



**TRANSPARENCY
INTERNATIONAL
BULGARIA**

TRANSPARENCY INTERNATIONAL - BULGARIA

2019

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In 2019, Transparency International - Bulgaria celebrated 21 years since its founding. The organisation was established in 1998 as Transparency International's first national office in Southeast Europe. During this period, TI-Bulgaria has built a significant capacity to create and implement projects to counter corruption, promote good governance in the activities of public institutions, as well as managed to develop the reputation of a professional, politically impartial and active civic organisation.

In recent years, Transparency International - Bulgaria has gained a wide range of supporters and has worked with a large number of independent experts from various spheres of scientific and public life to implement its projects and initiatives. Established ties with national and international institutions were extended towards civil society structures and the media, and the association earned its name as a respectable and stable organisation.

In 2019, Transparency International - Bulgaria continued to actively carry out activities to counter corruption at a national, regional, and international level. All implemented programs and initiatives of the association were focused on the realisation of its mission and main priorities, as well as the objectives and tasks laid out in the charter.¹

The team at the Transparency International – Bulgaria continued to successfully realise its full range of goals and objectives by planning and implementing specific projects and initiatives under two main programs.

THE NATIONAL PROGRAM aimed at:

- The application of effective models for independent expert monitoring and civil control over the legislation and processes of governance in relation to transparency principles and accountability

¹ **The mission of Transparency International - Bulgaria, deriving from its status as a Bulgarian representation of the greater body:** uniting the efforts of state institutions, local authorities, representatives of civil society, the private sector and the media in order to introduce systemic reforms and concrete actions against corruption in the country.

The main priorities in the work of the association: the initiation and implementation of projects and programs for combating corruption at both a national and regional level.

The main goals and tasks set out in the charter of the association:

- Conducting research initiatives on corruption issues by mobilising efforts of scientists, public figures and experts in the relevant fields;
- Collecting, presenting, and disseminating the necessary analytical information among state institutions and civil society organisations.
- Developing, testing and implementing various citizens' initiatives aimed at anti-corruption;
- Offering expert and technical assistance for various citizens' initiatives aimed at anti-corruption;
- Building and maintaining a contact network of international and national partner and donor organisations dealing with similar issues;
- Long-term cooperation with central and local authorities, experts in the state administration and non-governmental organisations with a similar focus in order to create a stable network of public coalitions working on fighting corruption.

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- Initiating advocacy campaigns in support of important public causes and issues related to preventing and tackling corruption, as well as the protection of individual victims of corruption;
- Increasing public awareness on the topics of integrity, transparency and accountability in the work of public institutions;
- Carrying out analytical activities on the problems related to anti-corruption and the enforcement of good management practices through mobilising the expertise of the organisation as well as of foreign experts in the field.

THE REGIONAL PROGRAM aimed at:

- The implementation of international projects in partnership with the Transparency International – Secretariat, along with the national representatives of the organisation.
- The exchange of experience and the creation of regional networks for the implementation of anti-corruption initiatives.

THE ACHIEVEMENTS of the association during 2019:

- Produced **‘The standard for publicity and transparency in the work of the Judiciary in the Republic of Bulgaria’** – an analytical product which presents the systematic standards for the publishing of information provided via the websites of the courts. It was developed based on in-depth research of the standards of the Council of Europe and its advisory bodies, including the Venice Commission and the Advisory Council of European Judges, as well as a comparative study of the good practices applied in the Member States of the European Union. In addition to serving as a tool for assessing the practices of the Bulgarian courts in relation to the established standards of their international counterparts, it can also be used as a starting point in the reform process with relation to the digitalisation of the courts in the country.
- Developed the **‘Map for publicity and transparency in the work of the courts in the Republic of Bulgaria’** – an analytical product used as a tool for assessing good practices and deficits in ensuring public awareness and transparency in the activity of the courts. It integrates quantitative and qualitative information from the survey of the sites of the courts of the country, formulating recommendations for promoting the transparency of their work.
- **Three analytical reports** on issues facing the electoral processes of 2019: published report from the monitoring of the European Parliament elections titled **‘Electronic voting machines and the European Parliament elections’**, with a focus on evaluating the effectiveness of the use of modern voting tools in the elections held on 26th May 2019; produced report through the monitoring of **‘Target Municipalities’** during local elections, with a focus on violations while they took place on October 27/November 3 2019; created the analytical assessment **‘Integrity in the electoral process and the trust of young people**

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in politics', which looks at the reasons for the low level of engagement of young people in politics and the motives for their participation and lack thereof in the election process.

