

CHRONICLE OF THE ANNOUNCED “FIERCEST FIGHT AGAINST CORRUPTION”



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At the very end of 2024, the President of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić, announced the “fiercest fight against corruption.” This document analyzes how the president — who has no official authority in this area — could announce the police operations that followed, and what additional questions arise after the initial actions in the “fiercest fight against corruption.”

ABOUT THE ANNOUNCEMENTS

Announcements of anti-corruption efforts from the political top are not new in Serbia, and even less so are announcements of actions by other state institutions made by the President of the Republic. While the announcements of measures that fall under the jurisdiction of the National Assembly, the Government, ministries, or public enterprises can be attributed to his political influence via the ruling party, such influence has much more serious implications when it is directed toward judicial bodies.

Announcements of the fight against corruption were much more frequent during the early years of the current political leadership (2012–2016), which is expected, since at that time it was still easier to associate the notion of corruption with the previous government or its remaining structures at lower levels of power. As time passed, less and less attention was given to the fight against corruption in the prime minister’s policy addresses. The Anti-Corruption Strategy, adopted with great fanfare in 2013, quietly expired in 2018. A new one, adopted in 2024, was practically not promoted at all.

Nevertheless, from time to time, Vučić himself or another official from the ruling party would speak about corruption within the ranks of the ruling party. This typically occurred in relatively rare situations where certain influential ministers lost their positions or it was directed at unnamed local officials.

HOW IT BEGAN (THIS TIME)

Vučić announced the fight against corruption during an appearance on the national public broadcaster–RTS¹: “By March 31, the citizens of Serbia will witness the fiercest fight against corruption, against people who are directly or indirectly in power, connected to them, in the last, I can freely say, even 24 years.” He promised that the first results could be visible as early as January 27, 2025.²

A few days before that deadline, at the first rally promoting the “Movement for the People and the State” in Jagodina, on January 24, 2025, it became clear that this announcement was connected to the previously stated “fight against corruption.” While highlighting that many good things had been accomplished in the previous period, Vučić stated that there were things he was not satisfied with and that citizens were also unhappy about: “From local powerbrokers who don’t care about the people and are unreachable, to many ministers who you can neither hear nor see, to those who focus on securing things for themselves, as people would say, and who care less about the public – all the way to dissatisfaction with real, objective problems. And I understand that. You, the people, will clean this up, and I will only help you. You will have my full support in all of it.”³

This was followed by several organized encounters between the President and citizens. These citizens – whether deliberately chosen to create such an impression or coincidentally given the opportunity to speak – expressed frustration over the behavior of “local powerbrokers.” Given that Vučić, as all relevant research shows, is significantly more popular than his party, a “fight against corruption” aimed at unpopular party figures seems like a very welcome move for the “purified” Movement.

An even stronger indication of the importance citizens place on the anti-corruption agenda is the fact that many people, even in small towns, took to the streets in support of student demands.

1 <https://n1info.rs/vesti/vuciceve-najave-novo-simuliranje-borbe-protiv-korupcije-i-koliko-ce-nas-to-kostati/>, <https://www.danas.rs/vesti/politika/vuciceva-najava-rata-protiv-korupcije-propagandni-potez-ili-izlaz-iz-krize/>, <https://radar.nova.rs/politika/nova-vuciceva-najava-borbe-protiv-korupcije/>

2 Ibid

3 https://rtv.rs/sr_lat/politika/skup-u-jagodini-povodom-osnivanja-pokreta-za-narod-i-drzavu-predsednik-vucic-svestan-sam-tezine-trenutka-u-kome-se-nalazimo_1601286.htm

IMPROVING THE EU INTEGRATION SCORE?

The aforementioned announcement was undoubtedly a move aimed at political marketing and a response to growing anti-corruption protests. In addition to being directed at the domestic public, it could also be interpreted as an attempt to respond to one of the key demands of the European Union regarding the fight against corruption—a demand that has been repeated for many years. The goal of the announcement or “action” in that context would be to obtain a favorable evaluation in the European Commission’s new report, expected in autumn 2025, stating that there has been “some progress” in the fight against corruption. This is particularly relevant since the language of the announcement closely resembles the EU’s demand—namely, to “further improve the track record on investigations, prosecutions, and final convictions in high-level corruption cases, especially in terms of confiscating assets acquired through criminal activity.”⁴

WHAT COULD THE ANNOUNCEMENT HAVE MEANT?

