



Frameworks of Paradiplomacy. Cases of Selected Unitary States: France, the Netherlands and Czechia

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Abstract. Paradiplomacy literature focuses on federations. This paper is dedicated to selected unitary states. The aim was to identify the achievement of those states in terms of cooperation between central and local governments with respect to foreign policy. The principal research method was a semi-structured direct interview. In the light of the examined examples, the French model of paradiplomacy for a unitary state appears to be the best solution. It respects both the authority of the sub-state governments to engage in foreign cooperation and the constitutional prerogative of the government as the body responsible for pursuing foreign policy of the state.

Keywords: paradiplomacy, France, the Netherlands, Czechia, unitary state, foreign policy, local government, regional government.

JEL Classification: H77, F50, R50.

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INTRODUCTION

The aim of this study was to identify the achievement of selected European unitary states in terms of cooperation between central and local governments with respect to foreign policy. The selection of case studies (France, the Netherlands, Czechia) relied on two criteria: democracy consolidation and systemic governance similarities. France and Netherlands are examples of stable democracies, whereas the consolidation in Czechia has not yet reached completion. All countries concerned are unitary states with two or three tiers of local/regional government. While France position itself as a global player, the Netherlands is an example of a middle power. The author was looking for instances that could be a guide in constructing a model of Polish paradiplomacy, meanwhile, the French and Dutch experiences were taken into account in the process of restoring local government in Poland after 1989. Czechia was chosen as an example of a post-communist state, worth comparing with Poland considering similar background.

FRAMEWORKS OF PARADIPLMACY

In further considerations, the notion “framework (model) of paradiplomacy” is assumed to denote the alignment of relations between central and local/regional government with respect to foreign policy. The nature of those relations is reflected mainly in their institutionalization or joint actions (or absence thereof).

The matter of paradiplomatic framework has been raised by several scholars, starting with the originators of paradiplomacy studies. Panayotis Soldatos (1990) defined two main models (“natures”) of paradiplomatic actions and their respective sub-models:

- 1) Co-operative (supportive):
 - a) Co-ordinated by the federal government,
 - b) Joint (federal government – federated units);
- 2) Parallel (substitutive):
 - a) In harmony (with the federal government):
 - With a federal monitoring role,
 - Without a federal monitoring role;
 - b) In disharmony (conflicting).

According to Soldatos,

co-operation (supportive) action in foreign policy is possible when subnational actions on the part of federated units are coordinated by the federal government (e.g. through umbrella-agreements or through federal-state – in Canada federal-provincial – relations institutions, permanent or ad hoc) or developed in a joint fashion (joint missions, joint approaches vis-à-vis a foreign actor, etc.) [...] Parallel (substitutive) action is also possible. This can be developed in a harmonious climate, where the federal government accepts the rationality of a federated unit’s independent action in external relations, with or without federal monitoring. On the other hand, such actions can be in conflict with the federal government, the latter opposing such an action or its content or form (1990, pp. 38-40).

Another classification was proposed by Jorge A. Schiavon (2018), who applied two variables in his framework of paradiplomacy: the degree of inclusion/exclusion of sub-state governments (SSGs) in national foreign policy decision-making and implementation, and the degree of powers granted to SSGs to engage in international relations. Consequently, Schiavon (2018, pp. 26-29) defined four types (models) of paradiplomacy, from more restrictive to more open:

- 1) Exclusive – central government controls foreign policy-making and implementation, and SSGs have no constitutional powers to conduct international relations;
- 2) Consultative – central government consults SSGs in foreign policy-making and implementation, even if they have no explicit constitutional powers in this regard;
- 3) Complementary – central government controls foreign policy-making and implementation, however SSGs have constitutional powers to conduct international relations in certain policy areas;
- 4) Inclusive – SSGs not only have constitutional powers in the field of international relations, they also participate in national foreign policy-making and implementation.

Schiavon analyzed cases of ten federal states and classified them according to his framework. The exclusive model is represented by India and Putin’s Russia. The consultative model is defunct; the last country in which it operated was Belgium prior to the constitutional reform of 1993. The complementary framework describes the arrangement in Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, pre-Putin’s Russia, South Africa and the USA. The examples of the inclusive model are Australia, contemporary Belgium, Canada and Germany.

Schiavon does not concur with the view widely expressed in scientific literature, namely that paradiplomacy has to be “intrinsically” cooperative or conflictive. He states that actually “it depends on the institutional and legal characteristics of the domestic systems. The more clearly defined the constitutional powers of SSGs and the more developed the intergovernmental mechanisms of cooperation between levels of government in international affairs, the more inclusive the internationalization strategy of the country and, thus, the more cooperative paradiplomacy is to national foreign policy” (2018, p. 28).

In other words, institutionalization of paradiplomacy should preclude threats to national foreign policy resulting potentially from the international relations of SSGs (IRSSG), as identified by Soldatos (1990) and Ivo Duchacek (1990), and challenged by Alexander Kuznetsov (2015, pp. 64-65). The major threat is the disintegration of the state and potential violent conflict; Soldatos went as far as using the term “balkanization” (1990, 43) to describe such circumstances. Other risks include trans-sovereign interference in domestic policy, fragmentation of foreign policy, provincial (regional) egoism and poor quality of local/regional “diplomats” involved in international dealings (Duchacek 1990, p. 28; Kuznetsov 2015, p. 64). Kuznetsov downplays potential threats of paradiplomacy, arguing that “the only possibly serious risk of paradiplomacy distinguished by specialists is its potential to forward ahead the centrifugal process in some nations” (2015, p. 65). He claims that paradiplomacy is a corollary of state disintegration rather than its cause, and that SSGs focus on low and medium politics in their international actions, thus posing no challenge to national security. Still, what if paradiplomacy trespasses on the domain of high politics? For example, since the launch of the Belt and Road Initiative European local and regional governments (LRGs) have been developing contacts with Chinese counterparts. Prior to the full-scale aggression of Russia in Ukraine in 2022, numerous European cities and regions, e.g. in Germany, cooperated with their Russian partners. It is very likely that authoritarian regimes, such as China and Russia, exploit paradiplomacy for the purpose of espionage or even interfering with the elections, just as Russia did in 2017 during the secession referendum in Catalunya (Kamiński & Gzik 2021, p. 84).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Here, the research hypothesis was as follows: based on data from selected states, paradiplomatic cooperation between local and central government reinforces national foreign policy. In order to verify the hypothesis a number of research questions was postulated:

