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# 11 Corruption and anti-corruption in Southeast Europe

## Landscapes and sites

*Steven Sampson*<sup>1</sup>

### **Introduction: Everyday corruption**

In a paper on anti-corruption in Southeast Europe, it is appropriate to set the stage with a recent report from Romania:

Romanian public TV station TVR broadcast ... a video recording which shows Agriculture minister Decebal Traian Remes receiving an envelope from the former Agriculture minister, Ioan Avram Muresan. Prosecutors claim that the envelope contained a 15,000 Euros bribe, paid by businessman Gheorghe Ciorba. TVR [Television Romania] also broadcast two audio recordings of tapped phone conversations that Muresan had with Ciorba and Remes.<sup>2</sup>

The video and the recordings were part of an investigation of high-level corruption conducted by the Romanian anti-corruption agency, the National Anti-corruption Department (DNA), with the collaboration of Mr Ciorba. The video of a minister receiving an envelope full of cash from an intermediary – himself a former minister – set off shock waves in Romanian political life. The implicated minister, Mr Remes, was forced to resign. The former agricultural minister and erstwhile intermediary, Mr Muresan, was detained by the police. The EU threatened to withhold 110 million euros in agricultural subsidies. A chorus of politicians, pundits, and civil society activists are calling for a concerted anti-corruption effort to cleanse the government of corrupt politicians. Muresan has responded, calling this a smear campaign reminiscent of the 1950s. Foreign diplomats and the EU are now scrutinizing Romania's commitment to wipe out corruption, which was a commitment that was a key requirement for Romania's accession to the EU in January 2007. The Romanian government, envisioning further embarrassing inquiries, is now considering merging the DNA with another Romanian agency. To complete this story, there are reports that a private viewing of the incriminating video was held for selected journalists at the offices of the Romanian affiliate of the American NGO Freedom House. Freedom House-Romania had already come into the public eye some weeks

earlier when it was accused of suspiciously obtaining a 2005 contract to assess Romania's anti-corruption strategy.

We have here a typical corruption scandal. The cast of characters in this drama is familiar: the arrogant minister, the unscrupulous businessman, the crafty middleman, the gloating media, the angry commentators, the watchful foreign donors, and, of course, the disillusioned public. This ongoing drama is unfolding not in some Third World backwater or 'failed state', but in an EU Member State, albeit the most corrupt among the current EU members.

How are we to understand corruption and anti-corruption in a place like Romania? In what way is this a local story, and in what way is it the result of international pressure to compel Romania to conform to 'global standards'. What conceptual frameworks can help capture both the dynamics of corrupt behaviour and the drama of public exasperation in a country where anti-corruption campaigns are a policy priority, but where one scandal replaces another in endless succession? The purpose of this chapter is to place the relationship between corruption and anti-corruption into the same analytical framework. I propose to do this by viewing this relationship in terms of two topographic metaphors: that of 'landscape' and that of 'site'. The anti-corruption 'landscape' denotes the transnational flow of resources, people, and ideas – an uneven flow to be sure – which make up the global anti-corruption project. The metaphor of a 'site' helps us understand how these forces play out in a specific local setting, as in the Romanian case. Using the metaphors of 'landscape' and 'site', we can better understand the interaction of local corruption, local anti-corruption fighting, and global anti-corruptionism. This global–local nexus is particularly important for understanding anti-corruption in transition countries, where local political forces are subject to external donor pressures. Using 'landscape' and 'site', we can achieve a better understanding of how corruption occurs in a world full of anti-corruption talk and anti-corruption measures.

### **Researching anti-corruption**

An anti-corruption site is a bounded setting where interests are articulated, resources exchanged, power exerted, and alliances formed. The site has its players, their goals (what is at stake), resources, strategies, and tactics. In examining the summit of the anti-corruption landscape, we can identify how policies are formed. In the valleys and enclaves of this landscape, however, we can observe how these same policies are implemented, distorted, or subverted by local actors.

Focus on specific sites, however, prevents us from observing the extensive similarities between them. Certain strategies and resources (and of course, discourses) seem to circulate beyond the control of local-level actors. Some other analytical framework is needed. I call this framework a 'global anti-corruption landscape'. I have investigated this landscape by carrying out brief periods of fieldwork in several countries of Southeast Europe

(Romania, Bosnia, Kosovo, and Albania), mostly between 2003 and 2006. In order to obtain a better picture of the global anti-corruption landscape, I have also carried out documentary research, interviews, and participant observation with global actors such as the anti-corruption non-governmental organization (NGO) Transparency International (TI), interviews with anti-corruption consultants and aid officials, and I have attended various international anti-corruption events.<sup>3</sup> In this sense, I have acquired some knowledge of how Southeastern Europe became part of the anti-corruption industry.

### **The anti-corruption industry**

The global anti-corruption industry now channels hundreds of millions of dollars in anti-corruption assistance projects to over 100 countries.<sup>4</sup> Using various corruption indices and governance statistics, we can track the dynamic of corruption in most countries of the world. Western donors and NGOs can now invoke the UN Convention against Corruption to pressure certain countries to sign or ratify the Convention, and then monitor them for their compliance using various 'good governance' indices. The anti-corruption industry intersects with movements for global ethics, corporate governance, public administration accountability and transparent management, as well as more established projects of democracy promotion, economic development, and state-building (Florini 2000, 2007; Carothers 2000; Carothers and Ottaway 2005; Ottaway and Carothers 2000; Fukuyama 2004).

