

Consolidation and Stabilization of the Party System in the Czech Republic*

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Introduction

The current Czech party system is the result of a process of gradual transformation which has been taking place since the breakdown of the communist regime, or, in the case of the Czech Republic as such, since the split of Czechoslovakia at the end of 1992.

The Constitution of the Czech Republic, as adopted in December 1992, established a parliamentary form of government. In other words, political parties became the major instruments of government. This means that the Czech parliamentary system of government is also one of party government. Parliament is now conceived of as a moderate arena in which political parties compete. Parties have the responsibility to stand for particular policy programmes and to attempt to implement those programmes if elected.

The transformation of the political and economic systems was not a straightforward and simple process. The aim of this paper is to give a definition and brief description of the main periods of development of the party system: from a one-party state system to a more mature and stabilized party pluralism. The latter stages of this development have seen a considerably fragmented party system transformed via a process of concentration into a system of moderate pluralism.

The level of the individual political parties will be examined from an evolutionary viewpoint. Parties will also be scaled along a left-right axis. The internal organizational structure of the parties is analysed as well as the role of the parliamentary party (officially referred to as the *deputy club*) in the organization and functioning of the Czech Parliament. Other important factors to be analysed in this paper are the influence of parliamentary electoral systems on the formation of the party system, and, last but not least, the phenomenon of cartelization which is currently manifesting itself in the Czech party system.

Development of the Party System

The post-1989 transition to a pluralistic democracy, and thus to a pluralistic party system, took place against a backdrop of simultaneous processes of continuity and discontinuity with the past. The establishment and formation of the party system in Czechoslovakia exercised a decisive influence on its own specific pattern of sharp cleavages within a brief span of history.¹ Differences

* This article reflects the political situation in the Czech Republic until January 1997.

¹ For more detailed discussion of these cleavages, see: S. W. Rivera, 'Historical cleavages of transition mode? Influences on the emerging party systems in Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia', *Party Politics*, 2,2 (1996), 177–208.

previously held in check – old conflicts from the pre-Socialist period, to some extent modified and muted during the period of Socialist development – were suddenly let out of the bag in the turmoil of states undergoing democratization and general transformation. These conflicts escalated and then acted as time bombs in the social organism. Newly revived nationalistic, class, and to some extent religious cleavages surfaced in full force in an atmosphere where swelling social energy did not encounter the inhibitory barriers of the long-standing written or unwritten rules that are customary in standard democracies. In nationally heterogeneous countries, this unique post-socialist development created a hierarchical pattern of mutually aggravating cleavages, dominated at the top by national conflict. This scenario eventually led to the trauma of the break-up of Czechoslovakia (as well as of the Soviet Union and of Yugoslavia).

The emergent system consisted of separate Czech and Slovak parties. This pattern was established in the early days of the Velvet Revolution of November 1989, when the Czechs and Slovaks set up their own citizens' movements, Civic Forum (OF) and Public Against Violence (VPN), respectively. The division of the party system was endorsed in the first free elections, held in June 1990 when the country was still a Federal Republic, in which only one of the parties standing in both republics – the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia – obtained seats in both national legislatures.² The separate party system generated a series of problems when the citizens' movement split early in 1991. The issue of Czechoslovakia will not concern this discussion any further, but attention will be focused primarily on the establishment, formation and development of the party system in the Czech environment.

The transition from a single-party state system to a pluralistic party system has its own dynamics. In the context of political development it is possible to identify four periods:

1. *Anti-party sentiment and proliferation of parties*
(November 1989 to February 1991)
2. *Emergence and crystallization of the party system*
(February 1991 to June 1992)
3. *Formation and consolidation of the party system*
(June 1992 to May/June 1996)
4. *Stabilization of the party system*
(after May/June 1996)

The first short period is defined by its salient features: November 1989, the first parliamentary elections in June 1990, and the split of the citizens' movement. This phase is characterized primarily by the dominant position of the newly founded OF (Civic Forum), which enjoyed mass support and was widely perceived as a substitute for the monolithic power of the Communist Party. The anti-party sentiment was connected with the historical experience of the First Republic (1918–1938), with the party state of the communist regime and the dissident movement, and with the attitudes of newly elected President Havel. Nevertheless, after January 1990, when the resolution was passed on the adoption of an electoral system based on proportional representation, there was a proliferation of parties and political movements. In the wake of the June 1990

² The Czech and Slovak National Councils came into existence as a result of federalization at the beginning of 1969.

elections, 66 political entities were registered on the basis of the Act on Association in Political Parties and Political Movements. The overwhelming majority of political parties and movements were created without mass membership or any organizational structure.

It would be misleading, however, to say that the establishment of the party system *per se* created the core of the political system. Rather, it was a transitional period, during which a variegated cluster of power centres operated: the Co-ordinating Centre of Civic Forum, the President, the Ministry of the Interior, and the Ministry of Defence (according to the round-table decisions) and to a certain extent Parliament itself.³

The second period is marked by the consequences of the disintegration of the electoral victors. Both of the broad political movements, OF (Civic Forum) with 49.5% of the votes in the Czech part and VPN (Public Against Violence) with 29.3% in Slovakia, split into a number of successor parties.⁴ An unconsolidated party system, in which party identities and organizational structures were weak, led to a number of party splits and mergers. A regrouping of political forces took place, both within and between parties. To give an example, the original four deputy clubs which formed the Czech legislature in early 1990 had proliferated into 11 party factions by the time of the 1992 parliamentary elections.⁵ At the same time, the parties became the real key centres of decision making as the parliamentary form of government began to function. The regime/anti-regime cleavage ceased to be central to political life. The spectrum of Czech parties began to be distributed largely along a left-right axis, with the addition of the KDU-CSL, a party which is more or less defined by its Christian stance, a stance dominated by Catholicism (Table 1).

