

# REPORT/SUPPORT/PROTECT

Southeast Europe Coalition on Whistleblower Protection

IN  
FOCUS

CIN-CG  
Montenegro



KALLXO.COM  
Kosovo



CReDO Moldova



Picture taken from the web: Tupungato - stock.adobe.com

## Whistleblowers in the media

**The experience of previous whistleblowers discourages others who might report corruption and other anomalies in the society. Instead of getting stronger, awareness of the importance of these people is declining - public opinion polls show in Montenegro.**

Research by the Center for the Development of Non-Governmental Organizations CRNVO shows that although 88 percent of citizens think that corruption in Montenegro today is widespread in society, there are only few who would report it. Most do not even know who the whistleblowers are.

Two-thirds of citizens do not know who to turn to for protection from retaliation. The CRNVO research also points out that 99 percent of citizens do not know whether their employer has appointed a person responsible for whistleblowers in the company. The research was conducted with a field questionnaire in March 2017 and June 2019 in 17 Montenegrin cities on a sample of 1,017 and 1,024 respondents, respectively, and the trends are discouraging. Moreover, awareness raising efforts have also seen a decline. Taking into consideration the misperceptions regarding whistleblowers, CRNVO program assistant Zorana Marković emphasized the necessity to raise awareness so that whistleblowers are seen as brave people who point out anomalies in the system, and not as spies and the like.

In this context, *Centre for Investigative Journalism of Montenegro (CIN-CG)* engaged in an awareness-raising campaign through social media (Facebook, Instagram and Twitter) aimed at motivating citizens and public officials to report wrongdoings and illegal activities in their institutions/organizations and strengthen the position of whistleblowers in Montenegro. Two of the most popular articles that CIN-CG has published are “Few whistleblowers warn of bad practices, regulations, and trends: whistle if you can” (Mali broj uzbunjivača opominje na lošu praksu, propise i trendove: zviždi ako smiješ) and the article on whistleblower Siniša Raičević who claimed that the state suffered damage during gas imports (Zviždač Siniša Raičević uporno tvrdi da država).

Patricija Pobrić, in an interview for CIN-CG, looks at the Golgotha she is going through because she pointed out to MP Mladen Bojanić in 2016 that two Social Democrat (SD) party rallies at the Ramada Hotel, where she was the manager, were paid by the Railway Directorate with money from the state budget. The Agency for the Prevention of Corruption (KAS) did not protect Pobrić from the persecution that followed, adding that she was not a whistleblower, but an assistant whistleblower, because she did not go directly to them, but shared her information with the MP. To this day, KAS still argues that they did not make any mistakes and blames the Law on Prevention of Corruption for not providing protection to Pobrić.

**"There is no need to regret doing the right things in life, no matter how hard this is, because why live a life with your head held down and unable to look at yourself in the mirror?" - Patricija Pobrić**

Additionally, the act of whistleblower Siniša Raičević, introduced to the public by CIN-CG was further promoted to strengthen the position of whistleblowers and encourage them to report abuse of power and other wrongdoings. Customs inspector Siniša Raičević had been warning for years that the wrong way of calculating excise taxes on gas was causing great damage to the state budget. The inspector not only warned of irregularities in the calculation of excise duty on gas, but also claimed that Customs Administration Institution (UC) had previously reported other similar abuses that later, with time, turned out to be true.

In a letter to his superior, Raičević explained how the miscalculations occurred and also pointed at cases in which he had to face the pressure to not confiscate undeclared devices and goods that were discovered during controls. Raičević was dismissed from his work place and transferred to what the institution claimed to be “a temporary reassignment” and stated that Raičević was relocated together with 40 other customs officers. Although his status as a whistleblower was recognized, Raičević’s superiors from the Customs Administration (UC) still deny responsibility and claim that everything that followed was according to the law.

Raičević claims that the revenge against him started even before addressing the director, and that he was transferred from Podgorica to the customs office in Danilovgrad as a punishment, although he is specialized in analyzing the scanned images and that this expertise is needed at the central terminal in the capital.

“Trying to do the job in a correct way and to have it valorized



Picture taken from the European Federation of Journalists website

after so many years of work experience is impossible, if you are not a relative, friend, party colleague or from a certain locality. For a long time now, I have been excluded from all groups that are chosen for seminars, commissions and those that receive awards”, - Raičević said in the letter.

Overall, the action taken under this project has contributed to increasing the capacities of CIN-CG journalists to investigate issues of high public interest. While the position of whistleblowers remains challenging, CIN-CG investigations concluded that Montenegro needs to improve its legal system to strengthen the position of whistleblowers and encourage them to report abuse of power and other wrongdoings.

