



YEAR

The year 2020 was meant to be a symbol of change. The whole of the society had high expectations for the upcoming parliamentary election that took place in February. However, at the time of the elections, no one expected that the main topic of the coming months would not be the fight against corruption and the breaking of the politics of "our people". One by one, schools, shops, industrial plants were closed down in March, and the whole world became paralysed by the pandemic of the hitherto unknown COVID-19 disease.

The pandemic became the centre of attention, and it was essential to manage it without major losses of life. Despite this situation, an unusual number of

prosecutions of suspected corruption were initiated by courts, prosecutors, and the police. These resulted in the arrest of thirteen judges in a police operation called "Storm", the prosecution of a former state secretary of the Ministry of Justice, the former prosecutor general, the serving special prosecutor, two former police presidents, and many other high-ranking law enforcement officials in Slovakia. The scale of the prosecutions initiated surprised many, especially because they involved judges, prosecutors, and police officers, even those who held management positions of these institutions. The abduction of the state, which VIA IURIS has been talking about for years, was suddenly more apparent than ever before.

On the other hand, we have seen some positive changes at the level of decision-making in important institutions of the judiciary, prosecutor's office, and the police. Several took place in an extremely transparent way, thereby increasing the quality of staffing of these institutions. It is also thanks to the many years of work done by VIA IURIS and other civil society organisations that we are succeeding in changing the processes for selecting key people to manage important institutions of the rule of law so that they are more transparent and consistent. We believe that this trend will be difficult to reverse in the future. In 2020, despite the challenges we continued to help active people defend their rights. One of our significant successes is the definitive halt to the construction of a small hydroelectric power plant on the Hron near the town of Žiar nad Hronom, against which we and other organisations have brought legal action. We also used our legal knowledge during the coronavirus crisis to help people find their way in the tangle of anti-epidemic measures.

Our organisation also underwent a significant change last year – after seven years, Milan Šagát resigned from the post of executive director, who was a great support in fulfilling the goals and mission of VIA IURIS throughout his work. Overall, 2020 was a very challenging year for the people at VIA IURIS, as well as for others, because of the pandemic. I appreciate the strength, determination, and the hard work of the whole team all the more.

We can only achieve fairer and more democratic Slovakia and that the weak do not feel powerless, thanks to you, our supporters. You are an important part of our organisation; without you we would not be able to attain it. At VIA IURIS, we are very grateful for this, and we appreciate every kind of support you have given us in the difficult times of 2020.

You can find out what we did in 2020 on the following pages.

Balle

Katarína Batková Executive Director VIA IURIS

YEAR

### **VIA IURIS** IN 2020

Despite the coronavirus pandemic, 2020 was an eventful year in our organisation, indeed.

We ensured legal assistance in several cases in liaison with law firms. We provided over 60 people who asked us for consultancy with legal advice. For the "With deliberation" project, we prepared legal answers to questions related to the impact of COVID-19 on professional or private life. Through consultations, we helped many civic organisations and initiatives.



Together with the Zmudri organisation we produced educational videos and methodological materials, which explained topics like the judiciary, the constitution and non-governmental organisations to pupils, students, and teachers.



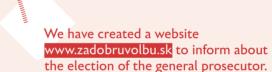
We continued to develop an informal civic platform, the Voice of Civic Organisations, which we established together with other organisations.



We participated in the working group of the General Prosecutor's Office of the Slovak Republic preparing amendments to legislation concerning prosecutors.



We drafted legislation concerning prosecutors' offices, the legislative process, the constitutional court, and changes to the constitution.





We participated in the creation of the draft amendment of the constitution and acts concerning the Constitutional Court, the Judicial Council and the creation of the Supreme Administrative Court of the Slovak Republic.



We published an expert handbook for employees of the state administration in the field of environmental care.

**PILLARS** 

**RULE OF LAW** 

"It is important for a democratic state governed by the rule of law that people trust the institutions, the courts, and the police. For them to be trusted, it is important that they function properly, reliably and fairly. We know that to help people with their legal problems, it is essential that legislative settings make it possible for them to defend their rights. This also concerns courts, from which we expect a fair and timely decision in the event of a dispute."

"We are working to ensure that the active members of the public are not left alone in their efforts to change things around them for the better. In the case they need legal help, we do everything we can to help them."

