

Europeanisation and Internationalisation: The Case of the Czech Republic

BOJAN PETROVIC & ETEL SOLINGEN

This article explores changes in party competition and coalition-building patterns in the Czech Republic that underpinned its twin transition to democracy and a market economy in the 1990s and early 2000s. It charts the domestic political landscape that underlined the Czech Republic's evolution from a communist state to a modernising political economy under relatively benign global and regional conditions. A key objective is to map the new internal political space that led to the deepening of the Czech Republic's integration into the global economy as well as to explain the ways in which internationalisation has transformed that political space over time. Internationalisation relates to the expansion of global markets, institutions and norms, a process that gradually reduces the purely domestic aspects of politics. Although progressively more aspects of domestic life become responsive to external processes, internationalisation does not necessarily imply global convergence (a term closer to 'globalisation'), at least in the short to medium terms, when domestic responses tend to vary across political sectors, institutions and time.¹ We refer to Europeanisation as a process of domestication of European Union (EU) policy directives, recommendations and standards by states acceding to the EU.² Our interest is to evaluate the particular response of the Czech Republic, and the sources of that response. In particular, we seek to: (1) identify changes in patterns of party competition; (2) outline the implications of coalitional patterns for policies and outcomes regarding internationalisation more generally, and Europeanisation in particular; and (3) assess the challenges that Czech leaders face in the changed global political and economic environment of the early twenty-first century.

Our findings suggest that: (1) an array of directives emanating from international financial institutions and EU adaptive pressures reduced considerably the scope of public policy debate, blurred party distinctions and increased the number of potential coalition partners; (2) the emerging policy consensus regarding EU membership both triggered cross-cutting cleavages in party competition over the theme of national autonomy and helped a marginalised, unreformed Communist Party boost its electoral support; (3) adaptive pressures also significantly diluted programmatic differences among major political parties, leading to splits within party ranks; and (4) the dilemmas created by a new

Bojan Petrovic and Etel Solingen, Department of Political Science, University of California (Irvine), Irvine, CA 92697, USA.

political landscape are unlikely to impair the internationalising trajectory on which the Czech Republic embarked during the 1990s.

In the first section our analytical framework is developed by drawing from several different strands of research. The following section then elaborates domestic policy adjustments to external directives, inducements and adaptive pressures. The effects of this newly transformed political landscape on policies *vis-à-vis* internationalisation and Europeanisation are then analysed. The final section extracts the main conclusions and outlines some comparative issues raised by the Czech Republic's experience. The integration of domestic and international dimensions helps us elucidate significant political side-effects of integrating a national political economy into the EU and the emerging structure of global economic governance at the same time.

The international context of economic and political transitions in Central and East Europe

The literature widely acknowledges the influence of international actors on the course of economic and political transitions in Central and East Europe (CEE). Yet theories explaining the precise domestic political effects of the external promotion of institutions and policies on the region are only now beginning to emerge. Moreover, relevant studies are scattered throughout several different literatures at the intersection of international relations and comparative politics. For the purposes of this article we draw selectively from studies on the impact of external actors on democratisation, as well as from research on EU enlargement processes, post-communist politics and western European political party systems.

First, recent work on external influences on democratisation has established that the impact of international actors in the CEE transition process varied significantly for individual countries in the region. For example, international financial institutions and the European Commission (EC) (via conditionality) are shown to have had a significant edge over the Council of Europe, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and international non-governmental organisations.³ This literature further suggests that the influence of international actors varied over time and intensified as the 1990s evolved. Thus, in the early phase (beginning in 1993) the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the European Bank for Reconstruction (EBRD) made their mark in the region by linking their financial assistance to CEE to specific criteria such as countries' ability to display effective policy implementation, the relative stability of their institutions and their success in promoting political pluralism. However, as several studies conclude, these were relatively loose forms of conditionality compared to EC demands from CEE countries as the latter prepared for EU accession negotiations in 1997. More restrictive rules and intrusive monitoring marked this later stage, featuring a decisive influence by the EU over and above all other international actors involved.

Most scholars agree that the EU's 'Eastern' enlargement accelerated CEE's dual transformation into liberal democracy and market economies and made it appear irreversible in the short to medium term.⁴ The attractiveness, prestige

and benefits from membership provided important incentives to CEE applicants. The EU's vast political and economic power – well documented in the enlargement literature – dictated both the pace and scope of reforms after 1997. For example, the EU controlled access to negotiations and further stages in the accession process by providing the largest amount of external aid. It affected simultaneously the CEE's economies and their systems of governance: the former by demanding an unconditional adoption of EU competition policies, the latter by insisting on political decentralisation (as prerequisites for the management of EU funds). In addition, the Commission left CEE countries with no choice for negotiating the opt-outs secured by some EU member states (the UK on the Schengen Agreement, Denmark on the European Monetary Union) and forced the applicants to forego a portion of the membership benefits (lower agricultural subsidies, reduced distributions in structural and cohesion funds, restricted movement of labour) in the medium term.

Some of these studies suggest that the sheer magnitude of the enlargement (involving 10 countries) – combined with concerns about post-communist legacies (in eight of the applicants) – prompted the EC to introduce financial assistance with reinforced conditionality in order to expand the membership criteria (on minority rights, prison conditions and border control) and subject CEE countries to a far stricter oversight over their administrative and judicial reforms, anti-corruption measures and the like than was applied during the EU's 'southern' enlargement in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Finally, in addition to formal monitoring of applicants through annual reports (by the EC and the European Parliament), the EU also practised informal observation missions, such as visits by EU officials. This latter form was used specifically in cases where the EU was unable initially to produce the desired political outcomes, for instance by applying direct pressure on the executive in Slovakia and exerting instead influence on the political opposition and the electorate.⁵

Second, while the EU enlargement literature mostly documents institutional change and policy adjustments in CEE, post-communist comparative studies increasingly focus on the domestic political costs of European integration in individual countries. Some have acknowledged the costly transfers of scarce public funds from health and education to the regulation of economic production imposed on CEE countries.⁶ Others have discussed whether the EU's stringent conditionality – despite its immediate impact on improved macroeconomic stability, rising foreign investment and economic growth – was likely to slow down or even arrest the transition process in the longer term.⁷ Yet others have argued that both elites and the public in the region often perceived new institutions as alien and regarded political initiatives as a commitment to Brussels rather than as a response to domestic demands. By privileging executives over legislatures, these studies suggest, EU adaptive pressures often cut the political process short, while the virtual absence of debate on the effects of European integration in national politics alienated elites from the public.⁸

Studies of political party development in the region since 1989 emphasise that CEE countries featured an underdeveloped civil society (with the exception of Poland and possibly Hungary) and political parties with no clearly defined constituencies, both of which significantly limit public policy debate and political

competition.⁹ Fundamental economic reforms, calling for minimal state redistribution and liberalised markets (IMF, EBRD), placed further constraints on policy options even before EU accession negotiations.¹⁰ As EU policy imperatives intensified later in the decade, political parties seeking elected office had an incentive to adjust their own political agenda to display their firm commitment to EU policies. Consequently, despite changes in ruling coalitions in all CEE countries, reforms were largely maintained.

