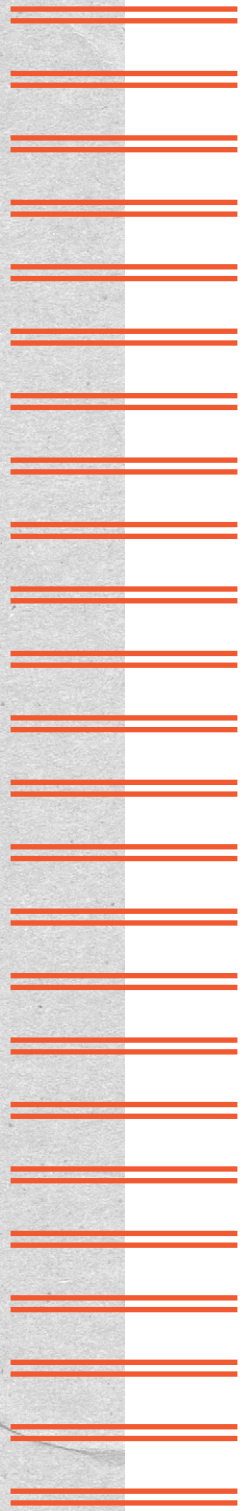# Civil society and leftist values

Comparative study mapping the state of civil society organizations from a leftist perspective in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary

ROSA LUXEMBURG FOUNDATION

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Foreword

The three studies which are presented in this publication examine left-wing organizations in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary. All three authors have analyzed organizations which have a decidedly left-oriented profile in their respective countries and, at the same time, they primarily focus on questions which address the issues taken up by these organizations, as well their methods and goals.

The outcome of this publication allows us to conclude that the situation and success of these organizations is highly dependent on the general presence of left-wing structures, such as trade unions or left or left-wing parties. Without these favorable accompanying actors, the left-wing spectrum runs the risk of losing itself in society as a whole and is likely to disintegrate, as it will become increasingly difficult to demonstrate its impact.

Another important factor evident in all three studies concerns the relationship to contemporary history, as discussed in media debates. This situation is unequivocally influenced by the historical experiences of the three countries researched, and all too often creates a significant obstacle to the developing of left-oriented structures as these structures are constantly associated with the past, even when such organizations are clearly oriented towards the future.

All three analyses are accompanied by statements from representatives of left-wing organizations and encompasses information regarding the given organization's activities and problems as seen from their own perspective. An oft-repeated critisism relates to the fragmentation of left-oriented structures,

which as can be seen in the studies, lacks a common framework. Thanks to this publication, we are able to contribute to the debate on the state of left-wing forces within the European Union and to specifically focus on the perspectives of three Central European countries which joined the EU community in 2004.

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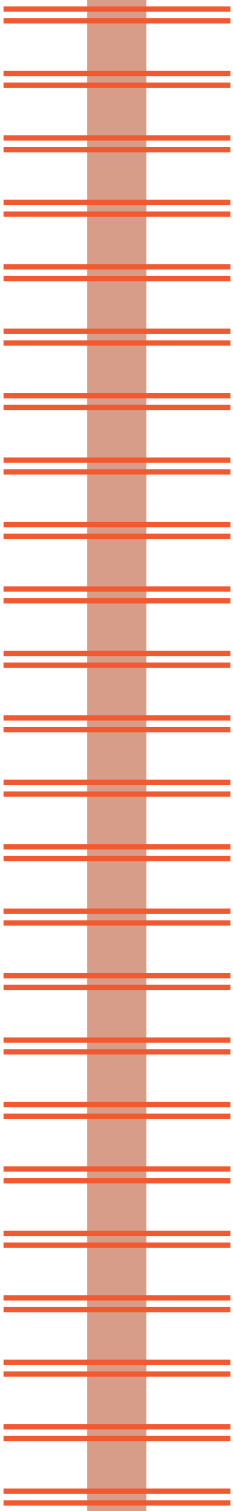
Czech Republic

Mgr. et Mgr. Jiří Navrátil, Ph.D.

Several steps have been taken in this study to map the existence of the Czech left. First, it attempts to divide the left into four basic sectors, as defined by the prevailing ideologies and values. In this sense, the four sectors are defined as follows: trade unions, communists, new advocacy organizations, and finally, the radical left. There are, of course, many ways of dividing the Czech left; however, according to the testimonies of actors in the field (see Conclusion), the division of left-wing entities on a spectrum of economic and cultural conservatism / progressivism still makes a great deal of sense in the context of the Czech left.

Further, each of these sectors is described in terms of their organizational field. This step, however, was not self-evident. For instance, it would be possible to define the Czech left solely in the scope of the ideas, issues, and discourses it produces and through which it is produced, or, alternatively, by a comprehensive analysis of its voter base (*constituency*). The prerequisite for choosing the first perspective is the material conditionality and sustainability of all political ideas, strategies and activities or, in certain cases, their dependence on (more or less) permanent organizational structures, resources, and institutional environments over time.

Therefore, the report constructs its description of organizational fields primarily on an analysis of the organizational functioning of the Czech left, taking into account, of course, the various ideological streams on which the primary division of the entire sector described above is built.

The next step also relates to this perspective. Here the report focuses purely on the organizational and financial aspects of how the sector functions. The aim in this section is to describe the infrastructure of the Czech left from the perspective of the two key resources that political organizations often have at their disposal, i.e., people and financial means.

The report then describes the political environment in which the Czech left operates. This is primarily comprised of both other organizations (including their political rivals) and institutions but also, for instance, of citizens' attitudes. Media also represent important part of the environment in which the left operates; indeed, media that can either facilitate or impede the relationship between political organizations and their constituents or supporters. Media can also preserve or break down, for instance, the historical myths and stereotypes regarding the social and cultural environment in which these organizations operate.

Finally, the final and quite possibly most important part of the report is a series of interviews with representatives from the four main sectors of the Czech left; the purpose of these interviews was to allow these individuals to reflect upon the key aspects of how the left functions. This section contains minimal editing as well as few analytical adjustments in an effort to present the authentic views of current representatives from the various sections of the Czech left on current issues and the environment in which they have been operating for a long time. The final section summarizes the most important findings of the report.

The organized political left in the Czech Republic—current position and prospects

Definitions

An organizational field is a broadly defined term that encompasses those organizations, groups, and their networks which, in their entirety, share systems of common meaning, interact with each other more often than with others, represent an established area of institutional functioning in terms of their pursued interests, and have different types of relationships with each other (symbolic, material, etc.) (DiMaggio, Powell 1983; Fligstein, McAdam 2012). Thus, on the one hand, the field of left-wing organizations includes both less formal organizations, including unregistered civic initiatives and, on the other, extends to political parties which, more or less, help to bring citizens together and who then further mediate their political preferences to the internal mechanisms of the political system.

Another term that needs to be defined for the purposes of this study is the concept of the political left. In this study, the term Left refers to more or less institutionalized collective political entities that, through different strategies and within diverse ideologies, promote progress in terms of social equality and strive for universal equality in political, economic and civil rights spheres.

For the purposes of this study, the left-wing organizational field within society will be defined in a broader context, albeit excluding individuals who are formally or informally not a part of a group. The reasons for this approach are both theoretical and practical. The theoretical reason is primarily due to the fact that from this perspective, the analysis of social and political reality allows for an understanding of the complexity of the interactions and nature

of the actors, while not excluding different types of actors from the analysis due to their formal difference. At the same time, the field should not merely been seen as a plurality of different types of links (mutual recognition, conflict, perception of difference, and construction of different hierarchies). Specifically, research into the Czech organized left will not exclude political parties, non-profit organizations, or informal groups or networks from its analysis. Indeed, on the contrary, such analyses will consider all these types of actors as part of the left-wing organizational field.

In the Western European context, studies on political parties or political theories and social movements primarily distinguish between two types of left-wing actors, especially in relation to their strategies and internal organization. The first is the so-called old or reformist left; the second is the so-called new or radical left. This division is based on four fundamental differences (cf. della Porta 1995; della Porta and Rucht 1995; Fitzgerald and Rodgers 2000).

First, both modes of left-wing politics differ in their organizational structure: the old, moderate left is often organized somewhat hierarchically and is subject to the formal aspects of the organization (i.e., clearly established leadership, a division of responsibility and management, etc.). By contrast, in the case of the radical left, we find both more elements of direct democracy and efforts to involve as many stakeholders as possible in the process of managing and shaping the strategies of the organization (Breines 1989).

Another important difference is in the methods that organizations employ. While the old left has already largely adapted to the institutions of traditional politics and has thus adapted its strategies to accommodate them (focusing on, albeit not limited to, close and often non-public ties to government officials via lobbying, etc.), the radical left, by contrast, prefers protest politics aimed at disrupting and challenging existing political powers and their institutions and involving other citizens and creating wider collective identities (Johnston et al. 1994; Buechler 1995; Pichardo 1997).

The third difference between the old and the new left is the way in which political achievements are assessed. While the old left seeks and accepts recognition from existing political elites and institutions in order to pursue what are, for the most part, short-term practical goals (typically trade unions) (Streeck 2005), radical or new organizations view their activities more in terms of a long-term struggle with the existing system and, thus, with existing institutions. Thus, the adjective "radical" is fitting given that the new left strives for a decisive break with the existing politico-economic order.

The last important difference between the old and the new left is their ideology. Research on new social movements has shown that while the new left is turning to similar values of the old left (political reformism, economic progression), these ideas are also combined with strong anti-authoritarian stances and go hand-in-hand with environmental issues, animal rights issues, and so on. In other words, the politics of reform / radical change is shifting from economic (also) to cultural issues (Kitschelt 1990; March and Mudde 2005; March 2009).

According to the aforementioned studies, radical and moderate left-wing activism represents two different modes of operating in this section of civil society. Nonetheless, the situation is somewhat different for left-wing civil society in post-socialist countries. The main difference is that in the cultural context of post-socialism, some of the actors—successors of the new Left of the 1960s and 1970s—would habitually declare themselves to be left-wing in Western Europe and the US, although by contrast at home, would endeavor to emphatically distance themselves from the left or, in certain cases, refuse to engage in cooperation with openly left-wing

organizations. Overall, the cultural context for left-wing organizations is somewhat closed, a fact mainly attributed to the prevailing cultural-political interpretation of the former political regime. The initial stigmatization of left-wing ideologies at the beginning of the 1990s has remained in the Czech cultural context to some extent until today and is most visibly in political anti-communism (see Perspectives for the left). Thus, in the post-socialist context, there is not only a division between the old (moderate) left and the new (radical) left, as in Western European countries, but there is also a division between the two sections of the new left. These sections are divided into those who reject or at the very least publicly refrain from highlighting major left-wing economic principles and those who try to apply these principles hand-in-hand to the cultural agenda of the new left.

Thus, in the Czech context, we can differentiate between left-wing positions in the following ways: the emphasis on equality is applied exclusively in the field of (broadly defined) culture (e.g., civil rights, environmental issues, migration); the emphasis on equality applies to both spheres—cultural and economic; and the emphasis on equality applies emphatically to the economic field alone. In other words, the basic classification of—but also the split between—left-wing actors is based on the level of progressivism they promote (i.e., equality) in the economy and culture.

	Economically conservative	Economically progressive
Culturally conservative	*Trade union movement* Trade union confederations, independent trade unions	*Old left* Communist organizations
Culturally progressive	*New advocacy organizations* Environmental movement, human rights activism, social democracy	*Radical left* Trotskyist movement, anarchist movement

In this sense, the aim of this study is to map all four sections of the Czech left—to describe, on the one hand, their basic characteristics and, on the other hand, to further analyze their mutual relationships. The main obstacle which often prevents the entire left-wing section of civic organizations from being united is economic in character. In other words, not only the new advocacy groups refuse to define themselves as the left, they are not even identified as leftists from the outside. This then separates these two groups of organizations not only in terms of practical activism and academic work, but it also creates deep political divisions between them. The roots of these divisions date back to the beginning of the new regime and relate to the wider socio-political conflicts in Czech society. In this context, class cleavage is typical. This has been predominant in the Czech Republic since the beginning of the nineties and has determined the nature of political conflict, thus leading to a lack of interconnection among the Czech left. Czech trade unions are a specific case. Although the objectives of trade unions are often closely aligned with those of the *Czech Social Democratic Party* (Česká strana sociálně demokratická, hereafter ČSSD) or the *Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia* (Komunistická strana Čech a Moravy, hereafter KSČM or Communist Party), trade unions refuse to define themselves as left-wing, and their willingness to cooperate with other sectors of the Czech left is traditionally low. This can be attributed, among other factors, to the position of trade unions in post-socialist countries, where they used to be an integral part of the old regime / state (which owned and controlled most of the means of production) and thus failed as an instrument for organizing and mobilizing workers against the interests of employers. The end of 1989 saw a relatively dramatic overhaul of Czech trade unions and they played a pivotal role in the key moments of the delegitimization and subsequent collapse of the old regime[1]; however, the economic transformation and concurrent building of new legitimizing narratives for the transition to capitalism led to a dramatic decline of their importance in the eyes of the public and to a subsequent decline in trade union membership

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1 Ten days after the famous student protests on 17 November 1989 which triggered the Velvet Revolution, Czechoslovakia's national trade union center, ROH organized its first general strike. This was coordinated by over 40,000 strike committees, with over half of all employees of the then Czechoslovakia participating. This strike influenced the further progress of democratization processes by casting doubt on one of the main legitimizing principals of the socialist regime, which was "advocating for the interests of workers."

and political influence. At the same time, however, there has also been an increase in protest activities due to a change in the economic environment. Trade unions have also diversified their strategies by, on the one hand, increasingly taking advantage of protest repertoire, and on the other by forming a close relationship with the state through tripartite functioning (see below).

Nonetheless, the position of the Czech organized left is evolving, and since 2013 we have witnessed a gradual transformation of the main political conflicts within Czech society and its representation. The 2013 elections to the Chamber of Deputies hinted at the extent of this transformation by allowing for the emergence of entirely new political entities, sometimes referred to as populist, and dramatically weakening existing traditional left-wing entities. The emergence of a new type of conflict has not only occurred in the Czech Republic but also in other countries. It is sometimes put into the context of being one of the consequences of globalization, whereby the so-called winners and losers of the processes of globalization are opposed to one another. The main aspects of this transformation are economic liberalization, migration, and European integration, i.e. a combination of economic but also of cultural factors. It was the latter that started to have a stronger presence in the Czech context in connection with the so-called migration crisis of 2015, and these factors contributed to redrawing the map of Czech politics. This led to a reconfiguration of the organizational structure of the Czech left, whereby there was less being articulated about the economic conflict and, by contrast, there was a dramatic strengthening of the cultural conflict, among other things. Thus, while the alliance of the radical left with the old left has been weakened, in a few cases alliances have emerged between the radical left and new advocacy groups. This started to be most apparent during the so-called migration crisis. For instance, on 25 April 2016, a demonstration, "Prague is not afraid", was organized in Prague and was announced by a representative of Socialist Solidarity.

Antifa, for example, participated in it and many new advocacy organizations joined in as well (e.g., Hlavák Initiative, HateFree Culture, the Green Party, etc.). The character of the demonstration indicated both the characteristics and limits of possible cooperation between the two types of leftist activism.

National legislation and typologies of organizations

As demonstrated in the previous section, the Czech left includes very diverse types of actors and ranges from informal networks of individuals and groups without any formal legal characteristics to extremely hierarchical organizations that are registered by the relevant public authority. Thus, in terms of legislation, we can look at a number of key legal norms relating to the law on the right to assemble, as well as legislation governing grouping in associations and political parties.

The right of assembly is governed by Act No. 84/1990 Coll. Nonetheless, it is also explicitly enshrined in the Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms (Art. 19). Generally speaking, the right of assembly in the Czech Republic is relatively liberal and in principle aims to safeguard the right to assemble and to express political views rather than to regulate or restrict it. In this country, there is a reporting obligation, but not, however, an authorization obligation. Thus, public administration has only limited authority to restrict assembly. In principle, it can only do so if the aim of such assembly is to limit the constitutional rights of others, to incite hatred, or to pose a threat to their health or property. Limiting the right to assemble also applies to how close key political institutions are. The Czech left uses the right of assembly in two ways: On the one hand, to organize demonstrations and meetings in support of its own issues and, on the other, to block extreme-right rallies and demonstrations. There is a long history of such efforts by anarchist and other radical left-wing groups and, in recent years, some new advocacy organizations have begun to join (for example,

the Brno Blocks Initiative has for several years now sought to disrupt the May Day marches of radical nationalists in Brno).

Another important legislative measure is a law on associations, which is part of the new civil code (Act No. 89/2012 Coll.) that came into effect in 2014. This amendment substantially improved the functioning of civil society organizations (as opposed to the previous one which primarily dealt with procedural issues related to the registration of civic associations). In this respect, both formal and institutional changes were implemented. The agenda of these associations was taken from the Interior Ministry and passed on to the jurisdiction of the courts. There was a redefinition of *civic associations*: These are now defined as a type of corporation consisting of at least three people which is run based on a common interest. Initial concerns as to whether the new regulations governing civic associations should really be directed only at the interests of members have not materialized, and instead, most civic associations have simply transformed into new legal entities. Similarly, the so-called secondary activities of groups were specified by the law, as was the possibility of groups carrying out for-profit activities. Furthermore, the new legislation has stipulated that most of the aspects of the organizational functioning of groups is not mandated by law, so there is a great deal of freedom for groups to determine the various aspects of their own internal structure. From this point of view, the legislation is non-restrictive and does not pose any major obstacles for original civic associations. Therefore, the legal form of *association* is used by both the vast majority of new advocacy groups as well as those radical left-wing entities whose legal form was that of a civic association prior to the reform.

Another key legal regulation concerning left-wing organizations in the Czech Republic is the Act of Law 424/1991 Coll., on association in political parties and political movements (Act No. 424/1991 Coll.), and to a certain extent, election legislation (Act of Law 247/1995 Coll., on elections to the Parliament of the Czech Republic; Act No. 130/2000 Coll., on Regional Council Elections;

Act of Law 62/2003 Coll., on Election to the European Parliament). Indeed, in terms of organizational structure, some left-wing organizations prefer to form a political party or movement and are thus governed by Act No. 424/1991 Coll. This was significantly amended in 2016 (and went into effect in 2017), resulting in several changes. In principle, these relate to the management of these entities by, for example, recently forcing registered parties and movements into non-cash management or the use of transparent bank accounts. The amended laws on elections (No. 247/1995 Coll., No. 62/2003 Coll.) further regulate spending during election campaigns. Although the majority of left-wing entities in the Czech Republic are not political parties or political movements, those that are registered as a party or movement are not affected too much by the amendments to the legislation; for instance, none of the left-wing entities were anywhere close to the stipulated spending limit during the elections to the Chamber of Deputies in 2017 or the Senate in 2018. The main restriction is still the administrative work involved with keeping transparent accounts and the subsequent reporting of election campaign expenditures.

Mapping of left-wing organizations

The general assumption of this study is that the main weakness of the Czech left is its inability to engage in cooperation and exchange resources outside its own sector. Therefore, we will now focus on giving an overview and a detailed description of these sectors.

Left-wing organizations in the Czech Republic have not yet been reliably mapped in terms of a complete list. In an attempt to provide a detailed description of the field of left-wing actors, it is thus necessary to combine existing studies which always more or less focus on a particular section of left-wing organizations. This uniqueness can largely be attributed to the aforementioned division of the left into culturally and economically progressive and conservative categories.

Nevertheless, an overview of the main sectors within the organized Czech left already exists (Bastl 2001; Kolářová 2009; Navrátil 2017). A further mapping of the organized left is needed and can be based on an overview of public protest events (Navrátil, Císař 2014; Císař, Navrátil 2016), the registry of political parties and movements (Ministry of Interior), and the registry of legal entities (Czech Statistical Office).

The old left

The old left typically comprises communist political parties and trade unions. The main pillars of the communist movement are the *Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia* (Komunistická strana Čech a Moravy, hereafter KSČM) and the *Communist Youth Union* (Komunistický svaz mládeže, hereafter KSM) to which several other organizations are affiliated. KSČM was established in 1990 when the former ruling *Communist Party of Czechoslovakia* (Komunistická strana Československa, KSČ) was transformed. Although it has

remained isolated, the party has been represented in the Czech Parliament ever since the first elections which took place after the fall of the old regime in 1990. KSČM officially regards the former regime as an authoritarian system which, despites all its positive features deviated from the ideals of socialism and accepts political pluralism and democracy. The party professes the principles of democratic socialism and adheres to the traditions of the communist movement (cf. Hanley 2001; Kunštát 2004; March, Mudde 2005). At the same time, however, the conservative part of the party openly subscribes to the heritage of the Communist Party, and even to its early, most problematic phase when repressive activities were practiced by the former regime. In terms of its economic program, the KSČM promotes socialism and social ownership and criticizes capitalism (KSČM 2019). Its work within the framework of Czech left-wing activism and, additionally, its mobilization tactics are often indirect. Furthermore, despite its financial and organizational assistance to other organizations or platforms (Bastl 2001), its influence is mainly due to the support its members provide to other Czech left-wing activism projects—e.g., *The Social Forum Initiative* (Iniciativa za sociální fóra, ISF), the Czech branch of *UNITED for Intercultural Action—Rainbow United*, and *Society for European Dialogue* (Společnost pro evropský dialog, hereafter SED). Other entities connected to KSČM—whether ideologically or practically—are *the Club of the Czech Borderlands* (Klub českého pohraničí), *the Left-wing Club of Women* (Levicový klub žen), *the Society of Czech-Cuban Friendship* (Společnost česko-kubánského přátelství), and *the Patriotic Association of Anti-Fascists* (Vlastenecké sdružení antifašistů). Another (this time non-parliamentary) political party which cooperates closely with KSČM is the Party of Democratic Socialism (*Strana demokratického socialismu, hereafter SDS*), which developed in parallel with KSČM from its breakaway organizations. The SDS party profile is an anti-capitalist (Marxist) democratic party that seeks to introduce democratic socialism with elements of direct democracy.

In terms of its civil society activities, one of KSČM's key partners is its youth organization, KSM, which was also founded in 1990. After initial disputes regarding its direction, KSM became dominated by orthodox communist influences whose rhetoric uses orthodox communist ideology based primarily on the philosophy of Marx, Engels, and Lenin, as is interpreted by the Stalinist doctrine. The organization calls for the revolutionary elimination of the private ownership of private funds, for which it was repeatedly criticized by KSČM itself. In October 2006, KSM was dissolved by the Ministry of the Interior for anti-systemic behavior. The Municipal Court in Prague confirmed this decision in March 2008, but the Supreme Administrative Court in Brno overturned the ruling in August 2009. Although the activities of the organization (including information) continued over the entire period, the repression by the political system had a significant impact on its functioning (including the registration of several new organizations which identified themselves as successor organizations).

Apart from peripheral organizations and KSČM groups, the old left is also represented by openly nostalgic, or neo-Stalinist organizations, which often take the form of political parties. One of the most significant was the *Party of Czechoslovak Communists* (Strana československých komunistů), renamed the *Communist Party of Czechoslovakia* in 1999, headed by M. Štěpán, the former representative of the pre-November 1989 KSČ. Another such party was the recently abolished *Communist Party of Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia* (KOMUNISTICKÁ STRANA ČECH, MORAVY A SLEZSKA).

Trade unions

The *Trade Union Association of Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia* (Odborové sdružení Čech, Moravy, Slezska, hereafter OSČMS), which is closely connected to KSČM (current chairman of the association is vice chairman of KSČM, and the basic organization of this

association operates directly at the KSČM regional committees), symbolizes a transition between the communist movement and trade unions. The story of the current trade union movement began with the transformation of the *Revolutionary Trade Union Movement* (Revoluční odborové hnutí, hereafter ROH), which had a monopoly over the unions since 1945 when it absorbed all of the then existing trade unions. The exception was in the 1960s, when independent of central union structures, part of the trade union movement expressed its disagreement with the authoritarian tendencies of the regime. Overall, however, ROH focused primarily on workplace social events and the provision of various types of services (employee evaluations, recreation, etc.) and remained under the direct control of the governmental party.
In March 1990, ROH ceased to exist and it was succeeded by the *Czech-Moravian Confederation of Trade Unions* (Českomoravská konfederace odborových svazů, hereafter ČMKOS). This is the largest Czech confederation and currently comprises thirty trade unions which are sector-specific. Whether as an organization or through its member unions, ČMKOS focuses primarily on employee protection and, at the same time, on certain related public policies, such as social, pension, employment, etc. ČMKOS's objectives are similar to those of the Social Democrats: a confederation that strives for social dialogue, the creation of a socially-stable society based on social solidarity, and one that rejects a restrictive right-wing government policy based on the neoliberal model (ČMKOS 2015). Relations between ČMKOS and the Social Democrats were also connected to personnel, as two of the previous confederation chairmen successfully running in the elections for ČSSD.

In 1995, the second largest trade union confederation, the *Association of Independent Trade Unions of the Czech Republic* (Asociace samostatných odborů České republiky, hereafter ASO), which currently comprises thirteen trade unions, was established. ASO started out as the political counterpart of ČMKOS by grouping together trade unions that had a negative relationship

with the political left in general and with the Social Democrats in particular. These were primarily the *United Union of Private Employees* (Jednotný svaz soukromých zaměstnanců) or the *Trade Union of Agricultural and Nutrition Workers* (Odborový svaz pracovníků zemědělství a výživy); the *Free Trade Unions Association of the Czech Republic* (Asociace svobodných odborů ČR) criticized ČMKOS for its lack of courage in organizing strikes and protests and for its alleged dependence on its relationships with left-wing politicians. Unions which were originally part of ČMKOS but for which ČMKOS subsequently seemed too passive in terms of supporting the interests of their members, also joined ASO. (e.g., the *Railway Workers' Association* (Odborové sdružení železničářů)). An important member of the ASO is also the *Trade Union of Czech Doctors* (Lékařský odborový klub). Nonetheless, ASO is currently coordinating its strategies with ČMKOS, while also taking advantage of its membership in the tripartite.

Even taking into consideration their relatively small membership base, the other Czech confederations play a somewhat minor role. These include the *Confederation of Arts and Culture* (Konfederace umění a kultury) which groups together union members working in culture and also the *Christian Trade Union Coalition* (Křesťanská odborová koalice), the *Federation of Train Drivers* (Federace strojvůdců), the *Federation of Train Crews* (Federace vlakových čet), etc.

ČMKOS and ASO regularly participate in tripartite meetings through the *Council of Economic and Social Agreement of the Czech Republic* (Rada hospodářské a sociální dohody ČR), where together with seven representatives of ministries, they negotiate key social and economic policies. Indeed, this is the precise mechanism which is designed to discourage trade unions from using protest, events and public mobilization when in disagreement with the government. In addition to membership in the tripartite, the following factors have had a long-term impact on trade union confederations' general strategies.

First, immediately after the political and economic transformation began in 1990, trade union leaders sought to achieve extensive decentralization of their operations (Myant 2010: 11). This should also be seen in the context of their previous subordination to the state and the political elites. Thus, compared to the European norm, there is much greater freedom of member organizations in the Czech Republic in relation to confederate trade union structures. This consequently makes it more difficult for confederations to engage in tripartite negotiations and, as the case may be, to organize larger-scale strikes or demonstrations.

Secondly, the public image of trade unions remains relatively unfavorable. Trade unions still have an air of something "old" in the public domain and remain associated with the "socialist past", which is related, among other things, to the aforementioned dominance of liberal capitalism narratives (Crowley, 2004; Uhlerová 2015). This, too, was one of the main reasons for the dramatic decline in membership in trade union organizations because, in addition to their reputation as obsolete, trade unions were also affected by the general reluctance of citizens to engage with any advocacy organizations (Navrátil, Pospíšil 2014). The drop in the number of members was truly dramatic— from 5.5 million in 1990 to less than a million in 2009, and it is currently estimated at less than half a million (Kroupa et al. 2004; Myant 2010). Although the figures are not officially available, it seems that the decline in the number of members finally came to a halt between 2016 and 2017 (Aktuálně 2018).

Thirdly, the union strategy was largely determined by the transformation of the structure of the economy, whereas the transition to liberal capitalism also brought about a fundamental shift in the economy, from large, centrally-managed manufacturing companies to smaller firms, an expansion in the service economy, and in the numbers of those self-employed. This transformation

has dramatically reduced the potential of trade unions to mobilize employees and has limited their political influence.

Finally, another important factor is the transformation of employee and citizen expectations in present-day Czech society. Since the beginning of the transformation, the Czech population (other Central and Eastern European populations as well) has been relatively patient in relation to its social costs (Greskovits, 1998). The increase in inequality, deterioration of purchasing power, and the rise in new types of risks were not initially met with any great response among trade unionists or other citizens (for example, the protests of railway workers in 1997). Nonetheless, over the past few years, after the appointment of a new ČMKOS chairman, trade unions have become more assertive in relation to the public and have focused on organizing public campaigns that set the agenda and frame specific ongoing problems (e.g., cheap labor and the minimum wage, three-day waiting period for entitlement to sick benefit). On these issues, the unions also have allies across other sectors of the left.

The radical left[2]

The radical left represents several ideological branches, the most influential being Trotskyist and anarchist.

The first of the main branches of Czech left-wing activism which has remained ideologically consistent over the years, is made up of Trotskyist and revolutionary socialist-oriented organizations, which based on their ideological and organizational prerequisites, can be considered as entities which have the greatest potential to become coalition partners among the radically left-wing camp of Czech left-wing activism, also in light of their efforts to establish contacts with an isolated communist sector and relatively active

2 This part of the text is based on Chapter 6 from the book: From Economic Globalization to the „War on Terror" (Navrátil 2017).

foreign contacts. Four of them, in particular, are essential in terms of Czech left-wing activism and its public strategies. The first and oldest of them is the *Socialist Alternative Future* (Socialistická alternativa Budoucnost, hereafter SAB), which was a member of the *International Committee for a Workers' International* (Výbor za dělnickou internacionálu) and which focuses primarily on the younger generation. Of all the other Trotskyist organizations, they have had the least amount of conflicts with the anarchist movement, and for some time they were closely linked to the *Communist Youth Union* (Komunistický svaz mládeže, hereafter KSM) (see above) (Bastl 2001: 76—77). The second important Trotskyist organization is *Socialist Solidarity* (Socialistická solidarita, hereafter SocSol), established in 1990. The main difference between SocSol and SAB is its stronger criticism of the communist regime and its increased emphasis on theoretical issues and the cultivation of its ideology. Also, SocSol pays greater attention to international affairs and is part of the *International Socialist Tendency Group*. The *Socialist Workers Organization* (Socialistická organizace pracujících, hereafter SOP) is the third major Trotskyist activist organization. It was formed in 1998 as a radical breakaway group of SocSol when, in contrast to SocSol, it placed less emphasis on the organization of the movement from the bottom-up and defined itself as a revolutionary Marxist group by highlighting the role of elite activists (Bastl 2001: 96). Although SOP has also distanced itself from Stalinism, and in terms of its ideological bases appears to have the most orthodox Trotskyist position from the entire sector, it has become a member of the *Movement for the Revolutionary Communist International* (Liga za revoluční komunistickou internacionálu), now the *League for the Fifth International* (Liga za pátou internacionálu). The organization is also probably the most obviously willing to cooperate with the communist branch. This stems from previous SOP campaigns against slave labor in the Third World, against drug addiction and the anti-racism initiative, which was also supported by KSM, as well as, for instance, SocSol. SOP was also involved in the campaign and in the anti-racism initiative

and cooperated on both with, for instance, SocSol and communist youth. However, the organization is in the abeyance at the moment. The last major Trotskyist organization is the *Revolutionary Youth Group* (Skupina revoluční mládeže, hereafter REVO), which was formed in 2000 as the youth organization SOP and focuses on organizing young anti-capitalists. In 2006, REVO part left the SOP structure altogether and was renamed the *Independent Youth Organization REVO Czech Republic* (Nezávislá organizace mládeže REVO Česko, renamed the *Revolutionary Internationalist Organization—RIO* in 2010). In addition to the existing Trotskyist structure, *Socialist Circle* (Socialistický kruh, hereafter SOK), established in 2003, focuses primarily on intellectual and analytical activities and also adheres to the traditions of unorthodox theoretical Marxism.

The emergence of the second major branch of the Czech radical left—the anarchist branch—dates to the final years of the former regime. Like the other two, the anarchist sector of Czech left-wing activism was always made up of different ideological branches and subcultures, but its degree of fragmentation was probably the greatest compared to the other two movements. One of several commonalities that connected this sector internally was its resistance to authoritarian or paternalist political movements. This limited its possibilities for cooperation with other streams of the Czech radical left (especially with the Communists). The process of merging and the networking of anarchist groups and cells peaked in the mid-1990s with the foundation of the sector's key platform—the *Anarchist Federation* (Anarchistická federace, hereafter AF and originally named the *Czechoslovak Anarchist Federation*). However, despite this, tensions remained between the two main anarchist branches: those advocating post-materialist, cultural and individualistic autonomy linked to squatting and musical subcultures, and those who focused more on syndicalism based on the working class (economizing, collectivism) (Bastl 2001: 38—40; Kolářová 2008: 4). After the gradual separation

of the more collectivist and syndicalist-focused groups (one of the consequences of dominant economic divisions within Czech society), the AF began to focus primarily on environmental, pacifist, and feminist issues, but also on social autonomism and anti-capitalism. The main syndicalist branch became independent in 1996 with the establishment of the breakaway *Organization of Revolutionary Anarchists—Solidarity* (Organizace revolučních anarchistů—Solidarita, hereafter ORAS). Its ideological starting point was radical syndicalism and its aims was focus on trade union issues. It was based on revolutionary anarchism and "platformism," and later began to focus on non-Leninist communism and transformed into the *Collectively against Capital* group. Another syndicalist organization (albeit not as clearly defined as ORAS) that broke away from AF in 1997 was the *Federation of Social Anarchists* (Federace sociálních anarchistů, hereafter FSA). However, after several years of independent existence and successful operation, the organization disintegrated, and its members joined both new and existing anarchist subcultures. One of the major issues FSA and AF had in common = one which connected the two groups from the very beginning of the existence of the anarchist subculture— was anti-fascism (Císař, Slačálek 2007: 5). It was this very issue that became the central driving force behind another leading radical anarchist organization that was closely affiliated to FSA, *Antifascist Action* (Antifašistická akce). It was founded in 1996, and its main goal is to protect the anarchist movement from attacks by the extreme right, to monitor and fight against authoritarian (especially fascist) ideologies and activities. Currently, the autonomist/individualistic version of anarchism is dominant in the Czech Republic. In addition to AF, there are several other projects that play an important role in the Czech radical left milieu. The activist networks surrounding *Autonomy* (Autonomie—and later named *Confrontation* (Konfrontace)) and *A-kontra* magazines, which was renewed in 1998, are important for the anarchist branch of the Czech alter-globalization movement. While the former became the movement's leading journal in the late 1990s, the latter was the main publication in the first

half (Císař, Slačálek 2007: 5—6). An important role is also played by the *Food Not Bombs* initiative (hereafter FnB), which is also linked to the autonomous branch of Czech anarchism, as is the *Feminist Alliance of March 8* (Feministická skupina 8. března), which has been operating since 2001 (Bastl 2001: 71—73). An important regional activist platform is Protestfest, which was set up in the Czech Republic's second largest city, Brno, in 2004 (it is currently not active). Other platforms that overlap into the anarchist sector include *Freedom Not Fear* (Svoboda místo strachu, established in 2008), which was inspired by the German-based initiative of the same name and opposes the spread of monitoring and control in contemporary societies. Another example is the *Education is not a Commodity* (Vzdělání není zboží) initiative established in 2010, which was founded in connection with the upcoming reform of higher education.

