



## Head of Slovak Whistleblower Protection Office elected

OFFICE EXPECTED TO RUN WITHIN THE NEXT SIX MONTHS



**BLOWING THE WHISTLE DURING THE PANDEMIC THE CASE OF FISNIK THAQI FROM KOSOVO**



**SABINA ĆUDIĆ RECEIVES THE COALITION'S FREE SPEECH AWARD 2020**

# REPORT/SUPPORT/PROTECT



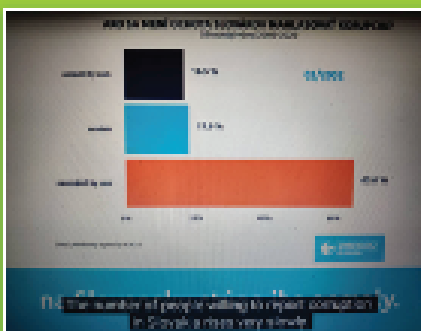
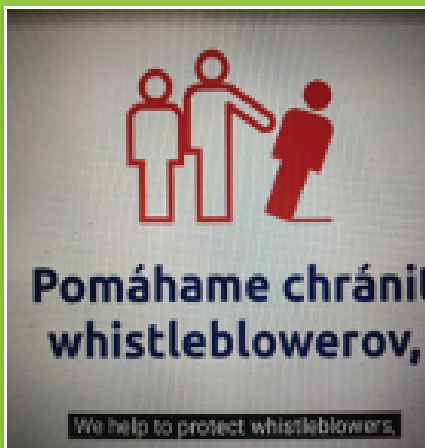
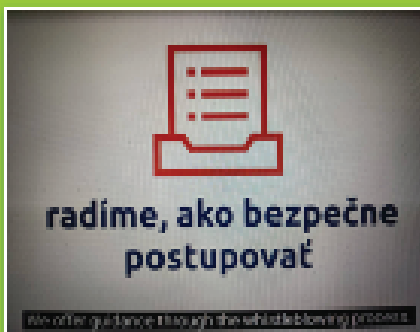
## End of stagnation for whistleblower protection in Slovakia

Finally, after two years of stagnation, MPs elected on Friday, 5/2/2021, Ms. Zuzana Dlugošová (lawyer) as head of the Slovak Whistleblower Protection Office. The office was founded under the Whistleblower Protection Act that took effect on March 1, 2019. Ever since, Transparency International Slovakia has been monitoring the new government and the Ministry of Justice and pressuring them about establishing a new whistleblowing office. Finally, things started to move in July 2020 when the new minister of

justice made the office a priority. However, it took a lot of persistence until it was finally established. The recommendations have been taken into consideration in that the newly-established office will not operate within the Ministry of Justice.

The law was designed so that the office is completely independent, including from ministries - it will have its own personnel, budget and will present annual reports directly to the Slovak Parliament. Until recently, the situation was on hold due to the COVID-19 crisis that has placed Slovakia on top of the countries with the highest number of deaths. Thus, the project concerning the whistleblowing office was overshadowed by other urgent topics. Despite this, TI – Slovakia continued to communicate with the government and send several reminders about the government's commitment to this issue.

For almost two years now, the Coalition has been following up on this process and working with TI – Slovakia to provide solutions on how to enhance whistleblower protection, as well as raise the importance of the independence of the newly-established office from other state institutions. Coalition partner, TI – Slovakia is willing to work with it, provide expertise and transfer knowledge and best practices on the subject of whistleblower protection to this office.



- How has the willingness to report corruption changed in Slovakia from 2002 to 2020?
- What discourages people from reporting unfair practices at work?
- How can we support those who choose not to remain silent?

More information at the link below:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VHU-WXwgw-zU>

**For almost six years** there has been a law on whistleblowing in Slovakia, yet, the willingness of the Slovak people to report corruption is low. From 2002 to 2009 the trend regarding willingness to report corruption was positive. The culmination was reached in 2016, when Zuzana Hlávková, an employee of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs raised concerns regarding suspicious contracts at the ministry during the Slovak EU

**Head of Slovak Whistleblower Protection Office, Ms. Zuzana Dluhošová has finally been elected on 5/2/2021 after almost two years delay**

Presidency. However, public polls conducted in the past few years in the country show a decline in willingness to report corruption, mainly out of fear of losing the job. In this framework, TI – Slovakia conducted the project “Enhancing #BackingBoldOnes for public sector whistleblowers” and committed to promote whistleblowing in the media and thus, increase public interest on whistleblower protection. The activities consisted of the conduct of a public opinion survey, a public event (debate) about whistleblowing based on the findings and dissemination and awareness raising. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the planned public event was not organized, so instead of it a short infographic video was created about willingness to report wrongdoings. The video has been disseminated through TI – Slovakia’s Facebook page, LinkedIn, and YouTube channel, as well as through newsletter subscribers.

The survey confirmed that most people, specifically 63% are still not informed about the law and the mechanisms of protection of whistleblowers. More than half of the respondents would not report wrongdoings in their workplaces. Furthermore, data collected from the Prosecutor’s office shows that none of the employees of the General Prosecutor’s Office has used this law.

# Blowing the whistle during the pandemic: the case of Fisnik Thaqi in Kosovo

October 22, 2020:

Fisnik Thaqi, technician at the University Clinical Center of Kosovo, denounced the poor safety conditions in this institution by showing images of his working place and pointing at the fact that the management was perfectly aware of this situation. “It’s horrible. Workers of the clinic, together with hospitalized patients suffer from radiation because the protective doors cannot be shut due to poor quality of work in their installment. What’s worse, is that the clinic was renovated a year ago. The management is aware of this.”

