

# THE HISTORY AND INTERVENTIONS OF THE HELLENIC LEAGUE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS (1918–2013)

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## READING UP ON THE HISTORY OF THE LEAGUE: GOALS AND BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

The Hellenic League for Human Rights is the oldest organisation that defends and intervenes decisively for human rights in Greece, having made its appearance long before the acronym NGO (Non-Governmental Organisation) entered the Greek vocabulary. The League is an association (*somateio*) set up under the provisions of the Greek Civil Code, and its history is intertwined with the contemporary history of Greece and the many significant changes that occurred in the public sphere during its existence.

In 2012, under the supervision of its current chairman Konstantinos Tsitsekis, professor at the University of Macedonia in Thessaloniki, the Hellenic League for Human Rights initiated a research project to examine its organisational history.<sup>1</sup> The main intent of this ongoing project is to seek out and unearth the elements composing the history of the League from its establishment towards the end of the second decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (1918) to the present.<sup>2</sup> This specific goal is achieved by studying relevant primary documents, in particular the private archives of committed former members of the League. These include the private archive of its founding chairman (chairmanship 1936) Alexandros Svolos, professor of constitutional law at Athens University<sup>3</sup> and leading member of the Greek Social Democratic Party (*Sosialistiko Komma – Enosis Laikis Dimokratias*, SK-ELD)<sup>4</sup>; the archive of Charalampos Protopappas, lawyer, leading proponent of the

1 Until now, there are no relevant books or articles dealing with the history of the Hellenic League for Human Rights. This essay is therefore the first systematic scientific study to thoroughly examine the presence of the League.

2 The research project is being carried out by historian Michalis Moraitidis and sociologist Alexandros Sakellariou.

3 In 1929, Alexandros Svolos succeeded Nikolaos Saripolos as the chair of constitutional law at Athens University.

4 From 1945 to 1953, Svolos was the chairman of SK-ELD. For the political discourse of SK-ELD, see Akritas Kaidatzis, *O Alexandros Svolos os Politikos Archigos (1945–1956). Apanthisma Politikon Paremvaseon (apo to SK-ELD sto DKEL) [Alexandros Svolos as a Leader of Political Parties (1945–1956). Compilation of Political Interventions (from SK-ELD to DKEL)]*, in: Giorgos Kasimatis / Giorgos Anastasiadis (eds.), *Alexandros Svolos. O*

principles of so-called “Democratic Socialism” (*Dimokratikos Sosialismos*)<sup>5</sup> and former minister of industry in the National Unity Government of 1974, which contains important information about the presence of the League and the diverse political paths of its members during the turbulent 1960s that saw the coup d’état by the military junta on 21 April 1967; the archive of League member, lawyer, well-known politician and former minister of the Centre Union party (*Enosis Kentrou*, EK) Giorgos Mylonas<sup>6</sup>; and the private archive of the League’s board<sup>7</sup> member and famous literary writer Stratis Doukas.<sup>8</sup> Also under scrutiny are the extensive archives of the United Democratic Left (*Eniaia Dimokratiki Aristera*, EDA)<sup>9</sup>, a legal left-wing party that offered support and direct political coverage between 1951 and 1967 for the efforts of the League for more democracy and free political thought, and in general for the protection of individual and societal rights in “semi-democratic” post-civil-war Greece.<sup>10</sup> All of the mentioned documents are located in the Archives of Contemporary Social History (*Archeia Synchronis Koinonikis Istorias*, ASKI) or in the Hellenic Literary and Historical Archive (*Ellini-*

*Syntagmatologos, o Politikos, o Oramatistes* [Alexandros Svolos. *The Constitutionalist, the Politician, the Visionary*], Athens 2009, 241–281.

- 5 Charalampos Protopappas, born in 1920, studied at the Department of Law of Athens University. He was a founding member of the Socialist Club (*Socialistikos Syndesmos*, 1954–1961), of the Socialist Union (*Socialistiki Enosis*, 1961–1964) and of the Socialist Democratic Union (*Socialistiki Dimokratiki Enosis*, 1964–1967). During the triple occupation of Greece (World War II), he participated in the National Resistance – particularly in the organisations Holy Brigade (*Iera Taxiarchia*), Panhellenic Union of Fighting Youth (*Panellinos Enosis Agonizomenon Neon*, PEAN) and Combatant Holy Brigade (*Machomeni Iera Taxiarchia*). In 1944, he was arrested by the Germans for his activity and incarcerated in the Averof Prison. He was a member of the National Connective Youth (*Ethniki Enotiki Neolaia*) of Panagiotis Kanellopoulos, which he left in 1947 with other members to found the Panhellenic Organisation of Democratic Youth (*Panellinia Organosis Dimokratikis Neolaias*, PODN), which was steadily orientated towards the ideas of reformatory democratic socialism.
- 6 In 1965, Mylonas was undersecretary of education in Papandreou’s government. His archive contains information about the *Fédération internationale des droits de l’homme* (FIDH), notably its announcements and appeals against the military junta. Giorgos Mylonas Archive, Archives of Contemporary Social History (*Archeia Synchronis Koinonikis Istorias*, ASKI).
- 7 Catalogue of the members of the Administrative Council of the Hellenic League for Human Rights (1962), Charalampos Protopappas Archive, ASKI.
- 8 The most famous literary book by Doukas is “Captive’s History”, which narrates the massacre of the Greek population in Anatolia by Kemalist Turks in 1922. Stratis Doukas, *Istoria Enos Aichmalotou* [*Captive’s History*], Thessaloniki 1980.
- 9 The history of the EDA archive is very interesting, as it was confiscated by police forces immediately after the establishment of the military dictatorship on 21 April 1967. Some documents were saved, however, by the chairman of the party and lawyer, Ilias Iliou. After the reconstitution of democracy in 1974, Iliou’s son Philippos donated these remains to the Archives of Contemporary Social History. The full catalogue of the archive documents was edited by Ioanna Papathanasiou. Ioanna Papathanasiou, *Eniaia Dimokratiki Aristera 1951–1967. To Archeio tis*, Athens 2001.
- 10 Ilias Nikolakopoulos, a scholar of the period and political scientist, wrote a book entitled *H Kaxektiki Dimokratia stin Ellada (1946–1967)* [*The Feeble Democracy in Greece (1946–1967)*], Athens 2001.

