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Czech and Polish Neighbours: Switching the Sides of Stability and Instability?

This paper presents a part of my doctoral research project performed within the PhD Programme at the Department of Political Science, Faculty of Arts, Charles University in Prague.

The topic of the thesis is “The Polish Party System in Comparative Perspective”, focusing on the issue of party system re/construction. Theoretically, the thesis borrows from the broad field of theories of party systems, a classical issue in comparative politics. More specifically, it aims to combine Sartorian competitive approach and Rokkanian historical-sociological approach, the synthesis of which (probably closer to Sartorian side) can be found in Peter Mair’s work.

The thesis shall consist of four chapters, treating on transition legacies, electoral system reforms, party system reconstructions, and party system consolidation, respectively. The paper presented below is based on Chapter Four. The thesis is to be defended in September 2015.

Introduction

The aim of this paper is to explore differing party system developments, the recent Czech tendency towards de-consolidation and Polish towards consolidation, in a comparative perspective. Separate analyses for the countries can, beyond doubt, bring very plausible interpretations, two coherent self-standing stories, of what has been happening in each country. The advantage of a comparative approach is that it makes possible

to narrow down the wide range of possible factors and select those only which hold for both countries.

The ambition here is no more than to provide some tentative answers. After all, they refer to a question that, itself, is rather preliminary. Both recent tendencies may soon prove quite episodic. There are a number of reasons to believe that the Polish stabilisation is based on a rather fragile basis. Similarly, the Czech deconsolidation may easily turn into a sort of temporary fluctuation.

The central idea is that certain divergence in both countries' most recent developments can be explained focusing on a slightly different set of factors than that are typically applied. These somewhat neglected, "second order" factors are an important component and complement to those traditionally emphasised, such as regime type, electoral system or party system (mechanics / format). This analysis also suggests that the original stories of previous Polish instability vs. Czech stability, however plausible and factually correct in their cores, are still somewhat distorted by their first-order-factors bias.

Pointing to the significance of such a broader category of factors, rather than presenting or re-shaping any stories, aims to be the main achievement of this comparative analysis.

1. The Polish Instability? (1989-2007)

Poland started its way to democracy under a number of unfavourable conditions. Firstly, there was a highly fragmented party system, partly ascribed to the 1991 electoral rules, but partly – and most of all – simply reflecting that time reality: strong and internally differentiated anti-communist opposition with abundance, rather than a shortage of individual leaders. And as far as there *was* a kind of an ultimate leader, he decided not to launch his own party project.

Some party system concentration was achieved in the 1993 election but was accompanied with an enormously high share of wasted votes and with polarization. After some optimistic tendencies of late 1990s (a hint of a bipolar concentration of the party system, prospects of depolarisation, improved governmental stability with Jerzy Buzek serving as Prime Minister (PM) for the whole term) a new upheaval came – a two-stage reconstruction of the party system, with the Right collapsing and restructuring first, followed with a complete breakdown of the Left as one of the main party system poles.

Furthermore, and turning back to the initial stage, Lech Wałęsa contributed to another institutional burden that shaped the Polish democratic transition: a specific type of a semi-presidential regime with a powerful head of state. This configuration floated, moreover, in an environment of constitutional interim. This was *only partly* resolved by the adoption of the temporary Provisional Constitution (*Mata Konstytucja*) in 1992 as this document remained rather vague in some important respects¹. Needless to say, this provisional state of affairs was contributing to the conflicts between the main players and to an overall institutional uncertainty.

The 1997 Constitution was an important turning point in reducing the uncertainty. On the other hand, it was far from eliminating it completely. Deep and wholesale reforms of political system have constantly been on agenda since then: abolishing the Senate, radical reduction of the size of Sejm, major changes of presidential powers, a fundamental electoral reform, a far reaching change of the status of political parties (abolishment of public funding), etc.

The executive branch was always considered to be a sensitive point of the Polish political system, namely the governmental instability, low cabinet durability and relative weakness of prime ministers who had to share their *de facto* power with other executive players: not only the President, or the leader of the coalition party, but often also with an informal leader shaping decisions from behind the scenes. This phenomenon, represented by Aleksander Kwaśniewski before his presidency (1993–1995), Marian Krzaklewski (1997–2001), Jarosław Kaczyński before becoming the PM (2005–2006) but also in a way Wałęsa before his presidency (1989–1990), was nicknamed by Polish journalists as “PM without portfolio” (*premier bez teki*).

Not at least, one more specific example of institutional instability is to be mentioned here: frequent electoral reforms. They have always remained within the category of the PR party list system (for the lower chamber, Sejm) but the replacements of mathematical formulae, modifications of district magnitude and legal threshold had an impact on the outcomes of the electoral game, as well as its stability and predictability in time².

To sum up, and connecting both political- and party-systemic features, the Polish politics has been highly polarized. There were relevant political groups delegitimizing the round-table transition and this issue remained sensitive at least over the 1990s.

¹ A famous example of an extensive interpretation of presidential powers was the Article 61 resulting into the practice of “presidential” ministers.

² For a detailed overview of Polish electoral system evolution see: K. Benoit, J. Hayden, *Institutional Change and Persistence: The Evolution of Poland’s Electoral System, 1989–2001*, “The Journal of Politics” 2004, No. 2.

While the first direct presidential election (1990) was the catalyst of a rapid disintegration of the post-Solidarity bloc, the second election (1995) was strongly polarized in terms of regime cleavage (anti-communism vs. post-communism, a payback for leftist 1993 victory, situation framed as old regime's return, etc.³). Another wave of polarization followed half a decade later with the arrival of two radical parties (Liga Polskich Rodzin (LPR) and Samoobrona Rzeczpospolitej Polskiej), and soon after that again with the establishment of the Platforma Obywatelska (PO) – Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (PiS) conflict as the core of the party system.

Interestingly, both these subjects were entering the scene around the turn of the millennium as anti-system challengers: a “Platform” demanding a wholesale reform of Polish political institutions and hesitating to establish itself as a party at all⁴, and PiS an anticommunist moral restoration movement with its radical programme of the Fourth Republic. The notion of an anti-system subject is used in Sartorian sense⁵ and does by no means imply anti-democratic or extremist, of course. If refined using Capoccia's re-conceptualisation⁶, a relational anti-systemness (rather than ideological) could be applied. The last, post-Smoleńsk stage of polarization (taking place especially *after* the 2010 presidential election) has only confirmed this polarized and fundamental opposition between PO and PiS. In anti-PiS oriented media a claim frequently occurs that PiS is an anti-system party whose aim is not to win the election but just mobilize a subculture-like permanent minority⁷. Similarly, in anti-PO media the government is often depicted as alien distant elite that, in the better case, does not properly represent the authentic Polish nation or, in the worse case, betrays Poland and works hand in hand with its enemies⁸.

³ A valuable analysis of 1993 election is V. Zubek, *The Reassertion of the Left in Post-Communist Poland*, “Europe-Asia Studies” 1994, Vol. 46, No. 5.

⁴ This happened as late as in March 2002, half a year after PO's first electoral performance and more than one year after its solemn establishment in Gdańsk.

