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# Newsletter

REPORT / SUPPORT / PROTECT

## Interview.ba

✓ To begin with, you will find a summary on the work of Interview.ba, following up on one of the most prominent whistleblowing cases in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the past years. In 2018, senior tax officer Emir Mešić addressed the Prosecutor's Office due to irregularities and corruption in his workplace, the Indirect Taxation Authority. Southeast Europe Coalition on Whistleblower Protection is commit-

ted to enhance whistleblower rights and turn whistleblowing into a mainstream practice that will be relied upon to clean up corruption in institutions. Thus, we follow up on cases like this that remain unsolved and only prove the seriousness and importance of our mission, as well as guide us in our work to identify the challenges that are yet to be overcome.

## Center for Investigative Reporting (CIN)

✓ Subsequently, our attention shifts to whistleblowing during the pandemic. In addition to the rising rates of infections, economic difficulties, the heavy load of the healthcare personnel, difficulties in keeping up with the daily activities and social life, the pandemic has also

brought challenges to whistleblowing. That is why members of the Coalition have focused on detecting abuses and offering better support to whistleblowers in a situation that makes their position particularly vulnerable.

## Parinti Solidari

✓ In contrast to investigating abuses, Parinti Solidari in Moldova has contributed in a different way to support whistleblowers during the pandemic by assessing the needs of COVID-19 frontline workers. The main concerns were later summarized and requests were sent to the competent authorities to address these issues, all the while protecting the confidentiality of the workers' data.

Lastly, we have dedicated a separate section to the reporting platform anonim.md in Moldova and have summarized for our readers the guide to whistleblowing that aims at increasing social and technical security throughout the process of reporting and submitting evidence.

Links to detailed publications and relevant websites are also included in this issue.



## The Battle Continues

In 2018, Emir Mešić, senior tax officer at the Indirect Taxation Authority of BiH addressed the Prosecutor's Office due to irregularities and corruption in the workplace. He reported that revenues from customs terminals were poured into the pockets of private individuals in an illegal and non-transparent way. In return and regardless of the status of "protected whistleblower" acquired by the Agency for Prevention of Corruption and Coordination of the Fight against Corruption, he was transferred to another workplace with a lower salary and threatened with dismissal.

The latter happened as Mešić received a decision on termination of employment and is currently appealing this decision. The termination of his employment was a result of disciplinary proceedings initiated against him in May 2020 for a breach of duty that occurred two years earlier. This makes us consider the forms of pressure used against whistleblowers and subsequently, the gaps within the legislation and the competent authorities to provide efficient whistleblower protection.

**Interview.ba** has been following this case and offering publicity by supporting this whistleblower but also raising concerns regarding dysfunctional protection mechanisms.

According to past reports, disciplinary proceedings and degradation at work are the most common forms of pressure suffered by those who decide to report corruption.

**Interview.ba reports that Emir Mešić is one of the only eight people in Bosnia and Herzegovina who have been granted the status of "protected whistleblower" since 2014.**

**A total of 28 people have applied for this status in the last seven years, but only eight have received it.**

Emir Mešić's story is not an isolated one but emphasizes the problematics that go beyond his case and concern all whistleblowers.

**Reports show that only in two cases did the Agency for Prevention of Corruption and Coordination of the Fight against Corruption impose protective measures to reinstate applicants.**

This puts into question the work of the Agency in using its full capacities and legal authority to provide protection.

