

A Comprehensive Analysis of Perceptions, Impact, and Behavioral Aspects of Corruption in European Union Countries

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Abstract

This article provides a comprehensive analysis of the perceptions, impacts, and behavioral aspects of corruption within European Union countries. The methodological framework of the study integrates the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) with the findings of the Eurobarometer 548 sociological survey, enabling a multidimensional assessment of corruption processes. The study analyzes the dynamics of the Corruption Perceptions Index from 2012 to 2024, regional disparities, and the specificities of subjective corruption perceptions among the EU population. It was established that, despite the relative stability of the index, there is a stagnation in anti-corruption policy and a gap between objective indicators and subjective perceptions of corruption. The research proves that a majority of EU citizens view corruption as a widespread phenomenon, despite its limited personal impact. Significant interstate differentiation was identified, along with a contradiction between declared intolerance toward corruption and the actual behavior of citizens. Particular attention is paid to the analysis of the reporting level of corruption offenses, which remains low in most countries. The study substantiates that the effectiveness of anti-corruption policy depends largely on the level of institutional trust and civic engagement in anti-corruption efforts.

Keywords: Corruption Perceptions Index; Eurobarometer; European Union; anti-corruption policy; behavioral aspects; integrity; public management; corruption risks.

1. Introduction

In contemporary conditions, corruption represents more than just a legal or economic category; it is a complex social phenomenon that impacts the level of citizen trust in state institutions, investment attractiveness, and the operational efficiency of the public sector. The analysis of corruption perception is of particular significance, as it reflects not only the objective state of corruption processes but also the level of social tolerance toward them, the effectiveness of anti-corruption policy, and the quality of its communication with society. Analyzing the European experience is especially vital for Ukraine amidst European integration processes, as it allows for the identification of key trends, patterns, and disparities in the development of anti-corruption policy, as well as the determination of pathways to enhance the effectiveness of criminal-legal and institutional mechanisms for combating corruption.

2. Literature review

The challenges of assessing corruption levels and the effectiveness of anti-corruption policies are subjects of active research by international organizations and the scientific community. In contemporary conditions, the key instruments for analyzing corruption processes are international indices and sociological studies, which enable both quantitative and qualitative assessments of this phenomenon. One of the most widely used indicators is the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) [2]. Developed by the international organization Transparency International based on expert assessments and business surveys, it allows for the comparison of public sector corruption levels across different countries worldwide. Another important research avenue is the analysis of public perception of corruption, conducted through sociological surveys, notably the Eurobarometer [1].

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3. The identification of previously unresolved issues and the formulation of research hypotheses

Such studies make it possible to evaluate the perceived prevalence of corruption in the minds of citizens, determine its impact on daily life, and analyze behavioral aspects, including the readiness to report corruption offenses.

4. Purpose, objectives and methods of the study

The methodological framework of the study is based on a combination of general scientific and specialized methods, the application of which ensured a comprehensive examination of the strategic directions for the development of Ukraine's anti-corruption policy under conditions of institutional transformation. The systemic approach made it possible to consider anti-corruption policy as an integral multi-level system encompassing legal, organizational, institutional, and social components. This approach enabled the identification of interconnections between preventive, control, and law-enforcement mechanisms in the field of public integrity. The comparative legal method was applied to analyze international standards and practices of anti-corruption policy implementation, as well as to compare Ukraine's experience with models operating in OECD countries and the European Union. This made it possible to identify effective approaches to building the institutional architecture of anti-corruption efforts and to outline directions for their adaptation to the national context. The institutional method was used to examine the role of public authorities, anti-corruption institutions, and the mechanisms of their interaction in implementing state anti-corruption policy. Its application contributed to assessing the level of capacity and independence of the relevant bodies, as well as determining their place within the system of public administration. The strategic analysis method enabled the structuring of the key objectives of anti-corruption policy, the identification of its development priorities, and the formation of a coherent model of strategic planning in the field of corruption prevention and counteraction. Within this approach, перспективні напрями modernization of anti-corruption mechanisms were outlined, including digitalization, the development of monitoring systems, and the strengthening of international cooperation.

5. Main results

The aim of the article is to provide a comprehensive analysis of the perception, impact, and behavioral aspects of corruption in European Union countries. By integrating the Corruption Perceptions Index with the results of the Eurobarometer sociological survey, this study seeks to identify regional differences and dynamic patterns, while evaluating the overall effectiveness of anti-corruption policy.

The methodological framework for researching the perception of corruption in the European Union is based on the results of the special sociological survey Eurobarometer 548, titled «Citizens' attitudes towards corruption in the EU in 2024»[1] conducted at the request of the European Commission. The fieldwork phase of the study took place in February–March 2024 and covered all 27 member states of the European Union. This extensive scope ensures a high level of representativeness for the obtained results.

The research methodology is based on a standardized mass population survey using a uniform questionnaire, which allows for cross-country comparisons and the analysis of indicator dynamics over time. The sample is formed on the principle of representativeness regarding the socio-demographic characteristics of the population (age, gender, education level, and socio-professional status), which ensures the reliability of generalizations at the level of both the European Union and individual countries [1].

In view of the above, a comprehensive analysis of the level and specific characteristics of corruption perception in European Union countries and adjacent regions is required, based on the systematization of statistical and sociological data.

- To achieve the established objective, the following research tasks have been defined:
- To analyze the dynamics of the Corruption Perceptions Index in European Union countries from 2012 to 2024 (Fig. 1);
- To investigate regional disparities in corruption levels using the countries of Central and Eastern Europe as an example (Fig. 2);
- To assess the general structure of the perception of corruption prevalence among EU citizens (Fig. 3);
- To analyze the dynamics of changes in the perception of corruption prevalence in the European Union from 2013 to 2024 (Fig. 4);
- To investigate interstate differences in the perception of corruption prevalence across EU countries (Fig. 5);
- To evaluate the level of personal impact of corruption on the daily lives of European Union citizens (Fig. 6);
- To analyze cross-country differences in the perception of the personal impact of corruption (Fig. 7);
- To determine the level of social acceptability of corrupt practices in European Union countries (Fig. 8);
- To examine the prevalence of bribery and favoritism in access to public services (Fig. 9);
- To assess the characteristics of corruption perception within the business environment of EU countries (Fig. 10);
- To determine the level of corruption reporting by citizens in the European Union (Fig. 11);
- To analyze interstate differences in the reporting levels of corruption offenses (Fig. 12).

