Czech political parties, their functions and performance: Assessing Czech party politics[1]

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Abstract
The paper tries to assess the roles that political parties play in the political system of Czech parliamentary democracy. Popular evaluation of the parties' performance seen by the eyes of the Czech public is rather skeptical. Parties are seen as weak and corrupted vehicles of political power without transmitting important societal interests and embodying important political and moral values. We are going to present different point of view. The analysis of Czech political parties will be based on a catalogue of parties' systemic functions and evaluation of the scope and quality of Czech political parties in respect to them.
Keywords: political parties, democracy, functions, Czech Republic, elections, representation, articulation, aggregation

In the European Union (EU) today political parties face a range of issues and challenges within the party systems of their respective countries. For parties in new member states of the EU, those which underwent a process of democratic transition during the 1990s, the situation is more complicated than for the rest. In a way, their position is more precarious than that of their Western European counterparts, as the concept of "political party" has various and not always positive connotations in Central Europe. Our contribution will not attempt to evaluate the positives and negatives of party politics in all EU member states with post-communist legacies, but will focus on the Czech Republic. Indeed, it was in the Czech Republic, following the fall of the communist regime, that the first democratic election (in Summer 1990) was won by the Civic Forum with its slogan *"Parties are for partisans, Civic Forum is for everybody."* This slogan had an obvious tactical importance as part of the wider struggle with the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia and other parties of the former National Front. But it also had a symbolic dimension and resonated with certain contemporary discussions about democratic theory which suggested that political parties had outlived their purpose. The assumption at the time that broad, non-ideological political movements with loose structures such as the forums could replace traditional political parties was not ultimately borne out in reality (see Juchler, 1994: 126; Kitschelt, 2006); however, criticism of political parties in Czech political discourse is no weaker at the beginning of the 2010s than it was twenty years ago. On the contrary, it is acquiring a new dimension, as we shall see below.

We believe that the Czech example is especially suitable for evaluating the role of parties in contemporary European democracies. On the one hand, the Czech political tradition has been affected by the experience of the communist regime; on the other, Czech party politics is in many respects closer to Western European patterns than is the Central European average. Above all, the nuclei of Czech party political traditions reach back to the revolutionary years 1848/1849 and party life continued developing between 1861 and 1938, a period which corresponds to the rise of mass parties in the West. Contemporary Czech party

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politics thus features a certain institutional memory of the era when the political parties represented the crucial levers in the political process, in the years preceding World War I. and especially in the inter-war era of the First Czechoslovak Republic. At the same time, contemporary Czech political parties are sensitive towards the thorny issues which have accompanied the renewal and development of party pluralism following the era of socialist rule.

Our contribution seeks to appraise the role played by contemporary Czech political parties in the country's political system. As we do not seek to enrich the discussion which endeavours to provide a normative definition of the role of political parties in contemporary liberal democracies both in Europe and world-wide, we understand the concept of "democracy" in a comparatively narrow and instrumental sense as a method of organising the political process and of granting legitimacy to the political elite. We thus understand democracy as a process rather than a substance and the following definition will do for our purpose:

"A democracy, briefly defined, is a political system in which citizens enjoy a number of basic civil and political rights, and in which their important political leaders are elected in free and fair elections and accountable under a rule of law." (Almond et al., 2001: 34).

A consequence of understanding democracy as a process is that our interest will not be in the issue of moral values conveyed (or not) by the political parties, but rather in the functions the political parties ought to fulfil within the modern liberal political systems of representative democracy. The structure of our article follows this logic. First we will define these fundamental functions. We will then examine the image of the Czech political parties as seen by the Czech general public on the one hand and by the scholarly discussion within the political science on the other. Adopting a functional approach to political parties we will then analyse whether the Czech political parties fulfil their functions and whether they are any good at doing so. We will focus mostly on the present situation, roughly from 2005 onwards, but where we believe it is expedient or necessary, we shall digress back to the 2000s and 1990s.

Functions of political parties

Scholars of politics were interested in identifying the functions fulfilled by political parties in modern representative democracies as early as the period preceding the turn of the 1950s and the 1960s, when the systemic approach and the structural-functional analysis drawing on it, inspired above all by Gabriel Almond, had become dominant within political science. In his original version Almond had created a kind of catalogue of functions within the political process conceived as conversion of inputs to outputs: (1) interest articulation, (2) interest aggregation, (3) rule making, (4) rule application, (5) rule adjudication and (6) permanent political communication (Almond, Powell, 1966: 29; for a more recent version see for instance Almond et al., 2001: 46-50). According to Almond other functions need to be fulfilled in order for the system to remain operational, namely political socialization and political recruitment (selection of political representation and people active in politics). There can be no doubt that we enter here the territory of political parties which to some degree participate in all of the functions bound within the structures of a political system, as listed above.

Attention to political parties and their functions or roles had already been given in the tradition of the government studies, especially in the twentieth century (see for example Fiala,

Strmiska, 1998: 62-63). Catalogues of political party functions appeared, some concise, others reaching dozens of entries. Some catalogues were grounded in describing the actual democratic practice, others tended to treat parties normatively, i.e. listing functions parties ought to fulfil. In this rather wide field we need to find a conception of political parties' functions that would be synoptic and would interconnect, as necessary, the concept of political party function with a conception of political system which itself needs to fulfil certain functions.

Although Klaus von Beyme's attempt at this from the early 1980s is now almost thirty years old, we believe it fit for the purpose. Von Beyme identified four fundamental functions of the political parties (von Beyme, 1985: 13):

1) the identification of goals (ideology and the programme),
2) the articulation and aggregation of social interests,
3) the mobilisation and socialisation of the general public within the system, particularly at elections
4) elite recruitment and government formation.

At the time when Beyme devised his analysis of the fundamental functions of political parties,[3] party theory was still at the stage when catch-all parties had replaced mass parties. During the 1980s and in the first half of the 1990s, the organizational pattern of many Western European parties and their functioning have undergone a transformation which was designated by later theory as emergence of the cartel party (Katz, Mair, 1995). It is obviously unnecessary to repeat here the basic definition of the cartel party or to reproduce the discussion about this concept's heuristic capacity and empirical relevance. But we must bear in mind that the emergence of the cartel parties was the result of desegmentation of political behaviour, of increasing dependence of parties on state funding, and of centralised conducting of election campaigns through the media, primarily the TV. The parties' response consisted in a more centralist organisation, professionalisation of political communication and decreasing importance of mass membership. As Klaus Detterbeck (2005) shows, empirical observations have supported the core notion of the cartel party concept, but they have also shown that elements of party organisation dating to the era of catch-all and even of mass parties retain their importance. For instance, state funding supplements and enlarges, sometimes substantially, the traditional resources provided by affiliated pressure groups. The concept of cartel party is clearly unable to explain all of the characteristics of the Czech political parties, which feature elements of catch-all parties and sometimes even of mass parties. It is nevertheless appropriate to ask the following question: How do the functions of political parties as defined by von Beyme apply in the era of cartel parties?

