



e-ISSN 3041-2498

Public Management and Policy

<https://www.eu-scientists.com/index.php/pmap>



Quantitative Assessment of the Effectiveness of Anti-Corruption Strategies in Candidate Countries for Accession to the European Union

Lyudmila Novoskoltseva  1 *

¹State Institution "Luhansk Taras Shevchenko National University" (Ukraine). Head of the Department of Political Science and International Relations, Candidate of Political Sciences, Associate Professor.

* **Corresponding Author**, e-mail: lnovoskolceva@gmail.com

ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

Research Article

DOI:

[10.70651/3041-2498/2026.4.06](https://doi.org/10.70651/3041-2498/2026.4.06)

Received:

28 February 2026

Accepted:

31 March 2026

Published online:

10 April 2026

Copyright © 2026
by authors



This is an open access journal and all published articles are licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution—NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0)

This article provides a quantitative assessment of the effectiveness of anti-corruption strategies in European Union candidate states. The relevance of the study is driven by the fact that anti-corruption capacity constitutes one of the key prerequisites for meeting the political criteria for membership; however, the formal existence of strategies does not always reflect their actual performance. The study aims to develop an integral approach to the comparative assessment of anti-corruption strategy effectiveness in candidate countries and to identify country clusters by level of institutional performance. The methodology is based on a combination of index analysis, a comparative approach, content analysis of European Commission reports, and author-developed indicator normalization. The model incorporates four components: the level of corruption perception, the dynamics of change, the European Commission's readiness assessment in the area of anti-corruption, and the practical effectiveness of law enforcement. The results demonstrate that Albania, Moldova, and Montenegro received the highest composite scores; however, their profiles differ considerably: Albania exhibits a stronger law enforcement component, Moldova shows the most favorable positive dynamics, and Montenegro displays a relatively stable institutional base. Ukraine occupied an intermediate position, which reflects a combination of a positive anti-corruption track record with limited progress and institutional resilience risks. The lowest scores were recorded for Turkey, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia, where formal anti-corruption constraints are not accompanied by sufficient public trust, stable dynamics, or credible law enforcement. The practical significance of the study lies in the potential use of the proposed index as a preliminary diagnostic tool for governments, public administration bodies, and expert communities.



KEYWORDS

anti-corruption strategy, public administration, candidate states, European Union, effectiveness index, corruption, law enforcement.



Кількісна оцінка ефективності антикорупційних стратегій у державах-кандидатах на вступ до Європейського Союзу

Людмила О. Новосколькова  ¹*

¹ Державний заклад «Луганський національний університет імені Тараса Шевченка» (Україна).
Завідувач кафедри політології і міжнародних відносин, канд. політ. наук, доцент.

* Автор-кореспондент, e-mail: lnovoskolceva@gmail.com

СТАТТЯ

АНОТАЦІЯ

Дослідницька

DOI:

[10.70651/3041-2498/2026.4.06](https://doi.org/10.70651/3041-2498/2026.4.06)

Отримана:

28.02.2026 р.

Прийнята:

31.03.2026 р.

Опублікована:

10.04.2026 р.

Авторське право

© 2026 авторів



Цей твір ліцензовано на умовах Ліцензії Creative Commons «Із Зазначенням Авторства – Некомерційна 4.0 Міжнародна» (CC BY-NC 4.0).

У статті здійснено кількісну оцінку ефективності антикорупційних стратегій у державах-кандидатах на вступ до Європейського Союзу. Актуальність дослідження зумовлена тим, що антикорупційна спроможність належить до ключових передумов виконання політичних критеріїв членства, проте формальна наявність стратегій не завжди відображає їхню реальну результативність. Метою дослідження є розроблення інтегрального підходу до порівняльної оцінки ефективності антикорупційних стратегій у країнах-кандидатах та визначення груп країн за рівнем інституційної результативності. Методологія ґрунтується на поєднанні індексного аналізу, порівняльного підходу, контент-аналізу звітів Європейської Комісії та авторського нормування показників. До моделі включено чотири блоки: рівень сприйняття корупції, динаміку змін, оцінку готовності у сфері боротьби з корупцією за матеріалами Європейської Комісії та практичну результативність правозастосування. Результати показали, що найвищі інтегральні оцінки отримали Албанія, Молдова та Чорногорія, однак їхні профілі різняться: Албанія демонструє сильніший правозастосовний компонент, Молдова – найкращу позитивну динаміку, а Чорногорія – відносно стабільну інституційну базу. Україна посіла проміжну позицію, що пояснюється поєднанням позитивного антикорупційного треку з обмеженим прогресом і ризиками інституційної стійкості. Найнижчі результати зафіксовано для Туреччини, Боснії і Герцеговини та Сербії, де формальні антикорупційні обмеження не супроводжуються достатньою довірою, стабільною динамікою і переконливим правозастосуванням. Практичне значення дослідження полягає в можливості використання запропонованого індексу як інструменту попередньої діагностики для урядів, органів публічного управління й експертних спільнот.



КЛЮЧОВІ СЛОВА

антикорупційна стратегія, публічне управління, держави-кандидати, Європейський Союз, індекс ефективності, корупція, правозастосування.

1. Introduction

Anti-corruption policy in the candidate countries for accession to the European Union is increasingly considered not as a separate direction of internal reform, but as one of the basic indicators of the state's readiness to participate in the European legal and administrative space. As part of the enlargement process, the European Commission has consistently linked the advancement of candidate countries to the quality of democratic institutions, the state of the rule of law, the independence of justice and the ability of authorities to prevent corrupt practices. In this context, the anti-corruption strategy ceases to be a declarative program document and acquires the importance of a management model through which the ability of the state to translate political promises into sustainable institutional results is assessed [1, p. 5].

