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**Changing Attitudes towards Human Rights  
in Europe:  
Perceptions of Czech Non-Profit  
Organisations**

*Master's thesis*

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## **Abstract**

This master's thesis deals with the identification and the analysis of the changes in society which lead to questioning the basic principles of human rights from the point of view of Czech non-profit organisations. In this study, it is important to divide the definition of human rights into their legal aspect, i.e. as rights of people, and their institutional aspect, i.e. as the moral imperative of equality and liberty. The latter is the main objective of this study, and is in this thesis labelled as *the human rights*. While the legal aspect of human rights is hard to change and to challenge, the institution of human rights is confronted by both the politics and the public. Because of their unique position between the political and the public spheres, non-profit organisations who advocate the human rights were chosen as the research sample. The dimensions of the researched phenomenon are divided into decreasing political influence of countries promoting the human rights, and increasing distrust in the legitimacy of the human rights. Findings from the research uncover the unequal intensity of the potential reasons of the changing attitudes towards the institution of human rights, and we can identify the political sphere as the creator of the boundaries in which the public reacts. As a result, this research shows that the situation the human rights find themselves in today is, in spite of its urgency, a natural part of the development and the evolution of the society.

## **Keywords**

human rights, non-profit organisations, Western society, the institution of human rights, legitimacy of human rights

## **Extent of the thesis:**

The thesis as submitted is 108 070 characters including spaces, i.e. 60 standard pages long.

## **Declaration**

I hereby declare that this thesis is my own work, based on the sources and literature listed in the appended bibliography. I also declare that this thesis was not used to get any other academic title. I agree to make this thesis accessible for further study and research purposes.

Prague, 19. 5. 2017

Bc. Anna Libová

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## **Master's thesis project**

Student: Bc. Anna Libová

Title: Changing Attitudes towards Human Rights in Europe: Perceptions of Czech Non-Profit organisations

Supervisor: doc. PhDr. Ondřej Císař, Ph.D.

The world of the 21st century is remarkable for its easily changeable nature. This change is also present in the sphere of social life and the sphere of social movements as well. Not only economic changes but also current cultural challenges in Europe show the high level of responsiveness of the public towards new situations in the life of ordinary people. European social movements are not an exception in this trend.

In my thesis I am going to concentrate on how are they dealing with new challenges formed not only in the public but also in the political discourses. My main goal is to focus on the social movements dealing with the recently emerging perception of human rights and its possible crisis and new challenges to study these movements. When talking about the crisis of perception of human rightist, this could be described as a cleavage in the societal acceptance of these. People are mobilising themselves to answer the questions of inequality all around the world, in cases of sexism, sexual orientation, racism or any kinds of xenophobia. One of the possible ways to get deeper into the inner processes of this mobilisation is to focus on the causes of their development and how individual actors from these movements perceive their activities.

In my master thesis, I would like to concentrate on the ways how human rights activists do what they do and what are the forms of their civic engagement. Thus, the main research question would be: How do the human rights social movements react to the changes in the discourse on the human rights? Based on this question, in my thesis, I would research what strategies do they use and why these.

To study this, I am going to use qualitative interviews with actors from different human rights social movement in the Czech Republic. In spite of the fact, that such study will not be representative, it can provide a deeper view into the issue. Moreover, it can focus on the real perceptions of these actors and thus, not general but very specific and detailed analysis on perceptions and motivations of those, who are involved, can be

done. Finally, such study can be useful for the activists themselves. When given information on nature and background of their own activities, they can do it more effectively and focus on some areas more or less.

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# 1. Introduction

*“Freedom is never granted - it is won. Justice is never given - it is exacted.”*

A. Philip Randolph, African-American civil rights campaigner<sup>1</sup>

In 1948, the United Nations signed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to protect the humanity from the horrors of the World Wars which occurred in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It was not sooner than until the end of the century when all European countries were free from authoritarian regimes which held their citizens from their basic human rights, and until today we still can see some countries where respecting human rights is far from what is declared. Considering the European development, increased respect and promotion of the idea of human rights was spectacular. Creation of the European Union, abolishment of borders between countries, and the possibility to access supra-national institutions as if they were national brought unprecedented freedom to the lives of European Union citizens. However, this freedom is nowadays taken as granted, and what is worse, it starts to be understood as achievable only for some parts of the society – at least from the some people’s point of view. Today, we see increased incomprehension for people fleeing from wars, for nations who found themselves in difficult situations, or for the institutions who are in charge of maintaining peace on our continent. It seems like some parts of the European society is forgetting about the importance of keeping on fighting for our freedom and on demanding equity among people.

The main purpose of this study is to uncover possible causes of why the Western society reacts in such way. Although there have always been some negative reactions to liberty and equal treatment of all human beings, intensity and forms of these opinions are rather new. Just when we thought these problems were overcome, today we witness far-right parties sitting in parliaments, massive demonstrations against religions, or the urge to rebuild recently removed borders. The novelty grounded in the vehemence of continuous oppression enables this thesis not to theoretically assign the causes and consequences, but rather uncover the structure of repeating events which can be possible causes of the changing attitudes towards the principles of human rights. To get

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<sup>1</sup> Retrieved from Amnesty.org

wider perspective on the topic, the view of non-profit organisations is analysed. The decision to involve them in this study originated in their unique position in the society. They, as advocates of the main principles of human rights, find themselves between the state and the public, and also between the ideas they promote and the reactions to them. This unique position enables them to critically evaluate the position of human rights in today's society and also the changing character of the issue. Even though reports on changing character of the public attitudes towards human rights already exist, and will be described in the next section, they are yet not sufficiently to be perceived as direct evidence of rejection of these principles. The research on non-profit organisations thus serves to monitor of the tendencies and the extent to which the public attitude is changing.

## **1.2. Changing views on the human rights**

When in 2015 more than one million migrants (Miles, 2015) crossed the borders of Europe, the continent's reaction was far from the European values built on tolerance and acceptance. In the public space, the anti-Muslim and anti-refugee opinions were spread fast, as if it was not about people but goods - things that can be shifted from one side to another, things that do not have feelings and do not need any compassion. And the political space experienced a similar problem. When the European Union proposed a quota system to release the tension put on the countries of arrivals Italy and Greece, instead of solidarity some of the member states tried to negotiate their obligation to temporarily accept asylum seekers. Among these countries were also the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Poland in which the number of asylum seekers is among the smallest in the European Union<sup>2</sup>. The paradox of this situation reflects the actual situation the European public found itself in. On one side, there were real solutions to the problem which would not disappear after refusing it, and on the other side, the theoretical frightening scenarios of what-ifs. The statements of Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico on restrictions of Muslims' freedom in Europe (Mulhall, 2017), or that the creation of Muslim community in Slovakia must be prevented (Noviny.sk, 2016) show that some of the European politicians prioritised discriminative discourse before the

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<sup>2</sup> Asylum applications per million inhabitants in 2015: Poland: 270, Czech Republic: 117, Slovakia: 50. EU average: 260. (Eurostat, 2016)

fundamental elements of the European Union. Similar trends occurred among the public. Pew Research Center states in their 2016 Global Attitudes Survey that “previous Pew Research Center surveys have found broad support for democratic principles in Europe, but the latest poll reveals less consensus on promoting human rights in the international arena. Among the 10 European nations surveyed, there are only four in which half or more say human rights should be a top priority for their country’s foreign policy” (Stokes et al., 2016, p. 27). According to the European Council’s report (Jagland, 2017), Islamophobia (i.e. specific form of racism towards Muslims) and anti-Muslim hatred represent major “threats to human rights and social cohesion in Europe” (ibid. p. 104).

The times when the European Union and its member states were celebrating their cooperation are now gone. We see regression in the development of a united continent, which is not jeopardised only from the outside but also from the inside, from its own citizens. The fears, hatred, and discrimination are taking us back to the times of history, which should be prevented by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The rights of other people, which should be determined only by non-violations of rights of others are today seen as privileged for ones and denied for others. Those with such a way of thinking can today be found not only on the margins of political spectres - on the far right. They can be found among the mainstream politicians, in the public space, in the mainstream media, and in our immediate surroundings.

### **1.3. Structure of the thesis**

The first, theoretical, part of this thesis will introduce a definition of human rights, evolution of the movements advocating for them, and the possible causes of changing views on the human rights in Europe. The main theoretical framework is based on Stephen Hopgood’s argument of ending humanitarian and human rights imperative. The proposed reasons of this phenomenon are framed as changes in the distribution of international political powers, new forms of political rhetoric, division of the public space, and change in the importance of different values.

Besides the theoretical implications, this thesis offers a point of view of important actors in the discussion on basic principles of equality, such as indisputability of human rights, which should stay essential for every democratic country – the non-profit organisations. Their perceptions conducted by means of qualitative interviews will be then studied in the analytical part, uncovering the individual dimensions proposed in the theoretical section and how they are perceived by the non-profit organisations. Afterwards, the given information will be summarised and discussed. Besides the suggestions for further research, the thesis will offer implications for the non-profit organisations. The analysis will attempt to connect the current situations with the perceptions of the non-profit organisations. It will be also able to trace the problems of these organisations back to their causes in the public and political space.

#### **1.4. Definition of key terms**

##### *The human rights*

For the purposes of this study, we need to distinguish between two possible understandings of human rights. Human rights in general can be understood as set of legislative regulations dealing with entitlements of a human being. This meaning is, however, not sufficient for this thesis, because its aim is not to study respect of the law and legislation. When *the human rights* are mentioned in this study, this term describes the institution of human rights, the moral imperative flowing from respecting these rights. *The human rights* can be understood as a collection of principles of equality, respect, and liberty among human beings.

##### *Western countries*

Although there can be many explanations for this term, the definition of *Western countries* in this study consists of: European countries, USA, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand (Kurt, 2004). As it is apparent from the different geographical locations of these countries, this term and its understanding is of a more abstract, rather than literal, kind. The term can be understood as a cluster of countries which share the same cultural principles and political ideologies. Although these can vary among each other on a certain extent, they are all rooted in the Greece and Roman antiquity, Christianity, and

Enlightenment (ibid.). To put it into the context of this study, the Western countries' shared history is closest to fundamental ideas of human rights and their present is furthest to their abuse. In this thesis, this term is also interchangeable with the terms the *West*, *Western world*, *Western culture*, or *Western society*.

#### *Non-profit organisations*

The main characteristic of these organisations, which distinguishes them from business organisations, is that their revenues are not distributed among their members and founders but are reallocated to defeat their main purpose. The non-profit organisations can be both founded by the state, and by individual citizens or groups of citizens. Most of the time, they offer publicly beneficial services. The area in which non-profit organisations operate is described as the third sector – the sector between the public and the state (Potůček, 1997). In this thesis, the non-profit organisations are considered as actors between the public and the governmental space, who advocate the importance of respecting human rights.

