

THE CORRUPTION IMAGE OF THE SEE COUNTRIES IN SELECT GERMAN LANGUAGE MEDIA

Policy Brief No. 4, February 2015

Introduction

The continuing debate about Bulgaria's and Romania's joining the Schengen Area, the accession of Croatia, and the enlargement negotiations with all of the rest of the region of Southeastern Europe (SEE)¹ has sparked intense debate in the EU media on EU enlargement as a whole, and in SEE in particular. Although fears about internal migration and exploitation and pressure on the old-EU members' welfare systems have been repeatedly proven as wrong², popular discontent with newcomers aided by media and populist politics has resulted in the freeze of further EU enlargement in SEE for the term of the 2014 – 2020 Commission. Provided serious concerns about the quality of rule of law in SEE, the lack of trust in enlargement seems at least partially founded in the lack of progress in tackling corruption in the region. SELDI's Regional Anti-corruption Report showed, that while administrative corruption remains a systemic problem in all countries in SEE, it is the lack of progress in tackling high-level corruption, which

creates the most concern for progress in enlargement.³

Not only does EU citizens seem skeptical about further enlargement. Rather it appears as if pre-defined images existed of the accession countries in SEE, which have the capability to create animosity and fear in Europe, which is exactly the contrary of the EU's goals. There is a contradiction between creating a shared feeling of togetherness and the reality of regions drifting apart. Why is that and how does this sort of otherness of SEE arise? One of the biggest influences on the public opinion is the communication of that region in the media. Media does not only inform, it also creates images and manipulates the perceptions of the reader. If there are only alarming reports in the media about corruption in those countries without the comparative perspective and the positive developments, the media consumer will associate them with corruption.

This analysis takes a first step to gain an insight in how the ten countries are depicted in the German language media. The policy brief seeks an answer - or rather an idea about an answer through content

* SELDI and CSD would like to thank Theresia Schneider for her contribution to the first drafts of the current analysis.

¹ For the purpose of this research, SEE includes Albania, Bosnia, Bulgaria, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia and Turkey.

² See for example Dustmann, Ch., Frattini, T. (2014). The Fiscal Effects of Immigration to the UK. The Economic Journal, Volume 124, Issue 580, November 2014.

³ SELDI. (2014). Regional Anti-Corruption Report: Anti-corruption Reloaded – Assessment of Southeast Europe. Center for the Study of Democracy, 2014.



analysis of 320 articles from 5 different German-language online media sources. With the help of the outcome and the understanding of how and why a one-sided opinion is prevalent it could allow one to improve relevant policies and find possibilities how to overcome those biased opinions.

1. Findings of the quantitative analysis

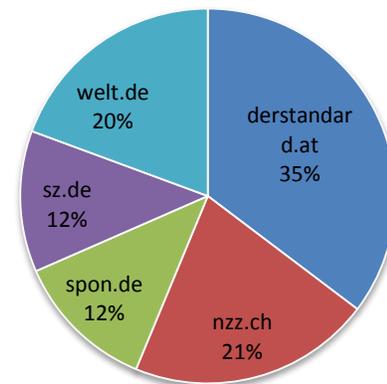
After having collected, coded and analyzed a sample of 320 articles several findings can be identified. The outcome consists of the analysis of single categories as well as of the combination of two or more codes. While the chosen methodology clearly has its limitations in terms of reach (it only reviews some of the media, and only their online formats), it does provide an interesting insight for further research and review. The chosen media outlets are some of the most influential in the German-speaking area, which makes the findings particularly interesting and relevant to policy-makers in the EU, and in SEE. The time frame of the media content analysis covers 2012 and 2013, which presumably influenced EU elections and policy-making developments in 2014 – 2015.

