

# ARMENIA'S CORRUPTION ABATEMENT: A PROGRESS ANALYSIS

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✘ **Z. S. Andrew Demirdjian, Ph.D.**, Los Angeles, 4 October 2015

One day, a schoolboy in a city not far from the Persian Gulf made some notes in his diary: "I recited my tablet," he scratched in clay, "ate my lunch, prepared my tablet, wrote it; finished it." Either this boy did not do his lesson on time or properly, or that he was naughty that day, for the unknown boy was flogged by his teacher. In desperation the boy asked his father to invite the teacher home for a meal. The father not only complied with his son's wish, but also provided the teacher "a new garment" and a "ring on his hand." Not long after that, the teacher claimed that the boy had "become a man of learning" and would one day "reach the pinnacle of the scribal art."

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When did this incident take place? More than 4,000 years ago in one of the cities of Sumer, which were built along the banks of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, originating from the Armenian Highlands. The American archaeologist who uncovered the pieces of clay (cuneiforms) which tell this story called it "the first case of 'apple-polishing'" in history. Or, is it rather the world's first recorded corruption case of bribery?

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Although it's amusing to find that schoolboys that long ago had their problems and ways of solving them, the story tells us it will never be completely eradicated from the fabric of even highly advanced civil societies.

Traditionally, corruption has been defined as any practice that promotes self-interest over the interest and well-being of society. Although, historically corruption has existed in the form of political abuse or deceit to facilitate the interest of the person over the public, the act nowadays permeates

all aspects of interpersonal activities. Over the years, experts have classified corruption into four main categories... conflict of interest, bribery, economic extortion, and illegal gratuities.

What prompted me to look into the present corruption rating of Armenia is the allegation that Armenia has a "serious" corruption problem. In the Sept. 24, 2015 issue of "The California Courier", U.S. Ambassador Richard M. Mills, Jr. reportedly has said: "Corruption is a serious problem in Armenia. If the problem is not solved, it will affect the relations between the U.S. and Armenia in certain areas such as U.S. investments in Armenia".

The Armenian Diaspora also accuses Armenia of corruption. Ambassador Mills seems to have joined the fray. Since the entire practice of gift, grease money, bribery is shrouded with ambiguity, let us give Armenia's corruption status a closer look to see if it really is in the gutter. Table 1 will help us decide.



\*A country's rank indicates its position relative to the other countries/territories included in the index (out of Total Number of Participating Countries in specific year).

\*\*Corruption Perception Index measured on a scale from 0 being highly corrupt to 10 being very clean.

\*\*\*Confidence Range states the true value falling between two likely ratings.

^Surveys Used specifies the number of sources tapped to get the data on corruption.

Note regarding the Confidence Range: The data are obtained from a very small sample in a descriptive study and they are treating them as though obtained from an inferential study based on a probability sample. Therefore, the use of the confidence range or the concept of margin of error is useless since the data do not approximate a normal curve (therefore, one cannot use an inferential statistical analysis on this type of data).

+ The scale used in the surveys was changed in 2011 from 0-10 to 0-100. For the sake of consistency in the data, the scores for the last three years were converted to the old scale values without creating any statistical problems.

We should first look at Armenia's ranking and rating scores over a period of ten years. To do that, International Transparency Corruption Perception Index Scores (CPI) were compiled from published individual annual reports as is shown in Table 1. The data were obtained mainly from [Transparency International Site](#). As a brief background information, CPI Score relates to perceptions of the degree of corruption as seen by business people and country analysts, ranging between 10 (highly clean) and 0 (highly corrupt).

Although uncalled for, confidence ranges are included to provide a range of possible values of the CPI score. This reflects how a country's score may vary, depending on measurement precision. Nominally, with 5 percent probability the score is above this range and with another 5 percent it is below. However, particularly when only few sources, namely sample size (n), are available an

unbiased estimate of the mean coverage probability is lower than the nominal value of 90 percent. Surveys featured are the number of surveys that assessed a country's performance. Usually, 18 surveys and expert assessments are used and at least three are required for a country to be included in the CPI score.

