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The Relevance of Perceptions of Corruption to Crime Prevention. A Comparative
Cultural Study In the EU-Accession States Bulgaria and Romania, the EU-Candidate
States Turkey and Croatia and the EU-States Germany, Greece and United Kingdom

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Approach
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Dr. Iuliana Precupețu is a researcher at the Research Institute for Quality of Life, Romanian Academy and an associate lecturer at the Faculty of Sociology and Social Work, University of Bucharest. She has a doctoral degree in sociology obtained from the University of Bucharest for her thesis on community development. Iuliana Precupețu has ten years of experience in social research and teaching. She is specialised in quality of life, social policy, methodology of social research and the study of corruption.
Introduction

During the past two years Romania continued with both its legislative and institutional efforts targeted at preventing, sanctioning and combating corruption. Corruption remained the main topic of interest of the public discourse. Extensive efforts have been undertaken up to 2006 in order to create the legislative framework and build the institutional capacity in order to curb corruption. During 2007 reforms continued in the direction of a structural transformation. Essentially, the various reports looking at corruption in a comparative perspective acknowledged change in Romania in the positive sense.

According to the CPI 2006 ranking, Romania is placed 84th in the hierarchy of countries, with a score of 3.1\(^1\). The CPI varies between 9.6 in Finland, Iceland and New Zealand and 1.6 in Haiti. Even though a slight continuous improvement of scores was registered over time, between 1997\(^2\) (score 3.44) and 2006, the score based on perceptions of country experts and analysts still indicates a high level of corruption.

Looking at the control of corruption as one of the six dimensions of governance, the WB report on governance (2007) reveals a continuous increase in this indicator starting especially with 2002 and marking a more pronounced evolution in the period 2005-2006. This reflects the great effort that has been put into creating a broad legal and institutional framework designed in order to target corruption prior to Romania’s accession to the EU in 2007.

The 2007 Freedom House report placed Romania's corruption rating at 4.00 (on a scale from 1 to 7, where one means highest level of progress and 7 the lowest level), which marked an improvement in comparison to previous years and continued the positive trend reported by the country in the past years. This progress in ranking has been explained by the growing effectiveness of anticorruption reforms.

Concentrating on the evaluation of the legislative and institutional framework designed in order to prevent, combating and sanctioning corruption, the TI Romania report (2007)

\(^1\) No. of surveys 8, confidence range 3 - 3.2.
\(^2\) First year of survey for Romania.
indicated that mechanisms put into place in order to fight corruption have both negative and positive aspects and a number of public policies that have had weak outputs so far.

Although there is evident progress in the field of anticorruption as mentioned by the various reports quoted above, the main topic of debate in Romania remains the actual results of investigations in corruption cases. The core issue in this respect is the seemingly high number of suspended sentences especially in high level corruption cases.

This paper seeks to understand the perceptions towards corruption held by the representatives of six target groups who are engaged in targeting corruption: economy, politics, civil society, media, police and judiciary. The present study uses a Grounded Theory approach aiming at reconstructing the profile of corruption in Romania as revealed by perceptions towards the phenomenon. This methodology entails a bottom-up approach which inductively derives theory from empirical data and aims to identify in an open manner the patterns of perception towards corruption in the attempt to reveal Romanian lines of reasoning. These argumentative patterns containing accounts of corruption derive from the present circumstances of Romanian society as well as from its particular social and cultural framework. Consequently, the analysis of perception models sheds light on both these elements. Following this premise of the research project (Taenzler, Maras, Giannakopoulos, 2007), the present analysis reveals the common sense theories of corruption in Romania.

The emphasis here is on the nature and causes of corruption in Romania as revealed by expert interviews. This paper is a contribution to a Grounded Theory of Corruption that was advanced in its initial form during the first stage of our research project (Precupetu, 2007). Here we highlight the characteristics and mechanisms of corruption as well as the major factors of corruption originating at individual level and in a set of structural spheres: economic, social, governance, regulations/judiciary and cultural.

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3 For a complete account of corruption resulting from the second empirical phase of the research please see the research report at [http://www.uni-konstanz.de/crimeandculture/reports.htm](http://www.uni-konstanz.de/crimeandculture/reports.htm)
Methodology of the study

The findings presented here are the result of the second empirical phase of the research project in which interviews have been conducted with experts from institutions having important roles in targeting corruption: economy, politics, civil society, media, police and judiciary. The field work was performed in the period January - September 2007. According to the common methodology of the research project, for each group, two interviews were carried out, with the exception of NGOs and Police groups for which three interviews were conducted. The focussed in-depth interviews were based on interview guidelines common for all subjects, which was adapted to the field of work and particular expertise of each interviewee. The average duration of the interviews was one hour and twenty five minutes.

The purpose of the interviews was to elicit ‘thick’ descriptions of corruption. These thick descriptions which are dense in terms of information and evaluation allow for an in-depth understanding of the ‘everyday theories’ of corruption.

The strategy of analysis is based on ‘analytic interpretation’ (Denzin, 1989) which essentially entails the use of an abstract scheme derived from research. It goes across the material gathered, namely interviews, trying to follow the concepts identified. This strategy assumes a variable language, which draws on the concepts resulting from open coding. The strength of such an approach is its capacity for easily highlighting a rather comprehensive and clear outlook of corruption, even though the ‘story’ of corruption tends to become rather fragmented by the consecutive description of variables. The interpretation is multi-voiced in the way that it uses the voices of those interviewed in order to build an account of corruption.

The researcher takes a ‘back seat’ in this approach. The ‘voice’ of researcher is to be heard in two instances. The first one is the mode of conceptualisation of perceptions, of using abstract notions that can make up models. The second situation in which the researcher has had a ‘voice’ was that of ‘interpretation’: the perceptions that constituted

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4 We would like to thank to all the experts who answered our questions and their valuable contribution to our study. Also, many thanks to the National Anticorruption Directorate and General Anticorruption Department of the Ministry of Interior and Administrative Reform for their continuous support to our research.

5 One fourteen-minute was excluded from the calculation of this average due to its unusual length.
the primary data have been ‘interpreted’ only to the extent that they have been placed into a larger context and sometimes explained in relation to the specific Romanian reality. The researcher’s ‘input’ has been, in this way, limited and the main lead belonged to the various stances expressed by those interviewed.

The purpose within this strategy of analysis was to further contribute to the generation of a substantive level theory of corruption which was firstly advanced during the previous phase of the research project (Precupetu, 2007). Such a theory entailed essentially several steps: highlighting the content (definitions, characteristics) of the core category of the study (corruption), exploring the causal conditions that influence the phenomenon, identifying the actions or interactions that result from the central phenomenon and delineating the consequences of the phenomenon. The current stage of research brought more evidence for the validation of this substantive level theory on several dimensions.

The method used in analysis was qualitative content analysis which is an approach of empirical, methodological controlled analysis of texts within their context of communication, following content analytical rules and step by step models, without rash quantification (Marrying, 2001).

The interviews were analysed by using the system of categories elaborated during the first phase of research which was completed and restructured. The categories were developed inductively by employing the procedure of open coding. Categories were created based on codes which were carefully founded and revised within the process of analysis in feedback loops. Trained members of the project team coded the material.

