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## CORRUPTION AS A NATIONAL INTEREST CHALLENGE

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### Abstract

The present article dwells on the analysis of complex and not fully resolved socio-economic issues still existing within Russian society. A considerable obstacle to the development of the Russian economy is traced to the legacy of the 1990s, namely, incomplete legitimacy of distributing former state property among a limited group of people (Russian elite), during market transformations of the last decade of the 20th century. Today, the ultimate solution of the problem is hindered by the fact that corruption is not entirely defeated, despite the effort undertaken by society and the state. The problem of corruption involves an ongoing outflow of capital abroad. The introduction of personal sanctions for representatives of the business elite created objective prerequisites for repatriation of capital exported from Russia. The opportunity was only partly realized. One of the reasons for it was the corruption of certain officials and representatives of the business elite. The Russian economy is in a state of revival. The fight against corruption on all levels of government and business structure enables eliminating the destructive phenomenon. Social sciences and humanities are proved to be one of the leading agents in the process of determining the basic guidelines for anti-corruption work. There is no consensus on the origin of corruption among social scientists. Therefore, only interdisciplinary scientific cooperation might produce a tangible effect on this multifaceted struggle. Significant advances in combating corruption could be achieved via an efficient combination of knowledge and techniques of social and legal science, criminology and legal psychology.

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*Keywords:* Export of capital, corruption, national interests, ownership, personal and sectoral sanctions



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## 1. Introduction

Throughout its long history, Russia has always been and remains one of the most authentic and powerful states in the world. The foundation of its might lies not only within a vast territory with abundant natural resources but also in hard-working people capable of generating most farsighted ideas for creating highly efficient technologies and new models of equipment. Nevertheless, in the course of market transformations of the late 20th century, a specific class formed within the elite, whose goal was to personally enrich themselves based on the national wealth created by many generations of Russians, and to export it abroad, mainly to Western countries. The authorities and civil society institutions confirm this fact.

As a result of exporting a significant part of the capital, investments into the development of the Russian economy are reduced. It impedes economic growth and welfare of the country's population. In other words, the lack of social responsibility and the desire to gain super-profits comes into extreme conflict with Russia's national interests. It poses a threat to its national security. The authorities, public business community and society upon the whole recognize this situation.

For almost seventy years, Marxist political economy has occupied the leading position in the domestic economic science. It proceeded from the fact that the nature of a social system, the content and forms of people's consciousness, political and legal institutions, and the total of ideological phenomena are directly or indirectly rooted in the relations that take shape in the production of wealth. The production of material goods, according to Marx, is the supporting structure of the entire social life building (Abalkin, 1988).

The results of social production are manufactured goods sold on the market under the capitalist mode. In this case, questions of the production results appropriation, closely related to the problem of the means of production ownership, come first. Negative phenomena in the domestic economy began with the privatization of state property. The latter was, in many respects, illegitimate. Precisely this tendency created the feeling of injustice in Russian society following the changes that took place. Vladimir Putin paid particular attention to this point in his Message to the Federal Assembly on January 15, 2020.

## 2. Problem Statement

Quantitative indicators of the withdrawal of Russian capital to offshore zones are still quite impressive. For example, in 2016, documents of the Panamanian law firm "Mossack Fonseca" got into mass media. The International Consortium of Investigative Journalists and the Center for the Study of Corruption and Organized Crime published them. The Federal Financial Monitoring Service of the Russian Federation (Rosfinmonitoring) immediately responded to the data from this case and carefully studied 11.5 million documents of the "Panama dossier". At the end of 2018, the results of the investigation were acknowledged. Rosfinmonitoring found overall 4,197 Russian-controlled companies. Also, officials, including those from the governor, deputy and ministerial corps, carried out shady operations. Utmost objectivity of Rosfinmonitoring should be emphasized here (the objectivity of work performed by similar structures in other states remains unconfirmed). Russians found more firms than in other countries. For example, 3,066 firms were found among Americans, 470 were found among

Ukrainians. Russian companies were in charge of dubious financial operations totalling 5 billion rubles (Kholiyavko & Bazanova, 2018). It should be noted though that the publication of the "Panama dossier" led to high-profile resignations in some countries, for example, the Prime Minister of Iceland Sigmundur Gunnleigsson and the Prime Minister of Pakistan Nawaz (Lebedev, 2017).

