



## The Europeanization of social movements in the Czech Republic: The EU and local women's groups

Ondřej Císař\*, Kateřina Vráblíková

*Department of Political Science and Institute for Comparative Political Research, Faculty of Social Studies, Masaryk University, Jostova 10, 602 00 Brno, Czech Republic*

### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

Available online 28 April 2010

#### Keywords:

Social movements  
Women's groups  
Czech Republic  
Europeanization  
Political activism

### ABSTRACT

The goal of this paper is to analyze the impact the EU has had on Czech women's groups since the 1990s. Drawing on both Europeanization and social movement theories, the first section defines the theoretical framework of the paper. The second section is focused on the impact of changes in the funding of women's groups which, since the end of the 1990s, have relied more than before on European funding. The third section analyzes the shift in the political context and the domestic political opportunity structure in the Czech Republic that has occurred in connection with the accession process. The fourth section analyzes transnational cooperation for which new opportunities have appeared with the EU's eastward expansion. The paper concludes by summarizing its main findings.

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### Introduction

Since the fall of communism, the East Central European countries have experienced tremendous changes in their politics and civil societies. This post-communist transformation has been at the centre of scholarly attention since then. Recently this body of literature has been accompanied by studies focusing on the consequences of yet another important transformation, this time induced by the integration of East Central European countries into the European Union (EU). Understandably, these Europeanization studies have predominantly taken notice of the changes brought about by EU accession in the political institutions and policies of new member states. Civil society actors, interest groups, and social movements have thus far remained somewhat overlooked. Our paper responds to this deficit by exploring the effects of Europeanization on Czech women's groups.

Our main argument reads as follows. Regarding women's groups, the integration of the Czech Republic (CR) into the EU brought about significant changes in three dimensions: resource access and organizational structure of the groups, the national context they operate in, and opportunities to mobilize at the international level. More specifically, in terms of resource access, at the beginning of the 1990s US programs and programs by individual European governments provided most of the funding for local groups. Later on, as the East Central European countries embarked on the way to the EU, grants provided by the EU became the most important source of funding for women's organizations and these, as a result, began to professionalize and formalize their activities.

With reference to the national context, in the first half of the 1990s institutional access was closed and cultural conditions were completely non-conducive to Czech women's organizations. But the start of the accession process of the CR into the EU, which demanded certain policy measures in the area of gender equality, provided them with domestic opportunities to mobilize. In other words, in the second half of the 1990s the EU empowered women's groups vis-à-vis the

\* Corresponding author.

local political elite, and substantially contributed to the creation of a publicly visible network of gender advocacy groups, that is, a women's movement.<sup>1</sup> In addition, the EU provided these groups with some opportunities to mobilize on the European level.

Drawing on both mainstream Europeanization theory and on theory of social movements, the first section defines the theoretical standpoint of the paper. The second section focuses on the impact of changes in the funding of women's groups which, since the end of the 1990s, have relied more than before on European financial sources. The third section discusses the shift in the political context, and the domestic political opportunity structure in the CR, in connection with the accession process. The fourth section analyzes transnational cooperation, for which new opportunities have appeared with the eastward expansion of the EU. The paper concludes by summarizing its main findings.

## Europeanization and political mobilization

Since the end of the 1990s, researchers have taken increased notice of phenomenon connected to European integration – Europeanization – both in the member states and in the countries preparing to join the EU (Cowles et al., 2001; Featherstone and Radaelli, 2003; Císař, 2007). In contrast to the theory of integration, which studies the causes of the integration process, the theory of Europeanization focuses on the impact of this process on the European states and actors operating within their boundaries. The research program of Europeanization thus presents a top–down view which takes as its dependent variable not the integration process but rather the changes brought on by it within the national political structures, in policies, and in the interactions of actors operating in the context of member and acceding EU states (Risse et al., 2001; Schimmelfennig, 2002; Börzel and Risse, 2003; Grabbe, 2003). According to Radaelli (2003: 30), Europeanization refers to

[p]rocesses of (a) construction, (b) diffusion, and (c) institutionalization of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, 'ways of doing things', and shared beliefs and norms which are first defined and consolidated in the making of EU public policy and politics and then incorporated in the logic of domestic discourse, identities, political structures, and public policies.

Based on this approach, the theory of Europeanization, simply put, concerns changes in national politics and politics induced by the adaptation pressure from the EU.

Social movement theory, especially the political process model, has come up with a somewhat different and at the same time complementary understanding of internationalization in general and Europeanization in particular, focusing on both domestic and international opportunity structures for political action and the interactions between them (Tarrow, 1998, 2001, 2002, 2004, 2005; Císař, 2008; Della Porta and Caiani, 2009). The major idea of this approach, based on political opportunity structure is that open political institutions facilitate mobilization, and closed institutions impede it. Reflecting the processes of globalization, internationalization and Europeanization, as an important instance of the latter, the political process model has applied its originally state-level-based notion of political opportunity structure to the study of international organizations as well (Marks and McAdam, 1999; Tarrow, 2001, 2005; Della Porta and Caiani, 2009). Thus, recent contributions have pointed out that political opportunities are provided not only by national institutions but an *international opportunity structure* is also developing, which influences both state institutions (Sikkink, 2005) and non-state actors operating within national boundaries (Keck and Sikkink, 1998; Risse, 2003; Meyer, 2003).

