

# GREECE

IS THE CRISIS IN GREECE  
A CHANCE FOR ITS MEDIA?

CREDIT : THEODOSIS

INVESTIGATION REPORT - SEPTEMBER 2011

**REPORTERS  
WITHOUT BORDERS**  
FOR PRESS FREEDOM



ARIS MESSINIS AT THE DEMONSTRATION ON JUNE 29, 2011 - CREDIT : ARIS MESSINIS

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**G**reece has fallen steadily in the Reporters Without Borders world press freedom index in the past three years, from 31st place in 2008 to 70th in 2010 (alongside Bulgaria).

This worrying trend is partly due to the system of cronyism in the media since the 1980s but the economic and financial crisis has also exposed the weaknesses and practices of a defective media market. Media groups are poorly funded, artificially supported and in danger of collapsing or even disappearing.

Owned by a few shipowners and other magnates, the media has seen extensive layoffs that have made journalists more vulnerable, and also very gloomy about their prospects as they point to increased and widespread self-censorship. Blogging provides temporary relief from this and much greater freedom of expression but is not an economically viable alternative that will break with the disastrous practices that have grown up in the last 20 years.

Amid the recent public protests and violent clashes, a huge crisis of confidence has also arisen between Greeks and their media. Journalists are seen as delinquents or overprivileged, and by some as the symbol of an evil power that has betrayed the country, at least by omission. Journalists are targeted and insulted in campaigns that mix jeering slogans with death-threats and are careful about the stands they take and the risks they run. Foreign journalists have more protection than their Greek colleagues, but admit they too have problems unusual in a European Union member-country.

The effects of the crisis have also radicalised some people, who have vented their anger and frustration in increasingly violent street demonstrations. Photographers and camera-operators have to work in these hazardous conditions of unrest and almost civil war, caught between violent extremists and brutal riot police little concerned about journalists, and pay a heavy price for recording for the world a society falling apart.

Reporters Without Borders went to Greece in August 2011 to investigate before an autumn that everyone expects will be politically and socially explosive.





He said ERT had for a long time been a “very costly” government operation for the government and said it would be made “non-partisan” and “better quality,” with a guaranteed profit of €8.3 million in 2012. The reforms would be implemented by the end of November 2011.

A dozen privately-owned TV stations broadcast nationwide (including *Mega, Skai, Alter, Antena, Alpha, Makedonia TV* and *Star*) and about a hundred locally. Most TV groups have radio stations of the same name. There is also the national radio, Era, and private stations – *Bima, Flash FM, and Athena 9.84* – which put out news in English and French twice a day, and some that have programme relay agreements with Germany’s national radio Deutsche Welle.

The print media is also prolific, and includes *Ta Nea, Kathimerini Ethnos, Eleftherotypia, Eleftheri Ora, Imerissa, Express, Naftemporiki, Estia* (the country’s oldest daily), *O Logos* and *I Dimokratia*, and as many as 12 sports dailies for a population of 11 million.

“If media laws were applied and taxes and social security contributions collected, there simply wouldn’t be any more print or broadcast media,” writer Markaris told us. “We built giants with feet of clay and the crisis is clearly showing us their enormous weakness.”

Some think only the Sunday press is profitable and funds the weekday press through selling merchandise such as DVDs. These weekend papers (with supplements) sell for €4, have a big circulation of around 250,000 and draw most of the advertising in the media.

## ADVERTISING ALSO IN A SLUMP AND AFFECTED BY THE CRISIS

Greece has many advertising firms, most of them owned by international groups. The economic and financial crisis had cut their revenue by over a third and some fear this figure could reach 55%.

But the economic crisis is not the only reason for this sector’s financial problems. Misuse of credit has contaminated it too. The advertising agencies have not played their role of regulating the market in the face of far too many media outlets for too few advertisers. “They’ve been playing with fire,”



PETROS MARKARIS - CREDIT : RSF

said one editor who asked not to be named. “They’ve relied on cronyism instead of doing cold analyses of print-runs and distribution numbers, though these are almost impossible to do. Each media owner has areas of influence and activities that have to be supported and protected or else provide the owner with support.

“The agencies have allowed themselves to be financially strung along. They’ve agreed to advance funds to media outlets in return for advance cheques based on estimated future revenue. Broadcast programmes have been launched only to disappear a few months later. For most TV stations this system operates at full throttle. Some people working in the sector also pay themselves commission on deals. When all the sources of funding are as shaky as this, an explosion’s inevitable,” the editor said.

