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Period of internship: March 15 – May 24
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Introduction

Transparency International

Transparency International is a worldwide NGO dedicated to fighting corruption. The NGO started in 1993, when a few individuals decided to stand up against corruption. On their website, their vision is articulated as follows: “a world in which government, business, civil society and the daily lives of people are free of corruption.”¹ Their mission is stated as follows: “to stop corruption and promote transparency, accountability and integrity at all levels and sectors of society. Our Core Values are: transparency, accountability, integrity, solidarity, courage, justice and democracy.”²

While it started with a few individuals, TI grew a lot and is now active in more than 100 countries, or “chapters” as TI prefers to call its subdivisions. TI is politically non-partisan and independent. As such, for example donors have no influence in TI’s policies.

The headquarters of the organisation are located in Berlin. The national chapters are independent organisations: they are locally established, formed to fight corruption specifically in those countries, since corruption differs from country to country. The national chapters are staffed with local personnel to fight the local corruption as specifically as possible.

Probably the most well-known published report by TI is the Corruption Perception Index (CPI). This CPI includes 180 countries by their perceived levels of public sector corruption, according to experts and business people. The scale goes from 0-100, on which a 0 is highly corrupt and a 100 is very clean. It is the most widely used indicator of corruption worldwide.

Transparency International Mongolia (TI-M)

On the most recent CPI (2017), Mongolia ranks 103 out of 180 countries. On the scale from 0-100, the country ranks 36, which means that it is not doing too well. Therefore, battling corruption in Mongolia is vital. This is where the local chapter of TI, called TI-M, comes in. TI-M was established and registered in 2003 by a group of citizens representing different civil society organisations. Only in early 2013 did TI-M get accredited as an official chapter of the global TI movement. This shows the strict requirements TI uses to determine when exactly a local movement can actually be recognised as part of the global movement.

TI-M has a vision: a country free of corruption, enabling justice, equality and integrity at all levels of Mongolian society, for current and future generations. The mission connected to this vision is to combat corruption for the people of Mongolia by promoting integrity, transparency, accountability and no impunity, by collaborating with individuals and institutions from all sectors of society. To complete this mission, TI-M works with a so-called sectoral approach. This means that it focuses at different sectors of society. There are three sectors, each with their own projects:
1. Government institutions and public services
   - Anti-Corruption Agencies Strengthening Initiative: aimed at reducing the level of corruption in the Asia-Pacific region by supporting Anti-Corruption Agencies to improve their effectiveness and performance. TI-M is conducting an independent

assessment of Mongolia’s Independent Agency Against Corruption (IAAC) to reveal problems areas within the agency and to establish concrete recommendations for action.

-Mainstreaming Social Accountability in Mongolia (MASAM): to enable citizens in poor locations to have increased access to public decision-making processes and quality services through social accountability. The government has implemented reforms to improve transparency and citizens’ participation in the management of public funds and this project was created to make sure that the government reforms are successful.

2. Business sector with a focus on the mining industry

- Business Integrity Programme. Long-term goals: to prevent corruption in individual business through improved business ethics, corporate governance and integrity practices; to establish a community of good practice among business; and to create a clean business environment, engaging stakeholders from the public and private sector and the civil society. Part of the Business Integrity Programme is the Business Integrity Country Agenda (BICA), which seeks to create a relevant body of evidence related to business integrity in a country, a widely shared agenda for reform and a collective momentum for change towards more business integrity among key stakeholders. BICA assessment started in September 2017 in Mongolia and is expected to be published in June 2018, including policy recommendations.

-Mining for Sustainable Development Programme: aimed at improving the transparency, accountability and integrity in the decision-making process related to the approval of mining projects.

3. Civil society with a focus on the youth

- Public Watch App and website: citizens are able to submit concerns and complaints about corruption anonymously, and provide comments and suggestions for addressing the issues.

- Parliament Watch App: is an app educating young people about the Mongolian Parliament and Mongolian democracy. Also, the app is meant to increase public participation in decision making.

-The Youth Integrity Programme: part of the regional movement Youth Movement for Transparency Asia-Pacific. It seeks to engage young people in challenging corruption through online and offline activities. Offline activities include workshops given to young people in high schools and universities in Ulaanbaatar and on the countryside. Online activities include the apps mentioned above and social media.