1.1 The different media sources and the countries

The analysis comprises articles from three German online media sources. Two online gateways of the daily newspapers *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (sz.de) and *Die Welt* (welt.de) are part of the analysis as well as articles from the German *Spiegel Online* (spiegel.de). Furthermore articles from the online gateway of the Austrian daily newspaper *Der Standard* (derstandard.at) and of the Swiss newspaper *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (nzz.ch) contribute to the analysis. With respect to corruption the countries were covered in all sources. The issue is featured most frequently in articles on derstandard.at: 113 articles (35% form all media reviewed) were accessible

online. On nzz.ch 67 articles (21%) were published, which make it the second largest amount. This is followed by 62 articles (20%) from welt.de. On each of the two other German websites spiegel.de and sz.de 39 articles (12%) were accessible online.

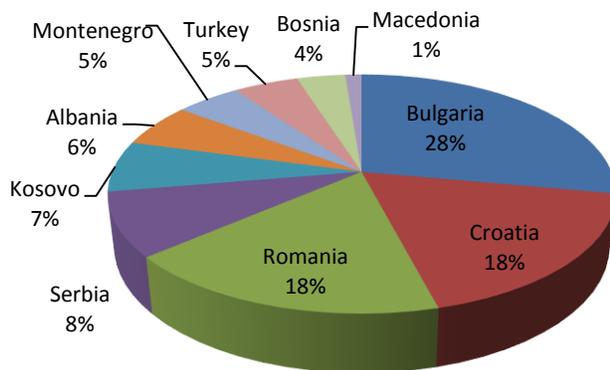
Figure 1. Distribution of the media sources



Source: SELDI, 2014

The greater share, 250 of 320 articles (78%), deals with one of the 10 **countries**, whereas 70 articles (22%) cover more than one country or the region as a whole. Regardless if the articles cover a single or several countries, the states, which are at the top of the league are clearly identifiable. First in line is Bulgaria with more than one quarter (28%), second stands Croatia followed closely by Romania. Altogether the share of those three countries in the sample is almost two thirds. The share of articles covering Serbia, Kosovo and Albania could be grouped together because the percentages range from around 4% to 9%. Montenegro, Turkey and Bosnia are each covered in approximately 5% of the whole while Macedonia comes last with being an issue in only around 1% of the articles.

Figure 2. Share of countries in the media articles' sample



Source: SELDI, 2014

Concerning the articles referring to a single country the distribution differs a little. While the order remains almost the same⁴, the distinction between Croatia and Romania is the most significant one. The difference between them falls to 5 pp only.

The mentioning of different countries in the same article underlines this hypothesis: 6 articles deal with, Croatia, and Bulgaria; 28 articles refer to Romania and Bulgaria. Other combinations never appear more than 4 times.

Bulgaria and Romania seem to be the favourite “black sheep” of the media referring to the region of SEE. A bigger number of articles analyses the Transparency International index, demonstrating that after Greece the situation in Bulgaria and Romania is the worst, due to the perception of corruption. Another reason is the time devoted to the two countries’ joining of the Schengen Area debate. The articles give a bad negative end result und discuss whether Bulgaria and Romania should really be allowed to join. Last but not least, as Romania and Bulgaria both newer member states, which still face

⁴ One exception is Turkey which stands fifth within this analysis

rule of law issues and a specific monitoring by the European Commission in terms of counter-corruption on a regular basis⁵.

1.2 The role of the European Union

The membership of the European Union or the prospect thereof seems to influence the media coverage. The countries, which are members of the EU⁶ are more likely to be reported about than those, for which a soon accession to the EU is rather improbable. This also shows, there might be an effect of a “media shock” for the population of the old member-states upon new-entrant: readers get a shot of articles, mostly focusing on the problems of the acceding country. The importance of the EU is also reflected in the articles’ relation to the EU: In half of the articles the European Union plays a role with respect to corruption. One quarter of the articles does not cover Bulgaria, Croatia nor Romania directly but is related with the EU, and how it tackles (has tackled) corruption in accession countries. This creates the image that the media looks closer at corruption within countries that are already members of the EU.

