



Call for ban on mobile phones in schools

Ivan Camilleri
Brussels

The Council of Europe has issued a new draft resolution calling for a ban on the use of mobile phones and Wi-Fi technology in all schools in its 47 member states, including Malta. Mobile phones should be banned from schools to protect children from potentially harmful wireless signals, says the resolution, based on a report approved by the Council's Environment Committee.

However, Environmental Health director John Mard Kingwell said there was no cause for alarm and stressed that Malta was following developments closely.

"This is still a draft resolution and there still needs to be plenty of discussion on the subject. If and when the European Union issues any legislation we will adopt it," he said when contacted.

The report, issued two weeks ago, stresses that European governments should "take all reasonable measures to reduce exposure to electromagnetic fields" emitted from wireless devices, including mobile phones.

In the report, which was developed by the European Commission, the committee said it was crucial to avoid repeating the mistakes made when public health officials were slow to recognise the dangers of asbestos, asbestos smoking and lead in petrol.

The draft report, unanimously approved by the committee, will be debated by the Council's Parliamentary Assembly. The views do not necessarily represent those of the Committee of Ministers, the council's decision-making body consisting of member states' foreign ministers.

It has long been claimed that the electromagnetic radiation emitted from wireless devices, including mobile phones, could harm brain development. However, experts never reached a conclusive decision.

The resolution coincides with a World Health Organisation warning issued last week that mobile phone use can increase possible cancer risk. Before this announcement, WHO had always assured consumers an adverse health effect had been established.

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Crushed



A trailer truck yesterday went out of control along Luqa's Qorrot Road and slammed into a vacant parked car. Photo: Alan Cavillie

EU to reinforce suspects' rights

Ivan Camilleri
Brussels

Brussels yesterday made fresh legal proposals aimed at reinforcing the rights of criminal suspects across the EU. All suspects, whether EU citizens or not, will be awarded the right to see a lawyer and have him present during police questioning.

In Malta, suspects have the right to consult a lawyer before interrogation but not to have one present during questioning.

The right to consult a lawyer has been on the statute books since 2002 but was only activated through a legal notice last February following pressure by Nationalist backbencher and lawyer Frances Debono.

The police were resisting its introduction as they deemed it could jeopardise their investigations.

Access to a lawyer is already considered a fundamental human right by the European Court of Human Rights. Asked if this right was already enforceable in EU member states, an EU official said the situation varied between one member state and another.

"Sometimes, although suspects have a right to see a lawyer, they are not even informed about this possibility or interrogators make it difficult for suspects to exercise this right," the official said.

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UNITED NATIONS

Italy's proposal for a reform of the UN Security Council is gaining support. LAURENCE GRECH talks to Ambassador Francesco Paolo Fulci who was in Malta last week to illustrate the proposal.



INTERVIEW

Dr FRANCIS CACHIA talks to Colonel Alberto Zucchi, head of the Italian military mission in Malta about the mission's role and about Malta's security.



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A 12-page MOTORING section featuring test drives, motoring news and the first article in a regular series on Formula One Grand Prix racing.



THE SUNDAY TIMES

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Inquiry report a cover-up, says Sant

THE Opposition Leader claimed yesterday that the inquiry into the bus-crushing tragedy was a cover-up rather than a proper investigation.

Dr Alfred Sant claimed, at a news conference, that the report left wide open the problem of corruption in the Transport Ministry and the Public Transport Authority.

"Although a long list of allegations, I had made about the tendering process were found to be correct, as a number of important aspects the report is very deficient," Dr Sant said.

"It is superficial and shrinks back from arriving at those conclusions that one would have to honestly and reasonably reach. In all fairness the report can only be seen, not as an investigation of corruption, but as a cover-up."

Against calling for the Transport Minister's resignation, Dr Sant said the report pushed Dr Fenech rather than established that he was innocent, or that he had acted correctly.

And he also hit out at the Prime Minister who, he said, failed to honour his word to pass on all the relevant documents that went with the report.

"The conclusion must necessarily be that it is in Dr Fenech's interest to keep the relevant documents under lock and key," he said.

According to Dr Sant there are three main issues which result from his analysis of the report.

The first major failure of the inquiry was the failure to establish the fact of the tendering process. Dr Sant said that the inquiry failed to establish the fact of the tendering process.

"According to the inquiry report this change was introduced in the final tender document following a discussion between the authority chairman and Dr Fenech," the Opposition leader said.

The suggestion for the change was made by the minister himself "on his own initiative" according to the inquiry report.

Dr Sant questioned why the minister had got involved in discussing the tender, why he had suggested the amendment and, subsequently, why the judge failed to investigate this.

