**Reply to the questionnaire by the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression**

***Answers are provided by the General Secretariat for Media and Communication***

1. **a) What are the key trends, threats or challenges to the freedom, independence, pluralism and diversity of media and the safety of journalists in your country, region, or globally in your view?**

**b) To what extent have these trends, threats and challenges emerged, or have been aggravated, because of the policies and practices of digital and social media platforms?**

Changes that occur in the field of media are happening, nowadays, at an astonishing pace. The rapid emergence and evolution of technology has allowed media to reach out to a wider audience. Admittedly, these changes have paved the way for the democratization of the media sector in general, boosting, at the same time, the right to freedom of expression and pluralism.

However, as the rise of digital media has significantly impacted the media industry, traditional media outlets have been falling behind, causing them to close or reduce their business and work plan, leading to, in some cases, mass redundancies. In a nutshell, digitalization has brought many opportunities as well as challenges to the media industry. It has thoroughly altered the way news content and information is disseminated. In this context, traditional journalism has been also significantly affected.

Internet giants and social media platforms are now the major players in this field. They have become a key source of news in most democratic states, functioning by collecting their users’ data and personalized selections of news and other information content. Moreover, they play a major role in the continuously changing mix of thoughts and ideas that define public opinion. In this “click-based economy”, it is not always easy to find reliable news. Sensational and misleading content is oftentimes more profitable, hence better promoted and more noticeable/noticed. In the end, this could result in a loss of confidence in democratic institutions and processes, which is the opposite of that which was originally intended.

Individuals increasingly rely on news and information from online sources, many of which lack the accountability structures and ethical self-regulation that characterize traditional quality journalism. The structural swift of attention away from established media, which are subject to rules, duties and ethics and thus can be held accountable, has resulted in the emergence of negative phenomena. Online platforms are correlated with online hate speech, often gender-based, as well as with the rapid dissemination of disinformation and “fake news”.

Intentional disinformation, sometimes going viral on all corners of the globe, impair societal consensus and trust in democratic processes, media and communication institutions. Greece recognizes the crucial importance of reliable and trustworthy news and information delivered in a pluralistic, diverse and sustainable media environment, free of undue state or private control. Additionally, Greece has always been recognizing, at the highest political level, that threats and violence against journalists constitute an attack on democracy. Initiatives in Greece towards the protection of journalists and the prosperity of their profession have always been and will continue to be a political priority.

**c) Please highlight the gender dimensions of the trends and their consequences for the equality and safety of women journalists as well as media freedom.**

Unfortunately, in today’s world, women are still under-represented, which results in deficits of journalistic content created by women, in addition to the persistent and pressing gender-issues imbalance and challenges such as harassment at the workplace, the still existing “glass ceiling effect” and the gender differentiated pay-gap.

To this end, we need to establish gender balance and social diversity in the content of market and job creation as well as strive for equality, diversity and inclusivity. Achieving balanced participation of women and other under-represented social groups in the workplace will not only have positive social outcomes, but it will also significantly contribute to the betterment of the quality and the broadening of the horizons of journalistic content as a field of professional activity.

In this regard, Greece attaches particular emphasis on mainstreaming gender perspective across its national policies, including measures to enhance the safety of female journalists and to ensure media freedom, independence and plurality. Therefore, combating gender stereotypes in public speech and the media, as well as the gender dimension of the safety of journalists, are included in the National Action Plans on Gender Equality (the current one is renewed for the period 2021-2025) and on Women, Peace and Security, to be formally adopted shortly.

Moreover, in order to improve its national protective legal framework, Greece has recently ratified the International Labour Organization Convention No. 190 (2019) on Violence and Harassment in the Workplace.

1. **What legislative, admin, policy, regulatory or other measures have Governments taken to promote press media freedom, including media independence, pluralism, viability and *ownership issues*? What has been the impact of these measures? What changes or additional measures would you recommend?**

Firstly, the Constitution of Greece in Article 14 regarding “*freedom of expression and of the press”* stipulates the following*:*

*“1. Every person may express and propagate his thoughts orally, in writing and through the press in compliance with the laws of the State.*

*2. The press is free. Censorship and all other preventive measures are prohibited.”*

In Greece, the General Secretariat for Media and Communication is the public authority competent for media regulation and strategic planning of policies in the media and audiovisual sector. Under this premise, the Directorate for Media, the main division of this Secretariat, is responsible for proposing media policies relating to audiovisual and news media issues, while monitoring the implementation of national regulation on the sector, according to national, European Union and international standards. In this context, it advocates and contributes to policy initiatives, led by public Authorities in Greece and in the European Union, related to all media mechanisms and journalism. Moreover, the General Secretariat for Media and Communication is also charged with the responsibility to provide timely and accurate information to the public regarding the work of the Government, as well as to exercise its supervisory responsibilities on the Athens News Agency - Macedonian Press Agency (ANA-MPA) and the National TV broadcaster (ERT SA).

