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GREEKS' CRIME RATE IS LOWEST IN EUROPE

By NICHOLAS GAGE AUG. 19, 1979

ATHENS — While the rest of Europe is experiencing a soaring crime rate, Greece is enjoying domestic tranquillity and freedom from violence.

Prime Minister Constantine Caramanlis strolls from his home to work nearly every day, stopping to receive the salutations of his constituents. When youths on a motorbike snatch an elderly woman's purse, it is considered worth an article in the newspapers. After dark the sound of footsteps on a lonely street causes no shudders of apprehension. Most families like to promenade at night, and even small children are out until nearly midnight with their parents, greeting neighbors, stopping at cafes and enjoying the warm weather.

Greece has one of the lowest rates of violent crime in the world and the lowest in Europe. The rate for murders last year was 1.3 per 100,000, compared with 8.8 in the United States and 3.8 in Italy. In Turkey last year there were more than 1,499 political assassinations alone, while of the 117 homicides in Greece only one was classed as a political killing.

The reason for the dramatically low crime rate does not seem to be tough treatment of wrongdoers by either judges or prison officials, although from 1967 to 1974, when the military held power, there were reports of brutality.

"Although capital punishment exists on the books, there has not been a single execution in eight years," said Nicholas Androulakis, professor of criminal

law at Athens University. "Long prison terms are not frequent and sentences under one year in length can be bought off for \$10 a day. In the prisons inmates are not expected to work, and those that do have each workday counted as two."

Crime Rate Consistent

The rate of violent crimes has remained fairly consistent except for a period in 1968, when it was even lower. "For about a year everyone apparently held back out of fear of the dictatorship, but by 1969 the rate of convictions had gone back to normal levels," said Mrs. C. D. Spinellis, a lecturer on criminology at the University of Athens Law School who has made a special study of fluctuations in crime rates.

She and Mr. Androulakis concur in attributing the low rate to strong family and community pressures. "Greece remains a traditional society, where family and community ties are still very strong," Mrs. Spinellis said. "There is little anonymity here. When you know your neighbor you don't harm him because you need him. Studies in criminality show that informal controls, such as the family and the community, are the most effective controls."

Alexander Lykourezos, a criminal lawyer, recalled that almost every one of his clients who was involved in a felony was more concerned about his family's reaction to his crime than about the judge's reaction. "The usual family response," he said, "is, 'How could you bring such shame on the family?' — not, 'Why did you do it?' or 'How have we failed you?' A response like that from people you care about is the most effective deterrent there is."

Crime statistics bear out this theory. "The incidence of those crimes condemned by the community — rape, murder, robbery — are very low in Greece, but those crimes not popularly considered reprehensible, like white-collar crime and tax evasion, which is endemic here, are quite high," Mr. Androulakis explained.

Even with those crimes included the number of arrests in 1977 was 223,795, or 2,486 per 100,000, as against an American rate in that year of 5,055 per 100,000.

Mrs. Spinellis, who received a doctorate in comparative law from the University of Chicago Law School, said there was little organized crime to carry out large-scale operations. The few incidents of criminals working in tandem,

she added, have involved the selling of narcotics and the stealing and smuggling of antiquities.

Although family and community strictures may be keeping Greece among the more trouble-free nations, the flood of people moving from small villages into the urban centers is creating anonymity, which is slowly undermining those strictures.

According to Mrs. Spinellis, juvenile delinquency and narcotics arrests are slowly increasing. Although narcotics arrests were a comparatively low 223 last year, they represented a 25 percent rise from 1977. "We're fortunate right now, but we're being extensively urbanized and I'm afraid our low crime rate won't last long," she said.

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