

## CALABRIA/2

### Is the volcano extinct?

#### Fewer threats, less competition, less news

By Roberto Rossi

As previously mentioned by Roberta Mani, in 2011 in Calabria the cases of intimidation against journalists were “only” seven. Death threats, assaults, unexploded bombs, and also some less violent, but still intimidating, episodes. One of these cases involved three journalists, and another one involved other three journalists, as well. The most worrying one (the Molotov cocktails left in front of the *Quotidiano della Calabria*’s office) put the whole newspaper staff in danger. So, we can say that last year, the journalists threatened in Calabria were 29. In 2010, there had been 20 individual cases, and the attention was focused on Calabria as the most dangerous Italian region for journalists. In 2011, the riskiest region was Campania and it seemed that the situation in Calabria was calmer. But is it really so? What is beyond the statistical data?

In order to understand that, we tried to go beyond the numbers, gathering the opinions, the stories and the testimonies of those who keep on working on the edge of a dormant volcano.

#### *Media protection and the mafia truce*

Antonio Nicaso is one of the leading experts on the ‘*ndrangheta*. He wrote four books with public prosecutor Nicola Gratteri on organised crime in Calabria. «Maybe, -- he says -- there really was a decrease of violence, but only because of the recent media attention of the on situation in Calabria.

The media protection has worked, also according to Paolo Pollichieni, former editor in chief of *Calabria Ora* and now editor of a new periodical, the *Corriere della Calabria*. «A lot of attention was paid last year to threatened journalists,” he says, “and now the mafia clans don’t want the focus to be on them». And he introduces another concept: the mafia truce. «In some periods the mafia clans don’t kill, not because they’ve given it up, but because they don’t need to. At the moment, the local press is not an issue for organised crime».

Angela Napoli, a Parliament member committed to monitoring the connection between mafia and information in her region, who was repeatedly threatened by the clans, provides us with a neater hypothesis: «The number of threats against journalists in Calabria decreased in 2011 because many reporters are “limited” by their own publishers’ instructions. They are forced to follow the editorial policy and are less free to give the news. And maybe not all the threats of 2010 actually came from organised crime, but from the so-called “grey zone” and they were aimed at preventing wiretappings and judicial inquiries from being published».

Matteo Cosenza, editor in chief of the *Quotidiano della Calabria* also speaks about the mafia truce, but he remarks that the potential for violence is still high. He says: «It’s true, the number of threats decreased. But this doesn’t mean that the potential danger for journalists decreased, too. This outward calm worries me more than a threatening letter, because I know that this land didn’t find peace at all. While we talk, probably a car was set on fire in Vibo, Lamezia or Reggio. And we know that threats against administrators, businessmen and prosecutors are still part of the daily routine».

Matteo Cosenza does know what he is talking about. On 20 July 2010, two Molotov cocktails were found near his newspaper printing house. The message was clear: they could have easily make them explode and destroy the building. He explains: «That was something new for us and we were shocked. It was strange because there was no explicit message that could allow us to understand which specific article we were attacked for. And it's not easy to understand it because we cover so many news stories every day that could possibly put us in danger».

Up until now, only twice has a bomb blown up the printing house of an Italian newspaper. The first time it happened in Palermo in 1958: the Corleonesi clan put a bomb inside the rotary press of the *L'Ora*, the newspaper that, from 1960 and 1972, had three journalists murdered by the mafiosi. The second time was in 1981 in Catania, at the newspaper *Giornale del Sud*, whose editor was Giuseppe Fava, killed three years later by Benedetto Santapaola's clan. It is clear that two bombs, with the fuse primed, left so close to the rotary press, are an intimidating message to the whole newspaper, to its editorial policy, to its role in a social context deeply influenced by criminal power. The role and the editorial policy of the *Quotidiano della Calabria* did not change over the last year. The newspaper keeps on giving voice to a widespread will for change and on taking the lead in mobilising public opinion: on 25 August 2010, the editor wrote a leading article in which he called for an anti-mafia demonstration and the event drew, a month later, 40,000 people.

