

Political parties and party system in the Czech Republic after 1989

Vít **Hloušek** (hlousek@fss.muni.cz)

Jakub **Šedo** (sedo@fss.muni.cz)

The paper has been elaborated in the framework of the Ministry of education, youth and physical education research project „Political Parties and the Interest Representation in the Contemporary European Democracies“ (the code No. MSM0021622407).

Political parties and party system in the Czech Republic after 1989

Vít Hloušek, Jakub Šedo

1) Czech political and governmental system¹

The transition of the Czech Republic to democracy began in November 1989 with the fall of the Communist regime. The Czech Republic was established as an independent state as of 1 January 1993 following the disintegration of the Czech and Slovak Federated Republic. The democratization of the Czech Republic has always been regarded as more or less problem-free, and at present is classified as a consolidated democracy.

According to the Constitution adopted in 1992, the political system of the Czech Republic is a parliamentary democracy. Direct legitimacy is enjoyed by the bi-cameral Parliament of the Czech Republic, which consists of the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate. The Chamber of Deputies has 200 members; the Senate 81. The key position among the various bodies of government is that of Parliament. The model is an asymmetric bicameralism, as the powers of the Chamber of Deputies are decisive compared to those of the Senate. This concerns not only the legislative process, but also as a check on the executive branch (the government).

The Parliament elects a President at a joint meeting of the two houses. The President has the power to name and recall the Prime Minister and individual ministers, and also wields a limited veto power over laws passed by Parliament; even so, his formal position is relatively weak. His veto may be overridden by an absolute majority of the Chamber of Deputies, and the government is dependent on the confidence of the Chamber of Deputies. Executive power is wielded by the government. Changes in relationships between institutions under the Constitution were carried out only slowly; some institutions stipulated by the Constitution that did not exist at the time of its adoption took some time to be established (the Senate in 1996, regional self-government in 2000).

Political parties enjoy a very strong position in the Czech political system. Their forms and activities are defined by the Constitution and by specific laws. The Czech political system is classified under Sartori's typology as a **party-controlled parliamentarianism**, in which the control of the executive is vested in Parliament; the political system is founded on

¹ For basic description of the Czech political system and legal regulations of the political parties cf. e. g. Stojarová et al. 2007; Vodička 2005.

competition between internally disciplined and stable political parties.² No ethnic or regionally-oriented groups are denied access to political competition. Limitations can be applied only for reasons of the concrete behavior of the party (anti-democratic policy, breach of code of conduct, hate speech, incitement).

Elections are regarded by international observers as free and fair; the majority of the public shares this conclusion. Marginal parties are critical that the media do not display enough interest in them (which diminishes their chances of winning elections). Their complaints are not found to be relevant by the electoral and court bodies; no party is *a priori* ignored by the media. No party is prevented from running an election campaign in accordance with the law; none is excluded from their share of free broadcast time in the public media. The national media, both public and private, declare their independence from political parties, although their position on individual parties is not perfectly neutral. In the case of the public media, speculation over possible influence by the parties appears from time to time.

2) Party system, society, and cleavages in the Czech case³

In the case of the Czech party system, there was not a great deal of continuity between the situation after 1989 and the situation that existed before 1938/1948. Elements of continuity such as the political parties (KDU)-ČSL or KSCĚ/M are the exceptions that prove the rule; some of the parties remained but the party system was much different. **The crystallization of the core democratic parties took place only after 1989.** The first “test of strength” between political parties in proper elections took place in June of 1990. Until that time there no reliable criteria existed for judging the political relevance of individual formations. Moreover, except for the obvious **cleavage of transformation, that is, the cleavage over the form of the regime, which is the issue that separated the Communist Party and its opponents (esp. the Civic Forum – OF)**, there were no clear factors in the party system that would suggest a potential axis of polarization or cleavages in the newly-emerging system.

The embryonic form of the Czech party system was shaped by the contest between the OF and the KSCĚ. However, at that time both these entities were undergoing internal

² Article 5 of the Constitution of the Czech Republic states that “*the political system is founded on the free and voluntary founding of and competition between political parties respecting basic democratic principles and rejecting violence as a means of promoting its interests.*”

³ For basic description and analysis of the Czech party System cf. e. g. Dančák, Hloušek 2007; Deegan-Krause 2006; Fiala, Mareš, Pšeja 1999; Kopecký 2006.

developments that prevented the formation of any kind of stable model for the functioning of Czech party competition. This allowed the Civic Forum to dominate the political scene on the federal and Czech levels until the first free elections in 1990. The elections themselves were perceived to a certain extent as a **plebiscite on the former Communist regime**. The **decisive and surprisingly large margin of victory for the OF (over 50 % of the vote) was a clear signal that the era dominated by the conflict between the Communist Party and the OF was over**.

However, the elections of 1990 confirmed at least partially the existence of other cleavages: a **church-state** cleavage, a **nationalistic** cleavage, and others. The **Christian and Democratic Union – Czechoslovak People’s Party (KDU/ČSL)** positioned itself along the church-state cleavage, for example. The most important actor on the nationalistic cleavage was the regionally-oriented **Movement for Autonomous Democracy – Association for Moravian and Silesia (HSD-SMS)**, which attempted to embody the Moravian protest vote on the periphery. However, ethnically and regionally motivated Moravianism never had majority support among the inhabitants of Moravia, a soon faded as a relevant political theme. Since the elections in 1996 there has been no relevant party of this type (Strmiska 2000a; cf. Strmiska 2000b).