The aforementioned tasks allow for a comprehensive, multi-level analysis of corruption, encompassing both objective indicators and the subjective perceptions and behavioral responses of the population.

Figure 1 presents the dynamics of the Corruption Perceptions Index for European Union countries from 2012 to 2024.

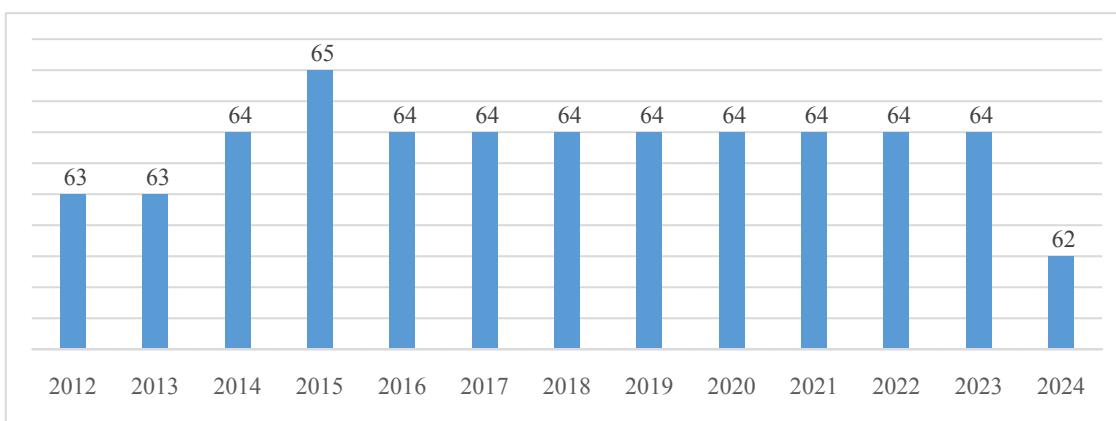


Fig. 1. Dynamics of the Corruption Perceptions Index for the European Union from 2012 to 2024 [3-15]

An analysis of the data in Fig. 1 reveals a relative stability of the Index values throughout the studied period. In 2012 and 2013, the indicator stood at 63 points, after which it rose to 64 points in 2014, reaching its peak value of 65 points in 2015. Throughout 2016–2023, the Index remained virtually unchanged at 64 points, indicating stagnation in the field of anti-corruption efforts within European Union countries.

In 2024, the indicator dropped to 62 points, which is the lowest value in recent years and may signal a deterioration in the perceived effectiveness of anti-corruption policy or an increase in corruption risks under current conditions.

The results obtained provide grounds to assert that the dynamics of the Corruption Perceptions Index in the European Union are characterized by relative stability with signs of stagnation and a certain decline in 2024. This indicates the limited effectiveness of existing anti-corruption mechanisms and the necessity for their further improvement.

A more detailed analysis of regional differences is presented in Fig. 2, which illustrates the Corruption Perceptions Index values for Central and Eastern European countries from 2020 to 2024.

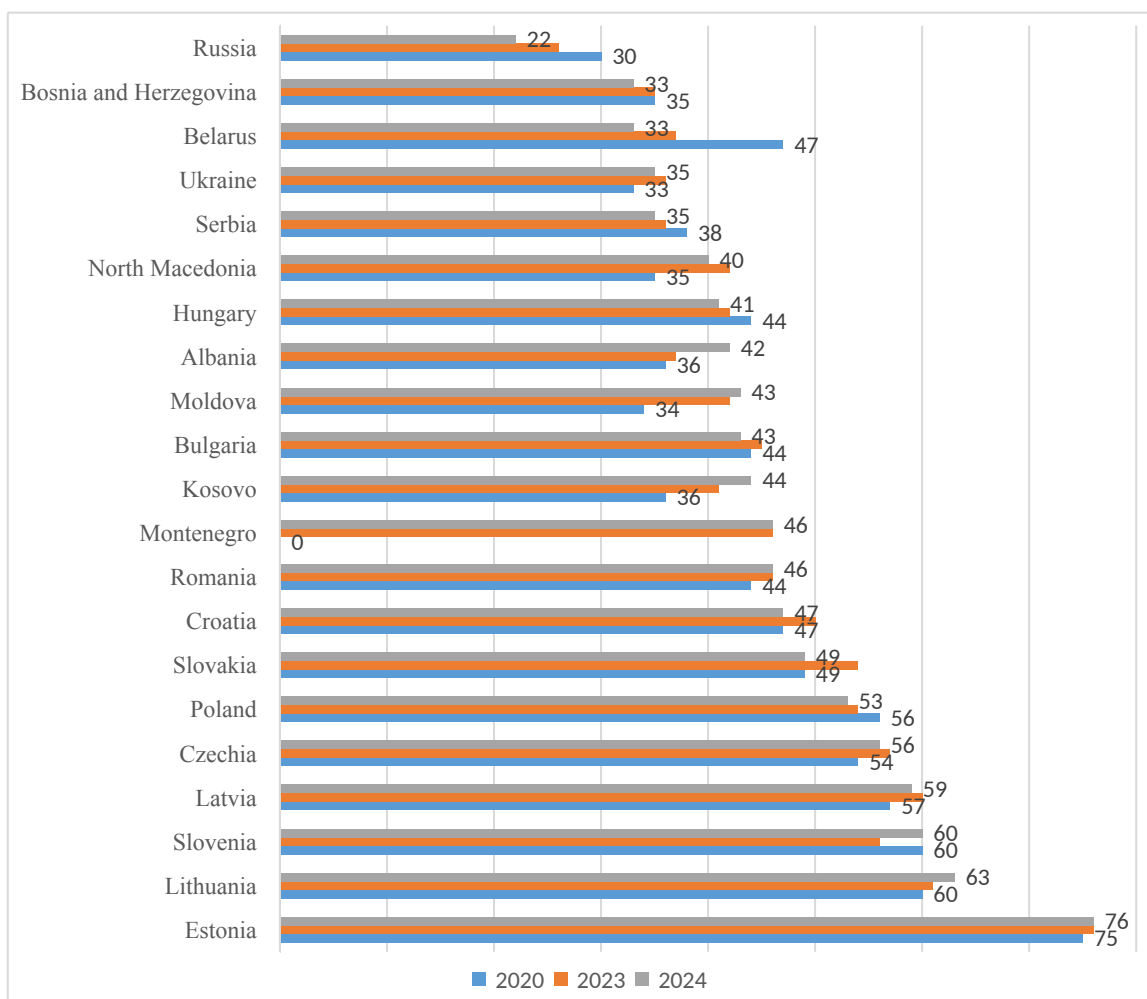


Fig. 2. Corruption Perceptions Index in Central and Eastern European countries from 2020 to 2024 [11-15]

The maximum value of the indicator in 2024 was recorded in Estonia (Fig. 2), reaching 76 points (compared to 75 in 2020), which confirms its consistently high level of digitalization in public administration and the effectiveness of its anti-corruption mechanisms. The group of countries with high performance also includes Lithuania at 63 points, Slovenia at 60 points, and Latvia at 59 points.

