Election Pledges in the Czech Republic (2010–2013)[*]

MICHAEL ŠKVRŇÁK[**]

Abstract

The theory of democracy states that political parties attract voters through election programs which they intend to implement upon election. This article examines the programme-to-policy fulfilment of election pledges in the Czech Republic in 2010–2013. It explores the factors that should influence the fulfilment of pledges. The article concludes that Czech political parties try to fulfil their election pledges, although the rate of fulfilment is not high because of the way the party system is structured. In addition, five factors influencing outcomes are tested. Consensus among parties, inclusion of the pledge in the Programmatic Declaration of the Government and whether pledges maintain the status quo influence the probability of pledge fulfilment. On the other hand, there appears to be no relation between pledge fulfilment and participation by a party in the government or its control of a ministry.

Keywords: mandate theory; election pledges; representation; mandate responsiveness; programme-to-policy linkage

1. Introduction

Mistrust of politicians has become widespread among citizens of the Czech Republic. A 2010 survey shows 76 % of the Czech populace believes political parties care primarily about their members' interests. 73 % thinks the parties are corrupt, and 65 % believes there is no real difference among parties (Tabery 2010: 7). This distrust in Czech political parties was also evident in a 2012 book by the Czech political scientist Petr Drulák. It was tapped by the Public Affairs movement, which won parliamentary seats in a campaign that emphasized that political parties were corrupt and irresponsible. Paradoxically, however, Public Affairs itself suffered from internal party corruption and other scandals.

This article examines the pledges made by political parties during the 2010–2013 political era from the standpoint of the mandate theory of democracy. Mandate theory declares that

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[**] The author is a Master degree student of Political Science at Faculty of Social Studies, Masaryk University. E-mail: 397925@mail.muni.cz.

political parties should articulate mutually distinguishable, clear election programs. They should not, therefore, all be saying the same thing. In contrast to claims that political parties are interested primarily in their own profit, under mandate theory they should implement their election manifestos once the election has taken place.

This article sets out three research questions to test these theoretical assumptions. They are as follows: Do Czech political parties present clear, mutually distinguishable election programs? Do political parties fulfil their pledges once the election has taken place? What factors influence the likelihood that these pledges will be fulfilled?

The majority of studies that have been done on pledge enactment have focused on countries in the Western Europe and North America (e.g. Royed 1996; Thomson 2001; Mansergh, Thomson 2007; Petry, Collete 2008). Evidence from developed democracies shows that political parties are mostly successful in fulfilling their pledges. They are normally able to fulfil the majority of their pledges. But it is less clear whether all the assumptions of mandate theory might hold for post-communist countries, as well, since there is a paucity of evidence from the region. The only research done on the post-communist countries has been that of Roberts (undated), whose focus was on the Czech Republic from 1992 until 2006, and Kostadinova (2013), who examined Bulgaria between 1997–2005.

The conclusion drawn here is that Czech political parties do indeed present clearer, more distinct programs than they have in the past. They also fulfil their pledges, but poorly, at a rate lower than in developed democracies. During the mandate of the Nečas government, in particular, the parties in power were unable to fulfil most of the pledges they made. Nor does participation by a party in the government significantly heighten its chances of fulfilling pledges. And control of the appropriate ministry seems not to be a crucial factor. On the other hand, consensus among parties, whether it is the status quo that is being pledged, and the inclusion of a pledge in a party's Programmatic Declaration of the Government raise the chances of fulfilment.

2. Programme-to-Policy Linkage in Post-Communist Europe

The theory of democracy offers three ways in which citizens may control their government and influence public policy – electoral accountability, mandate responsiveness, and policy responsiveness. 'Electoral accountability means that voters sanction politicians for producing outcomes that they do not approve of. These punishments should induce politicians to produce the outcomes that citizens want, lest they lose office. Mandate-responsive politicians present clear and distinctive programs in their campaigns, which they enact when elected. This gives citizens a means of ex ante rather than ex post control over policy. A policy-responsive government is one whose policy choices continually follow public preferences' (Roberts 2009: 6).

The focus of the present article is on mandate responsiveness. According to the mandate theory of elections, political parties propose policies during campaigns that they implement if elected. Citizens make their decisions about which party to vote for based upon the programs that have been presented. This process should ensure the creation of a representative government. Subsequently, every representative government should fulfil the pledges it has made during the election campaign (Manin et al. 1999: 29).

To work, the mandate theory must meet three requirements: parties must present clear, mutually distinguishable programs; voters must be acquainted with these programs and make a choice based upon them; and finally, the governing parties must fulfil the pledges they have made in their election manifestos (Roberts 2009: 38).

The first research question is thus: Do Czech political parties present clear, mutually distinguishable election programs?

The characteristics of an election program depend on linkages between voters and political parties. According to Kitschelt et al. (1999: 47–49), political parties may use three types of linkages – programmatic, charismatic, or clientelist. The type of linkage that prevails depends upon whether the country in question has a communist legacy: political parties in former bureaucratic-authoritarian regimes, such as the Czech Republic, are likely to support programmatic linkages.

Socioeconomic development also works to foster programmatic linkage between citizens and political parties. When politicians try to attract poor voters, they do so instead using clientelist or charismatic linkage. But education increases political sophistication and ideological commitment (Luna, Zechmeister 2005: 395).

The Czech Republic should therefore have the strongest programmatic linkages in the region because of its relatively high level of socioeconomic development, and its legacy of a bureaucratic-authoritarian communist regime.

The next two questions inquire into the fulfilment of pledges included in election manifestos. Do political parties fulfil their pledges after the election? And what factors influence the fulfilment of pledges?

Stokes (2001) claims politicians may break their election pledges out of a need to pursue economic reforms. This took place in Eastern Europe in the 1990s (Roberts 2009: 85–86). But Eastern Europe has made progress since then. The economic transformation into a market economy has ended (Ost 2009:13). We should therefore expect policy switches and broken pledges to be less common in the parliamentary term of office beginning in 2010 than it had been during the 1990s period of transformation.

Economic and foreign affairs events may also impact on politicians' ability to fulfil the pledges they have made (Royed 1996: 47). This may be seen as the case with the economic crisis that emerged in 2008, but the crisis should have impacted the government formed after the 2010 elections to a lesser degree, since parties had had time to adapt and adjust their programs to constraints imposed by the crisis (see ČSSD 2010: 3; KSČM 2010: 1; ODS 2010: 6; TOP 09 2010: 7; VV 2010: 6).

