

A structural change in Greek public media – a self-governing media model or another emanation of the Mediterranean model?

KEY WORDS

Greece, television, public service media, ERT, media policy, internet

ABSTRACT

This article analyses the liquidation of the Greek public media service company (ERT) and its consequences for the Greek electronic media market and the political scene. The author focuses on social reactions to the closure of ERT with a special emphasis on the discussions in social media and platforms fostering citizen (participatory) journalism. The discussion is based on the Mediterranean (polarized pluralism) model of media and politics (Hallin & Mancini, 2004), of which the Greek media system is considered to be the best example. Finally, the “ERT case” is considered here as yet another example of traditionally strong relations between the politics and the media in Greece.

The decision of the Greek government of 11 June 2013, widely commented in the world¹, on the shutdown of Greek public media (ERT²) had manifold consequences to the local media market. Contrary to popular opinions³, this effect was not purely negative. In October 2013, one of the local commentators said even, referring to the comparative theory of media systems by Hallin and Mancini, that the liquidation of ERT unexpectedly led to the formation of a fourth model of mass media in Greece, which he dubbed “self-governing” (Gr. *αυτοδιαχειριζόμενο*)⁴. Once the first few weeks since this decision have passed and the hot emotions have subsided, many journalists suggested (including the left-wing press, ill-disposed towards the conservative Prime Minister Antonis Samaras), perhaps in an overly

¹ See, e.g., *Grecja zamyka media publiczne. To element programu oszczędnościowego* [Greece closes public media: It is part of savings program], http://wyborcza.pl/1,76842,14084239,Grecja_zamyka_media_publiczne__To_element_programu.html?piano_d=1; M. Kokot, *Grecja z biedy wylacza telewizję* [Greece shuts down the TV for poverty], http://wyborcza.pl/1,76842,14083782,Grecja_z_biedy_wylacza_telewizje.html?piano_d=1; G. Christides, *ERT closure: Silencing of broadcaster shocks Greece*, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-22879269>; *Greece shuts down state broadcaster in search for new savings*, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jun/11/state-broadcaster-ert-shut-down-greece>; J. Elgot, *‘Shut down the BBC, like Greek State broadcaster ERT to save money’ Daniel Hannan says*, http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2013/06/13/greek-state-broadcasterbbc_n_3433438.html; *Griechenland stellt staatlichen Rundfunk ein. Tausende demonstrieren gegen Abschaltung*, <http://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/medien/griechenland-stellt-staatlichen-rundfunk-ein-tausende-demonstrierengegen-abschaltung-12218508.html>; P. Galiatsatos, *Schließung des griechischen Staatsrundfunks. Das war kein Blitz aus heiterem Himmel*, <http://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/medien/schliessung-des-griechischen-staatsrundfunksdas-war-kein-blitz-aus-heiterem-himmel-12219214.html> [accessed: 6 Feb 2015].

² Gr. *Ελληνική Ραδιοφωνία Τηλεόραση (ΕΡΤ)*; Greek Radio Television, or Hellenic Broadcasting Corporation.

³ See, e.g., A. Langley, *EBU moves from assistance to defiance*, http://www.cjr.org/behind_the_news/european_broadcasting_union.php?page=all [accessed: 6 Feb 2015].

⁴ Cf. N. Χειλάς, *EPT: Η τέταρτη διάσταση* [ERT: The fourth model], “To Vima”, 9 Oct 2013, <http://www.tovima.gr/opinions/article/?aid=533912> [accessed: 12 Jan 2014]. More details further in the text.

wishful way, that the radical move of the authorities may paradoxically be an opportunity for a “new opening” on the Greek electronic media market. It would have been feasible, had the government remained faithful to its declarations of building the new institution based on the best Western examples⁵. An institution free of the greatest faults of its predecessor, listed by the opponents of ERT in the same breath, namely the lack of transparency in spending public funds, economic inefficiency, and overstaffing⁶. Most interestingly, such opinions emerged even more than a year after ERT was liquidated, while the “new” public media were being formed, though by then rather in the context of unfulfilled promises and shattered hopes⁷.

Meanwhile, in spite of the decision of the government, the journalists of the formally closed ERT did not stop their broadcasting work around the clock. An open studio was established at the premises of the head office of the television in Athens, where virtually anyone could enter⁸. It is still the case (as of September 2014), even though more and more buildings of the former public media in various parts of the country (including the ERT building in Athens) have been taken over by the police. For this reason, the journalists of the open studio moved much of their activities to the Internet. Whereas the social activists supporting them, bloggers, and other followers remembered the more than 80 years old tradition of amateur and slightly anarchist broadcasting using all available means⁹. This is how the main website of the “self-governing” public media was established (www.ertopen.com). Currently available streaming videos containing programmes prepared

⁵ The minister responsible for public media appointed in summer 2013, Pantelis Kapsis, ensured many times (e.g., in his interview for the German weekly “Der Spiegel”) that the new Greek public service broadcaster would be easily comparable to the BBC. See: *Ο Παντελής Καψής έκανε έργο, ο Γιάννης Δαραβίγκας δεν πρόλαβε...* [Pantelis Kapsis fulfilled his mission, Giannis Daravigas had no time...], <http://e-tetradio.gr/article/10854/O-Pantelis-Kapsis-ekane-ergo-o-Kosmas-Darabigkas-den-prolabe> [accessed: 15 Sep 2014].

