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A Diagnosis of Corruption in Slovakia

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Executive Summary

This paper looks at corruption in Slovakia, the government's strategy to reduce the levels of corruption and the citizens' perception of the problem. In addition, it describes what civil society organizations have undertaken to tackle the issue of corruption.

After widespread corruption in the 1990s extending to every aspect of public life and facing continuing major problems with the rule of law, in the 1998 national elections Slovaks voted a new government into office. In the following years (2000 to 2008), Slovakia was able to substantially reduce the levels of perceived corruption. However, after EU accession in 2004 and with a new government in power since 2006, Slovakia seems to shift backwards into the very habits of cronyism, clientelism and favoritism that were characteristic of the post-communist years of the 1990s.

Between 1998 and 2006, fiscal pressure, the prospects of EU accession and the strong voice of civil society forced the government to implement major reforms in almost all policy areas. Slovakia had become "a showpiece of communist change" when it successfully reformed the state administration and in October 2002 the European Commission stated that the republic had fulfilled the political criteria for joining the EU. However, after the new Prime Minister Fico took office in 2006 a significant decline was noted in the government's anticorruption activities.

Civil society is considered by experts to be among the most dynamic in Central Europe. The third sector can be described as heterogeneous and pluralistic and in the past has been able to exert strong influence on the government's agenda. The legal and regulatory environment for NGOs is free of excessive state pressure and taxation is favorable. Even though advocacy NGOs, including those active in anti-corruption, have accomplished countless systemic changes, their funding has dropped significantly especially since the US and other donors have significantly reduced their bilateral aid in recent years. Not only has the financial situation worsened, but civil society organizations are facing an increasing number of resentment by government representatives. Observers consider the relations between NGOs and the government marked by mutual distrust.

Slovak citizens generally seem to perceive corruption as a major problem. It has consistently been rated as the fourth most pressing problem behind high unemployment, the unsatisfying standard of living and poor health care. One of the main reasons for the prominence of corruption as a political problem lies in the awareness raising campaigns initiated by NGOs in the early 2000s.

NGOs operating in the field of anti-corruption include Transparency International Slovakia (TI Slovakia) and Alliance Fair-Play (AFP). Prominent anti-corruption activists in the public eye include co-founder and former head of TI Slovakia, Emília Sičáková-Beblavá, and founder and executive

director of AFP, Zuzana Wienk. Many other activists, but also journalists, judges and lawyers, have played an important role in the fight against corruption in the past.

1. Corruption in Slovakia: Extent, Forms and Developments

Introduction/Background Information

Explaining Slovakia's current state of affairs as regards the prevalence and extent of corruption can only be understood by taking into account the far-reaching changes that came along with the end of the communist rule and the subsequent transition period in the 1990s. On 1 January 1993, three years after the Velvet Revolution (the collapse of the communist regime that had controlled Czechoslovakia since 1948), the Slovak Republic gained independence moving from 'the nation after the hyphen' in the Czechoslovak federation to becoming a sovereign state.

At the outset, the prospects for Slovakia were not bright. Slovakia's economy was heavily dependent on large-scale but obsolete heavy industry. Employment was extremely high and foreign investment lagged behind that of other former Soviet satellites. In addition, Slovakia's regional political leaders lacked experience on the national level since Czechs had long dominated the federal leadership of Czechoslovakia. However, despite the less favorable economic conditions than its former Czech counterpart – more rural and less economically diversified – on average Slovakia has achieved greater economic growth and lower inflation rates in the past years and positioned itself as one of the most successful former Soviet countries (Britannica Encyclopedia 2010, EIU Slovakia 2008).

Extent and Forms of Corruption

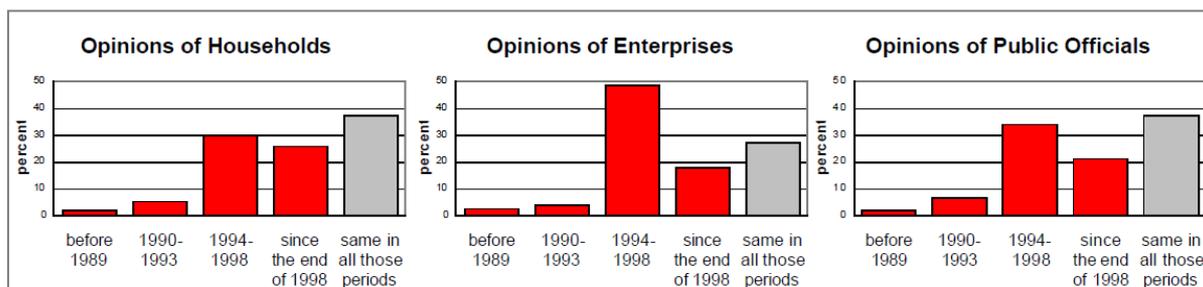
Similar to a number of other countries in Central and Eastern Europe in the post-communist period, corruption in Slovakia can be described as deeply entrenched and endemic with deep traditional roots. Corrupt practices were nurtured by the political structures and patterns of the communist state. Following the end of communism, extensive reforms were implemented with the objective of building a democratic state with a market-oriented economy. In the years of moving towards a consolidated democracy, the Slovak public began to demand more accountability and more transparency in the government's activities (Ivantyšin and Sičáková 1999).

