Marija Zurnić, *Corruption and Democratic Transition in Eastern Europe. The Role of Political Scandals in Post-Milošević Serbia*, Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019 (Political Corruption and Governance). 262 pp., ISBN 978-3-319-90100-8 (Hardcover), ISBN 978-3-319-90101-5 (eBook), € 85.59 (Hardcover), € 67.82 (eBook)

Marija Zurnić's monograph deals with discourses of corruption and their (absent) impact on anti-corruption institutions in Serbia during the years 2000 to 2012. Defining discourse as 'both ideas and the process of communicating them' and institutions as 'being simultaneously both fixed and contingent' (7), she explores their mutual influence. By pointing to analogous research, she underlines that corruption scandals mostly lead to long-term changes in anti-corruption legislation, while in Serbia this has not been the case. In order to support her assumption, the author focuses on six major corruption scandals in Serbia, which she singles out as the most relevant in post-Milošević Serbia due to their media coverage and other criteria, such as their impact on the quality of life or the specific moment in time at which the scandal occurred. In parallel, Zurnić describes changes within the anti-corruption institutions and to laws in Serbia during the time period under scrutiny.

Following the introduction, two chapters discuss the concepts of state, interest, power, and property during the time of the interwar Yugoslav kingdom and the socialist era, as well as during the reign of Slobodan Milošević in the 1990s. In the fourth chapter, Zurnić describes the establishment of anti-corruption institutions in Serbia after the end of the Milošević regime in 2000. The subsequent three chapters analyze six selected corruption scandals. The first two scandals comprise

the privatization of the pharmaceutical company *Jugoremedija* as well as the evidence of the transfer of substantial funds to banks in Cyprus by the National Bank of Yugoslavia and the ruling party of Milošević during the UN sanctions. Both occurred in the early 2000s. The second two affairs include the bankruptcy of the *Sartid* factory and the privatization of the supermarket chain *C Market*, which were controversially discussed between 2004 and 2008. The privatization of the Port of Belgrade and the swine flu scandal, the most prominent corruption affair in the health sector, are the last two scandals to be analyzed. They took place between 2009 and 2012. Zurnić's research is based on the qualitative analysis of newspaper reports as well as interviews with various stakeholders.

Going back in time, the author highlights the different perceptions of corruption that existed during state socialism and the regime of Milošević, and those that have prevailed since his fall in 2000. In socialist Yugoslavia, political corruption was virtually non-existent on the discursive level because there was no separation between powers in the political system. Even though corruption existed on a normative level, it was not discussed in public. During Milošević's regime this changed, and two main discourses developed. Critics of Milošević emphasized how corruption was an inherent part of his governance; his supporters, on the other hand, ignored corruption and stressed that they were acting in the national interest.

After the political and economic changes in the year 2000, some of these discourses changed once more, while others displayed continuities with the past. Zurnić highlights that in general anti-corruption discourses in Serbia have followed a glob-

al trend—good governance has been the keyword. Rule of law, transparency, participation, and inclusiveness are just some of the headwords that characterize this policy. Beyond that, discourses have centered around pledges to separate the public and the private spheres in politics. Even though the six corruption scandals vary in detail, the discourses around them show similar patterns. State actors largely stressed that they were operating in the interest of the nation—an argument reminiscent of political actors under Milošević. Others, such as the National Anti-Corruption Council, an independent institute established in the early 2000s to advise the government concerning corruption, have criticized the lack of transparency in state institutions and demanded rule of law. Likewise, the Council insisted in relation to some of the case studies that citizens should have a right to participate in decision-making during the privatization phase, as in the socialist era the companies had by definition been owned by society as a whole, and in the years that Milošević was in power by small shareholders.

In scrutinizing these corruption scandals, Zurnić successfully demonstrates how they had no or only minor impact on anti-corruption legislation. While the corruption scandals concerning funds transferred to Cyprus and the *Jugoremedija* case between 2000 and 2005 had no direct effect, the scandal around the privatization of *C Market* and the swine flu case between 2007 and 2012 had a small, though close to negligible influence. Zurnić emphasizes that the impact of external actors has been much more important. Major changes in anti-corruption legislation were carried out in 2003 when the country joined the Council of Europe's anti-corruption monitoring body, Group of States against Corruption (GRECO), and in 2005 due to

the uplift in the negotiations for Serbia's EU accession. A third instance was EU visa liberalization in 2009, which required a change in Serbia's anti-corruption legislation to be put into force.

Zurnić's book on corruption scandals and institutional change in Serbia after Milošević is a valuable contribution to the discussion about the entanglement of public discourse and institutional change. The author successfully highlights the non-existent or minor influence of civil society organizations on political actors when viewed through the prism of corruption in Serbia. However, one point of criticism should be raised: even though Zurnić indicates that similar research has not been conducted for other Central and Eastern European countries or other successor states of Yugoslavia, she underlines the 'specific role in politics' of corruption scandals in postcommunist countries (199). She refers here to the discrepancy between wider public debates and their (largely lacking) reflection in the institutional framework, as well as to the absence of transparency regarding issues that have concerned Serbian society as a whole. Despite the historical overview presented in the book, it remains open as to why the Serbian state of affairs should be applicable to other postsocialist societies, and how and in what ways recent events are connected to socialist times. Still, Zurnić is one of the few authors to deal with corruption in the economic realm in Serbia and connects the phenomenon to the political sphere. She convincingly points out the deficits in Serbia's democratic order, and her book is therefore a must-read for scholars interested in that country's transition to democracy, and also in democratic processes more generally, and corruption discourses more specifically.

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