The media sources report about the region of SEE to a different extent. A connection with the EU is likewise perceptible here. Compared to the Germany-based media, articles not dealing with one of the EU members Bulgaria, Croatia and Romania are more prevalent in Swiss and Austrian media, on

⁵ Upon joining the EU, a special monitoring mechanism was introduced for Bulgaria and Romania to follow their progress in tackling corruption and organized crime, and in judicial reform, called the *Cooperation and Verification Mechanism*. Since its inception in 2007, there have been 9 annual reports, and some interim updates.

⁶ or were about to become and became a member during analyzed period of time, as in case of Croatia

nzz.ch and on *derstandard.at*. 48% of the sample from *nzz.ch* and 34% from *derstandard.at* concern Albania, Bosnia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Turkey, or a combination of at least two of them. The percentage of those countries in the German media range from 13% on *spiegel.de*, 19% on *welt.de* to 28% on *sz.de*. *Nzz.ch* and *derstandard.at* exhibit further common characteristics. While Albania is scarcely reflected in the German sources it has a greater share on *derstandard.at* and a particularly big share on *nzz.ch*.

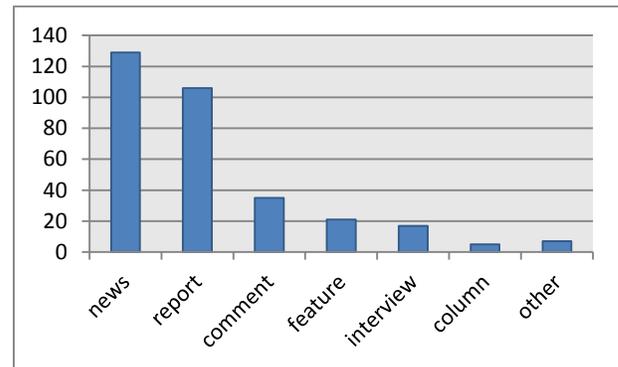
Articles concerning Bulgaria are found more often in the German sources. Combined with other countries the share is higher than 50% in all three sources, therefore considerably higher than on *nzz.ch* (16%) and *derstandard.at* (26%). Articles that mention Bosnia in connection with corruption are especially found on *derstandard.at*.

There are also differences between *nzz.ch* and *derstandard.at*: With 30% Croatia is reflected most often on *derstandard.at* and with 16% least often on *nzz.ch*. Publications referring to Kosovo and corruption are not likely to appear on *sz.de* or *spiegel.de*. The same is true for Macedonia and Montenegro, there are no articles. By far *nzz.ch* reports the most about Montenegro, followed by *derstandard.at*.

1.3 Forms of journalistic presentation

The statistical analysis provides information about the different forms of journalistic presentation. There are 129 (around 40%) news articles, 106 reports (33%) and 35 (11%) comments. There are 21 features and 17 interviews, whereas the number of columns, analyses, reviews, galleries, insider reports or portraits ranges from 1 to 5.

Figure 3. Forms of journalistic presentation



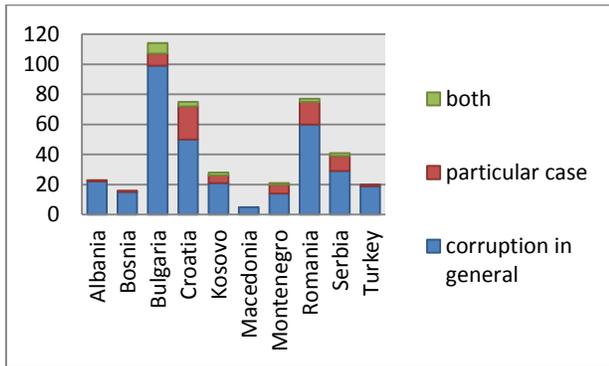
Source: SELDI, 2014

190 articles (60%) were written by an editor or by editors. For 125 articles (39%) news agencies are given as the source. The authors of the remaining articles are unknown except two contributions by the German and the Hungarian Ministers of Foreign Affairs.