However, instead of decreasing levels of corruption the 1990s were characterized by widespread corruption extending to every aspect of public life. Corruption in Slovakia has mostly been associated with bribery, but the nature of this phenomenon is much broader than that:

“[...] extortion by bureaucrats and politicians, abuse of authority and power, misappropriation or embezzlement of public resources for private gain, taking kickbacks in public procurement, accepting commissions for awarding public tenders, subverting competition by favoring the highest bidder, exchanging favors, giving favored treatment to friends and acquaintances, providing ‘jobs for the boys,’ various forms of clientelism and cronyism alongside the more everyday nepotism and patronage, establishing bogus companies to strip assets from publicly-owned firms, composing legally unenforceable or ‘mined’ contracts, home improvement fraud, car repair fraud, and tax frauds” (Ivantyšyn and Sičáková 1999).

In a corruption perceptions survey from 1999, the World Bank and USAID show that corruption in Slovakia was perceived to be much worse in the years 1994 to 1998 than during communism (see Figure 1: Perceptions of Corruption). The main factors explaining Slovakia’s high levels of corruption in the 1990s can be summarized as follows: lack of transparency in privatization and in the general use of state funds, low quality of the public service, absence or ineffective legal norms for the prosecution and prevention of corrupt practices, low risks when accepting or giving bribes and a widespread public tolerance for corruption (Ivantyšyn and Sičáková 1999).

Figure 1: Perceptions of Corruption (World Bank and USAID survey from 1999)



Corruption on the Rise under Vladimir Mečiar (1993 – 1998)

Experts generally seem to blame the government under Mečiar for the poor performance with regards to political reforms towards more transparency and accountability. Vladimir Mečiar, most popular politician in the early and mid-1990s, was Slovakia’s Prime Minister from 1993 to 1998 with a short interlude in 1994. He used his political influence for concentrating power in the hands of his party. Slovakia’s relations with the neighboring states and the West worsened when press freedom was curbed, economic reforms slowed down and the Hungarian minority was stripped of cultural rights. Following repeated warnings by the European Union and the US over the worsening political climate, Slovakia was not invited to join the NATO and the EU in the upcoming expansion round (EIU Slovakia 2008). In its Opinion on the Application of Slovakia for Membership of the European

