

06

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▲ Lvl. 1

Bulgaria

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## Investigative Journalists Detained in Bulgaria

Resolved

SOURCE OF THREAT ▶ State

CATEGORY  ▶ Detention and imprisonment of journalists

**PARTNER: IPI, AEJ, CPJ, EFJ/IFJ, Index, RSF**

Dimitar Stoyanov, a reporter for the Bulgarian investigative journalism website Bivol, and Attila Biro of RISE Project Romania, were taken into custody for several hours by authorities in Radomir, western Bulgaria, on the evening of 13 September 2018, as they attempted to prevent and document the destruction of material related to a mass fraud investigation. On 10 September 2018, Bivol had published a report detailing what it described as “large-scale and wide-spread corruption” in EU-funded projects in Bulgaria worth hundreds of millions of Bulgarian leva. The site based its findings on accounting documents from “a network of consultancy firms linked to large construction companies”. After publishing, the site began to receive tips that one of the firms cited in the report, the GP Group, was moving documentation and equipment from its headquarters in Sofia, the Bulgarian capital. The site said that it informed the authorities but that the moving continued. On 13 September, Bivol received information that the material was being destroyed near Radomir. After informing the authorities again, Stoyanov and Biro travelled to the site, where they found official documents related to EU projects being burned. Shortly after arrival, however, local police arrested both journalists and refused to release them despite being presented with press cards. Police also confiscated the pair’s mobile phones and did not allow them to make calls. They were eventually released in the early hours of 14 September and their phones were returned to them. On 14 September, the head of Bulgaria’s anti-mafia police force apologized for the incident, which he attributed to poor communication with local police, although Bivol said that members of the force with knowledge of the context were at the scene and could have intervened. Bivol also rejected the Bulgarian Interior Ministry’s claim that the journalists had only been taken in for questioning, supplying photographs of an arrest warrant.

RESOLVED

**06 Dec 2018:** On 15 November 2018, the Administrative Court of Pernik ruled that the detention orders for Bivol's journalists Dimitar Stoyanov and Attila Biro had been illegal. On 6 December 2018, the partner organisations to the Platform declared this case to be "resolved", concluding it was no longer an active threat to media freedom.

## UPDATES

**28 Nov 2018:** On 15 November 2018, the Administrative Court of Pernik ruled that the detention orders for Bivol's journalist Dimitar Stoyanov and Attila Biro had been illegal.

- ➔ Article published by Bivol : "GP Gate: Pernik Court Rules: Detention of Bivol journalist Dimitar Stoyanov Is Illegal"

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- ➔ IPI statement: 'IPI condemns detention of investigative journalists in Bulgaria'
- ➔ Statement by the Association of European Journalists - Bulgaria : 'The detention of journalists indicates the existence of concerning deficiencies in the Interior Ministry's structure'
- ➔ CPJ statement: "Bulgarian police detain two investigative reporters"
- ➔ Report published on Mapping Media Freedom platform: "Bulgaria: Investigative journalists arrested and detained"

## STATE REPLIES



**05 Dec 2018** | Reply from the Bulgarian authorities

- ➔ Letter from the Permanent Representation of Bulgaria to the Council of Europe

## FOLLOW-UPS

**OSCE** **28 Nov 2018** | OSCE Representative welcomes court ruling that police detention of investigative journalists Atilla Biro & Dimitar Stoyanov in Bulgaria was illegal.

- ➔ Tweet by Harlem Désir

