WARNING ON CRIME

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PUBLIC DISCOURSE ON OC AND CORRUPTION IN EUROPE: DOES IT EXIST?

UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI TORINO

AMAPOLA
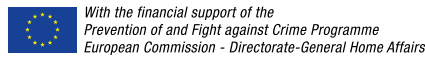PROGETTI PER LA SICUREZZA DELLE PERSONE E DELLE COMUNITÀ

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Public discourse on OC and corruption in Europe: does it exist?

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1. Introduction

The main goal of this background analysis is to identify the existence of a public discourse on criminal infiltration and public procurements in Europe. The analysis primarily aims to understand whether academic studies have been carried out on how media and other Institutions (including European Parliament, Commission and Council) address the issue of criminal infiltration in legitimate economy. Moreover, it is very interesting and useful to achieve the general objectives of the WOC Project, to understand the citizens' perceptions and awareness on these matters and to know whether or not criminal infiltration in public tenders is perceived as a common problem by Europeans and as a priority for EU policy-making.

The results of this study also serve to design the research instruments for the 28 MS and to implement the second part of the project WOC. To analyse this topic, secondary resources including the literature of such fields as previously mentioned and other reports and surveys of various organisations[1] have been taken into account.

2. The main research results

The literature shows a lack of academic attention on the existence in Europe of a public discourse about the connections between organised crime and public procurement.

A unique analytical and detailed study on this issue is found, by a quantitative and qualitative analysis, on German and Britain case studies carried out by Young and Allum in 2012.

Actually, the two authors focused their attention exclusively on th e organised crime problem.

They extracted 389 British and German articles from national newspapers, which reported the expression **organised crime** between 1999 and 2009. Their analysis was aimed at understanding how British and German press portrayed OC. These two countries had been chosen as they are both democratic States, Western European MS, and have a well-established judicial system (Young and Allum, 1012, pp. 139-140). The authors found 180 articles in UK national newspapers where OC was in the headline between 1999 and 2009, compared with 209 articles in Germany.

The two scholars compared the frequency and nature of the reporting as well as the use of term OC in both national press systems. In order to understand how organised crime was reported by British and German press and to determine the level of importance ascribed to this specific problem, the authors used as indicators: **page number** (the closer to front page, the more important), **word count and number of statistics** (the more words and statistics, the more important) and **OC reported as a**

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domestic or international event (articles with an international focus give importance to international OC and detract from domestic OC and *vice versa*) (Young and Allum, 1012, p. 145).

This study showed that OC articles had a greater priority in the German press compared to the British. Moreover, the majority of articles found in the first five pages were published in broadsheet newspapers, which suggests that OC had precedence in serious newspapers.

German articles contained many more statistics than the British (respectively, 838 and 497), but British articles were longer than the German pieces. Then, too, British national newspapers focused more attention on international OC over the past ten years than German national press (Young and Allum, 1012, pp. 146-149).

From the discourse analysis of all articles, it emerged that both British and German press used the same tools to influence the readers. They used: **topicalisation** (putting a specific theme in the topic position to make it the focus of the article), **register** and **agency** (using selective voices or agents to give certain comments more legitimacy and reliability). Moreover, in both nations' press, OC was presented as a problem linked to the same topics: police performance, fraud and drugs.

In general, German articles were more factual, using more statistics, shorter in length and located closer to front page and often focused on nationalities of OC suspects as compared to British articles. All these elements appear to point out that OC was a greater priority in the German press than in the UK. Effectively, British articles were mainly focused on international OC, distracting the national public attention and conveying the message that OC did not really affect the common person in the UK (Young and Allum, 1012, pp. 155-156).

Through this study, which is a unique systematic analysis on this specific plight, it is possible to have an overview on the European perceptions of it, thanks to an exploration of some reports and surveys of national and international organisations (see § 3).

3. Citizens' perceptions and awareness of the matter

Before considering the Europeans' perceptions on how widespread organised crime (OC) and corruption are in each national country, it is interesting to briefly consider the EU position on OC and security threats.

It is worth to remember that OC was formally introduced into the legal sphere of the EU with the adoption of the Maastricht Treaty (1993) and the construction of the Justice and Home Affairs Area (JHA). Then, too, during the nineties organised crime became, together with terrorism and other security threats, one of the few common issues of concern within the European region when the Amsterdam Treaty (1997) was named the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice (AFSJ).

The advent of the European market and the opening of borders have encouraged the spread of OC in Europe and have generated problems across jurisdictions.

