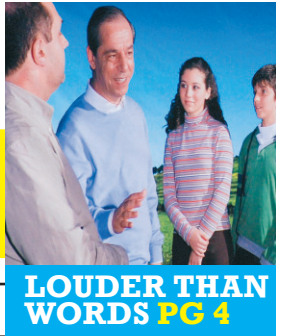


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# Europe takes Malta to court over spring hunting

## European Court requested to take interim measures to halt this year's season

RAPHAEL VASSALLO

THE European Commission will today announce the opening of European Court action against Malta for repeated violation of the 1979 Birds Directive, after the country permitted hunting in spring for each year since its accession to the Union in 2003.

In a terse statement to be published this morning, the Commission expresses its dissatisfaction with Malta's failure to phase out of hunting in spring – an illegal practice according to European law – and announces that action will now be taken against Malta in the European Courts of Justice.

The Commission also warns

that, even if the case may take years to conclude, the European Court will be requested to take interim measures to put an immediate halt to spring hunting, should the Government of Malta's insist on opening the season again this year.

Similar action was taken last year against Poland, after the government failed to respond to the Commission's reasoned opinion on a construction project in the environmentally sensitive Rospuda valley during the breeding season. The European Court issued a specific order to halt construction works while the case was ongoing.

Well-placed sources in Brussels have suggested that the same will apply to Malta, if it

carries on playing for time on this controversial issue.

The Commission's decision comes in the wake of a final written warning to Malta in October 2007 regarding the hunting of quail (Maltese: "summien") and turtledove ("gamien") during spring. The government officially replied in January 2008, and although the text has not since been made available, it is evident from today's decision that the Commission was not satisfied with the response.

The government has long argued that, like any other member state, Malta is free to apply for a derogation from the Birds Directive under the terms of Article 9. This right was specified in the Accession

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## Louis Galea accuses PBS of collusion with Labour

EDUCATION Minister Louis Galea has alleged that PBS officials were in collusion with the Labour Party in the management of news, in a letter of protest sent yesterday to the station's chairman Joe Fenech Conti.

Urging the chairman to investigate why a press conference he gave on Monday was not covered on the PBS news bulletins, the minister called on Fenech Conti

to "take the necessary steps if it results that there was wrongdoing from some employee".

Galea's press conference was in reply to Labour's proposal to increase a year in primary education, between kindergarten and Year 1, outlining what he said were the consequences of such a policy if the Opposition had to implement it.

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## Times journalist appointed PBS head of news

KARL SCHEMBRI

THE Times journalist Natalino Fenech was yesterday confirmed as the new Head of News and registered editor for Public Broadcasting Services, after the resignation of Sylvana Cristina a couple of weeks ago.

Speaking to MaltaToday Midweek yesterday night, Fenech said his appointment came after he had long expressed interest in the post.

"I was approached by the PBS Chairman, who asked me

whether I was still interested in the post after it became vacant again," Fenech said.

Incidentally, The Times yesterday carried an editorial called 'No news manager is bad news', calling for the immediate replacement of Cristina.

"Ideally, a suitable candidate should be found immediately to fill the post of registered editor and news manager," The Times said. "Past experience and cumbersome recruiting mechanisms make this quite unrealistic, at least for a few weeks. An ad hoc solution has, therefore,

to be found, especially with an impending election."

The 45-year-old journalist and author of Fatal Flight, The Maltese Obsession with Killing Birds – a highly controversial book about the indiscriminate hunting of migratory birds over Malta – pre-empted criticism of bias which is most often levelled by the Opposition towards The Times by saying his only agenda was objective news.

"It is a long tested tactic to label people by associating them with one side or the other," he said.

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