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**Narratives of evil: Localized understandings of corruption**

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<tr>
<th>Project co-funded by the European Commission within the Seventh Framework Programme</th>
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<tr>
<td>PU</td>
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<td>PP</td>
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<td>RE</td>
<td>Restricted to a group specified by the consortium (including the Commission Services)</td>
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<td>Co</td>
<td>Confidential, only for members of the consortium (including the Commission Services)</td>
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Corruption is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that has different forms in different contexts (Richter, Burke 2007). Similarly to other grand concepts like ‘society’, ‘morality’, ‘human relationships’, corruption is also abstract, diffuse and lacking in clear delineation – which makes it a good target for metaphorical reasoning (Kovecses 2000, p.23-26). This research explores the metaphorical dimensions of corruption vocabulary arguing that it is built on a paradox. CACA and HACA research has indicated two apparently contradictory facts. The first one is that there is an international vocabulary associated with corruption that reveals a general, even though superficial, understanding of this phenomenon (“a person is corrupt”, “that is a corrupt country”). The second fact is that there are important local peculiarities in the usage of even the most common corruption related terms (like nepotism, familism, clientelism, cartels). This report is built around this paradox, exploring the tensions between the transnational symbolism of corruption and its local meanings by looking at the use of metaphors in the national press from seven different countries (Italy, France, Hungary, Latvia, Romania, Slovakia and UK).

In cognitive linguistics metaphors are understood as tools that define one conceptual domain in terms of another (Kovecses 2000, p.4). They provide images that are “better suited to making it [the thought] more tangible and more striking than if it were presented directly and without any sort of disguise” (Ricoeur 1978, p.60). In this way metaphors contribute to giving meaning to abstract terms, such as corruption – they provide images to model their reality. For example, corruption might be imagined as an enemy that needs to be conquered or a bribe might be visualised as a gift offered to friends. American cognitive linguists George Lakoff and Mark Johnson show that our cognitive system is primarily metaphoric, but we are mostly not aware of it (Lakoff, Johnson 1980, p.3). They further argue that metaphors not only illuminate the meaning of some abstract concept, but simultaneously hide/obscure/misrepresent it: “In allowing us to focus on one aspect of a concept, a metaphorical concept can keep us from focusing on other aspect of the concept that are inconsistent with that metaphor.” (Lakoff, Johnson 1980, p.10)

This report will proceed as following. The first part will look at the transnational vocabulary associated with corruption and its local understandings. The second part will analyze the symbolic representations of corruption in the media, by drawing out corruption and anti-
corruption metaphors. The third part will focus on various frames of corruption, and the conclusion will bring together the main arguments.

1. **Localized understanding of “official” corruption lexicon**

Analysing the symbolic dimension of corruption from a comparative perspective in seven countries (Italy, France, Hungary, Latvia, Romania, Slovakia and UK) with different evolutionary societal paths, traditions of civil service and most importantly recent history was bound to uncover both commonalities, but also tensions related to the meaning, spread, forms, actors and practices of corruption. CACA has revealed an international vocabulary associated with corruption. The nine key words used in the computer assisted analysis were: corruption, bribe, kickback, embezzlement, collusion, favouritism, nepotism, clientelism and familism. Translated into the original languages the words show some similarity (see Table 1 below) - in more than half of the cases the English word associated with corruption can be found in an almost identical form in the other languages (the most similar forms are displayed in red). We argue that such words are part of the corruption lexicon, that is essentially transnational (promoted and sustained by transnational institutions), strongly associated with legal terminology and criminal justice apparatus, made not only by words, but by concepts that need constant revision in the realm of social sciences. The corruption lexicon is most certainly not reduced to the nine key words used in the computer assisted analysis. For example, Transparency International has an entire glossary\(^1\) establishing the meaning of such concepts in such a way that can be used for policy purposes by national governments and transnational entities like the World Bank, International Monetary Fund or the European Commission.

\(^1\) [https://www.transparency.org/glossary](https://www.transparency.org/glossary)
### Table 1: Vocabulary of corruption

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UK/English</th>
<th>Italy</th>
<th>France</th>
<th>Hungary</th>
<th>Slovakia</th>
<th>Romania</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Corruption</td>
<td>Corruzione</td>
<td>Corruption</td>
<td>Korrupció</td>
<td>Korupcia</td>
<td>Coruptie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bribe/bribery</td>
<td>Tangente</td>
<td>Pots-de-vin</td>
<td>Csúszópénz</td>
<td>Úplatkárstvo</td>
<td>Mita</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kickback</td>
<td>Mazzetta</td>
<td>Bakchich</td>
<td>Kenőpénz</td>
<td>Provízia</td>
<td>Spaga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embezzlement</td>
<td>Peculato</td>
<td>Detournement</td>
<td>Sikkasztás</td>
<td>Sprevera</td>
<td>Delapidare</td>
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<tr>
<td>Collusion</td>
<td>Collusione</td>
<td>Collusion</td>
<td>Összejátszás</td>
<td>Kartel</td>
<td>Blat</td>
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<tr>
<td>Favouritism</td>
<td>Favoritismo</td>
<td>Favoritisme</td>
<td>Részrehajlás</td>
<td>Konflikt záujmov</td>
<td>Favoritism</td>
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<td>Nepotism</td>
<td>Nepotismo</td>
<td>Nepotisme</td>
<td>Nepotizmus</td>
<td>Rodinkárstvo</td>
<td>Nepotism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clientelism</td>
<td>Clientelismo</td>
<td>Clientelisme</td>
<td>Klientúra</td>
<td>Klientelizmus</td>
<td>Clientelism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Familism</td>
<td>Familismo</td>
<td>Familisme</td>
<td>Mutyi mutyzás</td>
<td>Rodinkárstvo</td>
<td>Cumetrie</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, behind such common words and phrases (like the ones in the Table), there are local meanings that emerge. The semantic compositions associated with corruption do not necessarily follow the definition put forward by international organizations, nor do they establish their own coherent definition. Quite the contrary – the meaning is constructed ad hoc, through constant associations between the recent history, local context and international jargon creating a semantic underbelly of corruption. For example, Table 2 summarizes the local meanings of the nine terms in Latvia.
Table 2: Meaning of nine corruption terms in Latvia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Corruption term in English</th>
<th>Corruption term in Latvian</th>
<th>Deviation from standard definition in case of Latvia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Corruption</td>
<td>Korupcija</td>
<td>Corruption in Latvia is perceived to be almost exclusively a public sector phenomenon. Even though private sector corruption is also recognized in the Criminal Law, it has a different vocabulary (not related to, for example, corruption or bribery).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bribe/bribery</td>
<td>Kukulis (bribe)</td>
<td>Latvian language makes a distinction between three forms of bribery depending on whether the focus is on the corruption client (briber) or agent (bribe); the more encompassing term – kukulošana – is relatively seldom used by media. Kukulis is a direct translation of bribe – it is the secondary meaning for the term bread – that’s why any content analysis would need to take into account that the term kukulis will have two meanings.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kukuļdošana (giving-of-the-bribe)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Kukuļpemšana (taking-of-the-bribe)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kukuļošana (giving-and-or-taking-of-the-bribe)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kickback</td>
<td>Otkats</td>
<td>Latvian language does not properly distinguish kickback from other forms/arrangement of bribery – kickbacks according to Criminal Law are punished as bribes. Relatively recently a Russian term otkat has gained prominence – it is a direct translation of the term kickback, but in Latvia it is not used frequently</td>
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<tr>
<td>Embezzlement</td>
<td>Piesavināšanās</td>
<td>The term in Latvian language encapsulates both public sector embezzlement and also private sector crime in cases where there is an abuse of trust (for example, someone gives a neighbour his car for a day and then the neighbour decides to keep the car forever).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collusion</td>
<td>Noziedžiga vienošanās</td>
<td>This term is almost never used in Latvia outside Criminal Law context – where it is used in order to designate all kinds of criminal arrangements by at least two people. Usually media would report on some group of people planning to or engaging in corruption, but would not name this practice in any way.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Favouritism</td>
<td>Favoritisms</td>
<td>This term is almost never used in Latvia. Latvian media would refer to privileges one gains via favouritism as blat (Russian term), as a form of conflict of interest (where the public official has undue influence on his/her decisions) or some sort of a political patronage.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Nepotism  
Nepotisms  
This term is rarely used in Latvia. Latvian media would usually refer to cases of nepotism as a form of conflict of interest (where the public interest makes decisions in the interests of his/her family).

