



European
Research Area

EUROPEAN POLICY BRIEF

Crime

& Culture

CRIME & CULTURE: Seeing Corruption

Comparative research on perceptions of corruption in Bulgaria, Croatia, Germany, Greece, Romania, Turkey and the United Kingdom.

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INTRODUCTION

Corruption is one of the most significant problems for European integration and enlargement. It seriously damages the Community's financial interests and undermines democracy by eroding trust in the state. Allowed to flourish, corruption could threaten the European Union's core principle of social order.

Though mainly affecting countries in East and Southeast Europe, corruption occurs throughout the EU. In terms of origin, form and intensity, it varies widely from country to country. Fighting corruption, therefore, requires a highly differentiated approach.

Europe's efforts to address the problem of corruption so far have focused on "top-down" measures with a strong emphasis on law enforcement. Unfortunately, this approach often ignores the radically different ways corruption is perceived in various cultures.

Shaped by cultural disposition, perception of corruption determines a country's capacity to recognize it as a problem and successfully implement anti-corruption measures.

Why does perception of corruption matter?

In order to optimise corruption prevention in the European Union, policymakers should pay closer attention to how corruption is viewed in individual member states and candidate countries. A "one-size-fits-all" approach to anti-corruption is unlikely to be effective. Instead, prevention policies should be adapted to fit prevailing socio-cultural conditions and take into account how such policies are perceived in daily practice ("bottom-up").

EVIDENCE AND ANALYSIS

The Crime and Culture project identified patterns of perception and interpretation of corruption in seven countries. These countries have been grouped into three representative clusters:

- Germany and Great Britain, representing modern western European societies (democracy, rule of law, market economy)
- Greece and Turkey, representing partially modernized countries with a paternalistic state
- Croatia, Romania and Bulgaria, representing post-socialist transformation countries.

The research methodology of this project was more qualitative than quantitative.

Though the observations and recommendations contained in this brief apply to the specific countries included in the study, the cluster model may be extended to analogous states subject to empirical testing.

Is corruption a problem or a solution?

Corruption and modernity

From a sociological perspective, corruption represents a solution to a social problem, irrespective of its effects.

In countries that are moving into modernity, corruption serves as a vehicle for participating in the transitional process. It functions both as an **elevator** and as a **means of retaining one's place** in a closed circle of privilege and power. In the first case corruption serves as an instrument to gain social capital; in the second case it serves to secure access to social opportunity structures and capital.

In South Eastern EU-candidate countries corruption is impeding the modernisation of society and thereby undermining the project of European integration.

Anti-corruption discourse

In all countries anti-corruption discourse is based on preconceptions that vary according to different fundamental understandings of social norms.

While adoption of new anti-corruption standards is leading to a different view of social reality, this does not necessarily translate into rejecting corrupt conduct in practice.

What accounts for the paradox of “a corrupt country without corrupt people”?

In the Balkans, for example, the EU view on anticorruption has been officially adopted, but patterns of perception and behaviour generally remain the same, thus jeopardising every anticorruption effort.

In Germany and the UK, meanwhile, the lack of petty corruption (perceived as the “real” corruption) is used as justification for grand, structural corruption. Though advanced anti-corruption standards are in place, some of the elite are slow to recognize structural corruption as illicit behaviour.

Anti-corruption has to be seen as a long-term learning process with regard both to transition and modern European states. Civil society and the media have decisive roles to play in the anti-corruption fight on both national and pan-European levels.

Corruption in Selected Countries

Corruption Perceptions Index 2009 (Excerpt)

Rank	Country/Territory	CPI 2009 Score	Surveys Used	Confidence Range
14	Germany	8.0	6	7.7-8.3
17	United Kingdom	7.7	6	7.3-8.2
61	Turkey	4.4	7	3.9-4.9
66	Croatia	4.1	8	3.7-4.5
71	Bulgaria	3.8	8	3.2-4.5
71	Greece	3.8	6	3.2-4.3
71	Romania	3.8	8	3.2-4.3

Source: Transparency International, <http://www.transparency.org/>

The index ranks countries by degree of perceived corruption, a low number indicating a relative lack of perceived corruption.

