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**Statements made by CCJ members on  
"Youth against Corruption"  
CCJ-PACE Networking for Youth  
27 January 2016**

## **Corruption in political life**

### **Christian Scharling**

International Federation of Liberal Youth

My point of intervention will look at how young people are faced with corruption in the political sphere and as well how they can help combatting it. Young people often feel alienated from politics in general, making it a field for the 'elite'. And not an 'elite' in its positive sense, more so in its excluding way. As such, politics are viewed as a place for the few, where decisions are taken to benefit the richer and more political powerful minority in society – often described as the "one-percent". In addition, young people often feel cared for in a tokenistic way, where they 'look nice' in photographs, but not in the political decision-making. However, some young people feel rather disconnected from the political sphere because of lack of information. This drives them to believe that they are 'not good enough' to take part in political discussions, which again alienates the political life in general, although admittedly in a less grave sense.

In general, it can be concluded that young people at large doesn't feel included and as such perceive politics as for the few, which accumulates an expectation of politics being corrupted. How can we overcome these challenges? And most importantly how can young people be a positive actor in combatting corruption in the political life?

First of all, young people and society in general needs access to information. Of course restrictions on media and internet access in some Council of Europe member States are of great concern to this extend, however, also member States who are generally considered to uphold high standards in access to information are introducing restrictions on access to correspondence between politicians and state institutions. The fear of the next 'political scandal' in tomorrow's news entails a significant blow to the access of information. However, if young people should stand up against corruption it is essential that they are able to check and balance their governments.

Corruption is often perceived as a 'habit' that needs change. It is obvious to start the change of such habits in ground schools across Europe. However, changing the school curriculum will not do it alone. Youth organisations and youth workers are central players here. Whereas school often feel obligatory, because of its mandatory nature, youth organisations and youth workers are able to give a non-biased education in combatting corruption through methods relevant to young people. State partnerships with private partners could be a way to introduce the fight against corruption in the volunteer forums that young people take part in.

At last, I want to draw your attention to the work of the Council of Europe and its youth sector. Terms like participatory budgeting and co-management are essential in the CoE youth sector and should be it as well in the political sphere throughout Europe in general. The city of Cluj Napoca in Romania was awarded the youth capital of 2015 and introduced participatory budgeting with great success.

As such, involving young people as equal partners in policy-making can help combatting corruption.

## **Corruption in education**

**Marko Grdosic**

Association des Etats Généraux des Etudiants de l'Europe/European Students' Forum

Corruption is a very big societal problem, and has probably existed from the beginning of human race. Coming from Croatia, a country fairly developed, but with difficulties just as most of others have, I have met different examples of corruption while growing up, with the biggest and most shocking cases appearing during my studies. In 2008, in a single day, police arrested numerous members of my Faculty of Economics and Business Administration. In the whole police operation called 'Index', that covered several faculties within the University of Zagreb, 69 persons were indicted of criminal offences, such as bribing, illegal mediation, abuse of position and sexual harassment. The accused persons included academic staff, faculty administration as well as students. This came as a big shock to the academic community, the students as well as to the larger public, with consequence of losing trust in higher education.

The question is always why do these things happen? Or better said, what are the challenges one have to address in order to work on reducing the level of corruption, not only in education, but in general? Corruption is considered socially acceptable as there is general resignation of society towards the problem. On the other hand, there is strong unwillingness and fear of reporting cases. Every person is from his or her early age surrounded with examples of corruption - in most cases not even being aware of it. From bringing a gift to the doctor, bribing a police officer, unreasonably exchanging favours; children observe their parents and learn how to act. One foreign student attending an exchange in Zagreb told me while we were using public transportation: 'You can't even consider addressing the problem of corruption as long as parents teach their children it is normal not to pay for the tram ticket!'