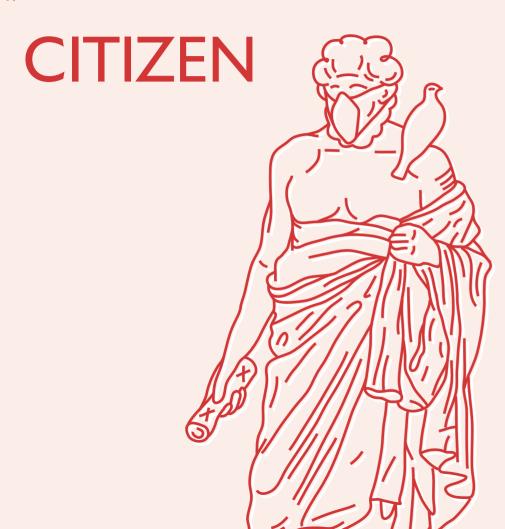
CITIZEN

"Civic organizations, initiatives and active people are simply indispensable in solving our country's problems. At VIA IURIS we are sensitive to the need to protect them from senseless attacks or abuse of power. It is very important to us that civil society can function well and develop in a healthy environment. We want to contribute to making life in Slovakia better for everyone."

Eva Kováčechová –

- Kristína Babiaková -

- Ivana Kohutková -



CASES

# OF OUR CONCERN



2020 we continued cooperation with law firms to ensure legal assistance in cases, to give legal advice, prepare legal analyses or represent people in proceedings before state authorities and courts.

### Small hydropower plants

We have been helping the Za živé rieky (For Living Rivers) initiative for a long time. We ensure legal support, consultations and representation in individual cases. In 2020, we participated in the update of the Concept of Utilisation of the Hydropower Potential of Watercourses in the Slovak Republic. According to the For Living Rivers initiative, the problem is that the concept continues to allow for the extensive construction of small hydropower plants. In addition, the environmental impact assessment of this document was not carried out in accordance with the law, which we jointly challenged in court.

### Our successes: The permit process for a small hydroelectric power plant near Žiar nad Hronom was halted

It was another one in a series of legal disputes concern-

ing controversial constructions of small hydropower plants on the Hron. Objectors of the construction (the Slatinka association, Rieka – association for the protection of watercourses, local association Hereditas HH from Hliník nad Hronom and Slovak Fishermen's Association) brought an action before the Regional Court in Banská Bystrica in cooperation with VIA IURIS. The reason was the insufficiently assessed environmental impact of the construction of a small hydroelectric power plant near Žiar nad Hronom. Damming the river would change its natural character, prevent migration of aquatic animals, destroy the habitat of protected fish species. In the complaint we also pointed out the inconsistency of the construction with the zoning plan of the Banská Bystrica self-governing region, which protects the Hron in the whole region, because it is important from the point of view of water tourism. In 2020, The Supreme Court of the Slovak Republic confirmed the decision of the Regional Court in Banská Bystrica, which annulled the decision of the Žiar nad Hronom building authority - the building authority illegally

permitted the construction of the small hydroelectric power plant near Žiar nad Hronom on the Hron.

**VIA IURIS** 

### Year-round ski hall in Donovaly

A developer intends to build a year-round ski hall in Donovaly. However, there was great public opposition to the construction. With the help of VIA IURIS, active citizens in the municipality filed an appeal against the municipality's decision on the location of the construction project. In the appeal, we drew attention to the non-compliance of the project with the zoning plan of the Banská Bystrica self-governing region. We also pointed out that the building authority did not investigate the opinion of Low Tatras National Park Administration that did not agree with the construction of the hall due to potential severe impacts. We objected that the building authority did not thoroughly evaluate the impact on all protected species of plants and animals in the area. We also pointed out that the building authority did not sufficiently consider the negative effects of the construction on the protected water management area of the Low Tatras and did not evaluate the impact of the construction on good condition of waters.

### Illegal changes to the Triblavina intersection

We ensured a legal assistance in filing a lawsuit with the Regional Court in Bratislava against the decision of the Ministry of the Environment of the Slovak Republic to Triblavina civic association. The Ministry argued that there was no need to assess the environmental impact of the change of the Triblavina intersection. However, the inhabitants of the affected area thought otherwise. According to them, it was unacceptable for such a significant change with an impact on thousands of people, the economy, and the environment, to take place without the legally required environmental impact assessment. At the same time, they pointed out in the complaint that the proposed change of the construction project was in conflict with the zoning plan of the Bratislava self-governing region.

