

GREECE

Media concentration and independent journalism between austerity and digital disruption

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Introduction

The Greek media system reflects the geopolitical history of the country. Greece is a medium-sized European country located on the southern part of the Balkan Peninsula. By the middle of the nineteenth century, it had just emerged from over four centuries of Ottoman rule. Thus, for many decades, the country was confronted with the task of nation-building, which has had considerable consequences on the formation of the over-extended character of the state (Mouzelis, 1980). The country measures a total of 132,000 square kilometres, with a population of nearly 11 million citizens. About 4 million people are concentrated in the wider metropolitan area of the capital, Athens, and about 1.2 million in the greater area of Thessaloniki. Unlike the population of many other European countries, almost all Greeks – about 98 per cent of the population – speak the same language, modern Greek, as their mother tongue, and share the same Greek Orthodox religion. Politically, Greece is considered a parliamentary democracy with “vigorous competition between political parties” (Freedom House 2020).

Freedom in the World 2021: status “free” (Score: 87/100, up from 84 in 2017).

Greece’s parliamentary democracy features vigorous competition between political parties [...]. Ongoing concerns include corruption [and] discrimination against immigrants and minorities. (Freedom House, 2021)

Liberal Democracy Index 2020: Greece is placed in the Top 10–20% bracket – rank 27 of measured countries (Varieties of Democracy Institute, 2021).

Freedom of Expression Index 2018: rank 47 of measured countries, down from 31 in 2016 (Varieties of Democracy Institute, 2017, 2019).

2020 World Press Freedom Index: rank 65 of 180 countries, steadily increasing from 99 in 2014 (Reporters Without Borders, 2020).

The political history of modern Greece is coloured by many upheavals, dichotomies, and partitocracy (Charalambis, 1996). While the growth of the modern Greek press in the mid-nineteenth century paralleled the establishment of political parties in the country, both radio and television broadcasting were introduced under dictatorships in modern Greece's troubled history. Radio was formed in the late 1930s under the Metaxas dictatorship and television in the mid-1960s under the Colonels (1967–1974) (Iosifidis & Papathanassopoulos, 2019).

As far as its structure is concerned, the Greek media system is primarily characterised by excess in supply over demand. In effect, in this small country, there has been an oversupply of newspapers, television channels, magazines, and radio stations, which undergo severe competition to capture audiences and the advertising market. Although the developments in the Greek media sector may not entirely respond to the needs of its advertising industry, it has been surprisingly adaptable to swings in the economic business cycle (Papathanassopoulos, 2017a).

The fiscal crisis of the 2010s, however, coupled with the crisis in economy, brought about major losses in advertising revenues for the media industry. Recently, although Greece was successful in combating the Covid-19 pandemic, the lockdown has had major negative impacts on the media sector. Today, all media outlets are facing their most difficult times ever, but it is the print media (newspapers and magazines) suffering the most.

In fact, one might argue that in Greece, there are more media outlets than the Greek audience can consume in reality. Therefore, it's not a coincidence that the fiscal crisis has simply demonstrated in a cruel way the irregularities of the Greek media system, and in this way, it has also affected its other aspects. Mostly, the nation's stagnant economy affected the consumption rates due to the collapse of the available income, derived from the heavy taxations and wages cuts. It led to the decline of the advertising budgets of most private companies and consequently, of the advertising spending on the media market. The Covid-19 outbreak and the consequent national lockdown had a negative knock-on effect on the media market, and in particular, on newspapers.

In the late 1980s, there were changes in the ownership of the Greek media with the entry of private radio and television stations. The fiscal crisis also affected the ownership status of traditional media outlets. For example, Tego-poulos Publishing, the Greek company in charge of the well-known *Eleftherotypia* – a daily newspaper and one of the most widely circulated newspapers in the country – ceased to exist. In June 2017, the historic but financially distressed Lambrakis Press Group (DOL) came under the control of ship owner Evangelos

Marinakis, who, after a public auction, won the tender by offering EUR 22.89 million to the lenders (banks). Following that, Ivan Savidis, after another public auction, bought the bankrupt Pegasus Group (including newspapers *Ethnos*, the Sunday edition *Ethnos tis Kyriakis*) for EUR 3 million and *Imerisia* for EUR 580,000. However, despite the operation of the historic newspapers under new ownership, the publication of the daily *Ethnos* was suspended on 30 July 2019, while the Sunday edition *Ethnos tis Kyriakis* stopped its circulation on 9 August 2020, with Dimera Media Investments announcing that the newspaper's website would continue its operation.

Covid-19

It is widely acknowledged that Greece managed to react successfully to the Covid-19 pandemic crisis by taking early severe restrictions and imposing, like other countries, a national lockdown. From mid-March to mid-May 2020, the Greek government imposed strict measures on liberal democracy freedoms and rights of the citizens in order to curb the spread of the potentially deadly Covid-19 virus. They closed borders to neighbouring countries, imposed a ban on all public gatherings and events, announced a curfew, and shut down all shops except food supply, supermarkets, bakeries, pharmacies, and a few others.

Nevertheless, the case of the media – especially the so-called mainstream media – is another story. The media, coming out of the recent financial crisis accompanied by major losses of advertising revenues, had to face the pandemic now, however, continuing the task of informing the public, which was more necessary than ever. According to media professionals, although the lockdown had increased television viewership, advertising revenue had declined considerably by 40 per cent. Moreover, the lockdown imposed further impediments to the distribution of the press, since most Greeks were used to buying newspapers distributed and sold by kiosks rather than subscribing. The new and sharper decline of newspapers sales led some to consider that these were the last days of the Greek press. On 21 March 2020, the government decided to allow supermarkets to sell daily and Sunday newspapers. Additionally, media professionals in the press industry, as in other sectors of the economy, were given a one-off compensation of EUR 800.

Although news websites attracted new readers and users, they faced the same problem as television stations: lack of advertising. In effect, it declined sharply by 40 per cent, causing revenue losses in advertising-based media, especially affecting Sunday newspapers and private-commercial television channels and radio stations. As in other countries, most of the remaining advertising revenue went to the tech giants such as Google and Facebook. A similar pattern was followed in the field of television streaming and subscription services. Since Greeks

stayed at home due to the pandemic, there had been an increase in pay-TV and streaming services. As a result, the Covid-19 crisis resulted in an increase in the consumption of news, particularly on television (Chaimanta, 2020a, 2020b), similar to other countries around the world (Nielsen et al., 2020).

The Greek media have urged the government for support in order to sustain their business. In effect, the government announced a EUR 12 million campaign regarding Covid-19 with a view to increase it to EUR 20 – or even EUR 30 – million, but actually, it was an indirect way to help the media industry, desperate for advertising money. Meanwhile, adversarial media, or media affiliated to the opposition, accused the government of discrimination regarding the allocation of the “Covid-ads”.

Leading news media sample

Today, media ownership in Greece is concentrated in the hands of a few media magnates. The main media groups of the country are as follows:

- Alafouzos Group, including *Kathimerini* (daily newspaper) and *Kathimerini tis Kyriakis* (Sunday newspaper), *Kathimerini – English Edition* (daily newspaper), Skai TV (television channel), Skai FM 100.3 (radio station), Erotikos FM (radio station), and *Skai.gr* (news website). A member of Alafouzos family (Giannis Alafouzos) is the owner of Panathinaikos football team.
- Alter Ego (former DOL), now under the ownership of Evangelos Marinakis. Alter Ego owns *To Vima tis Kyriakis* (Sunday newspaper), *Ta Nea* (daily newspaper), *In.gr* (news website), and Mega TV (television channel). Marinakis is also the owner of Olympiacos football team.
- Proto Thema (Anastasiadis-Karamitsos). This group operates *Proto Thema* (Sunday newspaper), *Newmoney.gr* (financial news website), and *Olivemagazine.gr* (food website).
- Dimera Media Investments (Pegasus, former Bobolas Group), under the ownership of Ivan Savvidis. It operates news website *www.ethnos.gr* (since the suspension of its newspapers: daily *Ethos* and Sunday edition *Ethnos tis Kyriakis*) as well as Open TV channel. Savvidis is also the owner of PAOK football team.
- Real Group (Chatzinikolaou-Kouris), incorporating *Real News* (Sunday newspaper), Real FM (radio station), and *Enikos.gr* (news website).
- Vardinoyannis Group, including Star TV (television channel), Alpha TV (television channel), Alpha Radio (radio station), and Diesi FM (radio station).

- Kyriakou Group, incorporating Antenna TV (television channel), Macedonia TV (television channel), Easy (radio station), radio stations in Romania and Moldova, Heaven Music (music company), Daphne Communications (publishing), and *Vice.com/gr* (Greek edition).
- Philippakis Group, including *Dimokratia*, *Estia*, and *Espresso* (daily newspapers), *Dimokratia tis Kyriakis* (Sunday newspaper), *Orthodoxi Alitheia* (religion monthly newspaper), and *Newsbreak.gr* (news website).

On the other hand, the digital media field seems not very different from the traditional one. In effect, there are four main digital-born groups operating more than four different digital news brands (news websites) and seeming to have an advantage over their competitors:

- DPG (owned by Dimitris Giannakopoulos, basic shareholder of one of the most important pharmaceutical companies in Greece, Vianex, and owner of a famous basketball team, Panathinaikos). DPG owns several websites: *Newsbomb.gr* and *CNN.gr* (news websites); *Gossip-tv.gr*, *Queen.gr*, and *Ratpack.gr* (lifestyle websites); *Leoforos.gr* (sports); and *Astrology.gr*.
- 24 Media Group, mostly owned by Dimitris Maris, includes the websites *News247.gr* and *Huffingtonpost.gr* (news websites), and *Sport24* and *Contra.gr* (sports websites).
- Liquidmedia, owned by Mr. Rudolf Odoni. It owns various websites, including the following: *Gazzetta.gr* (sports); *Insider.gr* (news); *Meteorologos.gr* (weather); *Jenny.gr*, *Koolnews.gr*, *Zappit.gr*, *Toratora.gr* and *Neopolis.gr* (lifestyle websites); *Akispetretzikis.com* (food); *Spirosoulis.com* (decorations); and *Luben.tv* (satire).
- Attica Media Group, owned by Theocharis Philippopoulos. It incorporates the following websites: *Capital.gr* (finance news); *Missbloom.gr* and *Madamefigaro.gr* (women-oriented websites); and *Playboy.gr* (lifestyle).

At the moment of writing this text, the government has certified 675 digital media companies with more than 1,500 news websites.¹ According to the law, if a news website wants to carry advertisement from a public organisation, it should be certified by the Secretariat of Information and Communications. It is estimated that there are more than 10,000 websites and blogs in Greece.

Indicators

Dimension: Freedom / Information (F)

(F1) Geographical distribution of news media availability 3 POINTS

In the Greek media market, news media are widely available all over the country, with supply often superseding existing demand. It is a media landscape characterised by high level of public access. Newspapers are mostly located in Athens, being national in scope; however, some regions still prefer, either as a first or a secondary choice, the local press. There are also both regional and local radio stations, with the most influential radio stations located in Athens and Thessaloniki. Television is available through terrestrial, satellite, or digital (broadband) transmission. Most of the media content, albeit not in its entirety, is offered free of charge.

The Greek media market is characterised by excess supply since there are more media outlets than what a small market can sustain. Despite a low readership, in 2016, the country accommodated 280 local, regional, and national daily newspapers. Among them there were fifteen national daily newspapers, four national business newspapers, sixteen national Sunday newspapers, and ten national weekly papers. Geographically, these are mostly located in Athens, which is not surprising since 40 per cent of the country's population resides in the wider Athens region. The Athenian press has become national in scope, but some regions still prefer local newspapers, albeit as a secondary choice (Papathanassopoulos, 2017b).

Radio is also readily available to all citizens across all regions in Greece. There are over 918 radio stations in Greece, transmitting mostly on the FM band. Most radio stations in Greece are privately owned and are transmitted on a local or regional basis, with the most important stations located in Athens (56 in Attika region) and Thessaloniki (Papathanassopoulos, 2017b).

With regard to the television landscape, private-commercial television dominates, with 120 terrestrial television channels broadcasting on a regional and local level and 8 terrestrial television channels broadcasting on a national level (Papathanassopoulos, 2017b). Satellite pay-TV is also available through Nova, owned by Forthnet Company, and through Cosmote TV of OTE Group, now a subsidiary of Deutsche Telekom, all offering their services. Streaming television services such as Netflix, Wind Vision, and Vodafone TV are also available to Greek households.

In 2017, pay-TV penetration in Greece was 22 per cent. In 2018, 86 per cent of pay-TV subscriptions were via satellite (DTH), and Internet-based subscriptions (IPTV) were at 14 per cent (Papadimitriou, 2020: 187). The dominance of satellite technology is expected to change with the ever-increasing expansion

of high-speed broadband, and especially fibre-to-the-home technology. According to the latest data released by the Hellenic Telecommunications and Post Commission (EETT), over the period 2015–2019, there has been a clear shift in consumers' preference towards IPTV. At the end of June 2019, there were 1.04 million pay-TV subscriptions in general, both via DTH and IPTV, with the greatest boom being given by the latter (Mandravelis, 2020).

