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Electoral support for the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia in parliamentary elections in the Czech Republic after 1990¹

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Abstract:

The purpose of this text is to find an answer to the question of where Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia enjoys the highest degree of support within the Czech Republic, and whether this support has or has not been stable over the last sixteen years. The basic data file is made up of election results since 1990 compiled by district. The distribution of electoral support will be correlated with selected socioeconomic statistics such as rate of unemployment, suicides, divorces, average wages, and religious faith. On this basis the text will analyze the interdependence of electoral behaviour.

Keywords: *election, electoral geography, Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia, the Czech Republic*

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1. Introduction

At the time of the rapid collapse of undemocratic regimes of Central and Eastern European countries around 1990, the main representative of "the old-time rules" was Communist party in its various forms. But this political force succeeded in re-establishing itself under the new conditions, and it integrated itself into the emerging political systems of individual countries. A concrete example is the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (CPBM), the principal heir of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (CPC), which was the strongest political party in the years 1948 - 1989. Although the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia has been exclusively an opposition party since 1989, it has consistently found sympathisers, and in comparison with its affiliated formations in the surrounding countries the CPBM can be considered a relatively successful political party at present.

There democratic elections to representative bodies of the various types have been held regularly since 1990, and the course of the electoral competition itself has become an object of interest on the part of social scientists who have been trying to give the general public an idea of what is going on in the electoral process with the help of various methods and techniques.

One of the many perspectives on electoral procedures has been electoral geography, a subject area which gives us an idea of the electoral behaviour and distribution of electoral support within a given geographical area. Among the first to focus on this phenomenon was André Siegfried in the first half of 20th century (Siegfried 1913). An area study focused on the Central and Eastern European post-communist countries was written by Tomasz Zarycki, who compares electoral behaviour in the former Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland and [Latvia] (Zarycki 1999). The first analyses of electoral behaviour in the Czech environment were studies by Petr Jehlička and Luděk Sýkora that showed the possibility of a continuation of the traditions in electoral behaviour interrupted in 1948, and described the electoral support of conventional political parties in domestic environment. The text concludes that the non-existence of real electoral competition for more than 40 years has not erased the traditional territorial patterns of electoral support for individual political parties. (Jehlička - Sýkora 1991).

Among later Czech works on the topic, Tomáš Kostecký examined the electoral behaviour within the Czech Republic in comparison with neighbouring Slovakia, and support for individual parties after the division of the federal state. His work showed three facts. Firstly, the historically-established electoral maps are too stable to be easily changed by the influence of a relatively short period of political and economic development. Secondly, in the Czech Republic some differences can be explained by economic factors. However, this it is not the case in Slovakia because of the more important ethnic, religious and historic features in the individual regions. Thirdly, in the Czech Republic the differences in electoral behaviour depending on the gradual penetration of political parties into the lower sphere tend to reduce regional differences, but in Slovakia it is the other way around (Kostecký 2001a).

Besides, electoral geography, the status of communist parties in Central Europe during the last 16 years has also become an integral part of political research. There are also works focusing on the potential for the transformation or eventual accommodation of the former main representatives of undemocratic regimes, such as that by authors Darius Stola, François Mayer, Michel Perottino and others (Stola - Mayer - Perottino 2000).

It is apparent from the given information that research connected with the Communist Party has become an integral part of the academic agenda, and explanation of electoral behaviour within specific geographical areas suggests itself as an appropriate way to continue along this path. .

2. Methodological background

As mentioned above, the following paper will identify areas of support for particular political parties, and whether regional support is stable or unstable. The basic data file is made up of election results to the lower house of the Parliament of the Czech Republic, the Chamber of Deputies. The electoral system in this case is based on proportional representation. There were a few modifications to electoral law during the monitored period of time. Voters behave more often according to their personal convictions in electoral competition because the rules of proportional representation have a less restrictive effect than the electoral principles of majority electoral systems (Birch et al 2002: 85-86).

