



UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI
DI PERUGIA



This project is co-funded by the
Seventh Framework Programme for
Research and Technological
Development of the European Union



EU Grant Agreement number: 290529
Project acronym: ANTICORRP
Project title: Anti-Corruption Policies Revisited

Work Package: WP 6 Media and corruption

Title of deliverable: D 6.2 Case studies on corruption involving journalists

Conclusion

Due date of deliverable: 31 August, 2016

Actual submission date: 31 August, 2016

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Organization name of lead beneficiary for this deliverable: UNIPG, UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI PERUGIA

| Project co-funded by the European Commission within the Seventh Framework Programme | | |
|--|---|---|
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Conclusion

1. Why case studies?

The case studies that we conducted are supposed to integrate the previous content analysis of the coverage of corruption and related topics that are part of the deliverable WP6.1. The latter is a typical quantitative study conducted on a very large corpus of data. It has offered, in a comparative perspective, very interesting insights into how the news media covers topics of corruption. It is mostly a descriptive study that has produced a number of more general interpretative hypotheses on the representations of corruption as well as on the possible uses of news media coverage as an instrument to curb corruption.

With the case studies, we follow a different path. We want to shed some light on what is defined in social science as “process tracing” (George – Bennet, 2005), that is, discovering the links that exist between causes and consequences of social phenomena. In other words, our case studies aim at discovering what is behind the specific representations that have emerged from content analysis (that is, the large presence of political and public administration corruption), how and why a particular story has become news, and what the role is of the journalist and his relation to the surrounding context. Content analysis could not say anything in this regard, while a case study approach may reveal something about how the story started, how it developed, and how it ended in becoming news.

We conducted our study in five countries: Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Romania, and Slovakia. The comparative perspective is an important part of our research design, as it is in most case studies, because it may stress even further the recurring combination of causes and effects when compared with different contexts. In the content analysis deliverable, we defined the countries that are the subject of our case study as “new democracies”: four of them adopted a democratic regime at the end of the '80s; Italy is much older democracy but, mostly because of the dramatic transformations that took place in 1993 – 1994 (as determined by a cycle of corruption scandals), has gone and is still going through a period of important transition.

Case study approach is often used to construct typologies that may allow larger generalizations on how and under what conditions independent variables may produce specific outcomes (George –

Bennet, 2005). In our study, we departed from a typology of the roles that journalists could perform in the face of corruption. Previous studies and existing literature have indeed indicated that journalism could play four different roles in the face of corruption stories and corruption behaviours. Two are positive roles and two are negative ones.

Indeed, a journalist may *play a positive role* in a corruption story by being 1) an initiator/enforcer or 2) a reporter/facilitator.

The Journalist as an Initiator/Enforcer of a Corruption Story

There seems to be a widespread consensus among journalists in democratic nations about the benefits of watchdog journalism and its contributions to the quality of public discourse (Nord, 2007). As to the coverage of corruption, it is surely an uncontroversial function of media organizations in a free and democratic society. Indeed, a journalist's involvement in covering a corruption scandal is crucial in the sense that the corruption story would be unlikely to reach the public if not for the efforts of a particular journalist. Such a story might originate in a variety of ways—the editorial team of a newspaper may notice that some public official or politician is living beyond his means and task a journalist with investigating his sources of income; a corruption story might also arise out of a journalist working with large data, such as tax information, and noticing suspicious patterns in these data. In all such cases, the journalist is the initiator of the story; a journalist might also just find the corruption story of a lifetime when someone else, a whistleblower, discovers the basis for a story and entrusts the journalist with confidential information. In such a case, strictly speaking, the journalist is not so much an initiator of the story as an investigator (fact-checker) who does a service to the public by verifying whether the leaked information might be trusted.

The Journalist as a Reporter/Facilitator of a Corruption Story

A journalist might also play a positive role in a corruption story just by giving the story the necessary visibility. For example, a journalist might report on court proceedings in a corruption case, on some political controversy relating to anti-corruption policy, or on new international corruption perception rankings.

Even though the *negative impact* of a journalist on a corruption story has been less explored in the literature compared to the positive role, content analysis and our discussions suggest that this oversight is not justified. We suggest the following two “negative” roles: 1) corrupt journalist or journalist as an instrument of corruption (actively corrupt or collaborator) and 2) apathetic or disinterested journalist (lazy).

