ON A TRAJECTORY OF
REVELATIONS

Tvapatum Investigation:
Media Against Corruption

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MINISTRY
OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS
OF LITHUANIA

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INTRODUCTION

From December 6 to 9, 2016, the Media Initiatives Center (formerly Internews Media Support NGO) held the Tvapatum Investigation: Media Against Corruption three-day journalism conference. Recognized experts in investigative journalism from ten countries presented their experiences.

The main goal of the conference was to foster investigative journalism in Armenia by offering a collaborative platform for discussions, presentations and workshops on different countries and experts experiences of reporting on corruption and human rights.

The handbook On a Trajectory of Revelations collects in one place the topics presented by the speakers at the conference to make them more accessible for a wider audience of journalists.

The authors of the twelve articles are from different countries: Lithuania, Czech Republic, Ukraine, Moldova, Turkey, Georgia, Russia, the US. and the UK. They write about both their professional experience and journalistic revelations, and the situation in their country and the importance and impact of cross-border collaboration.

The authors present the current trends, platforms and tools of investigative journalism, and discuss its opportunities and challenges, obstacles and pressure.

On a Trajectory of Revelations complements the Media Initiatives Center's professional library and is designed for journalists, media experts, journalism students, and different civil society groups. designed for journalists, media experts, journalism students, and different civil society groups.

DAVID LEIGH

COLLABORATION AGAINST CORRUPTION

Founding member of the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ). He was the Investigations Editor of The Guardian newspaper, where he now consults. He has been involved in various journalistic investigations. He is currently the Anthony Sampson Professor of Reporting at the City, University of London journalism school.
He is the author of many books and has won numerous UK and international journalism awards.

Journalists who try to expose corruption always face an uphill struggle. They are pursuing people who have money and power, and who can pay squads of compliant lawyers, accountants and bankers to keep their dirty secrets safe.

However, two developments in recent years have provided investigative journalists with new tools. One innovation has been cross-border collaboration. The other is the eruption of mass data leaks, thanks to computer hackers.

When these two online phenomena came together, they created a powerful new weapon, which determined reporters have now learned to wield successfully against financial corruption.

Systematic cross-border collaboration launched in 1998. I was among the first international group of 50 seasoned investigative reporters who came together by invitation in a conference hall at Harvard University. We were there to hear Charles Lewis, a US former producer on the CBS documentary series 60 Minutes, outline a scheme which became the ICIJ — International Consortium of Investigative Journalists.

The plan was to work together on big stories and break them worldwide simultaneously with a variety of media partners. A hub in Washington, D.C., funded by donors, would coordinate and share information via the internet. We wanted to beat transnational corporations at their own game.

Our first success was to work with reporters from South America, Asia and Eastern Europe to plow through stacks of thousands of internal company files (paper ones in those days!) released in London after a lawsuit against British American Tobacco. Using local knowledge, we were able to decode the ugly truth — that the corporation was conniving at massive smuggling operations, dumping cheap and addictive cigarettes on developing countries.

We had put important investigative building blocks in place. Simultaneous publication worldwide was demonstrated to be possible. Journalists realized that they simply had no need to treat reporters as competitive rivals if they were publishing in another language and another country. They could help each other instead. Everyone would win from the increased traction and attention. And the process offered powerful legal protection, not

tion and attention. And the process offered powerful legal protection, not least to journalists from small states with authoritarian regimes. Their work was unstoppable if it came out as well in Washington and London.

I wrote in a story (http://bit.ly/2pHUOmX) for one of the media partners, The Guardian, at the time: "The BAT story so far has married investigative skills with global technology in an interesting way. And something less tangible … has been nourished as well — a worldwide optimism about new possibilities for chasing the truth."

In ensuing years, we built on the cross-border collaborative model at The Guardian, using these invaluable ICIJ connections. We were able to expose, in investigations lasting several years, a worldwide network of bribery used to sell warplanes built by UK arms giant BAE. We came to share information on this network with Fredrik Laurin and his team of Swedish TV journalists; with investigative reporter Paul Radu in Romania; and with journalists in Tanzania who told us what they knew (but could not print domestically) about the crooked middlemen involved.

To expose footloose international oil trading company Trafigura, who had dumped toxic waste in the small African state of Ivory Coast, we worked with Dutch newspaper journalists (the oil waste started out from Amsterdam) and Norwegian state TV (one of the firm's oil tanks exploded there). Dodging between different legal jurisdictions, we were able to outwit Trafigura's lawyers as they tried to gag us.

Collaboration became normal, even on a small scale. Working with an Italian team of reporters, we were able to show that cans of "Italian" tomatoes sold in British stores were in fact imported from China. (They were put into Italian cans, to allow them to be stamped "Produced in Italy.")

But the truth was that we needed some other collaborators before our techniques could really take off in a game-changing way. Who were they? They were hackers. All of the world's military, economic, medical, scientific, commercial, political, technical, and financial information was steadily accumulating every day in huge databases. These mountains of data had never existed before.

And, as it transpired, the obscure geeky types who knew how to tend these systems were also the ones who knew how to break into them.

The first major demonstration of the potential of hacking came a decade after that first BAT exposure, in 2010. This was when WikiLeaks burst onto the world. A troubled young US soldier, Private Manning, discovered that from his obscure camp in the Iraqi desert, he could hack into the US Army's classified database of military reports covering two entire wars, in Iraq and Afghanistan.

He was able to download shocking video footage of the pilots of a US helicopter gunship in Baghdad mistakenly strafing and killing civilians. He also was able to 'scrape' thousands of unvarnished diplomatic dispatches from US embassies all over the world.

Manning and some other "hacktivists" launched the age of mass digital leaking, which had many technical, ethical and operational problems. No one could read through or even browse this stuff — it had to be searchable. But what software could journalists use to make giant caches of data searchable? We thought the Manning data was formidably big at 1.65 gigabits of rigidly formatted entries, which could be indexed into a database relatively straightforwardly. But soon, with subsequent leaks we would be dealing with wildly mixed-up formats (old emails, passport copies, spreadsheets) and data sizes running into hundreds of gigabits, and then to terabytes.

Was it acceptable simply to dump out material, when it might contain sensitive information identifying informants, say, or giving private addresses of people who might be harmed?

And could countercultural hackers, like Julian Assange of WikiLeaks, to whom Manning had passed his material, work comfortably with what he and his friends contemptuously called the Mainstream Media. Their political agendas soon clashed.

Nevertheless, the world eventually was able to see Assange and co. working with a group of the world's most prestigious editors — from The New York Times to London's The Guardian, Spain's El Pais, France's Le Monde, and Germany's Der Spiegel. The concept of collaboration was spreading.

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One of the next phases of that particular drama involved US NSA contractor Edward Snowden and his astonishing hack of the US intelligence agencies' surveillance systems. But at the same time, there were key developments on the anti-corruption front.

Soon a flow of the most extraordinary mass leaks started to come the way of the ICIJ in Washington, now run by a tenacious ex-newspaper editor from Australia, Gerard Ryle. At a global journalism conference in Kiev in 2011, Ryle put together a team to deal with the first of a series of exposures which were to rock the offshore system, the home of all of the world's dirty money.

The full potential of these new journalistic techniques for fighting corruption at last began to be realized. IT specialists who had access to the databases of offshore company formation agents, Panama lawyers, and Swiss banks found a market in European and US tax authorities, who were willing to pay cash for the stolen data. The work of these hackers inevitably found its way into journalistic hands.

Ryle's global network at ICIJ was ideally placed to process this material, working out the identity and significance of names that emerged in countries ranging from Mongolia to Moldova to Paraguay.

First came the Offshore Leaks (https://offshoreleaks.icij.org) project which plundered the files of two large offshore company agents in the British Virgin Islands. Then emerged files from international accountants PwC, revealing tax avoidance schemes in Luxembourg. Soon followed Swiss Leaks: internal correspondence from a major Swiss bank, part of HSBC, exposing the way it helped rich people hide their millions.

This process reached an apogee with the so-called Panama Papers, in which the global law firm Mossack Fonseca was revealed to have been providing secret facilities for politicians and criminals around the world, ranging from associates of Russian President Vladimir Putin to scores of individuals under criminal investigation in far-flung places.

This is a process which is continuing in a flood. As 2016 ended, further secret files were tumbling out from the company registry in the Bahamas, and a rival European consortium to Ryle's, involving Der Spiegel and Lon-

don's The Sunday Times, was exposing massive tax avoidance data implicating Spanish footballers.

It's possible that this tsunami of leaks will eventually dry up, as the holders of electronic databases become more successful at security. But as long as human beings are involved, nothing is ultimately secure. If a database is brought into existence, it can be leaked. And for now, the machinery of international corruption has been opened to the sunlight, for those journalists prepared to do the work.

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DAVE BLOSS

MORE EYEBALLS FOR OUR STORIES

Caucasus Regional Editor for the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP). Following a twenty-five-year career with US newspapers, he worked as a reporter, editor, and teacher in Afghanistan, Bosnia, Cambodia, East Timor, India, Indonesia, and Libya. From 2004 to 2006, he was the Academic Director of the Caucasus School of Journalism and Media Management (CSJMM) in Tbilisi, Georgia. He has collaborated with the International Center for Journalists (ICFJ) and Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR).

We all work so hard on investigative stories — hundreds of hours of researching, reporting, writing, editing, fact-checking and designing.

But we also need to spend hundreds of hours doing everything possible so the maximum number of people watch, read, or listen to our stories.

I think the internet has made us lazy. Newspapers spend far more money and effort on printing and distribution than on news gathering. What good is a newspaper if it never gets to a reader? Television stations spend far more money and effort on production and distribution than on news gathering. What good is a TV report if viewers can't find it with a click of the remote?

But with almost all our work now going online, we far too often think that distribution is nothing more than putting it on our (often poorly marketed) website and then pasting a link on Facebook. Never mind that the competition now is millions of websites, as opposed to a few newspapers and television stations in our markets.

No media outlet anywhere in the world reaches a high enough percentage of people by itself. That's why Facebook sharing grew so fast. But what we need to be doing is thinking of every possible way we can present our information so we can offer it (either free or for a fee) to a variety of media outlets.

Every media market and every one of our investigative units are different. There's no one way to do this. We just want to share the ideas we have been trying in Georgia in the last four years.

Working conditions in factories

OCCRP reporter Nino Bakradze went undercover in 2014 and worked in two textile factories in Kutaisi to show working regulations and conditions. She prepared a multi-media story in English for OCCRP.

But since so many of our stories are focused on Georgian topics, we offer our material free of charge on OCCRP and simultaneously on netgazeti.ge, a popular and highly respected news website. We sit and work together with Netgazeti staff on any editing or format changes they wish to make. (The result is available at http://netgazeti.ge/life/35845).

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Every survey in Georgia shows that the majority of people still get their news and information from television. The highest-rated news show is PS, which has been anchored at the 9 p.m. Sunday time slot on Rustavi-2 TV for many years.

So anytime we can rework one of our stories so PS can use it, we figure out a way. In this story, Rustavi-2 chose to use a few seconds of Bakradze's undercover video clips, interview her at length about why she did the story and what she saw, and then take comments from factory officials. The result was a story that was widely watched nationwide.

Panama Papers

OCCRP Caucasus and its Armenian partner Hetq.am received access to the Panama Papers database in September 2015. Soon after, we were informed that the release date for stories, negotiated among dozens of media outlets worldwide, would be 10 p.m. local time on April 3, 2016

That was a Sunday night — right in the middle of Rustavi-2's broadcast of PS.

Pledged to secrecy on the contents of the Panama Papers, we waited until three weeks before the release date to meet with Rustavi-2 and make this offer: at exactly 10 p.m., Rustavi-2 could announce they were one of hundreds of media outlets worldwide reporting a story based on the Panama Papers. The station agreed and the report began at exactly 10 p.m. on April 3.

