



European
Research Area

EUROPEAN POLICY BRIEF

Crime

& 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 in the EU-States Germany, Greece and United Kingdom

Ongoing project

SUMMARY

Objectives of the research

The goal of the project is to deepen the knowledge of the phenomenon of corruption in the countries designated above. The urgency of such a project is reflected in the fact that corruption holds the potential to retard seriously the process of the Community's enlargement and integration.

Scientific approach / methodology

Core project's assumption: varying perceptions of corruption, determined as they are by cultural dispositions, have significant influence on a country's respective awareness of the problem and thereby on the success of any preventative measures. By applying qualitative research methods the project investigates perceptions of corruption in the target groups: politics, judiciary, police, media, civil society and economy.

New knowledge and/or European added value

In contrast to a "top-down" anti-corruption approach the project identifies in a "bottom-up" manner which patterns of everyday life perceptions are dominant in respect to corruption, thus contributing to a better knowledge of the phenomenon on European level.

Key messages for policy-makers, businesses, trade unions and civil society actors

The findings of the project on perceptions of corruption concern everyone involved in anti-corruption efforts in the fields of politics, police, economy, civil society, etc. and policy-makers in EU and international anti-corruption agencies.

Objectives of the research

Efforts to prevent corruption within the EU and in the EU candidate countries generally consist of a set of administrative measures oriented to institutionalised values and goals, put into effect by experts “from the top down”. Moreover, neither in the elementary definitions determining existing counter-corruption policies nor in their implementation are those everyday life orientations rooted in socio-cultural contexts and conducive to corrupt behaviour taken into account. The project employs a two-step procedure to make a central contribution towards optimisation of existing corruption prevention measures. Its first goal is to identify in the countries participating in the project which patterns of everyday life perceptions are currently dominant in respect to corruption. Then, in co-operation with policy-makers in the field and in the frame of the final project’s conference, it aims to operationalise the knowledge gained employing a “bottom-up” strategy.

Scientific approach / methodology

From a sociological perspective, corruption represents the solution to a social problem, regardless of how the effects it may have on a society’s morals and effectiveness, as well as on many other areas, are evaluated. Thus, the task at hand is to identify what motivates people to opt for corrupt and illegal conduct. The motives and causes that underlie corrupt conduct are rooted both in current conditions and in long-standing socio-cultural contexts, both of which are to be disclosed through sociological analysis. Accordingly, the project conducts not an inquiry into the nature of corruption ‘as such’, but into perceptions of corruption held by political and administrative decision-makers in specific cultures and those held by actors representing various institutions and authorities. The objects of the project are both the conceptual preconditions of the expert systems as well as the socio-cultural conditions under which these systems are put into effect. The project’s first and second empirical phases focus on the reconstruction of the cultural patterns underlying the perceptions of corruption among institutional actors. In the project’s concluding phase findings of the inter-cultural comparison out of the third project’s phase will be discussed with experts, practitioners and policy-makers within the frame of the project’s final conference on July 10th 2009 in Brussels.

**New knowledge and
European added value**

Corruption is an effect of modernity. According to Samuel Huntington corruption is an effect of a failed state or a society with weak institutions. The problem of Huntington's functionalist argument is its normative impetus. Since the work of Shmuel Eisenstadt we are sensible for the diversity of the pathways to modernity. A second important "function" of corruption is also obvious if we consider the historical fact that the bourgeoisie came to political power by simony, that is, by buying political offices in the 19th century. Something similar happened in the post-socialist transition states after 1989. Considering all that the question that immediately arises is: why corruption still exists in modern states like the USA, Germany or in the UK if it really is only a prerequisite of the passage to modernity?

