Police Corruption and Misconduct in Central and Eastern Europe

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Police corruption is a serious problem almost everywhere. According to the 2010 Global Corruption Barometer (GCB) report, more citizens around the world pay bribes to police officers than to any other state officials.1 The previous year’s GCB indicated that the police also are more likely than officials in any other agency to take bribes.2 These latest findings essentially duplicate those in earlier GCBs. Moreover, despite concerted efforts by states, international organizations (IOs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) over many years, experiential surveys suggest that the percentage of citizens paying bribes to the police substantially increased in the period 2006-2010.3 And, again replicating results from earlier years, the 2010 GCB indicated that citizens in lower income brackets were more likely than those in higher income brackets to have paid a bribe to a police officer;4 it is the ordinary citizen, rather than members of the elites, who is most subject to police misconduct.

Clearly then, police corruption is a problem globally. But how does the situation look specifically in CEE (“Central and Eastern Europe” defined, broadly, here to include the whole of the Former Soviet Union)? In the 2007 GCB, the police were the institution most affected by bribery in NIS (the “Newly Independent States”, here referring to Moldova, Russia and Ukraine) and SEE (South East Europe), with almost 35% of those citizens in the NIS who had come into contact with the police in the previous year having paid a bribe—and almost 20% of such citizens in SEE.5 While these figures are not as bad as those for Africa (at some 47%), they were considerably higher than those for North America (2%) or the EU+ (c.2.5%).6 Along with corruption of the judiciary (i.e.,

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3 Riaño et al. 2010, op.cit. note 1, 18.
4 Ibid., 15.
5 Robyn Hodess and Juanita Riaño, Global Corruption Barometer 2007 (Transparency International, Berlin, 2007), 7. Unfortunately, Transparency International’s coverage of regions varies from year to year; for a full listing of the countries surveyed from 2003-2010, see Riaño 2010, op.cit. note 1, 50-52.
6 The “EU+” includes several of the post-Communist EU member-states; had they—and Greece!—been excluded, the EU+ figure would have been even lower.
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another law enforcement agency), police corruption is seen as the most serious form of corruption among appointed officials in many post-Communist states.

Police corruption can have significant security implications. For instance, it has been seen as a major factor in the disruptive ethnic (nationalist) riots that took place in Moscow in December 2010. It has even been linked to terrorism (e.g., in connection with the January 2011 bombing at Moscow’s Domodedovo Airport), although the evidence is mostly circumstantial and often of indirect connections. Widespread police corruption can delegitimize an established system, or else undermine attempts to legitimize a new one; the latter was certainly a problem of early post-Communism. Yet its significance has traditionally been underestimated. Thus, while transnational organized crime has by now been widely recognized as one of the major “soft” (i.e., non-military) security issues in the contemporary world, collusion between the police and crime gangs—which substantially contributes to the success rate of organized crime—has until recently rarely been identified as a serious danger. Fortunately, awareness is now rapidly increasing. For instance, in December 2010, the French and German interior ministers requested the European Commission to delay Romania’s scheduled March 2011 admission into the Schengen (visa-free) zone because of security concerns at Romanian border crossings, a major aspect of which was collusion between officers of the state and crime gangs involved in smuggling and trafficking.

For all this, and despite recent improvements, police corruption and collusion is still inadequately researched, especially with reference to CEE and comparatively. This chapter is an initial foray explicitly into this area. Following

8 A survey conducted by the Levada Center in late-January 2011 revealed that 33% of respondents believed that the attack on the airport was made possible because of “corruption and bribery” among law-enforcement officers and local government officials; see Levada Center, “Terakty na transporte”, available at <http://www.levada.ru/press/2011020404.html>.
11 In late-2010, the author of this chapter was awarded a 3-year major grant by the ARC to conduct comparative research into police corruption in four states. The countries were selected so as to compare a more democratic with a more authoritarian established and affluent system (Germany