For the basic shaping of the structure of relevant cleavages, the period 1991-1992 was key ((cf. Fiala, Mareš, Pšeja 2001). During this time there was an evident strengthening of the importance of the cleavage of **socioeconomic transformation**. It was accompanied by the gradual consolidation of the most important actors on the Czech right and left. The importance of other cleavages gradually dropped off. By the elections of 1992 the socioeconomic cleavage defined both the right (ODA, ODS, KDS, KDU-ČSL) and the left (OH, HSD-SMS, LSU, ČSSD, KSČM). Only the populist and radical nationalist SPR-RSČ was relatively illegible in this regard. This division was strengthened by the existence of the right-wing coalition ODS, ODA, and KDU-ČSL in 1992-1996, and thus the existence of the left and center-left opposition as well.

Given the cultural and ethnic homogeneity of the Czech population, there was no other relevant cleavage at that stage. The consolidation of the socio-economic transformation cleavage as the fundamental dividing line of the Czech party scene worked to advance the process of integration of parties (electoral options) on the right (symbolically expressed in the merger of the ODS and KDS), and perhaps even more so on the left. Here, the KSČM was ostracized by informal but consistent agreement between the other parties; while the pro-

system ČSSD gained hegemony over the area on the political left, as reflected in the elections to the Chamber of Deputies in 1996.

The 1996 elections confirmed the trend towards simplification and greater transparency in the system of relevant political parties. The number of actors represented in the Chamber of Deputies shrunk to six. **The election campaign was clearly dominated by economic issues and competition according to the right-left scheme.** The ODS stressed the successes of transformation, which it (evidently prematurely) described as basically completed, while the ČSSD accented the principles of a social market economy, decentralization, and sustainable development. The elections were decided between these two formations. The elections resulted in something of a stalemate, as the parties of the former coalition won only 99 mandates, and the parties lacking in coalition potential (KSCM, SPR-RSČ) a total of 40 seats.

In the years 1996-1998 **the importance of the socio-economic transformation cleavage continued to strengthen.** All of the relevant political parties fully and clearly defined themselves along the right-left axis which this line of cleavage copied. The socioeconomic cleavage was decisive not only for party competition, but also began to be seen by the electorate as an important factor in party identification and preference. The right-left axis solidified as the most important aspect, and at the same time reflected the dominance of the socioeconomic transformation cleavage. It also became the most important orientation point in the process of shaping the electorate's scale of values and electoral identification. The period 1992-1996 also saw a certain shift to the left by the Czech electorate in terms of value orientation (Matějů, Vlachová 1998; Vlachová 2001).

Research on electoral preferences and attitudes at the time showed a new dimension beginning to emerge along this line, which we could label an **“axiological” counter-cleavage based on values, between advocates of liberal values on one hand, or somewhat more authoritarian political-cultural and social attitudes on the other.** While in the previous stages this cleavage was of less importance, since the end of the 1990s its importance has been growing. At the same time the orientation of voters along this cleavage has more or less corresponded with the right-left dimension (Hloušek, Kopeček 2005).

These processes were also undoubtedly fostered by the basic stabilization of the programs of the relevant Czech parties. After 1998 none of the relevant Czech political parties were fundamentally dependant on the kind of charismatic leadership figure that had been indispensable at the parties' founding (Václav Klaus for the ODS, Miloš Zeman for the ČSSD). All of the parties now possessed a relatively detailed program that allowed for clear

ideological distinctions to be drawn. Not that all of the parties were internally unified. Within the ODA especially there was a conflict between advocates of relatively liberal and conservative political and social values. In 1997-1998 it was possible to observe a split of opinion within the KDU-ČSL brought on by different degrees of willingness to accept economically liberal policies.

The complex situation of stalemate after the early parliamentary elections in 1998 was resolved with an agreement between the ČSSD and ODS (*Agreement for the Creation of a Stable Political Environment in the Czech Republic*) – the so-called “Opposition Agreement”. It set out rules for the relationship between the two political parties, and allowed the creation of a minority government by the ČSSD. However, the proposals that the parties agreed on for the introduction of new mechanisms in the Czech political system (like changes in electoral law), for the most part went unrealized.

However, the “Opposition Agreement” had a fundamental effect on the shape of party competition in 1998-2002. The smaller parties; that is, the Freedom Union (US) created by splitting off from the ODS in 1997/1998; as well as the KDU-ČSL and the parties ODA, and Democratic Union (with no seats in Parliament), formed the so-called Quad-Coalition for the senatorial elections in 1998.⁴ Its main *raison d'être* lay in its criticism of the constellation created by the opposition agreement, which was portrayed as a cynical cartel agreement intended to limit the democratic institutions of the Czech Republic (especially in regard to the proposed changes to the Constitution and electoral law designed to strengthen the system's majority elements).

The situation before Parliamentary elections was characteristic in a number of ways. During the 1998-2002 period the ODS experienced something of a regeneration, overcoming its problems with murky financing, and personnel problems related to the splitting-off of what would become the US. It also helped to stabilize the party when its long-time chairman Václav Klaus was elected President of the Republic in 2003.