**In 2017 only, the Agency received 130 reports indicating corruptive behavior but took into account only seven of them.**

Despite the non-responsiveness of the institution that is entitled to provide special protection and the procrastinating on the side of the Prosecutor's Office, Emir Mušić remains optimistic in continuing the fight and considers his struggle an investment for the future of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

**The recent interview with Emir Mešić can be accessed on the link below:**

<https://interview.ba/2021/01/14/emir-mesic-whistleblower-i-received-a-decision-on-dismissal-but-i-will-win-despite-the-uio-and-apik/>

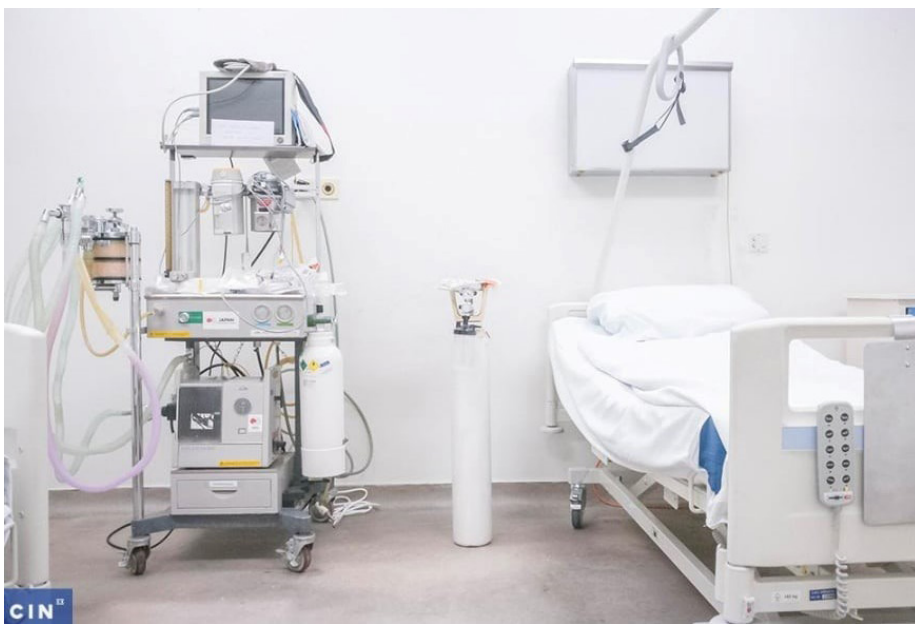
**For more information on this case you may check the following links:**

<https://interview.ba/2020/12/14/disciplinary-procedures-and-dismissals-as-a-reward-for-whistleblowers-in-bih/>  
<https://www.fairplanet.org/editors-pick/a-whistleblower-that-broke-the-silence-lost-his-job/>  
<https://balkaninsight.com/2020/10/22/bosnian-whistleblower-sanctioned-after-talking-to-birn/>



## Blowing the whistle during pandemic

In addition to the rising rates of infections, economic difficulties, the heavy load of the healthcare personnel, difficulties in keeping up with the daily activities and social life, the pandemic has also brought challenges to whistleblowing. That is why members of the Coalition have focused on detecting abuses and offering better support to whistleblowers in a situation that makes their position particularly vulnerable. In this section, we will bring you closer to our member in Bosnia and Herzegovina, **the Center for Investigative Reporting (CIN)** and portray some of its activity during the pandemic. CIN has published and is working on many stories that revolve around whistleblowing and are based on actual cases reported by whistleblowers. Particularly during the pandemic, CIN covered concerns regarding corruptive behavior and covered cases such as the corruption scandal that erupted with the procurement of ventilators. This is helpful in a situation in which whistleblowing might be discouraged, especially in healthcare institutions, with doctors and the rest of the personnel facing a heavy workload.



In 2020, 12 governments have set aside **54.7 million KM** for contingency funds, not counting Canton 10, which has yet to unveil its budget. Since the outbreak of the pandemic, seven governments allocated nearly **5.7 million KM** to fight COVID-19.