The Corrupt Journalist or Journalist as an Instrument of Corruption (Actively Corrupt or Collaborator)

Given the important role that media plays in society, active social actors such as politicians, corporations, and other interest groups often attempt to project their influence onto media content (Entman, 2004). Sometimes, journalists may receive benefits in exchange for purposefully producing biased or misleading media content. This phenomenon can be labelled “bribery for news coverage” (Kruckeberg & Tsetsura, 2003). So-called “blackmail” (Ledeneva 2006) is an ingredient of this possible role. It focuses on the fact that journalists or media institutions receive benefits (including money or other forms of benefits) to cover (in specific ways) or not to cover certain news, and therefore purposefully mislead the audiences to benefit the bribers. Bribery for news mostly occurs between the bribers (public relations practitioners, governmental officials, advertisers and other interested parties) and the gatekeepers of the media (e.g., journalists, editors, producers, and other media managers) (Yang, 2012). There are a variety of ways through which a journalist or a media outlet as a whole might be corrupt: a journalist might extort bribes in exchange of his silence on a corruption story, or he could play a relevant part in a corrupt network facilitating corruptive behaviours; an editor-in-chief might accept secret payments from a politician who is interested in an interview shortly before elections; there might be an editorial ban on publishing any critical information on the corrupt transactions of a major advertiser; etc.

Apathetic or Disinterested Attitude Towards Corruption Stories (Inactive/Lazy)

A journalist can also play a negative role even if there is not any bad and unethical intent. For example, an editor, for a variety of reasons, may not see the value in investigating or reporting on a corruption story, but as result of this editorial decision, the corruption story is less known among the general public or opinion-makers. Another reason for such a lack of interest in corruption cases is the reduced (overworked) or “lazy” staff. In such cases, the media just copy/paste official press releases. The backlash of such an approach is that it leaves the impression that corruption is just another technical matter for politicians and the judiciary to address thus losing its status as a matter of public interest. Finally, there are cases in which journalists are pressured by external actors (business and political) to silence all critical views.

To better explain most of the interpretations described thus far, Table 1 summarizes the four types and highlights how these types can be employed to explain the main features of journalists when they address corruption cases in the selected countries.

Table 1: The four roles played by journalists in a corruption case

| Role | Typology | Activities of journalist |
|----------------------|---|--|
| <i>Positive role</i> | <i>Journalist as an initiator/enforcer of a corruption story</i> (Role 1) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Investigative journalism</i>; - <i>Fact-checking</i>: service to the public by verifying whether the leaked information might be trusted |
| | <i>Journalist as a reporter/facilitator of a corruption story</i> (Role 2) | The journalist gives this story the necessary visibility for the readership/audience of that particular media outlet. For example, a journalist might report on court proceedings in a corruption case, on some political controversy relating to anti-corruption policy or on new corruption perception international rankings. |
| <i>Negative role</i> | <i>Corrupt journalist or journalist as an instrument of corruption (Actively corrupt/collaborator)</i> (Role 3) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - journalist extorts bribes in exchange for silence on a corruption-story; - journalist is part of a corruption network |
| | <i>Apathetic/disinterested attitude towards corruption stories (lazy)</i> (Role 4) | For a variety of reasons, journalist might not see value in investigating or reporting on a corruption story |

As it will be explained in the following pages, our study has demonstrated that these roles hardly exist separate from each other and that often they overlap and are dramatically blurred.

While one of the main features of quantitative study is its representativeness, a case study approach may not be representative of a whole: it shows under which conditions something may happen but not how many times it happens. In other words, we do not pretend to say that the cases that we have analysed demonstrate that journalism works in that specific way in the investigated country. We may say that when the same conditions recur, the described causes may determine that specific outcome, but our study does not allow us to say how many times this may happen.

The case study approach poses another problem: the selection of cases. This may be a source of bias. In our study, we selected the cases to be investigated by departing from the typology that was outlined at the very beginning of the study. We selected cases that could be representative of each type. More generally, we decided to have good and bad cases of journalism as well as mixed cases in which the role of the journalist remains ambiguous. However, this implies neither that we completed the entire set of possible journalistic roles nor that the specific cases we chose are sufficiently representative of that specific type in that country. As said, this is a specific limitation of the case study approach.

