Environmental protest in the Czech Republic: three stages of post-communist development

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Introduction

Environmental protest in the Czech Republic\(^2\) has changed quite considerably since 1989.\(^3\) In terms of the political influence and capacity of environmental NGOs, there has not been a linear progression towards increased efficacy and pluralisation. Rather, it is possible to discern three distinct stages: an initial phase of political prominence and apparent radicalism (1990-mid 1991); a period of political marginalisation and de-radicalisation (mid 1991-96); and a current phase (1996 onwards) in which a cluster of large professional environmental NGOs have regained a degree of influence. In trying to explain such variation in the nature and efficacy of environmental protest, a number of determinants can be identified. The relationship between NGOs and the political elite is particularly important and has varied considerably since 1990. Second, and relatedly, the availability of resources and funding has had a profound impact on the capacity of NGOs to function within the political process and has also had an indirect effect on strategies and ideology. Other quite specific factors have exerted an impact: the authoritarian communist regime in Czechoslovakia and the role of environmental protest within its collapse explains patterns of protest and the radicalism of the early 1990s. The communist legacy and the political culture which it spawned also helps understand lingering public hostility towards environment protest and radicalism.

In conjunction the various theoretical approaches to the study of social protest offer a set of analytical tools for considering environmental protest in the Czech Republic.

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2 ‘The Czech Republic’ is used to cover the period after 1993, though the information up until the demise of the federation obviously relates to Czechoslovakia as a whole.
3 I would like to acknowledge the help of Hana Pernicova, formally Executive Director of Greenpeace CR, who has during lengthy interviews provided me with information and data on development in the environmental NGO sector over the past five years. I would also like to acknowledge the particular help of Dan Vondrouš (Duha), Jindrich Petřlik (Deti Zeme), Prof. Bedřich Moldan (CSOP), Marie Hasiova and Zuzana Drhová (Zelený Kruh).
since the end of the 1980s [Della Porta and Diani, 1999: ch. 1], though no single analytical approach provides a comprehensive theoretical framework to cover the post-communist decade. The role of environmental groups as a catch-all political opposition during the final months of the communist regime seems to lend credence to the structuralist-functionalist school who depict social movements as a conglomeration of the dispossessed and marginalised in a rapidly changing, crisis-ridden system [Smelser, 1962]. The politicisation of environmental protest can be explained in terms of the lack of legitimate procedural mechanism for channelling political protest within the Soviet-style system. Opposition sought political expression and the semi-legal conservation organisations provided such an outlet.

In the aftermath of the velvet revolution, in which former dissidents temporarily occupied positions of political power, the recently ‘liberated’ environmentalists appeared to be rejecting conventional pressure group activity in favour of strategies and organisational forms characterised by western social scientists as a new form of social protest [Melucci, 1988; Eder, 1985; Dalton, Kuechler and Burklin, 1990; Touraine, 1981, 1988]. However, such radical tactics and approaches were more a reflection of environmental protest having emerged within the authoritarian political setting of communist rule and of young activists lacking any political experience than an outright rejection of more conventional forms of protest and organisation. The radicalism of the early 1990s rapidly disappeared after 1992 as NGOs focused increasingly on conventional lobbying-based strategies in an attempt to win political influence in an increasingly hostile climate. On one level this appeared to be a positive step towards establishing a strata of professional environmental organisations prepared to negotiate at the policy level. From another perspective the 1992-96 period witnessed ideological constriction and political marginalisation. In the hey day of Klaus’s centre-right coalition government, environmental NGOs appeared to be being squeezed out of the political fray by the absence of resources and the lack of any political patronage. The former dissidents had left formal politics and the opposition parties seemed largely disinterested in the environmental issue.4

4 The small Free Democrats party did emphasise the environment and civil society.
The collapse of the Klaus government and the return to formal politics of former dissidents has brought forth a significant change in the political efficacy of NGOs. Yet, the capacity of the environmental movement in post-communist politics remains distinctly affected by the lack of a developed civil society and an infrastructure capable of supporting NGOs intent on political representation. In this sense the communist legacy and the difficulties of trying to consolidate democratic practice in a post-authoritarian context are critical determinants of environmental protest.

This paper will trace the development of environmental protest throughout the three stages identified above. Particular emphasis will be placed on how the relationship between the environmental sector and the political elite has altered, and on how NGOs have responded in terms of strategies, organisational structure, ideological focus and political engagement. The conclusion will offer tentative suggestions regarding the specific determinants of environmental protest in a post-authoritarian context.

**The ‘enthusiastic’ period⁵ - 1989-91**

In the months prior to the velvet revolution, the number of environmental organisations increased dramatically. By early 1990 estimates placed the number of groups in existence to be somewhere in the region of 800 [Silhanova et al, 1994, 1996]. The new environmental NGOs⁶ consisted typically of young students who had been drawn to the environmental issue during the months prior to the velvet revolution via state organisations such as the Czechoslovak Union of Nature Conservationists (Cesky svaz ochrancu prirody - CSOP), which had been established in 1979, or Brontosaurus, the conservation branch of the Socialist Youth organisation [Tickle, 1998: 125; Waller, 1989]. The new NGOs were small amorphous organisations that lacked cohesive internal structures. There was also a great deal of overlap between groups in terms of the campaign issues and the activists involved. NGOs were offered practical and financial assistance from a variety of external

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⁵ The use of the term ‘enthusiastic’ to describe this period was first employed by Jehlicka and Kara (1994)
⁶ The organisations themselves tended to use the term NGO to describe their organisation.
agencies including the Swedish environmental organisation Acid Rain, philanthropic foundations such as USAID, the German Marshall Fund (committed to economic restructuring in eastern Europe), the British Know How Fund, and (later) EU funding via the Phare Programme. NGOs received virtually no money from Czech citizens, nor did they seek to establish a fee-paying membership, preferring a handful of active members than passive supporters.