At first glance — considering the constitutional powers of the President of the Republic of Serbia ⁵— one must ask what the announcement was actually supposed to mean, what its real content was, and whether it could be implemented at all, and if so, how.

The fact that public prosecutor’s offices across Serbia — including those specialized in anti-corruption — remained silent for days after Vučić’s end-of-year announcement sparked public curiosity and raised the question of the announcement’s true purpose.

For this reason, Transparency Serbia (TS) submitted seven Freedom of Information requests at the end of January 2025. These requests were sent to:

- The Republic Public Prosecutor’s Office,
- The Appellate Public Prosecutor’s Office in Belgrade,
- The Prosecutor’s Office for Organized Crime,
- The Special Departments for Combating Corruption at the Higher Public Prosecutor’s Offices in Belgrade, Kraljevo, Niš, and Novi Sad.

The requests asked for the following:

- Copies of all mandatory instructions for action in individual cases under Article 3 of the Law on the Organization and Jurisdiction of State Authorities in Combating Organized Crime, Terrorism, and Corruption (Official Gazette of RS, no. 94/2016, 87/2018 – other law, and 10/2023) that were in effect at the time of submission, and which were issued by the Republic Public Prosecutor or chief public prosecutors to other public prosecutors under Article 17 of the Law on Public Prosecution (Official Gazette of RS, no. 10/2023);⁶
- Information on how many criminal complaints related to offenses under Article 3 of the same law were received by the relevant prosecutor’s offices in 2024, and in the period from January 1, 2025, to the date of the request; how many indictments were filed; and how many of those indictments were confirmed;⁷

4 European Commission Report for 2024, p. 6, https://www.mei.gov.rs/upload/documents/eu_dokumenta/2024/izvestaj_24.pdf, European Commission Report for 2023, p. 35, https://www.mei.gov.rs/upload/documents/eu_dokumenta/godisnji_izvestaji_ek_o_napretku/izvestaj_ek_23.pdf, European Commission Report for 2022, p. 31 https://www.mei.gov.rs/upload/documents/eu_dokumenta/godisnji_izvestaji_ek_o_napretku/Serbia_Report_2022_SR.%5B1%5D.pdf

5 Article 112 of the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia – the President of the Republic represents Serbia at home and abroad, promulgates laws by decree, proposes to the National Assembly a candidate for Prime Minister after hearing the opinions of representatives of the elected electoral lists, proposes to the National Assembly the holders of public functions, appoints and dismisses ambassadors of the Republic of Serbia by decree on the proposal of the Government, receives letters of credence and revocation from foreign diplomatic representatives, grants pardons and decorations, and performs other duties defined by the Constitution https://www.paragraf.rs/propisi/ustav_republike_srbije.html

6 https://transparentnost.org.rs/images/7-TS_zahtev_za_pristup_Vrhovni_javni_tu%C5%BEilac.pdf, https://transparentnost.org.rs/images/6-TS_zahtev_za_pristup_Apelaciono_Bg.pdf, https://transparentnost.org.rs/images/5-TS_zahtev_za_pristup_TOK.pdf, https://transparentnost.org.rs/images/4-TS_zahtev_za_pristup_VJT_Beograd_POSK.pdf, https://transparentnost.org.rs/images/2-TS_zahtev_za_pristup_VJT_Novi_Sad_POSK.pdf, https://transparentnost.org.rs/images/3-TS_zahtev_za_pristup_VJT_Nis_POSK.pdf, https://transparentnost.org.rs/images/1-TS_zahtev_za_pristup_VJT_Kraljevo_POSK.pdf

