

About the ‘de-democratization’ of Europe: democracy, Media and political corruption

DOI: 10.1590/1809-5844201512

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Abstract

In this paper we want to draw a picture of the changes in European societies and the role played by the Media in the so-called de-democratization, where the issue of political corruption has gained high visibility particularly in southern European countries. The *mainstream Media* have played a crucial role, especially in southern countries, by exhaustively repeating the dominant discourse of the inevitability of the austerity “measures” and of individual responsibility in the financial collapse of countries. In this process, political corruption emerges as a national phenomenon within globalized standards (JOHNSTON, 2005), monitored by international bodies of prevention, as well as by national institutions. The methodology focuses on documentary and bibliographical revision, as well as on the analysis of discourse (VAN DIJK, 2008; 2012) and contents (CUNHA, 2012). The conclusion points to the role of the *mainstream Media* in the construction of the image of “bankruptcy” of national democracies, from the visibility and treatment conferred to the *issue* of corruption, as well as on the acceptance by European citizens of the inevitability of “austerity” policies carried out.

Keywords: European crisis (2008). Democracy. Media Analysis. Corruption. Journalism.

The de-democratization of Europe

The crisis experienced in Europe since 2008, with indelible repercussions in the European society, has boosted internal and external pressures, and aimed to expand the global

capitalism in its neoliberal financial shape. This phenomenon brought about the end of the paradigm established in post-World War II Europe focused on the idea of a democracy of redistributive masses, capable of being exported by globalization, ensuring to all citizens, anywhere in the world, basic social and cultural rights. This kind of democracy, founded on the role of the State as a provider of a minimum supply of social goods, such as health, education and social protection at work, housing and assistance in case of disability, has undergone deep restructuring since the start of the crisis. According to Giddens (2007), the redefinition of the welfare State in Europe will have to occur as it was built on circumstances which no longer exist, notably for having been designed at a time of economic expansion, growth of population and of easy access to financial markets. The change in these conditions caused immediately, in the author's opinion, an inability of the Social State to sustain the model, without resorting to indebtedness; hence, structural changes are necessarily in order. Deepening and analyzing this analysis, German author Streeck (2013) considers that the collapse of the welfare State has been avoided in European countries, since the late sixties, by using different strategies in order to maintain the existing model and ease social conflicts.

Among these strategies, he emphasizes the use of inflation, public debt, the expansion of private credit markets and, finally, the purchase of State debt and banks by central banks, a process that accelerated and consolidated financial dominance over the economy. Both authors previously cited advance that Europe should not only adapt to a new position and reality, within a globalized world and amidst the world nations (GIDDENS, 2007), notably facing the end of the utopia of a globalization modelled after its image. Actually, this past decade has witnessed the rise of an ultraliberal capitalism that helped capital markets, and of *modi operandi* of emerging countries, to end the role of the welfare State in Europe, equaling (with the less privileged) income, working conditions and rhythms of life. Deregulation, privatization of basic State roles, the constant praise of private sector and a certain

disdain for public sector, especially after 2007, bolstered the trend of de-democratization of capitalism from the de-economicalization of democracy, providing income concentration in Europe and an increase in the gap between the poorest and the richest (within and across countries, regions and citizens).

European countries, in spite of their still hegemonic wealth, of their welfare model fairly advanced when compared to most countries and regions of the planet, have been featuring growing evidence – according to data from 2014 – of a “globalized periphery”. Among the main evidence, we find the increase in poverty (124 million Europeans are at risk, i.e. one citizen out of every four)¹, unemployment (26.5 million unemployed; 10.9% in the 27 countries of the EU)² and, above all, unemployment within the youth (from 15 to 24 years old) that reaches, in countries such as Spain, Italy, Greece, and Portugal, values above 30%³. Despite the continuous flows of migration, in most European countries, the demographics of “inverted pyramid” have become a central problem that affects the continuation and viability of States. On the one hand, there is an average fertility rate of 1.5 births per woman⁴ values that do not allow for the replacement of generations – and, on the other, an above average life expectancy of 72 years, that alone is a positive indicator, but which puts a great deal of pressure on the pension systems of States⁵. These structural problems appear in conjunction with increased precariousness in both qualified and non-qualified work, the decrease of security and wages paid to existing and newly hired employees, as well as the increase in the retirement age to more than 65 years old and forty years of work, both in the public and private sectors. At the same time, increasing signs of an authoritarian exercise of the role of national States appear, as guardians of European and international policies, in the

¹ See the report of the National Institute of Statistics (Portugal). European Network Against Poverty <http://www.eapn.eu/en>

² European data on unemployment http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_STAT-15-2964_en.htm

³ See data <http://www.tradingeconomics.com/euro-area/unemployment-rate>.