The ČSSD's strong position remained stable even after the charismatic Miloš Zeman was replaced in April by the less-controversial figure of Vladimír Špidla. Under Špidla's

⁴ On 1 September 1998 a coalition agreement was signed between the KDU-ČSL, US, ODA, and DEU on the formation of a joint ballot for senatorial elections in the fall of 1998. In this phase, chairmen of the smaller parties Ratibor Majzlík (DEU) and Daniel Kroupa (ODA) did not hide the idea that this was to be a stepping-stone to the gradual merger of these political actors. Later the DEU did in fact merge with the US. Nor was this the final shape of developments in the Quad-Coalition. Early in 2002 tension arose among the coalition partners over the ODA's debt of 45 million CZK left over from 1992. Despite previous agreement on payment of the ODA debt, in late January and early February 2002 the Quad-Coalition disintegrated. On 1 February 2002 chairman Karel Kühnl resigned from his post as leader of the virtually no longer existing Quad-Coalition. The KDU-ČSL and the US-DEU formed a common ballot for the elections to the Chamber of Deputies in 2002.

leadership the party distanced itself from Zeman's cutting rhetorical style; it also sought to modify its image as a modern social democratic party of the West European type. At the same time it strengthened its rhetoric and program focus on the traditional social democratic agenda (social policies and related issues) and, in the context of integrating the CR into the EU the party, gradually began to present itself as a formation strongly supporting that process (cf. Kopeček, Šedo 2003).

The Coalition consisting of the US-DEU and KDU-ČSL was in a more difficult position. In light of the problems of the ODA and the former Quad-Coalition, the Coalition's appeals for a new political style appeared less than fully credible. The strongly positive attitude shared by both the coalition parties towards EU integration was not a strong enough motivation for voters (cf. Kopeček, Šedo 2003). The coalition sank in the polls.⁵ The position of the KSČM improved considerably, however. In a situation where the left-wing ČSSD had been in power for four years, it was logical that dissatisfied voters on the left would turn to the KSČM.

Nonetheless, the winner of the 2002 elections was the ČSSD; the ODS finished second. Also winning seats in Parliament were the KSČM and the Coalition consisting of the US-DEU and KDU-ČSL. The elections confirmed the long-term decline in the number of relevant parties. No other group made it past the 5 % threshold; not only that, only two slates of candidates (the Association of Independent Candidates and the Green Party) got more than 2 %. No other formation finished above 1 %. A government coalition was finally formed, headed by Vladimír Špidla, consisting of the ČSSD and the two parties of the Coalition. The government had a very fragile majority of 101 votes in the Chamber of Deputies (Plečtitá-Vlachová, Stegmaier 2003).

Events after the 2002 elections brought a new dynamic in many ways to the Czech party system, indicating potentially identifiable trends, the full evaluation of which will have to wait at least until the next Parliamentary elections. In September 2002 a new party, the **European Democrats (ED)**, was founded by former Prague mayor Jan Kasl, previously of the ODS. Kasl's declared goal was to open a new, credible alternative to the ODS on the right. The party established itself relatively successfully in November elections to Prague's city council, and gradually began building a nationwide structure. The party did well in elections to the European Parliament in 2004, in which it presented itself as a strongly pro-

⁵ In the summer of 2001 some surveys showed the Quad-Coalition enjoying the support of some 30 % of voters, but its actual electoral result in June 2002 was 14.28 %.

European formation. For the “Euro-elections” it ran on a ballot together with the Association of Independents, and the slate won 11 % of the vote.⁶

Participation in the government with the Social Democrats after the 2002 elections touched off a long, drawn out internal crises within the US-DEU. Chairwoman Hana Marvanová resigned in protest against the policy compromises the party was forced to accept as part of the coalition. The crisis damaged the party in Senate and especially municipal elections in the fall of 2002. In January 2003 Petr Mareš was elected chairman with the task of stabilizing the party’s position. The US-DEU attempted to revitalize its program and present itself as a strongly liberal formation (with a set of program documents called *Agenda 21*), but in vain. The US-DEU, running in cooperation with the ODA, LiRA, and Cesta změny on the ballot of the Union of Liberal Democrats, failed in elections to the European Parliament (winning only 1.69 % of the vote). Afterward, Mareš was replaced at the head of the party by Pavel Němec (June 2004), but the party’s free-fall continued.

The results of the elections to the European Parliament were more positive for the Czech right. ODS won with 30 % of the vote, while the KDU-ČSL maintained its position (9.6 %); only the US-DEU plunged. The KSČM also placed well (20.3 %), placing second after the ODS. The ČSSD suffered debacle, winning just 8.8 % of the vote. Limited importance of European integration issues was however shown by the very low turnout, only 28.32 %.⁷

After its poor showing in the “Euro-elections”, the ČSSD experienced an internal crisis which resulted in the resignation of Vladimír Špidla as head of both government and party. The party leadership was taken up by Stanislav Gross, who became Premier on 26 July 2004. The existing coalition of the ČSSD, KDU-ČSL, and US-DEU was preserved. At the beginning Gross was relatively successful in halting the ČSSD’s slide in the polls. His pragmatic approach met with opposition from the left wing of the party, mainly represented by Zdeněk Škromach, who challenged Gross for the party chairmanship. After the regional conferences it was clear that majority support belonged to Gross. However, Gross’s position was undermined at the beginning of 2005 by the unclear source of money for his apartment,

⁶ Voter turnout was quite low, only 28.32 %. In January 2006 the SNK and ED merged to form the party **SNK European Democrats**. Heading this liberally-oriented party is Jana Hybášková. In the 2006 parliamentary elections the party won only 2.08 % of the vote.

