

## **Local political parties in the Czech Republic**

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To date, there have been five elections to municipal assemblies after 1989. The first elections were held in 1990 when municipalities became self-administrative units and when political life started to recover. Next to the dominant Civic Forum and other parliamentary parties, local groupings were formed and new independent candidates appeared. The first municipal elections, however, took place in politically simple and unstructured environment. Therefore, it makes sense to study the following elections held in 1994, 1998, 2002 and 2006 (see Šaradín, Outlý 2004). This lowest level of the party system offers active participation in the political process to parliamentary parties as well as to local entities, independent candidate lists and candidates. Additionally, it makes it possible to connect all these actors in various coalitions of which some are unimaginable at the parliamentary level.<sup>1</sup> Since the first elections municipalities and especially larger towns have seen the formation of local party systems influenced, for example, by the activity and ability of individuals to participate in political life (establishment of a local or even regional political entity), by the electoral success of parliamentary parties (local parties can take advantage of the free space), acquaintance and popularity of people establishing such a party, various socio-economic indexes etc. There is a whole range of these local entities in the Czech politics that have been in existence for more than one election term and which present successful candidates running for municipal (or even regional) assemblies.

It is nevertheless parliamentary parties<sup>2</sup> that get most votes in communal elections, which is mostly a result of the gains in larger towns. In smaller municipalities independents dominate and outnumber parliamentary parties in terms of the number of seats. The goal of this contribution is to show what position local political parties enjoy, wherein lie their limitations,

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<sup>1</sup> For example, after elections coalitions were formed in some cities involving the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia and the Civic Democratic Party, the Christian Democratic Union-Czechoslovak People's Party and the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (Ostrava), the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia and the Civic Democratic Party, the Czech Social Democratic Party and the Association of Independent Candidates.

<sup>2</sup> Parliamentary parties are those that are represented in the Chamber of Deputies of the Parliament of the Czech Republic, i.e. the Czech Social Democratic Party, the Christian and Democratic Union – Czechoslovak People's Party, the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia, and the Civic Democratic Party. During the development of the party system gradually, smaller political parties (the Civic Democratic Alliance, the Union of Freedom, and the Green Party) won seats in the Chamber of Deputies but because of their limited presence in the Chamber we will not be dealing with them.

whether they can spread their activities to higher echelons of politics (i.e., whether and in what way they are, for example, active at the regional level).

A short remark in the end: the Czech Republic local government system is based on a unitary system and it belongs to the Middle European countries (see Denters, Rose 2005: 11)

### **Election systems – who is eligible to run?**

In the Czech Republic voters can vote in five types of elections: to the Chamber of Deputies, the Senate, the European Parliament, regional and municipal elections. Let us now explore which actors can run in individual elections (we will leave out the Senate where a majority system is in place and only 27 seats are divided every two years; there is a total of 81 Senators).

#### *Municipal assemblies*

Registered political parties and political movements, coalitions of political parties, independent candidates, associations of independent candidates and associations of political parties and independent candidates are eligible to run.

#### *Regional assemblies*

Registered political parties and political movements and their coalitions can submit candidate lists for the elections to regional assemblies.

#### *Chamber of Deputies*

Registered political parties and political movements and their coalitions can submit candidate lists for the elections to the Chamber of Deputies.

#### *European Parliament*

Registered political parties and political movements and their coalitions can submit candidate lists for the elections to the European Parliament.

From this overview we can see that independent entities and candidates can compete for votes only in elections to municipal assemblies. Consequently, they are limited to the local level, which of course restricts their ability to establish themselves at higher echelons of politics, to receive money from the state and in general to strengthen their position in the system of local politics.

Table 1 shows the number of absolute votes for parliamentary parties in local elections, their percentage, number of seats, including the percentages. I have focused on local elections in the years 1994–2006.

**Table 1: Parliamentary parties in the local elections (1994-2006)**

Party	Year	Votes (abs.)	%	Seats	%
ČSSD	1994	10 935 889	8,54	1 628	2,62
	1998	13 673 268	17,43	4 259	6,77
	2002	12 575 626	15,58	4 666	7,47
	2006	18 079 942	16,63	4 332	6,94
KDU-ČSL	1994	9 260 542	7,23	7 616	12,25
	1998	8 394 101	10,70	7 121	11,32
	2002	7 728 402	9,58	6 013	9,62
	2006	6 263 980	5,76	5 049	8,09
KSCM	1994	17 413 545	13,59	5 837	9,39
	1998	10 704 328	13,64	5 750	9,14
	2002	11 696 976	14,49	5 702	9,12
	2006	11 730 243	10,79	4 268	6,84
ODS	1994	37 872 640	29,56	7 289	11,73
	1998	18 959 786	24,16	5 697	9,05
	2002	20 360 211	25,23	5 729	9,17
	2006	39 353 957	36,20	7 033	11,27