My choice for Transparency International Mongolia

The choice for Transparency International Mongolia was not my first. Before I started to look into the possibility of doing my internship at an NGO, I was mostly looking for placements at embassies or consulates. I wrote to more than 15 government organizations and all said no to me. I had one job interview with the Dutch embassy in Astana, Kazakhstan, where I became second out of 45 candidates. After all the failures, I kept focusing on my main criteria of an internship: it had to be situated in the former Soviet Union or the former satellite states, since that is the area I am focusing on in my studies. I wanted to have a follow-up experience to my exchange to Moscow in the Bachelor. After a while, I gave up hope on doing an internship beginning in February, opting to write my Master’s Thesis in that period and finding an internship that started in September. That was the moment that the Mongolian ambassador came to Groningen for a lecture, provided by SIB.
Mongolia immediately sparked my interest. Having been a satellite state of the Soviet Union from 1924 until 1992, it checked off my main criterion. Nowadays, being sandwiched between increasingly aggressive and assertive Russia and China, the country has little space to manoeuvre in its foreign policy, making it a very interesting case to study concerning the current geopolitical climate. This again fitted my studies: in my Bachelor’s Thesis I addressed the power of a rising Russia. This was all addressed in the lecture by Ambassador Mr. Od Och. During the lecture, I got the idea of doing my internship in Mongolia. There was another opportunity Mongolia would provide me: practicing my Russian. The second most spoken foreign language in the country is Russian, which would make it a perfect opportunity to practice my Russian some more.

Thus, after the lecture, I emailed Professor Halbertsma, director of the Centre of East Asian Studies in Groningen University and I asked him whether he knew any NGOs in Mongolia that would be looking for interns. He sent out some emails, and after a while, Transparency International emailed me with the message that they would like to have me as an intern. There was no application process whatsoever, they wrote that “based on my CV”, they thought that I was a suitable candidate for their organisation.

Establishing initial contact with TI-M and preparing for the internship

The initial email contact was a bit of a chaos. TI-M immediately wanted to know when I wanted to commence my internship and they also wanted me to start arranging my visa, but that was not an option for me, since I first needed to know what exactly I would be going to do. After all, if the work I would do in Ulaanbaatar would not check the requirements of my internship, I would be doing it all for nothing. Hence, I asked TI-M for details as to what they wanted me to do at their organisation. After asking this three times in three emails, I finally got a reply. I got a Terms of Reference (TOR), in which the activities of my internship were outlined. Still, after this, not all was clear. The director of TI-M emailed me a very long list of projects and stated that I could involve in all of them. All of them seemed a bit too much for me, since I had only three months to work there, but I agreed to work on the projects that checked the requirements of my internship:

- that it would be international in orientation
- that the work would provide a sufficient element of independence, adequate space for individual input and creativity
- that the work would be of a sufficient academic working level, e.g. preparing content for speakers of an event or writing a specific policy paper.

Now, the most important boxes were ticked. TI-M had a specific approach that they wanted to apply for me: I would learn from them, and they would learn from me. After all, I was going to be the very first intern for them. It would be a beneficial period for both sides, with opportunities for me to engage in areas which are in my interest, like foreign policy.

Now, I could finally apply for my visa. This proved to be another hurdle, however. There were two ways in which I could apply for my visa. Firstly, I could apply myself by applying at the Mongolian embassy in Brussels. Secondly, I could apply for a visa on arrival at the Mongolian airport. TI-M said that they would find out for me what the best option would be. Finding out what the best option would be took them about one and a half week. In the meantime, the starting date of the internship, March 15, was three weeks away. Time was thus closing in and after urgently asking them what I should do in another two or three emails I finally got to know that I could get a visa on arrival. Then all I had to do was prepare myself to
start the internship. Financial matters were not really an issue, since it was clear from the start that the internship would be unpaid. All funds would thus have to come from myself.

Expectations

**Based on the Terms of Reference**

My expectations of doing an internship at TI-M were formed mainly by reading on their website what TI-M is actually doing. Furthermore, I based my expectations on the Terms of Reference (TOR) I got before I went to Mongolia. Based on this TOR, I would be able to work in:

- the Business Integrity Programme, assessing the Business Country Agenda Report, which would mean I would be writing reports on business integrity in Mongolia
- the Youth Integrity Programme, which would mean I would be delivering workshops at high schools and university in Ulaanbaatar and the countryside
- the Grand Corruption Project, which would mean that I would engage in activities battling high level corruption, writing reports and articles
- lobbying for better laws concerning whistle blowing and the transparency of political parties.