⁷ The role of European issues in voter’s mobilization and party competition is generally limited. The attempts of Quad-Coalition to mobilize voters using strong pro-European voices have failed. In the same time, Euro-skepticism has only limited impact on decision-making processes of Czech voters. We can assess the level of Europeanization following way. Czech party system confirms Peter Mair’s (2000) idea of almost no impact of Europeanization to party system mechanics and format. However, political parties are Europeanized as far as inclusion of EU issues to programatics, strong ties to euro-parties and increasing role of EU professionals within the parties are concerned (cf. Hloušek, Pšejja 2007).

and his wife's business activities. The affair grew into a government crisis, with KDU-ČSL chairman Miroslav Kalousek demanding Gross's resignation while maintaining the existing coalition, and Gross calling for the resignations of the ministers from the KDU-ČSL. The crisis was resolved with the aggressive Jiří Paroubek taking over the job of Premier. He continued with the existing governing coalition, but in Parliament worked more and more with the KSČM. As yet the boycott of the KSČM has not been completely broken in terms of coalition-building on the national level.

The election campaign in 2006 diverged from the usual pattern. On one hand it was conducted professionally, with the successful application of elements of political marketing; on the other hand it signaled the bi-polarization of Czech public opinion. The campaign was in effect a duel between the two strongest parties, the ČSSD on the left and the ODS on the right. The results reflected this: both parties increased their share of the vote. Mandates in Parliament were also won by the KSČM and the KDU-ČSL, and the Green Party won seats for the first time as well, reflecting a growing demand by parts of the Czech electorate for post-material values. The elections produced a stalemate, however, with the left (ČSSD and KSČM) and the right (along with the Greens) each holding 100 seats.

Post-election negotiations on setting up a coalition government were started by chairman of the victorious ODS Mirek Topolánek, first with the Christian Democrats and Greens. The goal was to create a three-party coalition. But because of the effective tie in election results, it became necessary to start talks over support of the government with Jiří Paroubek's Social Democrats. The Communists, whose support Topolánek refused, were excluded from the negotiations. Any movement toward the creation of a functional government was from the beginning dependent on a forthcoming stance by the ČSSD. However, Social Democrat leader Paroubek rejected proposals for greater participation by the party in putting together a government led by Topolánek. During several months of talks no consensus was found between the democratic parties, and finally on 4 September the President appointed Mirek Topolánek to head a minority cabinet consisting of the ODS and some independents. According to the Constitution the government requires a vote of confidence by the Chamber of Deputies within 30 days of being named, but at the beginning of October the government lost the vote.

With upcoming municipal and Senate elections, the President postponed the appointment of a new premier until after the elections. The local elections and first round of Senate elections were held on 20 and 21 October; the second round of senatorial elections took place a week later. The result confirmed the ODS as the strongest party; and on

November 8 the President decided to again charge Mirek Topolánek with assembling a government.

Around the mid-1990s the array of relevant political parties became relatively stabilized: political parties' electoral results are similar, and, the profile of their "typical" voters and the territorial distribution of support for individual parties quite stable. Minor shifts in the positions and preferences of voters do occur, however. Certain groups of voters behave in various ways depending on the level of the election (for example, ČSSD backers who vote in elections to the Chamber of Deputies are less likely to vote in other elections, while KSČM voters are the most disciplined. This is one of the reasons the KSČM has been able to achieve the same or better results than the ČSSD in European and regional elections. The ODS relies on voters with higher-income and higher education living in the larger cities (getting more than half the vote in the Prague City Council elections of 2006). The ČSSD is supported by people with lower income from the medium-sized and smaller towns; the KSČM does well in the regions hardest hit by economic transformation: north Bohemia, north Moravia, and the border areas. Of the relevant parties at present, the KDU-ČSL has the least-homogeneous regional support, depending greatly on the proportion of inhabitants of the Catholic faith in the individual regions. It gets the most votes in south-eastern Moravia, gradually declining as you go west and north. In the republic's western regions the KDU-ČSL has problems maintaining even minimal representation on the regional councils. The Green Party has stronger support among young and urban voters: its electoral base includes classic environmental voters, as well as groups passed down to it by the smaller right-wing parties ODA and US-DEU.

3) Institutional conditions for the functioning of political parties

In the Czech Republic, the following are elected by direct ballot: (1.) the Chamber of Deputies of the Parliament of the Czech Republic (till 1993 the Czech National Council), (2.) the Senate of the Parliament of the Czech Republic (since 1996), (3.) regional councils (since 2000), (4.) the European Parliament (since 2004) and (4.) municipal councils (since 1990). Active voting rights are enjoyed by citizens 18 and over; passive voting rights vary according to elected organ: from 18 years (on the local and regional level), 21 for the Chamber of Deputies, and 40 years of age for the Senate. The Chamber of Deputies plays the decisive role in shaping the party system: it is the strongest elected body institutionally, and its continuity remains uninterrupted. For this reason, only parties with representation in the Chamber of

Deputies can really be considered relevant, even though the parties represented in the Senate are by strict definition “parliamentary” parties as well.

The Chamber of Deputies is elected according to the principle of list proportional representation for a term of four years. In the period 1992 to 1998 the legal thresholds for representation were of 5 % of the vote for individual parties, 7 % for two-party coalitions, 9 % for coalitions of three parties, and 11 % for coalitions of four or more parties. Mandates were awarded in two tiers; the first consisting of eight relatively large electoral districts, the second on a national level (Hagenbach-Bischoff formula). In the period 1998-2001 the ODS and ČSSD prepared a set of electoral reforms intended to increase the disproportionality of electoral outcomes (through a system of 35 electoral districts with a small number of mandates, using a modified d’Hondt electoral formula); this would have favored the larger parties. However, the reform was proclaimed unconstitutional by the Constitutional Court in 2001. Elections in 2002 and 2006 were held under a new electoral law that establishes 14 electoral districts (identical with the boundaries of the regions, in size ranging from 5 to 25 mandates) using the d’Hondt formula, and therefore with only one tier. At present the legal threshold is 5 % for one party, 10% for a two-party coalition, 15 % for three parties, and 20 % for four or more parties (Šedo 2006: 29-31).

