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MODERN FORMS AND PRACTICES OF THE CIVIL SOCIETY SELF-ORGANIZATION IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

The aim of this article is to study the peculiarities and specifics of Czech civil society. The initial situation and institutional conditions of the social self-organization are analyzed, along with specific examples of representing social interests and other forms of participation, as well as the ideas of state policy and civil society that fuel civic activism or protests. The author emphasizes that today the Czech Republic has a fairly diverse and extensive network of organized civil society, particularly in the ecological and social spheres. The system of political parties and a certain form of legal and financial regulation have not always contributed to the development of civic initiatives. Trade unions benefit from the opportunity to participate in state politics and its institutions.

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For Czechs, it is characteristic to express collective interests and outside the parliament – informally through demonstrations, petitions, and initiatives directed towards post-materialistic orientations. Civic initiatives address issues concerning Roma and other minorities, aid refugees, and resolve matters in which the state takes a restrictive position, although it is supported by broad segments of the Czech society. Similar patterns can be observed in protests and demands for political reforms. Czechs are seeking alternatives to existing parties that rely on civil society. The author emphasizes that among the numerous civil society organizations, there are influential ones, but the level of participation of Czechs in them is low. There have been frequent expressions of dissatisfaction with the form of social life and significant reservations towards the “party elite” in society. To some extent, this also applies to associations closely related to politics.

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Сучасні форми та практики самоорганізації громадянського суспільства у Чеській Республіці

Метою даної статті є дослідження особливостей та специфіки чеського громадянського суспільства. Проаналізовано вихідну ситуацію й інституційні умови соціальної самоорганізації ГС, розглянуто конкретні приклади представництва соціальних інтересів та інших форм участі, ідеї державної політики та ГС, які живлять громадянську активність чи протести. Автор наголошує, що нині в Чехії доволі різноманітна та розгалужена мережа організованого ГС – особливо в екологічній та соціальній сферах. Система політичних партій, певна форма правового і фінансового регулювання не завжди сприяли розвитку громадянської ініціативи. Профспілки виграють від можливості брати участь у політиці держави й її органах.

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Для чехів властиве вираження колективних інтересів і поза парламентом – неформально на демонстраціях, в петиціях, ініціативах, спрямованих на постматеріальні орієнтації. Громадські ініціативи займаються проблемами ромів, інших меншин, приймають біженців, вирішують справи, в яких держава займає обмежувальну позицію, хоч її в цьому підтримують широкі верстви чехів. У протестах і вимогах політичних реформ існує схожа картина. Так чехи шукають альтернативи діючим партіям, які опираються на ГС. Автор наголошує, що серед численних організацій ГС є дуже впливові, але рівень участі чехів у них низький. У суспільстві часто були прояви невдоволення формою суспільного життя і значна стриманість щодо «партійної верхівки». Певною мірою це стосується і близьких до політики об'єднань.

Ключові слова: Чеська Республіка, громадянське суспільство, неурядові організації, форми організації в соціальній та екологічній сферах, форми правового та фінансового регулювання діяльності, державна політика щодо громадянського суспільства.

Problem statement. The contemporary image of the Czech Republic (CR) in the world is shaped by the fact that in the recent parliamentary elections, a politician, a former military officer, who supports the values of Western society and openly advocates for changes in the democratic

model of development, emerged as the winner. At the same time, society has grown fatigued by parties and politicians, there's apathy towards their activities, which manifests in widespread Euroscepticism and a refusal to cooperate. This significantly disrupts the positive image formed by the state in the early years after the 1989 changes. The revolutionary events of November in Czechoslovakia and the civilized division of the state into the Czech Republic and Slovakia on January 1, 1993, demonstrated to the world a broad social mobilization and a struggle for civil rights. In the free elections of 1990, V. Havel, a member of Charter 77, was elected President of the Republic. His fellow democrats from Charter 77 were nominated for the majority of government positions. They brought with them democratic political ideas and values, including the concept of "non-political politics." This idea emerged in the 1970s when political opposition was prohibited and subjected to repression. The idea was to create an independent and at the same time informally organized sphere of society, which was the essence of opposition as an alternative model to the socialist system. Ethical and moral principles of individuals played a significant role. From this concept, the "Civic Forum" emerged as a non-governmental organization that emphasized pluralism, self-organization, and consensus, and did not want to be a political party with ambitions for power. The residents of Eastern and Western Europe believed that this would open the way for Czechs and Slovaks to actively participate in politics. But did it happen this way?