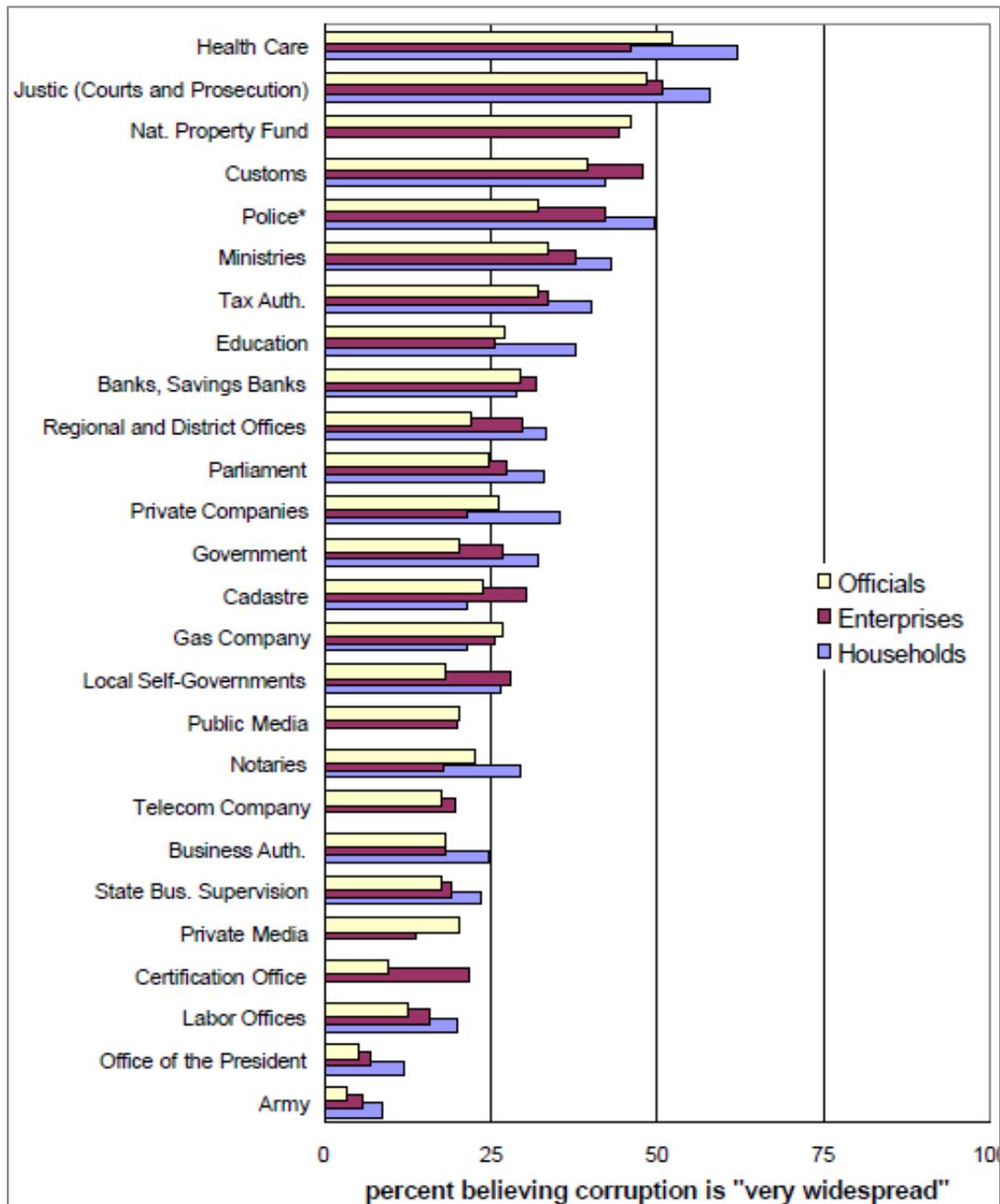
Union, the European Commission (EC) stated that “[...] the government does not sufficiently respect the powers devolved by the constitution to other bodies” and stressed that “the fight against corruption needs to be pursued with greater effectiveness” (European Commission 1997).

Declining Levels of Corruption: Mikuláš Dzurinda (1998 – 2006)

Following a near-collapse of the economy in 1998 and continuing major problems with the rule of law and corruption along with the fear of missing out on the opportunities of EU and NATO membership, in the 1998 national elections Slovaks voted a new government into office. The situation for Slovakia was severe. After the crony capitalism of the Mečiar era, the public’s main concern was to bring to power a reform-oriented government willing to enact much needed policies to bring Slovakia on the track towards EU membership negotiations.

On the request of the Slovak Government, in 1999 the World Bank and USAID analyzed the state of corruption in Slovakia based on diagnostic surveys (World Bank and USAID 2000). The survey indicated that corruption was perceived to be widespread in particular in health care, the judiciary, customs offices, the National Property Fund, the police and government ministries (see Figure 2: Perceptions of Corruption in different Areas).

Figure 2: Perceptions of Corruption in different Areas (World Bank and USAID survey from 1999)

