

## OPINION PAPER • National Security

May 2026 • CySII — Cyprus Security and Intelligence Institute

# Corruption as a national security threat

**Dr Petros Petrikkos** • *Head of Operations, Cyprus Security and Intelligence Institute*

Transparency deficits create structural vulnerabilities enabling corruption to operate as a force multiplier for national security threats. In this context, information asymmetries, weak oversight mechanisms, and inadequate accountability frameworks establish permissive environments where corrupt actors exploiting institutional blind spots. The democratic model enables citizens to actively seek and pursue access to reliable information, as citizens in democratic countries have both rights and responsibilities, while the state itself is seen as the guarantor and protector of such rights and liberties.

The aforementioned model is considerably threatened in less transparent environments, where the political elite exercise power unchecked. Unhinged corruption, fraud, nepotism, and the exercise of political power at the expense of citizens' rights and liberties ultimately provides fertile ground for instability, social disorder, and for hostile operations to flourish. Corruption is ultimately an indicator that, apart from the undermining and abuse of basic democratic values across the social spectrum, it also undermines national security. When corruption is present, power is concentrated and forces out checks and balances that would otherwise scrutinise power as such.

Additionally, corruption contributes to the continuation of (organised) crime and facilitates foreign influence. The literature on National Security Studies showcases that corruption can shape influence operations by altering power dynamics and undermining security institutions. In turn, this facilitates processes that can exploit national security to achieve hostile geopolitical objectives. By extension, this increases the workload of security services in countering hostile influence operations nationally and regionally, whilst society remains endangered, as it is a vulnerability area in democratic societies which can be further exploited by disinformation and hybrid attacks. Influence operations can encourage agents of

influence (or 'useful idiots') extending hostile positions without reflecting on the credibility of the information at hand, simply because such information might potentially be targeting corruption scandals. Russian malicious actors exercising influence operations have notoriously targeted key political figures, academics, company executives, CSO and societal figures, and other agents of influence, with or without their explicit consent to replicate narratives of political significance and to further hostile policy ambitions through acts of corruption and other methods. As such, corruption enters a multifaceted domain that can even transform narrative across a range of influential actors.

The scandal noted at the beginning of the Cypriot Presidency of the Council of the EU is a primary example of how states, particularly small states, can feel the effects of corruption on a more widespread level. On 8th January 2026, a video was circulated on social media, showing the involvement of key political figures with the chief executive of CYFIELD, a major construction company. While it is true that the video is a product of a targeted malicious information operation aimed at destroying the credibility of the Republic of Cyprus, the fact remains that the information operation exploited real, existing vulnerabilities, in a timely manner and at the beginning of the Cypriot Presidency. Additional corruption scandals that are discussed even in contemporary context include the 'golden passports' scandal recorded via the Al Jazeera Investigative Unit, which revealed the abuse of the Citizenship By Investment programme, and the leak of the Hacking Team company, which revealed how the Cyprus Intelligence Service and other security and intelligence services had obtained software to spy on citizens.

On 23rd April 2026, during the workings of the Delphi Economic Forum, Laura Codici, the European Chief Prosecutor under the European Public Prosecutor's Office (EPPO) highlighted that "no country is clean", reflecting on EPPO's 5-year operations across 24 EU member-states. Codici emphasised that corruption exists everywhere and anywhere systematically. EPPO's role throughout these past 5 years has shown increased reporting of fraud and corruption cases, something which is encouraging, yet simultaneously alarming, due to the need for stronger measures to tackle corruption and fraud.

In Estonia, the Internal Security Service (KAPO) acts to prevent corruption, recognising that cases of influence peddling and high-level corruption should be taken very seriously, particularly due to their disruptive nature. Ultimately, while Estonia in 2025-2026 has consistently held the 12th spot in the corruption perception index, and thereby

maintaining relatively low levels of corruption, agencies like KAPO recognise that corruption can disrupt the functionality of state institutions, meaning officials might act in personal interests rather than the state's interest. KAPO's official website comments that Riigikogu in 2017, states that based on "The Fundamentals of Estonian Security Policy", as approved by the Riigikogu (parliament) in 2017, "corruption diminishes political, social and economic stability, undermines trust in the state and democratic values, and can lead to an unfavourable social and economic environment and declining public security."

The main obstacle, as noted, is rooted in the structural impediments that feed and sustain the same corruption mechanism exhibited across institutions. While it is a considerable challenge to root out corruption in every corner within institutions, understanding that diminishing its effect is vital for ensuring long-term stability and growth, both for the state but also its citizens.

---

#### **About the Author**

**Dr Petros Petrikkos** is the Head of Operations of the Cyprus Security and Intelligence Institute (CySII). His research focuses on ontological security, intelligence & national security, defence, small states, technology in warfare and hybrid threats, amongst others.

---

*The views expressed in this opinion paper are those of the author in his capacity as a CySII researcher.*

---