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The Role of Anti-Corruption Policy in the National Security System of Post-Socialist States

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ABSTRACT

The article examines the role of anti-corruption policy within the national security systems of Southeast European states, using the cases of Romania, Croatia, and Bulgaria. The relevance of the study is determined by the transformation of perceptions of corruption in contemporary states, where it is increasingly viewed not only as a legal or economic problem but also as a factor affecting the effectiveness of public administration, political stability, and institutional resilience. This issue has become particularly significant in the context of contemporary security challenges associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, growing geopolitical instability, and the full-scale Russian-Ukrainian war. The purpose of the study is to determine the place and role of anti-corruption policy in ensuring the national security of post-socialist states. The research analyses the specific features of the formation and development of anti-corruption policies in Romania, Croatia, and Bulgaria from the beginning of post-socialist transformations to the present day. It was established that in all three countries, the spread of corruption was closely linked to processes of economic liberalisation, privatisation, and the institutional weakness of the state apparatus during the transition period. The study identifies European integration processes and the European Union's requirements regarding the rule of law as important drivers of anti-corruption reforms. The findings demonstrate that Romania achieved the most notable results through the activities of the National Anticorruption Directorate (DNA) and the strengthening of the independence of specialised anti-corruption institutions. In Croatia, a key role was played by the activities of the Office for the Suppression of Corruption and Organised Crime (USKOK) and the adaptation of public policies to European standards. The Bulgarian experience illustrates the difficulties of combating systemic corruption in the context of persistent political patronage networks and state capture practices. The study concludes that all three countries have experienced a gradual expansion in the understanding of corruption—from a criminal justice issue to a complex threat to national security. Corruption is increasingly perceived as a factor influencing political stability, the quality of governance, public trust, and the state's capacity to respond effectively to internal and external challenges. The experiences of Romania, Croatia, and Bulgaria demonstrate that effective anti-corruption policy constitutes an essential component of state resilience and national security under contemporary conditions.

KEYWORDS

anti-corruption policy, national security, public administration, public trust, Eastern Europe.

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Роль антикорупційної політики у системі національної безпеки держав колишнього соціалістичного табору

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СТАТТЯ

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АНОТАЦІЯ

У статті досліджено роль антикорупційної політики у системі національної безпеки держав Південно-Східної Європи на прикладі Румунії, Хорватії та Болгарії. Актуальність теми зумовлена трансформацією уявлень про корупцію в сучасних державах, де вона дедалі частіше розглядається не лише як правова чи економічна проблема, а як чинник, що впливає на ефективність державного управління, політичну стабільність та інституційну стійкість. Особливого значення ця проблематика набуває в умовах сучасних безпекових викликів, пов'язаних із пандемією COVID-19, посиленням геополітичної нестабільності та повномасштабною російсько-українською війною. Метою дослідження є визначення місця та ролі антикорупційної політики у забезпеченні національної безпеки держав колишнього соціалістичного табору. У ході дослідження проаналізовано особливості становлення та розвитку антикорупційної політики в Румунії, Хорватії та Болгарії від початку постсоціалістичних трансформацій до сучасного етапу. Встановлено, що у всіх трьох країнах поширення корупції було пов'язане з процесами економічної лібералізації, приватизації та інституційної слабкості державного апарату в перехідний період. Визначено, що важливими чинниками реформування антикорупційної сфери стали процеси європейської інтеграції та вимоги Європейського Союзу щодо забезпечення верховенства права. Дослідження показало, що Румунія досягла найбільш помітних результатів завдяки діяльності Національного антикорупційного директорату та посиленню незалежності спеціалізованих інституцій. У Хорватії ключову роль відіграли діяльність USKOK та адаптація державної політики до європейських стандартів. Болгарський досвід продемонстрував складність подолання системної корупції в умовах збереження практик політичного патронажу та явищ «захоплення держави». Зроблено висновок, що в усіх трьох державах відбулося поступове розширення трактування корупції – від кримінально-правового явища до комплексної загрози національній безпеці. Корупція дедалі більше розглядається як фактор, що впливає на політичну стабільність, якість державного управління, суспільну довіру та здатність держави ефективно реагувати на внутрішні й зовнішні виклики. Досвід Румунії, Хорватії та Болгарії засвідчує, що ефективна антикорупційна політика є важливою складовою забезпечення державної стійкості та національної безпеки в сучасних умовах.

