CORRUPTION AND MONEY LAUNDERING IN THE REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA

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INTRODUCTION

Two negative social phenomena of corruption and money laundering are occurring in parallel in the United States. Namely, money originating from organized crime, to be unrecorded by the appropriate services, criminals to enjoy criminal money, but also to become more competitive on the market, created money laundering schemes and techniques. These two criminal phenomena manifest in parallel and intertwine in such a way that money from crime is placed in the legal financial system through corrupt activities, with the presentation of "fictitious income" of legal companies. For this purpose, companies where it is "difficult" to control income were used, and laundromats were selected, which is where the term "money laundering" came from. The crime of money laundering is the act of processing a large amount of illegal money resulting from criminal activities into funds that appear clean or legal according to the law, using sophisticated, creative, and complex methods. It is a process or an act that aims to hide or conceal the origin of money or funds, obtained from the proceeds of a crime, which are then transformed into funds that appear to originate from legitimate activities (Anggun, 2022).

Corruption and money laundering are also an economic category that is often the cause of an imbalance between supply and demand. Influence trading is driven by business interests, and there could not be a comprehensive reform step that can be taken without the support of the political and economic elite (Lažetić, 2021).

Corruption and money laundering in North Macedonia have a significant impact on general functioning with negative effects on economic development, the political situation, the rule of law, effective access to justice, and public institutions. Following the recommendations of international conventions, but also the reports of international institutions and bodies since the beginning of the new millennium, systemic measures and activities have been undertaken to improve national legislation and establish special institutions in the direction of harmonization of national legislation. It is widespread and deeply penetrated in all sectors and pores of society, so it is always among the first five biggest problems for citizens. More than 80 % of citizens point to the inefficiency of the judicial system in the fight against corruption, the desire for quick personal enrichment of those who come to power, and the lack of strict administrative control over corruption. The inefficiency and corruption of the judicial system are also noted in the so-called Priebe report from 2017(https://vistinomer.mk/izveshtajot-na-pribe-tezhi-od-argumenti), where a group of high-ranking experts refers to the "captivity" of the judiciary by a small number of judges in influential positions who abuse the judicial system to gain power and advance personal interests and the interests of the ruling elite (Trpkovski, 2020).

Corruption and money laundering are white collar crimes and also a major organized crime. Historically, the term money laundering originates from the mafia buying laundromats as a place to invest

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the proceeds of crime. The crime of money laundering is generally carried out through several stages, namely placement, layering, and integration.

Without money laundering, there would still be corruption, but bribes would have to be paid (and held) in cash or readily movable valuables such as gold, diamonds and art. Not all bribes received have to be laundered: some cash can be redistributed as 'grease' payments or simply spent. Corrupt public and corporate officials, as well as other criminals, often use laundering agents, relying on them to show discretion in handling funds – and to be uncooperative in any criminal investigations that might arise (Levi, 2001).

In order for most corrupt proceeds to be reused they must undergo the money laundering process. It is during this process that corruption and money laundering in most cases interact at some point and form what could be described as a family-like relationship. However, for the money laundering process to be completed, corruption is highly noticeable as a facilitative ingredient. It has been observed that in almost all cases involving significant corrupt practices across very large spectrum, the proceeds do usually undergo the money laundering process. Corruption instruments contain provisions on the link or interaction between corruption and money laundering. The relationship between corruption and money laundering tends to be very clear. Corrupt money is often laundered in order to be legitimised. The World Bank noted this close link and observed: "Corruption and money laundering are a related and self-reinforcing phenomenon. Corruption proceeds are disguised and laundered by corrupt officials to be able to spend or invest such proceeds (Ekwueme & Bagheri, 2013).

