

Risks of corruption and the development of self-control of public officials

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Abstract: *Ethics, or the ethical self-control of public officials, is considered to be one of the principal factors on which the proper use of administrative discretion depends. Weak personal ethics may result in corrupt behaviour, the misuse of office for private purposes. The concept of ethical self-control, or ethos, can be used to explain the differences in levels of corruption in various countries. Where the civilising process has led to development of stronger ethical self-control, less corruption can be expected. Differences in the civilising processes and problems of corruption and ethics in Denmark, Finland and Latvia are considered in this article.*

Keywords: *Corruption, public officials, ethical habitus, civilising process, public administration*

Introduction

Corruption imposes high costs on society and political order. Nowadays researchers of corruption generally agree on that point (Klitgaard 1991; Rose-Ackerman 1999, 2006). Realisation of the harmful consequences of corruption, including its negative impact on economic growth, has encouraged policy-makers to undertake measures to curb or prevent it from happening in the public and private sectors. Anti-corruption activities in many countries, especially from the beginning of the 1990s, have become an increasingly international movement.

A number of explanations of the causes of corruption have been suggested. One of the most widely used explanations is simply that the legal power of state officials, their monopoly position in combination with their opportunities to create obstacles to citizens and entrepreneurs offer favourable conditions for corruption to emerge. And when the public sector is large, officials have more opportunities for extortion and rent-seeking (Khan 2006: 219; Lambsdorff 2006: 4). The problem with this explanation is that it is not supported by the empirical evidence. Thus, research on developing countries shows little impact of such factors as liberal or interventionist policies on corruption, and Scandinavian countries provide a case contrary to the hypothesis, where an extended public sector coexists with fairly low levels of corruption.

In this article I propose to explain corruption by using the conceptual tools of the sociology of Norbert Elias, and in particular the notion of the civilising process – the changes of habitus in the direction of development of stricter self-control in conjunction with the process of state formation. It can be argued that in the course of the civilising process and state formation there develops an ethical habitus of public officials - internalised expectations towards behaviour in the role of a public official. As institutions of state develop, demands arise for a particular kind of conduct in the context of state administration, and when internalised, this becomes 'second nature'. Ethical habitus then prevents corruption from taking place or from becoming a major problem. In this article I present and analyse some material from interviews with public officials which I

conducted in Denmark, Finland and Latvia in 2011, the purpose of which was to identify and characterise 'ethical habitus' and its influence on the officials' conduct in relation to problems of corruption.

Explanations of corrupt behaviour

The definition of corruption is contested, but there is a basic consensus on what kind of behaviour generally constitutes 'corruption', especially as far as the public sector is concerned. Thus, in legal acts, policy papers and academic writings one can find that behaviour such as bribery, paying 'kickbacks', extortion, embezzlement, trading into influence, selling official information, exceeding official authority would be considered as 'corruption', that is, 'abuse' of public office, when pursuing non-official goals.

The international non-governmental organisation Transparency International currently defines corruption as 'an abuse of entrusted power for private gain' [1][#N1]. The definition includes both public and private sectors. It has been argued that the notion of entrusted power and its abuse is universal, because the betrayal of trust is a universal moral phenomenon and can be found in any culture. The state involves a great number of trusting relations; their breach may therefore have harmful consequences on a larger scale (Brown 2006: 72). In this article I deal with the issue of corruption in state administrations.

One of the leading experts on corruption, Johann Graf Lambsdorff, has provided an overview of existing explanations of the causes of corruption. The assumption that government officials have an inherent inclination to enrich themselves at the expense of citizens, and that a more extensive public sector and more interventionist policies lead to higher corruption has little support from the empirical research. There is much variation in the behaviour of public officials which is not explained by such a general proposition (Lambsdorff 2006: 4). There is more support for the hypothesis that poor quality of regulation leads to corruption. When government regulations are vague and lax, that may induce citizens to make corrupt deals and also gives officials more opportunities for manipulation. Lambsdorff critically notes that it is sometimes difficult to say whether bad regulation causes or is caused by corruption; that the distinction between bad and good regulation is not obvious; that the hypothesis has been tested on a limited number of countries and has not been controlled by other variables (Lambsdorff 2006: 7). It has been suggested that absence of economic competition and lack of openness can provoke corruption. When there is lack of competition and procurement rules are not transparent, public officials have more opportunities to extort bribes. Although there is some support to this hypothesis, increased competition may in fact lead to more corruption because firms will seek to ensure that their bid wins in the competition (Lambsdorff 2006: 10). It has been suggested that the form of government affects the level of corruption. There is no simple association between the political regime or government structure and the level of corruption. Some authoritarian regimes may establish standards of integrity and be relatively non-corrupt, just like some moderate democratic regimes. Some authoritarian regimes may be less corrupt than moderately democratic regimes. The transition from authoritarian regime to democracy may be associated with increased corruption. It has been found, however, that the developed forms of democracy and higher levels of political participation are associated with lower levels of corruption (Lambsdorff 2006: 11).

Researchers, using data from international survey programmes, have found that higher levels of generalised trust are associated with lower levels of corruption. It also has been found that greater power distance, or expectation and acceptance of an unequal distribution of power in the country, are correlated with a higher level of corruption. Such 'traditional' attitude as strong loyalty to one's family is correlated with corruption, as it is likely that, in the collision between official and family interests, loyalty to one's relatives will be given priority. A high percentage of Protestants in the population was found to correlate with a lower level of

corruption. Domination of the quest for material success in value orientations and feelings of being threatened by uncertainty were found to be conducive to corruption (Lambsdorff 2006: 17–19). Lambsdorff concludes, however, that ‘cultural’ variables, taken separately, explain only a fraction of the variance in levels of corruption (Lambsdorff 2006: 17), and do not, in fact, constitute a coherent framework for explaining the causes of corruption.