⁵ G. Sartori, *Parties and Party Systems: A Framework for Analysis*, Cambridge 1976, p. 132–133.

⁶ G. Capoccia, *Anti-System Parties: A Conceptual Reassessment*, “Journal of Theoretical Politics” 2002, No. 14, p. 9–35.

⁷ In SLD's R. Kalisz's words, „...it fights the political (constitutional) system...“, see: “PiS jest partią antysystemową, ale mamy male możliwości delegalizacji”, available online at: <http://wiadomosci.dziennik.pl/polityka/artykuly/332919,pis-jest-partia-antysystemowa-ale-mamy-male-mozliwosci-delegalizacji.html> (retrieved: 20.11.2012).

Interestingly, even an idea of de-legalisation of this „anti-system” party has occurred. See “Radosław Markowski, politolog bliski PO, rzuca hasło “delegalizacji PiS”. Przygotowanie gruntu pod rozwiązanie siłowe?“, available online at: <http://wpolityce.pl/wydarzenia/8613-radoslaw-markowski-politolog-bliski-po-rzuca-haslo-delegalizacji-pis-przygotowanie-gruntu-pod-rozwiazanie-silowe> (retrieved: 20.11.2012).

⁸ Particularly media like “Gazeta Polska” nurture an idea that the ruling party (coalition) is some-

So far, the image of Polish instability, observed across multiple dimensions and criteria, seems to hold. A caveat is, nonetheless, needed here and it concerns the party system. Even in this long period of relative instability the emphasis on a party systemic malfunction (in terms of Omar Sanchez's inchoate party system or even non-system⁹) seems to be exaggerated.

The famous Frances Millard's thesis of "parties without a party system"¹⁰ could actually be almost turned upside down. My assertion is that in the 1990s there was a quite stable and predictable pattern of inter-party competition – or, in other words, Sartorian patterned interactions¹¹ – even in a situation of a high party fluctuation and electoral volatility. In other words, party system format trailed behind party system mechanics¹². Moreover, this format instability refers only to a part of party spectre (right wing). The competition reflected the dominant cultural (or value based) right-left cleavage of that time characterized as post-communists versus post-solidarity. This division partly coincided with a polarity between cultural liberals (secularist, cosmopolitan, mainly urban) and conservatives (Catholic, nationalist, mainly rural), even though some significant exceptions existed. Moreover, this scheme was supplemented with another, much weaker, socio-economic division, along which parties such as Kongres Liberalno Demokratyczny (KLD) or Unia Wolności (UW) vs. PSL could be positioned¹³.

Importantly, there has been a notable stability and predictability in the coalition patterns. Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej (SLD) allied itself always with PSL (post-communist) and conservative parties with Unia Demokratyczna UD/UW "liberals" (post-Solidarity). The stability of party system as such (in terms of a relative stability of inter-party interactions) was, however, not necessarily accompanied with the stability of party system units. As already mentioned, especially right wing parties would constantly merge and emerge, shift and re-label, group and regroup. In this turmoil, there was, however, a notable personal continuity. Tersely said, parties appeared and disappeared but the leaders persisted.

thing worse than a merely incompetent (unsuccessful, corrupt, etc.) clique – their defect is of a deeper moral nature, a betrayal. See: "Co trzeci Polak: Tusk zdradził", available online at: <http://www.gazetapolska.pl/7-co-trzeci-polak-tusk-zdradzil> (retrieved: 20.11.2012).

⁹ O. Sanchez, *Party Non-Systems: A Conceptual Innovation*, "Party Politics" 2009, No. 15, p. 487–520.

¹⁰ F. Millard, *Poland: Parties without a Party System, 1991-2008*, "Politics & Policy" 2009, Vol. 37, Issue 4, p. 657–928.

¹¹ G. Sartori, *Parties and Party Systems*, *op.cit.*, p. 43.

¹² For the famous conceptual distinction see: *ibidem*, p. 119–129.

¹³ For a detailed and thorough analysis of Polish party system developments in the earlier period see: A. Szczerbiak, *Interests and Values: Polish Parties and Their Electorates*, "Europe-Asia Studies" 1999, Vol. 51, No. 8.

True enough; a two-phase reconstruction of the party system took place in 2000-2005/2007. Looking at the results, however, and imagining PO as the functional replacement of the SLD in its party systemic role (in the purely relational sense), a conclusion can be drawn that the alliance patterns from the old system largely persist. The major shift is the stabilisation and integration within the Right. Also the short PiS-LPR-Samoobrona coalition may be interpreted in line with this argument, as a parallel of similar alliances from the early 1990s. Some personal linkages between Porozumienie Centrum- Zjednoczenie Chrześcijańsko-Narodowe (PC-ZChN) and PiS-LPR seem to support this argument. Also Samoobrona might be conceived of as a systemic (and, again, purely relational) parallel of agrarian parties such as *Porozumienie Ludowe* and others.

2. The Czech Stability? (1996–2010)

The Czech Republic has often been characterised as a country with a reasonably stable and concentrated party system – the most stable, together with Hungary, among the new Central and East European democracies. The core of the system were four, quite well profiled programmatic parties, the latter three of them with a long history: Občanská demokratická strana ODS (conservative liberal), Česká strana sociálně demokratická ČSSD (social democratic), Komunistická strana Čech a Moravy KSČM (communist), Křesťanská a demokratická unie – Československá strana lidová KDU-ČSL (Christian Democratic, centrist). The stability and identity of the party system units was highlighted by the fact that the electoral volatility remained quite low, definitely very low by new democracies standards. On the whole, the party system was characterised as a slightly bipolar five-member format with a “changing fifth party”, usually a right-of-centre, liberal (conservative), mainly urban-based (Prague-based) party.

A favourable condition seemed to be the parliamentary regime, only moderately tempered with a tradition of an informally powerful head of state. Anyway, for most of this long period of stability, President Havel was by far not intervening as much as his successor Václav Klaus into the domestic affairs.

The Constitution was adopted as early as 1992, supported in the Parliament by five major parties, including KSČM, and opposed only by an extremist anti-system Republican Party (that failed to be re-elected in 1998). Since its adoption, the Constitution has

never been questioned substantially, even though some modifications were considered from time to time (a failed attempt of reducing presidential powers during the ODS-ČSSD so called oppositional agreement) and some changes made. The more important modifications (such as the introduction of a direct presidential election), however, fall into the more recent period, *after* the “era of stability”.

Governmental durability and PM’s predominance was evident at least until 2002. Klaus’s era (1992–1997) was followed by Zeman’s period (1998–2002), only after a short intermezzo of a caretaker cabinet. In terms of the party composition of governments, the persistence may seem even more robust. We can see three more or less symmetric pendulum moves: 1992–1997 ODS-led cabinets, 1998–2006 ČSSD-led cabinets, and 2007-up to now (with an interruption of a 2009–2010 caretaker cabinet) again ODS-led cabinets.