New advocacy organizations

This sector of the organized left appears to be the least problematic in terms of its definition and clear classification. In general, it includes organizations that pursue very diverse objectives in terms of their mission, although most of them do not declare their left-wing political orientation. Some of these organizations are also referred to as apolitical, often out of fear of being labeled as left-wing and thus damaging their reputation. Some of these organizations can be identified through their protest activities and areas of activism which are not directly related to the issues and symbols of the political left (for example, Labor Day celebrations), but where there are a variety of issues addressed at once. Such events were, for example, protests against economic globalization and its symbols, the campaign against the location the US radar in the Brdy military area, protests against budgetary cuts during the Nečas government, or most recently, in the mobilization against hate speech in the context of the refugee crisis (Navrátil 2016). The first major branch of this sector are environmental

organizations. One such organization is *Earth First!* (hereafter EF), which rejects traditional moderate environmentalism, favors a policy of direct action and identifies with a biocentric perception of the environment. EF has been involved in a series of protest events in the context of alter-globalization protests and is particularly linked to the anarchist scene. The *Rainbow Movement* (Hnutí Duha*,* hereafter HD) is also an environmental organization and is connected to the traditional left-wing scene mainly through an overlap in members (e.g., Jakub Patočka). Unlike EF, HD is a more mainstream non-governmental organization that favors media campaigns and volunteering over direct action.

The *Independent Social-Ecological Movement* (Nezávislé sociálně ekologické hnutí, hereafter NESEHNUTÍ) was created when it broke away from HD and has had close connections to the Brno left-wing scene from the outset. Typically, NESEHNUTÍ combines many post-materialistic issues typical of Czech left-wing activism: Its activities in the field of environmental activism have a greater emphasis on human rights policy. This is outlined both in its campaigns against arms and their export to non-democratic countries and in the fight for women's rights, as well as refugee and migration issues.

An important organization is *Children of the Earth* (Děti Země, hereafter DZ), founded in 1989. The organization initially focused on campaigns related to problematic construction projects, air pollution, and transport. Gradually it began to increasingly highlight the importance of involving citizens in political processes and, unlike other environmental organizations, it openly criticizes political leaders and political parties for their activities in those areas.

After the first half of the 1990s, some of these organizations have gradually transformed into typical environmental non-profit organizations (NESEHNUTÍ, DZ, HD) or have ceased to be active publicly (e.g., EF!). *Greenpeace* is interesting insofar as it has never identified as left-wing or radical but has participated in some major

campaigns organized by the Czech left, notably in protests against the location of the US radar base in Brdy.

Another significant group are non-profit organizations that provide assistance to developing countries, some of whose projects or activities are considered left-wing. These are represented here by *Fair Trade Society* (NaZemi), which focuses on third world social issues and is critical of economic globalization. It focuses on supporting local producers, the development of education, decent working conditions and, in some cases, even addresses the problem at the political level. The organization combines the practical aspects of activism (the sale of fair-trade products) with education and public activism (e.g., petitions against multinational corporations, etc.).

A similar, albeit more academically-oriented organization, is the relatively new *Bottom-Up Alternative* (Alternativa zdola). It is inspired by the former alter-globalization movement and the current criticism of the political economy, and its aim is to strengthen the self-governing democratic elements of Czech society, build alternative economic and political models while empowering citizens and, finally, tackle environmental issues.

Another development organization that has become a think-tank in recent years is *Trust for Economy and Society* (Trast pro ekonomiku a společnost, hereafter TES). It deals with criticism of the current economic arrangement from the perspective of environmentally, socially and democratically-oriented economic thinking. Again, the activities of the organization are primarily academic and educational, without overlapping public protest activities.

Another branch of new advocacy organizations are religiously-oriented organizations, whose participation in left-wing activism is not permanent either and whose relationship to left-wing activism has changed significantly over time.

The Christian branch is primarily represented by the *Ecumenical Academy* (Ekumenická akademie, hereafter EA), whose focus includes issues of poverty, solidarity and democracy, development aid and Third World debt relief. EA focuses both on economic issues and, for instance, highlighting gender and ethnic inequalities, thus pervading the divisions in Czech left-wing activism. The religious left was further represented by the *Movement for the Just Society and Love for your Neighbor* (Hnutí za spravedlivou společnost a lásku k bližnímu) and *Christian Dialogue* (Křesťanský dialog), although neither is probably active anymore. Another spiritually-oriented organization is the *Humanist Movement* (Humanistické hnutí, hereafter HH), which was established in the Czech Republic in 1994 as an offshoot of the *International Humanist Movement* that originated in 1969 in Argentina. Nowadays, the Czech movement consists of a network of several environmentally, developmentally and peace-oriented organizations and one non-parliamentary political party (the Humanist Party was registered in 2001 and wrapped up its activities in 2018). From the very outset, HH has focused primarily on issues of human rights and the development of Third World countries; it has identified itself partly with the objectives of left-wing and anti-war activism, while maintaining a relatively strict distance from its Czech members. After 2003, HH began to increasingly highlight the tradition of nonviolence and to gradually focus on anti-war activities, which was reflected in the establishment of its own anti-war organization, *Nonviolence* (Nenásilí), or what is known today as *World without Wars and Violence* (Svět bez válek a násilí).

Nonetheless, the dividing lines between the various categories of groups, e.g., development or religious, can become blurred with the existence of initiatives or networks in which organizations from different branches mix. This is an example of the broad international *Social Watch* network, whose main goals are the eradication of poverty, the fair distribution of wealth and the administering of human rights (including, for example, social rights). In the Czech context, since 2008, for example,

the aforementioned EA, NESEHNUTÍ, TES, and part of the HH have come together, as well as organizations that do not consider themselves left-wing or, in certain cases, did not consider themselves left-wing[3]—*Educon* or *Forum 50%*. After 2015, a more formal form of this network was established.

3 Data from the 2008 survey.

Human and financial resources

The funding obtained by any Czech left-wing organization is largely determined by the organizational and ideological left-wing organizational field of which it is a part. Not much research is available on this topic. Previous studies have highlighted the diversity of resources used by different types of political activists. A study by Císař et al. (2011), based on survey data, illustrated the differences between the different modes of activism in relation to the use of so-called hard (material) resources—i.e., personnel and financial. These three modes of activism were the so-called old civil society organizations, comprising of trade union and agricultural interest groups, new activism including environmental and human rights organizations, and finally, radical activism, represented by organizations rejecting the existing political or economic organization of society.

In terms of resources of personnel, it is possible to distinguish the involvement of persons in the activities of organizations as employees or as volunteers or members. The difference between the three modes of activism is primarily related to numbers, with a high number of members in old activist organizations and a low number in the other two. When compared to new advocacy activist organizations, old and radical organizations have much larger volunteer numbers. Also, both new and old activist organizations have the same level of employee numbers (slightly higher numbers regarding older organizations), which is in contrast to radical activist groups (Císař et al. 2011: 151—152). In terms of financial resources, the research findings are as follows: old activism can generate the highest amount of income (typically above CZK 5 million per year), new activism is somewhat worse off (typically between one and five million CZK per year), and radical organizations have minimum funds. There are also important differences in terms of the types of resources. While old activism is primarily based on individual membership contributions, new activism is dominated

by external sources of funding (typically grants and subsidies), and radical activism combines the sale of publications, regular membership contributions, and occasional donations.

From the data of this detailed 2008 survey, it is possible to select self-professed left-wing organizations (N = 55) and to supplement this with other data (KSČM)[4] and, in doing so, to demonstrate the differences in their resources and to also then compare these results with the above-mentioned modes of activism. In terms of personnel resources, the differences between the left-wing modes are clear. Regarding the number of everyday participants involved in the running of organizations, the highest numbers were recorded for trade union organizations and KSČM, which is the only subject representing the communist left in the study. These two groups can engage several times more people to get involved in the activities and operation of organizations on a daily basis than the new advocacy groups and radical left. The same applies to the number of everyday employees—both the unions and the KSČM clearly dominate in terms of the number of people employed. In terms of volunteers, the situation is similar—although data is not available for KSČM, the number of volunteers in trade unions is dramatically higher than in the new advocacy groups and radical left. Finally, in terms of the number of members, there is a clear distinction between the mass organizations of the old left and the member-limited activities of the new advocacy and radical organizations.

Table 1: **Human Resources of the Czech left**[5]

	Trade unions	New advocacy groups	Radical left	KSČM
N	17	23	12	1
Average number of daily participants	294	38	33	263
Average number of daily employees	22	11	1	177*
Average number of employees	21	13	6	263
Average number of jobs	21	9	4	NA
Average number of volunteers	602	65	69	NA
Average number of individual members	24 801	823	176	37 402

We can now compare the financial resources of the four organizational modes of the Czech left. Here we find a similar pattern to that of the three modes of Czech activism. The trade union movement is heavily dependent on membership fees, with only a small part of its financial resources made up of projects financed by Czech public authorities (typically projects supporting trade union activities and tripartite funded by the European Union through the Czech public authorities; e.g., ČMKOS began to make relatively intensive use of the possibilities of EU funding distributed by national institutions, especially after 2008). Similarly, membership contributions are important for the radical left, which typically operates on smaller budgets. The radical left is also dependent on somewhat random income from the sale of small goods and from occasional fundraising events. The typical recipients of project money are the new advocacy organizations that clearly focus on obtaining grant support and regular individual

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4 For example, data on the Social Democrats (ČSSD) could also be added to the dataset, which would affect the results on the characteristics of new advocacy organizations. However, the study avoids this step because the sample of these organizations is large enough in the study.

5 The data is from the 2008 survey (Císař et al. 2011). The data on the KSČM has been taken from the party's 2017 annual report (KSČM 2018). The average number of participants in the party was listed as the number of employees, and the average number of daily employees was calculated as the sum of all employees who did not carry out professional activities.

contributions. As a parliamentary entity, the Communist Party is dependent on state contributions for its activities or, if applicable, to cover electoral expenses. Therefore, membership fees play a much smaller role in this context than in the case of the radical left or trade unions. However, in terms of absolute value, a significant amount of funds is involved. In terms of total funds, the two groups of the traditional left are clearly separated—the trade unions and the Communist Party, on the one side of the divide, and the new advocacy organizations (excluding the ČSSD) and the radical left, on the other.

Table 2: **Financial resources of the Czech left[6]**

	Trade unions	New advocacy organizations	Radical Left	KSČM
N	17	23	12	1
(%) member contributions	75	6	58	16
(%) sale of publications and small goods	0	3	29	0
(%) EU grants / contracts	3	50	18	0
(%) grants / contracts from Czech public authorities	11	37	20	52
(%) grants / contracts from foreign public authorities	0	15	5	0
(%) charges for the services of private companies	0	16	0	0
(%) donations from corporations and businesses	3	20	0	0
(%) one-off fundraising events	0	18	26	0
(%) occasional contributions from individuals	0	19	10	10
(%) regular contributions from individuals	0	31	10	0
(%) grants redistributed by Czech foundations	0	10	90	0
(%) resources from other organizations	0	5	10	0
Annual income	31 641 667	3 008 000	389 273	76 401

6   With the exception of the KSČM data, which comes from the party's 2017 annual report, the data was compiled from the 2008 survey (Císař et al. 2011). Respondents were asked to estimate the proportion of each type of financial resource, which is why the average value of each resource may exceed 100.

Perception of left-wing organizations in public and politics

The political left in the Czech Republic finds itself in a specific socio-political context, largely determined by both the existence of what was known as "real socialism" before 1989 and the subsequent political and economic transformation. In this regard, I would like to focus 1) on the population's perception of the previous regime, which is still identified as being a typical political project of the left; 2) on the ongoing current political efforts to establish and maintain a specific portrayal of this project, thus delegitimizing it in the public eye; and 3) on the role of the media's interventions into these areas. In other words, the significant influence of history on the perception and subsequent position of the Czech left is not only due to society's "natural" reaction to the shortcomings of the previous socialist regime, but also to the continued politics of memory that plays an important role in the post-socialist context (Gjuričová et al. 2011, Šubrt et al. 2012). In order to understand the position of the current Czech left, it is necessary to know the level of self-identification of the Czech population on the left-right scale and also where its support for the main modes of the political left stand. Last but not least, the context of left-wing politics is determined by the media, which is why attention will be paid in this article to the role it plays.

Opinion polls

One of the key determinants is the relationship of the Czech public to political history (Šubrt et al. 2012). In Czech history, the period of the German protectorate and occupation is most negatively evaluated and the second worst-rated period is the "1950s", which is currently synonymous with violent collectivization, political trials, and political repression. On the contrary, the 1960s is much more favorably rated, and although it is still considered a slightly polarized time, the public's assessment of the period is, for instance, similar to that of developments from 2001—2009. The third worst-rated period of Czech history is the period of so-called "normalization," which is culturally associated with the violent suppression of the Prague Spring, the restoration of censorship, and the forced depoliticization of society. In other words, two of the three worst-rated periods in Czech history are linked to the socialist regime. Czechs have evaluated the historical moments for which they are ashamed in a similar manner. The "political trials of the 1950s" were rated worst; however, surrender to Nazi Germany and developments after 1989 are in second and third place.

The disagreement over the "Velvet Revolution" of 1989 and its subsequent developments are often seen as a divisive moment in Czech history, an aspect which also defines conflicts within the Czech left. The Velvet Revolution is considered by most to be the single most important moment in Czech history, and the majority of the population (69%) rate it as a change that was "worth it" (Subrt et al. 2012: 51). Subsequent developments are assessed more critically by citizens. Although still rated better than before 1989, satisfaction with the country's development between 1989 and 2009 (research time frame) is highly variable and is roughly just as high as population dissatisfaction (Šubrt et al., 2012: 57). Indeed, in terms of satisfaction with developments since November 1989, voters of the left-wing parliamentary parties are most reserved, even skeptical, in their assessments. Generally, the declared political orientation of citizens (left vs. right) is a strong predictor of how they assess the previous regime. In other words, there is a strong correlation between the political orientation of an individual and his/her interpretation of history.

Self-identification in terms of political orientation in the Czech Republic has been changing rather significantly over time (Figure 1).

Data suggests that the proportion of respondents identifying with the political left was relatively high at the end of 2012 / beginning of 2013 (40—44 percent), yet fell by 20 percentage points towards the end of the reference period. By contrast, the share of right-wing respondents returned to approx. 40 percent after 2013, after their share declined after 2006. An interesting finding is that in terms of the relationship between the various proportions, the correlation between the proportion of left-wing and right-wing stances is strongest, while the second strongest relationship is between left-wing stances and the "don't know" category. This may suggest that the strengthening of right-wing orientation at the expense of left-wing orientation is mainly due to a weakening or uncertainty of left-wing political identity, which is not shifting towards the "center" but instead is shifting towards uncertainty about political self-identification.

Figure 1: Development of political self-identification in the Czech Republic (2002—2018) (%)
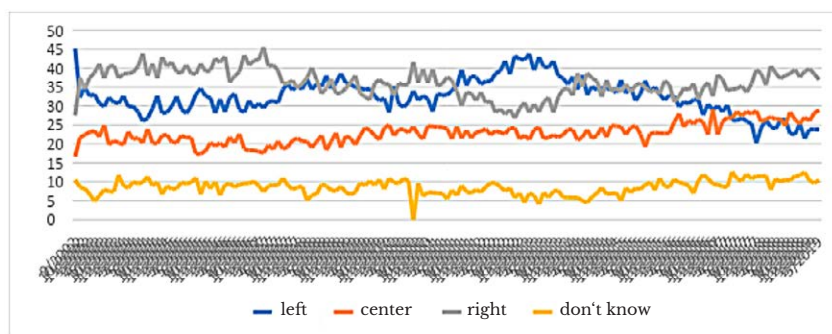

Source: CVVM

This development is closely related to the drop in electoral support for left-wing parties after the 2013 elections (Figure 2). It is clear here that during 2016, electoral support for left-wing parties decreased over the long-term, and after the elections to the Chamber of Deputies, it remains below 10%. This is the first time since 1999 that support for the KSČM has dropped so low, and in the case of the Social Democrats, it is a repeat of what happened to their party in 1993. For both parties, this is a dramatic change in electoral support and is repeatedly attributed to the arrival of new parties on the Czech electoral scene (Šaradín, Vašátková 2017): on the one hand, the arrival (or partial renewal) of the *Freedom and Direct Democracy Party* (Strana přímé demokracie, hereafter SPD), and on the other hand, the first time the *YES 2011* movement (hereafter ANO) entered government. ANO 2011 movement was founded by entrepreneur A. Babiš as an expression of disagreement with political corruption in the Czech Republic and was registered as a party in 2012. ANO 2011 portrays itself as a "right-wing party with social feeling" or as a "party for everyone." Using a strategy of political and social opportunism, both of these new political actors are systematically "nibbling away at" KSČM voters (the anti-systemic and culturally conservative rhetoric of the SPD), on the one hand, and on the other hand, ČSSD voters (highlighting social issues, criticism of previous right-wing governments).

Figure 2: Development of support for left-wing parliamentary parties in the Czech Republic (2013—2019) (%)
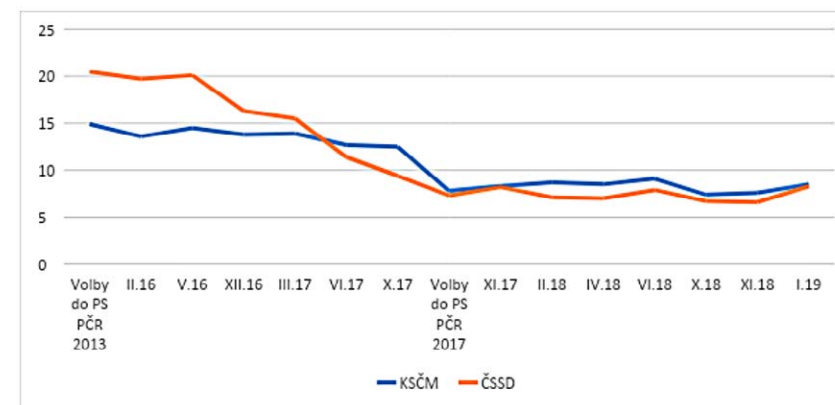
Elections to the Chamber of Deputies Parliament of the Czech Republic (Source: STEM)

Political party stances

A separate problem of the Czech left is the stance of political parties. In this context, I will focus on two key issues—on the relationship between the two major Czech left-wing parties and on the strategies of the other political parties in relations to the left. The common denominator of these two relationships is anti-communism.

Since the 1990s, the relationship between ČSSD and KSČM has been determined by anti-communist sentiment and an effort to name not only KSČM but also all collaborating entities as the driving force of attempts to "return to before 1989." This was, for example, the subject of campaigns in which many Social Democrats participated, where the allegedly dictatorial or totalitarian tendencies of KSČM were emphasized. There are a multitude of examples of this: the framing of the activities of left-wing party leaders as being similar to those used during normalization policy such as during the 2006 election campaign against ČSSD chairman Jiří Paroubek (Koubek et al 2012: 57—58). Anti-communism, in particular, was previously used by ČSSD itself. This relationship was institutionalized in 1995 at the latest with the adoption of the so-called Bohumín Resolution (formulated two years earlier) under which ČSSD banned cooperation with "extremist political parties" including KSČM. Efforts to forbid cooperation with the Communist Party and reject communist identity were in reaction to several circumstances. First, this was in response to external efforts to delegitimize the entire parliamentary left as anti-democratic and to associate it with a potentially violent threat of a communist return. Second, it was as an attempt to establish a strong left-wing alternative to KSČM (i.e., non-communist) and was also an effort to consolidate differing opinions within the party—opinions which consisted of an anti-communist left which sought to build on the traditions of the ČSSD of the First Republic and representatives of the radical left and post-Communists. However, since its approval, the Bohumín Resolution has been increasingly reinterpreted; recently (in connection with the transformation

of the Czech party system after 2013 and the subsequent suppression of anti-communist rhetoric) it has publicly been declared a relic and has largely been phased out (ignored). For example, in 2003, during the presidential election, even non-left-wing candidates publicly sought the votes of communist legislators. In 2005 and 2006, Social Democratic and Communist deputies formed regular voting coalitions in the Chamber of Deputies; in 2008 coalitions were formed between ČSSD and KSČM in regional councils (e.g., in the Moravian-Silesian, Central Bohemian, and Karlovy Vary regions), and in 2013, the Moravian-Silesian branch of ČSSD demanded that the Bohumín Resolution be terminated (Charvát 2013). This new situation coincided with the formation of the ANO movement, which won the election to the Chamber of Deputies in 2017, despite a strong anti-communist campaign (linking chairman of ANO Andrej Babiš with the communist secret police) mainly led by citizens' initiatives and right-wing political parties. The victory of ANO and the ineffectiveness of the subsequent civil protests against A. Babiš was subsequently interpreted, among other things, as a weakening of the anti-communist discourse and was partly attributed to the forming of a government after long negotiations with ANO and the ČSSD representatives which had the tacit backing of KSČM.

The second point in the history of Czech anti-communism is the recurrent campaigns organized by civil society and political parties on the right of the political spectrum. These campaigns have been held with some regularity since 1990. The anti-communism espoused by Czech right-wing parties has been repeatedly described as a "politics of memory" and has become a commonly used political instrument in Czech society (Gjuričová et al. 2011; Kunštát 2011; Koubek et al. 2012). This fact can be evidenced by data from the analysis of public protest events which employed themes of (anti-) communism (Hrubeš, Navrátil 2017; Navrátil, Hrubeš 2018). The analysis, among other things, demonstrated that the expectation of a rapid decline in anti-communist mobilization

after the end of the political and economic transition of the Czech regime was erroneous and that anti-communism among the Czech public was more than persistent. The study indicated that anti-communism also steadily emerged as a topic of political protest in the period of 1993—2011, i.e., the period immediately following regime change. Anti-communist mobilization in the Czech Republic essentially takes on two forms: either open-ended anti-communist demands (typical for political actors) or anti-communist framing which often frames unrelated claims by referencing communism in an attempt to provide them with political or social relevance.

The first type of mobilization was typically utilized by right-wing political parties and was more likely to have preceded the second type of mobilization for which it defined and maintained fundamental significance: identifying communism with the political left, the violence and repressive institutions of the past regime, defining a fundamental moral framework for marking ethical and moral boundaries. Parallels with fascism have often come to light. ("I have the impression that we do not see our communist totalitarian past with the same contempt as the majority of Germans sees its totalitarian fascist past; and I think that's a shame" (Němcová, 2018)). Thus, this method of making demands provided a context for the activities of less-politically institutionalized actors, who then used anti-communism as a tool to promote political demands that were unrelated to communism or, for example, that were unrelated to KSČM (e.g. the doctors' protest in 2006 against then Health Minister Rath; or protests by civic initiatives against A. Babiš in 2018, etc.)

Both types of mobilization have occurred relatively consistently over time. According to the analysis, the dynamics of such protests appears to be influenced primarily by the political context, or more precisely, by either political or symbolic threats to a certain subset of the political elite that the left will come to power. Specifically, the absence of openly anti-communist

representatives in the government constituted a necessary condition for anti-communist demonstrations in the streets in a given year. An increase in electoral preferences for KSČM (or ČSSD) is also regarded as a threat which has led to an increase in anti-communist awareness. This confirms the use of anti-communism as a "policy of the present." In addition, this is reinforced by the fact that the increase in frequency of mobilizations using anti-communist framing only (i.e., without the direct requirements regarding the KSČM or the previous regime) is taking place at a time when there is an increase in electoral support for ČSSD (while maintaining the condition for the absence of explicit anti-communists in government).

The media—mainstream and alternative
The political context, as described above, is not only based on the activities of politically institutionalized actors and civic initiatives but is also embedded in the media. In terms of left-wing policy, it is important to mention two important factors in relation to the Czech media landscape. Firstly, confidence in the media is dramatically low in the Czech Republic, which is related, among other things, to the prevailing political orientation of journalists (Moravec et al. 2016). Secondly, there is a relatively limited range of media in the country that could be identified as left-wing, which further complicates the relationship between the political left and the majority of the population.

The first problem was demonstrated in a study by Moravec et al. (2016), which highlighted the causes of distrust among citizens in the media. Long-term trends in media confidence have indicated a decline in confidence in various types of media for a long time now (Figure 3).

Figure 3: The development of confidence in television and print media between 2002 and 2019 (%)
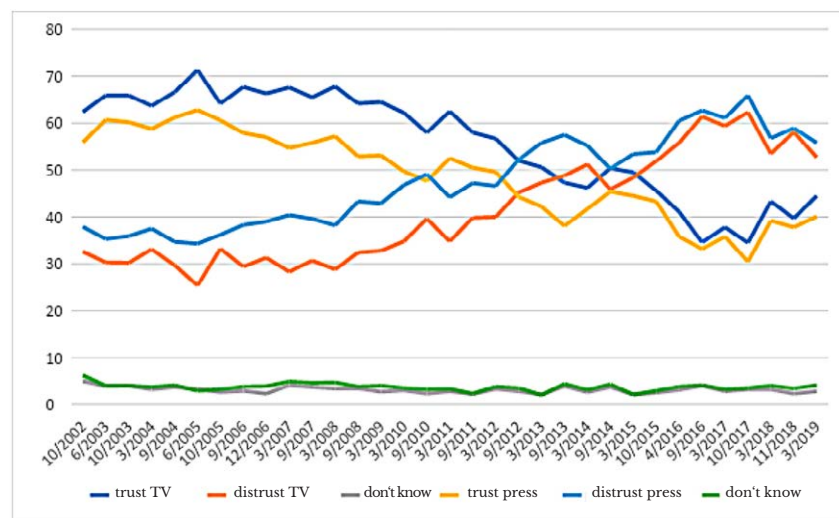
Source: CVVM

It is evident that from 2006—2008 confidence in television and print media eroded; furthermore, this level of distrust has deepened dramatically over the years. The decline in confidence was most notable among the youngest group monitored in the study (18-29-year-old), while, at the same time, there was a higher level of distrust among the lowest income groups and left-wing voters (Volek, Urbániková 2017). There are probably several reasons for this trend, and it is difficult to identify them precisely. Nonetheless, one of the causes seems to be that there is a discrepancy between the political orientation and the values of Czech journalists and their audience. Journalists are "perceived as those who are on the same side as more successful people" and research confirms their strong inclination towards the political right (the proportion of journalists self-identifying as left-wing continued to fall between 2003 and 2016) (Moravec et al. 2016).

This situation is one of the causes of the sharp rise in popularity of so-called alternative media that focuses mainly on disappointed "mainstream media consumers". The alternative media is gradually gaining a foothold both on the Internet and in print media, but also on television, and are gaining more and more influence among left-wing voters, both in terms of agenda-setting and framing of current political and economic processes. The response to this trend is currently twofold in the Czech context: On the one hand, there is a rise in so-called fake news production and the political response to it and, on the other, there is an expansion of the so-called hybrid warfare agenda, which is actually the militarization of this political response. Essentially, this militarization puts to use military metaphors in order to lead a debate in the public domain on the problem of false messages and misinformation, where the main adversary (producer and sponsor of these activities) is typically referred to as the Russian Federation (Daniel, Eberle 2018; Rychnovská, Kohút 2018). Since 2013, existing (mostly right-wing) think tanks (e.g., *European Values* [Evropské hodnoty]) and some journalists have positively seized the initiative in this area, whereas public institutions (e.g., Ministry of the Interior and other security forces) are also gradually emerging in this network. This has led to the creation of a new network of experts that are seeking to establish themselves in the area of legitimacy (security, credibility, political alliance) of the current media and which are attempting to produce a specific narrative in relation to the relationship between Western political regimes and Russia or China (Rychnovská, Kohút 2018: 23—24). The functioning and public political and media support of this network continues to increase the gap between mainstream consumers and alternative media.

Current left-wing media in the country is relatively isolated and has little influence. Of the major daily newspapers, the only one that can be considered somewhat left-wing is *Právo*, and apparently, none of the national weekly newspapers can be categorized as left-wing; in the case of TV channels, in general there is no left-wing

media position. Most left-wing media focuses on the Internet and magazines which are published less frequently. Overall, the left-wing media can be described as somewhat fragmented. This is also supported by materialistic and post-materialistic divisions within the Czech left, which have gained in intensity since the so-called 2015 migration crisis. This is also illustrated by the structure of the interconnectedness of left-wing media websites (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Internet networks of Czech left-wing media

Source: author.
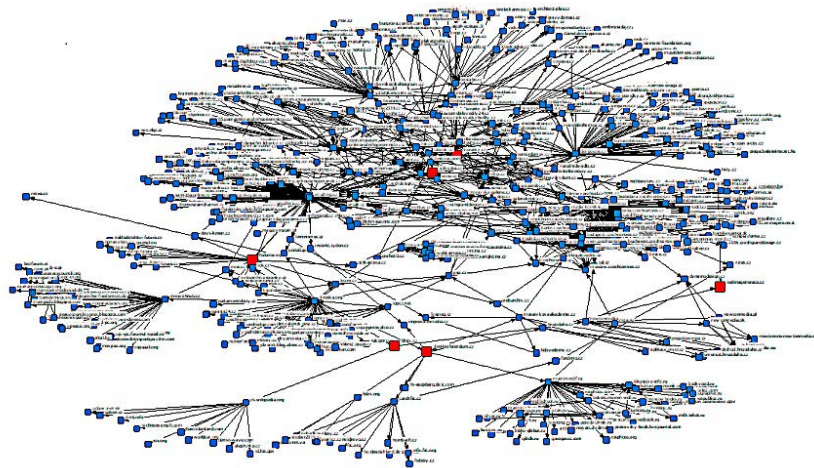
Most of these websites do not have direct links to each other and operate more as media bubbles for different sections of readers or activists. This has seen the creation of four structurally-separate and internally-homogeneous areas of the Internet; on the one hand, are the literary and culturally-oriented servers (Literarky.cz, Advojka.cz), characterized by interaction with cultural institutions and world of art in general (galleries, publishing houses, music events), and, on the other, are those affiliated with the Communist Party (Halonoviny.cz), which create a network of links to websites of friendly organizations and to so-called alternative news sites (Zvedavec.org, Dfens-cz.com). Another group is represented by

daily online newspapers with a greater focus on international affairs; these outlets (Denikreferendum.cz, Blisty.cz). seek to represent a news alternative to the Czech mainstream media and are therefore not very connected it. Finally, the environmental platforms (Sedmagenerace.cz) are the most isolated from other left-wing media (and from other media in general). These environmental platforms are on the periphery in terms of interaction with left-wing media as a whole.

Perspectives of the Czech left

In addition to the above-described facets of the structure of the Czech left and the environment in which it operates, it is also necessary to provide an illustration of how its members perceive the current situation: their concept of the left, the values they associate with it, how they perceive the current position of the Czech left, how they perceive problems and relationships within the Czech left, the issues they are dealing with, and their views on the intra-organizational processes and resources of their organizations. This analysis is based on four semi-structured interviews with representatives from the key sectors of the organized left—i.e., the unions (Respondent 1), KSČM (Respondent 2), ČSSD (Respondent 3), and the radical left (Respondent 4).

The respondents were chosen on the basis that they would be as familiar with and representative of the given sector as possible; this means that in terms of its structure, they would not only be aware of the problems of ordinary organizations or members but also would have an overview of the elite from the organizational sector in question. The unions are therefore represented by a respondent with solid knowledge of the functioning of trade union confederations and their top management and is also currently a leader of an independent trade union. In the case of the communist scene, the respondent is a KSČM representative from a large city with experience and contacts from both municipal and national politics. In the case of the ČSSD, the respondent is a ČSSD representative from a large city who has experience and contacts with municipal politics, and, at the same time, has a fundamental knowledge of the national leadership of the party. Finally, in the case of the radical left, an elite activist was chosen with long-term knowledge of the functioning of civil society and large left-wing parties.

Definitions

The first step was to ask respondents to describe how they understand the political left and what values they associate with it.

Respondent 1 clearly defines the left as a political force anchored in history which is able to draw on experiences from its history. The left was created as a workers' movement with the aim of helping workers and similar groups within the population. In the past, the left defined itself primarily in response to poverty, which is why today's left should once again focus on this issue as opposed to presenting its image as "ambivalent"—an image which the respondent compared to current political strategies such as those of Czech social democracy. The loss of the material moment of the contemporary left is thus very problematic for this respondent.

Respondent 2 associates being left-wing with the personal identity of the individual; this is not, he believes, merely about opinions, but about the very essence of the individual. His example, which he repeatedly used in his interpretation of the Left throughout the conversation, is the primitive communal society. Indeed, it is this very type of society in which interpersonal solidarity is essential and in which it is necessary to preserve the family and ensure its survival. According to the respondent, because there is inherent equality between people, we should all help one another to survive. In this context, the respondent is optimistic about the so-called essence of human beings—in his view, it is important to look for the good in everyone, and, thus, he deduces that people can be persuaded by the left-wing agenda to work hard. Only the Communist Party, in his opinion, embodies the real left that is clearly associated with interpersonal solidarity.

Respondent 3 defines the left as an aggregate of three principles: equal access to education, equal access to healthcare, and equal treatment for all by the institutions. In his view, the role of the state

is important for property management because public estates can be managed well and reasonably through public institutions, despite repeated criticism from the right. In contrast to the opinion of the Communists, the left should not, therefore, aim for common ownership, but for the coordination of property management which benefits everyone; such property management must be subject to a set of rules so that these resources are not laid waste, but are distributed fairly. According to the respondent, the left in the Czech Republic includes Communists, Social Democrats, largely the Green Party, in many ways the Czech Pirate Party, and political entities such as Žít Brno[7]. The respondent does not perceive civic movements as leftist because they themselves do not consider themselves leftist.

Respondent 4 defines the left primarily as an anti-capitalist vision of a society based on something other than profit, where there is no exploitation of humans or nature—in short, a society which is not exclusive. In his view, the radical left is a political force seeking a systematic transition to a qualitatively different society. An important concept for the radical left is solidarity across nations and promoting the struggle for human rights and freedom. The respondent rejected the tensions between the materialistic and the post-materialist left, which has been the focus of part of the political discourse in recent years. By way of example, he mentions the problem of racism, which is commonly categorized as political human rights, and therefore is more likely to be classified among post-materialist struggles. However, he believes that the left fights against racism not only for humanistic and cultural reasons but also because racism is directed against the poorest members of society and results in divisions and incohesiveness among the working class which, in turn, weakens it. According to the respondent, it is not possible to determine which forms

7   A local municipal party which succeded to turn a local grass-root reccessist association into a political movement which was a part of the government (between 2014 and 2018) in Brno, the second largest Czech city.

of oppression are preceded by others because they usually all act simultaneously nor is it possible to say, for example, that we will eradicate poverty first and then racism. However, from a strategic point of view, exploitation is the main, most paramount enemy. For example, certain non-profit organizations that focus on environmental issues rank among the left-wing actors in the Czech Republic. Some of these groups are unambiguous about the fact that overcoming capitalism is a necessary condition to overcome climate change. In this respect, it is important to the respondent that the radical left strives to make capitalism more problematic. Therefore, he believes that it is sometimes possible to classify environmental organizations as being part of the left, although they would never define themselves as such.

Current situation

Respondent 1 questioned the existence of a "left-wing political party" in the Czech Republic at present. In his view, neither the ČSSD nor the Communist Party has majority left-wing membership, and although they talk about being leftist, they gravitate more towards the center (e.g., by working with center-right or right-wing actors and taking on their objectives). He believes that the Communist Party has been stuck in the past and is not sure of its goals, and what's more, it is being abandoned by young members and supporters who are in search of left-wing alternatives. The problem is the leadership of these parties, who prevent the inclusion of left-wing issues. Trade unions are supposed to be leftist because it is their primary role. However, this is not always the case. In addition, there is a problem with the Czech unions insofar as their leadership sometimes works autocratically and lacks connections to the membership base and other organizations. The Czech left—the "pure" left—now works more on the level of civil activism and is independent of the left of political parties. According to the respondent, in general, the Czech left is no longer operates in a hostile environment, and thus the anti-leftist era

has, according to him, already "fizzled out." This is a consequence of the transformation of the political environment over the last few years through the transformation of the party system, i.e., the arrival of ANO, the Czech Pirate Party, and other new parties who have taken on some left-wing issues, thereby weakening the left.

When asked about the position of the Czech left, **respondent 2** claimed that it is in a similar position as the Czech right—both political branches were pushed into the background by the arrival of oligarchs, and therefore left-wing forces should come together and unite forces. The untapped potential of the Czech political left is the contact it lacks with citizens, and the new populist parties have now overtaken them in this respect. People need the context of the current political and economic situation to be explained to them; on the issue of climate change or drought, for example, it is necessary to explain the issue of common resources. According to this respondent, in addition to the real left, a moderate left also exists in the Czech Republic—the social-democratic left.

