



**Háskólinn
á Akureyri**
University
of Akureyri

The impact of corruption on an Eastern-European country

Forms of corruption in key systems such as health
care, politics, and education

Tania Mihaela Muresan

Félagsvísindadeild

Hug- og félagsvísindasvið

Háskólinn á Akureyri

2024

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12 eininga lokaverkefni
sem er hluti af
Baccalaureus Artium-prófi í félagsvísindum

Leiðsögukenndari
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Félagsvísindadeild
Hug- og félagsvísindasvið
Háskólinn á Akureyri
Akureyri, maí 2024

Titill: The impact of corruption on an Eastern-European country: Forms of corruption in key systems such as health care, politics, and education
Stuttur titill: The impact of corruption on an Easter-European country
12 eininga bakkalárprófsverkefni sem er hluti af Baccalaureus Artium-prófi í félagsvísindum.

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Öll réttindi áskilin

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Skráningarupplýsingar:
Tania Mihaela Muresan, 2024, bakkalárprófsverkefni, Félagsvísindadeild, hug- og félagsvísindasvið, Háskólinn á Akureyri, 33 bls.

Akureyri, 10. maí, 2024

Ágrip

Þessi ritgerð fjallar um ríkjandi form spillingar innan heilbrigðiskerfisins, menntastofnana og stjórnmalanna, þar sem sérstök áhersla er lögð á opinberar stofnanir í Rúmeníu. Til að framkvæma þessa rannsókn var notuð aðferðafræði sem fól í sér gagnaöflun og greiningu á gögnum á borð við fréttavefsíður, fræðigreinar og akademískar rannsóknir. Algengasta form spillingar reyndist vera mútur og misnotkun valds af hálfu umráðamanna stofnanna sem höfðu í för með sér neikvæð áhrif á rúmenska þjóðfélagið. Niðurstöðurnar benda til þess að spilling er viðvarandi vandamál í Rúmeníu, sem er rótgróið í samfélaginu og hindrar þróun landsins og velferð þegnanna þess.

Abstract

This study examines the prevalent forms of corruption within key sectors such as health care, politics, and education politics with a particular focus on public institutions in Romania. To conduct this research, the methodology used was data collection and document analysis where news websites, articles on the topic, academic studies, and research were analyzed. According to the research, the most prevalent form of corruption was found to be bribery and the abuse of power by institutional occupants, negatively affecting Romanian society. The findings suggest that corruption is still a significant problem in Romania, being deeply rooted within society and public institutions, hindering the development of the country and the welfare of its citizens.

I would like to thank my supervisor, Verena Karlsdóttir, for assisting me through this writing process and for her patience, advice, and remarks.

My eternal gratitude goes out to my parents for their endless support and encouragement, especially my mother for always believing in me and pushing me forward.

Preface

This thesis is a 12 ECTS BA in social sciences at the University of Akureyri. For my thesis I chose the topic of corruption on an Eastern-European country, to be more precise, Romania. The topic carries a personal interest to me because I was born in Romania and lived there for half my life. Therefore, some of the forms of corruption I will discuss in my thesis have been experienced by myself, members of my family, and friends.

My aim with this thesis is to illustrate the severity of corruption and its seriousness by how it affects public institutions, society and the development of a country.

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1 Introduction

Corruption is a problem faced by countries worldwide in some shape or form to some greater or lesser extent. Most often, corruption involves abuse of power for the benefit of a group or for personal gain. In most cases, corruption is explained and motivated by greed and desire for power. The essence of corruption is that it violates the ethical principles of honesty, integrity, and fairness. It can be visible when individuals who have a position of authority or influence abuse their power for personal interests at the expense of the public good (Raicu, 2010).

The issue of corruption persists throughout Europe, especially in Eastern European countries that have transitioned from communist to democratic regimes. According to Rasma Karklins, post-communist countries are particularly prone to corruption as a result of the communism harsh regime. This means that, under communism, an unrestrained corruption environment was created for survival, allowing corruption to flourish (Karklins, 2006).

Romania is one of the Eastern European countries that transitioned from communism to democracy in December 1989. To this day, there is no doubt that corruption is a major problem in Romania. According to the Corruption Perceptions Index in 2023 published by Transparency International, this ranking is established by awarding points from 0 to 100, with 0 points meaning "very corrupt" and 100 points meaning "not corrupt", Romania has 46 points out of 100, making it one of the three most corrupt countries in the European Union, with public institutions being most affected, along with Bulgaria having 45 points and most corrupted country being Hungary with 42 points out of 100. According to this index, the Nordic countries had the best scores, Denmark with 90 points out of 100, Finland with 87 points, and Norway with 84 points. The average of this score from the analysis of 180 countries in 2023 in Western Europe and the EU was 64 points out of 100 (Euronews, 2024).

Therefore, the purpose of this thesis is to explore the prevalent forms of corruption within key sectors such as health care, education, and politics, with a particular emphasis on public institutions in Romania and how these forms of corruption affect Romanian society. To conduct this thesis research, I will examine national news and articles that cover the problem of corruption in Romania and academic studies and researches that address this issue.

I will first examine some of the definitions of corruption in general and then Romania as a country in Eastern Europe, further we will look into Romania during the communist regime, and how the fall of communism impacted the society and its transition to democracy. Therefore, corruption will be discussed in light of culture and theories associated with it. Next, we will discuss the methodology used in this thesis. Afterward, we will investigate corruption in key sectors mentioned above as well as its effects on society. To conclude, we will examine the results and findings of this thesis.

2 Theoretical overview

The following section will have a look into different definitions of corruption in general. We will therefore move into an introduction of Romania as an Eastern-European country, then an examination of corruption in Romania during communism and how it was implemented in society. We will examine corruption as a cultural factor and theories related to the issue.

2.1 Definitions of corruption

It can be simply stated that corruption is the act of abuse of power in order to gain personal advantage or for the benefit of a particular group or organization. There are a variety of unethical and illegal behaviors that can be categorized as corruption, including bribery, embezzlement (financial fraud), nepotism, cronyism (favoring friends in every position), influence peddling, and favoritism, among others (Myint, 2000).

