

A Safer World For The Truth

**Impunity in Europe:
*Uninvestigated Murder of Greek
Journalist Sokratis Giolias***



A Safer World For The Truth

A Safer World for the Truth is a collaborative initiative of Free Press Unlimited, the Committee to Protect Journalists and Reporters without Borders. A Safer World for the Truth works towards the pursuit of justice for crimes committed against journalists. The project consists of a series of investigations of cases where a journalist was murdered for doing his or her job. The aim of these investigations is to bring new facts and information around the killings to light, paving the way for pursuing justice.



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Impunity in Europe: the uninvestigated murder of Greek journalist Sokratis Giolias

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Abbreviations

CFN - Conspiracy of Fire Nuclei

CPJ - Committee to Protect Journalists

ESIEA - Athens Journalist Union

EYP - National Intelligence Service

FPU - Free Press Unlimited

ND - New Democracy

PASOK - Panhellenic Socialist Movement

RSF - Reporters Without Borders

RS - Revolutionary Struggle

Executive summary

Sokratis Giolias was a former radio journalist and TV editor who started his news blog *Troktiko* in 2007.¹ It soon became one of the most popular news sources in Greece. On 19 July 2010, two assailants in police uniforms shot and killed Giolias in front of his house. Eight days later, the terrorist group, Sect of Revolutionaries, claimed responsibility for the murder. Despite this claim, no one has ever been charged with the murder. Worryingly, time to bring the perpetrators to justice is running out. Under Greek law, the period in which the case of the murder of Sokratis Giolias can be brought to court expires in 2030; after that the authorities will no longer be able to hold anyone responsible for the murder.²

The official investigation progressed only marginally beyond the collection of evidence in the first days after the murder. Within ten hours after the murder, the Criminal Investigative Division of the Athens police announced it had linked 16 bullet casings found at the crime site to the exact same weapon previously used in attacks by the Sect of Revolutionaries. The case was subsequently transferred to the Anti-Terrorism Unit of the Greek police. The Unit did not find significant evidence beyond the ballistic analysis and after thirteen years, no one has been arrested for the murder.

Giolias' murder and the subsequent impunity profoundly impacted the Greek media landscape. *Troktiko* was one of the most well-read news blogs in Greece at the time, often covering news events real-time. The murder caused widespread safety concerns among journalists and other news bloggers in Greece. While the case is often dismissed as a press freedom matter, due to concerns in the Greek media sector about *Troktiko*'s journalistic standards, our findings underline its relevance to the safety of journalists in Greece today. The persistent impunity in his case is indicative of a pattern of poor investigative standards applied to solving crimes against journalists that continues to impact the Greek journalist community. The impunity for his murder and that of journalist Giorgios Karaivaz in 2021, and also police violence against, and surveillance of, journalists, are all reasons why Greece scores so abominably on the press freedom index. It is ranked the lowest of all EU Member States.³

In light of the impact of the case on press freedom, A Safer World for the Truth conducted a year-long investigation into the murder. The goal was to reconstruct the official investigation into the case and discover why it stagnated. By analyzing witness testimonies, case files and news reports, we found a pattern of inaction and inadequate investigation. As a result of our investigation, we present the following findings:

First, our investigation reveals how far-reaching the chilling effect of the murder was. Both witnesses and journalists approached for this investigation indicated that the murder not only altered their perception of what they could cover as journalists, they also stated that even talking about the case is dangerous. Several crucial witnesses explicitly stated this fear as the reason for their refusal to speak with our investigators, even thirteen years after the crime.

Second, there were crucial omissions and delays in the early stage of the official investigation. The police failed to analyze the content of Giolias' devices, or record his wife's witness testimony until three years after the murder. They also failed to respond to requests by Cypriot police authorities to offer evidence. When several of these omissions were publicized in Greek magazine *Hot Doc* in 2013, no investigative body was held accountable and several omissions still persist today.

1 The blog remains available at: <http://troktiko.blogspot.com/>

2 Art. 111 (2a) of the Greek Criminal Code

3 See the Press Freedom Index by Reporters without Borders: <https://rsf.org/en/country/greece>

Third, our analysis reveals that the investigation was impeded by tunnel vision and a lack of pursuit of (new) leads. After the investigation was renewed in 2014, in response to the 2013 publication, the police investigation focused on verifying hypotheses initiated in the Greek media. The case files seen by A Safer World for the Truth do not show evidence that other hypotheses were pursued. Also, important leads, such as the relationship between Giolias and a senior police official, Manolis Sfakianakis, remain under-investigated. Testimonies deemed convincing by the Supreme Court of Greece, identify Sfakianakis as the person who told Giolias of an impending police raid, which was supposedly why Giolias opened the door to his assailants. In 2019, Sfakianakis was only charged with breach of duty for the contact he had with Giolias in February 2010, and the case was dismissed on technical grounds in 2020.

Fourth, the entire investigation lacked transparency. Giolias' family publicly lamented the lack of updates by authorities and failure on the part of the police to provide public investigation updates beyond the first days following the murder. Because of this, public scrutiny of the investigation was seriously hampered and the climate of fear around the case still prevails to date.

In light of these conclusions, we reached out to the Greek authorities, specifically the public prosecutor, the leadership of the Hellenic Police and the Minister of Citizen Protection, as well as Mr Manolis Sfakianakis, offering them the opportunity to reply to these findings. None responded to this request.

To bring Sokratis Giolias' killers to justice, and stop impunity for similar murders in the future, A Safer World for the Truth recommends the following:

To the Prosecutor of the Supreme Court of Greece:

- **Transfer and renew the investigation into the murder of Sokratis Giolias without delay, in order to pursue justice before the case expires in 2030.** The investigation must be adequate, impartial and prompt, and must take into account all available evidence.
- **Request investigative assistance from Europol to ensure an adequate, prompt and independent reinvestigation into the murder of Sokratis Giolias.**
- **Commission an independent evaluation of the past investigations of murders of journalists, notably Sokratis Giolias and Giorgios Karaivaz, to critically review specific failures to investigate and any indications of obstruction to the investigation.** Such a review should also take into consideration the close ties between police officers, media and business interests, highlighted by this case.

To the Ministry of Citizen Protection:

- **Improve access to information concerning criminal investigations, for the relatives of murdered journalists and their legal representatives, and also the general public.** Provide clarity about the status of all open investigations into murders and serious attacks on journalists and recognize the impact impunity for these cases has on the public faith in the judicial system and the right to access to information for Greek citizens.

- **Develop a Criminal Investigation Procedure for crimes against journalists**, to reduce impunity and promote specialized knowledge about these crimes across police units. This Criminal Investigations Procedure must be developed in accordance with international standards for effective investigations, such as those specified in the Minnesota Protocol⁴ and the Guidelines for prosecutors in cases of crimes against journalists.⁵ Developing a criminal Investigation Procedure for crimes against journalists, will help increase the effectiveness of this process.

To the European Commission:

- **Monitor the implementation of these recommendations by the Greek government** and track cases of impunity for crimes against journalists, and policies for tackling this impunity. as part of the Rule of Law-report composed for each Member State of the European Union and the monitoring of the implementation of the 2021 Recommendation on the safety of journalists. Continue the dialogue with the Greek government on this theme, and stimulate cooperation among Member States to address impunity for crimes against journalists in Europe.

⁴ United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner. 2016. The Minnesota Protocol on the Investigation of Potentially Unlawful Death; The Revised United Nations Manual on the Effective Prevention and Investigation of Extra-legal, Arbitrary and Summary Executions. <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Publications/MinnesotaProtocol.pdf>.

⁵ UNESCO & International Association of Prosecutors. 2020. Guidelines for prosecutors on cases of crimes against journalists. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000375138>.

1. Context of the murder: the links between media and politics and crime

Democratic backsliding and attacks on the freedom of expression

According to Reporters Without Borders (RSF), for the second year in a row, Greece performed the worst of all EU countries in terms of press freedom, ranking 107th in the RSF Press Freedom Index.⁶ Despite its international commitments to press freedom, for example, in the Council of Europe's Safety for Journalists Platform and the Media Freedom Coalition, the domestic state of press freedom is severely impaired by several systemic threats to press freedom, which include the failure to investigate murders of journalists, large-scale surveillance of reporters, lack of efficient and transparent media regulation, low economic sustainability of the media and targeting of journalists by extremist groups and by police violence.^{7,8}

To mention a few examples, in November 2021, Greek legislators approved an, now repealed, amendment to Article 191 of Greece's criminal code, imposing a prison sentence up to three months on persons who spread "fake news".⁹ Meanwhile, investigations into the murder of journalists Giorgios Karaivaz and Sokratis Giolias did not result in justice.¹⁰

The encroachment on press freedom coincided with the gradual deterioration of other democratic checks and balances in Greece. In 2022, the Varieties of Democracy Institute (V-Dem Institute) downgraded Greece from a liberal to an electoral democracy after bastions of democracy, the legislature and the judiciary, were debilitated.¹¹ A 2023 mission by a European Parliament delegation also reported "very serious threats" to the rule of law and raised concerns about the state of press freedom and the independence of the judiciary.¹² In 2019, the Greek government enacted the "Executive State" law (4622/2019), which brought the National Intelligence Service (EYP), the national broadcaster ERT, and the public news agency ANA-MPA under direct Prime-Ministerial control.¹³

The most glaring example of how aggrandizement of the executive has affected journalism was the wiretapping scandal of 2022. Multiple investigative journalists and opposition leaders were targeted using Predator spyware.¹⁴ The Mitsotakis government admitted that the Greek secret services had bugged the phones of journalists.¹⁵ This led to condemnation in the European Parliament and reports by the EU Committee of Inquiry, investigating

6 Reporters Without Borders. 2023. *Press Freedom Index*. <https://rsf.org/en/index>.

7 Reporters Without Borders. 2023. *Press Freedom Index*. <https://rsf.org/en/index>.

8 Human Rights Watch. 2021. *Greece: Alleged 'Fake News' Made a Crime*.

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/11/17/greece-alleged-fake-news-made-crime>

9 The Committee to Protect Journalists. 2021. *New Greek criminal code amendment threatens journalists with jail for spreading 'false' information*.