Source: Czech Statistical Office

Among parliamentary parties it was the Christian Democratic Union-Czechoslovak People's Party that was the most successful in terms of seat gains at the communal level, but only up until 2002. Since 1994 it won regularly. In 2006 it recorded a national drop of approximately 1,000 seats, which could be a result of an internal crisis of the party, the affairs of its chairman Jiří Čunek, but also because of the strengthening of the two major political parties, the Czech Social Democratic Party and the Civic Democratic Party. The strong position of the Christian Democratic Union-Czechoslovak People's Party between 1994 and 2002 was especially a result of its strong membership base and subsequently the ability to put together candidate lists in small municipalities. Another reason is that it has a stable electorate which supports it in all types of elections. The ratio of votes in 2002 when it ended up fourth after the Civic Democratic Party, the Czech Social Democratic Party and the Communist Party, and the number of seats it obtained shows that its major gains are in municipalities and not in towns. The Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia recorded an even greater drop in the number of seats—approximately by 1,500. The Czech Social Democratic Party has maintained a stable

position with around 4,000 seats while the Civic Democratic Party has strengthened significantly—by more than 1,000 seats since the last communal elections and has returned to the 1994 gains when it was the main transformation political power in the country. Our goal, however, is not to analyse the results of parliamentary parties in local elections but those of local groupings. Nevertheless, let us take a look at how many and what percentage of seats in individual elections the four largest parliamentary parties have gained in local elections.

**Table 2: Number of seats for parliamentary parties (1994-2006)**

	Number of seats	% of all seats
1994	22,370	35.99
1998	22,827	36.43
2002	22,110	35.37
2006	20,682	33.13

Source: Czech Statistical Office

Table 2 shows that since 1998 the gains of the four major parliamentary parties in local elections have been falling, most between 2002 and 2006 when their influence fell by 1,428 seats. This is not a major drop from which we could glean any tendencies, such as that the popularity of non-parliamentary/local parties has grown or that the popularity of parliamentary parties has fallen. The result was caused by the falling gains of the Christian Democratic Party-Czechoslovak People's Party and the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia, i.e. parties that existed before 1989 and had (have) the possibility, thanks to their numerous membership bases, to create many more candidate lists than the Czech Social Democratic Party and the Civic Democratic Party. The continued drop in their membership base has caused losses in the number of seats in local elections. Table 3 shows which percentage of candidate lists individual parties have managed to put together in the whole of the Czech Republic, which could result in the fall of the gains of the Christian Democratic Party-Czechoslovak People's Party, the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia and the Czech Social Democratic Party, and thus also the total support for all parliamentary parties combined. The Civic Democratic Party was the only one to submit more candidate lists compared to 2002.

**Table 3: Percentage gains of parliamentary parties in the 2002 and 2006 local elections**

	2002	2006
ČSSD	23.3	20.8
KDU-ČSL	30.2	27.5
KSČM	32.9	28.6
ODS	20.6	23.0

Source: Czech Statistical Office

### **Political party funding in the Czech Republic**

If we are to examine the success of local parties, we have to consider the financial aspect in addition to their eligibility in various types of elections. Election campaigns are very demanding and this does not concern only elections to the Chamber of Deputies but also to regional assemblies. It is regional politics where local groupings and their coalitions could win seats but it is very difficult for them to bring to attention that they are, in fact, running. Usually they cannot afford billboard campaigns to promote their trademark.

After the 1997 political crisis influenced especially by political party funding—or more precisely the revelation of a number of frauds—when the right-wing cabinet of Vaclav Klaus was forced to resign, Czech law-makers decided for the state to dramatically fund political parties. Thus political parties and movements can receive money in the following way:

#### *Permanent contribution*

CZK 6 million per year to a party or a movement that has gained 3 % of the vote in the elections to the Chamber of Deputies; CZK 200,000 per year for each tenth of a percent of the vote up to 5 % of the vote.

#### *Contribution per seat*

CZK 900,000 per year per seat of an MP or Senator  
CZK 250,000 per year per seat of a member of a regional assembly or a member of the assembly of the Capital City of Prague

#### *Contribution to the payment of election costs in elections to the Chamber of Deputies*

CZK 100 for each ballot cast for a given party if the party has gained at least 1.5 % of the valid vote.

