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By: Stefan Caragea, Associate Editor



## **Bribery, an Immortal Plague**

*Especially in the so called "kleptocracies"*

We're all aware of the kind of world we're living in. It's a world where there are quite a lot of countries in which bribe has become something so ordinary that it's almost surgically attached to the people's minds. To some extent, the concept has almost become something legal, something that people consider to be normal. And how could it be otherwise, since this phenomenon has extended to all the levels of those societies, to both rich and poor, the only difference being the amount offered as "gift". These countries, in which bribery and corruption have spread across the whole society, are what some economists and analysts call a "kleptocracy". First of all, let's see what bribery means. According to one of the most important law dictionaries, namely Black's Law Dictionary, bribery is defined as the offering, giving, receiving, or soliciting of any item of value to influence the actions as an official or other person in discharge of a public or legal duty. The bribe is the gift bestowed to influence the receiver's conduct. It may be any amount of money, right in action, property, preferment, privilege, emolument, object of value, advantage, or any promise or undertaking to induce or influence the action, vote, or involvement of a person in an official or public capacity. But before we speak about the most "popular" types of bribes, we should take a look in history, towards the origins of these types of practice. Bribery is one of the oldest practices in the history of mankind, competing with the oldest profession in the world (and sometimes even merging with it). Thus, the concept of bribing is mentioned in a lot of ancient sources, among which the most important is none other than the Bible itself (leaving aside the numerous cases mentioned in the Old Testament, the clearest case is that of the 30 coins received by Judas for his betrayal), and it seems that the oldest archaeological proof regarding bribes is a 3400 years old clay tablet, discovered by a team of Dutch researchers on the territory of what used to be the Assyrian empire, on which a list of the "employees who took bribes" is imprinted. As we can read on the [worldwidewords.com](http://worldwidewords.com) website, which makes a short history of this term, the word itself starts in medieval French, where bribe meant "a piece of bread". A linguistic game of consequences led the sense from this to "a piece of bread given to a beggar", then more generally to "alms" and "living upon alms", to "begging" and so to associations with mendicancy and vagabondage. It was with the last of these senses that the word first appeared in English in the fourteenth century, in the works of Chaucer and his contemporaries. It soon evolved further to take in the idea of extortion, or demanding money with menaces. Only in this usage did bribe finally come to mean a sum of money, though at this time briber meant the person doing the menacing and so getting the money. The worst offenders were often judges and public officials, who extorted money from claimants in order to pass down a favorable outcome. It was in the sixteenth century that the meaning flipped completely over so that briber meant instead the person handing over the money. Nobody seems to know quite how this happened. In the process, bribe changed to mean a supposedly voluntary inducement instead of something extracted by force, thus arriving at the sense which it has retained ever since. Nowadays, bribery is taking different shapes, adapted to the national culture. Western countries have lower levels of corruption (at least low-level corruption, among doctors, lawyers, judges etc.), but top-level corruption is still present, although very well hidden between all kinds of contracts and more or less legal business deals. However, in Eastern-Europe, the Middle East and some of the Asian countries, bribery is much more widespread, being present at all levels. And the main reason behind this situation is the fact that these people have what could be described as a "bribe-culture", meaning that they've become so used to the idea of offering bribes in order to obtain some favors (or simply get

things done), that they don't imagine the world otherwise. Actually, I do believe that this represents both the problem and the starting point for a possible solution. As long as there are people who offer bribes, there will be other people who'll be accepting them (and even grow accustomed to asking for such illegal "gifts"). But if people change their point of view regarding this problem, some things might change as well. It's difficult (in some societies, almost impossible), but it's really the only way. However, whether this will happen or not, at some point in mankind's future, only time will tell.