

Transparency International EU

The global coalition against corruption

Lost in translation? How do you say Whistleblower in different languages?

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This text is from the 2013 Transparency International report: “Whistleblowers in Europe“. At Transparency International EU we’re calling for EU-wide whistleblower protection, so we thought this little translation guide might help European officials draft such legislation.

“Whistleblower” is not a universally recognised term that can be easily translated into other languages. However imprecise, this colloquialism – which conjures old-fashioned images of a police officer chasing after a thief – has evolved over the decades to mean a person who exposes wrongdoing that has occurred in their midst.

Regardless of whom the person contacts – their line manager, a dedicated helpline, a journalist, the police, an NGO or a government watchdog – a whistleblower is someone who speaks up when most people do not. They are beacons, bell-ringers, alarm-sounders – people who shine the light on secrets that should become known in order to end wrongdoing.

The difficulty in translating the term whistleblower into other languages has led to problems in how whistleblowers are perceived publicly. In many EU countries, terms such as “informant”, “denunciator” and “snitch” are still commonly used by citizens and the media alike. Journalists in some non-English-speaking countries simply use whistleblower for lack of a better alternative. They then may have to explain the term to audiences.

This difficulty has also created challenges when it comes to proposing and drafting whistleblower protection laws. Because whistleblowing is not a commonly accepted legal term.

The following are some commonly used translations from several EU languages, including any connotations they may carry – positive, negative, neutral or none.

BULGARIAN

• ????????, ????? ?????? ?? ????????? – employee who signals a violation – negative

CZECH

• *oznamovatel* – reporter – neutral

• *udava?* – informer – negative

- *práška?* – snitch – negative

DANISH

whistleblower – often used by the public

- *sladrehanke* – snitch – negative

DUTCH

- *klokkenluiders* – whistleblower (“bell-ringer”)

- *slachtoffer* – victim – term occasionally used by former whistleblowers

ESTONIAN

- *vilepuhuja* – whistleblower (“piper”) – negative

- *väärkäitumisest teavitaja* – one who informs about wrongdoing – neutral

- *korruptsioonist teavitaja* – one who informs about corruption – most neutral

- *koputaja* – snitch – negative

FINNISH

- *ilmiantaja* – a person who finds out information and passes it on – somewhat negative

FRENCH

- *lanceur d’alerte* – one who alerts about wrongdoing – commonly used term

- *signalement* – whistleblowing (“reporting”)

- *dénonciation* – whistleblowing – neutral/negative

- *alerte professionnelle* – whistleblowing – used by trade unions

- *alerte éthique* – whistleblowing – term used by NGOs and media

- *donneur d’alerte* – term used in official contexts (for example, concerning the EU)

GERMAN

- whistleblower – often used by media and in official contexts

- *Denunziant* – squealer, tattletale – negative

- *Hinweisgeber* – hint-giver – neutral

- *Nestbeschmutzer* – one who dirties their own nest – negative

GREEK

•*karfi*, *karfi*

(*spiounos*), *spiounos*

(*roufianos*), *hafies* – snitch – negative

•*pliroforiodotis* – informant – neutral/negative•

public interest witness – public interest witness – positive

HUNGARIAN

•*közérdek? bejelentés* – public interest – reporting – positive

•*bejelentés* – reporting

•*panasz* – complaint – reporting wrongdoing to authorities

ITALIAN

•*sentinella civica* – civic sentinel – positive (used by Transparency International Italia)

•*informatore* – informant – neutral (linked to secret police)

segnalante – reporting person – neutral (used in anti-corruption law)

•*denunciante* – denouncing person – neutral – judicial term

•*fare una soffiata* – to blow – neutral to negative

•*talpa* – mole (spy) – negative

•*corvo* – crow – negative

•*delatore* – leaker – very negative

•*spia / spione* – spy – very negative

LATVIAN

ziņotājs – denouncer – negative

•*Trauksmes cēlājs* – alarm-setter – neutral

•*Trauksmes celšana* – setting the alarm – a process by which wrongdoing is made public – neutral

LITHUANIAN

•*pranešjas* – whistleblower

MALTESE

- *ji?vela* – neutral term for disclosure

POLISH

- denouncer, informant – negative
- *sygnalista* – signal – positive (new term used by certain NGOs)

PORTUGUESE

- *chibo / bufo* – snitch – negative
- *denunciante* – whistleblower

ROMANIAN

- *avertizori de integritate* – those who give integrity warnings – positive

SLOVAK

- *oznamovate?* – whistleblower – positive
- *donáša?, udava?, práska?* – snitch – negative

SLOVENIAN

- *eti?ni upornik* – ethical resisters
- *žvižga?, piš?alkar* – one who whistles
- *prijavitelj* – one who reports – neutral (used in the Slovenia's Integrity and Prevention of Corruption Act)

SPANISH

- *denunciante de acto de corrupción* – blowing the whistle on an act of corruption – neutral

SWEDISH

- *visslare, visselblåsare* – whistleblower – neutral

WELSH

- *chwythwr chwiban* – whistleblower

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