#### *Migration crisis*

Despite the fact that this thesis does not primary deal with the issue of this crisis, it will be identified in this section because of its rather ambiguous name. In this thesis, the term *migration crisis* refers to the events in 2015 and 2016 when hundreds of thousands people crossed borders of the European Union. Although this situation persists until this day, the intensity and urgency sank considerably. When term occurs in this thesis this, it refers to the period of time between 2015 and the first half of 2016. During this period the issue was part of the mainstream, everyday discourse and was considered as the number one priority for the European public. This term and its meaning can be also altered with *terms immigration crisis* or *refugee crisis*.

## **2. Theoretical framework**

The first, theoretical, part of this thesis aims to define the structure of the phenomenon of changing attitudes towards the human rights. In the first section, a brief definition and development of human rights will be introduced. The second section deals with the evolution of human rights social movements as the representatives of the respect of human rights in the public space. The third section consists of an analysis of potential causes of shifting perceptions of human rights, including both political rhetoric and public initiatives, and their controversial character.

### **2.1. Definition of human rights**

The human rights are rights belonging to all people simply because they are human beings. United Nations define them as universal, inalienable, interrelated, interdependent and indivisible (OHCHR.org). They are valid for all human beings all around the world, no matter their religion, ethnicity, nationality, or sex. Citizens of all countries have human rights despite the social, cultural, or political background of a country. These rights should not be taken away from a person. Only under special circumstances of committing a crime and being guilty of a crime by a court of law, exceptions are made. These rights are dependent on each other and tied together. They cannot be cancelled by any law and are valid throughout the whole life of a person. Human rights are not only ethical and moral principles, but also compliance and effective protection of these rights belong to the essential features of every democratic state ruled by law.

As proposed by the Czech jurist Karel Vašák (1997), we can distinguish three generations of human rights. These were divided according to the motto of the French revolution – liberty, equality, and fraternity. The first generation of human rights consists of civil and political rights. These rights are dealing with freedom and political participation of a person. The state secures the observance of these rights mainly by not limiting citizens in any of them. The first declarations of such rights were the Magna Carta (1215), English Bill of Rights (1689), United States Bill of Rights (1789), and Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen (1789). The active initiative by

citizens is a necessary precondition of the political rights. Rights of this generation are for example voting rights, freedom of speech, or right to life. The second generation of the human rights contains the cultural, economical, and social rights. They deal with equal conditions and equal treatment. In the contrast with the first generation, these rights and their compliance require action by the state, not the individuals. This generation consist of rights such as the right to education, the right to desirable work, or the right to the adequate living standard. The rights from both of these generations are internationally guaranteed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). The third generation of the human rights covers rights which could be described as solidarity rights. The observance of these rights requires the participation and collaboration of more individuals and states since the realisation of these rights crosses not only the borders of states but also those of regions and continents. The reason why these rights cannot be covered by any universal declaration, such as the first and the second generations of the human rights, is the sovereignty of states and the nature of these rights which does not only cover rights of a human being but also rights of humanity as such. These rights include right to peace, or right to a healthy environment.

## **2.2. Human rights social movements and their development**

When we understand the concept of human rights not as a set of legal practices towards a human but rather than a social institution, we have to connect its development to a specific sequence of events which occurred in the history. The basic understating of human rights as natural rights of every human being, independent to any legal system can be dated back to the times of ancient philosophers of Stoicism who “believed that the nature of all human beings are equal“ (Mijuskovic, 2016, p. 5). Significant work on natural law was made by John Locke whose approach to natural rights and law inspired the movements in the American War of Independence in 1775–1783 (Forde, 2011). Here we can see the first implications of movements towards the institution of human rights and the anti-slavery campaign can be seen as the oldest human rights movement (Leonard, 2006). The next human rights movements did not appear sooner than one century later, at the turn of the 19th and 20th century. These movements held the issues of anti-colonialism and women’s suffrage and were affecting the human rights policies only partially on their levels of interest and definitely not globally. It was not until the



end of the Second World War when the human rights became universally valid legal rights of all people (Normand, Zaidi, 2008). The events after the WWII where the developed world was divided into the West and East were also reflected in the human rights movements. From 1954 a growing African-American Civil Rights Movement dealt with the rights of the minority in the USA. This movement was active until the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1968 followed by signing the Civil Rights Act of 1968 which equalised the African-Americans and other non-white population with the white population.

The Western pioneering in proclamation of the human rights continued in the 1970's. The issues such as South African apartheid, or Cambodian genocide caught broader attention of the world, and the human rights became accepted as an international movement. The international character of the movement was also acknowledged in 1977, when the organisation Amnesty International won the Nobel Peace Prize (Nobelprize.org). On the other side, the positive development in the evolution of the human rights was suspended on the Eastern side of the world - the one under the communist regime. The regime was built on the oppression of democratic principles, which include the respect to all of human rights. The totalitarian regime in the USSR persecuted those who did not agree with it, and continued to violate the rights even after the Helsinki Accords in 1975 (Neier, 2012). The Helsinki Accords were signed primary to release the tensions caused by the Cold War, and were signed by most of the European states, including Russia or Czechoslovakia, Canada, and the USA (Britannica.com). However, the USSR did not take any steps to increase the protection of human rights within its states. As an answer to this, the dissident movement in Czechoslovakia created Charter 77 which criticised this approach and called the communist regime to implement the agreements it undertook in the Helsinki Accords and other documents, such as the Czechoslovak constitution. Until 1990, Charter 77 was signed by 1898 persons (Totalita.cz). The collapse of the Iron Curtain caused spread of democracy and balancing the level of the respect to human rights. Whole Europe accepted the Western model of acceptance and togetherness which then lead to creation of the European Union in 1993 (Europa.eu). When the differences between regimes in Europe disappeared and the continent became unified, the movement redirected its focus from respect to basic human rights to rights of the third generation, such as

international advocacy to the third world countries, advocacy for minorities, and overcoming differences within societies (Neier, 2012).

Today, human rights are internationally and universally guaranteed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and thus by the United Nations. Besides the declaration, the United Nations also supplement the supranational role of the protector of human rights worldwide. The United Nations Security Council and the United Nations Human Rights Council are the institutions which are primary dealing with human-rights law, its abidance and implementation. In Europe, the role of a more regional protector is performed by the European Court for Human Rights. The Court for Human Rights originated from the European Convention on Human Rights by the Council of Europe. The convention is ratified by all of the Council's member states, or has to be ratified as soon as possible by new member states.

### 2.3. Challenging the institution of human rights

In 2013 at the 15<sup>th</sup> Humanitarian Congress in Berlin, English Professor of International Relations and the author of the book *The Endtimes of Human Rights* (2013) Stephen Hopgood opened his session with these words:

*“I am in a very unusual position for a professor, of hoping not convince you that I am right, but hoping that you will convince me that I am wrong.”<sup>3</sup>*

The scepticism of his words is conditional to the fact that the human rights, understood in the sense proposed in this thesis – as an institution, come to its critical stadium where the Western society cannot any longer protect and stand by this institution and as the protector and the ultimate symbol of the human rights (Landman, 2014).

In his speech, Hopgood defines five main characteristics of the change which is happening right now and which cause the declining effect of the human rights institution. These are as followed:

1. decline of the West and relative decline of the US
2. challenges to the core of the human rights
3. resistance to the legitimatisation of the human rights
4. religious conservatism
5. progressive extent of the human rights taken as granted

Inspired by these reasons, in this thesis, two characteristics which might lead to challenged and changed attitudes towards the institution of the human rights will be introduced in the following sections of this chapter. The two suggested characteristics are: decreasing Western influence, and challenges towards the basic human rights principles and their legitimacy.

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<sup>3</sup> The speech was published on YouTube.com

### **2.3.1. Decreasing Western influence**

As Hopgood (2013) suggests, USA and the European Union libertarian ideals are losing their power and influence to China, Russia, Brazil, and India whose respect for human rights is often considered as insufficient. These countries are becoming bigger actors in the international debate not only economically but also by expanding their political influence. While the European Union keeps on living through the most critical times of its existence, China and Russia are becoming strategic allies celebrating the twentieth anniversary of their strategic partnership (Duchâtel, 2016). For our, Central-European perspective, the strategies of Russia are more visible and can be identified as moving away from democratic principles.

Among the developed countries, the condition of the Russian democracy is one of the most criticised. According to the Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index (Economist.com, 2017), since 2011, Russia has been considered as authoritarian regime, and its democracy index is still decreasing. Amnesty International criticises Russia in its annual report for increasing “restrictions on rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly” (Amnesty.org). The Russian regime tries to oppress the civil society, its international connections and cooperation. Nevertheless, Russian undemocratic practices do not stay within the federation. In 2014, Vladimir Putin successfully demonstrated his authority when Russia occupied a territory of its western neighbouring country Ukraine. As the Maidan demonstrations evoked in Ukraine, Russia took the chance to strengthen its political power. The action peaked in February and March 2014 by the seizure of Crimea. The only answer by Western countries to this controversial power enforcement was the international sanctions to Russia which were mostly of an economic character. As the result of the sanctions Russia was looking not only for a new political but also market partner and found it in China (Makocki, 2016). The problematic part of the alliance in consideration of the human rights is the Chinese attitude towards the importance and respect of human rights. The Guardian's reporter Benjamin Haas describes the legal persecution of human rights activists as elimination of the civil society (Haas, 2017). Reports from Amnesty International (2017) or the Human Rights Watch (2017) are constantly pointing on the abuse of the human rights in China such as limited freedom of speech, movement, or the press. The problem laying

by this alliance for the Western ideology of human rights is that it is possible to violate human rights and yet to be one of the global leaders with growing power.

However, the European and Western values are not tested only across their borders. Probably the most critical moment occurred in June 2016, when the British public by means of a referendum decided to leave the European Union. The reasons behind the vote are Euroscepticism among British politics and a populist leave-campaign, connected to increasing nationalism among the British public (Corbett, 2016). The growth of nationalism, which was partially caused also by the culminating refugee crisis in Europe, was not only visible before the referendum and resulting in the leave votes, but also led to increased hate crimes in the United Kingdom. When compared to previous year, the number of hate crimes shows a 49% rise in July 2016 (Travis, 2016) and a 58% in September 2016 (Forster, 2016).

### **2.3.2. Challenges towards the basic human rights principles and their legitimacy**

Another argument on why the institution of human rights is at a crossroad is that the ultimate validity and the indisputability of it became questionable. Besides the fact that the respect of human rights is not a necessary precondition for gaining global power anymore, human rights find themselves in a crisis in the Western world as well. From the global financial crisis in 2008 until today, we witness a rapid increase in social movements whose primal aim is to protect only some parts of the population, and what is worse, shift of these movements from the margins of the political scene to its mainstream. Just a few examples of such movements, movements-becoming-political-parties, or politicians whose strategies lay in disrupting the old-fashioned politics are: Golden Dawn in Greece, Marie Le Pen's Front National in France, presidential candidate in Austria Norbert Hofer, Self-defence party in Poland, Viktor Orban's Fidesz in Hungary, People's Party Our Slovakia of Marian Kotleba, leading person of the Brexit referendum Nigel Farage, Alternative for Germany, or the 45<sup>th</sup> American president Donald J. Trump (Rohac et al., 2017). These people and parties have one thing in common – they all are populists. Probably the most thorough explanation of the spring of populism in Europe and the United States is that it serves as an opposition towards the neo-liberal politics of the West (Oliker, 2017). On one hand there are

people living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, who expected their lives to be as developed as their technological devices, the access to information on the Internet, or availability of products from all around the world. On the other hand, there are old politicians, financial crises, lack of jobs, terrorist attacks, and people fleeing from all over the world to its more secure parts. When these two clash, there are unmet expectations of ordinary people, and those to blame are those who hold the power. One threat resulting from the rise of populism is in its interconnection. The populists all around Europe share similar values and opinions which are also popular by the politics of Vladimir Putin in Russia. And as it was described in the previous part of this thesis, such connection could be dangerous for democratic institutions such as civil society, free press, or free speech (Rohac et al., 2017).