# WE ENSURED CONSULTATIONS

addition to helping and representing people in the aforementioned cases, we ensured legal assistance to over 60 individuals as part of our consultancy activities. The consultations concerned in particular environmental protection, access to information, personality protection, problems with non-functioning self-government, the right to petition, land use and spatial planning, and participation in building proceedings, and environmental impact assessment proceedings. We also answered legal questions in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic.

## How to make it through the pandemic WITH DELIBERATION

The AMI COMMUNICATION agency brought us together with three other organisations – RED NOSES Clowndoctors, the League for Mental Health, the National Health Information Center, and jointly we offered guidance on how to best handle the pandemic times. We have created a website, www.srozvahou.sk, which offers practical information from the National Health Information Center, recommendations of experts in the field of mental well-being, statements of lawyers from law firms cooperating with VIA IURIS on the laws and regulations regarding the pandemic and the cheerful videos of RED NOSES Clowndoctors.

### How to get wise

What is the Constitution of the Slovak Republic and what is it good for? Where can I go if someone violates my rights? How do the police work? These are some of the questions we helped to answer together with the Zmudri ("get wise") organisation in educational videos and methodological materials that we prepared for secondary school students and teachers.

YEAR

2020



**VIA IURIS** 

he topic of protecting a healthy environment for the functioning of civic organisations and active citizens is of key importance to maintaining democracy in Slovakia. That is why we focused on the protection and development of civil society in 2020.

### **DEVELOPING**

CIVIL

### **ORGANISTIONS'**

### **PLATFORM**

In 2020, we continued to develop an informal platform for civil society organisations – the Voice of Civic Organisations. The platform was created in 2019, thanks to the original idea of VIA IURIS, the Youth Council of Slovakia, and the Center for Philanthropy. Our goal is to maintain a healthy environment for the existence of civic organisations and its expansion. We also strive for strengthening transparency and cohesion of the civic sector, creating space for cooperation of civic initiatives and organisations, and supporting their activities. To this end, we have brought together 51 civic organisations.

## The government's programme statement supports civil society and human rights

Before the parliamentary election, we prepared a study titled "Election 2020: Attitudes of political parties towards civil society". It contains an analysis of legislative proposals submitted in the previous parliamentary term and an evaluation of the electoral programmes of political parties and movements running in the parliamentary election, in relation to civil society. We have repeatedly sent the study to all candidate democratic parties and movements to highlight the need to support civil society in the coming years.

We managed to achieve that many of our proposals first appeared in the election programs and were then "translated" into the Government's Programme Statement. We will monitor the implementation of the government programme.

**VIA IURIS** 

### Civic organisations in the corona crisis

Despite the huge help of civic organisations in addressing the problems arising from the coronavirus crisis, we have perceived that their activities have been overlooked by the society. We have also seen several attacks on organisations by the government, members of the parliament, but also the political extreme, and the anti-system. The platform therefore published a weekly digest of activities of the member organisations they helped with during the pandemic.

### Slovakia's recovery and resilience plan

### without public involvement

Since October, we have focused our attention in the platform on the preparation of the Recovery and Resilience Plan of the Slovak Republic. Together with the Green Restart initiative, we called on the government to involve the professional public in the Plan's finalisation. We also suggested that civil society organisations be partners in implementing the measures proposed in the Plan. We discussed our demands at a meeting with the Minister of Finance, Eduard Heger, who supported civil society and its involvement in the Plan's preparation and implementation.

WE HELPED

2020

**CIVIL** 

SOCIETY

**ORGANISATIONS** 

& ACTIVISTS

ast year, in addition to legal advice, we also provided active citizens, organisations and initiatives with advice on leading campaigns, strategic planning, and communication.

In cooperation with the Slovak Open Society
Foundation, we continued the From activism to
advocacy project, through which civic organisations
learned how to plan and run successful campaigns. As
part of the project, Milan Šagát and Dana Mareková
prepared a handbook titled How to run a successful
and purposeful campaign in the civic sector.

For civic organisation we organised a workshop How to fend off verbal attacks. Its aim was to provide information on the legal ways for organisations to defend themselves if they experience verbal attacks.



2020 we kept focusing on draft legislation in the areas of prosecutors' offices, the judiciary, the legislative process, and changes to the constitution. We monitored the election of the general prosecutor, we suggested ways to streamline the functioning of the state administration in environmental care, and organised seminars for judges, senior judicial officers and assistants.

