

Forschungsstelle Osteuropa an der Universität Bremen

Research Centre for East European Studies at the University of Bremen

Changing Europe Summer School IV Civil Society in Central and Eastern Europe before and after the End of Socialism

Kyiv (Ukraine), 27 – 31 July 2009

at the National University of 'Kyiv-Mohyla Academy'

sponsored by the Volkswagen Foundation

www.changing-europe.org

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Can civil society play a role in foreign policy? Societal groups in the Czech Republic

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Language editing: Hilary Abuhove

Abstract

In contrast to the first years of Foreign Policy Analysis (1960s), it no longer seems possible to dismiss the impact of societal groups on the foreign policy-making process as negligible. The complexity of issues in international politics and the establishment of multilevel structures of decision-making have opened up space for various forms of political action, including by non-state actors. At the domestic level, civil society organizations have become increasingly geared towards foreign policy-making and national governments are increasingly willing to involve them in the process. However, the role of societal groups in foreign policy-making varies according to historical and national contexts.

The Czech Republic constitutes a particularly interesting case in this regard: the philosophy inherited from the dissident movement and leading civil society figures (such as Vaclav Havel) has considerably shaped Czech foreign policy thinking, steering it towards democracy and human rights promotion – so much so that some refer to Czech foreign policy as a ‘civic foreign policy’. This tradition should seemingly facilitate civil society’s involvement in foreign policy; indeed, several societal groups appear to interact with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. However, this involvement has to be contrasted with the recurrent lack of popular support for recent major foreign policy decisions. The paper was inspired by this conundrum, and relying on analytical instruments framed by Foreign Policy Analysis and International Relations, attempts to analyse more closely the role and influence of societal groups in the formulation and implementation of Czech foreign policy.

To this end, the structure and content of Czech foreign policy-making is first analysed in detail. The limited number of key actors as well as the emphasis on democracy assistance paves the way for societal groups’ involvement. The nature and functions of the latter are described in the second part of this paper. These groups appear to be interconnected with the Ministry in many ways, but to examine this synergy more precisely and to gauge the role of societal groups in foreign policy, I present two case studies, namely the Eastern Partnership and the issue of the Ballistic Missile Defence system.

The findings indicate that societal groups do play a significant role (as kick-starters, agents or joint managers), particularly with respect to democracy assistance policies towards the Eastern Neighbourhood. However, those groups hardly perform the classic functions of civil society (i.e. limiting the scope of the state and encouraging citizen involvement), acting instead as ‘parastate organizations’. This stems less from shortcomings on the actors’ part than from the essence of foreign policy, which generally leaves little room for civil society’s involvement in the domestic (vertical) process. However, at the horizontal (transnational and European in particular) level, societal groups are increasingly performing the abovementioned traditional functions by engaging abroad in civil society capacity-building.

1. Introduction

When Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) was undergoing its first developments as an academic subject, Lester Milbrath deemed the impact of societal groups on the foreign policy process to be negligible.¹ This view is less tenable today. Indeed, the continued process of international political and economic integration (i.e. globalization) has led to the formation of a system of 'complex interdependence' in which the privileged position of the state is increasingly challenged.² The internationalization and complexity of issues as well as the establishment of multilevel structures of decision-making have opened up space for various forms of political action, including by non-state actors.³ At the transnational level, cause groups are becoming increasingly adept at influencing the intergovernmental agenda by capitalizing on global communication channels.⁴ But societal groups are also exerting more influence at the domestic (and European) level, for instance by successfully lobbying policy-makers on specific issues.⁵ Thus, several scholars analysing the reshaping of national foreign policies have been advancing the narrative of 'diplomatic change':

Not only has the continuum of relationships between state and societal actors been enhanced by the development of civil society, but the emergence of a closer state/societal complex is reflected in the ways that professional diplomats perceive and discharge their roles and also in the texture of the formulation and implementation of international policy itself.⁶

In other words, civil society organizations have become increasingly skilled at participating in the foreign policy-making process and national governments are more and more willing to involve them. However, the role of societal groups varies according to historical and national contexts. Thus, their influence ought to be evaluated individually and empirically.