These facts have turned the organised crime phenomenon into a EU problem (Allum and Den Boer, 2013, pp. 140-141; Allum and Sands, 2004, p. 137; Elias and Timmermans, 2014, p. 161 and ff.). However, already in 1990, the European Council, in its quality of the agenda-setting body in EU, had increased its attention on OC in an important way. And, over time this threat has received fluctuant political attention by European institutions. As a result, the political plans and strategies adopted are rarely actually effective.

This can be due to the absence of a common consensus within the EU over the meaning and the urgency of organised crime, which is a highly differentiated problem in each European national context (Fijnaut and Paoli, 2014). There are considerable differences country-to-country on what OC consists of, and on the illegal activities implemented by various criminal groups, as well as on their presence at national level, and so on.

The particular geographical, cultural and economical conditions of each national context give different opportunities to OC. This implies that criminal groups are greatly diverse between States, and even more between cities. As a result, despite the transnational characteristic of OC, this remains a relatively sovereign and domestic field. The ideas of what OC is, and the approaches used to fight it are very different among the various Member States (Allum and Den Boer, 2013, p. 136).

European citizens think EU's institutions should play a very important role in tackling security threats.

Europeans citizens' perceptions on the issue can be understood analyzing surveys and reports by EU organisations.

Corruption is perceived as one of the main challenges of EU security.

These dissimilarities have always been great obstacles for identifying both a European political plan and a common operational strategy and for the creation of a common view and perception of OC and corruption issues.[2]

Nevertheless, according to several surveys on citizens' perceptions, the majority of Europeans would favour a more extensive role being played by the EU on different security threats, including organised crime and corruption. In 2015 seven out of ten respondents say that the EU's institutions should play a very important (32%) or a fairly important (31%) role in ensuring the security of Europeans. However, there are quite a number of differences among the MS: for example in four countries there are high percentages of respondents who think that EU's agencies should play a very important role - Cyprus 67%, Malta 57%, Bulgaria 53%, Romania 52% -. On the contrary, in other States few people share this view -Finland 14%, Portugal 15%, Netherland 20% - (Eurobarometer, 2015, pp. 35-36). These percentages are lower than those from a survey taken of 2006, when 86% of EU citizens believed that more decision-making should take place at EU level concerning security challenges, with particular reference to OC (Eurobarometer, 2006, pp. 3-4). Instead, in 2011 half of Europeans thought that both EU Institutions and national agencies were doing enough to fight security challenges, in particular organised crime (Eurobarometer 2011, pp. 55-56).

Among the main spontaneously perceived threats to EU security in 2015, **organised crime** (23%) and **corruption** (23%) are present with little more percentage points compared to 2011 (when they were respectively 21% and 15%)[3]. However these two challenges are identified as less important EU security priorities with respect to **terrorism** (49%, +16 percentage points compared to 2011), **economic and financial crisis** (27%, -7 pp) and **poverty** (23%, +5 pp) (Eurobarometer, 2015, p. 19; Eurobarometer, 2011, p. 18).

Nonetheless, in 2015 in six countries corruption is the most mentioned security challenge (Spain and Romania 57%, Portugal 50%, Slovenia 47%, Croatia and Lithuania 38%). On the contrary, organised crime is considered as the most important security threat only in Austria (39%).

With particular reference to organised crime, in 2015 55% of Europeans believe that OC is likely to increase over the next three years (vs. 57% of EU citizens who felt this way in 2011). On the other hand, just 12% of Europeans think that it is likely to decrease and 27% think that it will probably remain the same. Among the countries with higher percentages of people who think that this plight will increase, there are: Austria (79%), Portugal (76%), Germany (72%), Cyprus (71%), Slovenia (70%), Ireland (65%), Belgium (58%), Italy (55%) (Eurobarometer, 2015, pp. 31-33; Eurobarometer, 2011, p. 38).

Along with the perceived level of risk of OC and corruption for internal European security, it is worth questioning to what extent these two issues are considered widespread.

During the last few years, the surveys on European perceptions have mainly focused their attention on the corruption phenomenon.

In 2013, 76% of EU citizens think that corruption is widespread within their own country, with 41% thinking it is **fairly widespread** and 35% believing it is **very widespread**. There are some differences between the new Member States (NMS12) and the Old Europeans Countries (EU15) where the people who think that corruption is widespread in their country are respectively 87% vs. 73%. However, the States where people are most likely to think that corruption is a national problem are: Greece (99%), Italy (97%) Lithuania, Spain and Czech Republic (all 95%), Croatia (94%), Romania (93%), Slovenia (91%), Portugal and Slovakia (90%). Instead, States where respondents say that corruption is rare in their national territory are Sweden (54%), Finland (64%) and Denmark (75%) (Eurobarometer, 2014, pp. 18-19).

The perception of national corruption among MS has not changed as much in the past four years, when comparing the current data to those from a 2011 survey (74%) and a 2009 survey (78%) (Eurobarometer, 2012, pp. 11-12).

