CULTURE OF CORRUPTION AS A KEY ISSUE IN ANTI-CORRUPTION METHODOLOGY AND POLICIES (ON EXAMPLES OF ITALY AND ARMENIA)

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Abstract: The aim of this article is to examine the presence of a culture of corruption in public administration systems, assess its negative impact on governance, and evaluate anti-corruption methodologies for enhancing governmental effectiveness. In this context, we explore various manifestations of corruption in public organizations and analyze international experiences - particularly the case of Italy - where we conduct a comprehensive review of its anti-corruption policies and highlight their significance in fostering an effective governance system. The more we know about the causes of corruption, the better we can decide which policy instruments to use to combat corruption. Corruption is a phenomenon that gains public visibility in democratic regimes because in such regimes there are freedom of press, freedom of expression, free party organizations, and opposition to the governments on duty. However, although democracy has the merit of not hiding corruption, not confronting and not containing acts that are harmful to the public interests can be lethal to democracy itself by generating autocratic governments that place themselves above political institutions (Ribeiro, 2000). The study examines the framework and methodologies of anti-corruption policies in the Republic of Armenia, comparing them with the experience of Italy. The theoretical foundation for addressing the issues discussed in this research is based on classical and modern theories of public administration, political science, and sociology. The study employs analytical, comparative, and systemic methods. Italy - being surrounded by European countries, possessing a more institutionalized governance system, and having a more democratic and socially mature society - finds itself in a relatively advantageous position in combating corruption compared to Armenia. Nonetheless, Italy still faces persistent corruption-related challenges. In contrast, Armenia's situation is shaped by its Soviet legacy, the Karabakh (Artsakh) conflict, and the inefficiencies in governance since independence, all of which have contributed to the persistence of a culture of corruption. Despite significant legislative advancements in recent years, systemic inefficiencies remain. Addressing corruption requires time, skilled professionals, strong managerial will, and other critical factors. International experience in managing state institutions plays a crucial role in shaping Armenia's anti-corruption efforts. With the purpose of providing better conditions for the adequate understanding of corruption, this article seeks to systematize some of the main theoretical reflections on the subject, highlighting attempts to conceptualize and classify it, as well as some of the approaches developed with the aim of understanding its causes and devising strategies for its control.

Introduction

The effectiveness of public administration is directly proportional to the transparency and democratization of governance processes. The scientific literature presents various approaches to improving governance, of which anti-corruption measures are among the most important. Corruption has been identified as one of the main challenges facing modern states. As a result of this process, public distrust of the state has gradually increased and the idea has spread that it is a widespread phenomenon that contaminates the public sector and the political class, and which is inadequately addressed and punished. This distrust is a characteristic feature of modern democracies and stems from the internal dysfunction of the representative system, which is conditioned by the fear of citizens that state agents do not fulfill their obligation to promote the common good. Moreover, corruption, by using state power for private gain, undoubtedly exacerbates this mood. There is consistent empirical evidence that corruption undermines economic development. In this regard, Wei (1998) notes that studies conducted by various authors Studies conclude that the more corrupt a country is, the slower its growth.

In the context of ongoing political, social and economic transformations in a globalized and networked world, the effectiveness of public administration is a key factor in shaping strategic governance, ensuring institutional accountability and modernizing public institutions.

The quality of public administration, its effectiveness, and the right anti-corruption policies directly affect a country's economic performance and the well-being of its citizens. Although efficiency is often associated with private enterprises, it is equally important in the public sector, where the allocation of resources should be consistent with the goal of providing public goods and services. Over time, the involvement of the private sector in the provision of public services has reduced the monopoly of the public sector in this area, stimulating competition and increasing efficiency (Florina, 2017: 316).

Corruption is a deeply rooted phenomenon that affects all levels of government, posing a serious challenge to sustainable economic and social development. It includes activities such as bribery, influence peddling, and embezzlement, and in some cases, legally permitted practices such as lobbying (Roots of Corruption, 2017). Political corruption occurs when officials exploit their positions for personal gain. Historically, corruption has been viewed as a moral and social problem. for example, Socrates was sentenced to death in part for "bribery of the youth" (Encyclopedia Britannica). Recently, corruption has been linked to complex international networks, including financial institutions, that facilitate illegal activities (United States Agency for International Development report, 2022). Corruption not only undermines democratic institutions, but also erodes the moral fabric of society, leading to severe social consequences and reducing the international reputation of the country (Akhmetov, 2018: 118). There is a wide range of theories aimed at studying the factors influencing corruption. These factors can be of different nature and extent. However, it is worth

noting that corruption is a complex, multifaceted and multifactorial phenomenon, and therefore is not determined by a limited set of factors.

