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### *“Development of smuggling on Russian-Polish border, as an effect of generally accepted bribery system.”*

As it can be seen in the title, this paper is about bribery system on Russian-Polish border. But I must mention, that it would be extremely hard for me to write something on this subject if I would not know it from my own experience. It was possible to write it only due to one specific fact.

One year ago I was going back from Kaliningrad (in Russia) to Poland, by hitchhike. I was lucky to being given a lift by Polish smugglers, who were not even ashamed of what they do and who spoke with me easily about their job. They were smuggling alcohol and cigarettes, which are cheap in Russia, just to sell them in Poland at a higher price. We went through the Mamonowo-Gronowo border gate and I was an eye witness of giving the bribe to a Russian custom officer. This unusual incident absorbed me so much, that I could not stop myself asking many questions to my carriers, what allowed me to find out more about this specific issue. I had also continued my research after this trip, what helped me to get closer to many other aspects of this subject.

This article, which contains complete information from my interview with smugglers, is final effect of my work.

#### **Bribery system.**

It is not a secret that alcohol and cigarettes are one of the most wanted products on earth, which people will always buy. It is also not a secret that those who sell them are making huge money on it. But the biggest mystery is how to buy it cheap and sell with higher price. In case of Russia you can buy it extremely cheap (comparative to Poland), that is why many people from area on both sides of the border are trying to make benefits on it. For some of them that is the only way of earning money and they continue it from one generation to another. It would be very easy and simple for them to make real fortune on it, if not the activity of one specific institution – the General Custom Office. However generations of smugglers created through their lives many ways of hiding the products, avoiding the control or even cooperation with custom officers. Of course from social point of view the most interesting is the last option.

For someone who is crossing border for the first time, it seems very obvious that you simply have to convince a custom officer (for example by giving him a bribe) to leave you alone and let you go free. But reality looks a little bit more complicated. Years of cooperation between smugglers and custom officers created the whole system which contains two levels of hierarchy and involves different types of officials.

First level is based on the ordinary custom officers. They guard the border path and it depends on them which car will be stopped and controlled. Because of the huge traffic on the path, they can not check every car, so they choose only some of them. Of course those who are in the system know how to “convince” them that their car is clean and they should check the other ones. If you want to cross the border without any difficulties, you do not have to even talk to the custom officer, you do not have to give him any secret signs or passwords. You just have to put five dollars banknote between sheets of your passport and give it to him without a word. He will return it to you after checking, but with no money inside. It will be the sign that you are fine and you can go free.

And that is the daily routine. Every 24 hours cars pass the border and those who are in the system avoid the control without any useless talk. Everybody knows the rules and everybody is satisfied because it works. And those who ever were at the Russian-Polish

border know, that more than half of crossing people are smuggling, so the whole bribery issue is large.

If only somebody would think for a while about that and count the number of cars that pass the border every day (700-800 thousands of people through all Polish border paths per day)<sup>1</sup>, than he could realize that Russian custom officers must be millioners . Five dollars from every smugglers car after few months would give a real fortune. But of course reality is different. If most of the people on the border know the system and it is not a secret to talk about it with foreign people, than probably it would take only few weeks for Russian police to catch all unfair officers and put them into prison. But unfortunately there is higher level of bribery system.

From every five dollars bribe only a small part belongs to the custom officer who takes it. The rest of the money he must give to his superiors – higher officers, who are leading the whole border path. Their job is to guard custom officers and the whole system in case of any control. They hid everything and report to their superiors, that everything works fine and their border path is free of any abuse. They control everything, that is why they take most of the money from the bribes and that is why the whole system is so hard to investigate by the Russian police.

### **Border path reality.**

Of course the fact that such kind of system exists and works, have strong influence on the border path reality. First of all, smuggling of alcohol and cigarettes is developing. Every year more and more people are trying to earn money on illegal selling of the products and now it involves people not only from the border area, but even from further lands. The effects of it are possible to be seen even in the cities like Gdansk, which is placed more than 100 km from the border, where on the city markets it is easy to find people with big bags who are selling alcohol and cigarettes at the very low prices.

