Corruption on the local level in the Czech Republic

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Abstract: *Corruption is one of the major social and economic problems in the Czech Republic as evidenced by numerous opinion polls among both the business community and the general public. In survey questionnaires, citizens regularly refer to corruption as one of the most substantial issues. This paper focuses, however, on how corruption is perceived by elected representatives, meaning both regional and local politicians. The data is based on survey which was part of an international research project which collected data from councilors in towns with more than 10,000 citizens, then on research we had conducted amongst 83 mayors of the Hradec Kralove Region in February 2017. We also draw on data from the Czech Social Science Data Archive that employs them from various surveys of the Institute of Sociology of the Czech Academy of Sciences and works within the NESSTAR analytical platform. This paper explores assumptions concerning elected local representatives and their perceptions of corruption.*

Keywords: *corruption, public administration, elected representatives of regional and local politics, the Czech Republic*

1. Introduction

Corruption is perceived as a major threat by Czech society. This is documented by questionnaire surveys carried out by various research agencies as well as in the data published by Transparency International published an annual basis. In addition, corruption ranks among the list of threats viewed as potential sources of social destabilization by the authors of the Czech Security Strategy. Corruption is not solely associated with national politics; however, it also concerns the lower tiers of regional and local politics. This study will demonstrate how corruption is perceived by elected representatives in the local assemblies

Corruption is usually defined by Transparency International, among others, as the abuse of entrusted power for private gain (Transparency). Research into corrupt behaviour yields a number of detailed definitions related to the social, political, moral, economic or legal perspectives (see Heidenheimer, Johnston 2007). The present text will focus on the negative impact of corruption on a society, which manifests itself in a range of ways and can lead to the undermining of its institutions and democracy. As such "corruption reduces the effective domain of publication, and thus the reach of democracy, by reducing public agencies of collective action to instruments of private benefit. (...) Moreover, corruption undermines the culture of democracy. When people lose confidence that public decisions are taken for reasons that are publicly available and justifiable, they often become cynical about public speech and deliberation." (Warren 2004: 328)

As seen in the Eurobarometer survey results, although other post-communist countries share the Czech Republic's problems of corruption, the Czech Republic is specific in at least one respect. Despite the various strong anti-corruption proclamations[1] by previous governments (2006, 2010) including the present one (2013–2017), the Czech Republic has fallen in the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI), particularly when compared with Poland. While Poland held the 64th spot in 2003 with a score of 3.6, the Czech Republic came in at number 54 with a score of 3.9 (on a scale of 0–10), inasmuch a higher index number implies a lower rate of corruption and vice versa, i.e. a lower rate is the herald of a higher rate of corruption. The Czech Republic came in at number 53 in 2014 with a score of 51, while Poland took the 35th spot with a score of 61 (on a scale of 0–100 points)[2]. The situations in the two countries have reversed. Similar results were reported in the Control of Corruption indicator by the World Bank Group (Schwab, 2013). In 2016 the position of the Czech Republic in the Transparency International data was fallen from 37th (2015) to 47th position with a score of 55 points. The position in 2015 could possibly be attributed to the anti-corruption campaign of the current government (est. 2014) and the arrival of new parties in politics. The recurring 10-position decrease is not fatal in any way, it only means a loss of one point in concrete. It shall be interesting

to observe the upcoming development because the Czech Republic keeps enacting other anti-corruption tools, as for instance the Office for supervision of economic management of political parties and political movements has come into operation due 1st January 2017. There is, however, no evidence or research stressing the factors that influence the perception of corruption the most. A number of studies have dealt with the reasons why corruption has persisted in post-communist Europe, as well as its role within society (e.g. Holmes 1993; Johnson et al. 2000; Miller, Grødeland and Koscheckina, 2001; Karklins 2002; Grigorescu, 2006; De Ridder 2009). Although the old regime was fraught with corruption and clientelism, there is no data showing how extensive the corruption was. The research data that is available indicates that corruption was more widespread prior to 1989. Bribery was common especially due to the shortage of selected services and goods. For instance, in 1989, 39 % of respondents admitted bribing the sellers of durable goods, while in 1998 the number had dropped to a mere 2 % (Otáhal 2006: 15) Leslie Holmes cites a number of important factors that can explain the causes of corruption within this region and which are, to some extent, attributable to the legacy of Communism. "One is that [the] strictly hierarchical nature of the communist system meant that personal responsibility was not encouraged anything like to the extent it typically is in Western systems; this underdevelopment applied also to moral responsibility." (Holmes 2003: 196) Other reasons include the growth of bureaucracy and the inability to make distinctions between the Communist party and the state — even many of the post-Communist politicians were insensitive to the conflict of interest issues. The use of power for private gain, a high level of nepotism and disregard for the rules and the law are other particularly significant factors (ibid.: 169–197).