#### *A “rabble-rouser” journalist and the mobilisation of public opinion*

It is unusual that a journalist calls up the masses, that he makes himself a “rabble-rouser”, according to Alberto Spampinato's definition. Matteo Cosenza shies away. «That's a bit of an overstatement. I just wrote a lead article. The day before the general prosecutor Di Landro was attacked in front of his house. It was the last of a long list of threats against the prosecutors of Calabria, a dramatic series that started at the beginning of 2010 with a bomb at the prosecutor's office in Reggio. I felt that I had the duty to tell my region, the institutions, the political parties, that statements of solidarity are not enough. I spoke about the absence of civil society and I said: let's do something and go to Reggio to show our solidarity with the men and women that are risking their lives for our freedom. They listened to my appeal, but I couldn't imagine such widespread participation. I believe that was also the result of the deep discussion published in our newspaper in the month before the demonstration. That day we showed that in Calabria there is a strong desire for civil participation, but there is also a huge political void. Without being aware of it, at that moment our newspaper filled that void. But I am a journalist and an editor, which is what I want to continue to be». So, Matteo Cosenza states that we must not feel relieved by the decrease of open threats. He says that we cannot talk about a situation of calm after the storm, but we must rather speak about a dormant volcano, cold and silent on the surface, but extremely hot under the earth's crust. Cosenza says: «Public prosecutors also watch over us to ensure that we are able to do our work. They asked us, more than once, to report any possible anomaly or any little sign of trouble. The prosecutors didn't advise us to be cautious, but they warned us, especially when we write in complex environments like those of Reggio Calabria and Crotone. Our line is clear: check the facts and give the news promptly, all the news».

*More subtle than the threats that come from mafia*

Giuseppe Baldessarro works in Reggio Calabria. He is a trial reporter for *Il Quotidiano*. He is also a correspondent for *La Repubblica*. He was threatened with death. At the beginning of 2010, he received an anonymous letter. He clarifies: «We must say that there are many more ways to intimidate a journalist, apart from death threats, lawsuits and accusations. For instance, the warning could come from a lawyer asking the journalist to use less aggressive words towards his powerful client. It could come from a journalist's friend or relative, who is in a friendly way advising him or her not to defend the prosecutors' position. Or maybe they could advise him or her not to take for granted what the police say. Another way to hit a journalist is to discredit him or her publicly or internally within the newspaper staff. A businessman or a politician could call the journalist's publisher or editor and imply that he or she wrote some articles for personal interest. For example, they could say: «That journalist is attacking me because his cousin is my competitor», or something like that. Sometimes they attack you personally to hit the newspaper».

He then says: «The world of local politics has got several instruments to make the newspaper pay for an negative coverage: for example, the allocation of institutional advertising – which, in a moment of crisis like this and in a poor context like Calabria, weighs on the newspapers' balance, especially small newspapers'. If you lose that kind of advertising and it is assigned to your competitor, the effects are far worse. If you want to receive certain advertisements, you must write some things and omit some others. This type of conditioning actually influence on the frequent changes that happened last year at the head of many small newspapers, radios, TVs and websites. This kind of pressure and interference exercised by politicians on the press has increased incredibly over the last year».

Doing our job with awareness and professionalism is not enough. Sometimes that is actually the problem. In this regard, during a convention of Ossigeno in Rome, on 9 February 2011, Giuseppe Baldessarro told two exemplary episodes. «About two years ago, during a City Council session in Reggio Calabria, the then-mayor and current Governor of Calabria Giuseppe Scopelliti said I was a problem for the city: “In this city we have a lot of problems. As long as journalists like him – he pointed at me –keep on writing about cheating, we'll lose credibility and we'll have negative consequences on financial investments and tourism”. I found that calling me “a problem” for the city was a very serious matter, and I asked my trade union to show public solidarity with me. Nothing happened, and now, knowing the context, I'm not surprised».

He goes on: «The other episode is more recent (February 2011). I was a consultant on an episode of the TV programme *Presa diretta* by Riccardo Iacona about the connection between politics and the '*ndrangheta*. The day after the episode aired, during a regional council session, a councillor proposed a motion to censor the programme because «it defamed our region». The motion was not seconded, but the fact that someone had presented it is symptomatic. It proves that someone actually thinks that the problem are the journalists and not the exchange of favours between politicians and the '*ndrangheta*. I would have expected a reaction from the Order of Journalists or the trade union in defence of the journalists who had made that programme. But it didn't happen».