The Czech Republic constitutes a particularly interesting case in this regard. First, as a post-Communist state, it is expected to have a relatively weak civil society due to a generally low organizational membership.⁷ Second, the philosophy inherited from the dissident movement and the leading figure of Vaclav Havel has considerably shaped Czech foreign policy thinking, steering it towards democracy and human rights promotion – so much so that some refer to the country's foreign policy as a 'civic foreign policy'. Third, the Foreign Ministry external action agenda overlaps (e.g. on the Eastern European Neighbourhood) with that of several well-established societal groups, and the two sets of actors actually

¹ Milbrath, Lester: Interest groups in foreign policy, in: Rosenau, James (ed.): *The Domestic Sources of Foreign Policy*, New York/NY: Free Press, 1967, pp. 231–251.

² Keohane, Robert / Nye, Joseph: *Power and Interdependence*, 3rd edn, New York/NY: Longman, 2001; Ruggie, John G.: *Territoriality and Beyond. Problematizing Modernity in International Relations*, in: *International Organization*, 1993 (Vol. 47), No. 1, pp. 139–174.

³ Risse-Kappen, Thomas (ed.): *Bringing Transnational Back In. Non-State Actors, Domestic Structures and International Institutions*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

⁴ The growing importance of non-state actors in transnational politics has been abundantly discussed in the academic literature. See for instance Edwards, Michael / Hulme, David: *Beyond the Magic Bullet – NGO Performance and Accountability in the Post-Cold War World*, West Hartford/CT: Kumarian Press, 1999.

⁵ See for instance Mearsheimer, John / Walt, Stephen: *The Israel lobby and US foreign policy*, New York/NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007.

⁶ Cooper Andrew F. / Hocking Brian: *Governments, Non-governmental Organisations and the Re-calibration of Diplomacy*, in: *Global Society*, 2000 (Vol. 14), No. 3, p. 363.

⁷ Morjé Howard, Marc: *The weakness of postcommunist civil society*, in: *Journal of Democracy*, 2002 (Vol. 13), No. 1, pp. 157–169.

appear to be interconnected in numerous ways.⁸ Fourth, many major recent foreign policy decisions have been largely unpopular.⁹ From those four basic assumptions, two paradoxes clearly emerge: How can a foreign policy be 'civic' without the involvement of a strong civil society? How can we explain the recurring unpopularity of foreign policy decisions when numerous societal groups are actually closely interconnected with the Foreign Ministry?

To address those questions, this paper scrutinizes the nature, role and influence of societal groups in the formulation and implementation of Czech foreign policy. To this end, it relies on analytical instruments framed by FPA and International Relations as well as on empirical materials collected in the framework of my Ph.D. thesis (which deals with the foreign and security policies of the Czech Republic in the EU context). Following the classic FPA analytical dichotomy between *structure* and *agent*, the Czech foreign policy system (constituent parts, processes and principles) will be described in the first part of this paper, with particular emphasis on analysing its 'civic' character. The second part will consist of an analysis of the nature of – and functions performed by – the societal groups involved in the foreign policy process. Subsequently, to gauge their impact, two foreign policy issues will be utilized as case studies: the Eastern Partnership (launched under the Czech EU Presidency) and participation in the American Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) system. Based on the findings, the conclusion will draw some lessons on the role of civil society in foreign policy-making.

2. A 'civic foreign policy'?

Simply defined, foreign policy is the sum of official external relations conducted by an independent actor in international relations. Christopher Hill rightfully stresses the political nature of this process as consisting of 'actions, statements and values relating to how the actor wishes to advance its main objectives and to shape the external world.'¹⁰ FPA hence focuses on *actors* (internal or external) – which conceive and influence those actions, statements and values – and on *structures* (domestic or international) – which condition the possibility and realization of those objectives. The interplay between external and internal sources of behaviour is central to the understanding of foreign policy; this paper rests on the basic premise that external factors create constraints and opportunities while the choice of a response ultimately depends upon internal factors. Because the objective of this paper is to investigate the influence of civil society on this choice, the emphasis will be placed on domestic sources of foreign policy. Deborah Gerner identifies three types of domestic factors: societal sources, bureaucratic structures and ideational aspects of decision-making.¹¹ A closer look at the structure of decision-making (organizational model, constitutional arrangements, etc.) and the core elements of foreign policy thinking (political culture, beliefs, world vision, etc.) will help to delineate societal groups' room for manoeuvre.

⁸ For instance, one of the current Deputy Foreign Ministers – considered by many experts to be a key player in Czech foreign policy – is a former director of the NGO *People In Need*.

⁹ According to opinion polls, the majority of the Czech population was displeased with the following decisions: participation in NATO operations in Serbia in 1999, EU adhesion, participation in the 2003 War in Iraq, and installation on Czech soil of the third site of the American Ballistic Missile Defence System.

