THE PUBLIC DISCOURSE ON CORRUPTION IN GREECE

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Abstract

Perceptions of corruption have significant impact on a country's awareness of the issue and thereby on the success of any prevention measures. This paper provides a brief overview and summary of preliminary findings from an on-going study funded by the European Commission to examine issues of corruption in 8 EU countries. The study examines the perceptions of political and administrative decision-makers in the various countries, of the representatives of various institutions and authorities, as well as of citizens and media in the European societies. Overall, the project attempts to investigate the difference between institutionalised prevention policies, how they are perceived in daily practice and how effective they are.

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The research project *Crime and Culture*: *The Relevance of Perceptions of Corruption to Crime Prevention* started in February 2006 and is coordinated by the University of Konstanz.[1] The project is currently in its second empirical phase. Recently, the seven participating countries increased to eight.[2]

The prevention policies that have been developed by the EU and implemented so far by the member countries have generally been characterised by legislative, administrative and police force measures. They stem from prevention policies employing a particular definition of corruption, developed in political and administrative institutions which rely on a "top-down" procedure.

The project starts from a different standpoint; that the varying perceptions of corruption have significant impact on a country's awareness of the issue and thereby on the success of any prevention measures. For this reason, the study examines the perceptions of political and administrative decision-makers in the various countries, of the representatives of various institutions and authorities, as well as of citizens and media in the European societies. It means that the project attempts to investigate the difference between "institutionalised" prevention policies and how they are perceived in "daily practice", as well as how EU candidate countries and EU member states deal with corruption. Finally, the research project intends to make specific recommendations for policy harmonization.

Below, some findings for Greece will be presented emerging from the *first research period*.[3]

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[1] 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 (http://www.uni-konstanz.de/crimeandculture/index.htm). Sixth Framework Research Programme of the European Commission, Priority 7, FP6-2004-CITIZENS-5, SPECIFIC TARGETED RESEARCH PROJECT.

[2] In the second year of the Project, FYROMacedonia was added as 8th partner.

[3] 'The construction of corruption in Greece: A normative or cultural issue?', WP 6.

Contractors involved: Panteion University, Athens, Greece (PU) and National Centre of Public Administration and Local Government (NCPALG). The research was conducted with the cooperation of Stella Ageli (PU), Eleftheria Bakali and Nikos Papamanolis (NCPALG), members of the Greek working group during the first research period.

1. The Context

Since the 1990s, corruption has increasingly attracted the attention of the media, become an issue of public concern, and caused political intervention and the creation of new legislation in Greece. These national developments were embedded in a global movement, which involved major international organizations, and affected countries all around the world.

In Greece the term "corruption" did not exist in the legislation until recently. The complex of crimes was integrated in the chapter of Criminal Law concerning duties and service. However, under the trend of recent years the country ratified all the relevant conventions of the EU, the Council of Europe, the OECD and the UN.

Concerning the **public sector**, Criminal Law specifically addresses bribery − passive and active − (general arts. 235, 236), breach of duty, of trust, oppression, illicit participation in auction, lease etc., embezzlement (Special arts. 237, 244, 255-6, 258-9 of Criminal Law), including Members of Parliament and Local Authorities. Civil servants, in both a wider and narrow sense, undergo the Disciplinary Law (2683/1999) in case of an offence and in case of a crime both, Disciplinary - and Criminal Law. In addition, all civil servants, police officers and parliamentarians are obliged to make an extra declaration of their assets to the Parliament and this has now been in force for several years.

For the **private sector**, special regulations are foreseen, i.e. for athletic associations, share companies or limited liability companies (Ltd), Unions etc., in private (commercial, civil, etc.) and public Law.

Moreover, Criminal Law and Special Criminal Laws deal with crimes, attending crimes of corruption, such as embezzlement, organised crime activities, drug trafficking and money-laundering.

