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**NEWS BY
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HOW TO INCREASE THE INTEGRITY OF THE ELECTION PROCESS IN MONTENEGRO?

On the 16th & 17th of February 2021 the Center for Democratic Transition (CDT) held a two-day conference focusing on how best to increase the integrity of the election process in Montenegro.

The conference was opened with remarks from Mr Aleksa Bečić, President of the Parliament of Montenegro; H. E. Karen Maddocks, British Ambassador to Montenegro; and Hugo Grondel, Political Secretary of Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Serbia and Montenegro.

Both days of the conference consisted of panels made up of representatives from political parties, institutions and NGOs.



More information can be found at CDT's website: <https://bit.ly/2REVB8>, <https://bit.ly/3pQoXjb>, <https://bit.ly/3wbdeOm>, and <https://bit.ly/3g9UEjX>.

Center for Democratic Transition, February, 2021

IS THERE A POLITICAL WILL FOR ELECTORAL REFORMS IN MONTENEGRO?

CDT invited the Parliament of Montenegro and all political actors to urgently initiate the work of the Committee for Comprehensive Electoral Reform, which should work at full capacity in the coming months. The fact that this body did not begin working six months after the formation of the new convocation of the Assembly calls into question whether a political will or sincere desire for electoral reform really exists.

Center for Democratic Transition, March, 2021

SELDI'S REGIONAL ANTI-CORRUPTION REPORT: "SERBIA PRODUCES POOR RESULTS IN ITS FIGHT AGAINST CORRUPTION"

According to the recent report "Western Balkans 2020: State-capture risks and policy reforms" Serbia's fight against corruption is faltering due to ineffective anticorruption policies, a lack of integrity and impartiality, and selective enforcement biased to private interests. The report published in April 2021 provides a reflection of the overall corruption environment in the Western Balkans in an objective and quantifiable manner.

The report draws attention to Serbia's lack of public service integrity, highlighting judicial reform as a key requirement needed to strengthen its independence against political interference. There is also a distinct lack media freedom in the country, with all national television frequencies controlled by the government or those with close links to people in power.

Center for Contemporary Politics, May 2021

ALBANIAN MINISTRY OF JUSTICE HOLDS CONSULTATION ON THE NEW STRATEGY OF JUSTICE 2021-2025



On 22 January 2021 the Albanian Center for Economic Research (ACER) participated in a meeting of the Sectoral Steering Committee for Justice Reform, coordinated by the Ministry of Justice in Albania. In this meeting a draft of the new Cross-cutting Strategy of Justice and Action Plan 2021-2025 was presented – a successor to the previous strategy that expired in 2020. The participants concluded that the legislative changes, the entire institutional framework of the judiciary, as well as the new bodies for the investigation and adjudication of corruption and organized crime, are now operational. The draft is still under consultation with partners including judicial institutions and civil society organisations.

Albanian Center for Economic Research, January, 2021

ACER TAKES PART IN CONSULTATION EVENT ON ACCOUNTABILITY, TRANSPARENCY, AND ANTI-CORRUPTION



By invitation of the Consortium for Elections and Political Process Strengthening (CEPPS), ACER participated in the Kick-start “Community Consultations on Accountability, Transparency, and Anti-corruption” event. ACER’s executive director, Mr. Preci had previous experience with the initiative, by contributing towards an assessment of the US Albania Transparency Academy on behalf of the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) and CEPPS. He provided a background on anti-corruption in Albania and its respective institutions, sharing his experiences of the SELDI initiative over the years.

Albanian Center for Economic Research, January, 2021

IMPENDING PUBLICATION OF THE LAW ON SENIOR MANAGEMENT REAFFIRMS NEED FOR WIDER DEBATE

The Institute for Democracy “Societas Civilis” (IDSCS) organised an online discussion around the Law on High Management Service. This formed part of a wider project looking at the oversight of merit-based appointments in senior management services. The session saw participants discuss the challenges and next steps in the adoption of the Law. Research conducted by IDSCS showed that although the appointments structure had been improved, there is still a lot to do for the system to be based on competences, qualifications and transparency i.e. based on the merit system.

IDSCS, May 2021

DECONSTRUCTING STATE CAPTURE IN ALBANIA (2008-2020)



ACER participated in the presentation of a new report “[Deconstructing State Capture in Albania](#)” produced by the Secretariat of Transparency International (TI-S) and the Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM).

The report finds that politicians in central and local government, along with the private sector, continue to exploit much of the country’s resources. It points out the failure of the judiciary in particular, noting that “a corrupt judiciary ensures impunity for these activities and furthers corrupt profit-making schemes”.

The report notes that reforms to date have not been sufficient in addressing state capture and its underpinnings. This has led to an erosion of public trust in government institutions as they are increasingly seen to serve private interests.

Mr. Preci congratulated the authors of the report, and agreed with their conclusions. He noted that the methodology of state capture, known as State Capture Assessment Diagnostic (SCAD), has previously been utilised by the SELDI network to analyse the procedure of tailor-made laws. Mr. Preci mentioned some of the main findings of this project which related to Albania, sharing at the same time the relevant links on the website of SELDI.

