

INNOVATION, WORK, SOCIETY

COUNTERING SYSTEMIC CORRUPTION IN THE CENTRAL EXECUTIVE,
LEGISLATIVE, AND JUDICIAL AGENCIES OF UKRAINE
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Summary

Given the negative trends highlighted in the media in 2024–2025, the issue of countering systemic corruption in the judiciary, law enforcement agencies, central executive bodies, and the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine is relevant and has been provided for and enshrined in national and international legal acts. At the same time, we must remember that Ukraine is experiencing one of the most brutal wars on European soil since World War II. The aggressor state is attempting to impose autocracy and undermine the country's democratic foundations. The article demonstrates that, in such circumstances, it is of paramount importance to unite and support processes related to European integration within the country. Society demands effective and timely action from the authorities to introduce the necessary changes, rather than lobbying for personal initiatives that undermine anti-corruption measures.

Key words: Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, state institutions, law enforcement agencies, criminality, full-scale invasion, National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine, integrity.

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1. Introduction

Society, represented by its institutions, individuals and legal entities, carries out activities to counter corruption crimes on their own initiative or in accordance with their duties to perform state functions. These activities aim to minimise the risks of corruption crimes and the impact of relevant criminogenic factors on the development of a democratic state governed by the rule of law (*Busol, 2015*). The European Commission's Communication

on the Fight Against Corruption (*European Commission, 2023*) emphasises that an effective strategy to prevent and combat corruption is essential for protecting European values, implementing policies effectively, maintaining the rule of law and fostering trust in public institutions. This aligns with the third Copenhagen criterion for EU membership, which stipulates that a country's legislation must align with the European Union's *acquis*, including in the area of corruption prevention. In the context of Ukraine's accession to the European Union, the European Union's anti-corruption strategies are of fundamental importance, particularly given the ongoing Russian aggression. This is not only a key foreign policy priority, but also a matter of existential importance.

The main documents that will determine Ukraine's future development, particularly with regard to anti-corruption measures, are the Ukraine Facility Plan, the European Union's Enlargement Report for Ukraine and the International Monetary Fund's Extended Fund Facility programme (*Transparency International, 2024*).

The following scholars have studied the topic of combating corruption in Ukraine's judicial system: M. H. Kolodiaznyi, I.O. Roshchyna, L. K. Bairancha, Y. O. Fidria; V. Averianov, O. Bandurka, Y. Bytiak, V. Kolpakov, O. Kuzmenko, Y. Shemchushenko, and others in the executive branch; O. M. Bandurka, O. A. Banchuk, V. M. Harashchuk, O. Y. Vasylenko, V. M. Trepak, R. M. Tuchak, and others in the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

The study aims to identify the problems of combating corruption within the judiciary, law enforcement agencies, central executive bodies and the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, based on a comprehensive analysis.

The empirical basis of the study consists of national regulatory and legal acts, international documents, and research papers on the subject. It also draws on official statistics from anti-corruption and judicial bodies, case law, and sociological, monitoring and analytical studies by Ukrainian and foreign organisations. Journalistic investigations in the media are also referenced, as they reflect the state of anti-corruption efforts and public opinion with a sufficient degree of reliability.

The study's methodology is based on systemic, formal, legal, structural, functional and comparative methods. This approach enabled a comprehensive and systematic consideration of the issue.

2. Results of Sociological Studies on Corruption Offences

According to the results of the nationwide study "Corruption in Ukraine 2024: Understanding, Perception, Prevalence", conducted by the sociological research company Info Sapiens, Ukrainians' actual experience of corruption was more than four times lower than the estimated prevalence of corruption. 91.4% of the population believe that corruption is somewhat or very widespread, while 18.7% of citizens have experienced corruption first-hand (*National Anti-Corruption Bureau, 2024*).

In the 2024 Corruption Perceptions Index, Ukraine lost one point, scoring 35 out of 100 and ranking 105th out of 180 countries. For Ukraine, this decrease is significant as it indicates a lack of progress in the fight against corruption despite legislative and governmental action. By way of comparison, the scores of Ukraine's European integration partners – Georgia, Montenegro and Turkey – remained unchanged. Meanwhile, North Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina lost two points each and Serbia lost one. Only two countries improved their results: Moldova improved by one point to reach a total of 43, and Albania also improved. Romania's score remained at 46 points. Therefore, it can be

assumed that the decline in indicators and stagnation is a general trend among Eastern European and Central Asian countries. Conversely, Ukraine's ability to minimise corruption is evident in its steady growth over the past 11 years, achieving a total score of 10 points. During the period of martial law, Ukraine implemented certain anti-corruption measures in the space of four incomplete years, which proved effective. Cooperation between the National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine, the Specialised Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office and the High Anti-Corruption Court has led to the exposure of high-profile corruption cases involving former ministers, former Members of Parliament and the former President of the Supreme Court. The Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine voted to increase the number of staff at the National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine and expand the powers of the Specialised Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office. They also adopted a law to begin reforming the Accounting Chamber of Ukraine.

