

Not enough to persecute, prevention is the key – The culture of integrity

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**Gusztáv Báger: Korrupció: büntetés, integritás, kompetencia.
Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 2012**

The public discourse on corruption and corruption phenomena has accompanied the history of the years after the regime change. Almost everyone has personal experience of it, but surely, we know someone who has told an astonishing, wild or even tragic story of Hungarian corruption. As diverse and deep-rooted as the cultural tapestry of corruption is, there is a dearth of works that explore, describe and systematise the essence of this social phenomenon with scientific rigour. It would be difficult to grasp the real reason for this phenomenon: can short, colourful and lively press reports not compete with works written with academic rigour? Or are people of science alarmed by the sensitive subject matter? Or is there too little scientific research based on objective facts from which professionals can formulate models, theories and solutions? Or is the world, and the phenomena of corruption in it, changing too fast to produce systematic works of scientific quality?

Whatever the reason for this phenomenon, we can conclude that although Hungarian society is showing considerable interest in corruption phenomena, also because of its growing involvement, the number of scientific works on the subject has remained very small. This is why works that delve deep into the causes and interrelationships of corruption phenomena and do not get bogged down in the presentation of superficial phenomena have a prominent role.

In my review, I will present the work of Gusztáv Báger entitled *Corruption*, which was published by Akadémiai Kiadó in 2012 and has had a significant impact on the course and practice of Hungarian anti-corruption measures through its approach and the presentation of the integrity management methodology used.

Before the volume is presented, it is appropriate to introduce the author, Gusztáv Báger, whose wide-ranging scientific, public and literary work would be difficult to summarise. In connection with our topic, I will therefore try to highlight those elements of the biography that are closely related to the volume under review. I am

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convinced that Gusztáv Báger's decades of professional experience in international finance, academia and public administration led him to the field of anti-corruption at the turn of the millennium. It was his openness to international relations, his knowledge of languages and his intellectual curiosity, combined with his keen intellect, that led him, as Director General of the Research Institute of the State Audit Office of Hungary, to undertake, with his excellent colleagues, an investigation into the causes of corruption.

The momentum against corruption at the turn of the millennium seemed to weaken after the adoption of international conventions on the subject. Behind the formal commitment felt in many countries, there was a lack of substantive, methodological added value that could have taken forward the initial period of anti-corruption action and led to the substantive results that public opinion demanded. The situation was further exacerbated by the global economic crisis of 2008, which highlighted the need for effective action against corruption with unprecedented sharpness, both internationally and in Hungary.

The Research Institute of the State Audit Office of Hungary, in cooperation with the International Organization of State Audit Institutions (INTOSAI), has been familiarizing itself with the integrity approach of the Netherlands Court of Audit and has been exploring the possibility of its introduction in Hungary in the framework of several twinning projects. This successful cooperation has not only resulted in numerous scientific publications, but also in the intellectual and professional preparation of the Integrity Project launched by the State Audit Office of Hungary in 2009 to assess the strength of integrity controls in budgetary bodies, as well as the Government Decree No. 50/2013. (II. 25.)

If it is true that the Russian realist writers all came out of Gogol's overcoat, then – to paraphrase a quote from Dostoevsky – we can say that all integrity management experts came out of the overcoat of Gusztáv Báger, or more precisely, the Research Institute of the State Audit Office of Hungary. This was the think-tank that launched the integrity approach in the Hungarian public administration, based on risk management, the balanced application of rules and values, and the logic of the internal control system. The foundations of this approach are summarised in Gusztáv Báger's book *Corruption*, which, in addition to a novel approach, has brought a scientific approach and a high level of professionalism to the domestic waters of anti-corruption.

The book, as the author writes in the introduction, aims at nothing less than

- ▶ to help learn about good anti-corruption practices in our own country and in other countries and international organisations;
- ▶ to demonstrate the culture of personal and organisational integrity that is recommended rather than the punitive, unilateral pursuit of anti-corruption; and
- ▶ propose new directions for the development of integrity management based on personal and organisational competences.

These efforts not only set a new direction for the times, but also had a very fruitful impact on administrative practice. The three main parts of the work follow logically from

the objectives outlined: the first introduces the concept of corruption and the relevant theories, the second the Dutch integrity methodology and its Hungarian application, while the third part is about competence-based strengthening of integrity. In this review I will follow this logic and provide an overview and evaluation of the work.

The first chapter of the first part seeks to answer the question of interest to many of us, using the methods of science: what is corruption? Although the author states at the outset of his exploration that there is no internationally agreed definition of corruption, that it is a kind of 'catch-all' concept, he draws heavily on the authors and organisations that have attempted to define this concept, which has changed from time to time. The author deliberately steers clear of criminal corruption concepts and instead focuses on a more political science approach to the phenomenon. Among the Hungarian authors, he highlights the works of Elemér Hankiss, Csaba Gombár, István Jávor and Dávid Jancsics. It is interesting to note that the concept of corruption used by INTOSAI is used alongside the international actors (UN, Transparency International) dealing with corruption, which serves as a transition to the next chapter on the sources of corruption.

In addition to an international perspective, the author analyses in detail the socio-economic contexts in which corruption phenomena are most prevalent. One of the scientific and practical values of the book is that it is one of the first to examine these socio-economic situations with scientific rigour. The results of the study are reflected in the results of the Integrity Survey of the State Audit Office of Hungary, which was carried out annually until 2019. The presentation of corruption phenomena is still relevant today, even if the behaviours of the perpetrators have evolved and changed significantly in recent years.