When it comes to corruption, the context where the corruption manifests itself is important. Contexts, likewise, corruption, have many forms. When it comes to a legal context, the definition of corruption is usually manifested by abuse of public office for one's own interest, accepting a bribe or illegal payments from a citizen who wants to get something in return for his own benefit or preferential treatment (*Corruption*, n.d.). If the context is ethical, corruption can manifest itself through fraud, dishonesty, or a betrayal of trust, violating moral principles or ethical standards (Fierro et al., 2024). In a political context, corruption involves political leaders or those who work within the government, abusing their high status, and the power they have either for personal or electoral gain, negatively affecting democratic

institutions and processes (Amundsen, 1999). When it comes to an economic context, corruption manifests itself by leading to inefficiency, unequal market competition, or economic inequality overhead, having a negative impact on a country's productivity, thus hindering the economic development and well-being of a country (Spyromitros & Panagiotidis, 2022). In a social context, when it comes to citizens and society, corruption compromises public trust in institutions, undermines the rule of law, contributes to inequality, and hinders social progress (Council of Europe, 2023).

High levels of corruption can negatively affect a country's society. Consequently, corruption can cause inequality among citizens. This inequality can cause citizens to be divided into two groups, those who have the resources to pay bribes for personal gain or those who do not. This leads to a much more severe situation, where there is a division between those with access to quality education services or health services, and those without access to these services. In the same way, citizens are classified as prosecutable or non-prosecutable based on their ability to bribe the court for an advantageous verdict (Zemanovičová et al., 2002).

In general, corruption can be viewed as a system. It is based on large social relationships that are deeply rooted, having its own internal rules and mechanisms. A corrupt environment makes corruption more likely to spread if radical measures are not taken to combat it. It hinders public institutions' performance and the efficient use of resources, thereby destabilizing democratic development. It also prevents the most vulnerable members of society from evolving and improving their quality of life (Zemanovičová et al., 2002).

2.1.2 Romania, an Eastern European country

Romania is a country located in East-Central Europe and has a population of 19.1 million people according to statistics from 2021. The capital and largest city of Romania is Bucharest, with a population of two million. Throughout the country, Romanian is the official language and the main religion in Romania is Christianity where approximately 87% of the population are Eastern Orthodox, 5% are Protestant and 5% are Roman Catholic adherents. Approximately 238,391 square kilometers make up Romania's territory. To the southeast, Romania borders the Black Sea as well as Bulgaria, Hungary, Moldova, and Serbia. Before flowing into the Black Sea, the Danube River forms a southern border between Romania and

Ukraine during its lower course. Romania and Turkey share a maritime border in the Black Sea (nationsonline.org, n.d.).

2.1.3 Romania and European Union accession

An integral part of joining the European Union is that it provides many benefits to a country, such as political strength, the liberty of citizens to live, study, and work anywhere in the EU, expansion in commerce due to access to the single market, EU finance and expansion in investments, and advanced consumer, environmental, and social standards (EU Enlargement, n.d.).

However, a country that applies for membership in the European Union must also consider some criteria, known as the Copenhagen criteria: secure institutions capable of assuring democracy, the rule of law and human rights. Aptitude to manage the competitive pressures of the EU market and an effective market economy. The capability to achieve the obligations of EU membership, including implementing EU legislation and adhering to EU goals (EU Enlargement, n.d.).

In 2007, Romania joined the European Union after an extended journey. Romania signed its Association Agreement with the EU in 1993. Subsequently, a membership application was submitted by the country in 1995. With Romania and five other states, Bulgaria, Lithuania, Latvia, Slovakia, and Malta, the European Council decided to open accession negotiations in 1999, which officially began in 2000. In addition to the six states mentioned above, Lithuania, Latvia, Malta, and Slovakia concluded negotiations in 2002 to join the EU in 2004, along with Hungary, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Poland, Cyprus, and Slovenia. In 2007, Romania and Bulgaria joined the European Union unprepared, leading to the establishment of the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism (CVM) by the European Commission (Mihai, 2016).

The reason for the lack of preparation is that when Romania and Bulgaria joined the EU in 2007, both countries still had problems related to their unfinalized judicial reform, corruption, and, in the case of Bulgaria, systematized crime. As a result, the Commission established the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism (CVM), which is a transitional measure to aid both countries in resolving these issues (Comisia Europeană, n.d.).

For Romania and Bulgaria to evolve, this mechanism was essential. In both countries, judicial reform and the battle against corruption and systematized crime are crucial issues. To

ensure compliance with EU obligations, the Commission assesses the administrative and judicial systems of both states. Therefore, citizens will be able to fully exercise their rights as European citizens once these goals are achieved (Comisia Europeană, n.d.). Notably, the European Commission adopted decisions establishing benchmarks for Bulgaria and Romania to achieve. To assess progress, the Commission consults with the authorities, civil society, independent experts, and other sources. In accordance with the criteria established within the CVM, periodic reports and recommendations are produced. Afterwards, the Council of Ministers discusses all Commission reports, the methodology used, and the conclusions drawn, usually approving them (Comisia Europeană, n.d.).

Romania is evaluated on the basis of its judicial system's effectiveness and transparency, as well as key institutions in areas such as integrity and combating and preventing corruption. In addition, both countries adherent to the CVM have access to financing and expertise through the European Structural and Investment Funds and the Support Service for Structural Reforms (Comisia Europeană, n.d.).

2.2 Corruption in Romania during the communism

In 1947, shortly after the end of World War II, the Soviets occupied the country, leading to the establishment of the communist party within the country (nationsonline.org, n.d.).

The communist regime took a toll on Romania's society. Because of its harsh regime, and dictatorship that had no boundaries, living standards were drastically lowered. The society was overwhelmed by suffering, physical hardship, and moral hopelessness. Therefore, in 1989 took place one of the biggest and significant revolutions in Romania in order to take down the communist party and its leader. At that moment, Romania took its first and slow steps towards democracy (Encyclopedia Britannica, n.d.).

In the communist regime, everything was controlled, from what was imported and exported to how the workers were paid to what one could buy, how much one could purchase, and with what. Even though one owned a house or a car, private property was also systemically controlled. Even food and electricity were restricted in the last decade of communism (Bizdadea, 2016). Therefore, citizens developed small habits of corruption, workers left with products in their bags from the factory where they worked, or others paid "small attentions" in order to solve a problem. This "small attentions" consisted of things such

as chocolate, soap, alcohol, or coffee, which were given to doctors, teachers, or counter clerks in exchange for their assistance (Stirile ProTV, 2023). There was very rarely a gift of 20 lei (4.03 euros) that was given subtly, but Kent cigarettes made everything possible (Project-E, 2024).

