

Nemtsov Phone Tap Is Probed

By [Jonathan Earle](#)

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Following official requests from two Duma deputies, investigators on Wednesday opened a check into accusations that Kremlin allies illegally tapped opposition leader Boris Nemtsov's phone and published the recordings online.

Nemtsov, along with A Just Russia Deputies Ilya Ponomaryov and Gennady Gudkov, appealed to investigators to look into how the recordings ended up on the Kremlin-friendly tabloid [Lifenews.ru](#), which they said violated Nemtsov's legal right to privacy.

In the 36 recordings, which Lifenews began posting on Monday, Nemtsov is heard disparaging a wide range of fellow opposition figures, including Ponomaryov, environmental activist Yevgenia Chirikova and Ekho Moskvyy editor-in-chief Alexei Venediktov.

A co-leader of the unregistered Parnas party, Nemtsov is one of the organizers of an opposition rally that is expected to draw tens of thousands this Saturday. He co-organized a similar rally on Dec. 10.

Since only the security services are believed to be capable of tapping telephones, the phone-hacking scandal has been widely seen as an attempt by Kremlin allies to divide the traditionally fractured opposition and convince potential protesters to stay home.

Lifenews.ru is part of a media empire co-owned by billionaire and Putin ally Yury Kovalchuk, and the tabloid participated in a pre-election smear campaign against independent election-monitoring group Golos. State-controlled NTV television, which ran its own "exposé" on Golos several weeks ago, made the Nemtsov recordings a top story on its "Extreme News" program this week.

Investigative Committee spokesman Vladimir Markin confirmed that the check had been opened into the phone hacking, Interfax reported. The inquiry could lead to a criminal investigation.

Lifenews chief Ashot Gabrelyanov denied wrongdoing, saying an investigation should have been opened into Nemstov. "We exposed people who are working against the state, and now they want to punish us," he told Interfax.

Nemtsov confirmed the partial authenticity of the recordings on his LiveJournal [blog](#) on Tuesday. But he said that "some are doctored and some are just fake," after the initial batch of recordings surfaced. He offered an apology to anybody he offended.

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