Albanian Center for Economic Research, March 2021

ENHANCE THE CAPACITIES OF NORTH MACEDONIAN PARLIAMENT IN THE FIGHT AGAINST CORRUPTION



Between 17th and 20th of May 2021 the Institute for Democracy “Societas Civilis” (IDSCS) held a training session entitled “Informed parliament members, accountable institutions”. The training aimed to enhance the capacities of Parliament in the fight against corruption. It was attended by parliamentarian groups, employees of the Parliamentary Institute and the Budget office of the Parliament. The training helped attendees get acquainted with the processes and tools used in the fight against corruption. Overall the focus was on enhancing the capacities for informing members of parliament, through developing analysis, using tools for summarizing institutions reports, and utilising wider support for policy makers. The training was part of a wider “Anti-corruption talks with Parliament” initiative that strives to support the reform process in North Macedonia, through the enhancement of the oversight role of Parliament in the fight against corruption.

IDSCS, May 2021

ANTI-CORRUPTION NEWS FROM THE SEE REGION

The current section of the Newsletter presents a summary of the latest anti-corruption news from the SEE region, based on consolidated information from multiple sources, such as media outlets and narratives received by the SELDI project partners.

QUESTIONS RAISED OVER RETROACTIVE APPOINTMENT OF ACTING DIRECTOR OF THE SERBIAN ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY (SEPA)

At a session held on 21 April 2021, the Serbian government brought a decision to retroactively appoint Filip Radović to the position of acting director of the Serbian Environmental Protection Agency. The appointment was for a period of three months starting from October 9, 2020.

An appointment of this kind is not legally permissible according to the Serbian Law on Civil Servants - given that it does not recognise the retroactive implementation of decisions made by the Government. By placing Radović in the aforementioned position for the period that passed, the intention of Government was clearly to ensure the legalisation of acts brought forward by him when he did not have the authority to do so. Although there have been calls for Serbia to address this situation with its public administration, to a pre-existing legal framework, it looks unlikely to happen anytime soon. Moreover, the problem of illegal appointments of public servants in Serbia is made clear by the fact that currently "about 60 percent of positions in public administration are filled by acting officials, and not by officials selected in a competition".

Transparentnost Srbija, April 2021

THE REAL PURPOSE OF THE LAW ON METRO QUESTIONED DUE TO ITS DUBIOUS PROVISIONS FOR LEGAL COMPETITION

Since the draft Law on the Metro system in Serbia is comprised of mainly technical details, along with an explanation of its purpose of existence, experts have warned of the possibility of realising the project by direct agreement. On 22 January 2021, a Memorandum on the implementation of the Belgrade Metro project was signed with French and Chinese companies. Since there has been no public debate required by the legal framework in Serbia, experts warn that legal procedure has not been followed. They point out that the purpose of the Law on Metro may simply be to legally cover issues already agreed with selected partners from China and France. This results in a lack of competition and the opportunity for companies to become involved under more favorable conditions, leaving open the potential for corruptive practices to take hold.

Danas, April 2021

CIVIL SECTOR PROPOSES AMENDMENTS TO THE SERBIAN LAW ON FREE ACCESS TO INFORMATION OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Representatives of the National Convent on the EU, Nemanja Nenadić and Ana Toskić proposed amendments to the Law on Free Access to Information of Public Importance, during a working group held on the 19 April 2021. The list presented contains 84 proposals related to the definition of the public authority body; the prohibition of discrimination of journalists and media outlets; the reimbursement, obligations and competencies of the Commissioner for information of public importance; and personal data protection etc. The process of amendments to this Law has been ongoing in Serbia since 2018.

Transparentnost Srbija, April 2021

LATEST EVALUATION FINDS SERBIA BELOW THE GRECO AVERAGE

The latest evaluation report by GRECO concluded that Serbia had implemented satisfactorily or dealt with in a satisfactory manner 4 out of 17 of its recommendations. Whilst it had partly implemented a further 12 out of the 17 recommendations. One of the recommendations was not implemented at all. Expressed as a percentage, Serbia fully implemented 23.5 percent and partially implemented 70.6 percent of GRECO's recommendations, which is below the GRECO average.

Transparentnost Srbija, April 2021

Find more on: <https://www.transparentnost.org.rs/index.php/sr/aktivnosti-2/pod-lupom/11961-srbija-potpuno-sprovela-cetiri-od-17-preporuka-greco>

FABRIZI AND VUČIĆ REITERATE THE NEED FOR FURTHER WORK ON THE FIGHT AGAINST CORRUPTION IN SERBIA

Ambassador and Head of Delegation of the European Union to the Republic of Serbia Sem Fabrizi and the President Aleksandar Vučić both agreed on the need of an enhanced anti-corruption agenda for Serbia. They concluded that, in the process of Serbia's accession to the EU, apart from a need to adjust the strategies and legislation in areas of fundamental rights such as gender equality and violence against women, Serbia should also take meaningful and effective steps to fight corruption. This involves reform of the judiciary, fight against corruption and organized crime, and media freedom as a special priority of the European integration process of Serbia.

