

The development and transformation of the Czech party system after 1989¹

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Abstract:

This article aims to reflect on the multiple dimensions of the Czech party system, examine it for breaking points and, at the intersection of these points, periodize the developments in the years 1989–2014. Attention is paid to four different party system variables – party format, party type, extent of bipolarity, and formation of coalitions and coalition relations.

Keywords:

Czech party system; periods; party type; party format; bipolarization; coalitions; 1989-2014

The aim of this article is not to describe and analyse in detail the evolution and interactions of Czech political parties over the past quarter century. This has been and continues to be the goal of others (see e.g. Smith 1999; Cabada, Hloušek, Jurek 2013; Haughton, Deegan-Krause 2010; Hanley 2012 etc.). Our goal here is to reflect on several dimensions of the Czech² party system, examine it for breaking points, and later, at the intersection of these points, periodize the developments of the past quarter century. One advantage in this examination may be the greater time interval of the period under review, as many things that took place immediately after some events ceased to be active weaknesses and turned out to be short-lived episodes, etc. Thus, for example, Strmiska and Fiala (2005) perceive the years from 1996 to 1998 to be a different phase from the one that occurred after 1998. Is this really the case? One of the goals of this text is to answer this question. There is a risk, of course, that due to a lack of a sufficiently long time period (ideally, there would be at least one additional election), we may be unable to identify the actual development of the party system. In this event, we must recognize the situation and encourage researchers to respond.

We begin our theoretical examination into the Czech party system with the classic works of political science that address these concerns – especially

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² In the text – especially for the sake of simplicity- the term "Czech" is used synonymously with "the Czech Republic" even though, for example, defining and defending the identity of Moravia and Silesia played a significant role in at least part of the period under review.

the still unsurpassed approach of Giovanni Sartori (1976) as well as other researchers from the Sartori school, Daniel Caramani (2008), Luciano Bardi and Peter Mair (2008), etc.

1. The story of the disintegration of the Czech party system

The story of the Czech party system is interesting. In comparison with those of other Central European post-communist countries, it has long been presented as one of the most stable. In this system, the main party actors did not change, their actions were, in principle, essentially predictable, and there was little electoral volatility. In stark contrast, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia (and to some extent Hungary) experienced polar reconfigurations of their main parties, confusion among the split parties, the emergence of new parties, etc.

This was true until sometime in 2010. The Czech parliamentary elections held in that year brought about a slight shift, which subsequently culminated in early elections in 2013. A new entity, based on the explicit negation of developments that took place after 1989, became the most significant governmental power. There is now an interesting debate over what this entity should be called (a movement? party? business entity?) as well as its internal structure (cf. for example Kopeček, Svačinová 2015). Thus, if we were not to use a quarter century lens, but rather look only at the past decade, the interpretation would be quite different. Poland becomes a country with a stable party system which is clearly polarized. Slovakia and Hungary will tend towards the predominant systems, and yet the future of the Czech party system raises a question mark.

Even prior to 2010, one of the authors of this text wrote that the composition of the Czech party system was remarkably stable in terms of political parties and in comparison with many other countries which had experienced a post-communist transition. He noted that of the six major parties operating in the Czech Chamber of Deputies (the lower house of Parliament) shortly before the 2010 parliamentary elections, two had had continuity since the 1920s: the Christian and Democratic Union/Czechoslovak People's Party (Křesťanská a demokratická unie – Československá strana lidová - KDU-ČSL) and the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (Komunistická strana Čech a Moravy - KSČM). One party was restored in 1989, while its continuity was ensured, at least symbolically, in exile (the Czech Social Democratic Party (Česká strana sociálně demokratická - ČSSD), and two were created in the late 1990s: the Civic Democratic Party (Občanská demokratická strana - ODS) and the Greens (Strana zelených - SZ). Then, up until June 2009, TOP 09 was the only new party, but many of its founding members came from within the KDU-ČSL (Hloušek 2010). The 2010 election was the breaking point, however. One of the early parties (KDU-ČSL) failed to gain a mandate and, for the first time in its more than a century of existence, had no deputies in the lower parliamentary chamber. About three and a half years later, in an early

election, KDU-ČSL returned to the Chamber of Deputies - but the chamber had already lost the right-wing hegemony of previous years (ODS), which had lost 28 percentage points of its support (it stood at nearly 80% in 2006) in the previous seven years. The newly formed ANO 2011 saw great success, and Tomio Okamura's new protest party Dawn of Direct Democracy (Úsvit přímé demokracie) gradually transformed into the party of xenophobia. The government which resulted from the election, made up of ČSSD, Andrej Babiš from ANO 2011, and the KDU-ČSL, would have been unimaginable before 2013.