Amendments have been made to the public procurement legislation, and implementation of the State Anti-Corruption Programme is ongoing. A notable event during martial law was the resumption of electronic declaration and reporting by political parties. Reform of the Financial Investigations Service has begun, with the first steps taken to regulate agreements with the investigation.

However, Ukrainian citizens have also witnessed numerous exposés, public discussions, negative trends and decisions that could nullify these achievements. These include cases within the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine involving suspicions of bribery during the purchase of clothing for the Armed Forces of Ukraine. There have also been accusations of corruption in the Ministry for the Development of Communities and Territories of Ukraine, as well as interference in the tender process for the renovation of the Okhmatdyt Children's Hospital, which has caused a public outcry. It should be noted that many similar events in 2024 are not included in the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) for methodological reasons. Nevertheless, they negatively impact citizens' perception of corruption. When calculating the 2025 CPI, these negative circumstances may be offset by the Accounting Chamber reform, the announcement of an external audit of the National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine and the resumption of the large-scale privatisation of former Russian assets (the sale of AEROC LLC).

According to a study by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology, more than two-thirds (70.7%) of the population had encountered some form of corruption at least once a year back in 2015, but such experiences are gradually becoming less common among citizens. For comparison, 27% of the population encountered corruption in 2020, which is almost a third more than the previous year.

This tendency for perceptions of corruption to significantly exceed actual experiences of corruption is also observed in other countries. According to the 2024 Eurobarometer survey, "Citizens' Attitudes Towards Corruption in the EU", more than 90% of the populations of Portugal, Croatia, Greece, Slovenia, Malta and Cyprus consider corruption to be widespread in their countries. At the same time, these countries have fairly high scores in Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index. In 2024, 68% of citizens in European Union countries considered corruption to be very widespread. This shows that perceptions of corruption do not necessarily reflect its actual level. Instead, population assessments are influenced by various factors, including intensive media coverage of corruption cases, insufficient public awareness of what constitutes corruption under the law and the influence of disinformation (*National Anti-Corruption Bureau, 2024*).

Ukraine's efforts to combat corruption should be viewed in the context of the country being at war with the Russian Federation.

3. Problems of Combating Corruption in the Judiciary

Given their special status, judges are subject to special criminal liability, the rights and obligations of which are enshrined in the Law of Ukraine “On the Judicial System and Status of Judges.” While most measures to ensure criminal proceedings cannot be applied to them, there are special features that characterise the consideration of criminal cases in which judges are suspects (*Salamatova, 2015*).

The most vulnerable areas of the judicial system are the effectiveness and predictability of court proceedings, compliance with reasonable time limits, the fairness of proceedings overall, and the prompt execution of court rulings. (*Babikov et al., 2025*). The judges draw attention to the problems posed by excessive workloads and constant media pressure, stating that “a judge who hears dozens of cases a day is physically unable to give equal attention to each one. Added to this is the ‘righteous anger’ of society, which expects a verdict to be delivered immediately. The robe symbolises serving the law, not the mood of the moment” (*Maryna Barsuk, 2025*). However, it should be noted that official statistics do not accurately reflect the level of corruption within the judicial system; rather, they demonstrate the effectiveness of the State Bureau of Investigations.

Corruption in the judiciary can be observed in courts, judicial administration offices, and the governing bodies of the judicial system. It is often accompanied by unethical behaviour from external politicians, individuals, or civil society representatives who are attempting to influence judgments improperly or illegally. Such corruption can lead to societal instability or even conflict due to an inefficient judicial system.

Successful judicial reform is one of the seven key requirements of the European Union related to Ukraine’s European integration (*Decree of the President of Ukraine, 2023; Pryshchepa Yaroslav, 2023*). One of the measures of the Council of Europe Action Plan for Ukraine 2023-2026, “Resilience, Recovery and Reconstruction,” approved by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on 14 December 2022, regarding support for the justice system, is, in particular, support for the functioning and development of an independent, effective and reliable justice system, including restoring the national court system, strengthening the structural independence of the judiciary further, expanding access to justice and improving justice effectiveness.