Although the fight against corruption in the Czech Republic has intensified thanks to, among other factors, the activities of non-profit initiatives, and even though some anti-corruption legislation has been adopted, citizens do not see the situation as improving. Society's view of corruption is problematic in and of itself, as corruption is not regarded as a threat to the political system and to democracy as such, but as a problem existing between the briber and the bribed. The prevalence of this view is yet another attribute that separates post-communist societies from long-standing democracies such as Germany.

Research on corruption in the Czech Republic tends to focus on the state administration, and also international comparative surveys assess the Czech Republic as a whole. Local governments remain insufficiently researched. No research regarding the presence of corruption on the local level is available, though. Despite the fact that the investigation did not primarily focus on corruption or clientelism, at least some findings regarding the phenomenon can be stated. As concerns municipal politics, several waves of international research have also been conducted involving Czech researchers. Most recently, the latest international research project entitled *Munici-*

pal Assemblies in European Local Governance (MAELG, 2008) took place in 2008 (for partial results see e.g. Ryšavý, Šaradín, 2008; Ryšavý, Šaradín, 2010; Ryšavý, Bernard, 2011; Aars, Offerdal and Ryšavý, 2012; Steyvers, Verhelst, 2012; Egner, Sweeting, and Klok, 2013). The objective was to determine how representatives' performance was influenced by their attitudes and opinions, or they were asked questions related to their career. There was therefore a single 'corruption' question and it dealt with the representatives' integrity.

This article provides selected results of a questionnaire survey implemented among mayors in 2017 in the Hradec Kralove Region and local politicians in 2009. The data is being accompanied by the findings and researches from the Institute of Sociology of the Czech Academy of Sciences which are being offered through the Czech Social Science Data Archive. The datasets are available from the beginning of the 90s. Basic analytical operations are provided by the NESSTAR platform that even opens the data to the public. In the local political system, the body of local authority is the most important, whose size depends on the number of inhabitants within the given municipality. While the governments of major cities have up to 55 members, the smallest have only 5. The mayor is elected indirectly by councilors, and municipalities with at least 15 mandates also elect the executive body of the municipality — the council. According to the law the mayor is a representative figure but in reality, the informal position of the mayor is much stronger. Of the four ideal types (Mouritzen, Svara, 2002: 56), the Czech Republic falls under the collective form. Crucial powers are held by the local authorities that elect city councils and mayors. The village mayors represent concrete territories and the position itself is rather ceremonial. Along with political parties, local elections also list independent candidates. The first elections to local assemblies took place in 1990, followed by six more in 1994, 1998, 2002, 2006, 2010 and 2014. There are 6,258 municipalities in the Czech Republic.

2.   Corruption and Public Administration

Michal Hašek, the former President of the Association of the Regions of the Czech Republic which includes all 14 regions, stated at the beginning of May 2012 that "social democratic self-governments in regions are able to administer well, introduce economic measures without any harsh impact on citizens, fight corruption and implement sensible and useful projects". In a brochure released before the (date) elections the ČSSD (Czech Social Democratic Party) claimed "Our decision-making processes are transparent and public contracts are subject to more tested and tried processes aimed at reducing possible corruption." (ČSSD in Regions, p. 5). Approximately ten days after the release of the report, the media informed viewers of the fact that the most influential Social Democrat Regional President and Member of

Parliament, David Rath, had been arrested for receiving a seven-million CZK bribe. This certainly damaged the reputation of the ČSSD in the eyes of both the media and the people. It displayed what many people privately felt that Czech politicians are hypocrites when it comes to corruption. They talk about the need to eradicate it while secretly enjoying the spoils.