In a report on corruption in transition countries prepared by the World Bank a positive association between the number of years of statehood and higher levels of integrity in the public sector was identified. States which have a longer history as independent polities have lower levels of corruption (World Bank, 2000: xx). This publication does not provide a theoretical explanation for this association, but one can interpret it by using the concepts of the sociology of Norbert Elias. It takes time, usually several generations, according to Elias, for patterns of self-control of the people to change. The civilising process is closely associated with the process of state formation because it is the establishment of a durable monopoly on the use of violence which provides the precondition for the development of stable patterns of self-control.

The discussion of the patterns of self-control of public officials can be pursued in terms of the professional ethics of public administrators. The factor of ethics is included in some approaches derived from the rational choice perspective and principal–agent theory. In the framework of principal–agent theory, a ‘principal’ hires an agent who is entitled to act in the interests of the principal. But in his or her actions and in interactions with the clients, the agent may pursue his or her own interests at the expense of the interests of the patron. The agent coming across an opportunity will try to use it for his or her benefit, for example, by misappropriating the entrusted resources or by extorting a bribe from a client. The agent will engage in acts of corruption if the agent, in taking decisions, enjoys a position of monopoly, has discretion for taking a decision and displays a lack of effective accountability. Thus, the formula of corrupt action, according to Klitgaard, can be expressed in the following way: corruption equals monopoly plus discretion minus accountability (Klitgaard 1991: 75). Klitgaard also suggested a more elaborate version of the equation. This included the size of the salary of an official, the risk of being caught, the severity of punishment, the amount of bribe offered, and the moral satisfaction which comes if a public official chooses not to engage in a corrupt deal and a sense of moral loss if an official acts corruptly. [2][#N2]

Ethics and self-control of public officials in the civilising process

What makes the component of personal ethics relevant is that a public administrator typically possesses some degree of discretion, because the rules cannot cover all cases, and in order for them to be justly applied, exercise of judgement is necessary; and it is not feasible to ensure total control over every agent’s actions.

The American political scientist John Rohr has emphasised the active role that appointed public officials play in decision-making processes through the exercise of discretion. They occupy a position, which is that of subordination and autonomy at the same time. He suggests that one should look upon discretion as a process. It is not simply a ‘window’ framed by the rules, wherein an official has the possibility to choose and exercise judgement. Through their discretionary activity bureaucrats, ‘advise, report, respond, initiate, inform, question, caution, complain, applaud, encourage, rebuke, promote, retard and mediate’ (Rohr 1986: 48). It has been observed in the studies of organisations and public administrations that decisional premises move up and down the hierarchical levels (Simon 1976; Perrow 1986; Luhmann 1982). That is why bureaucracy has a substantial influence on elected politicians. Improper exercise of administrative discretionary authority can lead to ethical and legal problems, such as abuse of administrative discretion or an excessive willingness on

the part of officials to further the goals of special interests (Rohr 1989: 41). Rohr formulates the core of the ethical problem pertaining to a public official in the following way:

Because bureaucrats govern through authority that is discretionary, and because they are not elected, the ordinary means of popular control are inapplicable. To the extent that formal, legal, or institutional controls over the bureaucrat's behaviour are either nonexistent or ineffective, bureaucrats have an ethical obligation to respond to the values of the people in whose name they govern (Rohr 1989: 4).

In Rohr's view, the values which should govern the decision-making of civil servants are the 'regime values', that is, basically, the values implicated in the constitution and their authoritative interpretations. But one may ask, what makes public officials learn or internalise the normative orientations peculiar to their professional roles? Rohr has pointed to the role of 'history' in the formation of value-orientations. Thus, he wrote: 'An attitude or a passion or a principle must have a history – either personal or societal – before it becomes a "value"' (Rohr 1989:78). If one uses the conceptual tools of Norbert Elias's sociology, one could say that it takes a civilising process to create a particular kind of self-control on individual or collective levels.

Public administration is engaged in providing services to the public and at the same time in regulating social agents (Rosenbloom 1998: 14). The functions of providing services and placing constraints on groups and individuals are intertwined. Public administration allocates resources and values and acts in order to solve communal problems of society, but in a way that is binding to the society as a whole. It uses, in David Rosenbloom's formulation, managerial, political and legal theories and processes for the provision of regulatory and service functions for the society or some segments of it. In a democratic society, public administration is a part of a political system through which the society's demands and expectations, expressed by means of the electoral process, are converted into managerial, administrative actions.

Public administration grows with the increasing centralisation of the state and the growth of public services, the responsibility for which, viewed from the historical perspective, is gradually transferred from local to central authorities (Raadschelders 2000). In addition to the control of violence within the borders of the state and taxation, a number of other functions are added which are related to social security, education, health care, transportation and communication infrastructures. Elias regards the process of state formation in conjunction with the process of development of economic functions, as a process of integration which is complementary to the process of differentiation (Elias 1977).

That public sector ethics has a distinctive character has been argued by a number of authors (for example, Durkheim 2005; Dobel 1999; du Gay 2000; Rohr 1989). Elias also argued that patterns of self-control vary according to different functions in society and the position an individual occupies in it (Elias 2001: 369). Self-control may be strong in some spheres of action, for example, related to the private sphere, but may be weak in other spheres, such as in matters of the state and politics (Elias 1994: 60, 2008: 301).

From the point of view of the theory of the civilising process, the development of the self-control and ethics of public officials can be seen in the following way. First, in response to the problem of control of the social processes, and in particular, the control of violence, the institutions of the state develop. Then, in response to the problem of control of those who exercise the administrative power, the process of bureaucratisation unfolds, in the process of which hierarchies, procedures of decision-making and codes of conduct and the professionalisation of the civil service develop. Further developments are related to the phenomenon of functional democratisation in the course of which power differentials between groups are decreased, and control changes from being mostly unilateral to being multilateral and reciprocal (Elias 2009: 66).