Respondent 3 started off by describing how the Czech Republic ten years ago was a place where anti-leftist ethos prevailed—the choice of the left was less legitimate than that of the right, and the left was described as a "choice for the more stupid." In his opinion, the situation today is different, albeit, we are still worse off than other countries such as Spain. According to the respondent, the left grew from 1998 to 2008. Today, in his view, the left is looking for an issue that would define it. The welfare state still exists, and the left is supposed to be its guardian to prevent it from being dismantled. The left is now coming face-to-face with its own limits because society as a whole has shifted more to the left in terms of issues and therefore left-wing political identity is becoming indistinct. In addition, according to this respondent, left-wing representatives have gradually given up on certain issues and are incapable of returning to them—for instance, the issue of social housing was taken over by other political entities. Indeed, the current left-wing

leaders are afraid of persistent ideological simplification, where extravagance and economic inefficiency are synonymous with the left. This respondent perceives trade unions as a clearly left-wing force, but unfortunately one that still carries with it the stigma of the past. Nonetheless, he expresses the hope that they will continue to play a role in society and that their time will come once again. In his view, the left defends interests that are currently not fully evident; however, since another industrial revolution is on its way, there will be an important role for trade unions and other left-wing forces. Trade unions now have an advantage over political parties because the demands they defend are more understandable to citizens. Nowadays, unions are relatively embedded in society, and people are beginning to have a greater understanding of the interests which they currently defend. In addition to trade union issues, the respondent commented on the overall change in the relationship of the Czechs towards politics in recent years and considers the arrival of new parties to be a huge asset. These new parties, he believes, have allowed dissatisfied citizens to "let off steam," and have improved the face of politics by joining the political arena alongside the old parties. They have been able to bring new personalities and ideas into politics and have given it a new touch. In addition to anti-political sentiment, the respondent mentions anti-communism as an important factor in terms of left-wing politics. He goes on to say, however, that anti-communist sentiments no longer interest anyone, and therefore, it makes no sense for anyone to use them.

Respondent 4 describes the situation of the current Czech left as being divided. On the one hand, there are the used up parties of the left that are incapable of responding to the enormous challenges of the present, such as the migration crisis or climate change. This is the reason, in his opinion, why new types of parties are entering the political arena which—to a large extent justifiably—criticize the role the existing left is playing in the current situation. On the other hand, left-wing non-partisan movements and groups

are expanding (both geographically and in terms of issues) and, by contrast, are taking on and proposing new issues, thus becoming more diverse. It is better when these movements and parties are able to respond to new trends; for example, in the Czech Republic this means taking the reins in the fight against climate change. This respondent believes that the leftist parties are unable to absorb this new impetus and cannot even attract new members or sympathizers. In his view, these parties do not understand why they should respond to such impetus, and this is because they "don't have people to explain it to them." He believes that the reason for this may be in general post-socialism, whereby participation in political party organizations is socially unappealing, and thus parties are unable to attract new members. In his view, the position of the Czech left is also determined by the cooperation between leftist parties and left-wing non-partisan movements and groups: the level of cooperation is low, and it is the leftist parties that are mainly to blame for this. On the left, integration between non-party members is taking place. This, for example, is happening within the climate change movement, where environmental organizations work with the radical left and the radical left is no longer ostracized. Problems with this collaboration were foreseen earlier, most recently during the migration crisis. According to the respondent, the left united with liberal non-profit organizations and was thus both criticized by the liberal press and the majority within the "non-political" non-profit sector.

Problems and relations

According to **respondent 1**, the left's main problem is its fragmentation. There are dozens of organizations dealing with each issue, and these are continuing to fragment and disintegrate. This is the case, for example, with environmental groups, youth organizations of the left-wing parties, and even trade unions. He thinks that the problem of the left is that it does not know how to work with citizens in the same way that it works with its

supporters, and not just as members: such a platform would allow greater numbers of supporters to connect; for example, large trade union confederations do not even want to establish links with other actors. The respondent believes that the main problem is the administrative elites of existing large left-wing organizations are not interested in cooperation. The one-time collaboration between ČMKOS and ProAlt during the Nečas government took place despite strong opposition from the trade unions; however, no other cooperation followed. In his opinion, trade unions are afraid of activism, and they prefer to avoid anything that does not correspond to their standards. He believes that this is not an intentional strategy, but one that can be attributed to mental laziness and bureaucratic encapsulation, as well as a reliance on the membership base. According to the respondent, trade unions should become more active. He believes that left-wing non-partisan movements and groups are interested in cooperation and interconnection, while left-wing parties and trade unions, do not have the same interest—potential cooperation is considered only with selected organizations that correspond to their interests and habits. Therefore, cooperation between left-wing non-partisan movements and groups and leftist parties is somewhat low and not at the level of, for example, joint events or activities. Nowadays, the issue of cooperation is not a geographic one (i.e., the issue of connecting geographically distant organizations and groups).

According to **Respondent 2**, the main problem of the left today is that it is unable to explain its program comprehensibly to people nor is it prepared for the challenges of the future, such as water shortages, access to education, and availability of housing. Another important problem, in his opinion, is cooperation: there is some cooperation between left-wing entities, but it is often complicated because many left-wing entities refuse to cooperate with KSČM; KSČM is ostracized and therefore the left continues to remain fragmented. According to the respondent, KSČM, for example, joined forces with smaller actors in preparing the list

of candidates for elections to the European Parliament, whereas this co-operation—like all other forms—was contingent on adhering to the KSČM program, an irrefutable condition of cooperation. The Communist Party, he said, also cooperated with the *Party of Civic Rights, Zeman's People* (Strana Práv Občanů—Zemanovci) during municipal elections, but again on the condition that the party program is respected. In his view, the party would not even oppose cooperation with civic associations and groups such as those focusing on environmental protection. However, in his opinion, civic activists are somewhat "immature individuals" who do not know how to exercise influence over real politics, and that is why it is necessary to socialize them, integrate them into real politics, for example via party activities. The respondent divides the Czech left into the "ecological left" and "our branch." He perceives the relationship with trade unions as unique because, in his view, unions are organizations that "are not allowed to engage in politics," and therefore he does not perceive them as another part of the left. Cooperation with them is legitimate, but must not be based on politics. According to the respondent, "parties do politics, whereas trade unions are supposed to defend workers' rights."

Respondent 3 also considers the main problem of the left to be its fragmentation and incohesiveness; additionally, he sees both an issue with the reluctance of citizens to change political parties from within and also the shortsightedness of certain informal left-wing entities who adopt left-wing issues yet who are incapable of carrying through with them and sustaining them over the long-term. In the case of the Czech left, the symptomatic system of relations between representatives of the main left-wing actors is another important factor. For instance, the Social Democrats (ČSSD) have cooperated with the Communists (KSČM) up to a point, e.g., at the municipal level, and this has gone smoothly. But now, according to the respondent, at the national level, the complete opposite appears to be the case—pragmatism and mutual opposition prevails as does a lack of willingness to compromise

and understand the other. In his opinion, the Bohumín Resolution which banned the ČSSD from working with the Communist Party is not working and, what's more, was damaged by the cooperation with the current government. The respondent believes that there has always been heated debate in relation to this ban, but at the same time there is no viable communist party in the picture. He states that the current party continues in its current form; it is a political entity that is slowly disappearing. On the contrary, there is great potential for cooperation with civic associations, but they often behave erratically: After the ČSSD strived to establish civic associations and to make room for them in the political arena, civic associations turned their backs on them. Civic organizations do not identify with the left, though they fail to realize that the left has been instrumental in their formation. Trade unions are potentially a strong partner for the ČSSD. According to the respondent, they now communicate with all political parties, but they realize that the ČSSD are their closest partner.

The problem of the current tensions and fragmentation between the culturally progressive and culturally conservative left is not, according to the respondent, the tension between the two existing wings of the ČSSD. He believes that the party is now experiencing a certain level of helplessness and is waiting for a compelling leader to put a unifying mark on the party. There is currently a lack of interconnectedness within the party in terms of ideas: the party has young and progressive members and sympathizers, as well as an older materialistic wing. Despite this, he does not see this division as being fatal to the party, and he believes that it can continue to connect to and have confidence in the project of social democracy as a whole. According to the respondent, divisions on the issue of migration (but also other issues) are not only a problem unique to the Social Democrats but one that is affecting society as a whole as well as individual families. The unwillingness of citizens to join political parties and to change them from within is described by the respondent as an unwillingness to "work through

institutions," which implies their efforts to establish small unstable entities and a subsequent inability to maintain a stable left-wing course in politics. According to the respondent, political parties are molding certain issues in order to make them more accessible to the public (and thus less ideological or fundamental), but in doing so, they are then capable of promoting and implementing them over the long-term.

Respondent 4 argues that the main problem of the left is its institutional weakness. In his opinion, all left-wing non-partisan movements and groups are fragile. Leftist parties do not have this weakness, although they are weak in terms of ideas because they neither have the apparatus for communicating with the civic sector nor for adopting new ideas, nor do they have their own intellectual basis. Another problem is that they are disorganized internally. Organizational structure is a general weakness in the case of the left—individuals are involved in the running of organizations and their activities, but most do so as volunteers or as inadequately paid employees who compensate for poor facilities and a lack of resources by their high level of commitment. According to the respondent, left-wing organizations typically do not have their own offices, nor do they have much in the line of human or financial resources. The parties use state subsidies, but unfortunately not in an effective manner. Due to bureaucracy and internal interest groups, resources are often wasted and flow outside the party structure.

Another important problem of the left is the historical burden. The Czech population is typically anti-communist, and any political program or actor on the left is subconsciously considered totalitarian, while right-wing views are considered natural. It is the left who must constantly support their demands with arguments and empirical examples. As an example, the respondent cites discussions in relation to the ending of the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) contract, where it was

the left that had to defend its negative stance while the opposite camp had "common sense" on its side. The radical left, according to the respondent, is technically associated with KSČM and automatically considered to be anti-system, albeit unjustifiably, and subsequently blocks cooperation on the left of the political spectrum. Nonetheless, in his view, the level of anti-communist sentiment is decreasing as a result of generational change. According to the respondent, part of the non-profit sector is left-wing, but does not want to declare itself as such and thus pretends to be non-political. The reason for this is the aforementioned Czech preference for non-political politics, which results in the assumption that any activism is biased, while some think-tanks, albeit with a clear political profile, behave as if they are objective and thus are also partly accepted as such. According to the respondent, unions are left-wing, although they, too, do not want to admit this openly. Nonetheless, they inadvertently admit this in their promotional materials.

Finally, the respondent concludes that another current problem for the left as a whole is the rift which was created during the recent crises in Syria and Ukraine and which continued during the refugee crisis. The radical left did not want to take either side in the disputes that arose from the two crises, neither the side of the establishment of the countries in question, nor that of the liberal mainstream, and therefore even further alienated the rest of the left (i.e., the conservative and liberal left). As a result, some traditional left-wing supporters rather unsurprisingly began to support the SPD populists.

Political issues

Respondent 1's view of current left-wing issues is specific. For him, current issues relate to cooperation with Polish trade unions on the issue of cross-border employment, (i.e., the employment of Poles in the Czech Republic and of Czechs in Poland). To

elaborate, there is a large number of Polish citizens working for Škoda in Kvasiny who do not know their employment rights in the Czech Republic and who are often not members of a union. Thus, more generally speaking, the issue at hand is the recruitment of foreigners to Czech unions, as well as restrictions on the permeability of national borders when transporting goods between the Czech Republic and Poland.

According to the respondent, other left-wing issues, not just trade union issues, include, for example, increasing cooperation among all trade union groups. Only then will it be possible to advance common demands and goals such as an increase in the minimum wage. This was the issue that ČMKOS took on independently without consulting other trade unions. In the end, it failed to push through the original proposal. Subsequently, other trade union organizations came together in support of the demand, though this move was also unsuccessful.

Respondent 2 considers climate change to be one of the key contemporary issues of the left, as well as the robotization of work and taxation. Of course, all social inequity remains a major issue. However, he says, the Communist Party is also focusing on other issues, such as transport and healthcare. The most important issues relate to the social sphere, especially social housing and the issue of property seizure by debt collectors. Another important issue is care for the elderly, which is a growing problem.

Respondent 3 believes that a large section of the Czech population lives just above the poverty level, whereas the left is often unaware of this problem and therefore does not bring it adequately to light. Therefore, the Czech left should take its inspiration from what is happening in other countries. With the advent of the technological revolution, new issues are emerging which are attracting a younger generation of politicians to Czech politics, for instance, the transformation of industry to industry 4.0, and so on. However,

these issues do not always resonate with the Czech public. Neither the parties nor citizens are ready for them yet because there is no public debate and the concrete consequences of these processes are still not very apparent. These new political issues are being broached by educated people with experience from abroad but, according to the respondent, they have thus far been unable to get their points across to their fellow party members, let alone citizens.

According to **Respondent 4**, the key issue of the (radical) left is its electoral project, i.e., the establishment of a new left-wing political party. The objective of establishing such a party is to unite existing independent left-wing forces and move their activities to a higher level. Climate change, housing, debt and the seizure of property by debtors are also important issues for this group. The radical left also has a number of more "routine issues," such as First of May celebrations. According to this respondent, issues such as robotization, digitalization—industry 4.0, and a universal basic income are also discussed by the left. The last topic mentioned by the respondent is one which he reflects on regularly: It relates to the functioning of the organization's current publishing house, which is supposed to produce books and other publications.

Resources and organizations

When evaluating the organizational and resource problems of trade unions, **respondent 1** argues that trade unions essentially have two options. One is to operate on the principle of membership fees and thus be dependent on these contributions. The second option is to manage the assets of member organizations and use the revenue from these assets to run the trade union organization. According to this respondent, the contribution-based model has prevailed among trade unions (due to managerial misconduct in the early 1990s, among other factors). Unfortunately, trade unions are losing members and do not allow employees to become members outside of their ranks, thereby closing themselves off and undermining their financial capacity.

Independent trade unions are therefore taking a different route, allowing de facto anyone to become a member (i.e., not only limiting membership to employees of specific companies). Another way in which unions can obtain funds is to apply for grants from public institutions. However, these funds are out of reach for smaller union organizations, whereas only large confederations have access to them and essentially have a monopoly over these funds.

Respondent 2 describes the functioning of the Communist Party as having a clear multi-level structure—from local core organizations and city committees to the district and levels, all the way up to the party's executive committee. At the same time, the internal democracy of the party is also important to the party— all documents of a political nature are discussed by members. In the case of operational matters, specific executives have the main say. In terms of resources, according to the respondent, member contributions are essential, and although the party is funded from multiple sources, the state should contribute more. In his view, one way to increase the financial resources of the party could be, for instance, to allow political parties to carry out business activities, specifically in regards to social services.

When **respondent 3** describes the Social Democrat's internal organization and decision-making process within the party, he emphasizes that these processes are critical to the way in which political decisions and policy is "made." In his opinion, it is necessary that the party to both work on and address issues over the long-term, as well as gain support for these issues from civil society. His view on increasing the organization's internal reflexivity is interesting insofar as he believes that it is necessary to constantly ask senior, politically-active party members to provide reasons for their political decisions. According to the respondent, the internal party's controls of this kind lead to the party making more responsible policy choices. In March 2019, there was a change made to the party statutes,

which the respondent considers essential for speeding up the flow of information and thus enables them to better compete with smaller political entities. The reform also has its negative sides: for example, it allows for less intra-party debate. However, according to the respondent, the speed of information in the present day has changed and, therefore, it is crucial to be able to adapt to this. This "acceleration of information" should maintain public confidence and improve the party's ability to act in the eyes of the public.

In terms of resources, the respondent adds that it is characteristic for the party not to cooperate so much with entrepreneurs and instead to try to involve sympathizers for whom supporting the party makes sense. According to the respondent, financial resources are lacking at the local level and therefore resources are more likely to be generated from individual members, some of whom also work as volunteers. He goes on to say that volunteers from outside the party are rare.

According to **respondent 4,** membership contributions are one of the resources used by the Czech left, but these play a somewhat minor role in the case of the political parties. He believes that parties do not use the potential they have or had in the past. For instance, they own substantial assets but, in his view, lack knowledge on how to manage them properly. The left-wing non-partisan movements and groups rely on membership fees, as well as benefit events, and only, in exceptional cases, on grants because grants demanding in terms of administrative work. In his opinion, the radical left lacks the structure which would help with fundraising; for example, this could take the form of a shared structure that would draw attention to grant opportunities and challenges and help with their administration. For instance, social enterprises or cooperatives could present a sustainable way of financing the radical left, which would enable it to function better than it does at present. In terms of organizational management, the respondent states that involving

everyone in decision-making is important, but his organization has gone down the road of specialization and has divided the issues into working groups. As a result, the organizational structure is subordinated to the goals of the organization rather than the other way round.

Conclusions

This report describes and analyzes the state of the Czech left in various areas. Its first goal was to provide an analytical categorization of the broad field of the Czech left into several sectors, around which it subsequently attempted to organize its analytical structure.

First, it provided an overview of the organizational outcome of all the sectors and subsequently attempted to describe their organizational resources. Second, it endeavored to describe and analyze the context in which the Czech left finds itself today—general population preferences, interaction with other political organizations, and finally, to provide an overview of contemporary media. Finally, the study outlined the results of semi-structured interviews with representatives from the four sectors, taking into account the very definition of the left, its position in the Czech Republic, the current problems facing the left, its issues, and finally, its resources and organizational structure. All the parts of this report tied together in this concluding summary.

Extent of networking and cooperation between organizations
From the very beginning, cooperation between left-wing organizations has been an important factor for the Czech left. The left is greatly polarized for two reasons: as with other sectors that focus on concrete issues, such as the Czech non-profit sector, there are obviously ideological and other rivalries between the individual organizations, be it for electoral support or supporters and, as a consequence, there is competition for resources as well as access to the political system (although the latter type of rivalry is quite minor in the case of the Czech left). This is a common model of interaction between different organizations that have a similar focus and arises, for instance, when applying for grants, when trying to monopolize a particular issue, when organizing protests about the same issue, or when carrying

out fundraising activities. At the same time, however, there are other—external—factors which come into play. Interviews with respondents highlighted two of these factors: anti-politics and anti-communism. Both factors tend to keep the political left isolated and discourage any possible alliances.

Anti-politics is a phenomenon that transcends the field of the political left but, nevertheless, applies to the left. This phenomenon essentially embodies resistance to everything that refers to politics as a profession, politics as an organization, or politics as a strategy for raising public demands. As has already been mentioned, the absence of open political opinion is still preferred in the Czech setting and is perceived as more legitimate than formulating a position with reference to political values or goals. Typically, this primarily relates to the way in which certain types of claims and activities are "framed:" When the political left uses political rhetoric to achieve a particular goal, it typically discourages representatives of non-profit organizations who are looking to achieve the same objective. For instance, framing a proposal for a new housing policy as helping families with children or the elderly is generally considered acceptable; framing the same proposal as an attempt to regulate the profits of developers and extending the municipality's control over private ownership is regarded by a large number of actors as an unacceptable "ideologized" construction.

A similar factor, one that is nowadays solely targeted against the left, is anti-communism. This phenomenon is interesting insofar as, unlike anti-politics, it is also used by the left against itself. The ČSSD' anti-communism, which is directed against cooperation with the Communist Party, was partly forced on them by the then prevailing political discourse. At the same time, however, it helped to maintain and reproduce this discourse. Ultimately, anti-communism has from the outset consistently turned against the ČSSD (whether through indirect framing or, for instance, by

identifying some members of the ČSSD as former Communists and thus trying to eliminate them from the political competition).

The issue of cooperation on the left was reflected on by all respondents: the trade unions and Social Democrats highlight the overall fragmentation of the left's organizational field and the isolation of trade union confederations and somewhat generalize the role of anti-communism. The Communist Party respondent seems to feel the most isolated and believes that anti-communism is the reason for this; according to a representative of the radical left, anti-communism is indeed still present (albeit receding), but the main dividing line, in his view, is the question of political preferences on everyday issues (for example, political news from abroad). Thus, although all respondents consider cooperation to be important, there are differences in how they perceive the causes of this fragmentation as well as differences in how they see the obstacles to such cooperation. What is interesting is not only what respondents say in this context, but also what they choose to omit.

First and foremost, an important starting point is to identify the concept of left-wing identity in the different sectors of the left: trade unions place great emphasis on the tradition of fighting poverty and a return to the tradition of materialism; Communists unequivocally prefer the basic and all-embracing solidarity that is perceived as a condition for the survival of the human species; Social Democrats, on the other hand, emphasize the modern, more liberal concept of equality, i.e., equality in terms of access to modern (welfare state) services; and the radical left focuses on opposition to capitalism which exploits both humans and the environment. What is also interesting is the subsequent strict definition of the left by both the trade unions and the Communists: their understanding is based on the premise that it should be possible to build a joint left-wing program without betraying left-wing principles. At the same time, however, trade unions criticize themselves by criticizing

their own blindness and inability to establish relationships with different political movements and organizational forms. From this point of view, the biggest problem seems to be communist isolationism and clinging to exclusive left-wing authenticity—this is combined with accepting the discourse of anti-political politics. The respondent for the Communists considers trade unions as a non-political actor and does not include them as part of the political left. By contrast, he regards political activists as not fully politically-socialized actors, although he considers it necessary to engage in further cooperation with them. Therefore, this is a much more significant roadblock to internal cooperation than political disagreement or organizational encapsulation demonstrated by the remaining respondents. After all, as the history of political campaigns demonstrates, both factors have already been overcome several times in the past. What is also interesting is the way in which respondents avoid the topic of international cooperation.

Proposals for improving the situation—resources and context
Apart from the abovementioned problems relating to cooperation across the various left-wing sectors, there are two other causes for the weakness of the current Czech left. These can be referred to as the problem of resources and context.

In terms of resources, it is clear that the left-wing organizational sector is extremely heterogeneous; furthermore, this remarkably accurately corresponds to the typology of various modes of political activism that have been developed by a much wider spectrum of civil society organizations than just the political left. It turns out that there are three types of organizations which operate side-by-side in very different ways. The first type is the "old" way of generating resources through members and is particularly ubiquitous in trade unions, where this is the dominant type of resource. This type of left-wing organization also has many professional employees that run the organization. This provides

unions with both organizational and political stability, albeit with declining trade union membership, as reported by Respondent 1.

In addition, there are organizations that operate with a small number of members and staff and who generate revenue from outside the organization. This includes both new advocacy organizations and the radical left. The two are similar in terms of human resources, while differences can be found in the way in which they obtain their financial resources. The radical left is more dependent on membership contributions and foundation grants than the new advocacy organizations, while new advocacy organizations tend to use individual financial contributions and EU grants. Structurally, however, the way in which these two types of organizations acquire their resources is somewhat similar.

Finally, the third type of organizational model are political parties. These are represented here by the Communist Party and, at first glance, it is clear that this political organization operates in a distinctive manner: The party's relatively large membership base exceeds that of the average trade union, and, moreover, it has a greater number of professionals who participate in running the organization, both in the administrative and professional / political sense. In addition, parties are generally relatively evenly represented throughout the country, thus overcoming the typical limitations that other organizational types face. In the case of political parties, the main difference in terms of financial resources is the dominance of state funding (i.e., regular contributions to party activities and the reimbursement of election costs).

The issue of resources is becoming especially relevant for the radical left. Respondent 4 identified the difficulties that this type of organization has with obtaining human and financial resources and suggests the possibility of sharing these resources. This would only be achievable, of course, if there was cooperation among

organizations. One of the suggestions made is the establishment of a shared fundraising office, the main focus of which would be to raise resources for the radical left and new advocacy organizations. Current independent trade unions which do not have a strong membership base and therefore would like to focus on obtaining public grants in the future, could also be potential recipients. Such a measure would probably work best for smaller organizations, which are currently, nonetheless, the most vulnerable in terms of resources. Another recommendation could be to seek greater cooperation across left-wing sectors; for instance, radical left-wing activists criticize trade unions and large parties for inefficient asset management, and, according to them, their wastefulness can be evidenced by the high number of employees in organizations operating on a non-profit basis. A system of longer-term grants or contracts between large organizations and political parties on the one hand, and new advocacy groups and the radical left on the other, would help alleviate this problem. Of course, this requires a solution to the problem of cooperation, as described above.

The second weakness of the Czech left relates to the current social context. Two important features of Czech political culture—anti-politics and anti-communism—have already been mentioned above. We can therefore now turn to the wider social context. The Czech left works in a social setting in which certain moments from the era of "real socialism" are considered as some of the most shameful in the modern history of the Czech lands. However, developments and transformations which took place in post-November 1989 Czechoslovakia have also been rated negatively (albeit less so). However, according to respondent 1and respondent 3, anti-leftist and anti-communist sentiment in the Czech Republic has decreased, and thus the situation for the left could begin to change. Interestingly, this is not reflected in the number of Czech citizens who self-identify as left-wing. The proportion of left-wing citizens and the electoral preferences of the major left-wing parties is in steady decline despite the (perceived) decline in anti-communist

sentiment. It can, therefore, be assumed that the main rival of the left is no longer (at least temporarily) the right with its anti-communist sentiment but rather the new political entities that are using left-wing issues and rhetoric to win over voters on the left of the spectrum. This onslaught has been recognized by all sectors of the Czech left, although they have been unable to tackle it head-on. What distinguishes the rhetoric of new entities, especially that of ANO and SPD, from that of the left? What dominates their discourse is the depoliticization of left-wing issues by combining them with what are essentially contradictory policies (increasing pensions and reducing taxes), and this is all in line with the traditions of Czech non-political politics. It is important to add that even a large section of the left has been unable to break from the dominant liberal discourse aimed at reducing human rights to political rights, pithy rhetoric, and which favors an individualistic interpretation of social processes. That is why Czech voters do not see very many differences between the rhetoric of ANO and ČSSD, and thus do not feel the need to identify with the left.

In this sense, the Czech left still has two journeys ahead. First, it still has to fight its dark past, which is still and will continue, albeit less frequently, to serve as a tool to challenge the left. Any attempt to reduce or delegitimize anti-communism thirty years after regime change should be the result of an effort to deal with history, rather than to reject it outright. Contemporary historical science can provide the Czech left with extensive facts and present a picture of Czech socialism prior to 1989 that is not black-and-white, and thus can be used as a tool to gradually change, or rather broaden, the way in which recent history is perceived by the Czech public. To achieve this, the left will also have to fight for "political politics," whereby it will be necessary to formulate the political agenda of the left in political terms and not in terms of morality and aesthetics. This will mean better connecting specific demands and policies with general political principles and values, such as equality, solidarity, religious freedom, and so on.

However, all these steps—a return to political rhetoric, a rejection of the anti-leftist interpretation of history, and attracting left-wing voters—are contingent on the transformation of the media landscape. It is interesting that none of the respondents explicitly criticized the absence of left-wing media in the Czech media landscape. However, the situation is somewhat unfavorable in this respect, as recent studies on the subject have demonstrated. In any case, without the establishment of left-leaning media having a nationwide impact, it would be delusional to expect the Czech left or sections of the left to succeed in advancing the above points. Indeed, the current situation may prove relatively favorable for the emergence of a strong left-wing media: There is currently a strong demand, especially among typical left-wing voters, for a media that would reject the dominant liberal mainstream and offer a critical view not only of the economic and political situation in the country but also of events abroad. This role is currently being fulfilled by a series of so-called alternative news servers or private television stations that produce dubious quality and content and abuse their role through the spread of nationalist and conservative stereotypes. The aim of all left-wing sectors should therefore be to create their own nationwide alternative to existing media sectors, instead of relying on it as an "alternative" to the dominate media.

Sustainability, trends (social and political), and prospects
In general, the sustainability of the Czech left and future trends will not only depend on the material and structural aspects of left-wing organizations (i.e., resources and context), but also on the ability of the Czech left to provide critical feedback to its surroundings (i.e., primarily citizens, the media, etc.). and to use these links to adapt to a changing environment. In this respect, it is necessary to mention the intra-organizational environment, dominant opinions, as well as issues currently being dealt with by the Czech left.

An important part of the intra-organizational environment is not only resources but also the decision-making processes

in place. While, according to their representatives, the unions and, somewhat surprisingly, the radical left, focus on achieving their organizational goals, in the case of representatives of the two political parties, intra-party democracy presents a crucial aspect of the functioning of the party. Here it is necessary to point out that it is the large organizations, essentially political parties, where intra-organizational "memory-loss" is potentially the biggest problem. As respondent 1points out, this has been a problem with large trade union confederations and is currently blocking not only cooperation across other left-wing sectors but also within the trade union sector as such.

The Czech left, perhaps surprisingly for some, is now focusing its interest on the issues of the present and the near future and, albeit only a declaration, this represents something of a guarantee that the current political left is not dormant in terms of issues.

All respondents agree on the importance of finding solutions to the problem of social inequality, (specifically issues relating to employment rights and minimum wages, as well as rights for foreign workers), housing issues, and finally the issue of property seizures by debtors. The second issues, the housing issue, is one that could potentially attract young supporters and voters in the big cities to the left, although this is an issue that has been raised by the Czech left relatively late and without much success. The issue of housing has recently moved high up on the political agenda and, as the current state of political debate on this subject illustrates, there is a complete absence of basic advocacy of housing regulation and municipal ownership, something the younger generation has been willing to accept thus far.

More interestingly, however, with the exception of trade union representatives and Social Democrats, there is a consensus on the importance of the issue of climate change, meaning that the left should take the lead in tackling this issue. This really is

a major issue for the present and near-future where, again, it is possible to work with its politicization and to demonstrate the benefits of collectively-shared farms and estates, the necessity of putting limits on (self)consumption for the benefit of others, and the principles of solidarity and humanity. Climate change has the potential to deconstruct the thus far unchallenged and uncriticized notion that deregulation and privatization of public property makes sense, that individuals are responsible for their own fate, and that the exclusive use of economic criteria to assess human activities and preferences is legitimate.

Another issue that is of a more practical nature, yet does not have the same level of potential to attract new voters, is the advent of industry 4.0, the advent of digitization and robotics, and the subsequent issue of taxation and redistribution. These are issues that will demand solutions in the coming years and where the left will have to persuade society that the views they hold are sustainable and fair, although, according to the Social Democrat respondent "neither political parties nor citizens are ready for this yet." In addition, in the case of the trade union left, this issue eludes to a further weakening of its membership base, even in the context of the issue of a universal basic income.

Left-wing prospects
At least from the point of view of representatives from the existing left, the current prospects for the left are slightly pessimistic. On the one hand, there is a slight skepticism as to whether there is a real left in the Czech Republic. This is the case for both the ČSSD, which have alienated the left, and the Communist Party, which some believe is a relic of the past and is unable to rebuild itself. Another factor to be pessimistic about is competition from new political entities which, according to some respondents, decimates both the left and the right. Others believe, however, that it has helped to ease Czech resistance to politics by bringing new faces to it, thereby increasing public support for politics in general. However,

this argument neglects the fact that the politics practiced by these new actors unfortunately damages not only the current political class, but above all, the political left. As mentioned above, in an environment where politics have been regarded as morally unclean and where economic and political liberalism has been elevated to the natural state of affairs and a common sense standing, there is little room for politicizing current and new issues, nor is there a willingness to listen to these arguments. Therefore, the left should feel threatened not only by the decline in supporters, but above all, by an even greater depoliticization of Czech politics.

Finally, the last reason for pessimism relates to the existing division of the political left into mutually isolated (often not even competing) enclaves, which not only very rarely join forces, but often do not even see a reason to do so. While some see this rift as being related to the values which extend across organizations, others see it as a dispute over the differences between the organizational characteristics of leftist parties and left-wing non-partisan movements and groups.

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Slovak Republic

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The concept of civil society, as the subject of this research paper, requires the reader to acknowledge that society is, to a large extent, a dynamic structure; its dynamic nature means it embodies a framework of, on the one hand, chronological development, and, on the other, structural factors, which are also subject to external as well as internal dynamics. This recognition enables us to avoid some of the exclusive interpretations of civil society that are rather restrictive. In other words, this research paper attempts to challenge the dominant perception of civil society in Slovakia, which, in principle, presumes a monopoly over the concept itself, avoids analyzing civil society on a discursive or structural level, and thus often delegitimizes efforts to expand on the established perception of civil society.

This article, however, prefers to utilize an inclusive interpretation of civil society which includes organizations, associations, or movements that may lie outside the strict definition of civil society. In my opinion, the term *inclusive*

interpretation also means that multi-level structures or even contributions to methodological approaches to civil society itself should be considered; these methodological approaches often tend to be a form of progressive-regressive teleology by perceiving civil society in Slovakia through the prism of Czechoslovak, respectively Slovak dissent (Bútora 2010). On the one hand, this concerns the relations of individual actors to the state and, in a broader sense, to society, both in Slovakia and globally. On the other hand, this concerns relations among individual actors, cooperation on the structural, not personal basis, or fields of activity that are launched or shaped by actors' activities. Additionally, an inclusive interpretation also refers to efforts to capture Slovakia's civil society from the perspective of social discourse. In this respect, I rely on Foucault's understanding of discourse as a result of leadership or distribution of power, albeit limited, that actively influences the very nature of society (Foucault 2016; Alexander 2006; Habermas 2018).

It this research paper, the left's perspective is represented exclusively by civil society actors as defined in this text. I, therefore, did not include political parties and left-of-center players perceived as left-oriented in the political party prism. The article is primarily devoted to subjects' activities or publicly declared views which do not go against the natural functioning of civil society. In order to create a frame of reference that will help me to analyze the activities of democratic civil society subjects, I will, however, comment on the views or practices of selected subjects who define themselves in opposition to the essence of democratic civil society.

Furthermore, the aim of this research paper is not to analyze the philosophical and historical prerequisites of Slovak civil society nor its development, even though the Slovak context is undoubtedly part of a wider discourse on this phenomenon. Nevertheless, this is the reason why I have chosen to reflect in the following text on at least certain selected philosophical concepts.

The Slovak literature has contributed quite actively to the discourse on civil society. This interest has been largely due to an internal political development that required the active involvement of civil society in political processes (Strečanský 2017). On the other hand, Slovak contributions must be perceived in the wider context of a re-discovered interest in democracy as an object of analysis, especially in the context of the fall of the so-called Eastern Bloc[1]. Furthermore, I believe that Talcott Parsons' rather pervasive thesis that civil society is an evolutionary issue has significantly resonated in Slovakia (Parsons 1967). Naturally, such a conclusion was possible primarily, but not exclusively, in a society defined by the Cold War. In other words, this "evolution theory" may be considered as normative.

Most interpretations (Bútora 2010, Strečanský 2017, Gyarfášová 2010), however, adopt the above model, respectively its specific liberal perception, which they abstract from the historical and material assumptions of the post-totalitarian world, such as the existence of a unilateral world or the so-called Washington Consensus.[2] These interpretations, along with others, are not consistent in applying the theory of a liberal understanding of civil society's development (Rawls 2005)[3] and also fail to address the critical theory approach (Habermas 1996). Additionally, I will attempt to demonstrate the shortcomings of the interpretation of civil society in Slovakia on another level, which will be based on the most recent texts on the very

1 However, the renaissance of democratic discourse cannot be perceived merely as a sudden eruption of polemics that would respond to the fall of the „Iron Curtain". Rather, we can assume that the former so-called The „Eastern Bloc" countries were included in the ongoing discussions that originated in the crisis of democratic discourse. (Ball—Farr—Hanson 1989. In addition, the very notion of the „Eastern Bloc", which presumes the homogeneity of the territory, as well as some form of militaristic threat, must be questioned. (Ther, 2016)

2 This term comes from John Williamson, an economist who wrote about the importance of economic measures and an institutional framework that could be applied to states under crises, respectively post crises, or to countries of the former Eastern Bloc; these measures and frameworks are built primarily around economic liberalization, deregulation, and privatization.

3 More about criticism of Rawls (Norval 2016)

origin of this concept (Feinberg 2016). Above all, I attempt to search for authentic Czechoslovakian, respectively Slovak civil society concepts in the historical context while avoiding the linear dissident principle. (Skovajsa 2012) Most of the standard interpretations of civil society in Slovakia neglect the existence of historical development, which, of course, goes beyond the revolution of 1989. Based on these interpretations, civil society in Slovakia appears solely to have roots in dissent. However, such a perception ignores the structural output of the 1960s reforms and neglects the development that liberal interpretations of civil society have undergone since 1968 or even prior. Besides that, the whole model is, to a large extent, static and can be applied solely to specific milestones in the development of civil society in Slovakia, such as the defeat of HZDS in the 1998 elections or Slovakia's accession to the Euro-Atlantic structures in 2004.