The Rath case demonstrates that corruption concerns all levels of politics, not only the so-called top or parliamentary politics, but also local (and now regional) levels as well. Additional cases were made public particularly concerning the allocation of European subsidies on the regional level in the summer of 2012.

The Civil Law Convention on Corruption adopted by the Council of Europe in Strasbourg emphasizes that corruption endangers rule of law, democracy, human rights, fairness and social justice. Corruption is perceived as a general threat to democracy, the one that most-often interferes with public administration. The Czech Government Anti-Corruption Strategy states: "Among the negative impacts of corruption is the lower confidence in the legal state or formation of parallel, non-elected and non-democratic power structures." (Government's Strategy: 5–6). The Czech Security Strategy, another government document the latest version of which was adopted in 2011, ranks corruption as among the significant threats to security. Pavol Frič in his discussion "Why is there corruption in the Czech Republic?" labels the current form of corruption as system corruption which "is not only individually corrupt behaviour, but corrupt behaviour of institutions" (Frič 2011). Public institutions do not serve citizens, rather they serve those who administer them, govern them or work for them. In fact, the state of corruption is exhaustively described in Frič´s first book dealing with the issue (Frič 1999). Although it is an older book, a number of the analyses remain relevant today.

CVVM (Public Opinion Research Centre) surveyed the level of corruption in the individual public administration areas and bodies of the Czech Republic (CVVM 2016) in February 2016. Based on the results, political parties came out the worst where the level of corruption was the highest according to the respondents; the situation did not improve with regional authorities either (See Figure 3 and 4 below).

CVVM also dealt with corruption in further investigations. It appears that citizens perceive corruption as an extremely serious threat and, along with unemployment, usually rank it amongst their list of concerns. Politicians' reactions to this threat are usually positive primarily during election campaigns. Prior to parliamentary elections, politicians have repeatedly tried to appeal to voters with anti-corruption strategies. The most noticeable campaign was in all probability by the Czech Social Democratic Party (ČSSD) prior to the 1998 elections, when the party promised complete investigations of the privatisation fraud and a minimizing of corruption in public administration. The Chair of the Social Democrats promised that 150,000 cheaters would end up in prison. He named his campaign after an Italian investiga-

tion into corruption but in the end, his high-flying, 'Clean Hands' campaign turned out to be an utter failure.

In the election campaign for the 2006 parliamentary elections, the opposing Civic Democratic Party (ODS) concentrated on a critique of the governing ČSSD and their scandals. Their campaign, along with the Green Party, was based on anti-corruption rhetoric. This strategy proved successful, winning ODS the elections. The Czech Government Anti-Corruption Strategy was adopted for 2006 and 2011 after the elections. The issue of corruption also dominated the 2010 election campaign, when specifically, the non-parliamentary party Public Affairs (VV) built on the fight against corruption. Public Affairs won the favour of protest voters, benefiting from the advantage of being a brand-new party unburdened by the past and therefore acceptable for many citizens. Thanks to its strong rhetoric anchored in the fight against corruption, the party acquired over 10 % of the votes in the general election. Public Affairs became part of the government, but fell apart during their first year in power in the wake of several scandals. The informal manager of Public Affairs was accused of corruption and "political entrepreneur". A New Strategy for 2011 and 2012 was grounded in the pillars of prevention, transparency and recourse. This strategy better specifies the conditions for the implementation of public contracts. It established the adoption of a new code of ethics for public administration clerks and employees as well as for elected representatives. It set up anti-corruption training for target groups, strengthened the support of non-government, non-profit, anti-corruption organizations and cooperation with them (e.g. Transparency International of the Czech Republic, Civic association Oživení, Otevřená společnost /Open Society/, Růžový panter /Pink Panther/, etc.), as well as setting up the operations of a central website by the Office of the Government of the Czech Republic www.bezkorupce.cz (translation: without corruption) which provides information on the fight against corruption, amongst other things. The government managed to devise an anti-corruption strategy for 2013 and 2014, only to crumble one year before the regular elections under the weight of several scandals, some of which were corruption-related. This situation was taken advantage of by the billionaire Andrej Babiš[3] who was, at that time, in the process of setting up his own political project: ANO 2011. Babiš censured all parliamentary groups and emphasised the need to fight corruption. He became a member of the government which pledged to keep the growth of corruption in the country in check after the 2013 parliamentary elections. After a couple of affairs concerning the tax optimization, he was removed from the government by the prime minister (2017). The Ministry of Justice monitors the amount of accused and sentenced persons in accordance with definite articles of the penal code related to corruption. The table 1 shows an overview of selected years as in line with the MAELG research (2008).