As opposed to Poland, there was only one significant lower chamber electoral reform with an impact on proportionality. Similarly to Poland, this was also a parametric change within the PR party list system (decreasing district magnitude, introducing d’Hondt HA and increasing legal thresholds, i.e. a similar mix to Polish 1993 reform, however with much lesser actual impact).

Also the story of Czech stability requires some qualifications. First, under the cover of governmental durability we can often see narrow and fragile majorities or even minority situations. This leads to rather weak PMs and powerful individual MPs as significant veto players.

Second the above-mentioned stability of identity of party system units (i.e. stable format) has not always been accompanied with a corresponding stability in the party system mechanics.

Applying the Mair’s concept of structure of competition¹⁴, the Czech system can be qualified as *open* in terms of the pattern of alternation which has always been partial, as opposed to full (as in Poland in all but one cases) or no alteration (Poland 2011) in closed systems. It is also open on the second dimension of innovative coalition formulae: ODS-led centre-right vs. the rest in 1992–1997, caretaker based on centre-right (without ODS) + ČSSD vs. the rest in 1997–1998, right-left pragmatic alliance (ODS-ČSSD) vs. the rest in 1998–2002, ČSSD-led centre-left vs. the rest in 2002–2006, ODS-led centre-right vs. the left in 2006–2009, caretaker based on ODS + ČSSD + Greens vs. the rest in 2009–2010 and ODS-led centre-right vs. the left in 2010 up to now. Only this last case has brought the confirmation of an older formula. In Poland, 2011 and

¹⁴ P. Mair, *Party System Change: Approaches and Interpretations*, Oxford 1997, p. 206–214.

2001 saw the replication of older formulae and 1997 could be, arguably, added, as well (acknowledging that Akcja Wyborcza Solidarność (AWS) was *not* the *same* subject as the parties forming coalition with UD back in early 1990s and that UD itself was, strictly speaking, another party than UW)¹⁵. Finally, from the point of view of the third criterion, accessibility of executive for all parties, the Czech system is closed, excluding KSČM. It is obvious that the open-system features prevail. And the only closed one, ironically, contributes in turn to the unpredictability (i.e., openness) of the system as the other parties have to improvise and experiment with new formulae to close the “communist gap” of the unusable seats. In this respect, Poland is a perfect mirror of the Czech Republic on all of the three criteria. This makes its system, in a way, more predictable, quite in line with the argument in the section above.

3. The new Polish post-2007 stability?

Among the European electoral earthquakes of 2010–2013¹⁶ there was a peculiar kind of a Polish one in 2011: PM and coalition for the first time re-elected, extraordinarily low volatility, almost the same format as in the previous term. In other words, in a country used to electoral earthquakes election by election, a sudden lack of such event is, indeed, a sort of electoral earthquake.

The format of the party system had already been somewhat stabilized in the 2007 election which brought some reduction (exit of LPR and Samoobrona, the most polarizing parties), its bipolar concentration (PO and PiS collecting together over 70% votes and over 80% seats), and a relative success of the previous governing party¹⁷. It might be claimed, thus, that at least some “preparatory” trembles of land in terms of party system stabilization had actually taken place already in 2007.

Anyway, the 2007–2011 developments in party system were a continuation of previous stabilization in other areas. As for the executive branch, a much more construc-

¹⁵ In the Czech case, however, we also counted the “fifth changing party” as a functionally identical subject in the coalitions. Sticking to a stricter approach, there would have been *no* single case of a previous coalition formula replication.

¹⁶ Landslides in Hungary, Slovakia and Romania, hung parliament in United Kingdom, huge increase in volatility in the Czech Republic, a success of True Finns in Finland, Beppe Grillo’s success and almost a Berlusconi-Bersani draw in Italy, etc.

¹⁷ As compared to 2005, PiS increased not only its percentage and the absolute number of votes (as SLD in 1993–1997), but also the number of seats, which happened to a governing party for the first time in Polish post-1989 history.

tive *modus vivendi* between the PM and the President had been established as early as in 1995 (the election of Kwaśniewski) and the consolidation here had actually preceded the adoption of the 1997 constitution. Two cohabitations followed (1997–2001, 2007–10) but conflicts were generally less grave and less frequent than in the early 1990s. Most importantly, the PM and the cabinet has gradually evolved to become the dominant body within the executive branch. As tables below display, after 2007 the Polish cabinets have become much more stable.

Table 1.
Cabinet durability: Polish-Czech comparison

Poland, PM	Months	Czech Republic, PM	Months
Mazowiecki	17	Pithart	29
Bielecki	11		
Olszewski	5	Klaus	66
Pawlak	1		
Suchocka	16		
Pawlak	17		
Oleksy	11		
Cimoszewicz	20		
Buzek coalition	32	Tošovský	7
Buzek minority	16	Zeman	48
Miller coalition	16		
Miller minority	14		
Belka I.	1	Špidla	21
Belka II.	17	Gross	13
Marcinkiewicz minority	6	Paroubek	16
Marcinkiewicz coalition	2		
Kaczyński coalition	13	Topolánek minority	4
Kaczyński minority	3	Topolánek coalition	27
Tusk*	65	Fischer	15
		Nečas*	33
Average	14.9	Average	25.3
Average (without Tusk)	12.1	Average (without Klaus, Zeman)	18.3

* As of the end of March 2013

A cabinet is regarded as the same one as long as (1.) it is led continuously by the same PM and (2.) based on the identical coalition formula. A parliamentary election resulting in the cabinet's

re-election (as in the case of Tusk 2011 or Klaus 1996) is *not* considered as a rupture separating two different cabinets as the moment of re-election underscores the logic of cabinet durability.

Source: author's calculation based on the Czech Government website, see: <http://www.vlada.cz/cz/clenove-vlady/historie-minulych-vlad/prehled-vlad-cr/1993-2007-cr/>, and Polish Council of Ministers website, see: <http://www.kprm.gov.pl/ludzie.html>.

Cabinet durability is, to be sure, just a very imperfect and, indeed, tricky approximation to the notion of executive branch stability. Leaving aside the dual dividedness of this branch of government in semi-presidentialism and taking cabinet/PM only, it must be recognized that a robust-looking figure may actually represent quite a weak cabinet and PM. The mere fact of duration need not necessarily imply stability, not to mention decision-making efficiency or even policy effectiveness. Under the façade of durability there might actually be a state of an (almost) permanent coalition crisis as in the case of the incumbent Nečas cabinet, or a state of an (almost) permanent lethal threat to the cabinet due to a fragile and narrow majority (plus proliferation of intra-party veto players) as in the case of second Topolánek cabinet.

Moreover, eliminating the highly durable cabinets on both sides (Tusk, Klaus, Zeman), the Czech-Polish contrast in average durability appears much more muted (approx. one year, vs. one-and-half year).

An evident difference between the Czech Republic and Poland can be observed for the period until 2002 when the durable Czech cabinets were at the same time reasonably stable.

A useful supplementary criterion is provided in table below that displays an internal cabinet in/stability. It contrasts the relative personal stability of Tusk's cabinet and the extraordinary Nečas's ministerial volatility.

Table 2.