Government advertising, an important source of income for the media and usually costing three times more than for private advertisers, has dropped from 30% of the media’s advertising budgets to 12%. The government channelled advertising towards those who supported it. Now it has to cut deficits and can no longer afford to do this, which will have a disastrous effect on the growth plans and income of media groups. ➤



Journalists with regular wages are increasingly rare. Many have been laid off and most are owed several months' salary. Wage payment and solvability problems are plain to see and even the most urgent costs can no longer be paid. The media's debts to staff are put at several million euros. Some media groups are planning to negotiate bankruptcy (known as the article 99 process) and so halt payments, which would protect them from their creditors. It would also allow media owners to skip paying salary arrears and rehire journalists on new terms, outside collective labour agreements.

Dimitris Trimis, one of the leaders of ESYEA, works on the daily Eleftherotypia, where he was in charge of the satirical feature "IOS" (The Virus) which dealt with social and political problems from a different angle. It was abolished by management and moved online, to [www.isopress.gr](http://www.isopress.gr). He was among the journalists injured in the 28 and 29 June 2011 demonstrations.

"The economic crisis has jolted the media's social and economic structure," he says. "The sector's collective labour agreement expired and wasn't renewed. Older journalists can still retain their benefits as long as they don't change jobs inside their media outlet. There's more and more pressure now to use any excuse to alter job descriptions. Employers can force journalists to drop out of a collective agreement in writing and accept a big salary cut. Media groups aren't legally obliged to negotiate collective agreements, and everything is now negotiated individually. Journalists are understandably ready to do anything to keep their job. They agree in writing to give up many things even though they aren't being paid any longer.

"There's a battle among journalists for the few jobs available that's matched by a battle for power among media owners. Over the years, owners have recruited many journalists into a kind of little army of people to protect and expand the interests of the media group without thought for impartial reporting. You can see this immediately with TV news, which is almost like a soap opera where journalists discuss real or imagined scandals that very rarely have anything to do with the public interest. It's a battle for influence waged by journalists who've steadily been made dependent and almost slaves.

"The state-owned media is also hit by the crisis and its journalists are equally vulnerable. The ERT reforms will hand over most broadcasting frequencies and associated markets to the private sector. Nothing is finalised yet (only announcements have been made so far) but nobody is fooled about who the new and even more powerful owners will be. The shipowners

haven't really invested in the media and have run them on the basis of loans they won't be paying back. They can easily continue on this basis or, at worst, invest temporarily to be in a commanding position in a few years time," says Trimis.

The national news agency ANA has so far escaped privatisation. Founded in 1903, it has about 300 staff (including 200 journalists) and remains one of the chief news sources for the media. Its two news wires (domestic and international) are still operating. Oddly, the Athens dailies and magazines can only subscribe to the international wire. Subscription to the domestic wire is banned under a union-inspired agreement seeking to protect print journalists working in Athens. But all the dailies belong one way or another to media groups that also have TV and radio stations not subject to the agreement. So the papers illegally get access to the domestic wire (with login and password) and use it heavily on their websites without paying anything to ANA.

## THE HEAVY PRICE PAID BY PRESS PHOTOGRAPHERS AND CAMERA-OPERATORS

Working conditions during demonstrations are nowadays rather like in a war-zone, which is both surprising and deplorable in an EU member-state.

Press photographers and camera-operators are by far the worst affected. Few protesters make a distinction any longer between media owners and journalists just trying to do a job. Photojournalists and camera-operators are scapegoats for all the bitterness and violence.

To the police, they are undesirable witnesses of often harsh and illegal repression. "Our images show that the police don't know how to do their job," says Aristotelis Messinis, a photographer in Athens for the French Agence France-Presse news agency. "We show up their poor training and their abuses and excesses. The police also consider the pictures taken of them as an invasion of their privacy. It's weird but true. For activists and extremists, we're a similar problem, as undesirable witnesses of their activities that don't belong in such demonstrations. To them, the media is an arm of the government, so they attack us." ➡





GROUP OF PHOTOGRAPHERS CAUGHT UP IN A POLICE CHARGE - CREDIT : ORESTIS PANAGIOTOU

## UNACCEPTABLE WORKING CONDITIONS IN AN EU COUNTRY

It is impossible to work without a gas-mask and a helmet, which are too expensive for most journalists (€170 for a good mask with a filter). Only those working for news agencies can rely on having proper equipment. The luckiest freelancers only have basic equipment which is often not very effective. The best masks have to be big enough to cover the whole face but the openings have to be quite small for cameras to be used. It is hard in these circumstances to have a broad enough view to see blows and attacks coming.

