

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Public Statement

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Greece presides over the violations of conscientious objectors' rights

On the eve of the informal meeting of the EU Ministers of Defence in Athens, on 14-15 March, Amnesty International wrote to Mr Kostas Simitis, Prime Minister of Greece and current EU President, to bring to his attention the serious concerns that the human rights organization has repeatedly expressed with regard to the punitive and discriminatory provisions set out in Law 2510/1997 relating to the right to conscientious objection to military service and alternative civilian service.

Amnesty International welcomes recent reports that the length of alternative civilian service will be reduced in future (following a parallel reduction in the length of military service from 14 to 12 months which was implemented on 1 January 2003). Amnesty International is concerned, however, that although the provisions relating to the length of alternative civilian service may be amended, this form of service remains punitive in length, lasting twice as long as military service.

Amnesty International also raised the cases of the following conscientious objectors who risk imprisonment as a result of having lost their right to conscientious objection because of the punitive, discriminatory and inadequacy of genuine dispositions of, alternative civilian service: Lazaros Petromelidis, Giannis Chrysovergis, Ioannis Glarnetatzis, Dimitrios Tsouchlis, Kyriakos Iosifidis, Panayiotis Makris, Dimitrios Sotiropoulos, Christos Gountinakos, Ioannis Ioannidis, Evangelos Michailidis, Georgios Skouros, Georgios Tsogas, Nikolaos Poulos, Nikolaos Theodorakopoulos, Paris Tsiranidis, Anastasios Batas, Nikolaos Tsakonas, Dimitris Pakkidis, Antonis Apergis, Dimitris Pitsikalis, Christos Tsaknakis, Christos Kiourktsidis, Filippos Goutzis, Ioannis Pantoulis, Alexandros Evtousenko and Petros Sotiropoulos. Amnesty International highlighted especially the case of Alexandros Evtousenko who is currently held in pre-trial detention charged with disobedience, and the case of Lazaros Petromelidis who is expected to be tried soon on two charges of insubordination. Amnesty International considers Alexandros Evtousenko to be a prisoner of conscience and is calling on the Greek authorities to immediately and unconditionally release him. If any of the other men named above were to be imprisoned as well, Amnesty International would consider them to be prisoners of conscience, and would call for their immediate and unconditional release.

Amnesty International has expressed in detail its concerns with regard to the alternative civilian service in Greece in the report "*Greece: no satisfaction: the failures of alternative civilian service*" published in July 1999 (AI Index EUR 25/03/99). Similar concerns have also been raised by the Greek Ombudsman and the Greek National Commission for Human Rights, with appropriate recommendations.

Although Amnesty International does not question the right of governments to conscript individuals into the armed forces, the organization campaigns for the right of those liable to conscription to

be given the opportunity to perform an alternative to armed service in conditions which are in line with international standards and recommendations. Amnesty International considers that the present provisions for alternative civilian service do not conform with these standards and recommendations. The organization accordingly urges that the current review of provisions relating to conscription should include amendments to Law 2510/1997 which would ensure that alternative civilian service is not of discriminatory and punitive length, that it falls under entirely civilian authority (including in the examinations of applications for conscientious objectors), that conscientious objectors have the right to claim conscientious objector status at any time, both up to and after entering the armed forces, and that the right to perform alternative civilian service can never be derogated from, including in time of war. Amnesty International also urges an amendment to current provisions which stipulate that conscientious objectors who carry out trade unionist activities or participate in a strike during their alternative service have their right to alternative civilian service or unarmed military service revoked.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Alexandros Evtousenko was born in Chechnya. He is unable to apply for alternative civilian service because Law 2510/1997 deprives those who have once entered the armed forces of the right to claim conscientious objector's status. Alexandros Evtousenko has served a 24-month military service in the Russian army (he was not a Jehovah's Witness at that time, but converted later). After he obtained Greek nationality, he was called up to perform a three-month military service in Greece. On 28 March 2002 he was suspended from military duties for one year on grounds of ill-health. He was called up again on 24 February 2003 to report for military service in Haidari. He was charged with disobedience and is currently held in pre-trial detention. The date of his trial has been scheduled for 14 March 2003. Amnesty International considers Alexandros Evtousenko to be a prisoner of conscience and is calling on the Greek authorities to immediately and unconditionally release him.

Lazaros Petromelidis was called up for enrolment in the army in March 1992. He wrote to the Piraeus enrolment military office declaring his conscientious objection to military service and refused to report for military duties. On 20 July 1992 he was charged with insubordination and was banned from leaving the country. He was recognized as a conscientious objector in November 1998 and was summoned to do 30 months' civilian service at a Health Centre in Kilkis, some 550 kilometres from his home. Under the provisions of that time, military service for a man of his age and family circumstances (married and father of a child) would in effect last four months (given the right to buy exemption from eight months of a 12-month service) and be carried out close to home. He refused to do this service on the grounds that it was of punitive duration and lost his right to conscientious objection on 10 February 1999. On 15 April 1999 the Naval Court of Piraeus convicted him on charges of insubordination in time of general mobilization for the insubordination of 1992, and sentenced him to four years' imprisonment. On 17 September 2002, while his appeal hearing on the charge of the insubordination of 1992 was being postponed, he was arrested on charges of insubordination because he had failed to report for alternative service in Kilkis.

Lazaros Petromelidis immediately appealed against his second charge. The prosecutor of the Piraeus Naval Court ordered Lazaros Petromelidis to pre-trial detention in Korydallos pending the appeal hearing on the second charge. He was released three days later on bail and with restrictive measures imposed on him (he is obliged to appear before the local police station twice a month, otherwise he will be imprisoned), after the case was referred to the Salonika Naval Court. Amnesty International urge that legal proceedings against him be suspended pending the review of the provisions relating to alternative

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