Stokes (2001: space 188), furthermore, claims young political parties are more likely to abandon their campaign pledges because their leaders hold more power than do the leaders of older parties bound to party activists and members. On this basis, we might expect ODS to have a higher rate of pledges fulfilled than TOP 09 or VV.

The final factor that may influence the outcome of a political process is how the decision-making environment is structured. This includes whether the governing party holds a majority or a minority in Parliament, the level of consensus among parties, whether the pledge reinforces the status quo, and the policy areas within which they have been made, responsibility for the pertinent ministry portfolio, and support expressed in a coalition agreement (Royed 1996; Thomson 2001). Some of these factors have been taken into account in the hypotheses below.

2.1. Hypotheses

The first hypothesis focuses on party status. According to Klingemann et al. (1994: 48 via Thomson 2001: 173): 'A pure mandate theory assumes that winning is everything. Losers' programs are ignored or repudiated. Winners' programs are enacted.' But it cannot be assumed that the rate of pledge fulfilment by opposition parties will approach zero. Consensus will exist on some policies, as well as on some pledges. In addition, opposition parties represent the legitimate demands of societal groups whose interest could be implemented for the sake of stability (Thomson 2001: 173).

There will, of course, be a difference between the rate of pledge fulfilment by governing and opposition parties, with the governing parties coming out on top. But 'winning is everything' is more likely to apply within majoritarian political systems. The difference in pledge fulfilment between governing and opposition parties is much reduced in consensual democracies, because opposition parties have a greater influence over the parliamentary agenda. The consensual model of democracy also encourages more cooperation between governing and opposition parties, with the result that opposition parties are able to fulfil at least some of their pledges (Louwerse 2011: 43, 45).

Besides controlling the parliamentary agenda, governing parties should be more capable of fulfilling their election manifestos than are opposition parties, because the government controls budget resources (Kostadinova 2013: 193). Governing parties also often hold a majority in parliament, and the government submits a high proportion of bills to parliament in the Czech Republic.

H1: Pledges made by a party in government are more likely to be fulfilled than are pledges made by a party in opposition.

The second hypothesis concerns the status quo. No government starts from scratch; there is a legal framework within which the government operates. This means that when a government takes office, it can decide whether to maintain the status quo or to pursue reform. But maintaining the status quo should be easier for political parties than implementing reform.

Maintaining the status quo depends upon the presence of veto players and their characteristics. Outcomes in political systems with a greater number of veto players are more stable but less cohesive (Tsebelis 1995: 301).

Previous research into pledge fulfilment has found pledges that maintain the status quo are more likely to be fulfilled than pledges that require policy change (see Royed 1996, Mansergh, Thomson 2007).

H2: Pledges that maintain the status quo are more likely to be fulfilled than pledges that pledge a change in policy.

Political parties try to distinguish themselves from each other, but they do sometimes agree on policies. This hypothesis partially connects to the previous one. A larger number of parties agreeing on a particular pledge means there will be fewer veto players to block the policy proposal.

But here the direction is opposite that of the previous hypothesis. While parliamentary passage of a bill may be blocked if enough veto players are present, bills may also be achieve passage when the political parties agree with the policy.

Thomson (2001: 177) distinguishes among three types of consensus: consensus between governing parties, consensus between governing and opposition parties, and consensus strictly between opposition parties. He suggests that consensus among governing parties heightens the chances that a pledge will be fulfilled more than do other types of consensus because of support by more than one governing party. The third type of consensus should, then, have the opposite impact: if only opposition parties agree on a pledge, the likelihood of its fulfilment should be lower.

This hypothesis may be utilized not only as a means to predict the outcome of a single pledge, but also to hypothesize that anti-system parties, such as the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia, will have their pledges fulfilled to a lower degree than other parties.

The third hypothesis thus becomes:

H3: The greater the number of political parties that agree with it, the more likely a pledge is to be fulfilled.

The succeeding hypothesis connects somewhat to the previous hypothesis by virtue of its focus on the Programmatic Declaration of Government, whose existence is the result of coalition negotiations and which represents a compromise among governing parties. Although political parties must deviate from some of their pledges in order to reach compromise, pledges included in the Programmatic Declaration of Government should be more likely to be fulfilled because the governing parties have agreed with the policy. In addition, the Programmatic Declaration of Government lays down actions and priorities of the government, and constitutes the result of negotiations that should be binding for the governing parties (Louwerse 2011: 45).

H4: A pledge is more likely to be fulfilled if it is included in the Programmatic Declaration of the Government

The final hypothesis is based upon the assumption that control of a ministry can positively influence the fulfilment of election pledges, because ministers can shape policy.

Although the cabinet is responsible for decisions collectively, there are too many decisions to be resolved for all members of the government to take part. Hence, ministers should be able to control most of the policies within their portfolios. 'Government departments are the only organizations with the resources to generate fully developed policy proposals and the expertise to implement and monitor any proposal that might be selected' (Laver, Shepsle 1996: 30–31). As a result, control of a ministry should increase the probability that the pledge will be fulfilled.

H5: A pledge is more likely to be fulfilled if the party making it controls the ministry responsible for the pledge

3. Methodology

The attempt here is to provide an answer to the research questions using pledge enactment research with a focus on discovering how many election pledges were fulfilled during the parliamentary term of office. In each case, pledges subject to objective evaluation are selected from the election manifestos, and their fulfilment is then examined.

3.1. Case selection

The choice of the Czech Republic was primarily a matter of convenience. Knowledge of the Czech language and of the contextual background of Czech politics was essential for conducting a study on pledge fulfilment.

Of post-communist countries, it may be presumed that the Czech Republic has fostered the best conditions for programmatic linkages to be developed. It leads all other post-communist countries except Slovenia in terms of GDP per capita and rankings on the Human Development Index. The communist legacy should also function to encourage programmatic linkages. Another factor is party system stability: the Czech Republic was considered stable up until the 2010 parliamentary elections. But even in 2010 and beyond, electoral volatility in the Czech Republic has remained less pronounced than in other countries of Central and Eastern Europe (Linek and Lyons 2013: 14, 29).

The specific focus is on the 2010–2013 period, which may at first sight seem an unusual period in Czech politics, given that the government endured only three years and a major fracture took place within the Public Affairs party.