Less than a week later, head of Radiology department, Bujar Gjikolli filed a request for disciplinary measures against Thaqi. The argument was that the publication of images and information concerning the institution was forbidden without prior consent from internal institutional authorities. However, Thaqi’s whistleblowing act falls under the category of public whistleblowing, which is recognized by the law in cases of actions that endanger life, public health, and security. **Kosovo Law Institute** advised the head of Radiology department to immediately withdraw this request and reminded him that otherwise he would be breaking the law on whistleblower protection. The latter foresees a fine or a two-year imprisonment against anyone who initiates an act of retaliation to someone who has reported actions that endanger public interest. Fisnik Thaqi did not apply for any kind of whistleblower protection but expressed his interest in receiving some legal advice and assistance. For this purpose, Kosovo Law Institute has offered to help Thaqi pro bono through a lawyer from the Center for Legal Help which operates within the KLI. The disciplinary measures against Thaqi are ongoing, however, he continues to work as before in the University Clinical Center of Kosovo.



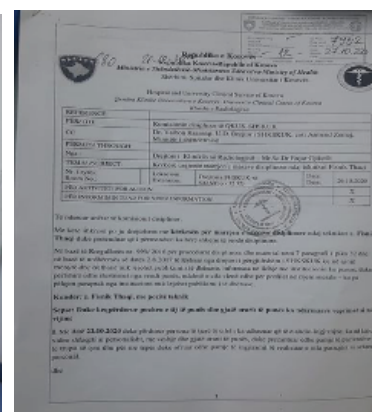
“Workers and patients suffer from radiation because the protective doors cannot be shut.”

-FISNIK THAQI

The case of Fisnik Thaqi is an indicator of the current situation in Kosovo regarding whistleblower protection. It indicates the need towards a better understanding of the law and its protection mechanisms so that disciplinary proceedings like those against Thaqi cannot be initiated in such open violation to the law and secondly, it indicates the need for state institutions to react once intimidating acts against whistleblowers happen.



Images posted by Fisnik Thaqi on his social media accounts



The request for disciplinary proceedings against Thaqi



# FREE SPEECH AWARD 2020

The Free Speech Award for the year 2020, given by Southeast Europe Coalition on Whistleblower Protection went to Sabina Ćudić, member of the Sarajevo Canton Assembly, for revealing a scandal at a care facility for children with special needs, specifically the Institute for the Care of Mentally Disabled Children and Youth.

**“When you receive such an award, you get a silent confirmation that someone is listening, someone has actually been paying attention and, essentially, that someone understands you.”**

- SABINA ĆUDIĆ

The images were shocking in that they showed these children tied to their beds. The story sparked a lot of anger and indignation, so that hundreds of people took the streets in November 2019, to demand an immediate investigation at the care facility. During the event in which Ćudić received the award, she announced plans to introduce a national law on whistleblowing and whistleblower protection. The Free Speech Award was presented during the International Whistleblower Day which usually is celebrated annually by the Southeast Europe Coalition on Whistleblower Protection on March 24, but this year was organized in June due to COVID-19 pandemic. Mark Worth, executive director of the European Center for Whistleblower Rights and Dženana Alađuz, head of INFOHOUSE Foundation considered Ćudić’s act heroic and inspiring towards a positive change in the future.

## **“Sabina Ćudić is a state heroine - clearly and simply.”**

*- MARK WORTH, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF EUROPEAN CENTER FOR WHISTLEBLOWER RIGHTS*

When she received the award, Ćudić referred to the people who reached out to her and reported the situation within the institute, and said “I am honored and grateful for the award, but the moment the investigation is over and these people can speak publicly, I will pass this award on to them because if we talk about freedom of speech and whistleblowing today, this is not thanks to Sabina Ćudić, but to those brave people who continue to take action to protect these children, despite the incredible pressure on them.”

In an interview for [interview.ba](http://interview.ba) on the significance that the Free Speech Award had for her, Ćudić said: “You work on something and feel like you are on your own, that very few people understand you, you are exposed to a lot of pressure about what you do.

Then, you receive such an award, and it is a silent confirmation that someone is listening, someone has actually been paying attention and, essentially, that someone understands you. I think the essence of any social interaction is that people hear and understand one another.”

**“This was a state scandal that angered us all. Ćudić deserves our most sincere gratitude for discovering what is happening in this institution. We hope that, thanks to her efforts, a positive change will follow.”**

*- DŽENANA ALAĐUZ, HEAD OF INFOHOUSE FOUNDATION*

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### **Publications related to the topic can be accessed at the links below:**

<https://whistleblowersblog.org/2020/07/articles/featured-story/sarajevo-lawmaker-who-exposed-child-abuse-wins-free-speech-award/>

<https://interview.ba/2020/06/25/sabini-cudic-dodijeljena-nagrada-za-slobodu-govora-zbog-ukazivanja-na-zlostavljanje-djece-u-zavodu-pazaric/>

<https://interview.ba/2020/06/25/sabina-cudic-nakon-nagrade-za-slobodu-govora-djeca-u-zavodu-pazaric-vise-nisu-vezana-ali-ne-postoji-sistemska-rjesenje/>

[https://www.bljesak.info/vijesti/flash/dodijeljena-nagrada-zastupnici-koja-je-ukazala-na-zlostavljanje-djece-u-zavodu-pazaric/315904,](https://www.bljesak.info/vijesti/flash/dodijeljena-nagrada-zastupnici-koja-je-ukazala-na-zlostavljanje-djece-u-zavodu-pazaric/315904)

<https://balkaninsight.com/2019/11/21/bosnians-protest-alleged-child-abuse-at-special-needs-home/>