

## **"CAVIAR DEMOCRACY"**

*By Paolo Mondani*

*With the assistance of Cataldo Ciccolella*

### **NICOLAS SARKOZY**

Democracy means having a multiparty system, free elections, freedom of expression, and of course, human rights.

### **MATTEO RENZI – PRIME MINISTER OF ITALY**

For me, democracy is a serious matter, and does not change in accordance with who wins or who loses an election.

### **FRANÇOIS HOLLANDE**

Democracy is more powerful than war.

### **ANGELA MERKEL**

We need an independent judiciary. Independent media. And we need a strong parliament.

### **VLADIMIR PUTIN**

Democracy is not subject to the same rules across the world. It cannot be seen as one, stereotypical thing, whether it be American, European, Russian or Indian.

### **RECEP TAYYIP ERDOGAN**

We have redefined democracy. It's like a tram. You go as far as you need to, and then you get off.

### **ILHAM ALIYEV**

Freedom of the press is one of the greatest assets of modern Azerbaijan. And we are proud of this.

### **MILENA GABANELLI IN THE STUDIO**

Good evening. Democracy is always what it appears to you, the individual. It is most certainly not an acquired right, something that remains fixed and immutable over the centuries. If you let your guard down because "they do what they want anyway", it will eventually shed its skin. The focus of today's investigation is an Italian politician, accused of corruption and money laundering, and our story takes place in the Council of Europe - not the same thing, by the way, as the European Council. What is the Council of Europe? It is an international organisation that was established in 1949, in order to protect and defend the pillars of democracy: freedom of expression, human rights, and the succession of democratically-elected governments. Gradually, the Council united all of the countries of geographical Europe, and after the collapse of the Berlin wall, also those of the East, right up to the border with Asia and the Middle East. All member countries have applied for membership and signed the agreement which obliges them to respect these principles - all of them mandatory and non-negotiable. Ok. The Council effectively serves as the "waiting room" for joining the European Union, and as such, monitors these member countries closely. And if any of them violate any of the principles, they are condemned, punished or suspended - the license for becoming a democratic country cannot be bought.

Ok. Strasbourg is the city at the heart of our story, where the Council of Europe has its headquarters. Here, a certain type of diplomacy with a very curious name is in operation: "Caviar diplomacy", that's what they call it. Subsequently, our story moves on to Panama, via Puglia and Barlassina, which is in the province of Milan, stopping off

in Nagorno Karabakh (which no-one has ever heard of). The tale begins in Azerbaijan, where there is no shortage of caviar. Incidentally, Azerbaijan did not grant our reporter Paolo Mondani a visa, because he has the misfortune of working with me. I don't know what I've done that is so very dreadful, but we'll see. Paolo Mondani.

**PAULO MONDANI, OFF SCREEN**

Corruption and money laundering - these are the offences with which Luca Volontè, a former Member of the UDC and president of the EPP in the Council of Europe, has been charged by the Milan Public Prosecutor's Office. According to the latter, he took 2.39 million euros from the government of Azerbaijan, in return for representing its interests in the European Assembly.

**SAMVEL FARMANYAN - ARMENIAN DEPUTY, COUNCIL OF EUROPE**

When I started working in the European People's Party, I realised that within the Council of Europe, there was a group of Azerbaijani lobbyists, growing and expanding like a cancer. And at the head of this lobby was Luca Volontè and the Spaniard Pedro Agramunt, the current President of the Council and a close friend of Volontè.

**PAULO MONDANI**

Money?

**SAMVEL FARMANYAN - ARMENIAN DEPUTY, COUNCIL OF EUROPE**

Yes, I think it's fair to say that they were united by money.

**PAULO MONDANI**

So are you saying that the Azerbaijani lobby bought support?

**SAMVEL FARMANYAN - ARMENIAN DEPUTY, COUNCIL OF EUROPE**

I'm sure of it. Totally certain.

**PAULO MONDANI**

How is it possible that Azerbaijan channelled such an enormous figure towards a single member of the Council, in your opinion?

**CHRISTOPH STRASSER - GERMAN DEPUTY, COUNCIL OF EUROPE**

I'd prefer not to comment on ongoing proceedings at the Court of Milan. But with regard to the money ... well, Azerbaijan attempts to exert influence in a variety of ways, and corruption is just one of these. For a country with that kind of money from hydrocarbons, what's 2 million euros! From their point of view, it's a good investment.

**PAULO MONDANI**

Because a catholic like Volontè, who started off as a devotee of the Communion and Liberation movement, before moving onto the People's Party, the CDU and the UDC, did not find himself automatically falling into agreement with Christian Armenia, and instead, chose to side with Azerbaijan, which has all these problems with human rights.

**ALDO DI BIAGIO – SENATOR, AP**

Opportunism, perhaps?

**PROTESTORS IN BAKU**

Freedom! Freedom! Resign! Resign!

### **PAUL MONDANI, OFF SCREEN**

On 17 September, many of those who oppose Aliyev, the President of Azerbaijan, gathered in the square of the country's capital Baku. Under the stage, a series of photos of political prisoners are displayed.

### **ALI KARIMLI - LEADER OF THE AZERBAIJAN POPULAR FRONT**

We all know that the country is brimming with riches. The government should use this wealth for the good of the people. But instead, you stole from us, sending our money abroad -the whole country knows it!

### **PROTESTERS**

Resign! Resign!

### **ALI KARIMLI – LEADER OF THE POPULAR FRONT, AZERBAIJAN**

For 23 years, the country has been ruled by the Aliyev dynasty. First came the current President's father, who came to power by manipulating the election results. Then, in 2003, he passed the sceptre onto his son Ilham. Here, there is no such thing as independent information. Aliyev chooses the MPs and the judges. The major banks, the holding companies, the most productive sectors -they're in the palm of his hand. His approach to governing the country essentially lies in misappropriating public money. Of the 135 billion dollars in state revenues from oil, do you know how much has been diverted into tax havens? 48 billion.

### **PAUL MONDANI, OFF SCREEN**

Much of that money ended up here. In Panama. Thanks to the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists, we now have access to the documents of around 200 thousand joint stock companies established by the law firm Mossack Fonseca. Among the names revealed in the Panama Papers, of particular note were the Argentine president Mauricio Macri, the head of the French far-right party Marine Le Pen, the former British Prime Minister David Cameron, Russian President Vladimir Putin, Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko, former Icelandic Prime Minister David Gunnlaugsson and Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev. Why do they all come to Panama?

### **JOSÈ ALBERTO ALVAREZ – PRESIDENT OF THE PANAMA LAWYERS ASSOCIATION**

In our country, tax evasion is not a crime.

### **PAOLO MONDANI**

But doesn't that also guarantee anonymity to drug dealers, gangsters, tax evaders and corrupt politicians? Don't you think it's time it changed?

### **JOSÈ ALBERTO ALVAREZ – PRESIDENT OF THE PANAMA LAWYERS ASSOCIATION**

I don't know of a single case in Panama where the owner of a company that's been investigated hasn't been unmasked.

### **PAOLO MONDANI**

The problem isn't for your authorities: the issue lies in the fact that you are preventing a foreign magistrate from finding out who the joint stock company belongs to.

### **JOSÈ ALBERTO ALVAREZ – PRESIDENT OF THE PANAMA LAWYERS**

**ASSOCIATION**

That's how it is, we keep the truth to ourselves.