Civil society in Slovakia: historical context

Among Slovak authors who interpret civil society from a philosophical point of view, I wish to highlight Emil Višňovský, who perceives civil participation as a cultural issue (Višňovský, 2010). Višňovský points out the importance of citizen participation (including the so-called third sector of civil associations and movements), which, in his opinion, fundamentally represents the civil dimension of society, while, at the same time, raises the issue of challenges posed by citizen participation as such. Višňovský perceives the term *citizen participation* as highly problematic. To him, the primary issue is with Kymlicka's perception of citizenship as a conflict between liberalism and communitarianism (Kymlicka, 2002). This initial conflict helps him lay the groundwork for challenging a unified model of civil society in Slovakia, although he seeks to anchor it in the broader context of a global discourse as opposed to the post-totalitarian experience of the economic transformation of the former "Eastern Bloc" countries only. Višňovský has gone beyond this by adding dynamic elements and additional qualities[4] to the concept of citizenship, which, in turn, makes it into a principle relevant and applicable to current circumstances. On the one hand, we have a model of citizenship as a set of norms, values, and practices designed to address public issues and problems, a model, which actively recognizes the rights and responsibilities of members of society. This model is dynamic because it recognizes civil society's role as an active actor capable of solving potential conflicts. On the other hand, it is a model that moves citizenship closer to the political realm. In this respect, citizenship is a set of policies regarding selected

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4   Višňovský plays with communitarian interpretation of „common liberty" as the subject of expansion, as formulated by Michael Walzer. However, unlike Višňovský, who emphasizes the cultural dimension of civil society, Walzer draws attention to the lost dimension of the "primacy of politics". (Walzer 1989)

public rights and responsibilities in the given community. Thus, Bellamy's interpretation provides space for specific political affiliations of civil society and, on the one hand, opens the door for left-wing, respectively right-wing actors while, on the other hand, inherently assumes the conflict within civil society. This dimension can be highly desirable, primarily for its capacity to a priori politicize potential conflicts, thus preventing them from entering the cultural segment. Višňovský points out yet another dimension of Bellamy's definition—citizenship as a condition of equality. (Višňovský 2010) Membership in the political community helps citizens dictate conditions of social cooperation based on equality.

Finally, in the repertoire of definitions Višňovský also includes a dimension of togetherness, which he sees as an emotional component of civil society. (Castles—Davidson 2000) I would like to emphasize here that this dimension of civil society has appeared within the context of migration. In this context, it conflicts with the perception of a closed political system or other types of communities. For a deeper analysis of this phenomenon, please refer to the part of my research paper below regarding transactional activism and selected left-wing movements. The question of togetherness has shaped this paper in the spirit of authors who have already built more extensively on this model (Alexander 2006). One can say that Višňovský significantly enriches the discourse on civil society found in Czech scholarly articles as he draws attention to many different contexts of Czech civil society itself through a historical lens and philosophical approach. These contexts quite often get reduced to an economic dimension, an abstraction, or a static liberal interpretation. In the Czech bibliography on theoretical concepts of civil society, we can also find a paper by Michal Vašečka, a sociologist who provides an overview of categorization and various approaches to civil society (Vašečka 2004) or publications by Martin Bútora on the political context of civil society in Slovakia (Bútora 2010).

Let us take a closer look at the classical interpretations of civil society in Slovakia mentioned above. Papers and analyses written by, for example, Boris Strečanský, Grigorij Mesežnikov, Milan Andrejkovič, Zora Bútorová or Oľga Gyarfášová are a better-formulated attempt to analyse the phenomenon on the basis of methodological frameworks. The hallmark of these texts is that they do not strive to simply describe civil society's origins in the dissent. Rather, the authors of these texts prefer an authentic and contemporary attitude expressed via particular methodological frameworks and, at the same time, which accentuate differences in participation and representation and which highlight deliberations in the society. They pay significant attention to the NGO sector as an imminent part of civil society. Most theoretical texts in Slovakia seem to anticipate this interpretation, yet do not analyse the structural aspects of the involvement of the NGO sector in civil society. Will Kymlicka paid increased attention to this phenomenon of the liberal discourse on civil society in which he recognized four key domains: state, associations, economy, and family.[5] Furthermore, he divides the state into a representative democracratic system and a public administration, while associations are further divided into the areas of public interest (i.e., NGOs and social movements) and private associations (i.e., art groups, groups associated with hobbies, and religious movements). Kymlicka is aware of the fact that disputes over interpretations arise already on the definition level. Regardless of the selected classical works and the overall consensus that the family and economy do not belong to civil society nor does the state and, above all, its bureaucratic apparatus, individual spheres often overlap and become inseparable. To Kymlicka, the most decisive elements are the two spheres of associations—private and public.

5 Other more substantive works are rather careful in defining what can be, in philosophical terms, included in the framework of civil society and how civil society can be distinguished from other social aspects. It is necessary to note that Kymlicka limits himself to liberal theories of civil society.

Regardless of the absence of certain defining aspects, the Slovak context of civil society in its liberal interpretation is worth paying attention to. Among the abovementioned texts, I would like to highlight the relatively topical paper by Boris Strečanský.[6] At the beginning of the paper, the author analyzes the selected structural characteristics of Slovakia. He points out the fact that Slovakia is a relatively young republic with a special concept of ethnicity, ruralism and provincialism, differences in perception of values, and ambivalent relations among the state, political parties, and civil society. Undoubtedly, all of the above are relevant obstacles to a functional civil society. On the other hand, we can conclude that they are rather abstract even though many scholars perceive them as elements of a static and vaguely defined concept of civil society. Strečanský's model has parallels with the so-called evolution model developed by Talcott Parsons. It is as if Slovakia built its civil society solely through the legislative framework that reflects the views of the coalition in power, which, in turn, results in the auto-legitimacy of civil society being reduced to the NGO sector and volunteer organizations.[7]

Strečanský presents yet another important attribute of Slovak civil society—visibility. Visibility in this sense relates to the perception of the media, respectively the framework in which the majority population identifies with the activities of individual organizations, foundations, civic associations, activist movements, etc. Zuzana Bútorová goes a bit further by probing deeper and describing a broader spectrum of attributes related to the perception of non-governmental organizations in Slovakia. (Bútorová 2017) Despite this shift, there are many more public perceptions of civil society's visibility. Above all, it is *a priori* simplistic to say that civil society equates to NGO activities.

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6 Slovakia 2018 Country Review. Equally topical is a paper by Pavel Demeš: Nové výzvy pred tretím sektorom. (New challenges of the third sector). (Demeš—Bútorová—Kollár 2014)

7 The paper, possibly due to its limited scope, does not reflect the basic methodological approaches to the dynamics, special features, and challenges to the concept of civil society. At this point, I refer in particular to the approach that distinguishes whether civil society is perceived as an idea, respectively an ideal or if we need to adopt a more realistic approach for its analysis. (Norval 2016)

The legislative and institutional framework limiting the boundaries of civil society is perceived relatively restrictively in the Slovak texts. First of all, the new legislation after 1989 introduced fundamental democratization changes to the law on associations, and there were new laws adopted to facilitate the establishment of free trade unions and civil associations. Undoubtedly, the most decisive point was the elections in 1998 when non-governmental organizations, which had by large helped shape Slovakia's democratic character, joined the mobilization campaign (Strečanský 2018). On the other hand, one can say that Slovak society started to become polarized, the consequences and narrative of which we've been suffering from ever since. In the Slovak society to date, we've been experiencing a certain form of a Manichean struggle which was introduced by the public discourse present prior to 1998.[8] There was yet another important milestone in the adoption of the so-called Information Act, respectively the Act on Free Access to Information in 2000. For the NGO sector, the newly enacted possibility to seek a small tax contribution (1—3 %) was yet another breakthrough; of course, NGOs in Slovakia are tax-free. Upon entry to the EU in 2004, NGOs in Slovakia gained a significant source of income, although became subjected, as pointed out by Strečanský, to an increased level of red tape which they were not accustomed to.[9]

In addition to the issue of how these approaches interpret civil society, we may also criticize them for a lack of interest in so-called transactional actors and the differentiation of the ideological and political roots of individual civil society actors, movements, or organizations. I will subject the role of transactional activism to a more detailed analysis later. In general, however, most of the quoted analyses of civil society provide a fairly static and ideologically incomplete constructed view of the development of civil society in Slovakia. However, Strečanský's texts also reflect

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8 This discourse often takes the form of intellectual shortenings. The absence of civil society outside the non-profit sector may also be a side effect of such polarized discourse.

9 For more on this issue, see: Blaščák—Török 2016

the recent development and challenges posed to civil society in Slovakia, such as the referendum by the *Alliance for Family* (Aliancia za rodinu) or the migration crisis; I will examine both below. To better understand the development of Slovak society as well the current threats it is facing, it will be necessary to examine certain historical facts and developments which have shaped both its character and current challenges or conflicts.

Joseph Grim Feinberg's study on the reform process in the 1960s and the nature of civil society presented a truly significant analysis of the historical development of civil society without merely reducing it to its "dissent" origin (Feinberg—Kmeť 2016). It is necessary to point out that in the 1960s, society, even though it was to some extent undergoing a process of reform, was according to all formal institutional or instrumental factors, totalitarian[10], and therefore talking about a public sector in which individual actors enjoy protection of their individual or collective rights is hardly relevant. It makes sense to refer to Feinberg's study in order to learn more about certain schools of thought, which at the time represented authentic efforts for discussing the intellectual discourse related to the possible forms of civil society. Feinberg analyzes three authors and their interpretation of what he calls a socialist civil society. This leftist interpretation is extremely useful for my analysis. The first author analyzed by Feinberg is Miroslav Kusý (Bátora, Kusý 2013).

Kusý's view of society was closely linked to institutions that both alienated him as well as connected him with politics. He perceived bourgeois civil society as undemocratic and thus advocated for closer and more concrete social relations, which, at the same time, would serve as a counterweight to the institutionalized relationship that

binds an individual to the authorities (Feinberg 2016). Feinberg's perception of Zdeněk Mlynář is similar in ways, yet different in other respects. Mlynář sees individuals as more autonomous of the state than Kusý, yet he also points to the state's alienation of individuals. Both authors realized that the liberalization potential of civil institutions could also act as an alienating factor. Similarly to Feinberg, Mlynář espouses a methodological shift towards a more realistic analysis of institutional activities. It is a completely different view when compared to most of the post-November texts on civil society. It can be argued that it largely correlated with the works of Western theorists, at least its Marxist representatives (Marcuse 1991). Obviously, Mlynář did not condemn civil society, rather the contrary: He presented it as the only possible field where conflicts could be resolved. The last of the three authors is Michal Lakatoš. Lakatoš's thoughts are closely related to the contemporary perception of civil activism, which he perceives both as a necessary and ideal practice (Feinberg 2016). Lakatoš, regardless of civil society's historical roots, highlights explicitly the necessity and benefits of civil society as well as its imminent values (Lakatoš 1966). Whereas Feinberg's contribution may remain an exclusively historical excursion into the intellectual discourse embodied in the framework of a totalitarian society undergoing certain reforms[11], it presents a contemporary and highly authentic view of the many interpretational limits of Slovak civil society.[12] After all, numerous civil activities have proven this criticism right.

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[10] Whereas Feinberg points out that the absence of labeling the given society does not necessarily equate to the absence of social phenomena which are associated with the given label, he is also willing to assign to that state of society only those elements that were objectively enabled by political restrictions. The tact he uses to address this hypothesis with allows him to present the idea of the possible existence of civil society in the years before the Warsaw Pact invasion in Czechoslovakia only as a methodological hypothesis. For my research paper, however, this question is rather instrumental.

[11] The concept of reformation is purely formal in this case. I realize that at this point there is no room to capture the nature, origin and diversity of the processes that we collectively, often without focus on content, call reformation.

[12] It is worth mentioning yet another interpretation of civil society, which is aware of its roots already in the late socialism, although of course in its contextual understanding. Historian Michal Kopeček (Architects of Long Change. Expert Roots of Post-Socialism in Czechoslovakia, 2019) draws attention to the expert sociological discourse of "participatory forecasting", which Kopeček interprets as a particular view of a plurality of interests and social attitudes incompatible with the totalitarian character of society. However, what some sociologists, such as Fedor Gál, understood by this term, can be understood as an idea of civil society. Indeed interesting observation mentioned in this context provides Petr Pithart, who sees the idea of civil society in the so-called the „gray zone" between the dissent and the regime during the „normalization" period. (Pithart 2016)

Last but not least, I wish to mention, albeit briefly, one more structural factor that has largely shaped and continues to shape the public discourse in Slovakia: the question of institutionalized religion and the church in Slovakia. In this respect, I refer to texts by Miroslav Tížik, a sociologist, who has written extensively on this issue (Tížik 2011). This issue is not the subject of this research paper, although it is worth noting that this "post-secular residue" also interferes with the civil and legal framework of civil society, mainly in the form of an international treaty with the Vatican.

Civil society and the left in Slovakia

In the previous chapter, I analyzed selected historical conditions and prerequisites of civil society in Slovakia. It is without question necessary to examine Slovak civil society from the perspective of the political left, especially in respect to the current situation. In western societies, left-wing topics and subjects in the public sphere are to a large extent the domain of civil society. The situation in Slovakia, however, is different. Several factors contribute to this fact, the most important being the definition of the left in the Slovak context.

I will analyze the activities and perception of the left in Slovakia as two complementary and, where applicable, dynamic phenomena. In other words, I will pay increased attention to the dynamics and developments of movements and groups on the left and their public representations. This research paper naturally raises one question: Is the post-totalitarian narrative stronger than attempts to define the left as perceived through the public lens? In this case, I will again refer to the historical perception of the left. However, before I start analyzing questions of typology of the Slovak left, it is necessary to place their existence and development into a historical context. The definition of the left is, to a large extent, dictated by the post-totalitarian discourse which illustrates a correlation between the values worshipped by the left and the existence of the communist regime, as well as its association with totalitarian tyranny and the absence of freedoms. This discourse helped to legitimize liberalization processes, deregulation, and privatization not only in the economic sphere but also in the public, respectively media discourse.[13] As I've already indicated, this discourse also embodied a phenomenon which certain authors present as the "NGO-ization" of civil society (Gagyi, Ivancheva, [s. a.]). In a field where economic liberalization was equated with

13 Emphasis on these phenomena, respectively at least on a discursive level, policy instruments have often been shrouded in the narratives of inclusion in European or Euro-

the democratization of the public sphere and where left-wing values were a priori demonized, the non-profit sector presented its own activities as evidence of the development of civil society. This phenomenon is typical, more or less, for the entire former Eastern Bloc. Moreover, in Slovakia, the non-profit sector had to fight "Mečiarism"[14], which partly contributed to the fact that left-wing values took hold relatively slowly, especially when taking into consideration the binarity of the authoritative-democratic discourse. Furthermore, the existence of a nationalist narrative promoting the legitimization of political representation seeking to rule the newly established state was yet another autonomous aspect which limited the position of civil society in Slovakia and, hence, its political or ideological content. For the purposes of the present research paper, it is not really necessary to determine who was to blame for the absence of a narrative or discourse that would have allowed for the creation and differentiation of civil society. We can only conclude that the radical division of society did not benefit the left-wing alternatives to an economized society.

Moreover, the above mentioned NGO-ization resulted in people losing interest in civil activism; this could have been, however, partially due to the traditional reluctance to engage in mobilizations of this kind (Jacobsson, Saxonberg 2013). The naivety of non-autonomous civil society built on the principal of financial dependence from the state could have predisposed the NGO sector to formulate and adapt its ideology to the political environment in which individual organizations had to fight for their existence and survival. Juraj Marušiak, a historian and politician, highlighted yet another problem related to the fact that civil society has been dominated by a non-profit sector financed by private donors (Marušiak 2014). Structurally,

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Atlantic structures. Either way, in a broader sense, we can perceive them as period, perhaps even paradigmatic components of the so-called liberal consensus as developed by Ivan Krastev: The Strange Death of the Liberal Consensus 2007.

14 „Mečiarism" is quite a common term designating the era of the rule of Vladimír Mečiar in 1992—1998 (with a short interruption in 1994) which happened to occur both curbing the rule of law as well minority rights.

investors perceived Slovakia, respectively the whole region of Central and Eastern Europe, as marginal or even semi-marginal (Gagyi, Ivancheva [s. a.]). In the later years, especially in the years of anti-politics, this aspect of "anti-establishment" movements became important to the public discourse.

Most analyses of civil society fail to give credit to the dynamic impact of trade unions in Slovakia. To understand civil society in Slovakia, we should not limit ourselves to descriptions of trade union legislation and a mere statement that they exist. Juraj Marušiak offers a deeper insight into this issue, while taking note of their decisive role as actors in the context of social confrontation during the second government of Mikuláš Dzurinda.[15] The stigmatized role of trade unions in the Slovak civil and political context has left visible consequences. Subsequently, they were also impacted heavily by the economic crisis. I will analyse their revitalization below in relation to the later introduced milestones of the left-wing perspective of civil society in Slovakia.

In terms of the political left in relation to the political system, the year 1998 was also important in terms of the participation of the Democratic Left Party (*SDL— Strana demokratickej ľavice*) in the government, which largely discredited the party due to cooperation with right-wing conservative and liberal subjects. Consequently, in the context of the so-called "third path" represented by SMER, a new political entity led by Robert Fico, left-wing politics were represented almost exclusively by the Communist Party of Slovakia (KSS) and several marginal social-democratic parties, respectively the declining SDL. After joining the National Council of the Slovak Republic, SMER took advantage the vacuum on the left side of the political spectrum and launched a project aimed at uniting the democratic left-wing political parties.

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15 Marušiak's observations should be placed in the wider context of the so-called. neoliberalism of the second wave. In this context, the German historian Philipp Ther highlights the role of Slovakia, which "brought" neoliberalism directly into the European Union from its economic reforms after 2004.

SMER added social democracy to its title (SMER—social democracy) and started integrating itself into European socialist structures. Regarding cooperation with trade unions, Fico took advantage of the negative sentiments left over from the socialists' relationship with the right-wing government coalition in 2002—2006, when, among others, the government suspended the tripartite law for a short period of time.[16] The most decisive economic factor at that time was the framework of adopted neo-liberal reforms in health care or the pension system and the introduction of a pro-entrepreneurial flat tax or enactment of the so-called flexible labour code, which had a huge impact and helped mobilize civil society.

Before discussing some of the most recent milestones of civil society in terms of the left-wing perspective, most notably after Slovakia's accession to the EU and NATO, it is necessary to introduce a basic typology of the left-wing subjects and movements which I have researched. The most visible division of the left, from which the current left-wing entities to a large extent derive their legitimacy, is the division of the so-called old left and new left. The new left, concentrated around the *New Left Review*, sought its place under the sun and in society by defining itself in opposition older, strictly classified old left practices. It also defined itself in opposition to the practices of the communist regimes of the former Eastern Bloc, although also in opposition to the power structures of the capitalist West. Ondřej Císař and Pavel Barša worked out a more detailed definition of the organization and programs of the old and the new left as well as the political strategies in the Slovak context (Barša, Císař 2004). Similarly, Kate Hudson analyzed visions of the European left applicable to the 21st century, and for this purpose, she suggested the need for a dynamic reflection of changes brought about by the new left (Hudson 2012). One of the most important texts which analyzes political strategies and concepts

of socialist parties and movements are works by Chantal Mouffe and Ernest Laclau (Mouffe, Laclau 2014). The original edition was published in 1985 and responded to the confusion of the left which was trapped between ideological emptiness, on the one hand, and a lack of political power ambition, on the other. As the subtitle "Towards and Radical Democratic Politics" suggests, the work is primarily about formulating an anti-hierarchical and radically democratic political vision of the left, which is largely based on the theories of Rosa Luxemburg and Antonio Gramsci. In addition to some other, largely anarchist or feminist theories, many new and active movements in Slovakia derive from this theoretical basis.

Within the typology of left-wing activism and contextualization of individual actors and movements related to both the Central European region and current trends and challenges, some Czech authors, who construct their arguments based on a historical and political context similar to that of Slovakia's, offer significant guidelines. I wish to highlight the already mentioned authors, Ondřej Císař and Pavel Barša, as well as Jiří Navrátil, Lukáš Linka, Kateřina Vráblíková, and Marek Skovajsa. These authors describe the concept of civil society in a more complex framework than the above mentioned Slovak authors who build on a restrictive liberal and legislation-based platform, resulting in limiting the NGO sector to volunteer organizations and movements.

Methodologies that guide the perception of left-wing parties and movements will have to include, in addition to the above mentioned division of the new and old left, also the already mentioned transactional activism and classification of the movement as so-called *grassroots* (Pedahzur 2003). It is not uncommon to read about grassroot movements in correlation with the word radical (Císař, Navrátil, Vráblíková 2011) or, in other works prevalent are characteristics that point out similarities with anti-

16 The government resumed tripartite negotiations in reaction to pressure from the International Labour Organization.

global, respectively alternative global movements, which draw inspiration from the global movement called "Porto Alegre" (Císař 2005). This type of organization is characterized by their resistance to the hierarchical perception of an organization, local activism relating to local issues (although often with the aim of succeeding in a more global dimension), and an inclination to a radical form of democracy; their activities are financed mainly by voluntary non-hierarchical resources. Slovak left-wing entities and movements often belong to these types of movements. However, resistance to parliamentarianism is minimal. Such movements, if any, are marginal and often *a priori* anti-systemic rather than leftist.[17]

Activities of left-wing subjects and movements in light of current developments

The current situation must be interpreted in light of past events which have helped to form organizations' characteristics, activities, or even to help create new entities in Slovakia. Although my research paper concentrates solely on the events of the past ten years, I cannot completely ignore the wider historical context. To describe the current situation, I decided not to use a chronological order, but instead to concentrate on the complexity or possible discursive meaning of events for the further development of civil society, respectively its left-wing actors. In particular, I wish to highlight the following milestones:

Gorila protests (2012)
Marián Kotleba's campaign to become governor of the Banská Bystrica region (2013)
Alliance for the Family referendum (2015)

Migration crisis (2015—2016)
ĽSNS in the Parliament (2016)
Murder of Ján Kuciak and Martina Kušnírová (2018)

There are also events and situations that happened prior to 2012 which are also worth mentioning; namely, in 2009, the Lisbon Treaty was ratified. The Slovak left-wing was involved in the discourse concentrated mainly around two left-wing portals, namely Nové slovo (*New Word*) and *Jetotak.sk* (It is so). Both portals, with Nové slovo published in print as a regular periodical for some time, served as platforms for the left-wing discourse in Slovakia.[18] With the new right-wing government of Iveta Radičová in 2010, *jetotak.sk* served as a platform that advocated for various protests, such as the strike of medical practitioners in 2011.
In 2012, Slovakia's public took part in protest events connected with the "Gorila" case. Although the protests did not explicitly target left-wing ideas and were attended by people across the political spectrum, they were massive and the protest numbers of people attending were the highest since the Velvet Revolution in 1989. The demonstrations asked for the resignation of the government and proper investigation of cases referred to as the "Gorila file".[19] SMER-SD won the elections which came after the protests and formed a single party government. The new setting opened the door to criticism of the proclaimed left government from

17 In Slovakia, this particularly concerns some anarchist groups which block neo-Nazi, respectively fascist events. In the Czech Republic, such movements are rather numerous and their activities are more visible. Nevertheless, it is not possible to talk about a conflict of perception between grassroot movements and anti-establishment entities; such conflict would arise only if both are left of center on the ideological spectrum.

18 Oftentimes, the texts and statements of authors who were actively commenting on public events from the left-wing perspective often overlapped; however, in general, I dare conclude that Nové slovo emerged as a platform for more conservative left-wing thinking, close to the values of the old left. On the contrary, jetotak.sk appealed mainly to liberal-minded citizens and its agenda was more intellectual, but above all, more liberal. Nové slovo played a more prominent role in criticizing US imperial politics, for example, during the war in Yugoslavia in 1999 or upon Slovakia's accession to NATO. These factors, along with social conservatism, played an important role in the subsequent turn of this portal's discourse towards nationalism.

19 Some cases within the Gorila scandal have never been successfully investigated. Gorila was mainly about wiretapped conversations which took place in an apartment where government officials (some MPs and entrepreneurs from the PENTA financial group) conspired to illegally benefit from public tenders. To this day, the authenticity of some recordings has yet to be explicitly confirmed and the whole case has remained a highly sensitive issue with new facts constantly emerging. https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/655095/tim-gorila-uz-ma-nahravky-z-kocnerovho-trezoru/.

other left-oriented parties and movements. This period gave rise to numerous left-wing initiatives and I dare say that it was a decisive period, not only for anchoring individual subjects in ideological frameworks but also for the diversification and clear positioning of the left-wing actors on the left political spectrum in Slovakia.

In 2013, Ľudová strana Naše Slovensko *(hereafter ŽLSNS) (People's Party Our Slovakia)*[20], a right-wing radical party established itself in the administrative structures of the self-governing region of Banská Bystrica. Marián Kotleba, the infamous representative of the extreme right, became the governor of the region. Of course, the left-wing groups had demonstrated against fascism even prior to Kotleba's election as governor. Protests were led mainly by Bratislava bez náckov (Bratislava without Nazis), which relied on the traditional modus operandi of blocking marching neo-Nazis which praised Slovakia's involvement during WWII. Other cities, however, started to mobilize after 2013 and above all, Banská Bystrica itself. The activists' response to the increasing long-term hatred and violence was a platform called NIE v našom meste (NOT in our city).[21] When compared to Bratislava bez náckov, NIE v našom meste was a community-based and liberal cultural platform without any specific program or political affiliation. Bratislava bez náckov, on the other hand, defined itself as an anti-fascist organization drawing inspiration from annual blockades organized worldwide with the aim of raising awareness of fascist violence and hatred, unveiling its political objectives, and preventing fascists from entering the democratic public space.[22] ŽLSNS started limiting its

public activities and cleared the space for other organizations while concentrating on their struggle to become institutionalized. As we've seen above, they finally succeeded and entered regional politics.

The rise of ŽLSNS was, at least to a certain extent, formed by circumstances which were not necessarily political. One can conclude that after 2012, anti-establishment movements started to flourish. Anti-establishment feelings are a phenomenon described by several authors, even in the Central European context. This issue may be approached from many angles; there is, however, one element which differentiates Central Europe and, in particular, Slovakia from the West. It is the absence of massive alter-globalization movements.[23] The anti-establishment space is then open to movements and groups on the right, which are often non-democratic or even identarian, nationalistic, fascisizing, or openly fascist.[24] Lukáš Linek explains the phenomenon of the deteriorating electorate in the Czech Republic in 1990—2010. (Linek 2013) Similarly, in his paper on social inequality and election turnout, he analyzes the conditions of both high and low election turnout, especially in relation to access of education, social status, and wealth (Linek 2013). This phenomenon may also result in a potential space for anti-political parties or the radical right. However, we should not disregard the global context, which envisages identity as a phenomenon at the forefront of the political struggle. Slavoj Zizek, a Slovene neo-Marxist philosopher, has repeatedly pointed out the absence of a political struggle, which has thus resulted in the struggle being played out at the cultural level instead. Marek Hrubec, a philosopher, perceives this trend mainly in the context of advancing globalization and the growing influence

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20 The extreme right designation is most problematic in several respects. Perhaps it would be more characteristic to opt for the neo-fascist label. More to the issue, see: https://dennikn.sk/398951/marian-kotleba-skutocne-fasista/; DRÁBIK, J.: Fašizmus. 2019; https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/737020/historik-fasizmu-tiso-nebol-fasista-kotleba-jednoznacne-je-rozhovor/?fbclid=IwAR1Wrc0UxAmJsthcRPMFvTA4AKqSR8_mXwnywFRA_N1q_P4dreiMuEnAQB4.

21 http://niot.sk/

22 Neo-Nazis in Slovakia march the streets regularly to commemorate the day of Slovak statehood (1939). For more on the blockades of their marches, see: https://protifasizmu.org/2013/02/.

23 However, it is necessary to point out the declining influence of similar movements in Western Europe and America, where anti-systemic rhetoric has almost exclusively become the domain of the conservative populism.

24 Civic and political engagement in terms of this issue was built on media platforms, lectures, meetings, and demonstrations, which mobilized around selected common beliefs that can be very simply described as a fight against modernity. There were many activities to this end, but I feel it is necessary to mention in particular the rise of the journal, Zem a věk, or Hlavné správy, a conspiracy news portal.

of transnational corporations, international financial institutions, and their economic and political partners in individual nation states. He says that these factors are responsible for the reactions of the so-called "disregarded." (Hrubec 2012) Even though Hrubec perceives this segment of the population primarily as potential actors of resistance against environmental, economic, or ethnic unjust inequality, its representatives also have the potential to become members of chauvinistic, racist, nationalistic, or patriarchal movements. Naturally, all of the above apply to Slovakia's geographical, historical, and/or political context.

In Slovakia, as a result of the single party social democratic government that was in power 2012—2016, the protests have often moved to the cultural level. One of the expressions of this shift was a referendum organized by an organization closely related to the church—Aliancia za rodinu (*Alliance for the Family*).[25] In this particular case, the Slovak context was a mere reaction to similar projects in Western Europe.[26] The civil sector almost unanimously condemned the referendum as a violation of human rights. Before the referendum itself, public opinion research agencies predicted that it would fail[27], but its political capital in the form of a frame of reference for conservative political actors remained as did its capacity to act as a mobilizing force, a fact that became fundamentally apparent in the second round of the presidential elections in 2019, when family and liberal values became key issues. On the other hand, the actual political fallout from the Aliancia za rodinu campaign was very limited. Left-wing actors in Slovakia, however, failed to embrace the issue and approach it systematically; the same was true for political organizations in favor of the LGBTI+ community. With the opposite approach in mind, social democrats (SMER), in collaboration with the opposition Christian Democratic Movement (KDH), managed

to enact an amendment to the Slovak constitution which defined marriage as a union of one man and one woman.

For two reasons, the migration crisis in 2015—2016 was a major challenge for the Slovak left-wing groups and movement. On 20 June, World Refugee Day, 5,000 people marched against the so-called "islamization" of Europe. On this occasion, activists hung a big banner with "Refugees welcome!" from the facade of the Comenius University building as a sign of solidarity with refugees and a warning of the growing intolerance.[28] Moreover, about 150 activists marched in a counter-demonstration. The anti-islamization march ended up in street violence committed by neo-Nazis, fascists, and other similar movements and groups and, as a result of that, the following march, which was announced for 12 September, was attended by "only" 500 people.

These protests have become a prerequisite and instrumental to the left-wing movement. There is a project which I wish to highlight—"Uprising Continues," also known as "Slovak National Continuation"—which since 2015 has been uniting several grassroot organizations. The project promotes ideas, such as solidarity, freedom, community projects, and the inclusion of minorities into Slovak society. The activities of the associated movements have been quite extensive and, every year, peak on the occasion of Slovak National Uprising Day, a public holiday. The organizers refer back to the Slovak National Uprising, which is, as shown by public opinion surveys, widely perceived as a positive historical event.[29] Thanks to this historical reference, the values promoted by these activists have become prevalent in the media. Furthermore, apart from their own activities, these activists have been offering a space to many other organizations and alternative artists, as well as a space for public poetry readings and community kitchens.

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25 The referendum in 2015 was invalid due to the low turnout (21%). In Slovakia, a referendum requires 50% turnout to be valid.

26 In France, it is, for example, La Manif pour toupage.

27 https://domov.sme.sk/c/7616538/pojdu-veriaci-na-referendum-pozrite-si-ekskluzivny-prieskum-citanie.html.

28 https://dennikn.sk/155837/transparent-na-univerzite-komenskeho-vital-utecencov/. ; https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/278174/v-bratislave-budu-protestovat-proti-islamizacii-policia-je-na-chuliganov-pripravena/.

29 http://www.ivo.sk/8173/sk/aktuality/na-slovensku-jasne-dominuje-hrdost-na-snp-a-jeho-pozitivne-hodnotenie.

On the other hand, protests by the political right have demonstrated the enormous potential of anti-establishment, xenophobic, and right-oriented populist forces. One of the outcomes of this growing potential was the success of Marián Kotleba's party in the parliamentary elections in March 2016; since then, ĽSNS has been represented in the parliament. Juraj Marušiak explains the success of ĽSNS and other similar forces in Slovakia.[30] Kotleba's popularity, however, has been increasing ever since 2012.[31] One can conclude that both Gorila protesters' failure to capitalize on the sentiment in society and form a reasonable left alternative and the single party government are to blame for the extreme right's success with winning over disappointed voters in 2016.

Two days after the elections (on 10 March 2016), all left-wing movements and civil activists organized a protest against the presence of ĽSNS in the Parliament.[32] To a certain extent, this moment became instrumental to the diversification of movements on the left in Slovakia. On the one hand, left-wing movements managed to mobilize quite a lot of people and succeeded in attracting media attention to the presence of fascists in the Parliament. Yet, on the other hand, the situation made more space available to new subjects and activities which actively support the working class. Furthermore, the *Human Rights Institute* started filing motions to the Office of Prosecution to abolish ĽSNS. Based on this initiative, there was a motion filed to dissolve the party.[33]

The very last event which I wish to include in my dynamic analysis of the left in Slovakia is the murder of Ján Kuciak and Martina

Kušnírová.[34] This unfortunate event is especially important to my research paper in light of the mass protests which immediately followed the murder and which were repeatedly organized.[35] The protesters managed to win the public's attention and the protests resulted in politicians conceding to the protesters' demands. The demands formulated by the protesters, however, were largely targeted at specific politicians who were asked to resign. One way or another, protesters won over the media and became a dominant activist force. Their slogan of "Slovakia is good" also provided them with legitimacy. For the left, such a discourse is rather challenging, especially when it comes to defining the grounds of the political conflict. Being good or decent is extremely vague and ideologically empty. Additionally, in left-wing circles, proper conduct may sound too close to fascist slogans since fascisizing movements often organize marches around inviting all "decent and well-behaved people." Protests for a good and decent Slovakia literally paralyzed the media sphere and there was no space left for left-wing activism. Paradoxically, however, the media was not willing to compromise on left-wing issues. Movements, advocacy groups, or grassroot movements can continue promoting their values and reaching out to people. However, the protests following the murder of Ján Kuciak and his fiancée, provided the right-wing discourse, most likely for an extended period of time, with a depoliticized form of political struggle which the left will yet have to respond to.

30 https://nazory.pravda.sk/analyzy-a-postrehy/clanok/505870-nastup-krajnej-pravice/.

31 https://www.vysledkyvolieb.sk/parlamentne-volby/strana/75-kotleba-ludova-strana-nase-slovensko.

32 https://dennikn.sk/minuta/398264/. The protest was attended by more than two thousand people.

33 https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/491080/generalny-prokurator-podal-navrh-na-rozpustenie-lsns/. The case is currently being heard by the Slovak Supreme Court.

34 I shall not analyze the case further here, but I shall rather concentrate on its implications for left-of-center subjects and their representatives in the public.

35 https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/574301/protesty-za-slusne-slovensko-budu-pokracovat/.

Other notable left-wing activities

In addition to the chronological description of the development and formation of left-wing groups and movements and their respective correlation, there are many entities in the civil sector which have been active long-term or on a regular basis. One can say that their activities have not been directly influenced by either developments in Slovakia or abroad, although there is no point in arguing that they are absolutely independent of the current political context. At this point, I'd like to comment on various grassroot movements or organizations as well as media representations that have increased awareness of leftist issues in the public discourse. Of course, I will not omit selected ad hoc events that have helped to define the left-wing environment in Slovakia, thus shaping civil society according to a leftist perspective.

If we perceive civil society as a particular kind of social relationship associated with universal solidarity, it is important to realize that such an unconventional setting (i.e., within a historical context) may win public support solely if articulated symbolically and communicated with rather vague language easily comprehensible for different groups of the population.[36] Left-wing movements and groups, especially those articulating their demands precisely and communicating their orientation clearly, may have a problem wining support of the public at large. That's why many of them try to organize joint events and join forces to promote common goals. In this respect, many of them act as so-called transactional actors.[37] Their goal is to influence public opinion while promoting their own interests and agenda, which they believe is the same as the public agenda. To promote progressive social changes, they do not

hesitate to make use of all the tools offered by civil society.[38] It is, however, necessary to differentiate their activities from selected Christian or liberal projects which have different ideological backgrounds. Michael Walzer, an important theoretician of civil society, points out that community activities may be very different in nature and often use different methods and follow alternative ends (Walzer 2002).