In recent years, the Greek Press has revealed some cases in which the award of public construction contracts had allegedly resulted from the influence of media owners who themselves or their relatives were also shareholders in the companies that won the contracts (see also Transparency International/TI-Global Corruption Report, 2004, p. 194; 2005, pp. 154-155). To increase transparency and limit the trade in influence, the Parliament ratified a law in June 2002 that prevents media firms from participating in public works contracts (3021/2002). Initial expectations that the new law would prevent misuse of influence, receded in 2003, within months of it being issued. Despite the above experience, the new Government ratified a new Law (3310/2005) which was suspended after the intervention of European Union, since it was not compatible with the EU legislation (Main Shareholder Act).

Furthermore, **institutional changes** have been introduced to promote transparency, such as the General Inspector of Public Administration (November 2002), the extension of the Ombudsman's responsibilities (January 2003), and of the Police Service of Internal Affairs (September 1999).

Yet, the more the country improves its normative and administrative instruments (public sector, private sector institutional changes) to prevent corruption and promote

transparency, the lower its score at the CPI index. In particular, Greece score at the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) decreased from 5.05 to 5.01 in the period from 1988-1996 and further to 4.3 in 2003 and 2005, with a slight increase in 2006 (4.4) (TI – CPI, 1996-1998; 2003-2005; 2006). Yet, the higher the score, the lower the place of Greece (28/54) among the countries during the two last decades, while the lower the score the higher the place (2003: 50/133, 2004: 49/146, 2005: 47/158, 2006: 54/163), eventually because of the increase of countries included.

2.   The Research

2.1.   Research Data

In order to assess existing conceptualizations of corruption in Greece, and to find out the origins of public concern, the national research team generated documents from all target groups under examination (Politics and Public Administration, Justice, Media, Police, Economy and Non Governmental Organisations/NGOs).

Specifically, it examined among others, Parliamentary proceedings (2001-2005), Ombudsman and Inspectors Controllers Body reports (1999-2004, 2005), reports of the Parliamentary Committee on Institutional Issues and Transparency (2000-2005), electoral programmes of political parties, articles from three daily newspapers of high circulation (2003-2005), Legislation and Court decisions (1987-2005), Reports of the Police Division of Internal Affairs (1999-2005), NGOs Reports (2000-2005), Findings of investigations of General Public Prosecutors (2001, 2002) and of party committees (2001) etc.

2.2. Case Studies and Data Collection

The project design required selecting at least two case studies, the first was party financing, common to all national groups, and the second left to the discretion of the researchers. Several cases that had attracted a lot of publicity were examined. Those chosen were selected because they could generate more data for each target group and cause no serious problems to data collection.

- *Case A – Description.* The party financing case study refers to alleged "black" accounts of the right wing party and its President at the beginning of the 1990s.

   The case covered four target groups, politics, media, the legal system and NGOs.

- *Case B – Description*. The second refers to claims of illegal naturalization of foreign nationals - mainly from the former Soviet republics - occurred after the 2000 general elections, under the pretext that they were repatriated Greek Pontians that qualified for such documents.

   The second case study responded to five target groups (the four of the party-financing case and police) and provided more information about NGOs.

   Economy could not be included in any of our case-studies. However, since it has referred sometimes to corruption there was not an issue to be integrated.

2.3. Comments on the selection of the case studies and the process of data generation

The main reservation of the working group with the party financing case was whether it would be useful to refer to a case shelved by the prosecutor, where there were no convictions. Nevertheless, our study was not the investigation of the case, but the discourse on it. Other technical and procedural difficulties faced by the national research group were more or less expected and are usual for such research.

Moreover, quantitative − the amount of adequate information, and qualitative −accessibility to data-sources, problems with the data generation were common to both research cases, in particular, with private TV channels and radio broadcasting.

2.4. Methods

Our analysis is based on the systematic generation known as Grounded Theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). The content analysis was carried out with the software Atlas-ti 5.0.