Theoretical and Methodological Foundations of the Studies of Corruption

Much attention has been paid in the professional literature to the question of what corruption is. To best understand it, we choose the following definition, which is based on many objective grounds: "the behavior of public officials that deviates from accepted norms in order to serve private ends" (Huntington 1989: 377). When looking at the literature on corruption we notice a difference between studies that put forward propositions about the causes of corruption (in other words, studies that theorize about the causes of corruption) and those that empirically try to establish the causes of corruption. The latter sort of studies is by far outnumbered.

In sociology, corruption is perceived as a pathological societal phenomenon that distorts interpersonal relationships. It functions as an informal regulatory system that coexists with official governance mechanisms, often emerging due to state inefficiency. Corrupt behavior among officials is thus defined as «informal, deviant behavior of the ruling elite, characterized by the illegitimate use of social resources» (Garaev, 2001: 47). From a political science perspective, corruption disrupts the political organization of society. It is closely linked to power struggles and is particularly prevalent during electoral processes. Maurice Duverger observed that political parties frequently use corruption to secure electoral victories, not only for personal enrichment but also to strengthen ties between the political elite and citizens (Duverger, 2000: 201). Hence, combating corruption requires strengthening political institutions, fostering civil society, and raising political awareness.

The conceptualization of corruption from the perspective of social sciences is not straightforward. This is because the term "corruption" can encompass a range of behaviors and practices that, depending on a particular set of values or cultural factors, may or may not be deemed morally or even legally reprehensible. In this sense, as pointed out by Andvig et al. (2000), the complexity of corruption lies in the fact that it has been viewed not only as a structural problem of politics or economics but also as a cultural and individual issue. Given these peculiarities surrounding corruption, numerous authors have sought to establish a more suitable concept for the phenomenon and its complexity. Holmes (2015) suggests that corruption, in its most traditional sense, is associated with moral impurity. However, the author acknowledges that, although the concept of corruption has changed over the centuries and varies according to each culture, it has been used to describe deviations from norms that may be considered improper.

Corruption has been a major issue in China, where the reliance on personal relationships has contributed to widespread unethical practices. Historian Keith Schoppa identified various forms of corruption in China, including bribery, embezzlement, nepotism, smuggling, and real estate fraud (Schoppa, 2020: 383). Addressing the challenges of arriving at a precise concept of corruption, Jain (2001), in a work organizing and systematizing empirical and theoretical studies on the subject, emphasizes that although defining corruption is not trivial, there is almost a consensus in the literature that it refers to acts in which public power is used for personal benefits, contrary to what norms and regulations establish.

Daniel Kaufman introduced the concept of «legal corruption» where those in power manipulate legislation to legalize unethical actions (Kaufmann & Pedro, 2005: 21-23).

The root causes of corruption include:
- Political monopolies and lack of competition.
- Weak democratic institutions and low political transparency.
- Excessive bureaucracy and inefficient administrative structures.
- Restricted press freedom and low economic liberalization.
- Ethnic divisions, group favoritism, and gender inequality.
- Poverty, political instability, and weak property rights.
- Influence from corrupt neighboring countries.
- Low levels of education and civic engagement.
- High unemployment and inadequate anti-corruption policies.

All these concepts, quite similar, focus on corruption from a perspective more oriented towards the actions of the public sector. Unsatisfactory results of corruption procedures can be found in any country of the world. For a long time, humanity has been trying to eliminate corruption; in some cases, it has gained both positive and negative experience. Each state has tried to develop its own effective system of measures that would minimize its negative consequences. The process of overcoming corruption is a function of the state governance system of all countries. There are several models of anti-corruption policy, of which two stand out, within the framework of which it was possible to introduce real anti-corruption potential. The first is the Singaporean or Asian model: it is characterized by strict control over officials and severe punishments. The second is the Swedish or Scandinavian model, when the main efforts are focused on the possibility of corruption itself. This is achieved through the elimination of restrictions in the economy, maximum publicity in state affairs and high ethical standards set for officials (Semenov, 2009: 4).

To effectively combat corruption, it is necessary to create an independent body that will be responsible for implementing anti-corruption policy (for example, the Singapore Corruption Investigation Bureau, which has political and functional independence). The next important factor is the remuneration of civil servants. High salaries do not guarantee that corruption will not occur, but they can significantly reduce the motivation to pay bribes. It is also necessary to introduce programs into the public administration system that will reduce direct contact between officials and citizens. It allowed citizens to monitor the progress of their applications to government officials via the Internet at any time of the day and from any place. This will make it possible to prevent unnecessary bureaucratic delays and biased discussions of ordinary applicants' cases, giving people the right to follow the entire process online (for example, the successful "OPEN" program to prevent corruption in South Korea) (Nelezenko, 2013: 58-71). As for the punishment, as in Finland, for example, serving a sentence for bribery seems strange from a national perspective. The maximum is four years in prison, but most cases end with a fine. Here, in addition to the fine, the official is subject to condemnation by citizens, against which the imprisonment may seem like a milder punishment (Aleksanyan and Aleksanyan 2024: 109-112; Semenov, 2009: 4). The examples of these countries are also important for understanding what methods may be most acceptable, depending on the cultural and national characteristics of the country.

