

# Preportr

Suspicious millions of  
the advisor to former  
Prime Minister Thaçi





**Arie Rabfogel, former adviser to former Prime Minister Hashim Thaçi, while he was in Kosovo, he had opened an account in the Swiss bank “Credit Suisse”, meanwhile, in which over 4 million Swiss francs have been transferred to that bank account. This money is suspected to have sources in Kosovo, due to the great influence he had. There were rumors that he has influenced the achievement of the contract between the Government of Kosovo and the company Saatchi & Saatchi. Officially, Rabfogel has worked for the government without getting paid**

## **Preportr**

Arie Rabfogel is no longer a very well-known name in Kosovo. Even at the time when he was an advisor to former Prime Minister Hashim Thaçi, few people knew him by name. He was referred as the powerful Israelite adviser. This is due to the fact that he had a great influence in many areas in Kosovo.

According to official documents sent to us by the media office of the Government of Kosovo, Rabfogel was engaged as an advisor from February 1, 2008 to May 28, 2009. But, he also was engaged in the campaign of the Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK) in 2007 elections, which this party won.

A few months after Rabfogel was appointed as an advisor to Thaçi, he opened an account in the Swiss bank “Credit Suisse”.

Preportr has managed to access the data that leaked from this bank.

Relevant bank codes show that he was residing in Kosovo when he opened a bank account in Switzerland.

On April 30, 2009, he had in his account the maximum amount of 4 million 396 thousand and 224 Swiss francs. Rabfogel closed his account at this bank on September 16, 2011.

The data we have been able to provide does not give us an idea of where the money came from or from where the money was transferred. But what is known is that these moneys are transferred to his bank account while he was living in Kosovo. The research of his businesses shows us that he may not earn this money from the business activities he has now, because he opened most of them after leaving Kosovo.

Moreover, Rabfogel had not received any salary from the Government of Kosovo regarding his engagement as an advisor, although in contract he had stipulated a gross salary of 525 euros.

“Arie Rabfogel, does not appear in the payroll, i.e. has not received a salary from the Prime Minister’s office and has not incurred any other expenses”; it is said in the response.

It is not known if he received any payment from the PDK, a party led by his boss Hashim Thaci.

Preportr since August 18 of last year has sent questions to this political party to know if they have given any salary to Rabfogel for his commitments and in what period of time, but the PDK has not responded.



# The Suisse Secrets Investigation

THE SUISSE SECRETS INVESTIGATION SUISSE SECRETS IS A COLLABORATIVE JOURNALISM PROJECT BASED ON LEAKED BANK ACCOUNT DATA FROM SWISS BANKING GIANT CREDIT SUISSE.

The data was provided by an anonymous source to the German newspaper *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, which shared it with OCCRP and 46 other media partners around the world. Reporters on five continents combed through thousands of bank records, interviewed insiders, regulators, and criminal prosecutors, and dug into court records and financial disclosures to corroborate their findings. The data covers over 18,000 accounts that were open from the 1940s until well into the last decade. Together, they held funds worth more than \$100 billion.

“I believe that Swiss banking secrecy laws are immoral,” the source of the data said in a statement. “The pretext of protecting financial privacy is merely a fig leaf covering the shameful role of Swiss banks as collaborators of tax evaders. This situation enables corruption and starves developing countries of much-needed tax revenue.”

Because the Credit Suisse data obtained by journalists is incomplete, there are a number of important caveats to be kept in mind when interpreting it.

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The office of the Prime Minister of Kosovo

In 2009 there was a lot talking about the influence that Rabfogel may have had in signing a contract between the Government of Kosovo and Saatchi & Saatchi, branch in Israel.

This contract which was signed on April 14, 2009 was never been made public and there have been various statements in the public regarding its monetary value. Preportr has secured this contract from the Ministry of Finance. The value of the contract was 5 million 704 thousand euros.

