

*Civil Society as a Discursive Frame:  
Václav Havel's Anatomy of Reticence  
as a Case Study*

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**M.**

## Abstract

“Civil society” was the exchange ‘currency’ of the dialogue between Eastern European dissidents and Western activists and critical intellectuals before the fall of state-socialism in 1989. But was there a strict understanding of the term “civil society” as utilized by the dissidents beyond their local activist context?

The present study attempts to refocus the “East-Central Europe 1989” ‘chapter’ of ‘civil society’. With the help of framework alignment, discourse analysis and analytic tools from intellectual history and critical social theory I analyze Vaclav Havel’s essay *Anatomy of Reticence* (1985). Discussing the context, argumentative structure, and the stylistics of the text as a discursive act, I argue that it displayed the discursive strength of civil society as a frame.

As such the conception of civil society – in the existential principle “life-in-truth” and the political stance of “anti-political politics” – was employed to address audiences in the West. It was aimed to demonstrate the idea of an independent life of society, to which people on both the eastern and western side of the Iron Curtain could align.

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## *Introduction*

In the modern history of Europe there has scarcely been a particular event and a concept so tightly connected as '1989, East-Central Europe' and 'civil society'. The loss of legitimacy of state-socialism in the region was perpetuated by underground associative cooperation between dissident intellectuals from the East and critical intellectuals and activists from the West of Europe. Civil society was not only the buzzword of the peaceful revolutions and the following transitions: it was the exchange 'currency', the common language that the East and West seemingly spoke in this new dialogue. But how is the legacy of this understanding reflected or refracted in the intellectual debate on the meaning of the events of 1989 and their aftermath? Was there a strict understanding and content of the term civil society in East-Central Europe, as used by the dissident intellectuals, and what was its role: was it an aligning high moral ideal, an incentive for strategic action, or as a utopian blueprint for a coming society? This study argues that it was primarily a patchy, but conventional and useful notion, utilized by the dissidents to articulate discursively a frame for collective action. It aimed to extend the claims of the fragile public sphere on the Eastern side of the Iron Curtain into a dialog with potential partners from the Western side of it.

The existing literature on the dissidents' theory and practice of civil society comprises quite a few volumes of work (though, mainly essay collections, e.g. Blackburn 1993, Tismăneanu 1998, Tismăneanu 1999, Kaldor&Vejvoda 1999, Kopeky&Mudde 2003). These volumes usually appear around the anniversaries of 1989 (1993-4, 1999-2000, and 2003-4), often without reference to each other, since they usually represent selections from already published materials. The texts represent diverse approaches. They answers to the question what "civil society" meant for the dissidents in East-Central Europe in several different ways.

First of all, a number of scholarly accounts apply quantitative approaches to discuss the political implications of the dissident's practice of civil society in and after the regime change in 1989: they display the levels of "efficiency" (or rather deficiency) of civil society detected by Western "barometers" in the post-communist countries (see e.g. Mendelson &al 2003; Howard 2003; Kaldor 2003, Kopecky&Mudde 2003). For such approaches the post-1989 political careers of a number of dissidents and/or their withdraw from civic activism are seen as a "drawback" of the working civil society in the region. Secondly, in opposition to this quantitative strategy, both Eastern and Western intellectuals have endeavoured to give an analytic definition of the dissidents' use of the concept (see e.g. Rau 1987, Isaak 1995, Murthy 1999, Outhwaite 2005). They use purely theoretical methods to test the applicability of one or more different paradigms – say Lockean, Hegelian, Toquevillian, Marxian, or Gramscian – in which civil society (should have) worked both 'truthfully' and 'fruitfully' throughout the 1980s. Thirdly, trapped between these two approaches historical accounts are usually confined to accusations

(Kennedy 1992; Roundtable LSE 2000) or apologies (Tismăneanu 1999) of the post-1989 “betrayal” of the alleged moral ideal of civil society by the dissidents.

Against this background the present study attempts to refocus the “East-Central Europe 1989” ‘chapter’ of the history of civil society. Even if the East-West axis has been overemphasized in the alleged decay of civil society in the 1990s (see e.g. Wedel 1998, Mendelson 2003, Howard 2003), it is vastly ignored in accounts of its re-birth and social life in the 1980s. This deficiency has left unanswered an important question which this study addresses: was there a role which “civil society” played beyond the local context of Eastern Europe, and beyond the underground civic activism of the dissidents? In answer to this question, instead of purely theorizing the concept or measuring its empirical application, I explore how the term was used in the intellectual dialogue between Eastern and Western European intellectuals and activists. I demonstrate that one of the main reasons for the success-story of civil society in the 1980s was that Eastern European dissidents employed strategically this newly rediscovered idea/l. They managed to articulate it as a *discursive frame*, and use it for the most immediate needs of the troubled societies in the Soviet bloc in appeals for collective support from international actors.

To prove this point, in my study I concentrate on one of the central texts – *Anatomy of Reticence* (1985) – of one of the main dissidents in East-Central Europe in the 1980s – the Czech playwright Václav Havel. I analyze the text from the viewpoint of its role in the discursive interaction with a network of East-Central European and Western intellectuals and activists. Since my aim is to show how, in their pragmatic use, abstract ideas have sociopolitical implications, I analyze the work with the help of two

methods from the field of applied social sciences: critical discourse analysis and frame alignment of collective mobilization. I study the discursive dimensions of civil society as a frame which contributed to the conceptualization and coagulation of one of the most important grassroots initiatives across the Iron Curtain, the “European Network for East-West Dialogue”.

In the light of Havel’s central speeches and essays published in the West before 1989, and his ideas of resistance and civil society, I show how in *Anatomy of Reticence* the theory and practice of civil society melt into as a subtle discursive appeal. I argue that ideas as “life in truth” and “anti-political politics” demonstrated the power of words. They rallied mutual understanding and support of the intellectuals of the two sides of the Iron Curtain which lived under radically different socialization conditions, and used diverse and divergent languages of expression (Tismăneanu 1988; Feher&Heller 1987:184-185). Thus, I show that the fused theory and practice of civil society worked not only as a set of measurements or a preexisting intellectual convention: it was made to operate as a complex frame, that called for comprehension and cooperation; it acted to address different audiences in the West, and to foster the East-West intellectual dialogue that contributed to the 1989 events and the developments in their aftermath; it unmasked existing topoi of misunderstanding between people living in different political contexts and under divergent conditions of life.

By addressing this highly problematic issue I believe, this study fulfills two main goals. First of all, in illustrating more fully the *modus operandi* of civil society before 1989 it synthesizes the scattered opinions on the problem. Then, on the ground, reflecting on the contextually specific understanding and use of a theoretical notion, it shows some



possible reasons and paths for research of the formation of the mega-frame civil society, its diffusion in the aftermath of the 1989, and the question why on the level of activist theory and practice the East and West of Europe are still divided.

The text is structured in the following way: in the first chapter I contextualize further the problematic of my study and place it in the broader frame of academic literature on the dissidents' use and understanding of civil society. I briefly sketch the role which the theory and practice of civil society played in the Western intellectual life before the "rebirth of civil society" in East-Central Europe in the 1980s. Then I go on to discuss the legacy of the dissidents' understanding and use of civil society in Western academic literature after the peaceful revolutions in 1989 and, in the last subchapter, the concept of intellectuals and its specific implications in the East-Central European case<sup>1</sup>. The second chapter is an excursion of sorts: there I draw on the observations made in the preceding parts in order to examine briefly and critically the specific understanding of civil society in the works of Václav Havel. This part might be seen as a formulation of the case, and as a disclaimer: I use existing comments on Havel's work and on the legacy of dissent to show the possible flaws in the theory of civil society before 1989 and in the practical implication in the aftermath of the events. In the third chapter of the text I

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<sup>1</sup> In this work I will use East-Central Europe as a geographical category that would designate three countries: Hungary, Poland and former Czechoslovakia. I do this simplification faced with the choice between two other possible but problematic categories. Simply saying 'Eastern Europe' could also include parts of the former Soviet Union, which this study aims to avoid. Yet, I sometimes use the term when I address processes that took part not only in the above mentioned countries, but also in a broader number of state formations to the East of these ones. The category of Central Europe is also slightly problematic: firstly, it could also include Austria and West Germany, which were not a part of the Soviet Bloc; then, despite the rebirth of this term in the 1980s (which started with two articles by dissidents from the regions – the Hungarian writer György Konrád (1983) and Czech novelist Milan Kundera(1984)) – in the broader literature of this period – and more specifically in Havel's texts – this term is used almost interchangeably with 'Eastern Europe'. The use is complicated even further by the post-1989 developments of the region. In his concluding remarks at a conference at the Central European University in the late 1990s Timoty Garton Ash makes the following remark: suddenly ten years after the changes Central Europeans have started accusing Westerners of imposing this definition on them, whereas, from the Western view point it were Czechs, Poles and Hungarians who insisted it into relevance in the late 1980s (Garton Ash 2000:401-2).

discuss briefly the methodology that I use to show the instrumental use of civil society as a frame in the East-West dialogue, discourse analysis and framework alignment.

Thus, in the fourth and last chapter of the work I apply this methodology on the text of Václav Havel *Anatomy of Reticence* divided into three parts. I firstly provide substantial context for the interpretation of the text – both the broader historical context that it emerged from, and the particular setting and audience it was destined to address. Then I demonstrate its schematic and argumentative structure and locate the articulation of Havel’s figure of civil society within it. The third section is dedicated to the pragmatic, syntactic, and semantic tools used to support the arguments. I conclude with a reflection on my results and the symbolic power of words as they shape and are shaped by worlds.

## **1. Con-textualizing the Problem**

For more than a century before the collapse of state-socialist regimes in Eastern Europe in 1989, the discussion of the term civil society was widely forgotten (Kaldor 2003). Its revival came with the almost concurrent events in Latin America and Eastern Europe in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that culminated in the regime changes in the 1970s and 1980s. Yet the peaceful revolutions in Eastern Europe are still pointed out as a primary re-birth date of the term. A theoretical ideal was represented mostly in reports on the main dissident intellectuals, published in the West, and by Western academic and journalistic representatives travelling the East of Europe. It was subsequently recreated in the Western academic literature as the triumphant reappearance of an independent autonomous and self-organized public sphere that catalysed the fall of state-socialism.

## ***1.1 Civil Society before 1989: towards an East-West Intellectual Dialogue***

The term ‘civil society’ was long used interchangeably with the ‘state’ – until the 18th century every citizen of a state was also understood as a member of civil society stemming from the classical tradition (Keane 1988:37). The concept only came to be interesting for social and political theories on itself once this coterminous use was questioned: civil society was theorized as a more or less autonomous sphere in reference to the state (see Keane 1988: 38-39). On this ground, contemporary theorists of civil society often reduce the concurrent traditions in theorizing civil society into two main ones.

On the one hand, the liberal tradition stems from the Scottish Enlightenment envisaged civil society as a political order that would regulate through the rule of law the commercial acts (Adam Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* 1977) or the common-wealth of people (John Locke, *Two Treatises on Government*, 1688-1702). A social contract guaranteed by the unity of the state a law-abiding government protects its citizens: the distinction between men and men – including ap-propriation of rights – is carried out with the precise procedures of market regulations: only thus could freedom be guaranteed. On the other hand, Georg W.H. Hegel’s *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* (1820) gave a leading definition of civil society as an autonomous sphere of social interaction between the public (state) and private (family). Hegel suggested a dialectic relation between family, civil society and state: civil society represents a broader family

of citizens, would abide by and guarantee the lawfully functioning centralized state, which then regulates the needs of the citizens-bourgeois<sup>2</sup>.

