

# Geopolitics, State Capture and Peak Corruption: What Is Next for Anticorruption in Southeast Europe?

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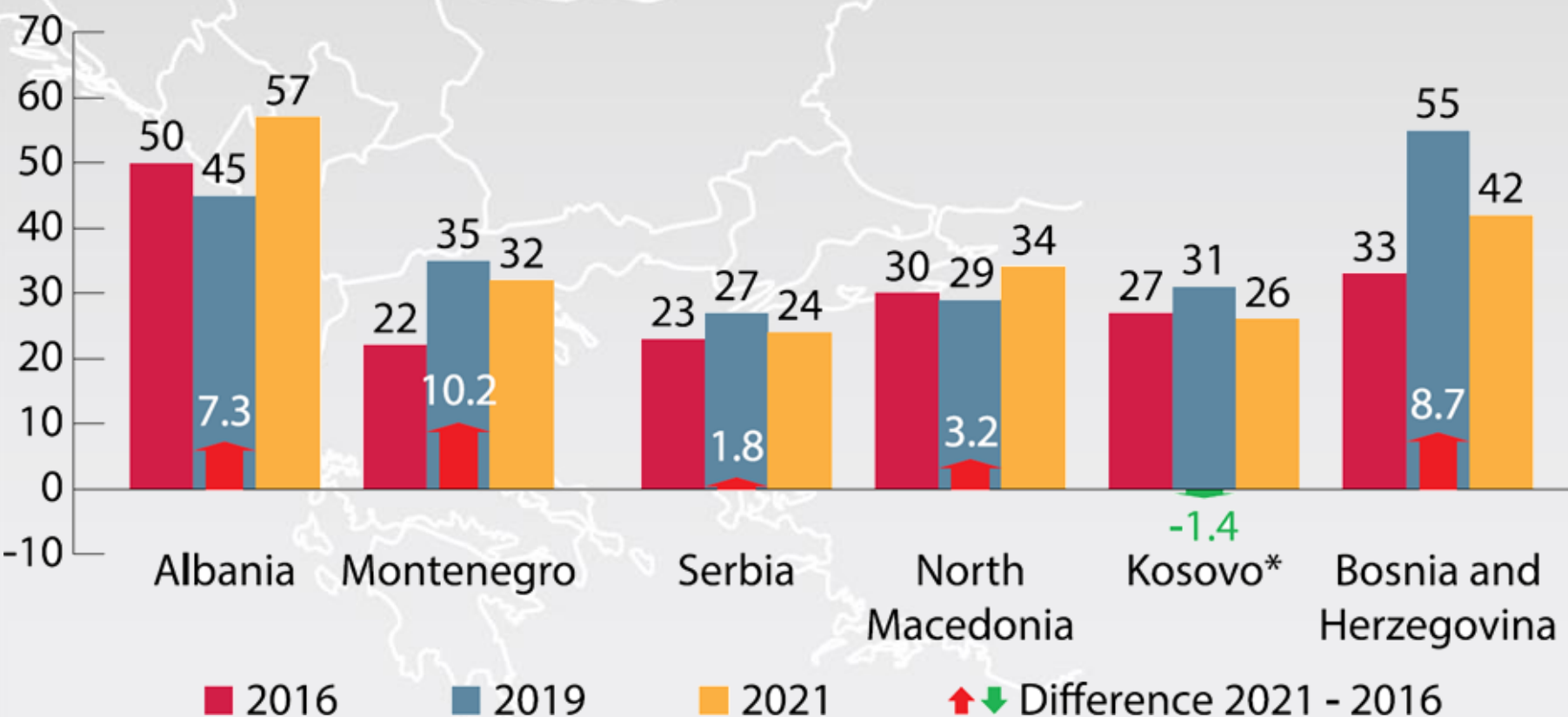