Thus we can see the longstanding discrepancy between the relatively fast and well-managed democratic transition and the process of consolidation. On one hand, the Czech Republic had a viable institutional framework of democracy, while on the other the confidence of citizens in both institutions and the political process (Pridham 2009) and the ability of political parties to anchor themselves within society (Kopecký 2006: 132-135) remained at dangerously low levels. This further eroded between 2006 and 2013. Another important indicator of the inherent weakness of the Czech party system can be seen in the continuous weakening, up to its present nearly non-existent state of the political parties within large segments of Czech local politics (see Balík, Gongala, Gregor 2015).

We will not further discuss how this actually played out in the institutional settings of the Czech political system, i.e., in an electoral system which "generates" stalemate results (see Havlík, Kopeček 2008 and Tomáš Lebeda's article in this issue), where the government holds a very weak position relative to the lower parliamentary chamber (despite the constitutional definition) (cf. e.g. Kubát 2013: 65-66), or where Czech political culture has rejected or at least questioned the concept of partisanship for more than a half century. We instead focus on describing the phases of party system development. Thus, we examine four different party system variables: size, type, degree of polarization and the formation of coalition relations.

2. Party System Format

In one of the two dimensions of the Sartori approach, it is important to analyse a party system in which the key characteristic is the number of political parties. Leaving aside the period between the founding (1990) and subsequent elections (1992), one can still distinguish several different phases. The reason is simple – the winner of the 1990 election and the hegemon of subsequent period Civic Forum (Občanské fórum - OF) was de facto a free pre-election coalition. There were up to 14 different, mostly ideologically contradictory, parties and factions. Only four parties passed the electoral threshold of 5%. This does not, however, reflect the actual size of the party format. Therefore, we must turn to the elections of 1992 and later.

Several months after the 1992 elections, the Czech National Council, due to the breakup of Czechoslovakia, became the lower (and till 1996 only)

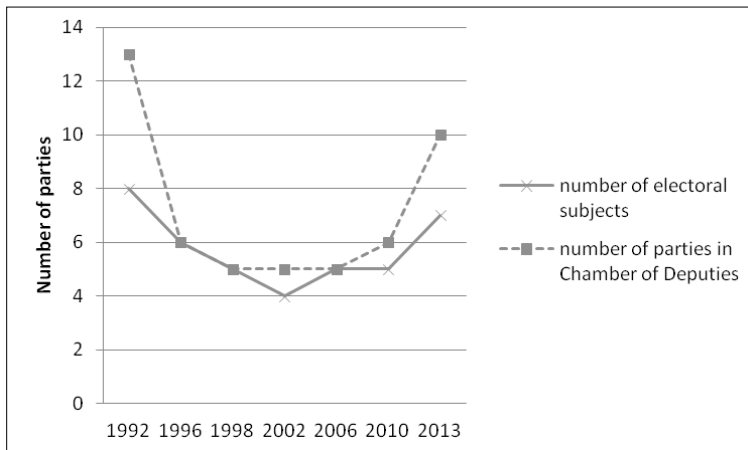
chamber of the new Parliament of the Czech Republic. It was made up of eight parties: the ODS, Left Bloc (Levý blok – LB), ČSSD, Liberal-Social Union (Liberálně sociální unie - LSU), KDU-ČSL, Association for the Republic - Republican Party of Czechoslovakia (Sdružení pro republiku – Republikánská strana Československa - SPR-RSČ), Movement for Autonomous Democracy - Association for Moravia and Silesia (Hnutí za samosprávnou demokracii – Společnost pro Moravu a Slezsko - HSD-SMS), and the Civic Democratic Alliance (Občanská demokratická aliance - ODA). In fact, there were even more, because three of these parties were comprised of pre-election coalitions: ODS stood together with the minority Christian Democratic Party (Křesťanskodemokratická strana - KDS); LB was formally a coalition of Communists and the Democratic Left - ČSFR; LSU partnered with the Green Party, the Czechoslovak Socialist Party, the Agrarian Party and the Movement for Farmers and Independent Candidates. So to be precise, there were 13 parties in the Parliament. When we focus more on the actual bid for election, eight entities were successful. The great fragmentation of the lower parliamentary chamber further deepened during the period. Many political groups merged or were absorbed, and many members changed their political clubs. This was the beginning of the stage of extreme pluralism.