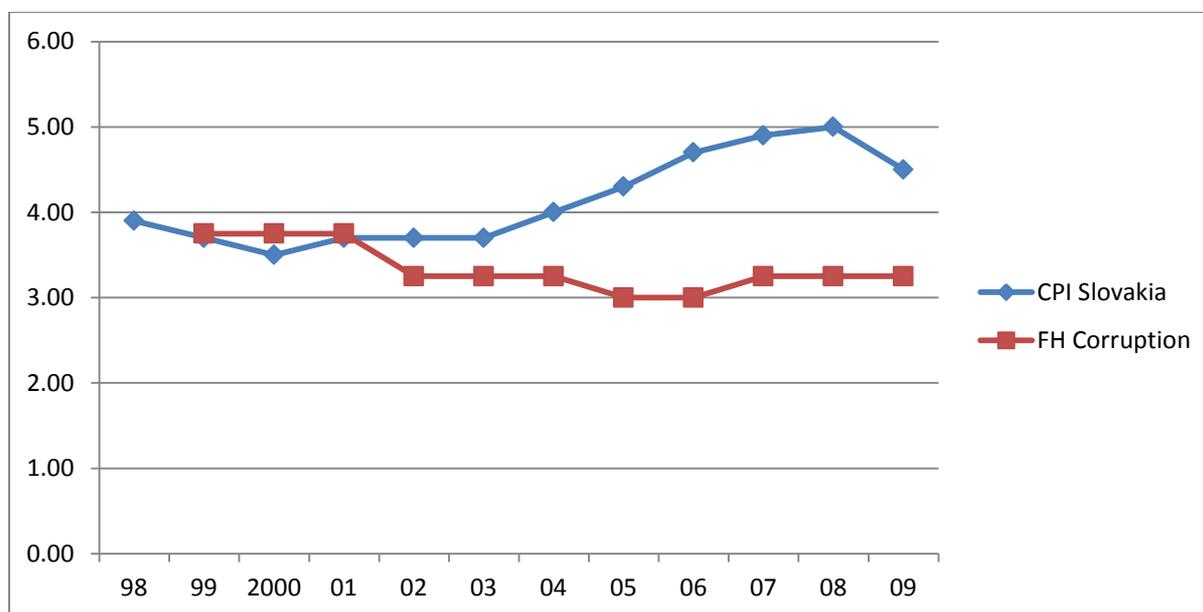


Note: The absence of a bar indicates that household perceptions of corruption in that organization are not available. On the enterprise and household surveys, separate responses were provided for traffic police and other police. These were averaged to arrive at the aggregate for "police."

In its initial phase, the new government coalition headed by Mikuláš Dzurinda was plagued by a number of high profile corruption cases leading to the dismissal of four ministers (TI Global Corruption Report 2001). In 2001, Slovakia even became the first country whose pre-accession financial assistance was suspended by the EC on grounds of corruption involving the administration

of EU funds¹ (Sičáková and Zemanovičová 2002). Although such scandals took place and the Dzurinda Government cannot be considered as entirely clean and honest, the government passed important anti-corruption reforms due to a mixture of EU pressure and civil society lobbying. Slovakia was able to substantially reduce the levels of perceived corruption between 2000 and 2008 (see Figure 3: TI CPI and Freedom House Corruption Scores). A major reduction in corruption perceptions from 3.5 in 2000 to 5.0 in 2008 on the Transparency International (TI) Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) shows that it is possible for countries to significantly reduce corruption from a high (though not extreme) level (Beblavý 2009). Through a number of well-designed wider institutional as well as anti-corruption specific reforms (see Chapter 2 for details), Slovakia gained the hallmark of a reform-oriented state. In most cases, experts praised Slovakia for its reforms in the areas of tax, pension, labor market and public finance management (Zachar 2005). However, important changes were also achieved in increasing the transparency and accountability of the government.

Figure 3: TI CPI and Freedom House Corruption Scores



Backsliding under Robert Fico (2006 – present)

It was hoped that joining the European Union in 2004 would result in “... an irrevocable shift away from the bad habits of the past” (The Economist 2009). In the case of Slovakia, however, a shift

¹ In March 2001, the wife (and at this point in the process of divorcing) of Roland Tóth, the director of the Foreign Assistance Department at the Slovak Government Office, wrote a letter to Prime Minister Mikuláš Dzurinda and Deputy Prime Minister for European Integration Pavol Hamžík outlining on 70 pages how her husband had embezzled money from EU funds (The Slovak Spectator 2001).

backwards into the very habits of cronyism, clientelism and favoritism has been witnessed with the new government in power. Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico won the national elections in 2006 and since then has been leading a coalition of a left wing (Direction – Social Democracy, Smer), a far-right (Slovak National Party, SNS) and a right wing party (The Movement for a Democratic Slovakia, HZDS). Journalists have been denounced by Fico as “sleazy snakes”, “prostitutes” or “hyenas” (The Slovak Spectator 2010) and former Minister of Justice and current President of the Supreme Court Štefan Harabin called the special anti-corruption court a “fascist institution” (The Economist 2008). While the list of corruption scandals involving ministers and government officials is long, the government’s passivity with regards to anti-corruption efforts is striking (see Chapter 2 for more detailed analysis of the government’s anti-corruption policies):

“Yet after Prime Minister Fico took office in 2006, a significant decline was noted in the government’s anticorruption activities. Over the past two years, the Fico administration has not adopted an anticorruption program or created administrative structures to combat corruption. [...] The incumbent administration has practically abandoned any systematic approach to combating corruption. At best, it appears to tackle only the consequences of corruption” (Mesežnikov, Kollár and Vašečka 2009: 495).

2. Anti-corruption: Actors, Policies and Results

This second part will seek to present and analyze the anti-corruption strategies pursued by the various governments in power since 1993. Due to the number and importance of reforms affecting the prevalence and extent of corruption in the years of the Dzurinda Government, the years from 1998 to 2006 will be the main focus of this analysis. The chapter will conclude with a short analysis of the stakeholders presently or potentially active in the field of anti-corruption.

