

What happens up in the North

By Matteo Finco

In the Centre and North of Italy threats, assaults, huge claims for compensation and other forms of intimidation are all used to keep journalists quiet, to hide important news. As a matter of fact, these sad episodes, which have downgraded Italy to the rank of a weak democracy, happen not only in the South, which is contaminated by mafia, but also in Milan, in Turin, in Vicenza. They are frequent, very frequent, even though newspapers very seldom report them. These bad things actually happen and perhaps it is out of a sense of shame that we try not to see them. Today, this reticent and distracted attitude is part of the problem. We should start by saying that these events happen in Italy, and since Italy is one, when there is a problem it affects every part of the country.

First of all, these episodes happen because organised crime – everybody knows– has migrated to and taken root in the centre and north of Italy. Furthermore, using violence to protect particular interests is not only a prerogative of mafia, it is a prerogative of power: violent censorship and legal abuses are used every time people with power, wherever they are, want to hide from they public something they said or did which, if known, could damage them. So they do anything to escape, at any cost, from the inquisitive eye of the journalist, even if they have to blind that eye. Ossigeno's data reveal that in central and northern regions, those people can be mafia bosses, sports executives, hooligans protected by their gangs, civil servants, local administrators, or politicians who threaten with violence, who abuse their position by intimidating, who sue a journalist for thousands or millions of euro in order to ruin him or her. These things happen every time that an someone breaks the rules, every time that someone – instead of exchanging views, instead of asking for a clarification, a denial or a news correction– chooses to abuse his or her power and says «I want to ruin them», using every means available.

In the centre and in the north of Italy these episodes happen. The proof of this is in the following report of facts documented by Ossigeno.

Assaults

«You know you're a dead man, right?». On 16 May 2010, Alessandro Capatano, reporter at the *Gazzetta dello Sport*, was asked that rhetorical question,. He was at the airport of Verona with a group of reporters waiting for their flight to Rome. They had followed the football match Chievo Verona vs. A.S. Roma. A Roma hooligan stood behind him, repeated the threat three times and added: «We can't touch you here, but you know you're done for». Other hooligans stood in front of him, insulting and warning him against writing bad things about the team. Once at home, Capatano reported them to the police. But the danger did not cease. Still today there is a Facebook group called «Alessandro Capatano, in friendship, Roma loathes you», in which one can read things like: «Fucking traitor, we are fucking fed up with you! All of us!». If you look at the wall, you can see that people who insult and threaten are not deterred by the fact that their names and faces are made public.

Remaining in the world of football, let's go back to 19 June 2011. The protagonists are: Alessio Corazza, from the *Corriere del Veneto* and Gianluca Tavellin, from the local channel *TeleArena*. The location was the Arechi stadium of Salerno, where the two journalists were following the match Salernitana-Verona. After the match, Corazza

was writing the report of the game in the press room. There, he and Tavellin were insulted, attacked and threatened of death by a group of hooligans. In this climate of «intimidation and violence», as reported by the staff of the *Corriere del Veneto*, «not only our co-worker, but also other journalists were forced to work before, during and after the match surrounded by people who moved in complete freedom, threatened with death by supposed fans sitting in the stands, they were literally forced to take shelter in the changing rooms at the end of the match».

At the Court of Bergamo, on 9 December 2011, Claudio Galimberti alias “Bocia” (“young guy”), a very well known hooligan, head of the die-hard supporters of the Atalanta team, and two other people, saw Stefano Serpellini, trial reporter at the *Eco di Bergamo*. They assumed that he was collecting information about the arrest of a hooligan who was accused of selling drugs to other Atalanta supporters. They thus waited for him outside and assaulted from behind, pushing him under the arcades of via Burfuro and smashing him against a shop window. Then Galimberti grabbed the journalist by the collar and told him: «I don’t want to see anything in the newspaper, otherwise I’ll come, burn down the newspaper office, and break your legs, even if I have to go to jail». To show that he was serious, before running off, he hit him with his head. Serpellini, with his nose bleeding, was treated at the hospital, where he was given a prognosis of five days.

