ABSTRACT: The paper deals with different interpretations of roots of contemporary Polish corruption. The authors discuss two competing theories developed by Polish scholars. The first one links the sources of corruption with both the culture of corruption developed in the peasant society and the inefficiency of the political institutions of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The second one connects them mostly with institutional changes that happened during the Communist period. Recent data and the path of evolution of corruptive behavior after Communism suggest that the latter interpretation is more plausible.

KEYWORDS: Poland, corruption, post-Communism, cronyism, amoral familism, backward society.

THE UNWANTED LEGACY.
IN SEARCH OF HISTORICAL ROOTS
OF CORRUPTION IN POLAND

Neželjeni legat. U potrazi za istorijskim korenima korupcije u Poljskoj


KLJUČNE REČI: Poljska, korupcija, post-komunizam, kronizam, amoralni familizam, nazadno društvo.
Introduction

The process of post-Communist transition in Central-Eastern Europe was followed by the phenomenon of business-related abuses of law in the public sector, including corruption (Miller, Grødeland, Koshechkina 2001; Sandholtz, Taagepera, 2005). In the first years after 1989 a popular view emerged treating corruption as temporary and related to the ineffectiveness and malfunctioning of institutions in a transition period. As such, it should be regarded as a short-term side effect (that particular point of view, expressed not only in Poland, was described by Ivan Krystev (2006). However, the continuing high level of corruption in the public sector led to a shift in the perception of that phenomenon: it was more and more often attributed to Polish civilizational or historical legacy.

Many social scientists in Poland argue that Polish political, economic and social culture is deeply rooted in habits which have been shaped in a *longue durée* social process (e.g. Kochanowicz 2004; Kochanowicz, 2006). Following this approach, a persistent culture of corruption is almost an unavoidable, informally institutionalized characteristic of the Polish society. It is related to the political cronyism in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (e.g. Mączak 1986; Mączak 2000; Mączak 2003) and to the Polish peasants’ habits, inherited from the second serfdom and agricultural system of pre-modern Poland (e.g. Wasilewski 1986; Sowa, 2011). This approach is related to the concept of backward society introduced by Edward Banfield in his studies on southern Italy and then developed by the scholars interested in the peripheral regions, including Eastern Europe. Following that interpretation, the legacy of the 20th century is of minor importance and may be perceived only in terms of strengthening the corruption. Particularly the influence of institutionalized corruption, cronyism and nepotism inside the political and economic system should be interpreted mostly as a continuation of formerly established social institutions. The Communist corruption was not perceived as a (partially) new social institution, with strong roots in systemic inefficiency of state socialism, but rather as a new incarnation of old habits (Kochanowicz, 2004).

To sum up, according to those interpretations, due to long-term social processes, the culture of corruption is deeply rooted in the broadly defined Polish culture and is relatively more widely spread compared to more modern countries (Miller, Grødeland, Koshechkina, 2001) like Germany or Sweden. Coping with corruption is possible but it will be a generations-long process, while in the short and medium term the high level of corruption (street-level, political, cronyism) seems to be an inevitable part of social life in Poland. A decline of systemic corruption might be perceived only as an ultimate result of successful social modernization, i.e. the formation of new values and/or a new social structure.

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3 The social relations in the rural society were here similar to Edward Banfield’s idea of amoral familism: the special type of collectivism in the southern Italian society (1958). Later this issue was studied by scholars who stressed the importance of the amoral familism for the backward societies (Macfarlane, 1978; Thompson, 1980; Foster, 1967; Putnam, Leonardi, Nanetti, 1994).
Contrary to this interpretation, we would like to argue that post-Communist corruption was shaped mostly by the Communist experience. We agree with the scholars (e.g. Staniszkiś, 2001) who stressed the importance of the impact of the Communist system – especially of the command economy system and the political institutions such as, for example, *nomenklatura* system. Long-term sources of contemporary corruption are of less importance, though it does not mean that they are completely insignificant. However, if our supposition is correct, we should expect a relatively rapid decline of post-Communist corruption during the transition period, particularly since the moment of establishing a new, stable institutional framework. It should be followed by highly efficient institutional reforms, such as adjusting Polish laws and public administration to European Union standards and requirements or the establishment of anti-corruption office.

