

DISTINCTION BETWEEN CORRUPTION PERCEPTIONS ON THE ETHICAL AND PRACTICAL LEVELS

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Abstract:

Corruption is one of the persistent problems of the societies over the years and it affects the credibility of public institutions and its ambassadors in front of the citizens and of the other related countries. This phenomenon eludes the rules, the transparency and the impersonal and impartial aspect of public actions, but, also, the responsibility for all these irregularities, being the opposite of the public integrity concept. The paper tries to investigate if the ethical principle about bribe or, extensively, about corruption is put into practice in the same way as it is ethically perceived by the citizens of nations. After this comparison and taking into consideration the results from it, the paper reveals that the national integrity systems are key factors for the corruption phenomenon and can be real solutions for this if they are well designed and well implemented at the level of public sector.

Key words: corruption, perception of corruption, bribe, ethical principle, national integrity system.

JEL classification: A 13, D 63, E 02.

1. INTRODUCTION

Extremely actual and relevant for the present paper is the Cicero's affirmation about the individual from a collectivity obligations to respect the public goods as being public ones, disposing only the private goods as being personal ones: „to report to the collective goods as being of the collectivity and to the personal ones as being of his own” (Bâtlan, 2008, 48). Accordingly to this idea, in a famous quotation, M. Kogălniceanu sustains: „Where the rights are present, the duties are also present; the larger the rights are, the larger the duties are”. So, if the society offers to its citizens rights accordingly with the development of the own person and of the entire community, they must respect the duties imposed by the rights conferment to be able to benefit in an equitable and honest way by them. Without respecting the duties, the general rights transform in barriers for the human nature, constraining and limiting it and creating new and amplified frustrations.

In this context, the corruption's impact goes beyond the wrong behaviour of implicated actors. Its effects extend to all social and economical structure, meaning over all citizens. Corruption is the main threat of good governance, its negative impact perpetuating also on the level of the standard of living, of the productivity, of the commercial equilibrium, of the national attractiveness, of the ability of objective implementation, of the good policies, of the capacity and the flexibility of sustaining growth. All these elements, if are put together, translate into a single expression: national competitiveness (Subarna and Rajib, 2010; Ulman, 2013). This perspective offers solid arguments to debate on the subject of national corruption and on the ways of resolving this persistent problem.

2. MAIN CHARACTERISTICS OF CORRUPTION

The bureaucratic traditional conception implies the promotion of a public sector that directly responds to the social needs of the people on the basis of the public sector values (Mureșan, 2012, p. 33). The actual public sector is preponderantly based on this bureaucratic conception and, taking into consideration this aspect, the rules of Niskanen (1994) that guide the public bureaucracy and are the sources of corruption generation are relevant for the actual debate:

- it does not have competitors (separate jurisdictions);
- it does not have the profit-and-loss statement as an evaluative test, so it cannot go into liquidation;
- it obtains the resources through the taxis payers coercion;
- it strictly uses the funds, on categories of budget;
- it is not subject of the customers' evaluation that have the capacity to decide the service offering advancement or not;
- it usually confounds the public interest that is vaguely defined with the bureaucrats' desires and aims;
- it enhances in dimensions and attributions for the satisfaction of bureaucrats' scopes;
- it persuades the legislators, creating problems for the bigger budget adjustment;
- it is taxis consumer;
- its success is obtained depending on the superiors' satisfaction.

So, the public system, through its characteristically bureaucracy, becomes inclined to corruption acts. The corruption eludes the rules, the transparency and the impersonal and impartial aspect of public actions, but, also, the responsibility for all these irregularities, being the opposite of the public integrity concept. Nicolae (2010) defines the corruption as being the abusive using of the power to take public decisions for the power or its sources (wealth and status – for private individual or politic gain – that negatively affects the social or political system scope or values) advancement or maintenance. From the point of view of the market approach, a corrupt public actor treats his function as a business that helps him to maximize his income, depending on the market way of being and on the capacity of finding the maximum point from the public demand inflection (Johnston, 1995, 11, apud. Heidenheimer, 2001, 9). Thinking in the same way, Thompson (1961) develops the concept of pathological-bureau that refers to the trove of the main organizational bureaucratic aspects as means to personal needs satisfaction (Thompson, 1961, 167, apud. Nicolae, 2010, 171). Corruption, as an important problem of the society, must be understood taking into consideration the decisions of every individual in part (Nicolae, 2010, 13). As a completion of the concept, Tullock considers that the bureaucrats follow the personal interest, not the societal benefits, although these occasionally coincide (Tullock, 1965, apud. Nicolae, 2010, 179).