Drawing on both the mainstream Europeanization literature and social movement theory, we distinguish among three dimensions of international organizations' influence on political mobilization. The first one describes the top–down dynamics captured by the Europeanization theory: "Changes in the international context can, by altering political and economic conditions and/or perceptions of those conditions, change the opportunities for activists within a country" (Meyer, 2003: 20). When, for example, a social movement organization is attempting to push through its agenda in a particular national political system the likelihood of its success increases greatly if this agenda is in line with internationally recognized norms, or overlaps with the agenda of important international organizations such as the EU. This top–down action of Europeanization may be described as a mechanism of certification or "an external authority's signal of its readiness to recognize and support the existence and claims of a political actor" (Tilly and Tarrow, 2007: 215). In short, through certification international institutions shape domestic opportunities, creating new access points for some actors and closing them for others.

Second, international institutions provide non-state actors with additional opportunities to mobilize at the supranational level. Nowhere are these opportunities more developed than in the context of an integrating Europe. The influence of the EU not only changes the domestic rules of the game and redistributes the available resources in domestic political arenas, but also enables particular groups of political actors to expand the scope of their activities, and to enter into either direct interaction with European institutions, or with EU-supported networks of nongovernmental organizations. As already pointed out by the theory of multi-level governance in the mid-1990s, the political process in the EU is characterized by the interconnectedness of subnational, national, and European institutions that enable political actors at different levels to interact and establish

<sup>1</sup> Social movements are seen in the paper as "(1) informal [interaction] networks, based (2) on shared beliefs and solidarity, which mobilize about (3) conflictual issues, through (4) the frequent use of various forms of protest" (Della Porta and Diani, 1999: 16). Conceptualizing social movements as interaction networks makes it possible to capture their internal complexities instead of representing them as homogeneous and coherent units. In the paper we also make use of the term "women's groups".

various types of coalitions (Rucht, 2001; Helfferich and Kolb, 2001; Martin and Ross, 2001; Greenwood, 2003; Frič, 2008). According to the proponents of this theory, the European multi-level polity has made new political opportunities available which allow for collective action on various levels. According to Tarrow (2004: 53), “the map of Europe today offers the potential for coalition building, political exchange, and the construction of mechanisms of alignment and conflict among social actors across states, sectors, and levels of decision making.”

Third, social movement theory not only takes into account the political opportunity structure as the determinant of social movement mobilization, but also focuses on access to resources. As the adherents of the resource mobilization paradigm pointed out long ago, organized political activism is determined by the availability of resources, such as money, time, leadership skills, expert knowledge, and cultural and human capital (McCarthy and Zald, 1977; Jenkins, 1983). While availability of resources fosters mobilization, a shortage of resources disables it. Activists are always limited in what resources they can get hold of; there are multiple mechanisms for resource access, from contributions by movement supporters to “the bestowal of resources upon an [social movement organization] by an [external] individual or an organization that often specializes in patronage” (Edwards and McCarthy, 2004: 135). Externally mobilized resources from various institutions play an important role in contemporary movements’ budgets. Importantly from our point of view, international institutions increase the availability of certain resources for certain actors, and decrease it for others.

This paper explores the Europeanization of Czech women’s groups along the three dimensions discussed in this section; that is, domestic and international opportunities for political action, and resource access. In our view, Czech women’s groups came under the possible influence of the EU in 1996, when the Czech Republic submitted its official application for EU membership. Of course, not all of the Europeanization processes started exactly at that point; rather they emerged only when the accession process progressed later on. In order to detect the influence of the EU, our analysis shows how the three identified dimensions developed before and after the negotiations began. For the sake of clarity of presentation, we first concentrate on organizations’ resource access and its consequences for the organizational development. Second, we focus on the development of the domestic political context in the area of gender equality as a product of pressure on the Czech Republic during the accession process, and what impact it had on the mobilization of women’s groups. Third, the paper analyzes the transnational activities of Czech women’s groups.

## Data

In our research we triangulated various sources in order to minimize the dependence of our conclusions on a single data source. The study mostly relies on two original data sets. First, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the representatives of ten important Czech women’s groups and the acting General Secretary of the European Women’s Lobby in spring and summer 2006. Second, our main source of information is an organizational survey of social movement organizations (Czech SMOs Survey) that was carried out between October 2007 and December 2008, which included 220 organizations from various activist sectors in the Czech Republic. Key informant face-to-face interviewing using a standardized questionnaire was employed in order to obtain information from the representatives of selected organizations. The questionnaire consisted of both closed and open-ended questions; in addition, the respondents were encouraged to add whatever information they regarded as relevant. The snowball sampling method was used in order to capture the networks of activist organizations and include organizations relevant from the point of view of the political actors themselves. We regard this as superior to other selection methods in this type of research focusing on the interactive networks of social movement organizations (Della Porta and Diani, 1999).<sup>2</sup> Organizations mentioned at least two times were included in the sample.