1.4 General corruption, organized crime and anti-corruption measures in SEE in the media

Out of the 320 analyzed articles a clear majority of three quarters concern **general corruption** while 66 (21%) report about a particular corruption case. 14 articles cover both, general corruption accompanied by a specific case. Most of the general corruption coverage is about Bulgaria. There are 58 articles on the country, and 99 articles in combination with other countries. This result is followed with respectively by Romania - 24 and 99 articles, and Croatia - 31 and 50 articles. For Croatia 20 country-specific, and 22 articles in combination with other countries concern a specific corruption case. About Romania such are 15 articles. Concerning Bulgaria, only 15 articles on specific corruption cases can be found. There are no articles referring to a particular case in Bulgaria or Romania in combination with other countries.

Figure 4. General corruption or particular case reported in the articles



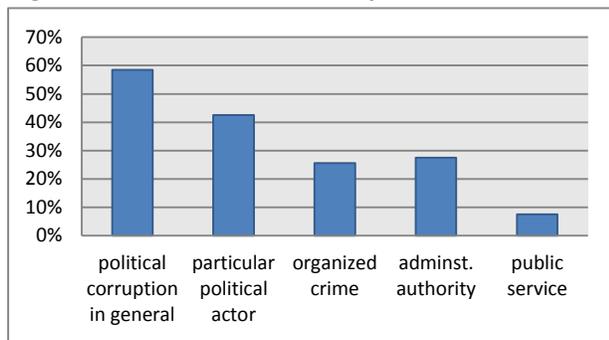
Source: SELDI, 2014

Of 320 articles, 82 contain a connection with **organized crime**, whereas 238 deal only with corruption. 18 articles about Bulgaria, 11 articles about Bulgaria and Romania and 10 articles about Croatia Serbia turned out to be related relatively often with organized crime. If the articles talk about organized crime they usually refer to a certain group of people that manipulate politicians and legal authorities in order to commit a profitable illegal action. Still the description of those articles is rather an additional evidence of how those countries situation is worse than in most of the European countries. In Kosovo for example the EULEX mission is rather associated with not doing enough to change the situation in the country, coming hand in hand with the ongoing corruption. This comes before the 2014 scandal in the EULEX mission, which revealed the organisation might have been affected by unethical behavior. The same is applicable for Bulgaria – organized crime is mentioned frequently in connection with corruption, but barely examples are given.

Corruption concerning a particular **type of public service** could be identified mostly in the judiciary. That is mentioned in 58 of 88 articles. 10 articles refer to the ministry of interior and another 7 to the health system. This is associated partly with Croatia where a quick and good medical treatment or a surgery is more likely to happen if you

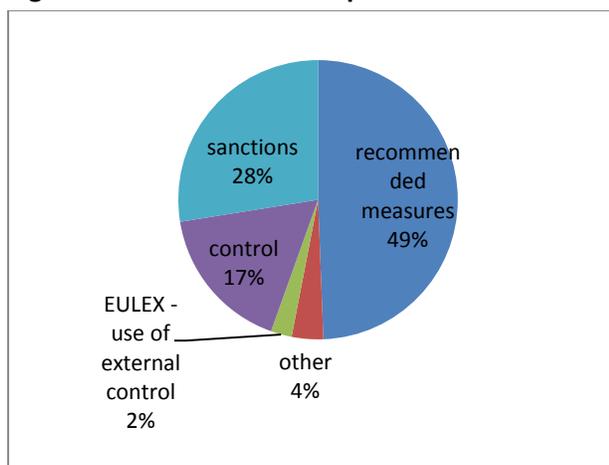
bribe the medical staff. The rest is scattered about other services such as public administration, the social welfare system, or customs. Taking a closer look at the specific **administrative authorities** a clear identification cannot be made. The only significant number of 8 articles relates to the building authority. “The room without a view” is common in Albania. This expression refers to the often-seen cases that buildings are just built anywhere – also so close to another building as to preclude the view from the room, against all regulations. Most new buildings were built illegally, bribing somebody in the building authorities to get the official documents needed.

