



Industrial relations
**Greece: Developments
in working life 2017**

[Developments in working life in Europe:
EurWORK annual review 2017](#)

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Author: Sofia Lampousaki, Labour Institute of Greek General Confederation of Labour (INE/GSEE)

Eurofound reference number: WPEF18030

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European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions

Telephone: (+353 1) 204 31 00

Political context affecting working life aspects

Because of the severity with which the global financial crisis of 2008 has hit the country, Greece has been included in a budgetary stability program since 2010 and receives financial assistance from the Eurozone countries and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Financial aid is associated with the Greek government's obligation to proceed with fiscal adjustment measures and structural measures for the consolidation of the Greek economy. These steps are specified following consultations between the Greek Government and the European Commission, the European Central Bank (ECB), and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) –the so-called 'institutions'. In 2017, the consultations between the Greek Government and the institutions continued intensively, while at the Eurogroup meeting on 15 June 2017, an agreement was reached between Greece and the institutions on a policy package of structural measures, which aims at shoring up growth and addressing the underlying structural imbalances in public finances. This agreement includes, among other things, measures relating to the labour market, which are mainly contained in Laws 4472/2017 entitled "Public pension provisions and amendment of provisions of law 4387/2016, measures implementing budgetary targets and reforms, social support measures and labour regulations, Medium-term Financial Strategy Framework 2018-2021 and other provisions," and 4475/2017 "Public pension regulations and other Provisions," presented below.

Social partners reactions following changes in governments

In 2017, the Government did not change.

Labour market reforms or major packages of working life regulations

Laws 4472/2017 and 4475/2017 adopt measures for drastic pension cuts for those already retired, and, at the same time, the amount of the social insurance contributions of self-employed persons is increased. Amendments are also made to the law on the protection of trade unionists from dismissal, and the law on collective redundancies. Furthermore, the application of the extraordinary measures regarding the prevalence of business-level collective bargaining over the sector-related ones and on the suspension of the Minister of Labour's ability to extend the application of collective bargaining agreements to the entire sector is extended at least until the end of the current budgetary adjustment program (2021). The year 2017 ends with the opening of the agenda on the amendment of the legislative framework for strike action. Considerable developments are expected in early 2018, as a draft bill is expected to be brought to the Parliament for voting in January.

Developments in industrial relations 2017

Changes affecting the national-level actors and institutions of industrial relations and social dialogue in 2017

Representativeness

There have been no developments in this area.

Actors

An issue that mainly concerned trade unions in 2017 was the change brought by Law 4472/2017 with respect to the legislative regime of the dismissals of trade unionists. Traditionally, various statutes, in particular, Law 1264/1982 ‘on freedom of association’, guarantee the protection of trade unionists from dismissals by rendering the termination of the employment contract for lawful trade union action null and void. These provisions lay down a limited number of reasons, the occurrence of which justifies the termination of the employment contract of trade unionists and, at the same time, establish a specific administrative procedure to ascertain whether such reasons occur in each particular case. The reasons provided by law that make it exceptionally permissible to dismiss trade unionists include the deception of the employer, the unjustified refusal to perform work, the disclosure of industrial secrets, etc. Law 4472/2017 introduced the following additions/amendments: It prescribes that: a) an unjustified absence from work for more than three days constitutes a legitimate reason for the dismissal of a trade unionist. According to the previous legislative regime, the dismissal of a trade unionist was justified after 7 (seven) days of absence without leave; (b) the termination of a trade unionist’s employment contract is permissible when the trade unionist has committed theft or embezzlement against the employer or a representative of the employer. In any case, the statutory provision under which the termination of a trade unionist’s employment contract for any reason is null and void if the Special Committee for the Protection of Trade Unions has not previously convened and ruled remains in force. The Committee mentioned above is a collective administrative body, and its decisions constitute administrative acts subject to cassation by the Council of the State (Supreme Administrative Court).

There were no major issues such as mergers of peak-level organisations, significant developments in membership etc. affecting the main employer’s organisations.