During the third phase, which saw the break-up of Czechoslovakia,⁶ there is a clear consolidation and concentration of the party system in the Czech Republic. *A multi-party system with the dominant party on the right* was estab-

TABLE 1. Parties in the First Chamber and Left-Right Self-Placement of their Supporters (%)

Parties*	1	2	3	4	5
SPR-RSC	5	12	40	21	22
ODS	–	2	21	54	23
ODA	–	1	46	47	6
KDU-CSL	1	8	61	26	4
CSSD	4	32	60	4	–
KSCM	40	46	12	1	1

*See Appendix for full English-language names of parties

Source: STEM/Stedisko empirických výzkumů – Centre for Empirical Research, Trends 1–97, 1 – clear left; 2 – somewhat left; 3 – centre; 4 – somewhat right; 5 – clear right.

³ For further discussion on this matter, see: V. Dvořáková and J. Kunc, 'The Czech Party System and its Dynamic', in E. Matynia (ed.), *Grappling with Democracy, Deliberations on Post-Communist Societies (1990–1995)* (Prague, Sociologické nakladatelství, 1996), pp. 159–66.

⁴ The split-up of OF was formally approved in February 1991, that of VPN in March 1991.

⁵ See: J. Reschová and J. Syllová, 'The Legislature of the Czech Republic', *Journal of Legislative Studies*, 2,1 (1996), p. 100.

⁶ The Czech Republic came into being as an independent state on 1 January 1993.

TABLE 2. Results of 1992 and 1996 Parliamentary Elections (over 5% of votes)

Parties Movements coalitions	1992 (%)	1996 (%)
ODS-KDS	29,73	29,62
LB ^a	14,05	(1,40)
CSSD	6,53	26,44
LSU ^b	6,52	–
KDU-CSL	6,28	8,08
SPR-RSC	5,98	8,01
ODA	5,93	6,36
HSD-SMS ^b	5,87	–
KSCM ^a	–	10,33

^aThe Communists left the club of the Left Block in January 1994.

^bLSU a HSD-SMS split and merged with other parties and deputy clubs. More detail in Table 5.

lished for four years (1992–1996), with almost one third of the votes going to ODS (Civic Democratic Party), as seen in Table 2. The majority principle was used on a governmental level. Within the coalition government ODS possessed ten members whilst ODA (Civic Democratic Alliance) and KDU-CSL (Christian and Democratic Union/Czech People's Party) had only nine.

The marked regrouping of political forces lasted right up to the time of the parliamentary elections held in May/June 1996. As a result of the concentration of political forces into a small number of political entities, the established parties entered a phase of gradual internal consolidation, during which they strengthened their bonds with society and thereby 'dug themselves in' on the political scene.

The fourth period began with the 1996 parliamentary elections to the Chamber of Deputies and to the newly established Senate. The spring 1996 elections to the First Chamber served as confirmation of the further concentration of the party system. Only six parties were able to overcome the 5% electoral threshold. These elections, however, gave birth to a new political situation. The significant gain in votes by CSSD (Social Democrats), an increase of 20% on the 1992 elections (see Table 2) resulted in the creation of a *multi-party system with two dominant parties*. A classic party system thus sprung into being, with one strong party on the left and another on the right. At the same time, the more or less extreme parties of the KSCM (Communists) and SPR-RSC (Association for the Republic/Republican Party), with approximately 20% of the votes between them, can be seen operating at opposite ends of the political spectrum. The three partners, ODS, KDU-CSL and ODA managed to form a right-centrist coalition, but this time as a minority government.⁷ From a party point of view, this government is more balanced: ODS no longer occupies such a dominant position, and although it is still the party with the largest number of ministers (8), KDU-CSL and ODA between them also share 8 portfolios between them.

⁷ The Chamber of Deputies is composed of 200 members, elected for a four-year period by the proportional representation method. The coalition government, made up of ODS, KDU-CSL and ODA has the support of a minority of 99 parliamentarians.

The Senate elections held in November 1996 reinforced the hitherto somewhat rickety balance of forces on the political scene (see below). Nonetheless, the establishment of the Senate entailed the creation of a new centre of political power and the rise of a new power group in the framework of the political parties.⁸ In this sense, the formation of senatorial deputy clubs may represent a much-needed stimulus to the development of intra-party democracy and decentralization.

Parties – Individual Level

The Constitution of the Czech Republic mentions political parties only in the broadest of terms: Article 5 of the Constitution states that the party system is founded on the basis of ‘free competition between political parties’ which respect fundamental democratic principles. In addition, the Charter of Basic Human Rights and Freedoms, which is an integral part of the constitutional order of the Czech Republic, makes direct or indirect reference to political parties in the section on political rights – Articles 20 and 22.⁹

From an evolutionary viewpoint, it is possible to divide the political parties of the Czech party system into three categories:¹⁰

1. *traditional parties – permitted* during socialism (the Communist Party and its satellites)
2. *traditional parties – prohibited* during socialism
3. *new parties*

The first category, that of traditional parties which enjoyed a continuous development, includes of course the *Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSCM)*, which, as a result of its specific form of development (during the First Republic of 1918–1938 and after November 1989), still retains a strong social base on the left – despite the fact that it is the least reformed Communist Party in Central Europe. This category of traditional parties also includes the current *Christian Democratic Union/Czech People’s Party (KDU-CSL)*. This predominantly Catholic party transferred its base in exile to London during the Fascist occupation, and its natural development was also considerably disturbed during the socialist period, when its leadership collaborated to a greater or lesser extent with the state Communist party. Nevertheless, its existence, primarily from a regional level downwards, helped at least to maintain minimum standards of an alternative civic life. If we compare over the century the concentration of voters for this Christian party, it is noticeable that it has maintained a remarkably stable geographic constituency – in the regions of southern Moravia and eastern and southern Bohemia.