- An initiative to ensure transparency and accountability in the management of European funds spent through public procurement. Transparency International – Bulgaria participates in an international project supported by the European commission, within which the organisation provides its expertise on the application of integrity pacts in the public procurement of organisations from 10 other European countries, while also monitoring the construction of important infrastructure elements of the domestic 'Struma' highway.
- Developed expert opinions and positions on current issues, related to the management, prevention and countering of corruption: a series of positions and expert opinions in connection with the changes in the legislation on financing of political parties and election campaigns, as well as in connection with the protection of whistleblowers.
- Held conferences, training seminars, roundtables and public discussions, both at home and abroad, on the topics of the standards of transparency in the work of the courts, the mechanisms for civil control over the management of public resources spent through public procurement, the democratic standards in the electoral process, transparency and accountability in the financing of political parties as well as protection of whistleblowers reporting corruption.
- Created publications, information and training materials which present the analysis and research of the association in connection to its implemented projects and initiatives.

FIELDS OF ACTIVITY

I. COUNTERING POLITICAL CORRUPTION. MONITORING COMPLIANCE WITH DEMOCRATIC STANDARDS DURING THE ELECTION PROCESSES. MONITORING THE FINANCING OF POLITICAL PARTIES

Monitoring of the European and local elections

The troubling impact of corruption on political life, as well as on the overall governance model of the country, is one of the main topics of focus for the association since its inception to present day.

In 2019, Transparency International-Bulgaria implemented two campaigns for the observation of elections². The organisation mobilised more than 60

² See decisions of the CEC № 266-EP / 07.05.2019 and № 1282-MI / 03.10.2019 on registration of observers from Transparency International - Bulgaria for participation in the European Parliament elections held on 26 May 2019 and the local elections held on 27 October 2019.

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observers to carry out monitoring of the election process. The initiative was based on the following actions:

- Training of observers of the election process, aimed at identifying violations and alerting institutions to limit their occurrence on election day;
- Establishing a network of volunteers at a local level in all regions of the country;
- Monitoring the key stages of the election process: 1.) election campaigns 2.) activity of the institutions preparing the elections 3.) the course of the election processes on 26 May and October 27/November 3, 2019;
- Participation in various formats of television and radio broadcasts, as well as discussions aimed at disseminating information on the issues to be discussed in the referendum;
- Establishing election violations and informing institutions of irregularities in order to take action on limiting/sanctioning them.

An important aspect of the initiative is the fact that the organisation not only succeeded to mobilise volunteers, but also to facilitate practical training in application of civil monitoring methods, which is an important part of the training of the political science students at the Sofia University 'St. Kliment Ohridski.'

Based on the monitoring and subsequent analysis, Transparency International has developed and published the following analytical materials:

- 1) **'Voting by electronic machines and the European Parliament elections** (election observation report for members of the European Parliament from Bulgaria, held on 26 May 2019)' – monitoring report on the preparation and conduct of the elections for the European Parliament, in which the main focus was the problems involved using modern electronic voting tools.
- 2) **'Target Municipalities - 2019'** – a regular bulletin dedicated to the preparation and conduct of local elections and government, with a focus on the role of local authorities in mobilising voters, electoral tourism and vote-buying mechanisms.
- 3) **'Integrity in the electoral process and trust of young people in politics'** – the publication presents an analysis of a survey's results on young people's attitudes towards participation in the electoral process and their engagement in political activity, assessing the reasons for their participation, or lack thereof, and the conditions under which they may shift their attitudes.
- 4) **'Target Municipalities'** (observation report for municipal councillors and mayors on the election which took place on October 27 and November 3, 2019) – monitoring report on the local elections, with a main focus on violations and in particular the problem of invalid ballots, evaluation of violation trends, as well as recommendations for overcoming issues in the election process.

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The development of expert positions on changes in electoral law as well as legislation which regulates political funding

In 2019, representatives of the organisation got involved in discussions on the upcoming changes in the electoral laws and in legislation related to the financing of political parties. In relation to this, experts of the organisation engaged in activities under the following categories:

- 1) Expert evaluation of the proposals for changes in the electoral code considered by the National Assembly in 2019. The main issues discussed were the use of new electronic technology in the electoral process, as well as a new composition of the Central Electoral Commission.
- 2) Elaboration of a series of official and expert positions on changes to the rules for the financing of political activity (the main problems that provoked public discussion and a sharp reaction from the organisation were associated with a drastic reduction in state subsidies, the lifting of funding bans by legal entities and the removal of restrictions on the amount of donations for parties and election campaigns.)
- 3) Participation in discussions at the National Assembly in connection with the changes in The Law on Political Parties, the Law on the State Budget, and The Electoral Code, as well as participation in expert discussions organized by NGOs and leading universities.
- 4) Elaboration of expert opinions on the considered proposals for legislative changes, including presenting these expert opinions before the Constitutional Court and the Ombudsman of the Republic of Bulgaria.
- 5) Mobilising support from non-governmental organisations and experts in order to strengthen the stance taken on the effect of the proposed changes, as expressed through the distribution of official positions on the topic, participation in the work of parliamentary committees on legal affairs, budget and finance, as well as in various discussions in the media.

