

2019 ANNUAL REPORT

bellingcat

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FOREWORD

Since the founding of Bellingcat in 2014 I've been fortunate enough to guide the growth and development of Bellingcat from a one-man organisation with a small group of volunteers to an increasingly complex organisation, one which continues to break new ground in online open source investigation.

Over the last year Bellingcat has gone through a major restructuring, not only gaining ANBI status in The Netherlands, but moving our operations there and increasing the size of our team considerably.

This allows us to have a solid base for future growth, both as an organisation and into new areas of investigation and research. As we've developed that solid base, we've also continued to produce our award winning investigations.

During 2019 we've continued to expand on our award-winning investigative work on the Skripal poisoning, revealing its links to more Russian spy activity across Europe, including attempted assassinations in Bulgaria and the failed 2016 coup in Montenegro. This work has helped bring light to previously undetected intelligence activity in Europe, and has triggered arrests and investigations in a number of cases. Our 5 years of work on the MH17 case led to the launch of the successful Bellingcat Podcast documentary series on MH17, and was the beginning of our efforts to turn our investigative work into products that can bring the intricate work of our investigators to a new audience.

The lessons learned from our experience with MH17 and other investigations led us to develop new processes for archiving and investigation that were part of our Yemen project, examining Saudi coalition air-strikes in Yemen. The intent of our work is that our investigations can be done to a standard that allow the work to be submitted to courts and legal processes, along with correctly preserved and archived evidence.

Bellingcat's work expanded into other areas as well. Bellingcat's Anti-Equality Monitoring project led to connections between the far right and mainstream political activity being exposed, and how the Christchurch shooter's manifesto was being translated and printed by far right groups in Ukraine. We've also examined the activities of the online far right community, and published significant and unique reporting on their background and activities.

As much as our work and impact is down to the endeavours of our team and volunteers, we wouldn't be where we are today without the generous support of each individual, organisation or institution that believes that what we do matters. Thank you for all the ways, big and small, in which you stand with us.



Eliot Higgins
Bellingcat Founder & Executive Director

ABOUT BELLINGCAT

Bellingcat is an independent international collective of researchers and citizen journalists, consisting of a small core staff and thousands of volunteers.

We use verifiable digital information to investigate a broad range of topics, validate facts and uncover wrongdoing. We apply an evidence-based method with maximum transparency and make our findings public with the purpose of advancing justice and accountability.

We cooperate with others, share knowledge and build networks of evidence-based researchers.

Bellingcat started in early 2014 as a one-man initiative, following a period of blogging with open source material to examine the conflicts in Syria and Libya. The launch of Bellingcat provided a central place for a widespread landscape of citizen journalists and enthusiastic researchers, initially focusing on conflict investigations. Over the course of just several months, Bellingcat expanded to an international collective of volunteers whose open source investigation delivered groundbreaking evidence for the downing of flight MH17. Over the next five years, additional research into the Malaysian airliner's downing and other incidents - most notably, the 2018 poisoning of the former Russian spy Skripal in Britain - acted as a catalyst for the rapid growth of Bellingcat, the adoption of digital research methods in mainstream journalism, and the explosive growth of the field of online open source investigation in general.

Today we investigate a broad range of topics, including corporate misconduct, illicit finance, organized crime, money-laundering, corruption, violence against journalists, environmental degradation, the rise of far-right movements, unsolved murders, politically motivated assassinations and many more.

VISION & MISSION

Our vision

A global community of innovative, resourceful and passionate individuals who use the latest technology to collaborate and piece together truth in a transparent way.

Our mission

Become the global leader in open source fact-finding.

Our formula

Collaboration: we work together as a team, we believe that the collective is stronger than any individual

Curiosity: we dig through digital data and choose our research topics independently

Tenacity: we value the process in searching truth and we persist

Diversity: we attract different people to sharpen our ideas and broaden our investigations

Innovation: we create and share tools and methods to benefit all, not just some

OUR RESEARCHERS





Eliot Higgins is the founder and executive director of Bellingcat. Eliot's work has focused on the conflict in Syria, the use of chemical weapons, the downing of MH17, and the conflict in Ukraine. Eliot presents the Bellingcat documentary podcast, the first series of which won the Political Studies Association Political Podcast of the Year award, and hosts BellingChat, Bellingcat's podcast discussing the work of Bellingcat with our staff and contributors. Eliot is currently working on the book "We Are Bellingcat", due for release in early 2021, and other media projects.

Eliot Higgins

Giancarlo Fiorella is an investigator and trainer for Bellingcat whose work focuses primarily on the Latin America region. During his time at Bellingcat, Giancarlo has sought out and fostered collaborations with Latin American investigative journalism and human rights organizations and provided free training opportunities to journalists living there. Giancarlo has overseen collaborative projects with the Latin American Centre for Investigative Journalism (CLIP), Colombia's La Liga Contra el Silencio, and Venezuela's Armando.info, among others. Furthermore, Giancarlo's academic background as a doctoral candidate at the Centre for Criminology & Sociolegal Studies at the University of Toronto has helped to motivate him to seek out collaborative partnerships to help bring Bellingcat methodological training to universities in Latin America.



Giancarlo Fiorella



Christo Grozev

Christo Grozev has been writing for Bellingcat since 2015, with a focus on Russia-related security threats and the weaponization of information. Based in Vienna, he authored many of the landmark investigations identifying, among others, two senior Russian officers linked to the shooting down of flight MH17 in 2014, GRU officers involved with the planned coup in Montenegro in 2016, and the three Skripal poisoning suspects in 2018. Christo holds a bachelor's degree in journalism from the American University in Bulgaria, as well as law and business management degrees. When he is not doing investigative work for Bellingcat, he runs radio stations in the Netherlands and Ukraine, and is senior researcher at the Risk Management Lab at the New Bulgarian University.

Nick Waters is a senior investigator for Bellingcat, focusing on the application of open source techniques to the investigation of conflict, primarily in relation to Syria and Yemen. His work has examined the use of drones by sub-state actors, chemical weapons in Syria, the destruction of mosques in China and the killing of Muhammad Gulzar at the Greek-Turkish border. His current area of interest is the systematic application of these techniques to track conflicts world-wide to improve international accountability. Nick's previous experience includes four years in the British army, an MA in Conflict, Security and Development from King's College London and two years working in commercial cyber threat intelligence. He was shortlisted for the 2018 European Press Prize.



