

ON THE WAY TO THE IDEAL STATE: INTERNET AGAINST CORRUPTION

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Abstract: The article is devoted to the research of discursive practices in the Internet environment on anticorruption issues. The research objective is to analyze the online-communications of the Russian authorities and citizens on the issues of anticorruption policy implementation. The methodological basis of the research is systemic-communicative approach; its theoretical basis is the conception of an Open society by K. Popper. Basing on the analysis of international rankings and all-Russia opinion polls on corruption issues, Internet freedom and quality of state administration, the authors come to the conclusion that the social-information anomie on anticorruption issues is strengthening. This type of anomie reflects the contradiction between the prescriptive, official information and the descriptive one, which ascertains the actual state of affairs in the society. The information gap leads to the reduction of level of trust to the existing power institutions, to the growth of social-political entropy, to social-network mobilization of the citizens. The analysis of the causes and conditions, which maintain the information misbalance, revealed the incongruence between the technological preparedness of the Russian state for its functions' implementation via the Internet and the level of the states' social-political preparedness for the open anticorruption dialog.

Keywords: Corruption, online communications, anomie, state, civil activity.

INTRODUCTION

The social discourse on the issues of anticorruption policy is an evidence of openness and social orientation of the state. To fulfill the discourse, alongside with the authorities as a status communicator, other subjects are needed, which proclaim, by K. Popper, "unwillingness to sit back and leave the entire responsibility for ruling the world to human or superhuman authority" (K. Popper, 1971). This is why the efficiency of anticorruption policy largely depends on the inclusion of civil society institutions into its implementation, on the coordination between the state and civil associations' political guidelines in the off-line and on-line communities.

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METHOD

The methodological background of the research is the systemic, social-communicative approach, based on the academic works by J. Habermas (1974,1987,1988), N.Luhmann(2001, 2012)and the concept of the Open Society by K. Popper (1971),the law theory of Mark van Hoecke (2012)and the “Corruption formula” determined by R.Klitgaard (1991, 1988).

RESULTS

The state as a status and resource subject of anticorruption policy implements its on-line activities using the abilities of the electronic government. This form of state services rendering minimizes the subjective component of interpersonal business communications and, all the more so, - reduces the bureaucratic arbitrary rule up to the Weber’s “depersonalization” of the rational bureaucracy. Thus we predict the increase of transparency of intra-system interactions and the reduction of corruption risks.

In international practice, the presence and degree of readiness of state structures to use the info-communication technologies to render state services to the citizens is estimated by E-Government Development Index (EGDI). This is a complex indicator (elaborated by UNO experts and renewed once in two years), which comprises: 1) the degree of coverage and the quality of Internet services, 2) degree of the info-communication technologies infrastructure development, 3) human capital. In 2014 Russia took rather high 27th position out of 193 UNO countries: its overall EGDI was 0.7296, and the constituents, accordingly: 0.7087; 0.6413; 0.8388(United Nations E-Government Survey, 2016). These positions of Russia had been sustained since 2012 (2010 – 59th position). In 2014 Russia failed to preserve the growing trend, probably, due to the increasing crisis in economy. Nevertheless, in global e-government rating Russia is not among the outsiders, consequently, according to the UNO experts, it possesses “a powerful tool” which “if applied effectively, can contribute substantially to eradicating extreme poverty, protecting the environment and promoting social inclusion and economic opportunity for all”. In other words, e-government is a powerful tool for increasing the quality of state government and locking the corruption factors.

However, the cumulative Worldwide Governance Indicators(WGI) (2004-2014), compiled by the World Bank, show the low ranking of the Russian Federation. The calculated indicators in 2004 and 2014 show that such factors as relatively satisfactory functioning of the government (44 and 51) and decent quality of legislative regulation (50 and 37) cannot efficiently reduce corruption (25 and 20) (Tab.1). The reasons for this paradox can lie in poor accountability of the state bodies and their lack of orientation towards people’s opinion (30 and 20) (Tab.1). Such system very logically implies the violation of the precedence of law, destabilizing the political system and generating coercion (indicator of stability and absence of coercion – 8 and 18) (Tab.1).

TABLE 1: THE WORLDWIDE GOVERNANCE INDICATORS (WGI)*

<i>Indicator</i>	<i>2004</i>	<i>2014</i>
Voice and Accountability	30	20
Political Stability and Absence of Violence/Terrorism	8	18
Government Effectiveness	44	51
Regulatory Quality	50	37
Rule of Law	19	26
Control of Corruption	25	20

* The Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI), 2004-2014. <http://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/index.aspx#reports>