Yet, the decisive critique against both the liberal, and the Hegelian version of civil society came from Antonio Gramsci. In his 1926-1935 *Prison Notebooks* Gramsci opposed the understanding of people as actors expressing their free will, embodied in the democratic system in the modern state. He followed Hegel's understanding of civil society as a sphere between the 'private-' and the 'public sphere'. Gramsci saw civil society as a tool for state control with consent (instead of coercion) through institutions for social and cultural intermediation. Yet, civil society was also seen as a locus of social change: it could take place through proper education and free association of a new class of "organic" intellectuals that would gradually abolish the state and create a so-called self-regulated society. (see e.g. Buttigieg 1995; Keane 1988:23-24)

By the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the two traditions had split the practice of civil society in two opposing camps. The liberal theory functioned through the institutionalized civil society in the western liberal states and found its global application in theory and practice of development, democratization and governance. The debates in which political theorists invested the concept of civil society were rather procedural. The debate circulated in the dichotomic division between representative and deliberative democracy; between individual rights-oriented liberalism and communitarianism; between the upsurge of neo-conservative critique and the defence of the welfare-state policies (Arato&Cohen 1992: 4-11). This trend was opposed by a revival of the Gramscian theory in a new academic interest in social movements, grassroots

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<sup>2</sup> This servitude of people to property and production regulation processes that made Karl Marx treat civil society in the Hegelian political philosophy with mistrust: in fostering egoistic aspirations civil society recreates individualism and disenfranchises any citizen with no private property.

mobilization in new-left movements, civil rights activism and liberation movements in the third world (see e.g. Hann&Dunne 1996, Comaroff&Comaroff 2001). This revival, which started in the 1960s, gained further vigour with the insecurity felt in the West by the disillusionment with the welfare state, and the apocalyptic expectations of the “Doomsday” of a nuclear war between the two opposite blocks of the Cold War (see Feher&Heller 1987; Keane 1988). It was this second camp of predominantly left-wing thinkers and activists that developed a new interest in the tradition of dissent behind the Iron curtain.

All these paradigms have been commented on – in one way or another – in the academic debate, surrounding the reappearance of civil society in 1989. The East-Central European dissidents’ activities were testimony for the necessity of reappraisal of the distinction between state and civil society under the conditions of life in the totalitarian state. The reasons for the interest to this process in the West recognized in the academic literature were several. After the violent suppression of the Hungarian revolution in 1956, the Soviet intervention that ended the Prague spring, and the rise of the Solidarity movement in the late 1970s, there was a new impetus for solidarity with peace movements and intellectual dissent behind the Iron Curtain. More and more left-wing intellectuals in the West reluctantly realize the illusion of Marxism put to practice behind the Iron curtain. (Arato&Cohen 1992; Heller&Feher 1987)

Besides, cooperation between the blocs was built in the face of issues of urgency as of cooperation on nuclear disarmament, human rights, and environmental protection. The scarce literature on this exchange shows that the Western *peacenik*’s attempts to attract new activists from “the other Europe” in their campaigns were often far from

adequate (Tismăneanu 1990). As East European dissidents were trying to point out – both from behind the iron curtain and refugees in the West – the new language of insecurity (détente, disarmament and peace) seemed far from the urgent issues of interest for people surviving state socialism that spoke the language of unfreedom (Feher&Heller 1987:184). Explicit differences notwithstanding, the accounts from this époque show that new dialogue was built on a newly realized shared interest: the language of civil society, which was used to bridge this semantic gap (see Tismăneanu 1990, Keane 1988).

The broad range of literature on ‘civil society’ in the late 1980s suggests that the history of the concept was not written primarily and only by the dissidents: initiated by them, the re-use of this well-forgotten concept has struck a painful chord the self-perception of Western society at that time. In the years around the peaceful revolutions in 1989 a few volumes appeared that marked a new academic occupation with the theoretical re-definition of the term civil society in the light of the newly realized significance of East-Central European context of its use (see Keane 1988, Kaldor 1990 ed., Arato&Cohen 1992). These volumes voiced the significance of civic activism in the gradual collapse of state-socialism, and gave voice to some of the prominent figures of the dissidents’ communities of Central Europe like Adam Michnick, Jacek Kuron, George Konrád and Václav Havel. They all praised the newly developed ‘ferment’ of civil society in Eastern Europe despite the suppression of civil initiative and violation of rights of speech and association under the totalitarian dictatorships. Yet, they also indicated the challenges which Western societies faced in the blurred distinction between civil society and the state. Representatives throughout the West European Left raised voices against the centralized power of the Welfare state which bureaucratizes every

sphere of life (what Claus Offe calls welfare-statism), and the subsequent weakening of social solidarity, autonomy and participation under the weight of consumption, efficiency and growth (Arato&Cohen 1992:37, 44; Keane 1988:11-13).

Speaking from the tormented totalitarian context, through their civil activism and recuperation of the idea of civil society, Eastern European dissidents were sending a messages in which the Western critical intellectuals could recognize the ideal of radical democracy and grassroots activist practice. It represented the newly acquired and contested need of individual liberty, inviolability of private life, and emancipated public sphere, independent from the state and economy. It stood for a moral, normative form of political practice: such that would nurture civic initiatives and self-management. Lastly, civil society signified a “parallel polis”, a direct critique of state power, coined in the context of totalitarian state-socialism that had failed self-reform ‘from above’: hence, civil society was considered in an anti-statist and anti-political – even if not apolitical – perspective, as a change of the relationship between state and society ‘from below’ (discussion in Arato&Cohen 1992; Tamás 1999).

### ***1.2 The Legacy of Civil Society after 1989***

By the late 1980s civil society had become the exchange ‘currency’ of the East-West dialogue between Eastern European dissidents and Western activists and critical intellectuals. The peaceful revolutions of 1989 were welcomed with celebratory accounts of the success of civil society drafted by Western intellectual audiences (e.g. Ash 1990); yet there were also many voices skeptical of the new future of Europe (see Carter 1982:150 and Kaldor 1991) In the years following, the existing literature split the use and

understanding of the term into irreconcilable dichotomies: firstly, between a utopian ideal of civil society before 1989 and its controversial reality in the aftermath of the peaceful revolutions; secondly, between the western social thought of a working civil society – within the frameworks of a liberal state – and the anti-statist motives inherent in the Central European thinking of this concept.

In the aftermath of 1989, different aspects of the ideal were recuperated by different and controversial ideologies in the West, contributing to the “activist”, “neo-liberal”, and “postmodern” version of civil society, as described by Mary Kaldor in her LSE Speech (Kador 2003:588-590). In contrast to Kaldor’s quoted article however – which outlines the positive legacy of the 1989 use of ‘civil society’ in all three versions of a global civil society – other interpretations could be used to show how particular motives in the dissidents’ understanding rather clashed with different aspects of the proposed division.

A variation of the *activist version*, anti-political aspect of the civil society ideal was taken in by the alter-globalization movement in the 1990s. This ‘non-party politics’ of “civil society against the state”, and against the market, was already in controversial to the dominant trend of Western understanding of civil society. The latter reads the tradition of Hegel and Marx, in which civil society and market (economic activity of free individuals) overlap to a different extent, or Alexis de Tocqueville and Talcott Parsons, for which civil society can only exist within the liberal state in support of the latter (discussion in Arato&Cohen 1992; reference to Central Europe in Murthy 1999; Rau 1987). Recent scholarship has argued for a more complex understanding of the relation between state and civil society in Gramsci’s works, than the simplest application to the



anti-statist trend of the dissidents' thought (Buttigieg 1995). Besides, as the recent work of Alan Renwick showed, the dissidents' understanding of civil society can not be called anti-political *en bloc*: their versions on the question of division between state and society varied between and cooperation – like the Czech and Hungarian political opposition – and mutual negation and perpetuation of non-party politics, where the most distinguished examples were Václav Havel, and György Konrád (Renwick 2005). Yet, even in this partial adherence to the Gramscian tradition of non-party politics (Tismeneanu 1999), the Western left was rather weary of drawing parallels to the Eastern European experience: it saw the anti-political version betrayed in the other two versions of the ideal of civil society. “Certainly post-communist Central Europe is party politics as we know it, or rather worse” (Garton Ash in Roundtable LSE 2000)

The second – *neo-liberal version* – of the newly emerged civil society, tried to surround the disappointing anti-political rhetoric in the face of the “new policy agenda” (Kador 2003:589). In the 1990s a great number of Western European and American foundations invested in the second aspect of the ideal of civil society: in self-agement and civil initiatives. Civil society, according to them, was a mechanism for facilitating market reform and the introduction of parliamentary democracy: a vigorous possibility to re-create, and thus reaffirm the neo-liberal political project. A variety of high profile actors and initiatives wanted to recreate an exemplar model of a working civil society, but, as a variety of authors have argued for a subsequent decay, rather than heyday of civil society in the region (e.g. Kopecky&Mudde 2003, Howard 2003).<sup>3</sup> In the rush the “portable”

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<sup>3</sup> As these books, representing western “barometers” of civil society of sorts, have detected, despite the mushrooming of NGOs, there has been no mass participation in voluntary organizations. The newly created NGO specialists, were often not able to address or for that matter to mobilize members' initiative

model of civil society NGOs was uncritically adopted by the post-communist societies (see Kalb 2002:318). Except for a small circle of civic activists, the vast majority of the population did not become their clientele and remained sceptical to the donor-driven initiatives. In these new realities, the dissidents were seen as ‘gatekeepers’ to information and networks of potential cooperation (Wedel, 1998). In this, it is argued that instead of following the incentive of the dissidents for a “third way” society – not falling into the observable mistakes of both socialism and capitalism (Giddens 2000) – the huistic intellectuals made a double compromis with their consciousness. Many of them were subsequently said to have compromised their class conscience to corporate interests returning the specified technical and economic knowledge of a new technocratic avant-garde that ‘bought’ their support in the media (Szelenyi 1997:62).

This misalliance between normative ideal and political pragmatics was intensified in the very political practice of the dissident intellectuals in the post-Communist period. Their individualism did not commend respect by the anti-individualist, *post-modern version* of civil society (Kaldor 2003:589), which supported subaltern voices from marginalized, oppositional societies and groups. In the early years after the revolutions, scholars acquainted with the historical development of the region predicted the (re)creation of a strong political society in Eastern Europe (Arato&Cohen 1992). The specific legacy of the authoritarian tradition in Eastern Europe – in which intellectuals were seen as a proposition rather than opposition of nation-state power (Bozóki 1999) – was commented on as a potential peril both to the activist non-party politics, and to the liberal democratization process: the newly obtained liberties were often used by former

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about issues of local importance. Grassroots activism was “patchy and weak”, and there was no restoration of organizations and initiatives from pre-socialist or socialist times.

dissidents to foster opportunist individualist claims to political power. Thus, strong centralized political societies suppressed civil society as understood both by the western anti-system oriented initiative or protest as uncivil. In this conjuncture, the theory and practice of civil society has frequently encounter opposition not least from those who see behind it the rise of ‘uncivil’ pressure groups and disruptive social movement politics (e.g. Kopecky & Mudde 2003).

Thus, whereas it remains an undisputable statement that “[T]he dissidents’ conception of civil society has left a strong cultural legacy” (Kopecky&Mudde, 2003), any attempt to understand the use of the concept by the dissidents faces significant impediments. In the aftermath of 1989 “the conceptual boundaries have been expanded to the point that the connections between what we now call civil society and what the Central European dissidents understood by the term are increasingly hard to grasp” (Tismăneanu 2001:977). Besides, unable to bridge the gap between micro-level biographic accounts and macro-level processes of democratization and global governance, most of the studies fall short of recognizing the sphere of (inter)action and impact of the dissidents as such.