The organisation Hnuti Duha (Rainbow Movement), though it became one of the largest and most prominent NGOs, typified the nature of environmental protest at this time. Duha activists rejected a formal hierarchic organisational structure and the notion of non-active supporters, preferring activists to work independently on particular issues that were broadly defined by the Prague ‘branch’. Though Duha have subsequently become the leading environmental lobbying group at the periphery of the policy process, in the early 1990s they rejected a ‘parliamentary’ strategy and a hierarchic internal organisational structure in favour of direct action based on a global agenda and an amorphous cell-like internal structure.

Despite a global ideological focus and their reluctance to embrace ‘formal’ politics, the larger Prague-based NGOs enjoyed close links with the newly established environmental agencies and their opinions on policy were widely canvassed. This can be attributed largely to the attitude of the new dissident-based political elite. The first post-communist Czech environmental minister, Bedrich Moldan, and the new federal minister, Josef Vavrousek, had both been active in the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences ecological section before 1989 and had been critical of government policy [Waller and Millard, 1992: 170]. In their new governmental roles they sought close co-operation with the environmental NGOs and activists who they had campaigned alongside months before. This sentiment of co-operation and consensus found its most blatant institutional expression in the formation of the Green Parliament in early 1990.

The objective of the Parliament was to create a discursive forum in which a wide array of environmental NGOs and officials could co-operate in the formation of a programme for environmental regeneration. The role and function of the Green Parliament were outlined in a document drawn up by the Czech Ministry of the

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7 Information on Hnuti Duha was obtained from a series of interviews with Daniel Vondrous between 1994-99. Vondrous has been a key figure in the organisation since its inception and is now its main lobbyist.
Environment in 1990. The Parliament was described as 'an assembly of NGO representatives, to whom all the Ministry's significant plans shall be submitted for consultation and opinions' [Moldan, 1990: 22]. The Parliament was to meet regularly at the Czech Ministry of the Environment in Prague, and although its recommendations were not prescribed as binding on the Ministry, there was a sense in which the new officials, lacking experience in policy-making and administration, were keen to consult interested parties. In the early months of the Green Parliament, the larger Prague-based groups such as Greenpeace, Deti Zeme (Children of the Earth), Hnuti Duha (Rainbow Movement) benefited most from the Green Parliament and through it enjoyed close access to the policy process.

However, the seemingly ideal relationship between the various strands of the environmental sector concealed a number of underlying tensions. The apparent emergence at this time of ‘new politics’ amongst environmental NGOs requires careful examination. The greatest problem that was to distract the environmental movement until the mid-1990s was that the false unity of the environmental movement during the final months of communism had been fractured by the collapse of the old regime in November 1989. Activists had now to confront ideological differences and degrees of ‘greenness’ that had previously been eclipsed by their unifying opposition to Soviet-style communism. In addition, the environmental movement lost a number of key activists as a result of political change. Many key activists at the time of the velvet revolution were now either engaged in government or on the fringes of formal political power (for example, Bedrich Moldan, Josef Vavrousek and Ivan Dejmal who had been key figures within the movement were now part of the new state environmental agencies). Although co-operation between the new elite and NGOs was close, their involvement and expertise within the protest movement was difficult to replace. Other former activists had retreated back into academia, science or conservation; others simply left the political arena for the newly reclaimed private sphere.

Though certain environmental NGOs did exert a degree of influence on the new policy process through the Green Parliament and close personal links with officials, the climate of co-operation and consensus was hindered by the legacy of communism and by the fact that the NGOs needed to adjust to the changed political circumstances.
Environmental protest had emerged as illegal or semi-legal clandestine opposition movements under authoritarian rule, enmeshed within a submerged and highly politicised ‘parallel society’. Environmental protest had occupied a uniquely political position during 1988-9. An alliance of scientists, intellectuals, conservationists and sections of the general public had formed under the environmental banner. As a semi-legal activity apparently encouraged by the Party, conservation had political potential as a means of lambasting the regime from a relatively safe quarter. The degradation of the natural environment also seemed to reflect and encapsulate all that was wrong with the political and economic system. It thus, became a highly politicised issue that took on the dimensions of an opposition force within the deformed political construction of Soviet-style communism. The environmental NGOs were now required to enter the formal political sphere and co-operate and negotiate with the new democratic regime. They were being invited to sit round a table and help draw up a concrete policy framework; they needed to deal in facts and realistic strategies in order to help ameliorate the ecological degradation of the preceding decades. However, the particularly authoritarian nature of the communist regime in Czechoslovakia right up until 1989 compared with Hungary was such that environmentalists had been denied any such political experience. The period prior to the velvet revolution had not witnessed a limited political liberalisation which would have allowed for the re-emergence of a vestige of associational activity. The only political experience the environmentalists had was clandestine opposition within submerged amorphous structures or within the state conservation groups in the late 1980s. That the nascent NGOs lacked internal structures, cohesive ideological platforms on domestic issues, and appeared to shun the formal political policy process in favour of remaining enmeshed within a nascent civil society was a reflection of the circumstances in which they had emerged and operated during the final months of communist rule.

It is the particular origins of environmental protest during the late communist period that explains the nature and dimensions of NGOs activity in the immediate post-communist period.

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8 The term ‘parallel society’ or ‘polis’ was used by Havel in his essay *The Power of the Powerless* to describe dissident activity in the pre-revolutionary period. Activists ranging from musicians, poets, playwrights and environmentalists occupied a submerged clandestine sphere from whence they opposed the formal party-state system with its heavily controlled ‘society’.

