

The 14th International TAU Seminar on Contemporary Antisemitism

From Statements to Actions: Official Measures in Combating Antisemitism

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Michal Navoth: Measures Taken by Greek Government to Combat Antisemitism

1. Recent antisemitism in Greece

Throughout 2018, antisemitic manifestations were mainly not violent in Greece.¹

There were no incidents targeting Jews, and vandalism targeted Cemeteries and Holocaust monuments given that all other Jewish institutions (synagogues, community offices, schools) are heavily guarded. Budget has not been affected by Greek economic crisis. In fact, the current situation implies the converse. Because the spike of antisemitism in Europe, the Greek government is increasing the protection and security of the Jewish communities in Greece. Incidents of vandalism and graffiti took place in various cities in Greece, but most of them occurred in Athens (four incidents) and in Thessaloniki (six incidents). In the latter, the Holocaust memorial was vandalized four times in 2018!

2. Initiatives undertaken to combat antisemitism

In the last years in addition to denunciations of Jewish bodies, relevant authorities and seniors in the Greek political system expressed zero tolerance against antisemitism, including their swift response to rectify damages caused by vandalism, as demonstrated by the following examples.

On 30 March 2017, in Kavala, a port city in the northern Greece, a Holocaust Memorial, dedicated to the 1,484 Jews of the town who died in Treblinka, was vandalized for the

¹ Based on information the author has obtained from the Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece (KIS). The information is part of KIS report on antisemitism in Greece in 2018; Michal Navoth, *Greece, in* Kantor Center for the Study of Contemporary European Jewry, Antisemitism Worldwide - 2018 - General Analysis, <http://www.kantorcenter.tau.ac.il/general-analysis-2018>

second time, since it was erected in June 2015.² The vandals used hammers to smash the marble coating on the memorial. The mayor of Kavala, Dimitra Tsanaka, visited the Memorial right after the act of vandalism. The City Council, prominent figures, and many citizens of Kavala co-signed an on line petition, expressing the local's society immediate and strong reaction in condemning the vandal attack against the Holocaust monument. Within only a few days, the Municipality of Kavala kept the promise of its mayor for the restoration of the monument at the expense and responsibility of the municipality.³ The case against them was forwarded to the prosecutor.⁴ The reaction of the mayor and the City Council was in a sharp contrast to their attitude two years earlier. When the memorial was vandalized with blue paint, although the mayor condemned the incident, she stressed that this was not a sign of antisemitism.⁵

On 17 July, 2017 an excommunicated Old monk, who calls himself "father Kleomenis", posted a video on social media showing him in front of the Jewish Martyrs Holocaust Monument in Larissa. The monument was the first Holocaust Monument in Greece when erected in 1987, in the memory of the Greek Jews deported and exterminated in the Nazi death camps. The video showed him denying the Holocaust, cursing the Jews, spitting, kicking, throwing eggs at the monument, and calling for its demolition. The Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece (KIS) and the Jewish Community of Larissa issued press releases condemning the attack. The Holy Synod of the Greek Orthodox Church issued statements disassociating themselves from Kleomenis and

² The memorial was vandalized for the first time on 21 June 2015, two weeks after its inauguration. See Michal Navoth, *Greece*, in Kantor Center for the Study of Cotemporary European Jewry, Antisemitism Worldwide 2015 General Analysis Draft, 41-42, <http://www.kantorcenter.tau.ac.il/sites/default/files/Doch2015-%20%28160117%29.pdf>

³ Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece (KIS), *Restoration of the Vandalized Holocaust Monument of Kavala due to Prompt Reaction of the Municipality and the Local Society*, 13 April, 2017, https://kis.gr/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=708:restoration-of-the-vandalized-holocaust-monument-of-kavala-due-to-prompt-reaction-of-the-municipality-and-the-local-society&catid=12:2009&Itemid=41

⁴ Based on information the author has obtained from The Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece (KIS). The information is part of KIS forthcoming report on antisemitism in Greece in 2017; *Four Men Arrested for Vandalizing Holocaust Memorial in Kavala*, 13 July, 2017, <https://enantiastontanisimitismo.wordpress.com/2017/07/13/four-men-arrested-for-vandalizing-holocaust-memorial-in-kavala>