ANNUAL REPORT

### **OUR LEGISLATIVE PROPOSALS IN** THE GOVERNMENT'S PROGRAMME

Before the election, we presented to the political parties and movements our proposed legislative measures concerning prosecutors' offices, the legislative process, the Constitutional Court, and changes in the constitution. The aim was for the coalition parties to identify with them and incorporate them into the new government's programme statement. In the end, the government's programme included the promise of changes in the prosecutors' offices, in the selection of constitutional judges, and in the legislative process in the parliament.

### WE WERE PART OF THE WORKING GROUP AT THE GENERAL PROSECUTOR'S OFFICE

We continued to cooperate with the General Prosecutor's Office as part of the working group that prepared amendments to laws concerning prosecutors. The working group consisted of representatives of the Prosecutor's Office, the Judicial Council, the Office of the Commissioner for the Development of Civil Society, and our organisation. The result of the joint work was a proposal submitted by the General Prosecutor's Office, which included changes mainly in the selection of the General and Special Prosecutors, the selection of ordinary prosecutors, and in disciplinary proceedings.

# WE MONITORED THE ELECTION OF THE GENERAL PROSECUTOR

We summarised the information on individual candidates for the post of General Prosecutor in one place – at the site www.zadobruvolbu.sk. The website also informed about the problems concerning prosecutors' offices as viewed by the individual candidates and what solutions they offered. One could also learn more about the function of the General Prosecutor, his/her position and powers or the course of the election itself. In addition, we prepared for the members of the National Council of the Slovak Republic a list of questions that they could ask the candidates for the position of General Prosecutor during the hearing sessions. A number of these questions were asked during the hearings, which we personally attended.

### WE PROPOSED CHANGES TO LEGISLATION

We monitored on a regular basis the legislative activities of the government and members of the National Council of the Slovak Republic in the area of the rule of law, as well as changes in the legislative process, which concerned the involvement of the public in decision-making.

We participated in the creation of a draft amendment to the Constitution of the Slovak Republic and to the legal acts concerning the Constitutional Court, the Judicial Council and the creation of the Supreme Administrative Court of the Slovak Republic. We also commented on the parliamentary bill on the election of the General and Special Prosecutors.

We systematically monitored the preparation of the new Building Act and the Spatial Planning Act. We plan to have significant involvement in a potential consultation procedure.

# WE IMPROVED THE FUNCTIONING OF STATE ADMINISTRATION

2020

In 2020, we drafted a legislative proposal concerning a new model for the functioning of the state administration for nature and landscape protection. We prepared an expert handbook for the local state administration in the field of environmental care, which we presented to the employees at a series of information seminars. The aim of these activities was to contribute to a more efficient functioning of the state administration in this area.

ANNUAL REPORT

## WE TRAINED JUDGES, SENIOR JUDICIAL OFFICERS AND ASSISTANTS

We also organised training seminars for judges, assistants and senior judicial officers of the Supreme Court and regional courts. The lectures concerned the decision-making of courts in connection with public participation in administrative proceedings in the field of the environment (e.g., building proceedings, spatial planning proceedings). The speakers included a judge of the Supreme Administrative Court of the Czech Republic who presented the legal practice and experience from the Czech Republic, as well as a judge of the Supreme Court of the Slovak Republic. The goal was to raise the awareness of participants in the field of public participation in these proceedings so that it received more attention.