Institutions

The suspension of the provisions on the accumulation and extension of collective bargaining agreements continues at least until at the end of 2021:

The new laws 4472/2017 and 4475/2017 regulate, among other things, matters concerning industrial relations in the context of the implementation of the new budgetary adjustment program for the 2018-2021 period, which was agreed in June 2017 between the Greek Government and the representatives of Greece’s lenders (IMF, ECB, European Commission). More specifically, provision is made for the continuing suspension of the provisions of Law 1876/1990, which stipulated that when an employment relationship is governed by an individual employment contract and by a business-level and a sector-related collective bargaining agreement (accumulation), then the most favourable provisions for the employee shall apply (favourability principle). Consequently, in accordance with the law in force that is applicable in the context of the adjustment programs of the Greek economy, the business-level collective bargaining agreement (CBA), even when it is less favourable, prevails in case of an accumulation with a sector-related CBA, and this regime is expected to apply at least until the end of the adjustment program, i.e., until 2021. Moreover, Laws 4472 and 4475/2017 provide that the suspension of the provisions of Law 1876/1990 on the scalability of collective bargaining agreements, which provided that the Minister of Labour may extend a sector-related collective bargaining agreement to the employees and employers of the entire industry (i.e., even those who are not members of the contracting organizations), shall continue to apply at least until the end of 2021.

B) Changes in the consultation and control of collective redundancies procedure:

a) The provisions of article 17, par. 1, of Law 4472/2017 provide for the employer's obligation, in the context of consultation with the employees' representatives, to present a "social plan", namely measures aiming at mitigating the effects of the dismissal, such as sums of money to cover self-insurance and sums of money through corporate social responsibility schemes for training aimed at the reintegration of redundant workers into the labour market, or actions for the use of specific programs through the services of the OAED (Greek Manpower Employment Organization) and measures for their re-employment as a matter of priority.

b) The result of the consultation between the employer and the employee representatives shall be recorded in minutes signed by both parties (or, by one side, as the case may be) and submitted, together with other documentation, to the Collective Redundancies Control Division of the ASE (Supreme Labour Council) (article 17, paragraph 2, of Law 4472/2017), not to the Prefect or the Minister of Labour, as provided for in the superseded provision of article 3, par. 3, of Law 1387/83. The Supreme Labour Council consists of 15 members. Five of them are appointed by the government, five by the GSEE (Greek General Confederation of Labour), and five by the employer organizations [one by the SEV (Hellenic Federation of Enterprises), one by the GSEVEE (Hellenic Confederation of Professionals, Craftsmen & Merchants), one by the ESEE (Hellenic Confederation of Commerce and Entrepreneurship), one by the SETE (Association of Greek Tourism Enterprises), and one joint representative]. The role of the ASE is not only advisory or consultative but also decisive, since it decides whether or not to approve collective redundancies. In any case, the decisions of the ASE can be judged, as to the legality of their content, upon a lawsuit filed by the interested party before the civil courts. Accordingly, Law 4472 replaces the mechanism of state intervention in collective redundancies through the Prefect or the Minister of Labour with a tripartite organization (ASE), whose role is decisive.

Changes in the social dialogue processes

In 2017 (March), as usual, the annual National General Collective Bargaining Agreement (EGSSE) was signed, among the leading private sector organizations, i.e. the Greek General Confederation of Labour (GSEE), on the workers' side, and the Hellenic Federation of Enterprises (SEV), the Hellenic Confederation of Professionals, Craftsmen and Merchants (GSEVEE), the Hellenic Confederation of Commerce and Entrepreneurship (ESEE), and the Association of Greek Tourism Enterprises (SETE) on the employers' side. This in itself is not an innovation, but it is a fact that, after the change in the institutional role of the EGSSE under Law 4093/2012, which removed the determination of the minimum wage/salary through the EGSSE from the powers of the social partners, the consultations and the signing of the EGSSE is of great interest because it represents an effort to turn to institutional issues which, in view of the regulation of wage conditions, have not so much been an object of concern for the social partners in the past. [The EGSSE 2017](#) refers to several critical institutional issues, including the adoption of the ILO proposals in the 2016 Diagnostic Report on undeclared work in Greece, tackling racism and violence at work, and the approval of the National Strategy on Health and Safety at Work of the Hellenic Institute of Health and Safety at Work (ELINYAE).

