

Announcement of the resignation of the President of the Greek National Commission for Human Rights, George Stavropoulos

The Greek National Commission for Human Rights (GNCHR) is the independent advisory body to the State, established by law, according to the relevant UN General Assembly Resolution 48/134 of 20 December 1993, as the National Human Rights Institution, with an exclusive mandate to protect, promote and defend the universal values of human rights. The GNCHR has been operating in Greece for the past 20 years, with full independence, without regard to political (partisan) considerations and has demonstrated an extremely important work. Its independence has annoyed in the past, nonetheless at the current moment it is under attack. The Government, wishing to alter the GNCHR composition, as well as to make it dysfunctional and completely inactive, proceeds unilaterally to an unbalanced and uncritical addition of 5 members from one community, the LGBTQ+ community, and 2 more members, in addition to the already existing member, from the Roma community, in violation of any principle of equality towards other human rights actors-members of the GNCHR with only one vote. The legislative process proceeded without public consultation, while the Government never informed the GNCHR of the process, despite the contrary unanimous decision of its Plenary, dated 27.11.2018 and its Declaration, dated 28.3.2019, by which the GNCHR requested the immediate withdrawal of the provisions violating the GNCHR's independence, deploring not only the procedure followed, but also the substance of the provision.

Human Rights are not in a relation of hierarchy. They are on the same level and protected equally when under attack. It goes without saying that the Roma Community should be represented at the GNCHR as should the LGBTQ+ Community. For the depiction of the problems, and advocacy of the rights, of both communities the GNCHR has made a decisive contribution by means of highlighting their problems; highlighting the need for the latter's immediate resolution through scientific studies and public statements, often supporting the relevant legislative initiatives. However, their excessively favorable treatment against all other human rights defenders affects the latter, and also undermines the authority of the GNCHR itself, by means of uncritically altering its composition and undermining its independence.

The recent governmental act was the result of an indifferent and often degrading position of the representatives of the Executive towards the GNCHR with only a few brilliant exceptions. Its budget is so low, that the GNCHR struggles to rise up to the challenges of its role. The small number of its underpaid scientific staff, which works with self-denial, has been recently informed by the competent Minister, that it could not be permanent and that it "*expresses specific perceptions and views*". Also the housing conditions of the GNCHR are unacceptable for the status of a National Human Rights Institution, while for each of its members (including the GNCHR President) is provided a monthly remuneration of 40 euros, of which the big majority has resigned on grounds of personal dignity. The GNCHR official documents to the government and the administration remain usually unanswered, while relevant requests are often not met. The

governmental authorities usually avoid any contact with the GNCHR! I regret to say that the Prime Minister, to whom the GNCHR is attached as its institutional advisory body, was neither available to be informed by the GNCHR Board on the human rights situation in Greece and the problems the GNCHR faces, nor even willing to personally receive the GNCHR Annual Report, as prescribed by the GNCHR founding law as well as by practice followed by every other recipient of the Report! On the contrary the President of the Parliament and the parliamentarians-members of the competent Committees of all political Parties have always shown particular sensitivity with regards to the information and the mobilisation towards the problems that the human rights face in Greece.

The arrogance of the Executive, the authoritarianism in taking and enforcing its decisions, and an offensive preaching, lately, are excessive. My resignation is now the only dignified reaction to the discredit of the GNCHR and myself personally as an elected President of the NHRI. Leaving my post, I would like to express my sincere thanks to the Vice-Presidents, but also to the other GNCHR members, who, in the vast majority, contributed or supported its difficult work, to the members of the Racist Violence Recording Network, which was established by the GNCHR together with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, and to the outstanding GNCHR staff for the work produced in recent years. I hope that better days will come for the National Commission as well as for human rights in Greece; as long as their defenders remain vigilant.

4.4.2019