As a result of the organisation's commitment, some of the proposals for changes in the legislation that had the potential to increase violations in the electoral process and the risk of political corruption were hampered.

'Fundamentals of Democracy: Participation of Young People in the political process - a prerequisite for building trust in institutions' Project

This is an initiative of Transparency International - Bulgaria carried out from the beginning of 2019 in partnership with 'Friedrich Ebert,' bureau of Bulgaria.

It was initiated in response to one of the most significant problems highlighted in the last few years in a number of national and international comparative studies

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- a low degree of youth engagement in politics and a lack of desire to participate in the election process.

The main goal of the initiative is to encourage the active participation of citizens, especially young people, in the political processes of the country. Guided by this goal, the team of the association implemented the project through the following activities:

- 1) Organising a series of workshops on the topic **'Corruption looms: my three reasons for (not) participating in politics'** in the three largest university centres in the country - Sofia, Plovdiv and Veliko Tarnovo. Within the framework of these conducted seminars, focus groups were held in which the main subject of discussion and analysis were young people's views on: a) the reasons why they do not actively participate in the political process and have little trust in representative democratic institutions; b.) the factors which would motivate them to participate in the election process and to engage actively with the political life of the country.

The seminars were attended by young people studying political science, public administration, economics and psychology. They got involved in training dedicated to maintaining international standards for conducting democratic elections and the approaches to independent civil observation of the election process. Some of them subsequently joined the initiative of Transparency International for election monitoring as volunteers, thus translating part of the acquired knowledge into practice.

Some of the students also joined the internship program of the association. In this regard, it is important to note that the students' internship was conducted on the basis of concluded agreements for cooperation with the Department of Political Science of Sofia University 'St. Kliment Ohridski,' as well as with the Faculty of Economics and Social Sciences at the 'Paisii Hilendarski' University of Plovdiv.

- 2) Conducting a sociological survey on **'Integrity in the electoral process and trust in politics'**. After the local elections, with the assistance of sociological agency Alpha Research, the association conducted a nationally representational survey aimed at providing an up-to-date and accurate depiction of issues in the electoral process (with a focus on buying and manipulating votes), and to offer more accurate quantitative information on the attitudes of young people in relation to the political life in the country.
- 3) The developing of an analysis on the topic **'Integrity in the election process and young people's trust in politics'**, which presents data and conclusions on the reasons for the low level of engagement of young people in politics, the motives for their participation (or lack thereof) in the election process, as well as the current scales and forms of violations in the election process itself.

II. REFORM IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION. MONITORING THE ACTIVITY OF PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS

Whistleblowers protection

Whistleblowing is an extremely important tool for exposing corruption, fraud and other violations and crimes that threaten public safety, the health of the general population, financial integrity, the environment, and the rule of law. It is one of the most effective means of detecting violations and imposing sanctions. At the same time, whistleblowers often must risk their career and even their security to expose such valuable information. For this reason, the protection of whistleblowers is among the current focuses of a number of international organisations as well as the subject of legislative initiatives. In 2019, the European Union has adopted a directive introducing minimum common standards for the protection of whistleblowers.

In 2019, Transparency International - Bulgaria continued to operate in this area. The organisation's efforts were focused on creating prerequisites for the adoption of national legislation. With this in mind, the campaign was carried out focusing on several important aspects of this process:

- 1) **Facilitating the dialogue and consultations** with the broad range of stakeholders focused on the consistent introduction of adequate national rules for the protection of whistleblowers.
- 2) **Carrying out an assessment of the impact of the European directive on the national legal framework**, taking into account the fact that the transposition of the Directive into Bulgarian legislation will deeply affect different branches of the national legal system, as in the field of substantive and procedural rules.
- 3) **Promoting the need to include measures in the national anti-corruption strategy** for the period 2021 - 2026 which ensure the effective application of the directive under national law.