National social dialogue in 2017 – Scope and Contribution

Main social dialogue topics and outcomes in 2017

Themes	Description of issue	Code(s)-interaction	Type of Interaction	Code(s)-Outcome	Outcome
General labour market topics					
Job creation, reduction of unemployment, active labour market policies, labour market participation of different groups	Nothing major to report				No remarkable development - Job creation policies focus on the implementation of business and employer grant schemes by the Greek Manpower Employment Organization (OAED).
Benefits (unemployment, sickness schemes, minimum income)	With Law 4488/2017, the Government tried to make use of the margin given to it under the Stability Mechanism to regulate industrial relations.	1	The social partners have sent written statements with their views to the Government.	2	Law 4501/2017: In the year 2017, an amount of 720,000,000 euros was paid for a one-time social benefit, as a distribution of a Social Dividend to support economically weak persons and vulnerable households. Law 4488/2017: The special maternity protection extends to women who have a child born through a surrogate mother.
Taxation and non-wage related labour costs	Law 4472/2017 is an implementation of government commitments to international lenders.	1	The social partners have sent written statements with their views to the Government.	1	Law 4472/2017: New cuts of the threshold for paying income tax from 2020. As from 1.1.2020, the threshold for paying income tax shall be € 6,250 - Reduction of the corporate tax rate from 29% to 26% - Reduction of the low tax rate bracket of the tax scale to 20% from 22% - Imposition of a special solidarity contribution on income over € 30,000.

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Themes	Description of issue	Code(s)-interaction	Type of Interaction	Code(s)-Outcome	Outcome
Pension reforms	Law 4472/2017 is an implementation of government commitments to international lenders.	1	The social partners have sent written statements with their views to the Government.	1	Law 4472/2017: Reduction of pensions from 2019; more specifically: a) reduction by 18% of the personal excess amount of wage paid in connection to all primary and supplementary pensions; b) abolition of family allowances (spouse and children); and c) freezing of all pension increases until December 2021.
Working life related themes					
Wage setting systems, including the setting of minimum wages (but excluding the 'regular' annual debates about the determination of the level of the new minimum wage)	Law 4472/2017 is an implementation of government commitments to international lenders.	1	The social partners have sent written statements with their views to the Government.	1	Law 4472/2017: the extraordinary regime of collective bargaining as in force following the admission of the country to the ESM, which includes a freezing of increases, the suspension of the scalability of collective bargaining agreements by decision of the Minister of Labour, etc., will apply until the end of the budgetary adjustment program (end of 2018). Law 4472/2017: The wage scales of public servants are merged in 6. Provision is made for wage improvements and pay freezes. Also, in certain professions characterized by particular conditions, special allowances are granted (special conditions allowance, liability allowance, night work, etc.

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Themes	Description of issue	Code(s)-interaction	Type of Interaction	Code(s)-Outcome	Outcome
Working time regulations	With Law 4488/2017, the Government tried to make use of the margin given to it under the Stability Mechanism to regulate industrial relations	1	The social partners have sent written statements with their views to the Government.	2	Law 4488/2017: Employers are obliged to enter any change or modification of the working hours or the organization of the working time of employees into the Ministry of Labour's information system (ERGANI) at the latest by the day of the change or modification, and in any case before the employees come on duty, as well as extra working hours and overtime before they start. A similar obligation is provided for by provisions specific to staff executing a construction work or a technical project.
Terms and conditions of employment, including different forms of contracts	With Law 4488/2017, the Government tried to make use of the margin given to it under the Stability Mechanism to regulate industrial relations.	1	The social partners have sent written statements with their views to the Government.	2	Law 4488/2017: Employers are obliged to enter any case of voluntary resignation of an employee, or termination of an open-ended employment contract, or expiry of a fixed-term or work contract in the ERGANI information system of the Ministry of Labour no later than 4 working days from the day of the retirement, termination, or expiry of the contract.
Health, safety and well-being at work	With Law 4488/2017, the Government tried to make use of the margin given to it under the Stability Mechanism to regulate industrial relations.	1	The social partners have sent written statements with their views to the Government.	2	Law 4488/2017: It was stipulated that Labour Inspectors may impose a temporary or permanent discontinuance of the operations of a business, or a part of it if it is considered that there are violations posing an immediate or