Because of the limitations on the character and range of topic, attention will be limited to selected questions. Individual electoral maps will be compared, and the methods of *areas of electoral support* and the *Pearson correlation coefficient* will be used to examine the stability of electoral support. This area is identified on the basis of simple calculation. Election results for individual political parties are arranged according to percentage gain from the highest to the lowest. Then we find half of the total by subsequent addition in the set order. In this line we divide the examined units into halves, and get areas which comprise 50% of the electoral support out of the total number of votes in given elections. An area outlined in this way is called area of electoral support for a political party (Jehlička - Sýkora 1991).

The district level will be taken as the base level for research; it has been studied several times in research, but not for the whole time period 1990 – 2006. The basic data file consists of the by results of the elections to the Chamber of Deputies (ChD) since 1996, and elections to Czech National Council (CNC) in 1990 and 1992. At this stage it is necessary to say that the districts were reformed at the end of the researched period of time, but the changes are not yet shown in the aggregation of election results. One of the main changes is the administrative division of the Šumperk district, and the subsequent constitution of the Jeseník district, which has appeared in the statistics since 1996. This change will be solved by dividing the Šumperk district into a Jeseník district and a Šumperk district from 1990. To determine the mutual cohesion and stability of electoral support, the basic statistical method of the Pearson correlation coefficient will be used, as it is commonly used for this purpose in Czech surroundings.

In brief, the aim of this paper is to determine whether the Communist Party has found areas with permanent and stable electoral support over the last 16 years in regularly repeated elections.

3. The Communist Party and its position in the party system of the Czech Republic

In comparison with the other post-communist countries of Central and East Europe, we can affirm that the party system of the Czech regions has stabilized during the last 16 years and is relatively easy classifiable. Today it is possible to consider four

main basic political currents as established and stabilised players in the political party spectrum. There are two main political parties, i.e. the Civic Democratic Party with its liberal-conservative orientation, and the Czech Social Democratic Party which belongs to the broader group of social democratic political parties. The other two stabilised subjects are the Christian and Democratic Union – Czechoslovak People’s Party which presents itself as a centrist formation, and the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia as the main principal heir of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. In the period under consideration there are also other formations which broke through, but they did not maintain their position and gradually quit the party field. In the latest elections the Green Party succeeded in gaining the necessary number of votes to enter Parliament, but it is too early to speak of them as an established element in the party field (Kostelecký 2001b).

Table 1. Election results of main political parties in Czech regions in 1990 – 2006

	CNC 1990	CNC 1992	ChD 1996	ChD 1998	ChD 2002	ChD 2006
CSDP	4,11	6,53	26,44	32,31	30,20	32,32
CDU	8,42	6,28	8,08	9,0	14,27 ²	7, 22
CPBM	13,24	14,05	10,33	11,03	18,51	12,81
CDP	-	29,73	29,62	27,74	24,47	35,38
Turnout	96,79	85,08	76,41	74,03	58,0	64,47

Source: www.volby.cz

According to the information given, it could be possible to fit the party system of the Czech lands into Giovanni Sartori’s concept of moderate pluralism, a type of party scheme which results in practice in a system of coalition government, and is based on the existence of at least three - preferably five, possibly six relevant political parties (Sartori 1976).

In assessing the Czech party environment, there is a problem with applying the criterion of the general acceptability of individual political parties as parts of a government coalition, because the CPBM is ostracized by the other parties and its coalition potential is zero. Today it is a party which does not represent fundamental opposition to the system itself, but because of its ideology an agreement there is an agreement to exclude it. The CPBM regularly takes part in electoral competition and

² In 2002 stood The Christian and Democratic Union - Czechoslovak People’s Party together with smaller liberal party The Union of Freedom on the common ballot.

gains representation in the legislature, but it is still prevented from participating in the executive. (Kostelecký 2001b).

A close up look at election results makes it possible to identify its nation-wide support at in the range of 10-20%. The CPBM enjoyed its best post-1990 results in the 2002 elections. At that time it gained 18.51% of votes, which guaranteed it 41 seats out of a total of 200. This was its highest point during the last 16 years.