In this first category it is also possible to include the ever-weakening *National Socialist Party*, renamed during Socialism as the Socialist Party, and after 1989 adopting the name Liberal Socialist National Party (LSNS). In December 1995,

⁸ According to the Constitution, the Czech Parliament is constructed as an asymmetrical bicameral body. This means that a negative vote on the part of the Senate may be overturned by a simple majority of all deputies. The government is not responsible to the Senate, but exclusively to the First Chamber.

⁹ *Ústava České republiky a Listina základních práv a svobod* (Aries, Ostrava).

¹⁰ For further details, see: M. Klíma, ‘The Emergence of the Czech Party System’, in B. Ríhová (ed.), *Anthology of Political Science Studies* (Prague, University of Economics, 1995), pp. 23–36.

this centre party merged with the Free Democrats, but is still in danger of disappearing.

The most significant member of the second category of traditional parties, those which were prohibited during the socialist era, is the newly established *Czech Social Democratic Party (CSSD)*.¹¹ This party entered the 1992 Czech parliament with 6.5% of the votes, making it the second largest opposition party on the left. Four years later, the CSSD achieved a remarkable success by gaining 26.4% of the votes (Table 2).

The third category, that of newly established parties without historical roots, developed mostly from the mass democratic movement (Civic Forum – OF), which succumbed to internal differences after winning the elections in 1990, and thus split into three successor parties: the *Civic Democratic Party (ODS)*, *Civic Democratic Alliance (ODA)*, and *Civic Movement (OH)*.¹² Since 1992, the first two of these parties, together with KDU-CSL, have comprised the ruling coalition. Both are oriented to the right or centre-right.

The new extreme right-wing opposition party, the *Association for the Republic/Republican Party of Czechoslovakia (SPR-RSC)* arose outside Parliament. It aims to attract protest voters by means of its strongly anti-establishment slant. In the 1996 elections it gained even more votes than four years previously (an increase from 6% to 8%). The remainder of the new parties, including the Green Party and several Moravian parties, are very weak. A similarly negligible influence may be felt on the part of the right-wing *Democratic Union (DEU)*, founded in 1994, although this party has become a parliamentary party by virtue of its victory in one single-member constituency in the framework of the majoritarian electoral system applied to the Senate (see below).

The prevailing discontinuity of the existing array of political parties is evident not merely from the dominant role of entirely new political entities. It is also manifested in the ill-defined boundaries of their constituencies, in the confusion and variability of their election manifestos, and in the stunted development of their internal structures. This applies to newly established parties which emerged at an elite level, usually within Parliament (frequently successor parties of the disintegrating OF). Such internally created parties built their organization top down. On the whole, the newly established political parties, including the strongest ones, have not gained more than some tens of thousands of members (ODS, 23,400; ODA, 2,800; CSSD, 13,700). These parties still do not possess a sufficiently developed organizational structure. This became particularly evident in the November 1994 municipal elections when ODS, ODA and even CSSD registered a very small percentage of votes in smaller towns and in countryside areas in general. In 1997, the two strongest parties tried their utmost to recruit as many members as possible, so as to have something to choose from when it came to compiling lists of candidates for the 1998 municipal and Senate elections.¹³ The weak membership base of the new

¹¹ Until spring 1993 the party leader was Jirí Horák, formerly a member of the Social Democrats until 1948, subsequently an émigré.

¹² OH, later renamed as the Free Democrats (SD), merged with LSNS in December 1995 to form the SD-LSNS. After the most recent parliamentary elections this centrist party (2.05% of votes) is in danger of extinction.

¹³ Municipal candidate lists may require up to 56,000 party members. See: *MF Dnes*, 20 January 1997.

political parties can also in part be attributed to the deep-rooted tradition of anti-party sentiment in Czech political culture (see above).

On the other hand, basically denominational parties like KSCM and KDU-CSL are based on a traditionally well-developed organizational structure that has a solid grass-roots foundation at the municipal level. These classic denominational parties are more or less dependent on a stable, relatively disciplined and geographically identifiable constituency. Both parties may also be regarded as the only mass parties (KSCM, 200,000 members; KDU-CSL, 80,000 members). These parties not only benefit from a relatively large and stable membership and a highly developed nationwide organization, but they have also inherited considerable material assets from the past.

The total membership of the Czech parties is between 420,000 and 430,000. This amounts to about 6% of the electorate.¹⁴ As is happening in Western Europe, the Czech political parties are loosening their bonds with specific groups of voters, and beginning to appeal to the electorate at large. The evidence suggests a consistent trend toward a much less structured electorate and toward the fragmentation and individualization of political preferences. Between the years 1990 and 1995 a clear decline may be detected in the extent to which voters identify very strongly with parties. Very strong party identification fell from 40 % in 1990 to 27% in 1992, and again to 18% in 1995. The highest sense of identification may be seen with voters for KSCM (44%) and KDU-CSL (30%). On the other hand, the lowest number of voters strongly attached to their party is found in the case of CSSD (8%) and ODA (7%).¹⁵

As has already been mentioned, the Czech party system was formed predominantly along a left-right axis (Table 1). This reflects the broader factor of citizens' own self-placement on the left-right scale in the period 1990–1996. From the data given (Table 3), it is clear that a centrist orientation dominated during the early phase of the democratization of society, when the broad-based Civic Forum was in power. A move away from this centrist orientation in favour of a markedly right focus was associated with the period of the second parliamentary elections (June 1992), i.e. with the disintegration of OF and the instigation of economic reforms. The left-right dichotomy typical of other Western European democracies was manifested in the Czech Republic as a dichotomy in attitudes for and against the radical transformation of society – transformation first and foremost in the economic sense.

TABLE 3. Left-Right Self-placement Distribution: 1990, 1992, and 1994

	May 1990	July 1992	June 1994
Left	19.2	16.4	20.2
Centre	50.9	33.1	39.2
Right	29.9	50.5	40.4

Source: STEM/Stedisko empirických výzkumů – Centre for Empirical Research, 1994.