The chosen unit of analysis was the theme and step-by-step codes were created out of the material. Data analysis for each case involved generating concepts through the process of coding which represents the operations by which data were broken down, conceptualised, and put back together in new ways (Strauss and Corbin, 1990).

The material provided by the interviews was analysed by using computerised analysis software, Atlas-ti.

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6 Adapted from Strauss and Corbin (1990).
No personal data like age and/or occupation were been provided in cases of quotes for the interviewed experts in order to insure confidentiality. The interviews were numbered in the order in which they were carried out. The quotes were reproduced exactly from the recorded interviews. Some short phrases were occasionally taken out in cases of redundancies.

Perceptions towards corruption. On the nature and causes of the phenomenon in Romania

I. Characteristics and mechanisms of corruption

1. How corrupt is Romania? Drawing shades of corruption

During the past years, a strong discourse about corruption overshadowed all the other major themes of public interest in Romania, especially in the period prior to Romania’s accession to EU. Looking at the discourse centred on corruption, the analysis carried out in the first phase of our research used public documents compiled during the period 2001-2006 and revealed perceptions towards corruption of the six target groups of our study. The analysis showed a perception of a highly corrupt country. There was a wide agreement among all target groups that corruption became generalised in all spheres of Romanian society representing thus a dangerous and grave phenomenon. Consequently, in terms of spread, corruption was perceived as all-encompassing and thus, along with poverty, a major problem of Romanian society (Precupetu, 2007).

In the same time, the discourse on corruption was not nuanced in any way. It developed around an aggregated concept without generally differentiating between forms or grades of corruption. While by and large the analysed discourses acknowledged the various institutions affected by corruption, they still did not distinguish tones of phenomenon.

Perceptions of interviewed experts on the spread of corruption create a different picture. First, most of them tend to point to the fact that corruption is rather isolated and does not have a great magnitude, revealing thus a certain contrast to the results obtained during the first phase of research. Second, the experts distinguished between various forms of
corruption and their extent among various institutions and/or different segments of society.

This can mean that, on the one hand, experts are well informed on the actual situation in the field of corruption and anti-corruption and they define the reality of corruption according to their own experience. On the other hand, some change happened during the time of previous analysis and the present. As in 2006, the year previous to EU integration of Romania, the country was facing the risk of activating the safeguard clause, a compelling discourse on the issue and significant efforts to combat the phenomenon characterised the period.

It is possible that 2007 marked a new stage in dealing with the issue of corruption. The discourse on corruption as such faded to a certain extent while institutions specialised in anti-corruption carried out their activity following the extensive earlier efforts of building the institutional capacity. At the same time, along with some political commotion a certain degree of conflict over corruption issues was also visible among the institutions with responsibilities in the anti-corruption fight. In this case, the perceptions of experts can reflect this new phase of addressing corruption.

While acknowledging corruption as a universal phenomenon for all societies, most experts consider that it occurs rather sporadically as deviant conduct, rather than a generalised phenomenon which affects Romanian society.

*It is a deviant isolated practice. Corruption in Romania is not a phenomenon. This is from my experience. (….) It is definitely isolated, there is no such thing as a phenomenon. It appears sporadically depending on certain conditions. (Participant no 4)*

*Corruption is a universal phenomenon in developed countries too (…). If we look at corruption globally, I believe in Romania corruption is within acceptable limits. If we look at it as a principle, of course, we have to combat it but it is not possible to totally eradicate it. (Participant no 9)*

*As an influence on the economy, corruption is very low in comparison to other countries. It does not affect the GDP so much. It has a very low influence in comparison to other countries and I can give as examples Italy or Greece. (Participant no 3)*
The reach of corrupt behaviour is uneven, and some spheres of social life are more affected by corruption than others.

_I do not think corruption is a behavioural pattern in Romanian society (…). There are activities and domains where it is less present and some others where it is generally present. We speak here about public servants where we still have big problems, judiciary maybe less and less but still with difficulties and domains involving (public) contracting._ (Participant no 3)

_Corruption in judiciary is quasi-generalised, I cannot say that all magistrates are corrupt but I can say that you can find unethical behaviour, not to mention games of interests and other bad things like abuse of procedures._ (Participant no 1)

While some segments of society are perceived as deeply corrupt, there are others that are not in the public eye, even though corruption might affect them as well.

_In universities we don’t talk about plagiarising, about promotions based on “beautiful eyes”, about those who have good relations with the dean and get two workloads while the others only get one_ (Participant no 11).

Various forms of corruption having different scopes and influence in society are discerned by experts. Most of the persons interviewed made the distinction between small and grand corruption. Also recognised as different is the outline that corruption takes in public and private realms respectively. Corruption in private realms is only briefly acknowledged by experts from NGOs, economy and media. The major focus is on corruption that develops within the public sector and in its relation to the private area. This signifies that corruption arising in private companies is not yet a theme for discourse in Romania and for the moment is only succinctly recognised.

The various forms of corruption are considered as governed by a different logic and stemming from dissimilar opportunities. The small corruption is perceived as plaguing especially the public sector being quite broad, while grand corruption is considered as less spread and more difficult to understand and penalize. Also, the public tolerance to these forms of phenomenon is different according to one interviewed journalist. While small corruption is considered as acceptable in society, grand corruption is highly rejected by the public. The “cultural corruption” identified as such by one representative of NGO involves small bribes or presents in various forms and is to be found especially
in relation that citizens develop to the health, education systems and more generally public administration. This phenomenon is considered to be rather generalised and already part of the people’s mindset.

*It’s not like you feel about all the teachers in school, giving them flowers at the end of school year or first of March (…). You can only give them if you are satisfied with your child’s achievements. But for us it is a mechanism that became routine, it is a burden.*

( Participant no 11)

Here things should be more nuanced according to experts from the judiciary, media and NGOs and we should distinguish between gifts and bribes. Usually the label of corruption encompasses even the situation in which gifts are given as a matter of gratitude. For example, we can speak of gratitude if a doctor saved a life and received a gift. This is a normal feature of social relationships which is wrongly labelled as corruption. According to this opinion, such situations should be regulated in the way that such gifts are declared and taxed. Laws sometimes do not keep up with the mode in which social relations develop.

*For example, the need to be grateful to a doctor who did you a lot of good is different from a bribe, especially because we that some doctors do not fare well since they have such low salaries. Those with higher positions fare well while the young doctors are doing very badly. This is why it appears a natural need to give them a gift; it is more or less important as a value. I suppose that in the health private system gifts are also customary but they are rather symbolic.* (Participant no 1)

Another form of corruption identified by an NGO representative affects state institutions as such and their functioning: it is seen as endemic in the health and education system and public administration in regard to public contracting, licenses, etc. This sort of corruption is embedded in the very operation of these institutions and heavily impacts on their performance.