During the communist era, Kent cigarettes were considered a luxury item. Kent promoted cigarettes with micro filters to soothe consumers' concerns regarding cancer risks associated with unfiltered cigarettes. Therefore in the 70s and 80s Kent became one of the highest demand brands of cigarettes in Romania. Kent cigarettes were requested by doctors, militiamen, and other officials, countless times. In the aftermath of the economic crisis, this brand of cigarettes was withdrawn from circulation and was officially sold only in currency shops, which were forbidden to most Romanians. Consequently, these cigarettes ended up on the black market and were sold for a much higher price (Project-E, 2024).

The Romanian currency (leul) became increasingly worthless, because few consumer goods were available and it was strictly forbidden for Romanian citizens to own currency, so Kent cigarettes became a substitute for cash on the black market, and sometimes a cartridge was worth 100\$. With a cartridge of Kent cigarettes, a Romanian could afford dental work or even buy a color television. It was considered that Kent cigarettes were the unofficial currency of Romania and could be used to purchase anything from a hospital operation to a cut of meat. Therefore, Kent cigarettes became a symbol of privileged status in the communist era of the 1970s and 1980s due to their use as bribes (Project-E, 2024)

During the 80s, when food became insufficient, grocery store or warehouse managers gained ground and power, getting along with them was essential to provide food for the family, especially for families with many children (Stirile ProTV, 2023). Additionally, at that time, having or using "pile" was and still is a common practice of corruption. The word "pilă" or in plural "pile" means to have an advantage or an illegal help as it is also described in the Romanian dex in the fourth definition of the word. "Pile" refers to an illegal aid or protection given to someone by a powerful/influential individual (Dexonline, n.d.).

In communism, "pile" were mostly used in the work environment. During the 80s and 89s, many people were relocated and sent to work where the state needed them, mainly to advance industrialization, which made it easier to find employment. Repartition was a common practice among Romanian citizens. Meaning that, after graduation, many were sent away from home for work in a completely unknown place. One had to be very lucky to get a job

not so far from home, or one had to have "pile" advantages or relationships, knowing someone who could help get a job near home (Foarfă, 2019).

From the first glimpses of analyzing corruption during communism in Romania, these habits or "small attentions" can be seen as bribery. As well as "pile" advantages who were used mostly in the work environment.

Bribery is one of the most prevalent and common forms of corruption, involving an exchange of favors, offering, giving, or promising something of value in order to receive something of value (Hellman, 2017). Only that at that time the bribe and "pile" were subtle and mild, without doing any harm to anyone, but more to survive such a harsh regime where the state ordered and controlled everything, and one just had to obey.

2.2.1 Corruption as a cultural factor

The Romanian revolution of December 1989 left the Romanian people shocked and traumatized. Many citizens lost their lives during that revolution in pursuit of freedom, which they eventually achieved with the fall of the communist party (Tapalaga, 2015).

Many people felt the need to take advantage of their newly acquired freedom after the revolution. But Romanian society was left with confusion between authentic value and imposture, between good and bad, distrust in work and honesty as valuable social values, and contempt for the law and rules (Tapalaga, 2015).

Therefore, corruption has shaped cultural norms, values, and practices. In communism, corruption was viewed as a necessary quality for survival and management. As corruption developed, the temptation of easy profit made it more aggressive. Despite regime changes, corruption has been passed from generation to generation, with a dysfunctional state as the main source. As a result of historical precedent, societal norms, and perception of necessity, Romanians tolerate corruption more readily (Bizdadea, 2016).

This tolerance can be seen from the conclusions drawn by the Eurobarometer on the subject of corruption, carried out by the European Parliament, in April 2022, among member states. While Romanian citizens are aware of corruption and its negative effects, being themselves affected by corruption in the country, many of them are still willing to give bribes/money or gifts for their own benefit (Euronews, 2022). Two out of three Romanians

who participated in this survey believed that corruption is a widespread phenomenon in Romania. The majority of participants indicated that public institutions are the most corrupt.

According to the study, 50% of the participants answered that the most corrupt people are the employees of the public health care system, followed by politicians and political parties than the Romanian Police, civil servants who issue building permits, and those who award public contracts (Euronews, 2022).

In spite of the fact that the majority is aware of the existence of corruption, 54% of the Eurobarometer participants are willing to give gifts to get something from a public institution, this percentage being double compared to the European average. And 37% of the Romanians surveyed would give a tip/money, compared to 17% at the European level (Euronews, 2022).

According to this survey, the most corrupt institutions in Romania are: 50% Public Health Care System, 44% Politicians, 41% Political parties, 40% Romanian Police, 38% Officials who issue building permits, 36% Officials who award public tenders (Euronews, 2022).

Alfred Bula, a Romanian sociologist, commented on these results after analyzing the situation:

"It is a cultural model. Interwar Romania was an ultra corrupt society. There was never a golden age. Corruption was reduced under communism, but it existed even then. There was the danger of being thrown in the hands of the communist party, it was more complicated. Some of this corruption is functional. In Romania, the bureaucratic system is designed in such a way as to obtain bribes or, let's say, illicit income. The system is so complicated that someone who needs a permit tomorrow cannot get it until three weeks from now, and so will try to get it, so as not to have significant losses. We have inherited a social system with many problems in its most nerve-wracking parts - the health and education systems. All medical and education services are the most expensive in the world. In our country, in communism, they were based on the logic of gratuity." (Euronews, 2022).

It is clear from this survey that corruption greatly affects public institutions, as the percentages indicate, but also Romanian citizens. The sociologist Alfred Bula's comment brings back to light the hard life during communism, as well as the extent of corruption for survival as described in the chapter above, Corruption in Romania during communism. Due to the extent of corruption, inherited from communist times, the bureaucratic system makes corruption easy

to infiltrate. This has been transformed into a cultural factor that allows corruption to flourish, being tolerant and accepted.

2.2.2 Theories related to corruption

Considering the theme of the thesis, involving key sectors, which in turn are public institutions, the casual theory of institutional corruption is relevant since it describes corruption in relation to public institutions.

Causal Theory of Institutional Corruption

According to the causal theory of institutional corruption, institutions aim to serve human interests, either intrinsically or instrumentally. When defining corruption, one must consider the moral effects that actions have on people and institutions. An action is regarded corrupt when it has a corrupting effect on an individual's moral character, the institutional process, or the institution's purpose. When a decision or action undermines a process or goal within an institution, it corrupts those who play a relevant role in that process. For example, an offense that violates a law or rule, a small one-time bribe for a minor service, does not automatically qualify as corruption; it must have a detrimental effect on an institution, acts that threaten the processes, purposes, or persons of an institution (Seumas, n.d.).