Prime Minister Antonis Samaras spoke in a similar tone. Cf., e.g., the speech of the Prime Minister to the New Democracy party activists at Nafplio, 16 Jun 2013; for the text of the speech, see: ΓΡΑΦΕΙΟ ΤΥΠΟΥ ΠΡΩΘΥΠΟΥΡΓΟΥ. *Ομιλία του Πρωθυπουργού Αντώνη Σαμαρά στο Προσυνέδριο της ΝΔ για τα Θεσμικά και το Σύνταγμα στο Ναύπλιο, Κυριακή, 16 Ιουνίου 2013*; te Prime Minister’s speech at the New Democracy party congress, 28 Jun 2013; for the text of the speech, see: ΓΡΑΦΕΙΟ ΤΥΠΟΥ ΠΡΩΘΥΠΟΥΡΓΟΥ. *Ομιλία του Πρωθυπουργού και Προέδρου της Νέας Δημοκρατίας κ. Αντώνη Σαμαρά στο 9ο Τακτικό Εθνικό Συνέδριο του κόμματος, Παρασκευή, 28 Ιουνίου 2013*. See also: *Παρασκήνιο, ίντριγκες και πολιτικές σκοπιμότητες! Αυτό είναι το σαθρό οικοδόμημα της ΝΕΡΙΤ, που παρουσίαζε ο Σαμαράς ως...το ‘Ελληνικό BBC’ – Διόρισαν πρόεδρο τον...Συνταξιούχο Πέτρο Μάη!* [Clandestine activities, intrigues, and political interests: Such are the poor foundations of the NERIT institution, which Samaras introduced as the “Greek BBC”], <http://www.makeleio.gr/?p=164972> [accessed: 15 Sep 2014].

⁶ Cf. the statement of the government’s spokesman Simos Kedikoglou published in the electronic media on 11 Jun 2013.

For the video recording of the spokesman’s speech, see: *Ο Κεδίκογλου ανακοινώνει το κλείσιμο της ΕΡΤ*, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h46UwF9tfAs> [accessed: 23 Mar 2014]. For the text of the statement, see: ΓΕΝΙΚΗ ΓΡΑΜΜΑΤΕΙΑ ΕΝΗΜΕΡΩΣΗΣ & ΕΠΙΚΟΙΝΩΝΙΑΣ. ΓΕΝΙΚΗ ΓΡΑΜΜΑΤΕΙΑ ΜΕΣΩΝ ΕΝΗΜΕΡΩΣΗΣ. *Δήλωση του κυβερνητικού εκπροσώπου κ. Σίμου Κεδίκογλου, Αθήνα, 11 Ιουνίου 2013*.

⁷ See, e.g., Δ. Γαλάνης, *ΝΕΡΙΤ: Το φάντασμα της δημόσιας ραδιοτηλεόρασης* [NERIT: The illusion of public media], “To Vima”, 12 Sep 2014, <http://www.tovima.gr/opinions/article/?aid=630571> [accessed: 15 Sep 2014].

⁸ It was the idea of the open studio which later gave the name to the media produced by the “rebel” journalists – ERT Open.

⁹ The first regularly broadcasting amateur radio station was founded in Thessaloniki in 1928. Illegal radio stations active during the period of World War II and the Civil War (such as “Free Greece” and “Voice of truth”) as well as student initiatives from the times of the Regime of the Colonels have become history. See also: Β. Ψιμούλη, *«Ελεύθερη Ελλάδα», «Η φωνή της αλήθειας». Ο παράνομος ραδιοσταθμός του ΚΚΕ: Αρχείο 1947–1968* [“Free Greece”, “Voice of truth”: The illegal broadcasting service of the Communist Party of Greece: 1947–1968 archives], Αθήνα 2006.

by individual units—members of the ERT Open network, as well as current information on how to receive the broadcasts in the traditional way¹⁰. Numerous blogs and other internet ventures have been established, widening the scope of ERT Open. Documentaries and reportages have been made as well, and some of them managed to enter European-wide circulation¹¹.

The discussion of the structural breakthrough in Greek media should begin with an introduction to illustrate the model features of the Greek media system along with the characteristic examples of direct interference of political authorities in the operation of electronic media in Greece. It should be said at the outset that the closure of ERT and its later consequences are indeed consistent with the historical relations between the whole predominant system of power of the time and individual media institutions, especially public service ones (and state and military before that). The phenomenon of the “self-governing” media in Greece should also be presented. One should also consider what will remain of this ERT Open “carnival” once its employees have been completely cut off from the professional broadcasting infrastructure and can only use the Internet. By September 2014 (which still had not changed by April 2015), the “self-government” was still in control of the television studio in Thessaloniki¹² and a dozen or so former regional radio studios. The new situation of the official public media (NERIT¹³), constructed by the current authorities for over a year, also encourages reflection. The public service media need to find their place in this slightly schizophrenic reality. Finally, how the issue discussed here fits the traditional connections between the worlds of media, business, and politics under the Acropolis (the “web of thousand interests”¹⁴). It should be noted that ERT Open, in spite of all its “self-government” and the importance of civic factors, is not free from such connections. Whereas NERIT, for obvious reasons, has had to struggle with the label of unreliable “government television” from its very beginning¹⁵. I shall also try to resolve the dilemma from the title of the article in the conclusion.

State and media: a long and troubled relationship

Hallin and Mancini, the authors of the theoretical breakdown concept of national mass media systems in the countries of Western Europe and North America, not only included the Greek

¹⁰ The number of the channels broadcast both on-line and traditionally has been changing since the very beginning of ERT Open (summer 2013) and depends on its current technical capacities.