Especially in the 1990s, the steep threshold had a strongly reductive effect on the number of parties represented in Parliament. This led to a correspondingly high proportion of unrepresented voters. However, in view of the relatively early consolidation and stabilization of the Czech party system (which was generally complete by the period after the elections in 1996), the influence of the electoral system on the result should not be overestimated.

Table 1: Results of elections to the Czech National Council (1990 and 1992) and the Chamber of Deputies of the Parliament of the Czech Republic (from 1996 inclusive) – percentage of votes gained

	1990	1992	1996	1998	2002	2006
OF	49.50	-	-	-	-	-
KSČM ^a	13.24	14.05	10.33	11.03	18.51	12.81
HSD-SMS	10.03	5.87	-	-	-	-
KDU-ČSL ^b	8.42	6.28	8.08	9.00	14.27 ^c	7.22
ODS	-	29.73 ^c	29.62	27.74	24.47	35.38
ČSSD	-	6.53	26.44	32.31	30.20	32.32
LSU	-	6.52	-	-	-	-
SPR-RČS	-	5.98	8.01	3.90	0.97 ^t	-
ODA	-	5.93	6.36	-	-	-
OH	-	4.59	2.05 ^d	-	-	-
US(-DEU)	-	-	-	8.60	14.27 ^c	0.30
SZ ^g	4.10		-	1.12	2.36	6.29
Others	14.71	14.52	9.11	6.30	9.22	5.68

- a) in 1990 the KSČ, in 1992 the Left Bloc
- b) in 1990 the KDU
- c) in coalition with the KDS
- d) SD-LSNS
- e) Coalition US-DEU and KDU-ČSL
- f) Miroslav Sládek's Republicans
- g) Green Party ran in 1992 within the LSU

OF – Civic Forum; KSČM – Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia; HSD-SMS – Movement for Autonomous Democracy – Society for Moravia and Silesia; KDU-ČSL – Christian and Democratic Union – Czechoslovak People's Party; ODS – Civic Democratic Party; ČSSD – Czech Social Democratic Party; LSU – Liberal-Social Union; SPR-RSČ – Movement for the Republic – Republican Party of Czechoslovakia; ODA – Civic Democratic Alliance; OH – Civic Movement; US(-DEU) – Union of Freedom – Democratic Union; SZ – Green Party; KDS – Christian Democratic Party; SD-LSNS – Free Democrats – Liberal National Social Party.
Source: Results of Elections (www.volby.cz).

The Senate is elected in a two round majoritarian system with run-off; for other bodies a list-proportional system is applied with a 5% legal threshold, usually with one electoral ward for the given elected body. Rule changes affected only the municipal councils, where a legal threshold did not apply until 2002, and instead of the d'Hondt formula the Sainte-Laguë formula was used. Electoral reform cut down significantly the number of parties, especially on the city councils of large cities (Belko 2004: 199-209).

The activities of political parties are guided by Law No. 424/1991 on association within political parties and political movements, last amended in 2006. Parties and movements are required to register with the Ministry of the Interior by having the name of the party or movement entered in the register of parties and movements⁸. Parties are kept entirely separate from the state. Only physical persons, citizens of the CR older than 18 years of age, may become members of political parties. They may be members of only one party or movement. Applications for registration of political parties and movements must be submitted by a preparatory committee of at least three members. The proposal must be accompanied by a petition signed by at least one thousand citizens requesting that the party or movement be founded. The name of the party and its abbreviation must be significantly different from the names of parties and movements active in the Czech Republic, so that they cannot be confused with one another.

⁸ The law states that “parties and movements may not be established or engage in activities if they violate the Constitution and laws, or if their goal is the destruction of the democratic foundations of the state, if their statutes are undemocratic, or their component bodies are undemocratically constituted; if they aim toward seizing and holding power by preventing other parties and movements from pursuing power by constitutional means, or endeavor to repress the equality of citizens before the law, or if their program or activities threaten morality, public order, or the rights and freedoms of citizens. In such cases the Highest Administrative Court will ban the activities of that party or movement.” A party's activities may be banned or the party dissolved for these reasons by court decision only.

Parties and movements may not engage in business in their own name, but they may found companies or cooperatives, the activities of which are limited to those specified by the law (for example, publishing). Parties may receive income from: (1.) the state budget of the Czech Republic, to be used for campaign expenses or the activities of the party or movement; (2.) membership dues; (3.) gifts and bequests; (4.) income from the rental of moveable or immovable property; (5.) interest on deposits; (6.) and income produced through the business activities of other legal entities founded by the party. Parties and movements are required to submit an annual financial report to the Chamber of Deputies by April 1 of each year. In practice, parties are financed mainly by state subsidy.

