
Informal Payments in former Soviet Spaces: Illegal but Licit?

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Professor Polese's research explores the phenomenon of informal payments in the former Soviet Union. Informal payments are sometimes the only way through which patients obtain medical services which they should normally receive for free. This research is based upon interviews with citizens of Russia, Georgia, Ukraine and the most recent data of the anti-corruption agencies.

The outcomes show a surprising reality: corruption sometimes makes the system more effective. In this regard, the phenomenon requires an appreciation of the difference between what is legal and licit. While by legality we understand compliance with the law, that very law and the policies stemming from it could be wrong or ineffective. Thus, even what is illegal could become licit in these countries: there is a level of social acceptance of some supposedly harmless forms of illegality. Adopting the standpoint of a patient in need of urgent care enables us to understand that the situation is not simply black or white. In this sense informal payments are to be considered as a symptom of the structural features of the countries of the former Soviet area.

Nevertheless, there are still many doubts linked to the disregard of rules: in the long run, the state could no more guarantee the welfare of the citizens. Future research should cope this issue as a broader economic concept, taking into consideration the effects on the transitional economies of the developing countries.

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