



Permanent Representation of Greece
to the Council of Europe

Strasbourg, 8 August 2022
Ref. No. 6686/AS 782

Dear Secretary General,

Please find attached the response from the Greek authorities to alert no. 103/2022, which was uploaded on the Platform for the Safety of Journalists and Protection of Journalism of the Council of Europe, in March 2022.

Yours Sincerely,

Georgios Skemperis

Chargé d'affaires a.i.

Att.: 2 pages

To: **Ms Marija Pejcinovic Buric**
Secretary General
of the Council of Europe

Cc: **Mr. Matjaz Gruden**
Director
DG II, Directorate of Democratic Participation

Mr. Adrian Evtuchovici
Head of Division/Coordinator of the Platform

In town

Alert No. 103/2022, 25 March 2022

“Threats against Journalist Thomas Sideris“

**Response from the Greek Authorities
Ministry of State
Secretariat-General for Communication and Media**

Freedom of expression and freedom of the press are guaranteed under article 14 of the Greek Constitution. The operation of the Press is central to our democratic state and is directly linked to the quality of Democracy. The Greek Constitution wisely and accurately describes the terms and conditions of its operation, in order to safeguard the Press and the Government, as well as the citizens against inaccurate, insulting and defamatory publications, while it also stipulates that the manner of protection is further determined by a relevant Law. Furthermore, editorial independence, autonomy and dignity of journalists are further ensured in public and private media by Codes of Conduct of the journalistic profession.

Greece has adopted all the recommendations and guidelines of the Council of Europe on the protection of journalism and safety of journalists and other media actors (Recommendation CM/Rec(2016)4 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the protection of journalism and safety of journalists and other media actors, Resolution on the safety of journalists adopted by the specialised Ministers of the Council of Europe member States, on the occasion of the Conference of Ministers responsible for Media and Information Society, jointly organised by the Council of Europe and the Republic of Cyprus and held online on 10-11 June 2021, etc) and takes all necessary measures for this purpose, namely to carry out effective, independent and prompt investigations into any crimes against journalists. Within its area of competence, the Secretariat General for Communication and Media places special focus on the upholding of human rights in the media environment by empowering people that work and support it, namely, media professionals and journalists.

Furthermore, we would like to add that Greece is currently unfolding a series of initiatives aligned with the Commission *Recommendation (EU) 2021/1534 on ensuring the protection, safety and empowerment of journalists and other media professionals in the European Union*, with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding on May 23rd of 2022 among the Secretariat General for Communication and Media of the Presidency of the Government, which undertook the initiative, and another five competent Ministries.

This Memorandum of Understanding contains a common framework of cooperation which includes, inter alia, the preparation and submission of proposals for legislative and non-legislative initiatives to ensure the protection, safety and empowerment of journalists and other media professionals, the documentation and specialization of policies and initiatives in regards to online safety, digital literacy and empowerment of journalists, the planning of training programs for the development of skills and competencies in all professions related to the protection of journalists and other media professionals as well as raising public awareness of the dangers posed by attacks on journalists for the smooth function of Democracy. This

Memorandum of Understanding has led to the formation of a Task Force on the 27th of July 2022, to which representatives from university institutions and journalists' associations participate alongside with the representatives of all competent public authorities and relevant institutions, to further pursue the objectives stated above.

These stakeholders are expected to work under the following mandate:

1. A review of the current situation of journalists in Greece.
2. The collection of experiences, requests and worries or difficulties that concern the participating stakeholders in the Task Force.
3. The analysis of existing best practices on an EU or international level, in order for them to be adapted to the needs of the greek media ecosystem.
4. The submission of proposals by each participating body for policy-making with a special focus on female journalists, young journalists, journalists active in the regional media and in the digital environment.
5. The joint exploration for existing tools, ways of cooperation and mutual support.
6. The drafting of a framework of proposals for legislative and non-legislative initiatives, which will be accessible for any parallel scientific or research development.
7. The promotion and public communication of the proposed actions.
8. Other initiatives related to the objectives of the Memorandum of Understanding.

On the matter of the Alert No. 103/2022 with the title "Threats against Thomas Sideris", the response of the Hellenic Radio and Television (ERT) is the following:

"With regard to the complaint of journalist Mr. Thomas Sideris for censorship in the radio of ERT and the relevant report at the platform of the Council of Europe for the safety of journalists, we inform you of the following:

There was no intervention or any disposition of censorship against Mr. Sideris' radio programme named "Azov Battalion" on behalf of the Director of the 1st Program of ERA [Greek Public Radio Broadcaster]. On the contrary, the Director aimed through a strenuous effort and always in consultation with Mr. Sideris, to reveal the truth on the Russian invasion to Ukraine.

Having as the main guide, the maintenance of plurality in public radio broadcast, the Director of ERT suggested to the journalist to proceed, after the broadcast of the said radio programme, with the production of a documentary on the current state of Russia, pointing to the imprisonment of journalists, the silencing of Media, the "Wagner Battalion". Mr. Sideris accepted the proposal. It is worth mentioning that the cancellation of the said radio programme of Mr. Sideris was never discussed, while the programme was broadcasted exactly as this was produced by Mr. Sideris.

The Director of the First Programme of ERA favourably supported the initiative of Mr. Sideris from the beginning, something that the journalist admitted himself."