Among the countries with medium Index values, noteworthy are Czechia at 56 points, Poland at 53 points, Slovakia at 49 points, Croatia at 47 points, and Romania and Montenegro at 46 points each. This indicates a gradual but uneven implementation of anti-corruption reforms. At the same time, some of these countries exhibit stagnation or minor fluctuations in their indicators, pointing to the limited effectiveness of institutional changes.

The minimum values of the indicator in 2024 were recorded in the Russian Federation at 22 points (compared to 30 points in 2020), indicating a significant deterioration in long-term dynamics. The group of countries with low values also includes Bosnia and Herzegovina at 33 points, Belarus at 33 points (down from 47 in 2020), Ukraine at 35 points, Serbia at 35 points, and North Macedonia at 35 points. This highlights the insufficient effectiveness of anti-corruption institutions and the presence of substantial institutional constraints.

At the same time, objective indicators, such as the Corruption Perceptions Index, do not fully reflect the subjective perception of corruption processes by the population. In this regard, it is appropriate to analyze the results of sociological studies, which allow for an assessment of citizens' perceptions, experiences, and behavioral responses regarding corruption.

Figure 3 below illustrates the perceived prevalence of corruption among the population of the European Union in 2024.

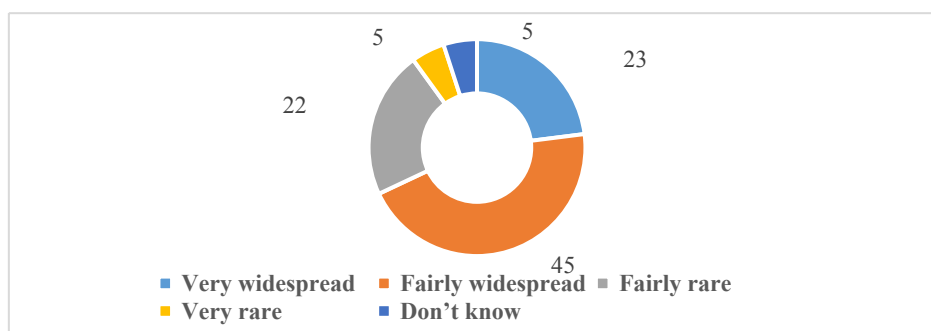


Fig. 3. Assessment of the prevalence of corruption among the EU population, 2024, % [15]

The assessment of corruption prevalence indicates a predominantly negative attitude toward corruption among EU citizens (Fig. 3). Specifically, 23% of respondents consider corruption to be very widespread, while 45% rate it as fairly widespread. Thus, the total share of citizens who perceive corruption as a widespread phenomenon amounts to 68%. Conversely, 22% of those surveyed note that corruption is fairly rare, and 5% believe it is very rare. The share of respondents who were unable to provide a definitive answer is 5%, indicating a low level of uncertainty in the perception of this phenomenon.

The results obtained indicate that despite the relatively stable values of the Corruption Perceptions Index, the majority of the European Union population continues to perceive corruption as a widespread phenomenon. This suggests a gap between objective indicators and the subjective assessments of citizens.

To deepen the analysis of corruption prevalence perceptions, it is appropriate to examine the dynamics of these assessments over time, which allows for the identification of trends in public perceptions of corruption.

Figure 4 illustrates the dynamics of the perception of corruption prevalence among the European Union population from 2013 to 2024.

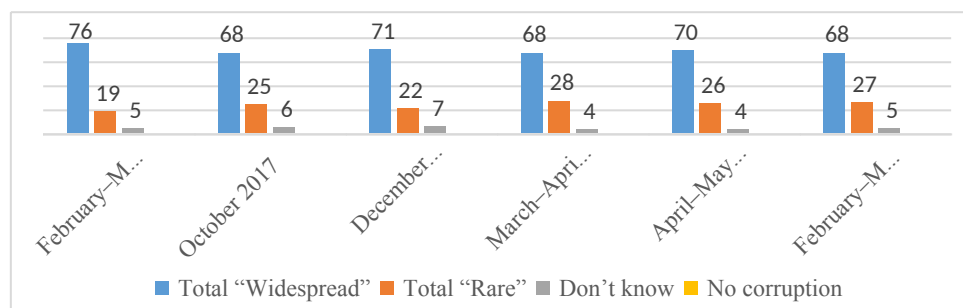


Fig. 4. Dynamics of the perception of corruption prevalence among the EU population, 2013–2024, % [1]

Thus, among the surveyed citizens, the share of respondents who consider corruption to be widespread stood at 76% in 2013, after which it decreased to 68% in 2017. In 2019, an increase to 71% was recorded; however, by 2022, it had dropped back to 68%. In 2023, a slight rise to 70% was observed, followed by another decline to 68% in 2024.

The share of respondents who consider corruption to be a rare phenomenon shows a gradual increase from 19% in 2013 to 27% in 2024, suggesting a certain improvement in assessments. However, this trend does not change the overall picture of dominant negative perceptions regarding corruption. The share of respondents who were undecided remains insignificant, fluctuating within the range of 4–7%.