The mentioning of **political corruption** could be detected very often in the articles. In 58% of the articles there is a connection with political corruption. Within this analysis political corruption refers to all actions that involve a politician or a party or generally relates their stay in power with general corruption, so whether a political involved person misuses his or her power or somebody takes influence on political decisions. There are numerous examples described in the articles, such as the dubious candidates during a Montenegrin election, Croatia’s former Prime Minister Ivo Sanader and his trial, protests in Bulgaria, etc. 42% of all 320 articles related corruption with the stay in power of a particular party or a member or both. This is quite a big number compared to the identified administrative authorities and the type of public services. Approximately a quarter could be allocated to the latter and 7% could be assigned to a particular authority.

Figure 5. Articles related to topics

Source: SELDI, 2014

A bit more than two thirds, 225 articles, feature **anti-corruption measures**. Yet in 47% of those 225 articles, anti-corruption measures are just recommended, and not applied or planned. In 28% sanctions are applied, 28% refer to sanctions and 17% of them to control as a measure. With respect to Kosovo 6 articles talk about EULEX, which means use of external control.

Figure 6. Share of anti-corruption measures

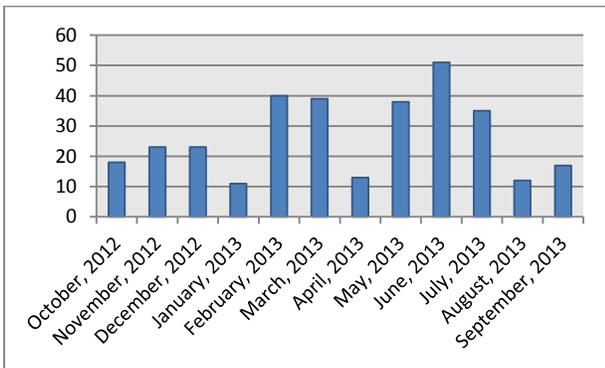
Source: SELDI, 2014

Most of the articles, 280, deal only with **national corruption**, while the rest concerns international corruption. The highlight is Croatia with 14 articles about international corruption. 13 of them refer to a particular case.

1.5 Period of time

Concerning the **period of time**, which the articles refer to, the years of 2012 and 2013 are significant. The analysis covers 3 months of 2012 and 9 months of 2013. It demonstrates that the media coverage is mostly about current issues. There are several reports about cases that occurred in the past, usually they go back just for a couple of years. Only for Croatia it happens to be slightly different: 8 articles go back to 1994 and 1995. The choice of the period, besides practical reasons, has been chosen to coincide with the final preparation for Croatia's accession, and the run-up to European elections in 2014.

On closer examination of the **publication date** only the month and the respective year were decisive. Two climaxes can be detected. The first one concerns February and March 2013 – with each 40 and 39 respectively articles published. The second one is May, June and July with 38, 51 and 35 articles published. Possible explanations of the peaks are developments in Croatia and Bulgaria. The former joined the EU on 1 July 2013, while there we major protests in Bulgaria in the February – March 2013. There are 17 articles in June about Croatia itself and about the country in connection with other countries such as Bosnia, Bulgaria or Romania. Also in July the number of articles concerning Croatia is high. The share of articles regarding Bulgaria, in combination with other countries, is above-average in the months February and March, May, June and July. For Romania the share of articles is above-average in February, March, June and December. In comparison with the fourth often mentioned country Serbia, the country's above-average share is seen in February and in September.

Figure 7. Articles per month

Source: SELDI, 2014

2. Findings of the in-depth analysis

2.1 Discussed reasons for the occurrence of corruption and involved actors

Reasons for the occurrence of corruption were given in 32 of the 49 in-depth analyzed articles. The most frequently identified reason is personal enrichment. 10 articles deal with personal enrichment only, another 6 articles with personal enrichment in combination with other reasons. This category consists of personal enrichment in general as well as of money laundering, maintaining power and assets, getting a personal advantage as well as getting a visa easily, preventing a trial, and receiving more social welfare. Furthermore two other reasons are mentioned more than once: Corruption is part of the system and that the occurrence of corruption seems to be related with old post-communist structures. Referring to corruption as being part of the system, the articles point out that corruption solves problems in different social classes, such as the middle and the upper class. One article notes corruption as a side effect of the capitalist system.