What makes corruption in Turkey different from that in Greece?

Greece and Turkey (partially modernized countries with a paternalistic state)

- Both share a common paternalistic pattern of governance and citizens’ participation, but the mode of corruption is different in each country.
- While corruption in Turkey is linked to pre-modern economic structures (bazaar economy, neighbourly support, social control), in Greece it is linked with a dominant consumer-based value system and hence with modern culture.
- **In Turkey corruption is an instrument of social and economic communication, i.e. active social interaction in a “bazaar mode”. In Greece corrupt conduct rests upon a consuming mentality and a hedonistic individualistic lifestyle.**
- In Greece the governing party exploits the EU-subsidized welfare state, buying votes by expanding the civil service sector.

How do people in Romania and Bulgaria define “corruption”?

Bulgaria, Croatia and Romania (post-socialist transformation countries)

- Corruption is perceived as pervasive and encompassing.
- Corruption flourishes in an environment of weak citizenship generated by a distorted relationship between state and populace.
- Corruption has been fostered by the process of privatisation: the former nomenclature secured itself the leading positions in politics and business as well as ownership rights to former state-controlled enterprises.
- **Former socialist re-distribution mechanisms have been transformed into networks of privilege.**
- Petty corruption and structural corruption have become interchangeable.
- “Corruption” now functions in the public discourse as a catch-all term: While serving as a metaphor for the incomprehensible causes of the transition crisis, it also refers to its negative effects (e.g. increasing social differentiation, inequality and redistribution of national wealth to the benefit of few).
- In Romania anti-corruption legislation has had little direct impact on daily life. Everyday practices are heavily burdened by corrupt conduct.
- In Romania corruption is being perpetuated by the unwillingness (if not complicity) of the judiciary to bring corruption cases to an end. Deficits of law enforcement result from the low performance of the judiciary.
- **In Bulgaria political parties are the major vehicles of corruption.**
- In Bulgaria the general public's perception is that institutions are often established not to improve the quality of governance but rather to create new power opportunities for the ruling parties.
- In many areas of Bulgarian society where public resources are spent (healthcare for example) corruption is not the cause of the problem but rather a negative outcome of system mismanagement. In such cases, a simple reorganization of the system towards better management would limit corruption.

Why is structural corruption often swept under the rug?

Germany and the UK (modern western European societies)

- **In western-central European countries petty corruption among the broader population is virtually nonexistent, fostering a social perception that corruption does not exist. This, however, disguises structural corruption (grand corruption) among functional elites in many areas – particularly at the**

interface between policy-making and the economy (e.g. public procurement).

- Differences in the way corruption is perceived among relevant actors reflect varying patterns of rationality: Whereas politicians and businessmen are success oriented, policemen, judges and public prosecutors view themselves as watchdogs of morality.
- Administrative and economic deregulation causes irritation in the self perception of social roles (administrative/entrepreneurial) and opens up new avenues of corruption.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICYMAKERS

European level

- Coordinate anti-corruption measures with other international organizations operating Europe-wide (OECD, Council of Europe-GRECO) and develop a consolidated anti-corruption strategy.
- Seek to overcome fragmentation in the European area of justice and law legislation with respect to anti-corruption; support related efforts in the newly launched Lisbon Treaty and the Stockholm Programme.
- Find ways to overcome conflicts between competencies and jurisdiction on EU and national levels in order to institutionalise a more effective control system.
- Combine existing mechanisms (EUROSTAT, etc.) to enable more effective financial investigation.
- Request greater transparency from member states, especially in the field of public procurement and financial control (for example, by publishing all relevant acts and documents in the internet).
- Support instruments to enhance citizens' participation particularly the Advocacy and Legal Advice Centres (ALACs) of Transparency International.

National level

In post-socialist countries:

- Break down networks among the political and economic class (above all among the nomenclature) and promote effective control structures (e.g. an independent judiciary and press).
- Support the media and civil society actors in assuring political enforcement of anti-corruption measures.
- Urgently improve the efficiency of the justice system in Romania and Bulgaria (where people take corruption for granted and few perpetrators are held accountable). Give particular attention to involvement in corruption by

members of the judiciary in Romania.