Subsidies for activities include a fixed annual subsidy and a bonus for mandates won. Parties and movements are entitled to the base subsidy if they receive at least 3 % of vote in elections to the Chamber of Deputies. The subsidy per mandate is awarded if at least one representative, senator, member of regional council or member of the city council in the capital city of Prague is elected from that party. The base subsidy is 6,000,000 CZK for those parties and movements that received 3 % of the votes in the last elections to the Chamber of Deputies. For each further 0.1 % and fraction of 0.1 % of votes, the party or movement receives 200,000 CZK per year. The subsidy does not increase further if a party or movement receives more than 5 % of the votes. The subsidy per mandate of deputy or senator is 900,000 CZK per year, and 250,000 CZK for members of regional councils or Prague city council. Parties that received 1.5 % or more of the vote to the Chamber of Deputies are entitled to compensation for election expenses (100 CZK for each vote cast in the party's favor). Parties receiving more than 1 % of the vote in elections to the European Parliament receive 30 CZK for each vote.

Table 2: State support for political parties

Elected body	Condition for financial support	amount
Chamber of Deputies	at least 1.5 % of votes	100 CZK/vote
Chamber of Deputies	at least 3 % of votes	6,000,000 CZK/year ¹
Chamber of Deputies	1 seat	900,000 CZK/year
Senate	1 seat	900,000 CZK/year
Regional (Prague City) Council	1 seat	250,000 CZK/year
European Parliament	at least 1 % of votes	30 CZK/vote
¹ + 200,000 CZK/year for each further 0.1 % of votes. Does not increase, if a party receives more than 5 % of votes.		

Overall the system gives the advantage to larger, established parties: besides the interest of sponsors, they also have the advantage of greater resources paid out to the parties on the basis of election results.

4) Political parties, their voters, political mobilization, and civil society

Political parties and politicians themselves enjoy very little popularity among the population. This is more or less the permanent state of affairs: political parties are trusted by some 15 % of those surveyed, and the profession of politician is one of the least respected. However, this fact has no influence on political life, if we disregard the steadily declining voter turnout. Attempts to form movements that would define themselves as an alternative to party politics (various groups of independents, etc.) have been unsuccessful in getting elected to the Chamber of Deputies. There have been initiatives calling for a change in political style or the resignation of groups of politicians (the 1999 initiative “Thank You, Now Go”, for example, led in part by some of the student leaders of November 1989).

In terms of size of membership base, Czech political parties resemble narrow professional teams with organizational characteristics approaching those of a cartel, and where mass membership is deemphasized. Two of the parties, the KDU-ČSL and the KSČM, are mass-party exceptions. Both enjoy continuity with the era before 1989, and are supported by a tradition of local organizational structures and a broad membership base, the average age of which is significantly higher compared to the other relevant parties. The KSČM has around 100,000 members at present; in the late 1990s the KDU-ČSL had some 60,000 members, and today around 45,000. The membership base of the ODS and ČSSD is less numerous, but quite stable, with a broad networks of local organizations. At present the ČSSD has approx. 16,500 members. The ODS has more members, roughly 26,000, corresponding with its overall better political position in local and community politics. The Green Party has around a thousand members.⁹

With the exception of the Greens, all of the relevant Czech political parties are relatively strongly consolidated from an internal standpoint. Until the beginning of Bursík’s chairmanship the Greens were wracked by organizational confusion, and plagued by disputes between environmental radicals (Patočka, Beránek) and the moderate wing, complicated by extreme autonomy at the lower levels. The party’s 2003 statutes bring it closer to the standard

⁹ Numbers of members are estimates, and are based on information supplied by the parties themselves.

organizational framework. Political parties do not directly influence the media market; they publish only periodicals for internal party purposes. All attempts at regional or national daily papers directly connected to political parties have failed. The only exception is the KSČM, which publishes the party daily *Haló noviny*.

The current statutes of the ODS were adopted in 2003. They dictate a four-layered structure for party organization – local, district, regional, and national. The party’s highest organ is the congress, which meets at least once every two years; below that is the Executive Board headed by the party chairman, which runs the party in between congresses. One of the ODS’s by-laws states that “no member of the ODS who does not fulfill the conditions of Law no. 451/1991 (the so-called “lustration law”) may serve in any function in the ODS at any individual level”.

The KDU-ČSL also has a four-level structure (local, district, regional, national). Working on a national level are the congress, national conference, national committee, the party presidium, referee committee, and review committee. The statutory organ of the party is the presidium, headed by the chairman. The congress meets once every two years.

The ČSSD also operates on a four-level organizational structure – local, district, regional, and national. On a national level the highest body is the congress; between congresses the Central Executive Committee and the party chairmanship run day-to-day affairs. On a national level there also exists the institution of extraordinary conference, which can be called by the Central Executive Committee to deal with urgent matters. Unlike the other parties, the ČSSD has quotas that guarantee at least 25 % participation of women and 10 % representation by members below 30 years of age in the executive committees on the regional and national level.

The statutes of the KSČM are very elaborate and detailed. The party has a four-level structure; local organizations are organized into districts, these into regional, and then national bodies. The party’s highest body is the congress; between congresses the party is run by its central committee, headed by its executive committee. The KSČM also allows for internal party referendums. Even so, actual decision-making takes place in a very centralized manner.

The Greens have a three-level organizational structure – local organizations, regional organizations, and the national level. In the cities the local organizations can form an intermediate level, called the city organization. The party’s key central institutions are the party congresses, held once every two years. In between time the responsible body is the republic council, consisting of the party presidium, members of parliament and senators, representatives to the EP, representatives of the regional conferences, and 30 members elected

by the congress. The political activities of the party are managed by the presidium, which is elected by the congress.