Table 1: An overview of accused and sentenced persons due to corruption

	Misconduct in office		Taking a bribe		Bribery	
Year	Accused	Sentenced	Accused	Sentenced	Accused	Sentenced
2008	156	55	42	26	78	50
2009	112	64	31	28	68	51
2010	130	73	31	21	82	53
2011	231	76	48	22	155	78

Source: Ministry of Justice

The table 1 shows a substantial deterioration in numbers of corruption affairs in 2011. Although it is not easy to explain where the causes may be found, the general election was held in 2010 and it resulted in giving rise to so called anti-corruption government which was, however, toppled in 2013 due to suspicion of corruption.

3.   Objective of the Study

The goal of this study is to determine whether or not local representatives have the same concerns regarding corruption as citizens and business people. This paper should verify a simple hypothesis: the more frequently corruption is discussed at the national level the more it will be perceived as an acute problem in the lower tiers of government. Research results indicate that councilors think corruption is predominantly found in national politics, with this opinion being expressed by 60 % of the surveyed sample.

The Special Eurobarometer on Corruption (Corruption, 2014) demonstrated that 95 % of respondents in the Czech Republic were of the opinion that corruption is widespread (the EU average was 76 %). The countries with the lowest numbers were Denmark (20 %) and Finland (29 %). The countries where respondents most often thought that corruption is widespread were Greece (99 %) Italy (97 %), Lithuania and Spain (both 95 %). The countries where respondents most often thought that corruption has worsened over the last three years were Spain, Slovenia, the Czech Republic and Italy.

The authors of the 2012 Eurobarometer 374 Corruption stated: "Greece, Cyprus, Italy and the Czech Republic record the highest levels of agreement with around nine in every ten respondents thinking corruption is part of their business culture." (Corruption 2012) According to the Global Competitiveness Index 2013–2014 (Schwab 2013), "Concerns remain about the quality of the country's public institutions, with public trust in politicians ranked at an extremely low 146th, ahead of only

Argentina and Lebanon globally." When asked to name the most problematic factors in doing business, corruption ranked first.

The public administration system can be said to bear the anti-corruption fight in mind, but on the national level a more tangible recourse is missing. In addition, looking at the litmus test of anti-corruption efforts, such as the law on financing political parties, Czech politicians completely fail in this respect. Their financing may be expected to remain non-transparent. The lower tiers of Czech politics shall be examined at this point

4. Questionnaire Survey of the Views of Local Representatives

The interpretation of the data is based on the assumption that the dependent variable is corruption. As neither of the surveys below established questions related to this issue as their primary focus, I did not try to identify the actual independent variables that would explain local corruption. The vast majority of research projects in this area target the national levels.

The second set of data concerned local politics. Between 2008 and 2010 we were involved in international research dealing with the investigation and analysis of opinions and attitudes of representatives in towns and city districts with more than 10,000 citizens (Municipal Assemblies in European Local Governance). This category included 132 towns with 3,620 representatives after the 2006 local elections. There were 47 city districts of a similar size with 1,352 representatives. The response was 828 of the completed questionnaires in total, where over two thirds were from town representatives (N = 629). We received 199 questionnaires from city district representatives. The response rate was 17.4 % in towns and 14.7 % in city districts. A similar percentage (15–22 %) of representatives also responded during the survey in neighbouring countries such as Poland, Austria and Germany. Lower response rates were registered in southern European countries (Spain, Italy) and in Great Britain. Higher response rates were achieved in Scandinavia, in the Netherlands and Switzerland. The top response rate — almost two thirds of all questionnaires sent out — was obtained by researchers in Sweden. We also carried out surveys in towns with 3,000–10,000 citizens. As previously mentioned, the representatives' integrity was at the focus of our attention.