The post-communist literature attributes this remarkable success of region-wide reforms to the ability of elites in individual countries to understand the limitations of political entrepreneurship under relatively strict conditions of economic transition to market-oriented economies and EU accession.¹¹ At the same time, it also notes the significant constraints that this process imposed on political party competition throughout the region. Rather than opt for a coherent ideological position, parties had an incentive to develop electoral strategies that distinguished them competitively in terms of the sequencing of political and economic reforms and their respective credibility in delivering them. With a relatively weak civil society, on the one hand, and strong international pressures on specific policy options on the other, there were few incentives for politicians to engage in party competition along specific ideological lines. Instead, most had incentives to endorse an internationalising policy agenda of open and competitive markets, balanced budgets, reduced public spending and entry into the EU.¹²

This article brings together the relevant findings from these two strands in the literature into a single analytical framework. We share the prevailing view in the democratisation literature that, since the beginning of accession negotiations in 1997, the EU played a more decisive role in CEE transitions than any other international actor (IMF, NATO, EBRD). Further, we believe that the EU enlargement literature makes a strong case for substantially limited policy choices of CEE governments once they were firmly along the integration path. However, the two literatures focus on institutional change in CEE politics and on external constraints on executive branches of individual governments, rather than on the nature of competitive politics (electoral and in the legislature) that evolved in response to these two processes. It is the latter that provides the focus of our analysis.

A primary focus on political party competition – parties' selection of electoral strategies and coalitional partners – is rooted in the assumption that political parties (mainstream as well as extremist) have been, and continue to be, pivotal in shaping domestic politics throughout CEE countries. In line with the post-communist literature, we assume that domestic political competition in the region emerged under conditions of a weak civil society (except for Poland), with political parties driven by intra-elite conflicts rather than by grassroots policy differences. But we go beyond this somewhat static picture and ask what consequences did such developments in party politics have on political competition overtime. Furthermore, post-communist studies have a tendency to look at party developments as endogenous, neglecting significant external influences on political competition of the kind examined by some of the enlargement literature. Where post-communist scholarship does acknowledge the influence of external actors on party competition, it is often considered to be marginal, downplaying the precise mechanisms through which external actors operated.

In an effort to account for the nature of domestic political competition under EU governance we draw from the literature on political parties in western Europe, which suggests that Brussels tends to influence party competition in member states by shaping the arenas in which political parties operate.¹³ By limiting the policy options of governing and non-governing parties, this literature asserts, the EU indirectly constrains their ability to engage in political competition. It does so by promoting consensus across the political mainstream, thus reducing the range of policy options available to voters and making national elections much less decisive in policy terms. As the freedom of movement of national governments decreases, competition among parties with a governing aspiration increasingly becomes devoid of substance. In other words, the EU influences parties' interactions in national electoral arenas in two important ways: by reducing the ideological distance separating parties aspiring to govern and by encouraging the emergence of new dimensions of political competition, including the public scrutiny of EU policies.¹⁴

Our analysis supports the view that political parties in CEE countries – in power and in opposition – were even more likely to be susceptible to reduced ideological distance among political parties and to the emergence of new dimensions of political competition in response to EU adaptive pressures. Even where ideological cleavages did exist, both within party elites and among the public, the absence of an open public debate on policy issues excluded the more substantive, ideology-based conflicts underlying the evolution of most western European party systems. As EU policies further blurred ideological distances, parties at the margin gained prominence.

As the literature on western European party politics predicts, most major parties in CEE countries moved to the political centre in response to EU incentives. Furthermore, the 'issue space' in party competition was left open, providing political entrepreneurs with opportunities that sometimes brought together 'strange bedfellows' advancing political platforms at opposite ends of the political spectrum.¹⁵ At the same time, as studies of Euroscepticism suggest, opposition to the EU or to some of its specific policies helps political parties willing to exploit such opportunities to distinguish themselves from an increasingly crowded political centre. The more distant parties are from this political centre, the less costly it is for them to voice dissent from the prevailing consensus at the centre.¹⁶

In sum, we share the prevailing view in the literature on political parties in western Europe that party-system convergence at the 'centre' provides new opportunity structures for political entrepreneurs at the margins of the party system. However, our findings from the Czech case suggest that the consequences of such strategic repositioning away from the centre are more far-reaching than studies of Euroscepticism would suggest. Thus, the growing electoral success of marginalised political forces resulted in: (1) a new polarisation of party competition over the redistributive role of the state; (2) the enlargement of the pool of potential coalition partners; (3) the emergence of 'national autonomy' as a new dimension in party competition; (4) an internal split within party ranks over 'national autonomy' and (5) a growing leverage of marginalised forces over the mainstream political parties.

Domestic adjustments to external inducements and pressures

Early transition processes in CEE countries invariably generated conflict over economic reform between protectionists and market liberalisers over the role of the state in the economy and in addressing social inequality. Distributional conflict at the elite level was particularly prominent in Czech party competition during the early post-1989 period. While cross-cutting conflicts over cultural and religious identity – particularly salient in Hungary and Poland, for example – also emerged in the Czech lands, they were less politicised. Consequently, the overwhelming factor determining placement in the ‘left-right’ spectrum between 1992 and 1995 was the economic divide.¹⁷ As the Czech Republic’s EU accession process began in 1996, policy differences among political parties became less - consequential as a function of required adjustments to the *acquis communautaire*.

The blurring of policy differences at the ‘centre’ temporarily diffused economic polarisation in the early transition years. As centre parties toned down their differences on several policy issues, the pool of potential electoral and legislative coalitional partners grew larger, particularly during the 1996 and 1998 parliamentary elections. At the same time, the emerging policy consensus geared toward EU accession also activated political forces at the flanks of the Czech party system, including xenophobic movements and militant groups on the political right, and the Communist Party on the political left. The latter not only revived economic polarisation in party competition, but also politicised national identity issues, thus introducing a cross-cutting cleavage across the spectrum.

