal difficulties in transferring property and in operating private schools, charitable institutions, and other nonprofit entities. Although properties used exclusively for religious purposes are tax exempt, nonreligious properties owned by religious groups are subject to taxation.

The law allows religious communities without status as legal entities to appear before administrative and civil courts as plaintiffs or defendants.

The 1923 Treaty of Lausanne accords the recognized Muslim Minority of Thrace the right to administer and maintain mosques and social and charitable organizations. A 2022 law outlines the process by which the government appoints official muftis in Thrace, including qualification criteria,

the selection process, and rules for constituting a decision-making advisory committee. The law stipulates that the Minister of Education and Religious Affairs chooses among candidates recommended by the committee. The final appointment is certified by presidential decree (as is also the case for Greek Orthodox metropolitans).

The same law secures Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs funds for the daily operation of the muftiates and for care of retired muftis.

Official muftis are required by law to obtain notarized consent from all parties who wish to adjudicate a family matter (marriage, divorce, child custody, alimony, or inheritance) based on sharia. Absent such consent, family matters fall under civil court jurisdiction. Sharia decisions are subject to ratification by first instance (trial) courts.

The law provides for optional Islamic instruction in public schools in Thrace and optional Catholic instruction in public schools on the islands of Tinos and Syros.

Homeschooling is generally not permitted, with certain exceptions, such as for health reasons. The law requires all children to attend 11 years of education in state or private schools, including two years of kindergarten-equivalent education (ages four to six). Religious instruction, largely Greek Orthodox, is required in primary grades three through six and secondary grades seven through nine. Students also receive religious instruction in grades nine-12 as part of the official curriculum. Non-Orthodox students may be exempted from religious instruction if a parent or guardian submits a document citing religious grounds. Exempted students may attend classes with alternate subject matter.

By law, any educational facility with fewer than nine students must temporarily suspend operations, with students referred to neighboring schools.

According to the law, parents may send their children to private religious schools; Orthodox, Catholic, and Jewish schools operate in the country. Per the Lausanne Treaty, the government operates bilingual (Greek/Turkish) secular schools in Thrace. Their number varies according to the number of registered students, with a minimum of nine per school. There are two Islamic religious schools in Thrace for grades seven to 12. Muslim students in Thrace wishing to study the Quran may attend after-hours religious classes in mosques with teachers paid by the Turkish consulate in Komotini. Bilingual schools in Thrace observe Islamic holidays in addition to official state holidays.

The law allows Muslim students at all grade levels to be absent for two days each for Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha.

The law allocates to the Muslim Minority of Thrace at least 0.5 percent of admissions to universities and technical institutes and appointments to civil service and public-sector positions. The law also allocates 2 percent of slots in the national fire brigade school and academy to the Muslim Minority of Thrace.

The law allows conscientious objectors to serve 15 months of alternative service in municipal or public service in lieu of the 12-month mandatory military service for men. The law provides financial support and employment protections for conscientious objectors.

The law establishes an individual's right to choose his or her burial or cremation location and mandates death certificates detail this information. In the presence of a notary, individuals may designate their preferences and designate a person to carry out funeral preferences.

Individuals or legal entities convicted of incitement to violence, discrimination, or hatred based on religion may be sentenced to up to three years in prison and fined up to €20,000 (\$22,100). Religious motivation for a crime is a special circumstance that can add up to three years to a sentence and double fines. Approval, trivialization, or malicious denial of the Holocaust or "crimes of Nazism" are illegal if they lead to incitement of violence or are threatening or abusive. The law

prohibits individuals convicted of specific felonies from holding senior party positions, such as president, secretary general, or legal representative, during their sentence. Parties led by convicted felons cannot buy advertisements on radio or television during an election campaign.

Since 1945, the country has had private property restitution legislation that provides for the return of all properties originally belonging to Jews and orders the immediate return of Jewish property by the trustees to the original owners. The government has returned property to the Jewish Community of Greece under the same set of laws.

All civil servants, including cabinet and parliament members, must take an oath before entering office; individuals may take a religious or secular oath. The law bars leaders of known religions, including Orthodox priests, from running for mayor or city counselor. Religious symbols may not be used as emblems of candidates for mayor or city council.

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

GOVERNMENT PRACTICES

Abuses Involving Violence, Detention, or Mass Resettlement

On January 20, a first instance court (trial court) in Agrinio, in the central part of the country, acquitted two members of Jehovah's Witnesses of proselytism charges.

