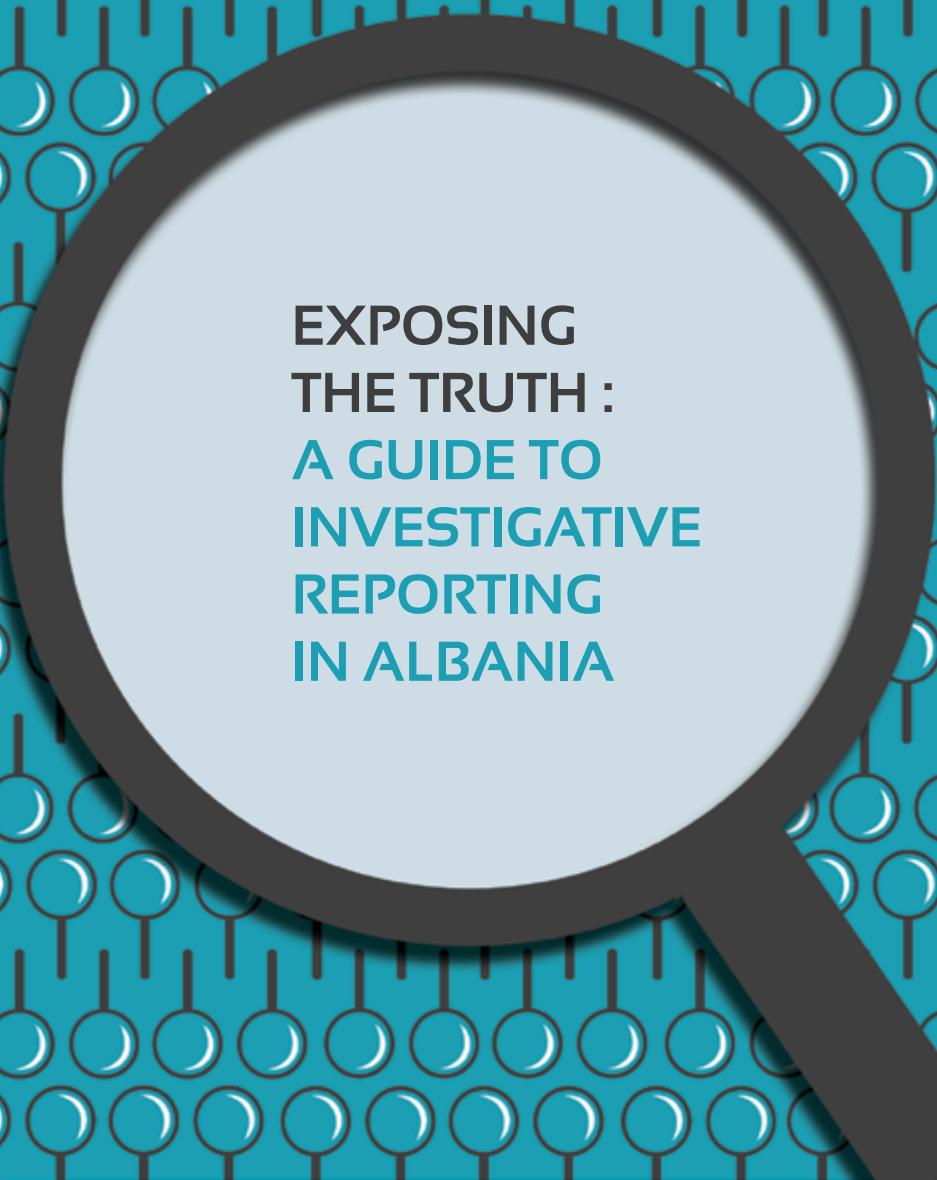


Lawrence Marzouk



EXPOSING
THE TRUTH :
A GUIDE TO
INVESTIGATIVE
REPORTING
IN ALBANIA

EXPOSING THE TRUTH: A GUIDE TO INVESTIGATIVE REPORTING IN ALBANIA

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About the Author

Lawrence Marzouk is an editor for Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN). He leads cross-border teams of journalists, deploying huge volumes of Freedom of Information requests, scraping and old fashioned reporting tricks to delve into high-level corruption in the Balkans.

He started his career in 2003 with regional newspapers in London and later in Brighton. He helped his first paper to national awards with his editing of the coverage of July 2005 London bombings and picked up nominations and prizes for his investigations at The Argus, Brighton.

In 2009, he moved to Kosovo to work for Balkan Investigative Reporting Network, where he edited its English-language newspaper Prishtina Insight and launched a new investigative journalism portal, Gazeta Jeta ne Kosove.

In 2010 and 2011, he won best anti-corruption investigation of the year at awards organised by the UN Development Programme in Kosovo.

Lawrence is the author of the Follow the Paper Trail, a guide to document-based investigative journalism in Kosovo and is currently penning another manual, this time aimed at Albanian reporters.

Since 2013, he has focussed on building and training cross-border teams of journalists for BIRN. Their stories have provoked criminal

proceedings, caused political tremors and been reproduced in leading publications across the world.

As part of this project – The Paper Trail Investigations – he has also been experimenting with new ways to present stories and working on making documents and data more accessible.



Chapter 1 : Introduction

Investigative journalism – the **Golden Rules**

Investigative journalism as a bulwark against the excesses of government and big business is critical for Albania's future.

This book gives you the principles and skills – from tracking people using geo-location data on Instagram to unpicking a press release – which will make your reporting more efficient and incisive.

5 An investigative journalist needs to be persistent, often obsessive, cunning, observant, analytical and above all creative – creative in circumnavigating labyrinthine bureaucracy, creative in finding and then charming whistle-blowers, and creative in presenting their complex material in a meaningful manner.

It's not easy to teach persistence or creativity, but in all of the different steps in the reporting process are skills that can be acquired to sharpen your natural instincts to uncover wrongdoing.

This includes how to spot and develop a story, online and offline research techniques, and crafting and testing your article pre-publication.

Despite the financial woes of mainstream media hampering its ability to undertake watchdog reporting, we live in a golden era of investigative journalism. New online tools provide us with ever growing sources of information, from geo-located social media messages to finding company records in Mozambique. This new world also presents problems, principally surrounding privacy and safety.

Journalists must stay on top of the latest tools without forgetting the age-old skills of walking the streets, notepad in hand, talking to people.

Combine the old and the new and your journalism will be more resilient and powerful.

Ten golden rules of investigative journalism

- 1) Know your target better than his mother does. Read every story, collect every document, visit every Facebook page until there is nothing left to find. Use new technology and ask for help from experts.
- 2) Make a note of all interesting pieces of information/saved webpages immediately (they may be gone the next time you look) and store documents. Stay organised as investigations are complex and time-consuming.

- 3) Learn the lingo. With every story you enter a new world with its own laws, processes and jargon. You will miss stories and fail to impress potential sources if you are obviously a stranger in their land.
- 4) Every story involves a chain of events – your job is to find the weakest link. Draw a timeline of events, with a list of documents and people involved (all potential sources) in each step. Pinpoint what information is public and who is most likely to talk (asking who are the “losers” is often a good starting place as they are most likely to talk out).
- 5) Submit Freedom of Information (Fol) requests quickly as these will take time. Submit far and wide.
- 6) Prepare carefully for key approaches to sources and interviews – don’t just pick up the phone and babble. Think strategically – what incentive can you provide for them to meet you in person?
- 7) Pull every document to pieces using your journalistic and analytical skills. Look for the unusual and the unexpected – that is where the story will be. Think of follow-up leads and sources.
- 8) Think creatively about how to resolve problems and bring in help from the outside if you need it, from social scientists to computer programmers.
- 9) Good stories can be ruined by dry prose

and poor presentations. Throughout the research, ruminate over potential photos, graphics, pictures, videos but also lively quotes and details which will give the story some colour.

- 10) Before publishing the story, consult the Englishlaw’s Reynolds Rules. They may be defunct, but they still offer the best guidelines for responsible journalism.

Chapter 2 : The Prep Work

How to prepare and focus your investigation

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2.1 Step-by-step guide to formulating an investigation:

- Step 1: Finding a story
- Step 2: Initial fact-finding
- Step 3: Feasibility question
- Step 4: The pitch
- Step 5: Your research plan

Step 1: Finding a story

Films such as All the President’s Men have shaped how the public, and even many

reporters, view the work of investigative journalists.

Hollywood screenwriters would have you believe it is shadowy world of clandestine meetings, codenames and tussles with the security services.

A tiny minority of stories do play out like movies – we have, after all, had cinema adaptations of the Edward Snowden leaks and The Guardian’s relations with Wikileaks recently - but most investigative journalism is much more mundane, although no less important.

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You will need to work hard to develop your sixth sense – your ability to spot the unusual, the unexplained or patterns that will lead you to your next investigation.

It helps to be inquisitive and curious by nature, but you can teach yourself to sniff out those great untold stories.

Here are a few tips to build up your skills.

Spotting the unusual

To be an investigative journalist you must be able to quickly spot the unusual – what I call “smell a rat”. Without that sixth sense, stories will pass you by and you will miss key details in your research.

Part of this skill comes from practice, but the

tips in this chapter should help you sharpen your eye to those potential story ideas.

Take a careful look at this press release from the EU Rule of Law Mission and ask yourself whether there is more to this story than meets the eye:

Press release – the Son of the Kurdish President

Indictment confirmed against six suspects in the Spain theft case

10 July 2012

A local judge at the Prishtine/Pristina District Court confirmed the indictment filed by a EULEX prosecutor against six suspects, one of them a high-ranking ROSU officer, in connection with a theft that took place in Barcelona, Spain in July 2009.

The indictment was confirmed against Haki Januzi, Artan Xhaferi-Jelliqi, and Shemsedin Benarba who are charged with the criminal offence of aggravated theft. Artan Xhaferi-Jelliqi is also charged with unauthorized control, possession or use of weapons.

The judge confirmed the indictment against Afrim Ymeri, Abedin Beka and Saim Januzi who are charged with the criminal offence of providing assistance to perpetrators after the commission of a criminal offence.

The confirmation judge found that the evidence supports the grounded suspicion that the suspects committed the criminal offences they are charged with. The indictment was severed against Sami Makolli because the suspect was not present in court during the confirmation hearing.

The judge did not hold a confirmation hearing for Erhan Berniqani, Dusan Kadijevic, Nebojsa Bojvic and Afrim Ymeri charged with the criminal offence of receiving stolen goods, since these charges are handled through a summary procedure.

The defendants are accused in connection with the theft of approximately 1.3 million Euros worth of jewellery in a hotel room in Barcelona, Spain.

The case is being prosecuted in a mixed team led by a EULEX District Prosecutor.

The press release appears to a pretty standard announcement of an indictment for an unremarkable crime, until you reach the second to last line.

When I read this, the immediate question which jumped out of the page was what kind of person would own at least 1.3 million euro worth of jewellery, travel with it and then leave it in a hotel room? The answer is someone who is grossly rich with perhaps a reckless approach to security.

After obtaining further court documents, BIRN was able to confirm that the victim of this crime was the son of the Kurdish President. This raised further questions about how he had accumulated such wealth and what he was doing in Barcelona.

An alternative investigation which reporters could have carried out would have delved into how this Balkan gang was operating in Barcelona, whether this was a one-off, how they operated and whether they were connected with other Balkan organised criminals, such as the notorious Pink Panthers.

Thus, from a simple press release, two excellent and intriguing investigations emerge demanding further attention.

Tackling the Press Release

The Press Release: A vector for much of modern journalism and a symbol of what is wrong with our trade. PR merchants and taxpayer-funded spin doctors spew out 'media releases' in the hope that journalists will be too lazy to do more than copy, paste, rewrite.

Press releases, however, can present a useful starting point for an investigation, revealing a great deal in a turn of phrase, its timing and its omissions. Here are a list of questions which are worth asking yourself when picking through one.

- 1) Why is the press release being issued? Is it pre-empting bad news (was it issued unusually late in the day for example)? Who issued it (which department or which press officer)? Who is quoted (the more powerful the person quoted the more likely it is important even if at first sight it does not appear to be)? Is the language and vocabulary clear? Is there deliberate use of vague or unusual terms?
- 2) What has been omitted from the release? Key details? Names? An important event?

- 3) Are there details which are unexpected or unusual which require further investigation?

Spotting the unusual, understanding the usual

As demonstrated by the previous example, a key part of investigative journalism is spotting the untold and unusual. You should be alert to this as you walk to work, attend a press conference or pour over thousands of pages of government paperwork.