But it must be borne in mind that even three years in office is an above average length of tenure for a government. In the entire history of the Czech Republic there have only been three governments that remained in office for their entire terms, these being the first Klaus government (1992–1996); the Zeman government (1998–2002), which survived on the basis of an opposition agreement; and, with some reservations, the coalition government of Social Democrats, Christian Democrats, and the Freedom Union – Democratic Union (2002–2006) headed by three different prime ministers (Vladimír Špidla, Stanislav Gross and Jiří Paroubek). Each of these periods was examined in an unpublished paper by Roberts (undated).

In addition, four governments failed to survive their entire term of office – the second Klaus government (1996–1998), the first and second Topolánek governments (2006, 2007–2009)[1], and the Nečas government (2010–2013) – and there have been three caretaker governments, those led by Tošovský (1998), Fischer (2009–2010) and Rusnok (2013).[2] It is thus unexceptional for Czech governments not to survive their entire term of office, and worthwhile data may be gleaned.

By contrast to other governments, the Nečas government started its term of office with a majority of 118 MPs. The coalition consisted of 53 MPs from the Civic Democrats (ODS), 41 from TOP 09, and 24 from Public Affairs (VV).[3] The opposition held 82 seats in the Chamber of Deputies, 56 seats were occupied by the Social Democrats and 26 by the Communists. Initially, the government included the prime minister (Petr Nečas, ODS), the first vice prime minister (Karel Schwarzenberg, TOP 09), vice prime minister (Radek John, VV) and 14 ministers (5 from ODS, 5 from TOP 09 and 4 from Public Affairs).

The emphasis in this article is on election programs from the 2010 elections. Only those programs put forward by political parties actually elected to the Chamber of Deputies are analysed. These parties were the Civic Democrats (ODS), the Communists (KSČM), the Social Democrats (ČSSD), Public Affairs (VV), and TOP 09. The Communists and Social Democrats were in opposition, and the Civic Democrats, Public Affairs, and TOP 09 formed a government that held a clear majority, with 118 seats in the Chamber of Deputies until a split occurred in Public Affairs.

This split in Public Affairs complicated things somewhat. VV were initially part of the government, but in May 2012, several Members of Parliament left the party to form a new party called LIDEM (the Liberal Democrats), in order to remain in the government in place of VV (Ludvík 2014). The pledges made by VV have nevertheless been coded as pledges from a political party represented in government.

All pledges found in the election manifestos were included in the dataset.

3.2. Definition of 'pledge'

Defining exactly what constitutes a pledge is the key methodological question for research on pledge fulfillment. What should be regarded as a pledge and what not?

Royed (1996: 79) states that 'pledges are defined as a commitment to carry out some action or produce some outcome, where an objective estimation can be made as to whether or not the action was indeed taken or the outcome produced.'

Pledges have two components: the action or policy they pledge to pursue and an indication of the firmness of commitment implied. Some pledges are 'firm' and use language such as *we will*; others are 'soft', phrased rather in terms of *we support, we are for*, etc. Pledges with both types of commitment are included in this study, since the key component of the pledge is the action that should be taken according to the election manifesto (Royed 1996: 79). Additionally, in countries where coalition governments are common, political parties don't make firm statements to the extent such statements are made in the USA or the UK, probably because they know some pledges will have to be renounced in the interests of reaching a coalition agreement (Mansergh and Thomson 2007: 313). The indication of commitment to the action or policy contained in the pledge must be specific enough that its fulfilment may be judged objectively.

3.3. Variables

The dependent variable in this study is pledge fulfilment. Fulfilment is evaluated at the end of the term of office of the Nečas government in June 2013.

Pledges are evaluated as fulfilled, partially fulfilled, or unfulfilled. But for analytical purposes, the fulfilled and partially fulfilled categories are merged into a single category to give rise to a dichotomous variable coded as one (1) for partially or wholly fulfilled pledges and zero (0) for unfulfilled pledges.

A pledge is coded as being fulfilled if it attains the goal set by the party in the election program in full. For example, the pledge, 'We will cut the Ministry of Defence budget by 10%' is considered fulfilled if the Ministry of Defence budget is indeed 10% lower by the end of the term. That same pledge would be only partially fulfilled if cuts of between 0–10% were made.

If the ministry's budget is not cut at all, the pledge is evaluated as unfulfilled. The particular contribution of the party to the process of fulfilling the pledge is not taken into account: it doesn't matter who brought about fulfilment of the pledge, only that it was fulfilled.

Fulfilment is evaluated using data available from various sources, including laws, government websites, and so on.

Several independent variables are included in the analysis. The first codes whether the party is in government – pledges from governing parties are coded one (1), and pledges made by opposition parties are coded zero (0). Pledges that promise the status quo are coded one (1), the rest coded zero (0). Pledges included in the Programmatic Declaration of the Government are coded one (1), while those not present in the declaration are coded zero (0). Pledges made by parties with control of the pertinent ministry portfolio are coded one (1), those by other parties zero (0). Party consensus is coded one (1) if the party agrees with the pledge, or zero (0) if it does not. The sum of parties agreeing with a particular pledge is represented by assigning an integer ranging from 1 (only the party making the pledge agrees with it) to 5 (all parties agree with the pledge).

3.4. Model

The core analysis is based on a logistic regression test of the hypotheses given above in Section 3. The statistical model, which includes all variables mentioned in the hypotheses is:

> *Fulfilment = b0 + b1 (Party Status) + b2 (Status Quo) + b3 (Consensus) +*
> *+ b4 (Programmatic Declaration) + b5 (Control of Ministry) + e*

The analysis was made using R (R Core Team 2013).

The regression analysis treats all pledges as equally important, despite the fact that some pledges may be more important than others for certain parties or groups of voters. There is, however, no nonarbitrary way to assign greater importance to some pledges over others.

3.5. Sources

The election manifestos of the parliamentary parties were incorporated in the analysis. These manifestoes are: the Change and Hope Program (Program změny a naděje) of the Social Democrats, the Election Program of KSČM (Volební program KSČM), Solutions That Help (Řešení, která pomáhají) from the Civic Democrats, the 2010 Election Program (Volební program 2010) of TOP 09 and the Political Program (Politický program) of Public Affairs. All pledges were extracted exclusively from these election manifestos.

To determine whether a pledge from the election manifestos was included in the programmatic declaration of the government I consulted the Programmatic Declaration of the Czech Republic Government from August 4th, 2010.

A large number of other sources was used to check pledge fulfilment. These include especially laws, official statistics, government websites, and newspaper articles. In addition, laws and government websites were used to determine which ministry portfolio specific pledges fell under, and which political party held the ministry in question.