#### *Contribution for the payment of election costs in elections to the European Parliament*

CZK 30 for each vote cast for a given party if the party has gained at least 1 % of the valid vote.

We can see from this overview of direct party funding that parties receive money for being successful in all types of elections except the local ones. Thus, independent parties do not have any chance to receive money from the state to finance their campaigns. Table 4 shows that in the election year 2006 the Civic Democratic Party received CZK 378.1 million from the state and the Czech Social Democratic Party CZK 284.6 million.

**Table 4: Party gains from direct funding by the state (million CZK)**

	2006	2007	2008
ČSSD	284,6	117,2	132,1
KDU-ČSL	94,8	51,7	50,0
KSČM	151,6	76,6	75,1
ODS	378,1	203,1	197,6

Source: Czech Statistical Office

Both these criteria are important for the success of local parties in Czech politics because both constrain their ability to succeed in higher echelons of politics: the first in terms of the election law because it does not allow the candidacy of independent groupings and candidates on other than the local level; the second in terms of political party funding by the state for successful running parties, again with the exception of local elections.

### **Local political parties**

For the analysis to make sense, we cannot deal with all the independent groupings or independent candidates. We may gain some relevance if we concentrate only on a group of municipalities with a population over 3,000. Pursuant to the Act on Municipalities these municipalities can be towns. Nevertheless, it is difficult to imagine that a local grouping in a smaller town could manage to mobilise in a way to put together a candidate list for regional elections. Let us then concentrate on another group of municipalities, county towns which are seats of greater importance and act as transport, cultural or work centres. In this way,

including city quarters/neighbourhoods, we get to the number of 141 units (municipalities) in the 2006 elections.

The question then is: can any local grouping be strong enough an agent to put together a candidate list in the so-called higher echelons of politics, for example, in the regional elections?

We can respond to this question in two ways. If we presume that the regional elections are the closest to local groupings—be it in terms of geographical proximity, programme or the financial demands of a campaign—we can examine the success of local groupings in the regional elections held to date. Regional elections were held a total of three times, in 2000, 2004 and 2008. Or we can look at the results of communal elections and find out whether local parties have tried to run either alone or in coalitions in regional elections and with what success. In this case we will be interested only in purely regional groupings as conceptualised by Strmiska (2004: 124): “independent party-political formations of regional obedience whose ideological-programmatic and organisational identity as well as sources of political legitimation and election mobilisation used by them (and related to their identity) are regional in nature”. Let us first look at regional elections in individual election years; here we record only parties that gained at least 1 % of the vote.

**Table 5: Regional parties in regional elections 2000**

Party name	Gains Votes %/Seats	Candidacy in 2002 local elections in the same region (regional city)	Gains Votes%/Seats
The Free's Party of the North	1.69/0	Liberec	0.66/0
<b>Vote for the City</b>	4.87/0	Hradec Králové	4.39/0
<b>Union for Sports and Health</b>	4.02/0	Liberec	7.18/3
<b>Democratic Regional Party</b>	4.32/0	Liberec	6.11/3
<b>Zlín Movement of Independents</b>	11.95/6	Zlín	14.51/6
Non-partisans for Moravia	6.76/5	Brno	2.82/0
<b>Association for the Region of Pardubice</b>	5.60/2	Pardubice	15.31/7
Vysočina Prosperity	1.90/0	-	-
<b>Chance for the Region of Olomouc</b>	1.26/0	Olomouc	8.94/4
<b>Our Region 21</b>	2.57/0	Olomouc	5.42/1
Moravian Silesian Coalition	1.80/0	-	-

Source: Czech Statistical Office

Table 5 shows that in some cases a successful regional party motivated another town party, i.e., that the local and regional levels became interconnected. The parties in **bold** were active in local politics before the first regional elections. These include the Zlín Movement of Independents, Association for the Region of Pardubice, Union of Sports and Health, Democratic Regional Party, Chance for the Region of Olomouc, Our Region 21 and Vote for the City (sometimes the name changed a little, for example Our Region 21 was Olomouc 21 in local elections). Table 6 show the situation four years later when the success of the Vote for the Region, Coalition for the Region of Pardubice and the Coalition for the Region of Karlovy Vary increased the success of these entities in the 2006 local elections. Some parties ran as early as 2000 but in the 2004 regional elections they failed (the Union for Sports and Health /Democratic Regional Party or the Zlín Movement of Independents, the Association for Health, Sports, Prosperity); nevertheless, they were successful at the local level.