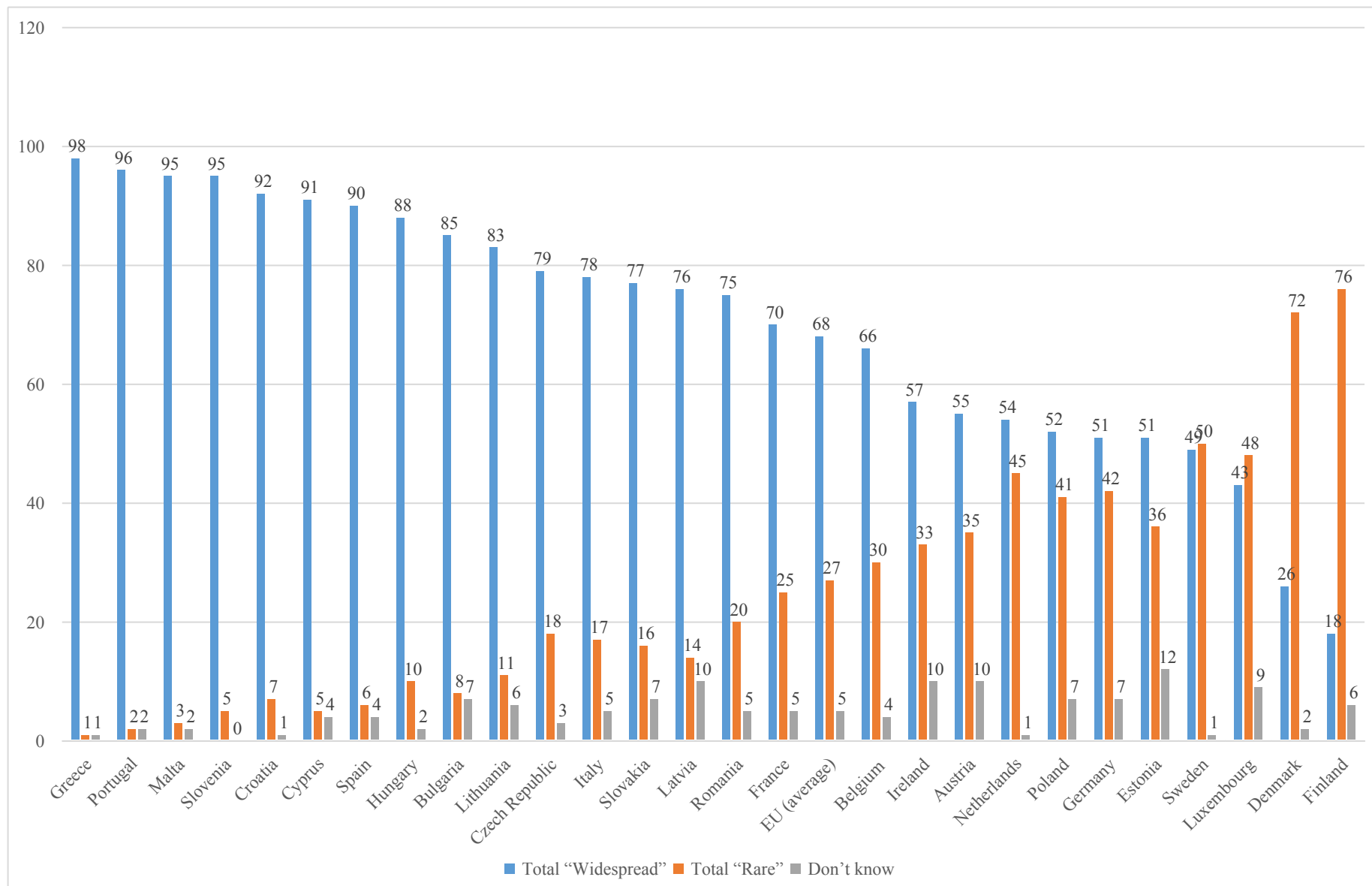


Fig. 5. Perception of the prevalence of corruption in EU countries, 2024, % [1]

For a more detailed understanding of the identified trends, it is appropriate to analyze cross-country differences in the perception of corruption prevalence, which allows for an assessment of the spatial differentiation of this phenomenon within the European Union.

The highest rates of corruption prevalence were recorded in Greece, where 98% of respondents consider corruption to be widespread, as well as in Portugal, Malta, and Slovenia, where the corresponding values range from 95% to 96%.

High indicators are also characteristic of Croatia, Cyprus, and Spain, where the share of such assessments exceeds 90%. Conversely, significantly lower values are observed in several Northern European countries. In particular, only 18% of respondents in Finland consider corruption to be widespread, followed by 26% in Denmark and 43% in Luxembourg, indicating a more positive perception of anti-corruption policy effectiveness in these states.

The share of respondents who consider corruption to be a rare phenomenon demonstrates the opposite trend. The highest values were recorded in Finland and Denmark, where the corresponding indicators stand at 76% and 72%, respectively, whereas in countries with a high perception of corruption, this figure is minimal. The share of respondents who were undecided remains insignificant in most countries and does not exceed 12%.

An important aspect of corruption research is the assessment of its impact on the daily lives of citizens, which allows for a transition from an abstract perception of the phenomenon to its practical dimension. Unlike the general assessment of corruption prevalence, this indicator reflects direct experience or the perceived influence of corrupt practices at the individual level.

Figure 6 below illustrates the assessment of the personal impact of corruption on the daily lives of European Union citizens in 2024.

