WITHOUT CORRUPTION - TOWARDS A KNOWLEDGE SOCIETY THROUGH EUROPEANIZATION AND GLOBALIZATION

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Abstract. *This article attempts to address corruption as a major threat to democracy, the rule of law, social equity, and justice. It undermines the principles of effective administration, erodes citizens' trust in state institutions, jeopardizes the market economy, and endangers the stability of state institutions. Corruption is a global security problem, long considered a major issue, but only recently recognized as a first-degree challenge to international security, to the extent that it is now loudly declared a gross violation of fundamental human rights.*

Developing a common policy concept for security and defense at the international level to optimize the fight against corruption involves creating shared databases and an institutionalized system of contacts to enhance and develop a new dimension of collaboration within multinational coalitions; reforming sectoral services through institutional depoliticization; developing and implementing a modern concept of reform; introducing legislative and institutional changes; and improving staff management and training in accordance with international standards.

The process of Europeanization contains the necessary ingredients to modernize the country and eliminate the fragility that makes Moldova unattractive to its own citizens.

Keywords*: corruption, national and international security, democracy, global security problem, corrupt countries, democratic transition, globalization, democratization, political corruption*

Introduction

Corruption represents a global threat to security, a phenomenon that undermines the development of any nation and erodes citizens' trust in state institutions. This scourge profoundly affects the functioning of the state, creating systemic vulnerabilities that undermine institutional stability, cause significant economic losses, and limit a country's potential for growth and progress. At the same

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time, corruption compromises good governance, negatively influencing decision-making processes and the state's capacity to implement policies that benefit citizens and communities.

The phenomenon of corruption is a first-tier international security challenge, deeply impacting the mechanisms of a functional market economy. It erodes the principles of fair competition, discourages foreign direct investment, and compromises the respect for fundamental human rights, including equal access to opportunities and resources. Furthermore, corruption damages a state’s image, potentially isolating it from the interests of the international community.

Corruption reduces the quality of social, educational, and healthcare programs, affects the quality of life, increases social inequality, undermines political accountability, transparency, and inclusiveness, and imposes the selfish interests of narrow groups of individuals on society, deteriorating democratic processes.

Corruption, as a typical phenomenon of bureaucratic and budgetary states that direct the nation’s energies into perpetually feeding their own resources rather than enabling healthy, normal evolution, is universal and not exclusive to Moldovan society. Corruption is considered the improper use of a public office, interpreted as benefiting personal or specific group interests, which directly impacts economic and social development, distorts the potential benefits of free market forces, and leads to companies "bidding on commissions" to secure profitable economic contracts.

As a result, such situations often mask activities related to the functioning of the state. This leads to public outrage and social unrest. According to the author, the system itself is corrupt, and the only way to change this would be to reform the system by establishing an external (foreign) monitoring and control mechanism. The legacy of this system, the so-called leadership networks, was initially redirected to serve objectives unrelated to public administration, aimed instead at personal interests and the enrichment of decision-makers, their relatives, and close associates.

Integrity is a virtue that encompasses a series of moral traits such as honesty, fairness, and probity. Integrity can only flourish in a climate that values human dignity, where people can express their choices and are free to make decisions.

Governance lacking integrity leads to poor-quality and unjustifiably expensive public services, which are borne by the public budget. To combat systemic corruption and increase public integrity, consistent efforts are needed to restore citizens' trust in governance. A significant success would also involve improving the efficiency of corruption cases and highlighting individuals who contribute to delays in judicial proceedings through civil society monitoring. More active involvement by civil society as a neutral arbitrator in monitoring judicial processes related to corruption cases, along with preparing monitoring reports, would lead to the desired and premeditated changes. Any country where state assets are embezzled and the problems or needs of ordinary citizens are ignored has no future.

Among the many types of corruption, such as professional, economic, or financial-business-related corruption, political corruption includes activities such as the illegal financing of electoral campaigns, promoting individuals to government positions based solely on political criteria, thereby exacerbating threats, risks, and vulnerabilities to national, regional, and international security.

