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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

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RESEARCH REPORT BULGARIA:

**Perceptions of Corruption in Bulgaria
A Content Analysis of Interviews from Politics, Judiciary, Police, Media,
Civil Society and Economy**

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1. Introduction

The issue of corruption was defined as a grave social problem in Bulgaria towards the end of the 1990s. Similarly to Western democracies, the topic of corruption in Bulgaria was first studied and brought to the social agenda by non-governmental actors. Broad corruption awareness campaigns, studies on corruption, and many other initiatives got underway at that time, with the support of the international donor community. Gradually, the anti-corruption agenda pervaded the programs of political parties and governments, while some of its main principles were converted into legislation. In spite of all these achievements, corruption and organised crime were identified by the European Commission as two of the most serious problems in Bulgaria throughout its monitoring during the accession process: the emphasis on corruption became even stronger in the last pre-accession reports of the Commission. System reforms, as well as practical results in the fight against corruption and organised crime, were specifically mentioned as conditions for the integration of Bulgaria into the European Union. There was a constant threat during the course of 2006 that the safeguard clauses regarding the country's membership in the EU could be triggered because of the government's failure to effectively counteract corruption and organised crime. However, and somewhat anti-climatically, the European Commission finally accepted that the government had made sufficient efforts in this respect. Respectively, Bulgaria joined the Union on schedule on January 1, 2007.

Corruption in Bulgaria has been of interest for academics and policy researchers alike. Since the end of the 1990s the country has been included in a number of international surveys measuring corruption. According to the most well known of them, the Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index, after a period of marked improvement between 1998 and 2002, corruption perceptions seem to be stabilising around a relatively moderate level over the last five years (4.1 for 2007). In 2007, Bulgaria ranked 64th out of 180 states included in the survey, scoring similarly as countries like Poland, Greece, and Romania.

The huge interest in the topic of corruption has resulted in numerous surveys not only of experts' opinions but also of public perceptions. According to *Anti-corruptions Reforms in Bulgaria: Key Results and Risks*¹, a 2007 report by Centre for the Study of Democracy, the Bulgarian public perceives corruption as one of the most serious problems in the country. Since 1998, corruption has been ranking among the top three gravest problems in Bulgaria, along with unemployment and the low incomes, but until 2007 it had never been ranked first by Bulgarian citizens. However, as a result of the stable macroeconomic situation in the country and the improved incomes of the population, over the last several years concerns such as unemployment and poverty have diminished in urgency. Thus, corruption has emerged as the first most important problem in Bulgaria according to public opinion polls. At the same time, the mentioned report indicates a stable decline of the number of Bulgarians, who report to have participated in corruption transactions. The discrepancy between actual and perceived corruption is very indicative for the ambiguous nature of the phenomenon that requires an interdisciplinary research approach going beyond the traditional anti-corruption discourse that has been dominating the policy community over the last decade.

¹ Anti-Corruption Reforms in Bulgaria: Key Results and Risks , Center for the Study of Democracy/Coalition 2000,2007.



In spite of the complexity of the problem and the huge interest in the topic of corruption, not much has been done to study the phenomenon in its socio-cultural aspects. The present study offers a different approach, which attempts to examine how corruption and anti-corruption are understood at the everyday level and why the anti-corruption measures implemented up to now have not managed to achieve the initially planned results. We investigate the correspondence and discrepancies between the perceptions of corruption and anti-corruption grounded in the anti-corruption programs, on the one hand, and these of the political and administrative decision-makers on the other, and on the basis of the analysis we attempt to make recommendations on possible ways to optimise corruption prevention.

2. Data Generation

The process of collecting data for the present study took place within the second phase of our research on the perceptions, notions and ideas of corruption of the six target groups included in the project. The groups are: politics, judiciary, media, police and prosecutors, civil society, and economy. In the first report, we gathered information from relevant documents produced by the target groups selected². For the purposes of the present paper, we have conducted a number of in-depth semi-structured interviews with representatives of these groups. At both stages, we have used two case studies to frame the process of data generation – the privatisation process of *Bulgartabac Holding* and the scandal concerning a suspicious donation to the United Democratic Forces party foundation, *Democracy*. (The UDF has been the main right-of-the-centre party during much of the Bulgarian transition). We have chosen this approach for several reasons. First of all, bearing in mind that corruption has been in the focus of public attention for the last ten years, we wanted to limit the scope of the data we were to generate to a reasonable amount. Secondly, we believe that using the framework of case studies will allow us to generate better quality materials and to avoid general documents including banal, abstract or imitative perceptions of corruption.

However, we used the case study approach in a non-restrictive fashion allowing for the respondents to refer to other cases of corruption they know well and to speak about the phenomenon in general like they do in their everyday practice.

Generally speaking, the respondents from all target groups were ready and willing to speak on the topic of corruption with some exceptions of politicians who were not very supportive and informative.

3. Methodology

For the purposes of our investigation, we transcribed into texts the interviews we had made with the representatives of the six target groups. As a second step, we applied the research method of qualitative content analysis by the means of the Atlas-ti software.

² Daniel Smilov, Rashko Dorosiev, *Perceptions of Corruption in Bulgaria. A Content Analysis of Documents from Politics, Judiciary, Police, Media, Civil Society and Economy*.



Code Development

In the process of code development we tried to keep as close as possible to the ideas embedded in the primary documents but also to reveal implicit ideas and links between differing concepts that were not identified by the respondents. We developed codes at several different levels of abstraction.

The code identified at the first level cover the most explicit ideas which are usually associated with specific words and phrases. In general, the basic meanings of these ideas are widely recognised and uniformly understood in a given society.

The second level of coding goes beyond the basic meanings of the concepts, exploring deeper argumentations and perceptions. At this level, perceptions of the different members of a given society might differ significantly. In most of the cases, we developed these codes by following different argumentations traced in the text. Some codes that we developed at this level have virtually no connection to ideas or concepts already identified at the first level.

The third level of coding includes hidden ideas or concepts that have more abstract character. Oftentimes when actors use different arguments, they either hide deliberately the deeper grounds of their perceptions, or are not aware of them at all. It is sometimes difficult to create objective codes at this level, especially in the cases where more than one interpretation is possible. Therefore, we use coding carefully and in many cases we considered all interpretations that we believe are possible.

Interpretation

In the process of interpretation we tried to combine all findings obtained from the qualitative content analysis in a single story that gives information about perceptions of the different target groups included in the project. While in the process of coding we restrained ourselves from using our general knowledge of corruption, at the stage of interpretation, we used our contextual understanding in order to reconstruct the overall situation of corruption in Bulgaria. We did that in order to put out findings in the context of the overall picture reconstructed in this manner.

4. Initial Hypotheses

Bellow we are summarising our main findings from the first stage of the project. On their basis we develop “model discourses” which will serve as basic assumptions and hypotheses in the analysis to follow. The “model discourses” on corruption are as follows:

Politicians

No unified definition of corruption exists amongst politicians despite the manifest consensus that corruption is a negative phenomenon that has to be combated. Normally opposition politicians stick to broad, public interest-based, inclusive and inflated conceptions of



corruption, which go much beyond the strict legalistic meaning of the concept.³ Such conceptions often allege various forms of favouritism in privatisation, clandestine state control or tacit state approval of smuggling channels; turning the party into a corrupt hierarchical structure, etc. Few of these allegations could be translated directly into penal code crimes; yet, all of these suggest abuse of public trust and some damage done to the public good because of the defence of private interests.

Governing politicians, in contrast, usually resort to two strategies in their discourse on corruption. First, they stick to legalistic notions of corruption and require proofs beyond reasonable doubt for the substantiation of corruption allegations. Secondly, and much less often, governing politicians try to “normalise” certain practices, which the opposition calls corrupt.⁴

Further, corruption discourse is engaged in the battles for more power between governments and the opposition in the following way. The opposition has an interest in the adoption of anti-corruption measures which limit the discretion of the government in policy-making (transparency requirements, deregulation, limiting licensing regimes, etc.) On the contrary, governments do have an incentive to preserve a broader range of discretionary powers.⁵

Finally, governments and the opposition differ in what they see as a proper response to the problem of corruption. The former tend to look for answers in long-term institutional and legislative amendments. The latter are looking mostly for a political change of government, which will bring them to power; this could happen if a scandal leads to a governmental crisis, mass protests, etc. Personnel changes of the government, indictment of key politicians, etc are also appealing anti-corruption measures for the political opposition.

Judiciary

Not surprisingly, the judiciary normally resorts to legalistic conceptions of corruption, and sticks to concepts and definitions in the law books. The paradoxical result of this usage is the virtual disappearance of corruption from the discourse of magistrates. In this discourse the issue of corruption is often renamed and translated into other problems. Thus, in two of the best known corruption scandals in Bulgaria in the period 2001-2004 the involvement of the courts was marginal: in one of the cases, an allegation of party finance violation was

³ For a discussion of public-interest based definitions of corruption see Arnold Heidenheimer, Michael Johnston, and Victor LeVine (eds.), *Political Corruption*, Transaction Publishers (1989) at p. 10. See also Mark Philp, “Defining Political Corruption”, *Political Studies*, XLV (3), Special Issue, 1997.