The phase of consolidation of Czech democratic politics began with the 1996 elections (cf. e.g. Ágh 1998: 160-162) when the number of relevant parties decreased to six (this is crucial according to Sartori – cf. Sartori 1976: 131). After the 1998 election, that number further decreased to five, and therefore the period borders on limited pluralism. This was true until 2013. Five parties passed the electoral threshold in four elections in a row (1998, 2002, 2006, 2010). It is interesting that only once, in 2002, was there no inter-election change in parliamentary parties; in all other years, there was an alternation of at least one party, mostly towards the centre-right of the spectrum. In 1996, ODS, ČSSD, KSČM, SPR-RSČ, KDU-ČSL and ODA were elected. In 1998, the SPR-RSČ and ODA lost parliamentary representation. The ODA was replaced by the centre-right Freedom Union (Unie svobody - US), which had split off from the ODS several months before the election. The same parties took office in 2002. In 2006, the US did not pass the electoral threshold, however, and was replaced by SZ, which was a relatively low profile centre-right party at that time (until 2006, and then again after 2010, SZ was more to the left on the party spectrum). The 2010 elections heralded major changes, but the number of parties still remained at five. Two of them had been replaced, however. For the first time in its more than a century of existence, KDU-ČSL did not receive a mandate in the Chamber of Deputies and was replaced by TOP 09. These elections also saw the removal of SZ from the parliament. The Public Affairs party (Věci veřejné - VV), a populist protest entity focused both on the question of direct democracy and on the criticism of post-1989 developments, won a place in the parliament. In any case, the period between 1996 and 2013 can be identified as a period of limited pluralism.

The 2010 elections were thus a harbinger of change (one could almost say the end of an era). Not only was there unprecedented turnover in players and related coalition changes, it is also necessary to point out that one of the new entities was in fact a (secret) pre-electoral coalition – TOP 09 in cooperation with the movement of Mayors and Independents (Starostové a nezávislí - STAN). Therefore, the total number of parties represented in parliament rose to six. There was much political turbulence during the election period, and the split in which VV separated from LIDEM and declared its centre-right position was particularly important.

The 2013 election saw the number of political parties to pass the election threshold increase to seven. VV lost its representation, while the newly formed ANO 2011 and Úsvit, as well as KDU-ČSL (after a three and a half year of absence), entered parliament. Add in the STAN candidate who ran on the TOP 09 ballot and the secret coalition between Úsvit and VV (three of whose members won mandates), ANO 2011, and the movement Severočeši.cz, and the number of parties approaches 10. Thus, the extreme format of pluralism is clear. The development of the number of parties is illustrated in Graph 1 (below).

Graph 1: Development of the number of parties in the lower chamber of the Czech Parliament in the period 1992-2013 (immediately after each election)



Source: Volby.cz

3. Type of party system

According to the parameters of a party system type within the Czech party context, both the period up to 1996 and the period after 2013 can be classified as polarized pluralism, and from the mid-1990s to the early years of the 21st century as moderate pluralism. But was this actually the case? For

a discussion on the theoretical definition of party systems, we turn to the text by V. Hloušek (2010).