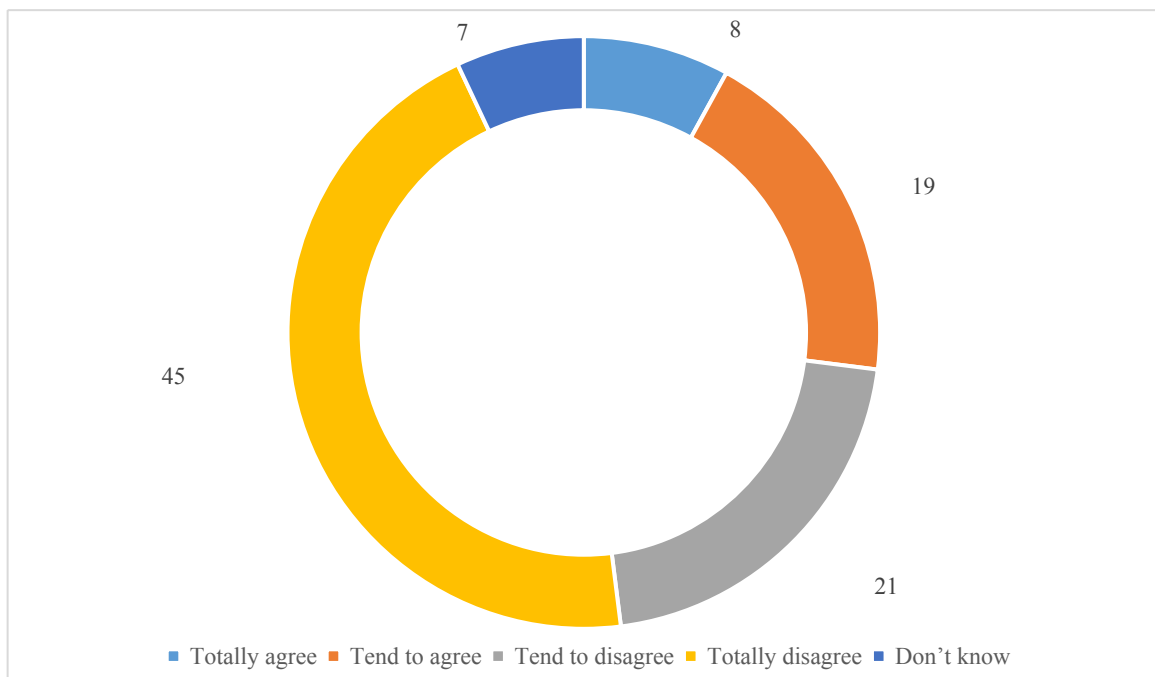


Fig. 6. Assessment of the personal impact of corruption on the daily lives of EU citizens, 2024, % [1]

The results presented in Fig. 6 indicate a significantly lower level of direct impact of corruption compared to its general perception. In particular, only 8% of respondents «totally agree» that corruption affects their daily lives, while 19% «tend to agree» with this statement. In summary, the total share of citizens who feel the impact of corruption is 27%. At the same time, 21% of respondents «tend to disagree» with the presence of such an impact, and 45% «totally disagree», accounting for a combined 66% of those surveyed. The share of undecided respondents is insignificant, standing at 7%.

Figure 7 illustrates the perception of the personal impact of corruption on the daily lives of citizens in European Union countries in 2024.

The highest percentages of respondents who feel the impact of corruption were recorded in Greece (Fig. 7), where this figure stands at 63%, as well as in Cyprus and Portugal at 61% each, Croatia at 60%, and Malta at 56%. High values are also observed in Romania, Spain, and Poland, where the share of such responses fluctuates within the range of 44–51%.

In Northern and Western European countries, the level of personal perception of corruption's impact is significantly lower. Specifically, only 4% of respondents in Denmark report such an influence, followed by 5% in the Netherlands and 6% in Finland, which indicates more effective functioning of anti-corruption institutions and a higher level of trust in them.

The share of respondents who do not feel the impact of corruption demonstrates the opposite trend and is at its maximum in countries with a low perception of corruption. The share of those who were undecided remains insignificant and does not have a substantial impact on the overall structure of the assessments.

Thus, the analysis results confirm the presence of a pronounced regional asymmetry in the perception of corruption's personal impact, which aligns with previous findings regarding the general perception of corruption and indicates the uneven effectiveness of anti-corruption policies across European Union countries.

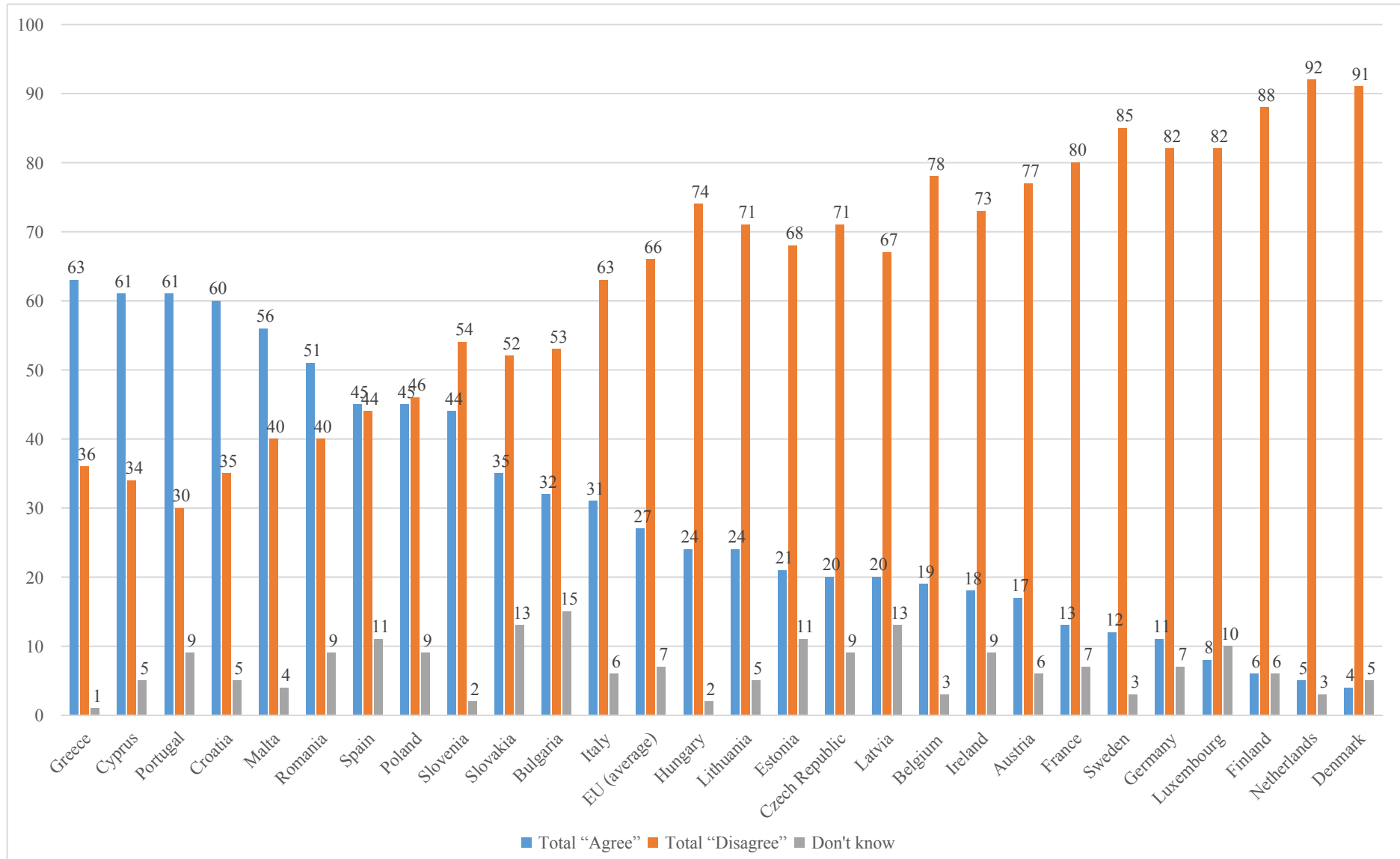


Fig. 7. Perception of the personal impact of corruption on the daily lives of citizens in EU countries, 2024, % [1]

A essential element of corruption analysis is not only the assessment of its prevalence and impact but also the investigation of citizens' attitudes toward the acceptability of corrupt practices, which allows for determining the level of social tolerance for this phenomenon (Fig. 8). Notably, in most countries, the share of respondents who consider corruption unacceptable exceeds 50%, and in some cases reaches 70–80%, indicating a high level of formal intolerance toward corruption. The highest rates of non-acceptance are observed in Northern and Western European countries, particularly in Denmark, Finland, Sweden, and the Netherlands.