Themes	Description of issue	Code(s)-interaction	Type of Interaction	Code(s)-Outcome	Outcome
					severe risk to the safety and health of workers.
Work-life balance related themes, incl. family leaves	With Law 4488/2017, the Government tried to make use of the margin given to it under the Stability Mechanism to regulate industrial relations.	1	The social partners have sent written statements with their views to the Government.	2	Law 4488/2017: The postpartum part of the maternity leave stipulated by the provisions of Article 7 of the National General CBA of 1993, and Article 7 of the National General CBA of 2000-2001 extends to cover women who have a child born through a surrogate mother – The Special Parental Leave for parents of children suffering from severe diseases is granted to the natural, adoptive or foster parent of a child of up to 18 years of age that is suffering from a severe mental disability, or Down's syndrome, or autism – It has been explicitly stipulated that public procurement contracts must include a requirement of compliance with the workers' health and safety legislation and prevention of occupational hazards.
	Law 4472/2017 is an implementation of government commitments to international lenders.		The social partners have sent written statements with their views to the Government.	1	Law 4472/2017: There is a limitation of the number of days of leave granted to trade unionists, and further reasons for the permitted dismissal of trade unionists are provided for (theft, embezzlement, absence without leave for 3 days)
	The EGSSE (National General Collective	7	Bipartite negotiations between the peak	5	With the EGSSE of 2017, the social partners approved the text on the

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	Bargaining Agreement) is signed every year and is the most important institution of bilateral social dialogue in Greece.		level social partners representing the private sector in Greece.		National Strategy on Health and Safety at Work that was developed by the Hellenic Institute for Occupational Health and Safety (ELINYAE) and is attached to the EGSSE as an annex and an integral part thereof. The social partners also agree to submit it jointly for adoption by the Government, so that it forms the framework for public policies to be pursued in this field and the relevant actions of the national social partners.
Individual Labour Disputes	With Law 4488/2017, the Government tried to make use of the margin given to it under the Stability Mechanism to regulate industrial relations.	1	The social partners have sent written statements with their views to the Government.	2	Law 4488/2017: Acceleration of the procedure for individual labour disputes litigation relating to null dismissal and wage arrears – Reduction of litigation costs for the hearing of lawsuits concerning industrial disputes.
Undeclared work	With Law 4488/2017, the Government tried to make use of the margin given to it under the Stability Mechanism to regulate industrial relations	1	The social partners have sent written statements with their views to the Government.	2	Law 4488/2017: Tightening of inspections and fines and penalties imposed – Tightening of the employers' obligation to keep a table of the personnel in the workplace and declare the working hours and work in excess of normal working hours, to facilitate inspections by labour inspectors – A strict obligation is provided for employers to enter any change or modification of the working hours, or the organization of the working time of employees into the Ministry of Labour's

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					information system (ERGANI) at the latest by the day of the change or modification, to determine more easily any undeclared work in case of an inspection.
	The EGSSE (National General Collective Bargaining Agreement) is signed every year and is the most important institution of bilateral social dialogue in Greece.	7	Bipartite negotiations between the peak level social partners representing the private sector in Greece.	5	Adoption of the ILO proposals in the 2016 Diagnostic Report on undeclared work in Greece.

No major social dialogue debates were held on the following themes: Skills, training and employability;

Note:

Codes for '*Type of interaction*': **1** - Tripartite debate; **2** -Tripartite negotiation; **3** - Formal consultation of both social partners; **4** - Formal consultation of trade unions; **5**- Formal consultation of employers organisations; **6**- Bipartite debate; **7** - Bipartite formal negotiations; **8** - Lobbying from at least one side; **9** – Type of interaction unknown.

Codes for '*Outcome as per 1.1. 2018*': **1** - Unilateral decision by government; **2** - Legislation passed; **3** - Legislation prepared (in legislative process, not concluded); **4** - Tripartite agreement or joint position reached; **5**- Bipartite agreement reached; **6**- Joint opinion of social partners reached; **7** - Issue not closed, ongoing exchange; **8** - Issue dropped, no concrete outcome, no further exchange; **9** – Outcome unknown, none of these types.