КЛЮЧОВІ СЛОВА

антикорупційна політика, національна безпека, державне управління, суспільна довіра, Східна Європа.

1. Introduction

The gradual transition from a command-administrative to a market liberal political system led to fundamental changes in the states of the former socialist camp. This transformation covered all areas, including becoming a real test for national security. And here, an important clarification is that, most often, when the national security system is considered, the emphasis falls on military, economic, energy, information and other fairly classic areas. At the same time, the period of so-called wild capitalism and the presence of a complex bureaucratic apparatus, inherited from the socialist apparatus of state administration, led to the spread of corruption among this group of states, which began to gain significant weight for the further development of these states, sometimes becoming an important factor that is an obstacle to joining the European Union.

However, the implementation of a successful anti-corruption policy gradually helped new actors on the political map of Europe to fight against negative phenomena, including the shadow economy, a crisis of political confidence and social conflicts, which cannot be avoided due to the spread of a sense of injustice among the population. Of course, not all states were equally successful in fighting corruption. Moreover, even in successful states, there was significant instability – along with significant successes, significant failures were also observed. All this necessitates the need for a holistic study, which should consider the period starting from the collapse of the socialist apparatus of state administration.

2. Literature Review

The topic of anti-corruption policy in the national security system is quite widespread among domestic researchers. The first block of research on the topic can be characterized by a vector that covers the domestic practice of anti-corruption policy. For example, O. Starenky studied the specifics of the institutional development of the National Agency for Corruption Prevention as a guarantee of the implementation of anti-corruption policy in Ukraine [17]. O. Panasyuk focused his research on conceptual approaches and strategic priorities in combating corruption in Ukraine [15]. A joint study by O. Predmestnikov and S. Skrebovska analyzed the effectiveness of anti-corruption bodies in Ukraine and such European countries as Finland, Germany, Lithuania, Romania and Slovenia [16]. M. Treshchov paid attention to determining the state and prospects for the implementation of anti-corruption policy in Ukraine by studying the indicators of the Corruption Perception Index and the Index of Economic Freedom [19]. The team of authors (L. Lipych, V. Rublev, O. Khilukha, M. Kushnir) in the publication determined the ways of developing anti-corruption policy in Ukraine based on the concept of New Public Management, which replaced traditional approaches to public administration [4]. M. Ogorodniychuk and N. Kovalenko specified anti-corruption measures in the public administration system of Ukraine, which are based on regulatory legal acts and the activities of anti-corruption bodies of Ukraine [13]. Another important vector for domestic scientists in the field of anti-corruption policy is the definition of conducting such activities in the public administration of the former socialist states. I. Myloserdna devoted her work to considering the experience of developing anti-corruption policy in such countries of Eastern Europe as Romania and Poland [8]. Yu. Voitenko emphasized in his study the importance of the practice of some states, namely Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, for combating corruption in Ukraine [20]. Y. Mindrescu focused the publication on the features of strategic planning of anti-corruption policy in Romania, based on the National Program for the Prevention of Corruption [9]. T. Grzybovska conducted a comparative study of approaches to conducting anti-corruption policy in Eastern European countries – Romania and Bulgaria [3].

However, despite the above-mentioned publications, the relevance of this article lies in the fact that the consideration of successful cases of post-socialist countries of the European Union can be useful for Ukraine. Such challenges as COVID-19 and a full-scale invasion of Ukraine increase the potential value of this publication.

3. Problem Statement

This study aims to determine the role of anti-corruption policy in the national security system of the former socialist countries. The emphasis in the study is on the history of its formation, problems of development and transformation of the role of anti-corruption policy in Romania, Croatia and Bulgaria.

4. Methods and Materials

The information base of the study is based on scientific articles, national strategies of the analyzed countries, reports of the European Commission and the World Bank.

During the study, a set of various general scientific and specialized methods was used. For example, for a better understanding of the development of anti-corruption policy in Romania, Croatia and Bulgaria, the historical method was used. The behavioral approach allowed for determining the reaction of the population of the studied countries for a better understanding of the level of threat to national security. The use of the comparative method made it possible to determine both common and distinctive features of the implementation of anti-corruption policy in Romania, Croatia and Bulgaria. In addition, the study used decision-making theory to better understand the process of implementing national security strategies.

5. Results and Discussion

The study of anti-corruption policies in the former socialist countries will focus on Romania, Croatia and Bulgaria.

