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Media Capture in Greece:

Entanglement of the fourth estate



Media capture in Greece: Entanglement of the fourth estate

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Introduction

Over the past decade, independent journalism and press freedom across large parts of Europe have faced increasing pressures from the phenomenon of media capture. This system for controlling the media involves the capture of once-independent media houses by vested political or business interests, which collude to control the narrative and serve their own political and financial ends. In this symbiotic relationship, media tycoons acquire media assets in order to wield influence and curry favour with the state, while the government benefits from positive coverage in return for indirect subsidization in the form of state advertising contracts and lucrative contracts in other sectors. In many countries in Central and Eastern Europe, this stealth-like takeover of news media by oligarchic owners working in tandem with state authorities in the last few decades has severely distorted the free flow of information and eroded media pluralism, with deeply damaging effects on democracy.

While media capture in Europe takes different forms, the most advanced model of media capture within the European Union has been developed in Hungary. This model is characterized by the use of legislative, regulatory and financial powers of the state by the dominant political force to capture media to advance its political interests. While private oligarchs act in collusion and benefit from the arrangement, the balance of power lies with the government. In this model, four key indicators have been highlighted: 1) capture of private media, 2) capture of public media, 3) capture of the system of funding media, 4) capture of media regulators. Media capture is most entrenched and systemic where all four indicators are achieved by the ruling party in cooperation with business interests.

In recent years, the International Press Institute (IPI) has been documenting different forms of media capture across Europe in a series of reports. IPI's monitoring and reporting have outlined the expansion of media capture tactics from Hungary to other Central European states, including Poland. Dedicated reports have been produced on media capture in the Czech Republic, Bulgaria and Slovakia. In this report, the analysis of media capture in the EU moves for the first time beyond the borders of Central and Eastern Europe to its southern border: Greece - a country which has often been overlooked in analyses of media capture in Europe. This report will examine media capture in Greece through the four indicators of media capture outlined above. It will also provide an updated overview of the current media ownership landscape in the country. After outlining its conclusions about the current picture for media capture, it presents recommendations for how to protect the media ecosystem against capture by business and political interests.

In addition to examining the different forms this phenomenon takes, and its damaging effects on watchdog media, journalistic standards and democratic values, IPI's work is aimed at finding international solutions to help stem the tide of media capture. The findings of this report also underscore the need for the EU to pass a strong and effective European Media Freedom Act (EMFA) which can help safeguard media pluralism and independent journalism across the bloc. Amidst wider backsliding on media freedom in Greece in the last three years, this report concludes that efforts by the government to improve the overall picture for press freedom in Greece cannot be decoupled from efforts to unwind media capture. These conclusions and the recommendations are aimed at supporting much needed democratic reforms to bolster free, independent and pluralistic media in Greece.



A History of Media Capture in Greece

Media capture is on the rise in Greece, a country whose media landscape has traditionally been dominated by a few media tycoons who exchanged favors with the economic and political elite. The story of the Greek media in Greece is characterized by the term “diaploki”. This “diaploki” - or entanglement - is what happens when the “triangle of interdependence” of media - state - banks goes unregulated. This entanglement has defined the relationship between big media and governments in Greece for 20 years (1993-2013). These intertwining interests have become ever more pronounced during and since the financial crisis intensified the media’s economic dependence on state support.

The origins of modern media capture in Greece can be traced back to the late 1980s when the deregulation of the telecommunications industry ushered in increasingly concentrated ownership across the media sectors. More importantly, the deregulation of the broadcasting field in Greece took place in the absence of state intervention. The National Council for Radio and Television (ESR) failed to establish criteria for the legitimate operation of radio and television stations. The relevant law set “experience in the field of mass media” as a criterion for media ownership, favoring station ownership by existing companies in the publishing sector.

In practice, however, new private stations and owners took over frequencies and started broadcasting without licenses, taking advantage of the institutional vacuum. This deregulated landscape for private media developed in an uneven and unplanned manner. As a result the entry of private media into the market went ungoverned by rules. Pluralism was not protected, rules on cross or horizontal media ownership were not established, and organized license distribution was highly delayed or disrupted.

This absence of a functioning regulatory framework enabled political actors to exercise undue control and influence over the newly established but economically vulnerable media. Media operating without or with only temporary licenses were vulnerable to political pressure by ruling parties seeking favourable coverage in return of financial and regulatory guarantees, creating ideal conditions for media capture.

Media capture is in essence a symbiotic system. For their part, media owners in Greece have historically had their own motives for becoming entangled in this web of conflicting interests. On the one hand, they sought to exert general influence over ruling parties. On the other, many used their media to secure privileged treatment such as to obtain public contracts in other business sectors. Some have used their media assets to pursue political ends, others financial.

The third factor of entanglement (“diaploki”) was the Greek banking system, which has backed both the financially-troubled media and the political parties, especially from the 1990s onwards. During the prolonged financial crisis post-2008, banks, now reinforced with resources from the bailout mechanism, continued to support commercial media, even when it was evident that the loans could not be repaid. These questionable loans led to defaults and bankruptcies, while those that survived saw their dependence on the banks deepen.

This mixture of historical and economic factors has significantly influenced the development of modern journalism in Greece, which is too often subject to the financial interests of news organization owners and shaped by a culture of political expediency, with political elites seeking to exert control over content. As a result, too many Greek journalists find themselves operating within an environment that is heavily influenced by corporate and political interests.

Financial crisis, collapse of the traditional media and the new era

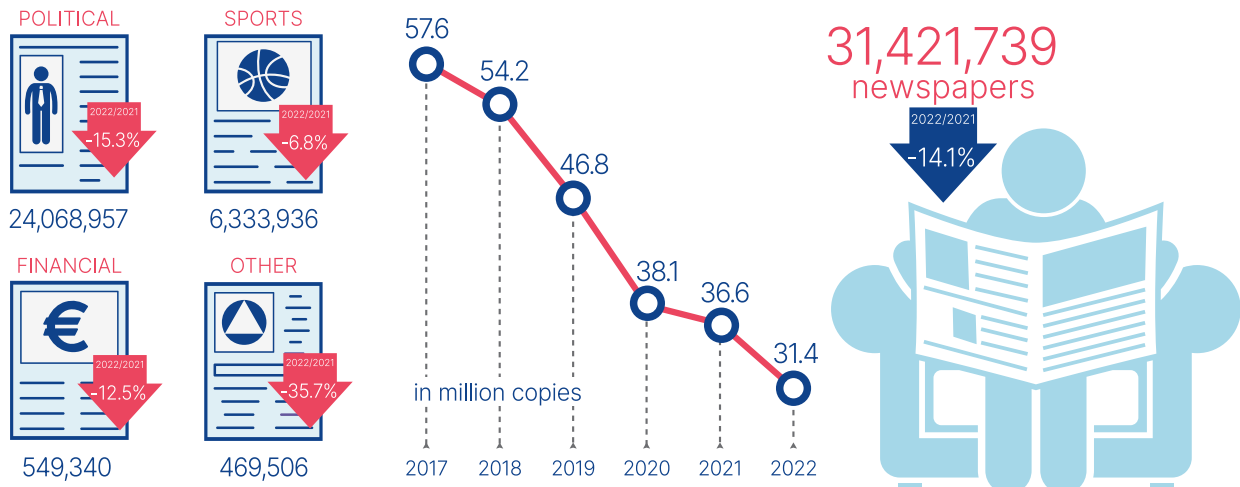
The Greek media sector, already weak, was dealt a hammerblow by the financial crisis of 2008 and subsequent austerity measures. The financial crisis had a detrimental impact on the quality and independence of media resulted in increased pressures on journalists. After the economic crash, media organizations faced a collapse in advertising revenue and consumer spending power, leading to slashed budgets, pay cuts and widespread layoffs across the industry. Numerous media companies were forced to close, while others were sold to survive. Legacy media owners and foreign publishers were pushed out of the market, paving the way for a new generation of Greek business owners to step into the sector.

During this prolonged crisis, the emergence and growth of digital news organizations became intertwined with the economic and political changes occurring in Greek society. Commercial media which emerged from the crash tended to support the bailout packages and austerity policies. Pluralism in news reporting and coverage fell. Spending on investigative and other forms of watchdog journalism, already scarce, was slashed by the time of the 2015 referendum, and the new dominant media discourse was accompanied by the increasing misinformation and fake news.

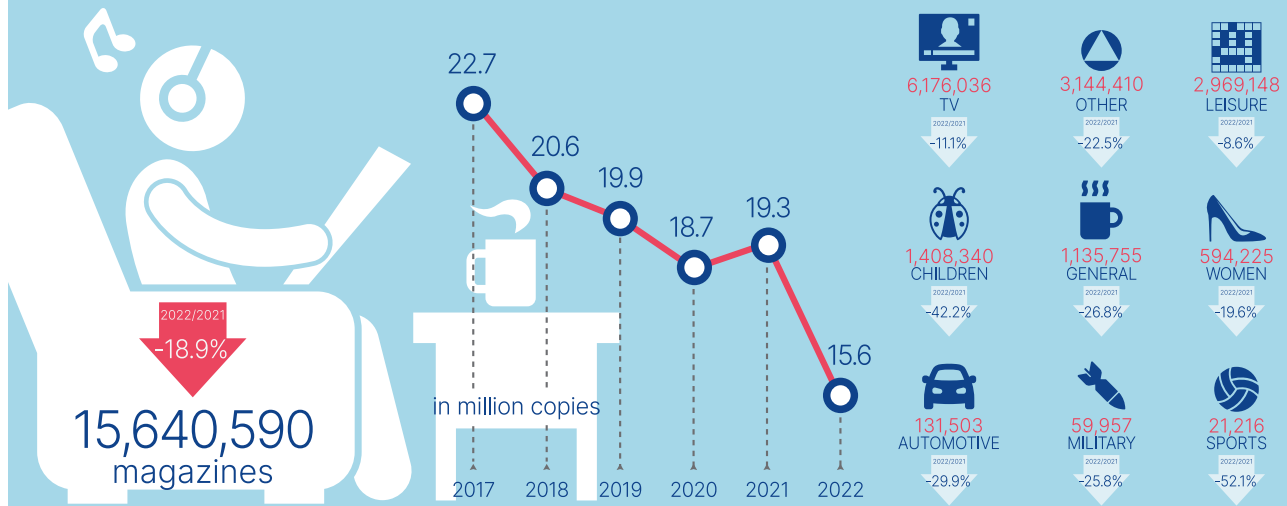
After the approval of the third package of financial assistance to Greece and the conclusion of a period of heightened protests and polarization at all levels, commercial media emerged seriously shaken. Bank loans to media essentially ceased, debts skyrocketed, and major outlets were left on the verge of collapse. Mega TV aired for the last time on September 14, 2016, with all employees remaining unpaid for five months. The bank accounts of prominent publisher Stavros Psycharis were frozen in July 2016 and soon afterwards control of his Lambrakis Press Group passed to the National Bank of Greece, Piraeus Bank, and Alpha Bank.

DAILY AND PERIODICAL PRESS, 2022

SALES OF NEWSPAPERS



SALES OF MAGAZINES



Source: Hellenic Statistical Authority/ 26 April 2023

#GreekDataMatter

According to the Hellenic Statistical Authority, *ELSTAT*, 2022 saw a 14.1% fall in newspaper sales from 2021 and an 18.9% drop in sales of magazines.