On January 30, police arrested former parliamentarian Petros Tatsopoulos on grounds he "insulted the religious conscience and freedom of worship" of Hellenic Solution party member Filippos Kambouris. During an event on religion and education, Tatsopoulos accused Kambouris of exploiting his faith to gain voter support. On April 4, Kambouris announced he had filed a second complaint against Tatsopoulos on similar grounds and asked for the antiracist law to be invoked.

On March 28, Hellenic Police reported having cooperated with the EYP and Mossad, Israel's National Intelligence Agency, to dismantle a terrorist network planning attacks during Passover on a Chabad synagogue and a kosher restaurant in Athens. Police arrested two suspects of Pakistani nationality and identified a third suspect, also Pakistani, who had allegedly recruited and instructed them from abroad. The defendants remained in pretrial detention at year's end.

On April 11, parliament passed a law prohibiting individuals convicted of certain crimes, including running a criminal organization, from leading political parties or running in national elections. On the basis of this law, in May, the Supreme Court rejected the application of the self-characterized far-right Hellenes party (founded by Ilias Kasidiaris, the incarcerated leader of the outlawed Golden Dawn party, known for its antisemitic and anti-Islamic rhetoric) to compete in national elections. On May 2, the Supreme Court rejected the far-right Hellenes party's application to compete in elections.

On May 8, a court sentenced the head of the Apostolic Church of the Nations and an associate to three months in prison, suspended, for having performed religious ceremonies in 2022 in a Thessaloniki location that was not under permit.

On June 16, the International Federation for Human Rights reported that an appeals court acquitted human rights activists Andrea Gilbert and Panayote Dimitras for charges of "filing a false complaint" against Greek Orthodox Metropolitan Seraphim of Piraeus. The two activists had filed a complaint against Seraphim in 2017 accusing him of racist and antisemitic hate speech. In 2022, a first instance court sentenced Dimitras and Gilbert to one year in prison.

On September 30, the Muftiate of Xanthi issued a statement saying that unknown individuals had written threatening messages in Turkish against the imam, the muezzin, and the president of the Islamic Community Trust (*waqf*) committee and left bullets outside a mosque in Xanthi. This act

was perceived by officials at the Muftiate of Xanthi as an attempt to pressure the leadership of the local mosque to side with the unofficial mufti. Secretary General of Religious Affairs Kalantzis publicly condemned the act and said an investigation was underway.

Abuses Limiting Religious Belief and Expression

Some religious groups and human rights organizations, including Jehovah's Witnesses, continued to advocate equity between the 15 months of mandatory alternative service required of conscientious objectors and the 12 months of mandatory military service required of others in accordance with a Ministry of Defense decree. Despite an appeal filed by conscientious objectors in 2020, the Council of State, the country's top administrative court, had not rendered a decision by year's end.

Abuses Involving the Ability of Individuals to Engage in Religious Activities Alone or In Community with Others

During the year, a self-declared ethnic Macedonian practicing an unaffiliated version of Orthodox Christianity (not officially recognized by any other Orthodox Church) continued to seek acquisition of a house of prayer permit. The applicant had sought a permit for a house of prayer since 2017. In 2022, the ombudsman sent an official inquiry to the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs regarding this case; the ministry said the permit application was missing parts of the required documentation. The applicant contended the government deliberately delayed the process. Groups lacking religious-entity status or a house of prayer permit could still function as registered, nonprofit civil society organizations, but they did not have full rights, such as the right to perform a legal wedding.

Government-appointed acting muftis continued to lead all three muftiates in Thrace. Some ethnic Turks and Turkish-speaking members of the Muslim Minority of Thrace continued to object to the government's practice of appointing muftis, pressing instead for direct election by the community. The government continued to state that the appointments were appropriate because muftis serve a judicial function, and the constitution requires judges be appointed rather than elected. The government also asserted muftis were allowed to practice sharia as it pertains to family and inheritance matters, with the notarized consent of all parties. Some members of the Muslim Minority of Thrace stated the government used these limited judicial powers as an excuse to ignore citizens' calls for direct elections.

Parallel to these three official acting muftis, two unofficial muftis (elected by some male members of the Muslim community) continued to provide religious services in Thrace. The government did not recognize these unofficial muftis.

Throughout the year, the government granted permits for the establishment of the following 14 houses of prayer: one operated by a group of Scientologists; seven groups of Jehovah's Witnesses in Athens, Mesolongi, Trikala, Crete and Pieria; four different groups of Sunni Muslims in Athens; an Old Calendarist group in Athens; and a Rosicrucian group in Athens. Two groups of Jehovah's Witnesses were granted authorization to build houses of worship in Igoumenitsa and in Lefkada. The government reported that it revoked nine house of prayer permits, including two from the Seventh-day Adventist Church per request by the church itself; four from various Protestant groups in Athens and in Crete on grounds of inactivity or lack of fire safety compliance; and three of different Athens-based Muslim groups, for lack of fire safety compliance.

Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and advocacy groups again reported no significant progress during the year on resolution of Holocaust-era Jewish property claims, including by foreign citizens. Several Holocaust-era property claims remained open at year's end. The Organization for the Relief and Rehabilitation of Jews in Greece, a public-law entity, said more than 100 properties owned by Jews before the war had become government facilities.

The Jewish Community of Thessaloniki reported no progress in the government's efforts to secure the return of the community's prewar archives from the Russian government. In December 2021, KIS, a legal entity established in 1945 and the official coordination body of Jews in the country, said Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis had pressed Russian Federation President Vladimir Putin to return the archives. The Jewish Community of Thessaloniki also continued to request the return of religious artifacts taken by Nazi occupiers in 1941 that are housed in the Jewish Historical Institute of Warsaw.

Some members of the Muslim Minority of Thrace again objected to the government's role in appointing persons to oversee financial matters related to the waqf. They said the community should elect such persons in accordance with the Lausanne Treaty, rather than having committee members imposed by the government.

Muslim leaders continued to state that the lack of Islamic cemeteries outside Thrace obliged Muslims to transport their dead to Thrace or abroad for Islamic burials. Government officials said faith-based groups could not manage cemeteries, except for those Islamic cemeteries in Thrace dating to the Ottoman era. Muslim leaders said it was against Islamic law for municipalities to continue the practice of exhuming bodies after three years due to space constraints. Municipal authorities attributed the exhumation requirements to lack of space regardless of religion.

The government did not allow slaughter of animals without stunning. In 2022, Jewish and Muslim leaders stated the prohibition of ritual animal slaughter eroded religious freedom, hurt local business, and increased the risk of unsafe private, in-house animal slaughtering. Imports of halal and kosher food were not affected by the prohibition.

In accordance with the 1923 Lausanne Treaty, the government operated 90 bilingual, secular primary schools in Thrace during the 2023-24 school year. The government also operated two bilingual, secular secondary schools, grades seven to 12, although these are not required under the treaty. The government suspended the operation of nine minority primary schools, citing low enrollment. Some minority representatives criticized the closures, contending religious minority schools should be exempted from enrollment minimums of nine students. Representatives of the Muslim Minority of Thrace said the existing schools were insufficient to meet their needs and that the government continued to ignore their requests to establish an additional religious minority secondary school and a private, bilingual preschool.

On September 12, the Council of State, the country's top administrative court, reiterated only non-Orthodox Christian pupils could be exempted from religious education, despite appeals filed by parents and the Union of Atheists advocating for "blanket" exemptions on grounds of conscience. The ruling affirmed previous decisions, stipulating Orthodox Christian students should attend religious classes in accordance with constitutional provisions and requirements. The court also deemed the exemption procedure established by a 2022 ministerial decree in line with the constitution, the European Convention on Human Rights, and the EU General Data Protection Regulation.

The government continued to provide direct support to the Greek Orthodox Church, including funding clergy salaries, estimated at €200 million (\$221 million) annually; religious and vocational training of clergy; and religious instruction in schools. According to Greek Orthodox and government officials, the government provided support in accordance with a series of legal agreements made by past governments and as compensation for religious property expropriated in the past by the state. The government also provided direct support to the three muftiates in Thrace, including salaries for the three official muftis, their imams, and teachers delivering courses on Islam in public schools. The government paid the salaries of the imam and two assistant imams of the Athens Mosque and the salaries of Catholic teachers at the state schools of Tinos and Syros islands.

The government continued to fund a chair of Jewish Studies at Aristotle University in Thessaloniki and Holocaust education training for teachers.

The government maintained a 2022 memorandum of understanding with the Shoah Memorial in France, the Jewish Museum of Greece, and the Mohammed Ali Research Center to educate teachers, students, and civil society actors regarding the Holocaust and other genocides. The ministry also covered the cost of educational visits to Auschwitz-Birkenau by middle and high-school students who won video competitions regarding Holocaust-related topics. The program had 77 participants from 40 schools. The government also co-funded (with UNESCO, the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, and the Jewish Museum of Greece) an online reference for teachers containing material, information, and project ideas for teaching about the Holocaust.

Abuses Involving Discrimination or Unequal Treatment

Antonis Alakiotis, the founder of the country's first and only crematorium, said the government discriminated against those who did not wish to comply with the Orthodox Christian practice of burial. He said the government required written attestation by a family member before a decedent could be cremated, asserting this was discriminatory as there is no such requirement for those choosing burial.