⁴ An extremely interesting case of this kind happened in Bulgaria in 2006, when the leader Ahmed Dogan of one of the mainstream parties – the Movement for Rights and Freedoms - attempted to sell to the public the so-called model of “circles of firms”, according to which political parties have the right to build circles of friendly firms, which in turn help for the funding of the patron party. Curiously, this model was advocated by Dogan as a cure against “oligarchic government”.

⁵ According to the Bulgarian case studies, it appears that in the framework of privatisation, corruption could be understood in different ways depending on the current positions of the politicians and their political parties. Largely, when in power, politicians tend to praise *political privatisation* where the decisions are made on the basis of political arguments, by elected bodies having extensive powers to decide not only on the economic and formal parameters of the privatisation offers but also on a number of other issues, such as possible consequences for the society as whole. On the other hand, politicians while in opposition claim that *political privatisation* is corrupt and favour the practice of *technical/expert privatization*, based on purely technical and formal considerations, where appointed bodies (of independent experts) take the most important decisions following a strict legal procedure.



transformed into a libel suit at the judicial level; in the other, an allegation of corrupt privatisation was transformed into a problem of pure procedural violation of the privatisation law.

In both cases, what was standing out was the inconclusive character of the judicial proceedings as regarding the major questions at stake in the two scandals. In the party funding case, for instance, judicial proceedings could not prove or disprove the two competing interpretations of the events: the acceptance of illegal donation v. an attempt by a controversial businessman to set up one of the major parties in the country. The unfortunate lack of conclusive judicial findings and decisions creates a fertile atmosphere for the production of myths. For our purposes, however, the important conclusion is that at the judicial level the discourse of corruption is by far not the dominant one: when cases reach the courts, corruption curiously shrinks.

Police and Prosecutors

In contrast to the judges, prosecutors and the police are characterized by a very wide-spread use (including in official documents) of “inflated” public interest-based conceptions of corruption, such as “circles of friends”, favouritism, party machines, “political umbrella against investigation”, massive theft through privatization, etc. Naming people as part of mafia-like structures – including ministers, calculations of the negative financial impact of corrupt privatisation, etc. feature regularly in the parlance and the documents produced by this target group. Regrettably, as it became clear from the previous section, formal indictments quite rarely reach the courts and even less often are upheld by them, which creates a significant gap between the discourse and the output (sentences) of the police and the prosecutors. The main conclusion is that this is a sign of the “politicisation” of the police and prosecutors in terms of anti-corruption discourse; this politicisation happens regardless of their institutional place in the constitutional structure of a given country. In terms of conception and perception of corruption this group is closer to the opposition politicians than to the judges.

Media

For the media corruption is generally an all-embracing metaphor for criminal and bad government. Here, public interest-based conceptions of corruption are encountered in their most inflated versions. The main theme is that greedy and incompetent elites are stealing from the people on a massive scale. Concrete cases are usually blown out of proportion in order to paint pictures of epic theft. As a result, the borderline between investigative journalism, analysis and story-telling is often blurred and sometimes non-existent. The solutions that the media see to the problem of corruption are, as a rule, repressive in their character: more convictions. Curiously, however, sometimes the media elaborate rather daring responses to corruption, by, for instance, advancing what could be called “participatory ideals of corruption”. According to these ideals, people should share in the spoils of corruption.

Such curious ideas, which find their place in the public sphere, suggest that the real role of the media is not exclusively the “fight” against corruption, but also in informing the public of latest developments in the story of grand theft. A cynic might even say that the role of the



media is in “involving” the people in these clandestine processes, making them privy to their intricacies, hooking them in the affair as a whole, albeit by means of vicarious participation. From this point of view, it is not surprising that the media, as a rule, show a disproportionate interest in the outbreak and unfolding of scandals, as compared with their resolution.

Civil society/NGOs

This is by far the most sophisticated discourse about corruption, dictating the fashion in general. The main elements of this discourse are the following: corruption is measurable; it is increasing or at least is very high; it is bad for the economy. Civil society groups stress the importance of institutional change and changes in the incentive structure of important actors in the fight against corruption. Yet, and somewhat paradoxically, although they frame the solutions in terms of substantial structural reforms, often results are expected relatively fast. This feature of civil society discourse raises dramatically public expectations. Some of the results of these raised expectations seem to be dissatisfaction with politicians, delegitimation of governments, and the creation of a fertile ground for the appearance of new populist political actors.

Economy

The business generally speaks about corruption through the discourse of silence. It prefers to shift the problem from corruption *per se* to the conditions for the emergence of corruption. These are usually found in the domain of public legislation and administration. Extremely popular is the so-called problem of “red tape” – administrative hurdles for entrepreneurial activities, which are to be overcome by corrupt transactions. Generally, business discourses on corruption are depersonalised: they refer to structural conditions, not to agents and perpetrators. Business is also as a rule portrayed as the victim of corruption, while the public servants (as an anonymous category) are the potential wrong-doers. Although the conception of corruption as “grease” for the economy has become unpopular among scientists and policy makers in the 1990ies, there seems to be little evidence that the business community has ceased to believe in this conception. On the contrary, the underlying structure of its discourse on the problem seems to reinforce the “grease” theory: corruption is not by any means excluded as a possible way to overcome unjustified and inefficient government-imposed burdens on the business.

5. Perceptions of Corruption

In this section we test the initial hypotheses on the basis of the interviews carried out in the second stage of the research project.



5.1 Target Group Politics

Definitions

At present, politicians in Bulgaria – both from the government and the opposition – “recognise” the “widespread character” of corruption and are generally ready to discuss the phenomenon in public. It has to be noted that this has not always been so. In the period 1998-2001 when the issue of corruption emerged for the first time as a public priority, there was a clear cut division between the discourse of the opposition on corruption and the discourse of the ruling parties. As described above, the latter stuck much more to the “legalistic” definitions of corruption, while the former resorted to inflated, “public interest-based” definitions. This initial division could be explained by the fear of the governing parties to “recognise” or “admit” the existence of corruption “unless proven in judicial proceedings”; such admittance would amount to recognising certain complicity in corrupt activities. Today this fear is gone, and the question is why?

What has changed since the end of the 1990ies is that governing politicians now seem to believe that they could also “score points” in a debate over corruption. That is why the corruption discourse has become not an exclusive theme for the propaganda of the opposition, but also a mobilisational, electoral tool of the governing parties as well. When somebody opens a debate about corruption, they could take part in this debate on an equal footing by pointing out “measures taken” against the phenomenon, “strategies”, “action plans”, “anti-corruption commissions and bodies”, etc.

Thus, we conclude that governing politicians no longer stick exclusively to a “legalistic” definition of corruption (as defined in the law books), but also engage in debates using inflated, public interest-based ones. In any event, in contrast to the opposition, they insist on a certain “depoliticising” of the phenomenon. They accept that corruption is “abuse of power”, but “power” in their view is diffused in many centres at different levels, and is not concentrated in the government. Thus, corruption could be encountered in the judiciary, the local self-government bodies, the lower levels of the public administration, the opposition parties, and in the private sector (including the NGOs). The “diffusion” of power is related to a concept of “diffused responsibility” for corruption as well: it is not the government which is essentially responsible, but a plurality of actors.

The opposition politicians, in contrast, try to concentrate the responsibility for corruption in government. So, they both use an inflated and all-inclusive concepts of corruption: the specificity is that the government is playing a role in one way or another in all these forms of corruption, either as a direct perpetrator as well, or as a conduit. At the very least, the government is responsible for a given form of corruption indirectly, by providing conditions which favour its emergence.

A particularly interesting conceptual debate about corruption took place in Bulgaria in the autumn of 2007 in relation to the numerous allegations of vote-buying in the recent local elections. The allegedly wide-spread vote-buying scandalised the public. In response, the leader Ahmed Dogan of the politicians from the ruling coalition party Movement for Rights and Freedoms stated in public that “The buying of votes is a European phenomenon. If the business feels uncomfortable and wants to get in the power, it will use this technology. Democracy will survive the vote-buying”. Many were additionally scandalised by these



words, and read them (properly in our view) as an attempt to “normalise” corrupt forms of electioneering. The surprising fact was, however, that there was no concerted reaction on behalf of the rest of the political establishment against this attempt, however. In our previous report we pointed out how the same politician attempted to “normalise” another corrupt practice – clientelistic links between parties and companies (so called “circles of firms”). Then, however, there was a much more serious public reaction and lack of tolerance to his ideas. In the autumn of 2007, our interviews and informal conversations with members of the political elite encountered a higher level of tolerance to vote-buying. One of the reasons for this tolerance could be the cross-party usage of this dubious electoral tool. Another, more surprising reason, which emerged, was the fact that vote buying introduces “market” relationships in politics. In current Bulgarian political language and thinking, the “market forces” generally produce good and efficient results. Ergo, marketisation of politics might not be that reproachable phenomenon after all.