The collapse in the strength of publishing groups is illustrated by their disappearance from the Athens Stock Exchange. While a decade ago companies including Teletypos SA, Tegopoulos, Technikes Ekdoseis, Attikes Ekdoseis SA, Pegasus Publishing, Kathimerini SA, Naftemporiki, and IMAKO Media Net were all listed, now there are only two: Attikes Ekdoseis and Livanis SA.

Post crisis: A new model of media ownership

In a weakened and splintered media landscape, new entrepreneurs sought opportunities to dominate the market, acquiring bankrupt media conglomerates such as DOL and Pegasus Publishing. In this new economic reality, a model of ownership concentration began to develop combining sports companies, shipping capital and a multitude of media outlets, from newspapers and websites and now expanding towards television.

The new media owners – precisely because they operate in a context of intense competition, fragmented audiences, a crisis of legitimacy and weak regulation – aggressively exploit their media, especially in their battles against each other. The publication of “exposés” to damage competitors are frequent. Central to the new business model, media owners are increasingly attached to popular sports clubs, particularly football teams, using sporting alliances to build cross brand identity with their media. While it was always the norm for sport press to “glorify” club owners, political newspapers are increasingly drawn into the realm of tribal sporting rivalry.

The image shows two overlapping screenshots from Greek media. The top screenshot is from the website 'OT Οικονομικός Ταχυδρόμος'. It features a navigation bar with social media icons and a main headline: 'Η νταμπλόχος με 391 εκ. ευρώ στα φέσια ΑΕΚ και ο τζάμπα μάγκας Μελισσανίδης'. Below the headline is a large image of a man (Vangelis Marinakis) with a beard, wearing a white shirt, looking slightly to the side. The bottom screenshot is from the social media platform 'in.gr'. It shows a post with a similar image of the same man. The post title is: '«Θερίζει» η τεκμηριωμένη απάντηση του Βαγγέλη Μαρινάκη στον Μελισσανίδη για τα εγκαίνια της «OPAP Arena»'. The post includes a date '29 Σεπτεμβρίου 2022 | 12:39' and a small caption: 'Ολόκληρη η επιστολή του Βαγγέλη Μαρινάκη στον Μελισσανίδη για τα εγκαίνια της «OPAP Arena»'. The right side of the social media post shows a sidebar with 'Topics', 'Similar' articles, 'Daily Hashtags', and 'Tags'.

Both OT and in.gr belong to Marinakis’s media group Alter Ego. Both stories “*AEK championship winner with 391 million euros in debts and armchair tough guy Melissanidis*” and “*“Reaping” response by Vangelis Marinakis to Melissanidis for the inauguration of the OPAP Arena stadium*” are examples of how sport/business rivalry is transferred to the connected media.

Another example is Dimitris Giannakopoulos’ newsbomb.gr, who also owns Panathinaikos basketball team “attacks” Halyvourgiki Hellenic Steel Industry which is owned by the Angelopoulos brothers, who also own Olympiakos basketball team.

ΒΟΜΒPLUS ΒΟΜΒTV **NEWSBOMB** 10°C 🔍
ΓΙΑ ΝΑ ΓΝΩΡΙΖΕΤΕ ΑΜΕΣΩΣ Ο,ΤΙ ΣΚΑΕΙ

ΡΟΗ ΕΙΔΗΣΕΩΝ ΕΛΛΑΔΑ ΠΟΛΙΤΙΚΗ ΟΙΚΟΝΟΜΙΑ ΥΓΕΙΑ ΚΟΣΜΟΣ ΑΘΛΗΤΙΚΑ MEDIA ΚΑΙΡΟΣ ΚΥΠΡΟΣ ΕΦΗΜΕΡΙΔΕΣ

ΟΙΚΟΝΟΜΙΑ 05/03/2021 06:01

Χαλυβουργική: Οι Αγγελόπουλοι την ρίξαν στα βράχια και ζητάνε και τα ρέστα

Newsbomb



«Φωνάζει ο κλέφτης για να φοβηθεί ο νοικοκύρης». «Εκεί που μας χρωστούσαν μας πήραν και το βόδι». Μόνο με τις συγκεκριμένες παροιμίες μπορεί να συγκριθεί η ανακοίνωση που εξέδωσε χθες η Χαλυβουργική, η εταιρεία της οικογένειας Αγγελόπουλου και με την οποία επιτίθεται στην Εθνική Τράπεζα, στην οποία οφείλει περισσότερα από 343 εκατ. ευρώ, διότι αποφάσισε να θέσει σε καθεστώς ειδικής διαχείρισης την απαξιωμένη επιχείρησή.

Ροή Ειδήσεων
 19:33 - GOSSIP
 Χριστίνα Μπόμπο: Το πρόγραμμα και η ρουτίνα των δίδυμων
 19:30 - MEDIA
 Η Γη της Ελιάς: Ο Φίλιππος συναντά τον Μιλτιάδη και τον ρωτάει ευθέως τι τρέχει με τη Βασιλική
 19:28 - ΜΠΑΣΚΕΤ
 Basket League: Η ΕΟΚ όρισε τους τρεις διατητές του ντέρμπι και στην 16η αγωνιστική
 19:26 - GOSSIP
 Αγγώριστη: Η διάσημη ηθοποιός «κατέστρεψε» το πρόσωπό της
 19:26 - ΠΟΛΙΤΙΚΗ
 Παφίλης για στάση ΣΥΡΙΖΑ - ΠΑΣΟΚ στην επιστολική ψήφο:
 ΟΛΕΣ ΟΙ ΕΙΔΗΣΕΙΣ
 novibet

Newsbomb title: *“Halvourgiki: The Angelopoulos brothers destroyed it and now they add insult to injury”.*

Businessman Giannis Alafouzos was one of the first to follow this model, by acquiring Panathinaikos FC and SKAI channel while maintaining ownership of Kathimerini Publications and Kathimerini newspaper. However, it is the owner of Olympiacos F.C, Vangelis Marinakis, and his company Alter Ego that best exemplifies the new media ownership landscape. By restructuring the remains of once-powerful media outlets, a strong new conglomerate has emerged. Alter Ego, for €22 million, acquired DOL and 22% of the influential Mega TV in June 2017, and subsequently purchased the film library and logo of the station. They also acquired the One channels, which have been broadcasting nationwide since the end of 2019, securing one of the last licenses, while utilizing the former Alter TV building for their productions. Additionally, Alter Ego owns the only press distribution agency in Greece, "Argos."

With the elections in 2019, a new element became the strengthening relationships between media owners and the new government of the New Democracy party, which won an outright majority for the first time since 2009. According to data from the National Council for Radio and Television (ESR)¹, the party significantly dominates TV news coverage as it serves as the main source for many issues. In 2020 it received an exceptionally high 61.7% of television airtime dedicated to political parties, plus a further 13.1% as government officials, while in the July 2019 elections, it won less than 40% of the vote. In 2021 it also still received 55% as New Democracy and another 13.4% as government officials. The disparity between the percentage of electoral votes and of television airtime is the largest in the past decade. Compared to 2019, when Syriza was in government, we see that the analogy between the election result and the respective airtime is closer but still in favor of the government.

¹ Source: National Council for Radio and Television reports for 2019, 2020, 2021.

Time Report by TV station 2019 - 2021

(percentage of total presentation time of political parties in all newscasts)

| Time Report by TV station 2019 (Jan-Apr) | Government | Syriza | New Democracy | Golden Dawn | KKE | Potami | ANEL |
|--|--------------|---------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Elections Result September 2015 | | 35.46% | 28.29% | 6.99% | 5.55% | 4.09% | 3.69% |
| ALPHA | 6.80% | 37.60% | 28.10% | 0.50% | 2.90% | 4.70% | 6.70% |
| ANTI | 2.00% | 43.40% | 31.00% | 0.50% | 2.80% | 3.10% | 6.50% |
| OPEN BEYOND* | 1.50% | 40.90% | 33.00% | 0.70% | 5.60% | 4.10% | 2.30% |
| STAR | 4.60% | 38.00% | 27.80% | 1.40% | 2.40% | 2.30% | 12.80% |
| ERT1 | 4.00% | 55.40% | 16.90% | 0.40% | 2.90% | 2.40% | 3.60% |
| ERT2 | 8.20% | 39.10% | 20.00% | 0.90% | 4.00% | 5.10% | 5.60% |
| SKAI | 1.90% | 32.40% | 33.10% | 0.30% | 3.20% | 3.00% | 6.80% |
| Average time | 4.10% | 40.90% | 27.10% | 0.70% | 3.40% | 3.50% | 6.30% |

*Data for OPEN from 1.3.2019 and onwards

| Time Report by TV station 2020 | Government | New Democracy | Syriza | KINAL | KKE | Elliniki Lisi | MeRA 25 |
|--------------------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|
| Elections Result July 2019 | | 39.85% | 31.53% | 8.10% | 5.30% | 3.70% | 3.44% |
| ALPHA | 11.20% | 62.60% | 15.20% | 5.70% | 2.50% | 2.00% | 0.80% |
| MEGA | 11.00% | 64.40% | 16.30% | 3.00% | 1.60% | 1.20% | 0.80% |
| OPEN BEYOND | 8.20% | 61.60% | 23.10% | 4.50% | 1.20% | 0.70% | 0.50% |
| STAR | 18.70% | 60.00% | 12.40% | 3.20% | 1.90% | 1.30% | 1.20% |
| ERT | 16.70% | 55.30% | 16.70% | 4.80% | 2.40% | 2.00% | 1.80% |
| SKAI | 13.00% | 66.20% | 13.20% | 4.10% | 1.90% | 0.90% | 0.60% |
| Average time | 13.10% | 61.70% | 16.20% | 4.20% | 1.90% | 1.30% | 1.00% |

| Time Report by TV station 2021 | Government | New Democracy | Syriza | KINAL | KKE | Elliniki Lisi | MeRA 25 |
|--------------------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|
| Elections Result July 2019 | | 39.85% | 31.53% | 8.10% | 5.30% | 3.70% | 3.44% |
| ALPHA | 11.70% | 48.20% | 21.60% | 9.80% | 3.50% | 3.00% | 1.80% |
| MEGA | 11.00% | 68.80% | 9.20% | 8.10% | 1.40% | 0.30% | 0.30% |
| OPEN BEYOND | 7.60% | 52.80% | 24.30% | 12.00% | 1.90% | 0.60% | 0.60% |
| STAR | 13.80% | 51.70% | 17.60% | 7.90% | 3.40% | 2.50% | 2.50% |
| ERT | 20.40% | 46.50% | 16.70% | 7.40% | 4.60% | 2.10% | 1.90% |
| SKAI | 15.70% | 62.20% | 12.70% | 6.30% | 2.10% | 0.40% | 0.50% |
| Average time | 13.40% | 55.00% | 17.00% | 8.60% | 2.80% | 1.50% | 1.30% |

As well as the new political situation dominated by New Democracy, the new landscape has also been shaped by the pandemic. In the initial stages of COVID-19, Greek news organizations framed it as a global issue, but after the first COVID-19 death in Greece, the narrative shifted from a global challenge towards that of a national struggle, with public officials and government officials assigned the role of “leading expert”, while the World Health Organization was gradually shunned. A process coupled with a “rally-to-the-flag” reflex reinforced the ties between media owners and political elites.