The problem of quantifying the effectiveness of anti-corruption strategies is that the formal criteria for the existence of a strategy, specialized body or action plan do not give a complete picture of the real state of anti-corruption policy. In many countries, there are regulatory documents, specialized institutions have been created and coordination mechanisms are provided, but the public perception of corruption, the stability of investigations, the quality of court decisions and the protection of anti-corruption bodies remain uneven. That is why evaluation requires a combination of quantitative and qualitative parameters, as well as a transition from a simple description of reforms to measuring their effectiveness.

Candidate states for accession to the European Union form a heterogeneous group. It includes Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Moldova, North Macedonia, Serbia, Turkey, Ukraine and Montenegro. Their anti-corruption strategies were formed under different political conditions: some countries are moving within the long Balkan cycle of European integration, some have received candidate status due to the new geopolitical situation, and Turkey is in a special mode of the actually frozen negotiation process. Because of this, a universal comparison is possible only if the indicators are previously normalized and the basic state, dynamics and law enforcement capacity are distinguished.

An important limitation is that international indices do not directly measure the effectiveness of strategies. For example, the Corruption Perceptions Index records the assessment of corruption in the public sector on a scale from 0 to 100, where a higher score means a lower level of perception of corruption [2, p. 3]. However, a high or low score does not by itself explain whether it is related to a specific strategy, the duration of reforms, political competition, the independence of the judiciary or the impact of external crises. That is why the study proposes the author's integral index, which does not replace official assessments, but makes it possible to systematize them in an applied management format.

The scientific novelty of the study lies in the attempt to combine four blocks of assessment in one indicator: the current level of perception of corruption, the dynamics of changes, expert assessment of progress based on the materials of the European Commission and the effectiveness of law enforcement. This approach avoids simplification, in which a country with a relatively high base score is automatically considered more effective, even if recent reports record a rollback, political pressure or weakening of institutions. The base score can get a higher integral score due to the positive dynamics and real results of specialized anti-corruption bodies.

2. Literature Review

The problem of measuring the effectiveness of anti-corruption strategies is at the intersection of studies of public administration, European integration, political modernization, and institutional economics. In scientific and applied literature, several approaches can be distinguished. The first approach focuses on assessing corruption through international indices, the second – on the analysis of legislative and strategic documents, the third – on the study of anti-corruption infrastructure and the independence of specialized bodies. For candidate countries, the fourth approach, which links anti-corruption policy with the fulfillment of EU requirements in the field of the rule of law, is of particular importance.

The Worldwide Governance Indicators methodology is useful for understanding that managerial quality cannot be reduced to just one parameter. It is based on the aggregation of various sources of perception of the quality of governance, corruption control, the rule of law and the effectiveness of

governance [3, p. 2]. For this study, this approach is important not as a source of direct calculation, but as a methodological confirmation of the need for multicomponent assessment. An anti-corruption strategy can be effective only when its implementation is supported not by a separate institution, but by the entire system of public administration.

The materials of the OECD Anti-Corruption Network for Eastern Europe and Central Asia demonstrate that the main problems for post-transition states remain the independence of anti-corruption bodies, the transparency of personnel selection, the political neutrality of investigations and the sustainability of results after the change of governments [4, p. 11]. The OECD approach allows us to consider the anti-corruption strategy not only as a set of measures, but as a coordination mechanism between the government, law enforcement agencies, courts, civil society and international partners. In Freedom House reports, the institutional state of transition states is assessed through a set of categories, among which the state of the judiciary and anti-corruption bodies occupies a separate place [5, p. 1]. These materials are important for analyzing informal constraints that are not always visible in legislative texts. We are talking about political influence, weakness of parliamentary control, ineffectiveness of accountability, and dependence of reforms on external pressure. For candidate countries, such factors are of direct importance, since the EU assesses not only the adoption of laws, but also the actual functioning of institutions.

The European Commission's reports for 2025 reflect the unequal state of anti-corruption policy in candidate countries. In Montenegro, moderate preparedness and some progress have been noted, but the final verdicts in high-level cases remain insufficiently convincing [6, p. 6]. In Albania, the work of specialized anti-corruption institutions is positively assessed, but corruption is still characterized as a widespread phenomenon that limits the overall effectiveness of reforms [7, p. 5]. Moldova demonstrates an improvement in the track of investigations and prosecutions, but its level of preparedness cannot yet be considered high enough [8, p. 6].

For Ukraine, the report of the European Commission records the presence of a specialized anti-corruption infrastructure and the continuation of the work of NABU, SAPO and HACC, but the overall progress in the fight against corruption is assessed as limited [9, p. 6]. Serbia faces the problem of reducing the number of final verdicts in high-level cases and maintaining a high public perception of corruption [10, p. 35]. In North Macedonia, anti-corruption policy is between a certain and moderate level of preparedness, but the report does not record progress, and corruption remains a serious problem [11, p. 6].

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the anti-corruption system is characterized by fragmentation, poor coordination and lack of progress [12, p. 34]. Turkey is at an early stage of preparation in the field of combating corruption and also does not demonstrate progress, which significantly limits its position in the comparative assessment [13, p. 6]. Georgia has a relatively higher baseline indicator of corruption perceptions, but the European Commission's report captures the rollback, the problems of the independence of the anti-corruption bureau and the need for a comprehensive strategy [14, p. 7].