- 1) What is the legal foundation for paradiplomacy in selected states?
- 2) In terms of paradiplomacy, how are the relations between central and local government institutionalized in selected states?
- 3) What is the attitude of the central government towards paradiplomacy in selected states?
- 4) What are the consequences of paradiplomacy for the development of national foreign policy?
- 5) What are the distinctive characteristics of French, Dutch and Czech paradiplomacy?

The views formulated by Alexander Kuznetsov (2015) provided a point of reference for the above research questions.

The principal method employed in this study was a semi-structured direct interview, which “is often the best way of obtaining focused responses in a short time frame” (Harvey 2011, 434). The interviews conducted can be considered expert interviews, i.e. conversations with people who have the expertise and “significant decision-making influence within and outside of the firm [organization]” (Harvey 2011, 433). In each state (France, the Netherlands, Czechia) four interviewees were recruited to represent the central government, regional government, local government as well as the academia or expert circles. In France, the author interviewed representatives of the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs (MEFA), Brittany, Rennes and *Cités Unies France* (CUF; French United Local Governments); in the Netherlands: Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations (MoI), North Brabant, the Hague, University of Amsterdam (UvA); in Czechia: Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), South Moravia, Prague, Association for International Affairs (AMO). Nine interviews were conducted in person, three via MS Teams. The interview scenario included open- and closed-ended questions, which allowed for obtaining diverse data and “provided elites with as much flexibility as possible in answering the questions, which maximized the response rate” (Harvey 2011, 435). Transcripts of the interviews were a subject of content analysis using CAQDAS. The interviews were complemented by the analysis of pertinent legislation and desk research.

The nature of the relationship between the unitary state and its SSGs with regard to paradiplomacy is a rare topic of separate studies. Usually it is mentioned briefly when analyzing the paradiplomacy of a given country. The case of France is succinctly described by Geneviève Cartier (2021, pp. 382-384), Manuel Duran (2011; 2015, pp. 272-273) and Rodrigo Tavares (2016, pp. 72-73). The Netherlands was the subject of research of Ben J.S. Hoetjes (2009, p. 158), Virginie Mamadouh (2016) and Herman van der Wusten (Mamadouh & Wusten 2016). Among the studies devoted to Czechia, one should mention Petr Drulák, Lucie Königová together with Petr Kratochvíl (2005, p. 159), Barbora Bodnarová (2007, p. 139) and Vít Dostál (2020, pp. 73-76).

It should be noted here that SSGs of unitary states generally have less freedom of action in the field of foreign relations than their counterparts in federal states. According to Chinese scholars, “some authors have argued that subnational units in federal countries act as *allies* of their national governments in international negotiations. [...] In unitary systems, however, subnational diplomacy plays a strictly subordinate or complementary role” (Liu and Song 2020, 9).

LEGAL FOUNDATION

France

France is party to the European Framework Convention on Transfrontier Cooperation between Territorial Communities and Authorities (the Madrid Convention) of 21 May 1980 and the European Charter of Local Self-Government of 15 October 1985.

The Constitution of the French Republic of 4 October 1958 does not feature provisions applicable to international relations pursued by local and regional authorities (referred to as “territorial communities” in French terminology). Pertinent legislation was enacted in the General Code of Territorial Communities adopted in 1996, specifically Art. L1115-1 to L1115-7 in Chapter V: External Action of Local Government Bodies, the title of which constitutes the official French term for paradiplomacy (*action extérieure des collectivités territoriales*; AECT).

Given France’s international commitments, territorial communities or associations thereof may pursue or support any annual or multi-annual international cooperation, development aid or humanitarian action, also in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adopted by the UN General Assembly on 25 September 2015. To this end, territorial communities and their associations may, where necessary, enter into agreements with foreign local authorities. Such agreements are to specify the purpose of the prospective actions and the estimated amount of financial commitments. They become effective as soon as they are communicated to the representative of the State (the prefect).

The Code introduces the institution of the one percent budget that municipalities and inter-municipal associations can allocate towards foreign activities. The law clearly defines the types of tasks that may be financed under that mechanism. These are: drinking water supply and sanitation services or public electricity and gas distribution services, household waste collection and treatment, as well as mobility (transport). In these particular areas, municipalities and inter-municipal associations may engage in cooperation, development aid or humanitarian action not exceeding the limit of one percent of the budgets set for the respective services.

Furthermore, the law sanctions an institution to monitor foreign actions of territorial communities: the National Commission on Decentralized Cooperation (*Commission Nationale de la Coopération Décentralisée*; CNCDC), established in 1992 and tasked with drafting and updating reports on the AECT. The Commission supports coordination between the State and territorial communities as well as between territorial communities themselves; it is also competent to formulate any proposals concerning the AECT. For their part, territorial communities and their associations provide the Commission with the information necessary to carry out its tasks.

The structure of the CNCD is governed by Art. R1115-8 to R1115-16 of the Code. The Commission is chaired by the Prime Minister or, in their absence, by the Minister for Foreign Affairs. The Commission meets at least twice a year. In addition to the chairperson, the Commission is composed of forty four members, including:

- 1) fourteen representatives of territorial communities and associations whose objectives are related to the foreign actions of territorial communities, as well as fourteen representatives of the State, who are entitled to vote;
- 2) twelve representatives of public institutions, associations or organizations involved in activities related to the external actions of territorial communities or the French-speaking world, in an advisory capacity, appointed by order of the Minister for Foreign Affairs;
- 3) four persons qualified in local development and international cooperation, who have an advisory vote.

