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Democratic solidarity within the foreign policy of the Czech Republic.

The case of the Venezuelan political crisis 2017-2022

Master's Thesis

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The Czech Republic proposes the promotion of human rights and transition to democracy among the core values of its foreign policy. Due to the political and historical justification of the promotion of human rights, frequent statements against authoritarian regimes as well as programs such as 'TRANS Programme' are some of the measures and platforms developed by the Czech government to put on the ground the concept of democratic solidarity. Due to the political and human rights violations in Venezuela, Czech Republic decided not to recognize the electoral results of the presidential election in 2018 in Venezuela as well as support a transition to democracy in Venezuela. The present research aims to identify the actions taken by the Czech Republic under the concept of democratic solidarity in the Venezuelan political crisis and analyze whether the institutional framework that shapes its foreign policy has any relations with those actions. To do so, a process tracing methodology will be applied in order to link observable empirical manifestations with potential causes within the Czech Republic foreign policy. Observable empirical manifestations will be studied through the qualitative analysis of the official documents on foreign policy published by official bodies, as well as statements made by important political figures within the Czech diplomat body, including members of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, deputies for the European Parliament and other representatives advocated to human rights promotion.

Collier, D. (2010). Process Tracing: Introduction and exercises. September 22nd, 2010. Ministry of Foreign Affairs Of The Czech Republic. (2015, September). Human Rights And Transition Promotion Policy Concept Of The Czech Republic. https://www.mzv.cz/public/98/7c/E8/2239165_1648851_Human_Rights_And_Transition_Promotion_Policy_Concept_Of_The_Czech_Republic_Pdf
Niederberger, A. (2013). 'Democratic solidarity: Why do democracies owe support to democracy movements?'. *Revista de Estudios Sociales*, 46 | 2013, 54-62. Punton, M. and Welle, K. (2015) Straws-in-the-wind, Hoops and Smoking Guns: What can Process Tracing Offer to Impact Evaluation?, CDI Practice Paper 10, Brighton: IDS

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Princip lidských práv a demokracie v zahraniční politice České republiky byl předmětem pragmatismu versus diskuse o lidských právech v nedávné politické historii země. Tato studie se snaží přidat důkazy o činnostech České republiky v souvislosti s tímto principem. Česká republika vyvinula strategii demokratické solidarity s venezuelskou demokratickou opozicí uprostřed politické krize ve Venezuele. Navzdory nízké ekonomické a politické vzájemnosti projevili čeští političtí lídři a zástupci silný závazek k demokratické věci ve Venezuele. Prostřednictvím metodologie vysvětlujícího výsledku procesního trasování (explanatory-outcome process tracing) jsem zjistil silné důvody pro potvrzení, že demokratická solidarita je hlavní hodnotou v české zahraniční politice vůči politické krizi ve Venezuele v období 2017-2022. Tato současná studie také přispívá do diskuse o podpoře demokracie prostřednictvím studia konceptu demokratické solidarity.

Klíčová slova: democratic solidarity, Czechia's foreign policy, process tracing, Venezuela, democracy.

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List of abbreviations

- **ANO: Action of Dissatisfied Citizens Party**
- **ČSSD: Czech Social Democratic Party**
- **EOPT: explanatory-outcome process tracing**
- **KSCM: Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia**
- **OHCHR: The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights**
- **PIN: People in Need**
- **The EU: The European Union**
- **The UN: The United Nations**
- **TRANS program: Transition program**

1. Introduction

The Czech Republic proposes the promotion of human rights and transition to democracy among the core values of its foreign policy. The Czech Republic has experienced the negative consequences of totalitarian regimes in its history, as well as the transition process to democracy. Due to that historical path, it considers relevant the subjects of defense of human rights and the importance of democratic institutions for the development of countries and the well-being of subjects around the world. That connection between its history and the necessity of democratic solidarity is clearly expressed by official bodies of the Czech Government (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, 2015).

Due to the political and historical justification of the promotion of human rights, the Czech Republic has included the promotion of human rights and transition to democracy as a fundamental policy among the general foreign policy. Frequent statements against authoritarian regimes as well as programs such as “TRANS Program”¹ are some of the measures and platforms developed by the Czech government to put on the ground the concept of democratic solidarity.

Because of the political and human rights violations in Venezuela, Czech Republic decided not to recognize the electoral results of the presidential election in 2018 in Venezuela and accepted the opposition leader Juan Guaidó as interim president of Venezuela as well as support a transition to democracy in Venezuela. These decisions appear as a phenomenon to study the behavior of the Czech Republic and its foreign policy, not just in which legal and political framework justifies its decision, but in solving the question of the potential motivations to take such a decision.

¹ TRANS Program is a program developed by the Czech Republic since 2005 to support democratic initiatives in countries facing authoritarian regimes or experiencing transition processes.

Studies on the foreign policy of the Czech Republic, as a non-leading state in shaping the foreign agenda of the European Union, have been limited to its relationships with neighboring or historically relevant states such as Russia. Therefore, there is limited knowledge that explains the actions of the Czech Republic towards other regions with lower interdependence, such as Latin America. The lack of studies and reports does not allow us to understand if the actions of the Czech Republic are based on principles of its foreign policy, or if they respond to alignment with the foreign policy of the European Union, or even both. On the other hand, among the values of the foreign policy of the Czech Republic, the principle of defending human rights and transitioning to democracy has been evident in cases involving neighboring states, such as the war in Ukraine. However, as a foreign policy with a global outlook, there is a scarcity of studies on the position of the Czech Republic towards geographically distant regions that are equally relevant, as the defense of human rights and democracy is an international cause.

Given the shortage of substantive studies that demonstrate the role of the Czech Republic as an international actor beyond its borders, this research offers potential benefits to understanding Czech foreign policy. This is especially true in regards to motivations and actions with countries that have an indirect geographical and political connection, as well as more evidence to the Czech Republic's actions in the international debate on promoting democracy and human rights. Coherence can be found between the practices of the Czech Republic and the declared foreign policy of identity with its neighbors. Nevertheless, the commitment with non-direct neighbors' states could be lower. Due to this, the current research is crucial for a wider understanding of the coherence of the Czech Republic foreign policy.

This research not only contributes to understanding the actions of the Czech Republic regarding the Venezuelan political crisis, but also to exploring diplomatic tools that even medium-sized states within the European Union can use on the agenda of human rights and democracy in the organization. The current research will bring contributions to the debate on the role of states in promoting democracy and

human rights, as it will add evidence as to whether the involvement of states with lower interdependence responds to material interests or a value-based policy.

Due to the previous motivations and potential benefits, this research aims to answer the question: What is the conceptual basis of the Czech foreign policy on the Venezuelan political crisis? To answer that question, the concept of democratic solidarity is presented and proposed as a causal mechanism explanatory of that position. Democratic solidarity will be defined as a foreign policy disposition that supports democratic movements with the purpose of establishing democracy as a system of governance. Therefore, the main goal of this research is to analyze the Czech Republic's actions on the Venezuelan political crisis through the concept of democratic solidarity.

In order to solve the research question, the following hypothesis is presented: The concept of democratic solidarity is a core value of the Czech Republic foreign policy towards the Venezuelan political crisis. To prove that hypothesis, two subsidiary goals will be developed all along the thesis. Firstly, to identify the features of democratic solidarity and its limitations. Secondly, to evaluate the coherence of the Czech Republic decisions on the Venezuelan political crisis with its foreign policy principle of human dignity and human rights.

To do so, a process tracing methodology will be applied in order to link observable empirical manifestations with potential causes within the Czech Republic foreign policy. The selected process tracing will be the explanatory outcome process tracing (EOPC) proposed by (Beach and Pedersen 2013)².

Having defined the research question, hypothesis, and main goals, the structure of the current master's thesis go as follows: in the second chapter, the methodology will be explained, including the explanation of process tracing, the

² The methodology will have a deeper explanation in the following chapter: Methodology.

reason I selected this methodology and specifically the explanatory outcome variant. Additionally, the data that I selected to address the research question.

The third chapter constitutes the theoretical framework, which will present in-depth the concepts of democratic solidarity. It will introduce a foundational concept for the research, develop its characteristics and critiques, as well as categorize the actions related to democratic solidarity as a political strategy to support democratic movements in challenging autocrats and establishing democracy.

In the fourth chapter, the concept of human rights and democracy within Czech foreign policy is explored. A comprehensive analysis on some of the recent administrations and their respective debates on this issue is presented to understand better the evolution of this idea, including its background, principles, and objectives.

The fifth chapter will be divided into two main sections. First, the collected data will be presented, and the actions carried out by the Czech Republic in the context of the political crisis in Venezuela will be studied to determine if they fit within the concept of democratic solidarity. Subsequently, the process tracing methodology will be employed to analyze these actions. Three tests related to the process tracing methodology, namely straw in the wind, hoop, and smoking gun, will be conducted to either falsify or verify the hypothesis.

Lastly, a concluding chapter will be included, presenting the research findings, its limitations, and the remaining challenges for future investigations on the subject. These future studies may not necessarily focus on the same case study, but rather on the considerations of the human rights principle in Czech foreign policy, as well as the concept of democratic solidarity as a foreign policy strategy.

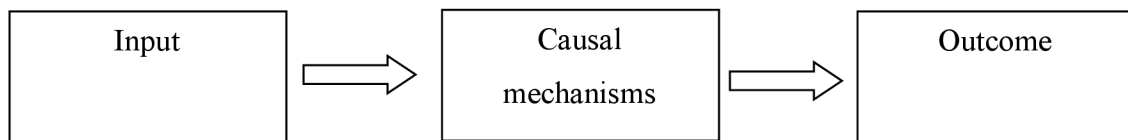
2. Methodology

This research contains a data collection process and a methodology for the analysis of the collected data. Regarding the data collection, a documentary collection was conducted, which involved a systematic review of academic and governmental sources, as well as relevant news regarding political events. The present research collected 23 academic articles and books, 9 governmental documents and statements from official organizations and representatives, 18 news articles, and 6 reports or articles made by non-governmental organizations.

As for the analysis, to address the research question, the chosen methodology for this study is process tracing. According to Collier (2011), process tracing is defined as "the systematic examination of diagnostic evidence selected and analyzed in light of research questions and hypotheses posed by the investigator." The primary objective of process tracing is to establish whether and how a potential cause or causes influenced a specific change. This is accomplished by applying formal tests to evaluate the strength of evidence linking potential causes to the observed changes. Additionally, process tracing involves testing alternative hypotheses regarding how the change might have occurred.

The set of evidence forms what is referred to as causal mechanisms, which serve as the bridge (B) connecting an action (A) to an outcome (C). Formally, causal mechanisms can be defined as "a complex system that produces an outcome through the interaction of multiple components" (Glennan, 2005, p. 52).

