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# CPI 2022 FOR EASTERN EUROPE & CENTRAL ASIA: GROWING SECURITY RISKS AND AUTHORITARIANISM THREATEN PROGRESS AGAINST CORRUPTION

*The average score for Eastern Europe and Central Asia is 35 – well below the global average of 43. While improvements in a handful of countries offer hope, the region has a long way to go to turn the tide against long-standing corruption.*

Across Eastern Europe and Central Asia, 2022 has underlined how high-level corruption is closely linked to political instability, weakened institutions and – in the most extreme cases – violent conflict. Across the region, governments undermine democratic processes, crack down on civic space and restrict media freedoms in a vicious cycle of corruption and authoritarianism, leaving Eastern Europe and Central Asia the second lowest performing region on the 2022 Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI).

Top scorers in the region are **Georgia** (CPI score: 56), **Armenia** (46) and **Montenegro** (45). **Tajikistan** (24), **Azerbaijan** (23) and **Turkmenistan** (19) are the worst performers.

## Eastern Europe destabilised by war

**Russia's** (28) brutal invasion of **Ukraine** (33) shook the world and made obvious how entrenched corruption threatens regional security and stability. President Vladimir Putin has tightened his grip through the power of the purse, including by granting lucrative business deals to his close associates – and persecuting those who deny him. Now, he can exert influence over other nations and pursue his geopolitical ambitions without internal opposition. The consequence for the rest of the world is immense: the attack on Ukraine has caused enormous new political, economic and security challenges across Eastern Europe, and threatens progress to protect the rule of law, fight against corruption and support the healthy functioning of democratic institutions.

## Country to watch: Ukraine

Although it still scores low, war-torn **Ukraine** is one of few significant improvers on the CPI, having gained eight points since 2013. The country has long struggled with systemic abuse of power, but has taken [important steps](#) to improve oversight and accountability.

Even while fighting back the invasion, in June 2022, the parliament adopted a new [National Anti-Corruption Strategy](#) and appointed a new head of the office that brings corruption cases before the courts. The strengthening of state institutions and functions vulnerable to corruption has been another vital factor in the country's progress: research shows that interference in the judiciary by oligarchs and other vested interests was one of the key corruption risks before the war.

This is just the most recent in a long line of innovative reforms sparked by the Maidan Revolution of 2014. By embracing the idea of “everyone sees everything”, the state has aimed to give its citizens maximum access to information on how public funds are spent

and provided them with the opportunity to raise questions about suspicious activities. Also, a system of new anti-corruption bodies was implemented alongside reforms in various sectors.

However, Russia's war of aggression has disrupted some of the reform processes and exacerbated [corruption risks](#). [Reconstruction and recovery efforts](#) can be drastically undermined by wrongdoers pocketing funds, both during the war and after. Such a case was discovered in mid-January when investigations exposed war profiteering by the defence and the communities and territories development ministries. The scandal clearly underscores the need for reforms to prevent such violations in the future, from both domestic and global actors. As foreign aid will play a vital role in rebuilding Ukraine, the international community must support the Ukrainian government in strengthening its national anti-corruption agencies and civil society. Only independent oversight can ensure the effective and accountable distribution of the development and reconstruction aid the country so desperately needs.

## Social discontent and shrinking civic space

After years of improvement, this CPI brings worrying signs as **Armenia** drops three points. While not yet statistically significant, this downturn reflects the breakdown in maintaining checks and balances, ensuring integrity in law enforcement, securing judicial independence and protecting civic space.

**Kazakhstan** (36) was rocked by massive civil unrest in January 2022. Triggered by a spike in fuel prices, the demonstrations were fed by public outrage over inequality and corruption, resulting in more than [200 deaths](#), many of which have not been properly and transparently investigated. Protestors highlighted the former Kazakh ruling family's [allegedly ill-gotten wealth](#), causing current President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev to prioritise recovering stolen assets. To move forward from this turmoil, the country must empower anti-corruption agencies and ensure transparency in the asset recovery process.

Meanwhile, power in **Azerbaijan** is [largely held by the president](#) – who has been in this role since 2003 – and his family. Corruption in the country is widespread, and effective opposition to the government has been weakened by years of crackdowns on rival politicians and civil society.