Regarding the literature on corruption, Filgueiras (2008) highlights that, in the 20th century, studies on the subject can be defined based on two main agendas: first, developed from the 1950s onwards, from a functionalist perspective, which views corruption as an obstacle to modernization; and second, hegemonic in the social sciences from the 1990s onwards, based on rational choice theory, which suggests that corruption is related to rent-seeking behavior, where the individual preferences of political agents weigh more heavily as they seek to maximize their private income, within or outside the rules of conduct. The first of these currents, based on the so-called "modernization theory," relates corruption to underdevelopment. It argues that the phenomenon represents the malfunctioning of political system organizations, responsible for creating incentive systems that may lead to deviation. According to this approach, corruption would be an accepted practice in underdeveloped societies, given the low level of political institutionalization (Huntington, as cited in Filgueiras, 2009). The author further emphasizes that, for the functionalist current, corruption could even be useful for development since, if kept under control, it could be an alternative to promote modernization, as it could streamline bureaucracy, expedite the issuance of licenses and documents by the State, and improve the relationship between the public and private sectors, establishing an informal bond between bureaucrats and private investors.

Serra (2006) included in his analysis the relationships of corruption with five sociocultural variables, such as religion and ethnic-linguistic fragmentation, and identified that different religions have different effects on corruption and that there are indications, as identified by Treisman (2000), that Protestant countries are less corrupt. This new way of understanding what determines corruption has led to a fresh reflection on the strategies that should be used to reduce its incidence. Previously, as already observed, corruption was often perceived as a problem more closely related to values, traditions, and culture. It is now seen as a rational phenomenon, in which the agent weighs the cost, represented, for example, by the possibility of sanction, against the economic benefits.

Based on these definitions and typologies, the following sections will present approaches that will define anti-corruption mechanisms that will help reduce corruption risks. In this context, the study of the Italian example is quite interesting, despite the numerous problems it faces. The Republic of Armenia has made considerable progress in recent years in the context of the fight against corruption. The study of different models, and especially the Italian example, is quite interesting and useful, where the application of the above-mentioned models is necessary to achieve results.

Comparative Analysis: Italy and Armenia

Controlling corruption is not trivial. As corruption is a multifaceted and multicausal problem, strategies to reduce its incidence must address a series of dimensions. It is, therefore, a complex problem that consequently requires complex solutions. For this reason, it is not uncommon to encounter a series of dilemmas related to combating corruption. Anekiarico and Jacobs (1996) point out that another consequence of fighting corruption may be that governments become less effective and efficient, as many anti-corruption controls tend to reinforce bureaucratic pathologies. This is in keeping with the need to create anti-corruption systems. Corruption and crime are

global issues, though their prevalence varies by country. Data suggests corruption is on the rise worldwide. Governments allocate resources to control corruption, often under the umbrella of anti-corruption strategies (The Grand Challenge: Effective Anti-Corruption Measures in Projects, 2022). In the public administration system, anti-corruption efforts involve a range of policies, procedures, and oversight mechanisms. The most common tool is **monitoring**, carried out by law enforcement agencies such as the Ministry of Internal Affairs, State Security, the Prosecutor's Office, and Customs. Civil society and international organizations also play a vital role in ensuring transparency and accountability (Arzumanyan, 2018: 41).

Despite the establishment of a legal framework in Armenia, significant gaps remain, necessitating further reforms. The success of anti-corruption measures depends on legal mechanisms, institutional integrity, and a systematic approach to governance (Kumukov, 2019: 27; Khazanov, 2019: 65).

By comparing Italy and Armenia's anti-corruption efforts, we can identify best practices and tailor them to Armenia's specific needs. A comprehensive, well-structured approach will be essential in overcoming the entrenched culture of corruption. For example, the application of the Swedish and Singaporean models can be considered a useful experience for both Armenia and Italy, given their positive impact. An in-depth study and simultaneous application of these two models will serve as a basis for preventing corruption.