9 The communist leadership in Hungary had legalised associational activity in 1985.
One of the most fundamental considerations at this time was the question of what role NGOs should play in the new political order. Some environmentalists who had become politically involved during the last months of the communist regime now argued that the creation of new environmental agencies plus the ascendancy of the new pro-environment elite deemed the role of NGOs unnecessary. Others stressed the continued importance of environmental protest within democratic politics and were concerned by the apparent apathy of others with regard to critical issues such as nuclear energy that were being debated at this time. Those advocating a continued role for independent environmental NGOs were further divided over the nature of protest. Fearful of destabilising the new regime, some activists urged restraint and were unwilling to counter the notion of radical direct action within the new democratic system. Other more radical elements were reluctant to become ensnared within formal politics at the national level and rejected conventional strategies in favour of more radical symbolic protest (e.g. the blockade of the proposed nuclear plant at Temelin). The need to adapt, to carve out a new role within post-communist politics and to alter patterns of internal organisation and strategy led to bitter rifts within the environmental movement which essentially paralysed effective mobilisation. Ideological disagreement over the nuclear energy issue and opposition to the Temelín plant in southern Bohemia led to the demise of the Green Parliament as NGOs fragmented, reformed, argued and, in many cases, folded.

There was something unusual in the fact that during the eighteen month period after the revolution the new ministers and state officials were, on many levels, more radical and were moving far faster than the NGOs who were distracted by internal ideological disputes and reformation. Despite the ambitions of the Green Parliament, the rapidly constructed framework of environmental legislation was established by those within the new agencies with the help of certain activists. Reluctant to work with each other, to widen their support base, or contemplate more mundane issues, the NGOs became increasingly detached from the policy process. In this sense the spirit of co-operation of the new political elite had come too early for NGOs who could not take advantage of the political climate. What was missing at this time was a sphere of environmental NGOs with the aptitude and expertise to co-operate at elite-level and to take
advantage of the political climate of consensus. There was a sense in which the political elite were waiting for environmental NGOs to adapt and take up positions around the negotiating table. Unfortunately political change at elite level ended this spirit of consensus and by the time the NGOs had adapted and reformed their involvement was no longer sought.

Political marginalisation: 1992-96

That the fledgling Czech environmental movement was beset by ideological rifts after the revolution is hardly surprising. A polarisation between more politically oriented groups and conservationists is typical of environmental politics [Young, 1992]. Political analysts charting the future course of environmental protest in the Czech Republic would probably have predicted a subsequent stage beyond the so-called enthusiastic period in which a polarisation would emerge between more moderate NGOs willing to engage with the political elite (a section of which would be co-opted by the state), and a more radical elements which would pursue alternative strategies from within civil society. What in fact occurred in the Czech case was that the radical protest and ideology of the immediate post-revolutionary period practically vanished and, although a core of more moderate state-focused professional NGOs did emerge, they were not co-opted within the political process. In fact they were politically ostracised and castigated throughout this period.

The nature and dimensions of environmental protest and the role of environmental NGOs within post-communist politics had begun to change during the second half of 1991, largely as a result of the break-up of Civic Forum and the political demise of the dissident-based elite. However, it was the election of Vaclav Klaus and the centre-right coalition in June 1992 that led to the political marginalisation of environmental NGOs. As a broad-based movement Civic Forum had established a political climate of consensus that was poignantly reflected in the Green Parliament initiative. Its fragmentation in 1991 led to the emergence of western-style adversarial politics which altered the political framework in which environmental NGOs were to operate. The environmental issue became engulfed in the emerging ideological rift between forces
on the political right advocating neo-liberal shock-therapy, rapid wealth creation and a de-regulated society, and the non-communist centre-left who emphasised a more gradualist approach, civic rights and environmental protection [Jehlicka and Kara, 1994: 159]. Public concern over the environment had already begun to decline as the impact of economic restructuring took hold. The victory of Vaclav Klaus and his right-of-centre coalition in the June 1992 election signified the end of consensus politics and ushered in a climate of hedonistic individualism in which concern for the environment was suddenly politically unfashionable. The political and economic reforms of the Klaus era impacted on environmental protest in a number of ways.

The most obvious impact of the changed political context was the marginalisation of the environmental movement. Instead of dealing with an environmental minister and set of officials who had themselves been activists and who sought to establish a progressive policy framework through consultation with the environmental movement, NGOs had now to face a political elite whose main objective was to curtail the regulatory role of the state in order to ensure rapid economic liberalisation. As opponents of untempered, unregulated growth, environmental NGOs were immediately identified as political enemies. Further environmental regulation was viewed as an impediment to the economic agenda and dismissed as ‘the icing on the cake’ - something to be dealt with in the future once a prosperous market economy had been established [Klaus, 1994]. In a move designed to further marginalise the environment as a political issue, the ministerial portfolio was handed to Frantisek Benda who, as a member of the ODA (Obcanská demokratická aliance - Civic Democratic Alliance), was politically weak within a coalition government dominated by the ODS (Obcanská demokratická strana - Civic Democratic Party) .

Far from there being any consultation between government and the environmental movement, Benda simply refused to meet NGOs and to set up any formal dialogue throughout his term of office. Such antipathy towards the environmental sector reached a nadir in early 1995 when four leading environmental NGOs were included on a security list.

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10 Initially, Benda remained loyal to Klaus and was keen to demonstrate his neo-liberal credentials by cutting funding to NGOs and to endorse the ‘icing-on the cake’ rhetoric of the prime-minister. However, as the ODA’s relationship with prime-minister Klaus deteriorated Benda used the environment as a political tool: towards the end of his tenure he attempted to court environmental NGOs in a blatant attempt to humiliate the leadership.
services’ list of ‘subversive organisations’ who were to be the target of surveillance. That the four environmental associations included on this list were committed to non-violent protest and to working within the democratic process, plus the fact that the other groups on the list were far-right neo-fascist organisations provoked political outrage. President Havel intervened as did a number of journalists and prominent figures in Czech society. As a result, three out of the four groups were eventually removed from the list. [Fagin and Jehlicka, 1998].