⁵ *Supra* note 2.

condemning his actions. The Municipality of Larissa also issued a statement denouncing the attack. The police and the justice system handled the case. The General Secretary for Transparency and Human Rights and the General Secretary of Religious Affairs responded promptly by providing the Public Prosecutor of Larissa, the Cyber Crime Police Department and the Racist Crimes Department of the Police with the relevant evidence. It took the prosecutor in Larissa only two days and on 19 July, he filed charges against Kleomenis and three more individuals for vandalizing the Holocaust memorial and for violating the antiracism law.⁶ Kleomenis escaped arrest since July 2017. On January 2019, the First Misdemeanors Court of Larissa convicted in absentia “Father Kleomenis” to 18 months prison sentence and a fine of 7,500 euros for the vandal attack of the Holocaust Monument in Larissa. On November 2019 he was caught.⁷

The Cyber Crime Police Department is also addressed to tackle the online hate speech. When the website Asteiakia (jokes) published amongst its various categories of jokes also vulgar and hideous "jokes" about the Jews, which trivialized Holocaust and offended the Jewish people, such as "What 10 Jews on TV are? A soap opera"; “How do 30 Jews enter in a Fiat?" In the ashtray”, the Cyber Crime Police Department was asked to take all necessary legal actions to remove those antisemitic jokes from that website.⁸

When the Holocaust Memorial in Thessaloniki was desecrated on June 2018, by then for the third time during that year, the justice system was mobilized through the head prosecutor of Thessaloniki first instance courts. The head prosecutor ordered a

⁶ Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece (KIS), *Holocaust Monument in Larissa Vandalized by Alleged Clergyman*, 18 July, 2017, https://kis.gr/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=726:holocaust-monument-in-larissa-vandalized-by-clergyman-&catid=12:2009&Itemid=41; *Press Release of the Jewish Community of Larissa for the Vanalization of the Holocaust Monument*, 19 July, 2017, https://kis.gr/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=727:press-release-of-the-jewish-community-of-larissa-for-the-vandalization-of-the-holocaust-monument&catid=49:2009-05-11-09-28-23; <https://www.ecoi.net/en/document/1430269.html>

⁷ Information provided to the author by KIS.

⁸ Based on information the author has obtained from Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece (KIS). The information is part of KIS report on antisemitism in Greece in 2017.

preliminary investigation to determine the misdemeanors committed in combination with the violation of the antiracism law.⁹

3. Is antisemitism a focal point of Greece's political agenda?

The answer is no. Yet, because governmental measures undertaken to combat and equally important to prevent antisemitism, two major developments took place.

3.1 The adoption of antiracism law, Law 4285/2014

As part of the crackdown on the Golden Dawn, the Greek neo-Nazi party, launched on September 2013, the Greek parliament adopted on 9 September 2014 the long awaited antiracism law, Law 4285/2014, which amended the previous legislation. Inter alia, for the first time the Law explicitly prohibits denial or trivialization of crimes such as the Holocaust.¹⁰ The Law was not only enacted, but also applied. On October 2019, Greece provided data on complaints and prosecution of hate crimes in the years 2015-2017. According to the data, there were 368 complaints for alleged racist crimes, 127 criminal prosecutions, 19 convictions and 4 acquittals.¹¹ Out of the nine cases referred to trial in 2019-2020, there were two referrals to trial for anti-Semitism.¹² One of that two referrals pertained to the publication by an extreme right columnist and an extreme right blog of an article entitled “*Parliament a Jewish Synagogue!!!*” when a commemorative plaque for inter-war Greek Jewish MPs victims of the Holocaust was inaugurated in Parliament on 2016.¹³ While there is a concern "for the still low

⁹ Thessaloniki prosecutor orders preliminary investigation into vandalism of Holocaust Memorial, 28 June 2018, <https://thegreekobserver.com/greece/article/45897/thessaloniki-prosecutor-orders-preliminary-investigation-into-vandalism-of-holocaust-memorial/>

