

Corruption in the Slovak local self-government: anti-corruption measures in the town of Martin and their applicability on a national scale

T o m a s J a c k o

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Public sector in Slovakia is still suffering from the remnants of the previous Communist regime, one of them being endemic corruption affecting many if not all spheres of life. The research was carried out in the small Slovak town of Martin in order to examine a case study of an anti-corruption policy-making process set in local self-government. The Martin anti-corruption project is a unique and unprecedented example of a local, internally funded but externally delivered, and multi-faceted scheme which if successful is bound to be recognised and possibly applied nationwide and perhaps even outside Slovak borders. Hence the second aim of the research was to see whether and how the scheme could be applied on a national scale in Slovakia. All three levels of government (i.e. local, regional and national) and 13 models in total have been considered for the application of the anti-corruption project and its measures in Slovakia.

Primary research was based on documents published by Transparency International Slovakia (TIS) which had been an inextricable part of the scheme. The author interviewed a sample of all those directly involved with the project and also other experts in the field, including the Martin town Mayor, the TIS President, the Vice-President of the Supreme Audit Office, and the former Chairman of the Civil Service Office. From June to August 2009, 18 interviews were carried out in total: elected Martin town officials (4), unelected Martin town officials (5), TIS employees (4), Slovak government officials (2), and other relevant persons (3). Secondary research discussed both Slovak and international literature covering corruption and topics relevant to the policy-making process discussion.

Project analysis - Findings

The author has discussed the various stages of the Martin project (i.e. initiation, audit, policy formulation, training and implementation) and mentioned some of its early positive outcomes:

- increased transparency
- increased public engagement in governance and accountability
- saving significant financial resources
- Town prestige leading to more investment
- benefits to the wider society

Project Limitations and Recommendations

A number of limitations have been identified which could potentially hinder the overall image of the project, its effectiveness and chances for applicability elsewhere despite its true uniqueness. Project's long-term sustainability has also been considered which will to a certain

extent depend on the level of policy initiator's sincerity. The author has examined the following limitations and provides the respective recommendations:

- *Insufficient funding and time*: in case of more funding and time, there could have been a better quality project delivered under more TIS supervision.
- *Top-down initiation process*: the project could have involved more bottom-up approaches and public engagement.
- *Teaching old dogs new tricks*: a new well-written and well-presented project does not secure its adherence by the staff used to the previous methods.
- *Political aspect*: some of the replies received through the interviews claimed that the initiator also had political reasons for implementation.

Project applicability

The research has demonstrated that there are multiple ways how to apply the Martin project and its measures in other levels of government in Slovakia. However, there are a number of factors which have to be addressed before applying and implementing such a scheme. Based on the Martin project, the author identified the following 5 determinants of successful anti-corruption project implementation which need to be present:

- great political will
- limited level of corruption
- enough financial resources
- willingness to change
- lack of negative external circumstances

The following 13 scenarios have been identified and considered for future application, from which the *Local uncoordinated self-funded project* (i.e. the Martin project model) was regarded as the most suitable model for project implementation now and in the future:

1. **Local uncoordinated¹ self-funded project**
2. Local coordinated self-funded project
3. Local externally funded project
4. Local co-funded project
5. New legislation & regulation affecting local government
6. Regional uncoordinated self-funded project
7. Regional coordinated self-funded project
8. Regional externally funded project
9. Regional co-funded project
10. New legislation & regulation affecting regional government
11. National self-funded project
12. National internationally-funded project
13. New legislation & regulation affecting national government

¹ Externally uncoordinated

Conclusion

Corruption in Slovakia is often connected with the word *endemic*. It is hence not enough to just rely on one-off projects and/or hope for more local anti-corruption champions to arise soon. Ideally, a more far-reaching and nationally coordinated approach is needed. However, until then the Martin project is a more realistic alternative which despite being able to affect only a fraction of Slovakia's population, does meet most of the requirements and preconditions for a successful anti-corruption policy which could later be applied nationwide. Nevertheless, the Martin anti-corruption project needs time until it bears fully grown fruits. It will take at a minimum of six months to a year for the first project audit and official evaluation to be conducted by the Martin Town Hall and TIS independently of each other. However, such a vast project will need at least three to four years to provide results which could then be vigorously assessed and compared in a reliable study.

Eliminating corruption in the public sector is the "basic and necessary premise for making it more effective" (Sikula 2008, 184). Governments wishing to deliver modern, effective, efficient, economical and quality, customer-oriented public services in line with the *new public management* could consider the Martin project as an epitome of such effort. What makes this project extraordinary in Slovak conditions is not only its complexity, external delivery and international recognition. It is also the ideal combination of factors supported by open windows of opportunity which led into a successful anti-corruption policy implementation. However, the Martin project would not have been successfully implemented or even initiated, had it not been for Martin Mayor's political will accompanied by his persuasion skills. Nevertheless, successful implementation (i.e. the end of implementation process) does not necessarily have to lead to project's long-term success and sustainability.

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