2. The methodology

A common methodology was established at the beginning of our study. In particular, it defined the sources for the study and detailed the narrative to be used. Indeed, ours may be listed as a specific variety of case study, the “detailed narrative” that is mostly used in history. In this specific variety, case studies are not strictly theory driven and there may be several possibilities of casual processes. In particular, beyond the representation of the four outlined types of journalist roles, the cases for in-depth analysis on the media’s interaction with corruption in the observed countries were chosen on the basis of the following criteria:

1. **Relevance:** how important and how typical is the case for the daily practice of journalism in the country and for the mechanisms at work?
2. **High profile:** are the individuals involved decision-makers, opinion leaders, relevant figures of particular sectors or influential in the media profession?
3. **Variety:** the case study shows a variety of possible interactions between media/journalists and corruption.
4. **Complexity:** the journalists and the media outlets involved appeared in various roles, both positive and negative.
5. **Novelty:** none of the case studies should have been previously subject to in-depth analyses (in the context of corruption)
6. **Comprehensiveness:** the case study as a whole should allow the ascertainment of the main issues of corruption coverage in the country.

All national reports begin with a short description of i) the main features of the mass media system, ii) how the journalist covers the corruption cases in relation to findings that emerged from HACA and CACA analyses and iii) the criteria used to select the case studies.

The report of each case study is therefore structured following this scheme:

1. **Introduction:** in this section, we describe the main elements/plot of the case, including the important actors (individuals, organizations, corporations, etc.), the setting of the story (time and place), in which sector the scandal takes place, how the actors are involved in the corruption case, how the corruption is dealt with, and on which type of corruption (bribe, embezzlement, solicitation/extortion, collusion, etc.) the case is focused. In addition, we provide information about the event that has triggered the corruption news story (publication

of phone tapping, judicial/police investigation, arrest/detention of a person charged with corruption, etc.).

2. ***Description of the role of the journalist/media in corruption case:*** in this section, we try to give evidence of the relationships between the journalist/media outlet and corruption in each selected case study. We connect this relationship to the four typologies that have been stressed above. Three main methods are used for the analysis: interviews with journalists/experts, quantitative and qualitative content analysis and an analysis of the judicial proceedings (if available).
3. ***Conclusions (description of the consequences/results of the corruption case):*** First, we provide a summary of the major consequences of this corruption case in the country. Second, we evaluate under what conditions the journalist/media can become “initiator”, “reporter”, “collaborator” or “inactive”. If the journalist/media outlet plays a positive (initiator or reporter) or negative (collaborator or inactive) role, the researcher explains it by relating the case to some dimensions of the media system in each country (political parallelism, role of the State in the media system, degree of journalism professionalization, how the media ownership impacts on outlet, etc.).

Table 2: The investigated case studies

| Italy | Hungary | Latvia | Romania | Slovakia |
|--|------------------------|--|-----------------------------|---|
| Calciopoli. The Most Important Scandal in the World of Italian Football | The Tocsik scandal | Investigative journalism of magazine IR on corruption in context of insolvency proceedings | The Black-Mailing Watchdog | Can a “Lone wolf” quasi-investigative journalist substitute low functionality of the law enforcing system”? |
| The Bisignani case | The Istvan Kocsis case | Media reporting on Jurmalgate | RMGC - Poisoned Advertising | “Dangerous liaisons” between politicians and journalists in the context of wiretapping of journalists |

| | | | | |
|---|----------------------|---|--|---|
| The Villa in Monte Carlo | The Istvan Papp case | Kompromat internet portals | Bacteristan: unveiling of a years-long scheme of corruption and negligence in the health system in Romania | News TV and Hidden advertisements: the Slovak news channel TA3 and state authorities |
| Infotainment and Current Affairs Television Programmes: From Petty Corruption to Grand Corruption | The Eclipse Case | Wiretapping and leaking of journalist's phone conversations | The "maybe too virulent" secret services | Media coverage of corruption: the role of Inter-media agenda setting in the context of media reporting on scandals. |
| "Agente Betulla": a case of secret agreement between a journalist and the Italian secret services | | | | The media and controversial armament by the Slovak ministry of defence |
| | | | | Politics, oligarchs and media in Slovakia: the Gorilla Case |
| | | | | A glance at the Glance house |

3. Main findings

As already stated, the five investigated countries have been defined as “new democracies” in our WP6 content analysis deliverable. We also included Italy under this label, although it is not literally a new democracy but presents many similarities with the other investigated countries essentially because of the transitional and volatile character of most of its institutions and its political system (Almagisti – Lanzalaco – Verzichelli, 2014).

Our case study shows that a large number of similarities exist among these countries that highlight a similar sequence of causes and outputs proposing a more general interpretative framework. Indeed, from the previous content analysis, it emerged that in these countries, the focus of corruption coverage is mostly on political and public administration corruption. “Petty corruption” is rarely covered (an exception, as showed, is the case of Italian television infotainment programs),

while newspapers essentially deal with “grand corruption”. Therefore, the selection criteria for case studies privileged cases of “grand corruption”.