⁴ See Pordata database. <http://www.pordata.pt/>

⁵ See Pordata database. <http://www.pordata.pt/>

enforcement of tax obligations, on the dismissal of consolidated rights and the repression of trade unions and civil movements. The implementation of unpopular measures and restriction of workers' rights, especially those from the middle classes, require a strong and authoritative State. Political decisions, decision-makers and prevailing interests are defined behind the scenes of the European Union – European Parliament, European Central Bank and European Commission – protected by Germany, the only country that is able to impose its policy and vision, which manages the triple crisis in Europe: the banking crisis, the crisis of public finances and the crisis in the real economy, to their own benefit.

Within national states, the tension between capitalism and democracy has been addressed by amendments to the latter for the sake of economic sustainability and the need for capital accumulation. The pursuit of this strategy led to a transfer of the supporting base of modern capitalism from politics to market, and generated a new concept of democracy supported by the idea of market justice, with deep repercussions on the daily lives of citizens. The process of transformation of *social democracy* in *market democracy* in Europe has turned democracy into a set of rules, or procedures necessary to the legitimacy of Governments that manage national and local public interests for the benefit of the large and increasingly global and internationalized economic and financial interests. In this context, democracy works as a method for the creation and management of government interests, devoid of ideological connotations in its practices, but rather providing a utilitarian tool to the political, economic and financial system. National political, economic and financial elites – regardless of their origins in terms of party affiliation and ideology – tend to act in a similar way, legislating to their own advantage, in a way that fosters the accumulation of globalized capital (PIKETTY, 2014). These procedures are greatly strengthened, at the national and European level, by allies recruited within the fields of academia and the Media who seek to justify and legitimize public policies and decisions taken.

The role of mass Media in de-democratization of Europe

Since the beginning of the sovereign debt crisis in Europe, the Media, in particular the Anglo-Saxon economic and financial newspapers, promoted a discourse on the debts of Southern European states based on categories where we can identify many similarities with the speeches, arguments and neo-colonial, racist and xenophobic vocabulary. These same categories of analysis have migrated by means of pictures, documentaries and reports, to television newscasts from countries of the European economic and political center, particularly to England, Germany and some Nordic countries. The acronym PIGS, which included Portugal, Italy, Greece and Spain, and to which was later added another I (Ireland) triggered a discourse of differentiation, which replaced the Media discourse of solidarity prevailing in European political construction. The focus of the distinction between citizens focused, from the perspective of the rich countries of Europe, in the evocation of moral anathemas of disapproval of the “offenders”, viewed as less Europeans on the basis of their cultural characteristics and ancestral habits (BROWN, 2008). This speech present in British newspapers such as the *Financial Times*, *The Guardian*, the German *Bild*, or even the Belgian *De Morgan*, reports the debt crisis and the use of external aid emphasizing the cultural characteristics of the countries where the “laziness”, the “lax”, the “inefficiency”, the “low productivity” should be blamed on employees, viewed as privileged and protected by rigid labor laws, which added to too many holidays, facilitated by warmer climes and sunny days. These words resonated in the *mainstream Media* of southern countries, without any context or framing, without any reference to the responsibilities of the political, economic and financial elites, corroborating and reinforcing the “need” of “adjustments” and “austerity”, i.e. less social protection, review of labor laws and devaluation of labor. Based on this argument, and in complicity with the lenders, most Media attributed to the ordinary citizen the “collective responsibility” and the “blame” for the bad management of national and European public funds.

Corruption is also one of the themes of this new “official” discourse of Europe on the countries of the South, where the national “corrupted” and inefficient political classes are at the origin of the financial and economic problems. In this case, the “mischief”, mostly international companies with headquarters in European and international tax havens, are omitted⁶. The journalistic materials do not tend to make holistic diagnostics on the crisis in the European zone, but rather partial analysis on each of the countries, which results in the perception of negative specificity of countries that are “peripheral” in relation to those of the “center”. As in the racist colonial and neo-colonial discourses of the 19th and 20th centuries, the “periphery”, due to its “irresponsible” behavior, must be “educated” to embrace “responsibility” with the application of symbolic and material “punishments” (VAN DIJK, 2008, 2012). The “center”, to provide “welfare” and “order”, has the duty to “protect” this education for work and for efficient management. In this distribution of roles, it was the responsibility of the Media to inform and clarify citizens about the causes of the global crisis in Europe, and specifically in southern countries and Ireland. As Streeck (2013) mentions, in current decade, in Europe, social networks have so far failed to exceed ephemeral mobilizations and overcome the realm of passivity and “couch” indignation. The indoctrination carried out by political elites, and by their allies within academia and the Media, on the lack of “alternatives” to the path of “austerity” and “sacrifices”, as well as the public perception that decision-makers do not represent ordinary people⁷ and their interests, reinforce the passivity of the majorities. The dominant thought, cherished by the Media, especially by the generalist television broadcasters, focuses on the “inevitability” of the austerity policy in the countries of Southern Europe, whereas in the North, the approach focuses on the “costs” required from ordinary citizens and from the banks to “support” the South.