7 https://transparentnost.org.rs/images/Zahtev_TOK_-_prijava_i_optu%C5%BEnice.pdf, https://transparentnost.org.rs/images/Zahtev_VJT_POSK_Beograd_-_prijava_i_optu%C5%BEnice.pdf, https://transparentnost.org.rs/images/Zahtev_VJT_POSK_Novi_Sad_-_prijava_i_optu%C5%BEnice.pdf, https://transparentnost.org.rs/images/Zahtev_VJT_POSK_Ni%C5%A1_-_prijava_i_optu%C5%BEnice.pdf, https://transparentnost.org.rs/images/Zahtev_VJT_POSK_Kraljevo_-_prijava_i_optu%C5%BEnice.pdf, https://transparentnost.org.rs/images/Zahtev_TOK_-_najave_procesuiranja_korupcije.pdf

- Information on whether, from November 1, 2024, to the date of the request, any of the listed prosecutor's offices provided information to higher-level prosecutors or any authority or individual about how many criminal proceedings they plan to initiate by March 31, 2025, or what actions they intend to undertake in ongoing criminal cases by that same date.⁸

The purpose of these inquiries was to determine whether there could have been any objective basis for conducting a large-scale anti-corruption operation. Specifically, when it comes to the prosecutorial organization itself, it seems that the only legal foundation for intensified prosecution of corruption could have been the issuance of specific instructions for handling such cases, their prioritization over other types of cases (e.g., economic crime), or the establishment of an obligation for prosecutors to proactively investigate potential cases of corruption.

Another possible objective reason could have been an increase in the number of criminal complaints related to corruption. If the number of complaints did not increase, then carrying out any kind of anti-corruption operation would imply that the prosecution had previously failed to act in a timely manner.

The third set of requested information aimed to determine whether the information originated from public prosecutor's offices (e.g., plans to initiate investigations in certain cases) could have formed the basis for the President's announcement — or whether the communication flowed in the opposite direction.

NO MANDATORY INSTRUCTIONS

If the President of Serbia's announcement that the results of the "fiercest fight against corruption" would be visible by the end of March were to be evaluated based on the number of mandatory instructions issued by public prosecutors for handling individual cases, the conclusion would be that, by early February, the expectations created by that announcement remained unfulfilled. According to responses obtained through freedom of information requests — "nothing new in the West."

The situation after the publication of the President's announcement is similar to that before it — no mandatory instructions for action were issued to public prosecutors in the surveyed prosecutor's offices (Higher Public Prosecutor's Office – Special Department for the Fight Against Corruption in Belgrade, Higher Public Prosecutor's Office – Special Department in Novi Sad, Niš, Kraljevo, and the Prosecutor's Office for Organized Crime). At the time the President's announcement was made, only one General Mandatory Instruction of the Republic Public Prosecutor's Office was in force: No. 5/2023 from May 30, 2023.

THE PROSECUTOR'S OFFICE DENIES PROVIDING INFORMATION

TS also attempted with these inquiries to determine the source of the information on which the President of Serbia based his announcement of the "actions." If the question is whether it was based on information obtained from public prosecutor's offices, the conclusion could be that it is completely unfounded.

Responding to freedom of information requests, two of the surveyed prosecutor's offices (Higher Public Prosecutor's Office – Special Department for the Fight Against Corruption in Belgrade and the same department in Novi Sad) stated that they had never submitted information to a higher-level prosecutor's office or any authority or individual about how many criminal cases they planned to initiate by March 31, 2025, nor about any actions they planned to undertake by that date in ongoing criminal proceedings.

One of the remaining three prosecutor's offices (Higher Public Prosecutor's Office – Special Department for the Fight Against Corruption in Kraljevo) responded that it does not possess such information, as these data are not contained in any document held by the office. Another (Prosecutor's Office for Organized Crime) emphasized that all persons carrying out tasks within the jurisdiction of state authorities for suppressing corruption-related crimes are required to treat the data and knowledge acquired in the performance

⁸ https://transparentnost.org.rs/images/Zahtev_TOK_-_najave_procesuiranja_korupcije.pdf, https://transparentnost.org.rs/images/Zahtev_VJT_POSK_-_Beograd_-_najave_procesuiranja_korupcije.pdf, https://transparentnost.org.rs/images/Zahtev_VJT_POSK_-_Novi_Sad_-_najave_procesuiranja_korupcije.pdf, https://transparentnost.org.rs/images/Zahtev_VJT_POSK_-_Ni%C5%A1_-_najave_procesuiranja_korupcije.pdf, https://transparentnost.org.rs/images/Zahtev_VJT_POSK_-_Ni%C5%A1_-_najave_procesuiranja_korupcije.pdf

of these tasks as classified information, in accordance with regulations on data confidentiality. In other words, without the approval of the competent public prosecutor, no data from preliminary investigations or investigations may be publicly disclosed. Therefore, this office has never provided anyone with information about cases or planned activities related to the initiation of criminal proceedings, against any person or for any criminal offense.