**Kyrgyzstan** (27) is among the weakest performers in the region. While it used to be a democratic outlier among its neighbours, the country has slid towards autocracy. The resulting weakening of checks and balances is making it increasingly easy for those with power to abuse it without accountability. To make matters worse, the government cracked down hard on [freedoms of expression and civil society](#) last year, arresting protesters and partially shutting down the internet after demonstrations against the government's secretive border demarcation deal with neighbouring Uzbekistan.

**Uzbekistan** (31), on the other hand, has been a steady improver on the CPI, gaining 14 points since 2013. In recent years, the country has prioritised preventing corruption, establishing an anti-corruption agency as well as a mandatory online public procurement platform to enhance transparency. Despite these important measures,

Uzbekistan remains an [authoritarian state](#) where activists and civil society face persecution, interrogation and dismissals. Until the country opens up civic space, it cannot fully address its issues with corruption.

## Deficient democratic processes and flourishing crime

The Western Balkans region is known for its [low resilience to organised crime](#). Countries have been slow in addressing this risk and responsible institutions are still lacking adequate resourcing and independence.

The recent escalation of tensions between Kosovo and Serbia increased security risks in the region, including by undermining cross border cooperation, which is key to successfully fighting organised crime. More transparent and accountable political decision-making, including during the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue, would create a climate better suited to constructive resolution of this frozen conflict and enable implementation of key reforms as a prerequisite for EU integration.

**Kosovo** (41) has made progress with an improved legal framework for political and election campaign finance, but implementation of such reforms will be key in the coming months. The government still needs to improve transparency and refrain from any [interference in the justice system](#). While corruption scandals have not come to light in the past year, this doesn't mean corruption is under control. Low capital investment budget spending in recent years has reduced opportunities for corruption in the distribution of public contracts, which has been a problem in the past.

In **North Macedonia** (40) officials are opening new corruption cases, but these steps in the right direction are jeopardised by [inefficient follow-up](#) with ongoing ones and lack of integrity in selection of key figures in the judiciary. To ensure accountability and demonstrate genuine will to fight corruption, the government must properly resource and allow independence for the Commission for Prevention of Corruption (SCPC) and the institutions responsible for investigating corruption and organised crime.

**Bosnia and Herzegovina** (34) scores lowest in the Western Balkans and is a significant decliner on the CPI, having lost eight points since 2013. Increasing political divisions along ethnic lines continue to hinder democratic institutions needed to govern the country and combat corruption. This has been no more apparent than within the country's leading prosecutorial office where there are serious red flags about its ability to bring corruption offenders to justice – after a series of resignations, the High Judicial and Prosecutorial Council [appointed a new chief prosecutor](#) in a [highly flawed procedure](#) in which three of the four original candidates either gave up or were eliminated. Additional cause for concern centres on the leader of the Republika Srpska, who is known for [his support of Russia's invasion](#) of Ukraine, and his recent mentions of a [law to criminalise defamation](#) that could be used to silence independent critics.

## Country to watch: Georgia

Although **Georgia** leads the region with 56 points, this is due to previous gains in eliminating low-level bribery; the country has stagnated on the CPI since 2012.

Disappointingly, in a country once held up as an anti-corruption champion in the region, the current government is effectively killing any momentum to fight this problem. The [governing Georgian Dream party](#) – which is widely believed to be controlled by Georgia’s richest man and former prime minister, Bidzina Ivanishvili – [has captured](#) key state institutions, the judiciary and law enforcement, meaning abuses of power at the highest levels go largely unpunished.

As an example, in recent years, Transparency International Georgia’s monitoring [identified](#) dozens of cases of alleged high-level corruption that have not been investigated; the nature, scope and increasing number of these cases point to an alarming conclusion that high-level corruption in Georgia is taking the form of kleptocracy, where officials systematically use political power to appropriate the country’s wealth and undermine all critical voices, including political opposition, media and civil society. Government representatives have even resorted to aggressive rhetoric against civil society that exposes corruption. Recent defamation campaigns against activists have raised fears that parliament might be pushing for a foreign agent law – similar to what’s in place in Russia – to attack non-profits.

The EU listed inaction over high-level corruption as a key concern in [its June 2022 decision](#) not to grant Georgia candidate status. This followed an assessment process that [many believe the government itself sabotaged](#) to appease Russia. The EU did, however, offer the country a membership perspective, dependent on the fulfilment of 12 priorities – including the creation of an anti-corruption agency to help “deoligarchise” the country. The government has unveiled plans to set up such an agency, but the proposals [fall short](#) as they don’t include investigative powers and sufficient independence.

