

Comparison of communist parties in East Central Europe

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1. Introduction

The fall of communist regimes in East and Central Europe at the turn of the 80’s and 90’s did not mean that the communist element was eliminated from the politics of the post-communist countries. The communist parties remain in various forms parts of the political spectrum with different influence. Various ways of the development of communist parties will be demonstrated on the cases of East Central European post-communist states – the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland and Hungary and on former German Democratic Republic.

This paper focuses on “authentic” communist parties, not on the ex-communist parties which were “socialdemocratized/socialized” after the fall of communism. The communist parties are such parties which are inspired by traditional Marxism-Leninism or try to reform this ideology only simultaneously, keeping their own communist identity. From the point of view of party family research, the contemporary non reformed or only slightly reformed communist parties build a subgroup of the radical left party family. This paper does not include an analysis of Trotskyist organizations, because in all the countries researched here they are weak and usually not officially registered as political parties.

The research into communist parties is interesting not only from the point of view of party research or transformation research, but also from the point of view of research into extremism (a. o. because in post-communist countries there exists competition between left-

wing extremist and right-wing extremist parties about protest oriented voters). In the comparison it is important to respect a specific influence of common history of the Czech lands and Slovakia in Czechoslovakia and the influence of the unification process of Germany.

This text tries to analyze and to compare the roots and the basic identity of contemporary communist parties in Central European countries, the development of the position of the communist parties in the party system (mostly in relation to socialist/social democratic parties and to the right-wing extremist parties), and to estimate the current and future potential of these parties to influence politics of East and Central European countries.

2. The Czech Republic

Communism in the Czech lands has a long tradition¹. The Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (*Komunistická strana Československa - KSČ*) was founded in 1921. As an extremist and anti-system party it had a strong position in the democratic Czechoslovak Republic. In the Czechoslovak right-wing authoritarian regime 1938-1939 and in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia under the nazi-rule (1939-1945) the KSČ was prohibited, however, it realized underground resistance. The party existed also in exile.

After World War II, the KSČ won the election in 1946 (38,12%). In 1948 the totalitarian communist regime under the rule of the KSČ was established. The KSČ merged in 1948 with the Czechoslovak Social Democracy (ČSSD).

In the 1960's the reform movement in the party and in society was growing, however, it was ended through the invasion of five armies of the Warsaw Pact in 1968. As a result of the party cleanings after the invasion there were no significant reform forces in the KSČ at the end of 1980's². Czechoslovak communism at this time did not have specific national identity.

After the fall of the communist regime the existence of the KSČ continued. The Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (*Komunistická strana Čech a Moravy - KSČM*) was established in the 1990 as a regional organization of the KSČ. Registration of the party was realized in the same year. According to Czech law it is a new subject, however, in fact it is the organizational successor of the KSČ in the Czech Republic (the existence of the KSČ as a federation of the KSČM and Communist party of Slovakia, later the Party of Democratic Left was ended in 1992).

¹ See Jacques Rupnik, *Dějiny komunistické strany Československa. Od počátků do převzetí moci*, Praha 2002.

² Petr Fiala - Jan Holzer - Miroslav Mareš – Pavel Pšeja, *Komunismus v České republice*, Brno 1999, p. 85.

The KSCM has occupied a relatively strong position in the Czech party system since the first free parliamentary elections in the 1990. In this year (as a part of the KSČ) the party won the second place in the CR with 13,24%. In 1992, as a part of the coalition Left Bloc, it won 14,05%. In 1996 the electoral result of the KSCM was 10,33%, in 1998 11,03%, in 2002 18,51% and 12,81% in 2006 (as the third strongest party) . The party has never been a member of any governmental coalition.

The KSČM could be generally situated on the “reformist fringe” of group dogmatic communist parties in European context³. Within the party as well as its satellite organizations (a. o. the Communist union of Youth – *Komunistický svaz mládeže – KSM*) Marxist-Leninist dogmatics and neo-Marxist reformists stay in conflict. The basic programmatic aim of the KSČM “is socialism, a democratic society of free and equal citizens, a society which is politically and economically pluralist“⁴.