We have conducted a questionnaire survey amongst mayors of the Hradec Kralove Region in February 2017. This region may be classified as average (from 13 in total) in many aspects, for instance the population, unemployment rate, GDP subsidy within the Czech Republic, and even its location is central. 247 mayors were approached and 83 of them have replied, i.e. 34 %. The questions were meant to

investigate two areas of interest. At an 11-point scale, mayors were supposed to share their stances towards the corruption urgency within various levels of public power: from the local and regional governance to the parliamentary and governmental level. Within the same scale, they were asked to express their opinions on the integrity rate of representatives of their village. Subsequently, they were asked whether the issue of corruption is being perceived as significant or exaggerated.

4.1 Integrity of Local Politicians

Only one question indirectly concerned the issue of corruption in the international research findings. It involved considering that the statement "councilors' integrity in town/city district (CD) is high and the representatives' decision-making processes cannot be influenced by any offered benefits". The councilors themselves assessed their own integrity as 'high', and therefore, any offered benefits may have indeed led to influencing them. Table 2 divides the representatives into three groups: the first are the right-wing parties (namely ODS), the second is the left (meaning the members of ČSSD and the Communists) and the third group are smaller parties and non-party councilors. Right wing representatives are more ready to believe in their own integrity than their left wing colleagues. There is also a considerable difference among the ODS members and other representatives, in this case more than double. In the case of ODS, there is a certain disparity between the councilors in towns and city districts. In decentralized cities[4] more than half of the respondents agreed on high integrity (Table 2). The difference among ODS representatives and the two other categories of politicians is due to a substantially larger ODS share in the executive power. The party was successful in cities where there is a higher standard of living and such voters usually support the right.

Table 2: Integrity of councilors in towns/city districts is high

	Agreement		Neither agreement or disagreement		Disagreement	
	Towns	CDs	Towns	CDs	Towns	CDs
ODS	48	58	36	34	16	8
Left	34	32	40	46	26	22
Others	23	42	52	37	25	21

Source: Ryšavý, Šaradín 2008

The question as to whether the councilors' integrity is high and whether the representatives' decisions were ever influenced by any potential benefits was answered by respondents in all the countries participating in the international research.

**Figure 1: Representatives' integrity compared internationally (local councilors)**
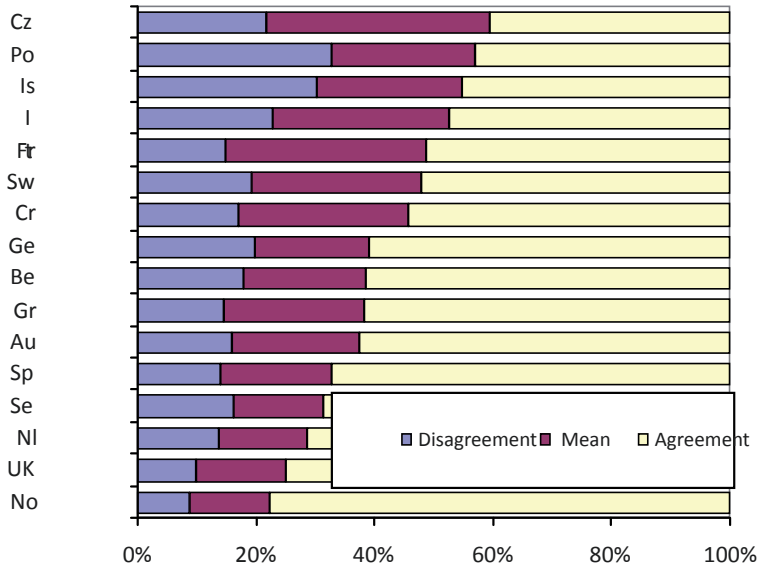
Abbreviation of countries: Cz (Czech Republic), Po (Poland), Is (Israel), It (Italy), Sw (Switzerland),
Cr (Croatia), Ge (Germany), Gr (Greece), Au (Austria), Sp (Spain), SE (Sweden),
Ni (Netherlands), UK (United Kingdom), No (Norway).