Nick Waters



Based in the Netherlands, Pieter van Huis is an open source specialist and investigator with a background in History. He is primarily focused on armed conflicts in Eastern Europe and the Greater Middle East region. He has been involved with research into the war in eastern Ukraine since 2014 and is a known expert on the shootdown of flight MH17. He participated in the identification of individuals involved in this crime who are currently on trial in absentia. He has also received much praise for his ability to collect and verify source material from social media in order to reconstruct important events, knowledge which he is currently spreading by giving courses and training all over the world on behalf of Bellingcat.

Pieter van Huis

Narine Khachatryan, based in Yerevan, Armenia, is an OSINT researcher and trainer with Bellingcat who focuses on social, economic, human rights and political issues in the South Caucasus and Central Asia. Among other things, Narine has worked extensively on monitoring the development of the controversial Amulsar Gold Mine project in Armenia and studying its societal and environmental implications. Currently, Narine's main focus lies on training researchers and journalists in the South Caucasus and Central Asia on how to conduct open-source investigations, with the goal of popularizing and promoting the use of OSINT methodologies and techniques in these regions. During her time with Bellingcat, she has also led and co-led OSINT workshops in a number of countries worldwide, including Senegal, Jordan, England, Australia, and the Netherlands.



Narine Khachatryan



Charlotte Godart is an investigator and trainer for Bellingcat. Before working at Bellingcat, she was a researcher and team manager at the Investigations Lab within the Human Rights Center at UC Berkeley, her alma mater. Her background is in the use of open source investigations for human rights research. At Bellingcat, she has investigated conflict zones, disinformation, and police violence. Some of this work includes investigating airstrikes in Yemen, exploring the propagation of bot networks on Twitter, debunking disinformation around the coronavirus, and mapping out police violence against journalists across the United States. As a trainer, she has conducted workshops in 6 different countries, teaching journalists, lawyers, activists, and others how to use open source tools and techniques for their research.

Charlotte Godart

Youri van der Weide is an open source researcher and trainer mostly focusing on Africa. A lot of his investigations have focused on Africa related topics e.g. BBC Africa Eye's Anatomy of a Killing, investigating mercenaries in Cameroon and Sudan. Recently, Youri has focused increasingly on researching migration-related topics, such as Greece's illegal pushbacks. So far for Bellingcat he has led training in South Africa, Ethiopia and an online training for South African journalists. He speaks Dutch, Portuguese, Spanish and has some command of Russian and Turkish.



Youri van der Weide



Rawan Shaif is a British-Yemeni investigative journalist and OSINT researcher focused on the proliferation of arms, the applications of weapons in conflict, the mapping of armed groups and the law of Armed Conflict. Rawan briefly worked on the Yemen project to create a database of violations using open source information. Before joining Bellingcat, Rawan was based in Yemen for 4 and a half years documenting and investigating airstrikes, diversion of aid, local manufacturing of drones as well as other incidents tied to human rights violations. During her time there Rawan worked for Amnesty International and Doctors Without Borders.

Rawan Shaif

Aric Toler has been with Bellingcat since 2014, where he now heads up the site's research and training efforts. His research interests include the war in the Donbas, creative uses of digital investigative methodology, and new research capabilities on the RuNet (Russian internet). He also organizes English and Russian-language training efforts for both for-profit and free Bellingcat workshops. Before joining Bellingcat, he received an M.A. (2013) in Slavic Languages & Literatures from the University of Kansas.



Aric Toler



Johanna Wild

Johanna Wild is an open source investigator from Germany with a particular interest in tech and tool development for digital investigations. She has a journalism background and spent several years in (post-)conflict regions where she supported journalists from Eastern Africa and the Middle East to investigate and report on local conflict dynamics. She also provided (online) research and verification training to media professionals in conflict regions and to German newsrooms and journalism schools. Since 2016, Johanna has focused on the collaboration between software developers and journalists with the aim to enhance journalistic research and production processes. For her work in this area, she won a fellowship from the digital innovation lab Media Lab Bayern and was listed by Medium Magazin (German) among the top 10 journalists in the entrepreneur category in early 2018. At Bellingcat, she continues to focus on tech and tool development for open source investigations.

Ross Higgins is a financial investigator. Since joining Bellingcat in 2016 Ross has concentrated on the abuse of corporate vehicles in the UK, most prominently Scottish Limited Partnerships ("SLPs") which have been used to facilitate several global money laundering scandals. Ross was the lead researcher in Bellingcat's joint report with Transparency International UK "Offshore in the UK". His latest major report "Smash and Grab - the UK's Money Laundering Machine" was published in 2019. His work has been cited in the Houses of Parliament, as well as media outlets including the Times, the Guardian, Business Insider and the Herald.



Ross Higgins



Daniel Romein is an IT-specialist and started in 2014 as an open source investigator focused on the MH17 case and the conflict in Ukraine. He is co-winner of the 2019 European Press Prize Investigative Reporting Award for his work in the Skripal case. In 2020 he was shortlisted for the European Press Prize Investigative Reporting Award for his joint work in the Europol stop child-abuse campaign.

Daniel Romein

Aiganysh Aidarbekova is an open source investigator and trainer at Bellingcat based in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. Her research interest lies in the same region in the field of governmental corruption. In particular how social media accounts might reveal the secret luxurious lives of influential government officials. Another interest of hers is creating various databases for further use in OSINT. Aiganysh has a background in economics and prior to joining Bellingcat she was involved in academic research which used open source and user generated data. She also co-leads Russian language workshops in Central Asia and Caucasus for local journalists and activists..



Aiganysh Aidarbekova



Robert Evans grew up enmeshed in, and obsessed with, the early digital communities of the late 1990s. He started following online extremism in late 2015, after the Bataclan attacks in Paris, by analyzing ISIS propaganda. Over the last five years he has become a leading researcher in the field of far-right extremism. He specializes in understanding how online communities self-radicalize and push individuals towards acts of violence.