At present, it is commonly understood that exporting capital abroad is directly related to the solution of a way more deep-rooted problem – corruption. Anti-corruption work today is developing rapidly, and, of course, brings about tangible results. However, corruption has not been defeated. This process is where the insufficient effectiveness of capital repatriation exported from Russia back to the homeland, lies, despite the efforts undertaken by the country's authorities.

According to the professors of the Higher School of Economics Elena Lukyanova and Ilya Shablinsky, the authors of the book "Authoritarianism and Democracy", current anti-corruption activities should also be directed against selective law enforcement, which is excessively dangerous for civil society. If the law is not equal for everyone, it is not right, and the sacramental expression "law is law" is no longer convincing.

The export of capital abroad poses a threat to the national interests of the Russian state. Thus, the task of combating corruption comes first, as corruption is the main obstacle to the domestic economic growth, manifesting itself in a decrease in real incomes of the population.

### **3. Research Questions**

The leading elite of the Russian Federation has repeatedly extended the terms of the amnesty of capital exported abroad (Amnesty of capital in Russia, 2020). However, not all Russian citizens owning money resources in foreign countries have begun to return them to Russia, notwithstanding the risk of losing them there because of the sanctions against Russian officials and entrepreneurs. Perhaps entrepreneurs' fears for their property upon its return to Russia outweigh the sanction risks of its arrest under foreign jurisdictions (Nikitinskiy, 2018).

Back in 2013, a book by Evgenia Pismennaya "Kudrin's System. The Story of Putin's Russia Key Economist" was released. This book sheds light upon the outstanding role of Alexei Kudrin, who served as Minister of Finance and First Deputy Prime Minister of the Russian government, in the development of the modern Russian economy. However, "Kudrin could not prevent the growing roll of kickbacks. Over the past ten years, the index has grown from 5 up to 70 %, according to people familiar with the state order system" (Pismennaya, 2013). Notwithstanding his solid administrative and political weight, Kudrin was incapable of putting a stop to redistribution of budgetary resources among senior officials. They were confronted with the conflict of interest.

Financial resources received by businessmen and corrupt official semi-criminally, alas, continue to move from Russia abroad. Presently the accumulated capital export from Russia exceeds the stock of investments that the country has received from abroad, by \$300 billion. This money is actually drawn from the Russian economy. It may be that this world receives investments from us, and not vice versa (Mirkin, 2018).

The capital exported from Russia was legalized abroad by transforming it in the form of depositing with Western banks, acquiring elite residential real estate, buying yachts and private jets, sports clubs,

moving families permanently to the Golden Billion countries, and organizing children's and grandchildren's studies in the most prestigious Western universities.

Illicit enrichment of many influential Russian businessmen based on privatization of state property and the ensuing "golden rain" in the form of a sharp increase in the world energy prices, led to the fact that the federal budget became practically deficit-free and increased significantly. In this regard, the capacity of many officials to redistribute budget funds to meet personal interests, increased. Since the new owners understood illegitimacy of their unexpectedly acquired fortunes, the decision to preserve them was apparent: withdrawal of capital to Western countries and its legalization in new jurisdictions.

It can be assumed that these countries' authorities were simply shocked by the scope of acquisition exhibited by individual Russian businessmen and the bureaucracy of foreign elite property (Hollinsworth & Lansley, 2010). Gradually, an opinion arose that these super-rich people's well-being is rooted in the money of Western countries paid for the same Russian energy sources and other raw materials exported to these countries. This found its concrete embodiment in the introduction of personal sanctions against certain state Russian officials and business people, as well as sectoral sanctions against Russian enterprises and organizations. A specific reason for the introduction of these sanctions was the accession of the Crimea to Russia in 2014.