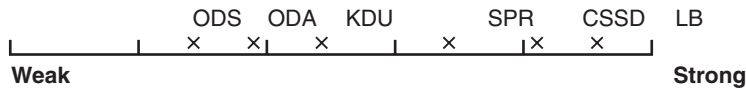
The discussion below maps the new political space that led to the deepening of the Czech Republic’s integration in a global economy, analyses the emergence of a broad consensus geared toward EU accession between 1996 and 2004, and reviews major policy differences that surfaced over this period.

Policy convergence: moving to the centre

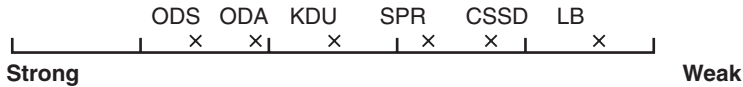
The economic polarisation between 1992 and 1996 kept the alliance of the Civic Democratic Union (ODS), the Civic Democratic Alliance (ODA) and the Christian Democrats (KDU) together. The Social Democrats (CSSD) and the now defunct small Left Bloc party (LB) were unable to offer an alternative to the liberal-Christian democratic alliance because a coalition between the Social Democrats and the unreformed Communist Party was considered impossible. By the 1996 electoral campaign, internal divisions – spurred by personal animosities and organisational rivalries – weakened the liberal-Christian democratic alliance. Originally a liberal party, the ODS now adopted more conservative themes (closer to the Christian Democrats) and populist ideas (in an appeal to left-leaning voters). At the same time, the Social Democrats, seeking to improve their electoral position, began adjusting their party programme by reducing demands for social protection. Once holding strong reservations over privatisation and supportive of generous public spending for health care (as depicted in Figure 1), they now moved towards the centre of the political spectrum, approximating the positions of Christian Democrats (and other liberal-democratic parties like the ODA) on issues such as support for balanced budgets, open and competitive markets, and entry into the EU.

Dimensions of competition

Support for the welfare state (public health care)



Support of privatisation/market economics



Emphasis on nationalism

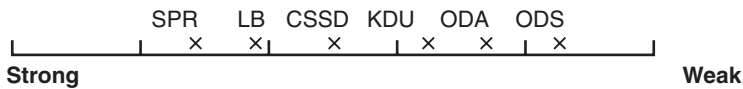


FIGURE 1. Political divides in the Czech Republic (1994).

Source: Herbert Kitschelt *et al.*, *Post-Communist Party Systems: Competition, Representation, and Inter-Party Cooperation* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), Figures 7.5 and 7.6, pp. 245 and 248.

This convergence towards centrist policies also brought the ODS and Social Democrats – the core political adversaries with very clear programmatic differences in the early days of transition – closer. After winning the 1996 general elections the ODS, forced to form a minority government, offered Social Democratic leader Milos Zeman the opportunity to become chairman of the parliament in return for agreeing not to veto the establishment of the Vaclav Klaus government. The silent coalition between Klaus’s ODS and Zeman’s Social Democrats continued during the interim government of Prime Minister Josef Tosovsky in late 1997 and early 1998. Following the electoral victory of the Social Democrats (CSSD) in June 1998, the two parties created a formal coalitional arrangement in the legislature – dubbed ‘the opposition agreement’ – envisioning changes in the electoral system and the curtailment of central bank independence and presidential powers. In exchange for abstaining from no-confidence votes, the ODS assumed the chairmanship of both houses of the parliament as well as the leadership of key parliamentary commissions. On at least two other occasions since 2002, the CSSD considered securing parliamentary backing by the ODS.

A close review of the party programmes of major political parties prior to the June 2002 parliamentary elections (Figure 2) provides an approximation of the position of the four largest parties and of some extra-parliamentary parties and groups on the twin issues of internationalisation and Europeanisation. The vertical axis maps the political space between the least and most supportive stand on a cluster of issues related to internationalisation (such as openness to foreign direct investment, liberalisation of capital controls, export expansion and emphasis on macroeconomic stability). The horizontal axis provides the range from least to most favourable position on Europeanisation (issues such as

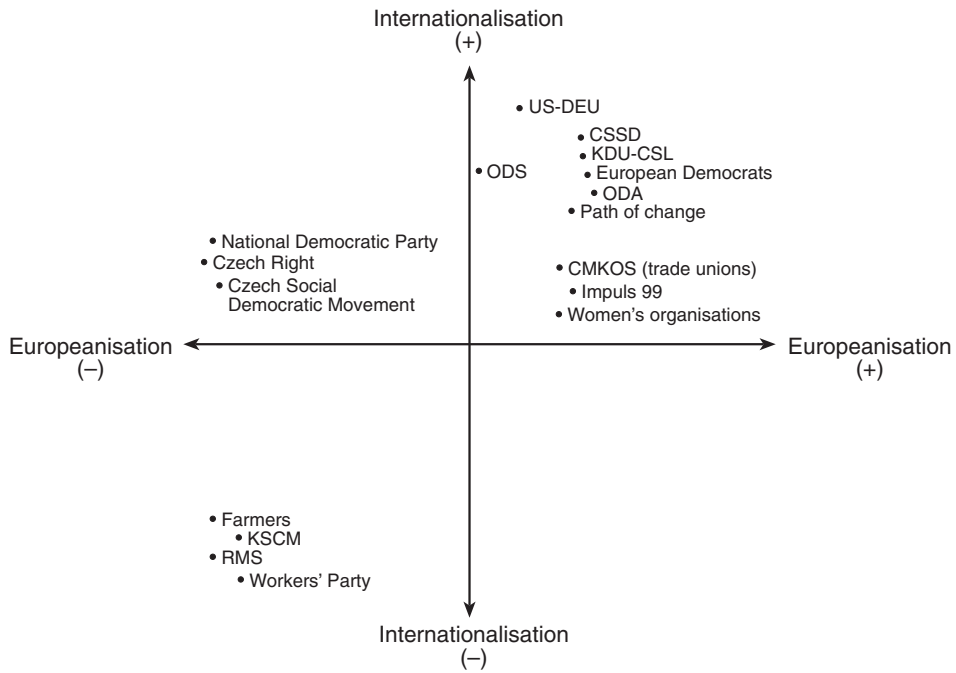


FIGURE 2. The positions of Czech political parties and social movements regarding internationalisation and Europeanisation.

support for the free movement of capital and labour, economic and political integration). Clearly, the two axes are not independent and policies towards internationalisation and Europeanisation overlap in some respects but not completely, as we shall see below.