Based on the causal theory of institutional corruption, it can be concluded that the only thing that undermines legitimate institutional processes is humans themselves. Institutional corruption involves either someone performing the corrupt act as an institutional occupant, or someone being corrupted as an institutional occupant (Seumas, n.d.).

Corruption is a deviation from the proper practice of a morally legitimate institution. When one or more constitutive actions for example of a judicial process are not carried out as they ought to be, the process may be corrupted. Similarly, an honest accountant may risk loss of their moral character by engaging in corrupt practices (Seumas, n.d.).

The term corruption encompasses a wide range of behaviors, where corruption can take many forms including bribery, nepotism, fabrication of evidence, fraud, and abuse of power and authority. Additionally, corruption manifests itself in different forms across a range of institutions, such as the key sectors mentioned in the beginning, among others. This diversity is accommodated by the causal theory of corruption (Seumas, n.d.).

Social norms and corruption

An important characteristic of a society is the existence of social norms, which are the actions or behaviors that are accepted and considered normal by a group or community. However, in some cases, there are social norms that determine how a person acts based on how a group acts, and how a group acts based on how a person acts (Mackie et al., 2015). In a social context, in order for a behavior to be considered acceptable, it must be accepted by others as well (Köbis et al., 2017), but if that behavior isn't considered acceptable by others, then it means that it is deviant from what is considered acceptable by society thus social norms (Nickerson, 2024).

In terms of corruption in this context, the new theories suggest that people living in a society that has a high level of corruption participate in corruption because other people participate in it as well. Even if some consider these actions and behaviors to be unacceptable, if the social context is one that tolerates corruption and a larger group participates in these actions, then they participate as well (Köbis et al., 2019).

Both theories can be said to be complementary to one another. There is no doubt that public institutions are an integral part of any society. It is an indication that the behavior or acts of corruption found in institutions are accepted as normal behaviors by the people responsible for these institutions. Consequently, other people who require the services of these institutions, take part in these acts of corruption, even if they consider these actions or behaviors to be unacceptable.

3 Methodology

Data collection or document analysis is the research method used in this thesis. In this process, written, visual or electronic documents and sources (Indeed Editorial Team, 2023) are examined and interpreted to gather effective data about corruption in Romania, how corruption manifests itself, why it gained momentum in the country and why it remains prevalent. Most of the content used for this thesis is found online on websites like Google Scholar and news websites like sitirileprotv.ro, or other local news websites and articles on

the topic. Due to the prevalence of corruption in Romania, this phenomenon has been studied and examined throughout the years. The analysis of several documents, news articles, academic studies and researches allows for the extraction of meaningful interpretations.

Therefore, I will use these findings in order to find trends and patterns, such as what types of corruption are most prevalent in Romanian's society and its consequences.

4 Corruption in key sectors

Until now, we have looked at corruption and its definitions, Romania as a country and how corruption flourished under communism, and how corruption changed into a cultural factor.

It appears from the above indications that corruption is prevalent in public institutions. So, as we move into the next section of the thesis, we will take a closer look at corruption in key sectors that are also governed by public institutions. The types of corruption that exist in these sectors and how they are implemented, as well as how prevalent they are.

My decision in choosing these key sectors was based on the fact that they are institutions that are public, institutions that play a major role in a country and in the lives of its citizens, institutions that should help a society develop and progress for the better.

Unfortunately, each of these key sectors are corrupt, as shown by the surveys and studies discussed above. In these sectors, corruption manifests itself in different forms, at the base having in common people who abuse their power and their high status in these public institutions and people who take part in these acts of corruption for their personal interest in receiving the quality services that these institutions should provide without intervening in a form of corruption.

4.1 Health care system

As a result of a study conducted by Cosmin Dobrin, Vasile Deac and Ruxandra Dinulescu, Quality Management in the Romanian Healthcare System in 2017, it became apparent that the Romanian health care system is subject to disputes regarding the quality of care provided by the state-run clinics and hospitals. Every country should have a health care system that is considered to be one of the main indicators of growth and development. However, even

though doctors in Romania possess advanced knowledge regarding medical practice, patients still report dissatisfaction with the quality of state-run health care. Whatever the case may be; bureaucracy, high costs, corruption (Dobrin et al., 2017).

The recorded data in this study highlight the main factors that influence the perception of quality by patients. Therefore, in a proportion of 82.18%, the main reasons that negatively affect patient satisfaction are (Dobrin et al., 2017): 1) The amount of time one has to wait in front of the cabinet, including the lack of a scheduling system, insufficient computer functionality and scheduling multiple patients during the same time slot (Dobrin et al., 2017). 2) Corruption, where doctors still practice the form of corruption known as "little attentions" or bribery offered by patients in exchange for quality care (Dobrin et al., 2017). 3) Bureaucracy, where there is a lack of a computer program for data collection where an excessive number of certificates need to be picked up from different branches and taken to the doctor (Dobrin et al., 2017). 4) The treatment received during a consultation, where the patient's health may be adversely affected by a lack of adequate consultation. As a result of imprecise consultation, a doctor can easily skip a diagnosis, which can harm the patient (Dobrin et al., 2017).

According to Transparency International Romania, a health care system can be thought of as an organization that is composed of people, institutions, and resources with the aim of providing the necessary medical services to cover the medical needs of the citizens of a state. In the health care system, corruption can mean the difference between life and death (Transparency International Romania, 2018).

There are many aspects of a health institution that can be affected by corruption, not just public health institutions but also private or semi-private. A common example of corruption is when medical staff receive unofficial payments to provide patients with the care they are entitled to, while patients often pay for the medications that they should receive for free (Transparency International Romania, 2018). There are also situations where some pharmaceutical companies illegally obtain through bribery and influence peddling contracts with hospitals, thus supplying low-quality medical equipment and counterfeit drugs. Moreover, up to 80% of non-salary funds intended for the health system in some countries, including Romania, do not reach their intended destination, according to a World Bank survey (Transparency International Romania, 2018). Several ministers and hospital administrators have embezzled millions of euros from health care budgets or demanded and accepted

substantial sums as bribes. The accounts of private hospitals and clinics can sometimes settle enormous amounts of money from the state budget for expenses that were not incurred (Transparency International Romania, 2018).

In areas where corruption is widespread and rooted in tradition, the health care system is more likely to be negatively affected. Consequently, a corrupt health care system is less able to provide effective and quality medical care to patients suffering from chronic diseases, elderly, and underprivileged patients. Fraudulent budgets received from the state result in insufficient funding for salaries, operations, and repairs of hospitals, which leads to less motivation among employees, increased bribe demands, and a decrease in the quality of care (Transparency International Romania, 2018).