The paper is divided into three parts. In the first two parts, we give an overview of interpretations that underline the long-term and Communism-related factors of corruption. In the first part we focus on the history and sociology of cronyism in the political system of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the amoral familism of the peasants rooted in the pre-modern period and corruption in the partition period in Poland in the 19th century. In the second part we discuss the existing socio-economic analyses of the Communist period, focusing in particular on the importance of command economy and *nomenklatura* system in the development of corrupted institutions. In the third part we focus on the phenomenon of corruption in the post-Communist period. We compare the changes in the levels of corruption in Poland and other countries, but we also discuss the character of the contemporary corruption in Poland.

**Long-term factors of contemporary corruption**

In accordance with the first of the interpretations we are going to discuss, in order to understand the deep roots of Polish corruption during the transition period we need to look far back into the past. Many scholars – economic historians and historical sociologists – located the sources of the specific model of social relations in Poland in the pre-communism period (see e.g. Kochanowicz, 2004). The proponents of this interpretation expressed the opinion that corrupted habits in the social life in Poland (such as cronyism or amoral familism) did not suddenly appear in the last few decades. Some of them were present as early as in the 16th and 17th centuries.

As a result of economic processes taking place in the late Middle Ages and in early modern times, two separate zones emerged in Europe, featuring distinctly different socio-economic systems: early capitalism in the West and

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4 *Nomenklatura* in communist countries had two meanings in political and social life. The first was the Communist party appointment system, one of the most important institutions of state-socialism. The second was the common name of the highest group of the society comprised of the party and state high officials. In our paper we use the term *nomenklatura* system for the first meaning and *nomenklatura* for the second.
post-feudalism in the East. Following that division, the East European economies supplied natural resources to the West in exchange for manufactured goods (Malowist, 1973; Kula, 1963). In opposition to the western part of the continent, in the East, including Poland, “the second wave of serfdom and serfdom based agriculture developed and the nobles formed a landowning class, supervising the labor of the serfs.” (Maćzak, 1986: 177).

The peasants were forced to move lower and lower on the social ladder and to depend more and more on the estates of the landowners (almost reaching the status of slaves). The social relations inside country villages existed de facto outside the control of the state. These relations were similar to Banfield’s model of amoral familism (Banfield, 1958): particular interests dominated and it was a family, not an individual, that served as the only point of reference. It should be mentioned that the situation was also determined by extreme poverty, where peasants were guided by the basest survival instincts.

The collapse of the Commonwealth of Poland and Lithuania did not change much in that matter. Except in the smallest Prussian partition, economic and social relations in the country evolved very slowly. Until the 1850s–1860s serfdom-based agriculture remained the dominant form in the agrarian economy. The reforms introduced in 1848 in the Austrian partition and in 1864 in the Russian partition started economic changes in the villages. However, the new laws, which ensured all children the right to inheritance, led to the growing fragmentation of peasant farms. At the same time rapid demographic growth led to significant overpopulation: the population of the Russian partition doubled between 1870 and 1914 from 6 to 12 million people (Krzyżanowski, Kumaniecki, 1915) and the population of the Austrian partition grew between 1869 and 1910 from 5.4 to 8 million (Zamorski, 1991). The situation could not be eased by the marginal level of emigration. As a result, the peasants’ farms were economically weak and a huge majority of the rural population hardly participated in the developing capitalist economy, producing mostly for themselves. The poverty of the majority of peasant families led to the reinforcement of amoral familism on the territories of the Russian and Austrian partitions.

