

## CORRUPTION PROBLEM IN SLOVAKIA: THE MEDIA SPHERE

LENKA HALAMOVÁ<sup>1</sup>

Catholic University in Ruzomberok (Slovakia)

### ABSTRACT

The paper presents the corruption issue by highlighting the actual situation of corruption in the Slovak society. This problem has a historical background when after 1993 the Slovak Republic was separated from the Czech Republic. The author offers theoretical attitudes which are necessary to apply in practice for to improve situation in Slovakia. Theoretical information was gained from relevant sources. The author tries to apply official results from Transparency International and other institutes. The media has great effect on public opinion and therefore investigative journalism should be developed which could uncover media property and corruption in the whole society. Journalism should be independent of politicians. It should be objective, full of truthful information with verifiable sources. In the last part of the paper some solutions are suggested which should be applied in practise as they can help to address corruption solutions. In other words, necessary measures may support the healthy environment with social welfare and spur development of the society.

KEYWORDS: *corruption, media, the Slovak Republic.*

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### Introduction

The main goal of this contribution is to define a severe corruption problem in the Slovak society. It is an attempt to offer recommendations which are based on theoretical attitudes and the research results of Transparency International and Reporters without Borders. The author seeks to describe the current situation in the political and media areas, approved measures and suggest recommendations which are necessary to apply in practice. Corruption occurrence is compared according to the world corruption rankings. There is also highlighted the organisation Transparency International and its solution of a corruption problem. Theoretical and practical information was gained using various methods. Theoretical research does not work with specific data, it uses theoretical explanations for monitoring consideration in theory. The author tries to solve a key theoretical problem, i.e., a corruption problem, and seeks to define deeper inner phenomena.

Knowledge of a historical background is one of the most important issues which is needed to understand the current corruption situation in Slovakia. Communist ideology influenced the Czechoslovak society, democracy, freedom of the media and laws, too. The period of the Velvet Revolution in 1989 was especially significant for development of society in Czechoslovakia and after 1989 one can talk about the developing democratization in the country. Cultural and political personalities tried to fight for freedom. They used the media, which was not under the pressure of communist ideology. Freedom of speech was limited and people

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<sup>1</sup> Lenka Halamová – Mgr., PhD student, Department of Journalism, Catholic University in Ruzomberok, Slovakia  
Scientific interests: journalism  
E-mail: lhalamova@gmail.com  
Tel. +421 908 396 563

who did not accept it, had to pay sanctions or spent time in jail. This is a basic view of Czechoslovakia in the 90s of the twentieth century.

The period which influenced the next development in the media, political and social spheres dates back from 1989 to 1993. Political personalities were new legal grounds for two countries that Czechoslovakia consisted of. The effort for freedom, democracy and free media were the most significant elements, which meant for the Slovak and Czech societies so much. Changes of the media system in Czechoslovakia were witnessed and then after 1993 in the Slovak Republic. The media market was modified according to new legislation which was inspired by other advanced media structures in free countries, which had not experienced totalitarianism and censorship. After the first legal steps in the media sphere there was noticed the entry of some advertising and entrepreneurial subjects. The media reorganised its ownership and then followed up electronic and internet media and their possibilities to reach the society. In many cases people witnessed relationships among politics, financial groups and media, what is still present in Slovakia.

## 1. Corruption issue

The question, how to select and understand some information without mass media influence effects on public opinion in other areas, is very significant. The media has a huge effect on society and its content is very helpful in using some politics and personalities with their public relations. On the other hand, it can be effective in the fight against a corruption. In the next part of this contribution we would like to target on political and economic areas, which are the most important for system functioning in our country with relationship to media.

We have to explain the two basic terms: corruption and bribery. Corruption means dishonest or fraudulent conduct by those in power, typically involving bribery. Bribery is therefore the giving or offering a bribe and it is part of the corruption. This term was defined by the World Bank and Transparency International (TI) as the misuse of public office for private gain (Langseth, 1999: 3). It is a wider term which includes more types of corruption. Petty corruption – from side a public servants who may be decent and honest persons but who are underpaid and depend on small bribes from the public. Grand corruption – high public officials make decisions including large public contracts financed by external donors. This corruption is motivated by personal greed. Usually some benefits are transferred to individuals or political party coffers. Episodic corruption – a corruption is the exception, and the dishonest public servant is disciplined when detected. Systemic corruption – systems depend on corruption for their survival (Langseth, 1999: 5).

Of course, we can classify corruption from more points of view but this contributes best for the set aim.