*ko Logotechniko kai Istoriko Archeio*, ELIA).<sup>11</sup> As declared in the statutes of the Hellenic League for Human Rights, its main task is “the diffusion, the implementation and the defence of the principles formulated by the General Assembly in the Universal Declaration on 10 December 1948”.<sup>12</sup>

#### THE FOUNDATION OF THE HELLENIC LEAGUE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS AND ITS HISTORY UNTIL 1936

The Hellenic League for Human Rights appeared in the public sphere of Greece in November 1918. Its first iteration was established by several radical politicians of the Greek Liberal Party (*Komma Fileleftheron*) headed by eminent Cretan politician Eleftherios Venizelos, academics from various disciplines<sup>13</sup>, and intellectuals<sup>14</sup> and persons who had studied the socialist ideas abroad, mainly in Germany (the so-called Berlin Circle)<sup>15</sup> and, less frequently, in France. The Great War was in full progress in Europe, and the Greek army was fighting Kemalist troops in Asia Minor. In August 1922, the war in Anatolia ended with the resounding defeat of the Greek Army and the slaughter of the Greek and Armenian populations in Smyrna. The Hellenic League for Human Rights suddenly ceased its activity at this point, as many of its members were either dead or had become involved in politics (like Georgios Michail Averof, Panagiotis Aravantinos, Apostolos Doxiadis, Aristotelis Sideris, Loukas Nakos<sup>16</sup> or Georgios Kafantaris<sup>17</sup>).

The second establishment of the League was undertaken on 26 April 1936 by a group of well-known lawyers, university professors and other intellectuals from the “art and literature circles” in order to uphold and protect human rights in Greece.<sup>18</sup> Its statutes were approved on 5 April 1936 by approximately eighty

11 The Hellenic League for Human Rights does not yet possess an archive of its own.

12 Statutes of the Hellenic League for Human Rights, April 1936, Alexandros Svolos Archive: Political Activity (1936–1956), ASKI.

13 Among these were the director of the Numismatics Museum Athens, Ioannis Svoronos, university professor Konstantinos Triantafillopoulos, Georgios Sotiriadis, Anastasios Aravantinos and Thrasivoulos Petmezas.

14 Among them sculptor Thomas Thomopoulos, Alexandros Delmouzos, Dimitris Glinos, Nikos Giannios and Konstantinos Xatzopoulos.

15 See Giorgos Kasimatis, *O Alexandros Svolos kai i epochi tou* [Alexandros Svolos and His Age], in: Kasimatis / Anastasiadis, *Alexandros Svolos*, 47–109. In 1908, the young scholars Alexandros Papanastasiou, Konstantinos Triantafillopoulos, Alexandros Delmouzos, Alexandros Mylonas, Thrasivoulos Petmezas, Panagiotis Aravantinos and Thales Koutoupis founded a party with proto-socialist principles, the so-called “Sociological Society” (*Koinoniologiki Etairia*). The core of this group consisted of young men returning from Berlin, where they had studied and come into contact with reformative socialism.

16 Following the conservative coup by General Georgios Kondylis, Loukas Nakos became minister.

17 For his political biography, see Manolis Koumas, *Georgios Kafantaris*, Athens 2012.

18 According to Antonis Kastrinos, the efforts for the re-establishment of the League seem to have begun one year earlier, in 1935, and were suddenly interrupted when the abortive coup

members in the hall of the Archaeological Society (*Archaiologiki Etairia*), and its administrative council (Figure 1) included: Alexandros Svolos, professor of constitutional law at Athens University; Petros Apostolidis (literary pseudonym Pavlos Nirvanas), former head physician of the Supreme Naval Medical Committee, famous writer and member of the Greek Academy; Ilias Tsirimokos, member of parliament (Liberal Party) and lawyer<sup>19</sup>; Konstantinos Veis, professor at a polytechnic school and Vice President of the Greek Academy; lawyer Antonis Kastrinos; Giorgos Theotokas, a literary writer and lawyer; painter Angelos Spachis; Konstantinos Triantafillopoulos, professor at the Department of Law of Athens University and member of the Greek Academy; Themistoklis Tsatsos, member of parliament (Liberal Party) and fellow at Athens University; Spyros Theodoropoulos (literary pseudonym Agis Theros), lawyer and politician; lawyer and Secretary General of the SKE, Stratis Someritis; Aristotelis Sideris, professor at the Faculty of Political Sciences at Panteion University; famous actor Aimilios Veakis; Panagis Skouriotis, lawyer and member of the “Sociological Society”; Georgios Pangalos, consultant in pediatrics at Evangelismos Hospital and fellow at Athens University Medical School; Faidon Vegleris, lawyer and fellow of administrative law at Athens University; university professor and writer Chrisos Evelpidis; journalist G. Makris; Agni Rousopoulou, an essayist, lawyer and aide to chairman Svolos; and the former minister and lawyer Damianos Kyriazis.<sup>20</sup> It is noteworthy that not a single woman besides Rousopoulou was included in the administrative councils of the first or second established leagues in 1918 and 1936.<sup>21</sup> The foundation of the Hellenic League took place in the international context of human rights leagues founded in the wake of the establishment of the French League for Human Rights in 1898 during the Dreyfus affair, and the Greek organisation maintained contact with the French League and its chairman Frederick Bouisson.<sup>22</sup> Most national human rights leagues joined the *Fédération internationale des droits de l’homme* (FIDH) launched in 1922. The creation of the French League for Human Rights signalled a new phase in the history of civil society and

by General Nikolaos Plastiras occurred on 1 March 1935. Unpublished article by Antonis Kastrinos [1935], Alexandros Svolos Archive, ASKI.

- 19 Ilias Tsirimokos was the son of the former minister, eminent member of the Liberal Party and former chairman of the Greek parliament Ioannis Tsirimokos, and was elected to parliament for the first time in January 1936. He was born in Lamia in 1907 and studied law at Athens University as well as political science in Paris.
- 20 Catalogue of the members of the Administrative Council of the Hellenic League for Human Rights, April 1936, Alexandros Svolos Archive, ASKI.
- 21 The absence of women probably indicates the social status of women in Greece and their limited role in public affairs until World War II. Women in Greece achieved the right to vote as late as 1952. For the instances of the League established after this date, we come across several women in each council.
- 22 Frederick Bouisson, salutatory letter from the French League for Human Rights to the newly created Hellenic League for Human Rights, 6 November 1918, Paris, in: *Rizospastis*, 18 December 1918.

