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Handful of recent court decisions take aim at concepts of ‘national’ and ‘religious’ consciousness in Greece



Consecutive and controversial judicial rulings over the recent period have chipped away at the concepts “national” and “religious” consciousness in Greece, a predominately Orthodox nation of 11 million residents.

The latest verdict, by the Council of State, Greece’s highest administrative court, upholds the constitutionality of removing the concept of “development of religious consciousness” from the jurisdiction of the education and religious affairs ministry.

The decision comes after the Greek government complied with a ruling by the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) ordering the removal of the religion

affiliation and citizenship status from high school diplomas and other public school certificates issued by the Greek state.

Moreover, the month's presentation of the official logo that will accompany events, in 2021, to commemorate the 200-year anniversary of the beginning of the Greek War of Independence, entailed another distinctly negative surprise.

The Greece 2021 committee unveiled a logo without any appearance of the Holy Cross, which prominently features on the country's flag since its establishment as an independent state in 1830.

Referring to the high court decision, an announcement by the Church of Greece reminded that the ruling holds that removing the reference to "development of religious consciousness" from the education system was not based on unconstitutionality – but because similar religious instruction is already foreseen in the constitution and under a 1985 law.

On his part, the shadow education minister of leftist Syriza party, former education minister Nikos Filis, praised the decision by the Council of State.

Finally, the European Court of Human Rights issued another final decision, which adjudicated that the Greek education ministry's guideline for issuing exemptions from religion classes violates one's right to education and freedom of conscience and thought.

Previously, parents wishing to receive an exemption for a pupil had to provide an affirmation that their child was not an Orthodox Christian.