### 1.1. The Slovak society and corruption

We cannot divide politics, economy and media, because this areas are included and influenced on each other. The corruption issue shows how scandal results from the manipulation of core social values by strategic social actors in a particular context (Pujas, 2002: 149). “The issue to consider is selected questions of democratic theory and political system formation, as bearing most directly and forcefully on media system change in post-Communist countries, related also to normative media theories – a matter of considerable importance in the media change process” (Jakubowicz, 2007: 2). Slovakia has to fight new traps which are dangerous for welfare and for the developing society. The main element crisis and stop of rising social level was and still is the corruption. This is the first problem of this spheres, which is attended after 1989 in our society and it affects it. The constitutional system of separation of powers is the significant component, because citizens can control the democracy in a country. The President, The Parliament, The Executive and The Judiciary, values and ethical leading of communication space with freedom of speech and the right citizens to inform and be informed are very important attributes, which can create social welfare and next development in our society (Darmo, 2009: 7). Current form and methods of corruption in the media are

visible in the system change from the media democracy to the mediocracy<sup>2</sup>. Corruption is not unique in post-Communist countries. There is a typical phenomenon using of media as a tool for promoting the interests of economic groups. This pressure is present because journalists have resigned: independence as an expression of an objective presentation of all existing available facts; public official is an employee of the taxpayer (Mistrišková, Žitný, 2001: 13).

In Slovakia, the problem of corruption in the media was for the first time officially notified by The National Programme for the Fight against Corruption and adopted in 2000. It notices that the media corruption is a major threat to any democratic country. This institution offered some arrangements, however some of them are very general:

1. Increase transparency of property relations in the media
2. Create a journalists ethics code
3. Support competition in the media to prevent corruption (Chmelár, 2009: 52).

The first point was resolved due to the press law, but the fulfillment of other points was and still is quite problematic. The Slovak Syndicate of Journalists adopted its own code of ethics in 1990 and updated in 2010, but it misses a mention of corruption. Authors have not agreed with establishing any Council or the Commission, which could speak or interfere authoritatively to all its things. The main problem is the respect of libel and privacy, which are overarching issue of the press law (Killenberg, 2008: 338).

Media pluralism again remained at a catastrophic level, one of the worst in Europe, and at this point the situation does not only improve, but it gets worse. This situation was confirmed by the European Commission's working document named "Media pluralism EU Member States" published on 16 January 2007. The primary requirement of pluralism, which is the principle that media content must reflect the views of all relevant pages of society, is not active (Chmelár, 2009: 53).

On the other hand, we have to adduce results from Reporter without Borders (RSF). This institution was founded by Robert Ménard, Rony Brauman a Jean-Claude Gillerbaud in Paris in 1985. It is nongovernment organization which defends freedom of print and media. RSF published on 20 April 2016 the World Press Freedom Index, which shows that there has been a deep and disturbing decline in respect for media freedom at both the global and regional levels. Slovakia is at the 12th place out of 180 countries in the world rankings in 2016 (Reporters without Borders, 2016).

RSF defined situation in Slovakia with following restrictions. "Defamation is punishable by up to eight years in prison, the harshest penalty for this offence in the European Union. Many legal actions have been brought by businessmen, politicians and judicial officials. Prime Minister Robert Fico initiated several during his first term. Censorship was tightened in 2014 by the adoption of a regulation limiting the number of journalists with parliamentary accreditation, restricting their movements within the parliament and banning them from photographing the personal property of parliamentarians" (Reporters without Borders, 2016).

## 1.2. Transparency International of Slovakia and situation in media

The Transparency International of Slovakia (TIS) is the institution which created the important list of conditions development and their reach to actual situation for the present:

1. Media must be independent politically and economically.
2. Property relations in media must be transparent.
3. Journalists must be guaranteed the freedom of speech by legislation.
4. Professionalism of journalists considering its responsibilities must be defined (socially promoted and guaranteed) not only in the area of legislation, but also ethically.
5. Items of public relations (lobbying, media relations) must be transparent and in the case of journalist be defined legally and ethically (Mistrišková, Žitný, 2001: 7).

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<sup>2</sup> Owners which own and influence media institutions makers who operate in these institutions.

There are a lot of problematic areas in the Slovak media market with relationship to corruption. Corruption is a global social problem. Its real solution is not possible without effective action at all levels of society. This process can greatly play an important media role, working to uncover corruption chain. Its efforts can effectively weaken some corrupt intentions. "We have to discuss about public accountability that would enable journalists to resist the relentless political spin from their sources better, and to produce authentic and worthwhile news" (Bennet, Lawrence, Livingston, 2007: 1).

