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“Corruption in Bucharest. Can we stop this phenomena?”

This essay is focused mainly on the analysis of the results produced by a poll made by Fundatia pentru Dezvoltarea Societatii Civile (The Foundation for Civil Society Development) financed by Open Society Institute Budapest.

The purpose of this poll is not measuring the actual level of corruption, but merely the perception of the capital's population of this phenomena. 84.4% of the interviewed believe that all or most of public servants are taking bribe and only 7% of them said that corruption affects only several public activities: healthcare, public administration, police, duane, justice, telecommunications, tax administrations.

The survey concludes that the Bucharest's population sees corruption as a generalized phenomena, with a 91.4% of them being positive about the existence of corruption (84.4% + 7% that indicated specific areas).

A series of factors were pointed out in explaining the massive presence of the corruption phenomena. A large ratio of the interviewed agreed with the influence of certain general conditions, such as moral crisis that characterized transition (37%), the communist past (31%); 28% of the capital's population view corruption as a national tradition; poverty and the lack of education were also considered among the factors that generate corruption (12.5% each).

When referring to the public servants responsibility, the citizens consider that they are rather greedy (80%) than low paid (60.6%) or in a power position (52.9%). Referring to their own responsibility, one must notice that corruption is mainly generated by the lack of knowledge - people don't know what services are entitled to - 72.1% and by the strong desire to benefit from a preferential treatment (64.4%).

It is interesting to notice that is a strong desire to "return the favor" among the capital's citizens despite the fact that the public servant-citizen relation is an official/professional one. The large weight of this factor (48%) indicates a reduced degree of formalization of the public servant-citizen relation; this is partly justified by the citizens' lack of information regarding their rights.

Among the corrupted public-servants' categories, the population indicated the medics o the first place (38.4%), police officers (7.4%); Romtelecom employees (7.1%), local public administration employees (6.9%), teachers and educators (6.5%), tax administration workers (4.7%), duane workers (2.1%), bank employees (1.5%), tax inspectors (1.1%) ending with judges (0.9%), government employees (0.2%), public prosecutors (0.2%).

Analyzing the poll's results one must notice a stronger citizens willingness to use illegal pays rather to solve their housing problems - purchasing houses (47.7%), obtaining various terrenes or commercial locations (26.1%), obtaining a construction agreement (26.9%) - than to use bribe in order to facilitate tax evasion (13.6%).

The corruption phenomena's perception among the Bucharest's population is differentiated on institutions. The army and the NGO are considered the most integer institutions and also the schools, private business, universities and banks are rather integer than corrupt; they are the less politically influenced. At the end of the specter, is a series of blamed institutions: public hospitals (83.5%), police departments (74.7%), Parliament (69.6%), government (69.6%), local administrations (67.5%), justice (65.7%), privatization agency (61.3%), political parties (49.7%), labor union (44.5%).

Theoretically speaking, only a 3.4% of the interviewed would prefer a system in which the public servants usually accept bribe and treat them preferentially, but despite the fact that the corruption is generally bad, it is considered inevitable by 45.7% and benefic by 7.5%.

Another question in the interview was: "In case a person looking obtaining something that he is legally entitled to, do you think that offering money or gifts is justified?" The affirmative answer regarded mainly medics (11%) and then cops (4.3%), teachers and educators (4.3%), cityhall employees (4.2%). If a public servant would ask for money or an equivalent for solving various matters, the weight of the population that would pay if they would have the means is 62.2% and only 37.8% would say no even if they could afford it.

If they were in the public servants' place, the citizens would feel offended, but they wouldn't take the offered money (52.8%), would feel offended by that offer (21.4%), ask for more (1.1%), would be tempted to offer better services to that person (24.6%).

As measures to diminish and eliminate corruption, the citizens found as useful the following:

- the existence and implementation of severe sanctions for the corrupted public servants that offer preferential treatment (92.3%);
- stop offering bribe (89.4%);
- the existence of certain special offices or telephone lines where the citizens can complain (87.4%);
- bigger wages for the public servants (87%);
- implementing taxes for urgency solving various problems (84.2%).