The newspaper staff of the *Eco di Bergamo* expressed full solidarity with the journalist, remembering that the episode is not an isolated case, but «the last of a troubling series of episodes of intimidation (around in the city there are still some very eloquent graffiti on the walls) and requires a serious reflection on the protection of journalists».

Let’s go back to 2010: on 12 May, in Chivasso, near Turin, two people, father and son, entered the office of *La Nuova Provincia* to protest against an article about thefts and acts of vandalism at their amusement arcade. They did not want the news to come out. They threatened the journalists and the office secretary, who asked them to leave. Later, they attacked Marco Bogetto, the writer of the article, kicking and slapping him. First, they boasted: «Call the police if you want, we are not afraid of them».

Maurizio Maule, a photographer from the photo agency Fotogramma, whose pictures are published every day in several Milan newspapers, was attacked, too. On 11 October 2010, he took pictures of a burnt car in the southern periphery of Milan. The car had been set ablaze the night before as retaliation against its owner, a woman who had reported an attack she witnessed on Luca Massari, a 45-year old taxi driver. The man was driving when he accidentally struck and killed a dog, out walking with its owner. An acquaintance of the owner, who was also present, became enraged at the pet’s death and beat up the taxi-driver, who died a month later as a result of his injuries.

Maule had been at the scene of the attack the day before, after Massari had been brought to the hospital. «Other journalists were there» - Maule told Ossigeno - «we were trying to understand what had happened, talking to the people who were there. That day I met one of Massari’s assailants: we talked calmly for two hours, he told us his point of view. At the end of our talk he even left me his phone number».

The next day, he returned to the scene to take photos of the burnt car. «I was the first one there and I started taking pictures of the car» – Maule says – «Suddenly this guy I met the day before, Piero Citterio, appears with a broomstick in his hand. He starts yelling at me, insulting me, ordering me to go away: “You, journalists, you have to fuck off!”, he cries. Then he starts running toward me, so I decide to go back to my

motorcycle, but he reaches me and hits me in the back with the broomstick. Then he continues hitting me until I fall down, almost unconscious. The camera falls, too, and breaks. The guy starts to walk away, so I stand up and call the police. As I try to get away, the assailant comes back with three more people. They stay a few meters away while he starts beating me up again, now with his bare hands, with punches and kicks. Luckily, the police arrive and stop him but he is able to get away. I was brought to the hospital». Many journalists showed solidarity with Maule: «Many of them felt really bad for me, here in Milan we know each other quite well. Some TV channels wanted to interview me to reveal what had happened».

Another more recent case happened on the night of 23 June 2011. In Brescia, a Moroccan man climbs up the Palazzo della Loggia, one of the historical palaces of the city centre, to protest against the denial of his request for a residence permit. He wanted to go to Morocco to see his family and wanted to be sure he could return to Italy legally. Near the palazzo, a demonstration for immigrants' rights is taking place. The editor of the *Telepadania* channel³, 35-year-old Aurora Lussana, arrives in the square with her co-worker Camilla Venaria, an intern. While taking in the scene, she starts to record a video with her mobile phone. A few people from the demonstration head towards the two reporters and when they say that they work for *Telepadania*, the demonstrators tell them: «*Telepadania* cannot stay here because it represents the Northern League party and its protectionist policies that forced that poor immigrant to climb up Palazzo della Loggia. So it's also your fault if he's risking his life». «They hemmed in us and started to insult us because they didn't want us to shoot the video», Lussana tells. Then a young woman grabbed the phone out of her hands and punched her on the chin. Luckily, the Digos⁴ arrived and order was established.

Lussana admits bitterly: «Among the attackers there was a journalist, too. He's the editor of a local radio broadcast that supports the activities of the community centres. He dared to say that we were yelling racial slurs at the immigrants and the demonstrators: we couldn't have done that, since the square was full of immigrants, and we actually didn't do it».

