



**NGO: EUROPEAN CENTRE FOR LAW AND JUSTICE (ECLJ)**

**UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW  
53<sup>RD</sup> SESSION**

**STATUS OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE HELLENIC REPUBLIC  
FOR THE 53<sup>RD</sup> SESSION OF THE  
UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW**

*www.ECLJ.org*  
*4, quai Koch*  
*67000 Strasbourg, France*  
*Phone: +33 (0)3.88.24.94.40*

## Status of Human Rights in Greece for the 53<sup>rd</sup> Session of the Universal Periodic Review

### Introduction

1. The European Centre for Law and Justice (ECLJ) is a non-governmental organization dedicated to promoting and protecting human rights around the world. The ECLJ also holds Special Consultative status before the United Nations Economic and Social Council. This report discusses the status of human rights in the Hellenic Republic (Greece) for the 53<sup>rd</sup> session of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR).

### Background

2. Greece is a country located on the Balkan Peninsula and has a population of approximately 9.3 million people.<sup>1</sup> The population is predominantly Orthodox Christian, with approximately 90% of the population identifying as Orthodox Christian, 5% as Sunni Muslim, 3% as other, and 2% as Roman Catholic.<sup>2</sup>

3. Greece's last review was held on November 1, 2021.<sup>3</sup> As a result of the review, Greece received 239 recommendations, 216 of which it accepted.<sup>4</sup> It was recommended by Poland, and supported by Greece, that the government “[c]ontinue efforts to guarantee the right to freedom of religion or belief of every member of the society.”<sup>5</sup> In our last report on Greece, we expressed concern over the country's ban on proselytization in its Constitution.

### Legal Framework

4. Article 13 of the Constitution of Greece claims to support religious freedom but also restricts the practice of religion.

1. Freedom of religious conscience is inviolable. The enjoyment of civil rights and liberties does not depend on the individual's religious beliefs.<sup>6</sup>

2. All known religions shall be free and their rites of worship shall be performed unhindered and under the protection of the law. The practice of rites of worship is not allowed to offend public order or the good usages. Proselytism is prohibited.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Loring Danforth et al, *Greece*, BRITANNICA, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Greece> (Last updated Apr. 2, 2026).

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*

<sup>3</sup> *Universal Periodic Review – Greece*, OHCHR, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/upr/gr-index>.

<sup>4</sup> *Infographic-Greece*, OHCHR, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2022-06/Infographic-3rd-cycle-greece.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> OHCHR, UPR of Greece (3<sup>rd</sup> Cycle – 39<sup>th</sup> Session) *Thematic List of Recommendations*, [https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2022-05/UPR39\\_Greece\\_Thematic\\_List\\_of\\_Recommendations.doc](https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2022-05/UPR39_Greece_Thematic_List_of_Recommendations.doc).

<sup>6</sup> CONSTITUTION OF GREECE art. 13, [https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Greece\\_2008](https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Greece_2008).

<sup>7</sup> *Id.*

5. Further, Article 4 of Emergency Law 1363/1938, states that “[a]nyone engaging in proselytism shall be liable to imprisonment and a fine.”<sup>8</sup>:

2. By the term ‘proselytism’ is meant, in particular, any direct or indirect attempt to intrude on the religious beliefs of a person of a different religious persuasion (heterodoxos), with the aim of undermining those beliefs, either by any kind of inducement or promise of an inducement or moral support or material assistance, or by fraudulent means or by taking advantage of the other person’s inexperience, trust, need, low intellect or naivety.<sup>9</sup>

3. Committing this act at school or educational or charitable institutions is considered a particularly aggravated case.<sup>10</sup>

6. Greece is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).<sup>11</sup> Under Article 18 of the ICCPR:

1. Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching.<sup>12</sup>

2. No one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice.<sup>13</sup>

3. Freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs may be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary to protect public safety, order, health, or morals or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others.<sup>14</sup>

7. Additionally, under Article 19, Sec. 2 of the ICCPR:

Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice.<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> Emergency Law 1363/1938 art. 2, available at [https://www.minedu.gov.gr/publications/docs2021/Acts\\_against\\_religious\\_sites\\_in\\_Greece\\_-\\_Report\\_2019.pdf](https://www.minedu.gov.gr/publications/docs2021/Acts_against_religious_sites_in_Greece_-_Report_2019.pdf).