In the context of the implemented campaign on December 12, 2019, Transparency International - Bulgaria hosted an international forum on the topic of 'Protection of whistleblowers in Bulgaria'. During the discussion, the key elements of the Directive were presented as well as the necessary actions for the successful transposition of the pan-European document. The forum was attended by representatives of national institutions, experts from the Whistleblowers International Network and representatives of Transparency International from Ireland, Italy and France who shared their own experience in protecting those who report corruption.

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III. REFORM IN THE JUDICIARY

'Development and advocacy for the introduction of standards for the publicity and transparency in the work of courts – a guarantor of public trust and civil control of the justice system' Project

This project is an 18-month initiative of the association and has been implemented since the beginning of September 2017 thanks to the financial support of the European Union through the European Social Fund and the 'Good Governance' Operational Program. It was implemented in response to several issues identified in recent years in the European Commission's reports on Bulgaria under the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism, as well as in the research of the global anti-corruption organisation Transparency International.

Examples include unsatisfactory levels of public awareness in the workings of the judiciary, low level of citizen confidence in the justice system, public perceptions of corruption and inefficient and unsystematic practices for providing information from courts, all of which make life and work difficult for citizens, businesses, the media and public organisations.

The project focused on formulating a proposal for uniform standards for making information from courts publicly available for citizens through their websites to encourage effective civil control and increase public confidence. The initiative was implemented through several ways:

- 1) Carrying out **studies of the leading standards for transparency and publicity of the courts in the Member States of the European Union and international organisations** to allow the development of similar standards for publicity and transparency in the work of the courts in Bulgaria.

The Transparency International team conducted a study of the documents of a number of international organisations, such as the Council of Europe, the Advisory Council of European Judges, European Network of Judicial Councils and the European Union. The team also studied the good practices in relation to the structure, vision, functionalities and content of the published information on the websites of the courts in the Czech Republic, Germany and Austria. Based on the conducted comparative studies and analysis of the current national legal framework in Bulgaria, a series of assessments and publications were published that consider questions related to the informative content and ergonomic features of the sites of the courts.

- 2) **Assessing the transparency of the courts in Bulgaria** through the lens of the information published on their internet pages and creating the first of its kind **map of the transparency of the courts** through evaluation of their compliance with the standard for publicity and transparency. To achieve this, the organisation examined the official websites of all 176 district,

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county, administrative, appellate courts, SCC and SAC. The document is a tool for assessing good practice and issues in ensuring publicity and transparency. The map integrates quantitative and qualitative information from a survey of the sites of the courts, formulating relevant recommendations for increasing transparency in their work.

- 3) Developing a **standard for publicity and transparency in the work of the courts** in the Republic of Bulgaria. It is the first of his kind analytical product that provides systematic standards for publicising information via the internet sites of the courts, outlined in the following key categories: access to justice and transparency; ethics and responsibility; the relationship between the courts and the public in light of their role in democratic society; the relationship of the court with those participating in court proceedings; court relations with the media; accessibility and clarity of the language used by the courts in its proceedings and resolutions.

The standard also contains a catalogue of the leading international ergonomic standards for judiciary websites. An important contribution of the standard is also the provision of information on good practices for transparency and publicity applied by the courts in Bulgaria, and the evaluation that the courts in the country could use in the process of developing and modernising their sites.

- 4) Organising a national **round table 'Transparency in the work of the courts - a prerequisite for increasing confidence in the judiciary in Bulgaria'**. The forum was held on January 24, 2019 with the participation of representatives of courts from the country, the Supreme Judicial Council, the Ministry of Justice, the Supreme Bar Council, the Union of Lawyers in Bulgaria, academics and the media. The main topics of discussion were the two innovative tools for assessing the level of transparency and publicity in the work of the courts in the country: the standard for publicity and transparency in the work of the courts in Bulgaria and the map of the transparency of the courts in the country.
- 5) Conducting training seminars on **'Civil control over publicity and transparency in the work of courts'**, aimed at providing information on international standards for publicity in the work of the courts, as well as the possibilities for exercising civil control over the courts in Bulgaria. 30 representatives of non-governmental organisations from all regions of the country took part in the seminar. In result of the conducted training of the representatives of the civil sector was built: 1) knowledge of international standards and best practices in the field of publicity and accountability of the institutions of the judiciary, 2) skills for practical use of civil tools monitoring the work of the courts in terms of publicity and transparency.

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IV. TRANSPARENCY AND EFFICIENT MANAGEMENT OF PUBLIC FUNDS – COUNTERING CORRUPTION IN PUBLIC PROCUREMENT

The initiative is part of a four-year international project ‘Pacts for integrity - a preventive civil mechanism for the protection of funds of the EU’, which has been implemented since the beginning of January 2016 with financial support from the European Commission. It is part of a joint initiative involving 11 countries (Bulgaria, Greece, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Hungary, Czech Republic) and coordinated by the Transparency International Secretariat.