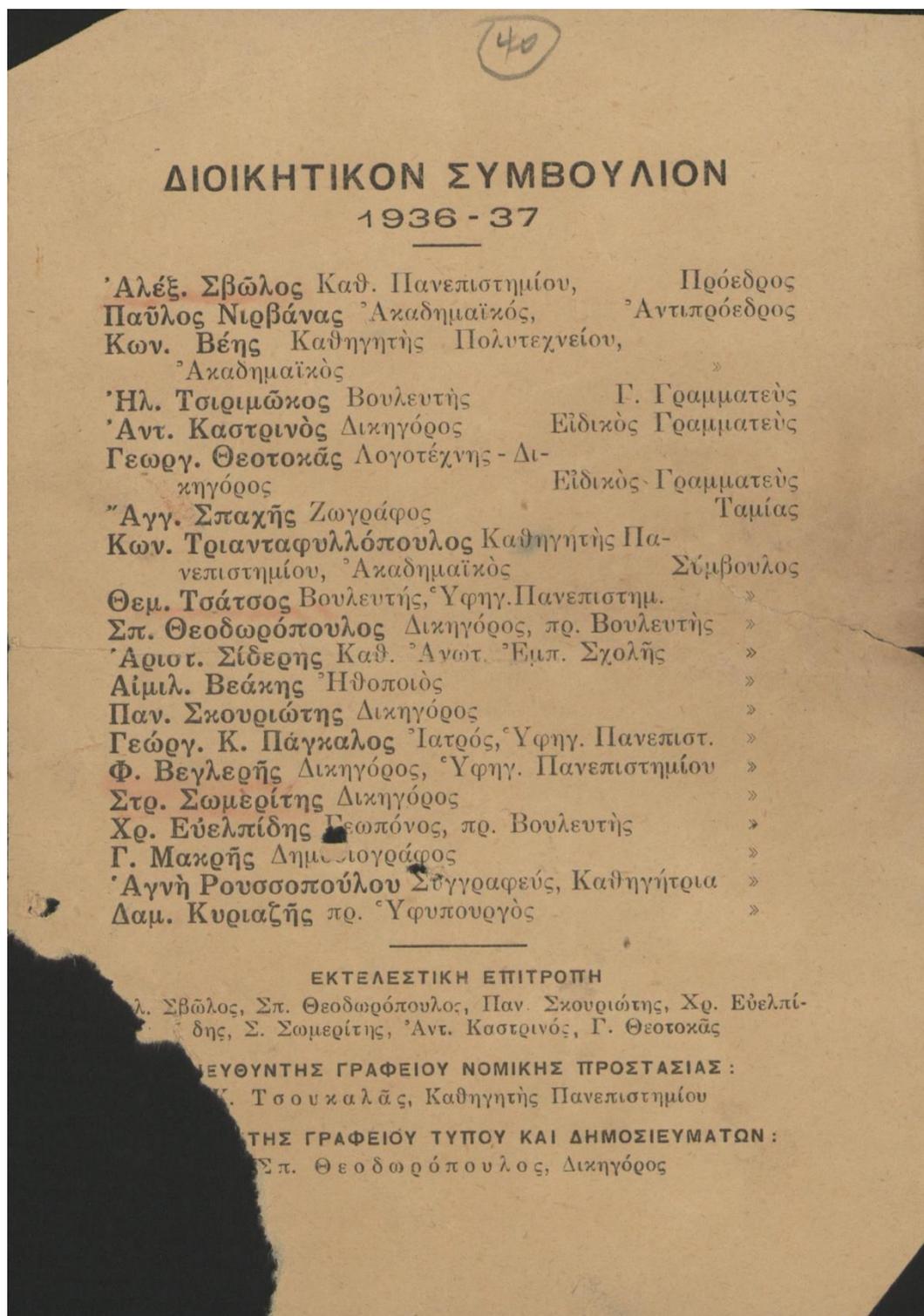


Figure 1. The Administrative Council of the League (1936), ASKI.

its institutions, and the Hellenic League for Human Rights sent delegates to its 1922 congress in Paris.<sup>23</sup>

The Interwar years were turbulent: There was political turmoil and governmental instability, and the army frequently intervened in politics via coups.<sup>24</sup> The leaders of the two main political parties, Eleftherios Venizelos<sup>25</sup> of the Liberal Party (*Komma Fileleftheron*) and Panagis Tsaldaris<sup>26</sup> of the Conservative Party (*Laiko Komma*), had died, as had the interim prime minister, professor of law Konstantinos Demertzis.<sup>27</sup> During this time, establishing a stable and powerful government was indeed an impossible task. On 9 May 1936 in Thessaloniki and 2 June 1936 in Volos, workers demonstrated against the authoritarian regime of General Ioannis Metaxas, who had come into power without elections following the sudden death of Demertzis in the spring of 1936, while communists were exiled. There was also general social turmoil resulting from the Great Depression of 1929/1932. The mass demonstrations of weavers, metal and tobacco workers ended with bloodshed in both locations: Violent clashes with the police left thirteen workers dead (twelve in Thessaloniki and one tailor in Volos) and several others severely wounded.<sup>28</sup>

The principal aim of the League was the protection of civil rights and liberties on the individual as well as the collective level. It issued memoranda demanding that the human rights of protesters, prisoners and exiles banished for their political ideology and accused as communists and anarchists should be respected. Committees of lawyers and members of the League, including its secretary Antonis Kastrinos, visited prisons in order to assess the detainment conditions and pressure the Metaxas regime into releasing captured protesters and communists.<sup>29</sup> Even League chairman Alexandros Svolos himself faced serious repression: He was dismissed from Athens University and forced into an extended exile on various islands (Anafi, Milos, Naxos, Chalkida). The League also gave lectures on issues relevant to its interests (the protection of human rights and the necessity of the League's existence).<sup>30</sup> But the organisation did not have time to evolve, instead being dissolved on 4 August 1936 by the dictatorial regime of General Metaxas, which remained in power until his death in 29 January 1941.

23 See Wolfgang Schmale / Christopher Treiblmayr, Human Rights Leagues and Civil Society (1898–ca. 1970s), in: *Historische Mitteilungen* 27/2015, 186–208.

24 For example, the dictatorship of Theodoros Pangalos (25 June 1925), the royalist coup by Georgios Kondylis (22 August 1926), the abortive coups of 1933 and 1935, and the dictatorship of Ioannis Metaxas (4 August 1936).

25 Venizelos died on 18 March 1936.

26 For a political biography of Tsaldaris, see Georgios Vouros, *Panagis Tsaldaris 1867–1936*, Athens 2014. Tsaldaris died on 17 May 1936.

27 Demertzis died of a heart attack on 13 April 1936, whereupon King George II appointed his deputy and Minister of Defence Ioannis Metaxas as the new prime minister.

28 *Rizospastis*, 10 May 1936, 3 June 1936.

29 Unpublished article by Antonis Kastrinos [1935], Alexandros Svolos Archive, ASKI, 6.

30 Unpublished article by Antonis Kastrinos [1935], Alexandros Svolos Archive, ASKI, 7.

The subsequent Second World War, which included the occupation of Greece by Axis powers beginning in April 1941, as well as the Greek Civil War that followed between the outlawed Communist Party (*Kommounistiko Komma Ellados*, KKE) and the Greek government halted the League's development. The Hellenic League for Human Rights was eventually re-established on 21 December 1953<sup>31</sup>, but the administrative court of first instance in Athens would only approve its statutes as late as November 1954.<sup>32</sup> Svolos, who had returned from exile, was very active in politics and participated, along with Tsirimokos, in the National Liberation Front (*Ethniko Apeleftherotiko Metopo*, EAM) during the period of the National Resistance as a leader of the small political party ELD (*Enosis Laikis Dimokratias*). He played a leading role in the establishment of the "Committee of Macedonians and Thracians" (*Epitropi Makedonon kai Thrakon*) in Athens, and as its president from 1941 to June 1943, he organised memorandums and protests in reaction to the brutality of the Bulgarian occupation forces as well as supporting the thousands of refugees who came to Southern Greece in order to save themselves. On 18 April 1944, Svolos was elected chairman of the Political Committee of the National Liberation (*Politiki Epitropi Ethnikis Apeleftherosis*, PEEA) and became finance minister in the National Unity Government of Georgios Papandreou.<sup>33</sup>