3. RESEARCH QUESTION

In this paper the difference between the declared unjustifiable character of accepting bribe action and the corruption level of 43 countries from all over the world is wanted to be analysed and compared. So, the paper tries to find out if the declarative level is equal to the practical one or, in other words, to investigate if the ethical principle about bribe or, extensively, about corruption is put into practice in the same way as it is ethically perceived by the citizens of the selected nations. For this research question, it was used the manner of grouping of The Global Competitiveness Report 2012-2013 (Schwab, 2013) of the Web Economic Forum, that divides the countries in five categories taking into consideration the national stage of development of every country:

- *Stage 1: Factor-driven* with 38 economies;
- *Transition from stage 1 to stage 2* with 17 economies;
- *Stage 2: Efficiency-driven* with 33 economies;
- *Transition from stage 2 to stage 3* with 21 economies;
- *Stage 3: Innovation-driven* with 35 economies.

The analysed countries were selected from three stages of development: Stage 1, Stage 2 and Stage 3 and in function of the availability of the data for each country. So, the analysed countries are:

- *Stage 1: Factor-driven*: Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, India, Mali, Moldova, Rwanda, Vietnam and Zambia;

- *Stage 2: Efficiency-driven*: Bulgaria, China, Colombia, Georgia, Guatemala, Indonesia, Jordan, Morocco, Romania, Serbia, South Africa, Thailand, Ukraine;
- *Stage 3: Innovation-driven*: Australia, Canada, Cyprus, Finland, France, Germany, Great Britain, Hong Kong, Italy, Japan, Korea, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan, United States.

In our discussion, two indices are used: Corruption Perception Index 2013 (CPI), measured by Transparency International and the declared justifiable character for accepting bribe action, data taken from World Values Survey 2005-2008. Taking into consideration that the ethical values and principles do not change year to year, the two indices can be subject of comparison.

4. DECLARED UNJUSTIFIABLE CHARACTER OF ACCEPTING BRIBE ACTION IN DIFFERENT STAGES OF COUNTRY DEVELOPMENT

From the World Values Survey, one question is relevant to the present discussion about the respect for the public goods. So, the justifiable or unjustifiable aspect of the acceptance of bribe actions is desired to be observed. For the countries from the Stage 1: Factor-driven economies, it can be observed that the first place is taken by Vietnam, where 84% of the respondents from this country considering the accepting bribe action an unjustifiable one. It is followed by Ethiopia with 75% and India with 64%. The lowest score is the one of Zambia, with 40% respondents considering that accepting bribe is not a justifiable action. As an average, for the countries from the Stage 1, the score is almost 60,5%, meaning that more than a half of respondents are taking an ethical position when they discuss about the bribe.