Bureaucracies find themselves in an environment which checks their decisions and activities, which increases the pressure and incentives to exercise stricter self-restraint. Functional democratisation also leads to the widening of the scope of emotional identification with the ruled, that is, the citizenry, and in the nation-state that becomes a feature of the we-image of the holders of political and administrative offices. [3],[#N3]It can be added that increasing global interdependence facilitates the generalisation and dissemination of standards of self-restraint through international organisations' adoption of these standards in the countries which implement anti-corruption policies, and through more intensive cooperation between the actors across the states.

The civilising process involving public administration thus outlined takes a long time to unfold; in the case of European states it took centuries. When changes in institutions are brought about by planned action within a short period of time, as in the case of engineered modernisation, there may arise the problem of mismatch between the habitus, patterns of self-control, and institutional structures, referred to by Elias in his study on the Germans. In the field of public administration this may cause problems related to corruption.

Formation of ethos of public officials in the civilising process: the case of Denmark

In this section I will attempt to reconstruct an outline of the civilising processes that could lead to the formation of a particular kind of ethos – role-specific normative orientations, or a pattern of self-control peculiar to state officials in the case of Denmark.

I will briefly outline how some aspects of state formation could be linked to the development of some patterns of behaviour in the context of state administration, using the case of Denmark. The characterisation of ethical demands towards public officials is taken from Max Weber's texts on bureaucracy.

Obedience. Max Weber pointed to obedience as one of the principles of conduct of bureaucrats. He considered that it was characteristic of an official to honour the execution of commands of a superior even if they contradict the official's personal conviction.

An official who receives a directive which he considers wrong can and is supposed to object it. If his superior insists on its execution, it is his duty and even his honour to carry it out as if it corresponded to his innermost conviction, and to demonstrate in this fashion that his sense of duty stands above his personal preference [...] This is the ethos of office (Weber 1978: 1404).

The centralisation of the state, the formation of a durable central authority was achieved, as has also been shown in the works by Elias, in the age of absolutism. In Denmark absolutism was introduced in 1660. The Royal Law of 1665 proclaimed the absolute power of the king, which was to be realised by his appointed officials, and that all official business be conducted in the king's name. The king subordinated all officials to his authority and had the power to appoint and dismiss the officials. Civil servants on assuming office gave an oath to be faithful and obedient to the king (Lind 2000: 180).The administration was initially organised after a pattern of colleges, with collegial decision-making and few levels of hierarchy; as the volume of official business grew, the internal hierarchical division of colleges grew with the delegation of authority downwards. Administrative reforms set out the separation of the office from domestic life, and subjected officials to work discipline, such as official procedures – written instructions for handling cases, work schedules, rules of bookkeeping and the filing system. The Danish Chancery was charged with the task of overseeing the

correctness and lawfulness of official proceedings and the activities of state officials and carried out inspections. After 1848, with the fall of absolutism, a ministerial system was introduced which further emphasised the principle of authority and obedience in the hierarchically organised state administration.

Expertness and professionalism. In his description of bureaucracy Weber wrote that the more complex civilisation becomes, the more administration demands a 'personally detached and strictly objective expert' (Weber 1978: 975). He also mentioned the role of knowledge as characteristic of rationality and the power of bureaucracy: 'Bureaucratic administration means fundamentally domination through knowledge. This is the feature of it which makes it specifically rational' (Weber 1978: 225). The development of professional specialisation in state administration is linked to centralisation and the differentiation of the organs of government. Before the introduction of absolutism in Denmark, most of the administrative tasks were performed on the local level within the estates. But the economic development of society, the growing differentiation of functions and the increasing interdependency of people within the borders of the state required that some administrative functions be performed on the central level. The significant change in the method of administration since the introduction of absolutism was that areas of administration came to be divided not along the territorial principle, but according to the thematic division of cases (Jørgensen, Westrup 1982: 26). That permitted and demanded a more professional and specialised treatment of cases and at the same time facilitated centralisation. Centralisation of the state finance system required professionalism, uprightness and efficiency. Cases were handled through a professional routine and carried out in a definite way, according to the rules of journalising and filing, some of which were followed through the time of absolutism and thereafter (Jørgensen, Westrup 1982: 33). Law was perceived as fundamental for the legitimacy of the absolutist regime and the collegial system of administration stressed legal certainty (Hortsbøll 1988; Knudsen 2000a: 468). From the end of the eighteenth century law graduates were given priority as candidates for offices. From 1821, it became mandatory for civil servants to have a university degree, but employees with a law degree were predominant, which contributed to the homogenisation of the state bureaucracy (Knudsen 2006: 73). Later in the nineteenth century, the lawyers' monopoly on the positions in state administration was relaxed. There was an inflow of economics and political science graduates into the state administration. With the growth of administrative tasks and institutions of new departments in the twentieth century there was an increase in employees with other professional training, for instance, education, health care, engineering (Knudsen 2000b: 154).

Loyalty. In his characterisation of bureaucracy, Weber mentioned loyalty among civil servants' ethical dispositions. In his view, loyalty in bureaucracy is characterised by impersonality, because a bureaucrat's loyalty is primarily to the functional purposes of the office:

It is decisive for the modern loyalty to an office that, in the pure type, it does not establish a relationship to a *person*, like the vassal's or disciple's faith under feudal or patrimonial authority, but rather is devoted to *impersonal* and *functional* purposes (Weber 1978: 959).