The analysis of information security is of particular importance for the topic, since anti-corruption policy increasingly depends on the protection of registers, open data, digital evidence and the stability of state communications. In this context, Y. M. Bidzilya considers the state policy of information security in the context of hybrid threats, which makes it possible to link anti-corruption capacity with the quality of the information environment, protection of public data and counteraction to manipulative campaigns [15, p. 4]. The work of Y. M. Bidzili, V. V. Sharkan and M. V. Tsviklinsky actualizes the role of media law in protecting the rights of citizens in the fight against corruption. For this study, its significance lies in the fact that an effective anti-corruption strategy should cover not only law enforcement and judicial mechanisms, but also public communication, guarantees of access to information, protection of whistleblowers and legal safeguards against the use of the media space to pressure or discredit investigations [16, p. 7].

A generalization of the available sources shows that the evaluation of anti-corruption strategies often remains either purely normative or overly dependent on a single index. The normative approach allows you to see whether the state has a strategy, action plans, institutions and legislative guarantees. The index approach shows the overall reputation position of the country. However, without a combination of these planes, it is impossible to establish whether the strategy really works as a management tool. integral model.

3. Problem Statement

The purpose of the study is to develop and test a quantitative approach to assessing the effectiveness of anti-corruption strategies in candidate countries for accession to the European Union. Achieving this goal does not imply a mechanical ranking of countries, but rather an identification of how formal anti-corruption restrictions are combined with real dynamics, law enforcement and assessments of institutional preparedness. strategies; to select indicators that can be compared between all candidate states; normalize data so that they reflect not only the current state, but also dynamics; to form an integral index of the effectiveness of the anti-corruption strategy; to conduct a comparative interpretation of the results obtained; to propose practical directions for improving the effectiveness of anti-corruption policy for different groups of countries.

4. Methods and Materials

The study is carried out as a theoretical and empirical comparative research in the field of public administration and European integration. The empirical basis is open international indicators, the European Commission's reports for 2025 on candidate countries, as well as analytical materials of international organizations used to assess corruption, the quality of governance and institutional capacity. The analysis covered nine candidate countries: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Moldova, North Macedonia, Serbia, Turkey, Ukraine and Montenegro. Several interrelated methods are used in the work. The comparative method is used to compare countries according to the same criteria. The index method made it possible to form an integral indicator that aggregates data of different natures. Content analysis is applied to the reports of the European Commission to convert qualitative assessments into normalized scales. The method of expert interpretation is used at the stage of explaining the discrepancies between the quantitative result and the political and institutional context.

The effectiveness of the anti-corruption strategy in the study is understood not only as the presence of a strategic document, but also as the ability of the state to ensure a sustainable reduction of corruption risks, maintain the independence of anti-corruption bodies, demonstrate positive dynamics of corruption perception and form a convincing practice of investigations, prosecution and enforcement of decisions. Such a definition is broader than the formal legal understanding of the strategy and allows us to evaluate it as an instrument of public administration.

The Integral Index of Effectiveness of the Anti-Corruption Strategy is calculated according to the formula:

$$IASE_i = 0,45 \times CPI_{i,2024} + 0,25 \times \Delta CPI_i^* + 20 \times EU_i + 0,10 \times ENF_i \quad (1)$$

where CPI_i is the value of the Corruption Perceptions Index for 2024; ΔCPI_i^* – normalized dynamics of CPI changes for 2020–2024; EU_i – expertly standardized assessment of readiness in the field of anti-corruption according to the reports of the European Commission; ENF_i – assessment of the actual effectiveness of law enforcement.

Normalization of CPI dynamics was carried out according to the formula:

$$\Delta CPI_i^* = 50 + 5 \times (CPI_{i,2024} - CPI_{s,2020}) \quad (2)$$

where $CPI_{i,2024}$ is the CPI value for the third country in 2024; $CPI_{i,2020}$ – the CPI value for the same country in 2020. The value of $\Delta CPI_i^* = 50$ means no changes for the analyzed period; indicators above 50 indicate positive dynamics, and indicators below 50 indicate a deterioration of the situation.

The enforcement component was formed on the basis of a meaningful analysis of the conclusions of the European Commission on the results of the investigation and prosecution of high-level corruption. If the report recorded the stable results of specialized bodies, the country received a higher score. If the low number of final sentences, political influence, poor coordination, or lack of progress was emphasized, the score decreased. This component has less weight than CPI, but is important for reflecting the practical action of the strategy.

The first group of countries includes Albania, Moldova and Montenegro. Their integral scores are the highest, however, the nature of this result is different. Albania has a relatively strong law enforcement component thanks to the work of specialized institutions, although the problem of the prevalence of corruption remains palpable. Moldova gains a high result primarily due to the positive dynamics of the CPI, which indicates an improvement in the perception of anti-corruption efforts.

Montenegro has less pronounced dynamics, but its advantage is a relatively stable institutional boundary and a moderate level of preparedness.

Table 1. Operationalization of the Integral Index of Effectiveness of the Anti-Corruption Strategy

| Component | Indicator content | Scale | Weight |
|--------------|---|-------|--------|
| CPI | Level of perception of corruption in the public sector for 2024 | 0–100 | 0,45 |
| ΔCPI* | Normalized CPI Dynamics for 2020–2024 | 0–100 | 0,25 |
| EU | Assessment of preparedness and progress in the field of anti-corruption according to the reports of the European Commission | 0–100 | 0,20 |
| ENF | Effectiveness of Law Enforcement in Corruption Cases, in Particular High-Level | 0–100 | 0,10 |

Source: Developed by the author.