Until the early 20th century the industrialization of Polish territories covered only small areas, mostly in the Russian partition (Warsaw, Łódź). The German partition remained the agricultural background for the rapidly developing industrial regions in the Western part of Germany. The Austrian partition stayed deeply underdeveloped nearly without any industry even comparing to other slowly developed regions (Koryś, Tymiński, 2015). The slow development of the new branches of economy and the limited scale of urbanization (in fact on the Polish territories existed only two large cities – Warsaw and industrial Łódź) resulted in rather slow penetration of social relations by capitalist institutions and values. The dynamics of the process of formation of capitalist society was much faster in urban areas (particularly in large, industrial towns) than elsewhere.

The rebirth of Poland in 1918 did not bring any significant shift because the newly formed state did not possess enough potential to rapidly modernize the structure of economy and to overcome the model of the dichotomous society
The situation worsened during the Great Depression, which deeply affected all sectors of economy, especially agriculture. 88% of peasant farms went back to the natural economy (Landau, Tomaszewski, 1989: 414). The government's industrialization program, introduced in the second half of the 1930s, was not finished before the war and its effects were rather meager. In 1939 Poland stayed the underdeveloped agricultural country with the huge majority of rural population, deeply impoverished during the Great Depression. As a result the mentality typical of amoral familism was overwhelmingly common in the Polish society. In that period the spontaneous model of self-reproducing dual social relations was characterized by the tension between the backward peasant class and fairly modern intelligentsia. Amoral familism remained the foundation of norms and social strategies, particularly within the lower strata of the society, resulting in the institutionalization of cronyism (Mączak, 2003: 222).

The further petrifaction of that social model accelerated in the time of the WWII. Although corruption, cronyism and nepotism had existed on the Polish territories for a long time, it was the WWII that could be considered as the moment of creation of “the culture of corruption”. It is fair to say that the war led to the institutionalization of amoral familism, which had formed in the 19th century, as a modus operandi (Wyka, 1984: 149). Additionally, German and Soviet occupants introduced the transformation to the state-controlled economy. It allowed for an easier establishment of the state socialism during the post-war years (Łuczak, 1979: 521; Jezierski, 1999).

But the existence of the backward society and the dominating institution of amoral familism only partially explains the thesis of corruption rooted in pre-Communism era. Antoni Mączak's analyses (Mączak, 2000; Maczak, 2003) may lead to the conclusion that although political corruption, nepotism and cronyism are almost irremovable factors of the political life in general, they played an even more prominent role in Poland than in the Western European countries. This conclusion is based on the argument which could be reconstructed in the following way.

Unlike the majority of European countries, which established absolutist monarchies, in the 15th and 16th centuries Poland formed a unique political system defined as noble democracy or noble republicanism. The main position in that system was played by Sejm (parliament) consisting of representatives elected by noblemen on regional assemblies of noblemen, called sejmik (“little Sejm”). The executive power belonged to the king and was weak and limited by the parliament. Starting from the late 16th century, after the establishment of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the kings were elected by all noblemen, which additionally weakened the king’s position.

The central idea of the system was the legal and political equality among all noblemen, estimated at 10% of population. However, because of huge
differences in the wealth between the members of the ruling class, the highest strata of nobility dominated the lower noblemen, especially after the wars in the 17th century, which deeply impoverished the middle noblemen. As a result, the wealthiest dominated the local assemblies and the parliament. It created fairly favorable circumstances for corruption and cronyism, because the richest needed the votes of lower noblemen in local assemblies, Sejm and king’s elections, while impoverished noblemen needed material aid from the magnates.

Cronyism in various forms, primarily in local assemblies, became an informal institution of Polish noble republicanism and resulted in the emergence of two semi-formal social strata – the rich patrons and noble clients. The growing importance of the clientele in the 17th century fundamentally determined the evolution of the Republic’s political system and the social structure of the country through the increasingly stronger dependence of the poorer nobles on their wealthy protectors (Mączak, 2003: 170–200).

