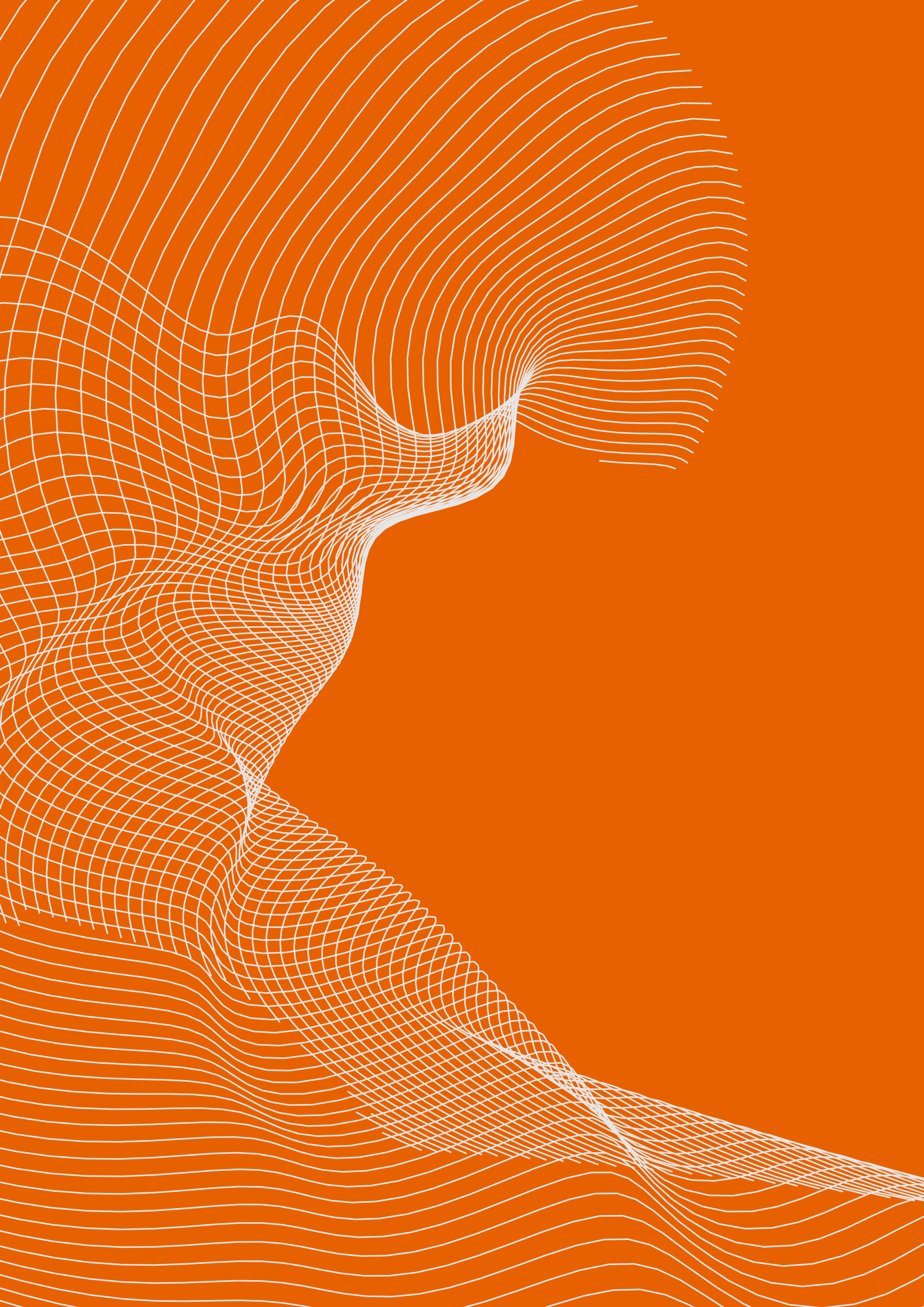




Southeast Europe Coalition on Whistleblower Protection

Newsletter

No.13 DECEMBER 2023



SAFEGUARDING ACHIEVEMENTS AND KICK-STARTING NEW PROJECTS

Appreciation note

As we leave behind the International Anti-Corruption Day on December 8, the Coalition extends appreciation to all its members for their ongoing efforts in the fight against corruption and to the National Endowment for Democracy for its continuous backing of whistleblower protection and awareness initiatives in the region.

Initial stage of the project implementation

In the initial phase of project planning and execution, the Coalition has greenlit specific projects. This newsletter aims to provide updates on some of these implementations. Nevertheless, the Coalition is actively overseeing and addressing potential challenges to accomplishments in the region, such as the situation involving the whistleblower authority and legislation in Slovakia.