In the Moneyval Report from 2013, it was noted that all cases in North Macedonia the perpetrators of laundering money and the proceeds of crime were prosecuted for abuse of official position and authority or tax evasion. (Report, april, 2014)

According to the Transparency International Report for 2021 "high corruption" is becoming a common term in North Macedonia, but it is rarely defined in a way that clarifies the necessary judicial and legislative reforms. It has been noted that the international organizations of the Group of States against Corruption (GRECO) and the European Commission (EC), although anti-corruption legislation was passed that meets international standards, the country did not continue with the implementation and enforcement of the legislation, thus eroding the public trust in the rule of law, where powerful politicians enjoy impunity, laws tailored to private interests and interference in the judicial system (Report, 2021).

The research for the period 2014-2022 is conducted based on the data from the Report of Transparency International and from the annual report of the Public Prosecutor's Office since it is the prosecuting authority for these criminal acts that are prosecuted in the course of official duty, and those reports include the data from filed criminal reports from all state authorities that have police powers, by the Law on Criminal Procedure (Official Gazette of the RM, No. 150/10), but also the reports from other sources - inspection services, anti-corruption commission, etc. In the same way, the data for the cases that are handled by the parties to the Basic Public Prosecutor's Office for the prosecution of organized crime and corruption are also taken into consideration. Nine years were covered during which the data were collected, synthesized, and analyzed, according to which the data for the reported, accused, and convicted perpetrators for all criminal acts pursued in the course of official duty are presented, and the research is only related to corrupt criminal acts from groups of criminal acts against official duty and laundered money and other proceeds from a criminal offense.

A special criminal offense with elements of illegal enrichment of public officials is also incriminated, thus enabling the authorities to conduct financial investigations and provide evidence for illegally acquired property and its confiscation, which as a measure is introduced with the purpose of confiscation of criminal proceeds and property subject to money laundering, i.e. legalization of criminal proceeds. The list of corrupt crimes based on the status characteristics of the perpetrators and the area of enforcement has increased since 2007 when the Republic of Macedonia became a member of the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) (https://www.stat.gov.mk/Dokumenti/MK.pdf). However, in 2023, in a non-transparent and quick procedure, amendments were made to the criminal offense "Abuse of official position and authority" (Official Gazette of the RSM, no.188/23).

CRIMINAL-LEGAL ASPECTS OF CORRUPTION AND MONEY LAUNDERING IN THE REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA

Regarding corruption, since the adoption of the first Criminal Code in the Macedonian criminal legislation in 1996 (Official Gazette of the RM, No. 37/96), more corrupt crimes have been criminalized, which are mainly systematized in Chapter 30 of Crimes against official duty, and for the first time, a criminal offense with elements of money laundering was incriminated – "Laundering of money and other proceeds of crime", which includes criminal acts of legalization of criminal money originating from the illegal drug trade. With the goal of harmonization of national criminal legislation and acceptance of recommendations from international conventions and reports of international bodies, the list of corrupt criminal offenses is expanded to criminal offenses systematized in the other chapters of the Criminal Code. Several amendments and additions were made to the Criminal Code to define the status characteristics of the perpetrators, redefine criminal acts, introduce criminal liability for legal entities, and predict measures for confiscation of property (Official Gazette of the RM, No., 37/96, 19/04, 80/09, 114/09, 248/18).

A special criminal offense with elements of illegal enrichment of public officials is also incriminated, thus enabling the authorities to conduct financial investigations and provide evidence for illegally acquired property and its confiscation, which as a measure is introduced with the purpose of confiscation of criminal proceeds and property subject to money laundering, i.e. legalization of criminal proceeds. The list of corrupt crimes based on the status characteristics of the perpetrators and the area of enforcement has increased since 2007 when the Republic of Macedonia became a member of the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) (*https://www.stat.gov.mk/Dokumenti/MK.pdf*). However, in 2023, in a non-transparent and quick procedure, amendments were made to the criminal offense "Abuse of official position or authority" (Official Gazette of the RNM no. 188/23).

Regarding the criminal offense of "Laundering of money and other proceeds of crime", according to the recommendations of the FATF, the Rapporteurs of GRECO and Manival have been brought to criminal responsibility for officials and responsible persons in financial institutions and for disrespecting official authorizations by failing to comply with the provisions of the Law on Prevention of Money Laundering and Terrorism Financing, with failure to take measures and actions to prevent the placement of suspicious money or suspicious transactions or giving away an official secret for a financial investigation prepared by the client, this also constitutes a crime within the group of corrupt crimes.