The main goal of the initiative is to study the Integrity Pacts model as a tool to increase transparency and accountability in public procurement and to promote implementation in the European Union to prevent fraud and corruption in the spending of European funds. The specific objectives of the project are:

- **To mobilise the expertise of organisations implementing integrity pacts and to facilitate the exchange of experience and expertise** between EU Member States in relation to the governance of European funds.
- **To contribute to transparency and accountability in 17 selected areas of public procurement in 11 EU Member States**, co-financed by European funds.
- **To provide transparency and access to information** on issues related to the process of arranging and implementing public procurement.
- **To evaluate the implementation of integrity pacts** by deriving good practices and formulating recommendations for wider distribution of this as well.

At the very beginning of the project, Transparency International - Bulgaria took over monitoring the implementation of public procurement orders in which a significant level of public interest is held and a large amount of European funds will be spent. For example, the construction of the ‘Zhelenitsa’ tunnel on the Struma highway was chosen as an object for monitoring.

In 2019, the efforts of the team at Transparency International – Bulgaria were focused on the following activities:

- 1) **Research and analysis of documents** – an expert team carried out an analysis of the contracts concluded with the chosen contractors.
- 2) **Media monitoring** – research of media publications and accumulation of information directly related to observations of objects, and in a more general context - in connection with issues in the field of arranging and carrying out public procurement.

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- 3) **Work meetings with representatives of the contracting authority**, within which were discussed the frameworks of cooperation in relation to the observation, findings and conclusions of the monitoring reports.
- 4) **Advocacy campaign among the local community**, which aimed to inform the residents in the area of the infrastructure site, the objectives of the initiative and engage them in the process of civil surveillance.
- 5) **On-site monitoring** – in the period of May – December 2019, the team at the association made a series of visits to the construction site and took part in the monthly work meetings on the progress of the construction.
- 6) **Information campaign** – the goals of the campaign were expressed in two ways: 1.) ensuring awareness for the findings and the recommendations of the monitoring and 2.) engagement of the locals in the surveillance. With this taken into consideration, a special section was provided for the possibility to submit reports of violations at the construction site.

As a result of the monitoring in 2019, two monitoring reports were published:

- The first report reflects the findings and assessments at the stage of document preparation for the public procurement order and evaluation of the received offers.
- The second report reflects the timeline of events between September 2018 and February 2019, accompanying the procedures on the concluding of the contracts for the execution of the three conditions from the third auction of the 'Zheleznitsa' tunnel. It presents and summarises the conclusions of the independent observer monitoring the assignment of the three public procurements for the site.

V. FIGHT AGAINST CORRUPTION IN BUSINESS

'Promoting Business Integrity in Bulgaria' Project

The project "Promoting Business Integrity in Bulgaria" (Setting the Ground for Business Integrity in Bulgaria) is a four-year initiative of Transparency International, which has been running since the beginning of October 2019 thanks to the financial support of Siemens.

It is aimed at developing and promoting standards for integrity, tailored to the specifics of three important sectors in Bulgaria -energy, healthcare and industry.

The initiative aims to have an impact on the way businesses approaches the management of corruption risks and adherence to business ethics principles. It is done through three main forms of activity:

1) Development of standards for integrity in business, in compliance with the specifics of the energy, healthcare and industry sectors in Bulgaria.

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2) Adoption of standards by companies in the three sectors, including promotion among their business partners and supply chains.

3) Impact the business environment, targeted towards a better understanding of the need for business integrity in Bulgaria.

The project includes the following activities:

- **Study of legislation, regulation, self-regulation** and the presence or absence of good energy practices, healthcare, and industry.
- **Assessment and analysis of the state of the sectors** and the availability of ethical infrastructure (standards and enforcement mechanisms) or other tools in the field of good business management.
- **Development of standards of integrity** in all three sectors based of international standards and adapted to the specific conditions in which Bulgarian companies operate.
- **Interaction with business associations and key companies from the three sectors**, aimed at the introduction and implementation of standards for integrity.
- **Interaction with suppliers and partners of companies**, targeted towards the dissemination of standards and building a culture of conducting ethical business.
- Establishment of a '**Business Integrity Club**', uniting companies who demonstrate a commitment to integrity issues in businesses and who make efforts to combat corruption in business practices.
- **Training of young business leaders** on the implementation of standards of integrity in business in their work.
- **Promoting dialogue between business and government institutions** in the context of corruption prevention, good management and creating conditions for a decent business environment in the country.