The present analysis of women’s movement includes 33 organizations that were mentioned at least two times by other women’s organizations and at the same time characterized themselves as women’s or feminist organizations. The response rate was 77%. The sample includes various types of groups such as organizations focused on maternity and family, politically-oriented women’s organizations, party-affiliated women’s organizations, unofficial alternative groups, and social service providers. There are also organizations not primarily working on gender equality but generally involved in the human rights agenda and charity. Hence, only 67% of organizations identified themselves with the women’s movement, using labels such as women’s rights movement or family movement. The remaining organizations either think there is no women’s movement in the CR, or identified with other movements, most often human rights. It is clear that there are a few groups and organizations not identifying themselves with the women’s movement/feminist label, but which are viewed by other organizations as members of this network.

Since the paper focuses on the development of women’s rights organizations over time, it must have information on their situation before the accession process started. Unfortunately, we did not conduct research on women’s groups in the 1990s, nor is any other study similar to our organizational survey available for that period. However, a number of scholars did research on women and politics in post-Communist Czechoslovakia and later in the CR; they conducted interviews with

<sup>2</sup> One of the women’s NGOs published a handbook of women’s organizations that presented women’s groups existing in 1994 (*The Prague Gender Studies Centre, 1995*). This list includes 27 groups and organizations, including lesbian groups and women’s sections of organizations primarily focused on other issues. The vast majority of the listed organizations still exist today. However, not all of them were included in our survey, since they did not appear in the snowball, that is, they were not seen by others as members of the women’s sector/movement. The only two exceptions that might matter were the political organizations Democratic Alternative and The Movement for the Equal Status of Women in Bohemia and Moravia. They were relatively important actors of the Czech women’s movement in the early 1990s and subsequently disappeared (Marksová-Tominová, 1999).

representatives of women's groups and analyzed the position of political elites toward gender equality during that period (Einhorn, 1993; Heitlinger, 1996; Wolchik, 1998; Vodrážka, 1996; Beck, 2000; Saxonberg, 2001, 2003). In order to capture the situation before EU accession, the present study utilizes these available sources.

In addition, it relies on retrospective information from the activists. First, there is a short activist report written by Marksová-Tominová (1999) that records the development of women's groups in the CR. Second, although our survey of women's groups was conducted in 2007 and 2008, the questionnaire included a number of retrospective questions on various aspects of the founding of the organizations and their historical development. The same holds for the semi-structured interviews. We are aware that there may be a selection bias regarding our information on the 1990s situation, since our information was collected only on the organizations that existed at the time of the survey. The reason is that some organizations that were significant in the early 1990s may have ceased exist by the time of our survey. However, additional information that we received from other sources does not show that there was any significant number of groups existing in the early 1990s that have disappeared.<sup>2</sup> Hence, our sample of organizations captures the women's movement of the early post-Communist era fairly well. Third, the paper draws on additional research focused on the Czech women's movement, particularly the work by Hašková (2005).

### Europeanization of resource access and characteristics of women's organizations

Resource access is the first mechanism of Europeanization to be presented in the remainder of the paper. It has affected the influence of the EU enlargement on the organizational characteristics of women's groups (Hašková, 2005; Hašková and Krížková, 2006; Vráblíková, 2007; Císař and Vráblíková, 2007). This section first analyzes the resources available to the organizations before the accession process started; subsequently, it concentrates on the transformation of resource access after accession negotiations began.

As in other sectors of political activism, for example, environmentalism, since they emerged in the beginning of the 1990s Czech women's groups were dependent upon external funding from American foundations and individual European states, and relied on volunteer work by a handful of involved activists. The former representative of one of the most important Prague women's organizations – Gender Studies – described the situation of the early 1990s as follows: “[there was] little money; if there was anything, it was money for the library, a lot of volunteering. If there was a grant, it was for our “girls” to lecture somewhere [on the periphery].”

Out of 13 organizations in our sample that were established before the accession period started, or up until 1997, six utilized funding from foreign foundations, and seven of them mentioned volunteering as one of their starting resources. In this period the women's groups were not supported by the Czech institutions. Only two organizations utilized grants from Czech foundations or the Czech state as their start-up funding; however, only one of them was specifically focused on women's issues. This is also a clear proof of the closeness of the national opportunity structure to this type of activism in the first half of the 1990s, which will be analyzed in the next section. In general, local advocacy groups were unable to mobilize resources from the population, since their membership base was nearly nonexistent and they lacked access to nationally-disbursed subsidies. The only way for them to mobilize resources remained volunteering and, most importantly, international patrons.

However, by the mid-1990s the CR began to be seen as a consolidated democracy on the path to EU membership. Consequently, US foundations closed down or severely cut back their programs (Mareš et al., 2006). At this point the dominant potential source of funding became EU programs, often redistributed through Czech authorities and foundations. When asked whether there has been any major change in organizations' sources of funding within the last ten years, the increasing availability of EU funds was the most frequent answer (eight out of 13 organizations which existed already before 1997; two mentioned the switch to grants in general). Moreover, the availability of European money contributed to the mushrooming of new women's groups and organizations. Since 1997 20 new organizations have been established, 15 of them with the help of direct EU grants or Czech foundations that also disbursed EU money. At present, 94% of the surveyed groups use direct EU funding sources or grants from Czech foundations.