Analysis of recent research. This article is based on the laws of the Czech Republic, which reveal the legal framework for the development of civil society in the state; statistical data; and monitoring of the civil space. Separately, it is necessary to point out the works of political leaders – V. Havel [Havel, 1988] and V. Klaus [Klaus, 2002], who had diametrically opposed views on the feasibility of civil society in the Czech Republic. They not only considered the theoretical aspects of this social phenomenon but were also directly involved in its development in the Czech Republic.

Many Czech scientists are actively engaged in researching these issues, and their monographs and scientific studies have been used in this article. For example, A. Chmelář explores the development and functioning of civil society and has conducted a review of labor relations and social dialogue [Chmelář, 2017]. O. Císař [Císař, 2013] and K. Vráblíková [Císař, Vráblíková, 2015] have analyzed the typology of non-parliamentary political activity in post-communist conditions in the Czech Republic and the problematic nature of conflict politics in the Visegrad Group countries.

Z. Mansfeldová has studied issues of civil society, associations, and interest groups [Mansfeldová, 2012]. M. Meyer has examined models of civil society in Central and Eastern Europe and summarized 16 country reports and expert surveys [Meyer, ed., 2017]. P. Mička conducted an analysis of civic participation in the Czech Republic [Mička, 2015]. Challenges and opportunities of civil society are explored by J. Navrátil and J. Pejcal [Navrátil, Pejcal, 2017]. The work of P. Frič and his team has attracted particular interest, as it likely serves as a reference for further research, as the author raised several important (and unexplored) topics [Frič, ed., 2016].

The aim of the article is to investigate the peculiarities of Czech civil society (CS). To achieve the goal, the following **tasks** are defined: outline the initial situation and institutional conditions of social self-organization; analyze specific examples of representation of social interests and other forms of participation; identify the ideas of state policy and CS that fuel civic activism/protest. The analysis is based on a certain understanding of CS, which includes a wide range of actors and their powers: collective subjects united on a voluntary basis (associations, public organizations, trade unions, interest groups, and social movements). The location of CS is situated between the state, the market, and the family (private life); informal involvement of the population corresponds to the conditions created collectively and consciously: demonstrations, strikes, “grassroots movements”, and initiatives without a fixed organization.

Presentation of the main material. The democratization process initiated in Czechia in 1989 allowed Czech citizens to voluntarily organize in civil life and express their opinions and interests. After the suppression of the Prague Spring in 1968, most Czechs «retreated» into private life. Charter 77 dissidents, known in the West for their self-published writings, were largely isolated from Czechoslovak society. There were no protest movements or initiatives regarding the socialist system in Czechoslovakia until 1988-1989 [Otáhal, 2011].

All social interests were subordinated to the leading role of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (CPC) and enshrined in the Constitution. Participation and membership in socialist mass organizations were formally mandatory for the population. However, the notion of a society that “controls everything” did not fully correspond to the realities of that time. Even under socialism (especially at the local level where mass professional organizations, youth and women’s unions, etc. existed) there was an opportunity for cooperation “in accordance with one’s own goal” and a cer-

tain space for independent activity. But the decisive changes that enabled the free organization of social interests only began in 1989. This opened up two paths: betting on activism and the opportunity to participate or exercising the right to participate. In addition to spontaneous civic activities, associations, unions, and interest groups were massively formed in 1990-1991. The existing “old” associations adapted to the new circumstances. The number of registered organizations grew in the following years. Most of them were civic associations. Even in the mid-2010s, this growth amounted to 3.6% [Prouzová, 2015: 4]. Therefore, in modern Czech Republic, there are nearly 12 active organizations per 1000 people (in Austria and Hungary, on average, it is 7/1000, in Poland – 2/1000) [Meyer, 2017: 20]. At the same time, some modernized organizations (trade unions, Czech Union for Nature Conservation) have experienced a continuous decline in their ranks.

One of the key factors in the development of an organized CS is the ability of politicians to create the framework conditions for its emergence and functioning. In the 1990s, this policy was largely polarized. Many former civil society activists who held government positions before 1992 believed that a strong civil society was crucial for social cohesion and checks on power [Myant, 2005:254]. This positive attitude towards civil society was reflected in concrete actions and the state’s responsibility for its development. Charitable foundations were established using funds from privatization, which improved the financial situation of non-governmental non-profit organizations (NGOs). In comparison to other countries in Central and Eastern Europe, Czech NGOs held a special position, as the funds were allocated not only for specific programs but also for the establishment of fixed capital of funds and the enhancement of public potential [Ronovská, Vitoul, 2017: 360]. Additionally, the government created a board within the executive branch, known as the Fund Board, as a permanent advisory and initiative body for cooperation with the NGO sector [Usnesení vlády Z 10. června 1992:428]. However, the Fund Board was later dissolved under the governments of V. Klaus (1992-1996 and 1996-1998), and its capital was divided in 1999.

