

# A Fragile Stability

## The Institutional Roots of Low Party System Volatility in the Czech Republic, 1990–2009\*

KEVIN DEEGAN-KRAUSE AND TIM HAUGHTON\*\*

### **Abstract:**

In contrast to much of the rest of Central and Eastern Europe during the first two post-communist decades, Czech party politics was characterized by low levels of volatility. Placing the Czech Republic into broader international context, this article suggests that the stability of the Czech party system derives from a combination of favorable structural conditions and more contingent differences in party strategy and organization. While the structural factors create a stronger likelihood for stability in the Czech Republic than in many of its neighbors, the strong role of more contingent institutional factors means that we cannot assume that the stability will continue, particularly if one of the major parties should suffer a major setback. The Czech example thus broadens our understanding of the interplay between structures and institutions in promoting stability.

*Keywords:* parties, elections, volatility, stability, Czech Republic

### **1. Introduction**

Observers of post-communist Europe are often struck by the fluidity of party politics in the region. Not only have many countries undergone an ‘electoral earthquake’ at some point in the past two decades, but frequently elections bring at least one major new political party to the fore while other once-popular and dominant parties fade into relative obscurity or die (e.g. Millard 2004; Sikk 2006; Szczerbiak 2002; Haughton 2003; Haughton and Rybář 2008).

The Czech Republic, however, bucks this general trend, and for that reason it is a source of considerable interest to those who study political parties and those in the region who wish

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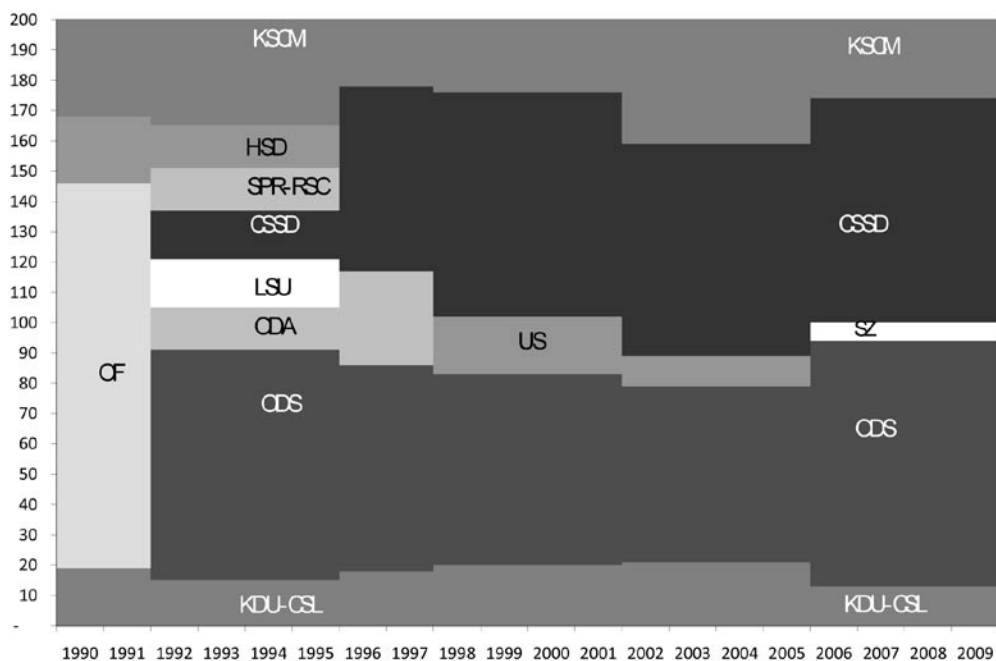
\*\* Kevin Deegan-Krause is Associate Professor of Political Science at Wayne State University, e-mail: kdk@wayne.edu. Tim Haughton is Senior Lecturer in the Politics of Central and Eastern Europe at the University of Birmingham, e-mail: t.j.haughton@bham.ac.uk.

to restore a degree of stability to their own domestic party systems. This article begins by documenting the degree of stability of the Czech Republic's political party system and the isolation of volatility to a relatively narrow ideological realm. The article then offers a preliminary explanation for these low levels of volatility. Placing the Czech Republic into broader international context, both in terms of the characteristics of its stability and the relevance of frequently-used scholarly explanations derived from other cases beyond post-communist Europe, this article suggests that its stability derives from a combination of favorable structural conditions and more contingent differences in party strategy and organization. While the structural factors create a stronger likelihood for stability in the Czech Republic than in many of its neighbors, the strong role of more contingent institutional factors means that we cannot assume that the stability will continue, particularly if one of the major parties should suffer a severe setback (as has happened elsewhere in the region). The Czech example thus broadens our understanding of the interplay between structures and institutions in promoting stability.

