January 5, 2018, Bratislava

To the members of the PhD committee
Charles University, Faculty of Social Sciences, Prague

Opponent Statement for the dissertation thesis of Steven Gawthorpe:

Rethinking Corruption in the Czech Republic: A Mixed-Methods Approach to a Systemic Corruption

In my opponent statement I will focus on following aspects – theory behind the research, methodological approach and findings.

As for the theoretical approach, the author has been able to provide an overview of the main concepts that are dealt with in the dissertation thesis. He showed an appropriate level of understanding of theories related to corruption studies and based his research on them. I especially value the fact that he recognizes new scholarly approaches in defining corruption and corruption control encapsulated by Schmidt (2016): *corruption is „less about individual transactions and more about networks of actors".* At the same time I find it important that he works with the concepts of institutions, particularism and universalism (e.g. Mungiu-Pippidi, 2014).

The author decided to expand what is known about systemic corruption, which as he shows, has been so far under-researched. That is *inter alia* due to the lack of suitable variables (and related data) that would prove the empirical existence of systemic corruption. That is also related to the fact that it is difficult event theoretically to draw the line between individual and systemic corruption.

The research questions are however rather broad - starting from determining if there is systemic corruption in the Czech Republic and continuing to measurement of its size. The thesis then focuses on one specific (although important) sector - public procurement market and tries to demonstrate the corruption patterns there. In other words he explores "pay to play" phenomena in the public procurement market in the Czech Republic.

When providing the theoretical knowledge on the public procurement market from organizational perspective (2.2.), the author opens up the thesis to the very promising and valuable (from the public management point of view) field of research. However he does not build his research on this knowledge and does not base his research on the current state of the art in this field.

In relation to the methodology, the author decided to combine quantitative and qualitative approach, a mixed method approach, which I find appropriate for triangulation. He conceptualizes the systemic corruption and stresses the criterion of partiality, networks and frequency (Table 1). He then focuses on the public procurement market and explores the contracts allocation within two groups – influence group and non-influence group. However dataset from politicalfinance.cz

provides only information on legal donations therefore it provides only partial information required for the research. Literature indicates that political partiers receive also financial support that is not publicly available. That is not reflected in the methodology. The second comment related to methodology (as well as plausibility of findings) concerns the structure/internal distribution of the two groups vis-à-vis explored characteristics (e.g. age, number of bids, contract amounts etc.) and how the author dealt with the extreme cases, especially due to relatively lower amount of cases within the influence group (section 5.1.). What is the frequency of receiving advantage in this group? Does the data really show the advantage that has the characteristics of a pattern? Does this thesis really prove systemic corruption based on partiality, networks and frequency? Does the author "proved" systemic corruption in the case he has explored?

I also believe that the conclusion and interpretation should receive more attention in the dissertation thesis. The author should also unify the title – if it is "paper" or "thesis".

Overall, the dissertation work brings valuable insights to understanding and researching "systemic corruption", the thesis is in line with formal and substantive requirements and I recommend the dissertation work to be accepted.

Questions:
1. Does the data really show there is a pattern?
2. Does this thesis really prove systemic corruption based on partiality, networks and frequency?
3. How was the frequency measured?
   Companies may have more objectives to support political parties. For example - companies may support ODS to pursue better business environment - when ODS forms coalition they may participate in procurement process believing it is more fair process and they can win. How do you deal with this possible effect in your disertation?

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