Finally, something which is worth noting at the conceptual level, the process of “depoliticisation” of corruption (which is best seen in the parlance of governing parties) goes on along with a process of “ethnicisation” of the phenomenon. The recent local elections, as well as the European Parliament elections earlier in the year, demonstrated that increasingly the party of the ethnic Turks in the country is seen as a the hot-bed of corrupt practices. This party is seen as “clientelistic”, “patronage-prone”, “feudal” in its attempts to control its electorate economically. In elections, it is seen as one of the primary perpetrators of corrupt practices – from vote rigging and buying, to the “bussing” of people (emigrants) from abroad to take part in the elections. Although part of these allegations might be founded in facts, the excessive emphasis on the irregular practices in a specific party cannot be explained otherwise than through its “ethnic”, “Turkish” character.

Causes and Origin

The “depoliticisation” of the concept of corruption is best seen in the perceptions of the causes and origins of the phenomenon. The governing parties and politicians seem to have won this debate, since the causes of corruption are not looked for in the character and individual morality of specific politicians, but in institutional, structural factors which shape the incentives in specific ways, so that individual cannot act in corrupt ways. Simply put, the roots of corruption are deep, the phenomenon is here to stay, and all we could do is to engage in serious, long-term oriented reforms, which should go in the following direction: downsizing of the state, lowering taxes, taking out the state from the economy, deregulating the economy, diminishing the licensing procedure, etc. This programme seems to be a cross party consensus.

On top of this programme the opposition parties and politicians are of course more insistent on personnel reforms, as far as they see these as a possible tool leading to pre-term elections.

A decreasing minority of politicians seem to be ready to blame the “communist past “ for corruption. Seventeen years after the start of the transition “anticommunism” has largely lost its mobilisational force. A telling fact for this trend is the relatively low interest which the opening of the secret services files of the former communist regime sparked in Bulgaria in 2007. A small group of right-of-the-centre parties and politicians attempted to draw public attention to the fact that important present-day politicians – including President Georgi



Parvanov – were active secret service collaborators. The interpretation of these right-of-the-centre parties was related to corruption: they were essentially arguing that the network of former secret police agents has managed to “infiltrate” the state as a whole, which raised not only moral problems, but also issues of lack of transparency, possible manipulation, hidden influences, etc. Their conclusion was that because of such reasons, people who had for seventeen years not disclosed their “true identity” had no right to continue occupying public office. This argument, which would strike many as reasonable, remained largely unpopular, however: it drew support from very small quarters.

Effects

Politicians no longer diminish the importance of corruption as a problem. At present, they – both governing and opposition parties – admit that corruption is a serious public concern and that it has negative effects on the economy, democracy, and the general prosperity of society.

Apart from the above-mentioned attempts to “normalise” corruption, no one has ventured to come out in public to defend the functionality of corruption. Our interviews confirm this statement – ideas that actually corruption could be good for the economy in one way or another are not popular.

Size and Scope

As to the size and scope of corruption, the opposition and the governing parties seem to differ. Representatives of both of these express the view of the wide-spread character of the phenomenon, but they tend to look for it at different places. Respondents from governing parties tend to stick to the “diffusion” theory of corruption: corruption takes place at many levels and in different centres of power in society: the government is not the primary site of corrupt activities. The opposition representatives tend to stick more to the “concentrated” model of corruption, which in one way or another is centred around the government.

As to the measurement of corruption, politicians rarely believe that these measures reflect objective realities. Still, such measurements are to be taken seriously. Opposition parties are interested in “independent” assessments and measures. “monitoring” by external actors, etc. Governments are increasingly interested in the production of their own data.

Anti-corruption Measures

This is the point where the opposition and the government differ mostly. The former see the most important measures in terms of political changes: personnel changes, and eventually government changes. They stress the “lack of political will” argument a lot. Governing parties, not surprisingly, stress more long-term institutional reforms, the setting up of commissions and other anti-corruption bodies. Other anti-corruption measures, as awareness raising, public education, etc, are also popular among governing elites. Finally, co-operation with civil society on the issue of corruption becomes of crucial importance both for the governing and the opposition. This paradoxically brings these two together, because both of them look for cooperation with one and the same actors. Paradoxically, cooperation with the



same actors from civil society leads to a certain “depoliticisation” of anti-corruption, despite the attempts of the opposition to “politicise” the issue.

5.2 Target Group Judiciary

Definitions

The representatives of the judiciary tend to define corruption as abuse of power. It may involve not only public servants and politicians, but also the private sector. In this sense, corruption refers to all forms of distorted application of *formally* accepted rules in a given society or organisation. Therefore, we found confirmation of the hypothesis about the *legalistic* emphasis in the discourse on corruption of the judiciary. Yet, the forms of corruption are described as going far beyond the ordinary graft to include nepotism, trade with influence etc. This means that in some cases the law may be imperfect and fail to include all forms of corruption. Therefore, one of the main concerns of the judiciary is the corruption in the legislative process: it is seen as one of the most dangerous form of the phenomenon since the laws passed by the parliament in favour of private interests create opportunities for repeated occurrence of corruption deals. Also, this type of corruption is dangerous since it affects negatively the interests of big groups of people. An example in support of this statement are some laws where the parliament deprived the court of control over the administrative acts of the government thus creating a window for repeated corruption occurrences. Corrupt legislative practices are possible and fuelled by the existence of political corruption and illegal party financing, which distort the political process the process of decision making in such a way, so as to favour of private interests.

Corruption in the judicial system and the court is no less dangerous than legislative and political corruption, as the judiciary is the power meant to correct the failures of the two other branches.

The legalistic emphasis in the judicial discourse on corruption is revealed in their professionally determined concern about the quality of the law. One of the main problems with corruption, in their view, becomes its legal definition and regulation: the assumption is that if there is a non-corrupt and efficient legislative process, which manages to produce a correct and inclusive definition of the phenomenon, the fight against it is going to be much easier.

Causes and Origin

There are several reasons for the existence of corruption, according to the representatives of the judiciary. The first one is related to the constant changes in the legislation that have been taking place in the last 15 years thus creating a situation of legal instability and insecurity. The unpredictability of the legal acts is the reason why often social actors opt for solutions that involve corruption. The second set of reasons involves peoples' values. Many Bulgarians tend to solve their problems in a way that circumvents the laws and the established rules. There is a popular perception that one cannot succeed in life if one follows the formally established rules and procedures. There is no clear idea where these popular attitudes might



come from but several possibilities have been mentioned, including history (the Ottoman rule in Bulgaria) and the transition period.

Effects

It is perceived that the negative impact of corruption on the value system is even more dangerous than that on the economy. Corruption destroys the social values and distorts the behaviour of social actors. This effect is reinforced by the fact that the youngsters are socialised into an environment where corruption, although not explicitly, is commonly recognised as an important precondition for economic and social success. This is perceived to be the way in which corruption behaviour is perpetuated.

Size and Scope

The representatives of the judiciary believe that corruption is present in all social segments. The phenomenon is considered to be “highly contagious” and since all elements of society are interrelated, it is not possible for the infection to not spread throughout the system. To a great extent this process is assisted by the media that through the permanent use of the corruption rhetoric creates popular perceptions that corruption is everywhere and it is somehow inevitable. Despite all this, respondents admit that it is very difficult to measure corruption objectively. In most of the cases only perceptions of corruption are measured. A slightly more reliable instrument to measure it would be to interview victims, but it should not be forgotten that in most of the cases corruption is a deal involving both parties and this would negatively affect the readiness of the respondents to reveal the case.

It is admitted, however, that there are certain fields of social life where corruption pressure is higher and corruption practices are broadly spread. These are the sectors of business and politics, where factors like competition and the high level of discretion of politicians and public officials play a major role.

Anti-corruption Measures

Somewhat paradoxically in view of the hypothesis of the “legalistic” emphasis in the discourse of the judiciary, the respondents think that too much attention is paid to laws and formal rules and procedures at the expense of informal institutions and education. Legislative and administrative measures could help to counteract corruption but only to a certain extent. They can help optimise and regulate of the public sphere so to limit the opportunities for corruption. They are important instruments indeed but they are not the first ones in importance. As regard the capacity of the regulation, the focus is placed on the concept that the state should simplify the existing administrative procedures, introduce rules that are as clear as possible, and limit its interference in the market and social processes only to the extent it is indispensable. There are examples showing that system reform is capable of limiting dramatically the opportunities for corruption. These are usually reforms that include withdrawal of state regulation and control and introduction of clear market rules, as in the case of the reorganisation of the notary services in Bulgaria, which are now provided on a pure market basis.



The second and more important set of measures involves moral education and prevention of corruption. Practically this means identification of the cultural roots of the problem and addressing them. A good example of the cultural conditioning of corruption can be seen in the educational system: it is believed that there is nothing wrong with giving presents to the teachers, and at the same time teachers have the discretion of giving grades that may be crucial to the future prospects of the students. Another similar example would be the common practice of providing false witness to friends, who need it to facilitate their divorce cases in the court. Given that situation, there are crucial roles to be played by civil society structures like the churches for example. There is a strong correlation between the role of the church and the crime rate in a given society. Unfortunately, the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, which is traditionally the most influential church in the country, nowadays has very little influence on the public. There are not many other genuine civil society organisations and NGOs that might bring a real change in this respect either. The media also have a major role to play in educating society and raising its moral standards of the society but the problem is that the Bulgarian media are largely commercial and the corruption discourse is often used in a tabloid manner, which has led to a growing trivialisation of the topic.

