

Alternative options for solving the problem of corruption through the activities of NGOs: A case study of Slovakia

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Abstract

The degree of enforcement of political accountability at all levels of government affects the level of corruption. Active civil society shaping public opinion puts pressure on politicians to act responsibly and thus reduces the risk of corrupt practices. Increasing political responsibility is possible through the activities of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as external actors in public policy. The aim of the study is to point out the possibilities of solving the problem of corruption through the anti-corruption NGOs in Slovakia. The research focuses on case studies of anti-corruption NGO activities focusing on mitigating levels of corruption. The selected NGOs are Against Corruption and Stop Corruption as two main civil society actors fighting corruption in Slovakia. The main method used is the case study method to map the complex activities of the two NGOs that support reducing the incidence of corruption.

Keywords

corruption; NGOs; case study; Slovakia

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Introduction

The occurrence of corruption in the public sector is an issue that negatively affects society located in the affected country. Each country has a different level of corruption, and more countries affected by corruption must also make more efforts to mitigate it. Large-scale corruption has implications for the political systems of countries, which is why organizations that are independent are important. These can be, for example, non-governmental organizations, civic associations, or foundations (Rotberg, 2017).

One important measure was the 2005 UN Convention against Corruption, which helped anchor anti-corruption agencies as a primary tool in the global fight against corruption. The subject of the research is the activity of anti-corruption non-governmental organizations as actors of public policy in solving the problem of corruption. Widespread corruption networks complicate the situation for NGOs who want to interfere and stop unfair processes. Thus, corrupt actors seek to weaken anti-corruption organizations by undermining their credibility, using various laws, misinformation, and in some cases through violence and blackmail (Broschi, 2017; Huntington, 1968; Merton, 1968; Offe, 2004; Becker and Stigler, 1974; Andvig et al., 2000). For such organizations, therefore, a dilemma arises as to whether they can withstand the onslaught and continue to carry out their activities effectively or reduce their efforts, or reorient them to less conflicting issues, which may give the impression of timidity and bias. The result is a reduction in support and credibility from opposition political parties, original sponsors, and the public in the country.

However, it cannot be denied that NGOs play an important role in the fight against corruption (DeSousa et al., 2012, Sampson, 2010, Helmer & Deming, 2011, Di Puccio, 2010). In the context of Central and Eastern Europe, the development of NGOs was managed by socialism (only state-controlled associations were allowed and citizens' associations were banned), so the formation of organizations to address the issue of corruption was slower and had specific characteristics defined by this context (Schmidt, 2007, Remišová & Lašáková, 2018, Pawelke, 2010). This was the motivation for processing this article. Important non-governmental organizations in the Slovak Republic include the civic association *Proti korupcii* (Against Corruption) and the *Nadácia Zastavme korupciu* (Stop Corruption Foundation). The aim of the article is to point out the possibilities of solving the problem of corruption through the activities of anti-corruption NGOs as actors in public policy. Using the implementation of the case study method, we analyze the activities of these selected anti-corruption NGOs in Slovakia.

Solution to corruption - theoretical basis

Government anti-corruption agencies

Anti-corruption agencies are organizations supported by state bodies that focus on exposing corruption such as the abuse of power by public officials for private gain. Problems of corrupt practices also concern bribes or ethical violations such as conflicts of interest, systemic corruption such as regulatory removals, or procurement processes prone to abuse (OECD, 2013). Regardless of the jurisdiction involved, anti-corruption agencies act as 'detectors' of undue influence over the state for personal interests. Pioneering anti-corruption institutions were established much earlier: the New York City Department of Investigation was established in 1873, the Singapore Corruption Practices Investigation Bureau was founded in 1952, the Hong Kong ICAC has been in operation since 1974.