Lussana was treated but refused hospitalisation; she went directly to the police station. «I reported the assault and the malicious mischief to the police that same night. My co-worker gave her testimony as well. Then I recognised our attackers in a video made by the police and I was even able to recover the sound of the video I had taken with my damaged iPhone».

Lussana received a few statements of solidarity: «Some local journalists called from Bergamo», she says. The Order of Journalists also issued a statement of solidarity. And some politicians showed solidarity, too: «We can say that this attack was politically motivated. I wasn't seen as a journalist doing her job, but as a representative of the Northern League party. Moreover, I'd like to clarify that *Telepadania* is a private channel, it's not the Northern League's official channel, we don't receive any funding from any political party».

Do the assaults change a journalist's behaviour? Aurora Lussana answers: «The hard part was managing the stress of the assault, of an unexpected act of violence that happened in a public place. I felt safe there, I didn't think I might be in danger».

³TV channel of the North of Italy.

⁴General Investigations and Special Operations Division.

Threats

Gisella Roncoroni was not physically assaulted: no one punched her, no one used any weapons against her. Yet, she was victim of a different form of violence: direct, rough and savage verbal abuse. It happened in Como, the city where she works, during a City Council session, in front of administrators, journalists, TV cameras and citizens. She works at the newspaper *La Provincia* and in 2009 she received the award “Guido Vergani, Reporter of the Year”. In May 2011, she gave, along with another journalist, “marks” to the City Councillors. A few days later, on 24 May 2011, Gisella Roncoroni was at the City Hall with other reporters.

Councillor Augusto Giannattasio was not happy with the mark that he received – 4 out of 10 – and started to say: «I was very upset by the bad mark I received». Then, he went on and insulted the journalist making fun of her surname, and said: «This journalist, this lady... I don't know her, I've never seen her...». But he was lying, because a few seconds later he kept on talking while staring at her and addressed her directly: «You say useless things. Please, do something else, there are other jobs you can do. You could be a beautician, I can help you find a job... in Switzerland!».

The video of the scene is available on the internet at www.quicomo.it. Roncoroni, who managed to stay calm during the verbal attack, received many statements of solidarity from the Order of Journalists, the Union of Reporters in Lombardy, and from several journalists and associations.

Apparently, many politicians from different parties cannot bear criticism and are intolerant of journalists. The leader of the Northern League party, Umberto Bossi, for example, at the Pumpkin Fair of Pecorara, on 31 October 2011, told the journalists: «You should go to prison for the articles you write about my family, sooner or later either we report you or we smash your face. Someday, somebody will beat you up, people are sick of you. Some of you deserve to be punched in the face».

Davide Pambianchi is a photoreporter who lives and works in Genoa. He has been working for the oldest newspaper in the city, the *Il Secolo XIX*, for ten years. He takes thousands of photos every year and he often covers trial news, at the Court of Genoa. One ordinary day in June, Pambianchi was at the Court while two people, arrested the day before, were brought before the judge. He was alone there and ready to take the pictures of the faces of the local crime bosses. Pambianchi tells us: «The background story dealt with a national investigation on the 'ndrangheta organised crime network, which centres around a grocery store owned by Cangemi, a 'ndrangheta boss. In the summer of 2010, Cangemi was arrested, along with others. One year later, there is another wave of arrests, 16 people throughout the region of Liguria and 7 in Genoa alone. The next day I went to the courthouse to take pictures of the people arrested, as they awaited questioning by the judge. One of them was Angelo Condidorio, whose relatives headed towards me and tried to intimidate me, yelling threats in my face, such as: «Scumbag journalist, don't let this photo come out, because we saw you». But I kept on taking pictures. Then, my co-workers arrived and informed the newspaper about what happened. The next day, the Order of Journalists put out a statement in which they praised me for going on with my job».

So Pambianchi was not beaten up, he received no physical assault. But being threatened by a family connected to mafia is certainly not encouraging. He nonetheless went on; he did not give in to intimidation. For this reason, last July he was recognized by the association “daSud” for «doing his job with passion and commitment».