One more form that corruption embraces in the view of an NGO representative is the one that can almost completely paralyse the state institutions, dragging them into patterns that are close to organised crime. The corrupt behaviour that used to be present in customs or that currently accompanies the system of medicine acquisition illustrates this form of the phenomenon discussed here. They strongly depart from the rule of law and fair competition and turn into well designed mechanisms that capture whole organisations.
For example, we used to have this model in customs\(^7\): they were raising ‘contributions’ (share of bribes) from custom officers, then from the heads of shifts, up to the head of the customs department, the head of regional customs departments and finally to the directorate. It was a basket pattern. (Participant no 11)

2. The logic of corruption: a multifaceted phenomenon

At an individual level, corruption involves an economic calculation, apparently in the form of a shortcut for solving problems. In the short run, the costs might seem acceptable to those involved in such behaviour. The nature of corruption essentially lies in economic grounds for the NGO’s experts and one media representative. While also acknowledging its moral component, they consider corruption to be an economic relationship. Both parts involved obtain benefits by taking on the potential risks involved. It is seen as a rational individual choice given the tough conditions in which citizens have to act.

You give something in order to obtain something else, either you are entitled to it and obtain it faster or because you are under the pressure of bribe demand. When you get to the hospital, the doctor will not look at you, you would not be willing to give a bribe but you know, you got into the hands of doctors and have to empty your pockets…it is not like you want it, it is an economic rapport. (Participant no 11)

People in these days live in mathematical ways (...). They make calculations, those who get involved in such things. What do I gain from corruption, even if I am caught, and what is the probability of being caught? If this probability is low...(Participant no 7).

Besides the individual decision for involvement in corrupt actions, looking at phenomenon as such we can observe its flexibility in moving along with the economic opportunities, according to one expert from economy group.

Corruption appears in every hot economic sector. I suspect that corruption is more concentrated in real estate and everything that has to do with it. (...) If in 5 years Romania will boom in telecommunications you can be sure that it will settle there.

\(^7\) It should be mentioned here that this type of corruption in customs has been tackled in Romania and progress has been reported in this direction.
Corruption is very flexible and very well trained, it moves where the return rate of the investment is high in the short term. (Participant no 9)

At the micro level, corruption is based on a “small understanding” which entails an informal agreement between those engaging in corrupt acts. This understanding goes beyond the formal rules and backs up the unlawful undertakings. Its origins are traced by one NGO expert back to the pattern of societal development of Romania, as far as such informal contracts used to operate in traditional societies.

Looking at other domains where corruption appears, in the police for example, this is where small corruption is, where the “small understanding” works, the desire to become rich among police officers who have small salaries and doubtful morality… and the preference (from the part of people) of not paying the full value of a ticket (speeding, parking etc) but a quarter or a half of it by breaking in this way some moral principles. (Participant no 1)

Also, corruption is viewed by one judiciary representative as being founded on an understanding as a powerful commitment creating bonds between people in their illegal actions.

(… ) corruption is a manly thing. If we shook hands, we got an understanding …, we say it has a mafia character. We shook hands, you give me 100,000 and I help you. If that person satisfied his interest and the advantages are much higher than the 100,000 bribe, he will never talk. (Participant no 7)

The relationship between the two parts involved in corrupt acts is conceived as being egalitarian and involving an exchange. In case of public positions, the trade in itself, however, is unequal in regard to the nature of goods being exchanged: while the one who is trying to corrupt is handing over his own money and goods, the servant is exchanging something belonging to the state.

It is an exchange. But the citizen brings in something of his own while the servant trades something that is public. The state invested in you for a clear purpose. You negotiate something that is not negotiable from the start. (Participant no 4)

To a certain extent, both parties benefit from engaging in corruption. (…)The power relation is dual and this makes it very difficult to abandon the corrupt behaviour, both parties are bonded. (Participant no 1)
Corruption is perceived as *machinery* that keeps people within by developing certain mechanisms to push them towards conformity to illegal practices. Material gain, blackmail and personal vulnerability triggered by initial involvement into corruption are such mechanisms.

*We have a saying: when you entered the “hora” you will never leave. This is mostly valid for prosecutors, judges, policemen. If you got into corruption once with a lawyer or someone else, you cannot escape. You become vulnerable. (...) First, it is because you need some extra money. Second, if you refuse him, you are afraid he might say, ‘take care, I know about you with that business in the past’. There are things that are about the system you belong to.* (Participant no 6)

Representatives of the judiciary pointed out a mechanism of corruption which is the political order carried out through *a phone call*: investigation in corruption cases revealed that people with certain positions within institutions engage in corrupt actions upon request, through a phone call, from a person having a higher position within the same or other important institution. The status of the respective person seems to justify the order/request and the consequent actions even though they might be illegal. The individual receiving the respective call carries out ‘the order’ and considers the actions legitimised by the position of the person making the call. It is possible that this is interpreted through a certain relationship that people have to the ‘power’. They relate to higher positions within various hierarchies based on the authority of their superiors. Especially in contexts where the ‘distance to the power’ is high, where organisational structures are elevated, people tend to respond submissively to organisational layers and their corresponding authority. This sort of automatic response helps them to maintain their own positions.

Corruption has become, in the view of representatives of judiciary, the name for all the wrongdoings in Romanian society. Consequently, the blame is placed on the institutions designed to fight corruption which are called to investigate problems that are not legally under their responsibilities, like bankruptcy among banks or issues of subsidised medicines. It is also used as a simple explanation employed in order to account for

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8 Traditional Romanian folk dance.
drawbacks of various institutions and even for the successes or failures at the individual level.

Grand corruption is an ever increasingly sophisticated phenomenon. It employs very modern means and develops parallel to new technologies. It certainly has a global dimension as it encompasses entities that cross classical borders.

*We talk about a phenomenon which is very hard to prove if you do not carry out an investigation in real time. We talk about closed doors behind which there are persons who plan something somewhere in Romania. Maybe next time they will not even meet on Romania’s territory but abroad, on an island, and they talk, they know what they have to do, I do not know what they did.* (Participant no 7)

In the beginning of the transition, corruption involved a sort of wild accumulation of capital while in our days it entails more tactical and refined ways.

*Now they do not have that exaggerated greed anymore, like ‘I’ll do this for you but tomorrow you come with the envelope (money). It is not about this anymore. Now they have information systems, they transfer the money, and they leave cybernetic traces. We can find them, but many persons can intermediate the way, law firms, consultancy firms and you cannot prove this is corruption.* (Participant no 7)

Apart from turning into a more refined phenomenon, it is also possible that in some areas corruption will exhaust itself, as society becomes more democratic and provides people with multiple choices for the paths they choose in order to solve their problems.

*In the ‘90s it was almost blackmail. But now, with competition in society and the many institutions, people can solve their problems in various ways, they do not depend so much on bribes to solve their problems.* (Participant no 6)

3. Too much ado about corruption. Do Romanians live in an oversized reality of corruption?

Many opinions expressed by the experts indicated a distorted perception towards corruption that would characterise the image that Romanians have on the phenomenon. Some views tend to suggest that perceptions on corruption are far above the ground and strongly depart from the objective reality. This would be essentially due to the highly
visible model of the new rich as well as to the way media portrays it. The lack of transparency about the mode in which wealth was accumulated also contributes to the misrepresentation of corruption according to one expert from media group.