The question itself provides us with an answer: Modern states are in transition too and corruption is one vehicle to take part in this process. According to our understanding corruption functions both as an *elevator* (structural corruption) for parvenus from the petty bourgeoisie but can also have the form of a *closed circle* of exclusive people of the haute volée. In the first case corruption is an instrument to *gain* social capital, in the second case to *secure* the access to social chances and social capital. Regarding the life-style, i.e. the habitualised practices based on the exchange of different sorts of capital (economic, social, cultural) of the actors involved in corruption, we extend the functionalist analyses by a cultural perspective. By doing so we investigate the pathways and the typical mode of modernisation in the countries participating in the project and try to define forms and functions of corruption in these processes.

Breaking new ground in corruption research: tentative insights into perceptions of corruption

Although detailed analysis and comparison of project results is currently under way, on the basis of the findings elaborated to date a number of similarities or/and differences regarding perceptions of corruption between countries as well as within countries, that is between the six target groups in the single countries could be formulated. For example, the perception of an all diffused and encompassing corruption strongly characterises all Balkan countries while in Germany and the UK the opposite occurs. Secondly, while in the Balkan countries corruption generally flourishes on the ground of a weak citizenship generated by a distorted relationship between state and the citizens, in Germany and in the UK it is feared that corruption can eventually produce exactly such an effect. Finally, the anti-corruption discourse in all countries is based on certain preconceptions that vary according to different fundamental understandings of *social norms*. Especially regarding common patterns it is interesting to consider that

although perception patterns may be the same, they result from different conditions and lead to different modes of action, i.e. corrupt conduct. This is the case if we, for example, compare closer perceptions of corruption in Greece and Turkey. Although a common paternalistic pattern of governance and citizens' participation exists, this leads in Greece to a type of corrupt conduct resting upon a consuming mentality and an individualistic life-style, whereas in Turkey corruption is an instrument of social and economic communication, i.e. in terms of an "active" social interaction in a "bazaar mode". Focusing on the post-socialist countries' transition to free market democracy it is obvious that the process of privatisation has fostered corruption. Furthermore, there occurred a transformation of the former socialist re-distribution mechanisms into privileged networks of former and new nomenclature members. It seems that in all transition countries petty and grand corruption became somehow interchangeable. The term corruption functions in the public discourse as a *catch-all term* and a *metaphor* for the uncomprehensible causes of the transition crisis as well as for the increasing social differentiation, social inequality and redistribution of national wealth to the benefit of few. On the other hand, de-regulation of the state, the administration and the economy causes irritation in the self perception of social roles (administrative/entrepreneurial) and opens new chances of corruption in countries like Germany and the UK. Differences in the way corruption is perceived by the representatives of the target groups generally derive from varying pattern of rationality by the members of the target groups. Whereas politicians and businessmen are success oriented, policemen, judges and general attorneys view themselves as watchdogs of morality in a society which goes beyond their professional attitude as such.

Finally, while adoption of new standards is a matter of fact leading to a different view of social reality, this, nevertheless, does not necessarily translate into behaviour that could reject corrupt conduct in practice. Generally speaking, on the Balkans the view of the "others" (that is, the view of the EU on anti-corruption) has without doubt been adopted, but patterns of behaviour remain the same thus jeopardising every anti-corruption effort. In Germany and the UK, on the contrary, the fact that petty corruption, which is perceived to be the "real" corruption, does not exist, functions as a justification for wrongdoings in the field of grand, structural corruption. Also in these countries new anti-corruption standards have been adopted, but the consciousness of a part of the elites of doing something illicit lags behind.

**Key messages for
policy-makers,
businesses,
trade unions and
civil society actors**

According to the implementation plan the project's findings, especially those elaborated in the frame of the inter-cultural comparison, will be presented and discussed with invited experts and practitioners in the anti-corruption field as well as with policy-makers in the final project's conference scheduled on July 10th 2009 in Brussels. The conference's core intention concerning the interaction of research and practical anti-corruption competencies is to enhance practitioners' and policy-makers' sensibility for and awareness of socio-cultural aspects of corrupt conduct which should urgently be taken into account in the fight against corruption.