The Vice-President is appointed by the Prime Minister from among the representatives of the territorial communities, following the motion of the latter.

Representatives of the territorial communities are appointed under order of the Prime Minister for a renewable three-year period, and may not hold office after the term expires. Territorial representation is composed of:

- 1) three representatives of the regions and of the community of Corsica proposed by the association Regions of France (*Régions de France*);
- 2) three representatives of the departments put forward by the Assembly of the French Departments (*Assemblée des Départements de France*);
- 3) three representatives of municipalities proposed by the Association of the Mayors of France (*Association des Maires de France*);
- 4) a representative of the associations of municipalities proposed by the Association of the Mayors of France;
- 5) a representative of the overseas regions, French Guiana and Martinique proposed by Regions of France;
- 6) a representative of the overseas departments proposed by the Assembly of the French Departments.

The associations are represented by the President of the CUF or their representative and by the President of French Association of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (*Association Française du Conseil des Communes et Régions d'Europe*; AFCCRE) or their representative.

State representatives include:

- 1) two representatives of the Minister for Foreign Affairs;
- 2) a representative of the Minister of the Interior;
- 3) a representative of the Minister for Decentralization;
- 4) a representative of the Minister of Development;
- 5) a representative of the Minister of Economy;
- 6) a representative of the Minister of National Education;
- 7) a representative of the Minister of Foreign Trade;
- 8) a representative of the Minister of Culture;
- 9) a representative of the Minister for Overseas Territories;
- 10) a representative of the Minister for Youth Affairs;
- 11) a representative of the Minister of Agriculture;
- 12) a representative of the Minister for Ecology;
- 13) a representative of the Minister of Territorial Cohesion.

Each member of the CNCD has a deputy appointed under the same procedure, who attends the meetings of the Commission in the absence of the member. Persons entitled to an advisory vote in view of their expertise in local development and international cooperation are appointed for a renewable period of three years by order of the Prime Minister. Two candidates are put forward by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, whereas the Minister of the Interior and the Minister for Decentralization suggest one each.

The Commission collects and updates information from the territorial communities and their associations to obtain a comprehensive picture of external actions within the purview of territorial communities as defined in the Code. The CNCD may advance any proposal in this respect; the body may also be consulted on any bill or decree which concerns them.

The Netherlands

The Netherlands has ratified the Madrid Convention and the European Charter of Local Self-Government with the stipulation that their provisions take effect in the European territory of the kingdom. Consequently, the above treaties therefore do not apply in the Dutch dependent territories (Aruba, Curaçao, Sint Maarten) and in the special municipalities in the Caribbean (Bonaire, Saba, Sint Eustatius).

The Constitution of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, just as its French equivalent, does not provide for paradiplomatic competence of the Dutch municipalities and provinces. However, one may draw attention to Art. 90 of the Constitution, according to which the government supports the development of the international legal order. This provision is associated with the international standing of The Hague, the administrative capital of the kingdom, which is known as the City of Peace and Justice. There are no provisions for the IRSSGs in the legislation pertaining to municipalities and provinces.

Cooperation between the different tiers of government and a consensual approach to resolving disputes between them are a tradition of the Dutch political system. This concept is reflected in the Code of Interinstitutional Relations (*Code Interbestuurlijke Verhoudingen*): an agreement signed by the government and the provinces, municipalities and water boards. As for local and regional authorities, the signatories include national organizations which represent them: the Association of Provinces (*Interprovinciaal Overleg*, IPO), the Association of Dutch Municipalities (*Vereniging van Nederlandse Gemeenten*, VNG) and the Union of Water Boards (*Unie van Waterschappen*, UvW).

As noted in the introduction to the Code,

the government, provinces, municipalities and water boards share the responsibility for good governance of the Netherlands. The local bodies recognize that each has a responsibility in this regard and that the policy choices they make and its consequent implementation may affect the responsibilities of the other authorities. Sound cooperation between the central government, provinces, municipalities and water boards is essential if one is to achieve common goals, address the problems of the Dutch society and realize aspirations (Rijk et al. 2013, p. 2).

It may be noted that the Dutch government admits participation of local and regional authorities in the EU legislative process. In accordance with Art. 9 of the Code,

Where EU documents have consequences for local and regional authorities, the central government and local authorities will explore the possibilities for cooperation at the earliest possible stage. For these documents they work together as much as possible in all phases of the policy cycle (preliminary phase, negotiations and implementation) (for example on the basis of inter-administrative dossier teams) and make use of each other's networks. Local authorities and the national government have the freedom to act independently.

Czechia

The Czech Republic is party to the Madrid Convention and the European Charter of Local Self-Government. The Czech Constitution does not refer to paradiplomacy either. The relevant provisions are contained in the local governance enactments of 12 April 2000, pertaining to regions (*kráj*), municipalities and the capital city of Prague. According to § 28 of the Regions Law, a region may cooperate with local governments in other countries and be a member of their international associations. Likewise, the Municipalities Act provides in § 55 that such entities may cooperate with the municipalities in other countries and join international local governance associations. An

analogous provision (§ 27) is to be found in the act applicable to Prague, which empowers both the city and its districts to engage in foreign cooperation.

INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF PARADIPLOMACY

France

In France, cooperation between the government and the territorial communities on foreign policy is institutionalized under the General Code of the Territorial Communities, which established the CNCD. Until 2021, CNCD meetings were held in Paris, while in 2021 a new rule was adopted whereby CNCD meetings will alternate between the capital and beyond it. As the representative of the French Foreign Ministry explained, the modification was introduced in view of symbolic and political considerations.

