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Struggle Against Corruption in Russia: Historic Overview and Modern Problems

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The article deals with corruption. It is viewed as a societal phenomenon. The author defines corruption and analyses it in a diachronical perspective. Particular features of corruption are under the scope of close observation. Its manifestations in different historical periods are exposed in the experience of different generations of the Russian and Soviet people. Contemporary social ills originated in corruption are revealed.

Keywords: corruption, societal phenomenon, politics, state governance, anti-corruptive actions.

Introduction

Russian corruption has been a struggle for numerous generations. It comes back to previous centuries. Russian aristocracy, a vast gathering of men of noble birth with titles, tsars, emperors, general secretaries and prime ministers, honest ministers and governors have been struggling against corruption. Great Russian poets and writers such as I.A. Krylov, A.S. Pushkin, N.A. Nekrasov, N.V. Gogol, M.E. Saltykov – Schedrin, as well as, actors of various artistic genres made a bigger contribution into that fight. Artists also have been implicated in depicting immoral behaviour.

In effect, it seemed that massive attacking the corruption would have resulted in its disappearance from the Russian people's life and professional activity.

Attitudes towards corruption in a historic perspective could be seen as the struggle against

its manifestations. One can compare them with the poisoned crown of the antiar, the tree of poison. Its deepest roots are spreading suckers just after the stem having been cut. The greatest Russian poet, A.S. Pushkin, described antiar growing in a hot and dry desert. He visualized the scaring tree as an alone and violent guard in the universe. Corruption, in contrast, is sprouting on a fertile soil, in the centre of civilization.

Point of view

Corruption appeared to be an unavoidable societal phenomenon within the institutionalized state structures and formations. The reason is: no one attempted either to erase or to eradicate its preconditions.

Despite the intention to get rid of corruption, it is still alive. What is more, its vitality can be easily explained by the fact that multi-layered structures of all kinds of officials are interested

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in it. The ordinary citizens of the country are also interested in it. The point is: they ought to support corruption because of the severe circumstances. In order to solve problems, they have to get corrupted.

There is a growing list of definitions of corruption as a phenomenon in the dictionaries. The Big Dictionary for Lawyers defines the concept of corruption in a very strict and concise form. It is stated that «corruption is a dangerous societal phenomenon in the sphere of politics or state governance. It is displayed in intended use of profits and advantages in any possible way by the functionaries and those who are in power, as well as giving bribery to them» (Big Dictionary for Lawyers, 2000: 288).

Authors of the new Big Academic Dictionary of the Russian Language have loaded the concept of corruption with emotional and extremely negative attitudinal flavour, having defined it as «direct, shameless, fierce use of power and authorised rights and opportunities in order to get easy money; venality of officials and politicians» (Big Academic Dictionary, 2007: 498).

Nevertheless, the former definition can not be seen as an absolute prerequisite to affirm the readiness of the majority of state officials to keep corruption preserving.

In our opinion, the recruitment policy and, as a consequence, placing of personnel, mainly on the personal employer's preferences basis, is pivotal in the concept of corruption. All other concomitant factors can not be taken into a serious consideration.

To build a team spirit for efficient management on the state level, it is necessary to use particular staffing strategies on the mentioned above basis. That is a major argument in favour of the personal devotion.

One can ask a question whether it is worth building a team when it is impossible to question

and judge on the leader's honesty, sincerity and opinion.

Making wrong decisions by such a team is most probably to have drastic consequences for the society. Russian population have been fiercely affected by and slowly survived from them.

Nowadays campaign of struggling with corruption has coincided with the starting career steps of the current president Mr D.A. Medvedev. It has dynamically accelerated and entered the front stage of social and political life of Russia.

Politicians and lawmakers in the State Duma have actively and energetically contributed aiming at struggling with corruption. They have approved and rectified piles of anti-corruptive documents and regulations. The only problem is: the content of papers and documents is closed for a wider population. Moreover, neither knowledgeable lawyers nor social scholars are intended to comment on them.

Short overview of all anti-corruptive actions of the previous year highlights the following ones: toughening punishment for bribery, abuse of power and confidence aiming at personal enrichment.

It seems paradoxical, but the results of so called anti-corruptive activity turned to be harmful, not the useful one for the majority of the Russian citizens. They are to pay bigger money to bureaucrats for being provided with allowable services than ever before.

Having started more than a year ago, the anti-corruption campaign added a substantial workload to the third power branch. Office of Public Prosecutor representatives, Ministry of Domestic Affairs, courts, tax offices of all levels had been involved into various activities that have resulted in completed search and disclosure of corrupted power officials of the middle echelon.