The two major parties, clearly positioned in the top right quadrant, were not significantly distant from each other on both issues, although certain differences as well as evolutionary dynamics can be noted. The standard bearer of market ideology in the early to mid 1990s, the ODS became less supportive of bank privatisation and energy deregulation when Social Democrats started favouring it. Social Democrats, initially somewhat reticent about foreign investment, became highly supportive of internationalisation (especially after the EU negative monitoring reports in 1999) but – under pressure from trade unions – continued to be more attentive to safety net issues than the ODS. Social Democrats' competition for communist votes and their political ties with some of the unions occasionally induced ambivalence over their party's own position on economic reform and the direction of the government it led. Nevertheless, the Social Democratic government privatised the largest banks, regulated financial markets and actively promoted foreign investment through tax advantages and subsidies.¹⁸ As a result, only a decade after ousting communism, the private sector in the Czech Republic accounted for 80 per cent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), the highest share for all former Soviet and East European countries.¹⁹ Social Democrats expected that structural and cohesion funds flowing from Brussels

would contribute to closing the developmental gap among Czech regions.²⁰ The party officially supported a deepening of EU economic and political integration, the creation of the permanent EU Presidency and the preservation of the 2001 EU Nice Treaty (specifically, of decision making in the EU Council of Ministers based on unanimity and representation of all members in the EU Commission).²¹

The ODS-led government between 1992 and 1996 prioritised the integration of the Czech Republic into the global economy through membership in international organisations (OECD, GATT/WTO). Whereas the Klaus government supported internationalisation, its relation towards the EU prior to accession negotiations with Brussels was much more ambiguous. It lauded the EU as a free trade area and favoured free labour and capital mobility. However, it also largely ignored EU political pressures on the Czech Republic to develop regional cooperation through the Visegrad group (including also Hungary, Poland and Slovakia), arguing that the country would achieve better economic results by acting unilaterally. Furthermore, it delayed the Czech Republic's formal application for EU membership and favoured selected economic partners such as signatories of the European Free Trade Agreement, the British–Scandinavian wing of the EU, and the United States and the North American Free Trade Association.²² Although critical of the EU and its bureaucracy, Klaus eventually signed the initial Czech application to the Union in 1996.²³

EU pressures for administrative decentralisation in the Czech Republic and its disclosures of ODS's failures in economic, institutional and legal reforms while leading the government between 1992 and 1997 (including neglecting reforms such as a freedom of information law, an independent civil service, regulation of capital markets, privatisation of banks and deregulation of prices) may have provoked some of Klaus' sharpest criticisms. But so did the failure of his party to stay in power. His questioning of the purpose and accelerated pace of EU political integration largely coincided with Czech accession negotiations with the EU from 1997 to 2003, the period during which the ODS was not formally part of the governing coalition. Notwithstanding Klaus's 'Euro-realism' (as his position came to be known), the ODS, the party with the most pro-EU segment of the Czech electorate, remained committed to the policy of Europeanisation throughout this period. From the summer of 2000 onwards, the ODS favored a 'grand coalition' of all non-communist parliamentary parties, arguing that working with Social Democrats on welfare reforms and on EU entry was in the country's national interest. Although some high-ranked ODS officials (such as Ivan Langer and Martin Říman) publicly spoke against EU membership before the June 2003 referendum, the ODS officially supported Czech accession to the EU.

Christian Democrats, the Freedom Union, the trade union organisations, some women's movements and a large number of local corporations also supported EU accession. The conditions imposed by the Christian Democrats/Freedom Union Coalition for joining the Social Democrats in 2002 reveal the former's strong endorsement of a 'pro-European policy', placing it closer to the Social Democrats and their policies on EU accession. Specifically, Christian Democrats regarded EU membership as enabling participation in the crafting of the technical rules that guided European markets and as a guarantee that US and Japanese foreign direct investments to the Czech Republic would continue to flow. This position

reflects a strong endorsement of both internationalisation and Europeanisation, as reflected in Figure 2. Further, Christian Democrats connected the deepening of European integration with European political and economic stability, favoured the transformation of the EC into a European government, supported the crafting of a European Constitution, and called for greater transparency in EU decision making and the implementation of the Charter of Human Rights. The Freedom Union also endorsed pro-European policies but, unlike Christian Democrats and Social Democrats, it also supported a federal EU.²⁴

The Bohemian and Moravian Confederation of Trade Unions (CMKOS) and some women's movements supported EU accession and stressed the need to adopt and maintain social and gender standards provided by EU membership.²⁵ The CMKOS anticipated wage growth, increases in productivity and a 30 per cent rise in purchasing power within three years. It perceived foreign companies as better in providing competent management and fairer pay scales than local ones, but retained some uncertainty about the consequences of EU enlargement. Domestic companies began looking forward to easier access to EU markets, enhanced transparency in business practices, larger inflows of investment and better access to new technologies. Finally, the Roma groups favoured EU membership for its high standards in the treatment of minorities.

Social Democrats, the ODS and the Christian Democratic/Freedom Union Coalition also agreed on key national security issues. They all endorsed the creation of the EU common foreign and security policy, but at the same time all three had reservations over the development of European defence structures independent of NATO, which they perceived as potentially damaging to EU transatlantic ties with the US and the integrity of the EU itself.²⁶ Christian Democrats regarded NATO as an effective security guarantor of the Czech Republic, while the ruling Social Democrat-led coalition made contributions to US military efforts in the Middle East, Central Asia and Europe. The Social Democratic government also expressed support for a missile defence programme and even hinted of the possibility of allowing US deployment of missiles on Czech territory.

