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THE “MISSING LINK”

Exploring organized interests in post-communist policy-making

Michael Dobbins and Rafał Riedel

In this book, we embark on a journey through the highly complicated and diverse world of interest organizations in post-communist Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). Great scholarly effort and passion have been dedicated to understanding how CEE countries have tackled the unprecedented simultaneous transformation from one-party monopolies to democratic political institutions, from communism to capitalism and, in many cases, the establishment of new nation-states (Bruszt & Stark, 1998; Hellman, 1998; Merkel, 1999; Offe, 1994; Ramet, 2010; Rose, 2008). Countless scholars have comparatively analysed the evolution of formal political and electoral institutions (Beliaev, 2006; Dimitrov et al., 2006; Easter, 1997), emerging party systems (Grzymała-Busse, 2003; Kitschelt et al., 1999; Lewis, 2006; McAllister & White 2007) as well as the impact of Europeanization on institutions and policy-making in CEE (Ágh, 1999; Goetz & Wollmann, 2001; Grabbe, 2001; Rupnik & Zielonka 2013; Zielonka, 2007; Zubek, 2011). Entire academic journals, books, conferences, symposiums and seminars are dedicated to better understanding the challenges of post-communism, spanning from their integration into world economies, tensions between desires for national sovereignty and Europeanization, managing ethnic conflicts, and the daunting ongoing reform processes in individual policy areas such as social policy and pensions, agriculture, education, the environment and healthcare, to only name a few.

Despite the impressive wealth of knowledge on the region, the previous literature has arguably not focused sufficiently on organized interests as key players in post-communist democracies. This is surprising because organized interests – as major conveyors of citizens’ inputs into the political process – can be regarded as a precondition of democracy (Dahl, 1971) and facilitator of democratic transitions (Linz, 1990; Schmitter, 1992). Organized interests can legitimize political decision-making by enabling the flow of citizens’ preferences and expertise in

the process. However, the governmental process may also be undermined when certain groups, in particular those engaging in particularistic rent-seeking (Olson, 1965), acquire monopolistic positions and continuously assert their demands (Dür & De Bièvre, 2007) to the detriment of other broader civic interests. Moreover, democracy may suffer when channels of interest intermediation are weak, dysfunctional or biased towards singular interests.

Organized interests and civil society in general are burdened with a difficult legacy in CEE. Under communism, political parties turned organized interests into their own appendages and held monopolies over participatory politics. One major facet of the communist experience was the compromised public sphere. While communist regimes indeed promoted a variety of civic organizations – from sports associations to youth movements – participation in these organizations was often mandatory and highly regulated by state authorities. Other independent alternatives were either marginalized or outlawed. As a result, the transition countries initially suffered from a constrained “civic infrastructure” (Pop-Eleches & Tucker, 2011).

This historical oppression of civic participation outside the party apparatus has reinforced the view that organized interests are weak and fragmented in the CEE (Ekiert & Foa, 2011; Howard, 2003). However, the events of 30 years ago generally are considered an enormous triumph of previously suppressed civil societies. In essentially all post-communist countries, civic movements which sought confrontation with communist regimes and gained momentum in the late 1980s ultimately brought communism to its knees. For example, the anti-communist opposition in Poland was fuelled by the Catholic Church and the *Solidarność* workers’ movement, both of which succeeded in gaining concessions from the communist party and a seat at the table during round-table negotiations. In Czechoslovakia and Hungary, civic groups consisting of academics, students, artists as well as common citizens also formed alliances with trade unions to call for a softening of Soviet control. Already in the late 1970s, Czechoslovak anti-communists coalescing around the idea of human rights, tolerance and free speech signed the Charter 77 document, paving the way towards the breakdown of the communist system. In the former Yugoslavia, a combination of social justice and nationalist-separatist movements put the individual republics on a pathway to independence and democratization. Hence, diverse civil society movements defied political oppression and ultimately achieved what had seemed unthinkable only a few years before (see Ekiert & Kubin, 1998).

