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**“Ethnic interest groups as actors in international relations and their influence in shaping the national interest: Applying a diversifying concept of culture in the US-American context”**

(Draft - Please do not quote)

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## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Despite the culturalist turn that the social sciences experienced in 1980s and which the vehicle of constructivism also carried into International Relations (IR) theory (cf. Roscher 2004, 231-252), cultural aspects have traditionally received comparatively little attention in the study of international relations. This observation applies to the research into the shape and functioning of the state-actor based international system as well as to the research on the latter's permeation with and influence by transnational phenomena, as embraced by the term "globalization". With this paper, I seek to focus on the role of culture as a dimension of globalization and its impact on the current international system (part 1) and accordingly on the role of culture as a dimension in IR theory (part 2).

Ethnic interest groups, emerged from and representing diaspora groups,<sup>2</sup> exemplify both perspectives: Through their political activism in the field of foreign policy, they link the political systems of both the country they originate from (the "country of origin") and the country they reside in now (the "new home country"). Their multi-layer cultural identities represent the heterogenization that is characteristic of (post-)modern identities. Instead of being monolithic blocs, these identities are characterized by multiple and possibly contradictory cultural references. This transnationalization of identities is reflected in the international system, which has traditionally been viewed as constituted by state actors. Ethnic interest groups challenge this state-centric perspective, while at the same time, through their particular structure and actions, contributing to the continuation of the state-based world order.

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<sup>1</sup> The paper reflects the author's views, not necessarily that of her institution.

<sup>2</sup> By this definition ethnic interest groups in the context of this paper do not refer to national minorities, i.e. ancestral or centuries-old ethnic minorities like, in the US-American context, Afro-Americans or Native Americans.

Thus, the question arises: If ethnic interest groups are influential actors in international relations, how is this reflected in the process of foreign-policy making, the governmental instrument in shaping international relations? An appropriate angle of researching ethnic interest group influence in foreign-policy making is the angle of the national interest (part 3). It is widely assumed that national interests<sup>3</sup> drive foreign-policy making. Many researchers in the field argue that ethnic interests distort the national interest, based on a view of ethnic and national interests as two separate blocs. Drawing upon a heterogeneous, pluralistic and dynamic definition of cultural identities, I argue in this paper that ethnic interests and *the* national interest are *not* separate entities. They are much rather inter-dependent and inseparable. Many interests make one interest, the national interest. Ethnic interest groups are one societal actor among many in forming this interest.

In the US-American case that I will scrutinize (in part 4), the American identity based on the motto “E pluribus unum” allows for the inclusion of these groups as one voice, as one force among many in shaping US foreign policy. However, this theoretical perspective on the relationship of ethnic and national interests does not reflect reality: The ability to express ethnic interests in a way that prompts their inclusion in the national interest requires certain “power” resources. Only if these power resources are at the disposal of an ethnic interest group, this group is able to influence the construction of the national interest and hence the foreign-policy making process. Furthermore, the evolution of the US national interest since the end of World War II shows that most of the time a security-based “core national interest” existed which did not allow for an inclusion of ethnic interests unless those coincided with the core interest pursued. The relationship between national and ethnic interests argued for in this paper does not pass the reality test in the US-American context.

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<sup>3</sup> Whenever I use a plural form of „national interest“ I apply a global perspective and refer to the national interests existing in the international system. However, this view is based on the assumption that there is usually *one* national interest for each national government. For a more detailed definition of „national interest“ see part 3a) of this paper.

## 1. Ethnic interest groups and cultural globalization

The ethnic homogeneity within state borders as implied by the concept of the „nation-state“ does reflect neither current nor past realities. In this chapter I will explore (a) the diversifying *notions of culture* on which this characterization of current nation-states is based, and (b) the *process of cultural globalization* which has shaped the cultural identities observable in today’s nation-states, as well as the phenomenon of ethnic interest groups, symptomatic of this process and an important link between the cultural and the political dimension of globalization.

