

March 10, 2024

To Mr. Michael Schwartz:

I am writing to ask you a series of questions about an article signed by you and published by The New York Times on September 3, 2021, entitled "Married Kremlin Spies, a Shadowy Mission to Moscow and Unrest in Catalonia".

In this article you make a series of statements about the Catalan separatist movement and about various militants of this cause.

These statements have had an important impact on public opinion, on Catalan politics and on the judicial proceedings aimed at prosecuting Catalan separatism.

Therefore, we believe that it is essential to know in greater depth certain details of the piece that you sign. A piece in which the readers are not offered any data, names or documents that would allow them to verify your assertions.

Considering the importance of the facts discussed in your article, the readers of the New York Times in particular and the public in general need to know what the basis of your assertions is.

Therefore, I am sending you two documents:

Document 1) List of 25 questions about your article.

Document 2) Transcript of your article with the lines numbered to facilitate the location of the passages that require answers.

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onsidering the importance of the collective fight against disinformation, we ask you to please send us your answers as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

Albano Dante Fachin Pozzi
OCTUVRE.CAT

Section A

In line 16 you mention *"a European intelligence report which was reviewed by The New York Times"*.

Question 1: Who is the author of the aforementioned report?

Question 2: Who commissioned the report?

Question 3: To whom was the report addressed?

Question 4: What is the date of the report?

Section B

In line 22 you explain that *"Other confidential documents indicate that Russia was a central concern for Alay and Puigdemont."*

Question 5: What are these other "confidential documents"?

Section C

In line 28 you say: "*And in Spain, the Russians have also offered assistance to far-right parties, according to the intelligence report.*" I interpret this as referring to the same report referred to in line 19.

Question 6: Is my interpretation correct?

Section D

In line 39 you refer to "*A confidential police report by Spain's Guardia Civil*".

Question 7: Exactly who and in which unit of the Guardia Civil wrote this report?

Question 8: To whom was the report addressed?

Question 9: What is the date of the report?

Section E

In line 42 you refer to "*A secret 700-page transcript of text messages*".

Question 10: Is that transcript included in the "confidential report" I quote in the previous question or is it another document?
In the case of a different document:

Question 11: By whom and on what date is this "transcript" made?

Question 12: To whom is this transcript addressed?

Section F

In line 51 you write: "*Spanish authorities later determined that operatives from a specialized Russian military intelligence group called Unit 29155, which has been linked to attempted coups and assassinations in Europe, had been present in Catalonia around the time of the referendum*".

Question 13: What "Spanish authorities" are you referring to?

Question 14: ¿On what date did these "Spanish authorities" "determine" this?

Question 15: Did you have access to the documentation that explains how these "Spanish authorities" determined this information?

Section G

In lines 67-69 one can read: *"The Times has drawn on the 10-page European intelligence report, the substance of which was confirmed by two Spanish officials".*

Question 16: Is this "European intelligence report" the same as the one referred to in section 1 of this document?

Section H

In lines 67-71 the text reads: *"The Times has drawn on (...) case files from two separate confidential investigations by magistrates in Barcelona and Madrid, which include the transcript of the texts, but have not yielded any charges related to the Moscow meetings"*

Question 19: Are these "files of two confidential investigations" the same "confidential documents" mentioned in line 29 or are you referring to different "confidential documents"?

Question 18: Who are these "magistrates from Barcelona and Madrid"?

Question 19: To which lawsuits do these investigation files belong?

Question 20: The "transcripts of the texts" (line 104) is the same as the one referred to in line 59?

Section I

In lines 67-74 you continue thus: *"The Times has drawn on (...) interviews with independence politicians and activists in Catalonia, as well as security officials in Spain and abroad."*

Question 21: Who are the "politicians" and "pro-independence activists" The New York Times spoke to for this piece?

Question 22: On what dates did these interviews take place?

Question 23: Who are the "security officials in Spain" that The New York Times spoke to for this piece?

Question 24: Who are the "security officials abroad" The New York Times spoke to for this piece?

Section J

Line 76 start with: *"The June 2020 intelligence report said that Mr. Alay, together with Alexander Dmitrenko, a Russian businessman, sought financial and technical assistance from Russia"*

Question 25: Is this "intelligence report" the same as the one referred to in line 19?

Section K

In line 82 you mention *"The text messages, taken from Mr. Alay's phone when he was briefly arrested in October 2020, help corroborate portions of the intelligence report."*

Question 26: Are these "text messages" the same as those referred to in line 59?