## 2. Measuring party system stability in the Czech Republic

It takes only a glance at Figure 1 to see that Czech party politics has been quite stable over time, and that this stability takes a number of forms. Two mid-sized parties – the Christian

**Figure 1: Distribution of seats in parliament in the Czech Republic by party, 1990–2010**

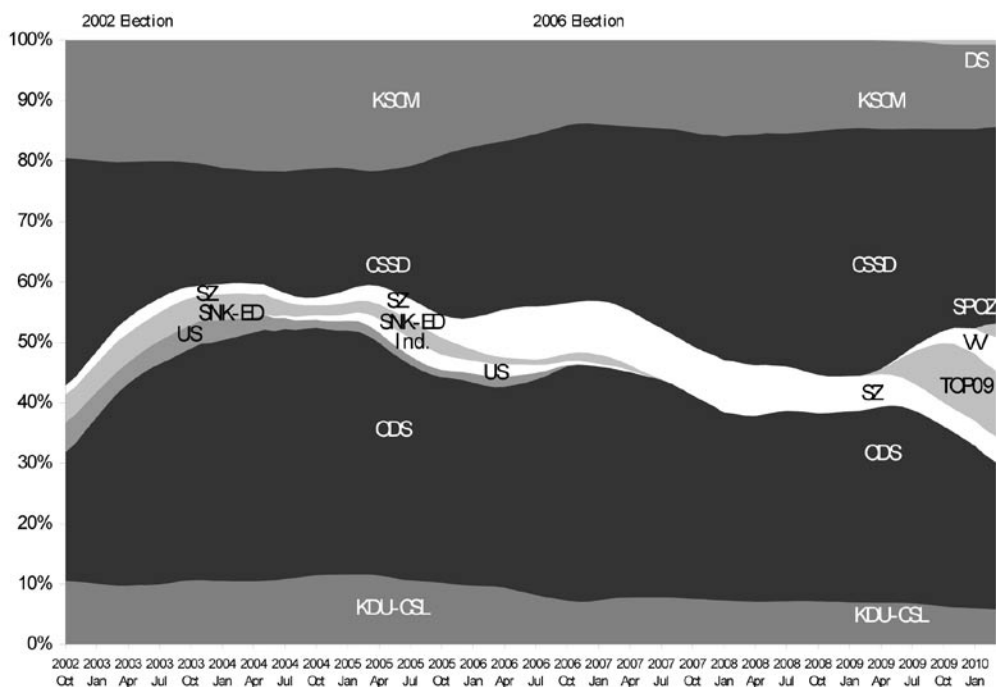


Source: CZSO Election Server

Democratic Union (KDU-ČSL) and Communist Party (KSČM) – have played a role in the system since the first democratic election, while interaction between the two larger parties – the Civic Democratic Party (ODS) and the Czech Social Democratic Party (ČSSD) – has dominated the party scene since 1996 (in the case of ODS beginning already in 1992). Together these four parties account for 82% of seats held in parliament between the 1990 and 2010 elections, 88% in the period from 1992 and 92% from 1996. Nor have their relative strengths shifted significantly: while ODS and ČSSD have alternated in first and second place, KSČM has taken third place in every election since 1996 and KDU-ČSL has taken fourth place in every single election except for 1992 when it took fifth. Moreover, work by political geographers has also indicated a striking continuity in spatial patterns of support for political parties across the country (Kostecký 2009).