**PAUL MONDANI, OFF SCREEN**

Here's an Italian businessman who has just arrived in Panama.

**ITALIAN BUSINESSMAN - PANAMA**

My background is as a salesman, I've been doing it for 15 years. In Italy. One day, the Guardia di Finanza called me to check something, a cross-check I think, and questioned me about some invoices. Invoices issued ...

**PAOLO MONDANI**

Fake invoices.

**ITALIAN BUSINESSMAN - PANAMA**

They questioned me about false invoicing.

**PAOLO MONDANI**

For a large sum of money?

**ITALIAN BUSINESSMAN - PANAMA**

Less than 100 thousand euros. At that point I was reported to the judiciary for false invoicing, the proceedings are still ongoing.

**PAOLO MONDANI**

You have set up a limited company here in Panama.

**ITALIAN BUSINESSMAN - PANAMA**

Yes, yes.

**PAOLO MONDANI**

And what kind of business is it...?

**ITALIAN BUSINESSMAN - PANAMA**

Essentially, the business will be acting as an intermediary for Italian companies that want to sell their products here in Panama. Joint stock companies that do business with companies outside Panama don't pay taxes.

**JOSÈ ALBERTO ALVAREZ – PRESIDENT OF THE PANAMA LAWYERS ASSOCIATION**

Here, VAT is 7 percent, and taxes amount to a maximum of 30 percent. Sure, Panama may be a tax haven, but only because countries like yours are a tax hell.

**PAOLO MONDANI**

How do you go about getting money out of Italy, for example, without being traced?

**GIOVANNI CAPORASO – LAWYER, CAPORASO & PARTNERS**

I could, for example, apply for foreign residency, move abroad with all my money, leave my money abroad and then take up residence in Italy again.

**PAUL MONDANI, OFF SCREEN**

For applying for a change of residency and setting up a joint stock company, the Panamanian lawyer Caporaso charges three thousand euros

**PAOLO MONDANI**

In Panama, you are in charge of managing a number of joint stock companies and regulating the so-called bearer shares.

**GIOVANNI CAPORASO – LAWYER, CAPORASO & PARTNERS**

Precisely.

**PAOLO MONDANI**

But if someone wants to remain anonymous, completely anonymous. How do they go about it? There must be a way, surely?

**GIOVANNI CAPORASO – LAWYER, CAPORASO & PARTNERS**

Yes, it's quite simple. It's like Chinese nested boxes or Russian dolls.

**PAOLO MONDANI**

Meaning?

**GIOVANNI CAPORASO – LAWYER, CAPORASO & PARTNERS**

We make the request for setting up the company through authorised intermediaries - lawyers, in this case - from various parts of the world. That is, we pass the request to set up the company through ten lawyers before it gets to me. At this point, if someone asks me tomorrow for information, I give the name of the first lawyer, who will then give the name of the second lawyer, then the third, the fourth, and so on, and after ten years, and all of the expenses for the letters rogatory, they will finally found out who the ultimate owner of the company is.

**PAUL MONDANI, OFF SCREEN**

In the barrios of Panama City, there are 225 criminal gangs, but the Mexican and Colombian cocaine kingpins and arms traffickers don't discuss "business" here... but rather in downtown skyscrapers. The Mossack Fonseca law firm manages the assets of clients with some of the world's biggest banks, and founds joint stock companies through 40 offices across every continent. They hide money and people so well that we weren't able to get hold of anyone in their offices.

**JOSÈ ALBERTO ALVAREZ – PRESIDENT OF THE PANAMA LAWYERS ASSOCIATION**

Business operations like those carried out by Mossack Fonseca are the norm in Panama. Unfortunately, our government has failed to defend the good name of the country.

**PAOLO MONDANI**

Yet Fonseca and the President are good friends.

**JOSÈ ALBERTO ALVAREZ – PRESIDENT OF THE PANAMA LAWYERS ASSOCIATION**

It's true, he also financed the election campaign. But why aren't you shocked at what's going on in the US state of Delaware? Where you can set up a joint stock company on the internet, and pay via credit card? You can't do that in Panama. We look our customers in the face.

**PAOLO MONDANI**

There are 11 heads of state embroiled in the Panama Papers but only one of them -

and I'm talking about President Aliyev of Azerbaijan - has used Mossak Fonseca to set up a joint stock company registered under his children's names. Well, they took a bit of a big risk, didn't they, Mossak Fonseca?

**GIOVANNI CAPORASO – LAWYER, CAPORASO & PARTNERS**

But we're talking about the biggest law firm in Panama. This is a smear campaign orchestrated by the US government, with a specific goal in mind - to attack Panama's financial system.

**PAOLO MONDANI**

Why?

**GIOVANNI CAPORASO – LAWYER, CAPORASO & PARTNERS**

Because clearly they don't like the fact that so much Latin American capital is ending up in Panama, they want it to come to Miami.

**PAOLO MONDANI**

Arzu and Leyla, the prudent daughters of President Aliyev, only do charity work in the United States. Instead, they use Panamanian companies to control mobile phone companies, the Azerbaijani bank Atabank, and six gold mines in Azerbaijan. The Azerbaijani journalist Khadija Ismaylova discovered the Panama Papers of the Aliyev family, and as a result, was jailed for seven and a half years for some imaginary crime. After extensive international pressure, the sentence was suspended.

**KHADIJIA ISMAYLOVA – RADIO FREE EUROPE JOURNALIST**

My research began in 2011 when I pieced together the information I had gathered regarding ownership of two mobile phone companies, Azerfon and Azercell. The government said these belonged to the German company Siemens, but in actual fact, they were under the control of two joint stock Panamanian businesses, behind which the daughters of the President were hiding - with as many as 11 companies. Then, I found out that Aliyev had ordered the Minister for the Environment to sign a contract with an international consortium for the management of six gold mines - just one of these is worth 2.6 billion dollars. And can you guess who controls the consortium? The Panamanian company owned by the daughters of the President.

**PAUL MONDANI, OFF SCREEN**

In 2015, the Panamanian President Varela signed an economic agreement with President Aliyev. The two countries will do business together even as the Aliyev family uses Panama to hide its assets.

**PAOLO MONDANI**

So, would it be right to say that the presidential family has got rich illegally, with state money?

**KHADIJIA ISMAYLOVA – RADIO FREE EUROPE JOURNALIST**

Of course, and there is just one word for it: theft.

**PAUL MONDANI, OFF SCREEN**

In April 2016, shortly before the Aliyev family hit the headlines with the Panama Papers, 12 thousand kilometres from here, violence broke out.

**SAMUEL MKRTCHYN – PRIEST**

The border with Azerbaijan is a few hundred metres away.

**PAOLO MONDANI**

And the helicopters were attacked from just here, is that right?

**SAMUEL MKRTCHYN – PRIEST**

Yes, from this village, they came into our territory, and set off bombs everywhere.

**PAUL MONDANI, OFF SCREEN**

The first articles on the Panama Papers appeared in newspapers around the world on 3 April. 24 hours previously on 2 April, Azerbaijan's Special Forces attacked Nagorno Karabakh. Hundreds were left dead. Only the decisive intervention of Russia and the United States put a stop to the carnage, after 4 days.

**SHAHEN SAILYAN**

It started at midnight. They were firing on everything that moved. I took the children into the cellar and we hid there.