With respect to institutionalization of the French paradiplomacy, one cannot fail to mention the Delegation for the External Action of Local Government (*Délégation pour l'Action extérieure des Collectivités Territoriales*; DAECT). DAECT is department of the Directorate-General for Globalization, Culture, Education and International Development at the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs. The DAECT acts as the secretariat of the CNCD. DAECT is headed by a delegate with the rank of ambassador, who also holds the office of the CNCD Secretary-General. The DAECT is staffed by twelve persons including the delegate and their deputy. The division of tasks between the DAECT staff is based on two geographical criteria: regions of the world and regions of France. This means that each desk is responsible for the cooperation of the French territorial communities with a particular part of the world (e.g. with the local and regional bodies in EU countries) and for the overall foreign activity of territorial communities from a particular region or group of French regions (e.g. Ile-de-France). Selected staff are also assigned specific areas of interest (e.g. sport). According to a representative of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, this division adds variety to the duties on the one hand and, on the other, promotes group work and prevents isolation of individual employees. At first glance, the system may appear complicated, but the respondent is of the opinion that it functions quite well, as well as offers the DAECT staff the ability to monitor AECT on an ongoing basis.

Decentralized cooperation liaison officers working at French diplomatic missions around the world and diplomatic advisors to regional prefects are a vital complement to the DAECT. The current list (31.03.2021) of the liaison officers, published on MEFA website, includes nearly 180 diplomats at French embassies across all continents. Diplomatic advisors are also to be found in all regional prefectures. Their task is to act as intermediaries between the MEFA and the decentralized state services on the one hand, and between various regional actors on the international stage on the other. As asserted on the Ministry's website, the advisors are key to ensuring cohesion and effectiveness of France's external actions taken in their entirety.

The respondents speaking for the territorial communities and the CUF are positive in their assessments of the institutionalized cooperation with the MEFA. The CUF representative highlighted the regularity of the dialogue with the DAECT, both on political and technical issues. The representative from Rennes spoke in a similar vein. Territorial communities turn the DAECT with specific problems relating to foreign activities. For example, the city of Rennes was requested by a local NGO to support a project in south-eastern Syria. The respondent consulted the DAECT on this matter. The authorities of Brittany inquired with the diplomatic advisor of the prefect for his opinion on cooperation with the Chinese partner. Brittany's representatives contact the DAECT less often, or indeed not at all, but consult more frequently with the decentralized cooperation liaisons.

The Netherlands

Based on the desk research and the analysis of the interviews, one may conclude that in the case of the Netherlands, cooperation between the government and sub-state authorities on foreign policy is informal. In the

organizational structure of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs there is no office responsible for cooperation with local and regional authorities.¹ The government's chief partner in the field of paradiplomacy is VNG International, the International Cooperation Agency of the Association of Netherlands Municipalities, whose task is to "support the professional capacity building of local governments and their associations, as well as local government training institutes and decentralisation taskforces, both in developing countries and in countries in transition." The cooperation between VNG International and the Dutch government dates back to the early 1990s, when the Ministry of Foreign Affairs launched funding for programs supporting international cooperation between local authorities (VNG 2017, p. 27).

By virtue of provisions of the Code of Interinstitutional Relations, participation of local and regional authorities in EU decision-making follows a more formal arrangement. For instance, current European affairs are discussed during annual meetings attended by the Minister of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and representatives of municipalities and provinces (MoI).

Responding to a question concerning current communication with the government, the representative of North Brabant replied that contacts with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs are virtually non-existent; it is decidedly more often that the provincial authorities communicate with the MoI on European matters. Also, The Hague is in regular touch with the government on foreign activities, which most likely should be attributed to the international status of the city. The fact that the municipalities and provinces consult the MoI on Europe-related issues is borne out by a statement from a representative of the ministry.

Czechia

Among the three case studies, Czechia is a country where cooperation between the central and the local government on foreign policy demonstrates the least degree of formality; simultaneously, contacts between central and sub-state authorities in this regard are the most sporadic.

The organizational structure of the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs features no department which would be responsible for paradiplomacy, as confirmed by the interviewed representative of the MFA. Also, the Czech Republic lacks a joint central-local governance institution dedicated to coordinating paradiplomatic actions. An attempt to formalize relations between the MFA and the regions through regular meetings was made prior to the Czech presidency of the EU in 2009, but the initiative was discontinued. The only venue for the central and the local government to convene and discuss foreign cooperation issues are the intergovernmental commissions for cross-border cooperation that the Czech Republic establishes with all neighboring states.

In practice, the exchange of information between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the municipalities and regions is only occasional. Good relations between the Representation of the South Moravian Region in Brussels with the Permanent Representation of the Czech Republic to the EU are a notable exception, resulting from personal acquaintance of the staff of these institutions (South Moravia). The representative of Prague mentioned frequent contacts with the MFA although, as the respondent noted, a somewhat patronizing attitude of the Ministry towards local government officials is palpable. The MFA usually asks the authorities of Prague to lend assistance when organizing visits of foreign delegations to the Czech capital. As an example of substantive cooperation, the Prague representative cited joint organization of study visits dedicated to economic diplomacy. The interviewee also observed that relations with the MFA picked up when a party colleague of the mayor of Prague became the Minister. Nevertheless, the respondent maintains that it is the MFA which continues to dictate the agenda of cooperation.

¹ Such a conclusion can be drawn from the analysis of the website of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and interviews. The author inquired on this matter twice via the online form of the Government of the Netherlands. Questions remained unanswered.

ATTITUDE OF THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT TOWARDS PARADIPLOMACY

France

The government's attitude towards the IRSSGs may be inferred from official and unofficial communications. The former include documents which set out foreign policy objectives.