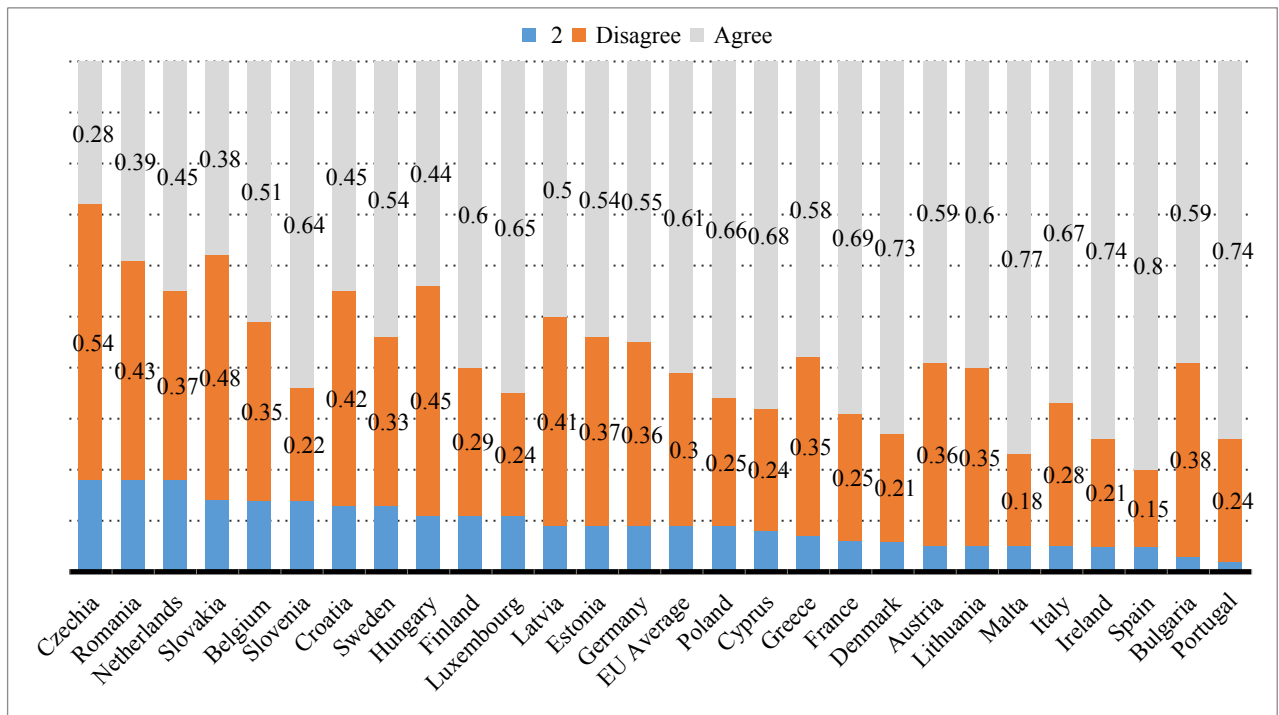


Fig. 8. To what extent do citizens of the European Union consider corruption acceptable in their countries in 2024, % [1]

In Southern and Central European countries, a relatively higher level of tolerance toward corruption is recorded. In particular, the share of respondents who find certain corrupt practices acceptable is notably larger in countries such as Greece, Cyprus, Bulgaria, and Romania, indicating the persistence of social attitudes that contribute to the reproduction of corrupt relations.

The share of respondents who directly admit the acceptability of corruption remains relatively low in most countries; however, even a marginal level of such tolerance creates preconditions for the spread of corrupt practices at the institutional level.

Thus, the analysis results indicate that despite general intolerance toward corruption, elements of social tolerance for its individual manifestations persist in European Union countries, serving as an important factor in the formation and reproduction of corruption risks.

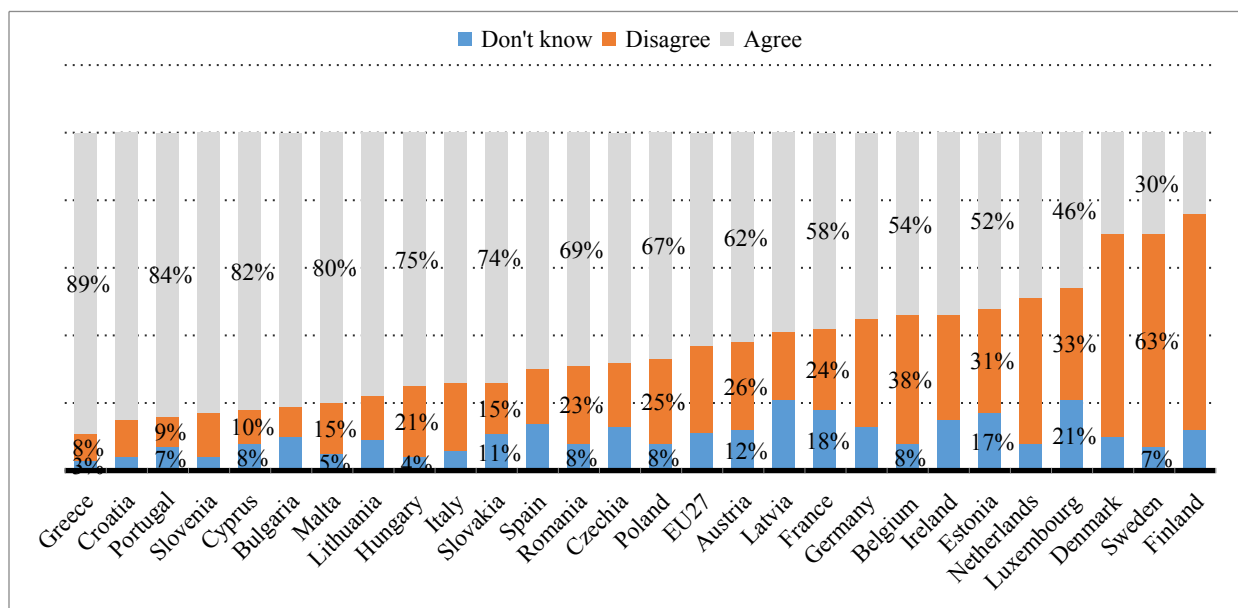


Fig. 9. EU countries' perception of bribery and favoritism in access to public services in 2024,% [1]