The KSCM has a strong fixation on the apology and positive evaluation of the former communist regime. According to Czech political scientist Stanislav Balík, “the declamations of top KSČM’s officials related to their new attitude towards communist history are falsehood”⁵. The KSCM has only the observer statute in the Party of European Left (PEL), because some Czech communist strongly criticize the reformism of the PEL.

The current position of the KSČM is strongly dependent on the development of the Czech Social Democratic Party (CSSD). This party is generally an “authentic” social democratic party. When the ČSSD was in the government, the protest potential of the KSCM and its popularity were growing. Current opposition role of the CSSD has weakened the KSCM. The coalition or other forms of governmental cooperation between the CSSD and KSČM are not excluded in the future, despite the fact that the social democrats declared in 1995 a non-acceptance of such cooperation⁶.

The KSCM has no significant competitor on the far left. The reformist split Party of Democratic Socialism (*Strana demokratického socialismu – SDS*) as well as the

³ See Miroslav Mareš, Reformists versus dogmatics. The analysis of the internal party conflict inside the KSČM. In: Lubomír Kopeček (eds.), Trajectories of the left, social democratic and (Ex-)communist Parties in contemporary Europe: between past and future, Brno 2005, pp. 130-139.

⁴ KSČM, Our Programm. Hope for the Czech Republic, 2004, <http://www.kscm.cz/index.asp?thema=3245&category=>

⁵ Stanislav Balík, Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia and its attitude towards own History. In: Lubomír Kopeček (eds.), Trajectories of the left, social democratic and (Ex-)communist Parties in contemporary Europe: between past and future, Brno 2005, pp. 140-149, p. 148..

⁶ Michel Perottino, Position and role of the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia. In: Ladislav Cabada (eds), Contemporary Questions of Central European Politics, Dobrá Voda u Pelhřimova 2002, pp. 176-197, p. 193.

dogmatic split Communist party of Czechoslovakia (*Komunistická strana Československa - KSC*) are marginal. The far right was not a strong element of the Czech politics in the 20th century. Since 1998 no extreme right party has had parliamentary representation. One of the reasons is the strong protest potential of the KSCM with its anti-EU and “patriotic” (often even nationalist) rhetoric.

The KSCM has currently only a limited chance to achieve its goals. However, the party has a strong influence on the Czech party system. The future governmental cooperation with the CSSD is possible. The real revolutionary potential of the communist movement is very limited (despite the militant rhetoric of some communist activists).

3. Slovakia

The development of communism in Slovakia was closely connected with the situation in the Czech lands. The KSC was in the first Czechoslovak Republic in pre-war period the only important multi-ethnic party. The Communist Party of Slovakia was founded in 1939 and in 1948 it became a land organization of the KSC in Slovakia. Reform efforts in the 1960' were in Slovakia connected with the demands of the federalization of Czechoslovakia and these demands came true in 1968. In the second half of the 1980's reformists in Slovakia were stronger than in the Czech Republic.

In the first elections in June 1990 the KSS (as a part of the KSC) won 13,3% of the votes and ranked fourth. The KSS was renamed to the Communist Party of Slovakia – Party of Democratic Left (*Komunistická strana Slovenska – Strana demokratickej ľavice – KSS-SDĽ*) in 1990 and definitively to the Party of Democratic Left (*Strana demokratickej ľavice – SDĽ*) in 1991. This party did not first have not a clear profile with democratic left identity, however, step by step it was “socialdemocratized” (although the authentic social democracy also existed in Slovakia in 1990' , but its position was not very strong).

The SDĽ was an important part of Slovak party system in 1990's, however, in 2002 it lost the parliamentary representation. In 2005 it fused with the party Smer – Social Democracy (*Smer – Sociálna demokracia – Smer - SD*), which was founded in 1999 by the former member of the KSS and later SDĽ Robert Fico⁷. Smer - SD won in the elections in 2006.