¹⁰ Hill, Christopher: *The changing politics of foreign policy*, New York/NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003, pp. 4–5.

¹¹ Gerner, Deborah J.: *The Evolution of Foreign Policy Analysis*, in: Neack, Laura / Hay, Jeanne / Haney, Patrick (eds): *Foreign Policy Analysis. Continuity and Change in its Second Generation*, Englewood Cliffs/NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1995, pp. 17–32.

2.1 Structure of decision-making

Although it is a peculiar context, the Czech Republic's assumption of the Presidency of the European Council (on 1 January 2009) presented an apposite occasion to study Czech foreign policy. Indeed, because the Presidency represents a momentous foreign policy task, it provides an excellent opportunity to observe the distribution of power among domestic actors. According to the Czech constitution, the government is responsible for conducting foreign policy. In addition, however, article 63 stipulates that the President shall 'represent the State with respect to other countries'¹². President Vaclav Klaus has consistently cultivated this ambiguity, indulging in multiple acts of defiance and issuing provocative statements against EU integration as well as defending an interpretation of the 2008 Georgian crisis that was contradictory to the government's stance.¹³ More profoundly, some protracted tensions seem to have taken root between the Foreign Ministry and the office of the Minister for EU affairs, which were both somehow responsible for organizing and conducting the EU Presidency.¹⁴

In his seminal study on the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, Graham Allison proposed a typology to analyse the structures of foreign policy decision-making.¹⁵ As indicated by the aforementioned dissonance of views, Czech foreign policy cannot be said to have corresponded to Allison's *Rational Policy Model* – which consists of a unified government following a coherent cost-benefits strategy – nor to the *Organizational Model* – where foreign policy is limited to pre-established standard operating procedures – since Prague was assuming the EU Presidency for the first time. The third model – the *Bureaucratic Politics Model* – where foreign policy is the result of a bargaining game between actors with different priorities and perceptions according to their institutional positioning – appears more pertinent to the Czech case. However, the validity of even this analytical frame, conceived for a much more complex foreign policy process, is limited in the Czech context. Indeed, more than the *where you sit is where you stand* aphorism, it is the personalities and world visions of policy-makers that seem to make the difference, especially since the number of people actually able to set the course of foreign policy is limited.¹⁶ In other words, the decision-making structure has a relatively minor impact on the outcome of the foreign policy-making process.

What can be inferred vis-à-vis the potential window of opportunity for societal groups from this characterization of the Czech decision-making configuration? On the one hand, the limited complexity (i.e. stretching) of the decision-making structure offers few opportunities to 'break into' the process. On the other hand, however, the limited number of decisive actors and centres of power facilitate lobbying. Most importantly, this configuration confers great importance upon decision-makers' world visions and more generally to ideas in foreign policy.

¹² <http://www.hrad.cz/en/czech-republic/constitution-of-the-cr.shtml>

¹³ On the role of Vaclav Klaus during the Czech EU Presidency see: Král, David / Bartovic, Vladimír / Řiháčková, Věra (eds): *The 2009 Czech EU Presidency*, Stockholm: Swedish Institute for European Policy Studies, 2009, pp. 18–23. On the dissonance of view on the Georgian crisis see Cadier, David: *CFSP and central European strategic culture. The Visegrad countries and the Georgian crisis*, paper presented at the 2009 EU-Consent PhD Market, Brussels, February 2009.

¹⁴ Interviews in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Prague, May 2009.

¹⁵ Allison, Graham: *Conceptual models and the Cuban Missile Crisis*, in: *American Political Science Review*, 1969 (Vol. 63), No 3, pp. 689–718.

¹⁶ For instance, the aforementioned discordance of views between the Prime Minister and the President on the topic of the Georgian crisis had more to do with their personalities than their functions.