Policy differences: the appeal of the margins

Clearly, most major political parties, trade unions, business associations and non-governmental organisations clustered toward the pro-EU axis in Figure 2. Despite some programmatic differences between the ODS and the ruling coalition parties (Social Democrats, Christian Democrats), as well as among coalition partners themselves, there were no major interruptions in EU accession negotiations. Among the strongest opponents of trade liberalisation and EU entry were farmers' organisations and food industry lobbies. While losing much of their previous subsidies and eastern markets, they faced strong EU agricultural protectionism. These pressure groups succeeded in keeping quantitative restrictions on many food products, but generally enjoyed little access to important parliamentary committees (except the one on agriculture).²⁷ Disputes over EU subsidies of agricultural goods exported to the Czech Republic prompted the Czech government at one point to cancel preferential tariffs on imported pork and place quotas on apple

imports from EU countries. In response, Brussels temporarily eliminated its own preferential tariffs on imports of Czech pork, poultry and fruit juice.

Also notable was the ability of the hunter lobby in the lower house to oppose the governments attempts to adjust nature protection to EU standards.²⁸ The only true challenge to EU accession came from Republicans and Communists. Political demands voiced during EU accession negotiations from across the borders – from Germany, Austria and Hungary – for concessions on property restitution (see below) helped the cause of populist-nationalist political forces. Specifically, Austrian and German threats to block Czech entry into the EU in the absence of Prague's compliance stirred up nationalist sentiments. Limitations imposed by majority EU members on the free movement of Czech (and other Eastern European) labourers after joining the Union, and dissatisfaction with the overall financial package obtained from Brussels by the Social Democrat-led government, provided further justification for marginalised opposition parties to invoke the national identity theme.

The rise of the radical right, led by skinhead and anti-immigrant groups, was by no means a uniquely Czech phenomenon in post-socialist Central and Eastern Europe. Such groups had some electoral success elsewhere in the region (Hungary, Slovakia) as they mobilised a fraction of the electorate dissatisfied with the rise in unemployment and living costs and with social welfare cuts. Yet the political success of the Czech Republican Party, the strongest party on the extreme right, was short-lived. It peaked prior to EU accession negotiations in the 1996 elections, with 8 per cent of the vote and 18 parliamentary seats, and waned soon after. In contrast, the Czech Communist Party not only managed to maintain its representation in the legislature throughout the accession process, but also consistently won an increasing number of parliamentary seats in each of the four consecutive elections held between 1994 and 2002 (growing in representation from 9 to 41 seats). Its electoral success was surprising given that the party bore, for a long time, the stigma of collaboration with a foreign invader, the former Soviet Union. In addition, the KSCM, unlike its counterparts in Hungary, Poland and even Slovakia, made little effort initially to design policies that corresponded with actual voters' concerns.²⁹

The Communist Party's platform, reflecting that of the umbrella European Parliaments Group of the European United Left/Nordic Green, strongly opposed internationalisation in its economic dimension.³⁰ It challenged the policies of 'neoliberalism' and the dangers arising from what it regarded as the imperialist character of globalisation in its present form. Indeed, it even proposed specific measures to offset what it labelled the 'Americanisation' of Czech culture. While supporting European integration in general, the party officially opposed Czech membership in the EU, which placed it at the bottom of the lower left quadrant in Figure 2.³¹ The party favoured the European model of a 'social state' and EU policies of increased employee corporate ownership as an opportunity for improved efficiency in the Czech economy and for solidarity with some European socialist and communist parties. Its leaders argued that the country was unprepared to join the EU in 2004, fearing that price increases in food and services would hurt the weakest segments of society, and that EU membership would further endanger agriculture and the food-processing industries. They invoked growing

unemployment and rising crime as dangers, depicted the transfer of decision making to Brussels as an erosion of national sovereignty, and vigorously opposed joining EU military and police forces. The party also voiced major reservations regarding the draft treaty of an EU Constitution. Although some Communist leaders expressed qualified support for EU membership (such as Miroslav Ransdorf), the party ran a negative campaign in the June 2003 EU referendum.³² It also officially opposed Czech membership in NATO or in any other military organisation willing to use force without prior UN Security Council authorisation.³³

The Communist Party's electoral success in June 2002 (with 18.51 per cent of the vote and 41 seats in the legislature) reportedly benefited from the open public disenchantment with the 'opposition agreement' of the two major political parties (between 1998 and 2002), from the splintering on the far right of the party system, and from a lower electoral turnout of 58 per cent (compared to 74 per cent in 1998).³⁴ The party also took advantage of poor electoral results by the Christian Democrat/Freedom Union/Democratic Union coalition, following accusations that it made conciliatory gestures to an organisation representing ethnic Germans that had been expelled from Czechoslovakia under the 1946 Benes Decrees (see below). Anti-German nationalism ran high among most Communists' leaders who feared German land claims, control of publishing companies and cultural influences. Their warnings against the danger of a potential resettlement of ethnic Germans in the so-called Sudetenland and a subsequent inclusion of this Czech territory into a 'Euro-region Sudetenland' resonated strongly with some right-wing voters.³⁵

The Communist Party vigorously opposed the 1996 Czech-German declaration that aimed at improving relations between the two countries. According to the declaration signed by Klaus in January 1997, the German government condemned Hitler's annexation of the Czech Sudetenland prior to the Second World War, while the Czech government formally admitted its responsibility for the expulsion of over 2.5 million ethnic Germans and Magyars under the decrees of Czechoslovak President Edvard Benes following the war (the Benes Decrees). Arguing that the declaration morally equated the two actions, whereas the former chronologically preceded and provoked the latter, the Communist Party described it as a betrayal of Czech national interests. In 2002 Communist leaders appeared once again as defenders of vital national interests when they generated strong public reactions to German and Austrian diplomatic offensives invoking the Benes Decrees in EU accession talks.³⁶ After more than 80 per cent of the Czech public expressed its support for the Decrees, the lower house passed a unanimous (161 to 0) resolution in April 2002, refusing to discuss or reopen this matter, let alone 'apologise' for the expulsion of Germans after the Nazi defeat.³⁷

Apprehension over German influence and opposition to EU membership could also be observed among some smaller extra-parliamentary parties, associations and movements both on the left and the right of the Czech political spectrum (see Appendix 1 for a summary of some of these parties' positions). On the far left were the Czechoslovak Communist Party, the Czech Borderland Association, the Patriotic Anti-Fascist Association and the Christian Socialist Movement.