Passivity under Mečiar (1993 – 1998)

In Slovakia, the effectiveness of anti-corruption efforts has been strongly connected to the government in power. The post-independence years from 1993 to 1998 witnessed almost no attempt by the government to seriously tackle corruption. In 1995, the government started an anti-corruption program called ‘Clean Hands’. It mainly proposed to enact new laws and amend existing ones designed to fight corruption. However, the program was largely ineffective because most of the measures proposed were never implemented and so the program did not bring any improvement to the institutional framework to combating corruption (Zemanovičová and Sičáková 2001).

Due to the frequency and scope of corruption cases and the government's apparent unwillingness and/or inability to curb corruption, Slovak citizens became increasingly pessimistic because they felt that they had no influence on the situation. In a survey conducted by the US Information Agency in 1997, 82% of the respondents agreed with the statement that "without acquaintances in influential positions, one cannot be sure that one will receive justice" (Ivantyšyn and Sičáková 1999: 340). Slovakia's citizens were the second most tolerant of corrupt public officials only after Belarus in the 1999 Survey of European Values (Sičáková and Zemanovičová 2002).

First Reforms under Dzurinda (1998 – 2002)

Fiscal pressure, the prospects of EU accession and the strong voice of civil society forced the government to implement major reforms in almost all policy areas between 1998 and 2006. The rapid policy change created a feeling that when change is possible in so many areas it should also be possible to reduce corruption (Beblavý 2009). While some measures were specifically directed at tackling corruption (e.g. special anti-corruption court) and its underlying structures (e.g. Freedom of Access to Information Act), reforms in other policy areas (e.g. tax reform or bank privatization) contributed indirectly to reduced levels of corruption (ibid.).

In the first Dzurinda Government, the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of the Interior were given the main responsibilities for fighting corruption (Ivantyšyn and Sičáková 1999). Based on a proposal by TI Slovakia the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister of Economic Policy developed a national anti-corruption program which was approved by the government in June 2000 (Zemanovičová and Sičáková 2001). The National Anticorruption Program was

"[...] a multifaceted strategy favoring changes both in formal and informal rules. It endorsed reduction in discretion and increases in transparency, but also sought to improve the functioning of the judiciary and prosecution, combat conflict of interest at all levels of government and change norms of behavior through education and public information campaigns" (Beblavý 2009: 6).

Anti-corruption measures included the introduction of a randomized case management system in the judiciary to minimize the possibility of influencing the assignment of cases and the introduction of the institution of an *'agent provocateur'* which should increase the exposure of corruption (FH Nations in Transit 2003). Even before the anti-corruption program was adopted, inarguably one of the most important legislative changes was the passing of the Freedom of Access to Information Act (FOIA) preceded by a massive civic campaign organized by a group of some 120 NGOs (Zemanovičová and Sičáková 2001). In 2001 already it was clear that the adoption of the law "[...] was a revolutionary change in the relations between the public administration and citizens. [...] It is one of the key anti-corruption measures the ruling coalition has managed to adopt" (Sičáková and Zemanovičová 2002). FOIA is considered to be one of the most progressive pieces of legislation in

Slovakia and a majority of the anti-corruption strategies NGOs currently pursue would not have been possible without this powerful tool (according to interviews with NGO representatives in Bratislava in January 2010).

As a result of the government's anti-corruption efforts, pressured by watchdog and advocacy NGOs (see Chapter 3 on civil society), levels of corruption have decreased mainly in those sectors where reforms were implemented (e.g. bank restructuring and privatization), but increased or remained the same in those where such reforms were repeatedly postponed (e.g. education and health sector). Thanks to awareness campaigns by NGOs corruption was no longer a taboo but widely discussed and political actors had started to change their attitudes on the issue (Sičáková-Beblavá and Zemanovičová 2002).

Slovakia's success in implementing major political and economic reforms was impressive. Although it opened accession negotiations two years later than most other candidates it soon reached preliminary agreements with the EU in a large number of areas. While in 1998 Slovakia was officially viewed as a country that did not meet the political criteria for membership, in October 2002 the European Commission said that the republic had fulfilled the political criteria for joining (FH Nations in Transit 2003). Slovakia had become "a showpiece of communist change" (The Economist 2006).

Major Reforms under the second Dzurinda Government (2002 – 2006)

In the 2002 national election campaigns, corruption was again one of the key topics (Sičáková-Beblavá 2004). At the end of 2002 the new coalition under Dzurinda established the Anticorruption Department at the Government's Office whose head became Ján Hrubala, a lawyer and civil activist and known for his relentless criticism of corruption in the Mečiar administration (FH Nations in Transit 2004). The main responsibilities for the government's anti-corruption agenda were shifted to the Minister of Justice Daniel Lipšic and in May 2003 the cabinet approved the Report on Concrete Measures to Fulfill the Program Manifesto of the Slovak Government in the Field of Combating Corruption. This program was much more technical than the 2000 anti-corruption program and proposed a number of specific legal measures especially in the field of repression (Sičáková-Beblavá 2006).