The relation to post-communist structures is more unambiguous as it refers to old power structures, and the associated assets that had to be defended. In order to fight corruption effectively the articles generally prescribe that those old power structures

should be sustainably abolished, personal enrichment should be less easy to achieve. The perception that corruption is a part of the system is more problematic, because it is more difficult to change this stable image of SEE in the German language media.

According to the in-depth analysis, **the actors who are involved in corruption** are found everywhere. The answers range from high-level politicians, who are mentioned in 15 articles, frequently in combination with other actors, to actors within the public sector, and also the general notion of the population culture as such. But the majority is identified within the political sphere and within the public sectors, which is accompanied by the findings above. From the articles dealing with reasons for corruption 43 of 49 raise the question of the roles of the different actors.

2.2 The perception, communication and combatting of corruption

Some 31 articles give an **idea of how corruption is grasped** by the population in SEE. Twelve articles reflect that the population does not accept the occurrence of corruption and that not enough is done to prevent it. This gives an explanation for the many articles within the whole sample that deal with protests against corruption. They took place especially in Bulgaria but happened as well in Turkey. Mostly those articles do not talk about a specific case of corruption but about corruption in general.

There are articles, which demonstrate that while the population in SEE does not accept corruption on the one hand, there is also fear to demonstrate against it since everyone depends on the goodwill of the ruling elite. Yet, further articles exhibit that in some cases the population recognizes and accepts corruption. They refer to those cases in which corruption is considered a part of daily life and most

of the institutions are seen as corrupt, hence no counter-action is feasible.

This is accompanied by the assessment of the **general atmosphere in the country**. Eighteen of 24 articles convey a negative mood among the people. The people are described as to be outraged, furious and angry on the one hand, but on the other hand they are seen as depressed, disillusioned, and as given up in view of the widely spread corruption. One notable exception has been spotted in the media analysis: in Albania people seemed to be optimistic despite the prevalence of corruption, which might be associated with the anti-corruption drive of the newly elected in 2013 government.

The prevalence of corruption is also seen as **impacting the general atmosphere**. In 16 of 20 articles it is one of the principal reasons for the generally gloomy environment. Four articles talk about national problems as rationale for the bad mood, such as an identification conflict.

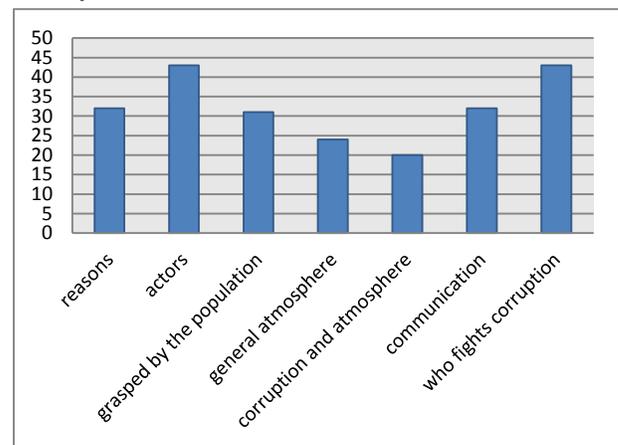
Regarding **how corruption is communicated** in public a positive result can be detected. 32 of 44 articles demonstrate an open communication on corruption in SEE.

6 articles point out that it is not openly communicated. Another 3 assume that the prevalence of corruption is well known but not openly communicated. Most of the articles refer to the communication by protestors, the European Union or the (international) media. The articles that do not show appropriate communication are related to controlled press or to governments that put other urgent issues on the agenda in order to distract the population from the real problem, namely corruption.