5. Results and Discussion

A comparative analysis showed that the effectiveness of anti-corruption strategies in candidate countries does not fully coincide with either the formal level of European integration promotion or the current CPI value. In several cases, a country with a higher base score shows negative dynamics or institutional setbacks, while a country with a lower starting level has more tangible progress in enforcement. That is why the integral index gives a more balanced picture, as it takes into account the state, movement, and ability of institutions to bring anti-corruption cases to a practical result.

The results obtained should be considered as diagnostic, and not as a final rating of the political quality of states. The Index does not claim to replace the assessments of the European Commission or international organizations, but it does allow you to see exactly where the gap between strategic documents and actual results occurs. Most importantly, the model shows the type of problem: weak baseline, negative dynamics, insufficient progress on the EU assessment, or weak enforcement.

Table 2. Quantitative Assessment of the Effectiveness of Anti-Corruption Strategies in EU Candidate States

| Country | CPI 2020 | CPI 2024 | ΔCPI | ΔCPI* | EU | ENF | IASE |
|-------------------------------|----------|----------|------|-------|----|-----|------|
| Albania | 36 | 42 | 6 | 80 | 65 | 65 | 58.4 |
| Moldova | 34 | 43 | 9 | 95 | 45 | 58 | 57.9 |
| Montenegro | 45 | 46 | 1 | 55 | 65 | 60 | 53.5 |
| North Macedonia | 35 | 40 | 5 | 75 | 50 | 35 | 50.3 |
| Ukraine | 33 | 35 | 2 | 60 | 42 | 55 | 44.7 |
| Georgia | 56 | 53 | -3 | 35 | 30 | 25 | 41.1 |
| Serbia | 38 | 35 | -3 | 35 | 40 | 32 | 35.7 |
| Bosnia and Herzegovina | 35 | 33 | -2 | 40 | 30 | 25 | 33.4 |
| Türkiye | 40 | 34 | -6 | 20 | 20 | 20 | 26.3 |

Source: Calculated by the author based on CPI 2020–2024, European Commission reports for 2025 and the author's rationing scale.

The second group is represented by North Macedonia and Ukraine. North Macedonia has a notable increase in CPI compared to 2020, but the lack of progress in the European Commission's assessment and a weaker enforcement component reduce its overall score. Ukraine has a functional, specialized anti-corruption infrastructure, but limited progress, institutional risks, and a military context do not allow it to be classified as the highest group. Its position is intermediate: it is better than countries with obvious rollbacks or stagnation, but weaker than states where positive dynamics are combined with more convincing progress.

The third group is formed by Georgia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Turkey. Georgia maintains a relatively high CPI score, but negative dynamics and a pullback recorded by the European Commission reduce the overall result. Serbia shows weaker dynamics and problems with final verdicts in high-level cases. Bosnia and Herzegovina have a structural problem of fragmentation of governance, which complicates the coordination of anti-corruption policies. Turkey gets the lowest result due to a combination of negative dynamics, early preparation and lack of progress.

The most significant conclusion is that the effectiveness of the anti-corruption strategy cannot be reduced to the availability of a document or the creation of a specialized body. A strategy becomes

effective only when it ensures regular policy updates, politically protected enforcement, open data, judicial independence and the possibility of public scrutiny. Otherwise, the strategy turns into an administrative shell that formally meets European integration expectations, but does not change the behavior of public institutions.

The connection between the anti-corruption strategy and the digital infrastructure of the state needs special attention. Electronic declarations, open procurement, digital registers, automated risk audits and transparent procedures for access to public information can significantly reduce the space for corruption solutions. However, digitalization is not a self-sufficient solution. If the information system is not protected from political interference, cyberattacks or selective access, it may not reduce, but rather concentrate corruption risks. That is why the anti-corruption strategy should contain a separate block of information security, data protection and legal guarantees of transparency.

The comparison also demonstrates that countries with the same or similar CPI values may have different management trajectories. For example, Ukraine and Serbia have the same CPI for 2024, but Ukraine's integral index is higher due to a better assessment of law enforcement infrastructure and more positive dynamics. On the other hand, Georgia, despite the higher core CPI, is lower than Ukraine due to negative dynamics and estimated institutional pullbacks. This confirms the feasibility of multicomponent measurement.

At the practical level, the results can be used to form targeted recommendations. Countries with relatively high dynamics, but weak institutional stability, need to consolidate the independence of anti-corruption bodies. Countries with a developed regulatory framework, but weak law enforcement, need to strengthen the judicial component and guarantees of the inevitability of punishment. Countries with negative dynamics primarily need to restore political trust, transparency of state decisions, and depoliticize anti-corruption bodies.

Table 3. Typology of the effectiveness of anti-corruption strategies and management priorities

| Group of countries | Countries | Key problem | Priority of management decision |
|--|---|--|---|
| High Relative Efficiency | Albania, Moldova, Montenegro | The need to stabilize positive dynamics and bring things to the final results | Strengthening the independence of specialized bodies, regular monitoring of the implementation of strategies, transparent criteria for evaluating results |
| Intermediate efficiency | North Macedonia, Ukraine | The gap between the presence of institutions and limited or unsustainable progress | Improving the quality of law enforcement, protecting anti-corruption bodies from political pressure, strengthening the judicial component |
| Low or unsustainable efficiency | Georgia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Turkey | Stagnation, rollback, or weak coordination of anti-corruption policies | Restarting strategic planning, restoring trust in institutions, depoliticizing the anti-corruption system, updating public control mechanisms |

Source: Developed by the author.