Figure 1. Scheme of process tracing logic

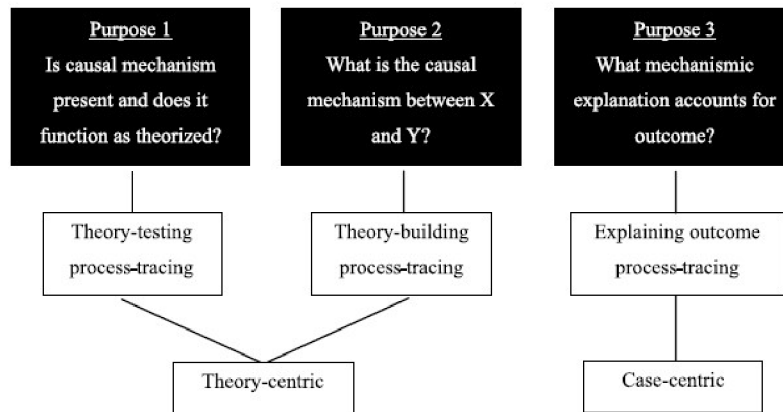


Source: own elaboration, based on Beach & Pedersen (2013).

Process tracing is not a singular method but rather comprises different variants that depend on the initial conditions of the research. Beach and Pedersen (2013) categorize the types of process tracing into three main variants: theory-testing, theory-building process, and explanatory outcome process. Theory-testing and theory-building share a common characteristic of being theory-centric variants. On the other hand, the explanatory outcome process focuses on the case study itself and does not necessarily rely on a theory to be tested. Instead, it emphasizes the identification and analysis of causal mechanisms to provide a sufficient explanation of the studied outcome³. Beach and Pedersen (2013) presented a figure that summarizes the main objectives of each variant, as well as their composition:

³ For the purposes of this research, the theory-centric variants will not be further explained since they were not the chosen ones for this master's thesis.

Image 1. Objectives of the different variants of process tracing



Source: Beach and Pedersen (2013, p. 12).

The selected process tracing will be the explanatory outcome process tracing (EOPC) proposed by Beach and Pedersen (2013):

"This type of process- tracing can be thought of as a single- outcome study, defined as seeking the causes of a specific outcome in a single case... ..Here the ambition is to craft a minimally sufficient explanation of a particular outcome, with sufficiency defined as an explanation that accounts for all of the important aspects of an outcome with no redundant parts being present" (Beach and Pedersen, 2013, p. 18).

The reason for choosing this variant is its case-centric nature. In the research proposition, no specific theory of action or international relations is put forth. Instead, the focus is on operationalizing a concept that encompasses actions under common premises of democracy promotion around the world, such as democratic solidarity. Moreover, the levels of interdependence between Venezuela and the Czech Republic are hardly generalizable to those the Czech Republic would have with its neighboring countries. Therefore, the aim is not to establish generalizations of

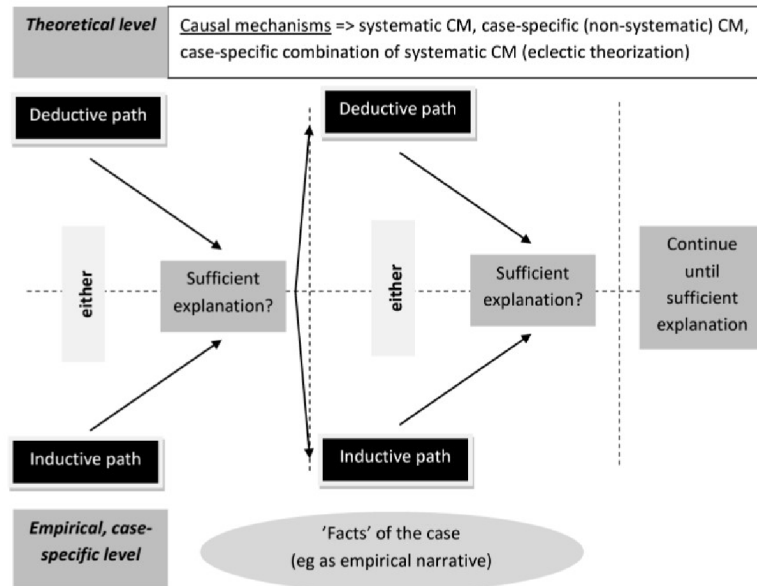
foreign policy in these cases, although this research brings new evidence regarding the foreign policy of the Czech Republic. In fact, these reasons align with the explanation provided by Beach and Pedersen (2013) regarding the necessity of identifying different variants of process tracing.

"Theory-testing and theory-building process- tracing seek to generalize, aiming at developing and testing theories beyond the context in which they were developed, whereas explaining- outcome process- tracing focuses on crafting a minimally sufficient explanation of a particular case" (Beach Pedersen 2013, p. 51).

The choice of the explanatory variant leads to a reflection on the role of causal mechanisms. The specificity of the case allows for the inclusion of non-systematic yet verifiable and valid actions to explain the outcome. Beach and Pedersen (2013) explain this as follows:

"In explaining-outcome process- tracing, nonsystematic, case-specific mechanisms would be included. An example could be a case- specific mechanism that describes how inclement weather impeded voter turnout in a specific election— a mechanism that could be vital to understanding the particular outcome but that probably does not have systematic, cross- case effects" (Beach and Pedersen, 2013, p. 51).

Image 2. Scheme of explaining-outcome process tracing variant



Source: Beach and Pedersen (2013, p. 20).

Among the mechanisms utilized, two will be of vital importance for this research: Institutional mechanisms: "deal with how certain intersubjectively present institutions channel actors unintentionally in a certain direction" (Beach and Pedersen, 2013, p. 53). Additionally, ideational mechanisms: "Outcomes are (at least partially) the product of how actors interpret their world through certain ideational elements. Here, the focus is not on how structures or institutions constrain behavior but instead on how ideas matter in ways that cannot be reduced to the objective position of an actor". (Beach and Pedersen, 2013, p. 53)

Although the process tracing variant has already been chosen, it is important to have a mechanism for hypothesis verification. Therefore, the model of tests for causal inference proposed by Collier (2011) and Punton and Welle (2015) will be used. This model presents four tests that can falsify or verify hypotheses based on two criteria: sufficiency and necessity.

Firstly, there is the straw-in-the-wind test, which is an assertion that is neither necessary nor sufficient to prove the hypothesis but contributes to strengthening it for the subsequent tests. After passing this test, the hoop test will be conducted, which fulfills the criterion of necessity, although its confirmation is not a sufficient criterion to prove the hypothesis. If the hypothesis passes this test, we will proceed to the third test, smoking-gun, which meets the levels of sufficiency to prove the hypothesis. There is also a fourth test called double decisive, which satisfies both the criteria of necessity and sufficiency. However, since a minimally sufficient justification is sought in the EOPC, it will not be relevant to apply this fourth test in this research.

Image 3 – Process tracing tests for causal inference.

		SUFFICIENT FOR AFFIRMING CAUSAL INFERENCE	
		No	Yes
NECESSARY FOR AFFIRMING CAUSAL INFERENCE	No	1. Straw-in-the-Wind	3. Smoking-Gun
		a. Passing: Affirms relevance of hypothesis, but does not confirm it.	a. Passing: Confirms hypothesis.
		b. Failing: Hypothesis is not eliminated, but is slightly weakened.	b. Failing: Hypothesis is not eliminated, but is somewhat weakened.
		c. Implications for rival hypotheses: Passing <i>slightly</i> weakens them. Failing <i>slightly</i> strengthens them.	c. Implications for rival hypotheses: Passing <i>substantially</i> weakens them. Failing <i>somewhat</i> strengthens them.
	Yes	2. Hoop	4. Doubly Decisive
		a. Passing: Affirms relevance of hypothesis, but does not confirm it.	a. Passing: Confirms hypothesis and eliminates others.
b. Failing: Eliminates hypothesis.		b. Failing: Eliminates hypothesis.	
	c. Implications for rival hypotheses: Passing <i>somewhat</i> weakens them. Failing <i>somewhat</i> strengthens them.	c. Implications for rival hypotheses: Passing <i>eliminates</i> them. Failing <i>substantially</i> strengthens them.	

Source: Collier (2011, p. 825).

To ensure the verification of the hypothesis, not only will statements that support the hypothesis be tested, but also alternative hypotheses that challenge the proposed hypothesis will be examined. This approach aims to either discard or reinforce the accuracy of the hypothesis.

The assertions tested will derive from the collected data, which will consist of empirical manifestations. Observable empirical manifestations will be examined through qualitative analysis of official documents on foreign policy published by governmental entities, as well as statements made by influential political figures within the Czech diplomatic body, including members of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, deputies for the European Parliament, and other representatives advocating for the promotion of human rights. Official decisions such as sanctions, appointments, or recognition of political representatives will also be considered. This information will be systematically tested in relevant cases, such as historical processes of foreign policy, as well as non-systematic but relevant instances for hypothesis verification. The application of tests for causal inference will be utilized, grouping these actions within the framework of democratic solidarity and using this concept as a causal mechanism.

3. Democratic solidarity: theoretical framework

To understand whether the idea of democratic solidarity plays an important role in Czech foreign policy and its actions in the political crisis in Venezuela, it is important to define what democratic solidarity is. In this third chapter, I will provide a conceptual overview of democratic solidarity, its characteristics, and criticisms of the concept. Additionally, I will examine the relationship between this concept and democracy promotion, along with a classification of the scope of both concepts and their practices.

[Addressing democratic solidarity: concepts and actors](#)

Projects in favor of democracy as the ideal system of government in international politics have faced interruptions throughout history, during which attempts were made to establish other systems, such as monarchy in the 19th century or nationalist and collectivist approaches during much of the 20th century. However, in the post-Cold War period, scholars like Banai (2013) and Cooper and Legler (2001) explain that a consensus on democracy as the system of government to be promoted worldwide has set down. A testament to this is the work of Fukuyama (1992), and the transitional policies in the 1990s, which have portrayed political and economic liberalism not as a successful alternative, but as the only desirable one. Democracy has transitioned from being a subject of debate to a universal aspiration as powerful as the idea of the nation once was. McFaul (2004) states that "throughout the world, people are embracing democracy not only as a system of government but also as a value" (p. 152).

Democracy, as a fundamental component of the liberal international order, finds its foundations in the ideas of Kant. According to Kant (1795/1993), economic interdependence, republican institutions, and representative democracy are necessary elements to achieve peace and progress. As a result, the defense of democracy has

been viewed from an instrumental perspective. In addition to representing an intrinsic value, democracy also offers benefits to both practitioners and promoters, as it improves interdependent relations. In this regard, the promotion of democracy by democratic states is based on the conviction that by fostering and supporting democratic principles in other countries, the foundations of a more stable and cooperative international order are strengthened. Moreover, democratic states can also benefit economically by establishing stronger and more reliable trade relations with other democratic countries. Thus, democratic states seek to encourage citizen participation, ensure human rights, promote accountability and transparency, and establish legitimate and representative governance systems.