Not only were environmental NGOs politically marginalised and pilloried during this period, the environmental policy process that had been vigorously established in 1990 essentially ceased to exist. Apart from the odd amendment virtually no new environmental laws were prepared or enacted between 1992 and 1996. Indeed, for much of this period there did not exist a long term environmental plan or a set of future objectives. The prepared draft ‘State Environmental Policy’ was rejected by the government three times and was only finally passed in August 1995 after the withdrawal of any reference to sustainable development, a concept bitterly contested by Vaclav Klaus [Slocock, 1996; Fagin and Jehlicka, 1998: 118]. The absence of a policy framework essentially removed the formal political stage on which the interaction between NGOs and the state occurs.

It was not only environmental policy which was halted during this period, the development of a legal and constitutional framework also stagnated. In particular, the delay in establishing a coherent legal and fiscal framework for civil associations affected environmental NGOs. Though a Law on Associations had been included in the 1991 Civil Code of the 1991 Constitution, subsequent legislation was required to clarify the legal position of foundations, civic associations, non-profit organisations with regard to their basic right to exist and their fiscal rights with regard to tax exemption on donations. Though under pressure from the non-profit sector the Klaus government did finally enact a Law on Public Benefit Societies in 1995, the act failed to clarify the legal position of civil associations such as environmental groups that do not ostensibly exist to provide public benefit, own property, or distribute grants. Indeed, there was a certain irony in the fact that up until recently environmental NGOs claimed the legal right to operate and raise funds on the strength of antiquated
communist legislation. Klaus’s often-expressed ideological antipathy towards such collectivist emblems as non-profit organisations, NGOs and civil associations has been identified as a key factor in explaining the delay in establishing a legal framework.

The first dissident-led administration after 1990 had identified the importance of the availability of information relating to the environment [Moldan, 1990]. It was recognised that environmental regeneration depended upon openness and co-operation based on the free flow of information between the new state agencies, NGOs, and the public. Somewhat reminiscent of the later communist period, information relating to the environment became a political weapon in the adversarial and confrontational exchanges between the ministry and NGOs after 1992. It was thus not until 1997, after the political demise of both Klaus and Benda, that a freedom of information act relating to environmental information was enacted.

The new government’s inertia with regard to implementing the wide-ranging local government reform enshrined in the constitution served to weaken the capacity of local environmental NGOs operating outside of Prague. The success of the new Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) process, which had been introduced during the 1990-91 period but only came into effect after the 1992 election, depended on administrative reform and the devolution of power and responsibility to local government and planners. In the absence of such reform the process was thwarted by the lack of authority and prolonged tenure of communist officials reluctant to facilitate NGO and public involvement within the EIA process.

It was during the Klaus era that environmental NGOs began to experience a financial crisis that was to have a profound impact on their activities. The crisis was precipitated, en parte, by changes in patterns of state funding. However inappropriate state funding of environmental organisations might be in the long term, it has to be acknowledged that prior to there being sufficient levels of donations to NGOs from

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11 Despite the 1997 amendment on foundations and charities, the SOROS-backed Open Society which provides grants to associations still feels it is operating against a background of legal ambiguity.
12 Klaus made clear his hostility to the concept of civil society in a televised debate with Vaclav Havel in ...
13 It was during the brief period of Martin Bursik’s tenure at the Ministry of the Environment that information became freely available (on the Internet) and all files were opened and made available to
sections of Czech society (sections of the middle classes who typically fund environmental organisations elsewhere still lack sufficient levels of disposable income to make substantial donations), environmental NGOs have to rely in the short term on the provision of state support and on donations from external agencies.

In recognition of the need for the state to support nascent civil associations, the first post-communist administration had established the *State Fund for the Environment*. This was to consist of the revenue from fines and licences paid by polluters. Half of the proceeds were to be made available, via the Ministry of Environment, to environmental NGOs and in particular to help establish an infrastructure within the sector. Thus, organisations such as *Zeleny Kruh* (Green Circle), established to help co-ordinate the activities of NGOs and to strengthen the representation of environmental issues within the policy process, were to benefit. However, from 1992 onwards grants from the Ministry of Environment were directed away from the more politically-oriented NGOs and from projects seeking to strengthen the sector as a whole (e.g. information flow, resources, campaign expertise etc.) towards apolitical conservation projects. Thus, *Zeleny Kruh* was denied funding for much of the period on the basis that it was not actually involved in conservation work. It has since been revealed that a sizeable amount of the funds supposedly available to NGOs from the *State Fund for the Environment* was actually directed towards private sector projects such as the building of incinerators, the environmental value of which is widely disputed. NGOs were also supposed to benefit from the *Fond narodniho majetku* - Fund of National Property which is essentially a small proportion of the revenue from privatisation. However, the distribution of this money was continually delayed throughout the Klaus period and has only now (early 1999) been allocated to NGOs.

Although the environmental movement had begun to fragment shortly after the velvet revolution, the lack of adequate funding augmented divisions within the sector and effectively narrowed ideological diversity. As state grants were rationalised, NGOs became locked in a competitive struggle with each other over the small grants that were still available. The political effect of such competition was a reluctance to co-

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14 NGOs [interview with Petr Stepanek, former spokesperson for Martin Bursik, and Director of Public Relations at the Ministry]. The Czech Republic still lacks an overall Freedom of Information Act.

