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**Regional cooperation in Central and Southeastern Europe:  
the Romanian experience in fighting corruption**

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**a) Abstract:**

Regional cooperation is of outmost importance, both for the southeastern European countries that want to set themselves on the European mainstream, and for the EU. In the last few years, the fight against corruption has been high on the agenda of all the governments in the CEE countries. The regional initiatives have provided the opportunity to exchange not only best, but also “worst practices” in this field, contributing to the development of anticorruption programs and to the improvement of the situation in these countries. The paper seeks to present the Romanian experience in regional initiatives, particularly in the Stability pact Anticorruption – Initiative.

**b) Key words:** regional cooperation, corruption, Southeast Europe, Romania

**c) Introduction**

The fight against corruption in the countries of southeast Europe should be seen from a regional perspective, for a number of reasons: first of all, because corruption is a phenomenon that has no borders, affects all the people and institutions alike. Second of all, it is a problem that can hardly be addressed solely from the inside. Thirdly, because it is in everybody’s interest to cooperate and improve the situation. In this context, regional cooperation in the field has become all the more important.

It is also true that the majority of these initiatives has come from and was heavily supported by the European Union and by other international organizations, while the countries in Central and Southeast Europe involved in regional cooperation initiatives are mainly driven by the goal of establishing themselves as soon as possible on the European track.

The paper seeks to present some aspects related to the regional cooperation in fighting corruption, with direct focus on the Romanian experience. In this respect, it first reviews the Romanian commitment to regional cooperation, then it analyses the current situation in the region, the programs that are undergoing and the progress in the last few years.

An important role in the fight against corruption in the southeast Europe is played by the regional initiatives. The paper has also given a special attention to two of them - The Anti-Corruption Network for Transition Economies and the Stability Pact Anticorruption Initiative.

## **I. Regional cooperation in Central and Southeast Europe**

The number of cooperation initiatives that have been established in Central and Southeast Europe in the last decade clearly shows the great interest and commitment of the countries in the region to pursue this kind of activities. Although it is true that the majority (if not all) of these initiatives have come from and were heavily supported by the European Union and by other international organizations, the interests of the countries themselves are usually a sufficient reason for getting involved in such activities: first of all, they come to consolidate peace, good neighborly relations and political stability in a region that not so long ago was ravaged by a long and bloody war. Second, on the economic level, they contribute to the development of the infrastructure, the increase of trade and investment flows and to the economic dynamism in general.

However, the countries in Central and Southeast Europe involved in regional cooperation initiatives are mainly driven by the goal of establishing themselves as soon as possible on the European track. The prospect of European integration has been, for Romania and for the other countries in the region, the most powerful motivation for pursuing domestic reform and engaging in regional cooperation initiatives.

Nonetheless, the pace of the reforms was and is considered slow, while expectations were and still are very high. Even though they have been accepted in the club, Romania and Bulgaria, and for that matter all the new member states, have been warned about the areas that proved unsatisfactory. The situation is similar for the countries in Southeast Europe that want to set themselves on the European mainstream.

At the same time, encouraging regional cooperation in Southeast Europe is equally important for the EU: on one hand, regional cooperation is the key for the stability of the region: the growing regional ownership and the mounting sense of responsibility of the countries of the region can only contribute to insuring stability close to home; on the other hand, regional cooperation is also high on the agenda because it is a necessary condition for a sustainable economic recovery and expansion and is therefore pursued both within the region and between the region and its neighbors, EU included; and last, but not least, regional cooperation is considered by the EU as an essential element, as it is clear that the capacity and readiness of an individual country to fully

and constructively engage in regional cooperation will be a key indicator of its ability to cope with European obligations and too eventually live in European family.

Brussels has given clear indications that without this level of regional cooperation stipulated by the EU for the region as a whole, but also in the EU's bilateral agreements with individual Balkan states, the goal of EU membership will become even more distant.