Since democracy is established as a value to be promoted and includes benefits for both practitioners and promoters, it is important to conceptualize the set of actions and policies taken in the name of defending and promoting liberal democracy as the ideal system of government at the international level. Therefore, this research will define two concepts widely used in both academic literature and the foreign policy documents of the Czech Republic and relevant international actors: democratic solidarity and democracy promotion.

Democratic solidarity is defined by Niederberger as: "Support from democratic regimes to democratic movements- in the pursuit of their aim to democratize the political order of the state in question, a support that is not unconditional but tied to a specific cause" (Niederberger, 2013, p. 55). This concept has three main points to analyze. Firstly, "support" implies a position of collaboration rather than imposition, which means that the primary responsibility for implementing democracy lies with an actor different from the one practicing democratic solidarity. Secondly, the choice of democratic movements rather than the state administration excludes the concept of democratic solidarity as synonymous with international cooperation, where a state or international organization offers support to another under problematic conditions through investment projects. The primary purpose of democratic solidarity is not to solve economic problems or intervene in vulnerable communities through social projects, but rather to promote change towards a

democratic system. Thirdly, support for democratic movements is not guided by profiting or used as political bargaining chips by the supporting state. There is a specific cause, the establishment of democratic institutions, and support is tied to the achievement of that goal. Promoting national, economic, or other particular interests of the democratic movement that go beyond the establishment of democracy are not part of the interests of the supporting state through the concept of democratic solidarity.

This concept could be subject to at least two criticisms. Firstly, the lack of characterization when choosing which movements to support and under what parameters, as well as the consolidation of the democratic system once political change has been achieved.

Banai (2013) defines democratic solidarity as "a political disposition concerned with realizing and preserving democracy – at home and abroad – for its own sake" (Banai, 2013, p. 416). This concept presents distinguishing elements compared to Niederberger's and addresses the gaps presented in the previous concept. Banai adds the element of democracy preservation, as a key factor of democratic solidarity should be the effectiveness of its support, as it derives the legitimacy of this stance. If democracy as a system fails to preserve itself, it makes room for incentives related to political interventionism.

The issue of interventionism is also criticized, precisely proposing the concept of democratic solidarity as an alternative to U.S. interventionism in the Middle East (Banai, 2013, p. 416). This stance makes Banai's concept normative, adhering to the ideal of democracy as a value to be defended for its own essence, rather than for the material interests of the promoting state. Banai explains that for democratic solidarity to occur, three elements must be present: non-interference, inclusivity, and reflexivity⁴. These elements better delineate the boundaries of

⁴ These principles will be explained in the next sub-section, specifically in the features of democratic solidarity.

democratic solidarity as a strategy and define the process of selecting initiatives to support, which remains unclear in Niederberger's work.

Finally, Cooper and Legler (2001) analyze democratic solidarity as "a growing consensus to pursue collective action to promote and defend democracy in the region." They are pioneers in the analysis of democratic solidarity as a strategy, having compiled the actions taken by the OAS at both the positive-organizational level and the actions taken in the region. The relevance of Cooper and Legler's concept to this research lies not only in the introduction of the concept itself but also in the characteristic of international politics that they attribute to it, viewing it as a joint effort in defense of a value rather than an isolated or individually driven agenda based solely on particular interests. In other words, they study the strategy of democratic solidarity as a multilateral agenda, which will be crucial in understanding the presence of this concept within the foreign policy of the Czech Republic.

For the purposes of this research and based on common characteristics of these concepts, democratic solidarity will be defined as a foreign policy disposition that supports democratic movements with the purpose of establishing and preserving democracy as a system of government.

[Democratic solidarity and Democracy promotion: differences, critics, and key points](#)

In the present research, it was found that the concept of democratic solidarity has been interchangeably used with democracy promotion several times. However, authors like Banai (2013) make a differentiation between the two concepts as they consider that democracy promotion has gained a bad reputation due to the interventionist consequences of the United States and other powers in the Middle East (p. 421). Niederberger (2013) also highlights this fact, citing works that have a critical perspective of the discourse of "democracy promotion" at the international level. (p. 55).

Both concepts stem from the growing hegemony of democracy as a political value in the international arena. However, the use of democracy promotion or democratization gained prominence with the discourse of the fight against terrorism (McFaul, 2004). The securitization of democracy as a global project led to academic and political debates about the limits and benefits of state intervention in the internal politics of other states. As a result, two major perspectives on the democratization debate in international relations have emerged. Firstly, there is a sovereigntist perspective that argues that the actions of state promoters of the democratization discourse use the idea of democracy as a façade to protect their own interests and maintain Western hegemony. On the other hand, there is a liberal view that asserts that authoritarian regimes employ concepts such as sovereignty and non-intervention to justify their dictatorial actions without facing any foreign interference.

From the sovereigntist perspective, there has been criticism, particularly of the role of the United States, for instrumentalizing human rights and democracy to carry out Western hegemonic projects and secure their own material interests (Bellamy, 2004). Thus, the critique to the democracy promotion discourse aims to discard the idea of democracy as a universal value and asserts that it is a discursive legitimization of their material interests. This criticism also portrays the promoting state as an executor of its democratization plan, unlike democratic solidarity, which involves supporting local groups dedicated to achieving their own political change. In fact, Banai (2013) presents the concept of democratic solidarity as an alternative to that unidirectional view of action that some scholars see in the democracy promotion discourse.

In contrast, the liberal perspective justifies the need for intervention, although not necessarily in military terms, as it believes that authoritarian leaders use the idea of sovereignty as a barrier to the defense of human rights by the international community. McFaul (2004) states:

"Many hoped that acquiring state sovereignty would be the first step toward democracy. People living in colonies could choose their rulers only after shedding

their colonial masters. Decolonization, self-determination, and democratization were to go hand in hand. They did not. Instead, new leaders in many decolonized regions trumpeted the importance of state sovereignty as an international norm to excuse their denial of popular sovereignty to their citizens" (McFaul, 2004, p. 153).

Moreover, the liberal perspective claims that the sovereignty as an argument to avoid the human right's speech has eroded through the last century. McFaul (2004) continues:

"When first penned, international agreements about human rights, such as the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the 1975 Helsinki Final Act, or the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights, seemed to hold little weight; they sounded nice, but what would they actually accomplish? Those living under tyranny, however, assigned real meaning to these normative statements. Perhaps most famously, East European dissidents invoked the Helsinki Final Act to demand the recognition of their human rights, and eventually they succeeded" (McFaul, 2004, p. 153).

The previous context would be especially important for the Czech Republic, since the Helsinki act was used by Czech dissidents to spread ideas against censorship under the socialist regime (Bolton, 2012, p. 24). Due to that, the utility of international agreements on human rights and democracy, as well as the rising legitimacy of this speech around the world, has been strongly helpful to democratic movements within an authoritarian context, therefore, efforts for widening democratic values particularly impact in a positive way in those places where is needed.

The liberal perspective is also strongly guided by security parameters according to some authors. Brands and Edel (2021) propose several pillars that highlight the intersection of liberalism and security in promoting democratic values. Those pillars include "countering coercion, enhancing technological cooperation, shaping international institutions, combating corruption, enhancing collective

defense, meeting threats from within, taking the offensive, and negotiating from strength” (p. 34).

Among the mentioned pillars, the following stands out: countering coercion, which involves actively resisting and opposing attempts to undermine democratic principles through coercive tactics. This can include diplomatic efforts, economic sanctions, or other measures aimed at deterring or discouraging coercive actions by non-democratic actors, and enhancing collective defense, which is a pillar that emphasizes the importance of mutual security cooperation among liberal democracies. Recognizing common security threats, liberal democracies seek to strengthen collective defense mechanisms, promote military cooperation, and enhance interoperability to ensure the protection of shared democratic values and interests.

Finally, negotiating from strength and meeting threats from within are examples on how the concept falls under the logics of securitization. In fact, Brands and Edel (2021) constantly point at the risks that China and Russia imply to the democratic international order. This leads to a position of instrumentalizing democratic solidarity as a tool to guarantee security, which makes clearer the critiques about this variant of democratic solidarity.

However, the proactive vision of democratic solidarity is not inherently securitized. McFaul (2004) states that democratization has not occurred exclusively through unilateral means, and that social movements, NGOs, and human rights activists have supported political changes under the concept of democratic solidarity and democracy promotion⁵.

⁵ The debate surrounding the legitimacy of democracy promotion as a strategy is extensive; however, it is not within the scope of the present research to delve into it. To explore this topic further, one could begin by examining the contextualization provided by Banai. (2013), Niederberger (2013), McFaul (2004).

Based on the significance and contextualization of both concepts, this research will adhere to the differentiation established by Banai. Therefore, the concept of democratic solidarity will be used with a special emphasis on the differentiating principles of non-interference, inclusivity, and reflexivity. The reason for this selection is that democratic solidarity will not be studied as a security strategy, as there is no evidence of action or capacity for the Czech Republic to act as a security actor in Latin America. Furthermore, the collected data suggests, as will be seen later, that the actions are oriented towards democratic movements in a centralized and decentralized manner, thus fulfilling the inclusivity parameters that, according to Banai (2013), democratic solidarity requires ⁶.

Thus, I have designed a table that allows for a clear overview of some of the differences between the concepts of democratic solidarity and democracy promotion studied in this chapter. The table takes into account the perspective of democracy as a means or an end, the approach regarding the actors that should be the main protagonists, the promoters of the democratic agenda, and the objectives of this position.

⁶ The three principles briefly summarized are as follows: A) non-interference: "an expressive approach to advocacy on behalf of democratic ideals in international society." According to the author, the threshold of this principle is that actions should not interfere with the internal politics of the state being addressed, nor should they create new actors within that political system. B) inclusivity: Broad participation of democratic movements, regardless of their political stance, as long as their objective is the achievement of democracy. The author explains that assistance should not be limited to political elites of the intervened state. C) reflexivity: The agenda of democratic solidarity should take into account the historical and contextual processes of the intervened state, rather than attempting to establish democracy based on a linear template, as such practices may not be suitable for the emerging democratic system. (p. 417-420).

Table 1. Comparison between Democratic Solidarity and Democracy Promotion.

	Axiology	Actor approach	Promoters	Objectives
Democratic solidarity	Normative and instrumental	Bottom - up (Democratic movements)	Individual states, multilateral organizations, NGOs	Democratic change and consolidation
Democracy promotion	Instrumental	Top - down (Direct action)	Individual states	Democratic change

Source: own elaboration.

For the purposes of this research, it is important to establish demarcation criteria to determine which actions fall within the framework of democratic solidarity. To do this, the triple criteria of non-interference, inclusivity, and reflexivity, described earlier, are taken into account. As previously stated, actions within the framework of democratic solidarity aim not to interfere in internal political affairs but to provide support to democratic movements and human rights within the targeted state. Due to this, Banai (2013) considers the following as demonstrations of democratic solidarity:

“An expressive approach to advocacy on behalf of democratic ideals in international society. It obliges states and non-state entities (non-governmental organizations (NGOs), intergovernmental organizations, activist groups, civil society networks, etc.) to support the spread of democratic rights and values through acts of public expression, whether through open calls for democratic reforms, criticisms of anti-democratic regimes, or simply articulating the qualitative benefits of democracy in comparison to the existing alternatives” (Banai, 2013, p. 417).