Often, what is “unusual” will be very obvious – although it is by no means certain that journalists will follow it up. In case involving the EULEX press release, we can all agree that it is unusual for someone to travel with 1.3million euro of jewellery. But, sometimes what is common and uncommon isn’t immediately apparent, particularly if you do not know the field well.

To spot the unusual, you must first understand what is usual in a certain context.

For example, it is usual for companies operating in the construction sector in Albania to be registered locally. It would be unusual if one of these is registered in the British Virgin Islands and if you discover this you should investigate.

The best way to increase your chances of spotting a story is to be well acquainted with the field you’re looking at and/or speak to someone who is.

It is impossible to build an exhaustive list of the “unusual” as each case is context-specific and you must let your journalist nous and common sense guide you to some extent but here are three red flags to look out for:

RED FLAG The presence of offshore companies: This is a tell-tale sign that something untoward is going on

RED FLAG Overly cautious, sketchy or aggressive statements from public bodies: In adversity and under pressure organisations, and humans, can react strangely. Remain vigilant for unusual behaviour.

RED FLAG Secretive and opaque processes: Where there is secrecy, a lack of transparency and money, there tends to be wrongdoing – you only have to look at FIFA, or the scandal surrounding British MPs’ claims for expenses (to get taxpayers to pay for a duck house on a private lake or have a moat dredged!). When there is secrecy and haste in a particular process (the awarding of a mining licence or tender for example), this should also ring alarm bells.

Case study – Arms dealers arrested in Montenegro

In March 2015, a Serbian-Israeli consortium snapped up Montenegro's state-owned arms dealing firm.

While Israeli firms and dealers are major players in the secretive weapons market, it was still noteworthy that it was an Israeli firm, ATL Atlantic, which had partnered with Serbian company CPR Impex to buy Montenegro Defence Industries in March 2015.

This provided BIRN with the impetus to find out more about the deal and who was behind it.

Public records in Bulgaria, where ATL Atlantic had opened a subsidiary, revealed that it had recently been owned by a man named Serge Muller.

Following a brief internet search, two important leads emerged. The first was that Muller was a notorious arms and diamond dealer who had previously been linked to ATL Atlantic in Belgium.

The second was that Muller had been arrested under a Belgium arrest warrant in Montenegro at roughly the same time as the deal between the Montenegrin government and ATL Atlantic had been signed. This raised the important questions - was Muller still involved in ATL Atlantic and was he present at the signing ceremony?

Through various interviews we were able to piece together Muller's movements and demonstrate that he was arrested immediately after leaving the signing ceremony and that he continued to play a role, albeit an unofficial one, in ATL Atlantic. Following the publication of our story, the case was referred to the prosecutor.

This example demonstrates how a journalistic hunch – a sense that there is something unusual – can lead to important revelations.

<http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/drugs-diamonds-and-bullets-balkan-arms-firm-linked-to-criminal-investigations>

Spotting the unreported in the reported

Many great investigations are hidden in plain sight. By that I mean that all of the information is publicly available, often accessibly online and sometimes already in the media, but the full picture has not yet been pieced together.

This is often because journalists have failed to ask essential questions, hastily dispatching stories for a daily deadline.

You will therefore find many great leads for investigations in the unfinished work of your colleagues.

Case study – Veselinovic works for PDK-linked firm on Bechtel

It had been widely reported that Zvonko Veselinovic, the Serbian underground figure who had led the 2011 uprising against the Kosovo government, had worked on Kosovo's 1 billion euro highway.

Some sources had even reported that he had been involved in a quarry based in northern Kosovo, near the border with Serbia.

At the same time, other news outlets had reported how senior figures linked to the ruling Kosovo Albanian party of Hashim Thaci had opened a quarry in northern Kosovo.

Placing the two stories side by side, it is remarkable that no one had spotted the potential links between the two.

Using court testimony from Belgrade, publicly available documents and interviews with key figures, BIRN was able to conclude that Zvonko Veselinovic had provided logistical services to the PDK-linked firm, Arena Invest, and that this firm had secured a major contract from the firm constructing the highway.

<http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/notorious-ex-bridge-watcher-helped-build-kosovo-s-patriotic-highway>

Spotting a pattern

Another useful technique to hone in on an investigation or to expand the scope of the story is to look for a pattern of events.

To do this you need to dissect the information you have, breaking it down into its most basic form. For a suspect tender, this would mean compiling a spreadsheet of the companies involved, owners, officials, addresses, telephone numbers and lawyers, for example.

You can then look for other tenders involving one or more of the elements above.

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Step 2: Initial fact-finding

So you've spotted something unusual which has piqued your interest and after some basic research you are beginning to form a picture in your head of what the story could be. This picture, or set of scenarios, is the beginnings of your investigative hypothesis.

Over the next few days or weeks you will need to test this hypothesis and ask some searching questions about what the story is, how much it will cost to carry out, how much time is needed, what are the logistics of contacts and travel, and whether it is in the public interest.

At the end of this process you will form an investigative hypothesis – combined with your minimum and maximum story which we will explain shortly – which will guide you throughout the investigation, providing you with clear demarcations of what your story is about and where it is heading.

Initial research to create a list of facts, and assumptions

Once you have a potential story, you need to refine it through some basic research. This will help you understand if your story is worth pursuing and to frame it. The time needed for this initial scoping will depend on how much you already know about the subject and its complexity.

The research should include:

- A thorough press review of all available material. You may need to use online media archives for this and, for course, Google (see Chapter IV for guidelines on using Google). Many media organisations and NGOs now publish the source material for their work – check these carefully for leads.
- Use social media – Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Google Plus – to build up an initial profile of your targets (see Chapter IV for more information)

- Check other official, online sources of material – government tenders, company registers, court documents, UN reports – to see if there is a pattern or other potential avenues of research.
- If there are books or academic and NGO reports about your chosen area of research then it is good time to start reading. This will give you the in-depth knowledge to understand the world you are entering. You need to grasp the vocabulary and the processes involved in your subject matter if you are to fully investigate.
- Meet sources who could give you an overview of the subject or an indication of whether you are on the right track. Do not spend too long on this in the initial phase.
- Research the context of the story asking to determine why this issue is important? Are there victims and who could they be?
- Attempt to work out the costs and time involved.

Create a list of bullet points which summarises your initial findings. These will allow you to later form your hypothesis.

Step 3: The feasibility question

Before you begin your investigation and frame your hypothesis, it is essential to ask yourself what documents are available and where you will find sources.

There is little point aiming for a story which you know will not be provable. This is not a time to be despondent about the lack of information available, but to carefully consider what you can reasonably expect to achieve.

Draw out a rough timeline of events, or a flowchart of how the system works, listing documents and people at each stage who are involved or will have knowledge of this. In this chain of events, look for the weakest links i.e. people who are most likely to talk.

Here is a helpful list of questions to use as a checklist.

- What documents are available and related to your subject matter? Can they be obtained through a public database? Freedom of Information request? Which institutions hold copies? Are there relevant court cases? Commercial disputes? What are the costs involved?
- What sources will have information relevant to the investigation? How many people are involved? Where do they work? How willing will they be to speak and what motivations may they have to blow the whistle or remain silent? Can you easily identify former employees? Who loses out? Who are the victims?
- How many and which countries are involved in the investigation? How could

the international nature of the investigation help by providing extra sources of information or hinder by making the research more complex? Could you obtain information from more transparent jurisdictions?

- Are offshore entities involved? What are the major complications you are likely to face? Are there potential ways of bypassing tax haven secrecy?

Step 4: The pitch

Set a hypothesis

Your hypothesis is what you are seeking to prove (or disprove) and therefore will guide you through your investigation, who you will contact, which documents you will seek.

It is an extremely useful device to focus your thoughts but also to explain to your editor and collaborators what you are doing. Get your hypothesis right, and pitching your idea should be easy.

Many fields use a hypothesis to frame their work, from scientists to police officers, which is then tested throughout the research or investigation.

You will need to think carefully about what kind of information is available and how you will obtain it as there is little point setting a

hypothesis which cannot be proved through journalist endeavour.

Your theory should provide answers to the classic what, when, who, why and how questions based on your initial research and your hunch.

Remember that it is easy to prove that events took place or decisions were made but very difficult to demonstrate the intentions behind them. For example, it is easy to prove that a minister awarded a contract to a friend, but it is far more difficult to prove that the minister awarded the contract to a friend because of their friendship.

Your hypothesis in this case may be that the contract was awarded because of the friendship, but do think carefully about how you can prove it.

Case Study: The Dahlan Investigation

When we discovered that famous Palestinian politician Mohammed Dahlan had been quietly and inexplicably handed a Serbian citizenship in 2013, we knew we had a good story idea which required further investigation.

We set about checking how this had happened and delving into how feasible the story was. Having explored the data we discovered these facts:

- 1) Dahlan, his wife and four children had been given citizenship in 2013 and 2014
- 2) Six other Palestinians had also been given citizenship over the same period, often at the same time as Dahlan family members. An initial search showed that these figures were supporters of Dahlan and had worked with him in the past
- 3) Citizenships tended to be awarded to prominent sporting and artistic figures, not politicians
- 4) No other Palestinians had been awarded citizenship in recent years
- 5) The decision had been taken by the Prime Minister and/or members of the cabinet
- 6) During this period Dahlan had been working with Abu Dhabi investors in Serbia, bringing the promise of billions of investment and had been honoured by the Serbian president for his bridge-building.
- 7) Mohammed Dahlan was under investigation at the time for corruption in Palestine.

From this we were form this hypothesis:

Serbia's government lavished passports on a group of controversial Palestinians in recompense for the work of Mohammed Dahlan in bringing Gulf money to Serbia.

Define your maximum and minimum story

Investigations are complex, making it impossible to accurately predict the outcome, particularly as you rely on sources and public bodies which are beyond your control.

Even the best reporters using all the tools available to them need a bit of luck, particularly as cost and time constraints must be taken into account.

As a result, it is important to create a safety net by setting a minimum story which you can publish even if sources fail and documents do not materialise.

17 If your minimum story is still worthy of publication, then your project will not fail even if luck is not on your side.

Equally important is setting your maximum story. This provides you with your ultimate ambition if you collect all the documents you planned and all of the sources speak out.

With a hypothesis, minimum and maximum story pencilled out, you are ready to pitch your story to your editor and convince him or her that you really need to be taken off the daily news agenda.

Step 5: Create a research plan

At this stage you know you have a story and you have successfully pitched it to your boss. It is time to create a research plan.

You should start by breaking down your story into stages in the process or events in a timeline.

From there, note what documents are created and used at each stage, who is involved in the process and who else would have access to the information.

Most stories can be broken down in this fashion, but if not then try to imagine all the interactions your person or company has with individuals, other companies and institutions (from the United Nations to small municipal councils). Make a note of these and the potential to obtain information.

You should then analyse each stage to determine the weakest links in the chain. Which institutions are likely to provide you with documents? Which individuals are likely to talk to you?

You should also consider the difficulty and time in obtaining the information or contacting people, (for example, Freedom of Information requests).

Write out your research plan (using a spread-

sheet works well) and share it with your colleagues.

Putting steps 1-5 into practice

Example: Highway robbery

This is a fictional example of bribery in the road construction industry to demonstrate the minimum and maximum potential stories. It has to be fictional, because any “maximum” story that has not been proved risks being libellous!

Step 1: Finding a story

The press in a Balkan country reports that a 1 billion euro highway has been awarded to a major European company without a proper tender process. Experts argue the deal is extremely poor value for money, particularly given the need for investment in hospitals and housing.

This type of story should immediately ring alarm bells among investigative reporters. Clearly something unusual has happened and it is a reporter’s job to find out more.

Step 2: Initial research to create a list of facts, and assumptions

- You compile a press review of all available material from across the world. This reveals that the company has a poor track-record in keeping to costs and punctuality and has been accused of corruption in other countries.
- You track down employees of the company through Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn, looking for potential sources. You also look at those within government circles who were involved in negotiating and approving the deal. You don’t notice anything unusual about the company employees/ex-employees, but keep a note of the names for further research. Photos on Facebook show some figures close to the prime minister appear to be living in luxury.
- You find all government documents available to the deal which are available online using the “site:” method (see Chapter IV for more information). This includes press releases, tender documents, photos, the law on public procurement - but no contract. The press releases include photos which show a range of figures at various meetings and ceremonies, including some individuals who are not from either the government or the company. You save

these for later.

