

Anticorruption policies as a guarantee for national security, stability and sovereignty

Concept note

Leading nation and broader context - for more than three decades Bulgaria is struggling to establish the rule of law as a system of governance free from corruption. As Bulgarian President Rumen Radev put it in his statement during the Summit for Democracy held on 9 – 10 December 2021 *“We have learned the hard way that the transition from a centrally planned to free market economy could be accompanied by deep social downhills.”* One of the reasons is corruption, which undermines the efforts of the authorities and the trust of citizens in state action. It undeniably also makes any country vulnerable to illegal intervention from other powers – aggressive states or criminal organizations, posing a real threat to its national security and sovereignty, creating political instability inside and outside state territory. While it is still engaged in this never-ending fight against corruption, Bulgaria is on the right path creating new laws and building institutions to tackle the issue. The country has accumulated experience not only by its own practice but also with the assistance of its international partners and mainly the European commission. From 2007 Bulgaria was one of two Member States of the European Union (alongside Romania) subject to a special monitoring (“Cooperation and Verification Mechanism”) which surveyed the achievements and gave recommendations for reforms. In 2019, the European Commission issued its last report affirming that Bulgaria has met the requirements of this special mechanism. Thereafter the country was evaluated under the common standards of the EU Rule of Law mechanism. Moreover, in order to benefit from the EU Recovery and Resilience Plan Bulgaria is currently engaged in creating new legislation and tools to tackle corruption. These reforms are in the centre of the political debate involving civil society and citizens and thus creating strong rejection of the public disease named “corruption”.

Bulgaria is the natural leading nation for the Cohort *Anticorruption policies as a guarantee for national security, stability and sovereignty*. Based on its recent history of ups and downs, its first-hand experience, its accumulated knowledge and expertise in the light of internal developments and external pressure, the country could contribute significantly to the discussion on this vibrant topic. Bulgaria is a party to all relevant international legal instruments of the United Nations, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development and the Council of Europe. As a member of the European Union, Bulgaria applies its anticorruption *acquis*. The recognised standards in this field are implemented in the national legislation and are regularly evaluated under the existing monitoring mechanisms.

Cohort participation - Corruption is everywhere but its manifestations are not the same in different states. There are certain features that make some societies more vulnerable to corruption and demand specific counteractions. In Central and South-East Europe, post-communist societies share many similarities of the deep roots of corruption. The massive distribution of state property in the 90’s made richness depend on political decisions creating an oligarchy, which still aspire for influence. Institutional distrust, political turmoil, inequality and poverty created a fertile soil for corruption. Nowadays things are rapidly changing but there is still much to be done. A Cohort engaging States from the region with their institutions and NGOs will certainly be of a huge mutual benefit creating trust and understanding that are essential for real cooperation and support.

Cohort objectives - to build an informal alliance between States with comparable problems by identifying challenges and overviewing the approaches to overcome them in five particular topics:

- High level corruption or corruption in politics;

- “The everyday bribe” or corruption in administration;
- Irregular foreign interferences or corruption in foreign affairs;
- Social rejection of the phenomenon or the role of education, media and civil society in tackling corruption;
- Investigation and punishment – institutional and legal review.

Cohort schedule:

- Establishing the list of participating states and non-state actors by the end of November 2022;
- Organising thematic meetings of officials, professionals, NGO’s, opinion makers for identification of best practices – January and February 2023;
- Convening a plenary meeting/conference in March 2023 to adopt a Joint Statement to be presented to the next Summit for Democracy.

Cohort practical outputs:

- Develop a system of alert for identified cases of corruption or attempts coming from abroad to corrupt state officials;
- Create better environment for common investigations and preventive actions;
- Organise sustainable communication channels and cooperation mechanisms between relevant institutions and non-state actors.