4. Analysis

4.1. Election manifestos & pledges

As noted above, political parties must release election manifestos in order for voters to know what the parties will do if elected. Election manifestos must therefore be comprehensive and must include a wide range of topics and policies to enable voters to decide based upon complete information about the parties' intentions. Manifestos should also include specific pledges rather than vague statements so that the policies parties wish to implement are clear.

Figure 1: Number of Sentences in Parliamentary Parties' Election Manifestos
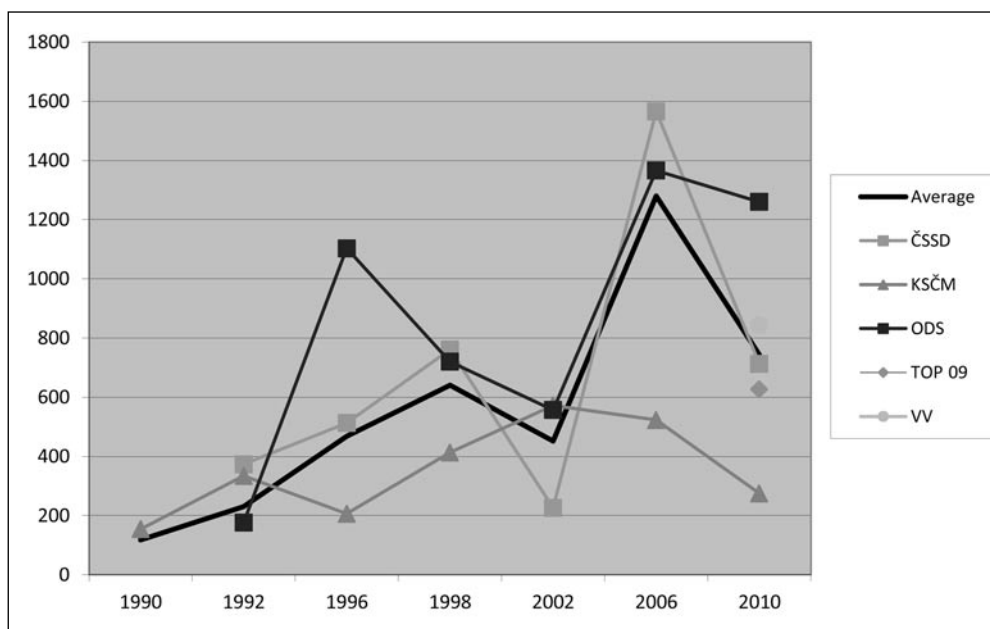

Note: Average counted for all parliamentary parties.

Source: Author based on Volkens et al. 2013.

The length of an election manifesto indicates its comprehensiveness – the longer program, the more comprehensive it should be. According to the Comparative Manifestos Project, the number of sentences in Czech party manifestos grew from 1990 to 1998. There has been no clear trend since – the average number of sentences in parliamentary parties' election manifestos declined in 2002, grew rapidly in 2006 (when the average was 1280 sentences) and declined again in 2010 (see Figure 1).

The clarity of election programs is measured by the number of pledges made by political parties in their election manifestos.

Figure 2: Election Pledges in the Czech Republic
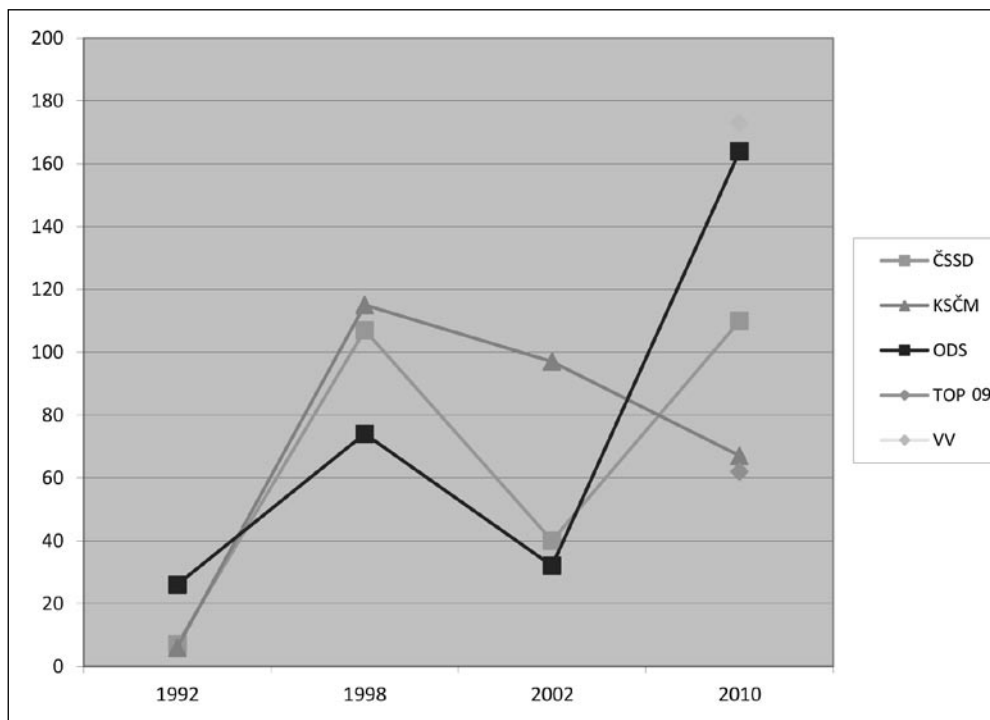
Note: Data from 1996 and 2006 are missing.

Source: Author based on Roberts (undated) and own data.

The number of sentences (Figure 1) and the number of election pledges (Figure 2) follow similar trends, although no data is available on the number of pledges for elections in 1996 and 2006. The number of pledges grew from 1992 to 1998, declined in 2002, and finally rose from 2006 to 2010.

How does the Czech Republic compare with other countries? The average number of pledges in Bulgaria was much lower in its 1997 elections (40.4 pledges/party) and higher in the country's 2001 elections (147.5 pledges per party) (Kostadinova 2013). In developed democracies, the average number of pledges varied from 60 (Ireland) to almost 200 (the UK) in the 1980s and 1990s[4] (Mansergh, Thomson 2007: 314).