The story, which chronicled how former Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili did not list a company with hundreds of millions of dollars of assets as required on financial declarations while he was in office, required very different formats for online distribution than for television. So the OCCRP story was again reworked for TV, relying more on Bakradze explaining on-camera the complicated corporate structure.

At exactly 10 p.m. on April 3, the story was released by the online media outlets.

The next morning, OCCRP actively contacted local media outlets and offered to schedule interviews on the Panama Papers–Ivanishvili story. OC-

CRP did TV interviews with Rustavi–2, Imedi TV, Public TV 1, and Associated Press TV; talk shows with Radio Free Europe's Tbilisi service and Tabula TV; and a magazine article with Indigo Magazine.

LESSON LEARNED: When you have a story, be proactive and contact media outlets. Don't wait for them to come to you.

Release of names found in Panama Papers

When possible, turn the publishing of your story into an event.

In Georgia and many other countries, there was intense interest in whose names appeared in the Panama Papers. Once again there was an international agreement on the next release date: May 9 at 10 p.m. local time.

This time it was a Monday night, so live TV was not as attractive an option since the news shows on the air at that time had fewer viewers.

So OCCRP organized its own event at the Frontline Club in Tbilisi, a venue well-known to journalists. We began at 9:30 p.m. with an explanation of what the released data would include and not include, and the search tools available to use the data.

We also offered to help any media outlet that wanted to do a story, including helping where we could with Panama Papers data access that we had that was not being released to the general public.

There were more than 50 media members in attendance. At exactly 10 p.m., we used an overhead projector to show the moment when the names were released. Simultaneously, we released our own list of 85 prominent Georgians who were in the Panama Papers, along with cautions that no criminal activity could be inferred simply by being on the list.

The media members focused on the Georgian list, and we spent over an hour answering questions and offering advice and help for stories.

Our local website occrp.org received 5,500 hits and 530 shares in the first 12 hours even though it was the middle of the night. Once again, we actively contacted media outlets and offered interviews. Local media coverage was intense.

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Georgia football match fixing

Cooperating with a television station on this story presented a problem common to investigative stories. Documents on a criminal court case involving several alleged fixed matches ran to thousands of pages, and it took months of cajoling before a defense lawyer gave us copies to study. A great story was buried in those papers, but not a great TV story.

In this case, we worked together for months with Rustavi-2 TV, not just reporting but getting video interviews with some of the accused, along with video footage from the Georgian Football Federation of the match that clearly showed players who appeared to be fixing the results.

Since we weren't committed to a release date, we let Rustavi-2 TV pick their best time slot, and then we released our online stories the next day at a better time of day for us.

Launching www.ifact.ge

After three years, we were ready to register a local organization in Georgia. We also wanted to brand it as a local outlet with an easier name than the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project in the Caucasus.

On July 30, 2016, www.ifact.ge and www.ifact.ge/en were launched. As new sites, we wanted to attract traffic quickly, a deed that is not possible when you publish infrequently, as is always going to be the case with quality investigative packages.

What we're trying now are daily infographics that we create, post on our website, and share on Facebook.

In addition, we created a Facebook group for local newsrooms, and we send the infographics directly to them along with a daily reminder that they can be used for free. One recent infographic on the rapid rise in car registrations in Tbilisi became the basis for a one-hour talk show on 1TV, the public broadcasting station.

On November 30, 2016, we organized another event. To formally launch these two websites, we again rented the Frontline Club and released our latest story, which lists the millions of dollars of spending (and irregu-

larities) in a government reserve fund that operates outside the parliament's budget laws and discussions. Invited media received ifact T-shirts.

Ideas for the future

- JumpStart Georgia (www.jumpstart.ge/en) is an innovative visual data and design organization in Tbilisi. Along with student station Radio GIPA 94.3 (www.radiogipa.ge), they are experimenting with using data in audio files.

- The OCCRP technical team is in the process of installing "push" apps on our websites so that every time we publish, our followers receive a notification on their mobile phones.

- We plan to create an interactive data blog that would share both open source data and data we receive by other means with the general public. As with the infographics, the goal would be to increase daily traffic while sharing information with the public during those gaps between publishing investigative stories.

- Some of the best investigative research being done is for the HBO comedy show Last Week Tonight with John Oliver. We're talking with a comedian and a TV host in Georgia to see if we can find a workable format for turning some of our stories into both informative and entertaining programming.

Conclusion

We don't have the numbers we want, and we surely don't have all the answers. But we are committed to trying anything and everything so that our investigative stories get as wide a distribution as possible.

OLEG KHOMENOK

OPEN DATA IN INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISTS' WORK

Member of the Board of Directors of the Global Investigative Journalism Network (GIJN) and Senior Media Advisor for the Internews Network. Previously, he was the national coordinator and a member of the Regional Committee of SCOOP, a network and support structure for investigative journalists, involved in projects in Ukraine and Belarus. He has more than twenty years of experience in the field of journalism and media education, facilitates training in investigative journalism in different countries, and is a co-author of numerous books and publications.

During the last few years, there have been serious changes in investigative journalists' work, connected with both the globalization process and access to public information and, its processing and systematization. Digitalization of a large amount of data, the reduced size of storage devices, and a simplified data processing system increase investigative journalists' capacity and efficiency.

All over the world, public information is becoming open and largely accessible without intermediaries. That is, everyone has the opportunity to find the data they need on their own in open and public sources of information. On the other hand, systems for storing and analyzing electronic data through spreadsheets have emerged and are being improved. These systems have search, filtering, ranking, sorting, and other necessary tools, enabling quick searches in millions of records.

Speaking generally about the current state of access to public data, we can distinguish three levels and consequently, different possibilities for investigative journalists to work with this information further.

First level: Access to public information is guaranteed through information requests, in accordance with the national or international laws ratified in the country. Journalists or editors receive the response to their questions in hard copy or via scanned copies sent by email.

These answers are prepared by the employees of state authorities and local self-government bodies, who manage the relevant information. The human factor quite frequently leads to mistakes and violations of the right to access to information and freedom of information: incomplete information, delays in providing information, or the information holder unlawfully refusing to provide information based on his subjective attitude towards the journalist or the media that he represents.

Information received in response to information requests is not suitable for machine processing in its initial format. For the sake of systematization, the information should be scanned or arranged into electronic spreadsheets. Moreover, getting an array of data from paper or scanned copies is a very time-consuming process, which requires great human resources.

For example, the paper copies of the list of the 73,875 assistants

of the People's Deputies of Ukraine were digitized and entered into a database on posipaky.info, which enables users to quickly find the necessary information and see the "migration" of assistants from one political party to another. This process didn't take much time because the data was received in the form of printed lists.

While for collecting, digitizing and verifying 22,000 Ukrainian civil servants' declarations, which were completed manually and scanned, the www.declarations.com.ua project team needed to send several hundred information requests, and develop and adapt a crowdsourcing system decoding the scans (http://sotnya.org.ua/type/declaration_task), involving 3,000 volunteers.

Second Level: Computer interfaces that information holders develop to search for and obtain public information through public registries on the websites of state authorities and local self-government bodies.

Consumers, after registering on the website or without registering (depending on the legislative requirement), are able to formulate their information request in the system on their own and get the search result. The advantage of this system is obvious. The time to get information is shortened, and the likelihood of human error is excluded. Information received in the search results may be generated in PDF or HTML, which sufficiently reduces their further processing. However, the system provides only the requested data, and the search for a variety of information, as a rule, is limited. Thus, to create the massive data file necessary for the investigative journalist, there is a need to perform a large number of repeated actions, collecting and systematizing the answers. This need has led to the emergence of data scraping (download) and parsing (further processing) software. This robot program that replaces humans accesses the site, generates queries, gets answers, and saves the results in a predetermined sequence and format, gradually forming an array of data contained in the public registry. The system can also be configured to search and download data updates.

This was how the http://z.texty.org.ua database on public procurement was created, which combined data from the public procurement bulletins since 2008 and automatically uploaded the changes on its own database with integrated analysis tools.

Third level: Designing ordered, downloaded, and machine-readable data in Excel, CSV, or JSON format, access to which is provided via open data portals or the websites of state authorities and local self-government bodies. The availability of such data and access to it creates extensive opportunities for users, including the creation of API (Application Programming Interface), the development of search and analysis systems for fast processing, systematization, analysis, and obtaining of the search results.

Thus, http://youcontrol.com.ua/landing_001 contains integrated data from 25 registries, including the registry of legal entities, tax debtors, court judgments, licenses, reporting of public companies, and so on, and allows users to receive a certificate based on open data in a few seconds.

Another service, http://opendatabot.com, a mobile robot operating in the main messaging apps, allows users to quickly get search results based on the name of a Ukrainian company, the names of its directors, its legal address, code of unified registry, as well as obtain information on court decisions concerning the company.

The countries of the European part of the former Soviet Union are at different levels of access to information. In Georgia (http://data.gov.ge), Moldova (http://date.gov.md/en), Russia (http://data.gov.ru/frontpage?laguage=en) and Ukraine (http://data.gov.ua), for example, there are public data government portals that contain hundreds of data files in downloadable form. A lot of open data is presented in the form of state registries with varying degrees of accessibility. At the same time, journalists often face the need to obtain data through information requests, overcoming difficulties and contesting in the courts an unreasonable refusal to provide public information.

What data is available on companies and people?

When pursuing an investigation, a journalist often needs to create a file (dossier) on the organization or person who caught his attention. As a rule, a dossier would consist of a set of proven facts. It's important to collect information from public officials and public sources, as information obtained this way significantly reduces the legal risks related to the journalistic work.

Open and accessible information on legal entities, which can be obtained through official channels, as a rule, include the following:

- Title, type of ownership (LLC, OJSC, etc.), registration code or the taxpayer number, legal address
- Founders, share capital, date of founding, property shares
- Type of activity, according to the National Classification of Economic Activities (NCEA)
- Governing bodies (director, board of directors, supervisory board, etc.)
- Contact information (phone, email, website)
- Date of registration, re-registration, and date the website was created
- Bank accounts for companies in the stock market
- Licenses, special permits, natural monopolies
- Registration as a taxpayer, tax debts, exemptions, and VAT returns
- Judicial history
- Participation in public procurement, auctions, and privatization
- Land and property (ownership, lease, use)
- Fixed assets (this information can be made available only regarding the public utilities and the companies in the stock market)
- Inventions, industrial names and trademarks, and other intellectual property

However, there are exceptions in several countries in the region. For example, in Azerbaijan, after Khadija Ismayilova's investigations, information about company founders and property shares became legally classified as information with limited access.

When searching for information about people, only information about public figures is available: as a rule, about the officials of state authorities and local self-government bodies. When preparing a dossier about the subject of an investigation, journalists are interested in the following information:

- First and last name, date and place of birth, citizenship (this information is available if a person ran for elections or assumed office)
- Place of registration (often can be different from place of residence), taxpayer personal number (if private entrepreneur, then the tax number is available in the registry of legal persons and private entrepreneurs)
- Education (diplomas, academic degrees and titles), scientific publications and abstracts of dissertations (this information is open and available to the public and contained in national research libraries' catalogs of theses)

- Contact information (phone, email)
- Career history (previous and current employment), public service, and work in local self-government bodies
- Public activities (participation in social organizations), party adherence, and religion
- Criminal records, administrative offenses
- Military service, participation in military operations
- Earnings (wages, material assistance, dividends, royalties, etc.) and assets (real estate, land, bank accounts, vehicles)
- Business (participation in companies that share ownership and financial obligations)
- Intangible assets (inventions, intellectual property rights)

Much of the data mentioned is subject to the laws on personal data protection in all the countries of the region. However, in the process of investigating the activities of public figures, public interest is the argument for publicizing information about a person. There is also a legal regulation for limiting the scope of private life of people connected to public money or public property. In Ukraine, for example, first and last names and patronymics of peoples and names of legal entities managing budgetary funds or assets are considered to be public. On the other hand, legal norms in Russia sufficiently restrict journalists' freedom in terms of accumulating personal data, and the court is more often on the side of the officials than on the side of the journalists acting for the sake of public interest.