Danas, April 2021

ADOPTION OF THE GOPAC SERBIA NATIONAL BRANCH 2021-2022 ACTIVITY PROGRAMME AND ACTION PLAN

The first meeting of the Global Organization of Parliamentarians Against Corruption (GOPAC) was held on 15 April 2021. The meeting was attended by representatives of Transparency Serbia, who proposed concrete activities GOPAC should undertake in the following months. GOPAC Serbia's Executive Board comprised of the Chairperson, Secretary and Deputy Chairperson considered these proposals and accepted them with some modifications in the adopted GOPAC Serbia National Branch 2021-2022 Activity Programme and the Action Plan.

Transparentnost Srbija, April 2021

PREUGOVOR ALARM REPORT: INSTEAD OF PROGRESS, FURTHER DETERIORATION IN FIGHT AGAINST CORRUPTION

The prEUgovor coalition presented the PrEUgovor Alarm Report on 18 May 2021. The report is a regular and semi-annual analysis, jointly produced and published by seven civil society organisations in Serbia. It focuses primarily on selected policy areas from the Political Criteria, Chapters 23 and 24 of the accession process of the Republic of Serbia to the European Union. It concluded that there have been no improvements in the legislative framework for the fight against corruption in Serbia. Since the ministries did not draft any of the laws that were scheduled to be amended, it appears as though the Government lacks the political will to make real changes in the area of anti-corruption. Instead of progress further deterioration has been highlighted with regards to the implementation of existing anti-corruption laws – one particular area in which this is an issue is public procurement and the operations of management at state-owned enterprises.

European Western Balkans, May 2021

REPORT OF THE MEMBERS OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ON SERBIA

The report on Serbia adopted by the European Parliament at the end of March 2021 reiterates calls for a fight against corruption. Although high-level corruption and organised crime are recurrent issues each year in these reports, this year the report included specific cases that must be solved - Jovanjica, Krušik, Telekom Srbija, and Savamala.

European Western Balkans, March 2021

THE CONSTITUTIONAL COURT IN ALBANIA MAKES THE FIRST DECISION AFTER THREE YEARS OF ABSENCE

Due to the vetting process that started in Albania in 2016, when the justice reform was approved, a number of judges and prosecutors were dismissed from office or resigned. As a result of this process, the high judicial bodies in Albania have remained non-functional in the years that have followed, due to the lack of the minimum quorum that is requested to make decisions. The Constitutional Court of Albania has been un-established since the year 2018, creating a gap of three years in the revision of cases. Finally, in January 2021, the Constitutional Court took its first decision after three years of absence. Currently, the court has seven members, while it requires nine to be fully functioning. However the High Court needs to become functional, too, for the appointment of the other members.

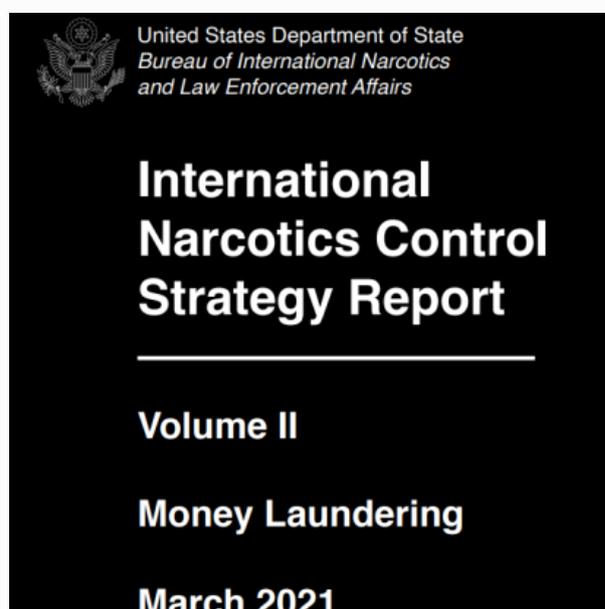
Euronews Albania, January 2021

INTERNATIONAL NARCOTICS CONTROL STRATEGY REPORT

The annual report of the International Narcotics Control Strategy by the US Department of State, estimates that Albania continues to have a number of problems with drug control. There are several factors affecting the phenomenon but the report emphasises: weak rule of law, corruption and a high unemployment rate. Albanian-led drug trafficking organisations are expanding their reach globally. The incomes generated from this activity continues to be laundered in Albania. Moreover, Albania has a large cash economy and informal sector. Large cash flows from abroad come in the form of remittances and are invested mainly in real estate or business projects.

The report also noted that the establishment of the Special Prosecution Office against Corruption and Organised Crime (SPAK) and the special court has marked some immediate successes. Though Albania still has a long way to go, it is crucial to undertake the effective implementation of existing laws whilst continuing to develop the capacity of its investigators and prosecutors to focus on the fight against corruption, money laundering and financial crimes.