Another episode happened in December 2011: in Aosta someone wrote «Genco, you dirtbag!» on a wall. The message was addressed to journalist Daniele Genco, who works for the newspaper *La Stampa* in Val d'Aosta.

«I didn't think that ghosts would have come back here, after all this time. I feel fine and I thank my colleagues for their solidarity, as well as the police forces and the judicial authorities», Genco commented. This is not the first unpleasant attack for him: in April 1998, he had been assaulted during the funerals of two anarchists, Edorardo Baleno and Maria Soledad Rosas. In August he received a mail bomb, which, thankfully did not explode. Those episodes led him to live under police protection for three years.

Primorski Dnevnik is the Slovenian newspaper of Trieste, especially published for the Slovenian minority living in Friuli-Venezia Giulia. In 2011, it was threatened twice. The first time on 17 March, the day of the 150th anniversary of the Unification of Italy, when a few envelopes containing bullets and threatening messages were delivered to the newspaper's office. The second time, in June, when a fake gun, a can of solvent and a threatening letter were found in front of the newspaper's door. However, it seems that this time it was the work of a fool. As Dušan Udovic, editor in chief of *Primorski Dnevnik*, explained to Ossigeno: «The investigations led to the identification of the person responsible for both episodes, who was mentally ill». Udovic was more afraid of the possible consequences of the episode on the good relations between the ethnic groups of the city, Slovenians and Italians. «We are always cautious when something like that happens, because a good relationship was built in a long time, but could be spoiled in a very short time», he says.

San Marino

San Marino is not Italy, but there is a close relationship between the two countries, so we cannot skip it. In San Marino there is also crime, mafia infiltration and money laundering. David Oddone is an Italian journalist who works at *L'Informazione di San Marino*. In the past, he has received death threats because of his articles on mafia and white-collar crime. Recently, along with Antonio Fabbri and Monica Moroni, he wrote a book called *Mafie a San Marino* (The Mafias in San Marino). Oddone says: «For a long time, the politicians and businessmen of San Marino were not aware of the problems related to mafia infiltration. The journalists who openly speak of mafia like me were accused of spoiling the country's image. I was labelled as the "Italian who wants to hurt San Marino". Today, however, thanks to the excellent work of the Court of San Marino and to journalists' investigations, nobody can say that they don't know». Oddone received two, very explicit, death threats saying: "You'll die". «I was also warned by the Gendarmerie. It's a way to try to silence the reporters who try to do their job with integrity. But it's not the only method. In San Marino there's a "gag law" stating that the journalists who breach the secrecy on preliminary investigations have to pay a fine of 10,000 euro. Apparently, the law is unconstitutional since journalists are not bound to that kind of secrecy, which applies only to lawyers and the police. The first draft of the law foresees imprisonment!» says Oddone, who received statements of solidarity from the Italian Order of Journalists, but not the institutions of San Marino.

Oddone knows well the "legal" threats, the specious lawsuits filed only to stop unwanted inquiries: «Our newspaper received about fifty of them over a few years, but they were all dismissed. In 2010 I reported on a mafia bank connected to a holding

company in San Marino. I was sued for libel, but the lawsuit was dismissed. And then I was proven to be right. But before that, I was sued about twenty times».

Delegitimisation and interference

Fabiana Marcolini, reporter of the newspaper *L'Arena* of Verona, was the victim of an unpleasant episode: she was summoned twice by the Public Prosecutor's office of Verona and heard as "person informed of the facts", regarding some articles she had written in 2010. She was asked to give the names of her sources about the news of the arrest of some criminals and police officers. But, in both cases, the information was not bound to secrecy.

The first time, she was summoned on 22 August 2011, to give testimony about two articles published in September 2010 on the arrest of two officers of the Guardia di Finanza⁵ of Verona. The prosecutor accused her of breaching secrecy on preliminary investigation. «The truth is» - Marcolini says - «the officer's superiors didn't want the news to be made public. But there were no secrecy on the facts», so they could be reported.

