

GREECE

Violations of the right to freedom of expression

Amnesty International is becoming increasingly concerned about a growing number of prosecutions and convictions of people in Greece for peacefully exercising their right to freedom of expression.

In two forthcoming trials people face possible prison sentences of up to several years because they peacefully expressed views in opposition to those held by the Greek Government. If these defendants are imprisoned Amnesty International will consider them to be prisoners of conscience. Over the past twelve months in two other trials people have been convicted by Greek courts on the basis of statements they have made publicly. If these convictions are upheld on appeal these people face terms of imprisonment. Amnesty International is gravely concerned at these restrictions on the right to freedom of expression which the Greek Government guaranteed to uphold when it ratified the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (European Convention) in 1974.

On 10 December Christos Sideropoulos and Anastasios (or Tasos) Boulis will stand trial for comments they made in an interview with a Greek magazine *Ena* in March 1992, about their ethnic identity as Macedonians and the Greek Government's foreign policy. The two men are charged with spreading false information about the non-Greekness of Macedonia and the existence of a Macedonian minority on Greek territory which is not officially recognized and with instigating conflict among Greek citizens by differentiating between the speakers of a Slavic language and Greeks. If convicted, they face possible terms of imprisonment of up to several years and heavy fines. Their trial which was postponed from 30 October will take place at the Sixth Criminal Court in Athens.

Panos Garganas, Costas Pittas, Angelos Kalodoukas, Tasia Kyrkou and Litsa Yidakou, members of the Organization for

Christos Sideropoulos: "We've reached a crisis point. Unless we are recognized as a Macedonian ethnic minority, you'll be seeing us in the next elections: the consequences will be brought to parliament. We assure you that we are fielding a Macedonian deputy in the next election either as an independent candidate or as part of a movement, or even in cooperation with another party...How long are we going to live in fear of danger from the north and east? We've reached a point when we see the Turks as our enemies, the Bulgarians as our enemies, the Macedonians as enemies, the Albanians as enemies...There are a million Macedonian-speakers [in Greece]. We are entitled to rights, to associations, schools, churches, traditions...I have a Macedonian ethnic consciousness but I am a citizen of Greece with all the rights and the obligations of a Greek citizen. With one difference: I belong to an ethnic minority which isn't recognized by my state..." **Tasos Boulis:** "We are citizens of a state extending from Florina to Crete and from Evros to the island of Corfu. We will protect this state if it gives us recognition as a Macedonian ethnic minority."

1 Excerpts from the interview Christos Sideropoulos and Tasos Boulis gave to *Ena* magazine. The two men face possible prison sentences for their remarks.

Socialist Revolution (OSE), face possible terms of imprisonment of up to several years and heavy fines. They are to be tried on 26 January

1993 for their involvement in compiling and distributing a pamphlet entitled *The Macedonian Question: the Crisis in the Balkans and the Working Class*. The pamphlet contains essays by members of OSE and its sympathizers as well as Leon Trotsky and Pantelis Pouliopoulos (leader of the Greek Communist Party in the 1920s) and expresses views on Greece's foreign policy, the Macedonian question and ethnic minorities which are in opposition to those held by the Greek Government. The four are charged with exposing the friendly relations of Greece with foreign countries to the risk of disturbance; spreading false information and rumours that might cause anxiety and fear to citizens and disturb international relations of Greece and finally, inciting citizens to rivalry and division, leading to disturbance of the peace.

On 4 April, members of the Anti-War Anti-Nationalistic movement, Stratis Bournazos, Christina Tsamoura, Vangelio Sotiropoulou and Maria Kalogeropoulou, were arrested in central Athens while distributing a leaflet entitled "Our Neighbours are not our Enemies. No to Nationalism and War". They were taken to the General Police Headquarters where they were held for a day and a night until their release pending trial. On 4 May 1992 they were all convicted by an Athens court of disseminating false information, attempting to incite citizens to acts of violence or to dissension and disturbing friendly relations with another country. They were sentenced to 19 months' imprisonment. The leaflet called for peace in the Balkans and opposed the Greek Government's foreign policy and domestic policy regarding Greece's ethnic minorities. They are free pending appeal.

