

Corruption in the Western Balkan countries

Corruption is assumed to be a bigger problem in the Western Balkan countries than in most other areas of Eastern Europe. The problem is perhaps greatest in Kosovo, Macedonia and Serbia. A research group is currently investigating people's attitudes to laws, regulations and institutions in these countries.

'In general, people in these three countries have little trust in the authorities. This is partly due to the fact that, historically, the region has been under foreign rule. Moreover, during the socialist period, public resources were regarded as joint property, and many people therefore believed that there was nothing wrong with helping themselves to them. Some of the behaviour we see today is certainly a result of this,' says FAFO researcher Åse Berit Grødeland, head of the research project *'Legal Culture and Anti-Corruption Reform: The Case of the West Balkans'*. Grødeland has been researching corruption in Eastern Europe for several years.

The project cooperates with four partners in the Western Balkan countries. The think tank Argument is participating in Belgrade (Serbia). Pro Media, which is attached to the city's university, is taking part in Skopje (Macedonia). In Kosovo, the project is cooperating with the research and analysis institute IPOL. The project's fourth partner is the Woodrow Wilson Center for International Scholars (Washington D.C.), represented by Elton Skendaj, who is originally from Albania and has in-depth knowledge about the Albanians in the Western Balkan countries.



FAFO researcher Åse Berit Grødeland is head of the project. (Photo: FAFO)

Negative spiral

People in Kosovo, Macedonia and Serbia distrust politicians, civil servants and people attached to the judiciary. Whether such attitudes are the result of personal experience or are based on assumptions that people in positions of this kind do not do their job properly and are corrupt, is another matter.

'The attitudes many people have to employees of government institutions have a negative effect. Because so

many people assume that civil servants are corrupt, it is easy to behave accordingly,' says Grødeland.

There is also a tradition in the Western Balkan countries for looking after one's own, whether family or friends. There is culture for helping one's kin. This mentality can also be to the detriment of others, however. In addition, in the field of corruption research, there is an ongoing debate about how much of the corruption in post-communist and post-socialist countries can be explained by the fact that these countries are what the researchers refer to as 'transitional societies'.

Focus groups and interviews

The researchers plan to use different research methods to collect data for this project. They have already established 18 focus groups consisting of ordinary people – including ethnic Albanians in Serbia and Macedonia, and ethnic Serbs in Kosovo.

Representative national opinion polls have been conducted in Kosovo, Macedonia and Serbia, with 1,000 respondents in each country. Polling agencies will also carry out surveys among an additional sample of 200 ethnic Albanians in Serbia, 400 ethnic Albanians in Macedonia and 200 ethnic Serbs in Kosovo. Both Serbs living in Northern Kosovo and in the Serbian enclaves in Southern Kosovo will be interviewed. Here, the researchers are looking for answers to questions about everything from attitudes to laws, regulations and judicial institutions to experiences of corruption and anti-corruption measures. The researchers are also trying to find out whether bribes are offered voluntarily at the giver's own initiative or whether they are something people are forced to give.

The collection of data will conclude with 450 in-depth interviews of politicians, employees of the judiciary and civil servants.



Partners

- > **ARGUMENT, Agency for Applied Political and Sociological Research**, Belgrade, Serbia
- > **Balkan Policy Institute (IPOL)**, Prishtina, Kosovo
- > **NGO 'PRO MEDIA'**, Skopje, Republic of Macedonia
- > **Cornell University**, Department of Government, USA



A negative spiral could explain corruption in the Western Balkan countries. (Illustration: Shutterstock)

▶▶▶ Studying the judicial culture

Several anti-corruption measures have been tried in the Western Balkan countries in the past 20 years. Foreign players have usually been responsible for these measures. The goal of the researchers in this project is to find answers to why such measures have succeeded or failed.

The project will also study the judicial culture in the Western Balkan countries, linking it to the anti-corruption work that is being carried out. Because the researchers are studying both 'legal insiders' (civil servants, elected representatives, judges and the police) and 'legal outsiders' (ordinary people), they hope to find more interesting answers. Previous research on corruption has often only looked at one of the two groups.

Minorities

It is also new that the project includes the question of majority versus minority culture in research on judicial culture, corruption and anti-corruption.

'We are studying both the Serbian minority in Kosovo and the Albanian minorities in Macedonia and Southern Serbia. One of our hypotheses is that these ethnic-religious minorities have to work harder in order for the authorities to give them access to their

rights and that they therefore use bribery to a greater extent than the majority population. We wish to test this hypothesis,' explains Grødeland.

The goal of the projects in the NORGLOBAL programme that focus on the Western Balkan countries is to address relevant challenges at the national and regional level, illuminating questions that are important in relation to sustainable economic development and to institutional and democratic reforms that can advance the countries' Euro-Atlantic integration process.

The NORGLOBAL-program

NORGLOBAL shall strengthen Norwegian research on and with the South. It includes Povpeace, Cgiar, Women- and gender research, Globalisation of the environment-, energy- and Climate research, Econpop, Western Balkan and The networks. New research related to development might be placed under NORGLOBAL

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