A recent report by Euronews confirms that hospitals in Romania still charge for medical services that should be free. This habit of corruption, bribery, is still practiced throughout the country, according to the "Harta Șpăgii", (meaning "the map" of giving extra money in order to receive adequate medical attention), made according to the data collected by the Ministry of Health (Euronews, 2023).

In condemning this act, the Ministry of Health sends a message to medical professionals who continue to charge for services that are theoretically free (Euronews, 2023). Alexandru Rafila, Minister of Health stated:

"One must do his duty as a doctor and to have a human conscience. A person who is suffering needs a medical service that he should get unconditionally. The conditioning of a medical act is something beyond our capacity for understanding and acceptability." (Euronews, 2023).

Corruption in the health care system is more evident in small counties, rural areas. In 2023, Dragos Vana, the founder of the Graphs.ro platform, showed the data represented graphically where the worst situation when it comes to corruption is found in Teleorman county, where 8.11 percent of respondents were asked for bribes, it is followed by Giurgiu with 7.55 percent, Olt with 5.08 , Arges with 4.95 and with the lowest percent, Covasna county with 0.47 (Euronews, 2023). According to a citizen:

"I have a friend who had an appendicitis surgery and was in pain effectively until he put some extra "money in a pocket" and everything was OK from then on" (Euronews, 2023).

The latest Eurobarometer published by the European Commission, illustrate that Romania is ranked first in terms of corruption in the health care system. Even if there was an increase in salaries in the health care system, this did not eliminate the issue of bribery (Barbu, 2022).

The Pro TV news confirms that one patient out of five admits that they gave extra money, "small attentions" or expensive gifts when they needed adequate treatment in a state medical unit (Barbu, 2022).

This form of corruption involving bribes to hospital employees, can be witnessed when relatives or even patients have discussions about how an extra payment, and the amount of this payment, should be made so that the patient in question receives qualitative care of the doctor or other workers in the hospital. These conversations usually take place in the hospital and waiting rooms or even in front of these public medical institutions (Barbu, 2022).

Therefore, 18% of Romanians admit that they still give extra money to the doctors for adequate care. They are only 1 percent less than in 2019, when doctors' salaries had barely risen to a level considered satisfactory (Barbu, 2022). Additionally, donations made by patients to hospitals are considered as a form of corruption as this method of donation is not practiced in Romania (Barbu, 2022).

According to the statement of Ioan Hosu, sociologist on this matter:

"The phenomenon is not perceived as one of corruption, but of gratitude, satisfaction or reward of services received. I think we are talking about a remanence that perpetuates itself over time, but originates in the communist period as a mass phenomenon." (Barbu, 2022).

4.1.1 Cases of corruption in the health care system

To provide a more comprehensive picture of the issue at hand the following cases from news outlets regarding corruption in the health care environment in Romania will be considered.

The first case was published in 2024, the second was published in 2023, and the last case was published in 2018, revealing a variety of forms of corruption within the medical environment.

My choice of these news stories is primarily based on the fact that the first cases are new, the difference of one year between them shows the persistence of corruption, and the legal cases in the last news are from 2015 and 2017. All cases involve people in positions of power in the health care environment, and in medical institutions taking advantage of their positions. The causal theory of institutional corruption suggests that it involves either

someone who performs the corrupt act as an institutional occupant or someone who is corrupted as a member of an institutional occupant (Seumas, n.d.). In order for an institution to be corrupt, the act of corruption must negatively impact it (Seumas, n.d.). Medical institutions, where damages involve a significant amount of money, as well as the people who need medical care are both negatively affected by these cases. As a result, these acts of corruption affect the moral character and purpose of medical institutions.

(a) The case of Dr. Cristian Paler

Dr. Cristian Paler was given three years suspended prison sentence under the supervision of the Bucharest Court, which acknowledged the plea agreement reached between the surgeon from the Marius Nasta Institute and prosecutors from the Capital Prosecutor's Office. Notably, the accused assumed responsibility for the bribery charge resulting in his conviction (Oanță, 2024).

(b) The case of the former manager of Sălaj County Hospital

A female doctor, former manager of the Sălaj County Hospital, was sentenced to three years in prison with suspension for bribery and abuse of power in the work environment. The accused admitted in court that she processed thousands of Papanicolaou test samples surcharged, in the hospital's laboratory, which were collected from private offices (Suciu, 2023).

As Sorin Flonta, Chief Prosecutor stated: *"these Papanicolaou tests were processed by her with the hospital's materials in exchange for sums of money."* A total of 3.200 samples were processed, for which the doctor allegedly received approximately 9.000 euro. The damage to the unit amounts to nearly 26.200 euro, according to investigators. The tests were performed privately for a fee, but the samples were processed at the county public hospital (Suciu, 2023).

Patriciu Achimaș, oncological surgeon further stated:

"Such cases really should be sanctioned in the most serious way possible, so that they don't happen again. It's about mocking the patients, about their health, about a situation that is not a luxury, it's about preventing a terrible disease, cervical cancer"(Suciu, 2023).

According to the specialists, Papanicolaou tests can be performed free of charge as part of the National Health Insurance House agreement (Suciu, 2023).

(c) Other Cases on How Corruption Manifests in the Health Care System

The news reports on several cases involving medical units and corruption in various forms in Romania. These cases are examples given by the National Anticorruption Directorate (NAD).

Based on judicial convictions between 2015 and 2017, NAD prosecutors concluded that corruption has become widespread within the public health care system in Romania (Stoica, 2018).

The following study was presented by NAD chief prosecutor Laura Codruța Kövesi with a first example involving Danut Capatan, former manager of the Emergency County Clinical Hospital in Constanta. He was charged with four corruption cases involving a bribe of 1.2 million euros. In exchange for the smooth running of the contracts, he received between 10% and 15% of the invoice value. The same manager was also sued in other cases because he claimed, and received commissions representing a percentage of 18-20% of the value of the investments that were to be made in the course of a contract concluded by the hospital with a private company, or because he failed to perform his duties in a manner consistent with the conclusion of the hospital's contracts (Stoica, 2018).

In another case, involving the field of public procurement, a percentage of 5% to 20% was claimed on the invoices where a hospital manager established this percentage before the contract was signed. In this case, the bribe was given directly to the manager or was disguised by the payment of fictitious consulting services. This criminal activity was based on a long period of time, the hospital manager simultaneously receiving money from several companies with which the medical unit had contractual relations (Stoica, 2018).