- Using Google (see Chapter VI), you look for NGO reports on the road-builder or about general corruption in the road-building industry which could provide you some clues for the investigation. One NGO report details a corruption case involving the company in an EU country. According to the report, the company had been paying large consultancy fees to another firm owned by the brother of the Minister of Transport, who had handed the construction firm a contract.
- You meet a couple of useful sources over coffee. An official from an international transparency NGO tells you that it is a public secret in the construction industry that the company bribes top official. He adds that the highway is hugely overpriced and will cripple the economy. A source in the government says that there was widespread disquiet about the deal among junior ministers but that the PM pushed it through. You try to understand whether this issue is important by putting the figures in context. 1 billion euro is the biggest ever contract issued by the government. By prioritising this highway, funding will need to be cut from schools and hospitals.

Following your research you summarise your findings:

- 1) The government signed a 1 billion euro deal with a major EU construction firm for the construction of a new highway.
- 2) The firm has a history of corruption and poor performance in other countries.
- 3) The firm has previously used fake consultancy contracts to hide bribes.
- 4) There is widespread concern among experts and even within the government about value for money and the impact it will have on the economy.
- 5) Sources believe the prime minister was bribed.
- 6) The deal is the biggest ever issued and could lead to cuts in school and healthcare funding.

Step 3: The Feasibility Question

You find that there are ample documents and sources to begin investigating the case and that there are few constraints in terms of costs.

Documents: Documents related to the deal should be available via the various government bodies. Many of these should be released under Freedom of Information laws. Company documents will also be available from public registers in the relevant countries.

Sources: Sources within the government, company and competitors are likely to be aware of the how the deal was struck. Given the number of people involved, it is likely that there will be individuals in each of these three groups who will be willing to talk.

Step 4: The Pitch

a) The investigative hypothesis:

The Prime Minister of a Balkan country awarded the country's biggest ever public contract because of a bribe.

b) Minimum and maximum story

Maximum story: The PM received millions of euros in a bribe from a major, international construction firm in order to award a ruinous road contract.

Minimum story: Questions are being raised about why the PM awarded a contract which is poor value for money in a process full of irregularities.

Step 5: The research plan

You have broken down the process of how the company was selected stage by stage and have identified some key weak spots in the chain.

These are:

- The Auditor General carried out a review of the process and, as a non-political appointee, may be willing to talk. You also plan to submit an FOI as early as possible.
- Political opponents of the scheme have claimed to be aware of corruption. You plan to meet them to hear their version of events.
- You have found former employees of the international firm who have left recently to work for a competitor, according to LinkedIn. You plan to meet them.
- An aggrieved company which competing for the same contract took to the media to complain. They could be an excellent source of information.

Chapter 3 : Mining the internet

The internet has revolutionised investigative journalism. From the comfort of my office, I am able to consult official records of companies, land/cadastral authorities and governments from Panama to Mozambique.

While the old skills of the trade – such as finding sources and scouting locations – remain as important as ever, you can carry out a huge amount of background research without leaving your office. This means it is possible to test your story and make important breakthroughs without having to expend large amounts of time and money.

Given the importance of online research, it is surprising that many journalists fail to understand how the internet functions, and therefore fail to exploit its amazing potential.

21 If you do not understand how to use Google properly, know what the dark web is, and can trawl social media, you will be hugely handicapping your potential.

3.1 The internet of things

Surface Web: Google.com is the most visited website in the world and rightly the gateway for many journalists when they are researching an investigation.

Google, and other search engines, work by indexing (taking a copy of) billions of pages across the web. They use a programme called a search engine spider (sometimes known as a robot) to crawl through webpage after webpage, downloading copies of the pages into their servers.

You can see what Google saves by checking the “Cache” option which drops down if you click on the green arrow on the right hand side of each result.



"The Dark Web"



Web

Videos

Images

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More ▾

Search tools

About 678,000 results (0.55 seconds)

The Dark Web, also confusingly referred to as the Deep Web and conflated with Deep Web search is the World Wide Web content that exists on darknets, overlay networks which use the public Internet but which require specific software, configurations or authorization to access.

Dark Web - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia ✓

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dark_Web

Feedback

Dark Web - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia ✓

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dark_Web ▾

The Dark Web, also confusingly referred to Web and conflated with Deep Web search is the World Wide Web content that exists on darknets, overlay networks which use the public Internet but which require specific software, configurations or authorization to access.

Cached

Webcam model ✓ - All Things Vice ✓ - Botnet ✓ - Cleamnet ✓

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TIP

How to find Lost pages: Sometimes you can retrieve lost webpages (or pages that have been deliberately deleted) by finding the copy kept in Google cache. Do remember that Google regularly updates the copies it keeps in cache so this is only a short-term option. You can also use the waybackmachine.com, which we will discuss in more detail later.

The pages indexed by search engines are known as the surface web and represent a small fraction of the overall information held online. Exactly how much is disputed but the perhaps around only 20 percent of all online information is held on the surface web. Surface webpages have their own URL, the Uniform Resource which is often referred to as a "Web address". Remember, even within this section of the internet which can be indexed by a search engine, there is no guarantee that Google has indexed every page.

The Deep Web: Beyond the surface web lies the "deep web" which, if we are to believe the estimates, represents the remaining 80 percent of the data. The "deep web" is much more than its image of a shady underworld of arms bought with bitcoins and hitmen hired on secret forums.

Here is a summary of some of the information contained the deep web:

- Databases that are accessed via a search interface. Public databases of companies and land ownership are often free to search but are kept in a "walled garden". As a result, you will not find results from archives with a Google search and need to search through each relevant database.
- Password protected data: This includes court registers, such as the US court ar-

chive Pacer, and paid-for databases for company databases such as Orbis.

- A page not linked to by any other page: There may be pages on a particular website which the company does not wish to make public and are invisible to search engines but can sometimes be found through playing with the URL structure.
- The dark web: The dark web is defined as a section of the deep web which is intentionally hidden from search engines and accessible with a particular type of browser which masks your IP address (that's the equivalent of the home address of your computer). The best known browser for entering the dark web is Tor (The Onion Ring). The dark web is where some of the seedier activities of the internet occur (it was where the online drug marketplace Silk Road operated until it was shut down by the FBI). While there are no doubt corners of the dark web for journalists to explore, Tor browser is most useful for protecting journalists' privacy, of which we will speak more later.
- Social media: Social media represents parts of the web often referred to as "walled gardens", such as social media websites like Facebook and Twitter. This mean that the treasure trove of information is invisible to Google and needs to be searched directly through the search engine of the social media application. Use

the social media's own search function (in the case of Facebook see Chapter 6).

- Historical pages: pages which have been removed or modified are not searchable but are maintained by various websites, the best being <https://archive.org/>. Here you can find not just deleted webpages but also deleted documents.
- PDFs and images: Google has become increasingly sophisticated in its ability to turn data such as PDFs and photos, previously arguably part of the "deep web", into searchable material. Google transforms PDFs into searchable text using optical character recognition, which is improving by the day but still fails to convert all the text particularly when it encounters different languages, unusual characters and poor quality PDFs. As a result, there remains huge quantities of data kept in unreadable formats online. If you inspect the mountains of data and information collected by the UN Security Council committee, it is all stored in the form of PDFs. Some of this is searchable, but swathes of the information, mostly original documents which have been scanned in, are lost to the search engines. Unless you read through the documents carefully you may miss key pieces of information.

Key lesson: *Do not rely on Google to find information, no matter how good it is. Check*

webpages manually, find walled-off databases, read PDFs thoroughly and learn to search social media.

3.2 Mastering Google

Google remains the greatest tool for journalistic research and all reporters must learn how to harness its potential.

Here are some key tips, from the extremely basic to more advanced, that you need to make the most of Google.

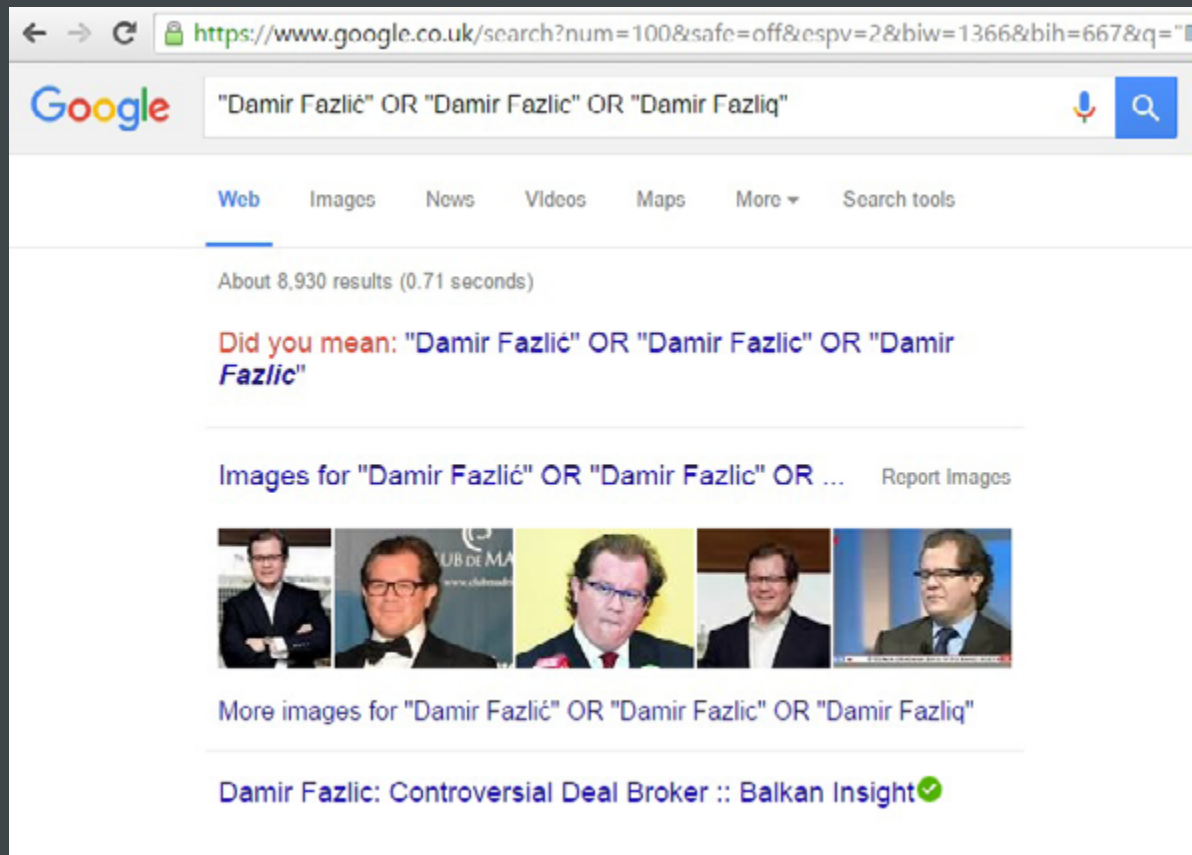
Rule 1: Quotation marks

Use quotation marks around your search term to find a specific name. If, for example, you are searching for references to Lawrence Marzouk and do not include the quote marks ("Lawrence Marzouk"), Google will return pages with references to Lawrence and Marzouk, but not necessarily the exact phrase "Lawrence Marzouk"

TIP

Tracking an individual

When you are searching in Google for information about a certain person, remember that names can be misspelt or transliterated in various ways. It is particularly important to look for variants if the name is originally written in a different alphabet. For example, in BIRN's investigation into Damir Fazlic's business in Albania, it was important to look for stories in a variety of languages. Damir Fazlić is sometimes spelt "Damir Fazlic" and "Damir Fazliq" when it is published in some Albanian media. We would therefore search for the variants of his name with OR (note the capital letters) between each search term.



TIP

While researching a story about Euroaxis, a Serbian bank set up in the Milosevic era in Russia, we found that we had to try multiple spellings to uncover all the relevant information. We had a similar problem while researching the Palestinian businessman and politician Mohammed Dahlan (whose name you can find transliterated into the Latin alphabet in more than a dozen ways).

It is very helpful if you understand how letters are transliterated in order to find the alternatives. For example, Euroaxis in Cyrillic is officially written Евроаксис with the Euro changed in Evro. If it is transliterated phonetically it appears as Eypoаксес. Both of these spellings occur and searches revealed useful information. Finally, some outlets had transliterated the spellings back into Latin, with some stories writing about “Evroaksis” or “Euroaksis”.

When researching Mohammed Dahlan, we tried a variety of spellings, but most useful was using Google in Arabic. While my knowledge of the language is limited, I was able to use Google Translate to write out his name in Arabic script. You can select Arabic as your base language and as you type Google translate will automatically transliterated into Arabic script. You may need to ask a Arabic speaker for help in getting this right, but Google Translate often works well.

