# Journalist Christo Grozev reveals chilling details of Russian surveillance plot



Christo Grozev, a well-known Bulgarian investigative journalist noted for his exposés on Russian intelligence operations, recently found himself in a precarious situation concerning his personal safety. The incident began in February 2023 while Grozev was at a café in New York, anticipating a return flight to his home in Vienna. However, U.S. law enforcement officials advised him against boarding the flight, citing intelligence suggesting that a “red team” was set to intercept him. “I was told that it’s not a good idea for me to leave back to Austria, because there’s been some intelligence suggesting there’s a red team waiting for you,” Grozev recounted, adding that he was informed the risks extended beyond mere hacking and surveillance.

Shortly after this warning, authorities in the United Kingdom carried out coordinated arrests of members of a Bulgarian spy ring purportedly working for Russian intelligence, with implications that Grozev was a target. In a notable trial at the Old Bailey, a jury convicted three individuals – Katrin Ivanova, Vanya Gaberova, and Tihomir Ivanov Ivanchev – on serious espionage-related charges. The court heard extensive evidence detailing how the accused had conspired to surveil Grozev across various European locations, even developing plans to kidnap him, although these plans were never executed.

Despite some elements of the plot appearing more theatrical than serious, Grozev expressed a sense of relief at the verdict. “They may have come across as muppets, but it’s clear that their plans could have been incredibly dangerous,” he stated. His prominence in investigative journalism was amplified through his affiliation with Bellingcat, a group renowned for integrating conventional investigative methods with leaked information to uncover Russian operatives. His notable work includes identifying suspects involved in the 2018 Salisbury novichok poisoning of former spy Sergei Skripal and his daughter, as well as unmasking the FSB operatives linked to the poisoning of opposition leader Alexei Navalny in 2020.

The danger posed by Russian intelligence has brought significant changes to Grozev's life, compelling him to adopt new security measures. However, during this period, he was faced with the unexpected death of his father in Austria, necessitating a trip back home for the funeral. “I had to breach all of these instructions and fly there to attend to the funeral,” he explained. He spent three days in a safe house for security, but complications arose when Austrian authorities impounded his father’s body for investigation, leading to a lack of closure regarding the cause of death.

Evidence presented in the Old Bailey trial hinted at a deeper connection between the Bulgarian spy ring and Jan Marsalek, a wanted Austrian fugitive with alleged ties to Russian intelligence. Marsalek, who vanished following a multi-billion euro fraud scandal involving his company Wirecard in 2020, purportedly orchestrated the spying efforts through a Bulgarian associate, Orlin Roussev, who has since entered a guilty plea. The trial revealed thousands of messages exchanged between Marsalek and Roussev, indicating collaborative planning alongside Russian operatives.

Grozev portrayed Marsalek as a figure who, having amassed vast wealth, sought a more significant role in global affairs, asserting, “He got so much money so early on, he scammed so many people early on, and he just wanted to be bigger than just a super-rich guy, he wanted to be an international player.” The scope of Marsalek's operations suggests he was regarded as a valuable asset by various intelligence services, with Grozev remarking on the unique financial capabilities offered by his Wirecard connections.

The spy ring instructed by Roussev reportedly tracked Grozev over several months, covertly followed him, and attempted personal engagements through social media in a bid to gather information or potentially orchestrate a honey trap. A detailed operation was even formulated to capture him during a visit to Kyiv, but Marsalek ultimately called it off before execution. Grozev described his situation of being under continual surveillance as unsettling yet indirect, noting an incident where his daughter observed a man who appeared to be following them, leading to speculation about unmonitored attention on their movements.

In light of the ongoing threats and disruption to his life, Grozev has refrained from publicly disclosing his current living situation. He articulated a profound sense of dislocation by stating, “I have no idea where my home is. Apparently it cannot be Bulgaria, it cannot be Austria or any Schengen country.” The complexities of his circumstances reflect the broader implications of state-sponsored attempts to silence dissenters in an age of increasing geopolitical tensions.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.cps.gov.uk/cps/news/bulgarian-trio-convicted-conspiring-spy-russia> - This article corroborates the conviction of a Bulgarian spy ring for conspiring to spy for Russia, with Christo Grozev being a target. It details the sophisticated methods used by the group and their connections to Russian intelligence.
* <https://www.rferl.org/a/bulgarian-spying-uk-russia-killing-grozev/33220505.html> - This report supports the claim that Bulgarian individuals accused of spying for Russia discussed kidnapping or murdering Christo Grozev, highlighting the serious threats he faced.
* <https://www.congress.gov/117/meeting/house/112696/witnesses/HHRG-117-FA14-Bio-GrozevC-20210527.pdf> - This document provides background information on Christo Grozev, detailing his work as a journalist and his involvement with Bellingcat, which is crucial to understanding his prominence in investigative journalism.
* <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jan_Marsalek> - This page explains Jan Marsalek's background and his involvement in the Wirecard scandal, which is relevant to his alleged ties to Russian intelligence and his role in orchestrating the spy ring.
* <https://www.bellingcat.com/> - Bellingcat's official website provides insight into the organization's investigative work, including their methods and notable cases, which is essential for understanding Grozev's contributions.