Source: Ryšavý, Šaradín 2008

It is apparent from Figure 1 that Czech representatives (41 %) themselves believe that the councilors' integrity is not high or is lowest in the data set overall. Representatives from Poland and Israel are directly behind the Czech Republic. In contrast, the highest integrity was reported by councilors in the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and Norway. If we had only data from the Czech Republic, no conclusions could be formed. It can be seen in this manner that the high prevalence of corruption in society is affirmed by the representatives themselves.

In the paper *Municipal and Local Politicians: What do they think of politics? Meditations on Public Opinion Polls* (Ryšavý, Šaradín 2008), we attempted to correlate integrity (see, Figure 2, the vertical axis) with Corruption Perception Index scores (the horizontal axis) from the year 2008 when we conducted our research (correlation coefficient = 0.76). It is apparent here that the Czech Republic is situated in the bottom left corner among countries with a high perception of corruption where councilors do not believe in the integrity of the elected representatives.

Figure 2: Correlation between CPI and integrity
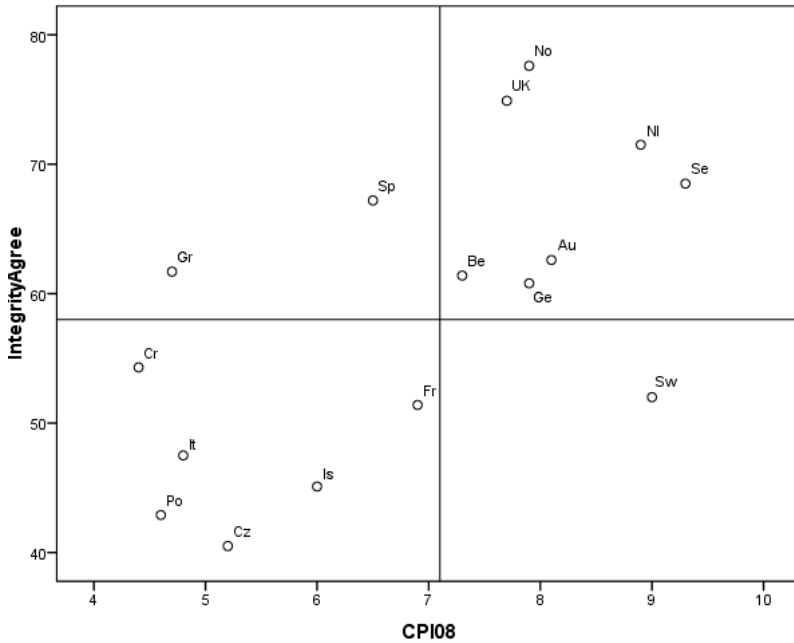
The mayors in the Hradec Kralove Region were asked a couple of questions in our survey as stated above. We inquired, inter alia, what level of public service shall be responsible for dealing with corruption. And the mayors used the 11-point scale where 0 means completely insignificant, and 10, on the other hand, stands for completely significant. Table 3 shows that mayors believe that corruption shall be addressed on the level of ministries (8,8) or the government (8,4 points). Contrarily, the local level does not represent such an urgent case where solutions should have been looked for (3 points). Consequently, we have observed the mayors' stances towards the issue in respect with of the number of terms in office. There is no linear dependency, however, only the mayors who are in office for the first time assume that corruption shall not be necessarily addressed within all the levels of power in comparison with mayors who have been re-elected for another term in office.

**Table 3: Mayors in the Hradec Kralove Region about corruption**

	Up to 500		500–3,000		3–10,000		above 10,000		Total
Population of the village									
	N = 34	I don´t know	N = 36	I don´t know	N = 9	I don´t know	N = 3	I don´t know	
Local level	2,8	3 %	2,8	3 %	3,3	0 %	6	0 %	3
Regional level	5,9	6 %	4,8	6 %	4,7	0 %	7,3	0 %	5,3
Parliamentary level	8,4	6 %	8,4	6 %	6,8	0 %	8,3	0 %	8,2
Government	8,7	9 %	8,6	11 %	7,2	0 %	8	0 %	8,4
Ministries	9	6 %	9	8 %	7,9	0 %	8,3	0 %	8,8
Integrity of Representatives	5,5	15 %	6,5	11 %	5,4	0 %	4,3	0 %	5,8
The need to fight	5,1	3 %	4,4	0 %	5,7	0 %	4	0 %	4,8
Corruption as a problem	6,7	3 %	6,8	0 %	5,4	0 %	6,7	0 %	6,5