Google Translate

https://translate.google.co.uk/#ar/en/%D9%85%D8%AD%D9%85%D8%AF%20%D8%AF%D8%AD%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%86

Google

Help improve Google Translate for refugees & volunteers

Translate

Serbian Russian Arabic Detect language

English Spanish Arabic Translate

محمد دحلان

Mohammed Dahlan

Google

Search "محمد دحلان"

Web News Images Videos Maps More Search tools

About 361,000 results (0.59 seconds)

Mohammed Dahlan - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia ✓
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mohammed_Dahlan
 listen (help info): (Arabic: محمد دحلان) born on September 29, 1961 in Khan Yunis Refugee Camp, Khan Yunis, Gaza Strip also known by the kunya or nom de ...

محمد دحلان - ويكيبيديا، الموسوعة الحرة ✓
https://ar.wikipedia.org/wiki/محمد_دحلان Translate this page ✓
 لم يكن محمد دحلان يبلغ من التسابعة عشر من العمر، عندما حرم حليته وأمه إلى مصر، لامتثال بكتلة القوية لرياضية عام 1979-1980. وكان هذا خروجه الأول من فلسطين ... محمد دحلان والفدح - قضية إغتيال المصور - بداية العمل - لشكة

Mohammad Dahlan محمد دحلان - Facebook ✓
<https://www.facebook.com/mohammad.dahlan2>
 محمد دحلان على قناة الـ BBC حربية في برنامج بلا قيود حول المبادرة التي طرحها لتركيب البيت الفلسطيني .youtube.com. Like Comment Share .29/8/2015

... فضيحة محمد دحلان وعمله شيكل وكلب حراسة لمحمد بن زايد ...
www.youtube.com/watch?v=xFAQIhcx4As

Mohammed Dahlan
 Palestinian Politician

Mohammad Yusuf Dahlan listen, born on September 29, 1961 in Khan Yunis Refugee Camp, Khan Yunis, Gaza Strip also known by the kunya or nom de guerre Abu Fadi is a Palestinian politician, the former leader of Fatah in Gaza. [Wikipedia](#)

TIP

It's worth remembering that on member official registers sometimes a person's surname comes first and often it includes middle names. In this case a simple search for "Damir Fazlic" or "Mohammed Dahlan" would not return results. You will need to search for "Fazlic, Damir" for some official forms.

To tackle the middle name issue use the * (known as a wildcard) which represent one or more unspecified word for example "Mohammed * Dahlan" also shows results for "Mohammed Yusuf Dahlan".

Last, you can use Google Trends (www.google.com/trends), which tracks trends in Google searches, to find out how other people are searching for your target.

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Rule 2: Narrowing your search

Using the world's biggest library has its benefits, but how do you filter the information to what is important to you? Once you have found it, do you trust the information? You can do this by using two Google search commands "site:" and "inurl" which we will explain here.

Trawling government archives

The best (although not unimpeachable) source of information is from governments and official bodies. Luckily Google allows you to filter results in that way.

Most countries in the world have "gov" in the domain name of their official websites. The US has ".gov", the UK ".gov.uk", Albania "gov.al" and Kosovo "rks-gov.net". There are exceptions within countries and internationally, of course – the Prime Minister's office in Albania is kryeministria.al and German official websites end with just the country prefix of

“.de” – which you should take into account.

By typing your search term followed by site:.gov in Google you will be searching for any webpages with your search term within websites with domain names which ends in gov. As a result it will return official, US government webpages.

Type:

“Lawrence Marzouk” site:.gov

Result: All references to “Lawrence Marzouk” found on websites which end in .gov

If you type your search term followed by inurl:gov you will be searching for any webpages with your search term where the domain name includes .gov.

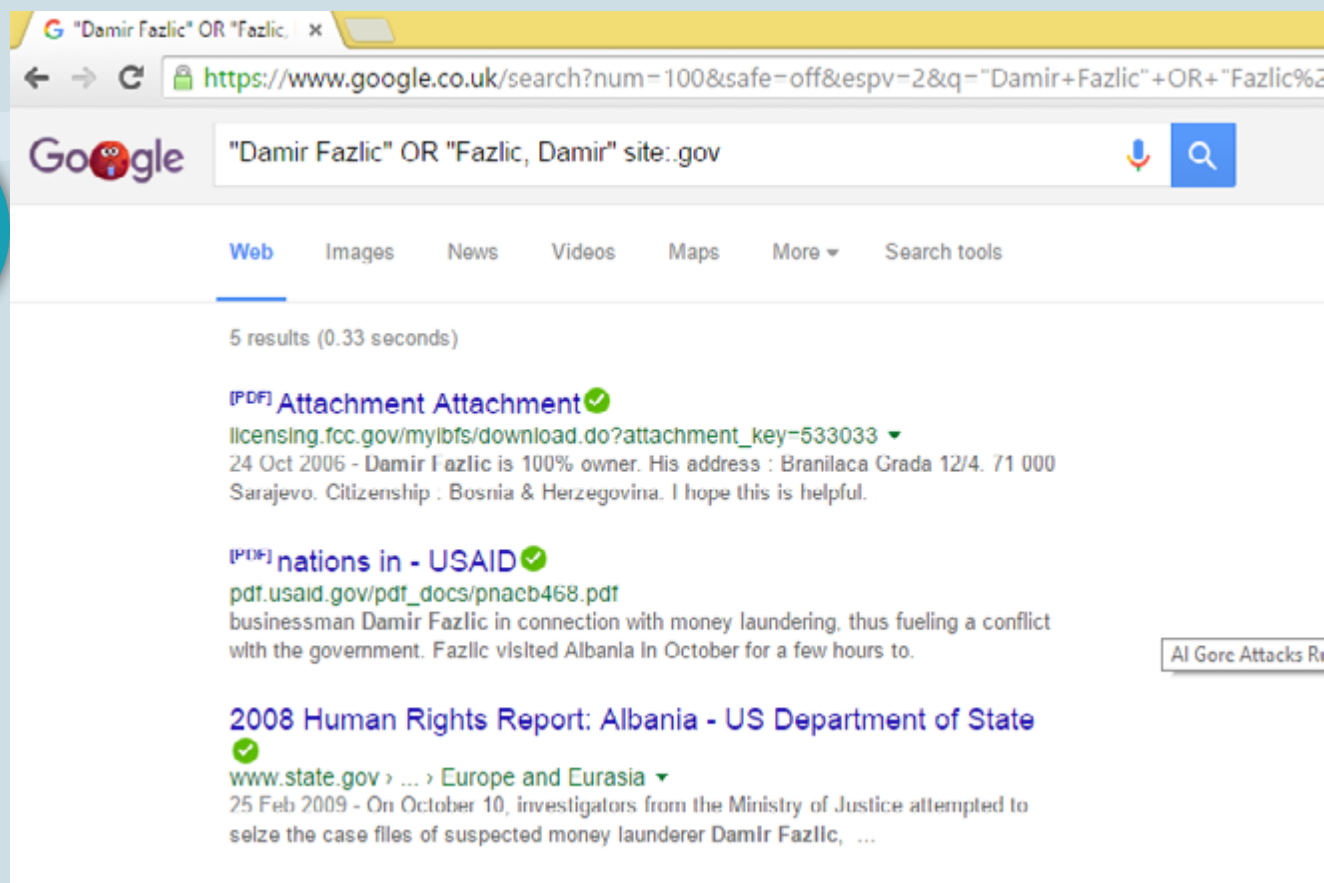
Type: “Lawrence Marzouk” inurl:gov

Result: Government webpages from around the world, including gov.al (Albania), gov.rs (Serbia) and gov.uk (United Kingdom), which contain “Lawrence Marzouk”.

Case study: Fazlic and the US investors

While researching Damir Fazlic's activities in Albania, I checked for any references to him in official US papers given that he had strong connections to the country.

As a result we searched for any references to "Damir Fazlic" or "Fazlic, Damir" on websites which end with .gov. You can see the exact search below and what we discovered.



The screenshot shows a Google search interface with the following elements:

- Search Bar:** Contains the text "Damir Fazlic" OR "Fazlic, Damir" site:.gov.
- Navigation:** Includes tabs for Web, Images, News, Videos, Maps, and More, along with a Search tools link.
- Results:** Displays 5 results in 0.33 seconds. The visible results are:
 - [PDF] Attachment Attachment** (with a green checkmark icon). The snippet shows a link to licensing.fcc.gov/mylbfs/download.do?attachment_key=533033 and text dated 24 Oct 2006 stating Damir Fazlic is 100% owner with an address in Sarajevo.
 - [PDF] nations in - USAID** (with a green checkmark icon). The snippet shows a link to pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/pnacb468.pdf and text about businessman Damir Fazlic in connection with money laundering.
 - 2008 Human Rights Report: Albania - US Department of State** (with a green checkmark icon). The snippet shows a link to www.state.gov and text dated 25 Feb 2009 about investigators from the Ministry of Justice.

The first result provided a major lead, revealing a hitherto unknown chapter in Fazlic's business interest – a shady Cypriot firm involved in the telecoms industry.

Alone, this hardly represented a major story, but the document published by the little known FCC licensing authority provided critical information in our story published here <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/albanian-telecoms-deal-cost-1m-to-buy-off-politicians-claim-us-businessmen>. Using additional documents, interviews and sources we were able to trace the extraordinary story of how a US telecoms firm part-owned by Fazlic came to invest in Albania, allegedly offering \$1m to the Democratic Party – then in government in Albania – in exchange for a key contract.

Narrowing your searches by country

Beyond looking at government webpages, you may want to limit your searches to a particular country. For example, perhaps you are looking for references to someone in the Spanish media.

Type:

"Lawrence Marzouk" site:.es

Or for Albania:

Type:

"Lawrence Marzouk" site:.al

Of course, not all webpages are country specific (there are many webpages which end in .com without being American), but this does give you an option to narrow down your search and is particularly useful if you are looking for media stories from a particular country.

Rule 3: Filetype

It is possible to narrow down your search based on the type of document you are searching for. This is done with the “Filetype:” search term.

This can be useful when you are looking for official material. Often companies, organisations and governments upload important documents (yearly accounts for example) in the form of PDFs, Word documents or presentations.

This function allows you to hone in on these documents.

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So, if you type your search term followed by Filetype:PDF and inurl:gov Google will search for all pages with your search term in a PDF and where the domain name includes gov.

Type:

“Lawrence Marzouk” filetype:pdf inurl:gov

You can select different types of filetypes (and indeed carry out much more advanced search options) by clicking on the cog at the top right-hand side of the screen and then selecting “advanced search”.

TIP

Be creative.

There are many other useful search commands you can use – too many to list here. But you can check out most of them here: <http://www.googleguide.com/> and practise using them in your own time.

The final thing to consider when carrying out a Google Search is that even if you master the commands, you will not get the full use out of Google unless you think creatively and think carefully about what search terms to use. Try to imagine what sort of page you are looking for, what type of format the information you are looking for might come in and alongside what other words. Also remember that a person or company name is not the only thing that identifies them – you might want to try a phone number, email address, website or office address.

Image search

Google Image Search:

Images can also be extremely helpful sources of information for your story and also provide leads to other information.

Google provides a means to see if and when a photo has been used elsewhere on the internet.

If you click on the "image" option on Google, you will notice on the far right-hand side of the search bar a camera icon.

Click on that, and it gives you the ability either to upload a photo from your hard disk or include the URL (the web address) of an image.

Once you have done that, Google will search online for any other examples of that same image and will even come up with similar pictures, although the latter is not of much use to journalists.

This allows you to find other webpages which have used the same image, for example, new stories from a variety of countries or different social media profiles using the same photo.

It can also help to check if a company's claims are authentic.

When BIRN was looking into the New York-based firm Siva Partners, which announced a series of developments in Albania and Kosovo in 2012 meeting the then Albanian PM Sali Berisha, we checked the photos of its offices and boardroom which featured on its website and looked unusually grand.



Is this office really what it seems? By running the photos through Google images, we were able to discover that its boardroom was rented office space and not the grand boardroom of a major company.

Google also has an advanced image search option which allows you to tinker with colours and add search terms to narrow down your options: https://www.google.co.uk/advanced_image_search

Google Maps and Earth:

Do you need to check out the offices of a company in London, New York or Paris?

Perhaps you would like to check the development of a new building in a capital city? Zoom in on a restricted military base? Find out what a prominent politician's home looks like behind the tall walls.