The political crisis of the noble democracy, which occurred after the profound economic collapse of the state, was fully exposed at the turn of the 17th and the beginning of the 18th century. The collapse of the political system revealed its unusual susceptibility to corruption. Flaws of the system evolved to become reasons for the crisis, for the weakening of state institutions and for escalating external interventions, including crowning of monarchs selected by foreign states (particularly Russia). Also, the collapse of the state itself, preceded by the partition of the country, made all patronage-related pursuits more feasible. Targowica, a confederation of magnates, forged in 1792, which aimed to block all transformations of the Polish political system stemming from the Constitution of the 3rd of May, was under the patronage of Catarina II, Empress of Russia. By then the interests of its members were significantly different from the interests of the state, and Catarina took advantage of that situation and turned them into Russia’s clients.

Hence, the conditions favoring patron-client relations, within the frames of formal institutions, developed a long time ago. The question remains how long the influence of the institutions of the pre-partition Poland lasted. That continuation of the patronage in institutions could have been enforced by the events of the 19th and 20th centuries, particularly by the quasi-colonial experience described below.

The collapse of the Commonwealth was followed by 123 years of partitions, when the Polish territory was incorporated into Austria, Prussia and Russia. Political corruption and cronyism based on relations with the foreign courts lost their reason to exist during the partition period, because Polish territories became relatively insignificant provinces within three empires. Instead, administrative corruption, particularly in the biggest, Russian partition, grew, encouraged by Russian policies (Chwalba, 1995). It preserved the importance of cronyism, although gained a new multi-layered form, typical of Russian administration. It is worth mentioning because that particular model of administration, with only few modifications, survived in the USSR and was also imposed in Poland once again, after WWII.
Furthermore, the absorption of Poles into the corruption machine was conceived as a method to instigate a moral crisis in the Polish society. That would, undoubtedly, ease the burden of governing an always rebelling province (Chwalba, 1995). The Russian administration was consciously drawing Poles into that dirty game. On the one hand they gained an opportunity to punish rebelling Poles for corruption crimes, on the other hand Poles would be drawn into the patron-client relations and corruptive deals with new authorities.

In the late 19th century and early 20th century the reinforcement of corruption might have also had its source in the attitude of the dynamically forming modern Polish nation to each partition’s authorities and their administration, particularly in Russian and German provinces. The formation of a modern nation without its own state, in an open opposition to existing state structures, created a dichotomy. During the 19th century, a model of a particular relationship was shaped locating the nation (“us”) on the one side and the partitioning states and their structures (“them”, “the aliens”) on the opposite side. The foreign, alien, origin of state structures justified corruptive behaviors or using favoritism in dealings with the state, which was “not our own”.

The legacy of corruption from the partition era is serious, resulting in the shaping of the culture of amoral familism as well as of particular „rules of the game” and norms in relation to the partitioning states, particularly in the Prussian partition. It probably also influenced the mentality and attitudes of Polish citizens after 1918. We need to remember, though, that the mindset of groups occupying higher levels of society – and this is important in regard to forms of corruption – was shaped by the patriotic upbringing and the tradition of uprisings and fighting for independence. It was, in turn, an important factor possibly limiting the scale of political and administrative corruption. Nevertheless, 20 years of independent Polish state could have changed existing customs only partially. The subsequent German and Soviet occupation during the WWII reestablished even more sharply the relations between Polish society and the occupants’ authorities similar to those in the time of partitions. The policy of terror introduced by both invaders (in the Western part of Poland by Germany and in the Eastern part by USSR) placed the administration, police and other public organizations as an unequivocal enemy of the Polish nation. As a result both occupations strengthened the dichotomous division of “us” versus “them” and led to the increase and legitimization of corruptive behaviors against occupant’s, “not ours”, administration.

According to the advocates of the approach we have just analyzed, pathologies and informal behaviors of the transformation period had deep roots in history, in long-term informal constraints (customs, traditions etc.) which shaped the model of the backward society6 (Kochanowicz, 2004). The phenomena like the peasant culture of the community (amoral familism),

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6 Taking into account debates concerning the notion of backwardness, we try to use the term in the possibly neutral meaning. The backward society means rural, unindustrialized, and devoid of modern capitalist hierarchies, classes and institutions. Therefore the backwardness of the society is connected to the development of modern industrial economy and state
formed on the basis of serfdom, or the cronyism which developed in the political system of Commonwealth and then was grounded in the time of partitions, were incorporated into the Communist system, which not only easily absorbed but also reinforced them. Following a definition suggested by representatives of the new institutional economics (North, 1990; Williamson, 2000), those kinds of rules would have been deeply rooted informal institutions. The change of those informal constraints as a result of the transformation of formal rules (introduction of market economy and democratization) has not been possible in such a short period of time since the 1989 breakthrough.

