

Corruption Perceptions Index 2024: Persistently low results and lack of progress in Bulgaria

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43/100

Bulgaria's score has dropped from 45 points in the previous survey to **43** points this year remaining among the countries with high levels of corruption in the public sector. This is the result of years of façade efforts and legislative changes in favor of kleptocratic elites—masquerading as efforts to align with European norms.

The index, which also measures the levels of political corruption, shows that it remains a barrier to good governance, incompatible with the functioning of democratic institutions and sustainable economic development.

Foreign investment has plummeted at a historic low. Serious businesses that make long-term investments have the responsibility and strength to drive the development of public environment in the regions in which they operate, leave the country or are considering doing so. The reason for this is the hostile environment of increasingly self-serving regulations and arbitrariness of the administration, complemented by the destructive effect of legal uncertainty. This uncertainty prevents businesses from making long-term, sustainable investments.

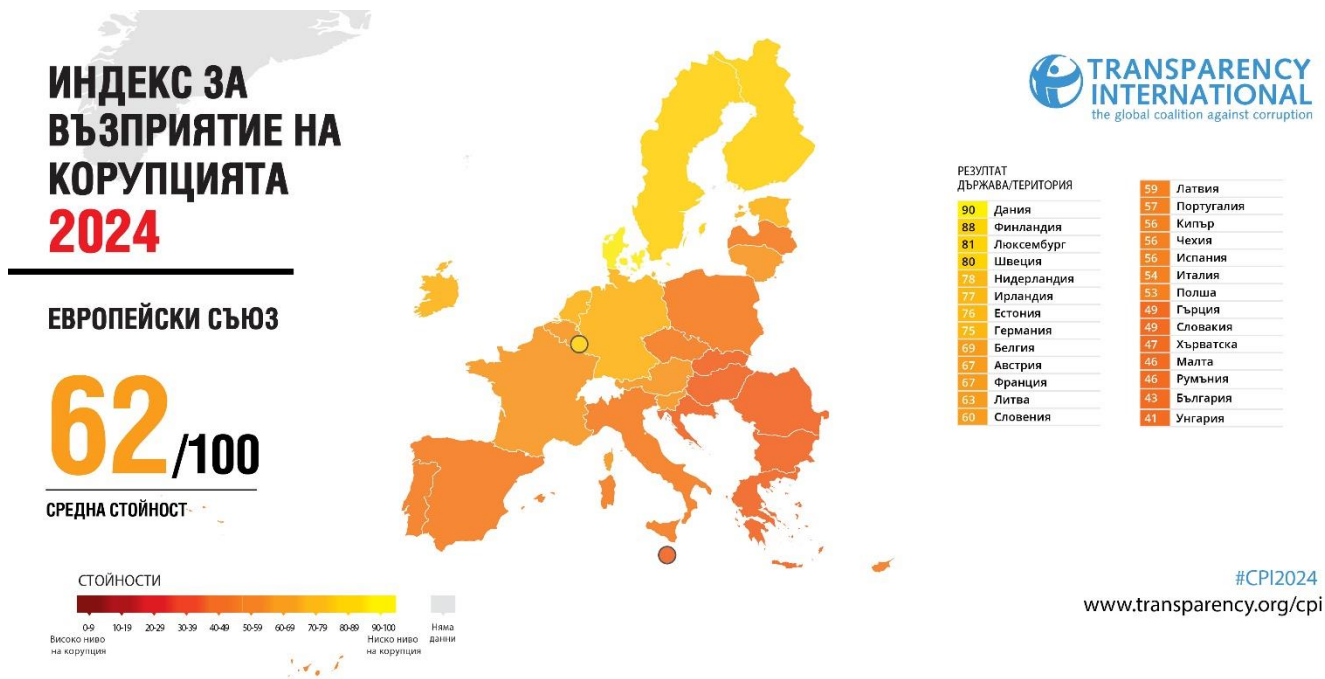
An environment in which the tax burden and the planning of labor costs are unpredictable even within the current year, and depend on behind-the-scenes political agreements to satisfy visible and invisible clientelist interests, makes the business environment poisonous.

Focusing on the public environment, we cannot ignore the fact that for the first time in the 36-year history of the democratic transition in Bulgaria, the legality of an entire election is under fire. Even the parliamentary represented political parties question the legality of the elections to such an extent that they leave the final decision in the hands of the Constitutional Court, whose opinion is unpredictable.

This situation also casts a shadow on the legitimacy of the political power, which must make key reforms and appointments.

