

# **OSSIGENO** *per l'informazione*

osservatorio sui giornalisti minacciati in Italia promosso da FNSI e Ordine dei Giornalisti

*Con il sostegno di: OdG nazionale, OdG di Lombardia, Emilia Romagna, Puglia e Sicilia, USIGRai, AST, ASR, INPGI*

## ***New lenses to see hidden censorship***



In the last six years the Italian NGO "Ossigeno per l'Informazione" (Oxygen for Information) has published the names of more than 2,000 journalists, bloggers, photo and video reporters, who have been victims of intimidation, threats and abuse in Italy because of their work informing the public.

Most of these threats were not reported by the media. Ossigeno has verified, analyzed and contextualized the cases, and has published and spread news reports to make them known. Ossigeno has also provided assistance to the threatened, and shown that in many instances, intimidations could be prevented.

The alarming state of freedom of information and expression in Italy is not perceived, although the observation and monitoring method created *ad hoc* and applied by Ossigeno has revealed how serious the problem has become. The "Oxygen Method" estimates that in Italy, in the same six-year period, at least 20,000 other journalists, about 40% of all active Italian journalists – whose names remain unknown – have been affected by similar intimidation.

The monitoring carried out by Ossigeno has helped many journalists to resist the pressure of intimidation. It has also created conditions for dealing with a problem, in Parliament and in the newsrooms, which is overlooked and often denied. The question is finally on the table, but for answers, we need to get it on the political agenda. This will be possible only when we overcome erroneous, deeply rooted beliefs that feed resignation and fatalism.

Therefore it is necessary to frame the "Italian case" in the European context and to know if other countries also suffer from the same disease. We can know it only by subjecting these countries to the analysis of the Oxygen Method. We must answer the following questions: Is Italy the only country that suffers from this evil that produces a covert censorship and prevents conscious participation in public life? Or does this disease, as seems likely, also affect other countries where information is free as it is in Italy? And if so, does this disease perhaps deserve to be cured more energetically and on a larger scale?

In asking these questions Ossigeno proposes a reflection to the organizations that defend freedom of information and expression in other countries like Italy, to evaluate together the hypothesis to

develop surveys in their countries that could benefit from the experience and the method of Ossigeno.

These questions are now more relevant than ever, at a time when the Council of Europe is preparing to launch a surveillance system for intimidation and improper censorship and a ready alert response against the most serious violations. This international monitoring requires the production of homogeneous, reliable, comparable data, in other words, a standard.

### **Why in other countries**

According to the analysis of Ossigeno, many cases of intimidation, threats, abuse and other violations, are carried out in order to censor or restrict the ability to publish news and opinions that are of significant interest to the public, but that are also disliked by the power that, everywhere and incessantly, by its very nature, attempts to circumvent limits, rules and prohibitions. This happens in authoritarian states as well as in democratic states like Italy. The main difference is the form in which censorship is implemented: through laws or even with illegal methods. Another difference is that so far in democratic countries the problem has been largely underestimated, and even denied.

In a democratic country, it is easy to believe that serious violations of press freedom occur only elsewhere, in other countries, in distant places, in extreme situations, in countries without freedom, in war-torn areas, in places where the failure to respect human rights is the norm. This wrong belief is deeply rooted, despite the analysis of influential observation centers, which reveal that more than two-thirds of the journalists killed were operating in countries where there was no war.

Ossigeno agrees with the campaigns of the organizations that defend journalists, bloggers, photo and video reporters and citizen-journalists, who circulate free information, ideas and opinions on

war-torn countries, and in countries without a recognized right to freedom of the press. We need to ensure them better protection.

But monitoring the limits placed on freedom of information, and the timely reporting of violations that occur in democratic countries is complementary to these campaigns, and it is no less important. The "Italian case" makes it clear.

Italy is a democratic country and among the most industrialized ones in the world, is a founder of the European Union, has been at peace for 70 years, recognizes international treaties and formally respects the freedom of speech, of expression, of information. Yet in this country serious and numerous violations of freedom of expression occur. Why does this happen? We need to understand the phenomenon and analyze it in the historical and political context of the European Union. In this frame, it is also necessary to ascertain what is happening in other countries that defend freedom of information with rules similar to those in Italy.

### **The new lenses against censorship**

The e-book "The new lenses against censorship" shows in detail the method of monitoring developed by Ossigeno and experienced in Italy, and its results. The manual provides answers to the main questions posed by those who want to observe such an elusive phenomenon: how to collect the information, how to verify and classify this data, why and how to make the intimidation public, what resources are needed, how to involve the threatened journalists and the organizations of journalists. In addition, the e-book exposes the problems that still need to be explored.

To develop this proposal Ossigeno will promote conferences and meetings in several Western European countries. To fulfill this plan Ossigeno requests the collaboration of organizations that care about the active defense of the freedom of information and expression. For further information:

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