



VNÍMÁNÍ A REALITA KORUPCE V ČESKÉ REPUBLICĚ. NOVÉ VÝZKUMY, METODY A POSTUPY

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The Institute for Social and Economic Analyses (ISEA) today announced the publication of a new book on corruption in the Czech Republic at a press conference, hosted by Jan Švejnar. The book, entitled *Vnímání a realita korupce v České republice. Nové výzkumy, metody a postupy*, represents one of the most serious efforts to date at enlisting advanced social and economic research to the fight against corruption.

„While corruption is one of the most important political problems of this country, Czech academia is virtually devoid of serious corruption research. This study has sought to help fill that void by using new data, asking new questions, and using better techniques at understanding how Czechs perceive corruption and what can be done about the underlying problems,” Michael Smith said, an ISEA expert and leading author of the study. Other contributors include the sociologist Petr Matějů, and economists Jan Hanousek, Filip Palda and Charles Kenney.

The study, which was funded by the Open Society Fund Prague, is ISEA’s first major analysis of the problem of corruption, though certainly not its last. Simona Weidnerova, the director of ISEA, said that “while we are known as think-tank focused on educational policy and other areas needing reform, corruption affects all policy issues. That’s why we decided to continue to engage in corruption research into the future.”

The study addresses three main issues: how Czechs perceive corruption, problems in how corruption is measured and studied, and anti-corruption policy.

In terms of how Czechs perceive corruption, some of the main findings of the book include the following points:

- According to the newest international survey on the quality of government, 47% of Czech respondents believe that “quite a lot” or “almost all” Czech politicians are involved in corruption. Similarly, 36% of Czechs believe that “quite a lot” or “almost all” Czech public officials are corrupt.
- Czechs’ perceptions of corruption are strongly shaped by their social background, such as their income, education and how trusting they are. People with low marks in all of these areas see much more corruption than others.
- Perceived corruption declines as an economy becomes more developed, maintains low levels of economic inequality, and has high levels of economic freedom. The Czech Republic has been moving in the right direction in these ways, which may also explain why perceived corruption has been declining over the last five years.
- Czechs perceive corruption largely as a problem of justice or unfairness. They particularly perceive police, administrative and legal procedures as a grossly unfair, in terms of advantaging those with more power or resources.

- The fact that corruption is perceived as undermining justice and fairness may explain the low legitimacy of economic inequality and the persistence of egalitarian attitudes among the Czech population, as well as citizens' rather cynical views of Czech politics.
- A majority (55%) of Czech respondents revealed that they have never been asked for a bribe or favor by a public official over the last five years. Only 2% of respondents expressed that this has happened to them often or very often. Respondents' social status – whether they are rich or poor, or how educated they are – has no impact on their experience of bribery.

The study also strongly recommends a new direction for that Czech anti-corruption policy. The study concluded that:

- The current government has made considerable progress in tackling corruption through reforms aimed at making the state administration more efficient. But the current government strategy for the fight against corruption is conceptually narrow and is not clearly based on research or established facts.
- Anti-corruption needs to be mainstreamed into all major attempts of political reform. This needs to go beyond regulatory impact assessment (RIA). When the government seeks to reform the tax code, the judicial system or even health and educational policies, it should be made explicit how those proposals contribute to the fight against corruption. This cannot be merely lip-service, but must be based on research.
- Anti-corruption policy needs to establish a clear and strong role for civil society associations – not simply as watchdog organizations, but also as associations that can help build trust and understanding in society. The lack of social trust and mutual cooperation is one of the greatest cultural problems leading to more corruption.

“Czech political culture is morally rotten. Unethical and corrupt behavior by politicians, officials and businesspeople is deeply rooted in a political culture that ridicules the rule of law, fair play, and mutual trust. Even the most ambitious legislative reforms will not be successful if that political culture is left untouched. Political culture is very difficult to change, but the right place to start is for anti-corruption policy to focus on the incentive structure of corruption exchanges, on building a stronger role for civil society in implementing anti-corruption policy, and on changing popular perceptions and expectations that bribe-giving and behind-the-doors deal-making are acceptable business and government practices,” Michael Smith concluded.

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