⁷ See Juraj Marušiak, Smer – From Pragmatism to Social Democracy? Seeking Identity. In: Lubomír Kopeček, (ed.): Trajectories of the Left. Social Democratic and (Ex)Communist Parties in Contemporary Europe: Between Past and Future, Brno 2005, pp. 165-177.

The current KSS has its roots in dogmatic Marxist Leninist split groups which were not satisfied with the socialdemocratization of the KSS/SDL at the beginning of the 1990's. The Communist Party of Slovakia 91' and the Union of Slovak Communists were founded in 1991. The common candidate list of these parties got in 1992 0,8% of votes. After the election 1992 both the parties fused into the Communist party of Slovakia. The KSS won 2,7% in 1994 and 2,8% in 1998 and stayed without parliamentary representation. In 2002 it won 6,32% of votes and 11 mandates, however, after internal conflicts (the party Daybreak – *Úsvit* split in 2005) the KSS got only 3,88% in 2006. Since this time the party is keeping an extra-parliamentary position again.

The KSS is a dogmatic Marxist-Leninist party which defines itself as a successor party of the KSČ/KSS. Its goal is the change of contemporary regime in Slovakia. The party has a very positive attitude to the Czechoslovak communist regime. It is observer in the Party of European Left. It criticizes reformism of the PEL. According to Czech political scientist Lubomír Kopeček the KSS is more orthodox than the Czech KSČM⁸.

The position of the KSS is relatively stable in the Slovak party system, however, in the sense of limited support between 2-6% of votes. This is problematic from the point of view of keeping parliamentary position. More successful in Slovakia are social-democratized parties (SDL, Smer – SD) in Slovakia. The radical left workers parties also are a competition for the KSS. The extreme right Slovak National Party (SNS) also has the protest potential (despite its governmental position). The extreme right generally has had a strong tradition in Slovakia.

The future position of the KSS depends on to the long-time perspectives of the Smer-SD and on to the economic development of Slovakia. The Slovak party system is relative unstable, however, the current chances of the KSS for the return to parliament are limited, however, not excluded. In specific constellations the KSS is a possible coalition partner for various – mostly leftist parties. The KSS is not able to achieve its revolutionary Marxist Leninist goals. A real strong revolutionary militant scene does not exist in Slovakia.

4. Poland

The Polish Communist Party (*Komunistyczna Partia Polski - KPP*) was founded in 1918. In the pre-war period it was not very influential and stayed under repression of the right-wing authoritarian regime. It was not legalized, however, in some elections it created specific

⁸ Lubomír Kopeček, *Politické strany na Slovensku 1989 až 2006*, Brno 2007, p. 254.

candidate lists under “non-communist” names. Their results were weak. In 1938 the KPP was dissolved by the decision of the Comintern.

After the establishing of the communist regime the Polish Workers Party (*Polska Partia Robotnicza – PPR*) (in fact successor of the Polish Communist Party, founded in 1942⁹) and the Polish Socialist Party (*Polska Partia Socjalistyczna*) merged and the Polish United Workers Party (*Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza - PZRP*) was created in 1948¹⁰. The PZRP got a relatively specific national character. Despite the strong conflict with the opposition in 1981, at the end of the 1980' the PZRP was able to start – under the pressure of Solidarity and partially in cooperation with opposition movement – democratic reforms.

After the failure in free elections the PZRP ended its existence in 1990. The members founded the new Social Democracy of the Polish Republic (*Socjaldemokracja Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej – SdRP*)¹¹. In 1991 the broad leftist coalition Democratic Left Alliance (*Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej – SLD*) was founded. The SdRP won the leading position. In 1999 the SLD was transferred into a political party. The social democratic SLD became one of the dominant parties of the Polish party system.