### **2.3.2.1. Creating cleavages in societies**

The more threatening part of the populist agenda is their actual strategy to address the people. Currently, most of these parties or politicians, build their policies on the *us versus them* agenda. The *us* stands for political new comers, major population, or traditional culture. The *them* in their understanding are old politicians who did not sustain the economic and social growth of their countries, minorities, and new liberal culture standing on individualism. When such cleavage is created, the state of indisputability of human rights is questioned.

The *us versus them* agenda became a symbol of the politics of Donald J. Trump, the 45<sup>th</sup> president of the United States. Not only during his electoral campaign but also after his inauguration, he continues to build his performance on the politics of division rather than unity (Speed, Mannion, 2017). Probably yet the most controversial and most characteristic to this politics is the Executive Order 13769 *Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States* which was valid from January 27, 2017 until March 16, 2017 and which bans the citizens from Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen to enter the United States (Federalregister.gov), also known as the Muslim ban. Both this order and its replacement, Executive Order 13780, were almost immediately challenged by many US judges and governors. Besides the fact that this ban is in a contradiction with the main principles of the existence of the USA, it is

also a possible violation of the United States' Constitution since its main purpose is "to disfavour a particular religion" (Levine, Rosenberg, 2017), as argues Derrick Watson, the district judge of the United States District Court for the District of Hawaii, who issued a temporary restraining order to the Muslim ban. Thus, the main problem of the populist politics promoting the division of the society on its welcomed and unwelcomed members might result in abuse of the human rights.

### ***2.3.2.2. Stepping back from the human rights***

Likewise, the advocacy of traditional values is a major threat to respect of human rights. Many kinds of abuse of the human rights are hidden behind the crash of the Western Christian tradition and the arrival of new cultures, religions, and also liberalism. Such abuse concerns mostly LGBTQ rights, integration of immigrants, or women's rights. In these cases, it rather seems as if the European societies would move backwards to restricted rights for certain groups of people.

The first illustration of the effort to restrict rights of certain groups is the same-sex marriages referendum which was held in 2015 in Slovakia. The main initiator of the referendum was the Alliance for Family who proclaimed that this referendum's objective is to protect the traditional family. The original four questions proposed for the referendum concerned the definition of marriage as a union exclusively between one man and one woman, adoptions of children only for heterosexual couples, on the education of sexual behaviour and euthanasia, and on the legal protection of a marriage (DennikN.sk). After the compliance with the Slovak constitution and these questions were called into a question by the Slovak president Andrej Kiska, the Constitutional Court decided that only the first three can be the subject of the referendum. However, two judges of the Constitutional Court Lajos Mészáros and Eduard Barány did not agree with the decision and argued that these questions challenge the basic human rights which should be defended primary by the Constitutional Court. After the decision of the court, Barány commented that: "Thus, my duty is to protect the human rights and fundamental freedoms not selectively but regardless of their nature, therefore if it comes to the right to life, the personal or religious freedom, the freedom of speech, the protection of property, or the human dignity" (Pravda.sk). In spite of the wide campaign of the Alliance for Family, the support from the Catholic Church, and apparent anti-

LGBTQ views of the mainstream Slovak society, the referendum did not succeed with the turnout of 21%. The validity of a referendum in Slovakia is conditional to a turnout of minimal 50% of eligible voters. Very similar referendums were held in Croatia in 2013 and in Slovenia in 2012 and in 2015. The Croatian Constitution was changed according to the referendum in terms of the definition of “marriage as a union between a man and a woman” (BBC.com, 2013). In both Slovak and Croatian referendums, their main purpose was to support the conservative approach towards the rights of gay marriages of the government. On the contrary, both of the referendums in Slovenia were held to stop the already passed new laws on the legalisation of the same sex marriage (BBC.com, 2015).

Another of the questionable attitudes of the European public towards freedoms of people are the restrictions to the reproduction laws. One of the most strict abortion laws are those in Poland, where a woman can go to an abortion only under three circumstances: when the life or the health of the woman are endangered by the pregnancy, when the foetus is deformed seriously, or when the pregnancy resulted from a criminal act. In all of the cases, there is a need for consent of a doctor in the first two cases, or a prosecutor in the case of a rape or incest (Graff, 2003). Thus, in Poland, a woman cannot decide on her own reproduction or body, and needs consent of another person/institution. According to the Polish academic Dorota Szalewa (2016), the main role in the country’s strict policies towards abortions plays the Christian Church. Although the Church does not have the direct influence on politics made in this issue, its main power lays in “effecting a shift in the discourse and in official legal language. For example, the word ‘foetus’ was replaced by the term ‘conceived child’ (in the law) or by ‘unborn child’ (in public discourse)” (ibid. p. 758). Nevertheless, a change of the discourse can be seen in the Polish society. In September 2016, the conservative Polish government considered to pass the bill to make abortions illegal in almost all cases besides “the ‘unintended’ death of a foetus while saving a woman’s life” (Grzymala-Busse, 2016). Almost immediately after that, thousands of women in Poland decided to repeat the strike for women’s rights from 1975 in Iceland and went to the streets, wearing all black on the so called ‘Black protest’ (BBC.com, 2016). The protest was successful and the bill was voted down.



Besides the efforts to restrict rights of certain groups of people, the clash of traditional and liberal approaches which concerns almost all European Union member states is the question of multiculturalism. Since the whole idea of the European Union is built on connectedness of many ethnicities, languages, and also cultures as such, the problem of multiculturalism in Europe can be defined as the problem of religious acceptance (Lægaard, 2017). However, the increasing population of Muslims raised question not only among the conservative understanding of the 'old continent' and its Christian roots, but also among the liberal secular approach of treating all citizens equally irrespective of their religion (O'Brien, 2012). Although this premise is simple in theory, the increasing suspicion of Muslim inhabitants in Europe puts the equal treatment of European inhabitants in question. The problem lays in the need of more-than-equal treatment of those people who are potentially exposed to persecution based only on their religion (Kymlicka, 2015). Such persecution does not only reflect in monitoring Muslims because of their possible connection to terrorism, but also in restrictions of dress code, or construction of places of worship. Similarly as in the cases of LGBTQ and women's rights abuse, there is an increasing tendency to adjust and shape the law according to the opinions of public. When considering the roots and the principles on which the human rights were built, such actions do not only lead to creating cleavages within societies, but also doubt the natural character of the human rights.

## 2.4. Summary

This chapter described the evolution of the international acceptance of the legal aspect of respecting human rights as inalienable for all human beings which was adopted in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 as answer to the horrors of the Second World War. Further in this chapter, the evolution of human rights social movements is described. Beginning in the American War of Independence, the human rights social movements represent advocates for people who are not treated equally and whose rights are abused. Today, the movements' attention in the Western countries is mostly on groups' rights, or on the rights of people living in the third world countries. The last section of this chapter consisted of the analysis of potential reasons which affected the changes in the perceptions of the human rights. These are overall divided into two levels: as changes in the distribution of global powers, and doubts on the legitimacy of indisputability of the human rights. The moral superiority and the position as protectors of democracy of the Western countries, is not sufficient for the role of a world leader anymore, and countries whose respect of human rights is behind their economic and political prosperity become more influential. The European Union as the main promoter of the ideas of integration, international cooperation, and equality, finds itself in a difficult position. Not only it has to maintain and justify its power in the international sphere, but it also has to proclaim its main pillars and fundamental principles among its own members. The spread of the *us versus them* discourse in the public space represents a danger in the evolution of equal treatment of all people. The positive European attitude is today confronted with the willingness to stop the progression and return to the more conservative treatment of minorities.

### **3. Research among the human rights activists**

The research procedure will be introduced in this chapter. The first section consists of characterisation of the main objectives of the study, together with the research question. Secondly, the theoretical framework of the study will be divided into eight dimensions on which the analysis will be conducted. In the next, methodological section, the main characteristics of a qualitative research and face-to-face interviews will be presented. The selection process of the researched population is described in the third section of this chapter. The last section provides information on the initial processing of gathered data.

#### **3.1. The research question**

On the contrary to the past critical milestones in the creation of the institution of the human rights, the level of oppression of the human rights in the Western world is today significantly lower and for many people almost invisible. Thus, it might seem that the human rights do not need any special agenda and that this is the final state of the art in which the human rights should be kept. Yet, there are still many kinds of at least latent abuse of certain rights which are denied for certain groups of people, as it was illustrated in the section above. Even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the “human rights are not a closed book, but rather part of an ongoing conversation” (Clapham, 2007, p. 160).

Besides those who are primary concerned by these rights – the citizens, and those who enact these rights on their legal level – the politicians, there is another member of the conversation. These are the social movements and non-profit organisations who advocate, mediate, and help to protect the human rights. This is the reason why I have decided to interview the representatives of eleven human rights movements from the Czech Republic.

As it was proposed in the previous part of this thesis, the Western world and the advocacy of the human rights in this world experience turbulent times. The objective of this part of the study is to analyse if these turbulences are recognised on the side of the human rights organisations as well and if so, to which extent. The main research

question for the qualitative research I conducted is hence: *How do the human rights activists perceive the changing attitudes towards the human rights?*

### **3.2. Dimensions**

In my thesis, this change is manifested on two levels: declining influence of the Western values, and questioning the legitimacy of the human rights and their natural character. According to these two levels, we can identify their nine dimensions. The dimensions will serve as guiding lines which define the researched field in the analytical part of this thesis. These dimensions are as followed:

1. declining influence of the West
  - a. increasing influence of countries which do not respect human rights
  - b. mistrust in European (and Western) values
  - c. increasing nationalism
2. questioning the legitimacy of the human rights and their natural character
  - a. spread of the *us versus them* ideology
  - b. increasing hatred and discrimination of certain groups of people
  - c. conflict with traditional values
  - d. questionable legality of some actions
  - e. different views on (some) rights across countries

### **3.3. Research methodology**

Before the actual analysis of the gathered data, in this section, I will introduce the way in which the data were collected. Because of the rather new and unexplored character of this study, I decided to use qualitative method to find out the views of representatives of the non-profit sector. The methodology used in this research is semi structured face-to-face interview.

Unlike quantitative research which enables the researcher to see frequencies and rate of occurrence in the collected data, qualitative research offers an in-depth view into the problematic and its processes. Qualitative methods use the inductive style, enabling the

researcher to create new hypothesis, and proceed from particular cases to general assumptions (Ryan et al., 2009).

