

PRESS RELEASE

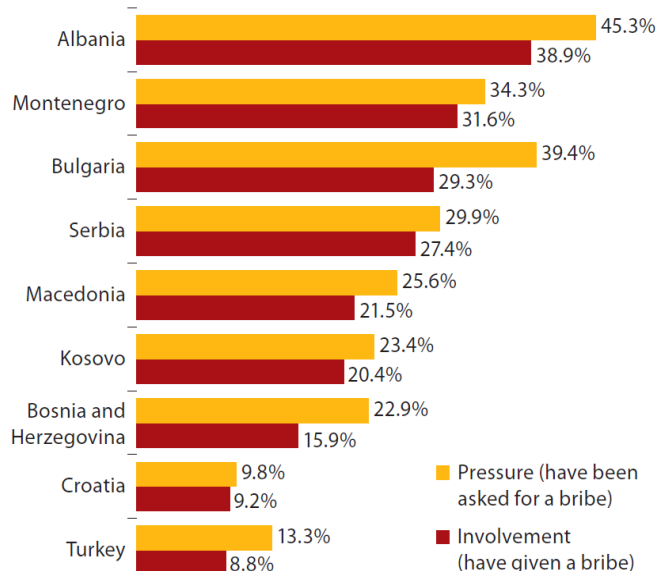
Brussels, 24-25 February 2015

Good Governance Agenda for Southeast Europe: The Role of Civil Society and the European Institutions

On **24 and 25 February 2015**, the Southeast European Leadership for Development and Integrity (SELDI) presented the key findings and policy recommendations from the first two years of the initiative in Brussels. The conclusions from the *Regional Anti-Corruption Report: [Anti-Corruption Reloaded: Assessment of Southeast Europe](#)* were discussed with representatives of the civil society, the European Commission, and the European Parliament. Given the major significance of the good governance and anti-corruption issue in Southeast Europe and the prospects of the countries from the region of joining the EU, the event aimed to contribute to promoting the civil society-state dialogue in identifying effective counter-measures and possibilities for future collaboration among all stakeholders. Western Balkans citizens and stakeholders have seen the enlargement “freeze” as a drag on motivation and drive for further reforms. The policy forum charted the needed next steps in tackling one of the worst outstanding challenges in the region – of corruption and state capture, and encouraged the countries not to lose the gained momentum of implementing the EU membership conditionality, as well as their will for reforms in the next five years.

Figure 1: Corruption pressure and involvement in corruption

(% of the population 18+ who have been asked to give and have given a bribe (money, favour, gift) in the preceding year)



Source: *Regional Anticorruption Report/SELDI Corruption Monitoring System, 2014.*

The **Regional Anti-corruption Report** underlines that despite some important achievements – mostly with respect to the stabilisation of democratic institutions, the adoption of laws in key anticorruption areas, a reduction in petty bribery and growing public intolerance of corruption in the region – anticorruption and good governance reforms are not consolidated, corruption among elected politicians and judges seems remains unchecked, and the enforcement of anticorruption legislation is haphazard. The experience with corruption (in other words, the involvement of citizens in corruption transactions) in SEE is very high. Even in Turkey and Croatia, where levels of administrative corruption are lowest in the region, about 8-9% of the population reports having given a bribe in the last year. Such levels of experience with corruption are well beyond the average levels registered by the Eurobarometer surveys in the EU. This shows that administrative **corruption is a mass phenomenon** in SEE countries, and cannot be confined to single cases of corrupt officials.



A project implemented by a consortium led by the Center for the Study of Democracy