These outcomes correlate with the analysis of **the actors who combat corruption**. First ranked is the population, speaking mostly of the demonstrators who want to achieve a fair system that excludes a corrupt political system. Also some governments are

seen as taking counter-corruption measures. That happened for instance in Croatia when the government had to take measures in order to fulfill the criteria for joining the European Union. In addition opposition parties, non-governmental organizations and other civil organizations have been depicted as actors to combat corruption, for example the "Alliance for a clean Romania" or the "Turkish fair play platform".

Figure 8.1. Answers regarding occurrence of corruption



Source: SELDI, 2014

2.3 Consequences, end results, and outlook

Many articles analyse the consequences of corruption for SEE. They note for example that the countries suffer from **the consequences of corruption** such as abuse of power, manipulation of elections, or the violation of the freedom of opinion. In addition corruption affects the economic situation negatively due to loss of money or the ousting of potential investors. Furthermore consequences in relation to EU were also seen in the sample: 3 articles deal with the German veto against the vote on Bulgaria's and Romania's joining of the Schengen agreement. Politicians also suffer from corruption as it can deflate their reputation and result in not getting re-elected.

In almost the entire qualitative sample an **end result** is described. The articles showing a negative one predominate. 29 articles estimate a negative end result, while merely 3 point out positive aspects, which is associated with the sentencing of former prime minister Ivo Sanader. 7 articles confirm a success in countering corruption but note that further measures have to be taken. The detailed answers regarding a negative end result differ slightly. They refer scarcely to a specific case but evaluate the size of corruption as very high and the fight against it as unsuccessful. The positive end result and those who still require more actions are frequently associated with the conviction of the Croatian former Prime Minister Ivo Sanader. This sentencing was highly appreciated throughout the media.

The respective **outlooks** concerning the prevalence of corruption are similar: 10 of 23 articles give a negative outlook, 3 show a positive one. The negative outlooks are either of a general nature or related with protests and express the opinion of the protestors that they are afraid of that nothing is going to change. The European Union is seen as relevant to anti-corruption future of some of the countries, because it requires greater measures against corruption for states that have already joined the EU and for states that want to become members.

2.4 EU's impact

In reality, the **EU has many different roles in SEE**, only few of them concerning the fight against corruption. The EU has the general task of supporting the countries' adoption of EU rules and standards. This can involve - providing funds, persuading the countries to put reforms into practice, achieving certain democratic standards, and/or ensuring safekeeping of independent legal authorities. In many cases the EU requires the fight against corruption. It has put rule of law (including anti-corruption) at the heart of its renewed enlargement strategy in 2012-

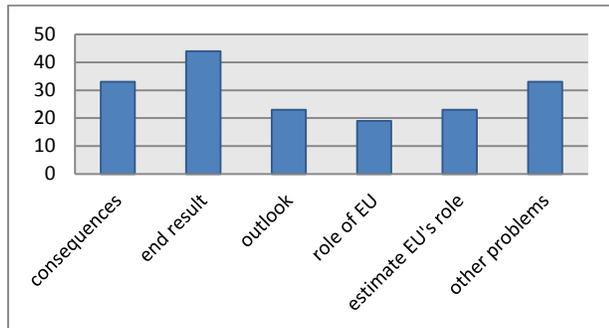
2013. The mission EULEX is a unique EU experiment, making attempts at implementing rule of law in non-member Kosovo. Another role is to control the state's progress in combating corruption, for instance with regular reports about Bulgaria and Romania. In sum, the EU's overall practical impacts on the countries appear to be positive, and has actually been generally seen as such by researchers and experts.

Yet that contrasts with the German language media portrait from the analyzed articles: In the majority of articles mentioning the EU, the **EU's impact** is assessed negatively. 12 of 23 articles estimate that the EU does not exert enough pressure to fight corruption, especially after a state has joined the club. Particularly in Bulgaria and Romania the EU is seen to have less influence than it had before the two countries became members in 2007. In Croatia the trust in the EU decreased to 45% reportedly after Croatia joined the EU. The role of EULEX in Kosovo is perceived as a failure on the ground that it was intervening in Kosovo's sovereignty and although a lot of money was used, not much has changed in the country. In Turkey the media articles also see the EU as having failed regarding the recent protests. The media noted that the EU could not convince the Turkish government to reconsider their actions and to listen to the protesting Turkish population. 7 articles understand that the EU has a positive impact, such as promoting peace among former Yugoslavian countries or that it has the ability to control the fight against corruption. In addition to that articles mention as positive that the member states could veto Bulgaria's and Romania's joining of the Schengen agreement.