The first function concerns party ideologies and programmes. Political parties must be able to offer to the electorate a coherent political programme that would, if they were to participate in the government, be the basis for that government's programme. Party programmes provide a fundamental plan of political agenda which in the ideal case is grounded in the long-term ideological view of the world which the party espouses. The programme plays an important role for the opposition parties as well, helping to define the priorities of government critique and offering to the voters an alternative that might materialise after the next election. Some of the cartel party's characteristics make one assume that mainstream parties are more pragmatic, yet this pragmatism might only appear in government documents and not necessarily already in party programmes.

The second function links politics with the economy and the civic society. These three spheres in which activities are undertaken in the modern democratic state produce individual

[3] The German original of von Beyme's monograph was published in Munich in 1982 already.

interests which are then integrated through the intermediary system and the pressure groups present in this system. Only political parties are able to aggregate fragmented political interests on such a level of abstraction that they can become the basis for political decision making. The problem political parties face is the expansion of articulated interests. As Russell Dalton (2007) has shown, developed democracies are characterised by a rapid increase of a range of social interests as well as of new types of actors articulating these interests. This translates into increased demands on the political system. Political system and political process become more complex, concurrently with citizens' increased perception that their particular interests are not sufficiently recognised by the system. The ability of parties to aggregate interests, and voter satisfaction with their performance, decrease in parallel, which leads us to the next function.

In the "golden age" of mass parties (which are sometimes called parties of social integration) mobilisation and socialisation of citizens into the political system was an important component of party activities. These parties, which we could with a slight simplification consider the products of traditional cleavages (see Lipset, Rokkan, 1967), were firmly anchored in the milieu of their voters. Through instruments which included party-political newspapers, mass membership and networks of supporting organisations which socialised voters into the party environment, parties were able to create in certain countries (Netherlands, Austria, and Switzerland) a culture of pillars with strong links between voters and parties (see Lijphart, 1977: 41-44).[4] In such an environment it was easy for the parties not only to mobilise, but also to socialise their electorates. The shift towards catch-all parties and subsequently to cartel parties (Katz, Mair, 1995), the disintegration of traditional social and political milieux, and the fragmentation of society, has brought a profound individualisation to the processes of political socialisation. The behaviour of voters is less group-conditioned and the new forms of political communication and marketing put the political parties' ability to mobilise electorates to a fundamental test (see Luther, Müller-Rommel, 2005: 7–10).

Additionally, the position of political parties in East-Central Europe is impeded by the attitude of the general public which is mistrustful of them due to the several decades' worth of experience with the non-democratic regime presided over by the communist party-state. In Central and Eastern Europe, the experience of the communist regime therefore intensifies the increasing dissatisfaction with politics (*Politikverdrossenheit*) and thus also with political parties as the key players in the political process, which has been observed in Western Europe in the last decade. Czech political parties too have to counter decreased interest in membership and in participation generally. The mobilisation and socialisation function is manifest in the ability of parties to induce the electorate's participation in the political process (typically by showing up to vote and voting for a particular political party), but also in their ability to socialise the voters, or citizens generally (for instance by inducing them to become

[4] There is no need to idealise the environment in which mass political parties operated, however. Concomitant with the strong role of parties in political socialisation and mobilisation of voters was clientelism, appearing alongside pragmatic and ideological motives for voting (see, for instance, Kitschelt, 2007). But the concepts of clientelism and patronage were also often used in the research into "post-communist" parties. In examining political parties of post-communist Europe in the first half of the 1990s, Herbert Kitschelt defined three types of parties. Charismatic parties are elected because of their leaders. Programmatic parties because the voters support their programmes and expect their political preferences to be fulfilled in this manner. Clientelist parties, Kitschelt's third type, are elected by voters who thus received personal benefits, material or immaterial (Kitschelt 1995: 449-451). But obviously there are enormous differences in degrees of political clientelism and these can be substantially explained by the different types of communist regimes. If we accept Kitschelt's tripartite division of communist systems into patrimonial, national-accommodative and bureaucratic-authoritarian types (see Kitschelt et al. 1999: 21-28), political clientelism has strongest presence in countries which experienced patrimonial communism with its dense hierarchic network of patrons and clients. Contrariwise, (direct) clientelism is weak in countries with tradition of bureaucratic-authoritarian communism (Hale 2007). The nature of Czech communism places the country in this last category of weak clientelism.

members, but also interesting them to participate broadly in their activities). From our point of view two indicators will be interesting to observe: voter turnout, which indicates the parties' ability to mobilise the electorate, and data on party membership.

Elite recruitment and government formation, von Beyme's last function of political parties, has been strengthening historically, inasmuch as one of the strategies employed by contemporary parties is securing their access to state funding streams and political support; concomitant with this is the focus of these parties on securing control of the political offices. In the Czech parliamentary regime the crucial country-wide institutions are the bicameral parliament consisting of the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate, and the government which is accountable to the Chamber of Deputies.

In determining the personnel of both of the chambers of the Parliament the electoral system plays an important role. It therefore impinges on the political parties as elite producers, predetermining to a certain degree the process of recruiting their cadres. The presence of independent representatives in the Czech parliament is interesting in this context. Whereas the election of the Chamber of Deputies employs a list proportional system (for specifics see Šedo et al., 2009) which does not allow the candidates to stand independently of parties' candidate lists, the election of the Senate by a two-round system allows independent candidates to stand.

In a parliamentary regime, the body which articulates and executes state policies is the government. This is one of the reasons why K. von Beyme (1985: 311-359) devotes so much space to explaining the processes of cadres recruitment. Von Beyme analyses several aspects of government and governance, ranging from the party-political composition of the cabinets, through their stability, the length of time the individual parties remain in government, to the impact parties have on government policies. These indicators allow one to establish which parties are critical for the formation of government and which, on the contrary, have only a limited or no influence on the shape of the executive (and why). Moreover, government stability is one of the most important considerations, influencing the quality of democracy and facilitating effective execution of the government policies.

The image of party politics in Czech Republic

There is no doubt that political parties represent the key actors in the political process, despite the growing influence of other actors and increasing importance of the international environment (i.e. the role played by the EU). Their position in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, a region influenced by the legacy of communism, is nevertheless different from that enjoyed by their Western European counterparts. In the Czech circumstances, but also elsewhere, the concept of party was equated with the all-powerful Communist Party. We have already mentioned how effectively this experience was incorporated by the Civic Forum into its electoral campaign in 1990. The dispute over the role of political parties has remained salient in Czech politics to this day, however. Two episodes must be mentioned here. The first incident whose roots predate the year 1990 had substantial repercussions for the Civic Forum's development, in whose definitive disappearance in spring 1991 the controversy over its organisation was instrumental. From the very beginning, two antithetical views of the organisation's future could be identified in the Forum. The first, connected with among others the first post-communist Czechoslovak president Václav Havel, was critical of traditional party organisation and preferred a looser structure for political movements. The other, which eventually prevailed in the Forum and founded the Civic Democratic Party (ODS), was led by Václav Klaus and favoured traditional party structures. This controversy was not solely about

party organisation, but equally about the role of traditional political parties and the nature of the political conflict in the society. Whereas Havel and politicians close to him viewed ideological conflicts and party politics in general critically, emphasising the role of civic society, the faction which eventually won in the Civic Forum understood party politics as paramount for the political structuring of the society and thought the various civic activities as more or less transient (Havelka, 1998, Novák, 1997: 34-36, Pšeja, 2005: 46-59).