Where is accessible public information kept?

Almost all the countries of the region have public registries online containing the following information:
Legislative and other legal documents of public authorities and local self-government bodies

- Information on the registration of legal entities and entrepreneurs
- Decisions on land allocation, information on the purpose of land
- Decisions on the privatization of municipal property

- Information on registration of taxpayers and tax debtors
- Advertisements on public procurement, and information about the winners of tenders
- Information about companies listed on a stock exchange, securities issuers and their reporting
- Information on the activities of banks, financial and credit institutions, and insurance companies
- Court decisions
- Information on property rights and intellectual property

Below are the links to public information data for Azerbaijan, Armenia, Moldova, Russia, Georgia, and Ukraine as of December 2016.

All these countries have databases of legal and other normative legal acts with search tools:

- Armenia: www.arlis.am
- Azerbaijan: www.huquqiaktlar.gov.az
- Georgia: http://date.gov.md/en matsne.gov.ge
- Moldova: http://lex.justice.md
- Russia: http://bit.ly/2kKi28l
- Ukraine: http://iportal.rada.gov.ua/

As a rule, the majority of legal documents are in the national language; however, the constitutions, codes, and important laws are also available in Russian and/or in English.

Information on registration of legal entities and entre-preneurs is available at the following websites:

- Armenia: http://www.e-register.am/am
- Azerbaijan: http://bit.ly/2kifG3
- Georgia: http://bit.ly/2kipLNJ
- Moldova: http://www.cis.gov.md
- Russia: http://egrul.nalog.ru
- Ukraine: http://bit.ly/1XE6z7y

Search results differ across countries. For example, the registry in Azerbaijan provides only a company's name and tax number, while the Russian registry provides a full statement in PDF. In Ukraine, the registry provides an opportunity for a free search according to name and registration number, and a statement is provided about the current state of the company, while a paid search allows searching by the company director's name, address, and other criteria.

Not all the countries of the region have a list of court judgements; for example, this list is not publicly accessible in Azerbaijan.

- Armenia: http://bit.ly/2k7ZQGx
- Georgia: http://prg.supremecourt.ge
- Moldova: http://bit.ly/2jIl0va
- Russia: http://sudrf.ru   Russia's state automated system's "Justice" offcial portal includes about 32 million documents, while the non-official system (http://rospravosudie.com) included 111 million documents at the beginning of December 2016.
- Ukraine: http://reyestr.court.gov.ua

As a rule, the search engines for court judgements have different filters, according to the type of proceedings, the region, timeframe, name of the judge. They also have a text-based search, which facilitates the process of finding the necessary judgements. The searched material could be in both PDF and HTML.

Information on public procurement is available in the appropriate resources, which, as a rule, require registration. The volume of the information provided varies: from a chart with the names of the tender winners and the amount provided from budgetary means to the whole document package, starting from the dates the tender was announced, to the procurement contract, and even the act on the work provided.

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- Armenia: http://e-tender.am
- Azerbaijan: http://tender.gov.az/new/?lan=az
- Georgia: http://bit.ly/2pAVADL
- Moldova: http://tender.gov.md
- Russia: http://bit.ly/2jlm4aV
- Ukraine: http://prozorro.gov.ua

Information on the property rights of real estate and of land has different levels of accessibility in different countries and varies in volume. The vast majority of the real estate and land registries require registration of the given country's citizens, and this type of information is provided for a fee.

- Armenia: The state cadastre committee website (http://e-cadastre.am/en) to search for information on real estate, and e-cadastre.am/map to search for plots of land on the map.
- Azerbaijan: Real estate property rights registry (http://e-gov.az/az/services/read/3185/0) has limited possibilities for information search, requires the registration number of the real estate, and information on plots of land is not available.
- Georgia: Real estate property rights registration website (http://napr.gov.ge/udzravi) with the searching service https://naprweb.reestri.gov.ge/?sta=sea#/
- Moldova: http://bit.ly/2kKvucd cadastre map provides an opportunity to search by the land plot's cadastre number.
- Russia: Real estate property rights and transactions registry (http://rosreestr.ru/site/fiz/poluchit-svedeniya-iz-egrp) provides public information about the registered real estate titles, while the cadastre registry (http://rosreestr.ru/site/fiz/poluchit-svedeniya-iz-gkn) includes public information about land plots. The public cadastre map (http://pkk5.rosreestr.ru) facilitates the search of information on plots of land.
- Ukraine: the website of the Ministry of Justice's administrative services office (http://kap.minjust.gov.ua/services?product_id=1) is paid, requires registration, and provides an opportunity to search by property name and address. The cadastre map (http://map.land.gov.ua/kadastrova-karta) and the non-official map (http://gisfile.com/map) allow you to get free information about land plots after registering on BankID.

Intellectual property and non-property rights are covered in the registries of the intellectual property agencies and institutes. Moreover, the information contained in them is considered to be public because their public nature and accessibility is regulated by international patent law.

- Armenia: The Intellectual Property Agency website (http://aipa.am/en) has a search for brands, patents and other objects in Armenian, Russian, and English languages.
- Azerbaijan: The Copyright Agency website (http://e.copag.gov.az/profile/login) will guide you to the electronic service portal (http://e-gov.az/az/services/read/2695) which requires registration. This is the only website in the region that has this requirement.
- Georgia: The National Intellectual Property Center website (http://sakpatenti.org.ge/en) provides data on official information bulletins in PDF.
- Moldova: The State Agency on Intellectual Property website (http://agepi.gov.md/en) includes information on Moldova's intellectual property objects and intellectual property rights holders.
- Russia: The Federal Institute of Industrial Property website has a complete search engine: www1.fips.ru/wps/portal/IPS_Ru.
- Ukraine: The Ukrainian Intellectual Property Institute (Ukrpatent) website includes several databases with search engines: http://uipv.org/en/index.html.

The above-mentioned is not the full list of public information registries of the countries in the region, only a small part of it, which is important for investigative journalists' work because the information contained in them is official, which naturally reduces the risks related to their publication.

LOUISE LIEF

NEW MODELS FOR CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN A NEW INFORMATION LANDSCAPE

Louise Lief is a Scholar-in-Residence at the American University School of Communication Investigative Reporting Workshop. She was the founding deputy director of the International Reporting Project and has collaborated with the International Center for Journalists (ICFJ).
She has been a correspondent for popular media outlets and programs such as the CBS News series 60 Minutes, The New York Times, Time magazine, and The Boston Globe Magazine. She is an award-winning journalist, has been in more than 70 countries, and produced reports from five continents.

Of all the surprising statistics that emerged from last month's US presidential election, one jumps out. Over 100 million eligible voters, almost 47 percent of the electorate, didn't vote, the lowest turnout in 20 years. As the country prepares to pursue radically different policies, it is with the knowledge that almost half its voting public sat on the sidelines.

One can speculate about the reasons. Perhaps they were disillusioned with the system, or no longer believe they have a meaningful voice in public affairs. But that many people choosing not to exercise one of democracy's most fundamental rights is a symptom of a larger problem.

The Tvapatum Investigation: Media Against Corruption conference is about investigative journalism, the watchdog role a free media plays, speaking truth to power. But for the extraordinary risks investigative journalists take to have meaning and to make government and corporations accountable, the public needs to trust their findings and feel they can act on the information. Today in my country, and perhaps in yours, there is less trust in the news media than in previous decades and growing doubts about its credibility.

The recent election revealed the US media's blind spots, and the work we need to do. It also exposed structural weaknesses. One of the best analyses (http://bit.ly/2fZZMJU) of the US media's performance in the recent election and the challenges ahead is by Joshua Benton, who heads the Neiman Journalism Lab at Harvard University. (He is also a former Fellow of the International Reporting Project, where I was deputy director.)

Benton predicts the forces that drove the US media's failures this past November are likely to get worse. Among the many factors he cites, including the increase in fake news and the limited perspective of social media echo chambers, is the loss of local news organizations, what he calls the "community backbone." Partly due to the economics of the digital era, the US news media has consolidated in New York, Los Angeles, and Washington, D.C., and has been hollowed out in the middle of the country.

This new information landscape requires new approaches. Journalists will need to find new ways to build relationships with diverse communities and harness the capabilities of a networked world to empower citi-

zens, strengthen civic life, and encourage productive civic discourse beyond "Shares" and "Likes" on social media.

I have been studying new models for civic engagement within and outside the world of journalism that reimagine the role of journalists in civic life, and transform news audiences from passive onlookers to active participants in information gathering. These approaches allow the public to experience for themselves the power of facts and building a case based on evidence by involving them in reporting on issues they care about. The people who designed these models don't expect participants to take on the world. They ask them to do one small thing, and acknowledge their contribution.

Some examples are as follows:

WDET, a small public radio station in Detroit housed at Wayne State University, invited listeners to participate in a Detroit Park Watch (http://wdet.org/series/parks-project), to report their observations on community park maintenance after the city emerged from bankruptcy. They created a map (http://detroitparkwatch.tumblr.com) where local citizens could report maintenance issues, showing their contributions along with city- and journalist-reported observations. With this much larger data set, WDET was able to show that 32 percent of park lands were not being maintained, a statistic that focused the community's efforts for government action.

ProPublica, one of the US's premier non-profit investigative news organizations, has pursued this model of open investigative journalism in some instances. One project asked members of the public for their experiences getting hurricane relief funds from the Red Cross after that organization refused to reveal the information. ProPublica created a secure digital drop box for documents.

Another intriguing model grew out of an audience engagement experiment at WBEZ, Chicago's public radio station. Its Curious City (http://curiouscity.wbez.org/) digital platform and framework solicits, sorts and manages audience questions. It asks listeners what questions they have about life in Chicago and does stories to find the answers, involving audience members along the way.

One of Curious City's founders then co-found Hearken (https://wearehearken.com/), a company that offers similar tools to newsrooms globally to help the audience participate in the story production process, with a sliding pricing structure so that even very small newsrooms can participate. Hearken tools are now used in 60 newsrooms on five continents.

Sponsoring live forums and events provides another opportunity for news organizations to build deeply layered relationships with the public and become catalysts for productive civic discourse. They can also be profitable.

The Texas Tribune, a small non-profit news organization in Austin, Texas, that has earned a national reputation, has created a dynamic synergy between its live events and online journalism as part of its business model. Often partnering with colleges and universities throughout the state, the Tribune invites politicians to appear at live forums to discuss local issues and answer the public's questions. In doing so, it also introduces new audiences to its online content, which the events also generate, creating a productive feedback loop.

But these transformative models face constraints. As Facebook and Google devour the lion's share of advertising revenues, most local news organizations in the US have been shrinking. According to Tom Rosenstiel, executive director of the American Press Institute, the number of journalists working in newspaper newsrooms in recent years has dropped by over 35 percent without growth in other local media to compensate, and the hemorrhaging in smaller communities continues. Many newsrooms lack the capacity to answer complicated questions that require collecting or creating large data sets, especially when there is no reliable official data.

To address this predicament, I explored disciplines outside the world of journalism to see what they might offer. My search led me to the field of citizen science, a growing global movement that sees public engagement and citizen empowerment as one of its cornerstones. Established in 2014, the new Citizen Science Association (http://citizenscience.org) now has 5,000 members in 81 countries. There is also a European Citizen Science Association. Guided by scientists, many hundreds of thousands of citizens have participated in collecting, reporting, or analyzing information to answer research questions, many of which address societal problems and challenges.

Their work has led to the development of new digital tools and techniques to collect and sort big data, and to ensure data quality.

Their methods have made their way into government. The European Union has spent 50 million euros on five Citizen Observatories that monitor environmental pollution, biodiversity, and marine litter. The US government has also incorporated citizen science into its work. Twenty-five different federal agencies (http://bit.ly/2q8zsOR) support over 300 citizen science and crowd-sourcing projects. In theory, the data they collect is also available to the public.

