

The car bomb murder of investigative journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia in 2017 sent shockwaves around the globe and shone an international spotlight on the tiny Mediterranean island republic of Malta (population circa 440,000).

On a local level, it has set in motion an investigative process involving journalists, the police and the judiciary that has unravelled a web of trans-national corruption and sickening deals between big businessmen and politicians.

At the time of her death, Caruana Galizia was investigating kickbacks on a \$1 billion, 10-year energy deal between the Maltese State and the Maltese-Azerbaijani-German Electrogas consortium which was supplying the island with fuel at above-market prices. Electrogas director, millionaire businessman Yorgen Fenech, is charged with masterminding the murder.

The energy minister at the time, Konrad Mizzi and paper business magnate Keith Schembri, who was then the Prime Minister's Chief of Staff, denied any wrongdoing. But Mizzi and Schembri owned Panama-based companies designed to receive kickbacks from a Dubai-based company owned by Fenech.

It was just one of many corrupt deals from the era of disgraced former Prime Minister Joseph Muscat. There are currently police investigations and magisterial inquiries into Caruana Galizia's murder, the Electrogas deal, another deal selling state hospitals to a company with no healthcare experience set up just weeks before, and a wind farm deal in Montenegro which netted Fenech millions while Mizzi was energy minister.

The fightback is a slow process, driven by continuous pressure from civil society groups and the media, but Malta is being forced to acknowledge its sins.

Malta, once the sunny George Cross island known for its hospitality, has lost this reputation to one of shell companies in opaque jurisdictions and dark dealings with despotic regimes - and corruption. The Maltese, already at loggerheads with Europe on the issue of the migrants from North Africa that it rescues at sea almost every month, sit with eyes closed and jaws clenched, praying that its vital financial services sector will survive the unceasing litany of scandals and not be blacklisted. The hope is that it will solve these problems by itself, without any EU intervention, but the reality may not be so rosy.

Joseph Muscat was forced to resign the premiership in January, driven from office by the constitutional and political crisis triggered by the Caruana Galizia murder. His successor, Robert Abela, was seen as a "continuity candidate" who, has so far done little to shake up the status quo, other than by hollow, cosmetic changes.

Konrad Mizzi, once a rising star in the Labour party, was expelled from the party in June. He retains his parliamentary seat as an independent MP aligned to Labour.

Malta's Commissioner of Police was also forced to resign in January, under a barrage of criticism about the police force's failure to investigate top government

officials or follow up on financial crime reports submitted to it by financial watchdogs. The Attorney General is under pressure to resign too.

Late on July 7, the largely unpopular leader of the opposition, Adrian Delia, lost a vote of confidence in parliament. Delia had also been the target of many of Caruana Galizia's criticisms. He has refused to relinquish his post as party leader, at time of writing, and there are calls for the President of the Republic to have him forcibly removed.

Meanwhile, criminal proceedings against Fenech and the men who carried out Caruana Galizia's murder continue, as does a public inquiry set up to establish what could have been done to prevent the killing.

Corruption has never been far away in Malta, part of the amoral familism that Caruana Galizia often wrote about and criticised and it will probably never go away entirely, but now it's on the back foot - and that is a step in the right direction.