¹⁴ According to estimates, SPR-RSC has 40,000 members. The *Pensioners for Life Security (DZJ)*, which was the only non-parliamentary party to exceed the 3% threshold (3.09) as the condition for receiving state subvention, boasts a surprising 53,000 members. But its nature is more that of an interest organization, politically inactive between elections. The other non-parliamentary party, SD-LSNS has 8000 members (2.05% of votes).

¹⁵ *MF Dnes*, 22 September 1995.

TABLE 4. Citizens' Self-Placement Across the Left/Right Spectrum (November 1996 – in percentage^a)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2	5	14	32	17	17	3

Source: IVVM/Institut pro výzkum veřejného mínění – Institute for Public Opinion Research, November 1996.

1 – extreme left; 2 – left; 3 – centre-left; 4 – centre; 5 – centre-right; 6 – right; 7 – extreme right.

^a10% do not know.

During the implementation of economic reform, when the essential foundations of the market economy were laid down, centrist tendencies again came to the forefront, despite the fact that public opinion in favour of the right remains a constant phenomenon for the time being. This is confirmed by the public opinion poll of November 1996, in which citizens were asked to place themselves on a seven-degree scale of left to right (Table 4). The tendency to a more right-wing orientation is evident from the table, even though citizens most often place themselves in the centre category. The extremes (both left and right) are rather rare.

Party Organizational Structure

As far as internal party activity is concerned, the law states that parties may not come into existence or develop their activity if they lack democratic statutes or democratically established bodies, or if their policy programme or activity poses a threat to morality, to public order or to the rights and freedom of citizens. These general principles are further specified only in the case of party statutes (*by-laws*). The Act on Association in Political Parties and Political Movements defines the formal requirements for the statutes: name and abbreviation of party, official party headquarters, policy objectives, rights and obligations of members, provisions concerning organizational units and party bodies (statutory bodies, organs of arbitration and auditing committees), the principles governing its financial management and the manner of disposal of the balance of assets in case of the party's liquidation.¹⁶ The legal regulations establishing the general and formal requirements of the statutes leave a considerable amount of leeway for the discretion of the political parties themselves.

The *division of power* in political parties operates in both a vertical and horizontal direction. The *vertical organizational structure* is to a large extent defined by the law, under which parties may be 'organized in principle on a territorial basis'.¹⁷ The system usually applied in the Czech Republic is that of a three- or four-tier hierarchy of party bodies: local, district, (regional) and national. The vertical structure of the parties is not only based on the territorial division of the state as contained in the law, but is also closely tied to the electoral system (division into electoral districts) and to the size of the individual parties.

¹⁶ Act no. 118/1994 Sb. on Association in Political Parties and Political Movements, Article 4 and Article 6, paragraph 2.

¹⁷ Act no. 118/1994 Sb., Article 5, paragraph 3.

The intra-party division of power on a *horizontal level* is founded on the basis of *representative, executive, judicial and controlling bodies*. The representative bodies comprise the assembly of members (delegates) on all levels of the vertical organizational structure. The executive element of party power consists of the elected bodies (party leader, Executive Committee) and appointed bodies (party apparatus). Any judicial power the party may have is represented by its internal organs of arbitration. Control functions are exercised by the auditing committees. Here we shall be dealing mainly with the representative and executive bodies on the national level.

The supreme body of a political party is the party convention. This, according to the statutes of most parties, takes place once every two years. The relative infrequency of conventions means that they are often overburdened with work, and that the ceremonial aspect of them is emphasized to the detriment of their working function. The extraordinary nature of party conventions is sometimes intensified by the fact they are held prior to parliamentary or municipal elections. The actual discussion and criticism of particular matters at conventions are also limited, owing to the fact that the executive bodies responsible for the preparations frequently present the convention documents just before the meeting, or even during the course of it.¹⁸

The decisive criterion for delegating members at the convention is the size of the membership base. Delegates at the convention are thus elected by the appropriate district organizations, with the exception of the *ex officio* membership of certain top state offices (minister, deputy) and party posts (party leader and deputy leader, other high-ranking party officials). The provision on *ex officio* membership also relates to the special position of certain party organizations. According to the CSSD statutes, the Young Social Democrats and the Social Democratic Women have the right to send their delegates to the party convention.

Elected central executive party bodies responsible to the convention include the party leader, the Executive Committee, and the conference. Party leaders usually have a special position based more on their informal standing than on a formally regulated position (e.g. by the statutes). In the case of an electoral victory, they aim to occupy the highest state office, and have considerable influence on the personnel and programme policy of the party. All of the major parties elect their leaders at the convention, for terms of office of 2–4 years.

The Executive Committee plays the role predominantly of initiator and coordinator. In cases where there is no such body as the conference, the Executive Committee has a greater degree of authority. An example of this might be the ODS executive council, which possesses the right to decide on the final composition of candidate lists or on the establishment and dissolution of local organizations. In general, the Executive Committee is made up of both elected and non-elected members. The *ex officio* members include the leader and deputy leader of the party, the chairperson of the deputy club, ministers etc. Whilst the ODS executive council is almost one third composed of members elected by the convention (8), ODA's executive council consists exclusively of non-elected members.

¹⁸ For more detail, see V. Simíček, 'Vnitřní život politických stran', *Politologický časopis*, No. 2 (1996), 105–121.

The conference serves as the supreme party body between conventions, and is a connecting link between the executive elected bodies (deputy leader, Executive Committee) and the supreme representative body (the convention). In practically all the parties it mostly consists of elected members. The majority of parties practise the proportional principle of regional representation in this body.

