

CENTRAL BOARD OF JEWISH COMMUNITIES IN GREECE

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THE IMPACT OF THE GAZA CONFLICT ON GREEK SOCIETY AND THE JEWISH COMMUNITY

The “anti-Israeli” feeling of the majority of the Greek public opinion revived and escalated since the outbreak of the Gaza conflict. In January 2009, the number of anti-Semitic incidents related to the conflict increased as well.

Greek public opinion is clearly pro-Palestinian. Politicians, popular Greek figures, bishops, public administrators, mayors around Greece, as well as the mass media made anti-Israeli statements, often with anti-Semitic references (drawing parallels between Israelis and Nazis, Gaza and Auschwitz, David and Goliath, etc).

Antisemitic incidents against Jewish targets:

From December 31, 2008 to January 21, 2009, Jewish sites were desecrated in Athens, Larissa, Volos, Corfu, Veroia, Drama, Komotini and Ioannina with anti-Semitic graffiti and slogans on Synagogues, Holocaust Monuments and Jewish cemeteries. Graffiti with slogans like “Jews = Murderers” and “Jews=Nazis” was common to all cases. In two cases, violent attacks were prevented by the police: In Veroia, there was an attempt to light the door of the Synagogue on fire and in Larissa, there was an attempt to tear down the Magen David from the door of the Synagogue and forced entry into it. Violent attacks occurred in the Jewish cemetery of Ioannina where a few tombstones were damaged and vandalized.

Totally 13 antisemitic incidents occurred in one month, when throughout 2008 only two relevant incidents occurred and respectively eight incidents in 2007.

In February 2009, the number of incidents decreased to one, reported in Ioannina, where swastikas appeared on the gate of the Jewish cemetery. (See detailed report, **Annex 1**).

GREEK REACTIONS:

The President of the Republic: President Karolos Papoulias, during the new year’s reception on January 1st, stated: “Aren’t they [the Israelis] ashamed of killing children?”. The Greek press reported that President Papoulias, while speaking to K.

Mitsotakis (ex Prime Minister who recognized Israel and upgraded diplomatic relations with Greece), said: “What are our friends, the Israelis, doing? Are they flying airplanes and killing in cold blood?”.

The Government: Prime Minister Konstantinos Karamanlis has made no public statements on the Gaza issue. Foreign Minister Dora Bakoyannis made careful and balanced statements, keeping equal distances from both sides.

The Opposition: The main Opposition Party of PASOK adopted a clearly pro-Palestinian position. The leader of the Opposition **George Papandreou**, who is also President of the “Socialist International” (expressed solidarity only towards the Palestinians. No M.P. of the PASOK Party made any reference to the Israeli victims of Hamas or to the rocket fire against Israelis from the organization. **Political spokesman of PASOK M.P Andreas Loverdos**, in an interview (Real news, Jan.4, ‘09), stated that: “One cannot keep equal distances from unequal subjects. Equal distances between unequal subjects are unequal distances. We have the weak Palestinians from one side and the almighty Israelis on the other. We have harassment from one side and hundreds of deaths on the other. ...I believe that today Greeks could say that ‘we all feel like Palestinians’!”. **The Parliamentary spokesman of PASOK Theodoros Pangalos** returned the Israeli Ambassador’s new year’s gift, together with a letter explaining that “he cannot accept a gift of wines produced in Golan which Israel illegally occupies”. With reference to Gaza, he compared it to the Warsaw ghetto. The letter was leaked to the press.

The Parties of the Left: The Greek Communist Party and the Party of “SYNASPISMOS” made severe anti-Israel statements. **Communist Party Secretary Aleka Papariga** urged Israel to “unconditionally stop the bombings in Gaza because the attacking party cannot pose any conditions”. **The leader of SYNASPISMOS Party Alexis Tsipras** spoke of “genocide against the Palestinian people”, stating that “the Israelis have turned Gaza into an immense concentration camp, exterminating civilians, women and small children” and asked the Government “to annul the agreement of military cooperation between Greece and Israel”. **The Chairman of the Parliamentary Group of SYNASPISMOS Alekos Alavanos** asked the Government to recall the Greek Ambassador from Israel. Alekos Alavanos, in his statements defined the Israeli attacks as a “crime against humanity”. He also submitted an interpellation to the Greek Parliament on the intermediation of the Greek Government in Gaza conflict. He also made statements pointing out that “the E.U. should condemn -instead of encouraging- the Israeli pogroms against the Palestinian people”. **M.E.P. of SYNASPISMOS, Dimitris Papadimoulis**, submitted an interpellation to the E.U. Council asking the E.U. to bring Israel before The Hague International Court under the accusation of war crimes.