_Several years ago there was a kind of mania about Nastase⁹, you went somewhere and every big villa was attributed to him by local people. There was something there, sometimes the one holding that villa was Nastase’s men but there were big exaggerations... (Participant no 2)_

_The anticorruption rhetoric became an element of political routine. In 2004 electoral campaign, the message was ‘down with corruption’, it was a social message of the current government. (Participant no 7)_

However, discourses on corruption, even though accompanied by exaggeration, are necessary in some views because they exert pressure towards institutions and push action against it. It is illustrated by the “Monica Macovei⁸ phenomenon which was essentially mental” in the way that it catalysed social engagement against corruption. (Participant no 2)

The great emphasis on corruption especially in the media encourages an oversized perception of corruption and induces in the citizen the feeling that he lives in a society that is profoundly corrupt. The first effect of such distorted perceptions is the unjustified generalisation for entire professional categories. Secondly, such deformed reality of corruption is used as validation of individual corrupt conduct. At the individual level it is used in order to overcome the cognitive dissonance that might accompany corrupt behaviour.

_We reached a level of perception that is equal to reality but we are confused because of the media. We consider all politicians to be corrupt, but it is not like that. In the same time, we consider that is normal to ‘give’ (bribes) to the doctor in order to obtain a compensated prescription or a medical leave, this is the kind of corruption that we do not perceive as such. Or we do, but we accept it. (Participant no 11)_

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⁹ Former Prime Minister.
⁸ Former Minister of Justice.
I think that people hide behind generalisations and find excuses for their behaviour. If everyone is corrupt, then my (corrupt) gestures are much more tolerable. On the contrary, corruption is something that is imposed on me. (Participant no 1)

At the micro level, people develop personal strategies in order to solve own problems that make use of corruption contributing thus to perpetuating the existing system.

We have this tendency to place the guilt on others, like ‘the servant is culpable that I had to give him a pack of coffee because I needed that document in two days’. But I actually knew two weeks ago that I needed that paper. It is a matter of management, if you give up by saying that things are going this way, you take part in this mechanism. (Participant no 11)

It seems that in time some practices turned into deeply rooted social customs. This would be the case of the corruption in the health system. While in the public system under-the-table-payments are usually motivated by the low salaries of the personnel, in the alternative private health system where taxes are paid, the practice of extra-paying is still present to a certain extent.

Even when you go to a private medical cabinet and you pay the cost for consultation you still feel the need to give something to the doctor. It is like you don’t feel well if you don’t do it. (Participant no 3)

II. Causes of corruption

1. Economic motives of corruption

The transition context

Corruption grew in Romania nurtured by the early context of transition. The process of replacing the deep-rooted old policy frameworks with new policy structures based on new principles was accompanied for a given period of time by a legislative and institutional vacuum. This has lead to serious dysfunctions in society in the opinion of one representative of judiciary. The large scale transformation was accompanied by almost unavoidable difficulties.
There was no one to make laws. It was a historical phenomenon. That was not the time to create institutions. It was all like an open field and each person managed on his own. After a decennium of transition we began to recover. (Participant no 6)

The weak social control of first years of transition is thus considered as a major driver of corruption. Early ’90s meant an utter rejection of rules as they were assimilated to a great extent to communist control. Therefore, the general social milieu was not favourable to law enforcing and allowed for increasing illegalities.

I was a prosecutor back then. If I tried to enforce the law, I was considered a communist. There was no authority at the time. (Participant no 6)

In the economic realm, the tough economic context of the early years of transition left enduring marks on the economic development of the country. Everything that is happening in the present is due to the transition period when transparency was non-existent. During the first six years up to 1996 the country was at the mercy of people who did whatever they pleased. The political colours did not matter as ‘crows will not take out each others’ eyes’\(^{11}\). They divided spheres of influence, interests and it is very hard to break this system. (Participant no 7)

Instead of organising a competitive economy based on free competition and having as a fundament private property, personal wealth was acquired which does not encourage competition (Participant no 10).

The practices established during the first stages of transformation continued over considerable time span and influenced the trajectory of growth. While the costs of initial investment in private business were high, the lack of capital coupled with the reticence of banks to lend money based on business plans contributed to an accumulation of capital many times through illegal means. Furthermore, the high taxes encouraged illegitimate activities. Such actions propagated in time to our days even though some measures have been taken in order to counter fiscal evasion, unregistered work and other illicit practices which go hand in hand with corruption. Even so, law enforcement is a major weakness that still leaves space for flourishing of wrongdoings.

\(^{11}\) Romanian saying signifying an understanding between those involved in the same type of illegal pursuit.
...because of the high taxes some try to elude the law in one way or another. If the laws were very clear, very tough but more flexible about the taxes, I am sure many people would not risk their business. Here there is another problem in Romania, there are firms and persons who practiced such illegalities over time and when they were caught they were not forbidden to carry out their activity. (Participant no 10)

Short term opportunities for corruption: privatisation of state assets

Privatisation itself illustrates this process of switching from the state regime of command and control to institutions governed by market incentives. The perceptions towards the process of privatisation and its facets vary among the persons interviewed. While some opinions tend to indicate an illegal course of action, others use distinctions in order to highlight a more complicated procedure.

Before 1989 there was also corruption at another level in terms of advantages obtained. Afterwards, there was a greater possibility to have access to privatisation and public contracts. The state is also much weaker and people have little fear of it. Corruption maybe developed or embraced other forms. (Participant no 14)

I believe that overall the privatisation procedure in case of big privatisation was done by the law but the money was made in small privatisation, small business where there isn’t so much control. Besides privatisation, the best money is made in public contracting. (Participant no 9)

According to the opinion of one representative of judiciary, in regard to privatisation the problem was that of the financial regulations at the time which dated back to the 70s. Essentially, there were no rules according to which one would have been able to judge at the time of privatisation. Consequently, the state assets were valued according to their “inventory value” and not at market value. The former assessment was usually much higher than the latter but did not correspond to the actual market price that an investor would be willing to pay. This is why, in the opinion cited, some state assets received low prices as strong criteria were not into place.
However, this argument, responds to one side of the problem, that of the value of state assets. The other side which was widely debated in regard to the process of privatisation concerns the actual hands to which the wealth was transferred.

One more aspect can be invoked in relation to the intricate economic context of early transition in Romania. Keeping alive the state companies even though they were not profitable was, in the perception of one representative of judiciary, a political decision that also brought more problems. Credits have been given in order to support the respective companies which were never returned to banks and led to huge losses in the economy.

In the present, the fact that political realm is still controlling the economy is acknowledged as a major seed for corruption by the representatives of judiciary who consider that the higher the political involvement in the economy the higher corruption is.

For the economic field, a complex of factors can account for the flourishing of corruption. Features of the economic environment like the excessive bureaucracy, a legislative framework still not clear enough, lack of transparency, disloyal competition create a broad background which is still fertile for corruption.

*In the business world, it is about the need for quick development, in connection with the fuzzy legislation and the bureaucracy which determined business people to constantly use bribes. (Participant no 1)*

*Transparency is not yet as it should be; there are many problems in the field of transparency and competition; there is still tolerance towards disloyal competition and favouritisms that the government and other state institutions are practicing in a hidden way, maybe less than in the past but there is still this practice. (Participant no 10)*

*The intricate overlapping positions: ‘the bread and the knife’*

Corruption is triggered by the overlapping economic and political positions, which transcend formal organisations and are organised around private interests. Representatives of the media, judiciary, NGOs, and business groups adhere to this opinion. However, the role of this phenomenon in corruption is conceived differently by
experts. Some views point out that the intersection of political and economical positions is still a mere reality originating from the convoluted circumstances of early transition. Other points of view indicate that the economic development of the country leads over time to a natural separation of the two realms, contributing thus to a sort of drainage of corruption that is fed by the connection between the economy and politics.