2.2 Democracy promotion and the Havel legacy

Several scholars have emphasized the importance of beliefs and ideas in international relations.¹⁷ In foreign policy-making, several ideational variables can be identified as potentially influential: the cognitive processes of decision-making (e.g. misperceptions)¹⁸, the strategic culture (i.e. interpretation of the past, national role conceptions)¹⁹ and more generally the values underpinning policy-makers' world visions. On this latter aspect, the most prominent figure is undeniably Vaclav Havel, whose legacy endures in Czech foreign policy. The dissident movement, symbolized by the Charter 77 initiative, played a considerable political role after the Velvet Revolution.²⁰ As president of Czechoslovakia – and then of the Czech Republic – from 1989 to 2003, Havel considerably shaped Czech foreign policy thinking through both his function and his aura, setting what Rick Fawn labels an 'ideology of foreign policy'. By applying dissident philosophy to international relations, Havel framed a 'civic foreign policy' inspired by humanist principles as well as moral imperatives and aimed at promoting democratic values.²¹ His foreign policy can also be labelled as 'civic' in the sense that most of the key policy-makers in his administration came from a civil society organization (Charter 77). However, Havel failed to anchor his political vision in a permanent institution; his ideas endure solely as idealistic values towards which external relations should endeavour to strive. Conversely, the 'competing' ideology, represented by Vaclav Klaus, materialized in a political party (the ODS). His foreign policy vision was steeped in a tradition of exceptionalism, advocating a historical role for the Czech Republic in reviving democracy and the market economy in the post-Cold War world. In other words, 'universal values have characterized both the content and the aims of Czech foreign policy. This was brought to the fore by both Havel and Klaus.'²²

Democracy promotion has thus been a major and resilient feature of Czech foreign policy. This translates of course into policy statements and white papers,²³ but is also manifested in concrete policies and official stances. Prague's unwavering dedication to democratization has sometimes led to its isolation in the EU with respect to the question of human rights promotion.²⁴ For instance, the Czech Republic was the only country opposed to the lifting of EU sanctions on Cuba (for 'historical reasons', as Foreign Minister Schwarzenberg put it).²⁵ Indeed, Czech foreign policy has devoted significant attention to three countries (namely Cuba, Belarus and Burma), a focus that can hardly be explained in terms of geopolitical interests. Beyond bilateral relations, this insistence on human rights and democracy promotion more generally inspires a programmatic approach, most notably towards the Eastern

¹⁷ Goldstein, Judith / Keohane, Robert: *Ideas and Foreign Policy. Beliefs, Institutions, and Political Change*, Ithaca/NY: Cornell University Press, 1993; See also Adler, Emmanuel: *Constructivism and International Relations*, in: Carls, Walter / Simmons, Beth / Risse, Thomas (eds): *Handbook of International Relations*, London: Sage Publications, 2002, pp. 95–118.

¹⁸ Jervis, Robert: *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, Princeton/NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976.

¹⁹ Gray, Colin: *Strategic Culture as Context. The First Generation of Theory Strikes Back*, in: *International Affairs*, 1999 (Vol. 25), No. 1, pp. 49–69.

²⁰ Rupnik, Jacques: *Charte 77, origines et héritages*, in: *La Nouvelle Alternative*, 2007 (Vol. 22), Nos. 72–73.

²¹ Fawn, Rick: *Reconstituting a national identity. Ideologies in Czech foreign policy after the split*, in: *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, 2003 (Vol. 19), No. 3, pp. 204–228.

²² *Ibid.*, here p. 224.

²³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs: *Transition Program Concept*, 2005, http://www.mzv.cz/jnp/en/foreign_relations/neverejne/archives_2002_2005/transition_promotion_program_concept.html, accessed 23 May 2009.

²⁴ *The legacy of Vaclav Havel's dissident spirit*, in: *The Economist*, 30 August 2007.

²⁵ *Czech Foreign Minister highlights new EU-Cuba dialogue*, in: *České Noviny*, 16 October 2008, http://www.ceskenoviny.cz/tema/index_view.php?id=339123&id_seznam=1981

European Neighbourhood (as will be discussed further down). Because 'values-oriented diplomacy is supported by all the mainstream Czech parliamentary political parties, democracy assistance has become one of the Czech Republic's top foreign policy priorities.'²⁶

The 'civic legacy' in foreign policy inherited from the dissident movement and from Vaclav Havel in particular, although more or less salient depending on the government, has symbolically paved the way for civil society organizations. Similarly, democracy promotion constitutes a domain particularly prone to societal group involvement. Hence, both from a structural and an ideological point of view, there seems to be ample room for societal groups in the Czech foreign policy-making process. However, their actual implication or importance as well as the functions they perform depend on the nature of the organization and on the issue at stake.

3. Societal groups in foreign policy

3.1 Nature of the actors involved

The term 'societal groups' refers in this paper to non-governmental associations of individuals pursuing non-profit goals; it was chosen because it appears more encompassing and less connotative than the term 'NGO'. Indeed, the latter tends to refer to organizations focusing on humanitarian aspects.²⁷ In the Czech Republic, the groups dealing with external relations issues differ widely, but few are actually NGOs in the aforementioned sense.