A helmet is essential and the best kind is the "snowboard" which covers the forehead and ears. The objects thrown (marble, stone, petrol-bombs, flairs and so on) can kill instantly. Tear-gas grenades can explode or set fire to the hair. The helmet also very usefully helps to keep the mask in place, as photojournalists are routinely attacked by protesters who try to tear them off. Women journalists are particular targets. Agency camera-operators and photographers also have their equipment insured and can get it replaced if stolen or smashed. Freelancers do not have these advantages and those who try to get insurance have to spell out their activities which results in impossibly-high premiums.

The police recently banned the public sale of gas-masks, until then freely and legally available, and restricted it to photographers with press-cards, which are hard to obtain from the Kafka-like bureaucracy.

The vast majority of photographers and journalists are also concerned about the kind of gas being used. These days, stun grenades and stinging or burning sprays are used alongside "traditional" tear-gas. Empty grenades picked up during demonstrations also show that some of the gas is old. In addition, riot police fire the gas just a few metres away from journalists, making them immediately vomit or faint and giving them headaches and burns.

## A LONE BUT VITAL UNION FOR PHOTOJOURNALISTS

Marios Lolos, president of the The Greek Union of Photojournalists (EFE), has been a photojournalist for 25 years and covered many wars around the world. "Our working conditions have got very much worse since December 2008," he says. At that time, photographers were surprised by summary trials where, for example, people were arrested and accused of having a bag with petrol-bombs in it. Many of us gave our photos for free to lawyers to show that their clients were innocent. The police didn't like this and since then have come down hard on us to make sure we don't get close enough to clearly identify faces. We're not police auxiliaries any more than we're lawyers' assistants, but what happened in 2008 was quite unacceptable and we thought what we did was useful," he says. ➤



The sporting world is also corrupted by rackets and uncontrolled betting that can't be eradicated. "You can't see anything at international events," says Lolos. "FIFA has strict rules that everyone obeys, including the supporters' clubs, but in the Greek League, club bosses impose a tight law of silence. The clubs' private security squads often attack us when we take pictures of club managers or their stands and demand that we erase the photos. If you don't obey, you risk having your equipment smashed. It's almost the law of the jungle."



A CAMERA DESTROYED AFTER A FOOTBALL CROWD INVADDED THE PITCH - CREDIT : SARIKOSTAS

## “IMPOSSIBLE TO EXCUSE BUT PERHAPS POSSIBLE TO EXPLAIN”

Some people try to understand why the police behave the way they do. "They're part of the state and thus reflect all its weaknesses," says Markaris, "but the big problem is that they've never really been controlled by the state. There're no clear policies or directives. They don't know what they should do or how they should do it. The lack of training is glaring, especially among young policemen."

Police are only trained for three months and most riot police do not know the laws under which they operate. They are very badly paid (about €600 a month) and have to pay for some of their equipment and their training ammunition themselves.

"We've always made very bad use of the police," says Markaris, "and for most Greeks they're still the police of the colonels' regime who can't arrest a thief but can always pick out a political opponent. There's an almost-instinctive distrust and defiance towards them. The police and the army weren't purged after the dictatorship. When PASOK came to power they put their allies in control of them and there was a dual authority at all levels of the police. It was a paralysing balance. Half the police were pro-government and half anti-government, depending on the election results. The police shouldn't be politicised, they should be simply functional and under control. We're very far from this. The police also can't represent a state that doesn't exist, which is the situation we're in right now."

Many people told us they were worried about the growing influence of the far-right, estimated at more than 5% of the

electorate and now with seats on Athens city council. It is gradually infiltrating the police, especially the Athens anti-riot squads. Their officials have pointed out to police the great legal weight carried by shots by photojournalists [as opposed to those taken by amateurs] in court cases involving a clear offence. ■

# FOCUS MANOLIS KYPRAIOS

MANOLIS KYPRAIOS HAS BEEN A PHOTOGRAPHER FOR NEARLY 20 YEARS AND WE WENT TO SEE HIM AT HIS HOME. HE WAS BRUTALLY BEATEN ON 15 AUGUST 2011 AND HIS RESULTANT LOSS OF HEARING HAS MEANT LOSS OF BALANCE, WHICH MAKES ANY MOVING AROUND DIFFICULT.

«**M**anolis Kypraios has been a photographer for nearly 20 years and we went to see him at his home. He was brutally beaten on 15 August 2011 and his resultant loss of hearing has meant loss of balance, which makes any moving around difficult.