During the 21st century, most countries have established or commissioned corruption monitoring agencies, also under international pressure. Proponents have supported anti-corruption agencies through agreements and treaties, such as the 2005 United Nations Convention against

Corruption, OECD, or Transparency International (De Sousa, 2010). Expectations regarding the outputs of the work of anti-corruption agencies are not easy to meet automatically. Problems faced by these organizations include: lack of financial resources, internal 'scandals', poor management, political cooperation and public distrust (Heilbrunn, 2004; Meagher, 2004; De Sousa, 2010; Andvig, Moene, 1990; Balaam, Dillam, 2018). However, some anti-corruption agencies have achieved 'tangible results' through broader public support, and their investigative activities and legal procedures have halted various corruption processes, saving some public resources (Quah, 2010). Such work gradually causes a certain disintegration of corruption networks in the given country (Kuris, 2014). In addition, these organizations carry out quality work with data, provide professional reforms and proposals for various solutions, which are also incorporated into the laws and procedural changes in the given country (Johnstone, 2014; Rothstein, Varraich, 2017; Chayes, 2016; Hellman, 2000; Mauro, 1998). The advantage of the existence and acceptance of anti-corruption agencies in a country is that they are well acquainted with local problems and can find effective solutions in the form of proposals for formal changes, strategic adaptation according to location to potential benefits and development, and restrictions to prevent corruption (Kuris, 2014).

Employees have access to sensitive information and decide on its further distribution in the event of unfair procedures (Loughman, Sibery, 2011). Internal abuse of their office, such as the manipulation of evidence or the leakage of information for persons under investigation, may impair the credibility and capabilities of anti-corruption agencies. Thus, corrupt opportunists can take advantage of the chaos and gaps in credibility with the primary goal of limiting the enforcement of anti-corruption measures.

Anti-corruption agencies are divided into three categories based on the division of anti-corruption agencies (OECD, 2013): multi-purpose anti-corruption agencies, law enforcement agencies, and corruption prevention agencies. Multi-purpose anti-corruption agencies are modelled on the Hong Kong ICAC, i.e. focusing on investigative activities, prevention of corruption and education of society. Law enforcement institutions may be specialized police departments, the prosecutor's office, i.e. institutions with certain legal powers and resources that fight internal challenges, such as organized crime, terrorism and espionage. Corruption prevention agencies address monitoring work and code of conduct issues in society and propose reforms, but without stronger investigative action.

In addition to these three categories, there may be different merges and combinations of their activities and powers. The OECD classification can be combined, which supports law enforcement compared to corruption prevention agencies only. For this reason, some agencies are perceived as inefficient, i.e. without broader investigative and subsequent legal action. Such situations have occurred, for example, in South Korea, but also in Slovakia (Kuris, 2014; Quah, 2010). Critics state that agencies focused only on the prevention of corruption, or its warnings without follow-up cannot be effective, even if they wish it to be so. The reason is that the mere warning of unfair conduct without subsequent steps in the sense of law enforcement sends society a feeling of fear of acting and related concerns. Therefore, law enforcement institutions have more power and thus a greater chance of success and being more effective (Meagher, 2004).

Nevertheless, in countries where 'entrenched' corruption is widespread, law enforcement is complicated, reducing the effectiveness of anti-corruption agencies. Some countries have 'sophisticatedly' created 'so-called' anti-corruption agencies, which, however, had no resources to make a false impression under pressure from other countries (Hough, 2013). Institutions that fight corruption can also be ineffective on the basis of 'unreliable partners' such as the police, the judiciary, or the government (Kuris, 2014). Anti-corruption agencies often face various obstacles where the other

parties are strong and pursue their own interests, and therefore the agencies must have, in addition to resources, perseverance and a willingness not to give up under pressure from different groups (De Sousa, 2010). For contrast purposes, the Slovenian CPC has issued a report officially reporting the state of entrenched corruption between the economic and political elites. Such findings of 'unfair revenues' have led to nationwide protests that have led the government to resign thereby speeding up anti-corruption measures. A similar situation was noted in the Slovak Republic, which improved its processes after a partial exchange of politicians from the previous government. The Commission on Government Integrity in New York in the 1980s and the Ward Commission in Massachusetts in the 1970s uncovered a vast network of corruption, which caused societal concern and led to law reforms and changes in anti-corruption measures, e.g. in public procurement processes (Fisman and Golden, 2017). Anti-corruption agencies are effective in investigative and preventive activities within the framework of their civil powers and laws. In fast and fair legal proceedings, the responsible institutions can coordinate measures such as the arrest of suspects, the 'freezing' of assets and the wider presentation of evidence. There are also anti-corruption agencies that have more rights than direct prosecution, telecommunication inputs for certain entities, or a certain range of powers in certain operations related to corrupt activities.

