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PEEMPIP

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Joint statement by SYDISE and PEEMPIP on the new Greek social security law

In February 2017, the Hellenic Association of Conference Interpreters (SYDISE) and the Panhellenic Association of Professional Translators Graduates of the Ionian University (PEEMPIP), both professional/scientific associations advocating and representing professionals in the fields of conference interpreting and translation respectively, on the eve of a wave of similar actions lodged by numerous scientific associations, professional associations and chambers, filed a recourse before the Council of State, which is the Supreme Administrative Court of Greece, pursuing the annulment of the new Greek social security law and other provisions. The aim of these numerous recourses/writs of annulment is to demonstrate that the new measures affect professional activity and the conduct of business and, above all, to exert political pressure by outright denouncing the conditions of financial confiscation and financial suffocation that the new law has created.

In doing so, SYDISE and PEEMPIP are opting to be proactive and not simply passive spectators to the decimation of their professions.

Admittedly the new social security law is particularly favourable to low income-earners. It is also common knowledge that even under the previous social security system, freelancers were quite often obliged to pay social security contributions which were disproportionate to their actual income (especially when they mandatorily switched to higher insurance classes and as they approached retirement), which caused many self-employed workers and freelancers to accumulate debts to the Greek Social Security Organisation for the Self-Employed (OAEE), although simple administrative measures would have effectively alleviated those professionals when the financial crisis hit the Greek economy.

Therefore, the purpose of the recourse jointly filed by SYDISE and PEEMPIP is not to dispute the model of proportionality *per se* or any relief offered to low income-earners, but to remedy important side effects stemming from the fact that the law (a) is not based on an actuarial study and (b) violates the principle of reciprocity between contributions/benefits and the constitutionally enshrined principle of equality, thus creating suffocating financial conditions even for middle or high incomes, which directly affect the right to property and the right to professional freedom.

The aim, therefore, is to protect our colleagues who are adversely affected by the new law, e.g. those who were forced to cease activity owing to high social security contributions and are currently unemployed without being entitled to unemployment benefits (another discrimination against the self-employed); our colleagues being openly blackmailed by their current employers to take up more clients (under the new



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law, if a freelancer is employed by less than 3 employers, the employer is obliged to contribute 20% towards social security, which translates into an additional financial burden that most employers are not willing to pay, therefore they prefer to stop working with those freelancers); interpreters and translators in the private and public sector who are now required to pay double contributions because once they used to be freelancers but were allowed by law to choose their preferred social security fund; our colleagues in the private sector also pursuing a freelance profession (as is the case with most literary translators in Greece); or our colleagues who developed a healthy and profitable business over the years only to be punished for their success and entrepreneurship.

Interpreters and translators stand before a dead end. Rate readjustment is virtually impossible considering the downward pressure at national, European and international level. The self-employed/freelancers in Greece have zero tax-free allowance. Considering the high taxation rates, the solidarity levy, the annual fixed tax on trade of €650 and the 100% income tax prepayment for the coming financial year(!), the burden of social security contributions to the overwhelming percentage of 26.95% is nothing more than another tax. With tens of thousands of self-employed workers/freelancers abandoning their professions, ceasing their activity or transferring their registered offices/principal places of business to EU countries with more favourable tax systems, common sense dictates that the new security system is not feasible, nor viable. It is irrational to force people to work below basic salary in order to maintain a low, tolerable level of social security contributions, or to punish those who generate income from their professional activity by confiscating more than 70% of their income in taxes and contributions.

Due to the importance of the joint recourse of SYDISE and PEEMPIP, it was submitted to Plenary Session, along with a number of other similar writs of annulment filed by important Greek associations, such as the Athens Bar Association and the Economic Chamber of Greece. The Plenary Session judges the constitutionality of laws. The hearing date was set for 5 May 2017.

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