Thus, these were my expectations. I did not really expect to have one main job to do, I was expecting to be involved in different sectors at the same time. I hoped to be able to engage in areas which are in my interest, like foreign policy, but I did not expect too much of it, because I thought that the workload of the actual internship itself would be more than enough, especially in the first few weeks. Furthermore, I expected to do a lot of office work, including preparing meetings and writing minutes. Lastly, I expected to have some travel opportunities as well. I expected the first weeks to be chaotic, and the workspace to be chaotic in general. After all, it is Mongolia that we are talking about.

**Personal learning goals**

Of course, I had personal learning goals that I wanted to achieve. First and foremost, I wanted to get to know how it would be to work in an actual non-governmental organisation. NGOs are a big part of world politics, but I never knew how they actually work. To be able to go to one and participate behind the scenes was something that I wanted to do. This would also help me to determine what kind of job I would want to do after I finish my studies. As a student of IR, you hear a lot about embassies and NGOs, but you do not know whether you actually want to work at one of those organisations, unless you try it yourself. This was my main personal learning goal in this internship.

Secondly, connected to my first learning goal, I wanted to get real-life work experience in the field of IR. IR is a really broad field, and with our studies you can go in so many directions that it is hard to determine which direction you actually want to go to. Thus, I wanted to see if this side of IR, corruption and politics, was something for me.

Thirdly, I wanted to get new perspectives for writing my Master’s Thesis upon my return to Groningen after the completion of the internship. Before I went to Mongolia I just had a broad idea of what I wanted to write my Thesis about, but I was hoping that in Mongolia I would be able to get new perspectives, which would allow me to find a unique perspective for my Thesis.

Fourthly, I wanted to explore a new culture and all its challenges. Of course, daily life and travelling is a part of this, but related to this is the culture at the office. I expected the
mentality of the people at the office to be different from those at home, of course, and I wanted to learn from them.

Fifthly and lastly, I wanted to create a network for future work possibilities.

Tasks

First few weeks: chaotic

The first few weeks in the office were, as expected, chaotic. I think how my arrival worked out shows this best.

At 7 am I arrived in Ulaanbaatar and the boss of TI-M picked me up. He had promised to find me an apartment upon my arrival, but, somehow expectedly, he did not manage to do that. Thus, he took me to his house and let me shower there. After breakfast, we headed straight to the office. There, I was shown again which projects I could involve in, and was put to work straight. Now, this was quite hard for me, since I was still suffering from a jetlag of seven hours. After a few hours my boss realized this as well, and he took me to his house again, where I could rest. After resting, I could look at the projects the next day with a fresh start. Again, the same projects as described in the TOR were presented to me, and I told them that firstly I would like to pick a few, instead of doing all of them at the same time, because that would be quite hard. So I picked the following projects to do:
- The Youth Project (where I would prepare workshops for students)
- Investigative Journalism (where I would write articles on grand corruption in Mongolia)
- Business Integrity

Furthermore, the office was at that moment working on grant applications, and they wanted my help in that as well. Thus, I would help in applying for grants.

I started reading in on the projects that I was going to work on and after a few days I asked my supervisor what I could actually do for these projects. Her answer was that at the moment, there was not much that I could do. There I was, at the office, not able to work on anything specific. At the end of this first week I told the boss that I did not come to Mongolia to do nothing, and he apologized, and after the weekend he came up with a new list of things that I could do. Now, my main activities would be in the Investigative Journalism project. In a few weeks, the Mongolian parliament would be discussing new laws on whistleblowing and anti-corruption, thus my boss wanted me to write articles about whistleblowing, political party financing and grand corruption, so that the parliament could be engaged. Next to the Investigative Journalism project, I would be involved in the Business Integrity project, working with on a workshop with a colleague, and in the Youth Project.

Thus, while the first few weeks were chaotic, after stressing to my colleagues that I came there to actually work, I got work to do.

Why were the first few weeks so chaotic? I think this is mainly due to the fact that I was TI-Mongolia’s very first intern. They had no experience at all with interns, so they were not aware of how to treat interns. This was of course annoying for me, but this whole situation has helped TI-M: when the next intern will come, they now know that they will need to have a structured plan, made beforehand, and that they cannot distribute random work randomly to an intern who knows nothing about the internal structure of the NGO where he or she just arrived.
My tasks

In the end, after a couple of weeks, I integrated well into the workspace and I could
continuously work on projects. These are the projects that I worked on:

1. Article on Political Party Financing. I wrote a big article explaining systems of
political party financing in the Netherlands, Germany, France and Canada. Recommendations
were given for how Mongolia can improve its political party financing system. This article was
written in preparation of a conference on political party financing. Part of the Investigative
Journalism sector.