2.4.1. Coding

All grounded theory studies use a data coding scheme (Strauss and Corbin, 1994). Our coding procedure focused on (a) definitions of corruption, (b) perceptions of the causes of corruption (c) and significance of the problem, (d) identification of the victims of corruption (e) and of the "corrupt" attributed actors, as well as (f) concepts for confronting corruption. A two-level coding with Atlas-ti was carried out (in-vivo and open codes and selective coding).

2.4.2. Memoing, Sorting, and Model-building

Memoing helped us in this research phase to compare noteworthy segments among various texts of the target groups and assign some initial ideas which could lead us, as it did sometimes, to uncover other relations in the data that were not obvious. Codes, memos, along with sorting memos in "families" revealed a form of model-building conceptualizations of "corruption" "opacity", "synchronizing of interests", and "misgovernment" among the target groups, which could be proved useful for our later "theory-building".

3. Findings

Corruption is characterised as *social illness* and occasionally as a *social phenomenon* and as a *by-product* of modern societies. Nevertheless, several texts share a strong critical view of representatives of the state. This is more intense in the media, implying its increasing power in Greek society.

Public administration receives the strongest criticism, as being the basic impediment to transparency and therefore the development of the country; unlike the private economy which presents itself as the main "victim" of corruption.

The remaining groups try for a clear role in the discourse on corruption. Politicians continue to consider themselves the main group responsible for corruption control and promotion of transparency in society. They support new legislation and inspection mechanisms. The Judiciary promotes more legislation, the Police more control, while the NGO's try to fit somewhere into the field. In general, the various target groups regard the issue according to their requirements, roles and interests. In specific:

POLITICS. Although politicians on occasion make allusions to "merging of interests", "corruption" etc., when a specific case emerges their debates turn to be mostly party-political. Thus, the debates are focused on the denial of responsibility, preferring "misgovernment" to corruption. Politics and the media have a shared definition of corruption.

The discourse on "honesty and corruption" in politics belongs to an emotionally loaded rhetoric. It is used as an instrument to accentuate various issues and is occasionally reduced by politicians to a joker. Therefore, its meaning remains obscure, as does its extent, and corruption is either accounted for as a contemporary phenomenon or directly related to parliamentary practice in modern times.

Alongside their official vocabulary on corruption, there seems to be another, covert vocabulary outlying an "unavoidable evil" which is "part of the game".

PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION (Politics). As far as the public administration concerns, high ranking civil servants and those who staffed control mechanisms remain adherent to dominant and traditional views (Inspectors Controllers Body of Public Administration, the General Inspector of Public Administration et al). They accept the term of corruption, without any comment on issues of bribery, breach of trust or duty, contrary to the judiciary. They associate it with misgovernment, which is considered as a well-turned term for corruption, and an effect of bureaucracy and non enforcement of procedures' simplification. They present their efforts for improving "inexpedient" and "unfortunate practices" to face the situation.

In general, the whole group of high ranking public employees remain adherent to the official language and the administration thinking for more legislation and control for its implementation.

Contrary to them, **the (Civil Servants) Union members** seem to share a more elaborated approach and tend to be more open-minded and of original thinking. They

mainly attribute corrupt practices to the political leadership and party-loyalties *(62.2%)* in public administration and only a small percent *(13.6%)* to civil servants.

JUSTICE. The courts are strictly focused on supporting their decision, with references and statements of the plaintiffs. The word corruption is non existent in their texts.

POLICE. The reports contain rhetoric and descriptive statements on state and ethics. They over present the effectiveness of the Service and they often stress the Police role as "objective, impartial, and corresponding to society's needs" and describe cases of police misuse of power and corruption as "occasional and not structural". The use of the word *corruption* is rare. The Service focuses almost exclusively on corrupt practices of public administration without being justified by the case numbers. The Service of Internal Affairs has not only investigation authority for police officers, but also for the investigation of bribery and extortion accusations against public servants.