This picture of Czech party politics as stable is confirmed by larger comparative studies. Although there are different ways of calculating volatility (see also Sikk, 2005; Lewis, 2000), two recent studies show the Czech Republic at the low end of the spectrum for postcommunist Europe. Mainwaring, Gervasoni and España (2009) calculate the Czech Republic's volatility between 1990 and 2002 as 0.29, nearly two percentage points lower than the next lowest postcommunist European case, Hungary, and ten to twenty-five percentage points lower than the other postcommunist European cases in the survey. Using different methods and a slightly

**Figure 2: Distribution of public opinion support in the Czech Republic, 2002–2010**



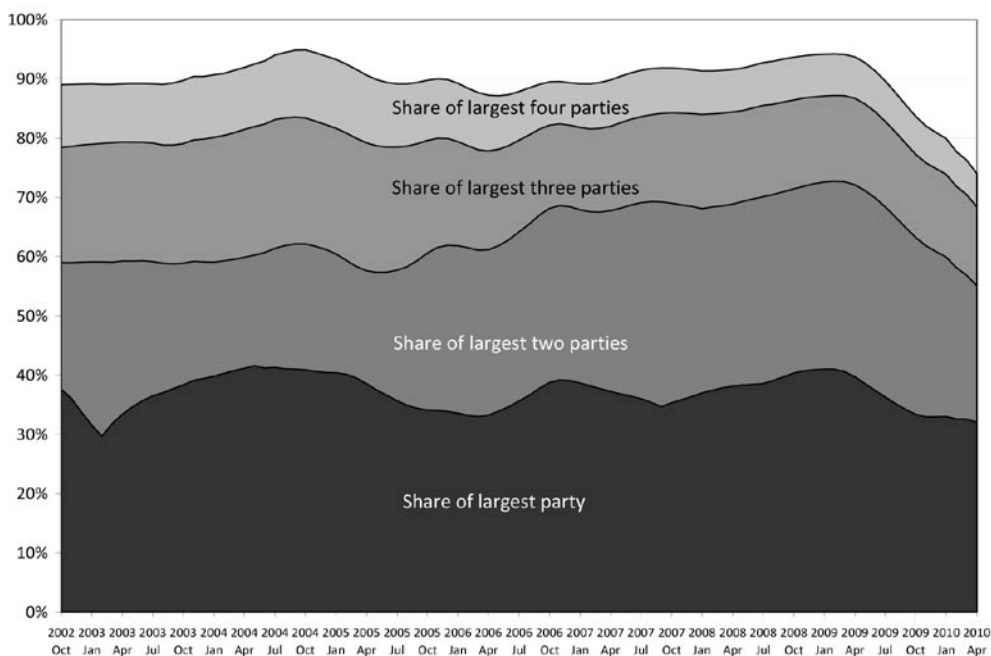
Sources: STEM, Factum-Invenio, MEDIAN, Centrum pro výzkum veřejného mínění Sociologického ústavu AV ČR

longer time period Powell and Tucker (2009) also measure Czech volatility as 0.29, the third lowest of the 21 countries in their survey, closely following Hungary at 0.25 and Montenegro at 0.28, and considerably lower than most other countries around the regional average of 0.43.

Unlike many previous studies, Tucker and Powell and Mainwaring et al. offer insight into the specific nature of this volatility and help to specify the ways in which the Czech Republic is unusual. Both papers distinguish between volatility that exists in the ebb and flow of existing parties (Mainwaring et al. call it “intra-system” while Tucker and Powell call it “Type B”) and volatility introduced by the wholesale entry and exit of the parties (Mainwaring et al. call it “extra-system” while Tucker and Powell call it “Type A”).

Both studies place the Czech Republic’s political party system lower than average on the two measures of volatility, unlike countries such as Hungary where extra-system volatility is unusually low or Slovakia where extra-system volatility is unusually high. Indeed Figure 1 and Figure 2 show that volatility is not completely absent: the Czech system has experienced both voter exchanges among the four long-standing parties and also occasional eruptions of new parties. The share of parliamentary seats received by parties campaigning for the first time was an extremely high 65% in 1992, but dropped to zero in 1996. Two new parties have subsequently emerged to take parliamentary seats: Freedom Union (US) in 1998 and

**Figure 3: Share of Support Won by Largest Parties**



Sources: STEM, Factum-Invenio, MEDIAN, Centrum pro výzkum veřejného mínění Sociologického ústavu AV ČR

the Green Party in 2006. The latter technically held parliamentary representation as party of the Liberal Social Union between 1992 and 1996, but it returned to parliament after a 10-year hiatus in such dramatically changed form that it may be considered essentially new (Deets and Kouba, 2008). In the 2010 campaign three other new parties have emerged – Tradition, Responsibility, Prosperity (TOP'09), Public Affairs (VV) and the Party of the Rights of Citizens (SPO) – though at the time of writing (February 2010) their potential electoral success in 2010 was unclear. Nonetheless, as figure 3 highlights there were some signs that the largest parties were losing their grip on parts of the Czech electorate as polling day approached.