The proposed typology shows that the universal recipe for all candidate states is methodologically flawed. For some countries, the problem is not the lack of laws, but the weak implementation; for others, in the political rollback; for others, it is in the fragmentation of public administration. Accordingly, the anti-corruption strategy should have not only general goals, but also measurable indicators of achievement, deadlines for implementation, responsible actors, independent audit procedures and adjustment mechanisms in case of non-compliance. It is also advisable to distinguish between short-term and long-term performance criteria. In the short term, the number of completed investigations, cases referred to court and sentences passed are important. In the long term, stability of procedures, trust in institutions, reduction of corruption risks in key sectors, transparency of financing of political parties and reduction of opportunities for state capture by private interests are important. It is the long-term dimension that is most often the weak link of strategic documents.

The peculiarity of candidate countries is the tangible influence of external conventionality. EU requirements stimulate the adoption of laws and the creation of bodies, but after the formal implementation of the requirements, the pace of reforms may decrease. Therefore, an effective anti-corruption strategy should be integrated not only into the negotiation process with the EU, but also into the internal public administration system: budgeting, personnel policy, evaluation of civil servants, public procurement, management of state-owned enterprises and judicial reform. Therefore, quantitative evaluation made it possible to identify three management conclusions. First, positive

dynamics is an important but insufficient indicator of effectiveness if it is not supported by independent institutions. Secondly, a higher baseline level of perception of corruption does not guarantee high effectiveness of the strategy in the conditions of a rollback. Thirdly, anti-corruption policy should be related to information security, media law and public control, since modern corruption is increasingly combined with data manipulation, non-transparent communications and pressure on whistleblowers.

Albania took the first place in the proposed model not because of the absence of a corruption problem, but because of a combination of positive dynamics and a relatively effective law enforcement bloc. This is an important clarification because the CPI score itself is not the highest among candidate states. A stronger element of the Albanian profile is the presence of a specialized institutional architecture and the ability to demonstrate visible results in cases that have political and social weight. At the same time, the strategy cannot be considered complete, since the prevalence of corruption still limits trust in the state. For Albania, the main managerial task is not to create new institutions, but to stabilize its independence, reduce selectivity and translate the results into regular administrative practice.

Moldova demonstrated one of the most interesting profiles, as its integral result was formed primarily by positive dynamics. This means that the anti-corruption strategy in the Moldovan case has the potential for political mobilization and is capable of changing the external and internal perception of the state. However, a high dynamic component does not eliminate the problem of a relatively lower level of institutional preparedness. For Moldova, the risk is the dependence of the reform on the current political situation and external support. If the positive dynamics are not supported by stable procedures, human resources and judicial effectiveness, it may remain a short-term effect, rather than a long-term change in the public administration system. Montenegro has the profile of a more stable but less dynamic candidate state. Its indicators indicate the presence of an institutional basis, some progress and experience of long-term approximation to EU standards. At the same time, it is the duration of the process that creates the risk of institutional inertia. Under such conditions, the anti-corruption strategy can be formally updated, but not provide sufficient pressure on the system to complete high-level cases. For Montenegro, the central task is to increase the credibility of the final judicial results. Without this, the strategy will maintain its reputation as moderately effective, but unable to fully overcome corruption networks associated with political and business influence.

North Macedonia occupies an intermediate position, which is explained by the gap between the more positive CPI dynamics and the lack of progress in the European Commission's reports. This situation shows that changes in perception are not always accompanied by changes in the depth of institutional practice. The country needs to restore trust in the anti-corruption infrastructure, because strategic documents cannot be effective without stable implementation, transparent appointment of the leadership of bodies, political neutrality and judicial support. The managerial significance of this case lies in the fact that the strategy requires not only plans and measures, but also a clear system of responsibility for non-implementation. Ukraine has a special anti-corruption profile due to a combination of military context, close external attention, developed specialized infrastructure, and complex internal risks. The presence of NABU, SAP, HACC, the electronic declaration system and public procurement creates prerequisites for higher efficiency, but limited progress shows that institutional architecture alone does not guarantee a stable result. For Ukraine, personnel independence, protection of selection procedures, stability of open data, preservation of the autonomy of anti-corruption bodies and prevention of situational political interference remain critical. In this case, the anti-corruption strategy should be related to post-war reconstruction, control of international aid and justice reform.

Georgia demonstrates a methodologically important case where a higher baseline CPI does not mean better integral efficiency. Negative dynamics and estimated institutional rollback significantly reduce the final result. This indicates that the anti-corruption strategy should be evaluated not only by the historically achieved level, but also by the current trajectory. If a country loses the independence of anti-corruption bodies, weakens public control mechanisms, or allows the politicization of supervisory institutions, previous achievements quickly cease to work as a guarantee of future effectiveness. For Georgia, the priority is to restore strategic trust and return to the consistent institutional logic of European integration. Serbia is characterized by a relatively weak result due to negative dynamics and insufficient conviction in the fight against high-level corruption. In this case, the problem lies not only in individual legislative gaps, but in the interdependence of political competition, the media environment, judicial independence and executive control. An anti-corruption strategy cannot be effective if it does not change the structure of incentives for officials and does not provide real autonomy

for those institutions that are supposed to check the authorities. It is important for Serbia to move from formal reporting on the implementation of measures to evidence-based assessment of how these measures affect high-level cases, public procurement and political financing.