As John Thompson has stressed in his book on “Political scandal” (2000), the increasing frequency of political and public administration scandals that, as just said, particularly feature the observed countries may refer to a more general transformation of the political environment and notably to the shift from “ideological politics” towards what he defines as “the politics of trust”. The gradual weakening of the ideological links binding citizens to party structures and the corresponding progressive disappearance of well-rooted and diffused party structures places greater relevance on individual politicians. Thompson writes: “with the weakening of the forms of reassurance once provided by the long-standing social affiliations of political parties, many people look increasingly to the credibility and trustworthiness of political leaders or aspiring leaders, to their character (or lack of it), as a means of assessing their suitability or otherwise for office. And in these circumstances, scandal assumes a newly potent and self-reinforcing role as a ‘credibility test’” (Thompson, 2000, p. 9).

Thompson mostly observes the well-established, liberal democracies of Europe and North America, but new democracies present even more extreme features of post-ideological politics. In new democracies, especially those emerging from the disappearance of the communist regime, political parties are weak, they are very volatile, and they are often established just at the outset of an election campaign only to disappear just a few months later. More importantly, party organizations are very often constructed around the figures of single leaders; they are very personalized political structures with poor and unstable, cultural and ideological background because rather than general views of society, they often represent personal vested interests (Bajomi Lazar, 2014, Zielonka, 2015).

The so-called “politics of trust” become even more relevant within these conditions; political preference is given to those figures who appear more trustworthy and equipped with leadership skills. As many studies note, new democracies are probably more corrupt than older democracies for different reasons (Treisman, 2000), moreover in these democracies symbolic politics sharpens the representations of corruptive and unlawful behaviours even more, as they become important ingredients of the struggle centred on the “politics of trust”. In these countries, expressions such “kompromat” or “assassination campaign”, which we read often in the attached national reports, become part of the political struggle. The coverage of corruption is a major occasion to undermine the reputation of a competitor because the ideological debate is very poor, the intermediary structured organizations are weak and volatile, and the distance between competing policy options is not so large. Therefore, what makes the difference is the figure of the leader in a situation in

which the news outlets often replace all the other possible agencies of political socialization. When parties are weak and volatile and when other intermediary organizations disclose the same characters of instability, the news media play a major role in constructing and/or destroying the reputation of the leaders and therefore the “politics of trust” relies almost exclusively on the actions of the news media.

In these conditions, the coverage of corruption, including the coverage of other dubious affairs (in the case study reports there are many examples of dubious affairs, not just corruption affairs), assumes a completely different character and importance, which is different from more established democracies in which other political and social organizations have a different societal role. Moreover, as the national reports clearly demonstrate, in new democracies, there are other problems as well: rational legal authority is poor (Mancini, 2015); rule of law is also poor (Krygier, 2015); and the process of rule institutionalization is not sufficiently advanced, requiring more time and an adequate social and cultural environment that does not seem to be sufficiently developed in these countries (Selznik, 1992). Professional journalism also seems to deserve a longer process of institutionalization (Mungiu Pippidi, 2008). In other words, in new democracies, rules are weak, volatile, rarely respected. The rules of professional journalism also follow the same pattern. In the coverage of corruption, a mixture of different causes and behaviours coexist that have a unifying and major character: the scarce attention towards “the common good” and the prevalence of private interest.

For many reasons, Italy also features similar characteristics that have been accentuated further since the well-known “Tangentopoli” (bribery city) scandal that caused the almost complete disappearance of the previous political system in 1992 – 1993 and its replacement with a new system that does not seem to have found a stable arrangement.

A complex, ambiguous and multifaceted coverage

The national case study reports clearly highlight the high level of complexity of the coverage of corruption. We could define this coverage as complex, ambiguous and multifaceted within which different competing interests and practices confront each other embodied by single figures who at the same time often perform different, contrasting roles. The complexity of the case is connected to the level of autonomy of the journalist in the specific country. For this reason, the report’s authors present the main features of the mass media system in each country, as there are a variety of reasons explaining why a specific media outlet may choose to cover or refrain from covering a corruption story.

