



06 June 2018

Mr. Fabrice Fries

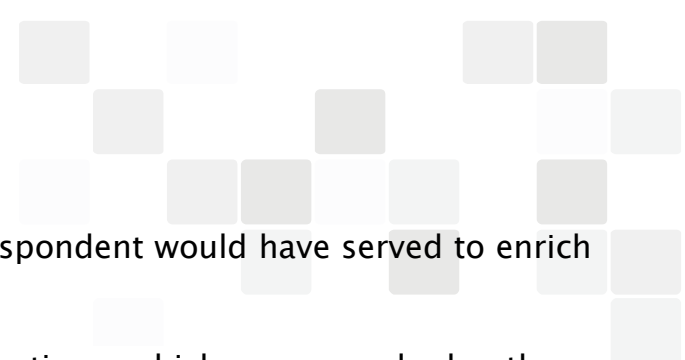
Chairman & CEO of Agence France-Presse

We are writing in response to the article “Azmi Bishara, from Knesset black sheep to Qatar Insider,” with a byline from your Dubai-based correspondent Shatha Yaish and published on your wire on 5 June. Allow us to begin by stating that, at first, we genuinely believed that the article was a hoax, perhaps misattributed to AFP or that your servers had been hacked. We waited to verify that the article was in fact submitted by a correspondent based in your Dubai office.

The article in question was an entirely counter-factual fabrication. It was unbecoming of a news agency such as AFP which, notwithstanding a few occasional errors, has otherwise maintained high professional standards. By running the piece, the AFP has allowed itself to become—whether knowingly or otherwise—a propaganda outlet for those Middle Eastern governments who simply cannot tolerate our Center’s commitment to justice, democracy and civil liberties.

To mark the first anniversary of the intra-Gulf crisis and the blockade on Doha AFP has chosen to attack a prominent intellectual figure whose writings on questions of democracy, secularism and civil society have become seminal works. For these crimes, Bishara is branded as the “Rasputin” of Qatar, an accusation repeated in the article carried by your agency. Qatar has offered sanctuary to Bishara and affords the academic institute which he leads a wide margin of freedom, a move which would be unthinkable in other countries in the Gulf. Yet, this is no justification for the insinuations repeated by these countries that he has a hand in Qatari policy.

Furthermore, your Dubai-based correspondent could have troubled herself to learn a little more about Bishara’s personal history in this instance. It would be incorrect to say that Bishara “repositioned” himself as a public intellectual upon his arrival in Qatar. Indeed, long before 2007, Bishara has enjoyed a reputation that has spanned the Arab region and Europe by virtue of his academic publications. A little



bit more homework on the part of your correspondent would have served to enrich this article.

Your correspondent never challenged allegations which were made by those quoted in the article—merely placing these statements between quotes does not diminish the seriousness of allegations that Bishara has some kind of association with “terrorism,” however vaguely defined. Instead, the author of the piece merely found a convoluted means of repeating the same accusations without substantiation or verification.

Nowhere did your correspondent find space to ask Bishara or one of Bishara’s associates at the research institute he heads, to offer their own comments. This in itself is a wide deviation from the professional standards expected of the AFP; instead, your correspondent opted to become a spokesperson for the host country leading the campaign against Bishara.

The article carried by AFP on 5 June was published by Arabic tabloids and a host of conspiracy theory peddling websites. With the exception of the media of the blockading countries, and Israel, which has long opposed Bishara for his position on Palestine and his support for the Arab revolutions, no reputable media outlet would publish such baseless allegations.

Finally, it would have served your correspondent well to become better acquainted with the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies. Just a short visit to our website would have informed Yaish of our offices not only in Doha, but also in Beirut, Tunis and Washington, DC. Such a visit would have allowed your correspondent to see that what she dismissively labels a “think tank” is in fact an academic research center in which dozens of scholars are engaged in advancing philosophy, the humanities and the social sciences, and through which hundreds of books have been authored and published.

We trust that you will promptly publish this response on an appropriate platform.

Respectfully,

The Arab Center for Research & Policy Studies,

Office of the General Director