Bosnia and Herzegovina has one of the most complex profiles due to its multi-level and fragmented system of governance. In such a structure, the anti-corruption strategy faces the problem of dispersion of responsibility: different levels of government can make their own decisions, and coordination between them remains weak. That is why even the presence of formal strategic documents does not guarantee coordinated implementation. In this case, effectiveness depends on the ability to create an inter-institutional mechanism that does not duplicate authority but provides common standards, data exchange, uniform monitoring criteria, and politically neutral evaluation of results. Without this, the strategy remains a set of parallel procedures. Turkey received the lowest integral score due to a combination of negative dynamics, early preparation and lack of progress. Her case shows that an anti-corruption strategy cannot be effective outside the broader context of democratic accountability and institutional independence. If regulatory bodies, the judiciary, the media, and civil society do not have sufficient space for action, strategic documents do not create real change. For Turkey, the most important thing is not only to update anti-corruption plans, but also to restore basic guarantees of institutional independence, transparent control over state decisions and the implementation of international recommendations in the field of integrity.

The first mechanism for improving the effectiveness of anti-corruption strategies is the transition from formal planning to effective management. Most strategies contain lists of measures, responsible authorities and deadlines, but this is not enough. Each measure must have a measurable result associated with a specific corruption risk. For example, the improvement of the legislation on conflict of interest should be evaluated not only by the fact of adoption of changes, but by the number of violations detected, the quality of inspections, the share of decisions implemented and the reduction in the recurrence of violations in specific sectors. This approach transfers the strategy from the plane of administration to the plane of result management. The second mechanism is to strengthen the independence of anti-corruption institutions through stable selection, funding and accountability procedures. The institution can be formally established, but in fact depends on political decisions regarding the budget, management, personnel competitions, or disciplinary pressure. Therefore, it is advisable to assess the effectiveness of the strategy by whether anti-corruption bodies retain the ability to act against high-ranking officials regardless of changes in government, election cycles, or pressure from influential groups. Within the framework of the European integration process, this criterion should become one of the basic criteria for checking the reality of reforms. The third mechanism is the integration of anti-corruption policy into the budget process. Without a budget, the strategy can remain a declaration, because the bodies responsible for the implementation of measures do not have the resources for analytics, inspections, digitalization, personnel training, and judicial support. In candidate countries, it is advisable to introduce a separate budget labeling of anti-corruption measures in order to track what resources are directed to the implementation of strategies and what results they provide. This will allow us to move from a general phrase about political will to a measurable indicator of managerial priority.

The fourth mechanism is the development of digital monitoring. Anti-corruption strategies should contain not only mentions of electronic services, but also specific digital tools: automated analysis of procurement risks, comparison of declarations and registers, transparent registers of beneficial ownership, open data on state aid, court decisions and disciplinary proceedings. At the same time, digital solutions must be accompanied by security audits, personal data protection, and guarantees of public access. Only under such conditions does digitalization reduce corruption risks and does not create new closed channels of influence. The fifth mechanism is the involvement of civil society and professional media in assessing the implementation of strategies. In many candidate countries, civil society organizations play the role of an informal auditor of reforms, but their contribution is often not integrated into state monitoring procedures. It is advisable to create regular public reports in which the authorities respond not only to formal indicators, but also to the comments of independent experts, investigative journalists and professional associations. Such a mechanism increases the credibility of the strategy and reduces the risk of selective coverage of the results.

The proposed index is of an applied nature and should not be perceived as a complete replacement for deep qualitative analysis. Its advantage lies in the ability to quickly see the comparative profile of states, but its limitation is dependence on the quality of open data and expert assessments. All

international indices reflect to some extent perceptions rather than the immediate scope of corrupt practices. Therefore, the results should be interpreted carefully, combining quantitative assessment with an analysis of the political context, the structure of public administration, judicial practice and the real independence of anti-corruption bodies. Another limitation is that anti-corruption strategies have different time horizons and different levels of detail. In some countries, strategic documents have been updated, in some countries, they are implemented through separate action plans, and in some countries, the anti-corruption bloc is scattered between several reforms. Because of this, direct comparisons of formal strategies can be uneven. The author's model partially overcomes this problem, since it evaluates not the text of the document, but the aggregate result; however, for future research, it is advisable to separately analyze the quality of the strategies themselves, their structure, control mechanisms and budget support.

The model can be used in three practical directions. The first area is preliminary diagnostics for public administration bodies that seek to understand which component of anti-corruption policy is the weakest. The second direction is expert monitoring of the European integration process, where it is important to compare not only formal steps, but also real dynamics. The third area is academic analysis, within which the index can be supplemented with other indicators: the quality of the judicial system, the level of media freedom, the transparency of political financing, the state of open data, and the effectiveness of parliamentary control. Therefore, the main value of quantitative assessment lies not in the final ranking of states, but in the identification of the managerial logic of anti-corruption policy. A country can be weak in one component and relatively strong in another; it may have positive dynamics, but low institutional stability; it may have a higher base level, but lose ground due to a political rollback. It is this multidimensionality that should be taken into account in the process of developing and updating anti-corruption strategies in the candidate countries for accession to the European Union.