Alternative movements stigmatized in *mainstream Media* or treated as a “show” to audiences in the news, tend to appear amidst intense agendas and disappear quickly, swallowed by

⁶ See OECD report, 2014

⁷ See Eurostat http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Statistical_themes.

another “scandal” of national political corruption or by national and international “scary” phenomena, like the Islamic State and its soldiers recruited in major European capitals⁸. Citizens mobilized via the internet, through websites and blogs, oscillate between support to the dominant political opposition movements (demonstrations in all major European cities) and support to new organizations, both on the right (*National Front* in France, *Golden Dawn* in Greece or the *True Finns* in Finland) and on the left (*Syriza* in Greece and *Podemos* in Spain).

In recent decades the role of the Media has been changing in Europe, with the end or reduction of public service, and the deregulation that caused changes in property. These transformations have resulted in the introduction of foreign capital to Europe, with different market cultures (for example, in the case of Media groups with North and South American origin) and political cultures (as the regimes of Angola, China and Russia). At the same time, a process of concentration of Media groups into corporations with disparate interests, such as banking, telecommunications and other business activities, has taken place throughout Europe. Thus, companies and Media groups have become dependent on interests and resources foreign to the activity and culture of the press and Journalism, which has had as a consequence the decrease in the level of political diversity and pluralism in the representations carried out by Journalism and the Media, as noted, in 2012, on a report produced by *The Economist*⁹.

⁸ We should mention that few issues within the European newspapers, even after the 7 January 2015 Charlie Hebdo attacks in Paris, have introduced into the agenda the situation of the European peripheries, the significant unemployment of the youth, particularly amidst children of immigrants with little qualifications. The press also did not establish a link between the crisis, the austerity measures and the “army” of unemployed youths ready to pursue a “fanatical hope”.

⁹ The control and the constraints to freedom of expression, in the mainstream Media, have been accompanied by the development and participation of social networks in the development of democracies. The use by the citizens of tools such as websites, blogs, facebook and twitter has made the introduction of new actors possible, as well as a greater diversity of voices in the public space. The institutional uses of these tools fosters new forms of democratic participation and citizenship, as the forms of political Communication grew more complex and the ability of these actors to convey and tamper with information to their own benefit.

The dependency of the Media and Journalism, both as an economic activity and as a professional activity, of a foreign field, results in an increasing dependence on “good press” for their funding, i.e. the “favorable opinion” or “convenient omissions”. It is “good press” that ultimately determines the continuation, the profits and the jobs in each Media outlet. It is the “conformity” and the repetition of the dominant discourse that keep advertising and *sponsors* of large economic and financial groups, as well as the institutional advertising of the State, which is tutored by international financial organizations (DI TELLA; FRANCESCHELLI, 2011). The idea that information and Journalism, both in the public and private Media, are domains that should be managed like any other business, brought about labor precariousness of professionals, plagued by threats of cost reduction, optimization, redundancies and abolition of functions, thus making them vulnerable to the pressures from leadership, managers, businesses and governments.

By systematizing the analysis undertaken by Streeck (2013: 25) we can move towards a framework of public and private Media action, where information, subdued to globalized capitalism, suffered a change in perspective, from national interest to one of international interest, where the convenience of *sponsors* (advertisers, promoters, etc.) and the principle of consumption prevail over citizenship. One must point out, within this context, the prevalence of a discourse that values contractual rights and minimizes civil rights and citizenship, transforming the voters in mandatory audiences. In this sense, information that can ensure *ratings* and *shares* becomes more important, in line with infotainment, than in-depth information about elections and parties, resulting in the promotion of the existing political *star system*, as well as the political parties in power, to the detriment of multiparty politics and of the dissenting voices outside the system. Although information abounds, it becomes virtually impossible to assess its quality and relevance, insofar as the “information” that really matters and makes the lives of citizens is not displayed to the general

public and increasingly circulates in encrypted form, i.e. technically encrypted, and restricted. An example of this is the trade agreement that is being negotiated between Europe and the United States, which will change profoundly everyday life in Europe, particularly with regard to civil and consumer rights¹⁰. Publics are thus segmented and the audiences confirm the functionality of the information, which is only accessible to certain elites. The situation is all the more worrying as it naturalizes the idea that in a democracy, information, the freedom of the press and of expression are acquired values, unworthy of discussion. Hence, the values inherent to market freedom appear as supreme “values” that are capable of redeeming the difficult situation in which citizens and countries under financial rescue find themselves. As a consequence to this path, the loyalty inherent to the exercise of representation in a democracy is replaced by reliance on market forces and by loyalty to the contracts signed between the States and the economic and financial groups. Media discourses tend to praise economic measures that punish ordinary citizens, such as cutbacks in pensions and salaries, and omit or pose reservations on the few measures that governments implement regarding the revision of contracts, in particular those relating to excessive energy, telecommunications rents, and expenses pertaining to public/private partnerships (PPP). We are thus confronted with some information that is intended to inculcate the predominance of market interests at the expense of public interests.