#### THE PRESENCE OF THE LEAGUE IN THE 1950S AND 60S

After the Greek Civil War, which ended with the defeat of the Communists, Svolos (along with Tsirimokos, Someritis, Xatzimbeis, Grigoriadis, Stratis, Sofianopoulos and other persons from the socialist political spectrum) participated in the formation of the legal non-communist left-wing party *Dimokratiki Parataxi*, since the Communist Party had been outlawed in 1947.<sup>34</sup> But the right-wing party that had prevailed during the civil war attempted to dominate on the political level as well. The adherents of *Dimokratiki Parataxi* were persecuted, taken into police custody and imprisoned for their political opinions. There was a repressive legal context against the members of the United Democratic Left and a suffocating po-

31 Statutes of the Hellenic League for Human Rights, 21 December 1953, EDA Archive, ASKI. Its first chairman after the liberation was the professor of Political Economy and former minister Dimitrios Kallitsounakis (1954–1961). Catalogue of the members of the transient Administrative Council of the League, Charalampos Protopappas Archive, ASKI.

32 *Eleftheria*, 25 November 1954.

33 See Panagiotis Mantzoufas, *O Alexandros Svolos os melos tis PEEA kai tis Kivernisis Ethnikis Enotitas tou Georgiou Papandreou (1944)* [Alexandros Svolos as member of PEEA and the National Unity Government of George Papandreou (1944)], in: Kasimatis / Anastasiadis, *Alexandros Svolos*, 223–239.

34 For the establishment of the party, its political discourse and the problems ultimately led to its dissolution in 1951, see Michalis Moraitidis, *The Formation and the Political Discourse of the Post-civil-war Left-wing Party (Dimokratiki Parataxi and Eniaia Dimokratiki Aristera EDA 1950–1951)*, unpublished undergraduate thesis, University of Thessaly, Volos 2007.

litical atmosphere. Indeed, the Hellenic League for Human Rights was re-established and developed within an environment of shrinking and ailing democracy, an environment where the struggle for the protection of human rights was politically dangerous, but nevertheless focused on its goals. The ideologies of anti-communism and nationalism became the official ideologies of the state until the reconstitution of democracy in 1974. Despite the fact that the statutes of the Hellenic League claimed that it was “independent from political parties and governments”<sup>35</sup>, the organisation did not actually manage to achieve this goal. It was in fact closely affiliated with the United Democratic Left and engaged in both juridical and political activity for the latter’s members and supporters. Svolos died on 23 February 1956, three days after being elected to parliament for the second time after 1950.

The first action of the League was the publication of a text in support of a well-known Cretan writer named Nikos Kazantzakis. Kazantzakis’ work, especially his “Last Temptation”, “Recrucifixion of Jesus” and “Captain Michalis”, had provoked an immediate reaction by the Holy Synod of the Greek Orthodox Church, the clergy and the powerful Zoe organisation affiliated with the Church. The Synod demanded the ban of Kazantzakis’ writings for insulting Christ and called for his excommunication. The Ecumenical Patriarchate rejected the proposal of the Holy Synod, however, and as a consequence Kazantzakis was never excommunicated.<sup>36</sup> The issue of self-determination of the Greek Cypriot people was also of concern for the League. Its members, like Vice President Ilias Tsirimokos or the physician Markos Dragoumis, student at Athens University Medical School and first Chairman of the Youth of the League, gave lectures in order to further the internationalisation of the Cyprus issue and focus international attention on the right of the Greek Cypriot people to join Greece.<sup>37</sup> Tsirimokos served as Vice President of the International Federation for Human Rights during the mid-1950s. His conviction was that Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot people ought to coexist and respect each other.<sup>38</sup>

At the same time in Athens and Thessaloniki, the Church of Greece and the student movement organised massive demonstrations demanding the union of Cyprus with the Greek State and the termination of British colonial rule over the island. On 1 April 1955, the struggle of members of the National Organisation of Cypriot Combatants (*Ethniki Organosis Kiprion Agoniston*, EOKA) against the British colonial rule and the hanging of several persons (particularly Michael Karaolis and Andreas Dimitriou) elicited an intervention by the Hellenic League for Human Rights: It tried to prevent the hangings by sending memoranda to the General Assembly of the United Nations and the International Federation for Hu-

35 Statutes of the Hellenic League for Human Rights, 21 December 1953, EDA Archive, ASKI.

36 *Eleftheria*, 29 June 1954, 3 July 1954, 15 February 1955, 18 February 1955, 22 February 1955, 23 February 1955.

37 The 1950s were a decade of anti-colonial movements all over the world (Algeria, Middle East, Egypt, India, Cyprus).

38 Ilias Tsirimokos, Introduction, in: Markos Dragoumis, *O Agon dia tin Kypro [The Struggle for Cyprus]*, Athens 1955, 1–2.

man Rights (Figure 2, overleaf)<sup>39</sup>, and also supported the subsequent appeals by the Greek government to the General Assembly of the United Nations regarding the issue.

In the turbulent decade of the 1960s, the League defended the constitutional rights of protesters (mainly students, but also construction workers), especially the individual rights of demonstration, expression and unionism, against the “limited democracy” and the Greek police state. There was a suffocating institutional context at the time that dramatically constrained the constitutional rights and civil liberties of citizens. In March 1961, for example, the League raised objections against the suspension of the student Alexis Karagiorgis – son of Kostas Karagiorgis, an eminent member of the Greek Communist Party – and demanded that the decision be recalled. The League also protested against repression by the police and the surveillance of citizens, particularly of students. The right to strike stipulated in the eleventh article of the constitution of 1952 had been repealed for employees in the public sector. Moreover, the General Confederation of Greek Workers (*Geniki Synomospondia Ergaton Ellados*, GSEE) was controlled by the government party from 1948 onwards.