Google Maps, the online search function from Google, and Google Earth, the downloadable application, can help out with all of these.

Search for particular places using the satellite view or, where it is available, use Street View to get a roadside picture of a location.

On Google Map, using Street View, you will notice at the top left-hand side the option to

scroll back through time and look at how a location has evolved. You may notice interesting developments, changes to posters or intriguing vans parked outside.

Google Earth (which you will need to download) offers historical Satellite images by clicking on the timer at the top right on the screen. You can also find street-level 3D images which can be helpful to visualise a location.

Unfortunately, Google Maps offers historical images of Street View and Google Earth of satellite pictures, but not vice versa, so you have to toggle between the two.

Street View hasn't arrived in Tirana yet but you are able to scroll through historical satellite images and use the 3D street-level view.



TIP

Searching for people in Google maps

It is possible to search for people based on email addresses, twitter handles or just names through Google Maps. The results are a little erratic but it is worth a try.

Case study: Bellingcat's investigation into the downing of MH17

When the Malaysian Air flight MH17 was shot down over Ukraine in 2014, two competing narratives were put forward to apportion blame. Western and Ukrainian media firmly pointed towards Russian-backed separatists while the Russians presented evidence to suggest Kiev's military had shot the plane down.

Bellingcat, a new group which has risen to prominence for its use of user-generated content (videos, photos, tweets etc posted to social media), set about testing the theories.

Using Google Maps, photos, videos, tweets, Facebook and VK (the Russian equivalent of Facebook) postings, Bellingcat was able to trace the route of the BUK missile system believed to have shot down the plane as it passed from Russia across the border and towards the launch site of the missile.

Google Maps was crucial in this process in order to trace the route and verify social media postings, as well as those provided by official Russian sources. In this case, Bellingcat was able to demonstrate that images used in the Russian military case had been doctored to change the narrative.

This work demonstrated that careful use of social media and Google Maps can reveal globally important stories and challenge the official narrative of powerful governments.

3.3 Wayback machine for erased websites – Finding hidden documents

The waybackmachine.org is an invaluable tool for investigative journalists tracking the history of individuals and companies. Webpages are often removed or edited for a variety of reasons, potentially removing key data which may prove important. The waybackmachine takes grabs of webpages, but also documents stored on the websites, giving you a chance to track back in time.

I have found important contacts and documents that the company owners had hoped would never be seen again. Potentially useful items include former directors, addresses, telephone numbers, as well as presentations and reports which the firm would no longer like you to access.

Pages which have recently disappeared can often be found by looking at Google cache too.

page on the internet. If you find something useful make your own copy. You can do this manually by, for example, creating a PDF of the page or visiting the website the waybackmachine and archiving the page there.

3.4 Web, registration, using IP addresses, Reverse

The registration details of websites and IP addresses can offer up helpful information in your research.

Registration details

There are dozens of websites available which provide a register of websites. This often includes the person who registered the site, an address and telephone number and an IP address.

The best, and most expensive, service is domaintools.com. I find that whoisology.com is also good and free (although some of its services cost).

Companies which have been careful to hide their true address or owner in official filings may have been less prudent when they registered the webpage, revealing useful clues.

TIP

Don't rely on the waybackmachine to keep a copy of a useful webpage as it does not cover every website and every

Unfortunately, in many cases you will only find the name of the web-hosting company and little else.

But remember that many of these webpage registers also provide a paid-for history search which may reveal details which have since been removed.

Reverse IP

Companies and individuals often host several firms at the same IP addresses, as happens with real-world addresses. Web registers such as whoisology allows you to carry out a “reverse IP” search, which provides all websites registered at a specific IP address. This can reveal links between pages and companies that were not initially apparent (or were hidden). It could also show websites which have been registered in advance for new products, companies or campaigns. For example, a politician may have registered a `lawrencemarzoukforpresident.com` page ahead of the launch of the campaign.

IP addresses

Each time you communicate on the web, from sending an email to visiting a website, you leave your calling card – an IP address (unless you are using software to block this such as TOR).

As a result, you can trace emails sent to you

by checking their IP address (For Gmail you must click on the “show original” option available for each email) and you can also view changes to pages such as Wikipedia based on the IP address of the user.

It is worth noting that IP addresses are often very approximate gauges of locations and can be downright misleading. It is most useful when you can see that an email has been sent from a specific company or Government department.

Case study: State Department Cleans Dell's Wiki Log of Controversial Material

This story does not really qualify as investigative journalism, but it does show you that you can discover some interesting facts if you know how to track people's IP address.

We had noticed that the US Ambassador to Kosovo's Wikipedia entry was being changed regularly following the scandal surrounding the selection of a new president in 2011 .

Opponents of US intervention in Kosovo were regularly changing the entry to reflect their views, while one Wikipedia user was consistently removing these references.

A quick check of the IP address of the user, on one of the many free services available online, revealed that they were cleaning up the Wikipedia entry from a computer registered with the State Department.

Same ID

Websites sometimes have content embedded into their code which can provide links between ostensibly unrelated sites.

Google Analytics is a commonly used analytics tool that tracks visitors to websites and provides the owner with stats, such as users' country, browser, and operating system.

Some owners of multiple websites use the same Google analytics account to monitor many websites.

You can test for links between websites using the same Analytics account (and some other code) with <http://sameid.net/> although use is limited for non-paying customers.

3.5 Social media – Facebook graph, LinkedIn, Geolocation

Our lives are becoming increasingly public as we put more and more details online.

This is good news for journalists, particularly as many crooks – from white collar criminals to mobsters – are remarkably careless in the data they upload.

From comprising photos to geo-location data, social media is rich terrain for investigative journalists, if you know how and where to look.

Facebook

For much of the world, the current undisputed leader in social media is Facebook.

Relatively little content uploaded to Facebook is indexed by Google, apart from names of individuals who have a Facebook profile.

As a result, to tease information from Facebook you need to understand the rules of engagement.

Facebook made huge changes to its extremely helpful Facebook Graph search option last year, and as a result it is much more difficult to use today.

Many of same search options remain but are

just more complex to use now. These search commands are available for Facebook users who have ticked US English as their language.

To use Facebook properly, it is important to think about what type of information you might discover there and how that could be helpful to your investigation. Here is a list of potential nuggets you could unearth.

- 1) The full name, date of birth, relatives and friends of an individual through their “info” page and friend list. This could provide critical details in understanding the network of people surrounding your target. We have used this successfully when tracking down companies owned by wives, brothers and other relatives of a particular target. When investigating why Serbia had granted citizenship to 12 Palestinians, we use Facebook information to show how the individuals were all connected to the politician Mohammed Dahlan.
- 2) Places visited by your target. Often people tag their photos to indicate which countries, bars or restaurants they have visited. They may do this by simply captioning a photo or by tagging it with their geo-location. This can be particular insightful when you are trying to pinpoint someone’s location on a particular day.
- 3) People met by your target. Photos can

show interesting meetings which could lead you to important discoveries. When we were investigating Damir Fazlic, we were able to find Facebook photos showing he had met the US top general and oil-businessman Wesley Clark.

- 4) People employed by a particular company. Companies often create Facebook pages, which can provide information on employees. You could use this to build sources. Also, individuals often list their employment and former employment.
- 5) Where people live. Perhaps photos will provide you with enough evidence to locate the person's address.
- 6) A combination of the above factors may allow you to pinpoint a key person to talk to. For example, Facebook allows you to find people who work for a particular company, who live in a certain town and speak a certain language.

Steps to using Facebook Graph:

Step 1: Change your Facebook language in your settings to US English.

Step 2: Find the person you would like to research. Use the extremely useful website graph.tips. Graphsearch is particularly useful for tracking down photos while Facebook Search Chrome plug-in is excellent at pinpointing people. You can also use the excellent search function on the Intel Techniques

website here <https://inteltechniques.com/OSINT/facebook.html>

Step 3: If you are still searching for more information, then you can attempt to delve into Facebook using Graph commands, which can be time-consuming and tricky. One of the best tutorial online for using the commands is available from BBC journalist Paul Myers here

<http://researchclinic.net/graph.html>

TOP TIP

Facebook users have varying degrees of privacy. Often it is possible to get around some privacy options by intelligent use of graphsearch and a few tricks.

- For example, a person may block access to his or her list of friends, but you can often see the people who have commented and liked his or her photos, a sure sign that they are Facebook friends. They may also block people from tagging photos of themselves, but they cannot stop people uploading photos of themselves. Check the profiles of friends and family and you may discover important pieces of information and photos

that were not visible from your target's profile.

- You can search for people on Facebook using a cell phone number or email address. That is particularly useful if they use a different name on Facebook.
- If you want to find out who someone is friends with on Facebook but that option is private, send them a friend request. Whether they accept or not, you'll notice that your list of suggested friends is updated to include the friends of the person you are investigating.

name. Last, if you have the person's email address you can also search in Facebook for a user based on that.

TOP TIP

Try the Google Chrome app Facebook Search to locate sub-sets of people. For example, people from a specific town or working for a specific company

TOP TIP

People use varieties of names and pseudonyms for their Facebook profile so it's important to try different options before ruling out that the person isn't on social media. Check nicknames, short forms and married and maiden names. If someone has an extremely common name, it could be initially difficult to track them down through the myriad of similar user names. Think about first locating a friend or colleague with a more unusual

LinkedIn

LinkedIn can be extremely helpful for investigative journalists looking for information about a particular individual, company or potential sources.

LinkedIn is trawled by search engines so you'll find most information by searching by names and companies directly through Google. There are however some important tools that you can find directly on the site.

First, with an ever-growing number of people on LinkedIn, it is often the easiest way to privately make contact with someone. You will

need a premium membership for this, but any organisation should have at least one person capable of sending messages.

Second, keep an eye on the right-hand column on people's user page which gives you a list of people who other people visiting the page have looked up. It could provide you with new leads.

TOP TIP

When you click on LinkedIn to send a message, you can often find in the top right-hand corner of the message page the email address of the individual. This allows you to contact them directly from your usual email address and to garner information if they are using the email of a particular company.

Warning: Be very careful with your privacy options on LinkedIn. Unless you have switched your settings to anonymous, others will be able to see that you have visited their page, potentially warning them that an investigative journalist is on their tracks. Remember that if you later changed your settings from anonymous back to visible (perhaps in order

to see who has visited your page), all of those you have previously visited will be able to see your earlier visits.

YouTube, Twitter, Instagram and other social media platforms

Behind each photo, video and tweet is hidden metadata, which can hold an extraordinary amount of useful information.

The key is to find a way of tapping into this information and put it to good use.

Beyond the usual search for keywords (as with Google, think creatively about what you're looking for), geo-location is an increasingly useful means to uncover new leads.

Many new videos, tweets and photos are uploaded with their location usefully embedded in the metadata, allowing you to find photos taken at a certain location.

This is obviously extremely useful for finding sources and content for breaking news stories but can also provide information for long-term investigations.

For example, you could check the posts from a particular house or office. You could look

for Jihadi content uploaded in remote areas of Syria, or track yachts across the Mediterranean through Instagram photos.

The information is out there: there are a myriad of apps and websites available all with strengths and weaknesses. Unfortunately, none allows you to search across all platforms. Some of these require you to pay for information.

I've found EchoSEC excellent for Twitter and Flickr, and Gramfeed works quite well for Instagram. For YouTube videos use [youtube.github.io/geo-search-tool/search.html](https://github.io/geo-search-tool/search.html). Yomapic.com allows you to search Instagram and the Russian Facebook equivalent VK by location, although only in week-long slots. It does, however, allow you to look at geo-locations of all posts from a particular individual, meaning that you can trace all of their movements.

TOP TIP

File metadata

All types of files – Word documents, PDFs, photos – contain some sort of metadata which could be useful to you.

Files created with major software provid-

ers, such as PDFs or PowerPoints, allow you to check the “properties” of the file, showing who created it and edited it. This can be extremely helpful if you are trying to track down sources and work out which department a particular file came from.

You can also attempt to uncover metadata hidden in images by opening the file (a jpeg for example) in Notepad. This often reveals pages of meaningless script, but you may be lucky and find information such as the photograph and even the camera used embedded in the file.

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Chapter 4 : Using online databases

In this chapter we look at essential websites both in Albania and internationally which will help you carry out your research, including practical examples of cases when they have helped dig up important information.

4.1 List of useful Albanian websites

In Albania, a number of databases have been

created which serve as an important source of information for journalists.

Qkr.gov.al: The official web site of Albania's National Registration Centre. The website contains a database of all the businesses registered in Albania, from small businesses to large corporations, including information on shareholders, company directors, board members and some financial records.