Academic research centres represent one category of societal groups, the most prominent example being the *Institute of International Relations*.²⁸ It has a clear academic orientation and produces a steady stream of scholarly journals, analytical papers and conferences. Its academic emphasis enables it to strive for independence, but the Institute nonetheless remains linked to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which funds it and calls for specific projects.²⁹ Think tanks represent another category, providing analysis in the form of publications but refraining from engaging in academic debates. They instead tend to focus on a specific set of foreign policy issues that they consistently promote (i.e. lobbying) and for which they produce policy recommendations (i.e. expertise). The two most important actors in this regard are the *Prague Security Studies Institute* (PSSI), which has a clear Atlanticist proclivity, and the *Institute for European Policy* (EUROPEUM), which focuses more on the EU.³⁰ Noteworthy, they tend to concentrate on the three areas (transatlantic relations, the Eastern European Neighbourhood, and energy security) that constitute the Czech Republic's primary priorities in terms of external relations.³¹ The *Association of International Affairs* (AMO) also falls to some extent in this category, although its research activities (and thus publications) are less developed; its specificity lies in the conception of education programmes for countries such as Belarus or Ukraine and more generally in democracy promotion in Eastern

²⁶ Bartovic, Vladimír: Limited Resources, Global Ambitions. The Czech Republic's Democracy Assistance Policies and Priorities, in: Kucharczyk, Jacek / Lovitt, Jeff: Democracy's New Champions, Prague: PASOS, 2008, pp. 29–49, here p. 29.

²⁷ This is confirmed by the definition given by the World Bank, according to which NGOs are groups that have 'primarily humanitarian or co-operative objectives'. Quoted in Warleigh: Alex: 'Europeanizing' Civil Society. NGOs as Agents of Political Socialization, in: Journal of Common Market Studies, 2001 (Vol. 39), No. 4, pp. 619–639, here p. 622.

²⁸ <http://www.iir.cz>

²⁹ For instance, the former director of the institute now holds a high-level position at NATO's headquarters.

³⁰ <http://www.pssi.cz>; <http://www.europeum.org>

³¹ Worth noting is that Alexandr Vondra, the former Minister for EU affairs and one of the leading figures in current Czech foreign policy thinking, has worked at PSSI.

Europe.³² Thus, in terms of classification, the AMO more or less falls between think tanks and advocacy groups. Of the latter, the most powerful NGO – and this holds for all of Central Europe – is undeniably *People in Need* (PIN), which focuses on development and democracy assistance.³³ Even though its focus is narrower than the think tanks' and its approach is less neutral than the academic research centres', PIN is also funded by the MFA.³⁴ Furthermore, as noted earlier, the former director currently holds the position of Deputy Foreign Minister.³⁵

A closer look at the various 'internationalist' societal groups in the Czech Republic revealed some links with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in terms of personal connections but also – and most importantly – in terms of issues and priorities. This convergence of focus between diplomacy and societal groups (and think tanks especially) inspires further study of the putative functions they perform in the foreign policy-making process. Should it be taken as a sign that societal groups are actually playing a role in foreign policy? And if that is the case, do they play the role of domestic sources (i.e. generating inputs) or instruments (i.e. delivering outputs) of diplomacy?

3.2 Functions performed by societal groups in the foreign policy-making process

A closer look at the government-societal group interface – in other words, at the configuration of their interactions – offers some indications regarding their possible functions. Cooper and Hocking advanced a typology in which they identified three forms of government-NGO synergy.³⁶ In the first configuration, societal groups perform the function of a *kick-starter*, engaging in proactive behaviour and thereby contributing to the framing of the government agenda on issues relating to their own activities. A classic example at the international level is the anti-landmine campaign led by a coalition of NGOs, whose efforts brought about the Ottawa Treaty. The second form of interaction between governments and societal groups is that of the *agent*, where the latter takes on a facilitative – sometimes subcontracted – role that supports the activities of the government. This pattern can be observed in the fields of civil society capacity-building and development aid. The third type of government-societal group interface identified by Cooper and Hocking is that of the *joint-manager*, a dynamic in which societal groups are implied in institution-building in coordination with governments. This configuration constitutes the most substantial form of societal group involvement in foreign policy. Between the two types of actors some kind of 'strategic alliance, partnership, or multi-party co-operative venture through which know-how is shared and some mode of formal or informal division of labour is established.'³⁷ This kind of multi-party venture is visible for instance in international responses to complex humanitarian emergencies.

