

Rule of Law National Report 2024

Additional Actions from Greece on Media Pluralism

by Secretariat General for Communication and Media (GGEE)

Following the Rule of Law call for input by the member-states on January 2024, and the recommendation to Greece to “take forward the process of adopting non-legislative safeguards and start the legislative process in relation to the protection of journalists”, we wish to mention **further concrete initiatives that have taken place recently to extra support journalists protection, after Rule of Law National Report 2023, not included in the previous written input.**

LEGISLATIVE INITIATIVES

A New Collective Labor Agreement (CLA) was signed on 23 May 2024 between the Greek State and journalistic unions¹ (Journalists' Union of Athens Daily Newspapers, Union of Magazine and Electronic Press Journalists) concerning the working conditions of journalists employed in the public sector, public entities, local government authorities and their legal entities, public enterprises, the General Secretariat for Communication & Media and the Greek public service media ERT and APE-MPE, improving the working conditions of journalists in the broader public sector in practice, and establishing significant non-wage benefits for them and their families.

In the new CLAs, among other things, for the first time:

- Measures for the personal protection and safety of journalists on assignments in war zones or areas affected by natural disasters, humanitarian crises, or epidemics are included.
- Economic protection measures are included to help employees meet basic needs due to the extraordinary and specific socio-economic conditions of recent years, as well as social protection measures for all employees, especially those most in need (persons with disabilities, young couples, new mothers, etc.).
- Vouchers per child attending nurseries are provided, as well as vouchers for renewing electronic equipment.
- Daily meal allowances are increased and provided via individual prepaid cards.
- Training seminars on education and ethics for journalists are established.
- Significant policies for inclusion, equal opportunities, and handling harassment incidents are introduced.

The new CLA was warmly welcomed by the Unions², including the International Federation of Journalists³. Union representatives highlighted, among other things, the landmark initiatives for introducing policies to effectively address workplace harassment for journalists, noting that with the signing of this CLA, Greece becomes the first country to incorporate related European directives.

¹ <https://media.gov.gr/ypografi-syllogikis-symvasis-ergasias-dimosiografon-pou-apascholountai-sto-dimosio-ta-npdd-tous-ota-ti-ngee-tin-ert-kai-to-ape-mpe/>

² <https://www.esiea.gr/simantikes-thesmikes-veltioseis-kai-m/>

³ <https://www.ifj.org/media-centre/news/detail/category/women-workers/article/greece-new-collective-agreement-to-boost-gender-equality-in-state-and-public-media>

The agreement includes new gender equality provisions and enhanced protection for women journalists against harassment⁴. It will be valid for two years, from January 2024 to December 2025. This new agreement is in fact the continuation – with several beneficial additions – of the previous two-year CLA, and is a very important step in the cooperation between the Unions of editors and the State, but also in terms of practical improvement of the working conditions of journalists in the wider public sector⁵. It establishes important non-salary benefits for them and their families which include, inter alia, personal protection and safety measures for journalists who are on journalistic missions in war zones, financial protection measures especially those who need it most (persons with disabilities, new couples, new mothers, etc.), vouchers per child who attends nursery schools, ethics training seminars for journalists, etc.

The official text of the agreement can be found here: https://www.esiea.gr/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/62227_EIΣ-913-2024.pdf

EVENTS & TRAININGS

1. A Special 4-day Training for Police Officers and Journalists, organized in collaboration with UNESCO, took place in June 2024 in Veria⁶. This event was led by the International Training Center for the Safety of Journalists and Media Professionals (ICSJ). This landmark educational initiative focused on protecting freedom of expression and ensuring the safety of journalists. The aim was to equip security forces with the necessary knowledge to improve their interactions with journalists, respecting their work and freedom of the press, and to prepare them to prevent attacks against journalists by politically or criminally motivated violent groups.

The training aimed to enhance cooperation between police officers and journalists, underscoring the importance of press freedom and journalist safety. Through such initiatives, the Greek Police strengthens its ability to protect press freedom, training over 8,000 police officers annually. The program received praise from academia and journalistic unions, with remarks highlighting its “high quality and the difficulty of finding equivalent education elsewhere”. A UNESCO representative also expressed satisfaction with the interaction between security forces and media members during the training.

The training covered a range of topics, including field exercises, fundamental values of freedom of expression, safety of journalists, practical operational aspects, principles of communication, the strengthening of professional relationships between security personnel and the media, etc.