Civil society is subjected to consistent and increasingly vicious attacks aimed at stigmatizing and silencing voices that call for transparent and accountable institutions, an independent judiciary, respect for human rights, support for vulnerable groups, environmental protection.

EU: Insufficient efforts by leaders lead to deteriorating levels of corruption

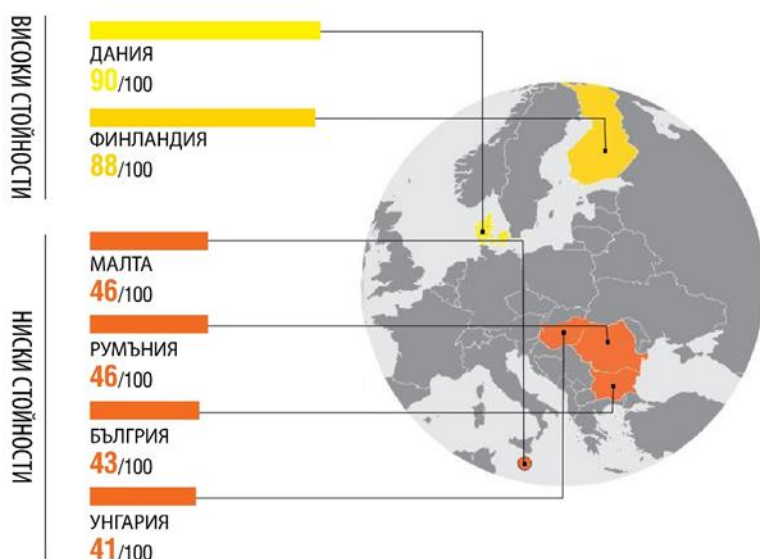


Europe's ability to fight corruption is deteriorating, hampering an effective response to various challenges such as the climate crisis, the erosion of the rule of law and the multiple attacks to which civil society is subjected.

The average result for the European Union (EU) region in the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) fell for the second year in a row to 62 out of 100 points. Major economies such as **Germany** (75) and **France** (67) are declining, and even traditionally strong Nordic countries such as **Norway** (81) and **Sweden** (80) registered their lowest scores ever.

The results of other countries such as **Slovakia** (49), **Malta** (46) and **Hungary** (41) deteriorated due to the breakdown of the rule of law. Of the 31 countries assessed, only 6 improved their scores, while 19 declined.

Bulgaria is in second to last place among the EU countries for another year.



The entire analysis for the countries of Western Europe and the EU can be found here: <https://transparency.bg/corruption-perception-index-2024/>

Key observations and conclusions for Bulgaria

Good governance and the rule of law

- The political crisis over the past 4 years, characterized by seven parliamentary elections and a carousel of caretaker governments, has delayed and deteriorated the implementation of the national anti-corruption strategy, which in 2024 is literally frozen.
- A number of recommendations of the European Commission, OECD and GRECO related to the implementation of integrity standards have not been implemented, including the regulation of lobbying activities and the development and adoption of a code of ethics for senior public offices.
- There is no progress not only on key reforms envisaged in the Bulgarian Recovery and Resilience Plan, nor on the anti-corruption monitoring framework tied to the plan.

Transparency and accountability of public spending

- There has been no progress in increasing transparency and accountability in the spending of public funds, including EU funds. On the contrary, the commitment to implement Integrity Pacts in significant public procurement procedures, undertaken in the Agreement between Bulgaria and the European Commission for the period 2021-2027, remains unfulfilled.

Competitiveness and sustainable investment environment

- The Competitiveness Yearbook of the Institute for Management Development shows a sharp decline in Bulgaria's score – 7 points in just one year, which confirms the alarming negative trend of deterioration in key areas such as governance, economic performance, business efficiency and infrastructure.

State of civil society and democracy

- In recent years, civil society has been subjected to consistent attacks and increasing stigmatization, including by parliamentary represented political parties, which have repeatedly submitted a Bill on the Registration of Foreign Agents to the National Assembly mirroring oppressive measures used in authoritarian regimes.
- For the first time in 36 years, the legitimacy of an entire elections has been questioned, putting forward arguments related to serious breaches of the electoral process. This reflects the fact that the public and even the political forces represented in parliament question the legality of the last parliamentary elections, leaving the decision in the hands of the Constitutional Court, whose opinion is unpredictable.
- Indicators that usually show a high score – those related to the level of democracy (The Varieties of Democracy Project) have deteriorated by 4 points within a single year.

As seen in the figure below, for the last 12 years Bulgaria has been moving between 41 and 45 points in the Corruption Perceptions Index, without being able to make significant progress and remains on the list of countries with chronic corruption problems, signaling an urgent need for systemic reforms.

