

# Greece: Ahead of court hearing, SLAPP lawsuit against media and journalists must be dropped

The undersigned international freedom of expression and media freedom organisations today renew our condemnation of a groundless defamation lawsuit filed against Greek journalists and media by Grigoris Dimitriadis, the nephew of the Prime Minister, and urge the plaintiff to urgently withdraw the lawsuit ahead of an upcoming hearing.

With the first hearing due at an Athens court of First Instance on 25 January, 2024 after a year-and-a-half delay, our organisations restate our shared characterisation of this lawsuit as a Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation (SLAPP) – a vexatious effort to muzzle investigative reporting on Dimitriadis' links to the Greek spyware scandal.

The claim by Dimitriadis – who belongs to the powerful Mitsotakis family – was filed on 5 August 2022 against newspaper EFSYN and online investigative portal Reporters United and their reporters Nikolas Leontopoulos and Thodoris Chondrogiannos, plus freelance journalist Thanasis Koukakis. It demands compensation of €250,000 from EFSYN, €150,000 from Reporters United and its journalists. Dimitriadis also demanded that Koukakis, a journalist targeted with spyware, take down his sharing of Reporters United's investigation on social media which referred to Dimitriadis and the wiretapping scandal and pay damages of €150,000. The total amount claimed is €550,000.

The defamation lawsuit was filed on the day Dimitriadis resigned from his position as the general secretary of Prime Minister, Kyriakos Mitsotakis, his uncle. The previous day, EFSYN and Reporters United made [revelations](#) about Dimitriadis' connection to the surveillance scandal at a time when he oversaw the National Intelligence Agency. On June 3, another [joint report](#) had provided evidence Dimitriadis was connected to a network of businesspeople and companies linked directly or indirectly with businessman Felix Bitzios, former deputy administrator and shareholder of the spyware firm Intellexa, which at the time marketed the Predator spyware, which was revealed to have been used by unconfirmed actors to surveil multiple high-profile political and media figures.

After the lawsuit was filed, many of our organisations [branded](#) the lawsuit as a startling example of a SLAPP and an attempt to muzzle investigative reporting on a matter of significant public interest. This assessment was supported by the Coalition Against SLAPPs in Europe (CASE). One-and-a-half years on, the frivolous nature of this lawsuit remains, and recent revelations have only further supported the reporting. Rather than

being targeted by financially and psychologically draining lawsuits, both Reporters United and EFSYN instead deserve credit for their watchdog reporting.

Our organisations met with journalists from Reporters United during a recent [international press freedom mission](#) to Athens in September 2023 to discuss the lawsuit and its impact further. Through the [Media Freedom Rapid Response](#), our organisations are proud to have helped provide support to cover the legal fees of the targeted media outlets and journalists in this court case.

Concerningly, we note that on 24 November 2023, Dimitriadis filed a [second lawsuit](#) against many of the same plaintiffs: EFSYN, three executives from the newspaper, as well as three journalists from Reporters United and Thanasis Koukakis. This second lawsuit – totalling €3.3 million for all the defendants – also stems from their reporting on Dimitriadis’ alleged links to the spyware scandal. Another lawsuit was [filed](#) against Alter Ego Media, as well as other threats of legal action.

Our organisations stress an alarming pattern of legal efforts to smother journalistic reporting on Dimitriadis’ connections to the spyware scandal. Ahead of the first-instance hearing, we urge Mr. Dimitriadis to withdraw the lawsuit and retract demands for the removal of the article and financial compensation. If the claim is not withdrawn, we urge the court to dismiss the complaint and to recognise the vexatious nature of this lawsuit, the accuracy and public interest of the report, and the pattern of legal intimidation by Mr Dimitriadis against independent journalistic reporting. We ask the judge to carefully assess international freedom of expression standards when making any decision.

Our organisations will continue to monitor the situation closely and report further attacks on the freedom of the press in Greece to international organisations and the European Union. We will also continue to raise SLAPP cases as a matter of concern with the Greek government and its Task Force for journalists’ safety. As the European institutions move to formally approve the EU anti-SLAPP Directive and the Council of Europe anti-SLAPP recommendation, the Greek authorities should take all national measures to ensure that journalists are not silenced by these vexatious lawsuits, in line with European standards. Our organisations remain committed to defending free and independent journalism in Greece and hope for a positive outcome in this case.

**Signed:**

International Press Institute (IPI)

ARTICLE 19 Europe (A19)

Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ)

European Centre for Press and Media Freedom (ECPMF)

European Federation of Journalists (EFJ)

Free Press Unlimited (FPU)

OBC Transeuropa (OBCT)

Reporters Without Borders (RSF)

South East Europe Media Organisation (SEEMO)