5.3 Target Group Media

Definitions

Journalists define corruption in a rather inflated way as an improper and illegal (concepts used interchangeably) advancement as a result of the abuse of the power resources. This only concerns matters, which involve exercising public power. Similar relations in private life are not included in this definition. In terms of possible negative effects on society there should not be a difference between the so called “grand” and “petty” corruption. Petty corruption undermines the rules and the social discipline, which eventually leads to negative consequences for society as whole. Grand corruption has not only a monetary effect for the state, but also a broader social effect, since in most cases the public services provided as a result of unfair procurement procedures are of poor quality. The legislation focuses to a greater degree on the phenomena related to petty corruption, such as bribes, where the crime can be easily proved with the help forensic instruments. Legislative provisions, however, are much less powerful when it comes to the grand corruption. In many such cases, the legal procedures are strictly followed and observed but at the end many of the deals concluded by the public authorities are immoral. Both the politicians and the business believe that the system of distribution of public resources should function in a way that is not based on pure market principles but requires special relations and arrangements between both sides.

Causes and Origin

Media representatives perceive the presence of the state in the economy as the major reason for the existence of corruption. Registration and licensing regimes are numerous and many key companies are in the hands of the state. One specific feature of the Bulgarian case is the great role of the state in the process of redistribution of the huge public resources inherited from the communist past. It is perceived that this process inevitably brings up corruption in any country and that Bulgaria is no exception to the rule. The transition process, with all its



components, is recognised to play a role for the development of corruption. Yet transition itself may not be regarded as a cultural phenomenon; it is very likely that similar situations in different societies produce very similar problems and outcomes.

Size and Scope

The journalists think that measuring corruption is an enterprise bound to fail. What can be measured are the perceptions of the people about corruption. At the same time they believe that the phenomenon is omnipresent in the whole society. This judgement is made on the basis of personal experience and knowledge shared with colleagues, friends and relatives. Due to the specific interconnections within society, corruption has spread everywhere from the field of politics to the field of art. The financial and economic spheres are most susceptible to corruption since the monetary flows are in bigger size there. This sphere includes also all public bodies having discretion in dealing with financial resources. The most dangerous corruption, however, is that present in the judicial system because it is itself the major structure meant to investigate and punish acts of corruption.

Anti-corruption Measures

According to media representatives anti-corruption measures cannot succeed in their current form for one main reason: the major actor that is expected to fight corruption, the political class, is deeply corrupt itself. It is hardly a secret that being a politician is indeed a business enterprise. This is the way in which politics functions and the political system recruits politicians. There is a superficial consensus that corruption should be counteracted, which has been pushed by the EU accession process and post-accession monitoring. However, reforms, to the extent they exist in practice, concern only general normative measures that are implemented so as to allow to preserve the status quo almost untouched. These superficial policies have produced no satisfactory results so far and the authorities desperately need to show the EU that people involved in corruption are indeed being punished in Bulgaria. The efforts of the Public Prosecutor's Office to do something in this respect resulted in several so called "demonstrative" corruption court cases involving high ranking officials and representatives of organised crime. However, for now there is no indication they might end successfully. Another evidence demonstrating the lack of political will to counteract corruption is the fact that some simple and very well functioning anti-corruption practices were suspended. The example that was given in this respect is the suspended practice of police officers under cover testing their colleagues, traffic policemen, whether they would accept the bribes that they are offered in return for not fulfilling their obligations.

One possible anti-corruption strategy, according to journalists, would be a dramatic reduction of the state presence in the economy. This, of course, cannot lead to a complete eradication of corruption, but the opportunities for its occurrence would be significantly limited.

Another idea for optimising the anti-corruption activities at the level of the state is a reorganization of the system of powers in Bulgaria and in particular transferring the Prosecutor's Office from the judicial to executive branch of power.



The roles of the different institutions in counteracting corruption as seen by media representatives are the following:

The media are the only arena left where a corruption scandal can be revealed and made available to the public. Unfortunately, the quality of journalism in Bulgaria is very low and corruption investigation is not always done in the best possible way. Another problem is that continuous corruption rhetoric has made the people tolerant to corruption. They are convinced that the country is lost in corruption and the media maintains these perceptions stimulating passive instead of proactive citizens' behaviour. The lack of clear institutional response to corruption scandals in combination with the situation in the media described above leads to a social normalisation of the phenomenon of corruption.

Political parties use the corruption/anti-corruption discourse only in its capacity to mobilize the public when trying to deal with their political rivals. When in power, politicians make use of information and investigative powers they control to accuse their predecessors of corruption. If however, these parties remain in the government as coalition partners then all information about possible corruption activities is concealed in the name of the political stability of the coalition.

The role of NGOs in preventing and counteracting corruption is ambiguous. It has many positive effects: it creates expert knowledge about the problem and promotes some anti-corruption measures in the legislation. On the other hand, it has some negative effects as well: its excessive focus on raising public awareness about corruption is one of the major reasons for normalisation of the topic and social tolerance toward the problem. In the time when there were such awareness campaigns the public perceptions about corruption (measured by the same NGOs that organised these campaigns) went very high. After the funding for similar sort of activities decreased the public perceptions did, too. In order to get governmental support for their activities and general programmes, NGOs have worked in close cooperation with government representatives, including persons allegedly involved in corruption. In this way, the NGOs took part in building an image of anti-corruption fighters for some corrupt politicians.

5.4 Target Group Police and Prosecutors

Definitions

The representatives of the bodies that investigate corruption-related crimes define the phenomenon broadly as an act in which the political process is distorted in favour of certain private interests at the expense of the common, public interest. This generally confirms our hypothesis from the first stage, that the prosecutors and the police as a group, have a different perception from the judiciary, perception which brings them closer to groups like the media and the politicians. Our respondents referred to a definition used by some international organisations such as the International Criminal Court, according to which the really dangerous forms of corruption are in the legislative process and in high-level governance. These forms are considered to be more dangerous in comparison to everyday corruption, since they have, above all, hidden accumulative effects. This means that the negative effects of current corruption deals might not be immediate, but might appear years later, for example in cases where environmental standards are not respected as a result of corruption.



Origin and Causes

The lack of certain values in Bulgaria is considered to be one of the major reasons for the existence of corruption. The church and religion in general, which normally have positive effects on crime prevention, have a limited influence in the country. Another set of causes combines factors determined by the Communist past and the transition period, such as the weak state and weak judicial system in particular.

If we compare the views of this group on the issue of the origins of corruption with the views of the judiciary, an important difference emerges: the prosecutors, apart from the issue of social values, stress also the *political* origins of corruption, and do not shy from making political in their essence judgements, relating the phenomenon to the “Communist past” and the “transition”. It needs to be said that references to such “key words” have a specific political meaning in Bulgarian public discourse; usually sympathisers of the right of the centre political forces will speak negatively about the communist past; people dissatisfied with the mainstream parties and sympathising for new populist parties will normally depict the “transition process” in negative terms, stressing its corruption and injustice.

Size and Scope

Similarly to respondents from the other target groups the representatives of this target group believe that corruptions is an almost immeasurable phenomenon. The quantitative studies that try to detect the numbers of the corruption transactions, cannot measure the social cost of separate transactions, which is the most important aspect in this respect. At the same time, respondents perceive corruption as present in all segments of society, justifying this conclusion on the basis of personal observations and experience. The state of total corruption is explained with the fact that the systems of politics and governance, which are of key importance for the functioning of the society, are corrupt themselves. Since corruption is considered to be “an infection,” it easily affects the whole social organism.

Anti-corruption Measures

Similarly to the journalists the representatives of the Police and the Prosecutor's Office believe that it is unrealistic to expect that the political system can do something to limit or prevent corruption, since the way in which it functions is determined by the corruption exchanges. The state has established formal anti-corruption bodies and structures, but they have no real powers and function on a very general level.

One way to tackle corruption would be to establish Ethical Commissions at all public institutions that have the power to investigate every single complaint of corruption filed by the citizens and companies. Another way would be to establish special investigative institutions to deal exclusively with corruption cases. In order to be effective, these institutions need to be independent and capable to investigate separate cases of corruption. This would seriously threaten the politicians' interests and therefore it is less likely that they would allow for such institutions to exist.

The respondents from this target groups are sceptical about the possible anti-corruption roles of political parties, the media, the NGOs, and the business circles. The political parties are seen as the major engine of corruption in society and therefore it cannot be expected that they would be the ones to initiate anti-corruption reforms. The media are seen largely dependent



on various political and business interests and therefore incapable of investigating and revealing cases of corruption to the public in a way that might bring real change. NGOs are perceived as similarly inefficient, as in most cases they are related to certain political parties and do not truly represent the civil society in the country.