The main consequence of this complexity for our study is that our initial, supposed typology appears to be blurred. Very rarely is it possible to distinguish between the role of initiator and the role of actively corrupt/collaborator and/or other roles. Very rarely it is possible to distinguish between good and bad cases. Take the example of the Italian scandal of the so-called “Villa di Montecarlo”: a journalist uncovered that some unlawful behaviour was involved in the ownership and the renting of a “villa” in Monte Carlo that was the property of a political party, but his discovery and the subsequent publication of the story were part of a more complex strategy to destroy the reputation of an ex-ally of the owner of the newspaper that published the news, Silvio Berlusconi. Moreover, the discovery probably resulted from following a leak arriving from an ambiguous figure with contacts with foreign political leaders and the secret service. In this story, professional roles and objectives appear blurred and ambiguous. From a methodological point of view, we have to treat our initial typology of the role of journalists as a typology consisting of “pure” (moreover “empty”) types in the Weberian sense. So the real research question here is to measure the distance between the “real” (or empirical) types and the “pure” types and as a result, to construct a conceptual order of the empirical types. Furthermore, the real types show elements of different pure types at the same time and in different combinations. This means that we can use our typology as a conceptual tool in interpreting very few of our cases.

The Romanian report offers many examples of the ambiguity and the complexity of the coverage, and in this report we also read that: “it is not rare for the same journalist/medium to sometimes play a positive role and other times a negative one. It is not rare for the same journalistic technique—such as the use of anonymous sources or leaked information—to be used for good or for bad”.

The Latvia report too clearly highlights the difficulty of placing different investigated cases into the proposed typologies, as there are frequent overlaps in roles that are moreover affected by external conditions. The evaluation of the journalistic performance becomes difficult if not impossible.

The observed complexity of the coverage of corruption stresses another well-known characteristic of corruptive behaviours: they are not just individual actions and decisions. As Alberto Vannucci has written: “corruption is systemic” (Vannucci, 2012, p. 44). The case studies show that the corruption exchange does not involve only two persons, the corruptor and the corrupted; usually, a plurality of persons and organizations are involved. Journalists are also involved, mostly in cases of grand corruption together with politicians, members of the government, public officials and often secret services officials. A network of people is in action with each of them pursuing his own aims undermining, all together, the safeguards of the public interest and in the end, often contrasting with each other.

The practice of systemic corruption is diffused and rooted both in real practice and in the attitudes of the people: those who do not want to enter that systemic network often become victims of practices of retaliation. This is what the Italian “Calciopoli” case stresses and the wiretapping of the Latvian journalist, Ilze Jaunalksne, also highlights: those who do not accept the invitation to enter into the network of corruption are pushed aside or punished in some other way. The practice of systemic corruption involving journalists also demonstrates that there exists a diffused culture of corruption that validates and even encourages behaviours that are clearly against the law and that are instead perceived almost as usual and diffused practices requiring (often forcing) a silent, if not an active adoption. This practice appears well diffused in journalism too.

Ambiguous sources

In large part, the ambiguity of corruption coverage derives from its mostly common origins. Indeed, in many cases, news on corruption derives from some sort of leak whose sources are very rarely identifiable, as they try to use the press coverage instrumentally for their own goals. The Slovak Babe case illustrates very well the dubious aims of a possible leak: “The actual content of the dialogue was mainly focused on a request by Kaliňák (a politician) to publish news of a rather minor breach of the law committed by an opposition politician, Minister of Defence (MD) Ľubomír Galko (he was apparently driving too fast). Kaliňák also put pressure on Vavrová by emphasising the fact that he was considering ending his practice of divulging secrets to her and turning to another daily—namely the liberal-right SME, the main competitor of Pravda—which would publish the scandalous news more promptly”. The leak by the politician, Robert Kalinak, to Vavrová, whom he very informally approached with the nickname Babe, was clearly aimed at undermining the reputation of a political competitor. The leak was given to a journalist not to curb a corrupt act or to blame the person who committed it but to undermine the reputation of a competitor.

Very frequently, leaks consist of wiretaps, but it is rarely possible to know who did the tapping. Indeed, in many cases, corruption stories involve secret services. They are responsible for wiretaps that they deliver with different and unclear aims. Secret service appears to be a constant presence in many stories of corruption in ex-communist countries, as many case studies demonstrate, but Italian journalism is also affected by its presence, as the story of “agent Betulla” testifies. The Slovak “Gorilla case” probably demonstrates more than other case how the involvement of secret services can be both ambiguous and important at the same time. Hungarian journalism is also frequently affected by initiatives deriving from their secret service, as the country report demonstrates. Very likely, the important presence of the secret service in post-communist countries is also partially a

legacy of the past, as during the communist period, the different variations of “securitate” were a stable presence in everyday life and in some ways, continue to be even today.