<https://cpj.org/2021/12/new-greek-criminal-code-amendment-threatens-journalists-with-jail-for-spreading-false-information/>

10 Politico. 2022. *Greece is worst EU country for media freedom, report says*.

<https://www.politico.eu/article/greece-worst-eu-country-for-media-freedom-in-world-press-freedom-index/>.

11 Natsika, N., Nord, M., Sato, Y., Wiebrecht, F., & Lindberg, S. I. (2023). *Defiance in the Face of Autocratization. Democracy Report 2023*.

12 Euractiv (8 March 2023). *EU Parliament mission: Rule of law in Greece faces 'very serious threats'*. <https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/eu-parliament-mission-rule-of-law-in-greece-faces-very-serious-threats/>

13 Natsika, N., Nord, M., Sato, Y., Wiebrecht, F., & Lindberg, S. I. (2023). *Defiance in the Face of Autocratization. Democracy Report 2023*.

14 Euractiv. 2022. *Greek 'Watergate': Mitsotakis' authoritarianism cannot be tolerated anymore*.

https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/short_news/greek-watergate-mitsotakis-authoritarianism-cannot-be-tolerated-anymore/

15 Euractiv. 2022. *Greek 'Watergate': Mitsotakis' authoritarianism cannot be tolerated anymore*.

https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/short_news/greek-watergate-mitsotakis-authoritarianism-cannot-be-tolerated-anymore/

the use of Pegasus and similar surveillance spyware in (among others) Greece.¹⁶ An audit by the Greek privacy watchdog, instigated in response to complaints from surveilled journalists and MEPs, was initially blocked by the Prosecutor of the Supreme Court, leading to further scandal.¹⁷

In the past twenty years, two journalists have been murdered in Greece: Giorgos Karaivaz and Sokratis Giolias. The murder of the latter is at the center of this report.¹⁸ Both journalists were murdered in targeted assassinations, for which no one has been convicted yet. While, in the case of Sokratis Giolias no arrests have been made, two suspects have been arrested for alleged involvement in the murder of Giorgos Karaivaz.¹⁹ Reporters Without Borders (RSF) has repeatedly criticized the Greek authorities for failing to present any progress in the investigation into Karaivaz' murder.²⁰ The lack of results in this case, despite the availability of evidence, and the lack of attention for the perpetrators who ordered the murder, reflect the failures in the investigation of the murder of Sokratis Giolias, as presented in this report.²¹ The fact that justice has not been delivered in these cases has had a chilling effect on the Greek press corps.²² This was confirmed by Greek journalists who spoke with the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) in connection with the murder of Karaivaz. One of them stated that, as long as his murder has not been properly investigated, "we can assume that it can happen to any journalist, and sources can also assume the same".²³

Power dynamics and the media landscape at the time of the murder of Sokratis Giolias

Sokratis Giolias (1973 - 2010) was murdered in the wake of the Greek government debt crisis, which followed the 2007-2008 global financial crisis. The sovereign debt crisis and its ensuing austerity reforms had profound repercussions on Greek livelihoods and Greek politics. In the first years of the crisis, unemployment,²⁴ poverty,²⁵ suicide,²⁶ (child-)malnutrition,²⁷ homelessness,²⁸ all rose significantly. At the same time, support for Greece's two main parties, the center-right New Democracy (ND) and center-left Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) drastically declined. This became glaringly obvious during the 2015 elections, when the more radical left Syriza

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- 16 European Parliament. 2023. Committee of Inquiry to investigate the use of Pegasus and equivalent surveillance spyware. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2014_2019/plmrep/COMMITTEES/PEGA/DV/2023/05-08/REPORTcompromises_EN.pdf
- 17 TVXS (16 December 2022). «Βόμβα» Euractiv: Η ΕΥΠ παρακολουθούσε Τέλλογλου και Κύρτσο. <https://tvxs.gr/news/ellada/bomba-euractiv-i-eyyp-parakolythoyse-tellogloy-kai-kyrtso>
- 18 Committee to Protect Journalists. 2022. *In Greece, reporters' killings unsolved, critical journalists complain of growing threats*. <https://cpj.org/2022/10/in-greece-reporters-killings-unsolved-critical-journalists-complain-of-growing-threats/>.
- 19 Media Freedom Rapid Response. 2023. *Greece: MFRR partners welcome first arrests over 2021 assassination of journalist Giorgos Karaivaz*. <https://www.ecpmf.eu/greece-mfrr-partners-welcome-arrests-over-assassination-of-giorgos-karaivaz/>; Reporters Without Borders. 2023. *Progress in investigation into Greek reporter's murder is not enough, says RSF*. <https://rsf.org/en/progress-investigation-greek-reporter-s-murder-not-enough-says-rsf>
- 20 Reporters Without Borders. 2023. *Progress in investigation into Greek reporter's murder is not enough, says RSF*. <https://rsf.org/en/progress-investigation-greek-reporter-s-murder-not-enough-says-rsf>;
- Reporters Without Borders. 2023. *Greek crime reporter's murder – do the authorities have something to hide?* <https://rsf.org/en/greek-crime-reporter-s-murder-do-authorities-have-something-hide>
- 21 Reporters Without Borders. 2023. *Progress in investigation into Greek reporter's murder is not enough, says RSF*. <https://rsf.org/en/progress-investigation-greek-reporter-s-murder-not-enough-says-rsf>
- 22 Committee to Protect Journalists. 2022. *In Greece, reporters' killings unsolved, critical journalists complain of growing threats*. <https://cpj.org/2022/10/in-greece-reporters-killings-unsolved-critical-journalists-complain-of-growing-threats/>.
- 23 Committee to Protect Journalists. 2022. *In Greece, reporters' killings unsolved, critical journalists complain of growing threats*. <https://cpj.org/2022/10/in-greece-reporters-killings-unsolved-critical-journalists-complain-of-growing-threats/>.
- 24 Eurostat. 2023. *Unemployment rate - seasonally adjusted data*. https://www.google.com/publicdata/explore?ds=z8o7pt6rd5uqa6_&ctype=l&strail=false&bcs=d&nselm=h&met_y=unemployment_rate&fdim_y=seasonality:sa&scale_y=lin&ind_y=false&rdim=country_group&idim=country_group:eu:non-eu&idim=country:de:gr:es&ifdim=country_group&start=41048280000&tend=1322953200000&hl=en&dl=en#!ctype=l&strail=false&bcs=d&nselm=h&met_y=unemployment_rate&fdim_y=seasonality:sa&scale_y=lin&ind_y=false&rdim=country_group&idim=country_group:eu:non-eu&idim=country:de:nl&ifdim=country_group&start=41281560000&tend=1625004000000&hl=en_US&dl=en&ind=false
- 25 Eurostat. 2017. *Eurostat: 1 in 3 Greeks live in poverty!* <https://www.kontraneews.gr/%ce%b1%cf%84%ce%b1%ce%be%ce%b9%ce%bd%cf%8c%ce%bc%ce%b7%cf%84%ce%b1/eurostat-1-stous-3-ellines-zoun-se-synthikes-ftocheias/>
- 26 Triantafyllou, K., & Angeletopoulou, C. (2011). Increased suicidality amid economic crisis in Greece. *Lancet Correspondence*, 378(9801), 1459-60.
- 27 Deutsche Welle. 2018. *Greece's debt crisis leaves nation hungry*. <https://www.dw.com/en/greeces-debt-crisis-leaves-nation-hungry-and-children-malnourished/a-46733130>
- 28 Financial Times, 2012. *Grim effects of austerity show on Greek streets*. <https://archive.ph/20150507010831/http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/95df9026-5983-11e1-8d36-00144feabdc0.html%23axzz3ZPW797me#selection-1553.0-1553.47>

party won in a landslide victory, while the neo-fascist Golden Dawn²⁹ moved from the fringes into the mainstream and became Greece's third largest party.³⁰

At the time of Giolias' murder, political murders and attacks were rife. Between 2007 and 2011, three groups in particular were responsible for domestic terrorism: Revolutionary Struggle (RS); Conspiracy of Fire Nuclei (CFN); and Sect of Revolutionaries (Sect). In 2010, two members of the far-left extremist group Conspiracy of Fire Nuclei, bombed a court in Athens.³¹ In 2010, three people were killed during anti-austerity demonstrations.³² In 2013, an anti-fascist musician was stabbed to death by a Golden Dawn member.³³ Since the murder of Sokratis Giolias was claimed by the Sect of Revolutionaries, the following section will specifically discuss their background and (claimed) attacks.

The Sect of Revolutionaries

Founded after teenager Alexandros Grigoropoulos was murdered by police during protests in December 2008, the Sect of Revolutionaries (The Sect) was a militant group that identified with anarchist ideals. The Sect conducted its first violent attack on 3 February 2009, when three or four helmeted assailants attacked Korydallos police station using a .32 Scorpion submachine gun and an unidentified 9mm pistol.^{34,35} The Sect claimed responsibility for this attack by leaving a CD on Grigoropoulos' grave the day after the attack.³⁶ Police officers of the Korydallos station later stated that four people aged between 22 and 30 years old attacked the station.³⁷

The Sect conducted their second attack on 17 February 2009, at 07:15 pm, when four gunmen wearing motorcycle helmets opened fire on and threw an IED (improvised explosive device) at the ALTER TV station building, using precisely the same weapons that had been used in the attack on the police station two weeks earlier.³⁸ The Sect claimed responsibility for this attack two days later in a letter to newspaper *Ta Nea*.³⁹ In this letter, the Sect attacked Greek journalists as "fascists" who "manipulate our minds" and promised bigger and bloodier attacks.⁴⁰ The US Ambassador to Greece at the time noted, in a leaked diplomatic cable, that the Sect's "hit-and-run attacks display a level of impulsiveness and bravado at variance with the more calculated approach of the other leading Greek terror group, Revolutionary Struggle".⁴¹

29 Seven of the 18 former Golden Dawn MPs and party members led a 'deadly organization' while the rest participated in the gang, according to a guilty verdict by an Athens court. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/oct/07/golden-dawn-leader-and-ex-mps-found-guilty-in-landmark-trial>.

