

WHEN HEALTH IS AFFECTED BY CORRUPTION

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Health is one's most precious and at the same time most easy to lose treasure; and yet it is one's worst guarded treasure.

Guillaume Victor Émile Augier,
French playwright and poet
(b. 1820 – d. 1889)

Summary

This paper emphasizes the most important features of corruption acting as a disease, its interaction with the official economy, the way this complex and multistructural phenomenon develops, as well as the consequences of ignoring this harmful phenomenon. In fact, considering the way things happen, there is an aggressive act on the state and the honest citizen; thus nowadays there is a deeper inequity in terms of income and living conditions. Ignoring such a phenomenon leads to a deeper inequity, which seems to be one of the most current and disturbing issues with consequences on the social development.

The gap between incomes grows bigger every year, according to statistics, in almost all the countries in the world, but mostly in the former communist countries; there are some very rich person as opposed to most of the citizens with lower income; it is one of the reasons why people are unhappy and accordingly they become distrustful, selfish, greedy and social chaos appears. The way chosen to control this inequity makes people feel nostalgia for the past times, like the communist system that seemed to be able to control the situation; in fact it is proved to have failed. One of the systems proving these inequities is the health system, where citizens interact with the state, and where the poor cannot benefit from basic proper health assistance, whereas the rich get special, different treatment; this causes increased social tensions. It has been a system with continuous increasing funding but at the same time it has failed to deal with the health of the population; various failures occur all the time, some are very serious, and media presents tragic cases that have not been solved by the system. It is known that the individual as the bearer of labor services is of particular importance in an economy; the population size at a given time and all the changes depend on key demographic processes (birth and death rates; the development of these elements represents the natural increase of population) under social and economic factors, such as life span and life expectancy, overall health, living standards, networking and spending on education and expenditures on health preservation.

*The serious phenomenon of corruption tends to become visible everywhere, in every circumstance and it is perceived as becoming an increasing aggression on the citizen; it is a cost that must be permanently considered, which is an additional stress. Eventually the effect translates in amounts that never reach the general consolidated budget or amounts that are ineffectively spent, which spread all over the health system and economy; the major result is that the state loses track of important resources of the budget generating lack of confidence both in the public health system and economy. The consequences are serious and they cannot lead to providing a decent living or promoting a climate of social peace. Permanent limitation of this phenomenon in the health system has a major importance in the economic and social development of the country as **the quality of labor** is closely interrelated on the one hand with overall health and, on the other hand both with the level of general education and training - an expression of the efforts of the individual, family, businesses and society as a whole.*

The general health of the population is affected when corruption affects the health system and the consequences are visible in the economic and social development of the country.

Keywords: health, freedom, development, confidence, economic crisis, corruption.

1. Introduction

When analyzing the evolution of human society from ancient times to the present day one finds out that corruption is not a new element; it occurs not only in developing societies, but it represents a permanent danger to any economy; it is a constant of human existence for it manifests itself where power is exercised.

Corruption in Romania has constantly preoccupied our society undergoing a long process of transition from a centralized economy, existing until the end of 1989, to the market economy, which is still an evolving process nowadays.

Professor Ph. D. H.C. Valeriu Ioan - Franc shows in the reason for the editor's opinion on "Corruption in Transition Economies"¹ (Matei, 2013) that corruption is a topic of large interest. He emphasizes that "People have been talking about corruption from the beginning of the world and people will write about it for the duration of the world. There have been discussions about the effects of corruption during the transition from one system to another or about parts of it undergoing special conditions as well. The works devoted to the *transition from flat* – i.e. deep centralized economy to *market*, namely the self adjustment and free building based on initiative, entrepreneurship and profit earned as a reward for the risk free assumed are less and less frequent and poorly articulated than the first ones. Therefore people wrote less. The reasons are various, but the main one is

¹ Matei, Adrian-Ducu (2013) – Corruption in Transition Economies, Bucharest, Expert Printing House, 2013.

that the transition from plan to market does not have its own articulated and perennial literature... ".