In the case of face-to-face qualitative interviews, Creswell (2014) identifies three main advantages of this type of research: “(is) useful when participants cannot be directly observed, participants can provide historical information, and (the type) allows researcher control over the line of questioning”. The characteristics of a semi structured interview further develop these advantages, mainly in the possibility to interact in a conversation with the interviewee in order to understand and to follow on what they say. The semi structured interview is usually built on a set of topics or questions which should be covered during the interview (i.e. an interview guide), yet these can be asked in different order, or supplemented with additional questions (Edwards, Holland, 2013).

In my research, the interview guide consisted of sixteen questions which were built from the nine dimensions described above. The complete interview guide is listed in the Appendix 1 of this thesis. All of the interviews were approximately one hour long. The interview was recorded and then transcribed for the purposes of further analysis and the respondents were familiar with this fact.

### **3.4. Research sample**

The initial sample frame was selected from the website [www.neziskovky.cz](http://www.neziskovky.cz) which gives a list of the non-profit organisations in the Czech Republic. The sample frame consisted of 96 organisations filtered on the website as dealing with one or more of these issues: international humanitarian help, gender, minorities, equal opportunities, human rights, and international relations. To select only organisations which can be considered as confronting with the public, the selection criterion was the number of followers on Facebook – the number of people who like and follow the Facebook page of the organisation. I have chosen this criterion not only because more likes indicate higher legitimacy of the organisation among public but also because it is then more probable that the organisation is used to communicate with public via this platform and thus they are able to recognise attitudes in the public sphere. Therefore, such ability is crucial to a research which seeks to find out how do human-rights organisations react to new challenges occurring in the society. From the initial number of the selected sample

frame, 20 organisations were removed because they did not have a Facebook profile. Afterwards, I have selected 13 categories of what is the main agenda of these organisations. The categories selected are as followed<sup>4</sup>: ageism, children, feminism, humanitarian help, integration, LGBTQ, awareness and dialogue on human rights, violence, people with disabilities, working conditions, Romani people, and health. The benchmark for choosing the organisation for contacting them for further collaboration on the research was 700 likes<sup>5</sup>. The benchmark quota left 38 organisations which best suited for the next steps in the research. The list of these organisations can be found in the Appendix 2 of this thesis.

The second phase consisted of contacting the organisations. Firstly, an email to all 38 organisations was sent, asking them to participate in the research together with a brief personal introduction and the purposes of the research. Afterwards, a reminding email was sent to those who did not respond in the first call. When comparing the response rate of the first and the second emails, the reminder was more successful, although most of the responses were of a declining character. The reasons to decline were mostly lack of time, lack of capacities, not being in the Czech Republic at the time, or not considering their organisation as dealing with the issue of human rights. Afterwards, I also received information that some organisations do not participate in students' researches.

The final research sample consisted of eleven organisations. The interviews were conducted in April 2017 either in the organisations' offices, or in two cases in a cafeteria. The interviewees' position in given organisations were founders, directors, deputy directors, and employees.

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<sup>4</sup> The agenda of organisations is not of an exclusive kind, since most of the organisations are dealing with more from the selected agendas at the same time. The differentiation is based on their most visible activities.

<sup>5</sup> Up to 15 February 2017

Table 1: Interviewed organisations

<b>Organisation</b>	<b>English translation</b>	<b>Facebook followers</b>	<b>Agenda</b>
Centrum Dialog	Centre Dialogue	1785	Awareness and dialogue on human rights
Centrum Narovinu	Centre Straightforwardly	2900	Humanitarian help
Centrum pro integraci cizinců	Centre for Integration of Foreigners	3900	Integration
Člověk v tísni, o.p.s.	People in Need	9500	Awareness and dialogue on human rights
FAIRTRADE Česká republika		2340	Working conditions
Gender Studies, o.p.s.		2400	Feminism
Hnutí za aktivní mateřství	Movement for Active Motherhood	2600	Feminism
In IUSTITIA, o. p. s.		990	Violence
Lékaři bez hranic - Médecins Sans Frontières in Czech Republic, o.p.s.	Doctors without Borders	106000	Humanitarian help
Národní rada osob se zdravotním postižením ČR	National Council for People with Disabilities, Czech Republic	1757	People with disabilities
Vteřina poté, z.s.	One Second After	1350	Children

### **3.5. Analysis strategy**

As it was already mentioned, the interviews were recorded for purposes of further analysis. When all of the interviews were conducted, the recordings were transcribed to enable deeper analysis and coding. Coding, as Creswell (2014) describes, is the process when the data are being organised and clustered according into segments with similar meanings. He also suggests that the process of creation of the codes can be done in three different ways: “the researcher should (a) develop codes only on the basis of the emerging information collected from participants, (b) use predetermined codes and then fit the data to them, or (c) use some combination of emerging and predetermined codes” (ibid. p. 248). For the purposes of my research and because of the semi structured character of the interviews, I have done the coding in the third, combined, way because the interviews were conducted together with a set of predetermined questions, or rather topics, which should be covered. These were represented by the previously described dimensions on which the changing attitudes towards the human rights can be perceived by the representatives from non-profit organisations. Although the questions and the answers to them were representing the dimensions indirectly, and sometimes the given answers were covering more than one dimension, clustering the data according to the dimensions appeared as the most logical and most suitable for this research.



## Scheme 1: Coded dimensions

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• increasing influence of countries which do not respect human rights</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ stability at the expenses of support and progress</li> <li>➤ sympathy of the Czech representatives for Russia and China</li> <li>➤ lack of solidarity with the European Union</li> <li>➤ tension tests on functioning of the European Union</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• mistrust in European (and Western) values</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ lack of critical thinking</li> <li>➤ dual role of the European Union</li> <li>➤ decreasing popularity of main EU values</li> <li>➤ conformism</li> <li>➤ increased donations</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• increasing nationalism</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ nationalism is not direct thread in the CR, its ideas are obsolete</li> <li>➤ Neo-Nazism goes mainstream, their ideas are legitimised</li> <li>➤ lack of disapproval from elites</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• spread of <i>the us versus them</i> ideology</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ breaking point in the migration crisis</li> <li>➤ society is polarised - the negative is more negative, positive is more positive, there is no between</li> <li>➤ politicians use populism to advantage from the polarisation</li> <li>➤ difference between what is said and what is done</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• increasing hatred and discrimination towards certain groups of people</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ the role of interviewed organisations arises from the need to protect certain groups of people</li> <li>➤ diversion from the topic of the human rights</li> <li>➤ legitimisation of hatred</li> <li>➤ the most problematic is the online space</li> <li>➤ theoretical discrimination</li> <li>➤ focus shifted on other minorities</li> <li>➤ world becomes more complicated, there is a need for shortcuts - stereotypes</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• conflict with traditional values</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ the organisations are not in a conflict with the values, yet they are confronted with it</li> <li>➤ difference between values and habits</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• questionable legality of some actions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ illegal actions on the Internet</li> <li>➤ the most conflicting ideas come from the politicians, state institutions, not from the public</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• different views on (some) rights across countries</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ difference between Western and Eastern Europe</li> <li>➤ different legal settings</li> <li>➤ mainstream society does not realise/perceive the issue of the human rights</li> <li>➤ Havel tradition is gone</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• other</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ the role of media</li> <li>➤ social bubble</li> <li>➤ the human rights are an active issue</li> </ul>

## **4. Analysis**

As it was described in the chapter of the research design, the main research question can be analysed on two levels, as set of eight dimensions. In the first section of this chapter, I will examine each dimension on the level of perceptions of the interviewees. To introduce their view deeper, this section is enriched by their authentic statements. To maintain the objectivity of the research both their names and the names of their organisations will remain anonymous. After the analysis on the level of the dimensions, the key findings will be summarised and discussed. The last two sections will consist of suggestions on further research, and suggestions for non-profit organisations.

### **4.1. Declining influence of the West**

#### **4.1.1. Increasing influence of countries which do not respect human rights**

In this case, the most conflicting is the sympathy of president Miloš Zeman to the countries whose respect for the human rights is questionable, namely to China and Russia. Some of the organisations perceive the increasing influence of Russia in the Czech Republic. Mostly, this influence is hidden behind the Russian propaganda and their media coverage. Yet, none of the respondents have felt any direct conflict with Russia or any country with controversial respect for the human rights. What can be problematic is the obeying of any kind of influences, not only those coming from the East. The American way of enforcement of their power in a militarised way was mentioned as well.

What is more visible for the organisations in terms of the Western influence in the world is that the European Union loses the position of a strong leader. In the times of different crises and challenges towards the European Union, the politics of compromises was chosen, not only inwards but also outwards. Inside the European Union we can find many different approaches to its regulations. The member states rather please their own interests than the interests of the European Union, and these are not always built on solidarity, which is one of the core principles of the existence of the

European Union. Many interviewees in this case described Brexit, or the attitudes of Hungary towards the immigration crisis as examples of non-compliance of principles which can have negative impact not only on the European Union but also on the groups the organisations advocate for. An example of this can be effects Brexit can have in the matter of preferring the country's interests before international cooperation:

*“Last week I read a text from our colleagues in Britain on Brexit. ... And there will probably be some quotas on how many of the goods have to originate from Britain. And those people who are existentially dependent on (exporting their goods) can now have problems. The European Union guarantees that there is some kind of established process. There are many agreements and it is difficult to re-make this system. And I can imagine that when every country starts to advocate for themselves the local can get stronger. But in some kind of a protectionist sense - we will favour the local and disfavour everything imported. It can have many positive aspects but it can be even fatal for small farmers.”*

The other problem is that the politics of compromises is now built on stability rather than progress. In the times of many different actors coming into the field of political leadership and influences, the European Union is not able to keep its progressive politics and tries to maintain its power in fear of cracking down or losing another member or ally. The respondents often claimed that the positive shift from recent years has now become slower and less important.

On the other hand, the crisis of the European Union does not have to be perceived only as a surprising and negative aspect:

*“On the anniversary of the European Economic Community there was an interesting opinion published, on why there is so many criticism around the European Union. And it is because it, in fact, works perfectly. Only thanks to the existence of the European Union*

*have so many things changed, and that makes us see what else needs an improvement.”*

It can be seen as a natural consequence of the changes and policies which are working only because of the European Union.