Clientelism  
Klientelisms  
This term is rarely used in Latvia. Latvian media would refer to cases of clientelism as politicians wishing to buy political influence or abuse of public (administrative) resources.

Familism  
Familisms.  
This term is almost never used in Latvia. Latvian media would usually refer to cases of nepotism as a form of conflict of interest (where the public interest makes decisions in the interests of his/her family) or a case of nepotism.

A good example of ambiguity is the usage of familism. Essentially this is a way of thinking that prioritizes family and family values over individual needs (Ochiai and Hosoya, 2014). This concept is closely linked to nepotism defined by U4 Anti-Corruption Resource Centre and Transparency International as a “form of favouritism based on acquaintances and familiar relationships whereby someone in an official position exploits his or her power and authority to provide a job or favour to a family member or friend, even though he or she may not be qualified or deserving”2. By contrast, this research shows that familism is represented in different ways in different countries and contexts (Table 3).

Table 3. Understanding the familism concept via metaphors on corruption

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Meaning 1</th>
<th>Meaning 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>Friends, acquaintances, comrades</td>
<td>Clan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>Net, web</td>
<td>Gang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latvia</td>
<td>Friends, acquaintances, comrades</td>
<td>Clan, Clique</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovakia</td>
<td>Net, web</td>
<td>Gang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td></td>
<td>Clique</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>family, eating together, aristocracy, vassals</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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2 [http://www.u4.no/glossary/](http://www.u4.no/glossary/)
The table above shows that there are essentially two ways of representing *familism* by the press at the European level, in the countries covered by this research. The first meaning points to the concept of family and the networks or social processes that surround it – e.g. friends, acquaintances, net, web, eating together. Such words have no intrinsic negative connotation. The word ‘comrade’ makes the transition to the second meaning. It may be used in a negative sense to denote strong relationships built during communist times, when the formal way of addressing someone in an official context was Comrade. This appellative had replaced Madam/Sir which were considered bourgeois and hence, unfit to be used in an equalitarian society. It is no surprise this word appears in former communist contexts like Hungary and Latvia referring to a family constructed along the Party lines. The second meaning of *familism* relates to negative concepts like clan, clique, gang that are essentially associated with deviance and organised crime, having intrinsic negative connotation. It is important to notice that such meanings as extreme and contradictory as family and gang, friends and clique coexist in most countries and are part of daily life.

2. **Metaphorical images of corruption**

HACA analysis produced a list of metaphors from press articles in seven countries – France, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Romania, Slovakia, UK. This corpus of metaphors gives a good picture on corruption related vocabulary. Despite some local peculiarities, the majority of metaphors that are in the corpus would be recognizable across the investigated countries even if they were coded in just one country. Nevertheless, it is assumed that the metaphors that have appeared in the corpus in more than one country are used more frequently.

2.1 *What is corruption?: Source domains for metaphors regarding corruption and anti-corruption*

Corruption is a highly abstract concept with multiple forms and expressions (e.g. bribery, conflict of interests, abuse of power, embezzlement). Human imagination turns to various source domains\(^3\) for metaphoric thinking in order to make sense of this concept – for example, it

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\(^3\) According to Zoltan Kovecses, a source domain is the conceptual domain from which we draw metaphorical expressions to understand another conceptual domain (target domain) (Kovecses 2000, p.14)
searches for analogies in a plant life, in military domain or in medicine. Typically, source
domain employs more concrete vocabulary than the target domain (Kovecses 2000, p.7).
Our analysis shows that the concept of corruption is not captured entirely by a single source
domain. Instead, the metaphorical reasoning on the concept of corruption draws on eight separate
domains: 1) Spaces, places, substances; 2) Things; 3) Living beings; 4) Diseases and
contaminations; 5) Events; 6) Social arrangements, institutions; 7) Individual
traits/characteristics; 8) Conceptual tools/structures. All but one of those source domains seem to
be generalizable across the countries investigated.
As no source domain captures all aspects of corruption, it is inevitable that some metaphors will
overlap and some will clash. For example, if corruption is conceptualized as a form of swamp, it
does not make much sense to wage a war against it. Likewise, - if corruption is seen as a shackle,
probably one would refrain from the need to prevent or uproot it. Imagining corruption as a
culture or a scheme, a flood or conflagration does not allow for a visual image of a shadow (of
corruption) or a cloud (of corruption) to appear.
Every metaphor not only illuminates and highlights some part of the abstract target concept, but
also hides that part of the concept that does not fit well with the (more practical, clearer) source
domain for the metaphor – which is why we paid particular attention to what information on
corruption gets to be LESS visible when a certain metaphor is used. Table 4 summarizes the
main findings on what traits of corruption are most and least congruent with particular source
domains for corruption related metaphors.

