

WRITTEN QUESTION E-4920/05

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to the Commission

Subject: Anomalous situation of TV broadcasting in Malta

In recent years the situation of the media sector in various Member States has become more and more problematic regarding conflicts of interest, pluralism, quality, etc. etc. A particular case is represented by Malta, where the board of the national Broadcasting Authority is nominated by the Prime Minister, after consultation with the Leader of the Opposition. Given the fact that for the particular electoral system of Malta only two parties have parliamentary groups, currently we have two people nominated by the Christian Democrats (Partit Nazzjonalista), 2 people nominated by the Socialists (Malta Labour Party) and a Chairperson on which the two parties have agreed.

There are four TV stations in Malta. One is the public state TV, where there is some form of representation of all political parties - according to strength of votes - in political debates.

The second one is a private TV station (SMASH TV), where any political party can buy air time against payment.

There are finally two other TV stations in Malta. One belongs to the Malta Labour Party and the other to the Partit Nazzjonalista. The Broadcasting Authority decided nearly ten years ago that there should not be any internal balance (even a minimum!) in these TV stations.

The state, the political parties and the Church own radio and/or television stations. Together they dominate the audio and audiovisual media. An audience survey held in October 2002 showed that the Maltese spend 78% of their radio listening time following a radio station owned by one of these institutions. During the same period the Maltese used 69% of their viewing time between 7.00 p.m. and midnight watching stations owned by the political parties or the state. They watch other Maltese TV stations for only 1% of their viewing time. The Maltese watch all other stations that reach the country terrestrially, through the cable system or by means of satellite, for 30% of their TV watching time.

Is the Commission aware of this unique situation of TV broadcasting in Malta?

Does the Commission share the point of view that pluralism in the media sector in all the Member States is an important question for the whole Union, even without having a clear legislative basis for direct action?

Does the Commission intend taking action with the Maltese authorities in order to ensure that this anomalous situation is rectified so that other political parties, minorities and civil society in Malta are given the opportunity to voice their opinions on ALL TV media?