



Legal Regulation of Anti-Corruption Measures: A Comparative Study of Transition Economies

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Abstract

The study aims to identify the content and role of legal regulation in the fight against corruption in transition economies. This study focuses on the regulatory framework governing anti-corruption measures in transition economies, utilizing k-means cluster analysis to evaluate the effectiveness of such strategies. By categorizing nations based on Corruption Perception Index (CPI) scores, the study reveals distinct clusters with varying levels of corruption, highlighting countries like Georgia, the Republic of Armenia, and Montenegro as exemplars with lower corruption levels. The study underscores the critical role of regulatory frameworks in combating corruption within transition economies, emphasizing the necessity for comprehensive regulations and the synergy of public and state power to address corrupt practices effectively. The findings emphasize the importance of reliable data, transparent methodologies, and strong regulatory frameworks in shaping anti-corruption efforts.

Keywords: Corruption, Legal Regulation, Transition Economy, Anti-Corruption Measures, Democracy, Policy

Introduction

Corruption, a pervasive global phenomenon, poses multifaceted challenges to societies and states alike. Its detrimental effects extend beyond national borders, hindering progress towards international goals and eroding fundamental democratic values. As such, the imperative to address corruption through effective legal regulation becomes increasingly evident.

The urgency of understanding the content and role of legal regulation in combating corruption stems from its profound impact on global development agendas, including the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Corruption undermines economic growth, exacerbates poverty and inequality, fosters criminal networks, and erodes public trust in institutions. Moreover, it perpetuates impunity, perpetuating cycles of injustice and weakening state capacity.

While corruption manifests differently across nations, its underlying causes often intersect with systemic deficiencies in legal frameworks and institutional structures. In many states, regulatory mechanisms remain inadequate or insufficiently enforced, allowing vested interests to manipulate

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the political and economic landscape for personal gain. This results in a pervasive culture of impunity and undermines the rule of law.

In light of these challenges, it becomes imperative to examine the efficacy of legal mechanisms in addressing corruption. Drawing on the experience of countries that have implemented robust anti-corruption measures and the practices of countries with weak anti-corruption regulations offers valuable insights into effective strategies and best practices. Nations that serve as exemplars in this regard can demonstrate the pivotal role of comprehensive legal frameworks in combating corruption. Despite variations in their socio-economic and political landscapes, these nations share common challenges rooted in weak institutional governance, economic instability, and insufficient political will for reform. Understanding these challenges and identifying strategies to overcome them are essential steps towards fostering transparency, accountability, and integrity in governance systems worldwide. Countries with transition economies demonstrate confrontation within the context of their legal systems.

Despite widespread recognition of its detrimental effects, devising effective strategies to combat corruption poses a complex scientific problem. This problem extends beyond mere legal and regulatory frameworks to encompass broader socio-economic and political factors that perpetuate corrupt practices. Understanding the underlying mechanisms driving corruption and identifying innovative solutions to mitigate its impact represent crucial scientific endeavours. In summary, the imperative to understand the content and role of legal regulation in combating corruption underscores the necessity for rigorous research and analysis. By elucidating the intersection of legal frameworks and anti-corruption strategies, this study seeks to contribute to global efforts aimed at fostering transparency, accountability, and integrity in governance.

Literature Review

Corruption, as defined by Transparency International, encompasses the misuse of entrusted power for personal gain, with far-reaching consequences for trust, democratic institutions, and socio-economic progress. A multitude of legislative acts and international agreements attempt to grapple with corruption, yet a universally accepted definition remains elusive (Andersson and Heywood, 2009). The OECD and the Council of Europe delineate various corrupt behaviors without providing a singular definition, reflecting the complex nature of corruption as a transnational phenomenon (OECD Glossaries, 2008). Similarly, the United Nations Convention identifies corruption as a hindrance to economic efficiency, development, and poverty alleviation, emphasizing its global impact and the imperative for coordinated action (UNODC, n.d.).

The Council of Europe has made significant strides in addressing corruption through conventions such as the Convention on Criminal Liability for Corruption and the Civil Convention against Corruption. These agreements recognize the multifaceted nature of corruption, encompassing bribery, criminal offenses, and money laundering across public and private sectors, both domestically and internationally (EUR-Lex, 2019). Such comprehensive

recognition underscores the importance of a holistic approach to combat corruption effectively.

Official documents from international bodies underscore the necessity of legitimizing tools and strategies in combating corruption (Perumal, 2021). These strategies often focus on the economic aspects of corruption, recognizing its roots in economic relations and the critical role of economic policy and international collaboration in addressing it (Boly et al., 2019; GRECO, 2022a).

Research on corruption spans various disciplines, with scholars like Vujović et al. (2017) and Jin (2021) examining its economic dimensions, while Zúñiga (2020) explore its socio-implications. Research by Mungiu-Pippidi and Fazekas (2020) sheds light on the importance of national-level analysis and citizen engagement in combating corruption effectively, emphasizing the need for societal involvement in anti-corruption efforts. Additionally, a study by Johnston (2013) explores the impact of corruption on economic development and governance, highlighting the challenges posed by corrupt practices in both developed and developing countries.