The post-1992 election period is characterized as a period of polarized pluralism (for the development of individual parties in the 1990s see e.g. Pšeja 2005), and at least some of the distinctive features of polarized pluralism, particularly the bilateral anti-system parliamentary opposition of the KSČM and the right-wing SPR-RSČ, were present. However, there was a predominance of centrifugal tendencies in the 1990s in which the two anti-system parties merged and strengthened. In comparison, the 1996 election saw the strengthening of the pro-system parties, a slight strengthening of the SPR-RSČ, and the weakening of the KSČM. Two ideologically opposite and similarly strong poles formed. The ODS and the ČSSD were on opposite ends, and the political centre was held by a single ruling power. In fact, attention centred on the rival right and left. This is one of the characteristics of moderate pluralism. Instead of a decrease in ideology, the relatively strong clash between the ODS and the ČSSD in the 1996 election instead resulted in an increase. It could be argued, however, that, because of the continuation of the previous coalition government (so no alternation), this period can still be categorized as polarized pluralism. Here it is clearly evident that a Sartorian evaluation does not apply unless we simply accept that the period possesses the mixed character of polarized and moderate pluralism.

This assessment certainly applies to the following brief electoral period of 1996–1998. This period was characterized by the first minority centre-right government coalition, then by a half-political (half-caretaker) government, and finally ended in early elections. During the preceding period, a long-standing bilateral anti-system opposition had been in place. The opposition was, however, weakened by the strategy of the ČSSD, which was able to gather both pro-system and protest votes, thus eliminating the potential rise in support for the anti-system parties (Strmiska 1999: 164).

The period after 1998 is interesting because of both the elimination of one of the anti-system actors (SPR-RSČ) and the emergence of a ČSSD minority government which was supported by its biggest rival ODS (in so-called “Opposition Agreement”). This four-year alliance became one of the main points of contention among Czech politicians, and a classic socio-economic clash was inevitable. Counter to the Opposition Agreement (whose main, and ultimately unfulfilled, goal was to strengthen most or at least some of the majoritarian elements of the electoral system), the Quad Coalition (Čtyřkoalice) was formed. It was based on the cooperation of the KDU-ČSL, the US, and the ODA (Roberts 2003). Party competition in 1998–2002 was certainly not typically bipolarized. Instead, it was rather multipolar. High levels of polarization persisted and resulted in one anti-system party. This would suggest a system of polarized pluralism, although elements of moderate pluralism were present as well. Here it must be

restated that the period up to 2012 cannot be placed definitively into either one of the pure Sartorian categories (Strmiska 2000: 1).

The 2002 elections did not fundamentally weaken the socio-economic competition between the ČSSD and the ODS that had originated in 1998. The Quad Coalition's attempt to establish itself as the equivalent of the third main pole ended in failure (Hanley 2005: 45-46). The former Quad Coalition parties individually entered into a coalition government with the ČSSD, which contributed to the polarization of party competition, as did the development of the Communist Party (for a debate on the KSČM, and full and masked anti-system parties, see Kubát 2010). Although in 2002 the KSČM achieved its best election result since 1989, and especially since 2005 (changes within ČSSD, the emergence of Jiří Paroubek to shepherd the cooperation of leftist parties), it clung to the ČSSD. An interesting starting point for examining the type of Czech party system during the years 1998–2006 came from Maximilian Strmiska, who proposed using the term “semi-polarized pluralism” (Strmiska 2007).

Before the 2006 elections, there was a clear structuring of the party spectrum. The stalemate (100 seats for the centre-right bloc and 100 seats for the left-wing bloc) and the undisguised willingness of the ČSSD to end the parliamentary isolation of the Communist Party were indications of the classic characteristics of moderate pluralism. And really, at this time, if the Czech system itself was not entirely defined by moderate pluralism, it was very close to it.

Events occurred at the end of this period, however, which began to diminish the existing moderate pluralism. First was the expressed no-confidence in the government during the middle of the Czech EU Presidency (Hloušek, Kaniok 2009: 5-6). This subsequently resulted in the call for early parliamentary elections which were rejected in a rather peculiar decision by the Czech Constitutional Court (see Balík 2010), and a caretaker government, originally expected to hold office for six months, ruled for nearly 15 months. The 2010 election seemed to confirm the previous trends of 2006. Despite the switch between the two parties in the system, polarization remained. However, this situation did not last long. In the years 2011-2012, after a series of government crises, the great instability of the system became apparent. This culminated in police intervention at the Government Office, the government's resignation, the presidential installation of a caretaker government and early elections in 2013 (see. Havlík et al. 2014). This confirmed the transfiguration of the logic of Czech politics. One of the main poles – ODS – fell, at least for a time, into the role of a marginal party; classic socio-economic dispute was side-lined and one of the main characteristics of the political field became a dispute over the interpretation of the period after 1989. From this emerged two new parliamentary parties (ANO 2011, Úsvit). ODS and TOP 09 both remained strong, while divisions remained between the other parties.