In 2003 the Parliament passed a law establishing a special court of justice and a special attorney entrusted with combating corruption and organized crime while at the end of 2002 the penal code was amended introducing stronger punishment for some crimes connected with corruption (FH Nations in Transit 2004). The government's repressive measures were accompanied by a "massive" anti-corruption media campaign financed from the EU's PHARE program (ibid.). While the country was flooded with billboards and TV spots, NGOs active in anti-corruption increasingly criticized the

campaign. According to NGO representatives, Slovak citizens had long been aware of the negative effects of corruption and the campaign itself did not offer any concrete solutions:

“Slovakia passed the stage of accepting the phenomenon and presence of corruption a long time ago. What it needs today are concrete and effective solutions. Given the fact that financial assistance from the EU was single and limited, it should have been spent on different anti-corruption activities which would have had higher value” (Sičáková-Beblavá 2004: 660).

Role of external actors in the reforms

External actors played a significant role in Slovakia’s anti-corruption efforts between 1998 and 2006. These were mainly the EU through its accession conditionalities and its aid program (e.g. PHARE), the World Bank through its grant and lending activities and selected governments such as the US and Switzerland through their technical assistance programs (Beblavý 2009). However, as a study on the effectiveness of Slovak’s anti-corruption efforts by Beblavý (2009) shows, the role of external actors was much more important in policy transfer and technical assistance than forcing reforms through conditionalities. Conditionality was present only in a minority of reforms showing that the political will to enact anti-corruption reforms was mostly domestic. In almost all reforms, however, external actors were important in providing know-how and inspiration for reform designs.

Inaction under Fico (2006 – present)

As mentioned earlier, the current administration has thus far not shown much willingness to deal with corruption issues. After Fico took office in 2006 a “significant decline was noted in the government’s anticorruption activities” (Mesežnikov, Kollár and Vašečka 2009: 495) and the government policies have created “greater room for corruption” (Sičáková-Beblavá 2007: 599). Party clientelism and cronyism have become the modus operandi of the ruling coalition, exemplified by numerous corruption scandals on virtually all government levels. The Special Court has come under strong pressure by the government. Ruling party deputies have asked the Constitutional Court to proclaim it unconstitutional and to abolish it. In September 2008, after having participated in drafting all strategic government documents to eliminate corruption since 1998, TI Slovakia announced that it would terminate its cooperation with the government due to the government’s passivity in the fight against corruption and Prime Minister Fico’s repeated defense of political clientelism and attacks on anti-corruption NGOs (Mesežnikov, Kollár and Vašečka 2009).

Despite the many scandals and allegations of corrupt practices within the government, the chances for Fico to win another four-year term in the general election in June 2010 are excellent. The polls

show a significant lead for Fico's party, the self-declared social democratic party, Direction – Social Democracy (Smer), and the opposition remains fragmented and weak (EIU 2009).

Stakeholders

As the previous elaborations on anti-corruption efforts have shown, it is rather difficult to identify specific government agencies as promoters, neutrals or opponents. The willingness to combat corruption depends very much on the government of the day. For instance, while the Anticorruption Department of the Government Office under Dzurinda could be described as a promoter of anti-corruption, it is highly questionable if the same is true for the current one. Potential partners for anti-corruption efforts within the present government could be found at the anti-corruption units of the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of the Interior. Also, the Special Court, resisting the attempts of the government to curb its powers, could be a valuable partner. Unfortunately, this is true only for a rather small number of regular judges. In the past, there have repeatedly been attempts of smaller groups of judges to tackle corruption within the judiciary. However, the attempts have largely failed due to the lack of high-level support or the entrenchment of corruption in the judicial system.

There is major corruption in all political parties and there seems to be only slight differences in the number of corruption scandals of each. However, the political parties currently in power seem to be very reluctant when it comes to any anti-corruption measures: Direction – Social Democracy (Smer), The Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS) and the Slovak National Party (SNS). It is more likely for some opposition parties to take a more serious approach towards corruption such as Dzurinda's Slovak Democratic and Christian Union (SDKÚ). Before each election, TI Slovakia evaluates the election programs of the various political parties with regards to their anti-corruption strategy. This could be a helpful starting point when attempting to identify parties associated with more or less corruption.