Nevertheless, the path-breaking year of 1989 cannot be automatically taken for granted as the permanent victory of civil societies over dysfunctional state apparatuses. Robert Putnam, a giant of social capital studies, expressed a less favourable opinion about post-communist civic societies in the early transformation phase:

(...) the formerly Communist societies had weak civic traditions before the advent of Communism, and totalitarian rule abused even that limited

stock of social capital. Without norms of reciprocity and networks of civic engagement (...) amoral familialism, clientelism, lawlessness, ineffective government, and economic stagnation – seems likelier than successful democratization (...).

(1993, p. 183)

This weak historical starting point for organizational life was compounded by the post-1989 political and economic trajectory. Socialist welfare states were dismantled, harsh neoliberal policies introduced, and key pre-existing industries struggled to survive. At the political level, new parties emerged to confront the gargantuan task of pushing through reforms which would often bring about many short-term losers (e.g. striking workers, former state bureaucrats, pensioners, to name a few), while long-term gains remained uncertain (Hellman, 1997). This unsurprisingly often led to widespread disenchantment and, in some cases, the return of neo-authoritarianism or illiberal populism (Bustikova & Guasti, 2017; Ekiert et al., 2007; Greskovits, 2015; Sata & Karolewski, 2020).

Strong workers’ organizations and unionism – arguably one of the positive characteristics of communist societies – also succumbed to the turbulent changes of the early 1990s. Aside from the special case of Slovenia, which managed to sustain a relatively lively organized interest landscape and civil society under communism and a vibrant labour movement in its aftermath (see Jahn, 2016; Stanojević, 2011), the collapse of communism generally heralded the at least partial decline of traditional trade unions as a voice of workers. The leadership of many organizations was also weakened (Nielsen et al., 1995, p. 29), since many appointees were technical experts who held similar positions during the communist control. Hence, the path dependence of old forms of interest intermediation exemplified in the revitalization of old networks and behavioural patterns often delayed the emergence of fully fledged systems of interest representation (*ibid.*, pp. 29–30).

Indeed, the defining features of CEE civil society after 1989 were low membership levels, low participation in associational life, low trust in organized civil society and weak consultative procedures (Borragán, 2004; Kostelka, 2014; Ost, 2011). Paradoxically, one could argue that the relatively successful democratization process initially driven by civil society mobilization was carried out by strong public institutions and public servants without genuine civil society input. In other words, it was ultimately technocratically operating executives largely insulated from civic participation who steered these fragile democracies through the unprecedented manifold challenges of post-communism (Dimitrov et al., 2006). At least in the 1990s, there seemed to be little space left for common citizens – most of whom were simply struggling to make ends meet – to voice their demands in the political process by means of organized mobilization. Hence, numerous authors argue that post-communist politics has become “over-parliamentarized” and “over-particized” (Borragán, 2004; Grzymała-Busse, 2003; Rueschemeyer et al., 1998) and dominated by state authorities (Zubek,

2011). In the region, there has been a widespread perception of party politics as the embodiment of participatory politics (Borrogán, 2006, p. 150). This falls in line with the previously observed weakness of corporatist, dialogue-oriented structures in the region (see Ost, 2011). As Borrogán (2004) argues, the rules of consensual democracy that evolved in the West during lengthy periods of political and economic stability are inapplicable in the post-communist context. The triumph of neoliberalism over communism and the radical reforms which rattled nearly every sector of society in the 1990s were not conducive for balanced relations between the market, state and society as a whole (Borrogán, 2006). Twenty-five years ago, Ágh (1996) already lamented a “missing middle” after the collapse of communism, thus an absence of institutions, which systematically and effectively channel civic interests into the policy-making process. More recently, scholars have argued that the continued prevalence of technocratic executives (Zubek, 2005), private clientelistic networks (Pleines, 2004), the ongoing legacy of the demoralization of citizens under communism and widespread apathy towards the political process (Cox, 2012; Kostelka, 2014; Pop-Eleches & Tucker, 2011) still stand in the way of participative democracy and functional interest representation in the region.

Yet there are also good reasons to doubt the “weak civil society hypothesis”. For example, Foa and Ekiert (2017) argue that many post-communist societies display vigorous public spheres and active civic society organizations, which due to their strong linkages to transnational civic networks are able to shape domestic policies (2017, p. 419). An alternative view of the authoritarian heritage is that communist regimes did not simply repress independent social and political organizations, but actively built their own associational structures, which may still provide an arena for the subsequent development of civic life. Even though the communist systems as such were highly undemocratic, the micro-level of associational life still offered some space for civic engagement. And while the associational structures of the communist era have indeed weakened, they are still there and being supplemented by new organizations, networks and initiatives.