14 Interview with Petr Stepanek, November 1998
operate with each other which further weakened the political efficacy of the environmental movement. But perhaps the most critical dimension of the financial crisis was that NGOs reacted to the political and economic climate and the apparent decline in support for the environment amongst the general public by rejecting their radical strategies and ideological platforms. The only visible occurrence of direct action and mild civil disobedience was an annual blockade of the Temelin power plant. By 1996 Greenpeace no longer participated in the event and increasingly opposition to the nuclear energy issue was down-played in favour of less controversial issues or was approached form a less radical angle. For example, Duha worked with local groups opposing the building of nuclear waste storage sites in various areas across the country, but did not openly campaign against Temelin during this period. The NGOs did face a difficult task in campaigning against nuclear power in the sense that a broad consensus had seemingly emerged which regarded nuclear energy as a ‘clean’ alternative to brown-coal power plants. Though Deti Zeme and other NGOs did present alternative scenarios in their publications and reports, their lack of political access and inadequate resources made it difficult to stage an effective campaign. The only viable strategy seemed to be taking up local NIMBY-campaigns against the location of storage sites and less controversial conservation-oriented issues.

The fact that the political and economic context encouraged environmental NGOs to adopt a more professional and less radical approach during this period can be viewed as a positive long-term development. In the sense that a strata of NGOs willing to operate within the policy process was clearly missing in the earlier period, the emergence of less-radical more state-oriented NGOs prepared to co-operate at elite-level seems an encouraging development. Yet the strategy bore little or no political dividend for NGOs during this period. Indeed, the four environmental NGOs included on the security services list of ‘subversive groups’ had all rejected direct action and had sought to promote their professional image.

As state grants dwindled and the prospect of receiving donations from the Czech public and organisations was thwarted by the effects of economic restructuring, environmental NGOs became almost entirely reliant on the funding provided by external agencies. In light of the relative success of the political and economic
transition in the Czech Republic, donations to Czech NGOs were rationalised and donors began to re-targeted their assistance elsewhere. The focus of attention began to shift from the relatively stable and prosperous central Europe to areas of south-east Europe and parts of the former Yugoslavia. This was a period of recession across Europe and America and international foundations and donors were forced to rationalise their support for east European NGOs. Czech Greenpeace, which receives the bulk of its income from its international parent organisation and has never accepted state funding, experienced financial difficulties as a result of financial constraints within the international organisation at this time. The Czech branch suffered more as a result of this than Greenpeace branches elsewhere and was forced to consider, against the wishes of Greenpeace International, corporate sponsorship. Levels of foreign donations to Czech NGOs has never recovered and the threat of further cuts and withdrawals continues to pose a significant threat to the many environmental NGOs that remain dependent on external funding. By 1996 the American Ford Foundation, Rockerfellers, the US Peace Corps and USAID had completely withdrawn from the Czech Republic; C.S. Mott (US) had rationalised its assistance and EU money (through the PHARE programme) is increasingly being targeted towards projects that strengthen the economic infrastructure in view of possible Czech accession in the next decade.

Environmental NGOs were essentially locked in a situation in which their main sources of funding were in decline. There was a need to develop a base of fee-paying supporters from amongst Czech society. As noted above, this strategy was hindered by the fact that levels of disposable income amongst citizens inclined to support environmental NGOs were not high enough to enable sizeable donations, and also by the fact that the NGOs themselves were only gradually coming round to the idea of non-active fee-paying members. For instance, in 1995 Czech Greenpeace had barely 400 listed supporters despite the commitment of the organisation internationally to accept passive fee-paying supporters [Rucht, 1995]. Compounding this problem, there was (and actually remains) a distinct lack of fund-raising expertise in the country available to those NGOs willing to venture down this path. Though NGOs clearly needed to focus more on obtaining donations from Czech supporters, without the

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15 Interview with Hana Pernicova, Director of Greenpeace CR, June 1995
initial resources to invest in fund-raising it was difficult to maximise what potential did exist in terms of public support.

Whilst the larger NGOs with international links (such as Greenpeace) did manage to create a more professional image and develop their expertise, smaller groups were hindered by a lack of resources to acquire trained staff, accountants, legal advisers and even premises from which to operate. Though Zeleny Kruh continued to provide basic services (the provision of information, a resource room, access to a fax machine etc.) many of the smaller groups outside of Prague became entirely disenfranchised or simply ceased to exist.16

In many ways this period was a nadir for the environmental movement in the Czech Republic and a stark contrast to the initial period of broad based co-operation and policy initiatives. In addition to the lack of resources and political marginalisation, the environmental movement now faced a population less sympathetic to its cause. Although environmental activists in the earlier period had made little attempt to court public support or establish a constituency of supporters from a wider section of the community, the climate of concern about pollution and its effects on health at the time of the velvet revolution created a positive backdrop to their activities [Ivan Dejmal in Lamper et al, 1993: 9].17 The impact of economic restructuring was now being felt and the public’s attention was focused on such ‘material’ issues of housing and employment. There was also little public support for radical tactics. The legacy of four decades of communist rule on political attitudes and values was a passivity and a fear of radicalism. Environmentalists were seen by many as attempting to rock the political boat and thus a threat to democracy. The Klaus government undoubtedly pandered to this viewpoint by portraying environmentalists as enemies of reform.

If during the early period the environmental movement consisted of too many radical organisations and lacked more conventional groups willing to lobby parliament and focus on domestic issues, the legacy of the 1992-96 period was precisely the reverse.