In 2017, NAD prosecutors sued the manager of a hospital who, for almost 7 years, used money from the institution's budget for personal interest. Due to the long time he held the leadership position, and the lack of specialized verification, he took advantage of both factors (Stoica, 2018).

Therefore, it was concluded that damages in such cases can be very large when control structures and institutions fail to react effectively. With another example Kövesi explained that the recovery of approximately 300.000 euro for damage caused to a medical institution by an illegal act is difficult when the court of accounts notifies the illegal act six years after it occurs (Stoica, 2018).

This study also examined the corruption surrounding the fraudulent purchase of a medical equipment for an emergency hospital section in Romania. According to the administered evidence in this case and the law, the main object of the purchase was equipment that was not authorized to be installed and put into operation by a Romanian company at the time of purchase. At the time of the court referral, that medical equipment had passed through at least three companies before being bought by the hospital for seven times its original cost. Therefore, a significant amount of damage was caused by subcontracting and successive acquisitions since many medical institutions pay prices ten times higher than the original purchase price to support an artificially inflated value of services/works (Stoica, 2018)

Other examples of corruption were drawn from the field of medical service, where other institutional occupants bribed specialist doctors. As DNA indicates, the particularity of this form of corruption consists not in the amount of bribes, but in the rhythm of receiving undue benefits, which generate important illegal profits for the beneficiary (Stoica, 2018).

In the cases of access to the medical system, the study showed that corruption manifests itself through bribery and abuse of office. NAD explained this by giving an example of an accused where he held a decision-making position in a medical institution. He received bribes from individuals who wanted to obtain working position within the health care system, therefore he requested 1.500 euros for the nurse position, 2.500 euros for the medical assistant position, 1.000 euros for the ambulance driver position and between 1.000 and 1.500 euros for the medical registrar position (Stoica, 2018).

The study took also examples of corruption in the process of the authorization of pharmacies, where corruption manifests by payments or acceptances of sums of money to shorten the authorization process of a pharmacy (Stoica, 2018).

At the end of this study presentation by Kövesi, she stated that there were not only individuals/officials who worked in the health care system that were requested in certain investigations regarding corruption, but also legal entities (companies, firms) which gave bribes or other illegal benefits to public health procurement (Stoica, 2018).

In the example cases above, both theories, Causal Theory of Institutional Corruption and Social norms and corruption explain the corruption in the health care system. It is evident that corruption is prevalent in medical institutions. Most of the times, corruption is committed through bribery by the occupants of the medical institutions, doctors, nurses, etc., who take part in these acts, abusing their power due to their high status. As a result, corruption has become a normal and tolerant behavior for several groups of people who occupy high positions. Although they who do not agree with this behavior, citizens who need these medical services participate in these acts of corruption to obtain quality medical services that in some cases are free of charge. An individual should not pay extra money or bribes to those who work in the medical environment to take him into account and offer him the necessary help.

As in the Causal Theory of Institutional Corruption, corruption affects the moral principles in this case the moral principles of an employee in a medical environment, because their responsibility is to help and provide the necessary help without receiving extra compensation.

At the end of this chapter, other examples of corruption in the medical environment from the study led by the NDA were taken into account. These cases are more in line with the Causal Theory of Institutional Corruption. Where the institutions in question are based on groups of people or persons with a position to make decisions who use this statute for various acts of corruption, thus damaging the integrity of the institutions and their purpose.

4.2 Political system

The corruption of state (political) power is a form of corruption where dignitaries, groups, or companies attempt to influence the drafting and adoption of laws, decrees, and other governmental acts to gain advantages by providing illicit and non-transparent private benefits (Cuşnir, 2015).

Political corruption represents the most dangerous form of the studied phenomenon and represents an attack on democratic values, especially in developing countries. It tends to occur in areas where economic power is dominant and competing social interests are weak. Taking advantage of non-competitive institutional frameworks, political corruption involves transferring ownership among politicians, companies, and the government (Cuşnir, 2015).

Political corruption is usually characterized by persons in position of power or who has public power, in this case, politicians and officials, where they initiate political actions and gain valuable social and economic benefits. Where politicians and officials have access to unlimited resources it is possible for political corruption to progress. Therefore, political corruption could be defined as an approach to buying loyalty through illicit means, provided through authority relationships (Cuşnir, 2015).

In Romania, it is a well-known fact that corruption within the state institutions has thrived by the lack of political will and responsibility to combat it, which has contributed to a decline in the country's development as well as a decline in its rule of law (Niţă, 2022). In the government, there are several power groups who prioritize personal interests over the interests of the nation, resulting in poor governance. As a result of conflict between political objectives and goals that do not align with the general interests of society, Romania has been experiencing a state of anomie and disorganization for the past 30 years. In the legislative system, there is an absence of precision and predictability, leading to a conflict of legal norms, which in turn promotes criminal activity, including corruption (Niţă, 2022).

Romania operates under a semi-presidential republic system, the president serves as head of state (and as a symbolic figure) and the prime minister as head of government. Both the government and the president hold executive functions (European Union, n.d.).

From 2017 to 2019, Romania experienced massive anti-corruption protests. The events occurred as a result of political corruption, the government's actions to undermine the fight against corruption, thus favoring various public officials (Youngs, 2019).

A year before the protests began, the general elections took place where the Social Democratic Party (SDP) won, the party's president at that time being Liviu Dragnea. Therefore, SDP and the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats (ALD) formed a center-left government, led by Sorin Grindeanu as prime minister (Youngs, 2019).

At the beginning of 2017, after the new government was established the Ministry of Justice suddenly passed an ordinance bill (Government Ordinance 13) decriminalizing government corruption, amending the Criminal Code and the Criminal Procedure Code (Youngs, 2019).

Among the changes brought by Government Ordinance 13, abuse of office was the main one. Meaning that, those convicted of abuse of office, such as mayors, civil servants,

parliamentarians, government officials, etc., were no longer criminally liable if the damage caused was less than approximately 40.200 euro (Stănescu, 2017).

Laura Codruța Kövesi, head of the National Anticorruption Directorate (NAD), illustrated this by giving an example: *a hospital manager could divide the budget for medicines into smaller contracts, which he could give to whoever he wants without being held criminally liable of abuse of office* (Stănescu, 2017).