	First		Second		Third		Fourth +		Total
Mayors' terms in office									
	N = 19	I don´t know	N = 21	I don´t know	N = 13	I don´t know	N = 29	I don´t know	
Local level	3,6	0 %	3,1	0 %	1,9	0 %	3,1	7 %	3
Regional level	4,9	0 %	5,4	5 %	5,4	15 %	5,5	3 %	5,3
Parliamentary level	7,8	0 %	8,3	10 %	8,5	0 %	8,2	7 %	8,2
Government	7,9	5 %	8,8	14 %	8,2	8 %	8,7	7 %	8,4
Ministries	8,4	0 %	9	10 %	9,1	0 %	8,8	10 %	8,8
Integrity of Representatives	6,1	5 %	6,1	10 %	5,2	8 %	5,8	17 %	5,8
The need to fight	4,6	0 %	4,8	0 %	6,2	0 %	4,4	3 %	4,8
Corruption as a problem	6,6	0 %	6,1	0 %	7,6	0 %	6,3	3 %	6,5

Source: own research

In June 2016, the Public Opinion Research Centre has asked more than a thousand of respondents what are their stances and perceptions towards corruptions on various levels of public powers.[5] If respondents, who were not able to assess the issue, are omitted (7.3 %), the answers are equally distributed for a 5-point scale so that the mean value (3) was the most frequent, thus both sides of the scale are represented equally. Hence, we employ the very same distribution of answers for the figure 3 where respondents were supposed to appraise corruption in political parties.

Figure 3: The corruption perceptions within local authorities and political parties

The corruption perceptions
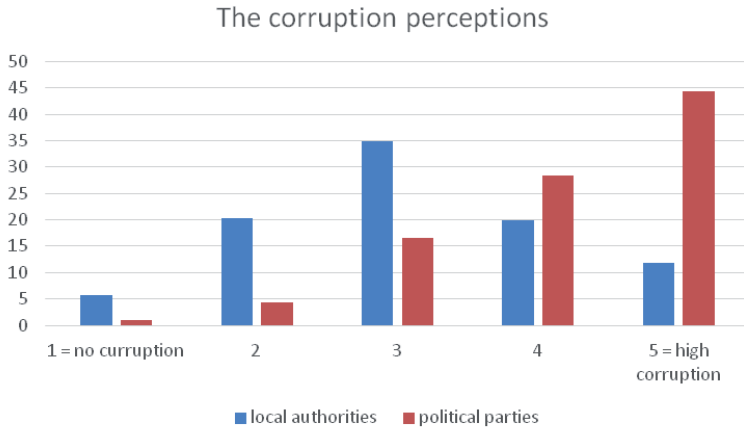
Source: CVVM (nesstar.soc.cas.cz): Our Society (Naše společnost) 2016 – March, prepared by the authors

Citizens and their stances complete previous mayors' attitudes to the intent that in comparison of various levels of public powers, the corruption perception on the local level seems as the least acute. The same survey shows that the European subsidizing poses a high rate of corruption amongst respondents (39 %), lower ones are as follows: Ministries and central authorities (26 %), regional and local authorities (16 a 12 %). By contrast, perceptions of a lower or no rate of corruption is being represented by 26 % of respondents; 15 % of respondents think so in case of regional authorities, 12 % in case of Ministries and central authorities, 7 % of respondents inclined towards this point of view in case of European subsidizing.