Question 27: Is this "intelligence report" the same as the one referred to in line 19?

Section L

In line 106 you mention "*the intelligence report*".

Question 28: Is "the intelligence report" the same as the one discussed in line 19?

Section M

In line 128 you mention Josep Lluís Alay's "*encrypted correspondence*".

Question 29: Have you seen this "encrypted correspondence"?

Question 30: Where have you seen it?

Section N

Line 144 refer to "*one of the confidential police files*".

Question 31: Which police force is the author of these files?

Question 32: What is the date on these files?

Question 33: Who signs these files?

Question 34: Who commissioned this report?

Section O

Line 155 again mentions "*the intelligence report*".

Question 35: Is this "intelligence report" the same as the one discussed in line 19?

1 Married Kremlin Spies, a Shadowy Mission to Moscow and Unrest in Catalonia

2
3 **Intelligence files suggest** an aide to a top Catalan separatist sought help from Russia in
4 the struggle to break with Spain. A fierce new protest group emerged shortly afterward.

5
6 BARCELONA, Spain — In the spring of 2019, an emissary of Catalonia’s top separatist
7 leader traveled to Moscow in search of a political lifeline.

8 The independence movement in Catalonia, the semiautonomous region in Spain’s
9 northeast, had been largely crushed after a referendum on breaking away two years
10 earlier. The European Union and the United States, which supported Spain’s effort to keep
11 the country intact, had rebuffed the separatists’ pleas for support.

12 But in Russia, a door was opening.

13 In Moscow, the emissary, Josep Lluís Alay, a senior adviser to the self-exiled former
14 Catalan president Carles Puigdemont, met with current Russian officials, former
15 intelligence officers and the well-connected grandson of a K.G.B. spymaster. The aim was
16 to secure Russia’s help in severing Catalonia from the rest of Spain, **according to a**
17 **European intelligence report, which was reviewed by The New York Times.**

18 Asked about the report’s findings, both Mr. Alay and Mr. Puigdemont confirmed the trips to
19 Moscow, which have never been reported, but insisted they were part of regular outreach
20 to foreign officials and journalists. Mr. Alay said any suggestion that he was seeking
21 Russian assistance was “a fantasy story created by Madrid.”

22 But **other confidential documents indicate that Russia was a central preoccupation**
23 **between Mr. Alay and Mr. Puigdemont.**

24 For Russia, outreach to the separatists would fit President Vladimir V. Putin’s strategy of
25 trying to sow disruption in the West by supporting divisive political movements. In Italy,
26 secret audio recordings revealed a Russian plot to covertly finance the hard-right League
27 party. In Britain, a Times investigation uncovered discussions among right-wing fringe
28 figures about opening bank accounts in Moscow. **And in Spain, the Russians have also**
29 **offered assistance to far-right parties, according to the intelligence report.**

30 Whether Mr. Alay knew it or not, many of the officials he met in Moscow are involved in
31 what has become known as the Kremlin’s hybrid war against the West. This is a layered
32 strategy involving propaganda and disinformation, covert financing of disruptive political
33 movements, hacking and leaking information (as happened in the 2016 U.S. presidential
34 election) and “active measures” like assassinations meant to erode the stability of
35 Moscow’s adversaries.

36 It is unclear what help, if any, the Kremlin has provided to the Catalan separatists. But Mr.
37 Alay’s trips to Moscow in 2019 were followed quickly by the emergence of a secretive
38 protest group, Tsunami Democratic, which disrupted operations at Barcelona’s airport and
39 cut off a major highway linking Spain to northern Europe. **A confidential police report by**
40 **Spain’s Guardia Civil,** obtained by The Times, found that Mr. Alay was involved in the
41 creation of the protest group.

42 **A secret 700-page transcript of text messages** shows the concerted effort made by Mr.
43 Alay and others in Mr. Puigdemont’s circle to cultivate ties to Russians with links to the
44 country’s intelligence establishment.

45 "I'm thinking a lot about Russia," Mr. Alay texted Mr. Puigdemont on Aug. 23 last year. "And
46 these days it's all very, very complicated."

47 Rumors of Russian involvement in Catalonia first emerged soon after Mr. Puigdemont's
48 government held the independence referendum in October 2017. The referendum passed,
49 overwhelmingly, with anti-separatist voters largely boycotting; Spanish authorities declared
50 it illegal and imprisoned those political leaders who did not flee abroad.