In the developing world, anti-corruption assistance is now a standard part of any kind of foreign aid package. Recipients of aid must commit themselves to statements of purpose, policies of integrity, and guidelines for efficient public administration. Anti-corruption aid includes activities such as raising public awareness, revising laws, formulating good governance strategies, setting up watchdog agencies, streamlining administrative procedures, conducting training courses, carrying out surveys, monitoring progress, and evaluating impact. The combination of discourse and practice comprises what we might call 'anti-corruptionism'.

While corruption was always seen as an impediment to development efforts, it is only in the last decade that anti-corruptionism has become a truly integral part of the global discourse of development, state-building, and democracy. Hence, new anti-corruption policies are announced, and new accusations of corruption are broadcast as well. Corruption has now become a part of local politics. Definitions of what constitute corruption, and assessments of the effectiveness of 'fighting corruption' are sufficiently vague that they can be integrated into many political agendas or private projects. Anti-corruption discourse thus fills political vacuums or serves local interests. This kind of inflation of concepts has occurred before: think of the 'career' of concepts such as 'human rights', 'civil society', 'democracy promotion', 'good governance', 'organized crime', 'transparency', 'accountability', and,

of late, 'trafficking'. In each of these policy areas there are academic debates about precise definitions, typologies, and borderline cases, and discussion about causes and effects. Nevertheless, human and financial resources are mobilized as if all the substantive issues are already settled. Vague concepts discussed in thinktanks become budget lines, and budget lines are 'exported' as projects to a dismal provincial town in Albania or a government department in Romania. The journey from academic seminars to awareness-raising campaigns and training sessions is long and convoluted. How do these vague concepts become budget lines? How do these budgeted programmes become projects? How do these projects affect the local political field? And how are they manipulated by local interests?

In this context of 'anti-corruption export', we need a framework for understanding how corruption and anti-corruption can coexist. Such a framework would outline the resources available to the anti-corruption actors, the strategies these actors employ, and the consequences for society at large of the anti-corruption projects. This framework would help us to understand how anti-corruption operates to inhibit or prevent corruption in some areas, and it would also describe how anti-corruption resources are manipulated in local political space as a partisan political tool (the politics of anti-corruption). It is such a framework that I call a landscape.

Landscapes have summits, enclaves, and nodes where intermediaries can steer resources. One of the nodes on the anti-corruption landscape is Transparency International, an advocacy NGO headquartered in Berlin. With a secretariat of about 45, a budget of £6,000,000, and with 90 national chapters, TI is the major non-governmental player in the anti-corruption industry. Here I will describe how TI operates as a global NGO in the anti-corruption landscape, and continuing with a description of the anti-corruption site in Romania, I will try to demonstrate that the metaphors of anti-corruption landscape and local site can be useful tools for researching the interaction between corruption and anti-corruption. By analyzing the flows of resources and the actors involved, we can begin to solve the basic riddle of anti-corruption programmes: their lack of impact. Despite hundreds of millions of dollars, and hundreds of programmes, projects, and campaigns, conducted by an army of anti-corruption specialists, experts, and trainers, we have very little evidence of any decline in corrupt behaviour, or even a decline in public perceptions of corruption. It is as if anti-corruptionism persists independently of its goal. Perhaps we can understand this lack of impact by viewing anti-corruptionism as a configuration of landscapes, resource flows, and local sites. Let me start, therefore with TI and what is called 'the TI movement'.

### **What is a global movement?**

As a global project, anti-corruption has aspects of social movement and of structured institution. The 'global anti-corruption movement', as its

proponents call it, includes political reformers, international donors, enlightened foundations, civil society organizations advocating transparency, journalists uncovering abuse, and private-sector businessmen calling for more integrity. The fight against corruption takes place in political life, within public administration reform, in the efforts to monitor international trade, and in programmes to make development aid effective and accountable. The remedy cited by anti-corruption reformers, donors, and activists is to build strong state institutions, enhance the rule of law, stimulate public integrity, and raise citizen awareness. Doing this will not only make development more effective, it will keep politicians and unscrupulous businessmen in line.

Anti-corruption ideology, i.e. anti-corruptionism, is not only promulgated by activists. The activists are in fact only a minority. There are also 'professionals'. The professionals are members of, or work for, transnational organizations, aid agencies, policy and training institutes, and private firms.<sup>5</sup> Professional anti-corruption fighters know how to lobby for new conventions; they know how to conduct training programmes for officials, how to carry out awareness-raising activities, how to assess corruption problems, and how to obtain grants and aid contracts from Western governments and foundations. At local levels, we find the hundreds of programmes and projects run by local NGOs or by hastily assembled project management units (PMUs) within the 'partner' government. The projects carried out by NGOs and PMUs are continually monitored through various meetings, reports, and donor visits.