An astonishing occurrence took place at the end of December 2018, when the U.S. Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) published the terms on which it was ready to lift sanctions against Oleg Deripaska's EN+, UC Rusal and Eurosibenergo, against whom eight U.S. Treasury companies imposed sanctions on April 6, 2018. Within 30 days, Oleg Deripaska was to reduce his stake in EN+ (owned 48.1 % of UC Rusal) from 70 to 44.95 %, and the Swiss trader Glencore would exchange his share in UC Rusal (8.9 %) for EN+ shares. O. Deripaska would be able to vote no more than 35 %, and VTB (the U.S. Treasury referred to this bank as one of the possible recipients of the businessman's package) as well as investors associated with Deripaska, would have to transfer the voting right to an "independent third party".

EN+ pledged that it would change the board of directors. Oleg Deripaska could nominate four out of the 12 people, the rest being independent, with six representatives from the United States and Great Britain. The named companies of Oleg Deripaska had to provide OFAC with profound information about their activities and avoid changing the registration from foreign to Russian without the approval of the new board of directors and notifying OFAC (Trifonova, 2018).

It is worth mentioning that some Russian media showed such a dramatic development of events from a pretty positive angle. Sanctions were lifted, jobs for Russians were saved in the cities where those assets were located, and they were single-industry towns, as a rule (Vasilyeva, 2018).

Thus, by the example of Oleg Deripaska's companies, the real interests of Western countries that imposed sanctions against Russian officials and business people became evident. This attempt is directly seized Russian property located in the state, but registered in foreign jurisdictions.

It was at that time, in our opinion, that the Russian leadership objectively had a unique opportunity to intensify the fight against corruption and outright theft in Russian society. If the country is threatened by the hostile takeover of Russian assets by Western countries, it is necessary to mobilize all financial resources for the economic development of the state under such complicated circumstances.

According to the well-known Russian businessman and public figure Alexander Lebedev, over the past ten years alone, more than one hundred billion US dollars have been stolen from bankrupt Russian banks. In this regard, it is proposed to transform the return of capital stolen from Russia into a subject of targeted state policy and use all state instruments to implement it. One cannot but agree with Alexander Lebedev, who claims that the return of stolen capital is net revenues to the state budget. We are talking about the formation of industry, whose income from the state budget would equal the export of hydrocarbons. In the context of Western sanctions, primarily limiting access to the capital market, these funds could become a key factor ensuring financial stability, investment and growth of the Russian economy. Repatriation of illegally withdrawn capital should be one of the priority tasks for the state.

To a certain extent, the return of capital to its homeland will be facilitated by the campaign to decapitalize Russian assets located abroad, which is carried out by the administration of the US President Donald Trump. The Russian elite today can take either of the two paths: to lose their assets, that may be confiscated in foreign jurisdictions, or to return them to their homeland. At the same time, the leading Russian elite has a real opportunity to use the created situation to repatriate capital exported from Russia to their homeland.

#### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to identify and neutralize corruption risks that have a significant impact on the realization of the national interests of the Russian state.

#### **5. Research Methods**

For the achievement of the goal, classical methods of social phenomena cognition dialectics are used: generalization, analogy, comparison; analyzing the behaviour of the subjects of market relations; analysis of the economic, political science, legal, criminological and psychological literature; identifying cause and effect relationships of the impact of corruption on the economy and society; modelling the benefits of public administration after eliminating corruption.

#### **6. Findings**

Lack of a sense of responsibility and patriotism among some businessmen and officials poses an unquestionable threat to the economic sovereignty of the state. It is this threat that should become, in our opinion, a compelling imperative for building up an anti-corruption economic policy. This strategy should be aimed at the return of capital exported from Russia to Western countries.

It seems that a fairly clear answer to the question of preserving the current situation in this country is given in Nassim Taleb's work "Skin in the Game: Hidden Asymmetries in Daily Life". The author claims that "risking one's skin" is necessary not only in order to be an honest and financially successful businessman but also in order to understand the world. Justifying his position, Nassim Taleb writes:

The principle of skin on the line, if looked upon as a regulation, mitigates the effects of the following discrepancies generated by the civilization: discrepancy between deeds and chatter,

consequences and intentions, practice and theory, honour and reputation, competence and quackery, concrete and abstract, ethical and legal, real and superficial... (Taleb, 2018).