Government	Available in 2020	Allocated	Beneficiary	Purpose
Federation of BiH	5,155,000 KM	4,950,000 KM	Federal Department of Civilian Protection	Procurement of ventilators and protective gear
Central Bosnia Canton	1,000,000 KM	300,000 KM	"Travnik General Hospital" and Croatian Hospital "Dr. fra Mato Nikolic" in Nova Bila	Procurement of four ventilators
Tuzla Canton	550,000 KM	202,000 KM	UCC "Tuzla" Cantonal Stockholding Agency	Procurement of ventilators Sanitizers, masks and gloves
West Herzegovina Canton	655,000 KM	70,000 KM	University Clinical Hospital "Mostar"	Furnishing of Isolation Rooms
Posavina Canton	360,000 KM	66,500 KM	Cantonal Hospital "Orasje"	Procurement of protective gear, sanitizers and medicine Other equipment necessary for agency
BiH Council of Ministers	Temporary financing	50,000 KM	Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport BiH Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Procurement of computers, laptops for students Evacuation of Bosnian citizens from Italy
Zenica Dobojski Canton	50,000 KM	50,000 KM	Ministry of Health	Procurement of protective gear and sanitizers

Between 2014 and October 2019, the state, entity, cantonal and Brčko District governments spent nearly **184 million KM** of contingency reserve funds. Reporters uncovered that governments and officials spent money in a non-transparent manner by financing political party-related events, a competition in grilling lambs on a spit, the Miss BiH beauty pageant, and for food and alcohol.

• Source: Governments and medical institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina, government newspapers

CIN Center for Investigative Reporting

The articles published by CIN in April 2020 cover abuses with the contingency funds in the fight against the coronavirus. CIN brings to attention past experiences with reserve funds being used by governmental authorities in a non-transparent manner for the purpose of financing political party-related events, shows and tv competitions, as well as buying food and alcohol. Moreover, there is no comparison between the amount of funding that was given out recklessly in the past years with the amount that was given out during the pandemic. CIN points at the lack of sanctions in terms of the way money is spent since institutions have not set any clear criteria about who is eligible to funding and under what circumstances. Furthermore, there has been no follow up procedure regarding the beneficiaries of these funds in terms of assessing the impact of the funding. This spending without a set of criteria turned into a burden for the authorities in the management of the pandemic. A great deal of funding is reported to have been spent on ventilators whereas the rest has been used for other concerns related to the pandemic. Nonetheless, authorities found themselves struggling with the allocation of the remaining funds.

In addition to the funding situation, CIN published an article concerning the technical and safety inspection of the ventilators. Out of a minimum of 222 ventilators in BiH hospitals and clinics, the authorized repair service companies certified 153 ventilators following the conformity assessments.

Experts estimated an addition of 160 machines to the aid of healthcare providers. In this situation, concerns were being raised regarding the assessment of these machines according to the technical procedure. CIN found that some managers did not think that this assessment was needed and decided not to carry on with it, despite legal obligations.

The head of the assessment laboratories, on the other hand, emphasized the importance of testing the machines as faulty ones could cause severe damage to a patient's brain and lungs and also lead to death. However, lots of concerns have been raised regarding the

situation. Some point at the money that is needed to carry out the assessment and would be more willing to save it whereas others point at the lack of doctors and medical personnel in treating infected patients because of the lack of safety measures.

Lastly, on top of management issues, CIN noted that people remained mostly treated at home and unattended, except by their relatives. The death of a patient who was treated at home raised concerns regarding the effectiveness of the treatment and the response of the healthcare agents in critical cases of patients infected with the virus.

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#### **Detailed publications:**

<https://www.cin.ba/en/bolnice-na-respiratoru/>  
<https://www.cin.ba/en/budzetska-rezerva-za-borbu-protiv-coronavirusa/>



In Moldova, Parinti Solidari, together with other NGOs and initiative groups carried out a set of activities, some of which were particularly triggered by the pandemic. In this context, Parinti Solidari engaged in efforts to inform the public about the virus, ongoing studies and results, contributing to dismantle any fake news around the topic.