During the pandemic, journalists who questioned government policy were subjected to censorship by their editors. Correspondent Richard Pine resigned from the English-language edition of Kathimerini after he [protested](#) that his article criticizing the prime minister for the environmental impact of projects in Corfu had been blocked. The chief editor of Vima newspaper also resigned citing intense government pressure after publishing a [critical article](#) on the Covid monitoring system of EODY (National Public Health Organization). The report published on in.gr, owned by Alter Ego group, was subsequently deleted from both Vima and in.gr. Renowned columnist Elena Akrita also resigned from Ta Nea newspaper after 20 years, claiming censorship of her article on December 12, 2020, where she criticized the government's handling of the pandemic. In 2022 and after the resignation of the then-director of the newspaper, A. Karakousis, Dimitra Kroustalli returned to work for Vima newspaper. In 2023 Elena Akrita became an MP with Syriza.

Overall, the current Greek media landscape can therefore be characterized by a history of chaotic and deregulated development, a weak economic market battered by multiple financial crises, combined with the heavy influence and interference of political and economic interests, resulting in a polarized and fragmented market undermined by low trust from the public. It is in this economic, political and regulatory climate that the current system of media capture has developed. The next sections assess the four pillars of media capture in the Greek context, starting with the private media landscape.

1 - Private Media: The Biggest Players in the Media Landscape

The ownership of private media by vested interests is the most acute form of media capture in Greece. The majority of Greek private media are owned by a small number of wealthy families with a long tradition in the economic and media environment of the country. The biggest TV channels are owned by the families of Alafouzos, Marinakis, Vardinoyannis, Kyriakou, and Savvidis. The present generation either inherited the media groups (Alafouzos, Kyriakou) or inherited the rest of the business activities and then entered the media (Marinakis, Vardinoyannis). Vardis and Giorgos Vardinoyannis and Ivan Savvidis are exceptions because they are self-made. This first section of the report maps out these media owners and their economic and political connections to the Greek state.

Vardinoyannis family

The Vardinogiannis family is one of the strongest families in the shipbuilding world both in Greece and internationally. The family today operates numerous companies in a variety of sectors, in Greece and worldwide, from shipping and finance to football teams, media, hotels and real estate. The most important is Motor Oil and its several subsidiaries². According to Forbes, Vardis Vardinoyannis and family have a net worth of \$2 billion. The family is also politically connected.

In the media sector, the Vardinoyannis family first appeared in 1982 with the acquisition of Mesimvrini newspaper. Despite the family having close relations with socialist Prime Minister Andreas Papandreou, Mesimvrini remained a newspaper of the centre-right. They now own Star Channel, [Alpha TV](#), the audiovisual content production company Plus Production and two radio stations: Talk Radio 98.9 in Athens and Alpha 9.65 in Thessaloniki. In the past, the family also owned a stake in Teletipos SA that controlled MEGA TV, one of the biggest channels in Greece. Star and Alpha are two separate entities, since participation in Alpha is through Motor Oil Hellas subsidiaries and Luxembourg based Primos Media S.a.r.l. Star is owned by Visbia Media Productions Limited and Paxana Holdings Limited both controlled by members of the Vardinogiannis family.

Star Channel and its company Nea Tileorasi SA is [connected](#) to Alkmaion On Line Media, Thema SA, European Media Services, Green Pixel Productions SA, Star Investments SA etc. Star Investments, now called Audiomax Investments SA operates the radio stations Alpha 98.9, Dromos FM και Diesi 101.3 FM. Recently it acquired a 50.002% stake of Stavros Theodorakis' Good Stories IKE, which runs pod.gr website.

Notably, Star Channel's board includes Mirjana Solak along with Dušan Radosavljević. Mirjana Solak is Dragan Šolak's sister and [Dušan Radosavljević](#) his brother in law. Šolak is a Serbian businessman and media mogul and through United Group he represents the [latest entree](#) in the Greek media landscape. Since 2021 United Group also owns Greek telecommunication company and satellite TV provider Nova.

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² Other companies include Motor Oil Renewable Energy, Optima bank, Vegas Oil and Gas (Egypt), NJV Athens Plaza, AVE Group of Companies (Audio Visual) that controls Allou Fun Park, IGE S.A., Odeon Entertainment, Kristelcom Group of Companies (Teleunicom SA, Teleunicom Cyprus LTD, Globalsat SA, Globalsat Cyprus LTD). They are also [connected](#) to Air Lift SA, Korinthos Power SA, Tallon Commodities, Thermoilektriki Komotinis SA, All Sports, Green Pixel Productions SA, Vista Bank Romania SA.

The family's political affiliations lean traditionally towards the right-wing party of New Democracy. Even though during the 60's Pavlos Vardinoyannis was elected with Papandreou, later he joined Konstantinos Mitsotakis' government. Another affiliation comes from Eleni Vardinoyanni (sister of Pavlos and Vardis) who married Yannis Kefaloyannis, a politician and member of Parliament (1958 - 1964 and 1974 - 2004) with New Democracy. His daughter Olga Kefaloyanni, also an MP for New Democracy, was appointed Minister of Tourism together with his nephew Yannis Kefaloyannis, who was appointed Deputy Minister of National Defense after the 2023 elections.

Vangelis Marinakis

Vangelis Marinakis is the son of Miltiadis Marinakis, a shipowner and right-wing politician. Since 2010, he has also been the owner of Olympiacos FC and in 2017, he became the majority [owner](#) of the English Premier League football club Nottingham Forest³.

In the media sector, he is the owner of Alter Ego Media S.A. In 2017, Alter Ego bought the debt-ridden media group Dimosiografikos Organismos Lampraki (DOL) and now it owns and operates Mega TV, the daily and Sunday newspapers Ta Nea and To Vima, a number of digital media (one of the largest news websites in.gr, ot.gr, tovima.gr and tanea.gr), and a portfolio of magazines and a radio station.

In the past Marinakis also acquired a 20% stake of Skai TV from the Alafouzos family, however their rivalry in Greek football led him to leave. He also runs Wellcomm company that involves the online shopping platform Shopflix.gr. In addition, he has entered the catering sector with the company, Foodflix Catering Services.

In 2014 together with the current mayor of Piraeus they founded an electoral alliance called "Piraeus Winner", which won the consecutive municipal elections of 2014, 2019 and 2023. Marinakis himself was elected as a member of the City Council in 2014.

Marinakis has a son, whose [godmother](#) is Dora Bakoyannis, sister of Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis. Bakoyannis is a former mayor of Athens and the mother of the former mayor of Athens Kostas Bakoyannis. Marinakis was best man when Bakoyannis was remarried in 1998.

A [close friend](#) of [Marinakis](#) is Yannis [Kourtakis](#), owner of the newspaper Parapolitika, Parapolitika FM, parapolitika.gr, the financial news website powergame.gr, and shares in tokarfi.gr. In 2023, he recirculated the newspaper Apogevmatini. Apogevmatini, founded in 1952, was a Greek newspaper published nationally in Athens that went bankrupt in 2010.

Both his company and Marinakis have shares in Argos, the only Greek press distribution agency. Argos has come under the [scrutiny](#) of the Hellenic Competition Commission and the EU Commission due to allegedly unfair trading practices against its competitors. It has been [reported](#) that the agency is attempting to unilaterally alter the terms of its cooperation with rival newspapers. Many newspapers are not included in the bulletin data of the agency, including Kathimerini, Documento, Proto Thema.

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³ He is a shipowner and chairman of the international shipping company Capital Maritime Trading Corp. In 2018, his Nasdaq-listed Capital Product Partners L.P merged with the tanker operator Diamond S Shipping, which is affiliated with ex U.S. Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross in a \$1.65 billion deal.

These political affiliations are easy to spot one day before the Greek national elections of 2023. Parapolitika - Apogevmatini newspapers



1. "Forward with Kyriakos", 26/6/23

Source: <https://twitter.com/KourtakisJohn/status/1672255748930240512>

2. "It couldn't get worse. A show of misery and mistakes by an obsessive Syriza"

Source: <https://www.frontpages.gr/>

Alafouzos Group

Alafouzos is an old shipping family from Santorini. Aristeidis Alafouzos (1924-2017) was a shipowner, civil engineer and publisher with strong ties to the Mitsotakis family. He was the first Greek shipowner to broaden his activities in the media sector. Nowadays his sons Yannis and Themis have taken over and advanced his legacy, amongst others with the shipping company Kyklades Maritime Corporation and hold a majority stake in international tanker company Okeanis Eco Tankers Corp.

Themis Alafouzos is the chairman of Nees Kathimerines Ekdoseis, one of the most influential media groups in Greece, which includes the daily newspaper Kathimerini, Kathimerini tis Kyriakis (Sunday edition), Kathimerini (English edition) and a big portfolio of magazines. Amongst his other business activities, he is also the CEO of Argonautis EEPN which controls Sea Shell Enterprises LTD, Sea Pearl Enterprises LTD, Bigal Shipping Corporation, Zenith Maritime Corporation, Christiana Marine Corporation, Clover Enterprises Corporation. He is also the chairman and CEO of Anonymos Techniki Etairia Ergon, that owns the property and the building in Neo Faliro, which houses the newspaper Kathimerini and the other companies of the Group.

Yannis Alafouzos meanwhile owns a football team and a media group. He is the owner of one of the oldest Greek teams, Panathinaikos F.C, and the founder and chairman of Skai Group. Skai group owns five radio stations: SKAI 100.3, Sport-fm 94.6, Menta 88, Pepper 96.6 and 104FM and one of most influential TV channels in Greece, SKAI. He has widely documented political affiliations with the New Democracy party. Journalists in his channel are connected with the Mitsotakis family and with New Democracy politicians. In the past it has been [reported](#) that in 1989 his father Aristeidis Alafouzos gave large amounts of money to finance former Prime Minister Konstantinos Mitsotakis (Kyriakos Mitsotakis' father). In the summer of 2016, during a highly polarized period in Greece, Yiannis Alafouzos [stated](#) that Skai TV "has a clear ideological and political framework and an equivalent front against Syriza".

Ivan Savvidis

Ivan Savvidis is a Greek-Russian self-made businessman. He is the founder of the food industry Agrokom Group, whose assets included (until 2018) Russian tobacco firm Donskoy Tabak. Savvidis is a former member of the Russian parliament and a Vladimir Putin ally. He also has strong [ties](#) to the Patriarch of Russia. Forbes estimates his wealth (2023) at \$1.7 billion. He started investing in Greece in 2012 when he bought PAOK, the biggest football team in Thessaloniki. Savvidis was also president of FC Rostov (2002-2005). In 2013 he attained a Greek passport and a few years later, in 2017, he purchased a minority stake in the port company of Thessaloniki. Today, the Savvidis family [controls](#) 71.85% of Thessaloniki's port and in September 2023, Savvidis [bought](#) the port of Volos, the third-largest cargo port in Greece. Savvidis's Belterra Investments Ltd (owned by Cyprus based Belterra Holdings Ltd) carries out business in Greece in a wide range of sectors⁴.

Recently Savvidis entered the e-commerce sector with open-market.gr (Dimera Group). Through the group's companies Dimera Ltd, Dimera Media Investments Ltd, Dimera Publishing SA and Radioteleoptiki SA. Savvidis operates Ethnos online newspaper, Ethnos tis Kyriakis (Sunday edition), business news website imerisia.gr and OPEN TV. The newspapers Ethnos and Imerisia were owned for years by Pegasus Publishing SA. In 2017 they were sold to Dimera Media.