But the main objective of the League was the struggle against “parasyntagma”, a set of special measures limiting the constitutional rights of members of the United Democratic Left and other people persecuted for their ideology. “Parasyntagma” was much stronger than the official constitution: For example, citizens seeking a job in the public sector, registration at the university or a driving license were required to show a certificate proving they had not been members of the National Liberation Front or its associated bodies during the National Resistance.<sup>40</sup> The Hellenic League for Human Rights supported the “union of fired employees in the public sector” and denounced the persecution of locally elected representatives for political reasons. It also published memoranda demanding the release of political exiles and prisoners on Makronisos and Agios Efstratios islands.<sup>41</sup>

In 1959 and 1960, the League defended the “Hero of the National Resistance”, EDA member and political exile Manolis Glezos, who had been arrested and sentenced for espionage (under Act 375/1936 of Metaxas’ regime). Members of the League provided legal support to Glezos and other arrested communists (including Lefteris Voutsas, Antonis Karkagiannis, Antonis Sigellakis, Fokion Vettas and a French communist, Suzanne Fouzer) and testified for them at the military tribunal.<sup>42</sup> A special committee of members of the League, among them the Vice President of the International Federation for Human Rights, Tsirimokos, the former minister and army general Konstantinos Manetas, the former minister of justice Dimitrios Papaspirou, and the member of parliament, former member of the National Democratic Hellenic Association (*Ethnikos Dimokratikos*

39 *Eleftheria*, 10 May 1956.

40 This requirement to provide a certificate of political affiliation was repealed only after the restoration of democracy in 1975.

41 EDA Archives, ASKI.

42 *Eleftheria*, 9 July 1959, 18 July 1959. Someritis testified for Glezos at the military tribunal.

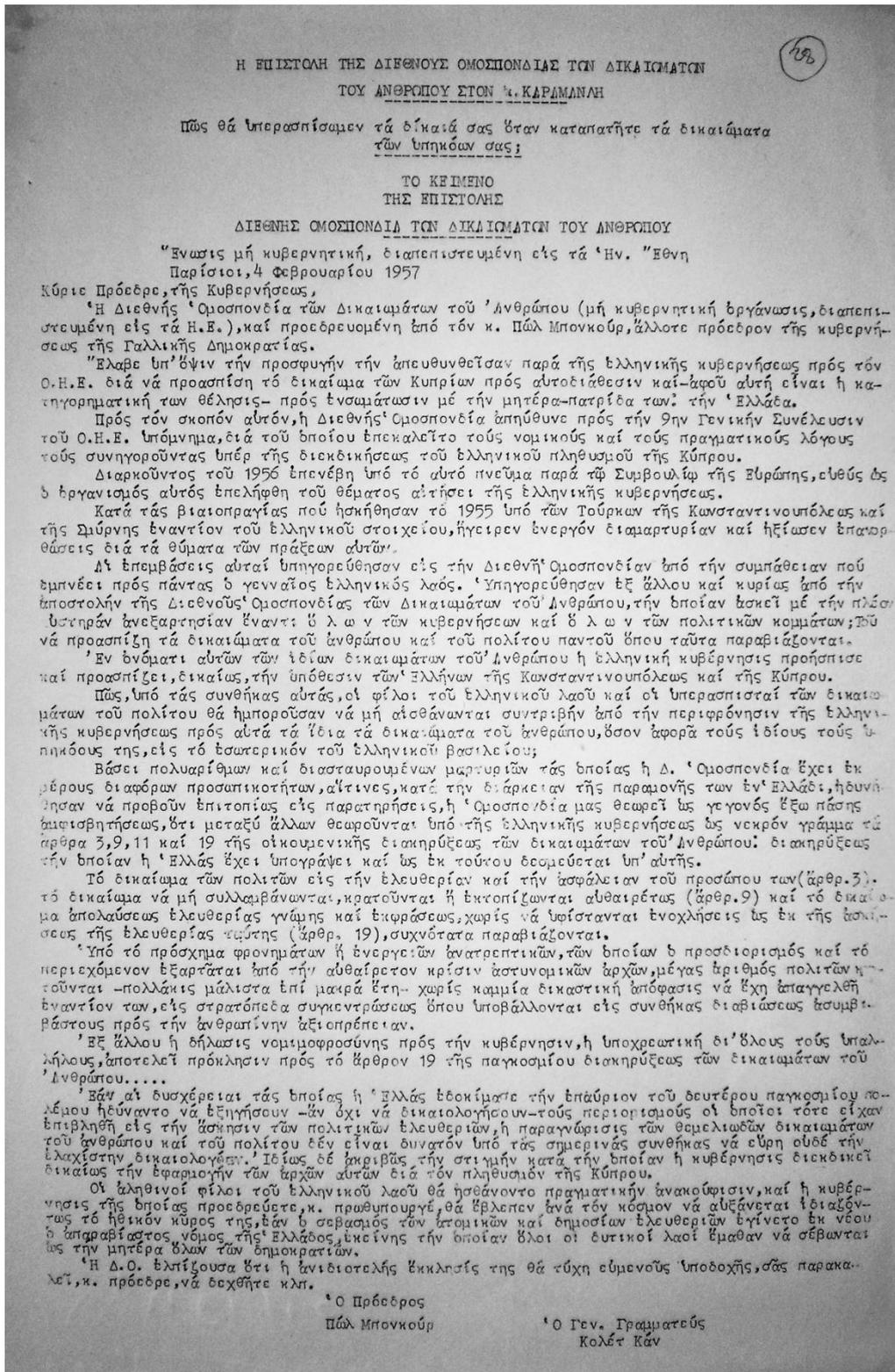


Figure 2. Letter by the International Federation to Prime Minister Karamanlis regarding the violation of human rights in Greece (1957), translated into Greek by the Hellenic League, ASKI.

*Ellinikos Syndesmos*, EDES) and former minister Petros Evripaios, sent informational bulletins to the International Federation for Human Rights seeking Glezos' release.<sup>43</sup> Following the elections on 29 October 1961, known as the “violent and fraudulent elections”, the activity of the Hellenic League for Human Rights focused on various violations (especially in the provinces) targeted primarily against voters of the Left and, to a lesser degree, against the Centre Union parties.<sup>44</sup> In certain provinces, extreme right-wing groups like *Tagmata Ethnofylakis Amynis* (TEA) had terrorised and forced peasants to vote for the government party, the National Radical Union (*Ethniki Rizospastiki Enosis*, ERE).

In early 1962, at Someritis' proposal, the League cooperated with the newly established organisation Amnesty International in a worldwide campaign named “Appeal for Amnesty”, which was in fact based on an article in the “Observer” published by British lawyer and Labour Party member Peter Benenson. The article, entitled “The Forgotten Prisoners”, was written after Benenson learned of two Portuguese students imprisoned for raising a toast to freedom. Reprinted in newspapers across the world, his appeal marked the beginning of Amnesty International. In the following years, the League cooperated regularly with Amnesty International, especially in several cases of violations of the rights of students and advocates of peace (1962–1963) (Figure 3, overleaf).<sup>45</sup>

The Hellenic League for Human Rights also strongly protested the assassination of Grigoris Lambrakis, member of parliament and the EDA, in Thessaloniki. On 22 May 1963, the far-right extremists Emannouel Emannouilides and Spyros Gotzamanis struck Lambrakis on the head with a crowbar from a moving vehicle in plain view of several police officers. He died in AHEPA Hospital five days later, on 27 May 1963. The events following his assassination led to rapid political developments: While Prime Minister Konstantinos Karamanlis resigned and left for Paris in July 1963, thousands of Greek youth formed a new political organisation called the Lambrakis Democratic Youth (*Dimokratiki Neolaia Lambraki*).<sup>46</sup> The League complained about the prohibition of the first Marathon Peace Rally (later an annual event in memory of Lambrakis) on 21 April 1963 and the arrest and abuse of several participants (e. g. the arrest and deportation of a lawyer and member of the Belgian League for Human Rights named Kornill).<sup>47</sup>

In February 1964, the Centre Union (*Enosis Kentrou*) won the parliamentary elections, and its leader George Papandreou governed the country until the “*Iouliana* (July) Events”.<sup>48</sup> The majority of the League's members (Thalia Koliva, Stra-

43 Charalampos Protopappas Archive, ASKI.

44 *Dimokratis*, October 1961, 5.