Robert Evans

2019 IN NUMBERS



120 PUBLICATIONS



2,567,476 UNIQUE VISITORS

99

1000+ MEDIA CITATIONS

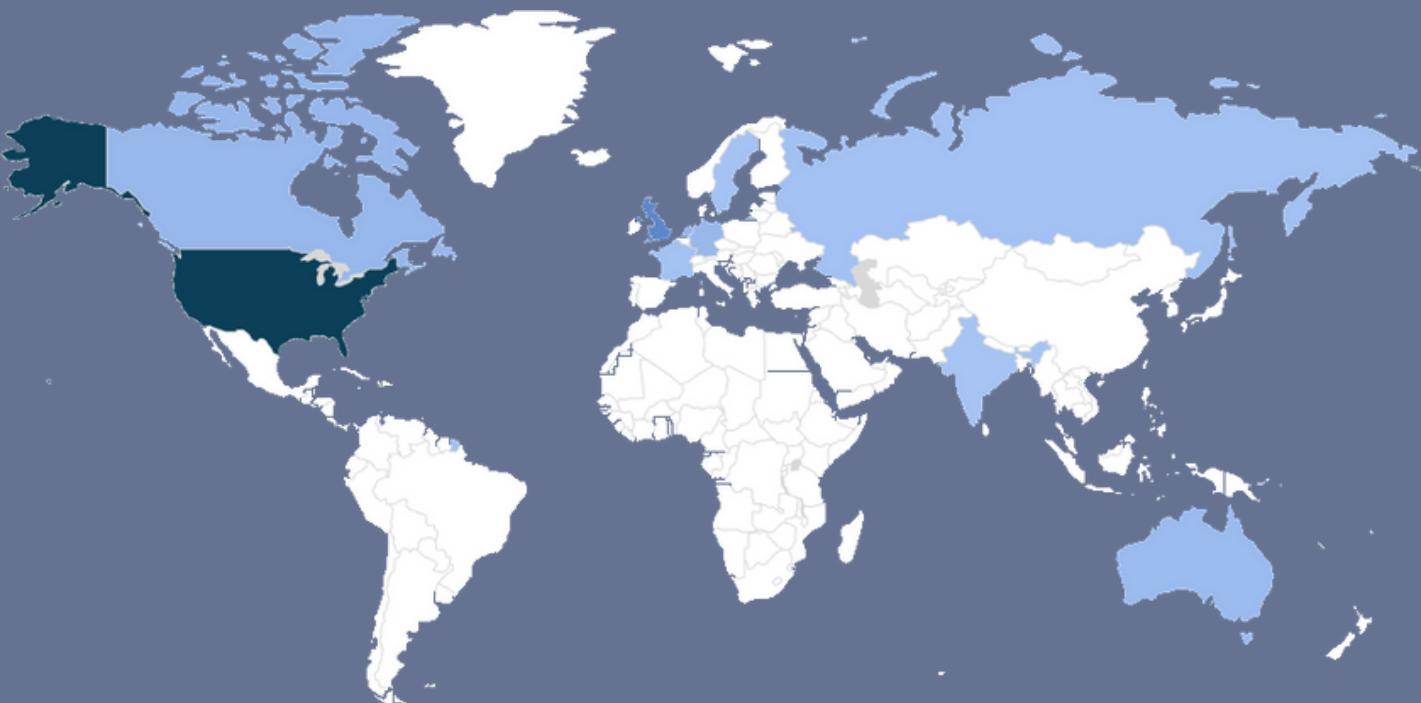
Monthly readers



The El Paso Shooting and
the Gamification of Terror



Average distribution of readers (top 10 visitors)



Twitter followers @bellingcat

40,4%
follower increase



Patreon



Publications geographical scope



Our most popular articles

Click the icons to go to the article



632K



465K



177K



137K



70K

bellingcat

OUR STORIES



SKRIPAL



After revealing the identity of two suspected assassins in the Skripal Novichok poisoning in 2018, a link was found with a third suspect. The suspect, who traveled under the name of Sergey Vyacheslavovich Fedotov, was involved in the 2015 poisoning of arms trader Emilian Gebrev and his son in Bulgaria.

Similarly to the other Skripal suspects, his name turned up for the first time in 2010, before which no record of him exists, indicating a false identity. A search for Sergey Fedotov revealed several irregularities. For example, his listed place of birth showed no record of Sergey Fedotov in local residential databases. Ownership records of Fedotov's registered address showed ownership of a different family, from which we were unable to trace any ties to Sergey. Acquiring Sergey Fedotov's passport file validated our suspicions about his cover identity. Like the other suspects in the case his passport was issued by the 770001 desk, known to issue passports to GRU officers.

Together with the Insider and Respect, Bellingcat revealed the identity of the third Skripal suspect as being Denis Vyacheslavovich Sergeev, a high-ranking GRU officer.

Over the course of the investigation Russian authorities have notably taken measure of erasing any public records of the existence of Denis Sergeev as well as the two main suspects in the Skripal case, solidifying belief in the direct involvement of the Russian state.

During these investigations we found that GRU undercover officers assigned to different operations often overlap, with the total number identified by Bellingcat not exceeding 10. This implied the existence of a limited elite team of internationally trained operatives that is recycled among various projects.

IMPACT

ARTICLES

- Bulgarian authorities have confirmed the presence of Sergeev at the time of the attack and announced they have reopened the 2015 cold case.
- Winners of a European Press Prize in Investigative Reporting in 2019.
- Winners of the London Press Club Award 2019.
- The stories were picked up and covered on major news outlets such as: le Monde, the Week UK, BBC, Newsnight, The Independent, France 24, USA Today and the New York Times.
- [Third Skripal Suspect Linked to 2015 Bulgaria Poisoning](#)
- [Third Suspect in Skripal Poisoning Identified as Denis Sergeev, High-Ranking GRU Officer](#)
- [The Search for Denis Sergeev: Photographing a Ghost](#)

GRU UNIT 29155

Following the research into the involvement of Denis Sergeev in the Skripal case, several joint investigations with the BBC and Tamedia have attempted to uncover more details on Sergeev's role in a multitude of international GRU operations.

Telephone metadata and cell-ID metadata allowed us to recreate Sergeev's movements both in Russia and abroad. These analyses show movements from Sergeev's place of residence to several locations housing GRU operations, as well as his movements from Heathrow airport to downtown London. Additional cell phone data such as incoming calls and data usage show a pattern of behaviour that shows a likely supervising and coordinating role in the Salisbury operation and further confirms Sergeev was an active GRU officer at the time of the Salisbury operation.

Further investigation follows Sergeev's movements via his cell phone data back to 2016, when he took his first trip to Switzerland, up to the Salisbury attack in 2018. Sergeev took several trips to Switzerland, and some of his movements show unmistakable linkage to previously known GRU targets, such as the European offices of WADA and the International Court for Sports.

These investigations show the existence of an elite unit, consisting of approximately 20 undercover officers with hands-on combat experience within Russian military intelligence (GRU) engaging in clandestine overseas operations.