The intention of research work during the course of the project and its final goal is to provide information that can be used to improve current national and international counter-corruption policies. The patterns of perceptions of corruption can flow into those policy-making aspects of corruption prevention which especially target public mentalities and their modification to rule-conforming behaviour through the promotion of *learning processes*. The concrete impact of the project's findings can be effectively evaluated to the extent that: 1. patterns of perception bare certain systemic disfunctionalities that not only result in intransparency in decision-making, but also lead to the development of blockages and social and political instability; 2. they identify causal relationships, thus promoting our knowledge of the interdependencies between corruption perceptions, social-ethical values, and economic and political behaviour; 3. they show to what extent a country's citizens regard European efforts to establish the legal framework of the *acquis communautaire* as a reform from above merely imposing conformity rules, or rather consider it to be a substantial improvement.

Putting the project findings to discussion with experts of the EU, the NGOs, and international agencies dealing with anti-corruption raises the potential impact of expert knowledge on corruption in a twofold way: 1. on the one hand, it helps them to gain retrospective insight into the specific shortcomings of current anti-corruption management given the fact that aspects of corruption perception not susceptible or even resistant to administrative measures may to date not have been sufficiently taken into account; 2. on the other hand, it provides foundations for prospective, long-term action, as it implements existing policies with regulatory strategies that incorporate the specific contexts of the perceptions of corruption in each individual country.

Given this twofold scheme of the applicability of project findings, the potential impact can be further specified in respect to which authorities and groups can immediately profit of them. The

immediately relevant targeted groups can be listed as follows: 1. all EU decision-making instances; the international organisations monitoring corruption, these being: a) Council of Europe: GRECO-Group of States against Corruption, b) Transparency International (TI), c) the Southeast European Legal Development Initiative (SELDI), d) the SIGMA programme (EU and OECD), e) UNODC: Economic and Social Council, The Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, f) SPAI: Stability Pact Anti-Corruption Initiative, g) World Bank: World Bank Institute (WBI).

As stated above anti-corruption has to be seen as a long-lasting learning process with regard both to transition and modern European states no matter whether in terms of petty or grand (structural) corruption. An increasing importance regarding this process is to be attested to two social actors that could indeed make the difference in the anti-corruption fight in the single countries as well as Europe wide: civil society and the media. The positive role the media could play in combating corruption goes without doubt if one considers the fact, according to Niklas Luhmann, that all we know about our society, and indeed about the world in which we live, we know through the mass media. Raising public awareness with regard to corruption should, however, go hand in hand with an enhancement of the possibilities given for a direct citizens' participation in the fight against corruption. A prominent example regarding civil society engagement in combating corruption are the ALACs (Advocacy and Legal Advice Centers) launched by Transparency International in more than 20 European and non-European countries. Transparency International's Advocacy and Legal Advice Centres demonstrate that people do become actively involved in the fight against corruption when they are provided with simple, credible and viable mechanisms to do so. The ALACs provide victims of corruption with practical assistance to pursue complaints and address their grievances. The recently launched research instrument "Research for the benefit of civil society organisations (CSO)" within the 7th Framework Programme of the European Commission can be seen as an important step in this direction. The research team at Konstanz University and the Secretariat of Transparency International will co-operate in the coming three years in the frame of the research project "ALACs", supported by the 7th Framework Programme of the European Commission, which aims at evaluating and improving this anti-corruption mechanism in Europe.

PROJECT IDENTITY

7

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Website	www.uni-konstanz.de/crimeandculture/index.htm
Further reading	1. Project Discussion Paper Series : http://www.uni-konstanz.de/crimeandculture/publications.htm 2. Project Publications : http://www.uni-konstanz.de/crimeandculture/papers.htm 3. Project Scientific Reports http://www.uni-konstanz.de/crimeandculture/reports.htm
Related websites	www.ec.europa.eu/research/research-eu/53/article_5336_en.html www.transparency.org www.greco.coe.int/heade.htm www.seldi.net/anti_corruption.htm www.anticorruption.bg/eng/practices/society.htm www.wmd.org
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