45 Letter from Joint Hon. Secretary of Amnesty International Peter Benenson to H.E. the Greek Ambassador Seferiades in London for two convictions by Greek courts, 14 December 1962, EDA Archive, ASKI.

46 *Dimokratiki Neolaia Lambraki* Archive, ASKI.

47 Charalampos Protopappas Archive, ASKI.

48 The subversion of Papandreou's government by defectors in his own party along with the massive student demonstrations and violent clashes with police forces following his resignation on 15 July 1965 are known as the *Iouliana* or *Apostasia*.

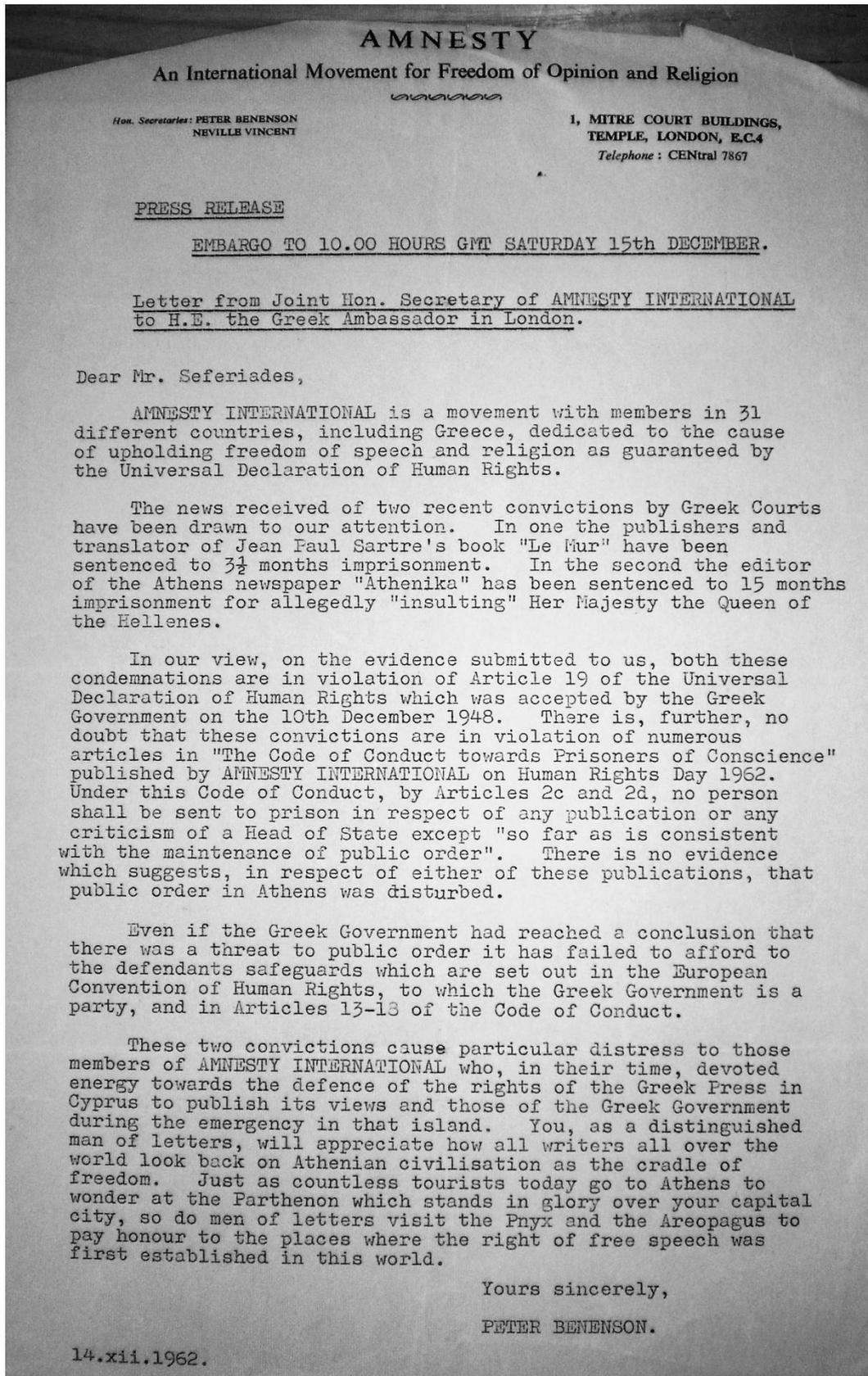


Figure 3. The Cooperation of the Hellenic League with Amnesty International, ASKI.

tis Someritis, Ilias Tsirimokos, Kostantinos Stefanakis, Giannis Koutsocheras, Giorgos Mylonas, Haris Rentis) were in touch with Papandreou's government and sent memoranda suggesting various measures in the fields of justice and education. They advocated the repeal of all special laws and the dissolution of the illegal organisations that effectively governed the nation.<sup>49</sup> On 23 March 1964, the League petitioned to Loukis Akritas, the undersecretary of education, to include the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the European Convention for Human Rights in the basic citizenship education at Greek schools. Furthermore, appeals supporting the return of various expatriated political refugees and their children from Eastern Europe were sent to the government.<sup>50</sup> But despite the interventions and recommendations by the League, its demands for the establishment of a truly democratic state and the abolishment or at least constraint of "parasyntagma" were not met.

