

News

of speech to to investigate



we are in a time where the 'them versus us' mentality has peaked once again, we need to send a clear message to people, and we can only start from the administration and the executive. That message must be that you do not harass a journalist.

"There are different forms of harassment of journalists – from verbal insults to placing obstacles to prevent them from carrying out their responsibilities, to physical assault and to blacklisting. We have had incidents involving journalists in the independent media over the years, as well as journalists who come from the party media."

"Whichever media you come from, it is wrong for journalists to be insulted or harassed just for doing their job. Social media and online news with comments boards opened up a whole new world for journalists to be put under the spotlight. We have seen instances where an editor writes an editorial and the comments boards are immediately flooded with people saying 'Ah, you're a Nationalist' or 'You're a Labourite'. If the editor is expressing an opinion or a thought, do

we really need to start swearing at him/her? This is what I mean by the need to create a media friendly environment, sending the right message."

Under the PN and now under the PL, TVM has always been accused of leaning towards the party in government. This newsroom asked the MP whether she believes TVM should be given more autonomy and independence.

"Both PBS and the Broadcasting Authority should be more autonomous and independent, and that would make them more impartial, giving them the objectivity they need to really carry out their responsibilities."

"Before entering politics I presented a case on behalf of PBS to declare that the Broadcasting Authority board members had such a conflict of interest that PBS itself could not be judged fairly and impartially in that particular case. Two members on the Broadcasting Authority board are appointed by one party and two by the other. In that case, there were two people who were publicly commenting in favour of one

party against the other on social media, and then judging the reporter concerned, which did not make sense. PBS should really be there for the public."

"If you look at PBS, there is no media awareness transmitted to the people – they don't really question what is happening. If you look at foreign public broadcasting services, there is more culture included and more knowledge transmitted, and there is deep analysis. This is what I expect from PBS, irrespective of who is in government – PN or PL. If we do not sit around the table and trust these agencies – our national units – with them taking the lead instead of having to depend on us, then I don't think we can expect the 'us vs them' culture to change."

'I start to question whether we are both EU member states'

Recently an investigative journalist in Slovakia was murdered, and the situation there has been compared to the situation here. This newsroom asked the MP for her opinion on how the two countries handled the similar situation.

"Regarding Malta and Slovakia, I start to question whether we are both EU member states – in the sense that being a full EU member state means having the same understanding of democracy, the rule of law, political responsibility and freedom of expression. The same incident – the murder of an investigative journalist looking into corruption and organised crime – should, if all the other factors are the same, have given rise to the same reaction."

"We have not had the same reaction from the political sector and we've had a somewhat mixed reaction from civil society. We have a strong civil society that spoke up. I use the word 'strong' rather than numerous as I believe that, in our culture, we are still afraid to speak and show our faces publicly but still protest silently in our circle of family and friends."

"Civil Society is still organising events: the fact that, only a few hours after Daphne Caruana Galizia's memorial was removed it was all there again shows that there is a strong response by civil society to the murder. Even on this subject, however, we still have this us and them mentality. The murder of a journalist should be about all of us, not about us versus them."

"The political sector has turned away from any political responsibility. The Prime Minister and ministers are both members of the Labour Party, as well as the government. In government, they are responsible for ensuring that the national authorities function well and also have to political responsibility when such incidents occur."

"Are the police functioning well? I have met several police officers whose hearts and minds are on the job, and who work relentlessly for justice. But then there is the top tier of police ranks where there are too many who are politically appointed or politically connected. So from the outside, there seems to be a conflict, possibly even internally."

"Politicians also have another responsibility. When something that shocks the country occurs, they do not only have the responsibility of finding whoever committed the crime and punishing that person through the justice system. In fact, that shouldn't even be connected in any way to you and should run on its own independent on politicians. You should be there saying to the people: 'Yes, I agree with you, this was wrong and I am ready to shoulder responsibility because it happened under my watch – not because I had anything to do with it directly, but the fact that it happened under my watch should be

sufficient for at least someone to offer a resignation'."

"We should have had an inquiry to check whether some of the authorities were lax in their responsibilities."

Turning to the protection of journalists, Comodini Cachia said that when a journalist is carrying out certain duties, such as investigative journalists looking into corruption and organised crime, some national authority must automatically realise that there is a certain security risk in that kind of work."

"Because the journalists are fulfilling a responsibility they have towards society, society must give them protection. Whether that protection comes from the police force or from a very strong Institute of Journalists that can coordinate such protection is something to be discussed. Daphne Caruana Galizia's murder really should have resulted in an inquiry as to whether any authority in Malta should have realised she was at risk and have made sure she was under some form of protection."

"I can understand that journalists investigating a corrupt authority or a corrupt minister would be hesitant to then trust that same authority they are investigating to protect them. If that is the case, then we must find a system – be it providing a fund for private security, or a fund for the Institute itself to provide security. This debate must start."

'There are times when we are not going to agree on an issue'

This newsroom asked the MP about her relationship with PN Leader Adrian Delia, given that she had broken rank on the IVF leave vote and abstained.

"It's a good relationship, it's a friendly relationship. We communicate like any other MP communicates with the leader. We do understand that each one of us has strong opinions and are willing to voice our opinions. We both agree that we are willing to understand where the other is coming from and the basis for the opinions we express."

Because both of us are strongly opinionated, we know that there are times when our conclusions will not be the same. We discuss and we debate, but we do realise when we aren't going to agree on an issue. Disagreeing on an issue does not mean disagreeing on the party or on what the party needs to do, or how it has to develop, or how to take the party forward. So there is a distinction. We are opinionated about certain issues, but we still work towards one aim, towards the best interests of the people through the Nationalist Party."