In 1990 a small group of communist dogmatics who were not satisfied with the transformation of the PZRP into SdRP, founded the Union of Polish communists – Proletariat (*Związek Komunistów Polskich "Proletariat" ZKP-P*)¹². It was a member of the SLD to 1996. After unsuccessful existence it was dissolved by court in 2002¹³. Several former members of the ZKP – P founded in 2002 the new Communist Party of Poland (KPP). This very dogmatic party is also very marginal. In the parliamentary elections its candidates were on the lists of radical socialist Polish Party of Work (*Polska Partia Pracy - PPP*)¹⁴, which got only 0,77% of votes in 2005. The KPP is involved in transnational communist networks. The other successor of the ZKP – P is the Polish Socialist Worker's Party (*Polska Socjalistyczna Partia Robotnicza – PSPR*)¹⁵.

⁹ Jiří Vykoukal - Bohuslav Litera - Miroslav Tejchman, *Východ. Vznik, vývoj a rozpad východního bloku 1944-1989*, Praha 2000, p. 159.

¹⁰ Bohdan, Szajkowski, Poland, In Szajkowski, Bohdan (ed.), *Political Parties of the World*, London 2005, pp. 479-485, p. 480.

¹¹ See Katarzyna, Sobolewska-Myślik, *Partie i systemy partyjne Europy Środkowej po 1989 roku*, Kraków 1999, p. 65-66.

¹² See Rozmowa z Andrzejem Namysłowskim, wiceprzewodniczącym okręgu warszawskiego Związku Komunistów Proletariat. *Dramat komunisty w kapitalistycznym świecie*, *Gazeta Wyborcza* 1998 – 04 – 03, <http://www.niniwa2.cba.pl/PROLET.HTM>.

¹³ Westyna, Gładkiewicz, *Związek Komunistów Polskich „Proletariat“*. In Paskiewicz, Krystyna A. (eds.): *Partie i koalicje polityczne III Rzeczypospolitej*, Wrocław, 2004, pp. 220-223, p. 223.

¹⁴ Holger, Politt, *Polens Linke vor den Wahlen*, 2005, <http://www.rosalux.de/cms/index.php?id=7109>

¹⁵ *Koniec Związku Komunistów Polskich – Proletariat*, *Gazeta.pl*, Katowice, 2002 – 04 - 21, <http://miasta.gazeta.pl/katowice/1,35063,800809.html>

The Polish communist subjects are small parts of the fragmented and weak far left spectrum in the country. The strong position of the SDL and the extreme right-wing parties with social populist program (Self-Defense and the League of Polish Families) are blocking the space for the KPP and PSPR. The militant activists are in Poland concentrated in various, not only communist structures.

The achieving of revolutionary aims for Polish communists is impossible now as well as in the middle-time perspective. The possibility for the future electoral growth of the communist parties in Poland is conceivable within the coalition of the whole far left in case that SLD will lose popularity on account of its governmental position and the right-wing populism will be not popular. However, it is only a not likely hypothesis.

5. Hungary

The Hungarian Communist Party (Magyar Kommunista Párt - MKP) was founded in 1918. For some months in 1919 there existed the Hungarian Soviet Republic under its rule (in cooperation with leftist social democrats). After its debacle the MKP was prohibited and it worked in opposition and in exile.

The legal existence of the MKP started again in 1944¹⁶. With Soviet support the MKP captured political power in Hungary. In 1948 the MKP merged with the Social Democratic Party (*Szociáldemokrata Párt* - SDP) into Hungarian Workers' Party (*Magyar Dolgozók Pártja* – MDP). The reform stream in the MKP dissolved this party in 1956 and the new Hungarian Socialist Workers Party (*Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt* - MSZMP) was founded¹⁷. Shortly after this step the Hungarian reform efforts were stopped due brutal Soviet military intervention.

