

## The “Missing Link”: Examining organized interests in post-communist policy-making

### DESCRIPTION FOR THE GENERAL PUBLIC (IN ENGLISH)

The proposed research project will tackle a scientific area that has been overlooked in both previous research on organized interests in comparison and on post-communist governance in generally, the latter of which has focussed primarily on formal political institutions (e.g. presidentialism vs. parliamentarism) and the consolidation of party systems. Specifically, the project will cover key new insights on the “nuts and bolts” of modern Central and Eastern Europe governance in the context of the political and socio-economic transformation and Europeanization. Moreover, the analyses will provide crucial insights on the emergence and evolution of civil society, which can be seen as a crucial prerequisite for functioning democracies. Thus, the project will contribute to our understanding of how societal demands are channelled into the political process and how societal organizations shape three of the most important policy areas for the long-term prosperity of nations - energy, health care and higher education.

The overall objective of the proposed project is to explore the structures, democratic-participative incorporation and impact of organized interests in Central and Eastern Europe. The applicants will analyze the interest group landscape in three policy areas – energy, healthcare and higher education – in four post-communist countries: Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovenia. First the authors will develop a database of the “interest group ecology” in each policy area. The applicants then explore how interest groups organize civil society and contribute to the political preference aggregation process, while examining the structure of the interest group landscape. The main part of the analysis explores the clout that interest groups wield over policy outputs. Against this background, we derive a series of hypotheses based on *interest group-related*, *issue-related*, and *socio-economic* factors, which potentially condition the influence of organized interests in post-communist politics. To do so, we address the extent to which interest groups impact partisan preferences and then draw on the so-called “preference realization method”, according to which interest group preferences are measured against the initial government proposal, the official legislative bill and the final output. In parallel, we examine how European integration and EU accession have affected the structure, democratic-participative means, and impact of organized interests in CEE. Has European integration resulted in the consolidation and professionalization of domestic interest groups, ultimately strengthening their impact on policy output? Or has Europeanization prompted major interest groups to shift their activities to Brussels, thus increasing the clout of the state or previously structurally disadvantaged organized interests? To explore these questions, the applicants rely on comparative case studies based on the qualitative method of process tracing.

The international collaboration brings an added value to the quality of the project - besides the linguistic benefits of Polish-German cooperation, the bilateral nature of the project provides the German and Polish sides important channels for accessing new knowledge and expertise originating from different scientific traditions and backgrounds. Beyond German-Polish synergies, the comparative nature of the project enables us to tap into and reinforce cooperation within the pan-European research area. The project also provides an opportunity to enhance research on Central and Eastern Europe in German political science, while also facilitating the transfer of western methodological and analytical approaches to the Polish and Central and Eastern European context. Finally, the strong reliance on PhD candidates for the empirical case studies enables young researchers to engage in bilateral and international cooperation at an early stage in their career and familiarize themselves with heterogeneous academic cultures. All in all, the proposed research project promotes young researchers, advances scientific knowledge and build bridges between Polish and German academia.