This shift in funding strategies brought with it an entire series of changes in terms of the groups' organizational structure, their goals, and the general functioning of Czech women's organizations as a sector (Hašková, 2005; Hašková and Krížková, 2006: 95; Císař and Vráblíková, 2007). The findings of Hašková's research demonstrate that the original organizational form of most of the groups did not attain a high level of formalizing in the beginning of the 1990s. The organizations chiefly consisted of small groups of 10 or 20 people, with sometimes as few as two active members. Thanks to the flexibility of projects funded from foreign sources, which supported not just concrete projects but also provided funding directly for organizational development, these women's groups were able to obtain funds for their operation (Hašková, 2005: 1085).

The situation changed rapidly with the accession process to the EU, which brought professionalization and bureaucratization to Czech women's groups. More specifically, they began to operate with much bigger budgets, hired more employees, and resorted to more bureaucratic forms of management. According to the above-quoted representative: “[our organization] started to apply for EU projects; people got at least half-time jobs so that they no longer had to volunteer without pay. They were employed at least part-time and were able to work regularly for us in some way at least.”

Nearly all of women's groups underwent professionalization based on the acceptance of EU funds. If the surveyed organizations identified a change in funding, they were asked an open-ended question about the consequences this change has brought about. All of the organizations that identified the transition to EU funding as the main change in their resource access told us almost the same story. For them the EU money meant professionalization, increased budgets, and hiring of new

employees; for some of them the Europeanization of their budget brought the ability to rent office space. They sometimes mentioned higher quality of work and expansion of provided services. The organizations also identified negative trends related to this process such as the growth of administration, demanding and unpredictable application procedures, and some of them also named bad effects on personal relationships in the organization. Today, 76% of the surveyed organizations have employees, with an average number of 11 employees (one huge charity organization that has about 1000 employees is not included). There is a clear relationship between EU money and having employees, since 80% of all groups that have some employees utilize EU grants, and the association between having EU grants or not and having employees or not is 0,40 (Phi).

Hašková et al. (Hašková, 2005; Hašková and Krížková, 2006: 93) explain this influence mechanism of EU money as follows. Money from the EU is tied to particular issues; there are time limitations and precisely defined objects for spending. Furthermore, attainment of these grants is conditioned by the existence of formal statutes on the part of applicants. The organization must fulfill a wide range of formal criteria and accommodate EU requirements in various dimensions, most importantly in the form of organizational structure, goals, and cooperation with other organizations (Hašková, 2005; Hašková and Krížková, 2006: 93). As a result, only formally registered groups with adequately developed organizational capacity – stable organizational and financial facilities, employees under contract – may consider funding from the EU. This organizational capacity at the same time makes it possible for them to accommodate themselves to the demands of European grants (Císař and Vráblíková, 2007). According to one of our respondents, organizations require continual funding, but all they have at their disposal is funding for individual projects; therefore they are forced to cover costs not related to a specific project by placing them in the project budget as well.

As has already been noted, the EU pressure is not limited only to the organizations' management activities but, as some authors have pointed out (Hašková, 2005; Hašková and Krížková, 2006: 95; Císař and Vráblíková, 2007), it also concerns the goals they pursue. In order to ensure their survival and to ensure they get EU grants, they must fulfill EU requirements not only in terms of their organizational format, but also in terms of the agenda they follow. Thus their projects must be designed around particular issues corresponding to EU priorities in the area of equal opportunity, which in the current period means the *gender mainstreaming* program (Hašková and Krížková, 2006: 95). Not taking into account the time of their establishment, out of the 18 surveyed groups that viewed EU grants as the main change of their money sources, 12 organizations identified a shift in their agenda, too. Due to EU funding some of them undertook a visible transition to another issue, as with one organization that switched from environmentalism to (eco-)feminism, since the original topic was not supported by the EU. Other organizations mentioned a deepening of issues that they had worked on before, or putting more focus on an issue required by the EU.

"Feminist framing" is yet another important difference between the 1990s and the accession/EU membership period. In the 1990s the label "feminist" had an unacceptable connotation not only for political elites and the majority of population (see below), but also for most women's activists. As Saxonberg (2003: 232) found out, for example, there was no organization that would call itself feminist in the mid-1990s. Many authors (Heitlinger, 1996; Saxonberg, 2001, 2003; Vodrážka, 2006; Wolchik, 1998) cite activists who explain that they strategically avoided using this word out of concern that it would alienate both political representatives and the general population. Therefore, the 58% of groups calling themselves feminist during our survey can be regarded as a nearly "revolutionary" phenomenon. It can at least indirectly be attributed to the EU assistance to local groups during the accession process. For instance, following the rules of European Women's Lobby, an organization wishing to become a member of its Czech platform – Czech Women's Lobby – must identify itself as a feminist organization (see below).

### **The Europeanization of the domestic opportunity structure and political activity of women's groups**

This section first analyzes selected indicators of the national political opportunity structure as they developed in the period before 1997; next, it focuses on changing institutional access after the accession process started. The dimensions of the national political opportunity structure studied in this section are openness/closeness of political institutions, opportunity for the groups to find influential allies among political elites and in this context, divisions among elites that imply a higher number of access points to policy-making process (Tarrow, 1998: 76–80). At the same time, we concentrate not only on the institutional level, but also discuss the so-called "discursive opportunity structure". Koopmans and Statham (1999) used the term "discursive opportunity structure" in order to highlight the idea that the context of political mobilization is not only shaped by formal political institutions, but is also formed by prevailing interpretative schemata that makes some ideas and claims generally acceptable, "sensible", "realistic", and "'legitimate' within a certain polity at a specific time" (p. 228).

