

On August 7, 2008, police officer B.C.'s colleagues took away the uniform he'd worn almost every day for years. They also took his gun and, after charging him with a criminal offense, escorted him to the Basic Court in Ulcinj, a small coastal town in Montenegro. N.F., a Swedish tourist, had reported him to authorities.

N.F. and his wife were entering Montenegro from Albania at the Sukobin border crossing. He reported B.C. because B.C. had demanded 15 euros (US\$21) from him as an entrance fee into the country, even though the couple had all the necessary documents.

This comes during a time when Montenegrin police have started arresting their own officers more often for allegedly demanding or receiving bribes. It is less common than it was a few years ago to see policemen taking cash without issuing tickets for supposed traffic offenses.

On the downside, however, it was a nonresident of Montenegro who reported B.C. Montenegrins don't dare because in such a small country (about 650,000 inhabitants), everyone is linked by a tight-knit network of family and friends. In addition, confidence in the judicial system is low, according to vast public opinion research.

Police and Judicial Obstruction

An annual US State Department report published in 2008, which covers 190 countries, says, "corruption in the police and judicial systems is one of the main problems in Montenegro." In addition, Tereza Sobyeski, a European Commission official, told daily newspaper *Vijesti* that she can see the Montenegrin government's desire to develop, but she also sees "poor results in fighting against corruption, organized crime and violations of human rights."

Indeed, no matter how often stories about alleged corruption appear in the media, cases are rarely brought to the judicial system. And if they are, the defendants usually are soon released. In the last two and a half years, only 70 verdicts for corruptive deeds were reached in Montenegrin courts, 37 of which are in effect.

Montenegrin police director Veselin Veljovic says he feels guilty when someone from an international institution warns that Montenegro isn't making great efforts in fighting corruption. He explains that the police are seriously trying

to fight this social problem. But he adds that during some jury trials — in which publicly known big-company directors or board presidents are suspected — police and judicial representatives have encountered obstructions and pressure.

According to data, Veljovic noted, 229 corruption-tainted criminal acts were prosecuted in Montenegro in 2007: 140 for abuse-of-office cases, 40 for criminal acts of unscrupulous work, 31 for misuse of industry authorizations, nine for giving a bribe, six for receiving a bribe, two felony charges for fraudulent accounting and one felony for forced bankruptcy. In the first five months of 2008, there were 38 criminal charges brought that included elements of corruption.

Corruption Is Everywhere

Corruption can hit Montenegrins almost anywhere. If parents want their children to attend a certain high school or university and there are no openings, a bribe may secure entry. When citizens need surgery that is covered by health insurance, doctors still expect an envelope. Many business transactions are not easy to complete without “strings attached.” The list goes on.

In everyday life, corruption is rarely perceived as a criminal act that can lead to jail. Instead, many corrupt acts are seen as “good business.” Citizens looking for favors can stimulate corruption by “encouraging” a state or local clerk to work faster on their cases with a simple cash “inducement.”

When I agreed to write a report about corruption, I began by talking to a group of young people who gather every night on the corner near where I live. I asked them to define the word “corruption.” None could. I briefly explained what it is. They asked if one goes to jail for that. After my response, the youngest was the first to speak. He said, “But that is how I enlisted in the school I wanted.” After him, a somewhat older friend said, “My sister passed the driving test after we paid a man from the committee.” In a couple of minutes, every young man from this group identified an “important” family event that could be defined as a corrupt act.

Nepotism is another form of corruption rampant in Montenegro. Family and social networks play an important role in getting top-level jobs. “Nepotism is often cited as the most frequent type of corruption in Montenegro,” according to “Corruption in Montenegro 2007: Overview over Major Problems and Status of Reforms,” a report

published by the Chr. Michelsen Institute (CMI). “However, there is no quantitative or overall analysis of such practices.”

Results of a poll of young people show that students think corruption is most prevalent in health care. The government, the judiciary, the police and education systems follow.

The general population — even those who work in the public sector — also think that corruption flourishes. A poll of state clerks and employees carried out by the government’s Directorate for Anti-corruption Initiative reveals this. Employees were asked to give their anonymous opinions about corruption in general public services. Many remarked openly about their own behavior, as well as that of their colleagues.

The results? Twenty-five percent admitted either participation in or experience with corruption. Those surveyed were aware that corruption is a “social evil,” an “abuse of official position and authorization” and “deviant behavior of giving and taking bribes.” Their awareness that this is wrong is evident, in their opinion, that corruption is the second sin, after prostitution. None of the respondents deny the existence of corruption in public service. More than 50 percent believe “corruption is present in some areas,” and one-quarter think it is “present to a large extent.”

On the other hand, some three-quarters of the clerks said they neglect to report corruption. The reasons they “close their eyes” to corruptive acts include: “the system of social control is not efficient enough to cope with corruptive affairs and to punish them”, “your family and you are jeopardized if you report corruption”, and the “investigation process is overburdened by the difficulty of proving corruption.”

The Montenegrin government, however, claims that the fight against corruption is making progress. “Thanks to some 275 measures of the innovative action plan for conducting the Program against corruption and organized crime, the result for the first half of this year [2008]... is a very satisfying rating,” said Montenegro’s Minister for International Economic Relations and European Integration Gordana Djurovic.

Construction: The Most Corrupt Industry

Corruption in the construction industry has been booming lately. Montenegro’s attractive Adriatic coast, beautiful

lakes, and mountain hinterlands attract many “rogue builders” who, apart from having no urban permits, build within coastal and national park zones.

Another problem, according to data published by the Chamber of Commerce of Montenegro (*Privredna komora*), is the length of time it takes to collect all the necessary documentation for construction — from eight to 15 months. Erection of a small residential or business building takes an additional 10 to 12 months. So the time needed to collect documents makes up some 55 to 80 percent of the time needed for the entire construction process.

“Such a long time span means that faster permit issuance can be ‘bought’ from state clerks,” explains Professor Milenko Popovi, one of the authors of “Analysis of Normative Arrangement of Construction Work,” prepared by The Montenegrin Chamber of Commerce. “Because of the number of permits involved and addresses that should be visited [to enforce these permits], it seems that decentralized corruption is the worst form of organized industrial corruption.”

The Montenegrin government and police department claim their fight against corruption is serious and progressing. However, the country’s general population, its government employees and international oversight bodies still see widespread corruption taking place in the public sector, in industry and in the daily lives of every Montenegrin.



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