The Ceausescu regime fell in December 1989, and thus Romania was faced with the need to carry out large-scale transformations, and it became necessary to simultaneously rebuild both the political system and the economy in the country. Poland or the Czech Republic went through a relatively rapid renewal of elites, if we compare it with Romania. In Romania, representatives of the former nomenclature retained influence on decision-making, and this had a great impact on both the pace of reforms and the nature of relations between the state and new economic players [14].

Alina Mungiu-Pippidi, analyzing this period, explains the spread of corruption not by individual political decisions, but by the logic of the transition from a planned economy to a market economy [7]. It was then that patronage networks were formed, through which access to state resources was provided by informal connections. In her opinion, the 1990s were a time when mechanisms were established that allowed combining political influence with economic benefits.

Privatization played a special role in these processes. The transfer of state-owned enterprises to private ownership took place with weak control and incomplete legislation, so a significant part of the assets went to those who had access to political decisions. The society felt that the reforms were unfair, and trust in the new democratic institutions was gradually undermined.

During the first decade after 1989, the fight against corruption was not among the priorities of the authorities. Attention was absorbed by stabilizing the economy, inflation, unemployment, and reforming the public sector. Meanwhile, corruption scandals increasingly entered public discussions, and by the end of the 1990s, the problem of corruption ceased to be perceived exclusively as a moral one. It began to negatively affect the assessment of the quality of public administration.

The change in approach came under the pressure of European integration. After the start of negotiations on accession to the EU, Romania found itself under constant monitoring by the European Commission. In annual reports, corruption in the country regularly appeared among the main problems, with special attention paid to the independence of the courts and the effectiveness of the prosecutor's office in investigating corruption crimes in the country. For Brussels, the issue of corruption was inseparable from the rule of law. Therefore, anti-corruption reforms became part of the measures aimed at modernizing public administration. In the early 2000s, the Romanian authorities were no longer expected to declare the need to fight corruption, but to provide specific institutions and results on this issue.

In 2002, the National Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office (Parchetul Național Anticorupție – PNA) was established. Its activities were initially assessed with restraint, but the very fact of the emergence of a specialized body for investigating corruption at the highest level was an important signal both within the country and for international partners [6].

After Traian Băsescu came to power, the emphasis was placed on reforming the law enforcement system. In 2005, the PNA was reorganized into the National Anti-Corruption Directorate (Direcția Națională Anticorupție – DNA). Most researchers consider this moment to be the beginning of the modern stage of anti-corruption policy in Romania.

The DNA was given the authority to investigate the cases of deputies, ministers, state secretaries and heads of central government bodies. For a post-communist state, this meant a fundamentally different approach to elite accountability.

During the same period, corruption began to be considered in a broader security context. Previously, it was mainly treated as an economic problem, but in the early 2000s, more attention began to be paid to its impact on the state's ability to implement reforms. Preparations for accession to NATO and the EU made these issues particularly important.

At the time of accession to the EU in 2007, Romania already had a basic institutional system for combating corruption. Despite numerous problems and criticism from partners, it was the years 1989–2005 that laid the foundation for the implementation of anti-corruption reforms, which would later set Romania apart from most countries in the region [10].

After joining the EU in 2007, Romania remained under the influence of the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism (CVM). Unlike most new members of the union, it continued to be monitored – Brussels did not consider reforms in the field of justice and combating corruption to be complete. The authorities were expected not to introduce new laws, but to show practical results.

The first years of membership did not bring noticeable changes. Anti-corruption bodies functioned, but public trust in institutions remained low. A significant part of citizens believed that real responsibility was unattainable for representatives of the elite. Therefore, cases involving well-known politicians received a special resonance.

The conviction of former Prime Minister Adrian Năstase in 2012 is often cited by researchers as a symbol of the changes taking place in the country. It was important not only that the court issued a verdict, but also that for the first time a politician of such a level was brought to justice. This changed the perception of the capabilities of anti-corruption institutions both domestically and abroad.

The following years are primarily associated with the DNA. After the appointment of Laura Codruta Kövesi in 2013, the directorate significantly intensified its work. Cases of deputies, ministers, and mayors were regularly referred to the court. The European Commission, in its reports, characterized this period as the most effective in the entire history of Romanian anti-corruption agencies.