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WHISTLEBLOWING

UNDER THREAT

On October 17, 2023, Transparency International Slovakia issued an initial statement addressing the attacks launched by Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico on TI Slovakia and the broader civil society sector. The alarming tactic of portraying civil society actors as foreign agents employed by contemporary populists undermines democracy and human rights.

This two-pronged attack involves framing civil society actors as foreign agents and concurrently attempting to undermine the existing whistleblower protection authority in the country. TI Slovakia has played a pivotal role in establishing the Whistleblower Protection Office. It has partnered to provide expertise, strengthening the capacities of this institution. The recent assaults on the Office were triggered by police investigations, particularly those involving high-profile politicians for whom the Office had granted protection to whistleblowers.

In response to these developments, on November 18, 2023, Coalition co-coordinators Arjan Dyrnishi and Mark

I SUPPORT WHISTLEBLOWERS



Whistleblowing in Slovakia - A timeline

Establishing the Whistleblower Protection Office in Slovakia was a major achievement as it had suffered from a two-year stagnation.

- The Office was founded under the Whistleblower Protection Act, which took effect on March 1, 2019.
- In July 2020, the new minister of justice prioritized Office.
- MPs elected on February 5, 2021, Ms. Zuzana Dluhošová, as the head of the Slovak Whistleblower Protection Office.
- In October 2023, newly appointed Interior Minister Matúš Šutaj Eštok temporarily suspended six police officers who had been granted whistleblower protection.

Worth, communications manager Klaudia Koxha, and whistleblower top expert and lawyer from the Government Accountability Project in the United States, Tom Devine, met with their colleague from TI Slovakia, Zuzana Grochalová. The discussion centered on the ongoing events and the Coalition's efforts to pressure Slovak and EU authorities to implement corrective measures.

Legal expertise has confirmed that the proposed government changes have a retroactive function, potentially leading to the pardon of cases and the expedited closure of ongoing cases. It is essential to note that these amendments run counter to the EU Whistleblower Directive, to which Slovakia, as an EU Member State, is obligated.

- The matter is becoming politicized, followed by protests organized by the opposition party.
- As of December 18, 2023, at least 13.000 people had signed TI Slovakia's petition against the government's move in less than a month.
- The government planned on pushing the vote on the new amendments in Parliament before Christmas. However, on December 28, the President of Slovakia moved the vote to the beginning of January 2024.

The statement

Transparency International Slovakia is dedicated to combating corruption and enhancing public oversight, objectives that serve the interests of society as a whole, excluding wrongdoers. In the long run, the organization advocates for increased transparency in the non-profit sector, pushing for non-governmental organizations' mandatory publication of financial statements. Information about their projects and financing has been accessible for over two decades on the web, in annual reports and financial statements, easily reachable by everyone.

Transparency International Slovakia firmly believes that a politician-driven approach, creating an adversary from civil society, is unacceptable in Slovakia as an EU member state and remains committed to monitoring abuses of power, promoting transparency, and encouraging public participation in decision-making. They welcome any support in joining these efforts.

HEROES' STORIES

MEETING WITH UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

On December 18, 2023, Coalition member Public Interest Advocacy Center organized a panel cooperating with the Faculty of Political Sciences in Sarajevo. The special guest was the prominent whistleblower Emir Mešić. The aim was to explain to students how whistleblowing works and how whistleblowers navigate the challenges that come with reporting corruption.

Mr. Mešić shared invaluable insights about denouncing perceived corruption safely, offering students an enlightening experience. Emir proved to be an extensive source of information, captivating the audience with his perspectives on



If you reported
corruption,
you've
already won.

- EMIR MEŠIĆ



anonymity and reporting approaches. He pointed out that there is progress being made regarding whistleblower protection. The former director of APIK [1] dismissed reports, unlike the new director, who stated publicly that nothing was done to protect the whistleblowers, and this alone can be considered a change for the better. The students' engaging questions enriched the session, adding depth to the discussion. Students were especially interested in Mr. Mešić's case, how to improve public relations towards whistleblowers through institutions, and motivate people to continue their fight, overcoming fears. The simple response is to be aware of the importance of whistleblowers. Ultimately, they bring funds back into the budget. Social media platforms and personal outreach or through similar events should be used to their full potential.

[1] Agency for the Prevention of Corruption and Coordination of the Fight against Corruption



I must admit,
I wasn't very
familiar with the
topic of
whistleblowing
prior to this
panel.