5.5 Target Group Civil Society

Definitions

NGOs have had a major role in promoting anti-corruption discourse in the country and therefore it is not surprising that they conceptualize the phenomenon of corruption in the most complicated and comprehensive manner. NGOs define corruption broadly as an abuse of power for personal gain. This is the definition largely used by international anti-corruption organisations such as Transparency International. This definition refers mainly to political corruption, and not to corruption in the private sector. Corruption is considered to be a normal practice and in this sense it is not as anything unusual, a one-off event, but is quite widespread not only in Bulgaria but also in the rest of the world. Corruption can be present in every area of social life but in some areas it might be more harmful than in others. These are cases where not only the system (institutions) but also citizens are affected. Corruption in education is very unpleasant but corruption in healthcare is a real life-threatening problem, and this should be the main criterion for classifying different forms of corruption.

Another very dangerous form of corruption is perceived to be the trading in influence. It is dangerous because it is very difficult to detect and prove. This is probably the most common type of corruption crime but it is very difficult to prove because it takes place within the relationships of persons, who do not have interest in disclosing the activity and giving evidence.

Origin and Causes

The representatives of the civil society target group believe that generally corruption is not a cultural phenomenon. Petty corruption could be culturally dependent on and connected with cultural heritage, with the culture of society at large, and with understandings about forms of gratuity gifts, etc., but this does not hold for the case of grand, political corruption.

The vision of the universal nature of corruption corresponds to the understanding that in general it is not connected with the legacy of socialism. Some influence is possible, but it is not decisive. Corruption also exists in developed capitalist countries and the core cause of the phenomenon is the lack of efficient control and enforcement both for grand political corruption and for petty corruption, which could be culturally-dependent to some extent.

Another possible cause of corruption is poverty. For example, this is the case in Africa. This coincides with the approach of Transparency International, which sees poverty and corruption as two interconnected phenomena, which feed on each other and generate each other.

The second set of causes of corruption as seen by representatives of this target group includes factors related to institutional performance, such as the lack of effective control and enforcement in some areas (public procurement mostly, but not exclusively), and the poor



capacity of investigatory bodies to investigate corruption crimes efficiently.

The lack of information and the lack of a culture of identification of corruption by the people is seen as an additional reason for the spread of corruption. Very few citizens know that active and passive bribery are both crimes and very often it is believed that only taking bribes constitutes a crime.

Last but not least, the lack of political will amongst Bulgarian political class is also an important factor.

Size and Scope

Contrary to respondents from almost all other target groups included in this study, the NGO representatives believe that corruption can be measured. The measurement is based on a study of perceptions similar to the method applied by Transparency International for its CPI index. One of the components that are measured is the impact of corruption on the life of ordinary citizens. According to these studies, three years ago more than 80 per cent of the citizens declared that corruption exercises strong influence on their personal life. Now the situation has changed and slightly more than 50 per cent declare so.

Another dimension of corruption that NGOs attempt to measure is the size of the bribes paid in different public spheres. According to NGOs studies the highest bribes are paid in the judicial system.

Effects

There are two major groups of negative social effects of corruption as seen by NGO representatives. The first one encompasses the negative effect on democratic institutions, as corruption undermines the public trust in them. The second one includes economic aspects such as the impoverishment of the population due to the non-regulated ways of distribution of public resources. Privatization procedures are a good example of this process.

Anti-corruption Measures

One set of anti-corruption ideas concerns the possible improvement of existing anti-corruption measures in terms of better coordination and implementation. The reason for the poor effectiveness of anti-corruption strategies is not that much in the balance of powers, but rather in the lack of effective interaction and cooperation between the agencies engaged in counteracting corruption. The fight against corruption crimes requires the joint efforts of many institutions. This is the job not only of prosecutors, but also of the court, anti-corruption commissions, the government, etc. Another problem of a similar nature is the lack of transparency in the work of anti-corruption bodies themselves, which leads to more public distrust in the capacity of the system to counteract corruption.

The major conclusion is that in terms of legislation and institutions building a lot has been done already. The problem is that the institutions do not use the powers they have to full extent and this is where the efforts should focus. If however, a new institution is to be established, this could be only a special anti-corruption agency. In order to be efficient it should be within the prosecutor's office and should have large investigative powers. There is



no need for other anti-corruption bodies, such as the Commission for the fight against corruption at the Council of Ministers, because all they can do is to educate, produce brochures, and monitor the implementation of action plans. Efficient anti-corruption activities, however, require investigative powers in order to punish persons involved in corruption and in this way play a prevention role in society at large.

As regards the question about the focus of a successful anti-corruption strategy, the respondents believe that it should be placed on both grand and petty corruption. This requires that both approaches the top-down and the bottom-up are applied in parallel. On the level of grand corruption, the focus should be on transparency and control of party financing, which is the main engine of corruption in politics. On the level of petty corruption, the first step is to narrow the popular perception about corruption. Corruption is cited as an explanation for too many different problems, which are not related to corruption. This lack of understanding of the essence of the phenomenon reflects on the citizens' perceptions and leads to exaggerated levels in the perception of the phenomenon.

The NGOs representatives consider the lack of good investigative journalism in Bulgaria to be serious shortcoming of the anti-corruption efforts in the country. According to them, the major role of media are to work on particular cases of corruption. The lack of investigative capacity amongst journalists is considered to be the main reason for the poor media coverage on the topic of corruption.

The role of NGOs in anti-corruption activities is perceived to be supportive and cooperative to the government's efforts for counteracting corruption. However, another equally important function of NGOs is to correct government activities.

5.6 Target Group Economy

Definitions

The representatives of the business define corruption as a state in which economic actors are forced to pay money in order to get services that are provided by the public authorities for free. In some of the cases this could be the so called "greasing the wheels" corruption where money are paid to get things done in a easier and quicker manner. In the other cases, the access to some services could be blocked by the public officials unless the certain sum of money is paid.

Another manifestation of corruption is when both business and public authorities in a consensual way circumvent rules and legal procedures. This type of corruption distorts the competition and lowers the quality of the services provided to the public. The most dangerous form of corruption is perceived to be that which affects negatively the interests of big groups of people. In this respect the petty corruption that affects many members of the society could be much more dangerous than grand corruption because it is destructive for values and further incidences of corruption.

The respondents from this target group believe that corruption exist not only in the public sector but also in the private one. This includes cases where private officials abuse their power for personal enrichment at the expense of the company's interest.



Origin and Causes

The representatives of business perceive corruption as universal phenomenon that exist to a certain degree in all societies. The characteristics of corruption in Bulgaria are determined first by the Communist heritage, and second by the lack of experience with democracy and market economy. This includes underdeveloped civil society, lack of independent media, and weak judicial system.

Size and Scope

According to our respondents, corruption can only be measured on the basis of a personal experience admitting that this approach cannot be applied for policy purposes. The phenomenon is present at low administrative levels with which many citizens interact in their everyday practice. As regards grand corruption, there are less people involved and the public is informed about it by the media. In this situation, it is very difficult to measure objectively corruption but perception that it is actually everywhere is very strong in the society.

Anti-corruption Measures

Since corruption has different manifestations, there should not be a single anti-corruption strategy. However, one general strategy can be used to limit corruption at lower levels. This reorganization of the public sphere involves reduction of the state influence and introduction of clear rules and procedures. In many fields in which public resources are spent (healthcare for example) corruption is not the cause of the problem but it is rather an negative outcome as a result of the system mismanagement. In such cases, a simple reorganization of the system towards better management would limit corruption.

Establishment of new state institutions meant to fight corruption would not help much since public trust in the state institutions is very low. The general public's perception is that institutions are often established not to improve the quality of the governance but rather to create new power opportunities for the ruling parties.

Introduction of transparency in all process of public decisions making could help to limit corruption significantly. It is important, however, that this transparency is achieved in an impartial way through the use of new technologies and media like the internet, rather than traditional media, which has lost much of its public confidence.

Persistence in teaching social values to the young generations is an important factor that might play certain role in reducing corruption in the country. However, respondents admit that changing social values would require a lot of time and effort.

It is unrealistic to expect that political parties would initiate reforms that might bring positive change to the process of counteracting corruption due to the fact that they are the major vehicle of corruption. The lack of interest in politics has led to parties commercialisation and clientalissation. Corruption to a great extent explains and rationalises their existence.



It is also unrealistic to expect that business organisations might contribute significantly to the anti-corruption efforts since they are private organizations that are primarily led by their private interests. This does not concern the low level administrative corruption, in which removal all businesses have questionable common interest.

In general, the media are of great significance for every anti-corruption strategy. In particular there are not many media in Bulgaria that enjoy considerable level independence. Most of them follow certain private interests. There is a presumption in theory, which assumes that existence of many media representing different interest and views might lead to relative balance in information. However, in practice, it seems that media have concluded unwritten agreement to excluded certain topics from the public debate.

6. Analysis

In this section, we try to reconstruct the logic of perception of corruption by summarising and analysing the results from both research phases. Our final goal is to offer a better understanding of the current anti-corruption efforts in the country and their shortcomings. Based on our conclusions, we will also attempt to offer a discussion on possible recommendations for optimisation of anti-corruption measures.