Ministerial turnover in the current cabinet

	PL (Tusk II)	CZ (Nečas)
Total number of members	20	15
Cabinet duration (months, up to mid-March 2013)	16	32

Continuous members	17*	5
Total number of replaced ministers	3*	13**
- as % of total cabinet size (for PL, e.g., 3 out of 17)	25.0 %	86.7 %
Average member durability (months, up to mid-March 2013)	13.9	16.8
- as % of total cabinet duration	86.9 %	52.5 %

* Minister Cichocki is not counted – only change of portfolio.

** One minister (K. Peake) was replaced twice (as Minister of Defence remained in office for 8 days only!).

For sake of comparability, “current cabinet” in Polish case means *second* Tusk cabinet only in this table.

To add another comparison, the *first* Tusk cabinet (2007–2011) displayed a reasonable level of personal stability: out of its 19 total members, 11 served the whole term and 3 others were replaced just some days before the term expiration. Moreover, the majority of replacements were concentrated into a defined period in the cabinet’s midterm.

Source: author’s calculation based on the Czech Government website, see: <http://www.vlada.cz/cz/clenove-vlady/historie-minulych-vlad/prehled-vlad-cr/1993-2007-cr/>, and Polish Council of Ministers website, see: <http://www.kprm.gov.pl/ludzie.html>.

So far, the idea of an overall political consolidation in Poland seems to be supported. On the other hand, the analysis must not disregard the fragile basis on which especially the newly achieved party system stability stands. Both Polish dominant parties are often labelled by various commentators (or their political opponents¹⁸) “leader’s parties” (*partie wodzowskie*). It is pointless to speculate how far the long- or medium-term survival of both parties is determined by the survival of their current leaders. It is enough to state here that both these parties are yet to undergo a leadership-turnover test, a test that their Czech counterparts have already experienced several times.

A similar caveat concerns the party system level, as well. The imposition of the PO-PiS polarity in the dominant public language of politics is not an “objective and natural reality”. It is rather a constructivist achievement, an outcome of “crafting” the language of politics. The crucial question is how much conditioned is the general acceptance of

¹⁸ Such as PJN’s leader Paweł Kowal, see: „*PO i PiS to partie wodzowskie. Bardziej niż PZPR*”, available online at: <http://pawelkowal.pl/2012/11/21/po-i-pis-to-partie-wodzowskie-bardziej-niz-pzpr/> (retrieved: 20.11.2012).

this construct (by voters, media, etc.) upon the continuation of its highly personified representation. In other words, once Tusk or Kaczyński (or both) leave Polish politics will only their parties disappear (split, become much weaker), as the “partie wodzowskie hypothesis” could suggest, or will the whole party systemic structure collapse? These questions (with a necessarily open ending) must be posed here to problematize the thesis of Polish party system stabilisation, even though this paper continues, tentatively, to hold this proposition.

Table 3.

Polish Sejm elections – consolidation of the party system

	ENP	Index of volatility*	Wasted votes (%)	Core, % of votes	Core, % of seats	Core2, % of votes	Core2, % of seats
1991	10.85	26.65	7.3	20.66	23.4	32.98	36.9
1993	3.87		34.49	35.81	65.9	46.40	82.0
1997	2.95	15.79	12.41	34.44	41.6	47.81	54.6
2001	3.59	47.59	9.31	50.02	56.1	72.20	79.8
2005	4.26	31.07	10.93	18.27	17.4	69.40	80.0
2007	2.82	22.88	4.12	22.06	18.2	95.68	99.7
2011	3.00	10.02	4.11	16.60	12.0	85.67	91.1

ENP = effective number of parliamentary parties, counted on the basis of the percentage of seats achieved in the election (M. Laakso, R. Taagepera, *Effective Number of Parties: A Measure with Application to West Europe*, in: “Comparative Political Studies” 1979, No. 12, p. 3–27).

*Pedersen index (S. Bartolini, P. Mair, *Identity, Competition and Electoral Availability*, Cambridge 1990, p. 20–21) is counted for parliamentary parties only. By this, the index value is somewhat distorted downwards (“others” are not counted).

Core = the only two continually parliamentary parties, SLD (alone or in coalitions) and PSL. This figure gives a somewhat false idea of the development of the party system. That’s why it is supplemented with an alternative concept of Core2 (see below).

Core2 = an approach that takes into consideration a wholesale party system reconstruction in 2001–2005. It works with an idea of two subsequent party systems with their respective cores: System 1 (elections 1991–2001) with core parties SLD, PSL, and UD /UW, and System | 2 (elections 2001–2011) with core parties PO, PiS, PSL, and SLD. Technically, MN could be added but it is reasonable to count relevant parties only.

Source: author’s own calculations based on Polish Electoral Commission website, see: <http://pkw.gov.pl/> (elections 2001–2011), and Inter-Parliamentary Union website, see: http://www.ipu.org/parline-e/reports/2255_arc.htm (elections 1991–2001), retrieved: 20th November 2012.

The three left-hand columns are explored below, together with those for the Czech Republic (see Section 6, Table 5). Therefore, only “Core” and “Core2” indicators are to be briefly commented here. As stated above, the “Core” figure is somewhat misleading. The two parties with continuous parliamentary relevance need not be, and indeed are not, the constant main pillars (poles) of the party system.

The Core2 figures are much more representative of the tendencies and shifts in the Polish party system. A general trend in Core2-votes is apparent: an overall constant increase cores’ share of vote. This is not so clearly reflected in the seat percentages as the 1997 election (a powerful entry of AWS in the game) strongly disrupted this generally increasing trend.

Focusing more closely on the last two elections (2007, 2011), the huge core concentration, both in terms of votes and seats, seems to support our thesis of Polish party system consolidation.

4. The new Czech post-2010 instability?

Signs of deconsolidation can be observed both on party system level and on political system (regime type) level. The latter concerns the question whether the Czech Republic, after the introduction of direct presidential election combined with previous Václav Klaus’s significant extensions and expansions of the presidential informal powers, remains to be a parliamentary regime (or a regime with basically parliamentary logics), or whether it shifts to a semi-presidentialism. This fundamentally unresolved question will not be dealt with here, while the focus will be on the party system level, instead.

In this realm, the analysis can offer some much more mature conclusions. The main idea is that the Czech party system has been undergoing a process of fragmentation and deconsolidation at least since the 2010 election.

In an analysis of 2010 election I identify a number of short- and medium-term factors having led to the alleged 2010 electoral earthquake¹⁹. Firstly, it is a tendency of Czech politics to produce and reproduce a high number of veto players²⁰. As a result of this, not only the cohesion and efficiency of parliamentary parties is undermined (frequent splinters, as well as intra-party factions or individual MPs holding their parties or even

¹⁹ J. Koubek, *České sněmovní volby 2010 z hlediska stability a změny stranického systému. Veto hráči, personalizace, lokalizace a fragmentace*, “Politologická revue” 2010, 1(XVI).

²⁰ The concept is borrowed from G. Tsebelis, *Veto Players: How Political Institutions Work*, Princeton 2011.

governments hostage), but also their legitimacy in the political game is questioned. The *de facto* power of non-party veto players (such as the President, Constitutional Court, media, in some issues the Central Bank, etc.) makes parties easily look dispensable – particularly in an environment fairly hostile to them as the Czech one is²¹.