In the Foreign Policy section, the website of the French MEFA lists nineteen key areas of external policy in alphabetical order, inclusive of the AECT. The dedicated page states that the MEFA recognizes that paradiplomatic initiatives "contribute to the development of French influence in the world" (*contribuent à développer l'influence française dans le monde*). In other words, the government of the Republic considers the IRSSGs to be an element of French soft power. In the context of foreign policy, territorial communities are crucial to French development cooperation, aimed particularly at the former colonies. For instance, one of DAECT's tasks is to gather comprehensive data from municipalities, departments and regions concerning development aid provided by territorial communities. This information is forwarded to the parliament and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), which carries out statistical assessments of official development assistance (ODA).

According to the MEFA representative, AECTs do feature in each relevant policy document; whether a French foreign policy white paper or a detailed document concerned with a specific state, decentralized cooperation will invariably be mentioned. Also, the instructions that French ambassadors receive from the foreign minister before assuming their post always include a section dedicated to AECT. After all, any ambassador is expected to monitor the cooperation between French territorial communities and partners in the state to which they are sent. The information shared by the MEFA representative is corroborated by the respondent from Rennes, who incidentally drew attention to the pressure that territorial communities put on the French government to support their efforts to have the European Commission apportion funds for international solidarity projects.

Respondents were asked to describe the nature of territorial community participation in foreign policy, i.e. whether they co-decide on it or merely pursue the objectives it sets. The MEFA representative was not thoroughly committed to either option. Citing the example of cross-border cooperation, he stated that such initiatives most often originate with the central government, but those are the local and regional actors that actually implement them. In his opinion, "it goes normally in the same direction or directions as a French foreign policy, but it uses different means" (MEFA). Also, the respondent saw a certain risk in the internal rivalry between French territorial communities for visibility abroad. The government has so far promoted France as a whole, whereas to the external observer the competition between the regions might suggest that a part of the country is superior to the others. A respondent from Rennes expressed a similar view, stating that the territorial communities neither co-create nor implement foreign policy, while simultaneously it is not their exclusive task to do what the state enjoins them to. At the same time, the interviewee emphasized that the local and central government collaborate in the international arena. Quoting the example of Turkish Kurdistan, he even argued that cities or regions can afford to undertake more than the government. For instance, Rennes called on the government, other cities and European networks to have Kurdish mayors imprisoned by the Turkish government released.

The complementary role of paradiplomacy was discussed by the CUF representative, who drew on the example of France and Mali. Following the 2020 coup d'état in Bamako, current inter-state relations are strained but, anticipating their improvement, Malian mayors ask their French counterparts to continue their cooperation, since it would be extremely difficult to re-establish in case the relations are broken off.

Moreover, the central government's attitude towards AECT is evinced by the degree of its control or oversight in paradiplomatic dealings. In France, this supervision is confined to assessing the legality and the manner of spending public funds on the external actions of territorial communities. Under the legality criterion, resolutions adopted by the municipal, departmental and regional councils are evaluated for compliance by the relevant prefect. Given that the latter office is part of the organizational structure of the Ministry of the Interior, the ministry works

closely with the MEFA when verifying legitimacy of AECT. The prefect may only find that a community council resolution fails to conform with applicable law if it is contrary to France's international obligations.

Instances in which French territorial communities have acted contrary to foreign policy are few and far between. Participants in this study mentioned issues which arose during cooperation with Armenia. The influential Armenian diaspora in France initiated contact between the local government and Nagorno-Karabakh, a region unrecognized by the international community.² Also, tensions in cooperation with China ensued when a number of French municipalities decided to grant the Dalai Lama the title of honorary citizen.³

Historically, France has struggled with regionalist or even separatist tendencies in Corsica and Brittany. While the Bretons underline their distinctiveness – if only through cooperation with the linguistically kindred Ireland – there is no indication that paradiplomacy may be a prelude to Brittany's bid for independence. Things are different in Corsica, where separatism has been more robust but, according to the MEFA representative, this has not been reflected in the region's foreign activity. The interviewee drew attention to another territory which causes some concern, namely Alsace. In 2021, the departments of Bas-Rhin and Haut-Rhin formed the European Community of Alsace, a territorial community belonging to the Grand Est region. According to the respondent, Alsatians are not interested in incorporation into Germany, but their goal is not entirely clear.

Furthermore, the respondents were asked whether paradiplomacy constitutes a challenge or an opportunity for foreign policy. All participants opted for the latter, albeit placing individual emphasis differently. By means of AECT, one can pursue an "open window" policy when relations at intergovernmental level are strained (Brittany). Paradiplomacy complements government action and also extends France's influence in the world (CUF). The mayor and the city hall are the first point of contact with a governance structure for citizens. When Russia launched aggression against Ukraine, the City Hall of Rennes received dozens of enquiries from residents concerning the war. In this context, paradiplomacy makes it possible to educate and inform the public about international politics (Rennes).

The Netherlands

In contrast to France, paradiplomacy features much less often in the official Dutch foreign policy documents. It is not to be found among the vital areas of external policy listed on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs website. It is also difficult to find references to paradiplomacy in ministerial speeches (Government of the Netherlands 2022). As previously noted with respect to institutionalization of the MFA-local government cooperation, sub-state authorities participate in the implementation of Dutch development cooperation through VNG International. Interestingly, the website of the Dutch government lists neither municipalities nor provinces among its partners. Local governance bodies are mentioned briefly in the Strategy for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation 2022 developed by the MFA:

The Netherlands seeks to be a reliable donor, and so the major part of its financial contribution is multiyear, flexible and non-earmarked. There is wide public support for achieving the SDGs in the Netherlands, among businesses, civil society organisations and local authorities, for instance. They have joined forces in the platform organisation SDG Netherlands. The government will make further investments in the coming year in raising awareness of the SDGs in the Netherlands itself (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2022, p. 38).