**Communist roots of corruption**

Interpretations positioning basic conditions which shaped the post-Communist corruption in such distant past seem insufficient – they miss the significance of social and institutional factors originating from the Communist system. First it seems necessary to point out two of them: economic and political systems imposed from the outside and, in particular, the nomenklatura system established within the frames of the political and economic system.

Rules of command economy laid out the foundation for the unintended development of economic dysfunctions within the Communist system. The disappearance of the market, nationalization of the economy and the introduction of central planning led to the creation of, as described by Janos Kornai (1980; 1992), an economy of shortages. Demand permanently exceeded supply, in consumption goods as well as in resources required for production. The inadequacy of the economic system forced managers to develop new strategies to acquire resources. Average households reacted similarly. As a result, the set of formal rules was supplemented with informal ones, which Jadwiga Staniszkis defined as adaptation superstructures (Staniszkis, 1972: 113–133; Staniszkis, 1976: 173). It was a set of defense mechanisms relieving structural tensions within the economic system. Those mechanisms included phenomena like corruption, nepotism or cronyism and, during the final period of Polish People’s Republic, the development of political capitalism. Usually components of the superstructure functioned well on the micro level, while on the macro level they would only deepen the existing insufficiency of the economic system.

Mechanisms which led to the final formation of ”the culture of corruption” during the WWII, encompassed the entire economy during Communism era. The concept of the persistence of “the culture of corruption”, as well as of total systemic incapability of the command economy were also recorded in the survey researches from 1970s and 1980s. The research conducted between the mid 1970s and 1980s regularly had 60% of the surveyed claim that in order “to get something” one needed “to give something” often or very often; another survey showed that 60% of the surveyed claimed that in order “to get something” it was necessary...
to use someone's support, so called “favors” (Polish “plecy”, Russian “blat”, see Ledeneva, 1998). The research conducted in the second part of the 1980s rendered similar results (Kubiak, 2000: 213–14). The structural ramifications of the central command system led to the expansion of corruption onto the entire society and mechanisms of Communist economy led to the domination of amoral familism model in the Polish society, manifesting itself in a low level of the social trust (Giza-Poleszczuk, 1991: 90, see also: Sztompka 1994; Kochanowicz, 2004; Wedel, 1986; Wedel, 1992; Wedel, 2006; Podgórecki, 1995).

Political rules, particularly a unique character of the formal institution of party nomenklatura system, constituted a second factor which strongly influenced the advancement of corruption. Nomenklatura was a cadre recruitment system led by the ruling Communist party. Its rules were not precisely defined and it was also unusually far spread, including even relatively low level positions. Party apparatus activists and functionaries adjusted to the existing solutions and learned how to use their flaws. Therefore they were able to achieve a broader extent of independence from the superior authorities. It led to an informal agreement between central authorities and their agents: in exchange for the loyalty of the former, the latter would enjoy the actual autonomy in their respective areas. The directors or the managers simply knew that as long as they remained loyal to their patrons they would be able to last as part of the organization's elite circles (Hirszowicz, 1973: 109).

The most important consequences of that informal arrangement was the advancement of the patron-client relations and promotions of inefficient but politically dependable candidates (see for USSR: Harasymiw, 1969: 509). The candidates for positions were supposed to express double loyalty – to the Communist party and to their particular group. Hence the structure of rewards in the game of nomenklatura strengthened the game players’ affiliation for negative selection, thus deepening the inefficiency of the socialist economy.

