

Law 5224/2025 (A' 142) "Establishment of a Legal Entity under Public Law under the name 'Greek Orthodox Sacred Royal Autonomous Monastery of the Holy and God-Trodden Mount Sinai in Greece', regulations on matters under the competence of the General Secretariat for Religious Affairs, enhancing security in higher education institutions, provisions on sports, granting of a lifetime pension to literary figures and artists for the year 2025, and other provisions"

REGULATION OF MATTERS WITHIN THE COMPETENCE OF THE GENERAL SECRETARIAT FOR RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS

CHAPTER A

PURPOSE AND SCOPE

Article 21 Purpose

The purpose of Part B is:

- a. to ensure the unhindered exercise of the right of worship of all religious communities and their members, through the establishment of a modern, comprehensive, and coherent legislative framework governing places of worship of religious communities with or without legal personality, with the exception of the Eastern Orthodox Church of Christ as provided for in Article 3 of the Constitution,
- b. to strengthen the Higher Ecclesiastical Academies and the Departments of Theology of Higher Education Institutions through the admission of foreign students of non-Greek origin,
- c. to facilitate the charitable and public-benefit activities of ecclesiastical institutions,
- d. to reinforce the Schools of Apprenticeship for Candidate Clergy and to facilitate the enrollment of foreign students in Model Ecclesiastical Schools,
- e. to rationalize the staffing of Holy Metropolises,
- f. to recognize the Church of Sweden in Greece as a religious legal entity pursuant to Law No. 4301/2014 (Government Gazette A' 223), concerning the organization of the legal form of religious communities and their associations in Greece, and
- g. to recognize the Bektashi–Alevi Muslims of Thrace as a religious legal entity pursuant to Law No. 4301/2014.

Article 22

Subject

The subject of Part B is:

- a. the definition of places of worship and the provision of procedures for the licensing, construction, establishment, operation, relocation, and building modifications of places of worship of religious communities with or without legal personality, with the exception of the Eastern Orthodox Church of Christ as provided for in Article 3 of the Constitution,
- b. the expansion of eligibility to participate in the entrance examinations of the Higher Ecclesiastical Academies to include graduates of Higher Education Institutions, Technological Educational Institutions, or institutions equivalent thereto, Higher Schools of Pedagogical and Technological Education, in Greece or abroad, and the introduction of the possibility to admit, in excess of the prescribed intake quota, foreign students of non-Greek origin to the Higher Ecclesiastical Academies and to the Departments of Theology of Higher Education Institutions,

- c. the regulation of the legal status of ecclesiastical institutions,
- d. the introduction of the possibility for clergy to attend the Schools of Apprenticeship for Candidate Clergy and the facilitation of the enrollment of foreign students in Model Ecclesiastical Schools,
- e. the introduction of the possibility for married clergy to attend educational programs of the Schools of Apprenticeship for Candidate Clergy,
- f. the provision of the right to teach at the Schools of Apprenticeship for Candidate Clergy to members of the Laboratory Teaching Staff of Higher Education Institutions,
- g. the reallocation of established positions of parish priests and ecclesiastical employees of the Holy Metropolises and the regulation of matters concerning hierodeacons of the Panhellenic Sacred Foundation of the Annunciation of Tinos,
- h. the provision for a digital system for the issuance of permits for weddings and baptisms by the Church of Greece,
- i. the provision for the granting of a residence permit of type “A.5” to students of Model Ecclesiastical Schools residing in student dormitories,
- j. the recognition of the Church of Sweden in Greece as a religious legal entity pursuant to Law No. 4301/2014 (Government Gazette A’ 223), and
- k. the recognition of the Bektashi–Alevi Muslims of Thrace as a religious legal entity pursuant to Law No. 4301/2014.

CHAPTER B

PLACES OF WORSHIP AND RELIGIOUS MINISTERS OF KNOWN RELIGIONS

Article 23

Scope of Application

The provisions of this Chapter shall apply to all religious communities with or without legal personality, with the exception of the Eastern Orthodox Church of Christ as provided for in Article 3 of the Constitution, which shall be governed by special provisions, unless otherwise explicitly provided herein.

Article 24

Places of Worship

1. places of worship are locations dedicated to the expression of religious reverence or the performance of acts of worship and are classified as follows:
 - a. prayer houses, namely places of worship with a surface area of up to two hundred (200) square meters and
 - b. temples, namely places of worship with a surface area exceeding two hundred (200) square meters.
2. The layout of a place of worship shall demonstrate that the distinct area of the main worship space is predominant and determines the use of the space subject to licensing, occupying at least two thirds (2/3) of the total area of the space subject to licensing. Minor deviations from the above percentage may be examined on a case-by-case basis, depending on the specific characteristics of the space, following a reasoned report by the competent engineer, provided that the predominant worship character of the space is not undermined.