Another area I have explored is the possibility of collaborations between the media, communities, and academic institutions to address societal challenges that they can't tackle alone.

In Flint, Michigan, serious problems with lead-poisoned water came to light thanks to an ad-hoc coalition (http://bit.ly/2qGDUY4) of community members, journalists, and academics, who independently tested and analyzed the water and children's blood levels, producing strong evidence that challenged flawed state and local data.

In New York, the John Jay College of Criminal Justice and Pace University Law Center enlisted community members in a research project (http://bit.ly/1NNBtsa) to discover what it is like to grow up policed in New York City. Over the course of several months, community members collected over a thousand responses from local residents describing their encounters with the New York City Police Department (NYPD), then analyzed the results with university researchers. The resulting data challenged official NYPD accounts and contributed to legal challenges and police reform efforts.

The Accountability Lab (http://accountabilitylab.org/) is a community-driven incubator model that promotes transparency and accountability, and establishes productive feedback loops. It helps young people and journalists create community conversations and actions around the issue of accountability. Local labs work with journalists, university students, filmmakers, and others on topics they choose. In Liberia, for example, they looked at the lack of safe drinking water in one community and established a weekly accountability radio call-in show.

In Nepal, after the recent earthquake and with a local journalist's help, the Lab set up volunteer-run citizens' help desks to help people fill out

forms for disaster relief. That project eventually led to a journalist-run survey in fourten districts to discover whether relief assistance had been effective. The results were disseminated to local radio talk show hosts.

The Lab also created a hit television show, Integrity Idol, in several countries. Members of the public can nominate and vote for their favorite honest government official. In Nepal, the government ignored the project until tens of thousands of people voted and millions watched the program.

These new models hint at how much is possible. And impressive as their results are, something even more important is at work. When they fill out surveys, test their water, and participate in other small actions, community members are telling their own stories, contributing to a larger communal narrative that seeks to understand and tackle shared problems. They are building relationships with each other and with the news media, getting to know and hopefully trust each other more. By doing so, participants' confidence in their ability to take civic action also gets a boost. Various studies have suggested that citizens involved in local civic life are more likely to vote.

In the new information ecosystem, the media's gatekeeper role is changing. If journalists discover new and better ways to build relationships with the communities they profess to serve, they will gain the public's trust, and investigative journalism will become an even more potent force.

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RYTAS STASELIS

INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM: HOW TO MAKE THE IMPOSSIBLE POSSIBLE

An independent journalist and an adviser at the European Humanities University.
He was the Editor-in-Chief of the News Department at Lithuanian Public TV and a correspondent for Verslo Žinios business daily newspaper.
He worked as an editor for Verslo Klasė, Lietuvos Žinios, and Respublika newspapers. From 1989 to 1992, he prepared materials for Lithuanian media from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Nagorno-Karabakh, and Russia.

Investigative journalism implies finding information that has public value, though it's possible that the information you obtained is not the information you needed, or the information you really need is inaccessible and acquiring it requires tremendous effort. What should you do in such situations?

Let's discuss these scenarios using two examples.

At Metsamor Nuclear Power Plant (NPP), they tested the same emergency situation that once led to the failure of the Japanese Fukushima-1 NPP. It turned out that there was no such threat to the Armenian NPP (The material taken from Wikipedia).

Our task is to check if this information corresponds to reality.

First, make sure that an active link to the source of that information is missing in Wikipedia.

Explore the media. It's possible that someone has written about the issue, moreover, by referring to other people who could be considered accessible sources. If there are fully or partially accessible documents, familiarize yourself with them.

It's possible that you don't have a good command of the topic (nuclear energy); well then you need to get in touch with experts. Begin with those who are less connected with the government and have no stake in immediately saying that "everything is all right."

Study international experience: tests (stress tests à la Fukushima) have been conducted not only in Armenia.

Recall the Armenian NPP's full history (its construction, security issues, incidents during big and small earthquakes and other natural disasters). Find out which body conducted the stress test: The plant operator? The independent state regulatory or supervisory institution?

Find out how many such tests the body conducting the test has previously conducted; is it a transparent institution? Or has it hidden information from the public, particularly information concerning NPP incidents? An important question is who has financed the test implementation?

Record your conversations. Transcribe them. Identify the parts of the information that are "gray" (murky).

Think about who can be a source of information. Learn more about them and your experts. What incentives may they have to communicate or not communicate with you? Who else can verify the information they provided? Are there documents to confirm the information?

If you managed to find some experts ready to cooperate with you, determine if their views agree. If not, then organize a discussion with them in person or remotely.

You will be able to present several viewpoints.Their opinions may not correspond to reality. Someone's opinion about a problem is not yet the truth. The grounds for truth are the facts.

Check all the facts of your story. Get rid of the initial hypothesis.

Try to find the experts who conducted the test directly. If you succeeding in finding them, communicate with them patiently, try to get evidence about everything: from their living conditions while they were conducting the tests and their salary to technical standards and personal photos. These could be not only interesting, but also important for your story.

Let's examine a Lithuanian investigation, which is similar to the aforementioned example.

Lithuanian example: How to determine if the politicians and businessmen are telling the truth?

In accordance with Lithuania's obligations to join the European Union, the Ignalina Nuclear Power Plant (INPP) stopped producing electricity on December 31, 2009. It transformed from an energy producer to an enterprise terminating its activities, but it maintained its status as an operator of nuclear facilities.

Two of the nuclear power plant's RBMK-1500 (electric power: 1500 MW) reactors were shut down (the first unit was stopped on December 31, 2004, and the second, on December 31, 2009), and the dismantling of the nuclear power plant began.

Since January 1, 2010, INPP's main objective has been to carry out a project unprecedented in the world — safely, timely and through the efficient use of resources (while maintaining public support in relation to nuclear energy): to decommission a nuclear power plant with an RBMK

reactor.

NUKEM Technologies (the contractor) won the international tender announced to implement the aforementioned work.

A few specific issues came to light while implementing the project:

- The work schedule was disrupted, and operation of certain facilities was late by 2–4 years.
- The European Commission (the project's main donor) criticized the Lithuanian government for failing to coordinate a project of this magnitude.
- The Lithuanian government accused the contractor for the missed deadlines. Lithuania's Minister of Energy directly stated that "about 300 million EUR disappeared by the contractor's fault."
- In the meantime, NUKEM Technologies explained that the work they are doing is unprecedented in the world. The contractor also pointed out that the documents it received from the Lithuanian party on the state of the reactors and cooling pools did not correspond to reality.
- NUKEM Technologies kept saying that the cartridges used for nuclear fuel were deformed and should be brought to a working condition, which implied new projections, certification, and so on.

There were few opportunities to check the provided information. Part of it was stamped "secret"; the other part was confidential due to the agreement between the government and the contractor. Moreover, specific facilities of the dispute were in a radioactive environment, and it was not possible to get there and verify them without harming the journalist's health. The flow of information in the media threatened to turn the matter into a multi-million-euro lawsuit.

Nevertheless, I managed to solve some problems of the investigation. Accessing information in a database, I was able to discover rather quickly that the work performed by NUKEM Technologies was not unprecedented as they claimed. NUKEM Technologies had worked on the closing project of the Chernobyl NPP — and as it was later discovered, not always successfully. The expensive equipment the company installed in Chernobyl worked with disruptions, was renovated occasionally, and remained idle. There was even a video online where one of the heads of NUKEM Technolo-

gies was seen offering a bribe to an official (at 15% of the contract cost).

After that we realized that NUKEM Technologies' claims should be accepted with reservation.

It was much more difficult to check if the state of the used nuclear fuel was worse than presented in the Lithuanian party's information booklet.

A few weeks later, when our enthusiasm to investigate the matter was nearly gone, we managed to find the operator who took pictures inside the cooling pools with the help of special equipment.

We got photos that clearly showed that the fuel cartridges kept in the pools were deformed. Namely, there was a new technological challenge to draw them out of the pool and place them in containers for long-term storage, thus requiring additional funding.

With all the facts at hand, you have to honestly say to yourself: "Is there something new in this?" It may be that your investigation didn't produce anything new.

If you failed to get any information that is vital for your story, but sources indicate that there is such vital information but it is not disclosed, then you can go to court. Going to court is what the journalists of The Boston Globe who were investigating pedophilia in the Catholic Church did.

If it's possible, tell your story through one person. Set forth the first paragraph of your article in such a way that the audience will want to read the whole story.

KEMAL GÖKTAŞ

INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM UNDER PRESSURE: TURKEY'S EXAMPLE

A journalist at Cumhuriyet daily. Previously, a correspondent for Radikal, Sabah, and Vatan ve Milliyet newspapers, covering the judicial system and political topics. He developed TV programs for IMC TV, one of the media outlets currently closed in Turkey. He is a PhD student in the Department of Communications at Ankara University and a visiting lecturer. He is author of the book Hrant Dink Murder: Media, Justice and State.

When the Justice and Development Party (AKP) came to power in 2002, some doubts arose among the media. The party was established by former members of the Islamist Fazilet (Virtue) Party, which included centrist and right-wing forces.

Initially, AKP denied its Islamic identity, insisting that it had removed the "armor of nationalist vision" that symbolized Fazilet's ideology. The AKP called itself a conservative democratic party and received its economic support from the representatives of small and medium-sized businesses, as well as from the capital of its supporters scattered across Anatolia.

During the first years of AKP being in power, democratic laws aimed at securing EU membership proved to have some influence both internally and externally.

AKP, which had received great support from European and Western intellectuals, did not exert pressure on the mass media, despite its problematic relationships with it.

But before coming to power, AKP supported businessmen who backed the party, so that in the future they would help in the task of creating government media and they would become owners of special media centers.

With the aim of overcoming its weakness in administration, AKP developed a close cooperation with the Gülenists (an Islamic religious and social movement led by Fethullah Gülen in the US). For a long time, militants raised by the Gülen body in special schools had been trying to get into state agencies and only during the years of AKP in power did they succeed in getting placed in both bureaucratic and military institutions.

During the 2007 presidential elections, when the military claimed it wanted a secular president, AKP managed to amend the law and have the president elected through direct popular vote. Particularly those Gülenists who were in judicial and police systems, receiving political support, managed through court proceedings to neutralize certain people who sought to destroy them and who were planning military coups. Initially, the trials were held against illegal state structures and The Gladio (secret underground organizations created by special services in the NATO states that must act in case of a possible war), but in a very short time they turned into a hunt for the opposition. Violence perpetrated by the ruling authorities towards

Kurdish political activists, students, socialists, and journalists was perceived as a result of court proceedings.

Media owned by the Gülenists and the government played an essential role during the trials. We can call this "journalism dedicated to operations." These publications cannot be called investigative journalism. Getting photos and recordings from some sources, they would publish them, trying to shape public opinion and change public perception of the events.

During this period, government pressure on other newspapers increased.

One of the country's largest media centers, Dogan Holding, was fined a tax penalty of 2,600 billion Turkish lira. Through such measures, the government was making it clear that the media and television no longer had the right to criticize the authorities. Dogan Holding's tax penalty was also a warning to other newspapers. Media owners who were also owners in energy, finance, construction, mechanic construction, tourism, telecommunications, mining, and other sectors, didn't want and were afraid to ruin their relationships with the authorities. Journalists and television employees were fired from their positions as a result of condemning the authorities.

There were officials in government whose duty was to monitor the media. They could get the headline and subject of a news story changed within two minutes. When the Gülenists got into a fight with the authorities, they published the recordings of the prime minister, the ministers and even the mayors who called the newspaper's chief editor or journalists and dictated how to prepare the story or told them which journalist should be fired.

In this way, the state advertising institution served as an intermediary link, because the newspapers' main profit was from the advertisements and the media could be subjected to pressure also through advertising.