On October 9th the New York Times reported additional details on this unit, including its military unit number and the name of its commander, General Andrey Averyanov, and the fact that a key suspect of the Salisbury poisoning, Anatoliy Chepiga, attended the 2017 wedding of the daughter of the GRU unit's commander. This finding counters Putin's statements that Anatoliy Chepiga was a civilian with no links to the Russian state. Bellingcat was able to corroborate the New York Times' findings with visual material of Chepiga at the aforementioned wedding.

Further investigation into the 2015 poisoning of Gebrev in Bulgaria finds that as many as eight GRU officers of the same unit traveled to Bulgaria in the weeks surrounding the poisoning attempt. Using the sequentially numbered passports has allowed Bellingcat to identify all members of the GRU 21955 sub-unit.

IMPACT ARTICLES

- The stories were picked up and covered on major news outlets such as: The Independent, Wired, BBC, USA Today, Mirror, Deutsche Welle, The Week, Le Monde, France 24, Handelsblatt, The New York Times, The Times, RBC, TVRain, BBC Russia, DW Russia, CBS, Helsingin-Sanomat
- [The GRU Globetrotters: Mission London](#)
- [GRU Globetrotters 2: The Spies Who Loved Switzerland](#)
- [Skripal Poisoner Attended GRU Commander Family Wedding](#)
- [The Dreadful Eight: GRU's Unit 29155 and the 2015 Poisoning of Emilian Gebrev](#)

THE YEMEN PROJECT



Over the course of 2019, the Yemen Project has investigated 21 airstrikes in the Yemen conflict. In all of these incidents civilian casualties were reported, unlike common claims from the Saudi led coalition that airstrikes solely target military infrastructure.

The civil war in Yemen that intensified in 2015 and is still ongoing today is one of the worst humanitarian catastrophes in the world. The Saudi led coalition is trying to dislodge the Houthis from power with ground forces, airstrikes and a crippling blockade. In this, Saudi Arabia has the backing of the US providing weapons and logistical support.

The Saudi Led coalition claims no civilians are killed in their airstrikes, and only legitimate military structures are being targeted. However, in many of the incidents assessed Bellingcat was unable to identify any military targets, calling into question the legitimacy of the attacks.

Even in the light of identified military targets, the attacks on these locations appeared to kill and injure far more civilians than was proportionate to any likely military advantage. In some instances, such as deliberate attacks on markets, civilian harm appears entirely foreseeable, suggesting that members of the Coalition have intentionally conducted indiscriminate or disproportionate attacks.

The Joint Incident Assessment Team (JIAT), established and run by the Saudi-led coalition in response to claims of potential IHL violations has brazenly dismissed many of the incidents investigated by Bellingcat, representing a pattern of impunity and lack of accountability that has thus far shaped their work on Yemen, absolving the Coalition of any responsibility.

The UK and the US have committed to billions worth of arms sales to Saudi Arabia and the UAE since the start of the conflict, and have neglected to independently investigate claims of international humanitarian law violations and potential war crimes, even when their arms have been directly tied to these incidents.

IMPACT

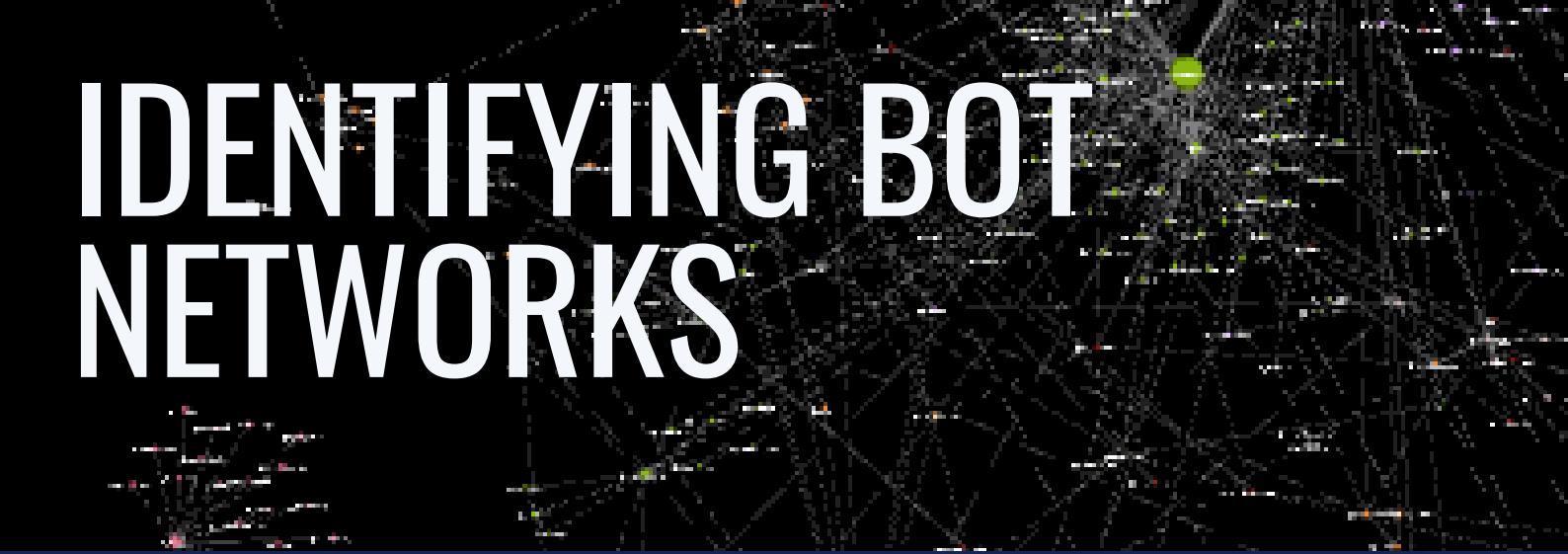
ARTICLES

- These investigations have significantly contributed to the accountability community's understanding of the facts surrounding mass casualty airstrikes, which in turn has contributed to our ability to pressure the states that supply arms to Coalition states.
- The investigations have been used to contradict the Coalition's JIAT. By showing that JIAT is essentially whitewashing the incidents, Bellingcat's investigations are making it increasingly difficult for countries that are subject to the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) to continue issuing export licenses for Saudi Arabia.
- Bellingcat's reports were used by the legal team of the Campaign Against Arms Trade (CAAT) who have challenged the UK government's decision to license the export of military equipment to Saudi Arabia, leading to a Court of Appeal ruling that UK arms sales to Saudi Arabia and Yemen are unlawful. The government has appealed, and the decision to further grant arms licenses to Saudi Arabia has been on hold since June 2019.
- Several investigations were submitted to and accepted as evidence by the UK Parliament's Committees on Arms Export Controls (CAEC) for their inquiry into the government's application of the legal criteria governing arms exports.
- The Global Legal Action Network (GLAN), working closely with Bellingcat has submitted a complaint to the war crimes division of a national police force, using open-source content discovered and verified by Bellingcat as potential evidence for a national criminal investigation, concerning accountability for war crimes in Yemen.
- The stories were picked up and covered on major news outlets such as: the New York Times, CBC, The Guardian, CNN, Just Security.
- [The Yemen Project: ADE10001 – Fayoush Market Strike](#)
- [The Yemen Project: HAJ 10005 – The Abs Prison Strike](#)
- [The Yemen Project: HAJ 10003 – Aahim Triangle, Bani Hassan, Hajjah](#)
- [The Yemen Project: DHA10002 – Sanaban Wedding Strike](#)
- [Yemen Project Release: Attacks Causing Grave Civilian Harm](#)