Externally, persistent corruption negatively impacts the credibility and image of states. Corruption is a global security issue, long considered a major problem, but recently recognized as a first-tier international security challenge. Today, it is loudly stated that corruption flagrantly violates fundamental human rights. Recent studies highlight the significant connection between transnational organized crime and corruption as major threats to political stability, human security, democracy, and economic development (Zeneli, 2016: p. 10-17).

In some countries, corruption is the system itself. The governments of these countries are oriented toward objectives unrelated to public administration but rather focused on the personal enrichment of leadership networks or political parties. It is no surprise that such governments are despised by the majority of citizens worldwide due to excessive bureaucracy, pursuing personal interests at the expense of national interests, making decisions contrary to public opinion, accepting bribes, hiding public information, etc.

Thus, the structural dynamics combined with acute corruption and international security violations confirm once again that corruption is a serious problem that must be properly assessed. Corruption and inequality feed off each other, creating a vicious cycle between corruption, the unequal distribution of power in society, and the unequal distribution of wealth. For example, the Panama Papers case demonstrated how easy it still is for the wealthy and powerful to exploit the opacity of the global financial system to enrich themselves at the expense of the public good. High-profile corruption cases, from Petrobras and Odebrecht in Brazil to the case of former Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych, illustrate how secret deals between businesses and politicians deprive national economies of billions of dollars in revenues, which are diverted to benefit a few at the expense of the many. This type of systemic corruption violates human rights, hinders sustainable development, and fosters social exclusion (Transparency International, 2017).

Corruption represents a major threat to democracy, the rule of law, social equity, and justice. It undermines the principles of effective administration and erodes citizens' trust in state institutions. It endangers the market economy and the stability of state institutions. Addressing essential issues within the security and defense system is imperative, with the objective of strengthening the prestige of armed forces by promoting respect for human rights and developing the professional integrity of soldiers in the National Army.

The process of democratic transition in the Republic of Moldova represents a multidimensional phenomenon characterized by the high complexity of dual transitions—political transition and the transition to a market economy. It should be noted, however, that Moldova's dual transition was further complicated by the necessity of establishing statehood, acknowledging that "besides democratization and marketization, post-communist states have inherited weak and inefficient bureaucratic institutions that required reform" (Kuzio, 2001: p. 168). In this sense, the analysis of the idea of creating the statehood of the Republic of Moldova is not an easy issue and it is worth mentioning that, to a large extent, a political structure has been formed in this territory, taking into account the ongoing international confrontations between the great powers. Over the years of independence, the Republic of Moldova has demonstrated a

high degree of vulnerability in one of its primary state components from the perspective of democratization and national security—*the concept of statehood*. The crisis of statehood is expressed through both internal and external dimensions. Internally, the crisis of statehood in the Republic of Moldova is evident through low public trust in state authorities, the state's inability to govern its entire territory, and the high level of corruption in the country. In this context, according to public opinion surveys conducted nationwide, the population exhibits a high degree of distrust in the main state institutions (Barometer of Public Opinion, 2023). Another direct challenge to the consolidation of statehood is corruption, which has a profound impact on the entire social mechanism and has reached alarming proportions in the Republic of Moldova. Additionally, the vulnerability of Moldovan statehood is directly expressed through the separatism of the Transnistrian region, which calls into question the existence of the state. The external dimension of Moldova's statehood crisis is conditioned by Russia's refusal to recognize the Republic of Moldova's real independence and its neutral status, as well as its direct support for Transnistrian separatism (Cojocaru, 2001: p. 67).

The phenomenon of corruption within the electoral process in the Republic of Moldova constitutes a major challenge to the consolidation of democracy and the guarantee of election integrity. Electoral corruption manifests itself in various forms, such as vote-buying, manipulation of votes, and the illegal influencing of voters, thus undermining public trust in the legitimacy of the electoral process and state institutions.

To combat this phenomenon, Moldovan authorities have adopted legislative and procedural measures. Recently, Parliament submitted a legislative proposal aimed at combating electoral corruption, which establishes shorter deadlines for investigating and adjudicating cases of voter bribery and provides for harsher penalties. The draft has already been reviewed by the parliamentary legal committee and is awaiting a vote in the plenary session.