¹⁰ See The Transatlantic Trade Investment Partnership (TTIP). <http://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/in-focus/ttip/>

Table 1 – Guiding concepts of the changes in the action of the Media in Europe

Media acting in the public interest (public or private)	Media acting in the interest of capital(public or private)
National	International
Citizens	<i>Sponsors</i> /consumers
Civil rights	Contractual rights
Voters	Audiences
Periodic elections	Continual ratings and shares
Multiparty politics	Parties of power
Public opinion	Selective audience indicators
Freedom of expression	Market freedom
Value: Loyalty	Value: Confidence
Public interest services	Market interest services

Source: Author's work from Streeck (2013: 25)

Table 1 summarizes and compares the changes in the acting of public and private Media in Europe, during the new millennium but especially in the last decade. The values that promote market dimension and formal democracy in the activity of the Media stand out to the detriment of public interests and social democracy. We observe the fading of the traditional role of the Media as guarantors of citizenship and freedom of expression, as well as the concept of audiences as citizens. On the other hand, the audiences as consumers of services offered by advertisers, promoters and *sponsors* gain prominence. In this scenario the national Media of southern Europe – mainly in the non-subscription television broadcasters, as in Portugal – have had a very important role in the promotion of values that are aimed at supporting the private sector and the market, which by itself alone would be welcome, but which comes associated with a downgrading of the fundamental activities of social democracy, such as education and health. The discourses of information Media, and of other Media as well, tend to generalize and label all the public sector as inefficient and corrupt – to which have contributed the numerous

reports of cases of political corruption – while extolling the virtues of the corporate and financial sectors, ignoring their corrupt activities¹¹ and their increasingly extreme neoliberal claims.

Standards of corruption in globalization

Corruption is characterized as an abuse of power for one's own benefit by democratically elected political agents, a situation that can occur during or after the exercise of public functions. According to Blankenburg (2002), these situations tend to worsen in times of economic crisis, when financial and political resources are scarce and, for various reasons, processes of deterioration of the credibility of public and private institutions take place.

In a “generalization-based” analysis of political corruption in the countries of southern Europe, we identified some common factors which may justify the emergence of these phenomena, in particular recent democratization processes, after decades of dictatorship; the emergence of new political and economic elites, carriers of new conceptions of public ethics; the growing trend of professionalization within the parties, where candidates for positions of governance are mainly the product of “party schools”, which stimulate loyalties between groups of the same age, both internally and between parties, at the expense of accountability toward citizens. Phenomena such as the arrival of the European structural funds, with the injection of billions of euros into the budgets of these countries during the late eighties and nineties; the archaic functioning of justice, with legislation and research methods inadequate to a new type of globalized crime; the expansion and the entry of the middle classes into the society of consumption, as well as the end of monopolies of Media of public service and the consequent liberalization of this market have also been relevant.

¹¹ See OCDE (2014) *Foreign Bribery Report: An Analysis of the Crime of Bribery of Foreign Public Officials* <http://www.oecd.org/corruption/oecd-foreign-bribery-report-9789264226616-en.htm>

In this context, wrongdoing tends to occur when the political agents are faced with the opportunity, the instrumental and rational means of execution of the crime or the pressure from collective needs, such as the funding of parties, or of the individual himself, including debt or consumer ambitions. There are four typical situations that bring about these crimes: when agents or former politicians compete for political office, exercising public office, legislate and govern. The illicit acts may also occur after the abandonment of positions of power when political agents retain their relational capital accumulated in those public functions that are later put to the service of private functions, in the field of economics, finance or banking, for personal benefit or for that of one's group.

From the perspective of Blankenburg (2002), as well as Johnston (2005) political corruption is directly linked to national culture, and particularly to the way in which elites are related to the public good. Some of the determinants of degree and characteristics of political corruption in each country or region include economic and political pressures from international interests, such as "investors", "funds" and multinationals, and the placement of those countries and regions in the global market. Thus, we cannot conceive of a single scale of political corruption applicable to all countries, because each one will have its cultural specificity. Other factors should be taken into account such as the deepening of democracy, the functioning of political and social institutions, the ability and willingness toward participation and mobilization of citizens. The characteristics of political corruption depend, according to the liberal perspective of these authors, on the level of openness of markets to competition, as well as regulatory mechanisms of competition. Against a backdrop of transition to an open and globalized economy, privatization of public enterprises, the concession of public services to private entities, particularly in the context of energy and telecommunications, as well as the aforementioned public-private partnerships (PPP) for infrastructure construction, are "critical" moments to the growth of political corruption.