² French municipalities and departments signed several "friendship charters" with Karabakh entities, which provoked protests from Azerbaijan. In July 2015, the French government responded by issuing a circular to the regional prefects, reiterating that signing agreements with entities which had not been recognized by France are prohibited. Nevertheless, in April 2018 yet another French town became the tenth to have drafted such an instrument (Papazian, 2018).

³ The city in question was Paris, which awarded that title to the Tibetan leader in 2009 (Blanchard, 2009).

The representative of the Ministry of the Interior stated that issues relating to the IRSSGs are indeed a matter of interest, for instance in the government's addresses to parliament. He added that the MoI consults municipalities on the government's positions to be presented at the UN General Assembly and on the State of the Union address. An expert from the University of Amsterdam and the representative of North Brabant took a different view. According to the latter, paradiplomacy is altogether absent in the documents defining the foreign policy of the Netherlands; the researcher stated that its presence is currently rather insubstantial, if any. A respondent from The Hague noted that the government's approach has changed in recent years: "so maybe ten years ago there would be more hierarchical attitude towards local governments but I find that increasingly that is less the case, I would say that increasingly you are talking as equals on issues that require collaboration" (The Hague).

Respondents gave varied answers to the question concerning participation of the Dutch municipalities and provinces in state foreign policy. Interestingly, a decidedly positive response came from the representative of the Ministry of the Interior, who emphasized the vital importance of active involvement of the local politicians in economic diplomacy. The interviewee from The Hague stressed that the state and the local government have distinct tasks to perform whereas formulating foreign policy is a prerogative of the central government; all the same, "for sure on issues that concern the participation of cities those interests will be incorporated in foreign policy" (The Hague). The representative of North Brabant stated that local governments have no capacity to influence foreign policy, unless the issue at hand concerns EU decision-making or – after 24 February 2022 – the impact of the war in Ukraine on the municipalities and provinces. In the opinion of this respondent, contribution of the latter reinforces the state's economic diplomacy. An expert from the UvA referred to the participation of Dutch sub-state authorities in foreign policy as "peaceful coexistence".

The participants in the study also offered different interpretations of the nature of SSG participation in foreign policy. According to the representative of the MoI, it lies somewhere between co-decision and implementation. The interviewee from The Hague expressed the opinion that local governments co-create foreign policy.

In the Netherlands, the government does not essentially supervise or control the IRSSGs. However, the Ministry of the Interior would expect municipalities and provinces to consult or advise it of foreign cooperation. The representative of North Brabant only noted that formal approval from the government was required when joining the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation.

In a few instances, paradiplomacy and Dutch foreign policy happened to diverge, but such situations were only recalled by the UvA expert. In the 1980s, Dutch municipalities, e.g. Amsterdam, signed cooperation agreements with cities in Nicaragua – then governed by the Sandinistas – while the government supported the US, which provided aid to the Contras. Also in the 1980s, Dutch municipalities declared themselves nuclear-weapon-free zones, and held large demonstrations against the deployment of US nuclear weapons. Paradiplomacy as an emancipatory measure is not employed by the Frisians. The expert is more concerned that Curaçao may establish closer relations with Venezuela.

Participants in the study were inclined to consider paradiplomacy as an opportunity for foreign policy, especially in terms of economic diplomacy (North Brabant). According to the UvA expert, "most of the time it's more of an opportunity because it is a way of straightening interaction at the level of political actions and citizens and cultural organizations and also sometimes economic actions in that sense". The answer from the respondent from The Hague was perhaps the most nuanced:

I think it is a bit both [challenge or opportunity]. The independence of cities and the real emergence of the cities as independent actors on the international stage is certainly a boost to the capacity of the country to be effective, and the Netherlands as the state is quite effective for many reasons, but for sure it can definitely enhance the visibility and the profile. So that is definitely an asset. But it is also a challenge because cities will probably act independently on the international stage and will not necessarily coordinate among themselves or with the foreign ministry. So the coordination is definitely a challenge. If that is a wish of course (The Hague).

Czechia

Paradiplomacy has been given some prominence in a Czech strategy document. The 2015 Concept of the Czech Republic's Foreign Policy, recognizes the IRSSG as one of the instruments of public diplomacy as part of the objective Reputation Abroad: "The Czech Republic's reputation is promoted by various forms of diplomacy: traditional (political), economic, public and cultural. It anticipates close cooperation between state administration bodies, specialised agencies, regions, towns and municipalities under the co-ordination by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs" (MZV 2015, p. 12). It should be immediately emphasized that, with regard to paradiplomacy, the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs does not perform the above coordinating function at all.

Czech participants in the study were of the opinion that municipalities and regions do not partake in the implementation of foreign policy. The AMO expert said that sub-state authorities "participate in the exercise of foreign relations rather than of a policy", and that paradiplomacy supports the actions of the government, albeit inadvertently. Even if municipalities and regions do not pursue foreign policy, the IRSSGs can, according to the expert, substitute for inter-state relations when the latter become overly politicized. This is best exemplified by the relations established between the South Moravian Region and the Grand Duchy of Liechtenstein, against the backdrop of an estate dispute over the Liechtenstein residences in Moravia, which were nationalized after World War II by the Czechoslovak government.

The Czech Republic has witnessed situations in which the IRSSGs had foreign policy implications. For instance, in 2021, the Czech government filed a complaint with the EU Court of Justice against Poland concerning the Turów mine. The most active party in the dispute was the Liberec Region (MFA). Conversely, an inter-state issue that is certain to have local repercussions is the so-called Czech territorial debt (MFA). Under the Polish-Czechoslovak border agreements, Czechia should restore 368 ha of land currently owned by Czech border municipalities to Poland. It may be expected that when such restoration is imminent, their authorities and the inhabitants will protest, affecting inter-state relations yet again.

