



**BREAKING THE SILENCE:**  
***Enhancing whistleblowing policies and culture in Western Balkans and Moldova***  
**Annual Meeting of the Southeast Europe Coalition on Whistleblower Protection**  
**Friday, November 19, 2021**  
**Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina**

**Report**

**I. Background**

The Southeast Europe Coalition on Whistleblower Protection (SECWP), established in 2015, is as reported ‘*the world’s first regional initiative dedicated to enhancing whistleblower rights and protection, and promoting whistleblowing as an effective anti-corruption tool*’.<sup>1</sup> The Regional Anticorruption Initiative (RAI), a regional intergovernmental organization, established to facilitate the cooperation and coordination of its member states<sup>2</sup> in the fight against corruption, has been supportive of the work of the Coalition since its establishment, in recognition of the importance of collaboration between the government and the non-governmental sector in effectively protecting whistleblowers.

*‘...While suspicious or even hostile toward each other in most countries, activists and public officials in Southeast Europe have grown to realize the need to collaborate in order for their fragile democracies to have a chance to thrive. They acknowledge their shared interest in casting out corruption and building public integrity.’<sup>3</sup>*

Under its EU-funded project titled ‘Breaking the Silence: Enhancing whistleblowing policies and culture in Western Balkans and Moldova’ (2020-2023), the RAI Secretariat will support the annual meetings of the SECWP throughout the lifetime of the Project. As defined in the Project, the Coalition annual meetings will be dedicated to the strengthening of the Coalition, membership expansion, and diversification. The annual meetings will serve as a platform for discussion of common challenges, strategies, and solutions for improving the protection of whistleblowers, and how to best utilize the Coalition’s resources. Meetings will also be an opportunity to celebrate success and capture lessons learned. The second such meeting supported by RAI Secretariat under the Project was held in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina on November 19, 2021, and hosted by members of the Coalition – the Centre for the Study of Democracy and Governance in Albania and Infohouse Foundation in Bosnia and Herzegovina (see: Annex 1 ‘Agenda’). Participants as below were present in the meeting:

---

<sup>1</sup> UNCAC Civil Society Coalition, ‘*Activists and Journalists Unite to Support Whistleblowers in Southeast Europe*’, <https://uncaccoalition.org/activists-and-journalists-unite-to-support-whistleblowers-in-southeast-europe/>

<sup>2</sup> RAI member states include: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Romania and Serbia.

<sup>3</sup> Worth, Mark, ‘*Positive Partnership: Officials and Activists Unite to Advance Whistleblowing in Southeast Europe*’, <https://whistleblowersblog.org/2020/08/articles/global-whistleblowers/positive-partnership-officials-and-activists-unite-to-advance-whistleblowing-in-southeast-europe/>



## **Breaking the Silence:**

### *Enhancing whistleblowing policies and culture in Western Balkans and Moldova*

#### **Coalition**

1. Arjan Dyrmishi, Centre for the Study of Democracy and Governance, Albania
2. Klaudia Koxha, Centre for the Study of Democracy and Governance, Albania
3. Aleksandra Milicevic, South East Europe Media Organization (SEEMO), Austria
4. Dzenana Aladjuz, Infohouse, Bosnia and Herzegovina
5. Alen Vejzagic, CPI Foundation, Bosnia and Herzegovina
6. Lejla Bicakcic, Center for Investigative Reporting CIN, Bosnia and Herzegovina
7. Alexenia Dimitrova, freelance journalist / Media Development Center, Bulgaria
8. Kristina Tsabala, Centre for the Study of Democracy, Bulgaria
9. Arrita Rezniqui, Kosovo Law Institute, Kosovo
10. Ala Revenco, Parinti Solidari, Moldova
11. Galina Bostan, Center for the Analysis and Prevention of Corruption, Moldova
12. Zorana Markovic, Centre for the Development of NGOs, Montenegro
13. Goran Lefkov, Center for Investigative Journalism SCOOP, North Macedonia
14. Marija Sunchevska, Transparency International, North Macedonia
15. Maria Cezar, Expert Forum, Romania
16. Simona Ernu, Romanian Academic Society, Romania
17. Zuzana Grochalova, Transparency International, Slovakia

#### **RAI Secretariat**

18. Desislava Gotskova, Head of RAI Secretariat
19. Elmerina Ahmetaj Hrelja, Project Manager – Anticorruption Expert
20. Anja Suvalija, Project Officer
21. Arman Fazlic, Project Officer
22. Meliha Capljic, Finance and Administration Assistant
23. Mark Worth, Whistleblowing Expert
24. Tom Devine, Whistleblowing Expert

#### **Other**

25. Vladimir Radomirovic, Pistaljka, Serbia
26. Dragana Matovic, Pistaljka, Serbia
27. Dragana Kurti, Civic Resistance, Albania
28. Rea Cikali, Centre for Quality Journalism, Albania
29. Thad M. Guyer, Government Accountability Project
30. Stephanie Ayers, Government Accountability Project

**Breaking the Silence:**  
*Enhancing whistleblowing policies and culture in Western Balkans and Moldova*



*Round Table, November 19, 2021*

## **II. Presentations and Discussion**

The meeting was opened by Mr. Arjan Dyrmishi, Executive Director of the Centre for the Study of Democracy and Governance, Albania and coordinator of the SECWP and Ms. Desislava Gotskova, Head of RAI Secretariat.