16 e.g. South Bohemian Mothers
17 During 1990 the environment remained a key political issue. When one public opinion poll conducted by sociologists from Charles University asked respondents to name the most important issues for the new government to deal with, 83% named the environment as the most important issue [Jehlicka and Kara, 1994].
By the end of 1995 the environmental NGOs that had survived had responded to the financial crisis and political exclusion by jettisoning radical strategies and ideological platforms. In fear of public reaction and government recrimination, none of the main NGOs was willing to contemplate any degree of direct action. However, it has to be recognised that whilst the political climate between 1992-96 exerted a negative impact on the environmental movement in terms of ideological diversity and political influence, the period also witnessed a number of developments that have, with hindsight, strengthened NGOs and set them on a more constructive course compared to the 1990-91 period. Regardless of the success of such a strategy, the response of certain NGOs to the political and economic climate was to become more professional and to concurrently focus their attentions on securing public support and lobbying the political machine. Though such attempts were hindered by the constraints outlined above, by 1996 a small core of environmental NGOs (Greenpeace, Duha, Deti Zeme, Society for Sustainable Living) had emerged that were well-informed, were prepared to work closely at elite-level and had established a small number of fee-paying supporters within Czech society. The role of Greenpeace at the time of the floods in Moravia in early 1997 provides a good illustration of how far environmental NGOs had travelled towards becoming professional organisations. In the aftermath of the floods, Greenpeace established the Phoenix Project urging the incorporation of solar energy within the re-building of all the destroyed villages. The project received wide-spread support from politicians, ministers, local politicians and notably the president. Most significantly, even the embattled Klaus government, which since the 1996 election had lacked an overall majority, was now keen to co-operate with Greenpeace and other NGOs that had been depicted as subversives barely eighteen months earlier. The project also received a huge grant from the Soros Foundation.\textsuperscript{18}

\\textit{A political renaissance?}

\textsuperscript{18} Interview with Hana Pernicova, former Director of Greenpeace (now a trustee) and Cestmir Hrdinka, Executive Director, November 1998.
Just as the fragmentation of Civic Forum in 1991 and the change of government in June 1992 had a direct impact on the environmental sector, so the loss of an overall majority for Klaus’s ODS-led coalition in the 1996 election marked the tentative first steps towards a new era for environmental politics. The replacement of Frantisek Benda as environmental minister with Jiri Skalicky, a respected politician and fierce critic of Klaus, ushered in what might be termed a normalisation of relations between environmental NGOs and the Ministry. The climate of outright hostility was replaced by a period of tentative co-operation between the more prominent Prague-based NGOs and a tactical politician. There was now mounting pressure on the Czech Republic from the EU and the OECD to improve environmental regulation. The original framework of laws and instruments enacted after the velvet revolution had not been improved or extended and future entry to both organisations depended on further environmental regulation. The accession of Skalicky broke the political deadlock of the Benda years and enabled the drafting of desperately required legislation on waste. Whether out of any real commitment by Skalicky to incorporating NGOs within the drafting of the legislation, or simply due to the fact that he became increasingly distracted by political tensions within the embattled coalition, Greenpeace was able to exert a significant influence over the new law, inserting a clause banning the import of goods containing PVC by the year 2001. This clause represented the most radical aspect of the legislation and extends the legislation beyond norms elsewhere in Europe.

As political events rapidly changed in the ensuing months, the political influence and position of environmental NGOs was to improve quite dramatically. The crisis which finally engulfed Klaus’s embattled coalition towards the end of 1997 resulted in the formation of a caretaker government prior to elections to be held in June 1998. Under the brief tenure of Martin Bursik as Minister of the Environment, NGOs enjoyed an unprecedented degree of influence and were granted unrestricted access to the process of beginning to draft and update existing environmental legislation. The temporary government to which Bursik belonged was not bound by party discipline nor ideological rift (Bursik himself was politically and financially independent). His

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19 In terms of actual new legislation this period produced very little. This is largely because Bursik’s four month tenure made it impossible for him to draft new laws and get them through parliament -
approach was to work with other ministries and to portray the environment as an integral part of all policy issues rather than trying to get more power for the Ministry of the Environment. This marked a significant departure from the approach of his predecessors (and even his successor, Milos Kuzwart) in the sense that regardless of political complexion, there had since 1992 been a power battle within government between the Environmental Ministry, seen as insignificant and politically marginal, and other ministries such as industry. Such internal party or coalition politics impacts directly on the environmental sector insofar as it establishes a further barrier to political influence. Bursik’s accession also marked the return of former dissidents to environmental politics. Involved with the human rights group HOS (*Movement for Unjustly Pursued People*), Bursik had forged links with environmental campaigners such as Ivan Dejmal and other prominent members of the clandestine *Ecological Society* in the 1980s. Some of those environmentalists were now involved with the *Society for Sustainable Living* and, not surprisingly, were invited to assist in the regeneration of environmental policy. Unfortunately, as part of a caretaker government, Bursik was in office for less than three months and was therefore unable to enact much new legislation (his third day in office was actually the last day for submitting policy to the parliament). Nevertheless, he was able to inject a new spirit of co-operation and openness that is proving tenacious.

Since the election in June 1998 of a Social Democratic government, the political prominence of environmental NGOs established during the Bursik period has been maintained. There are clearly parallels with the early post-revolutionary period in the sense that a network of pro-environment politicians, lawyers and NGO activists has emerged within which there is once again an overlap between the NGO sector and state agencies. The new minister, Milos Kuzwart, a geologist and former member of the pre-1989 dissident environmental association the *Ecological Society*. More recently he has been involved with the non-governmental sector (he worked for NROS (*Nadace rozvoje obcanske spolecnosti* - Civil Society Development Foundation), the Czech organisation that distributes PHARE money to NGOs) and is still a member of the highly influential *Society for Sustainable Living*. The Green Parliament has been re-established as a forum for consultation between the Ministry and NGOs and the
first meeting (November 1998) was well-attended. There has also been formed a Legislative Group of environmental NGOs who receive draft copies of new laws and are asked to produce comments and suggestions.