Prague represents a special case in Czech paradiplomacy, as the authorities of the capital and its districts have more than once taken decisions that proved a challenge to the government (MFA). When Prague terminated its cooperation agreement with Beijing in 2019 and established relations with Taiwan, the act resonated worldwide. On several occasions, the Prague City Hall also demonstrated solidarity with Tibet, drawing harsh criticism from China. Moreover, the actions of Prague and its districts have been repeatedly protested by the Russian authorities. In 2020, the district of Prague 6 removed a monument to Soviet Marshal Ivan Konev, and Prague 13 erected a plaque dedicated to the Vlasovites, a Russian formation which collaborated with the Third Reich and, towards the end of the war, took part in the Prague uprising against the Germans. At the same time, the authorities of Prague renamed the square where the Russian Federation embassy is located to Boris Nemtsov Square. The City Hall also wants to recover from Russia the real estate which the USSR had unlawfully appropriated in districts 6 and 7. A somewhat anecdotal situation was recounted by the Prague representative who recalled a meeting between the Prague 6 authorities and a delegation from North Korea – the district officials were convinced they were meeting a group from South Korea. The same respondent stated that Prague's controversial moves which resulted in international ramifications did not in principle prompt criticism from the Czech government. Such moves on Prague's part may also be attributed to the ambitions of Mayor Zdenek Hřib, who believes the city can be far bolder in its foreign actions than the government (Prague).

The respondents largely agreed that paradiplomacy is an opportunity for Czech foreign policy. At the same time, the AMO expert admitted that local governance bodies would need support from the central government rather than control, although the latter – at least in the legal dimension – is not exercised by the central authorities. The Prague representative noted that proximity between the local authorities and the citizens is vital in paradiplomacy, as the city's foreign relations should serve to solve the problems of its residents. A similar view was expressed by the interviewee from the South Moravian Region, whereas the representative from the MFA spoke of the opportunities and challenges. Paradiplomacy can enhance the state image-wise, but it may pose threats, even to

state security. While on the subject, the respondent noted that China shows considerable interest in cooperation with the Czech regions, especially those ruled by left-wing political groups.

THE INFLUENCE OF PARADIPLMACY ON FOREIGN POLICY-MAKING

France

The respondents were asked about the implications of paradiplomacy for foreign policy. The author thus sought to determine whether influence from the IRSSG translates into rationalization or democratization of foreign policy decision-making processes (Kuznetsov 2015, pp. 64-65). The interviewees found these questions to be the most difficult, and several were unable to offer an answer.

In the opinion of the representative of the MEFA, in no way does paradiplomacy render foreign policy more rational, on the contrary. The IRSSGs are a spontaneous, haphazard phenomenon. AECTs, on the other hand, help raise public awareness or give foreign policy concrete shape through partnerships with foreign local governments. A similar observation was shared by the respondent from Rennes, who drew attention to the fact that municipalities in France are exceedingly numerous: “I hope we have an impact. It is probably smaller than what we hope and it is probably a bit more than the what we feel”. The CUF representative stated that the government sometimes takes heed of the demands made by the territorial communities regarding foreign cooperation. In this context he mentioned issues like water supply and sewage treatment.

Concerning democratization of foreign policy, the MEFA representative replied that “appropriation” would be a more applicable term: “you understand better because you are becoming an actor of foreign policy. So it’s, it’s closer to you and it’s, and you are part of it. You appropriate yourself some decisions”. The interviewee from Brittany said that the government receives messages from the territorial communities through local government organizations such as the AFCCRE and through French embassies, which work with communities to deliver projects.

The Netherlands

The MoI and The Hague representatives as well as the UvA expert responded in the affirmative when asked whether paradiplomacy contributes to greater rationality in foreign policy, though defining the scale of this impact proved problematic: “I think mostly, firstly about those services which are generally designated as local, not necessarily about the unique position of the Hague as a City of Peace and Justice, which adds a layer to our work which not all cities will have because most cities will not have international organizations based in them” (The Hague); “But if you ask me are we organizing this, are we structuring this, are we having a structured debate about this – no” (MoI). The UvA expert said that local governments play less of a role in foreign policy rationalization than their networks, such as Eurocities (with respect to the Urban Agenda of the EU) or the Global Parliament of Mayors.

The Dutch interviewees nuanced their answers when speaking of democratization of foreign policy. The interviewee from the MoI stated that the topic is not subject to any official discussion between the government and the local government, while local and regional government networks, such as the Global Parliament of Mayors and the European Committee of the Regions, are quite vocal in the matter. The representative from The Hague admitted that the government is primarily concerned with central-level institutions; according to the respondent from North Brabant, mutual communication with the government is confined to economic diplomacy and EU policies. The UvA expert noted that it is traditional for the Dutch political culture to seek consensus and engage in consultations, but this does not mean that the voice of municipalities and provinces is always taken into account by the government.

Czechia

The AMO expert cited the South Moravian cooperation with Liechtenstein as an example of foreign policy rationalization through paradiplomacy: “sometimes when these interstate relations are lacking, these local government relations can replace [them]”. The respondent from the MFA said that no such process can be observed at present, while in his opinion Czech municipalities and regions should have a greater influence on foreign policy both in development cooperation and in terms of relations with the neighboring states. In the opinion of the representative of Prague, the international brand awareness of the Czech capital has a positive impact on external policy. Simultaneously, foreign cooperation cannot be consist solely in reciprocal visits. Local authorities need guidance from the MFA, while there is no designated Ministry official who would be in charge of paradiplomacy.

With respect to democratization, respondents drew primary attention to the absence of communication channels between the MFA and local governments. Given that the former mayor of Hradec Kralove is the incumbent deputy foreign minister warrants hope that the situation will improve (AMO).

