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## **U.S., EU WARN AGAINST POLITICAL MEDDLING IN BOSNIA GRAFT CASES**

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Reuters (21 February 2018)

The United States and the European Union on Wednesday warned Bosnia it needed to better protect the judiciary in corruption cases from political pressure, which had resulted in few high-level graft cases being processed in the Balkan country.

A report by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), funded by the U.S. government, found that most high-level cases of corruption in Bosnia failed because they were poorly processed by prosecutors and judges.

In a country where corruption is widespread, no top official charged with graft has ever been convicted.

The OSCE report, which was based on monitoring 67 trials for corruption completed in Bosnia between 2010 and 2017, said that a lack of harmonisation of laws and criminal procedure codes involving graft in Bosnias multi-layer judicial system was among the main problems.

Too many prosecutors arent drafting quality indictments, ... too many judges arent scrutinizing indictments and they arent applying or interpreting the law in a reasoned, consistent way, U.S. Ambassador in Bosnia, Maureen Cormack, said during the presentation of the report.

Lars-Gunnar Wigemark, the head of the EU mission in Bosnia, said the basic problem was that penalties for engaging in corrupt behaviour were not harsh enough.

There needs to be sufficient deterrent, Wigemark warned. You cannot become a member of the EU with such levels of corruption.

Bosnia aspires to join the wealthy 28-member bloc but EU officials have repeatedly said it needs to improve the rule of law and combat graft.

The report stressed the need for protection of judges and prosecutors from political pressure, and said responsibility for this falls on the High Judicial and Prosecutorial Council (HJPC), the top judicial coordination body.

The key is for institutions like the (HJPC) to vigorously and impartially ensure that corruption does not go unchallenged, Cormack said.

She said the body has often allowed politicians in Bosnia to interfere in selecting, disciplining and dismissing judges and prosecutors, which was unacceptable.

The HJPC must be independent, but it must also be accountable. Not to the politicians with a stranglehold on power in Bosnia, but to the people whom the judiciary represents and serves, Cormack said.

HJPC President Milan Tegeltija said the body was already working on improving of its capabilities and training prosecutors and judges to deal with graft cases.

<https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-bosnia-corruption/u-s-eu-warn-against-political-meddling-in-bosnia-graft-cases-idUKKCN1G52BZ>

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