¹¹ See, e.g., *The lost signal of democracy*, dir. Yorgos Avgeropoulos, broadcast in the early 2014 by Belgian and Austrian public television, among others.

¹² From where the 3rd Programme of the public television (ET3) was broadcast until June 2013.

¹³ Gr. Νέα Ελληνική Ραδιοφωνία Ιντερνετ Τηλεόραση (NEPIT) [New Hellenic Radio, Internet and Television].

¹⁴ The phenomenon is known, verbatim, as “intertwined interests” (Gr. *διαπλεκόμενα συμφέροντα*), the term first uttered in the early 1990s by the then Prime Minister Konstantinos Mitsotakis.

¹⁵ Since 2013, Alexis Tsipras, the Leader of the Coalition of the Radical Left (SYRIZA) – the largest opposition party in the parliament – has been comparing NERIT to the infamous military YENED television, which was the main mouthpiece of the authorities during the Regime of the Colonels (1967–1974). In July 2013, during the Hellenic Assembly session devoted to the liquidation of ERT and establishment of its successor, Tsipras addressed the members of government in the following words: “You have done something even the junta of 1967 did not dare!” Cf. *Τσίπρας: Δωράκι στα ιδιωτικά κανάλια το κλείσιμο της ΕΡΤ* [Tsipras: The closure of ERT is a gift for private broadcasters], <http://www.nooz.gr/greece/tsipras-doraki-sta-idiotika-kanalia-to-kleisimo-tis-ert> [accessed: 11 Nov 2013].

media market within the Mediterranean model but also considered it as the closest to the theoretical model¹⁶.

Having analysed the media markets of Greece, Portugal, Italy, and Spain, Greek media expert Stelios Papathanasopoulos, Professor of the Kapodistrian University of Athens, defined a number of fundamental indicators characteristic of the media systems in the countries of the Mediterranean, which are concurrent with the observations of Hallin and Mancini. In the context of the Greek market and the conclusions drawn in this article, it is worth paying attention to such issues as:

- direct connections of many Greek journalists with the world of politics, manifested, among other things, by combining the journalistic work with the employment at party institutions or ministries¹⁷ (this theme will return due to the connections of the ERT Open employees with the largest party in opposition to the government of A. Samaras – the Coalition of the Radical Left (SYRIZA).
- multidimensional instrumentalisation of the means of mass communicating by their owners (media institutions are not solely commercial entities here, seeking profit, but they themselves become tools with which their owners pursue various interests carried out in many sectors of the economy, often on the verge of the world of politics¹⁸);
- Prolonged, perennial difficulties in the formal regulation of the radio-television market after the loss of the broadcasting ownership monopoly by the state and the resulting extremely weak position of the public service broadcasting service in Greece after 1989 (quite ironically, this situation, which actually resulted from the impotence of the state and its institutions responsible for shaping the media order, in 2013 became one of the arguments of the government justifying the necessity of the liquidation of ERT; whose expenditures were said to be out of proportions to its share in the audience market¹⁹);
- difficulties in creating an apolitical, professional supervision of public service media and ensuring that various political and social milieus have equal access to these media (Papathanasopoulos concludes: “In Spain, Portugal, and Greece, the head editors of information programmes change with the coming of the new government, and the outlook of news and journalism is largely reoriented to support the dominant power directly or indirectly”²⁰). The case of liquidation of ERT and subsequent creation of NERIT are both perfect illustrations of the characteristic Greek chaos in the broadly understood management of public media, constant game of musical chairs on leadership positions,

¹⁶ D. Hallin, P. Mancini, *Systemy medialne. Trzy modele mediów i polityki w ujęciu porównawczym* [Comparing media systems: Three models of media and politics], Kraków 2007, p. 67.

¹⁷ Σ. Παπαθανασόπουλος, *Πολιτική και ΜΜΕ. Η περίπτωση της Νότιας Ευρώπης* [Politics and the means of mass communicating: The case of Southern Europe], Αθήνα 2004, p. 48–51.

¹⁸ These are the dependencies Prime Minister Konstantinos Mitsotakis called “intertwined interests” (see also note 14). Cf. Σ. Παπαθανασόπουλος, *Πολιτική και ΜΜΕ...*, op. cit., p. 59.

¹⁹ In 2013, the ERT budget was estimated at about 300 million euros. Cf. *FAZ: «Χάρτινος τίγρης και όχι στρατηγός ο Σαμαράς»* [FAZ: “Samaras is a paper tiger, not a strategist”], *To Vima*, 19 Jun 2013, <http://www.tovima.gr/world/article/?aid=518490> [accessed: 15 Dec 2013], and M. Kokot, *Strajk generalny w Grecji w proteście przeciwko wyłączeniu telewizji publicznej* [General strike in Greece in protest against the closure of public television], <http://wyborcza.pl/51,76842,14095626.html> [accessed: 21 Jun 2013]. Meanwhile, the combined shares (SHR) of three ERT channels broadcasting country-wide in the last full week of operation (3–9 June 2013) reached 13.4%. The most popular ERT programme, the informative and journalistic NET, took the 6th place in this ranking with the share of 6.3% (source: Nielsen Audience Measurement).

²⁰ Σ. Παπαθανασόπουλος, *Πολιτική και ΜΜΕ...*, op. cit., p. 63.

direct interference of political factors in both HR and programme matters, among other things);

- limited professionalization of journalistic work, lack of sense of independence and freedom of work among people working in the trade (it is noted that the lack of commonly accepted professional codes and autonomous self-regulating institutions lead to the situation in which “journalism is constantly dependent on external influence, usually related to the world of politics and big business”²¹).