The frequent use of wiretaps opens several difficult problems of regulation. Several attempts have been made to regulate and to limit the use of wiretaps with clear consequences on freedom of the press, which have been and are still discussed at length in a very harsh way.

The situation in many of the ex-communist countries is further dramatized by the presence and initiatives of private “intelligence” services. Rarely it is possible to know to whom they answer while they circulate information that journalists use for different purposes. A clear example of this ambiguity is proposed by the Latvian “Kompromat internet portals”, “a mix of journalism, public relations smear campaign and citizen journalism”, as we read in the Latvia case studies report. These portals publish news (e.g., gossip, corruption stories, other PR initiatives) and often are also used by the mainstream news media. The ownership of these portals is, in most cases, unknown, meaning that the source of the news they publish confirms the ambiguity and the risks of Internet manipulation already stressed in the well-known “The Net delusion” (Morozov, 2012).

More traditional, “old” paper documents represent still another source for news on corruption. Their nature and their origin is also often ambiguous: the key to the locker containing the documents from which the Hungarian Tocsik case started was found “under a traffic sign next to a gas station on the M3 motorway near Budapest”. Often, news on corruption seems as though it has been inserted into the plot of a detective story.

Advertising investment represents another occasion of ambiguity. In most cases, nobody is directly bribed, but positive coverage of a single person or institution may represent a sort of “insurance” for gaining large amount of advertising investment just as, in contrast, negative coverage may push away a possible investor. This is demonstrated in many examples stressed by the Hungarian report. It is very difficult to demonstrate the improper exchange because data, negotiations and information are not transparent. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that this is frequent, unlawful behaviour.

Investigative journalism vs judicial activities

Just as the content analysis has demonstrated, most of the corruption news stories derive from judicial initiatives. Undoubtedly, their high frequency is also determined in all of the observed countries by the complexity and the length of the trials that motivate the frequent return of each case to the front page of the newspaper. It is not by chance that many of the trials addressing the corruption cases that are described in this deliverable and started years ago have not yet reached an end.

Our case studies have also confirmed the importance of judicial investigations as a source of news on corruption and the contemporary irrelevance of investigative journalism. It cannot be denied that cases of investigative journalism have been observed, but they are rare, they confirm the possible ambiguity of the investigation (such as in the already quoted case of the Italian “Villa in Montecarlo”), and they mostly demonstrate that it is not easy to conduct a journalistic investigation into cases of corruption.

Both in studies on corruption and on professional journalism, the practice of investigative journalism is supposed to be a major instrument to curb corruption; as we read in one of the “canonical” texts on investigative journalism, its duty is “to confront a certain sort of social reality: the reality of outrageous civic vice and, by implication, the possibility of enhanced virtue in the conduct of public affairs” (Ettema – Glasser, 1998, p. 7). However, our case studies demonstrate that investigative journalism in the classical sense of the word is rarely practised, and in any case, it encounters numerous difficulties and obstacles. Journalists sometimes work without a professional background, as shown in some of the investigated cases. However, there are some signs of the professionalization of investigative journalism in, for example, Latvia and Hungary.

Scarcity of resources is indicated as a major cause of the poor diffusion of investigative journalism in the observed countries. In most news outlets, it is not easy to keep a certain number of personal resources employed for a long time on just one investigation without any commitment to everyday reporting. Few newspapers can afford this. The economic crisis of the recent years has further worsened an already poor situation (Stetka – Ornebring, 2013), and therefore, resources devoted to investigate journalism have diminished. The Latvian report illustrates this point very well.

There are other obstacles as well that are of different nature. As some of the investigated case studies demonstrate, often the coverage of corruption brings actions of retaliation. They can take place when the journalist decides to report a case of unlawful behaviour, receiving clear pressure not to do it. This can be observed in the Latvian “Wiretapping and leaking journalist’s phone conversations” case in which a journalist was targeted for retribution due to her work or the Romanian case “RMGC - Poisoned Advertising” in which a corporation used its advertising and PR budget to silence all critical views of its gold mining project. Retaliation, as has already been stressed, may intervene when the journalist does not accept an offer to become part of some corruptive network, as happened in the Italian “Calciopoli” case when the television journalist who did not accept the suggestions coming from the “boss” of the corruptive network, Moggi, suffered clear professional consequences as a result.