**Table 6: Regional parties in the 2004 regional elections**

Party name	Gains Votes %/Seats	Candidacy in 2002 local elections in the same region (regional city)	Gains Votes%/Seats
Coalition for the Central Bohemia Region	6.62/4	-	-
Union for Sports and Health – Democratic Regional Party	4.32/0	Liberec	9.06/3
Vote for the Region	5.00/2	Hradec Králové	8.27/3
Zlín Movement of Independents and SNK together	4.69/0	Zlín	7.22/3
Independent Mayors for the Region and European Democrats	5.61/3	-	-
Coalition for the Region of Pardubice	22.79/12	Pardubice	19.23/8
Green for Moravia	5.08/3	-	-
Coalition for the Region of Karlovy Vary	5.12/2	Karlovy Vary	6.65/2
Association for Health, Sports, Prosperity	3.19/0	Ústí nad Labem	13.78/6

Source: Czech Statistical Office

**Table 7: Success rate of local parties 1998-2008**

Party name	Gains Votes %/Seats	Candidacy in <i>communal</i> and <b>regional</b> elections
Coalition for the Central Bohemia Region	3.44/0	<b>2004</b>
Central Bohemians	1.64/0	
“Independent Mayors for the Region” (Central Bohemian Region)	5.73/4	
Coalition for the Region of Plzen	7.21/3	
Alternative for the Region	9.94/5	
Doctors (for Recovery of Society)	9.56/4	
NorthBohemians.cz	13.20/8	2006
Dissatisfied citizens!	1.06/0	
Mayors for the Region of Liberec	13.78/7	
Union for Sports and Health	4.40/0	1998, 2000, 2002, 2004, 2006
Coalition for the Region of Liberec	3.84/0	
Coalition for the Region of Pardubice	18.59/9	1998, 2000, 2002, 2004, 2006
Mayors and Independents for the Region of Zlín	10.08/5	1998, 2000, 2002, 2004, 2006 (ZHN)
Coalition of Non-partisans	3.18	
Coalition for the Region of Karlovy Vary	5.93/3	2004, 2006
Association for Health, Sports, Prosperity	3.07/0	2004, 2006
Vote for the Region	4.95/0	
Coalition for the Region of Karlovy Vary	7.68/4	
S.O.S. for the Region	0.41/2	
“Independent Mayors for the Region”	3.66/0	
Agreement for Vysočina	2.86/0	
Chance for Our Region	3.20/0	1998, 2000, 2002, 2006
Personalities of the Region	2.96/0	

Source: Czech Statistical Office

Elections to regional assemblies were held also in 2008; in some cases we can see a truly local party that ran as early as 1998 and in the following regional and other communal elections. These are the Union for Sports and Health, the Coalition/Association for the Region of Pardubice, the Zlín Movement of Independents. We can find similar links in other cities but with a shorter tradition.

Let us take a look at the second option: local groupings that were formed in order to run in the 2006 local elections and which can be also found on the 2008 candidate lists for the regional elections. If we look at all the candidate lists in the sample of towns (N=141) we have selected, we can basically find only one such entity, the Association Most Inhabitants to Most, which was responsible for the creation of the regional candidate list NorthBohemians.cz.

## **Conclusion**

In the Czech Republic there are barriers that significantly curb the entry of local groupings to higher echelons of politics, especially regional politics where successful parties receive financial incentives. These barriers are twin: firstly, they are given by the law since independent groupings can run only in local elections; secondly, they are financial because only successful entities in regional, parliamentary and European elections receive funding from the state. This creates a major financial disproportion.

In principle we can say that local groupings are restricted by these limitations, and to get to even the regional level is very difficult for them. With few exceptions this isolation is broken only by individuals (independent candidates) who leave local groupings and enter various coalitions or run as independents on party lists of political parties or registered political movements. There are countries where independent candidates can run at regional level provided that they meet minimal criteria (signatures of voters) (Slovakia). The Czech Republic thus makes difficult the circulation of political elites and remains captive of members of political parties who make up approximately one percent of the entire population of the Czech Republic.

In our paper we have not included successful entities in communal and regional elections that run almost nation-wide. These are the political movement Independents and the Association of Independents SNK. Both these entities were among other things elected to the European Parliament. One year ago another similar movement was formed, "Mayors and Independents" which joined their forces with the newly created political party TOP 09 and are hoping to get to the Chamber of Deputies. Such a success would help the whole movement in the other types of elections.

## **Literature**

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