Selected major social dialogue debates

Signing of the National General Collective Employment Agreement of 2017

Like every year, [in 2017](#) the negotiation and signature of the EGSSE is of particular interest, because it is the only formal instrument of the bilateral social dialogue that is not spent on a simple exchange of views, but ends in the formation of common positions and the commitment of the top organizations representing workers and employers. In particular after the change in the institutional role of the EGSSE under Law 4093/2012, which removed the determination of the minimum wage/salary through the EGSSE from the powers of the social partners, the consultations and the signing of the EGSSE is of great interest, as it represents an effort by the social partners to turn to the tackling of serious institutional issues of the labour market. The EGSSE 2017 refers to several important institutional matters, including the adoption of the ILO proposals in the 2016 Diagnostic Report on undeclared work in Greece, tackling racism and violence at work, and the approval of the National Strategy on Health and Safety at Work of the Hellenic Institute of Health and Safety at Work (ELINYAE).

Major social partners send position papers to the government.

The [GSEE](#) (Greek General Confederation of Labour) filed [four statements](#) of technical positions to the Ministry of Labour; more specifically:

1. Statement on Collective Bargaining and the determination of the minimum Salary/Wage: The GSEE calls, among other things, for the restoration of the institution under which the CBAs are declared as generally mandatory by the Minister of Labour; the reinstatement of the principle of favourability in the case of accumulation; and the abolition of the ability of associations of persons to sign business-level agreements. It also requests that the determination, with universal binding effect, of the national minimum salary/wage to be included again in the EGSSE.
2. Statement on the right to Strike: The GSEE requests that the prohibition of lockout remains in effect and the conditions for the lawful calling of a strike are not tightened.
3. Statement on Collective Redundancies: The GSEE requests that the approval of collective redundancies by an administrative body remains in effect.
4. Statement on the overall status of labour rights in Greece, in the light of the decisions of international human rights monitoring bodies: The GSEE expresses its opposition to the deregulation of individual labour relations, including, in particular, the provision for a reduced minimum wage for young people up to 25 years of age, the strengthening of flexible forms of employment, etc.

The Hellenic Federation of Enterprises ([SEV](#)) presented its positions on labour issues in written statements to the government, and a workshop on the Future of Work following the Memorandum of Understanding that the SEV organised in October 2017. The SEV's positions can be summarized as follows:

The return to the working arrangements that were in effect before the crisis is an unrealistic utopia that has nothing to do with today's economic realities of the country. The only way to ensure sustainable jobs is that wages are linked to and depend on productivity. Social dialogue is critical and needs to be broadened with issues such as social insurance, education, human resources development and business performance and business growth. When we stop being obsessed with the minimum wage, then the economy and incomes will take off. Over-regulation, as well as too high tax increases, reduce the international competitiveness of larger companies and, by extension, their ability to create new jobs, at the same time excessively burdening small businesses, pushing many of them to the shadow economy as a survival option. It is crucial to reform our education system and adapt it to the new requirements of the economy and the labour market, by linking education more effectively to the business and improving our performance in the online economy. Flexible forms of employment are not

anathema. They are a necessary complement to an ever-changing labour market and are linked to opportunities for additional income and new jobs.

Unilateral government actions – without social dialogue

In 2017, to fulfil its obligations to its international lenders, the government proceeded with the adoption of new legislation concerning - among other things - the labour market and labour relations, in particular through the passing of Laws 4472/2017 and 4475/2017. These laws provide for a series of regulations mainly concerning pension cuts, and arrangements for collective redundancies, the protection of trade unionists from dismissal, the prevalence of business-level CBAs over the sector-related ones, and the suspension of the scalability of CBAs. Also, the government, outside the framework of negotiations with international lenders, adopted Law 4488/2017 in September 2017. According to the Ministry of Labour, this law is an attempt to regulate the labour market, in the light of the limited possibilities for initiative left to the government under the stability program of the Greek economy. Before the adoption of the laws by the Parliament, the social partners sent statements of views and letters to the Prime Minister and the Ministry of Labour; yet the social dialogue did not take any structured form and was more like the announcement of positions than an attempt to form a common final result.

Changes affecting the sectoral and company level social dialogue 2017

The new Statutes 4472/2017 and 4475/2017 stipulate that the suspension of the provisions of Law 1876/1990 "on Free Collective Bargaining," which provided for the favourability principle in the event of an accumulation of regulations continues to apply. Therefore, under the current regime, the business-level CBAs shall prevail over the sector-related ones at least until 2021. Moreover, the suspension of the provisions of Law 1876/1990 on the scalability of collective bargaining agreements, which provided that the Minister of Labour may extend a sector-related CBA to the employees and employers of the entire industry (i.e., even those who are not members of the contracting organizations), shall continue to apply at least until the end of 2021.