3. A place of worship may not be used as a permanent or temporary residence or as accommodation for any person, including the religious minister.
4. Prayer houses and temples existing prior to the year 1955 may be licensed in accordance with the procedure set forth in Article 26, in areas where the applicable urban planning framework and land-use legislation permit the specific land use category of “religious spaces,” without any additional requirement, unless explicitly required by the regulatory planning framework of the area.

Article 25

Designation of Places of Worship

1. The designation of a place of worship shall, in particular, indicate the religious identity of the place, comply with the principle of truthfulness, not contravene public order, good morals, or the international relations of the country, not be used abusively, and not infringe upon the rights of third parties, in particular those of other religious communities, so that the true and accurate religious identity of the place of worship is clearly established without any possibility of confusion. Where, for religious reasons, the designation is expressed in another language, it shall be rendered into the Greek language by means of a faithful translation, with the option of including the original designation in Latin characters in parentheses, so that the true and accurate religious identity of the place of worship is clearly established without any possibility of confusion. Any incorrect or misleading rendering of the designation into the Greek language shall render it unacceptable.
2. Any change in the designation of a place of worship shall require authorization by decision of the Minister of Education, Religious Affairs, and Sports, issued following a relevant application and provided that the conditions set forth in paragraph 1 are fulfilled.

Article 26

Licensing Procedure for Places of Worship of Recognized Religions and Notification Obligations

1. For the construction, establishment, operation, relocation, addition (vertically or by extension), and for any type of construction work in an existing place of worship, or for the demolition of a place of worship of any religious community with or without legal personality, a license is required, issued by the Minister of Education, Religious Affairs, and Sports upon application, and issued in the name of the religious minister. The issuance of the license under the first sentence constitutes a prerequisite for the issuance of the relevant administrative acts, such as building permits and pre-approvals for construction works or changes of use required under urban planning legislation for the operation of the place of worship, approvals from competent authorities or collective bodies, as well as for the submission of notifications. The religious minister is obliged to post, in proximity to the main entrance and at a publicly visible external point of the place, a clearly legible sign indicating the name of the place of worship as stated in the license, the Internet Publication Number of the license, and the religious community to which it belongs.

2. Places of worship existing prior to 1955 operate legally without the license referred to in paragraph 1, provided they hold the relevant certification issued upon their application by the Minister of Education, Religious Affairs, and Sports.
3. Licensing for the construction, establishment, and operation of prayer houses requires an application signed by at least five (5) individuals and one (1) religious minister, who are Greek citizens, citizens of European Union (E.U.) member states, or third-country nationals legally residing in Greece. A natural person acting as a religious minister or as a member of the administration of a public law legal entity under Article 1 of Law No. 2456/1920 (A' 173) or Article 1 of Legislative Decree 301/1969 (A' 195), or of an ecclesiastical or religious legal entity under Law No. 4301/2014 (A' 223), may co-sign more than two (2) applications.
4. Licensing for the construction, establishment, and operation of temples requires an application signed by at least one hundred (100) individuals and one (1) religious minister, who are Greek citizens, citizens of E.U. member states, or third-country nationals legally residing in Greece. A natural person acting as a religious minister or as a member of the administration of a public law legal entity under Article 1 of Law No. 2456/1920 or Article 1 of Legislative Decree 301/1969, or of an ecclesiastical or religious legal entity under Law No. 4301/2014, may co-sign more than two (2) applications.
5. Issuance of licenses under paragraph 1 for places of worship of the Muslim minority of Thrace requires the consent of the relevant Mufti.
6. Licenses under paragraph 1 for places of worship of the Israelite (Jewish) religion shall only be granted to a Public Law Legal Entity under Article 1 of Law No. 2456/1920 and Article 1 of Legislative Decree 301/1969.
7. Religious communities and religious ministers, including those of the Eastern Orthodox Church of Christ under Article 3 of the Constitution and its ministers, when acting in their capacity as religious members:
 - a. are obliged to explicitly and clearly declare the religious community to which they belong:
 - (aa) when publishing books, periodicals, or other religious publications, or broadcasting radio, television, or online programs of religious content, or systematically posting publications and material presenting or transmitting religious teaching on online networks, communication, and information media, and in any informational or promotional material that they distribute, send or disseminate under their responsibility to the public outside their religious community, by any means of information or communication, with the purpose of propagating the religious beliefs of their religious community or recruiting new members to their religious community,
 - (ab) in collective communication with natural persons or representatives or members of associations or legal entities not belonging to their religious community, by any means of communication, for the purpose of propagating the religious beliefs of their religious community or recruiting new members to their religious community, and
 - b. must respect the recipients' refusal to receive the religious material or content referred to in subparagraphs (aa) and (ab) above and shall not repeat communication for the purposes described therein. Administrative fines, as defined in the joint ministerial decision under paragraph 2 of Article 62, shall be imposed on violators.

