

## **Violence in Malta: BirdLife volunteers attacked by extremists protesting against hunting ban. The ban was imposed by the government in an apparent move to back the designation of Vella as Commissioner for the Environment and try to silence criticisms**

BirdLife Europe strongly condemns the unacceptable acts of violence over the weekend in Malta that have seen BirdLife Malta volunteers physically attacked by a mob that split out of a demonstration contesting the decision of Maltese authorities to suspend the hunting season. The decision, taken after a series of poaching incidents, has provoked an angry backlash from extremist elements within the Maltese hunting community, which has mostly distanced itself from both poaching and the mob violence. BirdLife Calls on Maltese authorities to step up their efforts to restore the rule of law and to provide adequate protection to volunteers studying bird migration and monitoring illegal activities.

The recent dramatic events in Malta accentuate BirdLife's questions over the decision by the newly nominated President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, to assign the environment portfolio to a Maltese Commissioner, and mandate him to "overhaul" the Birds Directive. Commissioner designate Vella will have to convince MEPs that he won't be using his new position to weaken EU nature protection in order to make life easier for his government.

Ariel Brunner, Head of EU Policy at BirdLife, commented: "We raised the issue from the very moment of Vella's designation by Juncker. It's not a thing against Malta or the Maltese: the point is that Juncker is wrong about the need to overhaul the laws that protect nature in Europe. And on top of that he has given the mandate to do so to a politician that comes from a government, and a country, that has serious problems in dealing with poachers and violations of nature laws."

**Ends**

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