The purpose of the contract was to promote the image of Kosovo in international media. But what was seen on the ground in that period of time, were several billboards placed in different cities of Kosovo and promotional videos that were shown on several international televisions. Preportr has requested a work report brought by the company "Saatchi & Saatchi" and the payments made to this company, but the Ministry of Finance says that they have no report from this company.

16 days after the signing of this contract, Rabfogel had in his account 4 million 396 thousand and 224 Swiss francs, while about a month after signing the contract with Saatchi & Saatchi, he officially resigned from the post of advisor to Prime Minister Thaçi.

Regarding the above-mentioned contract, Preportr has also sent questions to the "Saaatchi&Saatchi" company but has not received a response.

## "Money lover"

The former Governor of the Central Bank of Kosovo, Hashim Rexhepi, is one of the people who have met Arie Rabfogeli. He says that Rabfogel has participated in almost all-important conferences where Kosovo has been represented abroad during his time as an advisor to Thaçi.

Apparently, Rabfogel was also very interested in the money that was managed in Kosovo. He had done this with concrete actions in 2009, when he asked the then governor Hashim Rexhepi to invest about 1 billion euros in the banks that he would propose to him.

Rexhepi, in an interview for "Gazeta Fjala", the details of which he confirmed during a meeting with Preportr, said that while he was at an IBRD (International Bank for Reconstruction and Development) conference, on the second day of the conference, he was told by the then Minister of Economy and Finance Ahmet Shala, not to plan anything for the evening because they will have a very important meeting with some foreign investors.

Rexhepi says that as agreed with the minister, in the evening he went out waiting for him in front of the hotel where the Kosovo delegation was staying.

"Minister Shala came in a hurry and told me that he had an urgent job and asked me to go to the meeting with the investors, so the meeting would not fail because it is very important. I got the address of the place where the



meeting was to be held. It was pretty far from the hotel where we were staying. To my surprise, when I arrived at the hotel where the meeting was to take place, there was the prime minister's adviser, the Israeli Arie (Rabfogel). After we greeted, I asked him where the investors were, he smiled and told me that the meeting will be with him," Rexhepi said.

But the fact that he was meeting Rabfogel, and not the foreign investors as he was told, was not the only surprise that evening in London for Rexhepi. He says he was even more surprised when he heard the request of the prime minister's adviser.

"He told me that the Central Bank manages over 1 billion euros, and it would be good to invest that money in the banks that he would propose to us, pointing that we will all be satisfied, in terms of material benefits", says Rexhepi.


He says that Rabfogel had not mentioned to him to which banks he had planned to send the money, in what form other investments would be made and other details, as the conversation had stalled in the initial stage. Rexhepi has not accepted this proposal.

"I said no, because the law is such that we have an investment community and since it is a time of crisis we are very careful in managing the public money managed by the Central Bank," said Rexhepi.

He says that after giving him this answer, the conversation on this topic stopped and the meeting became a bit uncomfortable. Rexhepi says that they stayed there for a few more minutes and after that meeting, he never saw Rabfogel again.

A few weeks after this meeting, the then Prime Minister Hashim Thaçi had organized a meeting regarding the investments of the Kosovo Pension Savings (KPST). Rexhepi recalls that the meeting was attended by Deputy Prime Minister Hajredin Kuqi, Minister Ahmet Shala, Chairman of the Board of the (KPST), Besim Beqaj and Director of the (KPST) Ardian Zalli.


He recalls that during the meeting, he proposed that a part of the money of the Pension Trust to be invested in commercial banks of Kosovo, but this proposal was not supported by the prime minister Thaçi and further says



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that he began to attack him for mismanagement with the Central Bank of Kosovo.

"There I realized that these accusations were a reflection of the refusal I had made to the request of his advisor Arie", says Rexhepi.

He says that a few days after this meeting, the Kosovo Pension Savings (KPST) has invested about 75 million euros in the financial institution "Fortis" in Belgium, which according to him at that time, it was close to bankruptcy due to financial crisis and was being kept alive only thanks to the intervention of the Belgian government.

