

WhistleWire

The Southeast Europe Whistleblower Journal



SOUTHEAST EUROPE COALITION ON WHISTLEBLOWER PROTECTION WELCOMES NEW MEMBERS

Welcome to **WhistleWire**, the magazine of the Southeast Europe Coalition on Whistleblower Protection

Three organizations have joined the Coalition in the past year, the Albanian Center for Quality Journalism, Civic Resistance, and Kosovo Law Institute. With their expertise and resources, these organizations will contribute to advocating for more whistleblower protection and raise awareness in three different aspects, investigative journalism, civil society activism, and legal assistance to (potential) whistleblower cases.

The Albanian Center for Quality Journalism is a non-political, independent, not-for-profit organization run by young professionals based in Tirana, Albania. The leading team consists of young professionals with a background in media and law.¹ The Center aims to provide reporting and news that follow the standards of quality journalism. To this end, the Center is engaged in providing trainings for young professionals to grow in the field of journalism and thus, build a new generation of dedicated and resourceful journalists, including but not limited to investigative work. The Center has been growing since 2017 with the support of grants from the US Department of State. Since 2018, the ACQJ has embarked on a mission to investigate and provide coverage of issues of public concern. It is increasingly becoming a safe source for potential whistleblowers who wish to report wrongdoings but lack the tools and knowledge to back their claims with facts and investigations.



A WHISTLEBLOWER STORY



Ariel Vasili

*University specialist for the Clinic,
 Management and Breeding of Wild and Exotic Animals*

One of the articles that the Center published in this regard is an investigation of bird flu case hidden by institutions.^{II} For this coverage, the center was contacted by Ariel Vasili, University specialist for the Clinic, Management and Breeding of Wild and Exotic Animals who reported the case by sending pictures and in a conversation with the ACQJ team of “Sinjalizo (Blow the Whistle)” stated that “They [the authorities] have not done anything to prevent this.” Competent for such situations, Vasili spoke freely and directly about the bird flu, exposing the (ir)responsibility of the state but also underlining the consequences. “Management turned awful from the moment they tried to hide it. It was ridiculous. The moment we started to refute rumors coming from the media regarding the outrage of the flu, we were just wasting our time. We were too late. With a viral disease of this kind, the hours are very critical, after the first 12 hours, we lost 30% of the chances to do something”, says Vasili.

II. <https://www.acqj.al/gripi-i-shpendeve-ekspertet-institucionet-e-fshehen-te-verteten-pasojat-rane-direkt-mbi-kompanite-dhe-konsumatorin/>

Civic Resistance is a non-profit organization also based in Tirana, Albania. It was founded by a group of young professionals with the mission to strengthen the participation of citizens in society, through policy advocacy, civic awareness and training of community groups in order to improve governance.^{III} The NGO has successfully completed several projects with a focus on education, especially by engaging students in a process of monitoring and evaluating government's policies in the field, assessing finances and the autonomy of universities, improving living conditions in student dormitories, tackling corruption in higher education, also conducting surveys to measure the perception of corruption. As a member of SEE Coalition on Whistleblower Protection, Civic Resistance raises awareness about whistleblowing and promotes it as an effective anti-corruption tool among youngsters. The activities so far include informative sessions in universities, providing examples and whistleblower cases, and trainings about the safest reporting ways, debates and discussions among students about dealing with hypothetical cases, thus, putting the knowledge into practice.

Kosovo Law Institute is a well-established association in Pristina, Kosovo. It has been operating since 2009, providing continuous research and assessments of f(laws), (bad) practices, (dis) respect, rules and procedures to cases of public interest.^{IV} KLI's mission is to strengthen the rule of law and make the justice system more accessible to citizens, regardless of their status and other conditions. As such, KLI offers legal advice to citizens who wish to report wrongdoings in institutions they work in or pursue legal cases concerning their private matters. It also offers support to state institutions, legal expertise and technical assistance to design and follow certain regulations, initiate and amend legislation that best responds to their mission and institutional responsibilities. KLI works closely with the broader community of lawyers and civil society to empower them and foster participation in legal processes. With its diverse staff in competencies and background, KLI is a resourceful association and a first contact point for those who wish to report and pursue irregularities.

