

European Parliament resolution on the rule of law and media freedom in Greece

IRIS 2024-2:1/8

*Amélie Lacourt
European Audiovisual Observatory*

On 7 February 2023, the European Parliament adopted a resolution on the rule of law and media freedom in Greece, following debates held on 17 January 2023. This resolution was adopted under Rule 132(2) of the European Parliament's Rules of Procedure, which states that when a statement with debate has been placed on its agenda, Parliament shall decide whether or not to wind up the debate with a resolution.

In its resolution, Parliament recalls that the rule of law and freedom of the media have deteriorated in Greece in recent years. As the situation has not been sufficiently addressed, many concerns remain and issues continue to arise. Bearing in mind that the AVMSD aims to ensure the independence of the national regulatory authorities by the objectives of the Directive, as well as the adequate financial and human resources and enforcement powers to carry out their tasks effectively, it noted several aspects of the Greek media landscape that presented or continue to present challenges.

In 2022, Greece adopted legislation to enhance the transparency of media ownership and create a register for print media and the electronic press, making registered companies exclusively eligible for state advertising.

However, the Parliament noted that Greece has the lowest ranking of any EU country - 107th - in the 2023 World Press Freedom Index by Reporters Without Borders and that the Council of Europe's Platform for the Safety of Journalists had identified two cases of impunity for murder, nine active alerts and two other alerts without reply by the end of 2023. It also referred to several national cases, including the so-called Petsas List scandal, involving the distribution of €20 million of state funds for public health communication campaigns to media outlets, including non-existent websites and personal blogs, while excluding certain media outlets altogether without any justification and using non-transparent criteria. The Parliament also referred to lawsuits filed by the nephew and former Secretary General of the Prime Minister's Office to remove an article implicating him in a national spyware scandal, which numerous international freedom of expression and media organisations condemned as a strategic lawsuit against public participation (SLAPP) aimed at suppressing critical reporting. In addition, a preliminary investigation by the Greek General Directorate of Financial and

Economic Crime Unit found that at least 270 funded media outlets were not properly and lawfully registered and that the loss to public funds exceeded EUR 3 million.

Based on such elements, the European Parliament has expressed several concerns about the rule of law in Greece in general, pointing to serious worries about severe threats to democracy, the rule of law and fundamental rights in Greece. While checks and balances are essential for a robust democracy, it is noted with concern that these have come under severe pressure.

The Parliament also expressed specific concerns about media freedom. It expressed deep concern that many journalists face physical threats, verbal attacks, including from high-ranking politicians and ministers, and invasion of privacy through spyware and SLAPPs. According to the Parliament, this is having a chilling effect on journalists. It also insisted that the government has an obligation to take all necessary steps to bring the perpetrators of crimes against individuals, journalists and other media actors to justice, to create a safe environment for all journalists.

Parliament also called on the government to ensure the full independence of its national regulatory authority for the audiovisual sector, as required by the AVMS Directive. It also noted the Commission's conclusion that media regulators lack resources, questioned the objectivity and independence of the Greek National Council for Radio and Television, and expressed concern about the sudden replacement of the Board of Regulators in September 2023. It called on the Commission to monitor the implementation of the new Media Law No 5005/2022 of 21 December 2022, particularly regarding transparency of media ownership.

Parliament highlighted the threat to media pluralism posed by the fact that media ownership in the country is concentrated in the hands of a small number of oligarchs, resulting in a dramatic under-reporting of specific issues. It also noted with concern the lack of transparency in the distribution of state subsidies to media outlets.

In the light of these elements, the Parliament called, inter alia, on the Commission to make full use of the tools at its disposal to address the breaches of the values enshrined in Article 2 TEU in Greece. It recalled that, in the event of financial measures being adopted, the Commission must ensure that the final recipients or beneficiaries of EU funds are not deprived of these funds.

This resolution will be forwarded to the Council, the Commission, the governments and parliaments of the Member States, the Council of Europe, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the United Nations.

European Parliament resolution of 7 February 2024 on the rule of law and media freedom in Greece (2024/2502(RSP))

https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2024-0069_EN.html