Anticorruption methodology in Italy

In the fight against corruption in Europe, the example of Italy is noteworthy. The fight against fascism in Italy, as well as in other European countries, initiated radical changes in domestic political structures, which became a guarantee for the transition from dictatorship to democracy. The first quarter of the post-war period was of great importance in the history of Italy: the old totalitarian structures were abolished, laying the foundation for the formation of more democratic institutions of state governance. The new Italy was born in the midst of a sharp struggle between the old and the new. In this context, structures were created in Italy to ensure the effectiveness of state governance, which over the years underwent numerous reforms, becoming the basis for the establishment of more democratic governance (Kalantaryan, 2022: 74-75).

The study of corruption risk management mechanisms in Italy is very interesting, because unlike other ancient European states, Italy has a fairly high level of corruption. Italy is one of the most corrupt countries in Western Europe and in 2024 ranked 52st in the world. In general, it can be noted that the Italian model of anti-corruption policy formation and implementation is considered to be partially effective. In fact, despite the fact that the 1990s in Italy were marked by an intensification of the fight against corruption in the state sector, it is still difficult to give an objective assessment of the situation there (The problems of corrupt governance in Italy, 2025).

The history of corruption in Italy, as well as the fight against it, can be divided into three stages: The first stage covers the period of the existence of the Roman state. Rome went through several periods of development: the royal period, the republican period, and the imperial period. Until the end of the Roman Republic (until the 2nd century BC), corruption as a phenomenon did not exist in Italy. The officials of that time did not embezzle state property, they were engaged in charity and built and

maintained it with their own means. It is important to understand that the absence of embezzlement of state property and other corruption crimes is explained not so much by the high moral qualities of officials or the presence of legal mechanisms aimed at combating corruption, but by the socio-economic relations that took place during that period, where the responsibility and other moral qualities of officials also played a certain role. The situation began to change dramatically in the 2nd century BC. This is due to the fact that during this period the Roman state began to possess enormous wealth, which was acquired during the wars of conquest. The growth of wealth affected the entire Roman society, as well as the civil servants who were part of this society. The changes, first of all, took place in the moral system of society, which was expressed in the transformation of attitudes towards corruption. Naturally, in response to the emergence of corruption phenomena, measures began to appear aimed at counteracting them. Such measures include «the prohibition of senators from simultaneously engaging in maritime trade, financial transactions and state contracts» (Mommsen, 2001: 422). However, these measures were extremely ineffective, as senators easily circumvented this prohibition through the use of proxies. In addition, legislative acts on wealth were adopted, the essence of which was to introduce a stricter tax regime for those things that were classified as «wealth» by law (Kuzovkov, 2010: 27).

A sharp increase in corruption crimes was observed especially in medieval Italy. It should be noted that the greatest increase in crimes of this nature occurred precisely during the period when Italy was part of the Eastern Roman Empire, that is, starting from 555. In the Middle Ages, monetary relations began to develop rapidly in the Eastern Roman Empire (Byzantium), the size of the state apparatus increased, and the branches of state power began to merge, which contradicted the principles of Roman law. The massive involvement of all strata of the population, including the nobility and clergy, in entrepreneurial activity led to changes not only in the social structure of society, which was reflected in the growth of the middle classes and political influence of the population, among which were wealthy merchants and artisans, but also in legal consciousness. And it was during this period that a fundamentally new understanding of corruption emerged as an antisocial phenomenon that permeates society as the basis for any deviation from the law (Gagen, 2009: 25). The consequence of this was that without judicial reforms it was impossible to overcome corruption, since the courts played the main role in this matter. For this purpose, three judicial reforms of the Palaeologus were implemented, which were of significant importance (1296, 1329, 1398) (Gagen, 2008: 47).

The next stage refers to a new period: at this time, corruption in Italy acquired a highly organized character: the state apparatus merged with organized crime, which led to the widespread penetration of corruption phenomena, including in the most important sectors of the country's economy. It should be noted that «the growth of organized mafia crime in Italy was characterized by a high level of criminal professionalism, a strictly hierarchical structure and a distribution of roles» (Berkov, 2012: 102). In other words, corruption essentially became high professionalism. Corruption in Italy is largely based on a system of relationships determined by the active participation of organized crime. Several mafioso groups operate in Italy, the Sicilian "Cosa Nostra", the Neapolitan "Cammorana", the Calabrian "Ndrangheta", the Apulian "Accra Corona Unita", etc., all of which are influential unofficial subjects of

public life. The mafia was able to achieve such a large influence due to a number of factors, including the weakness of the state, a certain skepticism of the population towards the law, and the elimination of the traditional value system and the development of capitalism. The mafia actually filled the gaps that arose during modernization and performed some of the functions of the state. As a result, by the end of the 19th century, the mafia was quite closely connected with the state, at first at the regional level, and after the Second World War at the national level (Lobin, 2006: 111-127).