On 15 July 1965, King Constantine II forced Papandreou to resign, and the right wing party under the leadership of Panagiotis Kanellopoulos sought to form a new government with defectors from the Centre Union (which is why the July events are also known as "*Apostasia*"). Tsirimokos and three other members of the government party who were also members of the League (Papasprou, Rentis, Stefanakis) participated in Papandreou's overthrow. The League's reaction was immediate, and the "apostates" were expelled from the association for violating its principles. Stratis Someritis addressed the Secretary General of the International Federation for Human Rights, Suzanne Collette Kahn, demanding Tsirimokos' resignation as vice president of the Federation. Over the course of about one month, the Centre Union, the United Democratic Left, and various student and labour unions organised massive demonstrations, while the most radical called for "spontaneous" rallies against the interference by the king and for the reconstitution of the elected government. Many of these demonstrations ended in violent clashes with the police, and hundreds of people were arrested and injured. On 21 July 1965, a student at the Supreme School of Economics and Business (ASOEE; today: Athens University of Economics and Business, AUEB), Sotiris Petroulas, was killed by the police during a demonstration organised by the National Union of Greek Students (*Ethniki Foititiki Enosis Ellados*, EFEE) in Athens.<sup>51</sup>

On 5 February 1966, in a letter to Defence Minister Stavros Kostopoulos, members of the League complained about the detention of members of the *Aspida* paramilitary organisation, their imprisonment conditions and the obstruction of their communication with relatives and advocates. The detainees from this secret group of centrist "democratic" low-rank military officers led by Captain Aris Bouloukos and Colonel Alexandros Papaterpos had been accused of being in touch with Andreas Papandreou, the son of the former prime minister, and plan-

49 EDA Archive, ASKI.

50 Letter demanding the return of the children of the expatriated political refugees from Eastern Europe (Hungary, Rumania, FYROM, Bulgaria), 1966, EDA Archive, ASKI.

51 Reported by various Greek newspapers (*Avgi*, *Eleftheria*, *Macedonia*), 22 July 1965.

ning to overthrow the government under Georgios Athanasiadis-Novas (who had been appointed prime minister by the king to replace Papandreou).<sup>52</sup>

In the same year, the chairman of the League, Thalia Koliva, and its Secretary General Stratis Someritis signed a petition against the rejection by the Stefanos Stefanopoulos government (the third government of defectors) of a school textbook written by a professor at Athens American College, Kostas Kalokairinos, and entitled “Roman and Medieval History (146 B.C. – 1453 A.D.)”.<sup>53</sup> A letter by the League condemned the decision by the dean of the Faculty of Philosophy and professor of Byzantine literature at Athens University, Nikolaos Tomadakis, to expel the members of the student union who supported the circulation of the same book.<sup>54</sup> The textbook in question had been approved by Papandreou’s government and was written under the influence of Marxism, emphasising the social and economic history of the Byzantine Empire and understating the importance of the “Great History”, meaning major political events and famous personalities (emperors, powerful persons, etc.). At the same time, the League opposed a special law demanding the dissolution of the Lambrakis Democratic Youth Organisation (*Dimokratiki Neolaia Lambraki*, DNL).<sup>55</sup>

#### DENOUNCING THE JUNTA FROM PARIS (1967–1974)

On 21 April 1967, a military regime established by army colonels toppled the government. This junta would remain in power until 24 July 1974, when the Turkish army invaded Cyprus. The coup by the group around Colonel Georgios Papadopoulos came as a shock a mere few weeks before parliamentary elections which, according to all predictions, the Centre Union would have won. There were rumours about a coup, but very few believed them – and almost no one was prepared for the eventuality. Seven thousand people were arrested and imprisoned in the first days, and one person, Panagiotis Elis, was killed while in custody. The colonels suspended several articles of the constitution that guaranteed civil liberties: freedom of speech was suppressed, the press was censored, political parties and unions were banned, and demonstrations were prohibited.<sup>56</sup>

Following the establishment of the military dictatorship, the Hellenic League for Human Rights continued its activity from France since it was now outlawed in

52 Aris Bouloukos, *Hypotheses Aspida. H Aletheia pou kaiei [Aspida Case]*, Athens 1989.

53 Kostas Kalokairinos, *Istoria Romaiki kai Mesaioniki (146 p.X – 1453 m.X) [Roman and Medieval History (146 B.C. – 1453 A.D.)]*, Athens 1965.

54 Several documents on the Kalokairinos school textbook case, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens Archives, Faculty of Philosophy, Dean Nikolaos Tomadakis.

55 *H Genia Mas*, 10 December 1966, 6. Announcement of the League regarding the dissolution of Lambrakis Democratic Youth Organisation, 1966, Charalampos Protopappas Archive, ASKI.

56 Polymeris Voglis, ‘The Junta Came to Power by the Force of Arms, and Will Only Go by the Force of Arms’. Political Violence and the Voice of the Opposition to the Military Dictatorship in Greece, 1967–74, in: *Cultural and Social History*, 8/2011, 551–568.

Greece. In cooperation with the International Federation for Human Rights in Paris, League members (mainly its Secretary General Someritis) denounced the military regime and the torture of members of the opposition.<sup>57</sup> The International Federation for Human Rights sent lawyers as observers to the military tribunals trying the members of underground organisations like Democratic Defense (*Dimokratiki Amyna*) and the Patriotic Anti-Dictatorial Front (*Patriotiko Antidiktatoriko Metopo*). Dennis Langlois, legal counsellor to the French League for Human Rights and lawyer at the appeals court in Paris, attended the trial of Alekos Panagoulis, a member of the Greek resistance (*Elliniki Antistasi*) who had unsuccessfully attempted to assassinate Colonel Georgios Papadopoulos near Lagonisi on 13 August 1968, at the Athens military court.<sup>58</sup> The International Federation for Human Rights conducted more than a dozen fact-finding missions to alert international opinion to grave violations of human rights in Greece.

The military regime restricted not only the rights of citizens who had left Greece during the colonels' coup (like Melina Mercouri, Eirini Papa, Amalia Fleming and Mikis Theodorakis), but also those of members of the League (Someritis, for example, had his Greek citizenship revoked until 1974). Another member of the League, professor of law Faidon Vegleris, was one of the key witnesses against the junta in the infamous "Greek Case" at the Council of Europe. This case created an important precedent in that Greece became the only state ever to have been evicted from the Council of Europe for systematic violation of human rights.<sup>59</sup> From Paris, the League denounced the violent evacuation of a polytechnic school on 17 November 1973 during which police abused several students and other gathered people (the so-called Polytechnic School Uprising of 1973).<sup>60</sup>

57 The military police (ESA) tortured an army officer, Spiros Moustaklis, as well as other proponents of democracy (mostly students). The junta captured and tortured the member of the Hellenic League for Human Rights and the Democratic Defence (*Dimokratiki Amyna*), 50-year-old political prisoner Charalampos Protopappas.

58 For the Greek Resistance see Panagiotis Kritikos, *Antistasi Kata tis Diktatorias 1967–1974* [*Opposition to the Dictatorship 1967–1974*], Athens 1996, 126–201. For Panagoulis' trial Denis Langlois, *Panagoulis, le Sang de la Grèce*, Paris 1969. Also Alekos Panagoulis. *Protagonistis kai Vardos tis Antistasis* [*Protagonist and Bard of Opposition against the Junta*], Athens 2008.

59 Following the establishment of the military dictatorship, the Council of Europe expelled Greece. Persons who had left Greece for other European countries testified about the situation in Greece and the serious violations of citizens' rights before the Council of Europe. Petros Vlassis, *Diadromes Zoes. Politikoi kai Politiki* [*Routes of Life. Politicians and Politics*], Athens 2009. Kitty Arseni, *Bouboulinas 18. Mia synglonistiki martyria gia ta vasanistiria tis Xountas*. [*Bouboulinas 18. A Shocking Testimony of Torture During the Junta Period*], Athens 2005.