Source domain 1. Corruption as a space/place/substance
In six out of seven countries analysed for the purposes of this study we have found references to
corruption being a sort of a space, place or substance. More specifically, two of the most
frequently encountered metaphors in order to explain the nature of corruption place was swamp
(HU, UK, IT, LV) and sea, ocean (HU, IT, UK). Corruption is also associated with darkness
(LV), underworld (IT), mud (SK), hell (Hungary), road to somewhere (RO), and a den of an
animal (UK).
Characterizing corruption as a space or a substance allows to convey the idea of vastness,
pervasiveness and omnipresence. This source domain mostly captures the danger involved in
corruption (one can drown in a sea or in a swamp, one might get endangered in darkness) and it
combines well with the visceral impression that corruption has bad smell (dirty sea or a den, smells like swamp)

However, this particular source domain hides more than it illuminates: for example, it hides that human agency is involved in corruption, it does not capture the internal complexity and the multiple forms of corruption, it does not indicate that corruption might be dynamic. Referring to this source domain in context of anti-corruption efforts would be disempowering: what can one realistically do when faced with an image of corruption as hell or as an ocean? The only options that would partly sense in anti-corruption efforts would be, depending on specific metaphor, moving away from corruption, building walls or shining a light (if corruption is imagined as being a sort of darkness).

**Source domain 2. Corruption as a thing**

References to corruption as a form or a thing were relatively infrequent in the corpus. There were articles in the Hungarian press that referred to corruption as being a shackle or a latrine. Slovakian press used a metaphor about corruption having threads, and the British press referred to corruption as being an obstacle.

Such metaphors could be used in order to convey some very specific aspects of corruption. For example, the metaphor of a shackle is successful in conveying the idea that corruption is a major inconvenience on the capacity to move forwards (both individually and as a society). This metaphor is usually combined with the metaphor of corruption as a shadow. Apart from that, there are very few good reasons for using this source domain in order to elucidate the concept of corruption – it has all the drawbacks that were mentioned above regarding Source domain 1. In context of anti-corruption efforts this source domain hints to necessity to remove corruption (if it is a thing) – which, taking into account the complexity and multiplicity of forms of corruption, would be more misleading than illuminating.

**Source domain 3. Corruption as a (hostile) living being**

In the countries covered by this research this is one of the two most often used source domains for corruption related metaphors – it was encountered in 6 out of 7 countries. Corruption can be imagined as all kinds of living beings: viruses (IT), flourishing plants (HU, RO, SK, UK, IT, LV), mystical beings (hydra – RO), worms (IT), lurking animals (UK, IT), beings with tentacles
Some imagine corruption as being born in hotbeds (breeding grounds – HU, UK, IT, LV) or in nests (RO, UK). Corruption may also be visualised as a conscious enemy (IT), even a ruler who reigns (Ro, IT, UK). It may even be a hunter (UK).

This source domain captures well the common attributes of corruption – e.g. dangerous, having a shadow, smelly, dynamic and able to spread. However, imagining corruption as a plant or as an animal would hide the human agency within the corrupt interactions; it also does not provide clarity on the complexity of corruption and on the multiplicity of its forms, as in this source domain corruption is imagined as a single, relatively uncomplicated entity. For this reason this source domain would suggest simplistic and aggressive anti-corruption efforts such as: fighting, combatting, uprooting, capturing, killing, restricting corruption.

Source domain 4. Corruption as a disease or contamination

Metaphors from this source domain were found in all of the countries that were analysed for this study. Corruption is frequently imagined as being a disease (HU, SK, UK, IT) or, more specifically, cancer (HU, UK, FR, IT), plague (UK, SK), gangrene (RO, FR), leprosy (IT). It can also be pictured as a contamination (UK, IT), epidemic (HU, IT, LV), infection (HU), infestation (IT).

The idea of corruption as a disease and/or contamination captures well almost all everyday intuitions having to do with corruption: it is dangerous, sometimes even pathological, it may be contagious, in some contexts it is the result of human mistakes/misdeeds. But such a conceptualisation also over-simplifies the complexity of corruption and, by giving it one denomination (for example, cancer, leprosy), it hides behind this label multiple forms of corruption.

In context of anti-corruption efforts this source domain would be most compatible with the idea of preventing corruption, eradicating corruption and curing corruption by provision of antidotes or medicine.

Source domain 5. Corruption as an event

Corruption can be associated to a conflagration or a flood (HU). This source domain partly overlaps with the one on diseases and contamination – sometimes the metaphors that are used in
the European press covered here could refer to any of those domains (for example, corruption is rampant – IT, HU, UK, SK, FR).

Such metaphors would stress the uncontrollable, overwhelming aspect of corruption and its dynamic nature. The most reasonable anti-corruption efforts would be directed towards extinguishing, putting out or preventing the occurrence of corruption.

Source domain 6. Corruption as a social arrangement/institution

Though relatively infrequently, corruption can also be visualised as a human social arrangement/institution – for example, a game or a sport (IT, UK, FR), a culture (UK), a theatre (IT), business (LV), tax (IT) and even an orgy (UK).

Such metaphors are highly context-specific - their function and aptness depends on the particular metaphor being chosen to convey some aspect of corruption. Drawing metaphors from this source domain is problematic because the source domain itself is highly abstract: one complex term (corruption) is explained as having traits of some other highly complex domain (for example, business, theatre). This source domain may be of help if there is a need to explain some complexities of corruption or to point out that corruption itself is a human social arrangement that can be changed by humans. If one would visualize corruption as being a social institution/arrangement, then anti-corruption efforts would most likely focus on changing the rules, the system.

Source domain 7. Corruption as an individual trait/characteristic

In our study references to the concept of corruption as directly linked to the individual were relatively infrequent. There were only two countries were we could find clear evidence that corruption can be conceptualised in such a manner – in Italy there were references to corruption being a bad habit and a drug addiction, and in Romania corruption was referred to as a lifestyle.

Metaphors arising from this domain point out that corruption is a human phenomenon and not the rule of nature. Anti-corruption efforts drawing on this source domain focus on the individual level – e.g. preventing corruption by changing ourselves, our own attitudes.
Source domain 8. Corruption as a conceptual tool, structure

The idea of corruption can also be conveyed through the means of conceptual reasoning devices – such as a scheme (LV), system (IT), pyramid organisation (UK), pattern (HU, UK), machinery (HU), grey zones (IT), vicious circle (UK), textbook examples (SK).