More specifically, since June 2015, IPTV has more than doubled its subscribers, from about 85,000 connections to 174,000 connections in three years. During the same period, the share of IPTV, within the total field of pay-TV, increased from 9.1 per cent to 16.7 per cent, as opposed to the share of pay-TV via DTH that underwent a clear decline from 90.9 per cent to 83.3 per cent (Mandravelis, 2020).

Finally, regarding digital media, all national newspapers and television channels offer digital versions in electronic, PDF, and app formats. Most of that content is free of charge; however, there are a few media organisations using paywalls. According to the latest *Reuters Institute Digital News Report* (2020), Internet users in Greece pay for online news only at a rate of 11 per cent (Newman et al., 2020: 72).

(F2) Patterns of news media use (consumption of news) 2 POINTS

A considerable majority of the population is reached by news media, with some gaps between the young and old. Although there is an abundance of choices, media consumption in Greece remains low compared with the rest of Europe, and uneven within the population. Greek media mostly reach the elites, while significant minority segments of the population experience deep inequalities of representation and access to the media.

Greek newspapers have been in a state of chronic crisis since the mid–1990s. Greece has one of the lowest newspaper readerships in the developed world; for example, on the eve of the economic crisis in 2010, newspaper readership was at a meagre 53 readers per 1,000 people (WAN, 2010). Over the recent past, the market has been experiencing a continuous fall in rates of average circulation, with even fewer Greeks reading newspapers on a daily basis (Papaathanassopoulos, 2017b).

According to the Hellenic Statistical Authority (2020), in 2019, compared with 2018, a decrease of 13.7 per cent was recorded in the total sales of newspapers and in the individual types of newspapers. A significant decrease, in absolute values, was observed in the sales of political newspapers (11.3%) and in the sales of sports newspapers (18.2%). In 2018, compared with 2017, there had been a decrease of 5.9 per cent in overall newspaper sales. Regarding the magazine sector, in 2019, compared with 2018, a decrease of 3.2 per cent

was recorded in its total sale, with the exception of children-comics and sports magazines, which increased by 56.9 per cent and 4.6 per cent, respectively (Hellenic Statistical Authority, 2020).

On the other hand, broadcasting remains one of the most important sources of information for the Greek audience. More specifically, Greeks listen to the radio approximately 3.5 hours per day (Focus Bari/Aemar, 2013), and, according to Nielsen's (2020) data, they watch television for 270 minutes per day.

The daily consumption of television media by the population over four years old, over the last decade (2010–2019), ranged from 251 to 274 minutes, on the whole. However, within the younger audience, 18–24 years old, much less time was spent watching television. More specifically, it is noteworthy that in the period 2010–2019, the daily consumption of television by young viewers showed a steady decline from 162 (in 2010) to 94 minutes (in 2019) (Nielsen, 2019).

According to data from Nielsen (2019), from the period of September to 8 December 2019 the most loyal viewers in Greece were women over 55 years old, devoting 434 minutes per day to television. This was followed by men over 55, who spent 368 minutes per day on what they considered a still-dynamic medium. In contrast, men aged 18–34 were proved to be the least loyal television viewers, spending 117 minutes per day on television. Female viewers of the same age category daily consumed television for 165 minutes.

Online and digital media have rapidly taken their place in the Greek media system, and Internet penetration in the country has been increasing over the last years. A recent study by the Hellenic National Centre for Social Research, in the context of the international World Internet Project, revealed that 71 per cent of the Greek audience sample, from the age of 15 or more, described themselves as users of the Internet (Demertzis & Tsekeris, 2020: 23). Furthermore, over three quarters of the total participants who did not report themselves as Internet users justified it by highlighting that they were either deprived of technical knowledge or they simply were not interested in using the Internet (Papathanassopoulos, 2017b). Meanwhile, 84.6 per cent of Greek Internet users saw it as an important or very important source of information, and 68.7 per cent consumed news online on a daily basis (Papathanassopoulos, 2017b). Kalogeropoulos (2019) reported that on an average, Greeks use more than five online news sources per week, an outcome placing them second among 38 countries.

According to the report from the Hellenic National Centre for Social Research, seven out of ten Greeks had access to the Internet (Demertzis & Tsekeris, 2020: 24). This represented a portion of the population, which was quite small compared to the relevant data in other developed countries. However, it reflected a rapid increase in Internet use, given that in 2015, Internet access was ten percentage points lower. Among Internet users, three out of four had access to the web on a daily basis using either personal computers or mobile phones (Demertzis & Tsekeris, 2020: 32).

The same research also showed that men, in terms of years, had a greater track record in Internet use (51.7% are long-term users of 11+ years) than women. The latter bear the highest percentage in the category of new users (12.3% are new users, 0–5 years) (Demertzis & Tsekeris, 2020: 28–29). However, over the period 2015–2019, the gender gap in Internet use was narrowed by 17.7 per cent, given the upward trend in female population. As a result, in 2019, according to the aforementioned research, only a small difference of 5.7 per cent was recorded between men and women.

A significant intergenerational digital gap exists in the use of the Internet in Greece. While there has been a steady increase in web access among all age groups since 2015, older people appear to have the most limited presence on the Internet. This contradiction is exemplified in how, in 2019, although almost 100 per cent of those below about 35 years of age used the Internet, it declined to as little as 22.8 per cent among those over 65 (Demertzis & Tsekeris, 2020: 37–38). Between 2017 and 2019, people 35–44 years old showed the most considerable increase when it came to Internet use (which amounted to a rise of 10% in a two-year period). However, a smaller, but noteworthy increase of 7.6 per cent in use also occurred among those above 65 (Demertzis & Tsekeris, 2020: 37).

Despite some media outlets being more successful in reaching the public than others, Greece suffers from deep inequalities of representation and access to media by minorities. The European University Institute’s report on media pluralism in Europe attributed a higher risk to Greece regarding social inclusivity. Psychogiopoulou and Kandyla (2018) mentioned that Greece has a very high-risk score regarding “access to media for minorities”, as legislation does not guarantee any airtime access to them. There is no legal obligation for public service media or for privately owned broadcasters to include minority content or minority-created content in their programmes. Furthermore, the obligation of Greek broadcasters to broadcast mainly in the Greek language further hindered programming dedicated to them.

However, there are some exceptions. In the Thrace region, some radio stations broadcast in Turkish for the Turkish-speaking minority. An equally high-risk element is noted with regard to the population’s access to local, regional, and community media, as media legislation does not impose obligations on network providers to carry local television channels or radio stations. There are no subsidy schemes for regional or local print media, nor is there a legal recognition of community media (Papathanassopoulos, 2013; Psychogiopoulou & Kandyla, 2018). However, it should be mentioned that this research does not take into account the 19 regional radio stations operated by the national public service broadcaster ERT.

Another thorny issue regarding the social inclusivity of the media in Greece is access to the media by people with disabilities. There is no coherent policy

in Greece, as the measures addressing accessibility issues are limited to imposing on television content providers with the requirement to provide daily sign language bulletins and subtitles in television shows for people with hearing disabilities (Psychogoulou & Kandyla, 2018).

(F3) Diversity of news sources

1 POINT

There is a limited variety of formats across media, and few formats are available. Research, as well as findings from interviews conducted with journalists and editors-in-chief on the issue of sources used by leading news media in Greece, revealed a uniform use of sources, albeit with some room for further investigation by the journalists. Moreover, the findings revealed differences among media outlets on how dependent they are on source material and the level of investigation they engage in.

Starting with the press, the findings from the interviews conducted with media professionals pointed towards press journalists relying on a few official sources and partnerships with foreign newspapers. The main institutional source of Greek newspapers is the Athens News Agency – Macedonian Press Agency, and at the same time, each newspaper has partnerships with foreign newspapers and agencies such as Reuters.

“We have *The Guardian* to begin with. Each day some items get in with the signature of *The Guardian* [...] of course there are the classic deals with Reuters and other big agencies”, said one editor-in-chief. However, the press journalists argued that when receiving news through news agencies or public relations sources, they are only used as a starting point, adding to that their own research and analysis. As one of the interviewed journalists described: “Everything that comes in as news is assessed and researched, it’s not reproduced in any case. At least in our newspaper”. Another press journalist admitted that newspapers very “rarely” republished news from other media outlets, while they also saw the agency copies as a stimulus to conduct their investigative journalism.

On the other hand, radio journalists described a mixed image with regard to the sources used and the balance kept between the news that come from agencies and public relations companies and the news that derive from their own reports. “Nowadays the ratio is 60/40. In effect, 60 per cent from agencies and 40 per cent from primary news”, argued an interviewee.

The issue of collaboration between Greek radio stations and local or international media is similar to the press, with the main collaboration being established with the National Athens and Macedonian News Agency and additional ones with international media, such as the BBC, or international news agencies, such as Reuters. “We have a collaboration with the BBC, we re-transmit its programme, but we do not have the possibility of sending our people in London to observe the logic and the process there”, said an interviewed editor-in-chief.

Television journalists said they also relied upon similar sources like their press and radio counterparts, and they concur that up to 30 per cent of the news they broadcast come from news reported from news agencies, with the exception of the national public service broadcaster, Hellenic Broadcasting Corporation (ERT). A journalist described the main agencies that Greek television stations collaborate with and how much they depend on them: “To a large degree the news comes out from the news agencies Associated Press, APTN, Reuters. They are the main sources we use. News comes out from press releases and approximately 70 per cent comes from primary reporting”.

However, another interviewee argued that there was less dependence on these sources: “I need to underline that our outlet does not depend exclusively on the content of the international agencies and on foreign websites. We have a large network of correspondents throughout the country as well as overseas”.

The latter also echoed the important role played by the funds and resources in the capacity of the media to have a multitude of sources and depend less on news agencies and public relations copy. The testimony of another interviewee pointed to the negative impact that the crisis had on the resources available to Greek television stations and how it had led to a form of syndication among television journalists in order to be able to have all the news occurring in a day:

There is an informal collaboration among all TV channels. After the financial crisis that had impacted the media, that’s how we have the capacity to be present on many topics at the same time. There are many times that we might have coordination with another TV channel. For example, I would cover for a particular trial for someone, but request that person to go to another rally and cover that for me. That’s the informal collaboration we rely upon.

Finally, Greek news websites seem to be mainly dependent on “copy–paste journalism”, reproducing news as they are reported by news agencies and other media houses, having very little time to do anything more due to time pressure. One interviewed journalist compared working for a news website with other media and how dependent they were on news agencies:

We rely on agencies very often, a lot more often than in other media organisations. It is because of the flow of the website. You need to do it quickly. You are chasing after the current news, and everything that happens you need to be faster especially from the other news websites, so at a rate of 90 per cent I would say that it comes from there [news agencies].

In conclusion, it appears that, to different degrees, the Greek media has uniform sources and Greek journalists have the capacity to independently conduct an inquiry. Press journalists reported the most freedom to do so, and news website journalists the least. The national news agency is dominant, and there are a number of international news agencies also relevant in the Greek media

landscape. Public relations announcements had less of an impact, according to testimonies by the journalists. But the financial crisis has had an impact, with content syndication being applied to television journalists, at least. Finally, despite the journalists not explicitly mentioning the impact of politics on their source selections, recent research on the Greek press (Kostopoulos, 2020) reveals that politics is still the most important determinant of source selection and information management.

(F4) Internal rules for practice of newsroom democracy 1 POINT

Journalists are heard and participate in decision-making, but do not have the power to make decisions. In Greek newsrooms, internal democratic practices are applied in rudimentary ways, with journalists merely having the opportunity to be heard, at best, and at worst, being deprived of any engagement with the decision-making processes. The appointment of editors-in-chief and other managerial positions are decisions left to the discretion of a media organisation's managers and owners. Moreover, Greek journalists' voices have no tangible impact on how news topics are ultimately framed.

Newsroom journalists reported that they usually did not have an equal say in how political issues are framed, although guidelines and rules exist at an informal level. Managerial appointments were decided by managers and media owners, and journalists did not have a say in this process either. Finally, several gender issues abound in Greek journalism, whether recognised by the journalists or not. A complete lack of any formal rules to support or promote women journalists' careers and access to managerial positions existed, as well as the lack of any system for monitoring and evaluating their participation in decision-making procedures.

Starting with the process of appointing editors-in-chief, the interview findings are rather uniform across all different media outlets. An exception was the newspaper *Efimerida ton Sintakton*, which is collaboratively owned by its journalists and, therefore, adopts different democratic procedures in the election of its editor-in-chief. Interviewed editors-in-chief and newsroom members of leading news media all concurred on how the appointment of the editor-in-chief was a decision made by directors of the organisation, and sometimes its owners. Some editors-in-chief interviewed underlined the importance of certain values, such as impartiality in the decision-making process:

For someone to become an editor-in-chief he/she needs a lot of things. They [editors-in-chief] need to know how to manage, to prove each day that they have professional judgment, and be impartial; to make sure that there are no political interests behind their actions, and make sure that what is broadcast is what most people want, what they are most interested in.