The Party of LAOS. George Karatzaferis, the leader of the far-right Party of LAOS, published a fiercely anti-Semitic article in his weekly newspaper “ALPHA ENA”, on Jan. 3-4, 2009, (the official organ of his Party). In his article –inter alia- he states that “Jews have turned themselves into murderers equally heinous as the Nazis were”, that “the Jew smells of blood” and that one would not expect any better from the “race that crucified God. Would the murderers of God care about a few hundred innocent children being murdered?” (see the full article attached – [Annex 2](#)).

The Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece addressed a letter of protest to the President of the Greek Parliament Mr. Dimitris Sioufas. In this letter, the Greek Jewry points out that *“This is an unacceptable, unique in the Greek records, as well as an open expression of anti-Semitism, coming from a member of the Greek Parliament and even leader of a political party.*

Dear Mr. President, we, Greek Jews, express our abhorrence and our serious concern; we consider that this wrongdoing of a member of the Greek Parliament, could, under circumstances of extreme racism, be a herald of similar and even violent actions against Greek citizens. Such violent actions have caused affliction to Jews in the past”. (Full text attached – [Annex 3](#)).

As a reaction the Special Secretary of the Greek Parliament communicated our Board’s letter to the Parliamentary Group of LAOS. (See attached – [Annex 4](#)).

George Karatzaferis replied to our Board (the whole correspondence passed through the Special Secretary of the Parliament). The letter, highly ironical with anti-Semitic hints, was communicated to our Board and was published in the newspaper “Alpha Ena” (January 24-25, 2009), under another anti-Semitic comment. (See [Annex 5](#) – The reply of G. Karatzaferis and the comment of “Alpha Ena”).

Representatives of the Church. A balanced statement was made by the Archbishop of Athens and All Greece Ieronymos. Nevertheless, the Archbishop met with the Ambassador of the Diplomatic Representation of the Palestinian Authority. On the other hand, a few local bishops made anti-Israeli and anti-Semitic statements:

The Bishop of Kalavryta Ambrosios stated that “Israel attacks spread death among civilians. The powerful people of the earth, through their silence and guilty tolerance cover the aggression of Israel! An ongoing genocide is being held in Gaza and nobody protests!...”.

The Bishop of Piraeus Seraphim, in his statement spoke of “the claws of the Zionist monster” and referred to a “global Zionist attack”.

Municipalities / Labour syndicates / rallies / demonstrations

A large number of Municipalities, Prefectures, public entities and labour syndicates around Greece issued resolutions and organized rallies of solidarity to the Palestinian people. Here under we refer only to a few characteristic examples, so as to outline the situation:

-During a demonstration in Athens, protesters burned Israeli and American flags in front of the Israeli Embassy (Dec. 29, 2008).

-The Greek Institute of Consumers issued an announcement urging consumers to boycott Israeli products.

-The Municipal Council of Athens passed a resolution condemning “the Israeli military attack in Gaza which assumes the characteristics of a genocide against the Palestinian people”. The Mayor of Athens Nikitas Kaklamanis declared to be “a keen supporter of the Palestinian cause for an independent, peaceful, and democratic Palestinian State”.

- The Municipality of Nikea (suburb of Athens), during the new year’s festivities, placed the Palestinian flag on the Town Hall premises. The Nikea Mayor Benetatos spoke of “mass murders” committed by the Israelis and expressed solidarity towards Palestinians.

-Announcements and resolutions condemning Israel were issued by a great number of Organizations, such as: The Union of Journalists of Athens, the Coordination Committee of Lawyers Associations, Workers Struggling Front (PAME -labour Union affiliated to the Communist Party), etc.

The MASS MEDIA. Greek press and TV broadcasts maintain a pro-Palestinian policy line. The main characteristic is the clear choice made by the majority of the Greek media to promote Palestinian losses over the Israeli ones and condemn Israel's military operations without condemning the Hamas attacks. Antisemitic references, drawing parallels with the Holocaust and the Nazis, cartoons with Nazi comparison, have been common place during this period. Mainstream daily "Eleftherotypia" published many anti-Israeli articles with anti-Semitic references. Some front page headlines are characteristic : "Avriani" (Dec. 28, 2008) "They began practicing for World War III" / "Eleftheri Ora" (Dec. 29, 08) "Auschwitz – The Gaza Strip, with the Jew as *baker* this time" / "Apogevmatini" (Jan. 5, 09) "Holocaust".

Internet. In the site of the daily paper "Rizospastis", official organ of the Communist Party, a flash animation, appearing in the home page, showed the Israeli flag scattering and the Star of David becoming one of the stars on the U.S. flag. Consequently, all the stars of the U.S. flag were turning into swastikas. Then the following slogan appeared: "Imperialism dropped its mask and put out its Zionist knife".