After the transition to the market economy after the changes in December 1989 a number of negative phenomena such as corruption, underground economy and tax evasion appeared shyly at the beginning, but they developed subsequently; this time the phenomena are complex and undermine the credibility of the country in the economic, monetary and financial relations at an international level. At the same time there is a negative influence on the international borrowing costs, ultimately affecting the economic and social development; this means that citizens bear the consequences by having low standards of living.

The fight against these negative phenomena will not be an easy one, but with perseverance one can achieve encouraging results that will restore confidence in the principles and values that will be placed on their natural place; only then good results will be seen as gains that citizens will be able to feel.

Corruption usually occurs amid development issues and it turns into situations of transition of society and economy from one form of organization to another, indicating the existence of malfunctions. What is even worse is when political corruption meets the bureaucratic corruption; they are both visible and dangerous when supported by specific conditions of political competition, slow and uneven economic development of an underdeveloped civil society not mature enough.

So political and bureaucratic corruption have slightly different features, but both are in fact serious cases that become extremely destructive phenomena when combined and when they meet as organized, pervasive and monopolistic entities.

Corruption is a destructive disease that can be found in organized form when there is an internal coordination, transmission and exchange of information and benefits. It facilitates the existence of domestic economy, which is not always visible; it links the leaders to the performers and it is known as the informal economy, black or underground economy.

Corruption in a country can have a very wide range of distribution, acting upon sub-levels, so there is little alternative to approach the issue of corrupt officials; thus is how corruption becomes omnipresent.

Bureaucratic corruption is a form of corruption that can be found everywhere, mainly when citizens interact with government when applying for permits, licenses, certificates, approvals; it is specific for countries and economies moving from a system of organization to another, namely in periods of transition.

A particular form of corruption is the one affecting the health system; indifference and lack of action affect one's ability to work, the right to life and, even worse, they seriously jeopardize the ability of economic and social development of the country, given that the work resource is the active and decisive factor of production.

Corruption in general, but especially in healthcare has to be diminished so that labor resource can be of good quality and enough in terms of quantity.

2. Corruption

Corruption is not a new element, it has existed since the ancient times as a complex, multi-structural, multidimensional economic, social and political phenomenon, whose complexity is determined by various factors, which can be grouped into: economic, institutional, legal, political, social, educational and moral.

Economic causes lie in: the increased cost of living, with a tendency of continuous growth; degradation of the economy and, as a result, the impoverishment of the population; low wages paid late to the civil servants; unsustainable state budget; over-regulating the private sector.

A note should be made regarding the phenomenon of over-regulation by laws, namely that excessive legal regulations do nothing else but to legitimize some of those actions which generate corruption; this leads to situations in which the laws issued restrict competition and free market access for all participants, generating corruption itself through these laws; the beneficiaries of these laws legitimize their actions even through the legal provisions themselves.

The institutional causes mainly include: flawed personnel policy; promoting the incompetent and corrupt on key positions; the lack of transparency in central government and local law enforcement agencies; excessive freedom given to decision makers; little possibility of exposing the corrupt persons; law enforcement insufficiently equipped with technical means; lack of human resources, logistics and effective tactics.

The legal causes are the gaps in the legislation, the lack of effective mechanisms for its implementation.

Political causes are: lack of political will and responsibility; the existence of internal and external factors that impose group interests when taking decisions; errors in the process of economic and social reforms; unfair political competition; traffic influence on the media and law enforcement, directing funds to media trusts so as not to present the correct data.

Social causes are related to culture, mentality, traditions, heritage of corrupt bodies of law; they include the following: disintegration and demoralization of society; erosion of ethical values; insufficient information to civil society; civic apathy and passivity; public tolerance; social polarization; dependence on mass media.

The many causes of corruption determine the diversity of the affected fields and the complexity of the actions needed to prevent and combat this phenomenon.

The educational and moral reasons related to culture, education, mentality, traditions, heritage bodies of corrupt power and law, family and educational institutions; they consist of: disintegration and demoralization of society; erosion of ethical and moral values.