Corruption and the dependence of public officials on criminal structures became so widespread that in 1992 the Italian government was forced to launch a special operation aimed at combating this social and legal phenomenon, called «Clean Hands». The initiator of this operation was the Milan prosecutor Antonio Di Pietro, who in 1992 arrested a member of the Italian Socialist Party for taking a bribe (Berkov, 2012: 102-104). In the early 1990s, a fairly close cooperation had been established between the economic and political spheres. Large organizations felt protected because they had close relations with the government and politicians, as well as the opportunity to influence decisions and protect their own interests. Political parties also felt protected, as they had constant financial, «moral» and power support from big business, which ensured the stability of the political system. Thus, a symbiotic situation was established in Italy, based on the illegitimate principle of relations between business and politics. In addition, the paternalistic type of state operating in Italy was distinguished by the latter's intensive participation in the country's economic activities. It not only directed the development of the economy, but also demonstrated a fairly high level of economic activity and was engaged in the redistribution of resources between commercial organizations, regions and individuals. The state, playing an active role in the economy, often rescued «friendly» organizations in case of financial difficulties. As a result, instead of improving the industry, the leaders of the organizations were wasting their efforts and resources on establishing unofficial relations with the political forces in power. This created a favorable environment for the development of corruption.

Let us give examples of a dream that received a great response at the time, where several high-ranking officials were exposed and convicted: in particular: «In early July 1994, a trial began in Milan, which became known as the «Trial of the First Republic» because of the large number of high-ranking politicians who were brought to justice. Thirty-two politicians were indicted, including party leaders and former ministers.» As a result of the operation, a large number of judges and politicians were convicted of corruption crimes, including even former prime ministers and former foreign ministers. 1,456 businessmen were also charged with other corruption-related crimes (Savchenko, 2015: 169). The development of corruption was also facilitated by the fact that during the years of the First Republic (1948-1994), even the application of democratic processes could not overturn the majority of the Italian political structures, since no political party could obtain a majority in parliament. This led to the need to form political coalitions and share political bonuses with other political parties. This also gives grounds to assume that during this period, political parties in Italy were not under the ideological influence, but rather under the influence of businessmen and politicians.

Despite the fact that the majority of the country's political forces were not inclined to actively fight corruption, the Italian government, under the pressure of certain circumstances, was forced to accept its negative consequences for society. Since the

1980s, efforts have been made to counter mafia groups and prevent their entry into state structures. It was a rather expensive initiative, both in terms of financial and human resources. The losses on both sides were significant. Already in the mid-1990s, thanks to the implementation of various measures, which, as mentioned above, was called the "Clean Hands" operation, numerous mafiosi of various ranks were sent to prison. In response, prosecutors and public figures were killed by mafia groups, with whose participation an attempt was made to prevent corruption risks. The result of all this was the loss of citizens' trust in political parties and politicians. The political structure of the First Republic could not withstand the long-term scandal and collapsed.

Already at the end of the 1990s, as a result of Constitutional reforms, significant positive changes were recorded: the Electoral Code was changed, state control was increased, the amount of state investments increased, etc. In some cases, the changes were simply astonishing, for example, the cost of one kilometer of metro construction became 57 percent cheaper, and the construction of a new international airport cost 59 percent less than planned, etc (Barbagli, 2003: 109-133). Italy has made significant progress in the fight against corruption, reforming its legislation, establishing oversight bodies and actively cooperating with international organizations, in particular GRECO. Membership of GRECO allows Italy to compare its anti-corruption strategies with the experience of other European countries and receive recommendations for improvement. The organization has paid particular attention to the problems of transparency in the Italian judicial system and the mechanisms for controlling the financing of political parties (EU cooperation with the Group of States against Corruption (GRECO): how to move towards full membership, 2021). The next important factor was the tightening of laws. For example, the anti-corruption law adopted in 2012 provides for stricter penalties for corruption, as well as obliges officials to declare their income and assets (The anti-corruption law in Italy, 2012). The National Anti-Corruption Authority (ANAC) plays a major role in anti-corruption efforts, overseeing transparency in state institutions. It also deals with the prevention of corruption risks in order to identify possible violations in the state system (The Italian National Anti-corruption Authority, 2012).

In Italian society, corruption was considered a common phenomenon for many years, and was approached with a kind of acquiescence by the elites and the middle classes. In particular, political parties often took advantage of this situation to gain support through corrupt deals instead of votes. Since the state often failed to combat corruption, society used this system in various ways, from finding a way to communicate with civil servants through official channels to corrupt deals. Thus, the presence of corruption was perceived as something "normal" in society, and some people even accepted it as something that had to be put up with in order to overcome the difficulties and problems that arose in everyday life (Jonathan, 2016: 88).