**NVARD ANTONYAN**

For twelve straight hours they didn't stop firing. Relatives of mine were killed, others maimed - these two generations of which we are part have seen too much. Too much.

**PAUL MONDANI, OFF SCREEN**

Is it just coincidence that the attack on Karabakh happened the day before the news broke on the money that the Azerbaijani President is hiding in Panama?

**KAREN MIRZOYAN - MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS, NAGORNO KARABAKH GOVERNMENT**

President Aliyev wanted to divert attention away from the theft of public resources, and we have paid the price, and were left to collect the dead. Aliyev behaves like so many other dictators in history.

**PAUL MONDANI, OFF SCREEN**

The war in April resulted in more than 300 deaths. And this is the front line, just a few dozen metres from the Azerbaijani barricades.

**SAMUEL MKRTCHYN - PRIEST**

This land is has been Christian for centuries. I'm a priest, but if we must fight, I won't hold back.

**PAUL MONDANI, OFF SCREEN**

Talish is the village that paid the highest price. It is now uninhabited.

**VILEN PETROSYAN - MAYOR OF TALISH**

In the morning after the bombing, a Special Forces commando team entered a house containing three elderly people. They found the oldest son. First, they were mutilated and then slaughtered.

**PAOLO MONDANI**

What are you going to do now?

**VILEN PETROSYAN - MAYOR OF TALISH**

We need to rebuild the country. But the deaths of these civilians are also on Europe's conscience, and on the conscience of all those who support the Azerbaijani regime.

### **SAMVEL FARMANYAN - ARMENIAN DEPUTY, COUNCIL OF EUROPE**

For us Armenians, Europe represents both a source of hope and a disappointment. In the Council of Europe, there are parliamentarians who have been supporting Azerbaijan's attack on Nagorno Karabakh for years, in return for bribes. Everyone knows it, but nobody talks about it.

### **MILENA GABANELLI IN THE STUDIO**

Europe obviously does business with Azerbaijan: the country is rich in mineral resources. But since it's also a member of the Council of Europe, the wars have got to stop. In short, the story is as follows: Nagorno Karabakh, which most of the world has never heard of, is a small territory which is home to 150,000 people, most of whom are Armenian, located within the confines of Azerbaijan. In 1991, it proclaimed its independence and, at that point, the classic ethnic-political-religious conflicts began, like those seen in the former Yugoslavia, which are still ongoing. So. The position of Europe, of the UN and of international negotiators is this: "Enough violence, you need to come to a compromise between you." Armenia, which is also partly to blame, agreed, while Azerbaijan refused to. Negotiations stalled, and the diplomacy of the strongest is in action. And now, our story moves on to the money received by a senior official, a Council of Europe representative, and the possible motives for this.

### **PAUL MONDANI, OFF SCREEN**

According to the prosecutor's office in Milan, former deputy Luca Volontè took 2.39 million euros from the Azerbaijani government, in exchange for garnering political support in the Council of Europe. In January 2013, Volontè allegedly used his influence over the People's Party (of which he was President), pushing them to vote against the report on political prisoners in Azerbaijan drafted by MP Christoph Strasser, who we are meeting at the Bundestag in Berlin.

### **CHRISTOPH STRASSER - GERMAN DEPUTY, COUNCIL OF EUROPE**

Azerbaijan denied me entry into the country. It was the first time that an MP tasked with preparing a report had been denied a visa.

### **PAOLO MONDANI**

The representative of Azerbaijan within the Council of Europe, Suleymanov, even wrote an open letter to the German members of Parliament, in which he complained of your behaviour, even calling you a liar.

### **CHRISTOPH STRASSER - GERMAN DEPUTY, COUNCIL OF EUROPE**

The German Parliament responded harshly, by passing a resolution appealing to the Azerbaijani government to allow me to go to Azerbaijan and confirm the situation of the country's political prisoners. But to no avail.

### **PAOLO MONDANI**

How many political opponents and how many journalists are currently in prison for their ideas?

### **KHADIJIA ISMAYLOVA – RADIO FREE EUROPE JOURNALIST**

According to the Strasser Report, there were 85. Today, we estimate that there are around 100, eight of whom are journalists. Anybody can go to jail, even just for liking a post on social media that criticises the government.

### **PAOLO MONDANI**



And which members voted against his report in January 2013?

**CHRISTOPH STRASSER - GERMAN DEPUTY, COUNCIL OF EUROPE**

125 against, 79 in favour. The courtroom was unusually full: all the Russians, all the Turks, many Spanish and many Italians, who voted against the report, along with the Conservatives and some members of the Socialist Party.

**PAOLO MONDANI**

The Armenian deputy Naira Karapetyan remembers the day well.

**NAIRA KARAPETYAN – ARMENIAN DEPUTY, COUNCIL OF EUROPE**

I saw it with my own eyes - a number of members were in Strasbourg for the first time ever: they didn't even know how to press the voting button. We had never seen them before and we never saw them again. And they had all been instructed to vote against Strasser.

**PAOLO MONDANI**

As far as you know, what role did Luca Volontè play in mobilising people against the report?

**CHRISTOPH STRASSER - GERMAN DEPUTY, COUNCIL OF EUROPE**

He was instrumental in turning the Conservative Group against me.

**PAOLO MONDANI**

How is it possible that in an organisation like the Council of Europe, the majority of members could question the existence of political prisoners in Azerbaijan, preventing a report from being drafted?

**CHRISTOPH STRASSER - GERMAN DEPUTY, COUNCIL OF EUROPE**

The Council of Europe is the organisation that promotes human rights, but countries like Russia and Turkey have a different idea of what these are. And then, there's the "caviar diplomacy" too.

**PAUL MONDANI, OFF SCREEN**

The European Stability Initiative is the Berlin think tank that wrote the first report on the Azerbaijani lobby in the Council of Europe. Title: Caviar diplomacy.

**GERALD KNAUS – CHAIRMAN OF THE EUROPEAN STABILITY INITIATIVE**

Three years ago, even as Azeri dissidents were arrested, tried and tortured, the Council of Europe had increasingly positive words for Azerbaijan. We discovered that this was the result of a planned campaign: namely, caviar diplomacy. This is what the Azeri officials from the Council of Europe call it themselves - it is a system which provides for favours, bribes and blackmail... and serves to secure the votes that affect their country.

**PAOLO MONDANI**

Can you explain the issue of blackmail in a little more depth?

**GERALD KNAUS – CHAIRMAN OF THE EUROPEAN STABILITY INITIATIVE**

A number of officials from the Council of Europe have told me about foreign delegations of deputies arriving at hotels in Azerbaijan, and prostitutes going into rooms, where there are also cameras. At this point, they've got them cornered. And then they receive expensive gifts: money, carpets and of course, the finest caviar

from the Caspian Sea. And when they leave the Council of Europe, they are immediately replaced by others.

**PAUL MONDANI, OFF SCREEN**

Elkhan Suleymanov is a good friend of President Aliyev, and is the head of the Azerbaijani lobby in the Council of Europe in Strasbourg. He was the one responsible for paying then-deputy Volontè the 2.39 million euros which the Milanese magistrates believe was a bribe.