### A TEAM OF PEOPLE DETERMINED TO FIGHT FOR FAIRER SLOVAKIA!

**VIA IURIS** 

# TEAM



Milan Šagát 🛚 🔻 Executive Director until Nov. 2020



Katarína Batková 🗷 **Executive Director** since Nov. 2020



Kristína Babiaková Lawyer



Eva Kováčechová Lawyer



Imrich Vozár Lawyer until Dec. 2022



Zuzana Zummerová Trainee Lawyer



Miroslava Majerová Lawyer



Alena Dodoková 🗷 Lawyer since Sep. 2020



Ivana Kohutková Programming Leader



Hana Mravcová Proiect Coordinator



Communication & Fundraising



Katarína Žitniaková Monika Tomeková Communication & Fundraising

until Mar. 2020

### **CHANGES IN THE VIA IURIS TEAM**





Patrik Kimijan 7 **Fundraising** & Communication since Apr. 2020

Zdenka Tesárová

Accounting & Finance



Eva Vysoká Project & Financial Manager



Helena Hricová

Financial

Manager







Kristína Šuleková Banská Bystrica Office Management until Aug. 2020

### **VIA IURIS BOARD**



Tomáš Kamenec Lawyer Paul Q



Erik Láštic Lecturer CU, Bratislava



Andrej Majerník Lawyer Maierník & Miháliková



Dana Mareková Campaigner ClientEarth



Ondrej Smolár Soitron Group

VIA IURIS YEAR 2020

### ANNUAL REPORT

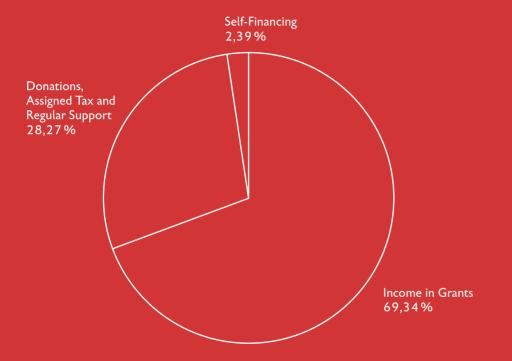
### VIA IURIS FUNDING

### INCOME IN 2020

Total Income	387	282,17€	100,00 %
Income in Grants		544,61€	
— Network of European Foundations	69	359,60€	17,91 %
— Active Citizens Fund Slovakia	61	844,08€	15,97 %
— Open Society Foundations	55	006,48€	14,20 %
— Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic	22	337,25€	5,77 %
— Fund for Transparent Slovakia	18	960,00€	4,90 %
— Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands	15	000,00€	3,87 %
— Freedom House	6	192,20€	1,60 %
— Nadácia ESET foundation	5	000,00€	1,29 %
— Telekom Endowment Fund at the Nadácia Pontis foundation	on 5	000,00€	1,29 %
— Nadácia Slovenskej sporiteľne foundation	5	000,00€	1,29 %
— ClientEarth		845,00€	
Donations, Assigned Tax and Regular Support	109	490,04€	28,27 %
— Donations	84	014,24€	21,69 %
— Assigned tax received (2 %)	20	475,80€	5,29 %
— Soitron (Amicus Club membership fee)	5	000,00€	1,29 %
Self-Financing	9	247,52€	2,39 %
Income from trade, contracts and rental of premises		200,00€	
Other (repaid loans, interests etc.)		047,52 €	
Other (repaid toans, interests etc.)	J	<del>047,</del> 32 €	0,7770

### **EXPENSES IN 2020**

Total Expenses	418 288,45 €	100,00 %
Programme Implementation Expenses	268 669,24€	64,23 %
— Citizen Programme	125 461,98 €	29,99 %
— Civil Society Programme	90 368,66 €	21,60 %
— Rule of Law Programme	52 838,60 €	12,63 %
Organisation's Management and Development	120 680,10 €	28,85 %
Management of the org., projects and grants, fund-raising, communication	113 430,77 €	27,12 %
Expenses for the provision of commercial services	2 852,25 €	0,68 %
Website and presentation materials	1 686,56 €	0,40 %
Expert literature, subscriptions	1 638,70 €	0,39 %
— Capacity building and training	1 071,82 €	0,26 %
Operating and Organisational Expenses	25 351,77 €	6,06 %
Office operating expenses	13 878,32 €	3,32 %
— On-line services and software	7 717,47 €	1,85 %
— Communication expenses	1 062,33 €	0,25 %
— Financial audit	900,00€	0,22 %
— Travel expenses	813,11€	0,19 %
— Banking and official fees	409,20€	0,10 %
— Taxes (on income, property, interest)	286,24€	0,07 %
— Consultations and meetings	285,10€	0,07 %
Other Expenses	3 587,34 €	0,86 %
Membership fees and contributions	500,00€	0,12 %
— Other expenditure	3 087,34 €	0,74 %



# IN 2020, WE WERE SUPPORTED BY

479 DONORS

We will be here for as long as you need.

Your support is invaluable to us.

VIA IURIS YEAR 2020 ANNUAL REPORT 29

### **INDEPENDENT**

### **AUDITOR'S**

**REPORT** 

### INDEPENDENT AUDITOR'S REPORT

To the statutory body of the civic association VIA IURIS

### REPORT ON THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

### Opinior

We have audited the financial statements of the civic association VIA IURIS (the "Association"), which comprise the balance sheet as at 31 December 2020, and the income statement for lever then ended, and notes to the financial statements, including a summary of significant accounting policies.

In our opinion, the accompanying financial statements give a true and fair view of the financial propriation of the Association as 43 1 December 2003, and list learned is preferance for the year then ended in accordance with the Act on Accounting No. 431/2002 Coll. as amended (the 'Act on Accounting).