The ODS is the only party without affiliated organizations. The Greens have an affiliated organization the Young Greens, with which it cooperates on an informal level on behalf of various ecologically-oriented initiatives. The KDU-ČSL and the ČSSD also have their own youth organizations, the Christian Democratic Juniorklub, and the social democratic organization Young Social Democrats (though these organizations are formally independent). Also working with the ČSSD are the Social Democratic Women, Seniors' Club, and other organizations. The KSČM has a broad network of affiliated organizations. Besides the Communist Youth League there is also the Left Club of Women and other associations (economists, sociologists, anti-fascists, etc.). Also affiliated with the KSČM is the not-very-numerous Labor Association of Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia.

5) Fragmentation and stability

The effective number of parliamentary parties in the Czech Republic has declined steadily since 1992, reflecting both the number of parties running, and the strengthening of the two most powerful parties at the expense of the rest of the spectrum. Measured by these indicators, the concentration of parties was greatest for the first free elections, when there was a very low effective number of competitors due to the predominance of the OF. The effective number of electoral parties declined steadily; there was a minor reversal in the trend in 2002, when, when the number of votes for which parties receive state subsidies was lowered, a larger number of marginal parties took part as a result..

Table 3: Effective number of parties

Year	1990	1992	1996	1998	2002	2006
Parliamentary	2,22	4,80	4,15	3,71	3,67	3,10
Electoral	3,50	7,31	5,33	4,72	4,82	3,91

Coalitions are counted as one subject in terms of number of votes and number of mandates won.
Source: Results of Elections (www.volby.cz), own calculation.

The strongest parties in the 2006 elections have been the longest active. The ODS was founded in 1991 with the disintegration of the OF. The ČSSD hails to a tradition reaching back to the Social Democratic Party founded in 1874; it was forced to merge with the KSČ in 1948, but resumed its activities shortly after the fall of the communist regime. The two

strongest parties have held their positions as the strongest political actors since the elections of 1996 (Chytilék, Šedo 2007: 23-35).

The stability of parliamentary factions (measured in absolute numbers) is quite high; since the crisis in the ODS in late 1997/early 1998, when more than twenty members of parliament left the party, only a few individuals have switched parties. On the other hand, in view of the slim majorities held by governments, a number of changes in party club membership have been of major importance. This applies to the most recent such move, when two members of parliament left the ČSSD. Only with their support was the present government able to win a vote of confidence.

A minority ČSSD government held power for the entire 1998 – 2002 term. Its position was stable due to the so-called Opposition Agreement with the ODS. The coalition government of the ČSSD, KDU-ČSL, and US-DEU from 2002 – 2006 had the support of only 101 deputies; moreover, 2 members left the US-DEU parliamentary club over the course of the term. During certain phases of the term the government had the support of exactly one-half of the members of parliament; however, neither of these governments was actually a minority government. An attempt to assemble a minority government in the fall of 2006 failed; while the current coalition is balancing on the edge of being a minority or majority government. It is directly supported by exactly one-half of the parliament; in any confidence vote it must rely under certain circumstances on two “rebels” from the ČSSD, who now serve in the Chamber of Deputies as independents.

With the exception of the KSČM, all of the parties have relatively high coalition potential. The KSČM, as has been said, represents an anti-system party in many respects (cf. Strmiska 2002). Especially in 2005-2006, however, it has become clear that cooperation between the KSČM and the ČSSD on the level of the Chamber of Deputies is possible. Whether the KSČM will gain coalition potential in the future is an open question, however.

The party was founded as the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia in 1921 when the revolutionary Marxist wing split away from the Social Democrats. It came in from the political periphery as part of the National Front in 1945-1948, and from 1948 to 1989 it was the party-state of the Czechoslovak *real socialist* regime. The KSČM as it exists today dates from 21.12.1989, when the Czech part of the KSČ founded its own organization to correspond to the Communist Party of Slovakia. On 7.4.1992 the KSČ definitively ceased to

exist as a federal party consisting of the KSČM and the KSS. Despite several attempts at reform in the early 1990s it remains in the Central European context a relatively orthodox communist party resistant to any major reform. For this reason, since 1989 the party has remained in the opposition, and is subject to unofficial boycott by the other parties.

The lack of internal party reform is reflected in its program. The KSČM promotes the traditional communist ideal, but declares its allegiance to parliamentary democracy, and concedes that the communist system of the era of so-called *realsocialismus* is discredited. The goal of the party is to be “the building of a modern socialist society”, which the party defines as a society of “free citizens with equal rights, a society that is democratic, autonomous, politically and economically pluralistic, prosperous and socially just”. In its rhetoric the KSČM emphasizes social issues, and presents itself as the party that defends the interests of the socially disadvantaged strata of society. It calls for plurality in the forms of property ownership, with emphasis on a broad state sector. It often criticizes the allegedly enormous degree of criminality in the country, presenting itself as the party of “order”. It declares its support for an expanded role for direct democracy. In foreign policy it is against the Czech Republic’s membership in NATO, and takes a negative stance toward the European Union.

6) Institutionalization versus personalization

The Czech political parties are guided by the principle of internal party democracy. The most inflexible centralism is practiced by the KSČM, but the other parties are relatively centralistic as well. In the case of the KDU-ČSL a certain role is played by the existence of a Czech wing and a Moravian wing, of which the Moravian wing is the more conservative and traditionalist. Within the ODS, regional party elites enjoy a relatively strong role compared to party leaders, reflected in the very strong position of the ODS in regional politics (at present 12 of the 13 regional presidents are from the ODS; as is the mayor of Prague, who is in effect a regional president). In the Czech party system, charismatic political figures are more important in the context of electoral mobilization than in day-to-day affairs.