Another interviewee added the importance of experience:

It is first and foremost a matter of experience. It is a matter of a well-rounded understanding of news. One needs to have gone through various posts, so he/she can have an in-depth understanding of the issues and of the news itself. Whoever is good at what he/she does and works hard and in a correct manner, can move on.

However, most of the interviewees made it clear that although there are certain criteria that someone must fulfil before being appointed editor-in-chief, the decision ultimately rested with the organisation's owners. For example, another editor-in-chief explained: "For privately-owned media, it is clearly a decision of the ownership. We do not have a self-governing system; the owners decide and appoint who will take charge of what in the framework of a structure". Other interviewees argued that "the owner and the management decided it, obviously based on the work of each of us", pointing to some cases where the ownership of the media had a more direct role in employees' selection process. In other cases, however, the administration of the organisation did not play a role in the selection process. This was especially true for larger organisations, such as the one described here:

The director proposes someone; the administration cannot propose. The administration does not understand journalistic work. It has executives that they trust and, these are the executives who decide to propose, in a well-documented manner always, what it is that makes them believe that the person can fulfil the duties of an editor-in-chief, to the administration.

Finally, as aforementioned, the *Efimerida ton Syntakton*, a daily newspaper, which is a collaborative business endeavour owned by its journalists, is a key exception. One of the interviewees describes the process through which the journalists can have a say in the election of an editor-in-chief:

It is a simple mechanism. From the day we started, the general assembly chose the director and the director of editing. From then on, each department elected its own editor-in-chief [...]. The editors-in-chief are elected and that is confirmed by the editing board, which is the sum of the editors plus the two members of the administration [...]. The department can also propose someone for the position of the editor-in-chief, meaning, for example, the political department of the newspaper. When the position is vacant, they can say, for example, that we propose this or that person. The director and the editor in chief propose; it is discussed in the board of directors and if – let's say – the department accepts it, then we are fine with it.

However, this example remains an outlier in the Greek media landscape, rather than the emergence of a new paradigm. The lack of formal rules, compounded

with the lack of agency of journalists to be anything more than merely heard, was also noted by some interviewees with regard to how political issues were framed and how decisions were made.

In any case, the Greek media remains more politicised and partisan than their northern European counterparts. Moreover, the political stance of a medium's owners is still the defining factor determining how news pieces are framed, as demonstrated in the arguments within journalists' testimonies:

The sense I have is that each media company has a political identity, even if professionally non-partisan. You try to serve this identity, it in the best possible way without, of course, being against public opinion. This means that you do not misinform, you do not peddle propaganda. There is a visible line. Discussions between the editors and the editor-in-chief obviously result in the final decision.

Finally, the issue of women's careers and women's ascendance to managerial positions is also rather problematic. Most women journalists and editors-in-chief reported that there were very few women that climbed up the hierarchy of their media organisations. One of the female chief editors interviewed explained:

A woman's career in journalism goes through many levels where she has to prove much more than a man [in the same position] what she is worth. It is enough to say that in 2019 in Greece there is not even one woman news director in any media house. A woman's career stops at the position of the editor-in-chief, and very rarely in a managerial position, not because she is not qualified or cannot manage it, [...] but the numbers speak for themselves. It is not acceptable that in a newsroom there are two women and ten men. Moreover, there can be no working place with ten men and one woman in the editor-in-chief positions.

(F5) Company rules against *internal* influence on
newsroom/editorial staff

1 POINT

Management and sales departments meet newsroom staff regularly. In Greek media organisations, although newsrooms, management, and sales departments are separated, internal manipulation is still exerted through unspoken pressures that lead to self-censorship by journalists. It implies a subconscious adoption of the editorial stance preferred by the ownership. Pressures from the advertising department are far less considerable, with most journalists being unaware of the main advertising sponsors in most cases.

Despite the fact that management of media organisations, sales departments, and their newsrooms are separated, in effect, there are a number of mechanisms in place that ensure journalists will follow the editorial stance preferred by the

ownership. Pressures from the advertising departments are not so accentuated as political ones, since most journalists report that they do not have any knowledge of the advertising workings of their media organisations. Unspoken pressures exist, however, that lead journalists to cases of self-censorship.

When it comes to pressure from the ownership, cases of direct interventions are not reported, and that is an improvement for Greek journalism. However, journalists always have a sense of what the stance of their organisation is, and they adhere to it. For example, one interviewed editor-in-chief noted:

Not at all. Through the corporation they [owners] do not get involved in the news editing. What exists [...] is a stance from the owner of the organisation that has to do with how each one manages the audience, and we do not want to cause fear and fear-mongering among people.

Other interviewees reported that media owners not only suggest the framework of reporting, but also the ideological stance that the organisation should adhere to despite a lack of direct interventions:

We do not have any relationship with the board of directors. We have an owner and a CEO who are in charge of the finances. But I want you to know that none of them is involved in the newsroom. Nevertheless, we do have rules and principles. These pertain to liberalism and the code of journalistic conduct. By default, the owner does not intervene. From then on, we have a framework that we work under. We are in favour of an open economy, we have a liberal understanding and within that framework we will hear the member of the Communist Party, the member of Syriza, the right-winger, and the extreme right-winger. We have no dealings with Golden Dawn but everybody else is hosted. We have a pro-European stance and we are in favour of the free market.

Despite a lack of cases of direct interventions by the owners, this did not mean that Greek journalism has become less instrumentalised, as the pressures are now indirect through the managerial class selected by the owners, according to the statements made by an interviewed editor-in-chief:

The ownership has never shown up, as far as I know. But I would say that it goes without saying and nobody has to tell you that you will never have a front-page that is against the ownership of the organisation. Meaning that nobody has to tell you that, it probably works subconsciously.

In some cases, the owners of new media companies in Greece are journalists themselves. This muddies the water of intervention, as they often have a say in how issues are covered, as described in the interviews conducted:

The owners are journalists. So as journalists they have an opinion. That doesn't mean that they will intervene to change something, but on the grounds that

they are journalists, they have an opinion for a piece of news. They don't force an editor how to write that.

Another interviewee explained how this coordination with the owner of the media organisation ensures that there would not be any necessity to intervene later in the process, giving a similar account:

There is a possibility to coordinate with the owner of the organisation, who happens to be a journalist and in favour of information and that makes things easier. I believe that there are no interventions, due to this coordination. So, some things are solved before [...] there is a necessity for intervention, or corrections.

Pressure from the advertising department was considered to be far less important in the Greek case, as the political value of information is more significant in a very small market with very slim margins of profit being made through advertisement and sales (Hallin & Papathanassopoulos, 2002; Kostopoulos, 2020). Most journalists interviewed reported that not only did they not have any direct communication with advertising departments of their organisations but, in most cases, they also did not really know who the main sponsors were.

Finally, the interviews confirmed that the public service broadcaster ERT, even more than the private media, was free from interventions coming from the advertising department, because, as an ERT journalist testified, the advertising revenue of the public service broadcaster is not that significant: “The advertising department has no relationship with the newsroom. There are some advertising agencies that ERT works with and they ask the advertising time for their clients. Beyond that, they have no say in how issues are reported”.

(F6) Company rules against external influence on newsroom/editorial staff

1 POINT

Newsrooms depend on a few major advertisers or sponsors. Leading media companies in Greece – either for reasons of political or ideological standpoints, or due to journalistic integrity and professionalisation – have the potential to resist outside pressures. However, there have been cases where media houses have experienced boycott or pressures because of their reporting. Most journalists are unaware of the main sources of advertising income, with the very small Greek advertising market having shrunk during and after the economic crisis, leading to dependence on fewer advertising sponsors.

Despite the pressures from the sales department and advertising agencies, there are certain cases where the media have been boycotted because of their reporting. These can be very critical, especially for smaller organisations.

This was confirmed from the many cases, reported by journalists, where they have experienced boycott or pressures because of the news they reported on. For example, one interviewee described the threats of advertisement sponsors to withdraw their funding: “There is no way that we won’t transmit news that concerns our client. It has happened a number of times [...] we have received threats of withdrawal if a piece of news gets out”.

Based on the interview findings, it seems reasonable to say that large media companies in Greece – either for reasons of political and ideological standpoints or for the reasons of journalistic integrity and professionalisation – have enough power to resist outside pressures. Furthermore, another interviewee pointed out that the introduction of new online media organisations has increased the communication nodes of the system, making it harder to conceal uncomfortable information.

However, a participant who works as journalist in one online media outlet reported that they [journalists] were more susceptible to pressures and might not emphasise such information so much:

There are interventions in all companies, but only as long as you have a primary advertiser and there is a piece of news that doesn’t make them look so good. This exists in every [media] organisation. But if we are talking about something very serious, it is very difficult to ensure that it is not written at all [by the journalist]. It can be written and not go up very highly. But, in any case, it will be written, so it is typically there. Even if it can be buried a bit.

This could be the case because these are smaller media outlets that lacked the backing of a strong owner, and therefore depended more on advertising money. As a director of a small media outlet argued, his organisation has been boycotted due to its reporting on big advertisers. Thus, he chose to find alternative means, such as crowd funding.

Most journalists and editors-in-chief claimed that they had no idea regarding which advertisers dominated the Greek market, but one editor-in-chief described the shifting post-crisis situation:

First in the ladder used to be the public businesses and banks. There are no public businesses anymore. Even the banks have cut down on their ads. However, the banking sector remains high, the energy sector, the betting sector, but I do not know specific numbers.

Therefore, we can assume that the market has been further shrunk after the economic crisis, increasing interdependencies and competition.

(F7) Procedures on news selection and news processing 2 POINTS

Internal debate on news production is practiced more than once every day and is part of journalistic routines. Leading news media follows informal rules and procedures, consisting of meetings between the editors-in-chief, when selecting news topics. The primary factor in this selection seemed to be the political stance of the organisation. In managing news derived from social media, certain processes of verification were in place, however, nearly all media outlets lacked a fact-checking department.

The news selection practices in Greek media organisations appear to be crystallised and concrete. They involved at least one meeting between the editors-in-chief on a daily basis and a critical stance towards news originating in social media. However, these rules were largely informal and not consistent across all media organisations. Also, a quite troubling finding is that most journalists reported the absence of fact-checking departments in their organisations.

One journalist interviewed described the process of news selection and how much journalists are involved in that, as well as how they treated information obtained from social media:

The supervisor of each department is the first to select news that they consider important. This is followed by a meeting in the presence of the news director and the editors-in-chief of the organisation, who move forward with the final selection of the topics of each day. The journalist that covers each topic has a say in the selection of issues, as they have an immediate connection with the [thematic] object and, therefore, considered to have better knowledge. Any information that is distributed through social media is treated with caution. In such cases, it is considered necessary to confirm the information through official sources.

A columnist working for a quality newspaper confirmed that the process was similar throughout Greek media and outlets, albeit with differentiated levels of participation for their journalists:

In the newspaper there is a meeting at four o'clock where we evaluate what is available. There is an assessment of the ranking with regard to next day's news. There is another meeting at 19:00–20:00 among the editors, with some things emerging as stronger and some milder. Certainly, it's important how original the story is, the assessment that we have on how much the people will care about it and the assessment on how much the country could change from it. These three are the rules that exist.

However, the primary factor for news selection in Greece remained the political stance of the organisation. As one interviewee revealed: "Each organisation has a specific way of seeing things, that's the political stance of the respective newspaper [...]. It's [the political stance] the most important criterion for news selection. In all the organisations, not just ours".

Finally, most journalists reported that their organisations do not have a dedicated fact-checking department, with one exception on the part of the public service broadcaster ERT: “We avoid using social media as sources, only in urgent cases we might use online sources, but in these cases ERT has a fact-checking department that screens those”.

(F8) Rules and practices on internal gender equality 1 POINT

Inequalities exist and remain. The organisations slowly move towards eliminating them. The Greek media do not acknowledge the existence of gender issues; therefore, there are no rules applied to address them. According to male journalists, all news employees enjoy the same treatment irrespective of gender. However, women journalists’ accounts reflect images of income inequalities based on gender, as well as difficulties in climbing the ladder of rankings within a media organisation.

The interviews conducted with Greek journalists on gender equality brought to light very different responses, varying based on the gender of the responder, with gender proving to be an important factor in whether one acknowledged the existence of such issues. Usually, male journalists said there were no issues of gender equality, whereas some even argued that women were more privileged than their male counterparts. However, the accounts given by women journalists reflected a very different image. They highlighted the fact that although women were employed en masse, they faced the problem of climbing to top positions, and also of income inequalities based on gender. The main issue, however, is that the Greek media do not acknowledge the existence and insistence of gender issues, and therefore, there are no rules to address them.