During transition, an important role in feeding corruption was played by the overlapping political and economic positions. “…this is very important because in this case you have in your hands both the bread and the knife (…). When a business man has a political position, he will benefit from transition mechanisms in order not to be transparent. When you have to make a decision which is discretionary because is not made by two people but one and there is no clear procedure while control mechanisms are atrophied …then corruption increases. (Participant no 11)

Overlapping political and economic positions although still important in corruption phenomenon, have been particularly significant for the privatisation process. This type of corruption is exhausting itself due to the exhaustion of the opportunities in this area. However, the current situation in the economic sphere tends to develop in a more independent way from the political area according to one representative of the economy group. While initially wealth accumulation was largely based on connections between politics and economics, at present there is another emerging model, that of the ‘clean’ development of business in a free market economy. This can be seen in the top 300 of the richest persons\textsuperscript{12} in Romania where the top positions are taken by those who made their wealth in the early stages of transition but there is also a segment that shows no political implication.

Political people are the ones who are behind the major economic activities. What is currently going on in Romanian politics is an attempt to re-establish the economic power on different bases. After the revolution of 1989 a powerful economic oligarchy was established which managed to lead the country from the shadow and now they have their representatives in politics. At present, there is an attempt to clean this area, re-settle economic power and re-divide of spheres of influence. (Participant no 10)

\textsuperscript{12} This is a hierarchy of people according to their personal wealth drawn by Capital weekly magazine.
Besides the link between economic and political statuses, there is also another sort of relationship, that between economy and judiciary which is revealed as highly detrimental to an independent justice and effectively fighting with corruption.

The pressure or the system inherited and cultivated by the top business people, including here people from former “Securitate” who became business people can account for the doubtful quality of judiciary. They have an interest in maintaining control over the judiciary. (Participant no 1)

2. Social factors of corruption: A ‘two speed society’?

A complex set of social factors contributing to corruption has been identified in the views expressed by interviewees. In social realm, more nuances of corruption have been highlighted by the perceptions of experts.

Romanian society is seen as developing ‘in two speeds’ on two major coordinates. First, there is a difference between the public and private sector in regard to values orienting their activity, models of social action promoted, actual performance of institutions and grade of corruption affecting them.

Second, another major separation pointed out by the opinions expressed is one that concerns social cohesion. The experts brought up the problem of social polarisation and the subsequent visible differences between social groups in society. Along with debating the social models provided to people by the current Romanian society, the inequities and disparities that seem to characterise the social setup are also contemplated.

Social and private sectors are differentiated by experts from the media, economy and NGOs. They are conceived as unlike realms in regard to the type and degree of corruption. Many opinions tend to point out that the public sector is more likely to be affected by corruption. Lack of responsibility towards public resources, the under-financing of public institutions and the ensuing low salaries of personnel, the more bureaucratic type of organisation all seem to contribute to a type of corruption seen as endemic for this sector.
In the opinion of one representative of the target group economy, in public sector there is a higher probability for corruption to happen as people are not always accountable for the public money.

*Corruption exists in many places but where the public money is there is also the highest concentration of activities involving corruption because someone else is paying (the state).* (Participant no. 10)

Corruption affecting state institutions was facilitated by the transition process through the massive social transformation involving designing the new legislation, creating new institutions, reassessing the philosophy of public administration in the opinion of one NGO representative. The major process left the space for corruption to flourish and created opportunities for state capture where “various groups knew how to monopolise through legislation, procedures that they imposed and give them mechanisms, especially in the area of licensing and public contracting” (Participant no 11)

Moreover, in regard to domains like health or education, in the perception expressed from the target group economy and NGOs, they are plagued by essentially the same sort of corruption stemming out from under-financing. In both instances, the personnel working in these fields will find ways to round up their incomes through conditioning the quality of their work upon the informal payments received. In the case of the education system, the mode in which teachers carry out their work has lead to the development of a parallel education system in the form of private tutoring which escapes legal arrangements and evades taxes. In the case of the health system, the payments under the table made in order to endorse a better quality of medical services are the ordinary model describing corruption.

*If you take one million Americans and you put them in the situation of having to live on salaries we have in Romania, with the access to medical and educational resources, I am sure they will choose corruption, too. This is about the incentives that are provided to people.* (Participant no 2).

In the same time, the public sector including education, health and culture is perceived as being oversized, having large dimensions that impede on its efficiency. Together with the small incomes of the employees in this system, this factor explains why petty corruption is flourishing within it.
The public sector is also perceived by NGO’s experts as lacking ethical mechanisms in comparison to the private sector where accountability means have been put into place. On the contrary, the private segment is considered as a powerful engine in society which has the capacity of showing desirable models of behaviour while the public realm continues to lag behind.

Corruption flourishes in the field of public contracting, sometimes in relation to the private sector. The price of bribes is included in the total cost that is being paid by the state for goods or services in the opinion of one expert from judiciary. In this case, corruption is seen as an ‘arrangement’, at the expense of public money, in favour of private interests.

Corruption is related to some illegal activities like public acquisitions, arrangements, when you favour someone on public money to gain a tender procedure. This is where we have oversized prices in order to secure the bribe because this is money which enters an illegal circuit. (Participant no 7)

The system of selection and recruiting the personnel especially within the public sector is regarded as affected by the network of personal relationships nurtured here. The solution is seen in the very clear, unbiased and well implemented systems of recruiting personnel consisting in objective and tough criteria to be used in the process.

It is also a matter of recruiting human resources, even though in our ministry there is a strict recruiting system. But in my opinion the strategy for human resources is highly criticisable. (…) We start with recruiting, selection and hiring. Even though there are norms, strategy 2004-2010. Who knows it? It is on the web site. Human resources are the gate to an institution (Participant no 4)

Excessive bureaucracy is pointed out by representatives of both the economy and police groups as facilitating corruption when speaking about public administration, where the relationship between the public servants and public is involved. Formalities might take a long time (like the ones for issuing an ID card or a passport) and corruption appears as a time-saving mechanism. However, the administrative reform during the past years largely addressed these problems so as to prevent the illegal ‘taxes’.

In state institutions you have to wait five days in order to receive an approval on a document which needs 7 signatures. Each person signing that document is afraid (to take
on responsibility). This is not normal, and this system blocks the institution. This is why informal relations appear, in order to move fast and solve the problem. (Participant no 9)

In some fields there is also a sub-financing of the incomes of those who work there, the administrative rules are made in a very complicated way with the purpose to need someone to undo things so you can’t do things by yourself. (Participant no 14)

The flawed functioning of institutions is considered a major cause of corruption: The incapacity of state institutions and not only of state institutions to offer the necessary services without an intervention, a shortcut, an entry through the back door and so on... (Participant no 14)

As a major field of public sector, the education system is singled out as a key part of the set of factors backing up corruption.