Thus, while it is possible to classify 1998 as a period of polarized pluralism, the years up to 2006 are more difficult to pigeonhole (see. e.g. Čaloud et al. 2006: 7-10). First, it was an era of semi-polarized pluralism (see Strmiska 2007), then later, a period of almost pure moderate pluralism. This ended prior to 2013. As a result of the double opposition, the re-emerged bilateral anti-system forces (KSČM and Úsvit), a centrifugal and polarized competition format, and extreme multipartism, we can safely classify the period as one of polarized pluralism.

4. The rate of bipolarity

The aforementioned D. Caramani (2008: 327-332) introduced the concept of a bipolar system into the theoretical research of party systems. His concept combines aspects of two-party and multiparty systems. This is a system in which many parties shape the two rival coalitions – the poles of the party system. It is not beneficial to apply the Caramani category to the Czech case, however, because in fact the main and secondary poles of the party system developed as separate political parties, not as a bloc or a coalition of parties. However, as we mentioned in the previous sections, party system logic has for much of the period been in fact bipolar. But the bipolarity of 2002 differed from that of 2006, etc.

If we want to truly define bipolarity strictly as the actual alternation of two opposing ideological blocs, then we can only truly categorize the two electoral periods in 2006–2013 as bipolar. We could move the beginning of that phase to somewhere near the year 2004, but electorally it emerged in 2006.

The party competition in 1992–1996 did not show this same bipolar logic. Opposition against the government coalition of the ODS, KDU-ČSL and ODA was fragmented. The strongest oppositional force was the Communist Party, with whom, however, some opposition parties refused to cooperate. The ČSSD even passed a resolution explicitly prohibiting cooperation with the Communists

Even the years 1996–1998 cannot be considered to be fully bipolar because cooperation between the ČSSD (who had just moved into one of the two main pole positions and around whom the opposition had unified) and the SPR-RSČ and KSČM was not a realistic prospect.

Interpreting the nature of party competition between 1998 and 2002 is not simple, and it definitely cannot be defined as bipolar. Rather, it was once again a multipolar partisan contest, which was not primarily to supplement the main competitive field with rivalry among anti-system parties, however. Despite the Opposition Agreement, the rivalry between the ČSSD and the ODS persisted and threatened to disrupt the Quad Coalition. Both parties of the Opposition Agreement remained in opposition to the KSČM as a minor left-wing pole.

The period 2002–2006 was special due to the rapid alternation of governments on the one hand, and by the existence of fragmented

opposition on the other. This opposition included both a main right-wing pole and a minor left-wing pole. However, it is true that during the course of this process there was a rapprochement between the right-wing and centrist parties (ODS, KDU-ČSL, some of US), whose relations had been significantly disrupted since 1997, as well as the (logical) convergence of the two left-wing parties ČSSD and KSČM. Despite the fact that the partisan composition of the ruling coalition (ČSSD, KDU-ČSL, US) did not change with the election in 2006, in 2004–2005 there was a realignment and the creation of a ČSSD and KSČM legislative coalition which stood in opposition to the other parties.

The bipolarization of the Czech partisan competition was then strengthened by the electoral campaign of 2006, which came with a duel between the two strongest parties, the left-wing ČSSD and the right-wing ODS. This corresponded with the election results, and the elections ended in a stalemate in which each bloc won 100 seats. The price for the formation of a centre-right government (which lasted only two years because several of its representatives fell from office) was the defection of two ČSSD members. The bipolarity of the competition was significantly reduced by an agreement to support the caretaker government made by the ČSSD, ODS and SZ. Instead of lasting several months, this government eventually ruled for more than a year (cf. Havlík 2010).