Secondly, there is a combined effect of local and personal fragmentation, which reflects a popular demand for “strong personalities” in politics and for an enhanced (and more direct) linkage of central politics to the regional (local) level. Old established Czech parties are quite decentralized (sometimes even depicted as loose confederations of their regional organizations) and their outsider challengers make full use of this local-personal push (such as VV and TOP 09 in 2010).

Thirdly and lastly, a high frequency of elections on various levels has led to the fragmentation of the electoral cycle on the national level, to the phenomenon of a permanent campaign (especially in 2006–2010) and to an inter-penetration between various electoral arenas. This means a transfer of some key features from the lower-order elections upwards, and *vice versa* (the salience of the first-order election, in exchange for some electoral behaviour characteristics of second-order election).

This all combined has led to weakening the core parties of the system (reducing the core from four to three as the KDU-ČSL dropped out of the Chamber) and to an increased success of challengers and outsiders²².

From nowadays perspective (as of early 2013) the post-2010 developments have only confirmed my observations and conclusions as the party system erosion has clearly reached the local (2010 municipal election) and regional level (2012 self-government election)²³.

As in the sections above, a caveat follows. Exploring this short, almost glimpse-like 2010–2013 period definitely precludes any authoritative and far reaching conclusions. The party system erosion may also prove to be a temporary fluctuation on an otherwise stable curve of Czech party system development. KDU-ČSL may well come back (as many polls suggest), VV will definitely drop out (as all polls predict with almost 100% probability) and by the next election something may happen to change the tendency

²¹ At times, parties themselves retreat voluntarily from some key political battles as was the Lisbon Treaty. Either, they find it a less costly/uncomfortable option, or they just have troubles reaching a coherent position. The above listed non-party players took the initiative instead.

²² This is now probably going to be reaffirmed by the impact of the direct presidential election and the boost that it gave to the winner's, so far extra-parliamentary party SPOZ.

²³ These developments are captured and quantified in a forthcoming book (J. Koubek, *Většinový systém a rizika lokálně-personální fragmentace*, in: Balík, Kubát, et al., *Většinový systém pro sněmovní volby? České zkušenosti a debaty*, 2013: forthcoming).

and concentrate the attention back on the old core (plus the “old-new” fifth changing party TOP 09).

Table 4.

Czech parliamentary elections (Chamber of Deputies) – deconsolidation of the party system

	ENP	Index of volatility*	Wasted votes (%)	Core, % of seats	Core, % of votes	Core + 5th party, % of votes
1990**	2.22	14.07	18.81	89.0	75.27	75.27
1992**	4.80		19.11	71.0	56.59	62.52
1996	4.15	18.87	11.16	84.5	74.47	80.83
1998	3.71	14.22	11.32	90.5	80.08	88.68
2002	3.81	8.10	12.55	95.5	87.45	87.45
2006	3.10	14.71	5.98	97.0	87.73	94.02
2010	4.51	30.60	18.85	67.5	57.96	74.66

* Pedersen index (S. Bartolini, P. Mair, *Identity, Competition and Electoral Availability*, Cambridge 1990, 20-21) is counted for parliamentary parties only. By this, the index value is somewhat distorted downwards (“others” are not counted). For a comparison, a “genuine” value for 2010 is 38,4 (as compared to 30,6), see J. Šedo, *Výzkum volatility a proměny stranického spektra ve volbách do Poslanecké sněmovny v roce 2010*, in: “Central European Political Science Review” 2011, Part 2-3, Volume XIII, <http://www.cepsr.com/clanek.php?ID=455>

** Czechoslovak federal elections: figures for the republic parliament, Czech National Council.

Core = party system core: ODS, ČSSD, KSČM, KDU-ČSL.

5th party = „changing fifth party“: 1996 ODA, 1998, 2002 US, 2006 SZ, 2010 TOP 09.

ENP = effective number of parliamentary parties, counted on the basis of the percentage of seats achieved in the election (M. Laakso, R. Taagepera, *Effective Number of Parties: A Measure with Application to West Europe*, in: “Comparative Political Studies” 1979, No. 12, p. 3–27).

Source: author’s own calculations based on Czech Statistical Office electoral website, see: <http://volby.cz/>.

5. Why are the neighbours switching the sides of in/stability? Some tentative answers

Before addressing the “why” question, a briefly commented summary-comparison is desirable. Table 5 below shows that in the “wasted votes” category Poland has per-

formed “better” than the Czech Republic since the turn of the millennium, and in the last election significantly so. The only exception from the previous decade was the very first election which was distorted by Poland’s extraordinarily proportional electoral system (leaving, thus, very low share of wasted votes).

As for the volatility, the Czech Republic has normally fared better. The only exceptions are the late 90s’ third elections²⁴ (with a negligible difference) and, in particular, the last election (Czech electoral earthquake). This is full in line with our general proposition.

The ENP figure must be taken cautiously as it is based on the effective number of *parliamentary* parties. It, hence, does not always reflect what is really happening on the ground of the party system, i.e. in the electorate. This indicator should be studied together with the wasted votes. Anyway, the table shows that the Polish (parliamentary) party system was usually more concentrated than the Czech one. The only exceptions are the very first elections (distorted by Civic Forum result) and the fifth elections (the beginning of PO-PiS prominence, but not yet their bipolar “hegemony”).

The table generally supports our hypothesis of divergent de-/consolidation tendencies in the two countries, which is especially well visible in the volatility and wasted votes columns.

Table 5.

Summary of Tables 3 and 4 in a direct CZ-PL comparison

Elec- tion nr.	Year		ENP		Index of volatility		Wasted votes (%)	
	CZ	PL	CZ	PL	CZ	PL	CZ	PL
1	1990	1991	*2.22	10.85			18.81	7.3
2	1992	1993	4.80	3.87	14.07	26.65	19.11	34.49
3	1996	1997	4.15	2.95	18.87	15.79	11.16	12.41
4	1998	2001	3.71	3.59	14.22	47.59	11.32	9.31
5	2002	2005	3.81	4.26	8.10	31.07	12.55	10.93
6	2006	2007	3.10	2.82	14.71	22.88	5.98	4.12
7	2010	2011	4.51	3.00	30.60	10.02	18.85	4.11

* The figure for 1990 Czechoslovak election is distorted by the existence of a dominant broad forum-type subject, Civic Forum, winning 49.5% votes and 63.5% seats.

Source: see: Tables 3, 4 above.

²⁴ The 1997 election in Poland actually represents a “peak” of consolidation, surpassing the Czech Republic, in two of the three indicators. The exception is “wasted votes” in which Polish electoral behaviour was still coping with- and adapting to the previous 1993 electoral reform.

Turning to the explanations and answers, Poland began with an unfavourable combination of factors and over time has shifted away from them. In the Czech Republic an opposite direction can be observed. The aim of the following section is to suggest some reasons why.