But besides the fast increase of smuggling there is one more interesting fact. The whole bribery system is very well known by almost all people on the border and it is accepted by most of them. Consequences of it are very strange and often absurd, because sometimes even honest people, who do not smuggle anything, pay the bribes. Reason of it is simple, five dollars is not a huge amount and it makes easier and faster to cross the border. So “thanks” to the bribery system many people are trying to save their precious time.

### **Fighting with the bribery system.**

Of course if the whole system is so well known by so many people, then it is natural that from time to time some information goes to official institutions on both sides of the border. Obviously Russian government as well as Polish government are trying to stop it.

Unfortunately it is very hard to prove anything, because of the higher level of the system. It works “very good” and it makes difficulties to every investigation. The second thing is that lack of money in the budget and lack of people make Russian government and custom office concentrate only on the most important and dangerous crimes and abuses, like real smuggle of huge doses of drugs, boxes with weapon or trucks full of cigarettes and alcohol. They can not pay attention to singular retail smugglers and that makes their border untight<sup>1</sup>.

Polish forces are in quite similar situation. All they can do is try to check more and more cars and catch all those people who where not checked on the Russian side, but of course it is impossible to get all of them. Also because of financial problems their main aim is to stop real mob, so they do not waste their precious time on small cases<sup>1</sup>.

But in whole issue it is more important to stop the bribery system, than particular smugglers. Besides that, both sides cooperate with each other and Polish General Custom Office has contact with Russian Federal Tax Police Forces<sup>1</sup>. They exchange information and join forces to stop smuggling on a huge scale, but it is still not enough. Even if Polish side warns about bribes, higher level of system defends itself from any Russian reaction.

In Polish Custom Office, custom officers are changing place of work every few months. It disturbs the creating of nets, systems and bribery gangs on the border paths, because after some period of time all workers are replaced<sup>1</sup>. But even if this kind of procedure was taken by Russian Custom Office it would not change anything, because it could hit only at the first level and the real heart of the system is at higher level, which maintains. And as long as higher officers and superiors of custom officers is untouchable, the whole system will be working.

### **Other consequences.**

So in the post communistic reality it is hard to have any hope, that something will change soon. That is why every day the queue of smugglers waits on the border for their time to pass. Even if each of them takes only few boxes and bottles of products, then in general, after the whole day all of them will smuggle thousands of it.

For Polish economy it means real weakness and lack of control over the market, because people mostly buy cheaper products (even if they are not sure about quality and where it comes from) rather than more expensive and controlled by the government of the country. That is why every year a lot of money does not go to the Polish Treasury, but to smugglers pockets<sup>1</sup>.

Another problem is that some of the contrabandits do not bring only vodka and tobacco. Sometimes they have more dangerous articles, like drugs, infected meat (which became serious problem in Europe) or weapon. For example, on free market in Suwalki (Polish city placed in border area) it is easy to find lot of Russian citizens, who offers guns and rifles. If anyone wants to order it, they will smuggle it from Russia within the next few days<sup>1</sup>.

In other words, the bribery system is also promoting inflow of other illegal articles, which should not come to Poland.

### **Final word.**

As you see, this paper is a case study of the problem which concern both Poland and Russia. As an author, my aim was not to give any solution or find any brilliant idea, how to figure it out. As a student I can not advise, or tell what to do. I can only report and that was the real message of my work – to warn.

But it seems to me obvious, that solution to this problem is possible only in cooperation of both sides, because both of them are suffering of it and both of them are not strong and rich enough to cope with it alone. And even if they struggle with more important things, they should not disrespect it .

As an author I can only have hope that my alert will not fade and it will be loud enough to make right persons on right positions to start right action.

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