Rexhepi says that as soon as he received this information, he ordered his subordinates to make an inspection regarding this investment. But the inspection wasn't done, because after a few days, on July 23, 2010, he was spectacularly arrested by the Kosovo Police on suspicion of corruption, abuse of the official duty taking bribes, etc.

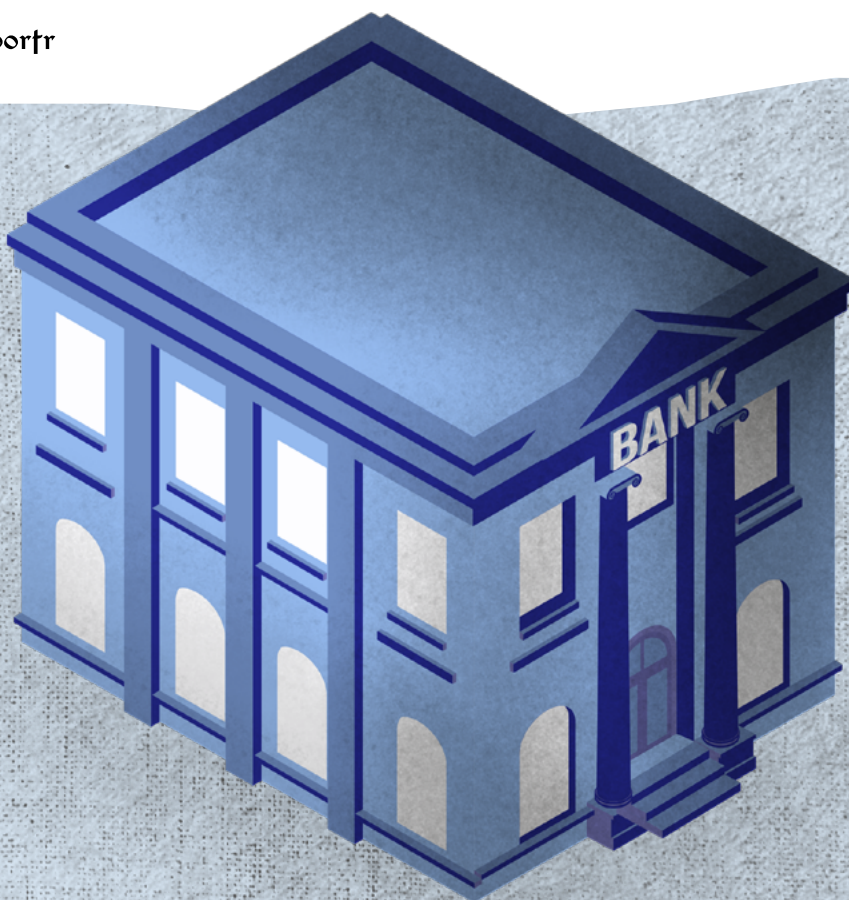
After spending four months in custody, Rexhepi was found not guilty on December 12, 2011 of the nine charges against him.

He says the indictment against him was fabricated and that his good luck was that the judge was a foreigner from the European Union mission - EULEX.

He links all this drama, which he says was organized causing him suffering and many consequences relating to Arie Rabfogeli's refusal to invest about 1 billion euros in the banks that he would propose to him.

Regarding this matter, Preportr has tried to contact former Minister of Economy and Finance, Ahmet Shala, but has been unable to reach him, since in the recent years, he lived abroad. The questions were only sent to his Facebook account, but we did not receive any answers.





## Rabfogel had influence in many areas

Former Member of the Assembly of Kosovo Driton Tali has been one of the biggest critics of the role and power that Arie Rabfogel had in Kosovo during the period 2007-2010. Tali told Preportr that Rabfogel was a person of a great influence in many areas.