2. Article on Grand Corruption in Mongolia and Political Party Financing. This article
was a follow-up on the previous article. This specific one explained how political party
financing is the crux of corruption in Mongolia. The results of a CRINIS-study were explained
as well. A CRINIS-study is a study assessing the legal framework regulating the financing of
political party financing in a country. Recommendations for Mongolia were given, also based
on the systems of political party financing in the West discussed in the previously written
article. Part of the Investigative Journalism sector.

3. Presenting at Conference: Political Party Financing and Whistleblowing Law. This
conference was organized ahead of the debate in the Mongolian parliament of the new
whistleblowing and anti-corruption law. At the conference, several important members of
parliament (MPs) were present, as well as ambassadors and representatives of the embassies of
Germany and Great-Britain. During the conference, I presented the two articles I wrote on
Grand Corruption and Political Party Financing. These subjects were engaged with during
discussions after my presentation. Furthermore, I have been interviewed for Bloomberg
Mongolia TV about political party financing in the Netherlands. Link to the interview:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yYrT7dD5z1s&feature=youtu.be.

4. Application MASAM Youth Project on Social Accountability grant. TI-M applied
for a MASAM Grant. In order to obtain this grant, TI-M had to come up with a two-month long
event. I involved in the creation of plans for the event. Organizing a two-month event takes
time, thus it took a while to plan all these things correctly. I strategically planned the
organisation of specific parts of the event: the Technical Approach, Methodology, Work Plan,
Organization, Communication and Outreach and Challenges and Solutions of, inter alia, the
“Youth Debates” and “National Conference”.

5. Workshop for Oyu Tolgoi. TI-Mongolia will give a workshop on business integrity
to Mongolia’s biggest mining company, Oyu Tolgoi. For this workshop I researched which
business integrity principles were already in place in the company, so that the workshop would
not repeat things that are already known to the employees. I thus helped preparing the
workshop. Part of the Business Integrity sector.

6. Accreditation Review for Transparency International. TI-M has to be reviewed by the
global TI-Secretariat in order to see whether the local Chapter is still worth it to be a part of the
global movement. I engaged in this review, researching information that had to be gathered for
the Accreditation Review and filling in the forms. For example, I researched how exactly TI-
Mongolia’s due diligence procedure works, in order to be able to see whether that needed to be
improved or not.

7. Engaging in applications for Youth Camp. In April 2018, TI-Mongolia, together with
TI-Cambodia, organised a youth camp in Cambodia. For this camp, people applied, but not
everyone could go. We had to make a selection. I engaged in the selection procedure of the
candidates.

8. Meetings. I engaged in meetings with partners of TI-Mongolia:
-Save the Children (work on a survey)
-Business Integrity Country Agenda lawyer
-New director of GIZ (German-Mongolian Institute for Resources and Technology)

9. Work visit to countryside. The TI-M team, including me, visited Choir, the capital of an aimag (province) of Mongolia, in order to increase social accountability. The intern engaged in meetings with the local representatives. In fact, TI-M wants to cooperate with Groningen University in this aimag. TI-M wants to have future interns from Groningen placed in this aimag, in order to improve social accountability and governance.
Expectations and reality

In the end, the reality of doing an internship at Transparency International Mongolia was of course different from what I expected.

Tasks

Concerning my tasks, I ended up doing some different things from what I expected. I did prepare workshops and I did write articles, but I did not write reports on the BICA, as I thought I would. This was because BICA is a research which is being conducted by professional researchers in the field of, inter alia, statistical analyses, and I did not have the knowledge to be able to participate in that. Furthermore, I did not give any workshops to university and high school students, because that was an event that was planned only in June, when I would be gone already because of the expiration of my visa. Also, I did not expect to be presenting at a conference with ambassadors and MPs present.

In general, I found the work that I did at the office to be not too exciting. However, it was in no way boring. I was not the so-called coffee-boy who just makes coffee for the rest of the team. I was an integral part of the team and had an equal workload. Furthermore, presenting at the conference was exciting, and the field trip we did to Choir was very interesting as well.

Independence of my tasks

One of the main criteria for doing this internship was that the tasks I would be doing would be of an independent nature, that is, that the work would provide a sufficient element of independence, adequate space for individual input and creativity. This was the case. In all my tasks I was able to work independently. For example, in the application of the MASAM grant, I had a lot of freedom to think about the project. It was largely up to me how the specific part of the project would be organized and how it would look like.