On 13 September, she was summoned again to understand how the reporter had received the news about an order of arrest expected on 22 August. According to the prosecutor, the news may have spoiled the investigation, since, when the article came out, not all the arrests had been made.

There is a third episode: the journalist wrote about a complaint against the Guardia di Finanza for sponsoring the Hellas Verona Football Club. The day after the article was published, the Guardia di Finanza asked the complainant to clarify how Marcolini knew about the complaint: the investigators talked of a news leak, but also in this case, there was no secrecy on the investigation.

«I don't care if I'm not praised for my articles» - Marcolini says - «what I do care is that the roles between journalists and magistrates are mutually respected and recognised».

Complaints and sentences

Renzo Magosso is an experienced journalist. In December 2010 he was sentenced by the court to pay a fine of 1,000 euro (pardoned) and a compensation of 240,000 euro for libel. At the same time, there still is an on-going civil action with a claim for a compensation of 1,5 million euro.

The story started in 2004, when Magosso wrote for *Gente* magazine some new revelations about a scoop he had published in 1980: Magosso was in fact the one who had first revealed the name of Walter Tobagi's killer, only 10 days after the *Corriere della Sera* journalist had been murdered. Twenty-four years later, on 17 June 2004, Magosso interviews the former *carabiniere* Dario Covolo (codename "Ciondolo"), who had been his source in the past. Covolo said that six months before Tobagi's death, he had informed his superiors that a known terrorist group was planning the murder.

However, this fact has always been denied by General Alessandro Ruffino and General Umberto Bonaventura, Covolo's superiors. After the article came out, Ruffino and Bonaventura's sister (the general had since died) sued Magosso for libel.

«If investigating and collecting new evidence on the events that led to Tobagi's murder is a crime, then I am guilty», Magosso says. «Covolo worked until 1980 for the anti-

⁵Law enforcement agency under the authority of the Minister of Economy and Finance

terrorism unit of General Carlo Alberto Dalla Chiesa, gathering from terrorist-turned-informant Rocco Ricciardi, called the “postman of Varese”». It seems that Covolo felt in some way guilty for not saving Tobagi, since «we had the chance to do it».

«When I was sued» - Magosso continues - «Dario Covolo spoke before the Court and confirmed word for word everything I had written in the interview in *Gente*. General Niccolò Bozzo also testified on my behalf and showed an internal document of the Carabinieri with a list of the “things to say and not to say”, in case he was questioned at Tobagi’s trial in the eighties. But all this was not enough to acquit me, to save me from a definitive sentence of guilty».

Along with him, Covolo and the former editor of *Gente*, Umberto Brindani, were also convicted.

«A ruling of the Supreme Court will set a precedent for every journalist who writes an article that goes beyond the official documents of a closed trial. That’s the point: the Supreme Court stressed that all journalists must refer only to the official documents of Tobagi’s trial, ignoring, essentially, all new evidence that comes out». According to Magosso, this would represent a threat for all the reporters who would like to investigate past closed cases.

Specious lawsuits

Over the last few years, there has been a large misuse of lawsuits and legal actions. When someone feels injured by an article or a news report, several things can be done: first of all, one can ask for a correction, as provided for by the 1948 law that regulates the press.

Not many people ask for corrections and it is true that these requests are often ignored or disregarded. Another possibility is to call on the regional Order of Journalists. However, more often people choose to sue the journalist and to claim damages. These claims often are excessive, ranging from a few thousands to a few millions euro: these types of complaint are “frivolous” and specious.

In June 2011, Paolo Colonnello, reporter at *La Stampa*, wrote an article in *Tabloid*, the official magazine of the Order of Journalists in Lombardy, wondering «what’s the proportion between a claim for damages of “up to” 2 million euro (I didn’t make up the amount) and a bottom of the page article on a final verdict? What could be the possible damage to a company – even if it’s listed on the stock exchange – that it should seek to financially ruin you and your family because of an article published perhaps a year ago and that nobody, except some zealous legal offices, can even remember? And finally: how is it possible that once the journalist wins the lawsuit and the charges are proved false, the complainants, who pursued the action for months or years, are not accused of threatening the freedom of the press?».