Community presence and community activities are popular among left-wing groups and movements that draw inspiration from alter-globalism or anarchist movements while emphasizing their disapproval of our hierarchical society as well as, at least in some cases, some Marxist movements. In particular, left-wing groups and movements focus their attention on citizen participation in the democratic decision-making process regarding both political and economic issues. This segment is represented in particular by *Utopia*, an association regularly organizing seminars, lectures, and various community events.[39] Apart from that, *Utopia* has taken part in anti-globalization protests and events to demonstrate disapproval of, for example, CETA, the recently debated free trade agreement with Canada.[40] On the local level, they primarily support participatory budgets and cooperative activities.[41] Recently, *Utopia* has paid increased attention to Romani women and their civic association.

Priama akcia (*Direct Action*) is yet another organization, this time openly promoting and siding with anarcho-syndicalism, respectively anarcho-communism. Priama akcia expresses solidarity with workers not only in Slovakia, but also globally. In its activities, Priama akcia is rather restrictively defined and maintains its anarchist character. Its members concentrate primarily on targeted

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36 Alexander writes that this general perception of values has enabled civil society to be active not only within a cultural framework but also an institutional one. (Alexander 2006)

37 Tomáš Profant emphasizes their non-violent character. According to him, these new advocacy groups organize non-violent demonstrations, petitions, happenings, and performances. Even though their potential quality may be similar to those pursued by the trade unions, which are actually capable of mobilizing more people, transactional activists' events are more intense and frequent.

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38 Alexander highlights that to be successful, they must also have power ambitions.

39 https://www.utopia.sk/liferay/web/guest/home.

40 https://utopia.sk/liferay/article/-/journal_content/56_INSTANCE_b8AZ/10136/4158126.

41 https://utopia.sk/liferay/web/participativny-strom.

and concrete support of workers, especially in cases when workers do not receive their pay or are otherwise treated unfairly by their employer.[42]

Pracujúca chudoba (*Working Poverty*) is engaged in a similar agenda, although on a much more institutionalized level. Members of Pracujúca chudoba enter into dialogue with labor market players, such as public authorities, trade unions, corporations but also individual employees. Through extensive media coverage and systematic awareness raising of poverty in Slovakia, they seek to influence legislative processes and raise awareness of the role of trade unions.[43] In relation to the economic crisis, we've seen the rise of precarity[44], i.e., people who, although employed and collecting wages, live on the verge of poverty. Pracujúca chudoba managed, thanks to its engagements in the legislative process and awareness raising campaigns, to enforce an amendment to the labor code, in particular to the following two provisions: 1) it is no longer prohibited for employees to publicly speak about their wage; and 2) corporate entities are now required to publish in their job listings the real salary which is to be paid to the selected candidate.[45]

Inštitút ľudských práv (*Human Rights Institute*) is located somewhere on the spectrum between the left and liberalism. It focuses mainly on institutional restrictions of interventions against liberal democratic establishment and civil society, particularly those proposed by extreme right, religious organizations and other associated organizations. Although their values are not explicitly defined to the left from the center, they often engage in the democratic left-wing discourse in which they promote

primarily so-called post-material, respectively culturally left oriented themes. Inštitút ľudských práv have long been organizing an anti-homophobic yearly campaign and have also published a flyer for secondary schools to disseminate information on homophobia and other related issues.[46] Inštitút ľudských práv also joined the international campaign to free Chelsea Maning. Apart from that, it managed to mobilize the public and enforce exclusion of representatives from the Roman Catholic church from its permanent position in the inter-agency process of legislation drafting.[47] Through its activities, Inštitút ľudských práv has always worked towards limiting the public presence of ĽSNS. Moreover, Inštitút ľudských práv has organized numerous events about the position of the modern left in the Central Europe of the 21st century.

Since all left-wing movements and groups in Slovakia have always suffered from an insufficient presence in the media, they have thus been actively trying to promote their activities and ideas through left-wing media and portals. In addition to the already mentioned Nové slovo (*New Word*) and *jetotak.sk* portals, activists have launched new projects, either as complementary activities to the current platforms or as attempts to build on some of those already established. Nowadays, Nové slovo and *jetotak.sk* are no longer relevant left-wing platforms, as *Nové slovo* had compromised themselves with a nationalistic and "pro-Putin" agenda, especially in connection with the annexation of Crimea; *jetotak.sk*, on the other hand, gradually disappeared from the media space. There is one traditional and established daily, Pravda (*Truth*), which has been regularly providing media space to left-wing perspectives. The media space did not remain empty for too long, and currently it is dominated by three projects, the labelling of which as leftist

42 https://www.priamaakcia.sk/.

43 http://www.pracujucachudoba.sk/.

44 In Slovakia, the most relevant actor capable of describing the phenomenon of systemic poverty is Slovenská sieť proti chudobe (Slovak Network against Poverty); for more info, see: https://sapn.info/.

45 https://spravy.pravda.sk/domace/clanok/492204-video-kontroverzna-novinka-zamestnanec-bude-moct-zverejnit-plat/.

46 http://www.ludskeprava.sk/homofob/#sthash.HuDihdwt.dpbs.

47 http://www.ludskeprava.sk/uspech-kbs-neziskala-postavenie-statneho-organu/#sthash.3MMOgTzU.dpbs ; https://domov.sme.sk/c/22084736/konferencia-biskupov-nebude-povinne-pripomienkovat-navrhy-zakonov.html.

is rather problematic. *POLE* (*FIELD*)[48], for instance, is a social, cultural, and political portal, respectively a blog, which strives, at least to a certain extent, to be like *jetotak.sk*. *POLE* would like to assume the same position as *A2larm* or *Deník referendum* in the Czech Republic, which, apart from cultural and social topics, also comments on current political developments. *POLE* has been actively disseminating information on cultural events amongst young people, raising global issues, and covering everyday political struggles from the left-wing point of view. The portal is rather inclusive and thus provides space for authors and journalists who are young and just starting their careers. Moreover, *POLE* organizes various events, conferences, and other activities. Last but not least, it has been building a network to improve communication among individual left-wing movements, organizations, and groups.

Karmína, another portal, is yet another space open to the left. Unlike POLE, *Karmína* is an anonymous space. Moreover, it has been drawing attention to more theoretical concepts that could be defined as explicitly leftist. Apart from dry theory, *Karmína* has been monitoring strikes and events that counter exploitation and the deprivation of people not only in Slovakia but also worldwide. In Slovakia, *Karmína* has covered in detail various events of this kind and even published a publication on the strike which took place at the Wolkswagen factory in Bratislava.[49] Similarly to *POLE*, *Karmína* offers media space for left-wing thoughts and has helped raise general awareness of left-wing ideas and political and civil practice. The reach of the *Karmína* portal, however, has been rather limited and the number of their contributors is low. When compared to the so-called alternative media which often disseminates at least to some extent *fake news*, their reach is very marginal. Most of their readers and contributors belong to a narrow niche of the left, which we can label the intellectual left.

Kapitál, is yet another project which is definitely worth mentioning. It is a magazine available from selected bookstores, such as the one run by *A2*, a Czech bi-weekly.[50] *Kapitál*, however, does not define itself as a left-wing oriented project and rather concerns contributions on cultural and social engagement from highly intellectual contributors.

Last but not least, I would like to mention "*Labour History*—Dejiny pracujúcich a práce,"[51] an extremely popular satirical Facebook platform caricaturing fascism, Nazis, and nationalism or patriarchal ideas. The platform clearly refers to (primarily visually) ĽSNS— "Naše Slovensko / Our Slovakia".[52]

Some feminist activities present in Slovakia can also be recognized as left-oriented. These are primarily feminist associations which have recently emerged, which, on the one hand, raise awareness of or complement the left-wing discourse, and, on the other hand, act as transnational actors by raising issues debated in neighbouring countries and presenting them to activists in Slovakia. It concerns, in particular, *Aspekt*[53] and *Feminist FYI*[54].

48 http://poleblog.sk/.
49 Karmína concentrates primarily on the historical importance of this strike which was not an expression of disapproval of the employers, but a positive event asking for improved working conditions and higher wages during times of economic growth.

50 https://kapital-noviny.sk/.
51 https://www.facebook.com/labhist/.
52 https://www.facebook.com/beznenavisti/.
53 http://www.aspekt.sk/.
54 https://feminist.fyi/.

Perspectives of the Slovak left

In my research paper, I wish to complement the above mentioned description of the civil society framework in Slovakia with statements from selected left-wing actors. My aim is to focus on the perception of the left, cooperation within the left-wing spectrum, as well as outside-the-left initiatives and movements, values, organizational structure and associations, decision-making processes, funding, or potential challenges for left-wing oriented civil society.

Below, I present interviews with five actors representing the following elements of the Slovak left-left-wing organizations, movements, or grassroot groups: grassroot (respondent 1), feminist movement (respondent 2), media (respondent 3), advocacy group (respondent 4) and advocacy group (respondent 5).

I selected male and female respondents in order to adequately cover the distribution and typology of the left-wing spectrum in Slovakia. My analysis is based on semi-structured interviews. Undoubtedly, it is not always clear who belongs to which of the above-mentioned types of organizations and movements, since the space occupied by left-wing movements and groups is relatively small and their activities thus often overlap. This can be largely due to the funding which, while providing the necessary resources, also shapes individual groups' actions. There are neither political parties nor trade unions represented here, as I decided to give priority to respondents whose approach to these issues is systematic and rather exclusive. In my paper, I emphasize transactional actors, a decision which is also reflected in my choice of organizations and movements. However, all of the included actors and movements have remained active in civil society as well-established individuals or entities and have profound knowledge of civil society in Slovakia.

Definition

In this part, respondents answered questions concerning a definition of the left and the values which they associate it with.

Respondent 1—From the Great French Revolution on, the left could be described as a political belief that seeks to change the world; it's always been about changing it, rather than preserving the status quo. The left accentuates egalitarianism and emancipation from all sorts of oppression. The left is convinced that there's a different world out there, although one that is governed by the logic of inequality and hierarchy. The left believes that we can live in a world where people are equal. Of course, the left is not homogeneous, as there are numerous movements and views on the left side of the political spectrum that may not always be compatible. We advocate for the radical left, which in a philosophical context means that we not only seek changes in the principles which rule the world, but we wish to change the rules which shape the changes happening in the world. At the same time, in the context of democracy, our left orientation means that we wish to extend democratization to the economy and other spheres of life, which are perceived at least by most people as "apolitical."

These spheres are egalitarianism, democratization, social and environmental justice, self-reflection, autonomy, assistance to the weak and oppressed, anti-militarism, and many others.

Respondent 2—I know that even the left has an issue with violence against women. My values are on the left, as I identify with values, such as freedom, solidarity, equality, sisterhood. For me, the left is mainly about autonomy. Decision-making processes should not be hierarchical because otherwise there would be inequality. The right, however, can claim ownership to values relating to inequality.

Respondent 3—The left has sought greater equality in society; this is the basic definition based on Norbert Bobbio's thoughts. The left

strives to make people equal, and it is about equality in many forms, especially in terms of social classes. The left has been promoting its goals directly: It has been very straightforward, not through any market mechanisms, but through redistribution. Of course, there are different schools of thought amongst the left, although equality is the key value.

To me, however, freedom is the key value. Equality enables freedom and helps defend mankind from domination by a few select individuals. These are the basic values. Certainly, I associate the left with some basic ethical standards, such as transparency, zero corruption, etc. But for me, equality is the most important value of the left. The left can have and has a lot in common with the right, but in this respect, they differ. It is not about equal opportunities or chances, but about overarching equality.

Respondent 4—To me, advocating for equality is the most desirable goal of the left. Everything is centered around people not the market: equality, freedom, justice.

Respondent 5—We perceive the left as a set of policies and measures centered around men and women and their well-being. The left's values are primarily solidarity, social justice, equality, dignity, respect, and empathy.

Situation

In this section, respondents answered questions concerning the current situation of the left. Is today's left successful or not and to what extent do people in Slovakia identify with the left?

Respondent 1—The left in Slovakia is pathetic these days. There has been an opportunity here to participate in both parliamentary and non-parliamentary politics for years. These efforts, however, have encountered many problems and failures along the way. Recently,

however, I've seen new initiatives and movements emerging that are slowly but steadily developing, organizing themselves, and building their potential to soon have their say in Slovakian politics. Recently, however, the Slovak left has been struggling and losing the battle.

To some extent, this can be attributed to the pre-November totalitarian regime, which had planted, at least in the heads of some people, a clear aversion to anything collective. Even today, some people perceive the left as posing a threat to them in terms of totality. This image has been largely fed by the mass media, most of which is oriented right of center. At the parliamentary level, there are many things to blame for the negative image of the left—corruption scandals linked to SMER-SD, serious suspicions of the Social Democratic Party's close links to the mafia, dismissal of the left's ideas by some representatives of the Slovak social-democracy and their increasingly extreme right and ultra-conservative rhetoric. Many young people perceive the left solely as a force that advocates for welfare and social benefits as a package deal which the current government offers to the public in exchange for their tolerance and which ultimately turns out to be a negative measure because people "will pay out of their own pocket anyway". The left in Slovakia obviously lacks a long-term vision for the future, something which would help it shake off these negative labels.

Respondent 2—The situation is bad. As far as political parties are concerned, it is a great pity that SMER stole this space from us and that we allowed it to be taken from us. And I am also disappointed with Progresívne Slovensko (*Progressive Slovakia*)[55]. They entered "the center" of the political spectrum rather boldly. I can imagine much more left-oriented parties here in Slovakia. I'm not an expert, but I think such parties would have succeeded if they had taken

55 Progresívne Slovensko is a political movement, resp. party, established in 2017. Politically it is sorted into center, resp. to the left of the center and ideologically extends on the liberal to social-liberal spectrum.

up workers' rights. Certainly, Slovakia is missing a real left-wing political party.

As far as civil associations and their activities are concerned, I think they are not loud enough and are not very present on the scene at all. When was the last left-wing demonstration? I don' remember any. There have been anti-fascist marches, but who is not an anti-fascist? I do not perceive anti-fascism as predominantly a left-wing issue. The only people who have a problem with anti-fascism are probably the fascists themselves. Pracujúca chudoba (*Working Poverty*) has been quite visible. It's great that they've managed to enforce the rule that wages must be publicly announced, although there was an issue with them because some of their people actually supported Kotleba.

The left is rather misogynous, which is a shame. The left-wing activists call me an extremely radical woman who hates men. It's quite horrible that such words come from the left. I'd like to be more on the left of the spectrum, but I'm afraid it might discourage people.

Respondent 3—Bad, of course. In a way, one can talk about SMER-SD being, to a certain extent, left-oriented, because it has some attributes of the left. Although most critics would probably disagree with me that SMER-SD is a left-wing party. However, we could probably agree on the description of it as a conservative, strongly pro-entrepreneurial or pro-oligarchic party which sometimes makes left policies, at least in some respects, as they strove for equality. It is, however, a left-wing party that casts a poor light on the left in Slovakia. Some of their activities are over the edge. We should at least all agree that it has lost voters unnecessarily over cultural issues and that their message could have been communicated differently. Of course, I basically disagree with the thesis.

Progresívne Slovensko (*Progressive Slovakia*), is a self-proclaimed entity and is also on the left to some degree. They say this left-

right division no longer exists. We have analyzed their policies and, they are for some form of regulation. They support a high-quality public administration with regulatory powers. Yes, it is true that this is an anti-neoliberal approach. The question, however, is to what extent this is left of center and to which extent this would contribute to redistribution. They would like to remove regional disparities—and this is also about countering inequality. They want property taxation, which is something new. On the other hand, they are in favor of income tax reductions. They are very centrist; they have declared themselves as not left-wing, which is even worse.

KSS (*Communist Party*) and Vzdor (*Resistance*) have had a problem condemning totality and the pre-1989 regime. Members of Vzdor have made defamatory statements about the Roma, which is not considered proper for the left. They are patriotic communists whose anti-migrant rhetoric promotes problem solving on the spot, i.e., far from our borders and back in the migrants' home countries; I think that in some articles they declared that no migrants are welcome in this country, which essentially goes against basic principles of humanism. One can talk about politicized anti-humanism here. It is not quite clear how they established themselves as a party. They have had problems with financing and their sources of funding are not transparent.

There is no real left movement in Slovakia. Transactional actors such as, for example, *Utopia*, incline to anarchism and devote most of their time to the issue of a participatory budget. This is, of course, interesting and important and is close to self-organization, which is equally important. In light of the left-wing agenda, however, this may be an issue since it does not include any of the broader issues related to the functioning of capitalism. A participatory budget is commonly the domain of NGOs that do not declare themselves as left of center. On the other hand, it is an effort to move away from the state system and financial capital.
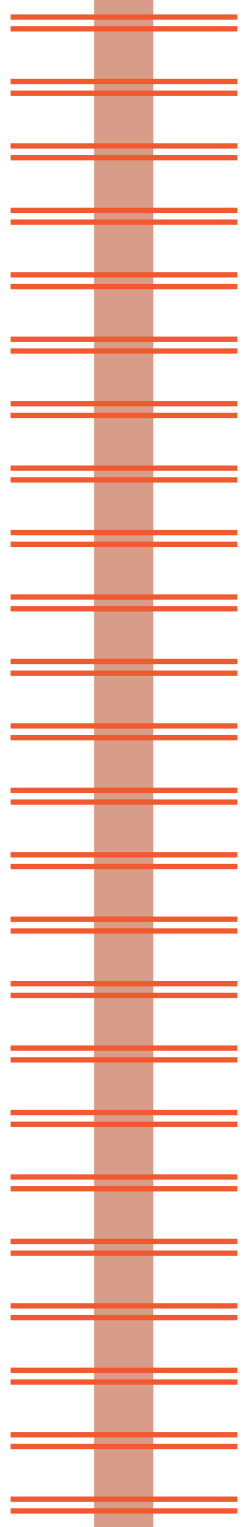
I perceive Povstanie (*Uprising*) primarily as an anti-fascist movement, although they also declare themselves as anti-capitalists.

Pracujúca chudoba (*Working Poverty*), clearly has a social-democratic perspective and supports the effort to improve working conditions and, in particular, to increase wages. They cooperate with unions and have remained stuck in the old modernization paradigm. This is their only agenda and it is often pro-growth, which I would normally criticize, but I am glad that there is at least this left movement here.

Karmína, *Kapitál*, and *Pole*. *Karmína* clearly presents itself as Marxist. Their activities have been very useful and I hope they will do well in the future, too. They are against public subsidies and foundations associated with political parties. *Karmína* wants support the workers, which I think is their exclusive goal. *Pole* (Field) is trying to be like *Alarm*, like a normal magazine. It wants to identify more with the people in order to take over the *Zeme a vek* (Earth and Era) readers. Their readership is rather limited. Editors of *Pole* want to cover various topics and not only those promoted by Pracujúca chudoba (*Working Poverty*); they also want to attract readers of *Denník N* (Journal N) or *Sme* (We Are), who have also moved towards the center. In other words, they need to write about issues other than only class. It is possible that *Karmína's* strategy is better, I do not know. *Karmína* and *Kapitál* do not stand in opposition to other media. *Pole*, on the other hand, criticizes other media. *Kapitál* has maybe made some strong statements in regards to feminism, but I'm not sure because I don't read it so often. It uses very strong elitist jargon and immensely and unnecessarily complicated language; it's as if it was no longer leftist. If the left strives for equality, this is actually the antithesis of the left. On the other hand, it has been drawing attention to important issues that are not in conflict with the liberal scene, but which have also brought left-wing themes to readers' attention. Quite possibly this is the goal of the editors. My impression is that *Pole* has been more prone to conflict with the liberal scene.

Of course, *Dav dva* (Crowd of Two) is also amongst these portals. They've had an issue with cultural topics. In the first issue, there were some anti-Semitic tendencies there. They published an anti-Semitic quotation by Štúr and some homophobic sentiments. I don't read this periodical as it is unacceptable for me. I don't know if I can even call it left-wing, although possibly it self-proclaims itself to be on the left.

Then there are various "NGOs," Živica (*Resin*), for example, that might be left-wing even though they do not have any political agenda. Next, we have Vlk (*Wolf*), which is a conservative non-governmental organization, respectively, the greens.

I am not sure whether the left-wing activist movements in Slovakia have the potential to reach out to Slovak citizens and to attract them to their cause. The activist spectrum has been taken over by Progresívne Slovensko (*Progressive Slovakia*). They've taken the lead and we will only see in which direction they will move. Čaputová has said that the minimum wage should be 60 % of the average wage, which means that it would need to increase further. It is slowly getting there. I envisage some leftist tendencies as part of this issue, but I doubt it will go in the direction of the radical left-wing. I don't really see it happening. Just the opposite. There are not enough people on the radical left. I reckon there's an anarchist movement organizing itself outside the state system. I've been to a couple of meetings that made me think so. Perhaps it will lead to something new.

Respondent 4—There are none. Leftist thoughts (because there are no left-wing movements here) are stuck due to reminiscing for the old regime and SMER-SD.

Respondent 5—The left in Slovakia is significantly atomized. Left-wing movements and political actors seem to have lost their identity; there are no new ideas or thoughts and the left has failed

to communicate in a more modern and engaging way. We've seen new approaches emerging in the world of the economy, approaches which have redefined the economic system and our understanding of it. Old and deeply-rooted economic axioms will soon be a thing of the past, and we will have to start thinking about the economy as an evolutionary adaptive complex system. Current movements in Slovakia are recycling old ideas and trying to fit them to the present world in which they may no longer be valid. But this is a problem both for the left and the right. They have burned themselves out.

The left is here to tackle the everyday problems of ordinary people—people who are employed or are small entrepreneurs. Their work should be well recognized and properly paid and the state should provide quality health services, high quality education, and reliable social security. If the left is unable to point out issues in this area and cannot offer solutions or has them but fails to communicate them, then it cannot expect anybody to identify with it. These are times of entertainment. Ideas need to be communicated in a charismatic, inventive, juicy, engaging, and interesting way. People will identify with that—be it on the right or the left.

In this context, Martin Šimečka comes to mind. He had to take a test to find out whether he was a leftist, because after 1989 everything was perceived right of the center and any leftist thoughts were perceived as an effort to return to the totalitarian undemocratic practices of the old regime. But there's more to it than that: After the revolution we had ourselves convinced that collectivism was evil and that the only way out is to stimulate individualism. Today, thirty years after the Velvet Revolution, we're finally harvesting the fruits of that. Those who ask for justice and less inequality are instantly labelled as communists and followers of Stalin and Gottwald. No wonder that many people whose ideas and values are left of center would rather join the right or go for centrism. Regardless of this

stigma, we should keep trying and compensate for the bad image with proper communication.

Problems

In this part, respondents addressed current issues as well as the urgent challenges that the Slovak left is currently facing.

Respondent 1—There is no relevant left-wing party at the parliamentary level. In the extra-parliamentary environment, an "authentic" left-wing medium capable of reaching out to the public at large is lacking. Moreover, there is no space to present these thoughts, respectively, there is not a platform around which the left could concentrate and communicate internally as well as externally or publicly. I know this is a recurring point, but in Slovakia we urgently need a project that combines issues pertaining to workers, the environment, poverty, gender, and the young and the elderly with the clear goal of not promoting these topics individually, but to generalize them and address them as a package.

Respondent 2—There are problems with misogyny and homophobia. I don't know specifically what the problem is, but there is a real problem. How can they change the world when they reproduce the same inequalities and hierarchy? I attend a roundtable with the left and who is it that speaks all the time—only men. They don't care that women are not able express themselves there, men are louder and that's it.

I expect potential problems in the future on the issue of trans people. In the West, there's been a quite toxic debate about this. The debate is much needed, but it's been terribly toxic. We will have it here as well, sooner or later. Those on the left who like "provoking" feminists, those misogynists, will grab this issue to further disseminate negative thoughts and to point out hypocrisy
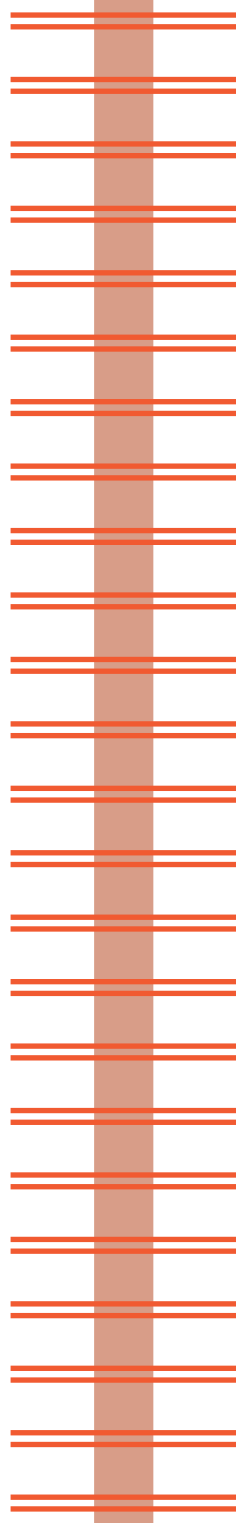
and so on. But I still hope it won't happen. I feel that in the West it's been more of a struggle over cultural issues.

Respondent 3—The left is not organized enough. I think the biggest failure of SMER was that it failed to build a wider left-wing platform. I think it may have been beneficial for them to define themselves in opposition to the liberal center and to the right of center media. They should have established a capable left-wing think-tank (ASA operates here, but it is extremely inadequate)[56]. There is no such thing as INESS, INEKO[57], or others. There are no left-wing alternatives to these initiatives. No wonder that journalists, who have nobody to interview, keep addressing the same old people all the time. Daniel Dujava contributes to the *Sme* daily. These are very centrist things, yet then you have Baláž, who said that the SYRIZA program is crap. Radovan Geist has had left-oriented articles in *Denník N*; Milan Šimečka has been contributing with rather critical articles, but his conclusions are often .... There is no radical left here that would be liberal and strong. The left is weak despite *Karmína*, *Kapitál*, and *Pole*. Neither *Kapitál* nor *Karmína* strive to promote their ideas in the public debate, for example, by contributing to the mainstream media.

Respondent 4—In Slovakia, a true left-wing movement has yet to be created and only when it does, then can we truly speak about what it would entail. In Europe, and perhaps globally, the main problem is lies in aligning all of the progressive agendas, which the right likes to label as "cultural Marxism", with economic content that is important and appealing to the absolute majority of the population.

Respondent 5—The left has a problem that is really urgent— it's been separated from its electorate. In Slovakia and worldwide, politicians in parliament that represent parties left of center and

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56 Analysis, strategies, alternatives. ASA acts as a think tank pf the Směr SD party.

57 The Institute of Economic and Social Studies is a Slovak pro-market think tank as well as the Institute for Economic and Social Reforms.

social democrats are mostly entrepreneurs and academics and have nothing to do with the working class. With all due respect, how do businessmen and academics expect to represent workers when they do not have any experience whatsoever with the working-class world?

Topics

In the following section of my paper, respondents commented on issues which are currently at the center of their attention, as well as on those which are currently addressed or need to be addressed by the left. They also discussed their perception of their own activities, namely whether they perceive them as political or rather civil activism and whether such a division is of any interest to them.

Respondent 1—In the Slovak context, the long-term goal of the left should be to develop a left-wing movement radically built around democratic and anti-authoritarian principles. In our activities, we emphasize anti-fascism, anti-Stalinism, feminism, environmentalism, criticism of neoliberal capitalism. At the same time, we strive to develop different forms of social relations and activism, and we want to educate people and to disseminate left-of-center ideas while searching for new forms of political practice. In Slovakia these days, we've been promoting change in the public discourse to include issues which have been interpreted one-dimensionally or, in many instances, not at all. Recently, for instance, this has concerned raising awareness of the long-term efforts to prohibit abortions and to curtail reproductive rights. Also, we would like to attract more attention to the murder of Henry Acord, a Filipino, who tried to defend his female colleagues from harassment right in the center of Bratislava. Our aim is to stir public opinion and generate public pressure by putting his murder in the context of the current situation, which we see as a result of structural problems. We wish to show the link between the rise of nationalism, on one hand, and labor-related problems,

women's rights, environmental problems, etc., on the other. In the near future, we will focus primarily on building a grassroots movement throughout Slovakia. The next so-called action weekend will take place in Rimavská Sobota. We are planning discussions and workshops focused on clarifying and consolidating left-wing positions, training sessions targeting direct action tactics, lectures, and the gathering of information regarding local issues.

When it comes to how we label ourselves, we prefer the term "political activism". This label is essential for us since we are active in the social sphere where we are trying to re-politicize problems which have been depoliticized in the past and instead are trying to open up the public discourse to include a wider concept of politics that would differ from the limited current perception of politics as merely encompassing representation, elections, and civil society. At the same time, civil activists very often become professionals in the field around which they have mobilized in the past or, alternatively, take up projects which pertain to the state. This, however, is not our goal and, in fact, it is quite the opposite: we strive to criticize the state from more radical positions; we wish to build a bottom-up movement; and we promote and enforce change.

Respondent 2—Feminism is our focus. In our country, however, if you would like to pursue a certain agenda, then you simply need to do it. When people turn to me and ask me to write about this or that, I always say in response: "Try to do it yourself." Firstly, we do not have that much time, and I also think that the person best suited to write about an issue is the someone who is concerned. If I were to write now about issues troubling other women, it wouldn't be from the very heart, it wouldn't be authentic.

We used to translate texts, in particular articles from *Everyday Feminism*. Their "policy" was that anyone could translate and publish one of their articles per week. Since I'd hate to violate copyright

laws, we didn't just look for articles everywhere to translate them and publish. It limited us in what we could actually publish. Now, it's different –people who worry about certain issues do not hesitate to write about them as well.

Officially, we are a team of two editors. We have contributors, some of which contribute one to three articles per year; it really is up to them. Now we are working on "Patriarchálny prd" (Patriarchal Fart), where 90 % of the texts have come from our external contributors. We drew inspiration from the initiative called "Sexisticke prasátečko" (Sexist Pig), although there have been many other similar initiatives. Some women, feminists, were rather unhappy with the name, Patriarchal Fart, as they said it was rather "manly". I think, however, that this way it will appeal to more people. But it is especially about having fun. We are definitely not here to please the entire society. Civic activity is political and vice versa.

Respondent 3—We do not have specifically defined issues, but, in a nutshell, we address culture in its various forms, politics, society, the economy, the environment, foreign policy, and the media. In regards to the media, it depends on the journalists or contributors and the issues which they cover. Mostly, we address some form of inequality and social problems.

The dichotomy of civil and political activism is rather challenging. Civic activism is often political. Yes, there are sports clubs where people gather to play sports, which are very apolitical. Even sports clubs, however, can formulate their demands and become political. In my definition, politics is a conflict of interest. In this respect, our activity is political, albeit non-partisan.

Respondent 4—Our cause relates to human rights with a special focus on economic, social, and cultural rights (ESCR), as these are rather neglected by other NGOs in Slovakia.

Of course, our work not political in of the partisan sense, but political in a broader sense; of course, almost everything is political in a broader sense. It is possible to make a distinction between political and civil activism, although I think that some organizations and initiatives resort to this distinction simply to avoid declaring an affiliation. Of course, both words are extremely sensitive in regards to marketing and need to be used with extreme care.

Respondent 5—We've been focusing primarily on inadequate and low wages in Slovakia and poor working conditions. We strive to enforce employees' rights and we wish to make workers more visible. Employees should be recognized as an important element of the economy. We want society to change its deeply-rooted neoliberal view of how the economy functions, a view which we find inappropriate. We strive to communicate why fair and proper employee remuneration is essential for the proper functioning of the economy and why trade unionism is important as well. The biggest problem is that the workforce in Slovakia is extremely passive and submissive. We strive to mobilize employees, engage them through daily communication on the Internet, and to enforce measures that have the potential to further mobilize the workforce to demand changes, such as mandatory information on wages in job listings, freedom to talk about individual wages, etc. Currently, we've been trying to enforce an exemption of labor-related disputes from court fees.

I do not know whether politics can be distinguished from civil activism in our field. We've been striving to mobilize and motivate the workforce and inspire trade unions to be more active, too. At the same time, we've been exerting pressure on politicians to change their attitude and to enforce legislative amendments. Our goal is to become a relevant political influencer in our field of interest. In regards to the form and funding of our activities, we are civil activists.

Resources, organizational issues, and decision-making processes

In the following section of my paper, respondents commented on their resources, organizational issues and decision-making processes.

Respondent 1—We are funded primarily from voluntary contributions collected from supporters at public events; we often serve food or sell "merch" in exchange for voluntary contributions or voluntary admission fees. We've also raised money via "crowdfunding" campaigns in which people receive, in exchange for their donations, various types of merchandise.

Our decision-making processes are collective and non-hierarchical. Prior to making a decision, we debate the individual issue and then reach a consensus.

Respondent 2—We do not receive pay for our work because we do not have any money, nor do we have grants or anything similar. We finance our activities from contributions, although we ourselves do not get paid. We raise funds from supporters. I had actually wanted to raise funds so that we could get paid for our work, but I realized that it was virtually impossible. On the one hand, I do not think it is possible, on the other hand I do not think it is not right.

Once we run out of money, we won't have staff either. My colleague is busy earning a living and sooner or later, I will also have to find a paid job. If I had resources, I could write and do more and so could the other women involved.

Since I started out as a one-woman operation, I still make the decisions myself. Moreover, other women do not have the time. I discuss most issues with my colleague and we

implement our ideas together. We try to make things as consensual as possible. I know that it should be different (although it cannot be, since I started this alone). It will never be completely autonomous. It's a grassroots movement from the very bottom-up, although we don't have decision-making processes in place because there isn't anybody to take the issues up with. I wish I had people to cooperate with. We've had moments when we disagreed, yet we've always managed to discuss it and find a consensus. If I had people to cooperate with, I'd officially be the one to make the decisions. On the other hand, if I felt that this would discourage my colleagues, I would not do it in this way.

Respondent 3—This is a difficult question. Sometimes decisions must be made. In principle, we debate the issue and sometimes take a vote. Should problems arise, we try to proceed democratically. As a rule, each member has one vote; this is a formal decision-making process. We have an executive manager who makes day-to-day decisions which most of us fully endorse. It has happened where a group promoting a certain issue got outvoted, although most decisions are the result of a discussion.

Our financial resources come from the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation and the Friedrich Ebert Foundation; we also received one smaller grant from the Arts Support Fund. That's basically it. We were also part of the Political Critique rant. We've been applying for Global Education grants, and we just failed one round. We have a few authors (6—7 total), people who write articles for us, although we would like to have more.

And then you have the 2% tax principle of course, although we don't really rely on it. Even if we make a big call, I'm not sure if people would contribute and whether it'd make sense at all.

Respondent 4—We have neither a formal process, nor an established hierarchy. Decision-making is based on deliberations

and participation with respect to the expertise of the individual contributors of the debate.

We've been receiving funding primarily from Slovak public resources and EU resources, followed by foreign and international foundations. We've had some small donors, for example, funding from self-governing bodies or individual donors. The problem with public resources is their approach of "the longer you exist, the higher the chance" approach; in other words, established entities "deserve" support more than the new ones regardless of quality or outcome. Foreign foundations, on the other hand, support activities that fall within a relatively narrow niche and their budget for Slovakia is low.

Respondent 5—There are nine of us in the association, so there's no need for any formal decision-making processes. We collect ideas, listen to employees, trade unionists and entrepreneurs, record political statements, and follow economic analysts. When someone has an idea, we brainstorm freely and informally analyze how it could be developed further. As the chairman of the association, I then make the final decision.

Our financial resources are very modest. We have funded most of our activities from our own resources (i.e., website, publications) and over the past two years, we have been able to raise some money from the 2% tax principle. We've had donors send us modest sums, from ten up to a hundred euros per month. So far, we've only once succeeded with getting a grant—we received several thousand euros for our publication, which was then distributed to parliamentarians, trade unionists, economists, journalists, and schools.