Albania, March, 2021



ALBANIA, A DIFFICULT COUNTRY TO DO BUSINESS DUE TO HIGH CORRUPTION

The U.S. Department of State's (DASH) Investment Climate Report for 2020 has once again found Albania to be one of the most difficult countries for doing business. Foreign investors cite corruption, especially in the judiciary, a lack of transparency in public procurement and poor contract enforcement, as ongoing problems in Albania. Several U.S. investors have faced controversial trade disputes, both with public and private entities, including some that went to international arbitration. The report also emphasises that property rights remain a problem in Albania. Though the United States has lauded its transition to online services.

Albania, April 2021

ELECTORAL PROCESS IN ALBANIA: ACCUSATIONS FOR A NON-TRANSPARENT PROCESS RAISED BY OPPOSITION PARTIES

Parliamentary elections were held on 25 April 2021 in Albania. The Socialist Party (SP) won the elections, which will see it govern the country for the next 4 years. Opposition parties disputed the result, claiming that the electoral process was subject to legal violations as a result of acts committed by the commissioners of the centers. These violations included the prohibition of observers entering into counting centers, not documenting electoral crimes during the counting process and incorrect declaration of votes. Meanwhile the OSCE/ODIHR published a preliminary report on the process of general elections in Albania. The report emphasises the pressure on state administration for voting, but also the publication of personal data of citizens. In addition to the above issues, the report reflects positively on the significant reforms made in the election process as well as the implementation of electronic voting technology - which served to increase the overall confidence of the electoral process.

Albania, April 2021

UNITED STATES DECLARES FORMER PRIME MINISTER SALI BERISHA PERSONA NON-GRATA

Former Prime Minister and President of Albania Sali Berisha has been declared persona non-grata by the United States of America. Mr. Berisha and his family will not be allowed to enter the United States because they have been designated by the DASH as persons involved in major acts of corruption. The news was personally confirmed by US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, who via a post on Twitter on 19th of May 2021, said that Washington made this decision because they have information that Mr. Berisha is involved in corrupt acts that are undermining democracy in Albania. Former Prime Minister Berisha rejected the accusations made against him by the State Department and warned that he would file a lawsuit against Secretary Blinken in the Paris Correctional Court.



Albania, May 2021

SPAK- THE INSTITUTION THAT DECIDES JUSTICE FOR CORRUPTION CASES IN ALBANIA

The Special Anti-Corruption Structure (SPAK) is an independent judicial body tasked with investigating corruption and organised crime at the highest levels of government and society in Albania. In May 2021, the authority took important decisions regarding possible cases of corruption that it investigated.

During the election period, patronages hired by the Socialist Party collected information about citizens opinions and prior voting habits. Information on the voting intentions of citizens was then published and observable, and this was judged by the Opposition coalition (Alliance for Change) as passive and active corruption. SPAK concluded that there were no elements of a penal offence of corruption in the lists containing the personal data of the citizens of Tirana. Instead it considered it to be a breach of privacy. This situation has further weakened public confidence in this institution. A separate issue that has sparked controversy is the reopening of the “Gërdeci” case, which was done at the request of SPAK in order to further investigate Fatmir Mediu, former Minister of Defence of Albania. This case was suspended by the Supreme Court because Mediu had parliamentary immunity. The “Gërdeci” tragedy occurred 13 years ago, and 26 people lost their lives, while more than 300 others were injured. This is important news for relatives of the victims, but also for wider justice in Albania. 2019 also saw SPAK intercept more than 1,000 entities, mostly for corruption, including 41 requests for assistance from foreign authorities. Although this institution has been functioning for only 3 years, the issues that it has undertaken have an important weight in the detection of corruption cases in Albania.

Albania May 2021

LOWEST RESULT AND RANKING OF NORTH MACEDONIA ACCORDING TO THE CORRUPTION PERCEPTION INDEX FOR 2020

This year, the Corruption Perception Index (CPI) 2020 recorded its worst result and lowest ranking of North Macedonia on the CPI since 2001, when the country was ranked for the first time. This year, with an unchanged number of points from 2019 (35) North Macedonia ranked 111th out of a total of 180 countries.

Transparency International Macedonia,
January 2021



Republic of North Macedonia

Rank	Score
111/181	35/100



MEETING BETWEEN UNODC AND THE STATE COMMISSION FOR PREVENTION OF CORRUPTION

In March 2021, representatives of the State Commission for the Prevention of Corruption (SCPC) met the UNODC Regional Advisor for Anti-corruption and Confiscation of Property and the National Programme Officer. The meeting was a step towards enhancing the pre-existing cooperation between the two, as well as a means of getting acquainted with priority areas that can be supported under the Berlin Process.

SCPC, March 2021

ZAEV AND NIKOLOVSKI: THERE ARE NO MORE UNREACHABLE PEOPLE, THE GOVERNMENT AND THE CITIZENS ARE ON THE SAME SIDE IN THE FIGHT AGAINST CORRUPTION



The Government of the Republic of North Macedonia presented held a press conference setting out the new plan and measures for fighting corruption, that was adopted during its 50th session.

