

Russia, EU Neighbors Allow Proliferation of Corruption – Watchdog

By [The Moscow Times](#)

July 03, 2015

The  **Moscow Times**

WASHINGTON — Political and business elites in five countries bordering the European Union and Russia exert undue influence over the judiciary and legislature, allowing corruption to go unchecked, a watchdog said on Thursday.

The lack of progress in fighting corruption in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine is hampering democratic progress and undermining greater economic and political cooperation with the EU, said Transparency International (TI).

The collapse of President Viktor Yanukovich's government in Ukraine last year amid street protests favoring closer ties to the EU than with Russia exposed massive corruption and asset stripping by government officials.

TI said in a report that risks are unacceptably high for similar problems in the five countries. Over the next five years, the EU is poised to send at least $\text{€}15$ billion in assistance to eastern

countries and that money may end up in corrupt pockets, it cautioned.

TI called on the EU to make any further financial support for the countries between its borders and Russia conditional upon taking specific steps to address corruption and ensuring civil society is free from political intimidation.

"The system of checks and balances against corruption across these countries lacks oversight or accountability," Anne Koch, TI Director of Europe and Central Asia Department, said in a statement.

"Corrupt individuals — be they politicians or business persons — are often able to get away without worry of prosecution,"

In all five countries, the judiciary is viewed as one of the institutions most infected by corruption, the report said.

"This is particularly stark in the cases of Moldova and Ukraine where 80 percent and 87 percent of citizens respectively perceive the judiciary to be corrupt or extremely corrupt," the report said.

When the judges, courts and law enforcement also have limited independence from a powerful executive arm of government, their ability to actively fight corruption is especially compromised, the report said.

Azerbaijan stands at one of the spectrum, rich in oil and enjoying a national income double that of its neighbors, its politics are dominated by a powerful leader and, standing at 29 out of 100 on the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI), it has the second highest level of perceived corruption in the region.

Georgia stands at the other end with a modest GDP, relatively well functioning democratic systems and, ranked on the CPI at 52, is seen as the least corrupt of the five countries studied.

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