8. The license for a place of worship under paragraph 1 or the certification under paragraph 2 may be revoked in particular due to:

- a. violation of constitutional provisions, public order rules, or national security as defined in Article 3 of Law No. 5002/2022 (A' 228),
- b. violation of the terms and conditions for issuance of administrative acts under paragraphs 1 and 2 of this Article,
- c. absence of a religious minister for a period exceeding six (6) months;
- d. discontinuation of operation of the place of worship for a period exceeding six (6) months, as established by any appropriate evidence,
- e. operation of the place of worship for purposes other than the expression of religious reverence or the performance of acts of worship, as established by any appropriate evidence,
- f. failure to notify the Ministry of Education, Religious Affairs, and Sports of the Tax Identification Number of the place of worship within thirty (30) days from the date of issuance of the license for establishment and operation,
- g. upon request of the religious community.

Article 27

Replacement, Suspension, and Dismissal of Religious Ministers from the Registry under Article 14 of Law 4301/2014

1. The replacement or suspension of a religious minister, or any deputy or deputies thereof, is permitted with the authorization of the Minister of Education, Religious Affairs, and Sports, issued upon request of the respective religious community.
2. Registration of a religious minister in the registry referred to in Article 14 of Law 4301/2014 (Official Gazette A' 223) shall be suspended upon the initiation of criminal prosecution until the issuance of a final court decision for felonies or the following misdemeanors:
 - a. theft, embezzlement, fraud, extortion, forgery, bribery, breach of trust, breach of duty, false testimony, false accusation, defamation, any crime against sexual freedom or economic exploitation of sexual life, bodily harm to a fetus or newborn, offenses under Law 3500/2006 (Official Gazette A' 232) on domestic violence, abduction of minors, illegal detention, illegal violence, vigilantism, threat, disruption of religious gatherings,
 - b. violence against public officials and judges, undue influence over judicial officers, disruption of official operations, disruption of court proceedings, disobedience, mutiny, impersonation, violation of official seals, failure to maintain security of the authorities,
 - c. incitement to disobedience, incitement to commit crimes, violence, or discord, solicitation or offer to commit a crime, criminal organization, terrorist acts or terrorist organization, punishable support, disturbance of public peace, threats to commit crimes, dissemination of false information, desecration of symbols or places of national or religious significance,
 - d. offenses under Law 927/1979 (Official Gazette A' 139) regarding acts aimed at racial discrimination,
 - e. proselytism under Article 4 of Legislative Decree 1363/1938 (Official Gazette A' 305),
 - f. offenses under Law 4139/2013 (Official Gazette A' 74) regarding addictive substances, and
 - g. impersonation of a religious minister.

The suspension under this paragraph also applies to violations of paragraph 7 of Article 26. In the case of a final conviction, the religious minister shall be removed from the registry.

3. If the religious minister under paragraph 2 is a third-country citizen holding a residence permit, such permit shall be revoked without any voluntary departure period. If the individual applies for a residence permit, the application shall be denied without any voluntary departure period. For the purposes of this provision, the public prosecutor conducting the criminal prosecution or the clerk of the criminal court issuing a final decision shall immediately notify the Directorate of Religious Administration of the Ministry of Education, Religious Affairs, and Sports of the criminal prosecution or the final court decision, respectively.

Article 28

Sealing of Places of Worship – Criminal Penalties – Administrative Fines

1. Places of worship that are constructed or operated without the authorization of the Minister of Education, Religious Affairs, and Sports shall be closed and sealed by the competent police authority, and the sealing decision shall be communicated to the Ministry of Education, Religious Affairs, and Sports. Any person who possesses, erects, or operates a place of worship without the authorization under paragraph 1 of Article 26, or alters the use of such place in violation of the permit, shall be punished by imprisonment of two (2) to six (6) months and an administrative fine, as determined by the joint ministerial decision referred to in paragraph 2 of Article 62. If those are foreign nationals, administrative repatriation shall be imposed in accordance with Articles 21–30 of Law 3907/2011 (Official Gazette A' 7). If they are third-country citizens holding a residence permit, the permit shall be revoked without a voluntary departure period. If they are third-country citizens applying for a residence permit, the application shall be rejected without a voluntary departure period.
2. Submission of an application for the issuance of the permit under paragraph 1 of Article 26 does not suspend the enforcement of this provision.

