

(English version)

Question for written answer E-000602/26
to the Commission
Konstantinos Arvanitis (The Left)
(11 February 2026)

Subject: Intimidation tactics against journalist by Greek Government spokesman

During the official briefing for editors on 9 February 2026 and following his question about the operational activities of the competent Greek authorities on the night of the shipwreck with a tragic toll of 15 deaths off the coast of Chios, the journalist Christos Avramidis was publicly and repeatedly subjected to unusual intimidation by the Greek Government spokesman, Pavlos Marinakis ⁽¹⁾.

The journalist cited statements by the local mayor that the Coast Guard had located the boat in Greek territorial waters and carried out deterrence and refoulement operations. He then asked whether it was a rescue or deterrence operation. Among other things, the Government spokesman replied that ‘The job of the Coast Guard is [...] and to prevent, based on what the law provides and without endangering human lives, at its own risk, illegal entry into our country’ and in conclusion that ‘it is a matter of perspective’.

When Mr Avramidis returned with a supplementary question ⁽²⁾, the Government spokesman, visibly irritated, responded with a series of insulting descriptions and threatening warnings with criminal implications ⁽³⁾, which escalated further in the course of the discussion ⁽⁴⁾.

The Commission is therefore asked:

1. Is intimidation and the threatening of journalists by government officials acceptable practice in accordance with the Union's rule of law acquis?
2. Given the increasing frequency of similar incidents in other Member States, does the Commission intend to strengthen the protection of journalists and their work through new legislative and policy initiatives?

Submitted: 11.2.2026

Answer given by Mr McGrath on behalf of the European Commission
(16 April 2026)

The Commission does not comment on individual cases.

To protect journalists and human rights defenders from strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs), the Commission adopted the Anti-SLAPP initiative on 27 April 2022, consisting of a directive ⁽¹⁾ for which Member States have a transposition deadline of 7 May 2026 and a recommendation ⁽²⁾ which is implemented since its adoption.

As announced by the European Democracy Shield ⁽³⁾, the Commission will organise, in the coming months, a high-level event on combating SLAPPs to support the review of its anti-SLAPP Recommendation.

Moreover, adopted in September 2021, the recommendation on the protection, safety and empowerment of journalists helps strengthen media freedom and media pluralism in the EU ⁽⁴⁾. It aims to ensure safer working conditions for all media professionals, free from fear and intimidation, whether online or offline.

It sets out concrete actions for Member States to take, including on better protection for journalists through strengthened cooperation with law enforcement authorities, as well as support mechanisms such as legal advice and psychological support.

¹ Transcription: <https://tinyurl.com/ye7uehbj>.

² ‘Since they had already entered Greek waters, the only legal action, based on international law, would be to rescue the people. There is no option of deterrence; it is illegal. In fact, this did not happen and we have 15 dead. Now you just admitted that the operation was a deterrence operation?’

³ ‘[...] do not distort my words, because at some point you may also suffer the consequences of the law [...] Because what you are doing is criminal [...] it is called ‘falsification of data’ [...] be careful, because at some point I will also be forced to take legal action [...] Enough with your immunity.’

⁴ ‘– We simply asked, we did not claim that you said it. And we want to ask again.– You did not ask [...] In addition to being impudent, you are also a coward [...] every time you say something that I have not said, I will consider the legal recourse I have.– Was it a rescue or deterrence operation?– [...] when you do something that goes beyond the limits of the law and offends [...] you will have the consequences [...] you work for a commissioned service.’

⁽¹⁾ Directive (EU) 2024/1069 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 April 2024 on protecting persons who engage in public participation from manifestly unfounded claims or abusive court proceedings (‘Strategic lawsuits against public participation’) OJ L, 2024/1069, 16.4.2024, <http://data.europa.eu/eli/dir/2024/1069/oj>.

⁽²⁾ Commission Recommendation (EU) 2022/758 of 27 April 2022 on protecting journalists and human rights defenders who engage in public participation from manifestly unfounded or abusive court proceedings (‘Strategic lawsuits against public participation’), OJ L 138, 17.5.2022, pp. 30-44, <http://data.europa.eu/eli/reco/2022/758/oj>.

⁽³⁾ JOIN(2025) 791 final, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:52025JC0791>.

⁽⁴⁾ Commission Recommendation (EU) 2021/1534 of 16 September 2021 on ensuring the protection, safety and empowerment of journalists and other media professionals in the European Union, OJ L 331, 20.9.2021, pp. 8-20.

The European Democracy Shield foresees an update of the recommendation on the safety of journalists.