Athens, February 26, 2009

Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece

ANNEX 1 – Report on anti-Semitic incidents

ANTISEMITIC INCIDENTS IN GREECE related to GAZA CONFLICT (Dec. 31, 2008 - Jan. 23, 2009)

December 31, 2008 – VOLOS, graffiti :

On the front façade of the Synagogue, slogans reading “The State of Israel Murders! Which side do you take?” and «“Neutrality” and “equal distances” do not fit with Genocide».

December 31, 2008 – CORFU, graffiti :

- On the entrance of the Synagogue: “Sheet on Israel” “Jews Nazis” and “Murderers”.
- On the Holocaust Monument: “Gaza 2008 – Why?”.
- On the Prefecture offices: graffiti picturing the Star of David, reading “Gaza 2008 – Dead Youngsters”.

January 8, 2009 – ATHENS, graffiti :

At the Jewish Cemetery: “Israelites – Jews – Murderers”

January 10, 2009 – VEROIA, violent attack :

Attempt to set fire to the Synagogue of Veroia. The Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece filed a complaint against persons unknown.

January 10, 2009 – KOMOTINI, graffiti :

Desecration of the Holocaust Monument with graffiti picturing: “the Star of David = swastika”

January 10, 2009 – DRAMA, graffiti :

Slogans and swastikas on the wall of the Jewish cemetery.

January 18, 2009 – DRAMA, graffiti :

Desecration of the Holocaust Monument and the dedicative plaque with graffiti reading “Greece - Palestine no Jew will remain” & “Zionism murderers of children”

January 16, 2009 LARISSA, graffiti :

- On the Holocaust Monument

Violent attack:

- Attempt to remove the Star of David from the door of the Synagogue and also to violate it. The attack was prevented at the last minute by the police.

January 18, 2009 IOANNINA, violent attack :

Desecration of the Jewish cemetery - three tombs damaged.

February 16, 2009 IOANNINA, graffiti :

Swastikas on the gate of Jewish cemetery

(updated: Feb. 20, 2009)

ANNEX 2 – Article of G. Karatzaferis

“Alpha Ena”, Saturday 3rd – Sunday 4th, January, 2009

It is widely¹ known...

They envied the glory of those whom they hate.

The most hateful person becomes, because of them, more approachable.

They are the worst thing of the 20th century.

HITLER, 3rd REICH, NAZISM

All the peoples. The entire earth. The civilised and the less civilised. The educated and the less educated. We all believed that it would not be possible for those dark pages of history to be repeated again.

And yet, in less than 70 years, the foremost victims of Hitler’s brutality, the JEWS, have turned themselves into murderers, equally heinous as their own.

They have been ceaselessly murdering ever since the ill-starred day when the independence of the State of Israel was declared. It was not ill-starred for having justly satisfied the 2,000-year-old yearning of the Jews for a state of their own. It was so for the pitiable error of the mighty of the inter-war period who did not simultaneously recognise a State of Palestine as well.

It was to be expected that his one-sided recognition would result in bloodshed. This blood was the blood of the innocent, as today, just the same as yesterday and tomorrow.

The state of ISRAEL still feels that –in the name of the Holocaust– it can brutalise, abuse, blackmail and humiliate, people as well as institutions.

This is a continuous and growing provocation against the entire civilised world, which bases its outrageously provocative behaviour, on the invasion, in the public life of most powerful nations, of Jews who follow the ruthless dictates of Zionism. No one is resisting sufficiently. Some countries are resisting partially, but none effectively. It is a SHAME.

With a little effort it would be possible to include them [the Jews] in a Society of Justice, solidarity and understanding.

It is difficult to do such a thing with a race that CRUCIFIED God on the one and only time he came down to earth.

And yet, we must try. They do not know the evil THEY DO. GOD, their GREATEST VICTIM is forever reminding us:

“THEY KNOW NOT WHAT THEY DO.”

Would the murderers of GOD care about a few hundred innocent children being murdered? Their innocent blood is already feeding the flesh, not of the Israelites –for they have developed a thick and insensitive skin after 70 years of continuous murders– but of Bush, even Obama, of the leaders of Europe and of some local supporters of theirs.

UNFORTUNATELY it has become WIDELY known to the whole world that the JEW smells of BLOOD. And it seems that, owing to the tolerance of some, he will continue to smell of blood for many years to come.

Children of Palestine, we apologise.

G. KARATZAFERIS

¹ Although spelled differently, in Greek the word “widely” is pronounced the same as “Jewish”. In the original, the title is deliberately misspelled, resulting in something that could be loosely translated as “It is Jewishly known”.

ANNEX 3 – Letter to the President of the Greek Parliament

To the President of the Greek Parliament
Mr. Dimitris Sioufas
Athens

January 12, 2009

Dear Mr. President of the Greek Parliament:

The head of LA.O.S. Party, Mr. G. Karatzaferis undersigns the following phrases titled **“It is widely² known...”** in the newspaper ALPHA ENA (issue 3-4 January 09), attached.