Moreover, in 2013, Europeans thought that corruption and abuse of power for personal gain affect almost all sectors of society, mainly politics: political parties (59%) and politicians at national, regional

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2   For more details on the steps made by EU Institutions in the field of OC and other serious crime, see Working Paper of WOC Project: "EU legislative framework on organised crime, corruption and public procurement".

3   These perceptions are quite different from those measured in 2006 when OC was perceived as one of the most important security priorities of EU for 56% of Europeans. Corruption was not considered in the 2006 survey.

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and local levels (56%). Furthermore, EU citizens thought that corruption was widespread among the officials awarding public tenders (45%), officials issuing building permits (43%) and inspectors (35%). Then, too, a vast majority of Europeans thought that both national and European institutions were affected by corruption: 80% of EU citizens said that corruption existed in national public institutions within their country and 70% of respondents thought that it was present in EU institutions (Eurobarometer, 2014, pp. 40-41). All these percentages on how widespread corruption is in various areas of society are broadly similar to those in 2011 and in 2009 (Eurobarometer, 2012, pp. 26-28). Considering country-to-country 2013 data, the States where respondents are most likely to agree that corruption is present within local and regional institutions are: Greece (95%), Italy (92%), Spain and Croatia (both 91%), the Czech Republic (89%), Slovenia (87%), Lithuania (84%), Cyprus (83%) and Romania (82%) (Eurobarometer, 2014, pp. 42-43).

The results of Eurobatometer's analysis are confirmed by other studies.

It is not by chance that in 25 of the 28 MS, the majority of citizens agree that bribery and the use of links are often the easiest way to obtain certain public services: mainly in Greece and Cyprus (both 93%), Slovakia and Croatia (89%), Lithuania, the Czech Republic, Italy and Slovenia (all 88%). The three exceptions are Sweden (40%), Denmark and Finland (both 35%).

However, public services and sectors are not the only areas affected by corruption and the abuse of power. Most EU citizens think that corruption is a part of the their national business culture and that it is caused by too close links between business and politics - higher percentages have been registered in Italy (90%), Slovakia (89%), the Czech Republic and Cyprus (88%), Greece (87%), Croatia (84%) and Slovenia (78%) (Eurobarometer, 2014, pp. 52-52). Already in 2011, people thought so (Eurobarometer, 2012, p. 65).

The trust in national institutions is inversely proportional to the level of corruption perceived.

Then, too, the level of corruption in daily life is perceived quite highly in all MS. 26% of respondents think that they are personally and daily affected by this problem. These results are slightly more positive than those from the 2011 survey. There are great differences among States, for instance the higher percentage has been registered in Greece and Spain (63%) and the lower in Denmark (3%) (Eurobarometer, 2014, p. 30). Moreover, 12% of EU citizens say that they personally know someone who takes or has taken bribes.

One out of 25 Europeans have been asked or expected to pay a bribe in the past year. Here, however, there are quite a bit of differences between NMS12 and EU15 (respectively, 15% and 2%) (Eurobarometer, 2014, p. 80). The daily and personal experience of corruption inure people to consider this plight as admissible and tolerable. In 2013, 26% of Europeans say that it is acceptable to do a favour in return for something from public administration and services (vs. 72% of citizens who think that it is never acceptable). 23% of Europeans think it acceptable to give a gift (vs. 76%) and 16% of people think it is acceptable to give money (vs. 82%).

The general feeling registered by the mentioned survey highlights that corruption is perceived as quite a widespread problem throughout Europe and entrenched in a vast majority of MS. Then, too, corruption is considered as a very difficult plight to deal with. In 2013, 66% (with 28% totally disagree) Europeans disagree that their government's efforts are effective in tackling corruption and 52% disagree that EU helps in reducing it. 62% of EU citizens disagree that there are successful prosecutions in their country and 73% think that the high level of corruption cases are not pursued sufficiently. Nevertheless, European citizens have a slightly more positive view on how corruption is dealt with compared to 2011 (Eurobarometer, 2014, pp. 61-65).

The percentages revealed by Eurobarometer's analysts have been confirmed by other studies and surveys. With particular reference to corruption, the Corruption Perceptions Index of 2014 by Transparency International underlines that it is a problem for all States around the world. Transparency International has measured the perceived level of public sector corruption worldwide, giving a score to each country of the globe.

The majority of Europeans thought the political sphere was one the main areas of society affected by corruption.