5.1. Personal continuity vs. political elite turnover

However partial focus on personal aspects of politics may the subtitle imply, i.e. on a purely arbitrary “leadership factor”, it is in fact something built into the very logics of the two party systems. As shown above, the Czech party system has long been a combination of stable format and unstable mechanics. This means that parties have been quite durable units that have been producing changing sets (generations) of leaders. An impetus for a fairly rapid elite turnover has also been provided by the mechanics instability as factions (with their sub-leaders) have frequently intrigued against each other in trying to re-direct the alliance ties to another partner. This has been a typical source of intra-party tensions in KDU-ČSL with its pivotal role in the party system (Svoboda’s pro-ČSSD leadership replaced with Kalousek’s pro-ODS leadership in 2003). There is, however, a more general reason explaining a high competitiveness within the institutionally stable parties. Namely, this is a fairly high degree of parties’ decentralisation. As its consequence, the pragmatic alliances of regional sub-elites can easily challenge the relatively weak national incumbent leaders. This pressure from below is exactly what happened to former ODS leader Topolánek in 2008–2009 and what current Czech PM Nečas is facing in 2013.

In Poland, on the other hand, a systemic fragility of party format has always been accompanied with greater personal stability and continuity. Poland started with a high competitiveness, both inter- and intraparty. In the early 1990, individual politicians were fluctuating loosely among weak, small (famous Polish concept of *partie kanapowe*) and ever-changing parties – at least on the right part of the spectre. Even at times of integration attempts of the Polish right (AWS), this feature persisted, leading, in the end, to a wholesale restructuring of the Polish right. The left, which had long been resistant to this turmoil and resembled a Czech-like stable generator of subsequent leaderships, meanwhile collapsed as one of the pillars (poles) of the party system. And in the new, right-dominated party system, Poland has ended up with a different combination of a high inter-party and relatively low intraparty competitive-

ness (polarization). This does not mean a lack of conflicts and tensions in parties like PO and PiS - on the contrary, of course. This means that leaders always prevail in these conflicts and challengers are typically either eliminated *from* the party (PiS), or eliminated *within* the party (PO)²⁵.

How is this Czech-Polish difference related to our discussion? A hypothesis is to be suggested that the relatively low turnover of elites (Tusk, Kaczyński, Pawlak were active top politicians in the early 1990s) has enabled for a strong professional generation of leaders to emerge and grow politically mature. No matter how “tired” of these politicians the Polish society might be in last years, few would doubt that they are, indeed, skilled and experienced leaders. Moreover, from the *policy* point of view, neither of the last two PMs (governing since 2006) seems to have been (or be) really unsuccessful.

In the Czech politics, a number of senior politicians can also be identified, of course - but none of them acting for a comparably long time as a party leader. The most distinctive Czech senior politicians, Klaus and Zeman, have rather been inflating the power of non-party veto players, than solidifying the established political parties²⁶.

To sum up, the personal fragility and volatility of Czech politics contributes significantly to the contemporary deconsolidation of the Czech party system. On the other hand, Poland now seems to benefit from what could once be perceived as its weakness: durability of politicians arising out of once very non-durable parties.

5.2. Personalisation vs. personification: two different logics

²⁵ For a detailed description of the Polish system, this argument would have to be refined, of course. The PO, e.g., is well known to be highly factionalized, both ideologically (Gowin’s conservative faction) and non-ideologically (Grabarczyk’s *Spółdzielnia* in the past, etc.). Latent intra-party challengers obviously exist (Schetyna, controlling much of the party’s regional organizational infrastructure). These all are examples of personalisation. The point is, however, that personification-driven pulls in the party (and, especially, in the whole system) prevail. Similarly, the two historical (pre-2000) parties are strongly factionalised and fit well to the Czech-like personalisation pattern. It is not these secondary-pole parties, however, who dominantly shape the logics of the party system. Generally speaking, and borrowing Boucek’s typology of factions (F. Boucek, *Rethinking Factionalism: Typologies, Intra-Party Dynamics and Three Faces of Factionalism*, in: „Party Politics 2009”, No. 15, p. 455–485), **Polish intra-party dynamics corresponds to a competitive** (rather than cooperative or degenerative) factionalism.

²⁶ More bluntly, both of these „founding fathers” have rather been working systematically *against* their original parties: Václav Klaus (indirectly) helping overthrow Topolánek’s cabinet in 2009 (using his influence on ODS rebel MPs) and Miloš Zeman inspiring two ČSSD defectors to support a right wing cabinet in 2007.

This section draws much on the previous conclusions. It turns, however, more narrowly to the party systemic logics. By personalisation of politics is meant a personal fragmentation, both within the parties (factions, individual veto players, rapid elite turnover) and across them (newly emerging personalist party projects trying to penetrate the system from outside as challengers). It generally undermines clear-cut alternatives and complicates the logics (mechanics) of the party system²⁷. By personification we mean something almost contrary. It is a strong symbolic personal representation of (usually) a limited number of well-profiled alternatives, often accompanied with a notable polarization. Personification simplifies, underlines and cements the logics of the party system – and provides it with human faces. The common denominator for both is that they are a response to a popular demand for strong personalities in politics, rather than for abstract ideologies or impersonal party labels, which is probably a kind of anthropologic constant. The difference is that personification helps translate, mediate and visualise the ideologies / labels, while personalisation generally works against them.

This conceptual distinction seems to be a useful tool for understanding the different dynamics in Czech and Polish party systems in the last years. Czech politics, which experienced two periods of personification (Klaus – Zeman in the 1990s and much shorter Topolánek – Paroubek 2005–2010), is now driven by the logics of personalisation. Poland, with its record of strongly personalised politics, has been shifting to the logics of personification since at least 2007.

As mentioned above, polarization is a mechanism that helps translate the personalist appeal in a “party-system-friendly” way. In the literature, polarization is usually conceived of as a danger to the party system, rather than anything positive. This Sartorian thesis, however, pre-supposes a well structured party system where moderate pluralism is probably a luckier constellation than polarized one. My argument goes that in systems that are quite far from being consolidated, polarization may help establish a structured system first. And then, a process of depolarization may follow (or not).

Moreover, Polish politics is not polarized *ideologically* in a symmetric way. It is almost a constant of Polish politics to be very unevenly ideologized. There are usually two dominant players: a broad heterogeneous, *status-quo* oriented, pragmatic, power oriented, compromise-prone party²⁸ (PO; or SLD in the pre-2005 system), vs. an ideo-

²⁷ At times, personalisation-driven appeals even attack and delegitimize the very notion of clear ideological alternatives such as right-left polarity (e.g. Schwarzenberg’s statements in Czech 2013 presidential campaign).

²⁸ In public discourse, PO is sometimes called a „cartel party“ (or, as by Professor Konarski, “*partia-kartel*”, see: “*Platforma Obywatelska to Partia-Kartel*”, available online at: <http://www.pol->

logical challenger of *status quo*, polarising and mobilising to change it fundamentally (de-communisation, moral restoration of society, wholesale reconstruction of the State and its capacity, etc.: PiS, AWS in the past, etc.)²⁹.