### a) A diversifying concept of culture and cultural identities

The *diversifying concept* of culture used in this paper acts on the assumption of a heterogenous, pluralistic and dynamic character of culture:<sup>4</sup>

- (1) *heterogenous* because cultures do not constitute monolithic blocs but comprise many different aspects, characteristics and, naturally, persons;
- (2) *pluralistic* because cultures may include different subgroups with differing, competing or even contradictory interests and agendas;
- (3) *dynamic* because cultures are constantly subject to change caused by internal factors (e.g. fluctuating membership), external factors (e.g. socio-economic and political factors) and the inter-subjective processes of social constructions through which they exist.

Cultures are systems of norms, values, beliefs, interests etc. which can be of a normative, ethnic, religious, linguistic, political, historical or/and descent-related character, among

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<sup>4</sup> See e.g. Elwert (1996) and his definition of culture as a “dynamic structure” and Carl Cederman’s constructivist definition of “ethnic group” as “a cultural community based on a common belief in real or putative descent” (2002, 411).

others. Accordingly, cultural identities are sets of cultural references that are generally voluntarily adopted by their bearers,<sup>5</sup> notwithstanding the fact that certain preconditions need to be met for someone to be able to take on a certain identity. For example, only if someone has Italian citizenship, permanently resides in Italy or is raised by an Italian parent abroad, may this person label him- or herself as “Italian”. This social constructivist perspective also bears on collective identities which are created when a group of people, drawing upon joint characteristics, chooses to take on a common identity. Collectives can only function if the insiders and the outsiders perceive themselves as pertaining to them, which entails that an “inside” and “outside” are defined. This process of simultaneous self-identification and external ascription is crucial in forming a group. In IR theory, the term “intersubjective understanding” is used to describe this characteristic of identity constructions (see e.g. Adler 2002).<sup>6</sup> National identities are collective cultural identities relating to a certain territory over which the bearers of this identity claim certain rights up to sovereignty. Asserting rights turns a culturally defined collective into a political entity, as reflected by Benedict Anderson’s definition of the “nation” as an “imagined political community” (Anderson 1991, 6).<sup>7</sup> Ethnic interest groups, representing diasporas, are also culturally defined politically assertive collectives. However, unlike nations (or national minorities) they do not claim rights over a certain territory, albeit having a special relationship with the nation – and hence – territory of their country of origin. In order to distinguish their activities from activities with a specific

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<sup>5</sup> Cultural identities acquired during socialization might be involuntarily adopted. However, identities may be abandoned, even though certain characteristics will keep up the outside perception of being the bearer of such an identity.

<sup>6</sup> However, due to the dynamic character of identities, groups face the constant challenge of keeping their coherence. A common reaction of groups to the pressures of change is to close themselves in and refer to the myth of a long-standing monolithic identity. Viewing identities as monolithic entities creates a feeling of security among members of a group. Ole Waever calls this phenomenon “societal insecurity” (quoted in: Adamson 2006, 183).

<sup>7</sup> Ernest Gellner also merges cultural and political references in his definition of “nationalism” which he describes as “primarily a principle which holds that the political and national unit should be congruent” (Gellner 1987, 1) This definition is also used by other researchers in the field of nationalism such as Eric J. Hobsbawm (1990). For the discussion of recent IR research relating to nationalism and ethnicity see Cederman (2002).

national scope while also pointing out their political and cultural character,<sup>8</sup> I use the term “ethnic” with reference to ethnic interest groups that relate to diaspora groups. Even though the term may evoke some confusion as to its relation to national minorities, my reason for using it in the context of my research is its being an established concept in the academic debate. This concept continues to be labelled as “ethnic”, notwithstanding its difficult past (the term “ethnic” came into use as colonial administrations sought to categorize the collectives they were dealing with).