#### **4.1.2. Mistrust in European (and Western) values**

When the respondents were asked about the role of the European Union in their organisations, it was mostly projected on two levels. These can be labelled as the pragmatic role, and the role of values. Most often, the pragmatic role of the European Union is the financial support which some of the organisations use to some extent. As non-profit organisations, their financing comes either from the state, individual donors, European grants, or as a combination of these. The most commonly used financial source is the European Structural Fund and its calls. However, for some of the organisations, these calls sometimes work as less helpful and rather restrictive. The problem is that to fit into different calls from either the European Structural Fund, or any other grant opportunities they have to cut their projects. Some organisations have already had this problem:

*“We, as a non-profit organisation, are mainly financed by the public resources. That means that we apply for different grants. However, these calls are very specific, it is narrowly defined what they support. And that, in fact, makes us to fit into these calls, to even come to this money and exist. So we do not really have the option to do what we would like to do, what we think is important, and what is important for us. We have to fit into the supported activities. ... I can give you one real-life example. We have a library here. It is the biggest one on our topic in the Central and Eastern Europe. And to find money for having a librarian who can be available here three days a week, that is quite an impossible task. Because that just does not get into the calls.”*

The other dimension of the pragmatic role is that the European Union and their implementations often substitute the top-down pressure on certain legal issues. Thus, the European Union works as a patron and a maintainer of similar legal conditions among the European Union member states. Besides the facilitation of policy-making processes, advantages of the European Union can be found in the levels of free movement across borders, or European platforms which serve as umbrella organisations for same-agenda organisations across the member states. . The organisations operating on international level mostly enjoy the possibility of free movement across Europe which makes many procedures easier:

*“The European Union smoothens our job. From practical things as unproblematic travelling, or, this does not apply for the Czech Republic but for most of our offices it does, the common currency. These practical aspects make our job much easier in terms of logistics. We have two central storages in Europe, and you do not have to think in which country it is, it is just in Europe.”*

On the other hand, there is the role of values which is brought by the existence of the European Union. A summarised view on this could be that the European Union does not only work as a protector and representation of the common European values of humanity and respect, but also as a watchman. This is connected to its legal implementations. When asked about the potential downfall of the European Union, respondents claimed that not only their organisations would be affected financially, but it would also represent downfall of the moral superiority of Europe. Although the European Union has its own problems, its role is irreplaceable:

*“Definitely (the collapse of the European Union) would weaken us - I mean the Czech society. In spite of all the problems the European Union has, in terms of crisis of the values, refugees, certain distrust among the members, I still think it is worth it. Just remember the First and the Second World Wars, and their horrors. It is more about finding new solutions, rather than talking about extreme ones.”*

However, the respondents perceive the decline of the popularity of these values. Mostly among people who do not agree with their organisation's ideas and ideologies. That can be especially visible in the migration crisis and the reactions from different groups of the public. Such reactions may call for the European values and yet lack the dimension of integration, and acceptance, two of the main pillars of the European Union.

The rejection of certain aspects of the common values on which the European Union was built is thus obvious. Some of the respondents perceive this as conformism. According to them, those people, who do not want to keep on all European values anymore, do not understand that the relationship between the European Union and its member states cannot be one-sided and that it takes active participation on both sides. Such relationship is similar to one between a citizen and democracy. And as one respondent claimed, democracy is similar to perceptions on our own health:

*“Democracy is not a final state of art. We need to constantly work on democracy. It reminds me of health. If you are healthy, you take it as granted, that it is given, and you have a tendency to neglect it. And then you are surprised when it is gone.”*

The problematic relationship between Czechs and their perceptions of what it requires to ‘take care of democracy’ can be seen as an unsolved legacy of communism. The lack of citizenship and citizen participation in the Czech Republic is not a new problem. Martin Potůček (1997) describes results of the survey conducted in 1995 in the Czech Republic on the civic participation as very unfavourable. He explains that more than a half of the respondents (59,5%) is not interested in being a part of the public affairs and to affect them. Six years after the fall of the communist regime, the willingness and the need to participate did not become essential parts of the new democratic society. Potůček describes this phenomenon as a ‘deficient citizenship’ which has four main reasons. The first is the stereotypisation of behaviour when after forty years of restricted freedom of speech the need of affecting public affairs has vanished from the society. The next factor were the economic changes which became more important for the society. The third reason is connected to this, and Potůček explains that the economic interests were made at the expenses of forming the civil society. That was the task of politicians who failed completely. The last factor is the insufficient reaction of traditional channels of social control to the needs of society. In the opinion of the

interviewees, this phenomenon is reflected mainly in the fundraising trends in the Czech Republic and the perceptions of non-profit organisations. They think that the perceptions are affected by the current migration crisis and also by the statements of president Zeman. In an interview for Blesk.cz, he stated: “I consider non-profit organisations as leeches on the state budget and I insist on this opinion. I would change their financing in a way that for every crown from state they would have to make their own crown. And if they would not be able to do that, they would disappear. In case of some of these non-profit leeches it would be only good” (Blesk.cz, 2016). Such statements are then naturally taken over from his supporters and voters. In terms of financial help by the Czechs to non-profit organisations, a research conducted by agency STEM/ MARK (2015) finds that Czech donating is of a more spasmodic and emotional character. This is supported by the fact that only 7% of Czechs donate to charities by means of a regular monthly standing order from their bank account. Although these numbers do not show very positive tendency, most of the interviewed organisations perceive an increased number of donations. For some of them it was even a fully new experience:

*“People can also donate to us. We have never done it before, there never was such atmosphere that people would like to donate to foreigners. ... But now the time is different. We take donations. ... People contacted us when there was the so called migration crisis and told us they would like to donate. And there was no way for us how to accept it. It was visible that for some people the things in media were so unacceptable they wanted to balance it with some kind of their personal engagement.”*

Besides the public dimension of the ‘communist legacy’, the respondents see problems in the sphere of political decision-makings as well. As Potůček 's analysis above explains, the most attention after 1989 was given to the economics, and financial prosperity of the state. Thus, there was not much space not only to build a civil society but also to concentrate on other parts of the state - healthcare, or education. When talking of education, most of the interviewees think that people who are in their direct opposition and who criticise their help to minorities, protection of the human rights, or international engagement lack critical thinking and often only take over opinions from

their surroundings. This can be caused by the underdeveloped educational system. This part of the state institutions, such as healthcare or education, did not go through any major changes since the fall of the Communist regime. The same obsolete approaches, which might be overcome in other, more progressive states, are still applied in many spheres such as maternity care, residential care for children, or gender politics.

### **4.1.3. Increasing nationalism**

Most of the interviewees, primarily those whose organisations deal with ethnic and religious minorities, do feel the increase of nationalism, right-wing extremism, or even Neo-Nazism in the Czech Republic. However, they do not perceive these ideologies as a direct threat to their clients or target groups, and their organisations. They think that even though these voices are louder and the opinions are more visible, the mainstream society does not agree with them. Nevertheless, such opinions are becoming normal and accepted as a valid political view. Normalisation and legitimisation of extremist opinions is seen as a bigger problem than the actual statistical numbers of supporters. Respondents see the legitimisation of these opinions not only as a problem in the public sphere. The interviewees disagree with and do not understand the lack of direct condemnation and disapproval of extremist nationalism from the political leaders. The disapproval of these ideas should come from political elites in the first place:

*“If there is not any strong condemnatory ‘No.’ from political leaders, unless they do not decry it, nobody will.”*

They find it incomprehensible that these views have support from politicians. In this case, the support does not have to mean a direct spread of the idea, and the support does not always have to mean direct spread of the idea. As long as the extreme nationalist ideas are considered as valid options and opinions, they will gain support among the public.



## 4.2. Questioning the legitimacy of the human rights and their natural character

### 4.2.1. Spread of the *us versus them* ideology

The interviewees agree on the fact that the Czech society is becoming more polarised. And no matter the agenda of the interviewed organisation, they defined the migration crisis as the breaking point of this polarisation. It does not concern only organisations dealing with the issue of foreigners. All respondents perceive that this phenomenon has somehow changed and influenced their functioning, either in different attitudes towards their work, or in different views on their agenda and their clients. According to the respondents, this caused practical disappearance of a neutral stream in opinions towards the human rights. Additionally, the polarisation is of a dynamic character - the negative attitudes towards the universal aspect of the human rights become more negative - and vice versa, the positive ones become only more positive. For those organisations which try to advocate and educate on most escalated topics, it became much harder to communicate with the public, even though the topics are becoming more popular part of the mainstream discourse:

*“Before, nobody really cared about (the migrants). Now there are two camps, divided with a clear cut. And it is really hard to find the bridge between them, the amount of undecided people is too small. Everybody has an opinion, and is unable to change it.”*

In terms of the immigration crisis, the society does not provide space for a neutral, pragmatic view on the issue, considering both negative and positive aspects of the crisis. This situation is surprising for many respondents. When Czech society dealt with the immigration wave caused by the Balkan crisis and many Balkan refugees came to the Czech Republic, there was no such escalation of the opinions of the public. The respondents claim that this might be caused by two factors - uneven and sensational coverage from the media, and political populism. Both of these factors have one thing in common - they try to use the migration crisis for their profits. Politicians do not promote any reasonable proposals to stabilise the situation and to set the facts straight. They rather use the increasing cleavage to keep their voters, or even find new ones.

However, this does not mean that the Czech politics is stagnating and lacks any movement forward. When taking a deeper look into this issue, respondents claimed they still can find ways on how to cooperate with decision-makers. That means that the populist approach from the Czech politicians lays in the cleavage between presentation of their ideas to the public and the actual decisions on the levels of administration. Thus, promoting the populist agenda - offering people simple statements they want to hear, and then administer given issues in another way, does not widen the gap within the public. It widens the gap between the public and the administration of the state. Such actions are undesirable and also dangerous for the state of democracy and its role as protector of the human rights. The differences can be often found between different institutions in silent execution of innovative decisions, and expressed statements to shape the image among the public:

*“Fundamental divergences are between our views and the views of the president Zeman, who does not support the non-governmental organisations. But on the other hand, the president is one institution, and the second institution is the government - we can find support there. ... One thing is the rhetoric - saying ‘No, we cannot’, but then you see that we have really developed the (integration) facilities system.”*

#### 4.2.2. Increasing hatred and discrimination towards certain groups of people

The link between interviewed organisations, or generally human-rights organisations as such, and discrimination is evident. If there were no such organisations it would mean that the society is equal and that all of its parts have same rights, that there is nobody to advocate for. Thus, the role of these organisations arises from the uneven positions of certain groups in the society. None of the interviewed organisations started to operate in last two years, so their agenda does not primary deal with the immigration crisis. Yet, they feel the changes on views of minorities caused by the polarisations of the society mentioned above. The changes and challenges ensuing from them do not always have to be primary - not all of the organisations deal with the most discriminated minorities. However, they still feel that the society is less open towards minorities and the issue of the human rights. That can cause all kinds of problems, from already mentioned negative attitudes towards non-profit organisations to very practical ones which can be defined as diversion from their topic, either in the eyes of the public or of politicians. As in the case of politics of the European Union which now aims on the stabilisation rather than innovation, same problems can be found in the third sector in the Czech Republic.

Another cause of the increased intolerance in society can be that nowadays the world is much faster than it used to be. The interviewees claim that we live in a constant change and for some people this can be hard to comprehend. Then they look for some tools to make the adaptation easier and more convenient for themselves. These tools can be mostly found in different stereotypes. Respondents feel that this process negatively affects their work:

*“I think some kind of abbreviating generalisation happens there. And therefore, the situation in the society gets worse. And we do not perceive this only on our actual project but also on the reactions. These are much more violent. They always have been negative, but have never been this escalated and violent.”*

The hatred is mostly seen on social networks and in online discussions. As states the previous quotation, negative reactions are common and natural for any kind of

engagement. The problematic part comes, when these expressions become too aggressive and vulgar, and too frequent. Such expressions are more common in recent years. When the respondents were asked, how do they react to such comments and posts on their social media accounts, mostly they do not keep the expressive ones and either erase them or block the user. They only discuss with those people whose posts are not vulgar, and have some kind of ‘discursive potential’. Such potential is visible from the reactions of the user - the exchange of views should lead somewhere, and the users are willing to discuss, not only repeat their opinion.