This clash between an ideology-imposing challenger and a pragmatic *status-quo*-defender, currently personified by strong leaders, contributes to party system consolidation – unlike the Czech tendency towards personal fragmentation (personalisation).

5.3. Some lucky institutional choices

5.3.1. Electoral calendar

This section aims to point to some often neglected institutional factors that influence the performance of the system no less than those classical and well acknowledged ones, such as electoral system, type of regime, or party system type.

Firstly, electoral calendar is to be mentioned. As stated above, one of the Czech weak points has been the fragmented electoral cycle and an abundance of elections as distributed in time. In Poland, this problem is alleviated in two ways. First, the election calendar for the two sub-state levels (municipal and local) is unified. There is, thus, one great self-government electoral “day D” that, moreover, normally does *not* fit *exactly* into the most sensitive period of parliamentary midterm as in the Czech case³⁰. Second, the election for the both chambers, Sejm and Senat, is held at the same time, as opposed to the Czech model of Senate election taking place every two years, often in concurrence with regional or municipal election, and often situated exactly in the most-sensitive midterm period.

The Czech Republic, in addition to having more dispersed electoral calendar, has just matched Poland in adding the only arena that was, in comparison with Poland, still absent.

skieradio.pl/7/1691/Artykul/751732,Platforma-Obywatelska-to-PartiaKartel). But the meaning is different from Katz’s and Mair’s notion of cartel party (R. Katz, *The Evolution of Party Organizations in Europe: Three Faces of Party Organization*, in: *Political Parties in a Changing Age*, W. Crotty (ed.), Special Issue of the “American Review of Politics” 1993, p. 593–617).

²⁹ In the latter case, this can be a group of challengers, rather than one powerful party. My argument is far from saying that Polish politics has been typically bi-polar in terms of format.

³⁰ In retrospect, the 2000, 2004, 2008 and 2012 political upheavals resulting from governing party’s (parties’) second-order-election defeat in the midterm has been one of the constants of the Czech politics.

The direct popular presidential election, introduced in 2012, is likely to aggravate the situation described above. Also in Poland (in place since 1990) this has been a factor running counter the advantage of a relatively unified electoral calendar. However, a distinction is necessary here. The presidential election has, indeed, helped party system de-consolidation in terms of an incentive for *ad hoc* presidential parties, splinters or crises in established parties, complication of party system mechanics, etc³¹. On the other hand, its potential for breaking the parliamentary-governmental electoral cycle has proven to be surprisingly limited. The reason seems to be purely contingent: a favourable constellation of time, events and factors. In 2010, the campaign was “artificially muted” in wake of the Smoleńsk tragedy (the polarization unveiled only soon *after* this election). In 2005, there was an electoral concurrence with the parliamentary election, thus the cycle as such could *not* be broken. In 2000, the *de facto* competitiveness was limited for another reason than in 2010 – there was an obvious frontrunner with a clear prospect of winning in the first round.

5.3.2. Preferential voting

Both electoral systems (lower chamber) are different versions of open lists. The incentives are, nonetheless, different. In Poland a variant of a “Finnish-like” quasi-list system³² is used, with one preferential vote only. On the other hand, the Czech Republic applies a flexible list with four preferential votes (previously two) and quite a low threshold for skipping the candidates above (5%, previously 7%).

While in Poland, this system follows logics of personification (voting for a party is only possible via voting for a candidate), in the Czech Republic it corresponds to logics of person-alisation (e.g. an incentive for underdog-biased voting, a peculiar within-party-protest vote in terms of ticking rebelliously the candidates from the bottom of the list, as in 2010)³³.

³¹ Jan Olszewski’s relative success in 1995 election encouraged him to found his own party later in 1997, even though without a success. More importantly, the 2000 election (especially A. Olechowski’s success and M. Krzaklewski’s failure) was one of the catalysts of the right-centre crisis and subsequent restructuring of the whole post-Solidarity „bloc” (*obóz*). The 2005 election immediately influenced the logics of the party competition in the concurrent parliamentary election – it obviously highlighted the emerging PO-PiS polarity and conflict. Amidst the continued campaign between the two rounds, the run-off strategic imperatives effectively precluded any serious discussions of the PO-PiS governmental cooperation. And after L. Kaczyński’s victory, PO’s shock and frustration from the unexpected double defeat helped cement this sharp polarity between the supposed “marvellous” allies (a word pun POPiS).

³² R. Taagepera, M.S. Shugart, *Seats and Votes: The Effects and Determinants of Electoral Systems*, Yale 1989, p. 25.

³³ In 2010, this has become a mass scale phenomenon as some civic initiatives aiming at the “invig-

In Poland, a reasonable modification of the Finnish model has been chosen: voters are still given an “advice” by parties as the candidates on the lists are ranked by the parties. This is advisable for less consolidated party systems where a Finnish-like effect of a well structured party system counterweighting the potentially destructive consequences of intra-party competition (among candidates on district level) cannot be expected.

5.3.3. Registration rules and constraints

Each of the countries is currently using a different method to prevent extraordinarily small groups from running in the general election. In Poland, the instrument applied is a minimum number of verified signatures (5 000 in a district). After qualifying in at least 21 districts, an automatic registration in the remaining 20 is triggered. Thus, a party (or, precisely, its so called electoral committee) is obliged to collect 105 000 signatures (0.34% of eligible voters, as of 2011) on a defined territory (some 21 districts) corresponding to a half of the country’s size.

In the Czech Republic, another model is applied: a financial barrier in terms of a non-refundable electoral fee amounting to CZK 210 000 (i.e., CZK 15 000 in each of the 14 districts). As opposed to Poland where the registration rules were made stricter over time³⁴, this barrier was softened significantly in the Czech Republic in 2002³⁵. This divergence (softening vs. hardening the legal requirements) has been clearly reflected in the total numbers of lists qualifying for the elections as illustrated in table below.

The fragmentation of the Czech party system and the concentration of the Polish party system is *partly* a consequence of this purely mechanical effect – compare to the wasted votes share figure in Table 3 above.

oration of Czech democracy” mobilized in favour of such a pattern of preferential vote.

³⁴ In 1991, e.g., the district limit was the same (i.e., 5000 signatures). But for registration on the national level, only five districts were sufficient. In 1993, the district limit was lowered to 3000 but the half-of-districts-rule for the country-wide registration was introduced.

³⁵ This happened after the Constitutional Court ruled unconstitutional an electoral law reform containing an electoral deposit (refundable at 5 % of vote) amounting to CZK 1 400 000 (CZK 40 000 in each of the proposed 35 districts). A similar regulation had been in place before the failed 2002 electoral reform (a refundable deposit of CZK 1 400 000, i.e. CZK 200 000 in each of the 8 districts). This had been found in line with the Constitution by the Court in 1995. The reason for the change of Court’s opinion was a changed context and a combination of some other factors working against small extra-parliamentary parties.