### 3. Explaining Party System Stability in the Czech Republic

While it is relatively simple to demonstrate the stability of the Czech Republic's party system it is relatively difficult to offer a single, coherent explanation. As with other political phenomena, it is helpful to distinguish between explanations rooted in social/economic structure and those which focus on institutional dynamics. To this end it is useful again to refer to Mainwaring et al. who assemble a variety of hypothesized explanations and test them in a large N-survey of 58 countries. The following sections explore the degree to which the explanations analyzed by Mainwaring – and related hypotheses that he does not test – are applicable to the Czech Republic and likely to explain why the country has unusually low levels of volatility for a post-communist European case.

Based on the idea that voters locked into a particular social group or ideology will continue to vote for the same party, quite a few explanations for low volatility address the underlying dimensions of political competition. Table 1 lists several of the more significant hypotheses. Bartolini and Mair (1990) suggest a relationship between the closure of economically-based voting groups and low volatility, whereas Birnir (2007) suggests a similar pattern for ethnic and linguistic divides. O'Dwyer (2010) also deals with "cleavage"-related questions, but instead of discussing the nature and depth of the divide, he argues that the number of divides is the key to low volatility, with the lowest number of dimensions producing the greatest stability.

While Birnir's explanation does not necessarily apply to the Czech Republic, both the economic and the low dimensionality arguments offer plausible explanations for low volatility in the Czech Republic, which boasts one of the very few nearly uni-dimensional socio-economic dimensions of competition in the region (Deegan-Krause 2006). At the same time, it is important to note that the Czech Republic's economic divide simply does not approach the level of encapsulization envisioned by Bartolini and Mair and that this explanation may therefore not apply as well as it might appear. Furthermore, while the Czech Republic is rare in having relatively uni-dimensional competition, O'Dwyer's work remains preliminary with only a limited sample of countries. Nor is it clear that the causality is uni-directional since party competition may shape the salience of issues within society (Rohrschneider and Whitefield 2009).

**Table 1: Explanations for low volatility and their applicability in the Czech Republic based on social structure**

What is the explanation for low volatility?	Does the explanation apply to the Czech Republic?
Class cleavages (Bartolini and Mair 1990)	Yes
Linguistic/ethnic cleavages (Birner 2007)	No
Low cleavage dimensionality (O'Dwyer 2010)	Yes

*Source: Authors' compilation*

Even if the type or number of dimensions helps explain the Czech Republic's low dimensionality, these may not be the only explanation as they do not address the actual mechanism (or mechanisms) by which the deep social structure shapes democratic competition, therefore it is useful to continue the search for potential explanations. A potential source of low volatility assessed by Mainwaring et al., democratization, relates to historical developmental paths. As table 2 relates, Mainwaring et al. find that the age of the democracy does not affect volatility, but that democracies founded earlier do have less volatility. Here, however the explanation does not have much traction in the Czech case as democracy emerged there only months after it did in Poland and Hungary, and not long before other countries in the region. It is interesting, however, to note as an aside that the average level of volatility in East Central Europe (including the individual cases of Hungary and the Czech Republic) is considerably higher than the long-established democracies of Western Europe and even higher than many countries in Latin America. By the standards of all democracies, the Czech Republic's level of volatility is not particularly low.

**Table 2: Explanations for low volatility and their applicability in the Czech Republic based on historical development**

What is the explanation for low volatility?	Does the explanation apply to the Czech Republic?	Does the explanation work (Mainwaring)?	Could it explain low volatility?
Longstanding democracy	No	No	No
Early period of democratization	No	Yes	No

*Source: Authors' compilation*

Table 3 lists other potential explanations that concern various measures of economic performance. Mainwaring et al. find that of these, only growth produces the predicted result, but this potential explanation does not offer much explanatory power for the Czech Republic since the country has not demonstrated higher levels of growth than others in the region since the early 1990s period of the "Czech Economic Miracle," which notably also coincided with the country's *highest* levels of volatility.