Table 1. Activities and powers of institutions and anti - corruption agencies

Type of agency	Investigative and prosecutor's office	Prevention and education
Anti-corruption agencies with less powers and enforcement mechanisms	Public hearings held; Expenditure of public administration; Summons to certain documents and data; Summons under oath; Audit of financial data.	Perform training and public education of society; Audit of government processes; Issuing public reports and recommendations; Coordinate national anti-corruption strategies.
Institutions with certain powers and enforcement mechanisms	Find and secure evidence; Freezing or securing assets; Arrest or detention of suspects; Carrying and using firearms.	Consideration of legislative proposals; Request for administrative changes; Mandatory disclosure of financial information; Regulation of campaign financing and regulation of conflicts of interest.
Anti-corruption agencies and institutions with stronger enforcement mechanisms	Offer of legal immunity; Issuing criminal reports; Direct prosecution of cases; Use of wiretaps, covert agents, and operations; Working with data from telecommunications / monitoring.	Placement of agents in other state agencies to monitor reforms; Issuance of fines and administrative sanctions; Punishment of officials who do not implement the recommendations; Reduction of political participation, banning of certain parties or candidates.

Source: own processing based on Kuris data, 2015.

NGOs as an actor in anti-corruption policy

When implementing a nationwide anti-corruption program, it is necessary to gather all relevant information on the prevailing conditions in the institutions located in the country (Heywood, 2013; Neild, 2002). This concerns the municipal level of district offices, the regional level for regional offices and the public's experience with bribes, and at the national level, i.e. the state of the judiciary, public authorities involved in criminal proceedings and their connections with groups suspected of crime, political representatives who may act suspiciously, amorally, with a high rate of increase in their assets to the ratio of all recorded income. Monitoring the mutual coordination of actors may reveal, for example, advantageous government contracts or public property sold at below-average prices. For

example, business entities whose acquired volume of assets for a certain period through state tenders, or an increase in their private assets or those of their relatives (Ngozi, 2018).

One of the advantages of non-governmental organizations is the offer of membership for the wider population in the state. Monitoring the manipulation of the public budget, transparency in public tenders, winning consortia of public tenders and the level of quality of products provided by contractors are activities that are in the public interest and their monitoring is therefore of social importance. The more the society is informed about corruption in various cases, the greater the demand for justice and punishment for incorrectly acting actors in an advanced democratic system. The intensity of resistance to corrupt practices is stronger when it is publicized, which worries the general public. In addition to other activities of non-profit organizations, they submit methodological measures or activities and proposals with regard to the current situation in the country at various levels. The aim of such analyses is not only to identify problems related to corruption, but also specific activities to mitigate it. NGOs are involved in activities such as raising awareness of the need for change among the general public. This may be easier where corruption directly affects people's individual lives and the work affects communities that are abused by corruption or are publicized for the entire population in the country, even for those places that have not yet experienced similar problems (Unger, 2018). A common system of shared experiences and concerns makes it easier to form civic coalitions / associations for public action against corruption. If the anti-corruption initiative is successful, the results may be more visible to communities, resulting in better transparency in the management of public resources, integrity, and better delivery of local services (Ackerman, 2016; Brinkerhoff, 2001). Anti-corruption activities and related activities can complement, support, and even replace national initiatives (Schweizer, 2019).

Public policy-oriented non-profit organizations focus on topics such as the environment, the fight against corruption, tax cuts, the protection of human rights, and the promotion of transparency in the country (Fukuyama, 1995). Non-profit organizations operating in the field of anti-corruption policy have a number of characteristics in common.

Transparency - transparency and accountability are now a citizen's claim as a result of public's lost confidence in the institutions due to the corruption scandals, also affecting the NGOs and other civil society organizations. In this regard, the transparency of NGOs has acquired a prominent role in recent years, especially after the economic crisis and specifically for NGOs which are working for reducing inequalities and to respond to the corruption issues (García-Mainar & Marcuello 2007, Baur & Schmitz, 2012).

Social and political impact - social impact is understood as the social improvements achieved as a consequence of implementing a particular project or action (Sorde-Marti, 2016) and political impact as the institutional repercussions of this project or action.

Recognition - the social recognition of an NGO, such as having received any award, allows them to have even greater social visibility and provides powerful incentives to continue their work (Osborne & Plastrik, 1997), being able to generate remarkable political impact.