Even though the actions of Greek authorities regarding the system of electronic media discussed here may seem shocking to an external observer, poorly versed in the intricacies of Mediterranean politics, one should remember that from the perspective of the socio-political life in Greece this kind of situation is not without precedent. To the contrary, it perfectly fits the sequence of similar events observed in the 20th and 21st centuries, in which both authoritarian and democratically elected government took part²². One of the common traits defining the relationship between the media and politics in Greece is a certain sense of omnipotence of the party and state institutions in their relations with media entities. Whereas its second trait is the total absence of any rational vision of market development. As a result, it often shattered the initiatives of external partners or discouraged them from collaborating, thus reducing the mass media to the role of a simple tool in the government’s hands. The losses can be seen from many viewpoints, like the quality of the political system without any real control of the “fourth estate”, programmes offered to the audience, technological progress, etc. They fully revealed themselves when ERT was being liquidated.

Liquidation of ERT, rise of ERT Open, and the idea of open studio

The legal basis for the closure of ERT was a short regulation issued by the Minister–Chief of the Prime Minister’s Office and the Minister of Finance on the Dissolution of the Public Joint-Stock Company Hellenic Radio Television²³, signed and published 11 June 2013, which came into force on the day of publication²⁴. Its six articles stipulated the following:

- dissolution of the ERT company and all its subsidiaries;

²¹ Ibidem, p. 73.

²² About the first operating decades of radio in Greece, see: T. Fraszczyk, *Od prywatnej do państwowej, czyli o początkach radiofonii w Grecji* [From private to national: The beginnings of radio in Greece], “*Studia Medioznawcze*” [Media Studies] 2012, No. 4, p. 114–130; on the relations between the worlds of politics and electronic media under the government of Andreas Papandreu, see: T. Fraszczyk, *Telewizja w Grecji w epoce ‘socjalistycznego snu’ Andreeasa Papandreu* [Television in Greece in the era of socialist dream of Andreas Papandreu], “*Studia Medioznawcze*” [Media Studies] 2014, No. 3, p. 69–82; on the digitalisation of television broadcasting in Greece, see: S. Papathanassopoulos, K. Papavasiliopoulos, *Digital television policies in Greece*, in: *Digital communication policies in the information society promotion stage*, eds. S. Denicoli, H. Sousa, University of Minho 2012, p. 41.

²³ Υ.Α. 1414/11.06.2013. Αριθ. ΟΙΚ.02/11.6.2013. Κατάργηση της δημόσιας επιχείρησης «Ελληνική Ραδιοφωνία – Τηλεόραση, Ανώνυμη Εταιρεία (ΕΡΤ – Α.Ε.)».

²⁴ The dissolution of the statute-established ERT corporation by a regulation issued by two ministers later became one of the threads of a long battle in administrative courts, in which former employees of the company tried to challenge the legality of that decision. Eventually, in February 2014, the Greek equivalent of Supreme Administrative Court (Συμβούλιο της Επικρατείας), sitting in full court, confirmed that the form of the liquidation of ERT and subsequent actions of the authorities associated with launching its successor, were in line with the constitution. According to unofficial press releases, however, the ruling favourable for the authorities was passed “by a small margin”. Cf. ΣτΕ: *Συνταγματικό το λουκέτο στην ΕΡΤ* [SAC: ERT closure constitutional], <http://www.tovima.gr/media/article/?aid=571713> [accessed: 2 Mar 2014].

- suspension of radio and TV broadcasting by the end of the regular programme on 11 June until the legal successor of the corporation is established;
- transfer of all assets of the company into the temporary management of the Minister of Finance;
- immediate dissolution of all work contracts and other civil law agreements with financial compensation to be paid on terms to be defined at a later date²⁵;
- termination of the appointment of all supervisory authorities of the company;
- suspension of the license fee, paid together with electricity bills.

The whole operation of shutting down ERT terrestrial transmitters and removing its signal from satellite platforms was carried out very smoothly, albeit often in the company of special police forces²⁶. It did not put an end to the company's activities, however. The majority of employees did not heed the calls to vacate individual buildings of the broadcaster and went on with their editorial work in the occupied studios. The signal they produced was then transmitted via a growing number of on-line channels. The public television headquarters in the Agia Paraskevi district of Athens was plastered in flags. An open studio was established in the square in front of the building, where debates were held, talks with the crowds of Athenians²⁷, evenings of poetry, concerts, and many other programmes were broadcast from there²⁸.

The idea of an open studio was the foundation of the new, de iure illegal stage of operation of ERT, which soon adopted the name ERT Open and the slogan "Free voice for the society"²⁹. For obvious reasons (the loss of the majority of terrestrial and satellite transmitters) the Internet became the main distribution channel for the programmes produced in the occupied buildings of the liquidated company³⁰. Most importantly, the radio and TV signal sent by ERT Open (see Table 1) quickly gained support and was supplemented by constantly growing numbers of bloggers, amateur journalists, reporters, film makers, and others, who all joined the active struggle for the "free public service media" by creating articles, programmes, and films. Some of the still active regional radio stations of the former

²⁵ The Regulation of the Minister of Finance No. Α.Π. 1126/17.06.2013 stipulated that the compensation shall amount to two months' salary. The lay-offs affected more than 2,500 people. The terms of compensation payments changed many times over the following months, also due to the fact that a group of former ERT employees was hired by the new public service media created by the government.