However, democratic solidarity is not merely a script for international platforms, but it can also take concrete actions. The author continues this idea as

follows: “Democratic states do employ coercive measures (sanctions and embargoes, limited military strikes, or travel bans) against non-democratic states”. Those coercive actions, following Banai, are imposed over nondemocratic states in very specific situations, such as rigged elections and persecution of democratic opposition. Moreover, this author considers that coercive actions “seek to express the views of the international community by creating incentives for democratic change” (Banai, 2013, p. 417).

Although some measures such as embargoes and sanctions may appear to be in line with interference in internal affairs, a demarcation line is drawn: "These actions are consistent with the principle of non-interference because they do not seek to intervene in the internal politics of a given state, nor do they introduce new parties or actors to what is already taking place on the ground" (Banai, 2013, p. 417).

As mentioned, actions are not exclusively carried out by the state, but states can allocate resources to NGOs or other organizations responsible for promoting these actions in states with democratic deficits (Niederberger, 2013, p. 55). In fact, this is one of the mechanisms that will be analyzed within the foreign policy of the Czech Republic through the TRANS program, designed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Having established the threshold for actions that are part of democratic solidarity, it is also important to establish a degree of intensity for the actions within the democratic solidarity agenda. This will be done based on the triple criteria established by Niederberger (2013). Niederberger presents a weak form of democratic solidarity, which is always considered permissible to apply.

“The weakest form of democracy promotion is rhetorical pressure by publicly exposing and denouncing certain practices and developments or by calling for an election and other boycotts. This form is weak because it is not sure that this pressure will affect the situation at all — especially if a government controls the public sphere and can thereby block the potential reception and impact of this exposure” (Niederberger, 2013, p. 59).

Niederberger continues with two more levels of commitment within democratic solidarity, a middle and a strong approach. The middle approach involves mechanisms of economic and bilateral pressure: “The prospect of membership and the accompanying advantages or economic support is tied to the development and maintenance of democratic institutions and procedures”. Following Niederberger, this approach is highly effective since they appeal to the interest of both promoters and conditioned states, without having openly intrusive behaviors. The strong approach, characterized by institutional design and direct support for political groups: “Coercive interventions with the aim to secure elections, the formation of parties, the building of institutions or the rule of law. As mentioned previously, such direct interventions are dangerous because by their very mode of operation they threaten democracy and the noncoercive character of democratic procedures, majority and will formation”. Here the author acknowledges the risks associated with the strong approach but does not dismiss them and mentions similar scenarios to those proposed by Banai (2013), such as fraudulent elections.

Based on the potential dangers of direct action, the author establishes their own demarcation line, which is based on a logic of weighing the advantages and disadvantages for the long-term democracy of the target country: “Direct interventions are only admissible if their costs for the future of democracy in a given political system are lower than their gains — which are obviously both often difficult to assess, but an assessment needs to be made” (Niederberger, 2013, p. 59).

Given the information mentioned earlier, I have created an indicative classification table, taking into account the levels established by Niederberger, along with some of the actions mentioned by both Niederberger and Banai (2013). Three levels have been established: Supportive acknowledgement (low), concrete assistance (middle), and active engagement (high)⁷:

	Intensity of intervention		
	Supportive acknowledgement (low)	Concrete assistance (middle)	Active engagement (high)
Actions	Governmental statements	Multilateral actions	Denial of election results in fraudulent elections
	Legal framework oriented towards democratic solidarity	Technical assistance in elections	Economic sanctions
	Criticism of human rights violations	Support for democratic movements	Economic blockade
	Joint declarations	Institutional support and financing for opposition	Military intervention without breaking the constitutional order
	Advocacy for democracy	Promoting dialogue on the application of sanctions	Diplomatic relations breakdown

Table 2. Intensity of intervention in democratic solidarity active

Source: own elaboration.

⁷ It is important to highlight that the mentioned actions are not the only ones in existence, but they serve as a framework for the level of commitment to the idea of democratic solidarity by the promoting states.

Throughout this section, the concept of democratic solidarity has been thoroughly explored, including debates on its application, differentiation from democracy promotion, criteria for demarcating what is and what is not democratic solidarity, and finally, a classification of the intensity of these actions that will be useful in testing the hypothesis regarding the validity of democratic solidarity in Czech foreign policy. Next, an analysis of this policy and its human rights principle will be presented.

Partial Conclusions

In this chapter, the concept of democratic solidarity has been comprehensively analyzed, and useful classifications have been presented for the upcoming evaluation of the actions taken by the Czech Republic regarding the political conflict in Venezuela. This evaluation will help to determine whether these actions meet the criteria of democratic solidarity and if so, to what extent of compromise the democratic solidarity is being executed. Overall, this chapter has provided valuable insights into the importance of democratic solidarity as a conceptual and strategic approach to the debate of democracy in the international arena. Further research has the challenge of evaluating the impact of the different levels of commitment presented in here, in order to elaborate plans of action before authoritarian regimes and institutional erosion.

4. Principle of human rights and democracy within the Czech Republic's foreign policy

In this chapter, I delve into the principle of human rights in Czech foreign policy. Firstly, I will describe the idea of human rights within Czech foreign policy, its historical and contextual development, i.e., its evolution under different administrations. Finally, I explore the relationship between the concept of democratic solidarity and the principle of human rights in Czech foreign policy, and whether the principles of democratic solidarity are reflected in the official Czech foreign policy program.

The analysis will be conducted at an institutional level (official documents), technical level (tools used), and practical level (actions of politicians). Additionally, historical episodes such as the conflict with Cuba and the recent debate on pragmatism versus human rights will be discussed, as they have direct relevance to the current research.

Since its first concept of foreign policy in 1998, the Czech Republic has included human rights and democracy as pillars in its project. Regarding this, Kříž et al. (2021) point out: "After the fall of communism, Czech foreign policy—driven by full-scale societal transformation toward democracy and the rule of law—placed human rights issues at its very core" (p. 65). The motivations for the prominence of these principles can be attributed to at least three key contextual factors. Firstly, the repressive past in Czechoslovakia left marks and the need to promote agendas in favor of freedom and human dignity. In fact, official documents of the Czech Republic currently state their intention to use their experience in transitioning to democracy as an example for other states (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, 2015). Secondly, membership in regional and international organizations that promote democracy and human rights, such as the European Union. Thirdly, a direct interest of the Czech state in considering democracy as a key element for its peace and security.

The first mention of human rights and democracy as values in foreign policy occurred in 1998, accompanied by the following argumentation:

“Human rights: The Czech Republic is aware that human rights are indivisible and must be protected through an active, inventive and dynamic policy. The policy of the Czech Republic is based on international documents which define the relationship of citizens and the state, in particular the General Declaration on Human Rights, the International Agreement on Civil and Political Rights, the International Agreement on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the European Convention on Human Rights, and the European Social Charter.

Democracy: The Czech Republic understands democracy not only as an internal matter of individual countries, but as a precondition for peaceful international relations. Democratic mechanisms are the only means allowing citizens, who suffer most in the end from international conflicts, to express and achieve their desire for peace and prosperity. The sovereignty and security of medium-sized countries, such as the Czech Republic, are therefore closely linked to the international democratic system”. (Czech Republic Government, 1998, p. 4)

The principles of human rights and democracy not only have early mention in official documents but also by political representatives such as Minister Jan Kavan (1999), who emphasizes the importance of these principles for the Czech state. Thus, the mentioned principles align with the interests of foreign policy and the state's own identity by being consistent with a concept of universal morality:

“The government of the Czech Republic considers the respect and safeguarding of human rights as an inherent part of its foreign policy. It is convinced that the respect of human rights, the political stability of individual states and the effectiveness and functionality of international organizations are all closely connected and depend on each other. It is possible to pursue a foreign policy with moral standards while at the same time respecting the national and economic interests of a state” (p. 6).

However, this is not the first inclination towards a foreign policy with a strong focus on human rights and democracy. These values have also been highly dependent on the positions of presidents and prime ministers. According to Cabada (2005) and Kříž et al. (2021), the invitation extended to the Dalai Lama as a representative of Tibet and the official representative for Taiwan by President Havel are some examples of the primacy of these values in the early stages of Czech foreign policy. In the case of Taiwan, The Czech Republic has been a notable leader within the EU. During the 1990s, Prague not only welcomed the Taiwanese prime minister but also actively advocated for Taiwan's membership in the UN (Turcsanyi, 2023). Thus, the post-velvet revolution period lacked specific tools on how to promote these values, but it was characterized by a strong ideological emphasis and commitment from the leadership of Havel.

Efforts by the Czech Republic in promoting human rights have led to tense diplomatic episodes throughout history, such as the case with Cuba, which lasted for approximately two decades and is still ongoing. The event that marked the precedent for the real onset of tension between the countries was the abduction in 2001 of two diplomats, Ivan Pilip and Jan Bubeník, which lasted for nearly a month. The detention was based on an unsubstantiated accusation of espionage on behalf of the United States and engaging in activities against state security with the purpose of inciting rebellion. There were even exchanges of letters between Valtr Komárek (Czech vice prime Minister) and Fidel Castro, and a visit by the President of the Czech Senate, Petr Pithart, who held meetings with local politicians advocating for the release of the Czech citizens. Czech Minister and vice Minister of Foreign Affairs, David Paulovich and Hynek Kmoníček, respectively, also presented several protest notes to the Cuban government regarding the aforementioned detention.

Despite the release of the two diplomats, the event was considered highly serious. Additionally, prior to the arrival of the diplomats, in 2000, the Czech Republic and Poland presented a resolution to the United Nations condemning human rights violations in Cuba, which was approved by the UN Commission on Human Rights. This led to a massive demonstration in Havana, where the Czech

diplomats were accused of subversive activities and internal counter-revolution. (Idnes.cz, 2001). It was not until 2014 that the Czech Republic adhered to the European Union's plan to improve trade relations with Cuba, as it was determined that dialogue would be the most effective path towards Cuba's transition and economic opening, (Novak, 2014).

During the years 2002 to 2009, Czech foreign policy published three relevant documents concerning human rights and democracy. Bílková and Matějková (2010) point out that: "The Conception of the Czech Republic's Foreign Policy for the Years 2002–2006" presented these values as important for the entire foreign policy, although without clear ideas on how to achieve the set objectives. The "Government Program Declaration" in 2007 opted for a more proactive approach, placing particular emphasis on the promotion of democracy and its expansion to other countries. Additionally, the "Conception of Transition Policy," adopted in 2005, served as evidence of the country's increasing interest in promoting democracy abroad (p. 335). During these years, the Czech Republic also chaired the Council of the EU, where it gained prominence in promoting human rights.