Also, I had complete freedom when it came to the writing of the articles on political party financing and grand corruption, which means that in extension, I was free to decide what I would present at the conference on anti-corruption and whistleblowing. In the end that got me an interview with Bloomberg Mongolia TV.

Even in cases where I got asked to do something, like the background research for the workshop for Oyu Tolgoi, I was able to do this completely by myself and deliver a satisfying report to my supervisor.

Did I achieve my personal learning goals?

Firstly, I wanted to get to know how it would be to work in a non-governmental organisation. This I did achieve. It was very interesting to see what goes on behind the scenes of an NGO like Transparency International. I now know how the organisational part of NGOs work, how the internal structure of NGOs work, how it is to work in a team at an office, etc.

Secondly, I wanted to get real-life work experience in the field of IR. I did get real-life work experience in the field of IR. However, the global fight against corruption, which is linked with politics, is a very specific field of IR. I am not sure whether this is a branch in which I would like to continue working for a long time. After all, I focus on International Security and I want to focus more on geopolitical issues. However, it was very interesting and satisfying to be able to experience this side of IR, because it is way more practical and applicable. What you do immediately has an effect. When I wrote my BA Thesis about a possible new Clash of
 Civilizations between the EU and Russia, nothing was done with that material. Now, I wrote two articles, presented them and actually had an impact on MPs in Mongolia. That feels very rewarding.

Thirdly, I wanted to get new perspectives for writing my Master’s Thesis upon my return to Groningen after the completion of the internship. This did not work out that well. I was not able to meet with people in the field of foreign affairs, even though I did get access to materials about Mongolia’s foreign policy. This taught me a lot about Mongolia’s multi-vector foreign policy regarding China and Russia, but my original idea for my MA Thesis was not centred to this area and these documents did not spark enough interest for me to to change the topic of my Thesis.

Fourthly, I wanted to explore a new culture and all its challenges. Of course, this worked out. I had some travel opportunities that connected me with the real Mongolian culture, but mostly I was confronted with an entirely different culture at the workspace. Lack of communication seems to be the biggest problem in Mongolian organisations and companies. Some examples:
- Once I finalized a report, handed it over to my supervisor (who found it well-written and had no comments on the contents), only to hear after the weekend that the whole plan had changed. Thus, most of the work I did had been for nothing. This had only been communicated between some members of the team, without involving everyone.
- When I had to do the Accreditation Review, I had to ask a couple of things to staff members of the team. I asked, for example, whether TI-M actually had a so-called “due-diligence” procedure. However, no one replied. Only after I asked three times, I finally received an answer. Apparently it is part of the Mongolian culture that people are very passive when it comes to things like this.

In general, I struggled with this sometimes over the course of the months that I have been there. However, I am an open and direct person, and thus, when I did encounter passiveness, I tried to work around it in my own way, and usually it worked out quite well.

Fifthly and lastly, I wanted to create a network for future work possibilities. This worked out as well. During the conference I met a lot of MPs and people from the embassies that were present. Furthermore, I got an official position at TI-Mongolia.

Future career perspectives: EU-Relations ambassador

Transparency International Mongolia was very pleased with my work as intern, which is why they wanted to conclude a contract with me in order to have cooperation in the future. As of now, I am EU-Relations ambassador for TI-M, including business card. This means that whenever there is a conference on corruption in the Netherlands, I can go there and send information about it to TI-M. Furthermore, if I find a project funded from the Netherlands, that I could implement in Mongolia, I could go back and actually get paid for it by TI-M.

Furthermore, TI-Mongolia wants to continue working together with the University of Groningen. TI-M wants to get more interns in the future and they want to improve social accountability in the Choir aimag. In exploration of this goal, they appointed me as ambassador. In the future I will have a meeting with professor Halbertsma on how to start organizing this project.

Other than that, I think that with my experience of working at TI-M it will be easier for me to get internships at other branches of Transparency International. Furthermore, working at this NGO made me grow as a person, got me real-life working experience and thus made me ready to face the job market.
Conclusion

All in all, I really enjoyed my time in Mongolia. For a very long time, it has been unclear to me what it is like to actually work at an NGO. After this internship, I know what it is like. I made useful contacts, learned to work with another culture and thus became more flexible, got a semi-job as EU-Relations ambassador and spoke for and with important people at a conference.

Of course, not everything went as smooth as I would have liked it to do, but in the end everything worked out. Considering it is Mongolia that we are talking about, it went relatively more smooth than I expected. I learned a lot, and since I am now EU-Relations ambassador for TI-M, I would love to encourage other students to go there, and help them whenever they need it.