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**Vor­sit­zen­der: Olaf Scholz Ge­schäfts­füh­ren­der Vor­stand:**

**Ole von Beust Ehrenvorsitzender: Dr. Klaus von Dohnanyi**

**Press Release**

**Safety for Tomislav Kezarovski:**

**The 51-year old investigative reporter from Macedonia is the last of this year’s guests of the Hamburg Foundation for Politically Persecuted People.**

Hamburg, 14 August 2017

For a long time, the defiant journalist Tomislav Kezarovski has lived with the fear of prosecution by the Macedonian authorities. During the weeks prior to his departure, it was particularly bad, the investigative reporter from Macedonia explains shortly after his arrival on 14 August 2017: „Now, I want to try to rid myself of this permanent anxiety.”

Kezarovski started his career as a journalist in 1999 at the daily newspaper Utrinski Vesnik in Skopje. Both in 2003 und 2013, the Macedonian Media Institute honored him with an award for the best investigative report. Until mid 2013, he worked for the newspaper Nova Makedonija. Then, the reporter fell victim to a scheme by the state authorities.

Based on a false claim, Kezarovski was imprisoned on 28 May 2013. Although he was able to refute all allegations in court, he was sentenced to a 4-year prison term in the first instance. After five months, he was released into house arrest. Finally, the court of appeal halved his sentence, counting in the served prison term and period of house arrest.

The authorities, however, had reached their goal: They stopped Kezarovski’s research on a topic too sensitive for the government’s liking.

In the independent magazine Fokus, publisher Nikola Mladenov – also a critic of the government – had repeatedly criticised the Macedonian head of government Nikola Gruevski and his network of corruption and nepotism. In late March of 2013, Mladenov died in a suspicious car crash. To this day, the investigating authorities refuse to examine obvious inconsistencies in the official report, which were uncovered at the accident site and published by Kezarovski.

Since losing his job at Nova Makedonija, Tomislav Kezarovski can no longer work as a journalist in Macedonia. Every dismissed court case is followed by yet another criminal charge by the prosecution. Most recently, Kerazovski expected to be arrested again any day.

The case Kerazovski exposes the anti-democratic and repressive politics of the Gruevski regime. Even after the change of government in June of last year, his supporters remain in their positions. There are no signs that the aspiring EU member Macedonia has changed its politics. Xhabir Deralla, president of the Macedonian human rights organization "Civil Center for Freedom", calls the prosecution of the journalist Kerazovski the "obvious evidence for a deeply politicized judiciary". Kezarovski’s application for a fellowship by the Hamburg Foundation for Politically Persecuted People was supported by the organizations Reporters without Borders and the Civil Center for Freedom in Skopje.

**Press contact: Martina Bäurle mobile phone: +49 151-56 311316 www.Hamburger-Stiftung.de**