A poor score points out that bribery is widespread, that there is a lack of punishment for corruption and that public institutions don't respond to citizens' needs. On the top of this index, there are Northern European States (Denmark, Finland, Sweden and Norway). Among the EUMS, the countries where the level of perceived corruption is higher are: Greece, Italy and Romania (Transparency International, 2015. See also, Transparency International, 2014, Transparency International It., 2012 and EU Parliament, 2013, p. 17).

Moreover, other analyses have confirmed that mistrust in public institutions, political parties, politicians and public administrators appear to be quite widespread in Europe (see 2012 Report by

Greco, cit. in EU Commission, 2014, p. 9). In some countries the links among a high level of corruption, the ineffectiveness of policies and the distrust in national governments are the main worries of national security. In particular, in Italy (30%) and in Spain (55%) citizens perceived corruption as one of the most serious national problems which originate political instability and inefficiency (Osservatorio Europeo sulla Sicurezza, 2014, pp. 9-12). The same picture has been painted also by a Gallup's study (quoted in OECD, 2015, pp. 16-17). According to this analysis, the perceived corruption and the trust in government are closely connected. Then, in countries where the perceived corruption is very high - such as in Italy (90%), Portugal (87%), Greece (86%), Spain (85%) - the trust in national institutions is very low. On the contrary in virtuous States - such as Sweden (15%), Denmark (20%), Finland (27%) - confidence in the relevant governments is quite higher (as shown in the graph on the next page).
All the mentioned analyses have clearly highlighted that corruption is widespread throughout Europe and affects all areas of society, mistrusting several public offices and sectors. As well as corruption, organised crime is perceived as one of the important EU security challenges.
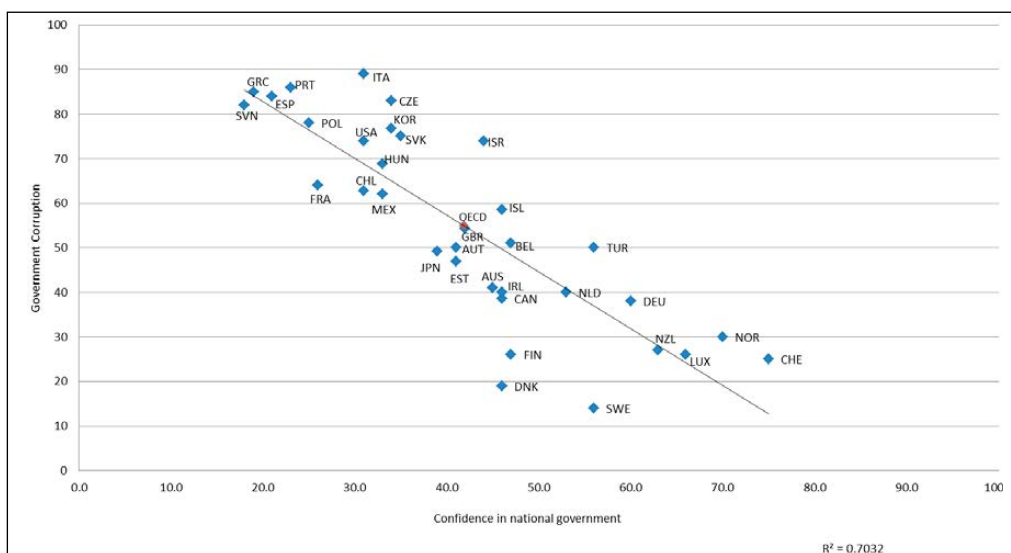
Source: Gallup World Poll quoted in OECD, 2015, p. 17.

4. Conclusion

Despite a lack of academic studies on the citizens' perception on how widespread corruption and OC crimes are in relation to public procurements, it is possible to understand Europeans' perceptions of these two phenomena.
As shown by several Special Eurobarometer surveys, confirmed by other analyses, a vast majority of European citizens believe that corruption is widespread in their country, while 26% of EU citizens say that they are personally affected by corruption in their daily life. 73% of European respondents believe that bribery and the use of connections is often the easiest way to obtain certain public services. Mistrust in public institutions appears to be widespread. According to the same sources, the public offices and sectors most distrusted are: political parties; politicians at national, regional and local levels; officials awarding public tenders and officials issuing building permits. In quite a high number of MS, a diversion of public funds due to corruption, favouritism in decisions of government officials and declining public trust in politicians' ethical standards are among the most problematic areas of governance.
As well as corruption, organised crime has been among the main spontaneous threats to EU security over the last few years. According to various analyses, the majority of Europeans believe that more decision-making should take place at EU level for tackling OC.
The results of various analysed reports make us think that both OC and corruption are perceived by EU citizens as two phenomena present in almost all public sectors, including public procurement, in each MS. Moreover, these two plights seem to be considered by EU citizens as a common problem of Europeans and as a priority for the EU policy-making.

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January 2015

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