Regional cooperation is an important coordinate of the Romanian foreign policy. Romania has actively engaged in a large number of regional cooperation initiatives, both on the political and on the more pragmatic, technical levels. Since the beginning of the negotiations of accession with the European Union, Romania has regarded regional cooperation as a means of consolidating links and creating closer relations on the regional plan in the South-East Europe. Some of the most important are as follows:

**The Central European Initiative (CEI)** is composed of 18 Member States: Albania, Austria, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Italy, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia and Ukraine. The CEI was established in 1989 as an intergovernmental forum for political, economic and cultural co-operation among its Member States. Its main aim was to help transition countries in Central Europe come closer to the EU. In the second half of 1990's, the extension of its membership to South-eastern and Eastern Europe refocused its priorities on countries in special need.

**The South-East Co-operation Initiative (SECI)** was launched immediately after the Dayton agreement, with the objective of stressing regional co-operation in SEE. This initiative was based on concepts concerning the long-term adjustment of countries in the region to the rules that will enable them to become members of the EU. The main objectives of SECI are: the development of the infrastructure of the region, cross-border co-operation, the creation of a better environment for business, the introduction of higher environmental standards, the reduction in customs corruption, the standardization of customs procedures

SECI has created numerous groups with specific objectives, including: a group for energy efficiency; a group for gas pipelines; a group for transport infrastructure; a group for the development and standardization of electric power; a group for financial markets; a group for the revival of the Danube; and a group for support of SMEs. But there is no financial support for any of these groups so, although the initiative has been good at mapping the main open questions, it

has proceeded almost without any financed actions. The best description of SECI is that it is a programme of self-support with some degree of technical aid from the EU. Despite the lack of financial support, SECI has laid the foundations for regional co-operation.

**The South East European Co-operation Process (SEECP)** was launched on Bulgaria's initiative in 1996. A special characteristic of SEECP is that it is an original form of co-operation among the countries in the region launched on their own initiative, and not on the initiative of some other international organizations or countries. In that regard, the SEECP seeks to define itself as an authentic voice of SEE, complementary to the Stability Pact, SECI or the Stabilization and Association Process. The basic goals of regional co-operation within SEECP include the strengthening of security and political situation, intensification of economic relations and co-operation in human resources, democracy, justice, and battle against illegal activities. It is the intention of the SEECP to enable its members to approach the European and Euro-Atlantic structures through the strengthening of good neighbourly relations and transformation of the region into an area of peace and stability

**The Stability Pact for SEE** can be considered the most complete initiative for the region. The Pact was established in the middle of 1999 in Sarajevo. There were 29 countries and 16 international institutions, organizations and programmes. This initiative, by its structure, scope and goals, stands as a monumental document, having numerous participants committed to the same task. It represents the political will of the EU and SEE countries, as well as the will of the international community to establish permanent solutions to the frequent conflicts and clashes in the region.

The main difference in comparison with the other initiatives is the involvement of all the world's political and financial institutions, together with the main political actors and all the regional countries. The Pact's objectives are "strengthening countries in South Eastern Europe in their efforts to foster peace, democracy, respect for human rights and economic prosperity, in order to achieve stability in the whole region." (Cologne, 1999)

For the first time, many politicians and experts were involved in creating a solution to the problems of the region. The most important changes are decisions that the reconstruction and economic development of the region can not be achieved without integration into EU structures and the decision that new radical economic change has to be introduced quickly. It is recognized that the region, for a number of reasons, can not attract foreign direct investment.

The numerous initiatives show consistent interest in the region. It is also clear that these initiatives have become more complex and have now gained financial support.