In March 2018, during a PAOK–AEK football match and after PAOK had a goal ruled out for offside in the 90th minute, Savvidis [entered the pitch](#) with his bodyguards and tried to take the team off. It was later revealed that he had been armed with a handgun at the time. The Greek Super League was subsequently suspended and Savvidis received a three-year ban on entering football stadiums by the HFF.

In 2020 it was revealed that Savvidis, who took over PAOK in 2012, [had acquired another team Xanthi](#) in 2018 in violation of a ban on a single investor owning more than one Super League club. The acquisition was made through a Cypriot offshore company controlled by a relative of Savvidis. The sports authority ruled that PAOK and Xanthi should be expelled from the 14-club Greek Super League.

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⁴ They own Porto Karras luxury resort in Halkidiki and it's companies: Porto Karras SA, Porto Karras Villa Galini SA, Ktima Porto Karras SA, Porto Karras Golf, Porto Karras Marina SA. Also Makedonia Pallas SA, the most iconic hotel of Thessaloniki. The Group also owns Northern Wings, a luxurious helicopters transportation company, Souroti SA, Thessaloniki's soda water bottler.

During the Syriza-ANEL government (2015-2019) Savvidis had good [relations](#) with Panos Kammenos who served as minister of defence. Both the ex-prime minister Kostas Karamanlis and Panos Kammenos attended Savvidis's son's [wedding](#) in 2016.

Kyriakou family

Minos Kyriakou (1942 – 2017) was a Greek media and shipping magnate. Originating from Poros and a shipowner's family he started his first oil trading companies in 1976: Bacoil International and Athenian Oil Trading Inc. In 1988 he founded the radio station ANTI FM 97.2, and one year later he founded the second channel of Greek private television called ANTI. In 1997 Minos Kyriakou took over the management of the Greek multi-sport club Panhellenic and contributed to the revival of the international sports meeting Tsiklitteria.

Today, Antenna Group, controlled by his son, Theodore Kyriakou, is a media group whose operations include broadcasting, radio, publishing, digital. In Greece it operates Antenna TV and since 2019 Macedonia TV. Both are controlled by Media Capital Partners, which in turn is controlled 70% by Antenna Media and 30% by MBC Initiatives (part of the Saudi media conglomerate MBC Group). Saudi authorities - Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman - took a controlling [stake](#) in MBC Group in 2018 as they seized assets during an anti-corruption campaign. It was the first time the Saudi capital entered the Greek media landscape.

Antenna Group also runs the international networks: ANTI Satellite (America), ANTI Pacific (Australia) and ANTI Europe, ANTI Cyprus, Kiss TV (Romania), Magic TV (Romania), Rock TV (Romania). VICE operates in Greece (closed in 2023), Serbia, Romania and other Southeastern Europe countries in partnership with Antenna Group.

It owns the streaming platform ANTI+, in which [recently](#) Fairfax bought a 15% equity stake, and antenna.gr, ant1news.gr, Heaven Music record label and 314 Records digital record label, also publisher and digital media company Daphne Communications SA (Fthis.gr, Bestofyou.gr, Glance.gr). It also runs Ant1 MediaLab for media education.

In 2021 Antenna Group acquired from Sony Pictures Television its entire network portfolio in Central and Eastern Europe. The deal covered 22 pay-TV channels and two OTT services in 12 territories (AXN and Viasat legacy brands). In 2022 Antenna acquired multiplex cinema chain Village Roadshow Operations in Greece that amounts to a 42% market share. Antenna Music operates the Greek radio stations Easy 97,2 and Rythmos 94,9 and in Romania it controls the radio group A.G. Radio Holding (Kiss FM, Magic FM, Rock FM, ONE FM). It also runs the audio aggregator Soundis in Greece, Cyprus, Romania and Moldova.

Minos Kyriakou and his media group had/has good relationships with New Democracy. It has been [reported](#) that Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis has traveled more than once with Kyriakou's helicopter in order to visit the mogul's residence in Porto Heli.

Other players



DPG Digital Media Group: Dimitris Giannakopoulos is the chairman and CEO of the biggest pharmaceutical company in Greece, VIANEX SA. He is also the owner of Panathinaikos Basketball Team, the owner of 50% of nutritional supplement company Superfoods SA. and he also owns the DPG Group that owns DPG Digital Media, GIATRA (Paoshop & PAO BC Academy), Clickhouse, Lab14. The media group runs Newsbomb.gr, CNN Greece, Gossip-tv.gr, Queen.gr, Akispetretzikis.com, Astrology.gr, Mothersblog.gr, Ratpack.gr, Onmed.gr, Onsports.gr.



Liquid Media: The owner, businessman Rodolfo Odoni, is a permanent resident of Cyprus who also owns online sports betting company Novibet, through Gamart based in Malta. He is also a major shareholder in online entertainment market company Centric that has activities in the shipping, F&B, renewable energy and tourism industries. A subsidiary of Centric is PlaySeas which combines cruise ships with onboard entertainment services. Odoni first entered the media landscape in 2003 by buying two important sports newspapers “Athletic Echo” and “Sportime”. Soon after that he launched the sports portal gazzetta.gr and later created the digital publishing group Liquid Media. Among the brands are gazzetta.gr, insider.gr, reader.gr, jenny.gr.



Attica Publications Group: The owner is Theocharis Filippopoulos, son of the journalist Alekos Filippopoulos who was the founding director of Giorgos Bombola's Ethnos. Filippopoulos business activities involve only online and print media publications. The group involves the weekly financial newspaper, The Capital, and the relative site capital.gr and 19 magazine titles including the Greek edition of Forbes: Esquire, Madame Figaro, Shape, Bazaar, Mirror, Teletheatis. Other websites include TheToc.gr, athinorama.gr, yupiii.gr, missbloom, shape.gr, gr.askmen.com, madamefigaro.gr, harpersbazaar.gr, esquire.com.gr, womantoc.gr, thememagers.gr. Attica Publications owns the radio stations Athens DeeJay 95.2, 96.9 ROCK FM, LAMPSI 92.3, Best Radio 92.6, while the group also has a presence in Bulgaria and Serbia where it publishes a total of 11 magazine titles. Filippopoulos is also the Chairman of the Board of the Association of Online Publishers in Greece (ENED).



24 MEDIA Group - Dimitris Maris is the founder and chairman of the Board of Directors of the Group. He is also an investor in a number of companies such as Change.org, Velocity, Syncbnb, etc. He is the co-founder of Kaizen Gaming, a GameTech company in Greece, and runs the international online gaming operator Betano. 24 Media runs sports portal sport24, sports lifestyle magazine Contra, OneMan, LadyLike, News 24/7, and ow.gr.

Big names but new in media

Dimitris Melessanidis - A Greek business shipping and oil magnate, best known for owning the Greek oil company Aegean Oil and the football team AEK F.C. He is the founder and former owner of Aegean Marine Petroleum Network Inc., one of the largest fuel suppliers in the world. In addition to that, for many years he was a major shareholder and investor in the biggest Greek betting firm OPAP. In 2022 he sold his stake to Allwyn, owned by Czech billionaire Karel Komarek. Now the Melissanidis family owns oil company Aegean Oil, shipping and management companies HEC Europe Limited, Aegean Shipping Management, Aegean Eco Carriers etc. Melissanidis also has very close ties to the Church of Greece and the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople.

In the media sector, in April 2021 Melissanidis and his son decided to expand their business activities, acquiring the newspaper Naftemporiki, the website naftemporiki.gr and the printing press. Naftemporiki is the biggest and only daily financial newspaper in Greece. The offices of both the printed and online editions of the newspaper moved to Akti Kondyli in Piraeus, in the building where Aegean Oil is based. In September 2022, they also launched a new channel, called Naftemporiki TV. It broadcasts online and through Nova and Cosmote TV (pay television services). Melissanidis also has strong ties with Yannis Filippakis, another media owner who controls “Espresso” newspaper, “Dimokratia” newspaper, “Estia” newspaper and their websites.

Bakos, Kaimenakis, Eksarxou - Shipowners and businessmen Dimitris Bakos and Yannis Kaimenakis are both ex-mariners who in 1997 founded in the UAE the fuel transportation company Akron Trade & Transport. In 2001 they bought the Asteras Tripolis football club who then used to play in the regional Arcadian League and managed to move up the team four divisions, earning the promotion for the Super League Greece. In recent years Bakos and Kaimenakis also partnered with Alexandros Exarchou, who used to be CEO of Aktor, an international infrastructure company, and has significant experience in the construction of public projects in Greece. The trio bought Intrakat (one of the biggest Greek construction groups) from Sokratis Kokkalis and Pancreta Bank from Michalis Sallas. In the media sector, in 2022 they acquired TV channel Action24 and through the company Media Time they bid for 30% of the broadcasting time of Attica TV. In addition to that, they also bought the news site flash.gr (former nooz.gr).

Party media

In Greece there is also a long tradition of party-affiliated media. This includes Rizospastis, the newspaper of the Communist Party of Greece and its website rizospastis.gr. There are also daily newspapers “Avgi” and “avgj.gr” and “Sto Kokkino 105.5”, radio stations both politically affiliated to the left wing opposition party Syriza. “Prin” is a leftist weekly newspaper, published in Athens and circulating nationwide, published by New Left Current, a political organization of the Greek anti-capitalist left.

Complicated picture of capture in the private media market

As outlined above, the landscape for ownership of private media ownership in Greece is dominated by a handful of wealthy and politically-connected families with vast cross-ownership interests in key sectors often reliant on public contracts from the government⁵. Shipowners and those with major investments in the industry now represent the dominant force of media ownership in Greece, although these owners also have a multitude of other assets in different sectors. Many demonstrate clear personal and even familial links to political parties, particularly the governing New Democracy party. In other cases, the clear political affiliations of the media owners are well-documented. The revolving door between journalism and politics has entrenched these connections further. Connections of media owners to the banking industry in Greece are also common, while media assets with sports titles are very often combined with sports club ownership. Disruptive new entrants into a market in recent years have also purchased media as part of a wider package of assets. The picture is complicated further by party-controlled media, which have long served as the media arms of the country's major political forces.

Unlike in other EU countries, almost no media outlets in Greece in the print, radio or television market are owned by business interests that have investments solely in the field of media and publishing. Instead, ownership of media is increasingly entangled with far more profitable industries such as shipping and finance. While in many Central and Eastern European countries media capture in the last decade was driven by the exit of foreign owners from the media market and their acquisition by politically-connected domestic oligarchs, Greece's media ownership has always been overwhelmingly dominated by domestic actors with links to political elites. As outlined above, the development of this ownership landscape in Greece cannot be separated from the unregulated development of private media in the 1980s and the repeated financial shocks experienced by the country, which either saw private media created and then swiftly acquired by powerful families, or later driven into the hands of shipping magnates after the Greek debt crisis.

The result has been a media landscape distinguished by the concentration of media ownership under powerful business interests with demonstrable political links. In this context, major media outlets all too often serve as vehicles for furthering certain narratives or supporting political parties, rather than platforms for public interest reporting and holding power to account. While the level of interference by media owners at the different titles has varied significantly throughout the last few decades, and the situation at some media is far better than others, pressures on editorial independence and journalistic output are many and varied. Even at titles where heavy-handed meddling by owners is rare, self-censorship is common among journalists who know the boundaries of investigations and topics considered off limits. These pressures on free and independent reporting drove many journalists to break away and form newer media platforms.

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⁵ Recent examples: Melissanidis' companies Aegean Oil and HEC have public contracts - among others - with the Ministry of National Defence and national ports, Vardinoyannis' Coral provides fuel to municipalities.