After the July 15 coup attempt, a state of emergency in the country was declared and pressure on the press intensified. Besides Gülen media, Kurdish-oriented magazines, newspapers, and television stations were also shut down. Cumhuriyet (The Republic), established in 1923 with the proclamation of the Republic and named after the administration of that time, became a target of various actions directed at it. Many journalists got sentenced on charges of cooperating with various terrorist groups.

News stories on the violations of human rights and democracy, the government's dictatorial wishes, the Kurdish issue, peace talks, and the ceasefire, and analyses showing alternative routes are seen as terrorist news articles. Even studies lacking serious criticism are accused under the pretext of being subliminal messages. As of December 5, 2016, 146 journalists are detained in Turkish prisons for cooperating with the PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party) and leftist forces. In Turkey, the issue of shutting or not shutting down a newspaper is usually resolved by the courts; however, since July 15, this decision is being made by the commission created under the minister's leadership. During this period, 63 newspapers, 28 television channels, 5 media agencies, 20 daily newspapers, 21 radio stations, and 28 publishing institutions were shut down.

Under these conditions of pressure, journalism was forced to surrender to the authorities, and editorial independence, which was already rather problematic, was completely eliminated. Journalists who prepared news undesirable for the authorities were fired. It's no longer possible to see people who are not desirable for the authorities in key positions in the media.

Many media workers have begun to think like state officials. In a survey conducted by Transparency International, journalists were asked: in your opinion, which of the following could be "red lines" for journalists? Survey participants answered: national security; religious, moral customs; faith; and disclosure of private life and personal data; and at the end mentioned public good.

Journalism should be focused on the public benefit, but, as we see, it is in the last place, which very well describes how journalism is being suppressed in Turkey.

Financially vulnerable journalists cannot at the moment prepare materials on issues that have become taboo. Producing news on the violation of human rights, authoritarian government decisions, and corruption is no longer possible in Turkey.

There are very few journalists who manage to withstand the pressure and produce stories that are considered important; however, they face great risks. Journalists must keep in mind that they may go to jail, and newspapers must consider the possibility of closure and termination of their activities. In

this situation, several documents that should be publicized remain in journalists' drawers and wait for the unknown day when they can be published.

In the same Transparency International survey, Turkish journalists were asked: what are the greatest risks of investigative journalism? They answered: local and international political pressure, fear of losing their jobs, the impossibility of finding a new job, editorial pressures, getting threats while conducting their activities, the relationship between the media and capital, censorship, the difficulty of reaching sources, judicial problems, and so on.

After the last coup attempt in Turkey, not only getting information from bureaucratic sources, but also finding information sources on independent topics has become quite difficult. When people are sure that all their connections and writings are being controlled, they are afraid to share information they possess with a journalist, and investigative journalists can't publish very important documents because the judicial system is not independent, a healthy critical environment is lacking in the country, society is too polarized, the press is unable to reach people, and journalists are unable to completely do their job.

The large size of newspapers and other media entities belonging to the authorities, and the state television channels and Anadolu news agency (considered independent media; however, it implemented and continues to implement state policy) supporting the authorities do not allow news revealing scandals and crime to reach the reader. And if a newspaper has the courage to print such news, then a very strong anti–ad campaign is implemented against it and the news outlet gets morally humiliated. It's also not possible to find news on the war that continues on the southeastern part of the country. The newspapers that have connections with sources in that area were shut down, and the correspondents, having examples of human rights violations, are unable to publish them.

The lack of fairness of the judicial system also makes the work of journalists risky because the judicial system is not on the side of the truth.

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SKIRMANTAS MALINAUSKAS

HOW THE 15MIN INVESTIGATIONS BRAND WAS BUILT

Journalist with news portal 15min.lt, which is known as an investiagtive and explanatory journalism platform and was an official partner of the Panama Papers investigations team.
He has worked at different Lithuanian media outlets. He has been involved in popular investigations in Lithuania and covers topics related to public finance, corruption, and taxes.

Let's start with a brief introduction. I am Skirmantas Malinauskas (a really difficult name to remember), a journalist from Lithuania. For the past four years, I have been working at news portal 15min.lt. I am part of our division of journalistic investigations.

Currently, we are five journalists. We have worked in Syria and in Ukraine during Maidan and the war in Donbass, following refugees and taking part in rescue missions. In the last two years, we wrote really strong articles about corruption in Lithuania. We were official partners of the Panama Papers project: we traced money-laundering schemes from Lithuania to Africa and so on.

In 2016, we started a collaboration with the biggest fact-checking portals in the world, such as Pulitzer Prize–winning website PolitiFact.

What is a journalistic investigation?

Only one person in our team has a journalism degree (our team has five members, as I mentioned). For example, I have a master's degree in international law. I worked as a journalist for fifteen years in newspaper, radio, TV, and online media.

In this article I won't talk about the theoretical aspects of journalism work, and please forgive me if my thoughts are not too academic. I will talk about my experience and what helped us build a strong brand and earn the trust of information sources and readers.

The first thing I want to mention is what a journalistic investigation actually is. When we started to designate our texts "15min investigation," we got many questions, such as is this report from a war zone in fact an investigation? Can you consider an article based on information provided by a third party an investigation? How is this investigation on corruption different from another text on the same issue?

We decided to make it clear: for us an investigation is not taking information from sources and simply publishing it but doing actual work to find and check this information, to use as much data as we can, and to make our conclusions. This is what we do.

We go to Syria and take our own pictures of destroyed cities. We go to Donbass and talk to the locals. We try to see all sides of a story. The bravery

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of soldiers and corruption in the upper echelons of political power. The same applies to our articles about Lithuanian problems. We have a lot of sources of information, but we clarify the information, check the facts, and evaluate the context, dig as much as we can, so that our readers get the most objective information. We are not a platform for companies or individuals to leak information and use the media for their interests.

The biggest pitfalls

Before starting to work as a group of journalists on investigations, we faced some serious questions. The first one: we operate in quite a small market. 15min.lt has one million unique visitors per month. Keep in mind that Lithuania has a population of 3 million.

Is it worth dedicating a lot of time and recourses to one article? This is a serious question our publisher had to answer. Can you have a highly qualified person work on one issue for a long time?

The second question was, what actual skills do we need to deliver a good quality product? As I said, nobody forbids media outlets to brand any article as a journalistic investigation. We have a bad experience in Lithuania when even obviously biased articles were presented to readers as journalistic investigations.

The third one: What work methods do we use? This is an important question too. People often think that a journalistic investigation is essentially the same as writing any other article. You just spend more time and produce more text. This is not the case at all.

The fourth question: How do we present our investigations? Did you notice that I always use the word "article"? It's common for me because I write a lot, but we understood very quickly that only text or even text with a photo in this day and age is not going to cut it.

Is it worth it?

The short answer from my personal point of view is "Yes." From the point of view of business: "It depends." Time is money, and journalistic investigations take a lot of time. That's a rule. Probably this is the main reason we talk about difficult times for long reads. People simply do not have time for them. Or do they?

In terms of clicks and page views, one very good and long text will not be able to compete against five short articles about sex, sports, or the weather. That's a rule. But I can say very confidently that we produced many investigations which have been the top articles based on views on our portal.

When you operate in a big market, one popular text can generate so much traffic and resonance in other media that there is no question of "Is it worth it?"

If you work in a smaller market, you have to calculate: What do you gain in terms of new viewers, reputation, and companies that want to place ads because they like your platform?

Another problem when you think about the costs: you can lose big companies that are your clients right now. When we wrote the article about the richest man in Lithuania, Nerijus Numavičius, who owns the biggest chain of retail stores (Maxima) in the Baltic states and runs his business in other parts of the world, our sales department immediately lost one of our biggest clients. On the other hand, we showed that we're not afraid and will not bend under such pressure. A year later Maxima's ads returned to 15min.

To conclude: you have to find shareholders who are willing to risk short-term profit and journalists who can dedicate a lot of time to a job they love. At least we felt that way and it payed off.

What skills do you need?

This is a very interesting topic too. I, personally, knew many great journalists who made attempts to build strong investigation units but failed. Why? One of the reasons was competition inside the office and a pressure to deliver loud, glaring headlines, no matter what.

When you share the same sources of information, when you cover the same areas of public life, when you are constantly compared to the person sitting one desk away from you, it gets under your skin.

We decided to avoid this by creating a team of professionals who worked in different areas. I was covering business, so now I work mostly with

corruption issues, tenders, real estate and financial fraud, Ponzi schemes, and such topics.

Dovydas Pancerovas covers national security issues. He was reporting from different hot spots in the world during his career.

Šarūnas Černiauskas works mainly on data journalism. He is our go-to guy when we need international data. He represents us in international organizations too and has many global contacts.

Dovilė Jablonskaitė covers such topics as health, education, culture, and religion.

Vidmantas Balkūnas is an award-winning photographer and works with all of us.

This model creates synergy and protects us from stepping on each other's toes.

Our methods

You can write an entire book on methodology, on how to do investigative journalism. I will just mention a few things. We live in a time when the internet provides us with huge amounts of open data. Just learn to use it — databases, information archives, social networks, and so on.

Still, I would argue, our main source of information are honest people in different institutions. Every single journalist grows his database of connections over time. You have to cherish it. We have an inside joke: If you don't know what to write, don't look for a topic. Open your list of contacts and call some people you talked to in the past. Very often you'll get information that can lead you to something big.

By the way, we get way too many emails, phone calls, and even regular letters to cover. Many of the suggested topics we forward to other divisions. This is a nice problem to have.

Presentation

For a long time I thought that the most important thing was the text. Maybe you need a few pictures to illustrate it, but nothing more. Well, I changed my mind completely. We had many chances to see what a difference presentation makes.

When we started doing not only articles, but also multimedia projects, we instantly felt very positive reactions from readers. This was the first of its kind: http://bit.ly/2q2OHNw

We made many such projects after that. Videos, infographics, illustrations, and explainers have become an integral part of our investigation. We took this 360-degrees video in Syria a few weeks ago: http://bit.ly/2knUfdW

Technology is changing and we have to change with it. Often we work on topics that are very difficult to cover, so all means to explain them should be used.

CORNELIA COZONAC

HOW PUBLIC MONEY REACHES POLITICAL PARTIES' ELECTION CAMPAIGNS

President and co-founder of the Investigative Journalism Center of Moldova and author of the column 'Your Rights" at Radio Liberty. She is a trainer of investigative journalism, communication and anti-corruption, and senior lecturer at the Free International University. She is a member of the South East European Network for Professionalization of Media and the board of Transparency International Moldova. Her investigations in corruption have received numerous awards.

Fraudulent schemes start from election campaigns in the Republic of Moldova, as in other countries with high-level corruption. The election campaign is a favorable time for certain groups to launder dirty money and legalize it. How? By paying for some campaign events, such as concerts, that were not declared in the political parties' financial reports, remuneration of volunteers involved in campaigning, payments that are not included in the political parties' financial reports, advertising and billboards installed before the start of election campaigns. However, most often these are not funded by legal sources and are not included in political parties' funds.

Electoral contenders or their shadow donors aim for public money, by getting procurement agreements, adopting business facilities, or following control over fiscal and judiciary bodies. Many of these details that can serve as a basis for a journalistic investigation start from political parties' financial reports, either compulsory reports submitted to the Ministry of Justice or the Central Election Commission (CEC), or the ones submitted by contenders in the election campaigns. We check information about parties' official donors, their job, residence, age, and the amount of their donation. The electoral contenders' financial reports include pensioners or the unemployed who donate huge sums of money, employees of state structures who get low salaries but make big donations, or companies and representatives of some private companies with big donations. If the donor's place of work and the residence are known, we can find information about availability of financial means for donations to parties. We call the mayor's office from the village or we go to discuss with the villagers or the employees of some companies. As for state employees, we can check the information in public institutions' reports, which, as a rule, can be found online or can be requested in accordance with the laws on the press, access to information, or freedom of speech. We can find out if these state employees received benefits, financial assistance, or were promoted before the election campaign. We identified cases in Moldova whereby certain individuals (some of them working abroad) received financial assistance from public funds, and this money was used in a candidate's election campaign.

