



Written by [Bruce Walker](#) on September 19, 2012

Greek Judges and Prosecutors Strike

The economic meltdown in Greece is producing some peculiar situations. The week of September 10, Greek Finance Minister Yiannis Stournaras met with the [Association of Magistrates and Prosecutors](#) — Greece's union of judicial employees. These individuals have historically had significantly higher salaries than other civil servants in the country. They are also charged with making sure that legal cases proceed through the system in Greece — that criminals are prosecuted according to law, that litigation between parties in civil actions proceed, and that the Greek government enforces tax and regulatory law. So keeping these people working is in the best interest of everyone in Greece.



But the Greek government, in order to cut public expenses and to bring the nation's fiscal situation back to order, plans to cut the salary of those magistrates and prosecutors by 25 percent. Stournaras met with the association and tried to persuade the members to accept pay cuts. But after already seeing their salaries reduced by almost 38 percent since the beginning of Greece's recent financial woes, the Association of Magistrates and Prosecutors voted unanimously to reject the government's proposal and instead the members voted to begin a partial strike beginning on September 17 and lasting five days.

Already these officials work only five hours a day — from 10:00 in the morning to 3:00 in the afternoon — but under the partial strike the magistrates and prosecutors will work only one hour a day, and only cases nearing the statute of limitations will be heard. This slowdown hits a Greek judicial system in which it sometimes takes 10 years for a case to come to trial.

The Association of Magistrates and Prosecutors will meet again on September 22 to determine whether or not to continue this partial strike. Panagiotis Liberopoulos, who is a representative of that association, said,

We realize the problems that the state is facing. We have contributed, we are not against contributing, but a line has to be drawn, there has to be a limit. They can't completely degrade us. We are determined to defend our current wages. We call on the state not to forget that it has the obligation of protecting the personal and operational independence of judges.

It is not unprecedented for judges to go on strike over compensation. In Indonesia earlier this year judges did just that. It is also not unprecedented for judges to go on strike for other reasons. In May of this year, the Tunisian Union of Judges called a strike to protest the firing of 81 judges who were charged with corruption.

What is happening in Greece, however, is qualitatively different. The Greek judges and prosecutors are trying to pressure the government into rejecting austerity programs that have been demanded by other nations in the eurozone as a condition of more bailout help. Moreover, these judges and prosecutors



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have been joined by other Greek civil servants such as tax collectors whose work directly relates to the revenue available to the Greek government as well as to hospital doctors, teachers, police officers and others. Greek judges are among the highest paid civil servants in the nation. They are also the officers charged with keeping the law.

Military officers and police officers have also joined picket lines in support of a general strike in Greece. Can a government function without judges, prosecutors, police, and military? Greece cannot pay the high cost of government salaries, which are a substantial part of the national state expenditures. Without serious reductions and the help that Greece needs from the eurozone, the Greek government, whose bonds have already been downgraded by rating services to the status of “junk bonds,” seems likely to default, which will mean that the value of Greek bonds in the investment portfolios of banks throughout Europe will be devalued dramatically. But the euro zone representatives are adamant that the Greek government must reduce expenditures significantly, and that includes even the salaries of magistrates and prosecutors in Greece.

Photo of Greek judicial officials protesting pay cuts in the Supreme Court in Athens: AP Images



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