To round up this study of the division of power in the organizational structure of a party, it only remains to mention the organs of 'judicial' power. The purpose of the arbitrating bodies within a party is to settle intra-party conflicts. Some parties (ODS, KSCM) have a two-tier system operating at national and district level, whereas others (ODA, KDU-CSL) use a single-tier system. Most parties apply the principle of permanent organs of arbitration (ODS, KSCM, ODA, KDU-CSL). CSSD is an exception, in that it sets up *ad hoc* arbitrating bodies for settling particular disputes. In general it is safe to say that the role of the organs of arbitration is not sufficiently specified in the statutes, and that its role is often perfunctory.

Amongst the conditions for the formation and consolidation of the party system in the Czech Republic, the elements of direct democracy are undervalued. Intra-party referenda are used neither for the election of the party leader nor for the nomination of party candidates for parliamentary elections or for resolutions on party mergers. The only exception to this is the intra-party referendum in KSCM on changing the name of the party.

Overall, it may be argued that the organizational structure of parties in the Czech Republic is not directly determined by the orientation of their policy programmes. The exception here would be the protest/extreme party SPR-RSC. This is the only party to possess a two-tier system as far as its vertical organizational structure is concerned – at local and national level. This party holds its convention only once every four years. The leader of SPR-RSC is elected for a 4-year period, and a privileged position is accorded to him by the party statutes.¹⁹ The Executive Committee has only five members, and enjoys extensive authority, closely tied to the party apparatus and the dominant influence of the party leader.

The Parliamentary Party

One important unit of the overall party organization also operates in Parliament. There exist party groups by means of which political parties play a central role in the organization and functioning of the Czech Parliament. Although there is a significant overlap of personnel at the top of party organizations, *the parliamentary party*, officially designated as the *deputy club*, plays a relatively independent role.

In theory, deputies may remain without membership in any deputy club, or an independent deputy club can be established. In practise, this tends to happen only rarely, since according to the electoral system the incoming representatives can enter the Chamber only on a party list of candidates. According to the new Standing Orders, passed in April 1995, the formation of a deputy club in the

¹⁹ According to SPR-RSC statutes, the party leader appoints and recalls the treasurer, and appoints two deputy leaders in an advisory capacity.

newly elected Chamber of Deputies requires a minimum of 10 deputies, as opposed to the former 5.

The raising of the threshold for establishing a deputy club, in addition to other measures (see below) in the new Standing Orders are designed to prevent the phenomenon known as 'political tourism'. In the 1992–1996 deputies' term of office, more than 70 deputies out of 200 went over to a different party from the one on whose behalf they were elected.

Massive fluctuation among the deputy clubs was accompanied by the frequent extinction and formation of new clubs. This process is shown in Table 5. Nine deputy clubs were established after the June 1992 parliamentary elections, but by June 1994 their number had risen to 12, plus several independent deputy clubs. At the end of the term, in May 1996, the number of clubs decreased back to 9, but the personnel composition of all of them was changed and 3 of them were newly established.

In this context, it must be emphasized that the governmental coalition was stable during the years 1992–1996. The phenomenon of party factionalism and party splits was confined largely to the opposition parties.²⁰ The high level of instability within parliamentary parties, however, can be ascribed to weak party identity, organizational instability and insufficient personal experience.

Deputy clubs receive subventions according to the number of deputies who are members of individual clubs, and are also provided with rooms and with the technical equipment necessary for their activity. They are entitled to proportional representation²¹ in the bodies of the Chamber of Deputies: Standing Committees, Commissions and Investigative Commissions. During the course of an electoral term, new deputy clubs may be established, but they are not entitled to proportional representation in the above-mentioned bodies of the Chamber.

The most important arena for deputy work is not the Standing Committee, but the deputy club. This is also clearly visible in the context of the legislative process. The legislative procedure of three readings determines that a draft should be available to committees only after the first reading, i.e. after a vote based on party grounds at a plenary meeting. As deputy clubs, as a rule, tend to submit to party discipline, the draft has a strong political bias even before being discussed in the committees.²² In general the deputy clubs show a high level of voting cohesion. In the years 1992–1996 this applied mainly to the coalition deputy clubs as well as to LB/KSCM, but in the post-1996 Chamber the voting cohesion of all deputy clubs rose to 90–95%.

²⁰ While only one deputy defected from coalition deputy clubs to the opposition side, nine opposition deputies joined the government coalition. For details see: Z. Mansfeldová, 'The First Czech Parliament in the View of the Members of Parliament', in L. D. Longley and D. Zaljc (ed.), *Working Papers on Comparative Legislative Studies III: The New Democratic Parliaments – The First Years* (Appleton WJ: Research Committee of Legislative Specialists, forthcoming).

²¹ The proportional representation system is not applied to the election of officials. Between 1992 and 1996, coalition clubs held the chairing positions in the Chamber itself and the individual Standing Committees. This situation changed after the spring 1996 elections, when a minority government was formed, but notwithstanding the more or less anti-system parties KSCM and SPR-RSC are still excluded from these leading parliamentary posts.

²² For further details, see M. Klíma, 'The New Standing Orders in the Light of the Relationship of the Legislative and Executive Power', in *Budapest Papers on Democratic Transition* (Budapest, Hungarian Centre for Democracy Studies Foundation, 1996), no. 168.

TABLE 5. Deputy Club Membership in the First Chamber

Deputy club	post-1992 elections	pre-1996 elections	post-1996 elections
ODS	66	72	68
KDS	10 ^a	–	–
KDU-CSL	15	24	18
ODA	14	16	13
CSSD	16	22	61 (58) ^e
SPR-RSC	14	5	18
LB	35	23	–
KSCM ^b	–	10	22
LSU	16	–	–
HSD-SMS ^c	14	–	–
CMUS ^c	–	15	–
ONAH ^d	–	6	–
Independent	–	7	(3) ^e

^aAfter KDS merged with ODS in March 1996, several deputies left for KDU-CSL.

^bThe Communists left the club of the Left Block (LB) in January 1994.