### **b) Ethnic interest groups and cultural globalization**

Ethnic interest groups are politically active groups referring to a collective cultural identity of which being part of the same diaspora group is a central aspect. Albeit dating much further back than the coining of the term “globalization”,<sup>9</sup> their emergence reflects the current processes of cultural globalization, which encompass an expansion as well as a fragmentation of cultural references (i.e. Hall 1994; Menzel 1998), and demonstrates the “imperfection of the nation-state” (Shain and Cofman Wittes 2002, 177). Based on the diversifying (i.e. heterogeneous, pluralistic and dynamic) notion of culture introduced above, their collective identity is defined by certain exclusive characteristics, yet membership is an ever-changing, socially constructed, generally deliberately chosen, and heterogeneous means of identification (cf. Puente and Kasindorf 2004, 57ff).

As the term “interest group” indicates, these groups seek to influence policy-making in a way favourable to their interests.<sup>10</sup> Accordingly, David Truman defines an ethnic interest group as “any group that, on the basis of one or more shared attitudes, makes certain claims upon other groups in the society for the establishment, maintenance [...] of forms of behaviour that are

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<sup>8</sup> The social anthropologist Jack Eller defines “mobilization around difference – a camaraderie with or preference for socially similar others” as one defining element of “ethnicity” as opposed to “culture” (Eller 1999, 9).

<sup>9</sup> Even though the term “globalization” usually refers to the increasing interdependence of economic, political, societal and cultural relations after 1945, the interdependence between these spheres already increased when industrialization set in in the 18th respectively 19th century.

<sup>10</sup> For an overview of the research on interest groups see Baumgartner and Leach (1998).

implied by the shared attitudes” (Truman 1951, 33). What makes them different from other, “conventional” interest groups is the international projection of their work: “their principal goal is to change policies and living conditions beyond [...] borders” (Clough 1994, 82). Many times, they pursue a single-issue approach, unlike their non-ethnic counterparts.

Ethnic interest group activity often aims at impacting the political situation in the home country of the diaspora the group identifies with. This can either be the actual country of origin or a cultural “home country”, such as Israel in the case of the Jewish American community. By acting within the new home country’s political system, influencing that country’s foreign-policy making is the means to impact political developments in the country of origin. Thus, ethnic interest groups do not only symbolize the link between the political and cultural aspects of globalization but also highlight the role that cultural identities play in current international relations.

As to the relationship between ethnic interest groups and cultural globalization, first the question arises: What is “globalization”? In the context of this paper it is especially one aspect which is important: According to Peter Andreas, “globalization“ is “characterized as an intensification of interdependence and cross-border interactions“. This encompasses processes taking place in many different spheres, such as economy, technology and culture (Andreas 2003, 82). Cultural globalization is usually framed as an ambivalent process: On the one hand, the spreading of popular cultures and goods turns the world into a “global village”. This homogenization of cultural identities is, however, accompanied by a fragmentation and localization of identities. Viewing cultural homogenization as a threat, people strengthen their local identities – and thus make them stronger and more coherent, sometimes more than they have ever been. The sociologist Roland Robertson termed this double, diverging character of cultural globalization as “Glocalisation” (Robertson 1995, 25-44).

Ethnic interest groups symbolize this dichotomous character of cultural globalization, representing both the trend towards expanding the scope of culture(s) as well as the trend towards a fragmentation of cultural identities. On the one hand, created through migration processes, a major vehicle of cultural globalization, diaspora groups propel the process of cultural expansion by bringing their “home culture” into their “host culture”. By creating collective sub-cultures within their “host culture”, on the other hand, they contribute towards the fragmentation of national identities, hence pluralizing them.<sup>11</sup> Taken together, different hyphenated identities form one national identity.

Cultural globalization has tremendously accelerated cultural interaction and hence amplified the pressures of change national identities are exposed to. Consequently, while the political importance of nation-states as actors is declining in view of the rise of transnational and supranational actors (cf. Zürn 1998), ethnic identities are gaining influence as a factor in policy-making. The rise of ethnic references is exemplified by nationalist political parties but also by discussions on how the influx of immigrants into a state affects the prevalent national identity. The argument of a monolithic national identity used by some participants in these discussions postulates a cultural homogeneity within state borders that has, however, never been reality in any country. On the contrary, at the beginning of the third millennium, the concept of culturally homogeneous “nation-states” corresponds less than ever with the international cultural and political state of affairs.