Extreme nationalists on the right included the National Social Bloc, the Patriotic Front, the Patriot League and the National Party. The old Republicans on the right and the Workers' Party on the left called for a declaration of neutrality, rejection of foreign capital and EU membership, withdrawal from NATO and a refusal to negotiate with Germany on repatriation of Sudeten Germans. They shared roughly the same position in Figure 2 as the Communist Party. Six of the smaller extra-parliamentary parties explicitly opposed EU membership, including the Czech Right, the Czech Social Democratic Movement and the National Democratic Party. In 2004 Miroslav Sladek went as far as to announce his Republican party's intention to secure a seat in the European Parliament and to defend Czech national interests by advocating a gradual abolition of the European Union.³⁸ Five extra-parliamentary parties supported the curbing of immigration, linking it to crime rates (the National Democratic Party, the Republicans, Sladek's Republicans and the CSNS). Not all smaller parties rejected internationalisation, however, even if they opposed EU accession (see upper left quadrant).

Implications for internationalisation and Europeanisation

The growing popular appeal of the Communist Party as a protector of the Czech national interest and of segments of the electorate negatively affected by economic reform prompted the ODS and the Social Democrats to dilute their policies. Although denied positions in the legislative bodies and excluded from electoral and parliamentary coalitions, the Communist Party ironically increased its political influence overtime. Since neither the Social Democrats nor the ODS could win the parliamentary majorities necessary to form a government in each of the four general elections, the two were forced into extensive bargaining to form electoral and legislative coalitions with smaller parties. The ODS (from 1996 to 1997) and the Social Democrats (between 1998 and 2002) failed to form a parliamentary majority and ruled through minority governments instead. While the two had avoided coalitions with the Communist Party in the early and mid 1990s, neither could afford to ignore the latter's growing influence in the legislature.

In the post-1996 era both the ODS and Social Democrats sought and obtained legislative support from the Communist Party on various occasions, with the latter extracting concessions from these *ad hoc* coalitions. For example, the Communist Party provided key support for the 1999 state budget proposed by the Social Democrats. In order to secure critical votes on fiscal reforms in the legislature, Social Democrats helped elect a Communist deputy to head the Chamber of Deputies' Election Commission and another as deputy speaker in 2002. The Communist Party also frequently supported the Social Democrats by keeping enough of its legislators off the parliamentary floor during key votes in order to reduce the size of the majority needed to enact legislation or protect the Social Democrats from a no confidence vote. On the other hand, the ODS's informal legislative alliance with the Communist Party helped Vaclav Klaus win the presidency in 2003. As an illustration of how coalitional politics can lead to unexpected outcomes and strange bed-fellows, Klaus, the erstwhile fervent advocate of anti-Communism, proceeded to invite the chairman of the Communist Party, Miroslav Grebenicek, to formal meetings on EU membership and on the conflict in Iraq. In so doing,

Klaus broke with Vaclav Havel's presidential policy since 1992 of abstaining from consulting with the Communist Party on policy issues.

The latter's increased political clout also had significant impact on the political strategies of the two major parties. Soon after stepping down as prime minister in November 1997, Klaus addressed the extraordinary ODS Congress expressing, for the first time publicly, concerns over EU long-term objectives.³⁹ In the 1998 and 2002 general elections and the run-up to the June 2003 referendum, Klaus explicitly promoted nationalist and populist themes. He catered to constituencies concerned with the 'sovereignty' costs of accession by insisting that dominant trends in European integration reflected German visions of a federal Europe. Klaus opposed any increase in the political power of the European Parliament and Commission, and argued in favour of the preservation of veto powers by individual countries in the EU Council of Ministers. He ardently defended the Benes Decrees as a Czech national interest and linked them to Czech EU accession, a position previously taken by the Communist Party and the far right. Accordingly, during the 2002 campaign, Klaus requested EU guarantees to the Czech Republic that Germany and Austria would not make claims against Czechs based on the Decrees. By treating it as an issue of vital national interests, Klaus warned that, without such guarantees, the ODS would demand a negative vote on EU membership during the 2003 referendum.⁴⁰

Klaus's positioning in the 2002 electoral campaign was an effort to attract votes on the right, such as those from the Czech Right Party (which opposed EU entry) and the xenophobic Common Sense party (suspicious of 'foreign faces'). Klaus also adopted some of the rhetoric on the 'dangers' of globalisation and excessive foreign investment, quite a departure from his statements of a decade earlier.⁴¹ A large Czech-owned media conglomerate (TV Nova) supportive of Klaus launched a campaign against US and EU investments. However, his strategy backfired because many centrist voters, uncomfortable with his more radicalised opposition to EU entry, shifted their support to the Christian Democrat/Freedom Union Coalition. Klaus's new positions also brought about divisions within party ranks. The net result was the ODS's poorest election performance since 1991 and a split within the party, prompting a call by its leaders for an overhaul of the party's organisational structure.

Although challenged from within (by a strong pro-EU faction), the ODS leadership did not abandon its selective public opposition to EU policies. Indeed, in December 2004 new party chairman Mirek Topolánek publicly opposed the EU constitutional treaty, claiming that it envisioned the creation of a new state to which the ODS could not lend its support. In line with this policy, all ODS members of the European Parliament voted against the treaty the following month.⁴² Topolánek also criticised Brussels openly for its presumed evasiveness on the issue of EU future borders. Yet his criticisms paled in comparison to those of his predecessor (now President) Klaus, who recently suggested that the EU and the Communist-era Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (Comecon) – although obviously ideologically different – shared a similar hierarchical structure. Acting as a champion of the country's long-term national interests, Klaus continued to voice his dissatisfaction with the EU and actively employed his presidential powers to undermine selected EU policies. For

example, he decided to challenge the EU constitutional treaty in the Czech Republic's constitutional court (over which he has appointment powers) and cast his shadow on appointments to the Czech National Bank's board, seemingly with a view to halting the Bank's euro convergence strategy and the projected adoption of the euro by 2010.

The coalition led by the Social Democrats also sought support from Communist Party legislators, which sometimes diluted its proclivity to endorse a stronger pro-EU policy and forced it to invoke the issue of national autonomy. For example, facing opposition from the Communist Party and trade unions, the Social Democrats were forced to slow down the process of budget cuts affecting public sector jobs, pensions and health benefits and aimed at reducing public spending (as required by the EU). Under heavy pressure from Communist legislators, Social Democrats signalled their intention to submit the European Constitution to a referendum, despite the EU's publicly expressed concerns that this might have negative political effects on other countries in the region.⁴³ The French and Dutch votes against the proposed European Constitution in May–June 2005 proved that fear valid.