Such concepts are most successful in conveying the idea that corruption is a complex concept with a variety of different expressions. They also provide an escape from a populist necessity to trivialise anti-corruption efforts: such metaphors allow to state that anti-corruption efforts sometimes mean finding nuanced solutions that might be highly technical and complicated.

Unfortunately, what this source domain wins in nuance and complexity, it loses in terms of clarity, emotional impact and common intuitions on corruption; such metaphors are, for example, not compatible with an idea that corruption has a smell or a shadow or that one needs to go on crusade against it.

Table 4 summarises all the corruption related metaphors discussed so far. The table relates source domains for metaphors of corruption to perceived traits (attributes) of corruption in general, excluding its more “specific” forms (e.g. bribery). Some of the traits are themselves metaphorical. For example, corruption is widely associated with bad smell (HU, RO, UK, IT, LV), filth and dirt (HU, SK, LV). Corruption can be paralyzing (HU), pathological (IT), it can cripple (UK), poison (IT), eat someone (SK, UK, LV), destroy them (HU), suffocate (HU).

Sometimes corruption is perceived as pervasive (HU, SK, UK, IT). It can also be associated with shadows (HU, SK, UK, IT, LV) or clouds (UK, LV).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source Domains for Metaphors on Corruption</th>
<th>Traits/Attributes of Corruption</th>
<th>Spaces/Places/Substances (e.g. ocean, sea, swamp, darkness, underworld, a road to somewhere, hell, den, mud, cloud)</th>
<th>Things (e.g. shackle, latrine, slime, obstacle)</th>
<th>Living Beings (plants, animals, humans) (e.g. worm, virus, hydra, hostile plant, enemy)</th>
<th>Diseases/Pollutants (e.g. plague, gangrene, leprosy, contamination, poison, infection, infestation, pestilence, leprosy)</th>
<th>Events (Conflagration/Flood)</th>
<th>Social Arrangements/Institutions (e.g. business, game, sport, culture, theatre, orgy, tax)</th>
<th>Individual Traits/Characteristics (e.g. lifestyle, habit, addiction)</th>
<th>Conceptual Tools/Structures (e.g. scheme, pattern, machinery, vicious circle, grey zone, system, textbook case)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Characterizes some negative (debased/degraded) state of affairs</strong></td>
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<td><strong>In some context</strong></td>
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<td><strong>It can have a smell – real or figurative</strong></td>
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<td><strong>In some context</strong></td>
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<td><strong>It can have a shadow</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Yes</strong></td>
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</table>
It is dynamic (it can flourish, be rampant, etc.)

No (except for cloud, sea)

Yes

In some context

It has many expressions

No

No

No

No

In some context

It is a complex phenomenon (it has an internal structure)

No

No

No

No

No

No

In some context

It can be “split up” and/or measured in order to compare (big, petty, more, less, etc.)

No

No

No

No

No

In some context

It is inextricably linked with human agency

No

In some context

Mostly

Yes

In some context

It makes most sense to orient anti-corruption efforts towards...

To orient and cause

Removing corruption

Uprooting, combatting, fighting, capturing, killing, restricting corruption

Providing medicine, antidotes; preventing and eradicating corruption

Putting out, preventing, extinguishing corruption

Changing social arrangements, changing rules, system changing the individual, changing oneself

Finding complex, nuanced solutions
2.2. Metaphors of corruption

As a highly general concept, corruption is inevitably portrayed metaphorically with the use of rather general terms. But what if one needs not to describe corruption as a concept, but rather some form of its various expressions (for example, a bribe, nepotism, political party funding irregularities?). Our research indicates that six metaphors are common to the countries covered by this project: 1) human networks and communities; 2) business/trade; 3) technology and manual labor; 4) agriculture; 5) military; 6) theatre and sport.

1. Human social interactions, networks and communities

Everyday communication, networks and communities are by far the deepest source of metaphors on corrupt interactions. Sometimes a corrupt group is directly referred to as a network (HU, RO, IT, LV), a web (SK, IT) or a form of informal relations (LV). Everyday social interactions are sometimes used as a metaphor for bribery – for example, providing arguments (LV), giving advice (HU), finding a solution (LV), giving a gift (RO, SK, IT, FR, LV). Embezzlement or abuse of state resources may be imagined as a magic trick (LV, HU) or stuffing one’s pockets (HU, LV). The metaphor of a cover up (FR, LV) is used in order to hint that a community will protect their own members.

Metaphors may originate in more specific types of social interaction/groups – e.g. a) friends and family; b) patronage networks; c) state-like structures; d) criminal groups.

a) Friends and family

A corrupt group can be visualized as a form of a family (IT), clan (RO, LV), group of friends (HU, LV), acquaintances or comrades (LV and HU). It is assumed that the traits that characterize the respective source group also tell something important about the nature of corrupt transactions. For example, an influential person within this group might be referred to as a godfather (HU) or grandfather (LV) who have obligations towards others who, in turn, might be visualized as mouths to feed (IT) or brothers-in-law (IT).

It is relatively frequent to visualize corrupt relations as having to do with food and common meals that may or may not happen in context of family or friends. For example, both in Latvia and Hungary there are references to taking bribes as being a form of eating and use of state resources as being a form of eating/picking from a common pot (HU, RO). It is different
to preparing one’s own food (HU) which signifies that somebody is working solely in one’s own interests.

b) Patronage networks
Corrupt groups/interactions can be visualized as loose patronage networks that have patrons (UK), benefactors (LV), sponsors (LV). Patrons do the sponsoring (bribing LV), while the recipients collect the honorarium (bribe LV), the scholarship (bribe LV) or get a good job – obtain a warm place (LV).

c) State-like structures and politics
There are numerous metaphors that originate in the political terminology, very useful to explain some features of a corrupt interaction. For example, a bribe may be associated to a tax or a levy (LV), embezzlement – to bleeding of a state (UK), and corrupt interchanges to political techniques, such as backroom dealing (HU).