^cIn January 1993 HSD-SMS changed its name to HSDMS and again in 1994 to CMSS – Czech Moravian Party of the Centre. In December 1994 the deputy clubs LSU and CMSS merged and the deputy club CMUS – Czech Moravian Union of the Centre came into existence.

^dIn November 1994 the deputy club ONAH – Civic National Movement – was founded by three deputies from SPR-RSC and two deputies from LSU.

^eIn December 1996 two CSSD deputies were excluded from the party itself because of voting in favour of the governmental budget proposal during the first reading. In January 1997 another member was excluded, this time for unwarranted use of an academic title. As a result, its deputy club numbers 58 members at present; the three deputies mentioned have become independent.

The governmental parties make use of an institution known as the Coalition Ten. This body is composed of the Chairperson and the Deputy Chairpersons of the Chamber, the three leaders of the coalition deputy clubs and the three leaders of these parties. The Coalition Ten meets prior to the plenary sessions and prepares recommendations for their deputy clubs. This has the effect of increasing Parliament's dependence on party bargaining.

The growing power of the deputy clubs in the functioning of the Chamber is determined by the process of consolidation taking place within the political parties themselves. By 1996 parties had succeeded in gradually forming a more developed party organizational structure. Not only did the management of the deputy clubs become more centralized, but also the influence from extra-party organizations, from the party national executive, and from the party in government (in the case of the government coalition), became more tangible.²³ This progressive party evolution in the context of the parliamentary form of

²³ As many as 74% of deputies in the Chamber said that the party national executive sometimes or often tried to give instructions to their parliamentary party. For further discussion, see P. Kopecký, 'The Organization and Behaviour of Political Parties in the Czech Parliament: From Transformative Towards Arena Type of Legislature', in P. G. Lewis, (ed.), *Party Structure and Organization in East-Central Europe* (Aldershot, Edward Elgar, 1996).

government increased the influence of the political parties in the Chamber. In this sense, the Chamber functions more or less as a kind of arena where the differing views and political opinions of the governmental and opposition deputy clubs confront one another.

The Influence of the Electoral System

The particular nature of the electoral system always has a palpable influence on the creation and formation of a party system. It is not by chance that there was heated discussion about whether it was appropriate for a democratizing and transforming Czechoslovakia to use a majoritarian system or proportional representation. It has become clear that the selection of a system of proportional representation for the Chamber, a system as yet employed in only the three parliamentary elections held from 1990 to 1996, has not led to the over-atomization of the party system or to regime instability, as some had warned. In addition, the proportional representation method neither eliminated minority interests nor basically distorted the representation of political interests in Parliament. Thus it did not create fertile ground for political radicalism and the potential formation of an extra-parliamentary opposition. On the contrary, the proportional system of representation integrated embryonic political interests into a united pluralistic framework for a party system. In this way, a much-needed legislative space was created for expressing and applying the broadest political interests in the conditions of the emerging democracy. The party system could thus develop and grow naturally. A broad spectrum of political parties formed. Although at first it seemed that the political scene was too fragmented, this factor indicated a fullness and depth in a variety of political directions and eventually exercised a positive influence on the crystallization of the party system in the development of a mature political culture.

However, the system of proportional representation is applied in a somewhat moderated version, incorporating a number of built-in mechanisms designed to curtail excess political fragmentation. The greater influence of the stronger at the expense of the weaker parties is in particular reinforced by two measures: the quorum for entry into Parliament and the payment of fees upon registration of a candidate for elections. The years 1992 and 1996 saw an increase on 1990 in the threshold for the entry of political parties or party coalitions into Parliament. In 1990, the threshold for individual political parties was set at 5% of the votes. In the 1992 elections, this basic threshold remained, but new quora were introduced at a higher level for party coalitions: for two- and three-party coalitions, 7%; for coalitions of four or more parties, 10%. The new electoral law passed in September 1995 raised the barrier even further for multi-party coalitions: three-party coalitions, 9%; coalitions of four or more parties, 11%.

As for the establishment of fees for registering party lists of candidates, even this mechanism improves the prospects of the larger and wealthier parties. For parliamentary elections in the Czech Republic, it is obligatory to deposit 200,000 CZK for each party list per electoral region. As the Republic is divided into eight electoral regions, the total sum for parties that want all regions covered by their candidates is 1.6 million CZK. This deposit is returnable only in the case that the given quorum for entry into Parliament is met. This can lead to considerable financial difficulties, particularly for smaller parties. Moreover, only parties and coalitions with at least 3% of the votes (until 1995, 2%) are

entitled to receive the state subsidy of 90 CZK (previously 15 CZK) per vote obtained.

In general it can be said that the electoral system is one of the factors which contribute to the tendency for small parties to lose votes. It is not by chance that the number of parliamentary parties was reduced from 9 (in 1992) to 6 (in 1996). The vote share of non-parliamentary parties (below 5%) have also fallen: whilst in the 1992 elections they won 19% of the vote, in 1996 this figure fell to only 11%.

Notwithstanding, the system of proportional representation not only helps to achieve a greater concentration of political forces, but it also strengthens the standing of the political parties themselves in the political system of the Czech Republic. The law on elections to the Chamber allows lists of candidates to be submitted only through political parties and party coalitions. Neither individuals nor groups can act as independent candidates or associations (in contrast to municipal elections).

The second factor reinforcing the position of parties and their apparatus is the manner in which the second count is carried out: on the basis of a Republic electoral number (Hegenbach–Bischoff method), all remaining seats from the first count in the regional voting districts are re-distributed. The order of candidates not elected from the regional districts is determined by the party leadership.

Even the fact that the electoral law allows limited preferential voting does not effectively alter the dominant standing of parties on the political scene. On one party ballot paper, voters have the right to mark only four candidates for whom they wish to express their preference. Preferential voting is only valid if at least 10% of voters for the given party use this option. In this case, the seat belonging to the given party goes first to the candidate who receives, in the form of preferential votes, at least 10% of the total number of votes cast for the party in the relevant regional district (the average district magnitude is 25 mandates). In practice, the impact of preferential voting is negligible. In the 1996 elections no candidate was elected in this way.