VI. RAISING PUBLIC AWARENESS - CARRYING OUT ADVOCACY CAMPAIGNS

The development of expert opinions and positions on questions related to the prevention and tackling of corruption.

Positions on changes in electoral legislation

In connection to the upcoming proposals for changes in the electoral code, which were discussed in early 2019 in the National Assembly, Transparency International developed a series of expert opinions and positions in which it

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expressed a critical assessment of the approach to changes in electoral legislation. The organisation also mobilised public opinion which led to the annulment of part of the disputed changes.

The organisation's experts criticised the changes in the electoral legislation made immediately before the European Parliament and local elections.

As a result of the advocacy of the association and other experts and organisations, part of the proposed changes were withdrawn and the National Assembly did not adopt the amendments which had potential to increase public distrust in the electoral process. Unfortunately, a significant part of the critical remarks of the organisation were not adopted, and issues in the electoral legislation continue to be the focus of the organisation's initiatives with regards to future changes.

Transparency International announced a series of official inquiries and stances in connection with preparation for the elections - in particular in relation to CEC decisions to adopt the use of electronic machines to conduct the elections for the European Parliament and the abolition of machine voting for local elections. In the context of the evolution of technology and the current dynamics of modern society, Transparency International appeals to public institutions and civil society organisations to unite in defence of the widest possible guarantees for the exercise of the right to vote - with all possible technological and organisational tools available. More detailed information on the content of the positions expressed and assessments of the organisation are reflected in the monitoring reports on the election process.

Positions on changes in legislation related to the financing of political activity

In mid-2019, the National Assembly adopted fundamental changes in legislation on the financing of political parties and the election campaigns, as the amount of state subsidy available was reduced to a mere symbolic value and in practice became unlimited, with little remaining controls on funding from legal entities. The changes were contrary to the standards of the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe, the OSCE and Transparency International and therefore represented a retreat from current national legislation.

Transparency International has developed a series of positions and expert opinions criticising the hasty and insufficiently-motivated proposals for changes which created conditions for escalation of political corruption, further compromising the electoral process.

The positions of the Transparency International were supported by a number of non-governmental organisations, experts in this field, lawyers and the entire professional political science community. Representatives of the organisation participated intensively in the discussions in the National Assembly. The organisation's opinion on the changes was also sent to the constitutional court. At

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the end of the year, some of the legal changes significantly limiting government co-financing were abolished.

Positions on changes in the anti-corruption law

The Anti-Corruption and Confiscation of Illegally Acquired Property Act was adopted on January 19, 2018 and had undergone five amendments during a single one-year period. The first changes, made in March 2018, postponed the requirement for declaring property and interests by municipal councillors until the end of the mandate of the current local parliaments - i.e. for the fall of 2019. The reason given for this decision was that it is not right for municipal councillors to learn about such changes in the middle of the term, and that a large part of them cannot resolve incompatibilities in a timely manner.

In April 2019, Transparency International - Bulgaria expressed its views in disagreement with the discussed amendments in the anti-corruption law, which exclude municipal councillors from the circle of persons holding senior positions in public office and therefore will not be obliged to declare their property and interests to the anti-corruption commission.

Positions and Initiatives of Transparency International

The association has been an active participant in the promotion of a number of initiatives and positions of the international team of Transparency International. In this regard, there are series of positions taken on the topics of whistleblowing, confiscation of illegally acquired property, the effective spending of public resources and the European elections.

In relation to the European Parliament elections, Transparency International has started the initiative 'Stand behind integrity – a commitment for the European Elections in 2019'. It aimed to engage the European Parliament candidates with measures to ensure more transparency, accountability, and integrity in the work of the institutions of the European Union.

Transparency International called on election participants to join the initiative and give their support to the declaration, which highlights commitment in four areas: 1) Enforce the rule of law in the EU by creating a permanent monitoring system; 2) Prevention of the entry of corrupt persons and illegally obtained money into the EU through the introduction of European standards for the so-called "Golden Visa" programs; 3) Establishment of a body that exercises independent supervision over the observance of ethical standards in the activity of the European institutions; 4) Implementation of measures to ensure transparency in the legislative EU process. The initiative received support from more than 20 candidates and 4 elected representatives of our country in the European Parliament.

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Advocacy and Legal Advice Centre (ALAC)

The Centre for Legal Consultation of Victims of Corruption was established in 2006 at the initiative of Transparency International (Bulgaria). Since then, under the direction of the TI- Secretariat and national representative offices, over 15 centres have been created in countries across Europe, Asia and Africa.