## **II. Corruption in Central and Eastern Europe**

Partly due to their own efforts, partly due to the pressure and at the same time the support of the international community, the countries of Central and Eastern European (CEE) have made impressive progress towards establishing democracy, the rule of law and a market economy. However, one of the problems that are still persistent in the region is the **high level of corruption**. There are, of course, a lot of reasons for this situation, among which maybe the most important ones could be even the extensive process of privatization of their economies, the severe reforms that they had to undertake. These tasks are inherently highly vulnerable to corruption and this problem will take a long time a lot of efforts to deal with, particularly in a region with a most unfortunate inheritance of the Communist regime.

As part of the EU accession process, the Commission has given a great importance to this aspect, stressing it in the “Copenhagen criteria” (the political and economic criteria, and ability to take on the obligations of membership - *acquis communautaire*). Corruption has consistently been one of the European Union's major concerns since the beginning of the negotiations with the 10 + 2 now member states and it made frequent reference to problems of corruption.

The EU's concerns with corruption are understandable, given that corruption can (directly or indirectly) impact on the implementation of the *acquis communautaire*, on the smooth functioning of the single market, and on the quality of democratic institutions and core democratic values the Union seeks to represent.

However, the efforts of the EU authorities in imposing certain measures were sometimes hampered by the lack of a proper strategy inside of the Union. More than once, we can say that the Bruxelles authorities had to adapt along the way, that the Union is itself learning from each experience with the candidate countries. At present, the European Community support for fighting against corruption has become more “coherent”, so, in that respect, the new candidate countries will have to fulfill more strict criteria but will also have more coordinated support and guidelines from the EU. In a way, we may say that the European Union is “learning” from each wave of enlargement, and the fight against corruption is moving higher and higher on the political agenda. Strong anti-corruption measures are at the base of political and institutional

reforms, while the economic development necessary to establish a functioning market economy cannot take place if widespread corruption remains a problem. A key lesson from the first wave of Accession is that, while enactment of anti-corruption legislation is relatively straightforward, implementation is extremely problematic, particularly when political will is limited. According to the European Commission’s own “Annual Report on the Stabilization and Association Process for South East Europe 2004” *“The continuing prevalence of organized crime and corruption in the region delays political reform, holds back economic development and puts into question the rule of law.”*

The adoption by the EU of the document “On a Comprehensive EU Policy against Corruption” in 2004 seemed like the next logical step. Since then, the EU’s own anti-corruption standards have substantially improved, and this is very important, both for the candidates and for the existing members. The accession process itself can also generate new corruption risks in candidate countries, for example in the distribution of the Community funds (the same applies in Member States), hindering economic development and contributing to political instability. Abuse in the disbursement of EU funds occurs for many reasons: weak control mechanisms in candidate countries; existing structures of corruption; limited capacity to absorb funds; inadequate financial oversight by EU bodies; and lack of civil society involvement in monitoring the use of funds.

Relating back to the economic criteria for membership, among of the most problematic 14 factors for doing business in the SEE countries, corruption runs second (see Table 1).

**Table 1.** Most problematic 14 factors for doing business in six SEE countries

Country	BUL	CRO	ROM	BiH	MAC	SaM
<b>Growth competitiveness Rank/Score/104 countries</b>	<b>59 3.98</b>	<b>61 3.94</b>	<b>63 3.86</b>	<b>81 3.38</b>	<b>84 3.34</b>	<b>89 3.23</b>
<b>Corruption subindex Rank/Score/104 countries</b>	<b>30 3.78</b>	<b>61 4.75</b>	<b>71 4.38</b>	<b>66 4.47</b>	<b>87 4.03</b>	<b>84 4.13</b>
<b>Factors 1-14</b>	<b>Rank</b>	<b>Rank</b>	<b>Rank</b>	<b>Rank</b>	<b>Rank</b>	<b>Rank</b>
Access to financing	1	5	4	5	3	4
<b>Corruption</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>7</b>
Tax regulations	3	3	2	6	6	5
Inefficient bureaucracy	4	1	5	1	2	2
Tax rates	5	6	1	10	8	8