As evident in Table 1, there is a turning of the tide in Armenia's corruption scores during the 2012, 2013, and 2014. While between 2004 and 2010, scores were way below average, in the last three years, the scores jumped closer to average as shown in Figure 1:



The rating methodology has a limitation, though. Ratings are based on the perception of the business people and country analysts regarding corruption. Countries where the economy is healthy, citizens are not as frustrated as countries with ailing economies such as in Armenia. Through sublimation, scapegoating, the citizens express their anger by exaggerating the practice of corruption. Since rankings are based on the rating, rankings are somewhat questionable as well. While time-consuming, it would be objective to use the frequency of corrupt practice cases brought to the attention of the law or for cases involving litigation.

It seems like "the emperor has no clothes" scenario. Most likely, Ambassador Mills is not aware of Armenia's positive trend toward the control of corruption. Like the majority of nations, Armenia still has corruption problem, but it does not have a "serious" one based, according to its CPI scores. Thirty percent increase in the rating is a celebratory figure. Compared to most of its neighbors, such as Azerbaijan, Armenia has fared considerably better in their corruption abatement programs. Despite being maligned as being a country "with a serious problem" of corruption by its Diaspora and others, Armenia emerges as an underdog in its corruption status.

Let us not forget that although corruption is curable on the individual basis its wholesale eradication is impossible as long as self-interest is a compelling force in humans. For example, Greece, the birthplace of democracy, could not eradicate corruption for centuries. Rome, the genius of empire administration, wrestled to get out of the quagmire of pandemic corruption for ages with no success -- which eventually drowned it. Even in the richest country in the world--U.S.A.--corruption is as American as apple pie. A casual survey of the political and corporate landscape there will give us the troubling realization that corruption is endemic to our American way of life.

In all fairness, we should congratulate and commend President Serzh Sargsyan's administration for the strides made in Armenia's corruption abatement program. Although the graph in Figure 1 shows small increments during the last three years, on a scale from 0 to 10, it translates into appreciable rise in controlling corruption. For example, the increase in corruption abatement from 2.6 in 2011 to 3.7 in 2014 is a whopping 30 percent improvement in three years. Also, Armenia showed a huge progress in ranking: from 129th out of 182 countries in 2011 to 105th place in 2012 out of 176 countries; 94th out of 177 countries in 2013; and again 94th place out of 175 countries in 2014. In terms of ranking, Armenia is very close to the average of the total number of countries surveyed.

Such a progress in abatement should be applauded and internationally recognized.

For the sake of comparison, let us see how Armenia has done vis-a-vis some of its neighbors in terms of ranking and rating as shown in Table 2.



\*The rating scale used for Table 2 scores has been from 0 to 100, 0 being the country is "Highly Corrupt" and 100 being the country is "Highly Clean".

\*\*To give the reader a perspective, Denmark and Somalia are included in Table 2 despite the fact that they are not Armenia's neighbors.

As it is abundantly clear, Armenia is way ahead of his neighbors in terms of its CPI rank and scores, with the exception of Georgia and Turkey. This progress indicates that corruption abatement programs are being diligently perused. As you know, corruption is part of a nation's culture and it takes time and herculean effort to change it. We should all be patient and helpful in making the transition to a social and business environment where corruption will be under control.

Corruption is a serious concern for all--the government, the private sector, the citizenry. This deadly disease has sunk empires and can cripple countries from advancement. That corruption is an impediment to development has been well established. If all of us concerned determine to reach the Millennium Development Goal of halving the number of people in the world living in abject poverty by the end of 2015 and continuing beyond, citizens, executives, ambassadors, presidents all need to seriously work toward the abatement of corruption in public contracting and by recognizing and rewarding those who make an effort to tackle the beast in bribery --which sooner or later would devour the victims as well as its owners.

Based on a closer examination of the data generated by the Transparency International, the future outlook of Armenia's corruption abatement promises to be bright. In view of Armenia's improvements in its CPI Scores, let us ask Ambassador Mills to use the presented evidence in this report for inviting U.S. investments to Armenia. Ambassador Mills' legacy as Armenia's true friend and a humanitarian diplomat would endure in the memory of the people he serves--for many years to come.