In September 2023, the Parliament of North Macedonia significantly undermined the judiciary by amending the criminal offense of "Abuse of official position and authority" (Official Gazette of the RM, No. 188/23). In a non-transparent, quick procedure, the responsibility of officials, responsible persons, and persons who perform work in the public interest will be abolished for acts that were carried out by using official positions, exceeding official powers, or failing to perform official duties when carrying out public procurement or damage to the budget, from public funds or other resources of the state. Because of this, the scientific and professional public emphasizes the dangers of the "legalization" of "high corruption", and in its report for 2023, Transparency International notes that the statute of limitations will be enabled on 200 alleged cases of corruption involving former high-level officials (Annual Report, 2023).

The research for the period 2014-2022 is carried out based on the data from the Report of Transparency International and from the annual report of the Public Prosecutor's Office, since it is the prosecuting authority for the criminal acts that are prosecuted in the course of official duty, and those reports include the data from filed criminal reports from all state authorities that have police powers, by the Law on Criminal Procedure (Official Gazette of the RM, no. 150/10), but also reports from other sources - inspection services, anti-corruption commission, etc. In the same way, the data for the cases that are handled by the parties to the Basic Public Prosecutor's Office for the prosecution of organized crime and corruption are also taken into consideration. Nine years were covered during which the data were collected, synthesized and analyzed, according to which the data for the reported, accused, and convicted perpetrators for all criminal acts pursued in the course of official duty are presented, and the research is only related to corrupt criminal acts from groups of criminal acts against official duty and laundering money and other proceeds from a criminal offense.

SITUATION OF CORRUPTION IN THE REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA

Since 2001, the Republic of North Macedonia has been on the list of countries ranked according to the Corruption Perceptions Index. A total of 180 countries are on the list. The following table shows the data extracted from all annual reports of Transparency International Macedonia for the period 2014-2022 year. Our country had the best perception index with a ranking at the 64th place in 2014, and the worst ranking was in 2020 when it was ranked 111th with 35 points, in 2021 it improved and was ranked 87th with 39 points, and in 2022 it was at the 85th place with 40 points out of a total of 100. In 2023, it will be at the76th place with 42 points, which indicates a "slight" improvement of the situation, but according to the methodology of Transparency International, any score below 50 points is considered a failure in the fight against corruption, that is, that there is a high level of corruption in the country (Annual Report, 2023).

Table 1. *Corruption Perception Index for the North Macedonia 2014–2022*

Year	Ranking	Points	Research	BF (BTI)	EIU	FH	GI	VDP	WEF	WJP
2014	64	45	6	49	66	46	21	42	47	
2015	66	42	6	40	61	41	21	42	47	
2016	90	37	7	40	54	42	19	34	49	21
2017	107	35	6	41	20	47	35	24		43
2018	93	37	7	41	20	47	35	39	33	43
2019	106	35	7	41	20	47	35	28	32	42
2020	111	35	7	41	20	47	35	28	32	40
2021	87	39	7	45	37	47	35	30	35	41
2022	85	40	7	45	37	47	47	27	36	40

Source: Transparency International Macedonia

According to the ranking and points for North Macedonia, the lack of integrity and respect for the legal as well as the decline in democratic processes is shown, the year 2022 was marked by huge corruption scandals in the judiciary, especially because the candidates passed the judicial exam without fulfilling all the legally stipulated conditions required for applying for it and fulfilling all the criteria, even though the procedures for the dismissal of the previous and the election of the new head of the Public Prosecutor's Office for the prosecution of organized crime and corruption, as well as the resignation of the President of the Judicial Council, leave doubts about the consistent application of the newly adopted laws by the parties at the two institutions whose aim is to take care of the integrity of judicial bodies, which additionally reduced the trust of citizens in the judiciary to only 4 %.(Taseva, 2022).