Inadequate infrastructure	6	10	8	11	10	6
Crime and theft	7	7	14	4	5	10
Political instability	8	11	6	2	4	1
Restrictive labour regulations	9	8	11	12	12	12
Government instability	10	12	13	7	7	3
Inadequately educated workforce	11	4	9	9	11	11
Poor work ethic	12	9	10	8	9	9
Inflation	13	13	7	14	13	13
Foreign currency regulations	14	14	12	13	14	14

**Source:** World Economic Forum, Executive Opinion Survey 2004. The Global Competitiveness Report 2004-2005. From a list of 14 factors, respondents were asked to select the five most problematic factors for doing business in their country and to rank between 1 (most problematic) and 5.

Corruption, in all its forms, from the highest level to petty bribery, is a common reality in developing countries, and certainly a cause for concern. It hampers the development process, damages reform in the field of governance by weakening the constitutional state and public services and two, it increases poverty. It hinders or limits public investment, small-scale corruption acts like a tax which the simple citizen must pay in the form of a commission on every transaction with the state. Corruption blocks both investment and growth.

As the United Nations Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, defined it in his statement on the adoption by the General Assembly of the United Nations Convention against Corruption, “[...] *it hurts the poor by disproportionately diverting funds intended for development, undermining a government's ability to provide basic services, feeding inequality and injustice, and discouraging foreign investment and aid*”.

The most common form off corruption is undoubtedly, **bribery**, although corruption is present in many other forms, from embezzlement to extortion, from favoritism and nepotism to creating and exploiting conflict of interests etc.

According to the 2006 Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index, which defines corruption as the abuse of public office for private gain and measures the degree to which corruption is perceived to exist among a country's public officials and politicians, the countries in the southeast Europe have relatively high levels of corruption. Among these countries, Bulgaria and Croatia are the best performers, followed by Moldova and Romania.

**Table 2:** The Corruption Perceptions Index figures for South East Europe

	GDP per capita (PPP, \$)	CPI 2004	CPI 2005	CPI 2006	Ranking 2004	Ranking 2005	Ranking 2006
Albania	4,900.-	2,5	2,4	2,6	108	126	111
Bosnia – Herzegovina	6,500.-	3,1	2,9	2,9	82	88	93
Croatia	11,200.-	3,5	3,4	3,4	67	70	69
Bulgaria	8,200.-	4,1	4,0	4,0	54	55	57
FYR Macedonia	7,100.-	2,7	2,7	2,7	97	103	105
Moldova	1,900.-	2,3	2,9	3,2	114	88	79
Romania	7,700.-	2,9	3,0	3,1	87	85	84
Serbia-Montenegro	2,400.-	2,7	2,8	3,0	97	97	91
States of SE Europe	5,544.-	2,9	3,0	3,1	88	89	86

Source: 2006 Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index

In Romania, the most frequently signaled acts of corruption are abuse (25%), traffic of influence (23%), bribery (22%), conflicts of interest and incompatibilities (12%). The most corrupt areas of the public system are: the judicial system (31%), local administration (26%), public administrations at county level (20%). The most corrupt employees from the public sector or related to the public sector are those elected or appointed (27%) on political criteria (mainly mayors), magistrates (25%), public servants (19%), policemen (12%)<sup>1</sup>.

It is no wonder then that, in the last few years, the fight against corruption was placed high on the political agenda of all the governments in southeast Europe. Mainly due to the pressures from the European Union, they intensified the efforts in meeting international standards and adopted anticorruption programs. Almost all have chosen a multi-disciplinary approach and developed the so called “omnibus programs”. According to the EBRD, these programs generally entail some

<sup>1</sup> According to an article by CAPITAL Magazine, 2004.

combination of the following: an anti corruption law, a national anti corruption strategy or program, a ministerial commission, specialized unit or dedicated agency (National Anticorruption Prosecutor's Office, in the case of Romania), an action plan to implement the program and a monitoring mechanism. The rationale for the development of these omnibus approaches to tackling corruption is that they provide the legislative foundation, accompanied by the necessary structures and instruments, while setting guidelines and directions for action and coordinating the efforts in meeting the objectives. At the same time, these programs are well adapted to the specific context of the country and at the same time they follow the standards imposed by the international organizations (the Council of Europe 1997 Resolution on the *Twenty Guiding Principles for the Fight against Corruption* and the 1999 *Criminal Law Convention on Corruption*, the 1997 OECD *Anti-Bribery Convention* and the 2004 UN *Convention against Corruption* are some of the most important).