In order to better understand the social logic in which the phenomenon of corruption is constructed we used a model approach. We examined perceptions of representatives of the six target groups to discover repeating patterns and links between ideas of the concepts we studied. Our final goals was to reconstruct existing models of understanding of corruption. The models we use to organise the social perception on corruption are ideal theoretical constructs in Weberian sense. They exist in reality not in pure but rather in mixed forms. Some models however, prevail in the perceptions of some of the six target groups we studied.

There are several possible explanatory models of corruption that could be found in the perception studied. We reduced them down to two broader models or even groups of models that could explain and organise most of the ideas grounded in the respondents' perceptions. Our goal here was not to exhaustively describe the features of the explanatory models on theory but rather to reconstruct them only to the extent they exist in the particular perceptions that we studied.

“Rational” Explanatory Model

We called the first model `rational` since it sees corruption to a great extent as a rational phenomenon in the tradition of western modernity: it can be relatively easy measured, understood and tackled by a set of certain policy actions. The major assumption behind this model is that individuals are rational, and that in similar situations they are going to act in similar ways – essentially maximising their benefits and minimising their costs. Because of this assumption, the model is largely insensitive to subtle differences in the context. According to the model, corruption happens in Bulgarian as a result of the incomplete processes of modernisation: every society at the Bulgarian developmental stage would encounter similar processes with corruption, since the incentive structure for the individuals will be similar. Further, with the advance of modernisation, that started with the collapse of



Communism in 1989, corruption is bound to diminish. It could be concluded that the NGO sector has been the major importer of the rational explanatory model of corruption to the country.

The definition of corruption used within the rational model is `abuse of power`. There is a broad consensus amongst respondents from all target groups that abuse of power is broad enough to comprise all manifestations of the phenomenon. Within the rational model however, there is a tendency to narrow down the definition to `abuse of power for personal gain`. This makes the phenomenon easy to distinguish on the field among other forms of bad governance, which are often associated with corruption in the media and the political debate. Thought not always, corruption here is often understood in the framework of crime. This vision fits well within the overall rational framework of perception of the phenomenon presuming that as a crime corruption can be easily normatively defined and then tackled with penal instruments.

As regards ranking the different forms of corruption according to the danger they pose the focus within the rational model falls on the political and grand corruption. The importance of these types of corruption is determined by several factors. First, politics itself is very important for the society as whole. Second, negative effects for society in terms of economic resources are bigger when corruption occurs at high levels of governance and politics. Third, this model considers corruption as a crime and therefore it is very difficult to detect and prove political and grand corruption since they involve trade in influence and take place as very complex and consensual deals.

Causes of corruption according to the rational model are largely universal and have little to do with the cultural context. Only several manifestations of petty corruption can be considered culturally determined. The origin of corruption in this sense is related to the development of modern capitalist societies in general. Universal factors like poverty, poor or lacking institutional control and enforcement, weak judiciary and investigative agencies and the lack of political will could cause corruption in the different societies.

One of the key feature of the rational model is the belief that corruption can be measured although difficult to do. The measurement takes place through combining studies on the perceptions of experts, businessmen and the general public. According to this understanding, particular aspects of the phenomenon such as the sizes of bribes paid or the absolute cost of corruption for a given society can be measured.

In line with the above mentioned, the rational model paradigm presumes that the size and the spread of corruption in given segments of the society can be determined in a relatively precise manner. The idea of corruption as a phenomenon present everywhere in society contradicts this concept.

The negative effects of corruption within this model are seen at two major levels. First, corruption brings economic harm to society: losses from direct corruption payments, missed benefits to society as a result of corruption deals, etc. Second, corruption affects society negatively in terms of undermining people's confidence in democratic institutions and procedures.

The strategies to counteract corruption within this model are logically connected to understandings about the origin and causes of the phenomenon. The major focus here is on



formal institutions and might include measures for improvement of the institutions in terms of legislative support, technical capacity, institutional powers, competences design, etc. Corruption conceptualisation as a crime invokes a special attention to investigative institutions and functions. In terms of which type of corruption should be tackled first, the priority is given to the grand and political corruption and the top-down approach at the expense of the petty corruption and the bottom-up approach.

The roles of different social actors in counteracting corruption as seen by the rational model largely correspond to the above mentioned strategies. Media is expected to take part in general in awareness raising campaigns on corruption and carry out journalistic investigations of separate cases of corruption. NGOs and civil society structures should support the government in its anti-corruption efforts and correct it when needed. Public institutions should push the process of establishment of a normative framework for counteracting corruption and more importantly ensure better coordination and enforcement of all anti-corruption policies and measures in the country. Similar roles are intended for political parties: they are expected to ensure public support for the anti-corruption legislation and reforms. The general presumption of the model is that businesses have an immediate and unquestionable interests in fair and non-corrupt governance and therefore it would support the government and other public institutions in their anti-corruption efforts.

“Cultural” Explanatory Models

For reasons of methodological consistency it would be very difficult to argue that only one cultural explanatory model of corruption can exist and can be reconstructed out of the perceptions we studied. In the rational model there is a certain degree of logical clarity due to the fact that this discourse was brought to the domestic context by NGOs and foreign donors after a period of long conceptualisation. This is not the case of the cultural explanation of corruption, where usually several differing, and more importantly sometimes contradicting, ideas can exist. We called these models `cultural` basically because some of their explanatory aspects refer to specific cultural features in a broader sense. Culture however, is subject to permanent influence and change and in this process perceptions of corruption are very much affected by the rational discourse on the problem. This explains why in certain points of the explanatory constructs there might be some similarities to the ideas of the rational model while in others not. The important feature of the cultural models, however, is of course the fact that they reflect domestic knowledge, specific insights into long standing domestic practices and experiences in most of their explanatory mechanisms. They are much more complex, eclectic and last but not least, they are more sceptical with respect to the possible success in reducing corruption. For the purpose of our research we did focus more on the important differences between the rational and cultural discourses rather than on reconstructing the complex cultural explanatory models *per se*.

The definitions of corruption within the cultural models do not generally contradict the one used by the rational model, but they tend to be broader and more inclusive. They go beyond the abuse of power for personal gain to include phenomena such as distorted political process, abuse of power in the private sector, various forms of bad governance and even negative patterns of social values and morals. The definitions of corruption are also not limited only within the framework of the crime concept. The broader definition of the phenomenon is determined largely by the different points of departure of the respondents. Those who



perceive the problem with corruption as part of the whole process of transformation of the formal and informal institutions in the country tend to broaden the definition in order to place the phenomenon in an appropriate explanatory context. On the contrary, in the rational explanatory model the phenomenon is being narrowed so as to fit well in a single definition and be tackled with a clear set of concrete measures.

As regard the most dangerous form of corruption, the focus here is rather on petty corruption in contradiction to the rational model where grand and political corruption are more important. Importance of petty corruption is determined by the belief that it affects negatively people's perceptions about the democratic system and the social values, as it appears in people's every-day social interactions. As a result, most of the citizens lose their confidence in democracy and the belief that society functions in a fair way. Other forms of corruption that might involve grand corruption could also be dangerous, since they produce massive negative effects for society and cause general public distrust in its functioning. These are forms of corruption that affect interests of big social groups and are very visible for the general public (such as the corruption in healthcare).

The ideas about the origin and causes of corruption in Bulgaria within the cultural models offer more variations in comparison to these of the rational model. They can be summarised in two main groups that interact and influence each other. The first group includes factors related to the institutional context of transition and the effects of the Communist heritage. These are weak state institutions, legal instability, the privatisation of state properties and the specific role of the state in the economy. The second group includes factors such as the lack of specific social values to prevent corrupt behaviour and the existence of historically determined cultural patterns that facilitate social tolerance of corruption. These factors go beyond the social habits immediately related to particular practices of corruption to include deeper characteristics of the political culture such as the perception about the just and fair functioning of democratic governance and society in general.

One of the key discrepancies between the cultural and the rational models concerns the possibility to measure corruption. Within the cultural models, corruption can not be measured in a precise enough manner to be used for policy purposes. Only peoples' perceptions of corruption can be measured, but they are formed and influenced by various factors that have nothing or little to do with actual levels of corruption. In the case of corruption seen as a crime it is even more difficult to measure it since the predominant part of the corruption transactions involve consensus of both parties.

In spite of the firm belief that corruption can not be measured, it is perceived by the cultural models to be present everywhere in the social organism. The justification of such a belief comes from the character of communications within the social co-existence. Social actors often speak about corruption, they share stories and personal or retold experience about corruption, and everyday the media feed the public debate with stories of corruption. All this results in an embedded social perception that corruption is everywhere in society and that it is an inevitable tool for solving problems of various nature. In such circumstances it is very difficult to judge which story is true and which not, but perceptions that corruption is everywhere become very powerful.

The cultural models recognise the same negative effects of corruption as the rational model does, but the main difference is that the focus here is on large-scale popular effects. As



mentioned above, these effects are to a great extent a result from the petty and very visible corruption on the one hand and the media discourse on grand and political corruption on the other hand. The most dangerous consequence of corruption in these circumstances is the destruction of social values and the demoralisation of the society. This is perceived to be the most important effect since it damages the very system in which society functions. These effects can have long term negative consequences that are difficult to tackle since they become embedded in social culture.