Although the "Velvet Revolution" that marked the end of the Czech version of communist rule can generally be considered a radical opening of political opportunities for social movement mobilization, this openness was not universal for all groups and issues. In regard to gender issues or women's groups, political opportunities remained closed up until the end of the 1990s. Women's groups struggled for official recognition step by step; there was no sudden opening for them immediately after the regime collapse. Although women participated in anti-communist dissent, for the political opposition the issue of gender equality never assumed salience comparable to universal human rights (Heitlinger, 1996: 78). In fact, the issue of equal standing of women vis-à-vis men was appropriated by the regime's propaganda, which claimed that the emancipation of women had already been achieved under socialism. In effect, rather than an issue for anti-regime mobilization, gender equality was associated with official regime's ideology (Heitlinger, 1996; Saxonberg, 2001).

As a result, after 1989 women's rights activists found themselves facing a situation of truly closed institutional access. Until late 1997 there was no state institution such as a ministry, commission or even a committee that would be responsible for the



issue of gender equality; neither did the government deal with this issue until that time (Marksová-Tominová, 1999). The only exception was the Commission for the Status of Families, Children and Women under the Committee for Petitions, Human Rights, and Nationalities of the Chamber of Deputies; however, this commission worked only from 1994 to 1996 and did not have sufficient powers (Marksová-Tominová, 1999).

There were no divisions among political elites during the 1990s regarding the question of gender equality; correspondingly, there was no opportunity for women's groups to find an influential ally among politicians. As many authors have shown in their analyses of Czech post-communist feminism, the problem of equality between men and women was not even regarded as a relevant political problem across the political spectrum during this time period, and this agenda was generally denounced as a version of the Communist ideology in disguise (Einhorn, 1993; Heitlinger, 1996; Beck, 2000; Saxonberg, 2001, 2003; Vodrážka, 2006). As is clear from interviews conducted by Vodrážka (1996), not even women politicians were allies for women's groups. All of the important women politicians he interviewed considered gender issue as irrelevant, and the demands of women's groups as unjustified.

By and large, the public discourse during the most of the 1990s was dominated by a universalistic ideology of human rights that did not leave no space for group-specific rights (Beck, 2000; Saxonberg, 2001, 2003). Moreover, the general public was warned against the "specter of feminism", depicted as the radical anti-male project of dogmatic Western feminists (Einhorn, 1993; Heitlinger, 1996; Saxonberg, 2001, 2003; Beck, 2000). The closed opportunities not only for women's groups, but for social movement organizations in general were most visibly epitomized by then-Prime Minister Klaus (1992–1997), whose neo-liberal discourse postulated the democratic transition as a purely economic project, with explicit aversion towards all potential political demands by post-materialistically-oriented and hence Western-inspired interest groups such as environmentalists and feminists (Saxonberg 2001).

A change in the configuration of political opportunities in the area of women's rights occurred only after the accession process had started. When the CR began accession negotiations, the so-called Fourth Action Programme for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, planned for the years 1996–2000, was underway in the EU. At the same time the CR agreed to adopt the recommendations of the UN Fourth World Conference on Women, held in 1995 in Beijing.<sup>3</sup> As a result of these activities at the international level, the CR committed itself to adopting at least some gender policies. It was thus pressure from international organizations, chiefly the EU, which, in the area under study, brought along and opened up political opportunities in the Czech Republic (Vráblíková, 2007; Císař and Vráblíková, 2007). In other words, the international opportunity structure opened access for the local groups within the structure of national institutions.

The Czech government first began to deal with the women's agenda in September 1997 (Marksová-Tominová, 1999). Pavlík (2006) interprets this sudden interest in the issue as a reaction to the approaching UN deadline for submitting a report on gender equality in the Czech Republic. Additional external requirements in the area of gender policy followed from the decision of the CR to join the EU. At the beginning of 1998, coordination of these policies was entrusted to the Minister of Labor and Social Affairs, while all ministries were simultaneously required to start cooperation with nongovernmental women's organizations. The necessity to harmonize legal regulations between the CR and the EU resulted in further institutional steps: the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs set up a Department for the Equality of Men and Women. The "EU-dependency" of gender equality in the Czech Republic is indicated by the fact that this Department was originally established as part of the Bureau for European Integration and International Relations (Pavlík, 2006). As Pavlík points out, originally the only official goal of this Department was to deal with legal harmonization in the area of gender policy. Consequently, the Department prepared and presented a governmental proclamation entitled "Government Priorities and Procedures for the Enforcement of the Equality of Men and Women". It was the first official document focusing in any way on the women's agenda (Musilová, 1999). Representatives of nongovernmental women's organizations took part in the preparation of the document, which the Czech government used in the accession negotiations.