The development of these anticorruption programs was to a much extent the result of the various cooperation initiatives that have been established in the region – hence the similarity of the approach. The regional cooperation activities have provided an opportunity to exchange not only best, but also “worst practices” (which are equally important) contributing to the learning experience that the countries in southeastern Europe need.

Romania is actively involved in a number of initiatives for fighting corruption, among which we can mention:

**1. The Anti-Corruption Network for Transition Economies (ACN)** is a regional anti-corruption initiative that was established in 1998 by national governments, civil society organizations, and international donor agencies to promote knowledge sharing, donor coordination and policy dialogue in the transition economies in Central, Eastern, and South Eastern Europe and the Newly Independent States. The main objective of the ACN is to support its member-countries in their fight against corruption by providing **a regional forum for the promotion of anti-corruption activities, exchange of information, elaboration of best practices and donor coordination.**

There are four strategic areas for the ACN activities, including

- rule of law and legal instruments;
- good governance;

- civil society participation;
- regional networking.

ACN includes countries in Central, Eastern, and South Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia, international organizations, international financial institutions, donor agencies. Civil society and business sector associations are also welcomed to participate in the ACN actions.

The Secretariat of the ACN is based at the OECD Anti-Corruption Division. To guide the Secretariat, the ACN Steering Group was established in January 1999. The ACN operates through its annual meetings, thematic activities and sub-regional initiatives (Baltic Anti-Corruption Initiative/BACI, Stability Pact Anti-Corruption Initiative for South East Europe/SPAI and Istanbul Action Plan for the New Independent States of the former Soviet Union).

The work of the ACN has been supported by voluntary and in-kind contributions of the donor countries (mainly of the United States, Norway, Switzerland and Turkey) international organizations (the OECD and the UNDP) and civil society associations (the Open Society Institute and the Transparency International).

One of the notable achievements of the CAN is the thematic project on “*Management of Conflict of Interest* in Government and the Public Sector” was carried out in 2003 – 2005. It involved Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro, Moldova and Romania. The project aimed to provide a series of thematic workshops for national governments, civil society, including investigative journalists, on policy, legislation and institutions to manage conflict of interest and prevent corruption in governments and the public sector and their implementation in practice. The project also provided a forum for exchange of information and knowledge in the region in the area of conflict of interest policies.

**2. The Stability Pact Anti-Corruption Initiative** was launched in February 2000 under the auspices of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe. The Stability Pact Anti-Corruption Initiative brings together the governments of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Romania and Serbia, supporting and donor countries, international organizations and international financial institutions involved in fighting corruption in the region. Together with the SECI Regional Center for Combating Transborder Crime in Bucharest and the Stability Pact Initiative against Organized

Crime - SPOC (SPOC) it has constituted itself in the most important regional cooperation initiative in the field of combating corruption.

The aim of the Initiative is to give an impetus to move the fight against corruption to the top of the political agenda in the region and encourage effective policy, legal and institutional reforms. To this end, the countries of the region have established five priority areas, identified as the “*five pillars of the Stability Pact Anti-Corruption Initiative*”. These are the following:

1. Adoption and implementation of international instruments;
2. Promotion of reliable public administration;
3. Strengthening of national legislation and the rule of law;
4. Promotion of integrity in the business sector;
5. Active civil society.