Moreover, additional legislative measures have been introduced to prevent electoral corruption, including strict deadlines for investigating and resolving voter bribery cases and supplementary regulations for registering political parties. Nevertheless, electoral corruption persists, and public perception of this phenomenon remains high. Studies reveal a significant public perception of corruption, underscoring the need to implement more effective anti-corruption policies and strengthen mechanisms to prevent and sanction acts of electoral corruption.

Foreign interference in Moldova's electoral processes during 2024–2025 represents a serious threat to the country's sovereignty and political integrity. In this context, external actors, particularly the Russian Federation, have intensified their strategies of influence, including the use of hybrid tools such as disinformation, public opinion manipulation campaigns, and support for pro-Russian political parties and movements. These actions aim to destabilize Moldova's democratic process, undermine citizens' trust in state institutions, and compromise the country's pro-European direction. In this regard, the Moldovan Intelligence and Security Service has conducted a detailed analysis of the data, highlighting an unprecedented intensification of actions taken by the Russian Federation to maintain Moldova in its sphere of influence.

The hybrid mechanisms employed by the Russian Federation focus particularly on undermining democratic processes and compromising the country's European

integration agenda. These actions not only affect Moldova's political stability but also endanger its aspirations to join the European community (Security and Intelligence Service of the Republic of Moldova, 2024).

Russian interference has been exerted on multiple fronts, including amplifying radical tendencies of a separatist-autonomist nature; propaganda and disinformation; exploiting ecclesiastical factors; interfering in Moldova's electoral process; carrying out subversive operations by Russian special services; and exploiting elements of organized crime.

These actions undermine citizens' trust in state institutions and the electoral process, thus affecting the political and social stability of the Republic of Moldova. To counter these threats, a coordinated response from national authorities and international partners is necessary, focusing on strengthening cybersecurity, combating disinformation, and promoting civic education.

Other factors affecting national security include the influence and funding of various political and civic forces by the Russian Federation, the economic crisis, disinformation and public opinion manipulation, the lack of a security culture in society and within the political class, inadequate public communication in the area of security and defence, lack of social cohesion, the refugee crisis, and border security issues (Țicu, 2022). Additionally, crises differ in their specific characteristics and areas of manifestation or action. The connections between organized crime and corruption highlight a link between goal-oriented crimes and means-oriented crimes. Often, organized crime structures use corruption to safeguard their illicit activities in this sphere. Separately, the need to conceal funds derived from corrupt acts forces them to engage in ingenious financial laundering and recycling schemes.

The Transnistrian issue remains one of the main factors contributing to severe corruption risks for state security bodies, as it is a region not controlled by Moldovan authorities. The status quo of this region allows the self-proclaimed authorities in Moldova's eastern districts to illegally maintain armed forces, produce and sell various types of weapons used by international Islamist organizations in regional conflicts or to support criminal structures. All these factors suggest that high levels of corruption and the absence of accountability and transparency are primarily the consequences of governance failures and weak rule of law. Therefore, in the Transnistrian region, there are numerous factors creating power vacuums easily exploited by traffickers, criminals, insurgents, and terrorists, such as increased military spending, low transparency, the creation of legal gray zones, the existence of irregular paramilitary formations, and the lack of effective control over the movement of immigrants into the Republic of Moldova via the Transnistrian segment. In a globalized world, poor governance becomes a liability.

In recent years, the Republic of Moldova has defined a clear European path, committing to strengthening transparent, accountable, and participatory governance, adjusting its legal framework and infrastructure to fortify a free and competitive market economy, and ensuring the protection of fundamental human rights. One of the most important conditions for achieving these goals is combating corruption in all sectors of public life. The necessity of fighting this scourge is confirmed by civil society and all international partners supporting Moldova's European trajectory (Transparency International Moldova, 2014).

