

European Court of Human Rights to Investigate UK Spying Laws on Journalists



Brussels, September 18 (RHC)-- The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) is to launch an investigation into UK laws allowing British intelligence agencies and police to spy on journalists. The ECHR has accepted the application which was filed by the Bureau of Investigative Journalism (BIJ) on September 12th, in a move aimed at forcing London to review its laws over the mass collection of communications data.

In its application to the ECHR, the BIJ asked the court to rule on whether the British government's policies on the interception of communications was a breach of the "right to free expression" as stipulated in Article 10 of the Human Rights Act.

Christopher Hird, chair of the BIJ's editorial board, said the bureau's concern was "that the existing regulatory regime to control the interception of communications data – such as phone calls and e-mails – by organizations such as GCHQ [Government Communications Headquarters] does not provide sufficient safeguards to ensure the protection of journalists' sources, and as a result is a restriction on the operation of a free press."

The bureau also says that the British law is incompatible with the European law, which allows journalists to keep sources confidential from police.

According to information revealed last year by U.S. whistleblower, Edward Snowden, GCHQ has been secretly gathering metadata relating to telephone communications, as well as e-mails of millions of people, including journalists and potential whistleblowers.

Acting managing editor at the BIJ, Rachel Oldroyd, said if the bureau's action was successful, it would mean the UK government would have to ensure that all journalistic communications be protected.

This comes after it was revealed that the police had secretly obtained records of a political editor at the UK tabloid, The Sun, after he refused to hand over the identity of sources in one of his stories regarding a faceoff between police and a Tory politician.

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