The second episode which to a certain degree followed the "initiating" conflict within the Civic Forum was connected with the so-called Opposition Agreement, i.e. the support by ODS for a minority social democratic government. The Opposition Agreement, which included among other things proposals for extensive changes in the constitutional and political system, but even more so the actors which signed the Agreement, became symbols of "evil" partisanship, and targets of criticisms voiced not only by other political parties but also by numerous civic initiatives (Dřevíč appeal [Dřevíčská výzva], Impuls 99 and Thank you, now leave [Děkujeme, odejděte]). Both Czech and foreign political scientists and commentators entered the discussion about the political arrangements at the time, providing substantially different interpretations. On the one hand, one could point to authors (Fiala, Mikš 2006) who understood the Opposition Agreement as a corollary of previous political development. On the other, we would find authors (Klíma, 2002) who understood the Opposition Agreement as a grand coalition *de facto* and considered it to pose a threat to Czech democracy. Although neither of these two interpretations could be described as dominant at the time, the very controversy surrounding the Opposition Agreement and the discussions that followed had consequences for the general perception of political parties. In the long term, trust in politics and political parties in the Czech republic is comparatively low and, most importantly, gradually decreasing (see Linek, 2010). The growing dissatisfaction with party political performance must also be put in the contexts of the fairly high instability of the Czech governments (Havlík, 2011, Kopeček, Havlík, 2008) and of the debates about the allegedly increasing links between political parties and private economic interests. The criticism of parties which have long-term relevance in the Czech political system, and also of their leaders, reached a peak in the 2010 election of the Chamber of Deputies, when incumbent parties lost 33.6 per cent in comparison with the previous election, and 114 (!) out of the 200 deputies were newcomers (Haughton et al., 2011, Kneblová, 2010).

Many political scientists are likewise critical of the Czech political parties. Elizabeth Bakke (2010: 65-67) for instance points out that the civic society institutions are generally fairly weak; she also notes the related fact that parties were built in a top-down fashion; political party membership in countries which experienced "really existing socialism" is low. Geoffrey Pridham (2009: 281-282) emphasises the already-mentioned low level of trust by the public in political parties. Kevin Deegan-Krause and Tim Haughton (2010: 237) brought attention to a related issue, viz. the Czech public's perception that their political representation as a whole displays an affinity for corrupt behaviour. Kopecký (2006: 125-128) points out that the Czech political parties essentially seized control of the process of recruiting political and administrative personnel, and particularly criticises the fact that administrative positions are routinely newly occupied with the change in the governing coalition, which hurts the professionalism of the civil service. Kopecký also highlighted the parties' tendency to push civic society bodies out of the public discourse, notwithstanding the fact that their own ability to generate political participation and to articulate interests is weak indeed.

The facts listed testify to the ongoing negative perception of the Czech political parties. One of the reasons for this can be the parties' inability to fulfil their function. Employing the functional approach, let us now look more closely whether such criticism is justified.

Identification of goals

That function of political parties which demands that they identify their goals is manifest practically in party programmes. Günter Olzog and Hans-J. Liese (1991: 12-14) identify long-term *fundamental programmes,* which set strategic goals for the parties, as well as their fundamental ideological position, *action programmes* on actual political topics, *electoral programmes,* conceived for elections, parliamentary or otherwise, and finally *government policy statements,* where the party programmes materialise transformed by virtue of government responsibility. In the Czech political reality action programmes consist mainly in individual conceptual materials usually prepared mid-term by the opposition parties which thereby seek to respond to the government agenda and elaborate an alternative political vision.

How do the ideological foundations and programmes of Czech political parties look? The comparatively swift consolidation of the Czech party system, in terms of both establishment and demarcation of the main relevant parties which already took place in the mid-1990s (see Dančák, Hloušek, 2007: 200-201) and consolidation of the socio-economic cleavage as the dominant one (see Hloušek, Kopeček, 2009: 526-533; Chytilek, Eibl 2011), allowed for a relatively quick stabilisation of the main ideological-political options. The space on the left has been divided between the Czech Social Democratic Party (ČSSD) and the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSČM), the latter exhibiting anti-systemic tendencies. Up to 1998, the space of the right was contested by the popular ODS and the small Civic Democratic Alliance (ODA). Between 1998 and 2006, Freedom Union (US) occupied ODA's position, and following a brief intermezzo of ODS dominance without a direct contestant, Tradition, Responsibility, and Prosperity (TOP09) became ODS' challenger on the right. Although the Christian and Democratic Union–Czechoslovak People's Party (KDU-ČSL) does not enjoy parliamentary representation at this time, it is a party with a traditional standing in the political centre and up to the 2010 parliamentary election had substantial coalition potential. The populist formation Public Affairs (VV) is the only one eluding an unequivocal classification on the right–left axis, socio-economically defined. Similarly, VV cannot be classified into any of the traditional party families, whereas the other relevant Czech parties display a pronounced affinity with Western European members of the respective party families (see Hloušek, Kopeček, 2010: 231-239). This affinity becomes even more remarkable when put in the context of other Central European countries.[5] In the analysis that follows we will be primarily dealing with the parties currently with parliamentary representation and, where heuristically appropriate, also with KDU-ČSL and the Green Party (SZ).

Not all of the parties listed have a long-term fundamental programme. KSČM is an example of a party which does have one, as the party produces extensive fundamental, medium-term and election programmes. A long-term programme was approved by the party

[5] VV also defies the Czech standards in that it does not exhibit features that traditional party organisations have. It could probably be described as a business firm party (Hopkin – Paolucci 1999). The designation implies that the party is organised and run as business whose aim is to be successful in elections, subordinating its profile and strategy to this goal. It does not rely on the traditional resources of membership, stable aggregation of interests and long-term policy priorities. The connection of VV with the ABL security agency is indeed one of the causes of the party's current crisis. The development of VV hitherto supports Jonathan Hopkin's and Catherine Paolucci's (1999: 335) assumption that a business firm party „*(...) undermines stable party competition, creating the potential for party system 'turbulence', and fails to provide voters with a political identity*."

already in October 1990. In December 1992 the so-called Kladno programme was adopted and became the party's fundamental document. It was supplemented and updated not only with the individual electoral programmes, but also with more substantial medium-term manifestos adopted at KSČM's party congresses. The fact that the Kladno programme remains the party's fundamental manifesto testifies to the party's programmatic continuity (Fiala et al., 2005: 1415-1418).