The Anti-Corruption Plan is prepared on the basis of all recommendations and proposals from competent institutions, CSOs, independent bodies, as well as in accordance with the findings of relevant domestic and foreign reports. It contains new ways and appropriate mechanisms to prevent and eradicate corruption as a continuation of previous anti-corruption policies set by the Government at the beginning of their current mandate.

During the press conference the President of the Government, Zoran Zaev, together with the Prime-minister of the Government Ljupco Nikolovski, who is responsible for anti-corruption, sustainable development and human resources, presented the measures that will synchronise the institutions in the system. The intention is to provide for an optimal set up in the fight against corruption, conflicts of interest and nepotism at all levels.

North Macedonia, March 2021

KICK-OFF MEETING OF THE NEW JOINT REGIONAL PROGRAMME “SOUTHEAST EUROPE – TOGETHER AGAINST CORRUPTION” – SEE-TAC



The Regional Anti-Corruption Initiative (RAI) and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) have officially launched their new anti-corruption programme in Southeast Europe (SEE), entitled Southeast Europe – Together Against Corruption (SEE-TAC). The Regional Programme is funded by Austrian Development Cooperation (ADC), represented by the Austrian Development Agency (ADA).

The event was attended by over 80 representatives of the public anti-corruption authorities, ministries, civil society organisations and the private sector representatives from the SEE region and beyond. Thirteen speakers from the implementing organisations, as well as the donor and beneficiary institutions reflected on the importance of the new Regional Programme which aims to strengthen the resilience of SEE societies to corruption.

This programme will focus on Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia, with participation of Romania, Bulgaria and Croatia. The three-year programme will operate with a total budget of 1,400,000 euros.

RAI, January 2021

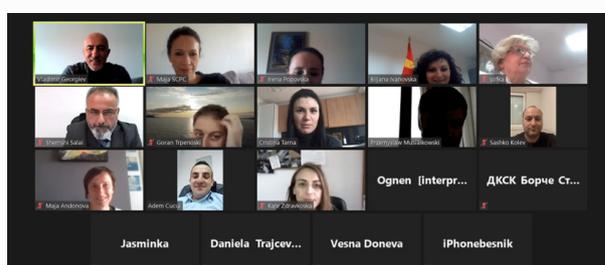
NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR PREVENTION OF CORRUPTION AND CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The Parliament of the Republic of North Macedonia adopted the National Strategy for Prevention of Corruption and Conflict of Interest 2021-2025. The strategy was prepared by the State Commission for Prevention of Corruption, in line with the Law on the Prevention of Corruption and Conflict of Interest. The SCPC serves as a competent institution to adopt the five-year Strategy and with an Action Plan for its implementation. The overall objective of the Strategy is to ensure and raise citizens trust in the system, as well as ensure the inclusion of the civil society and the media in the fight against corruption.

Parliament of the Republic of North Macedonia, April 2021

ONLINE TRAINING FOR SECTORAL ASSESSMENT OF RISK OF INTEGRITY AND CORRUPTION

In March 2021 an online presentation and training was organised for the commissioners and employees of the secretariat of the North Macedonian State Commission for the Prevention of Corruption. The training was part of the initiative "Promotion of Transparency and Accountability of the Public Administration in North Macedonia". The training was conducted by an international expert and included a presentation on the concept of integrity and recommendations for future development. There was also a presentation on the Methodology for sectoral assessment of risk of integrity and corruption detailing its range and phases.



SCPC, March 2021

WEBINAR ON EFFECTIVE ASSET RECOVERY: LEGAL STANDARDS, CHALLENGES AND GOOD PRACTICES

The webinar was organised within the Regional Project "Strengthening anti-corruption in the South East Europe through improving asset seizure measures" implemented by the AIRE Centre and the RAI Secretariat, with funding from the Government of the United Kingdom. Judges, prosecutors, and asset recovery practitioners from Asset Recovery Offices and Asset Management Agencies from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Kosovo*, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Romania and Serbia all took part in the webinar.

The webinar was designed with the intention of building expertise amongst prosecutors, judges and asset recovery practitioners and to facilitate the exchange of good practices. Distinguished speakers from the Western Balkans region and the UK presented and discussed with the participants the international and European legal standards and the European Court of Human Rights case-law in the field of asset recovery. Legal challenges to jurisprudence were also discussed and illustrated with case studies from the region.

RAI, February 2021

RAI DELIVERED THE REGIONAL MULTI-BENEFICIARY TRAINING ON WHISTLEBLOWER PROTECTION

Following the Gap Analysis of Whistleblower Protection Laws in SEE jurisdictions, which assesses the level of compliance of these laws with the EU Whistleblowing Directive, the RAI Secretariat delivered a two-day Annual Regional Multi-Beneficiary Training on Whistleblower Protection on the 9th and 11th of February 2021.

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, this training was delivered online, through two webinars: 'Building Effective Whistleblower Protections for the Benefit of Citizens in line with the EU Whistleblowing Directive' and 'Experiences of Public Institutions and Civil Society in Handling Whistleblower Reports: How to Enhance Mutual Cooperation and Coordination?'. The webinars were held one day apart to provide participants (e.g. professionals from anti-corruption agencies and other oversight bodies) to attend both webinars with time for retrospection.