To avoid potential criticism from nationalists in the opposition, Social Democrats vigorously opposed the double-majority voting systems in the draft European constitution under which EU decisions would be approved with the backing of more than half of the bloc's members representing 60 per cent of the EU population. Social Democrats also criticised the tendency of the Union's larger member states (Germany, France) to discriminate against smaller ones (Greece, Portugal) over budgetary deficits beyond the limits specified by the EU Stability and Growth Pact. Finally, Social Democrats also dismissed the concept of an EU federation, which many Czechs perceived as being promoted by Germany, and repeatedly declared their firm support for the Benes Decrees.

These concessions to the Communist Party have created divisions both within the Social Democrats and the governing coalition. The Communist Party's repeated attempts to pass a resolution aimed at abolishing the so-called lustration law (banning former high-ranking Communist and secret-police agents from holding senior positions in civil service) have enhanced tensions among the Social Democrats who support this law. The Social Democrats congress in March 2005 clearly revealed the lack of party consensus on informal parliamentary alliances with the Communist Party. The Social Democrat left-wing, calling for the dissolution of the alliance with Christian Democrat/US-Freedom Union and proposing a new minority government with parliamentary support from the Communist Party, was only narrowly defeated.⁴⁴ Concessions to the Communist Party are even more strongly opposed by the Social Democrats' coalition partners. Christian Democrats have publicly expressed concerns that Social Democrats might repeal the lustration law in return for Communist Party support in the legislature and have opposed Social Democrats' budget deficits, partially incurred in deference to Communist pressures.⁴⁵ The Freedom Union also opposed the Social Democrats' adherence to a strict policy of enforcement of the Benes Decrees, which does not allow compensation for the German minority still living in the Czech Republic. Against the background of accusations against Prime Minister Stanislav Gross over personal finances, the Christian Democrats

abandoned their coalition in March 2005, leaving a minority Social Democratic cabinet even more dependent on Communist Party support. Three Social Democratic Prime Ministers had succeeded each other over a period of nine months: Stanislav Gross, Vladimir Spidla and Jiri Paroubek.

Informal reliance on Communist parliamentary support has also restrained Social Democrats' support for NATO membership and close relations with the US (both supported by many high-ranked party officials). Disputes within the EU and NATO over policy on Iraq revealed some tensions in the effort to sustain both a pro-EU and pro-NATO policy. This oscillation was evident in the initial endorsement of French and German positions by Social Democrats and Communists, who ruled out military action and subsequent support for the US position in Iraq, whereas the ODS and Christian Democrats supported the latter.⁴⁶ Like other East European governments, the Czech leadership pondered the potential trade-offs involved in supporting 'old Europe' or the US. While 'Atlanticists' (mainly the ODS and Christian Democrats) maintained that NATO should be the only guarantor of Czech security, 'Europeanists' (many among the Social Democrats) insisted that NATO was more appropriate for 'hard security' issues, whereas the EU's Common Security and Foreign Policy was better suited for dealing with 'soft security' matters such as peacekeeping.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, the ruling coalition led by Social Democrats pursued a foreign policy that often departed from the common EU stance in external affairs, such as opposition to ratification of the International Criminal Court treaty. While the Social Democrats' pragmatic defence policy orientation largely overlaps with that of the ODS, it does not reflect the preferences of the popular majority, especially with respect to Czech support for US-led military efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan.⁴⁸

Conclusions

The dramatic changes in the Czech Republic in its first post-Communist decade have provided it with a favourable foundation for embracing internationalisation and Europeanisation, despite the collapse of the ODS-led coalition that had brandished the banner of economic reform. Indeed, it was the Social Democrats that executed the most important reforms enabling EU entry and an enhanced Czech position in the global economy capable of attracting significant foreign investment. The Social Democrats also successfully steered the Czech electorate to support EU membership during the 2003 referendum. Instead, the ODS under Klaus, in political opposition continuously since 1997, increasingly gravitated towards more nationalistic policies on foreign investment and EU membership. Despite evolving trajectories and tactical differences, Czech ruling coalitions have exhibited relatively strong support for both internationalisation and Europeanisation.

This article has analysed how the adoption of these new policies by most domestic political actors transformed the Czech political space. Specifically, we have reviewed how EU adaptive pressures indirectly affected political party competition by modifying ideological differences between the two major parties and reinforcing internal ruptures within their ranks. The resulting blurring of policy differences at the political centre temporarily diffused the economic polarisation

of the early transition years. Moreover, as the centre leaning parties downplayed their ideological differences, the pool of potential electoral and legislative coalitional partners grew larger. At the same time, this emerging policy consensus geared toward EU accession also strengthened political forces at the flanks of the Czech party system: initially, the xenophobic movements and activist groups on the political right, later and much more significantly, the Communist Party. The latter's growing electoral success, and its ability to block initiatives by any ruling coalition that excluded it, has had several effects. First, it brought about renewed party competition over the redistributive role of the state. Second, it introduced 'national autonomy' as a major dimension in party competition. Third, it forced a new consideration of potential coalition partners, whether formal or informal. Fourth, and related to the preceding points, it enhanced internal cleavages *within* major party ranks over redistributive and 'national autonomy' issues. In sum, this process heightened the leverage of political forces that had been rather marginal during the first decade of reforms over the interests of mainstream political parties.

The Communist Party has steadily increased its electoral support by embracing the theme of national autonomy, reviving economic polarisation and enhancing cleavages within competing parties. Ironically, the Czech KSCM had been the only Communist successor party in Eastern Europe excluded from any post-1989 government coalition.⁴⁹ Its increasing political influence in the legislature at the turn of the century has strengthened political factions in the ODS and the Social Democratic party that favour more inward-looking themes: limiting external influence on the economy, countering austerity policies and other economic reforms, and opposing provisions of the Czech–EU accession agreement. This new political landscape helps explain delays in privatisation of the banking and telecommunication sectors (until 2000) and fiscal reforms (until 2003), as well as an ongoing debate over euro conversion and ratification of the constitutional treaty.

Although primarily directed at the national executive, EU pressures during accession negotiations had the far-reaching, if unintended, consequences of boosting the electoral success of the previously marginalised Communist Party and of dividing those parties that had been instrumental in bringing about reforms. At the same time, some caveats are in place. Opposition to the EU may have provided the Communist Party with an appealing party identification in political campaigns, but it is not supported by all party leaders, much less within its rank and file, as demonstrated by the referendum vote on EU membership (Table 1). ODS's criticism of the EU is much more selective than that of the Communist Party, is not widespread among party officials, and deviates from ODS supporters who are overwhelmingly positive on EU membership. While criticisms of the EU among party leaderships are likely to persist, particularly regarding fiscal restrictions, monetary and environmental policies, and the constitutional treaty, there is no certainty that they will derail the Czech republic from the internationalising trajectory that successive ruling coalitions have charted during the 1990s.