"We, the undersigned, have a view radically opposed to that of the government and official political world on national issues, the question of former Yugoslav Macedonia and the dangers threatening our country...We are of the firm belief that a dirty game is being played behind our backs, which even if it does not end in a war, will have painful consequences on all of our lives. Government, the political executive, well-paid journalists, generals and bishops are trying to persuade us we're in danger. They present a picture of a Greece suffocated from all sides which is creating insecurity and fear in Greek citizens...Our leaders are cultivating nationalist hysteria...and ancestor-worship in order to make us forget economic misery, unemployment, reduced incomes, a lower quality of life...Our rulers are trying to persuade us that our needs are identical [to those of the great imperialist powers]...They want us to be indignant when somebody makes nationalistic statements in Skopje, but to applaud when the same or even worse statements are heard in Athens or Salonica...the Greek people is in danger! Not from the unarmed little state to the north of our country nor from hungry Albanian refugees! We are in danger from the continuing war in former Yugoslavia in which our country may become involved if the government and (mainly) the principal opposition party do not abandon their megalomaniac plans...and don't stop playing the game of outstripping each other in vote-winning patriotism...We declare clearly: No to the climate of war with Yugoslav Macedonia. This aggressive and racist attitude, based on the pretext of the name "Macedonia", which they have anyway used for the past half century, must stop. This people also has the right to national determination and to existence as a state in order so that it can survive. We should be ashamed to be accepting the continued economic blockade of our neighbouring country and all the various...proposals for invasion without protest...We want to live in peace with all people of the Balkans!...There is no shame in a society made up of different civilizations and national groups living together in harmony. On the contrary, it is an honour. It is shameful when minorities are crushed and oppressed in the name of unity and purity of the nation. There are Turks, Pomaks, Slavomacedonians and Gypsies living in Greece! We feel for these minorities living in our country exactly as we feel for other Greek citizens. We don't want them to disappear...On the contrary, we defend their right to take those freedoms and opportunities that we all enjoy. We support their special linguistic, religious and civil rights arising from their different origins..."

2 Excerpts from a leaflet entitled *Our Neighbours are not our Enemies. No to Nationalism and War*. Four people who were caught by police distributing the leaflet were sentenced to 19 months' imprisonment in May.

As far as Amnesty International is aware, no date has yet been set for their appeal hearing.

In another case, editor Irene Petropoulou was sentenced in November 1991 to five months' imprisonment and a 50,000 drachmes fine for a comment she printed in the gay and lesbian magazine *Amphi*. She is free pending appeal. The comment was in the classified section and asked why so many homosexual and heterosexual men were interested in corresponding with lesbian women. The court ruled that the comment "offends public feelings of decency and sexual morals and cannot be considered to be a work of art and science". Irene Petropoulou has appealed against her conviction. If her appeal is rejected and she is unable or unwilling to convert her prison sentence into a fine (of 1,000 drachmes per day for each day of her prison sentence), she will face a term of imprisonment.

These prosecutions are a violation of Article 10(1) of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, ratified by Greece in 1974, which states:

"Everyone has the right to freedom of expression. This right shall include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers."

This treaty is binding on Greece. It is also clear that the prosecutions of these people does not amount to a legitimate restriction within the terms of Article 10(2) of the European Convention.

Amnesty International is calling on the Greek authorities to take immediate steps to quash convictions against Irene Petropoulou and members of the Anti-War Anti-Nationalistic Movement and to drop all charges against Christos Sideropoulos, Anastasios Boulis and the members of OSE. It urges that steps be taken to ensure that no further restrictions on the exercise of the right to freedom of expression be imposed.

"Note: I don't usually study the small ads, but something that caught my eye is the desire of men to get to know lesbians through small ads (they also phone desperately seeking lesbians...even to serve them free of charge). One gay man seems to be looking for a friend...by contrast there's a heterosexual man asking to break sexual conventions. I have started to ask myself: "Are lesbians strange and hard to find "exotic fruits" that have to be sampled: or are we unique lovers - totally fantastic and liberated in love - and for whom there is no place for "convention" in bed? Thanks for the compliment as far as the first interpretation is concerned?! But [I'm not sure about] this desire for us (!) to teach heterosexuals how to make great love (...I believe that this is what is "unconventional"...). Certainly this magazine wants to abolish fascism of the senses and wants as far as possible to advance sexual "variety" of any kind, or other preferences. For that reason, we publish all the small ads which we receive. For the sake of avoiding any misunderstanding with our two friends who sent in their ads, let me make it clear that this note was written not to criticize but to provide an occasion to open a dialogue. You, lesbian women, what do you say to all of this? What do you think a homosexual or heterosexual man's attitude is towards you? What is your attitude towards them? As a lesbian it would help me tremendously if you wrote to me so that we can put together a lovely article with all our letters so they themselves can learn what we think of them. They must learn sometime. So what do you think??? Send letters to the magazine. I am waiting for them and I kiss you and how I am laughing. Cassandra."

3 The editor of *Amphi* was sentenced to five months' imprisonment in November 1991 for publishing this note.