In the past there have been cases where neither the cabinet nor political parties have initiated anti-corruption measures or activities but individual members of parliament. Anti-corruption NGOs have repeatedly cooperated with smaller groups of parliamentarians in drafting anti-corruption bills (Sičáková-Beblavá and Zemanovičová 2003).

With a few exceptions (e.g. the town of Martin, see database for information), local governments seem to oppose major anti-corruption measures. This is all the more problematic because the recent decentralization of public administration has brought many challenges, including the increased risk of corruption. In the past representatives of the Association of Slovak Towns and Villages (ZMOS) have been remarkably active in lobbying against legislation for more transparency such as regulation seeking to regulate conflict of interests of local representatives (Sičáková-Beblavá 2004).

3. Civil Society: Actors, Strategies and Reputation

Civil society is considered by experts to be among the most dynamic in Central Europe (FH Nations in Transit 2003). In recent years, Slovakia has received high scores on the USAID NGO Sustainability Index (USAID 2010). The civil society sector can be described as heterogeneous and pluralistic and in the past has been able to exert strong influence on the government's agenda. In addition, the NGO sector has a well-developed infrastructure, training and research base. The Dzurinda Government gradually eliminated the serious legislative deformations of the Mečiar administration and created favorable conditions for the emergence and existence of civil society organizations (Strečanský et al 2006). Today, the legal and regulatory environment for NGOs is free of excessive state pressure and taxation is favorable. In 2008, the Slovak Ministry of the Interior listed 34,064 NGOs of which the majority (90.1%) were civil associations (Mesežnikov, Kollár and Vašečka 2009).

Since 2004, companies and individuals officially registered as tax payers in Slovakia have been able to donate 2% of their taxes to non-profit organizations of their choice. This has become increasingly important for some NGOs since foreign donors have reduced their financial support significantly in recent years. Despite the many attempts by the Fico administration to abolish this mechanism, it is still in place.

Slovak NGOs have played an important role in a number of major civic campaigns since 1998. Starting with the 1998 national elections, NGOs have traditionally been an election player increasing voters' awareness and mobilizing or monitoring the election process (Strečanský et al 2007). In 2000, a 120-NGO strong umbrella group, united behind the slogan "Everything that is not secret is public", was successful in creating public pressure on the government to adopt the Freedom of Access to Information Act (FOIA). Moreover, in recent years, Slovak NGOs have increasingly become active outside of Slovakia. In Central and Eastern Europe, Slovak foundations and NGOs have played an increasingly important role in supporting democratization activities. Their own experience with a successful transition from communism to democracy gives them credibility throughout the region (Strečanský et al 2006).

Reputation and recent developments

According to surveys, NGOs are substantially more trustworthy than other actors in public life such as political parties. The reputation of Slovak NGOs increased in the years from 2003 to 2005 and stagnated in 2006. In 2006 the ratio of people who trusted or distrusted NGOs was 47% to 39% (Strečanský et al 2007).

Even though advocacy NGOs, including those active in anti-corruption, have “accomplished countless systemic changes that affected the whole of society” (Strečanský et al 2006), their funding has dropped significantly especially since the US and other donors have significantly reduced their bilateral aid in recent years. Some of these NGOs have yet to find enough domestic (financial) supporters.

Not only has the financial situation worsened, but civil society organizations are facing an increasing number of resentment by government representatives. While some observers consider the relations between NGOs and the government “diverse but marked by lingering distrust on both sides” (Strečanský et al 2006: 568), others have noticed an “atmosphere of mutual distrust” while “think tanks and watchdog groups were perceived as a threat and verbally attacked” (FH Nations in Transit 2008). Despite these recent developments, the civil society sector remains powerful and capable of organizing major campaigns (e.g. “People to People” campaign to preserve the 2% tax assignment in 2006) (Strečanský et al 2007: 540).

NGOs in the Field of AC

NGOs operating in the field of anti-corruption include Transparency International Slovakia (TI Slovakia) and Alliance Fair-Play (AFP). While both NGOs have achieved major successes, their approaches differ to a certain extent.

Until the termination of its cooperation with the government at the end of 2008, TI Slovakia pursued a strategy of “constructive criticism” vis-à-vis the government. On the one hand, the administration was criticized for not implementing certain reforms and on the other hand, TI Slovakia supported the government designing strategies to curb corruption. For instance, TI Slovakia’s proposals formed the basis for both anti-corruption programs in 2000 and 2003. On the contrary, AFP has always tried not to get too close with government representatives in order to maintain their credibility as an independent watchdog. AFP’s work is more based on an “investigative” approach by monitoring and controlling the government’s activities and seeking to disclose the misuse of state funds (see database for details on projects of TI Slovakia and AFP).