III. <https://qq.com.al/index.php/stafi-bordi/>
 IV. <https://kli-ks.org/en/about-kli/>

International Whistleblower Day in Skopje

Whistleblower stories and acknowledgments

At the annual celebration of International Whistleblower Day in Skopje, co-host of the event, Center for Investigative Reporting – SCOOP in North Macedonia awarded members of the Coalition and representatives of close partner organizations, together with whistleblowers the certificate of appreciation for their efforts in enhancing whistleblower protection, speaking up against injustice, and advocating for whistleblower rights. The two day event that took place on 12 May in Skopje brought together members of the Coalition, partner organizations, representatives of state institutions in North Macedonia as well as

internationals such as the Ambassador of the EU to North Macedonia in several panels of discussion. A celebration of achievements and brave acts of whistleblowing, the event served also as a forum for exchanging ideas and practices into improving whistleblower protection in the region. The event addressed some of the practical issues of how responsible institutions handle whistleblower cases, what are the hurdles that whistleblowers face, and why some are still lacking the protection and have not received the whistleblower status. As such, the forum shed light on ongoing cases that need more attention and support, be it from institutions, media, or NGOs.

TOWARDS A CONSOLIDATION AND BETTER IMPLEMENTATION OF LEGAL PROTECTION MECHANISMS

Members of the Coalition have increasingly focused on the respective whistleblower protection laws and mechanisms in their home countries by assessing the legal frameworks and providing recommendations. The Coalition has put together an assessment of ten countries of the region in a report that identifies successes and shortcomings and aims to guide stakeholders' future actions. The evaluation shows considerable progress especially in new cases reported to responsible institutions, protection granted and final verdicts in whistleblowers' favor.

With the exception of Bulgaria and Romania, every country has enacted a whistleblower law and appointed a public institution with designated staff to handle cases. Compared to most other regions in the world, Southeast Europe is well advanced in this process. There is progress with regard to activation of specific institutions responsible for handling whistleblower cases, with some countries resolving some of the cases and pursuing others in court.

Some of our members organizations have been actively involved in drafting law proposals and providing

recommendations. Despite the importance of a solid legal framework, countries have to improve their administrative institutional capacities but more urgently, have to provide sufficient data and inform the public on processing protection requests. Moreover, as our member NGOs often confirm from their work with citizens, there is still work to be done in strengthening trust in institutions and encouraging people to speak up against injustice. We remain committed to contribute to the strengthening of whistleblower protection, freedom of expression and rule of law.



WHISTLEBLOWER STORIES THEN AND NOW

As the Southeast European region moves forward with enforcement of whistleblower protection, advocacy, and legislation that mirror the EU Whistleblower Directive, whistleblower stories become especially relevant to understand the improvements that have been made and what is still lacking. Whistleblower stories are thus not only inspirational in the work of the Coalition but also a reference point for future changes. During this past year, we have brought stories of whistleblowers closer to our members. Such was the case of Wendy Addison, whistleblower of the South African biggest corporate disaster of LeisureNet Ltd in 2000 who shared her story during the Coalition Annual Meeting in 2021. Other stories were brought to the forum in detail by organizations in the regions, such as Pitaljka in Serbia. The difficulties in dealing with whistleblower cases but ultimately the success stories provide first-hand knowledge on how to address whistleblower cases in an effective manner.



The prominent North Macedonian whistleblower Gjorgji Lazarevski took part in the annual celebration of International Whistleblower Day this year in Skopje. He took the floor to not only talk about his experience but also the lessons that we all can draw from his whistleblowing process and how former whistleblowers can help in providing guidance to several stakeholders to handle sensitive cases. He also gave an inspiring talk to youngsters and an interview for the Coalition.

As some new cases throughout the region currently have the potential to emerge as whistleblower cases, exchange and continuous contact with former whistleblowers is relevant in drawing the best strategies for assisting potential whistleblowers in an effective and timely manner, providing public support for them, protecting them from retaliation and pursuing their cases in court.



Gjorgji Lazarevski
 North Macedonian whistleblower

WHISTLEBLOWING – A CONVERSATION

Raising awareness through podcasts, blog posts, and engaging youngsters to advocate for more whistleblower rights

The diverse nature of the Coalition membership is reflected in the different ways our member organizations tackle whistleblowing. This past year, some of our members have turned to alternative channels of information that allow for a much more direct and broader discussion on the practice of whistleblowing. Through podcasts^v, CPI Foundation engaged young professionals in different fields such as social sciences and law to conceptually clarify the term 'whistleblowing' and its practical implications. Whistleblowing and especially prominent whistleblower stories are addressed in a conversation-like manner and turned into a topic that attracts more and more common people.