Journalistic investigations are often prevented due to the fear of being prosecuted. In the important Slovak Gorilla case, the wiretaps from which the case originated were not originally revealed for fear of being prosecuted; they then became public thanks to the Internet. Investigative journalism always faces the risk of the court. On some occasions, this risk and, of course, its monetary implications are so large that the journalist (or the entire editorial team) decides not to proceed, while in some other cases, the discussion of possible judiciary implications delay the publication of the story to the point that it is no longer news.

Our study shows that the coverage of corruption is very often prevented because it addresses complicated matters that a large portion of the readers can not properly understand. Often the journalist himself does not have all those knowledges that are necessary for a precise comprehension of the case in question and for its explanation to the public. This is what happened in the Hungarian Kocsis case that had several severe implications in different social and economic fields and also implied the necessity of investigating data that were not easy to retrieve. The Latvian scandal on insolvency administrators is similar. The case received poor coverage and only from a single news media outlet because most of the editors thought it was not an easy matter to describe and to transfer to a public who could only devote a small portion of time to reading the newspapers. In other words, an assumed lack of interest and competence by the readers prevented the journalist from paying more attention to this case.

Unfortunately, as many of our case studies in different countries demonstrate, the judiciary itself (which in many cases replaces the watchdog function of the news media) is often part of the diffuse “system” of corruption; judges themselves are corrupt or act dishonestly. Therefore, corruption may expand without serious limitations and become a sort of dominant and diffuse culture. New democracies suffer a low level of institutionalization and weaknesses in their intermediary organizations (of which journalism is one); their culture, their professional and ethical standards are not well defined and set. Within this situation, the pursuit of private interests easily prevails over the general interest that is perceived as vague, not well defined and in any case, not unanimously shared.

Between techno-optimism and techno-pessimism

Several of the cases we have investigated came to the light because of the Internet. The most important of these cases (also because of the consequences it produced) is probably the “Gorilla case”. The wiretaps of conversations between several politicians, entrepreneurs and public officials were published on the Internet after a long period of rumours about their existence. Important political consequences were also derived from the Internet publication of the wiretaps. There is no

doubt that citizen journalism, blogs and all the opportunities deriving from the web are important mechanisms to check power holders and their unlawful behaviours. Our case studies demonstrate this very clearly. At the same time, the web may help in overcoming all those limits that the coverage of corruption may encounter and that have been discussed thus far.

Nevertheless, a good portion of techno-pessimism also appears necessary. Indeed, as we already discussed regarding several cases, the web is the best place for manipulation. Everybody can circulate news attacking competitors, leaking the wrong information, or diffusing gossip. Checking of these posts are often difficult, if not impossible, and once those posts have circulated, corrections do not have the same impact. Latvian “Kompromat internet portals” wonderfully illustrates this problematic aspect of the Internet and its ambiguous nature.

In other words, the web is undoubtedly a good resource to curb corruption, but at the same time, it represents another occasion for further blurring an issue, such as the coverage of corruption, which alone is already complex and ambiguous. Our case studies offer good evidence to assume an attitude of prudence in face of this new media.

A prevailing logic of instrumentalization

As already emphasized, there is no doubt that the news media may curb corruption by playing important tangible and intangible functions, as Rick Stapenhurst has written (2000). In the ideal model of western journalism, the investigation and disclosure of corruption cases represent the main ingredients of the so called “watchdog role” that the press is supposed to play. Through this role, it can carry out very tangible and immediate functions to work against corruption and bring to light behaviours that contrast with public ethics and interests, just as it may do in the face of any power. At the same time, the press may contribute to the diffusion of a shared idea of common good that may prevent the adoption of corruptive behaviours; this is what Stapenhurst meant as intangible functions. Our case studies demonstrate that on some occasions, the press does play tangible functions in face of corruption (we did not investigate the possibility of intangible functions) by investigating and making public those behaviours that contrast with the public interest. Nevertheless, from our study, it becomes clear that most of the time, the coverage of corruption is directed by a logic of **instrumentalization** rather than a logic of fair control over power holders in defence of a shared public interest. At least, this is what emerges in the investigated countries. Both from content analysis and case studies, it seems that there are many bad cases suggesting interesting interpretative hypotheses.

The logic of instrumentalization means that journalism responds to interests that are particular, vested and partisan; corruption is covered because it allows the pursuit of specific goals that most of

the time, favour private interest over the public. In this situation, journalism is not intended as an activity to spread news and to foster an informed citizen; rather, it is an instrument to intervene in public decision making. Ideological and cultural dimensions do no direct media coverage in any important way. What is more important is the possibility of affecting the decision-making process to defend and promote partisan interests. News media become part of the political struggle and the decision-making process, reflecting the often-contingent interests of groups, individual politicians, and individual businesspersons. Instrumentalization is diffused not only in new and poorly established democracies but also in countries that follow the “polarized-pluralist or Mediterranean model” of professional journalism (Hallin & Mancini, 2004).