WEBSITE



IDENTIFYING BOT NETWORKS



Our research doesn't stop at unmasking human wrongdoing to the world - we also worked on exposing bot networks. Benjamin Strick published an investigation uncovering a vast number of bots working on behalf of the Indonesian government.

The ongoing conflict in West Papua had surged as the West Papuan freedom movement seeks independence from Indonesia. While aggression has been documented on both sides, there are grave concerns that Indonesian security forces have been responsible for human rights abuses through the violent suppression of West Papuans in their pursuit of independence.

The fight has had a spill-over to the digital world in the form of censorship and the spread of disinformation. Besides the targeted internet disruption in Papua and Indonesia, and the banning of counter narrative YouTube content, Bellingcat identified an active bot network disseminating pro-government content through major social media platforms, in the form of hashtags on genocide and the West Papua freedom movement, with the intention of drowning out any anti-Indonesian government narrative.

In a separate investigation, Nathan Patin uncovered a major Saudi bot network harassment campaign targeting journalists and dissidents. This investigation revealed the involvement of the Saudi crown prince's right-hand man, Saud Al-Qahtani.

IMPACT ARTICLES

- Our research uncovering an Indonesian bot network was used by Twitter to take down this network.
- Our research uncovering a Saudi bot network was used by Facebook to take down a number of botnets and epicenters of inauthentic activity.
- [Twitter Analysis: Identifying A Pro-Indonesian Propaganda Bot Network.](#)
- [Investigating Information Operations in West Papua: A Digital Forensic Case Study of Cross-Platform Network Analysis.](#)
- [Lord of the Flies: An Open-Source Investigation Into Saud Al-Qahtani.](#)

THE BERLIN BICYCLE ASSASSIN



On August 23, 2019, Zelimkhan Khangoshvili, a Chechen man living in Germany, was assassinated in downtown Berlin. The killer was caught only minutes later as he tried to disappear into a crowd of tourists. The suspect was so far publicly referred to as Vadim S.

A joint investigation between Bellingcat, Der Spiegel and The Insider (Russia) has established that the assassin travelled to Berlin via France under a validly issued Russian passport in the name of Vadim Andreevich Sokolov, born in August 1970. However, we have determined no such person exists in Russia's national citizen database, as well as hundreds of leaked residential databases. This makes Russia's claim that the killer is not connected to the Russian state implausible, as no person in Russia is in a position to obtain a valid Russian passport under a fake identity without the involvement of the state bureaucratic and security apparatus.

In the process of this investigation Bellingcat and its partners have obtained conclusive evidence that the suspect traveled to Berlin under a cover identity with the active support of the Russian state that created a comprehensive back-dated paper trail for his fictitious persona in order to help him obtain the necessary travel and insurance documents and a Schengen visa.

In a later investigation we were able to establish the true identity of the assassin as Vadim Krasikov, formerly the key suspect in the murder of a Russian businessman. In 2014 Russia initiated a national and international search warrant for Krasikov, and an Interpol warrant was issued. However, just over a year later the warrants were withdrawn, while no other suspect in the case had been detained. Krasikov was again able to travel internationally, and had his existence purged from Russian state databases. The silent withdrawal of Krasikov's search warrent, in combination with the purging of data from Russian databases as well as the fabrication of a parallel identity with historic data confirms our earlier conclusion that the assassination in Berlin was a state-sponsored act.

Vadim Krasikov is tied to the elite FSB Vympel unit that has carried out additional assassinations across Russia, the former Soviet Union, and now the European Union.

IMPACT ARTICLES

- Germany's Federal Prosecutor confirmed the key findings presented in our reports, and supports our claims that evidence suggests the Russian Federation may have ordered the murder of the Chechen man in Berlin.
- With evidence pointing to Russian state involvement, the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced that two Russian Diplomats residing in Berlin had been designated personae non grata and were expelled.
- Germany has formally accused Russia of ordering the murder, and Vadim Krasikov, identified by our investigation as the real identity of the assassin, has been charged with the murder.
- The stories were picked up and covered on major news outlets such as: Le Figaro, Deutsche Welle, Daily Beast, Ilta-Sanomat, The Washington Post, Der Spiegel, NTV, Interfax, TVRain, Die Zeit, France 24, the Guardian, Wall Street Journal, de Volkskrant, NPR, the Times, BBC, World Politics Review.
- [Suspected Assassin In The Berlin Killing Used Fake Identity Documents](#)
- [New Evidence Links Russian State to Berlin Assassination](#)
- [Identifying The Berlin Bicycle Assassin: From Moscow to Berlin \(Part 1\)](#)
- [Identifying The Berlin Bicycle Assassin: Russia's Murder Franchise \(Part 2\)](#)

ANTI-EQUALITY MONITORING



Bellingcat researchers Michael Colborne, Oleksiy Kuzmenko, Narine Khachatryan and Aiganysh Aidarbekova are involved in ongoing monitoring and investigative effort into anti-equality and far-right groups in Ukraine, Armenia and Kyrgyzstan. Their research focuses on exposing the existence and movements of far right extremist groups in public life, with the aim of bringing these groups to a halt.

In August 2019, two articles exposed the links between Ukrainian far-right group C14 and a leading Estonian think tank, ICDS. C14 is a group that has been called a 'nationalist hate group' by the US State Department. We revealed that members of C14 and a C14-affiliated group, Education Assembly, had cooperated with ICDS on hosting a summer school about infosec and combating disinformation.

A second article revealed that ICDS had continued their relationship with Education Assembly even after they were made aware of Education Assembly's links to C14. In the wake of this article, ICDS ceased its cooperation with Education Assembly, hampering Education Assembly's efforts to mainstream and legitimize themselves.