60 See Kostas Korneitis, *Children of the Dictatorship. Student Resistance, Cultural Politics, and the "Long 1960s" in Greece*, New York / Oxford, 2013.

### THE ESTABLISHMENT OF DEMOCRACY (1974–1981)

After the collapse of the junta in 1974 and the restoration of democracy, the Hellenic League for Human Rights was once again re-established with Someritis as its first chairman and with the participation of Vegleris and Rousopoulou. Since then it has been operating with a continuous presence and activity in line with its statutes, namely the protection of human rights in Greece. Thankfully, the post-1974 period in Greece provided a safer environment for human rights defenders: The discriminations common in the past began to diminish with the approval of a new liberal constitution (1975) and the repeal of various inequitable laws from the post-civil-war era (1950–1974). One of the first actions of the National Unity Government was to repeal the prohibition of the Communist Party that had been in place for twenty-eight years. The League could now act in a liberal political environment, and discrimination and political persecution of its communist members ceased.

In the first years after the establishment of democracy, the League undertook coordinated efforts to contribute to the purging of junta supporters from the state apparatus and the restoration of human rights and civil liberties in post-1974 Greece. In a letter to Prime Minister Konstantinos Karamanlis, the League highlighted that there were still many junta proponents at various administrative levels (ministries, prefectures, municipalities) and demanded that the government act decisively by removing them from their positions.<sup>61</sup> A 1976 open-letter appeal to Defence Minister Evangelos Averof suggested launching a campaign for human rights in the Greek army because of its involvement in the coup regime, as well as instituting corresponding seminars in military academies. One year later, the League similarly suggested to the administrations of public television (ERT) and radio (ERA) that they should organise lectures or panel discussions on the issue of human rights.<sup>62</sup> In 1981, the rise to power of the Panhellenic Socialist Party (*Panellinio Sosialistiko Kinima*, PASOK) under Andreas Papandreou accelerated the necessary institutional and political changes, and the majority of the League's demands were fulfilled.

### CURRENT FIELDS OF ACTIVITY

During the 1990s, the League developed various activities and initiatives, in particular pertaining to freedom of speech, religious freedom, migration, police violence, among others. The debt crisis that engulfed Greece starting in 2009 and the continuous decline of the Greek economy have brought about unprecedented challenges concerning the protection of human rights. The conditions of the economic crisis objectively threaten human rights due to the impoverishment of an increasing number of citizens. On the surface, it is self-evident how the economic crisis

61 Nikolaos Alivizatos private archive (in his possession).

62 Nikolaos Alivizatos private archive (in his possession).

and the dimensions it has reached since 2009 primarily threaten the enjoyment of social rights, first and foremost in regard to labour rights and the right to a decent life. The challenges faced in terms of labour affect the unrestricted exercise of individual rights, since the primary response of neo-liberal politics to rising protest against diminishing social rights is in fact the curtailment of individual rights. Within this framework, the protection of human rights and a strategic approach to their promotion is of central importance in the work of the Hellenic League for Human Rights.

Some of the major issues that concern the League today are the relationship between the Orthodox Church and the state, religious freedom in Greece, protection of freedom of expression and art, combating ultra-right extremism (racist violence and hate crimes against immigrants like the murder of the young Pakistani Shehzad Luqman in 2013), the rise of neo-Nazi ideology and the neo-fascist party Golden Dawn, police repression and violence during demonstrations (e. g. the murder of student Alexandros Grigoropoulos by a policeman in December 2008) and against immigrants, prisoners' rights and the improvement of the penitentiary system, the rights of foreigners and other vulnerable groups, the anti-terrorism laws, the granting of Greek citizenship to the children of second and third generation immigrants, industrial pollution of the Asopos river and the consequences on the health of affected residents, and the protection of the rights of national minorities, particularly their right to self-determination (Greece was condemned on this account by the European Court of Human Rights in 2008). The League is also an active defender of the rights of homosexuals and LGBTQ persons, supporting them in legal cases, through public announcements and press releases endorsing their right to civil partnership and civil marriage, and by condemning attacks against them.

In 2013 the League launched a new campaign against ultra-right extremism and expressed its strong objection to the violent shutdown of public television broadcaster ERT by the government. It also made sound suggestions for a new law regarding Greek citizenship (2008–2010) and a new framework for the relationship between the state and the Orthodox Church. For the former issue, the government initially accepted the proposals of the League, but the law was shot down after consultation of the Council of State (*Symvoulío tis Epikrateias*). As for the issue of state-church relations, there was no apparent political will for a legislation initiative. Since 2008, a branch of the League is active in Northern Greece, based in Thessaloniki (*Omada Thessalonikis*). In 2012–2016, the League has developed a series of initiatives and projects in relation to refugee rights.

Finally, the Hellenic League for Human Rights participates in various international institutions and programs like the United Nations Refugee Agency, it participates in the Greek National Commission for Human Rights, in the Councils for Migrant Integration in the municipalities of Athens and Thessaloniki, in the Racist Violence Recording Network coordinated by the National Commission for Human Rights and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and in the activities of the International Federation of Human Rights and the European Association of Human Rights, in whose administrative councils the

League is represented. The League has also organised many events (congresses, meetings and press conferences) and published three books on issues of its interest.<sup>63</sup> Finally, it is worth mentioning that in August 2016, the League's former chairman (2003–2011) Dimitris Christopoulos was elected president of the FIDH, becoming the first Greek and the first non-French speaking person from Europe to hold the office.

In conclusion, the Hellenic League for Human Rights is the oldest organisation with the goal of protecting human rights in Greece. It currently has approximately 600 members. The organisation continues to take action in Greek society today for a wider and more advanced range of rights intertwined with the contemporary social, political and economic history of the country. For more than eight decades, it has been intervening effectively in favour of minor as well as major individual and collective rights in Greece.

63 See Michalis Tsapogas / Dimitris Xristopoulos, *Ta dikaiomata stin Ellada 1953–2003. Apo to telos tou Emfiliou sto telos tis Metapolitefsis* [*The Rights in Greece 1953–2003. From the End of the Greek Civil War to the End of the Restoration of Democracy*], Athens 2004. Dimitris Xristopoulos, *O Theos den echei anagki eisaggelea. Ekklesia, blasfimia kai Xrysi Avgi* [*God Does Not Need a District Attorney. Church, Blasphemy and Golden Dawn*], Athens 2013. Kostis Papaioannou, *Epeidi den einai oloi opos theloun na fainontai. As milisoume kathara gia tin Akrodexia* [*Because They Are Not All as They Seem to Look Like. Let's Talk Clearly About Right-Wing Extremism*], Athens 2014.