Medium-term programmes are more common in the Czech Republic and have been adopted repeatedly by ČSSD, ODS and KDU-ČSL. ODS last adopted a medium-term programme in February 2010: the document called "Vision 2020" [Vize 2020] articulates general goals and priorities for ODS' policies, exceeding one electoral term.[6] ČSSD's programme is even more developed: in addition to the document named "Open to new challenges" [Otevřenost novým výzvám], which was adopted in 2003 and, given its contents and conception, could be considered a long-term programme, the party also has a medium-term programme and a wide range of further documents setting its position, of which the so-called Orange books [Oranžové knihy] expressing the political standpoints of ČSSD's shadow cabinet members deserve special attention.[7]

KDU-ČSL mostly focused on creating and innovating their programme in the 1990s. The party's first attempt at a long-term programme dates back to spring 1990, but the dynamics of development inside the party in the early 1990s when KDU-ČSL sought to establish a better and modern profile, and especially to clean itself of the label associating it with the former National Front. This made the party adopt a strategy combining medium-term and electoral programmes, with other types of documents stating its position on various issues. In 1995 the document called "Foundations of KDU-ČSL policy" [Východiska politiky KDU-ČSL] was adopted and in 1997 another three: "Christian-Democratic politics for the twenty-first century" [Křesťanskodemokratická politika pro 21. století], "KDU-ČSL's foreign policy" [Zahraniční politika KDU-ČSL] and "KDU-ČSL's social doctrine" [Sociální doktrína KDU-ČSL], which together we can understand as the party's long-term programme (Suchý 1999). KDU-ČSL did not create its own programme material for the 2002 election as it was co-operating with the parties of the so-called Quad-Coalition. The party has been embroiled in internal disputes since then, however, and programmatic activity has receded somewhat. In the last years it has been communicating its position chiefly in electoral programmes.

What VV's fundamental programmatic document is cannot be established entirely clearly. The party produced a large document laconically entitled "Political programme" in 2010. By virtue of its structure and contents it could be used either as a fundamental or an electoral programme and it was indeed used in the latter capacity in the 2010 election. VV does not really offer any other coherent programmatic statements. Strictly speaking, TOP09 does not have a fundamental programme, limited as it is to a very brief statement of values in the documents "Programme ground and principles" and "Decalogue of values." Apart from this the party only produced two electoral programmes for the early election in 2009, which was called off, and for the regular term election of 2010.[8]

It is clear from what has been said thus far that as a rule the relevant Czech parties produce extensive electoral programmes in the process of identifying their goals.

[6] ODS's first document was adopted as early as 1995 and it was enhanced and developed (rather than substituted) with other documents: "the Poděbrady articles" (Poděbradské artikuly, 1998), "the Blue chance" (Modrá šance, 2003–2004), "Together for a better life" [Společně pro lepší život, 2005] and, most recently, the Vision 2020.

[7] In ODS the collection of documents entitled "the Blue chance", elaborated by the party in opposition, played the same role.

[8] It is true, however, that TOP09 was only founded in summer 2009 whereas VV constituted itself already in 2001 – though until 2009 the party limited itself to Prague local politics.

Employing the methods of *Comparative Manifesto Project* (2010), Otto Eibl's study of the most recent election of the Chamber of Deputies in summer 2010 will help us to illustrate our point here. The electoral programmes were fairly detailed in 2010, ranging from 268 to 1165 coded units.[9] Limiting ourselves to the coded units with political meanings we can observe that the parties' programmes confirm the stability of the Czech party spectrum laid out along the right-left axis. The programmes of ODS and TOP09 place the parties on the right and KSČM's programme anchors the party on the Left. KDU-ČSL and VV are centrist, as is the ČSSD which in comparison with the past shifted towards the centre. The prevailing issues are those concerning economic and social policies, as well as questions concerning the active role played by the state and its effectiveness, which again confirms the socio-economic cleavage as the dominant axis of Czech parties' political contestation (Eibl, 2010: 81-86). Also important is the fact that in those and other topics the parties propose alternatives to the electorate both in terms of setting the political goals and of proposing ways of achieving those goals.

The fact that the goals set in party programmes (especially in electoral programmes) are transformed into goals of the executive which are traditionally announced in government policy statements is of no less importance. The policy statement of the present coalition government made up of ODS, TOP09 and VV can serve as an example here (Vláda ČR, 2010). The policy areas that the government says need to be dealt with as a priority correspond to the priorities articulated in the parties' electoral programmes in 2010 (see ODS 2010, TOP09 2010, VV 2010). Naturally, the statement speaks a different language from that employed by the electoral programmes, with their appeals; a number of specific points also result from coalition compromises. But on both ideological and practical levels it exhibits clear correspondences with the political lines of the parties involved. Where the parties' specific goals complement each other, the government's statement feels as if it consists of goals defined by the coalition partners together. For instance, in one section of the statement the struggle against corruption emphasised by TOP09 and VV in particular sits next to the project of digitalising the state administration, eGovernment proposed by ODS.

Political parties' share in defining the political objectives of the government will be thrown into an even sharper relief if we compare the policy statement of Petr Nečas's government with that of Jan Fischer's caretaker government, which preceded it (Vláda ČR, 2009). The statement of Fischer's government is both extremely short and non-specific, limiting itself to declaring a few generic political goals which any government would have to address at the time, for instance the completion of the Czech presidency of the Council of the European Union, or the endeavour to make a budget with a smaller deficit than was the case in previous years.

Articulation and aggregation of interests

The function which articulates and aggregates interests links parties with the system in which collective interests are mediated and therefore with the world of pressure groups. One thing must be made clear at the outset: this function is only one of several. If it hypertrophies at the expense of other functions, the political party in question tends to become a party of

[9] According to the methods of the long-term international survey *Comparative Manifesto Project* a coded unit is a meaningful sentence or part thereof. KSČM's programme was the shortest, but this party can rely on its ideological profile which is stable in the long term and on its extensive fundamental and medium-term programmes.

patronage and to develop clientelist relations with voters and also with interest groups attaching to the party (see Müller, 2006). If, however, a party was to give up on articulating and aggregating interests, it would end up in the position of the business firm party mentioned above with all the potential negative consequences this entails.

The tradition of Czech partisanship in the inter-war period involved a fairly high degree of party patronage. In a context characterised by milieux that were at once strongly party-political and social, and where the parties had at their disposal wide networks of auxiliary organisations ranging from trade unions to consumer co-operatives, they could distribute various material and non-material advantages to the pressure groups attaching to them. The party was clearly identified as the benefactor, and enjoyed a fairly substantial ability to mobilise and control the political behaviour of its clients. Non-democratic regimes lasting several decades disrupted these affiliations, however, and in post-1989 Czech society the connections between political parties and pressure groups had to be rebuilt practically from scratch, as the process of the country's triple transition encompassed not only the construction of plurality politics but also a fundamental transformation of the economy and of the structure of the society. Collective interests were subject to deep transformation, some of the structures and actors vanishing and others being born; new means of liaising with political parties only gradually appeared. At the same time, the political parties' traditional financial dependence both on mass membership and on a wide network of collateral social and economic organisations was not renewed after 1989. The Czech Republic adopted a model in which political parties are mostly funded by the state, the importance of which has only increased since the second half of the 1990s when, in response to scandals connected with party political funding, the system of auditing donations has been tightened up (see Dančák, Hloušek, 2007: 197-198; Kopecký, 2006: 139-141).