Further investigations exposed Russian and Ukrainian far right groups who were sharing and in some instances selling translations of the Christchurch shooter manifesto. We revealed that a Ukrainian-language Telegram channel devoted to praising the shooter had been selling bound versions of the manifesto in a Ukrainian translation. These findings led to a public demand by the Prime Minister of New Zealand, Jacinda Ardern, for the Ukrainian authorities to prosecute anyone selling the manifesto.

IMPACT

ARTICLES

- A respected think tank was forced to cease its cooperation with a front organization for a notorious Ukrainian far-right group, as a result of our publication.
- We have exposed people selling and promoting translations of a terrorist's manifesto - and forced one far-right group to remove a translation from their website.
- Our work received international attention, including from the Prime Minister of New Zealand, Jacinda Ardern, who publicly demanded Ukrainian authorities to prosecute anyone selling the manifesto.
- Our publications about one of the groups sharing the manifesto, the Wotanjugend, lead to the disappearance of their website along with the video of the attacks they had shared on Telegram.
- The team has received multiple death threats for their work, while unconventional impact, this means that the subjects of our work know how much our work matters and want us to stop doing it.
- The far-right responds to our work in a way it doesn't with conventional media coverage of their activities. In response to our August articles on Education Assembly, the group made a 3-minute propaganda video condemning us and trying to deny their extremist connections. The de facto leader of Wotanjugend, Alexey Levkin, contacted a team member in November 2019 to try and 'correct' the record on how we had written about the group.

- [Defend the White Race: American Extremists being Co-Opted By Ukraine's Far right](#)
- [A Tough Weekend For Ukraine's Anti-LGBT "Excremists"](#)
- [Calls To "Fight" LGBT People By Ukrainian Cleric Emblematic Of Church's Proximity To Far Right](#)
- [Why is a Leading Estonian Think Tank Working Alongside Ukraine's Far Right?](#)
- [Ukrainian Far-Right Extremists Receive State Funds to Teach "Patriotism"](#)
- [The Russians and Ukrainians Translating the Christchurch Shooter's Manifesto](#)
- [Yes, It's \(Still\) OK To Call Ukraine's C14 "Neo-Nazi"](#)
- [How to Mainstream Neo-Nazis: A lesson from Ukraine's C14 and an Estonian think tank](#)
- [The "Hardcore" Russian Neo-Nazi Group That Calls Ukraine Home](#)
- [Armenian Far-Right and Church Opposition to Anti-Female Violence Convention](#)
- [How to Mainstream Neo-Nazis: A Lesson from Ukraine's New Government](#)
- [Ukraine's Ministry of Veterans Affairs Embraced the Far Right – With Consequences to the U.S.](#)

TRACKING ONLINE EXTREMIST GROUPS

The most well-read series of articles from 2019 come from Robert Evans, analyzing far-right extremists who turn their digital threats into real, horrifying acts of violence. These communities on notorious sites as 4chan and the now banned 8chan are sharing their extremist views freely, veiled by the anonymity the platform offers. In a similar vein, mass shootings are being contextualized as games in these violent communities, with language about 'high-scores' and one-upping previous mass shooters. Robert's articles have analyzed several of these horrific incidents. The first of these being the shooting at a Mosque in Christchurch New-Zealand, that was preceded by an online manifesto on Twitter called 'The Great Replacement', and followed by a livestream of his actions on Facebook.

On April 27, 2019, a young man with a semi-automatic rifle walked into the Chabad of Poway Synagogue in Poway California. He opened fire, killing one worshipper and wounding three others. Similarly to the shooting in Christchurch, New Zealand, a manifesto began circulating online, which originated in posts on 8chan, more specifically, their /pol/ board.

The El Paso Shooting that took place on August 3, 2019, shows many of the same traits. At around 11am local time, police reports indicated that a gunman had walked into an El Paso Wal-Mart and opened fire, killing 18 people in the attack. Here also, the shooter announced his rampage on 8chan's /pol/ board, and a four-page manifesto was released.

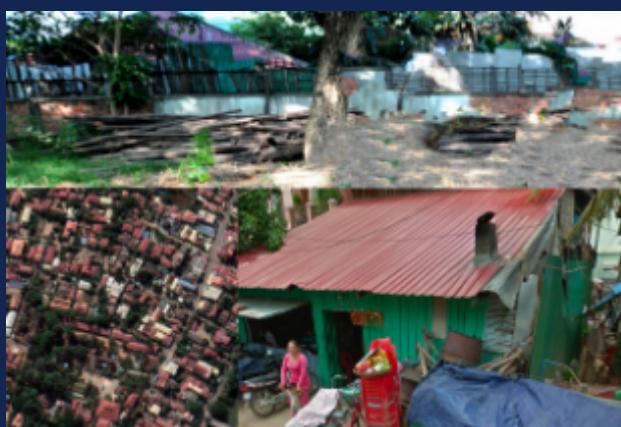
Shocked by these incidents, the media turn to these manifesto's to find explanations for these acts. However, Robert's analyses show that these manifesto's are filled with what is called 'shitposting'; the act of throwing out huge amounts of content, most of it ironic, low-quality, for the purpose of provoking an emotional reaction in viewers that are not familiar with the language used on these Internet platforms. The ultimate goal is to derail productive discussion and distract readers. It is therefore important to view these types of manifesto's with caution, and place them in the right context, therewith not allowing it to take over the discussion about these horrifying acts.

IMPACT ARTICLES

- The articles explaining the content of these manifesto's provided much needed context to their value in light of these horrific events. This helped prevent mainstream media taking the manifesto at face value, and shaped a constructive media narrative.
- The stories were picked up and covered on major news outlets such as: the Intercept, CNN, BBC, Washington Post, FAZ, Columbia Journalism Review, NPR, the New York Times, the Daily Beast, Vox, Der Spiegel, Wired, ABC, Wall Street Journal, Insider.
- [In Portland, A Roving Right-Wing Gang Demasks Left-Wing Activists](#)
- [Shitposting, Inspirational Terrorism, and the Christchurch Mosque Massacre](#)
- [Ignore The Poway Synagogue Shooter's Manifesto: Pay Attention To 8chan's /pol/ Board](#)
- [The El Paso Shooting and the Gamification of Terror](#)
- [The State of California Could Have Stopped 8Chan: It Didn't](#)
- [Dogolachan And The Ghost Of Massacres Past](#)

EUROPOL STOP CHILD-ABUSE

Responding to the Europol 'Stop Child Abuse: Identify an Object' campaign, Bellingcat published a series of investigations geolocating photos of unsolved cases of child abuse. The public campaign aims to crowdsource assistance in identifying objects and landscapes in abuse imagery to help rescue victims of child abuse and exploitation, and bring suspects to justice. A number of our team members and new volunteers, including Carlos Gonzales and Bo, were able to accomplish incredible geolocations with photographs that seemed to have virtually no identifiable details. In one of these instances, investigators searched for dozens of hours before they settled on a potential landscape in Ukraine, to eventually find the exact location of the imagery, providing a valuable lead to Europol investigators in locating both suspects and victims of child abuse.