### ***1.3 Excuse: Central European Dissident Intellectuals and Civil Society - Discerning Voices in the Debate***

The discussion above shows that the academic literature on the theory and practice of civil society in and after 1989 has made the case of its exploration in two ways: either in a highly abstract, and philosophical language (in the attempt to relate it to more or less relevant theoretical traditions, see e.g. Rau 1987; Arato&Cohen 1992, Murthy, 1999, Outhwaite 2005) or in a rather pragmatic political jargon discussing the

work of the political society and/or the NGO sector during the transition, trying to bind it to the activist practice in 1989 (see e.g. Glenn 2001, Howard 2003). Thus, the legacy of the dissidents was criticised either in their radical anti-statist understanding of civil-society-against-the-state, or in their own strives to political power. This dichotomy was most visible in the case of Václav Havel who shared the most radical version of civil society with no engagement in real politics, but also came to power as an elected President of Czechoslovakia in 1990. For this reason, a discussion not only of the structure/form of civil society, but also elaboration of its (en)actors is a necessary element of the present study. One crucial difference between the academic discourse and the opinions of the dissident intellectuals is the very understanding of the term ‘intellectual.’ This difference has often been mentioned in a slap-dash manner, but has generally been underscored in academic scholarship on the 1989 transitions (though Bozóki 1999).

A discussion of the dissident-intellectuals under state-socialist regimes requires a differentiation of the term intellectuals as a category to be made. As Bauman states in his otherwise precise distinction between intellectuals-interpreters and intellectuals-legislators, the category of intellectual is not bounded to the fulfilment to particular criteria. It rather designates its referent as carriers of specific knowledge/power relations (Bauman 1987:4-7) In this sense, one should distinguish between ‘intelligentsia’ (intellectual-ideologues professing a “moral-behaviour code”) and the other definition of ‘intellectuals’ as *Kulturträger* (carriers of culture), which might as well include high-skilled bureaucracy, technocrats and experts party elites (Bozóki 1999). These categories are supplementary contextually-specific: East-Central European dissident intelligentsia

could be contrasted to two other groups of intellectuals – the East European high profile technocracy, and the Western European critical intellectuals.

On the one hand, under socialist regimes the supposedly classless societies developed a knowledge-based class distinction. To foster this distinction, the state-socialist regimes in East-Central Europe the in 1970s-1980s gradually managed to create a new expert class ‘on the road to class power’ (Konrád&Szelenyi 1979). The technically skilled and politically apathetic class conformed to limited acquisitions and liberties under the soft-hand reforms and in the political climate before 1989 (see Kennedy 1992, Szelenyi 1997). It was contrasted to the group of humanistic intellectuals-ideologues – called “dissidents” firstly in the Western academic and activist discourse (see Havel 1991a). This group of critical thinkers, even if not monolith in their visions and opinions, engaged in the theory and practice of civil society. Many of them rejected the pragmatic attitude towards governance. This issue became very problematic in the aftermath of 1989, when a political rivalry emerged between experts from the former group and highly moralistic but unqualified political-society members of the latter (Kopecky&Mudde 2003).

On the other hand, a difference persists between the (situationally left-libertarian) Central European dissident intellectuals and the (traditionally leftist) critical intellectuals in the West (Tismăneanu 1990). Unlike in the West, where critical intellectuals have usually remained in opposition to state power, in Central Europe humanistic intellectuals engaged vigorously in liberation struggles, and often entered politics ahead of nation-states (Bozóki 1999:1-5). Besides, before 1989, speaking the language of civil society, the two groups expressed different interests. Unlike the latter, who saw civic associations

as the guarantee for avoiding atomization and oblivion of duty, the former suffered from too little autonomy, rather than from too much; suffering severe repression within the state socialist system, they had the only dignify right left to “escape politics altogether with the aid of a commonplace morality, stressing the beauty of hummundrum human life, small sense integrity, a sense of humour...” (Tamás 1999:188-189).

While these hardships were seemingly recognized in the West, critical intellectuals there expected that the dissidents had various negative latencies. They were suspected – in the most cases unjustly, since the great majority of them were liberals – to lean towards nationalism as opposed to internationalism; to return to the tradition of the nationalist struggles in the region, instead of creating a new utopian vision for the Left (Zizek 1990; Habermas 1990); they were also often accused of not sharing interest in global issues, and championing the dream of capitalism, instead of criticising the problems which advanced capitalist societies had (as discussed in Roundtable Discussion LSE, Tismăneanu 1988). There were matches and mismatches in this attempt to come together “[t]he interest of the Western Left in Eastern European dissidence was a strange fact... The Left’s local prestige depended on it.” (Tamás 1999:184).

One the ground of these contrast in categories of intellectuals, one could easily discern positions in the debate. The group of western scholars is subdivided into three main voices in reference to the role of the dissidents in the region. A certain trend tends to praise their humanistic contribution to the development of the Eastern European post-1989 civil societies. A good example for such reflections are a number of articles by the American Political theorist Jeffrey C. Isaak (e.g, Isaak 1995, Isaak 1999 [1996]): the

author highly praises the dissidents' sophisticated political theory, and contribution to to the development of civic consciousness in their own countries.

In more sceptical comments on the dissidents' high moral ideals, other scholars detect a decisive clash to the post-socialist political realities, and superfluous everyday needs of common people in their countries. The British historian Timothy Garton Ash<sup>4</sup> sees the glaring contrast between dissidents' ideal of "living in truth" and the "half-way truth" of liberal democratic politics, to which they had to adapt. Whereas in 1990 Garton Ash claims that the opposition movements in Eastern Europe were in effect saying "We want to be Bürger and bürgerlich."... [We want] "old truths and tested models..." (see e.g. Garton Ash 1999[1990]), in 1998 he detects that those values were rather applicable to common people and clashed with the dissidents' ideas (Garton Ash 2000:204). A group of scholars around Petr Kopecky identifies a problem in the dissidents' understanding of civil society in its Manichean division of the world into "us"(the people) and "them"(the elite); for them the post-1989 political practice of the dissidents is rather authoritarian and paradoxically neglected extra-parliamentary opposition and civic initiatives as "uncivil society"<sup>5</sup> (Barnfield&Kopecky 1999, Kopecky&Mudde ed 2003). The latter statement becomes highly problematic in the light of the discussed consolidation of a strong political society in the post-1989 years, suppressing the civil one.

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<sup>4</sup> Garton Ash has acquired the anecdotic nickname of a "velvet revolutionary": in the framework of intended research on the history of Nazi Germany, his encounter with the ongoing repressive regime in the DDR, he changed the focus of his study. In the 1980s he frequented Germany, Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia. He visited dissidents, helped in the support of samizdat and witnessed and depicted vigorously some of the events in the region before 1989 (see e.g. Ash 1990) arguably with a discrete emphasis on his role in them (David Pryce Jones, book review of Garton Ash's book *The File*).

<sup>5</sup> As Kopecky and Mudde note, the connotation of "civil" society should be "civilized" contradicts the actual role of civil society to be contentious and challenge the role of the state and political society.

Lastly, some scholars as the US-based Romanian historian Vladimir Tismăneanu blame western critical intellectuals and activists for having misinterpreted the intentions of the former dissidents and neglected the conditions of life under totalitarian regimes. Tismăneanu underlines the different dimensions of risk in protest under the repressive regimes. He underlines the imposition of western models of democracy without the necessary considerations of the post-1989 legacies of 40 years Leninism (e.g. Tismăneanu 1988; Tismăneanu ed.1999, for a similar opinion see also Ken Jowitt's article in the latter collection).

The tiny group of former dissidents, who still engage in the explication of the revolutions in the Western, as well as in the local context, is also subdivided. Despite his altogether negative vision of the post-1989 “velvet restoration” citizens’ disenfranchisement and return to power of the ormer *nomenklatura*, the Adam Michnik – former spokes person of the Solidarity movement – has gradually adopted a rather liberal jargon of civil society as return to normalcy (Michnik 1999). He sees it as a moral prerogative that – if not achieved – is still achievable (see e.g. Adam Michnik quoted in Roundtable LSE). Others, like Hungarian philosopher Gáspár Miklós Tamás, claim that the dissidents have been misinterpreted from their Western defenders in both their means and their ends: civil society did not represent a unity of theory and practice, but as a dynamic and interchangeable set of shared ideals of morality, integrity, and authenticity. Besides, many among them have been disappointed with the illiberal sentiments of the post-1989 societies (Tamás quoted in Tismăneanu 1999) or with the dominant role of technocracy in the civic sphere after 1989: “What we dreamed of was civil society. What we got were NGOs” (Ferenc Misslivetz quoted in Kador 2003).



## 2. A Definition of Civil Society in East-Central Europe before 1989: the Case of Václav Havel

Several studies of dissidents in 1980s Eastern Europe have discussed broadly the role of Václav Havel in the events of 1989 Czechoslovakia. A participant in the oppositional intellectual life in the country ever since the 1960s, and a prototypical ‘dissident’ after the death of Jan Patočka in 1977, Havel was one of the exemplary figures of the dissident scene. He was also a spokesperson of the alliance, and – as such – also a prominent actor in the relation between Western peace activists-intellectuals and Eastern European activists and dissidents.

A playwright and autodidact philosopher himself, Havel was not only an activist and oppositional figure: he was a part of the humanistic intelligentsia, and as such he was able to contribute to the development of the dissidents’ field. Havel remained in the periphery of the events in 1968; he did not enter the struggle against totalitarian regime in Czechoslovakia on board of Dubcek’s reform opposition. Instead his first more serious engagement in issues of dissent came in the late 1970s, and more specifically as one of the main signatories of *Charter 77*<sup>6</sup>. After his detainment in the late 1970s and the broad campaign of his wife Olga for the termination of his prison term, Havel was released and despite later detainments was ever since one of the main figures of the dissident community of Prague. A group of primarily humanistic intellectuals, they were often marginalized for political reasons, as their visions of politics did not represent the

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<sup>6</sup> Designed to fight for human rights, in general, and right of artistic expression in particular, the Charter claimed the liberation from prison of the Czech rock group *Plastic People of the Universe* that were put to prison because of their allegedly anti-system oriented songs. The Charter, beheaded by the philosopher Jan Patočka, Jiri Hajek and Havel and was signed by 237 people mainly from the Prague intelligentsia. It was not considered as an organization, rather a free association of people (see e.g. Falk B. 2005:84-88, Pontuso 2004:6).

traditional ideas of the reform opposition (Bloem 2002)<sup>7</sup>.. They had to cooperate predominantly in tight underground network activities: one of the reasons perhaps, why only there out of the three countries in East-Central Europe regime change took place more abruptly in 1989. Known at home, in the region and abroad he was the main motor of the Velvet Revolution of 1989, and subsequently became a President of Czechoslovakia(1990-1993) and of the Czech Republic(1993-2003).

Having chosen the works of Havel as a case study, my paper will face the following advantages and limitations. On the positive side I could claim Havel's role as seen from abroad: he was recognised as one of the main actor of the civil society in the Eastern bloc, an active participant in the East-West dialogue before 1989, main political actor in its aftermath (Keane 1988, Garton Ash 1990, Tismăneanu 1990, Hauner 1990, Carter 1992). As such he is often accused of having betrayed the imperatives of the 1980s civil society – be it in his authoritarian political career of a philosopher-king (Tucker 1999), or in his attempts to introduce into it his pre-1989 ideal of anti-political politics, which are seen as inappropriate to the post-socialist realities (Kopecky&Barnfield 1999). The work of Havel is also rather handy for the current enterprise. He never published whole volume of works in the West before 1989 besides his letters and a number of essays. Yet, a limited number of polemic essays were broadly translated and presented in the West, both in academic works (see e.g. Keane 1988), or on occasions such as conferences, activist and academic forums. In this sense, it is also easier to understand

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<sup>7</sup> In this conference paper Filip Bloem gives a concise account about the differences between the main opposition and the dissidents is available in: reform opposition both before and after 1968 tried to reaffirm the role of the party in the longstanding national tradition combining socialism and democracy, and enlightened paternalism, protecting the party leading position through democratic legitimacy; the dissidents, on the contrary, were always skeptical to the one-party state and preferred the practice of civil association (civil society) in structures independent from the official regime structures (Bloem2002:2-7).

their immediate context – on what occasion they were written and what audience they were facing. Furthermore, they addressed briefly and synthetically issues of central interest in the East West dialogue in the 1980s – Cold war, dissidence, life in truth, anti-political politics, issues of power and, in all that – of civil society, Central Europe. Discussed by Havel with the sentential precision of cues in a play, and thus they became widely known and quoted and commented in Western literature before and after 1989.