Another symptomatic story deals with Mario Meliadò, anchor of ReggioTv and correspondent for *Il Sole 24 Ore* in Calabria. On 11 May 2011, four days before local elections, his article on the financial distress of the City Council of Reggio Calabria

came out in the southern section of *Il Sole 24 Ore*. Meliadò also mentioned a parliamentary inquiry of nine parliament members of the Democratic Party – among them the coordinator at the Chamber of Deputies Dario Franceschini – stating that the 2009 financial statement was approved with delay.

The same day, the electoral committee of the candidate mayor Demetrio Arena of the People of Freedom party, issued a press release in which, without explanation, personally attacked the journalist. The release said: «We are shocked by Mario Meladò's article [...] For example, it mentions a total debt of 330 million euro (a completely false and unfounded statement) [...]. One should check the facts before writing such cock-and-bull stories [...]. A perfect occasion for the other candidates for mayor who, despite the emptiness of their own proposals find the time to join in the chorus of denigration».

Nino Amadore, editor of the southern section of *Il Sole 24 Ore* comments: «I consider it absurd and unbelievable that a press officer could issue a release in which such things are said about a journalist who is only doing his job. And we don't understand why they attacked only Mario Meladò and not Roberto Galullo who, on the same day, had written even more explicit things on the same subject: "In this electoral campaign talking about mafia infiltration is not a priority, in spite of all the pending judicial inquiries and despite the fact that assistant Giuseppe Lombardo, on 21 September 2010, at the anti-mafia parliamentary committee stated: "To do business, the mafiosi in Reggio go to the source, the De Stefano clan". They are actually managing the city budget"».

Meliadò is still upset about that press release personally addressed at him, because, among other things, he felt he was left alone. He recalls: «The release was published in full by many local newspapers and websites. Nobody distanced himself from it. So it was believed that I made up the news and nothing was said about what actually mattered: the financial situation of the City Council». A matter that is under investigation as a result of Orsola Fallara's suicide, on 17 December 2010. Fallara was the head of the department of finances and taxes. Meliadò concludes by saying: «No journalist spoke in my defence».

We must talk also about the "Pollichieni affair", involving Governor Scopelliti, one more time. The affair proves that a journalist can be hit and discredited without any reference to what he or she wrote. Paolo Pollichieni says: «Since the foundation of our periodical, the *Corriere della Calabria*, on August 2011, Governor Scopelliti, without making any explicit reference, but clearly talking about us, in every public occasion has said: "How is it possible that in a region with poor financial resources and poor advertising investments, new newspapers can be founded, unless they receive dubious funding?" Thus, he implied that our newspaper was financed by some criminal group. It was apparent that he was talking about us, and at some point it was very clear because he made an explicit reference to me in a newspaper».

The explicit reference happened on 11 August, when Scopelliti mentioned Pollichieni in a letter of protest he sent to the *Corriere della Sera* against an article written by Sergio Rizzo and Gian Antonio Stella, who cited an article from the *Corriere della Calabria* about the Region Council sponsoring a beauty contest, using resources allocated to help poor families». In that letter Scopelliti said not to trust the news published by «a man known for his judicial problems and who, at the same time, had a series of well-paid professional assignments financed by the region of Calabria». For those words, Pollichieni has sued him, and today he says: «Finally, instead of making allusions he put his face and his signature under his slanders».

When the Governor mentions Pollichieni's past, he is probably referring to the inquiry on the health service, headed in 2000 by Salvatore Boemi, the then assistant prosecutor of Reggio Calabria's DDA (Anti-mafia district department). Pollichieni, who at the time was department head of the *Gazzetta del Sud*, was arrested and charged with criminal conspiracy and threats, but he was fully acquitted by the appeal court for not having committed the crime. He says today: «I was acquitted and compensated by the State, and regarding the professional assignments, I never had any professional relationship with the Region of Calabria. I challenge him to prove it, if he can».

Pollichieni was vice-president and head of the office of "Report Porter Novelli" in Rome, a press and PR agency that in 2007 managed the planning of an expensive institutional campaign for Reggio Calabria, realised by photographer Oliviero Toscani. Pollichieni states: «I don't understand this behaviour. Whether a journalist writes something about the Governor's work, he should be criticised on the basis of what he wrote, of the articles' content, he should not be attacked on the personal level, with false and biased accusations. I immediately resigned from "Porter Novelli", when I became editor of *Calabria Ora*».