Moreover, the third prosecutor's office (Higher Public Prosecutor's Office – Special Department for the Fight Against Corruption in Niš) rejected such a freedom of information request outright, citing that data from investigations and preliminary proceedings are classified, and that the nature of these phases of the process demands confidentiality in the work of the authorities responsible for uncovering criminal acts.

THE NUMBER OF REPORTS IS NOT INCREASING

When it comes to the number of criminal complaints received, data from three surveyed public prosecutor's offices (Higher Public Prosecutor's Office – Special Department for the Fight Against Corruption in Belgrade, in Niš, and in Kraljevo) confirm the previously stated conclusions. Data from two additional offices (Novi Sad and the Prosecutor's Office for Organized Crime) could not be used for analysis because they were provided in annual rather than monthly format, as requested.

The Higher Public Prosecutor's Office – Special Department in Kraljevo received the fewest reports in December 2024 (29). From this perspective, one could conclude that the President's announcement had some effect, since 32 reports were filed in January 2025. However, this conclusion is questionable given that 56 complaints were received in January 2024 – significantly more than in January 2025.

The Niš office received the fewest complaints in July 2024 (18), and the most in November (57). In this context, the 20 complaints received in January 2025 following the President's announcement are only slightly above the monthly minimum and much lower than the peak. The number is also significantly smaller than the 37 reports filed in January 2024.

The Belgrade office consistently receives the most complaints. The data from this office also show the same trend: 56 complaints in December 2024 (the lowest), and 161 in January 2024 (the highest). In comparison, only 9 complaints were filed in January 2025, which speaks volumes.

Whether the President's announcement affected prosecution of these reports can only be inferred indirectly, since all surveyed prosecutor's offices submitted annual rather than monthly data. The Kraljevo office was more specific, stating that no indictments or proposals for indictment were filed based on reports received in January 2025, unlike 2024, when it filed indictments against 70 individuals and issued 29 indictments.

In contrast, the Niš office reported that, based on all complaints received during 2024 and January 2025, it filed six indictments against seven individuals. The Novi Sad office filed 88 prosecutorial acts (both proposals and indictments) against 127 individuals. The Belgrade office provided data only for 2024, reporting 91 indictments and 72 prosecutorial proposals. The Prosecutor's Office for Organized Crime reported only the total number of individuals it indicted in 2024 – 391 persons.

INVESTIGATIONS FOLLOWING THE ANNOUNCEMENT

Until the beginning of February 2025, several special departments for combating corruption at higher public prosecutor's offices in Niš, Kraljevo, and Belgrade, along with their criminal police departments, carried out their usual activities in combating crime and prosecuting perpetrators of criminal offenses. These actions can hardly be characterized as the "fiercest fight against corruption to date" – suspects were arrested for bribing a police officer⁹, a tax inspector and a city administration employee were detained for accepting bribes¹⁰, and a public enforcement officer was arrested for abuse of official position.¹¹

9 <https://www.srbija.gov.rs/vest/855688/uhapsen-osumnjiceni-za-davanje-mita-zaposlenom-u-policijskoj-stanici-veliko-gradiste.php>, <https://www.srbija.gov.rs/vest/854848/uhapsen-zaposleni-u-gradskoj-upravi-u-leskovcu-zbog-primanja-mita.php>

10 <https://www.srbija.gov.rs/vest/848377/uhapsen-poreski-inspektor-zbog-primanja-mita.php>, <https://beograd.vrt.rs/saopstenja/saopstenje-707/>, <https://www.srbija.gov.rs/vest/854848/uhapsen-zaposleni-u-gradskoj-upravi-u-leskovcu-zbog-primanja-mita.php>