The limitations mainly stem from the extreme case of Havel’s anti-political version of civil society, and the not necessarily region-representative case of the humanistic dissidents of Czechoslovakia: these are said to have been more severely persecuted than the Hungarian opposition, which managed to balance communication with the reform opposition in the country; they were seen as a tiny single-class as opposed to the Polish cross-class oppositional alliance in the 1980s.<sup>8</sup> Yet, these facts might also be beneficial for my work: they allow me to speculate about an almost ‘ideal type’ version of frame of civil society which managed to spread from a small nucleus of activists, reaching a vast majority of adherents, and then to dissolve with the change of status quo in the country.

Other than that, the very case of the Czech dissident Václav Havel in the discussion of the concept of civil society is peculiar. Even if his post-1989 presidency he initiated a heated debate on the term with the prime minister of Czechoslovakia and the Czech Republic, Václav Klaus<sup>9</sup>, in his texts as a dissident he never uses the term “civil

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<sup>8</sup> Czechoslovakia where the dissidents of the country were neither a mixture of intellectuals, workers, and Church laics as the Solidarity movement had created it Poland; besides, the post-1968 Czechoslovakia did not leave much freedom for cultural dissent and potential for development of a high-ranking technical intelligentsia with claims to reform and power as the Kadar government did in post-1956 Hungary (Kennedy 1992:30).

<sup>9</sup> The debate between Havel and Klaus in 1994 over potential changes to the Czech constitution is described at length by variety of authors (e.g. Keane 1999, Kopecky&Barnfield1999, Pontuso 2004). In

society” as such. Yet many commentators have spoken of his version of civil society, keeping closely to its motives in two of his essays before 1989 *The Power of the Powerless* and *Politics and Conscience* (see e.g. Tismăneanu 1990; Renwick 2005, Falk 2005:322-324). This strategy was most probably initiated in the late 1980s-early 1990s when the editors of a few essay collections have assigned Havel a central role in the East-West dialogue on the concept (see e.g. Tismăneanu 1988, 1990), or even designed for him the role of an arbiter in it (Keane 1988, Kaldor 1990 ed.). Following the main scholarly intuition of these works, it is not difficult to allocate Havel’s understanding of civil society and resistance in his essays *The Power of the Powerless* ([PP] 1978) and *Anti-political Politics* (1984, hereafter quoted as [PC], as *Politics and Conscience* was known and quoted ever since its appearance in the Keane 1988 collection). Whereas the first essay is much more powerful in describing the practice of resistance and dissent in the post-totalitarian post-1968 Czech society, the second one elaborates further on the stances towards political society that this practice implies in his employment of the terms “life in truth”, “anti-political politics”, and – arguably – “parallel polis”<sup>10</sup>.

Written primarily for the audience at a meeting between the Czechoslovak and Polish underground opposition, and dedicated to the late Czech philosopher and dissident Jan Patočka<sup>11</sup>, *The Power of the Powerless* seeks to find common ground of “dissident” experience in the figure of “life in truth” or in Václav Benda’s notion of a “parallel

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very brief terms it could be reduced to the opposition between Havel’s adherence to *laissez-faire* economic (regionalism of small-scale (fn14) work and civic initiatives) and the persuasion of Klaus that a strong civil society could prevent the desired rapid transition to market economy (Pontuso 2004:123-129)

<sup>10</sup> Initial disagreement with Benda’s 1978 concept notwithstanding, Havel still adopts the idea of parallel structures to official state institutions allowing independent life of society. Havel’s objections were not that much to the concept itself, but rather to the social conditioning on which the independence were actually highly dependent (Havel 1991d:63)

<sup>11</sup> After the “spontaneous” anti-petition that followed the Charter 77 petition, Patočka, Havel, Hajek, and numerous other signatories were questioned by the state police. Patočka, by that time approaching 70 years of age, did not survive the interrogation and suffered a heart attack (Pontuso 2004:6).

polis”. For Havel in 1978 “dissident” could only be used in inverted comas, since it rather labelled a category of people and actions from the insider’s viewpoint of Western observers and visitors to the countries in the Soviet bloc (an idea developed further in PC). Yet, Havel does not totally deny the categorization, but rather tries to broaden it. He tests another perspective of judgement – this of the impersonal state power in its apparatus. As such instances “dissent” could be found not only amongst the well-known enclave of like-minded humanistic intellectuals, which have turned out to be “the tourist attraction of Eastern Europe”<sup>12</sup>. It could also be arbitrarily attributed to any opinion and act that is recognized as resistance towards the thick ideology of the Party-state.<sup>13</sup> Havel is not satisfied with this category either – yet, he points out its potential of empowerment of the powerless, in what commentators find to be one of the elements of his vision and understanding of civil society: “life in truth,” that is dissent in “a system [Czechoslovakia of Hussak] which has become more ossified politically that there is practically no way for such nonconformity to be implemented outside of its official structures”.(PP 127)

Borrowed from the earlier phenomenology of Patočka – a student of both Husserl and Heidegger in Freiburg before the World War II – and influenced by his later writings on self-sacrifice as the only true possibility for the fulfilment of existential principles, Havel’s “life in truth” does not lack a social dimension. Life in truth is seen as the commendable (even if not commandable) practice of resistance against the “panorama of lies” (PP 142) of the post-totalitarian regime which has developed subtle mechanisms for

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<sup>12</sup> This observation did not only recur in the texts of Havel and other reticent dissidents. At an the END support conference in 1982, Dan Smith, Chairperson of the Coordinating Committee appealed to co-members to stop being “an elite travel-club for a bunch of superstars; an undemocratic clique run by a self-perpetuating elite” (END Bulletin, July-August 1982:23 )

<sup>13</sup> Havel gives an example with his beer brewery shift supervisor, who was harshly punished for his “dissident” ideas of improving the manufacturing technology (PP 173-174).

control and coercion of society. It is the choice every one of the citizens of such regime could make in opposing the “life in lie” that is being emanated to him from the very centre of the repressive regime claiming that “the centre of power coincides with the centre of truth” (PP 130). Thus, Havel’s version of civil society stems directly social experience under state-socialism. It is based primarily on an existential and moral choice. The social dimension of the principle of life in truth is primarily this of voluntary membership in a community sharing common values and issues of interest:

Under the orderly surface of the life of lies, therefore, there slumbers the hidden sphere of life in its real aims, of its hidden openness to truth...The singular, explosive, incalculable political power of living within the truth resides in the fact that living openly within the truth has an ally, invisible to be sure, but omnipresent: this hidden sphere...This is where the potential for communication exists. But this place is hidden and therefore, from the perspective of power, very dangerous. (PP 148)

The communication takes place in what Havel calls “parallel structures” or, following the notion of the Czech dissident Václav Benda in “parallel polis”. This second expression of civil society is represented in self-organized parallel accessible information networks, forms of education, trade unions, foreign contacts etc. It is still seen however as

the most articulated expression so far of living within the truth... it must foreshadow a general solution and, thus, it is not just the expression of an introverted, self contained responsibility that individuals have to and for themselves alone, but responsibility to and for the world.”(PP 193-195).

The second motif of Havel’s understanding of civil society is related to the state-society division and represented at length in *Anti-Political Politics*, an essay dedicated to an academic ceremony in Toulouse, where the Czech dissident was invited to receive a

Peace award. There Havel develops further what in *The Power of the Powerless* he briefly mentioned as “independent, alternative political ideas [that] must necessarily reflect this moral dimension as a political phenomenon” (PP 154). In his essay from 1984 Havel rejects the idea of mutual control of civil society and the state. Instead he professes the principle of anti-political politics, which directly opposes conscience to politics, because especially in the post-totalitarian society:

System, ideology, and *apparat* have deprived us-rulers as well as the ruled-of our conscience, of our common sense and natural speech and thereby, of our actual humanity. States grow ever more machinelike; people are transformed into statistical choruses of voters, producers, consumers, patients, tourists, or soldiers. (AP 388)

Against this servitude to impersonal power machines, Havel offers his principles of civil society in “politics as practical morality, as service to the truth, essentially human...”anti-political politics, i.e. “politics from below”( PC 397-398)“.

In the years following the 1989 peaceful revolutions, Havel’s understanding of civil society in his dissident years<sup>14</sup> was discussed critically both by theorists and by political scientists, both by Central European dissidents and by Western scholars. Using different approaches, they reached rather similar conclusions of the ideational flaws or even dangers of this anti-political version of civil society.

Already in 1994 the theoretical side of this concept was put under disquisition by the Hungarian philosopher and former dissident Gáspár M. Tamás. In his text Tamás never refers to Havel himself. Yet the two main motives of the concept of civil society in

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<sup>14</sup> It might be noteworthy that Havel arguably claimed the stances on anti-politics and life in truth during his first years as a president of the country: one year after taking the present position he still wrote that every word he said stems from the principle of life in truth (quoted in Renwick 2005:308). Initially the most political he got in his first propositions for a political reform in his notion of small-scale works developed already in his work in the late 1970s (see e.g. PP: 173) and influenced by another renown Czech philosopher – the first president, Thomas Masaryk (Bloem 2002:7)

1989 that he recognizes follow closely the trends of Havel's conception of it: the ideas that civil society should be voluntary and non-hierarchical. Drawing on the founding fathers of Western contract theory, Tamás rejects the idea that abstract institutional rule should be considered as humiliating:

it might be felt as alien, cumbersome, and overwhelming, but there is nothing intrinsically destructive even in the adoration of power such as it was practiced in ancient oriental societies. If you worship something of a superior order, something acknowledged to exist on a higher plane than yourself, the result is hierarchy, not oppression.(Tamás 1994:208-209)

Besides, Tamás's argument continues, "the needs of the political community entails an approval of the dominion of opinion...political community can be discovered only by listening to the opinions of the people." (210-211). On this basis he disclaims the search of nature, and authenticity, difference, or otherness based on preference, "inner truth" and opinion, which every external rational order aimed at governing people would contradict or limit at least partially (211). Thus, in their anti-utopian feature and in the fight against the utopianism of rational order, the civil society as understood in the revolutions of 1989 could only live up to the ideals and "fanciful daydreams of the Marxist intelligentsia keen on legitimizing communist rule"(215). Even further, in this concept of a non-coercive political order and arbitrary rule based on a "lofty civic ideas", Tamás discovers the very paradox of civil society in Central Europe of the 1980s. The idea of civil society as a new social movement with fluctuating, volitional membership, not responsible before and for the impersonal abstract power of the state, this notion simply reinvents the enemy of the 1989 revolution, communism.

Recent studies from the field of political science (most notably in Kopecky&Barnfield 1999, and Renwick 2005 following Linz and Stepan (1996)) have



also shown inconsistency in Havel's version of the practice of civil society. Amongst other dissidents' versions of civil society his was the one that was least conversant with the conditions of properly (even if not perfectly) functioning democracy.

Renwick defends the need of a more subtle interpretation of the different levels of anti-political or ethic understanding that might have been irrelevant to post-communist party politics. The author distinguishes between three basic types of dissidents' understanding of the relationship and attitude of civil society to the state: "ignoring the state", "engaging the state from outside", and "entering the state." (Renwick 2005:288). In these three approaches there are also variations, but Renwick finds that the highest representability of one type of relation of dissidents towards the state: *anti-politics*, *pressure group approach*, and *political opposition*. The first case was represented in Havel's variation of anti-politic politics that is seen by Renwick as more extreme than that of George Konrád's anti-politics. The second version, "pressure group" was present in the conceptions of the opposition in Poland ever since the 1970s. The third version of "political opposition" could be found in both the Czechoslovakia and Hungary in the 1980s, but is most easily discernable in the *Beszélő* circle in Hungary in its early 1980s debates and the "social contract" offered in 1987.