Mass media have published details about notorious corrupted characters, as well as about their unmasking and punishment.

In order not to be trapped, top state and political circles of Russia took in advance all the possible precautions and warnings for legal and controlling authorities. They were remunerated for their job and got a guaranteed pension security *boni*. It is worth noting that such an incentive pay plan is many times fold pension of those Russian pensioners whose professional career was far away from the power structures of the post-soviet period. One can easily assess such decisions as a particular bribery and a prepaid scheme for the corruption fighters. The plan has not worked well. There is a proverbial saying that there is never enough money. The time for so called «militiamen werewolves» has come. Both low and high rank officers, including lieutenants, colonels and even generals, got involved into corruption acts. Not only should-straps, but judges' gowns turned to be dirty.

A growing set of corruptive bargains are being revealed and punished.

There is another widely spread form of so called «concealed corruption». For the most of cases, its exposure is hidden. Corrupted officials are exchanging their services, acting in accordance with the principle: scratch my back and I'll scratch yours. It is next to impossible to prove that it is a corruptive act.

Further climbing a career ladder and reaching the apex of the power pyramid becomes a reality due to such «barter» activities. It is unlikely to be risk-taking. A «bunch» of mates and friends guarantees rescue.

One can compare corruption with a monster that is getting engrained into the modern Russian society. Another strong metaphor strikes the mind: it is deteriorating the society from inside, and, finally, it could be compared with terrorism.

According to Georgy Satarov, besides destroying the moral basis of the society, corruption ruins economy, and leads to unfair

distribution of social benefits, as well as to dangerous growth of social stratification.

Massive corruption came into existence during the period of privatization that was called by the talented Russian people «wild gangster privatization». It was the time of property redistribution resulted in a big amount of imposing monuments in the majestic corners of the Russian cemeteries, and inherited by the descendents.

Later period of privatization turned to be more civilized. The time of loans-for-shares auctions has come. As a common rule, auditor's report on the privatized enterprises of the board of Mr Sergey Stepashin stated validity and reasonableness of the privatization procedures. Fines in favour of the State were rare. Some auditors of the Controlling Board were granted with bigger rewards by the owners of the privatized property. They could afford bribes because extremely expensive property belonged to them. They had paid nothing for it. It goes without saying that such reports made some people calm. Partly, the owners suffered from lack of self-confidence. They felt, they knew for sure that they could not entirely possess their ownership. They got it illegally.

In order to comfort Russian tycoons and their overseas partners, authorities and governmental circles did their best. They have kept lulling: «It does not make any sense to get worried. Nobody expects privatization reviewing». Such formal and public affirmation meant that there was not any obstacle on the way of corruption.

Moreover, under the world financial crisis inflation and unemployment are rising in Russia. Production growth rates, export tax revenue have drastically reduced.

Ironically, at the very beginning of the current year mass media announced that Russia was not anymore a world leader in terms of number of oligarchs. Russia has lost one-half of

them. Tycoons of all calibers were sliding into poverty. Some of them had many billion debts.

Having heard that, «God fathers» of oligarchs started a rescuing campaign. In order not to be late and to be in the right place on time, tycoons also contributed into setting written communication channels: they started scribbling enquiry letters and asking for subsidy payouts from stabilization fund.

On the 18-th of February the newspaper «Izvestiya» published the editorial under the title «Let's help billionaires». The article was full of details concerning some well-known Russian oligarchs' behavioral patterns under the crisis, as well as the Russian government readiness to respond to their queries for help. It is not a secret, but with intention not to pay taxes, their firms were registered in the off-shore places: in Cyprus, in the Netherlands and Luxembourg.

The editorial rhetorically asked a delicately wrapped question; «Should the State stop playing off-shore games and not pay for their assets?» The delicate strategy of the newspaper is more than transparent. One can easily anticipate prosecution for fomentation of hate for oligarchs.

In 2009 the economic and financial crisis has greatly affected the population of Russia. Under these conditions struggle for surviving turned to be on focus. Struggle against corruption has been slowly shadowed. At the same time it has got overt that corruption could cover those social and political spheres that traditionally have been free from its destructive effects. The amount of corruptive deals of power circles and suddenly «broken» tycoons and bankers blatantly demonstrate this assumption. The Russian society infected with the virus of corruption has attained the epidemiologic edge. The population needs sanitary and healthcare inspection. It has to escape from the forthcoming catastrophe.