As far as information sources: we communicate with general employees, managers, PRs, entrepreneurs and trade unions. We read foreign print, academic papers and publications.
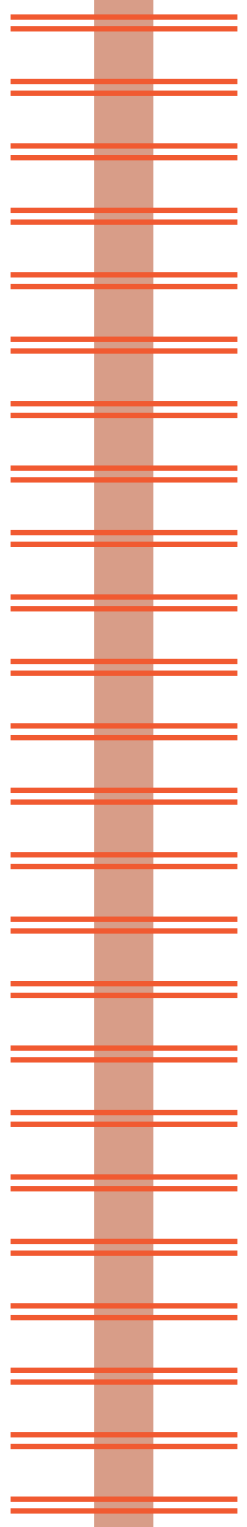
Cooperation with the left and within the left and future challenges

In this section, respondents commented primarily on issues of cooperation and networking. Additionally, I asked them to share with me their take on the obstacles and limitations of cooperation for left-of-center subjects in Slovakia.

Respondent 1—We've been cooperating both with organizations whose decision-making processes are anti-authoritarian and democratic as well as with other organizations, movements, or initiatives even though they are not necessarily and openly left of the center. To promote our issues, we like to join forces with various initiatives. However, the main goal for the future should be to link these groups even further and to find ways to organize a wider network of cooperation.

I see an obstacle in the certain exclusivity of individual left-wing groups as well as differences in their decision-making processes, internal organizational structures, communication strategies, and ultimately their goals and priorities.

Respondent 2—To me, fragmentation and misogyny are the key obstacles to cooperation on the left. We've been cooperating with selected initiatives and have a good relationship with women's circles. But this is it—we do not cooperate or network in any other way. I've heard people say that I should not engage in an issue unless I have studied it or read up on it extensively. In this field, I perceive some degree of academic elitism and even in the field of what I call "state feminism." To be accepted in feminist circles, one has to graduate from a university located somewhere in Holland and preferably with a degree in gender studies. This bothers me a lot.

Since I am not a member of a left-wing movement where men coexist with women, I can only speculate that the "male ego" may

be a certain obstacle to cooperation. I realize that the system which makes civil entities to compete for grants is primarily to blame for these animosities, yet I believe the ego plays a role as well.

Respondent 3—The left has been taken over by NGOs, which are depoliticized and intentionally apolitical activists. The problem is that liberalism is very strong in Slovakia; this will be an issue particularly in the future. Many people have moved from the left to the center, towards Progresívne Slovensko (Progressive Slovakia). The roots of liberalism go very deep here, which is mainly due to the media, but also thanks to Pohoda and other events. Many people despise the left and anything left-wing and often loathe "Fico voters." Alternative media strengthens this dichotomy. It may happen in the future that reasonable left-of-center activities and movements will stagnate, while the rather problematic alternatives may flourish. The centrists will position themselves in opposition to the alternatives, thus blocking a public debate which could contribute to a new rise of the left.

Many left-of-center actors cooperate due to the notion of a common enemy. Yet, I don't know how we are perceived by others. Cooperation is often understood through delimitation. If we lived in Germany, for example, it'd be much easier; in Germany there are so many activists and entities that, one can choose with whom to cooperate and therefore you don't have to cooperate with an organization that declares themselves as leftist, yet which is totally unacceptable. In Slovakia, however, this will remain a recurrent issue.

We also cooperate internationally, for example with *A2* and *Deník referendum* (Referendum Daily).

Respondent 4—In Slovakia, we cooperate with anyone and in the region it's rather weak as well. In Europe, our level of cooperation is quite insufficient, although is slightly improving. **Respondent 5**—When we published our first publication, in which we quoted many personalities' views of low wages—people from all

over the political spectrum—many perceived us with disbelief. They couldn't tell where we stood on the issue; of course, that was our intention, especially given the fact that many right-wing politicians suddenly identified with the same problem which we had drawn attention to. Some left-wing activists even suspected us of receiving money for our campaign from the fascists. We've been striving to cooperate with anyone who is interested in tackling the issue; we don't care about labels. We are open to discussions with right-wing politicians, too, because discussions are often much better than guerrilla warfare. This openness, however, has been an issue in the eyes of many left-wing activists who condemn us for such cooperation.

We haven't established any regular cooperation mechanisms. The only principle we follow is that anyone, who wants to discuss anything with us, brainstorm, or collaborate on a certain issue, is welcome. We collaborate and debate issues with politicians from various political parties, with representatives from trade unions, with other workers' associations (IOC, KOVO, ECHOZ), and with the Confederation of Trade Unions (*Konfederácia odborových zväzov*). We are open to any ideas and any organizations that are interested in cooperating with us, but, on the other hand, since we are all employed and this is only a free-time activity for us, we are not in a position to meet with everyone and we really must concentrate on those who have some kind of influence over our issues. It is a waste of time to discuss a global revolution and the perfect world, even though we do realize that we do not live in a perfect world. We must be selective and concentrate on issues which we can influence and work on. We don't strive for a global revolution; it'd be enough if we managed to stop the decline of trade unionism and possibly reverse this trend, as well as change the neoliberal narrative in the public sphere. Some organizations that we have approached have ignored us. We've taken note of that, and if they decide to change their approach, we welcome their interest.

Conclusion

My research paper analyzes the Slovak left and its position within the wider context of civil society in Slovakia. My aim was to put the usually static issue into a dynamic historical context. I believe that a dynamic analysis of civil society and the left's activities is the best option for comprehending the current situation of the left in Slovakia.

The left in Slovakia has been impacted by many factors. In my research paper, I first analyzed the legislative and political context in which individual left-wing subjects have emerged and established themselves. I emphasized both the global framework as well as explicit anonymous frameworks which have been shaping and defining the existence and mutual correlations of left-wing subjects. The descriptive part of my research paper focused on the two following phenomena. The first attempted to capture the widest possible range of relevant subjects and their relationship to the political context in which they operate. The second looked at the dynamism of their actions and put an emphasis on complementarity.

Furthermore, I devoted a substantial part of this research paper to mapping the Slovak left. I framed the Slovak left in the context of the most important historical milestones, especially those from the past fifteen years. When selecting the most relevant milestones, I took into consideration two key factors—their importance for Slovak society as such and their particular importance for mobilization, activities, cooperation, and the interaction of left-of-center actors. In some instances, for example during the Gorila-related protests or the fascists inclusion in the Parliament, the two layers overlapped. In this research paper, I concentrated primarily on subjects whose activities are relatively long-term and which have had a substantial impact on the left or certain left-wing movements

or groups; the relevance of these subjects has recently been on the rise in the media or on social media. Furthermore, there are left-wing associations and subjects which have contributed substantially to changes in legislation or institutional reforms. In other words, these associations or subjects have not only attracted media attention or helped to raise awareness of left-of-center issues but also have managed to exert significant political pressure, respectively, have had a long-term impact on the process of forming left-oriented grassroots movements.

Last but not least, I decided to include a semi-structured questionnaire asking left-wing actors questions regarding key issues pertaining to the Slovak left. I asked about the character of left-wing associations and movements, their funding, organizational issues, media outreach, impact, political and social mobilization, cooperation potential, and, last but not least, values.

Left-wing networking in Slovakia

Slovakia's democratic left-wing organizations are structurally limited by a number of factors which impose certain limitations to their potential cooperation. Above all, Slovakia is a "small market" and that largely means that left-of-center actors must compete with each other. This is true not only in respect to their potential resources but also in respect to the audience reach for left-wing ideas. Due to this and historical reasons as well, left-wing entities in Slovakia have been perceived as so-called transactional actors, their influence cannot be measured primarily by membership supporter numbers or even a general audience. To a large extent, this aspect has influenced the selection of policies and the search for enforcement channels, which has, in turn, created potential conflicts. In particular, there have been disputes over legitimacy, correctness of methods used, or means of gathering resources. It seems as if there has been a metaphorical struggle for legitimacy and "orthodoxy" of the left.

Additionally, the left has been subject to economic and globalization pressure typical of former Eastern Bloc countries. This makes it particularly difficult for the left to publicly articulate their ideas, which, at least potentially, poses a threat of conflicts. Media space for left-wing actors is very limited, although it necessarily does not need to be fatal. In particular, many, longer-term actors have learned to operate and cooperate under such conditions at least *ad hoc*. In many instances, they have managed to significantly influence public opinion, accentuate problems, or even launch the public discourse.

One of the outputs of this analytical research paper is my hypothetical conclusion that left-wing issues in Slovakia have been fragmented. Undoubtedly, this has resulted in more conflicts, especially at the beginning of the process. On the other hand, there has been more room for activities influencing the public at large since individual left-wing actors have concentrated on particular issues, thus creating space and new opportunities for left-oriented representation and political or activist influence over mainstream society. Of course, the above has had resulted in more than fragmentation of the Slovak left—the recent economic situation and the general development of civil society have played a significant role, especially in boosting transnational cooperation or raising new resources.

In Slovakia, unlike in the Czech Republic, the communist left has been relatively insignificant. For this very reason, internal conflicts have always taken place outside communist party structures and left-wing associations have almost exclusively defined themselves in opposition to the proclaimed social democratic program of SMER-SD and, to a certain extent, Progressive Slovakia. At the same time, the communist left has largely merged with anti-establishment, often conspiratorial, and essentially undemocratic subjects. In my research paper, I therefore decided to skip this phenomenon. The above, however, indicates that in the future,
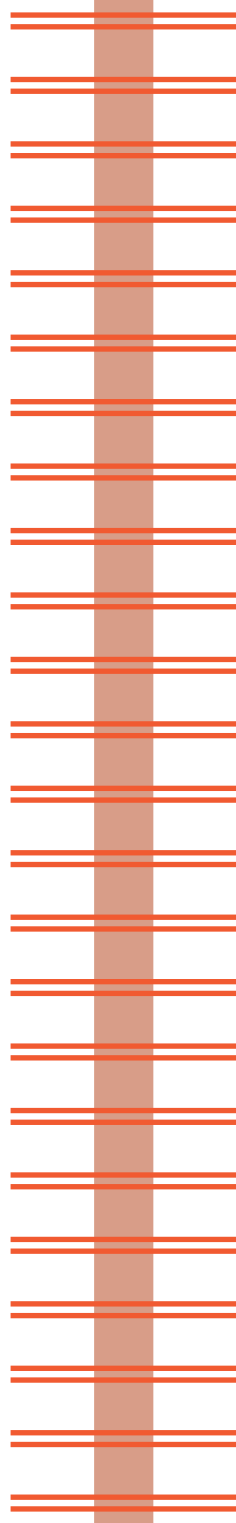
there may be intensified fights within the democratic left, as confirmed by many of the respondents in this research paper.

Furthermore, my research paper generally highlighted that there is a relatively strong consensus on the left's values among the subjects addressed herein. There are differences, although they are essentially marginal. Most of the subjects were, to a large extent, willing to openly declare their left-wing orientation, whereas there were some differences in respect to organizational issues and decision-making processes. When it comes to the individual responses, it was quite difficult to distinguish and contextualize the decision-making processes. However, it is obvious that the respondents' decision-making processes range from strictly non-hierarchical to those who considered other factors as equally important, such as decision-makers' expertise, the capability to reach out to the majority population, or other more subjective features that may influence decision-making processes. In regards to the individual subjects' resources, they are by large irregular and inconsistent. The agenda of associations or platforms is subject to an extensive external factor, which often affects their operations. Generally, one can argue that resources are not only a material part of the individual subjects' activities, but a constitutive factor of potential conflicts. In principle, conflicts do not arise over resources as such, but over their nature. Consequently, this conflict may grow into a wider ideological dispute and might even end up hampering cooperation.

Proposals for improvement

Above all, I must conclude that formulating viable proposals to improve the situation of the left in Slovakia is extremely difficult, not only for the abovementioned structural reasons, which ultimately limit their cooperation potential, but particularly due to factors mentioned below.

The first factor relates to an absolutely legitimate question which, although it may raise doubts, must be asked even if the answer may very well be negative. Do current left-wing entities need to enhance their mutual cooperation? This question is only relevant in the context of those left-wing actors in Slovakia, which have, in my view, overcome the period of "unity of ideals". Values of the left have gradually become part of the mainstream, albeit in a much softer form. This is primarily due to external circumstances, such as the economic crisis and also internal circumstances, such as antipathy of the SMER-SD government and others. Fragmentation of the left, confirmed by many of its actors, may appear as an internal matter only and an external observer may perceive it as a negligible phenomenon. In fact, it is possible that what we have been witnessing is a natural process of mutual delimitation, which can trigger the rise of new subjects, established players may narrow down their focus on individual issues, or the left may gradually penetrate the political and civil mainstream, not as a monolith, but as individual players having their own agenda recognized by the public. This may be particularly important for some advocacy groups. Of course, in their narrative, they may have to make necessary compromises, although they will be able to keep their left-wing goals. Therefore, the overall situation of the left can also be assessed as creating a qualitatively new element which individual entities may not yet be able to cope with.

On the other hand, the absence of a uniform or at least closely cooperating left that is able to pursue its objectives has been, to a large extent, a limiting factor which most respondents

would agree with me on. It is to blame for low public mobilization in support of the left agenda, a lack of energy to engage in more fundamental, albeit less important disputes, and, ultimately, it may compromise some ideas.

The second factor is primarily contextual and concerns both internal and external circumstances, which may not impact the Slovak left per se, but which have defined the Slovak left-wing field of operation. In this context, I am referring to "anti-system" actors and sentiments. There are some actors known for their conspiratorial rhetoric, which has a potential to attract left-wing voters, primarily workers. Workers, however, are not the only supporters of these entities. The Slovak left has always promoted its own special narrative; it is predominantly political and therefore anti-systemic and anti-establishment, positions which have always threatened the left to a certain extent. In respect to potential solutions, I would recommend targeting primarily economic issues, respectively, disseminating post-materialistic values carefully so that they are not abused by anti-political and facsized organizations.

The third factor is the above-analyzed phenomenon of neutralized, essentially apolitical, protests dominated by the right-wing discourse. Although some observers might disagree with me, this phenomenon is present here as well. One of the respondents also pointed out this problem, arguing that the activist space is currently dominated by the right. This is a very current phenomenon, and it is likely that the right will continue occupying the public space for a long time. In essence, left-wing movements, organizations, and advocacy groups have failed to actively participate, and thus they may start losing their potentially more liberal supporters in the future. Given the fact, that the right-wing forms its activist narrative as essentially apolitical, respectively, abstracted from ideology, the left is not only losing its ideologically-defined space where it can reach out to a wide spectrum of supporters through its thoughts, but its influence on the field of conspiracy has been

weakening as well. In other words, the left has been suffering particularly from the absence of a politically-defined conflict. To improve its position, the left in Slovakia therefore needs to politicize the public discourse.
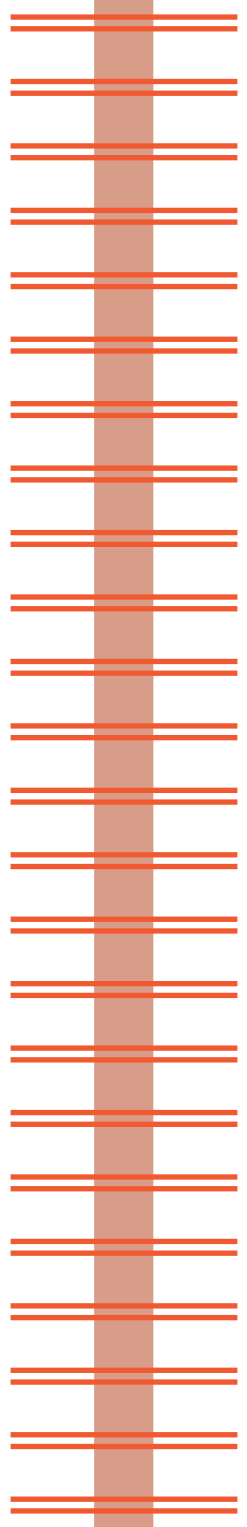
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Hungary

M.A. Szabina Kerényi

This work aims to give a general overview of the most recent processes of the civil society, in particular the tendencies on the left wing.

What are civil organizations in Hungary and what traditions are they drawing on? How have these processes and organizations changed within the past years and decades after the regime change? How are civil society organizations and informal groups related to grassroots movements and how has this relationship changed? Who are the other important actors present in the field? And altogether: where is the political left now, how can it be defined, and where is it to be found among the political agents of the wider civil sphere?

The study will focus on these questions outlined above, while aiming to place them within a broader political and institutional context of the current tendencies in Central and Eastern Europe and most specifically in Hungary. While the study will place an emphasis on the complex interrelatedness of the institutional structures and the civil sphere in a relatively longer time frame of 30 years, dating back to the regime change, the research focuses on the most decisive processes of the recent years, particularly since the so-called "illiberal turn", and the process behind it that has characterized

the entire political field since Fidesz (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ Fidesz) came to power again in 2010. The study is rich in empirical materials, it is based on a research period of 2—3 months, but includes empirical findings and materials from earlier studies.

Methodology and ethical considerations

Throughout the research I used various methods of qualitative research methodology, that include five in-depth interviews with NGO leaders and experts that I made explicitly for this study, supplemented by participatory observation, informal talks to activists, participation at events and gatherings, press analyses, analysis of public discourses, and literature reviews from the field of social sciences, primarily the school of social movements and discussions on the civil society. Due to the time limitations of the research, I also included interviews from my earlier related research into the analysis, which makes it into a total of 11 in-depth interviews that have been used in this study, and altogether 13 semi-formal interviews or mini-interviews that have been made during the fieldwork.

The organizations / informal or semi-formal groups / networks that are presented in this study have been selected from different fields and sectors, as key agents of their area: they are well known in the field, and / or participate in or initiate many activities. The interview subjects are not necessarily leaders of these groups, but persons who take an active, important role, and / or have a long history of participation. The informal, smaller interviews and talks aimed to bring more details into the picture and refine the dominant narratives and statements of the representatives. Given the overly centralized position of the capital, Budapest, most resources are allocated here, and consequently most formal and informal organizations can be found here. The main reason for looking at predominantly Budapest-based organizations was the limited scope of this research, which,

however, is intended to be taken further to more geographic destinations. Similarly, future research intends to include cases from other Hungarian towns as well.

All interview subjects are aware of the purposes of my study and have given consent to the use of their statements in this report. Since the privacy of the subjects is a priority issue, and given the problematic situation of NGOs and the entire movement and the civil sphere in Hungary, it has been particularly important not to include information into the study that would potentially compromise the subjects or the organizations they represented. All interview subjects have been anonymized, for that purpose, and the interview sections received a numbering, even though there are overlaps between the statements, the numbering of the sections does not follow that, in order to protect the identity of the informants. There is only one informant who appears with a full name, and this is because he has been interviewed as an expert of the field, and the statements made by him reflect his professional views on the subject.

This study aims to include agents that take an important role in public discourses or initiate them, therefore I decide to extend the scope of the study from the "classical" focus of movements and NGOs, and focused rather on mobilizations and discourses. Considering the recent events in Hungary[1], it seemed important to include union mobilizations into the picture, which are generally not considered as part of the NGO or the movement scene, at least in Hungary, mostly for historical reasons. This situation has changed, however, with the strikes and mobilizations of the unions, which were embedded into anti-governmental narratives and also resonated in oppositional sentiments and mobilizations, and received a lot of attention under this framing. The strike and series of negotiations of the AudI factory have been particularly in the focus of the interest of the public, especially

1   The study has been conducted in the early months of 2019.

that their resistance was eventually successful and became a common reference point to many other citizens' movements.

Even though parties are generally considered as part of the institutional context at an analysis of the civil sphere, and are therefore not typically taken into consideration as subjects of such research, the current political situation in Hungary called for yet another exception. Given their activities and general role in the public political discourse, I have decided to include the Two-tailed Dog Party, which has become famous as the "joke party" in Hungary, and which, nevertheless, ran at the 2018 national elections and received 1,73 % of the votes. Moreover, they ran for seats at the European Parliamentary elections in 2019, and even got seats at four electoral districts at the local elections in October 2019. The main reason they are included in this study is partly because they do not behave as a typical party, but are organized as a bottom-up grassroots organization that heavily criticized the government, and take an important role in forming the oppositional discourse and participate in the anti-governmental mobilizations. The other reason why they are considered here is because of their local communal activities, which make them closer to a citizens' initiative than an actual political party. The hybrid, non-typical form of the operation of the party, as well as their participation in Hungarian public life are in a way very symptomatic for the current political climate in the country.

This study is structured as follows: in the first section, the problem of understanding the "civil sphere" will be presented in general and also in the particular context—I will discuss how the civil sphere has changed since the regime change, give an overview of the institutional frames. I will focus on the operation of a few selected groups and will then turn to the understanding and the meanings of "the left" in a regime that positions and declares itself to be illiberal. I will discuss how the movement and civil sphere has shifted from the given liberal political frame

in the '90s, through economic and political crises, to search for new meanings and new positions through the structural changes. As mentioned above, the study will focus on the recent years, which means that an emphasis will be given on the political field under the current Fidesz regime, already in its 3rd electoral cycle in a row[2], and its construction of the illiberal state, but will also discuss the processes that had lead up to the 2010 election results.

2   This makes it to the 4th government of Fidesz and also the 4th time that Viktor Orbán has become a PM, when taking the 1998—2002 period into account.

Shifting frames: from the liberal normative expectations to the illiberal frame

In this chapter, I will first outline the concept of civil society and the problems that can be related to it, then I will also discuss the changes in the institutional frames from the 1990 regime change on. This part will discuss the radical turns that have taken place since the liberal paradigm towards process of the "illiberalization" of the state. The analysis will be based on the concept of Political Opportunity Structures (POS), and a particularly emphasis will be given to the opportunities of civil society organizations and other political mobilizations.

The golden era of the liberal paradigm

In the study of social movements, the analysis of POS has been a widely used theoretical concept—the analysis of the political macrostructures, within which a movement emerges, and how much these structures constrain or enable possibilities for movements. Even though the original concept has been criticized for being too vague and overly universalistic (Rootes 1999, among others), it serves as a useful analytical tool to discuss the context of the movements and the civil sphere under discussion. According to the original model, POS can be open or closed on the one hand, and weak or strong, on the other, based on the characteristics of the political institutions and the accessibility of those for other political agents, that is, the opportunities they can offer (Kitschelt 1986, McAdam 1986), where the intersections of these dimensions form the basic typologies. Similarly, in another classical work, Sidney Tarrow further elaborates the model and defines certain elements of POS, such as access to the structures, shifting alignments between the elites, division of elites, potential influential allies of movements and repression/facilitation (Tarrow 1998).

While in this study does not aim to go into details and discuss the political theory approaches too deeply, I would like to use this approach in order to discuss the situation of movements in Hungary in the recent couple of years, as a result of a long process since the regime change in 1989.

Before discussing the broader political context and the structural conditions for movements, I would like to clarify first how the terms 'social movements' and 'civil sphere' are used in this study. I aimed at using an approach to movements and NGOs that is as broad and inclusive as possible, be they formal or informal, institutional or non-institutionalized, local or national. In this study, I will also discuss social movements in various forms (including union mobilizations), and agents of the civil sphere, even though these two entities (movements and civil society) are usually separated in the literature, moreover, there are crucial epistemological differences between the two. As Grzegorz PiotrowskI discusses about grassroots movements and NGOs from the CEE region, the differences are sometimes not as self-evident as they would look, but there are, nevertheless, serious discussions about being true, about the attitude towards the organization (NGO as a workplace vs. the movement as a site of political beliefs), life span (NGOs being generally long-term, while movements tend to stand for certain issues in certain moments), and very importantly:

"Also important are attitudes towards the state: social movements are confrontational and present their lists of demands, fulfilment of which means the end of a campaign/movement, whereas civil society actors (understood as NGOs) often cooperate with governments and authorities, criticizing it occasionally but avoiding confrontational attitude. Social movements, at least in recent years, tend to politicize their claims; civil society actors play a much more supporting and ideologically neutral role than the movements" (Piotrowski 2017). While this statement can be a generally stable point of reference,

it also seems to fail for the most recent political climate in Hungary, as it will be discussed in the next section in details—even the supposedly most neutral NGOs have found themselves in the foreground of the political battlefields of the illiberal regime. Moreover, as discussed in an earlier study, the unwelcoming political climate very often pushes organizations to find sideway manoeuvres in their operation to have access to funding, to cover themselves, to avoid irrational administration, or any other motives (Kerényi 2016). For these reasons, this study will not make distinctions between civil organizations and grassroots movements, as their operation is often intertwined, and not at least, the pressure from the state makes them closer to each other than ever earlier.

It is crucial to stress that civil society is not a neutral, descriptive concept, but as Gerő has pointed out, there have been normative expectations towards the term "civil society" (Gerő 2018), which is particularly important in the context of Central and Eastern Europe, where the civil society, as the third sector, has been expected to play a crucial role in the democratization process of these societies. Already throughout the '80, particularly in Hungary, where the so-called "goulash communism" allowed a relatively larger personal freedom and was more open economically, too, the seeds of the later civil society were present in a few legal, NGO-type of organizations (like the Hungarian Birding Association), and also movements with political sentiments, most of all in the environmental sphere or the peace movement. As these initiatives were associated to anti-regime activities, there is a discussion about the role of those, particularly the Danube movement in bringing down the regime in Hungary (EnyedI and Szirmai 1998, Szabó 2001). There seems to be a consensus about the statement that these movements were part of the oppositional movement and did contribute to the democratic changes, and not at least, they became part of building the new, democratic civil society in the early 1990s (Kerényi 2018). As in the transition in the region market liberalization and

democratization were intertwined self-evidently, the liberal idea and the liberal frame became dominant in the building of the civil society itself, too, and this has remained a dominant view for decades. As GagyI and Ivancheva have stressed, the idea of a civil society in the region has developed as an ideologically loaded term, which needs to be analyzed within its macrohistorical frames (Gagyi—Ivancheva 2017). Most importantly, the building of the civil society was based on the idea of the backwardness of the East and the myth of catching up to the West, which has been dominant already in the state socialist period and has prevailed after the democratic changes (Melegh 2006), a topos of "backwardness" that has been interiorized into the narratives of grassroots movements and the civil society, too (Piotrowski 2015), which enforces a perspective of deficits in the research of these societies and political structures (Gagyi 2015). Moreover, the building of a civil society was not built gradually, from below, but was realized as a part of the democratization project, which meant also funding and know-how by established networks from Western Europe and from the US. In Hungary, which counted among the more liberal and open countries in the region during state authoritarianism, the expectations were high—the motives of catching up with the West, the NATo and the EU membership as a promise to bring stability to the region have been recurring frequently. The referendum on the EU accession was advertised with grand promises—e.g. one of the most widely cited one and subject of many parodies and ironic jokes, was, for instance a placard with the question "Will I be able to open a cake shop in Vienna?" Just a couple of years after the accession, people were not only incapable of opening a cake shop in the shiny neighboring capital city, which serves as an eternal reference point for Hungarians ever since the Habsburg Empire, but even a simple travel Vienna has remained the privilege of the few, just like during the '80s, when Vienna was became a symbol for a desired travel destination. The myth and the eternal position of "catching up" has prevailed both at the regime change and at the accession to the EU (Böröcz, 2014).

After the accession to the EU, most US foundations withdrew from the region—the idea behind that being that the EU would take over the funding of the civil sector in these countries. As one of the activists, who is familiar with the early history of civil society in Hungary has explained, this lack has had a sensitive effect on the operation of the entire sphere:

"There were important American foundations who have invested into the development of the civil sphere in the region—with finances and with know-how, and Hungary participated in these programs that were offered for the Visegrad countries, followed by further Eastern European countries later on. These foundations provided financial support till the mid-2000s, always in cycles of limited terms, which were renewed, and which enabled the organizations to run the programs and offer applications for other organizations in Hungary. Then, these foundations withdrew from the CEE region almost entirely. The idea was that as soon as we enter the EU, their mission would be completed. However, the EU resources could not replace these American sources, because they never had the development of the civil society among their goals. They offered different qualities, like access to EU policies and services, but not the support of the entire civil sector. I think it is just becoming clear for the international donors that their job has been left unfinished. In the Hungarian civil sector, the service type of operation has always been stronger than the advocacy, and the type of support coming from the EU has explicitly strengthened that." (**Interview 1**)

The crisis of the liberal paradigm

While the liberal frame and the expectations towards a civil society served as a norm and also lead to the "golden age" of the civil society in Hungary throughout the '90, there were several stages that lead to the illiberalism, which, as mentioned earlier, did not emerge without any antecedents. Next to the criticism towards the externally

funded NGO sector (Fagan 2006, Gagyi—Ivancheva 2017), the structural changes that took place after the accession to the EU resulted in a shift of the entire scene towards bureaucratization and "projectification" (Buzogány 2015, Buzogány—Kerényi—Olt 2020, Kovách 2007). On the other hand, as some empirical research has pointed out, the EU accession proved to be more than a dead-end street overwhelmed with short-term projects, as it also brought about the rise of new types of activism (Tarrow—Petrova 2007, Císař—Vráblíková 2010). Moreover, on a different account, the new millennium also saw the rise of transnational grassroots mobilizations, with spreading the idea of a "global civil society", which also affected the movement scene domestically. Although this process has been often criticized (Gagyi 2018) for being elitist and mobilizing primarily groups that were otherwise rich in resources (education, international networks, cultural capital), empirical finding also shows that the illiberal shift in the governmental politics, affecting practically all spheres of social and political life, and resulting in closing opportunities for bottom-up initiatives, have also opened up the space for grassroots mobilizations and informal modes of operation (Buzogány—Kerényi—Olt 2020).

Even though the 2008 world economic crisis has left deep impacts in the international movement networks with the rise of a second wave of transnational global movements—the Occupy Movement (originating in the US) and the movements inspired by the Indignados-type of movements and the ones that came into existence as anti-austerity movements, their local representatives left unremarkable traces on the movement maps of the CEE region (Piotrowski 2015). At the same time, the anti-austerity movements or the workers' initiatives raised little academic interest among scholars of social movements studies (Gagyi 2018). This is quite remarkable at cases, such as the Koppány group in Hungary, who represented citizens who had been seriously affected by the Swiss currency crisis after the 2008 world economic crisis, and many of them have lost their properties. Since

the movement did not fit into the regular grassroots narrative and operational type, it had been neglected by the domestic public discourses, both on the political and on the movement side. After a weak attempt to unite the movement with the seriously underrepresented Hungarian Occupy Movement, nationalist-patriotic sentiments started to prevail and the movement slowly appeared on the extreme right-wing discourse, and consequently was completely isolated from the mainstream movement narratives. And while evictions of families happen way too frequently (about 12 people get evicted every day), the problem of the people affected by the foreign currency loan crisis is still a silent issue. The value-laden attitudes towards the idea of a civil society are well demonstrated in concepts like the "uncivil society" (Mudde—Kopecký 2003), which point at the lack of a "proper" civil society.

Other movements emerged in the years following the world economic crisis, were not caused by the decline of a welfare state that was never realized (Gagyi 2017) in a region that has been in a constant crisis, without a period of prosperity. These mobilizations did not address anti-austerity measurements explicitly, but resulted as a consequence of those, and targeted their governments—in Romania, Bulgaria or in Macedonia. In Hungary, the largest demonstrations took place against the proposed internet tax, education or the media freedom in Hungary (Gerő—Kerényi 2017), and addressed the new Fidesz government, which came to power for the second time in 2010, and has won the national elections three times consecutively since then.

Institutional frames in the illiberal state

"Mr. Prime Minister, it is a very elegant thing of you to ask me for help. But this is not my task. My task would be... if there was a different media law in force in Hungary and not the one accepted by the socialist—liberal government... to hold you accountable, to make you give account... It is the country that I need to help,

and if we have common points here, that's alright."[3]—when left-wing, liberal journalist György Baló died, some of his memorable interviews started circulating again in the critical online and also in the social media, and were remembered with a large amount of nostalgia for the days when press freedom seemed feasible, like the one he made with then Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsány during the anti-governmental rallies in 2006. There was a good reason for these nostalgic sentiments, as today, in 2019, such an interview on the state television with the current Prime Minister would be beyond imagination. The norms in media have changed within just a couple of years, and the national television, just like the majority of the media channels—be they radio, television, printed journal, and probably online media to the least extent—are in line with the governmental policies and leave no space for criticism.

The popular narrative of the opposition side on the overwhelming parliamentary majority of Fidesz is focusing on the electoral fraud, intimidation and corruption. The OSCE report on the 2018 elections was very critical and pointed out the hostile, xenophobic rhetoric as well as the fact that the electoral campaign of Fidesz focused almost exclusively on the "migrant threat"—the danger of immigrants invading the country, listing the most unoriginal phrases from "taking our jobs" to "threatening our culture".

The new electoral law has brought about heated debates, as all amendments (redrawing the electoral districts, eliminating the second round, etc.) have bluntly favored the victory of Fidesz. These are relevant points about the two consecutive elections, however, the fact that Fidesz had seized power had nothing to do with electoral fraud—at the 2010 elections, the overwhelming majority of Fidesz can be explained by a general disillusionment of the voters in the previous governments led by the socialists, and the protest votes following the political scandals and not at least the poor handing of the economic crisis by the government,

3   Source: https://nava.hu/id/203208/

the high unemployment rates and the credit crisis. As OSCE reported, "the elections were conducted in a pluralistic environment characterized by an overall respect for fundamental civil and political rights, and high public confidence in the process. The competition took place on a generally level playing field, under a sophisticated electoral system. It was administered by professional and efficient election management bodies, including fully-fledged political party representatives."[4]

Accordingly, as political analysts point out, the dramatic political turn in 2010 took place by fair elections, playing by the rules (Mudde 2012), and this gave Fidesz a huge popular legitimacy that is a common point of reference in the communication strategy of Fidesz, calling the victory a "revolution in the voting booths". Great success in the elections ensured Fidesz, the large majority ensured Fidesz a 2/3 majority at the parliament, which has enabled them to pass any laws, including changes in the constitutional law, without the need to consult with the opposition. Therefore, the effects of the self-proclaimed "revolution in the voting booths" after 2010 and the introduction of the self-proclaimed illiberal regime has brought about structural changes that should not be underestimated, and have marked the beginning of a new era in civil life and self-organization.

As the declining economy and dissatisfaction was a major reason that stood behind the fall of the socialist government, stabilizing the economy became a crucial point in the policy of Fidesz. The "unorthodox" economic policy was based on the financial deficit that the previous, Socialist government had left over—the rate of the national debts was above 80 %, the nation economy had shrunk, the unemployment rates were about 10 %. The Fidesz government introduced bank taxes and general crisis taxes for multinational corporations, which was in line with their populist views, and at the same time changed the focus

of the anti-austerity sentiments and started to communicate a protective rhetoric. Besides taxing the corporations, within the frames of the "unorthodox" economic policy, the government had also nationalized the private pension funds[5]. Economic minister Matolcsy's economic policies turned to be effective in fighting the general economic and debt crisis: "Statistical data from May 2015 demonstrate that significant improvements took place in most (if not all) areas of the Hungarian economy since 2010. The country avoided bankruptcy and its 2014 GDP growth outpaced that of the Czech Republic and Poland... At a minimum, Hungary avoided the downside scenarios predicted by critics, including the IMF and European Commission. The country staved off bankruptcy, and was able to repay the IMF facility and tap international bond markets" (Piasecki 2015: 76). However, as Piasecki points out, this has been coupled by generally controversial, populist politics and an opening towards problematic international political alliances. As other sources have stressed, the stabilization of the economy was a priority issue of the second Orbán cabinet of 2010, which could be realized through a strong state control, on the expense of the social sphere (Gerőcs 2012).