Since the introduction of absolutism in Denmark, it was important for the king to form a group of loyal civil servants. He set out to lessen his dependence on nobility and tried to balance the influence of the nobility with the rising bourgeoisie. The basis of recruitment was the education and experience of the candidates. The king admitted to the civil service the candidates from the bourgeoisie also counting on their loyalty. The bourgeois origin of the civil servants made them dependent on the king and thus his loyal servants. Immediately after the introduction of absolutism, the number of civil servants from the bourgeoisie and nobility was evenly balanced, but by the beginning of the nineteenth century civil servants from the nobility constituted only a small portion. At the beginning loyalty was personal. That was also because at the beginning the duties of an

official were not precisely defined (Knudsen 2006: 68). Later on, the volume of administrative tasks grew and procedures and routines became defined in a more detailed way. This made the participation of the king in the business of administration less decisive. Personal loyalty to the king was gradually replaced by the loyalty to an impersonal legal order and the state. With the introduction of the ministerial system in 1848, public servants' loyalty to the minister came to the fore, but was balanced with the loyalty to the state and the legal order (Knudsen 2000b: 81). Danish political scientist Tim Knudsen writes that in cases when there appeared to be a conflict between the interests of the government and the state, the civil servants refused to be mere 'private' servants of the minister. They were servants of the state in the first place (Knudsen 2000b: 13).

Neutrality. According to Weber, neutrality constitutes an ethical principle of a bureaucrat, which differentiates him from the role of a politician. A bureaucrat should be politically neutral, and stay outside the political struggle.

To be above parties – in truth, to remain outside the realm of the struggle for power – is the official's role, while the struggle for personal power, and the resulting personal responsibility, is the lifeblood of the politician as well as of the entrepreneur (Weber 1978: 1404).

From the introduction of absolutism in Denmark, civil servants were first of all servants of the king. But in the years following the introduction of the constitutional regime and the institution of representative parliament the notion of the political neutrality of a public servant crystallised. There was a period of controversy in the relations between the parliament and the government. In 1872, the Left won the parliamentary elections, but were not allowed to form the government. The ministers were appointed by the king, who chose the candidates from the Right. The conflict lasted until 1901, when the Left, which won the elections, formed the government. In the years of this constitutional controversy, officials in state administration learned that it was safer and more appropriate to their role to stay away from the struggle between the political ideologies. Tim Knudsen writes that during that period the civil servants who openly supported the Right had to pay the cost in the form of hostility of most of the population; but those who supported the Left could be removed from the office. From that time on, the emphasis in the civil servants' role was on neutrality, caution and correctness (Knudsen 2006: 141). There The ideal of the neutral civil servant, who could not identify with any political movement, was formed; a concept which is still valid. Civil servants were understood primarily as bearers of continuity, and of expert knowledge and proficiency in handling cases (Knudsen 2000b: 13). Nowadays appointed public officials in Denmark are increasingly involved in defining policies, not simply implementing them. But they are still expected not to intervene directly in matters which involve stark differences between the government and opposition (Knudsen 2008: 235).

Integrity and non-corruptibility. Danish historian Mette Frisk Jensen considers that it may be correct to assume that before the introduction of absolutism, corruption in the state administration in the form of nepotism, sales of offices, fraud and bribery were widespread in Denmark, and perhaps existed at the same level as in other more advanced European states (Frisk Jensen 2008). From 1660 the king tightened control over officials, introduced a system of supervision over the activities of officials and laws prohibiting corruption, such as the law of 1690 specifying the penalty for fraud in office, and the law of 1676 which banned bribery and the acceptance of gifts by civil servants. The administration of civil servants was the responsibility of the king and it is likely that he considered corruption a threat to his authority. The punishments for misconduct were very harsh; civil servants found guilty of corruption could be imprisoned for life. Generally, as Tim Knudsen considers, there was already a fairly low level of corruption in eighteenth-century Denmark, partly because the finances of the state were healthy and the king was able to pay a regular salary to his officials. State administration in Denmark was less corrupt by that period in comparison to many

other European countries (Knudsen 2006: 67). An increase in corruption was observed in the years around the Napoleonic war and thereafter, from 1810 to 1830. The costs of the war were very high; the state suffered defeat and went bankrupt. The number of cases of embezzlement increased during that period, as did the number of legal prosecutions. From 1830 until 1860 a set of legal and administrative reforms was introduced, including improvements of book-keeping, a new penal code with a more detailed description of corrupt acts, and a new system of payment to civil servants. According to M. Frisk Jensen, corruption in Denmark had decreased by 1860 and has generally remained low ever since (Frisk Jensen 2008).

Although Weber did not emphasise it in his texts on bureaucracy, the process of democratisation puts further demands on the ethical codes of civil servants; values of service to the public, transparency and responsiveness become increasingly important. In Denmark, the beginning of process of democratisation can be traced to 1849, when the parliament and limited representation rights were introduced. The rights of representation were further widened in 1901 and 1915; parliamentarism as a political system was formally adopted in Denmark in 1953 (Jespersen 2004: 70).

The purpose of this outline of the development of civil servants' role-specific normative orientations has been to show that it takes a history and a civilising process for the principles of conduct in state administration to crystallise and stabilise. It can be noted now that Elias related the 'strength of pattern of civilization' of some European countries to the *length and continuity of state-formation process* (Elias 1996: 281, 283). He also observed, with reference to Denmark, that a long and continuous state-formation process produces a social habitus of individuals that is attuned to life together and that matches this particular form of survival unit – the nation-state (Elias 1991: 219). When it comes to the ethical habitus of state officials, one can point to the *continuity of the state administration* in Denmark and its traditions. Continuity of the forms of administration is exemplified, for instance, by the tradition of a high taxation, which has been in place for more than 300 years, to the way of recruiting officials, and certain forms of administrative routine (Knudsen 2000b: 54; 2006: 62). But continuity in Denmark is also perceived as a value and is linked to the aforementioned principles of conduct, such as neutrality and loyalty to the state. As Knudsen remarks, according to the classical model of bureaucracy, which Denmark has followed very closely, it should be resistant to the changing 'spirit of the time' and the moods of the people, which contributes to the quality of the rule of law (Knudsen 2000b: 54). Even though elements of new public management have been introduced in public administration in Denmark, it has retained the classical bureaucratic expectations towards officials, such as 'objectivity, professionalism, truthfulness, political neutrality, legality and the demand to treat everybody equally' (Knudsen 2008: 244).