The database is not trawled by Google and it can be quite temperamental to use.

Although data collected by this database could serve as the basis of a news report, most of the time the data are more helpful in identifying real-world sources for journalists.

The reporters Lindita Cela and Aleksandra Bogdani used this database to identify the key actors that should be interviewed for their exposé of corrupt practices that led to the award of a hydropower plant concession in a protected area in the Lengarica River, southern Albania.

Through the database the two journalists created a wide list of people who had knowledge of the affair, including former shareholders and directors of the company involved in the building of the hydropower plant.

TOP TIP

QKR's search function by company names is temperamental. To get round this search for the company's unique ID in the international company database opencorporates.com and copy it back into QKR.

Qkl.gov.al: This is another government-operated website, which contains a database of the licences issued by different government institutions. This database is useful to identify people who operate in different professions, or licences awarded to specific companies.

The website works best with Internet Explorer compared to other browsers.

Financa.gov.al: This is the official website of Albania's Ministry of Finance, where the government publishes on a daily basis all the transaction of the treasury, including names of individuals and companies.

Journalists have used the data, which are published under an .xls format, to identify beneficiaries of state funds and sift through possible conflicts of interests between them and state officials. However, this data

sometimes contains mistakes, and the data should be double-checked.

The data published daily by the Ministry of Finance can be easily searched by using the database spending.data.al, published by the Albanian Institute of Science, AIS, which aggregates all the Excel files.

The Ministry of Finance publishes also other statistical data on the budget expenditures, revenues, debt, etc.

Dogana.gov.al: This is the official website of Albania's customs. The website also contains a statistical section where every month the volume of the country's exports and imports are noted, as well as the revenues collected by the custom's agency.

Qbz.gov.al: This is the website of the Centre of Official Publication (Official Gazette), which publishes all Albania's legislation, including laws, Council of Ministers decisions, bylaws from line ministries and other independent public agencies. Search in this website does not work. Ligjet.org is an alternative mirror website with enhanced search capability.

Journalists visit qbz.gov.al to read the official gazette, because in many cases the government does not publish its most controversial decisions on its website.

Instat.gov.al: This is the official website of Albania's National Institute of Statistics, which publishes periodically an array of official data and statistical reports. These data are often useful to journalists as background information for their stories.

Instatgis.gov.al: This database contains visualised statistical data extracted mainly from national census and divided by administrative entities.

BankofAlbania.org: is the official website of the Bank of Albania. The central bank produces a number of statistical reports centred on the financial sector, which are available in the periodicals section of the website.

Amf.gov.al: This is the official website of the Financial Oversight Authority, an independent institution that publishes a number of reports on the financial markets.

Ere.gov.al: This is the website of Albania's Energy Regulatory Agency, ERE, an independent agency that regulates the country's energy market. ERE publishes data on the energy sector, including detailed yearly reports.

Parlament.al: This is the website of Albania's parliament, which publishes the draft laws as well as the arguments sent by the draft-

ees and minutes of meetings of parliamentary committees. The website provides quick access to useful information on the political parties' stances on different issues.

Cec.gov.al: This is the official website of Albania's Central Electoral Commission. The website contains election results on local and national polling contests held in the past two decades as well as information on candidates.

App.gov.al: This is the official website of Albania's Public Procurement Agency. The website contains a database of current public procurement listings, as well as notices of the winners of various tenders held within a period of a few months. Historical data is continuously archived.

Kpp.gov.al: This is the website of the Public Procurement Commission, PPC, an appeals body for tenders which have been run by public institutions. The website contains a database of complaints and decision takes by the PPC for procurement disputes.

Gjykata.gov.al: This is a portal hosted by the Ministry of Justice, which provides access to verdicts of district and appellate courts in Albania and links to their respective websites.

4.2 Looking internationally for companies

Investigative Dashboard, Companies House

Investigations rarely neatly stop at national borders. Globalisation, the cross-border nature of criminal networks, and wrongdoers' desire to hide their crimes and wealth through complex offshore structures inevitably mean that you will need to know how to obtain information from beyond Albania's borders.

Luckily it has never been easier to quickly track down company records from every corner of the globe.

Opencorporates.com

The website [opencorporates.com](https://www.opencorporates.com) is an unrivalled, free source of information on companies internationally.

Through the process of scraping – extracting large amounts of data from public websites – [opencorporates.com](https://www.opencorporates.com) has brought together almost 90million records from 105 different jurisdictions.

As a result, you can quickly find companies and directors and start to plot their networks of interests.

The website also provides links back to the original source, usually the official state-run company register, where you can download

further information.

Remember that information on opencorporates has been scraped from a database at a certain point in time and you should always check the original source.

Investigative Dashboard

Investigativedashboard.org is a website produced by the Organised Crime and Corruption Reporting Project, an NGO based in Sarajevo.

The website offers the most complete index of company registers from all corners of the world, including many that have not been scraped by Opencorporates.com.

It also offers an “Ask the Expert” service, whereby journalists can request further information on a company or individual. Researchers at OCCRP have access to other paid-for databases.

Paid-for databases providing international and country-based company and legal data are increasingly available and useful to investigative journalists. Companies such as Orbis and Lexis Nexus are able to offer worldwide searches based on key

words, offering huge benefits to journalists – with a price-tag to match.

Country-specific databases are much more affordable and are popping up in the Balkans, with Serbia and Macedonia now offering these services. BIRN uses the website Poslovna.rs for Serbia, which has proved an invaluable tool as it allows you to search for companies based on the shareholder (a rarity among state-run services) and even narrow down searches by the nationality of a director.

Companies House, UK

London remains the financial capital of Europe, if not the world, and many of your investigations will take you through the UK capital.

Until recently searching with the UK register, Companies House, would have cost you. But in 2015, Companies House launched a trial version of its database providing documents for free.

Not all companies are currently available on this free service, but most are, particularly if you are looking for a firm which remains active. The web address is beta.companies-house.gov.uk

TOP TIP

It is currently impossible to search using the name of a director or shareholder. But you can get round this problem by using the Google search engine. For example if you type `Berisha site:beta.companie-shouse.gov.uk` it will provide you with all pages that Google has indexed on which the name Berisha appears. As this website is relatively new and there are hundreds of thousands of pages for Google to index, many results will still be missing. As time passes and Google catches up, this should become an extremely useful trick in searching for directors, shareholders and even bank lenders.

We plan to add to this database, allowing reporters and the public to draw new links between powerful individuals and companies

Land registries – finding out about land ownership online

Land registries can offer a goldmine of information to investigative journalists but the information that is available varies hugely from country to country, both on paper and in practice.

Albania lags behind on this, but you can obtain information from neighbouring countries relatively easily:

Croatia: <http://www.katastar.hr/dgu/>

Serbia: <http://katastar.rgz.gov.rs/KnWeb-Public/>

Macedonia: http://www.katastar.gov.mk/prebmk_address/searchadd.aspx

Bosnia: <http://www.katastar.ba/pregled>

Montenegro: http://www.nekretnine.co.me/me/Katastarski_podaci.asp

It is worth remembering that some countries offer enhanced services for those paying. For example, in Serbia there is a service provided by the cadastral office which allows you to

BIRN Source

BIRN has recently launched a library of documents used in its investigations.

We are also due to include a database of scraped official registers from the Balkans. The first database to appear will be from the Montenegrin cadastral records which, for the first time, will be searchable with the name of the owner.

search the whole land registry by keyword (e.g. company name or individual) for a modest fee. Make sure you ask a colleague from the country what information is available.

Courts:

Courts are a first-class source of information as they provide detailed documentation which can be reported without facing a lawsuit.

Most countries make available at least some documents related to cases, including Albania, although this does vary between countries and sometimes between courts.

The highest-level courts – appeals, high, supreme for example – are those most likely to publish information online.

It is impossible to provide a comprehensive list of all courts, but two worth checking regularly are the UK and US services.

The UK service is provided by a charitable trust:<http://www.bailii.org/> Although it is not an official government source, you can treat the information provided with a great deal of confidence. You can search for British and Irish case law and legislation, European Union case law, Law Commission reports, and other law-related British and Irish material.

As London is the scene of many major international disputes, you may find useful information related to Albanian companies from high court judgements.

The US's Public Access to Court Electronic Records (PACER) is in a league of its own in terms of access to court documents.

You must register on pacer.gov and provide credit card information (you get charged a small fee for each document downloaded), which is a little fiddly and time consuming but definitely worth the effort.

Once you are signed up you can access documents online from federal appellate, district, and bankruptcy courts.

As with London, the US's place as a major business centre means that this is a hugely useful source of information on individuals and companies from across the world.

It's worth noting that not all cases are uploaded to PACER. I've found that small civil cases are often not found there, but you can track them down in the website of the relevant court.

Here are three useful court databases from the US but there are many more.

Delaware (home to many offshore firms):

<https://courtconnect.courts.delaware.gov>
New York: <http://iapps.courts.state.ny.us/is-croll/>

Washington DC: <https://www.dccourts.gov/cco/maincase.jsf>

TIP

Cracking offshore secrecy

Company records in offshore jurisdictions are designed to provide as little public information as possible.

Court documents can offer a way to circumvent this secrecy and find out who is really behind such a firm.

Disputes between partners in such a firm often end up in court either in the local jurisdiction or in a legal and financial centre such as London or New York.

It is also worth noting that access to court documents – both online and from court-houses - in some offshore jurisdictions is reasonably open.

The Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court covers many of the most common tax havens, including British Virgin Islands, and

uploads judgements to its website which are searchable <http://www.eccourts.org/>

You can also apply for further information from the court by finding a clerk on the ground to submit a request for you. This is likely to cost you in the region of \$100 for submitting a request and collecting documents.

Offshore Alert also provides paid-for access to court documents in Caymans, Bahamas and other tricky jurisdictions here <http://www.offshorealert.com/>

Chapter 5 : Access to public documents

Public documents are the lifeblood of investigative journalism and reporters need to know how and where to get their hands on hard copies, not just search the internet.

As well as mastering the art of finding original documents in public registries, investigative journalists must also learn the art of submitting Freedom of Information requests.

This chapter will address both issues.

5.1 What is Freedom of information?

Freedom of information (FOI) is about liberating and accessing public documents and data.

This includes seeking out material which is stored away in the bowels of libraries, email messages in hard drives, and recordings of meetings, but also the proactive release of documents by government.

FOI laws do not vary hugely from country to country, most provide access to ALL types of material created in the line of public duty. Technically this could and should include notes taken on the back of a napkin at an official lunch, the list of people at the lunch and a copy of the bills.

Many Balkan countries score surprisingly well in terms of making information available through public registers although the situation is not so rosy for journalists trying to obtain information through Freedom of Information requests (or access to public document rules, as it is sometimes called).

The Serbian business registry, Montenegrin cadastral office and Kosovo Office of the Auditor General all have a history of releasing vast amounts of documents to BIRN without

fuss.

In Albania the picture is mixed, with some areas where a great deal of information is released into the public domain (QKR is arguably one of the most comprehensive, free company registers anywhere in the world) but a real dearth of transparency in terms of releasing information following Freedom of Information requests.

TOP TIP

Playing to each country's strengths

When dealing with sensitive, secretive issues, you will inevitably encounter obstacles. The trick is to know how to overcome these.

Each country's information regime has its own strengths and weaknesses and understanding where these are will help you immeasurably in your investigations.

Map out which countries are implicated in your investigation and decide how to target each based on their strengths. There is little point submitting a request to view company documents in the British Virgin Islands, but you may have more luck looking at court cases in financial centres

and company documents in the offshore firm's subsidiaries.

If you're unsure about access to information in a particular country, consult a well-informed colleague.

Five FOI ideas

- Hardcopy of receipts submitted by a minister as expenses
- Diary of meetings held by a top official
- Correspondence between procurement officials and a bidding company
- Internal emails in a foreign embassy relating to a particular politician or businessman
- Letters from major companies to a minister

access for the public to official documents as well as concrete penalties for public officials who refused to make information available. Now, by submitting an FOI request a journalist in theory is able to gain access to most public information, documents and data in Albania.

The new law includes a number of novel concepts in regard to freedom of information requests, including reclassification of secret documents, and release of partial information and the use of information technology to make information held by public institutions available to the public.

The law also obliges public institutions to appoint coordinators for access to information and created the institution of a Commissioner for the Right to Information, an appeals body in cases where institutions either refuse to answer FOI requests or hand out partial information.