- STUDENT
FROM THE AUDIENCE

WHISTLEBLOWER

CHRONICLES

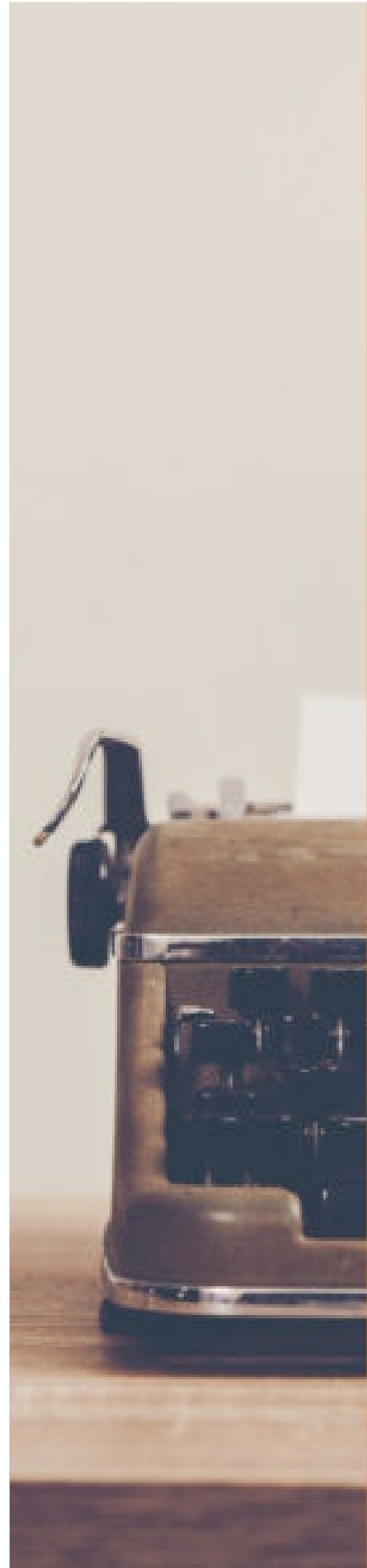
Our team has been diligently revising calls for journalist pitches, and the response has been remarkable. Our call has been widely distributed, gaining visibility through prominent media outlets, including 'Transition, 'a highly influential regional platform based in Prague, and the Center for the Study of Democracy in Bulgaria. Additionally, our call has been featured on three notable journalism platforms: IJNet, Hostwire, and SEEMO. These active platforms have played a crucial role in disseminating our call and fostering diverse perspectives. We are thrilled to report that we've



Special thanks go to Bulgarian journalist and professor Alexenia Dimitrova for managing the call and providing expert opinions on selecting and finalizing the winning pieces.

received compelling stories from various countries, including Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Romania, and Ukraine. Our team has already approved ten intriguing story ideas, and we are pleased to share that four final articles have been delivered. The first article delves into Montenegro, focusing on the gradual yet steady improvement in whistleblower protection. The second article focuses on reporting corruption in Ukraine. The third one explores the implications of the new media law in Croatia about whistleblowing. Finally, the fourth article investigates why Hungarian whistleblowers turn to the independent media rather than official channels to report corruption.

Check out the detailed stories on the Coalition's website under the ["Whistleblower Chronicles."](#)



MORE FROM THE COALITION

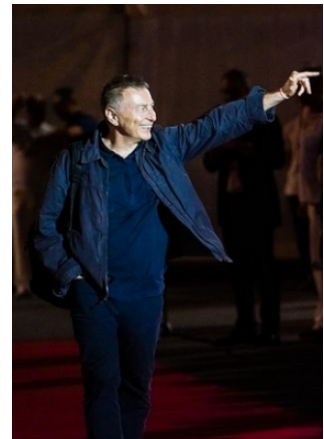
[Transposition of the EU 2019/1937 Directive on whistleblower protection in Southeast Europe: Challenges and lessons learned](#)

The present analysis evaluates the transposition of the European Union's Whistleblower Directive in Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, and Romania. The objective was to assess the quality of the transposition process and share findings and lessons learned.



['Filmmaker Milcho Manchevskis Latest Drama: Corruption Fighter](#)

Manchevski says he is being targeted for retaliation because he exposed financial irregularities and conflicts of interest within North Macedonia's Film Agency. Ironically, this is the public agency that helped Manchevski produce his classic 1994 debut, Before the Rain, which made him a star and brought the country its first-ever Oscar nomination.



[The instrument for whistleblower protection against retaliation](#)

This document addresses the challenging aspects of whistleblowing by proposing an instrument that will support all actors engaged in promoting an accountability culture and increasing awareness.



MORE FROM THE COALITION

[Disabled Whistleblower Wins Epic Case in Moldova](#)

Exposing hidden crimes requires a special kind of courage most people don't have. On top of this, imagine you are a disabled orphan. Marcel Lemnaru proved that anyone can be a whistleblower and prevail against powerful opponents. It is a gamble he took and won.



[52 Women Accuse Doctors of Violence and Corruption in Bosnian Maternity Wards](#)

Corruption and abuse in maternity wards is an open secret in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which has been condoned by hospitals and ignored by public officials for decades. Half of the women interviewed by Baby Steps said they gave money or a gift before or after childbirth. One-third of women said this happened secretly, allowing doctors and nurses to deny the corruption.