In the same vein, it must be noted that the Republic of Moldova faces integration and Europeanization challenges that are unfamiliar to other European states. Modernization and Europeanization are developmental choices—an evolution toward a better life, higher standards, like those enjoyed by European citizens. Europeanization strengthens mechanisms for drafting and implementing policies within European institutions, driving changes to the national institutional framework. Europeanization is not only a political construction but also an institutional one, considering its particular historical evolution. The process of Europeanization encompasses a wide range of actions: urbanization, education, industrialization, communication, democracy, stability, structural differentiation, development models, European integration, eliminating internal disparities, and bridging gaps with other European states. Moreover, Europeanization represents the development of governing institutions at the European level and the division of responsibilities. Therefore, achieving European integration is tied to citizens' demands for the Europeanization of society in each country and at the European Union level.

The Europeanization process inherently contains the ingredients needed to modernize the country and, consequently, to eliminate the fragilities that make Moldova unattractive to its own citizens. However, Europeanization cannot be achieved solely by the European Union but with its support and through the efforts of the political class in Chişinău. Beyond the fact that migration demonstrates Moldovans fleeing the multiple fragilities present in the country's project, it also reveals a significant challenge Moldova faces—depopulation of the country by supporters of European integration. On the one hand, citizens who see clear prospects in proximity to the EU emigrate, while, on the other hand, those remaining in the country adopt a Eurosceptic position due to pro-EU parties that have proven to be corrupt.

Incorporating the European agenda into the daily lives of Moldovans can only occur if there is sufficient public support. Pro-European sentiment has always been stronger among young people. However, their perception of the EU has changed radically since 2012, when political corruption linked to pro-European parties began to dominate the public sphere (Cenusa, 2017).

Even so, aligning the Republic of Moldova with European standards is a complex challenge that requires an integrated and sustainable approach across multiple fields, with education playing a crucial role. Continuous training programs and specialized education are essential for developing the skills needed in the current European context, contributing to the formation of an informed society capable of addressing contemporary challenges. This will not only contribute to citizens' personal and professional development but also to the country's economic and social progress, facilitating integration into the European community.

Combating corruption is a cornerstone in strengthening the rule of law and promoting effective and responsible governance. Corruption undermines citizens' trust in public institutions, affecting the proper functioning of administration and the economy. It creates an environment conducive to social and economic inequalities, discouraging investments and sustainable development.

The *Anti-Corruption Reforms in Moldova report* evaluates efforts to combat corruption in various sectors of the country. Moldova demonstrates strengths in

developing evidence-based anti-corruption policies through inclusive and transparent processes. Asset declarations cover a wide range of officials and assets, are accessible to the public online, and are verified by the National Integrity Authority (ANI). Whistleblower protection is legally guaranteed, covering employees in both the public and private sectors. However, challenges remain. Policy implementation is slow, with only half of the planned measures fully realized. Sanctions for violating conflict-of-interest regulations are inconsistently applied to high-level officials. Although asset declarations are digitalized, essential information is withheld from public access, and data is not available in a machine-readable format. Whistleblower protection mechanisms lack sufficient resources and enforcement powers, and anonymous reporting is not allowed. Improvements are needed in business integrity, particularly in real beneficiary transparency, state enterprise governance, and compliance program implementation. The report highlights best practices, such as the ”National Integrity and Anti-Corruption Strategy (NIAS)” framework and the inclusion of civil society organizations in monitoring, but emphasizes the need for stronger law enforcement and more efficient resource allocation to achieve significant progress in combating corruption (OECD, 2023).

Key achievements of the National Anti-Corruption Center (CNA) for 2023 include 250 operational analysis reports, 905 anti-corruption expertise reports, 13 institutional integrity evaluation monitoring reports, and numerous training sessions for public officials, students, and private sector employees. The CNA initiated investigations into 511 offenses, with the most frequent cases found in local public authorities, internal affairs bodies, the National Food Safety Agency, and the Public Services Agency. The CNA also managed 1,100 criminal cases and seized assets worth 1.8 billion lei. Parliamentary committees expressed support for the CNA's objectives for 2024. The report recommends that the CNA continue its efforts to combat systemic corruption in the public sector, public procurement, external fund management, and the energy sector, as well as to strengthen the recovery of criminal assets. The government is urged to support the CNA’s institutional capacity, while parliamentary committees are encouraged to monitor the CNA’s activities (Parliament of the Republic of Moldova, 2023: p. 1-4).