The large number of election pledges made by ODS may be attributed to an attempt to attract voters to allow the Civic Democrats to form a government again after the fall of the Topolánek government in 2009. Also, new parties (Public Affairs and TOP 09) appeared that could woo voters away from the Civic Democrats. Therefore, ODS needed to promise a lot.

Public Affairs likely followed the same pattern. To get elected to the Chamber of Deputies, the party had to promise a lot.

In addition, both ODS and Public Affairs published their election manifestos in April 2010, less than 50 days before elections. The high number of pledges could be partially attributed

to an attempt to react to the Social Democrats, who had released their election program one month earlier (Eibl 2010: 77).

The Social Democrats, in opposition since 2006, were in a different position. They were expected to win the elections and had no need to make impossible-to-fulfil pledges. In the end, they did win, but were unable to form a coalition, despite pre-election polls that had suggested the Social Democrats would gain around 30% of the vote and could therefore form a coalition with the Communists or a minority government with Communist support. Governing with KSČM support is still taboo, but the leader of ČSSD, Jiří Paroubek, said he would be willing to cooperate 'with the Martians, if necessary'.

KSČM and TOP 09 made around sixty pledges each. KSČM's strategy was clear: their voters show the highest level of commitment, and election campaigns make little difference (Fiala et al. 1999: 188). Even promising the moon would hardly attract a greater number of voters. Rather, their appeal is based at the symbolic level – a vote for KSČM is a vote against the regime, and it expresses dissatisfaction with the economic and political transformation of the Czech Republic over the past twenty-five years.

In its election manifesto, TOP 09 declared: 'Over the previous twenty years, political parties have presented the voters with their election manifestos knowing that they would not be able to fulfil them in their entirety. TOP 09 believes the most virtuous, clearest way to gain the trust of the voters is to act as governments do in the Chamber of Deputies. We present our election manifesto in the form of a governmental programmatic declaration.' (TOP 09 2010: 5) The party also attracted voters through the charisma of its leader, Karel Schwarzenberg.

4.2. Pledge fulfilment

As may be seen in Table 2 below, fulfilment of election pledges is not particularly impressive in general. Slightly less than 40% of pledges were wholly or partially fulfilled in total. Even though the parties' term of office in the Chamber of Deputies ended prematurely in 2013, after three years of governing, the proportion of pledges fulfilled is similar to that shown in previous research by Roberts (undated).

In addition, the proportion of wholly or partially fulfilled pledges by each of ODS (44.5%), TOP 09 (45.2%), and ČSSD (42.7%) is similar. Although the Social Democrats were in opposition, they were able to attain slightly better-than-average results in getting their pledges fulfilled.

Public Affairs and the Communists did not fare as well. The results for VV were around 8% lower, probably due to the party's breakup during the term, as well as the inexperience of its deputies, and its character. Public Affairs may be labelled a populist political party. It used a mix of celebrity figures, such as Radek John, a former investigative journalist at a commercial TV station, and a large number of pledges to attract voters, some of which were impossible to fulfil (Hloušek 2012: 322, 326).

Nor is the outcome for KSČM any surprise. The party's pledges evoked nostalgia for the communist past – a halt to the privatization of state property, the exit of the Czech Republic from NATO, and so forth. In addition, the party stands for opposition to the current political system, and tries to block almost all efforts at reform.

Table 1: Fulfilment by Political Party

	Fulfilled	Partially fulfilled	Unfulfilled	Total
ODS	52 (31.7%)	21 (12.8%)	91	164
TOP 09	20 (32.3%)	8 (12.9%)	34	62
VV	43 (24.9%)	18 (10.4%)	112	173
ČSSD	35 (31.8%)	12 (10.9%)	63	110
KSČM	10 (14.9%)	4 (6.0%)	53	67
Total	162 (28.1%)	64 (11.1%)	351	576

Source: Author.

The proportion of pledges fulfilled is much lower in the Czech Republic than elsewhere. Kostadinova (2013) found Bulgarian political parties fulfilled around 60% of their election pledges. Political parties in fully developed democracies may have even higher rates of fulfilment. Although the rate of fulfilment of governing parties ranges from around 30% to 80%, only in Ireland, with parties such as Fine Gael, the Labour Party, and the Democratic Left was a rate of 30% found. In other countries, the rate of fulfilment is higher – in the Netherlands, it ranges from approximately 50% to 60%, in Canada it stands at 65% for the Conservatives and 81% for the Liberals, while in the UK, the Labour Party has achieved 67% and the conservatives 76%. In Greece, PASOK has a pledge fulfilment rate of 73%. Pledge enactment is lower for opposition parties than governing parties in these same countries: 33% between 1986–1998 in the Netherlands, 24% between 1979–1987 in the UK, and 45% between 1977–2002 in Ireland (Mansergh, Thomson 2007: 317–318).

The factors that could influence the fulfilment according to the hypotheses established above are discussed in following sections.

4.2.1. Party status

Hypothesis 1: Pledges made by a party in government are more likely to be fulfilled than are pledges made by a party in opposition.

Table 2: Fulfilment by Party Status

	Fulfilled	Not fulfilled	Total
Government	162 (40.6%)	237 (59.4%)	399
Opposition	61 (34.5%)	116 (65.5%)	177

Source: Author.

As Table 2 shows, the difference between the rate of fulfilment of governing parties and opposition parties is not large. There are several possible explanations why the margin is so thin.

First, Public Affairs had a below-average rate of fulfilment which might have been influenced by the party's split as well as by its character. The party was novel and appealed to

voters by virtue of its newness, in addition to its objective of cleansing the system of dirty political dealings. Its election manifesto was therefore created with an eye to setting Public Affairs apart from other political parties, with an emphasis on topics like fighting corruption and bureaucracy via measures that were often impossible to fulfil.[5] The party also attracted undecided voters brought together by trust in the leader of the party, Radek John, and by political dissatisfaction (Linek 2012: 167, 182).

Other governing political parties attained better-than-average rates of fulfilment, with around 45 % of pledges partially or wholly fulfilled. But the average for opposition parties is burdened by the performance of the Communists, who fulfilled only 21 % of their pledges; the Social Democrats, by contrast, were much more successful, with 44 % of pledges fulfilled.

Second, ČSSD controlled the Senate from the 2010 elections forward. But any veto by the Senate may be overruled by the Chamber of Deputies.

Another explanation is the consensual style of politics in the Czech Republic. The expected margin between government and opposition parties should be lower in multiparty democracies with coalition governments. In addition, the dissolution of Public Affairs might have contributed to a greater need to reach consensus within the Chamber of Deputies.