The next issue is that the Slovak media have not had the real investigative journalism yet, because of low budgets and time, which journalists need to gain enough information. The investigative journalism is an integral part of journalism and has self-worth and professional standing (Harcup, 2005: 74). Then public has got only basic data. Situation has a little bit changed last years when editorial offices have started to establish investigative teams. But when we compare situation aboard we are still in the beginning. The role of the media uncover a corruption has been irreplaceable. Where citizens cannot get, journalists should. An independent journalist can detect a corruption and arise other problems. Investigative journalism is in a triangle, whose other two sides are investigations and a scientific research. All three sides examine something which is important for the society. However, the successful investigative journalism would need more time and money. Recently, several ministers have had to resign due to different causes which were presented in the media. This published reports changed nothing a few years ago. Therefore investigative journalism can be the very dangerous weapon, because words and facts can damage career and reputation.

Specific attributes and aims investigative journalism are:

- to inform the society of extraordinary injustice against individuals or groups, about the failure of social or political system;
- to be interested in consolidation of moral values and calls for public participation in exposing corruption;
- to find the way of redressing crimes or offenders punishment;
- the objectification of moral standards as the result of investigative journalism<sup>3</sup>;
- investigative journalist does not judge but finds, collects, interprets and simplifies standards so that the public could use such assessments (Školkay, 2001: 84).

In Slovakia, we can observe many types of journalists. Their attitudes can be divided into several groups. The first group are those who firmly rejected attempts to be influenced from the outside. Then there are journalists who do not have wrong intent, but do not deny the attention of stakeholders in the belief that their attempts are resistant. The third group consists of journalists who are directly corrupted: openly ask for financial reward for journalistic material and accept bribes for the agreed articles. This situation is very dangerous for society, because is very common that these things are accepted by Slovaks and they do not anything in order to fight it (Chmelár, 2009: 54). On the other hand, we need to develop media ethics as discourse which analyses media communication, and concentrate on the political-philosophical context (Crook, 2010: 155).

Corruption has been a problem of global dimension. "It cannot be denied that corruption from the inside has created the types of tragedies that broke out during the 1900s" (Spencer, 2007: 228). The most obvious is the institution Transparency International which works with the corruption index, which is the important indicator of corruption in world media. That time this index was the first of its kind and today is the most respected and most detailed methodology of corruption in world media. The Corruption Perceptions Index was first launched in 1995, when Transparency International was two years old. What exactly is the Index and how it is used? "The index is a "poll of polls", representing the average scores which individual countries have been given by international businessmen and financial journalists when polled in a variety of contexts" (Transparency International, 1995: 9). The aim of this index is not the assessment of the level of corruption in any country. It tries to assess the level at which corruption is active for example in relationship among an entrepreneur impact on business life. The index is covered by countries where is allowed to publish polls

<sup>3</sup> Objectification of moral standards is realised by comparing the law, with regulations and codes of ethics, with views of experts, research conclusions, statistics and with the rules of fair play, decency and honesty (Školkay, 2001: 84).

results. The index includes three figures for each country. The first is its overall integrity ranking (out of 10)<sup>4</sup>. The second column is the number of surveys in which the particular country has been involved<sup>5</sup>. The third column indicates the variance of the rankings. A high number shows a high degree of deviating opinions.<sup>6</sup>

### 1.3. Slovakia results

According to the corruption world rankings by Transparency International, Slovakia in 2016 ended at the 54<sup>th</sup> place. It retains the last year score of 51 from hundred maximum points. It is also aggravation of four places comparing to 2015, while the number of countries increased from 168 to 176 countries. This is the seventh worst place in the European Union, while Croatia, Hungary, Romania, Italy, Greece and Bulgaria were below than Slovakia. However, the first year of the third Robert Fico government, indicates that the fight against corruption will continue in declarative rather than the actual level. Not even in 2016 was convicted of corruption any senior politician or businessman. The discomposure was started because of the government disinterested approach to its own anti-corruption measures. It was the second government of Robert Fico, which adopted the modern law of protection by Whistleblower<sup>7</sup> more than two years ago. But this law has the minimum results in the practice. Transparency appreciates the tightening of the law of the registered partners in public sector and the measures were adopted by the current Government. The Government should negotiate the introduction of company owners' registers in other EU countries for its greater efficiency. The good news is the work on preparing the amendment of the information law, which has the ambition to streamline and enhance citizens' right to information. In the ranking of perceived corruption it got worse last year in 70 countries and 60 states improved. This indicator suggests to deteriorate international conditions for the fight against the corruption. Transparency International global chief Jose Ugaz says about the insufficient fight against corruption what leads to the growth of populist politicians who are not able to solve the corruption either. In countries with populist and autocratic leaders the weakening of democracy and disturbing trend of attacks on civil society, media freedom and undermine the independence of the criminal authorities is often seen. Instead of fighting bribery these politicians usually lead a country even into worse corruption (Transparency International Slovensko, 2017). According to this index we can see a lot of indicators which offer us view of our society. When traditional politicians fail to tackle corruption, people grow cynical. Increasingly, people are turning to populist leaders who promise to break the cycle of corruption and privilege. Yet this is likely to exacerbate – rather than resolve – the tensions that fed the populist surge in the first place (Transparency International, 2017). It shows rise of extremist parties' popularity. This situation is activated in many countries in Europe, for example, France, Hungary and Slovakia too.