²⁶ The so-called Order Restoration Units (MAT). Most interestingly, the same units were used by the government of A. Papandreu in 1988 in the attempt to pacify the formally illegal self-governing TV station being organised in Thessaloniki, founded by the mayor of the Macedonian capital, in opposition towards the Socialists. See also: Σ. Βαλούκος, *Ιστορία της ελληνικής τηλεόρασης*, Αθήνα 2008, p. 128.

²⁷ Even though the offer of the public media had enjoyed little interest of the audience since the early 1990s, the majority of the Greek society considered the liquidation of ERT as wrong. According to the poll results published on 27 June 2013 in the main news service of the MEGA channel, 55.5% of respondents were strongly against or rather against that decision, while 35.8% of participants were rather or strongly in support.

²⁸ For instance, the recording of the live performance of the part of the famous work by Odiseas Elitis, awarded the Nobel Prize in literature, entitled *It Is Right* (Gr. Άξιον Εστί) with music by Mikis Theodorakis; see: *Το ΑΕΙΟΝ ΕΣΤΙ στο ραδιομέγαρο της ΕΡΤ στις 15 Ιουνίου 2013*, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pzxRjY7qnVA> [accessed: 17 Sep 2014].

²⁹ Gr. Ελεύθερη φωνή για τη κοινωνία.

³⁰ ERT Open has an information website of its own (www.ertopen.com) where, among other things, links to all currently active channels of the broadcaster are published, available both via streaming and traditionally. Moreover, ERT Open programmes are often posted in many hosting services, including YouTube (www.youtube.com/user/ertsocialnetworks).

ERT, like the one on the island of Rhodes, have their own websites³¹. All broadcast programmes were connected with a system of links and mutual sharing in social media, blogs, and amateur portals. One of the semi-professional productions carried out within ERT Open – the documentary *The lost signal of democracy* (dir. Yorgos Avgeropoulos) – was shown in the public service television in Belgium and Austria in early 2014, and even distributed in cinemas in Greece.

Table 1. The central node of the ERT system (as of 19 Sep 2014)

TV	Radio	The Internet
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • one regular TV channel • broadcasts from the TV studio of the former 3rd Programme of public service television in Thessaloniki (ERT 3) • available on-line via streaming technology 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 19 radio channels • two still use the brand of the old country-wide programmes of the public service radio (II & III) • 17 regional radio stations • all available on-line via streaming technology • some are also available in the traditional way, on FM, SW, and MW bands • some broadcast from the former ERT studios, some use studios as guests (e.g., the regional station in Athens used to broadcast from a students' studio at the local University of Technology), the rest returned to amateur broadcasting traditions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ERT Open central information website • channels in hosting services (e.g., YouTube) • profiles at community websites • portals managed by some of the regional stations

Source: own research based on the data obtained from the websites of ERT Open and cooperating sites

It might be said that the open studio concept described here and the – quite far-reaching and spontaneous – way in which it was implemented fell on extremely fertile ground in Greece thanks to the opportunities brought by the development of Web 2.0. One should also remember the long tradition of amateur radio and television broadcasting in this country, which was often accompanied by the characteristic theme of struggle against the occupation or oppressive regime³². This theme has been used by the ERT Open journalists from the very beginning, as they consistently show their venture as the only one free from the infamous “web of thousand interests”. The only one to actually speak out in defence of the whole society and not just its individual political and business patrons, who remain hidden and feed upon regular citizens. Many (especially young) Greeks, from the very beginning distrustful of

³¹ <http://erarodou.blogspot.com>

³² See also: Κ. Παναγόπουλος, *Από την αναμονή στην αναγνώριση. Η πορεία του ελληνικού ραδιοερασιτεχνισμού* [From expectation to recognition: The evolution of Greek amateur radio], Αθήνα 2000.

any authority regardless of its ideology and colours, and quite tired of the crisis, eagerly became involved in the project positioned this way³³.

The mass movement described above led one of the Greek authors to suggest a hypothesis about the rise of a new “self-governing” model of media³⁴ to accompany the three previously distinguished by Hallin and Mancini. In the proposed model, at this evolutionary stage limited to the characterisation of the public service media system³⁵:

- the public service broadcaster operates in isolation from both the pressures from the political system and formal ties with this system;
- political authorities do not even have an indirect influence on appointments in the broadcasting company;
- the broadcaster is focused on producing programmes serving the public interest, in particular news and journalistic services;
- the broadcaster stands face to face, not in opposition to the legislative, executive, and judicial authorities (it does not presume that the political system is sinister yet, thanks to the separation from this system, networking structure, and unlimited numbers of co-authors it remains efficient in fulfilling its monitoring function);
- there is no obligatory duty to finance the broadcaster in any form;
- even though the central node of the public broadcaster is still based on the traditional radio and TV, it is already a web-based institution in the essence (e.g., through its on-line distribution channel and its content management and presentation system adapted to it);
- the public service broadcaster is not “closed” regarding the number of radio and TV channels etc. (anyone can “plug in” to the system and leave it at any time);
- the self-governing model of media is not limited geographically, it cannot be tied to a single region of the world.

The most important doubt concerning the operation of ERT Open (apart from the many months of occupation of buildings, illegal use of public property: radio and TV studios, some of the terrestrial transmitters, etc.) and its self-proclaimed employees, is associated with the political affiliation of ERT Open itself.