Culture-focused models entail several possible strategies for counteracting corruption. The most prominent strategies can be classified into two groups. The first group encompasses measures aiming at improving the administrative capacity for dealing with petty corruption. These measures, however, are not based on purely technical explanations, but rather on the perception that the more petty corruption exists, the greater chance there is that people would have had a first-hand experience of corruption, which justifies their overall perception of the system as corrupt. The second group of strategies requires changes in the system of values, but there are hardly any specific proposals on how to effect these changes. This lack of specificity is directly related to the scepticism intrinsic to cultural explanations. Most of them are based on the presumption that culture is a very inert system and that widespread social attitudes and practices are extremely difficult to change, at least in the short or medium term. Therefore, the most promising approaches aim at long-term goals, for example through influencing the education, the upbringing, and the living environment of the younger generation.

Culture-determined explanations also differ from the rational model on the roles various institutions and actors could play in counteracting corruption. While the rational model proposes cooperation between NGOs and the government, the culture-based models call for NGOs that stand apart from the interests of the government and represent genuine civil-society platforms. On the role of political parties and business circles in counteracting corruption expectations of the culture-determined model are rather negative or sceptical. This is so, because political parties and business circles are seen as the main forces generating corruption. Therefore they cannot be expected to initiate the change, but rather they should be subject to change that might come as a result of the civil society pressure. The role of the media in the past is seen as negative as they are perceived to have trivialised the anti-corruption discourse and to have played a serious role in lowering public interest in politics.

Target Groups and Models of Corruption

As this study is qualitative, rather than quantitative, and the number of respondents is limited, the breakdown below should be considered as purely illustrative and is not representative or comprehensive in any way.

The analysis of the empirical data indicates that the rational explanatory model is most prominent among NGO representatives. This is not surprising, having in mind that the NGOs have been the main actors to initiate the corruption/anti-corruption discourse in Bulgaria, and that they based their work on concepts imported from abroad. Yet some of the local culture-focused explanations have influenced NGO representatives as well, especially the perception about the importance of petty corruption. This has influenced the measures they propose and for many of the representatives of NGOs addressing petty corruption (the bottom-up approach) is now just as important as fighting grand corruption (the top-down approach).

Certain theses belonging to the rational model are also used by respondents from the other target groups, to a greater or lesser degree. This may be related to the fact that corruption/anti-corruption discussions in Bulgaria were first initiated on the basis of the rational model. Yet, not all of the theses of the rational model have stood the test of critical examination, following the events of the past decade. For example there is a consensus among most of the respondents that corruption should be fought on a case-by-case basis and that the greatest focus should be on institutions with investigative functions.

In the table below we have attempted to illustrate the presence of the two types of explanatory models among the respondents of the different target groups:

Table 1

<i>Indicators/Target groups</i>	Politics	Judiciary	Media	Police/PO	Civil Society	Economy
Definitions	Dark Grey	Dark Grey	Dark Grey	Dark Grey	Dark Grey	Dark Grey
Forms	Dark Grey	Light Grey	Light Grey	Light Grey	Light Grey	Light Grey
Origin/Causes	Dark Grey	Dark Grey	Dark Grey	Dark Grey	Dark Grey	Dark Grey
Measurement	Dark Grey	Light Grey	Light Grey	Light Grey	Light Grey	Light Grey
Size and Scope	Dark Grey	Light Grey	Light Grey	Light Grey	Light Grey	Light Grey
Effects	Dark Grey	Light Grey	Light Grey	Light Grey	Light Grey	Light Grey
Strategies	Dark Grey	Dark Grey	Dark Grey	Dark Grey	Dark Grey	Dark Grey
Roles of other institutions	Dark Grey	Light Grey	Light Grey	Light Grey	Light Grey	Light Grey

Rational model
 Cultural models

Models of Corruption and Political Dynamic

In this section we attempt to show how the different models of perception of corruption interact in the discourse of the different groups. We set this interaction in a political context, and try to explore to what extent different groups can use the anti-corruption discourse to promote their interests. Our main focus is on the politicians and governing politicians in particular. The questions we are trying to answer are the following:

- Why governing politicians admit the wide-spread character of corruption?
- Why are they interested at all in anti-corruption measures, as the setting of anti-corruption bodies, for instance?

Governmental parties risk losing the public debate if they rely only on the legalistic discourse towards the phenomenon of corruption. Practice seems to prove such a hypothesis. In 2000-2001 the government of the Bulgarian Prime Minister Ivan Kostov was in the business of vehement denial of the existence of corruption unless proven in court. This government was swept aside by King Simeon II's movement, which came in office on an anticorruption ticket



using a much more inflated concept of corruption. Thus, governments, sticking only to the narrow, legalistic conception of corruption, could rely only on a very limited discursive support – coming mainly from the judiciary, which is hardly a vocal player in political life. Against such a “legalistic discourse coalition”, the government will see virtually everybody – the media, the NGOs, the businesses, eventually the prosecutors and the police, if they enjoy a degree of autonomy. Governments, therefore, need to reexamine their discourse coalitions very carefully, if they do not want to be left in isolation.

Further, it is rational for governing parties to attempt to broaden their discourse coalitions – to relate to the discourse not only of the judiciary, but to other important groups as well, the media and civil society mainly. In order to break up their discourse isolation, however, governments must take at least some of the following steps:

- publicly “admit” and “recognize” the problem of corruption. In this way they build a discourse bridge to potential partners in other groups, who are not directly interested in political changes (like the opposition);
- start cultivating the partnerships with these other groups by using their discursive support for the adoption of specific anticorruption measures;
- with regard to civil society, in exchange for the public “recognition” of corruption, governments could require cooperation with NGOs in a number of spheres, such as measuring corruption, legislative drafting of programmes, action plans, and other normative acts, consultation with experts, etc. The governments will be successful in breaking up their discourse isolation, if most of the influential NGOs in the country adopt a “non-confrontational” stance towards them. This would mean that corruption is depoliticized and that change of government is no longer seen as the key measure to be taken;
- in the case with the media, the situation is more complex. In contrast to NGOs, the media are not that interested in long-term institutional and legislative measures. They frame public discourse mostly through scandal and personalisation of politics: therefore, personnel changes are indispensable in order to bridge the gap between media and governmental discourse on corruption. For this purpose, governments must involve as potential partners elements of the prosecutors and the police, with the goal of *starting* investigations of public persons, possibly including members of the governing parties as well (but in exceptional cases, of course). It is important to stress that for the purposes of collaboration with the media, governments need to focus only on the start of investigations, since media interest is highest at this point, and goes down dramatically at the more complex judicial stages, whose intricate procedures are often impenetrable for the public in general;
- even the opposition could be co-opted in terms of anti-corruption discourse by a skilful government. The key element here is the depoliticisation of the issue through the elaboration of a comprehensive anti-corruption plan, which requires long-term profound institutional changes in all areas of governance. Ultimately, governing parties will be successful if they obtain the consent of the opposition for these programmes and plans, which is normally not impossible, since these contain predominantly common-sense measures aiming at the general improvement of governance. In certain cases, members of the opposition could become also members of watchdog bodies, supervising the implementation of legislative and institutional reforms;



- the government must read very carefully the silent discourse of the business sector on the issue of corruption. The best strategy to ensure that this silence means support is to lead a policy of downsizing of the state and lowering the taxes. These are the key anti-corruption measures which the business community looks for; normally, political change in terms especially of a political crisis and instability are not in the interest of the economic players.

There are several residual problems with these strategies of breaking up the discourse isolation by a government. First, the adoption of legislative and institutional measures – which is the core of what a government can offer to the public and other influential players in terms of anti-corruption – is potentially threatening to limit governmental discretion in important areas. This alienates traditional clientelistic partners (the role of patronage decreases) but also, this leads to a certain convergence of the acceptable party platforms in the longer run. Thus, in order to become suitable for government, a party must plan for: institutional reforms, downsizing of the state, lower taxes. Cooperation with civil society – understood as a monolithic, non-partisan entity – also leads to a certain “depoliticisation of politics”, which dilutes the dividing lines between the major parties.

Thus, by creating successful discourse coalitions with other influential players, governments resolve their short-term political problems of electoral mobilisation: they break up their discourse isolation, and their messages start to find support in what the other actors are saying as well. However, the long-term cost of this strategy seems to be a particular level of depoliticisation and of further undermining of the tools for political mobilization of the *established political parties as a whole*. It is no surprise, from this perspective, that despite the commitment of governments in South East Europe to the fight against corruption for more than seven years now, there is no revival of the public trust in the established political parties. In most of the countries, trust in governments and the representative structures of society as a whole is very low: parties and parliaments are usually most at risk.