“I’ve covered nearly all the wars of the past 20 years,” he said. “Kosovo, Nigeria, all over the Middle East, Georgia and Abkhazia, and it’s here in my own country that I get a lifelong injury. I still don’t believe it!

“On 15 August, I was covering the trade union demonstrations. Between 2 and 3 in the afternoon, at the junction of Xe-

nofontas and Filellinon streets, protesters were clashing with the MAT riot police. I went closer while continuing to send photos live to my customer from my phone and also taking photos for the website. The police, making obscene gestures, ordered me to stop taking pictures. So I went back toward Constitution Square and came to a cul-de-sac near Filellinon Street where one of my customers had an office where I thought I could take refuge as the situation was deteriorating. The MAT followed me and asked what I was doing there. I said I was taking photos, that I was a journalist and I showed him my press card.

“He turned to his subordinate and said: ‘Deal with him!’ The other MAT fired a stun grenade at me. The shock, and the flash and noise in the alleyway was terrible. I threw myself on the

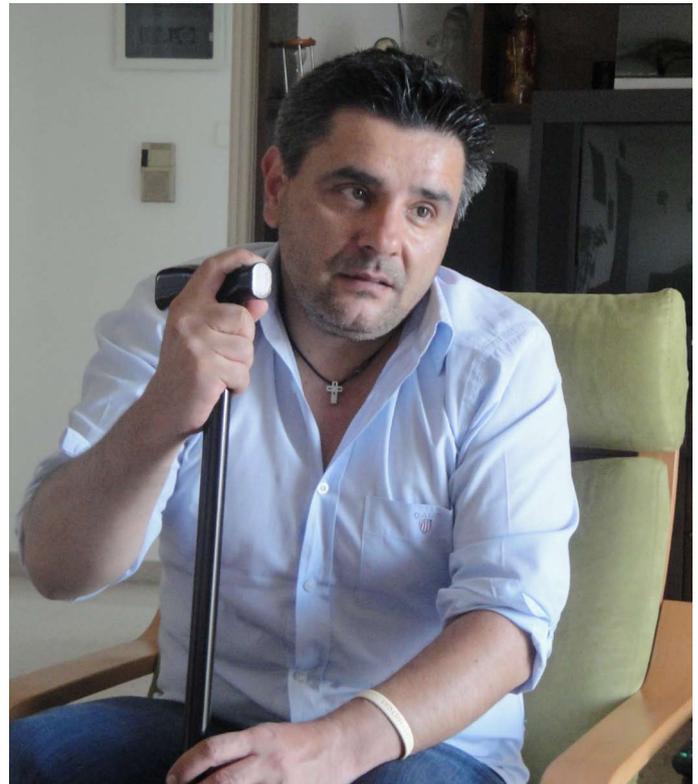
ground and thought I was going to die, and then I fainted. When I woke up I was surrounded by people trying to bring me round. They helped me to get up, I couldn't hear anything and I was staggering. The people said I should go to hospital. Going up Filellinon Street, I came across a group surrounded by motorcycle police, two on each bike, one hitting out as the other drove. It was terrible. I saw one terrified boy no older than 15 and I threw myself on him to protect him. The police beat me on the back, chest and in the kidneys and then kicked me. It lasted about 10 minutes.

"When they left I got up and tried to make my way to the nearest hospital. I was in pain all over and I couldn't hear anything. I sat down on a bench near the Anglican church. I asked the way to hospital from the first police I saw and asked them to call an ambulance because I could hardly walk. But they just laughed. Passers-by helped me get to the Evangelismos hospital where doctors couldn't help me. Nurses sent me to another hospital, Erithro, and I got there by taxi and was immediately taken in. Next day they told me I'd gone deaf in my left ear and the day after that I lost hearing in the other. I stayed there for eight days.

"I can't hear anything anymore and I can't sleep. In the evenings, I feel like I'm drowning at the bottom of the ocean in total silence. I have terrible toothache. Since I left hospital, I've shut myself in at home. I no longer have my bearings and I can't drive or work. I communicate by writing on a notepad because I can't speak properly anymore and don't hear anything. I'm depressed but I'm seeing a psychiatrist. I've had a first operation for an ear implant. In a year's time I'll have another and if doctors can coordinate sound frequencies, I might get some of my hearing back. But I won't be able to drive at night again or walk without a stick.