Akhmetov et al. (2018a) argue that corruption is a pervasive social phenomenon with profound repercussions for society and the state, ranging from distorted market competition to the erosion of state authority. Understanding the drivers of corruption, whether driven by personal gain or systemic deficiencies in legal culture, is crucial in formulating effective anti-corruption measures (Akhmetov et al., 2018b).

Legal mechanisms for combating corruption often involve administrative and legal regulations, as proposed by Korostashova (2019), Powell and Wiegand (2014). Additionally, the role of anti-corruption agencies as key institutional actors in governance, as highlighted by Gemperle (2018a), underscores the importance of institutional frameworks in the fight against corruption (Gemperle, 2018b). Moreover, some scientific publications discuss the macroeconomic implications of corruption, emphasizing the need for transparency and accountability in public financial management to mitigate the adverse effects of corrupt practices (Zúñiga, 2020).

Conducting a comparative analysis of various countries' experiences with transition economies in combating corruption provides valuable insights into cross-sectoral anti-corruption strategies (United Nations, 2014). The term "transition economy" denotes countries undergoing structural transformations from state-controlled to market-based systems, with diverse strategies and challenges in combating corruption (Round, 2009).

Research by Arapović et al. (2017) explores the relationship between economic growth and corruption in transitioning economies, emphasizing the need for comprehensive strategies to mitigate corrupt behaviors during periods of economic expansion. Additionally, a study by Saputra and Saputra (2021) examines the impact of corruption on political stability and social cohesion, highlighting the importance of effective anti-corruption policies in fostering trust and accountability.

Effective measurement of corruption levels and empirical reductions necessitates robust methodologies, as advocated by scholars like Malito (2014) and Holmes (2015). These efforts contribute to a deeper understanding

of the dynamics of corruption and inform evidence-based policy interventions aimed at curbing its detrimental effects on economic, social, and political spheres.

Addressing corruption requires a multifaceted approach encompassing legislative regulation, institutional reforms, and international cooperation (Boly et al., 2019). By examining the various dimensions of corruption, society can strive towards fostering a more just and equitable world.

Overall, the literature review underscores the importance of understanding the content and role of legal regulation in combating corruption, emphasizing the necessity for rigorous research and analysis to develop effective anti-corruption measures. By exploring the complexities of corruption and the diverse approaches to addressing it at the international level, this study seeks to provide insights into enhancing legal mechanisms for combating corruption in transition economies.

The study aims to identify the content and role of legal regulation in the fight against corruption in transition economies.

Materials and Methods

The study employed a comparative analysis approach to examine the legal mechanisms for combating corruption in transition economies. We chose to focus on transition economies based on the United Nations (UN) classification (see Table 1), which identifies countries undergoing significant structural changes from centrally planned to market-oriented economies. This classification provides a standardized framework for comparative analysis, ensuring clarity and consistency in identifying transition economies. By aligning our research with this classification, we aim to address the unique challenges and opportunities associated with corruption within transitioning contexts.

To analyse the level of corruption, we used Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI), employed since 1995, is widely used and often associated with corruption levels, economic growth, and governance indicators (Budsaratragoon and Jitmaneeroj, 2020). Despite some acknowledged limitations (Malito, 2014; Perumal, 2021), the CPI remains one of the most widely recognized and utilized tools for measuring perceived corruption levels across nations. Its widespread adoption by international organizations, policymakers, and researchers underscores its utility and influence in shaping perceptions and policy responses concerning corruption. Data on Corruption Perception Index scores for countries with transition economies from 2012 to 2021 was obtained from reputable sources such as Transparency International. Additional information on anti-corruption legislation, institutional reforms, and anti-corruption strategies in the selected countries was gathered from official reports, government publications, and academic sources.

The k-means cluster analysis was utilized to group countries into clusters based on their Corruption Perception Index scores and assess the dynamics of changes in corruption levels over the study period. Using K-means clustering we grouped 17 observations (transition economies) into 3 clusters: countries with the low, average and high level of corruption. Each cluster

represented countries with similar levels of corruption, allowing for a comparative analysis of the effectiveness of anti-corruption measures in different contexts. The results of the cluster analysis were interpreted to identify patterns, trends, and variations in the level of corruption and the impact of legal regulations in transition economies. The findings were discussed in relation to the existing literature on anti-corruption measures and the challenges faced by countries in combating corruption.

It is important to acknowledge potential limitations of the methodology, such as the reliance on secondary data sources and the subjective nature of perception-based indices like the Corruption Perception Index. The study's scope may be limited by the availability and reliability of data on anti-corruption measures in some countries. By following a systematic research design and methodological approach, the study aimed to provide valuable insights into the role of legal regulation in combating corruption in transition economies.

Results and Discussion

Table 1 shows the distribution of countries with transition economies by clusters and the dynamics of changes in the level of corruption in each country during 2012-2021 according to the Corruption Perception Index.