At the same time, the successes of DNA did not eliminate the debate on the methods of combating corruption. Some researchers and politicians raised the issue of the balance between the effectiveness of investigations and compliance with procedures. Bogdan Iancu, in particular, drew attention to the fact that the anti-corruption issue gradually became one of the central elements of the Romanian political struggle. Corruption ceased to be only a legal problem and turned into a weapon in electoral and coalition competitions.

The fire in the Colectiv club, which occurred in October 2015, exacerbated these contradictions. 64 people died. It began to be heard in society that the causes of the tragedy were not reduced to technical violations – behind them were practices that had existed for years in relations between business and government. Mass protests and the subsequent resignation of the Ponta government showed the scale of the accumulated dissatisfaction of the country's citizens [11].

The reaction to the 2017 government decree was even more intense. For most protesters, it was not about changes to the criminal code, but about an attempt to roll back the results of the anti-corruption reforms of the previous decade. The protests reached a scale that Romania had not seen since 1989.

After the second half of the 2010s, the topic of corruption remained open. In the 2020s, public attention gradually shifted. Specific figures and high-profile cases gave way to questions about whether institutional gains were being preserved and whether anti-corruption bodies were sufficiently robust. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated these doubts: accelerated decision-making on the procurement of medical equipment and financing of the healthcare sector has raised concerns about control over the use of budget funds [22].

In 2021, a new National Anti-Corruption Strategy was approved, which focuses not only on punishment for committed corruption offenses, but also on prevention and warning. Particular attention was paid to issues of healthcare, education, public procurement, and the activities of state-owned enterprises – precisely those areas that have traditionally remained the most vulnerable.

With the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the discussion took on a new dimension. For Romania, which borders Ukraine and is involved in ensuring the security of NATO's eastern flank, issues of public administration efficiency have become even more sensitive. In the political and expert environment, they began to openly talk about the fact that corruption can undermine decisions in the areas of defense, energy, and critical infrastructure.

In 2023, the European Commission terminated the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism. For Romania, this was symbolic: since joining the EU, the country had been under this mechanism. The end of monitoring meant that Brussels recognized the progress made in the field of justice and combating corruption in previous years.

But this issue did not disappear. If in the 2000s and 2010s the main topic was holding specific officials accountable, in the 2020s the quality of the work of institutions and their ability to function in crisis conditions came to the fore. In Romania, corruption is increasingly seen not as a separate legal or political problem, but as a factor affecting the overall stability of the state.

Croatia approached these issues in a different way. Unlike most post-Soviet states, it formed an independent statehood in conditions of armed conflict. After declaring independence in 1991, the tasks of defense and state-building absorbed all resources. Issues of control over budget funds were pushed into the background, and wartime conditions created opportunities for opaque redistribution of resources [2].

During 1991–1995, the main priority remained defense and restoration of control over occupied territories. At the same time, it was during this period that practices that researchers would later describe as clientelism and political corruption were formed. After the war, privatization became the order of the day. It was carried out as opaquely as in other post-socialist countries, and by the end of the 1990s, close ties had developed between party structures and business groups in Croatia.

Croatian academic discourse has gradually moved beyond treating corruption as a purely legal or economic problem. While in the 1990s, the main focus was on privatization abuses, since the early 2000s, researchers have increasingly viewed corruption as a factor that undermines the stability of institutions and the ability of the state to ensure its own security. In parallel, the very concept of national security was being rethought – it encompasses not only the military dimension, but also the political, social and economic.

Changes began after 2000, when the death of Tuđman and the defeat of the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) opened up space for a new course. The new government declared democratization, institutional reform and rapprochement with the EU. The fight against corruption first emerged as an independent priority.

In 2001, the Office for Combating Corruption and Organized Crime (USKOK) was created. For the first time, a body appeared in the country whose main task was to investigate corruption and organized crime. The results of the first years, however, did not particularly impress international partners.

The prospect of EU membership gave a real impetus. Having received candidate status in 2004 and opened negotiations in 2005, Croatia found itself under the same pressure as Romania: the European Commission directly linked the progress of negotiations to tangible results in the areas of the rule of law and the fight against corruption. USKOK was given broader powers; thus, the fight against corruption became a measure of the country's readiness for EU membership. Unlike Romania, where mass mobilization of civil society played an important role, in Croatia the main driver of reforms was the European integration process.