Among the Bucharest's population, the most willing to offer bribe are the person whose net incomes are over 7 mil. ROL. Almost 80% of the person in management would be willing to bribe and so would do over 70% of those whose revenues exceed 7 mil. ROL. Regarding the relation between the level of education and the corruption phenomena, the study found that the willingness to bribe is higher for the middle (66%) and elementary educated persons (58%) and lower for the college or university graduates (51%). Also men are more inclined to offer bribe than women, if they would have to solve the problem (65% vs. 60%).

The unofficial pays seem to have a negative effect on the low-income population: a large number of these householders tend to consider healthcare

services inaccessible. The estimated value of the total amount paid by the Bucharest's citizens to its local public administration employees is around 50.5 mil. ROL, the equivalent of approximately 34000 net monthly nominal mean wages in 1999.

As an amendment to the data presented above, I must say that the level of corruption is in a certain degree under represented for the institutions with whose employees the ordinary citizens rarely engage contact: judges, public prosecutors, duane workers, tax inspectors.

The evolution of the romanian economy and society, as a whole, is under constant and rigorous monitorization by the reprezentants of european institutions. The institutionalization of corruption is a more and more broadly treated matter in the reports of these institutions. EC annual country report places Romania among the last, underlining the negative effects of corruption and economic offences.

Everywhere there are two forms of corruption: an active one in the public sector and a passive one at the level of every person. Most of the corruption cases are located in the public sector, because the public servants, still driven the past communist mentalities, suffer from the complex of income disparities, that pushes them towards gaining illegal revenues.

As a recognition of the amplitude of the phenomena, WB asked the government among other things to elaborate an anti-corruption strategy for approving a loan for 2002-2004. This march, the romanian legation of the WB stressed out that 4 out of 10 firms are affected by the corrupt Parliament members who support certain private interests; this is considered to be the most important impact of corruption on the business environment.

The next places in the corruption hierarchy are occupied by the financial contribution made by certain private interest groups for the political parties, the corruption in the justice courts and public servants activities.

Although, justice should play a primary role in cutting down corruption, it has become o source of corruption itself. An alarm signal has been drawn at Brussels and Bucharest as well regarding the danger of political interference with justice. The european commissioner Gunter Verheugen recently stated that "the EC are waiting for explaining about certain radical changes produced after the elections in 2000 concerning the employees and process of justice". His recently visit declared purpose was actually finding real solutions for solving justice independence issue.

As a response, the romanian government restated its support regarding the power separation inside the state and the independence of justice. However, even the Ministry of Justice told the press that the Courts of Appeals should pronounce favorable solution for the tenants (regarding the matter of nationalized houses); this is an obvious attempt from the government to interfere with the justice problems.

In the past eleven years, it has become clear that corruption weakens the public services, changes the destination of a large amount of public resources and delays economic growth; corruption also helps to diminish the budget incomes undermines the state's credibility. Along with these negative aspects, there are certain legislative and other achievements.

This January, the Parliament approved modifications of several paragraphs in the Penal Code regarding the offences that boost corruption by harassing the punishment. The law no. 78/2000 regarding the prevention, uncovering and sanctioning the corruption acts has already made its first victims: 281 defendants were sued for corruption offences, resulting in a statistic drop in the number of the economical and financial felonies.

For a better information of the citizens regarding the services they have the right to, the EU and Fundatia pentru Dezvoltarea Societatii Civile are spending 600000 euro for creating information centers all over the country in the " Found for Developing Civil Society" program. This program has in view the creation of consulting services for citizens, the facilitation of the access to information in vital areas for the population, because the citizens must be helped to understand what are the necessary steps in solving their problems.

The Nastase Government late successes were positively regarded by the prestigious publication "The Economist" - revigorating the economy, competitive exports, diminishing rate of inflation a.m.; this progress is also well regarded by the population.

I believe that cutting down corruption means:

- better laws (meaning they pursuit the general interest and provide harsher punishment especially for corruption);
- an independent justice (meaning no interference of the government in the justice act and also bigger wages for the justice employees);
- the privatization of the public sector;
- access to public information (creating information databases, computer networks, web pages);
- the creation of unique public offices (for authorizations issuing);
- rationalizing of the number of public servants;
- higher wages for certain public sector employees.

In conclusion, I believe that Romania must make all the efforts to eradicate the corruption phenomena in order to aspire to a better life and a better position in future Europe's architecture: a unified Europe.

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