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A contractor empire : public-private partnerships and overseas expansion in Habsburg Portugal (1580-1640)

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Stellingen - Propositions

1. Government contracts were a powerful instrument of early modern empire-building, in Portugal and elsewhere in Western Europe, although they took on different shapes across space and time.
2. Historians were too harsh in their assessment of the economic efficiency and political impact of government contracts. Their portrayal as predatory, inefficient, rent-seeking institutions that led to the devolution of state power is, simply put, too simplistic and one-sided.
3. Rather than a crude dichotomy between contracting and direct administration, it is more insightful to look at how the state went about contracting, with whom, and how the implementation of state concessions was monitored by the Crown.
4. The implementation of government contracts, particularly those involving naval and military logistics, was inextricably linked to transnational commodity chains.
5. Contracts were the most powerful mechanism of capital accumulation for the kingdom's merchant elite
6. Contracts were by no means risk-free investments and it was no foregone conclusion they would yield astounding profits to their recipients.
7. While profit was the main driver of contractors, it was not the only rationale behind underwriting a government contract since it allowed for economic capital to be exchanged for social-symbolic capital.
8. If the decision is made to underwrite a public private partnership, present-day democratically elected governments owe it to the people to strictly follow the legal framework that regulates public-contracts. Cabinets should negotiate the terms with the utmost transparency and aim for the most cost-effective outcome.
9. When it comes to the journalistic coverage of any political and societal event, neutrality should not be mistaken for objectivity. The different sides to a certain issue should be brought up and discussed, but reporters and journalists should not be afraid to speak out and denounce falsehoods, bigotry and morally bankrupt behaviour under the guise that "they want to play it down the middle".
10. A warm and collegial academic environment, where PhD candidates feel at ease to discuss ideas and speak their mind, but also to share their insecurities and frustrations about work and personal life, increases the chances of them living up to their true potential.