The position of the party leaders is weak, as reflected in the fact that since 2002 all of the parties represented in the Chamber of Deputies have replaced their chairmen, in several cases as a result of competitive internal-party election among several candidates. On none of these occasions did the conflict result in the splitting off of a new party to follow a charismatic candidate defeated in party competition. The phenomenon of personalization is more evident in political marketing (for example, prior to the 2006 elections there were

several television debates between the chairmen of the ODS and ČSSD, which were presented as a symbol of competition between the main election opponents).

References

Belko, Marián (2004): Vývoj volebního systému v českých zemích od roku 1848. In: Chytilík, Roman/Šedo, Jakub (eds.): Volební systémy. Brno: Mezinárodní politologický ústav, s. 158-209.

Beyme, Klaus von (1982): Parteien in Westlichen Demokratie. München: Piper Verlag.

Dančák, Břetislav/Hloušek, Vít (2007): "Czech Republic." In: KAS (Hrsg.): Parties and Democracy. Bonn: Bouvier, S. 195-217.

Deegan-Krause, Kevin (2006): Elected Affinities: Democracy and Party Competition in Slovakia and The Czech Republic. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press.

Fiala, Petr/Mareš, Miroslav/Pšeja, Pavel (2001): Formation of the System of Political Parties in the Czech Republic 1989-1992. In: Studia Polityczne, 1, S. 145-162.

Fiala, Petr/Mareš, Miroslav/Pšeja, Pavel (1999): „The development of political parties and the party system.“ In: Večerník, J./ Matějů, P. (Hrsg.): Ten years of rebuilding capitalism: Czech society after 1989. Praha: Academia, S. 273-294.

Hloušek, Vít/Kopeček, Lubomír (2005): Cleavages in Contemporary Czech and Slovak Politics: between Persistence and Change. Paper presented at 3rd ECPR General Conference, Budapest, 8-10 September 2005 (<http://www.essex.ac.uk/ecpr/events/generalconference/budapest/papers/30/10/Hlousek.pdf>),

Hloušek, Vít/Pšeja, Pavel (2007): Europeanization of Political Parties and Party System in the Czech Republic. Paper presented at 4th ECPR General Conference, Pisa, 6-8 September 2007. Draft (unpubl.).

Chytilík, Roman/Šedo, Jakub (2007): Party System Stability and Territorial Patterns of Electoral Competition in the Czech Republic. In: Hloušek, Vít/Chytilík, Roman (eds.): Parliamentary Elections and Party Landscape in the Visegrád Group Countries. Brno: CDK, s. 23-35.

Kopeček, Lubomír/Šedo, Jakub (2003): Czech and Slovak Political Parties and their Vision of European Integration. In: Středoevropské politické studie, V, 1, S. 1-10, www.cepsr.com.

Kopecký, Petr (2006): "The Rise of Power Monopoly: Political Parties in the Czech Republic." In: Jungerstam-Mulders, S. (Hrsg.): Post-Communist EU Member States. Parties and Party System, London: Ashgate, S. 125–145.

Mair, Peter (2000): The Limited Impact of Europe on National Party Systems. In: West European Politics, 23, 4, S. 27-51.

Matějů, Petr/Vlachová, Klára (1998): Values and electoral decisions in the Czech Republic. In: *Communist & Post-Communist Studies*, 31, 3, S. 249-269.

Plecitá-Vlachová, Klára/Stegmaier, Mary (2003): The Chamber of Deputies election, Czech Republic 2002. In: *Electoral Studies*, 22, 4, S. 772-778.

Stojarová, Věra/Šedo, Jakub/Kopeček, Lubomír/Chytilík, Roman (2007): *Political Parties in Central and Eastern Europe*. Stockholm, International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance.

Strmiska, Maxmilián (2000a): Rise and Fall of Moravian Regional Parties. In: *Středoevropské politické studie*, 2, 4, www.cepsr.com.

Strmiska, Maxmilián (2002): The Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia: A Post-Communist Socialist or a Neo-Communist Party? In: *German Policy Studies/Politikfeldanalyse*, II, S. 40-60.

Strmiska, Maxmilián (2000b) The Czech Multipartyism in the Late 1990s. In: *Středoevropské politické studie*, 2, 2, www.cepsr.com.

Strmiska, Maxmilián (2007): „The Czech Party System: A Few Observations on the Properties and Working Logic of the Czech Party Arrangement.“ In: Hloušek, Vít/Chytilík, Roman (Hrsg.): *Parliamentary Elections and Party Landscape in the Visegrád Group Countries*. Brno: CDK and ISPO, S. 107-115.

Šaradín, Pavel (2007): “Czech Republic: The Influence of the Strong Bi-polarization.” In: Šaradín, Pavel/Bradová, Eva (Hrsg.): *Visegrad Votes: Parliamentary Elections 2005-2006*. Olomouc: Palacky University, S. 13-37.

Šedo, Jakub (2006): *Volební systémy postkomunistických zemí*. Diss, Brno: Fakulta sociálních studií Masarykovy university.

Vlachová, Klára (2001): Party identification in the Czech Republic: inter-party hostility and party preference. In: *Communist & Post-Communist Studies*, 34, 4, S. 479-499.

Vodička, Karel (2005): *Das politische System Tschechiens*. Wiebaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.