- Discourage demagoguery among political parties who campaign on an anti-corruption ticket. Dissuade political parties (especially in Romania) from using anticorruption rhetoric as a political instrument (“witch hunts”).
- Persuade the media (especially in Romania) to stop inflationary treatment of corruption affairs as this tends to reinforce public perception that corruption is a basic fact of social relations and may ultimately have a legitimizing affect.
- In Croatia, encourage members of the judiciary to confront corruption within the judicial system. Highlight long-term benefits of judicial reform to help allay fears of losing credibility in the short term.

In Greece and Turkey:

- Urgently reform the electoral and party systems to overcome paternalistic assimilation of interest groups.
- Promote development of civil society actors to provide institutional control structures.
- Develop long-term strategy for overcoming the deep breach of trust between state institutions and civil society.
- Seek to counteract the widely held notion that corruption is a legitimate means of dealing with the state apparatus.
- In Greece, raise awareness that the corrupt exchanges of clientelism are not acceptable compensation for the loss of trust between citizens and state.

In western countries:

- Strive to change the attitudes and values that underpin structural corruption by encouraging a shift away from national economic orientation and toward global responsibility.
- Consider options for adjusting legal system to favour collective/corporate liability instead of allocating fault to individuals (Roman legal tradition).

General

Education:

- Develop measures for detecting corruption at the earliest stages.

Civil administration and business:

- Discourage a particularistic (family-based, local, professional-network) understanding of “common good” responsibility.
- Encourage a universal sense of responsibility.

Civil society organizations:

- Promote direct and active participation of citizens in the fight against corruption (e.g. via the Advocacy and Legal Advice Centres (ALAC) of Transparency International).
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RESEARCH PARAMETERS

Crime and Culture was an EU-funded research project that examined corruption as a cultural problem in seven countries. The comparative cultural study considered the way perceptions of corruption relate to crime prevention in Bulgaria, Croatia, Germany, Greece, Romania, Turkey and the United Kingdom.

Objectives of the research

The main objectives of the research were to:

- develop means to optimise corruption prevention in the EU.
 - document perceptions of corruption held by:
 - political and administrative decision-makers
 - the judiciary
 - the police
 - civil society actors
 - the media
 - business representatives
 - investigate the 'fit' between institutionalised prevention policies and how these are perceived in daily practice.
 - investigate how EU-candidate and member countries are handling the issue of corruption.
 - make specific recommendations with respect to corruption prevention policies.
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Methodology

1. First empirical phase: evaluation of expert systems. Content analysis of documents of the target groups politics, judiciary, police, media, civil society and economy.
 2. Second empirical phase: interviews with representatives of all target groups. Reconstruction of common-sense definitions of corruption out of the data.
 3. Third empirical phase: systematic strength-weakness analysis of expert systems. Improvement of the effectiveness of the existing expert systems, which are presently limited to a top-down approach.
 4. Interactive scholars-experts conference took place in Brussels: Bottom-up strategies for the prevention of corruption were discussed.
 5. Co-operation with national and international anti-corruption agencies took place.
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PROJECT IDENTITY

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Budget

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Website

[http:// www.uni-konstanz.de/crimeandculture/index.htm](http://www.uni-konstanz.de/crimeandculture/index.htm)

Further reading

1. Project Discussion Paper Series :
<http://www.uni-konstanz.de/crimeandculture/papers.htm>

2. Project Publications :
<http://www.uni-konstanz.de/crimeandculture/publications.htm>

3. Final Countries Reports

<http://www.uni-konstanz.de/crimeandculture/finalcountriesreport.htm>

4. Final Project Report

http://www.uni-konstanz.de/crimeandculture/docs/STREP_Crime_and_Culture_Final_Project_Report.pdf

5. Final Executive Summary

<http://www.uni-konstanz.de/crimeandculture/executivesummary.pdf>

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