The forming of patron-client relations was tied to the development of informal, highly advanced, interest groups within the broadly defined authority apparatus (Tarkowski, 1990). The forming process of such groups had a horizontal character, when the representatives of various power centers from a particular area created informal coalitions, as well as a vertical character, when the coterie would expand the existing patron-client relations, fronted by the protector from the highest level of authorities. The analysis conducted in the 1980s leads to the conclusion that the concentration of the key positions in the hands of a fairly narrow group of people on a local level would favor the formation of local interest groups (Tarkowski, 1983).

The nomenklatura system along with the economy of shortages were the main reasons for the establishment of the new social structure, in which the new nomenklatura elite played the role of the highest class of the society. The privileged, because of their position in the hierarchy, had access to desirable goods, as well as a decisive voice in the redistribution of those goods. Within the frames of the command system and the economy of shortages that became a foundation for the development of various forms of corruption. As a result
of the implementation of the rules of the new system, the new social relations, resembling the amoral familism, emerged (Tarkowska, Tarkowski, 1994).

It remains an open question to what extent “the culture of corruption” of the Communist era was a legacy carried on from earlier periods or a consequence of the Communist system itself. According to this view we can express the hypothesis that the corruption and cronyism of Communism in Poland were brought to life through the implementation of the formal institutions such as the rules of centrally planned economy and the party *nomenklatura* system. “The culture of corruption” of the Communist period would have been the result of the adjustment to the new formal rules, and its roots would be definitely more shallow than in the case when it would have been the consequence of long-term conditions.

### Post-Communist corruption

In the final stages of the existence of state socialism, there were the first signals heralding the formation of a new political and economic system, later defined as political capitalism (Staniszkis, 1991). The process occurred in almost all socialist countries and preceded the political transformation. An example of such transformation would be the phenomenon of spontaneous privatization, which occurred in the USSR in 1987. The party and state officials, in exchange for a symbolic gratification, took over the state property (Karklins, 2009: 148–149).

In Poland, according to Maria Łoś and Andrzej Zybertowicz, transformations implemented by the party at the end of 1980s allowed to formally legalize “informal ownership rights”, and the *nomenklatura* interest groups of the late 1980s seemed well prepared for system transformation (Łoś, Zybertowicz, 2000: 73, 75). It enabled them to take control over a significant part of state-owned properties, and informal personal connections played the key role in the process (Tarkowski, 1991; Staniszkis, 2001). That rendered significant consequences for methods of action and the structure of the elite after the collapse of Communism. In this group people with ties to old *nomenklatura* played some of the leading roles.

In 1993 in Poland 40% of the existing high-ranking officials in the administration earlier belonged to the elite of the final years of Polish United Workers’ Party (the higher levels of *nomenklatura*). Adding those who in 1988 were one step lower on the power ladder (sub-elite), the percentage rises to 45%. Among the managers and entrepreneurs (economic elite) the level of self-reproduction was even higher, up to 50% of them belonged to the higher *nomenklatura* levels (for example the managers of most important enterprises, high ministry officials) and adding the sub-elite (for example the deputy managers or managers of the large plants) – 57%. The high percentage of former elite members in the new one could point to a successful conversion of political capital into economic position (Wasilewski, Wnuk-Lipiński, 1995: 687–688). Research conducted by Jacek Wasilewski in 1998 provides an interesting

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7 As the authors of study for Poland, Czech Republic and Hungary wrote: „In all three countries a high percentage of the managing positions in the economy in 1993 were occupied
commentary to these data, and exemplifies the stability of the arrangement observed in 1993. The author draws a conclusion that the higher strata of 1993 was a stable post-transformation elite, and the transformation itself took place at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s (Wasilewski, 2000).