Another factor which may contribute to the concentration of the party system is the functioning of the Upper House of Parliament. At the end of September 1995, after almost 3 years of provisional constitutional arrangements, the Chamber passed a law specifying the electoral rules for the establishment of the Senate. The 'Act on Elections to the Chamber of Deputies and to the Senate of Parliament' enabled elections to the Senate to be held in 1996. Thus the letter of the new Constitution, approved at the end of 1992 in connection with the split of Czechoslovakia, was finally fulfilled. The alternative principle of electoral system applied to the Senate corresponds to the asymmetrical nature of the bicameral Parliament. For the Senate, a two-ballot system in single-member districts was approved.

The new electoral law established 81 constituencies. In November 1996, full elections to the Senate were held for the first and also for the last time. The reason for this is that a system was used in which senators in one third of the electoral districts were elected for a period of only 2 years, in the second third for 4 years and in the rest of the country for 6 years. Thus the Senate will be replenished, not all at once in all districts, but by one third every 2 years on a 'mosaic' principle. Candidates are elected by absolute majority. Should no candidate receive an absolute majority of votes in the first ballot, a second run-off ballot is held between the two best placed candidates.

On the basis of such limited experience, it would be premature to evaluate the impact of the first Senate elections on the existing pattern of the Czech party system. The fact remains that SPR-RSC refused to participate in the elections. The biggest surprise was the success of the Democratic Union in fighting its way through to join the other parliamentary parties, albeit with a gain of only one seat. From the point of view of the balance of forces on the political scene, the Senate elections had a somewhat stabilizing effect, as the minority coalition government gained a majority of seats in these elections. In the long-term perspective, however, the situation is not so clear-cut, as CSSD was the most successful party in the six-year constituencies (Table 6).

TABLE 6. Number of Senators – According to Length of Term of Office

Parties	2 years	4 years	6 years	Total
ODS	13	13	6	32
CSSD	5	9	11	25
KDU-CSL	4	3	6	13
ODA	4	0	3	7
KSCM	0	1	1	2
DEU	0	1	0	1
Independent ^a	1	0	0	1

^aThe only independent senator is R. Falbr – President of the Czech Trade Unions. Nevertheless even he is indirectly supported by CSSD.

Cartelization of the Party System

A new party model has entered the political debate in the form of the cartel party, a model which is characterized by the interpenetration of party and state and by a pattern of collusion between parties. Parties become agents of the state and employ the resources of the state to ensure their own collective survival against the challenge of new parties. In the case of cartel parties, traditional hierarchical party organization and sheer size and commitment of party membership are not such important factors in the organization of an effective electoral strategy. The introduction of public subsidies for parties and privileged access to state-regulated channels of communications is a major help to the established parties in maintaining their position.²⁴

Of what relevance to the Czech party system is the discussion on the new type of political party? Is there a 'cartel party' in the Czech Republic, on an individual level and/or on the level of the party system? Is there a real danger that party competition will be stifled and that we will witness the subsequent rise of protest parties?²⁵

First and foremost, it must be stated that Mair and Katz define their *cartel party* as a purely theoretical model. Actual parties in a given country tend to appear on the borderline between particular types of party, and are more or less

²⁴ For a more detailed discussion of this issue, see P. Mair and P. Katz, 'Changing models of party organization and party democracy: the emergence of the Cartel Party', *Party Politics*, 1,1 (1995), 5–28.

²⁵ See: M. Klíma, 'Strana kartelového typu', *Politologický časopis*, no. 1, (1996), 4–11.

similar to one type or other. In the conditions prevailing in the Czech Republic, KSCM and KDU-CSL may in general be classified as mass parties; they are distinguished from the other parties by their relatively extensive membership base, complex organizational structure, strong party identification (stable voting preference) and clear denominational orientation. CSSD and ODS, on the other hand, may be ranked among the so-called 'catch-all' parties. These parties are oriented less towards narrow interest groups, and have a much wider field of activity. Nevertheless, their links to civic society are of fundamental importance. In this respect, one still cannot overlook the influence of the membership base, even though this may operate on a lesser scale, or the importance of the organizational structure and a certain degree of voter identification with the party. ODA comes closest to the cartel style of party. This is a party with a tenuous membership base, a weak organizational structure and an almost negligible degree of direct liaison with the voters (and not only at grass-roots level). Decisions on tactics and strategy in ODA are made almost exclusively within the central party bodies. SPR-RSC, on the other hand, is a type of party to be characterized rather by its reaction against official policy. In its own way, it portrays itself as a protest party, adopting an oppositional stance towards the established parties.

This division of the Czech parties is to be taken only as a rough guide, and it must be remembered that many of these parties are still fledglings, and in this respect the categorization sketched above may prove to be somewhat premature. At the same time it is worth noting that both KSCM and KDU-CSL are attempting to expand their voting clientele, and their election campaigns exhibit marked symptoms of a management style of leadership.

In any case it has to be admitted that, even in the Czech environment, a party system is developing which corresponds more or less to the characteristics of the cartel style of party. Parties are receiving quite considerable state subventions, as well as access to the electronic media, which is subject to substantial state control.

Concerning state grants to political parties, the biggest recipients are, needless to say, those parties with the largest number of votes in elections. The current system of state contributions calculates the amount of money to be assigned according to the results of elections (see above). In addition, exceeding the 5% margin brings with it both entry into Parliament and the so-called mandate grant.²⁶ State grants to parties make up a substantial portion of a party's budget; in the case of ODS and ODA the state contribution is the highest item of party revenue.²⁷

The following considerations serve to illustrate the fact that the financing of parties is to a large extent being shifted onto the state:

- the political parties do not in general have a mass membership base
- party business activity is limited by the law

²⁶ Parties which gain representation in the Chamber are entitled to a yearly grant of 0.5 million Czech crowns per deputy mandate, and to an additional 5 million crowns a year. The state also allocates money for the activity of deputy clubs.