The National Council for Radio and Television (NCRTV) is the Greek independentadministrative Authority that supervises and regulates the radio/television market, founded in 1989. Its legal framework is primarily defined in the Greek Constitution (Article 15, paragraph 2). The NCRTV is a nine-member body, consisting of a president, a vice president and seven members (Act N.2863/2000, as amended by Law 4357/2016). These members are appointed by the “Plenary of the Presidents”, a special body of the Parliament, in charge of the nomination of the members of the various independent Authorities, where all political parties are represented. The NCRTV members are persons of high status, enjoying social approval, distinguished for their scientific expertise and their professional ability in the legal, academic and media fields.

**The NCRTV has the following functions:**

* **Regulatory**: The NCRTV advises the competent Minister on the type and number of digital terrestrial television and radio licenses, as well as on the starting price of the auction procedures; issues the relevant Calls for Applications and grants all types of operating licenses to broadcasters; compiles Codes of Ethics for news broadcasts, advertisements and entertainment programs.
* **Inspections**: With regard to the content of radio and television programs, the NCRTV systematically monitors the observance of the rules of ethics, the content quality, the plurality of information, the protection of minors and the respect of human dignity. With regard to the ownership status of private media, it monitors compliance with the applicable law restrictions and incompatibilities and publishes the relevant data, in order to comply with the principle of transparency.
* **Sanction**: In cases of law violation, it imposes fines or other administrative sanctions, while, in serious cases, revocation of the operating licenses may be imposed.

In 2021, with the aim of modernizing and ensuring the smooth operation of the broadcasting market, in the light of addressing the emerging challenges of digital transformation, Greece, along with the transposition of the Audiovisual Media Services Directive 2018/1808 into national legislation by Law (4779/2021), introduced amendments to existing legislation proceeding, thus aiming at a comprehensive improvement of the audiovisual environment’s regulation, always within the context of advocating and promoting pluralism in the media as an essential pillar of the right to information and freedom of expression.

In particular, the new Law:

* + supports television stations, as well as the regional and local media, in dealing with the effects of the pandemic;
  + adds flexibility to the operation of TV station license holders, regarding the employment relationship of the staff they employ;
  + enhances transparency by introducing the obligation to register in the National Regulatory Authority’s (NCRTV) Business Register for media service providers;
  + confirms and enhances the NCRTV role as the independent authority supervising the AV sector;
  + sets a strict obligation regarding funding allocations for the NCRTV.

Moreover, with regard to particular **media ownership** issues, Law 3310/2005 defines the incompatibilities between owners of media and owners of enterprises that participate in public contracts. Apart from the level of owners, the same provision applies to partners, key shareholders, board members or executives in the media market. The incompatibilities are inspected by the National Council for Radio and Television (NCRTV). The new Law (4779/2021) further enhances transparency of media ownership and public availability of media ownership information by introducing the obligation for media service providers to register with the National Regulatory Authority’s (NCRTV) Business Registry.

In the same context, the General Secretariat for Media and Communication has launched, as a national operational measure, the online media registry “e-media” (<http://emedia.media.gov.gr/login>), under Law 4339 of 2015. The “e-media” registry is addressed to all media owners with online presence (websites), encouraging them to voluntarily register their activities online, thus ensuring a transparent, balanced and fair-functioning of the media industry in the non-linear environment. The “e-media” is innovative as it acknowledges the new trends on journalism and active citizenry, aspires to map the media field in a clear and transparent way, engaging all media players, online media included as well for the first time, in order to increase their online news activity and take advantage of the state advertising and other benefits.

**In the field of foreign policy**, Greece prioritizes and promotes the issue of safety of journalists and media actors from abusive practices by authoritarian regimes or in conflict environments. Since 2013, Greece, together with a core group of countries (Argentina, Austria, Costa Rica, France, Tunisia), submits biannually the Resolution on the “Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity” to the Third Committee of the UN General Assembly. In this vein, the Resolution 76/173 on the “Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity”, adopted in 2021 by the 76th UNGA Third Committee, inter alia, includes a gender-perspective in dealing with the issue of violence against journalists.

Greece also participates in the core group of countries supporting the Austrian-led Resolution on the “Protection of Journalists”, which is adopted biennially by the Human Rights Council. Moreover, Greece is a member of the “Groups of Friends on the Safety of Journalists”, established within the framework of the UN, UNESCO and OSCE, as well as a member of the Media Freedom Coalition.