In its juxtaposition with other cases in the typology of Linz and Stepan (1996) Renwick finds that in Havel's case one could distinguish all the main characteristics of an ethical civil society, most notably ethical basis of action of an ethical community, no liability for compromise, preference of human relations as opposed to routinized institutions, no sympathy and understanding of modern party politics as representing group interests (see discussion in Renwick 2005:304-307).

In both these approaches it is visible that the idea of civil society as professed by Havel has a problematic legacy in both its theoretical grounding, and in its post-1989 practical application in political society based on the principles of democracy. In this sense, my I would not try to give yet another reinterpretation of Havel's theoretical approach to civil society and its political implication. In my analysis I will stick to the definition of Havel's conception of civil society and will keep in mind its persuasive critique outlined above. I would try however to expand the dimension of civil society in its instrumental need before 1989: in the fusion of dissident's theory and practice of civil society as a frame of the East-West intellectual dialogue; in the discursive appeal for mutual understanding and cooperation across the Iron Curtain in the years preceding the fall of state-socialism.

### **3. Civil Society as a Discursive Frame: Methodological Considerations**

In other to discuss the role of theory and practice of civil society as a discursive appeal for cooperation and collective action, I analyse Havel's text *Anatomy of Reticence*. This short essay is often referred to as one of the main documents in the East-West dialogue (Hauner 1990). It engages in a polemic the Western European peace movement. By pinpointing some basic moments of misunderstanding between the Eastern and Western activists, Havel identifies potential principles of a further cooperation which would reduce the mutual mistrust.

In the following text I treat the essay as both a textual document – written by Havel and perceived by a reader – and as speech act – as which it was intended to address the audience at a conference in 1985. In order to ground the abstract use of concepts and

show the impact of ideas, I work with two methods from the field of applied social sciences: critical discourse analysis and frame alignment theory.

Discourse analysis uses successfully methods from the field of linguistics, critical Marxist and neo-Marxist social theory and communication theory. Its attempt is to analyse discursive messages transmitted in social and political contexts. It clarifies their implicit meanings, level of coherence within the speech, discursive repertoire or text they represent, and their potential impact on the audience. The method enables the analysis in socio-historical perspective of different levels or dimensions of discourse, such as syntax, style, strategies, turns and other aspects of interaction, genres of discourse, relations between text (discourse) and context, discourse and power. (see e.g. Van Dijk 1994, Chouliarak&Fairclough 1999).

Frame analysis is usually applied in more empirical work in studies of social movement mobilization and political campaigning (see e.g.). The founding father of frame analysis, sociologist Ervin Goffman conceptualized frames as “schemata of interpretation”, enabling individuals to “locate, perceive, identify and label” events and phenomena in their social environment (1974:21). Framing implies dynamics, constructive agency. It organizes experience and guides action “to mobilize potential adherents and constituents, to garner bystander support, and to demobilize antagonists” (Snow & Benford 1988:198). Movement actors are seen as signifying agents actively engaged in the production and maintenance of meaning for constituents, antagonists, and bystanders or observers (Snow&Benford 2000:613-614). Frames are often confused with ideologies: indeed, they need to resonate with prominent ideological visions, but they are

actually amplifying, extending or subverting existing ideologies, as their components or antidotes (Snow & Benford 2000:613fn2).

Despite the general independence of these two methods, however, in recent years however, scholarship of social movement studies has identified a particular gap in the analytic tool kit of the field: the central important role of discourse in understanding the semiotic dynamics of the framing process. Drawing on a wide range of studies from the field of protest research, Marc W. Steinberg shows that plainly referential use of language has produced significant flaws in frame theory (Steinberg 1998:847)<sup>15</sup>. To address these so-called “cracks” in frame alignment Steinberg uses Mikhail Bahtin’s understanding of discourse as dialogic interactive process of meaning, in which actors struggle to invert discourse with their preferred meanings. He offers a combination between discourse theory and social psychology in order to trace frame formation and diffusion in a “terrain of conflict” (Steinberg 1998:853).

Yet, Steinberg’s work on the explanation of the framing process is used primarily to discuss the formation of protest frames<sup>16</sup>. Stepping on former research however, my current study assumes the operation of a ‘civil society’ as a mega-frame for action in

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<sup>15</sup> Steinberg identifies five “cracks” in frame analysis. Firstly, neglecting discursive and rhetorical processes scholars leave the centrality, range and interrelatedness of frames largely unspecified. Secondly, in the representation of frames as discursive texts, frame analysers often draw coherent modular texts or maps, reifying the discontinuous flow of discursive texts. Then, the third flaw to identify the links between the individual and the macro context in frame formation; between talk of interaction and social construction of issues in the public sphere. As a fourth problematic field, Steinberg shows in the distinction between frames as cultural resources and strategies of power and control of material resources. Lastly, the author points out the impossibility to understand the social life of frames only through institutional and conjunctural constraints without observing how the production of meaning itself. (Steinberg 1998:847-852).

<sup>16</sup> In his research on the British working class in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Steinberg has produced intricate analyses on the frame formation in collective mobilization of Spitalfield milk weavers and cotton spinners (Steinberg 1999)

1980s in East-Central Europe<sup>17</sup>. Despite the limitations of these studies<sup>18</sup>, a discussion of how this frame was formed and managed to align different audiences is beyond the resources of the present research. My use of the “discursive tilt” in frame analysis is restricted. I follow the Stenberg’s dialogic approach intuition that in some instances “actors can realize power within discourse to the extent that they can convert the dialogue to a monologue, that is dampen or temporarily arrest the multivocality meaning within discourse”(Steinberg 1998:855). It allows me to use the categories of frame alignment theory (outlined in Snow&Benford 2000) to complement those of discourse analysis in the close reading of *Anatomy of Reticence*. Thus, I show how an instance of the frame of civil society (Havel’s anti-political politics in its existential principle of “life in truth”) was employed *discursively* in the interaction with one audience (the Western participants at a peace conference). I elaborate on how it appeared in a crucial phase of a movement dispute of meanings of its own frame on all levels of frame formation: diagnostic (interpretations of reality), prognostic (alternatives for changing problematic aspects of reality), and resonance (impact of the negotiated visions of reality to the audience which they need to mobilize)(see Benford 1993:678-679).

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<sup>17</sup> The use of civil society as a master frame has already been persuasively explored from its strategic and contested point of view by John Glenn III (2001). The study reveals and deals persuasively with the political aspect of how the ‘master frame’ of civil society in resource mobilization of popular support, Indeed, Glenn does fulfil the purpose he sets to himself in exploring civil society as a threefold claim about injustice, identity and agency (2001:26). He examines critically and explains the use of civil society by social movement entrepreneurs in the democratization of two Central European countries – Czechoslovakia and Poland – in terms of their success in four aspects: resource mobilization, excluding alternatives, influence in agenda setting processes in negotiations with the state, and the subsequent paths of democratization(see 2001:31-33).

<sup>18</sup> Glenn’s work (2001) lacks a complementary theoretical and discursive aspect to such analysis. Focusing on the particular case studies of internal political struggles, Glenn neglects two important aspects of the use of civil society before 1989: firstly, the theoretical frame formation of the concept, crucial in the dialogue amongst East-Central European dissidents, and between them and their audiences, including western intellectuals; and, thus, secondly the implications of this dialogue and interaction beyond the temporally and spatially isolated context which he explores.

Thus, the primal task of this study is to analyse *Anatomy of Reticence* in three different clusters of analysis (see van Dijk 1993:270 and 1997:6-7): context (global and local dimensions, actors', access, setting, participants, and issues at stake); argumentative structure and schematic organization of the text and the complementing dimensions of the text as a discursive act (semantics, pragmatics and syntax of the text). In this system I also emphasise on which aspects of the text address the diagnostic, prognostic and resonance levels of discourse in the Western European Nuclear Disarmament movement: the discursive moments of articulation and amplification of the "civil society" frame in the structure of the text; the points in which the East-Central European action frame of civil society indicates ways for strategic action and cooperation beyond its local context; and the degrees of resonate with issues of importance to the audience (Benford 1993, Snow&Benford 2000).

Besides this broader frame of analysis, several more specific questions will be implied in my work. Firstly, how is civil society represented/enacted/referred to in the speech – which analytical or pragmatic features are represented and how? Secondly, if and how do these feature contribute to the understanding of civil society in its representation in Havel's work as a discursive frame that is used instrumentally to indicate possibilities for cooperation and debate between Eastern and Western intellectual audiences?

## **4. Anatomy of Reticence: A Discursive (Frame) Analysis**

### **4.1 Context**

*Anatomy of Reticence* is an essay which Havel intended to present “at a peace conference in Amsterdam, in my absence” in 1985. It was then to appear in a subsequent essay collection on European identities published by the West German editing house Suhrkamp. Havel was not permitted to leave the country for the conference; the essay was first published in the Czechoslovak samizdat publication *Obsah* and reappeared in the Pamphlet of Charter 77 Foundation in Stockholm the same year (Paul Wilson, editor’s note to the text in Havel 1990).

This background information can give cues about important factors in the *context* of preparation and address of the essay. These should be taken into consideration in analysing the piece for two main reasons. Not only was Havel’s essay written in a dramatic moment of development of East-West dialogue: it is the author’s fine sense of drama that arguably made him choose the right moment, cues and stage setting that would grab and maintain the attention of the selected audience (Garton Ash 1993:79).

The text – clearly a polemic – was an attempt to respond to a particular sequence of recent events and developments within the post-WWII Europe, polarized in the two blocs of the Cold War. On the European continent the Western European peace movement was burgeoning more vigorously than ever before. On the one hand this was a result of the decision of NATO in 1979 to deploy intermediate range nuclear forces on the territory of Europe, which met extensive debates and huge protest in Britain,

Belgium, the Netherlands, Italy and West Germany<sup>19</sup>. In acts of solidarity, activists were trespassing national borders – including those of the countries behind the Iron curtain – with petitions and mutual support at protest actions (Carter 1992:114-115). On the other hand, by the middle of the 1980s the movement started expressed in renewed interest of Western activists in the happening in the underground civil society in East-Central Europe as potential collaborators in their campaigns. This interest was revived after the birth of the Solidarity movement in Poland and its suppression. It was also catalysed by the gradual détente in the Cold War politics, the signing of the Helsinki Final Act of Security and Cooperation in Europe<sup>20</sup> and later by Gorbachev’s pro-Western course and gradual reforms in the Soviet Union.

In terms of strategic action, this revived interest was represented in attempts to communicate with both peace officials and Eastern European independent groups. Yet, Western peace groups were “anxious to explore the space between official party and its political fronts, and the minority of dissidents openly challenging the party” (Carter 1992:205). The decisive document in this respect: the Appeal for European Nuclear Disarmament (END) was launched in 1980. It was drafted mainly by the historian and activist Edward P. Thompson who was one of the central figures of the British Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament CND – a think tank of sorts, in which engaged socialist intellectuals elaborated the theoretical and political agenda of the peace movement<sup>21</sup> (Carter 1992:122). One of the decisive demands of the Appeal was to support a European

<sup>19</sup> These protests were with mixed success – only in the Netherlands was the pressure on the government successful and the deployment was delayed; in both Britain and West Germany the peace and disarmament problematic was put on the agenda, but the reelection of the Conservative government and the raise to power of the CDU lead to stagnation of the impact of protest by 1984 (Carter 1992:114).

<sup>20</sup> There the governments of the countries of the Soviet Bloc declared they would abide by the international human rights covenants (Tismăneanu 1990:7)

<sup>21</sup> Except for E.P.Thompson, other important theorists on the British END were April Carter Mary Kaldor, Dan Smith, Ken Coates, who providing theoretical analysis and Cold war ‘dealignment strategy’.