In order to grasp the functions performed by societal groups in the Czech foreign policy-making process, the two case studies will be analysed in reference to this typology. Furthermore, as the more general

³² <http://www.amo.cz>

³³ <http://www.clovekvtisni.cz/>

³⁴ As for EUROPEUM, IIR or AMO, some PIN projects were funded by the Ministry. For a list of projects financed in 2008 see: <http://www.mzv.eu/wwwo/mzv/default.asp?id=56095&ido=21027&idj=1&amb=1>, accessed 20 January 2009.

³⁵ For this typology to be complete, cause groups such as *Ano Pro Evropu* or *European Values* (both concentrating on promoting European integration) ought to be mentioned. The peculiar *No Base Initiative* group (opposed to the BMD system) will be touched upon later.

³⁶ Cooper Andrew F. / Hocking Brian: Governments, Non-governmental Organisations and the Re-calibration of Diplomacy, in: *Global Society*, 2000 (Vol. 14), No. 3, pp. 370–374.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, here p. 373.

question animating this paper concerns the role of civil society, the extent to which the societal groups under study actually fulfil the functions of civil society ought to be discussed. In the classic sense, civil society is 'a sphere of dynamic and responsive public discourse between the state, the public sphere, consisting of voluntary organisations, and the market sphere, concerning private firms and unions.'³⁸ Thus, civil society acts as a mediator between the state and citizens, performing the double function of limiting the alienating scope of the state and of encouraging/facilitating the political engagement of – and solidarity between – citizens.

4. Foreign policy issues and the impact of societal groups

4.1 The Eastern Partnership

The launch of the Eastern Partnership can be regarded as the major achievement of the Czech EU Presidency in the area of external relations.³⁹ EU policy towards its Eastern Neighbourhood figured prominently in the Czech Presidency programme and constitutes more generally one of the cardinal priorities of the Visegrad countries in the framework of the Common and Foreign Security Policy (CFSP).⁴⁰ However, the levels of support and activism varied among the four countries, and the Czech Republic in particular underwent different stages.

Poland has been the most active in this regard, denouncing as early as 2003 the absence of an Eastern dimension in EU foreign policy and advancing what is known as the Polish-Swedish initiative, which directly inspired the Eastern Partnership. In contrast, the Czech Republic, in the absence of a border with this region and because the 'Return to Europe' rhetoric implied a distancing from the East, largely ignored the Eastern Neighbourhood at first, focusing instead for instance on the Balkans.⁴¹ However, Prague gradually invested in policies pertaining to the Eastern Neighbourhood, creating a dedicated department within the Foreign Ministry in 2004 and presenting a non-paper during its Presidency of the Visegrad Group. This evolution was concretized in the launching of the Eastern Partnership at the 7 May 2009 Prague Summit.

Undeniably, this new attention to the East was prompted by external events such as the prospective EU Presidency and the conflict in Georgia in August 2008.⁴² But at the domestic level, it was the implication and activism of societal groups that were instrumental in inscribing the Eastern Neighbourhood on the government agenda. Indeed, they organized a plethora of conferences on the matter, consistently advocating a more pronounced Czech involvement in the region, thus playing the role of the *kick starter*.

³⁸ Janoski, Thomas: *Citizenship and Civil Society*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 12.

³⁹ For an academic analysis of the ENP dynamic see Rupnik, Jacques (ed.): *Les Banlieues de l'Europe*, Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 2007.

⁴⁰ As a matter of fact, the launch of this policy testifies to the Visegrad countries' success in uploading their preferences at the European level as well as to their success, five years after the enlargement, in seizing CFSP instruments. See Cadier, David / Parmentier, Florent: *L'Europe centrale, premier violon du concert européen*, in: *telos-eu.com*, 15 May 2009, <http://www.telos-eu.com>

⁴¹ Kratochvíl, Petr / Tulmets, Elsa: *La Politique Orientale de la République Tchèque et la Politique Européenne de Voisinage*, in: *Revue d'études comparatives Est-Ouest*, 2009 (Vol. 40), No 1, pp. 72–98.

⁴² Tulmets, Elsa: *Preparing the EU Presidency: the Czech Contribution to the Project of 'Eastern Partnership'*, in: *Polish Quarterly of International Affairs*, 2008, No. 4, pp. 79–98.

