

WRITTEN QUESTION E-0278/02  
by Luckas Vander Taelen (Verts/ALE)  
to the Commission

Subject: Attack on journalists' freedom of speech in Malta

Recent events in Malta are quite a preoccupying sign for journalists' freedom of speech in this country. A TV sports journalist was suspended by the Malta 'Public Broadcasting Services' and stopped from appearing on state TV for one week because he had produced an investigative programme on the possibility of corruption in Maltese football.

Even worse is the attitude of the Malta Labour Party (MLP) leadership that, after a vicious campaign against the company 'Where's Everybody' which produces three of the most popular programmes on national TV, including one on how the EU institutions function, has now decided to boycott all 'Where's Everybody's' TV programmes and leading personalities.

Considering that the MLP represents 46% of the Maltese electorate, and is the alternative Malta Government, such a boycott is a veritable attack on the basic norms of democracy and free speech.

The MLP boycott, apart from showing a crass disrespect for people's intelligence, effectively means that independent journalists are now under threat by the Malta Labour Party for not towing its party line.

It is very unfortunate that the leadership of the MLP, the potential alternative government of Malta, seems to want Malta to go back to the eighties, when political hatred was the order of the day.

With this background in mind, is the Commission bringing up this issue in its negotiations with the Maltese government? What arguments does the Commission intend bringing up with the Maltese authorities during negotiations in order to ensure the freedom of speech and the investigative liberty of Maltese journalists, without any threats from the establishment or prospective Prime Ministers?