According to the *Ex-Post Impact Evaluation Report of Law No. 325/2013 on Evaluating Institutional Integrity,* the National Anti-Corruption Center (CNA) assessed 16 public entities between 2021 and mid-2023, identifying common issues such as inadequate anti-corruption measures, ambiguous procedures, and flawed regulations. Specific problems included abusive practices in healthcare contracts, monument inspections, and the issuance of permits. The CNA issued 853 recommendations, which led to the adoption of 16 integrity plans. However, implementation remains a challenge, with only approximately 75% of planned actions completed. The report highlights difficulties such as internal regulatory conflicts, limited human resources within the CNA, and the recovery of funds used in integrity tests. It also examines international best practices, noting that integrity testing is recommended by organizations such as the UN and OECD. The evaluation results show that the law has had a positive impact on good governance and the business environment, but it calls for strengthening the evaluation process, increasing CNA staff numbers, ensuring funding, and amending the

law to address Constitutional Court decisions and practical implementation challenges. Additionally, it recommends exploring international best practices and developing a mechanism to incentivize and protect integrity testers (Parliament of the Republic of Moldova, 2023: p. 1-72).

The study *Anti-Corruption Expertise 2019–2020* provides a comprehensive analysis of the effectiveness of anti-corruption measures implemented in Moldova's electoral context, highlighting associated costs and their impact on the electoral process and citizens' trust in democratic institutions. The study's findings emphasize that, although progress has been made in developing a legislative and institutional framework to combat electoral corruption, the effectiveness of these measures remains limited. The high costs of implementing anti-corruption programs, relative to the results achieved, suggest the need for a re-evaluation of the strategies used. The positive impact of anti-corruption initiatives is evident in raising public awareness about corruption, but their effects on electoral behavior and the integrity of the electoral process are not yet sufficiently convincing (Ionita; Savva, 2021).

The implementation of a comprehensive and well-coordinated strategy should go beyond simple legislative measures. This strategy should integrate educational initiatives aimed at increasing the awareness and responsibility of all actors involved in the electoral process. By fostering adequate education on electoral integrity and promoting transparency, a healthier and more open electoral environment can be created, contributing not only to strengthening democracy but also to ensuring national stability—a prerequisite for the development of Moldovan society. Thus, through training programs and informational campaigns, a better understanding of the importance of transparency and integrity in elections can be facilitated, ensuring a stronger commitment to democratic values.

Combating corruption is crucial for developing a fair and prosperous society, as well as for strengthening democracy and the rule of law. Coordinated efforts by authorities, civil society, and the private sector are necessary to prevent and fight corruption in all its forms. In this regard, the project implemented by the *Pro Marshall Center of the Republic of Moldova* in partnership with the Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Moldova and with support from the *Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Foundation*, titled "*Cultivating Integrity and Justice to Strengthen Security within the Ministry of Defense*," serves as an illustrative example of promoting transparency and accountability in state institutions. The project aims to develop a stronger institutional and legislative framework to combat corruption, while strengthening integrity and ethics in decision-making processes within the defense sector (Pro Marshall Center of the Republic of Moldova, 2024).

The general objective of the project was to enhance the prestige of the armed forces by promoting respect for the rights of military personnel and cultivating professional integrity within the National Army. The target group of the project included over 1,000 conscripted and contract soldiers. Between September 24 and October 7, 2024, experts associated with the Pro Marshall Center, in partnership with representatives of the Ministry of Defense's Military Inspectorate, conducted field training sessions for conscripted and contract soldiers. The central topic of these training sessions was strengthening the image of military service by promoting respect for the

rights of military personnel and cultivating professional integrity within the National Army. The overall research findings highlighted the need for synergy between state security and defense institutions and civil society to enhance the attractiveness of military service and the Ministry of Defense, as well as to recruit highly qualified personnel from related fields, which would contribute to improving the country's security and defense levels (Pro Marshall Center of the Republic of Moldova, 2024).

In the context of the Republic of Moldova's European integration process, combating corruption is essential for aligning with European Union standards and ensuring transparent and accountable governance. Corruption undermines the EU's fundamental values, such as the rule of law and respect for human rights and can affect the effectiveness of European policies and programs.