Czech societal groups also fulfilled the *agent* function, notably in uploading this focus to the EU level.⁴³ The most salient example in this regard was PSSI, which contracted a project – funded by the Visegrad Fund – purporting to ‘increase and sustain the role of the Visegrad Countries in shaping the political agenda of EU institutions.’⁴⁴ Finally, through their educational training programmes (e.g. AMO) and civil society capacity-building activities (e.g. EUROPEUM), Czech societal groups also acted as *joint-managers* in cooperation with the government.

As a matter of fact, the role of NGOs in civil society-building in the Eastern Neighbourhood has been increasingly advocated by both policy-makers and scholars.⁴⁵ However, the NGOs’ actual ability to ‘Europeanize’ civil society has been called into question. Alex Warleigh argued for instance that NGOs were unsuited to this task due to their inability to foster political socialization among their supporters and to the insufficiently democratic nature of their own governance procedure.⁴⁶ This criticism, at least in its first aspect, is applicable to some extent to the societal groups studied here: they do not necessarily encourage Czech citizens to engage politically in the Eastern Neighbourhood issue. Instead, they interact with the government and nascent civil society organizations of the Eastern Neighbourhood countries, aiming to reinforce the latter with the help of the former.

4.2 The Ballistic Missile Defence Shield

As noted earlier, several of the Czech Republic’s major foreign policy decisions have lacked popular support. This can be interpreted as civil society’s inability to impact the foreign policy-making process and explained by looking at the potential limitations on the part of the three different actors involved. One possible explanation would be the state’s impermeability vis-à-vis civil society inputs. While it is true to some extent that external relations constitutes some kind of governmental *domaine réservé*, the Czech Republic has a parliamentary system and political parties do influence foreign policy; witness the political battles in Parliament over the Lisbon Treaty and the BMD system. Secondly, the citizens’ lack of influence on the foreign policy-making process could stem from the societal groups’ inability or unwillingness to act as a transmission belt for articulating and conveying public opinion or concerns. As was observed, in the case of democracy assistance in the Eastern Neighbourhood, societal groups are playing the role of agent – or joint-manager – in relation to the government. Finally, a third potential explanation, and perhaps the most important, concerns the citizens and their lack of interest in foreign policy issues when it comes to voting. While they might have opinions on matters pertaining to external relations, they do not tend to vote according to these particular issues, and hence policy-makers feel free to issue unpopular decisions. The ODS party is a striking example in this regard: while its MPs tend to adopt rather Euro-sceptical stances, its voters number among the most Europhile (along with those of the Green party) in the Czech electorate. In fact, very few of the aforementioned unpopular foreign

⁴³ Beyond the question of the Eastern Neighbourhood, the role of think tanks in communicating the new member states’ preferences at the EU level is interestingly exemplified by the European Policies Initiatives (EPI), which aims at enhancing the new member states’ capacity to impact the framing of a common European policy. See <http://eupi.osi.bg>

⁴⁴ Schneider, Jiří: Central European Contribution to the Eastern Policy of the EU, Project Summary, Prague Security Studies Institute, December 2008.

⁴⁵ Thiers, Robin / Rommens, Thijs: Strengthening the ENP through Regional Civil Society Cooperation, in: CEU Political Science Journal, 2009 (Vol. 4), No 1, pp. 26–47; European Commission: Non-Paper: Strengthening the Civil Society Dimension of the ENP, http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/pdf/non-paper_civil-society-dimension_en.pdf, accessed 29 May 2009.

⁴⁶ Warleigh, Alex: ‘Europeanizing’ Civil Society. NGOs as Agents of Political Socialization, in: Journal of Common Market Studies, 2001 (Vol. 39), No. 4, pp. 619–639.

policy issues have actually been politicized. The question of installing a 'radar' for the US Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) system is an exception in this regard.

The Czech Republic's involvement in the US Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) system has been under negotiation since 2002 (officially since 2007) and would consist of installing a tracking radar base in Brdy (southwest of Prague).⁴⁷ However, although a bilateral agreement between Czech and American authorities has been signed, the realization of this project is by no means a certainty. Not only has President Obama indicated that in this time of economic crisis the technical efficiency of the BMD system will have to be demonstrated, but the ratification of the Treaty is also in jeopardy in the Czech Parliament, where the main opposition party is clearly against it. The Social Democrats (CSSD) have indeed decided to capitalize on popular disapproval of the radar to make it one of the major features of their foreign policy platform.