In response to challenges posed by society and the international community, the State Anti-Corruption Programme for 2023–2025 set out measures to prevent corruption in key areas. One such challenge identified is ensuring the fairness of courts, prosecutors and law enforcement agencies (*Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, 2023*).

The large number of appeals to administrative courts by citizens is explained by significant and long-standing problems in the activities of public authorities. The main measures that will contribute to eliminating these issues are developing and implementing information technologies, de-bureaucratising court proceedings, involving the public in the formation of the judiciary and supervisory activities, optimising the professional selection and training of judges, introducing strict liability for violations of ethical conduct rules by judges, and forming a unified approach to case law (*Bondarenko, 2021*). The procedures for assessing the qualifications of judges and the competitive procedures must be improved. Clear and predictable integrity and professional ethics criteria (indicators) must also be developed (*Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, 2023*).

The High Council of Justice’s key current tasks are to address the shortage of judges and to enhance and restore the disciplinary accountability of judges. The current initiatives aimed at improving the quality of the judicial process should continue, including improving

the disciplinary function of the High Council of Justice, strengthening judicial control over the enforcement of court rulings, improving the quality of legal education, and so on (*European Business Association, 2024*).

The measures taken by the state to increase trust in the judiciary and fulfil Ukraine's international obligations regarding judicial reform have not produced the desired outcome. The level of corruption among judges remains high. Anti-corruption agencies are ineffective in detecting corruption crimes within the judicial system.

The Law amends Article 219 of the Criminal Procedure Code of Ukraine with regard to the jurisdiction of criminal cases, delineating the powers of anti-corruption and economic investigative bodies. It also increases the value threshold at which a case must be investigated by the National Anti-Corruption Bureau (NABU). The Law has been supplemented with the following provision: persons accused of committing serious and/or especially serious corruption-related criminal offences cannot be employed by the Armed Forces of Ukraine or other army units if criminal proceedings against them have reached the court stage.

4. Systemic Corruption in Central Executive Bodies

Crimes committed by law enforcement officers pose an increased public danger as they undermine government authority and violate citizens' rights, freedoms and legitimate interests (*Nesterenko, 2024*). An analysis of the implementation of the Ministry of Internal Affairs' Anti-Corruption Programme for 2023–2025 revealed the main issues raised by citizens. These include long waiting times to see administrators at the Ministry of Internal Affairs' service centres, poor customer service, and visitors being unable to obtain services or electronic queue tickets. Consequently, the service centres of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine were found to be the most corrupt, which has a negative impact on the ministry's overall anti-corruption rating. The most common manifestations of corruption were related to the registration or deregistration of vehicles, the issuance of driving licences and the obtaining of number plates. Employees of service centres were most often the initiators of corruption situations.

A review of special studies on corruption prevention has identified several offences that create favourable conditions for corruption within the police force.

1. Using one's official position to interfere in the activities of various types of governmental and non-governmental agencies.
2. Granting unjustified advantages to certain legal entities and individuals when preparing and adopting decisions on issues within an internal affairs officer's remit.
3. Using information obtained in the performance of official duties for personal or group benefit.
4. Violation of the procedure for accepting and considering statements, complaints or appeals from legal entities or individuals.
5. Requiring legal entities and individuals to provide information not required by applicable legislation.
6. Unfounded refusal to provide information required by law or other regulatory acts, or providing incomplete or inaccurate information or delaying its provision.
7. The illegal creation of obstacles for individuals and legal entities when exercising their rights and legitimate interests.

To ensure the full implementation of anti-corruption prevention measures and in accordance with legal requirements, the Ministry of Internal Affairs' Anti-Corruption Programme for 2023–25 was approved.

Measures focusing on education, punishment, prevention and instilling a sense of duty and responsibility are expected to be effective in combating corruption. In order to prevent corruption, it is necessary to mould citizens' values and cultivate their skills. However, given the context of martial law and police officers' involvement in combat operations, it would be inappropriate to conduct a public survey. Police officers can perform their duties successfully if they are confident that the government will reliably protect their rights and interests. This protection should be legal, organisational, methodological and managerial in nature. It should include the introduction of anti-corruption standards containing clear algorithms for police officers' actions in situations relating to corruption. It should also define mechanisms for preventing corruption risks, and include the protection of whistleblowers, as well as the establishment of transparent and reliable protection mechanisms for them. Furthermore, the social security of police officers must be ensured.