Table 2. *Volume, Structure and Dynamics of Reported, Accused and Convicted Perpetrators Involved in Corrupt Criminal Offenses for the Period 2014–2022*

Year	Art 353			Art 357			Art 361			Other			Total		
	RP	AP	CP	RP	AP	CP	RP	AP	CP	RP	AP	CP	RP	AP	CP
2014	1378	256	210	14	12	15	44	18	12	/	/	/	1436	286	237
2015	1635	215	328	14	6	10	32	13	8	/	/	/	1681	234	346
2016	1584	154	172	19	11	11	38	11	14	/	/	/	1641	176	197
2017	1528	125	120	10	1	6	22	1	13	/	/	/	1560	127	139
2018	1094	160	122	17	7	13	28	4	21	/	/	/	1139	171	156
2019	1674	271	80	12	7	7	29	2	4	/	/	/	1715	280	91
2020	1298	140	144	4	5	6	25	5	2	/	/	/	1327	150	152
2021	1391	200	133	17	5	6	27	11	3	295	50	66	1730	266	208
2022	1221	151	95	23	9	2	27	11	9	286	46	49	1557	217	155
Total	12803	1672	1404	130	63	76	272	76	86	581	96	115	13786	1907	1681

In the research period from 2014 to 2022, a total of 13,786 offenders were reported for corrupt criminal offenses, of which 92.9 % or 12,803 offenders were charged with the criminal offense of "Abuse of official position and authority" – Art. 353. For "Receiving a bribe"– Art. 357, 130 offenses were committed or 0.9 %, 2 % or 272 were committed for "Falsifying an official document" under Art. 361 and 4.2 % or 581 offenses were committed for other corrupt criminal acts. Of the total number of offenders reported, 13.8 % were charged, and 88.1 % of them were convicted. Of the total number of applicants, only 12.2 % were convicted persons. This is a fairly low conviction rate for corrupt criminal offenses, and especially for "Abuse of official position and authority" under Art. 353, where the conviction rate is 11 %.

According to the dynamics of corrupt crimes, the largest number was reported in 2021, a total of 1730, of which 266 were accused and 208 were convicted. In 2018, the lowest number of total reported offenders was 1139, of which 15.01 % were charged, and of the total reported 13.7% were convicted. This is a higher conviction rate than the average for the researched period.

According to the structure and dynamics in the researched period, most of them are for the crime "Abuse of official position and authority" under Article 353, and the largest number of 1674 perpetrators were reported in 2019, and the smallest number was in 2018 with 1094 perpetrators.

Table 3. *Volume, Structure and Dynamics of Reported, Accused and Convicted Perpetrators of Corrupt Criminal Offenses for the Period 2021–2022*

Criminal Offences – Art.	2021			2022			Total		
	RP	AP	CP	RP	AP	CP	RP	AP	CP
Abuse of official position and authority - 353	1391	200	133	1221	151	95	2612	351	228
Negligent performance of duty - 353-v	186	20	20	199	21	16	385	41	36
Embezzlement in the duty - 354	9	2	3	24	6	10	33	8	13
Fraud in the duty - 355	4	/	/	7	1	/	11	1	/
Helping oneself in the duty - 356	3	1	3	1	1	2	4	2	5
Receiving a bribe - 357	17	5	6	23	9	2	36	14	8
Giving a bribe - 358	10	1	1	5	5	6	15	6	7
Giving a reward for unlawful influence - 358-a	/	/	/	1	/	/	1	/	/
Receiving a reward for unlawfully influence – 359	20	2	/	3	/	/	23	2	/
Unlawful acquisition and concealment of property - 359-a	2	3	2	5	/	3	7	3	5
Falsifying an officia document - 361	27	11	3	27	11	9	54	22	12
Others	61	21	32	41	12	12	102	33	44
Total	1730	266	203	1557	217	155	3287	483	358

The table shows the data on the corrupt crimes for which the Public Prosecutor's Office started conducting proceedings and on other crimes from Chapter 30 of Crimes against Official Duty. For most of them there were no proceedings in previous years, but again the most committed crime is "Abuse of official position and authority". It is to be welcomed that the public prosecutors "dared" to classify other crimes as well, especially those with elements of illegal remuneration and illegal acquisition of property. And in these two years, the degree of conviction is low and amounts to 11.7 %. That is quite a low percentage, but it is due to "corruption in the judiciary", or "secondary corruption", which is a long-standing problem.