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Officials with bigger donations than their incomes

In the election campaigns of the past 10 years, we investigated donations to parties by public officials and candidates on the electoral lists. Comparing them with the statements on property, filed with the Central Election Commission, we found that some officials were so generous that they donated sums bigger than two years of the family budget. In some cases, people who donated sums worth 700,000 to 1 million MDL (US$30–50 thousand) were awarded important state positions. For example, in the 2010 election campaign, Liberal Party leader Mihai Ghimpu donated about US$750 thousand, a sum bigger than twice the family budget for 2 years. Then, after his party entered parliament, Ghimpu was elected Speaker of the Moldovan Parliament and then he became the acting president of Moldova for one year. Also, Liberal Democratic Party of Moldova leader Vlad Filat made donations to his party during the same election campaign.

Officials and architects of illegal funding schemes

change their schemes very quickly after investigative journalists reveal them. During the 2014 parliamentary election campaign, the officials who became the focus of journalistic investigations made donations within the limits of their declared incomes. Instead, donors of the Socialist Party, a young party that participated for the first time in parliamentary elections, made donations that exceeded the party's declared income. But when they abandon a scheme, a new scheme appears somewhere. In 2014, we identified a new scheme linked to public procurement (outlined in the next section).

The properties and assets of the candidates included in the lists of political parties and of independent candidates can be found on the Central Election Commission website (www.cec.md).

In the statement on property submitted to CEC, the candidates declare the family's total income for the last two years and other properties.

If the candidates occupied a public position, then their statements on property and interests can be found on the National Integrity Agency portal: www.cni.md. There is a field where you can type the name of the person, type of statement (property or interests), and year, and then click "search."

At the bottom of the page you can find the requested statements in PDF. Statements on property are submitted for the previous year, when the official is elected and 30 days after the official's mandate was expired, the official was dismissed, and so on. If you check the statements on interests of officials, you see the connections with private companies, and you can check these companies' connections with the state.

Statements on property and interests of officials can be found at www.avere.md, which belongs to Moldovan NGO ADEPT (Association for Participatory Democracy).

On this portal, you can find the statements on property of officials for the period when they were in public office. You can search by name.

Also, you can find a number of analyses and infographics about how the official's property increased in the period of serving in public office, as well as problems and inconsistencies in statements on property.

All this data can facilitate journalists' work or be a starting point for wider investigations.

The Cadastre database (www.cadastru.md) is used to check when an official purchased a residential property. Payment is required to use this database. The Investigative Journalism Center has a subscription and can provide assistance to journalists investigating this database. On the Cadastre's website you can search by address of the property, of the land, or by the cadastral number. This database shows general information about a building or piece of land, number of sales and owners, if the property is being used as collateral for a loan (the amount, bank, payment terms of the loan). We can also find out if the court has set bans and/or seized the property. This data is important for a journalistic investigation.

We find out about donations to political parties from the electoral contenders' financial reports. You go to the CEC website, choose the elections and electoral contenders, select the party and then financial reports. In the first part of the report, you will find expenses in the reporting period (two weeks), then incomes from donations. It is worth mentioning that each party has several reports, compiled every two weeks, and a final report.

Public procurement: A means of parties' funding

In 2014, when we checked the donations of different people to parties, we realized that there were many representatives of some economic entities. This was something new for us, so we decided to select donations exceeding 50 thousand MDL (US$2,500). We compiled a list of economic entities whose representatives have made donations to parties. We checked everyone at the State Registration Chamber, to see the connection with the party to whom they donated the big sums of money. The database on economic economics is partially open; if you need a detailed analysis or information about a company, you have to pay. We did not find too many connections. And then we decided to check if these economic entities had any connections with the state, if they had procurement contracts. The National Agency for Public Procurement portal (www.tender.gov.md) is open to the public and contains an extensive database about all public procurements. On the right side of the page you can search by name of economic entity, name of the public institution, object of public procurement, period of the contract, and so on.

When we checked the public procurement contracts, we found that representatives of all the economic entities made donations to parties. We collected all the sums and made some calculations of the sums of agreements with the state from the last four years, then we calculated the sums donated (for each economic entity, the donations were made by those in leadership and management positions). Then we checked the managers of the public institutions from whom economic entities obtained public procurement agreements and which parties promoted them. And we got a surprising overview.

Economic entities that had, for instance, procurement contracts from the mayor's office or district councils managed by members of some parties made donations to these parties. For example, if an economic entity obtained contracts from a mayor's office where the mayor was a Democratic Party of Moldova member, it made donations to this party. In the 2015 local elections, we made the same investigations and the overview was surprising.

Impressive schemes were registered for the parties in power and with bigger influence over public institutions.

In Moldova, they talk a lot about otkaturi: amounts that are sent as bribes from public contracts that fall within the limit of 10–20% of the sum of the procurement contract. If we calculate economic entities' donation amounts to parties and the sum of the agreement, then in the majority of cases the donation amount is 10–20% of the contract's value.

Following these calculations, we investigated separately the procurements that seemed dubious to us. In some cases, we found that some economic entities obtained money in one installment without doing the work, whereas in some cases, the work was not completed. For example, in the Orhei district, where the regional governor obtained his position through the Democratic Party of Moldova, the highest amount for road repair in the district budget went to the mayor's offices where the mayors were from the same party. When we checked each procurement separately, we found that the money had been allocated, but the roads had not been repaired.

During the 2015 presidential election campaign, the CEC hid data about the job and year of birth of donors under the pretext of personal data protection, which complicated the work of journalists a lot.

However, the Investigative Journalism Center team conducted an investigation because it had a database of donors from previous election campaigns.

During this campaign, we revealed another scheme: namely, that two-thirds of the electoral contenders' money went to ads on TV channels owned by Democratic Party of Moldova First Deputy Chairman, businessman Vlad Plahotniuc.

For instance, most of the donations for the Democratic Party of Moldova went to TV channels managed by the person of the same party.

Interests in public money start from election campaigns. It's important for journalists to follow public money and the interests of those who aspire to public office. Interests for public money start from the electoral campaigns.

NANA BIGANISHVILI

A SERIOUS INVESTIGATION CAN BEGIN FROM A SMALL DETAIL

Nana Biganishvili is the founder and president of the Georgian NGO Studio Monitor, and editor of the organization's monitori.ge website, which deals with investigative journalism.

She has worked as a reporter for the Rustavi–2 programs Business Courier; Idea, Money, and One Chance; and 60 Minutes; and was a correspondent for Akhali Versia newspaper.

She has conducted journalistic investigations on human rights violations, corruption, false court cases, unfair verdicts, and other issues.

Unlike news journalism, investigative journalism deeply studies this or that problem and presents the results for public judgment. Investigative journalists, being optimistic, strive to change life for the better. They not only uncover various violations, but also try to find the answer to the question "If the current reality is not good, then what should it look like?"

In Studio Monitor's journalistic investigations (of which there are over 150), we have addressed numerous questions. Even the naked eye can see that we always choose the hottest topics for investigations, topics that the public is concerned with the most at the moment.

When "made-up" criminal cases based on the principle of "zero tolerance towards criminals" underwent scrutiny in the country, investigations of the cases of illegal seizure of private property gradually faded into the background.

The unprecedented increase of penitentiary institutions' workload has led to a growing number of cases of torture and ill treatment in places of detention. Reports on deaths and torture in the prisons were followed by a phase of investigations into elite-level corruption.

The journalistic investigation presented below is a good example of how to proceed with an investigation without any evidence, just following intuition based on suspicion.

This investigation (http://bit.ly/2kJ96El) is significant also because almost all the public databases available in the country at the time were used. And most importantly, after the investigation results were published, the foundation created by Tbilisi City Hall began to be subject to the Law on State Procurement and currently alienates properties through auctions.

During 2007–2012, Tbilisi City Hall implemented the "New Life of Old Tbilisi" project with the aim of restoring the capital's historic areas. This project was important in terms of not only restoring (and sometimes saving) historical buildings in Old Tbilisi, but also increasing the capital's tourism potential.

Studio Monitor's investigation proved that the foundation created by the municipality spent 365 million GEL (US$219 million at the time) from the budget, violating the State Procurement Law. In addition, the municipal authorities were planning on donating the property owned by City Hall (the

historic buildings) to the foundation, a move that was also a violation of the law. The municipality had given the newly formed foundation the status of a non-industrial, non-profit legal entity, which the foundation and municipality used to justify spending the budget money without announcing a tender. And the property transferred through direct sales appeared in the hands of people who had close ties to the officials.

In addition, the journalistic investigation revealed that the capital's budget suffered a loss of US$10 million from the sale of one of the historic squares (Rike) to a businessman close to then President Mikheil Saakashvili.

Experts unanimously maintained that the facts uncovered by the journalistic investigation confirmed the presence of elite corruption in the country.

Sometimes a serious investigation can begin from a small, seemingly insignificant detail. For example, during restoration of the historic David Agmashenebeli Avenue in Tbilisi, the roof of one of the historic two-story houses was replaced twice, and later an attic was built over it.

By noticing this, I became interested in how this work was being funded and why the budget was being spent so mercilessly. To get answers to these questions I naturally applied to Tbilisi City Hall. From there I learned that the restoration of Agmashenebeli Avenue was being performed by the Tbilisi Development Fund, established by the municipality. Moreover, according to the information from the State Registry, the fund was created purely for this purpose. Interestingly, the fund's executive board, besides representatives of various ministries, also included senior officials from city hall.

Then I officially contacted the fund, but in vain. The fund's lawyer responded that I don't have the right to demand financial reports because the fund was a non-commercial legal entity. And with that, the circle was closed. On the other hand, this signalled to me that the investigation should be continued.

With the help of the internet, I became acquainted with all the news and information disseminated by official authorities on the capital's historic buildings restoration project. In terms of information, there was practically nothing except for blueprints, slide shows, and promises. It was as if the financial information had gone underground.

The information request filed with Tbilisi City Hall, it turned out, was hopeless. Let's agree, when we're talking about hundreds of millions of lari, obtaining information is not a joke.

Continuing to dig, I filed an application with the courts, trying to obtain information from the municipality this way on how much money was transferred from the Tbilisi municipal budget to the Tbilisi Development Fund account and how this money was spent. As court proceeding takes a lot of time, in order to save time I also contacted NGOs, hoping that the third sector would have something to say. The topic could interest NGOs with a specific focus, for example, those dealing with issues of historical heritage preservation or corruption in the country.

According to experts, the restoration of historic parts of the city was being carried out with violations, hastily, and without preserving cultural heritage monuments. As a rule, 200-year-old facades were being dismantled and replaced with cement and even plaster. NGOs advised me to contact Nana Janashia, who was publicly protesting the demolition of her 16th-century cellar. That's how the first interview came about.

As for the finances, the task was more complicated. I learned from the Institute for Development of Freedom of Information NGO that they also had applied to official authorities with information requests, also in vain. I simultaneously continued to look for further information in information databases.

Since 2010, information on all the tenders announced by state bodies is included in the State Procurement Agency's electronic database (http://procurement.gov.ge). There, one can find who announced the tender, for what amount, who participated, and finally, who won the tender.

I discovered crucial information from this database. The Tbilisi Development Fund had not announced a tender. Namely, there was no information about it in the data-base. In other words, millions of lari was spent by bypassing the law on procurement.

The National Agency of State Registry's database (http://napr.gov.ge) is also an important information source. The Industrial Registry gives exhaustive information about any company, including its founders, founding date, possible changes of the founders, sales of the company or its shares, the respective price, and so on.

The Real Estate Registry, in turn, has all the information about properties registered in the name of a private owner or a legal entity. I learned from the registry's database that during the last few years about 100 properties had been registered in the fund's name, including well-known historical buildings in Tbilisi. It also turned out that the Tbilisi authorities had gradually transferred those buildings to the fund without compensation, which eventually became their owner, instead of the municipality. And after all this, the fund was officially claiming that the Administrative Code did not apply to it.