The electoral victory and the 2/3 majority of Fidesz has led to a massive centralization in technically all areas— in the economy, in the media, culture and the field of education, which has also affected the civil sphere directly, which in other words meant the stabilization of the economy at the expense of personal freedom, and through the introduction of a full centralization and governmental control, which has been coupled by a change in foreign policy—a critical attitude towards the EU and the narratives of Hungary being a "freedom fighter". This, at the same time also meant paving the way towards new international political allies, which has been a gradual process since the 2010 victory of Fidesz, a distancing from Brussels and the core

4   Report of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe ont he Hungarian elections: https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/hungary/117819

5   https://diepresse.com/home/meinung/debatte/1463943/Orbans-unorthodoxe-Wirtschaftspolitik?from=suche.intern.portal

of the EU, and strengthening ties with Russia, Turkey, China and Central Asia among others, also known as the "opening to the East". Slogans such as "we won't be a colony" became an organic part of the governmental propaganda—it stems from Orbán's speech on the national remembering day on the 15 March in 2013, where a parallel was drawn between the freedom fight of Hungarians against the Habsburg Empire and against Brussels as a foreign empire that wants to interfere into the country's internal politics and harm its autonomy. This rhetoric has been supported by changes in the legislation and the institutional structure that the government has built up.

Below, the process that has been known as the "illiberal turn" will not be discussed in a chronological order in details, but it is important to introduce the political environment that has affected the political, cultural and institutional embeddedness of the civil society and the grassroots, and to clarify the concept of illiberalism in itself. While there is a general rise in populism all over Europe and the US, and a rising academic interest in the study of populism and a growing literature of social sciences deals with the subject of populism, "illiberal democracy" as a concept has not come out from social sciences analysis but it is a term that has been coined by Viktor Orbán in his speech at the Bálványos Summer School in 2014, which has become an important public participation surface for Fidesz towards Hungarian abroad (causing also diplomatic tensions with Romania). In the original speech there the proclamation of "illiberalism" was cautious and coupled with the emphasis that "...it does not reject the fundamental principles of liberalism such as freedom...,"[6] and marked the break with the liberal heritage of the regime change, the later definitions of the regime were much more aggressive and straightforward,

favoring Christian culture, Christian values, "anti-immigration" and the "Christian family model".[7]

As already mentioned above, the anti-immigration campaign has dominated the last electoral campaign of the government—but not only that, it has been an issue that has been constantly heated up and communicated through different channels, from the so-called "national consultations"[8] to media campaigns or everyday, average media content. In November 2018, 476 media outlets came under the property of the pro-governmental Central European Press and Media Foundation, which has thus become the biggest media holding in Europe.[9]

Figure 1: **Main page headlines of eight different county news portals on the same day**

6   https://www.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/the-prime-minister-s-speeches/prime-minister-viktor-orban-s-speech-at-the-25th-balvanyos-summer-free-university-and-student-camp

7   https://www.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/the-prime-minister-s-speeches/prime-minister-viktor-orban-s-speech-at-the-29th-balvanyos-summer-open-university-and-student-camp
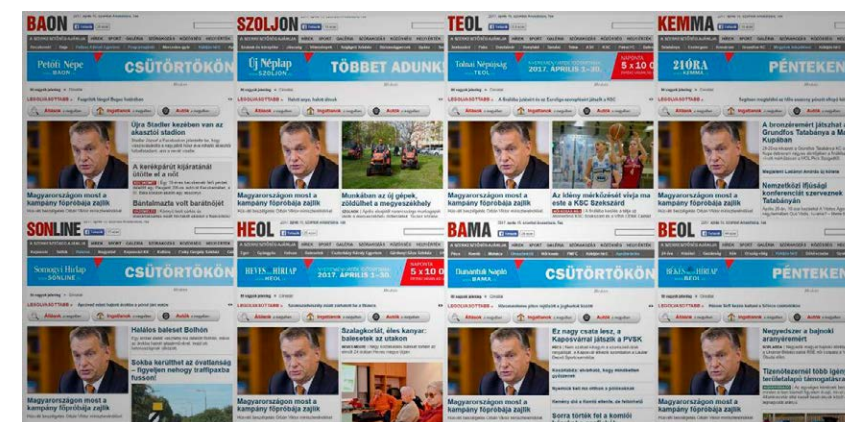
8   The Orbán government has been demonstrating its legitimacy through the so-called "national consultations," which consist of postal letters sent out to the voters with manipulated questions. E.g. the first question of the consultation on the "Soros plan" issue is as follows: "George Soros 1. George Soros wants Brussels to resettle at least one million immigrants per year from Africa and the Middle East onto European Union territory, including in Hungary.Do you support this point of the Soros plan?"

9   https://english.atlatszo.hu/2018/11/30/data-visualization-this-is-how-the-pro-government-media-empire-owning-476-outlets-was-formed/

In the coming section, the report will discuss how these changes that have affected civil society and the grassroots scene—how the changes in the media have affected communication, how these groups cope with the new legislation.

A new mobilization frame— the illiberal state and its "enemies"

In this section, some major processes will be discussed that have taken place within the last few years on various areas, which have affected the civil society and the grassroots scene. Here I do not aim to give a comprehensive picture and represent the entire scene, but to focus on some major events and more relevant organizations and mobilizations. The interviews and examples from the field work serve as illustrations of these cases—they do not claim to be universal but are applicable to present certain phenomena and processes. Some of the key agents of the field and some major events that have formed the sector will be introduced. The title refers to the work of Karl Popper, the *Open Society and its Enemies*, which has provided the basic frames for building the civil society and an ideal "open society" under the liberal paradigm after the regime change, and which has also an important role in the modelling of the establishment of civil society in Hungary.[10] With the title "illiberal state and its enemies" I refer to the changing paradigm that has shifted from the liberal to the illiberal frames. The term "enemies" is probably too strong and sometimes even inappropriate as many of the civic and grassroots initiatives discussed below have no political opinions and would not regard themselves as enemies of the structures. However, the structure of the illiberal state is effective in several areas, and creating enemies has been popping up the rhetoric of power. Therefore I have decided to use "enemy" in an ironic sense and point out the mechanisms that have been involving different entities into the political field that had formerly nothing to do with

10 Philanthropist George Soros had a huge role by donating finances to the establishment of civil society organizations in the region, and most of all Hungary. Besides the Central European University, Soros has donated $32 billion to fund the Open Society Foundations in several countries, including Hungary, where the foundation was set up in 1984, still during the state socialist regime. After the regime change, it has supported various initiatives and programs in the field of civic participation, journalism, anti-corruption, etc. (https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/)

politics—be they NGOs that had been working on professional issues, citizens who have been mobilized within the recent years and who have entered the political arena through a single (typically local) issue, the unions, and even a (very untypical) political party. In all of these cases, the production and projection of an "enemy" has been created by the power, which has eventually resulted in unusual influences, alliances and co-operations.

In their annual report prepared by the Ökotárs Foundation together with the USAid, the authors have expressed serious concerns regarding the deteriorating tendencies in Hungarian democracy. The report has underlined some burning issues such as the shutting down of the Central European University, the aggressive anti-Soros campaign that has seriously affected the perception and the possibilities of the NGOs, and expressed concerns about the introduction of the act "on the transparency of organizations supported from abroad," which stigmatizes a number of organizations and loads them with administrative burdens, and has generally created a hostile climate where NGOs that were previously perceived as neutral, have become major targets of suspicion. It is still early to see the results of these acts, however the number of CSOs had decreased, and there is a general tendency of private donors to distant themselves from the organizations that have become subjects of controversial and loaded political discussions. On the other hand, the negative campaign has had some unforeseen positive effects, too, such as a tighter co-operation between the targeted organizations:

"One good side effect of the scandal was the formation of the Civilization Coalition, which is almost 2 years old, and is probably the biggest, cross-sectoral, long-term, nation-wide co-operation between large civil organizations whose aim is to defend ourselves. Many of us have realized that we needed to make our communication towards the public much clearer and that we needed to co-operate with each other. All this

started when they prepared the law at the parliament about the stigmatization of organizations supported from abroad, which affects about 130 organizations. We do not know about the effects of this law yet, and there are about a dozen organizations that boycotted the law, which means refused to register. There have been no consequences so far. And at the same time, the ones that did register, like the Charity Service of the Order of Malta, the Red Cross or some animal protection organizations, just made the whole law look even more ridiculous, and the stigmatization effect was not successful" (**Interview 2**).

The opportunity structures for both the civil society and grassroots movements have narrowed—they have been facing administrative challenges, due to the changes in the legislation, and the ever tight resources have got into an even more problematic situation. This phenomenon has been present in the civil sphere since the regime change—the problems of early burnout, large fluctuation due to the underpayment and the general uncertainty in this area (Arató—Mikecz 2015). This has, however, turned dramatic gradually after 2010, and the process has worsened, making jobs in the NGO even more unstable and uncertain: "CSOs often hire employees on a part-time, project basis, and once funding runs out, have no means to keep them employed. Tasks like accounting and legal support are usually outsourced." (USAid—Ökotárs report)

The environmental movement, including informal groups and professional organizations, has been one of the strongest sectors on the civil scene, and the environmental issue has been present already during state socialism, and the environmental organizations started mushrooming from the early '90s on. The environmental sector has been among the first ones to organize itself (with the help of international, mostly US donors), and started to build up networks that were unique within the civil sector, and there were discussions organized
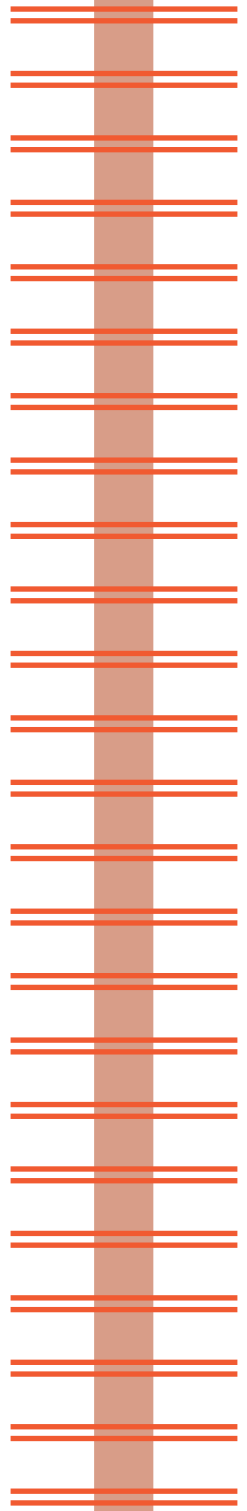
on a monthly basis, initiated by Ökotárs (Environmental Partnership Program), one of the most important organizations in the sphere. It was initiated within the frames of an American initiative right after the regime change, and was registered as a foundation in 1993. Throughout the '90s it focused primarily on the development of environmental organizations, but already around 2000 they opened up towards other sectors, too, and has been a key agent in the development of Hungarian civil society in organizing meetings, trainings, co-operations for NGOs and also non-institutional (but locally active) groups, and manages applications and programs in the civil sphere.

"The goal of these meetings was that these organizations would meet, know about each others' projects, co-operate with each other. And the other goal was to initiate a dialogue between the NGOs and the state sector. We regularly invited state officers to these meetings from the ministries and other institutions to exchange ideas. At those times, they even used to come. In 1995, the environmental law was passed, and the green organizations had a very big role in it—they participated in the preparations, they expressed their opinion and could interfere into the whole mechanism. These processes brought about the necessity and also the need for co-operation between the sectors." (**Interview 3**)

This co-operative strategy of the NGOs is important for both sides—it enables NGOs to participate in decision-making and represent the professional and the civilian standpoints on the one hand, and on the other, it gives great legitimacy to the policy making processes (Buzogány 2015). This good co-operation between the movement and the state sector was typical only for the golden era of the civil sphere—the '90s and the early years of the new millennium. After 2010 a series of governmental measures pushed the environmental issue on the policy level to the margins, including severe cuts in financing, reduction of human resources, the abolition of an independent

Ministry of Environment through its integration into the Ministry of Agriculture.[11] Eventually, after 2011, the consultations with the NGOs gradually stopped.

"Already in 2010—2011 it became clear that the issue of the environment is nowhere on the priority list of Fidesz. This has been a long process but 2010 meant a sharp turn in it—with the abolishing of the Ministry of Environment, with the weakening of the territorial institutional structure. These all happened very quickly and made it clear that environmental protection is a pain in the neck for Fidesz, and this has weakened the environmental politics of the government... After 2010, Fidesz started to change the legislation of the regulation of the civil sector. There were a lot of problems in with the legislation, so we started to discuss these problems together, and when Fidesz started to prepare the changes in the legislation, we took part in the process for some while—until 2011. We got invited regularly, we went to these forums, they listened to us... At the end of 2011, the Civil Law was passed, and all possibilities for participation and negotiation ceased to exist." (**Interview 4**)

The closing opportunity structures characterize not only the environmental field, but virtually all sectors of the civil sphere. As Gerő et al. describe in a study on NGOs working on legal protection, these organizations used to be involved in an active professional co-operation and asked for their expertise by different institutions of the state, and parliamentary working groups. In general, there are fewer forums where the civil experts are invited, or if they are, they are invited as audience and not as speakers (Gerő—Susánszky—Tóth—Kopper 2017)—in general, the formerly existing platforms for dialogue have shrunk, and the mechanisms that formerly stood behind decision-making

11 A good summary on the details about the process can be found in a report of the Clean Air Working Group, https://www.levego.hu/hirek/alapjogunk-serult-a-kornyezetvedelmi-igazgatas-leepitesevel/

or were part of the preparations of legislative processes have changed dramatically.

The changes after 2010 that have seriously affected the development and character of the civil society can be separated into two phases—a passive and an active one. The passive phase was designated by a slow distancing of the state sector from the civil sector and worsening co-operations, and by radical legislative changes,[12] which involved also changes in the Constitution, including the symbolic change of its name from constitution to 'Basic Law'; passing a new media law, which raised serious concerns about the independence of the media and prepared the later centralization and monopolization of the different media outlets; the introduction of flat taxation, etc. The active phase took place somewhat later, the departure point being the attacks on the EEA Grants (also known as "the Norwegian scandal"), which are grants by Norway, Liechtenstein and Island to support the countries that joined the EU after 2004 (and Greece and Portugal) in areas such as research, education, environmental protection, energy, culture, justice. In Hungary, four organizations have been selected to be responsible for the Norwegian Grant program for the civil society, with the Ökotárs Foundation as leader of the consortium. In 2014, the government accused the consortium for being politically engaged and biased, and started a series of investigations, accusing the organizations with misappropriation, budget fraud and forgery. At the same time, an aggressive media campaign started to take place not only against the affected organizations, but the NGO sphere as a whole. In the already quoted speech in Bálványos, PM Viktor Orbán called the NGO employees "political activists financed from abroad" and accused them of wanting to influence the country

12 Changing the constitution in itself counted for a radical step and a symbolic break with the consensus of the regime change, that Fidesz had also been part of, moreover, these changes were of explicitly political character. More on the legislative changes: https://www.jogiforum.hu/hirek/26974

with their foreign allies. After two years, the investigations proved that the attacks on the Norwegian grants had been initiated by PM Orbán himself.[13]

The investigations lasted for about a year, and could not find any significant irregularities during these investigations. The Norwegian partners demonstrated support for the accused organizations, moreover, the consortium managed to maintain their programs during all this time, publicized their calls as planned, and even though they received fewer applications (1.000 instead of the usual 1.700, roughly), they were still sufficient in order to realize the programs. Nevertheless, the scandal caused serious harms to the whole sector, and started a new discourse on the civil society as a whole. On the practical side, the whole issue was time-consuming and increased the administrative duties of the organizations, while it also further burdened the capacities of these NGOs.

"It was all very unpredictable, we always learnt from the press what the problem with us was. We had a lot of discussions among each other, with other organizations, with lawyers, we talked hell lot with the press, so it was quite time-consuming, but at the same time we had to do our jobs. Ironically, the scandal had its advantages, too, as it put us into the spotlight and the wider public could learn about our mission. But the negative effects were there, too, the so-called "chilling effect"—these processes that were going on at large were present at the local levels, too, moreover, in small towns, where people know each other, the small organizations got much more intimidated and were afraid to speak up. We also felt that some organization became much more distant and aware of "Sorosist" organizations like us in order to avoid getting into trouble." (**Interview 5**)

The Norwegian scandal was not the only attack on the civil society, it was only the first step in this respect, where NGOs that have been

13 https://tasz.hu/cikkek/kideritettuk-hogy-orban-viktor-szemelyesen-rendelte-el-a-civilek-vegzalasat

engaged into professional work in various fields, became to be labelled as "Sorosist" groups representing foreign interests and thus expose the country to potential dangers. As there have been many discussions both on the NGO sphere and the movements scene—the on representation, values, legitimacy, and on the efficacy of the liberal agenda that has dominated the discourses since the regime change, these discussions were marginalized with the illiberal turn and have transformed into a fight for existence. As an activist summed up:

"It is not a secret, it is actually quite obvious that Fidesz aims to narrow down the civil sector to merely service and charity functions. In other words, they have divided the sector into 'good' organizations and 'bad' organizations, the good ones being the ones that give away charities and do not want to interfere into the larger structural decisions, while the bad are the problematic ones that are loud, point out problems, or even criticize governmental acts. This story is part of destructing the democratic checks and balances." (**Interview 6**)

It needs to be added that next to the "well-behaved" and the "problematic" civilians there is a third category present, which is the astroturfing groups and movements. The *Forum of the Civil Co-operation* (Civil Összefogás Fóruma—CÖF) is an organization that has been founded by Fidesz in 2009, in order to promote Christian conservative ideas. After Fidesz came to power, the Forum has organized a series of events called the Peace March, promoted by right-wing politicians, journalists and celebrities who usually show up at the events, the main goal of which is to express their public support for the government. The march is organized on a regular basis on big national holidays, with the participation of tens of thousands of people.

In a way, this political climate has indeed led to a return to the discourses of the '90s on the open society and has repressed the critical voices from within and returned to the liberal frames

of freedom and the open society. At the same time, this new condition opens ways for different strategies of survival, and they would find creative ways to handle these problems. This is one reason behind the "grassrootization" of movements and the fact that if a new initiative comes up, the members would rather avoid institutionalizations. This trend of prioritizing an informal type of mobilization and co-operation of groups seems a reaction of the movements to the closing opportunity structures, where their possibilities to influence the policy making it very limited—these are the conditions that characterize strategies of movements within the illiberal frames (Buzogány—Kerényi—Olt 2020). Recent studies have shown how bottom-up initiatives of locals deliberately decide to avoid institutionalization within this system, since the potential outcomes are not very promising—the government is not inclusive and not open for co-operation or even for consultation, while the opposition is weak and their space for action is very limited within the parliamentary system, where they have no voice against the government's 2/3 majority. The stigma, the legal difficulties and not at least the administrative difficulties make organizations find their own ways. There is also the problem that PiotrowskI identifies as being "true" to the issue, which makes the informal type of operation much more appealing. As an activist explains:

"About ten years ago, I had the idea to found an NGO on a professional basis, I invited my best colleagues from the field (lactation experts, baby wearing consultants, doulas), it was very powerful, it felt like a forge. We virtually formed the organization on four pieces of A4 sized papers. We were registered immediately after we submitted our papers. The entire documentation of the organization consisted of a few hand-written pages. And now, after just a couple of years, I am member of an association that operates a school, and it is a true nightmare. Today, it seems impossible to operate an NGO without a degree and a background in law. It is already very challenging just to operate within the legal frames and meet the requirements. It

is all very bureaucratic, it needs a lot of paperwork, and you need to consult the law and the new regulations all the time, you need to have money, because you need to pay a professional who sees this through and can give you advice. In the last 10—12 years, I have always been involved in some kind of organization, I have been a president, a board member or member of the supervisory board—I thought this would make me experienced enough. But I cannot manage without help of other professionals and some extra resources. This demonstrates very well what happened in the last 12 years." (Interview 7)

The organization *Respectful Maternity Care* (Másállapotot a szülészetben!) is a good example for a movement that has emerged along one clear issue—better care at childbirth, whether at home or in the hospitals. The movement was founded in 2016 following a series of talks organized by EMMA, an association that works to support mothers in maternity care—an issue that is not particularly political, as it aims to represent all women who give birth or who are about to give birth, overarching a relatively longer period from the planning up to the birth of the baby and even beyond that. The birth of the movement was marked by a large street march in March 2016, and was followed by further street demonstrations and demands on different levels for a better maternity care. The movement claims for a protocol at the obstetric departments at the hospitals and generally the right of women to be involved into the decision at birth in the hospitals. A large part of the movement's activities takes place on the Facebook, where their page aims to invite women to share their experiences at birth— both positive and negative experiences. The uniqueness of the page is that it collects (mostly anonymous) the subjective stories from women and make them public.

Figure 2: One of the hundreds of personal messages on the Facebook page of the movement

"... my first thought when the doctor dilated me manually was that this is how it must feel to be raped by a dozen of men. This cannot be real, this is not me, it is not happening to me."

Figure 3: Hungarian obstetrics if the best contraception!

When the activists decided to gather and found an organization for their claims, they thought it was self-evident that they should operate as a movement. Many of the participants had previous experiences at other organizations, and there was a consensus that registering as an NGO would bring about many difficulties but also provide little advantage in the current political climate. As one activist involved in the movement explains:
"Formalizing the operation means the death of a movement. It makes it traceable, tangible, and if we turn into a legal body, we could get sanctions even. It was a strategic issue, too, as operating as a movement is a form of self-defense, too. And if we functioned as an NGO, what would be the benefit of that? A charter and other basic documents do not provide the necessary safety. And I know of very few organizations that obey their own charter—it is a document made so complicated that is impossible to follow point by point." (**Interview 8**)

The tensions, the hate speech and series of attacks did not only concern NGOs and non-institutional groups but have affected other type of such as the Central European University, the Corvinus University, and most recently, the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. Even though they normally function as educational and research institutions, the political context pushed them towards the movements' scene. There have been heated debates about the government's plans to restructure these institutions—whether these patterns of reorganization fit into a neoliberal, market-oriented frame, subordinating all interests to the logic of the market. There were episodes in this process when the relatively new departments of Gender Studies were discontinued, without any prior discussions or notifications—the professors and the students themselves learned about the decision from the Hungarian Gazette of legal documents. The decision was followed by a discussion on the usefulness of gender studies and further university programs, most of all social sciences and the humanities. Ironically, when it came

to the reorganization of the Corvinus University, it was a general assumption in the liberal narrative that the university had been too liberal and did not fit the conservative agenda of Fidesz. It is much more difficult to rationalize the conflict with the CEU, but the explanation certainly goes beyond market interests. After the Hungarian government decided to discontinue the American program of the university[14], the university was forced to relocate its headquarters and a large part of its programs to Vienna, while a part of it remains in Budapest. This decision of the CEU leadership was also perceived controversially, as the original idea behind establishing the university was to integrate and support the new political and intellectual elite of the CEE region. As opposed to that, moving the headquarters to Vienna entails a completely different focus, both geographically and conceptually, as it will presumably also change the composition of the students. The scandalous issue of the CEU provoked harsh criticism both domestically and internationally[15], and mobilized tens of thousands of participants at massive street protests events in Budapest.

The attacks against the Hungarian Academy of Sciences were the next to follow in this row—László Palkovics, head of the Ministry of Innovation and Technology has been appointed to lead the negotiations between the government and the Academy about the re-organization of the latter one. The process started in the summer of 2018, but it was not clear until the beginning of year 2019 what the proposal actually contained, and how exactly it would influence the budget or the operation of research institutes at the Academy. The few things that become public after

14 The official explanation behind the decision is that CEU is an American, foreign university, therefore it should not operate in Hungary. For that reason, all programs that had no accreditation by the Hungarian state, were forced to relocate, and the CEU leadership made agreements with Vienna.

15 The fact that the Hungarian government could not reach an agreement with the CEU, moreover that they argued with CEU being a "foreign" and "Sorosist" university was widely condemned—by the SargentinI report for the European Parliament, by the US international diplomacy and even the European People's Party, which had since then suspended the membership of Fidesz.

a while contained serious cuts in the state support for the basic research, moreover, the new proposal would make the research institutions compete for operative costs, too, including overhead costs or administration. The attacks on the Academy also involved openly political sentiments and the parallels were made between the researchers and the Sorosists / Stalinist structures.

The reactions to the attacks against the Academy were not as spectacular as the mobilizations for the CEU—instead of big masses, the demonstrations involved not more than 1—2000 people. The reasons for that are multiple, but probably the main reason was that the government did not communicate their goals very clearly, and the employees were left in an uncertainty, nobody knew what was to be expected, or what the actual problem of the government was, and not even president László Lovász was informed about the next steps, which was a tactic very similarly to that of Ökotárs. Therefore, it was rather challenging to organize a resistance, or to mobilize forces. On the other hand, just a few months after the first rumors started spreading, the employees started to organize themselves into a movement. Originally, when thinking about the best form for self-organization, the researchers who found themselves in an activist role, thought to reach back to the tradition of unions in Hungary:
"We had long discussions about how to best organize our advocacy, while waiting for our leaders to make wise decisions about us. In that respect, we were in a lucky situation, because our president turned out to be a really wise person. He made a very strong statement about the CEU a year earlier, before which I wouldn't have thought of being on the same platform with him. And during this same period, there the unions' movements were mobilizing and getting loud. We found it very inspiring to see that at all these other cases, the oppressed workers reached out to the unions, so we thought to give that a try. We checked the history of the unions at the Academy and investigated about our possibilities, which brought about many surprises—interestingly, this self-organizational

form from below was not logical for our union leaders. When we inquired about one union of the Academy, we were told: it is dead, leave it alone, you cannot expect anything from it. We discussed many possibilities, and when we eventually joined one of the available unions, it turned out that the union does not want to make a single step in order to protect our workplaces, to protect the research institutes of the Academy, and it did not look very promising. Then we had this idea to invite all the workers together—both researchers and the administrative staff, and to decide how to call ourselves. This initiative turned to be the Academic Workers' Forum (AWF), which carries elements from the spirit of the unions, which was the surplus we could offer." (**Interview 10**)

In the process of self-organizations there were many interesting turns—due to the resistance from the union's side, the co-operation proved to bring more difficulties than expected. And while the original idea of a union is to protect workers against their employers, quite a subversive situation emerged, with the employees being on the same side as their employers, and the unions representing the side of the government, which in this case meant the side with conflicting interests. Thus, interestingly, while the original idea was to revive the union culture, the actual union that was meant to represent the employees' interests, but instead, the employees founded the forum, which is an organization that does not operate formally (although there are discussions whether or not to formalize its operation), but represents the idea and the spirit of an ideal union. As one of the activists put it: "This is a very peculiar and absurd situation, when the workers are on the same side as the employer, and the union stands on the others side. But still, we function according to the original meaning of a union—we have got to hold each other's hands, metaphorically speaking." (**Interview 11**)

The Workers' Forum was deliberate about being inclusive and due to the peculiar situation, the goal of the Forum was first of all to unite all employees, and secondly, to express their support

with the leadership of the Academy, which had been under a big pressure for months by the ministry. As there had been no official body to represent the employees, the forum fulfilled that function and organized gatherings, released statements and organized so far two demonstrations—the first one in February, when the activists (in fact, the employees of the Academy and their sympathizers) surrounded the main building of the Academy of Sciences, and demanded the board, who just held a meeting, to insist on the independence of the Research Network of the Academy of Sciences from politics. According to the board, the demonstration had a large impact on the decision, which encouraged the forum to further continue their work and outline distant plans of operation. Next to the demonstrations, the forum has also organized several internal, online ballots for all employees on the issues that the Ministry of Innovation and Technology had been negotiating with the board of the Academy—these are related to issues of the independence of the Researchers' Network of the Academy. The ballot was organized a couple of times electronically, with the participation of about 50% of the employers, which counts for a relatively fair result, first of all because these occasions were organized and communicated within a couple of days, and secondly, because no similar action had ever taken place earlier. The participation of more than 2000 employees is a remarkable political act that uses direct action as a technique and aims to legitimize President Lovász in his decision to resist the proposal that the Research Network of the Academy would come under the supervision of the Ministry.

The mobilization of the unions usually not discussed in line with NGOs and the grassroots, as they are embedded in a different context, are affected by different mechanisms, and are related to completely different power structures. The organization of the unions in Hungary, just like elsewhere in the region, is rooted in the state socialist past, and after the regime change, they typically became attached to one of the bigger parties. Interestingly, mobilizations

of union got a greater emphasis during the recent years—they have been in the headlines of the oppositional media, and they came to the forefront with a few successful negotiations and actions. The proposed, and later passed "overtime act," which has been also running under the name "slave law"[16]—it basically enables employees to demand up to 400 hours of overtime work (as opposed to the previous 250), and allowed the payment to be delayed up to 3 years. This act involved wide massive demonstrations in Budapest and in other cities, too, and the series of anti-governmental demonstrations united not only the opposition with the unions, but also union branches that generally belong to opposite political traditions. Shortly after these demonstrations the workers' initiated strikes at the AudI factory in Győr, demanding a raise of their salaries by 18%s. Journalists and activists all across the country expressed their solidarity and make the connection between the workers' strike and the anti-governmental mobilizations from other sectors and other areas.[17] As the interview section above shows, the success of the union has also inspired self-organization and political action from other fields, too.

According to sociologist Tibor T. Meszmann, specialized on unions, there are several reasons behind this rise of the unions, but first of all it is important to point out that the general revival of the union mobilizations hardly stands for the CEE regions, as there had been never a golden era of the unions in Hungary, as there was in Western Europe, between the two world wars, for instance. We can rather talk about international influences on local union mobilizations:
"There is a different factor in the unions' working mechanisms— one that follows a transnational logic. Some of them has been very determined about representing workers' interests and have organized more serious strikes, moreover, their wage negotiations have been well publicized. There are different kind of dynamics and

16 https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/22/world/europe/hungary-slave-law.html
17 https://index.hu/gazdasag/2019/02/02/audi_sztrajk_szakszervezet_partok_bertargyalas/

different possibilities for the peak producers—they have their own private corporate governance structures, which means that they take joint decisions, they have their own code of ethics, their own charter. For instance, to start production in Hungary, the producer company set the precondition for the local branch to have its own union in Hungary—and they have made this was part of their charter. They could even make claims and set their conditions on their suppliers. Even though the new labor code and the union law has affected them seriously, they are also able to provide more serious protection against them. At their parent company, transparency is becoming increasingly important. In Germany, there is a push from the consumers—they would never buy an electrotechnical product knowing that the workers who produced it had been employed under bad conditions. And this has already reached a level that it is able to influence shares on the market." (Interview—Tibor T. Meszmann) As Meszmann also claims, it is also important to talk about the complex domestic mechanisms besides the international factors behind the prospering of the unions, and they have less to do with changes within the unions. The negotiations and the conditions have not changed that dramatically, and there have been successful events earlier, too—there were bigger strikes in the previous years, too, including the peak producers, but the popular support was nowhere close to the recent one, while today the demand at the factory for a minimal raise in the salary is all over the news in the oppositional media. According to Meszmann, it is rather about changes in the social structures in Hungary: "Actually, there is a general feeling of a decline and the middle class feels to be losing ground. Therefore, the public is generally more sensitive towards others and this is why there is more solidarity towards other issues, including the unions. I would say, there is rather a reverse logic in this process—the public is more open, there is more media attention towards these issues, and the unions are aware of that and that puts them into a better position, because they can feel a wider social support. The workers see that, too, which confirms this drive, and consequently more and more people would join the union—which is a recent fact in the last six months.

The support from the public was part of the success of these strikes, which was unimaginable earlier." (Interview—Tibor T. Meszmann)

The other unusual scene that has come up within the frames of the illiberal regime is that of party politics, which rarely appears in analyses on movements or the civil society. The structure of political parties has changed very radically though—there is one very strong party, Fidesz, with 66,83 %[18] or the parliamentary mandates, followed by the extreme right-wing Jobbik with 13,07 %, the Socialist—Párbeszéd coalition with 10,05 %, the Democratic Coalition (lead by former PM Ferenc Gyurcsány) with 4,52 %, the LMP with 4,02 %, and three MPs without a parliamentary fraction.[19] In such an environment, the role of the oppositional parties comes under questions, as their opportunities are very limited, moreover, they are very fragmented as there have been several splits and conflicts about their potential co-operation.

18 The counting of mandates has been another interesting point of discussion, and the 2018 show this twist very well, as Fidesz won 49,27% of the votes, which does not even mean a simple majority, however, that translates to a 2/3 majority in the Parliament according to the mandates of the MPs.
19 http://www.valasztas.hu/ogy2018

Figure 4: Graph presenting results of the individual electoral districts in 2018
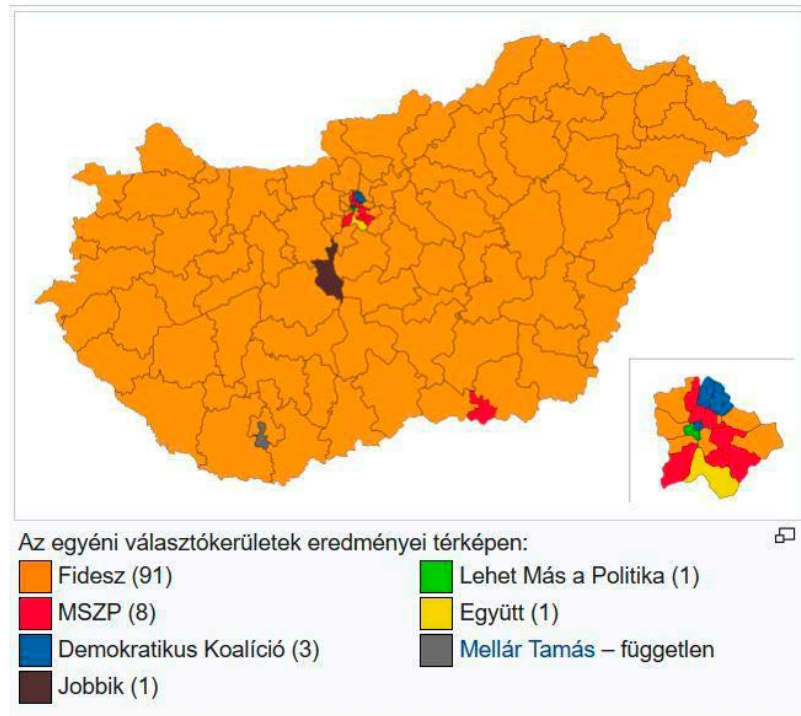
The *Two-Tailed Dog Party* (Kétfarkú Kutyapárt), also known as the Hungarian joke party started off as something at the intersections of political art and jokes, but has been registered as a party since 2014, and participated at the parliamentary elections in 2018, even received 1,75 % of the votes. The results at the elections entitle the party to a financial support, which has enabled them to run an office and have five paid employees. Even though the party is also running at the European elections, their functioning is not at all typical for a party, and their activities make them closer to NGOs or local activists. They have a strong presence in the social media, and have become known for their subvertizing messages of mainstream political campaigns of the government. In 2016

the party received a relatively bigger sum of money by crowd-funding, which they turned into mock-versions of the government's anti-immigrant campaign on the billboards (financed by public resources), which prepared the manipulative referendum on immigration.

Figure 5: Anti-immigrant messages on the billboards

- Did you know? Since the beginning of the immigrant crisis, 300 people died of terror attacks.
- Did you know? The terrorist attack in Paris was committed by immigrants.
- The respective campaign of the Two-Tailed Dog Party prepared posters with the same question *Did you know?*, with provocative answers questioning the hostile governmental politics on migration, such as:
- Did you know? Not really. Give a stupid answer to a stupid question. Give an invalid vote.
- Did you know? An average Hungarian would meet more UFOs during their life than refugees.
- Did you know? A majority of corruption crimes are committed by politicians. Etc.