When asked about gender issues, most male journalists responded in the same manner as the one noted here: “There has not been an issue of equality between men and women. Each journalist has the same treatment regardless of gender”. That could be true regarding how journalists are treated within newsrooms in general, but it’s not true regarding the general progress of women’s careers within a media organisation. Additionally, women interviewees pointed out a very different experience compared with their male colleagues. “Let me answer that politely because that’s an issue. No there’s no equality. It is a man’s world”, one of them said. Another female editor-in-chief gave one of the best examples of how women have problems in climbing the hierarchy in the profession of journalism:

I have worked in five biggest media companies in the country. It is unbelievable that in all five of them, women are simply lacking. There is a huge difference and they face a lot of racism. I told you there is no woman director and there never has been one.

The situation of gender equality in Greek media can be summarised as one of lack of knowledge, since there is a complete lack of any formal framework to address these issues.

(F9) Gender equality in media content

0 POINTS

There are no specific rules on gender equality in reporting, and each journalist decides whether or not it is respected in reporting. In leading news media organisations, a culture of safeguarding gender equality in their content is lacking. This is reflected in the lack of rules regarding gender balance or parity in reporting, a phenomenon stemming from the lack of awareness that gender sensitivity in reporting is crucial in order to make media reflect upon the plurality of society's voices.

Greece did not exhibit any special efforts to address challenges regarding gender equalities in media content or promote the inclusion of diverse voices. There were no rules or codified practices observed, and no consideration was given to these aspects when assigning issues to report upon. In some cases, such as the one described by one of the journalists interviewed, the understanding in media organisations among journalists is that there are some topics more relevant for women than others:

There is no segregation or discrimination towards gender, age, or other factors as to how the [news] topics to be assigned are selected, or as to what it has to do with the fulfilment of the reports. On a personal and friendly level there is, in some cases, “conceding” of topics from a man to a woman, for example on a topic that’s about fashion or vice versa with a sports report. But that’s not because of a central decision and it’s not in any sense a rule.

For some interviewees in our research, gender was not considered important in who was selected to cover a story, while others argued that “the equality between men and women as to the conducting of the report has principally to do with its topic”. Therefore, we can assume that there is a complete lack of formal rules regarding gender balance in reporting and news content, because of the lack of an understanding that this is a problem in the first place.

(F10) Misinformation and digital platforms (alias social media)

1 POINT

Regular internal meetings to discuss potential misinformation. There is no common approach applying to all the Greek media regarding the issue of misinformation. The process of careful crosschecking is the typical action of Greek journalists in order

to deal with misinformation. Most media organisations do not have fact-checking departments, nor have they established official collaboration with external fact-checking organisations.

There is no uniform approach by the Greek media regarding the issue of misinformation. One could say that the most common approach is an effort to simply translate the values of journalism to the new era, with an extra layer of caution when information originates from social media. Starting with the public service broadcaster ERT, the interviewee described a combination of a fact-checking department with the traditional practice of information cross-checking:

ERT of course has its own fact-checking department. The staff of ERT has experience and it is hard for misinformation to happen, whether it is guided or not. It is a matter of experience. To a large degree, what we call fact-checking often happens through traditional cross-checking that we always did.

In most cases, Greek journalists use their experience and employ extra caution with social media information in order to deal with misinformation, as one of the editors-in-chief mentioned:

We are dealing with the fake news phenomenon because most associates, freelancers, and colleagues, have experience. We do not broadcast if we do not cross-reference. We won't rush to be first if we are not certain that this piece of news exists. And because with social media things have become too quick, the orders that we have is that we need to be very careful.

This process of careful cross-checking is the go-to practice of Greek journalists in order to deal with misinformation. Meanwhile, people working for alternative media outlets have a very different perspective regarding fake news and misinformation:

Ever since the advent of journalism, misinformation has always existed. So, we follow the basic principles of the code of conduct. We make sure to double-check a piece of news, and carefully choose our sources, etc. We haven't made any changes because fake news is in fashion.

Most organisations do not have fact-checking departments. Moreover, there is also no official collaboration with external fact-checking organisations. The only fact-checking organisation that is mentioned is Greek Hoaxes. It is an unofficial organisation that has taken up that role on the Greek Internet. One of the editors-in-chief described how their website collaborated in some cases with Greek Hoaxes:

There are "hoaxes" that surveys all of us in any case. We work with them and when there is something, they call us out and we either fix it, or we give an explanation on what is going on. I think that is the process we follow.

Another journalist also mentioned Greek Hoaxes, but as a source to be advised from rather than as a stable relationship: “The burden rests upon ‘Hoaxes’ here in Greece. It is a credible source in my opinion, rather than a partnership”.

By and large, it can be argued that misinformation and fake news are slowly pushing Greek media companies to consider new technologies and ways of addressing these issues. However, the process is still in its infant stages.

(F11) Protection of journalists against (online) harassment 2 POINTS

Journalists can rely on their employers in such cases, but cost or other reasons sometimes compromise the assistance provided by news media organisations. In case of harassment, the main type of support offered to journalists from their media organisations is legal support. However, not all journalists feel adequately protected, or there are cases where they felt no level of support towards them, especially for women journalists.

One of the editors-in-chief in our research described how their organisation supported them when they received threats:

I have been threatened and I have called the legal service to the Cybercrime Division and we have done what we needed to do. On the threat level, on the level of comments, each and every one said whatever he/she wanted. If someone is stalking you, then yes, we can use our legal service. Thank god they are here and we have enough to go and get the job done.

Another editor-in-chief also mentioned how their organisation supported journalists that were actually attacked:

A few years ago, we had a reporter that was assaulted by a police officer during a protest. He was hurt so bad that he had to be taken to the hospital. Someone from the website went with him to the hospital [...] and he was with him. Whatever he needed, the website was there for him, because that is what was needed to be done.

But the main type of support offered to journalists from their organisations was legal support, as one editor-in-chief mentioned: “When it starts becoming intimidating or you see someone obsessed and is trying to hack you, for example, or is sending threatening letters, that’s where the legal division of the organisation steps in and protects you”.

However, not all journalists feel adequately protected, as in the case of a woman editor-in-chief, who felt that her organisation did not support her as much as they could have:

Limited support I would say. I had a bad example. Members of the Golden Dawn party attacked me and I didn't feel like my newspaper supported me enough. I think it is an issue of sensibility. They probably felt that I did not need support.

Therefore, it can be concluded that in most cases of harassment, Greek journalists receive different forms of protection and support from their media organisations.

Dimension: Equality / Interest Mediation (E)

(E1) Media ownership concentration national level 2 POINTS

There is a moderate concentration ratio, with some market dominance by large companies – CR3 is between 0.40 and 0.70. Despite the fact that Greece has more media outlets than the market can sustain, the level of ownership concentration is dangerously high. The main reason for this is the vulnerable media legislation, whose limitation on horizontal concentration in broadcast media and newspapers permits a specific *modus operandi* of the market.

Despite the number of media outlets in Greece, the level of ownership concentration in the state is dangerously high. The main reason for this development is the vulnerable media legislation, whose limitation on horizontal concentration in broadcast media and newspapers permits a specific *modus operandi* of the market. Two authorities – the National Council of Radio and Television (NCRTV) and the HCC – are in charge of the task of keeping track, imposing remedies, and enforcing compliance with media regulations. However, there have been periods when both of these authorities take actions with limited results due to the restricted availability of data or the purposeful obfuscation of them regarding market shares and media ownership.

Specific difficulties characterising the Greek media market combined with its small size has proved to be quite an unwelcome environment for new entrepreneurs. Five mainstream media groups (Alafouzos Group, Alter Ego, Kyriakou Group, Vardinogiannis Group, Dimera Media Investments) dominate the market. It also includes free-to-air terrestrial television and radio stations, newspapers, and online news websites, followed by three other secondary groups, making up the bulk of the market (see Trappel & Tomaz, Introduction).

Regarding free-to-air terrestrial television, after a delay of 28 years, six national television licences were granted in 2018. Their owners came from other sectors of the economy, principally the shipping industry. Among them, the most popular television stations are ANT1, Star, and Skai TV (CR3 = 0.46), companies that have also paid for satellite distribution. For the purpose of

our research, we have also taken under consideration journalists and editors coming from the public service broadcaster ERT, even though traditionally, its television channels score low in audience share (5%).

In subscription-based television, three major suppliers dominate the market. They are Cosmote TV, Nova, and Vodafone (CR3 = 0.99) with the penetration of pay-TV (in relation to the total number of households), via both DTH and IPTV, reaching 25.3 per cent in June 2019 (Mandravelis, 2020) (for penetration, see Indicator F1 – Geographic distribution of news media availability).

In the field of pay-TV, the dominant player is Cosmote, which gained a 45 per cent market share in 2018, attracting more than 500,000 subscribers. It also represents the most dynamic Internet provider in terms of subscriptions, having conquered 48 per cent of the mobile and 47 per cent of the fixed-line markets. Nova TV, the oldest subscription television service in Greece and owned by Forthnet S.A., in 2018 gained a 42 per cent market share (Papadimitriou, 2020: 186–187). When, in 2018, fibre-to-the-home technology appeared in the market, Cosmote and Forthnet initiated separate over-the-top media services. Moreover, two mobile phone companies, Vodafone and Wind Hellas, which are also Internet service providers, have been launching pay-TV services since 2017.

Additionally, Netflix is a new promising player in the Greek communication market. It reached more than 100,000 subscribers in less than three years, despite its relatively low start in January 2016.

The print media is legally required to name their director and publisher on their copies. Evening daily newspapers are the most popular newspapers in Greece despite their reduced circulation nowadays. The main competitors are *Ta Nea*, *Kathimerini*, and *Efimerida Syntakton* (CR3 = 0.72). Most popular news radio stations are *Skai 100.3*, *Real FM*, and *Parapolitika FM* (CR3 = 0.21).

(E2) Media ownership concentration regional (local) level 2 POINTS

More than two media companies address most relevant regions. Following the media market deregulation and the abolition of state monopoly on broadcasting, regional television stations entered the media field in the early 1990s without receiving official licences, as was also the case for the national television stations. Later on, indicative of the harsh crisis afflicting the media market, is the fact that more than 50 regional television stations closed down over the period of the economic recession.

According to the NCRTV 2019 index, there are 112 television channels and 1,001 radio stations registered in Greece (NCRTV, 2019a, 2019b). Regional television stations started appearing in the early 1990s, following deregulation and the abolition of the state monopoly on broadcasting. Nevertheless, the first regional television station, ERT3 – part of but also independent from the public service broadcaster ERT – was established in 1988. ERT3 seems

to have a national rather than regional reach, although the news output and some programmes primarily appeal to the audience of the Greek periphery, particularly those in northern Greece.

The first real regional channel Thessalian Radio Television, located in Volos, was established in 1989 as soon as the first private national television channel appeared. In a relevant piece of research, Roy Panagiotopoulou (2004) notes that the vast number of low-budget regional and local television channels has been the outcome of businessmen investing in television channels as a source of influence, without having the technical knowhow to run them. In 1998, Greece had 150 regional and local television stations. Many attempts were made to regulate the field (1995, 1998, 2003, etc.) through a paradigm of contemporary broadcasting licences, since none of these stations were legal. At present, with the economic crisis hitting the media market particularly harshly (more than 50 regional television stations closed down over the period of 2009–2016), and with the granting of the regional television licences in progress, there are 102 registered regional television channels in operation (NCRTV, 2019a). Of these, 92 broadcast nationally via Digea’s digital terrestrial platform.²

Public service broadcaster ERT, funded primarily by the licence fee, does not compete with national, regional, or local private channels on commercial level, as it receives only a 3 per cent share of the total advertising. This corresponds to only about 5 per cent of its revenues (ERT, 2020: 30).

Almost one-fourth of the population in Northern Greece stated that it was watching one regional television channel per day (21–26%). This rate for Western Greece and Crete was close to 28 per cent (Focus Bari, 2019b). Unfortunately, there is no evidence regarding the listening habits of the audience when it comes to the regional radio stations, due to unreliable data collection. The Attica region, where Athens is located, has more than 28 radio stations (CR3 = 0.21), with 84 per cent of the population listening to the radio daily (212 min. per person per average) (Focus Bari, 2019a). Thessaloniki region has 15 radio stations (CR3 = 0.41), with 82 per cent of the population listening to the radio daily (218 min. per person per average) (Focus Bari, 2019b).

(E3) Diversity of news formats

1 POINT

Few formats are available, and public attention is focused on dominant news formats. Deprived of substantial investments on innovative ventures, the news media of Greece are characterised by conventional news formats. The transition to the online environment has been slow, clumsy, and in some cases, questionably user friendly.

Only 27 per cent of Greeks expressed trust towards the media, and 54 per cent stated that it actively avoided the news – the main two reasons stated were the lack of trust and depression (Newman et al., 2019).

