

# European companies sold spyware to despots: media

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Credit: Pixabay/CC0 Public Domain

European companies sold powerful spyware to authoritarian regimes which have used it against dissenters, a group of investigative media said Thursday.

According to the probe—by European Investigative Collaborations (EIC) and spearheaded by the French site Mediapart and Germany's Der Spiegel weekly—European companies "supplied dictators cyber-surveillance tools for more than a decade", EIC said in a statement.

"During the last decade the Western world has encouraged and applauded the [digital tools](#) that empower democracy activism in countries under authoritarian regimes," it said. "But at the same time European companies have supplied such authoritarian regimes the digital back doors to turn any digital device into powerful spying tools against dissenters," it said.

The Predator Files investigation, named after the software, said the sellers benefited from "the passive complicity of many European governments".

The investigation focused on the Intellexa Alliance, a group of companies through which EIC said Predator software had been supplied to authoritarian states.

Intellaxa is run by former Israeli intelligence officials mostly based in Europe, and was targeted by US sanctions in July.

"Activists, journalists and academics have been targeted, as have European and US officials," it said.

The findings of the investigation run by 15 media are based on hundreds of confidential documents obtained by Mediapart and Der Spiegel and analyzed with the help of the Security Lab of Amnesty International, a human rights organization.

Amnesty called Intellexa "a complex, morphing group of interconnected companies" and Predator "its highly invasive spyware".

"Intellexa alliance's products have been found in at least 25 countries across Europe, Asia, the Middle East and Africa and have been used to undermine human rights, [press freedom](#), and [social movements](#) across the globe," Amnesty said.

"Highly invasive surveillance products are being traded on a near industrial scale and are free to operate in the shadows without oversight or any genuine accountability," it added.

Mediapart said that a French [company](#), Nexa, had sold Predator to "at least three autocracies: Egypt, Vietnam and Madagascar".

Mediapart said the spyware had also been sold to Qatar, Congo Brazzaville, the United Arab Emirates and Pakistan "under the complacent eyes of the French secret services".

Criminal charges against Nexa and four of its managers, brought in 2021 over spyware sales, were downgraded a year later, making their trial unlikely, legal sources told AFP.

EIC said its members would publish further details over the coming days.

The recent revelations follow a 2021 scandal around Pegasus, a [spyware](#) sold by Israeli company NSO Group, with several media reporting that it had been used to illegally spy on more than 50,000 individuals.

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