However, the respondents do not find the increasing negative and expressive reactions to their work as a primary indicator of increased intolerance in the society. They think that this situation is in many cases only theoretical. Most of the interviewees, who perceived this, believe that when it would come to face-to-face confrontation, most people would not react in a discriminative way. The actual experience is just the opposite, and individual non-Czech citizens mostly do not feel unwelcome in their Czech community and the real life situations do not affect them negatively:

*“Our (foreign) clients tell me that they feel good in Czechia. That friendly people live here. So some kind of attitude, tone what is written, what is on Facebook - that is something else. And a different situation is when a person stands in front of you, as a real human being. Then these xenophobic attitudes do not come out that easily. Our director says something similar as well - when you ask in a questionnaire if there is a problem with foreigners, everybody claims that yes, there is. And then you ask if they have any foreigners in their neighbourhood, how they are, in schools, in grocery stores, everybody says they are nice. So the aversion is hard to manifest face-to-face.”*

Here we see another cleavage - the potential, statistical perceptions of minorities and the increasing hatred in the virtual space on one hand, and on the other hand, there are the real-life interactions and reactions which are not that escalated.

Yet, the ‘discriminative potential’ has always been a part of the Czech society, mostly concerning the Roma minority. These organisations who come into contact with this minority claimed that they are not the most discriminated minority in the Czech Republic anymore, as it used to be before the immigration crisis. The increased discriminations is also perceived from the Romani people themselves:

*“When the immigration crisis started, our Roma clients asked us what is happening that there are suddenly no attacks on them. And we said them that now they will be fine, now it has shifted somewhere else. It always has been here, now it has only escalated. The institutional racism was here, is here, and probably will always be here. Because it is like that in the society. Now it has only peaked.”*

The respondents say that the wave of hatred is now concentrating on Muslims, and immigrants. The ‘old’ minorities such as Roma people, Ukrainians, or Vietnamese communities are now seen as less disturbing.

### **4.2.3. Conflict with traditional values**

The role of the traditional values in terms of the human rights and their perceptions of the Czech Republic could be described on two levels.

The first level is that the actual assumption of challenging protection of the human rights with arguments of traditional values is not correct. When the respondents were asked if they are in conflict with some traditional, religious, or any other kind of values, most of them claimed that, on the contrary, they want to protect the values of the Western world - those declared in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The respondents claim, that their goal and mission is to preserve and cherish these values:

*“From our point of view, it is not like that - that we do something in conflict (with traditional values). Exactly the opposite is true, our*

*argument is that these are the values on which the Czech and European society is built - the respect to the freedom of a human.”*

However, they sometimes come into a conflict with persons who use the traditional values as a tool for oppression. Most often, this tool is used by the national extremists. As it was already mentioned, they do not perceive them as a direct threat since the nationalist views are, in the eyes of the respondents, against the natural evolution and progress of the world. Such oppression is thus seen as something that has no rational place in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The second dimension could be described as the conflict not between traditional and new values but between the values as such, and outdated approaches towards solutions which can be understood as traditions. As it was mentioned above, the post-communist societies still have not overcome some of the aspects of their communist legacy. The inability to know apart the values and established habits can be the source of criticism:

*“I am a very conservative person, and I think that our values are as those traditional, conservative. For example: when we say that most of the care should occur in families - that comes from conservative values. But it is true that part of the society, the more conservative and mainly Christian part, thinks that the care should be in institutes. That is surprising for me sometimes, and I do not understand it. But I think it is more problem of a lack of knowledge. Because that is how it had been here for 40 years.”*

The conflicts occur between the suggestions of the interviewed organisations on how some issues should be handled, and how they are actually solved either on the levels of political decision-making or on the level of the real everyday approaches of the public. Many respondents find it hard to comply with the old habits, whether in the form of stereotypes, old-fashioned laws, or lack of knowledge.

#### 4.2.4. Questionable legality of some actions

This dimension covers the set of problems of the legal coverage of issues and their actual legality and respect to human rights. As it was described in the previous section, the interviewed organisations often deal with old-fashioned solutions in their field of work. However, the opinions and lack of knowledge are not the biggest problem for them. More critical are situations when the political decision-makers or the representatives of the law act contrary to the organisations' agenda. During the interview, the respondents were asked to remember a situation when the public or the politicians stated something which was completely against the organisation's values and beliefs. The expectation was that such conflict situation would be mostly connected with a public opinion. However, their most controversial experiences were with the political decisions and attitudes. What is thus more dangerous than the public opinion is the change of law in favour of popular opinions, lack of information, or allowing promotion of political powers to be reflected in the actual policies. Such actions are then always at the expenses of minorities, or the people for whom advocate the interviewed organisations.

The debatable legality does not concern the policy-making processes alone. It can also be visible in the behaviours of individual actors. Most typically, the respondents come into interaction with such behaviours in the online space. As it was already mentioned, some of the users' posts might be of a more inappropriate character. The problematic situation arises when such comments are not (only) vulgar, but they slip into an illegal, hateful speech. The anonymity of the online space opens the door for new forms of oppression:

*“And then there is a group of people who react very negatively, mostly on social networks. Because these persons, who have the urge to share their opinions there, have a feeling that they do not confront us directly, that they are anonymous and they are allowed to be this aggressive.”*

Although the Czech legal system defines incitement to hatred as a crime, proving such actions on the Internet is rather an exception than a rule. As Pavel Zeman, the supreme

public prosecutor, claims in an interview for *Hospodářské Noviny*, the Czech justice is not yet ready for such cases, and it does not know when exactly these expressions fall into criminal action. “We enter a situation when we only make clear what is and what is not a criminal action. The courts will have to set their opinion on that.” (Blažek, 2015). Less than a year after this interview, Martin Konvička, leader of the Block against Islam, was accused for incitement to hatred towards Islam religion on the Internet (*idnes.cz*, 2016). He, as a public person, was more likely to be confronted with the law and his statements were relatively easy to prove. However, such situation is not typical on the daily basis and thus is less probable to be proven and convicted as a crime.

#### **4.2.5. Different views on some rights across countries**

The problematic aspect of the feeling that the Czech society is not as developed in terms of detachment from the outdated attitudes was already analysed above. According to the respondents, the differences among approaches towards the human rights in other countries could be in this respect divided between Western and Eastern European. The Eastern are represented by the post-communist countries - the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Poland and others. In these countries the models of respect of the human rights are not as developed. They are accepted and understood by the minority of the public, and thus are not of the same importance as the other aspects of a democratic state. Interestingly, the former ‘liberal champion’ of the West - the USA, was rather used as an example of negative attitudes both on public and political levels. The most common example of the Western, positive approach to the human rights was Scandinavia. According to the respondents, the Scandinavian approaches to the issue of the human rights are closest to the ideal state of the art. Even though the interviewees see and understand that these states deal with the same or similar problems, they seem to operate on completely different levels. Besides Scandinavia and other European countries, Canada was also mentioned as a positive example of a liberal and innovative country.



The Eastern and Western difference can be demonstrated on two examples. The first one is how countries differently deal with the same set of problems on the level of law, e.g. on the issue of the hate crimes which was also analysed in the theoretical part of this thesis:

*“But I can tell you that there is a great difference between the Czech Republic and Britain in terms of hate violence. In the Czech Republic, when you come and say “They attacked me because I am ...” and add any kind of minority the police will not take it that way. To make the law enforcements reflect the hatred into the proceeding is almost impossible. Most of the time, they will tell you it was not because of that. Or we have documented cases when our clients were called at, and now pardon me for these expressions, “White power”, “Gypsies into gas”, “We will burn you down” and the police does not care at all. If this happens in England, they work with it. It does not matter if it ends up completely different in the court, but they do not exclude the hate motive automatically.”*

The second example concerns the public attitudes towards the human rights across countries. Even though Greece was only mentioned once during the interviews, the public reaction in the migrant crisis is a good illustration on how can be the situation handled differently:.

*“I was positively surprised by some countries, Greece for example where I was last year. There was a big economic crisis and then a big migrant crisis, not theoretical as here, it was real there. There were immigrants everywhere. But the atmosphere in the society was completely different, it was human. The mainstream society, even though they did not have money, were affected by the crisis, nobody denied it - that the immigrants who come from war, who land there*

*on boats, that they need help. I did not meet any person on the street who would deny this.<sup>6</sup>*

Many respondents agreed on the fact that the attitudes of the Czech Republic have not always been of this cold character. They mentioned the Havelian<sup>7</sup> tradition as a set of principles towards the human rights, civil society, and political responsibility on the public good. Despite the fact that the human rights became a mainstream topic, the humanitarian approach is rather unpopular:

*“I am afraid that (the human rights) is not a priority issue. There used to be the tradition of Václav Havel, but this tradition is slowly disappearing. Besides that, you can hear opinions that it is important to rethink some rights, for example the right to seek asylum and so on. So I am afraid that the human rights are, in general, at the bottom of interest of people.”*

According to the interviewees, this time is gone now, and these principles are not essential for the Czech citizens anymore. This trend is then reflected on the decline of the public interest in the human rights. When the respondents were asked on how they think the human rights are perceived by the Czech public, mostly they claimed that these are a very marginal issue. The economic pragmatism, own interests, and own well-being prevail. The lack of realisation that these would not be possible without the protection of the human rights is crucial in the analysis of the perceptions of the human rights.

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<sup>6</sup> It is important to note that in this case we talk about the importance to help the immigrants. In the Global Attitudes Survey in 2016 the Greeks claimed that they are not satisfied with the increased number of foreigners in their country (Foster, 2016).

<sup>7</sup> I.e. the tradition of Václav Havel.

### 4.3. Other findings

Besides the above analysed dimensions, respondents often mentioned the media coverage of certain issues. They claimed that mainstream media often do not reflect the reality, and subordinate the facts to their own profits. Mostly, this was perceived during the peaks of the immigration crisis:

*“What was happening here about the refugee crisis, that hysteria, I find it sad. ... But I think that those to blame are both the rhetoric from politicians, and the way media talked about it. Because what was happening here during one period of time - only playing with people's feelings, with fear, although many people did not even know what is it about. For one period of time, there were no facts at all.”*

With the uneven and non-factual coverage of the media, it is hard to make people know about the organisations' agenda. In this case, many respondents often struggle with the problem of their social bubble. They find it hard to reach those people who do not know about their activities or are of different opinions. To promote such activities, organisations would have to change the concentration of their resources to other channels. Furthermore the polarisation of the society does not make the communication with the public easy. To communicate and to find understanding among those people who are of different opinions became almost impossible. Some of the organisations consider this as one of the challenge they are dealing with:

*“ (Our) theme can be the bottleneck, we can talk about a problem of the social bubble. With our theme, we address only those people who have already been addressed, the supporters. And we deal with this not only on the level of our department but in the organisation as such. On to how step out from the bubble and to address the wider society. You have to go to the grey zones as well, into the mainstream.”*

However, this does not have to always result negatively. As it was already mentioned in the section of donations, the organisations can also profit from polarisation. And the

profits do not have to be only financial. Today, the organisations meet acceptance from the state institutions more often:

*“I see (the change) also in the judgements of the courts which deal with family issues in the cases when (our) clients are homosexual. From the side of the court it is accepted, not in the criminal but in civil issues, and even strictly reacted in the cases when the counterparty tries to abuse it. “*

Similar trends can be found in the mainstream society. Although the proportions do not increase equally, with increased antipathy, sympathy increases as well. The organisations often meet people who decided to support them because they wanted to make a statement against the negative opinions.