51 **Spanish authorities later determined that operatives from a specialized Russian**
52 **military intelligence group called Unit 29155, which has been linked to attempted**
53 **coups and assassinations in Europe, had been present in Catalonia around the time**
54 **of the referendum,** but Spain has provided no evidence that they played an active role.

55 Many Catalan independence leaders have accused the authorities in Madrid of using the
56 specter of Russian interference to tarnish what they described as a grass-roots movement
57 of regular citizens. The referendum was supported by a fragile coalition of three political
58 parties that quickly dissolved over disputes about ideology and strategy. Even as some
59 parties pushed for a negotiated settlement with Madrid, Mr. Puigdemont, a former
60 journalist with a Beatles-like mop of hair, has eschewed compromise.

61 Asked about the Russian outreach, the current Catalan government under President Pere
62 Aragonés distanced itself from Mr. Puigdemont.

63 "These trips to Moscow were not taken on behalf of the Catalan government and took
64 place without Pere Aragonés's knowledge," said Sergi Sabria, Mr. Aragonés's spokesman.
65 "These people are not even part of the president's party, which is not aware of the
66 agendas of other parties."

67 To piece together the contacts with Russia, **The Times has drawn**

68

69 **on the 10-page European intelligence report, the substance of which was confirmed**
70 **by two Spanish officials;**

71 **case files from two separate confidential investigations by magistrates in Barcelona**
72 **and Madrid, which include the transcript of the texts, but have not yielded any**
73 **charges related to the Moscow meetings;**

74 **and interviews with independence politicians and activists in Catalonia, as well as**
75 **security officials in Spain and abroad.**

76 **The June 2020 intelligence report** said that Mr. Alay, together with Alexander Dmitrenko,
77 a Russian businessman, sought financial and technical assistance from Russia for the
78 creation of banking, telecommunications and energy sectors separate from Spain. The
79 pair, along with Mr. Puigdemont's lawyer, Gonzalo Boye, also consulted with a leader of a
80 violent Russian criminal syndicate, part of an effort to set up a secret money pipeline to
81 fund their activities, **the report said.**

82 **The text messages, taken from Mr. Alay's phone when he was briefly arrested in**
83 **October 2020, help corroborate portions of the intelligence report.**

84 "We're working for The Americans," Mr. Alay said at one point, referring to the FX show
85 about deep-cover K.G.B. officers in the United States.

86 It was no joke. Two of his primary contacts in Russia, according to the intelligence report,
87 were a husband-and-wife team of intelligence officers whose story helped inspire the
88 series.

89 'Good News From Moscow'

90 The Catalan independence movement had been building momentum for a decade but by
91 2019 had fallen into disarray.

92 Nine leaders of the movement were in jail and would soon be sentenced to long prison
93 terms for their roles in the referendum. (This summer, all received pardons.) Others had
94 fled Spain, including Mr. Puigdemont, who is living in Belgium and is now a member of the
95 European Parliament, even as he has railed against the "silence of the main European
96 institutions."

97 The European Union declared the Catalan independence referendum illegal. Russia's
98 position, by contrast, was more equivocal. President Vladimir V. Putin described the
99 Catalan separatist drive as Europe's comeuppance for supporting independence
100 movements in Eastern Europe after the fall of the Soviet Union.

101 "There was a time when they welcomed the collapse of a whole series of governments in
102 Europe, not hiding their happiness about this," Mr. Putin said. "We talk about double
103 standards all the time. There you go."

104 In March 2019, Mr. Alay traveled to Moscow, just weeks after leaders of the Catalan
105 independence movement went on trial. Three months later, Mr. Alay went again.

106 several active foreign intelligence officers, as well as Oleg V. Syromolotov, the former chief
107 in Russia, according to the intelligence report, Mr. Alay and Mr. Dmitrenko met with

108 of counterintelligence for the Federal Security Service, Russia's domestic intelligence
109 agency, who now oversees counterterrorism as a deputy minister at the Russian foreign
110 ministry.

111 Mr. Alay denied meeting Mr. Syromolotov and the officers but acknowledged meeting
112 Yevgeny Primakov, the grandson of a famous K.G.B. spymaster, in order to secure an
113 interview with Mr. Puigdemont on an international affairs program he hosted on Kremlin
114 television. Last year, Mr. Primakov was appointed by Mr. Putin to run a Russian cultural
115 agency that, according to European security officials, often serves as a front for
116 intelligence operations.