The global anti-corruption scene is thus a transnational one, with transnational players and local counterparts. These players cooperate *and* compete for resources. The resources are projects, contracts, catchy ideas, the attention of major donors, and the support of what are called 'stakeholders' and 'target groups'. At times, these competing actors will come together: NGO activists, the World Bank, private oil companies, European development agencies, and international advocacy groups cast aside their interests and agree upon, for example, an anti-corruption convention or a new regulation to recover stolen assets. This is anti-corruptionism as policy-making, and it takes place at the summit of our anti-corruption landscape. The landscape thus consists of metaphorical mountains, hills, plateaus, valleys, and enclaves. Moving through this landscape – sometimes unhindered, other times diverted – are anti-corruption discourses, policies, organizations, activists, and practices. Like every landscape, the landscape of anti-corruption appears differently depending on the vantage point of the observer. The summit of the landscape are the policy offices at the European Commission in Brussels, at the United States Agency for International Development's (USAID) Office of Democracy and Governance, at the World Bank's governance unit and its lending officers, in the offices implementing the UN Convention against Corruption, and in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) anti-bribery convention-

monitoring office. These are the sources from which emerge 'programme priorities' and 'country strategies' to which more peripheral anti-corruption actors must adapt. This is where the signals are sent, as they travel through the landscape.

Just below these elite, policy-making and agenda-setting institutions are other bilateral aid agencies and grant-giving foundations. These include the Department for International Development (DFID (UK)), the German *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit* (GTZ), and the Scandinavian aid donors (the Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA), the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD)). As government units, they formulate policy, receive allocations from ministries, and contract implementing NGOs or firms, after which they monitor progress. Among foundations, the Soros (Open Society) foundations and National Endowment for Democracy can be mentioned. At regional levels are other players: in Southeast Europe, for example, are the Group of States against Corruption (GRECO), the EU/PHARE (Poland and Hungary: Assistance for Restructuring their Economies) missions, the UN Missions in Bosnia and Kosovo, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) democratization offices, and the Stability Pact Anti-corruption Initiative (SPAI). Similar constellations exist in Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

Further down the landscape, 'off the road' from these central policy actors and donors, are the various contracting NGOs and consulting companies. They search out signals or submit tender proposals for 'good governance' or 'public administration reform'. These groups commute between the summits where policies are formed and the local enclaves where anti-corruption projects are implemented. Finally, in the local enclaves are the ministries in the aid-receiving countries (now called 'partners'), the local counterpart organizations (NGOs, anti-corruption agencies). Partners and counterparts select suitable 'target groups' who are the subject of campaigns (e.g. police, judges, the business community, health institutions, the general public, youth, etc.).

In this landscape, relationships form between the central actors and the intermediaries, and between intermediaries and the local groups on the receiving end of anti-corruption projects. These relations can take the form of cooperation, complementarity, or competition where each actor pursues their own agenda. Cooperative/complementary relations exist when an international intervention adjusts itself to a local situation; competition/conflictual relations occur when the two interests collide, and we may also find the situation where the intervention is simply irrelevant to local interests because it brings in no resources.

The landscape metaphor, with its peaks and valleys, its flows and its Khyber passes controlled by intermediaries, provides us with an image of global anti-corruption policy in the making. As policies flow, the various actors are both objects of these policies and manipulators of the resources

attached to these policies. Such manipulation could be at the level of flexible interpretations of policy guidelines, selective application of policy to political opponents, or outright diversion of funds for other agendas. The result is what we could call the politics of anti-corruption.

### **From policy-making landscapes to local sites**

Once governments ratify conventions or make commitments, the anti-corruption policies must be implemented in the local space of cities, communities, and government offices. These implementations are supposed to affect the everyday behaviour of officials, citizens, and businessmen. In these local spaces also dwell the anti-corruption activists, who I previously termed 'integrity warriors' (Sampson 2005). Attuned to global trends, the activists seek out information about donor priorities, about anti-corruption strategies or tools, or about the latest international initiative. Activists search out grants for training, conference participation, for carrying out projects, for office space and printing, or they bid directly on contracts to implement donor programmes. This activity runs parallel to other activities of a purely local nature: uncovering suspicious payments in a telecom bid, finding out which politician bought a new house, or monitoring bribes to police or doctors. Anti-corruption practice links together the high peaks and the narrow valleys of corruption. This practice includes anti-corruption campaigns and the local corruption scandals. Local gatekeepers translate the global discourses from Brussels or Washington into fundable projects in Bucharest or Prishtina. To understand anti-corruptionism, we need to understand how these global flows are launched, how they move along hills and plateaus, and how they are blocked or diverted. The study of anti-corruptionism involves understanding which key actors are manipulating what kind of resources for what kinds of ends.

Along this anti-corruption landscape there is a flow of five basic types of resources: money, knowledge, ideas, people, and technologies. Money takes the form of grants or projects. The flow of knowledge includes conventional wisdom about the causes, consequences, and remedies for corruption. The flow of ideas and values focuses on the importance of fighting corruption, and these ideas and values are disseminated by a flow of people – donors, officials, consultants – who implement anti-corruption projects. The flow of technologies involve the so-called 'tools' for measuring and preventing corruption (regulations, training programmes, auditing routines). These resources are launched at the anti-corruption policy-making level in a transnational, or supranational, context. Project implementation occurs at specific sites. Anti-corruption is thus a 'world of projects' (Sampson 1996). These flows are affected by the strategies and resources of relevant actors. Hence, they are blocked, diverted, or manipulated by intermediaries and by local actors in specific sites. One of the key intermediaries is Transparency International.