The most frequent unlawful acts are crimes against the State, crimes against the State committed in the exercise of public function, active and passive corruption (aimed at the practice of lawful or unlawful acts), embezzlement (which includes embezzlement of use and embezzlement by virtue of a third party's mistake), economic participation in business, abuse of power, influence-peddling, money laundering and violation of urban planning rules.

Whereas in a globalized world political corruption takes place in countries with various forms of economy and governance – although all countries advance towards “liberalization” – Johnston (2005) identified four “syndromes of corruption”, or patterns of corruption, which he said, correspond to four ways to combine politics and economics, as well as the quality of public economic and financial institutions. Describing these phenomena from the perspective of the democracies and markets referred to as more “mature”, Johnston (2005) considers that the “syndrome” that occurs in “liberalized markets” reflects the “extreme competition” for advantages in designated “mature democracies” or “advanced” countries – which are mostly located on the northern hemisphere, notably Anglo-Saxon and Nordic countries – where citizens have, theoretically, a diverse set of opportunities in politics and in the economy. In these open market democracies, societies are rich and the State exerts, preferably, the role of regulator and watchdog, and citizens have a positive opinion on institutions, which are viewed as credible. To the characterization of this “syndrome” we can add that corruption cases occur mainly within the competition for the expansion of national and international markets and are typically focused on figure of the corrupter.

The “elite cartels syndrome” is characterized by occurring in democracies in a stage of consolidation and subject to deep institutional and political reforms, where the rhythm of competitiveness and participation grows. The markets are under pressure because there is greater openness and liberalization, with the purpose of preventing the operation of monopolies and cartels. The role of the State as regulator is in a phase of

consolidation and the conflicts and tensions between public and private institutions, in the field of economy and finance, are constant. These societies are moderately wealthy and citizens have very diverse perceptions about their quality and good reputation. This scenario is conducive to corruption phenomena that occur in the formation of interest groups that stand at the intersection between public and private interests in order to obtain advantages in the most protected public sectors within the economy, such as public enterprises and State leases, often working as a monopoly regime. Still under generic perspective, one can identify, in the countries of southern Europe, a pattern of corruption that oscillates between that which we described in relation to the corruption syndrome of “elite cartels” and the one mentioned regarding the corruption syndrome present in “liberalized markets”.

The third corruption “syndrome” can be called “Oligarchies and clans” and occurs in transitional regimes of authoritarianism or totalitarianism to democracy, where the processes of liberalization are recent and competition is less structured. In this context, the economic opportunities are in their growth phase but private and public capitals are not sufficient to foster, in a sustainable manner, the internal market. Public and private institutions are fragile and susceptible to the interests of those who have managed to enrich due to early and direct access to certain political and economic decisions. This new class constitutes an oligarchy, often united by family ties, which controls the ongoing economic liberalization, increasing their wealth and power in proportion to the growing poverty that face a majority of citizens. The oligarchies take possession of the economic interests of the country and maintain formal and functional democracies that protect their investments, preferably of an extractive nature, centered in raw materials such as oil, gas, diamonds and other minerals. Emerging countries of globalization are among those in which this is frequent corruption syndrome.

The last “syndrome”, identified by Johnston, occurs in countries with non-democratic regimes where power is concentrated in senior single-party officials or tycoons who use the

party structures to defend their interests. In this scenario, there is officially no “market”, the economic and financial management is centralized and decisions are concentrated in certain party structures. Citizens have a limited participation in the above mentioned structure and there is no representativeness even in terms of merely formal democracy. The institutions tend to be strong in the relations they maintain with ordinary citizens and weak vis-à-vis those who run the party structures. The country is poor and access to goods is restricted. Corruption is part of the routine of public function, deeply contaminated by politics and poorly paid, which considers the provision of services as a way to obtain the extra income necessary to their survival. Within the higher structures and party elites, corruption can be justified as a tribute paid by “international capitalism” to the “formerly colonized or dominated people”, in which the local political agents would work as intermediaries. Acts internationally identified as corruption may not be perceived as such, to the extent that certain local cultural traditions and practices resemble forms of corruption. Examples of these situations are in Asian countries and Africa.

On table 2 we articulate the four syndromes proposed by Johnston (2005:40) and its main social, economic, political and institutional characteristics.

