



ANDREW ON WEDNESDAY

Breathlessly

Egrant

At this point it's complete bedlam.

Beyond the truths and fabrications, veracities and falsehoods, yonder of what people think and what the facts are it has indeed turned into a situation where this country is grinding to a halt. This is indeed the tail end of a political soap (or soup?) opera. What we have seen unravelling over these last years can be documented as two political parties fighting it out tooth and nail not only on the issues that matter but seemingly to get their pound of flesh – dishing out 'the scandals and the scoops' when it is 'strategically convenient' to reveal them has become the rule of the day.

This political scenario has sunk to depths that I personally cannot recollect. When two leaders, even if they come from opposing positions, cannot see eye-to-eye in itself becomes a seminal moment. We will keep hearing about this Egrant issue for weeks and months to come. At this point Head of State HE President of Malta Marie Louise Coleiro Preca needs to come into play and guide this nation out of this conundrum of accuracies and falsehoods and in this delicate moment offer guidance at least for the leaders to keep some sort of level headedness.

Institutions

What happened during these last years, in terms of a warped and twisted political dialectic, is bad enough. However, the biggest stain in all of this state of affairs was the negative impact on the country's institutions. Even though segments of the public opinion have criticised the police, the courts, the financial institutions with acrimony, safeguarding our institutional integrity is foremost – and we can now understand why.

Threatening libel

It is indeed worrying that politicians (or people in the political landscape) are now threatening libel every time a journalist confronts them with an inquiry and a question. That some journalists' behaviour is akin to harassment might be true. However, we need to bear in mind that it is the obligation of every journalist to probe even when the situation becomes hot under the collar.

Council of Europe research

Colleagues of mine, Prof. Marilyn Clark assisted by Dr Anna Grech from the Faculty for So-



cial Wellbeing, were recently commissioned to conduct a survey among the 47 member states of the Council of Europe and Belarus titled 'Journalists under pressure – Unwarranted interference, fear and self-censorship in Europe'. The sample base was of 940 journalists and some indications from the research are indeed worrying and distressing. As the official press release refers: "[I]t shows that journalists in Europe are often exposed to serious unwarranted interference in their work, including intimidation and violence. As a consequence, many also suffer from fear, which frequently leads to self-censorship." The research goes on to mention that physical assault and psychological violence is not an uncommon occurrence.

Some facts taken from the official CoF's Press Release:

- Almost one-third of the journalists who participated in the survey had experienced physical assault over a period of three years;
- Nearly three quarters of respondents said that they did not feel protected from targeted surveillance;
- The most common interference, reported by 69% of the journalists, was psychological violence, including intimidation, threats, slandering and humiliation;
- The second most common interference was cyberbullying, reported by 53%, mostly in the form of accusations of being partisan, personal attacks, public defamation and smear campaigns;
- Reports of intimidation from

interest groups were the third most frequent interference mentioned (50%), followed by being threatened with force (46%), intimidation by political groups (43%), targeted surveillance (39%) and intimidation by the police (35%);

- Incidents of theft, or confiscation or destruction of property related to their work, were reported by 21% of journalists, non-contact personal theft by 19% and sexual harassment by 13%;
- Almost one quarter of respondents (23%) said that over the last three years they had experienced judicial intimidation (arrest, threat of prosecution or actual prosecution), mostly through defamation laws;
- Over one-third of the journalists (35%) participating in the study reported that they did not have access to mechanisms to protect them against the interference with their work;
- Fear of becoming victims of future unwarranted interference was high, especially with regard to psychological violence (60%), cyberbullying (57%), intimidation by individuals (51%) and by interest groups (45%), and physical violence (41%);
- One-third of the journalists were concerned about the safety of their families and friends;
- One in five of the respondents said that they felt pressured to present their reports in ways which are more amenable to their employers. Many felt compelled to tone

down controversial stories (31%), withhold information (23%) or abandon stories altogether (15%);

- 36% of journalists said that the pressures they experienced made them more committed to resist censorship, whether from outside forces or self-imposed.

(<http://www.coe.int/en/web/portal/-/en-europe-les-journalistes-sont-exposes-a-la-violence-aux-intimidations-et-a-l-autocensure-selon-une-etude-du-conseil-de-l-europe>)

Worrying outcomes to say the least.

Stakeholders

The Faculty for Social Wellbeing has organised a successful meeting with stakeholders. That the Faculty bridges the gap with its social partners is crucial to ensure the best possible impact. Academia cannot exist in isolation without its collaborators, namely, service providers and service users, a mission taken on board by the University of Malta.

France

The election in France is indeed another matter that might affect our country, definitely a worrying situation for the EU. With all the issues that have gripped our country we seem to be ignoring that in France the far-right led by Marine Le Pen (that has promised a referendum on whether to stay or to Frexit, amongst other) seems to be with a good chance to find herself elected. The showdown will be with centrist newcomer Emmanuel Macron. Pleasures yet to come!

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