Another controversial issue in Calabria deals with the positions of professional advisors for institutional communication at the Region of Calabria that were given to the relatives of some influential journalists. When the new administration took over, new institutional information platforms were introduced in addition to the already existent press agencies for the governor and the regional council. The regional union of journalists reported that the Region Council hired thirteen new professionals, with a public contract whose rules were «changed in the process».

### *The complex story of Calabria Ora*

Pollichieni left the head of the newspaper *Calabria Ora* on 20 July 2010, writing a lead article in which he reported the publishers' unacceptable interference into his editorial policy, while the newspaper was covering the judicial investigations on the alleged relationship between the Governor Giuseppe Scopelliti and some businessmen connected to the De Stefano clan and to the Alvaro family. After Pollichieni's resignation, the majority of the newspaper's managing board resigned, as well: the central managing editor, two vice-editors of the central office, two department heads, the manager for political news, a trial reporter in Catanzaro, the head of the office in Gioia Tauro.

Young reporter Angela Corica, correspondent from Gioia Tauro, who had been threatened in 2008 with five gunshots against her car, resigned three months later. She says in her resignation letter: «I was wrong to think that things would be the same as before. After Pollichieni's resignation I had believed that, if we all made efforts, we could have continued working peacefully and without conditioning. [...] That was just an illusion because, in fact, things changed within the newspaper, regarding both the internal organisation and the newspaper contents».

In that letter, Angela pointed out another important change: «The newspaper's office in Gioia Tauro was downgraded to a correspondence office [...] nobody explained to us the reason for that decision, while the newspaper was still a reference point for the area of Gioia Tauro. [...]. Apparently, the newspaper also changed its editorial policy regarding the news and politics sections».

Other peripheral offices were downgraded to correspondence offices, like in Vibo Valentia, at a time in which the constant increase of crime in the city would have required a strengthening of the resources.

Furthermore, in October 2010, after of a long series of arguments with new chief editor Piero Sansonetti, reporter Lucio Musolino was dismissed. Musolino, over the past years, had been repeatedly threatened by the '*ndrangheta*, and was one of the most committed reporters in covering Scopelliti's legal troubles. His dismissal was then ruled unfair by the Judge of Work of Reggio Calabria who ordered Musolino's reinstatement, but Musolino didn't want to return and now, along with a lot of other former reporters of the newspaper, he works at the *Corriere della Calabria*».

Piero Sansonetti's management style marked a significant change of the editorial policy of *Calabria Ora*. We can define it a policy of "hyper-guarantism" that led to openly criticise some choices made by the Public Prosecutor's office of Reggio Calabria; especially the use of the *pentiti*.

Some of Sansonetti's choices made clear that the winds had changed. On 7 October 2010, the newspaper published a long interview by Sansonetti of the newly elected Governor of Calabria, Giuseppe Scopelliti. In the interview he talks about politics, the problems with developing the south, and also the '*ndrangheta* and journalism. At some point, referring to the rumours of his alleged involvement in judicial inquiries, Scopelliti states: «I believe in the protection of civil liberties and I await for the pending investigations. But don't you think that there are many people who know *mafiosi* but that doesn't make them *mafiosi* as well? I think about some of your reporters, too... I finally understood the importance of protecting civil liberties. Before destroying someone's reputation, we need to be careful. Some journalists at your newspaper know very little about guarantism. Lucio Musolino for example...». Sansonetti replies: «Musolino is a very good journalist who does his work with seriousness and accuracy».

So Sansonetti stood up for his reporter. But that defence was considered too weak by some people, and raised some criticism.

On the same day, some journalists, including Enrico Fierro and Guido Ruotolo, showed public solidarity with Musolino, who had been attacked so directly by Scopelliti. They wrote in a statement: «The governor's words represented a threat towards the reporter, but also towards the autonomy of autonomy, and the attack was made public by the same newspaper where Musolino works. Criticising Musolino's brave work is an attempt to isolate him, and that is unacceptable».