117 "Good news from Moscow," Mr. Alay later texted to Mr. Puigdemont, informing him of Mr.
118 Primakov's appointment. In another exchange, Mr. Dmitrenko told Mr. Alay that Mr.
119 Primakov's elevation "puts him in a very good position to activate things between us."

120 Mr. Alay also confirmed meeting Andrei Bezrukov, a decorated former officer with Russia's
121 foreign intelligence service. For more than a decade, Mr. Bezrukov and his wife, Yelena
122 Vavilova, were deep cover operatives living in the United States using the code names
123 Donald Heathfield and Tracey Foley.

124 It was their story of espionage, arrest and eventual return to Russia in a spy swap that
125 served as a basis for the television series "The Americans." Mr. Alay appears to have
126 become close with the couple. Working with Mr. Dmitrenko, he spent about three months
127 in the fall of 2020 on a Catalan translation of Ms. Vavilova's autobiographical novel "The
128 Woman Who Can Keep Secrets," according to his encrypted correspondence.

129 Mr. Alay, who is also a college professor and author, said he was invited by Mr. Bezrukov,
130 who now teaches at a Moscow university, to deliver two lectures.

131 Mr. Alay was accompanied on each of his trips by Mr. Dmitrenko, 33, a Russian
132 businessman who is married to a Catalan woman. Mr. Dmitrenko did not respond to
133 requests for comment. But Spanish authorities have monitored him and in 2019 rejected a
134 citizenship application from him because of his Russian contacts, according to a Spanish
135 Ministry of Justice decision reviewed by The Times.

136 The decision said Mr. Dmitrenko “receives missions” from Russian intelligence and also
137 “does different jobs” for leaders of Russian organized crime.

138 A Political Tsunami

139 A few months after Mr. Alay’s trips to Moscow, Catalonia erupted in protests.

140 A group calling itself Tsunami Democratic occupied the offices of one of Spain’s largest
141 banks, closed a main highway between France and Spain for two days and orchestrated
142 the takeover of the Barcelona airport, forcing the cancellation of more than a hundred
143 flights.

144 The group’s origins have remained unclear, but one of the confidential police files
145 stated that Mr. Alay attended a meeting in Geneva, where he and other independence
146 activists finalized plans for Tsunami Democratic’s unveiling.

147 Three days after Tsunami Democratic occupied the Barcelona airport, two Russians flew
148 from Moscow to Barcelona, the Catalan capital, according to flight records obtained by The
149 Times.

150 One was Sergei Sumin, whom the intelligence report describes as a colonel in Russia’s
151 Federal Protective Service, which oversees security for Mr. Putin and is not known for
152 activities abroad.

153 The other was Artyom Lukoyanov, the adopted son of a top adviser to Mr. Putin, one who
154 was deeply involved in Russia’s efforts to support separatists in eastern Ukraine.

155 According to the intelligence report, Mr. Alay and Mr. Dmitrenko met the two men in
156 Barcelona for a strategy session to discuss the independence movement, though the
157 report offered no other details.

158 Mr. Alay denied any connection to Tsunami Democratic. He confirmed that he had met with
159 Mr. Sumin and Mr. Lukoyanov at the request of Mr. Dmitrenko, but only to “greet them
160 politely.”

161 Even as the protests faded, Mr. Puigdemont’s associates remained busy. His lawyer, Mr.
162 Boye, flew to Moscow in February 2020 to meet Vasily Khristoforov, whom Western law
163 enforcement agencies describe as a senior Russian organized crime figure. The goal,
164 according to the report, was to enlist Mr. Khristoforov to help set up a secret funding
165 channel for the independence movement.

166 In an interview, Mr. Boye acknowledged meeting in Moscow with Mr. Khristoforov, who is
167 wanted in several countries including Spain on suspicion of financial crimes, but said they
168 only discussed matters relating to Mr. Khristoforov’s legal cases.

169 By late 2020, Mr. Alay’s texts reveal an eagerness to keep his Russian contacts happy. In
170 exchanges with Mr. Puigdemont and Mr. Boye, he said they should avoid any public
171 statements that might anger Moscow, especially about the democracy protests that Russia
172 was helping to disperse violently in Belarus.

173 Mr. Puigdemont did not always heed the advice, appearing in Brussels with the Belarusian
174 opposition and tweeting his support for the protesters, prompting Mr. Boye to text Mr. Alay
175 that “we will have to tell the Russians that this was just to mislead.”