While western countries could continue in the tradition of the third sector and the NGOs have grown strong in the previous characteristics, in Slovakia, like in many other post-communist countries, the development of the NGO sector was more complicated. As Sadike (2010) stated, the end of communism in Central and Eastern Europe symbolized a period full of hope for a future different from the recent past. But after more than twenty years, most of the optimism has died out and post-communist countries are struggling with more than just the regime's legacy. Corruption is one of the key issues that the countries of Western Balkans need to overcome in order to part from the past.

Slovakia also experienced widespread corruption extending to every aspect of public life in the post-communist years of the 1990s. In the 1998 national elections, the Slovaks voted a new government into office which, in the early and mid-2000s, implemented far-reaching reforms leading to a substantial reduction in the levels of corruption. It was hoped that joining the EU in 2004 would result in an irrevocable shift away from the bad habits of the past. Yet, following EU accession and with a new government in power, the Slovak public has witnessed a slide backwards into the very habits of cronyism, clientelism, and favoritism in recent years (Pawelke, 2010).

The role of organized civil society in facilitating citizen engagement in Central and East European new EU member states after the EU accession was analyzed by Guasti (2016) showing the creation of new NGOs initiatives, in particular those tackling corruption and political parties' campaign finance. The Slovak Republic and its development in the area of the third sector during the 1990s took place through initial processes, which initially suffered from a qualitative shortage of experts. Later, however, progress was made in science and research. Progress concerned, for example, the emergence of politically oriented NGOs that focused on certain topics (Vlach and Nemeč, 2001). Problems related to society were defined as local, regional, or national. Developments have also been recorded in globalization and networking, i.e. cooperation with domestic and foreign non-governmental organizations. For politically oriented NGOs, this is a change from independent organizations to 'party/politically' organized activities. Such institutions focus on the creating public policy proposals, while processing various analytical and pragmatic data (Demeš, 2000).

Positive changes also relate to activities where the ability of NGOs to shape and promote various systemic changes is growing, either alone or in cooperation with the government (Volejníková, 2007). In the period from 1998 to 2006, positive changes were recorded, for example, in the partnership between the government and non-governmental organizations in Slovakia. The development concerned both formal and informal forms. The Government of the Slovak Republic created the Council of the Government of the Slovak Republic for non-governmental organizations. At that time, the members of the council comprised 15 representatives from state administration bodies of the Slovak Republic and 20 representatives from non-governmental institutions. This council is officially a government means of negotiating with the third sector. The cooperation covers topics related to the internal activities of the third sector, as well as its influence, which creates opportunities for the formal involvement / application of NGO experts in public policy-oriented advice. Representatives of various so-called think-tanks are thus members of various public administration institutions. The outputs of their work vary, e.g. Transparency International Slovakia has prepared a draft National Program in the Fight against Corruption. At the request of the government, INEKO, the Institute for Economic and Social Reforms, prepared an Audit of the Central State Administration. In addition to the Audit itself, it also prepared conceptual material and, at the expert level, participated in the measures that resulted from the Audit itself. Non-governmental institutions are also active in opening up 'public discourse' in the form of civil advocacy and promote various proposals in the form of valid laws of the Slovak Republic without the help of the government. An example is the enforcement of the law on access to information.

Objective and methodology of the study

The aim of the article is to point out the possibilities of solving the problem of corruption through the activities of anti-corruption NGOs as actors in public policy. The subject of the research is the activity of selected anti-corruption non-governmental organizations as actors of public policy in solving the problem of corruption. The main method is a case study, with which we identified the two most

important NGOs in Slovakia that are engaged in the fight against corruption: the Stop Corruption Foundation and the Against Corruption civic association.

The case study method is a research method of scientific research of a qualitative nature. A case study is 'an idiographic examination of one individual, family, group, organization, community, society, or process, and its main purpose is description; attempts at explanations are acceptable' (Rubin and Babbie, 2001, pp. 390-391). There are procedures for working with this method in order to maintain a certain level of expertise (Tellis, 1997). According to (Yina, 2009), a well-developed case study has five basic characteristics, namely the significance of the case, the completeness of the processing, the consideration of alternative perspectives, a sufficient amount of data, creativity and 'attractiveness' in processing. We observed these characteristics when processing individual case studies of corruption cases in the application part of the study.