#### **4.4. Summary**

Coming back to the initial research question, the summarised conclusion leads us to the answer that the interviewed representatives of non-profit organisations do perceive a change towards the attitudes in the issue of human rights. In most of the cases, these changes were somehow connected to the immigration crisis in 2015 and 2016. From that point, the organisations feel increased hatred towards certain minorities, also decreasing hatred towards other minorities, and if they do not deal with ethnic minorities they at least feel the departure from their agenda. They also perceive a decreasing importance to talk about their agenda among the public and the politicians. The urgency to develop the human rights and to increase the equality in the society is subordinated to stabilisation and enforcement of political power. One of the most critical aspects of the changing perceptions of the human rights is that it concludes into polarisation of the society. From a marginal theme, the universal aspect of the human rights - the fact that they are valid for every human being regardless of their race, beliefs, or ethnicity - comes into the mainstream discourse. And the opinions are escalated. The respondents claim that nowadays the portion of those people whose opinions are neutral and who are able to change their point of view is very small. Although the polarisation does not only concern views on the immigration crisis, it might be seen as a baseline for the pro or contra attitudes. This baseline then divides opinions on the non-profit organisations, political preferences, trust in media, views on nationalism, and finally the inherence of the human rights.

However, the respondents do not perceive the most disappointing reactions from the public. It comes from more important places - from the politicians. The interviewees agree that the political decisions are in fact shaping the public opinion, mostly in setting the boundaries of what is and what is not a legitimate answer towards certain issues. And similarly to what was suggested in the theoretical section of this thesis, the respondents think that the political decisions should not be affected by the public opinion. Exactly the opposite process should be seen - the policy-making processes should regulate escalation of the opinions on more critical issues. Despite of that, the respondents point out that such process does not occur often in the Czech Republic. If there is supportive policy, it is given much less attention in sake of not upsetting the public, and not raising much attention.

Here we can see another cleavage being made - the division between what is said and what is done. This cleavage does not concern only political decisions. According to the respondents, the public opinion can be divided into what people claim and how they would actually react in a face-to-face confrontation.

When analysing this from the point of view of declining Western and European values, respondents agreed that this trend does not concern only the Czech Republic, but is common for most of the European countries. However, the declining values are not reflected in the denial of these values as such. It is rather the supportive policy towards the human rights which is declining in Europe. First, the policies had become silent and just then the people became sceptical. To the interviewees, the most important role of the European Union is in financing their activities. Maintaining similar legal levels across countries is also seen as a positive aspect. On the contrary, the European values are becoming a tool for groups and movements to oppress the development of equality.

The second proposed level of the changing attitudes towards the human rights appears to be more of a consequence of the political neglect described above, which is given more importance from the respondents than expected. Neither increasing nationalism nor conservative approaches can be as harmful as the policies which are being made on the expenses of progressive development of the human rights. The more extreme and oppressive opinions are only seen as a minor threat by the respondents. Yet, they can represent a decline in the perceptions of the importance to keep certain level of the respect of the human rights. The interviewees claim that the European democratic regime, positive aspects of the European Union, and the peaceful era we nowadays live in generated conformism in the European citizens. This conformism then leads to unawareness of the fact that these 'privileges' are not automatically given. When people do not realise what it takes to keep the equality and peace among their countries, they are not able to realise that the changes in the society, such as increased numbers of immigrants from non-European countries are a major change in the structures of the society, require new political and civil approaches. To comprehend the complexity of the problems is definitely not easy and to make it easier, people use abbreviated relationships - stereotypes. These stereotypes then lead to discrimination which is threatening to the equality in the society. This division and polarisation of the society is the most critical aspect of the different and challenged perceptions of the human rights.

The division affects the interviewed organisations. Their agenda cannot be apolitical anymore and by the advocacy for equal approaches to all members of the society they are put on one of the sides of the barricade. Today, their advocacy for one group is seen as a direct opposition to another group.

The different legal settings among European countries do not make it easier either. While other Western European countries try to move their integration policies on intersectional level, the Czech Republic, and its neighbouring post-communist countries still deal with setting the basic levels of inclusion. We can connect this ‘un-development’ with the communist past of the countries. While building the democratic state, the economical growth was the top priority and was given more attention than supporting the other institutions in the society. That concludes into highly developed economics, and stagnating civil society, health care, and education.

## **4.5. Discussion**

As it was already outlined, the most unforeseen finding of this research was the significance of the political decision-making processes. In the theoretical part, the political aspect was seen on the same level as increasing nationalism, influence of the traditional institutions, or increasing hatred towards certain groups of people. Put together, they all affect the perceptions of the inherence of the human rights. The uneven distribution of the importance on these dimensions perceived by the respondents, suggests reassessment of the causes and their effects. From what this research showed, we could think of the political dimensions as causes, and of the other dimensions as effects. These then lead to the changing perceptions of the human rights among the public.

Another finding of a higher importance as expected is the aspect of globalisation, and the ability to adapt to it. Although the respondents did not want to make generalised statements, they could find some common characteristics of people who could be described as their opponents when they were asked to. According to the respondents, these people lack critical thinking, are rather frustrated, and lack knowledge of different cultures and of the world as such. Their attitudes were also connected with the inability to comprehend the complexity of today's reality. In the globalised world, things became

more connected, from economical to cultural aspects, and to adapt to these interconnections takes to know the world better, to be more conscious about the processes.

Arguably, how can people be capable of the consciousness when they do not have the access to financial, educational, language, or any other resources to meet the 'new world'? Such requirement can then result into elitist and discriminative division among those of different, said in Bourdieu's words, cultural capitals. Yet, the distinction between these groups is visible. In my opinion, this is caused by the globalisation and the interconnected processes described above. The principles of individual responsibility used to be limited to one's local influence and actions. Suddenly, with the possibility to share information worldwide we see the person who made our new shoes, the faces of people killed in a terrorist attack, or retreating glaciers. We became more accountable for the negative aspects of the modern living. And many people react to this accountability with restrictions and denial. However, these processes cannot be stopped, as also the interviewees think. This evolution is already given.



## 4.6. Recommendations for further research

The first implication when researching the issue on changing perceptions of the human rights is to widen the sample. The sample should consist of representatives of the whole spectrum of the human rights movement in a given country. In cases when some of the organisations are not willing to participate in the research, as it was described in the methodological part of this study, the sample could be modified. Such modification would include not only non-profit organisations, but also all kinds of activists and activist groups. In this case, the suggestion is to choose the sample on a more ad-hoc principle in order to cover the whole scope of advocates for the human rights. Although increased number of respondents would require transformation in the research design, the study should remain of a qualitative character since this problematic is rather new and still needs in-depth analysis.

Another suggestion is to conduct the research in other European countries. There are two reasons behind this. The first reason is that the study as such deals with the issue on the European and Western point of view. Thus, a research in more European countries could help to validate the findings from the Czech Republic. The second reason is connected to the validation. Although most of the European countries deal with the same issues, the issues differ in their extent. Different ranges in perceptions of the dimensions could result in different findings among European countries. For example, in Slovakia the increasing nationalism could be seen as a bigger threat than in the Czech Republic, since the extreme nationalists are also part of the parliament and thus have bigger influence on the public.

To completely cover this issue, another suggestion for the research is to conduct similar measurements among the public and the state representatives. From this thesis, it is obvious that people who deal with the human rights on daily basis are aware of changes in the public and political discourse on this issue. This theme is important for them, and they can recognise subtle differences in the topic. However, that does not have to mean that these have to be identified by the public and the politicians. And if it is so, it does not have to be perceived as a negative. As this analysis suggests, the public is already polarised in terms of the perceptions of the human rights, the question remains in what extent this phenomenon is seen by people from the different sides of the barricade.

The last suggestion is connected with the findings on the different understanding of the causes and effects of declining acceptance of the inherence of the human rights. First of all, the extent on which the political decision-making processes affect the social climate should be measured. Such measurement would be conducted as a longitudinal quantitative study among different European countries, researching both the political decisions and attitudes towards issues dealing with the human rights on one hand, and the changes in attitudes among public on the other hand. This research could then either prove or disprove the hypothesis that the rejection attitudes of the public are only operating in the field defined by the political powers. The second level of the measurements is of an even more extensive character than the first one. If the hypothesis would be proven, there should be research on why does this happen - why the political aspect is not an effect but a cause when it comes to changing attitudes of the public. Such research would require interdisciplinary approaches from the fields of social and political sciences and a highly-developed research, analysing both past and present tendencies, uncovering connections between political decisions and the public opinions. The findings could then allow to view politics as a trigger in the process of changing the attitudes of the public, not only in escalated situations such as revolutions, but also when the process seems to be affected only by the external effects, e.g. by immigration crises.

#### **4.7. Suggestions for non-profit organisations**

As it was mentioned in the purposes of this study, this research should also help non-profit organisations to orientate themselves better in these turbulent, changing times. From this point of view, the cooperation with the state or European institutions might be crucial. Although, the interviewed organisations cooperate with either the state or some European institutions, or both, they perceive these only as one of many supporters, financial resources, or only as a maintainer of legal levels. In my opinion, the organisations should realise the actual influence these institutions possess, and the impact they can have on the public opinion. The organisations should also understand that their work cannot be apolitical anymore. As it was described before, the advocacy for one group puts them into opposition of another group. The organisations are aware

of the fact that they have opponents, and are able to characterise them well, hence they are aware of their conflict position. This does not mean that the organisations themselves should become political actors. It means that they should claim the political aspect of their work more - and the aspect is respecting the human rights. When cooperating with the state institutions, the non-profit organisations should push the representatives into promoting their direct impact on the human rights. This promotion could then lead to higher acceptance of the issue among the public.

## 5. Conclusion

The main purpose of this thesis was to uncover the perceptions of Czech non-profit organisations of the public challenges put on the institution of human rights. To be able to analyse this phenomenon, I firstly set the framework of possible causes which affect the changing attitudes in the public space. The overall framework can be divided into two ongoing issues – the loss of moral superiority as the primary indicator of the global power, and the need to justify the fundamental definition of human rights. These two then consist of nine dimensions on which the phenomenon can be observed and analysed. The analysis was conducted by means of face-to-face semi structured interviews with representatives of non-profit organisations dealing with the advocacy of human rights in the Czech Republic.

