

Commendation of Andreas Georgiou

Andreas V. Georgiou, former President of the Greek Statistical Authority ELSTAT, is receiving this special commendation for his competency and strength in the face of adversity, his commitment to the production of quality and trustworthiness of official statistics and his advocacy for the improvement, integrity and independence of official statistics.

Andreas Georgiou was appointed the first president of ELSTAT in August 2010 having worked outside Greece with the IMF over the previous twenty years. Andreas served as President of ELSTAT until August 2015. From the outset he committed himself to ensuring that the production of all official statistics in Greece should be undertaken in strict conformity with international and European statistical principles and standards. In particular, he insisted that all statistics, and the processes that underpinned their production and dissemination, should conform to the UN Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics and the European Statistics Code of Practice. While all these requirements were provided for under the Greek Statistical Law, he encountered from the outset many practical and political obstacles to the running of ELSTAT and the compiling of factual and impartial statistics. In particular, he was subjected to continuing inappropriate efforts to influence the coverage and content of certain politically sensitive statistical releases, in contravention of the principle of professional independence. Furthermore, he faced deliberate interference and many unnecessary obstacles in recruiting and deploying the agreed human and other resources required for a modern statistical service and in obtaining full access to administrative data for statistical purposes.

One issue above all others overshadowed the whole period of his Presidency. A major political controversy related to the 2009 Greek government finance deficit was used for a campaign against Andreas. Investigations and ultimately court proceedings, launched in September 2011, are still continuing seven years later. The main serious felony charge is that Andreas Georgiou and two of his colleagues conspired with European institutions and the IMF to artificially inflate the 2009 Government debt and deficit figures for Greece thereby causing damage amounting to €171 billion to the Greek economy. This charge continues to be pressed despite the fact that the figures at issue, the corresponding data for subsequent years and the methodologies that underpin them, have been consistently and repeatedly validated by Eurostat as meeting the highest European and international standards. In a related decision, the Supreme Court has also recently rendered irreversible the conviction of Andreas Georgiou in August 2017 by the Appeals Court on the misdemeanour charge of not putting the disputed deficit figures to the then Board of ELSTAT for approval prior to public release. A two-year suspended prison sentence was imposed for this conviction. In his defence, Andreas Georgiou argued that he was following, in full, the procedures set down in the European Statistics Code of Practice for ensuring that statistics are produced and disseminated in a professionally independent manner.

A notable feature of the prolonged court proceedings is that recommendations for acquittal or discontinuance by prosecutors, investigating judges and courts have been overturned on six separate occasions. These have included two unprecedented annulments by the Greek Supreme Court of acquittal decisions by the high-level Council of the Appeals Court on the felony charge. Many informed commentators maintain that the only possible explanation is that there is a substantial political context to the proceedings.

Thanks to his competency and strength in the face of adversity, the quality of official statistics and their trustworthiness were greatly improved in Greece during his tenure at ELSTAT. This was confirmed in a Peer Review of the Greek Statistical System that was completed in March 2015. Since his retirement from ELSTAT, Andreas Georgiou has become a strong advocate, within the international statistical community and elsewhere, for the adoption of measures to ensure the professional independence of official statistics throughout the world. This award acknowledges and commends his significant contribution to the improvement and integrity of official statistics.