

## **Enrico Brivio**

I am a correspondent for "Il Sole 24 Ore" which is a financial newspaper in Italy and I represent here also the International Press Association, which probably is the biggest press room in the world even if in Washington, they may not think so. But it is practically, because we have almost 1,000 accredited journalists and the majority are members of our organization. So, just to explain what is, in two words, the International Press Association: it was established in 1975 and was the first organization to bring together foreign journalists of all categories and specializations based in Belgium and from all the different organs - TV, radio, press agencies or newspapers. It is not a journalist trade union in the classical sense, it is an association which has as its aim the assistance of its members in the exercise of their profession. We also represent correspondents, in the relations with the institutions for all the problems concerning communications, the organization of press conferences and other issues.

So, why am I here? I am not what you may call an investigative journalist – some of whom you probably had the pleasure to hear in the previous days, and which is a category of journalists for which I have a great respect and admiration. But I think even here in Brussels, correspondents have a stimulating job that allows us to come in contact with Ministers, members of the European Commission, MPs, officials, and with the way of thinking of 25 and even more different countries, if you consider that there are also members of third countries.

The risk, maybe, as correspondent, is living and writing within what I call a communitarian bubble. So -- a bubble where you have to deal with directives, comitology, qualified majority, block minorities and all things that seem very remote from everyday life and problems that may sometimes seem a little far from the problems of the world, real stories like some cases of frauds and misdemeanours that some professional investigative professionals in the audience here are used to come into contact with.

Still, I think it is very important for you to understand my world and for me to understand yours. Why? Because if you want to have a complete picture of the world on the media and information, no matter what country you live in, you will have to come to terms with the flow of information in Brussels, which often is often channelled through almost 1,000 correspondents, actually more than 1,000. And also because it is also useful for me to understand better, when I write about Community frauds or OLAF investigations in Brussels, some of your experiences on the ground in different countries. That will allow me to give a real perspective to the stories from Brussels, and help me to understand exactly what happens outside this Communitarian bubble.

There are a few aspects I would like to touch, in the relationship between journalists and operators in the field of investigation. I would briefly touch on different subjects: the structure of the current information society, the time factor, the different national sensibility and the converging and sometimes

conflicting roles of journalist and investigators, that maybe is the point that interests you most.

As far as the structure on news is concerned, I would say that the world of news has drastically changed in the last few years. Now, as we all know, we are totally overwhelmed with such a flow of information. Every day I receive hundreds of e-mails, like you do, probably. In this respect, I think we have to be realistic and acknowledge that the fierce competition between media and the large flow of information lead a large part of the media to be more sensational. To catch the attention of the reader or the TV-viewer you have to strike, nowadays, a higher cord. And even newspapers with the solid reputation in the business community, like the Financial Times or the Wall Street Journal or we can mention, if I may, Il Sole 24 Ore, are forced nowadays to carry more sensational titles, to gain the attention of the reader, which they would not have done 10 years ago.

And so I know that if I asked everybody here in this room if they would prefer a long, in-depth, accurate story, everybody would say "yes", but we have to face reality. Even many newspapers or news media that carry serious articles, now have to strike the attention of the reader if they want to survive in a very competitive market.

So the lesson number one is, I think, and we cannot escape it: if you have a message, I think you have to make it sexy.

Unusual stories, broad conspiracies in many countries, frauds involving large amounts of euros unfortunately will have greater possibilities to pass through the media and reach a large number of citizens than very detailed essays and reports. So if you want to reach a large number of citizens with your message and make it known all over Europe, I am afraid you will have to play according to the rules of the game and grab the interest of journalists with those elements that can feed their appetite: so, as I said, unusual stories, broad investigations, large confiscations of illegal goods or drugs. And we also know other rules, like sometimes leaking a document in an exclusive way to one media can bring that media to give much more emphasis to the fact than if that piece of news had been released to every other media. It may be a cheap rule but sometimes it works, so if you want to be effective I think you have to consider also the fierce competition that exists between different media and use it for your own purpose.

Another point I wanted to touch on is the time factor. Being forced to cover the events for a daily newspaper day by day, I probably have the privilege to have a little bit more time than my colleagues who work for a news agency or Tv, because news agencies and Tv have to give the news in real time. But still, I have a time constriction much stronger than some other journalists that, as I said, I respect and admire. Those journalists who may work for days and days in an investigative story for a magazine. No matter what, I have to file my story at the end of the day. So for this, I think availability and prompt response by the press official of an institution is extremely important. I think that most of the correspondents in Brussels are very serious professionals, most of them are, I know them very well. And they like to check with two or three different

sources the information they get, sometimes using also a network of their colleagues in their own country or in other countries and exchange information with other correspondents in more provincial and local situations where some stories may have happened or where some events may have taken place. But in these cases, it is extremely important to have the possibility to have access to a spokesman or to an official source, to have a confirmation or to correct wrong information. But these things have to be made almost in real time in many cases. In my case, I have a few hours time. The article must be written by 9 or 10 o'clock at night, at the latest, and be published the day after. So, I understand that some of you may have legal constrictions and you may have to ask permission to release the information, and the permission could be hard to get. But in some cases, to give an answer tomorrow will be too late, because a story may already be too old and readers will not need a following article on the same story the day after. So my suggestion is, if you trust a journalist or if he comes from a reputable media it is better, I think, to give an off-the-record comment or an unofficial confirmation in background than nothing. At least, your point of view will be registered and have an impact on tomorrow's stories, otherwise it may be absolutely lost in the sea of news produced every day.