1. **What measures are Governments taking to support public service media? What has been the impact of such measures? What changes or additional measures would you recommend?**

The Covid-19 pandemic has affected all productive sectors of various countries, including Greece, creating conditions for unprecedented and unpredictable market volatility. In these difficult and demanding conditions for the Greek economy and its resilience, the Government has already taken, and continues to take, a number of measures to alleviate the consequences of this crisis for the entire media sector, ensuring its viability. The guiding criterion for the institutional interventions that have been selected in this field is the support of media companies, but also the protection of their employees. In the wider framework, a network of protective regulations has been established in order to support all sectors of the Greek economy and to prevent permanent financial damages, after this global health crisis has diminished. Additionally, in 2021, an ambitious program was adopted for the support of media outlets, totaling 20 million euro and offering financial support to companies publishing national, regional and local newspapers, regional TV stations, radio and periodical press, as well as private electronic media companies (websites).

The Greek government is currently planning additional institutional interventions that will offer media in Greece the ability to adequately respond to current challenges, ensuring their freedom and supporting them in functioning under guaranteed independence. In this respect, it is worth noting that E.R.T. SA which is the public broadcaster in Greece has administrative and financial autonomy ensured by Law 4173/13.

1. **What measures have a) Governments b) social media companies c) media companies taken to promote the safety of journalists? What has been the impact of these measures? What more can /should be done and by whom? Please also mention any specific laws or measures to address online violence, threats and harassment and what result they have produced.**
2. **a) What measures have Governments taken to investigate and prosecute attacks against journalists, including online violence and harassment against female journalists? What re the barriers to fighting impunity? What changes would you recommend?**

These questions are answered as follows:

Greece is significantly active in the area of protection of human rights, including journalists’ rights, acknowledging the need for an integrated approach which involves actions by all public Authorities that take into account the human rights dimension in the course of their operation. It has to be stressed that, in case of attack(s) on journalists, relevant civil and criminal legislation safeguards their rights, as with any other Greek citizen.

Greece has adopted all the pertinent recommendations and guidelines of the Council of Europe (*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*) as well as measures to be taken for this aim; namely to carry out effective, independent and prompt investigations into any crimes against journalists, such as murders, attacks or ill-treatment, and bring to justice authors, instigators, perpetrators and accomplices who are found responsible under the law, ensuring that there is no impunity for attacks against journalists.

Moreover, Greek Authorities have an excellent cooperation with the “Platform to promote the protection of journalism and safety of journalists” of the Council of Europe. The Greek state has provided information about all the alerts through the Permanent Representation of Greece to the Council of Europe. Within its area of competence, the General Secretariat for Media and Communication attributes special focus on upholding human rights in the media environment by, inter alia, empowering people that work and support it, namely, media professionals and journalists.

It goes without saying that the safety of journalists and the issue of impunity in the digital space, and especially the prominent online harassment and abuse of women journalists, have become a significant problem at recent years. In this context, online harassment of women journalists represents not only an attack on gender equality, but it can also provide a serious chilling effect on the exercise by women of freedom of expression and opinion.

In this regard, the General Secretariat for Media and Communication has recently transposed within its national legal framework, by adopting Law 4779/2021 (Government Gazette A’ 37), the revised European Union “AVMSD 1808/2018” which also extends to Video Sharing Platforms (VSPs). To this end, the recently adopted Law advocates specific aspects regarding the encouragement of social media and other intermediaries, which use algorithms, along with media actors, the NCRTV, civil society and other relevant stakeholders, to engage in open and participatory initiatives that promote and support media literacy tools and activities; notably by countering disinformation and eliminating online harassment and abuse of women journalists. Indeed, the General Secretariat for Media and Communication, which is the Authority responsible for the implementation of these provisions of law 4779/2021, wishes to promote future discussions on this important matter leading to people being educated by media literacy tools and activities, with a view to enhancing the critical ability to recognize and condemn phenomena such as online harassment of women journalists etc.

Furthermore, as far as recent measures taken in the field of protection of journalists are concerned, the General Secretariat for Media and Communication has contributed, within its field of competence, to the drafting of the National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) 2019-2024, with a view to eliminate gender stereotypes against female journalists. In this light, and in cooperation with all relevant stakeholders, including private sector media, public service media, civil society, academia, etc., the General Secretariat for Media and Communication aims at implementing the National Action Plan on WPS by proposing awareness-raising activities for media professionals, regarding the protection and safety of women journalists, in particular those who their main activity and work is focused on investigative journalism and/or conflict areas (i.e. women war reporters).

These awareness-raising activities will be implemented through seminars and workshops, organized by the General Secretariat for Media and Communication, with a view to enhancing the safety and protection of journalists through the promotion of activities based on the empowerment of media literacy skills of journalists and other media professionals, with an emphasis on fighting online harassment of journalists and enhancing the protection of investigative journalists and whistle-blowers.

Finally, Greece salutes the recently announced European Commission’s first ever Recommendation on the Safety of Journalists, and is currently reflecting on the idea of establishing a special working group with the participation of all competent Ministries with the scope of implementing the Recommendation.