Resolution on the rule of law in Malta, five years after the assassination of Daphne Caruana Galizia

2022/2866(RSP) - 20/10/2022 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 564 votes to 10, with 17 abstentions, a resolution on the rule of law in Malta, five years after the assassination of Daphne Caruana Galizia.

The text adopted in plenary was tabled by the EPP, S&D, Renew, Greens/EFA, ECR and the Left groups.

As a reminder, the Maltese anti-corruption investigative journalist and blogger Daphne Caruana Galizia was assassinated in a car bomb attack on 16 October 2017. She was the target of harassment and numerous threats in the form of threatening phone calls, letters and text messages, as well as an arson attack on her house. The self-confessed hit man testified in court on 16 March 2021 that two years before Daphne Caruana Galizia was murdered there was a previous and separate plot to assassinate her using an AK-47 rifle. On the first day of their trial on 14 October 2022, two other accused hit men pleaded guilty in court and were sentenced to 40 years' imprisonment.

The murder investigations led by the Maltese authorities and assisted by Europol have led to the identification, arraignment and ongoing trial of several suspects and one of the potential masterminds behind the murder, the owner of the Dubai-based company 17 Black Ltd. and former member of the Board of Directors of ElectroGas Malta Ltd., responsible for generating the majority of Malta's electricity, who was arrested on 20 November 2019 in an apparent attempt to escape Malta. The United States Federal Bureau of Investigation was also involved in the investigations. Furthermore, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) was used to conceal transactions allegedly linked to corruption that Daphne Caruana Galizia was exposing at the time of her assassination.

In its resolution, Parliament paid tribute to Daphne Caruana Galizia five years after her assassination and to her essential work in exposing corruption, organised crime, tax fraud and money laundering, and in holding those involved in such illegal activities accountable. It strongly condemned the criminalisation of, attacks on and killings of journalists for doing their job while stressing the crucial role they play in unveiling the truth, protecting democracy and ending the culture of impunity. It emphasised that independent media and active civil society are fundamental pillars of justice, democracy and the rule of law.

While acknowledging the progress made in the ongoing judicial proceedings on the murder of Daphne Caruana Galizia, Parliament deeply regretted that they have led to only three convictions related to the execution of the assassination, following the hit men's guilty plea. It reiterated its call for the full and continuous involvement of Europol in all aspects of the murder investigation and all related investigations.

Parliament is also appalled about the **lack of progress** in prosecuting the corruption and money laundering that Daphne Caruana Galizia had been investigating at the time of her murder, which involved suspects at the highest political levels. It expressed concern about the recent revelations of repeated inaction on European Arrest Warrants against those connected with high political officials.

Malta is called on to:

- address challenges related to the length of investigations into high-level corruption cases, including by establishing a robust track record of final judgments;

- make progress on investigations into cases of possible attempts by then public officials to conceal evidence and obstruct investigations and judicial proceedings;

- reach an agreement on depoliticising the appointment of the chief justice involving the judiciary in the procedure, taking into account European standards on judicial appointments;

- ensure that the proposed reforms to improve the situation of media freedom meet the European and international standards on the protection of journalists, in particular as regards preventing and sanctioning threats against and harassment of journalists, publicly and online, and to swiftly implement them;

- further address existing concerns related to media freedom and the independence of public media from political interference, including a framework to ensure transparency in state advertising, and the increasing use of hate speech on social media;

- introduce additional measures and other safeguards to improve the environment for critical and independent journalism in Malta, and the accountability of politicians and officials.

Lastly, Parliament stressed that the Maltese Citizenship by Investment (CBI) programme remains a source of major concern. It recalled its position that **EU citizenship is not for sale** and calls for an immediate **ban of the programme** in Malta and throughout the EU. It also welcomed the Commission's proposal for a directive to combat strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPP suits).