

Open Letter to the Shift News

Dear Ms Muscat, Mr Balzan and Mr Debono,

Re: Mr Balzan's article, entitled "New Brexit citizens held accounts at Pilatus Bank"

I have been asked to write to you by Christopher Chandler and Mark Stoleson in the wake of Jurgen Balzan's recent article "*New Brexit citizens held accounts at Pilatus Bank*" being published on the Shift News website.

The following is posted on your website:

The Shift is an on-line news platform committed to fair and incisive journalism and in-depth political, cultural and social commentary aimed to inform and entertain.

We are editorially committed to our belief in good governance, European liberal values, social inclusion and environmental protection.

I am sure you will agree that fair and incisive journalism, good governance and European liberal values embrace an outcome in which the Maltese public is told the truth, and is not knowingly misled. Taking your claim to be pursuers of the truth for the benefit of the Maltese public at face value, we feel compelled to help you correct a number of misapprehensions and speculations which Mr Balzan has been induced to accept as fact. Whilst it would have been helpful if Mr Balzan had contacted either Mr Chandler or Mr Stoleson before accepting as reliable what he has apparently been told by or has been reported about Ms Maria Efimova, it's better late than never to get the truth in front of the Maltese, and wider, public.

1. **Claim:** Mr Balzan's headline states that Mr Chandler and Mr Stoleson are "New 'Brexit' Maltese citizens".

Fact: The truth is that Mr Chandler and Mr Stoleson filed their applications for Maltese citizenship in August and July 2015, after months of preparatory work, at a time which pre-dated the passing of the UK's European Union Referendum Act 2015, and long before the (unexpected) referendum result in June 2016. Put simply, both Mr Chandler and Mr Stoleson applied Maltese citizenship long before Brexit and their decision therefore had nothing to do with Brexit.

2. **Claim:** Mr Balzan has reported that Ms Efimova claims to have met Mr Stoleson in Malta during the first half of March 2016.

Fact: The truth is that Mr Stoleson was not in Malta at any time during the month of March 2016. Therefore, it is impossible that he met Ms Efimova at that time.

3. **Claim:** Mr Balzan has reported that Ms Efimova claims to have interacted with Mr Chandler and Mr Stoleson.

Fact: The truth is, neither one has ever met her. Mr Chandler and Mr Stoleson were unaware of the identity of Ms Efimova or her circumstances and the allegations she has made involving Pilatus Bank until after the Shift published Mr Balzan's story.

4. **Claim:** Mr Balzan has reported that Ms Efimova testified to having delivered envelopes to Pilatus Bank clients, including Mr Chandler and Mr Stoleson, which she *feels* *'possibly'* contained cash. He further reports she never opened any of the envelopes that she was asked to deliver.

Fact: Regardless of what Ms Efimova 'felt' was 'possible', the truth is Mr Chandler and Mr Stoleson never received envelopes containing cash – from anyone. To the extent that Mr Chandler and Mr Stoleson ever received any delivery from Pilatus Bank this could only have comprised copies of normal documentation relating to the opening of an ordinary bank account; and

5. **Claim:** Mr Balzan has reported Ms Efimova's allegation that "*A few days later, Chandler was also present at the bank's offices in Ta' Xbiex and Efimova said that she was instructed to purchase €600,000 in bonds for Chandler.*"

Fact: The truth is that at no time did Mr Chandler instruct anyone at Pilatus Bank to purchase, or purchase on his own account, €600,000 of bonds. This is a complete fabrication.

What Mr Chandler and Mr Stoleson have done, in all of their dealings in Malta, is to comply with every aspect of a highly regulated Maltese citizenship programme application process, which even cursory research demonstrates includes extensive due diligence, as required by the Maltese authorities and approved by the European Union.

It is entirely understandable, due to the circumstances in which Ms Efimova is currently reported to find herself, claiming to be a whistleblower, reportedly in hiding or seeking political asylum, and reportedly avoiding arrest warrants, that she may be under strain or confused. What we can say with certainty based on Mr Balzan's account, is that what Ms Efimova is reported as having said about Mr Chandler and Mr Stoleson, is not only inaccurate but completely untruthful.

We therefore call on you to adhere to the Shift's stated commitment to fair and incisive journalism, good governance and European liberal values, and to remove Mr Balzan's article from your website immediately as it is filled with gross inaccuracies, distortions of the truth and damaging content.

Yours sincerely,
LEGATUM LIMITED

Colin Webb
Corporate Communications