Emergence of independent media

Since 2010, there has been a steady emergence of media that do not have ties to governments or wealthy business and shipping interests. These owners also do not have ties to the banking industry or sports clubs. To preserve their financial independence, most are instead funded through grants by organizations that support independent journalism and guarantee that funding will not be made conditional on the exercise of any control or influence over the editorial process. Some also use subscriptions providing either free or paid content.



Alterthess - Alterthess was founded in 2010 and is an independent, collaborative media outlet in Thessaloniki. It runs a journalistic website but is also involved in video and audio production. Its main stories cover the environment, refugee and migrant rights, gender based violence and defending the public space. It is a social cooperative enterprise of eight members, funded through subscriptions, donations and audiovisual productions.



OmniaTV - OmniaTV is a grassroots medium founded in 2011 by eight citizen-journalists and reporters. The editorial team today includes journalists, researchers and two of the original founding members, Antonis Dimopoulos and Loukas Stamellos. OmniaTV provides in-depth coverage of under-reported social, political and human rights related stories. It is a Social Cooperative Enterprise funded mainly by its readers via open subscriptions. It occasionally receives grants for specific projects on condition of complete editorial independence.



Press Project was founded in 2010 by journalist Kostas Efimeros and now managed by Konstantinos Poulis. It is independent and funded by its subscribers while the content is accessible to all. It has a newsfeed and analysis as well as online radio and TV shows.



Sto Nisi - Founded in 2019 by a group of journalists, Sto Nisi is a press cooperative on Lesbos island. The team runs a news website, a radio station "Sto Nisi 99 FM", the free press magazine "Plateia" and the sports site "sportlesvos.gr". It is funded through advertising.



Typos-i.gr - Founded in 2016 by three Ioannina, NW Greece, based journalists, Varvara Angeli, Giorgos Patelis, Giorgos Tsantikos. Typos Ioanninon is a cooperative, independent news portal, managed by a social cooperative enterprise. Its content is mainly news feed – local and national – as well as investigative pieces. It is funded by commercial advertising and a subscriber network.

The last years has also seen a new ecosystem of small, independent organisations that focus on in-depth investigating reporting emerge:



Inside Story - Founded in 2016 by Tatiana Karapanagioti and Dimitris Xenakis, it is an Athens-based independent daily outlet that focuses on in-depth investigations. It is funded by its subscribers and through grants that support independent journalism.



Solomon - Founded in 2016 Solomon is a non-profit that produces public-interest journalism. Solomon's objective is to hold power to account, support domestic investigative journalism, as well as facilitate collaboration among journalists at a cross-border level. It is led by journalists Iliana Papangeli and Stavros Malichudis. It started in 2016 as an initiative between migrants and media professionals. Solomon has a hybrid revenue model receiving support from journalistic grants, philanthropic foundations and readers' donations.

The Manifold **Manifold** - Founded in 2018 by journalists Augustine Zenakos, Mariniki Alevizopoulou and Yannis Oresits Papadimitriou, the Manifold is a non-profit, investigative outfit that focuses on in-depth journalism in the public interest. The Manifold is funded through grants that support independent journalism.



Mediterranean Institute for Investigative Reporting - The Mediterranean Institute for Investigative Reporting - Based in Greece MIIR is a non profit organisation that was founded in January 2019 by a diverse team of six journalists. MIIR provides in-depth investigative journalism and cross-border reporting. Its work is funded by grants in support of an independent press, participation in cross-border journalism networks and readers' donations.



Reporters United - A network of reporters aiming to conduct investigative journalism in Greece, collaborate on cross-border investigations and publish stories that would struggle to be published in the Greek press. Founded in 2019 by Nicholas Leontopoulos and Christoforos Kasdaglis, Reporters United is a non-profit, funded by donations or voluntary subscriptions, revenue from collaborations with foreign media, and grants by organisations that support journalistic initiatives, provided they do not have ties to governments or business interests.

While the emergence of these independent media is a welcome development, which has resulted in partially filling the vacuum left for public interest and investigative journalism, these media largely remain on the fringes of the media landscape. Despite the production of high-quality and award-winning investigative reporting, which has made major revelations about spyware abuses and illegal pushbacks of refugees and migrants, their influence remains limited.

2 - State Funds, Advertising and Banking Loans

A central element of media capture involves the financial dependence of media on state support and advertising, which leaves them vulnerable to editorial interference or self-censorship. In many EU member states, state advertising is under-regulated and acts as an indirect form of subsidy in exchange for government-friendly coverage. In Greece, a pandemic-era scandal shone the spotlight on this issue and led to major reform, although its effectiveness remains to be seen and other issues regarding state support for media remain. Greek media have also historically been vulnerable to pressure from corporate advertisers, as well as the banking industry.

Since the 1980s, the Greek state and the media have enjoyed very close ties. It is common practice for the state to provide funding to whatever media it chooses without basic prerequisites such as the circulation of a newspaper or audience measurement. During the 2000s, successive governments [spent millions](#) in advertising. From €36 million in 2004, the expenditure rose to €65 million in 2007. In 2011, €34 million was allocated to the media in the form of state advertising campaigns by public bodies and ministries.

Even before the financial crisis, state and corporate advertising has influenced news in favour of the advertisers. Major media outlets in Greece depended on public contracts and the banking system, through loans or advertising revenue for their survival⁶. During the financial crisis, the dependence of the media on advertising increased considerably. As a result, the key advertisers, both state and corporate, were able to exert control on the news content. One of the country's most influential media owners, Yannis Alafouzos, himself [admitted](#) the problematic situation to Reuters in 2012, saying that some of the media "are in effect press offices for business groups". He added: "It's developed into a completely unhealthy situation. The purpose of media has been largely to execute specific tasks for their owners."

State advertising: The Petsas List example

The issue of non-transparent state advertising to media based on political considerations was put under the spotlight during the pandemic. During the lockdown the government allocated €20 million to media to carry "Stay at Home" public health messages. It outsourced the distribution of these funds to a private company, thereby bypassing its obligation to make public all transactions conducted by the state, as well as the Online Media Registry (where online media must register to receive state advertising). After public pressure, the government finally released the so-called "Petsas list" - named after government spokesperson Stelios Petsas - listing all media outlets and their allocated sums. The list confirmed what many suspected: that the funds had been disbursed in a way that was closely aligned to the government's agenda.

As [mentioned](#) in an alert filed by the International Press Institute (IPI) to the Council of Europe's media freedom platform: "*An analysis showed that many outlets perceived as 'opposition' media in Greece received disproportionately lower levels of advertising revenue from the public health campaign compared to more government-friendly media, regardless of their circulation. The weekly newspaper, Documento, was excluded entirely with its editor and publisher alleging this was a clear retaliation for its critical coverage and recent investigations into the leadership of the ruling New Democracy party*".

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⁶ G. Mpompolas is a [great example](#) of a businessman owning a construction company (Aktor) taking for decades public contracts while in the same time owning one of the biggest Greek media groups (Pegasus Media Group).

Parliamentary monitoring and transparency watchdog Vouliwatch has campaigned for three years for effective transparency and accountability of the use of public money in the case of the Petsas List. In October 2023, after having exhausted all national legal remedies, the non-profit [appealed](#) to the European Court of Human Rights demanding full transparency and access to all the data and criteria on which the money was allocated.

The Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom (CMPF) [report](#) for 2021 allocated a high-risk score of 67% to Greece for the indicator for “state regulation of resources and support to the media sector”, mainly “due to the lack of transparency concerning the distribution of state subsidies to media outlets during the pandemic”. The Media Freedom Rapid Response (MFRR) wrote to the Greek government about the Petsas list, [calling for greater transparency](#) and objectivity in the distribution of public advertisement funds to media.

In 2020 alone, apart from the first “Petsas list”, there were three more information campaigns providing indirect support to the media. The total spent on the campaigns was €23.5 million. According to a statement by the Deputy Minister to the Prime Minister Ioannis Bratakos, the government also allocated €12 million to the media as part of the COVID-19 campaign in 2021, and €25.3 million to TV channels in 2022 in support of the economic distress caused by the energy crisis due to the war in Ukraine. For 2022, the same CMPF indicator [received](#) a positive low-risk score of 25% due to the government reform initiatives to support the media in a fair way.

The media also received “emergency” state grants that tend to become permanent (insurance contributions, employment support programs etc). For example, in March 2020 the government exempted channels from the annual license amounting to €21 million (for all TV channels of national broadcasting). Again in 2020, the state will pay half of the “fee” (€1.1 million) for TV channels to use Digea, the network operator that provides the digital terrestrial television system in Greece. These subsidies have been repeated in 2021, 2022 (Energy saving campaign, 3/10/2022, €7.4 million) and 2023. In October 2023, the government [decided to pay](#) €6.8 million to cover the insurance contributions of all national TV channels. The scale and criteria used to distribute state funding via government subsidies is non-transparent and therefore largely unknown to the public.

In recent decades, the General Secretariat for Media and Communication has had access to this data but does not disclose it, with the exception of cases like the Petsas list where the public demanded transparency. In addition, since 2012 and the creation of Diavgeia, a transparency portal where ministries/institutions of the government upload their acts and decisions, there is access to the state funds given for media purposes but it is done in such a fragmented way that makes it very difficult to track. In 2017, Syriza created a registry for online media to receive state advertising and ensure transparency. In December 2022, the New Democracy government replaced the old registry with another online [media registry and a newspaper registry](#) to further improve transparency.

In 2022 the government passed a [new media law](#) that aims to establish rules for the distribution of state advertising in the printed and electronic press. Its effectiveness remains to be seen. Moreover, the government issued a new Joint Ministerial Decision that regulated the distribution of direct subsidies. The list with the final beneficiaries was publicized with no complaints regarding the transparency of the procedures. However, the two government support measures to contain the crisis in the TV sector provoked criticism about the allegedly preferential treatment in state funding received by the big TV stations, while other media were not included in the scheme.

Censorship through revenue: Corporations and banks

It is common knowledge in Greece that advertisers seek to influence news output, undermining media independence. There are many examples in which advertisers seek to weaponize their funds to censor criticism, silence truth and leverage public opinion. When energy companies, banks, telecommunications providers, construction and gambling companies advertise in the media, readers will very rarely find investigative stories about those companies.

A recent instance of a company pulling its advertising following media coverage was a well-publicized dispute between the most influential Greek finance website [capital.gr](#) and United Group which owns NOVA, one of the biggest telecommunications companies in Greece. After a report about the 2022 financial statements of the company, United Group filed an extrajudicial notice and informed the commercial department of the media outlet that they would suspend the advertising program in NOVA.