Table 1 Index of perception of corruption in countries with transition economies for 2012-2021

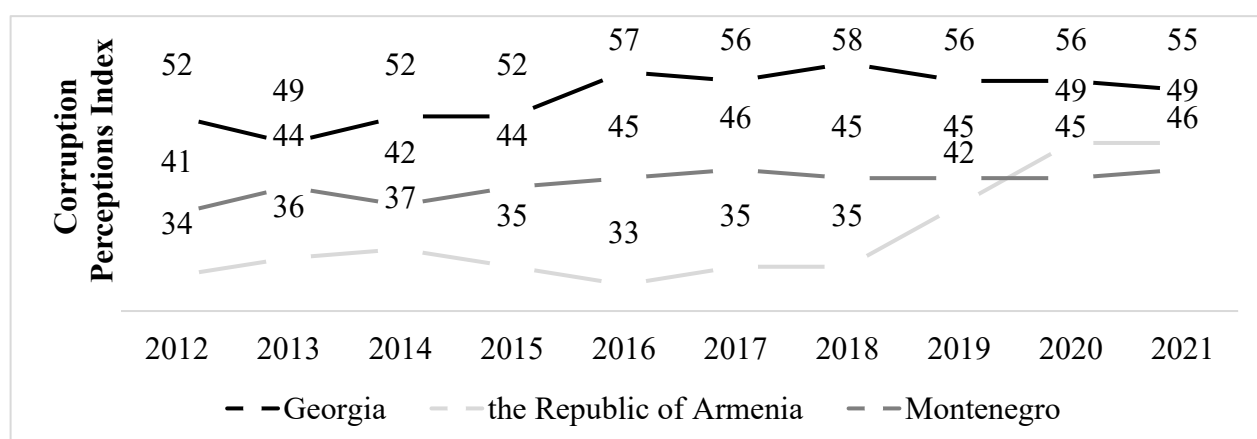
Country	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	The level of corruption perception
Georgia	52	49	52	52	57	56	58	56	56	55	Low level
The Republic of Armenia	34	36	37	35	33	35	35	42	49	49	
Montenegro	41	44	42	44	45	46	45	45	45	46	
The Republic of Belarus	31	29	31	32	40	44	44	45	47	41	Average level
The Republic of North Macedonia	43	44	45	42	37	35	37	35	35	39	
The Republic of Serbia	39	42	41	40	42	41	39	39	38	38	
The Republic of Albania	33	31	33	36	39	38	36	35	36	35	
The Republic of Kazakhstan	28	26	29	28	29	31	31	34	38	37	
The Republic of Moldova	36	35	35	33	30	31	33	32	34	36	High level
Bosnia and Herzegovina	42	42	39	38	39	38	38	36	35	35	
Ukraine	26	25	26	27	29	30	32	30	33	32	
The Republic of Azerbaijan	27	28	29	29	30	31	25	30	30	30	
The Russian Federation	28	28	27	29	29	29	28	28	30	29	
The Republic of Uzbekistan	17	17	18	19	21	22	23	25	26	28	

The Kyrgyz Republic	24	24	27	28	28	29	29	30	31	27
The Republic of Tajikistan	22	22	23	26	25	21	25	25	25	25
Turkmenistan	17	17	17	18	22	19	20	19	19	19

Source: Transparency International (2021)

The grouping of countries into clusters according to the Corruption Perception Index was carried out using the k-means clustering method, with the help of which three relatively homogeneous groups (clusters) of countries with a low, medium, and high level of corruption were obtained. Each cluster includes countries with the value closest to the average in the given group. Georgia, the Republic of Armenia, and Montenegro have the lowest level according to the Corruption Perception Index (from 55 to 46). During the period studied, the Corruption Perception Index (CPI) in these countries changed (Figure 1) depending on the mechanisms used by the countries to prevent and fight corruption.

Figure 1 Countries with a low level of corruption according to the Corruption Perception Index (CPI)



Source: Transparency International (2021)

Georgia has the highest level of Corruption Perceptions Index among the studied countries (Table 1 and Figure 1). The rapid and substantial improvement of the fight against corruption in the corrupt society of Georgia is an effective embodiment of the anti-corruption reform. This means that Georgia's anti-corruption agenda included all areas of economic and social life, rather than an anti-corruption agenda as such, isolated from economic and social reforms.

The Republic of Armenia significantly reduced the level of corruption - from 34 in 2012 to 49 in 2021. During this period, the Republic of Armenia continues to reform its anti-corruption legislation and institutions.