How has the environmental movement changed? The most visible dimension of the environmental movement consists of the core Prague-based political NGOs that emerged during the 1992-6 period (Greenpeace, Duha, Deti Zeme, Society for Sustainable Living). After four years in the political wilderness, these groups are now benefiting from the post-1996 political climate. The profile of environmental NGOs reflects the changes that began to occur during the earlier period. Most of the prominent groups have now adopted a more conventional organisational structure and are directed by older (aged 30 plus) people who typically possess specialised higher-education qualifications in the natural sciences, management or the social sciences. This marks a distinct contrast with the early 1990s when NGOs consisted almost entirely of students under 25.

In addition to political NGOs, the environmental movement also consists of conservation groups such as CSOP and Brontosaurus. Though within these organisations there are radical elements (e.g. the Brno branch of CSOP), these organisations have moved away from political involvement during the post-communist period. Whilst these groups were politicised at the time of the revolution, they have largely returned to their role as conservation groups. Indeed, as restrictions were placed on the availability of state funding during the 1992-96 period, CSOP sought to emphasise its apolitical nature and was the recipient of a sizeable proportion of the total amount of funding available to NGOs. Other NGOs that were once more radical and appeared to be following a political path have subsequently fallen into the ranks of the apolitical conservationists. For example, the environmental NGO Tereza, one of the most prominent organisations in the 1989-91 period established to promote environmental awareness amongst children, now prides itself on its apolitical position and seeks to distance itself from environmental issues within the political sphere (such

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20 The Society for Sustainable Living, of which Kuzwart is a member, is perhaps the most influential and was recently able to halt the proposed amendments to the Waste Law which were deemed to be incompatible with the EU directive and open to manipulation by those intent on importing waste from abroad. Hnuti Duha and Deti Zeme are also doing well and work closely with the ministry over new legislative amendments on waste, the EIA process, and water.
as nuclear energy, transport etc.). The director of the organisation sees no contradiction in the recent decision to accept financial support from CEZ (the Czech electricity company) and Coca-Cola. It received payment from the latter for advising the multinational corporation on a green strategy for its advertising campaigns in the Czech Republic.²¹

Though Prague-based groups remain prominent, a network of local environmental NGOs has emerged focusing on local issues (such as opposition to nuclear storage sites) and targeting local politicians. An example of such activity is Pratele prirody (Friends of Nature) in Usti nad labem who have mounted a campaign against the building of dams on the Elbe. The Prague-based NGOs have begun to work with such groups as part of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) process, providing resources, advice and a link to the national political arena.

In terms of strategies and ideological breadth, a degree of radicalism appears to have returned to the Czech environmental movement after a period in which even the mildest campaign of civil disobedience was rejected. In 1997 a campaign organised by Greenpeace against the Syntesia chemical plant in Pardubice introduced a new dimension of ironic humiliation that was successful in winning public support. Invited on a river ‘tour’, the public were offered foul smelling polluted water in wine glasses that had been discharged directly from the chemical plant. Compared to the 1992-96 period in which NGOs were reluctant to embrace such tactics, the campaign marked a new approach. Despite some trepidation (a ‘happening’ organised in the middle of Prague’s main dual carriageway in Summer 1998 met with an angry response amongst the public and was considered a flop by activists), it is now possible to discern amongst environmentalists a recognition that such methods carefully used effectively challenge dominant attitudes. Whereas in the 1992-96 period NGOs became obsessed by not upsetting the public, it is now accepted by activists that instead of trying to win over huge swaths of the public, NGOs need to target sections of society sympathetic to the environmental cause whilst becoming more resilient to hostile opinions.

This changed strategy is clearly linked to apparent changes in the attitude of the public towards the environment. When asked about environmental organisations in a national opinion poll survey towards the end of 1996, 87% of respondents said they were

²¹ Interview with Jana Ledvunova, Director of Tereza, 17 July, 1997.
useful and important. In recent months there are clearly signs that the public are willing to offer financial support to NGOs. On a recent fund-raising campaign, Greenpeace more than tripled its donations from the public. For the first time the larger NGOs are now starting to keep lists of supporters and are targeting their fund raising accordingly. This change in attitude cannot simply be explained in terms of increased prosperity. Those who gave money to Greenpeace were public sector workers whose financial position has if anything worsened since 1996. Rather, the change in attitude of the public towards the environmental movement may be the combined result of a changed political climate in which NGOs are no longer identified as enemies of reform and progress, and the altered approach of the larger NGOs who now place a great deal of emphasis on public relations and in forging links with sections of society.

Though the political climate has certainly improved and the new spirit of co-operation has empowered NGOs, problems remain. NGOs are still affected by inadequate funding which particularly affects smaller local groups. Though apparently committed to working with NGOs, the new government has yet to alter the basis on which Ministry funds are allocated. It has been declared that funding received by NGOs as part of the recently released proceeds from privatisation cannot be used to pay salaries but must be used for conservation-related projects. Thus, the more-politically oriented groups and organisations, such as Zeleny Kruh which exist to strengthen the infrastructure of the environmental sector cannot benefit.

The case of the Budejovice-based NGO Jihoceske Matky (Southern Bohemian Mothers) illustrates how despite recent improvements in the relationship between NGOs and the Ministry, local groups away from the central loci of political power are severely affected by the funding crisis. The organisation was one of the few remaining NGOs in the Czech Republic to actively oppose the completion of the Temelin power plant in Southern Bohemia. After failing to attract funding from any of the foreign foundations or (unsurprisingly) from the state, the organisation has now folded. As a result there is now no organised opposition to the completion of the Temelin plant at a critical point when the new government has commissioned an enquiry into its future.