It is advisable to start the practical use of the integral index with the formation of a single set of data for each candidate state. At the first stage, quantitative indicators are collected that can be updated every year: CPI, its dynamics, the presence or absence of improvement in the reports of the European Commission, as well as signs of enforcement performance. At the second stage, a qualitative check of the data is carried out: whether the improvement is accidental, whether it is confirmed by judicial practice, whether the independence of anti-corruption bodies is preserved, and whether there is political pressure on whistleblowers or journalists. Such a sequence avoids technical ranking without meaningful interpretation. At the third stage, the index is calculated, but its result should not automatically turn into a political conclusion. For example, the close values of the two countries may hide different problems: one state may have a low baseline but steady progress, while the other may have a higher level but negative dynamics. That is why, after the calculation, it is necessary to build a country profile by four components. Such a profile shows which block needs intervention: strategic planning, execution, litigation, digital control, public participation, or information security.

At the fourth stage, the results of the index should be related to specific management decisions. If the dynamic component is weak, a revision of strategic priorities and communication of results is required. If the law enforcement component is weak, it is advisable to strengthen the procedural autonomy of investigative and prosecutorial bodies, ensure transparent competitions and stable funding. If the problem is a low assessment of preparedness based on the materials of the European Commission, the priority is the implementation of specific recommendations, and not the expansion of declarative strategic goals. The fifth stage consists of the annual review of the assessment. An anti-corruption strategy cannot be evaluated once, as its effectiveness is manifested in dynamics. The annual update of the index will allow you to see whether the improvement is sustainable, whether it was due to a one-time policy decision, external pressure, or a change in the assessment methodology. This is especially important for candidate countries, since the negotiation process with the EU is of a long-term nature, and anti-corruption reforms often go through stages of acceleration, stagnation and rollback.

The European integration conditionality creates a strong external stimulus for anti-corruption reforms, but does not guarantee their irreversibility. The experience of candidate countries shows that political elites can actively support reforms at the stage of obtaining candidate status or opening negotiations, but slow down after achieving intermediate goals. Therefore, the anti-corruption strategy should be built in such a way that its implementation does not depend solely on external pressure. It should be integrated into the internal mechanisms of civil service, budget planning, parliamentary control and judicial accountability. For the European Union, the results of such a measurement can be useful as an auxiliary tool for distinguishing between formal and substantive progress. If a country has

adopted the necessary laws, but does not demonstrate law enforcement results, it is advisable to assess its progress more carefully. If a country has a lower starting level, but demonstrates a steady improvement, this can be an argument in favor of increased technical and financial support. This approach makes the expansion policy more evident and less dependent on general political impressions.

For the candidate countries themselves, the index can serve as an internal strategic management tool. It can be used in the preparation of government reports, parliamentary hearings, updating anti-corruption programs, and allocating budget resources. The advantage of the index is that it does not reduce the assessment to a single source, but allows you to combine international indicators, expert opinions, and the author's standardization. If applied regularly, this can increase the responsibility of the authorities for real results, and not only for the formal implementation of measures. At the same time, excessive reliance on external indicators can create a risk of imitation policies. The government can focus its efforts on improving the indicators that are most visible to international partners, leaving out less visible but structurally important problems. Such problems include informal political arrangements, shadow influence on the courts, control over the media, non-transparent financing of political parties, and corruption risks at the local level. Therefore, the index should be used in conjunction with in-depth sectoral analysis.

Public procurement, construction, energy, state-owned enterprises, the judiciary, customs, political financing, and local self-government remain the most vulnerable to corruption risks in candidate countries. The overall anti-corruption strategy often describes these areas too broadly, without offering a separate measurement logic for each sector. However, efficiency in the field of procurement cannot be evaluated by the same indicators as efficiency in the field of judicial integrity. This requires special indicators: the share of competitive procedures, the level of appeals, the average duration of court proceedings, the share of enforced decisions, the transparency of ownership and the number of identified conflicts of interest.

Public procurement is a special sector, as it quickly reflects the quality of anti-corruption policy. If the procurement system is open, digital and competitive, it reduces the opportunities for manual allocation of resources. If exceptions, closed procedures, or emergency regimes are used excessively, corruption risks increase even if there is a formal strategy. For Ukraine, this aspect is of particular importance in connection with reconstruction, defense procurement and international assistance. For the Balkan countries, it is associated with large infrastructure projects and local political networks. The judicial system is the second critical sector. Anti-corruption bodies can investigate cases, but without an independent court, the strategy does not ensure the inevitability of responsibility. Therefore, the effectiveness of anti-corruption policy should be assessed not only by the number of open proceedings, but also by the quality of indictments, the duration of consideration, the share of final verdicts, the stability of court decisions and the protection of judges from political pressure. It is the judicial component that often explains why a country may have active anti-corruption rhetoric but weak practical results.

Local self-government also needs a separate analysis. In many candidate states, corruption is not limited to the central level, but manifests itself in land decisions, permits, local procurement, utilities and the distribution of social resources. The strategy, which focuses only on central bodies, does not cover a large part of everyday corrupt practices. Therefore, it is advisable to introduce local anti-corruption plans, but they must be coordinated with the national strategy, uniform open data standards and independent public monitoring. Political financing is another area without which the anti-corruption strategy remains incomplete. If parties, election campaigns, and related media are financed non-transparently, this creates preconditions for the seizure of the state by private interests. An effective strategy should include control of sources of funding, real responsibility for hidden contributions, openness of party reporting and an independent supervisory body. In candidate countries, this aspect is directly related to the quality of democracy, the integrity of elections and the credibility of the European course.