The new leader of the party – Janos Kádár – was loyal to the Soviet Union, however, since the 1960's the MSZMP realized policy of economic reforms. A large part of society accepted the “Hungarian goulash communism”. The reformists within the party were even stronger in the second half of the 1980's and the democratization process in the country was realized. In 1989 the congress of MSZMP dissolved the party without legal successor. The new *Magyar Szocialista Párt* – MSZP) was founded at the same time. This party became a dominant part of the Hungarian party system and a member of transnational socialist structures.

¹⁶ Vykoukal, Litera, Tejchman 2000, p. 175.

¹⁷ Vít, Hloušek – Lubomír, Kopeček, *Konfliktní demokracie. Moderní masová politika ve střední Evropě*, p. 115.

The re-organization of the MSZMP into MSZP was rejected by a group of dogmatics who founded the new MSZMP in 1989¹⁸. This party adopted the new name Workers Party (*Munkáspárt – MP*) in 1993. In the 1990's the party held an extra-parliamentary, however, not fully marginal position. It got 3,68% of the votes in 1990, 3, 18% in 1994, 3,95% in 1998 and 2,16% in 2002¹⁹. In 2005 the small Workers' Party of Hungary 2006 split from the MP (*Magyarországi Munkáspárt 2006 – MM 2006*) and the MP was renamed to Hungarian Communist Workers' Party (*Magyar Kommunista Munkáspárt - MKMP*)²⁰. In the parliamentary elections in 2006 the MKMP got only 0,41% of votes.

The MKMP uses radical rhetoric – “We will fight against capital, bourgeois exploitation and bourgeois order. Not only by words, but by actions. We will fight everywhere where the capital derogates the interests of workers and employees. We will be among the strikers; we will support the demonstrators against the restricting arrangement of the government. We will strew leaflets if it's needed, we will collect signatures for referendum if it's needed. We will inspire the broken people if it's needed.”²¹ The MKPM is a Marxist Leninist dogmatic party. It is a member party of the Party of European Left.

In the 1990' s the MP never achieved parliamentary mandates in competition with socialist and this fact probably determined its decline since 2002. The potential of other far left groups is also limited and the perspective of “far left front” in Hungary is unlikely. The far right is in Hungary not the main enemy of communists in the fight about protest voters. It is interesting that the decline of the communists happened at the same time as the decline of the extreme right Justice and Life Party (MIÉP). The tendencies to bi-polarization in the Hungarian party system make the perspectives of the rise of the MKPM or other communist party in Hungary very problematic.

6. German Democratic Republic

The German Democratic Republic is a specific case in the comparison of East Central European post-communist states, because it existed as an independent state with democratic regime (or regime in process of democratic transition) only for several months. However,

¹⁸ Nigel, Swain, *Extremist Parties in Hungary*, Liverpool 1991, p. 6, http://www.liv.ac.uk/history/research/ceg_pdfs/Book7.pdf

¹⁹ Lukáš Benda, *Republika Maďarsko*, in: Petr Fiala - Jan Holzer - Maxmilián Strmiska a kol., *Politické strany ve střední a východní Evropě*, Brno 2002, pp. 223-248 , p. 228.

²⁰ Hungarian Communist Workers' Party , Wkipedia 2007, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Workers_Party_\(Hungary\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Workers_Party_(Hungary))

²¹ With New Party, with Unbroken Belief Against Capital! Resolution of the 22nd Congress of the Hungarian Communist Workers' Party, 2006, <http://www.munkaspart.hu/english/resolution.htm>.

some elements of the development of communist parties are similar to the situation in other post-communist countries. From this point of view the comparison is meaningful. The situation in the whole GDR-party system in 1990 was influenced by the expansion of West German parties to Eastern Germany. On the other hand, the contemporary party landscape in Eastern Germany is strongly influenced by communist past.

The history of German communism has its roots in the ideas and work of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in the 19th century. The Communist Party of Germany (*Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands - KPD*) was established in 1919. It was an extremist party in the political system of the Weimar Republic and it was suppressed during the Nazi-era.