Figure 4: The corruption perceptions within various levels of public powers
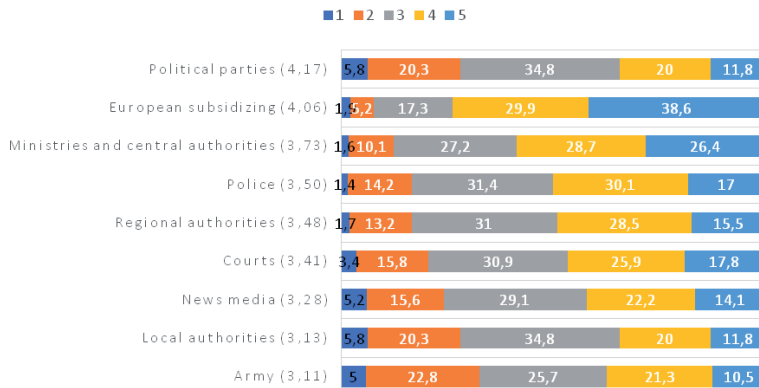
Note: The data shows a percentage frequency distribution of valid answers on the scale as follows: 1 – no corruption, 5 – high corruption. "I don't know" answers are excluded, but represent remaining figures to 100 %)

Source: CVVM (nesstar.soc.cas.cz): Our Society (Naše společnost) 2016 – March 2016, prepared by the authors

Table 4 shows that citizens tend to think that a vast majority of public officers takes part in corruption or at least its clear majority. 66 % of respondents maintained this position. Subsequently, the respondents were asked a question: "How do bribes and corruption influence the politicians?" If answers for these two categories stating: "in large extent" are toted up, 58 % of respondents opined in favour.

Table 4: The corruption spread amongst public officers

A rare number of public officers is bribed	3.6 %
Less than a half of public officers is bribed	24 %
A vast majority of public officers takes bribes	43.9 %
Nearly every public officer take part in bribery	22.2 %
I don´t know	6.3 %

Source: CVVM (nesstar.soc.cas.cz): Our Society (Naše společnost) – March 2006

5.   Conclusion

It appears that public administration in the Czech Republic has established suitable mechanisms to fight corruption comparable to those in other Central European countries. Based on the position in the index published by Transparency International, its position hardly changes. Surveys regularly carried out by research agencies indicate that Czech citizens perceive corruption as one of the major issues.

The international data set indicates that the Czech town councilors' integrity is the lowest. Only two other Central European countries participated in the research — Poland and Croatia — and both obtained slightly better results in this respect. Not even half of the representatives in any category, divided according to their ideological anchoring, were persuaded that the integrity of town representatives was high. The most affirmative responses could be heard from right wing representatives, which is likely due to their higher numbers in town councils at the time of the survey when compared to those of left wing or non-party politicians.

The data of our research demonstrated that according to Czech citizens, corruption is perceived as a parliamentary acute issue, rather than local. The statement is being backed even by the data published by CVVM (see figures 3, 4). The goal of this paper was to determine the extent to which the responses of local and regional politicians corresponded to the public perception of corruption in Czech society. Although the surveys were neither fully representative, nor primarily concerned with corruption, at least certain indications could be obtained. Regional representatives did not consider corruption as the greatest obstacle to regional development, however, the differences in seriousness among the most pressing problems undermining

the development of the region were not substantial. The data on local politicians was more conclusive. Compared to their peers in other countries, councilors in the Czech Republic have the worst view as to the moral integrity of their representatives. This finding corresponds to the public perception of corruption as a major problem.

Notes

1   An anti-corruption agenda was central to two newly established parties that made it into the government after succeeding in parliamentary elections: Public Affairs in 2010 and the billionaire Andrej Babiš's ANO 2011 movement in 2013, 2017. Government strategies were elaborated, see for example Government's Strategy of the Fight against Corruption for 2006 to 2011, The government anti-corruption strategy for the years 2011 and 2012 etc.

2   In 2003, 133 countries were evaluated; in 2014, it was 175 countries.

3   Babiš is the second richest person in the Czech Republic with a net worth of almost 2 billion US dollars. Among other businesses, he owns a powerful media group that publishes national dailies.

4   Statutory cities in the CR may be divided into local quarters or districts. Not all cities do so and the research includes only such city districts with more than 10,000 citizens.

5   The data set Our Society (Naše společnost) – March 2016, NESSTAR, nesstar.soc.cas.cz. The exact question wording: Tell me, please, which of these following institutions and areas of public life are affected by corruption. Mark your answer where 1 stands for no corruption, while 5 means a high rate of corruption.

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