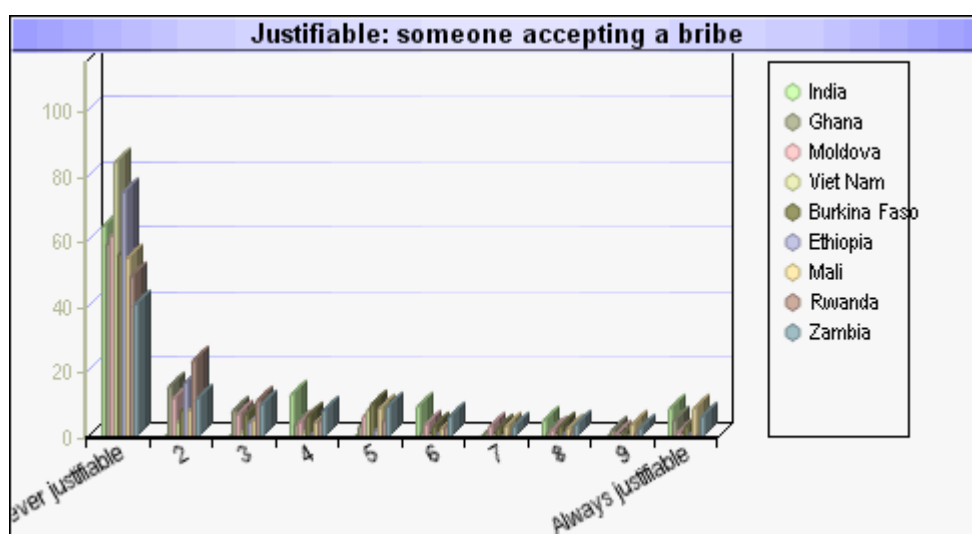


Figure no. 1 – Someone accepting a bribe – justifiable or not in the Stage 1: Factor-driven economies (WVS 2005-2008 (2008), data tooled on-line on <http://www.wvsevsdb.com/wvs/WVSAnalyzeSample.jsp>)

For the Stage 2: Efficiency-driven economies, the percentages are in almost cases bigger than in the previous stage. So, the best score is registered by Jordan, with 95% of the respondents that indicate that taking a bribe is an unethical action, followed by Indonesia, with 87% and Georgia with 84%. Romania is included in this category of countries and it registers a score of 82,4%, meaning that, at the declarative level, the Romanians are, in their majority, ethical persons when they speak about the bribe. At the extreme, Thailand has an only 28,9% score, meaning that the bribe as a social action is seen as being an almost accepted manner of action and not a rejected one. At this extreme, Thailand is followed by Serbia, with a 38,7% score. The Stage 2: Efficiency-driven economies average at this aspect is 68,6%, a score with almost 10% bigger than the score of the previous group countries, meaning that the countries from the Stage 2 are with almost 10% more ethical than the countries from Stage 1 at the declaration level. This aspect put into practice will be

discussed later and, confronted with these data, will be observed if the declarative level coincides with the practical one or, in another words, if what is said is also applied in day by day practice.

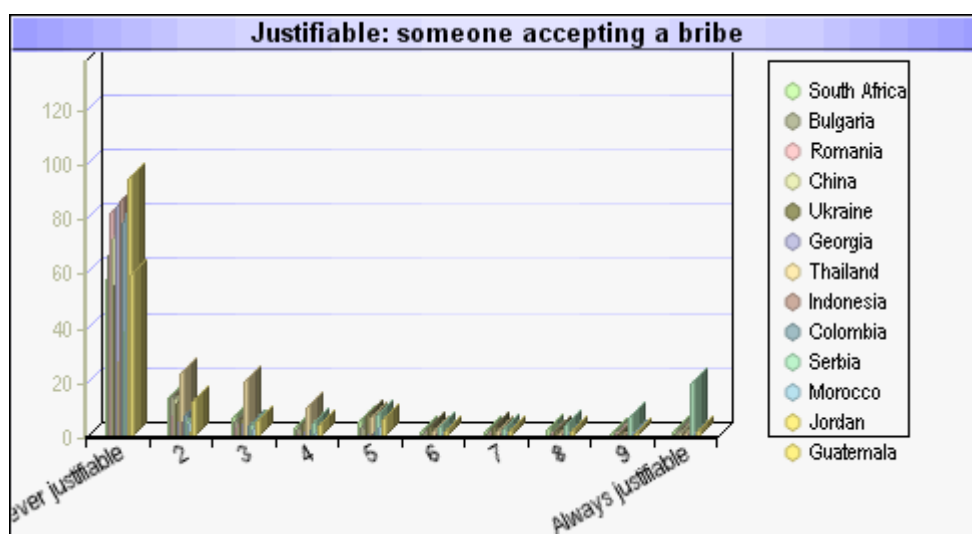


Figure no. 2 - Someone accepting a bribe – justifiable or not in the Stage 2: Efficiency-driven economies (WVS 2005-2008 (2008), data tooled on-line on <http://www.wvsevsdb.com/wvs/WVSAnalyzeSample.jsp>)

From the Stage 3: Innovation-driven economies, more countries were taken into analysis because, in their case, the data were more available. So, discussing about 20 developed countries, it can be observed that any of them do not have a lower score than 60% for the aspect of accepting bribe action as being never justifiable. The least percentage is the one of Sweden (61,4%), followed by France (63,3%), Hong Kong (67,2%), Cyprus (68,3%) and Germany (69,6%). The countries with the biggest score from the top are: Italy (86,2%), New Zealand (83,3%), Australia (81,7%) and Netherlands (80%). The average for all the countries from this stage is 78,8%, being considerably bigger than the averages for the other two groups.