In my opinion, the most important finding was that the dimensions are of different importance than expected. While the theoretical part considered all of its implied dimensions as having the same weight, the research showed that this might not be true. The political decision-making process and the politicians' resolutions are those which shape the public opinion. Just afterwards, the other dimensions are being formed in the public space. Thus, the assumption that all the elements of the framework affect the changing attitudes towards the human rights equally is not right. The importance of holding on to respect and promotion of the principles of equality is primarily displaced by the political elites and just then by the ordinary people. When the political elites do not set boundaries of what is and what is not an acceptable reaction in accordance to the imperative of the human rights, it strengthens the legitimacy of hateful and discriminative rhetoric. And when this rhetoric is legitimised, it can be abused by different groups. The lack of neutral stream and the escalated reactions in some issues suggests that the process of legitimacy has already happened. The research of the non-profit organisations with different advocacy target groups showed that society became polarised not only within single topics, but rather on the whole spectrum of solutions towards the human rights and principles of equality.

The second important finding is connected to the world views leading to challenging the universality of the human rights. The respondents agree on the fact that the process of globalisation can play a crucial role in this. As Zygmunt Bauman has already proposed in his remarkable book *Liquid Modernity* (2000), the world of today is in constant

change. The temporal character of the reality we live in makes people look for certainties. In some cases, the certainties lead to abbreviations and these lead to stereotypes. And when these stereotypes concern minorities and unknown cultures, it mostly leads to discriminations. Here we come back to the issue of globalisation and its role in this phenomenon. Because of the globalised, interconnected world, people have to react to things they were never confronted with before. And these things do not have to always be of a physical kind. These can be minorities, new cultures, new sexual orientations, or even new eating habits. The possibility to know everything brought people to the necessity to react to everything. However, not everybody is able to get all necessary information on given topic and therefore their reactions can be unjustified. A good illustration of this can be the reaction to the migration crisis. As also the interviewed representatives of non-profit organisation agreed, the average Czech individual is not a racist. Yet, when it comes to opinions on refugees, migrants, or foreigners, the average opinions might express xenophobic, discriminatory views of these people. The lack of knowledge of their cultures, and actual experience with such persons puts them in a position when they are simply not able to offer an unbiased opinion. When explicitly asked to give an opinion, people who lack the information have to find it somewhere. And the simplest way and source are stereotypes.

Similar thing happens in the conflict with traditional values. Interviewees claim that they are not in a conflict with any values, and argue that they, in fact, are those who try to hold on to these. Yet, they might be criticised by people who call for traditional, European, or Czech values, although the people who refer to these values in reality only prefer the traditional solutions and habits. Generally, the problems of adhering traditional practices may be that these are obsolete and do not reflect the actual situation. In the Czech Republic, the attachment to old habits is not only visible in the opinions of people but also in the practices of institutions such as education and health care which have not changed since the Communist era. Low efforts to change these institutions suggest that it is a correct way of administration and any attempt of innovation is seen as a violation of traditional ways of execution.

To summarise the main findings, the changing attitudes towards the human rights in the Western society should be perceived as a natural stage in the development of the world. Our world has entered a new era of shared, globalised space which is faster and more complex than ever. As a result, globalisation gives us a number of new opportunities, yet it puts people into new, unfamiliar roles. To cope with their new roles, it takes resources which are not available for everybody. The lack of these resources is the main reason for individuals to neglect this development and to preserve their old ways of thinking. However, history teaches us that this situation is not unique in the evolution of humanity. Similarly to the history of arts, the periods of innovation are alternating with the periods of returning back to traditions. From this point of view, the human rights challenges are a direct result of their evolution.

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## 7. Appendix

### Appendix 1: The interview guide

Hello, as I have already mentioned in the email, I am a student of the Charles University in Prague. I am in the last Masters year and I currently write my diploma thesis. Its main objectives are the changes of perceptions and views on the human rights in the Western society. The aim of this interview is to find out how the non-profit organisations dealing with the issue of the human rights perceive these changes. I will ask you not only on your job, but also on your opinions, estimations, and assumptions. It is probable that in some situations, you will not be able to tell the objective facts, rather only your point of view. That is acceptable and normal. It is not a test, there is no wrong answer. However, please, apply to your job and your experience from what you do in your organisation. The interview will be recorded, transcribed, and will be used for the purposes of my diploma thesis only. If you have any questions now, during, or after the interview, feel free to share them with me.

First of all, introduce yourself and your organisation – what is its main purpose, how many years it operates etc.

1. Why is your organisation necessary?
2. What are the main obstacles your organisation deals with?
3. How does the mainstream public perceive your organisation?
4. Have this perception changed in recent years (+-10)? If so, how, when?
5. Who are the biggest opponents of what you do? Why these people?
6. How are perceived the people you help?
7. Have this perception changed in recent years (+-10)? If so, how, when?
8. In what extent do you come into a conflict with the values of the majority or other groups?
9. How would you judge the Czech society and its attitudes towards the human rights from your organisation's point of view?
10. Have there been any critical moments when there were opinions of the Czech public/politics which were unacceptable for your organisation?
11. How is the European society doing?
12. In which way do the views on the human rights in the world move?

13. Which countries are the perfect models in the respect of the human rights? Why?
14. What impact has increasing nationalism on your organisation, its activities, and the people it advocates for?
15. What is the role of the European Union in your organisation?
16. How would change running your organisation if the European Union would disappear?

## Appendix 2: List of the contacted organisations

Organisation	Webpage	Facebook followers	Agenda
<i>Alternativa 50+</i>	<a href="http://www.alternativaplus.cz">www.alternativaplus.cz</a>	1700	Ageism
<i>Amnesty International Česká republika, z.s.</i>	<a href="http://www.amnesty.cz">www.amnesty.cz</a>	22300	Awareness and dialogue on human rights
<i>Centrum Dialog</i>	<a href="http://www.centrumdialog.cz">www.centrumdialog.cz</a>	1785	Awareness and dialogue on human rights
<i>Člověk v tísni, o.p.s.</i>	<a href="http://www.clovekvtisni.cz">www.clovekvtisni.cz</a>	9500	Awareness and dialogue on human rights
<i>Forum 2000</i>	<a href="http://www.forum2000.cz">www.forum2000.cz</a>	9618	Awareness and dialogue on human rights
<i>Liga lidských práv</i>	<a href="http://www.llp.cz">www.llp.cz</a>	6300	Awareness and dialogue on human rights
<i>Otevřená společnost, o.p.s.</i>	<a href="http://www.otevrenaspolecnost.cz">www.otevrenaspolecnost.cz</a>	1900	Awareness and dialogue on human rights
<i>DOMINO cz, o. s.</i>	<a href="http://www.idomino.eu">www.idomino.eu</a>	832	Children
<i>Vteřina poté, z.s.</i>	<a href="http://www.vterinapote.cz">www.vterinapote.cz</a>	1350	Children
<i>CARE Česká republika</i>	<a href="http://www.care.cz">www.care.cz</a>	851	Feminism
<i>Fórum 50 %, o.p.s.</i>	<a href="http://www.padesatprocent.cz">www.padesatprocent.cz</a>	2086	Feminism
<i>Gender Studies, o.p.s.</i>	<a href="http://www.genderstudies.cz">www.genderstudies.cz</a>	2400	Feminism
<i>Hnutí za aktivní mateřství</i>	<a href="http://www.iham.cz">www.iham.cz</a>	2600	Feminism
<i>Liga otevřených mužů</i>	<a href="http://www.ilom.cz">www.ilom.cz</a>	2700	Feminism
<i>NESEHNUTÍ</i>	<a href="http://www.nesehnuti.cz">www.nesehnuti.cz</a>	6900	Feminism



<i>APERIO - Společnost pro zdravé rodičovství</i>	<a href="http://www.aperio.cz">www.aperio.cz</a>	1100	Health
<i>Mládež českého červeného kříže</i>	<a href="http://www.cervenkykriz.eu/cz/mladez.aspx">www.cervenkykriz.eu/cz/mladez.aspx</a>	920	Health
<i>Lékaři bez hranic - Médecins Sans Frontières in Czech Republic, o.p.s.</i>	<a href="http://www.lekari-bez-hranic.cz">www.lekari-bez-hranic.cz</a>	106000	Humanitarian help
<i>Burma Center Prague (Barmské centrum Praha)</i>	<a href="http://www.burma-center.org">www.burma-center.org</a>	989	Humanitarian help
<i>Centrum Narovinu</i>	<a href="http://www.centrumnarovinu.cz">www.centrumnarovinu.cz</a>	2900	Humanitarian help
<i>Shine Bean o.s.</i>	<a href="http://www.shinebean.org">www.shinebean.org</a>	900	Humanitarian help
<i>SIRIRI o. p. s.</i>	<a href="http://www.siriri.org">www.siriri.org</a>	3450	Humanitarian help
<i>SVĚTLO PRO SVĚT - Light for the World, o.s.</i>	<a href="http://www.svetloprosvet.cz">www.svetloprosvet.cz</a>	2300	Humanitarian help
<i>UNICEF ČR</i>	<a href="http://www.unicef.cz">www.unicef.cz</a>	13480	Humanitarian help
<i>Wontanara</i>	<a href="http://www.wontanara.cz">www.wontanara.cz</a>	1000	Humanitarian help
<i>Centrum pro integraci cizinců</i>	<a href="http://www.cicpraha.org">www.cicpraha.org</a>	3900	Integration
<i>InBáze, z.s.</i>	<a href="http://www.inbaze.cz">www.inbaze.cz</a>	1650	Integration
<i>Multikulturní centrum Praha</i>	<a href="http://www.mkc.cz">www.mkc.cz</a>	1550	Integration
<i>Prague Pride</i>	<a href="http://www.praguepride.cz">www.praguepride.cz</a>	25200	LGBTQ
<i>Národní rada osob se zdravotním postižením ČR</i>	<a href="http://www.nrzp.cz">www.nrzp.cz</a>	1757	People with disabilities
<i>Spolurádi</i>	<a href="http://www.spoluradi.org">www.spoluradi.org</a>	920	People with disabilities
<i>o. s. Slovo 21</i>	<a href="http://www.slovo21.cz">www.slovo21.cz</a>	1400	Romani people

<i>ROMEIA, o.s.</i>	<a href="http://www.romea.cz">www.romea.cz</a>	20100	Romani people
<i>ACORUS - centrum pro osoby ohrožené domácím násilím</i>	<a href="http://www.acorus.cz">www.acorus.cz</a>	700	Violence
<i>In IUSTITIA, o. p. s.</i>	<a href="http://www.in-ius.cz">www.in-ius.cz</a>	990	Violence
<i>ROSA - centrum pro týrané a osamělé ženy</i>	<a href="http://www.rosa-os.cz">www.rosa-os.cz</a>	1700	Violence
<i>FAIRTRADE Česká republika</i>	<a href="http://www.fairtrade-cesko.cz">www.fairtrade-cesko.cz</a>	2340	Working conditions
<i>Na Zemi</i>	<a href="http://www.nazemi.cz">www.nazemi.cz</a>	4600	Working conditions