Risks of corruption and relation between external control and self-control

What I propose in this article is that the different patterns of state-formation and civilising processes condition the formation of different patterns of ethical habitus in society and state administration. In *The Germans*, Elias formulated the following theoretical conclusion of his study of the civilising processes:

The hallmark of civilizing processes, as my researches have revealed, is a change in the relation between external social constraints and individual self-constraints. [...] Put briefly, in the course of the civilizing process the self-constraint apparatus becomes stronger relative to external constraints (Elias 1996: 33, 34).

Reinterpreting this passage in the context of the present subject matter, it can be suggested that a more lengthy and continuous process of development of the state and its institutions and civilising processes leads to stronger ethical self-control in state administration.

I have tried to put to the test the proposition formulated above in interviews with public officials in Denmark, Finland and Latvia. In 2011, I conducted ten semi-structured interviews in each country with public officials from ministries or state agencies. The respondents were mostly middle-range managers, although there were high level officials (for example, managers of an agency or deputy state secretaries) in each country, as well as employees at the level of senior specialists. The length of the interviews was from half an hour to two hours and covered a wide range of questions about the prevention of corruption, and ethics in state administration. One of the questions that I posed to the respondents was the following: ‘What is the most important factor that limits or prevents corruption from taking place in your country: external control, that is, the law-enforcement agencies (police, anti-corruption agency etc.), internal organisational controls within the institution or the self-control of public officials?’ In this section I present quotations from the respondents’ answers to this question. In my view, their replies demonstrate the differences in ethical habitus in the three countries. The common pattern was that in Denmark and Finland the respondents put more emphasis on the importance of self-control, while in Latvia external control appeared to be more prominent.

Denmark. Developments in the state administration in Denmark have been outlined above. The process of state formation in Denmark can be traced from the Middle Ages, but the development of the state administration from a proto-modern form beginning from the early modern times, the second half of the seventeenth century. The level of corruption in Denmark is evaluated as one of the lowest in the world. In recent years it has been ranked by Transparency International as among the least corrupt countries in the world. [4],[#N4]

In Denmark, respondents emphasised the importance of self-control and culture, but also mentioned internal control within institutions and external institutions of control. There were those who emphasised tradition.

One civil servant pointed to the ethics and values of public servants and the tradition in the public sector. In comparison to these, control mechanisms are less important:

I think the last point – the ethics and the values of the public servants and tradition. Tradition in the public sector. Of course, we have control mechanisms, but I think the most important thing is the ethics and the values of public servants (DK 1).

Another respondent stressed the role of tradition which began a long time ago. She said that thanks to this tradition it has become a norm that there is virtually no corruption. She referred both to her experience and the study on corruption in Denmark she had heard about:

I think tradition plays a great role. [...] I think that it is an important factor that there is a tradition that we don’t do corruption. And that is kind of ingrained and carried on in an organisation. [...] I just read a review of a historical study [...] I do not know the details, but I think the point was that in maybe sixteen-hundred-and-something or seventeen-hundred-and-something there were certain procedures that the king within the administration [...] kind of set up certain procedures to prevent corruption developing and spreading, [...] somehow it became a norm that corruption was not an option or was not easy (DK2). [5],[#N5]

Another official said he was not sure about the relative weight of these factors, but said that in his opinion the role of self-control should not be underestimated. He used the term 'internalisation' to characterise the formation of dispositions and behaviour of civil servants:

If you ask someone also in this office they would say, 'Well, of course, that is the outside control mechanisms.' But I do not believe that. But I think it is a mixture. [...] But I think that one of the elements that has been neglected so far is the individual, what I try to describe in Freudian terms, you know, the internalisation of norms. To me that's very central. It is the key element in the understanding the behaviour of civil servants (DK3).

There were respondents who mentioned the factor of self-control in combination with organisational controls and procedures, as well as the factor of a fairly high salary:

I think it is mostly the self-control of public officials, the sense that being corrupt is very wrong. And not at all compatible with being a public servant. And you don't need it as a public servant either. Your salary is fine. Which is also of course important. [...] I think the fear of the police or the fear of being caught by the agencies is not very important. But mostly in government office you will have sensible internal controls which limit the possibilities of corruption and you have quite a strong sense that that is not right (DK4).

I think it is mostly self-control. Not necessarily on the individual level. In a public organisation it is very hard to make big decisions in the dark. [...] When you get into bureaucracy you enter into an institution with a lot of [...] stories, a lot of norms, a lot of attitudes towards various problems and these things are both ethical and practical. And of course you are shaped by where you end up sitting basically (DK5).

In the last two quotations the respondents referred to the role of internal control on the organisational level. The respondent's opinion that the ethical issues are also practical is close to James Q. Wilson's view that robust organisational culture enables the administrators to economise on other incentives for ensuring compliance (Wilson 1989:95).