4.2.2. Status quo

Hypothesis 2: Pledges that maintain the status quo are more likely to be fulfilled than pledges that pursue a policy change.

Maintenance of the status quo is a strong predictor of fulfilment, as can be seen in Table 3, but only 12 % of pledges do so.

Table 3: Status Quo

	Fulfilled	Not fulfilled	Total
Status quo	55 (79.7 %)	14 (20.3 %)	69
Not status quo	170 (33.5 %)	337 (66.5 %)	507

Source: Author.

The distribution of pledges that maintain the status quo is unequal. The lowest number is found in the election manifesto of TOP 09 (approximately 4.8 %), followed by VV (9.8 %). The Communists are also below average in terms of making status quo pledges although one might expect KSČM would have a higher proportion. But instead of maintaining the status quo, the party's pledges often harken back to the policies of the communist regime – such things as leaving NATO, the end of privatization, and so forth.

By contrast, there is a large number of status quo pledges in the election manifestos of both the Civic Democrats (15.9 %) and the Social Democrats (14.5 %). Their status quo pledges, however, diverge when it comes to the policies concerned. The Civic Democrats which was to maintain achievements from previous governments such as keeping the tax rate at the same level as in previous years, maintaining a flat tax rate, etc. ČSSD's status quo pledges were

instead oriented at maintaining social security and standing against proposed reforms such as introducing tuition fees at universities.

4.2.3. Consensus of parties

Hypothesis 3: The greater the number of political parties that agree with it, the more likely a pledge is to be fulfilled.

Political parties commonly justify the need to form a government as the basis for abandoning some pledges. ODS used it in their 2013 election manifesto, where they proclaimed, ', 'We do not renounce our responsibility, even though we governed as part of a difficult coalition government in which many political decisions were made as a compromise among three not quite ideologically close subjects.' (ODS 2013: 3) But the Comparative Manifesto Project shows the difference in positions among political parties in the Nečas government was only 10.4 points (Volkens et al. 2013).

Table 4: Consensus among Governing Parties

Number of governing parties	0	1	2	3
Fulfilled or partially fulfilled pledges	35	129	38	21
Unfulfilled pledges	103	207	33	10
% of fulfilled/partially fulfilled	25.4 %	38.4 %	53.5 %	67.7 %

Source: Author.

Table 5: Consensus among Parliamentary Parties

Number of parties	1	2	3	4	5
Fulfilled or partially fulfilled pledges	126	52	26	14	5
Unfulfilled pledges	276	57	20	0	0
% of fulfilled/partially fulfilled	31.3 %	47.7 %	56.5 %	100 %	100 %

Source: Author.

Tables 4 and 5 would seem to show that consensus among the governing parties has a bigger impact on the rate of fulfilment. But this conclusion would be premature; Table 4 shows agreement by opposition parties with a pledge has no influence.

Actually, consensus among the governing parties has lower impact on fulfilment than consensus among all parliamentary parties.[6] Therefore, the assumptions of Thomson (2001) don't apply in the Czech Republic. Consensus across the Chamber of Deputies had the greatest effect, followed by consensus among governing parties. The least impact was due to consensus between among parties.[7]

Also, most pledges (around 70 %) are unique. This is a sign of the fact that the Czech political parties present distinct election programs. Agreement among all parties was only seen

when it came to the introduction of direct presidential elections (this pledge is included in all five election manifestos).

4.2.4. Programmatic Declaration of the Government

Hypothesis 4: A pledge is more likely to be fulfilled if it is included in the Programmatic Declaration of the Government

Table 6: Pledges Included in the Programmatic Declaration of the Government

	Number of pledges	Fulfilled
Included in the Programmatic Declaration	138	63 (45.7%)
Not included	438	97 (22.1%)

Source: Author.

The data in Table 6 shows that inclusion of a pledge in the Programmatic Declaration of the Government has a substantial impact on fulfilment.

The success of the political parties in placing pledges contained in the Programmatic Declaration varies. Most successful was TOP 09, which pushed through 41.9% of pledges included in the Programmatic Declaration. Other parties pushed through many of their pledges – the Civic Democrats only 26.8% of pledges and Public Affairs 23.1%.

Table 7: Pledges included in the Programmatic Declaration by Political Party

	Pledges included in the PDG	Total
ČSSD	21 (19.1%)	110
KSČM	7 (10.4%)	67
ODS	44 (26.8%)	164
TOP 09	26 (41.9%)	62
VV	40 (23.1%)	173

Source: Author.

Also, some pledges made by the opposition parties were included in the Programmatic Declaration of the Government. In the case of pledges made by ČSSD, these account for 19.1% of the total and in the case of KSČM, 10.4%.

The success of TOP 09 in placing its pledges in the Programmatic Declaration is only partial when one looks at Table 8 below. The high percentage of pledges made by TOP 09 that were included in the Programmatic Declaration of the Government is probably caused by the low number of pledges that TOP 09 made in the election manifesto.

Also, as can be seen in Table 8, the pledges made by opposition parties included in the Programmatic Declaration of the Government mainly concern pledges included in the election manifestos of other political parties. Exceptions are pledges that appear in the election

manifestos of governing parties in different forms. Probably during coalition negotiations a compromise was reached that conformed to the pledges of the Social Democrats and one pledge made by KSČM.[8]

Besides the total number of pledges included in the Programmatic Declaration of the Government, success may be evaluated via the number of pledges with which no other (governing) party agreed, but which were nevertheless included in the Programmatic Declaration. By this benchmark, the most successful was ODS, which pursued 26 pledges meeting this criterion. VV followed, with 23 pledges and TOP 09 is last among the governing parties, with 12 pledges (see Table 8).

Table 8: Pledges included in the Programmatic Declaration by Consensus of Governing Parties

	Number of governing parties agreeing w/ pledges			
	0	**1**	**2**	**3**
ČSSD	5 (23.8%)	9 (42.9%)	5 (23.8%)	2 (9.5%)
KSČM	1 (14.3%)	4 (57.1%)	1 (14.3%)	1 (14.3%)
ODS	0 (0%)	26 (59.1%)	12 (27.3%)	6 (13.6%)
TOP 09	0 (0%)	12 (46.2%)	7 (26.9%)	7 (26.9%)
VV	0 (0%)	23 (57.5%)	11 (27.5%)	6 (15.0%)

Source: Author.