The issue raised controversy. On the same day, Musolino was guest of Michele Santoro's programme *Annozero* and told his story, he spoke about the death threats he received as a result of his articles. Editor Sansonetti answered two days later writing a lead article called "Against the mafia, but not avengers". The article says: «They say that Scopelliti called Musolino a "justicialist". But then, the other night at *Annozero* I listened to a few journalists, and one from my newspaper too, saying far more serious things about Scopelliti. He was called *mafioso* and nobody defended him. [...] I am persuaded that we can fight the mafia only if we comply with guarantism. Using repression, authoritarianism and avenging methods means playing into the hands of mafia».

### *The hidden pentiti and those on the front page*

A few days later, on 13 October 2010, the *Quotidiano della Calabria*'s opening title is: "The *pentito* reveals the names of the politicians". The article reports *pentito* Paolo Iannò's declaration about the relationship between the '*ndrangheta* and politics: «People said – Iannò states – that Giuseppe Scopelliti was supported by the '*ndrangheta*: they used to say that even when I was a fugitive». This news does not come out in *Calabria Ora* on that day nor on the following days.

A few weeks later, between 19 and 29 November 2010, while the health service of Calabria suffered a financial crisis, the Region assigned new funds to the psychiatric department of some clinics connected to Pietro Citrigno, one of the two publishers of *Calabria Ora*.

On 22 June, Pietro Citrigno was sentenced to 4 years and eight months' imprisonment for usury. On 24 May, he was remanded to a court for trial, along with the other publisher Fausto Aquini, charged with extortion. The charges dealt with the purchase of a closed textile factory in 2006. The two of them forced the owner to sell the establishment for less than the twentieth of its value.

On 15 March 2011, the DDA of Catanzaro asked for the dismissal of the judicial inquiry of the ships full of dangerous waste that may have been deliberately sunk near the coast of Cetraro. *Calabria Ora* started a campaign against «the media case that brought the region to its knees». The editor wrote: «Poisoned by lies, and now who pays for it?». The newspaper sponsored a conference on the subject and became the centre of the renewed debate on the realisation of works to help tourism in Cetraro, works that should be financed with the 2009 Cetraro Law.

One of the most important projects is the conversion of the textile factory into an aquarium. But the media campaign ended few days before the conference, when the Court of Paola requested a trial against the two publishers and scandal broke out.

Another key event that marks the new direction of *Calabria Ora* is the case of Giuseppina Pesce, a *pentita* who belongs to one of the most fearful families of the '*ndrangheta* in Rosarno, in the area of Goia Tauro. The prosecutors succeeded, in one year, in hitting hard the Pesce clan, also thanks to Giuseppina's collaboration, while she was put under police protection.

Last April, a few days before some members of her family were remanded to court, Giuseppina changed her mind and decided to exercise her right to refuse to answer, publicly accusing the prosecutors of having forced her to collaborate with justice. She turned back again in September 2011, stating that she had stopped collaborating because of fear and of pressure from her family.

The false accusations by Giuseppina against the Public Prosecutor's office of Reggio were documented in a letter which she admitted she had signed but that had been written by her lawyer, who sent it to the «only newspaper that would have listened to them».

It was *Calabria Ora* that, on 26 April 2011, published the full letter, dedicating to the event to its front page for two days and bringing on the accusations against prosecutor Giuseppe Pignatone through a series of lead articles in which Sansonetti asked Pignatone to explain himself.

On the other hand, the *Quotidiano della Calabria* deals with the news for the first time on 27 April, introducing the hypothesis – which was later proved to be correct – that Giuseppina's retraction had been ordered by her family. Baldessarro, who detected some inconsistencies between the letter and Giuseppina's first statements,

wrote: «Pesce is not convincing» and he defines as “strange” that «retraction only few days before the first hearing of the preliminary investigation». On 30 April, the journalist wrote an article in which, based on the documents, he demolishes Giuseppina’s new version. The next day, Pignatone himself stepped in and wrote a statement to the *Riformista*.

Sansonetti answered back and on 3 May he wrote: «In that article Pignatone confirms some of the statements made two days ago by the *Quotidiano di Calabria*, but not explicitly attributed to Pignatone, they were instead signed by a reporter of that newspaper (a newspaper being the official prosecutors’ spokesman is a common practice that we do not share)».

The attack against Baldessarro was serious, but very few people showed solidarity with him. His newspaper staff however, issued the following statement: «Today the editor of *Calabria Ora*, Piero Sansonetti, accused Giuseppe Baldessarro of being the “prosecutor’s spokesman” only because he had published some trial documents that were already public [...]. We consider this to be a very dangerous practice both for the physical safety of our co-worker and the entire profession, and for the effectiveness of the fight against organised crime and corruption».