An indicator of the low level of indictment, and especially the conviction of perpetrators for corrupt crimes, is the absence of responsibility of public prosecutors. Prosecutors are rarely held accountable for misconduct, even when their actions are proven to have contributed to wrongful convictions. There is public distrust in prosecutors working to prosecute organized crime and corruption, as well as widespread perceptions that the prosecution lacks integrity and is not immune to influence from politicians and business elites (*https://www.ihr.org.mk/storage/app/media/Publications/zaslepena-pravda-za-web.pdf*).

As indicators of "influence trading" on public prosecutors and contribution to their negligent work are the data that in the past years the Parlament of North Macedonia dismissed four state public prosecutors, and the special public prosecutor was also convicted of corruption. Regarding the degree of conviction of the officials for corrupt crimes through statistical analyses, only 19.1% of the criminally reported officials were also convicted, which is emphasized in the reports of the European Commission on the progress of our country in the implementation of reforms, as well as the reports of Reinhard Pribe (Blinded justice: to a captured state in North Macedonia – judiciary, public prosecution and police, *https:// www.ihr.org.mk/storage/app/media/Publications/zaslepena-pravda-za-web.pdf*).

THE MONEY LAUNDERING SITUATION IN THE REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA

For the first time, "Laundering of money and other illegal property gains" is provided as a criminal offense in Article 273 of the Criminal Code of 1996 (Official Gazette of the RM, No. 37/96), and in 2004 the title was changed to "Laundering of money and other proceeds of crime", (Official Gazette of the RM, No. 19/04), and certain additions were also made in 2009 (Official Gazette of the RM, No. 114/09) so that the specified criminal offense includes several criminal behaviours, including corruption in the process of money laundering by bank officials, which is also incriminated. It is about criminalizing criminal behaviour in the process of money laundering by officials, responsible persons, or persons performing work of public interest in entities that will enable or allow a transaction or business relationship, or will act contrary to their legal duty into a ban imposed by a competent authority or a temporary measure determined by a court or will not report the laundering of money, property or property benefit, which they learned about in the performance of their function or duty. Likewise, the same applies when they unauthorizedly disclose to a client or an uninvited person the data related to the procedure of examining suspicious transactions or the application of other measures and actions to prevent money laundering (Criminal Code, Official Gazette of the RM, No. 114/09).

The money laundering situation is continuously monitored and evaluated by the MONEYVAL Committee, so because of a two-year multi-stage evaluation process, the report on the RNM was considered and adopted at the 65th plenary session held in May 2023. The report presents a comprehensive assessment of the country's level of compliance with the international standards of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), stating that, after the RNM strengthened its legal framework since the last evaluation and laid the foundations for a sound system to deal with laundering money and terrorist financing, there are still several areas where the state needs to improve its enforcement. This relates to the results of money laundering investigations and prosecutions, law enforcement and prosecutors should systematically conduct parallel financial investigations and target more complex cases of money laundering involving organized crime, especially drug trafficking, human trafficking as well as tax evasion and corruption. MONEYVAL also calls on the authorities to systematically apply the "follow the money" principle to improve confiscation levels (Moneyval, May 2023).

The criminal offense "Laundering money and other proceeds of crime" in criminal cases occurs as a secondary criminal offense for which it is expanded by opening an investigation by the public prosecutor's office, and the most common predicative is the corrupt criminal offense and that is "Abuse of official position and authority". In the Financial Intelligence Agency's 2020 Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing Risk Assessment Report, the crime listed is the first on the list of high-risk money laundering-related crimes (*https://ufr.gov.mk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/NRA-Izvestaj-za-web-19-05.pdf*).