30 Ministry of the Interior of the Hellenic Republic. 2015. *Parliamentary Elections January 2015*. <http://ekloges-prev.singularlogic.eu/v2015a/v/public/index.html?lang=en#%7B%22cls%22:%22level%22,%22params%22:%7B%22level%22:%22epik%22,%22id%22:1%7D%7D>

31 Reuters. 2010. *Greek guerrilla group claims Athens court blast* <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-greece-bomb-claim-idUSTRE7043HX20110105>

32 The New York Times. 2010. *Three Reported Killed in Greek Protests*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/06/world/europe/06greece.html>.

33 Al Jazeera. 2013. *Greece mourns slain anti-fascist rapper Pavlos Fyssas*. <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2017/9/15/greece-mourns-slain-anti-fascist-rapper-pavlos-fyssas>

34 US Ambassador Daniel Speckhard, leaked cable to US Secretary of State (5 February 2009). https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09ATHENS165_a.html; Newsbeast (19 July 2013). The 'silence' of 'Sehta' three years after the assassination of Giolias [translated]. <https://www.newsbeast.gr/society/arthro/560418/i-sigi-tis-sehtas-tria-hronia-meta-ti-dolofonia-giolia>

35 Newsbeast (22 October 2014). Criminal prosecution against strangers four years after the murder. <https://www.newsbeast.gr/society/arthro/745888/poiniki-dioxi-kata-agnoston-tessera-hronia-meta-ti-dolofonia-giolia>.

36 Newsbeast (22 October 2014). Criminal prosecution against strangers four years after the murder. <https://www.newsbeast.gr/society/arthro/745888/poiniki-dioxi-kata-agnoston-tessera-hronia-meta-ti-dolofonia-giolia>; US Ambassador Daniel Speckhard, leaked cable to US Secretary of State. https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09ATHENS165_a.html.

37 Vasilios G. Lambropoulos (25 July 2020). A "Cuckoo" did not bring "Sehta" [translated]. <https://web.archive.org/web/20100728230517/http://www.tovima.gr/80/default.asp?pid=2&artid=345136&ct=32&dt=25/07/2010>.

38 Newsbeast (22 October 2014). Criminal prosecution against strangers four years after the murder. <https://www.newsbeast.gr/society/arthro/745888/poiniki-dioxi-kata-agnoston-tessera-hronia-meta-ti-dolofonia-giolia>; US Ambassador Daniel Speckhard, leaked cable to US Secretary of State. https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09ATHENS165_a.html; Newsbeast (19 July 2013). The 'silence' of 'Sehta' three years after the assassination of Giolias [translated].

39 Newsbeast (22 October 2014). Criminal prosecution against strangers four years after the murder. <https://www.newsbeast.gr/society/arthro/745888/poiniki-dioxi-kata-agnoston-tessera-hronia-meta-ti-dolofonia-giolia>; US Ambassador Daniel Speckhard, leaked cable to US Secretary of State (26 February 2009). https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09ATHENS248_a.html.

40 Newsbeast (22 October 2014). Criminal prosecution against strangers four years after the murder. <https://www.newsbeast.gr/society/arthro/745888/poiniki-dioxi-kata-agnoston-tessera-hronia-meta-ti-dolofonia-giolia>; US Ambassador Daniel Speckhard, leaked cable to US Secretary of State (26 February 2009). https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09ATHENS248_a.html.

41 US Ambassador Daniel Speckhard, leaked cable to US Secretary of State (26 February 2009). https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09ATHENS248_a.html.

The Sect remained quiet until 19 June 2009, when three people wearing motorcycle helmets assassinated anti-terrorism police officer, Nektarios Savvas, who was guarding a witness in a legal case against another militant group at the time.⁴² Savvas was on guard in his vehicle outside the home of the witness when he was shot at 24 times by two 9mm pistols, one of which was an automatic.⁴³ The attack happened at 06:20 am, right after Savvas' shift started.⁴⁴ Just two hours later, at 08:18 am, newspaper *Ta Nea* reported that the 9mm shell casings left at the scene linked the attack to the Sect.⁴⁵ Again, The Sect claimed responsibility by means of an announcement in *Ta Nea*.⁴⁶ The Sect did not reappear until the attack on Giolias, which it only claimed eight days after the attack. All previous attacks were claimed within one to three days, raising questions about the authenticity of the letter and claim.

Political, financial and criminal entanglement with the media

Greece's media landscape has always been permeated by politics,⁴⁷ but the 2009 economic crisis in Greece further eroded the socioeconomic conditions necessary for quality journalism in Greece. The media sector shrank and many media were forced to scale down or cease operations entirely.⁴⁸ This had a significant effect on the way news was produced and consumed, as was illustrated by the steep rise in popularity of blogs like Giolias' *Troktiko*. Moreover, due to the decrease in revenues, Greek media increasingly turned to private funders, including those with political ties. Unsurprisingly, partisan bias within mass media, and self-censorship under journalists, all grew in the wake of the crisis.⁴⁹ These effects remained visible after the crisis had abated. For example, in 2019, then opposition party, New Democracy, barred its Members of Parliament (MPs) from being interviewed by the public broadcaster, citing the broadcaster's political bias.⁵⁰ Meanwhile, Syriza, the ruling party, boycotted the largest news broadcaster, SKAI, because of its critical coverage of Syriza's management of wildfires in Attica.⁵¹

The level of trust in Greece's media is among the lowest in Europe: around a third of the public trusts the news they themselves consume.⁵² Digital News Report, which develops media landscape reports on Greece every year, explains this low level of trust: "Decades of corruption, undue political and business influences, and their targeting by left- and right-wing populist parties have resulted in the media being widely distrusted by Greeks".⁵³

A common concern is that the media is too close to politicians and security services, and their reporting on the same appears to be partisan.⁵⁴ *Reuters* reported that Greece has far more newspapers, and radio and television stations per capita than other EU countries, many of them primarily used as "press offices for business groups".⁵⁵ According to the publication by *Reuters*, the Athens Union for Journalists, ESIEA obtained a list of members who also work for the government, which is against ESIEA's policies. After protests from members who appeared on the list, Greek officials refused to allow publication of the list citing privacy concerns.⁵⁶ This led Dimitris Trimis,

42 The Independent (18 June 2009). Greek terrorists shoot officer guarding witness. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/greek-terrorists-shoot-officer-guarding-witness-1707915.html>.

43 Ta Nea (19 June 2009). The Rebel Sect behind the killing of the Anti-Terrorism police officer. <https://www.tanea.gr/2009/06/17/greece/i-sexta-epanastatwn-pisw-apo-ti-dolofonia-br-toy-astynomikoy-tis-antitromokratikis/>.

44 AltEr TV (19 June 2009). Live coverage of the assassination of Nektarios Savvas. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i5hw855Fo2s&t=101s>.

45 Ta Nea (19 June 2009). The Rebel Sect behind the killing of the Anti-Terrorism police officer. <https://www.tanea.gr/2009/06/17/greece/i-sexta-epanastatwn-pisw-apo-ti-dolofonia-br-toy-astynomikoy-tis-antitromokratikis/>.

46 Newsbeast (19 July 2013). The 'silence' of 'Sehta' three years after the assassination of Giolias [translated]. <https://www.newsbeast.gr/society/arthro/560418/i-sigi-tis-sehtas-tria-hronia-meta-ti-dolofonia-giolia>.

47 Media Landscapes (2023). Greece. <https://medialandscapes.org/country/greece>.

48 Freedom House. 2015. *Freedom in the World 2015 - Greece*. <https://www.refworld.org/docid/54f472504.html>.

49 Nektaria Stamouli (8 August 2022). How Greece became Europe's worst place for press freedom. <https://www.politico.eu/article/greece-became-europe-worst-place-press-freedom/>.

50 Digital News Report (2019). Greece. <https://www.digitalnewsreport.org/survey/2019/greece-2019/>.

51 Digital News Report (2019). Greece. <https://www.digitalnewsreport.org/survey/2019/greece-2019/>.

52 Digital News Report (2019). Greece. <https://www.digitalnewsreport.org/survey/2019/greece-2019/>.

53 Digital News Report (2019). Greece. <https://www.digitalnewsreport.org/survey/2019/greece-2019/>.

54 Stephen Grey & Dina Kyriakidou (17 December 2012). Special Report: Greece's Triangle of Power. *Reuters*. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-greece-media-idUSBRE8BG0CF20121217>.

55 Stephen Grey & Dina Kyriakidou (17 December 2012). Special Report: Greece's Triangle of Power. *Reuters*. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-greece-media-idUSBRE8BG0CF20121217>.

56 Stephen Grey & Dina Kyriakidou (17 December 2012). Special Report: Greece's Triangle of Power. *Reuters*. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-greece-media-idUSBRE8BG0CF20121217>.

the union's president at the time, to state: "There is a triangle of political powers, economic powers and media owners, and nobody can tell who has the upper hand. ... It starts from the top, between the minister and the publisher, and it trickles down to the press office and the journalist. It's a pyramid".⁵⁷

The murder of journalist Georgios Karaivaz on 9 April 2021, in a mafia-style execution, also illustrates the dangerous entanglement between police and organized crime.⁵⁸ Karaivaz focused on this relationship in his journalistic work, in the wake of a 2015 - 2017 National Intelligence Service's (EYP) investigation that led to the prosecution of 19 (former) police officers and lawyers for ties with Greek mafia.⁵⁹ In January 2023, all the accused were declared innocent by the Court of Misdemeanors. The criminal case is still ongoing.⁶⁰ The case, based largely on the EYP investigation, demonstrates continuing ties between Greek police and organized crime.⁶¹ Several high-ranking officers with years of experience in the Anti-Terrorism and Security service were involved in the case, which revolved largely around Dimitris Malamas, known as "the treasurer" of the Greek Mafia, who was murdered in 2020.⁶²

The following sections examine the murder of Sokratis Giolias in this context by outlining the events of the murder, its immediate aftermath and the steps followed in the official police investigation. Chapter 2 presents our findings about the role of *Troktiko* in the Greek media landscape and Giolias' role in *Troktiko*. In Chapter 3, we outline the events of the day of Giolias' murder and the steps known to have been taken by the Athens police unit initially charged with the murder. Their evidence formed the basis for the direction of the official investigation until today. Our analysis of the main omissions and anomalies in the investigation is presented in Chapter 4.