SPECIAL FEATURES OF PARADIPLOMACY IN SELECTED STATES

France

The study attempted to identify the distinguishing characteristics of the IRSSGs in selected states. In France, the entire institutional system of AECT can be considered as such. According to the MEFA representative, the French DAECT has very few counterparts in the world. Interestingly, they are to be found in the structures of governments with which France is involved in development cooperation, such as Morocco, Tunisia and the Palestinian Autonomy. The mechanism of allocating one percent of the municipal budget for development cooperation is also a French idea. According to the CUF representative, French paradiplomacy is characterized by a considerable degree of politicization, in that mayors exploit it to build their image and political capital. In other words, the sole credit for foreign cooperation at municipal level and its benefits goes to the mayor concerned.

The Netherlands

One could venture that openness to international cooperation is coded into the DNA of the Dutch, which results from the geographical location and the history of the Netherlands as a major maritime power.

With regard to EU decision-making, it is characteristic of the Netherlands to include municipalities and provinces in the process, to the extent that their representatives go to Brussels as members of the government negotiating teams (MoI). Another feature of Dutch paradiplomacy, and in fact of the political system as a whole, is the sense of city autonomy deriving from historical experience (UvA). According to the representative of North Brabant, the intensity of foreign contacts varies considerably between the Dutch provinces: certain regions are very active in the international arena, but there are others which do not engage in paradiplomacy. Being the seat of international organizations, The Hague enjoys a special status.

Czechia

Czech interviewees emphasized the pragmatic attitude of local governments towards paradiplomacy. Currently, municipalities and regions sign fewer and fewer agreements with foreign partners, as it turned out in many cases that such instrument did not translate into cooperation or went no further than the exchange of delegations and handshakes. According to the representative from Prague, the economic dimension is a major asset of Czech paradiplomacy: attracting tourists, investors, foreign students and skilled workers. The respondent from the MFA also observed that the regions are divided into internationally active players and passive entities.

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

With regards to the models of paradiplomacy outlined at the beginning, one should bear in mind that they were conceived based on federations. Presuming their applicability to unitary states, the French paradiplomacy is closest to Soldatos' cooperative model, in which the government coordinates AEETs, and the exclusive model developed by Schiavon. The Czech and Dutch cases are in line with the parallel model by Soldatos, in which the central government does not play a monitoring role, while it is difficult to align them with any of the models advanced by Schiavon.

The results of the study are summarized in the table below (Tab. 1). The author would like to disclaim that the assessments in the table should be approached in a discretionary manner, at the same time inviting discussion in that respect. Nevertheless, a few facts should be noted. The strong anchoring of the IRSSG in the legislation of a given state does not always translate into institutionalization and central government involvement in paradiplomacy, as evidenced by the example of Czechia. The Czech case also shows that the inclusion of paradiplomacy in the priorities of the national foreign policy does not necessarily translate into the state's real interest in the international activity of local authorities.⁴ In all the analyzed examples, paradiplomacy should be considered as an instrument supporting foreign policy. However, it is difficult to recognize LRGs as co-creators of the state's external policy (only a representative of The Hague expressed such an opinion). At the same time, the dominant view among the survey participants is that paradiplomacy is an opportunity for foreign policy, despite friction sometimes caused by local authorities on the international arena (the example of Prague). The conscious use of the IRSSG as an instrument of the state's external policy can only be seen in the case of France. Worth emphasizing is the comprehensive support system of the French government for AEET and the one percent of the budget instrument from which municipalities can finance their foreign activities.

Tab. 1. Frameworks of paradiplomacy in selected unitary states

	France	The Netherlands	Czechia
Legal foundation	Strong	Weak	Strong
Institutionalization	High	Low	Low
Approach of central government	Active	Neutral	Neutral
Participation in foreign policy	Complementary	Cooperative	Supportive
Control/supervision	Limited	None	None
Challenge/opportunity for foreign policy	Opportunity	Rather an opportunity	Rather an opportunity
Rationalization of foreign policy	None	Limited	Limited
Democratization of foreign policy	Limited	Limited	None
Distinctive features	Institutionalization Financing (one percent) Politicization	SSG participate in the EU decision-making Autonomy of cities Varied degree of activity of SSG Status of The Hague	Pragmatism Economic paradiplomacy Varied degree of activity of SSG

Note. Source: own elaboration.

⁴ Comments on the Czech Republic also describe the situation in Poland after 2015 (Ksenicz, 2020).

CONCLUSIONS

To sum up, it needs to be stressed that scientific literature about paradiplomacy focuses mainly on examples of federal states. Therefore, the author hopes that this paper will encourage scholars to undertake research on paradiplomacy frameworks of other unitary states. The typology of various political regimes in relation to the autonomy of non-central governments developed by Stéphane Paquin (2020, pp. 54-55) may be an inspiration.

The research hypothesis stated that based on selected case studies, paradiplomatic cooperation between local and central government reinforces national foreign policy. This has been positively verified only in relation to the example of France. The analysis of the cases of the Netherlands and Czechia does not give unequivocal answers, as the Dutch and Czech governments do not use IRSSG as a foreign policy tool in a systematic way. Hence, the French model of paradiplomacy appears to be the best solution for a unitary state, among the analyzed cases. It respects both the authority of the SSGs to engage in foreign cooperation and the constitutional prerogative of the central government as the body responsible for pursuing foreign policy of the state.

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APPENDIX

Interviews

1. France

Brittany. May 11, 2022.

Cités Unies France (CUF). July 27, 2022.

Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs (MEFA). May 16, 2022.

Rennes. May 11, 2022.

2. The Netherlands

The Hague. June 28, 2022.

Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations (MoI). June 28, 2022.

North Brabant. June 27, 2022.

University of Amsterdam (UvA). June 30, 2022.

3. Czechia

Association for International Affairs (AMO). June 2, 2022.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA). June 2, 2022.

South Moravia. May 30, 2022.

Prague. September 1, 2022.