The most innovative aspect of this period is the "Transformation Policy", which demonstrates, according to Bílková and Matějková (2010), a strong and growing interest of the Czech Republic in supporting democratic movements and transitions abroad. Bílková and Matějková (2010) present it as follows: "This policy aims to promote democracy and protect human rights by focusing on building and strengthening democratic institutions, the state's legal system, civil society, and principles of fair public administration".

During the period of 2010-2013, under the administration of prime Minister Nečas, there was a significant shift in the principles of human rights and democracy, and an internal debate began to emerge regarding pragmatism versus human rights. The Nečas administration had to deal with the consequences of the 2009 economic crisis, which led political parties within the Czech political system to focus more on

local issues. As a result, there was a distancing from European Union policies, such as the Greek crisis and the refugee crisis (Beneš 2015).

Although human rights and democracy were not directly discussed in relation to the Greek and migrant crises, they did take a backseat and suffered a shift towards a more "domestic policy" focus promoted by some politicians. As an example, prime Minister Nečas stated in 2012 that support for the Dalai Lama or jailed members of the Russian punk band Pussy Riot might have a negative impact on trade relations⁸. This statement drew accusations that it contradicted the country's official foreign policy. Minister of foreign affairs, Karel Schwarzenberg commented that prime Minister Nečas was "throwing the human rights agenda overboard" (Volynsky 2012). Therefore, the debate on the primacy of promoting human rights abroad versus the economic interests of the Czech Republic began.

Later, in 2013, the foreign policy of the Czech Republic took a significant turn with the arrival of president Zeman (Kříž et al., 2021, p. 52). The debate intensified as the president's statements prioritized Czech economic interests. Paraphrasing Kříž et al., the president took advantage of a political crisis that affected negatively to prime Minister Nečas and kept Jirí Rusnok in the cabinet, who followed the priorities of president Zeman, as did foreign minister Lubomír Zaorálek later, from 2014 to 2017. The authors described the foreign policy under Zaorálek as follows:

⁸ Support for the Dalai Lama and the imprisoned members of the Pussy Riot group represents acts of solidarity towards leaders who challenge the status quo of the ruling classes in China and Russia, respectively. In the case of the Dalai Lama, as a representative of the Tibetan region, which has historically been a contentious issue for the Chinese Communist Party. In the case of Pussy Riot, they are an anti-establishment group known for their openly critical performances against repression under the government of Vladimir Putin. These displays of solidarity, according to prime Minister Nečas, would potentially create tensions with the administrations of these economic and political powers.

“Influenced by the ideological input of his deputy Petr Drulák, shifted toward a foreign policy of assertive pragmatism, and promoting Czech interests toward key non-Western actors. This resulted in an adjustment of Czech foreign policy toward Russia and China, but also toward other actors like Azerbaijan and Israel. This adjustment manifested itself in two forms. First, when the international community took on a negative stance toward these actors, the Czech Republic took on an allegedly pragmatic free rider position”. (Kříž et al., 2021, p. 52-53).

Zeman stated that "the country's business interests were sometimes hurt by what he called an excessive emphasis on human rights on the part of Czech leaders" and referred to this policy as "a self-defeating policy" (Lazarová 2014). In fact, the president was widely criticized for his approach to China despite the allegations of human rights violations. This turn especially affected Taiwan, which had been a reliable economic and political partner since 1990s.

“President Zeman was very active during his 2014 visit to China, where he claimed that a restart of the relations between the Czech Republic and China was possible, as Czechia was no longer under the influence of the EU and US and is now promoting its own national interests. He was the only head of state of an EU member state that attended the 2015 military parade in Beijing, which was rewarded by a visit of President Xi to Prague in 2016”. (Kříž, Chovančík, and Krpec 2021, p. 63).

However, the principle of human rights and democracy was not limited to Zeman's expressions alone, as new foreign policy documents were also presented in 2015. The most recent Czech foreign policy documents with a focus on human rights and democracy are "The Concept of the Czech Republic's Foreign Policy" and "Human Rights and Transition Promotion Policy Concept of the Czech Republic." These documents provide more specific details on diplomatic tools compared to previous concepts. The concept reaffirms the importance of human rights and democracy for Czech foreign policy:

“A policy of promoting human rights and democracy is fundamental to the safeguarding of human dignity. Czech foreign policy is based on the principles of universality and the indivisibility of human rights, within the scope of which civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights are crucial for a dignified existence; the denial of such rights violates human dignity and may invite international instability” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, 2015).

The vision of universality of human rights, although not new in this concept, is maintained despite being criticized by some politicians as an "Atlanticist" perspective. (Kříž, Chovančík, and Krpec 2021) make this observation and also points out that there were criticisms of Minister Zaorálek's efforts to contest President Havel's legacy of human rights support in foreign policy. These criticisms focused on three aspects: an excessive emphasis on first-generation human rights, an overly confrontational and assertive approach that was not always effective, and a tendency to admonish only states opposed to the US. (p. 65).

In this document, the Czech Republic also begins to utilize its own experience as a basis for the concept of democratic transition in other states. It states, "The promotion of human rights includes sharing the Czech experience of the transition to democracy and sustainable social market economy with transition countries and societies interested in this experience" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, 2015, p. 9). This effort is not presented as an individual action but rather as a collaborative effort with the European Union and other international organizations. The document states, "In addition, the Czech Republic will promote human rights within the European Union and its common positions on human rights agendas, as well as in the form of human rights consultations across regional groupings of human rights organizations" (p. 10).

However, Bílková (2015) points out that a large part of the concepts and objectives presented did not undergo significant changes compared to the previous concept. The means by which the promotion of human rights and democracy is achieved remains unclear, which, according to the author, indicates the limited

importance given to human rights during these years (p. 420). One aspect that is highlighted as innovative and well-developed in terms of tools is the Human Rights and Transition Promotion Policy Concept. This document further elaborates on the guidelines established in the 2005 Conception of Transition Policy. In this new document, the human rights and democracy departments were merged, and the TRANS program was introduced, serving as the clearest instrument for implementing democratic solidarity within Czech foreign policy.

Bílková (2016) considers that despite the major debates on the shift in foreign policy and the statements of important political leaders, at a theoretical level, the concept of foreign policy and the human rights and transition promotion policy concept show no "revolution" or significant change. Despite Petr Drulák's declarations during the Sobotka government, stating that Havel's vision of foreign policy, criticized as Atlanticist, would be abandoned, the documents are more or less a continuation of previous foreign policy concepts.

The possibility of change in foreign policy raised expectations, including the abandonment of concepts such as the transition to democracy. However, this did not happen. Instead, a more specific framework was established under which it operates. However, the expansion and continuation of these documents do not necessarily imply a greater significance of the government on this issue. In fact, Bílková (2016) states, "Human dignity has been put to the center of attention on the rhetorical plane but this has not brought about any important changes in practice" (p. 4). Recently, since the election of a new government, both President Pavel and prime Minister Fiala, apparently are guiding Czechia back to a value-based policy. As a result, partnership with Taiwan, Ukraine and other states threatened by Russia and China might growth.

In the case of the foreign policy towards Taiwan this shift has been clearly strong despite the recency of the new government. Current ministry of foreign affairs, Jan Lipavský, claimed that the relations between Czechia and Taiwan are more important than those of Czechia and China (Sang, 2022). This statement can be

empirical verified, especially through the actions performed by the new Czech government, strengthening communication with Taiwanese political leaders (McVicar, 2023). The shift to a value-based policy under the new administration does not mean that the economic interests are totally put aside. But the violation of human rights by China, threats to European political leaders for supporting Taiwan, plus a rising trade relations with a democracy such as Taiwan -Turcsanyi (2023) explains that Taiwan allocates around €1 billion in the Czech Republic-, give enough reasons to justify this shift.

Democratic solidarity and human rights in the foreign policy of the Czech Republic

After understanding the historical evolution of the concept of human rights and democracy within the Czech Republic's foreign policy, I will now analyze how and through which actions and documents the idea of democratic solidarity becomes present. Among the key events that demonstrate the notions of democratic solidarity are the promotion of democracy and civil organization in Cuba, the inclusion of non-state actors in Czech foreign policy, particularly regarding human rights, the TRANS program and its policy of democratic transition, and explicit statements about the need for democratic solidarity within Czech foreign policy.

The first notable incursion of the Czech Republic into the democratic solidarity agenda was marked by tension with Cuba. The tension escalated further in April 2001, after the Czech Republic submitted a resolution on the situation in Cuba to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in Geneva. The resolution emphasized the need for "an open and constructive dialogue between the government of Cuba, its people, and the international community as an essential precondition for moving the current status quo [on the island] towards a better future". The text aimed to establish a level of international intervention that could strengthen support and

commitment to the Cuban people in defending their human rights and promoting the national economy (Alfonso, 2001).

The involvement of the Czech Republic in the democratic transition of Cuba did not end with the release of politicians Ivan Pilip and Jan Bubeník. The Czech Republic's interest in Cuba's democratic transition continues to this day. Hrabálek (2015, 2017) points out that the Czech foreign policy towards Cuba remained tough until 2015, due to existing tensions and an economic debt that makes Cuba the country with the highest debt to the Czech Republic. The Czech Republic's participation in democratization projects in Cuba has been both direct and indirect. The indirect form of involvement has been through the NGO People in Need (PIN), which has provided financial support to Cuban dissidents (Slačálek 2010). The role of this NGO has been instrumental in implementing actions related to the principles of democratic solidarity. Through festivals that highlight human rights violations in Cuba and other countries, as well as political training for Cuban dissidents and journalists. Slačálek (2010) further explains: "People in Need Foundation connects an overall refusal of the Cuban regime with support of dissidents and argumentation against their imprisonment" (p. 304).

The involvement of People in Need (PIN) as a non-state actor promoting Czech foreign policy is rooted in the theoretical foundations of Czech foreign policy since its beginnings in the concept of foreign policy in 1998:

"The establishment of institutions and organizations based on civil society is becoming an important factor in international relations. In many fields (such as protection of human and minority rights, social issues, environmental protection, etc.) these organizations carry out activities which complement traditional instruments of the foreign policy of a state. The formulation and achievement of the objectives of Czech foreign policy depend, inter alia, on the existence and activities of non-state factors" (Government of the Czech Republic, 1998, p. 4).

During the period of 2007-2009, the priorities of the human rights and democracy principle continued to align with the principle of democratic solidarity, which involves supporting democratic movements and engaging non-state actors. This can be observed in the priorities of the human rights policy area:

“Thematic priorities of the Czech foreign policy in the area of human rights. The priorities are divided into three categories of different levels of importance, being category encompasses the civil society, including human rights defenders and NGOs, freedom of speech and expression, free press, the relations of those freedoms to religious intolerance, and cooperation with mechanisms for human rights protection” (Bílková and Matějková, 2010, p. 337-338).