The troubles of the established parties have recently taken two major forms. In the Romanian case, the two major political parties (the ex-communist Social Democrats, controlling Parliament and the block of the President Basescu) went on an all-out anti-corruption war against each other in an act of desperation to win back public trust. Before Romania's accession to the EU, the anti-corruption effort was lead by the charismatic minister of justice Monica Macovei, who was closer to the presidential camp. The Social Democrats, who saw themselves as victims of the anti-corruption campaign, retaliated by sacking Macovei immediately after the accession of Romania to the EU, and by starting impeachment proceedings against Basescu himself. The impeachment failed, because the Romanian people confirmed Basescu in office in a referendum. So far, high profile investigations against important party leaders on both sides have not lead to convictions – some of them never reach the judicial phase, while the others usually take a lot of time for final resolution. For an external observer, it would be a real miracle if these developments restore public trust in the political process and the representative structures of democracy in Romania.

In Bulgaria, the mainstream parties have adopted another strategy. In general, they have avoided thus far an all-out anti-corruption war against each other, with one significant exception in the first part of 2007, when a vice-PM of the Socialist Party was forced to resign, together with the Chief Investigator (who was seen as an appointee of another coalition



partner – the Movement for Rights and Freedoms). These two started accusing each other of corrupt behaviour, accusations which remained unproven in court, but had a dramatic public effect. This was just an exception to the general rule of avoidance of anti-corruption warfare among the major parties, however. The result of this avoidance is the public perception of all of the major parties as corrupt, which opens the political stage for ever new anti-corruption populist actors. Accordingly, all new elections bring a new popular anti-corruption hero in Bulgarian politics. In 2001 this was Simeon II and his movement, in 2005 the nationalist Ataka, and in 2007 – the charismatic Boyko Borisov – the former bodyguard of the ex-tsar, who made a career in the Ministry of Interior in the period 2001-2005.

Somewhat paradoxically, whether avoiding an all-out confrontation on the issue of corruption or not, major parties suffer from a long-term tendency of loss of public support in South East Europe. The impasse that I am trying to describe here is the following: in order to break up their discourse siege on the issue of corruption, governing parties must attempt to build “discourse coalitions”. This has short-term positive effects in electoral context: for instance, King Simeon II’s movement did not win as a governing party the elections in 2005, but it still managed to win enough votes to participate in the next “broad coalition” government. In Romania, President Basescu managed to convince the public to vote for his staying in office in a referendum. The long-term trend in terms of winning the public support through anticorruption discourse strategies is hardly encouraging for the major parties in these two countries, however. The door for new populist players seems wide open.

Rational and Cultural Explanations in a Political Context

Anti-corruption programmes started more than seven years ago in Bulgaria. Our case study shows that over this period of time they have managed to change to a degree the perception of corruption of different target groups. The most dramatic change in our view concern the groups of governing politicians. They have undergone significant metamorphosis in terms of discourse in the following direction:

- They have “admitted” the “existence” and “wide-spread character” of corruption;
- They have abandoned the “legalistic” and embraced the “inflated” public interest-based definition of the concept of corruption;
- They have adopted the view that modernisation and structural reforms in neo-liberal direction (downsizing of the state, deregulation) are the key anticorruption measures;
- They have agreed to form coalitions with civil society (understood as a monolithic whole) in the fight against corruption, thus “depoliticising” corruption as an issue;
- They have generally abandoned “the cultural” model of explaining corruption, and have adopted the “rationalistic” discourse of changing “the structure of incentives”, institutional reform, etc.

The paradox which the Bulgarian case study exhibits is that none of these elements of a quite substantial metamorphosis did not lead to a increased public trust in the Bulgarian governing parties. On the contrary, despite this “rational” approach to the issue of corruption which they have adopted, governing parties in Bulgaria continue to lose elections and the confidence of the people. First, Kostov’s government was swept aside by King Simeon II’s movement in 2001. Then Simeon II dramatically lost the elections in 2005 to the Socialist – the two parties were ultimately forced to enter a coalition government. In the final act thus far, the King’s



movement (local and European elections 2007) the King's movement shrunk to the point of non-significance, while the Socialists were badly beaten by the party of a new charismatic leader – Boyko Borissov.

Curiously, the Bulgarian case study demonstrates that the more one “rationalise” anti-corruption discourse, the more one “disenchants” the anti-corruption world (in the Weberian sense), the more anti-corruption magicians and superheroes emerge. Thus, first the ex-tsar Simeon II built his anti-corruption platform on the fairy tale character of his personal story. Then, his bodyguard Boyko Borissov followed the model and created his own party. He won the hearts of the public with words, looks, behaviour: subtle details which only a connoisseur of domestic public consciousness would truly appreciate.

And here is the paradox. Politicians must have adopted the “rational” explanatory model, but the public want a “cultural” hero, somebody who truly expresses their identity, to carry out the anti-corruption fight. For the believers of the “cultural” explanatory model, this is the only consolation that we could offer.

7. Conclusions

In this final section we attempt to place our research findings in a broader context so as to contribute to the better understanding and conceptualisation of the problems of corruption and anti-corruption in Bulgaria. The last decade has been marked by continuous anti-corruption efforts and various attempts to study corruption. In the beginning this process was driven and the phenomena exclusively conceptualised by external factors but over time a domestic, culturally determined discourse on corruption has developed. This discourse consists both of broader cultural features that might have some relation to corruption and reflections on the recent discourse on anti-corruption and corruption. Our goal here is to make a critical assessment of the `official` or `formal` conceptualisations of corruption and anti-corruption based on the results of our study of the local, culturally determined discourse on these problems.

As we showed above, there is a crucial difference in the way in which corruption is defined by the rational model and the culture determined models. While the former one is aiming at a clear-cut, universal definition, the latter prefer a broader definition that might easily connect the phenomenon to the context and explain it in relation with other social problems and developments. Anti-corruption strategies within the rational model deal exclusively with corruption itself, without giving an account neither of the deeper, grounded in the context causes of the problem nor of the possible side effects of these strategies. According to the rational model, corruption itself undermines the confidence of the people in the democratic system. According to the culture determined models, not corruption itself, but corruption and anti-corruption rhetoric are the major reasons both for the declining confidence in the democratic institutions and procedures and for the growing popularity of corrupt behaviour in the society.

These observation show that in fact there are two major interconnected sets of problems related to corruption in the country. First, there are problems of actual corruption deals and their negative effects measured largely in terms of economic losses and damages for the society. Second, there are problems related to public perceptions of corruption that affect



negatively social trust and values. Strategies that are meant to cope with the first set of problems come in combination with increased information and tabloid media discourse on corruption. At the end of the day, this creates a vicious circle, where the more information of corruption appears the more corruption becomes spread in society. This of course is possible because of the lack of effective responses to the cases of corruption on behalf of the state institutions and in particular the judicial system.

What should be done in this situation? The presumption of the `official` or `formal` discourse on corruption (that overlaps to great extent with what we found in the field as a rational model) was that the top-down approach, where the political class is the major actor in implementing large-scale anti-corruption policies is the best strategy. It also presumed that this process will be pushed at a political level by external conditionality such as the European Union and will be supported at the local level by civil society groups most of which are funded by foreign donors. The focus of this strategy was on grand and political corruption. It was expected that convictions of corruption of high-profile public servants and politicians would increase the general public confidence in the democratic system and make corruption a less attractive option.

What happened in reality is different. First, since Bulgaria joined EU, the soft power of the Union that might trigger reforms has been dramatically limited. Even before that, in the accession period, the EU pressure for reforms in anti-corruption and anti-crime policies did not archive much. The government undertook a number of so called `showcase` activities to convince the European Commission that the country takes seriously problems of corruption and organised crime. These activities, however, were more a kind of PR rather than deep system changes. These observations are indirectly confirmed by the fact that most of the large court cases involving high-profile public servants and organised criminals that have been initiated over the last year have proved to be very difficult and are not very likely to end with convictions. Most of these cases were seen by media and public at large as direct responses to the European Commission's explicit demands for convictions of corrupt high-profile public officials and members of the organised crime groups. Second, civil society groups have indeed carried out a lot of anti-corruption initiatives and managed to establish corruption as a social priority and promote many anti-corruption tools and measures in the legislation and institutional setting. However, as our study shows, the representatives of NGOs themselves admit that anti-corruption normative tools have not archived their full potential because there is no real implementation and coordination. Broad awareness campaigns on corruption that were conducted by NGOs have had a significant contribution to the trivialisation of anti-corruption topic and have triggered the general public perceptions about the spread of corruption in society. This has made the general public rather passive and tolerant of corruption. On the contrary, the culture determined strategies place petty corruption in the centre of the efforts needed. Successfully anti-petty corruption strategies would make ordinary citizens more optimistic about the fairness of the democratic governance as whole. This in turn will have a positive affect on social values that do not tolerate corrupt behaviour within society. Eventually, under such circumstances, the citizens would be perhaps more willing to vote for non-corrupt politicians and political parties. All this however seems too simple to be true. The reduction of corruption in Bulgaria cannot be considered in isolation from the overall political and social situation. Anti-corruption measures cannot be successful unless intertwined with the overall development of democracy in the country and solving the problems such as the lowering interest and confidence in politics, and the increasing comersalisation of the political process.