**Table 3: Explanations for low volatility and their applicability in the Czech Republic's economic performance**

What is the explanation for low volatility?	Does the explanation apply to the Czech Republic?	Does the explanation work (Mainwaring)?	Could it explain low volatility?
High growth	No	Yes	No
Low inflation	No	No	No
High satisfaction	No	No	No

*Source: Authors' compilation*

Beyond the underlying structural divides and the more immediate question of economic performance, scholars also offer institutional explanations for low volatility, particularly governmental and electoral systems, as listed in Table 4. Though the Czech Republic is one of relatively few countries in the region without an elected president – a factor sometimes thought to increase volatility – Mainwaring et al. find that presidentialism has little effect. On the other hand, although Tavits (2007) finds a relationship between electoral systems and new party entry, by those standards the Czech Republic's proportional representation system and relatively low barriers to party entry should encourage more rather than less volatility. The country's 5% formal threshold has helped to limit the number of parties entering parliament and, as we discuss below, it has helped to eliminate smaller, more unstable parties while not affecting larger, more established ones. Nevertheless, within the region a 5% threshold is quite standard and cannot explain *lower* levels of volatility. A slightly stronger argument for an electoral-system related explanation is the relatively low district magnitude of the electoral system implemented for the 2002 and 2006 elections, that in some small districts yielded an effective threshold in the double digits and limited the parliamentary representation of smaller parties. However, the effects here were extremely small and Mainwaring et al. found no clear relationship between district magnitude and volatility.

**Table 4: Explanations for low volatility and their applicability in the Czech Republic based on electoral institution**

What is the explanation for low volatility?	Does the explanation apply to the Czech Republic?	Does the explanation work (Mainwaring)?	Could it explain low volatility?
High restrictions (Tavits 2007)	No	—	No
Low district magnitude	Yes	No	No
No presidentialism	Yes	No	No

*Source: Authors' compilation*

As table 5 shows, Mainwaring et al. also deal with the role of institutions other than political parties. While at least one of these – the degree of union density – appears to help keep

volatility low (reflecting the aforementioned discussion of economic cleavages raised by Bartolini and Mair), the Czech Republic cannot be easily distinguished from its neighbors on this particular measure.

**Table 5: Explanations for low volatility and their applicability in the Czech Republic based on social/cultural institutions**

What is the explanation for low volatility?	Does the explanation apply to the Czech Republic?	Does the explanation work (Mainwaring)?	Could it explain low volatility?
Strong civil society	No	No	No
High union density	No	Yes	No

*Source: Authors' compilation*

#### 4. Party Level Explanations

The discussion so far has focused on the party system as a whole, but the evidence above calls attention to the level of party institutions. In the absence of a single, clear systemic explanation for the Czech Republic's low volatility, it is useful to look below the system level at the political parties themselves. Here we can find some meaningful explanations which are more idiosyncratic, but which correspond to new hypotheses about volatility and help build volatility-related theory.

##### 4.1 What does not kill me: The longevity of large parties

In line with other studies (e.g. Tavits 2009) which suggests that well-developed organizations matter for longevity, ODS, ČSSD, KDU-ČSL and KSČM have much stronger and well-developed party organizations than many other Czech parties. ODS is illustrative here. Although it was a newly created party in the early 1990s lacking the organizational legacy of KSČM or the historical roots of ČSSD, it created a reasonably well developed network of members and local branches. Crucially, and despite the existence of a strong leader who seemed to embody the party, i.e. Václav Klaus, there was a significant degree of decentralization in ODS (Hanley 2008). Such decentralized parties have the advantage of being able to survive the departure of their leader, even an iconic one like Klaus. Indeed, its strength at the regional and local level is a vital part of the explanation for why the party has endured through crises which might have sunk an elite-driven party.

Moreover, as Hanley (2008) has shown, in the case of ODS there is a much larger streak of pragmatism in the party than is generally attributed. Whilst ideological debates animated some members in the higher echelons of the party, a large chunk of the grassroots membership was actually surprisingly rather uninterested in national political issues; being much more animated by 'parish pump politics' (Hanley 2008: 104). The pragmatism of the bulk of the party membership was demonstrated by the decision to elect Mirek Topolánek as leader in 2001

rather than the more ideologically-minded alternatives available, the unsuccessful attempt by Pavel Bem to unseat Topolánek in 2008, and perhaps most significantly, the ability of the party to survive the departure of its charismatic and long time leader Klaus both when he stepped down from the party leadership to run for the Czech presidency in 2003, and when he quit as honorary party president in 2008.

