

Solidarity with ERT

Written by Marianna Karakoulaki

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MARIANNA KARAKOULAKI, JUN 13 2013

Author's Note: I want to clarify that although I rarely take a clear political stance especially about the developments in Greece and I rarely (if ever) write about Greece, I feel that in these times of political and social turmoil it is important for everyone to take a stance against the Greek government.

On Tuesday 12th June, Simos Kedikoglou, the Greek government's spokesman in a sudden press conference announced the Government's decision to shut down the public broadcasting company (ERT). While the Greek society stood in shock, Mr Kedikoglou explained that the reason of this closure was because ERT was an organization that was costing too much and was mismanaged. Additionally, the sudden closure shocked the rest of the world as it is the first time in history that during peacetime a public television is being closed overnight. ERT's closure means that around 2700 employees were fired overnight, and several radio, and TV stations closed. More specifically, five TV stations sever radio stations in Athens, three radio stations in Thessaloniki, 19 radio stations in rest of Greece, the National Symphony Orchestra and the Orchestra of Modern Music and Choir, one printed publication, and the ERT's webpage. Right after the announcement, ERT's employees announced that they will not leave the building and they will not stop broadcasting.

On Tuesday afternoon, the Greek Riot Police was sent to ERT's headquarters in Athens and Thessaloniki and at they had clear orders to shut down the transmitters and empty the buildings from the employees. The transmitters were shut down a while after 12 am on Wednesday and ERT TV channels all over Greece were black, and radio stations mute. Yet broadcasting did not stop, it continued online and through other transmitters all night; ERT's staff with the company's and their own equipment continued broadcasting from their studios informing the Greek people of what is happening. Meanwhile right after the government's announcement thousands of people started going at ERT's headquarters and, at the time of writing, still remain there in order to peacefully protest against the closure and in solidarity with the employees. Additionally, the international media, journalist and broadcasting unions reacted and condemned the government's undemocratic decision. The president of the European Broadcasting Union said:

"When the microphone of a journalist is cut off, it's like the voice of democracy being silenced. This has just been brutally done to 1,300 journalists – brutally in all senses because the Greek government has sent in the police to cut off a broadcaster and stop journalists from doing their job. That is the voice of democracy, the counterweight, a pressure group, that the government, the economic power is gagging" and continued "The idea of cutting the signal and sending screens black is the very worst kind of censorship. It's a violent assault on democratic debate which is not acceptable."

Meanwhile, the Greek Prime Minister, Antonis Samaras on a press conference condemned the solidarity wave and said that "the government is not shutting down public television but tries to create a real public television" noting that "now that the sinful ERT is closing down, the hypocrisy that brought Greece to its knees in bursting" impudently declaring with his now know 'Success Story' rhetoric that the worst is now gone and Greece is gradually recovering.

Antonis Samaras, his government, and his supporters make a huge mistake in the reasons people are protesting. The main reason Greeks are supporting ERT workers in their fight against the undemocratic decision by the Greek government is not emotional. It is not because we agree with everything ERT has done so far – the contrary – the majority of Greeks has criticized ERT over the years because of its role as the main propaganda machine for each

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government. It is well known that the journalist have been covering news in the demands of their appointed directors – if they did the opposite they would be fired; they admitted this themselves by saying that when the Greek Police was accused of tortures their News Director, Aimilios Liatsos, decided to cover an opening gala of a government-leaning newspaper.

The reason we react to this undemocratic and unconstitutional closure is because 2700 employees will be unemployed and a large majority of young people working there will join 64% of young people in unemployment. The reason we react is because the Greek government thinks they can act as they wish, disrespecting the citizens that trusted them with their vote. We react because the government has taken every democratic liberty we have. We react because the government resembles a dictatorship and not a European democracy. We react because we did not ask for it – it was imposed to us by a government that many thought would help Greece get over the crisis. We react because our Prime Minister travels all over the world and preaches about the “Greek Success Story” while the majority of the people are living just above poverty lines. We react because such action needs a collective reaction.

I do not know if things will be the same tomorrow or the days that will follow but it is important for everyone to join the general strikes that will take place from tomorrow on. It is important for everyone to unite their voice and show the current regime that we will no longer tolerate their actions. We will no longer shut up, listen, and compromise. We will stand against them taking back our lost dignity. ERT is just the beginning of what will follow. We stand together with ERT’s employees, and we will fight until they start respecting us again.

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About the author:

Marianna Karakoulaki is E-International Relations’ Articles Editor and a Director of E-IR’s Editorial Board. Marianna is a Lecturer in Sociology at Anglia Ruskin University and a PhD Researcher at the University of Birmingham (part-time, thesis awaited status). Her research focuses on critical border studies and looks at border violence, forced displacement and death. In addition, Marianna is an award-winning journalist with a focus on forced displacement in the Mediterranean. She is the editor (with Laura Southgate and Jakob Steiner) of *Critical Perspectives on Migration in the 21st Century* by E-IR in 2018. Her work can be found on her website.