Table 2. Number of CPBM deputies in 1990 – 2002

CNC 1990	CNC 1992	ChD1996	ChD 1998	ChD 2002	ChD 2006
32 (200)	35 (200)	22 (200)	24 (200)	41 (200)	26 (200)

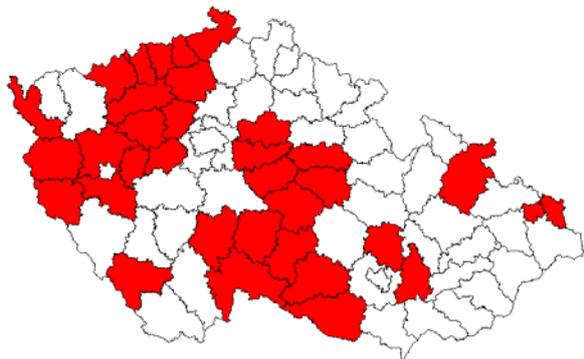
Source: www.volby.cz

Numbers of votes won in elections are certainly important, but more important are the numbers of individual seats the party gains in the election that help it advance its policy. CPBM and its group consisted of 32 and 35 members in the first two terms. This number dropped slightly to 22 and 24 members on the basis of election results in 1996 and 1998. In the 2002 election they reached their greatest highest numbers with 41 CPBM deputies seated in the Lower Chamber of Parliament. However, the upward trend did not carry over into the latest elections, and the number of CPBM legislators in the lower house dropped to 26.

4. Support in 1990 – 2006

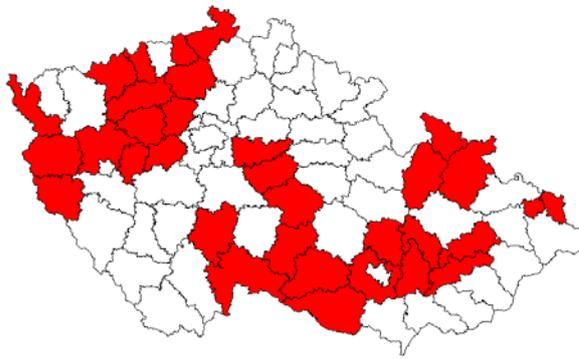
The first free and democratic election in the Czech environment took place in July 1990, and the Communist Party was the main representative of the old times. For all intents and purposes it was not so much an election as an vote for social democratisation. The main representative of the pro-reform forces was the heterogeneous Civic Forum, which consisted of a number of factions whose shared motivation was the move towards civil society. The Communists gained more than 13% of the votes, and the map below shows the regions where the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia of that time won the majority of its support in 34 districts, located more in Bohemia than in Moravia. The Communist Party of Czechoslovakia found its highest support in areas of Central and Western Bohemia, and in the following districts: Tachov, Domažlice, Louny, Beroun, Litoměřice, Rakovník.

Map 1. Areas of electoral support in 1990



Source: data of CZSO, own map

Map 2. Areas of electoral support in 1992



Source: data of CZSO, own map

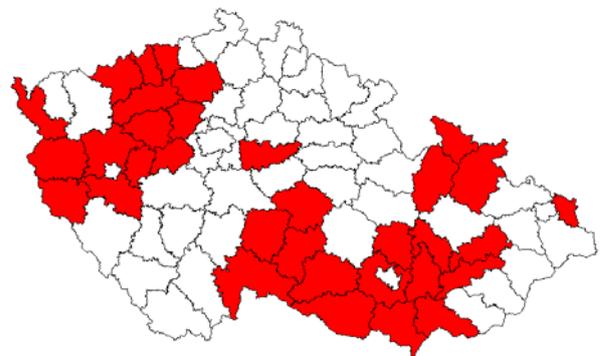
In the following election in 1992 the renamed Communist Party (now the CPBM) ran within a coalition called the Left Bloc. But because of its dominant position the pre-election coalition can be considered a CPBM ballot. The main subject latently present in the election campaign was the future of the common federal state with Slovakia. The Communist Party held the opinion that the federation should be preserved, and it gained 14.05% in the elections. There were only small changes in its areas of electoral support. 32 districts were areas of electoral support for the party. In comparison with the previous period their numbers in Moravia increased, but some districts in Central and South Bohemia dropped out.