One of the sources of funding for NGOs like People in Need is rooted in the development of the TRANS Program, which has funds available to support democratic causes in countries under totalitarian regimes and other countries undergoing democratization processes. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2015)⁹. This program has the following objectives:

“(1) supporting civil society, including human rights defenders; (2) promoting the freedom of expression and information, including the freedom of the media; (3) promoting an equal and full political and public participation; (4) supporting institution-building in the area of the rule of law; (5) promoting equality and non-discrimination; (6) promoting human rights in employment and in the environmental context” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2015).

These principles are directly related to the conceptualization of democratic solidarity discussed in the previous section. Therefore, TRANS Program can be

⁹ There are 11 target countries according to the TRANS program: Moldova, Ukraine, Belarus, Georgia, Armenia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Myanmar, Cuba, and Vietnam. However, they are not the only ones receiving economic support through NGOs. For example, People in Need has political training projects in Venezuela and Nicaragua, as well as an office in Costa Rica, among other Latin American countries.

considered as the clearest and most aligned tool with the principles of democratic solidarity within Czech foreign policy.

Furthermore, the promotion of democratic solidarity within Czech foreign policy goes beyond official documents and projects such as the TRANS Program or votes in favor of economic sanctions against authoritarian regimes, as demonstrated by the actions of the Czech Republic towards Cuba and Venezuela (Hrabálek, 2017). There are also pronouncements made by prominent Czech politicians. A recent example of this is the statement made by the Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies, Markéta Pekarová Adamová, where she declares that democratic solidarity is the way forward (Liu 2023).

In summary, the concept of human rights and democracy within Czech foreign policy has been present since the first foreign policy document. Historically, there was a dominant position in advocating for these values until 2013 when a debate emerged regarding whether economic pragmatism should outweigh human rights and democracy considerations. However, institutionally, the principle of human rights and democracy was maintained, and programs like the TRANS Program were established within Czech foreign policy.

Partial Conclusions

Throughout this chapter, a historical overview of the principles of human rights and democracy in Czech foreign policy has provided a broad understanding of the significance of these values for both state and non-state actors. The discussion on the pragmatism versus human rights and democracy debate is important for testing the research hypothesis, as it contextualizes the Czech Republic's recent stances on human rights issues worldwide. Additionally, the presentation of the TRANS program, along with the Czech Republic's firm stance towards countries like Cuba and Venezuela, demonstrates the existence of Czech interests in the Latin American region, despite the lack of economic and geographic proximity.

The historical trajectory of human rights and democracy in Czech foreign policy, and the ongoing debate regarding the balance between pragmatism and the promotion of human rights. These insights will contribute to the further examination of the Czech Republic's actions and positions in relation to human rights issues.

5. Czechia on the Venezuelan political crisis. Tracing democratic solidarity.

In this chapter, I will approach to the research objectives and assess the falsification or verification of the hypothesis: "The concept of democratic solidarity is a core value of the Czech Republic's foreign policy towards the Venezuelan political crisis". To accomplish this, I will first present a section describing the actions and documents of the Czech Republic concerning the political crisis in Venezuela, including some background information but primarily focusing on the period from 2017 to 2022. I will then verify which of these actions are framed within the characteristics of democratic solidarity.

In the second section, an exposition of reasons to justify democratic solidarity as causal mechanism is presented. Later, the methodology of process tracing will be applied through the application of three tests: straw-in-the-wind, hoop, and smoking-gun. Additionally, alternative hypotheses will be presented to verify the strength of democratic solidarity within the actions of the Czech Republic.

Tracing actions on the Venezuelan political crisis

Venezuela is going through a profound political and social crisis that has raised concerns among numerous democratic states and international organizations (Buschschlüter, 2023). There has been a significant and systematic violation of human rights, according to OHCHR (2019) and Human Rights Watch (2022), and ongoing investigations by the International Criminal Court regarding the responsibility of political actors in these human rights violations (International Criminal Court, 2023).

Opposition groups and civil society in Venezuela have attempted various mechanisms to challenge the regime, including participating in elections, protests, and referendums against Nicolás Maduro, who has used repression and authoritarian

practices to remain in power (Human Rights Watch, 2022). As a result, Nicolás Maduro's regime is characterized by Corrales (2020) as an authoritarian regime. In response to this situation, international organizations, and democratic states, including the Czech Republic, have taken measures in support of the Venezuelan opposition democratic movement and against the Venezuelan dictatorship. In order to clearly track the actions taken, I have categorized the different actors involved in each of the selected actions outlined below.

Presidential Recognition

Nicolas Maduro's second term began in 2018 after the presidential elections in Venezuela. However, the European Union and the Organization of American States denounced certain irregularities that revealed a lack of transparency and constitutional guarantees (Council of the European Union, 2022). As a result, several democratic countries around the world decided not to recognize the elections and their results.

Due to the impossibility of a democratic change of government and in response to the European Union's demand for new elections in Venezuela, which President Maduro refused to comply with, the opposition parties and a broad sector of civil society embarked on the recognition of Juan Guaidó, the President of the National Assembly, as the interim president of Venezuela in 2019. This constitutional-based action was acknowledged by a significant number of states, including the European Union as a whole and the Czech Republic as an active state in condemning the Venezuelan dictatorship (CNN, 2019).

In the case of the Czech Republic, the recognition of Juan Guaidó as the interim president was proposed to the parliament by the Foreign Minister, Tomáš Petříček from the ČSSD party. He stated, "The government of the Czech Republic regrets the fact that, despite repeated appeals by the international community, no steps have been taken in Venezuela leading to free and democratic elections. The government of the Czech Republic therefore recognizes Juan Guaidó as the interim

president who should lead Venezuela to free and democratic elections" (Kopecký & Lederer, 2019). Similarly, the Czech government insisted to the European Union on the need to lean towards this recognition in order to alleviate the humanitarian crisis. Politically, this decision was supported by the opposition. The exception to this support came from a member of the governing coalition, the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSČM), who considered the action to be compliant with the foreign policy of the United States. This demonstrates that the recognition of the interim Venezuelan government was not partisan but rather a common stance.

Among the main international consequences of the recognition of Guaidó, were the recognition of diplomatic agents of the interim government of Guaidó (CNN, 2019), (Venezuelan National Assembly, 2019) and disputes over economic resources (Jones, 2022). In the Czech Republic, this fact stood out more than in many other countries that also recognized Guaidó as president within the EU, as the Czech Republic recognized human rights activist Tamara Sujú as the Ambassador of Venezuela to the Czech Republic, a position that did not even exist prior to the non-recognition of Nicolás Maduro as the legitimate president.

On the other hand, the recognition was not limited to a partisan policy in the Czech parliament, as President Zeman also expressed support for the recognition of Juan Guaidó and extended an invitation to the Czech Republic (iRozhlas, 2019). Zeman's statement includes key terms for this thesis, as he emphasizes the historical process of democratic transition in the Czech Republic, in line with the concept of foreign policy, and asserts that the support is aimed at enabling Guaidó to lead a process for democratic elections, i.e., the promotion of democratic processes carried out by the citizens of the affected country, in accordance with the principles of democratic solidarity explained earlier.

Sanctions against authoritarian regime and pronouncements on human rights violation

A package of individual and general sanctions was imposed by the United States and the European Union as a coercive measure for political negotiation and pressure on the regime of Nicolás Maduro (Council of the European Union, 2022). Since the foreign policy of the Czech Republic aligns with that of the EU (Ministry of foreign affairs of the Czech Republic, 2015) it is possible to trace how, despite not being a state with strong trade relations with Venezuela, the corresponding measures to sanction the Venezuelan regime were supported.

In fact, the pronouncement of the Czech Republic regarding the violation of human rights has preceded the non-recognition of Maduro, and the use of sanctions as tools has been consistently promoted by Czech representatives to the European Parliament even before their approval (Charanzová, 2014). This demonstrates that the position of the Czech Republic is not passive but actively participates in the implementation of pressure measures against the authoritarian regime. These efforts have been specially promoted by the vice-president of the European Union, Dita Charanzová from the political party ANO, who also led the coalition Renew Europe to pronouncing in favor of travel bans, targeted sanctions and asking for prohibiting Venezuelan gold trade in Europe (Renew Europe, 2020).

The Czech Republic beyond the EU

As mentioned earlier, the positioning of the Czech Republic has enough elements to observe actions that go beyond a mere adherence to European Union policies. The Czech Republic was among the states that recognized and received representatives with diplomatic functions from the interim government although for a brief period (Ramos, 2019) as well as made challenging pronouncements to other members of the European Parliament in order to maintain pressure on the Venezuelan regime (Politico, 2021).

One of the prominent figures in this regard is Dita Charanzová, the Vice-President of the European Parliament. As a highly influential representative within the organization, she has consistently raised her voice against the Venezuelan regime (Carrasco, 2021), (Radio Francia Internacional, 2018). The continuous pressure on the Venezuelan regime bears similarities to the historical tension with the Cuban regime, which could provide insights into a clear Czech foreign policy stance towards left-wing authoritarian regimes in Latin America that has persisted over time.

Finally, the support from the Czech Republic was also provided in a decentralized manner. As described earlier, the Czech Republic endorses non-state organizations as actors that execute and contribute to the objectives of Czech foreign policy. In terms of lobbying and political influence, the Forum 2000, created by President Havel, has served as a platform for discussing the Venezuelan crisis, including the invitation of political leaders, human rights activists, and the organization of campaigns and recognitions. Venezuelan political organizations gained support and recognition among the attendees of the forum, which includes ministers, academics, think tanks, and organizations with a high impact on international policy formulation (Forum 2000, 2017). These foundations have the backing of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic and the participation of Czech political leaders.

On the other hand, the organization People in Need, mentioned earlier in this research, also carries out projects for human rights monitoring in Venezuela, as well as projects for democratic strengthening and capacity-building of NGOs in Venezuela (People in Need, n.d.). These projects directly align with the principles of inclusivity, non-interference, and reflexivity that constitute democratic solidarity (Banai, 2013), as well as a bottom-up approach, as the Czech organization supports Venezuelan democratic movements. The funding for organizations like People in Need partly comes from the TRANS Program, which, although Venezuela is not considered a priority country for the program, provides financial support to

organizations with projects clearly oriented towards democratic transition and strengthening in Venezuela.

Democratic solidarity?

After identifying the actions taken by the Czech Republic in response to the political crisis in Venezuela, I will proceed to evaluate whether these actions fit within the concept of democratic solidarity based on two variables. First, I will verify that these actions do not imply a violation of the three principles of democratic solidarity proposed by Banai (2013). Subsequently, I will classify these actions according to their level of intervention, following the scale proposed in Chapter 3. In the previous section, three sets of actions were identified. Firstly, the non-recognition of Nicolás Maduro as the president of Venezuela and the recognition of Juan Guaidó, along with their respective diplomatic envoys. Secondly, systematic statements regarding human rights violations in Venezuela and the voting and promotion of sanctions against the Maduro regime. Thirdly, support for political and social leaders through non-state organizations such as Forum 2000 and People in Need.

