

GRECO: Fifth Round Evaluation Report on Bulgaria



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News

On 19 January 2023, GRECO published its [fifth round evaluation report on Bulgaria](#). The focus of the fifth round is on preventing corruption and promoting integrity in central governments, especially regarding persons with top executive functions (PTEFs) and law enforcement agencies. In particular, the evaluation tackles conflicts of interest, the declaration of assets, and accountability mechanisms. Bulgaria has been a member of GRECO since 1999 and has fully implemented the recommendations of the first and second evaluation rounds, 70% of the recommendations of the third evaluation round, and 84% of the recommendations of the fourth evaluation round.

The perceived level of corruption in the country is high. According to the Corruption Perception Index published by Transparency International, Bulgaria ranked 78th out of 180 countries in 2021.

Bulgaria's anti-corruption framework is based mainly on the Law on Countering Corruption and Forfeiture of Unlawfully Acquired Assets, which has been in force since 2018 and contains provisions on the transparency and integrity requirements applicable to public officials as well as on the institutional framework to supervise implementation. At the time the report was adopted, the Anti-Corruption Law and the institutional setup of specialised bodies were in the process of being reformed.

Among Bulgaria's specific problems, according to the report, is the lack of a proper integrity framework for top officials of the government. There is no code of ethics applicable to them, no awareness raising on integrity matters, nor any established mechanism for confidential counseling. In addition, there is a lack of rules and transparency in respect of interaction with lobbyists seeking to influence government policies. The verification of top officials' declarations of interest and assets is also ineffective, as it is limited to desk analysis and cross-checking against information contained in other state databases. GRECO calls for more transparency concerning government officials, including their remuneration and possible ancillary activities. The response of criminal justice to corruption offences involving top government officials is ineffective: procedural impediments should be eliminated and adequate sanctions provided.

With regard to law enforcement authorities, it is necessary to prevent undue political influence, as the police and the Ministry of Interior are closely related, with the Minister having far-reaching powers over the police. GRECO recommends that a comprehensive code of ethics brings together provisions on ethics and the integrity required of police officers and covers matters such as conflicts of interest, gifts, contacts with third parties, outside activities, and handling confidential information.

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There is a need for a sufficiently transparent procedure as regards recruitment and promotion procedures in the police force, for more representation of women at all levels, for an obligation to report integrity-related misconduct, and to ensure effective protection of whistle-blowers.

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