The activities of the centre include the provision of practical legal assistance and expert advice for citizens who have suffered or become witnesses to corruption and wish to inform state authorities. For this purpose, they have been provided with access to the contact number 0800 11 224 (no costs apply), through which reports can be submitted for cases of corruption. Reports can also be submitted electronically by email (alac@transparency.bg) or through the continuously maintained website (<http://alac.transparency.bg/bg/signals-corruption.html>).

The centre aims to provide an opportunity for citizens to take an active part in the fight against corruption through providing free legal aid in support of their efforts to report crimes of corruption committed by public institutions or their fellow employees. In this regard, the focus of the activity of the centre in 2017 was the reports made by citizens for expected and/or already reported violations of the election process. Many of the received reports involved violations and crimes against citizens' political rights in connection with the European Parliament elections held in May 2019, as well as the local elections held in October 2019. As in previous election campaigns (2009, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017) the centre's team assisted the citizens by providing information about their rights as voters, sending reports to competent institutions, and processing and organising the information of the reported infringements in order to support the work of the institutions as well as our own work on the prevention and countering of violations tied to the election process.

Based on the results of the centre's work in 2019, the organisation's team of experts has formulated a series of recommended changes in the electoral legislation in relation to the preparation and conduct of elections, as well as the implementation of a more effective policy for sanctioning confirmed cases of crimes against the political rights of citizens. The recommendations were presented both in work meetings and at public forums with the participation of representatives of the institutions.

As part of the spring advocacy campaign of 2019, Transparency International initiated the training of observers aimed at building knowledge and skills to monitor the electoral process and the protection of the voting rights of citizens. The conducted training served as a starting point for carrying out civil monitoring of the election process and for the identification of issues and trends within the electoral process of the country.

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'National Anti-Corruption Resource Centre' Project

Transparency International - Bulgaria continues to support the Anti-Corruption Centre, which was established with the financial support of the European Commission. The library of the centre contains a significant volume of books, periodicals and analytical resources reviewing the nature of the problem of corruption both nationally and globally. Along with the publications by experts, international institutions and other non-governmental organisations, the centre shall make available all publications of Transparency International in both English and Bulgarian, which is the outcome of over 20 years of work.

The built capacity of the centre allows the team to continue carrying out activities in the following three main areas:

- Processing and filling in the information archive which is also being completed by several other different sources for information. The archive is updated by the daily press review of the national press and electronic publications providing information on corruption cases and analysis dedicated to the topic. In addition, the archive is filled with publications, analysis and research published on the internet. Therefore, the archive is also being supplemented by conference materials provided by state institutions as well as by Bulgarian and international non-governmental organisations.
- The team at the association continues providing information on its library, processing submissions on a daily basis and accepting electronic requests for information from the library.
- The activity of the Anti-Corruption Resource Centre is supported by interns - students of political science, European studies and public administration at the Sofia University, NBU and foreign universities as well. Transparency International has an established practice of providing students with the opportunity to conduct an internship. Alongside informing them on how the organisation operates, the team strives to promote TI's fight against tolerating corruption. The trainees provide assistance both in the current work of the team and in the activities of the centre.
- In 2019, Transparency International - Bulgaria concluded agreements with the Department of Political Science at Sofia University 'St. Kliment Ohridski' and the Faculty of Economic and Social Sciences at the University of Plovdiv 'Paisii Hilendarski', based on which students from both universities had the opportunity to use the informative resources at the library.

Monitoring government anti-corruption commitments made at the Anti-Corruption Summit in London

In 2019, Transparency International - Bulgaria continued to monitor the implementation of the commitments made by the government of Bulgaria during the Anti-Corruption Summit in London, which took place in 2016. The monitoring,

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carried out under the initiative of Transparency International UK, includes an assessment of the implementation process of commitments made by the governments of the states which participated in the forum. Bulgaria's official commitments are in connection to improving the national regulatory framework in the field of anti-corruption as well as its effective implementation, active participation in the process of international cooperation, and the exchange of expertise and good practices.

In relation to this, the association has been carrying out media monitoring and analysing publicly available information on government anti-corruption activities.

The most significant problems remain: 1) the protection of persons reporting corruption. Further development of the legislative framework as well as tools for its application, have been recommended; 2) overcoming weaknesses related to the confiscation and management of illegally acquired property; 3) ensuring publicity and transparency regarding the work of the institutions by providing data in an accessible and understandable manner to the general public; 4) awareness of information on the topic of public procurement and efficiency in the spending of public resources.

Monitoring of national electronic and print media

Our team carries out regular media monitoring of national print and electronic publications. Information about corruption cases, abuse of power and public resources, as well as analysis and comments on the various dimensions of the problem of corruption in various public spheres, is subject to necessary reorganisation. This allows information to be used within various project activities and to help identify problem areas in the fight against corruption.