The education system is rather outdated in both its methods and content of learning according to one representative of economy group. The Romanian education system is traditionally rather theoretic and emphases encyclopaedic orientation. This is perceived as unpractical and a having deep impact on education in the fields of major importance to anti-corruption like the judiciary. This has even more importance especially in the knowledge society. Corruption became a global phenomenon, increasingly complex due to the new technologies. It needs well educated people and appropriate methods to deal with it. As a consequence of the education system described above, the quality of human resources in judiciary realm is rather low. Another factor is the unequal relationship which exists between prosecutors and lawyers. While the lawyers have the opportunity of continuous learning by working on few cases, prosecutors have high workloads and little time to dedicate themselves to the intricate cases.

The law school which is extremely important is still training people like in Ceausescu’s times, meaning you learn a little bit of everything and you know nothing. (…) Today economic criminality involves a lot of legislation and even experience in international transactions. Corruption is globalised today and, besides the very act of corruption which might take place in Romania, the money will tour 7000 towns. (Participant no 9)

Education at individual level is also pointed to as a critical factor that influences corruption by other interviewees, as well. In the opinion of one representative of Police,
individuals are not properly trained to the extent that they become very good professionals and this can influence the way they understand to carry out their jobs. In this view, a low work ethic and lack of responsibility go together with a low level of education of people. Eventually, there is a mix of factors that is not conducive to either organizational or societal development. Experts from the media, politics and economy groups also adhere to this view adhere. *It is definitely lack of education: since early ages we have to tell a child that giving ciubuc, persches, spaga or any other way you might call it is a negative thing.* (Participant no 14)

Another facilitator of corruption is considered to be the citizen’s lack of education in juridical and institutional matters which might be a consequence of the setup of the communist society. The current framework of Romanian society is much more complicated and complex in comparison to the make-up of the former system. As a result of this aspect, people engage in corrupt behaviour without essentially comprehending all facets of their actions and the nature of the crime.

*Social models: ‘firing the canon’*

Besides the line of differentiation introduced in the configuration of corruption by the ownership system public/private, the opinions expressed by experts also revealed a string of delineation induced by social inequalities. The Romanian society in general is perceived as severely unjust. First, it is seen as polarised, with a segment of population being very rich and another part of its people leaving in poverty while middle class is considered rather insignificant.

*In fact, Romania is a deeply polarised society in regard to salaries; it is about the social condition. There are some who are very rich, like those from the top 300 who are billionaires, very rich. We don’t have a middle class as it should be in all civilised societies, who have professors, researchers, magistrates who are paid at a good level, then very few people who live at the limit of existence, like it happens all over the world.* (Participant no 7)

In the same time, the wealth accumulation in Romania especially in the early ‘90 is seen as highly dubious as many personal fortunes were made in the intricate context of the beginning of transition when social control was very low. As a result, the model of social
success posed by these individuals is seen as deeply wrong and further encouraging incorrect individual life strategies.

High level corruption became thus a model for the ordinary people. “Firing the cannon” (a da tunuri) signifies becoming rich quickly by a move that takes advantage of certain short time opportunities, like the privatisation of state assets: “what used to belong to everybody before 1990 became the property of the few, through fraudulent methods” (Participant no 2). It seems that this is the prototype of the new rich which grew to be the most powerful model of social success in the eyes of most people. They are so encouraged in their actions especially that punitive action against corruption appears to be absent.

This is the system: everybody sees that in order to get rich you have to ‘fire the cannon’ and you can do it and nothing happens to you. (Participant no 2)

People judge like this ‘I ‘fire the cannon’ now, launder the money by investing into something and I will get away with it like all the others before me’. Then the media come in, announcing investigations, inquiries and afterwards you see that everything fades away, everybody goes home peacefully. Next you think ‘if that person got away I will do it too’. (Participant no 7)

In the same time the model posed by the new rich affects some basic social values, for example that the accumulation of wealth is not based on personal achievements. Consequently, trust in the moral ways of social success decreases and frustration at individual level increases.

People see that you get the car, the villa, the mistress and all other status symbols… and get frustrated. (Participant no 2)

A series of inequalities and inequities seem to characterise Romanian society, constituting the sources of profound frustration among people. On the one hand many interviewees point out that there is a rupture between social effort/work and reward, which severely impairs the correlation between action and payment. The configuration of incomes/incentives reflects this situation, as work is not always remunerated accordingly. Moreover, social status is no longer the result of hard work, effort and education but can be the output of a rapid affluence obtained in illicit ways. Education and qualification are no longer accompanied by the consequent incentives. In this respect, the society seems to
a certain extent chaotic, the rewards being attributed to those knowing how to take advantage of the disorganisation of the transformation period and use it to personal private interests. Furthermore, the wrongdoings are not punished accordingly but seem rather ignored.

*There is no equity in what is going on - the cases in which you steal a hen and do 3 months in prison and those steeling billions and get away with it for various reasons. Actually, the larger resources you have access to, the slimmer the chances of being penalised. This is such an abnormal thing!* (Participant no 10)

**Networks of corruption**

The networks of relationships and interests, which transcend all spheres of formal societal organisation, constitute an important foundation for corruption. Social capital seems to play at times a negative role in corruption as relationships are used in unconstructive ways, especially in the situation specific for Romania in which former ‘securisti’ (members of communist secret service) were not revealed and still occupy key positions, according to some opinions.

*There are networks of relationships, for example in ministries, many “securisti”. These are breaks for a new generation of public servants…. There are informal networks, and I don’t mean exactly the top politicians like Nastase, or ministers, but at the second level, secretaries in ministers, councillors, around 45-50 they make a network. And they have relationships with the former “securitate”.* (Participant no 1)

Networks are either inherited from communist times or they come into being around current opportunities. During the communist regime, the lack of resources led to the establishment of networks of informal social relationships which redistributed the rare supply of goods from public system to people.

*Essentially it was a matter of survival, the networks of ‘pile’, and there is such a word for every post-communist country, took care of everything, from coffee, sugar, up to good books. Corruption used to function as the re-allocation of scarce resources. Money was not important, but the ‘pile’ relations were.* (Participant no 2)

The type of special relationships established in communism which transcended formal organisations in the attempt to access the scarce resources is considered as continuing to
today by one representative of the media and representing the seed for the current state of corruption in public system.

“Small corruption is the direct heritage of communism… Even at the level of enterprises, they had this arrangement of exchanging non-monetary goods among them. …The system was deeply corrupt” (Participant no 2).

The networks are also organised depending on current opportunities and around powerful interests whom they promote. They tend to constitute an accepted social norm.

Groups are formed and when someone from that group has an opportunity for an important position which can be a source of financial resources the whole group will back him up in order to get that position. This is no longer about moral support - it is like ‘we help you to get there but once there, do not forget us’. It is already a standard practice and tends to obtain a moral confirmation; these are the rules of the game” (Participant no 9)

Another facet of the networks issue is the so-called ‘entourage’ which is invoked as another factor that might foster corruption. In case of police officers, a model is revealed that small groups (in this case, policeman) can exert pressure towards citizens and use the situations of illegal conduct to their personal advantage.