2. An International Conference on Journalists’ Safety titled “Safeguarding Journalists: Mapping the Field”⁷ will be held from September 20-22 in Thessaloniki. This conference aims to address the challenges faced by journalists worldwide and explore strategies to ensure their safety while upholding the principles of free speech and independent journalism. The conference objectives

⁴ <https://www.ifj.org/media-centre/news/detail/category/rewriting-the-story-gender-media-and-politics/article/greece-gender-equality-in-public-and-political-discourse>

⁵ <https://www.esiea.gr/simantikes-thesmikes-veltioseis-kai-m/>

⁶ <https://www.amna.gr/mobile/article/829009/Me-epituchia-oloklirothike-i-ekpaideusi-astunomikon-kai-dimosiografon-ICSJ-se-sunergasia-me-tin-UNESCO-P-Marinakis-Exairetiki-protoboulia->

⁷ <http://safetyforjournalists.org/index.php/en/conference-2024-en>

include: i) Raising awareness about the risks and threats faced by journalists in different parts of the world. ii) Discussing legal frameworks and international mechanisms for protecting journalists. iii) Exploring technological solutions and safety measures for journalists working in conflict zones and hostile environments. iv) Promoting collaboration between media organizations, governments, and civil society to safeguard journalists' rights and freedoms. v) Sharing best practices and case studies on ensuring the safety of journalists in challenging environments. The conference themes include: i) Legal Protection and Accountability ii) Digital Security iii) Safety in Conflict Zones, iv) Covering Crisis and Disasters, v) Trauma Journalism, vi) Gender and Diversity

3. The Third edition of "Safety for Journalists" Training School will be held from September 16-20⁸

The Safety for Journalists Training School is a dynamic, week-long experience that brings together practitioners and experts from around the world. The training objectives focus on the physical, mental, and intellectual preparation of reporters heading into war zones or complex assignments. The curriculum has been developed by global leaders in safety training and complements the activities of the International Training Centre for the Safety of Journalists and Media Professionals. Both the Safety for Journalists Training School and the new International Training Centre are supported by the Peace Journalism Laboratory at Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, where research includes work on international journalism, peace journalism, and reporting on United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC PROTECTION OF JOURNALISTS

A new financial support program was adopted in May 2024 aiming to address the need for financial support for media companies and their employees due to the economic disruption caused by the Russian attack on Ukraine and the sanctions imposed by the EU and international partners, as well as the countermeasures that were taken. The program received approval from the Commission with a relevant decision on May 7, 2024. It encompasses private newspaper publishing companies, regional digital terrestrial television content providers, private radio stations, magazine press, and electronic press companies. This initiative, based on Joint Ministerial Decision E/2018/10.5.2024, helps these entities repay their contributions to their insurance fund (Unified Journalistic Organization for Subsidiary Insurance and Health Care - EDOEAP), according to objective criteria based on the size of each business. This benefits both the businesses and the EDOEAP, which provides comprehensive health care, pension, and unemployment benefits to media professionals. The program aims to ensure the sustainability and growth of media organizations while supporting the welfare of journalists and media workers in Greece. The program is horizontal and based on objective criteria meticulously described in the Joint Ministerial Decision.

The Joint Ministerial Decision is available here:

<https://www.edoeap.gr/2024/05/διαβίβαση-κυα-ε-2018-09-05-2024-β-2729-αδα-ψ0λδ46μνψ7-κση/>

Additional measures concerning journalist's social and economic protection were adopted in the framework of the New Collective Agreement (as mentioned above)

⁸ <http://safetyforjournalists.org/index.php/en/tranining-school-en/about-en>

PUBLIC SERVICE MEDIA

In Friday June 7, 2024, the Independent NRA ASEP and the Secretariat General for Communication and Media **published the call for expression of interest for the position of CEO at Public Broadcaster Hellenic Radio Television S.A. (ERT SA).**

The selection process for the appointment of the CEO is conducted under the new law 5062/23 (A' 183) *"New system for the selection of administrations of public sector entities, strengthening their efficiency and other provisions"* referring to fair conditions and procedures, ensuring that the objective criteria of the new law shape ERT's administrative structure for the coming years.

Candidates must meet a series of stringent criteria and conditions set forth by the new law (as describe in our previous written input). The selection process also includes written exams conducted electronically by ASEP. Applications for the CEO position are due by June 25 and must be submitted to the Independent NRA ASEP, as the new law provides.

This initiative underscores Greece's commitment to enhancing the independence of public service media, fully aligning with the new European Media Freedom Act (EMFA). The call for the CEO position at ERT meticulously adheres to all relevant safeguards stipulated in the EMFA, ensuring a transparent and fair selection process. This includes among others stringent criteria for the selection and also the dismissal of the CEO, thereby reinforcing the integrity and autonomy of public service media in Greece. By implementing these measures, Greece demonstrates its dedication to upholding media freedom and fostering an environment where public service media can operate independently and effectively.

The public call for the CEO position of ERT is available here:

<https://diavgeia.gov.gr/doc/984P46MΓΨ7-ΩΧΚ?inline=true>

Comments:

We would like to stress the importance of including the aforementioned initiatives in the forthcoming 2024 Rule of Law Report. The continuation of recording our initiatives is crucial, as the Greek initiatives are ongoing. We believe that all reports should be updated until the moment of publication for two main reasons: firstly, due to their significant impact, and secondly, because they are used as reference points for up to a year (or more) later. This ensures that the described situation accurately reflects the current reality, avoiding the omission of important developments (as confirmed by other studies and reports that keep falsely reiterating outdated frameworks).