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<http://www.rsf.org/georgia-serbian-travel-journalist-held-in-16-09-2011,41005.html>

Europe & ex-USSR - Georgia

Worrying arrest

Serbian travel journalist held in South Ossetia

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Reporters Without Borders strongly condemns Serbian travel journalist **Viktor Lazic's** detention since 10 September in the self-proclaimed independent republic of South Ossetia and calls for his immediate release. Arrested by border guards after entering the territory from Georgia, Lazic is being held in its capital, Tskhinvali, on a charge of crossing the border illegally.

A polyglot law graduate and PhD student who has written two best-sellers about his travels, Lazic is currently on his second world tour for the Serbian publication *Press*, to which he is supposed to be sending weekly reports. A visit to South Ossetia, which is recognized by few countries aside from Russia, was part of his itinerary.

After leaving Gori, a Georgian town near the South Ossetian border, on 9 September, Lazic passed three Georgian and Russian control points. The next day, after seeing no sign or flag indicating he was in South Ossetia, he approached another checkpoint and asked the guards what papers he should present. They immediately accused him of crossing the border illegally.

Lazic spent the first two days in solitary confinement after being transferred to Tskhinvali. He was deprived of food, light and medical care and was unable to move freely. He was given no official document with the reason for his arrest and was not allowed to contact a lawyer. After an attempt to take his laptop, phone and passport, he was interrogated and threatened.

It was only two days after his arrest that *Press* was able to contact Lazic. After being told of the situation, South Ossetian foreign minister Murat Dzhioyev said he could do nothing until the Serbian embassy in Moscow contacted him. But the Serbian ambassador to Moscow, Jelica Kurjak, said she could not contact her South Ossetian counterpart because Serbia has not recognized South Ossetia.

Lazic's arbitrary detention and the physical and psychological mistreatment to which he had been subjected constitute serious violations of his rights.
