

For Immediate Release

Greece: EU Ignores Deteriorating Rule of Law

Misleading Report Plays Down Curbs in Media, Civic Space

(Brussels, August 1, 2024) – The European Commission's [2024 Rule of Law Report](#), published on July 24, 2024, misleads readers about the state of the rule of law in Greece at a time when media freedom and civic space face dire threats and attacks, 14 human rights and media freedom organizations said today.

The overly positive account in the report starkly contrasts an alarming reality experienced by journalists, activists, and civil society organizations on the ground, and a growing international concern over the deterioration of the rule of law in the country, which was highlighted by 17 human rights and press freedom groups in a [February 2024 letter](#) to European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen.

The European Commission's report, ignores a stark discrepancy between the Greek government's self-reported data and [alarming accounts](#) submitted to the European Commission by civil society organizations and journalists. It disproportionately focuses on positive developments, without weighing them against the broader systemic issues and ongoing violations. This raises concerns about the Commission's willingness to confront the depth of the crisis in a European Union member state, and uphold the rule of law and fundamental rights in Greece.

By glossing over critical issues in Greece facing the media and civil society, the European Commission's findings risk emboldening the Greek government's crackdown on independent media and civil society, the groups said.

Greece consistently ranks last among European Union countries in the Reporters Without Borders [World Press Freedom Index](#). In February 2024, the European Parliament adopted a [resolution expressing](#), “grave concerns about very serious threats to democracy, the rule of law and fundamental rights” in Greece.

While the Commission's Rule of Law report acknowledges issues with the independence and resources of the media regulator, the independence of public service media, access to information, the persistence of threats to journalists' safety, and the potential chilling effect of strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs) and harassment, including by politicians, it fails to grasp the [severity of the ongoing crisis](#), the groups said.

The report highlights some positive developments and legislative changes such as decriminalizing the offense of simple defamation, however inadequately reflects chronic flaws with implementation of past reforms and deep-rooted systemic issues that continue to erode media freedom.

Journalists are intimidated and harassed by [invasive state surveillance](#), including through the [use of commercial spyware](#), abusive legal actions, and coordinated online smear campaigns, often instigated or amplified by pro-government actors. These tactics not only erode journalists' ability to work freely but also endanger their lives, safety, and the confidentiality

of their sources.

This is compounded by this week's supreme court's prosecutor [decision clearing](#) all Greek state agencies or any state official of responsibility for the use of Predator spyware against dozens of prominent individuals, including journalists, despite [documented](#) evidence of their involvement.

[Impunity](#) for those who threaten and harass journalists exacerbates the hostile environment for journalists in Greece as concrete action plans or investigative protocols are not [implemented](#). This week's acquittal of suspects in the 2021 killing of journalist Giorgos Karaivaz, leaving his death unsolved, further perpetuates the climate of impunity for crimes against journalists in Greece. [A lack of media pluralism](#), including inappropriate [government control](#) over state media, and collusion between [media owners and political interests](#) lead to a pervasive climate of censorship and [self-censorship](#), which further distorts the media landscape and undermines journalistic independence.

Civil society organizations and human rights defenders, particularly those working on migration issues, also face [significant obstacles](#), and even [criminal charges](#), for their work in Greece. The European Commission in the report does not adequately address the detrimental effect of these chilling tactics on freedom of expression and association in Greece.

The incoming European Commission should take a stronger stance on upholding its commitment to fundamental rights and democratic values in member states, including publicly condemning specific instances of press freedom restrictions, civil society crackdowns, or rule of law violations.

The people of Greece deserve a free press, a vibrant civil society, and a government that respects the rule of law, the groups said.

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Greek Council for Refugees (GCR)
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