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## Slaying Corruption – Or How Romania is Fighting Its Biggest Enemy

MARAVELA & ASOCIATII / 05 DECEMBER 2017



Since Romania's accession to the European Union in 2007, the European Commission has set up a Cooperation and Verification Mechanism (CVM) in order to monitor, among other strategic points, the progress of Romania's fight against corruption.

The CVM Report, which was published on January 25, 2017, concluded that judicial reform and the fight against corruption have been key issues for Romanian society over the last ten years.

Romanian society has indeed changed significantly in the past ten years, as the level of awareness and the perception of the civil society regarding high-level corruption has shifted from acceptance to extreme disapproval. For instance, at the beginning of 2017, there were massive protests in many of the country's major cities for an ordinance created by the Romanian Government that decriminalized and/or reduced the criminal punishments for corruption offences such as abuse of office, conflict of interest, and negligence at work. In response to the largest street protests in the past 25 years, the Government repealed the ordinance.

The most important reasons for the changes in the Romanian view of high-level corruption are: (i) the creation of a comprehensive legal framework for fighting corruption crimes; (ii) the creation of independent judicial institutions investigating, prosecuting, and deciding upon high-level corruption cases; and last but not least, (iii) the efforts made in the elaboration and implementation of anti-corruption procedures.

Even though the investigation and punishment of wrongdoers are important parts of the fight against corruption, the key element to changing society's view of corruption is the institution of prevention policies, meant to change the society's perception of the offense.

### Prevention Policies

From 2012 to 2015 Romania made major progress in its attempts to stop corruption via its National Anti-Corruption Strategy (NAS). Furthermore, after many consultations with the representatives of more than 90 central and local public institutions, independent authorities and anti-corruption institutions, and various business organizations, a new strategy was adopted on August 10, 2016.

This strategy – NAS 2016-2020 – continues the efforts of the previous strategy, with primary policies including: (i) a more transparent government at both the central and local levels; (ii) increased institutional integrity; and (iii) deeper knowledge and understanding of integrity standards by employees and beneficiaries of public services.

The strategy is destined to strengthen integrity and reduce corruption risks in priority sectors such as healthcare, education, judiciary, politics, and public procurement. The prevention policies of NAS 2016-2020 are mandatory for all public sectors.

However, the engine of the Romanian economy is not the public but the private sector, and corruption practices exist in relationships between private companies as well, not only with public authorities. Thus, by focusing on fighting corruption in the public sector, Romanian authorities overlook corruption in the private sector and the need for a special law that would include sanctions and prevention policies for private companies.

Even though the authorities do not focus their resources on elaborating strategies and corruption prevention policies for the private sector, companies may look for assistance to the ISO 37001 Anti-Bribery Management System, an international standard that helps organizations manage the risks of corruption through a series of measures that aim to prevent, detect, and address bribery.

### **Conclusions**

Corruption is a constant threat for democracy, the rule of law, and social and judicial equity. Bribery is contrary to fundamental values as it undermines organizational effectiveness in both the public and private sectors, corrupting society at its core.

Romania has made major progress in the fight against corruption, having investigated and sanctioned numerous cases of high-level corruption. However, harsh punishment has never sufficed to entirely discourage the criminal phenomenon.

We salute and support the efforts to develop new standards and establish new institutions designed to suppress corruption, but as long as there is no economic stability in society, a lack of education on the concept, and no collective awareness, none of these programs will be able to reach their goals.

Furthermore, in order to have more significant results in the fight against corruption, the authorities, civil society, and the business environment need to work together closely and continuously.

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This Article was originally published in Issue 4.9 of the CEE Legal Matters Magazine. If you would like to receive a hard copy of the magazine, you can [subscribe here](#).