Table 1 Greek news sources, 2016–2019 (per cent)

	2016	2017	2018	2019
Television	66	66	67	68
Print	31	26	26	24
Internet (& social media)	96	95	94	92
Social media	74	69	71	67

Source: Newman et al., 2019

In this general climate of mistrust towards traditional media, Greeks turn to online news websites for their daily information (92%), reading between five to six different news sources daily. However, the native news platforms do not invest in research and development regarding news formats. For native online news platforms, click-bait technique was still the main way of gathering page views, while most of the articles were up to 300 words, including, in some cases, embedded tweets, image galleries, or television news clips. Popular news websites also use live blogging to report on breaking news.

Generally, the news media of Greece are characterised by conventional news formats. Printed newspapers, most of them tabloid-sized with a few exceptions, include journalistic texts of all types (editorial, reportage, feature articles, opinion articles and columns, and interviews), framed by a great variety of images. The online versions of these newspapers are mostly based on content made for the printed version, adopting the basic features of online journalism. Nevertheless, there are some online news media adopting innovative news formats, compared with the legacy media and their online versions.

Private television channels and public service broadcaster ERT incorporate several news bulletins and news-related talk shows in their flow, employing conventional formats of news presentations, such as recorded videos, live panels and multi-guest interviews in studio, outdoor broadcast interviews, Skype interviews, and telephone interviews. All television channels operate their website with a section devoted to releasing news on current affairs and another section of web television, where visitors can find and watch news programmes that were already broadcast on free-to-air terrestrial television, at a later date. Private television channels, compared to the public service broadcaster ERT, usually adopt more sensationalist forms of news presentations, particularly in the context of infotainment and soft news television magazines.

The public service broadcaster ERT spends a great part of its programming time on news and news-related talk shows. The main news report is at 21:00 (50 min. including news on sports and the weather report). However, the first news report is at 10:00 each day (15 min.), followed by the noon news report at 15:00 (50 min.) and the late-night news report at midnight (15 min.). The

evening news report is at 18:00 (10 min.) and includes sign language. Most commercial channels have a news report at noon, one in the evening (also in sign language), and one in the prime-time zone. Over the last years, political talk shows and debates have been absent from commercial television. Moreover, despite the fact that most of the editors-in-chief expressed their support for investigative journalism, the reporting process seemed to be reduced to the bare minimum under the pretext of the need to cut costs.

Furthermore, the Greek version of Euronews – a European and multilingual news television channel based in Lyon-Écully in France – is the only 24-hour news channel in Greek available online. However, there are foreign 24-hour news television channels provided to the audience via satellite.

In radio, a common feature shared by almost all stations is short news flashes every full hour. However, the radio stations focusing on information over entertainment, apart from short news bulletins, also broadcast hard news-related talk shows, where daily current affairs are reported and analysed by journalists, through the lens of political actors or experts. In these broadcasts, news is provided to the audience through pre-recorded sound-bite interviews, or live interviews conducted in studios or by telephone. Public service radio stations and most of the private radio stations are also available as web radio, or they offer podcasts to the public on specific websites.

In spite of low circulation, newspapers still set the news agenda (Papathanasopoulos, 2005). Both in radio and television morning shows, the newspapers' front pages remain a point of discussion. Due to fierce competition and motivated by sensationalising strategy, newspapers have turned to a more tabloid-like format (Diana, 2019). Moreover, during their online transition, the newspapers' tabloid appearance was transported to the online environment in the hopes that users would feel familiar with the online layout. However, newspapers failed to use the potential provided by the web (Veglis, 2005). This is nowhere more visible than on the mobile apps: Most of the main newspapers have a mobile app with simple functions and notifications leading nowhere, elements resulting in bad user reviews and no more than a few hundred downloads.

(E4) Minority/Alternative media

2 POINTS

The existing media houses recognise large and mid-size minority groups, and they operate their own media. Since the early 1990s, various attempts have been made to establish fair representation of minority groups in media outlets. However, governmental policies of no-recognition and counterfeit representation of ethnic groups by traditional media left a lot to be desired.

The Muslim minority of Western Thrace is the only minority officially recognised by the Greek state. The community has been characterised as a religious

minority, but it is also an ethnic one; Turks, Pomaks, Pontians of the former USSR, and Roma are cohabiting alongside Greeks in the area. Based on the Greek state's perception that these people are a single minority, they have been actively encouraged by local community leaders, and, to some extent, by the Turkish government, to use Turkish as their primary language since the mid-1990s. To that effect, six newspapers are issued in Turkish in the area (*Birlik Gazetesi*, *Cumhuriyet*, *Gündem Gazetesi*, *Bati Trakya Olay*, *Millet*, and *Trakyanın Sesi*), along with online news portals (*azinlikca.net*, *Trakyadan Haber*, *iscecemuftulugu.org*, and *abtff.org*).

In addition, there are other minorities such as Arvanites, Sarakatsanoi, Vlchoi, and so on, whose languages have either not been protected by the government or even actively suppressed, and therefore, have survived through oral tradition. News topics for these minorities exist only in the Greek language.

Regarding migrants, in 2007, there were more than a dozen newspapers issued in Athens in foreign languages (Arabic, Albanian, Bulgarian, Polish, Romanian, Russian, Philippino, and Urdu). Today, very few of them are left (*Mir* and *Omonioia*). They are mostly online, like *albanians.gr* news portal, Radio Bulgaria (*bnr.bg*), *Azat Or* (Armenian), *Aldafatan* (Arabic), and TV Tribuna (Albanian).

Apodimitika Poulia is a newspaper issued by young refugees assisted by journalists, coordinators, and translators. The initiative was started by a group of Afghani girls and the Greek Network for Children's Rights, and now features articles in five languages (Farsi, Urdu, Arabic, English, and Greek). There is also a radio station, Pikralida Internet Radio, which young journalists, migrants, and refugees operate with the support of Unicef.

Among the traditional newspapers, only *Kathimerini* has an English edition, both in print and online. Furthermore, there are some online magazines in English (*greeknewsagenda.gr*), German (*graktuell.gr*), French (*grecehebdo.gr*), Italian (*puntogrecia.gr*), and Spanish (*panoramagriego.gr*), featuring news topics on economy, culture, tourism, and so on. Few online news portals feature LGBT news as a special category. News regarding these communities can be found mainly on blogs and social media.

Meanwhile, for people with disabilities, news bulletins at 18:00 are accompanied by a presentation in sign language. Only a few television channels, such as Alpha TV, includes in their programme flow broadcasts like Greek series suitable for people with hearing loss.

In the alternative media field (such as the YouTube environment), all minority groups have easy access to produce content so as to make their voices heard.

(E5) Affordable public and private news media 2 POINTS

Price excludes only few households from receiving news – Prices of services are relatively low, while the majority of news content is offered free of charge. However, the cost of news media is still relatively high for an average household.

Table 2 Minimum cost for media products in Greece, first quarter of 2020 (EUR)

Products	Minimum cost
Annual subscription to a quality daily newspaper (Kathimerini)	120
Annual subscription to a weekly news magazine (Hot Doc)	20
Annual subscription to broadband access 25 MB (average: 20x12)	264
Annual subscription to general satellite-TV package (e.g., Nova Full Pack)	419
Annual tax for public service of television and radio (compulsory)	36
Total	860

Source: Data collected by the authors based on the lowest subscription available

Considering that the average income per capita in Greece in 2017 was EUR 15,556, the amount spent on a basic news media package is sizeable, since according to an approximate calculation, it amounts to 5.5 per cent of the annual income. This amount may seem low, but combined with the fact that 31.5 per cent of the Greek population is estimated to be at a high risk of poverty or social exclusion, it is certainly not an easy financial feat.

In particular, the Internet prices seemed to be rather high for what were mediocre services. While the rates with regard to Internet entry level in Greece were similar to the EU mean, the price for high-end Internet speeds was double the EU mean (European Commission, 2018). The offer for the triple-play packages (Internet + landline + TV) of the two main competitors ranged EUR 22–60 per month, based on a variety of channels and connection speeds. A report conducted by EETT (2018) found that 55 per cent of the respondents mentioned their subscription expense as the foremost reason for not selecting a pay-TV package. Even with contents of the main newspapers available online free of charge (without subscription), the technological progress and the multitude of audiovisual cues integrated into news stories rendered the slower Internet connections inoperable for their intended purpose.

In any case, taking the above scenario as an example, spending about EUR 72 every month to access the main media content as well as the Internet is a significant burden in a country where the minimum salary, legally prescribed, is now EUR 580 per month.

(E6) Content monitoring instruments

1 POINT

Content monitoring is done irregularly and occasionally by various organisations. The NCRTV is the monitoring body for broadcasting media, a regulating entity independent from, but supervised by, the government. Thematic observatories, as well as university departments focusing on media and communication studies, also conduct relevant monitoring procedures and research projects regarding news media content.

The NCRTV is the monitoring body for broadcasting media, a regulating entity independent from, but supervised by, the government. Its nine members are proposed by the parliament (in effect, by the political parties) and elected with a supermajority of two-thirds.

NCRTV's powers are mainly regulatory, being a monitoring and supervising body that deals not only with the content of radio and television stations, but also with the wider operation of the broadcasting field. More specifically, the council has been assigned 1) to control the broadcasters' operation with reference to their informational, educational, cultural, and entertainment responsibilities to the public; 2) to ensure fundamental benefits such as the freedom of expression, political, and cultural pluralism, and the broadcasting of reliable, fair, and balanced information; 3) to allocate licences, impose fines when needed, and take any decision of non-regulatory character. Apart from monitoring the broadcasters' content, NCRTV supervises their compliance with the journalistic code of ethics in respect to programme variation, plurality of views, protection of minors, and human dignity. In case of violations, meanwhile, the NCRTV committee can issue financial or other penalties, and for extreme violations, is entitled to recall a media organisation's licence.

In terms of media evaluation, it is indicative that over the period 2009–2018, the NCRTV published a number of reports referring to the degree of political polyphony in the news broadcasts of the leading news media (NCRTV, 2020b). Moreover, in the context of its annual activity reports, the NCRTV has occasionally discussed aspects of the media field with regard to the developments taking place in the television sector, the institutional problems of radio broadcasters (NCRTV, 2017), the developments inherent to the field of electronic media (NCRTV, 2014), changes in media legislation, as well as the decisions taken by the independent administrative authority in its attempt to regulate the radio and television market.

Apart from NCRTV in the communication field, there are also other thematic observatories, such as the Observatory for Racist and Fascist Speech in the Media, operating under the aegis of Journalists' Union of Athens Daily Newspapers (JUADN), publishing reports and issuing complaints about malpractices in media content.

Last but not the least, university departments offering media and communication studies also carry out research projects aimed at monitoring and

investigating many aspects of media content. The malpractices and misconduct of journalists is a debatable issue, and it represents one of the greatest concerns for most people in Greek society.

Additionally, there are private entities monitoring the market. Nielsen, for example, measures television audience shares among television channels, and Focus Bari offers radio audience measurements. Argos is the only press distribution agency providing the newspapers' circulation numbers, and Online Publishers Association is the voluntary online publishers union monitoring audio metrics.

(E7) Code of ethics at the national level

2 POINTS

A code exists, but not all leading news media respect it. In Greece, there are five journalism associations, which compose the Pan-Hellenic Federation of Journalists' Association, covering the whole country geographically and representing both newspapers and electronic media. There is also the Internet Publishers Association, representing the publishing companies of primary digital content. Each of them has issued their own Code of Ethics. However, they mostly share common norms on how journalism should be exercised. Despite journalists' declarations of loyalty and adherence to the journalistic Code of Ethics, research has shown that they are less sincere than it is thought. In leading news media, there are many cases where loose interpretation of the Code of Ethics proves to be a common practice among journalists, showing disrespect towards ethical standards.

Among the five journalism associations existing in Greece, composing the Pan-Hellenic Federation of Journalists' Association, JUADN is considered the primary one, incorporating two disciplinary bodies and an Ethics Council, consisting of ten regular and ten alternate members. It is noteworthy that news editors, and the second one by journalists, all of them elected by the Union's members, compose the first body. The Internet Publishers Association incorporates 19 parent companies and 69 news websites and maintains its own Code of Ethics, applicable to web journalists, user-generated content producers, and media consumers.

Despite journalists' declarations of loyalty and adherence to the journalistic Code of Ethics, research has shown that they are less sincere than it is thought. In leading news media, there are many cases where loose interpretation of the Code of Ethics proves to be a common practice among journalists, showing disrespect towards ethical standards.

A representative of JUADN described the way in which the Code of Ethics is employed:

It is for the benefit of both journalists and media to fully respect the Code of Ethics. However, this isn't always the case. Often both media and journalists

disregard the Ethics Code's provisions, either in order to serve their personal interests or to serve their medium policy, or even to achieve higher goals for their medium (circulation, readership, viewership, etc.). This happens mostly in online journalism with click-bait techniques, such as the use of dramatic headlines to attract readers, as well as fake news process. In the long run, these practices have a negative impact on a medium's reliability until they swipe it off the map.