Referring to a journalist as the «spokesman of the prosecutors» in a land like Calabria is very dangerous. It does not only insinuate, like it would in Milan or Rome, that a journalist is conditioned by his or her sources. “The cops’ friend”, “The police confidant”, are typical phrases used by mafia to identify the “vile”, those who speak too much and who are hated for that. Using those words in a land like Calabria may provide a reason to fuel that hatred, to expose the reporter to mafia retaliation. This is what Angela Napoli said: «It’s extremely worrying, because it puts the journalist’s life at risk». And Antonio Nicaso added: «In cases like this, the risk is to give the idea that a journalist’s behaviour is different from the others».

Piero Sansonetti expressed his convictions in the lead article «Journalists or soldiers?», written on 7 May 2011. He wrote: «I’ll tell you the truth, I actually don’t care about lawfulness. [...] Lawfulness means respect of laws. That being a value or not depends, obviously, on the laws and how they are applied. According to me, to respect the laws is not always a merit. As a certain Father Milani used to say, disobedience is a virtue. Yes, but who still remembers Father Milani! I often dislike the laws. I’ve never been on the side of laws. I tend to think that it’s right to stand up for the weak, whoever they are, regardless of whether they’re good or bad, guilty or innocent».

He also set a campaign against the prosecutors’ choice to collaborate with *pentiti* and against the mafia bosses that serve hard time in prison. Antonio Nicaso explains: «Before the law of hard time for mafia criminals, many of them could still manage their businesses from prison. The prison system was modified to prevent any contacts with their organisations»

Another questionable choice by Sansonetti was the publication of a letter written by the member of a historical and feared ‘*ndrangheta* family, Antonio Alvaro, who complained about Father Pino De Masi’s attitude regarding the funeral of Alvaro’s father: «Father Pino, why did you forbid the church to my father?» was the front-page title on 20 July 2011. Angela Napoli says that «Publishing the letter of the son of a mafia boss on the front page is extremely worrying, because it’s clearly a threatening message to Father Pino. The mafia lives on the people’s fear, that’s what they do, they scare people. We can’t fight organised crime if we gave them space in the newspapers».



### *The coverage of the territory*

Finally, there is the issue of the coverage of the territory, as already mentioned by Angela Corica. Michele Albanese, a correspondent for the *Quotidiano della Calabria* and the target of repeated threats reveals to us: «*Calabria Ora* doesn't cover the trial against the Pesce family of Rosarno, or it dedicates ten lines to it, while we write two pages. If our competitor steps aside, we are more exposed, there's no doubt of it». Giuseppe Baldessarro shares the same feeling, as he stated on 9 February 2011 at the Ossigeno conference: «After Paolo Pollichieni's resignation and Sansonetti's arrival, *Calabria Ora* has completely changed. Even if I didn't like Pollichieni's style very much, after his resignation I am the only one left writing these kind of things. Today I feel poorer: as a citizen because we have lost something in terms of pluralism; as a journalist because I feel more alone; and as a professional because there isn't a competitor pushing us to be more accurate. Maybe there is a competitor, but it's a poorer one».

Keeping down the quality of information, hindering the circulation of inconvenient news is a form of censorship used by many prominent figures— politicians, businessmen, criminals. When this fails— more often at the national level — retaliation becomes violent against those — especially at the local level, which is more exposed to conditioning — who do not want to bend.

We had proof of this with two overreactions by the governor of Calabria Giuseppe Scopelliti after major national newspapers revealed news critical of his administration. The first protest — as we mentioned — was a letter addressed to the *Corriere della Sera*, to complain about a report in a local newspaper about the alleged funding of a beauty contest using the public money allocated to initiatives against poverty.

The second protest, formulated by Scopelliti in a public speech on 16 November, was addressed to Roberto Galullo, Enrico Fierro and Guido Ruotolo, three experienced journalists of *Il Sole 24 Ore*, *Il Fatto Quotidiano* and *La Stampa*, who, for weeks, were writing news articles and updates on the judicial inquiry of the financial crisis at the City Council of Reggio Calabria for which the Governor is under investigation.