Anti-corruption Champions

Prominent anti-corruption activists in the public eye include co-founder and former head of TI Slovakia, Emília Sičáková-Beblavá, and founder and executive director of AFP, Zuzana Wienk. Another well-respected anti-corruption figure is former civic activist and lawyer Jan Hrubala. He was the head of the newly established Anticorruption Department of the Government Office under the

Dzurinda Government and now has the position of a judge with the Special Court. Pavel Nechala, a lawyer working with TI Slovakia, is actively involved in anti-corruption work in Slovakia.

In addition, there are some journalists researching and writing on corruption in Slovakia. One of the most prominent journalists is Tom Nicholson, a Canadian who has been working in Slovakia for many years as a reporter with the daily SME and The Slovak Spectator.

Moreover, two judges, Jana Dubovcová and Alexander Mojš, have been given the White Crow Award (see projects database) for their courage in promoting transparency and accountability. Jana Dubovcová has been demanding reform of the judicial system and has worked to unite pro-reform judges (http://spectator.sme.sk/articles/view/36684/2/judiciary_racked_by_turmoil.html). Judge Mojš has been actively fighting for a clean and transparent judiciary (<http://www.bielavrana.sk/>).

Some activists have been crucial in pushing and advocating for specific reforms, e.g. Sarlota Pufflerova from the NGO, Citizen and Democracy (OAD) in the case of the Freedom of Access to Information campaign.

- See projects database for particular projects of mentioned anti-corruption champions
- See excel sheet “Contacts Slovakia” for contact details of anti-corruption champions

4. Citizens: Perceptions of Corruption

Slovak citizens generally seem to perceive corruption as a major problem. It has consistently been rated as the fourth most pressing problem behind high unemployment, the unsatisfying standard of living and poor health care (FH Nations in Transit 2004). One of the main reasons for the prominence of corruption as a political problem lies in the awareness raising campaigns initiated by NGOs in the early 2000s. Public opinion polls, however, have also revealed that many citizens admit their own participation in corrupt practices when doing so is likely to yield an advantage (ibid.). This corresponds to the World Bank and USAID (2000) findings that tolerance to corruption in Slovakia is rather high. And despite being aware that the penalty for corruption is dismissal or worse, less than 12 percent of the surveyed public officials indicated that they would certainly report a peer who accepted a bribe, while 15 percent indicated they definitely would not report such a case.

Looking at the demographic characteristics of the respondents surveyed by FOCUS in 2004 for TI Slovakia (Sičáková-Beblavá 2005) yields interesting information on who is more likely to pay bribes. Accordingly, 32% of the respondents admitted to had bribed public officials in the preceding three years while 61% said they had not. The following demographic categories were more reluctant to pay a bribe: men (66%), young people between 18 and 24 (77%), students (89%) and the

unemployed (79%). Moreover, while there is an equally high level of tolerance towards corruption on the local level compared to the national level, there are substantial differences in the number of bribe payers across the regions (Sičáková-Beblavá 2005: 685).

The latest Eurobarometer survey on corruption perceptions in the European Union (European Commission 2009) shows that 83% of Slovaks perceive corruption to be a major problem in their country (EU: 78%) while 15% disagree with this statement (EU: 19%). With 91% corruption in national institutions is perceived to be slightly more widespread than in regional (88%) and local institutions (86%). Slovak respondents differed in a number of areas of which they think are most prone to corruption from EU respondents. 26% stated that giving and taking bribes and the abuse of positions of power for personal gain are widespread among people working in the public education sector (EU: 19%). This difference is even more pronounced in the public health sector with 49% (Slovakia) compared to 32% (EU). While politicians at the national level are perceived as highly corrupt both in Slovakia (56%) and in the EU (57%), politicians at the regional level (Slovakia: 42%, EU: 49%) and at the local level (Slovakia: 41%, EU: 48%) are viewed slightly less corrupt in Slovakia than in the EU. A substantial difference of the corruption perceptions between Slovakia and all EU member countries can be observed in the field of issuing building permits and in the judiciary. While Slovakia fares much better in the first (building permits: Slovakia: 37% compared to EU: 51%), it does much worse in the latter (judiciary: Slovakia: 61% compared to EU: 37%).

Two more substantial differences between the perceptions of corruption between Slovak respondents and those from all EU countries are worth noting. First, more Slovaks are of the opinion that the government is not doing enough to curb corruption (Slovakia: 44%, EU: 34%), which is probably due to the present government's inaction concerning anti-corruption efforts. Second, this finding corresponds to the relatively high number of Slovak respondents stating that people accept corruption as a part of daily life thereby showing resignation towards any efforts to tackle the issue of corruption (Slovakia: 37%, EU: 21%).

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