All this has hindered the modernization and development of the Italian public administration system, the result of which has been that major reforms have been implemented in recent years: restrictions on officials, that is, some public officials are prohibited from engaging in business during their term of office. Next, property confiscation, that is, income and property obtained as a result of corrupt transactions are subject to confiscation. Next, trials in short terms, this means that within the framework of reforms of the judicial system it is planned to speed up the examination of corruption cases, reducing delays in trials, etc.

Corruption risks, and anti-corruption methodology of Armenia

In countries in transition, including the Republic of Armenia, the presence of corruption risks is even more evident in the public administration system. Especially in post-Soviet countries, where there was a totalitarian form of government, after independence, overcoming corruption in these countries is progressing very slowly and not very effectively.

The fight against corruption in the Republic of Armenia has been carried out at the level of policies and strategies since 2001. In general, the Republic of Armenia has had four anti-corruption strategies with corresponding action plans, all of which have to some extent envisaged the completion and improvement of the anti-corruption institutional system, as well as the creation of new bodies: council, commission, committee, court, etc. The creation of the Anti-Corruption Committee can be considered one of the important results of the so-called Velvet Revolution that took place in Armenia in 2018 (Atanesyan, 2018). The provisions on the Anti-Corruption Committee, as well as other bodies of the anti-corruption institutional system: the Anti-Corruption Policy Council, the Corruption Prevention Commission, the Department of Supervision over the Investigation of Corruption Crimes of the Prosecutor General's Office of the Republic of Armenia, and the Specialized Anti-Corruption Court are enshrined in the Anti-Corruption Strategy of the Republic of Armenia for 2019-2022 (The Anti-Corruption Strategy of the Republic of Armenia, 2019-21).

According to Transparency International's 2013 Corruption Perceptions Index, Armenia ranks 94th out of 175 countries. According to civil society organizations, corruption is widespread in Armenia. The existence of corruption is also acknowledged by officials, but no serious steps are being taken to eliminate it (Corruption risk assessment in Armenian defense agencies, 2013). These and similar studies indicate that in almost all areas of public administration in the Republic of Armenia, despite some positive changes since independence, there are still many shortcomings in terms of overcoming corruption. For years, anti-corruption efforts in the Republic of Armenia have attempted to target the manifestations of corruption rather than the underlying causes of their occurrence. However, in the absence of effective management of corruption risks in the governance sector, a negative attitude is formed in the public perception and in relation to the services provided by the state, and an inadequate understanding of the results of individual works carried out. Corruption risk is equated with institutional vulnerability within the system or process, which can contribute to the development of corrupt practices. Corruption risk management is an essential and integral part of any corruption prevention strategy and integrity policy, enabling public and private sector organizations to identify weaknesses at management, structural, control and other levels that may contribute to corruption. It provides a risk-based framework that helps the organization develop corruption risk mitigation action plans that effectively minimize the organization's exposure to corruption risks. The need to introduce a corruption risk management system in public and private sector bodies is justified both by developments at the national, domestic level, and by international commitments undertaken by the Republic of Armenia («On amendments to the law «on the commission for the prevention of corruption», «on amendments to the law «on local self-government», 2019).

The process of establishing an anti-corruption system in the Republic of Armenia faces a number of fundamental challenges, which relate to the formation of the institutional structure, the uncertainty of legal regulations, as well as the need to ensure the independence of structures. Back at the beginning of the last decade, the RA government completed the anti-corruption policy, legislative and institutional frameworks. The motivation to strengthen public intolerance towards corruption, to have a country secured by the rule of law and guarantees of human rights protection, requires a firmly formulated will and determination to declare the fight against corruption as a priority. All of this became even more important in Armenia, especially with the change of government in 2018, where the newly formed government developed a new strategy for revealing corruption scandals.

As a result of the above-mentioned imperatives, on October 3, 2019, (anti-corruption strategy of the Republic of Armenia and its implementation program, 2019-2022) the Government of the Republic of Armenia approved the Anti-Corruption Strategy of the Republic of Armenia and the Action Plan for its Implementation for 2019-2022, the main goal of which was the consistent implementation of the conceptual assumptions and principles proclaimed by the Government of the Republic of Armenia in the field of combating corruption. Remaining committed to the implementation of the above-mentioned goals, the Government of the Republic of Armenia, within the framework of its 2021-2026 activity program, is determined to wage an uncompromising fight against corruption with the involvement of all stakeholders in order to finally eradicate all manifestations of corruption (Anti-Corruption Strategy of the Republic of Armenia, 2023-2026).