Or it is the entourage. In certain places they organise stakes (police officers) and they put the citizen in the situation of offering bribes in order to escape the respective contravention. (Participant no 4)

The part played by socialisation

Socialisation during communist times is considered as a major cause of today’s corruption by experts from NGOs, media and economy groups. In those times, people have learned to develop life strategies within their private sphere of life and, with few exceptions, in conflict with the outside world which was not worthy of trust. Moreover, a specific rupture between citizens and the state contributed to an impaired relationship that people developed with their society. Morality was not assimilated in relation with the state but rather conveyed to the groups like family and friends within which people developed strong bonding relations.
I believe that corruption has to do with the education we received. (...) I think corruption is essentially based on the legitimization of theft in communist times. Then, stealing from the state, which was the enemy of the population, was not in itself a very bad thing. This extended to today. (Participant no 1)

Limited freedom of the press

A not completely independent and even corrupt media is considered as a factor contributing to the phenomenon of corruption. This is acknowledged by the representatives of the media, economy and political groups.

We should also keep in mind that the press is also corrupt. This is especially evident at the local level where there is an awful situation. They are controlled by those who have a lot of money. At the same time these rich people are accused of corruption and the way they made the money is dubious. At the local level, the press is of very low quality and they don’t do their duty as they should. Even when they know the situation, they don’t tell, or if they tell it is only to get revenge politically. (Participant no 1)

The media is considered as having a negative role in the current stage of the anti-corruption fight. While in the early stages of efforts for curbing corruption, it helped to a great extent in order to signal the situations of breaking laws, at the present its role is less diminished in this sense. It happens in the opinion of one media representative because journalists are no different than the rest of society:

“We are as corrupt, stupid, idiots, and lame people as the rest. There are journalists who are doing their duty, others who write ‘on demand’ and others who write what they think the owner of the media expects from them. This is very sophisticated censorship.” (Participant no 2)

A sort of discourse can also be seen in the media which is not only biased but that generalises corruption and does not differentiate between the gravity of facts. It plays an important part in creating the image of all encompassing corruption.

Furthermore, media, as an important social actor, is seen as teaming up with both economic and political interests thus departing from its democratic role as a watchdog.

There is a double guilt, of politicians and mass media to use the subject with political and spectacle connotation. Politicians who talked for years about corruption did not believe
it for a second, the journalists did not believe it either. It was a kind of assumed hypocrisy which was accepted by everybody. (Participant no 14)

3. Governance: No planning for the future

In regard to governance, the lack of vision about the future development of the country is seen as a major impediment for progress in Romania. This is seen as incapacity on the part of human resources in politics to think in advance and create a coherent strategy of development as an instrument that can orient decisions and actions in society.

*It is the effect of a difficult and sometimes inefficient transition which left the remains of the old system cohabitating with the new system,... When you reassess mechanisms, the transparency is lost, rules are not clear, dynamic, changing from today to tomorrow and leaving gaps... especially that Romania does not have a social plan for its future.* (Participant no 11)

4. Regulations/Judiciary: An incomplete reform

Another cause of corruption is considered to be the sluggish reforms that were undertaken within Romanian society on the one hand and at the level of judiciary on the other hand. The lack of legislative framework in regard to anticorruption in the early years of transition is seen as the major obstacle for an efficient action against corruption. *The lack of an appropriate legislative framework can generate fraud or corruption. You can also have bad laws that allow for certain mechanisms. Conflicts of interest, wealth declaration did not exist. Nobody would declare in the past wealth or conflict of interest.* (Participant no 7).

*Legislation* is sometimes extremely sophisticated and demanding that implementing it into practice is considerably hard. This would be the case of the public servant law which stipulates that all public servants are not politically involved according to one media representative.
Heavily important are transparency and social control based on strong and multiple mechanisms that can check for violations of the law. The hesitations in regard to implementation of legislation of incompatibilities and conflicts of interests led, in the opinion of one NGO representative, to flourishing corruption. Overall, the capacity of the judicial system is considered as low while the rule of law is not fully implemented in Romania. There is a strong perception that justice mechanisms do not perform properly. *We do not do enforcement in Romania, we do not apply the law, and for example the law on conflict of interests is not put into practice.* (Participant no 11)

5. Cultural/Historical causes: The burden of heritage

The [historical heritage](#) is revealed as one of the major background factors that favour corruption. The weight that is assigned to it in facilitating corruption varies however in the opinions expressed by the participants to research. Some interviewees indicated the historical heritage as a fundamental reason for Romanians’ behaviour in general and for corrupt conducts in particular. Others designated a limited influence in corruption to this particular element.

*In my opinion, historical culture leaves its mark on individuals. (...) Our historical culture is from Dacians and Romans and before the Turks generally the Balkans. We have to take it into consideration. You cannot say that after the revolution we switched to the other side, that of the west. No, because is genetic. You want to do something but you get bored at a certain point, Balkanisms, Turkisms and so on...*(Participant no 4)

The heritage is especially important in regard to the so-called ‘cultural corruption’, in the opinion of NGO representative. This type of corruption can be traced back to the long-term social development of the country, having therefore historical roots.

*It is about the area of Balkans, our practices in the relationship with the ottomans, the way we developed and built the modern state, there is a historical component here.* (Participant no 1)
Features of mentality

Mentality is invoked in order to explain corruption by representatives of the judiciary, police, NGO’s, economy and media. Although their views differ to some extent in the weight they place on this factor in explaining corruption, the majority of those interviewed mentioned the mindset of individuals as an issue relating to the phenomenon discussed here. The opinions on the role of mentality span from the extreme view that all people are inclined to get involved in corrupt acts, if they had the opportunity, to the more moderate belief that individuals’ frame of mind is rather secondary in explaining involvement in illegal actions.

In the opinion of one representative of judiciary, corruption is a sort of virtual reality within the grasp of each individual.

*It is in the mentality of all Romanians. In his mind, each Romanian knows that he can corrupt someone and can be corrupt. (…)But mentally they would all do it. (Participant no 6)*

*The individual mental norm is that ‘if I were in Niki Spaga’s place I would do the same’* (Participant no 2)

Apart from the mindset of individuals in society, a special mentality seems to have developed within state institutions in the opinion of one representative of judiciary. The public sector is viewed as a separate social segment with a special organisational culture - one in which servants do not follow the rules that are in place but rather the old deep-rooted ways which still have the power to legitimise people’s actions.

*Getting your right* is one idea that defines the bribe for certain public positions like that of policemen, or of a doctor. In everyday language, it signifies that the one having the respective status is entitled to bribe, as a sort of privilege (‘right’) associated to that position. According to one representative of the media, this would mean that bribe is widely accepted among people as a natural supplement of the position occupied. In this respect, bribery acts as a virtual incentive especially for public positions.

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13 Well-known local leader for the habit of taking bribes.
It is interesting that a juridical notion like the ‘right’ is used to denote an unlawful action which thus becomes a social norm (Participant no 2).