57 Stephen Grey & Dina Kyriakidou (17 December 2012). Special Report: Greece's Triangle of Power. *Reuters*. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-greece-media-idUSBRE8BG0CF20121217>.

58 BBC. 2021. Giorgos Karaivaz: Veteran crime journalist shot dead in Greece. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-56705631>

59 Eleni Stamatoukou (6 February 2023). Leaked Greek Police Report Reveals Officers' Underworld Connections. *Balkan Insight*. <https://balkaninsight.com/2023/02/06/new-report-reveals-the-connections-between-greek-police-and-underworld/>.

60 Kostas Koukoumakas (31 January 2023). All Innocent for the Greek Mafia [translated]. *News 247*. <https://www.news247.gr/koinonia/oloi-athooi-gia-ti-greek-mafia.9922942.html>.

61 Yannis Souliotis (5 February 2023). The dirty files of EL.AS. *Kathimerini*. <https://www.kathimerini.gr/politics/562262386/oi-vromikoi-fakeloi-tis-el-as/>.

62 Kostas Koukoumakas (31 January 2023). All Innocent for the Greek Mafia [translated]. *News 247*. <https://www.news247.gr/koinonia/oloi-athooi-gia-ti-greek-mafia.9922942.html>.

2. Sokratis Giolias: background and Troktiko

Sokratis Giolias was born on 13 February 1973 in Cuxhaven, West Germany. He was the fourth of five children of Greek migrants to Germany, and returned to Greece in 1978 with his mother, brothers and sister. After journalism school, he started covering sports issues for a small radio station.⁶³

Giolias' professional career in journalism started when he was approached by a woman who made a serious allegation against an sports official. Wanting a bigger audience for the story, Giolias approached Makis Triantafyllopoulos, a well-known journalist and TV presenter at the time.⁶⁴ Triantafyllopoulos liked Giolias' reporting and offered him a position in his team. Giolias worked alongside Triantafyllopoulos for almost two decades, rising to the position of editor-in-chief in TV shows such as *Kitrinos Typos* [Yellow Press] and *Zougla* [Jungle], two of the most popular TV shows in Greece.⁶⁵

The successful collaboration between Triantafyllopoulos and Giolias ended in 2008 when the latter quit his job, leading them into an irresolvable conflict that would last until Giolias' death.⁶⁶ After Giolias stopped working for Triantafyllopoulos, an online war broke out between *Zougla.gr* (run by Triantafyllopoulos) and Giolias' *Troktiko*-blog, with several personal attacks and allegations coming from both sides. The personal and public conflict between Giolias and Triantafyllopoulos.⁶⁷ After his resignation, in addition to his anonymous contributions to *Troktiko*, Giolias first took a job as advisor to media mogul Dimitris Kontominas and also worked as general manager of radio station 'Thema 98.9', part of newspaper *Proto Thema*.⁶⁸

The birth of Troktiko: an online phenomenon

Together with colleague Manos Niflis, Giolias launched the blog, *Troktiko*, in 2007, while still employed by Makis Triantafyllopoulos. The name means 'Rodent' in Greek.⁶⁹ *Troktiko* quickly became a major success, reporting over 1.5 million views per day; it significantly increased the speed of news coverage of current affairs across the Greek media landscape.⁷⁰ Many of its posts covered public interest news, and it was often one of the first to come with footage of the latest news. Giolias, Niflis and the other writers contributed to *Troktiko* anonymously, common practice for contributors to Greek blogs at the time.⁷¹

Troktiko's function and main selling point was that it covered the news in real-time. A former employee used the word 'now' to describe Sokratis Giolias: "There were times that if you were 1 or 2 seconds late he would go crazy. He wanted, if possible, to publish what happened *right at the moment* that it was happening," he said.⁷² Our investigators spoke with a professional journalist, on condition that he remain anonymous, given the sensitivity of the case. He gave the example of an incident in March 2010, when a teenager from Afghanistan was killed by a

63 TL!fe (26 July 2010). *S. Giolias: Poor childhood, journalism and the unfair end*.

<https://www.tlfe.gr/eidhseis-nea/s-giolias-ta-ftoxika-paidika-xronia-i-dimosiografia-kai-to-adiko-telos/450049/>.

64 'Troktiko Documentary' (2013). https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OaiOlo_irwI&ab_channel=troktikodocumentary.

65 Biography of Sokratis Giolias extracted from sokratisgiolias.gr. Archived., Kostas Vaxevas (August 2013). *Who Killed Sokratis Giolias?* Hot Doc issue 34

66 Biography of Sokratis Giolias extracted from sokratisgiolias.gr. Archived.

67 Kostas Vaxevas (August 2013). *Who Killed Sokratis Giolias?* Hot Doc issue 34; Eleftherotypia. (2 August 2010). *Hellas-Greek-Rodents*, of Sunday Virus [translated]. <https://tvxs.gr/news/ellada/ellas-ellinon-troktikon-toy-ioy-tis-kyriakis/>.

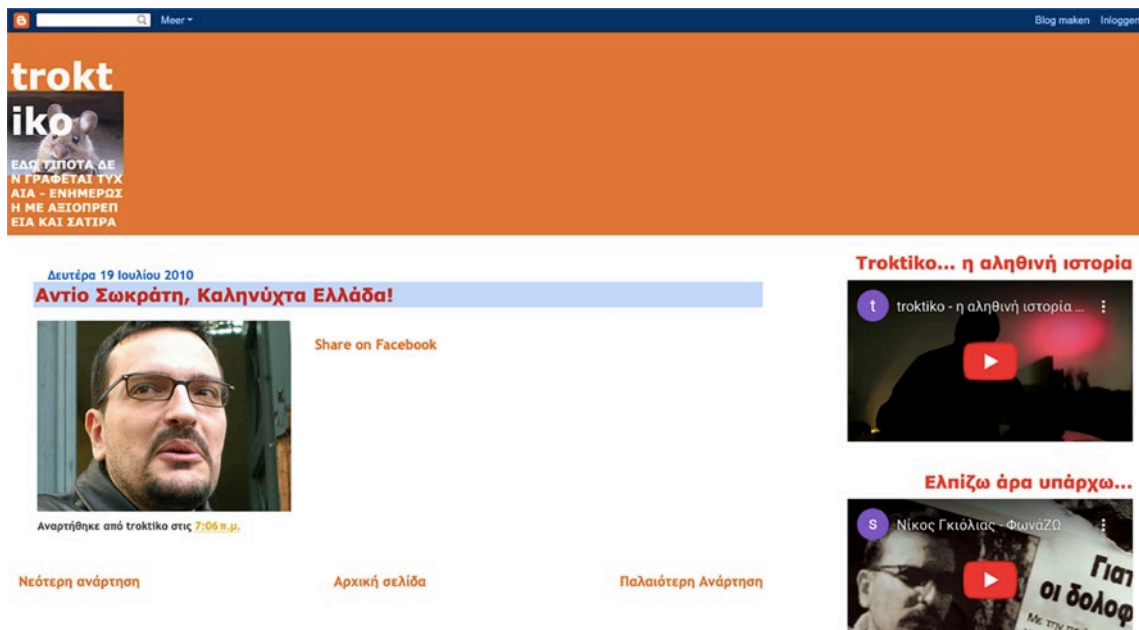
68 Biography of Sokratis Giolias extracted from sokratisgiolias.gr. Archived.

69 Case Files official investigation Sokratis Giolias, seen by Safer World investigators.

70 Troktiko Documentary' (2013). https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OaiOlo_irwI&ab_channel=troktikodocumentary; Kostas Vaxevas (August 2013). *Who Killed Sokratis Giolias?* Hot Doc issue 34.

71 Case Files official investigation Sokratis Giolias, seen by Safer World investigators

72 Troktiko Documentary' (2013). https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OaiOlo_irwI&ab_channel=troktikodocumentary.



Screenshot of the homepage of Troktiko, covering the news of the murder of Sokratis Giolias on 19 July 2010

bomb explosion in Athens. Within a few minutes, not only did *Troktiko* have the news online but was the first to publish photos from the scene.⁷³

Troktiko reached millions of visits at a time when social media were not as established, and most Greek users' phones had no access to the internet.⁷⁴ According to journalist Kostas Vaxevanis, "a blog run by a small team of people [note: eight] managed to have 1.5 million visits a day, when large publishing conglomerates combined, could not even sell 500,000 newspaper copies per week".⁷⁵ The speed at which *Troktiko* covered events was a result of citizens sending photos, video and allegations and encouraged them to keep doing so. Former employees said that they would, on occasion, get over 50,000 emails per day, including emails from politicians and ministers who, seeking future positive coverage for themselves or negative coverage for their opponents, were willing to provide information.⁷⁶ Journalists, active during *Troktiko*'s peak, told our investigators that the blog had "the fastest reflexes", leading professional reporters to constantly refresh *Troktiko*'s news feed to catch up on updates of the day.

Its style of reporting also led to controversy around *Troktiko*. After Giolias' murder, several Greek media outlets wrote about enemies that he had allegedly made as a result of the reports on *Troktiko*. They accused him of engaging in blackmail via the blog.⁷⁷ Former newspaper *Eleftherotypia* listed examples of regular announcements on the blog concerning pending major "revelations" about businessmen or politicians. The revelations were never posted, and coverage on the person in question suddenly became more positive after a couple of days.⁷⁸ This type of reporting indicated blackmail and led to complaints, resulting in Google temporarily shutting down the

73 In (29 March 2010). The family of the 15-year-old Afghan boy is under the protection of the State.

<https://www.in.gr/2010/03/29/greece/ypo-tin-prostasia-tis-politeias-i-oikogeneia-toy-15xronoy-afganoy/>

74 'Troktiko Documentary' (2013). https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0aiOlo_irwI&ab_channel=troktikodocumentary.

75 'Troktiko Documentary' (2013). https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0aiOlo_irwI&ab_channel=troktikodocumentary.

76 'Troktiko Documentary' (2013). https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0aiOlo_irwI&ab_channel=troktikodocumentary.

77 Eleftherotypia. (2 August 2010). Hellas-Greek-Rodents, of Sunday Virus [translated]. <https://tvxs.gr/news/ellada/ellas-ellinon-troktikon-toy-ioly-tis-kyriakis/>.