After World War II the KPD merged with the Social Democratic Party of Germany (*Sozialistische Partei Deutschlands - SPD*) into the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (*Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands - SED*). The independent KPD existed further only in Western occupation zones and later in the Federal Republic of Germany, where it was in 1956 prohibited by constitutional court. Several splits and new communist parties in Western Germany were established.

The SED was a rigid dominant party of the communist regime of the GDR in 1949-1990. After the fall of Berlin wall it was renamed to the Party of Democratic Socialism (*Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus – PDS*). It received 16,32% in the election to Peoples Chamber of the GDR in March 1990. The West German Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) was not interested in “socialdemocratization” of the former SED and it created its own structures in Eastern Germany. In January 1990 several former SED-members founded the Communist Party of Germany (*Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands – KPD*) because they were unsatisfied with the change of orientation of the PDS. The KPD received in the elections in 1990 to Peoples Chamber only 0,1%. The KPD had contacts with “Communist Platform” in the PDS²². In 1994 the KPD was a founding member of the New Communist International in 1994 (organization of dogmatic Marxist-Leninist parties)²³.

After the unification of Germany in October 1990 the PDS occupied an important role in the German party system as a far left democratic socialist party with the dominant electoral basis in Eastern Germany. Within the party there existed also a communist platform. The PDS was represented in the German parliament as well as in the regional parliaments in Eastern Germany, in some federal states it was also a member of governmental coalitions.

²² Heinrich Oberreuter – Uwe Kranenpohl – Günter Olzog – Hans J. Liese, Die politischen Parteien in Deutschland, München 2000, p. 224.

²³ *Verfassungsschutzbericht 2005*, Bonn: Bundesministerium des Innern, p. 86.

In the party system of Germany the PDS could be characterized as a small parliamentary party without coalition potential, in the party landscape of Eastern Germany it was one of the three main parties with the coalition potential (for social democrats). In 2005 the party was renamed to the Left Party. PDS (*Linkspartei.PDS*). In 2007 it merged with the Party Labor and Social Justice – Electoral Alternative (*Partei Arbeit and Soziale Gerechtigkeit – Wahlalternative – WASG*; leftist split party from the SPD) into the party The Left (*Die Linke*). This new party is a successor in membership of the PDS in the Party of European Left.

There exist also other communist parties and other subjects (so called “K-Gruppen”) in Germany. The cooperation of the KPD with PDS and WASG led in 2005 to the split of the Communist Party of Germany – Bolsheviks (*Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands – Bolshewiki*). From West Germany two dogmatic communist parties expanded to the new Bundesländer. They were the German Communist Party (*Deutsche Kommunistische Partei – DKP*), founded in 1969 (the DKP has an observer statute in the PEL), and Stalinist-Maoist oriented Marxist-Leninist Party of Germany (*Marxistisch-Leninistische Partei Deutschlands – MLPD*), founded in 1982.

The electoral results of these dogmatic parties in the Eastern as well as in Western Germany are marginal. The far left PDS as well as the SPD are blocking the potential for “authentic” communist parties. In Eastern Germany the far right uses the protest potential in some regional elections.

The future possibility for limited influence of communist parties is the cooperation with the party The Left (mostly for the DKP and KPD, which are open to such cooperation). However, it is questionable if the party The Left is interested in long-time collaboration with dogmatic communists. There exists militant communist underground in Germany, however, it is not able to initiate Leninist revolution. The connections between registered parties and militants are relatively limited. It is impossible to achieve revolutionary aims of communist parties in contemporary Germany.

7. Conclusion

Communist parties in all the countries researched had a long tradition with roots in post WW I period. In the interwar period the communist parties in Czechoslovakia and in Germany in the 1920's were relatively influential extremist parts of the pluralist democratic spectrum. In Hungary, Poland and mostly after 1933 in Germany and after 1938 in Czech lands and

Slovakia they stayed under repression of right-wing dictatorship regimes. During World War II communists in all countries fought against Nazism and domestic collaboration.