Innovation in collective bargaining

There were no significant innovations in collective bargaining practice in 2017 apart from what has been mentioned above.

Collective labour disputes in 2017

In January 2018, a law was adopted which includes a modification of the strike law, which reads as follows: Article 8 of Law 1264/1982 foresaw that a first-level trade union might take a lawful decision on a strike, after a decision of its general assembly with the presence of at least 1/3 of its economically settled members. The new law now stipulates that at least 1/2 of the economically settled members should be present.

In 2017, two general nationwide 24-hour strikes took place, called by the GSEE and the ADEDY (Confederation of Greek Civil Servants' Trade Unions) with a general character against "policies dictated by the memoranda" and austerity measures. The number of participants cannot be estimated with validity nor can the results of the general strikes be valued as their goal is to send a political and social message to the government and they rarely directly affect government policy.

Working time 2017

Law 4488/2017: Employers are obliged to enter any change or modification of the working hours or the organization of the working time of employees into the Ministry of Labour's information system (ERGANI) at the latest by the day of the change or modification, and in any case before the employees come on duty, as well as extra working hours and overtime

before they start. A similar obligation is provided for by provisions specific to staff executing a construction work or a technical project.

Health and well-being at work 2017

Physical working environment

Law 4488/2017 established a general framework of regulations implementing the provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, with a view to removing obstacles to the full and equal participation of Persons with Disabilities in the social and economic life, and the politics of the country. This general regulatory framework does not lay down specific provisions concerning the persons with disabilities as employees, but it is a positive development that will also have an impact on the workplace in the future.

With the EGSSE of 2017, the social partners approved the text on the National Strategy on Health and Safety at Work that was developed by the Hellenic Institute for Occupational Health and Safety (ELINYAE) and is attached to the EGSSE as an annex and an integral part thereof. The social partners also agree to submit it jointly for adoption by the Government, so that it forms the framework for public policies to be pursued in this field and the relevant actions of the national social partners.

Psychosocial working environment

Nothing to mention

Employment status 2017

Type of contracts	Changes made during 2017.
‘Standard’ employment contracts	Law 4488/2017: The current legislation provides for the unemployment benefit to be granted by the OAED (Greek Manpower Employment Organization) only to employees who are made redundant. Consequently, employees who terminated the employment relationship themselves do not receive an unemployment benefit. In the context of the current economic crisis, employers were given a large margin of discretion to modify the working conditions of employees unilaterally, in particular, to make pay cuts. At the same time, the employer's failure to pay the monthly salary to employees, even for several consecutive months, did not justify the employee's retirement from his/her work. As a result, employees who terminated the contract and left their jobs because of the unilateral deterioration of the contractual employment terms by the employer, or the employer's failure to pay the monthly salary were not entitled to unemployment benefit. To address this problem, Law 4488/2017 provided that an unemployed person may consider the unilateral adverse alteration of his/her working conditions as a termination of the employment relationship by the employer and be subsidized by receiving a working allowance from the OAED, provided that, together with the application for a subsidy, an out-of-court notice and proof of service to the former employer are produced.

Self-employed	Law 4472/2017: It stipulates that the basis for calculating the social security contributions of self-employed persons would change as of 1.1.2018, with a consequent increase in the monthly premium amount paid by self-employed persons.
Fixed term contracts	No major changes made during 2017
Temporary agency workers	No major changes made during 2017
Posted workers	No major changes made during 2017
Seasonal workers	No major changes made during 2017
Zero hour contracts	No major changes made during 2017

References

Law 4488/2017, Pension and other insurance regulations, strengthening of workers' protection, rights of persons with disabilities and other provisions.
Law 4472/2017, Public sector pension provisions and amendments of the provisions of Law 4387/2016, measures for the implementation of fiscal targets and reforms, social support measures and labour regulations, Medium-term Financial Strategy Framework 2018-2021 and other provisions.
Law 4475/2017, Ratification of the amended Agreement Establishing the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean, Public Pensions and Other Provisions.
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WPEF18030

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