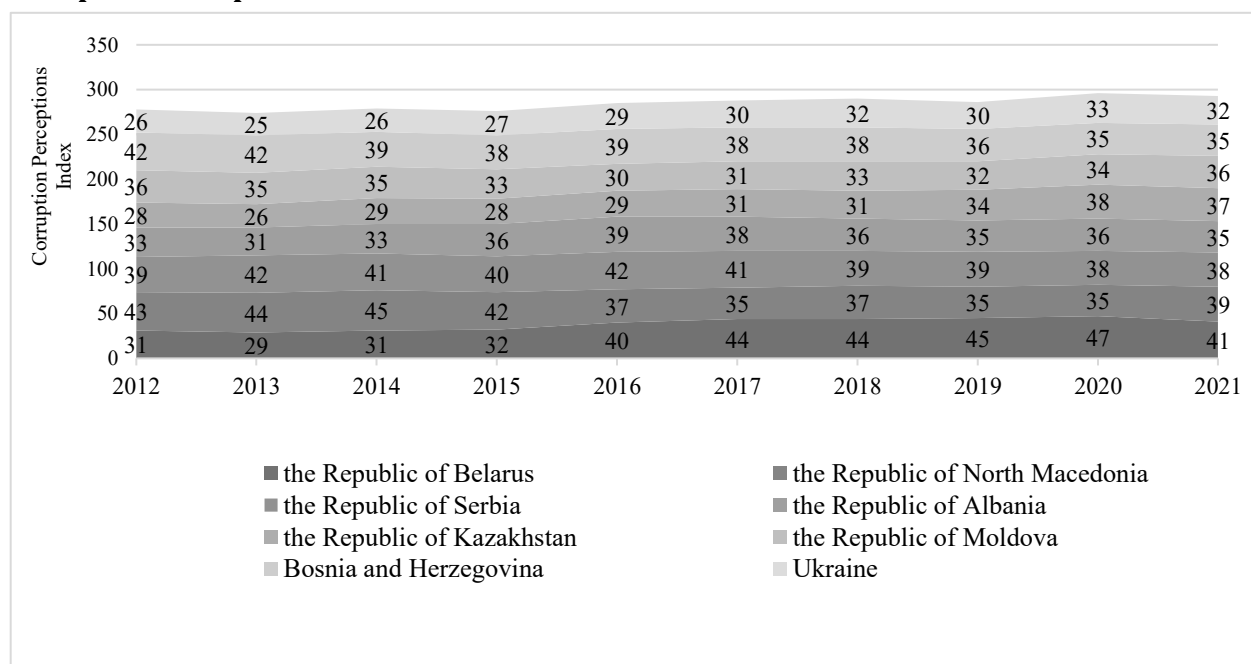
The monopolized economy and widespread conflict of interest among public officials remained a serious problem, affecting the difficulty of the practical application of anti-corruption legislation (OECD, n.d.). The Republic of Armenia's anti-corruption strategy and its Action Plan for 2019-2022 are one of the main anti-corruption mechanisms. The strategy focuses on reforms of anti-corruption institutions. In March 2018, the Republic of Armenia

adopted a new version of the Law on Civil Service. This improved the system of resolving conflicts of interest for civil servants, increased the transparency of competition in the selection for positions, monitoring of the income of civil servants. Strengthening the mechanisms for disclosure of illegal assets allowed to create an effective system of sanctions for corruption offenses by public officials (OECD, n.d.).

Montenegro recognized the fight against corruption as a priority in the process of European integration. This country has made progress in anti-corruption legislation, but regulations still do not meet international standards. Pressure from the international community, rather than domestic political actors, drives anti-corruption measures in Montenegro (Vujović et al., 2017). In 2020, Montenegro adopted a new anti-corruption program with a defined mechanism for interaction with the public, experts and legal institutions.

Countries with a low level of corruption (from 55 to 46 points according to the Corruption Perception Index) carried out effective reforms not only in the legislative field but also in reforming institutions (Figure 2).

Figure 2 Countries with an average level of corruption according to the Corruption Perception Index



Source: Transparency International (2021)

In Ukraine, anti-corruption measures were introduced after the Revolution of Dignity. Ukraine sought to have permanent economic ties with the countries of the European Union, so the fight against corruption was necessary to obtain financial aid and attract investment. Specially authorized entities in the field of anti-corruption began to function in Ukraine - the National Agency for the Prevention of Corruption, the Specialized Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office, the National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine, and the Anti-Corruption Court. There is also the State Bureau of Investigation, which investigates corruption in law enforcement agencies.

Some institutions were created as indirect tools to fight corruption - the ProZorro electronic procurement system, the state government open data portal e-data.gov.ua and local open data portals at the level of the region, city, and territorial communities (Huss and Keudel, n.d.). In 2014, the Law on Prevention of Corruption was adopted, and the 2021-2025 anti-corruption strategy is being implemented. In 2021 Ukraine decreased the CPI by one point (from 33 to 32). The failure to form an independent and professional judicial system had the greatest impact on the assessment of Ukraine.

The situation in the Republic of Albania is similar. The justice system of the Republic of Albania is currently undergoing a complete reconstruction after the adoption in June 2016 of a package of justice reform laws. The reform affected more than a third of the provisions of the constitution. In addition, about 40 new laws or amendments to legislation have been adopted (Vurmo et al., 2021).

Political impunity is one of the reasons for corruption in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Anti-corruption bodies (apart from the Corruption Prevention and Coordination Agency) are not set up in a way that provides functional guarantees of independence (Lee-Jones, 2018). It remains necessary to make legislative changes regarding the integrity of judges to increase public trust in the judicial system and create a mechanism for checking judges' reports (European Commission, 2021a).

The Republic of Serbia is an example of a "captured political system" due to the excessive influence of its president A. Vučić. The downward trend in the CPI is projected to continue in 2018 if the government continues to undermine those bodies and institutions responsible for upholding the rule of law. In 2018, despite opposition from NGOs, professional associations, and others, the government pushed for increased influence over the judiciary.

The Republic of Belarus scored 47 points in the 2020 CPI, an improvement of two points compared to 2019. Her assessment does not reflect the countless problems the country faced during the O. Lukashenko regime. Authoritarian rule and the tightly controlled state apparatus, which is created to support its outcomes, can work well to detect and deter administrative corruption at a lower level. This means that corruption is more centralized in the hands of a few individuals (Myrzabekova, 2021). Much of the economy is still controlled by the state, which creates a breeding ground for corruption. Bureaucrats enjoy enormous discretionary powers, thereby increasing the risk of encountering extortion when solving administrative requirements.