**CHRISTOPH STRASSER - GERMAN DEPUTY, COUNCIL OF EUROPE**

A minute or two after my report was rejected, Suleymanov stood up, turned to me and yelled: "You see, this isn't Mr. Strasser's Council of Europe, it's Azerbaijan's Council of Europe."

**PAUL MONDANI, OFF SCREEN**

The Council of Europe monitors the 47 member states, focusing on human rights, civil rights, the justice system and corruption. Azerbaijan knows that a conviction in any of these areas would be very bad for business.

**NAIRA KARAPETYAN – ARMENIAN DEPUTY, COUNCIL OF EUROPE**

It is very alarming, what we're reading about the former head of my group, Luca Volontè. The prosecutors in Milan have accused him of corruption and money laundering. Apparently, he accepted millions of euros from the Azerbaijani government to guide the EPP vote in this assembly.

**PEDRO AGRAMUNT - PRESIDENT OF THE PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE**

Honourable Member Karapetyan, please do not use the assembly to raise these issues. If he is convicted, we will speak about it then, but currently there is a judicial proceeding in progress. If you continue, I will have to ask you to stop speaking...

**NAIRA KARAPETYAN – ARMENIAN DEPUTY, COUNCIL OF EUROPE**

The news is public, and regards this assembly. Mr. Volontè...

**PEDRO AGRAMUNT - PRESIDENT OF THE PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE**

I have already asked you not to speak about this issue.

**NAIRA KARAPETYAN – ARMENIAN DEPUTY, COUNCIL OF EUROPE**

The smell of bribes in this room is really very strong.

**PAUL MONDANI, OFF SCREEN**

In May 2013, the Azerbaijani lobbyist Muslum Mammadov, who works at the Council of Europe, told Volontè that he had convinced Agramunt to follow the line on the PPE. An Azerbaijani lobbyist was responsible for deciding the fate of the most important party in Europe.

**NAIRA ZOHRABYAN – ARMENIAN DEPUTY, COUNCIL OF EUROPE**

Many international organisations claim that some members of this Council are buying other members. We only need to look at the case of Luca Volontè.

**PEDRO AGRAMUNT - PRESIDENT OF THE PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY OF THE**

## **COUNCIL OF EUROPE**

Excuse me, you know that you can't talk about this; I have to ask you to cease doing so immediately.

## **NAIRA ZOHRABYAN – ARMENIAN DEPUTY, COUNCIL OF EUROPE**

Mr. Agramunt, you cannot interrupt me, you are a lobbyist for Azerbaijan, you always support the interests of Azerbaijan, you should allow this to be discussed freely.

## **DEPUTY, COUNCIL OF EUROPE**

She's right, she's right.

## **PEDRO AGRAMUNT - PRESIDENT OF THE PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE**

You no longer have the word. That's enough thank you, please take a seat.

## **PAUL MONDANI, OFF SCREEN**

Between 2013 and 2014, four British companies paid money to Volontè. They are called LCM, Hilux, Polux and Metastar, and are all controlled by joint stock companies located in Belize, the Seychelles and the British Virgin Islands. They paid 390,000 euros to Volontè's company LGV, and another 2 million to his foundation, Novae Terrae, which is in Saronno.

## **PAOLO MONDANI**

Is it normal for money to pass via the Seychelles, Belize, the British Virgin Islands, if it's headed for a foundation?

## **LUCA VOLONTÉ – FORMER DEPUTY, UDC (UNION OF THE CENTRE) PARTY**

I don't know, I didn't know about lots of these things. And so I never suspected that there might be some kind of... improper intent, or ulterior motive.

## **MILENA GABANELLI IN THE STUDIO**

Okay. Meanwhile, Agramunt, the President of the Assembly, could open a commission of inquiry as required by the code of conduct, but it doesn't seem as if he intends to go through with this. And so Italian justice will rightly take its course, but here we have the head of the most important European party who is being exclusively financed by the country he is monitoring. And the payments, a few million euros, arrive via some of most heavily-guarded countries in the world, in terms of financial dealings. And Volonté - who can't exactly be called naive - still can't see a problem. So he'll have no problem explaining to us where he got the money from, and how he used it. After the break.

## **ADVERT**

## **MILENA GABANELLI IN THE STUDIO**

So. We're still in Azerbaijan, where a lot of money was paid to an Italian politician. This is the image of the Council of Europe on the day on which a corruption scandal involving a country is being discussed - a hypothetical case of bribery involving a country that is being closely monitored. There are 4 people present. On the day that the motion against Azerbaijan was set to take place, to prevent the country from imprisoning journalists and dissidents, the Assembly was full - rightly so, and indeed thankfully. However, the motion was not passed. That day, the Vice-President of the Assembly and leader of the largest political party in Europe was Luca Volontè, who now stands accused of corruption and money laundering. Let's go to Saronno, to the

headquarters of the foundation which received the bulk of the payment.

**PAUL MONDANI, OFF SCREEN**

The Terrae Novae foundation was paid on the basis of an agreement with the Elkahn Suleymanov's NGO, ACSDA.

**PAOLO MONDANI**

So, the foundation signed a contract with ...

**LUCA VOLONTÉ – FORMER DEPUTY, UDC (UNION OF THE CENTRE) PARTY**

A consultancy. The foundation drew up an agreement... a convention.

**PAOLO MONDANI**

Which lasts ten years.

**LUCA VOLONTÉ – FORMER DEPUTY, UDC (UNION OF THE CENTRE) PARTY**

In the agreement, it says that it lasts ten years.

**PAOLO MONDANI**

For how much?

**LUCA VOLONTÉ – FORMER DEPUTY, UDC (UNION OF THE CENTRE) PARTY**

A million a year.

**PAOLO MONDANI**

Ten million, then.

**LUCA VOLONTÉ – FORMER DEPUTY, UDC (UNION OF THE CENTRE) PARTY**

Yes.

**MARCO ANTONINI – ACCOUNTANT FOR LUCA VOLONTÉ**

We established that this money constituted the donations made by the company, because of its belief in the values and the work done by the foundation.

**PAOLO MONDANI**

Are the donations taxable?

**MARCO ANTONINI – ACCOUNTANT FOR LUCA VOLONTÉ**

No, the donations made to the foundation aren't taxed because it's an institutional activity.

**PAOLO MONDANI**

So two million in donations. And the 390 thousand euros given to his wife's company?

**LUCA VOLONTÉ – FORMER DEPUTY, UDC (UNION OF THE CENTRE) PARTY**

Yes, that money was paid for advice that I personally provided to Suleymanov as president of this NGO.

**PAOLO MONDANI**

What kind of advice?

**LUCA VOLONTÉ – FORMER DEPUTY, UDC (UNION OF THE CENTRE) PARTY**

On various things, various NGOs, NGO networks that exist in Europe. On how he could

reflect on improving his activities as president of ACSDA, and various other things of that nature ...

**PAUL MONDANI, OFF SCREEN**

Azerbaijan promised Volontè's foundation ten million euros over ten years, all in non-taxable donations. With the initial two million, they produced these two publications. And then?

**LUCA VOLONTÉ – FORMER DEPUTY, UDC (UNION OF THE CENTRE) PARTY**

We carried out these two studies, we helped, we helped lots of NGOs in Europe with their initiatives.

**PAOLO MONDANI**

I saw that you received transfers of 105 thousand euros per month, does that sound right?

**LUCA VOLONTÉ – FORMER DEPUTY, UDC (UNION OF THE CENTRE) PARTY**

Yes, that could be the case.