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DEMOCRACY, MEDIA AND POLITICAL CORRUPTION

Table 2 – Syndromes of corruption

	Degree of participation of citizens	Degree of participation of citizens	Quality of Institutions	Quality of Institutions
Type of Syndrome	Opportunities Policies	Economic Opportunities	State/Society	Economic Institutions
<i>Influence Market</i>	Mature Democracies (participatory democracy; competition and constant debate between trends)	Mature markets (liberalized; open; regulated/ high indexes very competitive; well-being)	Broad/ Extensive	Strong
<i>Elite Cartel</i>	Democracies in consolidation phase/reform (democracy with increasing participation and competition)	Markets in the process of reform (largely open and liberalized; learning to regulate; increased competition; average well-being indexes)	Moderate	Media
<i>Oligarch and Clan</i>	Transitional Regimes (recent democracies; significant competition but little structure)	New Markets (recent liberalization; not regulated; great inequality and poverty)	Weak	Weak
<i>Official Moguls</i>	Non-democracies (limited opening and participation dependent on the groups, parties, etc.)	Construction markets (recent liberalization; not regulated; huge inequality and poverty)	Weak	Weak

Source: Author's work based on Johnston (2005, p.40)

The perception of corruption and journalistic coverage of corruption on television: the Portuguese case

The Media, mainly television, is responsible for building the perception of political corruption, a crime whose nature necessarily implies secrecy and concealment. The perception of this crime within society depends on news coverage, but this is, as previously mentioned, directly linked to the freedom of the press and of expression, as well as other variables such as the independence of the Media vis-à-vis the political and economic power (Roca, Alidedeoglu-Buchner, 2010). These constraints should be considered in the analysis of the indices of corruption disclosed by international reports, without prejudice to the conclusion that the perception of this phenomenon is generally growing amidst the public opinion in the countries of southern Europe. On the other hand, political corruption has been one of the most covered phenomena in the news Media since the beginning of the crisis, in 2008. The Media have taken the role of denouncing and disclosing, which to many authors constitute raw material for an industry of “scandals” (Schudson, 2004), as the events reported command high news value as a result of the ruptures that they generate in the expectations of public opinion. The periodical reports on corruption, disseminated by international organizations, also point out the Media, especially television, as privileged sources as regards the perception of corruption.

In Portugal, from 2006 to 2012, the perception of political corruption, according to reports published by *Transparency International*, has increased in such a way that in 2006 the country was on the 26th place; in 2008 on the 32nd; in 2009 the 35th and, in 2010, in 32nd position. In 2012, the *Eurobarometer survey* reported that 97% of the Portuguese believed that corruption was the biggest problem in the country. The values are common to the three other southern European countries that find themselves in financial difficulties, such as Greece, Spain and the Italy. Maia (2008) argues that the perception of corruption in Portugal, stems from the fact that *most people collect information regarding practices*

of corruption and build their perception about the problem based on the television news channels, as well as the press (Maia, 2008: 115).

From the beginning of the Millennium, in a framework of growing economic crisis, the visibility of allegations of political corruption increased significantly in the Media in Portugal. The reason for this phenomenon lies in, on the one hand, the flow of funds from the European Union under the structural funds, implemented without adequate oversight (Morgado and Vegar, 2003), as well as the “perception of impunity” which seems to involve “white collar crimes”, given the inability of the penal system to modernize in combating this new type of crime. However, the number of corruption cases registered has no correspondence to decided judicial cases, which makes it easier for a negative perception associated with impunity to arise. On the other hand, the number of defendants accused differs largely from the number of defendants ultimately found guilty and sentenced (Maia, 2008), which created a huge discrepancy, in the eyes of public opinion, between “convictions” and the high visibility attributed to these cases by the Media.

The liberalization of the Media market in Portugal took place in the late 1980s, early 1990s, with the opening of the market to private operators of television and the rise of SIC (1992)¹² and TVI (1993)¹³. Until then, there were only RTP1 and RTP2¹⁴, public broadcasters. We note that two of these channels (SIC and TVI) are part of groups with a high participation of foreign capital, particularly Angolan and Spanish/Mexican¹⁵. We also note that in recent years, the issue of government funding to the public channel (RTP1), the redistribution of advertising, particularly from large advertisers, open and paid subscription channels, as well as the internet, have greatly influenced activity in this sector.

¹² Sociedade Independente de Comunicação (SIC): <http://sic.sapo.pt/>.

¹³ Televisão Independente (TVI): www.tvi.iol.pt

¹⁴ These two television channels are part of the Rádio e Televisão de Portugal group: <http://www.rtp.pt/>

¹⁵ See Rita Figueiras “O Sistema dos média em Portugal no contexto da globalização do século XXI In: Cunha, I. F. e Serrano, E. (2014) *Cobertura Jornalística da Corrupção Política*. Lisboa: Aletheia, pp.253-281.

Based on these findings, and with reference to Portugal, we will observe how the open signal television channels (RTP1, SIC and TVI) have given attention to two cases of political corruption, *Freeport*¹⁶ and *Hidden Face*¹⁷. The choice of these cases is based on some of their characteristics, such as involving Socialist Prime Minister José Sócrates, who remained in office from 2005 to 2011, which corresponds to a first term as President from 2005 to 2009 and a second mandate from 2009 to 2011, at which time the intervention of the IMF, the European Central Bank and the European Union was requested to rescue the Portuguese public finances. Other features are equally relevant, notably the involvement of former ministers, international companies, national public companies and their managers, as well as the movement of capitals to tax havens.