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<sup>11</sup> However, the degree to which these subcultures contribute to a fragmentation and pluralization of national identities is different from group to group. Some diaspora groups (or subgroups within these diaspora groups) choose to share their culture of origin with their new home country’s society while others may opt for less intercultural dialogue. Others may even decide to abandon their culture of origin and assimilate into the mainstream culture of their new home country.

## **2. Ethnic interest groups and IR theory**

Unlike realist IR theory which views states as unitary actors, liberal IR theory allows for the recognition of ethnic interest groups as actors within the international system. In this chapter, I will (a) describe how liberal and ideational studies of the international system integrate these actors and (b) how the latter act in the domestic context of foreign-policy making – what enables them to influence the policy-making process?

### **a) The international system**

Representing the influence of cultural globalization on international relations, ethnic interest groups with a focus on foreign policy issues link three different levels of international policy-making: (1) their country of origin's political system, (2) their (new) home country's political system and (3) the international system. IR theory, much like IR practice, even though to a lesser degree, has so far paid but sporadic attention to the role of ethnic interest groups as actors in international relations. To a large extent, this has to do with the traditional rational-choice approaches used in IR study, concentrating on individuals and states and regarding them as the main actors in shaping the international system while neglecting or completely disregarding the role of ideas (Gourevitch 2002).

With the emergence of liberal theory, allowing to open up the “black boxes” of state actors (Moravcsik 1999), ethnic interest groups began to attract more attention in IR research. By including domestic politics into the study of International Relations, the interdependency of the different levels of politics was recognized: “International and domestic are both ‘politics’. They can be understood by the same categories and concepts. The real question is not whether the two ‘levels’ are distinct, but how to study their unmistakable interaction” (Gourevitch 2002, 309-328). One prominent approach putting analytical weight on the

influence societal actors have on foreign policy activity, is the “two-level game” concept developed by Robert Putnam (1988). Focusing on the actors connecting the domestic and international level of foreign-policy making, Putnam asserts that in order to succeed in international negotiations, governmental actors need to satisfy the expectations of their negotiation counterparts as well as those of the society they represent.

At the same time, the “culturalist turn” reached IR study. Social constructivism brought ideational factors to the fore. Alexander Wendt (1992, 391-425) started off the debate which soon gained more and more momentum. The role of ideas was being recognized (again) as a decisive factor in international politics and integrated into different schools, including those of security studies and foreign policy analysis (Gourevitch 2002; Hudson 2005). The emergence of societal actors and the recognition of ideational factors also brought ethnic interest groups as actors in international relations into the focus. Yossi Shain and Tamara Cofman (Shain and Cofman Wittes 2002) made a significant contribution to the debate by expanding Putnam’s two-level game by a third level, i.e. the level of ethnic interest groups, thus turning the “two-level game” into a “three-level game”: Ethnic interest groups and the interests they pursue link the two sides involved in foreign policy action – the governments of their home countries and those of their host countries.

#### **b) The domestic context**

Recognizing ethnic interest groups as actors in International Relations raises the question as to how they act within the domestic context of international politics: What makes a societal group powerful enough to exert influence over the process of foreign-policy making (declaratory policy) and implementation (operational strategy)? According to the pluralist theory of interest group influence, the means for an (ethnic) interest group to succeed in a competitive majoritarian democracy is to prevail in the struggle for power. Taking this power factor into consideration, ethnic interest groups need to reach a certain “power threshold” in

order to be successful in their lobbying efforts. I define *power* as the resources an interest group can dispose of, as for example, the group's structure and strategies, i.e. its degree of inner cohesion, cohesiveness of political representation, volume of financial backing, geographical location (i.e. regional concentration of group members, location in regions with a particular political salience, such as swing states in the US-American context), cooperation with alliances respectively confrontation with competitors. This power must reach certain degrees in order to *enable* the group to actually attain political clout.<sup>12</sup>

Following the assumption that foreign policy is guided by *the national interest* (Weldes 1996), the resources an interest group disposes of cannot be solely decisive. They also depend on the relationship between ethnic interests and the national interest. Therefore, another important condition for successful ethnic lobbying, that some experts in the field mention, is the convergence of the lobby group's interests with the current national interest, the overarching ideational road map directing foreign policy decisions (e.g. Garrett 1978; Shain 1995; Tierney 1993). I would therefore like to readjust this perspective of group power by labelling the power factors above mentioned as *preconditions* (rather than conditions) to exert political influence.