The most high-profile case of this phase was the case of Ivo Sanader. In 2009, he unexpectedly resigned, and in 2010, corruption charges were filed against him. The trials lasted for years. This was unprecedented for Croatian politics: for the first time, a former prime minister, one of the most influential figures of recent decades, was brought to trial. The case was seen by society as proof that the anti-corruption system was capable of acting regardless of the status of the suspect.

The period 2005–2013 was the most active in the history of Croatian anti-corruption policy. It was then that the largest number of high-profile investigations were conducted, and USKOK significantly strengthened its institutional capacity. Reforms were one of the factors that allowed Croatia to complete negotiations and join the EU in July 2013 [5].

But accession did not yet mean a solution to the problem. After 2013, the challenge was to maintain what had already been achieved and prevent the resumption of patronage practices. The emphasis gradually shifted from criminal prosecution to prevention and the development of integrity mechanisms. The European Commission continued to pay attention to the transparency of state-owned enterprises, the independence of the courts and the prevention of conflicts of interest in its annual reports.

The Corruption Prevention Strategy for 2021–2030 consolidated this approach [18]. New priorities include the digitalization of administrative procedures and the protection of whistleblowers. The Croatian anti-corruption model shifted from an emphasis on punishment to an emphasis on risk management.

In state strategic documents, corruption is increasingly seen as a security problem. The 2002 National Security Strategy already included corruption in the list of threats to the stability of institutions. The 2017 Strategy described corruption as a factor that weakens state resilience and opens up space for organized crime.

In the Croatian scientific discussion, the approach through the concept of "state capture" has become widespread. Corruption in this case is not a set of bribes and abuses, but a systemic situation when influential groups gain the ability to determine state policy in their own interests. The threat here is not in financial losses, but in the fact that the state gradually loses the ability to perform its basic functions.

Separately, Croatian researchers consider the connection between corruption and emigration. They argue that when people do not see the opportunity to realize themselves in fair competition, and not through connections, they go abroad. From the point of view of national security, the loss of young specialists means a reduction in labor potential, an aging population and a narrowing of the base for innovative development. As a result, corruption begins to affect the demographic, economic, and social security of the state [22].

The Croatian National Security Strategy emphasizes that corruption can undermine trust in institutions, weaken social cohesion and limit the state's ability to respond to internal and external challenges. Therefore, combating it is considered not only as a tool for ensuring legality, but also as a matter of state stability [18].

After 1989, Bulgaria followed the same path as other post-socialist states: large-scale privatization in the presence of weak legislative control, the formation of a new elite from old personnel, and the gradual growth of corruption in state institutions. It gradually acquired a systemic character and became one of the determining factors of the country's political and economic development.

During the 1990s, informal ties developed between business, parties and state administration, which weakened competition and made the application of laws selective. Already then, signs of what later came to be called "state capture" were evident: individual interest groups were gaining the ability to influence the formation of state policy [1].

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, the European Commission regularly pointed out to Bulgaria the need to strengthen the judiciary, the existence of an independent prosecutor's office and mechanisms for monitoring the activities of officials. Governments adapted legislation and created new bodies, but the results remained limited, and corruption scandals accompanied each coalition, regardless of its color.

Bulgaria's accession to the EU in 2007, like Romania's, did not solve the problem. Together with Romania, Bulgaria fell under the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism (CVM) – a special monitoring mechanism that was not applied to most new members. In 2008, the European Commission froze about a billion euros in financial assistance due to irregularities in the use of EU funds. This became a precedent in the history of the union and seriously damaged the country's reputation.

World Bank researchers have found that public procurement in Bulgaria exceeds 12% of GDP [12]. This means that corrupt practices in this area directly affect the allocation of a significant part of public resources. According to the same researchers, Bulgaria demonstrated one of the highest levels of corruption risks in public procurement among EU countries, and companies with political connections had a noticeable advantage in obtaining contracts. When public contracts go not to the most efficient, but to those closest to power, this hurts innovative development, undermines trust in institutions and creates risks for strategic sectors. After all, corruption in public procurement means not only budget losses, but also reduces the level of public services and has a negative impact on the further development of the country.

After 2016, researchers recorded a concentration of such contracts in the hands of relatively small supplier networks. This is a direct illustration of the mechanisms of state capture: private interests begin to influence not just individual decisions, but the functioning of state institutions as a whole [21].

Corruption has also affected political stability. Bulgarian researchers point out that the long-term dominance of the same groups contributes to the formation of stable corruption networks, and what looks like stability can actually be the consolidation of impunity.