Many metaphors that refer to corrupt actors originate in feudal systems and monarchy – for example, influential corruption agents may be referred to as kings (HU), princes (IT), court (HU), aristocracy (HU), vassals (HU), kinglings (HU), fiefdoms (HU), grey cardinals (LV). Anti-corruption fighters may be visualized as knights (RO), while corrupt groups – as cliques (UK, LV). Some metaphors recall a later era – that of a wild capitalism, where money dominated politics, which is why influential moneyed interests are referred to as oligarchs (HU, LV), oil barons (HU), magnates (LV), money bags (LV), voting machines (LV).

d). Criminal groups
There are only three referrals to criminal groups in the corpus of our metaphors – corrupt actors are being visualized as mafia (HU, SL), a gang (SL, IT) or a roof (LV). Concept of a roof has been taken from vocabulary of criminals and refers to a state official or some other influential person who provides protection (roof) for bandits.

2. Business/trade
There is a very nuanced metaphorical language on corrupt transactions that draws from the economics vocabulary. For example, a corrupt state official might be selling (LV) his/her services, people might have an exchange rate (IT), be for sale (UK) or have clients (IT); one
might be *renting himself out* (UK), gaining *extra income* (HU), *auctioning* (UK), *having a price* (RO, LV). The client would be expected to give the officials *bonuses* (HU), a *tip* (HU, LV) or some other *incentive* (HU, LV). In the context of corrupt transactions it is important to reach a *settlement* (LV) or get a *deal* (HU). The transactions themselves are a form of *black market* (LV) where many deals are passed *under the counter* (IT).

3. **Technology and manual labor**

In Hungary an important source for corruption related metaphors is the domain of technology and manual labor (construction, mechanics, tailoring). For example, bribing is referred as *greasing* (oiling), the agent *tailor-makes* (HU) the public procurement rules or *manually operates* (HU) the whole procurement procedure. Embezzlement/abuse of state resources might be visualized as *water-pumping* (HU) or *carting-away* (HU) public goods. Political parties are sometimes imagined as *machines* in Italy and Latvia. In order to escape punishment, it is important *to clean up the ends* (Latvia).

4. **Agriculture**

Corrupt interactions can be imagined as a form of fishing, harvesting or minding one’s livestock. For example, in Latvia and in Hungary the abuse of state resources can be seen as *milking the state, feeding upon a state* (LV) or *being a parasite* (IT). Agriculture-based metaphors are used in order to refer to corrupt agents as *big fishes* (SK, IT, LV), *rotting fishes* (LV), *spoiled apples* (IT), *black sheep* (LV) or *goats as gardeners*. The state and state resources may be visualised as a *feeding trough* or a *manger* (LV).

5. **Military**

Military references are rare in context of corrupt transactions – the only metaphors that could be found in our corpus where *lieutenant* (corrupt agent UK) and a *brigade* (corrupt group HU). However, this metaphor is very much preferred to portray anticorruption (see next section).

6. **Theatre/sport**
There were two metaphoric visualizations of corrupt actors in the corpus – juggler (HU) and marionette (LV). In addition, the sports metaphor of match-fixing was also used to refer to corruption.

2.3. Anticorruption metaphors
The metaphorical representation of anti-corruption mirrors the metaphorical domains of corruption. Below (Table 5), we put forward five major metaphors common to all the countries included in this research: war (conflict), sanitization (cleaning), hunting (sports), agriculture (survival) and negative politics (delegitimization of AC). Our framework of interpretation builds upon Joris et al (2014) frame used to make sense of the Euro crisis, adapted to our analytical purposes.

1. War
The metaphor of war is used in all contexts to frame anti-corruption as a “fight”, “battle”, “struggle”, “crusade” against corruption; it makes use of “miraculous weapons” among other typical military props in order to raise the “flag” and defend the “honor of anti-corruption” and ultimately “annihilate it”. The “war on corruption” is essentially portrayed as a conflict consisting of all the actions taken by national governments/key political figures and international actors to destroy the corrupt practices and mentalities from a particular country/domain/sector/area of interest. The conflict is caused by a clash of interests, visions and power usually between traditional and modern practices and morality. As a result, violence and rivalry escalate. The solution is a solid counterattack to annihilate corruption, sometimes framed in the language of ‘zero-tolerance’ policy, which effectively means a strict enforcement of anti-corruption regulations. The moral values associated with this metaphor are courage and the determination to “fight with tooth and nail” to the end.

The war metaphor fuses modern and traditional canons of warfare in a unique way. Modernity is linked to the policy language and policing practices, particularly to the “zero tolerance” concept that is twisted to refer to white-collar crime as opposed to street crime which was it is initial

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4 Arguably, corruption (at least at the top level) is associated with white collar crime.
focus. The “war on corruption” originates in the “war on crime” fought in New York during the 1990s under Giuliani and the subsequent “war on terror” that started on 9/11 in New York. These wars are “fought” concomitantly in the contemporary society with modern and sometimes extraordinary measures that justify action outside the realm of normality. In a more traditional fashion, anti-corruption is referred to as a “crusade” conducted with unsophisticated arsenal – e.g. knife or even bare hands –, but with determination, as some should “have the will to stab corruption” [avere la voglia di affondare la lama nella corruzione]. Such a visceral representation of the murder act has the power to humanise corruption, as it is impossible to kill an abstract concept. Fiction further serves to add magic, as the participants are portrayed as “knights of morality and justice”, Don Quixotes or “forces of light”. This eclectic mix of images and meanings uncovers complex associations showing how tradition is reinvented and modernised and how modernity is being lived.

2. Sanitization/Medicine

The metaphor of sanitization is the right remedy if corruption is represented as a disease. In this frame, countries/domains of interest are presented as dirty due to their proximity to areas already infected by corruption. The solution to ensure a healthy living in a society is to “clean” or “whitewash” in order to prevent the further spread of the infection. At a fundamental level, the concept of cleaning is connected to the sociological concept of order. Within the metaphorical framework of sanitization anti-corruption is in fact a way to establish a new social order based on values like “freedom”, “integrity” or “transparency” that are the exact antonyms of the current state of affairs. The success of the new social order is represented by the media with the use of four key metaphors: cleanliness, whiteness, freedom and transparency. The first is inherently ambivalent, as it refers on the one hand to “cleaning the country of corruption”, and on the other hand to “launder money from corruption”, or “whitewash someone from murder”. In the first

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5 Zero-tolerance is a policy popularised in the US in the 80s in connection to the broken windows theory (Kelling and Wilson 1982) and enforced primarily by Giuliani during his mandates as mayor of New York in the 1990s, which empowers the police to repress minor offences, homeless people and the disorders associated with them in order to reduce street crime. Wacquant (2002) criticised this policy arguing that it reduced crime to ‘street crime’, over emphasising the role of lower class and excluding the white collar crime. He further argued that this approach redefines crime in terms of social security.