Three categories of institutions are subject to the FOI law in Albania:

- All administrative institutions, including the council of ministers, ministries, municipalities, government agencies, public advisory council and boards, as well as the armed forces, the police and the republican guard
- Commercial companies where the state

5.2 FOI law in Albania – what is the new law, what in practice can you expect to obtain

Freedom of information is not a new concept for Albanian journalists and editors. Despite its practical shortcomings, a law on freedom of information has been on the statute books since 1999.

However, in September 2014, this law received a legislative upgrade providing greater

controls the majority of the shares or companies that provide a public service. An example of such companies is the state-owned oil producer Albpetrol or the Military Export-Import Company, MEICO.

- Every person or company that through a law or sublegal act has been granted with authority to perform a public service. This may include companies that perform public functions in the area of education, telecommunication or health. Although such companies are not necessarily recipients of public funds they have been judged by the legislator as having a direct impact on the public, which makes them subject to its requests for transparency.

FOI requests directed toward an authority included in these three categories can potentially seek available information in any form or format, paper or electronic, despite the fact that such information has been compiled by the authority or received by other institutions or individuals.

In Albania, FOI requests can be compiled by any individual or organisation, Albanian or foreign citizen. The requester can be an individual, company or non-profit organisation.

FOI requests can be made through writing and filing directly to an institution or public authority, through regular mail or through

electronic mail.

The request should contain the identity and signature of the requester. Irrespective of the form of communication, the authority should register the request in its register of answers and questions within three days after receipt.

5.3 EU/international – How to access documents from the EU and other countries

Most Freedom of Information legislation does not preclude foreigners from applying for information, meaning that citizens of any country can obtain information with a simple email.

This means that when you are considering where information may be held on your particular subject, you must think internationally.

In recent years we have secured FOI requests related to Balkan investigations including from the US, UK, EU and the Netherlands.

United Kingdom

The UK offers one of the most efficient and comprehensive FOI systems in the world.

Citizens of Albania can submit FOI requests to UK public bodies, including those operating in the Balkans, such as the embassies,

Department for International Development or the British Council.

Almost every organisation has an FOI officer and contact details are usually available on the relevant website. If in doubt, contact a press officer.

Documents available include internal correspondence and reports.

To follow what other people are searching, or submit an application yourself, you can use the website whatdotheyknow.com. It's an excellent website which takes out the difficulty of finding the correct person in the correct department to contact, but it does mean that all your requests are public.

United States

Anyone can apply for documents in the United States which has a slow but extremely transparent FOI process. Even the FBI is subject to FOI requests.

It is free (or very inexpensive) to obtain information.

European Union

Public access to documents is guaranteed at the European Parliament, Council and Commission, and you don't need to be a citi-

zen or resident of an EU member state to apply.

Use www.asktheeu.org to make the process easier, albeit public.

The EU has a major influence over Albania and provides large amounts of money for various projects, all of which can be explored with the use of carefully crafted FOI requests.

World Bank

The World Bank has its own Access to Documents policy which means you can apply for previously unreleased reports and data. In practice, this policy has not resulted in a significant increase in transparency.

Other countries

Dozens of countries, ranging from Germany to Belize, also have FOI laws. For a full list visit http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Freedom_of_information_legislation

In Europe you can ask for the help of Access Info Europe (www.access-info.org) who work on promoting the use of FOI laws by journalists.

They have a useful website called Legal Leaks which includes a handy handbook full of tips (www.legalleaks.info/toolkit.html).

5.4 Looking for loopholes

Here are some tips for submitting a Freedom of Information Request:

- Know what you are looking for. It pays to do background research and find out where the documents are kept and what they are called so you can ask precisely. This makes it more difficult for officials to waste time and should win you a favour or two with the person in charge of finding the information.
- Most FOI laws are very, very clear: even when an exemption applies to part of the document you have asked for, the whole document should be released with the relevant parts redacted. Make sure that you point this out if an official attempts to deny you access.
- A public interest test applies to most exemptions. Don't be fobbed off, try to prove this "overriding public interest".
- Appeal – FOI requests are denied for a variety of reasons, some genuine, others self-serving. Unless there are strong reasons not to, appeal a decision denying your request. We have been hugely successful in overturning decisions in countries from the United Kingdom to Serbia. Even if your appeal fails, remember that using all the legal recourses available to you will make it easier for you and your colleagues to obtain information in the fu-

ture, as institutions become accustomed to having to be more open.

5.5 Consulting public registers

This is perhaps the most important lesson you can take from this book: when you are consulting public registers, collect all documents available and do not rely on what is provided online.

Visit the register and submit a request. Each folder and document could include a clue which will be crucial to your story.

As mentioned earlier, you must also learn to judge the strengths and weaknesses of each country, working out ways around problems when you encounter them.

Registers usually hold significantly more information than is available online. For example, in Serbia you can access all original documents that are submitted by the company. This is particularly useful if you are investigating an offshore company, as you will have access to documents from the secretive jurisdiction which will include names, addresses and phone numbers that are not available directly from the country of origin.

We have used Montenegrin cadastral records (which included stacks of mortgage documents) to expose strange dealings in

Hypo Bank.

And Albanian court records reveal suspicious transactions between the now bankrupt Austrian construction giant Alpine Bau and a Cypriot consultancy firm.

<http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/failed-hypo-bank-owed-42m-for-unbuilt-montenegro-resort>

I will not go into details about principles and techniques of data journalism here, as you can brush up on your skills by checking the many handbooks available online such as this:

From the Centre for Investigative Journalism <http://www.tcij.org/sites/default/files/u4/Data%20Journalism%20Book.pdf>

Or the Data Journalism Handbook here: <http://datajournalismhandbook.org/>

Chapter 6 : Organising your investigation

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As your investigation becomes more complex and the amount of information you are collecting expands, you must find ways to organise yourself and your documents.

Luckily there are many online tools available which make this easy, some of which I profile here.

6.1 Excel – how to use spreadsheets to organise your information and thoughts

Excel is a powerful tool for data journalists, allowing huge amounts of information to be processed to tease out newsworthy numbers.

I recommend the use of spreadsheets (Excel or Google spreadsheets for example) in organising your work. A table is a simple, quick means of recording the information that is coming in and the work you need to complete.

At BIRN, we have used spreadsheets to coordinate large teams of reporters in order to ensure that they know the tasks that are expected of them and can keep on top of what they have already completed.

6.2 Google Drive, OCR and other file-sharing - the importance of collaboration

If you are cooperating with other journalists, the chances are that you will need to share documents.

The best options to set up a folder in a virtual drive such as Google Drive or Dropbox.

My preference is for Google Drive as it has the added benefit of analysing documents using “optical character recognition”, transcribing PDFs so that they are searchable.

This means that beyond creating a handy online folder (which you can also access through applications on a mobile phone), Google Drive will make your library of documents searchable. This, potentially, could reveal links between companies and individuals that you had not spotted.

It is worth building up your library of searchable documents in one place such as Google Drive. Often apparently unrelated stories or documents can help in your research. The more data you have, the more likely you are to crack the story you’re working on.

TOP TIP

Security

Journalists need to think carefully about how to stay safe and secure their information and means of communication.

One of the first things to do when you are

starting an investigative project, alongside colleagues and your superiors, is to assess the risks to your personal safety and the security of your data. It is essential to ask yourself who are the people and organisations targeted in your research and whether they have the means and the motivation to hurt you or compromise your investigation. Depending on your initial assessment of this, you may want to consult a security or IT expert.

Google Drive is fine to store everyday items, but if you are in possession of confidential, classified information which could endanger your story or source if revealed, you should look for an encrypted service. Many of these are paid for, such as Stackfield, but you must not scrimp if people’s jobs or safety are at risk.

Think carefully about how you communicate with journalists and sources. Online chat services such as Skype and Viber are not secure and must be avoided for sensitive discussions.

Cryptocat is a free encrypted chat service available through Chrome and mobile, for confidential communications, and Jitsi is excellent and free for encrypted calls.

You should also consider how secure

your email is. Is your password strong enough? Can you make a double or even triple authentication process?

You can set up an email address which you can encrypt in order to share information by following the step-by-step guide provided by the Electronic Frontier Foundation: <https://ssd.eff.org/en>

This brilliant organisation also offers a wealth of information on how to stay safe online.

If your computer or mobile phone has been fully compromised then no software will protect you from snooping eyes and ears. In some cases you may decide it is safer to use hard-copy documents.

Lastly, always make sure a colleague knows where you are and has a copy of your documents. This is the best way to stay safe.

Beyond writing in sparkling prose, journalists can turn to technology for a helping hand in providing clarity.

Easy to use, free software is available online if you want to create interactive infographics, timelines and maps to bring your story to life.

Irrespective of making your stories more attractive, it can be worth setting out your story visually in order to improve your understanding. Often setting it out in a different format can reveal links you had not spotted.

Here are some useful websites you can use:

- Visual Investigative Scenarios <https://vis.occrp.org/> from Organised Crime and Corruption Reporting Project is a great, free visualisation software. It is particular useful for setting out schemes involving corrupt individuals and companies. The visualisation is interactive and can be embedded into your stories.
- Gephi (<http://gephi.github.io/>) is an “interactive visualization and exploration platform for all kinds of networks and complex systems, dynamic and hierarchical graphs”. I haven’t used it before but it does receive excellent reviews.
- Tableau Public and Google Fusion tables both allow you to transform spreadsheets into interactive maps. Here is an example

6.3 Visualisations – making it easier for you and your reader to understand

Explaining complex stories in an accessible, interesting way is a considerable part of a reporter’s job.

of old meeting new: Doctor John Snow's pioneering work plotting the cause of cholera in the London of the 1850s illustrated by Tableau Public.



- The Northwestern University Knight Lab has a superb timeline creator which you can use to illustrate your stories and explain complex chronology. We use this for one of our investigations into Damir Fazlic: <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/how-berisha-s-inner-circle-profited-from-multi-million-euro-land-deals>

6.4 Use the network

Investigative journalists work best in packs. That's because there is safety in numbers and there is an extraordinary wealth of knowledge that you can tap into.

Use the networks of journalists already available and build your own through collaborative work. Signup to newsletters, join mailing groups, like on Facebook, attend conferences and get involved.

Global Investigative Journalism Network (GIJN): An international association of non-profit organisations that support, promote, and produce investigative journalism. GIJN holds conferences, conducts trainings, provides resources and consulting, and encourages the creation of similar non-profit groups.

Investigative Reporters & Editors (IRE): US-based group which maintains databases, training material and provides access to software for members.

NICAR - National Institute for Computer-Assisted Reporting: NICAR is for the data-journalists out there and offers a very useful, if very technical mail list.

GLOBAL-L@LISTS.REPORTER.ORG: A wonderful mailing list where investigative journalists share ideas and ask each other for tips. Do join.

Chapter 7 : The Legal Hurdles

7.1 Albanian law: Legal worries to look out

Criminal/ civil proceedings for slander/libel

The 2012 reforms of the Albanian laws on criminal and civil defamation were the product of seven years lobbying by the Albanian Media Institute and the Open Society's Justice Initiative.

While these amendments are positive and generally in line with international standards, the criminal law amendments in particular appear to constitute a curious combination of modernity and regression.

The Albanian legislator decided to retain the criminal classification of the offence of "insult" and although prison terms were abolished, the maximum fines to be imposed were increased to 3 million leke (approximately 21,000 euro) while the conviction will be entered into the defendant's criminal record. Either of these elements is enough to have a "gagging" or "chilling" effect on media professionals, as also noted by the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly (PACE) October 2014 Resolution on Albania which found that defamation has not been fully decriminalised.

Turning to the civil law amendments on defamation, although these reflect the most recent standards in the field, whether judges will adequately implement them in their everyday practice is a different matter.

In particular, we have yet to see whether Al-

banian judges will uphold the new principles (and more importantly, espouse their underlying rationale) or whether they will continue imposing awards of high damages. According to the EU 2014 Progress Report, "Further action is needed to ensure the proper implementation of amendments on defamation and guidelines on setting damages at a reasonable level, in particular through training for the judiciary".

What's a libellous statement?

According to Albania's criminal code, a libellous statement is defined as: "the voluntary spreading of statements or any other information, which is known to be false and harms the honour and dignity of a person."

Based on the provisions added to the criminal code in 2012, insult and libel are ranked as misdemeanours, subject to a fine.

A criminal case of libel or insult can be privately prosecuted by the alleged victim and does not involve of the police or the prosecutor. However, a conviction under either article will still result in a criminal record for a journalist, editor or for anyone found guilty.