78 Eleftherotypia. (2 August 2010). Hellas-Greek-Rodents, of Sunday Virus [translated]. <https://tvxs.gr/news/ellada/ellas-ellinon-troktikon-toy-ioly-tis-kyriakis/>.

blog.⁷⁹ After Giolias' murder, online news site *Newsbomb.gr* released photos of a contract between Giolias and businessman Petros Kyriakides and raised questions about the payment of over 700,000 euros for two weeks of employment.⁸⁰ Over time, these scandals have come to overshadow the case, leading authorities and media to dismiss the implications of the case for press freedom in Greece. The following sections present our findings concerning the investigation into Giolias' murder, outlining the impact impunity in his case had on the Greek media landscape.

79 Truthout (18 October 2014). In Greece, Media Censorship, Self-Censorship, Journalist Arrests and Murder. <https://truthout.org/articles/in-greece-media-censorship-self-censorship-journalist-arrests-and-murder/?amp>

80 Photos from Newsbomb via Makeleio (4 February 2019). <https://www.makeleio.gr/επικαιροτητα/Με-κομμένη-την-ανάσα-Η-δολοφονία-Σωτήρ/>

3. The Assassination of Sokratis Giolias

Before presenting our findings on the official investigation into the murder, this chapter outlines the main events of the days leading up to the murder of Sokratis Giolias and immediately thereafter. For the chronology of the murder, we rely on witness testimonies, internal police documents, depositions, multiple newspaper articles and *Troktiko*'s blog posts. Following our investigation, we reached out to the Greek authorities, specifically the public prosecutor, the leadership of the Hellenic Police and the Minister of Citizen Protection, as well as Mr Manolis Sfakianakis, to offer them the opportunity to address these findings. None of them provided a response to this request.

On Friday 16 July 2010, Sokratis Giolias received a phone call from a high-ranking police officer.⁸¹ The officer advised him to "be careful during the following days". This police officer was later identified as Manolis Sfakianakis, then head of the Cyber Crime Unit of the Greek Police.⁸² According to testimonies given to the authorities after Giolias' murder, Sfakianakis regularly warned Giolias in advance of impending visits by the authorities in relation to posts published by *Troktiko*.⁸³ According to these witnesses, Giolias interpreted Sfakianakis' phone call on the 16 July as a warning of another possible police raid on his home, which Sfakianakis had previously warned him about, in relation to complaints made to the police against *Troktiko*.⁸⁴

According to online news site *Real News*, Giolias received a message the same day from Spilios Zacharapoulous, a friend and former coach of his, warning him to be careful.⁸⁵ After the murder, Giolias' lawyer, Giannis Marakakis, declared publicly that Giolias had increasingly been receiving threats in the two years prior.⁸⁶ Our investigators did not find any information to suggest that he reported these threats to the police.

In the morning of 19 July 2010, at approximately 05:20 am, three unidentified assailants, dressed in police uniforms, rang the doorbell of Giolias' building in a southern suburb of Athens. The attackers told Giolias that his car was being stolen, supposedly to lure him out of his house.⁸⁷ As soon as Giolias opened the door, two of the attackers shot him 16 times using 9mm parabellum bullets from two pistols.⁸⁸ Sokratis Giolias died instantly.

Immediate aftermath of the murder

The news of the murder was made public around 7:00 am. Giolias' blog *Troktiko* was one of the first to announce the crime.⁸⁹ Around the same time, the Criminal Investigation Division (ΔΑΑ/Δ.Ε.Ζ.Ι./DEPARTMENT 1) of the Athens police announced it had found a burned out, dark-coloured Honda Civic Sedan car, license plate YKA 5889, presumably the get-away vehicle used in the assassination.⁹⁰ According to police records, the car was reported stolen on Saturday 17 July 2010 in Alimos.⁹¹ At this point, police identified the assassination as "a mafia-style hit related to unfinished business".⁹²

81 Kostas Vaxevanis (August 2013). Who Killed Sokratis Giolias? Hot Doc issue 34.

82 Hot Doc (April 2016). Η εμπλοκή Σφακιανάκη στην υπόθεση Γκιόλια. ο. 36

83 Case Files official investigation Sokratis Giolias, seen by Safer World investigators.

84 Kostas Vaxevanis (August 2013). Who Killed Sokratis Giolias? Hot Doc issue 34.

85 Real News, front cover, 25 July 2010. Archived.

86 Statement by Giannis Marikakis (19 July 2010), reported on TV Nea, reposted by *Troktiko*: https://troktiko.blogspot.com/2010/07/15_7326.html.

87 Enet (19 July 2010). Death card to the journalist Sokratis Giolias. <https://web.archive.org/web/20100923052017/https://www.enet.gr/?i=news.el.article&id=184468>.

88 Case Files official investigation Sokratis Giolias, seen by Safer World investigators.

89 *Troktiko* (19 July 2010). Goodbye Sokratis, Goodnight Greece! https://troktiko.blogspot.com/2010/07/blog-post_5011.html.

90 Case Files official investigation Sokratis Giolias, seen by Safer World investigators.

91 Case Files official investigation Sokratis Giolias, seen by Safer World investigators.

92 Kostas Vaxevanis (August 2013). Who Killed Sokratis Giolias? Hot Doc issue 34.



Location of the murder of Sokratis Giolias.

At around 08:00 am, Giolias' former boss Makis Triantafyllopoulos, insisted that the attack was not mafia related.⁹³ Giolias' lawyer, Giannis Marakakis, appeared in a television interview stating that Giolias had been receiving threats in the last three years of his life and that the police "will find answers in Sokratis' files".⁹⁴

The Criminal Investigation Division of the Hellenic Police announced it found 16 9mm parabellum caliber shell casings at the crime scene, fired from two weapons.⁹⁵ According to the ballistic analysis, 13 of the 16 bullets were fired from the exact same weapon that was previously used in the assassination of police officer Nektarios Savvas in June 2010. 3 of the 16 bullets were fired by the same weapon used in the assassination of Savvas, and in armed attacks against Korydallos police station and ALTER TV in February 2009.⁹⁶ Although the exact type of weapon used in the attack had not yet been made public, the day after the murder, weekly publication, *To Vima*, reported that a Glock 17 had been used,⁹⁷ which was reiterated on the website, *The Paper*, in 2014.⁹⁸

After linking the weapons to the Sect of Revolutionaries within 10 hours after the assassination, the case was transferred to the Anti-Terrorist Division of the Greek Police.⁹⁹ A day later, on the 20th of July, the unit held a

93 Kostas Vaxevanis (August 2013). *Who Killed Sokratis Giolias?* Hot Doc issue 34.

94 Enet (19 July 2010). Death card to the journalist Sokratis Giolias. <https://web.archive.org/web/20100923052017/https://www.enet.gr/?i=news.el.article&id=184468>.

95 Case Files official investigation Sokratis Giolias, seen by Safer World investigators.

96 Naftemporiki (20 July 2010). "Sect of Rebels" shows the weapons of S. Giolias' murder. Archived.

97 Vasilis Lambropoulos (20 July 2010). The "Rebel Sect" has declared war on the media. *To Vima*. <http://www.tovima.gr/default.asp?pid=2&ct=32&artid=344052&dt=20/07/2010>.

98 *The Paper* (13 February 2014). New information on the murder of Sokratis Giolias. <https://www.thepaper.gr/νέες-πληροφορίες-για-τη-δολοφονία-του/>

99 Naftemporiki (20 July 2010). "Sect of Rebels" shows the weapons of S. Giolias' murder. Archived.



The burnt out get-away car. Source: To Vima

press conference giving new information about the investigation, revealing that witness testimony suggested that a motorcyclist had been watching the journalist's house during the ten days leading up to the murder.¹⁰⁰ The police also announced they were looking for evidence to determine whether five individuals previously linked to (but not convicted for) attacks by the Sect of Revolutionaries were responsible for the murder.¹⁰¹ Police announced they were examining Giolias' publications, and looking into the threats made against him. The police also noted that they were awaiting a public declaration from the Sect claiming the murder.¹⁰²

Just eight days after the murder, on the 27th of July, newspaper *Ta Nea* received the declaration, signed by the Sect of Revolutionaries.¹⁰³ The letter criticized several well-known journalists, and included threats against police officers, prosecutors, prison officials and social workers.¹⁰⁴ Looking at this declaration and the immediate response to the murder, it is clear that Giolias' murder had a profound impact on Greek journalists and their perception of their safety. In the letter in which the Sect claimed his killing, they alleged that he would be "the first of several prominent journalists and publishers to be targeted".¹⁰⁵ It also stated: "Giolias was one of the many prominent journalists we collected information about their homes, their vehicles, their security, their favorite hangouts, restaurants, even where they play tennis".¹⁰⁶ In the days after the murder, the ministry of Civic Protection reported that, in response to the killing, the police had received several requests for protection from journalists.¹⁰⁷ The lasting intimidatory effect of this case is also evident from witnesses' continued reluctance to speak about the case even today. Several of the journalists that A Safer World for the Truth interviewed in preparation for this investigation, strongly warned against pursuing certain leads and indicated that they had not touched the case because of security concerns.

100 Naftemporiki (20 July 2020). "Sect of Rebels" shows the weapons of S. Giolias' murder. Archived.

101 To Vima (21 July). <https://web.archive.org/web/20100728003441/http://www.tovima.gr:80/default.asp?pid=2&artid=344277&ct=3>.

102 To Vima (21 July). <https://web.archive.org/web/20100728003441/http://www.tovima.gr:80/default.asp?pid=2&artid=344277&ct=3>.

103 An English version of the declaration can be found here: <https://athens.indymedia.org/post/1197784/>.

104 Ekathimerini (28 July 2010). Murder of journalist claimed in statement.

<https://www.ekathimerini.com/69489/article/ekathimerini/news/murder-of-journalist-claimed-in-statement>.