The Republic of Kazakhstan, a country in which the level of corruption is decreasing according to the Index (from 28 points in 2012 to 37 in 2021), considers the fight against corruption an important priority of state policy, which is reflected in the statements of top officials. The main document of the anti-corruption policy is the Industry Anti-Corruption Program. In the Republic of Kazakhstan, research on the situation of corruption is regularly conducted, but it is not comprehensive and its results are not widely disseminated and are not used for the development of anti-corruption policy (OECD, n.d.). The anti-corruption strategy of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2015-2025 is a regulatory and legal document on the introduction of measures to prevent and fight corruption. Only a close partnership between the state and society will make it possible to successfully resist corruption. The creation of

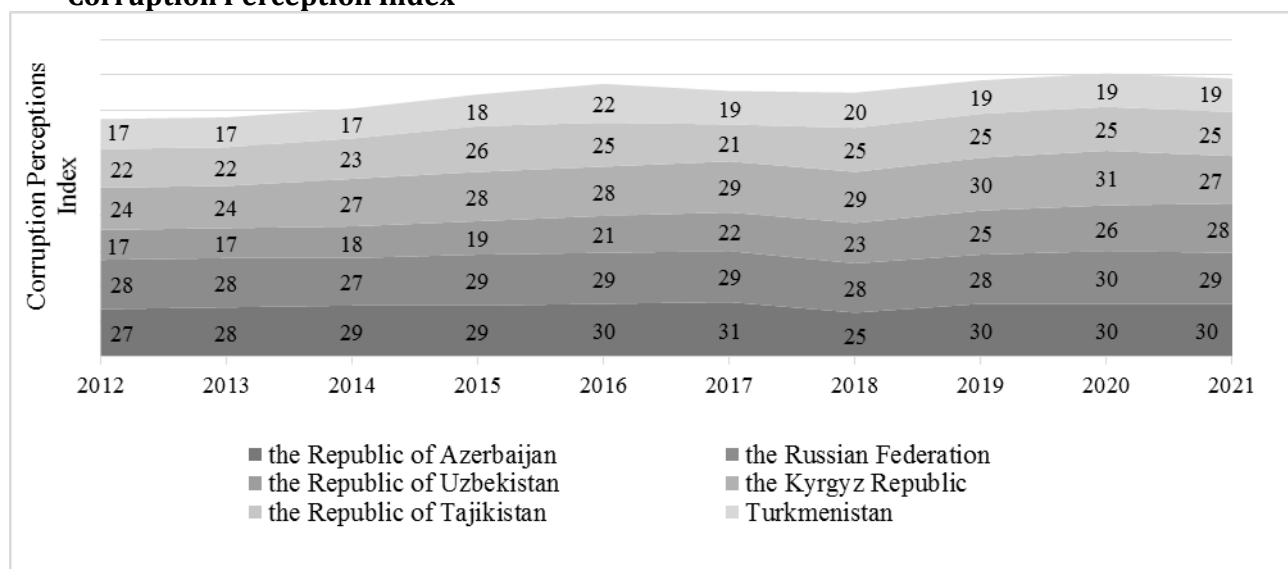
the Anti-Corruption Agency and the adoption of strategies and initiatives aimed at prevention are important to solve this problem in the Republic of Kazakhstan. Fundamental anti-corruption reforms seem necessary to bring institutions closer to anti-corruption standards (GRECO, 2022b).

Despite some democratic reforms following the change of political power in 2017, the Republic of North Macedonia still faces serious governance challenges. These include the takeover of institutions by political parties and politically connected businesses, ongoing clientelist practices in government employment, and the ongoing politicization of ethnicity (Taseva, 2021). The European Commission's 2020 strategy foresaw the need to fight corruption in the Western Balkans, and EU representatives highlighted the challenges of poor governance and limited progress in improving the rule of law. Accordingly, poor governance in the Republic of North Macedonia affects the impossibility of implementing anti-corruption reforms (Duri, 2021). After the 2016 elections in the Republic of North Macedonia and the loss of power of the Democratic Party for National Unity, anti-corruption measures began to be implemented more actively. The new government expressed commitment to strive for Euro-Atlantic integration and implement reforms, including anti-corruption reforms (Resimić, 2022). Politicians have shown a willingness to tackle corruption. However, the strong influence of the business elite and corruption in the judiciary remain the main problems of anti-corruption activity. (Zúñiga, 2020). However, since 2018 there has been a gradual implementation of judicial reform. This has an impact on the implementation of the anti-corruption strategy of the Republic of North Macedonia (European Commission, 2021b).

The situation in the Republic of Moldova is similar. The new government, which won the parliamentary elections in 2021, has incentives to implement anti-corruption measures and implement legal mechanisms. First of all, the new government is trying to strengthen the integrity of the judicial system. Although the government has introduced some legislative proposals to amend anti-corruption legislation, how these amendments were rushed through has been criticized. In particular, regarding the change of key persons in positions in the General Prosecutor's Office. In 2021, anti-corruption measures intensified.