Besides the mocking of governmental laws, decisions and news, and even the mobilizations, by organizing the mock-event of the Peace March, the Two-Tailed Dog Party has been actively involved into local action and community building, and focusing on local issues in the districts of Budapest and in bigger cities. A typical action of the party is covering the cracked pavement on the sidewalks into colorful paint in the city. As an activist explains:

"We are trying to find solutions to the problems in the city. Our principle is that whatever you can solve on a local basis, with a handful of people, with minimal resources—like if there is a missing bench or a damaged bus stop, or the playground is built in a shitty way, and you can easily fix it, we just go for it. We don't ask for a permission, we just apply direct action. And if there is something bigger, like two tons garbage that you cannot move simply, we make an action with a performance to draw attention to the issue. Many times, when we draw the public's attention to a problem, the local governments have to deal with it. We try to make people realize that ok, the situation sucks, the system is autocratic, but still there is a scope within which you can be effective—either on a local level, through direct action, or you can just articulate a problem." (**Interview 12**)

The activists of the party (since this is a joke party, their activists are called "passivists") believe in direct action and are engaged into guerrilla-type of actions, that are generally well perceived by the locals,[20] and many times locals would join them to refurbish a bench in the park, build a missing bus stop or decorate different objects in public spaces in the city. As their activist stated: "The first step to change the world is to grab a brush," next to which they would also take part in other civil initiatives—for instance, they took part in protest action to protect the City Park, and have co-operated

on different projects with other groups, such as The City is for All action group (A Város Mindenkié), which works on housing issues and problems of homelessness, and is also engaged into direct action, and this type of co-operations could not be imagined with a "classical" type of party having a "classical" type of membership.

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20 There was one occasion when the guerrilla actions of the party were not perceived well—in 2016 in Pécs the party was accused of causing "damage" by the painting—ironically, they were denounced by the company that was responsible of maintaining the pavement.

In search of the lost left

After considering the political frames and the institutions, the opportunity structures that these have constructed and introducing a few of the major actors and events, here I would like to turn to one of the main focuses of the study: to discuss the situation of activism on the political left. Without being explicit, the study has already outlined groups and processes that could be considered as left wing. At this section, I would like to first address the problem of conceptualizing "left-wing"—how to define and where to look for the political left it in a post-socialist country led by a Christian conservative government, within a system of an illiberal democracy, and where the left-wing position was taken by market-oriented liberals right after the regime change, where each of these dimensions challenges the concept and the local understandings of the term "left". When discussing this problem with colleagues Jiří Navrátil from Czechia and Matěj Ivančík from Slovakia, where similar problems are present that stem from the similarities in the post-authoritarian histories and the geopolitical positions, we agreed to seek for general marks that have characterized the left-wing, traditionally, and could be broadly applied. Drawing on that, on the traditional meaning of the left, based in a local Central and Eastern European context, the problematic category of "left-wing" within the Hungarian NGOs and grassroots mobilizations, as well as formal and informal groups has been approached through the following dimensions:

- Solidarity and co-operation with other groups on the field: with whom do they co-operate? How do they relate to other groups and organizations within their field and beyond it? How do they relate to political parties and not at least, what is their relation to the government?
- Organizational types: how are these organizations built up? How do they operate? do they operate merely on a professional basis? Are they engaged into community building?

- Decision-making: how do they make decisions? How inclusive are they?
- Self-definitions: what are their motivations? How do these groups define themselves, where do they position themselves, and which are the organizations and the sites that explicitly call themselves "left-wing"?

In the section below, I will try to address these questions and summarize the findings from the interviews and the empirical research. The initial concern was that due to the political heritage in these countries, the left would be a difficult and disputed concept, and the organizations would have difficulties with declaring themselves explicitly and openly left-wing. As the research results have shown, these presumptions proved to be correct, and the organizations had two main motivations for keeping their left-wing engagement in the background: firstly, in the current hostile political climate it seems adequate to hide the political preferences as a self-defence mechanism; and secondly, in Hungary the "political left" has been occupied by the Hungarian Socialist Party and the Democratic Coalition (the party of former PM Gyurcsány), and they did not want to be identified with those. In other words, the concept of "left" seems to be temporarily hollowed out and the content that is being built behind it is still too blurred. When asked directly, some of the informants identified as left-wing but were very cautious about calling their group left-wing or placing it anywhere on the political map:
"It would be a mistake to connect ourselves to the current parties that call themselves left-wing. There are a lot of people in our group who are fed up with this dichotomous Hungarian middle class, for different reasons, and it is a huge relief for them to be able to talk to people that they wouldn't have talked to just a couple of years ago. As we all know, we have an extreme right-wing government, and that infuriates many decent people on the conservative side, with sympathies towards parties like the Momentum and the Párbeszéd, and shifts all other groups

towards the center. I think there is also a change now in the attitude towards politics, the dominant apolitical attitude, meaning that we should avoid all contacts with any party, does not seem to work." (**Interview 13**)

In case of professional NGOs, the issue of political orientation is normally off the table, as the task of the NGOs is oriented towards some type of professional work. But within the current political frames, the issue of left/right does not come up within the traditional cleavages as a matter of preferences, but means a stand against the government, where these organizations have been placed non-voluntarily. An activist who has been involved in such a professional NGO complains about this situation: "We cannot talk about left and right at the NGOs, because they have been organized for certain causes, issues or problems. There is a criticism of the government, because this is what the civil sphere is for. And this criticism has become more explicit only in as much as the government's politics has become more explicit against the NGOs. If a legal organization sees the system of checks and balances in danger, they will have to express their criticism, because this goes against all the values and principles that the legal organization stands for. In the case of the civil sector, I would not really talk about left and right, it makes no sense. But also, as the civil sphere has become more and more narrow, there is something new coming up next to the "classical" NGOs, which stands on the ground of liberal democracies and believe in its values—these are the extreme rightist and the pro-governmental organizations. If we take this trend into consideration, all these organizations, who have been around for quite a few years and believe in the rule of law and in the democratic frames, will seem "liberal" disregarding the fact if they have ever considered themselves as liberal, which is a stigma." (**Interview 14**)

As the upper interview section shows, being anti-governmental does not happen by choice of these organizations, but for them, it simply means

a belief in the mechanisms that were considered to be democratic and self-evident on the civil sphere before 2010. An informant from the Two-Tailed Dog Party felt to be much closer to the leftist values, as the party is involved in social issues and articulates problems of poverty and social decline. However, the informant also pointed out that it is becoming increasingly difficult for a party to position itself especially when people are disappointed in conventional politics, and the parties that promised to overcome traditional political cleavages and renew politics, like the LMP (Lehet Más a Politka—Politics can be Different) or the Párbeszéd have also failed to do so. Therefore, not taking a stand on the current political map of Hungary is also a must for a party that really wants to differentiate itself from the conventional structures: "We are certainly not the first party to say that they are different from all other parties. But also, as the 2-tailed dog party, we are aiming to position ourselves outside the existing political structures, and not to take part in them." (**Interview 15**)

On an organizational level, it was striking to experience that these groups were organized horizontally, in a non-hierarchic way, without exceptions. The way of organization is expressed not only in their formal structures but also in the way the operate—as the evidence has shown, all of these groups function on based on the principles of direct democracy. All of them operate in working groups, and do typically not have a regular type of a membership, and are declared to be inclusive. This organizational culture has started to spread as an influence of the global justice movements in the early 2000s, and became massive after the accounts on the Occupy and the related movements to the extent that nobody has been able to tell the origins of the decision of the group to opt for direct democracy both in operation and in the decision-making. This is summed up thoroughly in the statement of one activist:
"There are also meetings that are open to everybody—so, whoever is there can take a legitimate decision. Of course, in reality it works less fluently—it is a question if everybody would get

the information about the gatherings, to begin with. Also, if you just pop up there and nobody knows you, you probably cannot make an impact. But if you show up repeatedly, if you show faithfulness and devotedness, that converts into trust by the community. We want to operate on the basis of participatory democracy—this has been self-evident since the beginning." (**Interview 16**)

Of course, participatory democracy is not and cannot be self-evident to all, it is a product of a learning process, and this is a point where the bias of the researchers comes to the surface—the ability to speak up, convince others and take an active part of a decision is a skill in itself, and presumes some cultural and organizational capital, as, for instance GagyI points out the position-blindness of the Occupy Wall Street movement, which claims to represent the 99 % (Gagyi 2012). This problem is well reflected in the City Park movement, which has involved activists with probably the most diverse social background, as it is geographically located in an area which intersects districts with various neighborhoods. This fact gives a great legitimacy, as the movement consists of non-typical activists—ones that have an activist background in other issues, politically active groups and individuals, but also locals, who live in the neighborhood and come to the City Park to walk their dogs or just to enjoy their leisure time. When the networks started to organize, individuals with prior political activist experiences presented the "grassroots movement culture" as a self-evidence, which caused many tensions within the groups, as some of the participants were simply not used to the mechanisms of a plenary, and it also came to quite absurd problems within the group, such as the tensions between the vegan activists, who wanted to ban meat in the entire area, and the homeless people, who had joined the movement and enjoyed the power of a community, but could not at all identify with problems such as the presence of meat on the activists' camp base area.

The already discussed, partly closed opportunity structures within the illiberal state in Hungary and the series of attacks

against different sites on the political map, including the mobilization of typically non-political actors, have resulted in atypical positions taken by the grassroots, and the NGOs, respectively. According to the classical patterns, the NGOs would be distant from both everyday politics and political action, and remain on a professional level of operation, while the grassroots would engage into making sharp political statements, expressing radical opinions and initiating street action. In the recent years, this has changed to the extent that the roles have even been switched at a number of times. There are known cases when established NGOs organized a street action—*Civilization* is an initiative of well-known Hungarian NGOs, including the Amnesty International, the Ökotárs Foundation, Védegylet or the Clean Air Action Group, and have already organized a series of actions, from a street demonstration with 20.000 participants against the law that stigmatizes organizations that receive international funding, issued joint petitions such as the one against the Stop Soros act, and initiated a strong political statement against the current governmental policies on the national day on 15 March 2019, which has been signed by 90 organizations already.

At the grassroots, however, there have been mobilizations for local issues recently, where being apolitical has been typically central to the agenda, as these groups fear to lose credibility and sympathies for the issue they represent, and because of the worries that certain oppositional parties would annex their case. At the group *For the Roman Shore*, and at the *Unity for the Little Forest* movement in the south of Budapest, party politics has been an issue that all involved parties tried to avoid from the very beginning. Therefore, co-operation with any political party of the opposition potentially involves the danger that it would rather lead to a split within the group. This can be observed at the most significant local mobilizations that have taken place recently—the already mentioned movement to protect the City Park for recreational purposes, the mobilization for the Roman Shore at the Danube (against the planned dam, which also means

cutting hundreds of trees at the Danube shore), or the slightly different initiatives of the locals in the so-called "party district" that wants to introduce regulations in the district that has been flooded by tourists and entertainment units, accordingly. There are similarities between these cases, as they are all nimby (not in my backyard) type of issues, which affect the quality of life of a local community, and with the exception of the inner city mobilization of the local inhabitants, they represent environmental issues within an urban environment, which also means that they lean on the traditions of environmental movements in Hungary, which contain a symbolic level, as they have been among the most effective mobilizations in the country, also involving political dimensions. These movements also emerged within the span of just a few years recently, and share many common features—they have all been initiated to protect their close environment, and all of them claim a voice in the decision-making in the name of the inhabitants.

At all these cases, it is a central aim and value for the movements to remain "pure" and trustworthy, which also means free of political connections. Of course, since institutional politics leaves very limited opportunities for parties, too, they try to seize all opportunities to become visible and gain credibility within the locals' communities, therefore parties are present at all of these cases, to a different extent, which causes tensions within the groups. Still, the co-operation with any party could overshadow a group or an initiative with political bias, which all groups try to avoid.

"When we learned about the plans that the city wants to build a four-lane road across the local forest here in Kispest in the summer of 2017, we immediately organized a picnic and invited the locals. A lot of people came and have engaged actively, we started to work together—we prepared leaflets, organized events. Most of the people are inhabitants from the district, but there are a lot of people who are active in parties of the opposition. We have invited representatives from all parties, people from Fidesz came to the first two forums but

we never saw them since then—they are expected to say something but they really cannot. There have been local council members from the LMP, Párbeszéd and the Socialists, even MPs joined the campaign and came to support us, and it was a consensus among each other from the very beginning that even though people know that we are involved in a party, the issue of the Little Forest would remain a local issue and we would not use it to promote our parties. The socialist were the first to break the deal and to found their own Facebook group, but otherwise this has remained an important point for us—campaigning as a party would estrange people from participation, because there are voters from all parties, including Fidesz, but it would bring us very little in exchange." (**Interview 17**)

At the City Park, the initial group of networks of activists has split into two, then three larger groups, which is also in a sound parallel with the political opposition in the country in general, moreover, even the reasons behind it are similar—the overwhelming dominance in power of the authorities, the lack of information, and the rise of small tensions, followed by a split of the groups. The original split in the City Park movement took place because of political debates, as one of the groups was more openly anti-governmental, and wanted also to have a tighter co-operation with the larger oppositional parties, most of all the very controversial former PM Ferenc Gyurcsány. As some of the activists thought that the movement should be openly left-wing and represent a broad variety of oppositional issues, while the other group thought it would be a wiser strategy to keep up with the issue and exclude all other side-problems. One of the groups through that they should explicitly build alliances with politicians from oppositional parties, while another group thought that any alliances with active politicians would discredit the movement and intimidate local activists. This "anti-politics" type of attitude, which stems from a long tradition of the post-communist (see Konrád 1984), is rather typical for local urban movements, who are mobilizing around an issue within the illiberal democratic system (Buzogány—Kerényi—Olt 2020).

"When we occupied the territory in the City Park, all of a sudden the politicians started to show up. There were activists from the Párbeszéd who really helped at the beginning, but of course, the ones who were posing in front of the cameras had nothing to do with our case and we had never seen them earlier. We only saw them when there was a scandal and the television or other media came to cover—all of a sudden, Ágnes KunhalmI was standing there with her lacquer bag, it was absurd, or Ildikó Lendvai, who immediately signed up on our alert chain, and whenever I called her, she would always say she was busy but she would make sure to send people. It was ridiculous." (**Interview 18**)

For the Roman shore group, the situation was somewhat clearer, which could be due to the fact that the affected area in itself is in a remote district in the North of Buda, and therefore the activists' group is also more homogeneous. There was a consensus from the very beginning that the movement would not make close contacts with any parties, and were cautious about keeping the issue of the shore ("part") away from issues of the parties ("párt"). The activists organized series of demonstrations and negotiations, and have been successful up to now, the reason for which is probably that the local elections are coming in the autumn of 2019, and the mayor of the district would not want to start open conflicts with his voters.

This non-typical situation of trying to separate politics as activism from party politics, and thus create "pure" politics unlike the corrupted party politics is also present at the non-party type of party, the Two-Tailed Dog, too—they are engaged in co-operation with several bottom-up initiatives, but not with other parties. In fact, they have accounted on negative experiences when interacting with other parties: "We do not have any particular co-operation with other parties or with the local governments, no matter if they are left or right-wing. In Zugló, for instance, where

the mayor is Karácsony[21], we don't have any particular relationships with him. One time, members of the Momentum Party came over to visit us at our headquarters. We had a nice talk but then, when it came to action, it turned out that they were only thinking in terms of campaigning. They would participate in our direct street hack action only if they could place their banners and party stickers around. This is not our point and this is not what we are for." (**Interview 19**)

At several occasions the parties that are considered as left-wing could be potential coalition partners for collective action or could possibly represent the issues of the movements on a different level, but the distance from politics and the need to remain neutral is too strongly present. But there are cases when it is not only the potential partners that cause challenges and controversial reactions but even the positioning towards the political right can be a problem. The movement For a Respectful Maternity Care, for example is a movement that uses a very inclusive language and is based on values that are typical for the traditional left. Moreover, possibly one of the biggest achievements of the movement if that it has managed to bring the issue of birth to a generally women-oriented, feminist agenda. Thus, it articulates classical conservative issues and values (children, birth, families) in a new, anti-systemic framing (a general criticism of the patriarchal establishment, coupled with the empowerment of women as a priority issue), which would connect them to the feminist discourse. Even though the movement prioritizes the problem of obstetric violence, which makes it close to some other organizations that work against violence against women, there are no other organic connections to the feminist movement, and would not even proclaim to be feminist, as the term "feminist" is also heavily stigmatized. For the same reasons,

21 Gergely Karácsony is a former MP as a representative of the LMP, the green party, and was among the members who split from the LMP to form a new party. Currently, he is a representative of the Párbeszéd, which ran at the 2018 elections as a partner of the Socialist Party, and is currently the mayor of district 14, Zugló in Budapest. In October 2019, he was elected to be the mayor of Budapest.

the activists would not place themselves on the political map and would not identify with the traditional right-left cleavages either, because they believe that would threaten to compromise the issue of birthing.

"I have been involved in all kinds of political organizations earlier, which were always left-wing groups. It was the first time in my life that I found myself on the same platform with people with a conservative orientation, which is something I never thought would happen. These are the activists with a religious background, representing conservative views, but we are all united under the issue of the quality of birth. What struck me was that when we tried to approach political parties, it was self-evident to me that the left-wing, liberal parties would be our natural allies, as for me, these are issues of free choice and self-determination. I was very surprised to see that for instance the extreme right-wing Jobbik understands our goals way better than the liberals. I also found myself quite puzzled at our first demonstration when I saw a Jobbik MP in the march with his family. On the one hand, it is a great thing that they came, and if our messages come up on various levels—the better for us. But on the other—I found myself marching with an openly with a politician representing anti-semitic, racist views!" (**Interview 20**)

While the values of purity and the problems of the appropriate distance from oppositional parties cause dilemmas on a regular basis for these organizations, it has turned out that the relationship to the government can be problematic as well. For the current Christian conservative government, the issue of birth and the prosperity of the family is a priority issue. This could open up the possibilities for co-operation on the issue of improving conditions at obstetric care, but so far this has not been realized. But on the level of communication, there have been approaches towards the movement:
"For me, this is a leftist organization. I don't use the terms left and right, probably because it is so self-evident for me. I can't define

what leftist means for the movement, maybe that we offer support for all women, including the ones who have no resources or who are in a disadvantaged situation financially, socially or any other way. In the movement we are surrounded by women with all kinds of political orientation, but this does not come up, it is not an issue, we have decided to keep our political preferences for our privacy. We are also very cautious that no party should use the movement for their campaign purposes, but I'm afraid we have not succeeded, and the movement has fallen into the communication trap of the government. For example, a couple of months ago when we got an invitation by the national secretary of health—she invited many NGOs to the parliament. There were pictures taken, they were posted in the social media, and they were happy that their expertise was taken into consideration. But I don't think this gesture meant that they would also want to hear us. It was clearly about nothing else but PR—that they could pose with the NGOs and they could point at this event and say—see, we have listened to you." (**Interview 21**)

When searching for left-wing politics and left-wing activism, it is also important to look for geographical sites where this activism can potentially take place. On the Hungarian left-wing scene in Budapest there are two places that function as headquarters of the authentic leftist movements and groups—the Gólya and the Auróra. Both of these places are located in district 8, which is near the city center, and had been known as one of the poorest districts in Budapest, with a large percentage of Roma population concentrated in the area. With the gentrification processes, however, the area started to change significantly, and also the population has started to change. The two leftist headquarters are both community bars, which are located on the crossroads of the district 8 in its original form and the huge reconstructions and gentrification projects of the district. Not at least, the district is led up to October 2019 by

a Fidesz mayor[22], who is known for the harshest acts against homeless people, and for evictions of poor families in the neighborhood. The Gólya is literally placed between the Nokia center, at the edge of the gentrification area with a new shopping center of the Corvin district and the infamous Szigony street, which had been a no-go zone and an area with high rates of drug abuse and prostitution. The idea behind the Gólya was to have a community pub that functions on all levels as a leftist enterprise, and was already founded as a co-operative by a handful of young people, who used to be active in the HaHa, the student network that organized the anti-governmental demonstrations in 2012. When the place was open, the founders took part in different training programs to learn how to run as a co-operative, and aimed to operate as headquarters of left-wing initiatives and be open for the local people, too, not just the well-educated middle-class left-wing intellectuals. The Gólya managed to attract a public that is interested in critical politics, and also serves as headquarters for a number of organizations and networks, and is even able to support some of those organizations on a solidarity basis. However, the project to involve the locals was not successful, even though there had been attempts at the beginning to invite the locals, by, for instance offering free coffee for the local inhabitants and inviting them for different joint programs. As the owners of the co-operative explained, no matter the sincere intentions, the Gólya was an economic enterprise, which had to produce profit in order to survive. The founders had on the one hand no capacities to actively work on involving the locals, and on the other hand, they had to realize that unless they would risk going bankrupt, they would have to make programs that bring in profits, which predominantly meant weekend parties with drinks. With all its limitations, Gólya remains to be one of the few places in Budapest that is openly political and engaged on the left side, and hosts organizations who work on a similar basis. This year,

in the autumn of 2019, the Gólya will move to the 9th district, because the municipality decided to sell the building. There is a rivalry between Gólya and the Auróra, which serves similar purposes just a few corners away from each other. Auróra is also a communal project that hosts a variety of programs and organizations working on cultural and social issues, is engaged in direct democracy and community building, and identifies itself as a democratic place: "The grassroots democracy, self-governance type of operation model of Aurora, and therefore the entire place in itself resembles the pattern of the cultural community centers (CSOA) initiated by the Italian great generation. Aurora operates through the whole year. The biggest part of the ground floor's furniture is unique, it consists of home-made lacquered plywood pieces. Its modular construction is meant to symbolize the structure of the institution."[23]

Auróra opened in 2014 and is a continuation of the former community bar Sirály and ran by the same organization (Marom, which is a Jewish cultural community), which operated in the 7th district, and was engaged in political activism until it was closed by the local government in 2012. Since 2017, the local government of the 8th district initiated to shut down several times for different reasons, but the Auróra has managed to survive thus far. Just recently the municipality has again initiated to close down the community bar, referring to complaints by the neighbors, even though the organizers of the Auróra claim that they had not actually met any complaints by the neighbors, and are also suspicious about the accusations made against them. The problem is most probably diverse and involves political sentiments just as much it reflects actual problems of gentrification, where the blossoming tourist industry has changed entire neighborhoods within just a couple of years, and resulted in irreconcilable conflicts between the tourists and the entrepreneurs on one side, and the inhabitants on the other (Csizmady—Olt—Smith—Sziva 2019).

22 The mayor Máté Kocsis was followed by Botond Sára after the parliamentary elections in 2018, when Kocsis was elected to be an MP. District 8 was one of the electoral districts taken over by the oppositional alliance at the local elections in 2019.

23 http://auroraonline.hu/

Discussion

In the study I have presented the state of Hungarian civil society, and even though the title refers to Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), the study extends this traditional frame and looks beyond the CSOs, to include non-formal organizations, such as grassroots movements, and even looks at some cases that are untypical for such analyses—namely the unions and even one political party, however non-conventional: The Two-Tailed Dog Party.

At the beginning of the study, I have outlined the current political background that serves as a context for the civil sphere and the grassroots, and how this context has changed after the regime change, which set the liberal paradigm as a basis for constructing the civil society, which has been a central project of the newly founded democratic state, and as such, it served normative purposes and was expected to contribute to the democratization process of the country (which was also typical for civil societies that came to being in the same period in the CEE region). The first decade, which has here been named the "golden era" of civil society, was a period that was relatively rich in resources that mostly came from US organizations, and which inspired the establishment of a large number of NGOs. This period was also characterized by promising co-operations both within the singular sectors, and across the sectors, including good and efficient working relationships between the civil society and the state sector.

The new influences came both by structural changes and international influences—the accession to the EU also meant that the US support for the development of a civil society had stopped, and the new resources coming from the European Union did not focus on development programs and advocacy, but rather on services and periodic programs, which had led to gradual changes on the field. At the same time, the rise of the global justice movement infiltrated

into the Hungarian movement scene, too, and even though it affected initially only a small number of groups, their traces and influences can be found on the operational structures of today's movements (both the formal and the informal groups and networks). This effect was later reinforced by the new global movements that emerged after the global economic crisis in 2008—the Occupy movements and their European counterparts, which had mobilized primarily against the austerity measurements.

Next to these changes in the global context, the national elections have contributed dramatically to the changes on the field, and basically all areas. The elections of 2010 that brought the victory of the right-wing conservative Fidesz with a super majority of 2/3 in the parliament have started to change the institutional frames and moved to closing the opportunity structures for all political agents, including the parliamentary opposition and the extra-parliamentary oppositional parties, and have affected the opportunities of the civic sphere dramatically. The changes concerned not only the political agents but also the media, the legislative processes and public life in general. The consecutive electoral victories of Fidesz prepared the construction of a right-wing populist regime, which has been declared "illiberal" by PM Orbán, which means a declared shift from the liberal paradigm of the regime change towards a closed system of the illiberal paradigm. With this shift, Fidesz has divided the political map into allies and enemies, and started a series attacks on actors and institutions that consequently mobilized and entered the political arena, which started to fill with actors that had previously been professional, neutral or invisible.

As a consequence of these changes, NGOs, unions and even universities and research institutions started to mobilize, and produced untypical patterns of action—for instance, the NGOs that formerly worked strictly on professional issues, got engaged in political activism, while on the other hand, grassroots movements, which are traditionally more confrontational

and radical, are cautious about having any sort of relationships with institutional politics, and aim at focusing solely on their issues in order to preserve their credibility. Therefore, the informal organizations started to implement conflict averse strategies, while formal organizations started to engage into more confrontational tactics, neither of which was typical in the years before the illiberal turn.

The groups generally try to be deliberately very horizontal and inclusive, both in their form and in their mechanisms, however, these processes are limited by the "position-blindness" of these activists. Nevertheless, community building is present overall as a goal and a value in itself.

One of the biggest challenges in this work has been the definition of the "left", the reasons for which are first of all in the polarized political environment, in which organizations do not want to narrow down their possibilities by declaring to belong to a small share on the political map, and secondly in the fact that they do not want to be identified with the political parties that declare themselves as left-wing. Nevertheless, there seem to be initiatives that have not been present earlier and also political engagements that are related to the leftist tradition, but do not openly proclaim to belong there.

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Summary

Jan Gruber

Three comparative studies, which have been commissioned by the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung e.V. in the Czech Republic, examine the state of civil society organizations in the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Slovakia and strive to describe civil society from a left-wing perspective by focusing primarily on political parties, trade unions, and various organizations that are dedicated to tackling left-wing issues, such as social and human rights, assistance to migrants, gender equality, environmental protection, or climate change.

The authors—Matěj Ivančík from the Philosophy Department of Comenius University in Bratislava; Szabina Kerényi, a researcher from the Hungarian Academy of Sciences Centre of Excellence; and Jiří Navrátil, a scholar at Masaryk University in Brno—share their opinion on aspects pertaining to the background of these structures of civil society, their historical development following the reign of totalitarian regimes, as well as questions regarding financing and the public perception of heir activities.

All three authors have agreed that the Czech, Slovak, and Hungarian left currently finds itself in a very specific social and political situation. Activities of the left have been suffering due to associations with the totalitarian past and also due to the political and economic transformation which followed the fall of the old regimes. "The definition of the left is, to a large extent, dictated by the post-totalitarian discourse, which demonstrates a correlation between the values worshipped by the left and the existence of the communist regime, as well as its association with totalitarian

tyranny and the absence of freedoms," writes Ivančík. Jiří Navrátil further adds, "Some keep pointing to the correlation between the socialist project and the current left, thus de-legitimizing the left in the eyes of the public."

In Hungary, however, Szabina Kerényi perceives another key obstacle to the development of the left in society—in her opinion, we are to blame the non-liberal process led by Fidesz, the most dominant Hungarian party. "It is no secret that Fidesz has been striving to reduce the civil sector to services and functions only. Government forces have divided civil movements and organizations into the 'good' and the 'bad.' The good are those who [...] have no desire to interfere with the important decisions of the central power, while the bad are those who rebel loudly, raise issues, or even criticize the government," explains Szabina Kerényi.

Are political parties a part of civil society?

A comparison of left-wing organizations and movements in the three countries of the Visegrad group is far from easy; this is not only due to the varying context in which they operate but also primarily due to the authors' selection of the actors and the playing field which they inhabit. The issue is best illustrated by the authors' approach to political parties. While Matěj Ivančík decided to exclude them from his paper and Szabina Kerényi included only a single one—the unconventional Two-Tailed Dog Party—Jiří Navrátil included them as an important element of Czech civil society.

"The field of left-wing organizations includes both less formal organizations, including unregistered civil initiatives and, on the other hand, extends to political parties which, more or less, help to bring citizens together," says Jiří Navrátil, a scholar at Masaryk University in Brno, and adds that: "Political parties, non-profit organizations, or informal groups or networks [...] must be considered as part of the left-wing organizational field."

How to bring the left-wing segment closer to civil society?

In addition to the authors' varying approaches to defining civil society, the structure of the three research papers differs in respect to the research approach of the three authors. Jiří Navrátil, the political scientist and sociologist from Brno, focused mainly on listing and describing individual actors, their subsequent categorization into sectors, and the summarization of their playing field. At the end of his research paper, he includes semi-structured interviews with representatives from selected left-wing movements and associations about the Czech Republic's left-wing movement, its most pressing issues, and topics of interest for the future.

Matěj Ivančík, the scholar from the Philosophy Department of Komenský University in Bratislava, took a different path. Unlike his Czech colleague, he mapped the Slovak left in the context of the social environment, respectively its analysis, and devotes more attention to the institutional framework of civil society's institutions. His aim is not to provide an outline of the left in Slovakia; rather he concentrates on several selected moments which have given rise to movements or new subjects and also looks at the public perception and reaction to such developments.

Szabina Kerényi, the author of the Hungarian paper, chose a similar approach. Unlike Matěj Ivančík and Jiří Navrátil, however, she provides a more complex and compact story of the left-wing segment of civil society. Not only did she manage to include in her research interviews with individual actors, but she also succeeded in vividly describing the dynamic changes underway in society due to the significant pressure from Fidesz, which introduced a number of limitations on public activism. She also analyzed in detail the limits of mutual cooperation on the left and examined the strategies which individual initiatives have chosen to achieve their goals.
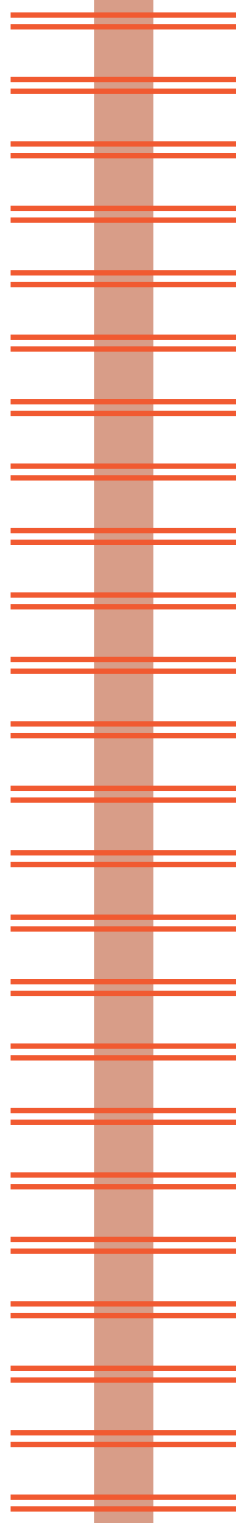
Why do "left-wing" organizations refuse to subscribe to the left?

Yet another aspect hampering a comparison of the state, activities, and prospects of left-wing organizations in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary is the definition of the left itself, respectively the method of selecting actors for the purposes of these papers, as some actors do not publicly subscribe to the left. "Some of these organizations are also referred to as apolitical, often out of fear of being labeled as left-wing and thus damaging their reputation," concludes Jiří Navrátil and adds that some may be identified solely thanks to their participation at certain demonstrations or, alternatively, according to their type of activism.

Szabina Kerényi, a researcher from the Social Sciences Centre at the Hungarian Academy of Science, claims that many organizations suppress their political orientation for two reasons. She explains: "First, in the current hostile climate, hiding one's left-wing profile seems to be a suitable method of self-defence. Secondly, in Hungary, the political space left of center has been occupied by the Hungarian Democratic Party and its spinoff, the Democratic Coalition [...] the notion of the 'left' is currently empty and its contents are blurred." In his attempt to categorize the Slovak Institute of Human Rights, Matěj Ivančík came across the same problem: "Although their values are not explicitly defined as left of center, they often engage in the democratic left-wing discourse in which they promote primarily so-called post-material, respectively culturally left-oriented themes," says Ivančík and adds that the institute has been recently organizing numerous events which highlight the activities of the modern left in Central Europe.

Which factors limit the cooperation of left-wing actors?

Regardless of the differences in the authors' approach, they all agree on the most pressing weaknesses of the Czech, Slovak, and Hungarian left: inadequate financial resources, understaffing, the limited scope of activities, and the inability to have a presence in the national media alongside stronger and more powerful players. At the same time, Matěj Ivančík points to conflicts arising amongst left-wing actors in Slovakia and says: "It seems as if there has been a metaphorical struggle for legitimacy and 'orthodoxy' on the left."

Jiří Navrátil also points out that left-wing organizations find it relatively difficult to cooperate with one another and concludes that "The left is significantly polarized." The reason is [...] the ideological struggle for support, an electorate, and resources. "There are two important features of Czech political culture—anti-politics and anti-communism. Both factors tend to keep the political left isolated and discourage any possible alliances," writes Navrátil and adds that it has been quite challenging to establish closer cooperation amongst left-wing actors, even though most of them realize that such cooperation is extremely needed.

Although Szabina Kerényi admits to difficulties in Hungary in coordinating activities of the left, she points out that the establishing of the neoliberal regime in Hungary resulted in an "unexpectedly positive impact" in the form of closer cooperation amongst individual actors. She describes how the *Act on Transparency of Organizations Supported from Abroad*, which sought to denigrate a number of subjects, imposed bureaucratic hurdles and, last but not least, contributed to the overall hostile atmosphere and resulted in both an increased sense of togetherness and courage to face the evil central power, regardless of the dissenting opinions and often conflicting interests of the groups involved.
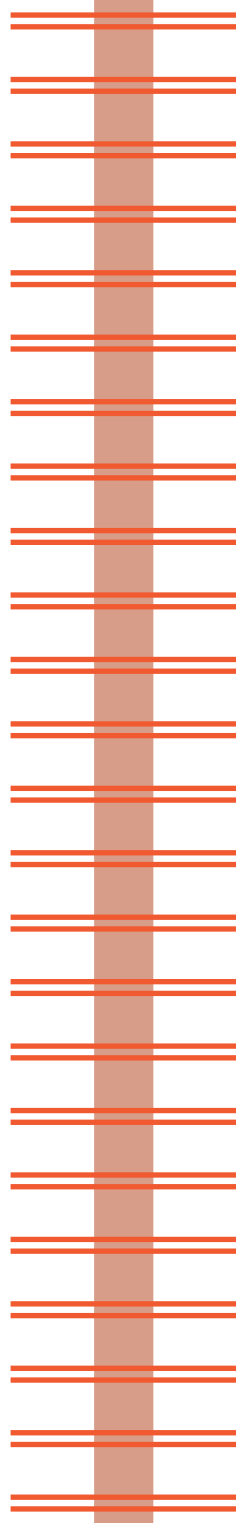
The path for the left to take in the future?

Unlike Szabina Kerényi, at the end of their papers the two researchers from Slovakia and the Czech Republic offer advice

and recommendations on how the left in the Czech Republic and Slovakia might overcome the current challenges. Both Jiří Navrátil and Matěj Ivančík return to the necessity of building relationships amongst left-wing organizations. They point out that the current fragmentation of this segment of civil society has been the major factor hampering the left's efforts to introduce structural changes in society.

Jiří Navrátil, a sociologist and political scientist from Brno, claims that for the left to develop further, it is necessary to wage "war against the dark specter of the past, which is still and will continue, albeit less frequently, to serve as an instrument of challenging the left. [...] the left will also have to fight for 'political politics,' whereby it will be necessary to formulate the political agenda of the left in political terms and not merely in terms of morality and aesthetics." He, however, calls attention to the fact that to win these battles, the Czech media approach would have to change significantly: "Nonetheless, without the creation of media with a nationwide impact, it would be delusional to expect the Czech left or some sections of the left to succeed in advancing the above points."

The author of the Slovak paper cannot help but agree with him. In his opinion, it is important to end the *anti-* rhetoric: "Given the fact that the right-wing forms its activist narrative as essentially apolitical, respectively removed from ideology, the left is losing an ideologically-defined space where it can reach out to a wide spectrum of supporters through its ideas." Thus, the left has been suffering from the absence of a politically-defined conflict. "To improve its position, the left in Slovakia, therefore, needs to politicize the public discourse," concludes Matěj Ivančík.