**PAOLO MONDANI**

At the height, let's say, of your activities, you were taking home 20 thousand euros per month. Say 10 thousand euros between all three employees, with contributions. And yet, 75 thousand euros per month was left over. What were you doing with all this money?

**LUCA VOLONTÉ – FORMER DEPUTY, UDC (UNION OF THE CENTRE) PARTY**

We put it...we actually left a lot of it in the bank. And from 2014, from December 2014 to today, we have spent that money on surviving, on setting up petitions, on launching initiatives. We certainly haven't used the money to get rich...

**PAOLO MONDANI**

Can you show me the financial statements for the foundation?

**LUCA VOLONTÉ – FORMER DEPUTY, UDC (UNION OF THE CENTRE) PARTY**

No, we decided to leave them at the Prefecture.

**PAOLO MONDANI**

So you can't let me see them?

**LUCA VOLONTÉ – FORMER DEPUTY, UDC (UNION OF THE CENTRE) PARTY**

That's what we've decided, yes.

**PAOLO MONDANI**

If it's above board, you could show them to me, no?

**LUCA VOLONTÉ – FORMER DEPUTY, UDC (UNION OF THE CENTRE) PARTY**

The Prefecture will decide what to do... we think...

**PAOLO MONDANI**

Have you heard from the Prefecture, yourself? Because you know that the Prefecture has to decide ...

**LUCA VOLONTÉ – FORMER DEPUTY, UDC (UNION OF THE CENTRE) PARTY**

The Prefecture asked us if they could give this information out, and we decided to oppose this request.

**PAOLO MONDANI**

So you opposed to our request to the Prefecture.

**LUCA VOLONTÉ – FORMER DEPUTY, UDC (UNION OF THE CENTRE) PARTY**

Yes.

**PAUL MONDANI, OFF SCREEN**

Fortunately, the law says that financial statements must be made public. In 2013, the Novae Terrae foundation had assets amounting to a total of 500 thousand euros, and a net profit of 300 thousand, triple that of 2012. In 2014, the value of assets jumped to 920 thousand euros, of which 500 thousand was invested in bonds and treasury papers. All thanks to the Azeris, and to the tax exemption applicable to foundations. The investigation by the Milan prosecutors kicked off at the bank in Barlassina where the foreign transfers for Volontè arrived.

**PAOLO MONDANI**

Initially, you told the bank in Barlassina into which the money arrived from the Azeris that this cash was for consulting services on agricultural issues.

**LUCA VOLONTÉ – FORMER DEPUTY, UDC (UNION OF THE CENTRE) PARTY**

Yes, because there was a quid pro quo agreement between me and the accountant ... and...

**PAOLO MONDANI**

Antonini the accountant?

**LUCA VOLONTÉ – FORMER DEPUTY, UDC (UNION OF THE CENTRE) PARTY**

Precisely. And so there was this simple quid pro quo.

**PAOLO MONDANI**

Did the accountant misunderstand?

**LUCA VOLONTÉ – FORMER DEPUTY, UDC (UNION OF THE CENTRE) PARTY**

Yes, we both misunderstood.

**PAOLO MONDANI**

Aside from anything else, he is a member of the foundation. How did the accountant misconstrue the situation?

**LUCA VOLONTÉ – FORMER DEPUTY, UDC (UNION OF THE CENTRE) PARTY**

There was a misunderstanding...

**MARCO ANTONINI – ACCOUNTANT FOR LUCA VOLONTÉ**

I can't remember, it may well be that there was a misunderstanding, it may be that there was one and I just don't remember.

**PAOLO MONDANI**

Look, the invoice submitted to the bank is practically blank. There are no entries. Then, you list a consultation with a company called Jetfield.

## **LUCA VOLONTÈ – FORMER DEPUTY, UDC (UNION OF THE CENTRE) PARTY**

Yes.

## **PAOLO MONDANI**

An organisation that has its parent company in the Marshall Islands. But didn't this make you suspect that you were dealing with, how do I put it, a somewhat dodgy situation?

## **LUCA VOLONTÈ – FORMER DEPUTY, UDC (UNION OF THE CENTRE) PARTY**

But I trusted the people with whom I had relationships, so...

## **PAUL MONDANI, OFF SCREEN**

Volontè trusted them, but the bank in Barlassina didn't. And in the end, the invoices and the contracts ended up on the Milanese magistrates' desk. But let's go back to those four companies registered in the UK which the Azeris used to finance Volontè. From their accounts with Estonian and Latvian banks, a great number of purchases are made from Italian companies, which are never paid with bank transfers from Azerbaijan; there's a lot of money, about 3 billion euros, half of which was paid by the Azerbaijani public telecoms company, Baktelecom.

## **GIAN GAETANO BELLAVIA – ACCOUNTANT AND ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING EXPERT**

So we have Community companies administered by unknown offshore joint stock companies that move money of unknown origin into Community banks, without these transactions being flagged as potential money-laundering operations.

## **PAOLO MONDANI**

But could it really be possible that the British authorities are allowing this situation to continue?

## **GIAN GAETANO BELLAVIA – ACCOUNTANT AND ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING EXPERT**

This is the true frontier of money laundering. It's the European community. And all operators in the sector have realised this, or are becoming aware of it now.

## **MILENA GABANELLI IN THE STUDIO**

They have all become aware of it. Well then. So, in 2012, the Parliamentary Assembly votes on a code of conduct, with the following rules:

- 1) Members shall not accept any compensation or reward intended to influence their conduct in decision-making processes;
- 2) No member may act to promote the interests of a given party within the Assembly in return for payment;
- 3) Members shall avoid any situation that may appear as a conflict of interest or accept payments or gifts.

So not only you can you not be paid - now, you can't even be seen to be accepting gifts. So, to get round this, the money now arrives as a donation - a close relative of the gift - from the representative of a country which is subject to a motion of censure. Now. We're talking about figures here which range from 1 million euros per year for 10 years. Then they stop at 2, because the prosecutor gets involved. Now, beyond the legal proceedings (and we hope that here, at least, there is no corruption), how can you go about declaring "I take decisions as a free thinker"? And justify this money, by saying that it was "for activities related to human rights"? Maybe so, but it was invested in treasury bills. So, all this effort to curry favour with members of

parliament, if the evidence is to be believed, is due to the fact that when you're branded as being a country that doesn't respect the prescribed obligations, you lose your reputation, and then it becomes more difficult, more complicated, to make trade agreements. In those very months, the lots regarding the gas pipeline leading to Puglia were being drawn up.

**PAUL MONDANI, OFF SCREEN**

This is the beach of San Foca, in the commune of Melendugno, in Italy's Puglia region. TAP (which stands for Trans Adriatic Pipeline), the gas pipeline from Baku to Italy, will come out here. But pay attention to the dates: On 23 January 2013, the Strasser report on political prisoners in Azerbaijan was rejected. On 28 June, the European Commission welcomed the pipeline, and on 11 August, the then-Prime Minister Letta goes to Baku to seal the deal with Aliyev. Is there a link between these events?

**CHRISTOPH STRASSER - GERMAN DEPUTY, COUNCIL OF EUROPE**

I'd be surprised if there wasn't a connection between these two facts. Rejecting my report on Azerbaijan spared the country's reputation, and no-one had anything to say when the discussions on the gas pipeline were launched.