### **3. Ethnic interest groups and the national interest**

Following a definition of "national interest" that is derived from a social constructivist and diversifying approach to the terms of "culture" and "nation", rigid concepts of never-changing national interests appear incoherent. Yet they dominate the debate on how ethnic interest groups influence foreign policy-making and hence the definition and allegiance to the national

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<sup>12</sup> These factors are mentioned by a wide range of authors as decisive in determining an ethnic interest group's clout. For an overview see Heindl (2006); Money and Gartner (2006).

interest. In this chapter, I will (a) discuss the main arguments in this debate and (b) infer my own concept of the relationship between the national and ethnic interests.

**a) Ethnic interests *versus* the national interest?**

First of all, what is a “national interest”? Depending on whatever concept of culture is applied (monolithic/homogenous versus dynamic/heterogeneous etc.), *the nature* of the national interest can be defined in different ways. What is less contentious (or at least in the context of this paper assumed to be so) is what the national interest actually *is*. Most authors define it as the overarching ideational road map directing foreign policy decisions (e.g. Garrett 1978; Shain 1995; Tierney 1993). As to the contents of national interests, Samuel Huntington describes it as a double combination of security and material concerns and of moral and ethical concerns (Huntington 1997, 35).

The debate sets in when it comes to the nature of the national interest, that is the question of how it is actually shaped: Is it dynamic or does it always stay the same? Is there but one national interest or can there be several, even competing or contradictory ones? Who does it represent and who is able to (legitimately and illegitimately) influence it? And what are the implications for the role of ethnic interest groups in the foreign-policy making process?

One of the most prominent proponents of the concept of a monolithic and unchangeable national interest is Samuel Huntington. His view is based on the notion of cultures as separate entities or blocs, such as the “civilizations” that are in the center of his controversial yet frequently quoted concept of a “Clash of Civilization” (Huntington 1996, 367). By allocating ethnic interest groups and American mainstream society in different cultures, he defines their interests as separate entities, too. Accordingly, ethnic interest groups do not promote the American national interests but “the interests of people and entities outside the United States” (Huntington 1997, 38). With regard to the growing numbers of immigrants arriving in the US, he anticipates an increasing political assertiveness of ethnic interests and hence an even

starker contrast with the American national interest (Huntington 2004). Even though he concedes that ethnic interests and the national interest “may at times coincide” (Huntington 1997, 40), he perceives such coinciding as rather accidental. In his view, ethnic and national interests continue to be separate entities, even though in some issue areas they happen to strive for similar or even literally the same aims. On a normative level, the existence of ethnic interests appears negative and even detrimental to the cohesion and clout of American national interests (Huntington 2004; 1997). Huntington claims that ethnic interests are “often pursued at the expense of broader interests and American relations with long-standing allies” (Huntington 1997, 40).

A similar concept of the relationship between ethnic and national interests is put forward by Eric Uslaner. He argues that there should be but one national interest: “On foreign policy there was but one interest – the national interest – behind which all Americans should – and generally did – unite” (Uslaner 1995, 127). However, according to the author, the coherence of the national interest is currently threatened by the expression and pursuit of ethnic interests: “Especially in international crises, when the stakes are clear and our entire way of life might be threatened, the nation must speak with one voice, not many. There simply doesn’t seem room for interest groups” (Uslaner 1995, 126). Uslaner apparently applies a concept of national and ethnic interests which is based on the notion of a monolithic and fixed American identity, to which immigrants and their references to cultures other than the American pose a threat. This view suggests the independent existence of ethnic and national interests.

