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<http://www.rsf.org/macedoine-large-scale-illegal-wiretapping-of-27-02-2015,47633.html>

Europe/Ex-USSR - Macedonia

Illegal wiretapping

Large-scale illegal wiretapping of journalists in Macedonia

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Reporters Without Borders and Civil-Centre for Freedom strongly condemn the illegal wiretapping of journalists in Macedonia and demand immediate measures to restore justice and the rule of law. According to opposition leader Zoran Zaev, the Macedonian government illegally eavesdropped on some 100 journalists in order to cement control over the media.

"This large-scale spying on journalists constitutes a massive assault on media freedom, threatening every aspect of the rule of law," said Christian Mihr, executive director of Reporters Without Borders Germany. *"If the government's professed desire to join the European Union means anything, those responsible for this massive assault on the fundamental rights of Macedonian journalists and all citizens must be identified and brought to justice without delay."*

At a press conference on 25 February, opposition leader Zaev played six audio recordings to demonstrate the extent of government spying on the media. According to Zaev, [those wiretapped included both the editors of pro-government media and critical journalists](#) like the deceased former editor of Fokus magazine, Nikola Mladenov.

Such practices violate Macedonia's constitution and laws, as well as the international standards and laws to which it is bound. They also violate the rights and freedoms of journalists, and call into question such basic principles as media freedom, protection of journalists' sources and the basic rights of Macedonian citizens in general.

Zaev's accusations are the fourth in a series of disclosures since early February in a major scandal allegedly involving the wiretapping of more than 20,000 people in this small country with a population of some two million. According to Zaev, who was charged last month with plotting to bring down the government, the operation was ordered and commanded by Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski and Gruevski's cousin Saso Mijalkov, the head of the State Security Service.

The prime minister's response has been to accuse Zaev of being used by a foreign intelligence service, which he claimed was itself behind the wiretaps. He declined to name this intelligence service but said the Macedonian intelligence services [knew the answer to this question](#). Gruevski did not deny the authenticity of the recordings.

Media freedom has declined dramatically in recent years in Macedonia, whose ranking in the Reporters Without Borders press freedom index has fallen from 34th in 2009 to 117th in the [2015 index](#). An interim EU report in October on Macedonia's candidacy criticized the media situation, including the misuse of defamation laws and the fact that the state places almost no advertising in independent news media.

Reporters Without Borders and Civil have also condemned the conviction of Macedonian journalist Tomislav Kezarovski, who was sentenced on appeal in mid-January to two years in prison for allegedly revealing the identity of a [protected witness in an article published in 2008](#). Having already spent several months in prison and more than a year under house arrest, Kezarovski has been spared the remaining prison time since the appeal ruling on health grounds.