Therefore, the value of the amount of damage above was established arbitrarily, not being correlated with the average salary of the civil servant in Romania. This arrangement, the value of the amount and the implementation of this law would have benefit, for example, Liviu Dragnea (SDP president), himself being convicted for incitement to abuse of office which the damage was calculated at 21.300 euro (Stănescu, 2017).

The implementation of this law required magistrates to analyze every case of abuse of office (under investigation, trial, or already resolved) and to acquit or abandon the case if the damage was below 40.200 euro or if the victim has not been seriously, and effectively harmed. Meaning that, in these cases, the crime of abuse of office will be removed from the criminal record of the accused (Stănescu, 2017).

In Government Ordinance 13 was also taking into account the reduction of the prison sentence. Previously in the criminal code, the prison sentence was between two and seven years. In Government Ordinance 13, for a damage higher than 40.200 euro or a serious harm to a person or a person's rights, the prison sentence would change from six months to three years or a fine. As well as for acts of limiting rights or creating a situation of inferiority based on race, gender, religion, disability, chronic diseases etc., would reduce the prison sentence to one month to one year or a fine (Stănescu, 2017).

Following the adoption of the ordinance, considering these drastic changes, the protests began. As a result of the protests that took place, the government repealed Government Ordinance 13, but protesters continued to protest, accusing the ruling coalition of attempting to pass similar legislation through parliament, along with the proposal of subsequent ordinances amending the justice system (Youngs, 2019). Therefore, in 2017, Romania experienced the largest protests in its post-communist history. An important factor that contributed to these protests was the ruling party's tactic, aimed at gradually dismantling the existing anti-corruption legislation of the country, to remove NAD head Laura Codruța

Kövesi, internationally appreciated for her great efforts in the fight against corruption in Romania, from office (Youngs, 2019).

4.2.1 National Anticorruption Directorate and cases of corruption in the political system

In its 20 years of existence, the National Anticorruption Directorate (NAD) has made great progress. Following Laura Codruța Kövesei's appointment as the head of NAD in 2013, the activity and fight against corruption accelerated. Unfortunately, the NAD's activities slowed down significantly after Laura's dismissal from the leadership in November 2018, which led to a drastic reduction in the number of high corruption cases investigated by prosecutors (Constantinescu, 2023).

As a result of NDA's progress over the years, around 15.000 people have been brought to court for acts of corruption which these acts resulted in 5,4 billion euros in damages. Among these 15.000 people were 400 mayors, 800 public officials and company directors, 160 judges and prosecutors, 60 government members, involving two prime ministers, ministers, and secretaries of state, 40 county council presidents and 1.000 policemen. More than 2.300 suspects were sent to court for fraud with European finances, with an overall damage of 300 million euros (Constantinescu, 2023).

Among these people were the most publicized people in Romanian politics. In 2000 till 2004, **Adrian Nastase** served as Prime Minister of Romania. The acts of corruption for which he was convicted were committed during that period. In 2012, he was convicted in the 'Trofeul Calități' case and sentenced to two years in prison. According to the charges, he tried to obtain illegal funds for the 2006 presidential campaign. Nastase, who was released on parole in 2013, was convicted again in 2014 in the "Zambaccian" case, receiving a sentence of 4 years in prison for receiving improper benefits valued at about 600.000 euros and for blackmail. After six months, he was released on parole (Constantinescu, 2023).

Elena Udrea, former Minister of Tourism and Regional Development in the Boc Government (2009) was sentence by the High Court of Cassation and Justice in June 2018 and sentenced definitively in April 2022, to six years in prison with execution in the "Gala Bute" file. The charges against her included abuse of office, three crimes of bribery, attempting to use misleading or inaccurate documents or statements to obtain unjustified funds from the European Union budget, and using influence to obtain undue benefits (Constantinescu, 2023).

Liviu Dragnea, former Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Administration and Development and leader of the SDP party, was first sued in 2013 by the NAD prosecutors for electoral fraud in the "Referendum" file, at that time he was in the position of general secretary of the SDP. As a person in a leadership position in a party, he was accused of using his influence or authority for personal reasons or for another's gain. He was assisted in electoral fraud by other members and 74 presidents of local polling stations in Teleorman, Vrancea, Gorj and Olt counties. In this case, Dragnea was sentenced to two years of suspended prison in 2016. In June 2018, he was sentenced to 3 years and 6 months in prison for inciting abuse of office. Dragnea was released on condition in July 2021 (Constantinescu, 2023).

A country's government is one of its most important and institutions. The government holds great power, and it is their responsibility to guide a country towards a successful future and wholesome development. According to the Causal Theory of Institutional Corruption, institutions aim to serve human interests, but when corruption appears within these institutions, their purpose disappears, and it becomes serving one's own interests.

Each of these cases and acts of corruption by politicians illustrates that corrupt institutions are based on several acts of corruption committed by several high-ranking occupants of the institutions, as this theory also proves.

The effects of a corrupt system, in this case the political system, are devastating for the society of a country, in this case Romania, where the damages are, as can be seen, billions of euros, or as for example in the cases of stolen money from the European budget, which could and should have been used instead for the country's benefit rather than for one's own.

One of the gravest attacks on the country is changing laws to minimize corruption penalties, for the benefit of corrupt politicians, as we have seen. Once again, these changes serve the interests of corrupt politicians, not the interests of the country.

4.3 Educational system

As it can be seen there is a widespread problem of corruption in public institutions in Romania, and educational institutions in the country such as kindergartens, general schools, and universities are no exception (Asociația Română pentru Transparență, 2013).

Students' right to education is compromised when corruption or dishonest behavior is prevalent in the educational system, so as a result, society becomes more tolerant of corruption. The corruption acts that come from the representatives of educational institutions, such as teachers, school principals, professors etc., is difficult to report according to the results of the study, "Mapping corruption risks in the education sector", carried out by the Asociația pentru Guvernare Eficientă și Responsabilă (Association for Efficient and Responsible Governance). That is because most students are afraid to report acts of corruption due to the fear of getting some form of revenge from those who are responsible for their education, this revenge, for example, consisting in the lowering of grades (Agenția de presă IPN, 2022).

In Romania, corruption in the educational system can often be disguised corruption. This consists of gifts, or "small attentions" given on occasions such as March 8 (International Women's Day), a "tradition" left over from the communist regime and changed into a cultural factor. This form of corruption manifests itself more often in kindergartens or general schools. However, these "little attentions" or gifts are given and received based on certain expectations. In general schools and universities, the giving and receiving of gifts encourages corruption, which eventually leads to grades and exams being purchased (Asociația Română pentru Transparență, 2013).