Acknowledging RAI's continuous support to the Coalition's work, **Mr. Arjan Dyrmishi**, who co-hosted and moderated the meeting, talked about the increased visibility of the Coalition, emphasized the significant impact it made on the adoption of new whistleblowing laws in Southeast Europe, improvements in legislative mechanisms in the protection of whistleblowers, and investigations of whistleblowing cases.

The Head of RAI Secretariat, **Ms. Desislava Gotskova**, welcomed the participants and emphasized RAI's efforts and continuous support to whistleblower protection, and the collaboration with the Coalition and experts in the region in the field of whistleblower protection in Southeast Europe.

**Ms. Dzenana Aladjuz**, Executive Director of Infohouse Foundation and co-host of the meeting spoke in particular about the hurdles in the Bosnian context to the work of NGOs and to the freedom of speech. She raised concerns about the democratic standards and a rather hostile environment in which NGOs have to operate and called for more cooperation within civic society throughout the region facing similar struggles.

Following opening remarks, **Ms. Elmerina Ahmetaj-Hrelja**, Project Manager – Anticorruption Expert, provided an overview of the Project, its goals and activities, as well as progress achieved to date. She went into details in some of RAI's activities concerning whistleblowing. One activity in the field of awareness was [‘Whistle for the End – Guerrilla Event’](#), a 24-hour performance that took place in several capital cities of the region and called the attention of the public not only to the scale of corruption but also to the key role that citizens have in fighting corruption. Throughout the day, by choosing to press the button and ‘Whistle for the End!’, the citizens kept symbolically saving public money from ‘destruction’ in front of their eyes. Additionally, Ms. Ahmetaj-Hrelja also shared the results of RAI's [Gap analysis](#). Through this quantitative assessment, general and specific gaps in statutory provisions were identified, and recommendations for improvement were developed for each of the seven beneficiary jurisdictions.

**Breaking the Silence:**  
*Enhancing whistleblowing policies and culture in Western Balkans and Moldova*

**Ms. Anja Suvalija**, RAI's Project Officer, presented RAI's call for proposals for NGOs in the region and some of the available grants and the respective deadlines.

**Mr. Mark Worth**, RAI Secretariat Whistleblowing Expert, together with **Mr. Tom Devine**, also RAI Secretariat Whistleblowing Expert spoke about the meaningful work of NGOs and especially the Coalition to enhance whistleblower protection. Mr. Devine also held a presentation regarding strategies that NGOs may follow in their work on whistleblowing, such as creating alliances e.g. by identifying the right politicians, as well as working with independent experts, and honoring whistleblowers.

Below is a summary of some of the presentations provided by participants and members of the Coalition on their recent, ongoing, and future whistleblowing campaigns/activities, lessons learned and good practices.

**Mr. Vladimir Radomirovic** and **Ms. Dragana Matovic**, two former whistleblowers from Serbia, journalists to date and co-founders of Pitaljka, talked about their own experience with reporting wrongdoings in their former institutions as well as the establishment and mission of their current organization with an investigative journalism profile. Mr. Radomirovic covered some of the most prominent whistleblower cases in Serbia that were followed up by the organization.

Following this presentation, **Ms. Klaudia Koxha** from Centre for the Study of Democracy and Governance in Albania and communication specialist of the Coalition raised some points for further discussion, in particular the extent to which journalists in the region can engage in whistleblowing cases, the experience with online reporting platforms and whistleblower authorities in the respective countries.

**Ms. Alexenia Dimitrova**, journalist and **Ms. Kristina Tsabala** from Center for the Study of Democracy in Bulgaria informed the participants about their engagement in the working group set by the Ministry of Justice of Bulgaria to transpose the EU Whistleblower Directive into the Bulgarian legislative system. They presented some of their project ideas for the future such as an ongoing initiative by 10 NGOs in Bulgaria to establish channels for whistleblowers and the proposal to organize a regional journalist competition that will give voice to whistleblower cases and the topic of whistleblower protection in general. Additionally, they identified some of the gaps in the Bulgarian system such as the lack of training for responsible personnel (e.g. Ombudsman's Office) as well as channels of communication not working properly. With their ideas, they aim at developing in particular mechanisms for whistleblower protection and citizen journalism.

**Ms. Maria Cezar** from Expert Forum informed the participants about the work of Expert Forum in the education sector, engaging both academic staff and students in topics of fight against corruption and whistleblowing as an important tool in this regard.

**Ms. Zorana Markovic** from the Centre for the Development of NGOs in Montenegro informed the participants about the current Montenegrin political context that has somewhat shifted the attention entirely to political issues, leaving not much room for whistleblowing topics to emerge in the broader debate and attract public attention. As such, we discussed ways to navigate in rather discouraging social and political contexts.