## **Fighting corruption with Transparency International**

The history and development of TI is described by Luís de Sousa in this volume. Although TI refers to itself as a 'movement', it is in fact a complex organization. TI consists of a secretariat in Berlin and 85 affiliated national chapters, but with only one chapter in any one country.<sup>6</sup> The TI secretariat, which both coordinates and serves the chapters, covers the global anti-corruption scene, organizes advocacy campaigns, publishes research and documentation about corruption (such as the Corruption Perception Index and Global Corruption Report) and liaises with its chapters about projects and activities.

TI was founded in 1993 by ex-World Bank staffer Peter Eigen and several colleagues with experience in international law, commerce, and development. Its breakthrough can be said to have occurred with World Bank president James Wolfensohn's 'cancer of corruption' speech in 1996, which placed anti-corruption on the aid agenda. Today, TI has a budget of €6–7 million per year, financed mostly by West European government donors, USAID partnerships, and some foundations. Eigen is a German citizen and is now retired in Germany, and it is largely due to his role that TI is based in Berlin.

Life at the TI Secretariat is like life in any office. TI staff come into the office each day around 8.30 a.m., sit down at their computers, and peruse their incoming emails. Those with the same geographic responsibility – Latin America, Africa, or Europe, for example – share offices. During the day, staff examine their messages or review documents sent from outside, from their co-workers and superiors, or communicate with relevant national chapters. An inordinate number of these messages and documents have nothing to do with what informants call 'the anti-corruption movement' as might be envisioned. Rather they have to do with project management: reports, budgets, applications, grant proposals, lists, agendas, meetings, etc.

Besides document processing and cooperation with national chapters, the other activity during the day is occasional meetings. Secretariat staff take a meeting, usually in one of the larger offices or meeting rooms, in order to make a decision about a policy move, document, or project, arranging a conference, or deciding to undertake an international mission. Meetings would last 10–30 minutes, and people would then go back to their computer again.

Much of the meeting activity concerns planning and reporting on international trips. These trips include monitoring visits to national chapters, participation at international conferences, or fundraising trips to meet with donors.

Every Wednesday, the entire staff eats lunch together for the weekly staff meeting. The meeting consists of a series of brief announcements about who is going on what mission, who has been where, which international meetings or events are on the agenda, which reports have been published, or practical matters about office routines or personnel changes. Most TI staff

are non-Germans and therefore have career plans or family obligations that would cause them to leave Germany. Following the staff meeting, it is back to work until 5, 6, or 7 p.m. As one TI staffer explained to me when I asked her, around 6 p.m., when she would be going home: 'No, I just have to finish one more thing ...' Around 6.30 p.m., most people have left while others stay on to finish up documents or perhaps catch up on private correspondence. Such is everyday life in an international NGO office filled with cosmopolitan NGO professionals.

The TI Secretariat's target group are international decision-makers, governments, and aid officials. In this situation, national chapters may feel overlooked. Indeed, nearly every encounter between representatives of the TI secretariat and those from national chapters – at the annual meetings of TI chapters, for instance – includes complaints from the chapters that Berlin does not inform them about major decisions, new procedures or funding opportunities. Berlin counters that the chapters do not respond to their queries or read their memos.

TI considers itself part of an international movement. Being hired by TI is called 'joining the movement'. A movement is usually considered to be a loose collection of volunteers who carry out actions to affect society. Movements have strategy discussions, ideological wrangling, factional disputes; they have their purists and pragmatists; movements have believers. Movements have a basic doctrine which is subject to periodic reinterpretation or even exegesis. Global movements these days go to mass gatherings such as the World Social Forum. They organize, they march, they protest, and they somehow find the funds or volunteers to carry out their activities. People in movements do not have CVs. They do not write grant proposals, and they do not take training courses in strategic planning or project-cycle management.

TI, as we can see, is not a movement. It is an organization. Those working at the TI Secretariat in Berlin are professionals. They are project officers, programme directors, legal specialists, financial officers, database specialists, webmasters, and interns. They are what we call staff. The anti-corruption scene around TI has no virulent debates, no factional disputes, no struggles over dogma, no urge to go out and demonstrate, no urge to proselytize, no effort to link anti-corruption with even moderate anti-globalization movements. The only 'marching' in TI are the sojourns to international conferences and to donors' offices in European capitals and in Washington. These donors are the furthest thing from global social movements. Instead of manifestos, TI produces interminable project applications and evaluation reports. TI is a project organization. Life at TI, and at many local TI branches, resembles the life in any kind of modern office. The TI Secretariat in Berlin is a quiet place.

With TI well into its second decade, founder Peter Eigen has turned over the reins to a new generation of middle-aged professionals with experience in international aid. On Eigen's retirement as chairman of TI's board, announced at the annual meeting of all TI chapters, elections for a new chair

were held. The winning candidate was Huguette Labelle, university administrator and former director of the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). Other board members are lawyers, business consultants, and former aid officials. In Berlin, TI's former executive director had come from the private sector and had served as financial officer for OXFAM; he has now moved on to the World Wildlife Federation. The new executive director, a South African sociologist originally recruited to head TI's global programmes department, has been an NGO activist, government staff member, and worked in the private sector. TI's new director of global programmes is a former World Bank officer. The communications director was formerly at the White House Office of Management and Budget. TI senior staff manage a well-established international advocacy organization, and they feel at ease in even the most elite international gatherings. TI's staff are professionals. They are not (if they ever were) grass-roots activists. They have jobs on contract, and they have dynamic careers. While TI policy priorities may change – more emphasis on fighting poverty or on private sector corruption – TI's general strategy remains that of founder Peter Eigen: to 'build coalitions' with the broadest range of international policy actors so as to stay on the inside. As reiterated by Eigen and other TI activists, 'coalition-building' means negotiation and cooperation. It excludes confrontation, a policy continually stressed by Eigen in all his public statements.