The only option for journalists is to hire good lawyers and to hope they are not convicted.

However, little can be done in this regard, as lawyer Oreste Flamini explains. Although the Criminal Code provides that – in case of declaration of nonsuit – the complainant can be sentenced, actually in penal actions «this option cannot be applied because the majority of them end because the fact is without foundation and because of the journalist’s acquittal. The majority of acquittal sentences mention the right of information and expression and state that the fact is not an offence. To sum up, it is a shameful that although the codes provide for specious lawsuits to be punished, in practice this premise is excluded if the acquittal comes due to the exercise of a right!».

Ossigeno has spoken about specious litigation in the course of two conferences (in December 2010 and April 2011) in Milan. The matter is extremely complex, but there may be a few solutions that could be applied: changing the 1948 law regulating the press, creating the offence of «hindering information», or establishing assistance and advisory committees for sued journalists. This last proposition is becoming concrete with the creation of an “anti-complaint office”, sponsored by several associations and entities like Ossigeno. The help-desk is conceived to assist especially freelancers, who are the most exposed to threats and are not covered by the publication’s legal assistance.

The last cases of complaints against journalists are those that happened to *L’Informatore Lomellino*, *VicenzaPiù* (and its website) and to Daniele Predieri of *La Nuova Ferrara*.

In Mortara, a town of 15,000 inhabitants in the province of Pavia, the newspaper *L’Informatore Lomellino* has existed for 60 years. It is a weekly newspaper published in about 3,500 copies by a cooperative of journalists. Last December, editor in chief Giovanni Rossi reported that the periodical is having a hard time: they are charged with libel and other charges may come soon, as announced by some local administrators. Should they be convicted, it would be the end of the newspaper.

Rossi tells Ossigeno: «On 31 October 2011, the *Carabinieri* came into the office armed with submachine guns. They took copies of seven issues of the newspaper, which came out from the end of August to the end of September». The agents were collecting material after the libel suit filed by the president of a public company of Mortara, Simone Ciaramella. Rossi cannot explain the grounds of the charge: «In one of those seven numbers the company is not even mentioned. In the other ones, I checked, there is nothing libellous. We hired a lawyer to defend us, but we still don’t have any further news», he says. Then there are the charges that have been only announced. «On 18 June, the City Council of Mortara gave a lawyer the mandate to sue us. The complaint is supposedly based on an article in which we wrote that two “parties” held at the Municipal Library had been paid for with public money. But we had made a mistake and we published a correction in the following issue». Apparently, this was not enough for the City Council.

Another episode: on 21 November 2011 the City Councillor for Culture also announced that he wanted to sue the *Informatore*. The Councillor – who is himself a journalist and had worked at the newspaper for 8 years – «said that he would sue the newspaper, but he did not explain why and didn’t give us the chance to respond», Rossi says. For the time being, the newspaper is not aware of that any charges were filed. «Neither of them has ever asked the newspaper to deny or correct the news, they didn’t send any letter of protest. Never said anything, never written anything», Rossi explains. And he describes what the surrounding environment is like: «Local powers threaten to sue you for whatever you write, knowing that they can intimidate the newspapers that don’t have the means to hire a lawyer like Perry Mason or the young journalists who stop writing once they are sued. That had never happened before».

In Vicenza, since 2006, there is a periodical newspaper, *VicenzaPiù* that started with 2,000 copies and now, after 220 issues, is printed in 10,000 copies. The newspaper staff is composed of the editor in chief, two reporters for the principle inquiries, six steady collaborators and other occasional collaborators. Moreover, they have a website, with about one million views every month.