Firstly, Russia should change the vector of the political system development from the

authoritative model onto the democratic one. It, undoubtedly, allow to select the managing corpus of all possible levels on the democratic and competitive basis amongst honest, decent and conscientious highly educated professionals. They should be experienced in working for the power structures. They should have credentials of their relevance. They should be strong and ready to combat and remove from offices arrogant, perky and cheeky contenders, whose career motto is: «What do you want, my boss?»

To avoid from the second category of officials and bureaucrats is, in fact, next to impossible. Therefore, the struggle with corruption under the authoritative political system can not lead to positive results.

On the one hand, the democratic and competitive way of shaping the managing corpus amongst gifted and decent Russian people will be possible if only dirty tricks, so called «administrative resources» and intended deceit of inexperienced voters would have been excluded from the electoral campaign. As a rule, the voters see quite different elected personalities, who are political «weathercocks», viewless demagogues. In order to get benefits and get privileged, or to reserve assets, they do need power. Those, who are striving to be elected for the presidential post, should take part in debates.

On the other hand, in order to minimise banning or, in contrast, prescriptive legal acts and regulations, one should replace them by the advising ones.

The remaining and necessary for secure life of the Russian people banning and prescriptive acts and regulations, should be explicitly meaningful and be gradually implemented. There are critical points for corruption. There will be no room for usury. Only those functionaries, who have been poisoned by the virus of kleptomania, would have been caught for usury. In other words,

all can worsen for corrupted officials because of the shrinking opportunities.

There will be isolated isles, the dark corners of the state full of corruptive activities. They will not jeopardize the morale of the Russian people.

Thirdly, thorough systematic work aimed at configuring of the civil society and legal institutions and mass media, reporting to it, should run.

Fourthly, one should loose stereotypes. There is prejudice that only obedient, devout and loyal to their leader team players and mates can rule efficiently in all levels: from the central up to the local ones. One should escape this dangerous misconception. It is necessary for those, who are in charge of building teams of managing staff and executives of all levels.

The activity of the «leader of all nations ever» on the Soviet political arena can serve a bright example of the two decade uncompromising struggle with dissenting people. Stalin wanted to build a team of mates in all the powerful structures in the Soviet Union.

To attain this aim several millions of nonconformists labeled as «enemies of the people» have been shot or exiled to GULAG.

Wise and far-seeing leader ordered «faultlessly», helping bury several millions of soldiers and officers of the Red Army.

He did not change his strategy after the Second World War. Having won the War, the Soviet people kept suffering from Stalin's outrageous tyranny. For the sake of preventive measures several thousands of the Soviet people were shot in 1950-1951. They were prosecuted under so called «the Leningrad case». They were said guilty because they had been at war, they had seen death, and they had survived in a 900-day blockade of Leningrad and have resulted in independent judgments on the after-war life. They lost their fear under the Stalin's punitive policy. Besides, several millions soldiers and

officers have been coming home from the fronts. They gave freedom and peace to the European countries from the Nazi occupation.

They were considered to be a potential danger for the Stalinist totalitarian regime. They could blow up the regime. But, unfortunately, they did nothing. There was not any socio-political explosion.

Stalin did know the history of Russia well. He was wiser and more provident than the liberal emperor Alexander I, who had not been able to prevent the rebellion of the Decembrists. Having come back to Russia from their European campaign, officers set up covert societies, aiming at deposition of the monarchy. In December 1825, in the period of interregnum, they entered the Senate square, taking up arms.

I.V. Stalin did not keep waiting when the hotbeds of opposition against his entire power would come into emergence. In 1946-1948, just after the Second World War, the powerful ideological campaign has started. It was the struggle against potential opponents of the totalitarian political regime. The best scientists, artistic professionals, well-known writers, poets, composers, philosophers, historians, economists, linguists, cyberneticists and geneticists have been demonized, triggered and, later, morally defeated. The «Leningrad case» turned to be a top moment of the struggle against the after-war dissenting personalities. It was a true present for Stalin's jubilee. Several thousands of the Communist Party members, trade union activists, and young communists were shot and morally ruined.

Nowadays some well-known writers, publicists and political scientists argue that Stalin with his associates have been destroying corrupted officials and the so called «fifth file» in the Red Army.

What if to support them? Nowadays the struggle against corruption is a rather dangerous idea. This struggle can result in

serious consequences. Not only true corrupted officials can inevitably suffer, but several thousands of the Russians, who are to get corrupted due to the existing circumstances. Is it worth doing? Perhaps, it does not make any sense to initiate the struggle against corruption, to find out corrupted officials in the power circles and to reveal their names or to toughen the punishment. Is there any certainty that corrupted officials will be afraid of further involvement into bribery activity? This very scenario will lead to the endless fight with corruption. Would it be better to get restricted and struggle with its manifestations?