The set of recognitions of Venezuelan authorities meets the triple criteria of demarcation, with special compliance in terms of reflexivity and inclusivity. In terms of reflexivity, the Czech Republic supports the democratic struggle from a position of accompaniment rather than imposing guidelines on Venezuela, respecting the historical and political process through which opposition democratic groups came together to form the interim government¹⁰. Inclusivity is fulfilled because the opposition coalition in Venezuela at the time of the formation of the interim government was broad both ideologically and in terms of political representation. Considering that the National Assembly had a majority of more than two-thirds

¹⁰ Political opposition and democratic movements in Venezuela followed a constitutional route where they tried to change government through protests, referendums, and other legal and pacific ways of resistance.

composed of various movements and political parties. The aspect of non-interference contains a certain level of confusion, which is even denounced by the Communist Party in the Czech parliament. However, following the conceptualization of Banai (2013) and Niederberger (2013), coercive measures such as the non-recognition of elections are not considered intrusive in the context of fraudulent elections, as there is no violated democratic institutional framework due to the decisions of the supporting state.

Regarding the sanctions and statements, there is no direct promotion of the triple criterion of demarcation, but there is also no violation of the established principles. In the hypothetical case that the sanctions were imposed by the Czech Republic with the purpose of generating electoral advantages for a specific group that would later benefit the supporting state, it would constitute a violation of this principle and the principle of inclusivity by favoring political elites. However, the sanctions imposed by the European Union and voted for by the Czech Republic, unlike those imposed by the United States, were targeted at specific officials and not in an electoral context, but rather as a consequence of non-competitive elections and orders from high-ranking officials of the Nicolás Maduro regime to persecute democratic leaders.

Lastly, the funding and strengthening of citizen initiatives, social projects, and support for human rights activists provided by organizations such as People in Need, as well as the political alliance forums promoted by Forum 2000, are a textbook example of actions linked to the concept of democratic solidarity. They follow a bottom-up approach, strengthening citizen grassroots movements to promote democratic projects led by Venezuelan citizens themselves, which fulfills the criteria of inclusivity and reflexivity. There is no interference in internal political affairs since these actions do not involve the creation of political parties or the modification of administrative decisions.

With the above, it is confirmed through a verification process that the actions taken by the Czech Republic during the period 2017-2022 fall within the concept of

democratic solidarity. Now, it is important to assess the level of immersion of the Czech Republic within this strategy. In order to clearly present the intensity of the actions, I have organized the scale of commitment regarding the actions carried out by Czechia in the mentioned period.

Table 3. Intensity of intervention in the actions taken by Czechia in the political conflict in Venezuela.

	Intensity of intervention		
	Supportive acknowledgement (low)	Concrete assistance (middle)	Active engagement (high)
Actions performed by the Czech Republic	Governmental statements	Multilateral actions	Denial of election results in fraudulent elections
	Legal framework oriented towards democratic solidarity	Support for democratic movements	
	Criticism of human rights violations	Institutional support and financing for opposition*	Economic sanctions*
	Joint declarations		
	Advocacy for democracy	Promoting dialogue on the application of sanctions	Diplomatic relations breakdown*

Source: own elaboration. ¹¹¹²

¹¹ Institutional support and financing for the opposition are presented in a partial manner, as the opposition benefits from a platform of support provided by both the spaces generated by the Czech government and non-governmental organizations. However, there is insufficient evidence to assert the presence of economic financing for opposition parties.

Applying process tracing

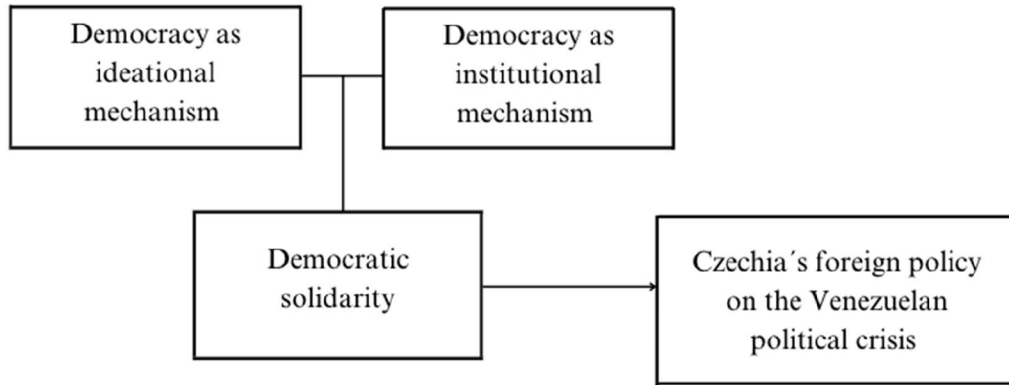
After confirming the existence of actions framed within the concept of democratic solidarity, it is important to explain the consolidation of this concept as a causal mechanism for explaining the outcome, according to the process tracing methodology. Following Beach and Pedersen, the EOPT requires special attention to the construction and selection of the causal mechanism. The choice of democratic solidarity as a causal mechanism responds to the fact that this concept can be seen as the combination of two major types of causal mechanisms proposed by Beach and Pedersen (2013): the institutional mechanism and the ideational mechanism¹³.

As explained in the theoretical framework, the need for democratic solidarity as a strategy arises from a consensus on the legitimacy of democracy as an ideal system of governance, which is reflected in international treaties, policies, statutes of international organizations, among others. This can be understood as an institutional mechanism that shapes the behavior of political actors. On the other hand, the idea of democracy as a value is deeply rooted in the identity of the Czech Republic as a liberal modern state, which consequently also leads to its liberal identity being reflected in its vision of the international system. Hence, the idea of using democratic solidarity as an explanatory mechanism for the phenomenon studied in this research emerges. For the purpose of visualizing the presented logic, I have created a graph describing the constitution of democratic solidarity as a causal mechanism:

¹² The economic sanctions were promoted collectively with the European Union, and as mentioned earlier, they target specific officials of the Maduro regime. Furthermore, there is no cease of diplomatic relations; rather, in the case of the Czech Republic, there is recognition of a diplomatic body that represents the interests of the interim government.

¹³ To find a definition of these mechanisms review page 10.

Graph1: Constitution of democratic solidarity as a causal mechanism



Source: own elaboration.

Now, in order to confirm the hypothesis, "The concept of democratic solidarity is a core value of the Czech Republic's foreign policy towards the Venezuelan political crisis," it is necessary to meet the criteria of necessity and sufficiency established by Collier (2011). This will be done through the testing of statements that support or challenge the hypothesis using three tests: Straw-in-the-wind, hoop, and smoking-gun. The testing process will be presented with a brief description of the purpose of each test, a statement that will be argued and contrasted with an alternative hypothesis, verification of its sufficiency or necessity for confirming the hypothesis, and a conclusion.

Straw-in-the-wind

Straw-in-the-wind test is the first of the three tests. Paraphrasing Collier (2011), this test examines a statement that neither confirms the hypothesis nor refutes it but could strengthen the hypothesis as more explanatory factors are established. In this case, the statement is: "Czechia supports the Venezuelan opposition and a democratic transition in the country due to its authoritarian past". This statement

arises from ideas expressed in official foreign policy documents of the Czech Republic, such as the Concept of foreign policy of 2015, which states: "The promotion of human rights includes sharing the Czech experience of the transition to democracy" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2015, p.9). Additionally, previous statements by President Zeman, inviting interim President Juan Guaidó to visit Czechia to discuss the experience of democratic transition in Czechia, support this affirmation¹⁴.

The previous affirmation does not explain a chain of events that fulfill the necessary elements to prove that democratic solidarity is a core value of Czechia. Having an authoritarian past does not inevitably lead a state to lecture on its political history nor it is a leitmotif in foreign policy. Moreover, even if it were the case, sharing experiences during a presidential visit is not a practice that directly contributes to democratic movements towards a democratic transition. Additionally, the affirmation assumes that Czechia takes position on the Venezuelan crisis for personal initiative, which could be criticized by an alternative hypothesis. The following alternative hypothesis has been selected: Czechia's actions on the Venezuelan political crisis are driven by the decisions of the European Union. What could support this hypothesis is that, as Czechia is a state with limited political influence in the global order and low interdependence with Venezuela, there are no specific motives or principles guiding its foreign policy in the Venezuelan political crisis. Thus, Czechia's foreign policy is determined by the human rights principles of the European Union, and Czechia's interest lies in aligning with the EU's foreign policy guidelines.

The alternative hypothesis presented may seem convincing at first glance, but it represents a false dilemma fallacy. The fact that there is a collective decision by the European Union regarding the situation of democracy and human rights in a state does not imply that each EU member state does not have their own principles or reasons for supporting that decision. This is further confirmed by additional

¹⁴ Please, refer to page 41.

decisions made by Czechia that go beyond the sanctions imposed by the EU and the recognition of Guaidó. Just to name a few examples, this includes the recognition of the diplomatic envoys of the interim Venezuelan government and the invitation extended to President Guaidó to visit the country.

In conclusion, while a historical past is not a necessary element for the application of democratic solidarity, it can serve as motivation to recognize the importance of human rights and democracy as foreign policy objectives, leading to the promotion of principles aligned with democratic solidarity. Even if this affirmation were to be rejected, a state is not disqualified from applying democratic solidarity just because it has not experienced an authoritarian regime in its history. After the argumentation, the results of this first test are as follows:

Affirmation₁: Czechia supports the Venezuelan opposition and a democratic transition in the country due to its authoritarian past.

Alternative hypothesis₁: Czechia's actions on the Venezuelan political crisis occur as a result of the collective actions of the European Union.

Conclusion: the authoritarian experience in Czechia could motivate the promotion of human rights and democracy principles. The decisions made by the European Union as a bloc do not invalidate the principles that each of its member states may have when supporting foreign policy decisions, and Czechia has shown actions that go beyond mere alignment with the European Union. Even if the first statement were to be rejected, it does not negate the hypothesis, as it is not necessary for a state to have an authoritarian past in order to promote democratic solidarity. The first statement does not meet the criteria of necessity and sufficiency, but it could serve as a contributing factor to the existence of democratic solidarity.

Hoop

The hoop test, according to Collier (2011), aims to affirm aspects of the hypothesis but does not confirm it. Refutation, on the other hand, would involve the elimination of the hypothesis. In terms of the criteria of necessity and sufficiency, the tested hypothesis meets the criterion of necessity for inferential cause but not sufficiency. Thus, the hypothesis presented in this test is related to a question already addressed in this thesis, specifically in the previous section of this chapter, “Democratic solidarity?”: Czech Republic's actions towards Venezuela are framed into the concept of democratic solidarity. As an alternative hypothesis₂, it is proposed: "Czechia's actions on the Venezuelan political crisis are driven by Czechia's economic interests in Venezuela."

