

PRESS RELEASE

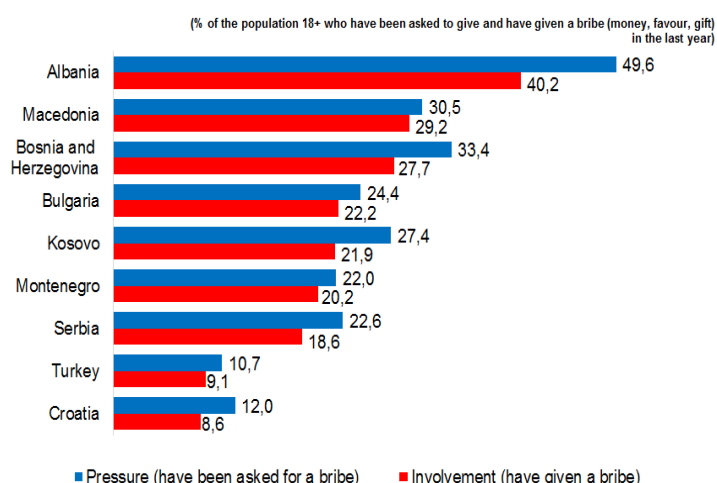
Brussels, 30 November 2016

Bribery remains widespread in the Balkans, but the real problem is high-level political corruption and the stalling of the EU accession process, according to the 2016 results of the SELDI Corruption Monitoring System

On 30 November 2016, the Southeast European Leadership for Development and Integrity (SELDI) will hold a round table in the European Parliament dedicated to the issues of anti-corruption in the Western Balkans and Turkey. SELDI (www.seldi.net), a coalition of 29 civil society organisations from Southeast Europe, underlines in its Regional Anticorruption Report 2016 *Shadow Power*, that anticorruption progress has slowed down in the past two years, with citizens feeling trapped in what they increasingly see as their captured states by powerful political – economic networks.

The SELDI 2016 *Corruption Monitoring System in SEE*, based on population surveys in nine countries shows corruption pressure of 25.9% - hardly a percentage decline since 2014 when the regional mean was 27.1%. Bulgaria, Montenegro and Serbia demonstrate some progress in diminishing corruption since 2014, however FYR of Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina once again lose ground. At the same time even in the most stable and perceived “corruption-free” countries in the region (Croatia and Turkey) more than 10% of the citizens were asked for a bribe during the past year. Albania still shows the highest corruption levels – every second citizen reports being asked for a bribe and every third gave one in 2015. On average a quarter of the citizens in the region have been forced to engage in corruption, exposing a systemic governance problem in SEE. Between a third and four-fifths of the citizens in the region have chosen to stay in the hidden economy damaging long-term growth prospects. People in the region have continued to embrace migration as their only hope for better life, abandoning the local political systems as incapable of delivering this for them. Enlargement remains largely SEE’s only hope for sustained future prosperity, despite the enlargement freeze in the current EC term and demands for stricter rules of engagement and quicker deliver mechanisms. Another response from the EU to the inefficient policy implementation has been the strengthening of the focus on justice and home affairs issues after 2012.

Corruption pressure and involvement in corruption



Some positive steps have been made: Albania adopted an Anticorruption Strategy 2015-2020; Kosovo's Anti-Corruption Agency started random verification of a fifth of the asset declarations of officials; in January 2016 Montenegro established an Agency for the Prevention of Corruption with a broad mandate; in Serbia a new Law on the Anticorruption Agency is expected to address deficiencies in the previous legislation and Bosnia and Herzegovina adopted Reform Agenda and ratified the Stabilisation and Association Agreement. Still, the events in the FYR of Macedonia and BiH of the past two years have demonstrated there is a need for a new approach and political engagement. There does not seem to be enough energy and/or capacity for both currently.

The round table will seek to chart needed next steps in finding effective tools to tackle some of the worst challenges in SEE in a discussion between representatives of the civil society, the European Commission, and the European Parliament.

Source: SELDI Corruption Monitoring System, 2016.



A project implemented by a consortium led by the Center for the Study of Democracy
5 Alexander Zhendov str.
1113 Sofia, Bulgaria
Tel: +359 2 971 3000
Fax: +359 2 971 2233



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