11 <https://www.srbija.gov.rs/vest/855169/uhapsen-javni-izvrstelj-zbog-zloupotrebe-sluzbenog-polozaja.php>

Furthermore, the special government website “Stop Corruption” published information on the prosecution of crimes that are not, or at least do not have to be, classified as corruption-related crimes – such as money laundering.¹² The same approach was applied to the official websites of some special departments for combating corruption, where arrests were reported for money laundering¹³, abuse of position of a responsible person¹⁴, and abuse of trust in business operations.¹⁵

However, immediately following a new statement made by the President of the Republic of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić, on February 10, 2025, declaring that “prosecutors have free rein,”¹⁶ some public prosecutors’ offices began to engage in actions that contradict the official data provided in response to previous information requests but align perfectly with the newly issued announcement. Based on information published in the media and on the official websites of public prosecutors’ offices, it could be concluded that this announcement — implying that prosecutors’ hands had previously been tied — actually signifies the control exerted over them.

A PROMINENT NAME TO START WITH

Just one day after this announcement, the former acting director of the Public Enterprise “Elektroprivreda Srbije” (EPS), Milorad Grčić¹⁷, was arrested. Beyond the fact of the arrest, what casts a serious shadow on the independence of the Higher Public Prosecutor’s Office in Belgrade is that he was arrested for abuse of official position and authority in connection with public procurement for this public enterprise—acts committed while he was managing the public company (from 2018 to 2021).¹⁸

Although at first glance it appears to address a long-standing issue and fulfill the recommendation of Transparency Serbia to increase the number of financial forensic experts, the news that the prosecutor’s office will also initiate a financial investigation against the suspects and their associates¹⁹ raises questions about the effectiveness of this procedure. This is because it is customary and logical that a financial investigation—especially in complex cases of high-level corruption—should be ordered and carried out before the arrest of suspects, in order to prevent potential interference with its course, such as transferring or concealing illicitly gained assets or destroying evidence.

Based on the above, it is inevitable to conclude that this case, like most of the actions undertaken afterward, had already been known to the Higher Public Prosecutor’s Office in Belgrade, which had taken no steps to prosecute it before the announcement. Moreover, the fact that the prosecutor’s office provided information on planned investigations to state bodies outside its hierarchy at the very least raises suspicion, and at worst proves that political leadership decides on arrests and the initiation of investigative procedures. This is especially notable given that the same prosecutor’s office failed to prosecute Grčić in early 2023 for the most obvious offense – that for nearly five years, he falsely presented himself as the acting director of the largest state-owned enterprise, making decisions and signing contracts even though his mandate had legally expired. A criminal complaint for this, for the offense of “negligent service,” was filed in 2021 by then-Minister of Energy Zorana Mihajlović.²⁰ In response to a freedom of information request, the Higher Public Prosecutor’s Office in Belgrade informed Transparency Serbia that the complaint had been dismissed, without explanation, asserting there was no basis for prosecution “for any criminal offense prosecuted ex officio.”²¹

12 <https://www.srbija.gov.rs/vest/848041/uhapsena-jedna-osoba-zbog-pranja-novca.php>

13 <https://kraljevo.vjt.rs/saopstenja/saopstenje-za-javnost-posebnog-odeljenja-za-suzbijanje-korupcije-viseg-javnog-tuzilastva-u-kraljevu/>, <https://nis.vjt.rs/saopstenja/saopstenje-za-javnost-182/>

14 <https://kraljevo.vjt.rs/saopstenja/saopstenje-posebnog-odeljenja-za-suzbijanje-korupcije-viseg-javnog-tuzilastva-u-kraljevu-2/>, <https://novisad.vjt.rs/saopstenja/26-02-2025-saopstenje-za-javnost/>

15 <https://novisad.vjt.rs/saopstenja/18-03-2025-saopstenje-za-javnost/>

16 <https://www.sd.rs/sr/vesti/info/vucic-tuzioci-imaju-odresene-ruke-ljudi-moraju-da-imaju-poverenja-u-drzavu-2025-02-10>