The results of this research point to a successful transformation of the former *nomenklatura*, which after 1989 became a significant element of the new higher strata of post-Communist society, “the self-reproducing *nomenklatura*” (Podgórecki, 1995: 223). The new private sector in the economy inherited old patron-client relations, and *nomenklatura* interest groups did not lose their *raison d’être* transferring old customs into the new state. In this way opportunities for spontaneous forming of new capitalist rules were blocked. Instead, it led to the reproduction of communist habits of “the culture of corruption” and to establishing a defective version of capitalism. The new system was composed of the new rules of market economy and democratic system and old informal institutions inherited from state-socialism. As a result the new regime was a kind of political capitalism as described by Randall G. Holcombe. In such systems “the economic and political elites cooperate for their mutual benefit. The economic elite influence the government’s economic policies to use regulation, government spending, and the design of the tax system to maintain their elite status in the economy. The political elite are then supported by the economic elite which helps the political elite maintain their status; an exchange relationship that benefits both the political and economic elite.” (Holcombe, 2015: 41).

The new regime emerged through a number of transmission mechanisms. Firstly, the newly forming group of managers and entrepreneurs in economy and high-rank officials in administration directly and personally inherited certain strategies of functioning in the public life. Although ex–*nomenklatura* members morphed into capitalist entrepreneurs, their experience in communicating with public offices and business partners stemmed from the previous system. Secondly, they inherited a network of social, institutional and financial connections, relations and obligations. Thirdly, this group’s manner of functioning created a favorable climate to comply with “the culture of corruption” also for the rest of the society.

Due to time lapse it remains difficult to point to an actual influence of previous patterns from earlier times on post-Communist corruption. It seems the only channel of such transmission refers to “the serf syndrome” focused solely on survival and existence. In subsequent periods this strategy of amoral familism resulted in formation of the “culture of corruption” (Hryniewicz, 2004; Sowa, 2011). That approach renders elements of identity and historic memory, formed during the long-term social endurance process, crucial for Polish post-Communism and the contemporary “culture of corruption” (Kochanowicz, 2004; Wasilewski, 1986) due to the influence of such institutions as serfdom-based economy. Using the category of serf syndrome one can explain most of

by the people who belonged to the technocratic-managerial elite in the 80ties (Eyal, Szelényi, Townsley, 1998: 115).
the informal and corruptive behaviors typical of the post-Communist period, arguing that the influence of Communist institutions was indiscernible or none – eventually they only petrified former patterns of behavior and informal institutions.

The analytical differentiation of the influence of amoral familism and cronyism rooted in Communism from the ones with older roots, is not simple. However, it seems that the fundamental differentiating distinction should be the persistence of corruptive behaviors and their susceptibility to change under the pressure of formal institutions. Informal institutions formed in a long perspective should be much more resilient to the influence of formal institutions. Or, in other words, if in the post-transition period the level of corruption significantly decreased, we can conclude that contemporary “culture of corruption” is probably mostly the Communist phenomenon, a consequence of changes in formal institutions. If the level of corruption is high and stable, the post-Communist corruption is probably mostly a long-term phenomenon rooted in the deep history of Poland.

The possibility of measuring corruption is still limited. Although the topic is highly discussed by scholars there is still a lack of a fully credible tool to estimate the level of corruption. The reason for the situation is the character of corruption, which is hardly a measurable phenomenon. However, in last 20 years there have been established two, maybe not perfect, but sufficient data bases which allow to compare the estimated corruption levels in different countries. The first is the Control of Corruption Index (CCI) published by the World Bank (see: Kaufmann et al., 2005). The second source of information is the Corruption Perception Index (CPI), published annually by Transparency International (2015). Both of them are so called hybrid indexes based on the information from different sources to calculate the index of perceived corruption in the countries. In the combining of both the authors use the results of different surveys, including the pools among well informed representatives of business and politics, international organizations etc. Even though the methods of the estimation of those indexes are slightly different, the results are correlated. For our analysis we use the CPI, though the results and dynamics of CCI for Poland and other countries are very similar to the CPI8. Although we are aware that the corruption indexes are disputable and cannot be treated as a fully credible picture of corruption, there is no better available series of data and apart from their weaknesses they allow to reveal the overall tendency of the changes in corruption level in different countries9. The level of CPI for Poland and other countries can be seen on the chart 1.