In part this pragmatism is linked to the stronger ties ODS members have to the lucrative benefits of office than to ideological conviction, something which was reinforced by the Opposition Agreement of 1998 (Tabery 2008) and in more recent times by the lure of EU funds. The Opposition Agreement of 1998 – whereby ODS agreed to a minority ČSSD government in return for control of parliamentary committees, the chairmanship of the Lower House and the right to nominate their supporters to key positions in the state bodies – was a vital reinforcement mechanism shoring up the powerful position of ODS and meant that although Klaus's party lost the election, they 'won' much in the post-poll carve-up. It built on the process of state-building throughout the 1990s which had seen those close to the politicians in power benefit markedly as political sympathizers were appointed to posts in public agencies and onto advisory boards (Gryzmała-Busse 2007; O'Dwyer 2006).

Three elements about the parties' appeal are key to understanding their longevity on the political scene. Firstly, ODS, ČSSD, KSČM and KDU-ČSL are programmatic parties, or at least the parties have a large programmatic element in their *raison d'être*. At the heart of the appeal of programmatic parties are policies tied to core values and aims such as social justice, equality or freedom. In contrast to many new parties which have emerged in Central and Eastern Europe in the past two decades, such programmatic parties are more than just about 'good government' and a 'put your trust in me I'll do it better' valence appeal. Given their roots in an ideological vision, programmatic parties are much better able to weather corruption scandals.

Secondly, both of the two major parties have adroitly woven together an 'integrative narrative' (Hanley et al. 2008). In the case of ODS, Klaus's integrative narrative was one which blended together well what can be dubbed 'populist appeals' with those of the more programmatic (Deegan-Krause and Haughton 2009). Klaus was adept at not just using the rhetoric of marketization in the early 1990s – even though there was always a marked gap between his enthusiastic Thatcherite rhetoric and the decision not to liberalize in politically sensitive areas (Dangerfield 1997) – he also stirred anti-communism into the mix and played on national fears (William 1997; Hanley 2004). Moreover, by drawing together the traditional and modern social democratic streams together, ČSSD has managed to position itself as the only moderate left party in the Czech Republic. Indeed, it is striking that new parties in the Czech Republic which gain a sufficient level of support to make them genuine contenders for parliament tend to form on the right of the political spectrum (see below).

Thirdly, both parties were adept at effective political marketing, especially when their backs were up against the wall. ODS entered 1998 in a dire position following the funding scandal and split in ODS which had brought down the Klaus government the previous autumn, yet in the June parliamentary elections the party bounced back with 27.8% of the vote, helped in part by the poor campaign of its centre-right opponents, but also by a shrewd election campaign encapsulated in the slogan, 'To the Left or With Klaus' (*Nalevo, nebo s Klausem*), in which Klaus portrayed himself and his party as the only bulwark against a left-leaning government. In a similar vein ČSSD's level of support was at a low ebb in 2004 as shown

by the disastrous results in the European Parliamentary elections, provoking the departure of the party leader Vladimír Špidla. Špidla's replacement, Stanislav Gross, however, was soon embroiled in scandal and resigned in 2005, pushing the level of support lower. Nonetheless, the party bounced back, scoring 32% of the vote in the 2006 parliamentary elections. In part the success owed much to a highly aggressive political campaign crafted with American public relations consultants who amongst other things advocated the use of the colour orange (Matušková 2006).

Indeed the 2006 elections, in which ODS and ČSSD managed to mop up two-thirds of the votes between them, is indicative not just of effective campaigning on the part of both parties, but also of the way in which the two heavyweight parties managed to portray the vote as essentially a choice between the two of them. In this they were helped by the fact that both parties have been around for much longer so they have name recognition amongst voters. Moreover, at the core of the parties' appeals in 2006 were different visions of socio-economic organization. This appeal draws on and feeds into the dominance and persistence of the socio-economic 'issue divide' in Czech politics (Deegan-Krause 2006). Nonetheless, other appeals did have resonance. For instance, Catholic values formed the bedrock of KDU-ČSL's small, but relatively stable levels of support in the first two post-1989 decades. Perhaps significantly in the Czech case as opposed to many other countries in Central and Eastern Europe, Czech politics does not have a significant 'national question' associated with a national/ethnic minority; such themes are/have been significant in shaping the political divisions in other states such as Slovakia, Romania and Latvia (e.g. Deegan-Krause 2006; Gallagher 2005; Haughton and Fisher 2008; Sikk 2006). Although there is a Roma minority in the Czech Republic, it is relatively small and is not well organized politically (Vermeersch 2006).

