

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE SPECIAL ISSUE
ON THE PROBLEM OF CORRUPTION
AND ON FEASIBLE WAYS OF TACKLING IT

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The issue of corruption was first seen as being at the centre of attention in the US mainly during the 1970s, due to bribery practices which came to light in foreign markets by notorious American companies. However, this interest was only extended worldwide in the 1990s, and so, in many developed economies of the West, cases of corruption seemed to have a broader scope and a corresponding negative impact on the smooth functioning of the economy. This evolution was facilitated by the collapse of the regimes of the so-called "real socialism" and the rapid development of economic "globalization", and with all the consequences of these on lifting restrictions on international markets and in a display of extreme forms of competition.

Indeed, there were many multinational companies which tried, through unscrupulous means, to secure jobs or to dominate national contracts within their own country or in other countries. These cases led to a serious additional burden on taxpayers with useless expenditure, e.g. by purchasing equipment or with exorbitant increased public spending on low-quality public works and services. To cope with this situation, drafting and signing of interstate agreements has taken place against corruption by leading international and European organizations, such as the OECD (17.12.1997), or the European Community as it was formally known (26.5.1997), the Council of Europe (27.1.1999 and 22.7.2003) and the United Nations (31.10.2003).

Furthermore, control mechanisms were established, for the verification of corruption problems in different countries and to formulate proposals to tackle these problems through evaluation reports. The Groupe d'États

Contre la Corruption (abbreviated: GRECO) from the Council of Europe should especially be mentioned at this point, as well as the OECD Working Group on Bribery, the Implementary Review Group UNCAC and, more recently, the European Commission which publishes the EU Anti-Corruption Report on a regular basis.

In addition, various ways of 'measuring' corruption in individual countries were introduced, primarily with the Transparency International Corruptions Perception Index - CPI, but also with the Eurobarometer surveys of the European Commission and with the Quality of Government research of University of Gothenburg in Sweden. However, these measures are simply based on subjective – and, as a result, on vague and arbitrary - criteria of how corruption is perceived by citizens of each country which comes under scrutiny and, therefore, their value is limited and, to some extent, ambiguous.

Of course, the heart of the problem of corruption is to diagnose and address the underlying causes that lead to corruption, so as to, respectively, formulate consistent proposals for criminal policy for the realistic steps to counter and – if possible - "deracinate" these causes or associated factors that produce corruption.

The issue has been a prominent subject of deliberation for the European Crime Prevention Network (EUCPN), the most important institution of the European Union for the formulation of policies against crime. In particular, during the meeting of this institution in Athens in March and May 2014, under the Greek Presidency, the issue of corruption, alongside the issue of illegal immigration, were the two main axes of research and contemplation. The recommendations on illegal immigration have already been presented in issue 6 of this electronic journal, while, on the other hand, recommendations on corruption are included in this issue, for the redaction of which special thanks are expressed to our scientific collaborators Anastasia Chalkia and Peggy Giannakopoulou.

Of course, these essays refer mainly to the problems generated by corruption in a particular country of the Western World, namely Greece. However, a closer study of these discourses provides the reader with relevant information of a more general interest concerning both

phenomenology, as well as the causes and remedies for tackling corruption – as a result, with information which can be useful to other countries with similar socio-political infrastructure.

More specifically, the study of *Nestor Courakis* "Anti-corruption efforts in Greece. Between law in books and law in action" attempts to greek legal framework on corruption, mainly in view of the latest amendments to Greek law against corruption: laws 4022/2011, 4139/2013, 4152/2013, 4254/2014 and 4320/2015. Besides, the conclusion is reached that corruption prospers especially in societies where: (a) there is a redundancy of overregulation and a complexity of the law (as an extension of an extreme interventionist state), so that the application of the law falls to the discretion a civil servant, who interprets it as they perceive, possibly based on the benefits which they expect or obtain, (b) there is a "customer" system of entanglement between public administration and political parties, which also affects the way in which the law is interpreted and, for example, public procurement is awarded, (c) there is a broader spirit of tolerance in society towards corruption, as people who adopt this spirit are "accommodated" in the promotion of their personal affairs, e.g. through a phone call from their MP's office, and (d) the state administrative mechanisms appear weakened and without a coordinated joint action by the competent services, and similar inefficiency problems are also observed in the procedures of the Disciplinary Board against bribe-taking officials and courts with similar cases.

The study of *Effi Lambropoulou* "The relevance of perception of corruption to crime prevention in Greece" is also relevant, where the research findings on how corruption is perceived and treated are listed, based on texts and interviews by decision makers. More specifically, the research is based both on archive material, such as the archives of the House of Parliament and Parliamentary Committees, election party programs, highly circulated newspapers, NGO reports, and so on, and also on interviews with politicians and representatives of public administration, justice, police, economy, media and NGOs. And from these two sources of documentation, public administration received, in general, according to the survey, the strongest criticisms as being the main obstacle to transparency and thus, as a "springboard" for corruption, alongside the interests of political parties and social classes (contrarily, issues concerning justice seem to come in

second place). In fact, according to most of those who were interviewed, corruption occurs mainly in services "where much money flows, namely taxation, urban planning, forest protection, garbage and trash policy".

Respectively, in the same study, tackling the problem is focused primarily on strengthening control mechanisms and on the implementation of strict legislation. Also, the strengthening of preventive measures, such as improvements in education, information and awareness towards the problem of corruption seem to play a major role here. However, during the study, those who were interviewed did not share the view that corruption in Greece is actually more widespread than in other countries, but that it is merely the media which exaggerate and pass on negative impressions to citizens.

Amongst those referring to the feasible ways of tackling corruption and, in particular, concerning the need to formulate and implement a comprehensive strategy, is the, until recently, National Coordinator for Combating Corruption *Ioannis Tentis*, in his study entitled: "National Anti-Corruption Coordinator: The Greek answer against the corruption challenge". This study particularly emphasizes that in order for an anti-corruption strategy to be successful, there has to be an effective coordination of all players involved in the fight against corruption, legislative improvements must be proposed, audit mechanisms should be intensified and there must also be a promotion of the training programs for auditors, judges and prosecutors, as well as relevant training programs at all levels of education.

In conclusion, interesting statistics on cases brought to the attention of the police authorities, as well as those disclosed either in a direct way, or which lead to arrests of persons involved in the corruption of law enforcement bodies and citizens from 2000 onwards, are included in the study of *Konstantinos Panagiotopoulos*, Brigadier and Head of the Directorate of Management & Strategy for Home Affairs (Ministry of Public Order and Citizen Protection), entitled: "Combating Corruption". In this same study general thoughts on zero tolerance and the determination which should, in the rapporteur's opinion, be applied by his service towards the problem of corruption, are mentioned.

As is accrued from the above recommendations, as the main weapons in the war against corruption (more generally) are zero tolerance towards offenders, educational programs, information and awareness, the simplification of administrative legislation and of the bureaucratic administrative procedures, and the independence of public administration from politics so that there is meritocracy in the employment and promotion of civil servants. However, beyond these measures, many of which are also medium to long term goals, what mainly "counts" on a moral level is, in our view, making an example of and the "tone" that is given by the leaders of the political and intellectual aspects of a country to its citizens, especially to the younger generation: A flawless moral attitude of these leaders within their own public progressions, so that no one may deem them accountable to charges of any form of corruption and vested interests (e.g. "trading in influence"), is the most important prerequisite for the conscription of citizens in the fight against corruption.