The dismissive attitude towards CSO is based on the market-liberal orientation of the American scholar M. Friedman. The government of V. Klaus was guided by his theories in addressing the economic and social problems of the state. He believed that private property was responsible for the problems and protection of individual rights [Myant, 2005: 256].

The main political objective of the 1990s was privatization and a “market economy without attributes,” so V. Klaus rejected any legitimacy of civil society. In his opinion, “society” consists of free individuals, and political parties serve as “standard mechanisms of democracy” in mediating between citizens and the state [Klaus, 2002: 26]. V. Havel opposed these ideas [Havel, 1988: 385-387]. He developed the concept of civil society as inseparable from democracy. Public discussions about the role and actions of civil society yielded various interpretations that still exist in the Czech Republic today. The contemporary institutional environment for the non-governmental and civil sectors was shaped over several legislative periods. The fragmented legal framework for civil society actions evolved, primarily NGOs, which were subject to state registration (including 13 different legal forms: foundations, civic associations, professional associations, chambers, trade unions, political parties).

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The fundamental amendment to the Civil Code of the Czech Republic in 2014 had far-reaching consequences and encompassed all civic associations and foundations that were previously regulated only by special laws [Sbírka zákonů ČR, č. 89/2012]. Smaller NGOs suffer from the fact that if the legal form changes, they will not be able to function. Lawyers dispute the status of the amendment, which, despite intense discussions, is still not clearly defined and not enshrined in the Law. Furthermore, in this context, the different and non-systematic procedure for granting tax benefits to organizations of various forms is criticized [Ronovská, Vitoul, 2017: 356-357].

Overall, the legislative framework is not restrictive, but due to its scattered nature, lack of stability, and loopholes, it is not beneficial. The interaction between state administration bodies regarding civil society organizations formally corresponds to the “cooperative model” [Mička, 2015: 2]. There are key mechanisms of consultation and participation of organized CS within the scope of policy: the Government Council for Non-Governmental Non-Profit Organizations (RVNNO) and the Council of Economic and Social Agreement Council of the Czech Republic (RHSD). RVNNO is an advisory body to the government on non-profit sector issues, coordinating measures to support it. It includes representatives from ministries, state administration, and civil society. For instance, the Council has initiated agreements at the regional level for partnership cooperation between state administration, politics, and NGOs. RHSD is a forum and tri-party agreement for conducting social dialogue among representatives of the

government, trade unions, and employers. It discusses fundamental issues of economic and social development in the Czech Republic to ensure social peace and makes certain legislative proposals [Vlada České republiky, 2023].

Some civil society organizations, based on their self-definition and the desire to preserve independence and prevent additional “bureaucratization,” criticized the positions of government representatives who favored cooperation with NGOs but conducted selective and non-transparent selection among CS representatives [Frič, 2016:18]. The government of Social Democratic Prime Minister B. Sobotka (2014-2017) sought to formulate a long-term and systematic state policy regarding the NGO sector. In addition to the Social Democrats (ČSSD), the government coalition included the Christian Democrats (KDU-ČSL) and the populist party ANO (“Action of Dissatisfied Citizens”). The Prime Minister stated that supporting NGOs was the government’s priority and presented a program for 2015-2020 that went beyond a single government term and legislative period. Thus, the B. Sobotka government found itself in a delicate situation as the functioning of the current bodies depended on the composition of the cabinet. This also demonstrated a willingness to cooperate in the RHSD Council when, after a cooling of relations during liberal-conservative cabinets (2006-2009, 2010-2013), the B. Sobotka government returned to social dialogue and increased attention to cooperation with trade unions [Chmelař, 2017: 6-8].