## Investigative reporting

---

Investigative journalism is a powerful domain to report wrongdoings, fight corruption, and encourage action towards injustice. On the other hand, it is also a signal to the society that journalism and the media in general can be a great ally to potential whistleblowers. It encourages people to speak up, knowing that they have a supportive system behind them which expands beyond the legal protection mechanisms to include the whole of society that can be reached by and educated through the media. That is why investigative reporting takes up a significant role in the Coalition's work with members and partners operating in the media. [KALLXO.com](http://KALLXO.com) in Kosovo has covered some cases of institutional abuse that have led to action being taken into investigating the matters further and holding the responsible people accountable.

One such cases concerned the two million euros that vanished from the State Treasury for which an official of this institution was taken into custody and the minister herself faced the pressure of political accountability. Another article was published that denounced the employment of family members of the rector at the University of Peja and elaborated on the conflict of interest that this case presented. The case was then taken by the Special Prosecutor's Office that initiated an investigation on this issue by requesting all relevant documents regarding the employment procedure. The third article referred to the workers' union of the Civil Aviation Authority that denounced the lack of transparency during the process of changes in the internal regulation and organizational structure initiated by the head of this authority. The union also complained about the short deadline for sending inputs regarding the regulation and that these inputs were not taken into account. KALLXO has sent questions regarding this matter on December 31, 2020 and January 18, 2021 but the CAA did not reply.

## Enhancing whistleblower protection through strengthening institutional capacities

---

On October 14, 2020, CreDO, in collaboration with the Călărași District Council carried out two activities during a training for the district's public officials. Zinaida Turcanu, Vice President of the Călărași District Council, Stela Pavlov, UNDP Representative for small project grants, and Olga Bîtcă, CReDO Project Coordinator gave the opening remarks on the event.

The first activity brought together mayors of Călărași district and aimed at strengthening the climate of institutional integrity within the municipalities of Călărași district. Vitalie Moisei, an expert in the field of strengthening public integrity, discussed with mayors anti-corruption policies, especially referring to the employment of public agents based on meritocracy and professionalism, avoiding conflicts of interest, declaring wealth and personal interests, inappropriate influences and the legal status of gifts.



Picture taken from CReDO's activity

Two cases were discussed in particular, concerning intra-family relations within public institutions. The first one to be discussed was the case of a secretary in the local council whose husband was elected mayor in that locality while she was on maternity leave and how, upon her return to work, finds herself in the hierarchical subordination of her husband. The second case was that of a driver who had been working in the town hall for ten years, whose wife was elected mayor in that locality and afterwards, as the mayor's office declared the situation to the respective authority, did not receive a response.

The second activity brought together 31 public officials from the Călărași District Council, including heads of departments. The purpose of the activity was to raise awareness among public agents regarding the denunciation of corruption and the protection of whistleblowers. This activity was carried out in the form of simulation of concrete situations, as well as practical examples from the social sphere, with the visualization of informative graphics and videos made on the subject and practice of whistleblowing. The theoretical part was provided by Olga Bîtcă, an expert in the field of integrity warning and the practical part by Vitalie Moisei, integrity trainer, contracted by CReDO.

The event took place within the project “Progress and impediments in strengthening integrity in Călărași and Orhei districts”, carried out by CReDO. In this framework, CReDO also prepared a questionnaire regarding public perceptions on anti-corruption measures in the district. The questionnaire is available in Romanian and Russian and can be accessed in the following link <http://credo.md/?go=news&n=692>. Following the training, on October 21, 2020, CReDO organized a focus-group with 11 public agents of Călărași district including two mayors to continue discussions about integrity, perception of corruption, and whistleblowers.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION CHECK OUT THE LINKS 🖱️ :

➡️ <http://www.cin-cg.me/mali-broj-uzbunjivaca-opominje-na-losu-praksu-propise-i-trendove-zvizdi-ako-smijes/>

➡️ <http://www.cin-cg.me/zvizdac-sinisa-rakocevic-uporno-tvr-di-da-drzava-trpi-stetu-prilikom-uvoza-plina-na-plus-40-isparile-stotine-hiljada-eura/>

➡️ <https://kallxo.com/lajm/ministrja-bajrami-nuk-jap-doreheqje-do-ti-kthejme-milionat/>

➡️ <https://kallxo.com/lajm/te-afermet-e-rektorit-punesohen-ne-universitetin-e-pejes-studentet-e-denoncojne/>

➡️ <https://kallxo.com/lajm/sindikata-e-punetoreve-denoncon-organizimin-e-brendshem-ne-agjencine-e-aviacionit-civil/>

➡️ <https://www.credo.md/?go=news&n=693>