Soon it became apparent that the narrow intertwining of professional interests and party politics along the First Republic model would not be possible. This argument is illustrated clearly by the fate of agrarian parties in the early 1990s (see Hloušek, Kopeček, 2010: 117). Privatisation, the gradual establishment of social dialogue institutions and further changes in society opened up the way to different forms of contact between the parties and pressure groups. Both positive and negative aspects of party patronage appeared. Some of the latter have been pointed out by Wolfgang Müller (2006: 192-193): a greater social integration of certain groups (for instance unionised workers); a tendency to use public funds ineffectively to the benefit of the clients; corruption. The perceived degree of party patronage in the Czech Republic today is fairly high, and the success of the VV in the 2010 election testifies to this fact. Under the banner of banishing the "dinosaurs" from Czech politics, the party established, in a somewhat populist manner, the issues of political corruption and clientelism as pressing topics. Without attempting to open a normative debate about the admissibility of the various types of patronage,[10] let it be said that a transparent and legal way of inter-linking political parties and pressure groups is an important element in the representative democracy model, as it connects party politics with the collective interests that compete for public support in the Czech pluralistic intermediary system (Krpec, 2009: 101-102).

In essence there are two ways in which parties become intertwined with pressure groups. Either the pressure groups are collective members of the parties (such a model is cultivated by the Austrian political parties, for instance), or the connection is less formal, manifesting itself in contacts or in situations where an individual party member is also a member of a pressure group. As for the first option, a clear connection appears between the

[10] The general hypothesis that parties have turned away from mass patronage towards wooing business interests, that they are more involved in pecuniary transfers and thus get closer to what is encompassed by the concept of corruption (Müller 2006: 193-194), is also valid for the Czech Republic.

length of time a party has been active in Czech politics and the number of organisations attaching to it. ČSSD has at its disposal a network of partner organisations: Social-democratic women, the Young social democrats, Zvonečník (an environmental organisation), the Union of workers' sports clubs, the ČSSD Club of senior citizens and the Christian-democratic platform which fulfils the function of affiliating believers to the party. The Masaryk Academy plays the specific role of a social-democratic think-tank. What these organisations have in common is that they are open both to members and non-members of the party and thus fulfil the function of "prospectors" for the party. At the same time it must be said that their role in party politics or hierarchy is minor, as is true of other formations. KDU-ČSL's network of partner institutions is similarly extensive. In addition to the Young Christian Democrats and KDU-ČSL Women's Association, it encompasses the affiliated think-tanks, the Institute of Political and Economic Studies and the European Academy for Democracy. A marginal Christian Trade Union Coalition is linked with KDU-ČSL, an interesting but ultimately failed attempt to resuscitate the long tradition of confessionally-grounded trade unions. KSČM also has auxiliary organisations which associate women and youth with communist leanings,[11] but the attempt in the 1990s to establish a communist trade union movement was not successful, failing to attract mass membership. The existence within the party structure of certain professionally-oriented "clubs" (of international politics, sociology and economy) is also worth noting (see Fiala et al., 2005: 1419-1421).

ODS co-operates with the youth association Young Conservatives and two think-tanks, CEVRO and eStat. The Green party, TOP09 and VV do not have any partner organisations, however TOP09 and VV in particular put their bets on modern approaches to attracting individuals who are interested in the party's politics but do not wish to become members. On their special web pages TOP09 presently registers over 8,000 "supporters", and with VV the number is a much higher 18,000; in the latter case the supporters, if registered, can partake in intra-party referenda.

Clearly the parties which tend to create these auxiliary supporting structures are either those which have a historical tradition which goes back deep into the era of mass parties (such as the Social and Christian Democrats), or, to a lesser degree, those which have been newly created since 1989 but nevertheless have since established complex organisational structures and have a history of their own (see van Biezen, 2003: 146-150).[12] New parties with an insufficiently large and stable membership attempt to enlarge their circle of supporters by employing new communication technologies, thus seeking to reduce the burden of acquiring adherents traditionally, through institutionalised membership. Only time will tell, however, whether such an on-line association can replace the traditional institutional structures inherited from the era of mass parties.

The question as to whether or not the Czech political parties nurture contacts–formal or informal–with the important pressure groups is of no lesser importance for the function of articulating and aggregating interests. Such informal contacts definitely do exist, the connection between the Czech-Moravian Confederation of Trade Unions and ČSSD being perhaps the most prominent example. Although by no means a case of the party controlling the unions, the degree of personal interconnection between trade union bosses and the ČSSD, for instance, is significant: presidents of the trade unions have stood on ČSSD's candidate lists in various past elections. Similar personal links exist between the Green party on the one side and the environmental organisations and movements on the other. KDU-ČSL, for its part,

[11] The best known communist youth organisation is the Communist Youth Union [Komunistický svaz mládeže], which however due to its radicalness distanced itself from KSČM' official policy and is today independent of the party.

[12] The nuclei of ČSSD appeared in 1878, the first catholic party in the Czech lands was founded in 1896 and ČSL was established gradually between 1919 and 1922. KSČ split off the Social Democrats already in 1921.

is traditionally close to the institutions of the Catholic Church. ODS and lately also TOP09 have been nurturing privileged contacts with the business sphere.

But it is precisely on the example of ODA's links to business interests that one can criticise the problematic by-products, actual or only potential, of the Czech parties' efforts to aggregate affiliated interests. A number of media and political critics of ODS talk about the so-called "Godfathers," pointing out the unclear connections between individual business interests and ODS politicians, links that are kept hidden from the public eye. The annual financial reports which the parties must release each spring testify in their own way to these connections: in 2010, ODS received donations amounting to 233 million CZK, whereas ČSSD received only 67 million, TOP09 about 39 million, VV less than 23 million and KSČM about 5.5 million.

The close connection between the VV leadership and Vít Bárta's security company ABL is even more cautionary, Bárta being the party's founder.[13] In this case it appears that the economic interests of a private company and the political interests of the party have melted into one which certainly does not testify to the quality of the democratic process.