6 The semantic field that incorporates antonyms of corruption has expanded in the past decade. The key antonyms of corruption have become associated with transnational institutions – e.g. Transparency International, Freedom House or new methodological devices – e.g. Freedom of the Press Index.
instance, the change is authentic, whereas in the second case, change is only mimicked\(^7\). Regardless of the meaning, the metaphorical environment is enriched by the use of “hand” as a part of the body in charge with cleaning: “one hand washes the other” refers to corrupt people who stand by each other, protecting their actions to prevent being caught; “with clean hands” refers to doing things in a non-corrupt manner. The use of two or more metaphors successively is not uncommon. For example, a news outlet spoke about “the need to clear the game of corruption”. Whiteness is a visual representation of cleanliness. It represents the purity of the anti-corruption goals, while also pointing to possible abuses – e.g. “whiter than white”. Freedom is represented as the absence of clientelism and corruption as in the Italian example “to free Genova of the business-political lobby and left wing clientelism that has been suffocating it for decades” [per liberare Genova dalle lobby politico-affaristiche e dal clientelismo di sinistra che da decenni la soffoca]. Lastly, transparency as a metaphor is used less in the sense of ‘easily seen through’ and more in the sense of ‘uncovering’. This means that journalists represent transparency as a process and, to be more precise, as work in progress.

3. **Hunting**

When anticorruption is framed using the metaphor of **hunting** (sports), corruption is inevitably portrayed metaphorically as the prey. The “animal” of corruption is by no means a modest beast. Quite the contrary, it appears in the media as a “hydra” or the “main fish”, in any case an extraordinary animal with “tentacles” and a “bottomless stomach” useful to “swallow” Hungarian public fund. This appetite for devouring public money makes corruption “rage” in former communist countries and “lurk” in Italy. Regardless of the behavioural strategies used to obtain food, journalists seem to concur in that there is a strong and specific smell (“nasty whiff” or “reeks of corruption and abuse of power”) associated with this beast, whose offspring may be reincarnated (reincarnate nepotism [reincarnazione del nepotismo]). This fact can only lead to the appearance of even more evolved creatures of evil. The hunting strategies used to trap and kill such a mythical prey are as extraordinary as the “animal of corruption”. Firstly, it requires massive participation, involving not only the criminal justice apparatus, politicians and business circles. Every citizen is invited to take part in the hunt

\(^7\) This situation is represented vividly by the French saying: Plus c’a change, plus c’est la meme chose [The more it changes, the more it remains the same].
in order to deter the beast from threatening other countries and/or people/sectors. Secondly, the hunting strategies aim to kill the beast (“eradicate it”). Trapping corruption is within the job description of the criminal justice apparatus or the specialised agencies like the National Anticorruption Directorate in Romania who “started to cut heads of the institutionalised corruption”. “Big fishes” end up in the “net of the judiciary” which attacks the “spider web of corruption and clientelism”, by setting up traps that take the beast by surprise. In chasing the prey, the hunters make use of helpers, typically dogs (e.g. watchdogs). In some cases, the chase becomes a “witch-hunt” – a pejorative term to denote an abusive form of hunting against perceived evil creatures with superior attributes that cannot be trapped with use of the typical strategies. This term is sometimes used to describe political prosecutions for corruption in Romania. The metaphor of hunting is closely connected to the metaphor of war and sanitization through the nature of the activity involved in all the cases. It is also connected to the metaphor of agriculture, as it is part of the fundamental set of skills and practices used by humanity to survive and prosper. Last but not least, hunting is linked to negative politics metaphor, because the first sings of de-legitimization encapsulated in the ‘witch – hunt’ concept. From the corruption metaphors, hunting mirrors best the sporting and games frames.

4. Agriculture

The metaphor of agriculture is common to Central and Eastern Europe (e.g. Hungary, Romania, Latvia) and Italy presumably due to the fact that these countries have strong agrarian traditions. As opposed to the other metaphors in which anti-corruption was presented as a one-off/extraordinary event (e.g. a war/hunt/massive cleaning activity), the metaphorical universe associated to agriculture relates more to routine activities/skills, familiar to the majority of the population. The logic is straightforward: countries are seen as big farms specialised in livestock raising, plant cultivation and other activities that sustain life. The activity is highly dependent on the forces of nature, as in the countries mentioned “money disappears into the wind”, business “thrive under the sun of corruption”, which has become the “symbol of a new spring”. An Italian newspaper compares corruption with water, which means that it is a fundamental element of social and political life. Other contexts are “fertile terrains” that allow corruption to grow deep roots. People themselves borrow from the animal behaviour: “businessmen come like bees to the
honeypot” and public officials “milk” the state budget. Occasional ironic references are made using the same metaphorical universe, as in the examples of “putting the goat as a gardener” or “putting the wolf to guard the flock”, which refer to appointing as guardians of public funds/morality people that have a strong reputation as corrupt. Intrinsic to the metaphor of agriculture is the idea of survival of the human beings that is connected to the survival of the plants – hence, the need to “root out” the weed in order to protect the crop – or the animals – the need to “get rid of the shit in one’s stables” in order to ensure that the livestock is not in danger of getting sick. In this frame, anti-corruption is a form of subsistence at a social level that involves regular control of the everyday practices while promoting healthy routines to ensure the survival of the community.

5. Negative politics
Last but not least, anti-corruption is commonly framed in the EU space in the form of negative politics (delegitimization of anti-corruption). This frame operates at a higher level of abstraction/conceptualization because it is based on the idea that anti-corruption is a form of governance. Essentially, anti-corruption is portrayed as a political activity that aims to exercise organised control over social life through the justice system. However, due to various local factors, it has modest results or has become corrupted itself. Such disenchantment with anti-corruption takes different forms, bears various meanings and has unintended effects. Firstly, it is done with the means of an abusive justice system that fabricates charges resembling science fiction [Italy], making use of “judicial voyeurism” or “KGB methods” to create a “witch hunt”. Secondly, anti-corruption is sometimes used as a negative electoral tool when the justice system is politically influenced by influential groups to charge their opponents just before the elections, thus discrediting them and reducing the chance of re-election. An Italian news outlet remarked that Berlusconi’s judicial charges follow the same metronome beat of the next elections [il ritmo delle accuse giudiziarie a Silvio Berlusconi ha lo stesso battito di metronomo degli appuntamenti elettorali]. Thirdly, anti-corruption can make collateral victims, ending promising political careers and making “victims in a witch-hunt”. For example, in Romania, the former president Traian Basescu claimed that the attempt to replace him was “a response to his reformist politics that wanted to end corruption”. In other contexts (e.g. Hungary, Slovakia), perturbing the