³³ The Greek political class as such has never enjoyed any special recognition of voters, and this still has not changed. According to a poll conducted in December 2013, 84.1% of the surveyed believed that in the passing year the government did nothing, or hardly anything, to decrease unemployment, the greatest malady of modern Greece. The opposition was judged even more harshly: 88.9% of respondents said that it had nothing noteworthy to offer on this matter. Cf. Γ. Παπαϊωάννου, *Η Ελλάδα που χάνεται!* [Greece is dying!], “To Vima”, 29 Dec 2013, <http://www.tovima.gr/politics/article/?aid=552790> [accessed: 10 Apr 2014].

A similar case is the common belief that serving public and administrative functions “must” be associated with enjoying certain financial gain. It was so in the 1970s (cf. J. Bonarek, T. Czekalski, S. Sprawski, S. Turlej, *Historia Grecji* [History of Greece], Kraków 2005, p. 631), and it is so now: in 2014 99% of the surveyed Greeks agreed with the opinion that corruption was a “grave issue” in their country, while 63% admit having had personal experience of corruption. Cf. Ε. Βαρβιτσιώτη, «Πρωταθλήτρια» της Ευρωπαϊκής Ένωσης στη διαφθορά η Ελλάδα [Greece is the EU champion in corruption], *Kathimerini*, 4 Feb 2014, <http://www.kathimerini.gr/751956/article/oikonomia/ellhnikh-oikonomia/prwta8lhtria-ths-eyrwpaikhs-enwshs-sth-diaf8ora-hellada> [accessed: 4 Apr 2014], and Ι. Μάνδρου, «Στην Ελλάδα θέλουν ακόμα το δωράκι...» [They still want gratuity in Greece], “Kathimerini”, 23.03.2014, <http://www.kathimerini.gr/759432/article/proswpa/syntey3-eis/sthn-ellada-8eloy-n-akoma-to-dwraki> [accessed: 4 Apr 2014].

³⁴ Cf. Ν. Χειλάς, *EPT: Η τέταρτη διάσταση*, op. cit.

³⁵ I present here both the traits listed by the author of the cited article and those which were revealed later, after more than a year of the operation of ERT Open, and which stem from my observation.

Therefore, the most likely answer to this question simultaneously reveals a serious rift in the self-governing model of media suggested above. Namely, it is impossible to ignore the connections between the largest trade union in the former ERT (POSP-ERT) and the leader of the opposition Alexis Tsipras and his SYRIZA party. In fact, since 11 June 2013, this union has been in control of the central node of ERT Open (including the radio studios and the TV studio in Thessaloniki controlled by journalists). It also officially collects funds for the employees devoted to the idea of free media and represents them before the courts. The indirect evidence of these connections include:

- all news messages on the main ERT Open website and in its news services
- about the actions of SYRIZA are either positive or neutral;
- all news concerning the activities of the government are either negative or neutral;
- SYRIZA has announced from the very beginning that once it takes power, it will immediately restore the old public media system and re-employ all laid off ERT employees;
- the leader of SYRIZA never condoned the closure of ERT and, as a rule, does not answer the questions asked by the journalists from the government's public media;
- the political narration of messages and news in ERT Open shows clear left-wing and communist sympathies (in a Greek context); for instance, ERT Open took a clearly pro-Russian stance during the conflict in Crimea. Also, when it comes to the relationship between Greece and the EU, it criticises everything related to the so-called austerity package, mimicking the position expressed on these matters by SYRIZA almost word by word.

Therefore, it cannot be said that the main feature of the self-governing media modes (i.e., its isolation from the pressures of the political system) has been wholly fulfilled in the case of ERT Open. It does not change the fact, though, that its other traits, like networking, dynamic number of entities involved, and significant role of amateur authors, are novel compared to the structures of previous broadcasters bragging to be public. It is difficult to clearly state what will remain of the ERT Open system once the present authorities take over all the building and studios now still in the hands of the former ERT journalists, which will certainly take place. Prime Minister Samaras, in his speech of 6 September 2014 in Thessaloniki for the inauguration of the 79th Thessaloniki International Fair, announced the imminent launch of the Northern-Greek branch of the NERIT public service television in the Macedonian capital³⁶. In order to do so, it will most likely be necessary to regain the building occupied for more than a year by ERT Open, even though the Prime Minister did not actually mention this issue³⁷. It is also difficult to decide whether, once the central node of the current system is lost, the self-governing public service media will manage to establish another integrating centre, or if the network will fall apart instead. Knowing the history of the Greek anti-system media, however, one might assume that the initiatives launched after 11 June 2013 will continue in the Internet, and its activists will attempt to air an “underground” radio.

³⁶ It is to become the successor to the former 3rd ERT Programme, also broadcast from Thessaloniki.

³⁷ For the full text of Prime Minister Samaras' speech, see: <http://www.taxheaven.gr/news/news/view/id/20187> [accessed: 18 Sep 2014].



Figure 1. The propaganda poster of former ERT journalists: a sinister, baton armed policeman represents the authorities, while the innocent child stands for free media. The subtitles say: “Seven months of silence on air. You won’t frighten us. Our voice is growing stronger! Free self-governing radio ERT3.”



Figure 2. Promotional poster of former ERT journalists. The subtitles say: “ERT is our common right. Every one of us has something to say.”

New public service media (NERIT)

It was most often repeated in the discussions across Europe following the closure of ERT that supposedly the Greek government had resolved so. However, it is not entirely in accord with the facts³⁸. In fact, the decision was made by the top management of the New Democracy – the largest party in the government coalition at the time. It is shown, among other things, by the form of the operation, which resembles a surgical cut³⁹, and the actual surprise of the representatives of the remaining two coalition parties (PASOK and DIMAR, the Democratic Left)⁴⁰. The political tensions and government crisis culminated in DIMAR leaving the coalition (10 June). The government of Prime Minister Samaras retained the majority in the parliament (153 seats out of 300), and the reconstructed two-party Council of Ministers received the vote of confidence a few weeks later⁴¹.