In the same line of reasoning, the idea that public positions incorporate possible gains beyond those that are official is already part of the people’s mindset. Furthermore, the advantages extend towards circles of relatives and friends in a somehow expected course of action. In our mind, a certain position is associated with advantages. When you hear that x is a member of the parliament you tend to attach a great importance to the position, even though you know it is not that well paid. But you also know that it comes with advantages, with opportunities for influence. It seems like natural for that person to ‘help’ relatives and people around him. (Participant no 3)

Nepotism is seen as a form of corruption that has its roots in a certain social development of society, with the extended family still being important especially when it comes to support of its members. Helping relatives or acquaintances to accede by those who have the power to do it seems to be a natural approach in Romanian society, being largely accepted. I think there is a pressure towards those in power, those around them like political friends, relatives or just friends they wait for a reward… This increases the pressure towards public servants. (Participant no 2)

Using illegal means in order to solve problems seems tolerable and to a certain extent encouraged socially. At the same time, individual mindset is seen as a break for social change and development. It is about mentality and education eventually, in our country the idea that you solve certain problems through a shortcut, even though illegal, is considered as normal and even laudable. (Participant no 14)

The inertia is given by the mentality, the education and generation (...). We carry the legacy of 40 years of communism in education. (Participant no 3)

Moreover, the social models that are provided by society do not seem to be the right ones according to one representative of NGOs. Corruption means violating integrity and
ethical standards. Such values are not considered as representing the social foundations that can orient individual actions in Romania.

6. Individual causes: Do people become involved in corruption because of their human nature?

Besides the systemic factors invoked in order to explain corruption, there are also factors at the individual level that can trigger corrupt actions. There are certain characteristics that push people towards engaging in corrupt behaviour that belong to human nature. One such major driver of corruption is greediness. 

Corruption is generated by inner traits. There are people who are greedy and wasteful. They don’t have such a bad standard of living but still get into an illegal business. There are many of them - in our cases we met people who were caught with evidence. When you check their wealth you see they have three houses, two cars, a wife, a mistress, Bora Bora, Virgin islands, fiscal paradises. They could easily have lived on what they had. But greediness takes you further. (Participant no 7)

Human nature also involves acquiring habits while performing on the job due to personal characteristics of people.

It is like a drug for the person who is used to it. When you come across such a specimen in an investigation, he doesn’t even bother to hide like the ordinary criminal. He doesn’t take any precautions thinking that someone like the DGA or another structure might be monitoring him. For him corruption is something normal, it becomes a part of normality. (Participant no 4)

According to one representative of the judiciary, some features of Romanians like being conservative, a certain tendency to live rather in the past than looking at the future also might encourage a particular propensity to hang onto the old ways.

Most of all, the desire for money is the major force of corruption at the individual level.

It is the low level of education and the desire of certain persons to make money fast with no effort. (Participant no 14)
Corruption is like prostitution, is part of our nature, it will never be eradicated. There will always be one person who wants to get richer than another person. (Participant no 3)

In order to also explain corruption, a set of social values and characteristics mix and form a scenario for corruption. Features like lack of responsibility on the part of people and the incapacity to follow established rules are invoked by experts from the police and media in explaining factors behind corruption.

We usually do not keep deadlines because we are not responsible. There is no responsibility like in other countries. In other countries, and I do not mean to praise them, are responsible and carry out their work according to the job description. I do not expect my boss to ask me but I do it in a responsible manner. (Participant no 4)

There is also another problem; western people follow rules while we do not. (Participant no 3)

In the opinion of one representative from the Police, in their activities, people seem to choose not to take on responsibilities or try to avoid them. The Romanian saying ‘leave me alone to leave you alone’ would signify a slow way of doing a job and, in the same time, an isolation of people from each other in the attempt to elude the control that might be exerted towards them from others.

An impaired relationship that citizens developed in relation to the society they live in is essentially considered responsible for the outlook of corruption in Romania by media and NGO representatives.

The population has developed a certain cynicism in regard to public life being isolated from it and to a great extent the voiceless recipient of decisions taken by the political system. Voting represents almost the exclusive mechanism available to people in order to control the development of matters in society. Even here, the choices are limited and sometimes people have to trade the bigger evil for smaller one as accusations of
corruption frequently loom over many political candidates in the opinion of one media representative\textsuperscript{14}.

A facilitating factor behind corruption is, in the opinion of one NGO representative, the low social activism in Romania and the general low social participation. Without informed, conscientious and active citizens who act in line with their interests, the potential for bottom-up pressure exerted towards institutions is insignificant. This leaves the room for abuses of power.

\textit{The citizen does not fight the state; he fights more now than in the communist period but still not enough for a democratic society. In Romania civic activism is very low. (Participant no 11)}

At the same time, the lack of information among citizens, the lack of trust in state institutions and lack of civic participation play an important part in corruption. Control is not exerted from the bottom up in order to maintain the necessary equilibrium in society in the relationship that citizens develop with institutions.

\textbf{Conclusion: searching for and researching the ‘reality’ of corruption through the analysis of interviews}

The analysis of perceptions towards corruption revealed common sense theories on the phenomenon in Romania, highlighting the main lines of reasoning. In reading the data we should be aware that the interviews are themselves interpretations of corruption and they were subject to further interpretation by the researcher. According to Denzin (2001), interviews are not an interpretation of the world as such but rather they stand in an interpretive relationship to the world that they create. In this case, they provided us with a tool for a deeper understanding of the ‘reality’ of corruption as seen by experts. In conclusion, we should not ask if the representation of corruption is ‘true’. Instead, the key to interpreting the research results (following Dillard, 1982) is to ask if this representation is possible, workable, fertile, and if it help us to see things differently and to think differently.

\footnote{The case quoted here is that of the political candidates for the presidency in the latest elections of 2004 who both were allegedly involved in corruption. Each has been accused of obtaining undue advantages from his position.}
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SIXTH FRAMEWORK PROGRAMME OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION
PRIORITY 7, FP6-2004-CITIZENS-5

SPECIFIC TARGETED RESEARCH PROJECT: CRIME AND CULTURE

Crime as a Cultural Problem. The Relevance of Perceptions of Corruption to Crime Prevention. A Comparative Cultural Study in the EU-Accession States Bulgaria and Romania, the EU-Candidate States Turkey and Croatia and the EU-States Germany, Greece and United Kingdom

Members of the Project Consortium
University of Konstanz, Germany (Co-ordinator)
University of Tübingen, Germany
Police University, German Federal State of Baden-Württemberg (Affiliated)
Centre for Liberal Strategies, Sofia, Bulgaria
Research Institute for Quality of Life (Romanian Academy), Bucharest, Romania
Galatasaray University, Istanbul, Turkey
University of Zagreb, Croatia
National School of Public Administration and Local Government, Athens, Greece
Panteion University, Athens, Greece
South East European Studies at Oxford (SEESOX), United Kingdom
Center for Research and Policy Making (CRPM), FYR Macedonia (Affiliated)

Contact
- Prof. Dr. Hans-Georg Soeffner, Person in Charge
  Hans-Georg.Soeffner@uni-konstanz.de
- Dr. habil. Dirk Tänzler, Scientific Co-ordinator
  Dirk.Taenzler@uni-konstanz.de
- Dr. Angelos Giannakopoulos, Head of the Project Office
  Angelos.Giannakopoulos@uni-konstanz.de

Project Homepage: www.uni-konstanz.de/crimeandculture/index.htm
Email: crimeandculture@uni-konstanz.de