

OPINION



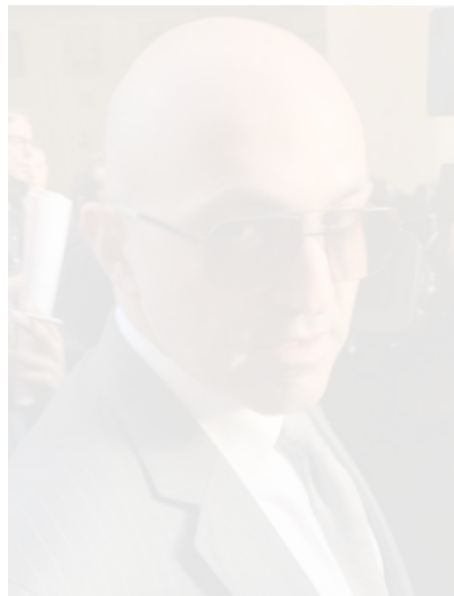
Arnold Cassola

Arnold Cassola is an independent election candidate

The dirty political implications of the Yorgen-Rosianne chats



Rosianne Cutajar and Yorgen Fenech



THE Rosianne Cutajar-Yorgen Fenech chats are scandalous. Not because of the explicit language or the sexual connotations of the context. We are all human beings, with our failings. Let us be frank. Who of us has not talked sex or uttered the odd swear word here and there?

What is scandalous are the dirty dealings going on behind our back in the political and business arena.

The chats revealed cryptic talk of the type: 'Shall we meet for lunch with Tikka? Yes, 1pm at BOV.'

Tikka is Charles Farrugia, Cutajar's principle canvasser.

As far as I know, BOV does not run a 12-star Michelin restaurant, the type Yorgen Fenech is used to frequent. And, in 2019, a 30-year-old Maltese woman having a secret affair with a rich married businessman does not take with her a chaperone. Could this be a message in code for something more sinister?

We learnt that in June 2019 a secret admirer gifted Rosianne Cutajar an expensive Bulgari handbag, using Farrugia's services. On 18 June, the MP learned that the anonymous donor was Yorgen Fenech.

We also learnt that Rosianne was gifted €9,000 in cash by Yorgen and that he bought her a designer signed orange jacket and another white one. None of these gifts were declared in her parliamentary asset declarations and in the case of cash, neither in her income tax return.

A week after these gifts, Rosianne travelled to Strasbourg to the Council of Europe Assembly, where she did her utmost to get Yorgen's 17Black taken off the resolution on Malta.

On 18 June 2019, Yorgen promised Rosianne, 'Illum nghidlek 100% (Today I'll tell you 100%)' who was going to be ap-

pointed European Commissioner by the Maltese government. Helena Dalli was appointed on 24 July. How would Yorgen know before of secret Cabinet decisions?

Yorgen even reassured Rosianne that she and Edward Zammit Lewis would form part of the planned Cabinet reshuffle that would follow Dalli's move to Brussels. Who was giving Yorgen this information?

In July 2019, Rosianne admitted that at the Council of Europe, after she had done her best to protect Yorgen, everyone was insulting her because of then minister Chris Cardona. She expressed surprise Joseph Muscat was not doing anything about it.

But the chats also show how Yorgen acted as some sort of advisor to then minister Konrad Mizzi. On 7 November 2019, he told Rosianne that he 'opened Konrad's eyes'.

The chats also revealed how Yorgen was furious over Chris Cardona's handling of the Dragonara casino concession. Fenech was interested in it but from the chats it seems Cardona, who was minister for the economy at the time, played the double game with Yorgen. In the end, the concession was given to Yorgen's rivals.

Yorgen was furious at what he considered to be Cardona's betrayal and he informed Rosianne that he will punch the minister so hard that he will not forget it.

The cherry on the cake would be Rosianne's anger at not being appointed minister. She decided to grant herself a useless €27,000-a-year consultancy, compliments of her friend Pierre Fenech, the ITS CEO.