²⁷ In 1995 ODS received a state contribution of nearly 37 million crowns, ODA 12.5 million (of the others, LB received nearly 15 million, CSSD 14 million, KDU-CSL 12.5 million etc.). See *Lidové noviny*, 11 April 1996.

- donations from sponsors do not amount to large sums in the case of most parties
- the concentration of the party system means that the parliamentary parties enjoy ever higher financial gain in proportion to their election results
- there is also a gradual process of increases in state grants to political parties in connection to the first elections to the Senate.

A tendency to discriminate against small parties in favour of large parties has been gradually emerging in the context of the electoral regulations (see above). This is reflected in the increase in the electoral threshold and in the increase in the limit for the distribution of grants per vote received, in the establishment of the condition of obtaining 3% of votes (in the case of the Chamber) for the return of deposits, in the absence of restrictions on electoral campaign expenses and in the acceptance of the single-member constituency option for elections to the Senate.²⁸

The application of the benefits of state grants and of access to the state media as well as the electoral barriers imposed on small parties could in the near future lead to the formation of a cartel of parties here which is capable of blocking the way for political alternatives (smaller parties).

Conclusion

The end of communist totalitarianism, coupled with the need to instigate and carry through a radical economic transformation, swung the pendulum of political sympathy in favour of the right. This right-wing tendency appeared constantly during the period from 1990 to 1996, and is likely to become a long-term factor on the Czech political scene. It is connected primarily to the relative success of economic reform. To a certain extent we can expect a repetition of the so-called German syndrome, when a significant left party entered the government only later on in the proceedings. In this context, it may also be expected that as the most crucial economic and political transformation processes draw to a close, public opinion will not only stop moving in favour of the right, but will start to move gradually in the opposite direction, towards a strengthened centrist or even left position.

On an individual level, the political parties were divided into three categories. The traditional parties (KSCM, KDU-CSL, and to some extent LSNS) take advantage of their highly developed organizational structure and strong party identity. The new parties on the other hand, whether they grew out of parliamentary soil (ODS, ODA, OH) or arose outside Parliament (CSSD, SPR-RSC) have had to form their own party base, internal organizational structure and party affiliation from scratch.

The initial fragmentation of the party system manifested itself on the level of the parliamentary parties – the so-called *deputy clubs*. Massive fluctuation among deputies was accompanied by the frequent extinction and formation of new clubs. The crystallization of the party system, the more centralized

²⁸ It was KDU-CSL and ODA who in the coalition negotiations with ODS advocated the option of 27 three-member constituencies.

management of deputy clubs as well as the toughening of party discipline increased the influence of political parties in the Parliament. The result was the formation of a moderate arena type of parliament (the Chamber).

The formation of the party system in the Czech Republic has entered a phase of stabilization, in which a broad spectrum of political parties with limited fragmentation has been established on a parliamentary level. A party system has emerged in the form of a moderate pluralism where only six parties play a central role on the Czech political scene.

Most recently, since the two parliamentary elections in 1996, a pattern of multi-party system with two dominant parties has been established. Thus the Czech party system is now based on the balancing out of the power ratio between right and left, a scenario which leaves open the possibility of a gradual transition to the originally German version of the ‘two-and-half’ party system. The precipitation of parties on the right, left, and centre would lead to the entrenchment of the two strongest parties in their dominant position, one on the right and one on the left (ODS and CSSD), with a greater or lesser degree of participation on the part of the smaller centrist parties. As for the extreme parties on both left and right, it is unlikely that they will constitute a significant political power in the future. It may be expected that, in time, KSCM will lose power in consequence of the loss of its older electorate. The nationalist or regional parties (after the break-up of Czechoslovakia and municipal elections in November 1994) currently represent a dwindling number of supporters. The Moravian parties, for instance, have effectively disappeared.

The established parliamentary parties are taking advantage of their privileged access to state subventions and to the media. They are also in the process of creating electoral regulations which effectively limit the entry of new parties into the party system. Thus the near future could see the formation of a cartel of parties in the Czech Republic. In this case, the irresponsibility of the established parties might create room for heightened activity on the part of extreme protest parties.

It is clear that the tendency to accelerate the concentration of the party system is strongly supported by the main political parties on the grounds that the less parties there are, to a degree, the simpler and clearer everything is, and the better for democracy. The opposite of this may be the case, especially in an environment of ‘unsettled’ transformation and an as yet immature political culture. In places where a natural renewal of the face of government by means of elections has not yet taken place, there is a danger of heightening political arrogance on the part of those who have been in power for a long time.

Appendix: Full Names of Parties²⁹

OF – Civic Forum

VPN – Public Against Violence

ODS – Civic Democratic Party

CSSD – Czech Social Democratic Party

KSCM – Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia

²⁹ For a summary description of all the parties and party-like organizations since the 1989 revolution, see Arthur S. Banks, Alan J. Day and Thomas C. Muller, *The Political Handbook of the World: 1997* (Binghamton NY, SA Publications, 1997), pp. 218–220.

KDU-CSL – Christian Democratic Union/Czech People's Party

SPR-RSC – Association for the Republic/Republican Party of Czechoslovakia

ODA – Civic Democratic Alliance

DZJ – Pensioners for Life Security

DEU – Democratic Union

SD-LSNS – Free Democrats/Liberal Social National Party

LB – Left Block

KDS – Christian Democratic Party

LSU – Liberal Social Union, a political movement which in 1992 consisted of three parties: the Czechoslovak Socialist Party (later LSNS), the Agrarian Party, and the Green Party

HSD-SMS – Movement for Self-Governing Democracy/Association for Moravia and Silesia