**PAUL MONDANI, OFF SCREEN**

4,000 kilometres long, total estimated cost: 45 billion dollars. For Italy, the public costs remain a mystery. Snam and Saipem will be doing the majority of the work. The first delivery of gas is expected in 2020. The goal of this project is to make us less dependent on Russian gas. But in Puglia this is the least of their concerns.

**MARCO POTÌ - MAYOR OF MELENDUGNO**

From those rocks, at around 800 metres from the coast, it goes below sea level. And then for 1500 metres it runs under the beach, under the dune, under the pines in the olive grove behind. Then it runs for a further 8.8km, before arriving at the outskirts of Melendugno, which is the provincial capital of the region. This is where they are going to build the power station. From there, the pipe will traverse an additional 55 kilometres, heading north between Brindisi and Mesagne, where it will connect with the national gas pipeline network.

**PAOLO MONDANI**

What's so special about this area of the sea? Isn't it just a patch of ocean like any other?

**MARCO POTÌ - MAYOR OF MELENDUGNO**

Um, no. Here we are in San Foca, it's one of the stretches of shore in Melendugno that has won the European Blue Flag award for the seventh year running, as well as five sails from the Legambiente environmental body, for the fifth year running. This year, it also won the national paediatricians' award for being a child-friendly beach.

**PAUL MONDANI, OFF SCREEN**

Michele Emiliano, the president of the Puglia region, is calling for the conversion of the Ilva plant in Taranto and the Enel plant in Brindisi from coal to gas. To do so, he needs TAP, and he needs the project to be changed - but no-one is listening to him.

**MICHELE EMILIANO - PRESIDENT OF THE PUGLIA REGION**

We think that if the pipeline came out here in the north, in the industrial area of Brindisi - instead of arriving here in southern Puglia, where, among other things, it would impact on a beautiful beach, one of the most beautiful in the Adriatic - it could



be attached to the Snam Adriatic pipeline very easily. This would prevent the need to construct this 55 kilometre-long pipeline which Snam has asked to build, without evaluating the overall environmental impact that this could have. And this situation is what has driven us to request the withdrawal of single authorisation due to the unlawfulness of the environmental impact assessment process (VIA). Because an environmental impact assessment cannot be carried out on a project that is divided into lots.

**MICHELE MARIO ELIA – COUNTRY MANAGER FOR ITALY, TAP**

We prepared the Brindisi plans on the request of the regional authorities. Unfortunately, we weren't able to examine these plans with the region, despite these having being requested by the latter.

**PAOLO MONDANI**

Won't the regional authorities meet you?

**MICHELE MARIO ELIA – COUNTRY MANAGER FOR ITALY, TAP**

It's not that they won't meet us. We haven't been able to re-examine the plans.

**PAOLO MONDANI**

Because of you? Because of them? Whose fault was it?

**MICHELE MARIO ELIA – COUNTRY MANAGER FOR ITALY, TAP**

You want to blame someone?

**PAOLO MONDANI**

Have you reflected on how much this will cost the public administration, the state included?

**MICHELE EMILIANO – PRESIDENT OF THE PUGLIA REGION**

If Snam completes this project, which TAP by chance happens to intercept, this must be done using the agreed rate. Or in other words, we Italians will be made to pay for it.

**PAUL MONDANI, OFF SCREEN**

If 55 kilometres of Snam pipeline were to be built, thousands of olive trees would be torn up - trees that are hundreds, even thousands of years old, and which represent one of the treasures of the Salento region. Here, on the other hand, is where the pipe could connect with the Snam national network in Brindisi. If the TAP pipeline came out here, we would save a lot of money that would otherwise end up on our energy bills.

**PAOLO MONDANI**

And you never succeeded in discussing the potential for a different arrival point with the government?

**MICHELE EMILIANO – PRESIDENT OF THE PUGLIA REGION**

No, we never met to talk about the issue, despite my requests. On the other hand, the goal of the Unlock-Italy bill is to minimise to role of regions as far as possible, when works are in the government's interest.

**PAUL MONDANI, OFF SCREEN**

The municipality of Melendugno has established a technical committee composed of 40 experts who, after years of study, have denounced the multitude of errors in the TAP Project.

**ALESSANDRO MANUELLI –TAP MUNICIPAL PIPELINE TECHNICAL COMMITTEE**

The seismic activity in this area has not been taken into account. And the geographical pre-requisites are completely lacking.

**PAOLO MONDANI**

So their plan is to start digging, even though they don't know what they'll find?

**ALESSANDRO MANUELLI –TAP MUNICIPAL PIPELINE TECHNICAL COMMITTEE**

The question is whether this project will float or sink.

**MICHELE MARIO ELIA – COUNTRY MANAGER FOR ITALY, TAP**

We are checking the nature and the composition of the rocks so that we can construct and lay the pipe in the most suitable manner possible.

**PAOLO MONDANI**

So the project has not yet been definitively finalised?

**MICHELE MARIO ELIA – COUNTRY MANAGER FOR ITALY, TAP**

The project has been finalised. All we need to do now is to establish what approach we are going to adopt if we encounter certain drawbacks when building the pipeline.

**PAOLO MONDANI**

But there has never been an accident with a gas pipeline, say the members of the TAP consortium.

**ALESSANDRO MANUELLI –TAP MUNICIPAL PIPELINE TECHNICAL COMMITTEE**

An accident involving a pipeline that can be compared to this one both in terms of size and working pressure occurred in Belgium on 30 July 2004, and there were about 20 deaths. There were reports of 300 metre-high flames. The rush of heat was felt a kilometre away.

**PAOLO MONDANI**

I mean it never, or hardly ever happens, but when it does...

**ALESSANDRO MANUELLI –TAP MUNICIPAL PIPELINE TECHNICAL COMMITTEE**

No, actually there is a European Commission Directorate General for the Environment, study which complains that in fact, the number of accidents is much higher than that declared - often late.

**PAUL MONDANI, OFF SCREEN**

Last July, the Oxford Institute for Energy Studies wrote a report on the TAP. Professor Pirani said that the Azeri gas that will arrive in Italy won't be as originally promised. Why?

**SIMON PIRANI – DIRECTOR OF RESEARCH AT THE OXFORD INSTITUTE OF ENERGY STUDIES**

The TAP Consortium states that initially, 10 billion cubic metres of gas will arrive, before this figure rises to 20 billion. But I don't understand where they're planning to

get this additional gas from. We know that the current deposits that we have will be in decline in 2023.

**PAOLO MONDANI**

The Oxford Institute states that in 2023, there will hardly be any gas left, whereas you say that the levels are increasing.

**MICHELE MARIO ELIA – COUNTRY MANAGER FOR ITALY, TAP**

Yes...

**PAOLO MONDANI**

One of you is wrong.

**MICHELE MARIO ELIA – COUNTRY MANAGER FOR ITALY, TAP**

Yes. Look. The problem is that I don't know where they got the data from.

**SIMON PIRANI – DIRECTOR OF RESEARCH AT THE OXFORD INSTITUTE OF ENERGY STUDIES**

Azerbaijan has recently asked Russia to import gas to meet the country's own needs. If it doesn't have enough for itself, how will it have enough to export to Europe?