PERMANENT ACTIVITIES

Presentation of Transparency International's comparative research

As the national chapter of the global anti-corruption organisation Transparency International, our team annually releases the results of comparative international research and analysis, some of which has been established as key sources for information and assessments on the level of corruption, economic and political development of the studied countries. Most notable among them are:

- **Corruption Perception Index** measuring the level of political and administrative corruption according to the assessments of business representatives, economic and political risk analysts from around the world and surveyed experts from relevant countries. The study allows for comparative assessments on both a regional and sub-regional scale, which can provide businesses with a general indication of which countries carry

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a greater risk of corruption and, as a result, where the environment for the conduct of business is most suitable.

- **Global Corruption Barometer** presenting an assessment of the level of corruption prevalent in the individual sectors and institutions within the studied countries. The study makes it possible to compare the degree to which corruption has spread in key sectors of social, economic and political life. Along with the ability to implement sector analysis, the barometer serves as a basis for the development of anti-corruption policies by highlighting priority areas. Alongside this, it serves as an indicator for businesses on the institutions and sectors of social, economic and political life, which face greater issues and, as a result, represent a more serious risk of corruption.
- **Global Corruption Report** presenting an in-depth study of corruption in key sectors of public life.

PUBLIC EVENTS AND FORUMS ORGANISED BY TRANSPARENCY INTERNATIONAL - BULGARIA

Within the framework of implemented initiatives and projects held in 2019, Transparency International – Bulgaria made a number of public appearances. The main goal of the team is to increase media interest and coverage of all its initiatives. The association actively works with a wide range of people from both national and regional print and electronic media networks. As a result of the establishment of lasting contacts with them, the events organised by the association were widely covered in the media. Amongst the forums organised in 2019 were:

- Press conference to announce the release of the Corruption Perception Index, held on January 23, 2019 in Sofia.
- National round table on the topic of 'Transparency in the work of the courts - a prerequisite for increasing confidence in the judiciary system in Bulgaria', held on January 24, 2019 in Sofia.
- Training seminars on 'Civil control over publicity and transparency in the work of the courts', held in Sofia on 22 and 23 February 2019.
- The press conference 'Integrity in the election process and young people's trust in politics', held on 9 December 2019.
- International Forum 'Protection of whistleblowers in Bulgaria', held on December 12, 2019 in Sofia.
- International Forum 'Party Financing and Political pluralism' held on December 16, 2019 in Sofia.

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NEW PUBLICATIONS OF TRANSPARENCY INTERNATIONAL - BULGARIA

As a result of the research, analysis and monitoring carried out during 2019, the following publications were made:

- 1) Standard for publicity and transparency in the work of the courts in the Republic of Bulgaria.
- 2) Voting by electronic machines and the European Parliament elections (election observation report for members of the European Parliament from Bulgaria, held on 26 May 2019).
- 3) Report on the monitoring of the construction of the 'Zhelezniitsa' tunnel on the 'Struma' highway: stage I 'Preparation of procedure' and stage II. Examination and evaluation of tenders. Choice of contractor.
- 4) Target Municipalities - 2019 – news bulletin on monitoring of local elections held in 2019.
- 5) Report on the monitoring of the construction of the 'Zhelezniitsa' tunnel on the 'Struma' highway: stage III Conclusion of public procurement contracts.
- 6) Target municipalities (election observation report for municipal councillors and mayors held on October 27 and November 3, 2019).
- 7) Methodology for assessing the system of integrity within the banking sector of Bulgaria.
- 8) Protection of Whistleblowers in Bulgaria (policy paper).

INFORMATION ON THE ACTIVITIES OF TRANSPARENCY INTERNATIONAL - BULGARIA, UNDER ARTICLE 40 FROM THE LAW ON NON-PROFIT LEGAL ENTITIES

As a non-profit organisation Transparency International - Bulgaria carries out its activity in support of the development of civil society. The main priority in the work of the association is the initiation and implementation of prevention projects and programs counteracting corruption at a national, regional and local level.

According to the association's charter, its mission is to unite the efforts of state institutions, local authorities, representatives of civil society, the private sector and the media - carrying out systemic reforms and sanctions which prevent the spread of corruption in the country.

All implemented programs and initiatives of the association in 2019 were directly tied to the implementation of the priorities outlined above. All income received within the past year has been used in alignment with the requirements of Article 38 and the charter of the organisation, as well as in agreement with the organisation's efforts to support public activity for the development and continuity of civil society.