

Rally Against Corruption/Misgovernance in Bulgaria

Parliament Hill, Ottawa

Speech by David Kilgour

Sept. 13, 2020,



Friends of Bulgaria and its people,

Thank you for coming from Montreal, Toronto and Calgary.

We are all here today because we care about Bulgaria, its people and its governance.

Wikipedia currently notes: “ ... A poll of Bulgarians indicated that 76 percent believe that political parties are corrupt and 86 percent believe that the judiciary is corrupt.”

In 2019, the Friedrich Naumann Foundation stressed: “Bulgaria is the worst corrupted EU-member, behind the otherwise comparable Hungary, Romania, Greece or Croatia... State capture by the informal alliance of political and business oligarchy, organized crime, only partially reformed secret services, and biased media, has remained as the main catalyst of corruption.”

In 2019, the [Rule of Law Index](#) gave Bulgaria the same ranking as Russia for corruption of the executive. This category is supposed to measure "the prevalence of bribery, informal payments, and other inducements in the delivery of public services and the enforcement of regulations. It also measures whether government procurement and public works contracts are awarded through an open and competitive bidding process, and whether government officials at various levels of the executive branch refrain from embezzling public funds.

The Bulgarian Supreme Judicial Council has been involved in a number of scandals, suggesting that it has been subject to external influences on its decisions. Recently, the Council of Europe expressed concern about the lack of judicial independence and the compromised separation of powers in the country.

The [Venice Commission](#) has raised concern about the Soviet model of Bulgaria's Prosecution which turns it into "a source of corruption and blackmail." Civil activists have demanded the resignation of Bulgaria's General Prosecutor [Sotir Tsatsarov](#) for a long time due to his alleged involvement in high-profile corruption cases.

Corruption has resulted in significant economic losses and underperformance in Bulgaria. Since its accession to the EU in 2007, it has remained the Union's poorest country with a per-capita GDP of \$16,300, less than half the European average.

The cabinets of [Boyko Borisov](#) have been in power through most of the decade, establishing a system of impunity for high-profile crime and favoritism of certain local companies. Approximately 22% of GDP are lost to corruption each year, and a number of major foreign companies have withdrawn from Bulgaria.

Corruption is a source of profound public discontent. The [2013 Bulgarian protests against the first Borisov cabinet](#) spread to over 30 cities and were marked by seven [self-immolations](#), five of which were fatal. Another wave of demonstrations occurred in November 2018 against low wages, as well as fuel price and vehicle tax hikes.

Media freedom

According to [Reporters Without Borders](#), the press in Bulgaria is rife with "corruption and collusion between media, politicians, and oligarchs".

Media ownership is concentrated in the hands of a few owners, despite a superficial diversity in ownership. Upon joining the European Union in 2007, Bulgaria ranked 35th on the [Press Freedom Index](#), alongside [France](#). It has since tumbled to 111th, by far the worst press freedom performer of any EU member and candidate state.

More than 90% of Bulgarian journalists, as polled by the [Association of European Journalists](#), have reported frequent interference with their work. Lawmakers have gone as far as threatening TV journalists with sacking during a live broadcast. The media environment has been further degraded by EU funds diverted by the government to sympathetic media outlets.

For more than sixty consecutive days, Bulgarians have been protesting against its openly corrupt government. Media and citizen actions have been revealing for years - and especially in the last few months before the protests started on July 11, 2020 - clear connections between the government and organized crime and rampant corruption.

Thank you.