“détente from below<sup>22</sup>”. It was an attempt to create and maintain “transcontinental network” for exchange between grassroots movements throughout Europe. It was to represent an informal civic version of official politics of détente that could put pressure on European governments to drift away from the United States (E.P.Thompson quoted in Baehr 2000). Another demand was presented in a plea for the creation of a “nuclear-free Europe”(Thompson 1982:1): a “free belt” of countries “from Poland to Portugal.” that would buffer between the two armed superpowers in case total disarmament was not accomplished. The appeal presented an apocalyptic vision of a coming nuclear war: following Thompson’s own anti-Soviet sentiments, it contradicted the traditional anti-Americanism of Left-wing formations in Britain and Europe and claimed reciprocity of the two polar blocs in the Cold War (Baehr 2000; Burke 2004).

Yet, by the middle of the 1980s the “détente from below” was taking place primarily on a discourse level, and was expressed in exchange of ideas, in articles, publications, and petitions across the Iron Curtain. On the level of strategic action, however, the policy of the Western movement towards East-Central Europe and the Soviet Union was based primarily on contacts with “officials” i.e. state-fostered peace committees on the Eastern side of the Iron Curtain (Burke 2004:199). As a British activist pointed out at the 1982 END Supporters Conference, from their viewpoint the difference between détente from below and détente from above were delusive as,

distinctions between official and autonomous organizations belongs to the language of the Cold war [...] we cannot find any general rules to guide us in

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<sup>22</sup> The so-called “détente from above” or official détente was taking place primarily on governmental levels: it was about arms control and disarmament. “Détente from below” or citizens détente dealt with these two topics but within a broader range of topics for cooperation on the grassroots level – environmental policies, demilitarization, tolerance and pluralism etc. In this the official détente was interpreted as clash between two competing blocs and was managed in preservation of the balance-of-power between them. The citizens détente saw the two blocs rather as complementary, than as competing parts of the same system.(Kaldor 1989:12-13)

making contacts between East and West. Everything is an experiment. Everything is unpredictable. .. to understand each initiative, each contact, each event in its own terms. All we know is that we have to reject the dangerous simplicities of Cold War rhetoric.” (John Mephram, END Bulletin, 10, July-August 1982:22)

Besides, the members of independent peace groups regarded and were regarded by the Western *peaceniks* with a growing mistrust. The westerners, were on double exposure between eastern independents and officials – the cooperation with the ones delegitimized the collaboration with the others and vice versa (Burke 2004); meetings with independents usually ended in complications: the latter often got into trouble with the officials, were blacklisted, and generally not allowed to participate at the movements’ conferences (Hauner, 1990:98). Western activists were also growingly impatient to the dogged refusal of the East-Central European independents to engage in issues of global importance (Tismăneanu 1990:8-9). The easterners had yet other troubles: not only was peace campaigning out of the official occasions and activities of peace committees regarded as act of dissent; for them more problematic was the fact that even the most radical claims for mutual disarmament of both NATO and the Warsaw Pact, did not imply the dissolution of the Soviet bloc and thus had no intention to change the status quo in the state-socialist countries; they claimed the need for growing pan European intellectual dialogue predicated primarily on human rights and change of political realities, which could only then create a free and peaceful Europe (Tismăneanu 1990, Burke 2004).

Against this background of mutual mistrust, a shift of position happened in 1984. After the British END had launched the annual END convention in 1981, this initiative grew independently into an umbrella body and forum for Western European peace movements (Carter 1992:115-116). At the third European Nuclear Disarmament (END)

convention in Perugia in 1984 the official peace committees from Eastern Europe were represented in contrast to the ostensible absence of participants from independents from their countries. This alarm for the growing hardships in the mutual communication made a faction of the movement require refocusing of its strategic framework<sup>23</sup>. They claimed the urgent need for Western groups to take stance against the oppressions in the repressive regimes in the Rest of Europe, and refocus their collaboration to work primarily with independent groups and avoid contacts with officials. At the end of the conference a European Network for East-West dialogue was created.(Burke 2004:189-190)

Yet, in February 1985 – two months before *Anatomy of Reticence* was written – the Network faced a major challenge. The first public event of the Network – a seminar organized on the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of the Yalta conference that arguably conceptualized the Iron Curtain divide – almost brought to schism the British branch of END. The organization that gave its name to the movement and, to a larger extent produced its political and theoretical agenda – had to decide whether to joins the Network. After heated debates, a fraction headed by one of the British END's founding members E. P.Thompson, rejected the idea (Burke 2004:200-201).

Thompson's arguments for this rejection came from various aspects. Thompson had himself make a few attempts to contact Central European dissidents during his visits to East-Central Europe in the early 1980s. In the years to follow he was also attacked by

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<sup>23</sup> Western activists appeared in a silent demonstration on the stage with mouth bound with red cloth in support of the Eastern European activists who were not permitted to access the conference (Burke 2004:189).

some of them in epistolary form on the pages of the *New Statesman*<sup>24</sup> (Hauner 1990). Speaking out of this experience he claimed that ceasing the negotiations with officials would not bring any positive results to the movement's campaigns: it would rather threaten the peace movements in Eastern Europe, diminishing further their legitimacy and exposing them to harsher repressions by the authorities. Furthermore, a historian of the British working class was weary of the thought that contacting only independent groups, END's network would be limited to the 'usual suspects – the dissident intellectuals were already "Westerners – they acted partly with an eye on western responses". Thompson's claim was for even broader participation (Burke 2004:202). Last but not least, the position and legitimacy of the British END was not going to profit from neglecting peace negotiations with official committees: within their local context END had to collaborate with organizations on the left as the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND), perseverant in their decisively anti-American stance in the Cold war, and definitely not interested in cooling down of the fight for civil rights and regime change beyond the Iron Curtain (Burke 2004:203).

The allegedly firm position towards the Network, however, was contradicted by the participation at the meeting by proponents of the more mild wing of the British END: having understood about the treachery, Thompson provisionally resigned from the organization and – in order to bring him back – the British END had to withdraw categorically from the "Network for East-West Dialogue", preserving their right to

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<sup>24</sup> The first and most important instances of such communication was the exchange of letters between an anonymous Czech intellectual under the pseudonym Vaclav Racek , who claimed that the Western peace movement should not insist on disarmament, but should use the weapons as a strength to put under pressure the repressive governments of the Soviet bloc countries. (the correspondence is represented in Thompson 1982)

communicate with both independent peace groups and officials in the countries beyond the Iron curtain (Burke 2004:201).

This episode is significant in interpreting the context of Havel's *Anatomy of Reticence* and shows its place as "perhaps the most influential contribution to the East-West dialogue" (Hauner 1990:105). The *setting* for which the text was designed, the "Amsterdam peace conference" was actually the Fourth END Convention in Amsterdam in July 1985, that followed the one in Perugia. As a follow up to the Perugia meeting and its decisions and implications, the Amsterdam END Convention was to have *socio-political significance* for the participation of END in the East-West dialogue. Such occasions gathered annually the *actors* (van Dijk 1993:272) who were the very central core of the Western European peace movements. Eastern Europeans were invited only as guests (END Bulletin 1982:22) but as at the Perugia meeting their *access* (van Dijk 1993:270) was limited from within their own countries. In this sense, the absence of Havel, one of the most prominent figures in the East-West dialogue, even if not desired, could be read as a meaningful condition that reaffirmed his position.

Thus, in the absence of Havel, his text still served the purpose not only of a "penetrating essay" (Carter 1992:185) in the very moment of resistance – and reticence namely – of other factions amongst them against the change of communicative focus in the East-West dialogue. It was also a powerful discursive act: an attempt of *counterframing* (Snow&Benford 2000:626) at a moment of a heated debate within the Western Peace movement. As the next chapters will show, Havel's text intervened discursively into the *diagnostic* level of frame formation of the END convention. It aimed to demonstrate something simple but crucial: that before looking for common strategic

alternatives for potential collaboration and mobilization between Eastern and Western activists (i.e. *prognostic* and *resonance* level of framing), they should negotiated on a common vision of reality and its priorities. How does the text manage to convey this message through the alternative of the ‘civil society’ frame?

#### ***4.2 Schematic and Argumentative Structure of the Text***

*Anatomy of Reticence* (Havel 1990:291-322) is a polemic pamphlet. The text is divided into 10 parts. The parts do not have titles, but only separated by roman ciphers; still, since every one of them has a particular place in the structure of the essay, an artificial but arguable – classification is possible.

The first three chapters form an introduction to the conceptual repertoire of the text and outline the main points of interest. Part one introduces the title term – reticence. Thus he specifies the subject of conversation: the mutual reticence (“caution, if not outright distrust and uneasiness”, 292) between East European dissidents and Western peace activists. Havel sketches briefly the arguments on both sides, and states as an intention of his speech his own contribution to the better mutual understanding (292). The second part of the text introduces the really central term in the discussion - “peace”- but in a rather sardonic tone: he speaks outright about the devaluation of “weary clichés about peace (293)” [...] arrested within the state socialist context in the same “pyramid of lies” like other words, “socialism”, “homeland”, “the people” (294). In the third part Havel speaks about the other two levels of perception of peace struggle: the “anti-imperialist” stance of socialist states in the hegemonic media representations of the world peace, and what it means for the common Czech people to meet Western petition carriers knocking on their door (295-296).

In the fourth and fifth parts the Czech dissident draws a pictorial description of the different perils to which Eastern European – both intellectuals and common citizens – are exposed in their adherence to the struggle for peace. He sketches the reasons of their powerlessness, the arbitrariness of decisions of impersonal power agents to vital questions of their and their children’s lives. He appeals not for respect of the conformity of the great mass, but for a basic, empathic reappraisal of the social atmosphere and context-sensitive strategies for struggle needed were any cooperation to take place.

The sixth part – decisively longer than all others – represents a more abstract, historico-philosophical polemics against utopianism. To oppose the halo of abstract power and the “arithmetic of common good” (301), Havel employs human conscience, and the specific Central European scepticism trained in many battles with the ideological mentality” (305).

This mediation is followed by two paragraphs that try to elucidate the conclusions with more examples. Part seven illustrates the reticence and life-saving scepticism of Eastern dissidents through the indignant response of many a female dissident in the country against the idea of signing a petition as women: an act which Havel describes as “dada”. After this rather symptomatic episode and a seeming reconciliation attempt in the end of part seven, in part eight Havel strikes back against Western misunderstanding of East European conditions and contexts. The Czech reminds his peace-making audience about the Western European Munich-“bow” to Hitler and his totalitarian state, which resulted in World War II. In this he draws a concrete parallel between the events in the thirties with the current situation in which the Soviet Union initiated a war in Afghanistan with million of victims and three million refugees.

The ninth part of the text is reconciling: in full recognition of the fact that the dissidents in Eastern Europe represent quite divergent opinions, Havel tries to synthesise what he calls “a common denominator” of their analogous experiences and perspectives in reference to the peace movement (313). In this, he outlines 5 basic points: the sympathy towards people exposed on the challenges of modern capitalist societies; the general conviction that a war cannot be prevented by means of attacking weapon systems; the role of disarmament negotiations in legitimizing repressive regimes with their collaboration with them; the need to struggle for a Europe of democratic, independent nations in order to prevent war and install ‘eternal peace’; the dependence of external peace on internally peaceful societies; and the dependence of autonomous individuals on peaceful and independent nations (313-315).

The last tenth part of *Anatomy of Reticence* is dedicated to an outline of four programmes of action – and the possible objections against them – that could be discerned amongst the dissidents themselves: the once defending the idea of a belt of Central European “neutral states”, which, however might rather make it a buffer zone in a potential war; the dissolution of military blocs and withdraw of both Soviet and American armies from Europe; the reunification of Germany as the first viable step of melting the blocs of war; and finally the idea of a critical mass of small scale actions and initiatives. Havel also outlines the pro- and anti-American moods in the dissidents community (317-319).

