

MEPs demand probe into corruption in Malta and Slovakia

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News

MEPs have demanded an independent inquiry into alleged continuing corruption in Malta and Slovakia.



Daphne Caruana Galizia | *Photo credit: Press Association*

The call comes after Parliament at its Strasbourg plenary endorsed a resolution on the rule of law in Malta and Slovakia by a large majority.

The resolution follows the murders of two journalists in the countries and is the result of a working group on the issue.

In the resolution, MEPs said they “deplored serious shortcomings” in the rule of law in Malta and Slovakia and warned of “rising threats” for journalists throughout the EU.

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The resolution was passed on Thursday by 398 votes to 85 and 69 abstentions and was greeted by MEPs from across the political divide.

It endorses the conclusions of the working group set up by the civil liberties committee to monitor the rule of law in the EU, particularly in Malta and Slovakia, following the murders.

Without naming any Member States, it goes on to condemn the “continuous efforts of a growing number of EU Member State governments to weaken the rule of law, the separation of powers and the independence of the judiciary”.

The text states that the assassinations of Daphne Caruana Galizia in Malta, Ján Kuciak and Martina Kušnírová in Slovakia, and the murder of journalist Viktoria Marinova in Bulgaria, had “a chilling effect on journalists” across the EU.

“The European Union must not tolerate journalist murders and attacks. We call for an independent international investigation into the murder of Daphne Caruana Galizia” **Sven Giegold MEP**

It says, “A strong democracy based on the rule of law cannot function without strong and independent media.”

On Malta, MEPs said they want an independent international public inquiry into the murder of Caruana Galizia and alleged cases of corruption, financial crimes, money laundering, fraud and tax evasion reported by her, which, said the resolution, involve Maltese high-ranking current and former public officials.

The text insists that all libel cases brought by members of the Maltese Government against her and her family be withdrawn.

Parliament also wants the investor citizenship and residence schemes which allow foreigners to gain residence or citizenship rights in Malta in exchange for a high investment, terminated immediately, as these programmes pose “serious risks” to the fight against money laundering and “result in the actual sale of EU citizenship”.

Turning to Slovakia, the resolution “welcomes” the charges brought by the Slovak authorities against the alleged instigator of the murders of Kuciak and Kušnírová and urges the investigation to continue at both a national and international level.

All aspects of the case should be fully investigated, including any possible political links to the crimes, say MEPs.

The resolution voices "concern about the allegations of corruption, conflicts of interest, impunity and revolving doors in Slovakia's circles of power."

"Thanks to the cooperation with Europol, the Slovaks could arrest the suspects in the murder of Ján Kuciak and Martina Kušnírová and due to the EU's pressure, the Maltese government is now slowly gearing into action to modernise problematic laws" **Sophie in 't Veld MEP**

It also warns about the "politicisation and lack of transparency" in selection and appointment processes, such as for the position of chief of police.

Reacting to the outcome of the vote, German Greens MEP Sven Giegold said, "The European Union must not tolerate journalist murders and attacks. We call for an independent international investigation into the murder of Daphne Caruana Galizia.

"We welcome that the Maltese government intends to implement many recommendations of the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe, but the Maltese Labour party is not getting to the worst of the problems."

"The corrupt members of Joseph Muscat's Labour government are still in office. The Maltese government continues to not seriously tackle rampant corruption, money laundering and tax avoidance."

"Malta as a safe haven for the money of financial criminals is a threat to European security," he added.

Giegold is the economic and financial spokesperson for his group and a member of the working group on the rule of law in Malta and Slovakia in the Parliament.

He told this website, "In Slovakia there has been progress in clearing up the murders of Ján Kuciak and Martina Kušnírová, but threats and intimidation of journalists happen every day and freedom of the press is in acute danger."

"The clear-up rate of fraud cases is the lowest in the European Union, and corruption, impunity, conflicts of interest and revolving door effects are of grave concern. The problems are organised crime, corruption and nepotism, but the ruling Socialists do not want to get their fingers burnt over influential power circles."

He said that European Commission Vice-President Frans Timmermans "must finally do his job and present an EU mechanism for ensuring democracy, the rule of law and fundamental rights."

Further comment came from Sophie in 't Veld, a Dutch Alde MEP who chairs the Rule of Law Monitoring Group in Parliament.

She said: "European pressure and cooperation can certainly lead to results. There is evidence of this: thanks to the cooperation with Europol, the Slovaks could arrest the suspects in the murder of Ján Kuciak and Martina Kušnírová and due to the EU's pressure, the Maltese government is now slowly gearing into action to modernise problematic laws."

The EPP group also greeted the resolution, with Roberta Metsola, who formed part of the group that visited Malta and Slovakia prior to its drafting, saying, “Europeans are defined according to their values: the rule of law, the fight against corruption and the protection of journalists are all European values which we should be proud of.”

“This is what this resolution is all about: making sure that all Member States protect our values. From our visits to Malta and Slovakia, it is clear that important changes are needed, and they should be adopted quickly,” Metsola added.

Slovakia’s head of delegation in the EPP, Ivan Štefanec, also spoke about the situation in Slovakia, saying, “We welcome the latest updates on the arraignment of the suspected mastermind behind the murders of Ján Kuciak and his fiancée Martina Kušnírová. But authorities shouldn’t stop.”

“We want to know the outcome of what Kuciak was working on, because his murder shouldn’t mean that his stories are not investigated. That is what the masterminds behind his murder want, and we want to make sure that this does not happen,” he said.

About the author

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