

ASA Expresses Support for Ousted Statistics Officials, Urges Greece to Drop Charges, Defend Against Undermining Efforts

ALEXANDRIA, VA (March 29, 2017) – In a joint letter to Greece’s prime minister, Alexis Tsipras, on Monday, the ASA—the world’s largest community of statisticians with members in more than 90 countries—expressed deep concern over the legal proceedings against Andreas Georgiou, the former president of the Hellenic Statistical Authority (ELSTAT), and other senior ELSTAT officials.

“We urge the government of Greece to unambiguously and publicly fulfill its Commitment on Confidence in Statistics that was signed on February 29, 2012, and is enshrined in Greek law 4051 of 2012, by immediately taking all actions necessary to publicly defend against any efforts to undermine the credibility of the Greek statistics produced by Dr. Georgiou and his former colleagues so that all charges against these official statisticians are dropped,” said Robin Mejia, chair of the ASA Committee on Scientific Freedom and Human Rights, and ASA Executive Director Ron Wasserstein.

Georgiou was appointed by the Greek parliament in 2010 to head ELSTAT and bring about the production of reliable Greek statistics. After many years of understated deficit and debt figures reported by Greece, Georgiou recalculated official economic statistics according to European Union (EU) law. Statistics produced under his leadership were validated and published by Eurostat (the official statistics body of the EU in which Greece is a member) for five consecutive years. Production of official statistics using objective methods that follow international standards is crucial for their effective use.

Yet, in 2013, Georgiou was accused of “undermining the national interest” and slapped with criminal charges for “false statements and complicity against the State” for allegedly inflating the Greek deficit and causing damages of 171 billion euro to the Greek state. Although various judicial procedures have several times concluded the charges against Georgiou are baseless, the charges keep being revived. In addition, in December, he was acquitted of related misdemeanor charges for violation of duty, but that acquittal was reversed just 10 days later. He is now to be retried for the same alleged crimes and thus subjected to double jeopardy.

“The charges against Mr. Georgiou and two of his colleagues of exaggerating the estimates of Greek government deficit and debt for the year 2009 are fanciful and not consistent with the facts,” continues Mejia and Wasserstein. “There is widespread agreement among statistical authorities that Dr. Georgiou compiled Greek public finance statistics in accordance with EU rules and standards, with which Greece is obliged to comply, and that charges against him are baseless.”

Other professional statistics organizations, including the International Statistical Institute, have documented that, since 2010, Greek statistics have passed all European quality checks. Georgiou is widely credited with producing the first round of reliable financial statistics in accordance with EU standards, breaking a tradition of many years of fraud. Key stakeholders have found these prosecutions to be “political in nature,” particularly evident upon the repeated reopening of cases shortly after investigating prosecutors or judges recommended the charges be dropped.

“Under no circumstances can criminal sanctions for developing and presenting independent and objective statistical data in a credible way be justified,” concluded Mejia and Wasserstein.

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About the American Statistical Association

The ASA is the world’s largest community of statisticians and the oldest continuously operating professional science society in the United States. Its members serve in industry, government and academia in more than 90 countries, advancing research and promoting sound statistical practice to inform public policy and improve human welfare. For additional information, please visit the ASA website at www.amstat.org.

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