Along these lines, Fink-Hafner (1998) put forward the optimistic hypothesis that CEE is experiencing the “reinvention of civil society” on the bedrocks of the past, reflected in a manifest growth of new forms and strategies of collective interest representation. Supporting this argument, numerous scholars have empirically shown that organized interests have rapidly developed in CEE (Duvanová, 2007; Fink-Hafner, 1998; Labanino et al., 2020; Rose-Ackerman, 2007; Rozbicka & Kamiński 2021; Wallace et al., 2012). This view is backed by numerous analyses on the density of membership in civic organizations (Fink-Hafner, 1998; Howard, 2003; Petrova & Tarrow, 2007; Rueschemeyer, 1998), and the regulatory constraints imposed on unfettered lobbying activities in the region (McGrath, 2008; Vargovčíková, 2017).

Thus, there is also a good argument that the strength of organized interests and civil society has been underestimated. This may be even more the case in view of the European integration process, which many post-communist

countries underwent. The European Union (EU) accession negotiations brought about a new array of organized interests aiming to impact the negotiation process by lobbying national governments. Accession also led to processes of diffusion, learning, adaptation to European models and repertoires (Grabbe, 2001), not only with regard to individual policies but also for interest groups as organizations. As Carmin (2010) shows, the EU and other transnational organizations constitute a crucial source of funding for CEE interest groups. Along these lines, European umbrella organizations (see Hanegraaff & van der Ploeg, 2020) may also enhance ties with like-minded actors and function as sources of information, resources and expertise for post-communist interest organizations. This may facilitate their professionalization and strengthen their bargaining position vis-à-vis national governments. In contrast, it is also plausible that CEE interest groups (in particular business interests) shifted their lobbying activities to Brussels and thus potentially altered national opportunity structures (Borragán, 2004). Altogether though, the general tenor in the literature is that the EU has conveyed new norms, ideas and collective understandings to CEE interest groups, while upgrading their means for action in national political settings (Fagan & Kopecký, 2017; Guasti, 2016; Vándor et al., 2017).

1 Aim and structure of the book

In recent years, various scholars have made crucial contributions to our understanding of civic participation and mobilization and their determinants as key parts of the elements of the post-communist democratization process (Guasti, 2016; Mansfeldová et al., 2004; Rakušanová, 2005; Vráblíková, 2009, 2014). Other noteworthy studies have comparably explored protest movements in the region before, during (Ekiert & Kubin, 1998) and after the collapse of communism (Císař & Vráblíková, 2012, 2019). However, we are convinced that there are still large gaps in the research, especially when it comes to organized interests in concrete policy-making processes. In other words, we have learned a lot about how, when and why civil society mobilizes in the post-communist context, but our understanding of how organized groups of citizens, professionals and businesses actually shape policy in the region is still limited.

This book positions itself in the growing body of advanced contemporary research on interest groups (Baumgartner et al., 2009; Eising, 2008; Klüver, 2012; Baumgartner & Leech, 1998; Mahoney, 2007) to partially overcome this research gap. Like social or civic movements, interest groups are characterized by their fragmented nature and heterogeneity (Eising, 2008), resulting also in a multitude of terms such as “special interest organizations”, “lobbying groups”, “advocacy associations”, “NGOs” and “civic groups”. What they all have in common and distinguishes them from looser social movements is that they are organized groups pursuing political interests by seeking to influence political decision-making processes. Eising argues that three attributes are inherent to interest groups: “organization, political interest, and informality” (2008, p. 5).

Organization means that they strive to “influence policy outcomes (...). Political interest refers to attempts (...) to push public policy in one direction or another on the behalf of constituencies or a general political idea” while “[i]nformality relates to the fact that interest groups do not normally seek public office but pursue their goals through informal interactions with politicians and bureaucrats” (Eising, 2008, p. 5).