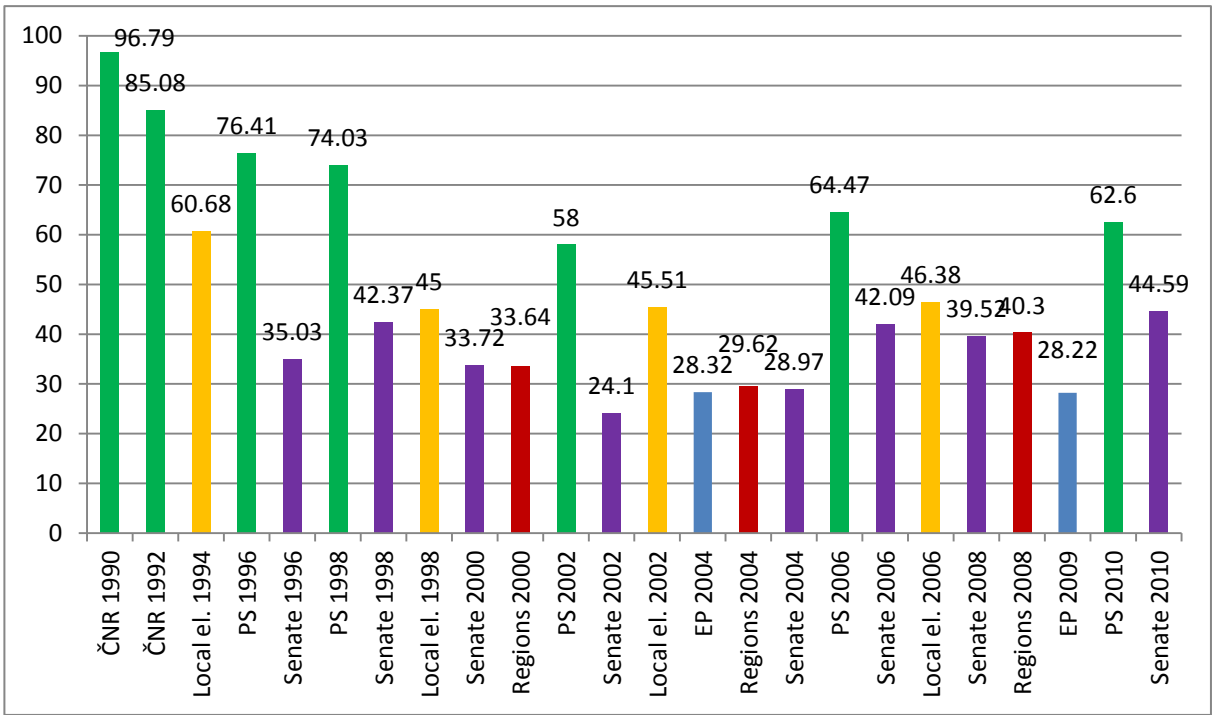
Mobilisation and socialisation function

As already stated above, the function enabling political parties to mobilise and socialise their electorate manifests itself particularly at the point of election (in voter turnout) and in the parties' ability to attract membership. Figure 1 gives an overview of voter turnout in the Czech Republic between 1990 and 2010, including both chambers of the parliament, as well as data pertaining to the elections of the European parliament and of the regional and local assemblies. Two facts apparent from this data deserve particular attention. First, the turnout was demonstrably higher in the first years after November 1989, both in the elections of the Chamber of Deputies and in the local elections.[14] This can be attributed to the initial enthusiasm and generally higher willingness to participate in the political process following the fall of communism, although such an explanation obviously does not lend itself easily to empirical verification.

Figure 1: Overview of voter turnout (expressed in per cent) in the Czech Republic, 1990–2010

[13] Although Bárta formally relinquished his share in ABL after entering "big politics" many of VV's top brass worked in ABL and this includes individuals who occupied positions of ministers.

[14] Data on the election of local assemblies in 1990 is unavailable.



Data source: www.volby.cz

Voter turnout decreased in the second half of the 1990s, but – and this is of extraordinary importance – it also stabilised at that time. The second important observation, and here the Czech Republic does not differ substantially from other European democracies, is that the turnout is significantly lower in the so-called second-order elections (see for instance Reif, Schmitt, 1980). Here again the turnout is stable, with largest fluctuations in the Senate elections).[15] It does not therefore seem that the parties would fail their mobilisation function; indeed, the example of the 2008 regional election, which was preceded by very intensive campaigning (see Eibl et al., 2008), testifies to the contrary: the parties have been able to induce the electorate to participate in the electoral process.

The topic of party membership is often discussed in connection with the parties' political socialisation function. Generally speaking, the importance of party membership in the functioning and especially in the funding of parties decreases (this fact was already reflected upon by Katz and Mair, but also by Panebianco, in connection with the definition of a new developmental type of "post-mass" political parties). Like other countries of the former Eastern bloc, the Czech Republic also has a specific experience of the institution of party membership (as well as membership in other organisations affiliated to the Party) in comparison with the countries of the Western Europe. Before 1989 party membership was to a certain extent a prerequisite for career development and has had negative connotations ever since. The data indicating membership of the four political parties which have been relevant in the long term (see Table 1) is therefore influenced by two issues.

Table 1: Czech political party membership[16]

	ČSSD	KSČM	ODS	KDU-ČSL

[15] The Senate is elected by an absolute majority two-round system. The turnout in the second round is usually lower than in the first but this is to a significant degree caused by the fact that as a rule another election (local or regional) is held concurrently with the first round of the Senate election.

[16] Data given on ČSSD membership from early 1990s in particular is probably overestimated due to the existence of the so-called "dead souls" through which some local organisations sought to increase their influence within the party. Similar situation occurred in ODS and again in ČSSD in the 2000s.

1991	*	354 500	18 600	94 100
1992	11 900	317 100	23 300	88 800
1993	10 900	212 700	22 000	80 000
1994	10 500	196 200	23 000	74 000
1995	11 400	171 300	*	*
1996	13 000	154 900	22 900	*
1997	14 100	142 500	22 100	62500
1998	17 300	136 500	19 300	60 500
1999	18 700	128 300	18 400	56 600
2000	17 000	120 700	18 900	55 300
2001	16 200	113 000	*	51 500
2002	16 000	107 800	20 400	50 700
2003	16 600	100 800	21 600	49 400
2004	16 300	94 500	23 100	46 900
2005	16 700	88 000	26 200	44 300
2006	17 600	82 900	*	*
2007	*	77 100	29 900	*
2008	20 700	*	*	*
2009	23 000	66 600	33 000	36 000
2010	24 100	*	31 500	34 300

Source: Data provided by Lubomír Kopeček, based on information provided by political parties.

The first issue concerns political parties which were in the past constituents of the National Front, i.e. KSČM and KDU-ČSL. These parties entered post-November 1989 democratic politics "equipped" with abundant memberships and in comparison with the other parties still exhibit above-average membership today. Following a sudden drop in membership in the first month following November 1989, gradual yet substantial decrease in membership of both parties is apparent, which is connected with, among other things, the high average age of the party members.

The second important issue concerns the fact that the majority of the political parties were built up from scratch after 1989 and this included membership. After an initial surge membership stagnated or stabilised. Generally speaking, membership of Czech parties is relatively low and with the exceptions of KSČM and KDU-ČSL (in the latter case until the mid-1990s), Czech parties can be defined as voter-oriented parties (as opposed to member-oriented parties). On the other hand, Czech parties are open in terms of the demands they place on new members (Linek, Pecháček, 2005). The function of political socialisation which is connected with the attempts to enlarge membership has been put somewhat into question in the Czech Republic, both in the 1990s and recently, by the scandals of the so-called "dead souls", affecting mainly ČSSD and ODS. Before party congresses in particular, certain regions reported substantial, yet purely calculated increases in membership (the position of local and regional party organisations on country-wide party congresses is as a rule a function of the membership of these organisations). In evaluating the parties' ability to draw new members one has to bear in mind the contemporary method of party funding; in accordance with the concept of cartel parties, the established parties rely mostly on state funding

(awarded for votes polled and seats won, but also for general functioning of the parties) and donations, not on regular contributions by individual members (see Rybářová, 2006: 57-99). In this sense the parties' motivation to obtain (and socialise) new members is weakened.