From a landscape perspective, the TI Secretariat operates close to the policy-making donor summit. To stay in close touch with these elites, TI is the secretariat and organizer of the International Anti-corruption Conference which is held every second year. This gathering brings together over a thousand governmental and non-governmental actors (the vast majority of the latter being TI activists whose travel has been paid by the Secretariat). However, the Secretariat also interacts with TI chapters in each country.

The national chapters reflect different blends of activism and professionalism. In Latin America and Africa, courageous anti-corruption activists risk violence and imprisonment in their struggle to reform corrupt political systems. Anti-corruption in these countries is part of a political movement led by high profile lawyers, journalists, and academics. Anti-corruption takes the form of political activism.

In Western Europe, TI chapters consist of smaller groups of volunteers who work in business, law, or as foreign aid consultants. There is often only one paid staff member. These chapters usually have a small number of members (20–50) and may meet only once or twice a year. The directors make statements, often connected to local scandals, to the press, or perhaps they lobby for whistle-blowing legislation or hold conferences; in some cases they may partner with another TI group in a developing country.

In Eastern Europe and the Balkans, TI branches operate as both grass-roots groups and as project units, financed by grants from various donors. The chapters conduct projects such as legal counselling, citizen surveys, information dissemination, and campaigns against corruption in sectors such

as procurement, health, media, and the customs service. In this project activity, Berlin may act as an intermediary for various donors, disbursing funds or monitoring projects, or Berlin may bring together several TI chapters into regional projects. All the Southeast European TI organizations subsist on foreign donor funding, support, and training. There are many types of donors – the European Union (EU), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), European governments or embassies, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and private foundations. Besides grants and donations, the local chapters may derive income from contracting tasks, such as conducting a survey or training civil servants. Hence, the portfolio of a local TI organization in the Balkans may be a complex mixture of project funds, training contracts, free rent, and seed money for operating costs, plus a foreign intern paid by a foreign donor such as USAID or the Soros Foundation. Were this foreign donor funding to cease – were donors to move elsewhere – these organizations would collapse completely. Donors, TI's local leaders, and especially staff are well aware of this.

### **Fighting corruption in Southeast Europe**

Reviewing anti-corruption assistance in Southeastern Europe, Tisné and Smilov describe three phases of anti-corruption policy since the 1990s: first, awareness-raising, a second phase centered on international conventions, and 'a third and crucial phase: implementation' (2004: 64). Yet, despite campaigns to improve public sector management and enact new laws and regulations, measurable results have been limited. Efforts to establish civil society coalitions, for example, 'failed to attract the broad backing they were designed to bring together, and tangible results of their actions were few and far between' (Tisné and Smilov 2004: 66). Similarly, 'broad public awareness campaigns have reached saturation point', while 'governmental omnibus anti-corruption programs ... have failed conclusively [to] reduce corruption or to reassure the public and foreign investors' (Tisné and Smilov 2004: 67). Several studies cite a lack of political will as the key factor in explaining the failure of anti-corruption strategies to produce results.

Since this 2004 report, and many others with similar conclusions, anti-corruption assistance to Southeastern Europe has continued unabated. The number of citizens helped by complaint centres, or the number of training sessions carried out, or seminars held may be impressive, but we have little evidence of any significant reduction in the rate or extent of corruption. For example, a Council of Europe project to help Southeast European countries formulate anti-corruption strategies, 'did not reach its targets', and 'chances for success are not great.' (Institute of Public Management 2006: 25, 34). Swedish anti-corruption training programmes in Serbia and a German-backed hotline programme in Bosnia and US anti-corruption coalition-building in Albania all showed successful goal fulfilment, but without any

effect on the extent of corruption in these countries (SIDA 2007; McCarthy 2005).<sup>7</sup>

Despite their lack of direct impact, such programmes succeed in integrating local sites into a much larger anti-corruption landscape. They become part of what the US State Department (1999) has called ‘an anti-corruption regime’. How do such regimes become a part of the local site? How are they adapted to local conditions? In the development aid literature, this problem is usually articulated as the problem of ‘ownership’. Without ownership, programmes and projects become money that is wasted; there is no fundamental change, no ‘sustainability’. Instead, global resources are used in local political struggles. This is particularly the case in Southeast Europe with its focus on integration/membership of these countries into EU frameworks. Here I will use the example of Romania, where reticent political leaders were pushed and prodded to pursue anti-corruption platforms. Let me therefore provide a brief description of the anti-corruption site as I experienced it in Romania, mostly prior to its EU accession.

### **The anti-corruption landscape in Romania**

In Romania, as elsewhere in Southeastern Europe, surveys of corruption have shown high levels of abuse within the state enterprises, in the privatization process, in the administration of Western aid, in tax assessments and collections, in public procurement, and in the customs service (World Bank 2001a, 2001b; Global Integrity 2006). For ordinary citizens, the health system and the courts are notorious for bribes and favouritism. Doctors and nurses, police and judges, teachers and professors, bureaucrats and customs officers all seem to be taking some sort of payment or are susceptible to nepotistic appeals. Public life is replete with accusations and exposés of corruption in politics, state-run enterprises, and EU aid.