Each building and plot has its own code in the State Land Registry. Through this registry I can find out the fate of a property that came into the fund's possession. This proved to be a very exciting occupation and took me about two months. According to the State Registry, the fund had sold the property belonging to the city without a tender, that is, according to its own discretion.

In the sea of information obtained from the registry concerning the fund's activity, one reference was particularly interesting.

Rike's 10-Million Deal

In 2010, the fund completed restoration of Tbilisi's historical Rike Square. In previous years, the square situated in the center of the city (4,000 m2) was the property of different private owners. Under pressure by the authorities, the owners finally donated their property to the state.

Tbilisi City Hall announced a tender for the restoration and development of the square, which was won by a company (New Riki) included in a business group suspected of having connections with the Georgian president. Paying US$7 million for the square, this company assumed the obligation of fulfilling the tender requirements: to build a recreation zone, and a bridge on the Mtkvari (Kura) River.

According to State Registry data (notary documents on the sales), the Tbilisi Development Fund purchased the territory two years later, paying US$17 million, when New Riki failed to carry out the conditions of the tender.

In other words, instead of getting sanctions for not fulfilling the tender requirements (which is often the case in practice), New Riki made a profit of US$10 million.

As for the conditions of the tender (restorating the square and building the Bridge of Peace), the Fund performed those at the expense of funds allocated from the budget.

According to the same registry database, an offshore company, whose director was a family member of Tbilisi Mayor Gigi Ugulava, had become the owner of two historic buildings.

During this investigation, I also used the Tbilisi Municipality Architectural Service's database (http://tas.ge).

During the restoration of Tbilisi's historical districts, besides the restoration of old buildings, new buildings were built by the municipal authorities' decision. One of these construction projects caught my attention because it was implemented over a small park. Of course I was unable to get official information on why it was decided to cut the trees and build a building, and who the owner was. I continued the thorough search on the Architectural Service website. I found the exact address, which was sufficient at that stage.

During the search, along with the information about the place I accidentally found a note that appeared there probably due to the negligence of one of the officers: "Davit Ninidze has said to register in the name of a local, and then someone wants a part for an office and another part for a parking station. Don't sell." Davit Ninidze was the deputy mayor of Tbilisi and simultaneously a board member of the Tbilisi Development Fund.

Getting comments on serious charges (or facts) is one of the important aspects of an investigation. In such cases one should not rely on the interviews the press service has agreed to. Look for other ways. Find out where the public official is planning on holding the next public meeting. It will take some time. But the effort is worth it. it.holding the next public meeting. It will take some time. But the effort is worth of it.

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PAVLA HOLCOVÁ

MOBSTER, POLITICIANS, COGNAC

Founding director of the Czech Center for Investigative Journalism. She investigated cases concerning money laundering and offshore companies. She has been involved in OCCRP's international investigative projects. She worked at the People in Need humanitarian organization as head of the Cuban section and at Europe's largest developer of open source software for news media, Sourcefabric, as manager of international projects. She has received the Global Shining Light Award and the EU Investigative Journalism Award.

We at the Czech Center for Investigative Journalism strongly believe in cooperation between journalists. And if the cooperation is cross-border, even better. We are a member of three main investigative journalism networks: Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (https://www.occrp.org/en), Global Investigative Journalism Network (https://gijn.org/), and International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (https://www.icij.org/). Thus, the majority of our stories is indeed cross-border. Just last year, we uncovered cases of illegal arms supplied to the Syrian conflict and Middle East, a cocaine business and its logistical headquarters in Prague, and offshore structures used by Cuban presidents Fidel and Raúl Castro.

At one of the investigative journalists' meetings organized by OCCRP, I talked to our Armenian colleagues and friends Edik Baghdasaryan and Vahe Sarukhanyan from Hetq. I explained them what data is publicly accessible in Czech Republic.

Only a couple of months later, I received an email from Edik and Kristine Aghalaryan, asking me for cooperation on some Armenia-related project.

My answer was yes, and at the beginning of 2016, Hetq journalists Vahe and Marine came to Prague. And they were amazing. Within one week, they were not only able to navigate Czech business and land registries, but also Prague public transport. The result was a complex series of quality investigative articles with the last one published just a week before the Tvapatum Investigation: Media Against Corruption conference (December 6–8, 2016). And there might be more to come…

We started the collaboration by introducing the Czech business registry, which has its pros and cons. The pro is that the registry contains lots of data including a company's founding date, documents related to company history, such as annual reports, financial statements, and so on. The con is there is no official leverage to oblige companies to update their information and provide all related documents. So sometimes, instead of finding important financial data, you find an empty box. The Czech business registry is accessible online for free at following URLs:

http://bit.ly/2kqRqNB, http://bit.ly/1mr111k

You can search by

- name of company,
- name of person, or
- name of shareholder.

And the information business registry contains

- For a person: name, date of birth, permanent residency, position within the company.
- For a company: history, shares/shareholders, address, ID number.

Also, in the section Sbirka listin, there are scanned company documents such as founding documents, annual reports, financial reports, transfers of shares, and so on.

Czech is a difficult language, but Google Translate can help for basic orientation.

The land registry is an altogether different situation. Here you can search by not only address, but also owner name. There are only two problems: first, you need a special account approved by the land registry to be able to search that data. Fortunately, we have one. Second, the land registry is full of very weird abbreviations such as LV, V2015 or complex procedures to find this data. But this did not stop us. Here's the part that's publicly accessible:

To search by address, access the land registry here: http://bit.ly/2r9ouwT

The simplified version, where you select real estate properties by clicking on a map, is here: http://ikatastr.cz/

You can also search by name of person (what the person owns), but you need to get advanced access, an approved account by the Czech land registry office. A search by name is paid.

We have established a working hypothesis that there are powerful Armenian business people investing in the real estate sector in Prague and its surroundings. As a secondary hypothesis, we decided to investigate whether Czech assets are properly reported in Armenian politicians' financial decla-

rations. And the last but not least topic to investigate was the extent to which Armenian entrepreneurs are involved in the Czech business industry.

The outcome of the collaboration is outstanding: a series of eight articles in four different languages. And here is what we discovered:

Among other facts, we found that

- the Armenian community in Prague is vibrant, indeed powerful and centralized mostly in the Prague district of Stodůlky, where also a significant part of the Russian minority is based. The community has some sort of interest in new apartment houses nicknamed Panelák in Czech.
- since 2007, investments from high-profile Armenians such as politicians, businessmen, and real estate developers started to flow to the Czech Republic.
- the areas of investments are mostly restaurants, hotels, real estate projects, and gambling.
- the amount invested in the Czech Republic amounts to tens of millions of US dollars.

What we learned from the collaboration:

- Language is not a problem, if there is goodwill and Google Translate.
- Seeing those real estate assets in person is always better than using virtual tools such as Google Street View because you can find relevant information for your story (e.g., who are the neighbours).
- It is great to interview people in their native language. You always get more information. But if you don't have anyone whose native language is Armenian, Russian also serves this purpose well.
- It's always necessary to localize and not translate the articles: Czech and Armenian general knowledge about the issue are very different. Well-known names in Armenia are totally unknown in the Czech Republic and vice versa. Instead of translating, rewrite the article so that it's understandable for your audience.

VIKTOR YUKECHEV

PUBLIC INVESTIGATIONS IN THE TAK–TAK–TAK NETWORK

Head of the human rights social network Tak–Tak–Tak (So–So–So).
As a journalist and editor, he worked at Novosibirsk media outlets Molodost Sibiri, RIA Novosti and Sibirskaya Gazeta.
Since 1999, he has been teaching journalism in different institutions and is currently the director of Press Development Institute–Siberia. He has authored more than a dozen professional books.

Why Tak-Tak-Tak (So-So-So)?

SO why is our work so important? Today there is a vividly expressed demand for justice in Russian society. Members of the public strive more and more to oversee state and local expenses, and implement civic projects aimed at solving urgent local problems. But most of them don't know how to do it. All of them (to a different degree) lack the legal culture, knowledge and cooperation skills when solving such complex social problems that can't be ignored when building civil society and democratic institutions.

SO why is this work so urgent? In recent years, serious changes have occured in the process of Russian media consumption. Although the majority still gets its main news from traditional media (according to data from the Russian Public Opinion Research Center [VTsIOM]: 98% from central television, 88% from local television), only 78% of the respondents considered television unbiased, considering the internet a more trustworthy source. According to the results of a survey conducted by Subscribe.ru, having the highest rating of confidence were news websites and online media (5% of respondents trust them "completely" and 64% trust them "more"), television (7% and 55%, respectively), and radio (5% and 53%, respectively). Of the survey respondents, 63% were sure that information ordinary people publish online may not only get publicity, but also help solve real problems. These tendencies are observed against a background of the rapid rise of social media users and bloggers, platforms that have become efficient tools for civic activism.

SO, all of this is interconnected: The low level of legal culture and the lack of objective information on problems urgent for the public create an atmosphere of mistrust towards the authorities and traditional mass media. Lacking faith that the authorities and the traditional media are able to really understand and protect their rights, people are obliged to protect their own rights and share information on their successes and problems in this area independently. Independently means they do it the way they are able to — some, a little better and some, worse. But wouldn't it be better if this was done by those who have experienced human right violations, those who know how to convey that information to an unlimited number of consumers so that they get interested in problems that have not yet affected them personally?

TVAPATUM INVESTIGATION:
MEDIA AGAINST CORRUPTION

In fact, those individuals who are aware of the connection between their constitutional rights and freedoms and their personal well-being are more willing to participate in not only the protection of their own rights, but also public scrutiny for the sake of ensuring human rights. In other words, they are willing to become human rights defenders, though most of them do not call themselves that.

And so-so-so: We are ready to mention the fundamental innovation of this technology, that is, the principle of a team public investigation, which takes place behind closed doors on the Tak-Tak-Tak website until completed, so that the internet won't be littered with unchecked information.

And so-so-so: Perhaps we are ready to see in this technology also a special "adventure." Until the user completes the respective stage of investigation on the site, he will not be able to move on to the next task, from the hypothesis to the interim analysis, and from there, to legal expertise and public verdict.

How?

You remember of course what Archimedes cried out when, after being submerged in water several times, he discovered his principle. Of course: "Eureka!" ("I found it!"). For us it was "Tak-Tak-Tak!" (So-So-So). That was what our designer Igor exclaimed thoughtfully when he "discovered" the long-sought-after solution for one of the problems of our website, which was initially named "People Say." I looked at his happy face attentively. It was shining from happiness of the discovery and well-deserved victory, and I immediately understood: we had unexpectedly found the name of the website — a site that was designed for the joint, not simple, and not always predictable work of searching for the truth.

Just listen:

Tak-tak-tak, I think I found an idea!

Tak-tak-tak, we are close to the truth!

Tak-tak-tak, we did it!

Having credible and significant proof at hand, public investigators may have a more confident and principled dialogue with state and local self-government bodies and demand that they respond to the human rights violations uncovered by the investigation.

And so, the teams of public investigators, which are not always comprised of professional journalists, master quality media technologies in real time and get accustomed to the social responsibility of the results of their investigations.

And so, something like this. And for this reason, 'Tak-tak-tak."

Public investigation and public interest

Let us first of all recall what types of investigations there are. Of course you know them: official investigation, parliamentary inquiry, and criminal investigation, which is conducted by law enforcement bodies. But we will not discuss these investigations here. Our format for investigations is designed for journalists and civic activists who are ready to jointly investigate certain closed or carefully hidden problems of public interest.

Public interest is key for a public inquiry, and unless we understand what it is, and how to identify and present it to public, better that we not start an investigation.

There is no uniform definition of public interest in Russian law. We suggest identifying public interest through threats to the public. These are several, but let's mention a few of them.

- Threat to public health and safety.
- Threat to mislead people through the action or inaction of officials or organizations.
- Threat of withholding information that enables people to make informed decisions on problems that are important to them.