### Basis for Opinion

We conducted our audit in accordance with international Standards on Audiling, Our responsibilities under those standards are huther described in the Auditor's Responsibilities for the Audit of the Financial Statements section of our report. We are independent of the Association in accordance with the provisions of Act No. 431/2002 Coll. on Accounting, and an Amendment to and Supplementation of Act No. 431/2002 Coll. on Accounting, as amended (hereinafter the Auditor State Auditor) related to the thical requirements. Auditor state are relevant to our audit of the financial statements, and we have fulfilled our other ethical responsibilities in accordance with these requirements. We believe that the audit evidence we have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our coinion.

### Other matter

The Association does not meet the criteria for the statutory audit of financial statements in accordance with the Accounting Act, and therefore does not even have to prepare an annual report. The audit of the financial statements was decided voluntarily.

### Responsibility of Management and Those Charged with Governance for the Financial Statements

Management is responsible for the preparation of the financial statements to give a true and fair view in accordance with the Act on Accounting, and for such internal control as management determines is necessary to enable the preparation of financial statements that are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error.

In preparing the financial statements, management is responsible for assessing the Association's ability to continue as a going concern, disclosing, as applicable, matters related to going concern and using the going concern basis of accounting, unless management either intends to liquidate the Association or to cease operations, or has no realistic alternative but to do so.

Those charged with governance are responsible for oversight of the Association's financial reporting process.

### Auditor's Responsibilities for the Audit of the Financial Statements

Our objectives are to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the financial statements as a whole are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error, and to issue an auditor's report that includes our opinion. Reasonable assurance is a high level of assurance, but is not a guarantee that an audit conducted in accordance with international Standards on Auditing will always detect a material misstatement when it exists. Misstatements can arise from fraud or error and are considered material; if individually or in the aggregate, they could reasonably be expected to influence the economic decisions of users taken on the basis of these financial statements.

As part of an audit in accordance with International Standards on Auditing, we exercise professional judgment and maintain professional scepticism throughout the audit. We also:

- Identify and assess the risks of material misstatement of the financial statements, whether due to fraud or error, design and perform audit procedures responsive to flower insix, and obtain audit evidence that is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our opinion.
   The risk of not detecting a material misstatement resulting from fraud is higher than for one resulting from error, as fraud may involve collusion, forgery, intentional omissions, misrepresentations, or the override of internal control.
- Obtain an understanding of internal control relevant to the audit in order to design audit
  procedures that are appropriate in the circumstances, but not for the purpose of expressing
  an opinion on the effectiveness of the Association, internal control.
- Evaluate the appropriateness of accounting policies used and the reasonableness of accounting estimates and related disclosures made by management.
- Conclude on the appropriateness of management's use of the going concern basis of accounting and, based on the audit evidence obtained, whether a material uncertainty exists related to events or conditions that may cast significant doubt on the Associations ability to continue as a going concern. If we conclude that a material uncertainty exists, we are required to draw attention in our auditor's report to the related disclosures in the financial statements or, if such disclosures are inadequate, to modify our opinion. Our conclusions are based on the sudit evidence obtained up to the date of our auditor's report. However, future events or conditions may cause the Association to cease to continue as a going concern.
- Evaluate the overall presentation, structure and content of the financial statements, including the disclosures, and whether the financial statements represent the underlying transactions and events in a manner that achieves fair presentation.

We communicate with those charged with governance, among other matters, about the planned scope and schedule of the audit and significant audit findings, including any significant deficiencies in internal control that we identify during our audit.

This is a translation of the original Slovak Auditor's Report, financial statements have not been translated. For a full understanding of the information stated in the Auditor's Report, the Report should be read in conjunction with the full set of financial statements prepared in Slovak.

Banská Bystrica, 30 April 2021

MONAREX audit consulting, s.r.o. Námestie slobody 2 974 01 Banská Bystrica Business Register Banská Bystrica Section Sro, Insert No.: 3701/S licence SKAu 263 Ing. Ladislav Pompura, Ph.D. Responsible Auditor licence SKAu 818



WERE

# **OUR ACTIVITIES**

# FINANCIALLY

SUPPORTED BY































# ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COOPERATION





















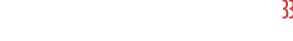
















### **ANNUAL REPORT 2020**

Published in 2021 by VIA IURIS Photographs: VIA IURIS archives Graphic design: Marek Mati Printed by: Bittner print

www.viaiuris.sk



We will be here for as long as you need.

Your support is invaluable to us.

2 0 2 0

— VIA IURIS —