4.2.5. Ministry control

Hypothesis 5: A pledge is more likely to be fulfilled if the pledge-making party controls the ministry responsible for the pledge.

Table 9: Control of Ministry Portfolio and the Rate of Fulfilment

	Fulfilled	**Not fulfilled**	**Number of pledges**
Control of ministry	39 (27.5%)	103 (72.5%)	142
Without control	121 (27.9%)	313 (72.1%)	434

Source: Author.

It is evident from Table 9 that control of the pertinent ministry was not an influence. The proportion of pledges fulfilled when the party controlled the ministry responsible for the specific pledge is only slightly higher than when the party did not control the ministry.

Changes of minister were frequent during the Nečas government. Only four ministers made it through the entire term: Minister of Foreign Affairs Karel Schwarzenberg, Minister of Finance Miroslav Kalousek, Minister of Healthcare Leoš Heger (all TOP 09) and Minister of Regional Development Kamil Jankovský (VV, later LIDEM). Karolína Peakce (VV, later LIDEM) spent the fewest days in office; she was dismissed eight days into her run as Minister of Defence. The average number of days occupying ministerial office is approximately

496. But the test of the number of ministries as an influence on fulfilment break did not yield significant results.[9]

On the other hand, the number of ministers replaced during the term shouldn't have a large impact because the ministries were usually held by the same party.[10] Also, the day-to-day work is carried out by civil servants, not by the minister. Moreover, most pledges required passing bills subject to amendment during the legislative process.

Pledges that belong within the portfolio of the Ministry of Transportation, Ministry of Defence, Ministry of Environment and Ministry of Foreign Affairs have a positive coefficient. Other ministries have a negative impact on the probability of fulfilment. However, these results are not statistically significant, except for the negative coefficient of pledges falling under the competence of the Governmental Committee for Coordinating the Battle against Corruption, which is significant at the 0.05 level.[11] This pattern may be attributable to a need to introduce serious change into the system (like establishing a special prosecutor for corruption and other serious crimes, special trials, and so on), or simply to a lack of will to carry through the changes.

4.3. Summary

A logistic regression analysis was conducted (Table 10) to analyse the influence of the factors mentioned above. The dependent variable was pledge fulfilment. Independent variables were the government status of the party, whether the pledge maintained the status quo, consensus among parliamentary parties, inclusion of a pledge in the Programmatic Declaration of the Government and control of the pertinent ministry.

To summarize the results, it seems factors that influence pledge fulfilment are maintenance of the status quo, which had the strongest effect, consensus among parliamentary parties, and the inclusion of a pledge in the Programmatic Declaration of the Government (Hypotheses 3, 4 and 5).

The remaining hypotheses suggest the impact of ministry control and party status (government vs. opposition) is not statistically significant.

Table 10: Results of Logistic Regression Analysis

Governing party	0.18 (0.24)
Status quo	2.40 (0.33)***
Consensus	0.52 (0.14)***
Programmatic Declaration	1.16 (0.24)***
Minister	0.20 (0.24)
Intercept	−1.99 (0.28)***
Log-likelihood	−319.08
Pseudo-R²	0.17
Observations	576
Note: *** significant at less than 0.001, ** significant at less than 0.01, * significant at less than 0.05.	

Source: Author.

5. Conclusion

The answer to the first research question, that of whether Czech political parties introduce clear, mutually distinguishable election programs, is straightforward. They do. Election manifestos have grown in both length and number of election pledges since the early 1990s. We may therefore assume that politics in the Czech Republic is based more upon programmatic linkage than anything else, although there will always be a mix of linkage types used by political parties.

The second research question (Do political parties fulfil their pledges after the election?) is more complex.

It is nothing more than a myth and a stereotype that political parties in the Czech Republic fail to fulfil their pledges. Pledges are fulfilled, but at a level much lower than that achieved by politicians in Bulgaria, Canada, Ireland, Greece, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and the United States. This is clear from past research.

But since there are few articles on pledge fulfilment focusing on post-communist Europe, it is difficult to draw general conclusions about the region. If, however, we compare fulfilment rates in the Czech Republic with those in Bulgaria, it would seem structural conditions such as socioeconomic development, the communist legacy, etc., have little or no influence on pledge fulfilment. What matters is the division of seats in parliament, the size of the majority held by the government, and the polarization present within the party system

The rate of fulfilment in the Czech Republic differs from that in majoritarian democracies like the United Kingdom, or in countries with a presidential system like the USA; however the difference between the Czech Republic and other parliamentary democracies with coalition governments is larger than expected. A low level of pledge fulfilment seems a stable feature of the Czech Republic; at least it seems so when we compare results from 2010–2013 with the rates of fulfilment found by Roberts during the 1992–1996, 1998–2002, and 2002–2006 terms of office. This could be explained by the dynamics of the party system.

It could be argued that the government might have performed better and fulfilled more of its pledges if it had endured the entire term. At the time of the Nečas government's fall, there were few bills introduced in the Chamber of Deputies whose objective was to fulfil a pledge. But simply introducing a bill is not the same as getting it passed.[12] More bills could be introduced later, but the legislative process in the Czech Republic is quite lengthy, and the probability of passing a bill declines with time.

To understand the dynamics of the party system, we must start with the role played by KSČM in Czech politics. The Communist Party did the worst in terms of pledge fulfilment in the 2010–2013 term. The party's low rate of fulfilment is clearly a function of its isolation within the Chamber of Deputies. Because of this isolation, brought about by the party's anti-system nature, its members are unable to fulfil their pledges. The only exception is with status quo pledges, and pledges that other parties agree with. Thus, its isolation has a negative impact on the party's probability of fulfilling pledges – KSČM is the only Czech political party with a negative and statistically significant beta coefficient.

But in spite of this, the party takes a similar share of the vote in every election, and KSČM holds a significant block of seats in the Chamber of Deputies, with 20.5% of the seats in 2002–2006, and 13% of the seats in the 2006 and 2010 elections. This has been a source of

problems in creating coalition governments, because options have been limited by the taboo on cooperating with KSČM, and by virtue of the fact that establishing a viable coalition government with at least 101 members of parliament is difficult when 26–41 seats are occupied by the Communists. In addition, relations between the two largest political parties, ČSSD and ODS, were hostile, making a grand coalition unlikely. Any coalition therefore had to include one big party and the remaining smaller parties from the centre of the political spectrum, making it even more difficult to create a government.

The ability to create a government depends upon political parties gaining a large share of votes. Hence, they try to attract voters by making a large number of pledges, even if they are not able to fulfil them.