The legality of the governmental decision to dissolve the ERT company was confirmed by the Administrative Court on 20 June 2013. It also called on the responsible authorities to re-establish publish service media, at least temporarily. In doing so, it

³⁸ Obviously, such a definition can be assumed to simplify the discussion, which I do in this paper myself.

³⁹ The Minister–Chief of the Prime Minister’s Office Simos Kedikoglou and the Minister of Finance Giannis Sturnaras, signed under the resolution of 11 June 2013, were then among the closest collaborators of Prime Minister Samaras.

⁴⁰ Cf. the statements of the managements of both parties from 11–19 June 2013.

⁴¹ The reconstructed cabinet included the post of the Minister of Public Media, who was to be responsible for the liquidation of ERT and creation of the structures of its successor.

referenced the Constitution of Greece and international commitments of the state⁴². The Court's recommendation was endorsed on 10 July, when the temporary Greek Public Television (EDT) started broadcasting⁴³. It offered a single TV channel to the viewers, mostly filled with re-broadcasted programmes from the former ERT archives. Thus came in Greece the era of two institutions which both claimed to be public service media:

- the official one, launched in July 2013 by the government, meant to transform from the temporary form (EDT) into the permanent one with comprehensive programme offer (NERIT);
- the self-proclaimed one (ERT Open), managed by the former ERT journalists, who still occupied the buildings in Athens⁴⁴, Thessaloniki, and a number of local radio stations.⁴⁵

The first draft bill for the new public service media (NERIT) appeared in circulation already on 12 June; it was adopted by the parliament a month later, in its final form, by the two-party coalition votes⁴⁶. As I have mentioned in the introduction, the government always ensured that it intended to create a "Greek BBC". In fact, the initial project was well received by the European Broadcasting Union (EBU), among others. The formal separation of the government and state regulatory organs from the appointment of the broadcaster's management and monitoring authorities was appreciated. It was also the case of open competition procedures both in the area of staffing and in the development of the premiere programme offer of NERIT⁴⁷.

Unfortunately, the NERIT law was changed many times over the following months, putting this institution more and more under the sway of state institutions and parliamentary majority⁴⁸. The announced competitions dragged on, and some attracted the prosecutors' interest⁴⁹. Only in 2014, the temporary managements of the broadcaster (or their individual members) who were responsible for ending the temporary period and finalising all competitions resigned, many times and in unclear circumstances⁵⁰. The criticism was on the

⁴² Η Επιτροπή Αναστολών του Συμβουλίου της Επικρατείας (άρθρο 52 του π.δ/τος 18/1989, όπως ισχύει). Decision No. 236/2013 of 20 Jun 2013.

⁴³ Gr. *Ελληνική Δημόσια Τηλεόραση (ΕΔΤ)*.

⁴⁴ The main television building was finally taken over by the prosecution and the order restoration units (MAT) of the police on 7 November 2013. The temporary EDT, which so far had broadcast from a studio rented from one of the private broadcasters, move into the building in the same month. Cf: *Παρουσία εισαγγελέα τα ΜΑΤ εκκένωσαν το ραδιομέγαρο της ΕΡΤ* [Prosecution had the police empty the ERT building], <http://www.tovima.gr/media/article/?aid=538261>; LIVE: *Επέμβαση της αστυνομίας στις εγκαταστάσεις της ΕΡΤ* [Police intervention in the ERT building], <http://www.naftemporiki.gr/liveblog/726048/epembasi-tis-astunomias-stis-egkatakatastaseis-tis-ert-stin-ag-paraskeui> [accessed: 12 Dec 2013].

⁴⁵ As of September 2014, this division continues to exist.

⁴⁶ Ν. 4173/2013, ΦΕΚ 169 Α/26.7.2013 (New Greek Radio, Internet and Television).

⁴⁷ Applications to all the competitions could be placed via an on-line platform.

⁴⁸ See, e.g., *Broadcasting Union concerned about NERIT*, <http://neoskosmos.com/news/en/Broadcasting-Unionconcerned-about-NERIT> [accessed: 6 Sep 2014].

⁴⁹ See, e.g., *Εισαγγελική έρευνα για προσλήψεις δημοσιογράφων στη ΝΕΡΙΤ* [Prosecution investigates the employment procedure in NERIT], <http://www.tovima.gr/media/article/?aid=629967> [accessed: 15 Sep 2014].

⁵⁰ For more on the musical chairs in NERIT, see: Δ. Γαλάνης, *ΕΡΤ: το απόλυτο χάος* [NERIT: A total chaos], "To Vima", 4 May 2014, <http://www.tovima.gr/media/article/?aid=591601> [accessed: 9 Jun 2014]; idem, *Νέος πρόεδρος της ΝΕΡΙΤ ο καθηγητής Αντώνης Μακρυδημήτρης* [Professor Antonis Makridimitris appointed the new chairman of NERIT], "To Vima", 6 May 2014, <http://www.tovima.gr/media/article/?aid=593182> [accessed: 9 Jun 2014]; *Παραιτήθηκαν από τη ΝΕΡΙΤ οι Α. Μακρυδημήτρης και Ρ. Μορόνης* [A. Makridimitris and R. Moronis resigned from NERIT], "Kathimerini", 12 Sep 2014, <http://www.kathimerini.gr/783428/article/epikairothta/ellada/paraith8hkan-apo-th-nerit-oi-a-makrydhmhtrhs-kai-r-morwnhs> [accessed: 12 Sep 2014]; Δ. Γαλάνης, *Παραιτήθηκαν Α. Μακρυδημήτρης και Ρ. Μορόνης από τη*