Based on the definition of article 120, it must be proved that the defendant knew the libellous statement to be false in order to be convicted, which is considered a "high bar for

prosecutors".

A civil defamation lawsuit is regulated by article 625 of the civil code that covers moral damages. Based on the new article the causes of damage's to one's reputation should be proved by the plaintiff in order to seek damages.

Based on article 647, which defines the criteria for assessing whether a defendant should be held liable for causing harm to someone's reputation, the amount of compensation should be proportionate and not used to punish the defendant.

The civil code has 11 non-exhaustive factors that should be taken into account when the court determines liability.

These include: whether the allegations constitute fact or opinion; whether they are true/false or constitute accurate references to third-party statements; whether they relate to "matters of public interest, or persons in government functions or running for election"; and whether the author has complied with any relevant rules of professional ethics.

Use of classified information

Publication of classified information in Albania is regulated by law no.8457, date 11.02.1999 on information classified "State

Secret.”

Publication of classified information is a criminal offence, punishable with a fine or up to five year imprisonment. However, no one has been prosecuted in Albania for such an offence over the last two decades.

7.2 International concerns and the Reynolds’ Rules

While you will primarily focussed on ensuring your story meets the legal standards of publishing in Albania, you should remain vigilant of action in other countries, particularly if you are targeting international figures.

Throughout the last decade, London became the setting for “libel tourism” as global plutocrats sought to defend their reputations using the UK’s notoriously tough laws on defamation. This resulted in newspapers and journalists from across the world, including many developing countries, being hauled to the High Court in order to defend their work.

This arguably had a chilling effect on publication, as struggling media outlets preferred not to risk ruinous suits against billionaire businessmen.

The UK parliament has brought in new legislation seeking to tackle this issue which came into effect in 2014.

This has greatly reduced the number of such cases being brought to UK courts, but the risks remain that journalists could be sued in England.

For a case to go ahead in an English court, the claimant would need to prove that he or she has a reputation to protect in England, for example by showing that they have business interests, family, and that a significant number of people have accessed the allegedly defamatory story there.

Ultimately, the court needs to decide whether or not an English court is the best Place to bring such a claim.

Reynolds Rules – a guide to responsible journalism.

Before the new defamation legislation was introduced to the England last year, there was no clear “public interest” defence for journalists which had unintentionally published libellous material or could not prove that the material was true.

Publishers, however, were able to rely on what became known as the “Reynolds Rules”, which set out in which circumstances a journalists can argue to have acted responsible and avoid defamation claims.

While these rules are no longer directly application in English courts, they provide excellent guidelines for anyone looking to publish controversial material in any jurisdiction.

I consider these points ahead of publication in all stories:

- How serious is the allegation? The more serious the charge, the more the public is misinformed and the individual harmed if the allegation is not true.
- What is the nature of the information, and the extent to which the subject matter is of public concern?
- What is the source of the information? Some informants have no direct knowledge of the events. Some have their own axes to grind or are being paid for their stories.
- What steps have been taken to verify the information?
- What is the status of the information? The allegation may have already been the subject of an investigation that commands respect.
- How urgent is publication? News is often a perishable commodity.
- Was comment sought from the claimant? He or she may have information others do not possess or have not disclosed. An ap-

proach to the claimant will not always be necessary.

- Does the article contain the gist of the claimant's side of the story?
- What is the tone of the article? A paper can raise queries or call for an investigation. It need not adopt allegations as statements of fact.
- What are the circumstances of the publication, including the timing?

Answer these questions and you should steer clear of legal problems.

Conclusion

Good journalism is about collaboration, so please do contact me if you would like any further information.

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Website listings

Google search

- www.google.com/trends

Use Google Trends to find out what other people are searching for connected to your target. Useful to find the standard spelling of a name

- www.googleguide.com/

A great guide to Google commands

- www.google.co.uk/advanced_image_search

Carry out advanced searches for images, by getting Google to find other occurrences of images. Select the most prominent colour to narrow down your search.

- www.searchbistro.com

Henk Van Ess is a superb trainer in advanced Google techniques so keep an eye on his website for updates and tutorials.

- <http://searchresearch1.blogspot.no/>

Follow Daniel Russell, research scientist at Google, and his blog.

Company searches

- [Opencorporates.com](http://opencorporates.com)

Through the process of scraping – extracting large amounts of data from public websites – opencorporates.com has brought together almost 90million records from 105 different jurisdictions.

- [Investigativedashboard.org](http://investigativedashboard.org)

OCCRP's index of international business (and other) registers is the best around. You can also request information from one of their experts.

- beta.companieshouse.gov.uk/

For the first time, company documents from the UK are available free of charge.

Land registry/cadastral info

- Croatia: <http://www.katastar.hr/dgu/>
- Serbia: <http://katastar.rgz.gov.rs/KnWebPublic/>
- Macedonia: http://www.katastar.gov.mk/prebm_k_address/searchadd.aspx
- Bosnia: <http://www.katastar.ba/pregled>
- Montenegro: http://www.nekretnine.co.me/me/Katastarski_podaci.asp

Considerably more information will be available directly from the registry and some registries also provide extra services online for a fee.

Court documents

- www.bailii.org

The UK and Irish High Court records can be searched here and can prove extremely helpful given the number of international business disputes resolved in London.

- www.pacer.gov

Signing up to Pacer takes a little time, but is worth it as it provides you with access to the vast majority of US court records.

- <https://courtconnect.courts.delaware.gov>

Delaware, a popular US jurisdiction for offshore firms, provides its superior court records here.

- <http://iapps.courts.state.ny.us/iscroll/>

New York superior court records available here.

- Washington DC: <https://www.dccourts.gov/cco/maincase.jsf>

Washington DC superior court records available here.

- <http://www.eccourts.org/>

The Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court covers many of the most common tax havens, including British Virgin Islands, and uploads judgements to its website which are searchable

- www.offshorealert.com/

Offshore Alert also provides paid-for access to court documents in Caymans, Bahamas and other tricky jurisdictions here <http://www.offshorealert.com/>

Freedom of Information

- www.asktheeu.org

Submit a Freedom of Information request to the EU through this website.

- whatdotheyknow.org

Submit a Freedom of Information to the UK institutions with this website.

- www.legalleaks.info

Legalleaks provides a guidance to submitting Freedom of Information requests across Europe.

Domain name information

- domaintools.com

One of the best known and comprehensive services to find current and historical information on websites, including the name of the registrant and contact information.

- whoisology.com

A free tool to look up domain name information.

- sameid.net/

Test links between websites using the same Analytics account (and some other code). Use is limited for non-paying customers.

- archive.org

Often called the waybackmachine. Use this to find archived webpages and documents which have been removed from the internet.

Facebook

- researchclinic.net/graph.html

Internet research specialist Paul Myers's excellent guide to using Facebook Graph, Facebook's powerful search function (don't forget to set the language to US English).

- inteltechniques.com/OSINT/facebook.htm

A very useful search function which allows you to search Facebook Graph without using complicated commands.

- Graph.tips

Another Graph tool which provides a means of easily searching Facebook.

Social media searches

- www.echosec.net

EchoSEC is excellent at finding geo-located posts from Twitter and Flickr. A premium version offers more options.

- www.gramfeed.com

Find geo-located Instagram photos.

- youtube.github.io/geo-search-tool/search.html

Pinpoint geo-located YouTube videos.

- yomapic.com

Allows you to search Instagram and the Russian Facebook equivalent VK by location, although only in week-long slots. It does, however, allow you to find the geo-locations of all posts from a particular individual, meaning that you can trace all of their movements.

Useful databases

- app.enigma.io/

A treasure trove of a database with very useful documents on US imports (bills of lading), US company registration information and a host of other data.

- documentcloud.org/public/search/Kosovo

A site regularly used by journalists to archive documents with a handy search function.

- Birnsource.com

Balkan Investigative Reporting Network's own database of documents. It is due to include scraped public registers from the Balkans.

Lobbying

- <http://www.fara.gov/>

Find out which US lobbying firms are employed by foreign governments and who they have been lobbying.

- www.opensecrets.org/

A useful website for tracking corporate lobbying in the US.

- <http://ec.europa.eu/transparencyregister/public/homePage.do>

Find out who is lobbying who at the EU.

Tracking transport

- www.flightradar24.com

One of the best websites for tracking planes based on a range of parameters.

- portexaminer.com

US customs data available for free, although coverage seems to be patchy.

- Vesseltracker.com

Track ships as they sail and investigate the history of a particular vessels.

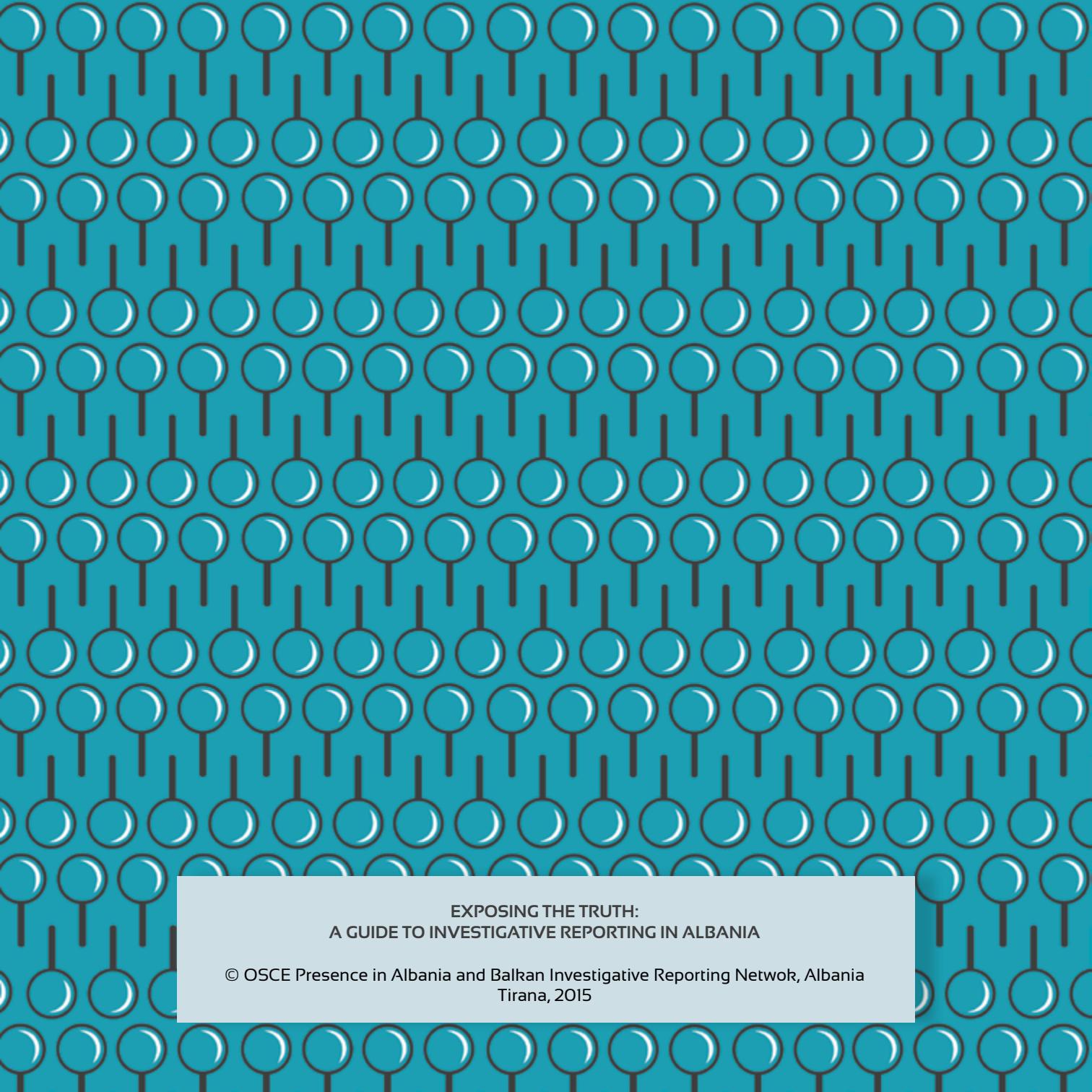
Weapons databases

- www.sipri.org/databases

Stockholm International Peace Research Institute provides a very handy searchable database of weapons transfers.

- nisat.prio.org/trade-database/

The Norwegian Initiative on Small Arms Transfers is, as its name suggests geared towards the small arms trade. A very handy tool for those investigating the arms trade.



EXPOSING THE TRUTH:
A GUIDE TO INVESTIGATIVE REPORTING IN ALBANIA

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