The societal opposition to the radar is articulated by and around the *No Base Initiative* group (NBI), which regularly sets up information points, organizes public demonstrations and channels the issue to the media realm.⁴⁸ And indeed, in comparison to other external relations matters, this topic has been 'politicized' in the sense that it occupies different political and societal spheres. Quite telling of the putative role civil society plays in foreign policy-making is the annoyed reaction of security experts and policy-makers: '[T]hey oppose this project in the same manner they oppose the construction of an airport near a village.'⁴⁹ However, such 'securitization' endeavours are legion in foreign policy, and to be fair, the arguments advanced by the No Base Initiative are quite broad, ranging from strategic to sanitary considerations.⁵⁰ Regarding its explicit objectives, because it challenges the scope of the state in foreign policy and aims at facilitating citizens' engagement on this issue, NBI does fulfil the functions of a civil society group to some extent. However, it should be noted that this mobilization originated as a top-down dynamic rather than as a spontaneous upload on the part of the citizens. Several analysts point to the fact that the impetus for the organization of the movement as well as the articulation of the ideas that underpin it came from one person, who happens to be the main foreign policy expert of the Social Democratic party.⁵¹

5. Conclusion

With respect to its structure and most importantly to its content (with particular emphasis on democracy promotion), Czech foreign policy theoretically allows room for the involvement of civil society. And in fact several societal groups do interact with the Foreign Ministry, partaking to some extent in the formulation and implementation of policies. This is especially salient in the field of democracy promotion in the Eastern European Neighbourhood, where diverse societal groups have acted as kick-starters, agents or joint-managers. However, while they participate in the foreign policy-making process, they do not seem to play the classic role of civil society (i.e. limiting the scope of the

⁴⁷ For an overview on the BMD system see Hynek, Nikola: Protiraketová obrana v současném strategickém a politickém kontextu. Vztah k odstraňování a dopad třetího pilíře na dynamiku mezi relevantními aktéry, in: *Mezinárodní vztahy*, 2008 (Vol. 4), pp. 5–31.

⁴⁸ www.nezakladnam.cz

⁴⁹ Experts Conference, Prague 2009.

⁵⁰ Securitization is the discursive process by which policy-makers frame a political question in terms of a security problem in an endeavour to remove it from the realm of debate. Wæver, Ole: Securitization and Desecuritization, in: Lipschutz, Ronnie (ed.): *On Security*, New York/NY: Columbia University Press, 1995, pp. 46–86.

⁵¹ Interviews in Prague, May 2009.

state and fostering the solidarity and engagement of national citizens). Thus, instead of civil society groups, they could be labelled as 'parastate organizations' serving the functions of the state through a form of intellectual corporatism (i.e. embracing the 'state spirit').⁵²

Such a configuration is not confined to the Czech context, however, and stems rather from an essentially difficult state-civil society synergy in foreign policy. The Czech government, due to limited resources, has been willing to involve societal groups in certain foreign policy areas. However, involvement should not be equated with empowerment; as emphasized by Susan Strange, this redistribution of tasks does not reflect a transfer of authority from the government to civil society, but demonstrates its willingness to let societal groups fill a certain vacuum vis-à-vis responsibilities.⁵³ Thus, societal groups can hardly fulfil the classic civil society function of limiting state power; they instead complement it, especially in the realm of foreign policy, which remains based on interstate relations. This is not their objective in any case, and nor are they explicitly trying to channel public participation, the second classic function of civil society. In this regard, a major impediment to the involvement of civil society in foreign policy is the citizens' relative lack of interest in many foreign policy issues, at least when it comes to the voting booth. For instance, the theme of democracy promotion, one of the pillars of Czech foreign policy, is depicted by some as an 'elite project often rebuffed by much of the population'⁵⁴.

It thus appears complicated for civil society organizations to actually play a role in the foreign policy-making process, even in one that has a 'civic' tradition. However, while the aforementioned societal groups hardly fulfil the functions of civil society at the domestic (vertical) level, they might be able to perform them at the transnational (horizontal) level. Indeed, by engaging abroad in societal capacity-building and thus facilitating political involvement, they might be contributing to the gradual emergence of an international civil society.

⁵² Parmar, Inderjeet: *Think tanks and power in foreign policy*, New York/NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.

⁵³ Strange, Susan: *The Retreat of the State. The Diffusion of Power in the World Economy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 14.

⁵⁴ Fawn, Rick: *Reconstituting a national identity. Ideologies in Czech foreign policy after the split*, in: *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, 2003 (Vol. 19), No. 3, p. 205.