

WARSAW, 12 October 2006

OSCE HDIM-WORKING SESSION 16:

**Special Day on Tolerance, non-discrimination and mutual respect:
Prevention of nationalism and aggressive chauvinism**

STATEMENT BY THE NGO HUMANITARIAN DEFENSE, GREECE

Following on with today's discussion on non-discrimination, I would like to bring to the fore some points addressing the issues and challenges when considering migration, tolerance and anti-discrimination in the case of Greece based on our NGO work.

Migration following the 1990s called into question previous understandings of social, economic and political identity. Greece experienced a shift from being a country of emigration to one of immigration. Immigrant population today, reaches well over one million people. This represents about 9% of the total resident population, a strikingly high percentage for a country that until only twenty years ago was a migration sender rather than host. According to the 2001 census, 7% of the legal(ised) population of Greece are 'foreigners'/immigrants¹, while it is estimated that 2-3% appears not to have registered, amounting in total to almost 10% of the (adjusted) population. More precisely, Greece was host to 762,200 foreigners, including 413,000 foreign workers, coming from all different faiths and cultural backgrounds. However, there were also over 300,000 illegal immigrants that were detected, significantly higher than in previous years. Half of the registered immigrants come from Albania, followed by Bulgaria, Romania, Georgia, Pakistan, Ukraine, Poland, Russia.

From the civil society point of view, Greece's approach to immigration and inclusion was primarily centered on economic concerns – with the need for labour shaping the distribution of residence permits. Migrants have contributed to the Greek economy's boost over the past decade. A sensitive tension that needs to be addressed is between a rather negative public opinion towards immigration with the need for an inflow of new citizens to counterbalance Greece's aging population.

Since the 1990s immigration policy in Greece was developed in terms of putting into practice stricter border controls and other enforcement measures. Initially there has been a significant time lag in designing and implementing a more comprehensive policy framework aiming toward the integration of this population across all sectors and areas of the host country. The prolonged undocumented status of many migrants and the policy vacuum that lasted for over a decade has not facilitated active civic participation on the part of immigrants in Greek public life.

To address this situation the Parliament adopted in August 2005 a new immigration bill on the 'Entry, stay and integration of third country nationals in Greece'. The objective of this new legislation was to rationalise the co-ordination of Greece's immigration policy, simplify procedures and cut red-tape. The innovative features include unifying residence and work permits into one document, clarifying family re-unification conditions, addressing the status of victims of human trafficking and strengthening regional migration commissions. This Bill also makes special binding provisions for the social integration of migrants coming from third countries, as well as the avoidance of discrimination of any kind. It also provides for the preservation of the migrants' ethnic identity and introduces a comprehensive Action Programme.

¹ NSSG (National Statistical Service of Greece) *Statistical Yearbook 2001*, Athens.

According to the European Civic Citizenship and Inclusion Index², Greece's performance over five strands of EU policy indicators-- Labour Market Inclusion, Long-term Residence, Nationality, Anti-Discrimination, Family Reunion – is closest to the average in terms of family reunion, and furthest from the average in terms of antidiscrimination. Greece's scores are less favourable in the cases of labour market inclusion, long-term residence and family reunion, and moderately unfavourable on nationality and anti-discrimination.

In labour market inclusion, Greece is well above the European average in access and eligibility but below the European average on other strands, especially rights associated with labour market participation. Long-term residence is an area of low scores, with performance below the European average across all sections, and moderately unfavourable in terms of eligibility. It is marginally above the European average in terms of both security and rights (where it enjoys solid moderately favourable scores). Nationality is another area weakness, as Greece performs below the European average in all indicators. In terms of anti-discrimination, Greece performs well in equality agencies.

With regard to the media, it has been inclined to privilege the perpetuation of negative prejudices. Yet recently have there been initiatives or measures targeting xenophobic attitudes and perceptions of Greeks towards foreigners. There are more and more efforts, largely supported by initiatives from the EU, aiming to promote tolerance, cultural pluralism and to bring forward the positive aspects of migration. Greek accounts of national identity seem also to be significantly informed by migration.

Immigrant activism in mainstream associations like trade unions or political parties is weak, mainly due to the insecure legal status of many immigrant workers, their mistrust towards the Greek state, their lack of time and resources to devote to activities other than paid work. Yet there are positive signs as Greek authorities and citizens have made steps towards migrants' incorporation in Greek society, such as the inclusion of immigrant families in state housing for the first time in October 2004.

² European Civic Citizenship and Inclusion Index, Research designed and co-ordinated by Professor Andrew Geddes and Jan Niessen, with Alex Balch, Claire Bullen and Marva Josi Peiro. Compiled by Laura Citron and Richard Gowan, First published in 2005 by British Council Brussels, Foreign Policy Centre and Migration Policy Group.