On March 14, the Athens Bar Association announced it had disbarred Konstantinos Plevris, defense attorney of the defunct neo-Nazi Golden Dawn party, for giving Nazi salutes in the courtroom on three occasions during the trial of former Golden Dawn member of the European Parliament Giannis Lagos.

Other Developments Affecting Religious Freedom

On January 27, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs marked Holocaust Remembrance Day, saying it was a "historical and moral duty to... continue to search the past, to ensure a peaceful future, free of racist hate, antisemitism, and other forms of discrimination." President Katerina Sakellaropoulou laid a wreath at the Holocaust Memorial in Athens in a march marking the 80th anniversary of the departure of the first train of victims to Auschwitz from Thessaloniki on March 15, 1943.

On March 5, local authorities and citizens' groups from the Eastern Macedonia and Thrace administrative region commemorated the loss of 2,076 Jews from the northern cities of Kavala and Drama who perished in the concentration camps of Treblinka and Auschwitz. The city of Kavala hosted six days of events, including photography exhibits and concerts. Nine regional mayors created the "Network of Cities Against Anti-Semitism and the Dispersal of Racial Hate" with the stated purpose of fighting antisemitism, racism, and nostalgia for fascism.

On October 5, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs collaborated with the Jewish Museum of Greece and the General Secretariat for Religious Affairs to hold a seminar for 25 teachers on curricula and research methods that promote and preserve memory of the Holocaust.

In October, the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs publicly condemned as antisemitic the October 7 Hamas terrorist attacks in Israel, including in a series of official social media posts emphasizing the continuing need to prevent antisemitism. The Foreign Minister participated in a memorial at the Athens synagogue for those who perished in the October 7 attacks. In November, Special Envoy for Combatting Antisemitism and for the Protection of Holocaust Remembrance Ambassador Aliferi co-drafted a "Joint Statement of Special Envoys and Coordinators Combating Antisemitism" condemning the October 7 attacks and denouncing the subsequent "online upsurge of antisemitic messages, disinformation, hate speech, and terrorist content, which instigate real world hate crimes."

On November 6, Minister of Education and Religions Kyriakos Pierrakakis met with KIS board members, who expressed concern regarding the public middle and high school teachers' union's recent call for solidarity with Palestine against "continued illegal occupation of the Palestinian territories." Per media reports, Minister Pierrakakis told KIS in the meeting "Antisemitism – and any form of blind fanaticism – is against the values we serve," emphasizing that the union's

statement did not reflect the opinions of the vast majority of teachers, who he said desired to build school communities “free from the logic and vocabulary of yesterday.”

Section III.

Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

According to the RVRN, an initiative of the Greek National Commission for Human Rights and the UNHCR and endorsed by 52 NGOs, 74 incidents of discrimination or discrimination-related violence were recorded in 2022, the latest year for which data is available, compared with 28 in 2021. In 33 of these incidents, migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers were targeted, compared with 28 of 72 cases in 2021. Because religion and ethnicity are often closely linked, it was difficult to categorize many incidents as solely or primarily based on religious identity. In two of the 74 incidents, the targets were a mosque in the center of Athens and a Holocaust memorial in Thessaloniki. The RVRN report stated police received nine reports of violence potentially sparked by religion, compared with 19 in 2021.

On February 1, media outlets reported unknown individuals physically attacked Imam Achmet, president of the Thrace-based Pomak Panhellenic Association, in Xanthi. According to Achmet, ethnically Turkish members of the Muslim Minority in Thrace targeted him due to his vocal insistence that Pomaks have a cultural ethnicity distinct from that of Turkish members of the Muslim minority, and because he refused to succumb to pressure to identify as Turkish. Police launched an investigation but made no arrests by year’s end.

On February 23, Father Tsarknias, a self-declared ethnic Macedonian practicing an unaffiliated and unrecognized version of Orthodox Christianity, said he was physically threatened and verbally insulted by a group of young men who vandalized and blockaded his car. He also said unknown individuals graffitied his driveway and threw rocks and eggs at his home in September. He filed complaints with police for both incidents, but there were no developments by year’s end.

On October 19, police arrested a Syrian national who was “behaving strangely” inside a Greek Orthodox church in central Athens. Police found a knife in his bag. Media and police representatives said the arrestee manifested mental health problems. The suspect was charged with illegal possession of a weapon, resistance to authority, and disturbing a religious service.

On January 28, media reported some migrants on the island of Kos celebrated an attack on a Jerusalem synagogue that killed seven worshippers. The migrants reportedly chanted slogans in favor of Palestine.