<sup>9</sup> *Id.*

<sup>10</sup> *Id.*

<sup>11</sup> *Ratification Status for Greece*, OHCHR, [https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/treaty.aspx](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/treaty.aspx).

<sup>12</sup> International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights art. 18, Dec. 16, 1966, 999 U.N.T.S. 171, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-rights> [hereinafter ICCPR].

<sup>13</sup> *Id.*

<sup>14</sup> *Id.*

<sup>15</sup> *Id.* art. 19

8. Greece also has a responsibility to uphold the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which protects religious freedom with language identical to that found in Article 18 of the ICCPR.<sup>16</sup>

### **Ban on Proselytizing**

9. In our last report on Greece, we expressed concern over the Constitutional ban on proselytizing. While Greece's Constitution states that "[f]reedom of religious conscience is inviolable" and that "[a]ll known religions shall be free and their rites of worship shall be performed unhindered and under the protection of the law," these right are undermined by its prohibition of proselytizing.<sup>17</sup> Further, during its last review, Greece supported a recommendation to "[c]ontinue efforts to guarantee the right to freedom of religion or belief of every member of the society."<sup>18</sup> However, Greece continues its ban on proselytizing, which infringes on the rights of individuals to freely express their faith.

10. Guaranteeing the right to freedom of religion includes guaranteeing the right of individuals to peacefully share their faith with others. Proselytizing is not unique to any one religion, and many religions call upon their adherents to go out and peacefully share their faith with others so that they might also believe. For example:

"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.' Amen."<sup>19</sup>

11. Greece's ban on proselytization is in contravention of numerous international instruments. The UDHR enshrined the right to religion, stating that "[e]veryone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion." and that this includes the right to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance." This right is also enshrined in the ICCPR with similar language. As demonstrated by the two examples above, proselytizing is an important component of multiple religions and is protected by UDHR and the ICCPR.<sup>20</sup>

12. While the ICCPR allows some legal limitations on religious expression, a total ban on proselytizing cannot be justified as necessary to "protect public safety, order, health, or morals or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others." Instead, such a ban criminalizes the peaceful sharing of faith among community members, which is an essential component of freedom of religion.

---

<sup>16</sup> *Id.* at art. 18

<sup>17</sup> CONSTITUTION, *supra* note 7 at art. 2

<sup>18</sup> *Thematic List of Recommendations*, *supra* note 5

<sup>19</sup> Matthew 28:19-20

<sup>20</sup> ICCPR, *supra* note 14 at art. 18.

13. In fact, we noted a specific case in our last report, where Mr. Damavolitis was sentenced to four months in prison and fined for having a conversation with his neighbor about his faith.<sup>21</sup> After his conviction was upheld in 2011, and in cassation in 2014, he filed an application with the European Court of Human Rights.<sup>22</sup> He alleged that Greece had violated his rights under Article 9 of the European Convention of Human Rights.<sup>23</sup> Unfortunately, his case was dismissed in 2022 on procedural grounds.<sup>24</sup>

14. The ban on proselytizing not only impacts the individual seeking to spread his or her faith, but it also violates the rights of the listener. It must be noted that the listener also has a right to freely adopt a religion of his or her choice. Further, both, the speaker and the listener, have a right to “seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice.”<sup>25</sup> Through banning proselytization, individuals are prevented from learning about other religions and are therefore unable to question, accept, or reject other religions.

### **Recommendation**

15. We urge Greece to reform its laws to fully guarantee religious freedom for all its citizens. The government must remove its ban on proselytizing and allow its citizens to freely and peacefully share their faith with others. This change would fulfill Greece’s international obligation to protect freedom of religion.

---

<sup>21</sup> Nicolas Bauer, *The Offence of Proselytising in Greece*, ECLJ (Feb. 26, 2021), <https://eclj.org/religious-freedom/echr/the-offence-of-proselytising-in-greece-before-the-echr?lng=en>.

<sup>22</sup> *Id.*

<sup>23</sup> *Id.*

<sup>24</sup> Application no. 44913/14, EUROPEAN COURT OF HUMAN RIGHTS (Oct. 6, 2022), <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng#%7B%22itemid%22:%5B%22001-220635%22%5D%7D>.

<sup>25</sup> ICCPR art. 19, *supra* note 14.