Huntington’s and Uslaner’s monolithic perception of the “national interest”, however, is debated. An alternative, social constructivist perspective is provided by Jutta Weldes, who defines the national interest as the “rhetorical device through which the legitimacy of and political support for state action are generated” (Weldes 1996, 276). She views the national interest as shaped by political actors and hence subject to constant change. Peter Trubovitz also applies a dynamic concept, seeing “regional diversity” as the driving forces of change

rather than political actors organized on the federal level and their agendas (Trubowitz 1998, 353). This recognition of the changing nature of national interests is shared by Colin Dueck. He defines “grand strategy” as “the prioritization of foreign policy goals, the identification of existing and potential resources, and the selection of a plan or road map that uses those resources to meet those goals” (Dueck 2006, 1). Dueck’s notion of the “national interest” included in this definition of the term “grand strategy” is a dynamic one, as it implies different possibilities to prioritize national interests and thus accords the latter an inherent dynamic.<sup>13</sup> For the US-American case, he regards major events such as World Wars I and II, the end of the Cold War and the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 as points of change in the American grand strategy and hence the national interest. This dynamic conception is grounded in a constructivist approach to culture, which he defines as “any set of interlocking values, beliefs, and assumptions that are held collectively by a given group and passed on through socialization” (Dueck 2006, 14). In the context of foreign policy making, “the relevant cultural values and beliefs are those that relate to the legitimate and efficient conduct of political-military affairs, while the relevant cultural unit or group is the citizenry of a given nation-state, and particularly its foreign policy elite” (Dueck 2006, 15). Dueck’s concept of the “national interest” does not only reflect a social constructivist approach but also a dynamic concept of what “national” refers to – he speaks of “citizenry” as a group with a collective national identity and thus allows for the inclusion of hyphenated identities. Like Weldes, Dueck also accords the policy elite a decisive role in shaping the national interest.

Yossi Shain (1995) is another author who applies a rather diversifying concept of culture and national interests. By also drawing upon the US-American case, he contends that ethnic interest groups do not pursue interests opposing the national interests, but rather interpret the national interest in their own – what he judges legitimate – ways. Shain argues that throughout US history, ethnically defined interest groups grown out of diasporas have been

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<sup>13</sup> For a more detailed definition of what Dueck means by “grand strategy” as well as for the development of the term see Dueck (2006, 9ff).

part of the policy-making process (Shain 1995, 70f). Their political engagement does not aim at “balkanizing” the American identity but interpret it in their own ways (Shain 1995, 78). By actively participating in the American political system, they show their identification as “Americans”. Shain therefore labels political engagement of diasporas as a sign of integration (Shain 1995, 87), and points out that ethnic interest groups may even be harnessed to “market the American creed abroad”, i.e. “the ideals of democracy, pluralism, self-determination, and human rights” (Shain 1995, 83). However, albeit labelling ethnic interest group activity as a legitimate way of interpreting the national interest, he views ethnic and national interests as separate entities. This becomes apparent through his conclusion that ethnic interest groups have the power to redefine US national interests (Shain 1995, 74). Shain defines the national interest as a monolithic concept which is however subject to change through the influence of interest groups, such as ethnic ones.

#### **b) An inclusive concept of the relationship between national and ethnic interests**

With their *monolithic concepts* of the American national interest, both Huntington and Uslaner do not recognize the embracing nature of the American collective identity. From its founding days to the present, the United States has drawn upon the self-definition of being a country of immigration based on the principle of uniting in diversity (reflected by the national founding motto “e pluribus unum”). According to the “melting-pot principle”, ethnic identities were allowed to prevail, as long as the American national identity was accepted as the primary source of identification. Unlike in the modern European nation-states of the Westphalian system, in the United States, hyphenated identities have always been not just accepted but viewed as an integral part of what being an American means.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> However, due to the impact of globalization and the resulting increase in cultural interaction (i.e. through migration), American society (just as most modern societies) has been pluralizing at a more rapid pace than before. This has also prompted a transformation of the national identity towards a more plural concept. Yet this pluralization has been perceived as threatening by some people, as reflected by the Huntington paper (see Hall 1994, 217ff).