¹⁰ Michal Navoth, *Between the Far Right and the Far Left: Current Issues of Racism and Nationalism in Greece*, KANTOR CENTER POSITION PAPERS 2 (Mikael Shainkman ed., March 2017), <http://www.kantorcenter.tau.ac.il/sites/default/files/PP%20Greece%20170320.pdf>

¹¹ <https://racistcrimeswatch.wordpress.com/2019/10/19/1-908/>

¹² *Id.*

¹³ *Id.* See also Michal Navoth, *Greece*, in *Kantor Center for the Study of Cotemporary European Jewry, Antisemitism Worldwide 2016 General Analysis Draft*, nn. 29-30 and accompanying text, http://www.kantorcenter.tau.ac.il/sites/default/files/Doch_full_2016_170717.pdf

invocation and application of anti-racism legal provisions and the low rate of convictions in courts"¹⁴[in the original – M.N.], in comparison to the former Greek antiracist law, Law 927/1979, the discrepancy between legislation and its enforcement is much smaller. For example, in 35 cases brought before the courts prior to the conviction in 2007 of the Greek writer, Konstantinos Plevris, self-professed Nazi and antisemite, who was later acquitted by the Supreme Court, no one had been convicted under Law 927/1979. The first conviction at the appeal level was on September 2008, in nearly thirty years of the law's existence.¹⁵

Generally speaking, it seems that things start moving in the positive direction, i.e., there are not only talks, but actions are taken place. That trend is also implied by the "Turning Words into Action to Address Anti-Semitism" (WIA) project. The project has been developed by the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). Its purpose is to assist in turning the commitments of OSCE participating states on countering antisemitism into action by providing government officials, parliamentarians and civil society with the knowledge and skills they need to do so effectively.¹⁶ In the first phase of the project, a manual was published. The manual entitled: UNDERSTANDING ANTI-SEMITIC HATE CRIMES AND ADDRESSING SECURITY NEEDS OF JEWISH COMMUNITIES - A PRACTICAL GUIDE was translated to many languages and on June 2018, it was published in Greek.¹⁷ The second phase involved working together locally to develop Practical Guides tailored to the specific needs of each country. To this end, OSCE / ODIHR representatives have visited the different countries including Greece. In their meeting held in Athens on 2 July, 2018 topics of

¹⁴ *Supra* note 11.

¹⁵ Michal Navoth, *Antisemitism, Holocaust Denial and Racism in Greece Today*, MORESHET JOURNAL FOR THE STUDY OF THE HOLOCAUST AND ANTISEMITISM, 7 Winter 74-78 (2009); Michal Navoth, *Antisemitism in Greece: The Trial of Konstantinos Plevris*, Stephen Roth Institute for the Study of Contemporary antisemitism and Racism Tel Aviv University, Topical Brief No. 8, nn. 44-46 and accompanying text (2011).

¹⁶ <https://www.osce.org/project/words-into-action-to-address-anti-semitism>

¹⁷ For the English and Greek editions *see*

https://kis.gr/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2010:2018-06-21-06-05-35&catid=100:2009-06-04-07-06-09&Itemid=80

activation of the legal process and the operation of the law enforcement were discussed.¹⁸

Despite the above mentioned crackdown on the Golden Dawn and the trial, which commenced on 20 April 2015, where 69 individuals, among them Golden Dawn's leader and all its MPs from the 2012 elections, had been charged with participation in a criminal organization, in all polls of 2018, Golden Dawn steadily keeps its third position, which translated to 7%-8% of the vote.¹⁹ Yet, a change came in the summer of 2019. In the snap election of 17 June, 2019 the Golden Dawn failed to cross the 3 percent threshold required to enter the Greek parliament and lost its seven-year-long parliamentary representation. According to political analysts, that outcome reflected a slow improvement in the country after years of economic crisis.²⁰ In addition, Golden Dawn has been plagued by an inner party strife.²¹ This is also evident from the proceedings of the trial itself. On 6 November, 2019 Golden Dawn leader Nikos Michaloliakos testified in court. He was the last of 69 defendants of the long running

¹⁸ Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece (KIS), *OSCE/ODIHR Meeting in Athens to Meet the Security Needs of the Greek Jewish Communities*, https://kis.gr/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2024:-osce-odihr-&catid=12:2009&Itemid=41

¹⁹ *Supra* note 1.

