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Interview with Miklos Marschall, Regional Director of Transparency International

1. CPI sometimes is referred to by international organizations and other entities as the basis for their evaluation, which is important to governments. What shall be response of the Governments when they don't agree with the CPI?

Transparency International is an honest organization and we are very open about the CPI: we always emphasize that the CPI is like a “warning system”, a “snapshot” that is not designed to monitor and measure progress over time. The CPI is a tool to raise public awareness about the serious threat corruption presents for any country.

We welcome discussions about the validity of our CPI! We even encourage governments to do deeper analysis, support in-depth research, review existing anti-corruption policies to “refute” the findings of CPI! Any public discourse on corruption helps us better understand the phenomenon and can lead to reforms. CPI is not an end in itself; it is a means to trigger reforms. So, if a government disagrees with the CPI, it should engage in a public dialogue with TI and other rating agencies as well as with our National Chapter in the country to find out the reasons why opinions differ and jointly design an anti-corruption strategy that can reduce corruption.

2. As the Regional Director for Europe and Central Asia and as the person who knows this region and Azerbaijan better than anyone in the TI, does your personal perception coincide with the CPI 2008?

As a matter of fact, the CPI score on Azerbaijan this year contradicts to my own professional opinion about the situation in Azerbaijan and our chapter in the country feels the same. I was also surprised by the fact that the CPI did not reflect the improvement in the anti-corruption situation other analyses – EITI, GRECO, WB, etc – have recognized. However, such a difference is quite normal. In-depth analysis can show a different picture than broad-based aggregate perceptions.

3. Can it happen that the TI as the institution does not agree with CPI score for one or another country? If yes, in such cases what are the TI's instruments to remedy to such situations?

The CPI is done by an external academic institution – University of Passau, Germany – in order to avoid any possible conflict of interest for TI. TI has therefore no control over the individual country scores. It can happen – as it did in this case - - that the CPI contradicts to TI's own experience. Again, TI is very open about it. We are in a permanent process of improving our own tools. That is why we have over time developed other indices like the Global Corruption Barometer that give more in-depth information about corruption.

4. How much does CPI score cover the real state of corruption in countries? Can it be used for measuring the level of anticorruption reforms carried out by countries?

As I said above, the CPI was not designed to measure trends. It is a composite index put together by extracting corruption-related information from other comparative surveys. Consequently, it shows the global “big picture” and is not a good instrument to measure the level of anti-corruption reforms of a certain country year by year. As you know it always takes time to change perceptions. Perceptions, opinions follow real life change always with some delay.

5. The CPI 2008 index for Azerbaijani contradicts the findings of the recent Doing Business 2009 Report of the World bank, which names Azerbaijan among top reformers in the world. How can you explain this?

This is indeed a real contradiction. Such differences in perceptions make an in-depth analysis of the corruption situation in Azerbaijan imperative. Why is it so that two serious surveys come up with very different results? The answers can be given only by an in-depth analysis; we call it a “National Integrity System” survey TI has done in many countries in the world. Until such an analysis is done, I can only speculate: I think the two indices measure somewhat different things. The WB index is about the business environment; and our index is more about the public sector. While perceptions for doing business may signal welcome and long-awaited improvements in the way business is being done in Azerbaijan, the level of corruption is a different matter. Azerbaijan has a robust economy and is attractive for international business. Anything that makes the life of a company easier in Azerbaijan is a welcome development, and I think this is what the improving scores of the “Doing Business” 2009 indicate.

The CPI is a broader index, and it reflects the state of affairs mostly in the public sector. While doing business might become easier in Azerbaijan, observers are apparently still critical of the capacity of many public sector institutions. It can easily be that the private sector is way ahead of the public sector – government bureaucracy – in terms of efficiency, transparency and service-orientation.

The stagnation of the corruption index – I would call it “stagnation” because a 0.2 drop is within statistical errors – is another reminder that more needs to be done in public sector reforms. In spite of the low score in the CPI, I believe the international business community has confidence in the government of Azerbaijan that it will continue its reform efforts.

6. How would you evaluate established cooperation between the Government of Azerbaijan and local and international civil society institutes and TI? To what extent this cooperation affects the CPI?

It is in our “philosophy” that our work is way beyond the “naming and shaming” act. I think TI has earned its global reputation because we are interested in change, we are interested in reforms. Therefore, we are a constructive partner for any government that is genuinely interested in anti-corruption reforms. We publish the CPI which is often an unfriendly “warning signal”, but if the governments hear the signal, we are ready to sit down with the government and engage in a serious dialogue about anti-corruption strategies and reforms. I can tell you we have excellent professional relationship with the Government of Azerbaijan, especially with the people responsible for anti-corruption reforms in the government. The fact that the TI European and Central Asian Regional Meeting took place in Baku last year shows the level of our partnership. We have an excellent National Chapter in this country, so our relationship is very good. In fact, our chairperson, Ms. Huguette Labelle met your President when she was in Baku. I understand the disappointment because of the low CPI score; however, I think it gives even more reason to work together! TI is impressed by the good work of the anti-corruption Commission of the Republic of Azerbaijan and remains fully committed to partner with the Government.

7. What do you think the Government should do to improve CPI score in the future?

Anti-corruption reforms never offer quick fixes and easy political gains. Whoever is serious about anti-corruption reforms should think in decades and not years. In the case of Azerbaijan, one can say that the

government should do even more to convince the broader business environment that Azerbaijan is on the right track of reforms. While expert analyses signal positive change, it takes time until this translates in better “perceptions” by the broader business audience.

One key aspect of good reforms is that they involve civil society organizations: TI Azerbaijan – the local chapter of the global TI movement – is ready to participate in the reform process.

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