

To Hon Alexis Tsipras, Prime Minister of the Hellenic Republic.

Copied to Press

Maria Efimova is a Russian national currently in an Athens prison waiting for a hearing on an extradition request made by Malta where she is wanted to answer for a complaint filed by her former employer, Pilatus Bank plc, that accuses her of misappropriating less than €2,000. Normally such a matter should not reach your attention. Nor indeed is it normal for a petty private dispute (Maria Efimova is seeking redress claiming Pilatus Bank owes her three months of salary payments) to be subject to an international arrest warrant and extradition.

Maria Efimova was a source that provided information on illegal activities in Pilatus Bank plc. She provided information to Daphne Caruana Galizia who, as you know, has since been assassinated in a car bombing. The brutal nature of her killing has been widely interpreted as a warning by her killers to her sources no longer to provide journalists and the authorities with information on what they know.

Maria Efimova has left Malta in fear for her life. The government mobilised a vilification campaign led by our prime minister who suggested Maria Efimova might be an agent acting on behalf of the Kremlin. While in hiding in your country fake news stories in Malta and in Cyprus have appeared falsely alleging she is suspected of killing Daphne Caruana Galizia and more recently attempting to kill the Skirpals in the UK.

These outrageous and utterly baseless accusations have been propagated by officials and agents of the ruling party in Malta whose leading members have been personally implicated by the information provided by Maria Efimova in the corrupt activities conducted by Pilatus Bank.

The sole owner of Pilatus Bank, an Ali Sadr, has since last week been detained by the United States federal authorities and indicted with several counts of financial crimes.

It is virtually unheard of for an EU member state to provide asylum to a fugitive from another EU member state. Cooperation in justice and law enforcement is an important pillar for our Union. But it is premised on consensus on European democratic values and principles.

There can be no democracy without free journalism. And there can be no journalism without the protection of sources. A journalist has been killed and her source has suffered vilification, exile, considerable financial hardship and now arrest and detention.

It hurts to say this but the fear she has for her own life and that of her husband and children – citizens of your country – should she be made to return to Malta, is reasonable and borne out by the facts.

The European Union is not a club of governments, especially when one of those governments steps away from the shared values of freedom and democracy. In the name of those values, we appeal to you to grant Maria Efimova asylum in your country in order for the extradition process to be terminated.

The need for the freedom of expression in Europe to prevail, outweighs the need for the prosecution of the alleged misappropriation of less than 2,000 euro filed by someone facing 125 years in an American federal prison for a long series of financial crimes.

We would not be alone in volunteering to reimburse Pilatus Bank for the loss it argues Maria Efimova has caused it to suffer as a result of this alleged misappropriation.

Maria Efimova helped us learn that our country was harbouring a banker for the corrupt and the criminal. Her account, whenever this has been possible, has been verified as truthful and correct.

For this she does not deserve to be rewarded with continued persecution, not to mention the real risk for her life and the life of her family.

Respectfully,

Occupy Justice, Civil Society Network, Il-Kenniesa and L-Awturi
Malta