The next Social Democratic government continued in the same direction when it assumed power after the 1998 elections. Its equal opportunity policy was understood to be a component of human rights policies. When in December the Council of the Government of the CR for Human Rights was established, its activities in monitoring and evaluating respect for human rights also expressly included evaluating the observation of international commitments, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (Pavlík, 2006). In January 2000 one of its advisory sections was renamed the Committee for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. It was composed of representatives of nongovernmental women's organizations, as well as representatives of the relevant ministries and experts (Pavlík, 2006). In 2001 the government further obligated each ministry to name a single official to serve in the ministry as coordinator for equal opportunities in that ministry's area of activities (so-called focal points). The institutional anchoring of EU law in the Czech context culminated in October 2001 with the establishment of an independent Government Council for Equal Opportunities between Men and Women, where representatives of the ministries were seated side-by-side with representatives of nongovernmental women's organizations, along with employers' delegations and the Czech Statistical Bureau (Linková, 2003).

The first response on the part of women's organizations to these opening opportunities in the Czech political system under the EU pressure was to form the umbrella organization Association for Equal Opportunities (APR). The organization was founded in 1998 in an attempt to create a unified platform for women's interest representation (Marksová-Tominová, 1999). It

<sup>3</sup> The action platform of the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing approved the strategy of *gender mainstreaming* (Musilová, 1999).

more or less played this role for a certain period of time in the context of the Government Council for Equal Opportunities for Men and Women. APR, however, did not include all the important actors in the sector. The Czech Union of Women (CSZ)<sup>4</sup> and the Union of Catholic Women (UKZ) were not among its members. For reasons of inadequate organizational capacity, the APR was not able to achieve its goal of effectively advocating the interests of Czech women's groups, and thus remained essentially an "empty shell" organization. The role of umbrella organization passed to the member organization of the European Women's Lobby – the Czech Women's Lobby (CZL) established in 2005. In contrast to the APR, the CSZ and the UKZ were both key members in the CZL (see below).

The institutional and legislative changes brought by EU accession were not limited to general gender issues. It also took place in more specific issue areas some of the groups deal with. The representative of one of the midwives' organizations said that thanks to the EU: "Czech law had to change in the area of midwifery; midwives gained competencies due to the harmonization of Czech and EU's legislation."

Based on the semi-structured interviews, the respondents often said that although the situation could be better, compared to the era of the 1990s the Czech political system is now much more open to gender issues. This relative openness of the system is also manifested by the number of groups that have become actively engaged in policy making: 58% of the surveyed organizations said that they participated in policy making, mostly through the above-mentioned institutions established due to EU pressure.

The shift took place not only at the institutional level of advisory boards and law harmonization, but also at the cultural level. In *Koopmans and Statham's (1999)* words, not only the institutional, but also "discursive opportunity structure" was transformed at the end of the 1990s. Specific gender-related issues promoted by the EU became established in the Czech public discourse and emerged as relevant political topics. The basis for European equal opportunities policy is so-called *gender mainstreaming*. It refers in practice to the systematic integration of equal opportunity in all policies, programs and projects for the member states (*Musilová, 1999; Kampichler, 2009*). The EU champions certain specific issues in this area. Issues of gender discrimination in the workplace, domestic violence, and issues related to balancing of the professional and family lives of women and men have, thanks to EU pressure, been introduced at the national level and recognized within the Czech context as relevant political problems. Only as part of the accession process did they acquire political meaning, even though local women's groups had been advocating these issues all through the 1990s (*Linková, 2003*). As revealed by Linková's (*Linková, 2003: 34*) textual analysis of the minutes of Czech institutions dealing with gender, issues such as "domestic violence and pay discrimination on the labor market" stopped being framed as the demands of "radical feminists" in the negative sense mentioned above. Instead they became "social problems" to be dealt with seriously. Meanwhile, other issues related to the asymmetric power structure, like introduction of quotas for management positions, or sexual harassment were seen by the state as insubstantial or distorted (*Linková, 2003*).

To sum up: Since the late 1990s the EU has acted in the CR as a "certification agency", and its policies determined which particular political demands would be recognized or not recognized as relevant (*Císař and Vráblíková, 2007*). Czech women's groups acquired access to the political system on the basis of pressure exerted against the relatively closed domestic political opportunity structure by the most important external agency in the region – the EU. Actually, when evaluating the EU's impact, the surveyed women's groups came up with phrases such as "[EU is] the sponsor of [gender] policy advocacy", "[it provides] the framework of legitimacy", and "[it made] women's issue a political issue".

## European opportunity structure and the Transnationalization of Women's groups

As pointed out by social movement theory, the Europeanization process is not limited to top-down pressure only, but also includes the reverse dynamic. Due to the very existence of EU institutions and norms, social movements are provided with supranational political opportunities that make it possible for them to widen the scope of their activities beyond the nation state arena. In the words of *Tarrow (2002)*, international institutions in general and the EU in particular function as "coral reefs in the ocean of global anarchy" that invite social movements to cooperate, organize and advance their demands internationally.

Until the CR became embedded in the international structures, mainly within the EU, the transnational cooperation or activism of Czech women's groups was rather underdeveloped. In the 1990s international cooperation took the form of individual contacts such as meetings and conferences. Then activist *Marksová-Tominová* mentions two such important meetings in 1991 in Dubrovnik and Alborg where Czech academic feminists met their counterparts from Western countries. West-European academic feminists also helped establish the originally informal group Gender Studies (*Marksová-Tominová, 1999*). According to our semi-structured interviews, the international contacts were not institutionalized or formalized in the form of an international organization membership, for example. Some of the groups also experienced "cooperation" with international donors; however, these contacts were one-sided, with women's groups playing the rather passive role of support receivers. In the beginning of the 1990s the women's groups did not become engaged in any cooperation with or lobbying of supra/international authorities.