Promoting policies of ethics and corruption prevention is an important condition for strengthening the capacity for good governance. Transparency, effectiveness, efficiency, accountability, and promptness in the exercise of public office responsibilities are tangible objectives for ensuring a professional and high-performing civil service body in line with the highest ethical and integrity standards agreed upon by the European Union ("the EU's multi-level system").

A culture of public integrity and zero tolerance for acts of corruption can only be cultivated if human dignity and universally accepted moral values are upheld. Overall, the integrity of a public official or a dignitary is an imperative pursued by any authority or public institution, leading to the realization of democratic principles of state governance and ensuring the fundamental rights and freedoms of citizens (Anti-Corruption Alliance, 2016: p. 1-52).

This phenomenon must be mitigated through rigorous controls and the implementation of a series of preventive measures aimed at addressing criminogenic factors and eliminating the conditions that generate corruption, by detecting corrupt acts and holding the perpetrators accountable. In this process, continuous training programs and specialized education represent an essential direction for aligning with European standards. Education reform and the development of specific educational initiatives are fundamental elements of this process, aiming to transform institutional culture, modernize structures, and strengthen capacities.

After 33 years of independence, Moldova still has the opportunity to recover from lost development prospects. The diversification of internal and external risk factors affecting the national security system is significant. The political threat is manifested through the uncertainty surrounding the state's political security, as political power is responsible for decisions and institutions related to state security. Thus, the instability of political security can be affected by ideological or national vulnerabilities, which may be intentional or structural. Corruption and group influence in Moldovan politics, the phenomenon of political separatism (the so-called Transnistrian Moldovan Republic), and ethnic separatism (the Territorial-Administrative Unit of Gagauz-Yeri) supported by the Russian Federation—which has yet to withdraw its armed forces—political defection, and the low political culture of citizens erode the sovereignty of the rule of law.

No matter how much pro-Russian forces insist, there is no more successful model of development in the region for a country interested in democracy than through the

instruments that constitute European integration. The Europeanization process of the Republic of Moldova heavily depends on the support of European Union member states in stimulating democratic reforms, the rule of law, and the development of a sustainable market economy.

In conclusion, it must be noted that currently, corruption—an issue with enormous destructive power over the security and defense of states—is not on the agenda of high-level multilateral and bilateral exchanges. Experts and professionals in this field are not involved in the process of making critical decisions. Decision-makers are those who must promote democracy, the rule of law, fair competition, individual freedom, contribute to the protection of human rights, strengthen institutional capacities, and provide appropriate assistance to ensure the efficient functioning of a state. Despite the existence of well-conceived legislative frameworks and policies, the effective implementation of these measures is progressing slowly, with only half of the planned actions being fully realized. This situation highlights a gap in law enforcement and the need for a more efficient mobilization of resources. Based on the reports mentioned above, it can be concluded that these deficiencies require a re-evaluation of current strategies to ensure more effective implementation of anti-corruption measures.

The achievements of the Republic of Moldova in the field of anti-corruption policies, as well as the persistent challenges, require attention and coordinated action to ensure the efficient and sustainable implementation of these policies. Institutional support and monitoring by the Government and parliamentary committees are essential for the National Anti-Corruption Center (CNA), especially in the context of preventing systemic corruption in the public sector and managing external funds. This collaboration is crucial for ensuring the efficiency and sustainability of the CNA's anti-corruption efforts.

The world's states, which act in the spirit of authentic democracy and the principle of the rule of law, must adopt, in their fight against any destabilizing manifestations—including terrorism, corruption, organized crime, or other such activities—a defensive attitude to protect the entire system, their citizens, and their countries. Developing a common concept of security and defense policies at the international level, aimed at optimizing the fight against corruption, involves creating shared databases and an institutionalized system of contacts to improve and develop a new dimension of collaboration within multinational coalitions; reforming services in the field through institutional depoliticization; developing and implementing a modern concept of modernization and reform; implementing legislative and institutional changes; and improving the system of training and personnel management in accordance with international standards. For these reasons, effectively combating corruption is imperative for strengthening a lawful, democratic, and prosperous state.

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