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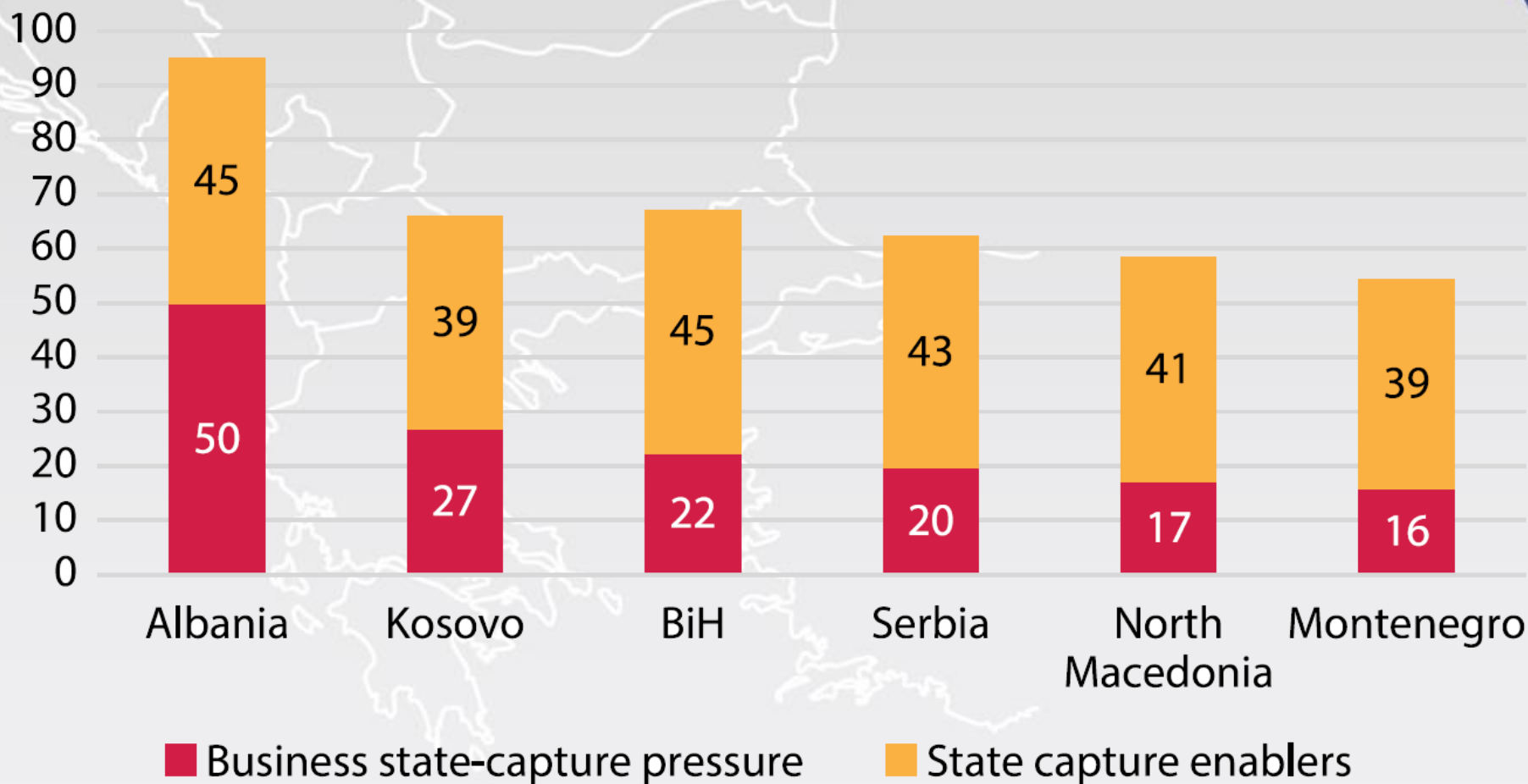
# Zero hour: the war in Ukraine and the promise of enlargement

- **Geopolitics of anticorruption:** how to help when no help is (officially?) requested?
- Anticorruption should not slip from the agenda
- The **integrity** of WB governments remains under serious stress.
- **Stalled momentum** of anticorruption reforms.
- **State capture** is influencing drafting, adoption and enforcement of government rules and regulations.
- Yet, neither the Western Balkan **anticorruption strategies** nor **EC's assessment reports** address it.

# Corruption pressure: up it goes again



# State capture vulnerability is high



# Official documents abound, unlike results

- AC strategies in the late 2010s are **not updated**, new ones are rarely developed.
- Existing documents are of **general nature**, with no government commitments to measurable targets.
- New laws in the WB countries are now increasingly targeting **sophisticated forms of corruption** (conflict of interest, lobbying, origin of assets).
- However, law drafting is **not sufficiently inclusive and transparent**.

# Problems in the institutional infrastructure of anticorruption

- **Broad-mandated** anticorruption institutions are vulnerable to:
  - being **overwhelmed** by the complexity and scope of their enforcement tasks;
  - being captured by special interests.
- Hundreds of referrals/reports/investigations → a **handful of convictions**.
- Lack of relevant and reliable **enforcement information**, needed to identify the reasons for this discrepancy.
- CSOs are among the few running engines of anticorruption, but used as a **token (check-box) of “inclusiveness”** rather than a respected stakeholder.

# Public procurement: a high-risk zone

- High share of **restricted procedures**.
- Frequent use of **emergency procedures**, especially during the pandemic.
- Using **lowest price** as main criterion is prone to **abuse** (best price-quality ratio criterion rarely used).
- In cases of “**strategic**” **interest** contractors of public works are awarded **preferential treatment**.



# Media capture and anticorruption

- Dominant role of **oligarchs** in domestic media -> **low media freedom**.
- Failure of watchdog function ('**nothing happens** even if corrupt politicians are exposed in media').
- Editorial **independence** is **compromised**.
- **Media biases** → result from high levels of political polarisation.
- **Intimidation** of journalists for anticorruption reporting.



# Turning the tide: how to regain the anticorruption momentum

- **Prioritise the dismantling of state capture**, and abandon the formula “if government is the problem, government should be the solution”.
  - Tackle **illicit finance flows** (dirty money that crosses an international border, illegally earned, moved, or used)
  - Target **media capture**, using the European parliament drive
- **Measure effect** of evidence-based anticorruption policies, **not intentions**.
- **Focus on outputs** (actual impact) not inputs (regulations, procedures, resources).

# Geopolitics, State Capture and Peak Corruption



What Is Next for Anticorruption  
in the Western Balkans?

**Thank you!**  
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