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8 The state is compared with a cow and the civil servants with farmers that milk the cow.
everyday routines also have a price because “whenever we want to fight corruption, someone comes and says: ‘Don’t put your foot on our tail!’”. Fourthly, anti-corruption can be a performance used for international audience in order to “keep up appearances in the EU”, but in reality used to “cover our own”, by providing shelter from prosecution for people from the same social group/business circles/political party. When this is the case, “fighting corruption is more a rhetorical device” or a “fashionable” trend than an authentic political action. The futility of anti-corruption is sustained by other delegitimization techniques that portray ironically the actors involved in it as naïve fighters against corruption (Hungary), dreamers (Don Quixote) in Latvia, medieval fighters (“anticorruption knights”) in Romania or mythical warriors (“forces of light”) in Latvia. Some terms of reference are more pejorative: “sleaze watchdogs”, “whistle-blower-in-chief”, “little barking dogs” (refers to NGOs that are involved in anti-corruption), “Sorosites” (NGOs that receive funding from George Soros), or knockers (denigrating term for whistle-blower in Latvia). By using such terms, the media indirectly casts doubt on the institutions and actors involved in anti-corruption, which should be the ethical role-models or “as the wife of Julius Caesar” (above suspicion).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Anticorruption frame</th>
<th>Corresponding frame of corruption</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Of the problem</th>
<th>Cause</th>
<th>Consequences</th>
<th>Possible solutions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Moral values</td>
<td>Sanitisation/hygiene</td>
<td>Countries are dirty. Countries/domains have become contaminated due to proximity with dirty/infested contexts. Possible contagion for other countries/domains.</td>
<td>Whitewash to control the spread of the disease. Freedom, transparency, integrity.</td>
<td>Cleaning hands, cleansing the game of corruption, clearing the way to be charged with corruption.</td>
<td>Freedom, transparency, integrity.</td>
<td>Following the daily/seasonal calendar of activities do the preparatory work to take care of the new crop. The activity, while carried out in the present tense, has a strong component of prevention for the future.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Metaphors</td>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>Countries are like farms that need to be taken care of (e.g. The crop, the livestock). Keeping seedlings apart from weed. A natural activity that is part of the routine of running a farm. Getting rid of unnecessary garbage, while planting new seedlings that will one day bring a wonderful crop. Following the daily/seasonal calendar of activities do the preparatory work to take care of the new crop. The activity, while carried out in the present tense, has a strong component of prevention for the future.</td>
<td>The right skills and knowledge to carry out the typical activities.</td>
<td>Root out corruption. Get rid of the shit in one's stables. The right skills and knowledge to carry out the typical activities.</td>
<td>Freedom, transparency, integrity.</td>
<td>Following the daily/seasonal calendar of activities do the preparatory work to take care of the new crop. The activity, while carried out in the present tense, has a strong component of prevention for the future.</td>
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<tr>
<td>War</td>
<td>Hunting</td>
<td>Pursuing an animal by making use of traps in order to kill it. AC is like hunting. Police/AC institutions, politicians and even lay people are challenged to take part in hunting.</td>
<td>The beast will threaten other countries/domains. Kill the beast of corruption; or at least trap it.</td>
<td>Perseverance</td>
<td>A trap has snapped, corruption hunt, nets of corruption and clientelism, witch hunt.</td>
<td>Perseverance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enemy</td>
<td>Negative politics</td>
<td>AC is a political activity that aims to exercise governance over social life, but has become perverted/corrupted itself. Lack of strength and political will to implement AC measures. Delegitimization of the AC institutions and actors.</td>
<td>Continue AC while preserving the democracy and the balance of powers in the state.</td>
<td>High ethical standards, be above suspicion, determination.</td>
<td>Witch hunt, judicial voyeurism, KGB methods, forces of lights, Don Quixote, sleaze dogs, Sorosites.</td>
<td>Positive politics</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.4. Local variability of metaphorical reasoning on corruption

At a conceptual level metaphors tend to be universal, while most cultural variation occurs at a specific level (Kovecses 2000, p. 227). This observation is true for corruption related metaphors – they originate in similar source domains, but it is the local circumstances that would explain why, for example, referrals to kinglings, vassals, court and fiefdoms resonate in Hungary more than in Latvia, or Latvian references to agricultural domain are more specific than in France. Even though such metaphors would seem more exotic in some countries rather than others, they would be intuitively understood across the countries covered by this research because they rely on similar intuitions about the nature of corruption.

Despite differences in their history and their development, the European countries studied here are similar in the imagery that readily comes to mind when thinking about corruption. This can be perceived when comparing the European corruption imagery to that of African countries - for example, Nigeria. Recently, two academics, constructed a list of corruption-related metaphors in Nigeria (Okunrinmeta and Olugbenga, 2014). It is striking that the majority of the metaphorical tool employed relate to two domains: agriculture and wildlife. For example, the state is compared to a giant elephant in order to indicate that it has many resources; corrupt people are compared to leeches that suck the blood or to animals of prey (hyenas, dogs, lions, vultures, snakes). A metaphor easily understood in many countries from our sample is corruption as the arrival of locusts that destroy the crops. This metaphor combines the intuitive understanding of corruption as an enemy and a crisis. A metaphor that would be harder to grasp in different contexts is comparing corrupt people to tortoises, because the local folk wisdom says that tortoises are cunning - they can cover up their trails.

Some of the Nigerian metaphors that originate in agricultural/cooking domain are identical to the ones that are used in the European context covered by this research. For example, just as Latvians, Nigerians also have an image of a fish that rots from its head in order to illustrate the idea of institutionalized corruption (Okunrinmeta and Olugbenga, 2014). Nigeria has the same metaphor of milking the state as Hungary and Latvia (Chiluwa 2007). Obviously further research is needed to show if the underlying intuitions on corruption are common, at least for those countries that have undergone a process of modernisation and are operating under some norms of universalism that involves a concept of public good (Mungiu 2006).
There are some corruption-related expressions and metaphors that can only be understood when aware of local context – namely, they would not “translate” to other countries. We have identified that such expressions/metaphors tend to originate when there is some specific: 1) corruption related practice; 2) corruption related event or 3) corruption related place. A summary is provided in Table 6.

