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Think Tank Involvement in Foreign Policymaking in the Czech Republic and Poland

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ABSTRACT

Studies on foreign policy think tanks have too often remained disconnected from the analysis of foreign policy outcomes. Yet, investigating the development, functions and influence of think tanks can provide valuable insights into the context in which foreign policy is formulated. The Czech Republic and Poland represent interesting comparative cases in this regard: while Polish think tanks are more numerous and tend to be better placed in international rankings, they are less involved in the policymaking process than their Czech counterparts. This contrast has mainly to do with the sociology of foreign policy elites and the role of political parties in both countries.

KEYWORDS

Think tanks; foreign policy; Czech Republic; Poland; Eastern Partnership

Although they have not yet acquired the stature of their American counterparts, foreign policy think tanks have proliferated in European Union (EU) member states. The scholarly analysis of this phenomenon has tended to focus mainly on the think tank scenes of some of the big Western European member states, however, and not sufficiently on that of the ten Central European countries that joined the EU between 2004 and 2007. In addition, studies on European foreign policy think tanks have often remained disconnected from the study of foreign policy outcomes. Central Europe, for its historical specificities and internal contrasts, constitutes a rich and didactic terrain for reflecting on think tanks as factors and actors in policymaking.

Central European countries' recent diplomatic history created a structural demand for the products of think tanks. After having seen, as satellites of the Soviet Union, their foreign policies largely determined from the outside, they had to establish the basis and main orientations of their new foreign policies in the early 1990s, in radically transformed regional and domestic environments. Later on, in preparation for their accession to the EU and then as member states and parties to its Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), they had to adapt to a complex political system and define positions on a range of international issues that had remained outside their foreign policy remit. In both contexts, the need for innovative solutions to novel and complex issues fuelled the constant demand for policy analysis and recommendations.

What is more, one could also expect think tanks to have an actual impact in responding to this demand or, at least, for the governments of these countries to be positively inclined towards these kind of organisations. In the cases of Poland and, especially, the Czech Republic, as medium-sized states, the decision-making chain is not too extensive and foreign policy think tanks not too numerous; thus meaningful interaction should, in principle, be possible.¹ In addition, in these countries, dissidents coming from civil society played a meaningful role in bringing down the communist regime and several of them became part of the political elite; thus they could be expected, in theory, to be rather open to societal groups feeding into the policy process.²

In spite of these similar historical and political configurations, as our study shows, think tanks seem more involved in foreign policymaking in the Czech Republic than in Poland. By reflecting on these two cases, both individually and comparatively, this article purports to shed light on the development, roles and influences of foreign policy think tanks. It does so with a view to contributing not just to think tank studies but also, more broadly, to a better understanding of the foreign policymaking context in these two countries. What factors affected the development of Czech and Polish think tanks? What functions do think tanks perform, if any, in terms of policy innovation, development and implementation? To what extent do they actually influence the policy process? How can the differences between the Czech and Polish cases be explained, particularly in terms of actual involvement and influence of think tanks?

In answering these questions, the article proceeds in three steps. It starts by briefly setting forth a framework for approaching think tanks and integrating them in the analysis of policy. Then, it considers the Czech and Polish cases in turn and seeks to answer, for each, the first three sets of questions presented above. Finally, it draws conclusions from the comparative exercise and tries to explain why foreign policy think tanks are more involved in the policy process in the Czech Republic than in Poland. In doing so, it places the emphasis on the sociology of foreign policy elites and invites future research on think tanks to pay greater attention to this variable.

Think tanks and foreign policymaking: a framework for analysis

Think tanks remain largely unidentified – and often ignored – subjects in the analysis of foreign policy. They are occasionally criticised in the media as being *eminences grises* or the focus of self-referential studies, but rarely investigated as factors in themselves. In many ways, the difficulty in integrating think tanks in analysis stems from their blurred agency, whether in the sense of their contours as actors or the discernibility of their activities.

In the most basic sense, think tanks can be defined as organisations that have “policy research functions and policy advisory practices”.³ They vary enormously, though, in their size, endowment, staffing, source of funding, strategies and productions. The most effective way to differentiate and classify them remains, in our view, reference to the latter characteristic. Thus, McGann and Weaver’s typology discerning between academic, contract and advocacy think tanks will be applied in the following.⁴ “Academic think tanks” (or “research

¹According to Krastev, in Central Europe, “think tank influence on government depends primarily on the personal access that analysts have to cabinet members or the Prime Minister” (Krastev, “The Liberal Estate”, 10).

²See, for instance, Szulecki, “Heretical geopolitics of Central Europe”, 25-36.

³Stone, “Think tanks, policy advice and governance”, 4.

⁴McGann and Weaver, “Introduction”, 1-35.

centres”) produce methodologically rigorous, often scientific, analysis; their researchers tend to have PhDs and publish in scholarly outlets in parallel to their think tank activities. “Contract think tanks” have less of a scholarly focus, their productions are often directed at public administrations, in the form of analyses but also sometimes of training. While research centres tend to define their priorities and focus internally, the priorities and focus of contract think tanks are often set by their funders or in relation to specific projects. Finally, “advocacy think tanks” focus on advancing a particular idea, position or agenda. Their aim is often more to persuade than to inform.

In studying think tanks, the literature has pursued three main lines of enquiry. A first body of works has explored the conditions and modalities of the development of think tanks in national contexts. It has usually done so by providing historical and empirical accounts of some of the most prominent and well known think tanks.⁵ By studying think tanks’ imbrications in national political cultures and institutional architectures, these studies shed light on the structural elements that favour think tank emergence and, one can assume, think tank activity and impact. For instance, as explained by Donald Abelson, the success and flourishing of think tanks in the US context can be attributed to a “fragmented and decentralized political system offering multiple channels of access to policy-makers”, “weak political parties”, a “political and social culture that encourages philanthropy and policy entrepreneurship”, and a high “turnover in the senior ranks of the civil service” which “facilitates the movement of think-tank scholars in and out of government agencies” (movement itself made possible by these agencies’ openness towards non-career civil servants).⁶ These elements – institutional system, strength of political parties, political culture, and dynamics prevailing in the civil service – will be retained as benchmarks when evaluating whether the Czech and Polish contexts provide fertile ground for think tanks.

A second strand in the literature focuses on the actual or possible functions, roles and strategies of think tanks in the overall political process and in foreign policy in particular.⁷ Some of these studies examine, for instance, whether think tanks can play a role in bridging the policy-academia gap,⁸ while others debate whether they should be seen as transmission belts for civil society inputs or, rather, outposts serving a dominant ideology and set of interests.⁹ Some of them tend to adopt a prescriptive or normative angle, however, or in any case do not seek to provide generalizable analytical tools. As will be emphasized below, through their indirect practices and direct demands, governments play a key role in mediating think tank activity. Thus, because it puts the emphasis on non-state actors’ interactions and synergies with governmental agencies, the framework developed by Andrew Cooper and Brian Hocking appears particularly useful. They distinguish between situations in which non-state actors (in our case think tanks) act as “kick-starters” (engaging in proactive behaviour and framing the government agenda), “agents” (taking a facilitative and sometimes subcontracted role that supports the activities of the government) or “joint managers” (working with governmental agencies in a cooperative venture where know-how is shared and some kind of division of labour established).¹⁰

⁵See, for instance, Parmar, “Anglo-American Elites in the Interwar Years”, 53-75.

⁶Abelson, “Old World, New World”, 131.

⁷Stone, “Garbage Cans or Think Tanks?”; Selee, *What Should Think Tanks Do?*; Parmar, “Institutes of International Affairs”.

⁸Jentleson and Ratner, “Bridging the Beltway–Ivory Tower Gap”; Walt, “Relationship Between Theory and Policy”.

⁹Medvetz, *Think Tanks in America*; Parmar, *Think Tanks and Power*.

¹⁰Cooper and Hocking, “Governments, Non-governmental Organisations”, 370–4.

The third line of enquiry – both the most promising and the most intricate – involves investigating the influence and impact of think tanks on foreign policy outcomes.¹¹ Concluding a recent and comprehensive reflection on the role of think tanks in international affairs, Donald Abelson calls on political scientists to “think more critically about how to evaluate the contribution these organizations make to policy development”, while he acknowledges that “isolating the impact that think-tanks have had at different stages of the policy cycle remains a formidable undertaking”.¹² Think tanks can mainly influence the policy process as idea entrepreneurs, and since it is difficult to trace the origins and impact of ideas, it is indeed difficult to trace the influence of think tanks. In addition, think tanks can hardly be treated as unitary actors: they are platforms, composed of many individuals who have multiple affiliations and multiple ideas, which makes attribution difficult.

Nevertheless, we argue that the literature on policy analysis does provide a venue for integrating think tanks into the analysis. For instance, the concept of epistemic community coined by Peter Haas makes it possible to study the texture of think tank-government relations by treating them in a specific, common environment. He defines epistemic communities as “networks of professionals with recognised expertise and competence in a particular domain and an authoritative claim to policy relevant knowledge within that domain or issue-area”.¹³ Similarly, in conceptualising policymaking as the confrontation of and eventual compromise between various belief systems, the advocacy coalition framework allows one to grasp how certain groups emerge in these communities and how they promote a particular preference within the policy system.¹⁴ Overall, think tanks can have more impact on the policy process when they participate in or even contribute to shaping the strategies of specific advocacy coalitions acting from inside the foreign policy elite.

This analytical framework is applied to two Central European countries, Poland and the Czech Republic. The think tank scene in Central and Eastern Europe has received some attention from the scholarly literature, especially in the context of the post-communist political and economic transition of the 1990s. Several studies have documented in a rich and insightful manner the emergence of policy research institutes in these specific conditions as well as the functions they have performed (pursuing, in other words, the first and second research tracks identified above).¹⁵ There remains, however, a gap in this literature with respect to the influence of foreign policy think tanks. On the one hand, many of the studies on Central and Eastern European think tanks have adopted a descriptive approach, presenting a regional think tank scene that had remained understudied, but rarely unpacking its impact on policy outcomes in a systematic manner. As emphasized by Ivan Krastev, “It is researchers of institutes and not researchers of the policy process who prevail in the study of the Central and East European think tank”.¹⁶ On the other hand, the works that have engaged in investigating think tanks’ influence on legislative decisions and policy debates, as have Krastev’s, have rarely focused on foreign policy as such, looking instead at liberal reforms in the domestic sphere. This article contributes to addressing this gap by focusing

¹¹Higgott and Stone, “The Limits of Influence”.

¹²Abelson, “Old World, New World”, 142.

¹³Haas, “Epistemic Communities and International Policy”, 3.

¹⁴Sabatier, “The Advocacy Coalition Framework”.

¹⁵Kimball, “From Dependency to the Market”; Krastev, “The Liberal Estate” and “Think tanks”; Sandle, “Think tanks, postcommunism and democracy”; Schneider, *Think-tanks in Visegrad Countries*; Smilov, “Think Tanks at a Crossroad”; Struyk, *Reconstructive Critics*.

¹⁶Krastev, “Think tanks”, 18.

on a concrete foreign policy dossier that has deeply involved both countries under study, namely the Eastern Partnership initiative.

As we are focusing on two Central European countries and one policy decision, we cannot pretend to provide a definitive picture applicable to the whole region or to every policy domain. Nevertheless, we hope to provide generalizable observations based on a comparative and case study analysis. The Czech Republic and Poland have been chosen because they are, at the same time, close in terms of historical experience and foreign policy orientation while offering variations in terms of size of the country and the think tank scene. According to the latest issue of the annual *Global Go-To Think Tanks* report, there are 27 think tanks in the Czech Republic as compared to 42 in Poland.¹⁷ In investigating the involvement of these think tanks in foreign policymaking, the study relies on official documents, secondary sources and, especially, interviews with policymakers and think tankers as empirical data.

Czech Republic

Foreign policymaking context

Whether with regard to the country's institutional architecture, domestic political environment or foreign policy elites, the Czech context has provided a rather fertile ground for the development and activity of think tanks.

First, the country's decision-making system in foreign policy is centralised and of limited scale: this offers few opportunities for outside actors to 'break in' to the process but also means that the number of key individuals is small, and thus that access to them can confer influence. The Czech Republic is a parliamentary system with proportional representation: the two centres of the 'foreign policy executive' are the Office of the Prime Minister and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA).¹⁸ In practice, however, the former tends to devote little attention to foreign policy as it is responsible for all other governmental policy and as this domain plays a relatively minor role in electoral politics. Thus, the design and formulation of foreign policy is mainly left up to the latter which, as will be shown, is rather open towards think tanks.

Second, after realisation of the overarching goal of joining NATO and the EU, politicians and political parties largely evacuated the foreign policy process, thereby creating a vacuum for think tanks to fill in feeding and animating policy debates.¹⁹ For instance, *ANO 2011* (originally an acronym for *Akce nespokojených občanů* [Action for dissatisfied citizens] but which also simply means yes in Czech - *ano*), the second biggest party in the current ruling coalition, did not have any sections on foreign policy in its program for the 2013 legislative elections. Overall, political parties have occasionally picked up on some international issues to score points with the domestic audience, but have rarely formulated consistent foreign policy platforms. This is partly explained by the fact that, as in many democracies, Czech voters tend not to cast their ballot based on foreign policy questions.

More specifically with respect to the Czech Republic though, this disinterest of political parties has to do with the historical context in which the bases of Czech foreign policy were

¹⁷McGann, *Global Think Tank Index*, 32.

¹⁸On the notion of foreign policy executive, see Hill, *Changing politics of foreign policy*, 56.

¹⁹Interview with the First Deputy Foreign Minister, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Prague, May 2013.

set. After the demise of the communist regime in 1989, some concrete issues (for example, withdrawal of Soviet troops, exit from the Warsaw Pact, etc) demanded immediate and effective attention, while the establishment of a full-fledged party system took time. In the early 1990s, foreign policy was thus largely the *domaine réservé* of President Havel and his advisors: he was indeed trusted by Czech political elites to be in the best position, thanks to the international aura he had acquired in opposing the communist regime, to represent and defend the country's interests. Havel never joined or created any political party. In the words of one of his advisors, at that time "foreign policy existed independently of Parliament or even of domestic politics".²⁰

Third and most importantly, the structure and composition of the foreign policy elite in the Czech Republic somehow predisposes it to collaborate with think tanks. The aforementioned group around Havel, mostly former dissidents like him, not only laid the foundations of Czech foreign policy in the early 1990s, but remained influential for years after that: their vision and legacy came to be institutionalised in Czech foreign policy structures and in the MFA in particular.²¹ Coming from the ranks of civil society and having, themselves, often worked with American philanthropic foundations and think tanks in the 1980s (such as the German Marshall Fund or the National Endowment for Democracy),²² this group had a natural tendency to work with think tanks and even integrate people coming from these organisations, since they had not themselves followed the traditional civil servant path to entering diplomacy. The group that succeeded the dissidents in dominating the Czech foreign policy elite in the 2000s, the Atlanticists, who embrace the American model and advocate close political and intellectual links with the United States, also have a positive inclination towards think tanks.²³ Beyond the sociological profiles and ideological orientations of members of the foreign policy elite, the cohesiveness of this elite matters: dominant groups and advocacy coalitions within the elite tend to engage with think tanks so as to maintain and reproduce their policy discourses.

Mapping the Czech think tank scene

The main foreign policy think tanks in the Czech Republic can be classified according to the typologies set out earlier, although several overlap into more than one category. Among research centres (or academic think tanks), *Ústav mezinárodních vztahů* (Institute of International Relations, IIR) is undeniably the most prominent and most influential. It has a strong academic orientation in both its staffing and productions and acts as a reserve of expertise for the media and the MFA on a broad range of international issues. It is linked to the Ministry in terms of funding and statutes, but its academic emphasis allows it to retain some latitude and independence. Although its academic foundations and credentials are not as strong, *Asociace pro mezinárodní otázky* (AMO, Association for International Affairs) could also somehow be placed in this category as it produces analyses of various international issues as well as reviews of the performance of Czech foreign policy. It also has a strong emphasis on education, running programmes for high school and university students in the Czech Republic and abroad.²⁴

²⁰Interview with a former advisor to Václav Havel (later Deputy Foreign Minister, Minister of Defence and Chancellor to the President), Prague, July 2009.

²¹Fawn, "Symbolism in Diplomacy of Havel".

²²Cadier and Mikulova, "European Endowment for Democracy".

²³Cadier, *L'invention d'une tradition de politique étrangère* [Invention of Foreign Policy Tradition].

²⁴These activities and geographical focus have meant that it has sometimes acted as a 'contract' and 'advocacy' tank.

The Institute for European Policy (EUROPEUM) and the Prague Security Studies Institute (PSSI) are probably the most notable representatives of contract think tanks in the country. They tend to focus more specifically on areas that are of priority relevance to Czech foreign policy (such as EU affairs, the Eastern Neighbourhood or energy security) and to provide technical expertise rather than academic analysis, notably on projects directly commissioned by governmental agencies.²⁵ EUROPEUM has cultivated, both in its outputs and contacts, a distinctive specialisation on European affairs (EU policies and relations with other European states), while PSSI deals with issues related to security understood in its broad sense (economic, energy, cyber, etc). Both think tanks subscribe to an identifiable foreign policy orientation and overarching project – promoting EU integration for EUROPEUM and strengthening the transatlantic link for PSSI – but without this agenda necessarily dictating and limiting their activities.

By contrast, advocacy think tanks such as *Evropské hodnoty* (European Values) or *Centrum transatlantických vztahů* (Prague Centre for Transatlantic Relations, PCTR) tend to be driven by their agenda and to approach policy issues with a more ideological bent. European Values was founded with the objective of advancing the idea of further European integration, but has also recently been active in denouncing Russia's presence in the Czech Republic.²⁶ The PCTR, a unit within the CEVRO Institute, itself a private university linked to the liberal-conservative party Civic Democratic Party (*Občanská demokratická strana*, ODS), is pushing the Atlanticist agenda. Finally, although it is not a think tank, but an NGO, *Člověk v tísni* (People in Need, PIN) could also be mentioned in light of its activism on international issues (development and democratisation) and its clout in the Czech Republic and in the entire Central European region.

Think tank involvement in foreign policymaking

The movement of personnel between the foreign policy executive and think tanks – the so-called 'revolving door' phenomenon – is remarkably high in the Czech Republic in comparison to Poland but also to other European countries such as Germany or France. Over the last years, several individuals from the aforementioned institutes have come to occupy policymaking positions in the MFA. The most potent example in that sense relates to the position of First Deputy Foreign Minister, successively occupied by former directors of PIN (2006-10), PSSI (2010-14) and IIR (2014-15), until the position was eventually suppressed. It was a key position within the Ministry's architecture, as the First Deputy was in charge of chairing the weekly collegium meetings, and the aforementioned individuals have, indeed, all been described by insiders as being particularly influential when they were in office.²⁷ Additional examples could also be cited for almost all of the institutes presented above: some members of AMO leadership transited to the position of Chief of Staff of the Minister for European Affairs and Deputy Foreign Minister, while the former director of EUROPEUM is currently heading the policy planning unit at the MFA. This involvement of

²⁵This type of production tends to place EUROPEUM in the 'contract think tank' category, but it could also have been regarded as a research centre at certain junctures, notably in light of its links with the European Department of Charles University.

²⁶Interestingly, a controversy has recently broken out regarding the publications of this think tank, which a group of Czech scholars and analysts from other institutes have criticised for their lack of methodological rigour and for disguising ideology into expertise. See "Maskovaná ideologie: Mluvme o bezpečnosti, ale bez ideologie" ["Masked Ideology: Let's talk about security, but without ideology"], *Lidové noviny*, 4 November 2016.

²⁷Conversations with Czech analysts and diplomats, Prague, 2009.

former think tankers testifies to – and in turn is likely to facilitate – think tank involvement in the development of policies.

Beyond the example of personnel mobility, tracing think tanks' involvement in more concrete terms implies delving into specific policy dossiers. The case of the Eastern Partnership (EaP), an EU initiative towards the post-Soviet space that Prague (and, even more so, Warsaw) contributed to initiating and promoting, is particularly enlightening in this regard.²⁸ To some extent, with regard to the EaP and the Czech Republic's policies towards the East more generally, think tanks have performed all three functions – kick-starter, agent and even joint manager.

First, from the mid-2000s onwards, they contributed to giving greater prominence to the Eastern neighbourhood on the Czech foreign policy agenda.²⁹ Institutes like AMO, PIN or EUROPEUM organised a plethora of conferences and workshops on the region, thereby providing a platform that was seized upon by norm entrepreneurs who, from within the foreign policy elite, were vying to push for more activism towards the East.³⁰ Second and subsequently, once the EaP had been elevated to the rank of foreign policy priority by the Czech diplomacy, the MFA turned to think tanks to solicit their expertise on the region and seek their advice on how to promote the policy at the EU level. For instance, the non-paper produced by the MFA on the Eastern Dimension of the ENP was submitted to IIR experts for comments while, later on, EUROPEUM dispensed training to Czech diplomats in anticipation of the Czech Presidency. Similarly, PSSI conducted a project commissioned by the MFA that aimed at formulating recommendations on how to maintain Central European countries' expertise on the East and, relatedly, develop their agenda-setting capacity inside the EU.³¹ Third, although to a lesser extent, think tanks have sometimes cooperated with government agencies in the implementation of the Czech Republic's democratisation assistance and capacity-building policies towards the Eastern neighbourhood. For instance, EUROPEUM and AMO have run MFA-funded education and civil society building programs in Ukraine and Belarus.

Thus, by carrying out some of the traditional functions associated with think tanks (such as advising on policy concerns and evaluating government programs, facilitating networking and the exchange of ideas, and supplying and training personnel), Czech think tanks contributed to the development and promotion of a new policy, the EaP. It should be noted, however, that by its very nature this issue area provides a favourable terrain for think tanks. On the one hand, for the complexities it represents and the opportunities it can offer, the EU context tends to invite technical expertise and policy innovation. On the other hand, development of policies towards the Eastern neighbourhood demanded the kind of regional expertise that is the trademark of think tanks. In that sense, the case of the EaP is illustrative but not necessarily representative. In fact, for the other major foreign policy dossier of the late 2000s, namely the Czech Republic's participation in the US Ballistic Missile Defense system (BMD), related to national security and bilateral relations with Washington, think tanks were much less involved. Rather than mobilising think tanks as hubs of the Czech epistemic community to develop and reproduce the coordinative discourse underpinning this foreign policy choice, the government created a special representative and a dedicated commission, which largely transposed US rhetoric on the BMD into the Czech context.³²

²⁸On Czech Republic's involvement in the EaP, see Tulmets, "Preparing the EU presidency".

²⁹It was largely absent until then; see Weiss, "Projecting the Re-Discovered".

³⁰Kratochvil and Tulmets, "La Politique Orientale de République Tchèque", 81.

³¹PSSI, *Strengthening Central European Contribution*.

³²Hynek and Stritecky, "Rise and Fall of Third Site", 103.

Even the main opposition party, seeking to capitalise on public resentment against the BMD project, did not reach out to think tanks as a platform for policy debates but chose, instead, to create a new organisation for this task.³³

Overall, the Czech case demonstrates that think tanks' involvement and potential influence is above all mediated by the foreign policy elite and by its sociological composition and ideological orientations. Think tanks' multiple contributions and deep involvement in the EaP were largely a function of the alignment of the kind of expertise they were able to offer with the agenda of a group of norm entrepreneurs acting from within the foreign policy elite. While these think tanks have continued to retain their focus and specialisation on the Eastern neighbourhood, they were unable to keep the region on the Czech foreign policy radar screen to the same extent once diplomats' interest in it started to fade.

Poland

Conditions for the development of foreign policy think tanks

Examination of the institutional architecture and functioning of foreign policy decision-making in Poland, as well as of the practices among political elites paints a picture of an environment that is not conducive to the activities of think tanks.

One of the favourable preconditions for foreign policy think tanks in Poland has been the ambition of all governments since 1989 for the country to become a regional leader in Central Europe. The desire to conduct an active foreign policy by covering various regions and topics provides a window of opportunity for think tanks in various stages of the decision-making process. At the same time, due to the centralisation of the decision-making process, which makes the Council of Ministers (primarily the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, MFA) responsible for conducting foreign policy and representing Polish positions together with the President of the Republic, the target group for think tank activities is small and approachable. Moreover, the legal regulations of the Polish constitution, the Law on Associations and the Foundations Act with subsequent amendments offer convenient conditions for the functioning of non-governmental organisations and many Polish think tanks enjoy this kind of legal status.³⁴

The urgent necessity to define new priorities and strategies after the breakthrough of 1989 when an independent Polish foreign policy started, resulted in the creation of numerous research centres, but the demand has dropped off over the years.³⁵ Even when presidents have had different views on foreign policy issues than the government,³⁶ the demand for think tanks' activities did not increase. Experts from leading think tanks report a scarce call for expertise from state institutions and explain it by indicating the growing number and importance of in-house experts in the MFA.³⁷ The MFA, although financing two think tanks – *Polski Instytut Spraw Międzynarodowych* (Polish Institute for International Affairs, PISM) and *Instytut Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej* (IESW, Institute for Eastern and Central Europe) – rarely seeks their advice and prefers to focus on in-house expertise provided by its

³³"10 arguments against the US radar", *Nezákladnám*, http://www.nezakladnam.cz/en/437_10-arguments-against-the-us-radar

³⁴On details of legal regulations for the non-governmental sector, see Sus, "Doradztwo w polityce zagranicznej", [Advisory in Foreign Policy], 93-5.

³⁵On forerunners of Polish think tanks, see Sus, "Still lagging behind?", 155-8.

³⁶For example between 2007 and 2010, when the ruling party and the Prime Minister, Donald Tusk, had very opposite views on foreign policy issues from those of Lech Kaczyński, the President of the Republic.

³⁷Interview with an OSW staff member, 10 November 2015; Interview with a PISM staff member, 4 January. 2016.

own officials. The MFA officials prefer to be advised by in-house sources whom they know and trust rather than to reach out for independent think tanks experts who cannot be relied on, since they are unfamiliar. A partial explanation for this tendency is the shallowness of the modernisation process in Poland and the low level of social capital, which manifests itself in widespread distrust towards institutions and elites and a relatively high level of trust in the family and persons with whom one has close face-to-face relations.³⁸ Furthermore, most member of the foreign policy elite in Poland have followed the traditional civil servant path or, as has been the case with most foreign ministers after 1989, were academic professors without any experience in working with think tanks. Only Radoslaw Sikorski, who served as foreign minister between 2007 and 2014, had the tendency to approach think tanks as he had worked for the American Enterprise Institute from 2002 to 2005. During his term, he regularly referred in his speeches and strategic documents to think tanks as important actors in foreign policymaking.³⁹ This did not, however, have much impact on the generally poor knowledge of think tanks among Polish foreign policy elites and the weak traditions of cooperating with them.

Moreover, the divisions over foreign policy priorities among Polish political elites are deeply rooted and have to be considered from a long-term perspective. The constant fear of domination by one of its big neighbours has made diplomatic choices highly politicised. While there have been various conflicting narratives, there is one that currently seems to dominate – should Poland be the part of the West and ally of Germany or should it become a leader of Central Europe, be much more assertive towards the West and regain full control of its political decisions rather than delegating them to Brussels. After EU accession, the politicisation of the foreign policy debate became particularly acute and the standoff between the two main parties on these issues have been numerous, as illustrated recently by the campaign for the parliamentary elections of November 2015.⁴⁰ In theory, the polarisation could have created a window of opportunity for think tanks to feed ideas into the debate. However, rather than as programmatic proposals, foreign policy issues are used as instruments in inter-partisan rivalries, limiting the demand for knowledge-based and technical advice in foreign policy.

Finally, Polish think tanks struggle with financing their activities. The problem has become particularly painful with the economic crisis as foreign private foundations and the EU itself are important sources of funding for Polish think tanks.⁴¹ Only state-funded institutes enjoy a stable budget, all others have to look for short-term project funding and very occasionally private sponsors.

Polish foreign policy think tanks⁴²

The majority of Polish think tanks can be classified as research centres. One of the prime examples is the aforementioned Institute for Eastern and Central Europe that operates from

³⁸Kochanowicz, "Trust, Confidence and Social Capital"; Bartkowski, "Social capital in Poland".

³⁹Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Expose Ministra Spraw Zagranicznych Radoslaw Sikorskiego* [Speech by Radoslaw Sikorski]; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Polish Foreign Priorities 2012-2016*.

⁴⁰Balcer and Blusz, *Changing course?*

⁴¹Institute for Public Affairs, *Sprawozdanie z działalności merytorycznej ISP 2015* [Activity Report of IPA 2015], 40-60.

⁴²For a more detailed background on Polish think tanks, see Czapotowicz and Stasiak, "Political Expertise in Poland"; Sus, "Still lagging behind?"; Sus, "Doradztwo w polityce zagranicznej" ["Advisory in Foreign Policy"]; Zbieranek, *Polski model organizacji typu think tank* [Polish model of think tank-type organisations].

Lublin. Its research has a clear academic character, which is amplified by the close cooperation with local universities. Another think tank with an academic orientation is *Osrodek Studiów Wschodnich* (OSW, Centre for Eastern Studies), which monitors and analyses the socio-political and economic processes in Central and Eastern Europe, the Balkans and Turkey. OSW experts publish hundreds of analyses and studies annually and try to engage in dialogue with the state administration regarding political developments in the countries they focus on.

The biggest and most well known Polish think tank, PISM, poses a challenge to the typology applied in this article. On one hand, the Institute publishes a range of academic journals and books and focuses much attention on the development of the academic careers of its employees, many of whom have PhDs. It also enjoys broad freedom in terms of setting its research agenda, which has however to be agreed with the MFA.⁴³ Only occasionally does the Institute receive requests from the Ministry to examine a certain issue. Between 2010 and 2015, the management of PISM changed and the new director tried to transform it into something of a ‘contract tank’ by promoting shorter analyses with specific policy recommendations, and reaching out to private companies, which could commission expertise on a particular topic that was not on the annual research agenda. A case in point is the study on the nuclear energy sector in Poland contracted by a French company, Areva.⁴⁴ However, mid-2016, the management changed again, and PISM seems to be moving back towards a purely academic type institution.

The two most important examples in the category of ‘contract think tanks’ are *Instytut Spraw Publicznych* (ISP, Institute for Public Affairs) and *Instytut Studiów Strategicznych* (Institute for Strategic Studies, ISS). Both institutions focus on specific topics – ISP covers European integration and Polish foreign policy towards Eastern Europe, whereas ISS deals with the transatlantic community and the role of NATO. Their research outcomes are delivered in different forms, from written analyses through concrete policy recommendations to public debates and workshops.

The last category – ‘advocacy think tanks’ – is represented by a number of think tanks, many of which have been established in the last decade. WiseEurope (former demos-EUROPA) is a recent example. It promotes stronger European integration and a low-carbon transition of the Polish economy. Another think tank of this kind is *Instytut Sobieskiego* (IS, Sobieski Institute), which was established by proponents of the conservative Law and Justice party. The ideology of the IS is in line with the foreign policy of the current government and promotes a restructuring of the EU by giving decision-making power back to the nation states.

Think tanks’ contribution to foreign policymaking

The most visible trace of think tanks’ involvement in foreign policymaking in Poland can be seen in the originally American phenomenon of ‘revolving doors’ between academia, the civil service and think tanks.⁴⁵ This remains very limited in Poland, mainly due to the professionalisation of the civil service, which does not make movement between the administration and research centres very rewarding. Nevertheless, there have been a few

⁴³As of September 2016, the government was represented in the twelve-person Council via five officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Also, two members represented the Chancellery of the President of the Republic of Poland.

⁴⁴Conversations with PISM staff members, Warsaw and Wrocław, 2015.

⁴⁵Haas, “Think Tank and U.S. Foreign Policy”, 7-8.

recent examples of revolving doors: in 2014, an expert on Russia who served as the director of the OSW moved to the MFA to become ambassador in Moscow.⁴⁶ Interestingly, after she came back to Poland in 2016, she returned to the think tank sector and became one of the directors of *Fundacja Stefana Batorego* (the Stefan Batory Foundation).

In order to trace other manifestations of think tanks' involvement, a specific dossier has to be taken under consideration. Since the Eastern dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) has constituted one of Poland's central foreign policy priorities over the last two decades,⁴⁷ it serves as an illuminating case study, as for the Czech Republic.

Several years before the EU launched the Wider Europe programme in 2004, Polish political elites had been developing ideas for further integration of their Eastern neighbours with the West. They emphasized that "Poland's participation in the Common Foreign and Security Policy, (...) will enhance the EU policy towards its Eastern neighbours, contributing to the development of open and partner-like relations with countries remaining outside the enlarged Union".⁴⁸ Think tanks such as PISM, OSW and the Stefan Batory Foundation in particular, together with other NGOs were actively engaged in delivering ideas on how to close ties between the Union and its Eastern neighbours. Their engagement and the dialogue with policymakers were a novelty in the decision-making process in Poland and this was facilitated by the receptivity of the decision-makers to external advice, on the one hand, and the outstanding expertise of several think tanks with regard to the Eastern countries, on the other.⁴⁹

Polish think tanks carried out four main functions. First, they served as kick-starters by delivering new ideas on how to integrate Eastern neighbours into the European framework along various lines of cooperation.⁵⁰ In this regard, they cooperated closely with officials who integrated think tank ideas into the first MFA non-paper presented in 2003 containing Polish proposals for the policy towards the new Eastern neighbours after EU enlargement.⁵¹ Second, think tanks functioned as agents by monitoring the discussion on the ENP within European institutions and the member states.⁵² As a result of the cooperation between research centres and Polish diplomacy, the latter could effectively react and present its proposals in the best possible way. Third, one of the key roles of think tanks was to promote Polish ideas for cooperation with Eastern neighbours among European partners by organising conferences and expert meetings for discussion of different perspectives on integration of this region.⁵³ Here they served as joint-managers with the official diplomacy. Finally, Polish think tanks functioned as transmitters between their counterparts from the East and the West. The Stefan Batory Foundation organised frequent seminars in which experts from Ukraine and Belarus had the opportunity to present their ideas to Western colleagues and discuss the possibilities for cooperation.⁵⁴ Polish foreign ministers actively took part in these events and played the role of go-between for the think tank debates and high-level political discussions. After the EU officially launched the Eastern Partnership in accordance with the Polish-Swedish proposal,⁵⁵ the willingness of the political elites to

⁴⁶For more examples, see Sus, "Still lagging behind?".

⁴⁷For more on the Polish doctrine towards the East, see Kowal, "Key Components of Polish Position", 341-4.

⁴⁸Klatt, "Poland and its Eastern Neighbours", 6.

⁴⁹Kowal, "Key Components of Polish Position", 345.

⁵⁰Pelczynska-Nalecz *et al.*, *Eastern Policy of the EU*.

⁵¹Stefan Batory Foundation, "EU Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policy", 85-8.

⁵²Sadowski, *Partnerstwo w czasach kryzysu*. [Partnership in times of crisis].

⁵³Stefan Batory Foundation, "EU Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policy", 22-43.

⁵⁴Stefan Batory Foundation, "Więcej niż sąsiedztwo" [More than neighbourhood].

⁵⁵Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Polish-Swedish Proposal*.

cooperate with think tanks decreased significantly. Therefore, after 2009, think tanks began to focus on the monitoring of the EaP's implementation and developing ideas on how to improve the framework for cooperation.⁵⁶

Conclusion

The functions performed by think tanks in the foreign policy process have been analysed with reference to a specific policy dossier, the Eastern Partnership initiative. In both countries, the Czech Republic and Poland, think tanks contributed to the development, promotion and implementation of this policy. This case study also revealed, however, that these contributions were largely a function of the nature of the issue at stake and were mediated by the priorities of foreign policy elites. As an initiative requiring region-specific expertise and a certain degree of technicality and innovation to be developed in the EU context, the EaP was perfectly suited to think tank involvement. By contrast, matters of national security are not. Nevertheless, think tanks were active and involved, but within a window defined by policymakers; they could not maintain the same level of influence once the priorities of the latter had changed.

The comparative analysis of the Czech and Polish cases has revealed interesting contrasts, from which several generalisable considerations on the development, functions and influence of foreign policy think tanks can be drawn. Polish think tanks traditionally fare better in global rankings than their Czech counterparts.⁵⁷ Yet, as this study has shown, Czech think tanks appear to be more involved in national foreign policymaking and, as a result, more influential in their respective domestic contexts than Polish think tanks. The 'revolving door' dynamic is, for instance, much more developed in Prague than in Warsaw.

This article advanced two explanations to account for this. The first pertains to the sociology of foreign policy elites. In the Czech Republic, the group that laid the foundations of the country's foreign policy themselves came from civil society. Their vision has largely been institutionalised in the structures of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which has remained open to cooperation with think tanks and the integration of individuals from these institutions. In Poland, by contrast, diplomats have tended to follow a more traditional and more hermetic civil servant path. This, together with a low level of trust in independent experts, institutions and civil society actors, has often led them to prioritise trustworthy in-house expertise rather than reaching out to external actors. The second explanation relates to the degree of involvement of political parties in the foreign policy process. It has been minimal in the Czech Republic, thus opening a space for think tanks to fill. Conversely, in Poland, the degree of politicisation of foreign policy is such that inter-partisan rivalries have dominated and actually structured debates toward controversy and emotional arguments and away from technical expertise.

In summary, this article highlights the importance of two elements of the foreign policy context — namely the sociological profile of the foreign policy elite and the involvement of political parties — in mediating the role and the influence of think tanks on the policy

⁵⁶Wojna and Gniazdowski, *Eastern Partnership*; Kaca et al., *Report PISM Learning from Past*; PAP, "Eksperci o sytuacji na Ukrainie" [Experts on the situation in Ukraine].

⁵⁷In the *Global Think Tank Index*, Polish think tanks are indeed ranked better both regionally (in the 'Best Think Tanks in Central and Eastern Europe' category, Polish think tanks occupy the 1st and 3rd position, while the first Czech think tank comes in 6th place) and internationally (in the 'Best Foreign Policy and International Affairs Think Tanks' category, the first Polish think tank ranks 19th while the first Czech one occupies the 50th position).

process. Thereby, it invites further research and analysis of these elements, in different national contexts and with regard to other policy cases.

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