We quote parts of these publications:

“UNFORTUNATELY it is now WIDELY known throughout the world that the JEW stinks BLOOD”.

“In less than 70 years the first victims of the Nazi atrocities, the JEWS, turn into equally atrocious murderers as their own persecutors.”

“With a little effort we could annihilate them (the Jews) in a Society of Justice, solidarity and concord. This is somehow difficult with a race which CRUCIFIED G-d, the one and unique time He came down to Earth.”

We turn to you, the President of the highest institution of our Democracy, because this is an unacceptable, unique in the Greek records as well as an open expression of anti-Semitism, coming from a member of the Greek Parliament and even leader of a political party.

Dear Mr. President, we, Greek Jews, express our abhorrence and our serious concern; we consider that this wrongdoing of a member of the Greek Parliament, could, under circumstances of extreme racism, be a herald of similar and even violent actions against Greek citizens. Such violent actions have caused affliction to Jews in the past.

At the same time, the abuse coming from the head of LA.O.S. offends the Greek Constitution itself, and exposes our country to the international community.

Dear Mr. President, we feel it is our obligation to inform you that we, Greek Jews, have complete faith in you personally as well as to the high institution of Democracy of which you are a leader. We believe that you will take the necessary initiatives and having the sense of responsibility due to your rank and your personality, you will take actions so that those grounds which could create a spirit of persecution of law abiding citizens are alienated by the Greek Society and condemned outright in the conscience of our Greek fellow citizens.

Yours Sincerely,

Moses Constandinis
President

Abraham Reitan
General Secretary

² Translator’s note: The words “widely” and “Jewishly” have a similar sound in Greek, although a different spelling. Therefore, one may play on these words. In this particular text, “widely” has an anti-Semitic connotation.

ANNEX 4 – Letter of the President of the Greek Parliament to LAOS

Athens, 14.1.2009

To the
Office of the President of the
Parliamentary Group of LA.O.S.

By special command of the President of the Greek Parliament, Mr. Dimitrios Sioufas, we communicate to you, enclosed herewith, the letter of Mr. Moses Constantinis, President of the Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece, dated January 12, 2009, as well as the article which was attached to the letter.

The Special Secretary
of the Hellenic Parliament

Dimitris Papagiannis

ANNEX 5 – The reply of G. Karatzaferis and the comment of “Alpha Ena”

LA.O.S.

POPULAR ORTHODOX RALLY

Athens, 22/01/2009

To Mr. Dimitris Papayiannis
Special Secretary of the Parliament

Mr. Papayiannis:

The letter you delivered to me from the Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece, signed by Mr. Moses Constantinis and Mr. Abraham Reitan is extremely interesting.

They are certainly right. It is not the JEWS but the ISRAELITES who are reeking with blood. They are the ones who claim that among all nations on Earth they are the Chosen People of the Lord whose son they crucified and carried out the bloodiest invasion in the most recent years in the Gaza Strip.

We didn't simply find out about the atrocity of their actions. Unfortunately for them and their supporters we experienced the horror they caused. Ascertainment and truth are not an insult, but a Democratic obligation dictated by the necessity to serve Human Rights.

Naturally, no one ever thought of blaming Greek Jews for anything that Israelites do. The reference to the Jews is due to the identification of the State of Israel to the Jewish religion.

Besides, I am absolutely convinced, like, I believe all Greeks, especially the ones who live abroad and have a close relationship with the Jews of the Diaspora, that anytime and under any circumstances a crisis between Greece and Israel occur (something which we all hope won't be the case), the Greek Jews will be on the side of Greece.

On this occasion, I would like to express the wish that, since we have Muslim Greeks who are members of the Parliament, we shall welcome Jewish ones. In the past we had Jews who were converted to Christianity and held high posts. So, why not have Jews who still keep their faith?

Sincerely,
G. Karatzaferis
President of LA.O.S

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The comment of “Alpha Ena”

The above letter was published in the weekly newspaper “Alpha Ena” (Saturday 24 – Sunday 25 January 2009), under the following comment :

UNLIMITED IMPUDENCE

The Central Jewish Board of Greece demands that the President of the Parliament controls and alienates G. Karatzaferis!

The President of LA.O.S. did nothing more and nothing less than express the anger and disapproval expressed throughout the world for the atrocities still going on in the Strip of Gaza. The former victims of the Holocaust are now the aggressors and aspire to become even more brutal than the Nazis.

However, the unlimited impudence of the native expressers of Zionism as a method of control and constraint, even appearing under the title “Hellenic Republic” reached the point to demand that the President of the Parliament controls and alienates a MP and head of a political party. Of course, the reply, including all the main points was sent back the same way. A word to the wise is enough!