Table 6.**Predispositions for fragmentation. Number of parties running in the parliamentary (lower chamber) election**

T = Total number of parties running in the election

	CZ	PL	CZ		PL	
			T	N	T	N
1	1990	1991	13	11	n.a.	n.a.
2	1992	1993	19	19	n.a.	n.a.
3	1996	1997	16	14	n.a.	n.a.
4	1998	2001	13	12	15	8*
5	2002	2005	28	21	22	9**
6	2006	2007	26	18	10	7
7	2010	2011	26	15	11	6

N = Nation-wide: number of parties running in *all* districts

* This would amount to 9 if another relevant party included: LPR that was eliminated in one of the districts.

** This would amount to 10 if another relevant party included: Samoobrona that was eliminated in one of the districts.

Source: author's own calculations based on Czech Statistical Office electoral website, see: <http://volby.cz/>, and Polish Electoral Commission website, see: <http://pkw.gov.pl/>.

5.3.4. Electoral districts

The focus here is not on the classical issue of the relation between district magnitude and proportionality, but rather on the impact of the districts on the party infrastructure. In the Czech Republic, the electoral districts coincide with the 14 self-governmental units (regions), which, in combination with high level of decentralisation of parties, contributes to local fragmentation.

In Poland, the number of districts is more than twice as large (41) as the number of *województwa* (16). This means that (1.) the above described effect of interpenetration of the national and regional logics of electoral competition is reduced and (2.) the infra-

structure provided by the districts is somewhat denser. This gives the parties an incentive to become more deep-rooted on the ground than in the Czech case, even though the Polish ones are, historically, still lagging much behind³⁶.

5.3.5. Party system: concentration of format, plus general access to government

In Poland, no relevant party is *a priori* excluded from the direct participation in the government. In the Czech politics, KSČM is still considered *not* to be, borrowing the German term, *koalitionsfähig*. This difference, together with the difference in format tendencies (Polish concentration, vs. Czech fragmentation), has a crucial impact on the party system mechanics. The overall governmental eligibility, moreover within a limited constellation of players, is a stabilizing factor in itself, while the permanent exclusion of a powerful relevant party precludes one of the “natural” coalition formulae, leading in turn, ironically, to a yet more chaotic experimenting with those coalition formulae that are arithmetically available (see the section “Czech stability?” above). Hloušek’s thesis of a *lack* of coalition formulae available in Czech politics³⁷ could be, thus, restated in terms of an *abundance* of coalition formulae in practice.

Conclusion

A divergence in the recent developments of Czech and Polish party systems has been identified. With maximum cautiousness (and awareness of possible backlashes against these tendencies), the analysis holds that Poland has experienced some party system consolidation in the recent years, while the Czech Republic *vice versa*. These developments have run counter the previous characteristics of Czech stability and Polish party volatility and institutional uncertainty.

³⁶ It is true that in absolute terms, the average “sociological” size of Polish districts (i.e. their population) is somewhat larger than the Czech regions-districts, which doubts the logics of the argument above. On the other hand, the argument holds if we take into consideration the combined effects of district size, coincidence with self-government units and preferential voting. The Polish quasi-list system forces parties much more than the Czech system to distribute strong and popular candidates across the different parts of the district.

³⁷ V. Hloušek, *Český stranický systém – skutečná evropeizace?*, “Working Paper” No. 31, presented at the conference on: *Střední Evropa v evropské dynamice* (CEFRES; Praha 17-18.03.2008). For an excellent Czech party system analysis, see also: M. Strmiska, *The Czech Party System: A Few Observations on the Properties and Working Logic of the Czech Party Arrangement*, in: *Parliamentary Elections and Party Landscape in the Visegrád Group Countries*, V. Hloušek, R. Chytilek (Eds.), Brno 2007, p. 107–115.

Following factors have been suggested to help understand this Czech/ Polish divergence. First, personal continuity on the top of Polish party politics, as opposed to a rapid party elite turnover in the Czech Republic, has helped establish more stable parties within a more concentrated and stable party system in Poland. Second, as a result of the above-mentioned shift in the Polish politics, logics of personification have prevailed in Poland, as opposed to fragmentary logics of personalisation in the Czech politics. Third, Polish electoral calendar is more unified than the Czech one, with some positive impacts on the cohesion of the parliamentary-governmental electoral cycle. Fourth, stricter registration rules in Poland have party contributed to the party system concentration. Fifth, some specific parameters of electoral systems, such as preferential voting or the number of districts, have created correspondingly different incentives in the both countries. Finally, the combination of a limited format and the overall governmental (coalition) eligibility in Poland, as opposed to the exclusion of KSČM in the ever more fragmented Czech system, has positively influenced the mechanics of the party system in Poland (more coalition formulae available, higher predictability), etc.

The point of this analysis – with some possibly valuable theoretical implications – is that alternative sets of factors ought to be paid increased attention in order to understand the recent dynamics of Czech and Polish party system developments. In the realm of party system, it is an alternative, perhaps more sanguine understanding of the role of polarisation, as related to the personal aspects of party politics (the concept of personification). In the realm of political system institutions, it is an emphasis on more delicate, “second-order” factors and features (besides the classical ones: electoral system, regime type, etc.), such as electoral calendar, preferential voting, or registration rules.

Czechy i Polska między stabilnością a niestabilnością: nieoczekiwana zamiana miejsc?

Abstract

This paper explores divergent party system tendencies in two neighbouring countries: the Czech Republic and Poland. In the Czech Republic a process of de-consolidation can be observed, while in Poland there seems to be a contrary trend towards

consolidation. These developments depart from the previous characteristics of Czech stability and Polish party volatility and institutional uncertainty. The analysis suggests that the difference in the recent trends can be explained by focusing on an alternative set of institutional factors such as electoral calendar, registration rules or pattern of preferential voting, combined with some party system characteristics such as personal continuity, as opposed to party elite turnover, logics of personification, as opposed to fragmentary logics of personalisation and the overall governmental (coalition) eligibility, as opposed to the exclusion of relevant parties from government.

Keywords: *party system, stability, elections, electoral system, government, volatility, deconsolidation, consolidation, personalisation*

Streszczenie

Artykuł dotyczy odmiennych tendencji w systemach partyjnych dwóch sąsiednich państw: Republiki Czeskiej i Polski. W Republice Czeskiej zaobserwować można proces dekonsolidacji, podczas gdy w Polsce mamy do czynienia z przeciwnym trendem, prowadzącym do konsolidacji. Zmiany te idą pod prąd wcześniejszej charakterystyce obu państw – Czech jako stabilnych, a Polski jako zmiennej i cechującej się instytucjonalną niepewnością. Analiza sugeruje, że powyższe zmiany mogą być wyjaśnione takimi czynnikami instytucjonalnymi jak kalendarz wyborczy, zasady rejestracji czy wzorce preferencji wyborczych, w połączeniu z cechami charakterystycznymi systemów partyjnych, takimi jak ciągłość personalna przeciwstawiona wymianom partyjnych elit, logika personifikacja przeciwstawiona fragmentarycznym logikom personalizacji oraz temu, czy w systemie występują partie wykluczone z zabiegania o uczestnictwo w koalicjach rządowych.

Słowa kluczowe: *system partyjny, stabilność, wybory, system wyborczy, rząd, zmienność, dekonsolidacja, konsolidacja, personalizacja*