The Code of Ethics in combination with the good journalistic practices is a well-known issue among journalists; however, considerable questions have often been raised about their reach and effectiveness. The non-permanent nature of the Ethics Council – along with numerous cases of ethics violations where Journalists' Union of Athens Daily Newspapers has failed to express its position or take action – enhances doubts about the effectiveness of the Code of Ethics.

However, this does not seem to be the case in public service broadcaster ERT, according to an editor-in-chief:

Obviously, we implement the JUADN Code. We never had incidents of breaching the Code. The journalists working in the public service radio and television are very experienced professionals. On top of that, news topics are not published just like that. Many colleagues see them. It is highly unlikely that there would be a mistake regarding the Code.

However, the applicability and efficiency of the Code of Ethics can be a thought-provoking issue in the case of private broadcasters or press companies. Also, journalistic practices for online media also seem to be "lighter". An interviewed journalist emphasised:

Yes, normally we have to respect the Code. But this has to do with every journalist on a personal level. We are not instructed to obey the Code like the Bible. While working, there is no time to check the Code.

Along the same lines, the chief-editor of a news website pointed out that the journalists working there usually have read the Code of Ethics, and they mostly adhere to it.

When interviewed journalists were asked whether there had been any instances where the Code of Ethics was neglected, and therefore measures had to be taken, the majority of the interviewees referred to their colleagues' high professionalism to justify why they couldn't think of any such case. It is indicative in the reference of an editor-in-chief working in a private radio station. He argued:

We follow the JUADN Code. If there is an incident of malpractice, we don't fire the journalist, but give him/her a warning. But I am telling you again, our journalists are professionals with over 15 years of experience. Therefore, such

incidents do not occur. It has occurred to me one or two times when I had to talk to a colleague and tell him to be careful. Not in the sense of “why and how”, rather not to risk his own or even the medium’s reputation.

These findings are in accordance with previous research (Dimitrakopoulou, 2017), which showed that Greek journalists perceive professional regulations and personal self-constraints – such as journalism ethics (77.7%) and personal values and beliefs (75%) – as the most important while reporting.

Contrary to journalists’ perception, research has highlighted numerous cases in which the Code of Ethics was seriously undermined, especially during the period following the 2008 economic crisis (Komninou, 2017).

(E8) Level of self-regulation

1 POINT

Self-regulation instruments exist, but are not notified. There is some “oral culture” in newsrooms. In the leading news media organisations of Greece, there seems to be no standard procedures or formal internal rules reflecting a typical self-regulation system. The interviewed journalists reported the dominance of an “oral culture” in newsrooms based on self-censorship and informal self-regulation practices. In this context, media organisations enforce their ideological orientation to which journalists must conform. Conflicting narratives and controversial topics are often settled through collective consensus in the newsroom.

All leading news media apply an “oral culture” in treating news topics. The JUADN Code of Ethics is allegedly taken as a point of reference for the self-regulation mechanisms taking place within the leading news media organisations. However, few of the traditional media have a mission statement emphasising their independence from political and economic powers or mentioning their devotion to pluralism (see Indicator E10 – Rules and practices on internal pluralism). They also cite technical guidelines – in other words, how to treat copyrighted material or gain permission to use material, and so on.

Journalists working in traditional media argue that the most important guideline is to put quality over quantity. That means they do not risk having a piece of news first at the expense of cross-checking information. An interviewed journalist of a private television station underlined this, regarding the internal practices they follow for news material that doesn’t derive from a trusted partner:

The truth is that we are much more careful now than in the past. The Internet is completely out of control and then there is the temptation to include something in our news bulletin, the scoops. We concluded that this makes no sense. So, we prefer to wait for our reporters to crosscheck if something is true or false.

Similarly, the editor-in-chief of a private radio station mentioned:

Beyond the JUADN Code, and in general within all media I have worked for, the speed in covering the news is not at stake. We have to be fast of course, but a piece of news is not coming out without having it crosschecked. It's ok not to be the first one to break it, as long as we are accurate. If we are not the first, then we consider having more information, more details to be a step ahead.

Quality is also of high importance to newspaper journalists. A statement made by a newspaper editor-in-chief is indicative:

We don't have any special internal rules. Our newspaper focuses on information, not resentment. We can be harsh in political critique, but we don't target someone that easily [...]. First, we put emphasis on what we call content. Beyond following leads, there is the ability of good writing. Our paper has always had strong writers. Writing has its value and its importance. It counts for a journalist's way to the top.

Both journalists and chief editors proved to be reassuring as to minimising missteps, based on their long-lasting professional experience and the practice of multiple checks done before a news topic is released, so that there is a very small margin for mistakes.

Positive of the efficient collective rules governing public service broadcaster ERT – as opposed to private broadcasters – is an interviewed journalist working in the public service television station who reported the following:

If someone breached the JUADN Code, the Union's disciplinary body would take action. However, I cannot recall any such instance. It is usually the private media that end up there, for example, when they keep their employees working during a strike and so on. Regarding the public service broadcaster, I cannot think of anyone ending up at the disciplinary authorities.

Nevertheless, in the field of online media, the rules seem to be more relaxed. In cases of misconduct, the disciplinary bodies of the Journalists' Union take action. According to a journalist of a private news channel who, despite believing in most journalists' adherence to the Code of Ethics, emphatically argued:

All journalists abide by the Code. However, there have been mistakes. As a result, measures were taken and removals had taken place on the part of the Union. We also have had disciplinary penalties and this can be humiliating for a journalist. All these can happen, but I believe that majority of journalists obey the Ethics Code.

Regarding internal rules, many journalists admit that usually in case of misconduct, there are no penalties internally from the media organisation's board of directors. It is rather a warning of "please don't do this again". Indicative is the description of a newspaper journalist who argued:

We have discussions. There are no standard practices or internal guide of conduct. Many issues have come up like whether or not to use the term “illegal immigrants”. Do we have to change the term or not? I was against it [...]. We have had articles that are sexist, racist, homophobic, and even anti-Semitic. There is not much conversation on these topics. For example, to discuss it among us, to respond with another article, there aren’t even consequences. Sometimes, if the telephone lines are very busy, the chief-editor gives lectures to the other editors, but there is no punishment as such like taking them off their columns for a couple of weeks. It is more like a “don’t do it again” warning. After a couple of months, one does the same.

However, an extraordinary type of internal rule seems to be applied in the case of the public service broadcaster ERT. As it is mentioned by a journalist of the public service radio, “there are no penalties for malpractices. They just put you on the ice; the same applies when the government changes”.

The dominance of “oral culture” in settling malpractices in newsrooms does not imply there are no special cases where stricter procedures are applied. As one journalist of our panel told us, “There is no standard procedure, something we have thought of. On the other hand, if a colleague didn’t respect the code on a regular basis [...] we would end the collaboration”. A newspaper journalist recalling an incident said that there was once an issue with one correspondent from abroad, when the director had to terminate the contract because the journalist didn’t respect the Code of Ethics.

Research conducted by the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens showed that from 2009–2014, there were 258 sanction decisions issued by the NCRTV: 39 for radio and 219 for the television sector. The most common type of violation was programme degradation (79 cases), followed by misguiding the audience (53 cases) and lack of political plurality (28 cases) (Komninou, 2017).

(E9) Participation

1 POINT

Newsrooms always closed some space for comments online, but in online forums, not underneath news items. In Greece, the transition to online journalism does not necessarily mean a rise in the interaction between the audience and newsrooms. The trend is that online news platforms close off their comments sections under the fear of legal action. Radio seems to remain the sole medium where audience members can participate without having their voices or comments edited or filtered out.

Despite technological advances, audience members are still not encouraged to participate in the news process. As an interviewed journalist pointed out, the most notable exception is public service television incorporating a citizens’ council – the so-called Social Monitoring Council – as a mechanism for audience

participation. The council consists of volunteers, and through periodic meetings, proposals are made by the audience members on new content, operational matters, and other regulatory issues. However, the council is not currently active, as its operation lies in the discretion of each administration.

Compared with the public service broadcaster, private television stations seem to be less active in terms of audience participation. As a private television journalist argued:

Public participation is a good idea in order to drive in a way that news comes closer to what the people think and to also see how people think. We are sometimes closed in a bubble. Having said that, we are part of the society. We are not superstars like the journalists in other countries. We are in the same place, in the same stores, in the same cafes; therefore, we have an understanding of the public. We are the common people. We do have a sense of how the society functions. So, it wouldn't be a bad idea.

As for the press industry, the general practice seems to be a quasi-dependable version of people's participation through opinions expressed either in the editor's column (usually in the second page of the newspaper) or through opinion pieces. Journalists or other renowned experts usually express public opinion. In addition, the default stance of citizen journalism is to rarely employ videos or audio items taken straight from the Internet without further text or context later provided by the media themselves.

In contrast to traditional media, the new media are meant to be more participatory by design. However, under web anonymity, users tend to become offensive and sometimes even threatening. In order not to be legally liable for users' comments, most online news platforms prefer to completely close down the comments section on their corporate websites instead of regulating discussion or removing offensive content. User comments are still prevalent on social media and online forums.

(E10) Rules and practices on internal pluralism

1 POINT

It is the personal responsibility of the editor-in-chief or chief producer to check for internal pluralism. Plurality is the default practice for the public service broadcaster ERT. On the other hand, commercial broadcasters are mostly tied to a specific political orientation, presenting a mono-dimensional policy in terms of internal pluralism. Thus, plurality in media is achieved through quantity of partisan perspectives, rather than through diversity of opinions inside a single medium.

In order to guarantee plurality, media organisations implement extra rules. For instance, public service broadcaster ERT has standardised rules safeguarding plurality in the sense that when presenting political news topics, sound bites

and visual content of all political leaders appear in a specific order, as dictated by the election results.

A journalist working in public service broadcaster ERT described this procedure adopted by the public service television:

It is compulsory to present the stance of all political parties on a given issue. In some topics, the Orthodox Church is also heard. However, no one interferes with the way a news piece is going to be presented. Generally, everyone has his/her share regarding television time, both political parties and advertisers. But they cannot interfere. It is very important to follow the rules and keep the balances, because with regard to public service television, everybody is being judgmental.

While journalists recognise the mission of plurality as necessary, public service broadcaster ERT has always been considered the mouthpiece of the party in power. On the other hand, commercial media have traditionally cultivated long affiliations and ties to political parties. This combination of factors creates the paradox of the Greek media system, where plurality may theoretically be sought, but a series of interests promote the unquestionable projection of some opinions at the expense of others.

Dimension: Control / Watchdog (C)

(C1) Supervising the watchdog "control of the controllers"

2 POINTS

Media performance is often publicly discussed in the media or online forums – some forms of journalistic coverage of the media. In Greece, the most prevalent institutionalised mechanism to control the performance and role of the news media is the NCRTV, which occasionally has been regarded as ineffective. Although media performance is often discussed in the media or in online forums, this discussion is often merely descriptive or based on the subjective perception of the criticiser, leading to unfocused or unsystematic critique lacking in depth. The most usual context where media performance is investigated and discussed comprehensively and systematically is the academic one.

In Greece, the public debate on the role of media as watchdogs is by no means systematic, nor does it include effective or high-esteem institutionalised mechanisms for scrutinising the performance of the leading news media. The Greek media system, due to its particularities, has not facilitated the development of a truly dynamic and commonly respected body of journalistic ethics. At the same time, it is questionable whether a Greek journalist can stand above

ownership influences, since their views can hardly be independent from their media organisation's "line" – editorial policy.

This lack of independence is not new. It can be seen in the various calls by leading journalists to follow principles of objective or neutral journalism. These were mostly related to the adoption of a media ethics code (Papathanassopoulos, 1999). However, at times there have been cases where journalistic ethics have been explicitly set aside or undermined by a proportion of journalists in what is "churnalism", or other types of low-quality journalism. Since the emergence of the digital environment, this undermining process has become more frequent, stemming from the relentless competition of journalists on the web to publish news that should serve a rule of immediacy.

(C2) Independence of the news media from powerholders

0 POINTS

Strong formal or ownership-related influence of powerholders is exerted on leading news media. Leading news media houses in Greece are owned by powerful entrepreneurs, coming from other sectors of the economy, who use media companies as an effective instrument of serving their business interests.

Leading news media houses in Greece, for the most part, operate as subsidiaries of companies owned by a few powerful entrepreneurs coming from other sectors of the economy and exerting pressure on political actors in order to promote their business interests. This regime is as old as newspapers themselves of the post-dictatorship era and remained dominant even after the deregulation of the broadcasting sector and the strict surveillance that Greece recently went through based on a number of bail-outs. It is what Papathanassopoulos (2001: 519) has called a model of "interplay between media owners and political power centres and the battle for control of the public agenda" (see also Papathanassopoulos, 2017a).

