

Media Advisory

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Greece: Freedom of expression must be upheld

Amnesty International has written to Greece's Minister of Justice, Professor Mihalis Stathopoulos, calling for a review of a recent court case in which a man was convicted of "disseminating false information" in a leaflet on minority languages.

The organization urged that the charges against him be dropped, and that Article 191 of the criminal code, which deals with the "dissemination of false information", be annulled or amended to ensure that it is never used to punish someone for the non-violent exercise of their right to freedom of expression.

Sotiris Bletsas, a member of the Society for Aroumanian (Vlach) Culture, was sentenced to 15 months' imprisonment, suspended for three years, and a fine for distributing a leaflet on minority languages at a Vlach festival in northern Greece over five years ago. The court said the leaflet could cause "fear and anxiety among citizens".

The leaflet, in the English language, was published by the European Bureau for Lesser-Used Languages and had been financed by the European Commission. It listed some 40 minority languages spoken in Europe and referred to Aroumanian as one of the minority languages spoken in certain regions of Greece.

The conviction is clearly in breach of Greece's obligations under the European Convention of Human Rights to uphold freedom of expression and could be seen to be encouraging intolerance.

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