The training took place in a mixed environment of more than 50 participants representing ministries of justice, anti-corruption agencies or other whistleblowing enforcement bodies, representatives of EU delegations, and 22 representatives of 15 CSOs involved in whistleblowing support and advocacy from 10 SEE jurisdictions, including Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Kosovo*, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Romania, and Serbia.

RAI, February 2021

CONCLUDING CONFERENCE OF THE PROJECT TO STRENGTHEN REGIONAL COOPERATION IN ASSET RECOVERY PRACTICE IN SOUTH-EAST EUROPE

Following two years of implementing the Regional Project "Strengthening anti-corruption in Southeast Europe through improving asset seizure measures", funded by the Government of the United Kingdom, and supported by the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, the implementing partners AIRE Centre and the RAI Secretariat organised the Concluding Conference of the Project.

The conference took place on 9 March 2021, with more than 150 participants from the region joining this hybrid event. Participants joined the event from six regional hubs in Belgrade, Podgorica, Pristina, Sarajevo, Skopje and Tirana, as well as from Bulgaria, Croatia, Moldova and Romania via the online conference platform.

The conference featured a presentation with an international perspective on asset recovery, taking contributions from representatives of key European institutions and bodies, as well as a discussion on the future of asset recovery cooperation in Southeast Europe. The project's final report was also presented on this occasion and guidelines for building upon the AIRE Centre and RAI's work on asset recovery in the future. Speakers at the conference included Tim Eicke, the judge in respect of the UK on the European Court of Human Rights, Hanne Juncker, the Executive Secretary of the Group of States against Corruption, and Burkhard Muhl, Head of the European Financial and Economic Crime Centre at EUROPOL.

RAI, March 2021

THE REGIONAL TREATY ON EXCHANGE OF DATA FOR THE VERIFICATION OF ASSET DECLARATIONS SIGNED TODAY

Secretariat of the Regional Anti-Corruption Initiative, initiated and coordinated the signing of the International Treaty on Exchange of Data for the Verification of Asset Declarations, which was signed on 19 March 2021 in Belgrade.

Republic of Serbia, Republic of North Macedonia and Montenegro are the first signatories of the Treaty that was prepared and negotiated among the SEE jurisdictions with the support of the Austrian Development Cooperation.



RAI expressed belief that the signing ceremony marked the beginning of a new and immediate form of intergovernmental co-operation between the signatory states in ensuring transparency and strengthening the integrity of holders of public positions.

By signing this agreement, delegations from Montenegro, Republic of North Macedonia and Republic of Serbia have once again demonstrated the essential commitment of their states in the fight against corruption and in strengthening cooperation in the region.

Minister of Justice of Republic of Serbia, Ms. Maja Popovic, Minister of Justice, Human and Minority Rights of Montenegro, Mr. Vladimir Leposavic and President of the Commission for the Prevention of Corruption of the Republic of North Macedonia, Ms. Biljana Ivanovska signed the International treaty on exchange of data for verification of asset declarations. It is the first treaty of this kind signed in the region.

RAI, March 2021

VENICE COMMISSION ISSUES ADVERSE OPINION ON PROSECUTORIAL LAWS IN MONTENEGRO

The Venice Commission has issued an adverse opinion on the proposed amendments to the prosecutorial laws sent by Minister of Justice, Human and Minority Rights Vladimir Leposavić. The opinion explicitly states several times that the mandate of the current Chief Special State Prosecutor must be respected. As it is stated, the proposed law is not directed towards legal regulation, but – towards the specific person, i.e. the current head of Special State Prosecutor's Office Milivoje Katnić. Venice Commission experts are of the opinion that institutional reforms must not be initiated only for one goal – the removal of individuals in key positions.

The members of the Commission have expressed particular concern over the proposed “transformation” of the Special State Prosecutor's Office into the Prosecutor's Office for Organised Crime and Corruption. They estimate that such a transformation would lead to the postponement of the activities and procedures of the current Office and that the redistribution of current cases could be carried out arbitrarily and/or politically motivated. The Venice Commission concludes that the most probable result of the Office reorganisation would be administrative chaos, which would lead to unjustified several-month delays in the Office's work.

Montenegro, March 2021

LARGE INVESTMENT PROJECTS SHOULD BE CONDUCTED IN TRANSPARENT AND COMPETITIVE PROCEDURES

The Platform of civil society organisations for the fight against corruption raised concerns over the low level of transparency in the process in which the Government of Republic of North Macedonia arranged for the construction of part of motorways from Corridors 8 and 10.



The Platform had considered all of the information made available to the public in relation to this project.

Yet it was unable to find a justification for why the announced signature of a direct contract for implementation of infrastructural projects had taken place without applying the Law on public Procurement. The CSO's stated that for the citizens it remains extremely important that the whole process is transparent, starting from publication of advertisement all the way up to contract signatures. This allows for the participation and equal treatment of all interested companies, and secures legal protection of all participants in the procedure. Most importantly it allows for oversight of the whole process by relevant institutions, interested experts and citizens.