Table 2. Reasons for corruption and proposals for solutions

Sources of corruption	Proposed solutions
Low level of transparency	Publication of materials of the council meeting in advance Publication of materials, invitations and minutes of meetings Creating an archive of materials from council meetings Creating a single address for requests and making information available Response to requests for access to information within the statutory time limit
Low level of participation by citizens	Low transparency of political entities and poor controllability
Low level of acceptance of the opinions of independent experts	Use of participatory budgeting
Interconnection of political entities with business groups	Negotiate with experts when dealing with public finances
Stagnation in the quality of public services (health, education, security, etc.)	Ensure the selection of an independent supplier
Low level of cooperation between public administration and the media	Implement previous solution proposals
Corruption can arise when ...	Providing feedback, identified media owner, publishing news Formal rules do not exist There are gaps or shortcomings in formal rules Formal rules are unclear and unpredictable Adherence to formal rules is not enforced If demand prevails over supply (possible bribes) Management and decision-making are not clearly defined There are no rules for solving possible conflicts of interest Current legislation and law enforcement are risky in detecting and bearing the consequences compared to the possible benefits There is a high level of public administration involvement in the economy There is an imperfect regulatory, control, and legislative system allowing political actors to be manipulated for the purpose of private enrichment

Source: Processed according to Transparency International.

At the level of local government, we have identified several problems and proposed solutions that can reduce the level of corruption (see Table 2). We will monitor whether the individual problems also appeared in the solution of corruption cases by selected NGOs and what procedure was applied in their solution.

Case studies of anti-corruption non-governmental organizations in Slovakia

Case study of the activities of the civic association Against Corruption

The civic association Against Corruption acts as a supervisory controller and at the same time submits proposals to mitigate corrupt behavior. Against Corruption was founded by citizens of the Slovak Republic who work as investigative journalists, lawyers, regional politicians who have rejected corrupt behavior, or such citizens who have pointed out corrupt behavior in their surroundings. The absence of systemic measures and the occurrence of corruption at various levels in the state was one of the main motives for the establishment of this organization. The activities of the civic association have increased efficiency in monitoring public systems, reporting corruption, monitoring processes and conclusions in individual corruption cases. The organization is also pushing for greater transparency, law enforcement and justice through coordination with the media.

One of the reasons for the occurrence of local-level corruption is the existence of improperly defined decision-making and management processes in the public administration, as well as the low enforceability of accountability of public officials. The risk of punishment for corrupt actors is lower compared to the benefits obtained from unfair activities. Regions that are described as long-term 'poor' in the country are besieged by corruption, which is often tolerated by the local public. Codes of ethics and moral behavior thus become vague concepts. In economically less efficient regions, due to slightly lower education compared to more efficient regions, citizens are more likely to vote for more populist political parties. This is reflected in the election of some mayors of towns and municipalities, or higher preferences of populist political parties in such districts and regions (Škobla & Filčák, 2020).

Against Corruption carries out support activities on this issue, for example in the form of organized lectures and workshops with relevant experts, organizes literary competitions for secondary school pupils on the topic of 'life without corruption'. Festivals such as the Anti-Corruption Festival with important Slovak personalities are also a support mechanism. In this way, the public can broaden their horizons and gain various important insights into corrupt practices. They can listen to opinions on the reasons for the stagnation of the level of corruption in Slovak society, as well as the presented empirical proposals and measures to mitigate corruption in public administration. These elements help to activate the public in the fight against corruption. At the same time, this reduces the level of tolerance against unfair practices in the public sector. Against Corruption focuses on specific cases of corruption and misuse of public resources. The reporters are the general public, who the association also helps in the form of methodological and professional best practices.

Case study of the Stop Corruption Foundation

The Stop Corruption Foundation was established in 2014 as an attempt to reduce corruption and its devastating effects on the quality of life. The team members are investigative journalists, lawyers, and other various coordinators. The foundation also cooperates with other law firms and lawyers who assist on the basis of civil complaints in legal activities such as filing complaints with the Public Procurement Office or the Supreme Audit Office. The Stop Corruption Foundation publishes its revenues and expenditures in a transparent manner, which avoids doubts about subjective complaints and unilateral investigative work. The activities of the NGO can be divided into six types (see Table 3).