²⁰ Renee Maltezou, *Golden Dawn loses its luster as Greeks reject militant far-right*, 8 July, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-greece-election-golden-dawn-idUSKCN1U31ND>. As one of the commentator added: "The element of rage (among Greek voters) is no longer here". *Id.* By tapping into public anger over the growing population of immigrants and austerity measures in the debt stricken country, Golden Dawn managed to portray itself as true patriots and the only defenders of Greek interests. That populist approach was what secured half a million votes in the precedent election of September 2015. *See* Navoth, *supra* note 10, 5. Those who were angry by that time and in 2012, when Golden Dawn first entered to the Greek parliament, felt uncertain rather than angry in 2019 and saw no reason to vote for the party. *See* Maltezou *supra*.

²¹ Ioanna Mandrou, *Alleged killer in Fyssas murder trial testifies in court*, 18 July, 2019, <http://www.ekathimerini.com/242731/article/ekathimerini/news/alleged-killer-in-fyssas-murder-trial-testifies-in-court>

trial, where contradicting claims by a defense witness were made.²² The judgement that is expected to be rendered in 2020 will determine whether Golden Dawn is a legitimate political party or a Nazi-type criminal organization operating under the guise of a political party.²³

To be sure, the Golden Dawn was defeated, but not the far right. On July 2019 election a new party squeezed into the Greek parliament, the Greek Solution. Though it is not a Neo Nazi party, it is in the far right of the political spectrum.²⁴

3.2 Educational initiatives and the adoption of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of antisemitism

During the recent years, the Greek Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs collaborate with KIS to enhance educational programs, believing that the best way to confront antisemitism is to start eradicating it in the classroom. This is not an easy task, given the continued dissemination of educational material conveying antisemitic message, objections by educators and non-Jewish parents in Greece to Jewish contents or the usage of the Internet in an abusive language and unleashed manner.²⁵ Thus, for example, the Blog “Education in Greece” in an entry entitled “Thessaloniki under Jewish occupation and the dirty role of the Jews and the state church” published an article relating to the Holocaust Museum in Thessaloniki, which

²² *Golden Dawn leader says he shouldn't be on trial for Pavlos Fyssas' murder by party supporter*, 7 November, 2019, <https://neoskopos.com/en/150576/neo-nazi-leader-says-leader-shouldnt-be-on-trial-for-murder-pavlos-fyssas-by-golden-dawn-supporter/>; Yiannis Papadopoulos, *Contradictions in Golden Dawn trial testimonies*, 10 October, 2020, <http://www.ekathimerini.com/245351/article/ekathimerini/news/contradictions-in-golden-dawn-trial-testimonies> In the previous phase of the trial where the testimony of the witnesses for the prosecution was heard, the evidence provided insight into the party operation and its aim. Golden Dawn was operated according to a strict hierarchical structure and was inspired by Nazi ideology. See Michal Navoth, *Greece*, in Kantor Center for the Study of Contemporary European Jewry, *Antisemitism Worldwide 2017 General Analysis Draft*, nn. 40-41 and accompanying text, http://www.kantorcenter.tau.ac.il/sites/default/files/Doch_full_2018_220418.pdf

²³ *Golden Dawn leader says*, *supra* note 22.