“He was a person with great influence on former Prime Minister Hashim Thaçi. Mr. Thaçi has taken most of the important decisions in coordination with Arien. “Among

other things, he was the leader of the PDK campaign in 2007”, says Tali.

He emphasizes that Rabfogel, while being an advisor to Thaçi, was also the coordinator of the major energy project “Kosova e Re” which was planned to be built in Kosovo, initially with a capacity of 2100 megawatts, which later became 1000 megawatts.

“Considering the influence he had in Kosovo in that period of time, it is possible that the wealth he has abroad had its source from Kosovo too,” says Tali.

That Rabfogel had influence in Kosovo is shown by two e-mails provided by Preportr.

The director of the Ferronikeli company at them time, Costas Lamantos, had sent an e-mail to Arie Rabfogeli regarding an environmental permit issued by the Ministry



of Environment to another company to operate, as stated in the e-mail on Ferronikeli properties.

“This is to inform you that this issue is of major importance for our company and needs your personal and immediate attention”, it is said among other things in this email.

Also Lorik Haxhiu, who was the leader of the energy project “Kosova e Re”, had written to Rabfogel about an issue that had to do with the purchase or repair of some excavators of the Kosovo Energy Corporation.

Contacted by Preportr regarding this matter, Haxhiu said that Rabfogel was an adviser to prime minister and a contact point to connect with energy matters that were current at the time.

Rabfogel’s influence was also mentioned by the publicist Veton Surroi in an article published in May 2017. He wrote that Rabfogel was also part of the Kosovo delegation during the negotiations with Serbia on the status of Kosovo.

“Maybe because he is little we did not notice his presence, but from one of the travels of the Unity Team, as a member of the Kosovo delegation all of a sudden we had an Israeli citizen. As if he had been trained in the then illegal trio, he neither introduced himself nor spoke. “Someone said that his name was Ari - short for Ariel - and Hashim Thaçi, the then chairman of PDK, said that he came as his advisor”, had written Surroi, among others.

He also raised the matter of how Rabfogel would be paid for his services during the election campaign he offered to PDK Chairman Hashim Thaci, who became prime minister after the election.

“Would he pay Arin (and his big firm) as he did with a local PR firm (a vulgar woman and a man dragged away claiming to belong to the art world) by inflating the utility bill for the balloons and fireworks of the declaration of Independence, in order to cover any television advertising bill or otherwise? Would he pay with the 6 million euros he gave to the Israeli firm “Saatchi & Saatchi”, as a formal payment for the “Young Europeans” advertisement? “Would he pay, as it was whispered, with the works

on the contracting for the new Power Plant?” wrote Surroi, among other things.

## Rabfogel businesses

Arie Rabfogel now deals with consulting. He now has several businesses dealing with this field. Rabfogel has been a shareholder and the owner of “Paralot Limited” since its foundation. In this company that was founded in 2012 in Cyprus, he also appears as a director. With this name, this company has no website or Facebook page.

Rabfogel has also ties to another company in Cyprus. He is the director of Rashidex LTD, which was founded in 2010. Also, this business does not have a website with this name.

In addition to Cyprus, Rabfogel has been a shareholder in the Croatian real estate company “Chesnut Real Estate d.o.o.” until February 2016. He was the co-founder of this company with Josip Marohnić, who is a lawyer in Croatia. The share capital of this company was 20,000 kuna, respectively 2600 euros.

In November 2018 they initiated the closing of this company and it officially stopped to operate in June 2020.

He is the managing director of the company “Rabfogel GMBH”, which was founded in March 2017 in Vienna, Austria with a capital of 35 thousand euros. The main activities of this company were business advice, purchasing, management, etc.

According to the published data last year by the platform DNB, Rabfogel GMBH has two employees and generates \$ 128,738 in sales.

Regarding all these issues, Preportr has sent questions to two e-mails of Rabfogel, which we found in the records of his businesses, but even after waiting for several weeks, he did not return any response.