The first election within an independent Czech Republic saw a moderate weakening of the Communist Party. They won 10.33% of the vote, a slight decline, and their parliamentary group shrank to 22 from the previous 35. As for distribution of geographical support, 33 districts were identified as areas of geographical support, mainly areas which had been so before. New areas of support were areas the Hodonín and Břeclav areas of South Moravia, and the Prachatice and Český Krumlov areas of Bohemia. At the same time districts in northern tip of Bohemia dropped out. Noteworthy was the change in the Karviná district, which is one of the CPBM's areas of electoral support in the long term, but did not meet the criteria in the 1996 elections.

Map 3. Areas of electoral support in 1996 **Map 4.** Areas of electoral support in 1998



Source: data of CZSO, own map



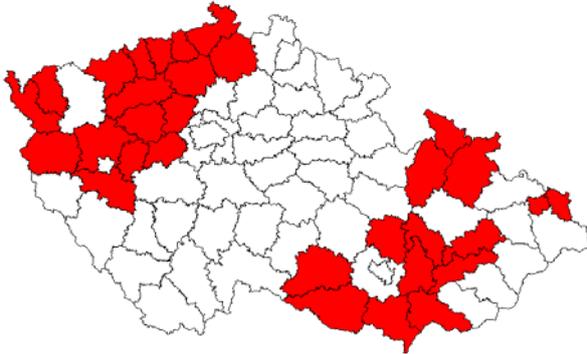
Source: data of CZSO, own map

After the 1998 election, the CSBM found itself more and less in the same position as before. They got 11.03% of the vote, and its parliamentary group grew by 2 deputies to a total of 24. The electoral support maps show consistent support from the same districts : the western tip of Bohemia except for the Plzeň, Karlovy Vary, and Sokolov districts, the area of Czech-Moravian Highlands, south Moravia, and north Moravian districts of Šumperk, Jeseník, and Bruntál.

In the parliamentary election of 2002, the map of areas of electoral support for the CPBM shifted towards two areas independent of each other. Districts situated in the centre of republic, e.g. Jindřichův Hradec, Jihlava, Pelhřimov, Havlíčkův Brod, ceased to qualify as areas of support. The CPBM's main support was focused on areas in the east, especially the Moravian districts which had been identified in previous elections, and districts in the northwest of Bohemia, with the exception of Karlovy Vary and Plzeň. On the whole

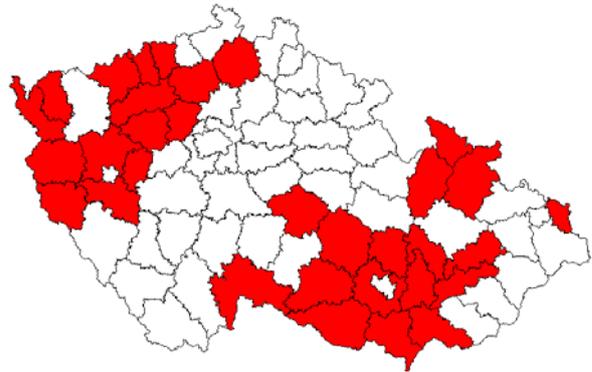
31 units qualified as areas of CPBM electoral support; that is, a slight decline.

Map 5. Areas of electoral support in 2002



Source: data of CZSO, own map

Map 6. Areas of electoral support in 2006



Source: data of CZSO, own map

Similar trends in geographical distribution of CPBM support were confirmed in the last parliamentary election. Regions with higher concentrations of CPBM voters are South and North Moravia, and north-west Bohemia area with the exception of the Plzeň and Karlovy Vary districts. There are changes in Bohemia, where the districts of Děčín, Ústí nad Labem, and Beroun dropped out as areas of support in comparison with previous elections. On the other hand, the districts of Jindřichův Hradec, Havlíčkův Brod, Žďár nad Sázavou, Greater Brno, and Ostrava can again be identified as CPBM support areas. On the whole, then, CPBM voters are still found in the same areas.