Additionally, the publication of blog posts^{vi} by Center for Investigative Journalism – SCOOP in North Macedonia offers short but insightful information on whistleblower cases in the region and the protection or lack thereof. Through a direct, informative, easy to



read style, journalists raise awareness on the benefits of whistleblowing to our society but also address challenges and areas of improvement.

WHISTLEBLOWING IN THE MEDIA MEASURING THE SALIENCE OF WHISTLEBLOWING

Coalition member Media Development Center has concluded a report about media coverage in Bulgaria on the EU Whistleblower Directive. Bulgaria, as an EU Member State, has a direct obligation to incorporate the Directive to the national legislation. Thus, the extent to which the general public is informed on its rights and opportunities the Directive offers for the citizens – short analyses of the media coverage and the way the Bulgarian citizens are being informed on the issue is an important component in this process. MDC has been monitoring coverage on this issue for the period July 2021 to January 2022,^{vii} and March to June 2022.^{viii} The monitoring work included websites of specialized law offices, websites of NGOs, legal analyses published on the Directive, draft project laws, articles covering whistleblowing-related events, open government portals, mainstream media, business and other professional media, company sites, and negative publications. The general impression is that the coverage of the Directive is moderate and mainly falls under specialized coverage

from law offices, and NGO web pages. Interestingly, new bodies set up in relation to the Directive only register one publication.

A working group was set up in the Ministry of Justice in 2021 to draft a law for the protection of whistleblowers. The group gathered representatives of government institutions, experts, civil society organizations and businesses. In January 2022 the working group at the Ministry of Justice was closed. However, it drafted a Law on the Protection of Persons Submitting Signals or Publicly Disclosing Information on Violations. The draft was published on the Public Consultation Portal of the Council of Ministers on April 21, 2022.^{ix} The opinions on the draft were due on 23 May 2022. Relatively few opinions were added to the Draft and only two comments – one of them is even not relevant to the issue. The date of publication challenges the information on the website of the Council of Ministers that the new law should have been adopted until 15 April 2022. The publication of the draft did not provoke massive public comments and the coverage of the issue remained relatively limited.

V. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MuxDQfr_iRk&list=PLkpoy4VIN_cb9bXxhEcJY0FDvsJMGVFsA

VI. <https://en.scoop.mk/?s=whistleblower>

VII. <http://www.mediacentrbg.org/news/monitoring-of-the-media-coverage-on-eu-directive-2019-1937-on-protection-of-whistleblowers-and-respectively-the-way-the-general-public-is-informed-on-its-rights-and-opportunities-the-directive-offers/>

VIII. <https://www.mediacentrbg.org/news/monitoring-of-the-media-coverage-on-eu-directive-2019-1937-on-protection-of-whistleblowers-and-respectively-the-way-the-general-public-is-informed-on-its-rights-and-opportunities-the-directive-offer-2/>

IX. <https://www.strategy.bg/PublicConsultations/View.aspx?lang=bg-BG&Id=6784>

NEW IDEAS FOR WHISTLEBLOWER COMMUNICATION

In a rare collaboration, activists, journalists and public officials met to develop new ideas to communicate whistleblower issues and cases to the public. The day-long 'Master Classes' were held in Sarajevo and Belgrade in June, and were led by Elma Kadric of the Sarajevo-based firm Via Media, and Mark Worth of the Southeast Europe Coalition on Whistleblower Protection.

Participants included:

- Center for Investigative Reporting, a Bosnian organization working with the Coalition to track the impacts of investigations and stories that originated with tips from whistleblowers and citizens
- Baby Steps, a Bosnian organization that

investigates bribes demanded from women, and the mistreatment of women, in maternity wards

- Center for the Development of Youth Activism, a Bosnian organization that is campaigning to expose and combat bribery and other corruption in universities
- Center for Research, Transparency and Accountability, a Serbian organization that is a watchdog for public accountability, effective democracy, free media and fair elections

The activists, journalists and public officials discussed how to apply advertising and public relations strategies to improve their communications with the public. The sessions were part of an EU-funded project managed by the Sarajevo-based Regional Anti-Corruption Initiative.



**Elma Kadric
 and Mark Worth**

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