It is fair to say that the top power echelons with the president D.A. Medvedev in the head have finally understood the essence of corruption, its danger and the crucial necessity to minimise its destructive consequences. In July 2008 mass media witnessed that Mr President had chaired a meeting on the formation of the personnel reserve for top – heavy managing staffing structures. Representatives of the Federal executives, educational authorities, scientific circles, political parties and non-governmental organizations entered the committee.

A paradoxical situation is being framed: corruptive officials, supplied with the top bosses' orders, decided to fight corruption.

The rich and educative history of Russia witnesses the analogy with the modern situation. As it is well known, at the beginning of the 60-s of the XIX century, in accordance with the Emperor's Alexander II initiative, landholders seigneurs (pomeshchiks) «abolished» the servage, i.e. passed the so called Emancipation Edict. According to the data, more than 3212 peasants' bloody riots took place in the period of 1861-1863. Moreover, the Emperor, who had freed the people, ended his life tragically. On the 1-st of May 1881 Alexander was deadly wounded and passes away several hours after.

A delayed-action mine that had been prepared by the landlords-liberators detonated in 1917. The Russian Empire crashed. On the contrary, corruption survived.

As a result, under the total corruption, the Presidential committee found 172 qualified experts. According to mass media, they are originated in Russia, not «exported» from the countries that are safer and free from corruption. No one knows the technology of the experts corpus configuring. God knows. It was a hard slog for them: to choose 1000 people amongst 1211 contenders for the top staffing managing reserve.

At the starting point of the experiment 100 pretenders were chosen as the trial ones. They were introduced to Mr the President. It was a kind of a «viewing of the bride». No one knows who are the favourites. A further «bride-show» for the Prime-minister is coming. If the experiment with the top 100 is being succeeded, the next 990 pretenders will be introduced to both the President and the Prime-minister.

Generally speaking, the President and his anti-corruption board have got an agenda: there is plenty of plans to implement. A rotation of the managing staff of all levels, from the federal one up to the local ones, is being expected. More than 20000 specialists will be involved into the procedure.

It is worth emphasizing the criteria for the presidential elite hundred of contenders. Amongst them the following personal and professional qualities are listed: ability to be successful, managing abilities, strategic thinking capacities, reputation, competences.

Is not that a team portrait of all kinds of corruptive officials? Are not their major personal and professional qualities? It is next to impossible to climb a career ladder and to be assessed by authorities without these credentials. The problem is: experts accidentally forgot to include

to this list such prerequisites as: honesty, decency and ethics. Who knows, they could forget these qualities intentionally. Perhaps, they could not find clean pretenders for the presidential reserve. They have been searching. They could not find. They stopped and, finally, got calm down.

The major difference of a decent official from a dishonest one is the following: the decent official is able to accept blame for wrong solutions. He gets dismissed. The second type of official searches and then nominates the guilty people for every single failure.

Within the frame of the struggle with corruption the widely advertised campaign of income declaration for top managers, party and governmental circles and their families, initiated by the President D.A. Medvedev, provokes serious thoughts. As one can feel, this campaign is more than ambiguous. It asks a question, whether it could lead to the efficient means of struggling with corruption.

Might it be a sign for the corrupted officials? Might it mean that it is a crucial moment for getting rid of their favourite activities and to hide their wealth that was earned in a criminal way? The majority of the corrupted officials managed to do that in advance. Those, who did not do that, have got enough time for doing that. The legislative bodies provided all with a time-out. The official income declarations will be compulsory only in 2010!

At the time-being family income declaration are voluntary. The president, D.A. Medvedev, and the Prime-minister, V.V. Putin, were the first, who have declared their accumulated family income. They have been tailored by their vices.

The regional and local authorities are likely to declare their family income in the nearest future. One can predict that the majority of the Russian citizens, deprived because of the worldwide financial crisis, will assess the information containing the life and income details

of the authorities with irritation and indignation. Due to the lack of a civil society in Russia, they will not flood streets with demonstrations; they will not require impeachment for the president. Moreover, no one will be surprised by the fact that there would be found poor and underprivileged officials.

There is a pretty sure assumption that this notorious campaign of income manifestation will not contribute positively to the reputation of power circles amongst the population of Russia. The minor population, having studied the income declaration content of the official elite, will be likely to queue aiming at getting the presidential staffing reserve and all the privileges of the officials' life in their own purposes.

Do we need such a queue for those who are eager to get power? The answer is: NO!