TIS regularly brings solutions and recommendations for reducing corruption and increasing transparency in the Slovak society. Recommendations include the following areas of public life: Government Public Administration, EU funds using, public procurement, politicians and political parties, government, the judiciary. TIS is also provides to anti-corruption measures which include recommendations on other sectors: health, police, media. Corruption threatens execution of law and institutions proper functioning, economic development country, regardless of whether it is bribery or corruption. Penalties for acts of corruption should be imposed by specialized criminal court. However, TIS has serious doubts whether this is active nowadays. Important places are the police and the prosecutor's office for more efficient detection of corruption in cooperation with media. These institutions should be led by individuals with the best results of the moral standard in the corruption fight. (Transparency International Slovensko, 2015: 18–35).

<sup>4</sup> A ten equals an entirely clean country, while zero equals a country where business transactions are entirely dominated by kickbacks, extortion etc. No country scores are either ten or zero (Transparency International, 1995: 9).

<sup>5</sup> i.e., from 2 to 7: the greater the number the more reliable the assessment (Transparency International, 1995: 9).

<sup>6</sup> For example: a variance of 0.01 for Denmark represents an almost perfect concordance. The variance of 5.86 for Argentina indicates a high disagreement among the polls, with some placing of the country much higher and others much lower on the overall scale. Some will wish only to publish the raw results (in Column One) (Transparency International, 1995: 9).

<sup>7</sup> This law includes notification about unfair or unethical practices generally superior employee, managing director or even the responsible person up to group level.



## 2. Reducing corruption

Many tasks have been not fulfilled so far that could help to reduce corruption in Slovakia and people perceive corruption as a widespread problem. The actual change in the range of corruption we can see in inevitable citizens' pressure to politicians who may adopt and enforce the application of the system of anti-corruption measures in practice. Debate on some anti-corruption measures must be kept, not only during the election period but also before the elections. Citizen should be interested in election campaign and according to whether politicians support any anti-corruption measures. Election campaign should focus also on the willingness of political forces to adopt anti-corruption minimum, regardless of political orientation, because of the severity of corruption and its impact on the economy, morals and values of the society are enormous. An important tool in the fight against corruption is information. We use these quite a few, because we would not know how and what to publish. But just not the political will to begin to solve the issue of corruption is sufficient. The significant social and legal dimension is conflict between the right to information and right to privacy in modern information society. Some interests of individuals and society are in the conflict. Representative of the public is media as the most common to promote the power of public opinion. From this contradiction arises serious collision that causes sharp differences in the theory and in the practice. An important factor in detecting this crime is also cooperation with citizens and their helpfulness, because people are not always willing to assist in detecting and proving crimes. A public force in fight against corruption is especially in its extensive knowledge of people, local conditions and knowledge of the facts of all kinds. The public opinion can help identify some witnesses, victims and suspects. Informed public is an important resource, particularly in obtaining indicators and incentive measures for the implementation of police officers. From this perspective, cooperation media is also very important. People expect help from journalists with various suggestions and knowledge, which in many cases can help to detect crime (Podhorský, 2001: 74–76).

### 2.1. Journalistic sphere and recommendations

Any opinion or statement can be described as true or false. However, in journalistic practice the truth should be understood identically like the accuracy of facts. The primary duty of the journalist is to respect the truth and the public's right to the truth. To fulfil this obligation journalist will always defend the principle of freedom to collect and publish reports on the principles of fair and comment on criticism. A journalist should report news only in accordance with the facts that identify the origin and cannot conceal older information or falsify documents. It is important to be careful and pay attention to information, documents and find out via fair methods. Journalists have to pay attention to the danger of discrimination by media. They have to avoid discrimination based on race, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin. Within the general law of each country the professional journalist should recognize principles within the jurisdiction, to the exclusion of any government interference or someone else (Repková, 2001: 79–80).