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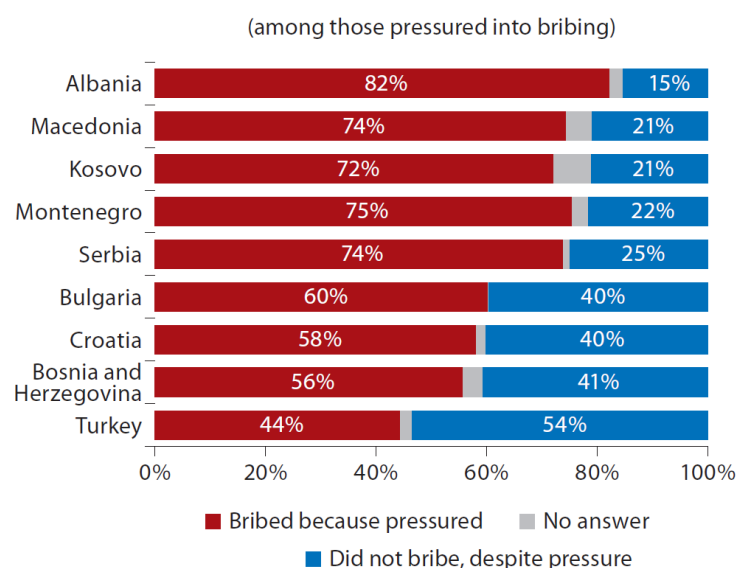
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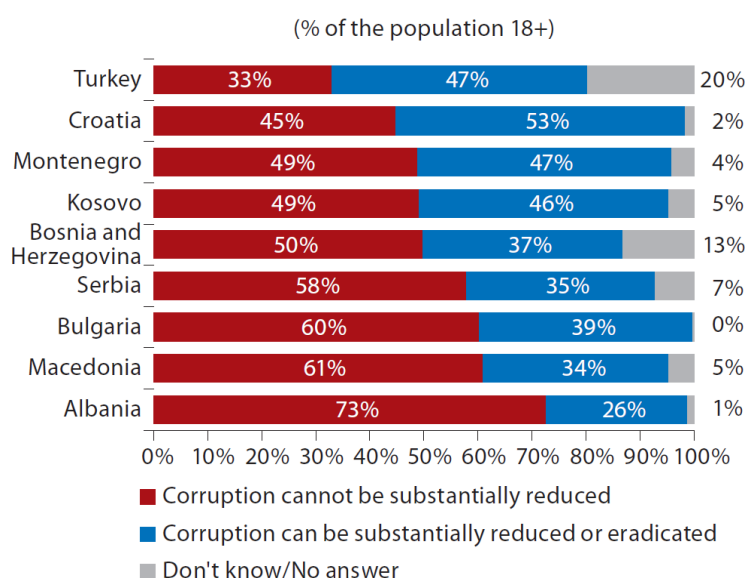


The European Commission is the EU's executive body.

"The European Union is made up of 27 Member States who have decided to gradually link together their know-how, resources and destinies. Together, during a period of enlargement of 50 years, they have built a zone of stability, democracy and sustainable development whilst maintaining cultural diversity, tolerance and individual freedoms. The European Union is committed to sharing its achievements and its values with countries and peoples beyond its borders".

Figure 2: Resilience to corruption pressure

Source: SELDI Corruption Monitoring System, 2014.

Figure 3: Feasibility to policy responses to corruption: public estimates

Source: SELDI Corruption Monitoring System, 2014.

Corruption pressure from officials is the main factor that influences the level of corruption involvement. Most of the countries where both involvement and pressure are high are also characterised by **low resilience to corruption pressure** (most of the respondents who were asked for a bribe gave one). Although resilience could not be considered the main factor to reduce involvement in corruption, it reflects the prevailing social attitudes to integrity and is largely a result of the efforts of civil society and the authorities in increasing anticorruption awareness. In this respect the role of civil society is crucial as it is in a position to lead the public pressure for change.

As regards policy priorities, there have been two significant changes in the approach to anticorruption – a shift of attention **from petty** (that of traffic police or public sector doctors) **to grand corruption** (that of members of parliament or ministers), and criminalisation of a wider array of abuses of public office. Achieving impact in terms of punishing grand corruption though remains limited at best. The key challenge for anticorruption policies in the region is to close the **implementation gap**, and keep up with the shifting manifestations and forms of corruption while maintaining regulatory stability and avoiding overwhelming the judiciary with frequent changes.

The findings of SELDI monitoring emphasise the **significance of public support for the success of anticorruption policies**. Trust by the public in government and the effectiveness of policy are joined in a kind of virtuous circle: higher shares of people who are optimistic about the feasibility of anticorruption success are correlated with lower corruption levels. Conversely, more prevalent corruption goes hand in hand with increased pessimism about the prospects of anticorruption.

