

Canadians of origin in Bulgarian Rally Against Corruption in Sophia

Comments by David Kilgour at Bulgarian embassy protest, Ottawa

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Dear friends of Bulgaria,

We are here in solidarity with the Bulgarian people. We oppose corruption, including indicated collusion between members of the current government in Sofia and organized crime.

WIKIPEDIA

The Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) is released by Transparency International each year. Its 2017 and 2018 indices ranked Bulgaria as the most corrupt in the European Union.^[9] ... A poll of Bulgarians indicated that 76 percent believe that political parties are corrupt and 86 percent believe that the judiciary is corrupt.^{[4][10]}

In 2019, the Friedrich Naumann Foundation stressed: "Bulgaria is the worst corrupted EU-member, behind the otherwise comparable Hungary, Romania, Greece or Croatia... It also noted: "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."^[6]

In 2019, the [Rule of Law Index](#) gave Bulgaria the same marks 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."^[12]

Courts

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.^[1] Recently, the Council of Europe expressed concern about the lack of judicial independence and the compromised separation of powers in the country.^[15] The [Venice Commission](#) has raised concern about the Soviet model of Bulgaria's Prosecution which turns it into "a source of corruption and blackmail."^[16] 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.^[17]

Procurement

Government procurement is an area of significant corruption risk. Many of the public contracts are awarded to a few politically connected^[18] companies amid widespread irregularities, procedure violations and tailor-made award criteria.^[19] [Ognyan Gerdzhikov](#)'s interim government found widespread violations in defence procurement after it took over from the [Second Borisov Government](#) in 2017; 45 out of 82 defence ministry contracts signed the previous year were in breach of public procurement laws and regulations. Fraud was strongly suspected in nine of the procedures.^[20] Public tenders in energy and infrastructure are particularly associated with alleged siphoning of funds from EU and state coffers.^[21]

Economic mismanagement[

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. By 2014, the Bulgarian government was accused of mismanaging the economy so badly that the European Union froze billions of euros in aid.^[24] Between 2008 and 2018, [foreign direct investment](#) collapsed, dropping from 28% to 2% of GDP, or \$9 billion to just \$1.13 billion.^{[24][25]} 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, like [ČEZ Group](#), have withdrawn from Bulgaria.^[25]

Corruption is a source of profound public discontent.^[26] Corruption and government inaction against convicted Roma criminal Kiril Rashkov sparked the [2011 anti-Roma riots](#).^[27] 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.^[28] The protests, directed against corruption, poverty and political parties, led to the resignation of the [First Borisov Government](#).^[29] [Mass demonstrations continued](#) against the government of [Plamen Oresharski](#), which also resigned following the appointment of [Delyan Peevski](#) as head of the [State Agency for National Security](#).^[30] Another wave of demonstrations occurred in November 2018 against low wages, as well as fuel price and vehicle tax hikes.^[31] Some 20 cities saw protests demanding the resignation of the [Third Borisov Government](#); several major roads were blocked.^[32]

Deterioration of media freedom

According to [Reporters Without Borders](#), the press industry in Bulgaria is rife with "corruption and collusion between media, politicians, and oligarchs".^[33] Media ownership is opaque, intransparent and 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](#).^[33] 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.^[33] The media environment has been further degraded by EU funds diverted by the government to sympathetic media outlets.^{[34][35]} In 2018, two journalists were detained and later released by police while investigating a massive scheme to drain EU funds by a company associated with a number of high-profile government procurement projects.^[36]

Thank you.