One major development in the framework of the SPAI was the establishment of the Regional Secretariat Liaison Office (SPAI RSLO) in Sarajevo (2004). It is in fact what makes this initiative different from any others, transferring ownership of the initiative to the region and enhancing regional capacities. (The SPAI RSLO as legal entity was established by the Agreement between Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Office of the Special Coordinator of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe - signed on 15 September 2003).

The SPAI Steering Group oversees the implementation of the Initiative. The Group brings together the Senior Representatives of the participating governments, supporting and donor countries Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Norway, Slovenia, Switzerland, the United States, the Council of Europe, the European Commission, the World Bank and the OECD; Transparency International, Open Society Institute and the American bar Association - Central European and Eurasian Law Initiative are observers.

So far, the work of the Stability Pact Anti-Corruption Initiative under the first pillar of action has been concluded in the adoption / ratification of the most important international legal instruments by the majority of the SPAI member countries (as presented in Table 3).

**Table 3.** Ratification/Adoption of the Anticorruption International Instruments by the CEE countries

CURRENT STATUS								
Ratification/Adoption of the Anticorruption International Legal Instruments								
Anti-corruption instruments	Albania	Bosnia& Herzegovina	Bulgaria	Croatia	FYR Macedonia	Serbia and Montenegro	Romania	Moldova
Council of	Ratified	Ratified on	Ratified on	Ratified on	Ratified on	Ratified on	Ratified on	Ratified on

Europe Criminal Law Convention on Corruption	on 19/7/2001	30/1/2002	7/11/2001	8/11/2000	28/11/1999	18/12/2002	11/7/2002	14/1/2004
Council of Europe Civil Law Convention on Corruption	Ratified on 21/9/2000	Ratified on 30/1/2006	Ratified on 8/06/2000	Ratified on 5/06/2003	Ratified on 29/02/2002	Signed on 7/04/2005	Ratified on 23/04/2002	Ratified on 17/03/2002
CoE Additional Protocol to the Criminal Law Convention on Corruption	Ratified on 15/11/2004	---	Ratified on 4/02/2004	Ratified on 10/05/2005	Signed on 15/05/2003	---	Ratified on 29/11/2004	Signed on 15/05/2003
United Nations Convention against Corruption	Ratified on 25/5/2006	Signed on 16/09/2005	Signed on 10/12/2003	Ratified on 25/04/2005	Signed on 18/08/2005	Ratified on 20/12/2005	Ratified on 2/09/2004	Signed on 28/09/2004
OECD Convention on Combating Bribery of Foreign Public Officials in International Business Transactions	---	---	Ratified on 22/12/1998	---	---	---	---	---

Source: Stability Pact Anticorruption Initiative – Cornel Calinescu

As for the work under the other four pillars, the Action Plan adopted in 2000 established four phases for the implementation: development of institutional mechanisms, assessments, monitoring and policy dialogue and technical assistance.

Since 2000, all SPAI governments have developed comprehensive and ambitious anticorruption programs. At the same time, specialized anticorruption institutions have been established, as in Romania (National Anticorruption Prosecutor's Office) and in Croatia (Office for the Suppression of Corruption and Organized Crime).

SPAI has also had important contributions in the legislative area, as the countries enacted and of laws to combat corruption. Important amendments were made to Criminal Codes and Criminal Procedure Codes, while specific anti-corruption laws, including laws on the liability of legal persons or anti-money laundering were enacted. In Romania, two of the most important examples are the elimination of the immunity for ministers, public notaries and bailiffs, as well as the introduction of the declaration of assets, as means of preventing corruption.

Legislation aimed at preventing corruption is becoming increasingly important in the other SPAI countries as well; specific laws have been introduced in areas as: conflict of interest, personal

asset declarations, public procurement and access to information. In addition, important provisions to prevent corruption were integrated in general civil service and public administration legislation.