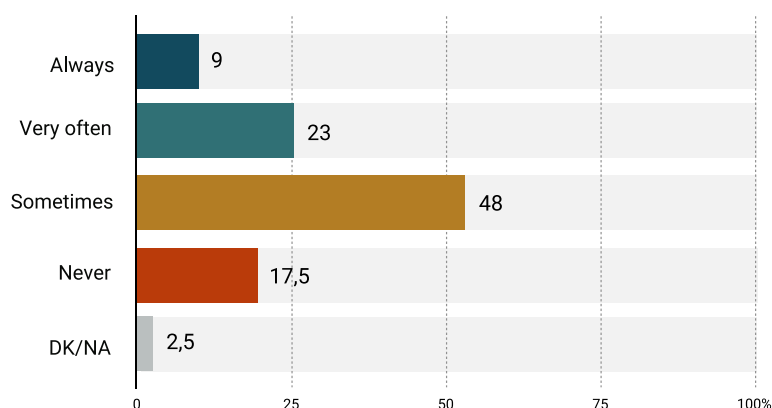
United Group responded to this report stating that its action was not retaliation for Capital's critical reporting but rather that it had suspended its advertising in Capital because it considered Capital's article inaccurate and misleading and could no longer "trust its objectivity". Additional information on this, including the exchange between Capital and United Group is available on Capital's [website](#).⁷

In a [survey](#) conducted by the Incubator for Media Education and Development (iMEDd) 80% of Greek journalists said that they self-censor while practicing their job. The survey assessed that this is the result of a cultivated "culture" that forces journalists to "know" what they should and shouldn't write. The banking sector, powerful business owners, and companies dominating the advertising market are all regarded as off limits at legacy and major media titles.

How often would you say you do or have the following happen to you?

> I self-censor

"Sometimes" reply 48% of journalists, "very often" or "always" say 32%



Source: Media Education and Development (iMEDd)

⁷ Editors' note: This section was revised after publication to include the response from United Group and clarify the dispute between Capital and United Group.

The connection between banks and the Greek media is intertwined with political and vested interests. For decades the Greek banks gave questionable loans that could not be repaid by big media. When the financial crisis began in 2009, the bubble burst, causing a huge collapse in the media sector. A [parliamentary investigation](#) in 2017 found that Greek media owed nearly €1.3 billion to banks. Panagiotis Psycharis, a top executive from DOL, one of the huge outlets that collapsed, told the committee that he secured a €15 million loan with just his signature as collateral. "Banks would give loans without collateral," Fotis Bobolas (Pegasos outlet) also admitted.

After 2014, banks stopped giving loans and in 2015, with increasing pressure from the European Central Bank to recoup loan losses, Greek lenders tightened the screws. That year saw a major conflict between the Syriza government and broadcasters regarding TV licenses. As previously outlined, since 1989 all channels had operated with temporary legality. In the end, the state auctioned six national TV licenses and the owners paid €350 million to acquire them.

After the recapitalization of the Greek banks, the banks were obliged to publish their advertising expenses to the media (law 4374/16). This decision was reached as a result of the agreement between Greece and the European lenders aiming to avoid any improper interconnection between banks, the media and the government.

| Banks | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 1/1/2023 - 30/6/2023 |
|---------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|----------------------|
| PIRAEUS | 19.373.000 | 21.550.310 | 14.635.630 | 12.323.410 | 10.529.888 | 8.946.650 | 4.322.130 | 7.314.560 | 3.832.030 |
| NATIONAL BANK | 6.394.598 | 6.493.553 | 8.175.107 | 6.420.600 | 8.892.280 | 8.257.692,18 | 8.493.683,93 | 7.363.900,61 | 3.770.542,75 |
| ALPHA | 7.584.736 | 8.731.258 | 8.843.778 | 8.736.705 | 7.298.697 | 4.400.536,00 | 6.903.817 | 6.776.308 | 3.461.722 |
| EUROBANK | 7.929.726 | 7.762.527 | 6.406.178 | 7.132.129 | 6.756.085 | 6.204.130 | 6.977.509,16 | 7.282.551,90 | 4.021.643,58 |
| ΣΥΝΟΛΟ | 41.822.060 | 44.537.648 | 38.061.693 | 34.612.844 | 33.476.950 | 27.809.008 | 26.697.140 | 28.737.321 | 15.085.939 |

Source: 2015 - 2019 *Typologies* and 2020 - 2023 our research through banks' announcements and financial statements. *Alpha Bank's amount for 2020 is for the period 01/01-30/09/2020.

3 - Independence of the Public Service Media

EPT

A third pillar of media capture across Europe is the capture and control of public service media by governments. In Greece, the country's public media have faced decades of challenges stemming from both political and economic pressures. Since its creation, Greece's public broadcaster ERT (Hellenic Broadcasting Corporation) has been controlled to a greater or lesser extent by the government of the day. Though efforts have been made to try and professionalize and depoliticize the broadcaster, ERT has suffered from a chronic lack of editorial and institutional independence due to the lack of safeguards insulating it from political power. Some managers or news directors have been more controlling than others. But it has also been common practice for ERT to be subjected to interference from government officials. Another perennial problem has been that after a change of government, there is an equivalent changeover in the state media institutions' executives.

The level of independence at the broadcaster has varied over time. Until 2010-2012, ERT, much like private media, was "obliged" to present itself as a versatile organization that hosts different political opinions and content. That changed after the beginning of a new era of significant polarization. Even though "traditional" polarization from the 1970s until the end of the 2000s was between Pasok and New Democracy parties, during the financial crisis the two parties met ideologically. After 2010 and the rise of Syriza, the new political landscape was marked by polarization between the right-wing New Democracy and the left-wing coalition of Syriza. This opened a new chapter in the battle of political control for ERT.

From 2012-2013, the situation deteriorated as government efforts to control political output grew. However, at the same time, journalists and other employees of ERT also demonstrated a readiness to resist political interference. For example, one day a journalist reported that the electricity bills would rise and was immediately asked to meet with management, which took him off air. The same day, 40 employees of ERT protested and the decision was reversed.

In 2013, amidst the economic crisis, the government of New Democracy and Antonis Samaras [closed down](#) all state-run broadcasts and laid off about 2,500 workers as part of a cost-cutting drive demanded by the country's international creditors. In a gesture of support for ERT, Greek private broadcasters pulled live content for six hours that day, declining to show the evening news. The result was to leave the Greek people without public TV and dependent on the private media sector.

Two years later, in 2015, the newly elected Syriza government under Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras restored the operations of ERT. The landscape at the time was highly polarized, not only at the political level but also inside the broadcaster. Observers say ERT continued to demonstrate bias in its news reporting. During this period, the government attempted to promote pro-government stories and later created a political show clearly affiliated with Syriza. During Syriza's administration, New Democracy accused ERT of biased coverage.

After New Democracy came to power in 2019, the first measure Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis implemented was to place the General Secretariat of Information and Communication, the supervising body of ERT, and the Athens News Agency - Macedonian Press Agency [under the supervision of the Greek Prime Minister's Office](#). The measure was justified as stabilizing the broadcaster and reducing political partisanship. The prime minister appointed Konstantinos Zoulas, the former head of his party's press office, as ERT president. Under this new management, ERT started to become much less political. The most promoted stories centered on everyday life issues, crime and natural disasters. However, the broadcaster is now criticized for not properly covering public interest stories.

Between 2019-2022, at least 800 people were hired in ERT. All were employed with work contracts that needed renewal every 6-12 months. Another breakthrough was the creation in May 2022 of a new channel called ERT News, which broadcasts 24/7. While the situation at ERT has stabilized in recent years, critics view the process of depoliticization as a subtle form of control by the current government, although one less aimed at overtly promoting a political agenda.

An example of this can be seen through ERT's coverage of the Greek surveillance scandal, where it was revealed that the Greek intelligence agency (EYP) was spying on journalists, politicians, and the head of the Greek army, among others. The same citizens and others were also being simultaneously spied on with Intellexa's Predator spyware. The scandal was revealed in April 2022, but ERT did not report on it until March 2023 when a major political figure was revealed to have been spied on. ERT also failed to report on the European Parliament's Committee of Inquiry on Pegasus and other spy programs (PEGA) that had specific conclusions and recommendations for Greece.




Another example is a [censorship case](#) regarding Prime Minister Mitsotakis's trip to the Greek island Ikaria, during which he allegedly violated the government's COVID-19 measures in February 2021. A memo from ERT management was leaked in which instructed the producers and journalists not to broadcast images of Mitsotakis taken whilst visiting the house of a fellow New Democracy MP in Ikaria.

During the pandemic, stories about the conditions in hospitals and the complaints of the medical staff were also underreported or concealed. The first press conference of hospital doctors was never aired, neither were stories about heads of hospital clinics resigning and the termination of the contract of the representative of hospital employees. On March 2021, Syriza turned against the public broadcasting service, claiming that it refused to cover or present its new policy proposal for the Greek National Health System.

The public media failed to cover the demonstration in Serres of the relatives of the 57 people who died in the country's worst train disaster in Tempi. More recently, other media outlets have sent reporters to Mykonos island where locals have long complained about [illicit and sometimes assertive activity](#) by deep-pocketed developers and the Greek government has carried out a swift crackdown. ERT has sent none.

While the previous crisis at ERT has subsided and it has benefited from a period of stability, its oversight by a government body overseen by the PM's office pose obvious major questions over its independence. The broadcaster continues to suffer from low levels of public trust and faces questions over its credibility. Overall, the situation remains an improvement compared to recent years and the broadcaster's news and analysis content is no longer used as an overt media megaphone of the government. However, clear political bias is clearly visible and sensitive stories which could damage the government are sometimes ignored, while public interest reporting on certain topics is lacking.

MEDIA ASSETS

| | | |
|---|------------|---|
|  | TELEVISION | ERT1, ERT2, ERT3, ERT Sports HD, ERT World, ERTNews |
|  | RADIO | First Programme, Second Programme, Third Programme, ERA Sport, Kosmos 93.6, Voice of Greece (ERA 5), 102 FM (Thessaloniki.), 95.8 FM (Thessaloniki). |
|  | WEBSITE | ert.gr, ertflix.gr (streaming platform), mousikasynola.ert.gr (Music Ensembles), ertnews.gr, ertsports.gr. |

ERT is also home to three music ensembles: National Symphony Orchestra, Contemporary Music Orchestra, Hellenic Radio Choir.

ERT is mainly funded by revenues that are generated through the collection of a license fee, a levy that is paid with the electricity bill. The fee is €3 a month and has to be paid by all households in Greece. **Turnover** for 2021 was 198,692,000 euros.

Suffocating control over the Athens News Agency - Macedonian Press Agency

The challenges facing ERT are similar to those facing the Greek public news agency, the Athens-Macedonian News Agency (ANA-MPA). However, while the influence of the ERT on the Greek media ecosystem has been diminished over time, the power of the ANA-MPA in shaping news content in the country remains high. This central role in the production and dissemination of news in Greece has made it a more important body for capture or control by successive governments via politicized appointments.

The ANA-MPA has a board of directors consisting of nine members, the majority of whom are appointed by the government. In 2021, a ministerial decision was made to increase the number of board members from seven to nine. The president of the agency announced that the two extra members appointed by the government will not be sitting on the board in any official capacity. The ANA-MPA is funded through a combination of a state grant, a small amount of European Parliament funds and advertising revenues which are not made public. It has more than 300 employees. Like ERT, the agency was put under direct prime ministerial control in 2019.

The agency's content amounts to almost 80% of all news content in the Greek media. This is due to the fact that almost all Greek media are subscribed to the agency's services, receiving and republishing its content. As most media, especially online media, do not have specialized reporters who cover all ministries and relevant topics, they choose to republish the content of ANA-MPA. Paradoxically, the agency's own website cannot compete with private media, even though its content is widely disseminated. The reach of the agency's content therefore increases the importance of its editorial independence. Much like ERT, after the elections there is an equivalent changeover in the ANA-MPA executives. As a result, there is a clear preferential coverage for the government.

In November 2022, the Journalists' Union of the Athens Daily Newspapers (ESIEA) issued a [statement](#) criticizing the repeated violation of the journalistic principle of pluralism by the ANA-MPA. The union said it received regular complaints about how the agency presents current affairs only through the responses of government officials, without reference to the news that prompted the response or to statements that complete the picture.