In most countries with an average level of corruption (Figure 3), the factor preventing the implementation of anti-corruption reforms is the lack of fair justice. All countries are implementing anti-corruption strategy measures, and legal norms, and creating anti-corruption agencies. Anti-corruption measures are more active in those countries where the political position of the authorities is stable and there is a political will to eradicate corruption. This was the case in Ukraine after the Revolution of Dignity, in the Republic of North Macedonia after the 2016 elections, and in the Republic of Moldova after the 2021 elections.

Figure 3 Countries with a high level of corruption according to the Corruption Perception Index



Source: Transparency International (2021)

In some countries, relevant concepts and strategies for combating corruption have been adopted. In the Republic of Azerbaijan, the National Strategy for Increasing Transparency and Combating Corruption was approved (OECD, n.d.), in the Kyrgyz Republic – the State Strategy for Combating Corruption, and in the Russian Federation the National Anti-Corruption Plan 2021-2024 (BOFIT, 2021). These documents describe the procedural features of implementing the anti-corruption reform.

Legislation and strategies in the field of anti-corruption are being approved in the Kyrgyz Republic: the State Strategy for Combating Corruption in the Kyrgyz Republic, the Law of the Kyrgyz Republic "On Combating Corruption", the norms of the Criminal Code of Kyrgyz Republic, on which the activities of state bodies, including national security bodies, are based, on the fight against corruption. In 2011, with the support of the Kyrgyz public organizations and international donors, the government improved the legal framework to ensure effective local self-government in the country. Towns and villages are governed by local authorities, but many are still in the hands of inefficient, poorly trained officials. The country has quite clear legal acts related to anti-corruption legislation, but there are no transparent institutions that would implement the legislative norms (France, 2019).

There is little progress in the anti-corruption policy in the Republic of Azerbaijan. In 2020, the Republic of Azerbaijan updated its anti-corruption policy document by adopting the National Anti-Corruption Action Plan for 2020-2022. The renewal process itself was public and included public consultation. However, democratic institutions in general in the state are under threat, and citizens of the state do not participate in active decision-making. The system of checks and balances that would not allow individuals to have an exclusive influence on government decisions does not fully work in the country (Karimov and Alizada, n.d.). Along with the actual situation of a relatively high level of corruption, Republic of Azerbaijan, within the

framework of the state policy implementation in the field of prevention and corruption counteraction, takes some anti-corruption measures, including the creation and operation of the state structure Azerbaijan Service and Assessment Network (ASAN). This is a state agency for citizen services and social innovations under the President. The main task is to provide quality services to citizens based on transparency and innovative technologies. The Republic of Azerbaijan continued to develop the infrastructure of the judicial system and the material support of the judiciary. The financing of the judicial system has increased in recent years - the salaries of judges have more than doubled since 2019. The anti-corruption structure of the Administration of the Judicial and Legal Council of the Republic of Azerbaijan was reformed, and additional human resources were provided to it in 2019 to ensure the prompt investigation of complaints about corruption offenses by judges. A special hotline for violations has been introduced to facilitate reporting (OECD, n.d.).

In the Russian Federation, the level of corruption remains high. Some anti-corruption measures were introduced: in 2021, the updated National Anti-Corruption Plan of the President for 2021-2024 regarding the improvement of anti-corruption measures was adopted; at the end of 2019, the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation made changes to the rulings in cases of bribery and abuse of power; In 2008, the Federal Law "On Combating Corruption" was adopted; in 2006, the UN Convention against Corruption was ratified. Anti-corruption campaigns are held in the Russian Federation, the president repeatedly emphasizes the importance of this problem during forums, and the Prosecutor General's Office condemns those guilty of corruption (Council of Europe, 2019). Nevertheless, there is no systematic fight against corruption in the Russian Federation. One of the key articles of the UN Convention - the prohibition of illegal enrichment - is not applied in the legislation of the Russian Federation. In the Russian Federation, corruption permeates all social strata of society, regardless of income and prosperity. Low incomes and weak political institutions are important factors contributing to the high level of corruption in the Russian Federation. Due to these factors, the population of the Russian Federation, unable to rely on the country's economic, social and political institutions, is forced to rely on informal institutions and participate in informal economic activities, which leads to an extensive shadow economy. The current political regime controls various areas that are most conducive to corruption: customs services, tax and law enforcement agencies, educational institutions, the construction sector, large retail companies, and aircraft manufacturers (Gontmakher, 2022).

The weak development of democratic institutions in the Russian Federation has resulted in significant negative consequences, particularly in relation to corruption. Despite some measures being taken to combat corruption, including the adoption of the Federal Law "On Combating Corruption" in 2008 and the ratification of the UN Convention against Corruption in 2006, corruption remains pervasive in all levels of society and permeates all social strata, regardless of income and prosperity. This is due, in part, to the lack of a systematic fight against corruption in the country, which means that anti-corruption campaigns are often ineffective, and the prohibition of illegal enrichment is not applied in legislation.

The high level of corruption in the Russian Federation is also exacerbated by low incomes and weak political institutions, which force the population to rely on informal institutions and participate in informal economic activities. This has led to the development of an extensive shadow economy, which further undermines the country's economic development and stability. Furthermore, the current political regime in Russia controls various areas that are particularly conducive to corruption, such as customs services, tax and law enforcement agencies, educational institutions, the construction sector, large retail companies, and aircraft manufacturers (Gontmakher, 2022).