The Platform asked the Government to abandon the concept of direct contracting, and the planning of the big infrastructural projects to be conducted publicly, and the implementation in a competitive and transparent procedure.

The Platform of Civil Society Organisations for Fight against Corruption, April 2021

EXECUTIVE ORDER ON BLOCKING PROPERTY AND SUSPENDING ENTRY INTO THE UNITED STATES OF CERTAIN PERSONS CONTRIBUTING TO THE DESTABILISING SITUATION IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

The President of the United States of America expanded the scope of the national emergency declared in Executive Order from 2001 (Blocking Property of Persons Who Threaten International Stabilization Efforts in the Western Balkans). The justification for doing so stems from the situation in the territory of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the Republic of Albania (the Western Balkans), over the past two decades, including the undermining of post-war agreements and institutions following the breakup of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. It also relates to its issue of widespread corruption within various governments and institutions in the Western Balkans, that stymies progress toward effective and democratic governance and full integration into transatlantic institutions. This is seen to constitute an unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security and foreign policy of the United States.

White House, June 2021

IRREGULARITIES IN THE LOCAL ELECTIONS IN NIKŠIĆ

Local elections in Nikšić were held on 14 March 2021. The election campaign was marked by strong tension, cases of violence, widespread disregard for epidemiological measures, violation of election silence, and participation of foreign actors from the Republic of Serbia, Republic of Srpska and municipalities from the northern part of the Republic of Kosovo. Election day saw tensions arise among political opponents who ran in the local elections, as well as a large number of reported irregularities in front of polling stations. Six electoral lists ran in the elections.

Montenegro March 2021

SUPPORTING THE STABILITY AND SECURITY OF THE WESTERN BALKANS

The US Department of State issued a Press Statement informing that U.S. President Biden issued an Executive Order (E.O.) that builds on and expands previous E.O.s, modernising the Western Balkans sanctions regime by including references to the 2018 Prespa Agreement and the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals. Additionally, the new E.O. provides for sanctions against persons whose actions destabilise the region by undermining democratic institutions and the rule of law or by violating human rights. To best address region-wide networks of corruption, Albania has been added to the scope of the E.O.

The E.O. also authorises the imposition of sanctions on individuals and entities responsible for corruption in the region, including misappropriation of public assets, expropriation of private assets for personal gain or political purposes, or bribery. All property and interests in property of persons designated pursuant to this E.O. that are or come within the United States or the possession or control of U.S. persons are blocked, and U.S. persons are generally prohibited from engaging in transactions with them. In addition, individuals sanctioned under this E.O. are not eligible to enter the United States and are not eligible for a U.S. visa.

The U.S. Department of State states that their commitment to promoting democracy, transparency, and accountability, across the Western Balkans is both unwavering and consistent with the standards the countries of the region must meet to secure their goals of advancing on the European path.

U.S. Department of State, June 2021



FORTHCOMING EVENTS



“WHISTLE FOR THE END” GUERRILLA EVENTS

“Whistle for the End!” is a part of the educational and information campaign the Regional Anti-Corruption Initiative is implementing with the financial support of the European Union, as a part of the project “Breaking the Silence: Enhancing the Whistleblowing Polices and Culture in the Western Balkans and Moldova”. The regional project supported by the EU Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA) aims to help partners in the government and non-governmental sector of the beneficiary jurisdictions to improve the disclosure channels and protection mechanisms for whistleblowers; strengthen the capacity of civil society to support whistleblowing; and enhance the public awareness about the importance of whistleblowing in the fight against corruption.

In the framework of the project, the RAI Secretariat works to strengthen the legislative and institutional framework for the protection of whistleblowers, in line with the new EU Directive on whistleblower protection, to which the candidate countries are expected to be aligned as part of the EU acquis within the enlargement process.

Guerrilla events were already organised in [Podgorica](#) and [Sarajevo](#), while events will take place also in [Tirana](#), [Prishtina](#), [Skopje](#), [Chişinău](#), and [Belgrade](#).

June 2021	
THU 10	June 10 “Whistle for the End” Tirana Guerrilla Event Murat Toptani Promenade (Tirana Pedestrian Walk) Tirana
WED 16	June 16 “Whistle for the end” Pristina Guerrilla Event Pristina Zahir Pajaziti Square, Pristina
WED 23	June 23 “Whistle for the End” Skopje Guerrilla Event Skopje Macedonia Square, Skopje
WED 30	June 30 “Whistle for the End” Chişinău Guerrilla Event Chişinău Europe Square, Central Park, Chişinău
July 2021	
WED 7	July 7 “Whistle for the End” Belgrade Guerrilla Event Belgrade Republic Square, Belgrade



**REPORTS
AND
ANALYSIS**



WESTERN BALKANS 2020: STATE-CAPTURE RISKS AND POLICY REFORMS

In the past two decades the Western Balkan countries have undergone considerable political, social and economic transformations. A number of outstanding challenges, however, remain, critical among which is the integrity of public governance. The matter of the rule of law in general and anticorruption in particular are now at the heart of the most consequential political project of the Western Balkans – their integration with Europe’s preeminent organisation, the European Union. SELDI’s contribution to the anticorruption agenda in the Western Balkans has been both specific and actionable, seeking to bridge monitoring, analysis and policy recommendations. The 2020 Regional Anticorruption Report looks into the legislative framework and developments in the practice of the institutions of state – executive, legislature and the judiciary. The assessment of the regulatory and institutional factors enabling corruption in the region is not intended as a comprehensive inventory but rather emphasises some of the priority issues relevant to potential efforts for stemming common sources of corruption. The report provides a model for reporting on anticorruption progress by civil society in the Western Balkans.