It is also criticized for lack of news critical of the New Democracy government. Examples of public interest news that was not picked up by the agency include Reporters Without Borders' 2023 report which ranked Greece as the worst EU country for press freedom, a European Parliamentary Committee's press briefing regarding the Greek spy scandal when the committee visited Athens, and news on anti-government demonstrations that are published only after the official announcement of the Greek police. During the pandemic all reports regarding COVID-19 and the state of the public health system were also defined by the announcements of Greek Civil Protection Deputy Minister Nikos Hardalias. While much of the news content sent out via the ANA-MPA is non-political in nature, sensitive matters of public interest such as these are regularly overlooked.

Through capture of this body via politicized appointments and the oversight of the office of the prime minister, the current executive wields indirect control over the ANA-MPA, and in turn, some level of indirect influence over 80% of all news content in the Greek media. Reports by international media freedom organizations have [criticized](#) the overt attempts by the New Democracy party to ensure "message control" within the Greek media landscape. This current control over the ANA-MPA is one of the clearest examples of controlling the message, and of state capture of media, in Greece.

4 - Media Regulator: National Council for Radio and Television

The final element of media capture involves the political control over the system for media regulation. In many EU states, management of media regulators by politicized individuals with links to ruling parties have been used to block media licenses, administer fines and pile pressure on critical and independent media. In Greece, a country which has historically suffered from the lack of a framework for media regulation, this issue has, overall, not represented as a major threat to media freedom in recent years. Rather, challenges facing the regulatory body stems from a lack of finances and capacity. Historical failures to properly regulate the media market have, however, permitted the high levels of capture of private media in Greece, with damaging knock-on effects for media pluralism.

The National Council for Radio and Television (NCRTV) is the Greek independent administrative authority which supervises and regulates the broadcasting sector. The Council has been assigned to ensure that all broadcasts comply with the provisions of the law. It has the competence to control the broadcasters' operation with reference to their informational, educational, cultural and entertainment responsibilities to the public and to ensure fundamental benefits such as freedom of expression, political and cultural pluralism and the broadcasting of reliable, fair and balanced information. The Council also regulates media companies and is able to impose fines and allocate or revoke broadcast licenses.

| | |
|--------------------------------|-----|
| TV (National 7, Regional 104) | 111 |
| RADIO STATIONS | 879 |
| SUBSCRIPTION SERVICE PROVIDERS | 12 |
| PUBLISHERS | 469 |
| ADVERTISING | 263 |
| MEDIA MARKET RESEARCH | 13 |
| AUDIOVISUAL PRODUCTION | 26 |
| POLLING COMPANIES | 63 |

The NCRTV is composed of nine members, who are nominated by the Conference of the Presidents, a special body of the Greek parliament in charge of the nomination of the independent authorities, and in which all political parties are represented. The nominees have to be elected by 4/5 of the members of the Conference of the Presidents and the members of the authority are appointed for a period of six years, not renewed.

According to the [Euromedia Ownership Monitor](#), which monitors media ownership transparency in European countries, one of the factors hampering transparency around this issue in Greece is that the NCRTV releases reports on major developments in the audiovisual sector "with apparent delay, displaying distinctive slowness in the execution of its operational responsibilities". The European Commission said of NCRTV, "concerns remain with regard to its financial capacity and human resources" in the 2022 [Rule of Law Report](#) on Greece.

Until January 2024 the latest available annual report of the NCRTV is the one from [2021](#), which was published in December 2022. The Council also has a Department of Transparency that deals with all ownership changes in TV channels, but their public data are actually not usable due to the great delays of their publications. As stated by NCRTV's president and former prosecutor of the Supreme Court, Evertipi Koutzamani, the regulator employs 34 people while in 2009 there were 81.

After the TV licencing procedure (2016-2018) there were no claims about problematic licencing decisions against media in Greece. Evidence of strong political meddling in the regulator and its operations, with an aim of revoking media licences, creating economic uncertainty, or suppressing independent journalism, is lacking. On balance, the system for media regulation in Greece, despite historic flaws, cannot be considered as captured. However, as outlined above, the system of capture in private media in the country can be traced back to the weak or non-existent media regulation in previous decades. Recently however, concerns as to the regulator's independence were raised after the [changes](#) in the composition and the election process of the new members of the independent authorities of Hellenic Authority for Communication Security and Privacy (ADAE) and NCRTV.

Media Freedom in Greece: Wider Backsliding

The issue of media capture in Greece must be framed within the wider context of deteriorating levels of media freedom in the country in the last few years, which has been noted by multiple international media freedom organizations. Even though freedom of expression and the right to information are explicitly recognized in the Greek Constitution, these rights are not always respected in practice. The most recent [Democracy Report 2023](#) from the V-Dem Institute downgraded Greece from a liberal to an electoral democracy in 2022.

Press freedom in Greece suffered severe setbacks between 2021 and 2023, including a major [wiretapping scandal](#). Furthermore, SLAPPs (Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation) are common and the 2021 murder of crime reporter Giorgos Karaivaz in Athens has not yet been solved. The same applies to the case of journalist Sokratis Giolias, who was shot and killed in front of his house on July 19, 2010. As press freedom groups [state](#), “no authorities have ever been held to account for their investigative failures amid ongoing impunity in the case”.

More than two years have now passed since Karaivaz was gunned down outside his Athens home in broad daylight. The authorities have been criticized for their lack of progress in the investigation. A European parliamentary delegation visited Greece in March and concluded that there was no “visible progress in the police investigation” into Karaivaz’s murder, urging the Greek authorities to seek Europol assistance “without further delay.” A few weeks before 21 May 2023 elections, the police [announced](#) the arrests of two suspects in connection with the 2021 assassination but the investigation is still ongoing.

The 2022 Corruption Perceptions Index from Transparency International [reveals](#) that Greece is “threatened by serious concerns over the roll-back of the rule of law, the independence of the national transparency authority, and weak guarantees for the protection and safety of journalists”.

The “Greek Watergate”

After Hungary, Poland and Spain, Greece is the latest EU member state accused of spying on journalists, opposition politicians and state officials. In 2021, Greek journalist Stavros Malichoudis found out through a newspaper article that the National Intelligence Service had been [monitoring his work](#). A few months later it was revealed that another journalist, Thanasis Koukakis, was also under surveillance from the Intelligence Service (EYP) and at the same time his phone was hacked through Predator spyware. The Greek prime minister admitted that the EYP surveillance “was a mistake” – but not an illegal one – and acknowledged that there were some surveillance operations against Greek citizens.

The use of cyber-surveillance technology to [spy on journalists](#) is clearly a major problem in Greece. According to [reports](#), many journalists have been targeted by Intellexa’s Predator spyware. The use of spyware by individuals is illegal in Greece. The New Democracy government has tightened the penalties for the use of such tools by individuals, but at the same time, in the same law, it has institutionalized the supply of spyware by the state. The Greek government still denies purchasing or using the Predator spyware.

SLAPPs

Legal threats are a significant problem for media freedom in Greece, including criminal lawsuits and Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs), which mostly target journalists who report on corruption at government-critical outlets. The limited resources of Greek journalists and media outlets mean such legal threats can lead to self-censorship.

SLAPP lawsuits by multinational companies and government executives have targeted independent journalists and outlets in Greece. Abusive lawsuits by the Greek Prime Minister's nephew and former secretary general of the prime minister's office, Grigoris Dimitriadis, against journalists of two media outlets (EFSYN, Reporters United) and the journalist Thanasis Koukakis amid the wiretapping scandal. In December 2023 Dimitriadis unleashed a [new round of SLAPPs](#)⁸. The Journalists' Union of Athens daily newspapers, ESIEA, claimed Dimitriadis "unleashed a flurry of new lawsuits against many journalists and the media and with exorbitant and exterminating claims", to intimidate journalists and limit access to information.

The Greek independent media outlet Alterthess and one of its journalists, Stavroula Poulimeni, were targeted by Efstathios Lialios, an executive of Greek gold mining company Hellas Gold. Tasos Sarantis from the daily newspaper Efimerida ton Syntakton (EFSYN) appeared in court on charges of "false publications" related to an article on the construction of a wind farm in the Peloponnese. Thodoris Chondrogiannis from Reporters United was targeted by a recycling company after publishing a story that showed how the company, which has strong ties to the Greek government, has failed to recycle packaging in Greece.

Reporting on migration and protests

Migration policy, human rights violations committed in its implementation including pushbacks, and the humanitarian crisis that the refugee stream has created are highly sensitive topics for the government. Reporting on the issue is increasingly difficult, as journalists face obstructions including arbitrary arrest and detention, restriction of access to migration hotspots, surveillance, and harassment. Suspension of journalist's access to Greek refugee camps is an issue which seriously hinders the right to information and the work of journalists. Previous cases of detentions of journalists that try to report on migration is a documented practice that creates a chilling effect and discourages journalists from carrying on with their stories.

Reporting on protests and demonstrations is another particularly problematic area for journalists, who face aggression and harassment from law enforcement and from protesters. Overall, there is a lack of political will to ensure that journalists can safely report from demonstrations, which translates to a lack of adequate protection at the operational level. There are many examples of police operations, where officers arrest and detain journalists and photojournalists despite the fact that they inform the police that they work for the press. Difficulties in reporting on migration and on protests highlights the lack of accountability for law enforcement personnel who are aggressive towards journalists. The lack of adequate disciplinary proceedings and oversight damages the rule of law and creates a highly insecure context for reporters.

⁸ Dimitriadis sent lawsuits to the media outlet Efimerida ton Syntakton, EfSyn, the media group Alter Ego and to journalist Dimitris Terzis, and for a second time to journalists Thanasis Koukakis, Nikolas Leontopoulos, Thodoris Chondrogiannos and Christoforos Kasdaglis.

Conclusions

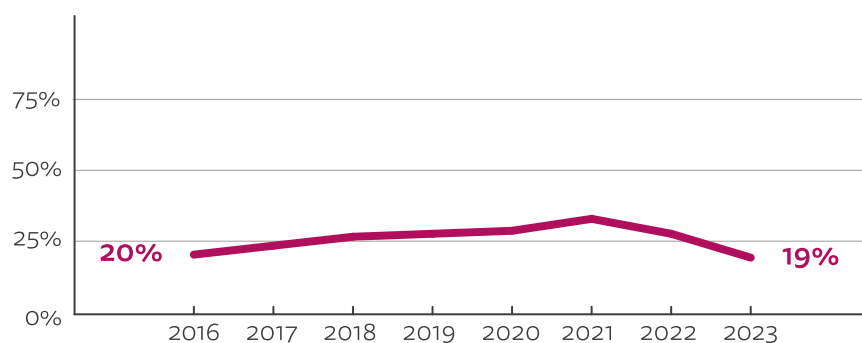
Legitimation crisis and lack of public trust in media

Media capture has many detrimental impacts on society and democracy, including negatively affecting media and public trust in news. Countries with higher levels of media capture – in which citizens perceive their media as serving particular political or economic interests rather than the public interest – are likely to experience lower levels of trust.

In the annual global study conducted by the Reuters Institute on Media, Greek media consistently rank among the lowest. In 2016, out of a total of 26 countries, Greece placed last, with only 20% of respondents confirming that they can trust the media most of the time. In 2017, among 36 countries, Greece ranked joint last, with a trust rate of 23%. In the [Reuters Institute Digital News Report](#) for 2023 Greece was again one of the lowest countries with 19%. Trust was again lowest in the country's television channels, where media capture is considered to be the most acute in Greece.