A number of countries in Southern and Central Europe have a high prevalence of informal practices (Figure 9). For example, in Greece, 89% of respondents believe that bribery or the use of connections is common in obtaining public services. High values are also characteristic of Croatia, Portugal, Slovenia, Cyprus and Bulgaria, where this figure exceeds 80%.

In Northern European countries and certain Western European states, the prevalence of such practices is significantly lower. Specifically, only 46% of respondents in Denmark consider these phenomena widespread, followed by 33% in Sweden and 30% in Finland, which points to a higher level of institutional transparency and more effective mechanisms for public service delivery.

The share of respondents who disagree with the existence of such practices demonstrates the opposite trend and is highest in countries with a low perception of corruption. At the same time, the share of those who were undecided remains relatively insignificant in most countries.

Thus, the analysis results indicate that even in conditions of general social intolerance toward corruption, a significant level of bribery and favoritism in the public service sector persists in several countries. This confirms the existence of a gap between declared values and actual practices.

The analysis of the prevalence of bribery and favoritism in public services should be supplemented by an assessment of corruption manifestations within the business environment, which allows for uncovering the institutional dimension of corruption and its impact on economic relations.

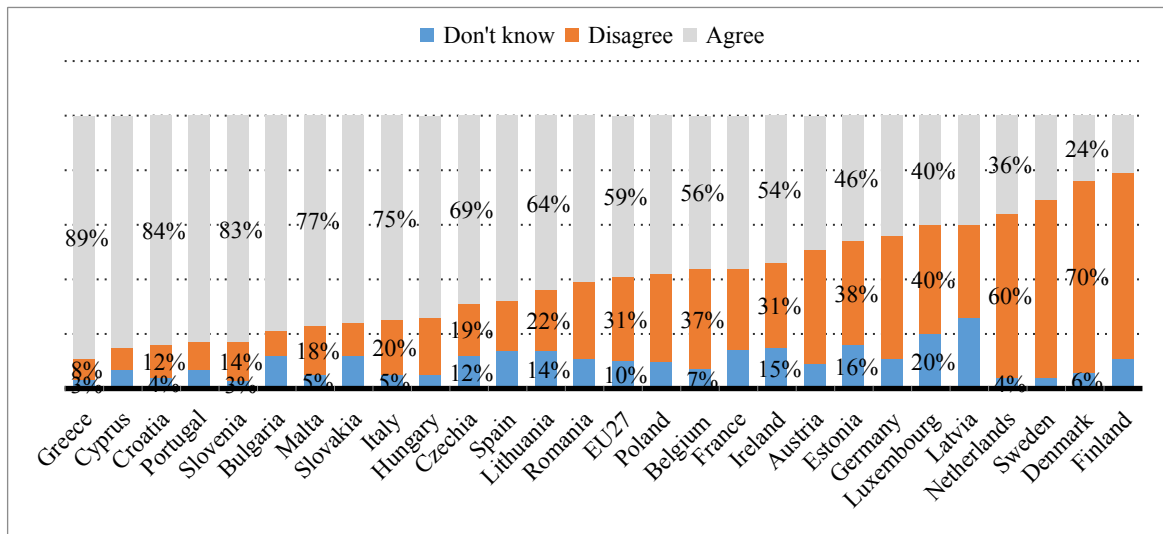


Fig. 10. Perception of corruption in business culture in EU countries in 2024, by country [1]

The results presented in Fig. 10 indicate that in Southern and Central European countries, the prevailing opinion is that corrupt practices are widespread in business. In Greece, 89% of respondents agree with the existence of such phenomena, followed by Cyprus at 84%, Portugal at 83%, Slovenia at 77%, and Bulgaria at 75%, which demonstrates a significant level of perceived corruption risks in the interaction between business and the state.

A somewhat different trend is observed in Northern European countries. For instance, in Finland, 70% of respondents disagree with the statement that corruption is widespread in the business environment; in Denmark, this figure stands at 60%, and in Sweden at 36%, indicating a higher level of institutional trust and transparency in economic processes.

The indicators for Western European countries occupy an intermediate position, reflecting the heterogeneity of assessments and the presence of both positive and negative trends in the perception of the business environment. The share of respondents who were undecided remains insignificant and does not substantially affect the overall structure of the results.

The final stage of the corruption perception analysis is the assessment of citizens' willingness to report corruption offenses, which allows for determining the effectiveness of mechanisms for its detection and response.

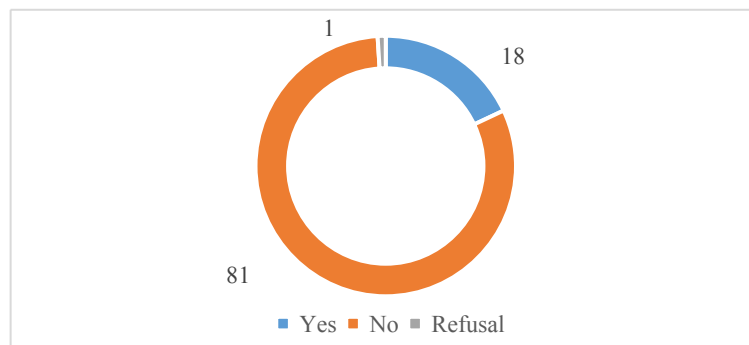


Fig. 11. Reporting cases of corruption among EU citizens, 2024, % [1]

The analysis of the data in Fig. 11 reveals an extremely low level of public involvement in the processes of exposing corruption offenses. Specifically, only 18% of respondents indicated that they had reported cases of corruption, while the vast majority of those surveyed-81%-did not take such action. The share of those who declined to answer is minimal, standing at 1%.