105 An English version of the declaration can be found here: <https://athens.indymedia.org/post/1197784/>.

106 An English version of the declaration can be found here: <https://athens.indymedia.org/post/1197784/>.

107 Spyros Vougiaris audio recording on Thema 98.9. Archived.

4. Silence and inaction: the official investigation

The police investigation into the murder of Sokratis Giolias was opened on the morning of his death and officially remains open to date. In the past thirteen years, there have been no convictions for the murder. Through an examination of the case files, news reports and interviews, A Safer World for the Truth finds that crucial omissions in the investigation persist, and that authorities have failed to provide transparency about the course of the investigation and the lack of justice in the case. These issues have persisted over the past thirteen years, during which time the case has been under the mandate of twelve different ministers of Citizen Protection, belonging to the parties PASOK (2010-2012), New Democracy (2012-2015 and 2019-now) and Syriza (2015-2019) respectively. The course of action in Giolias' case is repeated in more recent cases such as the murder of reporter Giorgios Karaivaz, and profoundly impacts journalists' perception of safety and justice. Moreover, time is running out. Under Greek law, the statute of limitations applicable to the case expires in 2030, at which point authorities will no longer be able to hold anyone responsible for the murder.¹⁰⁸

Up to 2013: omissions and undue delay

Following the publication by the Sect, the first years after the murder of Sokratis Giolias were marked by silence from the police and authorities and crucial omissions in the evidence collection. In 2013, several of these omissions were discovered and were publicized in the Greek magazine *Hot Doc*. These omissions included the failure to analyze Giolias' devices, failure to obtain a testimony from his wife, and the failure to respond to a Cypriot request for mutual assistance.¹⁰⁹ Our investigation confirms that several of these omissions have still not been resolved to date, and no (police) authorities have been held accountable for the steps they failed to take in the investigation.

Most strikingly, the police never sought to obtain, and therefore never analyzed, Giolias' mobile devices.¹¹⁰ Despite the police's commitment on 20 July 2010 to investigate the potential link between Giolias' murder, his work and the threats he received before his death, these crucial sources of evidence were seemingly never explored. Our investigators found indications that, until today, they remain in private ownership.¹¹¹ This is particularly problematic in investigations concerning the murder of a journalist, in which investigating the (potential) link between the journalist's work and their murder is often not (exhaustively) investigated. In case of Giolias' murder, examining his mobile devices might have presented a strong line of inquiry; these devices could contain solid evidence regarding threats received before the murder and potential connections with his journalistic work.¹¹²

Another crucial omission, as reported by *Hot Doc* in 2013, concerns the delays before interviewing one of the most important eye witnesses: Giolias' wife Adamantia Giolias. She had seen the attackers from the balcony, and could have contributed unique and crucial witness testimony. Yet, by August 2013, three years after the murder, she had still not been formally interviewed beyond her brief statement in the immediate aftermath of the murder.¹¹³ Only in

108 Art. 111 (2a) of the Greek Criminal Code

109 Kostas Vaxevanis (August 2013). *Who Killed Sokratis Giolias?* Hot Doc issue 34

110 Kostas Vaxevanis (August 2013). *Who Killed Sokratis Giolias?* Hot Doc issue 34

111 This information was obtained through a source whose identity is known to the investigators of a Safer World for the Truth

112 Paragraph 19 of the Recommendation CM/Rec(2016)4[1] of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the protection of journalism and safety of journalists and other media actors (adopted on 13 April 2016).

113 Kostas Vaxevanis (August 2013). *Who Killed Sokratis Giolias?* Hot Doc issue 34, p. 20

March 2014, after the publication in *Hot Doc*, it was reported that she had been called in again by police to provide testimony for the renewed investigation.¹¹⁴

Another crucial opportunity for obtaining additional evidence was missed when Greek police officers did not respond to requests for collaboration from the Cypriot police. The Cypriots had identified a link between an assassination in the popular tourist destination Ayia Napa in 2012, and the murder of Giolias.¹¹⁵ The assassination in Ayia Napa took place on 23 June 2012, when five bodyguards of a prominent businessman were executed by a professional hitman. The Cypriot police identified two Greek suspects in their investigation; they were subsequently extradited by the Greek authorities. The Greek authorities confirmed that one of them had previously been identified as a member of the Sect, yet after extradition of the suspects, the Greek police did not take action. According to *Hot Doc*, the Cypriot authorities obtained testimony that linked one of the suspects of the attack in Ayia Napa to the murder of Giolias, confirming that the shooter had conducted contract killings before. The Cypriot prosecutor subsequently reached out to the investigative authorities in Greece, including the Anti-Terrorist Unit tasked with the investigation into the murder of Sokratis Giolias. Despite eleven requests in 8 months, the Greek police did not respond.¹¹⁶

Investigations into the Sect of Revolutionaries: 2009 - 2011

The passive attitude regarding the information from the Cypriot authorities adds to the mystery surrounding the unsuccessful police investigations into the Sect. Despite having apparently collected extensive information concerning the attacks committed by the Sect, follow-up investigations failed to identify any individuals involved in the murder of Sokratis Giolias. The following section outlines the interaction between the ongoing investigations into the Sect as a whole, and the unsuccessful pursuit of Sokratis Giolias' killers.

Even before Giolias' murder, the Anti-Terrorist Unit of the Greek police had already been watching the Sect closely.¹¹⁷ During the summer of 2009, after the first three attacks by the Sect, three security operations were carried out to arrest people suspected of having connections with the Sect.¹¹⁸ Furthermore, widespread and long-term wiretapping of individuals suspected of being involved with the Sect, led to several arrests.¹¹⁹ After these operations in 2009, the police reported that it believed the Sect had been disbanded and that their weapons had vanished.¹²⁰

In 2010, after the murder of Giolias, several members of dominant militant groups such as Revolutionary Struggle (RS) and Conspiracy of Fire Nuclei (CFN) were arrested.¹²¹ This again led police officers to state that the Sect had disappeared; they now claimed that critical indications had been given that the Sect had originated from (arrested) members of CFN.¹²² Throughout 2010 and 2011, police officers uncovered a number of major hideouts of Revolutionary Struggle and Conspiracy of Fire Nuclei. In December 2010 for example, police arrested six individuals for their involvement in CFN. One individual, Christos Politis, was also charged with involvement

114 Proto Thema (30 March 2014). "He told us that Triantafyllopoulos will kill him and they will make it appear that it is "SEKTA". <https://www.protothema.gr/greece/article/365952/suglonizei-i-katathesi-tis-suzugou-tou-giolia/>.

115 Kostas Vaxevanis (August 2013). *Who Killed Sokratis Giolias?* Hot Doc issue 34, p. 43

116 Kostas Vaxevanis (August 2013). *Who Killed Sokratis Giolias?* Hot Doc issue 34, p. 45

117 Vasilios G. Lambropoulos (25 July 2020). A "Cuckoo" did not bring "Sehta" [translated]. <https://web.archive.org/web/20100728230517/http://www.tovima.gr:80/default.asp?pid=2&artid=345136&ct=32&dt=25/07/2010>.

118 Vasilios G. Lambropoulos (25 July 2020). A "Cuckoo" did not bring "Sehta" [translated]. <https://web.archive.org/web/20100728230517/http://www.tovima.gr:80/default.asp?pid=2&artid=345136&ct=32&dt=25/07/2010>.

119 Vasilios G. Lambropoulos (25 July 2020). A "Cuckoo" did not bring "Sehta" [translated]. <https://web.archive.org/web/20100728230517/http://www.tovima.gr:80/default.asp?pid=2&artid=345136&ct=32&dt=25/07/2010>.

120 Vasilios G. Lambropoulos (25 July 2020). A "Cuckoo" did not bring "Sehta" [translated]. <https://web.archive.org/web/20100728230517/http://www.tovima.gr:80/default.asp?pid=2&artid=345136&ct=32&dt=25/07/2010>.

121 Joshua Keating (4 November 2010). What do we know about the Conspiracy of the Fire Nuclei? *Foreign Policy*. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2010/11/04/what-do-we-know-about-the-conspiracy-of-the-fire-nuclei/>.

122 Vasilios G. Lambropoulos (24 July 2020). Unknown facts about the "Revolutionary Sect" come to light [translated]. To Vima. <https://www.tovima.gr/2020/07/24/society/sto-fos-agnosta-stoixeia-gia-ti-sekta-epanastaton/>.

in the Sect.¹²³ In the raids on various hideouts following the arrests, police confiscated multiple pistols and guns, and linked them to the weapons shown in the photo sent by the Sect to claim Giolias' murder.¹²⁴ After the same December 2010 raids, police further leaked that, for the previous 45 days, they had been carrying out 24-hour surveillance of the phones of ten members of the Sect.¹²⁵

So, on multiple occasions between 2009 and 2011, both before and after the murder of Giolias, police were quick to claim that, due to their actions, the Sect had been disbanded.¹²⁶ Despite these claims, to date no members of the Sect have been convicted for involvement in the murder of Sokratis Giolias. In the public discourse about the case, concerns have been raised as to whether the Sect was used as a cover-up for the true perpetrators behind Giolias' assassination. Besides this accusation, there were theories that the Sect was not a truly ideological organization, but rather a loosely organized group with close ties to organized crime.¹²⁷ During a meeting in November 2009 between Minister for Civil Protection, Michalis Chrysochoidis, and the US Ambassador to Greece, Chrysochoidis stated that the Sect were "assassins without ideology" who "hate society".¹²⁸ A source inside anarchist networks who, because he feared for his safety, talked to our investigators on condition of anonymity, said that within the anarchist networks at the time it was understood that there were indeed core members of the Sect with very close ties to criminals. He deemed it feasible that the Sect was either hired by, or collaborated with, another party in the murder of Giolias. The source mentioned: "Everybody has heard the rumors about Triantafyllopoulos ordering the killing, but the understanding is more that Giolias blackmailed someone he should not have. He took it too far."

In October 2014, officers of the Anti-Terrorism Unit reiterated their belief that the reason the Sect had gone quiet since the assassination of Giolias was as a result of the arrests of key members of the Conspiracy of Fire Nuclei (CFN).¹²⁹ Police allege that at least three members of CFN and one other wanted individual were members of both terrorist organizations.¹³⁰ Seemingly coming back to this claim, on 20 October 2014, the Anti-Terrorism Unit sent four boxes of materials and case files of the four attacks carried out by the Sect between 2009 and 2010, to prosecutor Eleni Touloupaki, who pressed criminal charges against unidentified members of the Sect.¹³¹

Between January and March 2015, police arrested various members of terrorist group CFN. Police officers linked several of the arrested individuals to the Sect of Revolutionaries, but did not provide proof of this.¹³² One of those arrested is referred to as 'Jason', who police stated was involved in the assassination of Nektarios Savvas and Sokratis Giolias.¹³³ According to press reports, thousands of decoded electronic notes reveal serious indications of Jason's participation in the murders carried out by the Sect. Police officers stated that they were hopeful they would soon be able to convert these notes into evidence.¹³⁴ Police never managed to connect those arrested at that time with the actions of the Sect or with their weapons, which were never found.