17 <https://beograd.vjt.rs/saopstenja/saopstenje-746/>

18 Ibid

19 Ibid

20 https://www.transparentnost.org.rs/images/dokumenti_uz_vesti/Krivicna_prijava_-M.G._7-00-15-2021-01_od_27.5.2021._-Vi%C5%A1e_javno_tu%C5%Bila%C5%A1tvo_u_Beogradu.pdf

21 https://www.transparentnost.org.rs/images/dokumenti_uz_vesti/Odgovor_VJT_-krivi%C4%8Dna_prijava_EPS.pdf

Had the prosecutor's office acted on that complaint as it is acting after the president's recent announcement—and given the fact that two-thirds of public enterprise directors in Serbia are serving in an unlawful status—it would have ended the practice of illegal governance of public enterprises and prevented situations in which those directors, due to their unresolved legal status and ease of blackmail, participate in corrupt activities. Since Grčić is now being charged for acts committed precisely during the period of his unlawful status, part of the responsibility for the abuses, if proven, falls on the Government of Serbia, which did nothing to end the illegal management of EPS.

A similar case involves businessman Aleksandar Papić, who was arrested together with Milorad Grčić over irregularities in the public enterprise "Elektroprivreda Srbije." The same prosecutor's office launched another investigation against him on suspicion that he laundered money by converting property while knowing it originated from criminal activity, intending to conceal and falsely represent its illegal origin.²² Papić became publicly known during the ongoing trial of the criminal group led by Veljko Belivuk and Marko Miljković, specifically in proceedings related to laundering criminal proceeds.²³

The Prosecutor's Office did not respond even after representatives of opposition parties publicly released an alleged letter that Papić had addressed to the President of the Republic of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić, regarding corruption in the construction of the Ruma-Šabac-Loznica highway, due to which €25 million more was paid from the national budget than the actual cost of the construction works on the mentioned highway.²⁴

Given that the Prosecutor's Office did not react even five days after the publication of the letter, in which it was stated that out of the €25 million, €8 million was allegedly given to the Serbian Progressive Party and that the letter mentioned former Minister Nebojša Stefanović as well as the current Minister of Finance Siniša Mali²⁵, representatives of opposition parties submitted documents to the Prosecutor's Office for Organized Crime indicating corruption in the construction of part of the Ruma-Šabac-Loznica highway.²⁶ The Prosecutor's Office for Organized Crime has not issued any statement on the matter to date.

That this is not the end of the controversies is confirmed by the fact that less than twenty days after their arrest, the Republic Public Prosecutor, Zagorka Dolovac, issued a mandatory instruction for action in a specific case, ordering the Higher Public Prosecutor's Office in Belgrade to transfer the case for competent handling to the Prosecutor's Office for Organized Crime.²⁷

Such a reaction not only raises the question of how the jurisdictions of different prosecutor's offices for combating corruption are defined and their mutual delineation established, but also creates doubt about whether communication and coordination of work exists within the prosecutorial organization.

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That other public prosecutor's offices are not immune to such practices is evidenced by the fact that the Higher Public Prosecutor's Office in Niš, just a few days after the aforementioned announcement, ordered the Anti-Corruption Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MUP) to detain the former mayor and member of the Presidency of the Serbian Progressive Party, Dragana Sotirovski, for up to 48 hours on suspicion that, along with other individuals, she committed the criminal offense of abuse of official position between March 2022 and July 2024, thereby damaging the city budget of Niš by 460,322,637 dinars.²⁸

It is reasonable to question what changed over the course of five months and what new information the prosecutor's office obtained, considering that in early September 2024 the same office, based on media reports, initiated proceedings related to a publicly released report from the State Audit Institution, which

22 <https://www.danas.rs/vesti/drustvo/tuzilastvo-aleksandar-papic-istraga/>

23 <https://www.blic.rs/vesti/hronika/prosirena-istraga-protiv-biznismena-aleksandra-papica-sumnjici-se-da-je-prodavao/dhcktr6>

24 <https://beta.rs/content/196350-aleksic-za-beta-sutra-dostavljamo-tuzilastvu-sve-informacije-o-korupciji-na-autoputu-ruma-sabac>

25 <https://beta.rs/content/196350-aleksic-za-beta-sutra-dostavljamo-tuzilastvu-sve-informacije-o-korupciji-na-autoputu-ruma-sabac>