**Ms. Zuzana Grochalova** from Transparency International, Slovakia, informed participants about the procedure of the election of Head of the independent Whistleblower authority. She described

**Breaking the Silence:**  
*Enhancing whistleblowing policies and culture in Western Balkans and Moldova*

the process and the involvement of TI Slovakia in the hearings, including its recommendations about the best candidates. Subsequently, she spoke about recent work of TI Slovakia and the Office, informed the participants of the planned event with the Head of the Office and other stakeholders to take place in December 2021. Additionally, Ms. Grochalova talked about the importance that NGOs such as TI Slovakia but also NGOs involved in whistleblower protection have on offering proper training to and sharing best practice with responsible people at whistleblowing authorities.

**Ms. Marija Sunchevska** from Transparency International, North Macedonia, emphasized the support since ten years provided by the organization to whistleblowers that includes, among other things, the legal advice centre, a mobile app and webpage for whistleblower reporting (including anonymous reports). Additionally, she spoke about the current project of TI Macedonia in raising awareness about whistleblowing through visual tools and social media engagement. Lastly, there was promising potential for collaboration with state institutions about external disclosers.

**Ms. Dragana Kurti** from Civic Resistance, Albania emphasized the difficulties in the Albanian context, namely that a lot of the research and analyses of NGOs and civic society is not taken into consideration by political actors as credible sources and references for improvement. However, important remains to reach a wider audience by sharing and emphasizing the findings and raising awareness.

**Ms. Arrita Rezniki** from Kosovo Law Institute, Kosovo informed the participants about the nature of the organization she is part of. She stressed the large number of people in need of legal advice and support to navigate the system in Kosovo. In particular, she stressed the importance to constantly monitoring the Law on Whistleblowing in Kosovo, for both public and private sectors and provide reports of the monitoring work.

The meeting ended on a high note by Ms. Elmerina Ahmetaj Hrelja who emphasized the importance of continued collaboration between RAI Secretariat and the Coalition in order to address real needs in the field and achieve synergy of efforts - all for the benefit of Southeast European societies, because protecting whistleblowers means protecting the public interest.

### **III. Concluding Remarks**

1. Members of the SECWP agreed that the gap analysis of the whistleblowing legislative framework in 7 jurisdictions prepared by RAI Secretariat, is relevant and timely, as well as that its methodology could be applied broadly, including Southeast Europe.
2. Members of the SECWP agreed to keep the Coalition updated about their projects concerning whistleblowing, anti-corruption, and more.
3. Members of the SECWP agreed to collaborate and exchange ideas and experience with one-another whenever relevant and feasible (e.g. online meetings).
4. Infohouse Foudation agreed to provide pro-bono workshop for members of the Coalition to inform them on application for grants and proposal structure.
5. Members of the SECWP discussed the need for journalists and media to engage more closely with whistleblowing topic and cases in terms of reporting and raising awareness.

### **Breaking the Silence:**

#### *Enhancing whistleblowing policies and culture in Western Balkans and Moldova*

6. Members of the SECWP discussed the need to advocate for greater transparency on how whistleblowing cases are handled through improved reporting by the responsible authority.
7. Members of the SECWP agreed to collaborate for a common activity and brainstorming in the frame of the International Whistleblower Day.
8. RAI Secretariat and members of the SECWP agreed that their continued collaboration will enable greater impact and visibility of their work on whistleblower protection and stressed the continuous collaboration between government and non-governmental sector as a contribution to improving the situation in the field.

**Breaking the Silence:**  
*Enhancing whistleblowing policies and culture in Western Balkans and Moldova*

## Annex 1

### Agenda

#### Time

- 10:00 – 10:15**      **Welcome and Introductory Remarks**  
*Mr. Arjan Dyrmishi, Coalition Coordinator*  
*Ms. Dzenana Aladjuz, Executive Director, Foundation Infohouse*  
*Ms. Desislava Gotskova, Head of RAI Secretariat*
- 10:15 – 10:45**      **Tour-de-table**  
  
Introductions by members of the Coalition
- 10:45 – 11:00**      **Overview of activities, findings and results of the regional project ‘Breaking the Silence: Enhancing Whistleblowing Policies and Culture in Western Balkans and Moldova’**  
*Ms. Elmerina Ahmetaj-Hrelja, Project Manager, Anticorruption Expert*
- 11:00 – 11:30**      **How can NGOs help whistleblowers: The experience and lessons learned of the Government Accountability Project (GAP), USA**  
*Mr. Tom Devine, Legal Director, GAP*
- 11:30 – 12:00**      **What Happens with Whistleblowers' Reports: Serbia Case Study**  
*Mr. Vladimir Radomirovic, Editor in Chief, Pistaljka*
- 14:10-15:45**      **Discussion and presentation of challenges and achievements in the work of Coalition members**
- 15:45-16:00**      **Closing Remarks**  
  
*Mr. Arjan Dyrmishi, Coalition Coordinator*  
*Ms. Elmerina Ahmetaj Hrelja, Project Manager, Anticorruption Expert*