The information and media components of anti-corruption policy are becoming increasingly important. Corruption scandals, investigations, data leaks and discrediting campaigns can affect not only domestic politics, but also the international image of the candidate state. Therefore, the strategy should include mechanisms for the protection of investigative journalists, whistleblowers, access to information and public registers. In the absence of such a block, even effective law enforcement actions can be neutralized through information pressure, manipulation or selective coverage of the results. In general, the results of the study confirm that an effective anti-corruption strategy for candidate

countries should be multi-level. It should contain a national border, sectoral plans, local implementation mechanisms, digital monitoring, an independent law enforcement unit and a system of public control. Its effectiveness should be measured not by the number of adopted documents, but by the ability to change the behavior of state institutions, reduce the space for abuse and ensure confidence in the European integration process.

6. Conclusions

The study proposes an integral approach to the quantitative assessment of the effectiveness of anti-corruption strategies in the candidate countries for accession to the European Union. The developed model combines the current state of corruption perceptions, dynamics for 2020–2024, assessment of preparedness and progress according to the reports of the European Commission, as well as the law enforcement component. This approach made it possible to move from the description of anti-corruption reforms to their comparative management diagnostics. It was found that Albania, Moldova and Montenegro received the highest integral scores. However, these results have different content: Albania has a stronger law enforcement bloc, Moldova has positive dynamics, and Montenegro has a relatively stable institutional framework. Ukraine is in an intermediate group, where the presence of specialized anti-corruption bodies is combined with limited progress and the need for additional protection of institutional independence. The lowest performers were Turkey, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia, which are characterized by stagnation, weak law enforcement, or fragmented governance.

The practical significance of the results lies in the fact that the proposed index can be used as a tool for preliminary assessment of the weaknesses of anti-corruption policy. For countries with positive dynamics, the priority is to consolidate the results and prevent political interference. For countries with weak law enforcement, it is necessary to strengthen the judicial system and the inevitability of punishment. For countries with a rollback, the most important thing is to restore trust, transparency and accountability of public institutions. Further research should be directed to detailing sectoral anti-corruption risks in candidate countries, in particular in the areas of public procurement, political financing, the judiciary, management of state-owned enterprises, and digital registers. Special attention should be paid to checking how changes in legislation and strategic documents affect the long-term perception of corruption, the quality of law enforcement and the pace of European integration.

References

1. European Commission. (2025a). *2025 communication on EU enlargement policy*. European Commission. https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/eb69a890-40d6-4696-801e-612d51709fdd_en?filename=2025+Communication+on+EU+Enlargement+Policy.pdf
2. European Commission. (2025b). *Albania 2025 report*. European Commission. https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/fe9138b7-90fe-4277-a12c-3a03f6d1957f_en?filename=albania-report-2025.pdf
3. European Commission. (2025c). *Bosnia and Herzegovina 2025 report*. European Commission. https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/5d8fc547-f8f8-456f-84e3-b38998acafad_en?filename=bosnia-and-herzegovina-report-2025.pdf
4. European Commission. (2025d). *Georgia 2025 report*. European Commission. https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/b3089ad4-26be-4c6a-84cc-b9d680fe0a48_en?filename=georgia-report-2025.pdf
5. European Commission. (2025e). *Montenegro 2025 report*. European Commission. https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/9ae69ea7-81d6-4d6a-a204-bd32a379d51d_en?filename=montenegro-report-2025.pdf
6. European Commission. (2025f). *North Macedonia 2025 report*. European Commission. https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/267b368e-6b55-4a42-bb72-6395593de4da_en?filename=north-macedonia-report-2025.pdf
7. European Commission. (2025g). *Republic of Moldova 2025 report*. European Commission. https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/23fa6af0-89b3-4532-a3d9-d1638727d14c_en?filename=moldova-report-2025.pdf
8. European Commission. (2025h). *Serbia 2025 report*. European Commission. https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/6e68ce26-b95b-48e1-921a-c60c12da8f00_en?filename=serbia-report-2025.pdf

9. European Commission. (2025i). *Türkiye 2025 report*. European Commission. https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/4bb4ddd1-4f20-4ee0-92db-926996ec8dd1_en?filename=t%C3%BCrkiye-report-2025.pdf
10. European Commission. (2025j). *Ukraine 2025 report*. European Commission. https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/17115494-8122-4d10-8a06-2cf275eecd7_en?filename=ukraine-report-2025.pdf
11. Freedom House. (2025). *Nations in transit 2025*. <https://freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit>
12. Kaufmann, D., & Kraay, A. (2024). *The worldwide governance indicators: Methodology and analytical issues*. World Bank. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/worldwide-governance-indicators>
13. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2025). *Anti-corruption network for Eastern Europe and Central Asia: Annual report 2024*. <https://www.oecd.org/corruption/acn/>
14. Transparency International. (2025). *Corruption perceptions index 2024: Results and trends*. <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2024>
15. Bidzilia, Yu. M. (2025). Derzhavna polityka informatsiinoi bezpeky v umovakh hibrydnykh zahroz [State policy of information security in the context of hybrid threats]. *Ukrainskyi polityko-pravovyi dyskurs – Ukrainian Political and Legal Discourse*, (17). <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17757320> (in Ukrainian)
16. Bidzilia, Yu. M., Sharkan, V. V., & Tsviklinskyi, M. V. (2025). Mediapravo yak instrument zakhystu prav hromadian u borotbi z koruptsiieiu [Media law as a tool for protecting citizens' rights in the fight against corruption]. *Ukrainskyi polityko-pravovyi dyskurs – Ukrainian Political and Legal Discourse*, (8). <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14843295> (in Ukrainian)