<sup>4</sup> The CSZ was the subject of a hands-off policy by other organizations throughout the 1990s for political reasons, as the other organizations looked upon it as a 'child of Communism' (*Marksová-Tominová, 1999*).

With the CR coming under the influence of international institutions, women's groups' strategies slowly began to change. The first international activity on the part of Czech women's groups was the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 (Marksová-Tominová, 1999). Later on, some of women's groups engaged in information politics within the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW Committee). It is the EU that has become the most important international actor, which not only shaped the domestic context of activism as shown above, but also provided non-state actors with an important opportunity to act internationally. In the area of gender equality, the *European Women's Lobby* (EWL) provides the main platform for transnational cooperation by European women's groups. It was founded in 1990 as the result of a combination of bottom-up mobilization and the activism of the European Commission in this policy area. At present the organization claims 2500 women's groups as members, and acts as their representative in European affairs (EWL, 2009).

It is only logical that, with the expansion of the EU, the EWL also expanded its network, and integrated groups from the new member states into its structure. This strategy was undertaken in the 1990s with varying degrees of success in the Eastern European candidate countries, including the CR. For the EWL the expansion of the EU has also meant the enlargement of its own network. In the case of the eastern expansion, this process took roughly two to three years. As the then-acting head of the EWL explained, the EWL first collected information

about the existence of organizations, in order that we may meet them, rally them and inform them about the EWL, and find out how they might be organized... we went there [to the candidate countries], organized international meetings or training sessions...

Generally, the goal of the EWL is to stimulate the creation of broad national platforms to include the greatest number possible of the existing women's groups. This strategy worked well in the Czech Republic: organizations came together to establish the Czech branch of the EWL which up to that point had not been united. The heretofore excluded Czech Union of Women (CSZ) now took its place alongside the Union of Catholic Women (UKZ) and Gender Studies. The CSZ, in spite of its political past that originally made it unacceptable to the other organizations, remained, thanks to its large membership and organizational facilities, one of the strongest players in the Czech women's sector. In establishing a national platform it was thus seen as a core element by the EWL. Consequently, other local groups were no longer able to ignore it (Císař and Vráblíková, 2007).

The establishment of a national EWL platform started to be discussed in 2004, when the most important Czech organizations were summoned by the EWL to create a Czech national platform.<sup>5</sup> At the beginning of 2005 the foundations of the Czech Women's Lobby (CZL) were laid. At the outset the platform had only observer status with the EWL; with growing membership it became a full member with all rights and duties. At present the platform is made up of 22 organizations; 15 organizations included in the Czech SMO survey were members of CZL at the time of this research.

The role of the EU as an important window of political opportunity for the social movements can be further demonstrated by a brief comparison between the EU-promoted EWL with the Karat Coalition, one of the Czech women's groups that actively participated in the establishment of the EWL. The Karat Coalition was meant to be an international umbrella organization representing women's organizations from the post-Communist countries. It was founded in 1997 as a follow-up to the above-mentioned Beijing conference. However, the Karat Coalition never managed to get the kind of recognition from the EU that the EWL did. Drawing on an interview with a former member of the CZL leadership and member of the Karat Coalition, the EWL completely occupies the opportunity space created by the European Commission, both in terms of political access and financial resources. The EWL meets the requirements of the EU exactly. According to our interviewee, if the Czech women's groups wanted to be in touch with the EU they simply had to join the EWL. Today the Karat Coalition has experienced a clear decline in its activities.

Although the CZL was founded as a reaction to the opening of an international opportunity in the form of the EU, this type of Europeanization was not accompanied by the same Europeanization of resource access as that enjoyed by most Czech women's groups. Even though 80% of its expenses are covered by the EU, the EWL's resources are fairly limited, and are used mainly for running the Brussels Secretariat. As a result, the CZL national platform does not receive any money for organizational development from Brussels and faces serious funding deficits.<sup>6</sup> As both former members of the leadership described it, from an organizational standpoint the CZL exists only as an "appendix" of the women's organization in which the chairperson works.

Mostly due to limited resources, international cooperation between the CZL and EWL, either Brussels Secretariat or other members, takes the form of coordination only. The Brussels office specializes in monitoring and influencing European institutions and providing information services for its member organizations. It is unable to directly support anything beyond the scope of this activity, such as an EU-wide lobbying campaign. Moreover, as demonstrated by the relatively successful campaign prior to the conclusion of the Amsterdam Treaty (Helfferich and Kolb, 2001), besides several less notable activities the core of its political work remains at the national level; this is also due to the importance that individual states continue to play in European politics. When it comes to lobbying campaigns, EWL coordinates a multi-level strategy: the Brussels office

<sup>5</sup> However, the CZL excludes groups affiliated with political parties. Therefore the Social Democratic Women, which had been a very active member of the ARP, was excluded from the current constellation of important women's organizations.