The selection of hypothesis₁ is based on the need to confirm that democratic solidarity is a core value in Czechia's foreign policy towards Venezuela. To affirm this, it is necessary to establish that the actions taken are framed within the concept of democratic solidarity. This provides a conceptual foundation that serves as an explanatory factor, giving coherence, classification, and context to the set of actions carried out. Since the set of actions has already been verified against the criteria of demarcation and intervention in the previous section, there is no need to reconfirm whether the actions fit within the concept of democratic solidarity. Instead, the alternative hypothesis₂ will be used for a falsifiability process, and if it fails to refute the hypothesis₁, it will strengthen the belief in hypothesis₁.

During President Zeman's presidency and with statements from former Prime Minister Nečas, the debate between pragmatism and human rights emerged within the Czech Republic's foreign policy¹⁵. One could argue that the trend in Czechia's foreign policy has been pragmatism, and as evidence of this, there are statements and the absence of them from important Czech political leaders regarding intervention in

¹⁵ To return to the description of this debate, please refer to page 29, chapter 4.

matters of democracy and human rights in China and Russia¹⁶. Additionally, Venezuela possesses natural resources such as oil, which are often used as arguments by critics of intervention by other states in Venezuelan politics, claiming that states intervene in Venezuela due to their interest in oil. This alternative hypothesis, which could be valid for other states, if confirmed, would invalidate the hypothesis of democratic solidarity as a core value of Czech foreign policy. However, it does not apply to the case studied due to the low levels of economic and geopolitical relations between these two states. There is not even a strong historical relationship between these nations, as there was with Cuba prior to the fall of the communist bloc. Moreover, even in a scenario where a historical relationship exists, Cuba serves as an example that it is not a condition to refrain from acting based on solidarity with democratic interests.

Discarding the alternative hypothesis does not rule out the possibility that Czechia has maintained pragmatism in its general foreign policy. However, it serves as additional evidence that, at least in the Latin American region, the Czech government seems to pay particular attention to authoritarian regimes with left-wing ideology. This connection even aligns with the assertion established in the straw-in-the-wind test regarding its political history. Now, confirming hypothesis₁ satisfies the criterion of necessity but not sufficiency, as proving the existence of actions framed within the concept of democratic solidarity does not confirm that it is the conceptual foundation or a core value of Czechia's foreign policy towards Venezuela. With this explanation, the results of the second test are as follows:

Hypothesis1: Czech Republic's actions towards Venezuela are framed into the concept of democratic solidarity.

¹⁶ This claim is related to Zeman's administration. Recent facts show a possible turning point in Czechia's foreign policy going back to a value-based policy. This situation highly motivated by the invasion in Ukraine and the continuous pressure over Taiwan.

Alternative hypothesis2: Czechia's actions on the Venezuelan political crisis are driven by Czechia's economic interests in Venezuela.

Conclusion: There are no historical or current economic relations, nor any expression of interest in establishing them, strong enough to put Czechia's interests at risk or imply a motivation to act in the Venezuelan political crisis. Czechia's actions are framed within the concept of democratic solidarity, although at the moment there is not sufficient reason to believe that they are the conceptual foundation of its foreign policy towards Venezuela.

Smoking-gun

The smoking gun test aims to confirm the criterion of sufficiency for a causal explanation. According to Collier (2011), the hypothesis is confirmed if it passes the smoking gun test, although its refutation does not eliminate it. For this test, hypothesis₂ has been chosen: "Democratic solidarity in Czechia's foreign policy towards Venezuela is systematic and highly committed." The selection of this hypothesis is based on the idea that systematic actions with varying levels of commitment serve as clear empirical evidence of the importance of the value of democratic solidarity for Czechia in relation to this political crisis. As for the refutation, the following statement is presented: "The Venezuelan political crisis is not a priority in Czechia's foreign policy". This is based on the idea that in Czechia's foreign policy tools such as the TRANS program, Venezuela is not included among the priority states. Additionally, as explained earlier, Venezuela is not a strong trade or political partner for Czechia historically or currently, and there is no specific focus in Czechia's foreign policy aiming to engage with Venezuela.

To begin with the refutation, it is important to highlight that both points are empirically verifiable. Venezuela is not among the states described as priorities within the TRANS program, and there are no direct strategic priorities with Venezuela in Czechia's foreign policy. However, the TRANS program does provide

financial and institutional support to organizations such as People in Need, which has been explained to be working on several projects in Venezuela, including strengthening civil society and supporting human rights activists. Therefore, even without being part of the priority states, democratic movements in Venezuela benefit from the institutional design of Czechia's foreign policy. Moreover, if the statement in the refutation were to be confirmed, it does not actually rule out the objective of hypothesis₂. Even if the Venezuelan political crisis is not a priority in Czechia's foreign policy, it does not mean that their actions have not been consistent, stable over time, and highly committed to the Venezuelan democratic movement.

Based on the above, it is argued that the hypothesis₂ is empirically verifiable and has been demonstrated through the description of recurrent actions by Czechia, such as statements, votes, and recognition of the interim government, as well as the evaluation of the level of intervention of Czechia's actions, ranging from supportive acknowledgement to active engagement¹⁷. Czechia, through representatives in the European Parliament, non-governmental organizations, and diplomatic recognition, has assumed a highly committed role in the discussion on democracy and human rights in Venezuela. This further strengthens the hypothesis despite the refutation that aimed to weaken it. There is a systematic and profound commitment to a political situation that is not even a priority among Czechia's strategic axes of foreign policy. The confirmation of this hypothesis fulfills the criterion of sufficiency, as demonstrating a high commitment to the implementation of a democratic solidarity agenda shows that democratic solidarity is indeed a core value in Czechia's foreign policy. Thus, the results of the test are as follows:

Hypothesis₂: Democratic solidarity in Czechia's foreign policy towards Venezuela is systematic and highly committed.

¹⁷ To see the actions taken, return to the beginning of chapter 5, "Czechia on the Venezuelan political crisis. Tracing democratic solidarity." To return to the classification, refer to page 46.

Refutation: The Venezuelan political crisis is not a priority in Czechia's foreign policy.

Conclusion: Czechia has demonstrated systematic and highly committed efforts to promote a democratic solidarity agenda towards the Venezuelan political crisis. The fact that Venezuela is not a priority in Czechia's foreign policy actually strengthens the hypothesis, as it demonstrates a commitment that goes beyond the expected parameters of Czechia's actions in this matter. The confirmation of the commitment and systematic nature of Czechia's actions serves as evidence that democratic solidarity is indeed a core value in Czechia's foreign policy towards Venezuela.

Final results

The confirmation of the three tests demonstrates that the criteria of necessity and sufficiency are met, indicating a minimally sufficient connection between the causal mechanism and the outcome. This is interpreted as confirmation of the hypothesis of this research. Therefore, there is empirical evidence and strong arguments to answer the research question: "¿What is the conceptual basis of Czech foreign policy on the Venezuelan political crisis?" through the affirmation of the hypothesis: "The concept of democratic solidarity is a core value of the Czech Republic's foreign policy towards the Venezuelan political crisis".

The strength of these tests lies in the possibility of the hypotheses to face alternative explanations that might weaken the main hypothesis. Alternative hypotheses are built on strong empirical evidence of Czechia's foreign policy. Alignment with the European Union, pragmatism, or the satisfaction of economic interests as a foreign policy agenda, and the scarce relations between Venezuela and the Czech Republic are real. Due to this, the fact of passing these tests shows that the central hypothesis is verifiable even under adverse conditions.

In the classification chosen by Collier (2011), a final test called double-decisive is presented to eliminate alternative explanations. However, with the selected EOPT, a minimally sufficient explanation is enough to establish a connection between the causal mechanism and the studied outcome. It is not necessary to eliminate alternative interests within Czechia's foreign policy towards Venezuela, but to expose how a value-based foreign policy has been consistently demonstrated by Czechia.

6. Conclusion

This research has successfully addressed the research question through the confirmation of the hypothesis: "The concept of democratic solidarity is a core value of the Czech Republic's foreign policy towards the Venezuelan political crisis". However, the contributions of the research go beyond understanding Czechia's actions on the Venezuelan political crisis. Throughout this work, the concept of democratic solidarity has been extensively discussed, and a new concept justified by demarcation criteria and an intervention scale has been presented, which can contribute to future research on democratic solidarity as a strategy.

The results show a consistent and multi-level commitment of Czechia to the democratic cause in Venezuela. This claim gains special importance after analyzing the different approaches that Czechia has had in its foreign policy for the last twenty years. In spite of having conflicts to define the relations with countries such as Russia or China, the struggle for democracy and human rights remained coherent in Latin America, especially with Cuba and Venezuela. The analysis contemplated various sources, which allowed to study the actions beyond the texts elaborated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, having the possibility to check that it was not a mere textual position, but a matter of empirical demonstrations as well.

Furthermore, the research provides evidence to the debate within Czechia's foreign policy between pragmatism and human rights. Although the purpose of this research is not to establish laws or confirm theories, the findings presented here demonstrate that Czechia's position in foreign policy is not necessarily driven solely by material interests but can also be seen as a value-based policy. Future research on this debate could apply comparative methodology to examine whether economic interdependence is a factor that can influence whether Czechia takes a pragmatic or value-based policy. On the other hand, the role of presidents and prime ministers in applying democratic solidarity is a factor that was not deeply studied here. Due to ideological interpretations on democracy and political alliances, the concept of

democratic solidarity is subject to the will and allocation of efforts of the political leaders' agenda. Therefore, further research might analyze democratic solidarity as a strategy for consolidation of regional blocs, whereas at the institutional level, policy makers could take this issue into consideration for a common policy based on shared values regardless of ideology.

One limitation of this research relates to the point mentioned earlier. Due to the applied methodology, it is not possible to determine whether this behavior will be generalized to other authoritarian regimes in the region or in general to those with whom Czechia does not have significant economic relations, or perhaps to states with socialist authoritarian regimes, as seen with Cuba and Venezuela. These are questions that could be valuable for future research on this topic.

Another aspect to highlight in this research is the analysis of Czechia's role in deliberations on Venezuela within the European Union. This demonstrates that, regardless of alignment with EU objectives, Czechia can take on an important advocacy role that allows it to emphasize and even showcase its commitment, in line with its identity as a state and its political history. The perception of Czechia as a medium-sized state within the European Union should not be a justification for restraining itself from taking strong positions that align with its values. A potential challenge for this point is that the regional bloc where Czechia could outstand is actually one of the most affected by democratic backsliding in Europe. The Visegrad Group gained strength and cohesion with a policy oriented towards pragmatism. The new shift to a value-based foreign policy might compromise Czechia in the tension between the European Union and leaders such as Orbán.

Finally, in practical terms, this research provides, at the very least, ideas for action in the formulation of policies and foreign policy tools by democratic states in the promotion of human rights and democracy. There is, both in Europe and in other regions, a wave of democratic backsliding, in which one can take a role of solidarity and action alongside democratic movements that are suffering from the institutional and democratic deterioration of their political systems.

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