Recruiting political personnel

As indicated above, the institutions playing the key role in recruiting political personnel in the Czech political system are the bicameral parliament and the government. As for the former, where the Chamber of Deputies constitutes the more important chamber, the key role of political parties is to a certain degree predetermined by the Constitution and the electoral law which defines the list proportional system used. Electoral law (Act of Law no. 247/1995, Coll., as amended) stipulates that *"[a]ny registered political party and movement whose activities have not been suspended, including any coalition thereof, may present a candidate list for the elections to the Chamber of Deputies."*[17] To be sure, this does not entirely exclude with no political affiliation from standing for election, but their participation is *de facto* in the hands of the party apparatuses. Elections of the Chamber of Deputies are therefore contests of parties' *candidate lists.* Election results (see Table 2) show that the overwhelming majority of both deputies and candidates nominated by parties represented in the Chamber of Deputies are themselves members of these parties.

Table 2: Share of deputies and candidates nominated by political parties represented in the Chamber of Deputies of the Czech Parliament who declared "no political affiliation" (1996-2010) expressed in per cent.

		1996	1998	2002	2006	2010
ČSSD	Deputies	0	0	0	4.05	3.57
	Candidates	0	0	0.29	2.05	1.18
KDU-ČSL	Deputies	0	5	6.45*	0	-
	Candidates	6.71	6.71	4.97*	6.71	-
KSČM	Deputies	0	0	7.32	3.85	15.38
	Candidates	2.01	2.68	9.94	10.79	14.04
ODA	Deputies	0	-	-	-	-
	Candidates	2.35	-	-	-	-
ODS	Deputies	0	0	0	0	0
	Candidates	0	0	0	0	0.29
SPR-RSČ	Deputies	0	-	-	-	-
	Candidates	0	-	-	-	-
SZ	Deputies	-	-	-	16.67	-
	Candidates	-	-	-	32.65	-
TOP09	Deputies	-	-	-	-	26.83
	Candidates	-	-	-	-	42.69
US	Deputies	-	5.26	-*	-	-
	Candidates	-	1.35	-*	-	-
VV	Deputies	-	-	-	-	12.5

[17] English translation taken from http://www.psp.cz/cgi-bin/eng/docs/laws/1995/247.html, accessed on 12 July 2011.

	Candidates	-	-	-	-	19.29

Source: www.volby.cz
* KDU-ČSL and US-DEU on the candidate list of Coalition.

The generally high level of party membership of the candidates and deputies testifies to the fact that in terms of occupying seats in the Chamber of Deputies the political parties fulfil their function of recruiting political personel. It has, however, demonstrably weakened at certain points. The first concerns the onset of new parties. A higher share of non-partisan candidates and deputies was observable in the case of the Green Party in 2006, and again with the two new successful parties in 2010, a fact that can be explained by the comparative underdevelopment of their membership at the time of the election.[18] The second point concerns KSČM where an incremental increase of non-partisan candidates (and to a certain extent also of deputies) is apparent. The explanation can be sought in the party's decreasing membership and the structural transformation of this membership. Despite these comments, however, it is apparent that the political parties play a key role in occupying the seats in the more important of the parliament's chambers.

Table 3: Overview of the share (expressed in per cent) of candidates and deputies with no political affiliation (1996-2010)

	1996	1998	2002	2006	2010
Candidates without political affiliation	15.25	11.26	41.69	39.54	35.8
Deputies without political affiliation	0	1	2.5	2.5	10

Source: www.volby.cz

The overview provided in Table 3 indicates that the total number of candidates without political affiliation has increased historically, but this has to be put in the context of the significant increase in the total number of candidates over the period in question. Whereas in 1996 and 1998, four and half thousand, and three and half thousand candidates, respectively, contested the seats, in subsequent years it has always been more than five thousand candidates. In addition, ten more parties on average[19] have been contesting the election since 2002 than was the case in 1996 and 1998. The bulk of those are marginal, without a developed structure of local organisations and with a very limited membership. This is one of the reasons which make the second indication in Table 3 concerning deputies actually elected interesting. With the exception of 2010, the share of deputies with no political affiliation has been minimal. As already indicated above, this finding should not come as a surprise, given the way the electoral system is set up and bearing in mind the expected "overheads" incurred by the political parties in offering seats on their candidate lists.

With the Senate (which is the upper chamber) the situation is somewhat different. Here electoral law allows independent candidates to stand; in other words, Senate candidates do not need to be nominated by a political party. In the discussions preceding the creation of the Senate and concerning its purpose, as well as the electoral system it should employ, the Senate was understood not only as a counterweight to the Chamber of Deputies in the law-

[18] The case of the Green party is interesting here: in 2006, more than one third of its candidates professed no political affiliation. By 2010, the number was down to slightly more than 15 per cent. In studying newly successful political parties one can envisage a certain "magnetic" effect by means of which the party attracts new members out of which she can choose its candidates.

[19] One of the reasons for the expansion of electoral parties was the 1999 change in party funding subsequent to a ruling of the Constitutional Court. This lowered the threshold in votes polled which the parties have to cross in order to attract the contribution of the state towards electoral expenses (see Rybářová 2006).

making process, but also as an electoral arena in which the personal dimension of politics would be made more manifest.[20] The set-up created by the electoral legislation allows us to work with a different type of data than was the case with the Chamber of Deputies. In addition to the candidates "with no political affiliation" we can equally propose the category of independent candidates (candidates not nominated by a political party).

Table 4: Overview of shares of independent and non-affiliated Senate candidates and senators (1996-2010)*[21]

	1996	1998	2000	2002	2004	2006	2008	2010
Candidates without political affiliation	23.94	22.63	32.5	35.71	39.09	34.8	41.5	31.72
Senators without political affiliation	12.35	14.81	29.63	37.04	14.81	22.22	25.93	18.52
Independent candidates	8.63	8.03	13.75	6.55	4.06	3.43	2	1.76
Independent senators	1.23	0	3.7	3.7	0	3.7	0	0

Source: www.volby.cz

* In every case the data concerns the election result (i.e. the newly-elected senators) and not the overall constitution of the Senate at the time.

In comparison with the Chamber of Deputies, the data in Table 4 indicates a higher share of candidates and Senators without political affiliation. The question is, however, how this data ought to be interpreted. To a certain degree, the electoral system plays into the hands of strong personalities (often of local or regional renown) to the detriment of those who are seen as "grey" party candidates. Political parties are thus more motivated to woo non-partisan strong personalities: as the data on independent candidates/senators show, most of those who are "non-partisan" are supported by a political party. The share of truly independent candidates and senators is again minimal.

The last organ of the state which we will analyse is the government. As already stated, the cabinet is the most important organ of the executive in the Czech parliamentary system, shaping the policies; it is therefore very important for evaluating the function of political personnel recruitment. Bearing in mind the election results described above, the set-up of the political system favours a strong role played by the political parties. The government is accountable to the Chamber of Deputies and this chamber's confidence is a prerequisite for the government's existence. Although the individual members of the government are nominated by the head of state, (s)he must do so with respect to the balance of power in the Chamber of Deputies. This fact is embedded in practice, where the nomination proper is preceded by informal negotiations between the president and representatives of successful political parties; the role of the head of state is rather one of a moderator. (But depending on the specific situation the position of the president can be much stronger in this respect. For more detail on how the Czech governments have been constituted see Havlík, 2011). In the Czech Republic's history thus far there have been thirteen governments (plus two federal cabinets), an overview of which is given in Table 5.