"If the MAT knew they'd be prosecuted and punished, they would never've done this to me, and there wouldn't've been so many injuries during these last three demonstrations. They just do what they want. I always said the most violent police I'd seen were in Turkey, but what we've seen here is worse. This is what I'm most concerned about. It has to stop before there're other cases like mine, or worse."

Like many other journalists, Kypraios is very worried about police using plastic bullets in future demonstrations. "They're not trained to use this kind of thing and there'll be some real tragedies," he says. "This can't be allowed to happen. It's not worthy of a European country. The justice minister has publicly



MANOLIS KYPRAIOS AT HIS HOME - CREDIT : RSF

apologised and even intervened to see my complaint is dealt with [it is scheduled for mid-September but normally it could have taken many months or even years], the minister for human rights and protection of citizens, Xristos Papoutsis, hasn't done so and says he has no responsibility in the matter.

Kypraios had not been paid since June. The Greek Union of Photojournalists (EFE) has taken on all his medical costs (more than €100,000) but he can no longer work and now depends solely on his family. ■

# “DELINQUENTS, MERCENARIES, JOURNALISTS”...

GREEKS PROFOUNDLY DISTRUST THEIR MEDIA. THEY STILL “CONSUME” NEWSPAPERS AND MAGAZINES BUT MORE TO READ SOME OF THE FEW MORE RESPECTED JOURNALISTS WHO PROVIDE BASIC INFORMATION THAT WILL BE THEN ARGUED ABOUT ONLINE ON THE COUNTRY’S RAPIDLY GROWING AND VERY POPULAR BLOGS.

## A PROFESSION SCORNED AND OPENLY THREATENED. JOURNALISTS UNDER PROTECTION

Activists on all sides (past masters of mockery) have stepped up their slogans and taunting of often well-known journalists – a short step to insults and calls for their death. Posters naming journalists considered “frauds” have gone up in the centre of Athens. «Delinquents, hooligans, journalists” and “cops, pigs, murderers” are the main slogans heard at all demonstrations. Leaflets with photos and names of journalists are distributed widely in the streets. Journalists have tried to respond with humour and intelligence by inventing their own slogan: “We’re not delinquents, we’re not mercenaries, we’re just journalists reduced to beggars.” No serious investigation has been done to find the authors of these denunciations by name. Graffiti all over Athens, especially in anarchist neighbourhoods, attacks journalists with a puzzling violence and hatred.

Journalists are now physically assaulted in the street, some when they buy a foreign newspaper or because they’re recognised. Like politicians, some who are easily spotted are treated as potentially guilty, as people who should pay a penalty and can be legitimately hounded.

The situation has worsened in recent months and some journalists have changed their daily habits, taking different routes and looking under their cars for home-made bombs. Some have had their cars vandalised. Even more worrying, a dozen journalists now have bodyguards paid for by their employers. Greece has joined Italy and Denmark as a country where some

journalists are forced to take special precautions just because they reported what is going on in the country or exercising their right to self-expression.

## JOURNALISTS ARE NOT REPRESENTATIVES OF POLITICAL PARTIES

Journalists keep stressing that they have no business doing “public relations” work for political parties or media owners. But the format of early-evening TV news programmes, the main source of news for most people, does not help. The hour-long programme put out by most stations reports domestic news in a way almost unique in Europe, with a panel of up to six journalists, each permanently “covering” the activity of a political party and reporting their views. “You have to really know the profession and take a huge distance to try to understand that the journalist isn’t a spokesperson for the party he’s supposed to be reporting on,” one former foreign correspondent told us.

“The conviction some of them display makes it very hard not to believe they aren’t members of the party. There’s almost no analysis. They just report what’s said by people they follow



PETROL BOMB THROWN AT A GROUP OF PHOTOJOURNALISTS - CREDIT : SAITAS PANTELIS

around everywhere. They sound like press attachés, which in fact some of them are and which increases the confusion. Some even interrupt the others or insult them like in a political debate, which is what these news programmes closely resemble. I'm not saying they're party spokespersons but it certainly looks they are from what you see and hear on the screen. I don't know why we're still attached to this format, which is supposed to ensure everyone gets their say but is very far from what journalism should be about," the former foreign correspondent said.

Journalism is an endless battle to find news and in the course of it, some colleagues have teamed up with their sources when they should be looking them in the face. This contributes to self-censorship too."

The ANA board has several journalists union members on it but the government appoints two of its members, including the president, who is also the news editor. Board members serve four-year terms, like members of parliament, and the news editor changes at each election. "It's not a rule but that's how it is," Tsiovaras says.