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8 CPI ranges between 0 and 10, where 10 means “no corruption” and 0 – “absolutely corrupted”. It is a synthetic measure based on different, standardized quantitative measures. The methodology of the index has been changed several times, therefore the comparison between countries (in a particular year) is more reliable than the comparison between years.

9 The reliability of both, CPI and CCI indexes may be disputed. Here we simply assume that bias for CEE countries was/is similar.
Chart 1.

CPI level in Poland and the average levels in Scandinavian countries, CEE countries, PIGS countries and EU25 in the years of 1996–2015

Source: Based on Transparency International (2015) data. CEE countries: Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary; Scandinavian countries: Sweden, Norway, Denmark; PIGS countries: Portugal, Italy, Greece, Spain, EU-25: excl. Bulgaria and Rumania (for part of the period data for selected countries are unavailable). Methodology of index were changed during the period, thus year over year comparison is not fully reliable. In years 1996–2011 CPI index ranged between 0 and 10, since 2012 – between 0–100. For the period 2012–2015 original results are divided by 10.

High levels of corruption in 1990s were probably a result of a deep institutional transformation as well as the short term legacy of late communist system. In turn, the further increase in perceived corruption in the early 2000s could be associated with large financial affairs which came to light during that period, as well as the fact that corruption became one of the major topics of public debate. What surprises is the relative improvement of Polish records, comparing to PIGS (Portugal, Ireland, Greece and Spain) and, particularly, to neighboring CEE countries, which occurred in 2002 and has continued as a trend ever since. From this year, the improvement of the indicator could be observed, also in reference to the obvious benchmark – Scandinavian countries. This improvement suggests that results of institutional rearrangement in the early 2000s (possible consequences of the “structural violence”\(^\text{10}\) coming from the European institutions after 2004 or to the partly successful institutional reforms which started in 2006) had an impact which lasted much longer than in neighboring countries. Moreover, the recession of 2008–9 resulted in a decline of CPI index for peripheral EU countries (both Eastern and Southern), while in

\(^{10}\) The term used by Jadwiga Staniszks to describe the impact of EU requirements connected with financial aid and European funds on Polish institutions (Staniszks 2006). Originally the term was coined by Johan Galtung, but with a different meaning.
In the case of Poland, it rose at a stable pace. We have no proof for that, but it might be a sign of a more successful institutional transition than those experienced by other CEE countries.

**Conclusions**

The analysis presented above may be summarized in two ways. Firstly, it would be valuable to emphasize a relative success of anticorruption policy in Poland and the lack of clear evidence confirming the thesis of the persistence of the serf syndrome (the existing one should be considered mostly anecdotal) and channels of multi-generational transfer of that syndrome in conditions favorable for social and territorial mobility during the last century. These arguments could be pointing to the legitimacy of the hypothesis that the corruption in the period of 1945–1989 was formed by Communist institutional arrangement, which also played the key role in the shaping of post-Communism corruption. The observed slow increase of the CPI level, signifying the decrease of perceived corruption in the state, is an effect of the weakening influence of the circumstances originating in the Communist system. The comparison of the CPI level of Poland to that of the CEE countries points to the fact that Poland is currently perceived as a relatively low-corruption state, contrary to the situation in the 1990s. It could be interpreted as evidence of certain effectiveness of institutional adjustments enforced by the European integration or a positive effect of the internal reforms and as a successful attempt at eliminating institutional dependencies rooted in the Communist era.

However, these results can be interpreted in a different way. It can be assumed that the dominant *longue durée* pattern of corruption has evolved both in the Communist and post-Communist period into informal institutions and habits poorly registered by indicators like CPI but which are equally unhealthy for the state and the civil society. It is possible that the evolutionary nature of society has led to new institutions, resistant to anticorruption procedures and policies. We described a similar process which happened in the early Communist period.

Hence it still remains difficult to resolve to what extent the existing contemporary corruption and informal behaviors have roots in communist period or how they are impacted by earlier factors. While we prefer to stick to former of these interpretations, we also take into account that communist corruption is a result of long-term institutional evolution.

**References:**