On October 8, Greek media showed videos of Palestinian and other Muslim residents at the Closed and Controlled Access Center on Samos and on Kos Island expressing support for Hamas’ attack on Israel.

According to the European Jewish Congress, on January 11, unidentified persons vandalized for a second time a mural commemorating the deportation of Jews from Thessaloniki to Nazi death camps during World War II. In response to the vandalism, KIS said, “Statements of condemnation are not enough! It is unacceptable that those responsible for the vandalism of memory remain at large.... We state once more: antisemitism begins with actions against Jews, but it never stops with the Jews.”

On October 19, unknown individuals wrote antisemitic messages and Nazi symbols at a memorial marking the site of former Jewish cemetery on the campus of Aristotle University in Thessaloniki.

On October 22, unknown individuals painted “Free Gaza/Palestine” and “Jews = Nazis” on a Holocaust mural in Thessaloniki. The city of Thessaloniki promptly painted over the graffiti. KIS

responded to the vandalism in an article, emphasizing, “The time for tolerance of antisemitism has irrevocably passed.”

Media outlets reported that on November 8, unidentified vandals threw black paint on the Holocaust Memorial in the northern city of Kavala. Kavala Mayor Theodoros Mouriadis ordered the cleaning of the monument and denounced the attack, calling it “an unacceptable act of intolerance and blind fanaticism” and pledging to preserve “the history and democratic origins of the city.”

On June 16, police arrested a French national in Xanthi for tearing a Quran and removing property from a local mosque. The Greek Orthodox Metropolitan of Xanthi and the Secretary General for Religious Affairs issued statements condemning the incident.

Throughout the year, there were media reports of vandalism of small Greek Orthodox churches and chapels in multiple locations across the country. On April 5, unknown individuals vandalized a Greek Orthodox church on the island of Evia. Police opened investigations of the incidents but reported no arrests by year’s end.

The government is a member of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance.

Section IV.

U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

The U.S. Ambassador and other embassy and consulate general representatives met with government leaders to discuss religious freedom, interfaith dialogue, combating antisemitism and Holocaust denial and distortion, and the establishment of a Holocaust Memorial Museum in Thessaloniki. Interlocutors included Secretary General for Religious Affairs Kalantzis; officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, including the Special Envoy for Combatting Antisemitism; and regional and local government representatives, including the mayor of Didymoticho in Thrace.

In their interactions with government officials and other interlocutors, U.S. government officials discussed the ability of minority religious communities to exercise their rights to religious freedom, including performing ritual animal slaughter, government initiatives affecting the Muslim Minority of Thrace and Muslim immigrants, the operation of the first public mosque in Athens, government action regarding the planned Holocaust Memorial Museum and Educational Center of Greece on Human Rights in Thessaloniki, initiatives promoting interreligious dialogue, and possible joint action in addressing antisemitism.

Embassy and consulate general officials continued to monitor the ability of minority religious groups to freely practice their religion and be free of societal discrimination, including physical violence and verbal harassment against members of minority religious groups. Embassy and consulate general officials expressed concern to government officials, including Secretary General for Religious Affairs Kalantzis, regarding antisemitic and anti-Muslim acts and rhetoric.

Embassy and consulate general officials also met with primates of the Orthodox Church, including the Archbishop of Athens and All Greece, the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, the Patriarch of Alexandria, the Archbishop of Sinai, and several Metropolitans; the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Athens; representatives of KIS; members of the Athens mosque committee; members of the Muslim Minority in Thrace, including the official Muftis and a religious leader of the Alevites; and representatives of the Church of Scientology and Jehovah’s Witnesses.

Embassy officials continued work throughout the year with the Office of the Prime Minister and the Minister of Culture on a U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum project involving the retrieval of personal items belonging to Jewish refugees from the 1946 *Athina* shipwreck off Astypalea Island. Officials plan to display some of the retrieved objects in the museum’s permanent exhibition.

The embassy and consulate general officials also promoted religious tolerance and the right of religious freedom on social media, emphasizing that religious freedom is a U.S. government priority. The Ambassador publicly condemned the January 11 vandalism of a Holocaust mural in Thessaloniki, calling the act “heinous” and “an offense to all.” On January 17, U.S. consulate staff in Thessaloniki joined the organization Vardaris Neighborhood to assist in the cleaning of the mural by removing Nazi symbols and slogans written by right-wing group(s). The event was reported by local and national media. The U.S. Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues retweeted embassy and consulate public messaging regarding the event, underscoring that acts of kindness and tolerance are a way of standing up against bigotry, hatred, and antisemitism.