## VULNERABILITY AND FEAR OF REPRISALS INCREASES SELF-CENSORSHIP

One news editor, of a privately-owned TV station, who insisted strictly that he not be named, admitted he censored himself every day and had done for a very long time. "It's the price I pay for remaining a journalist and keeping my senior position

and the hope of still influencing things. If I'm saying this, you can imagine what's happening here on the floor below."

Economic uncertainty and the risk of losing one's job due to a now very broadly-defined "professional error" are not the only reasons for the growth of self-censorship. "Journalists are frightened now," says investigative journalist Telloglou. "They don't want to cover things that aren't strictly mainstream, especially Greek news. You have to go with the pack. Some colleagues are scared for their physical safety if they take a stand in favour of unpopular but necessary measures. Some weigh up, in everything they write, the balance between the truth, the reason for printing it and the trouble it might cause for them. This encourages greater self-censorship that's already widespread."

Only Grigoris Tsiovaras, of the ANA news agency, plays down the self-censorship. "It's existence doesn't surprise me. That said, even in Greece, when journalists want to say something they can always find a way. It's just one of several constraints.



IN CONSTITUTION SQUARE (ATHENS)  
CREDIT : RSF



A POSTER THREATENING JOURNALISTS  
CREDIT : RSF

Some doubt that independence and lack of self-censorship is possible in an entirely government-funded news agency. "You can criticise ANA but we're perhaps the country's only media outlet where its true owner is known and how it's funded," he says. "I can assure you there're no subjects we don't cover freely. I'm not talking about the past but under the present management there aren't any."

Another constant problem for the media is access to government data, which is officially available by law but in reality is very hard to get and requires a lot of patience. Trimis, of ESYEA, says "the legal framework isn't the obstacle. In fact it's quite good. We're just up against a state and a bureaucracy that never respond to our requests and bury them over time, and since you run out of time you end up dropping the matter. They don't refuse your request for data, they just don't tell you where it can be found. They never answer. There's no direct or legalised censorship but in practice it's growing because credible or official sources are drying up," says Trimis. ➤



RWB: Papoutsis didn't tell EFE that the incidents would be investigated and that police involved in assault and violence against the media could be prosecuted.

TK: Internal investigations are under way.

RWB: How many?

TK: I don't have an immediate figure but I can tell you that after each case, after each complaint, a new enquiry is launched. If the complaints aren't filed at police stations but with a prosecutor, he tells us at once and we start a different investigation. Independently of the criminal law there's also disciplinary enquiry. But the presumption of innocence enjoyed by all Greeks also applies to all police who are accused.

RWB: So the attack on Manolis Kypraios is being investigated ?

TK: Not just his case but those of all who've filed complaints.

RWB: But Kypraios will probably be handicapped for life.

TK: You know, we have 126 injured police, 26 of them still in hospital. One has also been made deaf after a flare went off.

RWB: How can police attacks on journalists be avoided, because it seems showing a press-card isn't enough to avoid being attacked?

TK: We have to find another way to identify them. Like the police, easily recognisable in uniforms. Maybe journalists could wear a jacket or other distinctive garment.

RWB: This doesn't explain why the police keep on beating, or even starting to beat, a journalist who shows his press-card. This clearer identification would risk making journalists the targets of extremists who hate the media. Several journalists have been attacked by these people.

TK: Choosing to become a journalist has its risks, like choosing to become a policeman. Anyone who goes to a place of violence knows they can be a target. It's something people have to accept. The 126 injured police accept their injuries as part of their job. It's not the rule. A policeman isn't a punchbag. He's a professional, with a family and parents, and if he leaves for work in the morning he should come home uninjured at the end of the day. Just as you ask to be treated impartially and correctly, the policeman asks for the same treatment. The media too have to avoid excesses.

RWB: How can a journalist commit excesses?

TK: By not doing his job objectively. By being on the spot just to report police excesses. By just wanting to show the force of the riot police. That's not objective. A journalist on the spot must show and prove to the Greek public the excesses of each side. This is perhaps where the emotional misunderstanding that I talked about arises. When a policeman sees a journalist, not a specific person but any journalist, it can remind him emotionally of situations and cases where he was unjustly treated as a policeman by the media. You know, feelings are such here that if you take a picture of a policeman with his hands in the air facing a citizen also with his hands in the air, if you show the picture to somebody he'll say the policeman is about to hit the person and that the other person is trying to defend himself. ■



## FOREIGN MEDIA SOMETIMES PAY A PRICE FOR THEIR SMALL PRIVILEGES

Foreign media are seen as more credible than domestic media outlets and have a slightly privileged position but are still subject to abuses or an occasional news boycott. "Greeks aren't really happy with the world spotlight on their

tics that more and more foreign correspondents hesitate to talk about their working conditions, especially those working for the English-speaking media. German reporters had a tough time after the German magazine Focus printed a very critical cover about Greece, the magazine Die Stern made further criticism and remarks were made that all Greeks were "thieves and layabouts." Just like Greek journalists, their German colleagues were held responsible for their employers but also for their government, and they became a target for public vindictiveness. Graffiti insulting foreign journalists appeared on the Foreign Press Association building.