Some respondents said that to behave in a non-corrupt way is a cultural pattern in Denmark, but expressed that differently. One civil servant emphasised the notion of equality which reinforces the non-corrupt pattern of behaviour and that the Danish habitus contains internalised social control and certain behavioural dispositions:

Definitely two last things in Denmark. We are a little country, there is a lot of control, there are always people who are looking over your shoulder and checking whether everything is all right. And it is possible to do it. It is possible to be transparent. [...] It is an ethics thing, that people are not cheated. It is a part of the Danish habitus or it is just a way we think, in a way (DK6).

Another civil servant said that it is mostly 'culture' that prevents corrupt behaviour and that severe punishments for corrupt crimes are an expression of cultural condemnation of corruption:

I do not think that it is control that keeps it out. I think it is a cultural issue. It is very much a cultural issue. [...] So giving an answer to your question, is it control, is it public-regulated or self-justice [...] I think it is the last. [...] But of course because it is a cultural issue the punishment is also very severe if you engage in any kind of corruption (DK7).

When talking about public sector ethics, Danish respondents expressed a generally positive self-image. Elias saw self-control and self-image as interlinked. That is, the possibility to hold a positive self-image is associated with a demand for stricter self-control, whereas a negative self-image usually leads to looser self-control (Elias 1996; Elias, Scotson 1994). In particular, the collective self-image of a state which has a long and continuous history, according to Elias, is a factor, strengthening the self-control of those who belong to this political community.

Finland. Finland is a relatively young state which became independent in 1918. Before the revolution in Russia in 1917, Finland was an autonomous duchy of the Russian Empire. The duchy of Finland was formed as a consequence of the military conquest of the eastern Swedish territory by Russia and the separation of these territories from Sweden in 1809. Researchers of the administrative history of Finland point out that the administrative law and administrative culture has been carried over from the earlier period of the Swedish reign and maintained and further developed through the nineteenth century (Tiihonen 2003: 100). The administrative reforms undertaken in the early modern period in Sweden and Denmark were similar. Generally, both in Sweden and Denmark the state administrations are already characterised as relatively well functioning bureaucratic systems in the eighteenth century (Gustavsson 1994). There are indications that back in the middle of the nineteenth century administrative integrity was in good shape in Finland. Paula Tiihonen's research on the statistics of crimes related to corruption shows that in the middle of the nineteenth century, one finds only a limited number of cases of corruption, decreasing every year, especially taking into account the growing number of civil servants (Tiihonen 2003:101). Tiihonen considers that the basic legal norms preventing corruption have been in place for more than 100 years and she mentions four legal principles which have informed the normative acts at various levels: the principles of equality, objectivity, proportionality and commitment (Tiihonen 2003: 100). She considers that Finns have formed general attitudes towards legality, integrity and corruption which include an awareness that the rules are 'old, short, clear and taken seriously', and despite the possibility of different interpretations of legal cases, 'there are limits for corruption and bad governance' (Ibid). Nowadays Finland is characterised as a country with low level of corruption by Transparency International measurements. Like Denmark, it is ranked among the countries with the lowest levels of corruption in the world.

One top-level official expressed the opinion that people do not accept corruption because there is a long tradition of state administration with little or no corruption. So there has been a continuity of expectations both of civil servants and citizens that the administration should function without corruption. He traced this tradition to the time, when the current territory of Finland was a part of Sweden:

My personal theory is that Finnish people do not accept it, when it comes to street level corruption. And this is a very long tradition, I suppose. Maybe even from the Swedish era. I haven't done any research, but this is my perception of the situation, that the culture is such among normal people that if some civil servant said, 'Give me some money', they would go to the authorities. And the culture among civil servants is also important, that they behave correctly. So I think old tradition of old administration (FI1).

Another official had made studies of the history of the administration in Finland in his capacity of a civil servant. Answering this question, he referred to the administrative tradition coming from Sweden and the continuity of this tradition. Specifically, he mentioned the rule-bound administration which Finland inherited from Sweden and the detailed provisions concerning the duties and rights of civil servants and also stipulations with regard to offences related to corruption:

Finland belongs to those Scandinavian countries which applied the stipulations of law very strictly. Regulations from the central government defined in a very precise way what would follow from wrongdoings. People have followed those rules. [...] I have been reading those very old regulations from the seventeenth century. They are very detailed. [...] There are very detailed regulations concerning wrongdoings and how they are punished. And that Swedish tradition was adopted in 1809, when Finland was separated from Sweden. The Swedish administrative system was moved from Sweden in a comprehensive way (FI2).

One senior civil servant replied that the most important factors are values and self-control, and referred to a distant past and a long history which has formed certain normative dispositions in Finnish people that are inimical to corrupt behaviour in the public sector. In his opinion one should start the explanation with the sixteenth century, the influence of Protestantism and social control, and the rules and values which were developed in communities. He especially emphasised the role of trust and honesty as values which developed in the Protestant communities, as well as the early spread of education which went along with Protestantism:

In Finland we haven't had very strong agencies or separate agencies for anti-corruption. [...] Most important are values and also self-control. [...] If you ask me, I would say that this is very much related to the history of our nation, country and state. Later on it was a state. There are few factors which I think determine it. It is, you see, how people have learned to live in the communities, in the villages, in the municipalities, etc. So it goes back to those rules and values which were sort of developed earlier. [...] I would even link it to the societal development, which was in the fifteenth, sixteenth century. Everybody learned to read and write. This was closely related to religion, I mean Protestantism (FI3).

Another civil servant ranked the importance of factors that prevent corruption as follows: culture; civil service conditions, i.e. salary and benefits; and then the controlling body. He also mentioned that the legal regulations are not very detailed, but that the civil service can manage without it. This indicates, in his opinion, that it is more a question of learned behaviour, culture, or self-control:

The basic culture, then the civil service conditions, then the controlling body. How to manage this? I don't know. I am hesitant here. Maybe we have managed to do without any strict control or conscious control over civil service ethics. We just execute the legal procedures. We have legislation. But as far as I know it is not very detailed legislation. So it is more or less a question of learned behaviour rather than control (FI4).