News media instrumentalization fits perfectly with the practices of the “politics of trust”, representing a major occasion to attack opponents and to undermine their reputation independently from any relevant ideological affiliation. It appears particularly diffused in those countries that feature a low level of rational-legal authority and in which formal rules have a scarce universal character and poor compelling effects. In these countries, informality and often unfair accommodation appear to run most social behaviours. These are the conditions that, as already stated, it is possible to observe in new democracies, mostly in Central Eastern Europe and the other ex-communist countries (Ledeneva, 2006; Kurkchyan, 2009). Most of our investigated case studies demonstrate how in these countries informality is the directing logic of corruption coverage, clearly prevailing over a logic of institutionalization. The best example of this is the nickname “Babe” stressing the informality of the links between a politician and a journalist.

Instrumentalization, the politics of trust and scandal seems to fit together very well. Indeed, it is through the construction of the scandal and a dramatized coverage that seizes the first pages of newspapers and often lasts just “three days”, as written in the Romania report, that the reputation of the opponent is undermined.

We analysed the print press; television coverage may be different. It is mostly through the print press that the attempt to affect the decision-making process takes place, as the print press has a major function in elite to elite communication (Ornebring, 2012) These are the elites that have a place within the decision-making process, and it is among these elites that news media instrumentalization accomplishes its functions, as most of the time, elites themselves take part in the corruption exchange, at least at the level of the grand corruption exchange.

Television, being addressed to a much large portion of citizens, may play a different function as an instrument to give visibility to cases of “petty corruption”, which the analysis of some Italian TV programmes demonstrates. However, this tangible function runs the risk of trivializing corruption, as it is inserted within an entertainment programme, and the disclosure of unethical behaviours

mixes together with a number of other funny social events and activities. Ambiguity appears again: on one side, a concerted action to curb unethical behaviours emerges, but at the same time, these behaviours are taken out of context and not investigated in their development and causes.

4. Final concluding remarks

The case studies highlight the prevailing lack of professional investigative journalism even if we detected a few cases of good reporting. On the one hand, editorial offices rarely provide the conditions in which journalists can elaborate on cases independently and thoroughly. The influences deriving from the ownership of media companies and the advertisers may be disadvantageous to investigative work and insufficient human and financial resources can also be a barrier to investigative journalism. On the other hand, the public does not show much interest towards detailed articles and reports about corruption, thus editors may prefer superficial, tabloid-like content about such cases.

As was emphasized earlier, the real methods and roles of journalists did not exactly meet with the typology that was constructed before the analysis of the cases. The journalists' behaviours cannot be classified into exact categories due to the heterogeneity of the circumstances influencing their work. News media instrumentalization fits perfectly within the complexity and ambiguity of corruption coverage and within the so-called "politics of trust". The case studies suggest that there are no predictable scenarios for the reaction of the media to corruption.

These conditions make investigative journalism a prosperous field for political battles. In addition, there are examples from all countries of the impact of secret services on the unveiling of certain cases. The outbreak of certain cases can have notable political outcomes, such as the Villa di Montecarlo case in Italy or the Tocsik case in Hungary.

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This project is co-funded by the
Seventh Framework Programme for
Research and Technological
Development of the European
Union



ANTICORRP is a large-scale research project funded by the European Commission's Seventh Framework Programme. The full name of the project is "Anti-corruption Policies Revisited: Global Trends and European Responses to the Challenge of Corruption". The project started in March 2012 and will last for five years. The research is conducted by 20 research groups in fifteen countries.

The fundamental purpose of ANTICORRP is to investigate and explain the factors that promote or hinder the development of effective anti-corruption policies and impartial government institutions. A central issue is how policy responses can be tailored to deal effectively with various forms of corruption. Through this approach ANTICORRP seeks to advance the knowledge on how corruption can be curbed in Europe and elsewhere. Special emphasis is laid on the agency of different state and non-state actors to contribute to building good governance.

Project acronym: ANTICORRP

Project full title: Anti-corruption Policies Revisited: Global Trends and European Responses to the Challenge of Corruption

Project duration: March 2012 – February 2017

EU funding: Approx. 8 million Euros

Theme: FP7-SSH.2011.5.1-1

Grant agreement number: 290529

Project website: <http://anticorpp.eu/>