The research by collecting, synthesizing, and analyzing the data from the Annual Reports of the Public Prosecutor's Office of the NM for the period 2014-2022 is a little more complicated than the corrupt crimes for objective reasons. Namely, no separate criminal charges have been filed against the perpetrators for the specified crime, the "grounds of suspicion" are included in the predicate crimes, or, later during the investigation, an extension was made to money laundering, depending on the results of the measures and actions taken or the monitoring on the "money flow" of predictive crime suspects. However, by applying the content analysis method, data on money laundering cases have been extracted and presented individually for each of the researched years. For the last two years of the investigated period, in the annual reports of the public prosecutor's office, the data on reported, accused, and convicted perpetrators for the crime of "Laundering money and other proceeds of crime" have been systematized and presented in a table.

For the crime of "Money laundering and other proceeds of crime" under Art. 273 according to the annual reports of the Public Prosecutor's Office (Annual reports from 2014-2020), the situation is as follows:

- In 2014, one criminal charge was received against one person, an investigation was opened for the same, and from the previous years, proceedings were conducted against 42 people or 43 in total, for all of them convictions were brought and confirmed by a second-instance court.
- In 2015, criminal charges were received against 21 people, of which 3 were rejected, 2 were not resolved, 4 were subject to additional investigations, 12 were investigated, of which an indictment was filed against 5, and 7 are in process.
- In 2016, 10 criminal charges were received, and 16 have been in process since 2015. Proceedings are in process against 26 people, of which 2 have been charged, there is a first instance judgment, after which the public prosecutor filed an appeal to a Court of Second Instance, three have been decided in some other manner, while for 21 people they are still in process.
- In 2017, the Basic Public Prosecutor's Office for Prosecution of Organized Crime and Corruption, after the completed investigation, filed an indictment against 6 persons, who are also being prosecuted for "Laundering money and other proceeds of crime" - Art. 273 and "Tax evasion" - Art. 279, as a predicative act, damages were calculated in the total amount of 24,212,222.00 denars, with which the Budget of the Republic of Macedonia was damaged.
- For the year 2018, no data have been recorded.
- In 2019, there are data on the confiscation from three persons for 223,225,015.00 denars and other items, for "Laundering money and other proceeds of crime", and the money and items originate from the illegal operation of gambling establishments.
- For the year 2020, in the Basic Public Prosecutor's Office for the Prosecution of Organized Crime and Corruption, a confiscation measure has been imposed against a total of three persons for crimes with elements of money laundering, and as predicates are the illegal drug trade and smuggling of migrants.
- For 2021 and 2022, a total of 69 persons have been registered, of which 17 are accused and 14 convicted, the percentage of the accused is 24.6%, and of the convicted it is 82.4%. The conviction rate concerning registration is 20.3%. The perpetrators are mostly suspected of predicative corruption crimes, but also of other crimes committed by organized criminal groups.

Table 4. *Volume, Structure and Dynamics of Reported, Accused and Convicted Perpetrators of "Laundering Money and Other Proceeds of Crime" – Art. 273 - for the Period 2021–2022*

Criminal Acts	2021			2022			Total		
	RP	AP	CP	RP	AP	CP	RP	AP	CP
Art. 273	29	13	3	40	4	11	69	17	14

In the research period 2014-2022, according to the method of analysis of reports, the data on confiscation of property originating from corruption and money laundering were collected and analyzed. Since the number of imposed measures, confiscation of property, is small from the reports of the Public Prosecutor's Office, the data have been extracted by year, type of crime and amount.