Similarly to the activity of CIN, the activity of Parinti Solidari also reflects public concerns regarding the allocation of public money during the pandemic. Thanks to an extended research and analysis of the procurement of certified medical equipment from abroad, the government closed a contract with a much lower price than the initial deal.

As the pandemic may have a discouraging effect on whistleblowing, efforts to investigate abuses like those taken from CIN offer an additional support to whistleblowers. In contrast to investigating abuses, Parinti Solidari has contributed in a different way to support

whistleblowers during the pandemic by assessing the needs of COVID-19 frontline workers. The main concerns were later summarized and requests were sent to the competent authorities to address these issues, all the while protecting the confidentiality of the workers' data.

Efforts were made to offer support to medical workers and families who sent anonymous and confidential warnings regarding irregularities within the healthcare system and the managing of the crisis. In this regard, Parinti Solidari contributed to the set-up of necessary protocols, such as those concerning the burial of the deceased and other policies in the frame of management. A particular focus was on the whistleblowers who reported irregularities, abuses, and deficiencies, in order to protect them from harassment or professional retaliation. Whistleblowers were informed and redirected to CSOs with available financial resources for the provision of legal services.

## Anonim.md

A social spot was set up to promote the institution of whistleblowers to the public interest, in particular in the context of the pandemic. Medical workers were redirected to an online platform, [www.anonim.md](http://www.anonim.md), to report irregularities and problems which were later picked up by NGOs and mass-media in order to inform the wider public.

The platform offers a safe and secure mechanism for reporting cases, linked also to an anonymous email system that will not store or ask for information revealing the whistleblower's identity and location from which the data is sent. The platform uses the latest technologies to anonymize the internet connection of users. These technologies are proven to be viable and used in other similar platforms. The data is transported and secured using encryption protocols equivalent to those for military use. In order to provide the most secure connection, the downside of the virtual tunnel that connects computers by hiding the source's identity and location is that the connection is rather slow. All the while protecting the whistleblower's anonym-

ity, the site allows them to engage in a conversation with a chosen recipient. The whistleblower can choose their recipient according to their own criteria, depending on how they personally resonate with the activity of the recipients listed in the platform. The recipients are investigative journalists that can check and verify the information and sources of data provided by the whistleblower. They work for the media (newspapers, magazines, websites, radio or television) and have, thus, the resources to shed light on any moral or legal issues that they encounter and make the abuses public. Recipients of reports are also NGOs whose agenda is to ensure the transparency of the state in the Republic of Moldova.

Additionally, the site also provides a guide to anonymous reporting and advises users on how to increase their technical and social safety. In the following section, you will find a summary of some of the main points of the guide to anonymous reporting.

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### Links:

[www.anonim.md](http://www.anonim.md)  
<https://anonim.md/s/index.html>

Am I the only person who has access to this information?

Can this information be directly related to me?

Would this information lead people to ask me questions about it regardless of the anonymity of the data?

Can I withstand the pressure of an internal or external investigation that may be triggered by the publication of the information I send?

## **GUIDE: Anonymous reporting**

Throughout the submission process, the whistleblower is advised to consider following questions:

### **Ways to increase security:**

**1**

Before and after sending the information, do not tell anyone that you have done this or that you are going to.

**2.**

Make sure that there are no monitoring or surveillance systems in place when you send the information.

**3.**

Do not use search engines or news sites to find information about your report.

**4.**

Use Tor Browser Bundle software to browse the Internet anonymously.

**5.**

Do not upload information from your work computer or home computer. Use one from an Internet Café.

**6.**

Do not keep copies of the information that you sent.

**7.**

Delete all files from the USB stick that you used. To make sure that the files cannot be recovered, format the drive.

**8.**

Some information might contain metadata such as the author of the content, the date, type of device. Try to delete any type of metadata that may expose you personally. Guides can be found on the Internet on how to delete this information from Microsoft Office or PDF files.

**9.**

After the information sent by you has reached the press, be careful about making personal public opinions on the matter.