GRAFFITI IN ANARCHIST NEIGHBOURHOOD IN ATHENS - CREDIT : RSF



GRIGORIS TSIOVARAS - CREDIT : RSF

"The problem of media freedom in Greece is like the issue of the country's debt – everyone knows about it but nobody talks about it," a leading Greek columnist told us, asking not to be named. "We're all guilty, including journalists. Our society is based on a tacit agreement to keep quiet about things. It's a bit like the Mafia vow of silence. It's in everyone's interest and in this way we avoid trouble. We're going to pay dearly for our silence." His view was shared by everyone we talked to.

current troubles," says Isabelle Malsang, AFP's Athens bureau chief. "Two years ago, Greece hardly got a mention. Now everyone's here and the country's being analysed and criticised from all sides. It's become harder to get reaction, especially from the authorities." Politicians are regularly accused of "treachery" when they speak to the foreign media. Increased physical attacks on MPs and their offices make them more careful or they simply fall silent.

International news agencies and some foreign correspondents also point to restrictions on information from government sources that sometimes favour the domestic media – a sort of unofficial boycott through lack of invitations to press conferences or lack of responses or statements. This attitude varies over time and Reporters Without Borders has criticised it, but it has resurfaced during the present crisis.

Perhaps more surprising, Reporters Without Borders has no-

## DIGITAL JOURNALISM'S LIMITED SUCCESS

Greeks still had a lot of trouble getting phone lines installed in the early 1990s, but things have greatly speeded up since then. The big European telecom companies entered the market between 1993 and 1995, sorting out fixed-line and mobile access and expanding availability of the Internet, which is now everywhere. Subscriptions are reasonable (around €35 monthly for a phone and Internet package), and especially an Internet-only service for just €10. Smartphone Internet access is still too expensive however.

Because they deeply distrust the mainstream media, Greeks are more and more taking to "citizen journalism" and blogs and news sites are growing fast. The justice ministry reckons there

are 55,000 blogs operating in the country. Journalists who have lost their jobs have found a place where they try to continue working. The web offers no short or medium-term earnings but in a country where most journalists have not been paid for more than six months, going online makes little difference to them. Most online journalism is commentary or analysis of mainstream media content.

“Many journalists have gained access to the ANA service, mostly using our stories on their blogs and news sites without changes,” says ANA’s Tsiovaras. “No news site is doing real investigative journalism yet. They’re mostly commentators or others analysing what they get from us unfortunately free of charge.”

Journalist Stelios Kouloglou is very familiar with the Greek media, especially broadcasting, after founding in 1995 through his production company a programme called “Reporters Without Borders” (no relation to our organisation), broadcast by ERT. It won a lot of journalism prizes for its choice and quality of coverage, but in June 2008 Kouloglou signed its death warrant by putting out, against ERT’s advice, a report called “The 700 Generation,” about how an entire generation of young people were living on salaries of under €700 a month.

He was pushed out of the government media but persisted and in November 2008 set up the country’s first online TV station, TVXS.gr, with a dozen staff and at least 450,000 unique visitors a month. The station has survived the economic crisis and inspired imitations.

## PHONE-TAPPING AND INCREASED ONLINE SURVEILLANCE

The 2004 Olympic Games in Athens involved maximum security for fear of a repeat of the September 2001 attacks in the

US. Extensive precautions were taken, especially concerning cameras, and the authorities accepted US government and private sector control of security for the Games. A huge scandal erupted in 2006 when a routine maintenance check showed that the phones of the prime minister, president of parliament, head of the armed forces and other top officials were being tapped, along with those of very many journalists. Greeks now have a great suspicion of their phones. Many journalists say their phones are tapped, some permanently and some depending on what they are working on.