**PAOLO MONDANI**

The funny thing is that we're doing all of this to branch out, away from the Russians, because we are currently too dependent on Russian gas. After which, in all likelihood, at least according to the Oxford Institute (and in light of the Turkey-Russia agreement), the gas that we get through this pipe will be Russian. It would be like saying ...

**MICHELE MARIO ELIA – COUNTRY MANAGER FOR ITALY, TAP**

The gas may come from Russia or Azerbaijan. The important thing is that we get the right amount to Italy, that ten...

**PAOLO MONDANI**

The important thing is that the gas actually arrives, basically.

**MICHELE MARIO ELIA – COUNTRY MANAGER FOR ITALY, TAP**

Of course, we need energy sources!

**SIMON PIRANI – DIRECTOR OF RESEARCH AT THE OXFORD INSTITUTE OF ENERGY STUDIES**

With regard to prices, then, according to our estimates, both the Russian gas and the liquid supplies from the United States will cost less than the gas from Azerbaijan.

**PAUL MONDANI, OFF SCREEN**

Perhaps having more gas will make us more secure - ENI, however, states that we are already in "oversupply", and have too much. And so it is not at all clear why we are going ahead with this project, and indeed, the TAP company itself, which is based in the secretive Swiss canton of Zug, is also somewhat murky.

**MICHELE MARIO ELIA – COUNTRY MANAGER FOR ITALY, TAP**

We are a company with high level of transparency, with a code of ethics which is industry-leading!

**PAOLO MONDANI**

If you're based in Zug, you don't have total transparency by any means...

**MICHELE MARIO ELIA – COUNTRY MANAGER FOR ITALY, TAP**

How so?

**PAOLO MONDANI**

Because Zug is where companies go to hide.

**MICHELE MARIO ELIA – COUNTRY MANAGER FOR ITALY, TAP**

But I think that company, I read ...that it was a place where they offered tax advantages.

**PAUL MONDANI, OFF SCREEN**

And yet, despite being based in Zug to save on taxes, TAP asked for 2 billion euros from the European Investment Bank, which is a public institution. So, who will be paying for the gas pipeline?

**SIMON PIRANI – DIRECTOR OF RESEARCH AT THE OXFORD INSTITUTE OF ENERGY STUDIES**

The private companies responsible for building the TAP line will pay, but with the guarantee that any additional costs will be added onto your energy bills.

**PAUL MONDANI, OFF SCREEN**

Luigi Vitali is the coordinator of Forza Italia in Puglia, and is a major supporter of TAP. Until 2013, he was a member of the Council of Europe, and shared Luca Volontè's support for Azerbaijan.

**PAOLO MONDANI**

In the documents that concern Volontè and his court case, I read two emails he sent to an Azerbaijani member of the Council of Europe, in which he says that in order to support the Azerbaijani position, they needed to talk to you to find the right people.

**LUIGI VITALI – CO-ORDINATOR FOR FORZA ITALIA PUGLIA**

To me?

**PAOLO MONDANI**

To make sure they were on the right ride, that is, pro-Azerbaijan.

**LUIGI VITALI – CO-ORDINATOR FOR FORZA ITALIA PUGLIA**

No. I don't know, I've never seen this email.

**PAUL MONDANI, OFF SCREEN**

On 15 December 2012, Luca Volontè sent an email to the lobbyist and Azeri deputy Muslum Mammadov. "We need to appoint a lot of friends during the discussion ... tell Vitali to get Iwinski and others to support the EPP ...they need to emphasise their point of view ... against Strasser".

**PAOLO MONDANI**

Did you know this Azeri politician named Elkhan Suleymanov?

**LUIGI VITALI – CO-ORDINATOR FOR FORZA ITALIA PUGLIA**

Absolutely. Absolutely.

**PAOLO MONDANI**

Because allegedly, according to the Milanese prosecutors, he was the one through whom the money for Volontè was channelled. Two million three hundred and ninety thousand euros.

**LUIGI VITALI – CO-ORDINATOR FOR FORZA ITALIA PUGLIA**

I understand. What's it got to do with me?

**PAOLO MONDANI**

Have you ever received a tin or two of caviar from Azerbaijan?

**LUIGI VITALI – CO-ORDINATOR FOR FORZA ITALIA PUGLIA**

Yes. I have received a tin of caviar from that parliamentarian, on the occasion of... before the Christmas holidays.

**PAOLO MONDANI**

You limited yourself to a tin of caviar ...

**LUIGI VITALI – CO-ORDINATOR FOR FORZA ITALIA PUGLIA**

I was unlucky. If all that money really was circulating, I was really unlucky.

**PAUL MONDANI, OFF SCREEN**

President Aliyev is very generous. He financed the restoration of the Vatican Catacombs of St. Marcellinus and St. Peter, the restoration of the Roman Forum, and of the Capitoline Museums. In 2014, Aliyev signed a strategic agreement with Renzi, promising yet more oil and gas to Italy. Meanwhile, internal repression of the press continues.

**PROTESTERS**

Resign, resign!

**GOZEL BAYRAMLI – AZERBAIJAN POPULAR FRONT**

All the elections were manipulated. Now they're changing the Constitution so that we won't count for anything anymore, and the Aliyev dynasty will elect a new president.

**PAUL MONDANI, OFF SCREEN**

Police arrest journalist Farid Gahramanov and other protesters.

**YOUNG WOMAN**

They arrested that journalist. The police arrested him, but the protest was authorised. Arrest me too, if you dare! Arrest me too!

**EMIN ASLANOV – CAUCASUS CIVIL INITIATIVE CENTRE**

If you're an independent journalist, you can't find work. If you have a blog, you risk being put in prison. If you insist on carrying on, you're risking your skin. It happened to Elmar Seynov, the publisher of the newspaper "Monitoring", it happened to Rafik Tawehl - but no one has opened an investigation into these killings.

**GUNEL MOVLUD – JOURNALIST, MEYDAN TV**

After the first threats, I left Azerbaijan. Then the regime arrested my two brothers, for no reason. That's how it works here.

**RASUL JAFAROV – LAWYER AND FOUNDER OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS CLUB**

I was in prison for a year and eight months, and was released in March after the ruling of the European Court of Human Rights. Europe always steps in afterwards, when it is too late.

**PAOLO MONDANI, OFF SCREEN**

Or alternatively, it is divided, as was the case in the Azerbaijani presidential elections in 2013, where Aliyev won a plebiscite. Pino Arlacchi was head of the EU delegation that was tasked with making sure the vote was legal, and Tana de Zulueta headed up the OSCE-ODIHR team of observers on this occasion.

**TANA DE ZULUETA – HEAD OF ODIHR - OCSE OBSERVATION PROJECT**

At the end of the day, we had direct and well-documented proof of the most blatant type of vote-rigging possible.

**PAOLO MONDANI**

Which is?

**TANA DE ZULUETA – HEAD OF ODIHR - OCSE OBSERVATION PROJECT**

Stuffed ballot boxes. That is, the ballot boxes had already been filled before the people could vote. And this is documented with photographs in 36 of the cases.

**PINO ARLACCHI – FORMER EUROPEAN DEPUTY**

There were 37 polling stations where irregularities were detected out of 5,300, so zero point something percent. At this point, the elections in any European country would have been declared invalid.

**PAOLO MONDANI**

You were the head of a delegation of seven parliamentarians. There were 319 ODIHR delegates led by De Zulueta, and some of them stayed there for more than three months. So, I mean, instinctively, one would think that they might have seen more than you, in two days.