Table 5: Overview of governments in the Czech Republic and in Czechoslovakia (1990-2012)

Prime minister	**Government formed**	**Parties involved**

[20] The Senate is voted in 81 single-member constituencies by a two round system where an absolute majority is required. A third of the chamber is elected every two years.

[21] The table does not include by-elections held if a senator's seat becomes vacant.

Čalfa	27 June 1990	OF, HZDS, KDH
Stráský	2 July 1992	ODS, HZDS, KDU-ČSL
Pithart	29 June 1990	OF, KDU-ČSL, (HSD-SMS)
Klaus I	2 July 1992	ODS(-KDS), KDU-ČSL, ODA
Klaus II	2 July 1996	ODS, KDU-ČSL, ODA
Tošovský	2 January 1998	KDU-ČSL, US, ODA
Zeman	23 July 1998	ČSSD
Špidla	12 July 2002	ČSSD, KDU-ČSL, US-DEU
Gross	4 August 2004	ČSSD, KDU-ČSL, US-DEU
Paroubek	25 April 2005	ČSSD, KDU-ČSL, US-DEU
Topolánek I.	4 September 2006	ODS
Topolánek II.	9 January 2007	ODS, KDU-ČSL, SZ,
Fischer	8 May 2009	ČSSD, ODS, (SZ)
Nečas I.	13 July 2010	ODS, TOP 09, VV
Nečas II.	27 April 2012	ODS, TOP 09, Lidem

Sources: authors using data on www.vlada.cz

The overview indicates that coalitions have been dominant during the whole period. Only two governments, both minority, were single-party, out of which one (Topolánek I.) was not granted the confidence of the Chamber of Deputies. Although stable coalition patterns cannot be identified entirely clearly, coalition governance in the Czech Republic can be characterised by some of its traits. One is that radical political parties (KSČM and SPR-RSČ) are absent from the governments. Another is that one of the large parties (ČSSD and ODS) is often present.

In evaluating the parties' elite recruitment function, an important consideration is the occupancy of seats in government, and it can be said that the practice hitherto has been to occupy the positions of ministers with party politicians. The two caretaker governments are very interesting in this respect. The first, Josef Tošovský's cabinet, was formed in response to the government crisis in late 1997, and then-president Václav Havel played an important role in its constitution. The specific situation of the turn of 1997 and 1998 allowed Havel to have a more substantial say in the cabinet's composition. Given that the cabinet was only temporary, and that it needed to secure the Chamber of Deputies' confidence, the elite recruitment function was not substantially weakened; indeed, the political parties participated in that government's formation. The situation in 2009–2010, when Jan Fischer's government was in office subsequent to the fall of Mirek Topolánek's second cabinet, was somewhat different. The solution to the governmental crisis at the time, and to the impossibility *de facto* of constituting a programmatically homogeneous cabinet, initially copied the situation in 1997/1998, even in its temporariness. Yet the intervention of the Constitutional Court and subsequent events precluded the calling of an early election and prolonged the term of Fischer's "temporary" cabinet to fourteen months. Various opinions can be proposed concerning the Fischer government, which was in fact created on the basis of an agreement arrived at by the two large parties, but without those parties' representatives (see Havlík, 2011, Hloušek, Kopeček 2011). Given the lack of an ideologically coherent majority in the Chamber of Deputies at the time, the political parties' function of elite recruitment was weakened, without however the parties being wholly excluded from the process of forming both caretaker governments.

The governments that appeared following the first fully free election in 1990 are also interesting in the context of "non-political" cabinets. The specific atmosphere of the period, in which a sceptical view of partisanship was one of the defining features, influenced the personal make-up of both federal and national governments. In analysing these two

governments Lubomír Kopeček goes so far as to use the term "semi-political" cabinets (Kopeček, 2010: 79–82). Notwithstanding how necessary it is to take into account the peculiarities of the period, the goal of constituting a government encompassing as many ideological currents as possible (with the understandable exception of the communists) was at least as important as efforts to make it a government of "experts" or "non-partisans." By virtue of their nature and their process of inception, however, these two cabinets differ significantly from Tošovský's and Fischer's governments. For the latter two the "semi-political" (or even non-political or caretaker) nature was the decisive factor.

Conclusion

As we can see, the extent to which Czech political parties fulfil their basic functions varies. In none of the four key areas can we observe the parties not fulfilling their function at all, but in some areas they are not very successful, or their goals are attained by problematic procedures.

An example of an area in which the parties are not very successful is the mobilisation of citizens into political participation. This is not so much the case with elections, as the parties' efforts to mobilise voters to turn up at first-order elections do not lag behind the European average, but more intensive forms of political participation, especially party membership, are definitely affected. Here Czech political parties appear to follow the cartel-type party, giving up on enlarging their mass membership or even keeping it at the existing level. Connected with this is the fact that the relevant Czech parties are not financially dependent on membership fees; their primary source of funding is the state (contributions for votes, seats, and for general functioning) and sponsor donations (KSČM is partially exempt from this pattern).

Articulation and aggregation of interests is an area where the function is fulfilled by problematic procedures. Czech political parties exhibit a fairly high degree of communication with organised and private interests. The potential for aggregating and articulating interests is certainly there, but in many cases is not exploited. Here we face a substantial deficiency in Czech political culture, namely the tendency to substitute particular individual, private or business interests for legitimate group interests. In a way, the pressure groups themselves are partly to blame here. As Martin Myant (2000) has shown with reference to employers' associations and business pressure groups, these organisations have not always been interested in co-operating closely with particular political parties, but as early as the 1990s focused on dialogue between the government and the trade unions in bilateral and tripartite negotiations.

Identifying political goals and recruiting political personnel are perhaps the two functions best fulfilled by the parties. As for the former, how those goals are realised in actual government policies is a question we had best leave aside here; the efficiency of the latter is illustrated by the analysis of Czech cabinet-forming practices presented above. In this respect the parties' role was weakened only by the caretaker cabinets, which themselves were a temporary solution to crises arising from a certain immobility in the party system, rather than from an unwillingness on the part of parties to participate in government formation. And the examples of caretaker governments clearly show that parties seek to preserve a substantial amount of control, however indirect, over the final shape of such cabinets.

Our general conclusion, perhaps controversial, is that Czech political parties do solidly fulfil a range of standard functions. They also have at their disposal tools to fulfil other functions which they have chosen not to, or find themselves unable to, perform more adequately. A hypothesis which suggests itself is that one of the main causes of the

problematic performance of Czech political parties in certain areas, as well as of their negative rating by the Czech public, is the low degree of political culture manifested by the party leaders. But that would have to be the subject of another, separate study.

List of abbreviations

ČSSD – Czech Social Democratic Party
HSD-SMS – Movement for Autonomous Democracy – Society for Moravia and Silesia
KDS – Christian Democratic Party
KDU-ČSL – Christian and Democratic Union – Czechoslovak People's Party
KSČM – Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia
Lidem – Liberal Democrats
ODA – Civic Democratic Alliance
ODS – Civic Democratic Party
OF – Civic Forum
OH – Civic Movement
SZ – Green Party
TOP09 – Tradition, Responsibility, and Prosperity
VV – Public Affairs

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