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Europe/Ex-USSR - Macedonia

Prison Sentence

RSF condemns sentence for Macedonian journalist Tomislav Kezarovski

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Reporters Without Borders, n-ost and Civil – Center for Freedom condemn the prison sentence for Macedonian journalist Tomislav Kezarovski.

The Skopje Court of Appeal confirmed the sentence for Kezarovski on Thursday while reducing it to two years from the four and a half years issued by a lower court in October of 2013. Considering the jail time and house arrest served by Kezarovski until now, he will still have to serve four and a half more months. Whether he will have to spend these in jail or under house arrest was not immediately announced.

"This absurd verdict is unworthy of an EU candidate and has to be overturned as quickly as possible," said Christian Mihr, executive director of Reporters Without Borders Germany. *"Tomislav Kezarovski should not have served a single day in confinement. His only wrongdoing was to have pointed to shortcomings by Macedonia's government and judiciary through his journalistic investigations."*

Civil – Centre for Freedom president Xhabir Deralla added: *"Such an unprecedented trial harming people's lives, human rights and the basic principles of democracy has not been witnessed in Europe in a long time. This trial and the verdict against journalist Tomislav Kezarovski are flagrant evidence of an utterly politicised judiciary."*

Kezarovski, a journalist for Skopje-based daily *Nova Makedoniya*, was suddenly arrested in May 2013 on the grounds that he revealed the identity of a protected witness. The charge relates to an article published in 2008 in the *Reporter 92* newspaper in which Kezarovski had quoted from an internal police report that had been leaked to him.

However, the witness had not yet been given protection at the time the article was written and anyway admitted in 2013 having given a false statement under pressure from the police. Kezarovski believes the real reason for his arrest was to make him reveal the identity of the person who leaked him the police report. At the time of his well-publicized arrest by special police forces, the journalist was also investigating the case of **Nikola Mladenov**, the publisher of independent newspaper *Fokus* who had been killed in a mysterious car accident about two months earlier.

Originally [sentenced to four and a half years](#) in prison in October 2013, Kezarovski had already spent several months in prison before being transferred to house arrest following international protests.

An interim European Union report on accession candidate Macedonia published last October criticizes the media situation there, including the misuse of its defamation laws and the fact that state institutions place almost no advertising in independent news media. It does not, however, mention individual cases such as that of Kezarovski.

The undersigning organizations call on the European Union to make better protection of critical journalists a precondition for Macedonia's EU accession, and to demand freedom of the press and media there more vehemently. In recent years, media freedom has declined dramatically in Macedonia, whose ranking in the [Reporters Without Borders world press freedom index](#) has fallen from 34th in 2009 to 123rd last year.