#### 4.2 Dying young: The ephemeral charm of novelty

Although part of the explanation for the stability of party politics lies with the ability of ODS and ČSSD in particular to consolidate their positions, it is illuminating to examine the other side of the coin, i.e. why new parties have not been successful.

It is useful to think of where new parties have located themselves in terms of policy space. In the Czech case there is a main economic left-right axis on which ODS and ČSSD largely compete with two smaller, less significant axes: an idiosyncratic national-cosmopolitan and conservative-liberal one. It is striking that new parties in the Czech system tend to appear in the space defined by the economic right/center and the cultural center/left. New parties in the Czech system have tended to appear in the space defined by the economic right/center, but have not prospered for long. All of these new parties started out as more or less "clean" alternatives – what Lucardie (2000) calls 'purifiers' – entered government and died. Here there are clear parallels with other countries in the region. As in Slovakia, the Baltic States and South-Eastern Europe, new parties tend to appear where other parties have already died or appear in danger of death (Deegan-Krause and Haughton 2009; Sikk 2006). Party death is hence the key to opening space for voters to move to *new* parties. To some extent this is unsurprising. We would not expect voters to move to new parties that are at odds with their positional attitudes, but rather within their own programmatic sector of the policy space. Part of the failure of new parties, therefore, lies in the durability of the existing parties.

The case of the Freedom Union (US) in 1997/8 is worthy of further examination. By 1997 the shine had come off Klaus's seeming economic miracle, provoking the introduction of packages of emergency measures (*balíčky*) to put the Czech economy back on track. Moreover, Klaus's position within his own party was weakened by corruption allegations linked to secret Swiss bank accounts that provoked calls for his resignation and the defection of several prominent party politicians, Interior Minister Jan Ruml, Finance Minister Ivan Pilip and Foreign Minister Jozef Zieleniec. Yet despite the favorable position for a new party to emerge and possibly even replace ODS, it was Klaus's party which triumphed in the summer 1998 elections. We have touched on some of the reasons behind ODS's rebound above, although we should add here Klaus's skilful rhetoric, which turned the focus from his own murky financial dealings into a crisis in which he projected himself as the victim of what he dubbed the "Sarajevo assassination" carried out by once loyal associates.

Part of the explanation of US's failures, however, also lies in the mistakes made by the party itself. Drawing on our arguments above about the salience of both organization and appeal, we can point to US's low level of membership and poorly developed organizational structure. Moreover, its appeal was vague, based more on a valence appeal than on programmatic politics, although there was a more positive tone on the European Union. To some extent, the anti-corruption appeal of those who defected from ODS had less traction in a country where the voters think not just that their current crop of politicians are corrupt, but that any replacement will probably turn out just as bad. As a well-known Czech expression stemming from the 1970s puts it, "if you are not stealing, you are stealing from your family."

## 5. Conclusions: Stable Sources of Stability or Time for a Change?

The stability of Czech party politics in the first two decades since the 1989 revolutions owed much to the dominance of the economic left-right division of politics and the abilities of the two main parties, ČSSD and ODS, to project themselves as occupying one or the other side of this divide. These two parties are themselves entering their third decade. They have survived the difficult years of infancy and now have a much higher life expectancy. Nonetheless, neither of the two largest parties is invulnerable. Indeed, both have witnessed some important fluctuations over time. ODS, for instance, suffered a significant drop in support in 1997 and ČSSD in 2003–5, both linked in to allegations of less than angelic behavior on the part of their leaders at the time. Both parties recovered from these blips, but there is no guarantee of survival in the future.

Speculation is a dangerous game for scholars to play, especially in light of the lag times of academic publishing, which in our case includes an election scheduled for May 2010. Indeed figure 3 shows a steady drop in support for the largest four parties in the run-up to that election, although it may not prove to be significant once election day arrives. Nevertheless, it may be instructive to conclude a paper examining the first two decades of Czech party politics by looking forward.