In the third chapter of the volume, the author analyses in detail the challenges of corruption and the integrity-based response to them. This chapter, supported by illustrative Dutch and Hungarian examples, also helps to understand the essence of the Dutch concept of integrity, which is analysed in detail in second part. In the light of the experience gained since the publication of this work, it is debatable whether the rule-based approach and the integrity-based approach can be sharply contrasted or whether the latter includes both a rule-based and a values-based approach, but in any case, despite the differences in terminology, the underlying findings are still valid today.

The fourth chapter is dedicated to the fight against corruption, starting with the international conventions against corruption and the role of INTOSAI. The European Union is not left out of the list, and looking back over a decade, it is precisely through the EU's institutional arrangements that the dynamics of anti-corruption policy and institutions are clearly visible. The development of the sanctions policy, the establishment of the European Public Prosecutor's Office or the Whistleblower Protection Directive are just a few examples of this. However, the book also provides illustrative descriptions of anti-corruption practices in a particular country (e.g. Singapore, Latvia or the UK). It is also interesting and instructive to look back on Hungary's anti-corruption measures a decade ago.

After a conceptual, theoretical, methodological and international overview, the second part of the book provides the reader with an introduction to the legal

and institutional foundations of the Dutch integrity management system and the methodology of risk analysis. The fifth, sixth and seventh chapters present both the internationally successful Dutch approach to integrity and a detailed description of both the risk management methodology and the role of the Netherlands Court of Audit in strengthening integrity.

This chapter reflects back on the tangible experiences of twinning projects of the State Audit Office of Hungary and the Netherlands Court of Audit. However, the Dutch example not only shows us how a methodology should be developed and continuously improved, but also gives us a sense that progress is not given for free. It requires a clear understanding of the situation, the will to implement it, commitment and resources. In the Netherlands, these were available, although both the corruption cases in the province of South Limburg, which are described in detail in this volume, and the example of the BIBOB law to prevent money laundering by organised crime networks show that the Netherlands, which is now considered almost spotless, has also had serious corruption challenges for several decades. A specific feature of the Dutch approach is that integrity is seen as a binary concept, which is either there or it is not. The approach of the 2008 integrity questionnaire presented in this volume, and the Integrity Project launched in 2009, is more sophisticated: it assumes that there can be different levels of integrity in different organisations and that the aim is to strengthen this level through controls and improvements. The volume presents in detail the first two years of the Integrity Survey launched by the State Audit Office of Hungary in 2011 and the lessons learned. This is also significant as the specific website of the State Audit Office of Hungary containing the documents of the Integrity Project is no more available, so researchers have no access to reliable and relevant data in this area.

However, in his work, Gusztáv Báger is not only a scientifically demanding analyst of the phenomena of the changing world, but also, based on international experience – primarily drawing on the experience of the Netherlands and the OECD – he also makes a proposal for the development of the Hungarian integrity management system in the ninth chapter of the volume, and describes the main elements of the Government's corruption prevention programme adopted in 2012, which – thanks to the work of the State Audit Office of Hungary and the author – clearly reflects the integrity approach.

The third part of the volume focuses on competence. In chapter ten, the concept of competence and the theoretical models of competence are explored and presented using an extensive literature, with a particular focus on the links between competence and public administration development. This is followed by one of the most innovative chapters in the volume, on the link between competence and integrity. In this chapter, the author derives the measures that can be taken to prevent or reduce the possibility of integrity violations through competences. The author presents these suggestions at both the personal and organisational levels and translates them into integrity competency models. In connection with the models outlined, the author presents empirical research conducted by the Research Institute of the State Audit Office of Hungary in 2008. The aim of the research was to explore

and understand the competence structure of the local government administration of two cities with county rights, Eger and Szombathely. The study was based on the premise that public administration functions more effectively when it is endowed with key competences. The analysis of the administration of the cities covered, among other things, customer satisfaction, individual competences and the self-image of civil servants. In addition to supporting the hypothesis, an important finding of the research was that „lower ratings of creativity skills, but especially communication skills, among civil servants are a negative factor for strengthening integrity”. It is also an important finding that „civil servants rated more practical, instrumental competences as more important than integrity-related, so-called soft-measures competences”. I believe that such in-depth, systematic scientific studies measuring administrative competences are still very much needed today, which could help not only to strengthen organisational integrity but also to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of public administration.

In the last chapter of the book, the author proposes to do just that, in order to shift the focus from reactivity to proactivity, i.e. to an approach (and competences) based on initiative. In addition to the training of public administrators, the author proposes that integrity in the National Curriculum should be understood as a dual concept, as an attitude on the one hand and as an educational task on the other. This will enable those involved in public education not only to learn about the dangers and consequences of breaking the rules, but also to incorporate it into their own self-image and personality by involving them in the tasks, and thus influence their attitude to life as a whole.

Gusztáv Báger's work *Corruption* not only marks a significant milestone in the fight against corruption in Hungary, but also provides important guidance for today's professionals by summarising scientific findings and formulating forward-looking and actionable recommendations. However, this book is not only useful for university students and professionals, but also for anyone who wants to learn more about corruption and the means to combat it. The important message of this work is that it is not enough to know and analyse corruption, but that it is necessary to fight it effectively and efficiently by applying modern scientific methods. In the words of Attila József:

„And settling at long last the price of thought,
This is our task, and none too short its lease.”²

2 Attila József: *By the Danube* (translated by Vernon Watkins) in: *Hundred Hungarian Poems* (edited Thomas Kabdebo), Albion Editions, Manchester, 1976