In February 2011, editor Giovanni Coviello, along with reporter Marco Milioni, was investigated by the Public Prosecutor’s office of Vicenza for breach of file secrecy (as

provided by articles 621 and 110 of the Criminal Code). Coviello says: «We received some documents dealing with a senator of the Northern League, Alberto Filippi (expelled from his party on July 2011), and an affair regarding the permitted use of some plots of land in the province of Vicenza, that passed from agricultural to commercial use. The documents contained commercial transactions, exchanges of letters, etc... Some of them were signed, others not. The same documents were also sent to other people, not only to us. And they were sent to Franca Equizi, former City Councillor of the Northern League, who brought a petition to the Public Prosecutor's office of Venice and to the Guardia di Finanza of Vicenza and organised a press conference in the City Hall to inform the public about the situation. The press conference was broadcasted by the TV programme *Annozero*: Equizi declared that she had registered the documents at the Public Prosecutor's office four days earlier».

«Once a document is registered, it is of public domain, so it can be published», Coviello explains. «On 21 February, we published this 62 pages document. We were the only ones who published it, no other newspaper did it. A few days later, at the beginning of March, Marco Milioni – the author of the article – and I were summoned by the prosecutor. By the way, they made a mistake because I was summoned as the publisher and Milioni as the editor»

Coviello and Milioni were ordered to black out two (of the 62) pages of the document: it was a letter sent by Filippi to the president of the manufacturers of Vicenza, Roberto Zuccato. Coviello says: «I pointed out that those were public documents, but I respected the sentence and blacked out the two pages. Later, we received statements of solidarity from everyone. Then, we brought a complaint before the Court and two months later the sentence was annulled because the material could be published in its entirety, as it was part of a lawsuit. Then we sued the prosecutor and the head of the Digos because they had mistaken our roles».

But the story does not end here: Coviello and his newspaper are currently involved in another, unresolved situation. Paolo Pecori, interim prosecutor of Vicenza, brought a libel action against Coviello for failure to verify the news. Pecori contests Milioni's article (that reports an extract from the *Fatto Quotidiano*) in which Pecori is said to have two sons working as lawyers in Vicenza, and that one of them was also City Councillor for legal affairs. So the article had reported the Public Prosecutor's conflicts of interest.

Coviello and Milioni were notified of Pecori's lawsuit in November. They commented: «If our telling the naked truth bothers somebody, it's not our problem. We will go on with our job and we will assert our rights in court. The complaint is built on false assumptions. The prosecutor didn't perform a preliminary examination of it. Moreover – and this is the most important and saddest part of the whole story – in his article Milioni reported only facts, criticisms and opinions that had already appeared in other media».

Daniele Predieri covers the trial news at the *Nuova Ferrara*. He has been sued many times for compensation, for both big and small amounts. He tells Ossigeno about two lawsuits he received while he was covering very important stories dealing with the recent history of the city of Ferrara.

The first one deals with the case of Federico Aldovrandi, an 18-year-old boy who died in circumstances that are still unclear (despite the many trials), after being arrested by the police. Predieri explains that, after the first trial, the four policemen involved were sentenced to «three years' imprisonment for the boy's death, caused by the agents' negligent use of force. But the witness testimonies revealed some mistakes and

omissions in the course of the investigations. In fact, during the second trial, three more people were arrested, among them the Chief of the General Prevention Unit, for misleading the public prosecutor Mariaemanela Guerra, who, when informed of Aldovrandi's death, didn't perform the inspection personally but assigned the investigation to the Carabinieri. Now, Aldovrandi's mother, Patrizia Moretti, has always stated that prosecutor Guerra didn't run the investigations properly and that she never actually committed herself to discovering how her son had died».

The libel action is brought against Predieri, his co-worker Marco Zavaglia (who had never written anything about the story: another journalist's byline appeared on one of the controversial articles, but he was not summoned in court) and their newspaper, represented by the editor Paolo Boldrini. The grounds of the action are: reporting Mrs Moretti's statements (who had only quoted the text of the first instance sentence); retracing the failures of the investigation and the chronological order of the events; stating that, after Guerra's was replaced by prosecutor Nicola Proto at the head of the inquiry, the investigations finally took off and brought to the agents' sentences.