After WW II the communist parties entered into pluralistic spectrum, however, only in Czechoslovakia the KSČ (mostly in Czech lands) achieved dominant electoral results. The regime change to communism was realized in all countries with Soviet help. In all the countries communist and socialist/social democrats merged and in Hungary, Poland and East Germany this step was connected with the rename of the party. During the era of communism the word “communist” in the name of party was included only in the Czechoslovakia.

Reform movements were significant within the regime communist parties in Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia, however, the reform communists were at the end of 80's influential mostly in Hungary and Poland. In both these countries the communist regime had a specific national character. Czechoslovakia and the GDR were more adopted to the “Soviet model”.

According to Czech political scientist Lubomír Kopeček, there are two important factors for the development of ex-communist parties after 1989: “First, the readiness of a part of party elite in the otherwise monopolistic communist party to carry out a radical transformation of the party identity in the late 1980s’. Second, the acceptance of the identity transformation, or “socialdemocratization”, on the part of some party members after the collapse of communism”²⁴.

After the fall of communist regimes the former state parties were dissolved in Hungary and Poland and social democratic/socialist parties were founded as the main successor parties. In Hungary this step was realized before the collapse of regime²⁵. Dogmatic communists created small communist parties. In Eastern Germany the SED was renamed to the PDS and this party kept far left, however, not only communist identity (despite the fact that there existed communist factions within the party and the party cooperated with some dogmatic communist parties). The marginal dogmatic communist party spectrum is fragmented and only the KPD is of Eastern German origin.

The KSČ was not renamed. The party was in 1990 transformed into a federation of two – officially new registered parties (in 1992 was this federation was dissolved because of ideological differences between the KSČM and the SDL), however, in fact both the parties are organizational successors of the KSČ. In the Czech lands the KSČM has held its communist

²⁴ Lubomír, Kopeček, Comparison of left parties in Central Europe. Some causes of different successfulness. In Lubomír Kopeček (eds.), Trajectories of the left, social democratic and (Ex-)communist Parties in contemporary Europe: between past and future, Brno 2005, pp. 109-117, p. 110.

²⁵ See Lubomír, Kopeček, Transformace středoevropských komunistických stran – polský a maďarský příklad. Středoevropské politické studie, Vol. III, Nr. 2, <http://www.cepsr.com/tisk.php?ID=89>

identity, in Slovakia the KSS was renamed to the SDL and it changed from a non clearly profiled left party to a socialist/social democratic party. The dogmatic communists created a new communist party named the KSS. In the Czech lands in the 1990's small democratic socialist as well as ultra-orthodox splits were formed.

Despite the fact that during the time of communism the regime state parties had the word "communist" in their names only in Czechoslovakia, currently most influential dogmatic parties have this word in their names in all countries. International position of these parties is characterized mainly by relation with the PEL. The KSČM, the KSS, the DKP have observer statute, the MKPM is a full member (full members from the Czech Republic is the SDS, from Germany The Left). All communist parties are involved in various weakly formalized dogmatic communist structures.

The KSČM is keeping an important position in the party system. The KSS won parliamentary representation in one period (at the time of crisis of the SDL), however, it lost it. In Hungary the MP was relevant in the extra-parliamentary spectrum, however, the current position of the MKPM is very weak. In Poland and Eastern Germany the independent participation of dogmatic communist parties in elections has always been a failure.

The explanation for the success of the KSČM is the strong tradition of the communist party in the country and the anti-system image of the party in the transformation years (the CSSD had limited protest potential). Similar factors can explain the rise of the KSS in Slovakia in 2002. In Eastern Germany the PDS was in a similar situation, despite the fact that this party is not "pure" communist. The success of the PDS has blocked the chance for dogmatic communists. In Hungary dogmatic communism does not have a strong tradition, neither does in Poland. The protest potential generate many other relevant actors of the party system.

The competition with far right parties about protest voters is probably significant for the communist parties in Poland, Eastern Germany and Slovakia (however, this thesis is very hypothetical and not empirically researched). A stronger militant communist milieu exists only in Germany, partially in the Czech Republic.