STREET PLAQUE NEAR THE PREMISES OF THE FOREIGN PRESS ASSOCIATION - CREDIT : RSF

Online activity hardly figures in Greek law, with no rules about blogs or websites. But justice minister Miltiadis Papaioannou has proposed regulating the sector in a measure to be discussed at the end of September 2011. It expands the list of offences that justify exemption from privacy of communications and even proposes to abolish online anonymity. Council of state prosecutors back this abolition both for crimes and “suspected offences.” The search-engine Google was recently forced by the government’s Internet crime unit to reveal the identity of the owner of the blog Fimotro (The Muzzle), which posts very harsh

and sometimes obscene criticism of the media. A request for this was made after the owner of the privately-owned TV station MEGA and his son received death-threats.

## THE INDYMEDIA PLATFORM, ENEMY OF THE RIOT POLICE

Indymedia is not really a news site but a clearing-house for news of demonstrations – where they are, what they are about and what incidents are taking place. It is the bane of the police, but they use it as a reliable source for organising their responses. It is informally fed by dozens of people and has a page for comment and discussion dominated by the left and extreme left. Anarchists are linked with the non-parliamentary left and

dissident opinions are tolerated but not very common.

The far-right DOS party filed several complaints against Indymedia in December 2008 for “calls to violence” in a bid to shut down the site and its Athens University based servers. The university rector, a believer in freedom of expression and guarantor of the values of the university, opposed the attempt and was prosecuted for “taking part in criminal activity.” Many were surprised when the courts ruled in his favour, showing that the judiciary is slowly regaining its independence.

But the authorities do not always share the view of the courts, and on the eve of big gatherings or demonstrations sometimes cut electricity supply to the university’s data centre, also cutting off access to Indymedia in the hope of hampering the demonstrators. Government censorship of Indymedia seriously harms the government’s image but such action is now being cancelled out by use of social networks and text-messages.

Online censorship efforts went further when police cut off all Internet access as they evacuated the “Indignant Citizens” protesters from Constitution Square during the night of 30-31 August this year. No wifi signal was available and all GSM networks in the area were down. This drastic measure, apparently with no legal basis, is one the police have used before. ■

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Reporters Without Borders strongly condemns cutting off Internet or mobile phone access during demonstrations, police interventions or in other circumstances. Such censorship cannot be tolerated in a European Union member-state. Access to the Internet and online information is a basic right under article 11 of the EU's Charter of Fundamental Rights.

Reporters Without Borders urges the Greek government not to try to increase monitoring of text-messages and social networking sites and calls on the authorities to begin talks with civil society groups and international organisations before proposing any law to regulate online activity. The bill proposed by the justice minister must be discussed without fail before being presented to parliament. Reporters Without Borders is ready to help the authorities with this process.

### REPORTERS WITHOUT BORDERS ASKS:

- that all complaints filed by journalists and photojournalists about police violence be carefully examined, that each be investigated and the results sent to the complainant and journalist organisations, and that exemplary punishment be meted out.
- that repression of the media cease when its members (journalists, camera-operators and photojournalists) clearly identify themselves to police at the scene.
- that the authorities ensure domestic and foreign media have free and fair access to all sources of public information, especially press conferences, since withholding such information is censorship incompatible with European standards and democratic principles.

### REPORTERS WITHOUT BORDERS ALSO RECOMMENDS THAT THE GOVERNMENT AND RELEVANT AUTHORITIES:

- begin as soon as possible a constructive and regular dialogue with journalist organisations to work out together practical measures and procedures to ensure the media can work

freely during public demonstrations and in public places.

- drop the proposal to require journalists to identify themselves by wearing special clothing when doing their job. Reporters Without Borders points out that the right to gather and distribute news is not the exclusive right of any profession or group and wearing such clothing would violate this basic universal right.

- The organisation also calls on the heads of police departments to update as often as they can the orders given to protect the media when they are legitimately doing their job and to ensure that police are thoroughly trained about the principle of the right to information.

### REPORTERS WITHOUT BORDERS ASKS THE HEADS OF GREEK NATIONAL LEAGUE FOOTBALL CLUBS

- to urgently improve working conditions for journalists and photojournalists, especially in their contacts with team managers and heads of supporters' clubs. A public dialogue with professional organisations must be opened.
- to stop seizing journalists' equipment and stop deleting photos taken in public places.

## THANKS

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REPORTERS WITHOUT BORDERS is an international press freedom organisation. It monitors and reports violations of media freedom throughout the world. Reporters Without Borders analyses the information it obtains and uses press releases, letters, investigative reports and recommendations to alert public opinion to abuses against journalists and violations of free expression, and to put pressure on politicians and government officials.

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