IMPACT

ARTICLES

- Our researchers have found the location of over 40 pictures and reported their findings back to Europol, where they are being assessed and passed on to national police for investigation.
- The joint work with our audience has resulted in 10 victims being identified and 3 offenders apprehended.
- The stories were picked up and covered on major news outlets such as the BBC.
- [More Europol's "Stop Child Abuse" Photographs Geolocated](#)
- [Europol's Child Abuse Image Geolocated In Ukraine: A Forgotten Story Hidden Behind A Landscape](#)
- [Two Europol StopChildAbuse Images Geolocated: Part I – Madagascar](#)
- [Two Europol StopChildAbuse Images Geolocated: Part II – Cambodia](#)

MH17



Malaysian Airlines Flight MH17 was shot down in 2014. Since then, we have learned it was shot down with a Buk anti-aircraft missile system from Russia's 53rd Anti-Aircraft Missile Brigade. We know it was brought to the battlefield in eastern Ukraine by the Russian Armed Forces and escorted to the launch site by the Russian-backed separatists in the area. What we didn't know is which separatists were linked to the shootdown.

Now, after almost a year-long investigation and analysis of dozens of open source documents, we do know. To understand who played what role in the shootdown we established what the front lines looked like at the time, and which groups operated in which region. Recordings from separatists just moments before the shootdown of MH17 were analyzed to find the identity of those that were involved.

We were able to publish an overview of the key individuals, who had a role in organizing or facilitating the transport of the Buk missile launcher that downed MH17. Most of the identities revealed in this report were new, and their connection to the death of almost 300 people in 2014 is important. But it will be up to an official investigation to determine their full culpability.

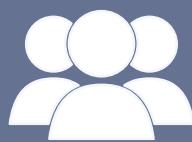
Four individuals, three of whom are Russian citizens, have been indicted by the Dutch district court in The Hague. However, they will most likely still escape accountability, because of one factor: Russia. Russia's clandestine role in Eastern Ukraine has almost guaranteed its pushback on any conclusion that officially links it to the shootdown of MH17. That means the odds of seeing Russian backed separatists held accountable are slim.

IMPACT ARTICLES

- The European Court of Human Rights has requested answers from the Russian Government in connection with two claims brought against Russia over the downing of Malaysian airliner MH17 over militant-controlled parts of Donbas on 17 July 2014.
- Four suspects are facing murder charges for the downing of MH17, in a trial in absentia by a Dutch court that started in March 2020. The suspects formed a chain linking the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's republic with the Russian Federation. It was through this chain that the suspects were able to get heavy military equipment from Russia to the battlefield in Eastern Ukraine.
- The stories were picked up and covered on major news outlets such as: NOS, RTL, Volkskrant, Nu.nl, NRC, NYT, Channel 4, BBC, Nieuwsuur, Tagesschau, NPR, ABC, Deutsche Welle, NBC, the Washington Post, de Correspondent, Forbes, the Conversation, Huffington Post, Kyiv Post, Daily Star, Saarbrücker Zeitung, Financial Times, the Moscow Times, Trouw.
- [Identifying the Separatists Linked to the Downing of MH17](#)
- [JIT Indictments and Reactions: Analyzing New Evidence Linking Separatists and Russian Officials to MH17](#)
- [The Arrest of Vladimir Tsemakh and Its Implications for the MH17 Investigation](#)

BELLINGCAT IN DEVELOPMENT





Staff

Throughout the year we have expanded our staff to a team of 15 staffmembers, adding a business manager, four new researchers & trainers, a project manager, a financial administrator, and a fundraising & training officer.



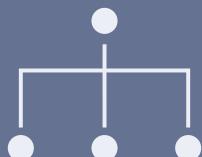
Office

We have moved into our new office in The Hague, the International City of Justice.



Policy plan

A draft policy plan for the following 3 years has been developed, which has now been complemented by a mission statement and strategy.



Supervisory board

Two new members have joined our supervisory board, strengthening it with knowledge on business development and governance.

ANBI status

We have officially been awarded the status of a Public Benefit Organisation in the Netherlands going into effect retrospectively, from January 2019.



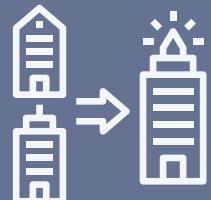
Financial administration

Stricter financial management and control mechanisms have been introduced, including a four-eye payment authorisation principle, setting up of financial software and accounting system, robust monitoring of costs etc.



Integration

Steps have been undertaken towards the merger of the UK entity with the Dutch foundation, completed in April 2020.



Partnerships

In 2019, we worked in close cooperation on various projects with the Global Legal Action Network (GLAN), Human Rights Investigations Lab at UC Berkeley, Lighthouse Reports, the Syrian Archive, Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP), Forensic Architecture and Global Investigative Journalism Network (GIJN).



RECOGNITION

Winners of the
European Press Prize
2019



Winner: Emmy for 'Truth in a Post-Truth World'



The Bellingcat documentary, which aired in 2018 and follows our research surrounding the downing of MH17 and the poisoning of the Skripals in Salisbury, received an Emmy in the category Documentary in November 2019.

Winner: European Press Prize for Investigative Reporting



Bellingcat's Christo Grozev and Daniel Romein and the Insider's Roman Dobrokhotov received the European Press Prize in the category Investigative Reporting for their four part series uncovering the role of the Russian Intelligence unit 21955 in the poisoning of Sergej Skripal and his daughter in March 2018.

Winner: London Press Club Award



The entire investigative team of Bellingcat was awarded the London Press Club award for Digital Journalist of the year 2019.

Winner: Sripps Howard Award



Our partner Newsy received the Sripps Howard Awards 'Roy W. Howard Award' for Innovation for our Bellingcat+Newsy video series visualizing our investigations in an innovative way, making our complex open source investigations accessible to a wider audience.