123 Newsbeast (5 December 2010). Big Blow Against Terrorism!

<https://www.newsbeast.gr/society/arthro/85744/megalo-htupima-kata-tis-tromokratias>.

124 Newsbeast (4 December 2010). Everything points to Sehta. <https://www.newsbeast.gr/society/arthro/85460/ola-deihnoun-sehta>.

125 Newsbeast (4 December 2010). They were planning a hit on a police officer. <https://www.newsbeast.gr/society/arthro/85522/shediazan-htupima-kata-astunomikou>.

126 Newsbeat (27 August 2011). They solved the riddles of Sehta!

<https://www.newsbeast.gr/society/arthro/220229/elusan-tous-grifous-tis-sehtas>.

127 To Vima (25 July 2010). Ένας «Κούκος» δεν έφερε τη «Σέχτα». <http://www.tovima.gr:80/default.asp?pid=2&artid=345136&ct=32&dt=25/07/2010>

128 US Ambassador Daniel Speckhard, leaked cable to US Secretary of State (19 November 2009).

https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09ATHENS1643_a.html.

129 The Toc (23 October 2014). Why the 'Rebel Sect' disappeared.

<https://www.thetoc.gr/koinwnia/article/giati-eksafanistike-i-sexta-epanastatwn/>.

130 The Toc (23 October 2014). Why the 'Rebel Sect' disappeared.

<https://www.thetoc.gr/koinwnia/article/giati-eksafanistike-i-sexta-epanastatwn/>.

131 Proto Thema (22 October 2014). Prosecutor presses charges against Sect of Revolutionaries. <https://en.protothema.gr/prosecutor-presses-charges-against-sect-of-revolutionaries/>; The Toc (23 October 2014). Why the 'Rebel Sect' disappeared.

<https://www.thetoc.gr/koinwnia/article/giati-eksafanistike-i-sexta-epanastatwn/>.

132 The Toc (11 January 2015). "Theocharis", who rented the hideout, was in the Rebel Sect.

<https://www.thetoc.gr/koinwnia/article/sti-sexta-epanastatwn-o-theoxaris-pou-noikiase-ti-giafka/>.

133 The Toc (1 March 2015). EL.AS: Suspect for Sect 'Iason' of SPF.

<https://www.thetoc.gr/koinwnia/article/elas-upoptos-gia-ti-sexta-o-iasonas-tis-spf/>.

134 The Toc (1 March 2015). EL.AS: Suspect for Sect 'Iason' of SPF.

<https://www.thetoc.gr/koinwnia/article/elas-upoptos-gia-ti-sexta-o-iasonas-tis-spf/>.



Locations of the attacks claimed by the Sect of Revolutionaries.

No charges and no alternative hypotheses

To date, all official police statements have only implicated and accused the Sect of Revolutionaries in the murder. The official investigation was revived several times over the years, also after the 2013 publication in *Hot Doc*.¹³⁵ It is therefore surprising that the only pieces of evidence that substantiate the attribution of the crime to the Sect, are those collected in the first week after the murder. Moreover, the police has never given public notice of any investigative acts taken to ascertain, or explain the potential link between this theory of the murder and Giolias' journalistic activities. This section is based on the case files of the official investigation, which indicate that in subsequent investigative phases, the police did not pursue alternative theories or unearth new sources of evidence.

The letter from the Sect, delivered on 27 July 2010, is the first piece of evidence that points at the involvement of the Sect. As described in the preceding chapter, this letter was delivered much later, and in a different format, than those published after the previous attacks carried out by the Sect. Neither public police statements, nor the case files viewed as part of this investigation, provide an explanation, or indicate there was a search for an explanation, for this difference in M.O. According to news reports, the police also conducted its own graphological analysis and confirmed the inconsistencies in the letter,¹³⁶ but this lead does not seem to have resulted in new findings about

¹³⁵ Proto Thema (30 March 2014). "He told us that Triantafyllopoulos will kill him and they will make it appear that it is Sehta". <https://www.protothema.gr/greece/article/365952/suglonizei-i-katathesi-tis-suzugou-tou-giolia/>.

¹³⁶ To Vima (24 July 2020). "Unknown facts about the "Rebel Sect" come to light" [translation]. <https://www.tovima.gr/2020/07/24/society/sto-fos-agnosta-stoixeia-gia-ti-sekta-epanastaton/>

the attribution of the crime. The second piece of evidence, i.e. the forensic report linking the bullets to weapons previously used by the Sect, also originates from the days immediately following the murder. The report became available within 10 hours of the murder, as the police announced at 15:30pm that it had found an exact match between the bullet casings found at the crime scene and specific weapons used previously by the Sect.¹³⁷

In March 2014, weekly publication, *Proto Thema*, reported that Greek police had reopened the investigation into Giolias' murder, following the new 'leads' highlighted by *Hot Doc*.¹³⁸ The two leads mentioned were the confession by the suspect in the Ayia Napa-case in Cyprus and also a new statement that the police obtained from Giolias' widow Adamantia, after it had become known this statement had not been taken in the first three years following the murder.¹³⁹ The police finally followed up on the information in Cyprus by interviewing one of the suspects in his cell. He testified that during their third visit, he was also interrogated about the murder of Sokratis Giolias.¹⁴⁰

In addition to these interviews, the Anti-Terrorist Unit took statements from additional witnesses about the murder of Sokratis Giolias between 2014-2016, including Giolias' former publisher, colleagues and business contacts.¹⁴¹ These efforts did not lead to any arrests or charges for his murder, and the investigation stagnated again in 2017.¹⁴² Moreover, witness testimonies, excavated as part of the investigation by a Safer World, suggest that the investigative authorities merely attempted to verify news reports concerning the case of the dispute between Makis Triantafyllopoulos and Sokratis Giolias.¹⁴³ The depositions reveal that, six years after the murder, the police still lacked factual information such as details about the exterior of Giolias' house.¹⁴⁴ This information was crucial, as useful investigative leads could have been derived from the fact that the assailants rang Giolias' doorbell; it later became clear that Giolias' name was not on the door.¹⁴⁵ Several witnesses testified regarding communications with police officer and former head of the cyber crime division, Manolis Sfakianakis, confirming that the latter regularly interacted with Giolias and other media figures like publisher Themis Anastasiadis. In none of the depositions seen by A Safer World for the Truth, did the police ask questions about this relationship, nor did they ask follow-up questions when witnesses mentioned the connection between Sfakianakis and Giolias.

The role of police officer Manolis Sfakianakis

The lack of attention to the significant connection between a senior police official and a journalist, prior to the latter's murder, is part of a pattern repeated throughout the official investigation into the murder. The phone call between Sfakianakis and Giolias, three days before Giolias' murder, became public information in 2013 through the *Hot Doc*-publication. In the article, Sfakianakis was not yet mentioned by name, but described as a "police officer" who "frequently asked for favors on behalf of business people whose names had been mentioned on *Troktiko*".¹⁴⁶ Multiple witness depositions in the official case files, viewed for this investigation, confirm that Giolias and Sfakianakis were in regular communication and that Sfakianakis, on several occasions, offered Giolias police information about impending raids and other forms of police intelligence.¹⁴⁷ Giolias' brother Pericles publicly commented that Sfakianakis also offered advice to Giolias to keep the ownership of *Troktiko* hidden and

137 Proto Thema (30 March 2014). "He told us that Triantafyllopoulos will kill him and they will make it appear that it is Sehta". <https://www.protothema.gr/greece/article/365952/suglonizei-i-katathesi-tis-suzugou-tou-giolia/>.

138 Proto Thema (30 March 2014). "He told us that Triantafyllopoulos will kill him and they will make it appear that it is Sehta". <https://www.protothema.gr/greece/article/365952/suglonizei-i-katathesi-tis-suzugou-tou-giolia/>.

139 Proto Thema (30 March 2014). "He told us that Triantafyllopoulos will kill him and they will make it appear that it is Sehta". <https://www.protothema.gr/greece/article/365952/suglonizei-i-katathesi-tis-suzugou-tou-giolia/>.

140 To Vima (21 March 2015). "D. Mamalikipoulos: 'I know Maziotis, 'Pyrrines', and 'Jason' but I do not speak" [translated]. <https://www.tovima.gr/2015/03/21/society/d-mamalikipoylos-kserw-maziwti-pyrrines-iasona-alla-den-milaw/>.

141 To Vima (24 July 2020). "Unknown facts about the 'Rebel Sect' come to light" [translation]. <https://www.tovima.gr/2020/07/24/society/sto-fos-agnosta-stoixeia-gia-ti-sexta-epanastaton/>.

142 To Vima (24 July 2020). "Unknown facts about the 'Rebel Sect' come to light" [translation]. <https://www.tovima.gr/2020/07/24/society/sto-fos-agnosta-stoixeia-gia-ti-sexta-epanastaton/>.

143 Case Files official investigation Sokratis Giolias, seen by Safer World investigators.

144 Case Files official investigation Sokratis Giolias, seen by Safer World investigators.

145 See also: Kostas Vaxevanis (August 2013). *Who Killed Sokratis Giolias?* Hot Doc issue 34, p. 17

146 Kostas Vaxevanis (August 2013). *Who Killed Sokratis Giolias?* Hot Doc issue 34, p.17.

147 Case Files official investigation Sokratis Giolias, seen by Safer World investigators.

suggested registering an offshore company in Liberia.¹⁴⁸ In a follow-up publication in April 2016, Sfakianakis was publicly identified as the police officer who called Giolias on 16 July.¹⁴⁹

Until February 2016, close to six years after the murder, Sfakianakis remained in his position as Head of the Cyber Crime Division, having been promoted several times since 2010.¹⁵⁰ In 2019, Greece's Supreme Court upheld an indictment against Sfakianakis for breach of duty. The case focused on Sfakianakis' interactions with Giolias in relation to a defamation case against Giolias in February 2010.¹⁵¹ The court document states that Sfakianakis "provided him [Sokratis Giolias] with assistance in resolving various technical issues concerning the blog and beyond" and notes that Sfakianakis had given Giolias "instructions for maintaining his anonymity and handling citizens' complaints in relation to his posts, which were often slanderous".¹⁵² It also cites witness testimony by Giolias' brother Perikles about the phone call prior to Giolias' murder; he stated that Sfakianakis had warned Giolias to "be careful in the next 15 days".¹⁵³ However, the case focused solely on the allegation that Sfakianakis helped Giolias escape prosecution in a defamation case, and did not discuss the potential role of the phone call in the events of the day of the murder, 19 July 2010.