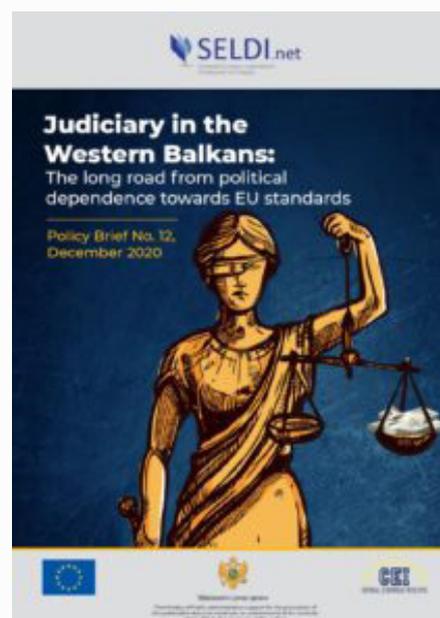


SELDI Network, April 2021.

SELDI POLICY BRIEF 11: JUDICIARY IN THE WESTERN BALKANS: THE LONG ROAD FROM POLITICAL DEPENDENCE TOWARDS EU STANDARDS

Although judicial reforms have been ongoing for more than a decade in the countries of the Western Balkans, no significant progress has been observed, in particular as it relates to impact. The essence of these reforms has been limited to updating the legislative framework and other technical matters, but implementation and anticorruption performance has remained poor. Comparative analyses of available data reveal that the legislative and the executive still exercise a strong influence on the judiciary election process and budget allocation across the region of the Western Balkans. All of these issues present major hurdles on the EU accession path of the Western Balkan countries (Albania, Bosna and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia).

SELDI Network, December 2020.



MIRROR MIRROR ON THE WALL, HOW ARE ANTI-CORRUPTION EFFORTS GOIN'? NATIONAL STRATEGY OVERSIGHT GUIDELINES

IDSCS published its policy brief named “Mirror mirror on the wall, how are anti-corruption efforts goin’?: National Strategy oversight guidelines”. If there is one thing that North Macedonia has in abundance, it is strategies. However, the country still faces a discrepancy between the efforts included in the strategies and what is happening in reality. The Parliament recently adopted the National Strategy for Fight Against Corruption, which is a document developed by the State Commission for Prevention of Corruption (SCPC) in 2019 through a consultative process. It involved a dialogue between the Commission, members of the Parliament (MPs), government institutions, independent and regulatory bodies and nongovernmental and business sectors. It is a good start, but the real effort now is to entrench the commitments of the Strategy in the daily work of the institutions and how to achieve success. The key question is how to ensure that the Strategy will provide the desired results, and how we can monitor its achievement and impact on the daily lives of the citizens. The second question is how the Parliament can instigate a success in the fight against corruption, through its oversight role over the Strategy.



IDSCS, May 2021

CENTRALIZED EFFORTS, FRAGMENTED RESPONSIBILITIES: GOVERNMENTAL ANTI-CORRUPTION PLANS AND THE ROLE OF PARLIAMENT

Anti-corruption policies and narratives are gaining ground in the government agendas in the Western Balkans region, according to a policy brief by IDSCS. Corruption is one of the main concerns of citizens that affect their quality of life. North Macedonia is one of the countries facing serious challenges in the fight against corruption. The government, regardless of the outcome, has made substantial efforts to address this phenomenon. This policy brief aims to examine the mechanisms through which the fight against corruption, which initially started as fragmented, is now becoming a policy with centralized elements, coordinated by the Prime Minister and his deputies, and how this affects the oversight mechanisms of Parliament.



IDSCS, April 2021

WHO'S GOVERNING THERE?

In the republic of North Macedonia, after the parliamentary elections and the subsequent coalition negotiations, the senior management service was subject to changes and rotations. Depending on the coalition agreement, and the composition of the new government, a wave of appointments of directors of agencies, directorates and institutions ensued. This process is expected to be based on the qualifications of the appointees and to be carried out openly and competitively. However, as notes in IDSCS's analyses "Who's governing there?", more often than not, this process is secretive and the positions are filled by persons lacking the required qualifications. For that very reason, in 2019, the Ministry of Information Society and Administration submitted the draft of the Law on Senior Management Service to the assembly. Without the enactment of the new law, there are obligations and principles in the existing regulation that necessitate an open, competitive appointment process. The aim was to look at the extent to which the appointment process would adhere to the good governance principles and how much the entire process is focused on ensuring the best candidates apply for the positions.



IDSCS, March 2021



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