Regarding the claimed trip to Birmingham, Dr Sant said the fact the invitation existed was not disputed. However the inquiry failed to analyse the implications of this.

"The three persons who denied that Michael Fenech had been invited to Birmingham were the very same people who failed the documents they presented to the inquiry," he said.

by James Calvert

tender documents as a result of serious disorder in the Public Transport Authority's offices, and not through an inside contact.

But, Dr Sant said, the documents presented to the inquiry by Maltech and Wayfarer were fabricated to deflect attention from their contact.

And the amendments to the draft submitted by Wayfarer also indicated they had a contact.

"If Maltech did not have their contact within the tendering process, Wayfarer would not have proposed amendments to the tender draft," Dr Sant said.

"There can be no doubt that Maltech did not obtain their tender draft accidentally, but because they had an inside contact."

Dr Fenech's role

The second issue highlighted by Dr Sant regarded Dr Fenech's role.

"At many points in the inquiry report, Judge Carlos Colombo failed to investigate properly Minister Fenech's role in the whole affair," he said.

The issue, where this happened was in the amendments to the draft tender, a claimed invitation to Dr Fenech to visit Birmingham and other aspects of his involvement, Dr Sant said.

One of the amendments, suggested by Wayfarer when they obtained the draft tender, involved the installation of filtering machines at bus terminals.

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"The three persons who denied that Michael Fenech had been invited to Birmingham were the very same people who failed the documents they presented to the inquiry," he said.

Dr Sant claimed the minister had denied the invitation had existed as well as to compromise himself.

He also said the inquiry failed to look into why the air filter, from Geneva to Birmingham, via Amsterdam, was not purchased in the normal way.

And Dr Sant claimed the judge had failed to investigate allegations that a priest had passed on a message to Dr Alberto Medici from Ministers Fenech and Tanti Borg, while he was carrying out his on documents presented to the inquiry.

"This is a very serious matter since it amounts to a Minister attempt to influence the expert," Dr Sant claimed.

The Labour leader said that even if one accepted the conclusion of the report it would appear that a "serious and serious" of disorder had become a fact of life at the Public Transport Authority.

"If no the responsible minister should surely be censured for this, if the report provides no proof of the minister's innocence it does underline Dr Fenech's total lack of efficiency," Dr Sant said.

The Opposition leader highlighted the lack of original documents makes it very difficult for one to see conclusively, the companies presented on.

Original documents were never produced and their origin was never disclosed. "Therefore one asks, how can one verify the authenticity and the veracity of photocopied documents presented by Dr Sant?" the opposition asked.

The person passing on the information to Dr Sant, the companies added, obviously wanted to see him for personal reasons, and "it appears that he has succeeded."

"The price now, if this inquiry is not needed, will be borne by the Maltese people because the nearest offer to that presented by Wayfarer and Maltech will cost at least £200,000 more," the statement concluded.



DR ALFRED SANT - again called on minister to resign

the failure of the report to mention a document he submitted. In it Ray Borg undertook to give the bearer of the document a "reimbursement" of 20 per cent of the tender was given to him, company.

This document was one of those withheld in dissent by the expert named by the judge, he said.

"It should have been extremely relevant to clarify facts with regard to this document. It should have been extremely relevant to the task of the inquiry to investigate to whom the commission was going to be paid," Dr Sant said.

Judge "unsuited"

The final issue brought up by the MLP leader involved the manner in which the judge carried out the inquiry.

Dr Sant reiterated that he had been

against the appointment of Dr Carlos Colombo to head the inquiry, as he was accused to carry a bias.

"The inquiry report confirms my assessment," he said, adding that the bias was by the judge to his point on the eve of his appointment was further confirmation.

Dr Sant also said the delay was carrying out a search on the computers at the ministry, Maltech and the authority had been "wasteful".

Two other alleged deficiencies highlighted by the Opposition leader were the investigation of witnesses carried out in the course of the inquiry, which he said had been superficial, and the fact the judge completely ignored evidence from Maltech's personnel which contradicted the findings of the report.

Dr Sant concluded by branding as "unjustified" the report's decision that the tendering process should continue as before.

Ministers' denials

However Transport Minister Michael Fenech yesterday hit back at the Opposition leader saying, "Alfred Sant's comments, after eight months of investigations by the police and by a judge, are a pathetic effort to insist on something that has never been proved," he said.

"It is evident that Alfred Sant has appointed himself a judge above all judges. I categorically deny having ever sent any message to anybody on the merits of this case."

In a separate statement Home Affairs Minister Tanti Borg also denied ever having given any message to anybody to be passed on to Dr Alberto Medici.

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