When choosing a topic for your public investigation, you should view the problem (situation, trend) as if through a filter: which of the aforementioned threats is present?

You, of course, remember the classic formula: can a topic about a dog become news? The answer: "Yes, it can." If the dog bit a man, it's not news, but if a man bit a dog, then this is news. It's the same in our case: can the mayor's grandmother become a topic of public investigation? The answer: "Yes, it can." But if someone stole the mayor's grandmother's purse, this is

not a topic for public investigation. But if the mayor registered his business and apartment in his grandmother's name, then this is certainly a topic for it. How to check? Try to answer one of the three questions. Recall, is there a threat (at least one) to the public here? There are at least two threats in this case: misleading and hiding the information. Shall we start the investigation? Yes, let's start. But which kind of investigation shall we start: journalistic or public? And is there a difference? Yes, there is. I call your attention to just three very significant differences:

- On Tak-Tak-Tak, anyone can start a public investigation.
- A mandatory principle of a public investigation is team work (journalists + civic activists).
- The result of a public investigation must be a social project that will involve the citizens in the process of finding solutions to the uncovered problems.

Did you notice the main similarities and differences? Any member of the public can be an investigator, but it's better to do this by uniting first with like-minded people in one team and then in a joint project with the compatriots in your own community. This is why in addition to the Investigations section on Tak-Tak-Tak we created also its continuation: Special Projects. And where investigative journalism – revealing the truth – ends, the last phase of public inquiry begins: the social project to achieve change in the situation through public efforts.

What are the risks?

The first thing that stands out in the social projects are the activities aimed at protecting someone's violated rights. Isn't there a possible conflict of interest concealed here? After all, following this scheme, a journalist must go outside the framework of protecting citizens' rights in the media sector and continue this work now in the real life. It's true that implied is that the journalist will do this not as a journalist but as a member of the local population. And nevertheless…

This issue is not regulated in the Code of Professional Ethics of Russian Journalists. The Code reads: "A journalist considers his professional status incompatible with holding positions in organs of state governmental, legis-

lative, or judicial power, as well as in governing bodies of political parties or other organizations of a political nature." But there is no mention of public activity. So is it permitted?

This is formulated more clearly in the ethical rules of *The Washington Post:* "We avoid active involvement in any partisan causes – politics, community affairs, social action, and demonstrations – that could compromise or seem to compromise our ability to report and edit fairly."

Does this mean that at the end of the public inquiry, the author crosses the boundary of journalism standards and must adhere to different, human rights ethics? The UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders states that every person has a right to protect his own rights and the rights of the others. This is why no one can be forbidden from engaging in human rights protection. Including also journalists.

And so, let's state the dilemma: human rights protection activity takes the journalist far beyond the limits of his profession, but everyone has the right to engage in human rights protection. Moreover, in Russia today, there is no unified human rights protection ethics so that the criteria for journalists and human rights defenders can be compared and their similarities or differences revealed. Let's note, however, that there also is no journalism ethics, which since 1994, are by and large present only in the professional Code of Ethics, that is, just on paper.

However, if there is no single human rights protection ethics yet and anyone can be engaged in human rights protection (including journalists), perhaps it makes sense to talk about a kind of general ethics for teamwork in the modern communication space? And if we recall that more than half of Russians today do not trust the professional media, then the wish of members of the public to engage in "information self-service" increasingly becomes clear. And the best way of such "self-service," in my opinion, is participating with professional journalists in public inquiries, where both parties would complement each other: members of the public through making journalists feel the importance of human rights, and the journalists through quality work standards using technologies and data. And in this case the perceptions of the ethics of the common cause will get closer. As we know, any task starts with our perceptions of it.

EVALDAS LABANAUSKAS

WHAT TO EXPECT WHEN AN INVESTIGATION IS PUBLISHED

Editor-in-chief of Lithuanian weekly magazine Veidas. Previously, he was the editor of veidas.lt, mobile editor at leading news website 15min.lt, and chief editor at regional news company Diena Media News. He worked at various Lithuanian media companies and other organizations. He covered Ukraine's Orange Revolution and the Russo-Georgian War.

After the story of an investigation is published, the author as well as the publisher face new challenges, which can be crucial for them. If your opponents are professionals, as they were in my case, they will use a mix of all these methods: denial, discredit, fake events, legal actions. How to mitigate the damage of those attacks?

All over the world, the media is going through a very challenging transformation process. One of the most challenging results of this process is the declining quality of journalism, including investigative journalism. Many big media companies shut down investigative journalism section in their newsrooms. (Find more on this topic here: http://on.cc.com/1mC-1qkd).

As everyone knows, investigative journalism is a costly business. It takes lots of time and work to make a good investigative report. You have to find and check a lot of data and then check it again and again, try to convince people to talk about tricky issues, and then check your information once again.

Moreover, investigation does not always achieve its goal. Sometimes your investigation doesn't attract as much attention as it should from your point of view; sometimes it has no impact on society. In the worst scenario, the story doesn't get published at all. And there are plenty of reasons: editor's choice, owner's business interests, and so on. Another fundamental question is, do people really care about investigative reporting? (You can find more about that here: http://bit.ly/2b01MPj.)

But even if you were able to overcome all those challenges and publish your investigation, it's not the end of a story. After an investigation is published, the author, as well as the publisher, face challenges that can be crucial for them.

This article is mainly based on my personal experience. In 2011, I was the deputy editor of the newspaper *Vilniaus diena* (Vilnius Daily), responsible for the content of the newspaper. One of our newspaper journalists, Šarūnas Černiauskas, was investigating the Lithuanian economic minister's alleged connections to his family business. I remember it as though it was yesterday, how many times Šarūnas and I scrupulously, thoroughly checked the data collected. Eventually the story was published. I was still very nervous

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about possible mistakes and was prepared to resign if that had been the case. But our information was correct. To make a long story short, after the story was published, we were subjected to enormous pressure, but in a few months the minister was forced to resign. Lithuania's Chief Officials Ethics Commission reviewed our investigation and admitted that there was a conflict of public and private interests, and that the minister abused his authority by making decisions in favor of a company his own mother co-owned. Later, the minister filed several cases in court but lost.

Lithuania is a democratic country and most of the people obey the rule of law now. At the beginning of Lithuania's independence, there were several cases of physical abuse against journalists. For example, in 1993, the journalist Vitas Lingys was killed. He was mainly preparing investigative reports on mafia members' criminal activities. The court ruled that Lingys was murdered because of his journalistic activities and the person who plotted the murder received the death sentence. The other people involved also received very strict punishments. This was the last time in Lithuania a journalist was killed because of his job. This case eliminated any wish to use physical violence against journalists. But there are plenty of other, more sophisticated actions still used against journalists.

Denial

This is the initial reaction to a lot of negative reports. If the subjects of an investigation are unable to find mistakes in an investigation, what most of them do first is deny. It's interesting to note that they often focus on denying details and circumstances that were not mentioned in the investigation. Thus, they are trying to discredit the story, the journalist, and the publisher. The main goal is to deflect attention from the investigation's main subject to those who did the investigation.

In the aforementioned case, the ministry tried to deny that the minister had an influence on the ministry's decisions (yes, it sounds ludicrous). Meanwhile, the investigation discovered and stated that the minister signed a very profitable contract for the company his mother co-owned. The article never mentioned that the minister used his influence to achieve anything.

If the tactic of denial produces results, the publisher and journalist become targets and have to apologize.

For example, after the story was published, a good friend of mine contacted me and asked, "Who paid for this investigation? For whom are you working? It's not true the minister is corrupt and took that money." I politely asked him to buy the newspaper, read the article, and compare what is written in the paper with what the ministry is trying to deny. In the end, my friend had to admit that the investigation was done according to professional standards of journalism and the ministry was denying things that were not mentioned in the article.

Discredit

If the denial tactic doesn't work, the opponents try to discredit the publisher and author of the investigation. For example, I heard rumors that Černiauskas, author of the investigation, was working in favor of some businessmen, who were not happy with the minister's policy. It was much easier for our opponents to discredit our media company, since not too long before the story erupted, our media outlet was bought by a businessman with a bad reputation. Thus, our opponents used this weakness and caused big damages for the company. But, honestly, only Černiauskas and I knew about the investigation, no one else was involved. The worst outcome was that after the investigation and outside pressure, the owner began to intervene into the content and some investigations were canceled.

Fake events

The tactic of fake, attention-diverting events is so popular that even Hollywood includes it in its productions. Most of us have seen the movie *Wag the Dog* or the TV series *House of Cards*. For example, in the final episode of *House of Cards*, Frank Underwood declares a "total war" in response to a journalist's investigation of him and his corrupt staff. The main purpose of this tactic is again to divert attention from the real story. Once again, let's recall the minister's story. Several weeks before the resignation he made public a "very important and shocking" document, in which he claimed that corrupt political and business groups were trying to coerce him and other government officials. But this scandal did not develop and diverted attention away from the main issue of his connection with the family business for only a few days.

Legal actions

Allow me to guess that almost every journalist at least once in his career has heard that he will go to court if the story is published or right after the story is published. Some opponents do what they promised, even if they know they will lose.

First, by taking these actions, opponents wants to show the public that they are right and the journalist was wrong. Second, they put psychological pressure on the journalist and the entire media outlet. Nobody wants to go to court and waste their time. And last, not every media company has financial resources, especially these days, to have a team of good lawyers.

The best example of the damage that can be done for a media outlet is the case of Terry Gene Bollea (Hulk Hogan) against news website Gawker. Important to say that the legal process was initiated not because of a journalistic investigation, yet the legal actions against Gawker had tragic consequences for the media outlet and its employers. They had to declare bankruptcy. Another example: Donald Trump threatened to sue media outlets, including *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post,* about 20 times during his election campaign.

Lithuania's economic minister also filed a case against our media outlet, but lost.

How to avoid negative outcomes

In any investigative story, the opponents will likely use at least one of those four tactics to discredit the investigation. If the opponents are professionals, as in my example, they will use a mix of all of these methods. I guess it is impossible to avoid this, but you can mitigate the damage of the attacks on you by using these tips:

First, be as accurate as you can, and even beyond, in your investigation. Check everything many times. Do not make mistakes because the smallest mistake could be crucial for the results of the investigation, for you, and for the media outlet.

Second, use publicity as much as you can. Post the documents and other evidence online, on social networks and cooperate with other media

outlets. For example, Černiauskas wrote an open letter to the minister and provided explanations regarding the investigation. The letter was published by another media outlet. Do not be afraid to join discussions and conversations on the topic. Publicity is your biggest weapon, while the opponent's main goal is to shut you up or to change the story.

Third, have a loyal team, which will help you in the post-investigation situation, providing you with more information about the investigation and, most importantly, supporting you morally. And yes, a good lawyer is a must.

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«Բացահայտումների հետագծով» ձեռնարկը մեկտեղել է «Թվապատում հետաքննություն. մեդիան ընդդեմ կոռուպցիայի» կոնֆերանսին բանախոսների ներկայացրած բազմազան թեմաները՝ լրագրողական ավելի լայն շրջանակներին հասանելի դարձնելու համար:

Ձեռնարկում տեղ գտած 12 հոդվածների հեղինակները տարբեր երկրներից են՝ Լիտվա, Չեխիա, Ուկրաինա, Մոլդովա, Թուրքիա, Վրաստան, Ռուսաստան, ԱՄՆ, Մեծ Բրիտանիա:

Նրանք գրում են թե իրենց մասնագիտական փորձի, լրագրողական բացահայտումների, թե իրենց երկրում առկա իրավիճակի, կոռուպցիայի դեմ պայքարում միջսահմանային համագործակցության կարևորության ու ազդեցության մասին:

Հեղինակները ներկայացնում են հետաքննական լրագրության ժամանակակից մեթոդները, հարթակներն ու գործիքները, խոսում հնարավորությունների ու խոչընդոտների, արգելքների ու ճնշում-ների մասին: