

Soviet troops on the TV tower in Vilnius in January 1991.

Far more important are some fresh interpretations, such as his fair remarks on some positive impacts of bank 'tunnelling' in Central Europe in the 1990s (p. 201), an accurate interpretation of post-communist societal order in Central Europe as being rather egalitarian despite all of the neo-liberal rhetoric (p. 162–163), an authoritative explanation of the benefits of close German economic co-operation with the Central European region (p. 262), and an interesting remark on the proximity between the ideas of *Annus Mirabilis* and the communitarian philosophy of Charles Taylor that deserves deeper expert elaboration (p. 321).

Seen through the eyes of a political science scholar, Ther's book is perhaps the strongest in the closing parts devoted to an analysis of Russian aggression against Ukraine. Ther offers not only a precise analysis of the affair in general, but he gets down to business when criticizing the approach taken by the European Union. To conclude, Ther's book perfectly shows the strength and contribution of contemporary history research on our understanding of current politics. As such, it is must for any reader who is seriously concerned with recent Central and Southern European politics or with the influence of the economic environment on recent political changes in Europe.

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**Neuman, Marek:**

## **TOO SMALL TO MAKE AN IMPACT? THE CZECH REPUBLIC'S INFLUENCE ON THE EUROPEAN UNION'S FOREIGN POLICY.**

Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang GmbH Internationaler Verlag der Wissenschaften. 2015. 308 pages.

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How can medium-sized EU members influence EU foreign policy? That is, in short, the question Marek Neuman has raised in his latest publication. He presents an example of Czech foreign policy vis-à-vis Russia and post-Soviet space and examines whether the Czech Republic has been successful in uploading its national preferences to the European level.

Neuman explains that the Czech Republic has been selected for material/geographic and cognitive reasons. The former seems to be clear: the Czech Republic is a medium-sized EU country which joined the Union in 2004 and is located, more or less, in its geographic centre. However, some latter conditions for selection are questionable. Neuman points out that the first special cognitive feature is the role of public figures. He singles out Jiří Dienstbier, Šimon Pánek and Václav Havel. However, this explanation is poorly justified only by the fact that these personalities advocated foreign policy grounded in ethical values. Such an assumption is not specific to Czech foreign policy discourse. The same voices might have been heard in Slovakia, Hungary or Sweden, which would also fit into the first material/geographic selection cluster. Moreover, the reason why only these three gentlemen are mentioned is not clear. Dienstbier has had little influence on foreign policy since 1992 when he left the post of the minis-

ter of foreign affairs. On the other hand, Vondra or Schwarzenberg who in fact were part of the researched processes are missing from the list. Both had dissident/émigré backgrounds and advocated for ethically grounded foreign policy. Further cognitive features are less problematic, however. The narrative of successful transition has been internalized such that the Czech Republic bears the responsibility of sharing its experience further to the East; this is visible on a practical level, as the Czech Republic runs several transition assistance programmes. And the Czech Republic has been seen as a 'frosty pragmatist' in its relations with Russia since 2007 and has balanced between economic pragmatism and normativism.

Despite the aforementioned and to certain extent awkward justification of the Czech Republic's selection, one must admit that the Czech case is extraordinarily interesting. The strong role of civil society organizations which argued for an assertive approach vis-à-vis the examined region, and the ambiguity of the national foreign-policy debate in this realm, which has evolved since 2006/7 with the U.S. plans to build part of its missile defence project, might also perhaps have been underlined.

In chapter one, Neuman provides an informative overview of the development of Czech and EU relations with the post-Soviet space. He found that Czech and EU approaches have been contradictory in many areas. First, the Czech Republic put little emphasis on its eastern policy in 1990's while the EU, on the other hand, approached its eastern partners. On the contrary, since 2000, the Czech Republic revived its relations with Russia and, more importantly, Ukraine and Belarus, and has tried to conduct more normative foreign policy. In the same time period, the EU's policy of continuous engagement was struck by series of problematic events (the Orange Revolution, Russia's ban on Polish agricultural products, gas/oil crises). The justification of the cases is

thus successful: one can expect different approaches by the EU and the Czech Republic. Therefore, the Czech Republic's impact on the EU level is traceable.