Amendments have been made under Resolution No. 1039 of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine (*Resolution of the CMU, 2025*) to facilitate the work of public administration and, consequently, reduce the level of corruption in central executive bodies. The powers of the Prime Minister or minister to coordinate the activities of central executive bodies may now be exercised by issuing decisions in the form of acts and protocol resolutions of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, instructions of the Prime Minister or minister on matters specified by the Law of Ukraine "On Central Executive Bodies"; issuing binding instructions on matters within the remit of the relevant central executive bodies, unless otherwise stipulated by law.

An analysis of statistics from the Prosecutor General's Office shows that the situation regarding criminal offences relating to the provision of public services is neither dynamic nor positive. Thus, 18,330 such unlawful acts were committed in 2021; this figure fell to 11,617 in 2022, increased to 14,820 in 2023, and then rose again to 16,820 in 2024. As of April 2025, a total of 6,978 criminal offences had been committed in official and professional activities related to the provision of public services (*Prosecutor General's Office, 2025*). Therefore, the actual number of socially dangerous acts remains consistently high, albeit showing a slight downward trend.

The social sector covers important areas such as education, healthcare, social security and housing policy. It must guarantee equal opportunities for all citizens. However, it is in this sector that corruption most often gives rise to social injustice by limiting access to basic services for the most vulnerable members of society. The main cause of corruption in the social sector is the concentration of significant financial and administrative resources in the hands of individual officials, who often exploit their positions for personal gain. Problems such as obtaining improper benefits in the distribution of housing subsidies, abuse in the allocation of social benefits and the illegal provision of medical services are common. The highest number of corruption violations has been recorded in relation to the distribution of health insurance funds and the provision of social care (*National Anti-Corruption Bureau, 2021*).

Education is one of the sectors most vulnerable to corruption. This corruption can manifest itself in the form of bribery to gain admission to higher education institutions, biased assessment of students, or the misuse of budget funds intended for the repair or equipping of educational institutions (*Transparency International Ukraine, 2021*). Recently, high-profile crimes have been uncovered in postgraduate education, with numerous cases of male applicants gaining admission through corruption to avoid military service.

Healthcare is another area greatly affected by corruption. Patients often face demands for illegal payments for basic medical services that should be free of charge by law. Abuses have also been detected in the procurement of medicines and medical equipment, resulting in inflated prices and the inefficient use of budget funds (*World Bank, 2021*).

Therefore, control over procurement in the healthcare sector needs to be strengthened by introducing electronic platforms for monitoring tenders, such as ProZorro (*EU Anti-Corruption Initiative in Ukraine, 2021*). Using digital technologies minimises human error and makes these processes more transparent. The Republic of Lithuania, for example, has introduced a “Social Card” system that automates the distribution of aid and prevents corruption. Corruption in the social sector undermines trust in public institutions and has serious socio-economic consequences. It exacerbates inequality, reduces the quality of social services and increases expenditure on unproductive goals. Corruption also has a negative impact on society’s morals, creating a sense of injustice and hopelessness among citizens (*Kokhan, 2025*).

5. How to Prevent Corruption in the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine

Political parties are public institutions in modern society that are based on ideology. They enable certain segments of the population who share a particular ideology to participate in the formation and activities of state authorities and the government. This right is based on Part 1, Article 5 of the Constitution of Ukraine, which states that the people of Ukraine are the sole source of power, exercising it directly through referendums and indirectly through state authorities and local self-government bodies. The Constitution also prohibits any usurpation of power. Accordingly, this is one of the legal ways in which they can participate in the process of forming and exercising power. Analysis of open sources suggests that bribery of voters and candidates for deputies and applicants for public office in government bodies in Ukraine is commonplace, and is carried out through propaganda aimed at influencing the electorate. Thus, Ukraine has established an electoral system in which voters elect candidates for the position of head of state or deputy who are proposed to them by relevant clans. These clans have acquired significant material resources for corrupt purposes, including the media, which operate against the rules. Of the 452 deputies of the 9th convocation of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, one in ten has been or currently is a defendant in criminal cases during their term of office. There are over 50 of them in total. At least 10% of deputies belonging to each faction or group in the Verkhovna Rada of the 9th convocation are defendants in criminal cases, with the most common charges being treason and corruption. Approximately 25 Servant of the People deputies have been or are currently suspected of criminal offences, equating to one in every 13 members of the faction. It should be noted that those who selected the deputies for the Servant of the People lists for the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine do not consider themselves responsible for the large number of people’s representatives involved in criminal cases. However, D. Razumkov, the first name on the Servant of the People list, told journalists that it is the deputies’ responsibility (*Bihus.Info, 2025*). The following high-profile cases illustrate the successful exposure of corrupt practices among Ukrainian MPs. For example, in August 2025, the National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine and the Specialised Anti-Corruption Prosecutor’s Office revealed widespread corruption in the procurement of unmanned aerial vehicles and radio-electronic warfare equipment. Among those exposed for receiving or giving improper benefits were a member of the Ukrainian Parliament, heads of district and city military civil administrations, and National Guard servicemen.