Another civil servant likewise said that it is more a matter of learned behaviour and culture. She underlined the importance of the internalised legal reasoning characteristic of civil servants and people generally in Finland:

I think this is a matter of behaviour and culture. Finnish people are [...] almost always thinking, what is according to law and what is forbidden and what is not. So I think that this is something in behaviour, this is something that is inside of everyone. Personal behaviour and ethic. [...] For example, in those guidelines [Ministry of Finance guidelines 'Civil servants' employment issues. Gifts. Benefits'], it is written that if you have to think that is this right, then you might think that this may not be so. Sometimes you are wondering, shall I do like this? And if you are wondering, whether it is right, this is already a sign that, 'OK, I shouldn't do this'. So it is a question of your own thinking and behaviour. If you know that this is not good or doesn't seem good or transparent, then, don't do it (FI5).

In this response, the civil servant describes the thought pattern which is followed when deciding upon issues where the risk of breaching ethical and legal norms is present. While reasoning in this way, the civil servant is trying to avoid the shame of transgression of social prohibitions, which is a sign of the internalisation of external constraints into self-constraint. Advancement of the shame threshold, according to Elias, is a characteristic of the civilising process (Elias 2001: 416).

Latvia. Like Finland, Latvia became a state in the aftermath of World War I. The preceding history of Latvia was, however, quite different from Finland's. Being likewise a part of the Russian Empire, Latvia did not form an autonomous politico-administrative unit and the dominant mode of administration until the second half of the nineteenth century can be characterised as semi-feudalism and patrimonialism, rather than bureaucracy, with a partial exception in the case of cities. In the face of the established privileges of the ruling estate, it was difficult to ensure effective control over the patrimonial rulers in the country. Latvia existed as a state from 1918 until 1940, when it was incorporated in the Soviet Union. Latvia regained independence in 1991. Discontinuity is evident in the interrupted process of state formation (in 1940), but also can be seen in the radical changes in the economic and political systems from capitalism to socialism and back to a market economy and the liberal state. During the years after the restoration of independence, it was realised that corruption represents a problem for the development of the state and economy, and for the integration of Latvia into international organisations. Anti-corruption programmes were launched and later a special governmental agency was set up for the prevention and eradication of corruption. [6].[#N6]

Public officials' replies to the question about the importance of the factors preventing corruption were mixed, that is, all factors were named as having influence. Nevertheless, the more frequently stressed and more persuasively presented was the answer pointing to the first factor, that is, external control.

One respondent, describing her experience of work in the central (higher level) state administration institutions, said that, in her opinion, the self-control of the public official is more important. These were prestigious state administration institutions and the positive image of employees was important. In her opinion, there is not much fear of the law enforcement agencies because of their limited reach and resources:

I think self-control. [...] I have experience in two prestigious state administration institutions, where image was important and was also important for the employees. [...] But maybe this is because I have worked in these prestigious institutions. I think that there is no fear of the controlling institutions. Maybe when they detain someone and it is a high-profile case, then maybe they start to think. But I think that purely rationally it is clear, how many employees there are in the controlling institution and how many public officials there are. And often people do not see corruption in petty corruption. For example, when it is not money that is given, but

tickets for a concert. They think that this is normal. They even do not think that this may not be correct (LV1).

Another respondent stressed the importance of self-control as the main factor that keeps the official from corruption because the rules can always be circumvented. If one wants to use one's office for private purposes, then external control cannot deter these people from corruption. In the state sector there are both those with the disposition to misuse their positions and resources, and those with strict self-control:

Only self-control. And in fact the value system that a person, who occupies the office, has. Only and solely [self-control]. [...] Only strict self-control can prevent this. The values which the person has, I would say, integrity; respect for the work which the person performs; if he is entrusted to decide on the destiny of the people who have entrusted this work to him (LV2).

But in most answers the importance of external control was emphasised. In Latvia there is a specialised anti-corruption agency. So a number of officials pointed to the role of this institution and the importance of the potential use of coercion:

When they see the handcuffs, the factor of fear works instructively. The activity of the law enforcement agencies can have an effect. First, the law-enforcement agencies, then control inside the institution, then self-control. But all these factors should work together (LV3).

I think that definitely the first one. I think one should not overestimate the role of the law enforcing institution, but it will always be scary, when someone can come and arrest you. If the management of the institution has been bad and half million is missing [...], that someone can come and detain you, that will always be a frightening factor. So I think that surely the first one. It makes the law-breakers think to some extent (LV4).

Other respondents evaluated the relative importance of external control and the audit within the institutions. One pointed out that in some institutions internal control was well established. Another said that this function is insufficient because of lack of resources. But both of them underlined the present role of external control as the most important. [7],[#N7]

For now external. It depends on the institution. There are institutions, where there are very good internal controls, as a secondary expression of external control, when the corresponding internal units are headed by former employees of law enforcement organs, which are fighting for an idea. There it function well. But if one evaluates in general, then the external, of course, plays the decisive role. Through intimidation (LV5).

I think that everything is there. But, not cherishing great illusions, I think that the handcuffs most of all. All these factors, but I think that the most important still is fear. The internal control of the organisation currently is not a sufficient factor. But the state audit is far away. [...] But if the person has it inside himself, one can base much upon that, better than on the formal restrictions. But it is impossible to create it. Whether it has been formed or not. And there are altogether different preconditions for that (LV6).

When we talked about tolerance towards corruption in society in general, the respondent quoted above said that, in her opinion, intolerance towards corruption is directed mostly towards other people, that is, to those who have acquired wealth through corruption. This intolerance is less directed towards oneself, that is, tolerance towards corruption is greater when it concerns oneself or colleagues, friends or relatives; as the respondent said, this value is not yet sufficiently internalised.