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22 Interview with Hana Pernicova, July 1997
It has been argued above that throughout the post-communist period the relationship between NGOs and the government has been a critical factor in explaining the nature and efficacy of protest. It has also been suggested that the balance of power between ministries within the government is also critical. In this sense, the relationship between the current Minister of Environment and other members of the government is likely to determine the future course of environmental protest. Regardless of how radical an agenda emerges from negotiations between the Ministry of the Environment and NGOs over the coming months, much rests on Minister Kuzwart’s ability to overcome opposition from within his own party. Though there is clearly a pro-environmental core of younger ministers within the Social Democratic government, the old guard politicians who favour industrial interests over the environment are well placed (industry, transport) to overturn policy initiatives. For instance, many activists have interpreted the recent decision not to include representatives from environmental NGOs within the international commission established by the new administration to decide the fate of the Temelin nuclear plant as indicative of the power of vested interests within the government who wish to see the plant completed. Moreover, political opposition from members of the former government and right-wing politicians at the local level cannot be overlooked. A decade in post-communist politics has been sufficient time for the consolidation of new vested interests. The links forged during the Klaus era between local politicians and the new private sector (for example, waste disposal companies and international mining companies) are likely to pose an increasing threat to the environmental lobby.\textsuperscript{23}

\textbf{Conclusion}

Environmental protest in the Czech Republic has undergone significant change since the velvet revolution of 1989 and the relationship between the state and environmental NGOs has been characterised by variation and flux rather than a linear progression.

\textsuperscript{23} An illustration of the pressure placed on local politicians by global corporations occurred recently when TVX Gold, a Canadian gold mining company intent on expanding operations in the Czech
The relationship between NGOs and the state immediately after the revolution was unusual insofar as the new state environmental agencies were keen to forge links with radical activists. However, between 1992-96 there appeared to be a return to old style politics in which independent interests seeking representation were ostracised and targeted as enemies. Despite a hostile climate, a cluster of NGOs emerged from this period more committed to participating within the policy process and intent on establishing themselves as professional organisations within the political arena. Since 1996, a new political climate has enabled such NGOs to regain some political influence, though a lack of sustainable and adequate funding continues to pose a threat.

In accounting for such variation a number of causal factors can be identified, some of which have long since been identified within the literature on social protest, others relate specifically to the post-communist context in which environmental protest operates. The Czech experience seems to endorse the view that in understanding the dimensions and nature of environmental protest, the relationship between organisations and the state and the interaction of NGOs with the political process is particularly critical. The attitude of the government towards the environment as an issue, environmental NGOs, and towards civil associations in general accounts for a great deal. The internal politics within the governing coalition or party is also critical. It has been argued above that regardless of how close NGOs might be to an environmental minister, it is the relationship between that minister and others within the government that is likely to ultimately determine the political efficacy of the environmental issue. Also, it is important to see the political process in which NGOs function as extending beyond the elite and parliamentary level to include both external political agencies (EU, OECD) and local politics. In the case of the former, pressure exerted by external agencies on the government to improve the state of the environment and tighten regulation can obviously assist NGOs. In the case of the latter, the often covert relationship between business interests and local politicians can serve as a significant constraint on apparently radical procedures such as the EIA process.

Republic, took a team of local politicians, officials and journalists on an all expenses paid trip to Central America to see how ‘successful’ the company’s operations were in other countries.
The availability of resources has long been recognised as a factor in the empowerment of interests within the political arena [Zald and McCarthy, 1987]. However, in the context of post-communist politics the issue of resources and funding is particularly critical in determining the capacity and political access of interests such as the environment. Post-communist societies lack the infrastructure of civil society that so benefits civil associations in more established democracies. This infrastructure is multifaceted and can be somewhat opaque; in western democracies it has developed over decades largely as a result of state assistance and private support. On a basic level it includes such practical assistance to NGOs as access to information (on other groups, new laws, foreign organisations), to resources such as photocopiers, computers, fax machines. Organisations such as the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) in the UK provide training programmes ranging from effective public relations, fund-raising, accounting practices, to legal advice. It is precisely the lack of such an infrastructure that constrains all shades of environmental protest in the Czech Republic.

However the resource issue with regard to environmental protest in the Czech Republic extends beyond the lack of a supportive infrastructure. Environmental NGOs in western Europe depend upon the financial support of sections of society. Though shortage of funds may well be a constraint elsewhere, the situation faced by NGOs in the Czech Republic is particularly critical. Though the situation seems to be improving, there remains an absence of sufficient levels of public donations largely, though not entirely, due to the pressures of economic reform on the Czech public. In a sense NGOs are caught in a vicious circle: they need the donations to acquire the expertise in fund-raising, but they cannot obtain sufficient funding until they know how to target sections of society and to elicit donations. NGOs of all types (including charities and foundations, third sector organisations) are thus all forced to depend on foreign donations and state funding, which immediately impacts upon the political independence of NGOs and on the possibility of long term development and expansion. It is the funding issue in the Czech Republic that has had a significant impact on ideological diversity, professionalism, and even the basic existence of the environmental movement. In the particular context of a young democracy, with a

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24 The NCVO receives financial support from the British Home Office as well as from charities and foundations.
nascent civil society trying to re-emerge after communist decimation in a climate of individualism and atomisation, NGOs that fail to attract foreign donations or state funding simply fold.

To summarise the key points of this paper, whilst the experience of environmental protest in the Czech Republic over the past decade endorses the importance of the political process and access to resources, it also highlights how the specific context of the communist legacy and the process of transition impact upon social protest in the so-called ‘democratic’ era.
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