We are talking about public control of politicians by the media. "Communications media hold many fascinating implications for human relationships and for world development that demand study, reflection, and debate" (Downing, Mohammadi, Sreberny-Mohammadi, 1995: xxvi). The media provide information and public control over all public life areas, but there is no authority to check such an important sector of society as media is. We have no discussions about the ethical issues of journalism and media practice and we cannot speak about consensus in this field. The functionality of journalism and the media environment is not possible without further development. The most significant impact on this environment is the opacity of media ownership and economy, non-transparent PR activities.

### 2.2. Ownership clarification

Media ownership is almost undetectable. A citizen practically has no opportunity to realise who owns the media from which he/she receives information. Legislation should impose an obligation to disclose the

ownership conditions of media not to be just a formality and it should be well known for public. The law should preclude the possibility that the actual owner is hidden in the opaque ownership or in the unknown name of company and clarify the relationship of the media to a major source of advertisers revenue, publishing annual financial report on revenues and expenditures by media owners. Tendencies towards expansion and diversification in the media are an international phenomenon. Concentration trends are filled by a wide range of economic and commercial motives that apply to media proprietors everywhere (Doyle, 2002: 141).

### 2.3. PR activities clarification

It is necessary for the media owners to realize that accepting a situation when journalists work for PR agency or own it, has not only affect the objectivity of their media, but also impoverishes them. Discussions on the adjustment of legal lobbying should become open and specific. There should also start public consultations on the public relations ethics code (Mistríková, Žitný, 2001: 16–17).

## Conclusions

The corruption issue in the media cannot be perceived without the understanding of the context and status of the whole Slovak society. The author tried to bring some information about the Slovak history which had strong influence on the actual situation. However, relationships between media, politics and public sphere are pretty close and it is essential to see a general perspective, because the corruption issue is present in all these areas. Some moral values cast doubt on many life areas every day. Therefore, it is necessary to think about the special position of the media in society, its significance in the fight against corruption in other spheres that can help to reduce corruption power in the society. It is extremely hard to begin this process in all areas. Anti-corruption measures are inevitable seeking to strengthen the regulation and supervision of political parties' financial control, courts and media. Slovakia needs to improve quality of the politics analysis, look for more competitive solutions, and lessen bureaucracy. Slovakia needs to put emphasis on the benefits of quality and costs analysis and anti-corruption clauses.

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## KORUPCIJOS PROBLEMATIKA SLOVAKIJOJE: RAIŠKA MEDIJOSE

LENKA HALAMOVÁ  
Katalikiškasis Ruzomberoko universitetas (Slovakija)

### Santrauka

Straipsnyje gvildenama korupcijos Slovakijos visuomenėje problema. Jos istorinės priežastys 1993 metais, kai Slovakijos Respublika atsiskyrė nuo Čekų Respublikos. Pateikiamas teorinis požiūris, kurį reikėtų pritaikyti praktiškai, siekiant pagerinti situaciją Slovakijoje. Informacija surinkta iš tokių šaltinių, kaip Tarptautinis skaidrumo antikorpucinis ir kiti institutai. Analizuojamas globalus korupcijos reiškiny. Aptariama tiek politinė, tiek medijų sritis, kurios yra susijusios, veikiamos kartu. Čia pasireiškianti korupcijos problema daro poveikį visuomenei ir jos gerovei.

Tarptautinis skaidrumo antikorpucinis institutas yra viena svarbiausių NVO pasaulyje, turinti filialus visame pasaulyje. Ši institucija siekia įvertinti kiekvienos šalies korupcijos lygį, pateikia pasiūlymų konkrečioms šalims, kaip realiai mažinti korupciją ir taip skaidrinti visuomenę. Siekiama valstybinių ir privačių institucijų bendradarbiavimo teisiniais klausimais, kad būtų laikomasi įstatymų. Žiniasklaida viešajai nuomonei daro didelį poveikį, todėl būtina plėtoti tiriamąją žurnalistiką, kuri atskleistų medijų įmonių priklausomybės ryšius ir korupciją mūsų visuomenėje. Žurnalistas neturėtų priklausyti nuo politikų. Jis turėtų būti objektyvus, remtis patikrinamais informacijos šaltiniais.

Straipsnio pabaigoje pateikiamos rekomendacijos, kaip įveikti korupciją, pasitelkus medijas. Taip sukurti aplinką, kurioje norėtųsi saugiai gyventi ir dirbti, žinant, kad esi apsaugotas įstatymų.

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