The consequences of corruption in the Russian Federation are significant, particularly for ordinary citizens who are often the most affected. Corruption can result in reduced economic growth, increased inequality, and diminished public trust in the government and democratic institutions (Council of Europe, 2019). Moreover, corruption can hinder the development of effective and accountable public institutions, which are necessary for ensuring the rule of law and protecting human rights.

In summary, the weak development of democratic institutions in the Russian Federation has contributed to a high level of corruption in the country. This corruption permeates all levels of society and has resulted in the development of an extensive shadow economy. The consequences of this corruption are significant and negatively impact economic growth, public trust in government, and the development of effective public institutions. To combat corruption in the Russian Federation, it is essential to develop and implement effective anti-corruption measures that target the root causes of corruption and prioritize the development of democratic institutions.

Belarus, despite its position as a European country, has a weak record on democratic development, which has led to negative consequences such as corruption. Compared to other countries in the same corruption cluster, Belarus has excessive control over the president in all government spheres, including the judicial system. According to the 2020 Corruption Perception Index, Belarus was ranked 69th out of 180 countries, with a score of 47/100. Corruption is a significant issue in Belarus, and it affects various sectors, including the judiciary, law enforcement, customs, and public procurement.

The weakness of democratic institutions in Belarus has led to the absence of an independent judiciary, which contributes to the impunity of politicians and government officials. This impunity undermines the implementation of anti-corruption policies and leads to the lack of transparency in the government. Despite the existence of regulatory and legal acts in Belarus, they are not always implemented, and the government's control over the judiciary system leaves little room for transparency and accountability.

The absence of transparent and accountable democratic institutions in Belarus also undermines foreign investments and economic growth. Investors are wary of investing in countries with weak democratic institutions and a high level of corruption, as it may lead to a lack of protection of their investments and potential financial losses. This, in turn, affects the overall economic growth of the country.

Furthermore, the weak development of democratic institutions in Belarus undermines human rights and freedoms, including freedom of expression, the press, and the right to peaceful assembly. The government controls most media outlets, and journalists are subjected to censorship and harassment, which affects the quality of information available to the public. This weakens civil society and leaves little room for the public to demand accountability and transparency from the government.

In conclusion, the weak development of democratic institutions in Belarus has negative consequences for the country, including corruption, lack of transparency and accountability, low economic growth, and violation of human rights. It is essential to strengthen democratic institutions in Belarus to ensure transparency, accountability, and respect for human rights and freedoms.

The Law of Turkmenistan about anti-corruption has been in force in Turkmenistan since 2014. In the future, the president of the country is trying to strengthen the work to eradicate corruption and develop relevant proposals for improving the national legislation. In 2017, the country's president announced the creation of an anti-corruption agency to improve the detection, prevention, disclosure, and investigation of corruption offenses (Eurasianet, 2017). A difficult economic situation is observed in Turkmenistan, which affects the high level of corruption in the sphere of trade. The country's government controls currency flows, the foreign market, and business. The creation of anti-corruption bodies and anti-corruption legislation is a symbolic action against the background of public protests against corruption. There is no transparency of the state's economic indicators, or reports on national budget expenditures (Myatiev and Shikhmuradov, 2021).

Political corruption is widespread in the Republic of Tajikistan. All elections in the country since independence from the Soviet Union are not considered democratic electoral processes, as observed by international organizations such as the United Nations. The Republic of Tajikistan's government is largely based on networks and family ties. Many of the president's family members and associates hold political positions (Phillips-Alvarez, 2019).

Corruption in the Republic of Uzbekistan is a serious problem. There are laws aimed at preventing corruption, but their implementation is inadequate: The Anti-Corruption Action Plan was created in 2015 (OECD, n.d.); in 2016, the Law on combating corruption was adopted. In the Republic of Uzbekistan, corruption is also rooted in certain social and cultural practices that are widespread within the country. Some customs became more widespread in the post-independence period (Lewis, 2016).

Some anti-corruption measures are being carried out. In 2020, the Republic of Uzbekistan established a new Anti-Corruption Agency to lead and coordinate anti-corruption efforts in the country (UNDOC, n.d.). Among the main tasks of the Agency are: 1) implementation of the system of internal anti-corruption control ("compliance control") and other international anti-corruption tools in state authorities and legal entities, including in banks with a state share in the authorized capital; 2) analysis of the anti-corruption activity effectiveness in the field of public procurement, the use of budget

funds, loans from international organizations and foreign states, and the sale of state property.

The low level of official corruption prosecutions is one of the factors contributing to corruption in the Republic of Uzbekistan. It is not a criminal offense for a non-public official to influence the decision of a public official. The judicial system faces serious functional deficits due to limited resources and corruption, and law enforcement agencies are under government control.

In countries with a high level of corruption, the fight against corruption is a repeated promise of the country's top officials. Poverty, corruption of institutions, and lack of quality services affect the scale of this problem. Adopted legislative acts, and strategies have a formalized nature. The vertical of power affects decision-making, which is developed by a small group of individuals. This affects the lack of independence of judicial institutions and law enforcement agencies in these countries.