Rosianne aptly admitted to Yorgen that everyone was like 'a pig at the trough' and she would be doing the same.



Daniel Xerri

Daniel Xerri is senior lecturer, Centre for English Language Proficiency, University of Malta

The islands awash with cocaine

WHEN a young woman is mown down by an SUV in the most callous way imaginable, is it just the perpetrator who is to blame? When he kicks the dying woman, throws stones and screams abuse at her, is it only his addled brain that is responsible?

Undisputedly, his actions are beyond all justification; he deserves to be excoriated for what he did and the attitude he displayed in doing it. When he is convicted — as he will surely be if the court does its job well — nothing short of life imprisonment will suffice in serving a small measure of justice to the victim, her family and society.

However, this same society needs to question whether this heinous crime was merely the act of a monster and hence a glitch in an otherwise orderly state of affairs, or else an overt symptom of the cocaine epidemic that is seemingly spreading in stealthy ways across the nation and clutching many in its grip.

If we entertain the possibility that this second reality might be afflicting some of the people we know or know of, then we might want to consider whether a collective sense of complacency is as much to blame for the woman's death. Complacency in the face of a social evil that is answerable for the loss of such a young life and the ones we do not hear about because they are extinguished or ravaged in more subtle yet equally tragic ways.

Cocaine's popularity in Maltese society has grown exponentially over the past few years. Just last year, nearly three tons of cocaine with an estimated street value exceeding €380 million were seized by law enforcement entities. This is triple the amount seized in 2021.

Between 2017 and 2021, the highest incidence of drug-related emergencies reported to Mater Dei hospital were for cocaine. Almost 1,300 individuals sought medical assistance due to cocaine induced intoxication. Government figures show that in 2021, 50% of those who started receiving drug treatment services for the first time considered cocaine to be their primary drug of choice.

Within the overall population of those seeking treatment for cocaine addiction in Malta, most users are male. While their median age is 36, first use takes place in a person's early twenties. Other characteristics of cocaine users include a secondary or tertiary level of education, regular employment, and stable accommodation. More than a third of them consume cocaine daily, with sniffing or snorting the drug being the most popular route of administration.

Reports of people making use of cocaine during private functions, when out socially or even as a common means of taking the edge off after a tough day at work are not uncommon. As indicated by drug rehabilitation agencies, the normalisation of cocaine as a recreational drug and the belief that it is trendy to partake of it in social circles are some of the reasons why its consumption has shot up. In addition, the decrease in cost over the years and its wide availability make cocaine a highly accessible drug in an affluent country like Malta.

Misconceptions surrounding cocaine are one of the chief reasons why certain people fall into the trap of using it. Their conviction that as a party drug it enhances how a person socialises and improves their ability to function might lead them to develop a dependency on it, even while believing that cocaine is not dangerous because addiction to it takes time to develop.

The way cocaine is at times glamorised leads some users to believe that it is safe to use in moderation. However, the evidence shows otherwise; it confirms that the drug can severely impact a person's mental state and behaviour.

The fact that the level of purity of the cocaine available on the street is relatively low when compared to that of the massive shipments seized in transit means that various cutting agents adulterate the mixture that is eventually consumed. These cutting agents are potentially as dangerous as cocaine, if not more so.

There are several reports of people suffering from delirium, hallucinations and other psychotic symptoms as a result of consuming cocaine cut by synthetic compounds. Violence and aggression, paranoia, panic attacks and excessive irritability are how the drug may manifest itself in a person's behaviour.

Having spent years personally witnessing the slavish dependency that hard drugs can generate in a loved one, the altered behaviour and disturbed mental state of the user, as well as the havoc these wreak on the lives of both the user and their family and friends, I think that as a society we cannot afford to remain complacent in the face of the growing menace of the cocaine epidemic.

If we do, the damage will not just consist of the untimely and brutal death of an innocent woman who found herself at the wrong place at the wrong time. If we do, there are likely to be far more victims of cocaine as it continues to rampage through our streets and sneak into our homes.