- In 2014, with the verdict on "Abuse of official position and authority" - Art. 353 p. 5 from the Criminal Code, 245,380.00 denars were confiscated from one person.
- In 2015, with the verdict on "Abuse of official position and authority" - Art. 353 p. 5 of the Criminal Code, 1,200,000.00 denars were confiscated from one person.
- In 2017, 39,627.50 euros were confiscated from one person in money laundering, and an indictment was initiated against six persons for three criminal acts: "Laundering money and other proceeds of crime", "Abuse of official position and authority" and "Tax evasion", while 24,212,222.00 denars were calculated and blocked, which damaged the Budget of the Republic of Macedonia.
- In 2018, with the verdict "Abuse of official position and authority under" Art. 353 of the Criminal Code, property worth 4,906,475.00 denars was confiscated from one person.
- In 2019, 223,225,015.00 denars were confiscated from three persons for the crime of "Laundering money and other proceeds of crime", originating from gambling crime.
- In 2020, a measure of confiscation was imposed against three persons for the crimes of "Laundering money and other proceeds of crime" originating from the predicate crimes of illicit drug trafficking and migrant smuggling, the amount is not specified.
- In 2021, a confiscation measure was imposed against four persons for laundering money and other proceeds of crime, narcotic drugs - marijuana and land worth 1,794,141.00 denars, on predicate crimes of illegal drug trade and migrant smuggling. Also, for the crime of "Laundering money and other proceeds of crime" from 97 persons a total was confiscated of 817,580.00 denars, 33,955.00 euros, dollars, Swiss francs, 47 motor vehicles, 11 trucks, two motorcycles, 120 mobile phones, two watches, computer equipment, 11 laptops, guns, GPS device, 279,413 gr of marijuana, and 2 kg of cocaine, as predicate crimes with elements of participation in a foreign military, human and minor trafficking, and migrant smuggling, committed by organized criminal groups.
- In 2022, with the verdict for "Abuse of official position and authority", the property benefit in the total amount of MKD 10,247,141.00 was confiscated for the benefit of the state. Also, the Basic Public Prosecutor's Office for Prosecution of Organized Crime and Corruption submitted six requests to the Basic Criminal Court Skopje for the determination of a temporary measure prohibiting the alienation and disposal of immovable property due to reasonable suspicion that the property originates from a criminal offense and that at the end of the criminal procedure its confiscation will be particularly difficult or impossible for two persons suspected of crimes of "Laundering money and other proceeds of a crime" and four person as perpetrators of the crime of "Abuse of official position and authority", whereby shares of legal and natural persons and securities are frozen. The three cases have been registered that refer to the request for temporary measures, the temporary freezing of financial assets for three persons and one legal entity due to the existence of grounds for suspicion of committed criminal acts of "Laundering money and other proceeds of a crime" and "Fraud", the property has a total value of 39,952,281 euros and refers to cash, construction land, apartments, business premises, hotel, securities, and shares.

According to the Transparency International Report published in 2024 for the period from 2016 to 2023, a total of 6 million euros were seized in 2016, in 2017 – half a million euros, in 2018 one and a half million euros, in 2019 – 8 million euros, in 2020 year - 2 million euros, in 2021 - a million euros, in 2022 - 22 million euros and 2023 - 2 million euros (Report, 2023).

CONCLUSIONS

- "High corruption" is a serious problem, and the most commonly committed crime is "Abuse of official position and authority", where the perpetrators are persons with official duties and powers, and they act criminally for the acquisition of illegal property benefits to the detriment of the State Budget.
- In the first seven years of the research, three corrupt crimes were most often committed, while the list of prosecuted cases in the last two years (2021 and 2022) is increasing, but the problem of weak convictions is evident in all corrupt crimes.
- The low number of convictions points to the problem of corruption in the judiciary, which is a very serious problem that Priebe points out in his report, but also other researches indicate that the citizens' trust in the judiciary is quite low and that low trust is due to the "suspicion" of their corruption and conducting proceedings according to the principle of "selective justice".
- The connection between corruption and money laundering is also indicated by the data from the confiscation, where it is emphasized that the predicate crime of "Laundering money and other proceeds of crime" is "Abuse of official position and authority".
- About 200 procedures for "Abuse of official position and authority" in public procurement that are being conducted before the courts will be stopped due to the "quick", non-transparent amendment, due to which more suspected and accused officials and other officials and responsible persons will be "released" from responsibility in the procedures that have been started and were in progress against them.

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