The analysed media articles note that SEE countries do not have to cope only with corruption but also with numerous **other problems**. The most serious among them being poverty, increasing unemployment, low wages and a low living

standard. Those problems regarding the economic situation and the living standard might even favor corruption and might make a successful fight against it harder.

Figure 8.2. Answers regarding effects of corruption



Source: SELDI, 2014

3. Conclusion and Outlook

To sum up the findings of the quantitative and of the in-depth analysis a relatively poor image of the SEE region is created in the German language media. The image concerns particularly the EU member states Bulgaria, Croatia and Romania in the Germany-based media. The other SEE countries are more frequently reflected in the analyzed Austrian and Swiss media. The countries are perceived as having a high level of corruption in general, some particular cases got the attention of the media. Very few success stories are described usually related to high-level corruption cases. With this image it is not surprising that old EU member-states' population opinion has swunged against further enlargement and is skeptic towards the region.

For the media corruption seems to be the worst indicator among other big problems haunting the region. The media portrays SEE governments as generally not to be taken seriously; they reportedly put no effort to change the situation. The impression of most of the ruling parties is that they pretend to fight against corruption but at the end of the day they benefit from it. Even the EU is depicted as not being capable of having a positive influence. The media

reports that the population is getting increasingly aware of corruption but as institutional constraints against it are weak, citizens choose to demonstrate against it on the streets. Occasionally the opposition is also seen as demanding a fair political system.

According to the outcome of this analysis the SEE countries should communicate more openly to the EU media that they disagree with their corrupt system and that they attempt to change it. The governments ought to make the measures transparent and provide the media with successful cases, in particular of high-level corruption. Attempts should be made at benefit more from the European Union and use the help it is providing. The prevalence of corruption should be taken very seriously because it is one of the main if not the principal reason for the bad reputation of the SEE region in German language media.

Appendix 1. Methodology

The applied methodology of this study is content analysis of 320 articles from five different online sources. They consist of three different German news sources, one from Switzerland and one from Austria. From Germany online gateways of the two daily newspapers *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (www.sz.de) and *Die Welt* (www.welt.de) are part of the analysis. The third German source is the news website *Spiegel Online* (www.spiegel.de), including a few articles from the independent editorial department of the weekly magazine *Der Spiegel*. Additionally, articles from the gateway of the Austrian daily newspaper *Der Standard* (www.derstandard.at) contribute to the analysis. The gateway of the Swiss quality newspaper *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (www.nzz.ch) gave an insight into the reflection of the topic in Swiss media. The content analysis covers articles published online between 1 October 2012 and 30 September 2013. The articles were collected with the use of *google search* and *inside search* on the respective websites. After the

collection of the articles an initial screening was made regarding five categories (country, date, type of article, author and media source). This initial screening was enlarged by more detailed categories which were derived from already conducted research: corruption in general, the time period that the articles refer to, whether there is a connection with organized crime, the association with a particular party or a party member, type of public service, type of administrative authority, anti-corruption measures, whether corruption happened on a national or transnational level, if there is any relation to the European Union, and finally an open format column of comments to include everything that might be important or interesting. 320 articles were coded within 15 different categories in order to make them comparable and analyzable. With the help of pivot tables and charts a statistical analysis was conducted, giving a brief result for each of the columns and connecting some of them with one another. By those statistical results a reflection of the SEE region with regard to corruption in the media coverage was gained. After this quantitative analysis of the data a smaller sample of 49 articles was taken by rational choice. For those articles new categories were invented while reading around half of them. Those categories were openly filled in and were coded in the next step. Providing the findings of that analysis in-depth answers were given and particular cases were explained.