State funds play a crucial role in financing NGOs. They account for 65% of the revenue, followed by sales of services and goods (22%), and donations and private contributions (13%) [Navrátil, Pejcal, 2017:47]. International donors provided significant support to NGOs in the 1990s, but their share has now become insignificant [Meyer, 2017:23]. Ministries allocate funds from the centralized budget, but municipal and regional authorities decide for themselves how to distribute the budget. Another characteristic of state funding and its priorities is its short-term nature. The time horizon is limited to one year. For NGOs in the social sphere, this short-term nature complicates the process of applying for annual project grants. The policy of state subsidies also varies. For example, sports clubs receive financial support based on the number of members, while trade unions have the privilege of participating in a tripartite structure [Ronovská, Vitoul, 2017:359].

The thematic spheres and target groups around which collective interests are formed in the Czech Republic are highly diverse. They range from sports associations, leisure associations, to the interests of workers, employers, and anti-corruption initiatives. They deal with social issues and services, children and youth, women, the environment, human rights, and minority rights. In terms of public visibility and influence, a certain thematic focus of forms of collective self-organization prevails. Interests formed outside the parliament have a post-materialistic orientation [Císař, 2013:158]. The actions of CSOs are primarily focused on protecting the environment, human rights, and the rights of socially vulnerable groups (such as Roma people and people with disabilities). The second focus is on activities in the field of socio-economic policy. Trade unions, professional associations, charitable organizations, and organizations providing social services are active here. The orientation towards post-materialistic socio-cultural topics serves as a counterbalance to party politics, which is primarily structured along socio-economic conflict lines. Researchers identify the share of protests (conflict politics) related to the economic situation in the Visegrád countries as follows: Czech Republic – 16%, Slovakia – 28%, Poland – 45%, Hungary – 69% [Císař, Vráblíková, 2015: 10-12].

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The areas of interest of the environmental and social services within the Czech Civil Society have undergone an open and specific development. They represent important stages and challenges faced by the CS, encompassing international factors, Europeanization, and decentralization in the Czech Republic. The environmental movement is one of the most significant social movements in the Czech Republic. It emerged during the socialist period as a response to the widespread environmental degradation, air pollution, and associated health risks resulting from socialist industrialization. Since the early 1990s, a significant and diverse field of actors has emerged, ranging from small local nature conservation groups to associations involved in lobbying and influencing state policy [Navrátil, Pospíšil, 2014:32]. They were members of various organizations: “transformed” nature conservation organizations established in the 1970s by the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (CPC) and the Brontosaurus Movement [Czech “brontosaurus,” 2023], which was part of the Socialist Youth Union. After 1989, their membership numbers significantly decreased, but it remains the largest environmental association in the Czech Republic. There are also groups with a small number of activists that formed in 1988-

1989 during the emergence of new protests against the regime. During that time, movements such as the “Rainbow” movement (Hnutí DUHA), Green Circle (Zelený kruh), and Children of the Earth (Děti Země) were created, characterized by significant activity [Seznam občanských, 2021]. In 2001 Arnika movement emerged. Another category includes organizations founded by foreign activists in 1991: Greenpeace CR, which is part of a global network and is considered the most influential interest group in the country [Navrátil, Pejcal, 2017:53].

Since the early 1990s, the emergence of NGOs in the Czech Republic was influenced not only by domestic politics but also by international factors. This became one of the key factors shaping environmental interests in the country, with the support of international funds and democracy development programs. Sponsorship from Western countries had a significant weight, because under V. Klaus, the state nearly ceased supporting civil society. The EU has been supporting the environmental actions of the Czech Civil Society since the 1990s. After the Czech Republic submitted its application for EU membership, the EU provided significant grants to environmental organizations. Czech NGOs are involved in cooperation with the EU through educational programs, support for know-how, environmental projects, and direct funding. With the Czech Republic’s accession to the EU in 2004, support increased through projects within the framework of EU’s structural funds.

One of the consequences of international support is the significant professionalization of NGOs, especially interest groups and associations working in the field of environmental protection and human rights, established after 1989 [Císař, 2013:162]. This trend is reinforced by the nature of their activities and the demands placed on them by the government [Frič, 2016:9]. A typical characteristic of NGO structure development is the employment of permanent staff members and a small membership base. It is positive that NGOs are able to exert pressure on the government in addressing domestic political issues. For example, in 2005, with the support of the EU, NGOs succeeded in achieving the adoption of the Renewable Energy Sources Act. Among the drawbacks is the weak social support for NGOs, as civil society organizations fulfill a socializing role (“school of democracy”) and should provide a broader social base for civic participation. However, assistance is provided mainly in the form of sponsorship or campaign support.

