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COUNCIL OF EUROPE ASSEMBLY

Political Debate

Strasbourg, Thursday 28 January 1971

Report Summary : The Situation in Greece (Doc. 2892)

Rapporteur : Mr. Max VAN DER STOEL, Dutch, Labour

The report is designed to inform the Assembly of the chief events in Greece since January 1970. It stresses that even though Greece is no longer a member of the Organisation, the Council of Europe and particularly its Assembly cannot remain indifferent to developments in that country.

The Rapporteur considers that there has been scarcely any change in the internal situation in Greece over the last year. Martial law is still in force. No real progress has been made on the road to a return to democracy and the re-establishment of human rights and basic freedoms. Even the undemocratic constitution which the Greek colonels gave the country is still not entirely in force.

The legislative council set up to give opinions on the decree-laws of the Government can in no way be considered a true parliament in the sense understood in the western world. The members of the council are not elected by the people but appointed by the Prime Minister on the proposal of various bodies controlled by the Government. The legislative council is moreover nowhere provided for in the constitution which the regime had adopted in 1968. The constitution provides for a parliament elected by the people. But the Government does not appear to be willing to hold parliamentary elections in the foreseeable future.

The draft law on political parties which was published by the Government in November 1970 shows that the regime intends keeping strict control over any political parties which might one day be formed. The spokesmen of the Government speak moreover of a "new democracy" under the protection of the Greek armed forces.

The regime seems ever more anxious to define an "ideology" and to inculcate it upon the Greek people. Special efforts are made to indoctrinate young people. The regime is also striving to exert greater influence on the artistic life of the country.

Numerous political trials have been held in Greece of opponents of the regime. Heavy prison sentences have been handed out. During the trials several of the accused alleged that they had been ill-treated during interrogation. Frequently they have denied "confessions" which, they claim, had been extorted from them during the investigations.

On several occasions the Greek Government has freed a number of political prisoners. But at the same time new arrests were made. Many persons are detained without trial.

The Greek Government has refused to renew the agreement governing the activities of the International Committee of the Red Cross in Greece which expired on 3 November 1970.

In spite of the abolition of pre-publishing editorial censorship and the coming into force of a new press law, the situation of the press is extremely difficult. One cannot speak of freedom of the press. The report quotes a document published in February 1970 by the International Press Institute which declares that the independent newspapers in Greece are "threatened with slow death".

The absence of trade union freedoms in Greece has been stigmatized in the International Labour Organisation.

The Greek regime has not come out of its isolation. Its repressive nature, chiefly, has cut it off from the Greek people. The great majority of politicians, be they right wing, left wing or middle-of-the-road, remain opposed to the Government. On the other hand the leaders of the regime keep claiming that they have the backing of the Greek people. If they are really convinced that such is the case, why, the Rapporteur asks, are they not willing to hold democratic elections?

As regards Greek foreign policy, the Rapporteur stresses that the leaders of the regime insist more and more on national independence and affirm more and more frequently that Greece is resisting foreign pressure.

The Greek Government is extremely anxious to show that it maintains good relations with the United States of America. The Americans, it appears, have continued to press the Greek leaders to ensure a return to democracy in the country.

In September 1970, the United States Government decided to resume all its deliveries of armes to Greece. The statement published on this subject by the State Department declared that the United States had most certainly expected a swifter re-establishment of a democratic government in Greece but that "the trend towards the establishment of a constitutional regime had begun". The Rapporteur considers that this justification given by the American authorities appears entirely incomprehensible. He wonders how the greatest power of the free world could thus stand surety for the colonels' regime. The Rapporteur adds that it is impossible to discern the least 'trend towards the establishment of a constitutional regime' in Greece.

The decision of the American Government runs the risk of provoking feelings of bitterness in the Greek people. The United States' "flirt" with the colonels' regime will not increase the popularity of the United States and NATO in this country.

The strategic importance of Greece for NATO is obvious. It is heightened by the growing Soviet penetration in the Mediterranean. However, the Greek question weighs heavily on the working of the Alliance and on its image.

In conclusion, the Rapporteur stresses that the present situation in Greece does not give cause for optimism. Future perspectives seem gloomy. The men who govern Greece prove more and more by their actions that they have no intention of bringing Greece back to democracy.