Despite the indictment, the case against Sfakianakis was never followed through. On 2 July 2020, the Supreme Court concluded that the case should be dropped as the legal provisions on which the charges against Sfakianakis were based had in the interim been removed from the Greek Penal Code.¹⁵⁴ After his dismissal from the police force in 2016, Sfakianakis founded several organizations and companies, most of which continue to cooperate closely with police units. One of the non-profits he created is the CSI Institute where he promotes online safety and regularly provides training to police units.¹⁵⁵ His most recent commercial venture, The Crime Lab, offers forensic services to private customers and lists collaboration with police units.¹⁵⁶ Sfakianakis also continues to be listed as "special investigator" for the law firm, Oikonomakis Law, which retains an office in Liberia.¹⁵⁷

Lack of transparency and accountability

While the investigation into the murder of Sokratis Giolias has remained open for more than 13 years, nearly all information known about the case comes from news reports that have relied on anonymous sources within the police force and leaked case files. After the initial police statements in the first days following the murder, no formal updates about the case or the investigation were given by the Anti-Terrorist Unit or the Public Prosecutor and Ministry of Civic Protection. A year after the murder, Giolias' father-in-law also commented that the family had not been kept informed about progress in the case.¹⁵⁸ Similarly, no transparency was provided regarding the aforementioned allegations of failures to investigate important leads and secure evidence, or the communications between Sfakianakis and Giolias. The investigation remained with the same police unit, and an independent evaluation of the investigation has not taken place.

Similarly, while the Supreme Court confirmed it found witness testimony concerning the phone call between Sfakianakis and Giolias credible, Sfakianakis was not prosecuted for this and the case files do not provide any indication of an investigation into this. This is not only an omission regarding an important lead about the

148 Kostas Vaxevanis (August 2013). *Who Killed Sokratis Giolias?* Hot Doc issue 34, p.17.; 'Troktiko Documentary' (2013). https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0aiOlo_irwI&ab_channel=troktikodocumentary.

149 Marios Aravantinos (April 2016). "The involvement of Sfakianakis in the Giolias case" [translation]. p. 36.

150 To Vima (18 February 2016). Dismissal of Cyber Crime Division director causes major tensions. <https://www.tovima.gr/2016/02/18/international/dismissal-of-cyber-crime-division-director-causes-major-tension/>.

151 Areios Pagos. Decision no 305/2019 (Criminal Department).

152 Areios Pagos. Decision no 305/2019 (Criminal Department).

153 Areios Pagos. Decision no 305/2019 (Criminal Department).

154 Documento (2 July 2020) The decision of the Supreme Court to impeach Sfakianakis in the waste basket [translated]. <https://www.documentonews.gr/article/ston-kalatho-twn-axrhstwn-h-apofash-toy-areioy-pagoy-gia-parapomph-sfakianakh-5efdedfe4cf3b/>.

155 Facebook CSI Institute: <https://www.facebook.com/CSIInstitute/>.

156 See The Crime Lab's website here: <https://www.thecrimelab.gr/schetika-me-emas/>.

157 See the website of Oikonomakis law here: <https://oikonomakislaw.com/sfakianakis-sfakianakis/>.

158 Statements by Efthimios Kermelis (9 July 2011). Troktiko: Interview - Disclosure of Ethymio Kermelis (his father-in-law) in the first subject, on the murder of Socrates Giolias [translated]. <https://dexiextrem.blogspot.com/2011/07/troktiko.html>.

murder; if Sokratis indeed opened the door to assailants dressed as police officers because he expected a raid, it would be pivotal to verifying whether Sfakianakis' timing was purely coincidental or known by the assailants. Furthermore, it also represents a lack of accountability for the inappropriate relationship between police and media that it showcases.

When no updates are provided about the course of the investigation, either in formal messages to the family or through updates to the general public, it becomes impossible to hold authorities to account for a failure to investigate. Moreover, it sends the message that no steps are taken to pursue those who kill journalists, thereby increasing the risk of a silencing effect on other journalists and media outlets.¹⁵⁹ The lack of transparency is also at odds with Greece's legal commitments at the European level, such as those flowing from the European Convention of Human Rights.¹⁶⁰ While secrecy laws do apply to police investigations, particularly in cases labeled as counter-terrorism investigations, according to their obligations under art. 2 of the Convention, police do have to allow a degree of public scrutiny over the investigation. As the European Court of Human Rights has confirmed in several cases, in addition to immediate relatives of the victims, the public must also be informed to such an extent that it can hold authorities to account in cases of misconduct or failure to investigate.¹⁶¹ The importance of this duty to cases of murders of journalists is also underlined in the 2021 European Commission's Recommendation on Safety of Journalists.¹⁶²

159 UNESCO & International Association for Prosecutors (2020). Guidelines for prosecutors on cases of crimes against journalists. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000375138>; A Safer World for Truth (13 April 2023). The Case for Transparency: Opportunities for Justice in the Case of Pedro Palma and Beyond. <https://www.saferworldfortruth.com/investigations/pedro-palma>.

160 European Court of Human Rights (31 August 2022). Guide on Article 2 of the European Convention on Human Rights. https://www.echr.coe.int/documents/d/echr/Guide_Art_2_ENG.

161 Ramsahai and Others v. The Netherlands. App. 52391/99 (ECtHR, 15 May 2007), par. 353; Giuliani and Gaggio v. Italy. App. 23458/02 (ECtHR, 24 March 2011), par. 303.

162 European Commission. 2021. Recommendation on the protection, safety and empowerment of journalists. <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/recommendation-protection-safety-and-empowerment-journalists>

Conclusion and Recommendations

Journalist Sokratis Giolias was murdered on 19 July 2010. Thirteen years later, his killers remain free and time to pursue them is running out. Together with the impunity for the more recent murder of Giorgios Karaivaz, the impunity for Giolias' murder continues to impact press freedom in Greece. Failure to pursue his killers marks a failure to commit to the protection of journalists. To demonstrate this impact and call for renewed investigations and accountability, A Safer World for the Truth conducted its own investigation into the official investigation of Giolias' murder.

Based on witness interviews, access to case files and analysis of public sources, we conclude that the investigation was hampered by crucial omissions, excessive delays, and a lack of transparency. The impact on public trust in the judiciary and press freedom was exacerbated by the lack of accountability when media reported on the failures of the investigative authorities. The fact that these issues, particularly the delay in arresting suspects despite the availability of evidence, and the lack of attention for the perpetrators who ordered the murder, persist in the case of Giorgios Karaivaz, underline the continued need for reforms.

Overall, the findings regarding the investigation demonstrate a lack of prioritization and urgency. The Greek authorities responsible for the investigation, the Ministry of Citizen Protection and the Public Prosecutor, did not publicly acknowledge the significance of resolving murders of journalists. Nor have they committed to realizing an adequate, impartial and independent and transparent investigation. Giolias' case proved to be symbolic, as is shown by other cases such as the unsolved murder of journalist Giorgios Karaivaz in 2021. The continuing impunity in both cases is a signal that it is still possible to get away with murdering a journalist in Greece.

Recommendations

To bring Sokratis Giolias' killers to justice, and stop impunity for similar murders in the future, A Safer World for the Truth recommends the following:

To the Prosecutor of the Supreme Court of Greece:

- **Transfer and renew the investigation into the murder of Sokratis Giolias without delay, in order to pursue justice before the case expires in 2030.** The investigation must be adequate, impartial and prompt, and must take into account all available evidence.
- **Request investigative assistance from Europol to ensure an adequate, prompt and independent reinvestigation into the murder of Sokratis Giolias.**
- **Commission an independent evaluation of the past investigations of murders of journalists, notably Sokratis Giolias and Giorgios Karaivaz, to critically review specific failures to investigate and any indications of obstruction to the investigation.** Such a review should also take into consideration the close ties between police officers, media and business interests, highlighted by this case.

To the Ministry of Citizen Protection:

- **Improve access to information concerning criminal investigations, for the relatives of murdered journalists and their legal representatives, and also the general public.** Provide clarity about the status of all open investigations into murders and serious attacks on journalists and recognize the impact impunity for these cases has on the public faith in the judicial system and the right to access to information for Greek citizens.

- **Develop a Criminal Investigation Procedure for crimes against journalists**, to reduce impunity and promote specialized knowledge about these crimes across police units. This Criminal Investigations Procedure must be developed in accordance with international standards for effective investigations, such as those specified in the Minnesota Protocol¹⁶³ and the Guidelines for prosecutors in cases of crimes against journalists.¹⁶⁴ Developing a criminal Investigation Procedure for crimes against journalists, will help increase the effectiveness of this process.

To the European Commission:

- **Monitor the implementation of these recommendations by the Greek government** and track cases of impunity for crimes against journalists, and policies for tackling this impunity. as part of the Rule of Law-report composed for each Member State of the European Union and the monitoring of the implementation of the 2021 Recommendation on the safety of journalists. Continue the dialogue with the Greek government on this theme, and stimulate cooperation among Member States to address impunity for crimes against journalists in Europe.

¹⁶³ United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner. 2016. The Minnesota Protocol on the Investigation of Potentially Unlawful Death; The Revised United Nations Manual on the Effective Prevention and Investigation of Extra-legal, Arbitrary and Summary Executions. <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Publications/MinnesotaProtocol.pdf>.

¹⁶⁴ UNESCO & International Association of Prosecutors. 2020. Guidelines for prosecutors on cases of crimes against journalists. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000375138>.

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