Potentially two of the evergreens of the Czech political scene which have played quite different supporting roles since 1989 may be affected by the results of the elections. KDU-ČSL may fail to cross the threshold and KSČM may be brought in from the cold and enter

a formal coalition. Both scenarios are possible and would have an impact on the stability of the party scene. A failure of KDU-ČSL to reach the threshold is likely to have its roots in the party split in 2009 and the formation of TOP '09. If the new party led by Miroslav Kalousek and Karel Schwarzenberg enters parliament will it break the mould? History offers contrasting lessons. The broader lesson from the CEE region is that entering government can be toxic for a party which uses a newness/clean hands/valence appeal in the election, because following Lord Acton's dictum no party in power can remain uncorrupted – or avoid the appearance of corruption – for very long. Although the experience of US suggests that remaining outside government after an election (US's campaign in 1998 included a promise not to form a government with ČSSD) can be damaging. The pragmatists in ČSSD and ODS buried the hatchet and agreed on the Opposition Agreement, which as mentioned above ensured that whilst ODS remained outside of government it won much in the post-election deal which helped to reinforce its position as the dominant party of the right.

However, taking Slovakia as a rather imperfect example, the experience of the new party Smer in 2002 when it garnered 13.5% of the vote but did not enter government, suggests it might be better for the long-term future of the party if it does not enter government immediately. What is crucial in the case of Smer, however, is that it succeeded in monopolizing a section of the political scene (the moderate left) thanks to the failure of the Party of the Democratic Left in the 2002 elections and that Smer had at its helm the most charismatic and articulate politician in the country, Robert Fico (Haughton 2003; Haughton and Rybář 2008). Given the likely success of ODS in the 2010 elections and the qualities and attributes of Schwarzenberg and Kalousek, the Smer scenario looks unlikely.

Although KSČM has changed over time (Hanley 2001; Handl 2008) its place on the Czech political scene has been protected by two factors: its unique programmatic space and its ability (necessity) to remain above the fray by non-participation in government. It avoids a large degree of potential scandal by avoiding power (it is kept from scandal because it is kept from power), although it has not been completely immune. If it were to go into government, it might lose both from the necessity of moderating its program (making it more like ČSSD and in more direct competition) and losing its status as the clean/true left alternative and home to voters disaffected with ČSSD, which could open up space for a new left-leaning party. The communists appear to have found a way to stay out of power without any effect on its support (its supporters do not expect *results* but merely voice). Indeed, it has little electoral incentive to join a government even if invited to enter coalition negotiations, so it will be interesting to see if the temptation of a few ministries would be enough to get it to switch. Moreover, statistical work on the demographic structure of KSČM voters indicates that barring any major shocks the Communists look set to be represented in the Czech parliament for the next decade and a half at least (Linek 2008).

The safe bet, therefore, seems to be the expectation that ODS and ČSSD will continue in business as usual for the coming years, although we have spent enough time observing politics to know that seemingly unlikely turns of events happen more frequently than one would expect. Nonetheless, in 20 years time when reflecting on four decades of Czech democracy we may still be examining a Czech party system in which the two larger parties remain stable while the cluster of parties around them shifts and continues to change. The alternative would require either major organizational collapse on the part of ČSSD or ODS, or the stabilization

of the smaller parties in such a way that they can survive (and learn to live with) constant exclusion from government (as KSČM has done) or a size and positional content that allows them to survive the corruption that comes with participation in government.

### Appendix: Party Acronyms and their Full English Names

ČSSD	Czech Social Democratic Party
HSD-SMS	Movement for Self-Governing Democracy – Society for Moravia and Silesia
KDU-ČSL	Christian and Democratic Union – Czechoslovak People's Party
KSČM	Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia
LSU	Liberal Social Union
ODA	Civic Democratic Alliance
ODS	Civic Democratic Party
OF	Civic Forum
SNK-ED	SNK-European Democrats
SPO	Party of the Rights of Citizens
SPR-RSC	Association for the Republic-Republican Party of Czechoslovakia
SZ	Green Party
TOP '09	Tradition, Responsibility and Prosperity '09
US	Freedom Union
VV	Public Affairs

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