Examining the Romanian anti-corruption site, we can identify six actors: the government, the opposition parties, the media, the national anti-corruption agency, the international donors, and that all-embracing category now called ‘civil society’. The various actors try to point out the guilty, propose measures to fight corruption, and pronounce on the effectiveness of these measures as well. Each actor has their own resources at their disposal. They interact with each other, striking alliances or garnering rewards. In certain conjunctures, these alliances shift, as occurs when key international donors descend on Romania to carry out assessment missions and issue warnings. Let me briefly review these six actors on the local scene.<sup>8</sup>

#### ***The Government***

Pressured by the conditions of EU accession, Romania has enacted a National Programme for Preventing Corruption, a National Action Plan to Prevent Corruption, and a National Anti-Corruption Strategy 2005–07. The

government's programme, drafted with foreign expertise and clear foreign pressure, is a familiar package of measures culled from well-known World Bank and OECD strategies for fighting corruption. A new anti-corruption law compels public officials to declare their assets, and enacting this law was not without protest by parliamentarians (Stan 2004). The government's fight against corruption takes places on several fronts: enacting of new regulations, training of personnel, programmes for more transparent administration, efforts to make courts more honest, and public education about the dangers of corruption. The Romanian government participates in international forums on anti-corruption, such as the Stability Pact Anti-corruption Initiative (for Southeast Europe) and the country is monitored by the Council of Europe's Group of States against Corruption (GRECO). Government ministers and functionaries attend international anti-corruption meetings and training sessions, and submit to evaluations by the EU, by the World Bank, and by other outside consultants. In late 2002, the government established the Anti-corruption Prosecution Office (financed by the EU and USAID), and this office later became the National Anti-corruption Department (DNA).

In practice, an anti-corruption campaign might suddenly focus on a ministry or department, such as the fiscal office or the customs authority (reminiscent of the 'islands of integrity' campaigns once used by TI). Officials continue to attend training sessions in making government more open to citizens, and in how to hold press conferences or conduct public hearings. Up to and even after accession to the EU in 2007, the Romanian government has had to endure criticism by EU monitors commenting on the lack of sufficient efforts to fight corruption and threats to withdraw agricultural subsidies.

### *The opposition parties*

The opposition parties can exploit media accusations against the government. The opposition can tip-off journalists to instances of favouritism in a ministry or in some piece of legislation. Some of the opposition are considered by civil society to be more NGO-friendly, so it is common for civil society activists to approach opposition politicians with information about corrupt practices or with complaints of abuse. Some opposition politicians sided with the EU in its criticism of Romania's inadequate anti-corruption efforts. Corruption accusations thus occur as a result of various political agendas, and we can speak of a genuine politics of anti-corruption in Romania.<sup>9</sup>

### *The media*

Romania's print media and independent television, always looking for scandal, focus on prominent public officials who appear to be living too lavishly or promoting their friends or cronies. Week in and week out, the media highlight cases of abuse, bribery, special laws, nepotism, pay-offs, and suspicious connections between officials and business tycoons. A politician

who acquires a cheap property or has a brush with the law can expect the scrutiny of the press. The media depict Romanian society as a never-ending series of corruption scandals, typified by the aforementioned envelope given to the agricultural minister. Corruption is interpreted as the hijacking of reform; its persistence is emblematic of weaknesses in the Romanian national character, and it is an international embarrassment.

The government, of course, periodically accuses the press of promoting false or sensational accusations, whereupon the press pressures for more access to data. Journalists can also be taken to court for obtaining data illegally or for libelling politicians. The media itself – subject to a complex system of licensing and regulation – is itself the object of corruption scandals, a process helped by the celebrity status of publishers, newspaper editors, and media moguls.

### ***The Anti-corruption Agency***

Operating between the government mandate, the opposition demands, and the media search for scandal is the National Anti-corruption Department (DNA), originally evolved from an Anti-corruption Prosecution Office. The DNA now has about 500 employees in Bucharest and in its district offices. Like anti-corruption offices elsewhere, the DNA can begin investigations or act on complaints. When this anti-corruption agency first began operating in 2002, there was scepticism as to whether it would prosecute senior officials. Under the leadership of former minister Monica Macoviei, they have. In 2006 alone, the DNA had solved 1092 cases, indicting 360 defendants; these defendants included seven MPs, one minister, two state secretaries, and two mayors.<sup>10</sup> Several cases involved embezzlement of EU funds as well, thus drawing the attention of foreign donors. The DNA has continually endeavoured to refurbish its image as impartial, but its staff can not operate effectively under the stigma of a cynical society, and it is subject to political pressures. In April 2007, Ms Macovei was discharged, partly due to her active prosecution of high level corruption. In late 2007, several investigations of high official remained delayed.