Chapter two puts forward a challenging theoretical discussion. Neuman works with two theories based on distinct ontological and epistemological foundations – liberal inter-governmentalism and social constructivism. Rather than combining them, Neuman uses both approaches in parallel and this makes his argumentation even stronger for two reasons: Firstly, it extends the empirical part. Neuman later observes a greater number of foreign policy activities and thoroughly examines the interest formulation. Secondly, his crucial method is process tracing, which is not limited to either theory. Though for the purpose of the empirical clarity, he does not take into account the norms and identity diffusion coming from the supranational level, which would fit into the social constructivist approach as well.

Chapters three, four and five are devoted to case studies. The first deals with the eastern dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy, later transformed into the Eastern Partnership. The second case study explores energy security. The last focuses on democracy promotion. It is perhaps not surprising that the outcome of the research is the finding that the Czech Republic has not succeeded in uploading all its goals to the EU's external relations. In the first case, Prague advocated for a less strict visa system with the Eastern Partnership countries and membership perspective, which it failed to deliver. In the second case, the Czech Republic was not successful in transferring some competences in energy policy to the European level. And in the final case, discussions on the European Consensus on Democracy have not provided a single policy document on the EU level.

The most important lesson to be taken from Neuman's work is found in the discussion on

the conditions under which the country is successfully able to promote its foreign policy priorities at the European level. His first master variable in this regard is the quality of national preference. When Prague's position was well deliberated at home and provided inclusivity, ambitiousness and complexity, it was more likely to succeed. That has been proven by Prague's contribution to forming the Eastern Partnership and launching its Civil Society Forum. The second master variable deals with a country's ability to position itself as a norm entrepreneur. In other words, a country has to frame its policy goal as an appealing norm: e.g. solidarity in energy security matters, right of the Eastern Partnership countries to aspire to a European perspective, etc. It has to establish a larger coalition of actors which may help to spread this message. Neuman highlights think-tanks, civil society organizations and, interestingly, the European Commission, which have proved to be extremely valuable partners in norms diffusion in selected cases. Norms promotion is interlinked with the third master variable – character of interstate negotiations and negotiating skills. The Czech Republic has been fairly successful in coalition building. On the other hand, given its necessity to consult with the capital on everything, its flexibility during negotiations has been questionable and this has made the Czech Republic a slow partner at the negotiating table. The latter finding might be seen in connection to the very first master variable. If there is a strong consensus on a national priority, the country would be less likely to change the country's position, and, mainly, it would become more necessary to consult with the capital on any steps.

Neuman also presents supportive variables: timing, content expertise and holding the Council Presidency. The latter seems to be the most important from both the theoretical and the practical point of view. As the legacy of the Czech EU Council Presidency is still unclear,

one of the Neuman's conclusions is a valuable contribution to the debate. He underlines that 'the Presidency served as a true catalyst for increased policy making at the domestic level. As such, the national preference formation phase on the domestic level gained momentum as a result of the approaching Presidency' (p. 263). Apart from that, his findings are in line with previous (e.g. Tallberg's) hypotheses that the (pre-Lisbon) Presidency was more than just an administrative matter.

Marek Neuman conducted research which is valuable from both the empirical and theoretical points of view. He developed master variables for (successful) national preference promotion on the European level which deserve to be further tested.

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**Kröger, Sandra et al.:**

## **POLITICAL REPRESENTATION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION: STILL DEMOCRATIC IN TIMES OF CRISIS?**

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The book *Political Representation in the European Union: Still Democratic in Times of Crisis?* introduces the current topic of democratic representation during and after the financial and economic crisis which hit in 2008. It explains how representation is perceived and searches for changes in representation not only within European institutions but also in civil society and transnational organizations. With its orientation, this book might be interesting not only for students and scholars