Winner: Political Studies Association's Political Podcast of the Year

Season one of the Bellingcat podcast detailing the process of our investigation into the downing of flight MH17 was awarded the Political Podcast of the Year in November 2019. Political Studies Association's awards are awarded for the public, academics, media, culture and politicians who have shaped an extraordinary year in politics.



First runner-up: Anti-Fraud Award

Bellingcat was shortlisted for the Anti-Fraud Awards, intended as a token of appreciation for a person, an organization or an initiative that has demonstrably distinguished itself in the fight against fraud and is therefore an exemplary function and a source of inspiration for others.

MEDIA PARTNERS

DER SPIEGEL

newsy

INSIDER

the guardian

BBC

bellingcat

MANAGEMENT TEAM



Eliot Higgins is the founder and executive director of Bellingcat. Eliot's work has focused on the conflict in Syria, the use of chemical weapons, the downing of MH17, and the conflict in Ukraine. Eliot presents the Bellingcat documentary podcast, the first series of which won the Political Studies Association Political Podcast of the Year award, and hosts BellingChat, Bellingcat's podcast discussing the work of Bellingcat with our staff and contributors. Eliot is currently working on the book "We Are Bellingcat", due for release in early 2021, and other media projects.

Eliot Higgins

Dessi Damianova joined Bellingcat in early 2019 as its Business Director. She is responsible for operations, fundraising and partnerships. In the past, she worked as journalist and editor for the BBC World Service in London and Amsterdam. She also worked in international media development managing large programs in Asia, Africa and Eastern Europe. Dessi holds an MA in Journalism & Media Studies from Sofia University and studied Arabic Philology at Damascus University. She is currently following an Executive MBA course at the London School of Economics and Political Science.



Dessi Damianova



Aric Toler has been with Bellingcat since 2014, where he now heads up the site's research and training efforts. His research interests include the war in the Donbas, creative uses of digital investigative methodology, and new research capabilities on the RuNet (Russian internet). He also organizes English and Russian-language training efforts for both for-profit and free Bellingcat workshops. Before joining Bellingcat, he received an M.A. (2013) in Slavic Languages & Literatures from the University of Kansas.

Aric Toler

SUPERVISORY BOARD



Joseph (Sjef) Peeraer is a technology entrepreneur. He grew his last venture - a green energy supplier - from scratch to over € 800m revenue (2019) in 10 years. He is currently looking for opportunities to use his scale-up experience in an emerging high-tech company. His experience in growing an organisation is also the angle from which he supervises Bellingcat. Joseph holds an MSc from Delft University (mechanical engineering) and an MBA from INSEAD.

Joseph (Sjef) Peeraer

Marietje Schaake is the international policy director at Stanford University's Cyber Policy Center and international policy fellow at Stanford's Institute for Human-Centered Artificial Intelligence. She was named President of the Cyber Peace Institute. Between 2009 and 2019, Marietje served as a Member of European Parliament for the Dutch liberal democratic party where she focused on trade, foreign affairs and technology policies. Marietje is affiliated with a number of non-profits including the European Council on Foreign Relations and the Observer Research Foundation in India and writes a monthly column for the Financial Times and a bi-monthly column for the Dutch NRC newspaper.



Marietje Schaake



Paul Radu is co-founder and chief of innovation at Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP). Paul coined the term "laundromat" to define large scale, all-purpose financial fraud vehicles that are used to launder billions of dollars. He is a co-creator of Investigative Dashboard – a research desk that sifts through datasets to help journalists trace people, companies, and assets – and the Visual Investigative Scenarios software, a tool that lets reporters sketch out the people, institutions, and connections in criminal networks. Paul is a winner of the Daniel Pearl Award, the Global Shining Light Award, the European Press Prize, and the Skoll Award for Social Entrepreneurship, and was part of the Panama Papers team that won the 2017 Pulitzer Prize in Journalism.

Paul Radu

FINANCIAL STATEMENT



STATEMENT OF INCOME AND EXPENSE FROM 11 JULY 2018 UNTIL 31 DECEMBER 2019 (IN €)

Income	
Income from Dutch Postcode Lottery	250,000
Income from other nonprofit organizations	155,403
Income from companies	5,000
Income from individuals	4,651
Sum of the proceeds gained	415,054
Income from workshops	499,592
Income from keynotes / presentations	5,604
Sum of earned income	505,196
Total income	920,250
Expenditure	
Spent on the organization's objectives:	
Research and Investigations	354,197
Training	232,103
Costs of income generation	137,609
Management and accounting costs	182,288
Total expenditure	906,197
Operating result	14,053
Financial income and expenditures	-9,608
Balance of income and expenses	4,445

FINANCIAL RATIOS

Spent on the organization's objectives/total generated income	63.7%
Spent on the organization's objectives/total expenses	64.7%
Costs of income generation/total generated income	15.0%
Management and accounting costs/total expenditure	20.1%

BALANCE SHEET AS AT 31 DECEMBER 2019 (IN €)

Assets	
Fixed Assets	
Intangible fixed assets	
Website	8,756
Tangible fixed assets	
Hard- and software	23,845
Office equipment	4,723
Total fixed assets	37,324
Current Assets	
Deposits	27,342
Debtors	19,568
Receivable from Bellingcat LTD	16,825
Accounts receivable and advances	41,860
Total current assets	105,595
Liquid assets	
Bank	488,060
Total assets	630,979
LIABILITIES AS AT 31 DECEMBER 2019 (IN €)	
Continuity reserve	4,445
Current liabilities	
Payable to staff	13,451
Payable to suppliers	18,818
VAT payable	22,045
Other short-term liabilities	31,850
Grants received in advance	510,000
Other amounts received in advance	30,370
Total current liabilities	626,534
Total liabilities	630,979

CASH FLOW STATEMENT 2019 (IN €)

<i>Operational activities</i>	
Balance of income and expenses in the financial year	4.445
Depreciation	2,110
Gross cash flow on the basis of operational activities	6,555
Changes in current assets	-105.594
Changes in current liabilities	626.534
Net cash flow on the basis of operational activities	520,940
<i>Investment activities</i>	
Changes to fixed assets	-39.435
Changes in liquid assets	488,060
Liquid assets at the start of the financial year	0
Liquid assets at the end of the financial year	488,060
Changes in liquid assets	488,060

OUR SUPPORTERS

The team at Bellingcat would like to thank everybody who made it possible to investigate and uncover wrongdoing in 2019. Without the support from our donors, both foundations and individuals, we would not be where we are today.

Thank you for your generous support!