<sup>6</sup> The exception was a period of major organizational development under the leadership of the organization Forum 50%, which ran a project funded by the European Social Fund designed to stimulate networking among Czech women's organizations.



makes use of its contacts primarily in the European Commission, while member organizations at the national level focus on influencing “their own” political institutions and the members of the European Parliament elected from their countries. According to the former acting General Secretary of the EWL, model letters are available to the EWL member organizations which they can use for appeals

to their own people as well as to members of the European Parliament and their own governments; they can translate them and inform these various individuals at various levels of the position [of the EWL]... [The organization makes effort to create] synergy between the national level, the European level, individual members of the European Parliament, etc.

The CZL is included in the regular EWL information service which, according to a former member of leadership of the CZL, means from five to ten e-mails a day. The Czech national platform also participates in the preparation of EWL position documents and responses to the calls from the Brussels Secretariat for campaigning or lobbying Czech representatives. This international cooperation between the Brussels centre and the national platform takes place face-to-face. Every fourth month a representative of the CZL participates in the Board of Administration of EWL. In addition, the CZL coordinated the EWL meeting in Prague in 2006. The organization Forum 50%, whose leader at that time was the head of the CZL, also organized a training session called “How to Lobby for Women’s Rights” in which a lecturer from the EWL took part. However, as both of the interviewed CZL representatives admitted, capacities for systematic transnationally-centered political work are limited due to insufficient resources. The CZL does not go beyond coordination activities, and does not engage in other activities such as direct lobbying of EU politicians, though it does lobby Czech representatives. Although opportunities exist to participate in the European political process through the EWL, the national platform lacks the organizational capacity to actually take advantage of these opportunities. As a result, Czech organizations turn to the EWL for support relatively rarely. The exception was a campaign by the organization Gender Studies in support of the International Day of Gender Equality, in which it drew on support from EWL member groups in other EU countries (Císař and Vráblíková, 2007).

## Conclusion

This paper has focused on the Europeanization of women’s groups in the CR. We first introduced social movement theory alongside the mainstream theory of Europeanization. In this perspective, Europeanization functions not only in the form of top-down influence by the EU on domestic politics, but also works as an international opportunity structure that encourages the transnational activities of non-state actors. The paper has analyzed the Europeanization of Czech women’s groups in three conceptual dimensions considered by social movement theory as important factors influencing the mobilization of social movements. First, we focused on changes in women’s groups’ access to resources; second, we analyzed the groups’ changing access to domestic political institutions; third, we studied international opportunities for political mobilization.

The paper demonstrated that the CR’s accession to the EU brought dramatic changes for the Czech women’s movement. It is no exaggeration to say that the process of Europeanization was even more significant for this activist sector than the preceding, obviously critical process of post-communist democratization. The political opportunity structure in particular remained closed for women’s activists during the early transition period. We observed a gradual opening of the domestic political opportunity structure only as a result of demands placed upon the CR by the EU during the course of the accession process. The result was the opening of several access points into the political system through which women’s organizations have managed to enter the policy process. At the same time, the EU acted in effect as a certification agency that helped to legitimize the demands of women’s groups in the eyes of the local political elite.

The expansion of the EU has also brought new opportunities for women’s groups to enter the European policy process through the EWL. The membership requirements for this European-wide network of women’s organizations introduced motives for cooperation into the domestic field of women’s activism. Membership in the EWL further provides a way to make use of support offered by women’s organizations from other member states in the EU. So far, however, this potential is being tapped only to a limited extent. The reason for this is the limitations on the organizational resources of the Czech groups.

A no less important influence of the EU was that of resource access. At the beginning of the 1990s women’s groups suffered from a lack of money, since they received funding neither from the state nor from individual contributions. EU resources brought to the Czech women’s groups’ a large amount of funding later on. By the end of the 1990s this had begun to play an increasingly important role in the budgets of Czech women’s groups, and significantly contributed to the organizational transformation of many of them. Requirements attached to EU funding led to the professionalization and formalization of almost all the recipient organizations, and financially helped establish a number of new organizations.

Summed up, the Europeanization process can generally be considered to have been beneficial for Czech women’s organizations. Indeed, most of the interviewed groups viewed the EU’s general influence to be a positive contribution for them. At the same time, the influence of the EU cannot be seen uncritically, since it also brought some specific aspects which are seen in a rather negative way by the activists. The representatives of the observed groups pointed out their ‘professionalization’ which made them move away from volunteering and informal friendly relations to a more business-like logic of functioning. Some of the critics also point out the EU influence on the groups’ agenda. According to them, due to the resource mechanisms that the EU has at its disposal, Czech feminism and women’s issues are made to mirror the EU agenda. Furthermore, the implementation of EU gender policy is criticized as a mere superficial fulfillment of the EU requirements. The above-mentioned institutions established to deal with the issue of gender equality are often perceived as nonfunctional, weak, and ineffective (Pavlík, 2006; Linková, 2003; Hašková, 2005). Finally, financial dependence on EU funding can be dangerous for

the groups in the long run. There is no guarantee that a group will continue to receive funding. Hence, women's groups may face financial uncertainty, and may find itself fully funded by the EU one day, and closing down their offices the next.

## Acknowledgement

This study has been prepared as part of the research projects Political Parties and Representation of Interests in Contemporary European Democracies (MSM 0021622407) and Electoral Cycle in Central and Eastern Europe: Agents and Strategies.

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