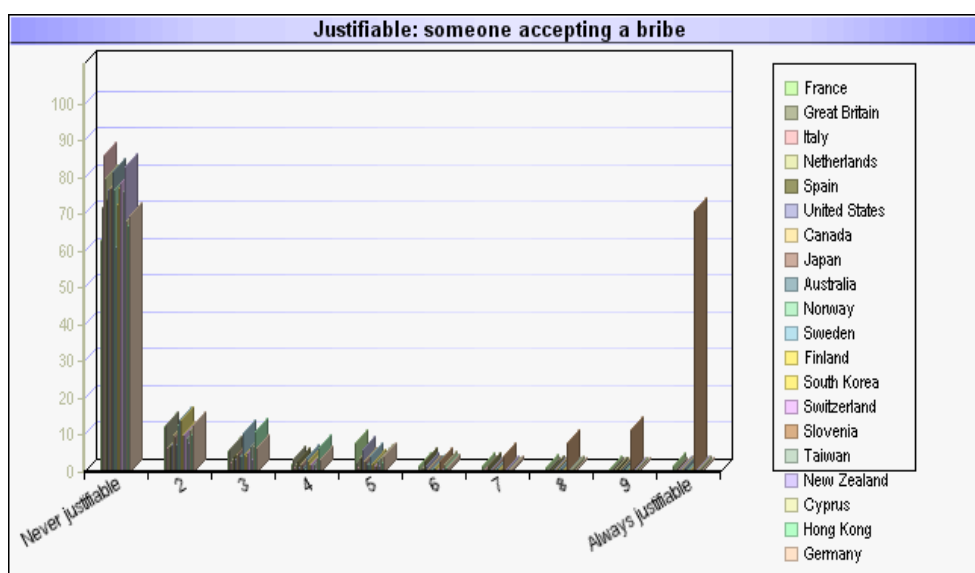


Figure no. 3 - Someone accepting a bribe – justifiable or not in the Stage 3: Innovation-driven economies (WVS 2005-2008 (2008), data tooled on-line on <http://www.wvsevsdb.com/wvs/WVSAnalyzeSample.jsp>)

In this context, we can conclude that the ethical principle of not accepting bribes is much more cultivated in the developed countries than in the other ones. Next, we want to find out if the

percentages are respected when they are put into practice, if and where the disparities register and to try to find the explanations for their apparition.

5. CORRUPTION AS AN ETHICAL PRINCIPLE PUT INTO PRACTICE IN DIFFERENT STAGES OF COUNTRY DEVELOPMENT

When the specialists speak about corruption, the most common used index is Corruption Perception Index of Transparency International. So, passing from the declarative level on the practical level, it is desired to find out what is the situation of corruption in the discussed countries, as an ethical principle put into practice in the daily reality by the nations' citizens, those that declare, more than a half, that they have solid ethical principles when this aspect is put into discussion. For the countries from the Stage 1, the concrete practical reality is much more pessimistic than the one from the declarative level. The best scores are 53 for Rwanda and 46 for Ghana, the other countries from this group having a score lower than 40. The average of all the scores is 38,7, at a large distance by the average for the declarative level for the same countries – 60,5.

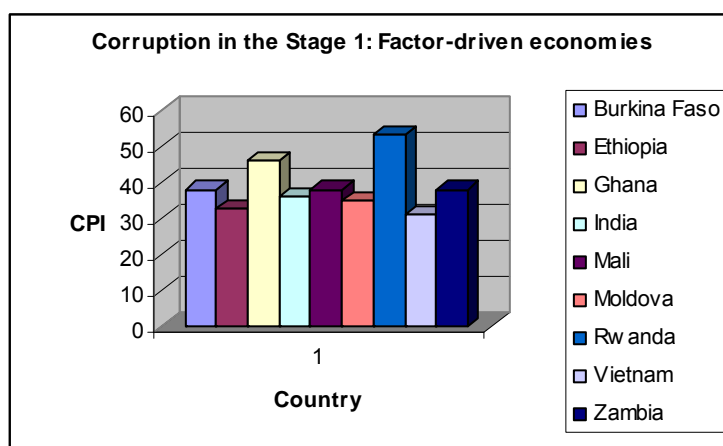


Figure no. 4 – Corruption Perception in the Stage 1: Factor-driven economies (Corruption Perception Index 2013, data tooled from <http://www.transparency.org/cpi2012/results>)

For the countries from the Stage 2: Efficiency-driven economies, the things are even worse, the best score being of 49 for Georgia, followed by 45 for Jordan and 43 for Romania. The lowest score is of 25 for Ukraine and the average of these countries' scores is of 38,2, with 0,5 less than the average score for the countries from the previous stage. More than that, at the declarative level, they had an average score with almost 10 points higher than the countries from the Stage 1.