There was overwhelming public support for EU membership in the June 2003 referendum, when a majority of Czechs brushed aside concerns over a loss of cultural identity, a second-rate position among EU states, land purchases by

TABLE 1. Proportion favouring a referendum on EU accession in the Czech Republic

Date	Favouring referendum
December 2002	77%
May 2002	63%

Source: Central European Opinion Research Group Foundation CEORG, *RFE/RL Newslines*, Vol. 6, No. 233, Part II, 13 December 2002.

foreigners and loss of sovereignty to bureaucrats in Brussels, the themes favoured by the Communist Party and by Klaus's ambiguities. As Tables 2 and 3 illustrate, public enthusiasm for joining the EU was relatively low months before the referendum, partly in response to perceived external pressures over the Benes Decrees. At the end of 2002 (Table 3), public support for EU membership was well below that of neighbouring Poland and Hungary; only 42 per cent of Czechs expressed the view that they would 'definitely' vote for membership in a referendum, compared to 67 per cent of Hungarians and 63 per cent of Poles.⁵⁰ As public support reached a low point, the Czech ruling coalition scheduled the EU referendum strategically, to follow similar votes in Poland, Hungary and Slovakia. Despite the negative campaign by the Communist Party and some ODS leaders that preceded the 2003 EU referendum, 77 per cent of Czechs favoured EU membership (Table 4), with a 55 per cent turnout. As a comparison with the Czech Republic's neighbours, 84 per cent of Hungarians and 77 per cent of Poles favoured EU membership, with 46 and 59 per cent turnout rates respectively.⁵¹ Notably, Czech supporters of the EU in the 2003 referendum came from most groups (including Communist voters over 65), parties and regions, whereas in other Eastern European cases the 'yes' vote drew more from urban than rural constituencies.

The anti-EU segment of the Czech electorate was slightly higher than that of Hungary but comparable to a number of other new EU members. According to the Czech CVVM polling agency, between 14 and 19 per cent of the Czech electorate opposed EU membership between 1997 and 2002. The size of the anti-EU segment in the Czech Republic thus approximated that of the Baltic states (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania) and Slovenia. Nor was the electoral success of the party opposed to EU membership (the Communist Party) unique to the Czech Republic. One or more parties with an explicit anti-EU ideology were

TABLE 2. Percentage supporting/opposing EU accession in the Czech Republic

Date	Support	Oppose
April 2002	41%	25%
October 2002	53%	36%

Source: GfK Praha, *RFE/RL Newslines*, Vol. 6, No. 189, Part II, 7 October 2002.

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TABLE 3. Public support for EU membership in Hungary, Poland and Czech Republic

Country	Would vote 'definitely'	Would vote 'probably'
Hungary	67%	10%
Poland	63%	10%
Czech Republic	42%	37%

Source: Central European Opinion Research Group, *RFE/RL Newslines*, Vol. 6, No. 233, Part II, 13 December 2002.

able to win between 10 and 20 per cent of the vote in party elections in three other Eastern European countries (Poland, Romania and Slovakia). This percentage is above the average vote against European integration among older EU members but lower than in Italy, Austria and Sweden, for example.

The literature on party systems in EU member states associates anti-EU policies with protest or 'outsider parties' (the Austrian Freedom Party, the French National Front, the Italian National Alliance and the Swedish Left Party) and suggests that opposition to the EU is one of the most obvious ways in which such parties set themselves apart from 'centre' politics.⁵² The Czech Communist Party's recent electoral successes, including the second largest number of votes won in the June 2004 European Parliament elections, resulted not just from its anti-EU position nor from its specific policies, but rather from its ability to attract voters increasingly disenchanted with the political mainstream. The narrowing down of policy differences in the Czech political centre during EU accession negotiations – most notably between the ODS, the Social Democrats and the Christian Democrat/Freedom Union Coalition – undermined the transparency of governmental decision making. The Communist Party benefited from the steep decline in public support for the ruling coalition led by Social Democrats since early 2003, as a reaction to widespread administrative corruption and widely unpopular reforms of health and pension plans.

In sum, internationalisation and Europeanisation have had significant effects on the Czech Republic's political landscape and on its party dynamics in particular. As in western Europe, major party convergence at the 'centre' provides new opportunity structures for political entrepreneurs at the margins of the party system. The Czech case suggests that the consequences of such strategic

TABLE 4. Percentage supporting EU accession in the referendum and turnout

Country	Supported	Turnout
Hungary	84%	46%
Poland	77%	59%
Czech Republic	77%	55%

Source: *RFE/RL Newslines*, Vol. 7, No. 112, Part II, 16 June 2003.

repositioning away from the centre can be quite far-reaching, considering the rising ability of the Communist Party to shift the debate. At the same time, the relatively high Czech support for EU accession in 2003 suggests that there may be limits to the mobilisational capacity of anti-EU themes. The results of the French and Dutch referenda in late May and early June 2005 are likely to intensify the Czech debate over the proper architecture of the EU in the near future.⁵³ Indeed, as of the time of this writing, Klaus and segments of the ODS have proposed the cancellation of Czech ratification procedures. However, the dynamics examined in this article suggest that the debate is far from over.

Notes

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Appendix 1. Smaller extra-parliamentary parties: positions on selected issues

Party	Oppose EU	Oppose NATO	Support EU	Curb immigration
Action for the Abolition of the Senate and Against Tunnelling Pension Funds				
Balbin's Poetical Party				
Path of Change			•	
Czech Right	•			
Czech National Social Party (CSNS)				•
Czech Social Democratic Movement	•			
Democratic League				
Humanistic Alliance				
Moravian Democratic Party				
Hope				
National Democratic Party	•			•
New Movement				
Civic Democratic Alliance			•	
Right Bloc				
Republicans	•	•		
Miroslav Sladek's Republicans (RMS)	•	•		•
Romany Civic Initiative of the Czech Republic				
Association of Independents				
Party of Democratic Socialism				
Party of the Countryside-United Civic Forces				•
Party of Social Guarantees (SZJ)				
Common Sense Party				•
Green Party (SZ)				
Choice for the Future	•			