

GLOBSEC Vulnerability Index: How resilient is Central Europe and the Western Balkans region to Russian and Chinese influence?

GLOBSEC's new extensive research, the Vulnerability Index, analyses vulnerabilities which can lead to greater Kremlin's and Beijing's influence in eight countries of Central Europe and the Western Balkans.

On a scale of 0-100 where 100 is the most vulnerable and 0 the most resilient, it evaluates eight countries in the areas of public attitudes, political landscape, public administration, information landscape and civic and academic space. The scores reflect how confrontation between the West, on one side, and Russia and China, on the other is playing out in a strategically important region with geographically peripheral or aspiring members of the EU and NATO.

Foreign malign activities constitute both a cause and consequence of weak and vulnerable societies and governments. The study, however, shows how different factors, including domestic actors and policies play a strong role in resilience-building.

Vulnerable public

Public attitudes dimension is the most vulnerable among the 5 analyzed dimensions. Pan-Slavic unity, language proximity, shared history and cultural ties are important factors influencing the vulnerability of the society in Serbia, Bulgaria, Montenegro and Slovakia. The Orthodox Church and its representatives often act as promoters of pro-Kremlin voices or interests and contribute to the vulnerability in 4 of 8 countries.

Weaponization of disinformation

Anti-liberal attitudes accompanied by intensive smear campaigns conducted by actors allegedly protecting "traditional values" are an important venue of societal polarization, which is a key source of vulnerability in Hungary, Montenegro and North Macedonia. Such attitudes often stem from widespread dissatisfaction and disillusionment with how democracy works in all of the analyzed countries. These, in combination with increasing government influence on the media in some countries, push people towards disinformation and preference of authoritarian systems of governance. The presence of disinformation in both the online and offline information space correlates with the presence and influence of pro-Kremlin actors and narratives in the media in the region.

Strategic documents differ in addressing foreign influence, Russia and China

Concerns about widespread corruption, state capture and the need for increased protection of the election system are present, at least in some form, in all analyzed countries. But one of the report's key findings are very different approaches and situational awareness to foreign influence, Russia and China in key strategic documents – security and defense/military strategies. Only in Czechia, Romania and Slovakia is Russia recognized as a security challenge, and China is addressed constructively only in Slovakia. Serbia, on the other hand, treats Russia in almost friendly terms.

The countries covered by the study are Bulgaria, Czechia, Hungary, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Romania, Serbia and Slovakia. How do the countries under review compare against each other in the above-mentioned five areas of public life? Visit www.vulnerabilityindex.org or GLOBSEC website to see more.

For media enquiries: Adam Sipos, PR manager, GLOBSEC, adam.sipos@globsec.org, +421 948 066 234

Overall Vulnerability Scores