Alternative actions to government policies by NGOs are also well known. Many Czechs oppose environmental NGOs. Activists are criticized for contradicting necessary measures for nature conservation in the Czech Republic, the logic of a market economy, that there is no threat to the environment and that anthropogenic climate change is not scientifically proven. They are seen as having an irrational private interest in environmentalism [Navrátil, Pospíšil, 2014:27]. This dismissive attitude towards NGOs is not new: various slanders and attempts to delegitimize NGOs have been known even when Klaus was Prime Minister.

In social policy, particularly in the provision of social services in the Czech Republic, non-governmental organizations play an important role. During socialism, this sphere was monopolized by the state. However, after 1989, numerous NGOs emerged, and significant activities are carried out by church charitable organizations such as “Charita” and “Diakonia” [Mansfeldová, 2012:767]. Gradually, a diverse network of assistance and counseling services has been established for various target groups, including people with disabilities, those facing crisis situations, pensioners, drug addicts, and the homeless.

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Especially noticeable is the assistance provided by NGOs in this sphere at the regional level. During the decentralization of 2001, the regions were entrusted, among other things, with tasks related to social policy, including the main responsibility for planning, and ensuring the development of the social services network. The relevant law [Sbirka zákonu České republiky, 14.brežna 2006] provided for the participation of NGOs in this process, and joint work is underway with social service providers and client representatives in the Czech Republic. The region is responsible for the registration of social service providers on the local level, which is a necessary condition for obtaining state subsidies. The territorial-administrative reform has influenced the development of social NGOs, not only as a new area of activity but also necessitating significant organizational changes: the establishment of larger associations in the regions and the creation of interdisciplinary regional umbrella organizations for NGOs, which politicians prefer as partners for negotiations.

Organizations of the social sphere of CS, including NGOs, primarily fulfill the role of service providers in society. Statistical data indicates that they comprise almost half of the social service providers. These NGOs are integrated into the social policy system and recognized, by their nature, as bodies of policy and public administration. However, their funding is

problematic, unstable, and undefined. They receive state funds for their project-based activities, needing to reapply every year and go through complex selection procedures. The uncertainty of funding puts them at a disadvantage compared to NGOs that receive primary funding from the state budget [Ronovská, Vitoul, 2017: 361]. Nevertheless, NGOs have innovative approaches to the social sector, particularly in healthcare. They provide convenient employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities in workshops and public catering establishments. Prior to 1989, people with disabilities were largely socially isolated. Today, this sphere is more developed, regional care institutions are engaged in it and small residential and care facilities are being created. The degree of real impact that NGOs can have on defining the priorities of a region's social policy depends on various factors and actors. Successful engagement of civil society representatives in the planning process requires politicians and officials to assist NGOs and understand their needs. Innovative NGO projects aimed at social work also operate at the national level. For example, among the large and influential civic associations in the Czech Republic is the organization "Human" ("Člověk"), which engages in humanitarian activities through educational projects and social services [Navrátil, Pejcal, 2017:53].

In terms of social perception, civic activism encounters significant limitations in two scenarios, which hinder the work of certain NGOs. These "emotional topics" are the interactions with the local Romani minority and the pressing issue of refugees. Groups that fight discrimination against Roma, particularly through projects aimed at improving educational opportunities for Romani children, face resistance and strong opposition in their work [Civicus Monitor, 2017]. However, in recent years, the Roma, as an unpopular minority, have been pushed into the background of the "refugee issue". A significant portion of Czech citizens are opposed to accepting refugees. In politics, there are hardly any voices drawing attention to the issue, let alone advocating for "positive" solutions. On the contrary, some politicians openly express fear and protest, such as Czech President M. Zeman in his anti-Islamic statements [Lang, 2015].

Since 1989, the number of members in CSOs has halved. This can only partially be explained by the reaction to the decline in pressure on members of mass socialist organizations in 1989. Rather, more general trends of modernization and processes of individualization are at play. Compared to the West, there are clear differences in the size of civil society communities

in the Czech Republic. Membership in political parties, trade unions, and employer associations created by civil society organizations in the Czech Republic is significantly lower. On the other hand, the number of members in leisure and recreational associations operating in the country is much higher [Frič, 2016: 44-46].