Table 3. Activities of the Stop Corruption Foundation

Proposals to change laws / Legislative lobbying	Submission of systemic measures and draft laws to combat corruption more efficiently.
Whistleblower protection	Protection of whistleblowers through legal aid and from retaliation by injured parties towards whistleblowers.
Control of manipulation of public resources	Supervision of compliance with processes, ethical conduct, and laws. Submission of complaints to the Public Procurement Office or the Supreme Audit Office.
Investigative activity	Quality journalistic work in detecting corrupt events and activities + investigative program Across the line, which monitors cases where the law is violated.
Local anti-corruption supervision	Annual supply of new members in various localities in Slovakia who draw attention to municipal corruption.
Educating society	Cooperation with secondary schools in order to increase sensitivity to unethical and corrupt practices in society.

Source: own processing based on data from zastavmekorupciu.sk

Proposals to change laws / Legislative lobbying. The Stop Corruption Foundation dealt in detail with and prepared a report on the state of the prosecutor's office and the police in the Slovak Republic. The Foundation also developed a set of proposals that would improve the system of property declarations; such a system is effective in France, for example. Legislative proposals on the prosecutor's office, police and property declarations were also adopted by four political parties. Following the 2020 parliamentary elections, 22 out of 25 measures were included in the government's program statement. These measures are aimed at alleviating corruption in the Slovak Republic. Table 4 indicates the measures that have been passed and in italics that have not passed the program statement of the Government of the Slovak Republic.

Whistleblower protection. From the many cases that the Foundation has dealt with, we can mention a specific one. After a forester warned of the disappearance of thousands of seedlings in the Telgárt district, which were originally supposed to grow on a mountain, the relevant actor found them buried and hidden in pits. After warning his superiors of unfair practices, he was subsequently summoned by the police for questioning and feared for the loss of his job. The company, suspected of corruption, had in the meanwhile planned further public procurement with the state. The Stop Corruption Foundation provided legal assistance to the forester and all criminal reports were resolved in favor of the whistleblower.

Control of manipulation of public resources. During monitoring, the Stop Corruption Foundation found that the State Material Reserves Administration, which was modelled for a specific security company, had ties to a specific political party in the coalition at the time. Thanks to the Stop Corruption Foundation, the tailor-made tender was made public and at the same time they submitted a complaint to the Public Procurement Office. The Public Procurement Office processed the complaint and decided to suspend the business transaction.

The so-called Zindex is an evaluation of public procurement, which was 'functional' in the Slovak Republic by the Stop Corruption Foundation in cooperation with the Czech think-tank Ekonlab. Based on this, they analysed 25,000 different government purchases totalling 8 billion EUR. A 'ranking'

of the best contracting authorities was created. From the processed analysis, however, the outputs show that the public procurement process in the Slovak Republic takes a very long time, and the institutions cancel, on average, every fourth tender. The aim of this project is to motivate honest contracting authorities to make purchases in accordance with the laws of the Slovak Republic.

Table 4. Proposals from the Stop Corruption Foundation for mitigating corruption

Reform of disciplinary proceedings of judges / establishment of the Supreme Administrative Court, focused on the given issue	Adjustment of selection procedures and career advancement of judges	Security checks of judges	Code of ethics for judges and other legal professions	Independent police inspection
Change in the evaluation system of police officers	Depoliticized election of the President of the Police Force	Functioning of the Office for the Protection of Corruption Whistleblowers	Extension of the powers of the Office for the Protection of Corruption Whistleblowers	Improving the informative value of property declarations
Transparent and clear publication of property declarations	Independent control of property declarations	Linking the control of property declarations to the property register	Functional law on proving the origin of property	Extension of design powers for the election of the General and Special Prosecutors
Public hearings of candidates for the General and Special Prosecutors	Public election of the General and Special Prosecutors	Better selection procedures for senior positions in the Prosecutor's Office	Strengthening and opening the Board of Prosecutors	Measures to reduce the level of corruption in public procurement
Modification of the Criminal Procedure Code in favor of prosecuting corruption - §363, penalties for indirect corruption, other	Control of GP decisions, restriction of GP powers and strengthening of the independence of ordinary prosecutors	Random or transparent allocation of files to prosecutors and detailed statistics on decision-making	Material Liability Act	Lobbying Act