Conclusions

The development of bureaucratic orientations described by Weber – obedience, loyalty, neutrality, integrity and expertness – are not simply the outcome of the process of rationalisation as presented in his works (Roth 1987; Weber 1978: 882, 1014). These orientations crystallise in the course of the largely unplanned and intertwined processes of state formation, increasing social differentiation and the division of economic functions. These processes in turn stand in complementary relationship with the increasing civilisation of human behaviour (Elias 2009: 32). The civilising process strengthens the self-control of public officials and raises the ‘moral costs’ of committing a corrupt act. The length and continuity of state formation processes are further factors in the development and stabilisation of ethical self-control. These arguments can be suggested on the basis of Norbert Elias’s theory of civilising processes, and the case study of the selected countries – Denmark, Finland and Latvia. Although the number of interviews was not large, it was possible to see common patterns in the answers of the respondents from each country. In Denmark and Finland, the countries which are generally characterised by continuity and a long tradition of administrative culture, public officials stressed self-control as the most important factor in preventing corruption, while external coercive institutions, such as the police or internal organisational controls, have less impact. In Latvia, a country which has experienced disruptions in its state-formation process, changes of political and economic regimes and whose history of state formation is not that long, the respondents were more inclined to stress the preventive effect of external controlling institutions. The interviews provided evidence for substantiating the argument about the link between the comparatively long and continuous development of autonomous institutions of the state, and the formation of an ethical habitus among public officials, which is a factor in the prevention of corruption in the public sector.

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Endnotes

1. *Transparency International website:

http://www.transparency.org/whoweare/organisation/faqs_on_corruption#defineCorruption
[\[http://www.transparency.org/whoweare/organisation/faqs_on_corruption#defineCorruption\]](http://www.transparency.org/whoweare/organisation/faqs_on_corruption#defineCorruption), accessed on 19 September 2015. ↗[#N1-pt1]

2. In the case of bribery the formula reads as follows: one will be corrupt if the bribe minus the moral cost minus the probability of being caught and punished times the penalty for being corrupt is greater than one’s pay plus the satisfaction one gets from not being corrupt (Klitgaard 1991: 70). ↗[#N2-pt1]

3. Bureaucracy becomes both autonomous, that is, 'independent' from and embedded in society. This point is discussed at greater length in my doctoral thesis (Šņitņikovs 2013). [↗\[#N3-ptri\]](#)
4. Transparency International Corruption perception index in 2011 for Denmark and for Finland was 9.4 (both ranked 2nd), for Latvia 4.2 (ranked 62) on the scale where points between 9.0–10 mean 'very clean', 0–1 'highly corrupt'. In 2014 the score for Denmark was 92 (ranked 1st), for Finland 89 (ranked 3rd) and for Latvia 55 (ranked 43), where 0 means 'highly corrupt' and 100 means 'very clean', 19 September 2015. [↗\[#N4-ptri\]](#)
5. The respondent was referring to a review of the doctoral thesis by Danish historian Mette Frisk Jensen 'Corruption and ethics of public officials – corruption of Danish public officials in 1800–1866' (see Frisk Jensen 2008). [↗\[#N5-ptri\]](#)
6. In the strategic documents of Latvia's anti-corruption agency, it is mentioned that over the last five years progress has been achieved in the prevention and eradication of corruption, and the level of trust among citizens towards government institutions has improved. Nevertheless, a number of areas remain problematic. [↗\[#N6-ptri\]](#)
7. Even though the respondents stressed the role of external control exercised by the law enforcing institutions, they also pointed to the positive role of internal controls within the organisations. There is no code of ethics common to all employees in the public sector in Latvia, but from the mid-2000s the institutions were obliged to adopt such codes through governmental programs and were provided with methodical guidelines and assistance through training conducted by the anti-corruption bureau. It is difficult to assess their effect on the prevention of corruption and promotion of ethical behaviour. In a survey conducted in 2006, in which 1000 public officials were interviewed, 21 per cent reported that they have never referred to the code of ethics while performing their official duties and 30 per cent did not remember when they last referred to it. When asked to assess how fully the principles laid down in the code of ethics were followed in the institution on a scale of 1 (not followed at all) to 10 (fully followed), the replies gave the average value of 7.9. 97 per cent of the respondents replied that observance of the code of ethics was important for them personally and for their institution (Socioloģisko pētījumu institūts 2006). Certain norms of behaviour of public officials, which in other countries are described in codes of ethics, such as limitations on receiving gifts, are, in Latvia, stipulated in the law on prevention of the conflict of interests. [↗\[#N7-ptri\]](#)

List of quoted experts

Denmark

DK1 Deputy head of an agency of the Ministry of Finance

DK2 Civil servant at the Ministry of Climate and Energy

DK3 Civil servant at Danish Ombudsman

DK4 Civil servant, mid-level manager at the Ministry Immigration and Integration

DK5 Former civil servant at the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Business

DK6 Civil servant at the Ministry of Education

DK7 Civil servant at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Finland

FI1 Deputy head of an agency of the Ministry of Finance

FI2 Senior civil servant at the Ministry of Finance

FI3 Senior civil servant at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

FI4	Former civil servant at the Ministry of Finance
FI5	Civil servant at the Ministry of Economy
Latvia	
LV1	Civil servant at the anti-corruption agency
LV2	Public official, former senior civil servant at the Ministry of Education
LV3	High ranking official at the Ministry of Environment and Regional Development
LV4	Former civil servant at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs
LV5	Public official, former head of anti-corruption agency
LV6	Head of governmental agency, former high ranking official in the government

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Biography

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