Already in this new situation, in November 2019, the Commission for the Prevention of Corruption was established as a specialized autonomous body for the prevention of corruption with appropriate guarantees of independence. As a result of the legislative amendments adopted in 2019-2022, the scope of competences and tools of this body have been significantly expanded, which is certainly a very positive development. In particular, as a result of the expansion of its powers, the Corruption Prevention Commission has been granted the authority to conduct integrity investigations in cases provided for by law, to verify the current financial activities of political parties, as well as annual property reports, to verify and analyze declarations submitted by members of political parties' governing bodies, and to analyze declarations within the framework of investigations into the confiscation of illegally acquired property. As a result of the expansion of its tools, the Corruption Prevention Commission has been granted legislative access to state databases, as well as financial information, including banking information, information on securities transactions, information constituting insurance secrecy, and credit information (The fight against corruption in the Republic of Armenia, 2019-22).

In October 2021, the Anti-Corruption Committee was established as an investigative body specialized in corruption crimes proceedings and with guarantees of independence, which organizes and conducts pre-trial criminal proceedings on corruption crimes. This committee was provided with a separate premises, independent budgetary financing, and the necessary tools to carry out its functions. This body carries out its activities based on the principle of independence, maintaining its political neutrality, transparency, and accountability to the public (Law of the RA on

the anti-corruption committee, 2021). The establishment of the committee is important, but the creation of the committee and the creation of a functional basis alone are not yet sufficient to make progress in the system. Evaluating these measures helps to understand how successful anti-corruption reforms have been, as well as what problems and challenges still exist that require attention and new solutions. It should be noted that as a result of the legislative changes made, some successes have been recorded, in particular:

- definition of virtue,
- introduction of morality verification mechanisms,
- situational declaration contribution (2024),
- launch of the electronic declaration system (2023),
- anti-corruption strategy implementation (2019-2022),
- expansion of the declaration system,
- legislative reforms (Law on property and income declaration of leading employees of government bodies of the Republic of Armenia, 2001).

The above-mentioned reforms aim to reduce the level of corruption, increase the transparency of state bodies and strengthen public trust. As a result, the performance of the 2019-2022 anti-corruption strategy was assessed at 80.2%: new anti-corruption structures have been created, integrity verification mechanisms have been introduced and the declaration system has been expanded. However, there are still challenges that require continuous reforms and oversight. For the effectiveness of anti-corruption policy, it is necessary to outline a clear vision of the institutional model for its implementation. The situation that developed after the so-called Velvet Revolution 2018 showed that the Armenian government is ready to fight corruption and achieve significant results. However, political will alone is not enough: it is necessary to ensure a systematic and institutional approach, as well as the maturity of society. The success of the fight against corruption largely depends on the existence of a stable and effective institutional system. To this end, it is necessary to ensure the independence of prevention and detection bodies, create effective mechanisms, and strengthen cooperation. It is necessary to continuously reform the legislative framework, simplify processes, and ensure the full independence and effectiveness of relevant structures. Only with a systematic approach and continuous demonstration of political will it be possible to form a stable and effective anti-corruption institutional system.

To increase the effectiveness of the fight against corruption, it is necessary not only to improve legal regulations, but also to expand the functions of the Corruption Prevention Commission. As a result of legislative amendments, new functions should be included in the scope of the commission's activities, which will contribute to the effective implementation of anti-corruption policy, strengthening public oversight, and ensuring transparency in public administration. Improving monitoring and control mechanisms, raising public awareness and fully implementing the country's anti-corruption policy are important conditions for the success of the country's fight against corruption. These changes will contribute to the effectiveness of state governance, increasing trust and reducing corruption risks, which in turn will ensure a stable and fair legal environment, contributing to democratic governance.

All these legislative changes are certainly important, but in Armenian society there is still a perception of corruption (as in Italy) that it is considered "normal" and some people even rebel against the use of anti-corruption norms.

The result of the legislative reforms was that some high-ranking officials (including the president) were convicted of abuse of office and corrupt practices. All this, of course, raised certain hopes in society for the anti-corruption policy of the country's leadership, but over time these hopes showed a certain tendency to decline, not due to the weakness of the legislative framework, but more due to the inconsistency and incompetence of the government. In this context, it is important to develop and implement a comprehensive strategy, which should not be a formality to please donors or the electorate, but rather create an effective framework for solving the identified problems. Our country is still far from being like Italy in terms of recording final positive results, this has both objective and subjective grounds, but thanks to political will and consistent work, we can very soon achieve the expected development prospects.

It should be noted that the institutional changes implemented in the Republic of Armenia to improve anti-corruption policy indicate a systematic and consistent approach to the fight against corruption. However, effectiveness depends not only on institutional reforms, but also on their practical implementation, strengthening of control mechanisms, and the maturity and involvement of society. The success of the fight against corruption depends on continuous political will, proper allocation of resources, and a consistent approach to anti-corruption measures.