As far as the different national sensitivities, I think that the Brussels pressroom is a privileged point of view to understand different ways of thinking. When I arrived here eight years ago, I had been used to hear in Italy, about bribes of millions euros during the Tangentopoli affairs and scandals and I could not understand why German and Nordic journalists were so excited about some Communitarian frauds involving a few thousand euros. But then living here you understand why there are different conceptions and ideas about the public office. For the Scandinavian mentality, transparency, for instance, is the main character that every institution should display in a very open way. On the contrary, a Spanish or Italian journalist would be a little sceptical towards an institution that claims to be very transparent, suspecting that giving out a lot of information is the best way to hide secrets. Germans are very careful about numbers and details. The British press is constantly concerned with every little expense that may involve a waste of taxpayer money, whereas other journalists of southern countries think that they should concentrate their attention on big scandals. I think that to know and respect each mentality is one of the beautiful things about being here in Europe and I think that for you to try to get in tune with each one of these different mentalities should be an important feature for any institutional communicator.

And then, if I can go to the question of roles of journalists and investigators, I think like, as Alessandro Buttice pointed out in his speech, I think the ultimate interest of the good investigator or communicator for a public institution and the one of the good journalist should be the same: to disclose some frauds in the interest of the citizen and as a tool of prevention. But of course, the investigator looks for evidence to be shown to the judge and the journalist to make it available to his reader. So the timing and structures of their two roles are inevitably different and sometimes, even if they have a common ultimate goal, they may run into a collision. And so I am perfectly aware that the release of some information by the media may have the effect of obstructing

the development of an investigation, creating problems. And I think that even in those crucial moments when there could be a collision, we do not have to lose the respect of the reciprocal roles, which are essential for our democracy. I personally think that there is not good democracy if crimes are not investigated, regardless of who committed them, but there is also not good democracy if there is not freedom of the media to report about crimes, regardless of who committed them. So, I consider as a good suggestion that was made by Alessandro Buttice in his speech to have a more structured dialogue - now I'm using an expression that may come from the Communitarian bubble of Brussels - to have some form of constant dialogue between OLAF and the press corps in Brussels. I do not know if this constant dialogue should take also the form of a code of conduct because I am a little sceptical about a code with no sanctions that help to enforce it. And also, the International Press Organization, is not an organization that deals with ethical sanctions. But I think it is very important to maintain a constant, open channel of communication, have a sort of mutual trust between the operators of the media and the representatives of this institutions, respecting, obviously, the two different roles. And I think we have already shown in critical moments that this mutual respect already exists. There was one case of a journalist belonging to the Brussels-based press corp, being searched by Belgian police. We had always kept, even in that situation, an open and constructive dialogue. In those days, one of the OLAF magistrates, Mr. Perduca, came into the press room, and was given the opportunity to explain the situation: what were the powers that OLAF had, its responsibilities, and those of Belgian police. That was very helpful for many people who did not have a clear picture of the situation. Api a priori refrained from expressing a judgment on the matter of the case because we feel that is not our business, and we have to respect the role of OLAF and people investigating, as well as the right of the journalist. The point that concerned us the most was the strange and disturbing situation of being a European correspondent in a country, Belgium, that at that time did not have a law that recognized the right of journalists to protect sources. Then, after a few months, the Belgian Parliament started discussing the law for the protection of sources by journalists, a law that from our point of view may improve the situation. But it is very important that at the root there is a mutual trust and a sincere relation. I do not think, for instance, that a public officer should ever recur to lies or, although you know that Winston Churchill used to say this: "In wartime, truth is too important and should be protected by some bodyguards: lies. But I do not think that even if you are at war with crime you should follow this Winston Churchill idea and you should recur, to the "no comment" or to the silence, without having to come to the point of saying lies.

In general terms and without references to any specific case, I think that if a journalist gets a confidential document which could be of some interest and think that it is not a fake document, he should publish it. If he is a journalist, he will do it and has the right to do it. Most European laws give this right and it is also the right that was recognized in the United States by the first amendment of the constitution. The first, not the second, not the third, to show how important is that right. And I think also that journalists should have, like priests in a confession, the right not to disclose their sources and not be forced to

disclose who gave them a document. Of course, search and operations of investigators can be legitimate if there is serious doubt of a crime. We have to be realistic, that can happen. But, from the point of view of journalists, it is not acceptable the so-called "fishing operation": let's go and search in a journalist's office just to check if we can find anything interesting. As it would not be acceptable any attempt to intimidate a journalist. And I hope that in our democracies this will never happen. In the same way, honest fact-based reporting should always be accepted, whereas trashy, not accurate reporting needs to be criticized, even by the same journalists .I think that even us journalists have to criticize sometimes those colleagues who do not do an adequate job because they do, after all, a bad service to the community and give a bad image also to our profession.

Of course, we have accept fast times and, as I said before, the constrictions of modern media, so we have to understand that if I do not get a quote by the evening, and the story would come out in any case, maybe it will not be so accurate. But the important thing is that this has to be done in good faith and with an honest professional attitude by the journalist. On the contrary, bad, trashy journalists, as I said, should not be excused and we don't have to be too complacent with bad journalism.

Justice, media and power may be a hellish triangle like someone has claimed. But this can also be a triangle that, with its checks and balances, helps our democracy to be a better democracy. For this reason, I think that a dialogue between journalists and investigators should be kept always open in the mutual respect and deep understanding of the different roles. And for this reason, I was very happy to be here with you today.