In all the countries the communist parties are not able to achieve their Marxist-Leninist goals, because their position in the party spectrum does not give a chance to win political power. The communist party politics in all countries is weakened by strong factionalism. In the future the chance for a stronger electoral result of communist parties could be the creation of broad "far left fronts". In the Czech Republic and maybe in Slovakia the communist parties could be leading parties of such fronts, in Hungary and Poland the communist parties could be probably small parts of such fronts with similar position to another left and far left subjects

and in East Germany the communist parties could be probably small parts in the shadow of the dominant party The Left.

The support and model for far left cooperation could be inspired by the PEL – its development and its capability to integrate the far left spectrum in European context is very important for the situation at national level in East Central European countries. The advantage for such fronts could be their profile as an alternative to strong social democratic and middle right-wing parties in the situation when the tendencies to bipolarization or to big coalitions are even stronger.

Annex: Comparison of selected characteristics of communist parties in East and Central Europe

	CZ	SK	PL	H	DDR
Founding of the first communist party (year, name)	1921, KSČ	1921, KSČ 1939, KSS	1918, KPP 1942, PPR	1918, MKP	1919, KPD
Interwar position	Strong in democratic pluralist system	Strong in democratic pluralist system	Weak in authoritarian system	Weak in authoritarian system	20's – strong in pluralist system 30's – weak in totalitarian system
Merge with social democrats/communists after WW II (year, name)	1948, KSČ	1948, KSČ, KSS	1948, PZRP	1948, MDP	1946, SED
Reform movement in the party during the communist era (top years)	1968, very weak in the late 80's	1968, weak in late 80's	Late 80's	Half of 1950's - 1956, late 80's	1989?
Organizational change of the party in the context of the fall of communism	Transformation into federation and registration of new communist subject at national level	Transformation into federation and registration of new democratic socialist subject at national level	Dissolving and founding the social democratic party	Dissolving and founding the socialist party	Rename and transformation to the far left party (with communist faction)

Main real organizational successor of state-party	KSCM	SDĽ (in 2005 merged with Smer)	SLD	MSZP	PDS, current Die Linke
Current main party actors of communist politics (name, founding year, circumstances of establishing)	KSĎM, 1990, first regional organization of the KSĎ, later new party; KSĎ, 1995, small ultra-orthodox split from KSĎM	KSS, 1991-1992, founded by dogmatics, which were unsatisfied with "social-democratization" of SDĽ; Ůsvit, 2005, small split from KSS	KPP, 2002, successor of the ZKPP-P (1990, founded by dogmatics, which were unsatisfied with "social-democratization" of SDRP, dissolved by court in 2002), PSPR, 2002, other successor of ZKPP- P	MKMP, 1989, founded by dogmatics, which were unsatisfied with "social-democratization" of MSZP; MM 2006 – small split from MKMP	Communist factions in The Left, 2007 (successor of the PDS). KPD, 1990, small split from SED-PDS) DKP (1969) and MLPD (1982), small West German parties extended to East Germany
Position of the main communist party within the left spectrum	Strong	Not very strong	Very weak	Weak	The Left relative strong (influence of communist factions limited). Communist parties very weak.
Best result (in %) of the communist party after the fall of communism in parliamentary elections at national level (result, year, party)	18,51%, 2002, KSĎM	13,3% 1990 (KSĎ/KSS) 6,32%, 2002 (KSS)	Not own electoral participation	3,95%, 1998, MP	0,1%, 1990 (only the GDR researched)
Result of main	12,81%, 2006	3,88%, 2006	Not own	0,41%, 2006,	0,1%, 1990

communist party in the last parliamentary elections at national level (result/year)	(KSČM)	(KSS)	independent electoral participation	(MKMP)	(only the GDR researched)
Current relation to the Party of European Left	Observer (KSCM) Member (SDS)	Observer (KSS)	-	Member (MKMP)	Die Linke (Member) DKP (Observer)