²⁴ *Legislative in Greece: the neo-Nazi party Golden Dawn retreats, not the far right*, 8 July, 2019, <https://www.tellerreport.com/news/2019-07-08---legislative-in-greece--the-neo-nazi-party-golden-dawn-retreats--not-the-far-right-.Hk7gORoeZB.html>

²⁵ *Golden Dawn MP accused of distributing racist material to pupils*, 31 March, 2017, <http://www.ekathimerini.com/217331/article/ekathimerini/news/golden-dawn-mp-accused-of-distributing-racist-material-to-pupils>; Navoth, *supra* note 22, n. 46 and accompanying text.

was under construction. According to the article “the Museum of the pseudo-Holocaust” aimed at “indoctrinating all children to serve the Jews.” The article was reproduced and posted by other antisemitic blogs.²⁶

In 2015, the field visit to Auschwitz was systemized based on nation-wide student contest. The competition required the creation of a video on the history and aspects of the Holocaust. The winners won their participation to the Auschwitz visit. Since then the video competition and the study visit to Auschwitz have been held on an annual basis. Due to the rise of public interest and the motivation of the schools, the program has expanded to more schools from more Greek cities. Best videos are awarded by the Minister of Education during an official ceremony and uploaded on the Greek Education Ministry’s You Tube channel.²⁷

On March 2018, the Holocaust education program was formalized by a new Ministerial Decree transforming a productive cooperation between the Greek Ministry of Education Research and Religious Affairs and Jewish organizations into a pillar program of Greek state policy determined to fight racism and antisemitism.²⁸

On 11 February, 2019 the Minister of Education, Research and Religious Affairs, Kostas Gavroglou, announced that in the context of implementing actions on combating antisemitism, the General Secretariat for Religious Affairs has adopted the International IHRA definition of antisemitism, as it was set out at the Plenary meeting of IHRA on 26 May 2016.²⁹

²⁶ *Supra* note 1.

²⁷ Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece (KIS), *Holocaust Education in Greece – A productive cooperation between Education Ministry and Jewish Organizations formalized by a Ministerial Decree*, 5 June, 2018, https://kis.gr/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=777:holocaust-education-in-greece-a-productive-cooperation-between-education-ministry-and-jewish-organizations-formalized-by-a-ministerial-decree&catid=12:2009&Itemid=4

²⁸ Ministerial Decree 42856/Θ2 of the Ministry of Education Research and Religious Affairs (published in the Official Gazette of Greece, issue no 950 B / March 16, 2018), entitled “Student Contest – Educational Program on teaching about the Holocaust”. *See id.*

²⁹ Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece (KIS), *KIS Announcement for the Adoption of the Working Definition of Antisemitism by the Ministry of Education*, 12 February, 2019, https://kis.gr/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=818:kis-announcement-for-the-adoption-of-the-working-definition-of-antisemitism-by-the-ministry-of-education-&catid=9:deltiatypoy&Itemid=32

It did not take long for the next stage to follow. On 8 November, 2019, the eve of the Kristallnacht anniversary, Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis met with the President of KIS, David Saltiel and members of the Board, as well as with the Head of the Greek Delegation to IHRA, Dr. Efstathios C. Lianos Liantis, in order to announce the adoption by Greece of the IHRA working definition.³⁰

The importance of that move was all the more clear from the announcement of KIS made on 9 November, the date of the Kristallnacht: "[t]oday, on the 81st anniversary of the 'Kristallnacht', Greece sent a powerful message: that our country stands against anti-Semitism, fanaticism and xenophobia." [in the original – M.N.].³¹

Additionally, Greece has started the preparations of its 2021 Chairmanship of the IHRA, a position that will bring Greece to the forefront of those states that fight antisemitism and have a decisive say in the preparation and implementation of legislative and educational initiatives to combat it.³²

³⁰ *Greece Adopts the Definitions of IHRA for Anti-Semitism and Holocaust Denial – Announcement by the Prime Minister*, 11 November, 2019, https://kis.gr/en/?option=com_content&view=frontpage&Itemid=19&fontstyle=f-larger [in the original – M.N.].

³¹ Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece (KIS), *KIS Statement for Kristallnacht and Greek PM's Announcement for the Adoption of IHRA's Definition of Antisemitism*, 9 November, 2019, https://kis.gr/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=855:kis-statement-for-kristallnacht-and-greek-pms-announcement-for-the-adoption-of-ihras-definition-of-antisemitism&catid=54:2009-05-27-11-10-17&Itemid=30

³² *Supra* note 30.