In 2013, the appointment of Delian Peevsky as head of the State Agency for National Security provoked mass protests. The appointment itself was a telling sign: a media magnate with intricate business connections was gaining control of the secret service. The following years added new scandals and new criticism of the judicial system.

After 2020, the situation sharply escalated. In the summer, long-term anti-corruption protests against the Borisov government and Prosecutor General Geshev began. The result was early elections – and then another, and another. Over the course of several years, the country has gone through a series of parliamentary elections, lengthy coalition negotiations, and technical cabinets. Researchers have identified corruption and dissatisfaction with the quality of governance as one of the main factors in this instability. Corruption has begun to directly affect the state's ability to ensure the normal functioning of the political system [22].

In 2023, a new anti-corruption law was adopted. The Commission for Combating Corruption and Confiscation of Property was divided into two separate structures: the Commission for Combating Corruption and the Commission for Confiscation of Illegally Acquired Property. The goal is a clearer division of powers and greater efficiency of investigations. The OECD welcomed this step, but added that success depends on the real independence of the new bodies, stable funding, and the ability to coordinate with other agencies.

The Bulgarian experience confirms that corruption rarely remains just a legal problem. It affects the stability of government, the quality of public administration, the international reputation and the ability of the state to implement its own priorities. That is why anti-corruption policy is increasingly being viewed in Bulgaria not as a separate direction, but as a matter of state stability and national security.

6. Conclusions

Analyzing the events in Romania, Croatia and Bulgaria, it should be noted that there is a gradual change in views on corruption in the countries of South-Eastern Europe. This can be understood as a correlation phenomenon of the first decade of economic liberalization, privatization and the powerlessness of the institutional state. Soon, corruption began to be perceived not only at this level, but mainly as an element affecting political stability, effective bureaucratic sectoral governance and the ability of the state to defend itself. In all three cases, it is possible to trace how the attitude towards corruption gradually shifted from a restrictive definition as a criminal law phenomenon to a complex threat to the institutional stability of the state. This shows that the relatively high level of anti-corruption reforms in most countries of the region was politically motivated, but it was due to external rather than internal factors – the processes of European integration. In the case of Romania and Bulgaria, the EU's requirements at the time of accession were crucial and were ensured through further gradual monitoring within the framework of collective institutions, notably the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism.

The EU accession negotiations, driven primarily by pressure to establish and strengthen anti-corruption institutions, were the main impetus for their establishment in Croatia. The results of these concessions were closely linked to the willingness of domestic political actors to pursue reforms, public support and the unity/efficiency of state institutions that could ensure that the transformations initiated by the process would withstand the economic shock.

Romania, as the experience of the countries under study shows, benefited the most. A National Anti-Corruption Directorate and an anti-corruption enforcement system were established with a mandate to hold political and administrative elites accountable. At the same time, the Romanian example has proven that effective anti-corruption policy depends not only on the volume of criminal cases, but also on institutional independence, public trust and the right balance between the fight against corruption and democratic procedures.

The Croatian case is another illustration of the intertwining of corruption and security. The circumstances of the war for independence, the period of reconstruction and the truly complex process of state-building created a special atmosphere in which corrupt practices could be introduced. In parallel, the gradual strengthening of the activities of the Office for the Prevention of Corruption and Organized Crime and the inclusion of anti-corruption issues in the state's strategic documents led to the understanding that corruption not only undermines the functioning of state bodies, but also hinders demographic, social and economic security. The connection between corruption, public distrust and migration processes is particularly indicative; they are considered one of the long-term development challenges for the Croatian state in the modern world.

The lesson of the Bulgarian case is that EU membership alone may not be sufficient to tackle systemic corruption. Furthermore, while in the case of Romania the main emphasis was placed on strengthening the capacity and independence of specialised anti-corruption institutions, in Bulgaria many of the problems related to political patronage, the dependence of certain sectors of public administration on influential circles and other phenomena that researchers define as "state capture" remained largely unchanged. This led to a decline in the quality and efficiency of public administration, political chaos and insecurity, and a growing distrust of state institutions. As a result, corruption has come to be perceived as one of the areas where institutions can fail and as a threat to national security. One aspect common to all three countries is the gradual inclusion of anti-corruption issues in the sphere of national security policy. The modern concept of national security moves away from purely military considerations and also includes the effectiveness of public administration, institutional stability, and the trust in government demonstrated by citizens.

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