Moreover, corruption in the educational system compromises the correct objectivity of the grading system. In this way, some teachers favor and give higher grades to students who, for example, have parents with good financial status and thus offer expensive gifts. Additionally, some students or their parents pay sums of money to get passing grades or maximum marks. In many cases, these amounts of payments are requested by the teacher (Asociația Română pentru Transparență, 2013)

According to the study mentioned above, 41% of parents would not pay anything if they were not asked to do so by someone such as representatives of educational institutions. They would not participate in acts of corruption in the educational system. Still, they do so to avoid exposing their children to revenge from teachers that may lower their grades (Agenția de presă IPN, 2022). Therefore, according to the theory of social norms and corruption mentioned above, in this case, even if the corrupt behavior was unacceptable, the parents participated in it to keep their children from being penalized by teachers (Köbis et al., 2019).

The most common form of corruption in universities is the purchase of exams. It manifests itself when teachers accept money for giving higher grades for a student, regardless of their merits, or students buying exam subjects or answers before the exam (Asociația Română pentru Transparență, 2013).

There are also forms of corruption within the meditation system. There are many instances in which teachers force their students to meditate with them. Therefore, students who meditate with their professors get higher grades in school than those who do not want or do not have the financial capability to do so, resulting in getting lower grades and a deficit in social classes (Asociația Română pentru Transparență, 2013).

Since teachers are evaluated based on their performance, the more students the teacher has in mediation, the more his status increases, and he becomes more sought after by other students, resulting in more money. Teachers justify this practice of corruption due to their low salaries (Asociația Română pentru Transparență, 2013).

Undoubtedly, corruption in the education system affects pupils and students. Not only are some students socially unadjusted, where those who can afford it get good grades and those who cannot get bad grades, but they also learn from a young age that corruption is acceptable, making it easy to commit corrupt acts as adults (Asociația Română pentru Transparență, 2013).

4.3.1 Cases of corruption in the educational system

The following cases were selected to provide a more comprehensive picture of how representatives of public educational institutions use corruption toward students for personal interests.

(a) University professor caught collecting money from students

A university professor from Cluj-Napoca was sentenced to three years in prison with execution for bribery in 2017. Over the course of many years, he was a professor at the Faculty of Mechanics of the Technical University. He was caught in these acts of corruption while collecting money from students for the passing of exams. Several envelopes with the students' names were found in the professor's office, containing 50 euro banknotes, the total sum 2.000 euros. The Cluj Court of Appeal accepted the prosecutor's request for the execution penalty after initially sending the professor to prison for three years with suspension (Hoară, 2021).

(b) Teachers accused of taking bribes from students

According to the allegations in this case, the teachers were accused of taking bribes from students to pass the exams. The intercepts made by the investigators revealed that the young students put a great deal of pressure on their parents to get the money that the teachers requested from them. As a result of the investigation conducted by the prosecutor's office at the University of Medicine and Pharmacy in Craiova, the prosecutors found that the students had paid for passing exams amounts between 300 and 400 euros (Digi24.ro, 2015).

(c) Other cases of university professors and corruption

University corruption does not stop in the cases mentioned above. Cosmin Serbanescu, former vice-dean of the Faculty of Finance and Banks in Bucharest, was sentenced to six years in prison for bribery by the prosecutors. Tiberius Epure, the former rector of the "Ovidius" University in Constanța, was sentenced to four years and three months in prison for accepting bribes for exam subjects. In his case, the decision is made in the first instance (Digi24.ro, 2015).

(d) The case of lecturer Rudlof Cristian

In 2023, lecturer Rudolf Cristian was dismissed from his position and excluded from the academic community by Babeș-Bolyai University (UBB) after he was sent to court by NAD for accepting bribes from students. According to UBB, the termination of his employment contract was due to his deviations from ethics and integrity, being fired for protecting the values of UBB, the UBB community and the students (Digi24.ro, 2023).

At that time, he taught the "Ethics and Academic Integrity" course at the Reșița Faculty of Public Administration of Babeș Bolyai University and was a member of the National Management Council of the Alma Mater Federation, the representative union structure in higher education (Digi24.ro, 2023).

He was accused of 25 cases of bribery, where he received from each student approximately 1,200 euro for the highest grade at the master's degree, and according to the data from the investigation, the payment for the highest grade at the doctorate was ten times higher (Digi24.ro, 2023).

These cases show again how the Causal Theory of Institutional Corruption shows the fact that those in high positions, in these cases, occupants of the educational institutions, take advantage of their status and the power that this state gives them for their own personal

benefit, endangering the purpose of educational institutions to prepare students for their future in the work environment in which they want to continue their profession.

5 Results and Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis was to illustrate corruption, particularly in public institutions, in an Eastern-European country, Romania. In this thesis, it is evident that corruption has become a cultural factor in the country since the communist regime due to the way it has flourished and been implemented within society and within the key institutions that have been highlighted throughout (Bizdadea, 2016). In communism, acts of corruption were used for the survival of the harsh regime. Romania's democratic transformation and entry into the European Union, however, did not minimize corruption. Corruption remained deeply rooted in Romanian society. Therefore, Romania was ranked the third most corrupt country in the European Union in 2023 based on the Corruption Perceptions Index (Euronews, 2024).

In all three key systems, health care, politics, and education, bribery was found to be the most common form of corruption. Throughout these cases, high-status occupants abuse their power for their own benefit, destroying the purpose of these institutions, destroying democracy, and destroying the prosperous development of the country. These acts of corruption have illustrated Romanian citizens' dissatisfaction with the institutions meant to help them, putting them at risk, especially in the health care system. As mentioned before, corruption can make the difference between life and death. In the cases of corruption in the educational system, it showed how corruption can negatively affect students and their future by those who are responsible for their education. Finally, the attack on the rule of law by corrupt politicians showed how corruption can take a turn for the worse, affecting the whole country's progress towards democracy and development.

During this writing process, I gradually became more aware of how dangerous corruption can be, primarily when it is well implemented in institutions of great importance.

On the surface, corruption is probably easy to comprehend. Still, when it is presented in so many different ways, for example, in this thesis, it becomes even clearer how much

corruption negatively affects the lives of all citizens of a country that has a high level of corruption.

This thesis's limitations were the lack of access to several studies on corruption.

Finally, it can be concluded that Romania lacks a responsible government capable of leading the country toward a prosperous future, mainly because of corrupt politicians. The government must take the first step to combat corruption more effectively.

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