

In December 2010, just as the first rounds of WikiLeaks' State Department Cables were metastasizing around the Internet, I spoke with Evgeny **Morozov**, a Belarusian academic and writer with a famously pessimistic attitude toward the Internet's ability to democratize global politics. Instead, he believes digital tools have only tightened governments' control over their citizens.

I ask him about WikiLeaks, and whether it might be an exception to his rule. He thinks not. "Information can embarrass governments, but you have to look at the nature of governments as well as the nature of information to measure this embarrassment factor," he answers.

In Russia or China, he specifies, corruption is already an open secret. "Just go and take photos of their villas and the summer houses they buy with their state salaries," he says. "It's already in the open, but exposure by itself in these countries doesn't lead to democratic change."

And what about BalkanLeaks, the Bulgarian site that at that time was just starting to get its hands on some juicy documents? Bulgaria is a subject **Morozov** knows well: He studied for several years at Sofia's American University.

"I don't know what information you could publish to embarrass the Balkans. It's a tough one," he says. "There's an environment that's so suffused with cynicism toward politicians that to me it's hard to imagine what kind of stuff would need to be leaked."

In May 2011, BalkanLeaks put that cynicism to the test. It published the words of the U.S. ambassador that labeled Bulgaria's prime minister a criminal several times over. The news reverberated around the country's blogs and was written up in several newspapers.

And then, as **Morozov** predicted, very little happened.

In a display of frantic backpedaling, the U.S. embassy in Sofia released a statement backing Borisov. "While we cannot comment on the content of alleged classified materials which may have been leaked, we would like to underscore that the U.S. and Bulgaria share an excellent relationship and that our high level of bilateral cooperation speaks for itself."

Borisov himself angrily told one reporter who asked about his ties to Lukoil that "I do not read WikiLeaks," and "will not comment on yellow press publications."

Assange seems more interested in hosting a TV talk show on the Russian government-funded network RT than in rebuilding his organization, and WikiLeaks-watchers from Evgeny **Morozov** to Richard Stallman argue that the group's fate holds dark lessons. With WikiLeaks, they say, the Web turned out to be less the free, anarchic realm we once imagined than a restrictive platform tightly controlled by corporations and governments.