Article 29

Granting of Government or Local Authority Properties for Use as Places of Worship

1. Places of worship that are classified as monuments in accordance with the Code of Legislation for the Protection of Antiquities and Cultural Heritage (Law 4858/2021, Official Gazette A' 220) may, by decision of the Minister of Culture, be granted for temporary use to the General Secretariat for Religious Affairs solely for the purpose of conducting specific religious rites of recognized religious communities.
2. Entities of the Central Government or Local Government Organizations (LGOs) of first and second degree may, following the prescribed procedure, grant the use of spaces under their exclusive ownership, possession, and control for the performance of specific and particularly significant religious ceremonies to ecclesiastical or religious legal entities under Law 4301/2014 (A' 223) or to recognized religious communities, upon certification by the General Secretariat for Religious Affairs that the recipient is an ecclesiastical or religious legal entity under Law 4301/2014 or holds at least one (1) permit for a place of worship. The granting referred to in this paragraph may not exceed six (6) days per year for each religious community. Municipalities are obliged to notify the competent police authority in writing and to take appropriate measures to ensure the safe conduct of the religious activities of the concerned parties.

3. Entities of the Central Government or LGOs of first and second degree may lease or grant free of charge the use of spaces under their exclusive ownership, possession, and control solely to religious public law legal entities or ecclesiastical or religious legal entities under Law 4301/2014 for the exclusive purpose of conducting their religious worship. In such cases, the permit under paragraph 1 of Article 26 is required for the lawful operation of the places of worship.

Article 30

Administrative Measures

In the event of: (a) the construction, establishment, operation, relocation of places of worship, vertical or horizontal extensions, execution of any type of building works in an existing place of worship, or the demolition of places of worship without the permit of the Minister of Education, Religious Affairs, and Sports as provided under paragraph 1 of Article 26, and (b) the violation of the terms and conditions governing the operation of legally licensed places of worship, as stipulated in Articles 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, and 29, administrative fines shall be imposed in accordance with paragraph 2 of Article 62.

CHAPTER D

ISSUES CONCERNING THE MUFTIATES OF THRACE

Article 34

Special Training Leave for Muftis – Addition of Paragraph 13 to Article 146 of Law 4964/2022

Paragraph 13 is added to Article 146 of Law 4964/2022 (Government Gazette A' 150), regarding the powers and duties of the Muftis of Thrace, as follows:

"13. Upon their request, Muftis and locum tenentes Muftis may be granted a special training leave, with remuneration, by way of exception to the Code of Civil Servants and Public Law Entity Employees (Law 3528/2007, A' 26), for up to three (3) months per calendar year, at public or private institutions in Greece or abroad, with the purpose of acquiring specialized knowledge in religious matters, and in particular concerning the matters of this Article.

The special training leave shall be granted by decision of the Minister of Education, Religious Affairs, and Sports, without requiring the opinion of the competent service council, following a recommendation by the Department of Islamic Matters of the Directorate of Religious Administration of the General Secretariat for Religious Affairs.

The decision referred to in the preceding paragraph shall specify the duration of the training leave, its purpose, the training institution, the method for proving successful completion, and the replacement of the Mufti or locum tenentes Mufti during the period of the training leave."

Article 35

Special Remuneration for Muftis and locum tenentes Muftis – Amendment of Paragraph 4 of Article 160 of Law 4964/2022

At the end of paragraph 4 of Article 160 of Law 4964/2022 (A' 150), concerning transitional provisions, the words "without requiring at least five years of service, continuous or

interrupted, in the duties of the Mufti or locum tenentes Mufti prior to their departure" are added, and paragraph 4 is reformulated as follows:

"4. Those who have served as Muftis or locum tenentes Muftis, who have resigned before the entry into force of the present law and do not fall under subparagraph (a) of paragraph 2 of Article 144 or subparagraph (a) of paragraph 7 of Article 150, are entitled to the payment of the special allowance referred to in paragraph 2 of Article 145, without requiring at least five years of service, continuous or interrupted, in the duties of the Mufti or locum tenentes Mufti prior to their departure."