When we compare electoral maps, there is an obvious stability of electoral behaviour and support for the CPBM. The subsequent map confirms it even more.

Table 3. Stability of regional differences in CPBM electoral support (Pearson correlation coefficient)

	CPC 90	CPBM 92	CPBM 96	CPBM 98	CPBM 02	CPBM 06
CPC 90	1	0,783	0,825	0,754	0,727	0,722
CPBM 92	0,783	1	0,671	0,641	0,677	0,668
CPBM 96	0,825	0,671	1	0,952	0,811	0,825
CPBM 98	0,754	0,641	0,952	1	0,882	0,885
CPBM 02	0,727	0,677	0,811	0,882	1	0,953
CPBM 06	0,722	0,668	0,825	0,885	0,953	1

Note: Correlation is significant from the level 0.01

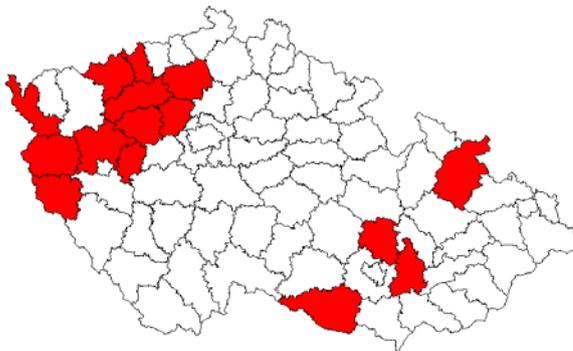
Table 3 clearly shows a high degree of stability in regional and district support for the Communist Party. On the basis of the data shown, it is possible to claim that

the basic character of interdistrict differences remains the same, with minor variations found when comparing later elections to the base election of 1992. In this case the numbers were the lowest, but still highly significant. At the same time we need to mention that the high correlation between the electoral results of the party in successive elections do not necessarily mean that a particular political party in an individual district enjoyed the support of the same number of voters. The correlation coefficient can remain high even if the party gained or lost a major part of its electoral support, as this phenomenon is not reflected by a change in the electoral map.

5. Electoral maps in wider context

At this point we have defined where the CPBM regularly finds its voters, and which districts are its 'strong districts' with the help of electoral support area maps. By comparing individual maps we can identify the districts that consistently qualified as the CPBM areas of electoral support.

Map 7. Districts of long-term electoral support for the CPBM 1990 – 2006



Source: data of CZSO, own map

The map above shows the areas of long-term support after comparing the maps. In South Moravia, the districts of Znojmo, Vyškov, and Blansko regularly meet the criteria as support areas. Despite higher support for communist candidates in North Moravia, the district of Bruntál was the only one which qualified for the final map. Larger areas regularly identified as areas of electoral support are found in the western part of the Czech Republic, except for the Sokolov, Karlovy Vary, and Plzeň districts. The following table shows how many votes the CPBM gained there.

Table 4. Electoral support for CPBM by district (data in %)

District	CNC 1990	CNC 1992	ChD 1996	ChD 1998	ChD 2002	ChD 2006
Blansko	15.16	17.49	13.8	14.54	22.11	15.64
Bruntál	15.1	18.41	12.19	14.84	27.87	18.35
Domažlice	16.51	16.38	13.12	13.87	20.76	15.51
Cheb	14.49	26.08	11.98	12.87	23.87	16.36
Chomutov	15.43	16.35	12.69	14.95	24.7	16.13
Kladno	19.86	20.86	14.23	14.79	23.68	16.27
Litoměřice	18.04	18.69	14.83	15.38	24.7	16.74
Louny	18.73	19.18	16.02	17.1	29.07	19.71
Most	17.92	19.19	14.97	15.77	27.41	17.05
Plzeň sever	15.29	15.4	12.19	12.67	21.03	15.33
Rakovník	18.63	19.08	13.56	14.12	24.65	17.52
Rokycany	16.7	17.71	12.99	14.58	22.9	16.4
Tachov	19.08	20.68	18.12	18.37	31.02	20.86
Vyškov	15.93	18.48	13.59	15.29	23.54	16.65
Znojmo	15.97	17.35	14.96	18.18	29.18	19.82
CZ	13.24	14.05	10.33	11.03	18.51	12.81