OVERALL TRUST SCORE Change over time 2016-2023

Greece

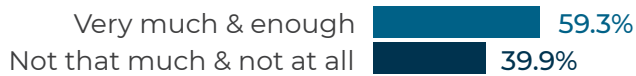


Source: <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report/2023/greece>

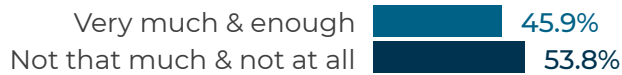
According to a nationwide [survey on public trust in journalism](#) conducted in 2022 on behalf of the Greek non-profit Incubator for Media Education and Development - iMedD, even though the public considers journalists to be well qualified (65%), the vast majority (85%) believe that they “attempt to manipulate people” and also consider them to be “censored by their superiors” (83.5%). 72% do not trust the public broadcaster and 93% regard journalists and the media in Greece to be too dependent on governments and/or political parties.

In a recent [survey](#) conducted in April 2023 for Eteron Institute specifically targeting young people of ages 17-34, when asked to what extent they trust the following in order to get informed they responded:

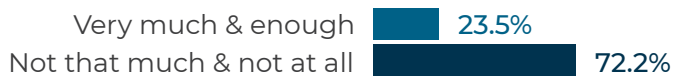
NEWS SITES



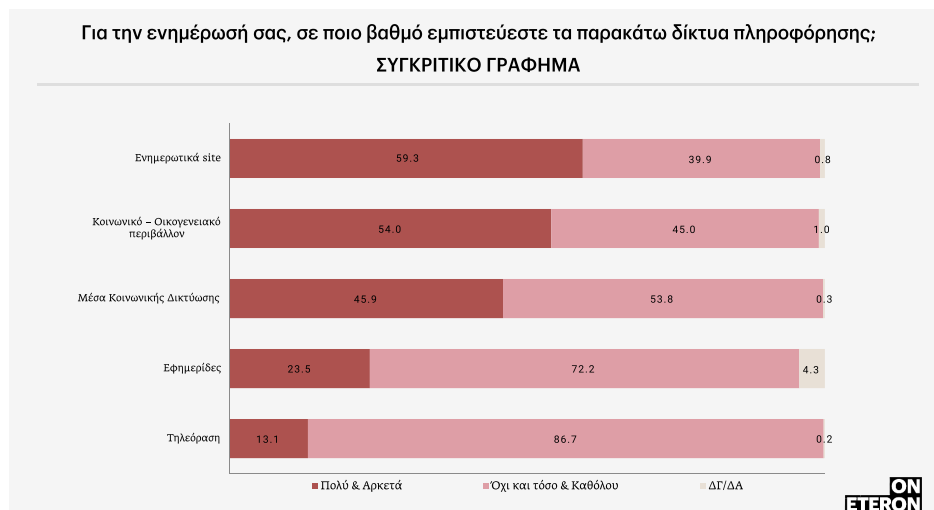
SOCIAL MEDIA



NEWSPAPERS



TV



Historical media capture in Greece, along with deep polarization in society, has been a contributing factor to low levels of trust in the media. This poses knock-on challenges for elections and democracy more widely. If Greek democracy is to stem its backsliding, efforts to roll back media capture, safeguard independent journalism and bolster media pluralism should be considered as part of the solution.

Assessing media capture in Greece

The following conclusions can be drawn from this report on the state of media capture and independent journalism in Greece:

- The toxic interdependence of media, the state and banks is unregulated and uncontrolled despite the modest attempts to improve the situation in recent years
- The weak or non-existent media regulation in previous decades, combined with a partial lack of beneficial media ownership ownership, also contributed to media capture in previous decades
- The use of state funding has historically been used as a weapon from the government to influence the media; the impact of government reforms here is yet to be seen
- Private advertising and banking loans create a landscape where financial dependence on banks and big corporations places editorial independence at high risk of compromise
- Independent media try to gain the public's trust through investigative reporting, despite intense political and economic pressure, but lack visibility and influence
- A small percentage of journalists working in bigger media try to report on transparency and corruption cases; though self censorship is high overall
- While public broadcaster ERT has stabilized after years of crisis and has become less partisan in nature, both it and the Athens-Macedonian News Agency remain subject to varying levels of political control and influence

These overlapping factors combine to create a media ecosystem exhibiting multiple forms of media capture, yet one in which the levels of capture and control vary. Of the four elements of media capture assessed in this report, the capture of private media in Greece is by far the most entrenched. High levels of concentration of legacy media in the hands of wealthy families and ship owners with varying political connections to political parties, and the New Democracy party in particular, have contributed significantly to a media ecosystem in which, although there is a high number of media titles, real media pluralism is weak and independent journalism which fulfills its watchdog role has been pushed to the fringes. A new law aimed at enhancing transparency of media ownership is positive, yet its effectiveness can be improved. The full impact of this law remains to be seen.

At the state level, public advertising was manipulated by the government during the pandemic to reward media outlets close to the ruling party. This pointed to a wider issue over the non-transparent allocation of state support to media down political lines. Recent reforms to improve the transparency of media ownership via new media registries and their receipt of state advertising campaigns are a positive step. The effectiveness of this reform remains to be seen. In the Greek context, the amount of money available to media via state advertising is limited, reducing the threat of this system being distorted to buy favorable coverage. However, pressure on media by private advertisers remains commonplace, and the financial crisis deepened the media's vulnerability to pressure from vested business interests. While there have been worrying examples of manipulation, systematic capture of the system for state support to media is not present, as it is in other EU member states.

Some level of capture of public service media in Greece is exhibited, particularly at the national press agency. Compared to previous decades, the level of control by the government over ERT and the ANA-MPA news agency is less acute and direct interference is lessened. However, the continued supervision of both media houses by the office of the prime minister poses serious questions over their independence. Despite positive stabilization after years of turmoil, public interest reporting at both the ERT and ANA-MPA is lacking and serious topics go unreported, indicating possible self-censorship and an aversion to sensitive topics which could damage the government.

The element of media capture least present in Greece is the capture of media regulatory bodies. While the NCRTV suffers from weak economic capacity and the system of appointments poses potential questions over the impartiality of its management, its functional independence has not been questioned. However, the weak or non-existent media regulation in previous decades played a central role in allowing the current capture of private media to become entrenched. Far stronger regulation of the media ecosystem to protect independent journalism and limit media capture is required.

A mixed picture therefore emerges regarding media capture in Greece. While the overall capture of state organs such as media regulators is not present, the government does wield undue control over the country's public service media bodies, which negatively affects their independence. Capture of the system for state advertising to media by political parties has been prevalent historically, including prominent examples by the current government, though reforms could ensure better regulation of the system moving forward. In the private media market, the long-term entanglement of major media owners with political forces and vested business interests and banks, which was deepened further after the financial crisis, is highly problematic and has long been having a corrosive effect on Greek democracy.

While this toxic capture of the fourth estate and the symbiotic relationship between media owners and political elites in Greece is as problematic as in many of the EU's worst offenders for media freedom, wider control over state organs such as media regulatory bodies and the system for state advertising is less severe. However, the lack of overt pressure on media through a media regulatory body in Greece may simply be down to the fact that capture in the privately owned media is so advanced that heavy handed measures to silence critical media or strengthen pro-government media are not required. Due to the dependence of media owners on the state and the web of personal connections with media owners and political figures, self censorship is rife and the ruling party already enjoys relatively favourable media coverage at the national level, particularly in the television market. After the party's victory in the 2023 election, more undemocratic tactics for influencing the media ecosystem may be deemed unnecessary. While critical and hard-hitting journalism is present in Greece, overall New Democracy is insulated from the effects of serious watchdog reporting due to the compliance of major television and print media with owners in towing the government line and limiting prolonged criticism.

Media pluralism is more than stating that Greece has hundreds of media, just as media freedom means more than saying that there are newspapers that criticize the government. Media freedom is fundamental for democratic societies. The public rely on the media for information and to make informed decisions. The media are also an outlet for public discussion and opinion and serve as a watchdog over government. That is the real criteria for media freedom: the level of transparency and accountability to which it can hold governments and corporations. It is hoped the conclusions drawn from this report can help underscore the need for long-term thinking about the bolstering of free and independent journalism in Greece as a prerequisite for the flourishing of the country's democracy.

Recommendations

- Ensure full transparency of media ownership, including all forms of beneficial ownership, in order to better safeguard independence from political connections and other associated business interests. The NCRTV's media ownership registry should be accessible and regularly updated and include all radio/print/online media, to allow greater scrutiny of ownership changes and practices
- Strengthen the National Council for Radio and Television (NCRTV) that now malfunctions due to limited resources, and political interference risks. Media registries should be a responsibility of the NCRTV and not of the government and the prime minister's office. Provide full transparency on media registries by publishing the media and the amount of state funding they were given
- Ensure all forms of state advertising or financial support to all media are distributed via a transparent and accessible process based on objective criteria, rather than apparent political affiliation, in line with the provision in the EU's European Media Freedom Act (EMFA). Ensure information is updated regularly and easily accessible to researchers and the public.
- Increase transparency over news media concentration and strengthen legislation to limit high levels of both vertical and horizontal ownership concentration in the media landscape in an effort to bolster real media pluralism. Ensure greater oversight of media acquisitions under competition law and ensure media pluralism is a key assessment criteria for any future sales.
- In media owned by wealthy and politically-connected commercial interests, particularly in legacy broadcast and print media, strong internal safeguards and firewalls should be established and respected to prevent all forms of interference of owners and other politics and business interests, while also protecting editorial independence and journalistic freedoms and discouraging self-censorship
- To help safeguard the independence of the ERT and national news agency, review the need for oversight by the office of the prime minister. Establish a new system for appointments to supervisory and management boards of the ERT and ANA-MPA which ends the ability of a government minister to select individuals and replace this with a more pluralistic system of appointment by civil society organizations. Strengthen rules about the professional criteria of those able to be appointed to oversight bodies. Enhance safeguards for firing or replacement of management and editors at ERT and ANA-MPA to limit political meddling
- Following the example of other EU countries, establish a stronger support fund for public interest, regional, community and investigative journalism in Greece through public grants, which is distributed on a tender basis through a third-party body with representation from journalistic and media experts from across the sector
- Adopt swift amendments to legislation which obliges competent prosecutors to justify any surveillance against journalists undertaken in the interest of national security that allows for proper scrutiny of its legality and proportionality. Bring justice for cases of illegitimate and illegal spying on journalists in an independent and transparent manner and invite Europol to support investigations

- Introduce a strong legal framework against strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs) in line with the EU Anti-SLAPP Directive. Repeal Law 1178/81, which regulates the basic legal framework of lawsuits against journalists and the media. Implement the call by the Journalists' Union of Athens Daily Newspapers for its repeal, which argues that the law has created the legal basis for a lawsuit industry whose sole purpose is to silence the press and journalists. These lawsuits obstruct investigative journalism and threaten the financial survival of the media and journalists. Fully decriminalize defamation.
- Ensure prompt, effective and independent investigations of crimes against journalists by dedicating additional resources and staff to these cases, recognizing their special nature and impact on the public sphere. Ensure adequate focus and resources are provided to addressing cases of impunity for the killing of journalists in Greece



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