Historically, the media system in Greece has been characterised by weak regulation and ineffective independent regulatory authorities, permitting a few powerful entrepreneurs – who were dominant in the newspapers sector – to expand their interests into the broadcasting and online media field. The rough-and-tumble deregulation of the broadcasting system that took place in Greece (1989) allowed the model of temporary television licences to thrive, a Greek paradox lasting 29 years (1989–2018). At the same time, a number of laws facilitated media ownership and cross-ownership.

Particularly in the broadcasting sector, the ineffective regulatory policies permitted the development of a problematic broadcasting model, characterised by clientelism and ministerial censorship in the shadow of a powerful state and

a weak civic society (Papathanassopoulos, 2017a). In Greece, there seems traditionally to exist the “triangle of power”, comprising the political leadership, entrepreneurs, and media owners (Iosifidis & Boucas, 2015: 12–14). Over the years that followed the deregulation of the broadcasting field, the legal and regulatory framework favoured or turned a blind eye to the concentration of press, television, and radio outlets owned by powerful entrepreneurs (Leandros, 2010). This is the result of the Greek media policy’s evolution, characterised by a traditional government-oriented model of policy-making, permitting a strong state intervention into the media field with the goal of serving political or other aims (Psychogiopoulou et al., 2014). The financial crisis, framed by the austerity measures imposed on Greek society through three bailouts for a period of nine years (2010–2018), enhanced the strong relationship between the political elite and the media (Papathanassopoulos, 2017a).

In this bleak media context, alternative models of journalism, in terms of ownership regime, were investigated based on a co-partnership rationale (such as *Efimerida ton Syntakton* daily newspaper) or crowd funding methods of sustainability (such as the news website *The Press Project*). A newspaper editor-in-chief commented on the advantages of the co-partnership operational model:

Employees are the owners of the medium. Therefore, they are involved in this process [editorial-decision] every day. However, there is no intervention from top to down so as a news topic not to be included [in the media agenda] or an issue to be turned into a news topic.

The low degree of independence – experienced by leading news media in Greece in their attempt to maintain a state of affiliation with the political field – is reflected in the carefully controlled process by which decisions are made on the daily news agenda or news editing. As a news website journalist underlined:

The director prioritises the news items that must go hand in hand with the political line [that is, the political orientation] of the media organisation. Journalists always express political beliefs diligently [...]. There is frequent contact with the director so as the news coverage does not contradict the political line of the media organisation [...]. There are interventions in everything depending on the political orientation of the medium.

As far as the public service broadcaster ERT is concerned, a public service radio journalist underlined:

There is no organised structure for the operation of an organisation even at the heart of the journalistic management. The main news comes from those serving the government line. Attempts [on quality content] are being made at ERT. However, these are performed recklessly without any logic of protection from those serving the government’s line. The latter dominates entirely.

(C3) Transparency of data on leading news media

2 POINTS

Information regarding ownership of leading news media is published once every year, but is available online. Leading news media's transparency of data, in terms of operational status and ownership identity, is undermined by a type of regulation that favours concealment of their funding flow and their ownership status. Therefore, citizens retain a blurred image of the media field. The release of relevant reports, available to the general public, is not compulsory, and therefore, transparency of information depends on the discretion of the media outlet.

Information regarding ownership of leading news media is published once every year and is available online. However, citizens in Greece, for the most part, retain a fragmented image of leading news media in terms of their operational status and ownership identity. Media organisations are not required to release relevant reports on press or electronic media, and therefore, information is occasionally provided either by universities or research institutes conducting studies on media market, or by regulatory authorities held responsible for supervising media outlets' operations according to the existing laws.

In the case of broadcasters' transparency, ownership information is achieved through NCRTV's intervention, requesting media owners to submit on an annual basis a series of documents for updating the Business Register kept in the Transparency Control Department of the supervising authority. All collected data related to shareholder composition of radio and television stations are available online on the NCRTV's website (NCRTV, 2020a, 2020b). Another regulatory authority having access to information concerning the ownership of leading news media is the HCC, with a mission of maintaining or restoring the healthy competitive market structure. In this context, among other duties, it precautionarily controls the effect on the competition of business concentration, as provided in articles 5–10 of Law 3959/11 (Hellenic Competition Commission, 2020).

Despite the regulatory framework (Law 2328/1995 and Law 2310/2005), the field was unregulated. In effect, information regarding ownership of leading news media is usually not available, or is only available to experts. However, the dissemination of such information depends on the discretion of the media outlet. Occasionally, universities or research institutes, in the context of relevant projects, discuss critically the ownership status of Greek media, but the provided data are usually not detailed. Journalists' unions and regulatory authorities keep records of ownership status of leading news media. However, in the past – and particularly in the “golden age” of the broadcasting sector (1990–2004) – there have been cases in which the ownership status of some media outlets was difficult to be fully and accurately identified, even by the NCRTV.

Last but not least, transparency of public funding received by the media outlets has frequently been questioned, raising serious counterclaims between

the political parties. Indicative is the case of the last campaign, “We Stay Home” – “We stay safe”, in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, whose cost amounted to a total of EUR 20 million. The government spokesperson was asked persistently to release the exact amount given to each media outlet that received state advertising, as there was strong criticism focusing on the fact that in this list of 1,232 media outlets involved in the campaign, there were websites of very low traffic and readership, or even non-existent websites.

(C4) Journalism professionalism

1 POINT

Limited journalistic resources do not allow for high professional ethos. The profession of journalism in Greece has been distorted by the financial crisis and the subsequent and larger crisis distressing the media industry. Interventions in editorial decisions on the part of politics and media owners are a long-lasting malpractice hindering the development of journalism in the country.

Limited journalistic resources do not allow for high professional ethos. The journalism profession in Greece presents a number of chronic features, given that journalists have persistently served the model of advocacy, reporting under the influence of the news organisations’ interests. However, journalism has been a profession with an active social and political role, particularly after media commercialisation and market expansion taking place after 1989 (Papathanassopoulos, 2001). Therefore, it can be argued that in the period of prosperity (1990s and early 2000s), journalism used to be quite solid and sufficient, in the sense that journalists were governed by high level of competence and resourcefulness in implementing their reporting tasks, enjoying freedom from pressure in terms of time and resources and sharing some fundamental norms and standards of journalistic work.

However, the recent economic recession has brought about the financial collapse of the media market, as well as the demise of journalists’ labour rights, affecting adversely the quality and level of their professionalism. This situation seems to worsen in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic, which has heavily affected all sectors of the economy, principally the media.

The main factors contributing to the distortion of the journalism profession are described by a representative of JUADN, highlighting,

the level of journalistic professionalism has always been very high in Greece [...]. Nonetheless, the financial crisis and the special crisis afflicting the media industry in recent years, and the various pathogens that characterise the way media owners grow and invest, have induced a significant blow to the industry, sometimes distorting the image of the profession itself.

During the economic crisis (2010–2018), the decline of the media market was reflected, as noted, in the bankruptcy of numerous media outlets: four historical media groups (DOL, Pegasus Publishing S.A., Imako Media S.A., and Liberis Publications). Moreover, 84 national newspapers, including newspaper inserts, 4 newspapers in Thessalonica, 4 national or Attica television channels, 55 regional channels, 3 satellite channels, 1 digital subscription-based platform (Alpha Digital), and 9 Attica radio stations closed down, forcing the media market to shrink.

At the same time, more than 50 magazines, either autonomous editions or inserts, suspended their edition, shaping the tragic account of the financial crisis. The market presented signs of recovery only to a limited extent through the replacement of certain losses. For instance, DOL passed to the jurisdiction of Alter Ego, while at the same time *Ethnos Newspaper*, *Sunday Ethnos Newspaper* (of Pegasus Publishing), as well as Epsilon television channel, now known as Open, came under Dimera's control.

The transition to the digital age has raised new challenges to the journalism profession. It relates to multitasking practices that journalists can cope with through constant training. According to a representative of JUADN, "the Journalists' Union is worried about the pathogens favoured by the digital environment (plagiarism, copy–paste phenomenon in news websites, aggregators – robot journalism and fake news) and evaluates the need to inform and train its members as very important".

Generally, in Greece, media is characterised by the lack of a strong journalism culture, a weakness that has deteriorated over the years during the financial crisis. In the networked environment, the partisan culture is interacting with new technologies under the pressure of the financial recession, leading journalists to search for alternative practices and funding models (Touri et al., 2017).

(C5) Journalists' job security

1 POINT

Leading news media change their journalistic staff frequently; employment for a longer period of time is not the rule. In contradiction to the past, due to sharp decline in media revenues, the journalism profession is characterised by non-permanent or occasional contact positions, which is a shared working regime between genders. At the same time, on the juridical level, there are no special legal measures or tools protecting journalists against dismissal.

Leading Greek news media change their journalistic staff frequently; employment for a longer period of time is the exception, not the rule. Nowadays, due to sharp decline in media revenues, the lifecycle of journalistic jobs in media organisations tend to be short-lived. As opposed to the heyday of leading news

media houses, over the last years, media owners have resorted to the systematic use of short-term contracting with journalists. As a representative of JUADN mentioned,

The truth is that in the past, during the heyday of media groups, journalists had a lifecycle of about 15 years in a media organisation, sometimes being retired from the same place where they began their careers in the industry. However, today, the cycle of a journalist's tenure in both traditional and new media houses has "shortened" dramatically, resulting often in their staying only for a few months on a website, a newspaper or a television channel and then leaving in search of a job in another media organisation.

The phenomenon of non-permanent positions or freelance contracts is not a working regime that differs between genders. There is also no discrimination in hiring journalists based on gender, according to most interviewees. However, there was a time, especially after 2006, when the advertising revenue began to decline, that media organisations provided job security mainly to young journalists, rather than to older ones, as a means of saving money. According to a representative of Journalists' Union of Athens Daily Newspapers,

At the time of the reduction in advertising spending, after 2006, both publishing organisations and TV channels often preferred younger journalists in order to reduce their payroll obligations on the grounds that younger journalists were considered more knowledgeable on digital tools. Today, this has started to subside in both traditional and new media, as the "slow journalism" movement has begun to inspire the Greek media organisations, which are slowly returning to credible reporting and to experienced, reputable reporters and to commentators.

On the juridical level, there are no special legal measures or tools protecting journalists against such dismissals. In terms of labour rights, what applies to all professions is the same for journalism as well. In case of proven illegal and abusive dismissals, journalists' unions are used to make allegations of support for underprivileged journalists, releasing relevant complaints. Although leading news media are mainly based on permanent staff rather than freelancers, there is no guarantee that a journalist's position will be preserved for a long period of time. At the same time, there are no professional rules protecting journalists against dismissal because of personal convictions. In effect, Greek journalists are usually subject to a type of self-censorship for fear of being fired.

(C6) Practice of access to information

2 POINTS

Public information is accessible by law, but not in reality. Journalists must spend time and effort to gain access. Although in theory, public information is accessible by law, in actual practice this is not the case, given that the accessing public documents presents considerable problems or difficulties. These restrictions affect the quality of investigative journalism, which at times is not truly revealing, or is ad hoc or only partially revealing.

In Greece, public information is accessible in theory, but not in practice. Journalists must spend time and effort to gain access. To be more precise, there is no media law specifically providing journalists with unrestricted access to public information. However, there are laws addressing citizens generally, which safeguard the above right. According to the Greek Constitution (Article 10, para. 1 & 3), citizens may either individually or as a group report in writing to the authorities asking for information or documents, and the authorities must provide a reasoned reply to the applicant or applicants within a specified period of time. With the constitutional revision of 2001, another Article (5A) was added to the supreme state law, which recognised citizens' right to information and to participation in the Information Society (Hellenic Parliament, 2019).

This important right of citizens is specialised in more detail in Law 1599/1986 (Article 16), defining that "every citizen has the right to be informed of administrative documents", and at the same time, the presidential decree 28/2015, coding the provisions for access to public documents and data, defines that "any person concerned/interested, at his/her written request, has the right to be informed of the administrative documents" (Official Government Gazette/FEK, 1986: 1644). The legislator's reference to "anyone interested" implies that the application for access to administrative documents should be based on a reasonable interest on the part of the applicant, whether they are a citizen or a journalist.

In the case of journalists, this reasonable interest (as defined by the law) derives from their obligation to provide the audience with accurate and timely information based on the principle of content documentation. However, this need for news documentation cannot be achieved without prior access to administrative documents. Therefore, the journalist's potential to request a public document is directly related to the satisfaction of an individual right and a wider public interest.

In practice, many times public information is accessible only in theory, as journalists must spend time and effort to gain access, since it may pose considerable problems or difficulties. One of the most common or recurring features is the tacit refusal of the administration to provide information requested by the journalist, or its long-lasting delay that amounts to refusal. This negative

attitude on the part of the administration at times may stem from political expediencies, meaning the administration's desire to protect politics.