The severity of this negative phenomenon is given by the **consequences of corruption**, and as it is shown by the official statistics and by those presented by nongovernmental organizations in the field, but especially as it is shown by the scientific research results, socio-criminology, law enforcement information, data in

the judicial statistics and media; the conclusion is that corruption has affected important areas such as politics and institutions, economy, the judicial field and law, training and education, social and health assistance, investments and international trade; state authority is severely undermined, as citizens lose confidence in state institutions.

This phenomenon also generates tax evasion due to the fact that honest citizens or traders are not motivated to pay taxes anymore, considering that public funds constituted as special funds and sources of budget is spent badly and ineffective.

If we were to notice what actually happens in society, we would be able to seize the economic impact of corruption that manifests itself in various ways.

Bureaucratic exaggeration manifested by postponement of documents and decision-making, the state's inability to provide security to the manufacturers, lobbying, protectionism, intercession, unfair competition, excessive state regulations and controls that affect the mechanisms of market economy and free competition, deterring potential investors and entrepreneurial initiative, lead to an increase in the cost of public projects, the decrease of economic efficiency, increased tax evasion, the reduction of payments to the budget and the development of underground economy.

Functional, political and moral degradation of central and local public authorities, which is a result of the expansion of political corruption by reducing transparent and responsible political competence, the impoverishment of population and the increase of social tension are some of the socio-political effects of corruption.

The effects of corruption in the activity of the executive bodies are: low quality of public administration, a system of informal decisions, strong ties between organized crime, public servants and corrupt politicians and others.

The effects of corruption that affect the international relations are major; they consist of incompetent, irresponsible, provocative, subjective and conventional behavior of the persons occupying positions of responsibility, which, in dealing with foreign partners, promote mainly personal and corporate interests instead of national interests, which irreparably undermines the country's image and credibility in its capacity as a partner in international relations.

An extended level of corruption affects savings, investment, economic growth and development¹ (Paolo Mauro) as well as the degree of freedom.

Of course there are some **differences in terms of corruption** and an assessment based on its aggressiveness; we could present corruption under its less serious or severe form.

In some countries, corruption is not very serious (Denmark, Norway, Canada) and its opponents benefit from real options. Resistance against corruption is not only based on fear of sanctions, but also on a set of rules and traditions, education, legitimately shared, from economics and politics. These opportunities

¹ Mauro, Paolo (1997) – *The Effect of Corruption on Growth, Investment, and Government Expenditure: A Cross-Country Analysis*. In Kimberly A. Elliot, ed., *Corruption and The Global Economy*. Washington, D.C.: Institute for International Economy.

are, once again, political and economic and powerful enough to use money in order to buy political power and use it in order to get money and control, as Samuel Huntington¹ (1986) and Michael Johnston² (1997) point out.

3. Health And Its Role In Providing Quality Work Resources For Economy

Our vision is that we face an opportunity that has to be rendered profitable in our society, which is fighting against corruption in our country; we begin our detailed research on this phenomenon by including the health system, which is one of areas that a nation must consider a priority, as a healthy nation can diligently work in order to achieve results that bring prosperity. The organization and the beneficial channeling of the energy used in this battle will bring benefits for a long time, if we understand that we have to transform energy into a war against this disease and not to improve our image.

This disease has and will always exist, because it is part of human nature, but it grows and develops if the individual and society provide favorable environment and conditions. We will have to continually try to treat this disease, make efforts to prevent and eradicate it by destroying its supportive environment. I have never lacked optimism while learning about different situations where corruption has reached much higher levels than in our country and seeing the successful actions of individuals adherent of freedom and social development, such as economic recovery, triggering healthy mechanisms of economy such as free market access, competition, production of goods and services in terms of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

It is very important to promote such people who can transform situations of corruption, apparently hopeless into the catalysts of successful reforms. There are many highly trained young people who have the necessary strength and experienced people having special qualities, which the young ones can ask for advice; they can do wonders, using this privilege that is using one's ability to promote the principles of ethics and morality in their fields.

Corruption Affects The Health System As Well

We live in terrible times, when corruption attacks the health system itself, hardly a month passes and we find out about other cases, even in the health system, the one that should provide the support for citizens to restore their ability to spare no effort in order to work, enjoy life and its benefits.

¹ Huntington, Samuel (1968) – *Political Order in Changing Societies*. New Haven, Conn. Yale University Press.