Though the 2010 elections brought about a number of changes, the bipolar nature of the competition persisted and lasted until the early elections in 2013. An interpretation of the following period is quite complex because it requires an answer to the difficult question of who represents the main poles of partisan competition. There are at least two answers. On the one hand, it may be the traditional pair from previous years, the ČSSD and the ODS. In the election campaign, the ODS were the target around which the rival parties positioned themselves, and the ČSSD won most of the votes in the election. However, the ODS did not win nearly as many mandates (see above), and it is quite questionable whether it can be categorized as one of the main poles. A second option is ANO 2011, which received the second-highest number of votes and was one of the main actors in the election campaign. The problem is that rather than being polarized against the opposing pole of the ČSSD, ANO 2011 was polarized against the entire current political establishment – all post-November 1989 parliamentary parties. If ANO 2011 were to be considered a main pole in the 2013 elections, the opposite pole would have to be composed of the ODS, TOP 09, and ČSSD. In any event, the bipolar logic was disrupted in 2013. The two strongest parties formed a government for the first time since 1990. Instead of being polarized against each other, they were mutually positioned against the weakened ODS and TOP 09. The opposition also included two additional ideologically anti-system parties (see Havlík 2014).

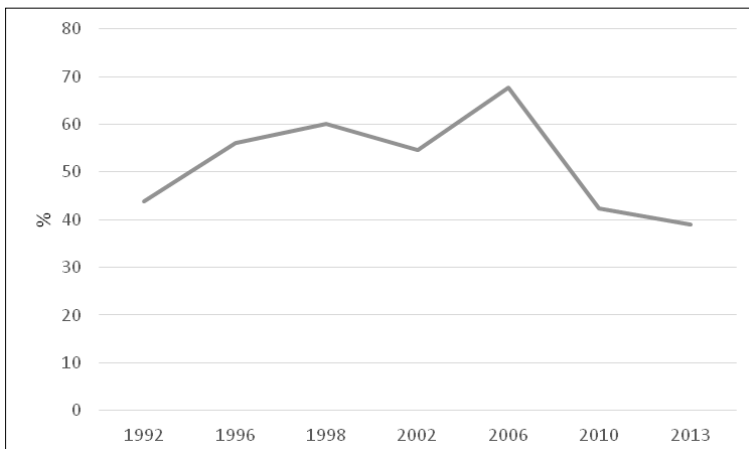
The weakening of bipolarity can also be seen in the “erosion” of the main party poles. This tendency was not seen in Czech politics until the first decade of the 21st century (although prior to this it did slightly exist at the

municipal level). This is particularly true for the ODS. At the beginning of 2009, the Party of Free Citizens (Strana svobodných občanů - SSO) split off from the ODS. Their greatest success was in securing one mandate to the European Parliament in the 2014 elections. Subsequently, in mid-2009, a significant part of the ODS left to create the successful TOP 09. Even after the 2010 elections this trend continued. In 2012, the group South Bohemia 2012 (Jihočeši 2012) was formed by local and regional ODS politicians. This was followed by a short-lived attempt to form the conservative Civic Conservative Party (Občanská konzervativní strana - OKS, 2013), among others. Thus, the ODS did not begin to fall apart during the crisis under Petr Nečas, but as early as Mirek Topolánek's second coalition government.

The ČSSD has so far managed to avoid such a situation, although two major attempts did occur. The first threat of potential voter drain came from the Party of Civic Rights – Zeman's followers (Strana práv občanů – Zemanovci - SPOZ). It was founded in autumn 2009 by people centred around the former ČSSD chairman and prime minister (now president) Miloš Zeman. Two years later, another former chairman and prime minister, Jiří Paroubek, founded the new National Socialists party – LEV 21 (Národní socialisté – LEV 21). Even though neither attempts ended with successful parliamentary representation, each, at least partially, did weaken the ČSSD.

In order to quantify bipolarity, we can, for the sake of simplicity, examine the total number of votes for the two most powerful actors (although as we have just shown, this is disputable). The evolution of this value is shown in Graph 2.

Graph 2: The rate of bipolarity –the sum of the electoral gains of the two strongest parties in the lower house of the Czech Parliament from 1992 to 2013



Source: Volby.cz

Between 1996 and 2006 we can see that the cumulative gain of the two strongest parties was at over 50%, with a peak of 67.7% in 2006. For comparison, it should be noted, however, that the two strongest Austrian parties reached a total of 94% in the 1970s; in Germany it was 91%; and in 2004 in Greece it was 86% (cf. Strmiska et al. 2005: 307, 324, 418). With 2010 came a significant drop to 42.3 % (less than in 1992 – 43.8%). This continued with a less drastic drop in 2013, when the number fell to 39.1%. In this light, we can phase this period into three parts – 1996 (multipolarity), 1996–2010 (bipolarity) and after 2010 (multipolarity).

