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## Corruption and Democracy in Kosovo: from Before to After

The DokuFest Panel “From before to after” delved into a historical, philosophical, and social inquiry around the roots of corruption in Albania and in Kosovo. The key figures Fatos Lubonja and Veton Surroi discussed whether corruption is a result of the environment that we live in, conflicts experienced, society created, or even a part of human nature. A highlight in this DokuFest’s theme on corruption, the panelists offered insights on the breeding of corruption from the era of communism, through neoliberalism to the present.

Corruption entails using public property for private benefit. Using this definition, Surrai declared, “in Kosovo there is no corruption...because the state is already the property of those who control it.” Signifying the gravity of the problem in the region, Kosovo has no more resources to be taken by those engaging in state capture.

Beyond the Western Balkans, corruption is a global phenomenon in virtually all countries, sectors, and sometimes even within international aid organizations. Studies have shown the negative effects of corruption on development and economic growth.

Corruption is also a main issue that many international organizations, including the United Nations, work to tackle. This is certainly the case in Kosovo, where the United Nations Kosovo Team partnered with DokuFest to shed light on this problem through the installation of the interactive corruption museum.

Yet, the inclusion of corruption under the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16 on peaceful societies came with great controversy. During the discussions of the SDG development in the General Assembly’s Open Working Group of for Sustainable Development Goals, the proposal to include corruption, justice, and rule of law was highly opposed by many states, who feared that this would turn the post-2015 development agenda into a security agenda. Behind this explicit reason, fighting corruption would entail great resources, and most worryingly, there are actors that benefit from the presence of this phenomenon and have a stake in its continuation.

Yet, Surroi and Lubonja emphasized that state-building and fighting corruption cannot be imported from outside; foreign forces and efforts cannot replace domestic ones. While actors like the UN have a great role to play in supporting the process, true state-building and democratic transitions must come from within – and be owned by the state and its respective population.

Against this background, Surroi proposes “are we predestined to be corrupt? The answer is no.” Corruption may be a learned behavior. In Albania was further developed in the 1960s and 1970s as police elicited bribes from citizens, thereby teaching members of society practices of corruption.

Whereas from a political philosophy viewpoint, Lubonja says, “fundamentally corruption stems from the lack of feeling of responsibility towards one another in a society.” During Communism in Albania, there was less sense of community and giving, as the state provided nearly all services for its citizens, absolving them from the opportunity to give to and help one another. Afterwards, during neoliberalism, when people craved freedom, personal gain was glorified, even at the expense and irresponsibility towards those around us. It became an economy of ‘eat and go,’ coupled with organized crime and a devastating brain drain ( Fatos Lubonja). This is further amplified in an era of special interests, where politicians receive less and less of their power from constituencies, and more from oligopolists. Thus corruption exacerbates inequality, SDG 10, and vice versa.

Yet, when asked about why there is a culture of indifference to corruption, Lubonja explained that, where there is a culture of violence and suppression, the will to make a change declines and people adapt to the environment. Another effect is that change-makers may choose to leave.

Therefore, what is needed to counter the citizens' passivity towards corruption is a "sense of possibility of "yes, we can." Though this political culture that takes much advocacy experience to cultivate, the way it has been in the USA or France for instance (Lubonja).

Nevertheless, there is hope in thwarting corruption – one way to break free is through debate, says Surroi. Meanwhile Lubonja cites the development of grassroots leftist parties as another tool against corruption, though notes their weakness in Albania.

Finally, transitional movements may create even larger problems or even tragedies, as explained by some of the states or the Arab Spring. In this context, only elections can bring legitimate sustainable democratic change officially. While the causes of corruption are many, and their remedies seemingly elusive, it is certain that an active and informed citizenry is key to tackling corruption.

by Klevisa Kovaçi

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