This operation was made possible by Law No. 4560-IX, signed by the President of Ukraine, which removed a number of barriers to the work of anti-corruption bodies. This contributed to the stability of their activities when investigating issues that were sensitive to the government. This operation demonstrates how institutional support and teamwork at the highest level can contribute to real change (*National Anti-Corruption Bureau, 2025*). On 7 October

2025, the National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine and the Specialised Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office referred the case of a former Member of Parliament, whose actions resulted in millions of losses to the government, to court (*National Anti-Corruption Bureau, 2025*). Therefore, real change in the fight against corruption among MPs can be brought about by institutional support and teamwork at the highest level.

As experience around the world shows, a key feature of a country's democratic political system is the existence of a group of political parties that profess democratic values. When describing democratic systems in Western countries, researchers note that elected officials are chosen in free and fair elections. These officials have the right to influence government decisions on policy issues, and virtually the entire adult population has the right to vote in elections for government bodies, and to stand for government office. Citizens also have the right to hold and express their own political views on the state of the economy and society. In order to exercise their electoral and other rights, citizens can access alternative sources of information and set up public organisations, as well as political parties (*By Robert A. Dahl, 1989; Gabriel A. Almond et al., 2005; Wolf Linder Sean, Mueller, 2021*).

In democratic societies, political parties provide a platform for ideological dialogue and communication between society and the state. Their aim is to create secure social stability. It is therefore important not only to articulate the interests of certain social groups, but also to realise these interests to the greatest possible extent at all levels.

6. Conclusions

Ukraine's score in the 2024 Corruption Perceptions Index indicates an intensification of negative trends in the fight against corruption in the country, which should alert the authorities. Against the backdrop of a protracted war and the country's commitment to integrating into the European Union, this indicates stagnation in the fight against corruption and the need for systemic changes.

Trust in the current Parliament has declined among the public and Ukraine's international partners due to the large number of corruption offences committed by its members. The situation is further exacerbated by faction members who are not involved in corruption scandals turning a blind eye to their law-breaking colleagues. This situation does nothing to help end the war and clearly damages the authorities' positive image. The extent of the corruption suggests that Ukrainian MPs feel they are above the law and will not face legal consequences for their actions. They disregard not only the interests of Ukrainian citizens, but also public opinion regarding their actions. The greatest threat to statehood is Ukrainians becoming accustomed to corruption among MPs and accepting it as normal and inevitable. The idea that Ukrainian MPs cannot be legally held accountable is firmly rooted among citizens, giving ordinary people the tacit right to commit corrupt acts themselves by following the example set by dishonest elected representatives.

The current state of corruption and related criminal offences remains consistently unsatisfactory. This is evidenced by negative quantitative indicators and an absence of positive trends.

At the same time, however, certain positive trends can be identified. Based on the quantitative indicator of criminal offences relating to official and professional activities in the provision of public services, it is predicted that the total number of such illegal acts will decrease slightly by the end of the current year.

The direction of anti-corruption law-making activities and the strengthening of criminal liability for such offences suggests that the decision will be effective and that the quantitative indicator will decrease in the next few years (*Arsentiev, 2025*).

In a democratic state, social order is achieved by ensuring the integrity of police officers, whose mission is to enforce the law and support the social well-being of individuals. Police accountability to society and compliance with societal demands are key to fostering an atmosphere of intolerance to corruption within every workplace. This can be achieved by taking a systematic approach to implementing a variety of preventive and disciplinary measures against individuals who violate anti-corruption legislation. Minimising corruption in all areas of society must be a state priority. Above all, this requires the establishment of an anti-corruption culture among citizens, particularly within the judiciary, law enforcement agencies, central executive bodies, and the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine.

In order to minimise the threat of growing corruption during martial law, isolated declarative measures are insufficient. Systemic changes to Ukraine's governance approach are required.

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