

**NEWS REPORT**

**Date:** 26 January 2010  
**Expert:** Athanasios Theodoridis  
**Title:** Arson of synagogue in the city of Chania  
**Country:** Greece

**Context**

**Issue at stake:** Violent attack and arson against Jewish synagogue reveals racial/ ethnic and religious discrimination in the form of antisemitism

**Ground of discrimination:** of religion/belief, race/ ethnic origin

**Source:** political development

**Field:** Other (religious / racist violence)

**Legislative provisions:** Article 187 of Penal Code (formation of criminal group of constant structure and action), Article 264 of Penal Code (arson), Law 927/79 (interdiction of racial discrimination) as amended by Law 1419/84 (sanctions against racial & religious discrimination) and by Law 2910/01 (ex officio prosecution), Article 79 of Penal Code (judicial designation of penalty) as amended by Law 3719/2008 (aggravation of penalty due to racist motive)

**Content**

**Political development:** Unknown individuals were the perpetrators of the fire that broke out inside a synagogue in Chania's historic old quarter, in the island of Crete, on 16/1/10. This was the second arson attack in a period of two weeks, and it has left the synagogue's infrastructure devastated. The first attack had occurred on 5/1/10. The medieval synagogue of Chania is amongst the most noted Jewish temples in Greece, functioning as both a cultural centre and a house of worship. Thus it serves a crucial role as a memorial and museum, preserving the knowledge and history of Crete's Jewish community which had been decimated in the Holocaust. The perpetrators broke into the synagogue's yard an hour after midnight and set fire to an outdoor wooden ladder which leads to the library. The fire was extinguished immediately before it threatened the temple and the adjoining library. Chania Fire Brigade chief said that at the scene, firefighters found a bottle with a flammable liquid still burning. The fire caused a damage estimated to 30,000 Euros, having burnt through the building's wooden roof and floors several books, archives, four computers, CDs and tapes of Jewish music stored within. The two attacks combined have been responsible for the burning of 2,500 rare books and manuscripts. All that remained of the contents of the building has now been

transferred to another location. The incident generated a firestorm of condemnation not only from within Greece (e.g. political parties, the Ministry of Education, City Council of Chania, media, NGOs, etc.) but also from abroad (e.g. U.S. State Department, Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research – ITF, etc), as well as a high-profile denunciation by the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew in a letter issued to the President of the Central Israeli Council of Greece Moses Constantinis. An investigation into the two attacks had been taken by Chania security forces, and on 22/1/10 two Britons and a Greek man were arrested as responsible for the second arson. On 25/1/10 Police arrested also a U.S. citizen, who is suspected of being the person who set fire during the first arson. The police official of Chania said that the Britons, both in their early twenties, and the 33-year-old Greek were nightclub employees.

After the arrests, Mr. Constantinis expressed his discontent for the fact that the perpetrators should had been arrested before the second attack. Moreover, he emphasised that after the first attack the synagogue had been left completely unprotected by the Police. Finally, the prosecutor pressed charges based on the Article 187 of the Penal Code (formation of criminal group), which is a felony, and on the Article 264 (arson) of the Penal Code, which is a misdemeanor.

**Internet link source and additional information:**

[http://www.eurojewcong.org/ejc/news.php?id\\_article=4928](http://www.eurojewcong.org/ejc/news.php?id_article=4928) ,  
[http://www.ypepth.gr/el\\_ec\\_categoryssn3365.htm](http://www.ypepth.gr/el_ec_categoryssn3365.htm)  
<http://cm.greekhelsinki.gr/index.php?sec=194&cid=3582>  
<http://cm.greekhelsinki.gr/index.php?sec=194&cid=3589> ,  
<http://cm.greekhelsinki.gr/index.php?sec=194&cid=3595> <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2010/01/135479.htm>  
<http://www.petitiononline.com/chasynag/petition.html> ,  
[http://abravanel.wordpress.com/2010/01/07/arson\\_in\\_chania\\_synagogue/](http://abravanel.wordpress.com/2010/01/07/arson_in_chania_synagogue/)  
<http://www.holocausttaskforce.org/news/175-chairs-statement-about-attacks-on-greek-synagogue.html>  
[http://www.astynomia.gr/index.php?option=ozo\\_content&lang=%27..%27&perform=view&id=2805&Itemid=492&lang](http://www.astynomia.gr/index.php?option=ozo_content&lang=%27..%27&perform=view&id=2805&Itemid=492&lang)