Overall, the SELDI countries have adopted the better part – more importantly the logic and approach – of international anticorruption standards in their national legislations. Statutory quality, however, continues to be a problem. Frequent and inconsistent changes to laws have resulted in procedural and statutory complexity and contradictory interpretation by courts. A shortcoming that is common to all SELDI countries is the compromised autonomy of the various oversight and law enforcement bodies. Some degree of interference by elected politicians – members of parliament or government ministers – in the work of the civil service is typical. Further, none of the SELDI countries has an adequately functioning complaints management mechanism in the public administration. Most have instituted an anticorruption body that is expected to receive complaints from the public. Another deficiency that is shared is the shortage of reliable and publicly accessible data on the performance of government institutions, especially as relates to anticorruption. Information and statistics are either not collected, not available to the public, or gathered so haphazardly as not to allow monitoring and analysis. One of the key issues related to the design of specialised national anticorruption institutions in the region is how to combine preventive and repressive functions. As regards the legislature, parliaments in the region do not rank high in the public trust and this unenviable position is not without its reasons. Codes of ethical behaviour are rare and unenforced; lobbying regulation is even rarer; only recently have procedures for lifting immunity from prosecution started to be introduced, albeit timidly; wherever there is an anticorruption body in parliament, it is typically to supervise some executive agency, rather than deal with corruption

among members. An issue of significant concern in the SELDI countries is the financing of political parties and electoral campaigns.

Key recommendations for the SEE region

Policies hoping to upset entrenched special interests cannot be delivered through traditional bureaucracies alone. High level of partisanship in SEE prevents reformist politicians from mustering the type of public support needed to make anti-corruption efforts successful. For this to happen, **broad public coalitions** need to be formed both within the countries, and region-wide. It is often wrongly assumed that anticorruption efforts would be opposed only by corrupt politicians and bureaucrats but somehow automatically supported by the general public. Corruption flourishes – or diminishes – not just because of the legal framework or government law enforcement but also in a social and cultural environment the informal rules and sanctions of which are sometimes more effective than those of law enforcement. Any anti-corruption programme in the SEE countries needs to ensure that it is **tailored to these local social networks** in a way that makes them receptive to reformist policies.

The experience of SELDI countries in tackling corruption since 2001 demonstrates that solving the corruption challenge in the region would require sustained efforts on many fronts and the involvement of all local and international stakeholders over the long term. The regional report provides a number of recommendations, among which three key areas need to be prioritised by countries in the region and at the European level in order to achieve breakthrough in the mid-term:

- **Effective prosecution of corrupt high-level politicians and senior civil servants** is the only way to send a strong and immediate message that corruption would not be tolerated.
- **An independent corruption and anti-corruption monitoring mechanism** needs to be introduced on national and regional level in order to provide robust data and analysis and integrate both corruption diagnostics and anticorruption policy evaluation. The mechanism should be implemented through national and/or regional civil society organisations and networks, and should be independent of direct national government funding. In this respect international partners, and primarily the European Commission, should engage directly civil society organisations in the region, which is already happening.
- **Critical sectors with high corruption and state-capture risks, such as the energy sector, should be addressed with priority.** The other priority measures include: increasing competition in public procurement; improving the corporate governance of state owned enterprises; transparent management of large-scale investment projects; enhancing the accountability and independence of energy regulatory authorities.

The SELDI Initiative (www.seldi.net)

Southeast Europe Leadership for Development and Integrity (SELDI) is a civil society anti-corruption and good governance initiative joining the efforts of 30 like-minded civil society organisations from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia and Turkey. SELDI aims to contribute to a dynamic civil society in the region, capable of participating in public debate and influencing policy and decision-making process in the area of anti-corruption and good governance. The coalition has endorsed a regional CSO strategy and action agenda, and carries out good governance monitoring, public awareness raising and advocacy for reformist policies.

The SELDI Corruption Monitoring System (CMS)

The *Corruption Assessment Reports* and employs the state of the art *Corruption Monitoring System (CMS)*. The CMS provides strong metrics to advocate for needed changes and to raise awareness on specific policy solutions, thus empowering citizens to influence the public sector reform process. The CMS presents comparability of 2001, 2002 and 2014 data across the target Southeast Europe countries and registers the actual level and trends of direct involvement in corruption, as well as the public attitudes, assessments and expectations relating to corruption.

The Regional Anti-Corruption Report and the available national Corruption Assessment Reports can be downloaded in full from SELDI's web-site at www.seldi.net.

Note: The text in this Press Release can be freely distributed on the condition that the SELDI initiative, the EU funding, the title of the event and name of the organizers are explicitly mentioned.