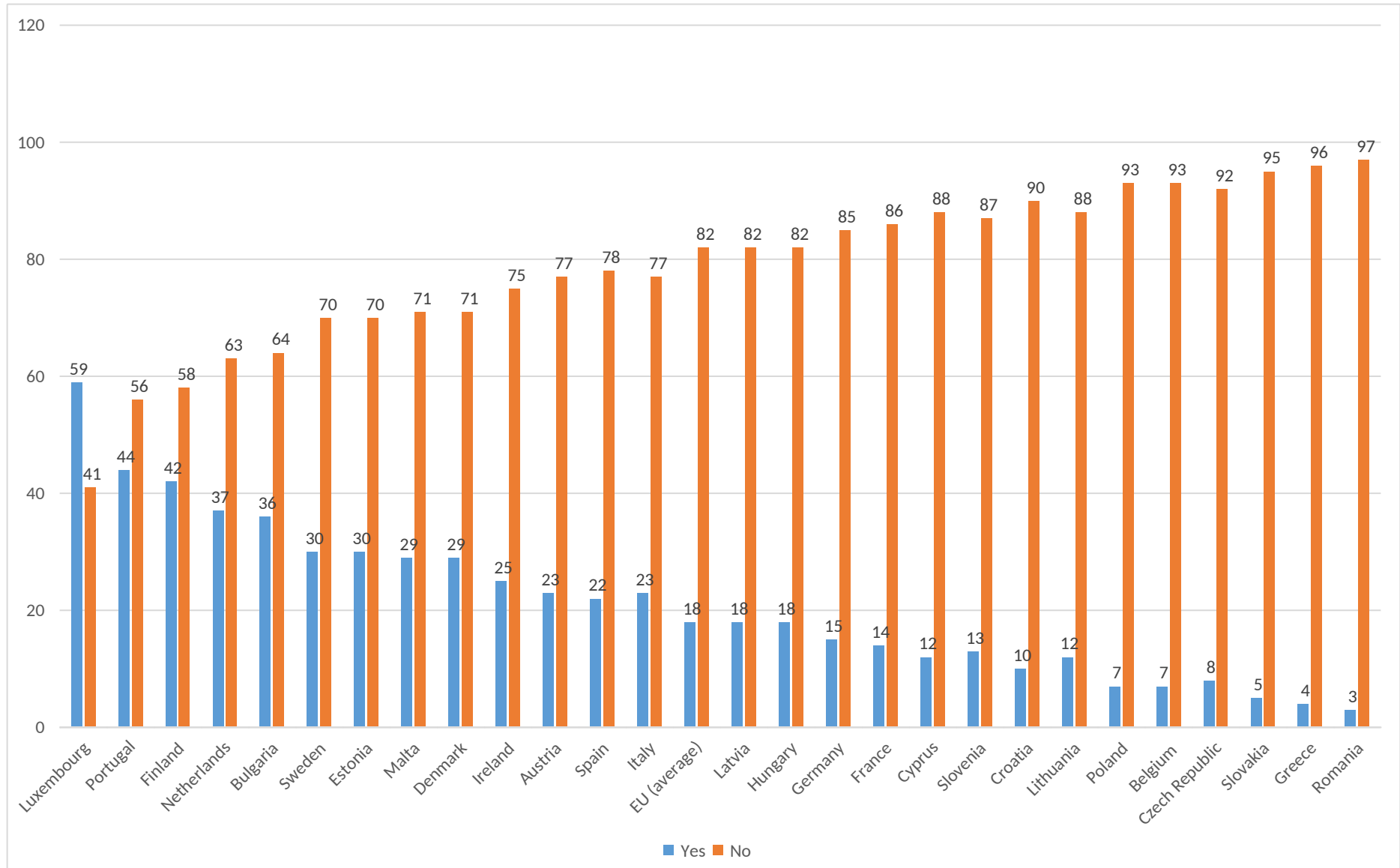


Fig. 12. Reporting cases of corruption among citizens in EU countries, 2024, % [1]

This situation may be attributed to a low level of trust in state institutions, insufficient public awareness of reporting mechanisms, and fear of negative consequences. Taken together, this points to the limited effectiveness of existing mechanisms for detecting corruption offenses.

Thus, the level of reporting corruption cases among citizens in European Union countries in 2024 (Fig. 12) indicates significant interstate differentiation; however, passive behavior among the population prevails in most countries.

The highest rates of reporting corruption offenses were recorded in Luxembourg, where 59% of respondents stated they had reported such cases, as well as in Portugal and Finland, where the corresponding values are 44% and 42%, respectively. Relatively high figures are also observed in the Netherlands, Bulgaria, and Sweden.

At the same time, reporting levels remain low in most countries. Specifically, in Romania, only 3% of respondents reported cases of corruption, followed by Greece at 4% and Slovakia at 5%, indicating limited use of corruption disclosure mechanisms. In these countries, the share of citizens who do not report such offenses exceeds 90%.

Overall, a trend toward passive behavior among citizens prevails across European Union countries, manifested in the significant proportion of those who do not report corruption offenses even when they occur.

This leads to the conclusion that the effectiveness of anti-corruption policy is largely limited by the low level of citizen engagement in reporting processes. This underscores the need to increase trust in institutions and improve protection mechanisms for individuals who report such offenses.

6. Concluding remarks

The conducted analysis of the perception, impact, and behavioral aspects of corruption in European Union countries has demonstrated its multidimensional nature, manifested in a combination of index indicators, public perception, and citizens' behavioral responses. It has been established that the dynamics of the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) between 2012 and 2024 are characterized by relative stability with signs of stagnation, indicating the limited effectiveness of anti-corruption policies in the long term.

It has been established that a high level of perception of corruption as a widespread phenomenon dominates in European Union countries, while its direct impact on citizens' daily lives is significantly lower. This indicates a gap between general perception and personal experience, confirming the institutional nature of corruption processes. The analysis of behavioral aspects revealed a contradiction between declared intolerance toward corruption and actual tolerance for its individual manifestations. It also identified a low level of reporting corruption offenses, which limits the effectiveness of anti-corruption policies and indicates insufficient trust in state institutions. The findings are of practical importance for Ukraine, as they confirm the necessity of strengthening a comprehensive approach to anti-corruption, which should combine institutional, legal, and social tools, while also fostering increased public trust and encouraging active citizen participation in exposing corruption offenses.

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