

To the President of the European Commission Mr. Jean-Claude Juncker

To the President of the European Council Mr. Donald Tusk

The journal *The Athens Review of Books (ARB)*, the Greek counterpart of the *New York Review of Books*, published a reader's letter that mentioned the political past of the—until recently—Greek Foreign Minister N. Kotzias as a leading member of the Communist Party of Greece by characterizing him as a fanatic Stalinist (“gauleiter of Stalinism”) at that time. Mr. N. Kotzias (author of books praising the totalitarian Honecker regime and Jaruzelski's dictatorship) sued the journal for defamation, demanding 250,000 euros in compensation.

Court rulings considered the characterization *extreme Stalinist* to be defamatory, ignoring the fact that it is a political value judgment about a public figure. There is evidence that the minister and the government interfered to pervert the course of justice in order to facilitate the journal's persecution. One such strong indication is the fact that in the Greek Supreme Court, the Court Rapporteur initially called for the case against the journal to be dismissed for violating the case law of the European Court of Human Rights as well as the Greek Constitution, but then voted against her own fully documented report without explanation, only to be later appointed Vice-President of the Supreme Court by the government.

Since July 2017, at the request of the former Foreign Minister the bank accounts of the publisher and of the chief editor of the *ARB* as well as the journal's revenues from the Press Distribution Agency have been frozen, in an obvious attempt to shut it down.

The never-ending persecution of the *ARB* is an extreme abuse of the ability that Greek law affords to politicians to file lawsuits against the press and request excessive sums of money. Because of the latitude provided by the Greek law they can win these lawsuits in violation of European Court of Human Rights case law, thus intimidating the press and deterring political criticism.

In recent decades such an absurd legal prosecution as the case of the (former) Foreign Minister against the *ARB* has not been encountered in the European Union. Recently, three different MEPs' questions to the European Commission regarding the journal's

persecution have been tabled at the European Parliament, while the leader of the Greek opposition stated that "the persecution of the *Athens Review of Books* is a shame for the Hellenic Republic." On October 23rd 2018, the former Minister N. Kotzias publicly confessed: "I served in the Stalinist left". It was the statement that he had alleged as defamatory in his lawsuit and which the courts consequently accepted as such in condemning the *ARB*.

Mr. President of the European Commission, Mr. President of the European Council, we ask you respectfully to use all means at the disposal of the Commission and the Council in order to save a journal that honors Greek letters and the Greek press.

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