Indeed, numerous existing studies have grappled with the role of interest groups in CEE politics (Cox & Vass, 2000; Fink-Hafner, 1998; Gallai et al., 2015; Novak & Fink-Hafner, 2019), their relations with the state (Cox & Vass, 2000) and parliamentary representation (Fink-Hafner, 2011). Other scholars have explored the activities of interest groups from the post-communist region in the European policy-making arena (Obradovic & Pleines, 2007; Pleines, 2010; Novak & Lajh, 2018), or vice versa, the impact of Europeanization on CEE interest groups (Fink-Hafner et al., 2015). However, most previous studies focus only on individual countries (most frequently Slovenia) or policies (see Roberts, 2009, for healthcare) and thus often lack a comparative focus. Therefore, there are still numerous open avenues for comparative research, which the authors of the book chapters wish to embark on. In doing so, they shall move beyond normative and theoretical discussions on civil society in the region and assess the actual role of organized interests as the concrete “embodiment” of civil society in the region.

No single work can cover the entire breadth and heterogeneity of organizational activity and interest groups politics. After all, thousands of large and small interest organizations operate in countless areas of public policy in the enormously heterogeneous post-communist sphere spanning from Vladivostok to Berlin. Therefore, we narrowed down the scope of the book to four countries, three policy areas and four overarching questions in order to ensure a certain degree of coherence, while also still enabling us to grasp the diversity of interest group politics in the region.

Our case selection comprises four post-communist countries – the **Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovenia**. They are similar regarding a wide range of broader features (e.g. post-communist democracies, new market economies, middle-income countries, EU members), but differ starkly on three decisive characteristics for interest group politics: election funding, lobbying regulations and economic coordination. The Czech Republic is a highly open market economy with privately funded elections and weaker lobbying regulations (McGrath, 2008; Šimral, 2015) and thus potentially more penetrable by organized interests. Poland also is a relatively liberal and weakly coordinated market economy. However, elections are publicly funded, and extensive lobbying regulations exist, which may stymie the influence of interest groups (McGrath, 2008). Hungary exhibits stronger market coordination (Duman & Kureková, 2012; Tarlea, 2017), whereby elections are publicly funded, and lobbying activities relatively tightly monitored (Ikstens et al., 2002; McGrath, 2008). Slovenia is the most coordinated market economy in CEE (Avdagić & Crouch, 2006; Bohle & Greskovits, 2012). As an ex-Yugoslav country, the Slovenian economy has historically been

highly decentralized and enjoyed considerable autonomy from the state. Regulatory controls over lobbying, party funding and electoral campaigns are comparatively weak, hence providing an interesting polar opposite case to Poland.

Looking at these countries, we move beyond economic policy (see Avdagic, 2005; Nölke & Vliegenthart, 2009) and explore three policy areas which are equally critical for the viability of post-communist democracies: **energy, higher education and healthcare**. The policy areas represent a large portion of public budgets and are of long-term strategic importance for the security and well-being of nations. In other words, they are “high-stakes” policies which strongly impact the viability of any country in the 21st century. These diverse and non-interrelated policy areas thus provide us broad foundations for general insights on policy-making in the region.

Energy is a highly relevant policy area in CEE and beyond due to the importance of secure, affordable and environmentally friendly sources of energy. However, CEE countries generally share a legacy of environmental neglect and inefficient energy usage, as reflected in their cautious opposing stance to Ursula von der Leyen’s Green Deal presented in 2019. While the transformation and European integration processes along with the bankruptcy of many energy-intensive industries indeed resulted in a reduction of usage, CEE is still characterized by dependence on domestic coal and Russian gas, high pollution levels and underdeveloped renewables sectors (Aalto et al., 2017; Binhack & Tichý, 2012). Thus, most CEE countries find themselves in a difficult balance aiming to promote renewable, safe and diversified energy sources, while also preventing mass unemployment through rapid de-carbonization. Against this background, the support of major interest organizations may be a crucial prerequisite for facilitating energy transitions and implementing reforms or vice versa, blocking change.

During democratic consolidation, all CEE countries moved away from their inherited **healthcare** model based on state ownership and control towards the establishment of a national insurance authority or a system of private insurers (Rechel & McKee, 2009; Roberts, 2009). Many CEE countries attempted to return to pre-Soviet structures and institutions based on the Bismarck social insurance model. However, economic downturns and high public debt forced many governments to introduce “out-of-pocket” payments to compensate for financial gaps (Rechel & McKee, 2009). This shift away from large state-run facilities was accompanied by measures to privatize hospitals and transfer services to private providers and decentralized authorities (Björkman & Nemec, 2013). Even though the healthcare systems are based on the principle of territoriality, the EU has influenced this sector through a number of different regulatory initiatives (e.g. medical trials, data protection, pharmaceuticals). During the coronavirus pandemic, functional healthcare systems which enable effective channels for key stakeholders (patients, medical experts, healthcare workers) are more important than ever.

CEE **higher education** systems have also undergone a process of “simultaneous transition”. They are challenged not only by the heavy burdens with which

Western Europe is also struggling such as underfunding amid expansion, academic output and efficiency, but also dilemmas particular to their special socio-economic and political circumstances. Among the most crucial post-communist challenges were the dismantling of state planning and the restoration of self-governance, autonomy and academic freedoms, while achieving an effective balance between state regulation and institutional autonomy has been a particularly sensitive issue. The Bologna Process has provided an impetus for reforms of including governance, funding and quality assurance (Dobbins, 2011). Europeanization and internationalization have recently also shed light on the relative underperformance of CEE higher education with regard to research, patents and innovations. This has resulted in targeted state strategies to promote university-industrial collaboration to generate “home-grown” human capital (Dobbins, 2017).

The book chapters revolve around four sets of overarching questions, which enable us to comparatively explore organized interests from different angles. Based on the motto “OrgIntCEE & friends”, Chapters 2–9 (and 13) present the results of the core research project “The Missing Link: Exploring Organized Interests in Post-Communist Policy-Making – OrgIntCEE”, while Chapters 10–12 put the reader on excursions into exciting and highly significant related themes not covered by the core project. The book is divided into the following sub-parts:

- 1 **Population ecology:** How have populations of organized interests evolved in the communist and post-communist phases and what factors impact the “births” and “death” of organizations? How have the breakdown of communism, the Europeanization process, broader political reform processes as well as the trends towards illiberalism in the region affected the number of organized interests operating in specific policy areas?
- 2 **Interest intermediation:** How are interest organizations incorporated into the political process? How penetrable are post-communist systems for organized interests and how polycentric is the policy-making process? In what political arenas do organized interests operate? To what extent have post-communist interest intermediation systems gravitated towards the corporatist, pluralist or statist policy-making paradigms? And do different types of groups (e.g. civic/ideational, business) operate in different political forums and how do lobbying systems vary between countries?
- 3 **Access and power organized interests:** How large is the clout of organized interests in specific policy-making processes and what factors (e.g. resources, expertise, size, professionalization) facilitate their access to policy-makers?
- 4 **Europeanization effects:** Many questions related to Europeanization in general and the Europeanization of CEE organized interests in particular are still open to debate. How has the European integration process affected organized interests? Which dimension of Europeanization is the most salient in CEE? Did the EU accession change the rules of the game? Can the EU

be seen as a gigantic socialization agency, which actively promotes rules, norms, practices and structures of meaning to which member states (including the advocacy and interest organizations) are exposed and which they have to incorporate into their domestic structures?

- 5 **Excursions to other territory:** Looking beyond the core project, our external authors Joanna Kulska, Tomasz Kubin and Paweł Kamiński cover additional essential ground. Their chapters explore how the church engages with civil society and the state in CEE, how coal mining unions are a key factor in explaining the aversion to more progressive energy and climate policies in the region and how the ideological positions of interest groups are distinct from those of political parties.

In addition to rich empirical material largely based on interviews, Parts 1–4 strongly rely on two fresh datasets. The first dataset consists of “population ecologies” of all interest groups operating in all three mentioned policy areas in all four countries from communist times up to present. Our main sources for identifying national organizations and their foundation dates were national online registries for civil society organizations. We used a harmonized set of keywords for each language and filtered out regional-level organizations as well as companies listed in the registries. For Poland, we used the National Court Registry (*Krajowy Rejestr Sądowy* – KRS), for Hungary the court registry of civil society organizations (*Civil szervezetek névjegyzéke*), for Slovenia the AJPES registry (Agency of the Republic of Slovenia for Public Legal Records and Related Services) and for the Czech Republic the registry of the Czech Statistical Office (for more details and data limitations, see Chapter 2).

Our survey for book parts two to four was divided into three parts. First, we requested general information on membership structures (e.g. employees, volunteers, member institutions, member firms, individual members). We then asked each organization about its affiliations with European, international or national umbrella organizations. The second large set of questions addressed the frequency of consultations between interest groups and parties, previous and present governments, as well as their activity within parliamentary committees and their relationships with rivalling organizations. The questions were multiple-choice, generally requesting the frequency of contacts and consultations on a 1–5 scale (never, biannually, annually, monthly, weekly), but also offered respondents to provide comments. The section also contained questions regarding access to government bodies and parties as well as the perceived level of political coordination on 1–5 scales, also with a comment option. We then posed numerous questions regarding the territorial level of activities of interest groups (regional, national, European) as well as their main advocacy platforms (e.g. outsider lobbying through social media, protests, through the press, vs. insider lobbying through diverse political institutions). Finally, we asked each organization about its perceived influence on policy as well as whether it perceives itself or rivalling organizations at an advantage.

The third segment covered organizational professionalization. We asked about the expertise organizations provide to policy-makers, ties with like-minded organizations at the European level and activities geared towards professionalization such as the training of lobbyists, fundraising, strategic planning and human resource development. The segment also included questions about financial sources and financial stability.

We were extremely fortunate to receive responses from nearly 440 CEE interest organizations in our three key policy areas (see Annex for the survey and response rate by policy area).

2 Brief overview of the book chapters

As outlined above, the book is divided into five parts, four of which present results from the core project “The Missing Link – Organized Interests in Post-Communist Policy-Making” and the final of which broadens our perspective through journeys into new territory.

Part 1 Interest organizations in numbers (population ecology)

In Chapter 2, Rafael Pablo Labanino, Michael Dobbins and Rafał Riedel explore to what extent legacies shaped the trajectory of interest organizations during and after transition. Assuming that the number of associations and level of civil society activity are decisive for economic growth, good governance and democratization in general, they look at interest organization populations and densities during the pre-transition phase in CEE. Drawing on our datasets of interest organizations operating in the healthcare, energy and higher education sectors of Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovenia, they address how “dense” populations of organizations were under communism and during the transition. Shedding doubt on the idea of a complete “tabula rasa” after 1989, they explore to what degree different “varieties of communism” and the nature of the breakdown of communism later affected organizational populations.

Linking directly to Chapter 2, Michael Dobbins, Rafael Pablo Labanino and Brigitte Horváthová explore in Chapter 3 how populations of interest organizations have developed in the post-communist era and to what extent they were transformed by the transition to a market economy, democracy and in some cases nation-building. They also address whether EU accession and membership have reshaped the organizational landscapes, while also analysing how organizational populations were affected by internal reform processes. Drawing on the theory of “density dependence”, the authors also show at what point organizational populations became “saturated”. The chapter is also the first to examine whether “democratic backsliding” in the region is affecting organizational “births” and “deaths”.

Part 2 Interest Intermediation

Chapter 4 written by Szczepan Czarnecki is, to our knowledge, one of the first to address lobbying tactics of organized interest groups in the post-communist context (see also Rozbicka et al., 2020). Based on our comparative survey data, he explores the forums (governments, parliaments or the public) in which energy advocacy groups operate. In doing so, Czarnecki tests Binderkrantz’s (2015) hypothesis regarding whether ideational or cause groups – in this case environmental protection or renewable energy groups – pursue different tactics (e.g. outside lobbying tactics such as protests and petitions) than business interest groups. He also explores whether and how lobbying strategies are contingent on issues themselves, i.e. whether issues are divisible or non-divisible. Importantly, he examines to what extent lobbying regimes (e.g. the Czech Republic with more liberal with privately funded elections; Poland with more regulated with publicly funded elections) impact the chosen strategies of organized energy-related interest groups.

Chapter 5 by Michael Dobbins, Emilia Piotrowska and Maximilian von Bronk also focuses on interest intermediation from the perspective of corporatism. Specifically, the authors address the intensity of consultations between different healthcare interest groups with governments, political parties and other political institutions and whether certain groups (e.g. the medical profession, patients) are at structural advantage or disadvantage. The article builds on pre-existing measurements of corporatism and applies them to post-communist healthcare policy-making using survey data. Drawing on the previous work of Siaroff (1999) and Jahn (2016), the chapter concludes with a “healthcare corporatism score” for Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovenia.

Part 3 Influence of Organized Interests

The third part strongly reflects the mixed-method approach of the book. Chapter 6 by Szczepan Czarnecki, Emilia Piotrowska and Rafał Riedel applies some of the major hypotheses in the political science literature to explore the access of green energy and traditional energy advocacy groups to national policy-makers. Using our survey data collected directly from organized interests operating in the energy sector in Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovenia and Hungary, the authors explore how different types of resources (e.g. financial stability, professionalization and various types of expertise) enable access to governments and political parties. In a region otherwise not known for progressive, ecologically friendly energy and environmental policies, they assess whether green and renewables organizations enjoy an equal playing field compared to groups representing traditional, non-regenerative sources of energy.

Chapter 7 by Brigitte Horváthová and Michael Dobbins also engages with our survey data to assess the factors, which enable healthcare interest groups to access

to national parliaments and governments. Using ordinal logistic regressions, they explore to what extent human resources, financial resources, expertise and professionalization enable healthcare organizations to access the policy-making apparatus. Tying into Chapter 2, Horváthová and Dobbins simultaneously test whether organizations that existed under communism enjoy an advantage over newly founded organizations. The chapter is also one of the first in the literature to operationalize and test what specific types of professionalization (e.g. collaboration with other organizations, focus on organizational development) facilitate or impede access to policy-makers.

Chapter 8 by Aleš Vlk, Michael Dobbins and Rafał Riedel is a comparative case study of recent developments in Czech and Polish higher education. Relying on the process-tracing method, the authors show how the configuration and strategies of organized academic interests vis-à-vis the state and the state's capacity to govern the sector have resulted in strikingly divergent recent developments in the governance of both higher education systems. Their main argument is that a combination of an increasingly strong state in Poland, combined with fragmented interest organizations, brought about the centralization of higher education, while a combination of a weaker state and much more consolidated stakeholders in the Czech Republic resulted in the persistence of pre-existing policy arrangements. Their analysis sheds new light on how the current Polish government pushed through a fundamental reform of Polish higher education against the will of numerous previously influential organized interests despite long-lasting multilateral consultations with stakeholder groups. This stands in contrast to the Czech situation, where internal stakeholders and institutions of "academic democracy" continue to dominate.

Part 4 Europeanization Effects

In Chapter 9, Szczepan Czarnecki and Rafał Riedel visit the crossroads of Europeanization and professionalization in their comparative analysis of the interplay between these two groups of factors determining the recent evolution of organized interests in CEE. Such an empirical study of the professionalization of interest groups is crucial to understand the development of post-EU accession advocacy groups and their evolution as a vitally important element of civil society. This chapter shows that it is not the standard channels of Europeanization (top-down and bottom-up) which drive the professionalization process, rather "cross-loading" Europeanization mechanisms (i.e. socialization through organizational ties).

Part 5 Excursions to other territory

The final part consists of chapters written by "friends" of the OrgIntCEE project who venture out into new territory not covered by the core project datasets, yet which are critical for understanding civil society and policy-making in

CEE. Chapter 10 written by Tomasz Kubin explores why the Czech Republic and in particular Poland have been so resistant to the European Union’s decarbonization strategy. Focusing on mining trade unions, their structure, their strategies, their interlinkages with the state and party systems, Kubin explains why Poland has had such difficulties embracing a more progressive and ecologically friendly energy policy, whereas the Czech Republic has gradually come on board with the European Union’s energy and climate strategy.

In Chapter 11, Joanna Kulska engages with the Catholic Church, which is arguably the largest interest group in the region, and in Poland in particular. She comparatively analyses the evolving role, goals and strategies applied by the Polish and Czech Catholic churches, against the background of the different position of religion in both countries’ social-political contexts. Focusing on the fusion of national and religious identities, Kulska explores to what extent and in what policy areas the church is able to effectively exert political influence. In doing so, she provides explanations for the highly different development of abortion policies in both countries.

In Chapter 12, Paweł Kamiński enters uncharted territory in CEE by systematically analysing the relationship between interest groups and political parties (see also Rozbicka et al., 2020). Specifically, he explores whether interest groups in CEE are occupying territory in the political space, which is “abandoned” by political parties, or contrarily, whether interest groups and parties are following a similar pattern of biased representation and indifference towards civil society. Using quantitative and comparative data gathered between 2016 and 2018 from six EU countries, the chapter sheds light on the interplay between interest groups and political parties in three CEE countries – Poland, Slovenia and Lithuania – and three “old” EU member states – the Netherlands, Sweden and Belgium. The study is one of the first to compare CEE interest groups with their western counterparts.

This final Chapter 13 by Michael Dobbins, Emilia Piotrowska and Rafał Riedel recaps the findings of the individual chapters and lays out comparative conclusions regarding structures and patterns of interest intermediation in the region, while also comparatively reassessing how organized interests impact the direction of policy. The authors also briefly present some simple aggregated data related to organized interests of all four countries, enabling us to identify some broader trends in the countries’ interest group ecosystems, their intensity of consultation and cooperation in policy-making, their perception of power and influence as well as their professionalization processes.

3 A final introductory note

As already hinted above, the world of interest groups offers infinite possibilities for exploration, but is also hampered by infinite methodological, analytical and practical challenges. However, we are fortunate not to be alone in this undertaking. Almost simultaneously to the publication of this book, another monograph on interest

group representation in the post-communist region is to be published: *Achieving Democracy Through Interest Representation: Interest groups in Central and Eastern Europe* by Patrycja Rozbicka, Paweł Kamiński, Meta Novak and Vaida Jankauskaitė.

Initially unaware of this parallel endeavour, the contributors of both monographs have increasingly engaged with one another, resulting in very fruitful discussions and exchanges despite the obstacles posed by coronavirus. In our view, both books perfectly complement each other as each book addresses gaps in the research which the other does not, while offering different approaches and lenses on civil society and organized interest in the region. While the monograph by Rozbicka and colleagues covers Poland, Lithuania and Slovenia, the present book adds perspectives on two additional countries, the Czech Republic and Hungary. Their book has the strength that the population ecology analyses cover the entire interest group populations of these countries, while ours places a narrower focus on three policy areas – energy, higher education and healthcare. Our stronger focus on vital rates enables us to single out the determinants driving organizational births and deaths such as communist heritages, domestic reform processes, Europeanization as well as population densities. While their book offers a highly informative overview of the legal foundations of interest group activities, our book stands out with its focus on specific policy-making processes in non-interrelated policy areas.

The book by Rozbicka et al. (2020) also more systematically addresses ties between interest groups and political parties, while the authors of the present book engage more intensively with the phenomena of democratic backsliding and illiberal civil society in CEE. And while their book offers outstanding overviews of where interest groups target their activities (courts, parliaments, executives, civil servants, parties, etc.), we place greater emphasis on the factors facilitating their access to policy-makers such as expertise, resources and professionalization. Both books also take different approaches regarding the funding of organizations: the upcoming chapters focus on whether funding facilitates political access, whereas Rozbicka, Kamiński, Novak and Jankauskaitė offer more detailed insights into *how* CEE interest groups are funded. And while their team of authors more systematically explores the activities of interest groups from the CEE region at the European level, we turn the focus around and look at the impact of European-level networking activities on the internal structures of CEE organized interests. Finally, whereas their book descriptively covers the development of trade unions in the economic sphere, we extend the focus to emerging forms of corporatism in healthcare – a previously largely unexplored policy area in the region – using a novel indicator-based conceptualization of corporatism.

Thus, we are firmly convinced that both books are unique and ideally complement each other. Hence, by no means should they be viewed as competing books, as territory not covered in the one book is covered in the other. And, after all, only a diverse collection of chapters taking different angles can do justice to this highly complex topic. Thus, taken together, we believe that both books will not only help overcome the strong bias towards Western Europe and North

America in interest group research, but hopefully also provide a solid foundation for scholars of post-communism to build on in the future and better understand a region which has captivated and will continue to captivate scholars for years to come.

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