

We no longer live in a totalitarian regime. Pointing out corruption is not selling out.

The recent developments of civic anti-corruption activities have been gaining strength. In this text I mean to present an analysis and rebuttal of the opinions and attitudes that, intentionally or not, attempt to weaken active efforts to stop corruption in our country.

I am personally surprised at the number of socially renowned people who *a priori* don't directly consider corruption to be theft, but rather a „sub-level“ of theft. The fact is that corruption is a special type of theft. A public servant who accepts a bribe is a thief who steals from public finances, meaning our taxes. Why is corruption considered by so many to be a lesser infraction than ordinary theft? My belief is that this is a result of the confusion left over from the former totalitarian regime. It is true that corruption in a totalitarian regime may be morally defensible, providing that it directly weakens the regime. An assassination attempt on a despotic dictator could also be considered morally defensible, even heroic, even though murder is otherwise considered the most serious of crimes. Fortunately we no longer live in a totalitarian regime, and corruption is theft – similarly we don't live in a despotic dictatorship, and the assassination of anybody is murder.

From an economic standpoint, corruption is the worst possible form of theft. The macroeconomic impact of ordinary theft, whether it be stealing from a shop or household, is negligible, whereas the economic impact of corruption in the Czech Republic is economically devastating. Corruption results in an increase in the public budget deficit with all its negative consequences, including the need to cut expenditure and raise taxes.

Often one hears the weak excuse such as „nothing can be done anyway“. Petr Mach expresses this opinion to an extreme extent in his blog at ihned.cz, I quote „...if we don't curtail national expenditures, we won't cut down corruption“ (see <http://mach.blog.ihned.cz/c1-49475260-jak-zlikvidovat-korupci>). One can, of course, agree that, other things being equal, the overall amount of corruption is a decreasing function of the national budget size. This obvious fact by no means implies that it is pointless to fight against corruption in any other way than to minimize the state. This statement's premise is invalid, as the conditions are not the same. The amount of corruption for a given fixed size of public budget strongly depends on the political culture of the given country. The proof is obvious: simply look at the situation in Northern Europe and Scandinavia where, in spite of large public expenditures, corruption is minimal. (By this I do not mean to defend increases in public expenditure. Indeed, I'm convinced that the intervention of the state into the economy should be minimized for long-term national prosperity.)

Some people suggest that identifying corruption and providing evidence against it is „selling out“ or „squealing“. This is, however, often the claim of thieves, themselves being corrupt and in fear for their own „business“, therefore wishing to manipulate public opinion. I am, however, very surprised to hear such opinions from certain intelligent people who I know not to be corrupt. I no longer see this attitude as simple confusion, but rather as a direct and deep hang-up from the former regime.

A similar such question would evidently be absurd, such as: „If you saw thieves stealing from your neighbour's flat and you called the police, are you a rat? And what if you saw them

stealing from your garage?“ If someone steals from the public budget he is a thief who steals from the taxpayers – not only is he stealing from your neighbour, but he is stealing from your garage as well.

During the totalitarian regime it was a brave person who fought against it and it was a coward and opportunist who was capable of turning such a person in. Nowadays it is the brave soul who takes a stand against corruption while risking his „cushy job“. A very brave soul goes so far as to try to gain evidence and proof to make sure that his efforts aren't in vain (if your neighbour's flat is being robbed and you have reasonable suspicion that the policeman on the phone is cooperating with the thief, are you brave enough to capture the thief on video, gaining direct evidence?). The coward would rather tolerate corruption in silence, not wishing to know anything about it. The greedy coward wishes to get his share too, becoming corrupt in the process: a thief.

By means of inspiration of Masaryk's saying I shall conclude with: “Have no fear and don't steal, never steal without fear.”

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