Furthermore, Predieri says that «I was remanded to the Court because I had written that “the Council of Magistrates had proceeded against prosecutor Guerra and had discharged her”. They contest that it was not a disciplinary proceeding but only a case of conflicts of interest». Predieri refers to an internal proceeding against Guerra, whose conduct was judged positively. This aspect is related to Predieri and his newspaper's second subpoena in the civil court.

This summons deals with Guerra's personal life. At the time of the Aldovrandi inquiry, Guerra's son was involved in a drugs investigation in Ferrara (and he was later convicted). That inquiry was interwoven with the Aldovrandi case. Predieri and his newspaper had worked on that story: the prosecutor considered herself to be a «victim of a defaming and detracting campaign». Predieri says: «The prosecutor and her lawyers sued three editors, four journalists and my newspaper's publisher seeking compensation of 1,500,000 euro».

The second legal trouble for Predieri deals with the “Costruttori-Donigaglia case”, a trial, still ongoing, on the bankruptcy of Coopcostruttori, one of the biggest cooperative of builders in Italy. That bankruptcy caused a 1 billion euro loss and fell on the backs of 3,500 families in the province of Ferrara, who lost their savings invested in the cooperative.

The principle defendant (30 other people were accused along with him) is Giovanni Donigaglia, ex-president of the cooperative, charged with bankruptcy fraud. Donigaglia asserts – just like prosecutor Guerra – that he had suffered a defaming and detracting campaign. Thirty newspaper articles are attached to the trial documents and Predieri explains that «they were all based on the documents of the Public Prosecutor's office of Ferrara. They are facts and documents that are being discussed at the trial against Donigaglia». Donigaglia brought a civil action before the Court of Rome against Predieri and the former editor of *La Nuova Ferrara* Valentino Pesci, seeking compensation of 2 million euro.

Predieri says: «The paradox is that I was not sued for breach of secrecy on preliminary investigation: in fact, I had published wiretappings and documents taken from the prosecution's file. Donigaglia sued me for libel. I am his target, he wants to intimidate me, but he will not succeed in doing it. Luckily, my newspaper has always been on my side, even when the editor changed. But it's hard to bear this situation in the long term. Our last editor, Paolo Boldrini, is the one who exposed himself the most», by asserting the journalists' right to inform and to defend themselves against any

accusation. «And he did well» - Predieri continues - «we could not tolerate such a situation».

Predieri has received a few statements of solidarity: «Also in this case, what gives me the strength to go on is the solidarity received from people like me, who feel miserable and abandoned by everyone. For years, I was like a psychologist to all these people who call me at any hour, who open their heart to me, I tried to give them some advice: all this goes beyond your professional duty, because at that point you are personally involved and you cannot step aside. These stories are humanly fascinating, because they involve people who are suffering, sometimes you have to deal with a mother crying right in front of your eyes», he says.

Therefore, he explains that the people living in the province of Ferrara «are a little “cold” because, for example, both the institutions and Donigaglia’s victims, those who have left him at the head of the cooperative for twenty years, all these people, who might say something against Donigaglia or might show solidarity with me, don’t do it because they are scared».

Predieri was involved in another legal case when he was questioned by a judge as person informed of the facts and when he had to appeal to professional secrecy. He says: «The questioning dealt with three articles I had written about Rosario Minna, Chief Prosecutor of Ferrara, who had been accused by prosecutor Angela Scorza to have taken away her, without valid reasons, the investigation dealing with the alleged bullying by some *Carabinieri* officers of a female colleague». The prosecutor’s office wanted to know Predieri’s sources, wanted to understand where he had got the information regarding the controversy between Minna and Scorza. All this, in the middle of an apparent conflict of interest. «But after the questioning, I didn’t receive any further notification», he finally says. He was lucky. Because that is another way to threaten journalists: when they are asked to reveal their sources, which they should and are expected to protect, and when they are accused of knowing something that should have remained secret.

That too, happens up north.