Other factors also influenced the rate of fulfilment during the term of the Nečas government. One such was the character of the parties. The character of Public Affairs contributed to its lack of success in fulfilling election pledges – many of its pledges were attempts to distinguish the party from other political parties that had been labelled corrupt and irresponsible. Public Affairs based its campaign on anti-corruption and anti-bureaucracy policies that were difficult or even impossible to fulfil. The split within VV also contributed to the fiasco.

ČSSD, ODS and TOP 09 reached similar outcomes, but the rate of fulfilment attained by the Social Democrats was higher than originally anticipated – the margin between the government and the opposition is usually higher, according to research from other countries. This low margin may be explained by the reduced number of pledges made by ČSSD compared to the Civic Democrats and Public Affairs. ČSSD expected to get around 30 % of the vote in the 2010 election and probably to form a government with the support of the Communists, as party leader Jiří Paroubek had indicated. The Social Democrats therefore did not need to make a large number of pledges to attract voters. But in the end, ČSSD got only 22 % of the vote, and the plan.

Other factors also influenced the rate of pledge fulfilment. The results of the logistic regression show pledges maintaining the status quo are more likely to be fulfilled. If there is consensus on a pledge, it is also more likely to be implemented. The same holds true if a pledge is included in the Programmatic Declaration of the Government. However, there is no significant evidence for the remaining two hypotheses. Participation by a party in the government (Hypothesis 1) and control of the pertinent ministry (Hypothesis 5) do not heighten the chances of fulfilment. The results for the first and fifth hypothesis are quite surprising, because previous research has shown the opposite.

Nonetheless, the narrow gap between the rate of fulfilment of governing parties and parties in opposition is less puzzling when we look at the course of the Nečas government. One of the governing parties, Public Affairs, split during its term of office. A government with a clear majority in the Chamber of Deputies lost its clear dominance in the Parliament and the opposition controlled the Senate. This could also show that Czech politics is consensual.

Ministers' inability to influence pledge fulfilment can be explained by the fact that ministers have a lower impact on the actual implementation of policies than expected. Most of the pledges required passing a bill which could be changed by members of parliament during legislative process.

Research into the programme-to-policy linkage opens a promising field. This study has tried to answer a few questions about programmatic linkage in the Czech Republic. But many

questions remain. Without further empirical evidence from other (post-communist) countries, reasonable comparisons cannot be made nor the factors influencing pledge fulfilment located. How does the ideological distance between political parties influence pledge fulfilment? Does the presence of a stable, isolated party (like KSČM) bolster competition and thereby increase attempts by other political parties to outbid? Are new parties more successful or less successful in fulfilling their pledges than established political parties?

Finally the post-communist countries are riddled through with patronage and corruption. This should negatively impact on their representativeness. An attempt to integrate research into pledge enactment with the literature on patronage might therefore bring noteworthy results.

Footnotes:

1. Topolánek attempted to create a minority government consisting of ODS that didn't gain vote of confidence. Then he created a coalition with the Green party and the Christian democrats that depended on support of the 'defectors' from ČSSD.
2. The caretaker character of the Rusnok government is questionable because of the influence of the president Miloš Zeman and his ties with some ministers that stood in the elections for 'the Zemanites'.
3. After the split of Public Affairs and creation of LIDEM, 8 former members of VV supported the government. Thus, the government held a majority of 102 votes in the Chamber of Deputies.
4. The data comes from the Netherlands, Greece, the United Kingdom and the United States and also from Ireland. On the other hand, according to Rallings's data from Canada and the UK the number of pledges was much lower from the 1940s to the 1970s. However, Royed counted two times more promises during the 1970s in the UK than Rallings (Thomson and Mansergh 2007: 314).
5. E.g. merging the Ministry of Defence with the Ministry of Interior, introduction of majoritarian electoral system, making it possible to recall a member of the parliament during the term etc.
6. Correlation coefficient equals 0.28 for consensus among all parliamentary parties and 0.22 for consensus among governing parties. P-value is lower than 0.01 in both cases.
7. According to bivariate logistic regression the coefficient for consensus across the Parliament is 0.169, for the consensus among governing parties the coefficient is 0.141. Both had a significance level lower than 0.001. The coefficient for the consensus between opposition parties is 0.076 with a significance level lower than 0.05.
8. This refers to 5 promises by the Social Democrats – raising the capital of the Czech-Moravian Guarantee and Development Bank, a ban on participation in public tenders for companies that violated law, actualization of the state energetic conception, new revenue tax bill and passing a private security services bill. All the promises (but the last one) are included in election manifesto of other parties in a different shape that excludes clearly rank promises of ČSSD and other parties as consensual. Moreover, one promise made by KSČM only was included in the Programmatic Declaration of the Government – the pledge concerning state energetic conception.
9. Lower influence on fulfilment with rising number of ministers that were replaced can be reached only when ministry of defence and ministry of transportation are excluded. Promises belonging to the portfolio of ministry of defence are the most consensal one because it usually concern deployment of Czech soldiers abroad that needs support of the majority in the Parliament. Also, ministry of transportation is rather consensual and technocratic. However, in each of these ministries there were 4 changes of ministers. In addition, the results are not statistically significant.
10. There are some exceptions – minister of interior (Radek John) and minister of education (Josef Dobeš) both from Public Affairs were replaced by ministers that didn't belong to any party in that

time (Jan Kubice and Petr Fiala). Also, Alexander Vondra (ODS) was replaced by Karolína Peakce (LIDEM) in the office of minister of defence, but she was quickly replaced by Petr Nečas who was temporarily charged to manage the ministry and then replaced by the former Chief of Staff Vlastimil Picek (without party affiliation). Moreover, ODS a LIDEM switched control of the ministry of transportation (minister from LIDEM was replaced by the member of ODS) and the Government Legislative Council (Jiří Pospíšil from ODS was replaced by delegate from LIDEM).

11. According to the logistic regression analysis that included variables for status quo, control of ministry, programmatic declaration, position of a party, consensus among political parties and all ministries (promise belongs to ministry portfolio were coded 1, the rest as 0).

12. E.g. National referendum bill was introduced into the Chamber of Deputies in April 2014, but the Constitutional Law Committee of the Chamber of Deputies disapproved with passing the bill. Also, the 'Financial Constitution' was introduced into the Chamber of Deputies, but it seems unlikely that it had a chance to be passed because it would need a constitutional majority.

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