Although journalists' access to public information cannot be characterised as totally unhindered or unrestricted, reporters enjoy an open communication regime when it comes to their contacts with politicians. A representative of JUADN argued:

Generally, there is an open field between politicians and editors [...]. What Journalists' Union of Athens Daily Newspapers is interested in is the observance of both the legislation and the rules of ethics in the way public information is collected, processed, and published.

In general, the accredited journalists to public sector bodies (such as ministries) gain easier access to public information, compared with other reporters or freelancers. In any case, all journalists, depending on their experience, gradually compile a list of personal contacts being used as a valuable source of information, even on topics regarding government or state activities. Nevertheless, in exceptional cases, there is still information inaccessible to anyone, deliberately hidden by those in power. An opinion-article journalist said, "There is quasi-public information intentionally hidden by the political sources".

(C7) The watchdog and the news media's mission statement

2 POINTS

Media market investigative and watchdog journalism is part of the self-conception of leading news media, but journalists rarely have resources to exercise it. The mission statements of the leading news media organisations in Greece contain no particular or separate references to investigative journalism or watchdog performance of journalists against the abuse of power and corruption. They just incorporate the conventional rules of journalistic ethics, as defined by the JUADN, a professional association of daily newspapers and broadcasting journalists based in Athens.

In the Greek media market, investigative and watchdog journalism is part of the self-conception of leading news media houses. However, journalists rarely have resources to exercise it or, to be more precise, on the grounds of reduced financial resources they can avail it less than they wish for.

The watchdog function of journalists against the abuse of power and corruption is perceived on its own as a vital and integral part of the journalistic mission, which does not need to be framed by a special code of conduct other than the one characterising conventional journalism practices. As an editor-in-chief of a television channel aptly put it, "Investigative journalism does not deviate from classical journalism [...], it lies within the classical mission of

journalists”. However, he revealed that the media organisation’s future aim was “to compile an internal code of ethics so as to further advance the classical rules of Journalists’ Union”.

The mission statements of the media organisations mostly incorporated very conventional rules of journalistic ethics, as defined by the JUADN. This is a professional association of daily newspapers and broadcasting journalists based in Athens. It represents the most important Greek journalists’ association, with over 3,000 members, and thus, its Code of Professional Ethics and Social Responsibility directed at its members has been integrated – even informally – as an important reference guide to the mission and role of all journalists and media outlets based in Athens.

The obvious presence and informal acceptance of these rules is evident in a newspaper editor-in-chief’s testimony:

In our job contracts there is no reference to it [investigative journalism and its rules]. However, there is the general code of ethics of Journalists’ Union governing journalistic functions, which refers to all these relevant duties. In theory, the media a priori accepts it. Whether the rules are followed reverently, whether they are followed little or at all is another matter. Nevertheless, they are predominantly accepted [by journalists].

In sum, the selection process of news topics worthy of in-depth investigation is based on strict criteria. These, for the most part, include those that top the preference list of editors-in-chief or news directors within television newsrooms and those researchable by journalists in a relatively short period of time. This is because news bulletins cannot sustain the absence of an experienced reporter for a long time, as a chief editor of a private television channel pointed out.

(C8) Professional training

1 POINT

Training opportunities are not regularly provided. However, those who wish to participate find ways and means to do so. In Greece, the need for continuous and systematic professional training on watchdog and investigative journalism or on Big Data analysis is not embedded within leading news media organisations’ culture. Therefore, there is a lack of internally institutionalised means permitting training courses or training networks. Although there are some exceptions to this prevalent trend, the issue of training is a matter of personal decision on the part of journalists disconnected from the media outlet’s policy.

Training opportunities (especially for Big Data analysis, digital research methods, and collaborative online tools for investigative journalism) are not regularly provided; however, those who wish to participate find ways and means to do so.

One of the best and well-known sources of such professional training courses is JUADN, something most journalists are aware of.

In effect, the obligation for continuous training is not embedded in journalists' or Greek media organisations' culture. Therefore, the participation in training networks (e.g., for digital research and investigation methods) is not a matter of media outlet or gender; rather, it is clearly an individual option or decision. This lack of a widespread training culture is justified on the grounds that journalists are distracted by the daily hunt of news in their great attempt to earn their living. "In terms of education, everyone fights it alone. It is primarily left to individual training and the struggle and the effort is to focus on living from hand to mouth", mentioned an editor-in-chief of a radio station.

Nevertheless, the lack of contemporary professional training is not a common feature among media outlets, since television organisations appear more consistent on this task, with the exception of public service broadcaster ERT. For instance, the media group ANT1 occasionally (once or twice a year) conducts educational courses on new technologies, addressing employees from the sector of news editing and entertainment. An editor-in-chief said:

The ANT1 group holds seminars once or twice a year for the media group's employees as a whole. It has to do overall education [...] how we interact in today's market conditions, what the audience wants nowadays, how much the presence of social media has affected the media.

Another prime example is the recently rebranded TV MEGA, where the use of new-coming high standard technological equipment has led journalists to pursue seminars on new technologies, data journalism, and fake news. An editor-in-chief confirmed that journalists had been provided with seminars in order to use high technology (employed in the television station). "One of our journalists is already a member of the International Federation of Research Journalism having a very systematic contact [with data journalism and new research journalism tools]", he added.

Compared to private television channels, ERT lags behind in providing organised or systematic training. In the past (2007–2008), some rudimentary efforts were made with the aim of enhancing staff's knowledge and skills. However, they proved to be clearly temporary and far from being based on a well-thought strategic plan. A public service radio journalist explained this and highlighted the lack of implementation:

There is no organised education or staff training in public service broadcaster (ERT) in general. In 2007–2008 some efforts were made. At first, it all started with a little good mood [...]. However, today, there is no training within ERT, neither for the administration, nor for the technical staff and journalists. There is nothing about data analysis. Something relevant is implemented with

regard to new media in collaboration with the Athena Research Institute and the European Communication Institute, [...]. However, it is not implemented at an institutional level.

As opposed to private television channels, radio stations attribute minimal or no importance to professional training courses, mainly due to limited resources. However, the economic recession that afflicted the media market has dramatically affected the ability of the media outlets to invest in staff training, even in the case of the traditional press organisations. According to an editor-in-chief of a mainstream newspaper, before the crisis, everyone had the right to go to training courses. Especially for everyone from the group of editors who were involved in new technologies, the newspaper relied heavily on their own specialisation and their own promotional energy to improve themselves. Lately, “it is definitely not happening as often as it used to”, he added.

As to the question of whether women journalists are supported and encouraged to participate in training courses on digital research, investigative methods, or leadership skills, the answer is plain, given by a representative of JUADN: “There is no discrimination in the attention paid to women compared to their male colleagues in terms of professional training. Women are given the same attention as men”, he argued.

(C9) Watchdog function and financial resources

1 POINT

Investigative journalism happens, but it is the exception rather than the rule. In leading news media organisations in Greece, although investigative journalism is recognised as a task of great importance, lack of the financial resources since the period of recession has minimised the potential of the newsroom to perform their watchdog functions systematically.

In leading news media organisations in Greece, investigative journalism is the exception rather than the rule. Journalists recognise investigative journalism as a task of great relevance, confirming the role of journalism as the fourth estate; however, they are mostly unaware of the range of financial resources invested in this aspect of journalism. According to a newspaper editor-in-chief, “Investigative journalism should be the dominant element in the media field, but it is not for either public or private media”.

Nevertheless, journalists argue that the decade of financial crisis has raised difficulties and restrictions in newsrooms, in regards to performing their watchdog function. “Over the last years in Greece, the range and number of journalists involved in investigative journalism have significantly declined”, said a news director of a commercial television channel. Therefore, according to another journalist working in a private radio station, the truth was that in Greece, it is

not so simple to do investigative journalism under the current economic conditions, as the economy had directly affected mass media. “We [as media] had already been destroyed [before the financial collapse of 2009]. One of the first areas hit by the crisis in Greece was the media”, he added.

In short, journalists and media owners appear particularly keen to produce more projects of investigative journalism than they actually do. However, their strong willingness or desire has necessarily been tempered or suppressed by the economic recession that afflicted the media field and Greek society as a whole. Nowadays, journalists have been turned into multitaskers, something that often deprives them of the possibility of dealing with a newsworthy topic for a long time. As a result, today, in comparison with the past, there has been a decrease in news topics investigated in-depth due to restrictions on the time available for research. Although leading news media have at their disposal trained specialists on given topics, the process of news cross-checking is not equally rigorous on all issues.

In websites based on crowd funding – such as *info-war.gr* or *thepressproject.gr* – there is a system of ad hoc provision of funds to specific investigative journalism projects that are documentary in nature. These public contributions ensure the implementation of independent investigations and the sustainability of the news portal. “Based on the money from public contributions, the operating expenses are first covered, which is a fixed expense, and the rest [money] goes to research”, said the editor-in-chief of a news website.

In the leading news media organisations in Greece, the process of news production is mostly based on the model of accredited journalists, required to deliver a news topic by the ministries or other official bodies on a daily basis. This journalistic routine on news composition does not leave much room for journalists to exercise in-depth investigation – this is a privilege enjoyed by fewer and fewer journalists. In the case of newspapers, in-depth journalistic investigation is a mission preferably assigned to highly experienced individual journalists instead of a group, due to limited availability of time and money. “In this regard, over the last decade, investigative journalists have been perceived as ‘luxury editors’”, said a newspaper editor-in-chief.

According to a newspaper editor-in-chief, despite the lack of vital conditions for journalists to perform their watchdog role through well-funded independent investigations, other incentives in newsrooms remain strong, including encouragement towards journalists on the part of media owners. After all, it is argued that “the control and criticism of those in power is multifaceted” and therefore, is not an exclusive matter or mission of investigative journalism, but journalism as a whole.

Conclusions

Traditionally, in Greece, there have been more media outlets than what the state can sustain. This seems to be the main feature of the Greek media landscape that, at the same time, is also the main cause of its problems. This has resulted in the politicisation of the field and the traditional interplay between media owners (mostly coming from sectors other than the economy) and the government.

With regard to the press market, Greek newspapers and magazines have faced an existential crisis. The financial crisis of the last decade, coupled with one of the lowest levels of readership in Europe, has led the printed media to be in question. The recent lockdown due to the Covid-19 pandemic seems to be a further impediment regarding newspapers' existence. However, the broadcasting sector, and especially television, despite facing a decline in advertising revenue, remain one of the most important sources of information for the Greek audience. Meanwhile, the online media organisations have rapidly cemented their place in the Greek media system, with the digital sector incorporating 675 digital media companies, with more than 1,500 news websites certified by the government.

Nevertheless, despite a plethora of all kinds of media organisations, and some being more successful than the others in reaching the public, Greece, like other countries, is experiencing inequalities in representation and access to the media by social minorities.

Journalism in Greece is suffering from chronic and severe crises (financial and operational), derived mostly from the fact that powerful entrepreneurs, coming from other sectors of the economy, own leading news media in Greece. They use media organisations as an effective means to serve their business interests by exerting pressure on political actors. This means that in Greece, there thrives a media system where the “triangle of power” – consisting of political leadership, entrepreneurs, and media owners – dominates.

As noted earlier, this is the result of a traditional government-oriented model of policy-making permitting strong state intervention in the media field. The financial crisis enhanced this paradigm, and the bankruptcies recorded in the media market over the last years brought about a reorganisation of the media sector leading to a new pattern of media oligopoly. This setting has adversely affected the already low rank of independence and pluralism in journalism, regenerating a journalistic culture receptive to the model of media *instrumentalisation* and governed by self-censorship when reporting news.

These highly precarious working conditions of journalists have undermined their potential to fulfil their function as watchdogs. After all, in the Greek media market, investigative or watchdog journalism is part of a self-conception of leading news media houses. There is no particular reference within the mission statements. However, due to reduced financial resources, it is exercised less than journalists wish for. This weakness is directly related to the lack of

culture within most media organisations to provide training opportunities, as well as due to the lack of internally institutionalised means permitting training courses to journalists on a regular basis.

With more than one fourth of Greeks stating distrust towards the media, the audience seems to have turned to online news websites for daily information consumption. They have chosen it despite the fact that for online news platforms, click-bait technique is the main way to increase their page views.

Although there are conflicting views among journalists as to the existence of gender inequalities within the media organisations, they all agree that official rules on these critical issues are missing. Misinformation and fake news are perceived as major problems, and media organisations have been left behind in terms of how they could handle them efficiently, with journalists appearing adhered only to the traditional practice of information cross-checking, ignoring the aid offered by new technologies or the external fact-checking organisations.

Overall, Greece is a country with a media market in chronic crisis. “Advocacy culture” still prevails in most media organisations, which seem to be influenced by “analogue” considerations, even in the digital age.

Notes

1. <https://emedia.media.gov.gr/>
2. For more details, see <https://www.digea.gr/en>

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