rise also in connection with the lack of ideas for the broadcaster (e.g., how would it differ from the closed ERT), the lack of dialogue with the defiant journalists, and the risk of total marginalisation of the public media in Greece, whose position for the previous 20 years had already been very weak⁵¹. Because of the chaos in the organisation of media order, characteristic for this country, a year after the dissolution of ERT its successor still does not have a permanent management. It offers but two television programmes to its audience, available in terrestrial broadcasting (one of which is a sports programme with limited technological range)⁵². Moreover, there is no network of regional radio stations⁵³. In view of the above it is easy to say that it will be a daunting task to restore the social trust in the official broadcasting institution. Which, in turn, strengthens and prolongs the existence of self-governing media.

Conclusion

It is difficult to unequivocally resolve the dilemma which arose in conjunction with the breakthrough in Greek media, outlined in the title of this paper. I am personally in favour of the opinion that the situation observed in the Greek electronic media market (after the surprising decision of the leadership of the largest party co-forming the government in Athens at the time to dissolve the public broadcaster ERT) is yet another perfect confirmation that Greece should be considered as the model example of the Mediterranean media model. I have already presented its basic features as well as their examples as they relate to the “ERT case”. The demand of a self-governed mass media model, the outline of which should emerge thanks to the rise of ERT Open, sounds attractive. It seems however unable to survive the clash with harsh reality – the hard political game and skilful instrumentalisation of media entities. It is not only the case of the “governmental” NERIT but also the clearly politically biased main node of the ERT Open system, connected to the opposition party SYRIZA.

The long not seen social movement caused by the closure of ERT and the boom of broadly understood civil journalism which followed, especially on-line (from blogs to films) were invaluable. It is also connected by the readiness to take responsibility for the creation of the “free voice for the society”. For understandable reasons, the activity of the Greeks is not an exceptional phenomenon. Specialists have been discussing various alternative forms of public service media already for some time. Nevertheless, the clearly visible political context of the events in Greece still places them within the traditional Mediterranean model⁵⁴.

NEPIT [A. Makridimitris and R. Moronis resigned from NERIT], “To Vima” 11 Sep 2014, <http://www.tovima.gr/media/article/?aid=630470> [accessed: 12 Sep 2014]; *Αποχωρεί από το Ε.Σ. της ΝΕΡΙΤ ο Χρ.Χωμενίδης* [Chr. Chomenidis steps down from the NERIT Supervisory Board], “To Vima”, 4 May 2014, <http://www.tovima.gr/media/article/?aid=631612> [accessed: 15 Sep 2014].

⁵¹ Since June 2013, I have been providing a detailed discussion on-line on the current situation on the incredibly dynamic Greek electronic media market: <http://nadwodawielkaiczysta.blogspot.com> (tagged as „telewizja”).

⁵² The mean viewership shares (August–September 2014) of the main channel (N) and sport channel (N Sports) reached 5–6% and 3–4%, respectively, which thus gives them the 6th and 7th place in the ranking of stations available in terrestrial broadcast (data from Nielsen Audience Measurement).

⁵³ The “self-governing”, illegal ERT Open is still the only station on this market.

⁵⁴ For more on “alternative” public media and civil activity in this area, see: J. Macnamara, *The 21st century media (r)evolution: emergent communication practices*, Peter Lang International Academic Publishers 2009; idem, *Public communication practices in the Web 2.0-3.0 media scape: The case for PR evolution*, http://www.prisjournal.org/fileadmin/Social_media/Macnamara.pdf [accessed: 11 Mar 2015]; Ch. Fuchs, *Alternative media as critical media*, “European Journal of Social Theory” 2010, No. 13 (2), p. 173–192; O. G.

Finally, it is worth noting that in the late January 2015 the Greek political scene changed in a fundamental way. Until then opposition party SYRIZA seized power, and its leader Alexis Tsipras became the Prime Minister. Until March 2015 (when this text was last edited) the structural division of public broadcasters described here still held. There is also no official decision of the new authorities regarding the restoration of the previous ERT organisations, which had often been announced. What experience dictates, however, is that the Greek media order can be expected to undergo fundamental changes again in several months, or perhaps a dozen or so. Also, the political factor will again be the lead animator of these transformations. It is all the more likely since both the ERT journalists themselves and the foreign press show no doubts regarding the intentions of the Prime Minister in this matter⁵⁵.

Bailey, B. Cammaerts, N. Carpentier, *Understanding alternative media*, Open University Press, Berkshire 2008; *Community media and social media: active citizenship in a changing media environment*, coll. work, http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/standardsetting/media/belgrade2013/CDMSI%282012%29Misc14Rev_en%20CMFE%20paper.pdf [accessed: 5 Mar 2015].

⁵⁵ Cf. <http://www.ertopen.com/news/ellada/koinwnia/item/32874-le-nouvel-observateur-afierwma-gia-ton-agwnaths-ert-ertopen,-me-titlo-o-syriza-xananoigei-thn-thleorash>, <http://tempsreel.nouvelobs.com/l-obs-du-soir/20150312.OBS4504/syriza-rallume-la-tele.html> [accessed: 15 Apr 2015].