² Johnston, Michael (1997) – *Public Officials, Private Interests and Sustainable Democracy: Connections between Politics and Corruptions*. In Kimberly A. Elliot, ed., *Corruption and The Global Economy*. Washington, D.C.: Institute for International Economy.

The effects of corruption limit the acquisition of the necessary goods and services, as well as the provision of the social development of improving the quality of living standards, ensuring a better life for the new generation. The reduction of free access to guaranteed healthcare, the increased number of people-victims of this phenomenon and later a pessimistic public perception of society towards the performance of the health system are some of the consequences of corruption acting upon the health system.

In reality there is no longer optimal public health assistance as an organized effort of society to protect and promote health of the citizens.

Public health care is a component of the public health system; public health care should be done by all the political and legislative measures, programs and strategies to the determinants of health and by organizing institutions with a view to fundraise the necessary amounts in better conditions, restricting the informal elements, tax evasion and providing all necessary services, as well as using funds in terms of economy, efficiency and effectiveness. This may provide public health assistance order summary in health promotion and disease prevention and quality of life. Thus a public health system that can aim to provide health within healthy communities can be ensured.

In reality things are far from satisfactory, especially since although funding is increasing, tax evasion and the informal are and corruption in this field are also increasing; the quality of health insurance has not been proportionally increased in spite of the increase in health budgets as shown in the Table. 1 Evolution of the National Health Insurance Funds budgets for the period 2004 to 2014; even worse, there are a lot of cases reported by the media and other tragic situations of mishaps of patients through healthcare and hospitals in Romania.

Table no. 1

The evolution of National Health Insurance Funds between 2004 - 2014

Euro, thousand million

2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
1,76	2,49	3	3,56	4,17	3,61	4,08	4,12	4,39	5,2	5,12

Source: The National Health Insurance House, author's own analysis

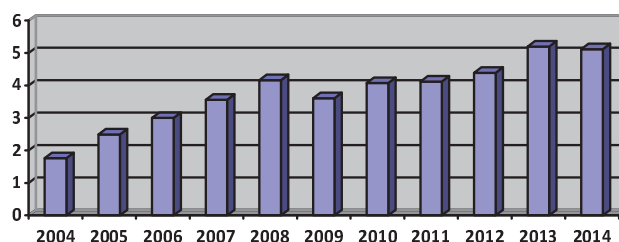


Figure no. 1 – The Budget For The National Health Insurance House
The evolution of National Health Insurance Funds between 2004 – 2014

This is highlighted in the **European Commission Report on Corruption in the EU Countries**¹ (EC Report on Corruption, 2014) that the European Commission released on February 3rd, 2014; it is the first report on corruption conducted throughout the European Union. At the same time there were released the results of the 2014 Eurobarometer report 2014, whose results correspond to those of the Global Corruption Barometer released by Transparency International last year. The analysis of the two instruments shows that a percentage of about 65%, which represents 2 out of 3 Romanians, believe that corruption has increased lately in Romania, compared to 56 %, which is the average of the EU countries. There is a note in the Report regarding corruption in the health system; it is estimated that *"informal payments are widespread in the Romanian health system. Low salaries of doctors and medical staff in the public sector make it more difficult to effectively address this issue."*

Such a phenomenon is revealed by the Special Eurobarometer 2013 on corruption² (Special Eurobarometer, 2014), showing that 28 % of the Romanian respondents who used the services of public medical institutions last year had to make an additional payment or give a gift or donation in addition to official fees. It is estimated that this is the highest percentage in the EU, well above the EU average of 5 %. At the same time it highlights the fact that half of the respondents (the highest percentage in the EU, compared to the EU average of 19 %) felt the need to make an additional payment or provide a gift before medical care. There are references to a study conducted locally³ in 2011 showing that only 33 % of respondents believed that informal payments in the health system could be reduced through co-payments, while 83 % felt that medical staff is poorly paid and claimed that this is a fundamental cause for corruption in this field.