## **Advances of – and against – autocratic rule**

A country with a long history of state capture, **Moldova** (39), has recently emerged from a turbulent political period and shown a real willingness to implement anti-corruption reforms. The pro-European government’s majority in parliament appears to reflect a widespread consensus against entrenched oligarchic networks. While rooting out corruption will continue to be an uphill battle, the government has made judicial reforms, anti-corruption efforts and the promotion of economic development its top political goals. Going forward, anti-corruption efforts will require increased support from civil society organisations and grassroots movements to increase pressure on Moldova’s political elite. The war in neighbouring Ukraine has added another layer of complications, causing major energy, economic and humanitarian crises in the country. While implementing the commitments for EU membership, the government now needs to make good on its promises to depoliticise anti-corruption bodies and genuinely reform the country’s justice system.

**Serbia** (36) has fallen to a historic low on the CPI, mainly due to [continued weakening of the rule of law](#) and [growing autocracy](#). Since 2018 the government has failed to produce a new anti-corruption strategy and allowed problematic policies to continue. These include direct negotiations over valuable infrastructure development and hiding public contracting information from the public. Also worryingly, [most managers in state-owned](#)

[enterprises](#) – in charge of spending billions of euros of public funds – remain in the “interim” status well over time allowed by the law, which significantly increases corruption risks.

Furthermore, Serbia’s judiciary is [heavily influenced by political players](#), severely undermining progress in organised crime cases, including those pointing to [high-level officials’ involvement](#). On the other hand, investigative journalists, [whistleblowers](#) and members of law enforcement who have disclosed potentially corrupt practices have come [under pressure from state institutions](#).

**Albania** (36) has been largely stagnant on the CPI. This [hybrid regime’s](#) progress in areas like judicial vetting and strengthening of the Specialised Structure for Anti-Corruption and Organised Crime has been overshadowed by [weakened media independence](#) and a lack of opportunities for meaningful engagement in decision-making by civil society. Smear campaigns and intimidation against journalists continue and, if adopted, [changes to the freedom of information law](#) will further narrow the opportunities for independent oversight of public institutions by providing the institutions with legal grounds for refusing to share information.

While scoring higher on the CPI than its neighbours, **Montenegro** is emerging from decades of autocratic rule, and has been stagnating on the CPI for the past five years. The new government hasn’t met expectations for improved institutional and legal frameworks for the fight against corruption and continues the practice of withholding information from the public.

Several arrests for alleged abuse of office and involvement in organised crime, including of the [former head of the Supreme Court](#) give some hope that the worst criminals and their enablers will no longer enjoy impunity. However, the political power struggle that has paralysed the Constitutional Court indicates that people in power wish to keep judicial independence under political control and undermine anti-corruption efforts.

To advance its democracy and rule of law **Turkey** needs to address weakening effectiveness in political checks and balances, and a stronger legal and institutional anti-corruption framework needs to be put in place in order to eliminate undue influence in prosecution of corruption.

## **Country to watch: Russia**

With a CPI score of just 28, corruption is endemic in **Russia**, and public institutions are almost completely captured by the executive government, meaning they’re unable to act as a check on power.

Under Putin, Russia has become the very embodiment of a kleptocracy, as corrupt high-level officials and politically connected individuals embezzle and misappropriate public funds on a massive scale. Over the past two decades, these political elites have successfully abused the loopholes in the global financial system and enlisted professional enablers abroad to help offshore their illicit gains for safekeeping in foreign luxury real estate, bank accounts and investments. This has ensured that Putin has the wealth and power to pursue his destructive agenda in Ukraine.

In the aftermath of Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Western governments have unleashed targeted sanctions against the country’s political and business elites. Assets

worth billions of dollars have been frozen; in some cases, investigations have also begun – offering hope for accountability.

In the country itself, following protests against its invasion of Ukraine, the regime has been cracking down on dissenting voices even more brutally. Many have left the country in self-exile. The government has also stepped up use of its so-called foreign agent law, [designating critics across the spectrum](#) – including the executive director of Transparency International Russia, [Ilya Shumanov](#) – as “foreign agents”.

Russia is in crisis. The government has attempted to lower petty corruption risks by digitalising public services, but the overall situation is only likely to worsen as the military gains further power and officials use the war of aggression to create additional opportunities for corruption.