### ***The international donors***

Overshadowing these local political actors are the various international actors, chiefly the EU, World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the United States embassy, all of whom are making demands on Romania to meet international standards, pursue more transparent policies, promote good governance, promulgate a culture of accountability, and improve the climate for foreign investment. Pressure on Romania was greater during the period prior to EU accession, but Brussels still threatens to withhold key disbursements. Criticisms by foreign diplomats do not go unnoticed by government leaders who invariably reply that the foreigners have exaggerated or misunderstood the situation or overlooked the country's

progress. When the US ambassador, in April 2003, made well-publicized remarks about Romanian corruption and the government's inability to do anything about it, several Romanian politicians discussed whether his remarks were made in sympathy or not, and whether his critique was directed to 'the entire Romanian political class' or the current governing coalition.<sup>11</sup> The current controversy about the Romanian branch of Freedom House and its role in the '15,000 euro envelope', is an example of Romania's ambivalence about foreign pressure.

### *Civil society*

The final actor in the Romanian anti-corruption scene is the NGO sector, and especially those organizations advocating civil liberties, human rights, honesty in government, and anti-corruption. This includes, for example, the Romanian chapter of Transparency International, first established in 2000. TI-Romania's projects include a programme for legal advice to citizens, translation of anti-corruption documents into Romanian, monitoring of local government procurement practices, investigation of corruption in the media, and awareness-raising with youth about corruption. TI Romania originally had hostile relations with the Anti-corruption Prosecution Office, but it has now become an integral part of government initiatives. TI is joined by a number of supporting NGOs representing media, human rights, civic education, and youth. Many of the staff of these NGO have acquired sufficient skills or have social networks enabling them to be invited into government service. In this sense, Romanian NGOs function as a training venue, with people moving along different sites in the landscape.

### **Summary and conclusions: Local sites in a global landscape**

Romania is just one site in the global anti-corruption landscape. These sites bring together political formations, government institutions, and the disgruntled citizens, each with their own interests. Meanwhile, the media focus on uncovering scandal, exposing the guilty, and drawing conclusions as to Romania's fate in the EU. In Romania, as elsewhere, corrupt practices and anti-corruption initiatives are tied to *accusations* of corruption, and of course, counter-accusations. In this site, the anti-corruption agency must continually deal with the forces that are pushing and pulling it in different directions: expectations of the government, demands from the opposition, and the scrutiny of foreign donors. The agency is itself a field of contestation about resources, claims, and legitimacy.

The Romanian anti-corruption scene, like other local sites, has its own theories of what corruption is, how it operates, why it is sustained, and how it should be combated. These ideas move transnationally, but take special form in the local context. A similar flow occurs with the various anti-corruption rituals that are sponsored by both government and society. These

would include the press conferences, the statistical presentations of successful anti-corruption campaigns, the public events such as the opening of anti-corruption units, the expressions of support for harassed corruption fighters, the individual appeals of frustrated citizens in the press, and the interminable televised debates between politicians, journalists, and experts.

In this context, corruption arrests and indictments are not just 'law enforcement'. They are 'signals' by the authorities that they are doing something about corrupt behaviour. Through the sensation-hungry media, the signals are sent to the political opposition, to the public, and to the international actors who can decide on aid priorities and can raise or lower Romania's international credit rating. The Romanian world of anti-corruption is thus a complex intersection of government claims that morality is being safeguarded, citizen demands for justice, and political jockeying for power.

This local scene operates as a node in the global landscape of anti-corruption. Along this landscape flow decisions about strategy and funding and the newest capacity-building tools for achieving good governance and administrative effectiveness. As new discourses emerge from the summit of the landscape (the major donor meetings), the surrounding international NGOs, smaller bilateral agencies, and consulting companies 'wait for a signal', passing down the news to their local counterparts, resident representatives, and so-called 'partners' in the various Balkan capitals. Outdated concepts are now retooled into newer, more fashionable techniques: awareness-raising and civil society coalitions are replaced by public servant codes of ethics. Corruption is now linked to other projects such as human rights, poverty alleviation, or trafficking. In the local anti-corruption field, the various actors attempt to gain access to the resources that flow through the anti-corruption landscape: they compete for ideas, knowledge, funds, and for the attention of those people who have access to these resources.

This panorama of the anti-corruption scene in Romania could certainly be extended to other Balkan countries. Some of the actors would change (due to weaker NGOs, more political will, or the degree of donor influence). The leitmotifs of corruption discourse – 'declining trust', 'everyone is doing it', 'we need to crack down', 'outsiders are watching us', etc. might change as well. Yet there is in fact an uncanny resemblance between the local anti-corruption sites across Southeast Europe, especially in the way in which anti-corruption enters through outside projects and interacts with local understandings about political life and the everyday struggle over public goods and private projects. I would therefore postulate that it is through corruption and anti-corruption practices that we might identify similarities in how the people of Southeast Europe relate to their formal institutions, on the one hand trying to get around them, and on the other insisting that these institutions function properly so as to prevent unchecked personal aggrandizement by those in power. In this sense, anti-corruption landscapes and the local site are a window for understanding how people deal with profound transformation and the accompanying uncertainties such transformations bring.

With so many international actors, and so much traffic in resources channelled through transnational vectors, what sense is it to speak of a 'national anti-corruption programme'? USAID in Albania, the European Commission in Romania, TI and the Soros Foundation in Bosnia, the OSCE in Kosovo, and Swedish aid in Serbia all are part of this global anti-corruption landscape. Local anti-corruption movements are thus drawn into well-trodden, protected pathways along the anti-corruption landscape, pathways of money, knowledge, networks, and power. As these resources travel the landscape, they become – to exploit a standard political science concept – literally 'path dependent'. What might have been incipient, autonomous movements, with their own dynamic and social support, become locked into the rhetoric of good governance projects, integrity pacts, project management, and the search for a donor. What might have been anti-corruption movements become anti-corruption budget lines. What might have been anti-corruption activists become anti-corruption project staff. What might have been social change becomes the reproduction of projects.