The study on the role of legal regulation in combating corruption in transition economies sheds light on the complexities and challenges faced by countries in addressing this pervasive issue. By utilizing the k-means clustering method, our research identifies three distinct clusters representing countries with low, medium, and high levels of corruption. This clustering approach enables a comparative assessment of the effectiveness and legal regulation of anti-corruption measures across different contexts.

Building upon the results, it is evident that countries such as Georgia, the Republic of Armenia, and Montenegro exhibit the lowest levels of corruption according to the CPI. These countries have demonstrated a positive trend in combating corruption, reflecting the impact of effective anti-corruption strategies and legal regulations. Our findings are consistent with those of Korostashova (2019) and Powell and Wiegand (2014), indicating that valuable insights can be gleaned from examining the legal mechanisms employed by these nations to inform anti-corruption policies in other transition economies.

Countries grappling with pervasive corruption issues like Azerbaijan, Russian Federation, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan require targeted interventions and comprehensive anti-corruption strategies to address systemic deficiencies and promote transparency. Understanding the unique challenges faced by nations with high levels of corruption underscores the importance of legal regulations to foster integrity and accountability in anti-corruption efforts. This aligns with the assertion by Boly et al. (2019), and partially explains why anti-corruption policies may fail in countries where the government is perceived (or known) to be corrupt.

Moreover, the study highlights the role of legal frameworks and regulations in shaping anti-corruption efforts. As mentioned by Akhmetov et al. (2018b), countries with robust legal systems and enforcement mechanisms tend to perform better in combating corruption, underscoring the importance of strong institutional frameworks. However, our study also recognizes the need for continuous monitoring and evaluation of these legal mechanisms to ensure their effectiveness and relevance in evolving socio-political contexts.

The study underscores the significance of reliable and transparent data in evaluating the impact of anti-corruption measures. The availability and quality of data on corruption can vary across countries, posing challenges to

comparative analyses. In line with Mungiu-Pippidi and Fazekas (2020), addressing these data limitations is essential for designing evidence-based policies and interventions that effectively combat corruption. Furthermore, the study's emphasis on the dynamics of changes in corruption levels over the study period underscores the need for continuous monitoring and evaluation of anti-corruption efforts. As highlighted by Perumal (2021), the evolving nature of corruption necessitates adaptive and responsive measures that can effectively counter emerging forms of corrupt practices.

By tracking changes in corruption levels and assessing the impact of legal regulations, policymakers can tailor interventions to address specific challenges and vulnerabilities within their respective contexts. Caution should be exercised, as noted by Arapović et al. (2017), when assuming that corruption is a strictly exogenous regressor in empirical models. The possibility of reverse causality presents a risk of providing biased and inconsistent parameter estimates, which may influence inference and interpretation. Additionally, discussing potential limitations in the methodology, such as reliance on secondary data sources and the subjective nature of perception-based indices, prompts a critical reflection on the study's findings. Recognizing these limitations is essential for interpreting the results accurately and ensuring the robustness of the research conclusions.

Integrating the study's results with a critical discussion of the implications and limitations enhances our understanding of the role of legal regulation in combating corruption in transition economies. Leveraging the insights gained from our research, policymakers and stakeholders can develop targeted strategies to strengthen anti-corruption measures and promote good governance practices in these dynamic and evolving contexts.

Conclusion

The research on the legal regulation of anti-corruption measures in transition economies has provided valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities associated with combating corruption in dynamic socio-economic contexts. The study aimed to identify the content and role of legal regulation in the fight against corruption, utilizing k-means cluster analysis to compare corruption levels across different countries undergoing structural transformations.

The obtained results, including the categorization of countries into clusters based on Corruption Perception Index (CPI) scores and the analysis of changes in corruption levels over time, offer a nuanced understanding of the effectiveness of anti-corruption measures in transition economies. Countries with lower levels of corruption, such as Georgia, the Republic of Armenia, and Montenegro, demonstrate positive trends in addressing corrupt practices, highlighting the impact of robust legal frameworks and institutional reforms.

From these findings, several key conclusions can be drawn. Firstly, the research highlights the critical role of legal regulations and enforcement mechanisms in shaping anti-corruption efforts. Countries with strong legal frameworks and effective enforcement agencies are better equipped to combat corruption and promote good governance practices. Continuous monitoring and evaluation of these legal mechanisms are crucial for adapting to evolving

challenges and maintaining the integrity of anti-corruption initiatives. Secondly, the study underscores the importance of reliable data and transparent methodologies in assessing corruption levels and evaluating the impact of anti-corruption strategies. Strengthening data collection mechanisms and enhancing transparency in reporting corruption-related information are essential for informed decision-making and policy formulation.

In terms of further research, there is a need to explore the long-term sustainability and scalability of anti-corruption measures in transition economies. Additionally, comparative studies across different regions and sectors can offer a broader perspective on best practices and innovative approaches to combating corruption.

In conclusion, the study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on anti-corruption efforts in transition economies and underscores the importance of legal regulation in fostering transparency, accountability, and integrity. By building on these findings and exploring new avenues for research, stakeholders can work towards creating a more just and equitable society free from the detrimental effects of corruption.

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