To avoid the aggravation of the negative trend, the Expert council of the Government has elaborated the Conception of openness in functioning of federal executive bodies (adopted by the decree of the Russian government on January 30, 2014). Informative openness is interpreted, first of all, through the content of organization's internet-resource and the feedback as ability for the citizens to participate in communication. Thus, it is not only graphical-verbal content of the web-site with a convenient navigation, but, first of all, the exchange of socially significant, topical, reliable information, both on the area of authority of the relevant body and on the corruption counteraction. The results of the practical implementation of the conceptual guidelines in 2015 are reflected in the comprehensive ranking of openness (experts + population + executives) of the federal executive bodies, composed by the Russian Public Opinion Research Center (VCIOM) together with the Open Government: only three bodies have overcome the threshold of 50 (minimum 41.7 – maximum 57.5) (Russian Public Opinion Research Center (VCIOM), 2015). Thus, we can see that the degree of “openness – lack of openness” is approximately 50 to 50. That is why it is not surprising that the research participants highlighted such a consequence of “partial openness” as the deficit of struggle against corruption in state bodies and non-transparency of decisions on state purchases.

As a result, the research of ARCPOR in 2015 ascertain rather high index of corruption in the country: indicator 70 out of 100 (in 2013 - 76) (Corruption in Russia: monitoring 2005-2015), while the Russia's position in the last third of the global Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) (CPI in the state sector-2014 - 27 points out of 100 (CPI, 2014); 2015 – 29 (CPI, 2015) demonstrates a long-term rather than episodic character, thus testifying to the systemic pathology of the research object. “Countries at the bottom need to adopt radical anti-corruption measures in favor of their people” (CPI, 2014), - says Jose Ugaz, chairman of Transparency International.

Since the beginning of the 2000-s the Russian authorities focus attention on the topicality of overcoming corruption as a social evil: laws and strategies are adopted, income and expenditure declarations of the officials are checked. Actually all state and municipal bodies, establishments and organizations have an intradepartmental document placed on their website, stating their adherence to the main provisions of the governmental anti-corruption policy. However, the declarative and chaotic character of the governmental measures for corruption prevention, the inconsistency and incompleteness in prosecuting the corruption offences discredit the role of the government, generating social-informational anomie in the society – the contradiction between the prescriptive, official information and the descriptive one, which fixes the actual state of affairs. The gap between words and deeds, the level of trust, social spirit and political instability are the links of one and the same chain.

While in 2010, according to the Global corruption barometer (GCB, Transparency International), 18% of the Russians believed in the efficiency of the anti-corruption efforts of the government, and 6% estimated the government measures as “very effective”, in 2013 the figures were significantly lower: 5% and 0% respectively (GCB, 2013). On the background of the reduced trust towards the governmental actions, social civil activity logically develops towards eliminating the corruption dysfunctions in the administrative system. However, only 41-60% of the Russians believe in the ability of citizens to effectively counteract corruption (Tab.2).

Belief in ordinary people’s ability to make a difference. Percentage of respondents who ‘agree’ or ‘strongly agree’, countries/territories grouped in quintiles.

**TABLE 2: DO YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT?
“ORDINARY PEOPLE CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN THE FIGHT AGAINST
CORRUPTION.” ***

<i>Percentage of respondents</i>	<i>Answers: ‘agree’ or ‘strongly agree’</i>
0–20%	–
21–40%	Armenia, Estonia, Kyrgyzstan, Lithuania, Serbia, Tunisia, Ukraine
41–60%	Algeria, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Burundi, Croatia, Czech Republic, Ethiopia, France, Germany, India, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Korea (South), Latvia, Lebanon, Libya, Luxembourg, Moldova, Mongolia, Morocco, Nigeria, Russia, Slovenia, Spain, Uganda, Vietnam, Yemen, Zimbabwe

<i>Percentage of respondents</i>	<i>Answers: 'agree' or 'strongly agree'</i>
61–80%	Afghanistan, Albania, Argentina, Australia, Azerbaijan, Bolivia, Cameroon, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Cyprus, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Egypt, El Salvador, Finland, Georgia, Ghana, Hungary, Indonesia, Israel, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Kenya, Kosovo, Macedonia (FYR), Madagascar, Mozambique, Pakistan, Philippines, Romania, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Slovakia, South Africa, South Sudan, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Switzerland, Taiwan, Tanzania, Thailand, Turkey, United Kingdom, United States, Uruguay, Zambia
81–100%	Bangladesh, Brazil, Cambodia, Denmark, Fiji, Greece, Jamaica, Liberia, Malawi, Malaysia, Maldives, Mexico, Nepal, New Zealand, Norway, Palestine, Papua New Guinea, Paraguay, Peru, Portugal, Rwanda, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Venezuela

*Global Corruption Barometer 2013. P.21. Transparency International. Authors: Deborah Hardoon, Finn Heinrich, 44 pp. <http://transparency.org.ru/barometr-mirovoi-korruptcii/korruptciiu-pobedit-ne-pravitelstvo-a-grazhdane>