Source: www.volby.cz

According to the data given, it is possible to note various tendencies in individual districts. The most successful district for the CPBM is Tachov, which has maintained the highest support in long term. Along with this district there are the other regularly identified districts of Louny, Most, and Litoměřice among the top ten districts. But what are the characteristics and features of these districts? And is it possible to find any other specifics which could indicate why the communists gain the highest support in these areas? We will try to find the answer in two ways. At first we will compare selected socioeconomic factors, such as the divorce rate, number of religious people in society, rate of unemployment, gross wage level, and number of suicides at the individual district level. These characteristics should give a true picture of the voters who did not duly profit from the transformation processes after 1990, and exhibited greater feelings of uncertainty. On the basis of simple comparison, we will look for the basic connection between the selected parameters and electoral behaviour. Then we will cross-correlate between these parameters and electoral support for the CPBM in latest election in 2006.

Table 5. Selected districts and data (data in %, gross wage is nominal)

District	Divorce rate ./100 marriage ³	Total of worshippers ⁴	Rate of unemployment. ⁵	Gross wages ⁶	Rate of suicides ⁷
Blansko	52.0	49.8	6.5	15474	12.8
Bruntál	74.4	27.4	13.6	14902	17.4
Domažlice	52.1	33.5	5.4	14902	17.4
Cheb	72.8	21.9	6.7	14728	19.0
Chomutov	74.8	15.7	14.2	17469	15.8
Kladno	67.6	15.6	7.8	17476	15.2
Litoměřice	62.2	18.1	10.10	18237	12.9
Louny	66,4	19,3	11,40	14962	15,4
Most	85	12.4	20.4	19662	21.0
Plzeň north	60.5	17.8	5.0	15541	16.6
Rakovník	64.3	14.4	5.7	19195	15.5
Rokycany	62.9	17.7	5.1	17648	15.8
Tachov	68.1	19.5	7.6	15794	14.8
Vyškov	49.8	42.4	7.4	14989	12.0
Znojmo	53.0	41.1	12.0	14877	21.0
CZ	60.34	31.95	7.9	17460	15.8

Source: Czech Statistical Office, <http://www.czso.cz/>

According to the given data, it is not possible to find common data in the individual districts that would point to a mutual context. We can see figures several times greater than the national level; but other, below-average figures can be identified as well. The rate of divorce is a clear example. The districts of Most and Chomutov show the highest rates of divorce in the whole Czech Republic. On the other hand, the districts of Vyškov and Blansko also belong to the group of regions with high support for CPBM where the rate of divorce is on the lowest possible level. Similar differences are also evident with the rate of unemployment, which reaches very different figures. In district of Tachov, where support for the CPBM is highest, the rate of unemployment is below the national average, and in other regions such as Plzeň – north and Rokycany, the rate is even lower. A similar trend can also be

³ The divorce rate is calculated as the number of divorces to 100 marriages, according to the methodology of the Czech Statistical Office (CSO).

⁴ Statistics on religiosity come from 2001 census, source CSO.

⁵ Unemployment – official source of CSO from the end of May 2006.

⁶ Indicator of gross wage is taken from CSO materials, as of 31.12.2004.

⁷ Statistics on number of suicides are taken from CSO, calculated as the number of suicides per 1000 inhabitants.