Source: own processing based on data from zastavmekorupciu.sk

Investigative activity. The investigative work of journalists is both time and money consuming. The Stop Corruption Foundation processed clearly important cases that took place in the Slovak Republic in 2019. One of the problems of the 'freedom' of the Internet is the creation of conspiracy websites, which in some cases publish unsubstantiated or modified information. On the other hand, some investigative articles in the qualified press are too long, which discourages readers or charge a subscription fee, which limits the availability of information to the general public. The Foundation is therefore preparing the 'Across the Line' program, which works with verified sources, information and provides clear information. The topics published by the program included: Who made Marián Kočner a celebrity?; Boris Kollár and the Bratislava underworld, what is the truth?; Does Robert Fico need state-paid protection?; What actually do people from the villages around Slovnafat breathe?; He knew

that Kočner was watching journalists, but he was still a prosecutor; Did Dobroslav Trnka help Kočner's intangibility?; How to deal with the inviolability of judges?

Local anti-corruption supervision. The fight against corruption cannot be monitored from a single location. An example of this is a member who pointed out an illegal billboard in Rožňava. It belonged to the city which subsequently removed the billboard, and today there are advertisements in accordance with the law.

Table 5. The Stop Corruption Foundation's anti-corruption activities at the municipal level

Stop Corruption Foundation – activities supporting local development against corruption in 2019	The foundation has reached the level of 60 members from different cities / better local monitoring 4 trainings for new coordinators 4 new locations / groups - Bratislava, Púchov, Prague, Nové mesto nad Váhom Obtained a 67,000 EUR grant from OSIF Berlin
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Source: own processing based on data from zastavmekorupciu.sk

Educating society. The ideal environment for educating society is, for example, in secondary schools, where pupils are still able to grasp the perception of what is ethical and moral, thus completing a more decent perception of behavior in society. The Stop Corruption Foundation provided support to four selected secondary schools in the year-round education of students as part of the 'Na férovku' (Be fair) project. The foundation trained its members on the so-called anti-corruption model of education. At the same time, these students become young members of the foundation who can thus positively influence their peers. The work of the project 'Na férovku' was in intensive cooperation at schools through workshops and mentoring where they achieved measurable results, which recorded a significant positive change in the following areas: fewer conflicts at school; fewer cases of bullying at school; fewer cases of cheating; better attendance.

The Stop Corruption Foundation organized the anti-corruption festival 'Pucung'. It was a multi-genre festival that, through music, films, workshops, humor, and various inspiring discussions in a friendly atmosphere, drew the public's attention to important topics in the field of corruption.

Summary of case studies

The activities of the Stop Corruption Foundation and the Against Corruption civic association, which contribute to the mitigation of corruption, are compared with the original Table 2, whilst we have added the activities of the NGOs that eliminate the described problems (Table 6).

Table 6. Reasons for corruption, proposals for solutions, and activities of NGOs

Sources of corruption	Proposed solutions	NGO activities
Low level of transparency	Publication of materials of the council meeting in advance	Proposals to change laws / Legislative lobbying; Control of manipulation of public resources; Local anti-corruption supervision; investigative activity
	Publication of materials, invitations, and minutes of meetings	
	Creating an archive of materials from council meetings	
	Using a single address for requests, making information available	

Sources of corruption	Proposed solutions	NGO activities
	Response to requests for access to information within the time limit	
	Low transparency of political entities and poor controllability	
Low citizen participation	Use of participatory budgeting	Educating society
Low acceptance of opinions of independent experts	Negotiate with experts when dealing with public finances	Investigative activity; Control of manipulation of public resources
Interconnection of political entities with business groups	Ensure the selection of an independent supplier	Investigative activity; Control of manipulation of public resources; Proposals to change laws / Legislative lobbying; Local anti-corruption supervision.
Stagnation in the quality of public services (health, education, security, etc.)	Implement previous solution proposals	Proposals to change laws / Legislative lobbying; Educating society.
Low level of cooperation between public administration and the media	Providing feedback, identified media owner, publishing news	Investigative activity; Control of manipulation of public resources; Educating society
Corruption can arise when formal rules:	Formal rules do not exist	Proposals to change laws / Legislative lobbying; Control of manipulation of public resources; Local anti-corruption supervision; Investigative activity' Whistleblower protection
	There are shortcomings in formal rules	
	Formal rules are unclear and unpredictable	
	Adherence to formal rules is not enforced	
	If demand prevails over supply	
	Management and decision-making are not clearly defined	
	There are no rules for solving possible conflicts of interest	
	Current legislation and law enforcement are risky in detecting and bearing the consequences compared to the possible benefits	
	There is a high level of public administration involvement in the economy	
There is an imperfect regulatory, control, and legislative system allowing political actors to be manipulated for the purpose of private enrichment		