After the first free “constituent” elections and the beginning of transformation, various ideas emerged regarding further development within the Civic Forum, revealing that politics is “non-political” and moral. The principles are not entirely problematic in everyday politics. The group that emerged around V. Klaus considered themselves “realists” and politically established themselves in the newly formed Civic Democratic Party (ODS), adhering to the idea of market liberalism. On the other hand, the dissident wing struggled to define its place in politics due to the prevailing politics of power and increasing right-left polarization. After the parliamentary elections of 1992, the civic movement became a marginal phenomenon. President V. Havel, an idealistic and moral figure, held a political position until 2003, experiencing greater popularity abroad than in his own country.

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— The search for an alternative, “decent” politics emerging from civil society never completely disappeared in the Czech Republic as a motive that could always be mobilized again for civic protest. While the forms of mobilization and the issues changed, the criticism of parties (quite proactive ones) and political development beyond individual politics remained a common thread. They were mostly associated with the demand to act as “citizens” or “movements”.

In 1999, on the tenth anniversary of the November 17, 1989 revolution, mass protests against the government emerged under the slogan “Thank you, get out!”. The political context was represented by the “opposition agreement” within a minority government, which M. Zeman concluded with the ODS and which became the symbol of “political agreement” and divergences. Society became divided in its support between M. Zeman and V. Klaus. Non-partisan politics at that time managed to mobilize people across the country, but the civic movement that emerged from it did not gain a foothold in politics. However, ten years later, in June 2019, tens of thousands of people took to the streets in Prague, calling for the resignation of Prime Minister A. Babiš, whom they accused of fraudulent use of EU subsidies [Protests in the Czech Republic, 2019]. Thus, the potential for protest civic participation in the Czech Republic is strong.

During the presidential elections in 2013, which were held for the first time in the form of direct presidential elections, the familiar split reemerged: in the second round, K. Schwarzenberg and M. Zeman represented two main positions. The first of them represented the international dimension, moral principles, and the recognition of civil society in the tradition of Havel's ideas, appealing to critics of party politics. On the other hand, M. Zeman appeared as a nationalist, a popular candidate, inciting distrust towards civil society and promoting "clientelism" and interest-based politics [Lang, 2013].

The rivals achieved close results in the elections, but the populist candidate M. Zeman emerged as the winner. This indicated that there was no demand in society for a more subdued politics. In recent years, various groups have promised different policies repeatedly participated in elections, some of them presenting themselves as supporters of civil society. In the parliamentary elections of 2017, the Pirate Party and the group of municipal politicians (STAN), which declared a policy aligned with the interests of citizens, gained success among voters. This party, which had already established itself at the regional level, managed to gain the support of voters by promising to facilitate direct citizen involvement.

In the presidential elections in the Czech Republic in January 2023, the victory over A. Babiš was achieved by Peter Pavel, a career military officer and the first in Czech history and among the countries of the former Soviet bloc Chairman of the NATO Military Committee (2015-2018). He takes a firm stance against Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, advocates for Czechia's Western orientation, supports the values of civil society, and appeals to patriotic sentiments. He is primarily supported by followers of right-wing, conservative, and liberal views. Over 58% of voters cast their votes in his favor, while his opponent, former Prime Minister A. Babiš, received nearly 42% of the votes. "I would like to thank those who voted for me, as well as those who didn't vote but came to the elections, because they made it clear that they respect democracy and care about this country," said P. Pavel. "I see that in these elections, values such as truth, dignity, respect, and humility have prevailed." [Chekhiia: na prezidentskykh, 2023].

Conclusions. Currently, the Czech Republic has a fairly diverse and extensive network of organized civil society, particularly in the environmental and social spheres. The system of political parties and certain forms of legal and financial regulation have not always been favorable. However,

trade unions and major non-governmental organizations benefit from the opportunity to participate in state politics and institutionalized bodies.

Collective interests are expressed beyond the parliament – informally through demonstrations, petitions, and initiatives aimed at post-materialistic orientations. Civil initiatives address issues concerning the Roma population, other minorities, accept refugees – matters where the state takes a restrictive position, but it is supported by the broad strata of Czechs.

Protests and demands for political reforms, as well as the search for alternatives to existing parties based on civil society, present a similar picture. Protests serve as a source of inspiration for the non-ideological, morally motivated engagement of “non-political individuals” and the general desire for better politics. However, such associations often struggle to establish themselves in politics or become marginalized, and some of these organizations gradually transition into political parties. Among the numerous civil society organizations, there are influential ones, but the overall level of Czech participation is relatively low. Society has repeatedly shown dissatisfaction with the form of social life and significant reservations toward the “party elite”. This, to some extent, applies to associations closely related to politics as well. Therefore, the search for alternative forms of organization continues.

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