The reasons of the poor confidence in their own abilities lie in the Russian features of implementing the “right for communication”. This is the right for access to information and the right of direct participation, *i.e.* orientation of the communicators to the equal information exchange, “the ability of the consumer to be a creator and a disseminator of information” (Leontieva, Gaynullina and Cherepanova, 2014). However, on the background of toughening legislation for independent mass media, non-profit organization and bloggers, the possibilities of developing the discursive practices are significantly reduced, the hopes of the civil society for the virtual space as a zone of constructive social activity are decreased. Limitations of the access, content and violation of rights of the Russian Internet users is stated by the international non-government organization Freedom House: since 2011 the index of Russia in the Internet freedom ranking decreases steadily from “partly free” to “not free” country (2011-2015: 52-62 (Tab.3)). In 2015 Russia got over the boundary of the “risk zone” and settled down in the cohort of “not free” countries – position 49 out of 65 (index 62) (Tab.3):

TABLE 3: FREEDOM ON THE NET 2014-2015*

<i>Indices</i>	<i>2014</i>	<i>2015</i>
Internet Freedom Status	Partly Free	Not Free
Obstacles to Access (0-25)	10	10
Limits on Content (0-35)	22	23
Violations of User Rights (0-40)	28	29
Total* * (0-100)	60	62

* Freedom on the net 2015, Russia. Freedom House. <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-net/2015/russia>

** 0 = most free, 100 = least free

As early as in 2011, the report by the Russian Public Chamber, devoted to the participation of the civil society institutions in the anticorruption policy implementation, highlighted the importance of the civil, public-professional initiatives connected with monitoring in the corruption sphere (National Anticorruption Committee, “INDEM” Fund, OPORA Rossii (Support of Russia), “Transparency International – Russia”, Federal Non Governmental Organization National Human Rights Association “Chelovek i zakon” (Person and law))(Report of the Russian Public Chamber, 2011). “Development of such resources in the Internet shows that the modern level of info-communication technologies allows to form effective mechanisms and techniques of the public anticorruption control” (Report, 2011), to increase the legal literacy of the citizens and intolerance to corruption. However already in 2015 the investigations of the non-profit Anticorruption Foundation (in 2014: 23 investigations were carried out on the property and business schemes of the officials; 133 auctions with the features of cartel collusion were revealed (Report of the Anticorruption Foundation performance, 2015) were estimated by the high-ranking actors as “made to order” ones. Not limiting themselves to the critique of the Russian non-profit anticorruption organizations, the officials also challenge the reliability of the unpleasant results of international ranking of the non-government organization “Transparency International”. However, according to the research data of the Russian “Levada Center”, the Russian respondents included corruption, bribery (29%) (Levada Center, 2015) into the top five of the main social problems, alongside with the aggravation of the economic condition (prices, poverty, unemployment, crisis). One can predict that, with the aggravation of material problems of the population, the delinquency of this “pathological norm” will produce the irritated-aggressive social spirit and, consequently, growth of social entropy. The “anticorruption” report of the Russian Public Chamber highlights: “The lack of authorities’ reaction to the flagrant cases of corruption is fraught with the risk of mobilizing the malcontents, turning the latent protest into mass

demonstrations” (Report of the Russian Public Chamber, 2011). At the same time, the basic mechanism of “contagious effect” in modern society is social networks. However, even being closed on the virtual reality, communicative practice is able to change the world of physical interactions, especially in the presence of political will.

DISCUSSION

Thus, one can ascertain high enough preparedness of the state structures to use the info-communication technologies for rendering state services to the citizens. According to international and national rankings, *e-government* is successfully functioning in Russia. The paradox is that its development does not increase the quality of state administration and poorly curbs the corruption.

The fundamental reason for that is the dual role of administrative-political elite: it is the central object of anticorruption measures and the main “high-status subject of forming and realization of anti-corruption policy, which means selection of information from the point of view of both content and technologies used” (L. Leontieva, T. Khalilova, L. Gaynullina & A. Khalilov, 2015). As a result, information is transferred not for the sake of social change but for itself, for the sake of presenting the anticorruption reports and media communiqués. Following the typology of social action by J. Habermas, we can assume that communicative actions of state bodies are not so much “purposeful-rational” but present an end in itself, “a symbolically mediated interaction” (Habermas, Jürgen, 1974). The network state-civil communications and law-enforcement practice exist in parallel worlds.

CONCLUSIONS

On the background of the media-demonstrative struggle against particular “resounding” corruption offences, the level of trust of the population to the anticorruption measures of the authorities is being reduced, generating social-informational anomie. Overcoming of such anomie is possible if the contents of state Internet communications are conjugated with the actual measures taken by the officials. The unity of the word and deed of the state servants of an “ideal” state is based on their personal liability and the independent public control. That is why the development of civil discourse presupposes:

1. Social demand for “anticorruption”.
2. Preparedness of legitimate authorities to constrictively react to public initiatives in real and virtual space.
3. Transparencies of reaction of the authorities to journalistic and social investigations.
4. High degree of cooperation between anticorruption actions of the authorities and the civil society.

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