Its approach to corrupt patterns is person-oriented. While indirectly rejecting external control for themselves, they support inspection and repressive mechanisms (deterrence) for other public services. They emphasize the significance of citizens' trust and the effects of corruption on the state's image and efficiency.

MEDIA. Corruption remains for the Media, a news story valuable for its threshold and personalization. It is considered a *social illness*, the curing of which needs the commitment of the whole society. Sometimes the discourse reverts to condemnation against the whole society, reproducing everyday theories and stereotypes. This is obvious when the Press "comments" on International Organisations' reports on the rank and scores of the country on corruption.

CIVIL SOCIETY. NGOs analyze corruption employing mostly a well documented *international* (as opposed to national) argumentation, still with emotional-cum-ethical statements. Thus, the issue is "a fight" and "a battle" against illegal practices and corruption.

ECONOMY. The views of the economy as presented in its texts are one-sided. They regard "political-party interests, social class interests and complicated legislation" as the main causes of corruption. They reproduce the every-day knowledge on corruption as social issue, with an illustration of modernity expressed in proclamations such as "quality" and "state reinvention".

4. Discussion

From the first research phase became obvious that a channel of communication and promotion of views among different social systems operates (here: Media, NGOs and Politics). As stated by the texts analysed in the first period of the programme, the *official perceptions* of corruption in Greece are not considerably different from the corresponding reports of international organisations (TI, OECD, World Bank, etc).

According to results of a recent published survey (European Crime and Safety Survey/EU ICS, 2005), respondents from the old 15 EU Member States plus Poland, Hungary and Estonia were asked whether "they had been requested by public officials *or expected to pay a bribe* for his or her services over the past twelve months" [2004] (EU ICS, 2005, p. 56). Most EU Crime and Safety Survey interviews (EU ICS, 2005) have been carried out with CATI (Computer-Assisted Telephone Interviewing) telephone methodology; the Greek response rate rose to 880 (43.6% of 2,020) residents over 16 y.o. (EU ICS, 2005, p. 14).[4] From the participating countries positive answers were given most often by the Greek sample, fully confirming scores on the CPI (EU ICS, 2005, pp. 57, 58, Figures 2.25, 2.26 respectively).

It is thought that since this "measure refers to personal experiences with a well-defined category of corruption - bribe-taking by public officials - results are likely to be more robust than indicators based on perceptions such as the CPI index of TI" (EU ICS, 2005, p. 58). As the Report stresses, "Perception–based indicators may sometimes be led by media reports" (op.cit.). No doubt this is so; however, expectation of bribe paying is a perception as well, constructed by reifications, representations or others' experiences. In relation to that we have to take into account a) the non face-to face interview and b) the nihilistic and thus destructive discourse of the Greek Media, described above, affecting citizens perceptions (i.e. two daily newspapers of high circulation such as *Eleftherotypia*, 7/2/2007 for the EU ICS, 2005,[5] also, *Ta Nea*, 10/10/2002, pp. 24-25;[6] cf. de Waard, 1999, p. 163, Table IX, as quoted in the 1st Global Competitiveness Report of World Economic Forum/WEF, 1998, Table 8.14; Lambropoulou, 2004, p. 98). Moreover, some findings of the above study are in contradiction with the responses of other research findings (i.e. European Social Survey, ESS1-2002, Politics, Trust in the Police, Scale from 0-10, GRE score 6,4). Nevertheless, rankings on the CPI and rates of actual experiences of corruption EU ICS 2005 were strongly related to each other (r= .73) (EU ICS, 2005, p. 56, Figure 2.26).

Since citizens' views are not included in our research, the findings cannot yet support the results of other studies that the followed behaviour (everyday behaviour) does not necessarily coincide with the legitimation of corruption (Karstedt, 2004, pp. 389-390,

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[4] More information on the methodology of the survey can be found also on http://www.gallup-europe.be/euics.