In this context, our understanding of corruption also changes. We need to understand corruption in the shadow of the global 'anti-corruption industry'. Any national anti-corruption programme is but a site in a global anti-corruption landscape that measures, assesses, and organizes against corruption. The global vectors of anti-corruption are the international anti-corruption gatherings, the lobbying activities of organizations like Transparency International in Brussels, New York, Washington, and London, the fundraising trips to foreign donors, and the apparatus of international anti-corruption conventions and monitoring mechanisms. All these take place in cosmopolitan venues. These practices affect how anti-corruptionism unfolds at the local level, where real people are struggling against bureaucratic abuse, criminal politicians, unchecked bribery, and political cronyism. Viewing anti-corruptionism in terms of global landscapes and local sites is a means of unlocking a riddle. The riddle is to figure out how local anti-corruption movements are transformed into anti-corruption budget lines, and how local activists become project 'staff'. And finally, how these staff get locked into anti-corruption projects of questionable impact.

## Notes

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- 2 Available < [http://english.hotnews.ro/Public-television-broadcasts-images-of-Agriculture-minister-Remes-taking-bribe-from-ex-minister-VIDEO-articol\\_46129.htm](http://english.hotnews.ro/Public-television-broadcasts-images-of-Agriculture-minister-Remes-taking-bribe-from-ex-minister-VIDEO-articol_46129.htm) > accessed 11 October 2007. See also < [http://www.realitatea.net/100186\\_Scandalul-spagii-Ciorbea-Muresan-Remes](http://www.realitatea.net/100186_Scandalul-spagii-Ciorbea-Muresan-Remes) > .

- 3 Research during this period was partially funded by the Swedish National Research Council (*Vetenskapsrådet*) whose support I gratefully acknowledge. I have conducted fieldwork in several sites: TI headquarters in Berlin, local TI offices in Bosnia and Romania, anti-corruption and democracy offices in Albania and Kosovo, various conferences and training sessions in these four countries, as well as international anti-corruption expert gatherings in Berlin, Passau, Prague, Nairobi, Seoul, Guatemala City, Stockholm, and in my own hometown of Copenhagen. The fieldwork included following typical anti-corruption activities included assessment missions, implementation projects, grant monitoring, training sessions, evaluation missions, courses, meetings, and seminars. I have reviewed documents such as consulting proposals, policy statements, minutes of meetings, and online forums. And I have interviewed anti-corruption practitioners in government aid units, intergovernmental organizations, private consulting companies, and NGOs, including staff and former staff of Transparency International in Berlin and at several TI member gatherings. As a member of the Danish branch of Transparency International, I also participated in various Scandinavian anti-corruption meetings and events, several of which were relevant to Southeast Europe due to the Scandinavian countries' interest in democracy-building in both the Baltic countries and the Balkans.
- 4 Bryane Michael (2004c) has used the figure of US\$100 million and 2,000 specialists, but these estimates are certainly undervalued. USAID, for example, has as much as US\$700 million available for anti-corruption initiatives. See also an interview with Michael on the 'flourishing anti-corruption industry' applied to Romania at < [http://users.ox.ac.uk/~scat1663/anticorruption\\_good.doc](http://users.ox.ac.uk/~scat1663/anticorruption_good.doc) > (Romanian version 'Industria anticorupție', *Jurnalul National*, 29 June 2007, < <http://www.jurnalul.ro/articole/96022/industria-anticoruptie> > ) accessed 13 October 2007.
- 5 The emergence of a private anti-corruption consulting branch deserves a study in itself. US-based firms in this area include Casals, Chemonix, Management Systems International (MSI), and DPK Consulting. In Europe, most of these firms originally specialized in improving public sector management and then went over to governance and anti-corruption.
- 6 Approximate because some are full-fledged chapters, others, 'chapters in formation', and still others, 'contact points' or 'partners'.
- 7 In Albania, the USAID-financed project, implemented by the private firm MSI, set up an anti-corruption coalition and helped established a citizens' advisory office. After some years of negotiation, the Citizens Advisory Office is now a TI chapter in formation.
- 8 This section updates a discussion in an earlier article (Sampson 2005).
- 9 The function of these accusations can be usefully compared to the anthropological study of African witchcraft accusations, or the use of accusations of secret police complicity. Regardless of the phenomenon, the accusations take on a life of their own.
- 10 See the DNA's annual reports at < [www.pna.ro](http://www.pna.ro) > (accessed 10 October 2007), summarized, and *Southeast European Times*, 9 April 2007, 'Nivelul corupției din România a scăzut, dar reprezintă încă o problemă'. Online. Available at HTTP: < <http://www.setimes.com/cocoon/setimes/xhtml/ro/features/setimes/features/2007/04/09/feature-03> > (accessed 10 October 2007).
- 11 See *Curier National*, 17 April 2003, < <http://www.curierulnational.ro/Politica/2003-04-17/Ion+Iliescu:+Afirmatiile+sunt+facute+cu+%E2%80%99Csimpatie%E2%80%9D+pentru+eforturile+Guvernului> > (accessed 13 October 2007).