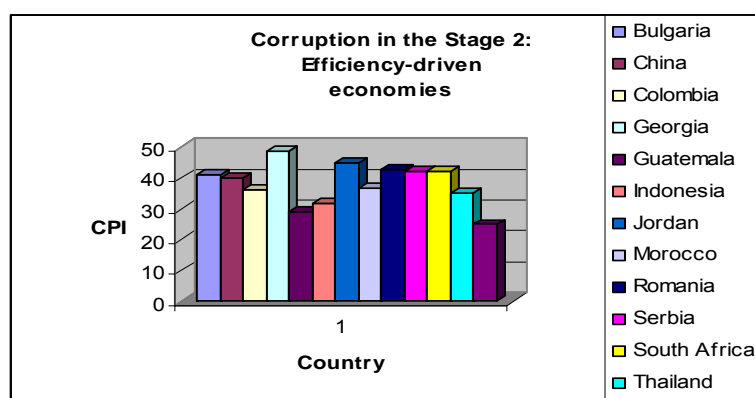


Figure no. 5 – Corruption Perception in the Stage 2: Efficiency-driven economies (Corruption Perception Index 2013, data tooled from <http://www.transparency.org/cpi2012/results>)

The things are different for the Stage 3: Innovation-driven economies. They have high scores on the perception of corruption, meaning that corruption at the national level is perceived as being low. The highest scores are for Finland and New Zealand (91), followed by Sweden (89), Norway (86), Switzerland (85) and Netherlands (83). The exceptions are registered in the case of Italy (43), Korea (55) and Spain (59). The average of the scores of the developed countries is 74,5, meaning that this group of countries has the highest score of CPI and that the level of corruption from them is the lowest one. Compared with the score of the declarative aspect (78,8), the developed countries are the only one that respect their ethical principles in the concrete behaviour. In other words, from the point of view of the discussed ethical principle, what they declare, they respect and put into practice.

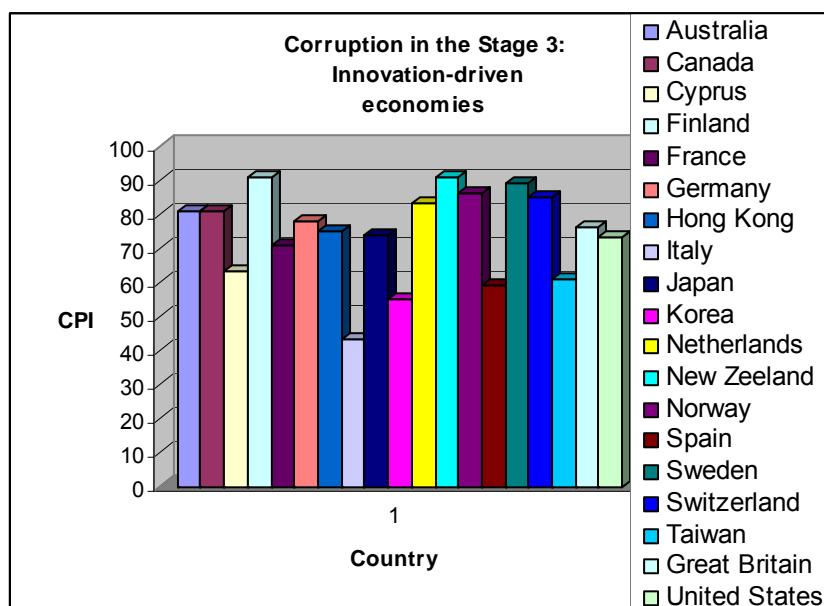


Figure no. 6 – Corruption Perception in the Stage 3: Innovation-driven economies (Corruption Perception Index 2013, data tooled from <http://www.transparency.org/cpi2012/results>)

6. THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN CORRUPTION FROM THE ETHICS' POINT OF VIEW AND CORRUPTION IN PRACTICE

For a better perspective, the figures no. 7, 8 and 9 reveal the difference between what is declared about the unjustifiable character of the accepting bribe action and the level of corruption as it is perceived at the national dimension. It is true that the corruption phenomenon is not restraint on the bribe aspect, but the bribe is an essential part of it. So, the comparison can be made between the two dimensions because the first one resumes the ethical principle and the second one reveals the manner of putting into practice of this principle. So, grouping the countries in three categories taking into consideration their level of development, it can be seen that each group has different characteristics when we discuss about the two dimensions taken into analyzation and comparison. In the first group of countries – Stage 1: Factor-driven economies, the majority of countries declare that they condemn the action of accepting bribes as being never justifiable with an average equal to 60,5. Discussing about the other dimension, corruption as it is present at the national level and measured by CPI, at this stage, has as average a score equal to 38,7, being revealed a big difference between what is declared and what is really made. This great difference is kept for almost all the countries from this group, exception being made by Rwanda, that has a declared unjustifiable character of accepting bribe action (49,2) less than the CPI (53). Also, Zambia has almost the same score for both the declarative level and for the practical behaviour one (almost 40). So, almost all the countries are capable to estimate in a correct way the unethical character of taking bribe action

and declare that they behave ethically when a bribe is put into discussion. On the other side, they have a low score of national corruption, meaning that they do not behave properly and in the same manner as they declare.

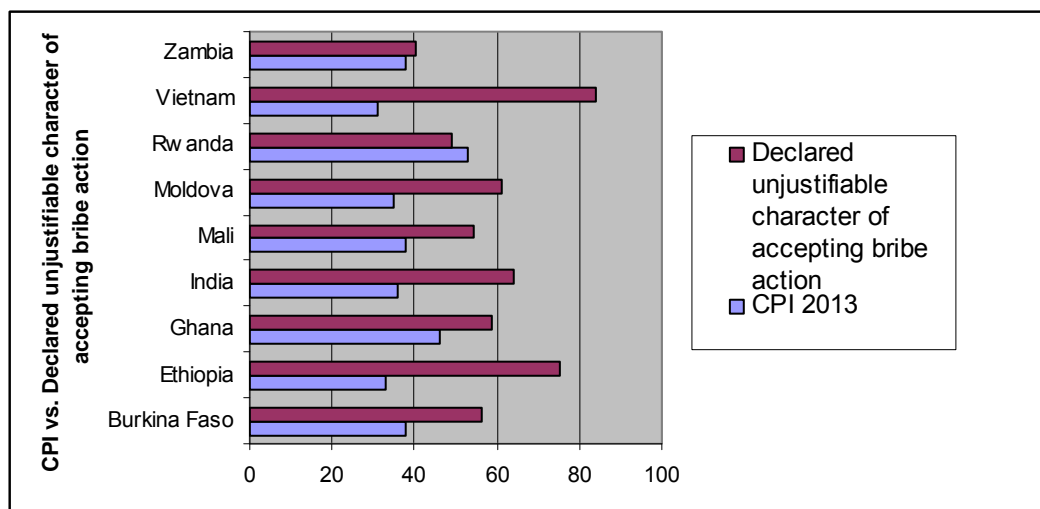


Figure no. 7 – CPI 2013 vs. Declared unjustifiable character of accepting bribe action in *Stage 1: Factor-driven economies*

The same situation or even a worse one is met in the Stage 2: Efficiency-driven economies, countries having a smaller score of CPI than of the other dimension – declared unjustifiable character of taking bribe action. Here, the average score is 68,6 to the declarative level and 38,2 for CPI, observing an even greater difference between them. The countries from this group seem to be more ethical, but, in reality, they are not. The ethical principle seems to be better understood, but, when it is put into practice, it is less implemented than in the countries from the first stage.