[5] http://www.enet.gr/online/online_text/c=112,dt=07.02.2007,id=42574252.

[6] More detailed at http://www.v-prc.gr/4/11/1_gr.html and www.v-prc.gr/2/polvar31/index_gr.html. On newspapers's behalf, V-PRC, a public opinion research company, has undertaken the research "Political Barometer", 9/2001, 31, Research Period 11.9.2001–28.9.2001, Sample: 1,659 over 18 y.o. from the general population. The Police rise to the third place of public acceptance (59.9%) after the Church, which is put first (77.8%), followed by the European Union (66.8%).

397-408; WVS, 1989-1993) or that moral disapproval of corruption necessarily associates with willingness to make a complaint about it (Killias, 1998). In the EVS of 1999/2000, (Halman, 2001) the Greek sample (1999, 65 G) puts, for example, corruption – bribery" in the group of highly disapproved of behaviours (1,116 out of 1,142 respondents), although the country's ranking in the CPI is low and the respondents of the EU ICS (2005) placed it in the highest position of corrupt practices.

In relation to that, interesting research conducted by Wayne Sandholtz and Rein Taagepera (2005), used the Elite Integrity Index/EI as suggested by Welzel et al. (2003), and approved by the WVS. The Survey has taken the average of the Transparency CPI scores for the five-year period 1997-2001; this is called *elite integrity score* (EI). Elite integrity is regarded as an expression of the 'rule of law', the *perceived* low elite corruption (Sandholtz and Taagepera, 2005, p. 118, Figure 2; Welzel et al., 2003, pp. 344-350, 357, 367). Specifically, Sandholtz and Taagepera (2005, pp. 117, 128, endnote 7) measured the answers on Question V213 of WVS in 1994-1999 wave: "How widespread do you think bribe taking and corruption is in your country? [1] Almost no public officials are engaged in it, [2] A few public officials are engaged in it, [3] Most public officials are engaged in it, [4] Almost all public officials are engaged in it, [5] Don't know" (WVS, 1994-1999 wave).[7] Thus, the EI scores represent average perceived levels of corruption in the late 1990s and the first years of the new millennium (Sandholtz and Taagepera, 2005, p. 117). Greece's average rank among 68 countries in the *Transparency International* index for the research period is 28 and its EI score 4.6 (Sandholtz and Taagepera, 2005, p. 131, Appendix).[8]

According to their research (Sandholtz and Taagepera, 2005, p. 118, Figure 2), EI scores "*seem to correspond roughly to increasing GNP per capita*" (emphasis by E.L.) and "elite integrity tends to coincide with greater material wealth and well being, possibly because these criteria create trust and hence synergy" (Sandholtz and Taagepera, 2005, p. 131, endnote 8).

Their study showed, firstly that socio-economic development provides people with the objective means of choice, raising emancipative mass values, and strengthening people's subjective orientation towards choice, and secondly that formal democracy grants people the legal guarantees of choice, which are made effective by responsive elites (Sandholtz and Taagepera, 2005, op.cit.; see also Welzel et al., 2003, p. 370; Inglehart and Baker, 2000).

From all the above, several issues arise which our study has to examine, being important for an effective policy design in the area. For example, how to explain the country's score in CPI index going lower, despite its improvements in the normative and administrative fields (public sector, private sector, institutional changes) to promote transparency, and despite the remorseless criticism from the media and the disapproval of citizens? And what is the influence of international organizations

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[7] See also European Values 1999, Methodological questionnaire, and for Greece: http://spitswww.uvt.nl/fsw/evs/documents/Surveys/Countries%20PDF/1999-2000/EVS_Greece_1999_1.pdf.

[8] Elite integrity figures are averages of available annual scores for the period 1997-2001, Source: Transparency International, 2003.

issuing the ranks and scores on corruption and of the media on people's attitudes regarding that issue? And is it possible that a "down-up" approach to corruption would bring results other than those of the top down process?

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