It is needless to say that it would be better to search talented and decent executives, who are able to serve and contribute for the sake of the Russian people's wealth, in the working teams, and convince them to change their job and get a bigger and significant position.

Perhaps, the presidential campaign is aimed at different foci and different objectives? May be the major purpose is to find out who is who in the power circles of the Russian state? Just to find out in order to trigger both the so called «honest» corrupted officials and those ones who will show a phony information. The «honest» corrupted officials can submit a true information concerning their income and property, including those ones of the corruption act origin. They can hope that the very sense of declaration is a hidden form of amnesty. On the contrary, those corrupted officials who submit a fake information, do hope that they the money is secure.

Finally, the «honest» and not «honest» corrupted officials will be «triggered» by the ruling tandem. It will manipulate with the loyal team-players for a long time.

The history of Russia witnesses one authentic fact. A great inquisitor A. Vishinsky was alive because the chief (Stalin) knew all the sins and wrong-doings of his subordinate.

Only those corrupted officials who will declare non-existent incomes due to their arrogant and vogue ambitions may sleep well and not be scared stiff of repressions.

The rest of corrupted officials will be a bit anxious and uncertain for some period of time. They will live under psychological discomfort until they understand the sense of the «black lists» for the ruling tandem. In the era of Stalin such lists were the major arguments for shooting.

The former head of the KGB (Security service of the USSR), Mr Y.V. Andropov, has collected for 15 years of his duty an impressive archive of information about corrupted officials: party leaders, ministers, their vices, directors of enterprises, department stores and supermarkets, heads of the sovkhozes and kolkhozes, shadow entrepreneurs, and others. Having got the post of the general secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist party of the Soviet Union, Mr Andropov for only one year exiled to the corrective labour institutions and detention centres several thousands of corrupted officials. For the period of 15 months of his duty he resigned 18 ministers and 17 first secretaries of the regional committees and first secretaries of the Central Committees of the former Soviet republics. There was no such a staff rotation of the top executives in the notorious 1937!

At the same time the corrupted officials from the Ministry of Interior and prosecutor's office, in revenge, managed to prepare false evidence and frame up cases resulted in imprisonment of several hundreds of the Soviet and party officials, who had disturbed bribe taking. There is a proverb: «Splinters will fly when the axe you ply». The only problem was: several hundreds

of non-guilty people, having been obstructing corruption, were seen as «splinters».

Resume

Who can foresee the results of the struggle with corruption nowadays?

Firstly, one can assume the growing rates of bribery.

Secondly, there will be a full list of the corrupted officials up to the 2010. The declaration information will likely to be fake.

Thirdly, all kinds of anti-corruption committees, boards and panels will not guarantee the problem solving. It is well known, that in order to bury a reasonable suggestion, it is fairly enough to make a committee.

Fourthly, due to the fact that corruption is a part and parcel of the modern power system, it is impossible to rely on the struggle with it without changing this very system. One can proceed success just in the struggle with its manifestations. It is possible to find out corrupted officials, and even to punish them. New appointees from the presidential staffing reserve, more gifted and young, will take the vacant positions.

I firmly recommend to the freshmen, who are on their way to get a plethora of corrupted officials, to study thoroughly an idiosyncratic book by Robert Grin «48 Laws of Power» (Grin, 2001). It may be viewed as a benchbook for those who are eager to polish up skills to manage people, to exploit their weaknesses in order to attain power.

Having learnt the theory, one feels confident and strong enough to climb a corruption tree. This is a very comfortable seat for the top corrupted circles of Russian state. Ironically, the state announced the anti-corruption war and started swinging a stem of the tree of poison and ulcer.

It does not make any sense for getting troubled. Top authorities will not cut their favourite tree. The only advice should be suitable: BEWARE

of falling down! It is easy to fall downward the peccable ground and be caught by guards, stuffed with handcuffs; finally, be imprisoned.

The results of this study have definite implications for both corrupted officials and

for those, who broke an anti-corruption war.

Everyone should be aware of a destructive nature of corruption. It ruins moral, political and socio-economic basics of the Russian society.

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Борьба с коррупцией в России: история и современные проблемы

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В статье рассматривается в диахронно-исторической перспективе феномен коррупции как социальное явление. Дается определение коррупции и анализируются отдельные ее проявления в различные эпохи в опыте многих поколений российского и советского народа. С научной беспристрастностью автор вскрывает социальные «язвы», порожденные разрушающим действием коррупции.

Ключевые слова: коррупция; общественное явление; политика; государственное управление; антикоррупционные меры.