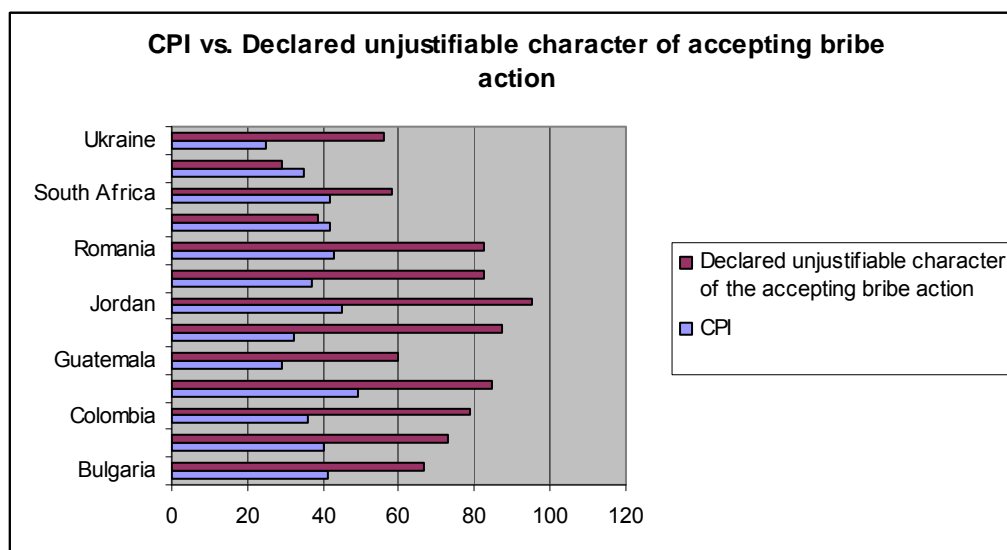


Figure no. 8 – CPI 2013 vs. Declared unjustifiable character of accepting bribe action in *Stage 2: Efficiency-driven economies*

Referring to the last group, the one of the developed countries, the things are differently situated. The declared unjustifiable character of accepting bribe action score is here almost equal to the CPI one. This means that they are ethical both in practice and in principles. Even more, there are countries that have a bigger score for CPI than the one for the other dimension: Canada (81 vs 77), Finland (91 vs. 73), France (71 vs. 63), Norway (86 vs. 76), Sweden (89 vs. 61) and Switzerland

(85 vs. 78). This can be translated that the citizens from these countries are more ethical in practice than in principles.

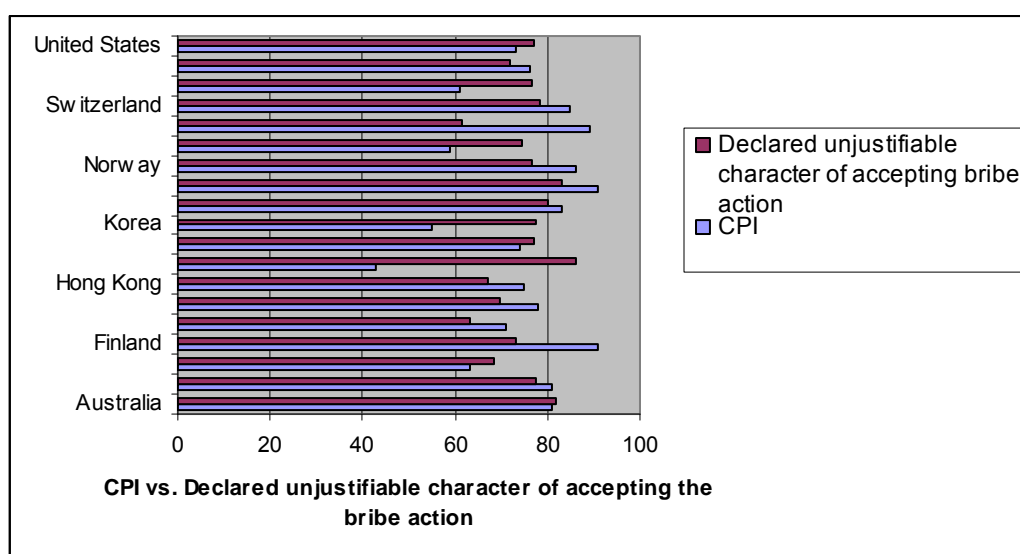


Figure no. 9 – CPI 2013 vs. Declared unjustifiable character of accepting bribe action in Stage 3: Innovation-driven economies