The *dynamic approaches* to culture applied by Yossi Shain, Peter Trubovitz and Colin Dueck, however, lack an important element of the diversifying approach I argue for in this paper. Even though the authors recognize that national interests are subject to change, they view ethnic and national interests as separate categories. Drawing upon the diversifying notion of culture outlined above, this view appears incoherent.

Relating to the US-American concept, I propose a concept of the American national interest that subsumes ethnic interests under the roof of the American national identity and hence the American national interest. Ethnic interests *are* national interests and their actions hence an integral part of the American foreign-policy making process. I attribute an *inclusive* character rather than a competing character to the relationship of ethnic interests and the national interest. The authors mentioned above act on the assumption that this relationship is a zero-sum game, but taking into account my diversifying notion of culture, the relationship rather appears to be a *non-zero* sum game. Hyphenated identities include an explicit reference to the general American national identity and can therefore not be viewed separately. Regarding the interests of hyphenated Americans as separate from the national interest, would mean considering them not to be American citizens. On the contrary, the fact that the United States – to a much larger degree than most other countries in the world – has emerged out of migration processes, makes the inclusion of interests of hyphenated citizens into the national interest even more cogent. *Many interests make one interest, the national interest.* Ethnic and national interests are not separate but rather inseparable and interdependent. It is dubious the national interest would be able to live up to its name if it did not represent all those that consider themselves to be nationals, even though they might bear a hyphenated identity. The concept of national interest put forward in this paper is consequently one of citizenry rather than ancestry.

#### **4. Ethnic interest groups in the US**

The fact that a definition of the relationship of national and ethnic interests has been generated does not necessarily mean this definition is applied in the context this paper focuses on, the US-American case. My point was to rather prove the legitimacy of the involvement of ethnic interest groups in the process of foreign policy making than to describe the current state of affairs. In fact, scrutinizing the relationship between ethnic interests and the national interest in the United States discloses a reality which does not correspond with the inclusive concept sketched above. In this chapter I will (a) briefly explore the power factor the relationship between ethnic and national interests depends on in the US and (b) study how ethnic interest groups actively contribute to shaping the US foreign policy.

##### **a) The power factor**

How are ethnic interests expressed in the US foreign policy making process? First one has to note that the US political system is characterized by a high permeability to interest group influence (cf. Hersman 2000; Tierney 1993). Homogenous and geographically concentrated constituent groups, such as many ethnic interest groups, also benefit from the preferential treatment by the electoral system.<sup>15</sup> Yet, even though the institutional context is favourable to all ethnic interest groups, they are not equally successful at all times. Some groups are more successful than others and even those lobbies labelled as very “powerful” by the public and academic debate, such as the Cuban-American and the Jewish-American lobby, have seen their clout exposed to fluctuation. Even though certain ethnic interest groups share major

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<sup>15</sup> This preferential treatment is exemplified by „gerrymandering“, the re-drawing of border lines between electoral district as a response to changing demographics and aiming at creating a constituency that is as homogenous as possible – a strategy which allows for easier campaigning

structural traits in terms of size, socio-economic background and organizational strength, their lobbying efforts produce distinctly different results.

Apparently, reaching the “power threshold”, the critical mass of resources (i.e. the factors identified in part 2b of this text), does not equal influence in foreign-policy making. In the US-American case, groups like the Greek-American community dispose of comfortable resources (e.g. a strong organization, the American Hellenic Institute), but one of their primary foreign-policy goals – reuniting the island of Cyprus – has never made it to the top of the US foreign policy agenda.

#### **b) Shaping the national interest**

Consequently, being provided with a favourable environment and the “power” to exert influence does not suffice to actually shape foreign policies. While the “power” factor is but a *precondition* for successful lobbying, the relationship between the ethnic interests pursued and the national interest is the *decisive* factor in determining success. Even though a certain degree of power is pivotal to lobbying success, in the US-American context, an ethnic group can only be successful *if* its interests coincide with the existing prevalent national interest. The more the interests coincide, the more successful the group is. A group unable to bring its interests in line with the national interest,<sup>16</sup> cannot be successful.