**PINO ARLACCHI – FORMER EUROPEAN DEPUTY**

Our representatives in this field were far more qualified than theirs, because we were all elected politicians. So in short, perhaps politicians aren't so great at some things, but in this instance...

**PAOLO MONDANI**

They are experts in electoral fraud, let's say.

**PINO ARLACCHI – FORMER EUROPEAN DEPUTY**

In terms of electoral procedures, in terms of electoral procedures I don't think that their expertise can be doubted.

**PAOLO MONDANI**

They had seen numerous opponents in previous months, perhaps that's why they had come to gain a fairly good idea of what was going on. The main opponent, the other presidential candidate along with Aliyev, was arrested, and imprisoned on false evidence. He is still in prison.

**PINO ARLACCHI – FORMER EUROPEAN DEPUTY**

That is a point upon which we were in complete agreement. They already had their

report in their heads before going to Azerbaijan and that really vexed us.

**TANA DE ZULUETA – HEAD OF ODIHR - OCSE OBSERVATION PROJECT**

If you look at the OSCE and ODIHR reports for the next elections, I'd like to say that they show progress, but unfortunately that isn't the case.

**PAUL MONDANI, OFF SCREEN**

So much so that in 2015, the European Parliament decided not to send observers to Azerbaijan during the general elections.

**LAURA AGEA – EUROPEAN DEPUTY, 5 STAR MOVEMENT**

In this instance, the conditions were not met for sending a group of observers to these elections - not least because the OSCE offices were closed down by the Azerbaijani government. The OSCE is the authority responsible for controlling and monitoring the respect for human rights in the different states.

**PAOLO MONDANI**

Why did they close the offices?

**LAURA AGEA – EUROPEAN DEPUTY, 5 STAR MOVEMENT**

When you don't want prying eyes to see what's going on your home turf...

**PAOLO MONDANI**

You chase them away.

**LAURA AGEA – EUROPEAN DEPUTY, 5 STAR MOVEMENT**

You chase them away, that's the first thing you do.

**PAUL MONDANI, OFF SCREEN**

On 1 February 2013, Luca Volontè responded to the Azerbaijani lobbyist Muslim Mammadov, who had asked him to withdraw a resolution presented to the Council of Europe. Volontè wrote: "Your wish is my command".

**PAOLO MONDANI**

You told me that you wanted to become Commissioner for Human Rights.

**LUCA VOLONTÉ – FORMER DEPUTY, UDC (UNION OF THE CENTRE) PARTY**

Maybe I didn't say that exactly.

**PAOLO MONDANI**

In the Council of Europe. But let's say, though, that you would like to, that's in essence what you said.

**LUCA VOLONTÉ – FORMER DEPUTY, UDC (UNION OF THE CENTRE) PARTY**

I'd like to get involved in international politics again.

**PAOLO MONDANI**

Ok, but how could you become the Commissioner for Human Rights for the Council of Europe, having taken money, from a company owned by Suleymanov? And that's enough, your company has only taken money from Azerbaijan. I wonder, how could you think you could retain any credibility as Commissioner for Human Rights if you're accepting money from a country that has essentially trampled these very rights underfoot?

**LUCA VOLONTÉ – FORMER DEPUTY, UDC (UNION OF THE CENTRE) PARTY**

From a foundation that works to promote human rights in a country that tramples them underfoot? Yes, that's a good question.

**PAUL MONDANI, OFF SCREEN**

Sergio Divina is the Chairman of the Italy-Azerbaijan inter-parliamentary friendship group which has members from all parties, from Maurizio Gasparri from Forza Italia to Linda Lanzillotta from the Democratic Party (PD).

**SERGIO DIVINA – SENATOR, LEGA NORD**

I'd say that our western democracies are somewhat flaccid and ineffectual. Our powers of law and order have been reduced to a minimum.

**PAOLO MONDANI**

While in Azerbaijan they are more ...

**SERGIO DIVINA – SENATOR, LEGA NORD**

Yes, I would say that maybe in Azerbaijan ...

**PAOLO MONDANI**

They are stronger, say.

**SERGIO DIVINA – SENATOR, LEGA NORD**

Like in the United States, in fact. There, they have the power, through the police force, maybe, to crack down on undesirable behaviours.

**PAOLO MONDANI**

In June 2015 in the Council of Europe, you voted against an amendment calling for the release of political prisoners. Why did you vote against it?

**SERGIO DIVINA – SENATOR, LEGA NORD**

Because I refuse to get involved in these games.

**PAOLO MONDANI**

What games?

**SERGIO DIVINA – SENATOR, LEGA NORD**

Anyone who says that Azerbaijan is not a democracy, who says that it is a presidential, almost dynastic republic, is only telling half the story. I don't know who benefits most from these mutual relations. I think Italy enjoys many more advantages. And are trying to help Azerbaijan grow and develop, in the interests of our own country above all.

**PAOLO MONDANI**

But in Azerbaijan, around 100 political prisoners are still in jail - that is, people who are in prison because of their beliefs, including journalists. What do we do about this?

**SERGIO DIVINA – SENATOR, LEGA NORD**

Perhaps in Italy too, some of them could do with a month or so in prison.

**MILENA GABANELLI IN THE STUDIO**

The concept of journalists enjoying some degree of immunity seems somewhat alien.



But we are not, however, used to them being punished for their opinions. And in this instance, we're not talking about hearsay, or relying on someone else's account - we have seen it first-hand. In July, Paolo Mondani applied for a visa for Azerbaijan. He was refused, due to the fact that he works on a programme that is headed by someone who is on their list of undesirable people - me, that is. And the reason for this is: "Illegal entry into the territory of Karabakh" - they certainly have long memories. It was 1992, and I was working for Mixer. I went to the country to report on the conflict, arriving via the only route possible, even today for the international watchdogs - that is, via Armenia. But now, if I want to be forgiven, and thus cease to be an obstacle to the work of my colleagues, they have written to inform me that I must "send a letter of retraction", in which I apologise for doing my job. If I lived in Baku, I'm thinking, maybe I'd be in jail? However, Divina says: "Our democracies have become flaccid and ineffectual". There is no doubt that this is true, but we see it from another perspective. All the Council of Europe has to do is ensure that its member states meet the minimum criteria. In Azerbaijan, the President has been in power for 13 years, and was appointed by his father. He has extended the limits of mandates, decreased the age for presidential candidacy (now it's only 18 - perhaps he's preparing the way for his son to succeed him), and has put a hundred of his opponents in prison. Still, the Council of Europe has not lifted a finger, just as it did nothing to address the issues concerning Turkey, another member of the Council of Europe. Here, opposition leaders have been arrested, 130,000 civil servants (judges, police officers, teachers and officials) have been suspended or laid off, newspapers and TV channels that oppose President Erdogan have been shut down...Erdogan himself is blackmailing Europe on Syrian refugees, despite the help that Europe has given to Turkey. And all the while, he declares that he has "reconstructed democracy". Now, the body created to oversee and defend the values and the principles for which we have shed blood and tears, is endorsing this model, even with our complicity, as one of the founding countries. Because we have stopped choosing, deciding, and keeping watch. Now, though, if we're not happy with the situation, we can take back our sovereignty. All we have to do it wish for it.