Source: Own processing based on Transparency International Slovakia data.

Conclusion

The aim of the study is to point out the possibilities of solving the problem of corruption through the activities of anti-corruption NGOs as actors in public policy. Corruption occurs as a result of insufficient regulations, legislation and laws, low control and transparency, or in political regimes lacking democracy. In addition to other entities, non-governmental organizations also fight against corruption. Their aim is to point out corruption, whether to submit proposals for changes in laws, to enforce liability enforcement in cooperation with the media, or to educate the public. In developed

democracies, actors in power publicly accept the activities of non-governmental organizations, or NGOs associate with public institutions to better enforce rights and apply punishments.

The reason for the establishment of the Stop Corruption Foundation and the civic association Against Corruption is the nationwide mitigation of corruption in the Slovak Republic, which is related to functional systemic proposals, raising awareness of ethical behavior in society for the 'young' generation, as well as protection of whistleblowers in cases of corruption. The current organization of society does not fully respect the rights of the citizen and corruption has deepened in recent years at all levels of public administration. The problems of at least unethical conduct have their origin at the level of: A) formal rules: management and decision-making processes in public administration are not precisely defined, i.e. in several cases there are no standards of practice. Existing legislation and law enforcement lead to the fact that the risk of bearing the consequences of corrupt behavior is lower or negligible compared to the benefit of such proceedings, i.e. affected by the efficiency of control mechanisms; and B) informal rules: the absence of a so-called code of ethics for all employees in public organizations; there are only special provisions for civil servants and at the same time a high tolerance on the part of citizens to the abuse of power and non-transparency and low levels of education in society about moral and amoral conduct.

Non-governmental organizations carry out several activities with the aim of mitigating corruption in the Slovak Republic: 1. legislative lobbying - systemic measures; 2. provide protection for whistleblowers in the form of legal aid; 3. control the manipulation of public resources of the Slovak Republic - whether the procedure is legal and ethical; 4. participate in active investigative activities that are time-consuming and costly, as well as in the distribution of the information obtained to the public; 5. local anti-corruption supervision - year-on-year increase in new members who draw attention to various problems throughout Slovakia; 6. education of society in the form of education of pupils, which increases the sensitivity to unfair practices or various social events used for education.

On the other hand, NGOs do not have executive power; they cannot change laws, regulate, as independent organizations they cannot issue sanctions or carry out inspections. Thus, non-governmental organizations cannot eliminate corruption on the basis of their activities, but only contribute to its mitigation, at the same time, there have been situations where NGOs have been exposed as corrupt or have carried out activities under pressure from the powerful that did not fall within their activities. Therefore, it is important to assess the activities of NGOs on the basis of the degree of their objectivity, or the degree of one-sidedness. In the conclusion of the article, we want to draw attention to the characteristics of the so-called an exemplary case study that was used as a research method. Based on Yin (2009), if it is a well-developed case study it contains five elementary characteristics: completeness of processing, significance of the case, sufficient amount of data, consideration of alternative perspectives and creativity in processing. These characteristics are met by the case studies. On the other hand, there is a limitation, namely that the results of the case study cannot be generalized. However, the case study has its significance in terms of understanding the importance of the activities of NGOs in Slovak society. Non-governmental organizations draw attention to incorrect conduct and corruption, which results in more efficient handling of public resources, lower clientelism, or a more correct conduct of powerful actors. However, paradoxically, political leaders do not automatically realise the important role of NGOs in solving the problem of corruption and so far, have not fully respected them as equal partners in the creation and implementation of public policy. It is for that reason why it is important for society to support and demand the activities of non-governmental organizations, which naturally forces political actors to act more fairly.

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