Resolution on the rule of law and media freedom in Greece

2024/2502(RSP) - 07/02/2024 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 330 votes to 254, with 26 abstentions, a resolution on the rule of law and media freedom in Greece.

The text adopted in plenary was tabled by the S&D, Renew, Greens/EFA and the Left groups.

In recent years, the rule of law and media freedom have been deteriorating in Greece. This situation has not been sufficiently addressed and many issues continue to arise.

In 2022, Greece adopted legislation aiming to enhance the transparency of media ownership, and set up a registry for print media, as well as a registry for electronic press, making registered companies exclusively eligible for state advertising.

Parliament expressed severe concerns about very serious threats to democracy, the rule of law and fundamental rights in Greece. It stressed that checks and balances are essential for a robust democracy and noted with concern that these have come under heavy pressure.

Media freedom

Members are deeply concerned by the failure of law enforcement and the judicial authorities in Greece to make progress in the investigation into the murder of the Greek journalist George Karaivaz on 9 April 2021. They noted that two suspects were arrested in April 2023, but otherwise there has not been any discernible activity in the police investigation. The authorities are urged to take all the necessary steps towards conducting a thorough and effective investigation, and to bring those involved in the murder, at any level, to justice.

Parliament is greatly alarmed that, aside from this murder, many journalists face physical threats, verbal attacks, including from high-ranking politicians and ministers, the violation of their privacy with spyware, and SLAPPs. It underlined that this creates a chilling effect for them. They called for these SLAPPs, in particular, to be dropped immediately and insisted that the government has the obligation to take all necessary steps to bring the perpetrators of crimes against individuals, journalists and other media actors to justice, as well as to create a safe environment for all journalists.

Parliament also has concerns over the independence of the national audiovisual regulatory authority, the concentration of **media in the hands of oligarchs**, and the distribution of state subsidies.

Spyware

Parliament called, with regard to the illicit use of surveillance technology such as Predator spyware, for institutional and legal safeguards, including effective ex ante and ex post scrutiny, as well as independent oversight mechanisms, to be urgently restored and strengthened. It should be guaranteed that the authorities can investigate all allegations of the use of spyware freely and in an unhindered manner.

Parliament called for effective investigations with the help of Europol. It asked to reverse legislation that placed the intelligence service under the direct control of the Prime Minister. The resolution voices concerns over the transfer of the investigation to a different prosecutor and political pressure, intimidation and harassment of officials who are scrutinising the government.

Humanitarian context

Parliament is concerned by the attacks against civil society and, in particular, smear campaigns and judicial harassment by Greek authorities targeting human rights activists. It is also alarmed by the recent trials against humanitarian workers and people who provide humanitarian assistance to migrants and refugees. The Greek authorities are urged to drop all charges immediately and ensure that humanitarian workers and volunteers can provide assistance safely and freely.

Members believe it to be crucial that the judicial investigation into the **Tempi train disaster** which caused dozens of deaths in February 2023 be conducted swiftly and comprehensively, covering all actors involved, including responsible government officials.

They are also worried about the treatment of migrants and systematic pushbacks.

While noting that Greece has put in place a legal framework regarding equal treatment, such as the creation of the new Human Rights Commission, Parliament is concerned about the weak legal framework and discrimination against LGBTIQ+ people, Roma and other minorities.

Lack of cooperation

Lastly, Parliament deplored the fact that the Greek Government and police authorities refused to meet with representatives of the European Parliament during its official mission in April 2022 and called for the current Greek Government to establish a constructive dialogue with the European Parliament. It called for a Commission to make full use of the tools available to address the breaches of EU values in Greece, including assessing the use of EU funds under the Common Provisions Regulation in line with the Charter of Fundamental Rights on the one hand, and in relation to the non-implementation of judgments by the European courts in line with the Rule of Law Conditionality Regulation.