In terms of substantive legislation to counter corruption, the situation is similar in most countries, in the sense that “it is impressive in range and volume”, but, as the last SPAI report notes, “more important now is the translation of that commitment to tangible change through implementation and enforcement of these laws. Failure to do so over the medium term will be highly detrimental to efforts to combat corruption and may also have a deleterious effect on the reputation of donors associated with the drafting and passing of legislation and establishing structures. Countries need to develop new ideas on how to boost the implementation and follow this up with regular monitoring”.

This is however a common situation for all transition countries, and there are a lot of reasons, from lack of political will to lack of experience, expertise and financial support. We must remember that the fight against corruption is very time consuming and results are unlikely to show in the near future.

The involvement of civil society and in particular of the business community in preventing corruption is perhaps one of the least developed policy areas in the SPAI framework. However, there has been a series of major campaigns dedicated at raising awareness, and a lot of efforts are being dedicated to identifying new ways of motivating and involving the civil society.

In Romania the Stability Pact Anti-Corruption Initiative has collaborated mainly with the public administration, with which is closely tied.

### **III. Romania’s Progress in fighting corruption and the way ahead**

As for the other countries in the region, a major motivating factor for Romanian reforms in the area of anti-corruption has been the prospect to join the EU. Despite the fact that the reform process in Romania has been accelerated by the Euro-Atlantic integration process, in 2004, the European Commission report stated that “corruption remains a serious and widespread problem in Romania which affects almost all aspects of society. There has been no reduction in perceived levels of corruption and the number of successful prosecutions remains low, particularly for high

level corruption. The fight against corruption is hampered by integrity problems even within institutions that are involved in law enforcement and the fight against corruption.”<sup>2</sup>

After 2004, the fight against corruption has become a top priority, as it still is, three years later. Two important documents developed by the government the **National Anti-Corruption Strategy** and the **Action Plan for European Integration 2005-2007** attempted to establish priorities for the next period, focusing on the enforcement of law and on increasing the impact of anti-corruption measures. The Romanian National Anti-Corruption Strategy identified the following priorities:

- Prevention, transparency, education: risk analysis, compliance with international standards, regulation of lobby, financial control and audit, sector regulation and activities - for civil service, criminal investigation bodies, education and research institutions and health system;
- Combating corruption: political corruption, administrative corruption, linking corruption with organized crime, criminal responsibility of legal persons, regulation of unexplained wealth, sanctioning conflict of interest, instituting whistle blowers protection, consolidating independence of judiciary;
- Internal cooperation and international coordination: coordinating and monitoring the implementation of the Strategy and of the Action Plan, fully implementing all the anti-corruption instruments of the EU, UN, Council of Europe and OECD.

In reviewing progress by Romania the EU has again recently stressed the need for Romania to make progress on the issue of corruption, noting that: “Corruption in Romania continues to be serious and widespread. Romania’s anti-corruption legislation is generally well developed, but its ability to curb corruption will depend on the effective implementation of the law. In particular additional efforts are required to ensure the independence, effectiveness and accountability of the National Anti-corruption Prosecution Office. It should concentrate its resources on investigating high level corruption.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> European Commission - Regular Report on Romania’s progress towards accession, 2004

<sup>3</sup> European Commission - Monitoring report on the state of preparedness for EU membership of Bulgaria and Romania, September 2006



In this respect, a recent setback has been the initiative regarding the establishment of the National Integrity Agency, which did not receive the desired or expected attention and support from the political class and was a major cause of domestic disagreement and external embarrassment.

The fight against corruption has greatly intensified in the last two years. However, it is too soon for the results to show, other than occasional “small victories” and improvements in specific areas. The levels of perception remain high, as Romania is still at the top of EU-27. The way ahead, in the context of accession into the European Union, is to continue the efforts for the implementation of the strategies, plans and measures that have been adopted so far.

Romania will, at the same time, promote the interests of the region within the EU and also push the countries of the region forward concerning regional cooperation in matters like fighting organized crime, democracy, the rule of law and corruption.

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