This observation contradicts the inclusive concept of the national-ethnic-interest relationship outlined earlier in this paper: In the United States, for most of the time since the late 1940s there was a prevalent “core” national interest, based on strong security interests, that did not allow for an inclusion of ethnic interests unless those were in line with that prevalent interest. From the late 1940s until the break-up of the Soviet Union and the democratic transformation

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<sup>16</sup> The missing ability to converge interests may be based on the nature of the pursued interests, on the failure to construct interests in accordance with the national interest or on both.

of Central and Eastern Europe, US foreign policy was determined by the Cold War and the resulting strategy of containment.<sup>17</sup>

With the end of the Cold War, that organizing principle of US foreign policy disappeared. What followed was a decade of dis- and re-orientation, allowing many different interests to gain strength (see e.g. Clough 1994; Huntington 1997; Hersman 2000). In that period, it was no longer imperative to have interests coincide with the prevailing national interest, since that interest had lost its coherence and hence its unifying power. Many interest groups active in the field of foreign policy, notably ethnic interest groups, were able to benefit from this development. On the one hand, the lack of a strong security interest guiding foreign policy opened up room for a pluralization of voices and thus enabled previously unsuccessful interest groups to attain clout. On the other hand, the lack of a core national interest also provided ethnic interest groups which had been influential before with the opportunity to continue to promote agendas that were no longer ‘up to date’. They were able to use their already attained power in order to push through their agendas.<sup>18</sup> In that case, the question of *what* interests were pursued was no longer relevant<sup>19</sup>; reaching the power threshold was all that mattered for an ethnic interest group in order to succeed. That power threshold was even somewhat lower than in the period of a core national interest. The struggle for power had turned from a zero-sum game into a *positive*-sum game, allowing both for a pluralization of interests and a survival of ‘out of date’ interests.

With the terror attacks of September 11, 2001 that period of dis- and re-orientation came to an end. The emerging Global War on Terrorism provided a new foreign policy paradigm guided

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<sup>17</sup> Even though, in the post-Vietnam era, foreign policy debates became increasingly subject to ideological polarization, the Reagan and Bush administrations of the 1980s, the period in focus here, were still driven by the guiding principle of containment.

<sup>18</sup> One example illustrating this phenomenon is the puzzling continuation of US policy towards Cuba. Despite the strategy of containment having ceased to exist, US Cuba policy was not affected by the ending of the Cold War. The interests driving that policy did no longer have to match the national interest.

<sup>19</sup> For analytical clarity, I am simplifying the situation by declaring the pursued interests as irrelevant. I suppose, however, that the pursued interests are not completely irrelevant.

by strong security interests. The relationship between ethnic interests and the national interest that emerged is similar to that of the Cold-War period.

## **Conclusion**

The observations made with regard to the relationship between national and ethnic interests in the US-American case demonstrate that the inclusive concept outlined in this paper does not reflect reality there. Viewed from a perspective of civic nationalism, a national interest ought to embrace the interests of all people identifying themselves and identified by others as nationals. At first glance, the US-American identity founded in the motto “E pluribus unum” seems to embrace this perspective. However, as the short outline of the evolution of the relationship between ethnic interests and the American interest since 1945 has shown, this citizen-based concept of what the national interest should be is not applied. Instead of functioning as interdependent and inseparable entities, the US national interest and those interests expressed by ethnic groups were rather competing with each other. For most of the time since World War II, a national interest prevailed which only allowed those ethnic interest groups to be influential whose interests coincided with that core interest. Only during the 1990s, the period between the end of the Cold War and the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, when an overarching core interest was lacking, ethnic interests were able to act as national interests. Yet, due to the sometimes competing or contradictory nature of the interests put forward, not all ethnic interests found their way into foreign policy-making but a struggle of power decided the competition.

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