The fact that corruption of the health system is omnipresent is highlighted by a number of studies and surveys such as ASSPRO EEC, the European collaborative research project (2008-2013) where informal payments in six countries⁴ were studied; the results show that such payments were made by 55% of beneficiaries in outpatient care and 72% of recipients of care hospitalized in Romania⁵. It is also shown that 81% of respondents would have preferred a conversion of current payments to a more formal payments system, while 54% would prefer to use private services instead of paying bribes. Another finding is that 34 % of respondents considered informal payment to be inevitable.

¹ http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/organized-crime-and-human-trafficking/corruption/anti-corruption-report/docs/2014_acr_romania_chapter_ro.pdf

² Special Eurobarometer 397 in 2013, released in February 2014 - European Commission „**Special Eurobarometer 397 / Wave EB79.1 – TNS Opinion & Social**” - http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_397_en.pdf.

³ The Romanian Institute for Evaluation And Strategy regarding the general view regarding health in Romania (RIES) 2011.

⁴ Poland, Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria, Lithuania and Ukraine

⁵ 20-35 % of them had to borrow money in order to be able to pay, while one third of the patients did not see the doctor due to the lack of money

According to another research conducted by INSCOP Research for the "Adevarul" newspaper¹, corruption in health tops, so that 78.1% of respondents believe that the medical system is badly and very badly affected by corruption - "Public Opinion Barometer – The Truth about Romania".

If one were to identify the main directions of corruption phenomena in the health system, it would be appropriate to bring up the fact that it is found on both sides of the budget, both on the revenue side and the expenditure side, affecting patients and doctors, population in general.

An analysis of corruption in health care cannot rule out the way in which The National Health Care Insurance Unique Fund achieves the income; in most of the cases there is tax evasion and the incomes are getting lower.

This is one of the consequences of the lack of proper control from the state; the control is particularly ineffective on fighting against undeclared work, working with no legal documents, which is done both by employers but also by the tax payers allowing such behavior.

The phenomenon of undeclared work, which means hiding the wage expenses by companies while hiding the income of some employees so as not to pay contributions to The National Health Care Insurance Unique Fund, creates the premises of the development and perpetuation of underground economy, the informal economy, with negative effects on the health budget.

This phenomenon often occurs with the participation of state officials, who often do not do it for free, thus making the first step towards bureaucratic and administrative corruption.

As the Romanian Court of Accounts appreciates in the Summary on the Audit Report Concluded with the National Agency for Fiscal Administration (NAFA) - *Performance Audit on Tax Collection Due To Public Budget For 2007-2010*, posted on the institution

website² "tax evasion is a phenomenon quite extended and generalized in some sectors of the national economy; a key role in preventing and fighting it is that of NAFA control bodies (territorial and central tax audit departments, Financial Guard, customs inspection bodies, General Directorate of the Public Finances, etc.). "

Considering the estimates of the Ministry of Finance (National Prognosis Commission, the National Institute of Statistics) that appreciates an underground economy in Romania of about 16-18%, but also taking into account the estimates of international research and specialists etc. indicating an underground economy of

¹ The report can be found at http://www.curteadeconturi.ro/sites/ccr/RO/Publicatii/Documente%20publice/Rapoarte_de_audit/Finante_publice/finante7.pdf

² The study was conducted between May 28 to June 3, 2013 on 1,055 persons, representative of the Romanian population 18 years and over 18 years. MPE data is $\pm 3\%$ at a confidence level of 95%; http://adevarul.ro/news/societate/infografie-adevarul-despre-romania-sondaj-romanii-cred-sanatatea-vama-cele-mai-corupte-1_51c05e68c7b855ff56a395af The Raport can be found at http://www.curteadeconturi.ro/sites/ccr/RO/Publicatii/Documente%20publice/Rapoarte_de_audit/Finante_publice/finante7.pdf

about 28.4% ~ 30%, as detailed in Annex. 1 *Size and Development of the Shadow Economy of 31 European Countries and five other OECD from 2003 to 2013: A Further Decline* by Friedrich Schneider¹ and other estimates that are higher (in some cases the estimates reach 35% -40%) one can appreciate, as the methodologies used are very different, that the limit of 28.4% - 30% is more reliable. The Court of Accounts conducted a simulated calculation of the revenues collected by NAFA in 2010 in order to estimate the impact of NAFA performance increase in the budget revenues economy:

Tabel nr. 2

Indicator	Case 1 (underground economy ~17%)	Case 2 (underground economy ~ 30%)
The weight of taxed economy in GDP	83%	70%
The weight of underground economy in GDP	17%	30%
Estimate – uncollected taxes from underground economy (% GDP)	5,68%	11,88%
Estimate - uncollected taxes from underground economy - RON	29,2 mld. Lei	60,9 mld. Lei
Estimate - uncollected taxes from underground economy - EUR	6,9 mld. Euro	14,5 mld. Euro

Source : **Romanian Court of Accounts** - Summary On The Audit Report Concluded With The National Agency for Fiscal Administration (NAFA) - *Performance Audit On Tax Collection Due To Public Budget For 2007-2010*, posted on the institution website at:
http://www.curteadeconturi.ro/sites/ccr/RO/Publicatii/Documente%20publice/Raport_de_audit/Finante_publice/finante7.pdf

The main directions of corruption regarding expenditures from the National Fund for Health Insurance are those with the procurement of medical equipment or purchases at inflated prices, or the purchase of unnecessary equipment, or the purchase of medicines and medical supplies at inflated prices with commissions earned by purchasers, current and capital exaggerated repair costs or which have not been done in reality.

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Another area is that of defrauding the amounts reimbursed by the National Fund for health insurance, that is the deduction of transactions which have never happened in reality, recording some operations while other are actually done, or lately deducting medical services to deceased persons or deducting medical services performed abroad on uninsured individuals¹ as reported by the media, the complicity of medical staff and patients, but also the indecent salaries paid to health professionals.

4. Conclusions and suggestions

To summarize, we have identified a number of areas that are affected by the phenomenon of tax evasion, the underground economy and corruption related to income and expenditure budget of the National Health Insurance as part of the general consolidated budget.

They concern illegal work and have consequences in reducing budgetary revenues resulting lack of funds to financing health care units; this is shown by the inability of medical care units to provide quality healthcare to citizens.

Regarding the expenditure of this fund, we have identified above the areas affected by corruption, namely procurement exaggerated prices or unnecessary procurement or poorly done current or capital works or even not done at all, or deducting medical services for the deceased or the uninsured.

Given the truth and actuality of thought of the illustrious French playwright and poet from the beginning of this paper - *“Health is ones most precious and at the same time easiest to lose treasure; and yet it is one’s worst guarded treasure.”* - altogether with the facts mentioned above, we have some proposals meant to promote a treatment, which is participating in the reduction of negative phenomena caused by the disease of corruption that has been affecting the Romanian health system.

In our opinion the regulations imposed by the state on tax policies should be reviewed and reconsidered, as follows:

- Collection level of public financial resources;
- Allocation and use of budgetary expenditure;

At the same time there should be considered a reduction of the tax burden by reducing the categories of taxes, especially those concerning labor cost.

Another suggestion concerns national cooperation regarding the interconnection of databases with information of the deceased, the insured and the retired who receive money so as to avoid the phenomenon of defrauding health funds.

¹ Ziarul Financiar, 7th February 2014 - National Fund for Health Insurance Insurance was damaged in 2012 by over 39 million lei for various irregularities including prescriptions issued in the name of the deceased and settlement services performed abroad for the benefit of the unsecured; the information used from the public 2012 Court document stating that damage to the FNUASS budget was 39.052 million lei, posted at <http://www.zf.ro/zf-news/decontari-pentru-decedati-sau-neasigurati-pagube-de-pestre-39-mil-lei-la-fnuass-in-2012-12040365>.

There should also be measures that activate one's self-conscience or fiscal ethics, such as citizens' attitude towards the state.

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*** Raportul Comisiei Europene asupra corupției din țările membre ale UE, 2014 - http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/organized-crime-and-human-trafficking/corruption/anti-corruption-report/docs/2014_acr_romania_chapter_ro.pdf

*** European Commission „Special Eurobarometer 397 / Wave EB79.1 – TNS Opinion & Social” - http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_397_en.pdf