**Table 6: Local specifics of corruption related expressions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons for local specificity</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Corruption related place</strong></td>
<td><strong>Prague Town Hall</strong> (corruption symbol in Czech Republic)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Panama</strong> (associated with corruption in Hungary)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Corruption related event</strong></td>
<td><strong>Casino deals</strong> (refers to a case where Hungarian government gave the rights to run casinos to close allies)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Corrupt backroom deal bus</strong> (refers to specific bus tender case in Hungary)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Zuschlagoziation</strong> (refers to Hungarian politician who was accused of fraud)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Golden hands</strong> (refers to corruption in medicine in Latvia; originates from one specific scandal involving former doctor and minister of health)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Corruption related practice</strong></td>
<td>A practice to call a corrupted person ‘<strong>Mr. X percent</strong>’ in Hungary and Latvia (as in 10%, 20% - depending on the amount of kickback)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A practice to call bribes ‘<strong>scholarships</strong>’ (originates in specific corruption scandal in Latvia)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Expression ‘<strong>keep money in a socket</strong>’ (originates in a Latvian practice for state officials to declare unreasonable amounts of cash).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. **Framing corruption as widespread or exceptional**

An important dimension of our research dealt with whether or not corruption was the norm or a deviation in the print coverage of each particular country. HACA coded the articles according to two major frames of reference that portray corruption as: 1. Business as usual; or 2. A deviation from the norm.
In approximately one fifth of the cases analysed (22%), the corrupt activities were part of the typical business practices. One metaphor aptly portrays corrupt activities as “flourishing weed” (Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, UK, Italy, Latvia), pointing to the fact that if left unchecked such practices will grow and suffocate the ethical routines of doing business. In some articles media representations painted corruption as being the norm of the society, which can be the case of absolutely corrupted states. A large number of metaphors support this idea pointing to “gigantic scale” or “sickening levels” of corruption in Romania and Italy, describing it as “omnipresent, pervasive, ubiquitous” (Hungary, Slovakia, Italy), “uncontrollable” or “rampant” (Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, UK, Italy, France), “like a fire or a disease” (Hungary, Slovakia, UK), or like a “container large enough to enable swimming and sinking (sea, ocean)” (Hungary, UK, Italy). The media across the countries studied puts forward a variety of explanations to uncover the reasons that make corruption pervasive (see Table 7).

### Table 7: Reasons on why a country is totally corrupt

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason for the current state of affairs</th>
<th>Metaphor/characterization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Illness/decay</td>
<td>Decayed government (IT)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sick democracy (IT)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Government is totally rotten (HU)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excessive influence of moneyed interests on politics</td>
<td>Capitalism for friends (LV)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The power of money (LV)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kleptocracy (LV)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Something is wrong systemically</td>
<td>State capture (LV)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>State corruption (SK)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low level of (human/democratic) development</td>
<td>Preadolescent democracy (FR)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Banana country (IT)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lawlessness</td>
<td>Country without consequences (HU)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dirty political process</td>
<td>Corrupt backroom deal country (HU)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sometimes the perceived corruption reaches a level where someone would feel that sarcasm is the only way to capture it properly. For example, both in UK and in Latvia we have found references to some country being a superpower of corruption or being near the top of the world’s corruption league. Humor and sarcasm can also be used in order to express outrage at the shamelessness of some corruption cases. For example, Hungarian news outlets refer to two billion for a kiss in order to describe cases where someone receives huge amounts of money from
the state for no legitimate reason, or would call some corrupt person a talented privatizer of social wealth.

In 13% of the cases, corrupt activities represented a deviation from the norm, which means that corruption was not a widespread phenomenon. Two metaphors were particularly relevant in this case: “spoiled apples” and “black sheep”. Both metaphors point to the fact that essentially the context favors ethical arrangements, but there are exceptions. If uncontained, they have the potential to spoil the entire context.

It is important to notice that in the overwhelming majority of articles (65%) it was not possible to determine the frame of reference because the media did not give any indication as to whether corruption was perceived to be widespread or an exception.

4. Conclusions

1. There is a common general representation of corruption across the European countries studies: the terms that are used to make sense of the concept of corruption overall fit well with the ‘official’ lexicon. The sources for metaphors on corruption are very similar for the seven countries analysed within the framework of this study. That signifies that corruption is understood in more or less similar way across all the countries covered.

2. Nevertheless, there are important (non-trivial) local specificities when it comes to using specific corruption related vocabulary. For example, some countries would not have a concept of kickback or familism, despite being able to recognize such phenomena. There are cultural differences in picking specific metaphors to describe corruption and corrupt interactions as well.

3. Metaphorical image of corruption across EU is clearly negative: in the news media corruption is associated with bad smell, filth, danger, pervasiveness and darkness. However, the concrete expressions of corruption are understood in terms of human communication (in families, among friends, in state like structures etc.), business transactions and daily activities, such as cooking or tending livestock. This discrepancy provides ground for confusion on the consequences of corruption – people have a clear
idea that corruption is something bad, but they do not have ready conceptual metaphors in order to recall the concrete harms that arise due to corruption.

4. The most popular corruption related metaphors (enemy, disease, pollution, bad smell) are so vivid that it is relatively hard to grasp the conceptual entailments of their usage. They all fail at conveying the sense that corruption is a complex, multi-faceted phenomenon that requires a nuanced approach.

5. Anticorruption metaphors revolve around five major domains - agriculture, hunting, war, medicine and negative politics. These are general frames of reference that encompass the activities which are the very base of human survival and evolution. The most common anti-corruption metaphor is war. This is a common, but essentialist way of visualising anticorruption, that does not entail prevention, changing social arrangements or finding complex, nuanced solutions to some challenging corruption related situations. At the opposite end, the negative politics metaphor portrays anticorruption as a form of governance, making use of symbolic devices that both construct and delegitimise the anticorruption efforts, in a complex, nuanced and context sensitive manner.
References

Project profile

ANTICORRP is a large-scale research project funded by the European Commission’s Seventh Framework Programme. The full name of the project is “Anti-corruption Policies Revisited: Global Trends and European Responses to the Challenge of Corruption”. The project started in March 2012 and will last for five years. The research is conducted by 20 research groups in fifteen countries.

The fundamental purpose of ANTICORRP is to investigate and explain the factors that promote or hinder the development of effective anti-corruption policies and impartial government institutions. A central issue is how policy responses can be tailored to deal effectively with various forms of corruption. Through this approach ANTICORRP seeks to advance the knowledge on how corruption can be curbed in Europe and elsewhere. Special emphasis is laid on the agency of different state and non-state actors to contribute to building good governance.

Project acronym: ANTICORRP
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