26 <https://direktno.rs/vesti/hronika/502860/aleksic-milivojevic-predali-dokaze-o-korupciji.html>

27 <https://nova.rs/vesti/hronika/istragu-protiv-milorada-grcica-i-aleksandra-papica-preuzima-javno-tuzilastvo-za-organizovani-kriminal-po-naredbi-zagorke-dolovac/>

28 <https://nis.vjt.rs/saopstenja/saopstenje-762/>

expressed a negative opinion regarding the execution of the Niš city budget after establishing numerous violations of laws and other regulations. At the time, the office justified its inaction by stating that the SAI had not submitted its report and that no criminal complaints had been filed based on it²⁹—without clarifying whether the prosecutor’s office had been unable to locate the report on the SAI’s official website or whether it had requested the document from the SAI.

WHAT IS REFERRED TO AS CORRUPTION

A specific aspect of this issue is the conduct of public prosecutors’ offices in the context of the announced anti-corruption campaign, where suspicions have arisen about crimes that do not constitute so-called corruption-related criminal offenses. For example, the Higher Public Prosecutor’s Office in Novi Sad launched proceedings based on suspicions of criminal offenses such as abuse of position by a responsible person, creditor fraud, money laundering, unauthorized pursuit of certain activities³⁰, and breach of trust in conducting economic activities.³¹

Confusion arises because both the prosecution and police investigations are handled by organizational units labeled as “anti-corruption units,” even though they are also responsible for various types of economic crime. As a result, investigations against private business owners who have found some illegal means to reduce their tax liabilities are often labeled as a fight against corruption—even when there is no indication, for example, that these owners bribed a public official to enable such manipulations. While it is legitimate to investigate such crimes, the confusion it creates in public discourse is problematic. This gives the impression that anti-corruption results are greater than they really are.

It is therefore necessary to clearly show what has actually been achieved in cases of abuse of official position, the detection of bribery, trading in influence, and in relation to certain criminal acts that represent a negligible portion of prosecutorial and police statistics—such as abuses related to public procurement.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Prosecution:

- The High Prosecutorial Council should determine whether the President of the Republic’s announcement constituted a violation of prosecutorial independence;
- The Republic Public Prosecutor’s Office, the Prosecutor’s Office for Organized Crime, and four higher public prosecutor’s offices should provide public explanation for the increased activity in corruption-related cases during 2025;
- There should be a clearly defined obligation for public prosecutors to investigate, within a specified timeframe, every documented allegation of high-level corruption reported in the media. There should also be an obligation to present to the public the facts established in such cases;
- Public prosecutors’ offices should provide explanations when they decide not to pursue cases involving suspected high-level corruption.;
- Prosecutor’s offices should regularly publish data on anti-corruption prosecutions in an open format and clearly distinguish between corrupt criminal offenses and other offenses under the jurisdiction of the Prosecutor for Organized Crime (TOK) and the Special Department for Combating Corruption (POSK);
- The Government and the High Prosecutorial Council (VST) should ensure that prosecution services have the necessary working conditions: personnel, office space, and equipment. They should also create the conditions for hiring more financial forensic experts, including, if necessary, amending legal frameworks to allow recruitment under market-based terms instead of standard civil service salary structures;

29 <https://www.danas.rs/vesti/drustvo/vise-javno-tuzilastvo-u-nisu-formiralo-predmet-povodom-izvestaja-dri-o-tosenju-proslogodisnjeg-gradskog-budzeta/>

30 <https://novisad.vjt.rs/saopstenja/26-02-2025-saopstenje-za-javnost/>

31 <https://novisad.vjt.rs/saopstenja/18-03-2025-saopstenje-za-javnost/>

- The VST and all prosecution offices should increase the number of prosecutors dedicated solely to corruption cases, enabling more proactive investigations based on publicly available information about corrupt practices;
- The Law on the Organization and Jurisdiction of State Authorities in Combating Organized Crime, Terrorism, and Corruption should be amended to assign the Prosecutor's Office for Organized Crime responsibility for all corruption cases involving high-level public officials;
- The Criminal Procedure Code should be amended to permit the use of special investigative techniques in all investigations of corruption-related offenses.



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