If we focus on identifying the two main poles, we can see a partially modified time-division: in 1995/1996 (bipolarity of the ODS vs. the KSČM), 1996–2013 (bipolarity of the ČSSD vs. the ODS), and after 2013 (multipolarity).

5. Form of coalition relations

If we focus on the form of governing coalitions (for a summary see Balík et al. 2011: 39-90), there is no apparent clear phase, but rather a mosaic comprised of at least four to five continuously alternating coalition types (for coalition typology see, for example, Balík 2009: 188-196). The most common of these are minimal connected winning coalitions (1992–1996, 2002–2006, 2010–2013). Between these periods there were alternating minority governments (1996–1997, 1998–2002, 2006–2009), either coalition or single party. Three periods also saw degraded coalition relations that resulted in caretaker governments (1998, 2009–2010, 2013) (for more on caretaker governments, see Hloušek, Kopeček 2014). The period after 2014 may possibly be characterized as a grand coalition (for a discussion on the nature of ANO as the main pole of Czech politics see above). However, up until 2014, there is no identifiable open grand coalition in the Czech Republic such as which can be seen in other post-communist Central European countries (cf. Balík et al. 2011: 228).

It is also important to note which types of coalitions were not recorded – the oversized coalitions (whether those coalitions were connected or not). At least until 2014, therefore, there was governmental support for the type of coalitions that favoured rivalry (whether with minimal mandates or minority).

From this perspective, therefore, this period can only be phased with great difficulty, if at all. There are, then, only two periods: pre- and post-2014. However, given that the time interval for such an assessment is still too short, we have to accept that the phasing of coalition relations does not help.

If we focus on coalition relations, or on the question of who created a coalition with whom, we again see a relatively rich mosaic. The party with the broadest potential for forming a coalition was the KDU-ČSL, which governed with seven other parties (ODS, KDS, ODA, SZ, ČSSD, US, ANO). Following the KDU-ČSL, quite surprisingly, was the ODS, who ruled with six

parties (KDU-ČSL, KDS, ODA, SZ, TOP 09, VV). ČSSD ruled one term alone as part of a minority government and also worked with three parties (KDU-ČSL, US, ANO 2011). The ODA had the same number of partners (ODS, KDS, KDU-ČSL). Other parties cooperated with a maximum of two other parties. Due to the mix – in particular the pivoting position of the KDU-ČSL – this aspect cannot be used for the creation of phasing.

6. Conclusion – transformation of the Czech party system

If we focus on the development of the Czech party system through the prism of the variables, we see three clear periods situated on either side of the transitional phase:

- a) from 1992 to 1996/1998 is a period of extreme and polarized pluralism with functional multipolar logic, but with a character of competitive coalitions; in the period 1996-1998 there is a transition, according to other characteristics, to limited pluralism;
- b) from 1996/1998 to 2010/2013 is a period of limited pluralism, evolving from semipolarized to moderate pluralism, based on functional bipolar logic and the competitive nature of coalitions; the 2010–2013 transition period is mainly due to the erosion of bipolarity and in preparation for the re-emergence of multipolarity;
- c) the years from 2010/2013 to the present are a period of extreme and polarized pluralism with multipolar logic; competition in forming coalitions is restricted.

Thus, it seems that in the Czech party system, after more than two decades of spiralling back to the days of its formation, the playing field is filled with fragmented parliamentary parties and the opposition is multiple and rather vulnerable. Party competition is strongly polarized, but not bipolar. This leads to controversy over the nature of the regime and interpretations of the past. In short, the political scene is almost the same as it was in the early 1990s. They differ “only” in the logic of coalition operations. While six years ago (and long before) it seemed that the Czech party system had stabilized (Hloušek 2010), now it most certainly is not. The years 2010–2013 brought about a major turning point, the consequences of which, for the party and the political system alike, we can only speculate.

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