

“Whistleblowers – Heroes or traitors?”	“UK Government’s Plans to Silence Whistleblowers in ‘Full-Frontal Attack’”	“While the UK attacks whistleblowers, the EU is defending them – that is, until Brexit happens”	<i>Life After Whistleblowing</i>
<p>Web article, Robert Hackwill, <i>euronews.com</i>, January 1st, 2017</p>	<p>Opinion piece, Ryan Morwood, <i>anyvoice.co.uk</i>, April 4th 2017</p>	<p>Opinion piece, Jean Lambert, <i>independent.co.uk</i>, February 2nd, 2017</p>	<p>Illustration / drawing, Eduardo Fuentes, <i>timeshighereducation.com</i>, July 31st, 2014</p>
<p>Two opposite visions and representations of whistleblowers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Part of the population and the media often consider their actions as heroic, as they expose possible wrongdoings committed by governments, agencies or other organisations. → their stories have often been adapted in songs, films or on TV - the US government considers them as traitors to the nation. <p>Several whistleblowers are quoted and they have all faced or are possibly facing legal charges and even prison sentences:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Chelsea Manning (leaked classified military and diplomatic documents to Wikileaks) went to prison. - Julian Assange (founder of Wikileaks) had taken refuge in the Ecuadorian embassy in London as he might be extradited to the US. - Edward Snowden (leaked documents regarding NSA surveillance) has had to flee to Russia <p>Some of the whistleblowers’ revelations have led to changes in practices:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the NSA had been reformed - some tech companies have taken measures to protect people’s private data more efficiently. 	<p>The UK government is considering reforming the existing Official Secrets Act into the Espionage Act that would include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - longer prison sentences for people charged with leaking documents - a broader definition of espionage that would encompass not only leaking but also receiving or examining classified data - a statutory commissioner, a person who would examine possible wrongdoings brought to his/her attention, investigate them, and inform the PM thus possibly preventing such data from being released. <p>A civil rights group is denouncing this reform as a way to prevent people from ever hearing about governments and agencies’ possible wrongdoings.</p> <p>The journalist is criticizing this reform:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - as a way to add more red tape in order to facilitate government cover-ups and prevent people from holding them accountable for their actions - as a way to discourage / deter people from blowing the whistle (especially after Snowden’s leaks) by taking harsher measures against them - as highlighting the gvt’s perspective on private information: legally collecting data (cf. Investigatory Powers Act) while not being open / transparent regarding its own practices. 	<p>Contrary to the UK government who is looking at toughening measures regarding whistleblowing, the EU Parliament is planning on creating a unified legal framework to protect whistleblowers across the union.</p> <p>According to the journalist this legislation is necessary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - to protect and offer safe ways for people from both the public and private sectors to expose / uncover illegal actions as some whistleblowers have already faced criminal charges. Whistleblowers should not be deterred from speaking by fear of the consequences. - to protect public interest as exposing such wrongdoings is a way to hold gvts and private companies accountable for their actions as gvts and private companies are sometimes opposed to public interest - to prevent further illegal or immoral practices as they would likely be revealed - as they allow / trigger investigations by journalists thus again protecting public interest. <p>The journalist urges that further encroachments on freedom of information and expression, allowing gvts and companies to hush up opposing voices, should be stopped.</p> <p>Brexit, however, might in that respect as in others, widen the gap between the EU and the UK.</p>	<p>A whistleblower walking away from a heavy rain and black clouds, with a bundle on his shoulder and a ball, represented as a whistle, chained to one of his feet:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the black clouds and rain might refer both to the political storm triggered by his leaking classified documents and legal charges and political attacks “raining down” on him - the bundle on his shoulder points to the fact that he is forced to a life of exile (// E. Snowden) in order to escape prison. - the whistle represented as a ball chained to his foot might represent both the possible prison time he may be facing and thus his status as a criminal and the fact that the consequences of his actions will follow him for the rest of his life. He will never be free from this one deed and will drag it along with him.

WHISTLEBLOWERS: CONTROVERSIAL STATUS, CONTRADICTION RESPONSES

Snowden, Manning, Assange have become familiar names as their releasing sensitive information has sparked debate. All four documents – two opinion pieces from British websites, a web article released on *euronews.com* and a drawing from the American website *timeshighereducation.com* – illustrate the international scope of this debate regarding the nature of their actions and the responses that should be given, prompting the following question: **how do the contrasting responses regarding whistleblowers reveal their controversial relations to both power and public interests?** While some countries have been considering toughening measures against whistleblowing, these stances are denounced as a way to keep people in the dark when whistleblowers should conversely be protected in the name of public interest.

While whistleblowers have faced legal charges, some countries are considering strengthening their responses. Hackwill quotes the case of Manning who went to prison or that of Snowden who fled to Russia. These examples are in keeping with Fuentes's drawing as the bundle on the man's shoulder may imply that he will live in exile dragging, along the criminal charges laid against him, metaphorically represented as a whistle chained to his foot. As Hackwill underlines that the US administration considers these actions as treacherous, Morwood explains that the UK plans on toughening legal measures against such actions to include a broader definition of espionage and a statutory commissioner charged with examining possible wrongdoings and inform the PM thus possibly preventing information from being released.

Such measures can be seen as a way to prevent people from hearing about governments and companies' wrongdoings as Morwood highlights: it not only adds more red tape to facilitate government cover-ups and prevent the public from holding them accountable, but it also allows them to deter people from blowing the whistle as charges will be raining down on them, as suggests Fuente's drawing. Likewise, Lambert urges that further encroachments on freedom of information and expression, allowing governments and companies to silence opposition, should be stopped.

Whistleblowers should conversely be protected as they defend public interest. As Lambert relates, the EU Parliament plans on creating a unified legal framework to protect whistleblowers. He deems it necessary to offer safe ways for people to uncover illegal actions while also preventing further unlawful practices as they would likely be revealed through the journalistic investigations triggered by leaks. These revelations have already led to agencies and companies changing their practices and for whistleblowers to be considered as heroes protecting public interest as Hackwill mentions.

Whether they are considered as traitors leaking data or heroes defending the people, the diverging political responses to their actions highlight an unresolved debate regarding their ambiguous status.

(439 words)