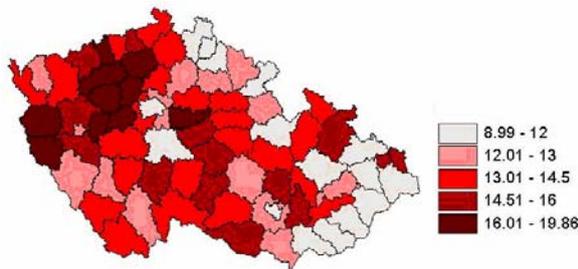
identified in the suicide statistics, where the districts of Most and Znojmo take first place, while the districts of Vyškov, Blansko, and Litoměřice do not reach even average. So it is not possible to draw the conclusions about electoral behaviour from some of these selected statistics. For better conclusions we can use a simple measure expressing correlation. For this purpose cross-correlation will be used, with the aim of monitoring single correlation coefficients and their figures.

Table 6. Correlation of selected parameters with support for CPBM (Pearson correlation coefficient)

	Unemployment	Suicides	Divorce rate	Religiosity	Wages
CPBM 2006	0.441	-0.079	0.190	-0.075	-0.076

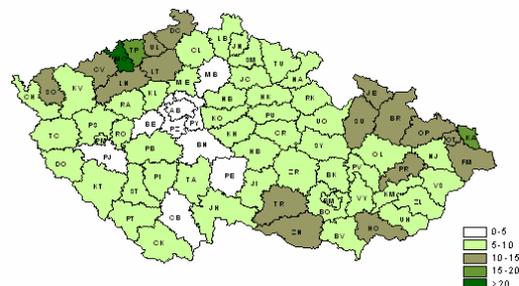
According to given figures, only with the average rate of unemployment is there a partial correlation with regional support for the CPBM. In simple terms, the highest rate of unemployment and the highest degree of support for communist candidates are found in the selected district. For that reason it is appropriate to compare the electoral map of CPBM support in 2006 with a map presenting the unemployment rate on the district level. The other indicators were not sufficient to prove correlation, even if their figures seem to be decisive for explanation of electoral behaviour in connection with support for the CPBM.

Map 8. Electoral map of CPBM support in 2006



Source: data of CZSO, own map

Map 9. Rate of unemployment as at 31.5.2006



Source: data of CZSO, own map

From the comparison of the two maps it is evident that the district of Most, which is one of the districts with the highest rate of long-term unemployment, is at the same time one of the areas with the highest support for the CPBM. Among the other

areas with higher rates of unemployment are the districts in the immediate neighbourhood of Most, including Chomutov, Louny, Litoměřice, Sokolov, Ústí nad Labem and Děčín. In South Moravia there are the districts of Znojmo, Třebíč and Hodonín; in the north of Moravia the region of Karviná and surrounding areas. Most of the specified districts qualified as areas of electoral support in the parliamentary election in 2006; however, not all districts with high support for the CPBM have high rates of unemployment. A prime example are districts in the central areas, the districts of Vysočina, Tachov, and Domažlice as noted previously in Table 5.

6. Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to find the areas of higher support for the CPBM in the long term, and try to outline possible factors affecting the distribution of votes. Comparison of electoral maps showed the districts with higher long-term electoral support for the CPBM. Comparison of electoral support maps revealed the following districts: Blansko, Bruntál, Domažlice, Cheb, Chomutov, Kladno, Louny, Litoměřice, Most, Plzeň – north, Rakovník, Rokycany, Tachov, Vyškov, Znojmo, all of which met the definition. The districts of Most, Litoměřice, Louny and Tachov have regularly placed among the top ten CPBM support districts in parliamentary elections since 1990. In these districts, were selected socioeconomic indicators that might explain the social conditionality of electoral behaviour were compared. However, on the basis of simple comparison no clear connection was proven. By subsequent testing and finding of connections with the help of the statistical method of the Pearson correlation coefficient, significant correlation was found only between support for CPBM and the district rate of unemployment. When we return to the comparison between of electoral maps of communist party support and the district rate of unemployment, we find there are districts among the ones mentioned above where the correlation is not that noticeable. On the basis of established facts we can assert that support for the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia in the Czech Republic has been relatively stable since 1990, and is more conditioned by a long term influence which is regionally conditioned than on socioeconomic features alone.

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