Given the volume of the *corpus* and as a result of the onset of the *Freeport* case in 2005 and that of the *Hidden Face* case in 2009, we decided to analyze the year 2009, as it includes both cases, and to collect the largest possible number of news (1045 pieces). We

¹⁶ *Freeport*: The “Freeport Case” dates back to 1999, when an Irish multinational company named *McKinney*, operating in the field of real estate development, applied before the Institute of Environmental Protection (ICN) for information on the possibility of transforming an old Firestone tire factory into a commercial and recreational complex. In 2000 the consulting company *Smith&Pedro* was hired in order to take care of all bureaucracy in order to obtain the necessary permits. The state secretary of urban planning and environment request ICN to reassess the boundaries of that protected zone. The British Embassy becomes involved, trying to push for the approval of the project by the minister of environment, which was then José Sócrates. This was when accusations arise that *Smith&Pedro* might have requested 4 million pounds in order for the licensing procedure of *Freeport* to carry on its course. This money would be for the latter, though they were acquitted in July 2012, or for the minister of environment, later elected prime minister in 2005. The prime minister was never involved in the judicial proceedings as defendant, nor was he ever heard as a witness.

¹⁷ *Face Oculta*: this case was first reported in 2009, in the context of an investigation by the Judiciary Police of Aveiro in several places across the country. The operations were intended to uncover economic crimes (money laundering, political corruption and tax evasion) of a corporate group, whose leader was reported to have put together a network involving former holders of government positions, local administration employees and public companies, and military personnel, with the goal of obtaining benefits to the business of his companies in the domain of waste management and disposal.

emphasize that that year was particularly important insofar as it corresponded to the re-election of the incumbent Prime Minister, José Sócrates (Socialist), which until the beginning of the election campaign – early September 2009 – gained high visibility in news associated with the *Freeport* case, as shown on table 3.

Table 3 – Visibility (number of pieces per year) of the Freeport and Hidden Face cases in the three non-subscription channels

Cases Channels/Years	Freeport			Hidden Face		
	RTP1	SIC	TVI	RTP1	SIC	TVI
2005	10	9	8			
2006	0	0	0			
2007	7	6	3			
2008	0	0	1			
2009	204	270	247	123	128	105
2010	42	35	34	55	101	57
2011	2	7	7	32	37	44
2012	23	15	44	12	19	35
Total	288	342	344	222	285	241

Source: data from the Markttest company/Mediamonitor (developed by the “Coverage of political corruption: a comparative perspective” project team)

Content analysis of news gave rise to an SPSS database, consisting of 32 variables, where the news piece of each television news broadcast, regardless of its journalistic genre, was chosen as the unit of analysis. The universe considered was formed by the units of analysis of the television news on the journalistic coverage of political corruption and which were made available on the *e-telenews* platform by the Markttest company/Mediamonitor.

We mention that the analysis of two cases, underlines, above all, the role of television journalistic routines in the coverage of phenomena of political corruption. The nature of the medium and of the day to day television operation, the need to fill time

with images that contain certain key elements – people, scenarios, “lines” – that are easily identifiable, are present in a large number of “statements” as well as the prominence given to news about “investigations, searches and interrogations” occurred within the cases. On the other hand, we observe that the “statements” are preferentially associated with Prime Minister José Sócrates, both in the *Freeport* case in which he is the main involved, as in the *Hidden Face* case, where appears as “friend” of the main accused, former minister Armando Vara. We also note that the news and the air times assigned to corrupters are very scarce, as they are not, generally speaking, public figures. In the *Freeport* case the corrupters are international companies intermediated by a national firm and, in the *Hidden Face* case, an obscure Portuguese entrepreneur of operating in the domain of scrap yards. In both cases, these individual or collective actors have a lower presence than the political actors. Also under the spotlight we find the State Prosecutor’s Office, due to the statements of the Prosecutor and the Deputy Attorneys General, which also evidences the routines of a “desk” Journalism, very centered in official sources accessible through a “telephone call”.

The protagonist of the *Freeport* case, Prime Minister José Sócrates, apart from being associated with the “statements”, commands high visibility in the context of the Eurojust case¹⁸, not only due to his proximity to the Head of Eurojust, which is – since 2007 – Associate Attorney General Lopes da Mota, who “stopped” the investigations by British authorities, but also due to the pressure on prosecutors in charge of the process. The Prime Minister is still implicated in irregularities in the licensing procedure of the *Freeport* outlet, while he was Secretary of State of the Environment. In addition to actors of the State Prosecutor’s Office – as Attorney General Pinto Monteiro and Deputy Attorney General Candida Almeida – actors suspected of operating as a “possible” fronts also acquire high visibility, such

¹⁸ Eurojust is a body within the European Union that gathers information and data from State Prosecutors of all member states in order to fight against organized cross-border crime. Its headquarters are in the Hague, Netherlands www.eurojust.europa.eu/

as the intermediary of “indicted” corrupters, Englishman Charles Smith, as well as the relatives of the Prime Minister. These accusations were not proven in trial.