Following Nassim Taleb's logic concerning Russia, it can be stated that after the fabulous enrichment of a specific part of the country's elite, capital export and property acquisition abroad, no one wished to "risk their skin". It was this circumstance that led to the "discrepancy between deeds and cheap chatter". Any profound actions did not always support some public figures' and media populists' countless words about the fight against corruption. The situation changed completely after 2014, when sanctions were imposed, which meant putting Russian bureaucracy "skin" at stake.

Unfortunately, it was precisely up to this period that some part of the Russian elite directed its efforts to compensate for the arrest of its property as a result of sanctions, instead of taking measures to protect the economic sovereignty of the state. Nevertheless, today it is evident that something has to be done to change the situation.

In his Message to the Federal Assembly, President Putin explicitly voiced his complaints against the state and business elite. In Russia, there are healthy forces that are capable of arranging activities that will ensure pulling through difficulties and obstacles. Among these forces, science occupies a priority position.

What can science do in the field of combating corruption? In the last decade, against the background of general scientific interest in the problem of corruption, an analysis of corruption causes in various spheres of public life has become particularly acute. A discussion tackling the origins of corruption is disciplined and segmented in the scientific community.

So, it is quite natural that economists see corruption origins in how economic institutions function (Lagov & Kovalev, 2006). Indeed, a certain economic structure, in which state regulation of the economy becomes distorted, and the entrepreneur begins to depend on the official, or rather, the latter's arbitrariness triggers off corruption. In such circumstances, corruption becomes a marker not only of relations between business and government officials but also relations between the subjects of economic activity, in particular, small, medium and large businesses. Corruption-related interaction is developing, for example, between the administration of a giant chain hypermarket and a separate food producer, who wants his/her goods to be on the shelves of an extensive distribution network. A similar interconnection can exist between the administrative body of a vast pharmacy network and a solo medicine distributor, striving to ensure that their product is sold in pharmacies of a popular pharmacy network.

Lawyers see the reason for corruption in imperfections of the legislative base (Yanovsky, 2010), insufficient control over potential corrupt officials, lack of corruption preventive measures, and little punishment for those who have committed corruption crimes. It should be noted that in recent decades, the economic and legal factors of corruption have generally been perceived as a complex structure, especially in line with the problems of ensuring economic security of strategically important industrial sectors (Arkhipov et al., 2016) and the state as a whole (Treushnikov, 2017).

Administrative and managerial works show a tendency to integrate ethical and legal aspects of corrupt behaviour. Accordingly, the mechanism for combating corruption, in this case, is seen in the administrative and legal regulation of the personnel's ethics and official behaviour (Vatel, 2012).

Tremendous research experience in the field of studying corruption issues has been accumulated in jurisprudence, economics and management theory. This experience is precious and significant, and it is

precisely this experience that needs to be addressed first and foremost when studying the problem of corruption.

At the same time, the described disciplinary positions are characterized by putting forth an exclusively external definition of corruption. Inattention to the "human factor" has instigated the appearance of another extreme – the explanation of the causes of corrupt behaviour solely via factors of a deeply personal nature. This approach typifies the East European School of Psychoanalysis (St. Petersburg). One of its most distinguished contemporary representatives Reshetnikov is convinced that the origins of corruption should be sought in human nature, in the inner world and archetypal characteristics of a person. The economic and legal components of corruption are only external indexes of the phenomenon, shaping the degree of what is allowed and not allowed within a particular community in a certain era (Reshetnikov, 2018). Reshetnikov's monograph is certainly a worthy read, and the author should be given credit to, as he is one of the first Russian scientists to highlight underlying psychological factors of corrupt behaviour. Moreover, although Reshetnikov refers to his research as psychoanalytic, the work draws unconditional parallels with Vygotsky's cultural-historical psychology.

Another representative of the psychoanalytic school, Vannovskaya explores the psychology of civil servants' corrupt behaviour from a deeply psychological perspective (Vannovskaya, 2013). Vannovskaya substantiates the concepts of corruption pressure and a corrupt personality. The research has come up with a practical solution: a methodology for anti-corruption diagnostics has been developed, and anti-corruption stability pieces of training for civil servants are being conducted. Thanks to Vannovskaya, a new scientific concept of "a specialist in the psychology of corruption" has appeared.