Conclusion

Corruption is a global phenomenon that affects modern democracies. Therefore, an analysis of its determinants is essential for its proper understanding. While corruption is a rather complex phenomenon, there is strong evidence that it is linked to factors of an individual, cultural and institutional nature. It is therefore important that such factors are widely taken into account in the development of strategies to prevent and combat it, improve its control, and thus reduce its prevalence.

Considering the culture of corruption as a key issue in anti-corruption methodology, we came to the conclusion that, by undermining public trust in public institutions, corruption hinders the development of any country. It is particularly harmful to the development of countries in the developing world, depriving them of such important capital. Resources obtained through corruption are often diverted to domestic and political influence, thereby weakening democratic institutions and further spreading corruption in this vicious circle. Corruption is an obstacle to development, undermines the security of modern societies and reduces trust in public institutions. Governments have at their disposal a wide range of tools to reduce corruption: strengthening good governance, improving transparency and accountability, etc.

In this context, analyzing the examples of anti-corruption governance mechanisms in Italy and Armenia, it became clear that despite the different levels of corruption prevalence, both countries face similar challenges related to combating corruption schemes, increasing transparency in public administration, and strengthening the role of civil society. The Italian experience shows that the combination of a strong law enforcement system, an independent judiciary, and public oversight can provide significant anti-corruption results. For Armenia, it is important not only to implement legislative reforms, but also to implement them in practice, ensure transparency in the administrative system, and create an anti-corruption culture. To this end, it is necessary

to continuously develop anti-corruption institutions, strengthen public oversight, and apply successful international experience. The effectiveness of the fight against corruption also depends on raising public awareness, strengthening the accountability of state bodies, and introducing new technologies. The development of e-governance, digital accountability, and transparent transaction mechanisms can significantly reduce corruption risks and promote the efficiency of public administration. In addition, it is necessary to activate international cooperation and apply the experience of global anti-corruption structures (for example, Italy is not only a member of GRECO, but also actively cooperates with organizations such as the European Union and the United Nations to participate in global initiatives to combat corruption). In this context, not only national legislative reforms are important for Armenia, but also the introduction of mechanisms in line with international standards. The fight against corruption should be a continuous and systematic process that includes all layers of society, law enforcement agencies, independent organizations and the media.

The examples of the two countries showed that the fight against corruption is conditioned by historical, political, socio-economic and cultural factors. Italy, having a long history, has over time formed strict anti-corruption management measures. The «Clean Hands» operation was an important stage in the fight against corruption, as a result of which many high-ranking officials and businessmen were brought to justice, and a multi-layered anti-corruption system operates there. The fight against corruption in Armenia is just developing, and a number of reforms have been implemented in recent years, including the formation of anti-corruption bodies and legislative reforms. However, in our case, anti-corruption policy is still in the process of formation, which does not have the strengthened mechanisms typical of Italy. Steps aimed at increasing transparency are making progress, but in practice, systemic problems are still observed, such as issues of judicial independence, corruption risks in the business environment, and accountability gaps within the state apparatus.

Italy recognizes the role of education in the fight against corruption. Public awareness campaigns are being conducted in this direction, especially among young people, so that the future generation realizes the importance of honest and responsible behavior.

Taking all this into account:
- Armenia should strengthen the role of independent anti-corruption bodies, ensuring their full operational independence from political interference,
- should strengthen the integrity of the law enforcement and judicial system, including increasing the impartiality of judges and prosecutors and reducing political influence,
- should toughen the punishment for corruption crimes, including the introduction of property confiscation mechanisms,
- should promote public oversight and participation, as well as the development of citizen engagement mechanisms and the expansion of the role of civil society,
- should establish a decent salary for public officials, reducing the incentives for bribery, etc.

In general, we must emphasize that the effectiveness of anti-corruption governance depends not only on legal regulations, but also on the active participation of society in the process, the accountability of state bodies, and the political will to fight corruption.

Only a consistent and long-term strategic approach will ensure real and sustainable changes, reducing corruption and strengthening democratic institutions. Our conclusion is that, in addition to the abuse of economic and discretionary power, which are the main causes of corruption, the low probability of sanctions may also contribute to the growth of corruption. Therefore, this variable is closely related to the mechanisms of control and punishment of potential perpetrators. The system of sanctions, combined with the presence of institutional controls, are factors that can reduce the prevalence of the phenomenon. The legal apparatus divides the state into branches that not only regulate the behavior of bureaucrats to prevent personal interests from trumping the public interest, but also control the degree of discretion in their actions. The concept of accountability is fundamental to the exercise of democracy, as it establishes that governments should be scrutinized to ensure that there are no deviations in the management of public affairs. Thus, transparent procedures, good audit strategies, and clear rules on ethical behavior, among other aspects, will play an important role in reducing the frequency of the phenomenon

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