For a better perspective of the revealed things, figure no. 10 intercepts the differences between the three stages of development economies when the discussion focuses on the two dimensions: corruption in the ethical principles and corruption in practice. As it was shown, the developed countries have the same average for these two dimensions; the countries from the Stage 1 have different average scores (almost 20 points difference) and the countries from the Stage 2 have even a greater different average scores (almost 30 points difference). Also, it must be pronounced that the differences exist when we compare the levels of declared unjustifiable character of accepting bribe action from each stage of development, but they are not very big (60,5 for Stage 1; 68,7 for Stage 2; 78,8 for Stage 3). But, the differences are much bigger when we compare the CPI average levels for each stage of country development (38,7 for Stage 1; 38,2 for Stage 2; 74,5 for Stage 3). The logical questions in this context are: Why are the things happening in this way? What are the factors that contribute and that have an impact on the social reality and have as direct effect the things surprised here?

CPI 2013 vs. Declared unjustifiable character of accepting bribe in different stages of country development

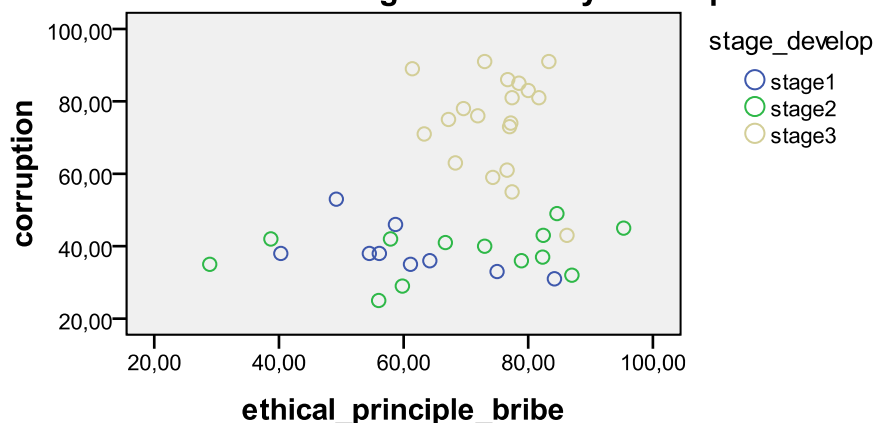


Figure no. 10 – The relation between CPI and Declared unjustifiable character of accepting bribe action in different stages of economy development

To answer to these questions, first it is necessary to clarify that the ethical principles are part of what is named national culture. So, the manner of accepting bribes as being a justifiable or unjustifiable action depends on this dimension of national culture. Surprisingly, the differences between the levels of this aspect are not big neither if we compare all the countries between them nor if we group them and speak in terms of average of groups.

6. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, in average, almost all the citizens of all nations taken into analysis have the right ethical perception on the principle of considering the accepting bribe action as an unjustifiable one. In its turn, the corruption as an implemented ethical principle in the day by day practice is the result of the interlacing of the national culture and the public context of every country. The public context includes the legal frame, the rules, regulations, ethical and behavioural codes, public management, etc. In other words, the national culture is correlated with the particular aspects of the public context and this correlation can be translated into a public space of integrity or into a corrupt one. Taking into consideration that the first dimension, meaning national culture, doesn't make the difference as it was earlier revealed, we conclude that the responsible one for the manner of being of the public sector is the public context emphasizing here especially the legal frame. In other words, the public context encourages individuals with almost the same ethical principles about bribe to be corrupt or, contrary, to be citizens of integrity. It must be said that a society that does not offer correct relations of work from both economic and ethical points of view cannot be the one promoting performance and competitiveness. So, a society that does not promote equity, but corruption, can not offer the right pillars for a competitive and performant society. This also explains why the corruption is reduced in the developed countries and in the less developed ones still consists into an important problem. So, the national integrity systems are key factors for the corruption phenomenon and can be real solutions for this if they are well designed and well implemented at the level of public sector. The national integrity systems are very different from a country to another and this fact explains the different levels of corruption from a country to another. So, more accent and attention to these elements are encouraged and desirable if the public sector is wanting to be more correct, more trusted by its citizens and more responsible for its acts. The prevention of corruption and the advancement of public integrity are possible through the laws, institutions and management mechanisms combination. In this context, an environment which supports the public sector activity in a good way, helped by the central integrity standards' development and implementation, is a must through an adapted to the specific conditions of every economy and culture national integrity system.

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