Referring back to the previously mentioned case of corruption at the University of Zagreb, it is important to also highlight what has been done to address corruption since the scandal was brought out in the open. First of all a central office for coordination of anti-discrimination and anti-corruption has been established; a legal framework has been developed and the existing codes of ethics have been reviewed, while new ones have also been adopted. At the same time a mechanism has been developed for reporting cases (website); brochures and videos have been published; roundtables and trainings organised, addressing students and the wider audience, as well as academic community and institutional staff. At European level, partnerships have been established with other universities with the purpose of exchanging on good practices in fighting corruption.

Based on my example, the question that must inevitably be raised is: how can the education sector get back the trust of students and the wider public after such a deceitful act? And how can the formal education sector in its teaching address the issue of corruption effectively? In my opinion, the most important change required is to put in place a strong education sector based on values and ethics as this is imperative for bringing about sustainable change in a long term perspective. Values and ethics are a way of living and a way of perceiving the world around us and it cannot be learned from a book - these principles and values have to be lived. This is why I am convinced that volunteering, non-formal education and youth work are the most natural ways for addressing this issue together with adequate family education. Children and young people, who at an early stage of life join various organisations with good causes and volunteer in different projects, get those essential values and principles entrenched and

can therefore also become real actors of change and view the world differently. This is where youth organisations play an important role and where the Advisory Council on Youth could support the Council of Europe bodies in developing initiatives.

### **Maria Roidi**

Youth Social Rights Network

Nowadays, the phenomenon of corruption grows bigger and bigger in the social, political and financial field. It is not rare to find ourselves facing incidents of bribery, money laundry and allocations of large amounts of money in purposes different than they ones they had been destined for, with the upper goal of legalizing these forms of income.

Doctors in hospitals ask for the so called “tip”, so as to perform a surgery. Tips are also given by citizens to workers in public services, so as to save time and bureaucracy. Political parties, wealthy entrepreneurs and other members of the social elite are often involved in local and international scandals. Furthermore, people without real qualifications get prestigious jobs just because they know the right people.

Citizens have no other choice but to provide tips so as to get better service. As a result, this mentality has been embedded in our society and it has become a common practice, which is widely accepted. Incidents of bribery in social services do not surprise anyone. Consequently, corruption passes from generation to generation as a social habit. Young people learn to abide by the unwritten rules, therefore, corruption keeps growing.

Young people have to face quite a few challenges, such as the establishment of corruption as a common practice, the dire economic traits which accentuate the situation, the low level of the educational system, which does not support young people in building critical thought towards this kind of social issues, political instability, which is also translated in political parties rising and falling long before completing their term of office. Monitoring mechanisms *do* exist in member states, however, these mechanisms are often part of the problem. As a result, new institutions are formed to monitor the old ones and so on and so forth...

How can this situation be reversed? How can young people – who are the future of Europe - change the social scenery?

Firstly, young people need to grow aware of the situation and have access to information on how to combat corruption. Secondly, active participation plays a major role. Youth organizations and NGOs can train people on how to fight against corruption. The same organizations can set up mechanisms and help eliminate this plague by providing legal advice, training and support in reporting and denouncing incidents of corruption. Furthermore, another measure which does not require large funds or complex planning is the creation of an e-platform, where all citizens can access information on how to combat corruption, report – even anonymously - incidents of corruption and share knowledge and good practices. The youth organizations can support this project by providing their know-how, by communicating this information to their target audience, by networking and collaborating with other bodies and the local authorities. I am aware of the fact that similar databases do exist, but I believe that a platform under the auspices of the Council of Europe would have a different prestige. The CoE could recommend member states to create similar platforms, a fact which would be a big success.

Last but not least, I would like to stress how important it is to tackle this problem that scourges all member states of the Council of Europe and the European Union, by emphasizing the role that young people can play in this fight. History shows that if we do not include young people in this change, then society is doomed to stagnancy, which is the root to all economic and social crises.

Young people need to be a part of the solution and this can be achieved only with your contribution as representatives of the member states of the Council of Europe. A comprehensive text with recommendations and directives towards the member states is a necessity.

I hope that these thoughts and ideas coming from a young person will be the impetus to take action against corruption. Thank you for your time.