The information on the substance of each of the cases of corruption usually appears on a secondary level and follows the accusations made by justice throughout the different stages of the proceedings. In the *Freeport* case, the licensing of construction in an environmentally protected area or, in the *Hidden Face* case, the economic crimes against the State and influence peddling. However, there are certain side issues that create public perceptions about the frailty of Justice, such as “pressures on justice”, the “violation of the secrecy of justice” or uncertainty about the legitimacy of “phone wiring” performed by police or judicial bodies.

We observed that the public institution with the greatest prominence, in both cases, is the State Prosecutor’s Office, which is associated with the crimes under investigation, i.e. crimes against the rule of law, embezzlement, economic participation in business, bribery and influence peddling.

Based on earlier interpretations, and taking into consideration the number of pieces, the prominence given to actors (generally political or judicial figures), we can suggest that the construction of the perception of political corruption amidst the public opinion, based on television news, results not exactly from informative contents, or from in-depth investigations on the subject, but from the repetition of *sound-bites* and *images-bytes* linking the semantic field of corruption to the field of politics and justice.

Brief conclusions

In this paper we seek to demonstrate that in recent years the quality of democracy in Europe, mainly in southern Europe, has deteriorated enormously. On the one hand, there are increasing signs of a de-democratization carried out at the expense of the shrinking social and labor rights acquired after WWII. European social democracy, though still in existence as a model, includes

fewer and fewer citizens and excludes an increasing number of benefits, leading to an impoverishment of the middle classes and allowing an ever greater concentration of income. Europe is not managing to reinvent the social model and addressing its problems of low demographics, immigration and the financialization of the economy through stronger knowledge and technology in a globalized and competitive world. The chosen path has been, in practice, to undermine and destroy the model of solidarity which inspired other regions of the world, including countries in Latin America such as Brazil. In this sense, the de-democratization of Europe is not just a European problem, or more particularly of Southern Europeans. This is the end of a utopia of social governance, which envisaged to export a model of justice and fairness to other societies, regardless of the foul play and imperfections that this model has evidenced throughout history. The consolidation stage is a model far less solidary, more selfish, individualistic and competitive.

The deregulation of the Media, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, as well as the introduction of foreign capital into the Media field and integration into groups with diverse interests and domains, deeply altered the functioning of the Media in Europe, until then considered a service to the public, whether undertaken by public or private companies. Journalistic activity became gradually subordinated to audiences to advertisers and to large capital interests, promoting “conformist” discourses and acquiring infotainment features. With the crisis of 2008, the signs of restriction to the freedom of the press and of expression become more significant (The Economist, 2013), from mechanism of self-censorship – journalists with precarious work relations, reduction of work positions – and external pressures from groups interested in inculcating in citizens the dominant thinking of the inevitability of a single political, economic and financial solution.

The coverage of political corruption arises on the news, with great visibility in years of crisis, along with the perception that many citizens have of this phenomenon in Southern Europe. The denouncing and disclosure of these crimes constitute a service

to democracy but, on the other hand, the procedures of agenda-setting that assign greater prominence, notability or relevance to certain themes or political actors, facilitate internalization, by public opinion, of a perception of “notoriousness” in relation to the quality of the “corrupt” representatives democracy. In this sense, the patterns or syndromes of corruption identified by Johnston (2005) allow us to understand, in a perspective of inevitable neo-liberal globalization, how journalistic coverage of the phenomenon characterizes political, judicial and corporate actors, as well as the way in which public and private institutions are presented.

Based on Johnston’s classifications on corruption, we developed categories of analysis that were applied to two cases of political corruption reported by the Portuguese Media. The results point to the role of journalistic routines and the value of the news criteria on television, such as obtaining “statements”/testimonies/interviews from public figures. On the other hand, the analysis suggests that the perception tends to be more linked to *image-bite* and *sound-bite* than exactly to the contents of the news. In this sense, the “notoriety”, i.e. *priming*, granted to a certain politician, is always associated with specific themes and attributes. The enunciation of those themes and attributes leads to identification, by the citizens, of this politician; the naming by the Media of such a politician carries along with it the theme and the set of attributes that are associated with him or her. In the analysis of political news on television, we emphasize the importance of image analysis that allows the viewer/voter/citizen to form his opinion from multiple elements, such as non-verbal and visual cues (GRABE, 2009).

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Received on: 01.15.2015

Accepted on: 04.09.2015