The text is and argumentative plea: it comprises a broader introduction to the problem, an antithetical suggestion for its reasons, and a synthetic ending, aiming towards possible ways for resolving the existing impediments. The wide range of topics,



examples and profuse storytelling notwithstanding, the text is structured around the sequence of four core arguments:

The newly initiated attempts for dialogue show mutual reticence and mistrust of the Eastern European dissidents and the Western peace activists;

Given the objective socio-political circumstances of life in the Soviet bloc countries, the population of the latter have a good reason to be reticent [because these conditions of life and are incommensurable and thus the existential roots of truth are deeper and grassroots are more genuine<sup>25</sup>];

In their obsession to introduce order (“peace”), western *peaceniks* perpetuate utopianism embodied in the status quo of regimes of impersonal abstract rational power [instead they should be sceptical to any utopianism – as the Central Europeans – and live up to the principles of anti-political politics, rejecting the life in lie, implied in abstract power structures]

Western peace activists should understand their mistakes and try to reappraise their strategies to help change the cause, and not only the change of this situation.

In this schematic frame one could easily see that Havel’s core arguments depend not only the understanding and sympathy of the audience of the situation behind the Iron Curtain. It hinged heavily upon their recognition of the principles of a civil society based upon the voluntary individual choice and understanding of “life in truth”, and then, upon its associational form of non-hierarchical practice of “politics beyond politics”. Investing these two motives of civil society in the core of his argumentation, Havel makes his text vulnerable to critique from both theoretical and pragmatic perspective. The next part of the text will show how these weak points are turned into a discursive strength.

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In square brackets I introduce the implicit theses in the text, as suggested by Van Dijk 1993:274.

### ***4.3 The Text as a Discursive Act***

In the anticipated interaction with the Western activist milieu, Havel's pedantically structured text was written to present the author as speaking from the *perspective* (Van Dijk 1993:272) of an East Central European dissident. Even if his speech often turns into an apology of the common people and Czechs, he still takes the stance of "we" only when speaking on behalf of the small enclave of dissidents or independent peace activists in the country. This attitude can mark a small change of Havel's use of the category of dissidents. As I have already mentioned, in *The Power of the Powerless* Havel speaks of "dissidents" as a much broader section of the population – the people, known and unknown – that have chosen to live in truth.

What changes in *Anatomy of Reticence* are several aspects in the *social meaning* of the text (Van Dijk 1993:271-272). The primary audience is not any longer a group of Polish KOR dissidents who live under the same or similar conditions and recognize the situations in which one could become a "dissident". Here the audience comprises the Western peace groups; the ones who have coined the term "dissidents" in their visits to East-Central Europe. Here, except for the first mentioning, Havel does not use dissident in converted comas as a rule – which he did in the older essay. Instead, he indicates the group of dissidents already in the first part of the text as "a minuscule and rather singular enclave," "monolithic society," "a handful of them" (AR 292). While in *The Power of the Powerless* the dissidents "could be found on every street corner" – the group defined here is tangibly much smaller. This change is hardly only due to significantly altered political

realities between 1978-1985. What Havel's further definition of the group shows is yet another characteristic trait of the dissidents. The role of the dissident here is not defined merely as one of repressed members of opposition formation or, for that matter, of independent peace fighters. "They are in fact different from the majority in one respect: they speak their mind openly, heedless of the consequences". In this, Havel constructs his role in the social setting of the Amsterdam Peace conference: not only does he represent the visions of a broader number of dissidents: above all he speaks for himself, as an embodiment of the very principle of dissident talk, "life in truth".

The position of "life in truth" is the core of *implicitness* on the semantic level of the text (van Dijk 1993:276): its main *presupposition* is a high level of responsibility and even risk. These are put into this text and context: it is a subtle, polite but categorical attack against both opponents and proponents of the fragile new initiative for East-West Dialogue: the ones who had much more structural power and resources to engage in this initiative, but also to withdraw from it. The current events and schism within the movement are mentioned briefly just in one sentence: "All this, to be sure, does not mean that this is a spontaneous and universal attitude within the Western peace movement. The opposite appears closer to the truth."(292) Yet, Havel does not address this concrete issue, but tries to identify a deeper problem. Instead of simply welcoming the interest of at least a faction of peace activists, the text strikes against the core of their principles.

In his argumentation, Havel stipulates, he represents a wide variety of voices within the East-Central European dissidents' scene<sup>26</sup>. Yet, distinguishing between the

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<sup>26</sup> As Hauner shows, even the opinions amongst the Czech dissidents' scene and the members of Charter 77 diverged significantly: between anonymous Vaclav Racek protesting against the conformity of Western peace activism with the Soviet totalitarianism through Milan Smiečka, who was skeptical towards

broad variety of their positions, Havel's speech subtly draws on the still existing "common denominator" in their opinions: the high moral standards and principles shared by the dissidents and drawn from the very experience of life in the countries from the Soviet bloc. Presenting this perspective, Havel puts salt into the wound: the double standard (as opposed to "common denominator") of the peace activists in the collaboration with both Eastern European officials and Eastern European dissidents is not even mentioned as a question or a problem; instead his critique is aimed to show that the collaboration with the dissidents is an absolutely necessary, but still not a sufficient condition on the way to truth; that the basic stances and claims of the Western peace movement appear as rather discrepant and ambiguous.

The "common ground" suggested by Havel, the language that he speaks is the one of the dissidents' "life in truth" and their practice of "politics beyond politics". As the next paragraphs show, the detailed descriptions of the debased existence, exposed to the arbitrariness on the edges of reason – no pathetic implied – a calm and dignified "natural folly" – shows them in a position that could be described as "existential situation" claiming the dissidents' "being in question"(301) has not only rhetorical but also philosophical implications. It speaks of the proximity of truth when forced to a real social and life-determining situation, as opposed to the detached position of "people who no longer bear the spectacle of life's outrageous chaos and mysterious fecundity (300)."

This central opposition of the text could be seen in two perspectives: in its philosophical and its socio-political *implications* for the basic understanding between East and West. The philosophical implication has an importance so far as the *resonance*

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the way the "peace fund" is consumed by luxury conferences of elite circles, to Jaroslav Sabata and Jiri Dienstbier who embraced the 1980 END Appeal (Hauer 1990:101-104)

of the frame civil society was concerned (Snow&Benford 2000:620-622). The principles of “life-in-truth,” and an independent (civil) society “beyond politics” did not enter the frame of the western peace fighters. Their own reality was to be shaped in the polar division of “exterminism” and the “double exposure” of Europe of Europe between the axes of the Cold War (Thompson 1982); this *diagnostic* vision *resonated* with the do-it language of Western activism in mottos as “Protest and Survive”(Carter 1992); it set its *prognostic* strategy on “denuclearization, demilitarization, depolarization, democratization, and development” in which pressure on governments should be caused from below, but no significant alternative to political realities is to be expected or desired (Baehr fn27).

Yet, despite this experiential incommensurability, the philosophical principles of the civil society frame articulated two issues which had a certain resonance with western philosophical doctrines and seemingly did improve the credibility in the East-West dialogue. On the one hand, as the literature review and the conceptional elaboration of this study already showed, the Western intellectuals and peace activists could recognize some genuine communist principles in a non-hierarchical civil society. They could sympathise with a Gramscian tilt in the organic parallel nuclei of revolutionary activity within the existing civil society in Eastern Europe, aiming to establish a self-regulating society.<sup>27</sup>

The concept of ‘life-in-truth’ also has deep philosophical roots: the visions of the opposition in Czechoslovakia were arguably under the influence of Jan Patočka. To

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<sup>27</sup> Despite the disclaimers of political power, at the very end of the essay Havel goes on to say that it is the realm of hypothetical power which dissidents do not wish to enter, having no wish to speculate about hierarchies, tactics, strategies. Yet, in a final remark, he stipulates the possibility of entry of dissidents into the realm of real politics – a change of roles, which situations might call for. ... maybe comment distinction self-regulatory society/self-limiting revolution/rectifying revolution?

conceptualize life in a dissidents position Patočka draws back on the German existential philosophy of Martin Heidegger and Karl Jaspers: there the encounter with extremes is seen as an encounter with the origins of Being. Recent interpretations of Patočka's work (Tucker 2000) have argued about the subtle distinctions between life-in-truth and Heidegger's "being-in-truth", the subjective core of "being-in-the-world" [*Dasein*]. According to Tucker, the difference between Heidegger's and Patočka's notions comes from how "truth" bears social conditions: whereas in Heidegger's philosophy the social exposure of truth in the world loses its link to Being in the ceaseless inauthentic talk of "them"[*das Man*]; in Patočka's terms, being-in-truth is by necessity "being-in-a-true-world" (Tucker 2000:35). In this sense it is not life in the world as such, but life under extreme repressive conditions, which constantly evokes the borderline existential situations (in Jasper's terms) that make painfully clear the choice between "life-in-truth" and "life-in-lie" (Tucker 2000:36).

In this same line, it is Havel dedicates a significant part of the text to show life of common people in the Soviet bloc: a thick description of the borderline situations and paradoxical communication, in which dissent is created out of exposure of the arbitrary decisions of an impersonal *apparat* of power. And whereas in *The Power of the Powerless* the invocation of fear and maltreatment is much less intense, and much more metaphorical<sup>28</sup>, in *Anatomy of Reticence* it is presented in a condensed form in several paragraphs. Every common citizen of the Soviet bloc knew that if he takes part in protesting for nuclear disarmament:

it means the complete transformation of one's life. It means accepting a prison term as one of life's natural possibilities. It means giving up at a stroke many of the few openings available to a citizen in our country. It means finding oneself, day after day, in a neurotic

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<sup>28</sup> the grosser's metaphor....

world of constant fear of the doorbell. It means becoming a member of that microscopic "suicide-pact" enclave surrounded, to be sure, by the unspoken good wishes of the public but at the same time by unspoken amazement that anyone would choose to risk so much for something as hopeless as seeking to change what cannot be changed.

The stylistic *amplification* of this condition of powerlessness and arbitrariness of life has a double function within the text. Firstly they have a *rhetoric* function (van Dijk 2003:278): brief and exhaustive, they convey not just the meaning, but also the rhythm of hardships of life under state socialism. These hardships were not necessarily a novelty for the majority of the END conference participants. Havel suggests in the first part of the text that the reason for the reticence on the western side addressed the dissidents' "provincial concerns," their suspicious prejudices against the realities of socialism (AR 292). Instead of providing extensive arguments about the power of ideology, as he does in *The Power of the Powerless*, in this essay, it seems, Havel had another aim. He did want to leave no unpleasant truth unspoken, to make the conference participants bare with him the sensual thick descriptions of the perpetual existence on the borderline, the "stifling atmosphere of universal irritability, servility, perpetual defensiveness, backbiting, nervousness, and an ever smoldering compensatory contentiousness" (AR 299). Unlike reading or listening to a consequent narrative these single words can only cause abrupt short representations, to cause irritability and recur for further meditation.

Secondly – and Havel is explicit about that – the depiction of life under state-socialism has a serious political implication of "life in truth" as indicated before. In this implication – more importantly – Havel initiates a discursive process of *articulating* the "civil society" frame of collective mobilization (Snow&Benford 2000:625-626). He *contests* the very level of frame disputes within the European Nuclear Disarmament movement. Instead of simply suggesting changes in strategic action as the ones embodied

in the creation of the European Network for East-West debate, Havel draws attention to the diagnostic level of representation of both everyday life and political realities behind the Iron Curtain.

Thus, *Anatomy of Reticence* is not an attempt to present a complaint or to simply plea for help against the prevailing conditions or superpowers (AR 297). It shows concisely, with anatomic, namely, precision the differences between eastern and western “customs” and realities. Whereas in the west governments sustain critique and claim only part of the truth<sup>29</sup>, in the East living in truth is firstly and primarily speaking the truth, attacking the ideological center of the “pyramid of lies”, where words like “peace”, “fatherland” and “socialism” have become worn-off clichés. To become a dissident in that world devoid of truth can be a matter of a single and simple act of true speech, “to speak against the rockets.”(AR 297) This position is everything but passivity, Havel’s essay claims. It means having chosen to act against all odds in every situation and even at the highest price. In this, dissidents could be seen as members of a “microscopic "suicide-pact" enclave”, that lives and works is beyond official reason, beyond politics.