Thus, today we see two relatively opposite methodological approaches to the problem of corruption. The first approach, which can conditionally be called economic and legal, is focused on the study of corruption behaviour factors external to the human personality. The psychoanalytic approach, on the contrary, lays a greater emphasis on deep-rooted, imperishable features of the human personality that generate corrupt behaviour.

Sociology, especially its phenomenological interpretations, is believed to have very significant potential in the formation of a methodologically integrated platform for studying corruption problems. Sociology cross-methodological capabilities are becoming relevant against the background of the general poly-paradigm orientation of modern social science (Savchenko, 2018). However, modern sociologists (Shediy, 2015) see corruption as external socially based behaviour, just as Emil Durkheim once traced reasons for suicide solely to social rather than personal premises. It is common knowledge that, among other things, Durkheim found that cases of suicide are much rarer among Jews, whose communities show solidarity and mutual assistance than in Protestant individualistic environment. On the other hand, Durkheim failed to explain why suicide cases still occur among Jews, and why not all Protestants are prone to suicide, vice versa. So, modern sociologists do not explain why, under similar social external preconditions for corrupt behaviour, some people become corrupt, while others do not, as well as why, given the apparent absence of external preconditions for corruption, some individuals turn out to be prone to corruption, while others are not.

Many representatives of political sociology, following Almond and Verba's philosophy, find sources of corruption in a specific type of political culture, usually called patriarchal (Almond & Verba,

2014). This type of political culture is oriented at local values (community values, clan, kin) and has such manifestations as nepotism, blat, and patronage. In this type of political culture, "gratitude" given to an official or, say, a doctor is a norm and fits into a public morality paradigm. This form of political culture, in Almond and Verba's opinion, is characteristic of "young" states that have recently gained independence, and are characterized by a layering of local subcultures, law violation, yet traditionalism, which is often transformed into walking the line and living by the code. The socio-anthropological approach to the problem of corruption also adheres to sociocultural characteristics of various communities, indicative of corruption practice. For example, the authors of the study "Fighting against Windmills: Socio-Anthropological Approach to the Study of Corruption" declare that they have managed to go beyond the framework of the "ideological discourse dominating today's corruption studies" and call their achievements in this area "non-trivial" and "paradoxical" (Olimpiyevoy & Panchenkova, 2007). However, upon closer examination, it turns out that the book is just saturated with ideology: it presents corruption as a phenomenon of exclusively "non-Western" societies. In the collection, one finds texts on corruption in African countries and articles on corruption in post-Soviet communities. As a result, the "paradoxical and non-trivial" conclusions are constituted by a firm belief that corruption in "non-Western" societies exists because they are "non-Western" societies, whilst nothing is written about the causes and, in fact, the existence of corruption (in its more sophisticated form) per se in Western countries.

Thus, for various reasons, the possibilities of creating an interdisciplinary platform for corruption studies in modern social science are being applied only to some extent.

In the given circumstances, the most promising studies are those combining legal psychology and criminology, provided criminology is defined as the sociology of crime (Komlev, 2017).

For example, Antonyan (2004) identifies a whole range of causes bringing about a corruption crime, without ranking the degree of their significance: economic, political, organizational, socio-psychological reasons. Moreover, it is precisely in this complex that all these reasons make corruption a mass phenomenon penetrating all spheres of public life.

The Nizhny Novgorod corruption study school is also focused on a combination of knowledge and techniques of legal science, criminology and legal psychology (Savchenko & Snegireva, 2017). The researchers identify primary and secondary factors of corrupt behaviour, among which there are micro- and macro-social factors, that in many respects are traced to economic and legal positions, social and socio-pedagogical factors (corporate deformation, peculiarities of upbringing and "life situation") and, finally, psychological factors: specific personal qualities and deep complexes that stimulate the action of compensatory mechanisms (Savchenko et al., 2016).

## **7. Conclusion**

Summing it all up, it must be stated that the emergence of new research branches that create a cross-methodological field for the study of corruption, gives hope for a fruitful scientific search. Under the current conditions, when the same problem is being studied on two 'scientific islands', it is quite reasonable to establish scientific communication between these 'islands'. In the end, all scientists who

analyze the issue touched upon in the present article, have a common goal – effective prevention of corruption.

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