Only as a dissident can Havel claim the genuine opportunity to see things as they are, and to articulate true claims. Only from that stance beyond indoctrination and ideology can he claim a non-coercive and non-complacent, but a privileged and dominant position in his civic activism, and in his human truth. On this ground, finally, he can initiate the common ground for “European rapprochement,” for “a mutual exchange of...hard truths, with no punches pulled”(296).

By that moment in the text, the exchange of hard truths has already started. It can be found on declarative level:

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<sup>29</sup> Timothy Garton Ash, quoted in Isaak 1999



I am trying to show that the general reserve in questions of war and peace is not- at least in my country- the result of a genetically determined indifference to global problems, but rather a completely understandable consequence of the social atmosphere in which it is our lot to live. (300)

Yet, the narrative is not devoid of accusations, but once again these could be seen in a deeper and more subtle level of discourse. Their core could be traced at best in the *lexicalization* (van Dijk 1993:277) of the beginning of the fifth and the sixth part of the text. Two big paragraphs of text are narrated in third person plural, “they”. In part fifth it is them, who impose coercion on common citizens:

"they" can do anything they want- take away his passport, have him fired from his job, order him to move, send him to collect signatures against the Pershings, bar him from higher education, take away his driver's license, build a factory producing mostly acid fumes right under his windows, pollute his milk with chemicals to a degree beyond belief, arrest him simply because he attended a rock concert, raise prices arbitrarily, any time and for any reason, turn down all his humble petitions without cause, prescribe what he must read before all else, what he must demonstrate for, what he must sign, how many square feet his apartment may have, whom he may meet and whom he must avoid. The citizen picks his way through life in constant fear of "them," knowing full well that even an opportunity to work for the public good is a privilege "they" have bestowed upon him, conditionally. (298)

In the sixth part, the situation is slightly changed. They (no inverted comas) are the utopian misanthropes, trying to install “peace” (inverted comas):

They are the people tragically oppressed by the terror of nothingness and fear of their own being, who need to gain inner peace by imposing order (“peace”) upon a restless world, placing in a sense their whole unstable existence into that order, ridding themselves of their furies once and for all. The desperate impatience of such people drives them compulsively to construct and impose various projects directed toward a rationally ordered common good; their purpose is to make sure that, at long last, things will be clear and comprehensible, that the world will stride onward toward a goal, finally putting an end to all the infuriating uncertainty of history. No sooner do they set out to achieve this- if the world has had the misfortune to have given them the opportunity- than they encounter difficulties. A great many of their fellow humans would prefer to go on living as they like. Their proposal, for all its perfection, does not attract those people. (301)

What is interesting to see however, is that a person hearing or barely skimming the text, the “they” in the first and the second quoted paragraphs might be the same

people: presumably the *apparatchicks*, still impersonal powerful people above them, introducing “peace” as a core figure in the state ideology and self-righteously imposing peace demonstrations and incessant incantation of the word (299). Yet, closer and further reading shows that this is a suggestive lexical equation of two different categories of people. In the first case the impersonal “they” are a part of the automatic state-socialist apparatus, that can hardly bear responsibility for their actions; “they” are subordinate citizens dependent on some other “they”- the logical *reductio ad absurdum* reducing common citizens to the absurdities of repressive societies(299).

In the second case however, the self-righteous “they” implies another subject: Havel’s audience, the peace activists. For the purpose of the argument, every single one of them, the “fanatic of the abstract project, that practicing utopian...<sup>30</sup>”(299). Oppressed by the terror of nothingness and exposed to constant erroneous impressions, they lose their own center of gravity to a “mental short circuit”. For Havel, they are no longer able to “perceive the integrity of all that exists,... demonstrating that it is proper to sacrifice a few thousand recalcitrants for the contentment of millions, or perhaps to sacrifice a few million for the contentment of billions”(301). It is the tragic story of what might be called a “mental short circuit”. The “mental short circuit” is not the dissidents’ “natural folly”, but rather its opposite, utopianism that might reach the examples of Marat, Lenin, Pol Pot. It is not dedicated to the “ceaseless and in fact hopeless search for truth (302).” but to the acquisition of “truth, readily, all at once, in the form of an ideology or a doctrine”. Unlike the “Central European natural folly” it does not invest in healthy skepticism against utopianism and manifestations of ideological mentality (305). It is a manifestation

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<sup>30</sup> The heading of a chapter in Peter Baehr’s text suggests that this critique as pointed directly towards E.P.Thompson. (Baehr 2000)

of an ideological mentality, whose highest aim is to build rational political Utopias of world order.

Aware of the borderline conditions of existence that these utopias create for their citizens, Havel claims the right to warn against the very strategy of the Western peace movement “the gradual growth in European minds of the wholly erroneous impression that the only dangerous weapons are those surrounded by encampments of demonstrators” (298); against the actual futility of a nuclear disarmament campaigners that bears no responsibility of the people they leave behind with no protection, rushing to yet another place for demonstrations; against their negligence of how marginal fear of war can be in the troubled “heart of Europe”(309).

After his audience is left to take a deep breath from the dense descriptions of the depictions of the totalitarian conditions<sup>31</sup>, Havel presents the crucial point of his in which communication can be restored. From the position of truth and integrity, of life in truth in a genuine independent (civil) society of like-minded people, Havel extends an open hand to the Western peace activists. In brackets – as a note in the margins, which the audience needs to deserve, or a remark that needs to be pronounced in another tone – Havel makes probably the most suggestive comment in the essay. He claims that the roots of the European nuclear disarmament campaign, its actual foremost intentions, are not the nuclear disarmament of NATO and the Warsaw Pact. Nuclear disarmament is seen by Havel as a means for a much more genuine but far less articulated end of the Western

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<sup>31</sup> Part VII of the text is a rather outstanding part of the text in both senses of the word: having spoken about the Central European skepticism and black humor, this chapter is the demonstration. It also serves a rhetorical function - having numbed his sensitive audience with intricate but intense accusations, this part seems to be “a breath of fresh air” before the core arguments...

peace movement. It is seen in the painful and unrealized need of the activists to create a genuine civil society as it exists in East-Central Europe:

There is something else here as well, something which we are probably insufficiently aware of - that for them [the peace activists], the fight for peace is probably more than a simple matter of particular demands for disarmament, it is an opportunity to erect nonconforming, uncorrupted social structures, an opportunity for life in a humanly richer community, for self-realization outside the stereotypes of a consumer society and for expressing their resistance to those stereotypes (310)

Only on this ground is Havel ready to address discursively the pragmatic, prognostic aspects of the nuclear disarmament frame: to insist on its strategic *extension and transformation* (Snow&Benford 2000:625) or – for that matter – for its *bridging* it with the frame of civil society in Eastern Europe(Snow&Benford 2000:624). As the text above showed, he does it by *amplifying* as their core value the creation of civil society beyond the state structures; he suggests a strategic adaptation of the European nuclear disarmament campaign to issues of the Eastern European independent peace groups. In this, Havel claims that after that strategy of disarmament and a peace struggle are two different things; that even a “détente from below” is still an attack simply against weapon systems, a treatment of symptoms that could not change the causes of peace debasement in the political realities; that protesting against nuclear weapons through negotiations with authorities simply reaffirms the status quo of condensed power of the two blocs of the Cold War; that only autonomous citizens can build autonomous and free societies, and only the existence of such could bring about a Europe of independent and peaceful nations. It is only when the preventions of human rights is stipulated as issue of primary importance – and this is the main claim of Havel’s text in its appearance as a direct, definite act – that a East-West dialogue could take place, based on common ground and mutual understanding(313-315).

## *Conclusion*

In recent years former western activists engaged in the events of 1989 have stated the need of “[a]ddressing the ‘civil society gap’ or the ‘civil society trap’”, in “new ways of theorizing” (Barbara Einhorn in Roundtable LSE 2000). In this study I demonstrated that in reference to the Eastern European events in the 1980s ‘not falling in the trap of civil society’ would mean not to represent it as a coherent political convention. It should rather be seen as a patchwork of different motives that temporarily melted into a common frame of dialogue and protest. Indicating the common normative language for cooperation between East and West, it was used to create a common ground for a trans-European network of cooperation, based on the universal principle of civic activism beyond official state structures that allows nonconformist speech and independent association of free individuals.

Beyond the scope of this study I can see my research as an important first step in a much bigger enterprise to bridge a significant gap in the existing literature on the topic of civil society in 1989 and its aftermath. Further research needs to be done on the significant instances and actors in the formation and use of civil society as a frame in the 1980s; on its impact on strategic collective action in Eastern Europe in the late 1980s and its diffusion in the aftermath of 1989. Thus, I believe my study has alarmed about an unexplored problematic field within the existing literature and has indicated directions and tools for further research. Researching these issues would mean opening them to further fields of knowledge like social and political theory, history of ideas, and new social movement studies.

Other than that, measuring the actual mobilization resource of Havel's *Anatomy of Reticence* and the impact of the frame 'civil society' as used in other dissidents' works is beyond the aims and resources of the present study. Yet, Havel's and other chartists' ideas and prognostic instructions for collective campaigns for peace and human rights were articulated further in the so-called Prague Appeal for Peace from 1985, a document which arguably had impact on the new priorities of the East-West dialogue (Hauner 1990). In the late 1980s more and more trans-national and trans-continental initiatives from different segments of the political spectre were extended to circles of dissident individuals and formations beyond the shadows of the Iron Curtain. The "European Network of East-West Dialogue" was one of them: it persisted well beyond the Amsterdam END covenant, and liaised with independent peace activists groups in Eastern Europe; it was supervised by activists from the British END, which never joined the network but kept cooperating with both independent and official peace fighters (Carter 1992; Burke 2004). Lastly, together with other written works – as e.g. Konrád's *Antipolitics* and Michnic's *New Evolutionism* – Havel's essays reached and influenced new audiences in the West. The events of 1989 were often quoted with the power of words: of dissidents' power to change worlds with words.

Yet, even if the events in the 1980s expressed a desire that the disrupted communication between the West and East be overcome, misunderstanding and reticence did not cease with the peaceful revolutions in 1989. Many people in the West still suffer melancholy about the East of Europe, be it because of the shattered socialist utopia, or because of the sloped mirror in which the West saw their own political values and interests reproduced. People in the East saw the change of the regime as 'light at the end

of the tunnel', and sought to compensate for everything that the West already had – good and bad; yet, the euphoria soon gave way to new turmoils on both individual and societal levels. In the background of these realities one can often read a recurrent motive: the resentment of the failure of the post-Communist period to give rise to a well working civil society. And as the literature review showed, the East-Central European dissidents have often been blamed for not having lived up to a moral ideal that the West saw crystallize in 1989.

If 'civil society' is to be interpreted as a discursive mobilization frame, however, such accusations are partly pointless. Frames of collective action cease to exist when the issues they address are accomplished; they are transformed or diffuse into other frames when faced with new realities (Snow&Benford 2000). In the end of perpetual encounter with the borderline situations, and the new devaluation of true speech in media campaigns in neo-liberal democracies, the distinctive hallmarks against which the principle of "life in truth" was formed are partly blurred. In the face of new political conjunctures, "anti-political politics" has been polarized. It split into the mass "political anti-politics" of 'voting the less evil' and the "a-political politics" of new social movements. In the lack of repressive state apparatus which claims the coincidence between ideology and truth, and in their "projectless, anti-utopian revolt"(Tamás 2007:3) the new social movement follow the legacy of 1989 in one. They attack – intentionally or not – the legitimacy of state forms (in this case prevalently neo-liberal) only subversively: in their withdraw from politics and the symbolic revolt against the very substance of the political process, however in late capitalist societies(seeTamás2007:4-5).

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